

Cumnock Swimming Pool



Lochmorriss Villa



The Glibe lands - wool mill and lade in the foreground

## A Brief History of Old Cumnock

The origin of the place name of Cumnock is lost in the mists of time. Suggestions include 'meeting of the waters' or 'little shrine' from the Gaelic.

By the 1300s the Barony of Cumnock was associated with the Dunbar family, the Earls of March. The seat of the barony, Cumnock Castle, was actually situated in New Cumnock which still has a place name Castle. But the parish church was always in Old Cumnock, and may date back to the 1400s or earlier.

In 1509 James IV made Cumnock a burgh of barony, conferring the right to hold weekly markets and an annual fair. Positioned at an important crossroads, Cumnock capitalised on its new status and became a thriving market town and stopping off point for weary travellers. The Barony of Cumnock was sold by John Dunbar of Cumnock in about 1602 and after several owners came into the possession of the Earl of Dumfries in the mid 1600s. At this time the town was caught up in the violence that accompanied the religious and social upheavals of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

The town expanded during the late 1700s – new roads and bridges allowed easier access into, and through Cumnock, to the benefit of the many inns and hotels in the town. Textile manufacturing also flourished. Handloom weaving provided employment for many residents of the Townhead area, and coal mining began at Garlaff in 1768. Other industries included snuff-box manufacture, the production of fine quality lace, an early venture into graphite extraction and the Cumnock Pottery.

By the mid 1800s the population had expanded to around 2,600. In 1866 the town was made a police burgh, and a further programme of civic improvements was implemented – including the introduction of street lights, paving, water supply and other Victorian improvements such as the Town Hall. Cumnock was now a proper town, and would continue to grow and expand over the twentieth century.

Today, Cumnock faces many challenges. The collapse of the coal mining industry has hit the town particularly hard. However, Cumnock remains a close-knit community, proud of its local heritage and local heroes – from James Keir Hardie, socialist MP and founder of the Labour Party, to composer James MacMillan and Cumnock Juniors Football Club.



## Welcome to Old Cumnock

Cumnock has a rich historical and cultural heritage. This walk aims to introduce some of the key historical sites, which still resonate with the inhabitants of the Cumnock of today and hopefully with you too. The 2 km route is circular and should take around an hour, depending on how long you spend at each feature. There are a few slight climbs along the way but always plenty of stopping places if you are in need of refreshments. Unfortunately the route is not suitable for wheelchairs. There are many beautiful places to explore in Cumnock and we have only briefly highlighted a few in this leaflet, so please take time to look around you, there are surprises around every corner.

We hope you enjoy your walk!

Bobby Grierson, Cumnock History Group

## Old Cumnock Heritage Trail

[www.cumnockhistorygroup.org](http://www.cumnockhistorygroup.org)



This leaflet was designed and developed by the Cumnock History Group and other members of the local community as part of the Raising the Bar project ([www.cumnockraisethebar.co.uk](http://www.cumnockraisethebar.co.uk)). The project was designed and delivered by Northlight Heritage and financed by the Scottish Government, European Community and Ayrshire LEADER 2007-2013 Programme, East Ayrshire Council and Historic Scotland Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme.

# OLD CUMNOCK HERITAGE TRAIL

## 1. Baird Institute (4 Lugar Street)

Scots Baronial style by architect R S Ingram. Built in 1891, the Baird was bequeathed to the people of Cumnock by John Baird, draper and architect. Baird's house can be seen to the right of the main door as you begin your walk. The museum holds a collection of Mauchline Ware of world importance complemented by many items of Cumnock Pottery, mining equipment as well as photographs and artefacts of local and social history. Works of traditional and contemporary art and crafts are also displayed here. Open Thursday – Saturday 11am – 5pm. Admission is free.

## 2. Lugar or Stepends Bridge

This 19th century structure replaced an earlier bridge built in 1753. Construction of the earlier bridge was marred by an incident involving a collapsing arch, which killed 8 workers and injured 4 more.

**Congregational Church:** Architect John Murdoch. Built in 1883 to replace the earlier Congregational Church in The Square on the site of the current Clydesdale Bank.

**Lochnorris Villa:** Home of James Keir Hardie, socialist MP and founder of the Independent Labour Party, later to become the Labour Party. Hardie's daughter Nan (Agnes), was elected the first female Provost of Cumnock. The house dates from 1891 and remained in the family until 1982.

