

Fragments of pre-1840 Colinton and Bonaly history

By Prof Roland Paxton MBE

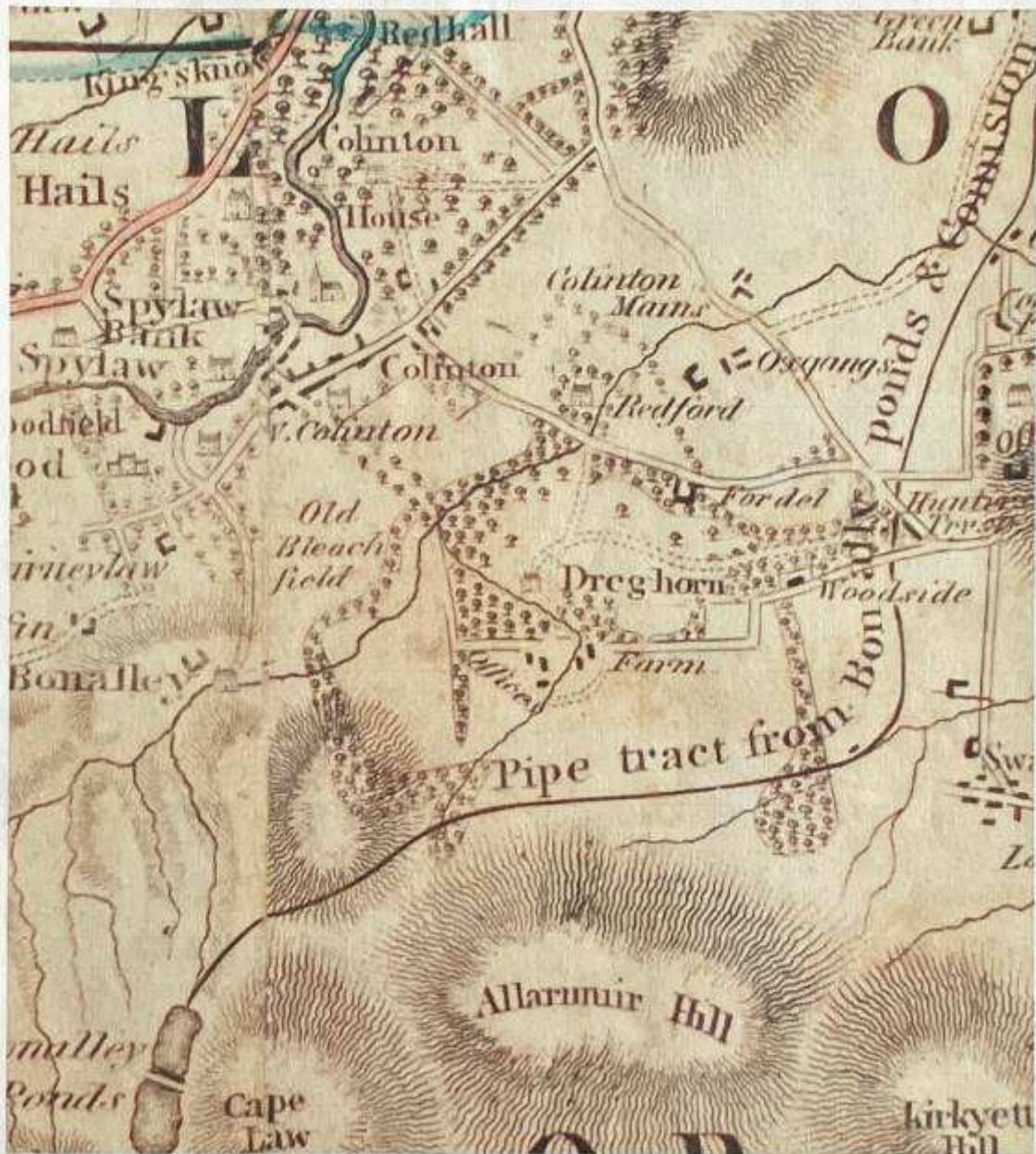
Civil engineering historian and Bonaly resident since 1964

