

# The Thomas Muir Heritage Trail

## Walking in the Footsteps of the Father of Scottish Democracy

Thomas Muir of Huntershill (1765–1799) was a leading light in ‘The Friends of the People’, a political reform movement of the 1790s, when only a significant minority of Scotland’s citizens had the right to vote. He was tried and found guilty of sedition and received the harsh sentence of being banished for 14 years to Botany Bay, Australia. In silencing the man they created a martyr, and a hero to many.

The Heritage Trail is 18km in length and offers visitors a great walking or cycling experience. The route itself stretches through some of East Dunbartonshire’s most attractive landscapes, and towns and villages that have a direct link to the Thomas Muir story as interpreted by built heritage along the way. Regular waymarkers allow the trail to be navigated in full or in part and from either direction. The historic town of Kirkintilloch offers a natural halfway point along the route or an alternative start/finish location for those wishing a shorter experience. Most of the route is on established off-road rural and urban paths, the terrain is level and suitable for all ages whether on foot or bicycle. Regular local village and town hotels and other service points are highlighted to enhance your heritage experience. At these locations you can pick up copies of ‘The Life and Times of Thomas Muir’ companion booklet.

### 1 Old Campsie Parish Church and St Machan's Graveyard

Watch out for the ruin of old Campsie Parish Church where The Rev James Lapslie was minister. Lapslie was a determined opponent of political reform. When the Government placed Muir on trial, Lapslie turned against him and went to great lengths to furnish incriminating evidence. Part of Lapslie’s Manse was set on fire by angry locals in 1797.

- Look for the prominent monuments to William Muir ‘The Campsie Poet’ (Thomas Muir’s relative) and John McFarlan of Ballenclerach (Thomas Muir’s close friend).

### AP Campsie Glen Gallery and Coffee Shop

In a building formerly used as an inn, tearoom, house and post office, a good place for lunch, tea, coffee and homebaking. Tel: 01360 313 049

### 2 Ballenclerach (Schoenstatt retreat and pilgrimage centre)

Ballenclerach was the home of John McFarlan, a friend of Thomas Muir. Known as the ‘Liberal Laird’, he opened up his land at Campsie Glen to the public in 1785, an act of kindness that attracted much admiration and respect. The house passed from the McFarlan family to become a hotel in the twentieth century. It was destroyed by fire in 1983 and rebuilt as a retreat and pilgrimage centre in 1989.

- Look out for the rebuilt Ballenclerach House, now used for guest accommodation as part of the Schoenstatt retreat.

### 3 4 5 Lennoxtown

In 1786 a calico printing works was opened at Lennoxmill (3). Nearby Lennoxtown, or Newtown of Campsie as it was sometimes called, was established to house the mill workers. A Reform Society was set up there during 1792–3. Campsie Parish Church on Main Street (4) occupies the site of a Relief Church established by parishioners who were offended by the appointment of James Lapslie as minister of the Clachan church in 1784.

- Try to imagine the giant printworks buildings on the right-hand side of Station Road, Lennoxtown, near the river (3).

- Look for the surviving building of the Lennoxtown Friendly Victualling Society (5) – established in 1812 as a pioneer co-operative society – just across the road from the modern Co-op building.

### LB Glazert Country House Hotel, Lennoxtown

Family-run hotel set in two acres of mature gardens bordering the River Glazert. It offers a variety of options for snacks and meals. Tel: 01360 310790 [www.glazert.co.uk](http://www.glazert.co.uk)

### 6 Kincaidfield, Milton of Campsie

In 1786 a ninety-nine year lease was agreed between two Glasgow merchants and John Kincaid of Kincaid House, for a portion of his lands, and a calico printing works was then established at Kincaidfield nearby. In November 1792 Thomas Muir addressed a large crowd that included many Kincaidfield workers. Thereafter a local reform society, The Associated Friends of the Constitution and of the People, was formed in Milton of Campsie. At Muir’s trial, the list of defence witnesses included six Kincaidfield men.

- Try to envisage the printworks buildings at Kincaidfield, near the railway walk to Kirkintilloch.
- Make a diversion into the village to see a plaque commemorating the landing here in 1785 of Italian balloonist Vincenzo Lunardi on one of his Scottish balloon flights.

### KB Kincaid House Hotel, Milton of Campsie

A grade ‘A’ listed building which was largely reconstructed around 1812, this family-run hotel offers a variety of options for snacks and meals. Tel: 0141 776 2226 [www.kincaidhouse.com](http://www.kincaidhouse.com)

### 7 Birdston Farm House

Thomas Muir’s ancestors, who were farmers from Ayrshire, purchased land at Birdston around 1650 and built dwellings there. A later Birdston Farm House still stands today, its design very similar to that of Huntershill House at Bishopbriggs. Thomas Muir’s father owned land at both Birdston and Hayston nearby. Birdston was also the birthplace and residence of ‘The Campsie Poet’, William Muir.

