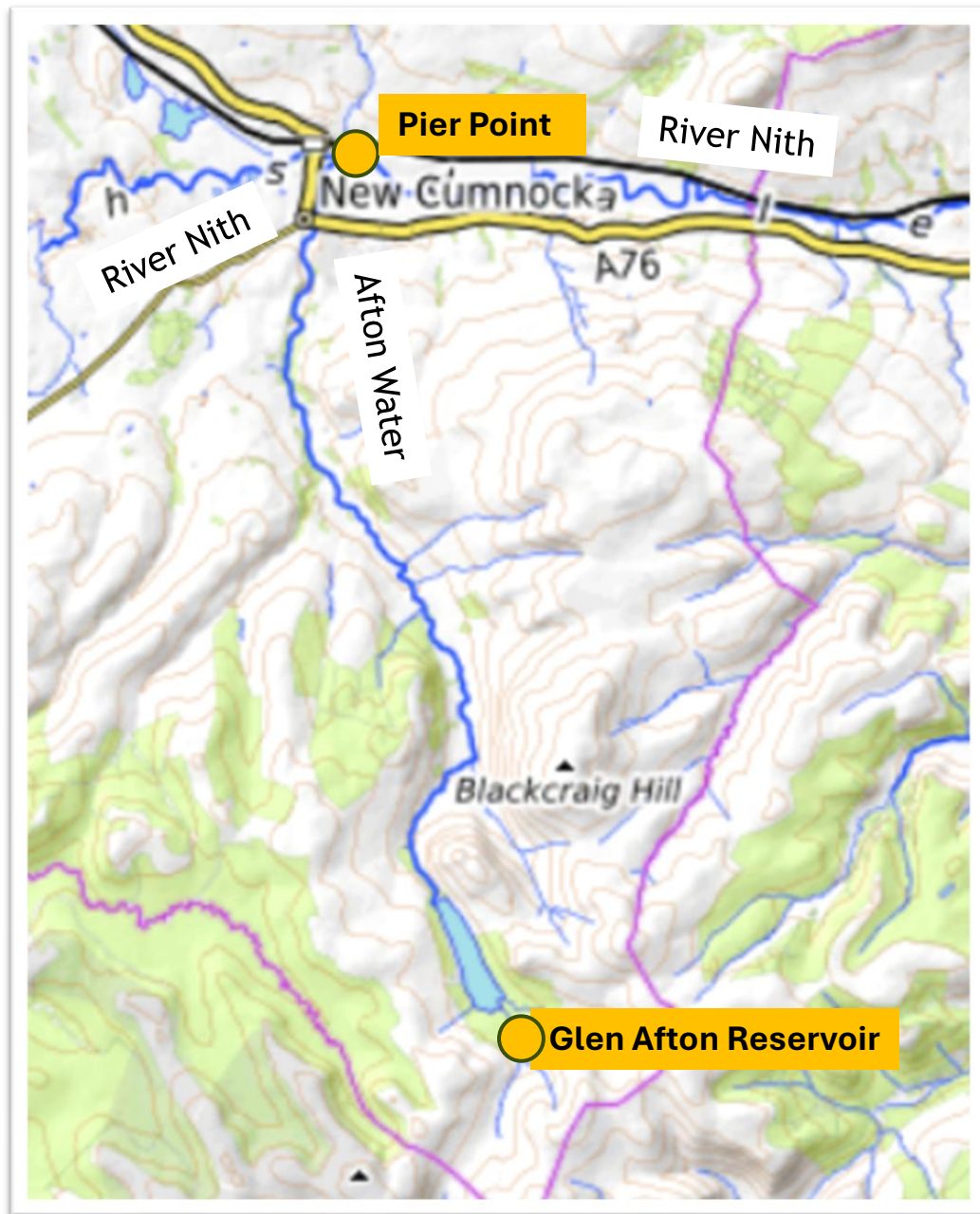


NEW CUMNOCK WALKS



GLEN AFTON

1. Pier Point to West Park (*Laigh Park*)



GLEN AFTON

The Afton Water meets the River Nith at the Pier Point in the village of New Cumnock. In its closing stretch the Afton runs parallel with the main thoroughfare in the village known as the Castle, named after Cumnock Castle the seat of the Baron of Cumnock from the 13th – 16th century.

