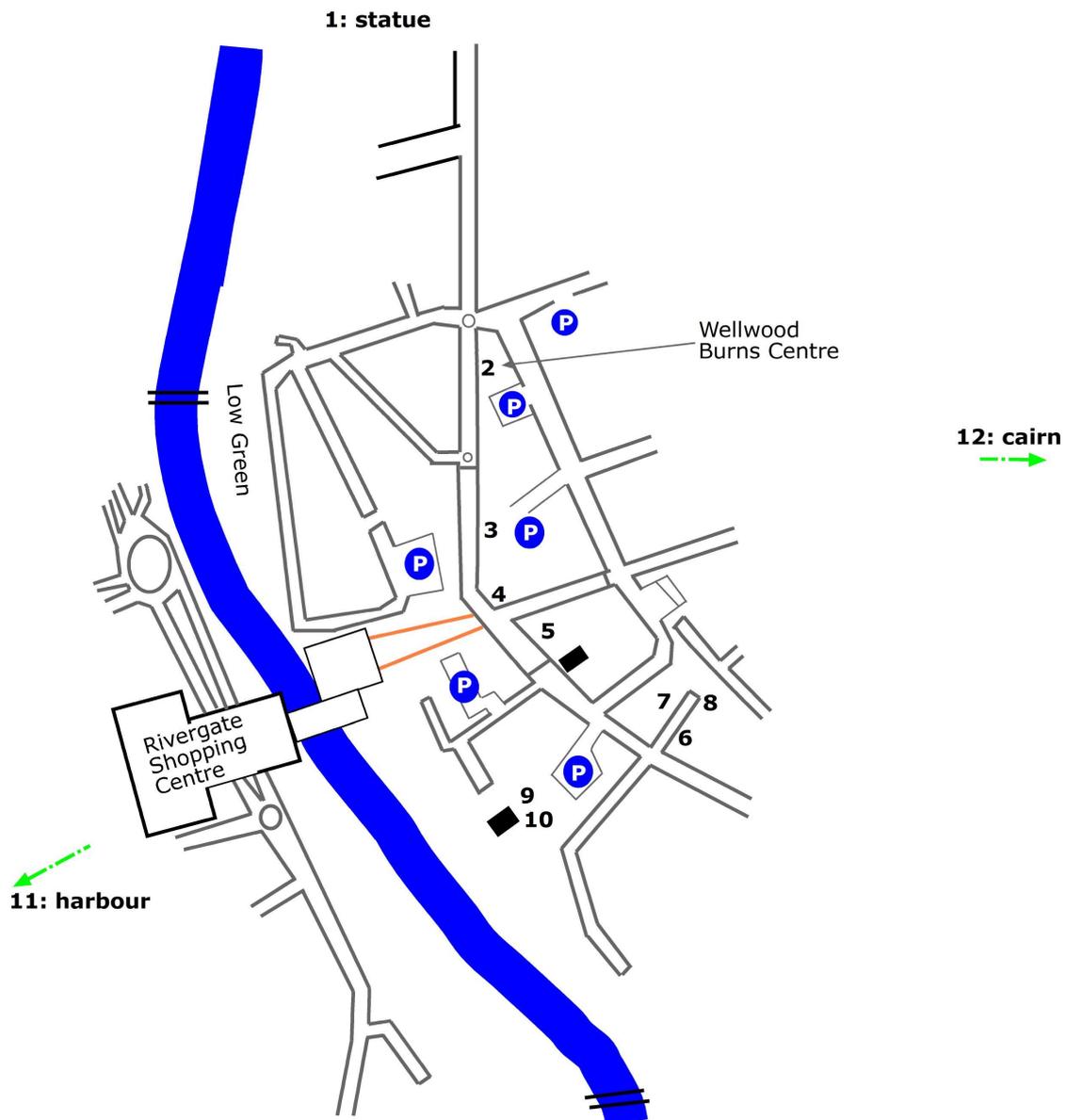


Walk in the Footsteps of Robert Burns in Irvine



1. Irvine statue of Robert Burns
2. Wellwood Burns Centre, the home of Irvine Burns Club (est. 1826)
3. The Crown Inn, once Milne's Inn, where Irvine Burns Club was founded
4. Pavement sculptures illustrating the cures prescribed for Burns' illness in Irvine
5. The site of Templeton's bookshop, where Burns first read the poems of Robert Fergusson
6. The site of the house where Burns lodged in 1781
7. The house where the members of the Buchanite sect met in the 1780s
8. The Heckling Shop where Burns worked as a Lint Dresser
9. The Old Parish Church, where a modern window commemorates Burns in Irvine
10. The gravestone of Helen Miller, the 'Mauchline Lass' who was the wife of Dr John Mackenzie, the first President of Irvine Burns Club
11. Irvine harbour, where Robert Burns struck up a friendship with Capt Richard Brown
12. Cairn memorialising the Drukken Steps and Burns' walk with Brown in Eglinton Woods.

1 The statue

Robert Burns here stands, “in contemplative mood”, his foot resting on a boulder, his plaid flung over his knee, his hair tied behind as was his custom, looking south towards his birthplace at Alloway. The annual wreath-laying ceremony, organised by Irvine Burns Club, is attended by representatives of other Burns Clubs, of the town’s secondary schools, of North Ayrshire Council, and of several other local organisations.

The 1896 statue is by James Pittendrigh Macgillivray, described at the time as “the most virile and original exponent of the newer school of sculpture”. The pedestal of Aberdeen granite sports four bronze panels, one simply stating ‘Burns’, one with Highland Mary, one with the toil-worn Cottar of the Cottar’s Saturday Night’, and one of the Bard being crowned by his Muse, Coila. For more information, visit the Irvine Statue page.

2 Wellwood

Coming into the town, we reach Wellwood Burns Centre and Museum, owned and managed by Irvine Burns Club. This fine Edwardian building contains an important collection of exhibits. Built by the widow and family of John Paterson, the Provost of Irvine in the 1870s, it was bequeathed to the Club by the last surviving brothers. Its maintenance and use are a fitting legacy of their generosity.

