

GARGUNNOCK VILLAGE

A SHORT HISTORY AND GUIDE TO 7 WALKS

Gargunnock sits 6 miles west of the city of Stirling at the foot of the steep-sided hills which bear its name and rise almost 1600 ft to an ancient cairn on a high point called Carleatheran.

The earliest known settlements in the Parish are an Iron Age homestead on Keir Hill within the village and the remains of an ancient, 1800 year old Broch in Leckie Estate about a mile to the west.

Legend has it that William Wallace set out from his camp on Keir Hill to successfully capture the Peel Tower of Gargunnock, a fortified structure garrisoned by the English, guarding a crossing point on the River Forth.

By the time Prince Charlie passed through the village in 1745 on his journey south, eventually to Derby, the village, which had been no more than a small hamlet in 1728, was growing strongly, by 1790 supporting a population of 400 weavers, masons, joiners, shoemakers, tailors etc following changes in agricultural practices which encouraged the creation of such settlements.

In the mid 1700s, before time-pieces became ubiquitous, a surplus of funds from the annual horse races was used to purchase a Drum and a Bugle and fund a drummer (who was equipped with a Wag-at-the-Wa' clock) to sound the drum round the village at 5am each summer's morning when it was dry or blow a bugle, somewhat tunelessly, if it was wet! The times were adjusted a bit in winter! That Drum and Bugle can be seen in the Smith Museum, Stirling.

Three Estates lie in the Parish of Gargunnock. From West to East, Boquhan, Leckie, Gargunnock and a little bit of Touch. Boquhan was home to General Fletcher Campbell, instigator of modern farming methods and founder of the second oldest Farmers Club in Scotland. Leckie was once owned by Robert the Bruce then a succession of Leckies, Moirs and

Youngers who still farm a portion of the original.

Gargunnock Estate was in the hands of Sir James Campbell of Ardkinglas in the early 1700s and it was he who feued strips of land on either side of the Main Street, thus beginning the creation of the village as we now know it.

Now it is still in the hands of Stirlings, one of whose family members took part in escorting Napoleon to exile on the island of Elba in the early 19th century while the youngest daughter of the house, Jane, was a pupil of Frederic Chopin the composer, who is said to have visited her here and played on a piano especially bought for the occasion.

During the latter half of the 19th century the population of the village reached nearly 500, new employment being provided by a successful basket weaving trade, a quarry operation, distillery, sawmill and grain mill. Sadly by the 1920s much of this had gone or was declining. Many houses were either in a poor state of repair or ruinous and abandoned. The Main Street was no longer the through road it had once been, indeed it would have been abandoned by the local authority in the 50s had it not been for the efforts of Miss V.H.C. Stirling of Gargunnock House, the last of the line. In the early 1930s her father had decided to sell the estate. Preparations had been made when suddenly he died. She immediately cancelled the sale and assumed the burden of running the estate single handed for the rest of her life. In so doing she had a considerable influence on the rate of development of the village through the gradual release of land for building in and around it.

From the late 1930s onwards new council houses were built then renovation of many older buildings began followed by new individual houses then private schemes which increased the housing stock from about 100 in 1930 to the 315 you see now and a near 4 figure population.

With its Church, Inn, School, Community Centre, Community Shop, and many other organisations Gargunnock is definitely here to stay.

A SHORT WALK UP THE MAIN STREET

A gentle stroll up and down the Main Street with a couple of diversions providing surprising views (1.20 miles/1.95 Km)

Start at the Village Square and stroll over the footbridge, past the renovated Community Shop and past the 3-storey Gargunnock Inn to your right. The houses on this side all sit on the old strip feus, each about 100 yds long, created in the 1700s to accommodate folks displaced from the land by new farming methods. The cobbled area by the kerb is where an open drain or sheugh used to run until the 1960s when it was filled in.

The houses on the left replaced much older ones demolished in the 1960s. At the top of this first, steepest part of the Brae, the house named Hillview is where the last "Provost" of Gargunnock lived, hence Provost Park opposite with its football field and play areas. Further on Belton Cottage, on your right, was the site of Charlie Forsyth's first Post Office in 1840s at the top of the appropriately named Charlie's Loan.

