



MarkHitsTheRoad

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Scotland and Northern England (S26A-2)

Edinburgh and the Scottish Lowlands

Although I used Glasgow as my base for much of the trip, I took trains to visit a number of other places. I planned eight such train day trips and then added a ninth one when I wrapped up the last of my planned sightseeing a day early. Most of these focused on Scottish Lowlands sites, including two over to Edinburgh.

Although I prefer Glasgow, Edinburgh is considered much more of a tourist destination than Glasgow is, especially with Edinburgh Castle, the Palace of Holyroodhouse (the official residence of the monarch in Scotland) and the Royal Mile that connects the two. It might have made sense to stay there for a couple days than travel there twice. But the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2026 a.k.a. the Fringe Festival was underway, drawing huge crowds and driving up hotel prices. The train from Glasgow to Edinburgh took less than an hour and the round-trip cost less than 20 pounds, so staying in Glasgow was a much cheaper option.

I summarize several of the train day trips here, going from southwest to east.

Dailly Parish, Ayrshire

My Watson/Wason/Wasson ancestors were from Dailly. The name started as *Watson*, but the West of Scotland Glottalization linguistic change led to several variations of *Wasson* and *Wason* in this region, with most of those who emigrated to the U.S. settling on *Wasson*, and those who remained behind adopting *Wason* (rhymes with *Mason*).

I spent four days in Dailly in 2012 focused on the family history and have plenty of photos from then. Because high clouds moved in while I was in Old Dailly, I hoped to get some better pictures this time. But only if I had a day with morning sun, as getting there was a chore – two trains to get from Glasgow to Girvan, then wait an hour for a bus, then three miles of walking to get from the bus stop to Old Dailly and back, then another bus to get to (New) Dailly. After finishing up at Dailly, a forty-minute bus ride to Ayr to catch a train back to Glasgow. This was the most travel effort needed for any of the day trips.

I had the bus driver drop me off at the gate to Killochan (keh-LOCH-en) Castle, the ancestral stronghold of Clan Cathcart and now an upscale hotel. My ancestors include the Cathcart family – John Watson and Jannet Cathcart were my five greats grandparents. All Cathcarts living in this area at that time were part of the Clan Cathcart family.

Jannet Cathcart wasn't living at Killochan Castle, though. Not every generation of these families got to stay in the castle. In general, a castle and its lands were passed down from the father to the oldest son. The descendants of his siblings would then join the riff raff living outside the castle walls, perhaps on farms owned by the family. All in all, a very good approach to such things, if you ask me, although it does explain why we don't know how Jannet Cathcart was specifically related to these Cathcarts. (The Cathcart connection was acknowledged by some Watson descendants as parents sometimes used *Cathcart* as a first or middle name for their kids.)



The Cathcart family arms on the castle gate

Parish church records show that my great great grandfather John Watson/Wasson was born at Craighead farm. Craighead is up the road from Killochan. I got several photos of it in 2012, but I also was able to get some distant/zoomed photos of High Craighead while walking the roads from Killochan to Old Dailly. I took pictures of all the farms, because I didn't know what further genealogy research would lead to, and I didn't know if I'd ever be back.

Good thing I did, because some years after I got home, a new/old source became available online that showed that when the Watsons were at Craighead, today's Craighead was Moorgate and today's High Craighead was Craighead. I also found out that it wasn't too unusual for farm names to change over time.

I hoped for better pictures of (High) Craighead with this visit.



My High Craighead photos turned out about like this.



Compare to 2012 – my old camera produced crisper zoom photos, so although I had the morning light with this visit, I did not get the photo payoff I had hoped for.

One of my favorite photos from 2012 was looking towards Old Dailly with the Smithy visible in town and Ailsa Craig island off the coast beyond it, taken from Garryloop Road. I brought a copy of that photo with me and walked to the spot along Garryloop Road where I took it.



This is the 2012 photo. The Smithy, where generations of Watsons lived, is the white building on the left.



And from this visit. There was a lot more tree and shrub growth than I expected, and the zoom quality difference is apparent. I also couldn't quite match up what I could see of the Smithy for some reason.