## 3. Woodroad Park

**Templand Viaduct:** Situated at the north end of Woodroad Park, this imposing A Listed structure was designed by engineer John Miller, in 1850. It has thirteen arches, the tallest rising 175 feet above the Lugar Water. It carries the main railway line from Glasgow to Carlisle.

**Site of Cumnock Swimming Pool:** Cumnock had one of Scotland's earliest heated outdoor pools. Opened in 1935, the pool was a popular attraction to locals and visitors. It closed in mid 2003 and was demolished in 2005.

## 4. The Glebe

We cross over to the old Glebe - land owned by the church to provide additional income for the minister. The Old Manse on Robertson Avenue dates from 1750, with later additions, and is now a private home. The current building is on the site of the medieval manse. Warrick Drive, named after Rev John Warrick who wrote the History of Old Cumnock in 1899, follows the line of the old mill lade which served the woollen mill.

## 5. Hamilton Place

This busy main road once boasted a row of chic Victorian shops with rich architectural embellishments and elaborate ironwork. Remodelled in the modern style, it looks very different today. On the south side of Barrhill Road is Greenmill Primary School, the former Cumnock Academy building. There has been a school on this site since 1909.



## 6. Cumnock Old Cemetery

Until its closure in 1768, the local graveyard was in The Square, surrounding the church. Land was purchased at Barrhill Road on the site of the former town gallows, and a new graveyard opened in 1756. There are a number of interesting monuments including one erected in memory of Alexander Peden, the Covenanting minister. Robert Burns's 'Winsome Willie', the Cumnock schoolmaster William Simpson is also buried here.

## 7. Bell Tree – The Strand

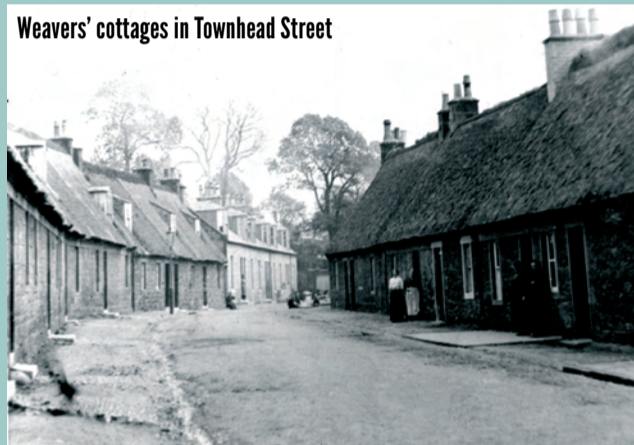
While the current parish church of 1866 was under construction, the church bell was hung on the 'bell tree' in the Strand. The bell dates from 1697 and can now be seen in the foyer of the present Parish Church in the Square. The Strand features in all the early maps of Cumnock as a short cut from Barrhill to Townhead.



## 8. Townhead Street

The Townhead area was where most of the town's handloom weavers lived and worked. Up to 120 looms were worked from the many small, two-roomed thatched cottages that lined the street. The mid 1800s saw the industry under increasing pressure from mechanised looms and by 1889 there was only one weaver remaining in Townhead.

Weavers' cottages in Townhead Street



## 9. Greenholm

Through the car park and over the small bridge, known as Betty's Brig after a woman who was saved from drowning near here, to the left is the site of the Greenholm Tweed Mill, and later the site of McCartney's Engineering Works. Gasworks Brae, to the south, is reputedly the site of a mass burial of plague victims, though no trace was found during archaeological investigations prior to the construction of the new council offices and library. According to the 1834-45 Statistical Account of the Parish of Old Cumnock, at some point in the 1600s travelling merchants who had been denied entrance to Ayr brought plague to the town of Cumnock: "There followed upon this such a plague in the town of Cumnock that the living, it is said, were hardly able to bury the dead."

## 10. Glaisnock Street

**Cumnock Town Hall:** Designed by architect R S Ingram and opened in 1885 on land donated by the Marquis of Bute. At the entrance is a bust of Keir Hardie by renowned sculptor Benno Schotz. The bust was unveiled in August 1939 by Keir Hardie's daughter, Provost Nan Hardie Hughes. The Town Hall underwent extensive renovations in 2014.

**Site of Cumnock Pottery:** Operated from 1792 until early 1900s producing brownware pottery adorned with mottoes such as 'Dooble drinks are aye guid for drouth.' Examples can be viewed in the Baird Institute. A row of workers cottages, Pottery Row is all that remains of this important local industry.

