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## Kilsyth History & Heritage

The ancient settlement, town and royal burgh of Kilsyth dates back to pre-Roman times and has a rich and colourful tale to tell.

NEW! There were two Eliza Rennie's - the poet/author, and her young cousin who left us her charming and devout copybooks and lived at **Carrie farm, Kilsyth**

Sources - see the full listing and transcripts of original source material - an invaluable resource for scholars and students of Kilsyth History

### Just some of the fascinating stories and links:

[Battle of Kilsyth - 1645](#)  
[NEW! Read this letter from Lord Kilsyth to Edmonstone of Duntreath](#)  
[Marquis of Montrose Society](#)  
[Kilsyth - birthplace of curling](#)  
[Family history and genealogy sources](#)  
[Bibliography - Books and videos](#)  
[Kilsyth Heritors' Minutes 1813-1844](#)  
[Kilsyth is the birthplace of several ancestors of President George W. Bush, including the Livingston and Fleming families](#)  
[Bonnie Prince Charlie stayed in Kilsyth in 1746 on his way to victory at the Battle of Falkirk](#)  
[Was your family living in Banton in 1851? View the 1851 census](#)



Photo - the elaborate monument to Lady Kilsyth and her son in Kilsyth Cemetery tells the sad story of their untimely deaths in a roof-fall in Holland whilst in exile. RK

[Check the Livingston Family lineage in this new family tree](#)

A KILSYTH TIMELINE - SOME KEY DATES AND FACTS - Compiled by Rob Kay and John Gordon from a wide range of archive sources: see bibliography for further details.

3300 - 1800 BC Some evidence of Neolithic settlement, stone axes found.

1800 - 800 BC Evidence of Bronze Age settlement near Croy, where several bronze axes discovered.

800 BC - 100 AD Iron Age settlement in the area. Fort at Bar Hill near Twechar

AD 80-85 Agricola and the Romans in the area.

130 - 160 AD Antonine orders the building of the Roman wall across Scotland. Kilsyth is a mile to the north of the Antonine wall. There are forts at Croy and Bar Hill, some manned by Syrian legionnaires. Wall is abandoned after fifty years of occupation.

5th - 6th Century AD - Early Christian Missionaries, e.g St Mirren, are recorded in the area

1216 First mention of a church in the area. Maldoven, Earl of Lennox, grants his sister Eva lands in Kelvesyth and Monyabroch

1306 - "Let the deed shaw" - the Fleming motto - a gory reference to the tradition of Fleming severing the head of the murdered Comyn. The Bruce granted him Comyn's lands in Cumbernauld as a reward.

1320 The Declaration of Arbroath

14th Century - The De Callendars support the Balliol faction in the Wars of Independence - their lands are forfeited and granted to another Bruce supporter, Sir William Livingstone

15th Century - Church and Livingstone family vault in the Howe Rd Cemetery are built

1406 - Fleming of Cumbernauld murdered by the Douglas's for exposing their plan to kidnap the child King James I and send him captive to England.

1440 - Fleming of Cumbernauld beheaded at court in Edinburgh along with the two Douglas heirs after the infamous 'Black Dinner' of James II.

Castle Cary built after 1473 from reparations paid by the Flemings for attacking their Livingstone neighbours.

1510 Curling gathers popularity as a sport in Kilsyth

James IV wooed Margaret Drummond at Cumbernauld Castle, where Margaret's sister was married to Lord Fleming. The Drummonds sisters lie buried in Dunblane Cathedral following their poisoning by a government determined to marry an unwilling King James to the sister of Henry VIII of England, Margaret Tudor. The murders made James IV a frequent visitor to the district, Margaret Tudor accompanying him on one occasion.

Mary Fleming was one of the four "Queen's Mariess". Mary and her brother, Lord Fleming of Cumbernauld went into exile with Mary, Queen of Scots in France. In 1558, Lord Fleming was one of the Scottish Commissioners arranging the Queen's marriage to the Dauphin of France. Fleming and other commissioners died mysteriously on the voyage home, poison being suspected.

1561 Queen Mary visited Cumbernauld Castle. Tragically, the great hall collapsed during the visit. Mary spent much time in Cumbernauld village comforting relatives of those servants killed in the accident. She also visited Castle Cary, where one of her other "Mariess", Mary Livingstone, was staying. The two young women planted a pair of yew trees which still grow in the castle garden. Lord Fleming fought for Mary at Langside in 1567 and, as Governor, led the defence of Dumbarton Castle for the Queen, until its fall in 1571

Kilsyth itself developed in the middle ages. One of the earliest maps is dated around 1590. By Timothy Pont, it is published in Blaeu's Atlas 1654.

