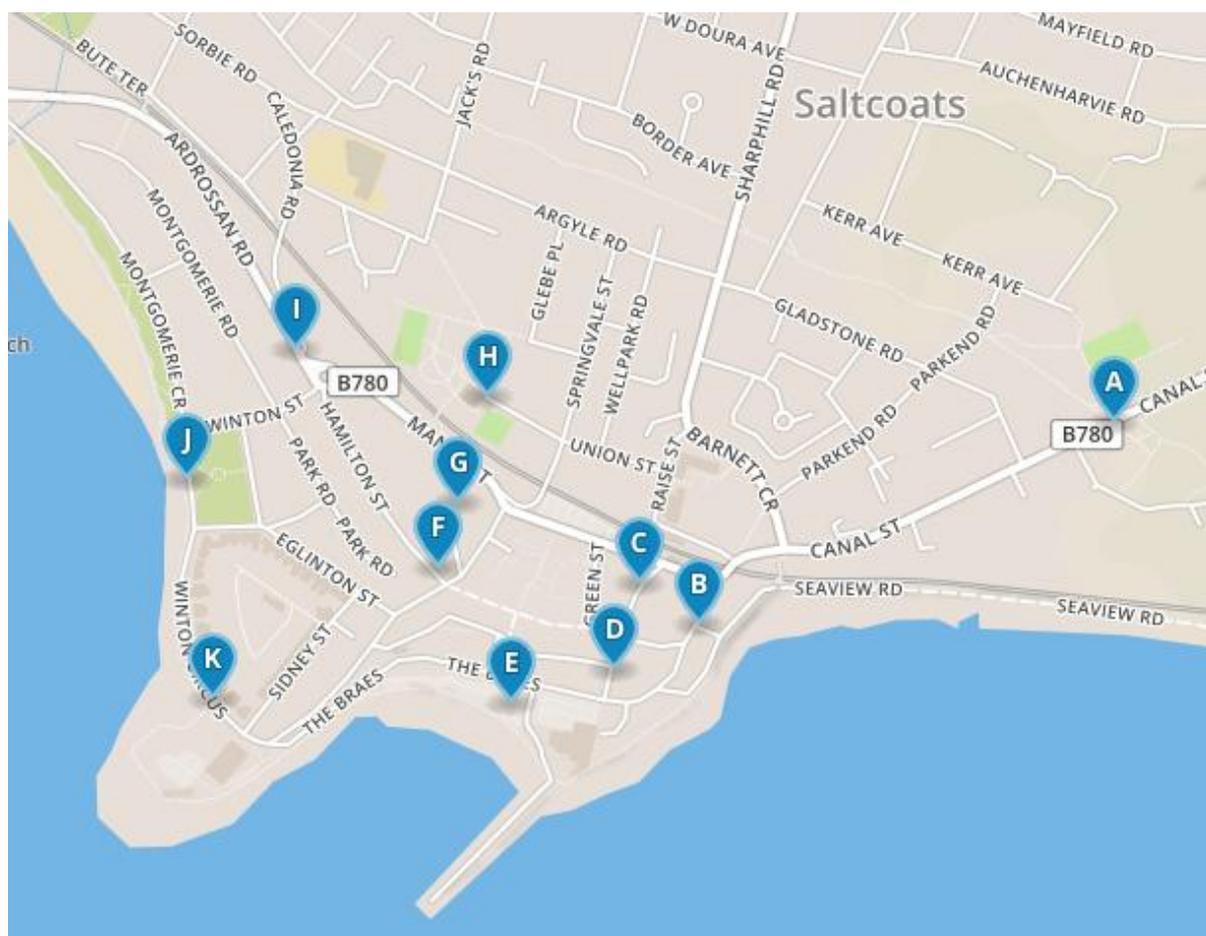


## Saltcoats Heritage Trail Route



Letters for each plaque can be found on the map above.

Start at Seabank Care Home<sup>1</sup>

### **(A) Robert Cunninghame, died 1715; industrialist and entrepreneur**

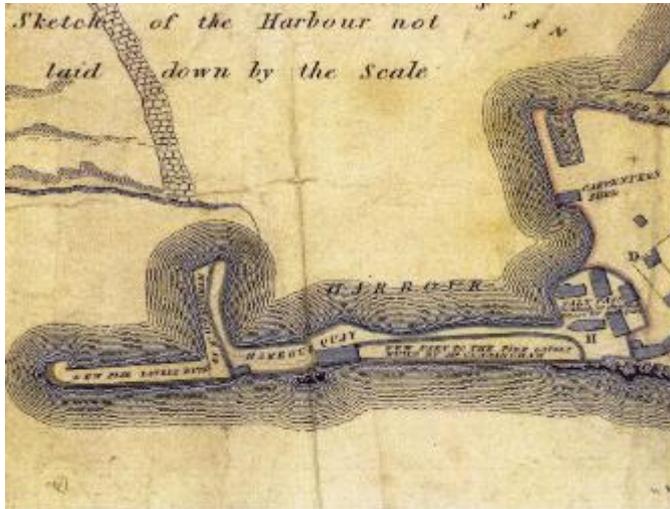
Next to Seabank Care Home, 92 Canal Street, KA21 5JB

OS Grid Reference - NS 25448 41465

Plaque on foot-bridge at end of Canal Street<sup>2</sup>. This overlooks the coal fields of Auchenhavrie where Robert Cunninghame had his mines.

In 1678, Robert Cunninghame inherited the Barony of Stevenston (including the southern shore of Saltcoats) from his uncle, Sir Robert Cunninghame, who had been physician in Scotland to King Charles II. He set about surveying and draining the land for the purpose of mining coal. The drainage adit which was completed in 1686 still flows out at the front in Melbourne Park in Saltcoats. He wanted to export coal to Ireland but it was too difficult to transport coal overland, across sandy terrain, to the existing harbour at Irvine so he set about improving facilities at Saltcoats Creek which was nearer to where the coal was produced.

The new harbour at Saltcoats cost £1,000 having been authorised by Act of Parliament in 1686. The Act also allowed him to levy a charge of four pence Scots on every pint of beer sold within Saltcoats and Stevenston to help pay for the work.