**Dumfries Arms Hotel:** Built in 1717, this was an important coaching inn and has also recently undergone major renovations. Former guests have included Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, who declared the beds to be "hard as a plank, sir" and even the Bay City Rollers!

Glaisnock Street circa 1898



## 11. Ayr Road

From the junction of Glaisnock Street and Ayr Road you can see some of the original Victorian buildings that run north to the Gorbals Bridge. These housed a great number of shops, a few of which can be still seen further up Glaisnock Street. Ayr Road retains many of its splendid Victorian villas. At 38-42 Ayr Road (beside the Old Cumnock Trinity Church) you can find a fine example of late 1900s shop units, featuring triple cast iron arches.

## 12. Tanyard

Crossing the Keir McTurk Memorial Bridge, you can view the neo-gothic Old Cumnock Trinity Church (formerly Crichton West Church), built in 1897, and the only church spire in town. To the north-east, the Glaisnock Water passes below the Gorbals Brig, where the Blue Tower Inn once stood. In 1688 Dragoon Guards hunting Covenanters were stationed here. Looking west towards the Lugar Water, the Tanyard area was where many of the town's leather works were concentrated. Shoe-making was an important early industry.

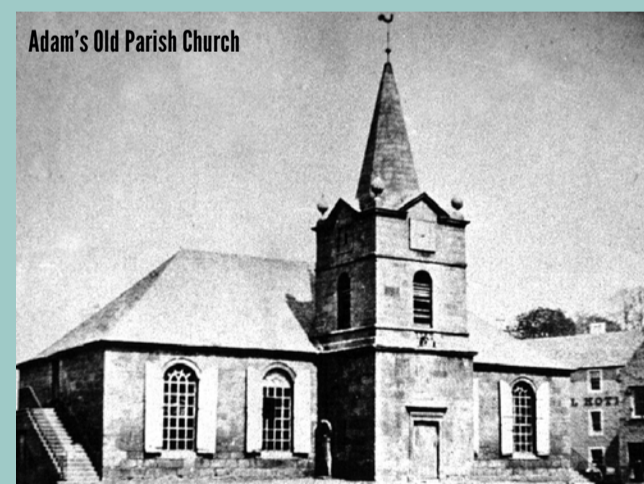
## 13. Around the Square

Approaching the Square by way of the Pawn Steps or Needle E'e, the Victoria Fountain, at the south-west entrance to The Square, was built in 1898 to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

The Square and the parish church have always been important focal points of the town. Up until the mid 1700s when the graveyard in the Square was closed and covered over, the main route through town was by way of Bank Lane and Tower Street. This meant most of the buildings on the Square originally faced onto these streets rather than towards the church as they do now. This 'turning outside in' had a major impact on the town, and all the buildings we see today in the Square date from this period onwards. Over the years, the Square has played host to grain merchants, cobblers, chemists, pubs, iron mongers, photographers, banks, tailors, grocers, hairdressers, and even psychiatrists!

**The Mercat Cross,** dated '1703, repaired 1778' was originally sited at Townhead, traditionally the location for local markets. The current cross is likely to have had several predecessors. Two sides of the top moulding feature a sundial, carved with the arms of the Earls of Dumfries, with the Crichton motto, God send grace.

**Old Cumnock Parish Church:** The present church was opened in 1866 to replace the old Adam built church of 1754. The area surrounding the church served as a through road and bus station until it was pedestrianised in the late 1960s. If you go clockwise around the Square you will pass the following buildings.



**The Sun Inn** dates from the 18th century and now incorporates the Snug Inn, an early 1800s addition.

**The Clydesdale Bank** was built in 1884 on the site of the Congregational Chapel and an earlier school and town jail.

**Mercat Hotel:** The central portion of the building dates to the mid 1700s and was formerly known as the Black Bull Inn. The Black Bull was a popular meeting and drinking venue. It also hosted many auctions and public meetings.

**The Royal Hotel** was erected around 1892 and has been extensively added to and renovated. The **Craighead Inn**, and numbers 15 and 17 Glaisnock Street are thought to be amongst the earliest surviving buildings in Cumnock, dating to at least the late 1700s.

**The Hunter Building** dates from 1927 and was a bank and a grain merchant before 1875.

We hope you have enjoyed the Old Cumnock Heritage Trail and we welcome your comments: [info@cumnockhistorygroup.org](mailto:info@cumnockhistorygroup.org)