

Saltcoats Town Trail

Welcome to Saltcoats! This Trail will help you find out more about the town's history. The map will guide you through the town and the trail should take about 1 hour. Your starting point is the Museum.

1. Inside North Ayrshire Museum

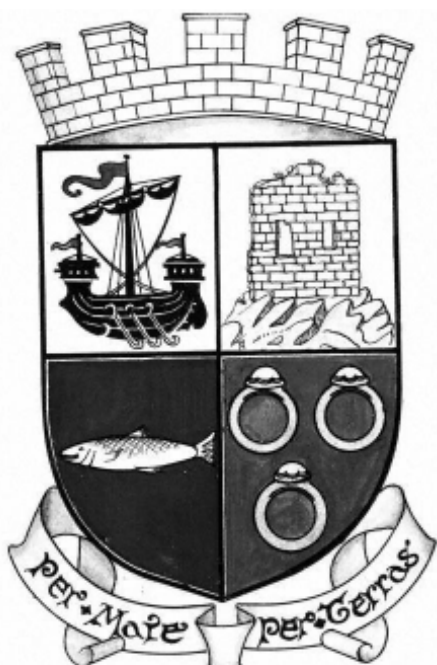
Where does Saltcoats get its name from?

Saltcoats gets its name from the ancient tradition of boiling sea water to extract salt, a practice which the townspeople once carried out in their beachside houses. These houses were sometimes called 'cots' or cottages. An early name for the town was 'Saltcots'.

The salt industry gave Saltcoats world wide fame.



In 1528 Saltcoats was made a free Burgh of Barony by King James I. This gave Saltcoats the right to hold markets and fairs. Not every town had this right.



BURGH OF SALTCOATS

What do the pictures on Saltcoats crest mean?

The **lymphad (boat)** represents the time when Saltcoats was famous for shipping and shipbuilding.

The **building** represents a saltpan. A saltpan is a building where the salt was produced.

The **fish** represents the former fishing industry.

The **three amulets*** are taken from the coat of arms of the Earls of Eglinton and Winton.

*an amulet is a charm carried or worn by a person.

The motto reads 'By Sea By Land'

Can you find Saltcoats crest in the museum?

2. Outside North Ayrshire Museum

Before being a museum, this building was Ardrossan Parish Church. The church has a connection with the world-famous poet, Robert Burns!



Rabbie and 'The Calf'

In 1788, the Reverend Stevens was assistant minister at Ardrossan Parish Church. He also preached at a church in Mauchline.

Living in Mauchline at the time was a young man called Rabbie Burns. Rabbie was walking to church one day when he saw his friend 'Dainty Davie'. Davie bet Rabbie that he could not write a poem about the Reverend Stevens' sermon. Rabbie accepted the bet and went off to church. He returned to Davie with his poem 'The Calf' and won the bet! Rabbie went on to become a world-famous poet.

Can you name any of Rabbie's other poems?

Directions: Leave the museum, turn right and walk along the path

3. The Graveyard

Some headstones in the Graveyard have skull and crossbones. **Can you find some?** These have nothing to do with pirates though! In the past people used these carvings as signs of death and these would often appear on headstones.

Some of the headstones are 'obelisks'. An obelisk is a tall four-sided pillar which gets thinner as it gets taller and finishes with a point.

What carvings can you see on the tall obelisk beside the path?

the moon

a compass

set square

the sun

Why not take a rubbing of one of our graves?

All of these carvings are connected to the Freemasons. The masons who built churches and cathedrals in the past, kept their knowledge and skills a closely guarded secret, to be passed on only to their apprentices. Because of this, the masons became known as a secret society.