The earliest written description of Dailly I've come across dates back to the late 1600s. It describes a small village that includes a smithy, but doesn't mention names. But a 1702 parish church baptism record for my five greats grandfather John Watson identifies his father as Robert Watson, a blacksmith. Later church records showed that the trade passed from father to son. But when John Watson and Helen Skeene – my four greats grandparents – had several sons, they could not all be blacksmiths in the family business, so most headed into other occupations – farm work in the case of my great great great grandfather John Watson.



This was the Smithy property in 2012. It's hard to tell how old the house is, as lots of old buildings have gotten updated roofs, windows and stucco. But this building matches the footprint shown on detailed maps from a couple centuries ago. In any event, I hoped to get better pictures with the yard cleaned up a bit and the "flood" warning sign gone.

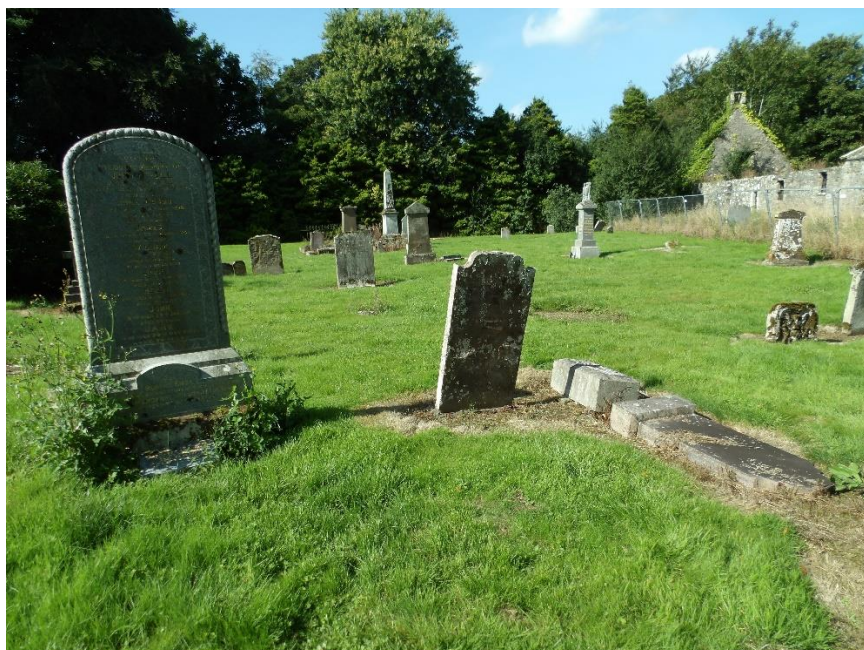


This time, I found the house surrounded by a fence, front and back, which explained why it didn't quite match when I saw it from Garryloop – the fence had blocked part of the view of the house.

I had one last disappointment when I crossed the street to the old church ruins and cemetery. The parish church in Old Dailly dated back to the 12th century but was left to fall to ruin in the late 1600s when a new church opened in what would become (New) Dailly. But this was the churchyard where my Dailly ancestors would have been buried.



In 2012, it appeared to be an attractive, well-maintained churchyard and ruins site. The red arrows point to grave markers for ancestors, cousins and other relatives, the middle one for John Watson (now Wason) and Helen Skeene.



This time, I found a chain-link fence around the church ruins, with grass and shrubs in the fenced area all overgrown, which I think could only hasten the deterioration of the church ruins. A number of the grave markers had fallen over, too, including one for several Wason cousins. All in all, a disappointing visit to Old Dailly, but at least I have the 2012 visit photos.

My Watson ancestors didn't live in (New) Dailly, but they were tied to the parish church there through marriage, birth and baptism, and death records there. The church looked more run down and in need of a fresh coat of paint when I got there than it did on past visits. But I mainly returned to (New) Dailly to take a short hike that I had originally planned on in 2012 but replaced with a different hike.



The ruins of Dalquharran Castle sit above Dailly. Built in 1790, it was abandoned in the 1960s and the roof removed to avoid taxes, allowing it to fall to ruin. But this castle had replaced an earlier Dalquharran Castle, the ruins I hiked to with this visit.



