

# Helensburgh Heritage Trust

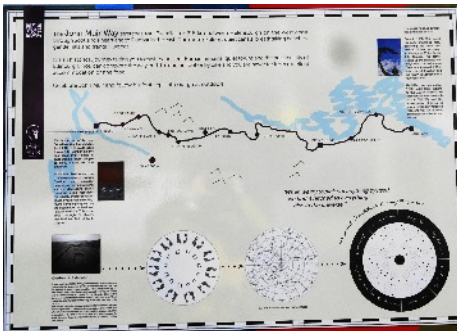
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# Newsletter

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Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome



**New Heritage Notes**

Much new heritage seems to have been created in Helensburgh in the very recent past. Whilst Colquhoun Square is still surrounded by exactly the same buildings with shops, offices and banks as well as cafes the entire central area has been transformed. The flowering cherry trees have blossomed, spring flower beds are on the way and there is very much more seating to enable the new views to be appreciated. The public was probably quite correct to force the traffic engineers to maintain the straight line of West Princess Street, rather than have some sort of double bend to slow down the traffic; that has been achieved with speed restrictions and ramps at each side. A regular monthly market has been re-established and looks as if it is receiving an attendance or at least it will if only we can persuade the weather to play its part! The Bicentenary monument is now in the paved area (without moving) and has uplighter floodlighting. Another big gain is a clear space for events, whether spring or autumn fairs, Christmas festivities or perhaps, the occasional performance artist. Structural form is provided by square blocks, some of which contain exhibits to create an outdoor museum type feature, which can be added to in the future as ideas and funds become available.

**The John Muir Way** starts (or finishes) on the sea front at the Putting Green, near to the swimming pool, with a seat, map and symbols.



**More Notes!**

The Access Trust is to be congratulated on achieving a cross-country cycle and walking route between the East and West coasts to commemorate the pioneer of the US national parks, whose vision has eventually inspired the Scottish Parliament to create *Loch Lomond and The Trossachs* and also *Cairngorm National Parks* in Scotland.

Then we have the new seafront Esplanade and progress is being made towards a complete restoration of Hermitage Park. There is even a resident led scheme for a new beach and pool to be created with a marina! It used to be said Helensburgh was sleepy and deteriorating!

## The Heritage Centre

We have been very pleased and honoured to have been able to host two exhibitions mounted specially by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Museum from Stirling as our contribution to the many commemorations which marked the outbreak of the Great War. I do wish that the visiting public could be persuaded to write comments, but two entries in our Visitors Book caught my eye.

17<sup>th</sup> February 2015

*Florence Heathcote wrote* "I'm only 10 (6) but I still found it very interesting and easy to understand."

29<sup>th</sup> January 2015

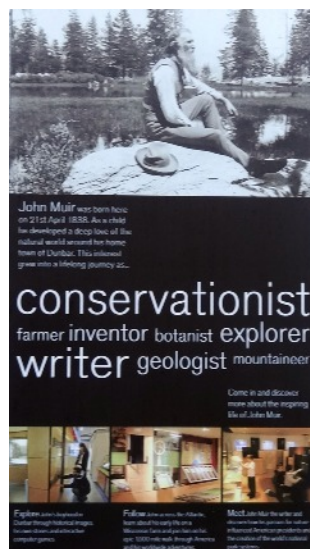
On his second visit *Councillor Maurice Corry TD wrote* - "A very revealing exhibition with lots of very interesting military historical information. *Well done to all!!!*"

## Current Displays in the Heritage Centre:-

- Case A-The Original Telesvisor
- B - Our 2004 working replica of the Daily Express 1936 DIY Telesvisor
- C.- Life beneath the Waves
- D.- Geilston, Personal items from Miss Hendry and Miss Bell 1920 - 1989
- E.- Boer War Presentation Clock
- F - Deborah Kerr.
- G - John Logie Baird
- H - Jack Buchanan
- J. - Geilston Hall and House
- K. - Garden Tools and Records and a Seed Planter from the Kitchen Garden
- L - Andrew Bonar Law
- M - Scale Model of 'Comet'
- Paintings of Henry Bell and John Logie Baird are on the walls.
- The Provost's Lamp is outside the door.



It finishes (or starts) at **John Muir's birthplace** on the High Street in Dunbar. 134 miles of breathtaking views of beaches, castles, roman remains, canals, woods and hills to walk or cycle. Never far from Food or Accommodation.