Note: NSA refers to *The New Statistical Account of Scotland* 'Colinton' entry dated 1839



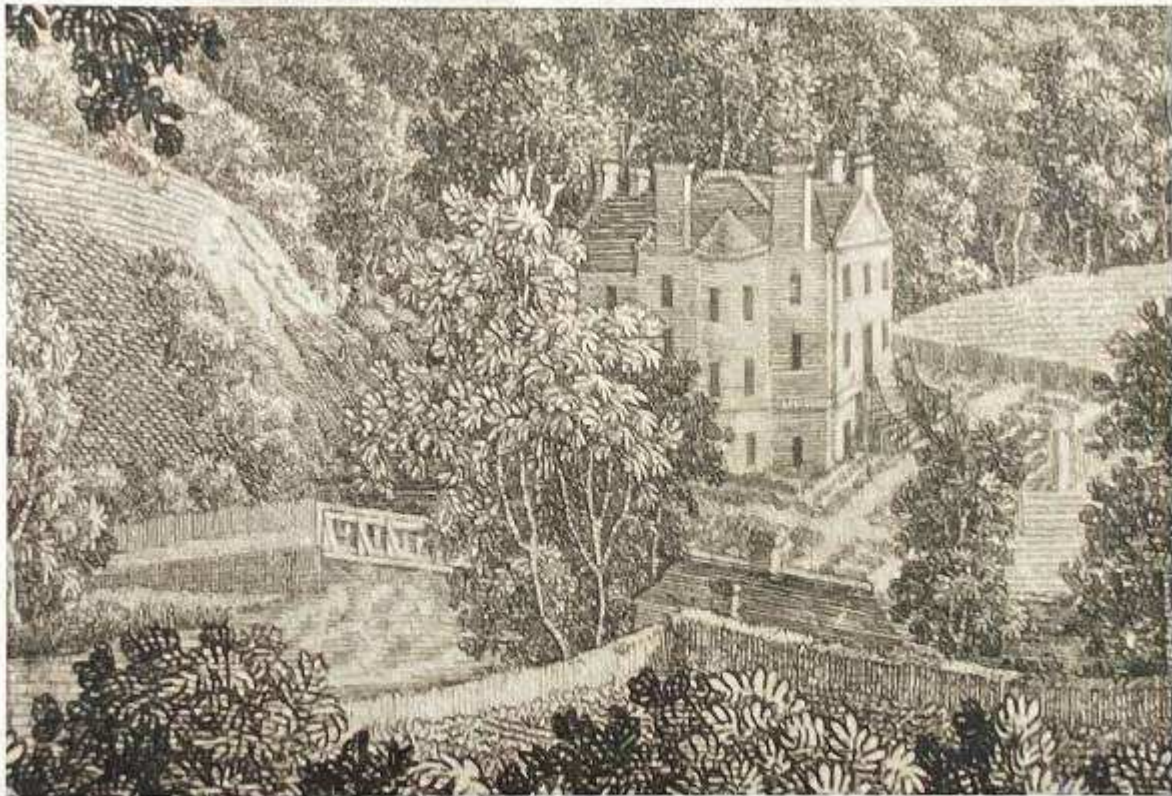
Colinton [NSA map], population 2232 (1831). Note the Union Canal and Compensation water pond [Glencorse Reservoir (south of boundary) improvements completed in 1822

Robert Kirkwood's map of 1817 [below] is probably the most detailed map of Edinburgh and its environs then extant, It shows much of interest. For example, Colinton village and its access to Lanark Road via the old bridge in the Dell, and to the south, what we now know as Redford Road, Dregghorn Loan and Bonaly Road. The latter leading to the hamlet of 'Bonalley', now non-existent apart from part of the old house later incorporated into Bonaly Tower. This old house was extended in 1839 by Lord Cockburn, Scottish judge, literary figure and, protector and enhancer of the beauty of Edinburgh, by an eye-catching imitation Peel Tower designed by one of Scotland's finest architects, William Henry Playfair (1790-1857).