The harbour took 15 years (1684-1700) to complete. Because Cunninghame did not own the northern half of the site, the harbour was not enclosed and gales every winter destroyed part of the previous summer's work. It was also prone to silting up. Even before completion, however, it provided an important outlet for Cunninghame's coal.

Marketing coal was an ad hoc business at the end of the 17th century making it difficult to plan ahead and Cunninghame did not have enough income to pay for all the development work without borrowing. He established the biggest, most productive colliery in Ayrshire and built an impressive new family home at Seabank House, but ended up in a tangled web of debt which led, after his death, to a long series of court cases.

He was highly regarded as an entrepreneur by his contemporaries but was possibly overoptimistic and may have lacked the expertise of experienced miners. The miners themselves would have had to work in dreadful conditions.

### **On to the next stop**

*Walk north past Seabank Care Home up Canal Street and over the railway bridge turning left into Nineyards Street. Note the milestone across from Moffat House<sup>3</sup>.*

### **(B) James Smith, died 1881; philanthropist and missionary**

Adelaide College, 3 Nineyards Street, KA21 5HS

OS Grid Reference - NS 24871 41216

This building was once the Glasgow Mission Coast Home.

The 'suffering, privation and distress' that James Smith witnessed in almost twenty years visiting the poorest parts of Glasgow on behalf of the Glasgow Missionary Society convinced him of the benefits of a convalescent home at the coast. He was instrumental in setting it up in 1866 and maintaining its profile to ensure ongoing contributions.



From a room and kitchen, the home was extended and remodelled on several occasions, notably in 1869, 1874, 1889 and 1896. The people who used the home were in very poor health, and in some years 3 or 4 deaths are reported. Initially the focus was on enabling people to benefit from the clean air at the coast but hydrotherapy was provided for those with rheumatism and sciatica including the installation of special baths in 1891. Treatment could also be provided for non-residents.

The Mission Coast Home was free of charge to those who used it apart from the cost of the train fare from Glasgow to Saltcoats. The home was financed by public subscriptions, gifts in kind, and legacies.

In 1870, the proceeds of an exhibition of the Glasgow Institute for Fine Arts were dedicated to the Home. Rich individuals, workmen from various firms and Sabbath School collections all contributed but Thomas Corbett, a businessman, made the greatest individual financial contribution and effectively underwrote the financial viability of the home. After his death his family conveyed the property occupied by the Home to the trustees. The board of the home prided themselves on being able to make a small amount of money go a long way.

Mr William Bryden, a Saltcoats clothier and his wife were central to the management of the home. The Bryden Memorial Hall was opened in 1889 as a tribute to the founders.

The Home continued to be used for convalescence well into the 20th century.

### **On to the next stop**

*Continue along Nineyards Street and turn right into Bradshaw Street. On the left is the Saltcoats Masonic Lodge<sup>4</sup>. At the end of Bradshaw Street turn right into Countess Street.*

### **(C) Sir John Lavery, 1856-1941; artist**

Saltcoats Town Hall<sup>5</sup>, 18 Countess Street, KA21 5HW  
OS Grid Reference - NS 24786 41269

Lavery lived next door when the shop was a pawnbrokers.

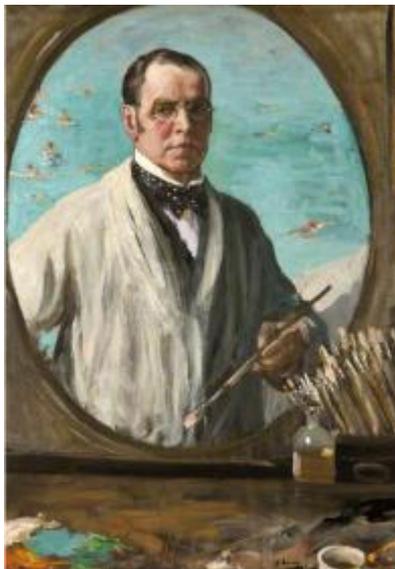
Sir John Lavery was born in North Queen Street, Belfast the son of Henry and Mary Lavery (nee Donnelly). Orphaned aged three John and his siblings - Henry(1855) and Jane(1857) - went to live with different relatives - John to his Uncle and Aunt Edward and Rose Lavery at their farm in Moira, County Down. Aged 10 he came to live in Saltcoats with his Aunt's cousin at the Union Loan Office in Countess Street. John moved between Saltcoats, Glasgow and Moira for a few years before finishing

his schooling in Saltcoats. His time in Saltcoats is fondly recalled in his autobiography "The life of a painter" and "John Lavery and His Work" by Walter Shaw Sparrow (available to read in the Heritage Centre, Saltcoats) as examples he recalls:

- walking from the Belfast to Ardrossan Ferry along the promenade on arrival and seeing two girls on the beach whom he later painted (Girls in Sunlight, a print of which Sir John donated to Saltcoats with the inscription "For the Print Room in Saltcoats from John Lavery 1939")
- enjoying attending the local travelling theatre groups
- attending St Mary's, Saltcoats - going to confession at Easter to Fr Halloran
- belonging to Saltcoats Cricket Club
- friendships with Charlie Miller, Willie Campbell, Workman and Blair.

He attributes his final years in Saltcoats as being "the turning point in my life" as it was here that he became fascinated by the local grocer who drew "profiles in pencil" which he copied before moving on to draw himself "until I was getting a reputation almost equal to that of the grocer".

With encouragement from his Uncle he determined that he would become an artist and he began to "draw day and night - gaining confidence with every step I took". On seeing an advert in the Glasgow Herald "SITUATIONS VACANT - A smart lad with knowledge of drawing wanted. Apply with specimens of work to J.B. MacNair, Artist and Photographer, 11 West Nile Street" he jumped on the first train to Glasgow and landed an apprenticeship, which enabled him to finance attendance at the Art School.



After finishing his 3 year apprenticeship he set up on his own in the West End of Glasgow with a brass plate on the door "JOHN LAVERY, ARTIST".

His career began in earnest at this point. There were further periods of study in London and Paris and on his return his painting a "Tennis Party"(1884) was accepted by the Royal Academy and was linked with what later became "The Glasgow School".