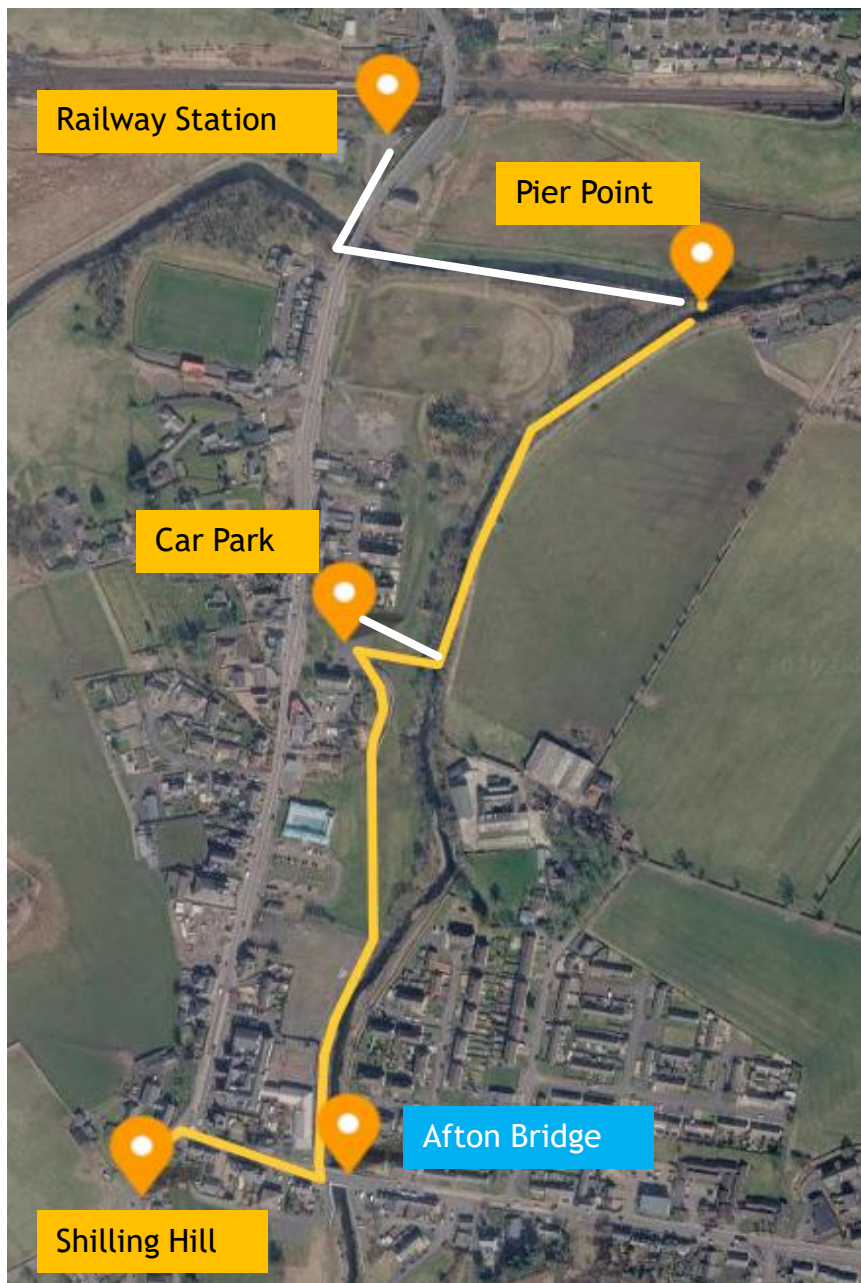
The Afton Water rises some 8 miles due south on Alhang Hill its meeting point with the River Nith. The *Afton Road* runs on the west side of the water providing a much-loved walk for locals and visitors alike, with stunning vistas, wonderful wild-life, a plethora of place-names and tales from our past.

*Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream,
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.*
Robert Burns



01	Pier Point
02	Castle Green
03	The Steppies
04	The Glebe
05	<i>'Hall's Factory'</i> Afton Glen Textiles
06	New Cumnock Primary School
B1	Afton Bridge
07	Old Mill Toll
08	Old Mill of Mossmark
09	Shilling Hill

Map B: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland



If travelling to New Cumnock by train

- exit the train station
- cross the footbridge over the River Nith
- cross the main road
- join the footpath on the south bank of the River Nith and walk along to Pier Point

If travelling to New Cumnock by car /bus

- use the car park in the centre of the village next to Trotters Building or the nearby bus stops
- Take the short walk towards the Afton Water – look out for the Flow Gently, sweet Afton stone
- Head north along the path to Pier Point before doubling back to head for the Afton Bridge/





Robert Guthrie



01: PIER POINT | Pier Point is the grassy promontory that divides the Afton Water, on the right, from the River Nith, on the left before they merge together and the triumphant Nith flows east at the start of its journey to the Solway Firth. Although there is no evidence of a pier, barges for transporting gravel from further upstream on the Nith were apparently tied up here and unloaded.



Robert Guthrie

In 2013 and then again in 2015 New Cumnock suffered from devastating floods as the Afton Water, River Nith and Connel Burn burst their banks, In 2023 the Flood Prevention Scheme, at a cost of approx. £9 million, was completed with earth embankments, reinforced concrete walls and riverbank strengthening. Here the lower reaches of the riverbank was strengthened with large rocks and short wooden stakes. Now head south and walk along the path towards the Castle Green enjoying the Afton views.



Robert Guthrie



02: CASTLE GREEN | In 1837 Charles Buchanan Esq. of Knockshinnoch and John Hair, *farmer* at Muirfoot put the wheels in motion to create a village common ‘*for the use of the village as a market place green*’.

The New Cumnock Brass Band, formed in 1855, held open air concerts on the green. The annual Sports Day was also held on the Castle Green which attracted locals and visitors alike to compete for the prizes with quoining the main event; which lasted throughout the day.

At the beginning of the century ‘Swallow’s fair’ would visit at the time of the Ayr races and ‘*set up tents and booths on the Castle Green*’. By 1909 it was ‘Cadona’s fair’ that came to town while in 1913 ‘Wilson’s Cinema’ attracted the young crowd.

