

Campbeltown Heritage Trail



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Campbeltown or Lochhead was founded around 1609 by Archibald Campbell 8th Earl of Argyll. The Exchequer offered to discharge his Crown dues if within five years he would ‘plant a burgh, to be inhabited by Lowland men and trafficking burgesses’ this, on land previously known in Gaelic as ‘Ceann Loch Chille Chiarain’ – the head of the loch of the church of Kiaran.

The Scotti, a Gaelic-speaking tribe from Ireland, had settled in Kintyre from the beginning of the Christian era, and, by the 3rd century AD the peninsula was synonymous with Dalriada – the land of Irish chieftain Cairbre Riada. With blood kin and inheritance on both sides of the North Channel, around 500AD Fergus Mor mac Eirc crossed the Irish Sea to establish Albain Dalriada, an Argyll-based province destined to expand into the modern nation of Scotland.

A planned settlement of Lowland Scots was undertaken in the early 17th century to nullify the influence of Clan Donald, descendants of the Dalriadic Scots who had earlier ruled the western seaboard as Lords of the Isles. The new settlement was named after the Earl of Argyll’s family and Campbeltown would eventually rise to the status of Royal Burgh in 1700. The later Victorian town achieved industrial success via commercial interests in fishing, agriculture, shipbuilding, coalmining and, most famously of all, the distilling of whisky.

1. Sir William MacKinnon, 1st Baronet of Strathaird and Loup, was born at Argyll Street, Campbeltown, in 1823. He rose from humble beginnings to become the founder and manager of a world-class mercantile network.

His British India Steam Navigation Company was at one time the largest shipping line on the planet and later merged with the P&O Line in 1914. First to put steam ships on the Indian Ocean, the group's maritime transportation system complemented its other interests in tea, coal, jute and cotton. Part of the commercial face of the British Empire, he founded the Imperial East Africa Company in 1888; advancing the interests of his country as first political governor of the region.

A well-known philanthropist, he promoted the work of the famous explorer Henry Morton Stanley, founded the Free Church of Scotland East Africa Mission, and was committed to the abolition of slavery.

He founded the Kintyre Technical School near the village of Southend, an institution later moved to Dumbarton and re-named Keil School. The statue we see today reached Campbeltown via Mombasa and Keil School. Sir William died in London in 1893 and is buried at Clachan in north Kintyre.

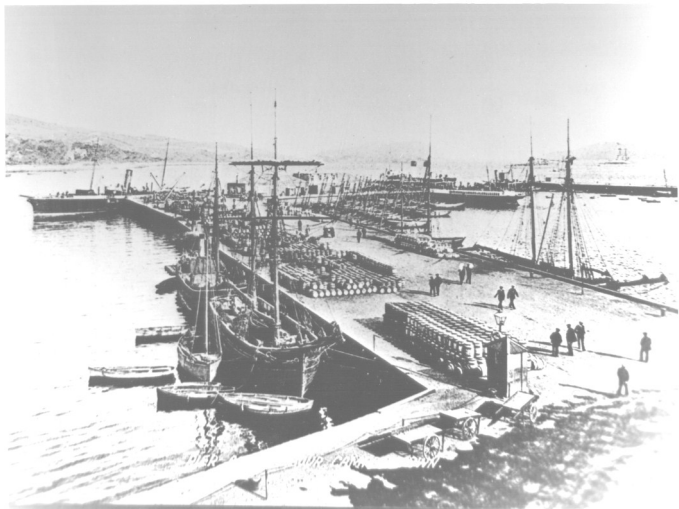


2. **Campbeltown Cross** was brought from Kilkivan Church near Machrihanish to serve as a market cross in 1680. It is the largest and most famous example of a late medieval Celtic cross in mainland Argyll.

Dating from circa 1380, it is a work of the highest craftsmanship and merits closer examination because of its intricate Celtic and religious markings. Almost certainly of the Iona School of carving, the monument's Lombardic inscription attributes ownership to Sir Ivor McEachran, sometime parson of Kilkivan, whose son Sir Andrew of Kilchoman in Islay caused it to be made.

The cross once stood in Main Street near the Town Hall, and witnessed historical events of local and national importance. Campbeltown Cross has a special place in the hearts of the local community, a respect observed regularly by its circumnavigation prior to all weddings and funerals.