Following a small one man show in Glasgow in Spring of 1888, he was chosen by Glasgow Corporation to paint the state visit of Queen Victoria in the August. This large canvas required personal sittings from over 200 people, including Queen Victoria. The painting still hangs in the Kelvingrove Museum, Glasgow.

This launched his career as a society painter and he moved to London. He was appointed an official war artist during WW1 and when ill health prevented him going to the front, the Admiralty commissioned him to make a record on canvas of the naval bases which included various studies of the Fleet on the Forth.

In 1921, he was elected to the Royal Academy. He was also a member of the Royal Scottish Academy and the Royal Academies of Rome, Antwerp, Milan, Brussels, Stockholm, the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts of Paris and the Autumn Salon. Was "Hors Concours" (not competing for awards, unrivalled) in the Society of French Artists and Corresponding member of the Institute of France. Member of the Secessions of Berlin, Munich and Vienna and the Société of Spanish Artists in Madrid. He was knighted in 1918. Chevalier of the Crown of Italy of Leopold of Belgium. Hon. LL.D of Queen's University, Belfast 1935; of Trinity College, Dublin 1936 and a freeman of both cities.

In his personal life his first wife Kathleen MacDickmott died of tuberculosis shortly after the birth of their daughter Eileen. In 1909 he married Hazel Martyn (1886 - 1935) and they had one daughter Alice. Hazel was an Irish American beauty and was often used as a subject by her husband in his paintings - including the figure used on Irish banknotes from 1928 until 1975. He died in County Kilkenny, aged 84, from natural causes. He is buried in Putney Vale Cemetery.

### **On to the next stop**

*Return along Countess Street and into Quay Street.*

### **(D) Betsy Miller, 1792-1864; first female sea captain**

8 Quay Street, KA21 5EU

OS Grid Reference - NS 24752 41149

Plaque above entrance door. Betsy was a resident of Quay Street.

Gales in the Firth of Clyde in the middle of February 1852 forced ships to run for shelter. There were many ships from both home and abroad anchored off Lamlash where their crews took on fresh water and provisions while waiting for conditions to change. Part of a report in the Glasgow Herald published on Friday 20th February 1852 headlined, "The Wind-Bound Fleet in the Firth, Lamlash Monday Morning", contains the following.

*"Not the least, but perhaps the greatest wonder in the Loch at present is the good old brig Cloetus of Saltcoats, which for more than 20 years has been commanded by a heroic and exceedingly clever young lady, Miss Betsy Miller, daughter of the late William Miller, Esq., shipowner and wood-merchant of that town. He was concerned with several vessels, both in the American and coasting trade. Miss Betsy, before she went to sea, acted as "ship's-husband" to her father; and seeing how the captains in many cases behaved, her romantic and adventurous spirit impelled her to go to sea herself. Her father gratified her caprice, and gave her the command of the Cloetus, which she holds to the present day, and has weathered the storms of the deep when many commanders of the other sex have been driven to pieces on the rocks. Her position and attitudes on quarter-deck in a gale of wind are often spoken of, and would do credit to an admiral.*

*We must not omit to state, that during the long period of this singular young lady's diversified voyagings, no seaman of her crew, or officer under her command, could speak otherwise of her than with greatest respect. The Cloetus is well known in the ports of Belfast, Dublin, Cork, &c., &c. She has often been driven into this Loch, and is familiarly known by the rude Highland boatmen as "Inloig laish Caphtain borin", i.e., the ship with the she-captain".*

Betsy would have been 59 when this report was written and was obviously well known during her lifetime. She was in charge of the brig, its crew and cargo. Her work involved taking on cargo from suppliers and delivering it to buyers in ports in Ireland and further afield. She may have bought cargo, dealt with the duties and taxes, sold the cargo at the destination where she took on another cargo to bring back to her home port. She would have hired the crew including a Master Mariner. Her choice of ships Masters would have been dependent on their experience of the voyages the brig was due to make. To make sure that her business ran as well as possible Betsy would have sailed, and over the years gained considerable experience in the way the brig reacted in all sea conditions. She was the owner and her livelihood depended on the Clitus.

A piece in the Ayr Advertiser of Thursday 14th March 1844 headlined, "Violent Storm - Shipwrecks", reported that one of the many ships that were in trouble in Ayr, Troon, Irvine and Ardrossan on Saturday 9th March 1844 was the Clitus. The Troon correspondent reported that during the worst of the weather the brig Clitus of Saltcoats arrived in harbour, let go one anchor but was driven on shore. Betsy would have been responsible for paying for and overseeing any repairs and maintenance required.

Betsy may never have gone to sea had it not been for the tragedy that befell her family in 1833. Her brother John drowned in what should have been a day out for him and his friend. The Glasgow Herald, 27th September 1833, reported,

*"Calamitous Occurrence. - We have this week the melancholy duty of recording a distressing accident which occurred on Tuesday last in the Firth of Clyde, by which no fewer than four men are supposed to have met an untimely death, and which has plunged several families into the deepest distress. On the afternoon of Tuesday last, Mr. John Miller, master of the brig Clytus of Saltcoats, and Mr. Alexander Gilchrist, a commercial traveller, connected with the firm of Stevenson & Co., muslin manufacturers, Glasgow, accompanied by two of the crew of the Clytus, named Jenkin Jones, a native of Wales, and - Brown, a young lad belonging to Ardrossan, left Saltcoats in an open boat for the purpose of enjoying a pleasure sail to the Horse Isle, lying off Ardrossan, and after remaining on the isle a short time they re-embarked and stood for Saltcoats; but the weather being very boisterous, with the wind increasing in fury, they could not make the harbour, and after tacking about for some time, they found their efforts to reach the pier unavailing, when they put about, and it is supposed attempted to get into Millport in the Meikle Cumbrae island, for which place the wind was favourable. The course of the devoted boat was traced by Mr. Affleck, the mate of the Clytus, from the mast head, by the aid of his glass, as far as Portincross, where they were overtaken by a tremendous squall,*