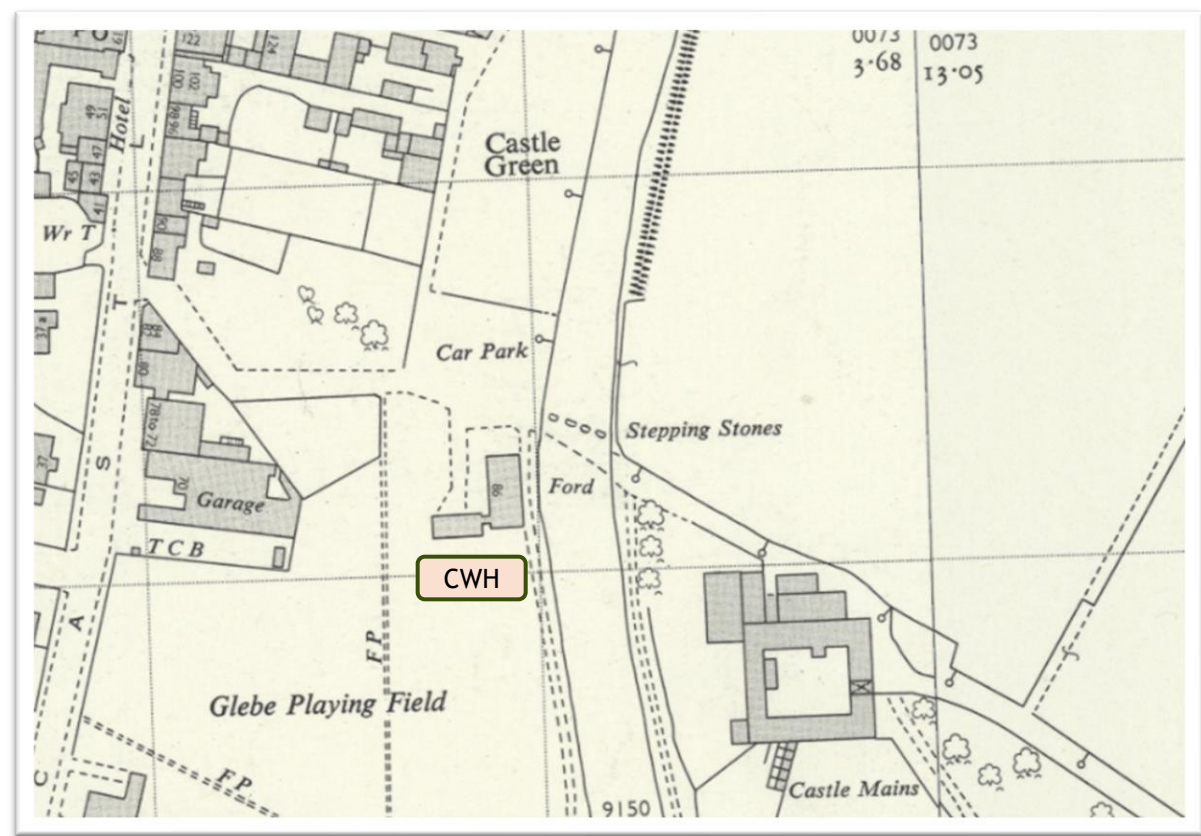
George Sanderson, New Cumnock Long Ago and Faraway

The Castle Green also served as a meeting place to address the burning political issues of the day including the Reform Act (1884) and the Great Miners Strike (1894). Fittingly, the Miners’ Memorial Lamp ‘*To the Memory to NEW CUMNOCK MINEWORKERS who lost their lives in the course of Duty*’. - ‘***Out of Darkness, Into Light***’, now sits adjacent to the Castle Green.

03: THE STEPPIES | At the southern extreme of the Castle Green can be found stepping stones a much-loved feature of the Afton Water. These provided a crossing, to and from, between the Green and Castle Mains farm. In years gone by, prior to the building of the Afton Bridge upstream, horse and cart traffic would cross the ford; indeed, as Castle Mains farm vehicles do today.



Robert Guthrie



Map 01: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland

The building labelled CWH was originally the premises of C. W. Hall's Hosiery before it relocated some 200 yards away at the top end of the Glebe. The building later served as the Old Men's Cabin for many years but has long since been demolished.



Photos Courtesy of the late Alex Jess



04: THE GLEBE | The Castle Green could no longer accommodate the town's annual activities which were now held on *The Glebe*, from Scots *glebe* 'portion of land assigned to a parish minister in addition to his stipend'.

It was here on the Glebe Playing Field that was now home to Cadona's Annual Fair having outgrown the Castle Green and better, known as 'The Shows'. The Glebe also hosted the annual Gala Day and the Community or Gala Queen was crowned on a dais erected against the wall of Tweedie's Garage. (This would later be held at Greenhead Playing Fields further up the Afton, on the east bank). A new community space was created on the fringe of the playing field with a Community Centre, Library, tennis court and small swing park. On 1st June 1968 the outdoor New Cumnock Swimming Pool was opened while later a Games Hall was erected nearby.



Today, only the stunningly refurbished Swimming Pool remains with an adjacent stylish car park.

Robert Guthrie



Robert Guthrie

04: THE GLEBE (cont.) | The path through the Glebe now runs south with the Afton Water to the east.

05: CHARLES W. HALL'S FACTORY LTD. | In 1954 C. W. Hall Hosiery relocated from the cabin at The Steppies to a purpose-built factory at the southern end of the Glebe, and through time it expanded further south, to neighbour the then New Cumnock Junior Secondary School. It soon established itself as a major employer in the town before it changed ownership and the name to Afton Glen Textiles Ltd., in the late 1970s. Later names were Afton Dyers and Afton Valley Dyers before liquidation and closure in early 2000s. Nothing now remains of the buildings, only memories.



Aerial view of Hall's factory in late 1960s with Afton Water in the back-ground (Courtesy of the late Alex Jess).



Photo from the roof of Afton Glen Textiles overlooking the school playground with Afton Water and the footbridge, now gone (Robert Guthrie 1980)

Robert Guthrie



Above: Castle Primary, photo taken in 1980 from the roof of Afton Glen Textiles. At that time, it still adopted New Cumnock Junior Secondary School form of two playgrounds. The far side; Girls: P1-P7 and Secondary 1Y-3Y and Boys P1-P2 while the near side Boys P3-P7 and Secondary 1Y-3Y. Below: Modern day with one single playground.



Robert Guthrie

06: NEW CUMNOCK PRIMARY SCHOOL | The parish school was built in 1832 on the west bank of the Afton Water on the south side of the Dumfries road.