The old castle ruins. This castle dates back to the 1400s

With seriously aching feet after all of today's walking, I started my way back to Glasgow.

Monkton/Ayr

Four greats grandmother Helen Skeene was born at Crosbie near Troon, but she was listed as from Monkton in the Dailly parish church record for her marriage to John Watson. I didn't visit Monkton in 2012, but this time I thought that I'd check out its old parish church and look for Skeenes in the churchyard.



Alas, the entire churchyard was blocked off due to the instability of the ruins and headstones, so I only ended up with a few photos taken over the surrounding stone wall.

There wasn't much else to see in Monkton, so I caught the bus to nearby Ayr, the main town in Ayrshire. I had taken a dreary day walk around Ayr in 2012, so I hoped for something better this time. But with rain moving in, it was even drearier this time.

Ayr has the ruins of an Oliver Cromwell-era fort, beaches, a William Wallace tribute, an interesting High Street and a handful of other sites, which I dutifully checked off as I walked around town.

Robert "Rabbie" Burns, the national poet of Scotland, had been born nearby, so references to him pop up regularly around town, too.



The Tam O'Shanter Inn dates back to 1749, and is the oldest pub in Ayr. It is named for the hero of a Robert Burns poem.



Auld Kirk of Ayr was built in the 1600s. Its kirkport (entrance to the churchyard) displays this mortsafe. Graverobbing of those recently deceased was a problem, as medical schools needed cadavers for students to practice on and would pay good money for them. By burying a coffin with a mortsafe over it, it became much more difficult to steal the body inside.

Once the rain started, I headed to the train station and returned to Glasgow.

Dumbarton Castle

I knew about Dumbarton Castle and Dumbarton Rock from my interest in Scottish history, and was reminded of it when I visited Govan in Glasgow. When I finished up all my planned sightseeing with a day to spare, I decided to use that day to head to Dumbarton.

Dumbarton Castle is quite historic. It has the longest recorded history of any stronghold in Scotland, going back to the 5th century, with archaeological evidence of settlement dating back to the Iron Age. It was built on Dumbarton Rock, a volcanic plug on the edge of the River Clyde. With the rock rising 240 feet, it provides commanding views of the Clyde, the surrounding area and the southern edge of the Highlands just to the north. It served as the capital of Alt Clud/Kingdom of Strathclyde until the Vikings destroyed it in a four-month siege in 870AD, resulting in the kingdom's capital shifting to Govan.

Dumbarton showed up in the record again in the 13th century, as a new castle there became an important royal castle. King David II and later a pre-king Robert the Steward were sheltered there. James the Fat attacked it in a failed rebellion against the crown. Mary, Queen of Scots was kept there for several months when she was five years old before leaving for France for safety. It was a favorite residence of hers after her return to Scotland.

During the First War of Scottish Independence, after Sir John Menteith captured Scottish hero William Wallace in August 1305, Wallace was briefly held prisoner at Dumbarton Castle before he was marched down to London. There, after Wallace was tried for treason, he was stripped naked and dragged through the city by a horse, then hanged but cut down before he died, then emasculated, eviscerated with his bowels burned before him, beheaded, and then drawn and quartered. His head was then dipped in tar and placed on a spike at the London Bridge. Certainly not something I've experienced in my many trips to London.



Surviving fortifications and buildings at the base of Dumbarton Rock



I took several stairs and some short trails to get to the top of Dumbarton Rock, where only a few structures survive. What was really apparent from up there, though, were the views of the River Clyde – this one looking upstream in the direction of Glasgow. It makes clear the strategic importance of Dumbarton Rock.



The town of Dumbarton with the southern edge of the Scottish Highlands just beyond the city.

Paisley

Paisley, a short train ride to the west of Glasgow, is an interesting historical town that I visited in both 2003 and more thoroughly in 2010. But I now had more information about our Cathcart ancestry and its ties to Paisley, warranting another visit.