The works of art exhibited include a fine bronze statue of Burns, found in a dealer’s salesroom by Clement Wilson. It dates to the early 19th century, and bears markings showing its origin in Belgium, but the artist’s name is not known. For some years, it graced Eglinton Park, but it is now safer in Wellwood.

A more recent work of art in ‘Wellwood’ is the stained glass window, created by Paul Lucky to commemorate the Club’s 175th anniversary in 2001 – it tells, in images, maps and manuscripts, of the poet’s time in Irvine, and highlights the esteem in which Burns was still held by the Club’s founders 45 years later, including by some who had known him.

Even more recently, the 2009 bronze ‘Independent Minds’, sculpted by Alan Beattie Herriot, who is inevitably better known for the large equestrian statue of King Robert the Bruce in Aberdeen. Here we see an imaginary meeting between Wallace and Burns, the former with his sword, the latter with his plough, linked below by the bridge which once spanned the Irvine in the middle of the town. Of the three inscriptions below, the central one quotes the Bard: “The story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins.” Stand before it, contemplate it, and your mind will take in the outstanding genius that was Burns, and the patriotic sacrifice that was Wallace.

3 Crown Inn

Irvine Burns Club was established at a meeting of twelve ‘worthies’ of Irvine in 1826, held here at the Crown Inn, then known as Milne’s Inn. Two had known Burns – Dr John Mackenzie, who had treated Burns’ father in his final illness, and who was by this time doctor to Lord Eglinton, and David Sillar, a friend of Burns from teenage years, who by this time was a grocer in Irvine and a bailie on the Burgh Council. Several other Burns Clubs existed by 1826, but Irvine claims to be one of only two with an unbroken history back to that decade. Today, the directors of Irvine Burns Club meet here on the anniversary of the original meeting to toast the twelve founders.