*accompanied by so thick a fall of rain as completely to hide the boat from his view, and when the shower had passed, no trace of either the boat or her unfortunate crew could be obtained; but still a hope was entertained that she had weathered the storm and reached Millport.*

*The whole of that night and next day was spent amidst the greatest anxiety by Mr. Miller's relations and friends, in painful conjectures as to the fate of those on board the boat - nor was any intelligence of them received till eight o'clock in the evening, when the Albion steamer arrived from Millport, bringing a letter from a gentleman of that place, which stated that Captain Miller's boat had been found on the beach upset, at a short distance from Millport, but that nothing was known of those who had been on board - and we fear it is but too probable that they have all met a grave in the depths of the ocean. Mr. Miller was in the very bloom of manhood - was generous and warm-hearted, and possessed all those distinguishing traits which mark the British sailor; his loss is therefore deeply deplored by all who knew his manly disposition. He was a son of Mr. William Miller, merchant, Saltcoats, the owner of the Clytus, and has several relations living in this town. His friend Mr. Gilchrist had visited Saltcoats with the view of spending a few days in relaxation from the toils of business, and was a young man of the most sprightly and agreeable disposition.*

*The death of these individuals will be long and seriously deplored by their sorrowing and affectionate relations and associates. The Welsh seaman, Jones, entered on board the Clytus with Captain Miller, at Cork, last spring, sailed with him to North America, and had been with the brig ever since. - It is a singular and melancholy fact that Captain Miller is the third of the family who has met a similar fate - the whole of them were shipmasters. - Ayr Observer".*

John Miller was 29 when he died. The article does not report that the other shipmasters in the family who had died were his brothers. They may have been cousins or uncles. Before 1833 John Millar was Master of the sloop Industry in the coastal trade before 1833. The Lloyds Register of that year has it listed as being owned by Millar & Co.



Elisabeth Miller, Betsy, was born on 11th June 1792, the eldest of ten children. Her baptismal record states that her father, William Miller, was at that time a Merchant Taylor in Saltcoats, and her mother was Mary Garret. They were married on the 12th December 1791. The record of their marriage notes that Mary was a widow. She had married John Mackey on the 23rd September 1782 and subsequently had two children by him, John in 1783 and Margaret in 1785. Mary Garret was born in Ardrossan in 1764 to Magnus Garret and Margaret Crauford. William Miller was born in West Kilbride in 1764 to Hugh Miller and Hannah Thomson. Betsy's brothers and sisters were; Hugh born 1st November 1793, Mary born 28th February 1795 and died before 1801, Hannah born 29th January 1796 and died before 1808, William born 15th December 1797, Margaret Crawford born 7th

November 1799, Mary Garret born 3rd December 1801, John born 5th April 1804 and died in September 1833, Robert born 20th September 1806, Hannah Thomson born 29th August 1808.

A Masters Certificate was issued for William Miller in 1853. He had gone to sea in 1812 as an Apprentice and by 1818 was a ships Master. A note at the bottom states that he requested the certificate by the end of April 1853 as he expected to take command of a vessel sailing for Australia. According to a piece by Catherine Duff he died in Australia in 1869.

There is also a Masters Certificate issued in 1853 and renewed in 1856 for Robert Miller who had gone to sea in 1823 as an Apprentice in the coastal trade and had since then sailed to destinations in North America, India and China. When Betsy died on the 12th May 1864 it was reported in newspapers and periodicals both at home and abroad. Amongst these was the Leeds Times of the 21st May 1864.

*"A Glasgow paper notices the demise of Miss Betsy Miller, aged 71, whose life and labours have often been quoted as illustrative of what a right-minded, earnest, and indefatigable woman can do in order to discharge a debt and earn an honourable maintenance. Miss Miller was a daughter of the late Mr. W. Miller, for a long time a shipowner and wood merchant in Saltcoats. In her younger years she act as clerk and "ship's husband" to her father, and when business affairs took an unfavourable turn, with a resolution which truly might be called heroic, she took the command of an old brig, the Clitus, and became "sailing-master". So successful was her career that she enabled to pay off a debt of £700, which her father's estate owed, maintain herself in comfort, and bring up two sisters left dependent upon her. The Clitus traded between Ardrossan and the coast of Ireland for more than 30 years; she transacted all the business connected with freight, cargo, and ship's course through all weathers".*

Her youngest sister Hannah, who by then had taken on responsibility for the business, registered Betsy at the time of her death as Eliza Miller, Ship Owner. Hannah and her sister Mary lived in Saltcoats. At the time of the 1841 Census they were living with their father William, a wood merchant, in Quay Street. By 1851 Hannah and Mary were working as seamstresses. The crew of the Clytus was recorded in the 1871 Census at Ardrossan. They were all born in Saltcoats. The Captain was James Anderson, age 56. Archibald Robertson, age 32, the Mate and Seamen John Stewart, age 55, Thomas Redmond, age 48, Neil Robertson, age 19, Duncan Campbell, age 18, and Gilbert McKenzie, age 17, the cook. Hannah Miller, age 64, was the Stewardess.

The Glasgow Herald, Wednesday 29th March 1876, reports on the end of the relationship between the Miller family and the Clitus.

*"The Last of a Famous Brig - Mr Plimsoll's destructive broom has swept away no more remarkable vessel than the old brig Clitus, which was recently condemned and which was sold this week for £122 by Mr Symington, auctioneer, Saltcoats. The Clitus was rebuilt more than a century ago from*

materials saved from the wreck of a man-of-war bearing the same name, which came to grief on the East coast. She became the property of Mr William Miller, merchant, Saltcoats; and during the great storm of February, 1839, when 33 vessels were driven ashore on the Ayrshire coast, the *Clitus* was included amongst the number. She required extensive repairs, and at the instance of a Kilmarnock gentleman, the late Mr Finnie, coalmaster, the eldest daughter of Mr Millar, the owner, was deputed to superintend the repairs. So efficiently did Miss Millar discharge this duty that Mr Finnie persuaded her to take command of the brig for one voyage, so that she might have a knowledge of her earnings.