Paisley Abbey was established here in the 12th century, replacing an 8th century church. It became a powerful site because of its ties to the High Stewards of Scotland and Scottish royalty. In 1316, a pregnant Marjorie Bruce, daughter of King Robert I (Robert the Bruce), was severely injured nearby in a horse-riding accident. The baby, who would become King Robert II, was born by caesarean section in the abbey, but Marjorie died from her injuries and was buried there. King Robert III was also buried there. The abbey lost its status after the Reformation in the 16th century, but it continues to serve Paisley as a parish church.

The Cathcart family was originally from this area. Rainaldus de Kethcart was a witness to a charter of the king's steward to Paisley Abbey in 1178. His son William witnessed a land exchange with the abbey. A later Cathcart sealed a charter transferring more lands to the Abbot of Paisley. Alan de Cathcart was a staunch supporter of Robert the Bruce in the Wars for Scottish Independence, and he himself fought in the wars. After the war, now King Robert I rewarded the Cathcarts with landholdings in Ayrshire, including the lands of Killochan, near Old Dailly, where the current Killochan Castle was eventually built in 1586. Shortly after King Robert I died, Alan de Cathcart accompanied Robert's heart on a crusade against the Ottoman Empire.

In 1307, King Edward I of England had the abbey burned down. Alan de Cathcart was one of the first benefactors to help the monks rebuild their church. He was honored for this when one of the aisles in the nave was named the Cathcart Aisle.





Inside the church



The grave of King Robert III



Recognize the Cathcart family arms from the Killochan castle gate? They are also displayed here at the top of the Cathcart Pillar, one of the pillars that lines Cathcart Aisle.

With these Cathcart connections, I'll note one more. A Cathcart married into the Bruce family, giving us a very distant, very tenuous connection to King Robert I (probably something half the people in Scotland can claim at this point). And because today's British royals are direct descendants of King Robert I, we have an even more distant connection to them. But because this was a connection through marriage, I suppose that makes Charles our king-in-law.

Paisley's influence on my day-to-day life, though, comes through a favorite in my music collection, Gerry Rafferty of *Baker Street* fame, who was born there. Paisley has paid tribute to their native son with a marker on their Buddie Walk of Fame, a handful of murals featuring Rafferty on Brown's Lane, and in a [community event](#) that was part of their 2017 bid to be named the 2021 U.K. City of Culture.



Brown's Land mural of Gerry Rafferty based on his *City to City* album cover

Other Scottish musicians in my collection include [Annie Lennox](#) (Aberdeen), [Al Stewart](#) (Glasgow), and [Simple Minds](#) (Glasgow), among a number of others. And I was recently introduced to the music of [Arab Strap](#) (Falkirk) through the theme song of Scottish detective TV drama *Karen Pirie*.

Lanark

I was briefly in Lanark in 2012, but only to catch buses to Douglas and Lesmahagow to explore sites related to the Weir and Swan ancestry of Jemima Russell Wasson, my great great grandmother. But Lanark is also home to New Lanark, a UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site.

New Lanark was a village about 1.4 miles from Lanark founded in 1785. David Dale started as a handloom weaver in Paisley. After success as a Glasgow merchant, he founded the Barrowfield Dyeworks in Bridgeton, now a district in Glasgow where a street has been named after him.

Dale went on to found New Lanark, where he built cotton mills that took advantage of the waterfalls of the upper Clyde as well as housing for his workers. Dale then sold New Lanark to a partnership that included his future son-in-law with utopian socialist views, Robert Owen, who established a school for his workers, medical coverage and savings plans. New Lanark was profitable, even with the added worker benefits. The site is considered significant as a well-preserved example of early industrialization, for the impact of his social views on his workforce, and as an example of urban planning. Critics argued that it still was essentially a company town, perhaps with more enlightened labor policies, but still one where company management controlled most aspects of workers' lives.

The site today has several restored buildings. Some have been converted to private housing, but others house exhibits and displays to tell the industrial and social aspects of the New Lanark story.





Large weaving looms were powered by water from the River Clyde.



Human-driven weaving also took place at the site.



Taking advantage of the elevation of the waterfalls of the upper Clyde, water was diverted to this channel at New Lanark where it then drove waterwheels whose rotation drove the belts connected to the mill buildings that in turn ran the equipment in the buildings that spun cotton into thread and that performed large-scale weaving.