4 Surgeon Fleming's potions

When Robert Burns suffered a high fever in November 1781, Dr Fleming visited him five times in eight days. Although the exact nature of his illness is uncertain, the drugs prescribed are known from the doctor's daybook, discovered 175 years later in 1956. The drugs feature in this unique pavement artwork outside the town centre hostelry now named the 'Carrick'. They were: the powdered root of a South American tree ('ipecacuanha'), an emetic; a sacred elixir of rhubarb and aloes, a powerful laxative; an anodyne or painkiller probably from the opium poppy; and the powdered bark of another South American tree ('cinchona') containing quinine.

5 Templeton's bookshop

Pause near the Sports Bar and imagine being outside a bookshop in Burns' day. The owner William Templeton enjoyed the young poet calling in to chat, to browse the books, and to keep up with the periodicals, both for their news and for the verse of other poets. In this bookshop, Burns discovered the work of Robert Fergusson – and the racy novels of the day! At times, he would sit in a favourite chair in William's back room, having, as the bookseller's family recalled later, "many a good laugh and a joke". The silk stockings passed by the family to the Burns Club were a gift from Burns to the bookseller.

6 Burns' lodging house

After passing the Porthead Tavern (a 20th century replacement of the house of Charles Hamilton, whose medical student son became a close friend of the young poet), the visitor turns into Glasgow Vennel, once the main road from the town towards Glasgow. On the right was the house where, after initially staying above a storeroom, Robert found decent lodgings. The current house is slightly later.

7 Buchanite meeting house

Further up, on the left, is the meeting house of the Buchanites – a sect of fanatics, whose leader, Mrs Elspeth Buchan, told her followers to be ready to ascend to heaven, *en bloc*, at short notice.

Robert Burns wrote of them (in a letter): "Their tenets are a strange jumble of enthusiastic jargon; among others, she pretends to give them the Holy Ghost by breathing on them, which she does with postures & practices that are scandalously indecent. They have likewise disposed of all life, carrying on a great farce of pretended devotion in barns, & woods, where they lodge and lye all together."

8 Heckling Shop

Then, on the right, you reach the cottage in front of the Heckling Shed, so take the short lane to view, at its rear, the since restored and thatched workplace where Robert Burns learned the skill of flax-dressing, a later stage of linen preparation than the growing of flax at Lochlie, the farm tenanted by his father.

Burns' employment ended there unexpectedly, when a fire during Hogmanay celebrations left the building a shell.

The Heckling Shop and the whole of Glasgow Vennel were restored by Irvine Development Corporation, with the Clement Wilson Foundation, in the 1970s.

9 Old Parish Church

It is believed that Robert Burns first took communion here, when the building was then less than ten years old. In 1995, at the bicentenary of the poet's death, Irvine Burns Club raised funds for a window to commemorate Robert Burns' time in Irvine. Designed and created by Susan Bradbury, once an Artist in Residence of Irvine New Town, it celebrates Burns' love of the countryside, featuring a tree growing beside a clear crystal stream, and the green, gold and brown colours of autumn. The Old Testament text in the design is Robert's paraphrase of the 1st Psalm, while the New Testament text reflects Burns being inspired by the book of Revelation.

10 Graves

The graveyard contains the graves of most of the Club's founder members. One grave is that of Helen Miller Mackenzie, one of the Mauchline Lassies made famous for all time in the poetry of Burns, and the wife of the Club's first President, Dr John Mackenzie, who moved to Edinburgh after the death of his wife.

The grave of David Sillar was renewed by Irvine Burns Club some years ago. His chequered career included a short spell in the town's Tolbooth for not paying a bill, but he was instrumental in involving the east coast Royal Marine, Captain Charles Gray, and several of his Edinburgh literary friends, in Irvine celebrations in the 1830s.

11 Capt Richard Brown

Captain Richard Brown, that wordly-wise seafarer who encouraged Robert Burns to consider publishing his poems, is remembered by a plaque at the harbour, one of a series of memorial plaques installed during Irvine Burns Club very successful Harbourside project of 2012-17.

12 Drukken Steps Cairn

This cairn was originally erected, in 1927 by Irvine Burns Club, near the 'Drukken Steps' – a favourite walk of Robert Burns and Richard Brown, though the stepping stones reference is from other sources. When the bypass was constructed, the cairn was moved to its current location, at Mackinnon Terrace, in 1976.