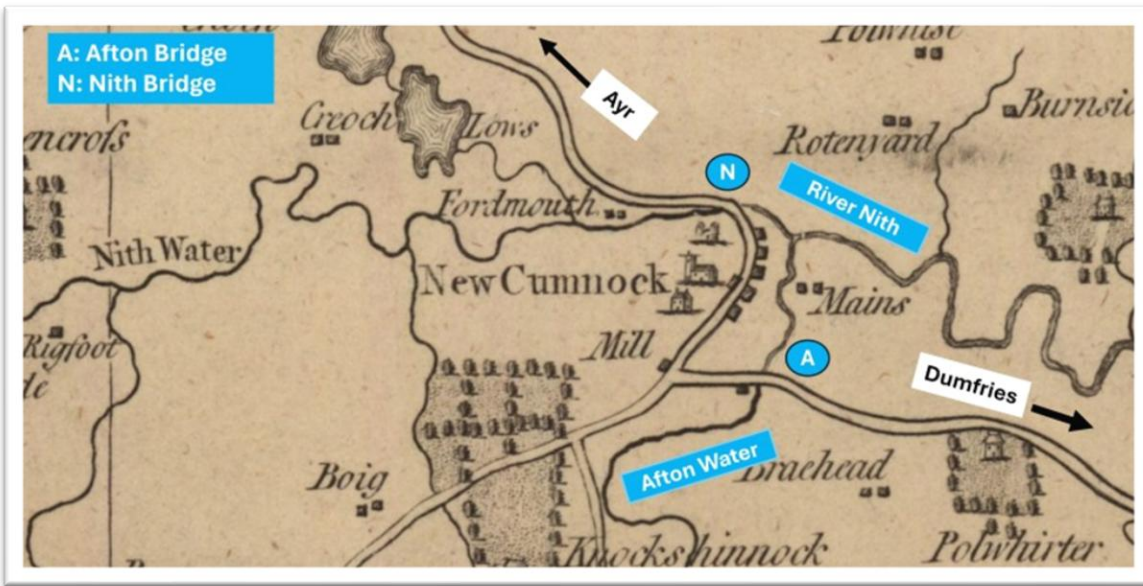
Later It was decided to build the New Cumnock Public School, initially on the minister's Glebe. However, after a dispute with the minister, the Marquis of Bute made land available at the toll, across the road from the Oldmill. It would accommodate 450 scholars at a cost of £4500 and was completed in 1873.

Through time the school was renamed New Cumnock Higher Grade School and then New Cumnock Junior Secondary School, albeit it was better known locally as the Town School.

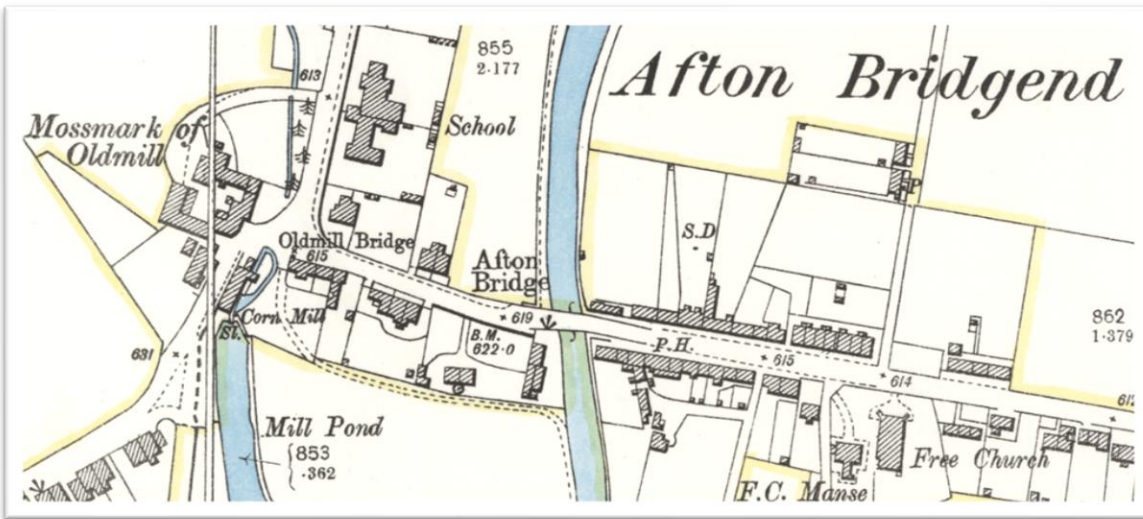
In 1970, the Secondary element of the school, 1st to 3rd year, was transferred to Cumnock Academy and the school was renamed Castle Primary.

Cairnhill Primary School, built in 1960, was closed in 2012 with pupils now transferred to the Castle Primary which was then renamed New Cumnock Primary School.

The New Cumnock Early Childhood Centre was also established in the grounds of the school.



Map 02: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland



Map 03: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland

B1: AFTON BRIDGE

The Ayr Road Acts of 1767 and 1774 heralded the *Turnpike Road era* where tolls were established to meet the costs of building and maintaining roads. Armstrong's 'Map of Ayrshire' (1775), shows that both the River Nith and Afton Water were bridged on the turnpike road from Ayr by way of Ochiltree, Cumnock to New Cumnock, as far as the county march with Dumfriesshire. This was probably a wooden bridge at the time. The building marked on the west side of the bridge was the Parish School of the time.

The Afton Bridge had been washed away on a number of occasions and in May 1882 a request was issued '*To Build Abutments of the Afton Water and to provide and fit up Iron Girders*'.

On the 15th July 1882 '*the memorial stone was laid with due masonic ceremony, overseen by Br. Dr. R.G. Herbertson, beforehand the cavity in the stone had been filled with various articles including daily papers, coins, a tobacco pipe &c*'.

Much later a footbridge was run parallel with the road bridge but was later removed and the Afton Bridge broadened. In 2023 the riverbanks at the bridge were strengthened as part of the Flood Prevention Scheme.

The houses built in the vicinity the bridge gave rise to the name Afton Bridgend one of the five villages in the parish of New Cumnock recorded in 1855 – along with the other villages - Pathhead, Mansfield, Castle and Couplalegate



Postcard

Afton Bridge looking east



Postcard

Afton Bridge looking north



Robert Guthrie



Robert Guthrie

Flood prevention
work underway the
south side of the



07. Old Mill Toll | After crossing the road at the Afton Bridge, walk west towards the last building on this side of Afton Bridgend, known as the Old Mill Toll, owned by the Marquis of Bute. Although it is not named on the adjacent Ordnance Survey Map (1856), the abbreviation T.P. indicates a turnpike toll; initiated as discussed following the Ayr Road Acts of 1767 and 1774 and in place until the period 1878-1883. The 1855 Valuation Rolls identify the Road Trustees as tenants, with Robert McKenzie in place. In the 1861 & 1871 Census Thomas McKenzie is recorded as the Toll Keeper in the Toll House while in 1881 John Montgomery, road surfaceman was the tenant in the Old Mill, most probably the Toll House. He had previously worked as a tollkeeper at Ochiltree, while his father, James, had worked as a tollkeeper at Pathhead.