## THE ETERNAL COMBUSTION ENGINE?

A reporter with the Helensburgh and Gareloch Times proved a perceptive, if cautious, prophet when he commented in 1898 that “The motor car is gradually making progress”. That pronouncement was prompted by the sighting of three motor cars on the Loch Lomondside road over the last three days. The rest, as they say, is history. But who were the motoring pioneers in this area?

Andrew Bonar Law is generally credited as being the first in Helensburgh to possess a motor car, and this is the attribution made in “200 Years of Helensburgh”. Mrs Hilda Whitelaw Purvis (b.1895), interviewed for the Helensburgh Advertiser in 1975, certainly believed this to be the case, and described how her first trip in a car was in his vehicle. Excitement however turned to fear when the car proved unable to surmount Whistlefield Hill - this along with other fascinating stories from her interview are recounted on the Helensburgh Heritage Trust website.

According to Col. Kenneth Barge (1883-1971), interviewed for the Helensburgh and Gareloch Times in 1966, Francis Buchanan of Clarinish, Rhu, was the first in the district to own a motor car. Col. Barge, a lifelong resident of Rhu, gave 1901 as the date. He also recalled that it was a James and Brown model, with the registration number SN1.

William Hamilton (b.1889) was brought up in the village of Garelochhead. In his unpublished memoirs, he states that he witnessed the first motor vehicle reliability trial in Scotland. This apparently took the form of a circuit from Glasgow to Helensburgh and up Garelochside to Arrochar, the return being via Tarbet and Loch Lomondside. All the vehicles, some of which were steam cars, stopped before tackling the very steep incline at the bottom of Whistlefield Hill, and many failed to overcome this hurdle, even after several attempts. Hamilton would have had a grandstand view, since he was living in a row of cottages nestling at the foot of the hill. Names like Panhard and De Dion Bouton were among those spotted. He gives the date when this took place as sometime between 1899 and 1901. Such trials were in later years switched to the Rest and Be Thankful.

Hamilton also recalls that Richard Brooman-White of Arddarroch was the first in the Garelochhead area to possess a motor car. One of his earliest vehicles was a 60hp Mercedes :

“It used to race up Whistlefield Hill like an express train, making a noise like a machine gun in action..... Brooman-White also had one of the first Argyll cars, and had a large Daimler for some years”.

The first local public transport service by motor vehicle was that operated by the Gareloch Motor Service Co. Ltd. Owned by the MacFarlane family, who were probably better known as grain merchants, a service between Helensburgh and Clynder was launched on a trial basis in 1905, this being extended the following year to a timetabled schedule. In 1914, this service was replaced by that run by David McLaren Ltd - by this time, the vehicles used included charabancs as well as large cars. Henry Brown and Son in turn took over the local service in 1919. Those firms were all Helensburgh-based, though Brown's moved their H.Q to Garelochhead c.1928.

Trying to determine the identity of the first local retailer to ferry goods by motor vehicle is not easy, but one of the earliest to do so is thought to have been the bakery firm of Lachlan McLachlan and Son, whose shop was on West Clyde Street.

At the time of writing, the motor vehicle is the undisputed king of the road. The only question seems to be: will the internal combustion engine be supplanted by other forms of propulsion?

## Trust Directors

We are pleased to welcome The Rev David Clarke who has been appointed a Director of the Heritage Trust on the resignation of Derek Hall.

## Authors?

Many Members (and the public) have enjoyed our publication ‘Around Helensburgh’ which first appeared in 1999 and may now be still available in its third edition. We have been approached by Amberley Publishing of Stroud wishing another local history book, which they presumably think the town needs. Their full colour Through Time series takes old and new photographs of a town, with a short caption to describe the changes in the scene. Or a collection of 180 old photos or Postcards or the ‘Secret’ series which covers anecdotes and quirky events and facts about a town and its region. They are seeking an Editor or Compiler to find the images and write the captions. Yours truly really enjoyed doing the first book with the late Alison Roberts, but has no capacity for a repeat! I think that most of the old pics of the town are now on our [www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk](http://www.helensburgh-heritage.co.uk) web site but creating current images could be most interesting and maybe challenging! The point of this piece is to find an interested person. Are there any more literary volunteers? *K.N.C.*

*Alistair McIntyre*