The voyage yielded an excellent return, and the upshot was that Captain "Betsy" Millar took permanent command. For the lengthened period of 22 years, at all seasons, Betsy continued in charge of the *Clitus*, relinquishing her duties only when failing health compelled her to do so. She died at Saltcoats in 1864, and the *Clitus* was left as the breadwinner of the surviving sisters, who, however, are now deprived of this source of income. The name of Betsy was a most familiar one both afloat and ashore, and it was honourably mentioned by the late Earl of Eglinton in the House of Lords during the discussion of the Shipping Bill in 1854, and also in the House of Commons about the same time".

Mary died in July 1880 at Quay Street in Saltcoats. When Hannah died in February 1890 the newspapers reported on her work and that of her more famous sister Betsy. Neither Betsy, Mary or Hannah had ever married.

The Glasgow Herald of 20th February 1890 reported on Hannah's death and used much of what had been written previously. This report was picked up by many papers both at home and as far away as New Zealand in the Ashburton Guardian of the 2nd May 1890.

*"Death of a Remarkable Saltcoats Woman - On Monday, Miss Hannah Millar, formerly of the brig Clitus, died in Quay Street, Saltcoats, at the advanced age of 82 years, The history of herself and her family is remarkable. Her father, the late Mr Wm. Millar, was a merchant in Saltcoats, in the days when it possessed a harbour, with a flourishing shipping trade and when shipbuilding was also carried on. In advanced years Mr Millar was unfortunate in his affairs, which at his death were embarrassed.*

*The principal asset of his business was the brig Clitus, which had been built out of material belonging to a man-of-war of the same name, which was wrecked on the east coast over 100 years ago. Mr Millar's eldest daughter, Miss Betsy Millar, at this crisis in the affairs of her family, with a resolution which might truly be called heroic, took the command of the brig and became "sailing master". So successful was her career as a "shipmaster" that she was enabled to pay off a debt of £700 which her father's estate owed to creditors, maintain herself in comfort, and bring up two sisters left dependent upon her.*

*The Clitus traded between Ardrossan and Irish ports, and for more than thirty years Miss Millar transacted all the business connected with freight, cargo, and ship's stores, engaged her crew, and directed the ship's course through all weathers. She received honourable mention by the late Earl of*

*Eglinton in the House of Lords, when the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854 was under discussion, and about the same time she was also mentioned praiseworthily in the House of Commons. At Miss Betsy Millar's death in 1864 Miss Hannah Millar assumed charge of the vessel, and continued successfully to command her for many years".*

## **The Clitus**

The first entry for the Clitus is in the supplement of new builds in the Lloyds Register of 1812. It was built in Sunderland, a Snow, for Lang or Laing from partly old material. This would make some sense of the later references to the Clitus being built partly from the wreckage of an old man-of-war. There is a small difference between a snow and a brig in the way the spanker is rigged. The spanker is the fore and aft sail behind the lower part of the mainmast. The inspection port was London and the destination was Gibraltar under the command of R. Sharp.

According to information given on [www.searlecanada.org/sunderland/sunderland145.html](http://www.searlecanada.org/sunderland/sunderland145.html) the Clitus was built by John and Philip Laing at Bridge Dock, Monkwearmouth for Laing & Co Sunderland. The tonnage was given a 197 and it was launched on March 28th 1812.

A report in the Quebec Gazette, 18th June 1812, announces the arrival of the brig Clitus from Sunderland in 49 days, R. Sharp, master.

Shipping registered by Lloyds was not inspected every year but would be listed in their annual publications. In the entry published in 1818 the brig Clitus was listed as belonging to Wade & Co. The inspection port was Liverpool and the destination of the up coming voyage was Brazil under the command of W. Hanton.

An entry accessed at The Ships List website from the Quebec Mercury of 1820 announced that the Brig Clitus arrived at Quebec on July 6th 1820 after 19 days from St Johns Newfoundland. The ship carried cargo to Bell and Stewart. The ships master Hanton. Bell & Stewart were noted merchants in Quebec at that time.

The Lloyds Register of 1833 has the Clitus belonging to Robinson & Co., master W. Hanton, inspection port Liverpool and the destination voyage was given as C. de V., possibly Cape de Verde. The ship had not been inspected in 1833. It was at that time owned by Miller & Co. and its master was the unfortunate John Miller.

The entries in Lloyds Register from 1834 to 1836 give the owner of the Clitus as Millar & Co. The ships master is T. Fleck. The brig is noted to be sailing from a port in the Firth of Clyde to Naples. Thomas Fleck was born in Ayr on the 5th April 1808. He went to sea as an apprentice in 1821. Between September 1831 and September 1833, (September 1835 on his Masters Certificate issued in 1851), he was the mate on the Clitus. It is likely that he was the mate reported to be watching from the mast of the Clitus when John Miller disappeared in 1833. The newspapers printed his name as

Affleck not Fleck. He then became master of the Clitus until September 1837. His time on the Clitus was spent in the North American trade. The Novascotian reported that on August 3rd 1837 the brig Clitus arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia carrying 106 passengers at the end of a voyage from Cork which lasted for 42 days.

Between 1836 and 1845 the master of the Clitus is given as J. Barclay. The Clitus was noted as trading between ports on the Firth of Clyde and Dublin. James Barclay was born in Saltcoats on the 17th January 1807. He first went to sea as an apprentice in 1820 and sailed to Montreal. According to his Masters Certificate issued in 1851 he was the mate on the Clitus for a short time between 1834 and 1835 in the Irish trade and its master between July 1836 and February 1837 sailing to Charles Bay, Newfoundland.

After 1851 Lloyds were more interested in gathering information about foreign trade so information about shipping involved in the coastal trade is less likely to appear.

### **On to the next stop**

*Walk to the end of Quay Street to Braes Road, cross over and go through the car park to the esplanade.*

### **(E) William Ritchie, 1756-1834; pioneer shipbuilder**

Car park next to Aldis. KA21 5EP

OS Grid Reference - NS 24580 41106

Plaque on gate post at esplanade walk. This was where William Ritchie's boatyard was on The Braes<sup>6</sup> near to the harbour<sup>7</sup>.