Map 05: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland



Prior to the demise of turnpike tolls the New Cumnock Parish School was built in 1873, straight across the road from the toll house, which would now house School Board Officers including Robert Howat (ca. 1891-1911), who can be seen standing in the doorway of the 'Old Mill Toll'. By the 1920s the Marquis of Bute sold off his properties in this corner of New Cumnock, and the Old Mill Toll passed hands to Andrew & John Beattie; Gavin Hamilton and later Richard Kennedy, builder who passed away there in 1963.

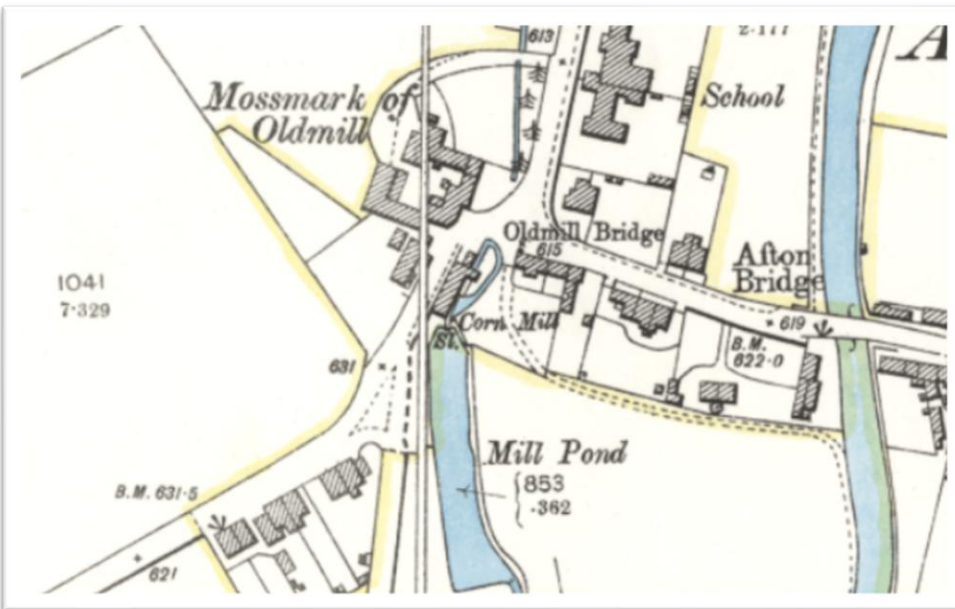
The adjoining house in the photograph was the home of the families associated with the Corn Mill, including Thomas Goldie (Goudie), having lived there for 45 years. James Robertson, *grain miller* and his family appear in the 1901 Census. The photograph shows of their infant children at their door ca. 1906. In 1930 James Robertson and his son John, both millers, owned the property. John became a well-known figure in the community, known as 'Jock the Bean'.

Courtesy of the late Jim & Linda Hamilton

* Old Mill in this section is not the Old Mill shown on the map above which is known as Mossmark of Oldmill.



Robert Guthrie



Map 06: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland

08: MOSSMARK OF OLDMILL The Ordnance Survey Name Book entry for Oldmill reads ‘A good farm house situated near an old corn mill from which it takes its name. James Wilson is tenant and the Marquis of Bute proprietor. Although an alternative form ‘Old Mill’ was initially overlooked, it was this form that would be appear on the Ordnance Survey Map (1860), It should be noted that the Valuation Rolls of 1855, record the property as Mossmark of Oldmill.

This was the site of the original ‘*Mylne of Cumnock*’, prior to the division of the parish of Cumnock in 1650 into the two new parishes of Old Cumnock and New Cumnock. The earliest recorded miller was a John McNacht in the ‘*mill of Cumnock*’ who in 1608 was set upon by the Craufurds of Auchincross and forced to hand over £20 for fear of his life. His descendant, John McNaught in Mylne of Cumnock was one of the many parishioners interrogated in 1684 during Covenanting times. In later years their descendant George McKnight and wife Betty Mitchell were tenants. Betty kept an inn within the farm which was the meeting place of the local heritors (landowners) from 1781 while in 1786 it was here that the renowned New Cumnock Herds’ Fair met for the first time. Of particular note was the visit of Robert Burns on a number of occasions, the most notable in wild January evening in 1789.

By the time of the 2nd Edition Ordnance Survey Map the farm appears as Mossmark of Oldmill. The tenants after James Wilson, included Hugh Hamilton and brothers Andrew & John Beattie, later taking ownership from the Marquis of Bute in 1920 which later passed to Gavin Hamilton. By 1940 New Cumnock Collieries owned the property and was tenanted by Alexander Mair, better known as *Sanny Mair* another well-known local worthy.

09: SHILLING HILL | Scots: *scheling-hill*, *s(c)hilling-hill* ‘a knoll or piece of rising ground on which husked grain could be winnowed by the wind.

Map 07: Reproduced with permission
of the National Library Scotland



Robert Guthrie

Top Left: Shilling Hill rising from ‘The Toll’ up to the junction with Afton Road and the houses at Mossmark. (As a youngster I thought a shilling was the toll to go up the hill!) . **Bottom left:** The School House and Parish School in the background while in the foreground is the Mill Lead flowing under the road.

Below: The Mill and Mill pond, now long gone with new bungalows in their place.