3. The Quays have been at the centre of the town's working life and economy for more than 250 years.

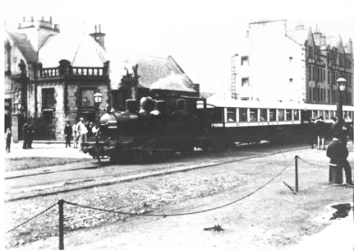
Throughout that period the sea has provided a natural highway to national and international markets, a medium of transport still used today by the renewable energy and timber industries. It was obvious from earlier times that a maritime approach was essential in the development of local business, the town's isolation being the catalyst for constructing the all-important quays. Nevertheless, what became the town's most important structures only came into existence at the insistence of Elizabeth Tollemache, 1st Duchess of Argyll.

The foresight of this feisty lady encouraged the Town Council to complete the quaintly named 'Old Quay' in 1712, with the second stage of the project achieved when the 'New Quay' was completed in 1765. Campbeltown's rise to become a leading fishing port was entirely due to the building of the quays, an initiative also responsible for the development of the Clyde steam packet services, naval strategem and the advancement of general maritime commerce.

4. Hall Street and the 'Wee Train' were inextricably linked during the opening decades of the 20th century.

The Edwardian era signalled the beginning of an expansion in tourism, the country's buoyant economy allowing all but the very poor to take a trip 'doon the watter' on a Clyde steamer. Founded in 1826, the Campbeltown and Glasgow Steam Packet Company offered year-round sailings on the mail ships Kintyre, Kinloch and Davaar, this a prelude to competition from the new turbine ships King Edward and Queen Alexandra in 1901 and 1902 respectively.

The increase in tourism inspired the formation of the Campbeltown and Machrihanish Light Railway Company in 1906, the addition of carriages to the existing coal-carrying railway serving the needs of the new holiday market. Affectionately called the 'Wee Train,' this iconic narrow-gauge railway carried passengers to Machrihanish on the Atlantic coast until its final demise in 1932.



5. Campbeltown Picture House is affectionately known as the 'Wee Pictures,' a terminology derived from its comparison with the town's larger, now demolished Green's Rex Cinema. Opened in 1913, it was one of the earliest purpose-built cinemas in Scotland, and is possibly the oldest continuously running film theatre in the country.

An 'A' listed building, it was designed by renowned architect Albert Gardner who was responsible for several other cinemas in and around the Glasgow area. It is a gem of early cinema design, a building of unique individualism that merges comfortably with the town's diverse seafront architecture.

The internal space of the building has been remodelled extensively; however, the auditorium retains original features in the quirky counterfeit theatre boxes found on either side of the stage and screen.

6. The Burnet Building – Campbeltown Museum is well worth a visit on a number of counts. A building of outstanding quality, it was opened in 1899 as a gift to the town by wealthy businessman and local benefactor James Macalister-Hall of Killean and Tangy.

Designed in early Scottish Renaissance style by leading architect John James Burnet of Glasgow, the building has many pleasing features, not least the frieze of sculptured figures found on the Hall Street frontage depicting the various trades of the town. At the rear of the building is the Lady Linda McCartney Memorial Garden, an open space sensitively used to commemorate the life of Sir Paul McCartney's first wife and display her memorial statue.

The museum collection contains artefacts of both local and national importance, an impressive display of objects highlighting the history of Kintyre and its peoples. Top of the list is a magnificent jet necklace dating from the Bronze Age (circa 2500 – 600 BC). The jewellery is an example of Kintyre's wide-ranging trade links in antiquity, as the only source of usable jet is Whitby in Yorkshire. Another 'star' item is the Neolithic Beacharra Pot (5000 – 2000 BC), one of six excavated from a burial cairn of the same name near the village of Tayinloan.



7. **Fort Argyll (as seen from ferry terminal)** was built in 1639 as a defensive installation at the entrance to the loch. From this vantage point we can appreciate its strategic importance overlooking the narrow strait between Askomil shore and Davaar Island, an area of the town known as Trench Point. Garrisoned in turbulent times by committed Covenanter the Marquis of Argyll, the fort was built to protect his newly acquired lands and the recently founded burgh of Lochhead or Campbeltown. The Lords of the Isles had forfeited their hereditary lands to the Crown in 1493; however, an opportunity for recovery arose when Coll MacDonald and his son Alexander were allied to the King in the early years of the Civil War. Supported by near relative the Earl of Antrim, they deserted the royal cause in favour of a personal crusade to restore their family lands in the west.