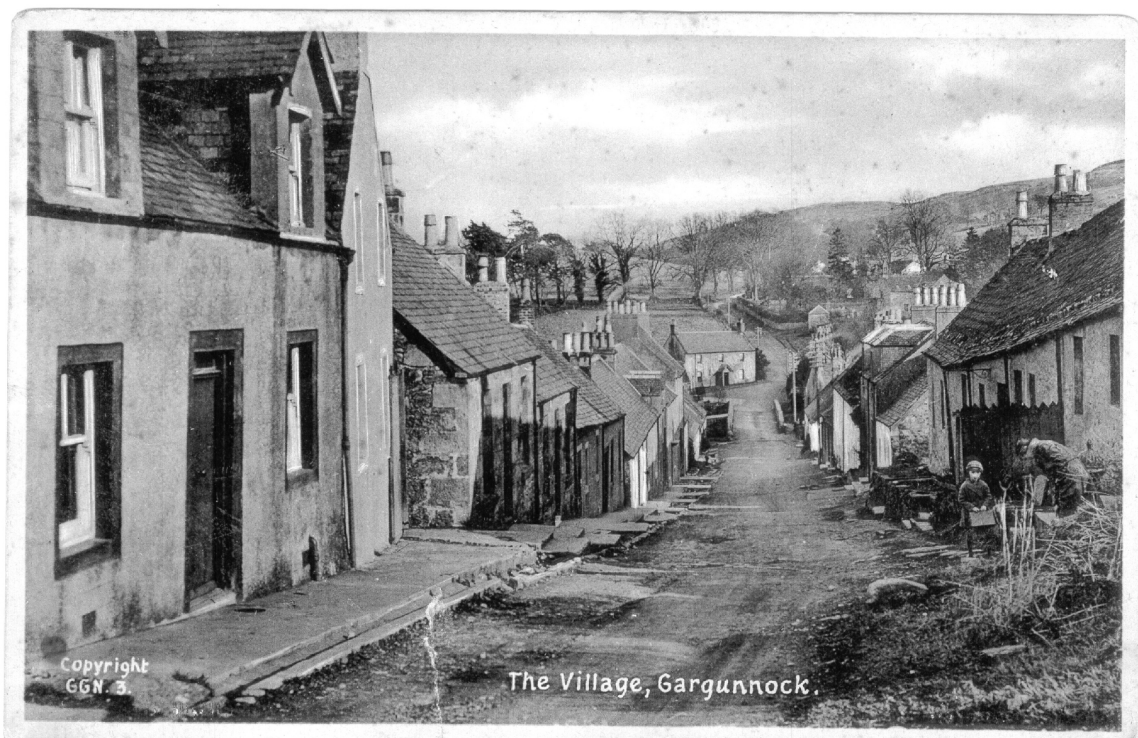
Continuing upwards it's worth turning right into

Loftbrae Park for a nice view over the Community Centre towards the Ochils on a clear day or westwards towards the Trossachs.

Retrace your steps to the Main St then turn right to the top of the street and enjoy another splendid view over the Carse towards Ben Ledi and the Trossachs. There used to be a path from here down to Leckie Rd thence across the fields to Kepdarroch Farm but it's long gone.

Before 1800 the Main St continued westwards from here through Leckie and Boquhan Estates to the village of Kippen and beyond all the way to Dumbarton but it became a cul-de-sac when Leckie Road was built to by-pass the steep Main Street around 1800. The house on the left through the gate was the school until 1854 when a new one was built, now the Community Centre.

Retrace your steps past two 18th century cottages on your right, Longrigg and Newton Cottage, and if you wish turn right down at McNeil Crescent then right again into Broom Park and Millbrae for some excellent views up to the Gargunnock Hills before returning to the Square.



An old postcard of Main St showing Hillview first left and the open drain or sheugh running down the left side of the road.

A SHORT WALK UP THE MANSE BRAE

A short walk up and down the Manse Brae with a wee bit of history thrown in.
(0.7 miles/1.0 Km)

Start at the Village Square and head eastwards up the Manse Brae with the Rest Garden (constructed 1930s) on your right and the church, dated 1774 but arguably 1623, which has a viewplate at the top of the Belfry stairs. See separate Church History leaflet and downloadable map and name index from QRI codes in notice board.

Next on your right is Dinning House, the former Church Manse. Beyond that, at one time, there were only two houses; Viewfield (originally Carpenters House in census records) and Shrub Cottage. Both are still there but much altered.

On your left is a large field once known as the Coo Park, an area of common grazing for villager's cows in daytime.

Viewfield, called "Houlet Ha" locally at one time, is the 2-story house with the retaining wall in front. It was originally single storey, similar to Shrub Cottage further up. There a local couple settled in 1820 and raised a family of 10 children. The father was a Wright or Carpenter and most of his sons

joined in his business which prospered throughout the 19th century becoming a bit of a dynasty, employing local men and in time building a sawmill alongside the house. I

Towards the end of the century the remaining sons were dying out but there were no grandsons to take over just a nephew down in England where the blacksmith had married. So one of his 20 year old sons was sent here in 1880 to pick up the reins of the business and continue the line.