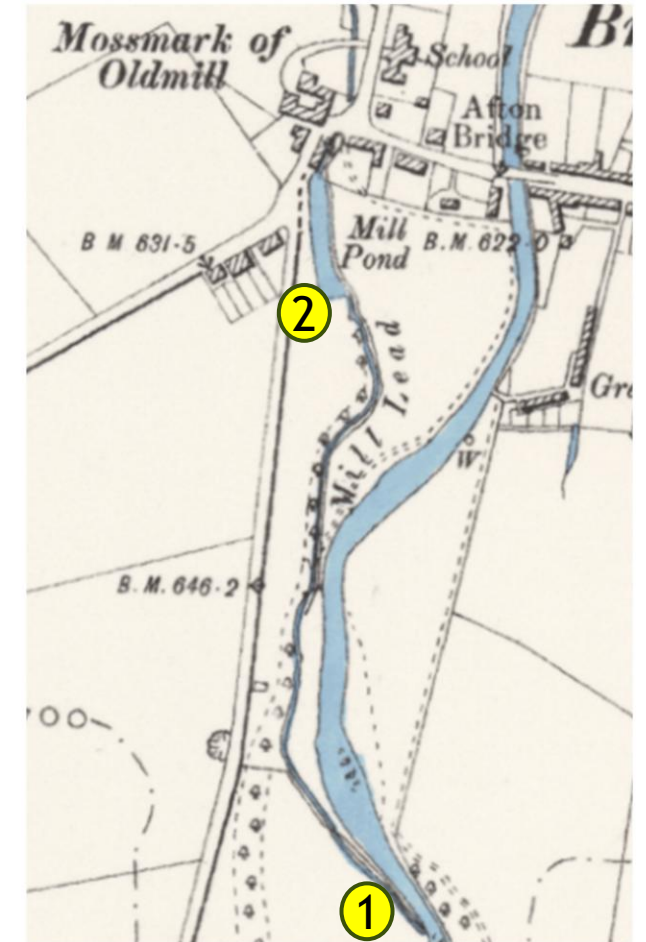
Right: The sluice on the Afton Water to divert the Mill Lead to the Mill Pond,

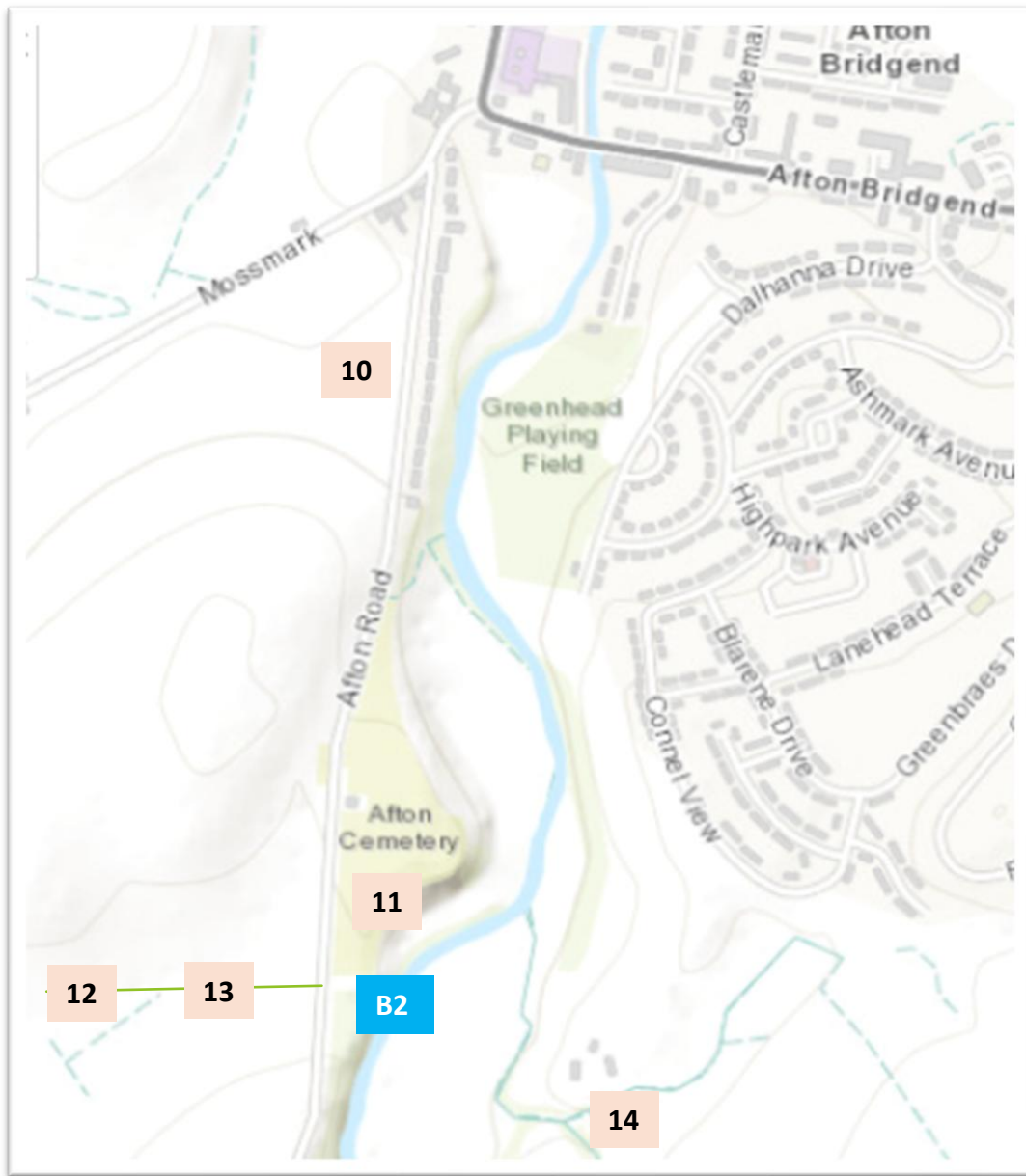


Postcard



Courtesy of the late Donald McIver





10	Afton Road
11	Afton Cemetery
12	Knockshinnoch Disaster Memorial
13	Deil's Dyke View Point
B2	Danny's Brig
14	West Park (Laigh Park)

Map C: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland



Robert Guthrie

10: AFTON ROAD | A row of twenty semi-detached single storey houses were built in the late 1930's by Ayr County Council. Despite the linear row it was originally named Afton Crescent before being re-named Afton Road.