1599 William Livingston, only son of Alexander Livingston was educated at the University of Glasgow and appointed to the parish of Kilsyth in succession to his father. Ordained on 13th July, 1596, he was admitted to the full charge on 15th July, 1599, becoming a fearless preacher and often persecuted religious revolutionary for much of the next four decades.

By the beginning of the 17th Century another hamlet, Burnside, had grown along the banks of the Garrell Burn at its confluence with the Ebroch Burn.

1645 - the great civil war Battle of Kilsyth, Covenanters under General Baillie are defeated by Royalists under James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, with dreadful slaughter. 1650 castle at Allanfauld blown up by Cromwell.

By the middle of the Seventeenth century, the town was fully established through the expansion of two separate hamlets, Monyabroch and Burnside. Monyabroch, (or Moniebroch) meaning moor or moss of the Ebroch, developed along the Ebroch Burn.

Within a few years a new town was forming on the higher ground to the south of the burns which eventually developed into the present day Main Street and that part of the town which is now in the conservation area.

At that time the old name of Monyabroch was replaced by Kilsyth, derived from "Kelvesyth", meaning lands watered by the Kelvin River. However the name lives on in street names such as Monieburgh Road and Crescent.

The early cluster of thatched dwellings was originally sustained by agriculture, with improvements such as drainage and diversion of the river Kelvin and tree plantations. Smallholdings were fenced in at High Barrwood known as "Couches".

These smallholdings were allocated by the Livingston family who enjoyed landed powers inherited from 1680 when Kilsyth was made a free Burgh of Barony by Royal charter. The small town depended more on industry than agriculture for its expansion.

1660-1690's Continued Covenanter unrest - John Wharry and James Smith executed in 1683 following an attack on Government troops at Inchbilly bridge. Religious republicanism developed during the long struggle of the Covenanters and reached an apex of radicalism in the 1680's when the Cameronians declared war on King James and the Jacobites.

1680: Lord Kilsyth made over the Kilsyth estate to his younger brother William who was responsible for having the ice-house built. It is situated in the glen of the Colzium Burn, on the right bank, about 30 metres from the main house. There is a rectangular vaulted chamber with an entry door and passage on its north flank and a trap in the centre of the vault. The floor is stone paved and is drained into the glen. Alongside is a small game-pit for storing game until fit for consumption. The ice-house was excavated and repaired in 1977.

1695 The pro-Stuart Livingstones are exiled. Lady Kilsyth and her son die in exile in Holland.

Photo - the tablet in Kilsyth Cemetery tells the sad tale of Lady Kilsyth and her son. RK

1707/8 Last Scottish Parliament - Viscount Kilsyth votes against Union with England

1715 Livingstone estates forfeited, Livingstone goes into exile in Rome

1716 Worlds oldest known Curling club established in Kilsyth - and still going strong

1733 Livingston, the third Viscount Kilsyth, died in exile in Rome on 12th January, and with him the title

1742 First religious revival under Rev. Jas Robe

The Jacobite wars came to a head at the Battle of Falkirk in 1746.

During the 18th Century the production of linen, and, after 1776, cotton weaving, were the principal industries. Trade was also assisted by the arrival in 1758 of the Edinburgh to Glasgow turnpike, later helped by the opening of the new Forth and Clyde Canal, and easy access to both West and East Coasts.

1783 Sir Edmonstone of Duntreath buys the Kilsyth Estates

1785-1794 records of mortality show that smallpox and consumption are the most serious infectious diseases, but measles and whooping cough can still be deadly, and children were the most at risk.

Detail: 18th Century tombstone from Kilsyth cemetery, resplendent with winged skulls, winged bible, trumpets, crossbones, and other symbols. RK

1789 Robert Graham planted half an acre of ground with potatoes on the croft of Neilstone, to the north of the town of Kilsyth, where he at that time resided as factor on the estate of Kilsyth. This is the first account of the commercial cultivation of potatoes in Scotland, and excited considerable interest.

1791 Statistical Account - Population is now 919 people in the town itself, and over 3000 in the Kilsyth and villages area as a whole. There is a wide scatter of occupations - 400 weavers, 280 tambourers, 167 servants, 118 farmers, 23 grocers, 15 taylors, 10 masons, 5 teachers, 2 surgeons, and even a clock maker. Most trades are represented. The 12 publicans show the growing popularity of drinking as a leisure pursuit. There were 408 houses, and 1458 children.