New Lanark bordered on the Clyde Valley Woodlands National Nature Reserve, where a trail leads hikers to some waterfalls along the River Clyde a.k.a. the Falls of the Clyde. I hiked a stretch of the trail.



Dundaff Linn is a minor waterfall just outside New Lanark.



Corra Linn is a 92-foot waterfall. It was reportedly named after a daughter of King Malcolm II who, according to folklore, leapt to her death here, having been prevented from marrying the man she loved.



The Falls of Clyde (Corra Linn), Jacob More, National Galleries of Scotland: National. Corra Linn was a popular subject for landscape painters.

Once I got back to Lanark, I had hoped to check out a historic church and walk up and down High Street. But because of my feet situation, I've learned that about six hours of walking and standing is about all they can take in a day, especially when I do that daily. So, I ended up just finding a Diet Coke and heading for the train station so I could get off my feet for the return ride to Glasgow.

Edinburgh

I've explored Edinburgh and especially its Edinburgh Castle-Royal Mile-Palace of Holyroodhouse area multiple times now, so I really didn't need to see them again. But there were some Edinburgh sites I missed on those past visits that I wanted to see this time. Because of my interest in Scottish history, I wanted to visit the massive National Museum of Scotland. And because I wanted to see some of the works of Scottish landscape painter John Thomson because of a family connection, I wanted to visit the National Galleries of Scotland: National. Those were the focus of my first train day trip to Edinburgh. I did spend some time on the Royal Mile, as it was between the two museums, but it was quite crowded on a Saturday with several Fringe Festival events underway.

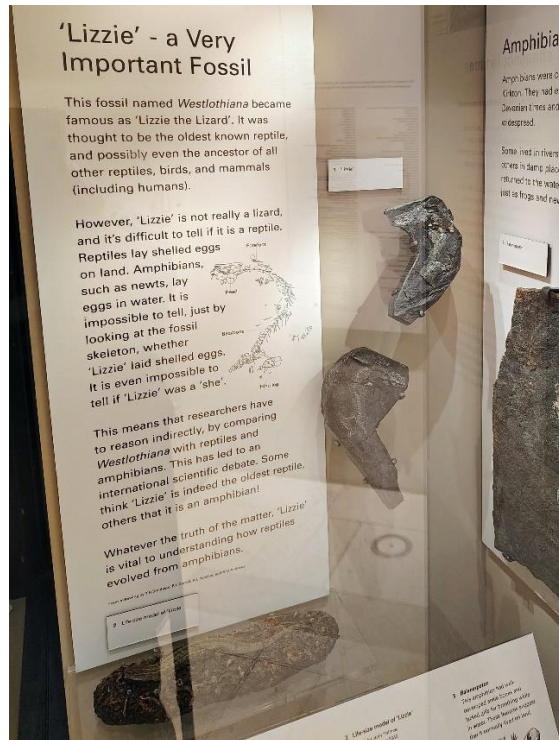


On the Royal Mile, looking towards Edinburgh Castle



The Mercat Cross and St. Giles Cathedral on the Royal Mile

The National Museum of Scotland had exhibits that covered what is now Scotland basically back to the beginning of time, from fossils to the Ice Age to early cultures, Roman occupation efforts, the emergence of Scotland as a country, religious-based strife, the unification of the crowns and of Scotland and England themselves into the U.K., to modern times. Count on spending several hours here.



A small exhibit of Scotland fossils included “Lizzie the Lizard”. Originally thought to be the oldest known reptile found to date, they’ve since determined that it was not really a lizard and may in fact have been an amphibian. But its age and the debate over what it was continue to make it an important fossil find.



Exhibit on the Celtic Britons. There were also exhibits on the Picts and the Norse Vikings and an extensive exhibit on Roman occupiers and their influence.



The Bute mazer was made soon after Robert the Bruce led the Scots to victory over the English at Bannockburn in 1314, and demonstrates Bruce's authority as king. He is represented by the lion in the middle, which is surrounded by the family arms of key supporters.