Until the American War of Independence broke out, it had been cheaper to build ships there. As a part of meeting the demand for ships during this period three yards were set up in Saltcoats. Between 1775 and 1790, William Ritchie was involved in shipbuilding in Saltcoats. 64 vessels were built here during that time. Some of these ships and brigs were sold on to owners in England, Ireland and Spain. The shipyards employed up to 60 men.

In 1791, the Reverend Dr James Woodrow of Stevenston reported in the Statistical Account of the Parish that one of three master shipbuilders was moving to Belfast. The industry in Saltcoats had declined but there was the opportunity of starting a shipbuilding business in Belfast at that time. William Ritchie took that opportunity. He came to be known as the father of shipbuilding in Belfast. The Ulster-Scots Community Network has produced a pdf booklet called 'Belfast Shipbuilders'.

William was born on the 12th February 1755 to James Ritchie and Susanna Niven. They were married in Stevenston on 30th March 1750. William was one of 12 children. James Ritchie's occupation is given as coal grieve, (either a coal merchant or mine overseer), in the records of birth

for the older children. By the time the younger children are born his occupation is given as either a merchant or an innkeeper.

William's brothers and sisters were John, born 11th February 1751, James, born 29th October 1752, William and Robert, twins born 2nd March 1754 and baptised on the same day both died in infancy, Robert, born 18th January 1757, Susanna, born 2nd April 1759 and died in childhood, Jane born 13th September 1761, Walter born 1st August 1763, Hugh born 9th February 1766, Susanna born 26th November 1768, and Margaret born 14th August 1773.

Sources tell that Hugh moved to Belfast with William and worked with him until he was able to set up a shipbuilding business of his own in 1798. Their first ship built in Belfast, the Hibernia, was launched on the 7th July 1792.

The Belfast Trade Directory for 1800 recorded an entry for William Ritchie, a ship builder at Thomas Street (North Dunbars Quay). Hugh went into partnership with Alexander McLaine. Hugh died in Belfast in 1808 and his eldest brother John took his place in the shipbuilding partnership with Alexander McLaine. John moved his wife, Jane, and children to Belfast. Ritchie and McLaine were the first to build a steamship in Ireland.

The Belfast Newsletter of the 8th April 1828 reported on the launch of a brig.

*"Launch. - On Friday, at one o'clock, a very fine coppered brig, 168 tons register, was launched from the dockyard of Messrs. Ritchie & McLaine, and went off the stocks in excellent style, amidst the cheers of hundreds of spectators. - She has been built for Messrs. Hardy & Clark, and Messrs. George & Richard Haloran, and is intended for the West India trade. She was named the Boyne".*

John Ritchie died on the 4th April 1828 in Belfast. A notice in the Belfast Newsletter of the 23rd May 1828 was posted by his business partner Alexander McLaine to enable the partnership to be dissolved.

*"In consequence of the death of Mr John Ritchie, the partnership accounts of Ritchie & McLaine must be closed. The subscriber therefore requests that those persons who are indebted to the Firm will make immediate payment of their accounts; and also requests that any claims against said Firm may be furnished forthwith".*

The following advert appeared in the Belfast Newsletter on the 27th May 1828.

*"For Freight or Charter, the Brig Star, 113 Tons Register, Coppered and Copper-fastened, And now ready to receive a Cargo or proceed on a Voyage - Apply to the Master on board, or to Ritchie & McLaine".*

The business continued with Alexander McLaine in sole charge.

James Ritchie, brother of William, Hugh and John, would most probably have been in Belfast. A death notice in the Belfast Newsletter of 26th September 1828 reflects the connection of the family with the city.

*"At Paisley, on the 22d inst. after a short illness, Mr. William Ritchie, the second son of Mr. James Ritchie, of Saltcoats in Scotland, aged 23 years. A residence of several years in this town, afforded to many in Belfast and its neighbourhood the pleasure of being acquainted with this amiable young man. His private and social behaviour commanded the esteem and affection of all that knew him, and by his removal from this town, back to the land of his fathers' in 1826, some of our benevolent institutions sustained the loss of a very valuable member. The Brown street Sunday School, in particular, was for many years the scene of his most assiduous and effective exertions, and to those who were his associates in that labour of love, his early decease will doubtless be a subject of deep and unfading regret".*

It was not unusual for business men to be actively involved with charitable institutions. William Ritchie was a committee member of several and chaired the General Board of the Charitable Society in 1829. By this time he had retired from the shipbuilding business. In the Belfast Newsletter of the 5th May 1829 he announced that there would be a meeting of this Board on the 12th May to receive the report of the Spring Water Commissioners, elect new members and consider a proposal to build a lying-in hospital.



William Ritchie had other ongoing business interests. In a government report published in 1835 he was named as proprietor of a quay used for loading and unloading ships. The following image shows how much duty was paid to government by that business over a three year period.

The Belfast Newsletter of 24th January 1834 printed the following notice on the death of William Ritchie.

*"On Saturday the 19th inst. in the 79th year of his age, Mr. William Ritchie, ship-builder. He was a native of Ayrshire, in Scotland; and settled in this town about the year 1792, and was the first who established a regular system of ship-building in the harbour of Belfast. Ever zealous in the cause of humanity - he was for many years a member of the Poorhouse, Dispensary, House of Industry, Pipe-Water, and Police Committees. He was greatly respected by all who knew him, and his death is much regretted".*

The will of John Ritchie's daughter Susanna, granted in 1867, contains a considerable amount of information about the family. Another daughter of John's, Martha, married Alexander McLaine. Susanna never married and her bequests to her nieces ensured that they would receive income

independent of their husbands through trusts. As the property of a married woman belonged to her husband, until an Act of Parliament in 1870, making use of a trust was a way of ensuring income went to the person it was intended for.

Susanna lived in Corporation Street and left £2750 in the hands of her nephews Alexander, a shipbuilder, and John McLaine to distribute as she wished. Their brother George Langtry McLaine was a Solicitor. Their father Alexander died 14th February 1857 and their mother Martha died 8th August 1864. Alexander and Martha had a younger son, Lachlan, and daughters, Jane and Helen.

Jane McLaine married Edward McDowell in Belfast on 28th July 1858. Their daughter Jane was included in Susanna's will as her mother had died. Jane went to live with her father in Liverpool.