Kirkwood 1817

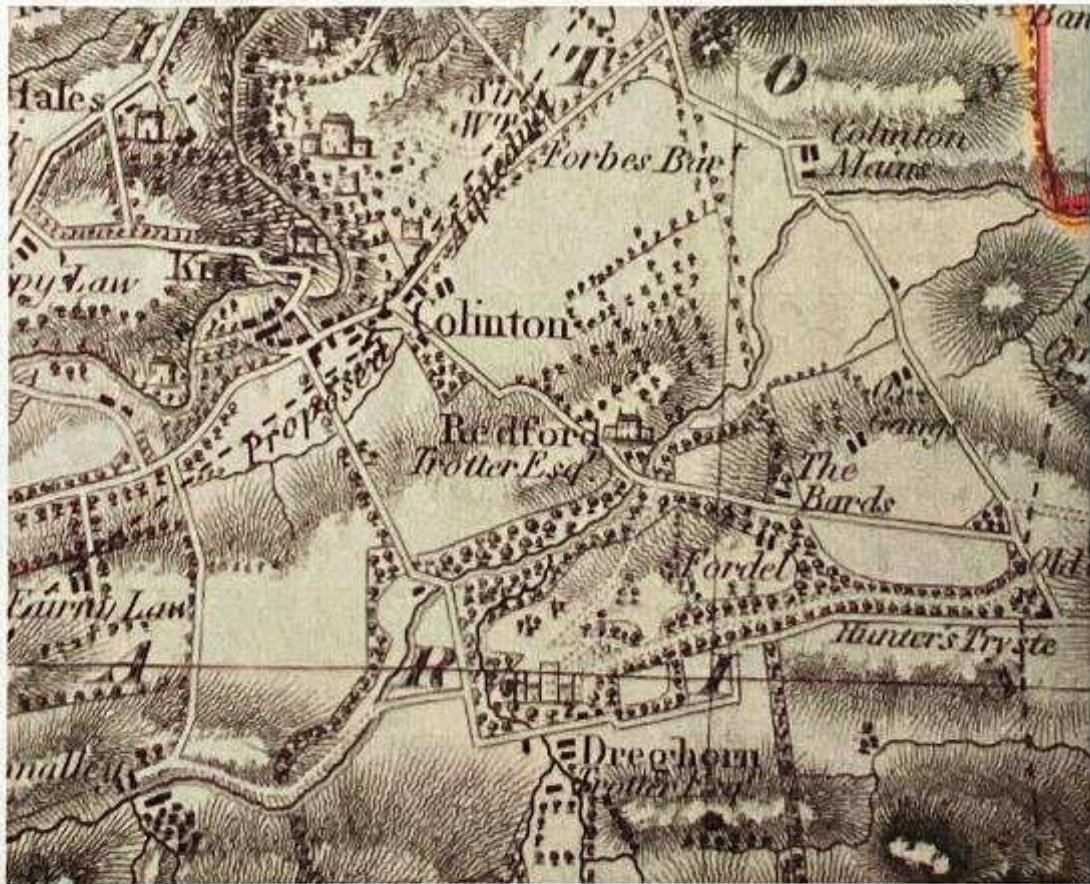
The NSA refers to the Water of Leith being 'an important aid to the industry of the parish with which it is employed in 16 mills and one bleach-field'. Kirkwood's map informs us that the whole of the land south of Woohall Road adjoining Bonalloy Road and Dreghorn Loan was formerly an extensive bleach field, most of which is now occupied by the present Bonalloy estate. Just imagine linen laid out on the grass for weeks, even months, being bleached in the rain, sunshine and wind, as an essential precursor to its 'finishing'. The parish church featured dates from 1771 [NSA]. The church is said to have been founded in c. 1095. Keen eyes will also spot 'Bonalloy Ponds' constructed by Edinburgh Council in c.1790, and the pipe line carrying its produce to augment the water in Comiston Cistern en route to Edinburgh's Castle Hill Reservoir. Much else can be seen on this map including Spylaw House built in 1773 for tobacconist, snuff manufacturer, mill owner, and philanthropist James Gillespie. It is attractively represented in Robertson's finely engraved view of 1800.