Exhibit on Robert the Bruce including artifacts (some reproductions) associated with his life and the Battle of Bannockburn



James VI became King of Scotland at 13 months after his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, was forced to abdicate. It is believed that this is the cradle he used while at Stirling Castle. He would go on to succeed his cousin, Queen Elizabeth I, as King James I of England and Ireland, thus unifying the monarchies.



Exhibit on weapons and tools of torture used against the Covenanters, who supported a Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the primacy of its leaders in religious affairs. At the time, there religious divisions between Protestants and Catholics, and disputes over the role of the king in leading the church.



A lot of Scots emigrated to new lands, including the United States, Canada and Australia. This was especially true when the Highland Clearances evicted a massive number of tenant farmers and crofters from the Scottish Highlands in order to replace traditional communal farming with large-scale livestock operations. A *kist* was a large wooden chest used to carry useful items that they brought with them.



The Elephant House tea and coffee house has become a shrine to *Harry Potter* fans. Author J.K. Rowling wrote her first book in the back room overlooking Edinburgh Castle, making The Elephant House the “birthplace” of the *Harry Potter* book series.

I visited two art museums in Glasgow and the National Galleries of Scotland: National in Edinburgh hoping to see some of the works by Scottish landscape painter, Rev. John Thomson. Thomson was raised in Dailly Parish where his father was the minister at the local parish church. Thomson succeeded his father at the church after he died, and was minister there when my great great great grandparents John Watson and Jane Lambie were married and their oldest children were baptized, creating a family connection. But while I confirmed that all three museums had some of his works in their collections, none of those paintings were being exhibited at the times of my visits.



On the Firth of Clyde, John Thomson, National Galleries of Scotland: National, features a castle ruin on the north bank of the Clyde with Dumbarton Rock in the distance.



Barr, Ayrshire, George Henry, National Galleries of Scotland: National. The village of Barr is just a few miles to the southeast of Old Dailly, and once was part of Dailly Parish.

Edinburgh Castle and the Royal Mile sit on Castle Rock, a volcanic plug shaped by Ice Age glaciers. Nearby in Holyrood Park is Arthur's Seat, the remnants of an extinct volcano. In past visits to Edinburgh, I wanted to hike the trails to the top (someday) for views of Edinburgh's Old Town and New Town. That wasn't going to happen now with my feet situation, but on my second train day trip to Edinburgh, I hiked as far as Haggis Knowe to get some decent views of Old Town, New Town and the Palace of Holyroodhouse.



Edinburgh's Old Town includes the Royal Mile and the distant Edinburgh Castle



Zooming in on Edinburgh Castle



Central Edinburgh, with Old Town center left, New Town center and the Palace of Holyroodhouse – the official residence of the British monarch in Scotland – right.



The summit of Arthur's Seat

Old and New Towns of Edinburgh is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognized for the juxtaposition of these two contrasting historical areas. I hadn't seen much of New Town before, so after photo stops at the palace, the Scottish Parliament and part of the Royal Mile, I headed over there to get lunch and take a look around.



The Palace of Holyroodhouse



The Scottish parliament



The Canongate Tolbooth on the Royal Mile



New Town's Queen Street



Edinburgh's Fringe Festival is the world's largest performing arts festival and draws huge crowds. Anyone with some schtick and access to a venue or suitable street corner can perform – no committee chooses the acts. This year, its dates coincided with my trip dates, so Edinburgh was rather overrun with tourists.



At least [one Fringe performance](#) actually had a Scottish flavor to it. They sure beat the odd puppet “singing” Christmas songs performance.



As I was heading up the Royal Mile, I noticed a number of family arms banners – and then was surprised to see the Cathcart family arms. Apparently, heraldic banners representing noble Scottish families and clans with historical ties to the city or palace are put up every summer. At one point, most Cathcarts not living in the Ayrshire area were serving the government in Edinburgh. Alan de Cathcart, 1st Lord Cathcart was appointed Warden of the West Marches and then the Royal Master of Artillery by King James III, earning our ancestors some recognition along the Royal Mile.



Arcade Haggis and Whisky House. You can't get much more Scottish than that.