A sister of Susanna had married a John Chambers. This sister was possibly Agnes or Jane. They had four sons, John, Archibald, Robert and Malcolm, named in Susanna's will. Susanna also made bequests to their married daughters, Agnes Carson widow of Lamont Carson in Edinburgh, Martha McNair wife of Robert McNair in London and Elizabeth Wallace wife of James Wallace also in London.

Susanna left money to two further nieces, Jane Coleman wife of James Coleman in Belfast and Susanna Ellis wife of Mr Ellis in Liverpool.

## **On to the next stop**

*Retrace your walk to Quay Street and turn left into Dockhead Street. Go to the end of Dockhead Street and cross over to Hamilton Street. Note the Metro<sup>8</sup> building on the left.*

## **(F) Harry Kemp, died 1972; impresario**

Salt Cot, 7 Hamilton Street, KA21 5DS

OS Grid Reference - NS 24496 41334

This building was once the La Scala Cinema owned by Harry Kemp.

Harry Kemp introduced a series of concert parties during the 1922 summer season at the La Scala cinema in Saltcoats. This proved to be the first of the renowned Kemp Summer Shows which ran at venues up and down the Ayrshire Coast. Kemp also invested heavily in Saltcoats' cinemas, with the Regal and La Scala cinemas in Saltcoats remaining in Kemp family ownership after Harry's death in 1972.

Amongst the many performers who featured in Kemp's shows at the Beach Pavillion was Dave Willis (1895-1973), a Scottish comedian and actor well-known for his music hall performances in 1930s and 1940s. Willis also made two films for Welwyn Studios, co-starring with Patricia Kirkwood.

Built on the site of the old Minstrel Stance, the Beach Pavilion was constructed to house summer shows. The Beach Pavilion, built as part of the Lido Complex, was also used a cartographic centre during World War II.



### **On to the next stop**

*Cross through the car park at the rear of the Salt Cot and into the grounds of the Heritage Centre.*

### **(G) Ardrossan Parish Church, rebuilt 1773; heritage centre**

North Ayrshire Heritage Centre, 13 Kirkgate, KA21 5HB

OS Grid Reference - NS 24549 41407

This building was once the Ardrossan Parish Church.

The heritage centre is housed in Ardrossan Parish Church which was built in 1773 on the site of an earlier church of 1744. There are a number of architectural features of note. On the external north wall the remains of the entrance to the Sailor's Loft can be traced, while on the south side the pedimental projection has a weathered sundial and a newer one below having both Greenwich Mean Time and British Summer Time figures. Above is a tablet which recorded the construction dates of 1744 and 1773, and above that is an imposing bellcote.

At the Manse Street entrance is the pleasingly well-proportioned Session House. It was built in the 18th century and was used by the church session for meetings and to house the gravedigger's tools. The grounds of the museum were cleared in 1967 to form a cemetery lawn; all illegible headstones were removed and the remainder set around the perimeter walls. The grounds were first used shortly after the church opened and was in use up until the last internment in 1915. Of the original 451 memorials 192 remain and a full report on them is kept in the museum for public consultation.

Families of interest buried here include relations of Robert Service (the poet), Edgar Allan Poe, the Allans of the Allan Line, the Smiths of the City Shipping Line, the Workmans (famous marine engineers in Belfast), Betsy Miller and there is the curious witch's headstone.



The heritage centre was originally the North Ayrshire Museum and was set up by Owen Kelly, a local businessman, in 1957 to preserve items of local interest. It was run as a private concern until 1975 when Cunninghame District Council shouldered the responsibility of looking after the building and collection.

Following the Merger of the Local History Library and Ayrshire Archive it is now the North Ayrshire heritage centre and is administered by North Ayrshire Council.

### **On to the next stop**

*Exit the grounds into Manse Street and turn left. Cross over at the pedestrian crossing and over the railway footbridge.*

### **(H) Janice Galloway, born 1955; novelist**

Saltcoats Library, Springvale Place, KA21 5LS

OS Grid Reference - NS 24564 41555

Go into the library and ask to see some of Janice's books.

Born and raised in Saltcoats, Galloway worked as a schoolteacher for ten years before becoming a professional writer. She is well known for her novels, which include 'The Trick is to Keep Breathing' and 'Clara'. She also writes for radio and has produced collaborative works with artists and musicians, including *Monster*, an opera libretto written in 2002 for Scottish Opera.



## On to the next stop

*Re-cross the bridge to Manse Street and turn right. Go up past the War Memorial<sup>9</sup> and into Ardrossan Road.*

## (I) Kenneth Campbell, 1917-1941; Victoria Cross recipient

Ardrossan Road, KA21 5BW

OS Grid Reference - NS 24306 41707



Kenneth Campbell was born on 21st April 1917 in Saltcoats, His father John was joint town clerk in Saltcoats. Kenneth had 2 brothers and 3 sisters. He was educated at Ardrossan Academy and then at Dreghorn Castle School, Edinburgh. He graduated BA from Clare College, Cambridge, where he joined the university's RAF (Volunteer Reserve) and trained as a pilot. He became a Pilot Officer on April 12th 1939.

He was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for "The most conspicuous bravery" in a low-level torpedo attack on a German battle cruiser at Brest in April 1941. He died at the age of 23 on Sunday 6th April 1941.

The events leading to his death are chronicled in the London Gazette in 1942. Campbell was a member of 22 Squadron whose mission was to attack the German ships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau

in Brest harbour. When he reached his objective at dawn, he and his three man crew found themselves alone facing 1,000 guns of shore batteries, ships and the two battle cruisers. Despite the odds Campbell flew in at 50ft and blew a 40ft hole in the Gneisenau's starboard side that flooded the cruiser and put it out of action for 8 months. This act of daring prove to be a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Campbell is buried in Brest Cemetery in France plot 40, row 1 grave number 10. In April 2000 he was honoured by Saltcoats when a memorial plaque and bench was dedicated to his achievements. These are situated opposite St. Mary's church in Ardrossan Road, Saltcoats.