Also shown on the map is the old School House (2 Woodhall Road) completed in 1815. I well recall climbing the winding stair on its east side [now closed] from Main Street. The NSA refers to the thriving state of education at Colinton in 1839:-

Education.—There are one parochial school, and six private schools in the parish. The parochial school stood originally “at the minister’s yett,” and bore above its entry these words, “*aut doce, aut disce, aut abi.*” It was rebuilt at a great expense in 1815, in a fine healthy situation above the village. The master, besides teaching English, writing, geometry, arithmetic, and geography, is qualified to teach Latin, Greek, and French. He has the legal accommodations, the maximum salary of L. 34, and generally from 90 to 100 scholars, yielding about L. 40 of fees.

John Thomson’s map of 1822 [below] also shows some of the above-mentioned features, but in more details, including what may be cottages at ‘Bonalley’ west of Bonaly House. Also a proposed aqueduct [not made?] to carry water from the Black Springs in the Pentlands into Edinburgh. Note Dreghorn Castle, House and the ruins of Colinton Castle in the grounds of Merchiston Castle School which feature as seats of the Trotter family, except the Castle, a 15th century house, originally the home of the Foulis family, reputed to have been destroyed by Oliver Cromwell. The map also features Colinton House, formerly Sir William Forbes’s residence, that now houses the Science Department of Merchiston Castle School,



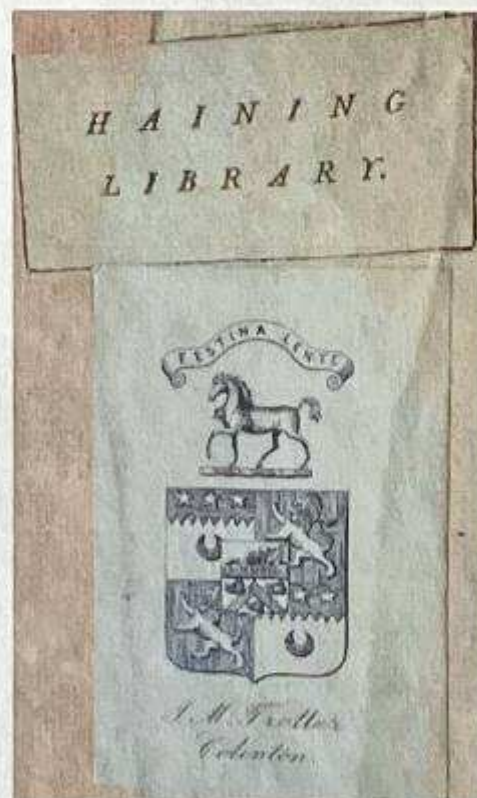
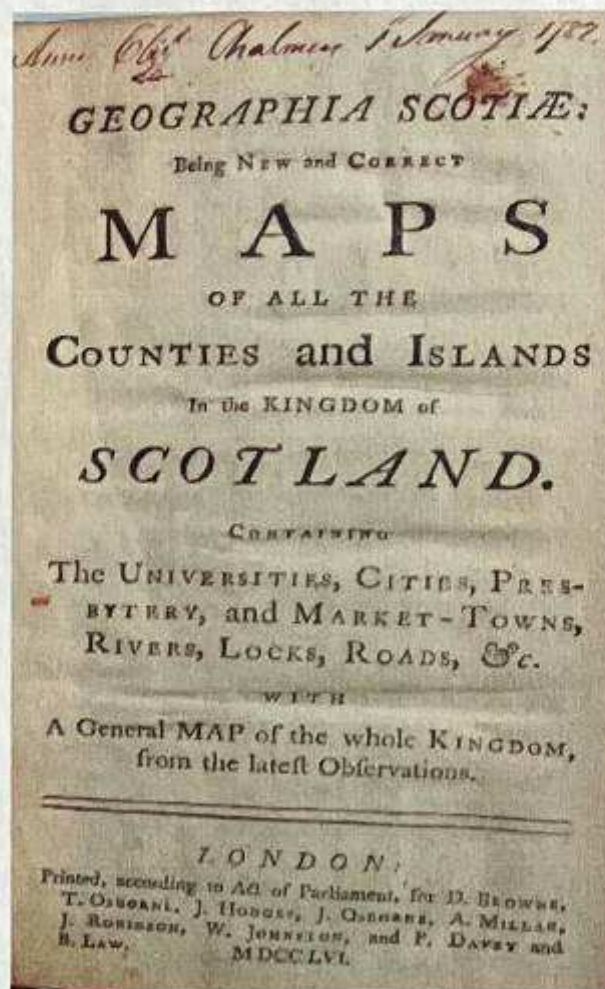
Thomson 1822