This was successful and in time he married, set up house in Shrub Cottage, produced a family then eventually moved into Carpenter's House which he added a storey to. Thus the dynasty continued, with a new sawmill down at Gargunnock Station which remained in the family till 1960.

You can see why he renamed it Viewfield, the views across the fields and woods to the hills being magnificent. All that remains of that minor local dynasty now is the name of the adjacent housing development - McLarens Park

Continue further to the top of the hill then retrace your steps meantime.



THE LADIES WALK (BLUE ROUTE)

The Ladies Walk was a direct route for the ladies of Gargunnock House to access the Parish Church. (1.72 miles/2.77 Km)



Start at the Village Square. Here is an old stone fountain (now disused) erected in 1910 at the time of the inauguration of the first piped water supply to the village from a tank high up in the woods fed from the hillside.

Leave the Square eastwards via Manse Brae past the Rest Garden, created in the 1930s with gates commemorating the coronation in 1953. Beyond the Rest Garden lies conical Keir Hill where Wallace is said to have camped before his onslaught of the Peel Tower of Gargunnock half a mile away and also the Lower Cemetery.

The church on your right is dated 1774 (although arguably 1622) and at the top of the stone steps below the bell there is a plaque identifying many of the peaks on the northern skyline.

Check out the Welcome notice board in front of the wall for Church History and a downloadable Graveyard Map with names index.

Continue up the Manse Brae a short distance to a way-marked footpath gate on your left. The path initially drops down to the carse then east to Millthread cottage where the Duke of Cumberland apprehended a poor fellow in 1746 and carried him off to the gallows in Stirling.

Here one choice is to leave the route the ladies followed and take the path up to the right through

trees skirting the west and south sides of the walled garden before it climbs steeply up a grassy field to two welcome seats at the top from where the views to north and south can be enjoyed. The path then drops down to join a short track connecting the Gargunnock House drive with the Back Road into the village.

Alternatively just continue straight on past the north wall of the garden towards

Gargunnock House with its distinctive Doocot then follow the drive until you reach the Lodge.

Gargunnock House was originally a tower house in form but over the centuries had various bits added to it until around 1800 when its then owner, Colonel Eidington, added the Georgian Facade to improve its overall appearance.

From the Lodge turn right onto the Back road towards the village. At the right time of year (late October/November) don't miss the spectacular Autumn colours of the drive to Gargunnock House or in late winter and Spring the incredible profusion of snowdrops, daffodils then rhododendrons. There is always something to see whenever you come.

There are no footpaths on the Back Road so beware of traffic. Most of Ladies Walk and the drive was once part of the road from Stirling to Dumbarton, the Back Road from the Lodge to the village being an 18th century diversion to remove passing traffic from the vicinity of the mansion when Colonel Eidington took over.

Gargunnock House is holiday accommodation now but if on rare occasions you get the chance to visit it take it. It's a fascinating place inside.

A WALK ROUND LECKIE ESTATE VIA THE BEECH WALK (ORANGE ROUTE)

***A satisfying, flat Sunday afternoon ramble.
(2.52 miles, 4.0 Km)***

Commence at the Village Square and head up the Main St. turning left into Drummond Place then right before No 20 into the path to the recently upgraded Beech Walk footpath, suitable now for buggies and bikes. That last house on the left is where the village curling pond once was situated.

On reaching the surfaced road continue straight along to the old sawmill past the wee bridge. Note Watson House on your right (built in the early 1830s for the Moir family) and the raised mound of earth on your right meant to hide the road and you from the inhabitants of the "Big House."

Now turn right at the sawmill down the farm track then right at the wooden bungalow. You are now on the old Military Road from Stirling to Dumbarton which was replaced around 1800 by the current main road A811. You'll turn right here towards a bridge but sixteenth century Old Leckie, a Laird's house visited by Bonnie Prince

Charlie in 1745, is on the far side of the farm and is worth a view first before doing so.

Just before the large bridge bear right down a narrow path and you will find a delightful 16th century pack-horse bridge spanning Leckie Burn with an old mill nearby. (Danger! Don't enter it) Another Mill nearby is less obvious, well hidden by summer vegetation.

Follow the path over the bridge until you clear the woods then enjoy a close-up view of Watson House, built 1832 as New Leckie House by the Moir Family. It was named Watson House after the war when it ceased to be a military convalescent hospital and became for a time the Church of Scotland David Watson Eventide Home, now it is luxury flats.

Follow the drive and bear right after Watson House past the Tree Houses, through to the old Lodge gates and the Bield Farm to Leckie Road which will take you back to the village and give expansive views of the Mountainscape to the North. Alternatively before the Lodge gates bear right to return to the end of Beech Walk again to avoid the traffic on Leckie Road.