1795 Embalmed bodies of Lady Kilsyth and her son found in the Livingstone family vaults.

Towards the end of the 18th century the local hand loom industries were complemented by the expansion of quarrying for building stone for the growing cities such as Glasgow. In the early 19th century Sir Archibald Edmonstone extended and improved the lime-workings, worth £2000 yearly to the local economy.

1797 - 1820 As world events such as the French and American revolutions started to take a hold on the public imagination, social unrest and conflict between progressives and the old establishment came to a head. There were serious disturbances in Kilsyth in 1797, when opposition to compulsory military service led to threats against the schoolmaster (who was ordered to prepare lists of men for service) and a district meeting was mobbed by large numbers of weavers. Many of these disturbances were organised by early forms of Trades Unions and workers democratic societies. (Lague, Kenneth, Popular Disturbances) The military were called in, and order restored through force.

1811 - The population of the parish was 3,250

In 1820, as the Napoleonic wars left the economy in a recession, serious disturbances erupted again with the "Battle of Bannymuir" (really a skirmish) near Kilsyth which ended as quickly as it began, with disastrous consequences for many of those involved in the new movement for popular democracy and workers rights. A further account by P. J. R. Mileham, gives additional detail.

Unfortunately for the Republicans, the British State forces were informed of the date and radical leaders such as Baird, Hardy and Wilson were betrayed before the revolution could spread. The leaders of the 1820 Radical Rising were quickly brought to trial and hanged for treason against the British State.

The pioneer socialist Robert Owen set up a number of co-operative communes in Lanarkshire and abroad.

In 1826 a new charter was obtained allowing plot holders to elect a town council - the distant relative of our modern-day Community Council.

Scottish Radicals participated in the great political movement which led to the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832. The Scottish Chartist Movement campaigned for the vote to be given to all Scots.

1839 Second Kilsyth revival under Rev William Burns.

Photo: Memorial in Kilsyth cemetery to Rev. William Hamilton Burns who served the Parish for sixty years, leading much of his congregation into the free church in 1843 "for conscience sake". RK

The New Statistical Account of 1841 by the Rev. Burns gives a fascinating insight into mid-century Kilsyth. The arrival of the railway at Croy in 1846 signaled a further expansion of trade and population growth. Manufacturing industry and mining replaced the traditional craft industries.

1849 - Cholera outbreak - 35 residents died.

The 1851 census gives a complete picture of the names and occupations of families living at that time, many of whom are have descendants living in the town today. The growing population also led to large scale emigration, with whole families leaving to start a new life in the colonies.

The outbreak and spread of potato blight in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands caused famine and a huge movement of population into the major towns and cities of the Scottish Lowlands. Employers used the displaced Gaels from both countries as a cheap source of labour and also employed them as strike-breakers. The native Scottish working class in the Lowlands were mainly Protestant and were therefore easy prey to anti-Irish and anti-Catholic propaganda. Republicanism became associated with Ireland and Fenianism and consequently declined as a political force.

Most of the grey-buff and red sandstone town centre we see today was built in the latter half of the 19th century. Elegant shopfronts survive at 40-42 and 55-63 Main street. Many of the doors and windows are original. The Market Square originally served as the focal point of the town. The Barony Court House was demolished in 1860 to make way for the present Market Chambers. The square retains an ornamental water pump dated 1869. The old part of the town reflects the medieval street pattern, with many narrow lanes and wynds.

1863 William Irvine born in Kilsyth. From early success in business he goes on to found world-wide highly secretive Christian fundamentalist sect known by various names as the two-by-twos, Coonyites etc. Founded 1897, First convention 1903

1880 Nimmo's History of Stirlingshire records population of Kilsyth as 6,313

1886 the post of Secretary of State for Scotland was restored and moves were made to set up what became the Scottish Office. Administrative devolution for Scotland was back on the political agenda. The Scottish Home Rule Association was formed to campaign for a Scottish Parliament albeit within the framework of the United Kingdom. The Association persuaded both the Liberal Party and the new Labour Party to include Legislative devolution on their political programmes.

1901 Population has grown to 7292. The principal buildings are the town and public halls, and the academy. The chief industries are coal-mining and iron-works; there are also manufacturers of paper and cotton, besides quarrying of whinstone and sandstone.