11: AFTON CEMETERY | Further up the road is the Afton Cemetery which was opened in 1903 with the War Memorial erected in 1921. An extension to the cemetery was added in 2010.

Robert Guthrie





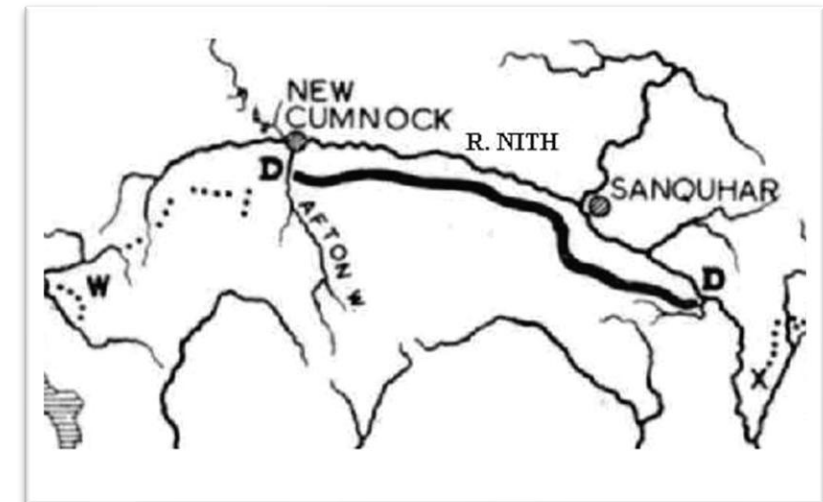
12: KNOCKSHINNOCH DISASTER MEMORIAL | Continue walking further up the Afton Road before turning right along the sign-posted path to the memorial.

On the 7th September 1950 an inrush of moss at Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery resulted in the death of 13 miners. Another 116 miners were trapped underground and after a heroic rescue effort were brought to the surface, some two days later. The bodies of the lost souls were recovered over the period January to July 1951 and laid to rest in the nearby Afton Cemetery.

Robert Guthrie



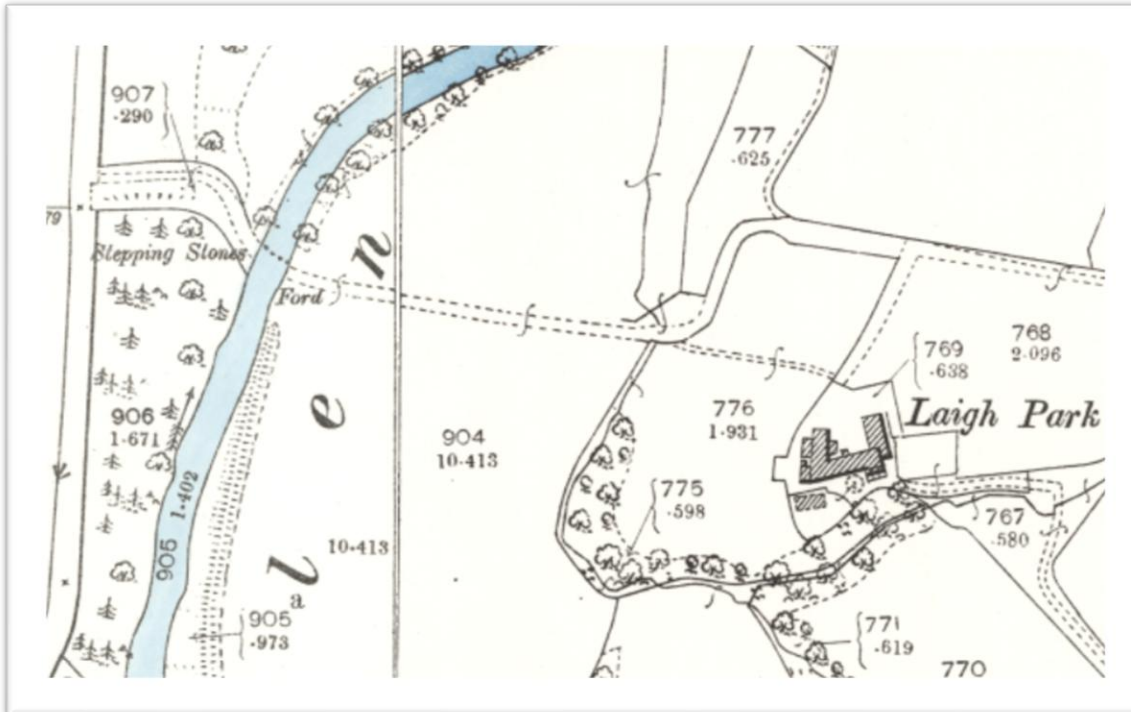
13: DEIL'S DYKE | On returning along the sign-posted path to the Afton Road it may be possible to see a stretch of the "Deil's Dyke". This is part of a linear turf embankment running up the side of Dalhanna Hill and onwards beyond Sanquhar, used perhaps as either park boundaries or for trapping deer.



The proposed stretch of original Deil's Dyke from Dalhanna Hill to Sanquhar.

B2: DANNY'S BRIG | On returning to the Afton Road, follow the path to the left, that goes down to the Afton Water'. The OS Map (1895) below shows the Afton was crossed by a ford as well as stepping stones, known as "Gibson's Steps", after Hugh Gibson the farmer at Laigh Park (now known as West Park).

In the 1930s, local councillor Daniel Robertson had a wooden bridge, built across the Afton to improve the crossing for miners travelling back and forth to the Knockshinnoch pits and beyond. The wooden bridge was later washed away and replaced by a metal bridge retaining the name "Danny's Brig" with Gibson Steps below.