### **On to the next stop**

*Cross over Ardrossan Road, return south and turn right into Winton Street. At the end of Winton Street, cross over Montgomerie Crescent onto the esplanade and turn left.*

### **(J) Queen of the Sea**

Montgomerie Crescent, KA21 5BY

OS Grid Reference - NS 24178 41442

Plaque on shelter on esplanade across from Melbourne Park. Melbourne Park is the centre of the Queen of the Sea celebrations.

In 1528, Saltcoats Town was elevated to a Burgh of Barony (the right of buying and selling and holding markets and of electing bailies being given to the inhabitants), the charter being granted to the Earl of Eglinton by James V of Scotland. As part of the Quater Centenary celebrations in 1928, the Town Council inaugurated the Queen of the Sea pageant, styled after a mediaeval coronation ceremony. The Queen was elected from one of the four local schools by her fellow pupils.

The ceremony was accompanied by a procession through the town and after the crowning the Queen and her maids of honour laid their bouquets at the War Memorial. The first Queen of the Sea was Miss Netta Duff crowned on 25th August 1928 by the wife of Provost William D Kerr. A crowd of 20,000 watched the ceremony.

The ceremony continued from 1928 until 1935, except 1934 when the Ayrshire Pageant took place, then again from 1950 to 1963. The ceremony was restarted in 2000 as part of the Millennium celebrations.

The previous Sea Queens were

1928 Netta Duff

1929 Jenny Reid

1930 Jean Jackson

1931 Sadie McLelland  
1932 Netta Orr  
1933 Annie Harper  
1934 None (Ayrshire Pagaent)  
1935 Mary Wilson  
1950 Matilda McEvoy  
1951 Moira McGuire  
1952 Clara Lambie  
1953 Isobel Speirs

1954 Alison Elliot  
1955 Patricia Hanlon  
1956 Aureen Anderson  
1957 Ruby Soden  
1958 Margaret Irvine  
1959 Margaret Reid  
1960 Sylvia Gill  
1961 Carolann Hamilton  
1962 Beatrice Clennell  
1963 Mary Theresa Miller  
2000 Hazel McMaster  
2001 Leah Robertson

2002 Diane Mathieson  
2003 Chloe Shaw  
2004 Sophie Johannesen  
2005 Ashley Fullarton  
2006 Blair Thomson  
2007 Rachel McGivern  
2008 Jamie Lee Smith  
2009 Antonia Henderson  
2010 Jillian Cameron  
2011 Carly Cowan  
2012 Katie Boyde



### **On to the next stop**

*Continue along Montgomerie Crescent to Montgomerie Circus.*

### **(K) Saltcoats Bathing Pond, built 1932; salt water bathing pool**

Winton Circus, KA21 5DA

OS Grid Reference - NS 24159 41236

Plaque at foot of stairs on esplanade wall.

In the late 1880s, a bathing station was built on the site of the former saltpans. This was in a rocky cove, which is at one end of what is now Winton Circus. This bathing station had changing facilities and some seated accommodation for spectators although seating was often just the surrounding rocks in the bay. This proved to be a very popular venue. This station was replaced in the 1930s.

On 10th June 1933, a new bathing and yacht pond was opened on the same site. Its claim to fame was that it was the largest tidal pool of the time in Scotland. Not only was it the finest open air pool but it boasted modern changing rooms, showers, a tea room, seating, a roof balcony and flood lights for mid night bathing.

The Bathing pond was opened by the Lord Provost of Glasgow, showing the links between Saltcoats and the thousands of visitors coming on their summer holidays or for day trips from the city to the seaside. The chairman of the opening event was Baillie Andrew Kennedy. Provost John Christie, bath master Allan Nelson, assistant bath master James Rainey, George Harley, burgh surveyor and all members of the council were in attendance.



On a dull and rainy day the provost's wife presented The Lord Provost of Glasgow's wife with a pair of scissors to cut the ribbon to officially open the new pond. Admission to the event was 7d. reserved seats 2/4d and unreserved seats 1/2d. Swimming galas were much appreciated by the many who attended the event. The tearoom had teas, coffees, ice cream and confectionary for sale. A season ticket for young people cost 2 shillings in the 1930s and was a great meeting place for all ages. Fashion displays, life saving demonstrations, diving contests, polo matches as well as numerous swimming galas were all popular with both visitors and local people. The swimming club held Miss Saltcoats competitions. Attendance often was over 2,000 per day.

On one day in July 1933 a record 4,511 paid to be part of this wonderful new experience. Throughout the next 50 years crowds flocked to the pond in Saltcoats, especially during the Glasgow Fair holiday. With the opening of indoor pools at the Magnum and later at Harvie's in Stevenston the pond's attendance declined. In 1983 the pond was demolished and in 1989 the site was re-developed and is now a landscaped area.

## **This is the end of the trail.**

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<sup>1</sup> This was the site of The National Convalescent Home for Miners.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Cunninghame built a system of canals to transport his coal from the Auchendarvie mines to Saltcoats Harbour. One of the canals ran behind Canal Street giving its name.

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<sup>3</sup> Moffat House was once the Saltcoats branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland before becoming the headquarters of AT Mays, the travel agents.

<sup>4</sup> Lodge Neptune Kilwinning Saltcoats No. 442, who meet here, was founded in 1865.

<sup>5</sup> The building was constructed in two phases. The Town House on the right in 1826 and the Town Hall on the left in 1892. The Town House has the town's court room and a cell. The circular window is part of the cell. The window is to allow friends or relatives of the imprisoned to give them food and drink. The Town Hall for a time housed the Countess Cinema.

<sup>6</sup> This was also the site of the southern set of salt pans where coal from Auchendarvie was used to boil sea water to produce marine salt.

<sup>7</sup> Saltcoats Harbour was completed in 1700. It was used mainly by the Saltcoats fishing fleet and to export coal to Ireland.

<sup>8</sup> This was built as the Regal Cinema before becoming the Metro Night Club. The Metro was once Scotland's most popular night club with coach parties coming down from Glasgow on weekend nights.

<sup>9</sup> The War Memorial was unveiled in 1922. The figure on top is a Royal Scots Fusilier soldier and it's made of Aberdeenshire granite.