1905 Sectarian riots at the Duntreath Arms Inn. Poor housing conditions, overcrowding and poverty increases tensions between Catholic and Protestant communities.

1908 Third religious revival

The inauguration of Burngreen in 1910 with its formal planting, elegant railings and bridges, and ornamental bandstand marked a high point for the town. Around Burngreen the form and shape of the wide boulevard, formal gardens and bridge villas is in marked contrast to Main Street.

1914 The Liberal Government passed a Home Rule for Scotland Act but after the First World War, largely as a result of the 1916 rising in Ireland, devolution for Scotland was dropped.

(1914-18 war - out of the 1171 local men who enlisted, 227 were killed in action or died of active service. The War Memorial was unveiled in 1923 (contemporary account and list of names of the dead)

After the 1914-18 war Kilsyth continued to enjoy a period of modest prosperity and the dignified public housing on Kelvin way and Kings way was built. (right)

1920 Town went "dry" (prohibition era) and stayed dry until 1967!

1926 General Strike - much local involvement and suffering

1928 The National Party of Scotland was founded.

1933 Population stands at 7817, an increase of 266 from the previous year. On June 9th, the Hunger March arrives, en route from Glasgow to Edinburgh: "The Provost (Alex Fisher 1931-1934) and the Labour Party had refused any assistance whatever. "No use the Marchers coming here": Nothing should be done"; "Nobody wanted them"; etc. But what a reception at Kilsyth! The entire town, almost without exception, turned out to greet the Marchers. The Town Council meeting scheduled for that night was hastily abandoned, and the Councillors and Provost disappeared. Quarters were found for the men in the Salvation Army headquarters; a gigantic meeting was held in the Park by comrades McGovern, Heenan, McShane, Ferguson; of a unanimous vote of support for the Marchers was given. Photo right: John Jarvie (1875-1951) was Provost of Kilsyth between 1934 and 1937, first Freeman of the Burgh, and responsible for much improvement of social housing. Bronze plaque by the distinguished sculptor Benno Schatz (1891-1984), Photo RK

1939 -1945 Second World War brings many social changes, men enlisted for all three services, Bevan Boys to work in the pits, children and family evacuees from the cities as Glasgow and the Clyde are blitzed by the Luftwaffe, women working in factories to help the war effort. - 55 dead are listed on the War Memorial

The new Academy was designed in the 1930's by Sir Basil Spence, (1907 - 1976), the architect of Coventry Cathedral, but was not finished until the 1950's.

1940s- 1960s Gradual decline of the mining industry, as small local coal seams were abandoned as uneconomic. Light engineering and a more diverse industrial base create new industries and opportunities.

Photo, Memorial to the Miners in Burngreen Park, RK

There was further expansion of public housing in the 1970s to the north west of the town along the lower slopes of the Kilsyth hills. More recently a number of high quality private houses and small estates have contributed to the ambience and choice of available housing in the town. With the advent of improved transport and wider choice of shopping in larger centres such as Stirling, Falkirk, and Glasgow, concern has been expressed over the appearance of older vacant shops, some of which have fallen into near dereliction, and an active programme of rehabilitation has commenced.

1978 District Council approves major scheme for the rehabilitation of derelict industrial land at Burngreen, Ebroch burn, Auchinstarry, Kilsyth Parish Church, the industrial estate, and land around the town centre.

1979 Devolution Referendum. The "Yes" side won by only 32% of vote to 30% against, but this was insufficient to create a change, as the rules required that at least 40% of the population support the change.

Since 1995 the town has been included within North Lanarkshire Council area - in earlier times it was linked to Dunbartonshire and Stirlingshire counties.

1997-1998 Labour wins a general election, and the Scottish Parliament is given the go ahead following a further referendum. Labour candidate Cathie Craigie elected as the first MSP for Kilsyth and Cumbernauld.

2001 Kilsyth Community Council establishes website here at [www.kilsyth.org.uk](http://www.kilsyth.org.uk)

2002 Kilsyth Community Council awarded Coat of Arms and wins Supercounty's coveted award as most effective community organisation in Lanarkshire

### Local History Links include:

[Kilsyth History Archive Sources - the full listing](#)  
[Battle of Kilsyth, 1645](#)  
[Battle of Falkirk, 1746](#)  
[Christian Revivals in Kilsyth](#)  
[William Irvine of Kilsyth](#)

[Check out our Bibliography - local books of interest](#)

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