Watson House, formerly New Leckie, built in 1832 to replace Old Leckie aka Leckie Castle

WATERFALL WALK AND THE PINNACLE (RED ROUTES)

The first part of this walk is similar to the Under the Craigs walk until you reach the open hillside. It's an excellent way of obtaining an outstanding view for relatively little effort. High Point 980ft, 300m.

Starting at the Square walk up Manse Brae to the 40mph sign and turn right into Quarry Brae. Follow this road all the way up through the woods till you reach open hillside. Bear left here on the track leading up towards the old quarry, noting the marker posts for the oil pipelines which run from Finnart on the west coast to Grangemouth on the east.

The Gargunnock Burn tumbles from the escarpment in a series of falls through the cleft just to the right of your view. In summer months the falls are unimpressive but after heavy rain or in winter they can be an impressive sight. From the mouth of the quarry rock was transported via an overhead cable transport system 800m down to a crusher in a storage area.

From here make for the crest of the grassy skyline approximately 70m to your right. (west) to better enjoy the view. You can visit the waterfall now but take care as the ground is pretty rough and uneven.

You can now choose to return to the village **(2.22 miles / 3.60 Km Return)** or continue higher to the Pinnacle and flag viewpoint. Look up at the skyline and identify a flagpole and small stunted tree. That's where you are going next. A stiff climb!



At the rear of the Quarry is a gap in the dyke at the foot of the scree slope. Go through this and make your way up to the rock face where you will find a Balloch or path through, Follow this along to another balloch through the next rock outcrop then continue on your way upwards then diagonally to the left until you eventually reach the flagpole and two small stone cairns, the first quite new, the smaller one established about 150 years ago. **(1.70 miles, 2.70 Km so far & 980ft, 300m climb)**

Now enjoy the magnificent panorama that lies before you with the village nestling below and the mountains in the distance dominating the skyline.

From the Ben Lomond and the Arrochar Alps in the west to the three bridges near Edinburgh to the east (on a good day) As an alternative to the steep return route head eastwards from here 250 metres to pick up the farm track leading down through Hillhead Farm to the Back Road into the village. **(4.13 miles/ 6.64 Km total)**



UNDER THE CRAIGS (BROKEN BLUE LINE)

An energetic walk offering splendid views over the Carse of Stirling and the mountains beyond. Part of the route is across open hillside, walking boots are strongly recommended. (4.50 miles/ 7 Km)

Starting at the village Square head east 500 yards up Manse Brae and turn right just before the 40 mph, sign up Quarry Brae. Follow this road/track up through the former sawmill/quarry storage area, fields and woods till you reach the open hillside.

Bear right at this point and cross the Gargunnock Burn then 50m later turn left uphill following the orange marker-posts steeply up the hill. The route then joins an old grassed over dry stone dyke. At this point the old Dinning Quarry is visible and a prominent waterfall often erroneously named Downie's Loup although that name is actually reserved for the next, less visible

one downstream. (Downie was a local lad who perished on his second attempt to ride (or jump) across the chasm!) This section affords spectacular views over the Carse of Stirling and mountains to the north.

Eventually the route leaves the course of the old wall. Climb up the hill and across two steep gullies to a stile over a dry stone dyke, from where a track can be seen in the distance (approx 1km) Make your way across the hillside towards it then follow it off the hillside down past Knock o' Ronald Farm.

Follow the surfaced road eastwards 1 Km to a point where it turns sharp left and the houses of the village can be seen in the distance. Take the Beech Walk footpath into the village and turn left to the Main Street then right back down to the Square.

KIPPEN AND BACK

A low-level, slightly undulating walk from Gargunnock to Kippen village. Can be muddy in bits. (4 miles/6.50 Km)

Leave Gargunnock Square and head up Main Street turning left at Drummond Place near top end. Turn right before No 20 along the Beech Walk footpath and on reaching the surfaced road continue straight along to the old sawmill past the bridge. Note Watson House (built 1830s for the Moir family) on your right and the raised mound meant to hide the road from their view.

Turn right at the sawmill down the farm track then left at the wooden bungalow. You are now on the old Military Road from Stirling to Dumbarton which was replaced around 1800 by the current A811. Sixteenth century Old Leckie, a Laird's house visited by Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745, can be glimpsed from here.

One kilometre further on, after enjoying panoramic views across the carse, Burnton of Boquhan is reached, now a row of red sandstone houses which once contained a school and a smiddy. Go through the stone pillars until the "auld brig of Boquhan" is reached with modern Boquhan House & gardens on the right.

The route now crosses an open field then climbs a short slope up to Glentirranmuir then on to Kippen Cross where two pubs serve meals. Return by foot or local bus.

(4.00 miles/ 6.40 Km one way)