Adair-Kitchin 1756

Colinton House later became the home of Col. John Moubray Trotter, from whose library a 263 year old Scottish map book has survived. From it I have illustrated Col Trotter's armorial bookplate, the title page, and part of the map covering west Edinburgh-Shire. It was engraved by T. Kitchin, but surveyed earlier by John Adair [d. c.1722] using a measuring wheel. Colinton does not feature on Kitchin's version of map, perhaps publishing casualty convenience because of its small scale, but Lanark Road does, with 'Curry K[irk]', 'Ride[Red] Hall, 'Selateford' and, to the east, the 'Fair Mill Head' road from Edinburgh.

Col. Trotter's book also bears the 'Haining Library' label of his family forebear, Mark Pringle, who in 1795 married Anne Elizabeth Chalmers, whose 1787 ownership is inscribed on the title page. From 1795 they lived at his newly completed mansion, The Haining, Selkirk. It is unusual to find a woman owning such a book then, but Anne Chalmers's family circumstances, her father Robert was a solicitor in Larbert and Musselburgh, seem to have conducive to its acquisition. Perhaps she may have been a forebear of Charles Chalmers, founder of the School at Merchiston Castle [now part of Napier University] in 1833.



The NSA account states, that Colinton earlier 'bore the name Hailes'. This may be so in a parish context, but Hailes seems never to have replaced Colinton on any printed map. An uncertainty that prompted me to do a search. No mention of either was found on the maps of Camden 1607 or Speed 1610. But, Blaeu's map [based on Pont's work and local sources gleaned by John Scott of Scotstarvit] revealed **Hales**, East and West, and **Cohintoun** as

separate entities in 1654, as did all the later maps seen i.e Moll 1725 [although Colinton is abbreviated to **Cohtn**], Dorret 1751 gives **Colington** only, Roy 1755 **Collinton & Hales**, Taylor & Skinner 1773 & 1802 gives **Collington** and **Hails** [see map], Cary 1789 gives **Colington**, Arrowsmith 1808, **Collington**. All these names, notwithstanding their spelling variations, in are forerunners of our present-day **Colinton** as it has been spelt on maps since 1808.



Blaeu 1654



Taylor & Skinner 1773&1802

My tail piece is an 1837 memento of the eminent Playfair, architect of the stylish Peel Tower at Bonaly House. It is his signed certificate that carpenter and joiner James Johnstone is due a payment of £75 in respect of his work on Lord Cockburn's House at Bonaly.

There is due to Mr Johnstone
 £75 in account of the expense
 of the work he has now in progress
 at the House of the Hon. Mr
 Cockburn.
 Wm Playfair.