4. A Witch's Grave

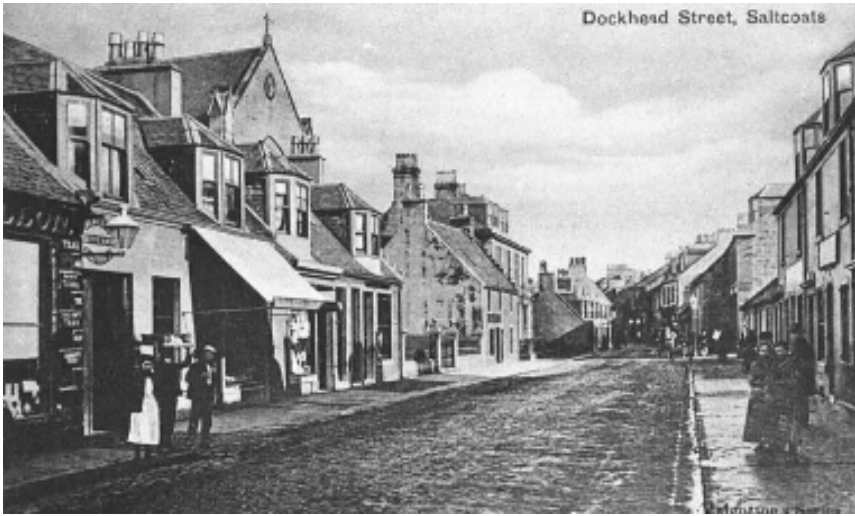
Behind the rose hip bushes on the left of the path is a very famous grave. Sarah Vincent was buried here in the 17th Century. Sarah was the last witch to be executed in Saltcoats! The headstone reads: **The Burning Place of Sarah Vincent of Saltcoats. Can you find Sarah's grave?** It has been worn away by the weather, but the word 'Saltcoats' can still be seen.

Directions: Go down the path and out the churchyard gate. Look for the modern building on the corner of Kirkgate and Hamilton Street. This was Saltcoats' site of execution. Witches would be executed here, often strangled first and then tied to a stake and burnt.

5. Saltcoats Market

Every Wednesday and Saturday, this car-park is transformed into Saltcoats open-air market. The tradition of markets goes back to medieval times and this tradition has carried on in Saltcoats. Saltcoats' streets are as bustling and full of local characters now as they were then.

Directions: Cross the road and turn left into the pedestrian precinct of Dockhead Street



6. Dockhead Street

Dockhead Street gets its name from the days when boats were built behind the buildings on the right.

Stop outside Trinity Church

Can you find the three amulets, the fish and the lymphad boat from Saltcoats crest?

Clue: Look under your feet!

Directions: Keep walking along Dockhead Street. You will pass Green Street on your left.

7. Green Street and the Parish Boundary

In the past towns were divided into parishes. The parish you lived in depended on where your nearest church was. Green Street sat on the boundary of Ardrossan Parish and Stevenston Parish. This meant that each Parish got half of the Town Hall!

Directions: Stop at the end of Countess Street and look at the building on the corner of Countess Street and Bradshaw Street.

8. Countess Street

What do you notice about the gable end of this building? The 'crow-step' design is often seen in old Scottish buildings. This is one of Saltcoats oldest buildings.

Look again at the gable end. Can you spot the signs of someone trying to avoid paying a window tax?

In the 18th Century, people were asked to pay a tax on windows. To avoid paying, they sometimes bricked up their windows. It must have been very dark inside!



Directions: The Town Hall and Town House are on your left as you walk along Countess Street.

9. Saltcoats Town Hall and Town House

The Town House with the tower contains the old court room and cell. You can see the small circular window above the door. This is the window of the prison cell that is still there with its stone bench and heavy prison door. Having the cell on the first floor is unusual as it would normally be on the ground floor so passers-by could give the prisoner food through the window.

In the past, the balcony of the Town Hall was used to make announcements to the people of Saltcoats. Nowadays it is used for the town Christmas tree. The town drummer and bell-ringer would work at the Town Hall and it was their job to spread important news throughout the town.

This photo shows Robert Reid, who was once the Town Drummer. When you return to the museum, ask staff if you can see the mechanism of the old Town Hall clock, the Town Drum and Bellringer's Bell.

Directions: Walk to the top of Countess Street and stop at the Anchor. Across the road you can see Saltcoats Train Station.



10. Saltcoats Train Station

The Stationmaster's House was built in 1894. Saltcoats was a popular holiday destination for Glaswegians, who would travel down the coast by train. Holidaymakers would enjoy a paddle at the beach and be entertained by Minstrels, 'pierrots' and other travelling circuses.



Directions: Turn back along Countess Street on the other side of the road from the Town Hall. Turn left along Bradshaw Street towards Nineyards Street.

11. Nineyards Street

This Street got its name when the Earl of Glencairn granted leases for 9 Saltcoats fishermen to each have a yard for 999 years. The fishermen built their houses on their yard and stored fishing gear there and so the street with the nine yards became known as Nineyards Street. John Bradshaw was one of the nine-yarders. He lived in Saltcoats in 1601 and gave his name to Bradshaw Street.