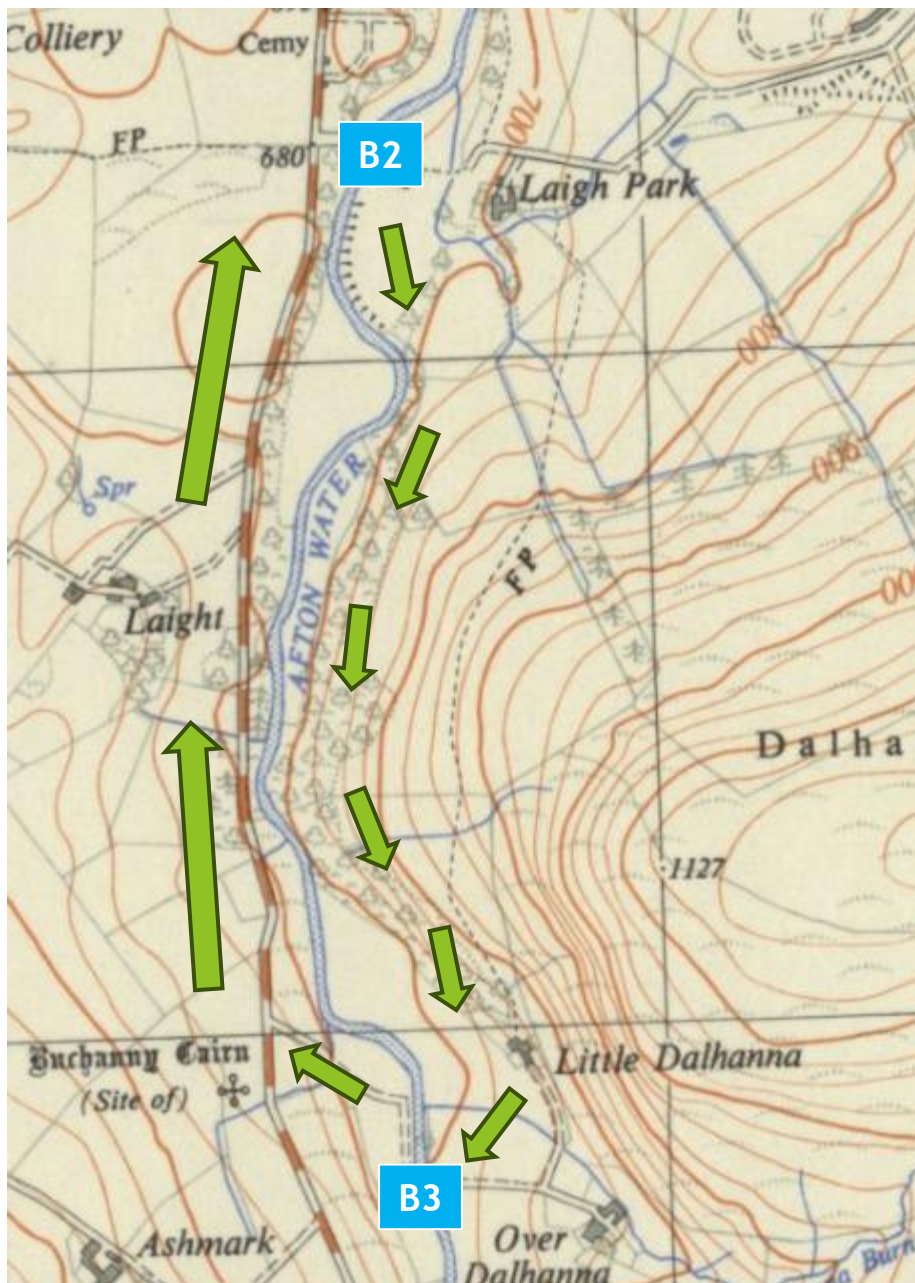


Map 08: Reproduced with permission of the National Library Scotland



Robert Guthrie





PLEASE FOLLOW
NEW CUMNOCK WALKWAYS
On Facebook



It intended to incorporate the
'New Cumnock Walkways'
from Danny's Brig to Dalhanna Brig
Into New Cumnock Walks – Glen Afton

01	Pier Point
02	Castle Green
03	The Steppies
04	The Glebe
05	‘Hall’s Factory’
06	New Cumnock Primary School
B1	Afton Bridge
07	Old Mill Toll
08	Mossmark of Old Mill
09	Shilling Hill
10	Afton Road
11	Afton Cemetery
12	Knockshinnoch Disaster Memorial
13	Deil’s Dyke <i>View Point</i>
B2	Danny’s Brig
14	West Park (Laigh Park)

MAP	Web-Links to Maps of National Library of Scotland
Map A	Open Topo Map : Glen Afton
Map B	ERSI Background – World Topo: Pier Point to Shilling Hill
Map C	ERSI Background - World Topo: Afton Road to West Park
Map 01	Ordnance Survey National Grid maps, 1944-1975 (1962)
Map 02	Andrew Armstong, A New Map of Ayrshire (1775)
Map 03	Ordnance Survey Maps - 25 inch 2nd and later editions, Scotland, 1892-1949
Map 04	Ordnance Survey Maps - Six-inch 2nd and later editions, Scotland, 1892-1960
Map 05	Ordnance Survey Maps- Six-Inch 1st Edition . Scotland 1843-1882 (1860)
Map 06	Ordnance Survey Maps - 25 inch 2nd and later editions, Scotland, 1892-1949
Map 07	Ordnance Survey Maps - Six-inch 2nd and later editions, Scotland, 1892-1960
Map 08	Ordnance Survey Maps – 25 inch 2nd and later editions, Scotland, 1892-1949
Map 09	John Blaeu, Coila Provincia (1654)

KEY SOURCES

[New Cumnock History: Place-Names](#)

[Place-Names of the Coalfield Communities](#)



PLEASE FOLLOW
[NEW CUMNOCK WALKWAYS](#)
On Facebook