Bloody times followed in what became known as the Colkitto Raids.’ In front of the ferry terminal is a representation of an ancient Dalriadic boat or Curragh by distinguished Scottish sculptor George Wylie, a commemoration of the historic sea journey across the North Channel by the early Scotti. The site of Argyll’s 17th century military installation – now vanished – can be envisaged by looking across to the far shore at the loch’s narrow entrance.



8. The Site of the Old Gaelic or Highland Church of Campbeltown is a short distance from the ferry terminal near the Ardshiel Hotel. The 17th century plantation of lowland lairds and their followers created a community with a split personality, a predominantly Gaelic-speaking population which had to deal with the Scots language of the incoming settlers.

Established in 1642, the town's first Presbyterian Church conducted its services in the Celtic mother tongue, and a lack of understanding by the Lowland community caused frustration. This prompted the founding of a second church solely for Lowland Scots, a distinction perpetuated to this day in the names of the local Highland and Lowland Parish Churches. These pastoral events were at odds with the violence of the times, the resident Royalist army being defeated at Rhunahaorine Moss by General David Leslie in 1647. The battle was a precursor to the bloodiest atrocity in Kintyre's long history, the massacre of around 300 of MacDonald's men after the siege of Dunaverty Castle.

Major Mathew Campbell of the Marquis of Argyll's Regiment was killed in the action and is buried here in Campbeltown's Old Gaelic churchyard. The invading army also brought an unwelcome visitor in the dreaded Bubonic Plague, the site of this church sometimes referred to by locals as the 'Plague Cemetery.'





9. First Lowland Church of Campbeltown 1654 – the ‘Thatched House’ was a forerunner of the building we see standing today. The present building was erected in 1706, and after falling into a ruinous state was restored in 1904. It is the oldest ecclesiastical building still in use in the town and contains an interesting memorial plaque to its formidable patron, the 1st Duchess of Argyll, Elizabeth Tollemache. The congregation of this little church is famous for its stand against the powerful Duke of Argyll, a man who persistently denied their wishes to choose a minister for themselves. Things came to a head when the majority of the congregation seceded from the Church of Scotland in 1767; however, their attempts to build the newly formed Relief Church were thwarted at every opportunity. They were denied access to the common quarry and the use of horses and carts, and, as the elders prepared to give in they were chided by a female member of the congregation.

In an open meeting she famously declared ‘Shame on ye to be turned back by that bogle.’(A ghost in Scots.) ‘Let the men quarry the stones and the woman will carry them!’ The stones were eventually quarried on Campbell of Kildalloig’s land on Davaar Island and transported by boat to Campbeltown. From the quay the rock was physically carried to the site of the new church in Longrow.

10. The Town Hall was built between 1758 and 1760 on the site of the first, by then ruinous tolbooth. Considered one of Scotland's finest Town Houses, its original timber spire was subsequently rebuilt in stone by local architect John Brown in 1788. Further remodelling took place during an extension to the building in 1866, the completed Main Street elevation resembling that of St Martin in the Fields, London.

Campbeltown Cross and the municipal well once stood in the vicinity of the Town Hall, the focus of the town's civic and social life. It was here in 1685 that the exiled Earl of Argyll returned to raise the banner of rebellion against James VII and II, his part in the unsuccessful Monmouth Insurrection. Here also the population gathered to witness the town proclaimed a Royal Burgh in 1700, and rallied to the beating of the Town Drum when a formidable female force routed the hated navy press gangs during the great riot of 1795.

A cherished symbol of the community, Campbeltown Cross was removed from its original site for safety in 1939 and relocated on the seafront after the Second World War.



11. Castlehill is the site of the long-demolished Lochhead Castle. It was built in 1609 by Archibald Campbell, 8th Earl of Argyll, as a beginning to his plans for the foundation of a burgh at Kinloch-Kilkerran. Possibly built on the site of an earlier MacDonald stronghold, the castle changed hands on a regular basis during the years of civil war.

An intriguing character on the pay-roll was the hangman, his gruesome profession fulfilled a short distance from the castle on the heights of the Gallowhill. According to legend, the Marquis of Argyll hanged the castle's small garrison of seventeen men on his return march from the siege of Dunaverty. Also as a matter of national history, later that century the unsuccessful attempt by the 9th Earl of Argyll to overthrow James II and VII signalled the beginning of the end for Lochhead Castle.

Along with Dunaverty Castle, it was razed to the ground around 1686 for fear of further insurrection against the King. Those lucky enough to avoid execution were transported to the Carolinas, some minus their ears as the stigma or mark of treachery.



Sources

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