Directions: Walk back down Bradshaw Street and turn left into Quay Street.

12. Quay Street - the home of Betsy Miller and Girl Power!

Quay Street was the home of Betsy Miller - probably one of the world's first female sea captains. Betsy took coal from Saltcoats to Dublin and brought limestone back to Ayrshire. She captained the ship 'Clytus' and its 14-man crew until 1862. This would have been a difficult job for a man or woman, especially in stormy weather. Betsy is buried in the Graveyard where we started our trail.

Directions: Walk along Quay Street to The Braes and with an adult, cross the street safely. Walk to the Harbour and stand at the Pagoda. Look across to the Grange Hotel.

13. Grange Hotel

Behind the Grange Hotel is a wagon way, which used to lead to the canal. The canal has now been replaced by the railway line. Coal would be brought up the canal and then taken on wagons along the wagon way to the Harbour. The coal would be used to heat the salt pans and some would be sent by ship to Dublin.

The Grange Hotel used to be called the Saracen Head. This inn was well known for smugglers! On the other side of the sea wall is a creek, known in ancient times as 'Smuggler's Creek' Smugglers carrying rum, tobacco, brandy and even salt would land their goods here.

Directions: Stay at the Pagoda and look across to Aldis.

14. 'Crusting the pans'

Aldi's is where the salt pans used to be. The salt pans would be filled with salt water. They would then be heated by coal fires underneath them. The coal would come from the Auchenharvie mines. The salt water would slowly start to boil, and would then evaporate, leaving the salt at the bottom of the pans. Look at the photo to see how big the pans were! It took a day and a night to boil off all the water with men adding coal to the fires all through the night.

During the long nights, the 'salters' would sit around the fires telling spooky tales of long ago. They would be very secretive about their work and did not like to be interrupted.

The salt would not look like salt as we know it, but would be in crystals or icicles. These thick crystals would have to be shovelled out, sometimes even chiselled out - making a terrible noise, known to the locals as 'crusting the pans'.

What would the salt be used for?

Saltcoats salt was used to "cure" fish. The fish weren't ill! "Curing" means to preserve or keep food fresh by covering it in salt. In the days before freezers, salted fish stayed fresher for longer.



Directions: Look across the water to the building built into the harbour wall.

15. Harbour Master's House (sometimes called Customs House)

This building was built in 1809 and was used as the Harbour Master's house. The Harbour Master was in charge of the Harbour. In 1794, 37 ships were registered at Saltcoats Harbour. These ships would take goods in and out of the country.

| | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Exports: | coal | herring | earthenware | |
| Imports: | oats | timber | limestone | butter |



In the 19th Century, many Saltcoats families earned a living fishing for herring. Families owned their own boat and would sell their catch and divide the profit amongst themselves. Saltcoats fishermen called the herring the

"Silver Darlings".



The fisherwomen would wait at the Harbour for the fishermen to return with the catch. Their job to gut the fish and pack it in very salty water to preserve it. Even with their aprons, gutting the herring was a hard, dirty job. The women would wrap their fingers in old rags to protect them from the sharp knives, saltwater and the cold.

Directions: *Walk along The Braes. Windmill Street is on your right.*

16. Windmill Street

This street got its name because there used to be a windmill there. As Saltcoats had no river and could not use water-power, early townspeople had to rely on wind-power to work the mills they used to grind their flour.

Look at the photo of Windmill Street. How has it changed?



17. Fun Fair

This used to be the site of Saltcoats Bathing Station. It would be used in the summertime and midnight swims were popular in the 1950's. Brrr!

Admire the view of Arran and along the coast to Ardrossan. Can you see Ardrossan Castle? Can you spot Ailsa Craig on the horizon?



Directions: *walk along the sea front, turn right into Melbourne Road and left into Melbourne Terrace. Turn right into Winton Street. View the war memorial on the roundabout from the outside of the Melbourne Cafe.*

18. War Memorial

The war memorial commemorates the dead of two World Wars.

The memorial is on the site of the old Saltcoats Jail. The old jail is shown in the photo. Prisoners in the jail used to be walked down to the beach in their shackles for their exercise. This would be done at night-time so as not to disturb the people of Saltcoats.

Directions: *Return to the Museum along Hamilton Street.*



We hope you have enjoyed the Town Trail. If you would like to find out more about Saltcoats - North Ayrshire Museum is a good place to start!