- Make a 500m diversion to see the distinctive Birdston Farm House, on the west side of the main road between Milton of Campsie and Kirkintilloch.

### 8 9 Kirkintilloch

With encouragement from Thomas Muir a Reform Society was set up in Kirkintilloch in November 1792. The Rev William Dunn, minister of Kirkintilloch Parish at the time, spent three months imprisoned in the Edinburgh Tolbooth for tearing key pages from a minute book of the Reform Society. On his release, the people of Kirkintilloch celebrated with a procession through the streets.

- Make a short diversion to the William Patrick Library (8) to inspect books and documents relating to Muir and to the Auld Kirk Museum (9) to see William Dunn’s pulpit.

### 10 Forth & Clyde Canal

The Forth and Clyde Canal was built from east to west between 1768 and 1790. It was complete as far as Kirkintilloch by 1773. In 1793 people used it as a mode of transport to attend Thomas Muir’s trial in Edinburgh. William Muir’s poetry contains many references to the canal.

- Watch out for the distinctive canal stables building at Glasgow Bridge, built to a standard pattern. This was used for changing horses on the express service of ‘Swift Boats’ between Glasgow and Edinburgh.
- Sail part of the trail on board a canal boat. Visit [www.forthandclyde.org.uk](http://www.forthandclyde.org.uk) or phone 0141 772 1620 for details.

### LB The Stables

Well-known country pub and restaurant housed in a stables block built in 1812 for horses which pulled barges on the Forth and Clyde Canal. A good place for family-friendly dining and snacks. Tel: 0141 777 6088 [www.vintageinn.co.uk/thestableskirkintilloch/](http://www.vintageinn.co.uk/thestableskirkintilloch/)

### 11 Cadder Church

Thomas Muir was an elder of Cadder Parish Church. He represented the Cadder congregation when they were fighting landlords who wanted to impose their choice of minister on the local church. After a long and bitter fight, the Church of Scotland General Assembly ruled in Muir’s favour. The present church building dates from the 1820s

- See the little ‘watch-house’ and the coffin-shaped ‘mortsafe’ in Cadder Church grounds. These both date from the days when bodies were being illicitly dug up and sold for medical research. Relatives guarded over their newly-interred loved ones in the watch-house, while the iron mortsafe was intended to make the theft of bodies more difficult.

### LB The Leisuredrome

Open every day, facilities include swimming pools with flume, sports hall, health suite, soft play and café. Tel: 0141 777 3060 [www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/leisuredrome](http://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/leisuredrome)

### 12 Bishopbriggs Library

A permanent Thomas Muir Exhibition at Bishopbriggs Library includes nine display panels telling Muir’s story.

- Make sure you don’t miss the bust of Thomas Muir by Alexander Stoddart. Three statues by this famous sculptor are displayed in prominent positions in central Edinburgh.
- Look out for books about Thomas Muir in the local history section.

### 13 Huntershill House

An important example of a Georgian house built in the 1760s, this became Muir’s family home when his father bought Huntershill House and estate in 1782. The house was purchased by Bishopbriggs Town Council in 1969 and for a time it housed the small collection of Thomas Muir memorabilia now displayed in Bishopbriggs Library.

- Imagine this as the Muir family home with views across fields and Thomas and his family in the garden.
- Note the proximity of the house to Crowhill Road, at one time an old post road from Glasgow to Edinburgh.

### LB Huntershill Village and Thomas Muir Coffee Shop

Huntershill Village is made up of over 40 businesses, mainly owned by local residents, who employ locally and offer a wide range of services to the local community. Thomas Muir Coffee Shop is a great place for a snack or lunch with a chance to reflect on Muir’s life as portrayed in the paintings, photographs and information on display. Tel: (Thomas Muir Coffee Shop) 0141 762 3323 [www.huntershillvillage.com](http://www.huntershillvillage.com)

### 14 Cairn and Martyrs’ Gate

The Cairn and Martyrs’ Gate at Huntershill were erected by John S L Watson in 1996 (unveiled 1997) with some financial support from East Dunbartonshire Council. The Martyrs’ Gate commemorates Thomas Muir and the other four men known as ‘The Scottish Political Martyrs’. During 1793–4 these men received sentences of transportation to Australia for ‘sedition’, an alleged crime which included the circulation of pamphlets on parliamentary reform. Other memorials in their honour were erected in Edinburgh and London during the nineteenth century.

- Read the short poem about Muir which is inscribed on the cairn, written by Muir’s friend John McFarlan of Ballenclerach.

