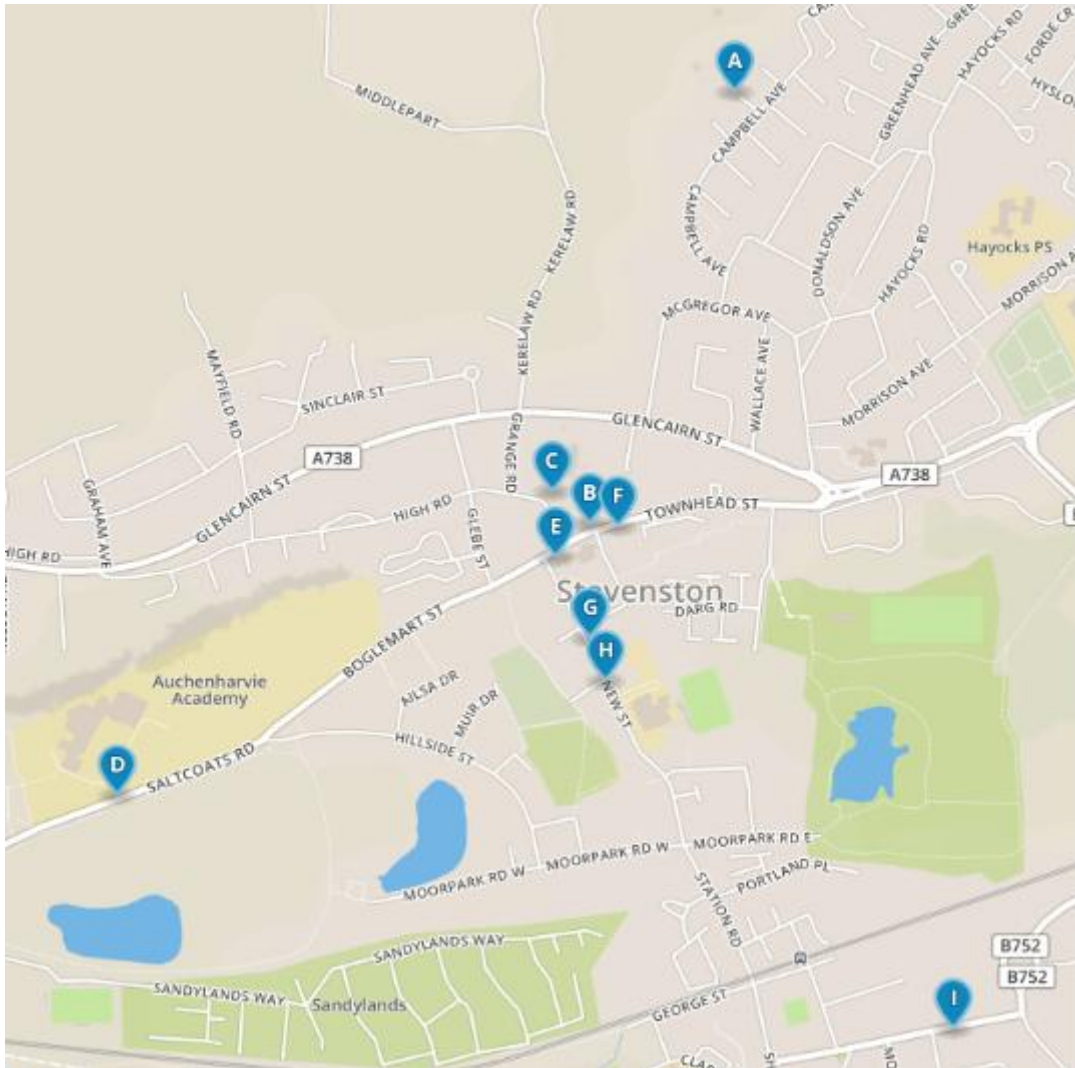


Stevenston Heritage Trail Route



Letters for each plaque can be found on the map above.

Start at Kerelaw Castle

(A) Kerelaw Castle, 15th century on; Cunningham stronghold

Northwest of Campbell Avenue, KA20 4BS

OS Grid Reference - NS 26896 42855

Note the old bridge next to the castle over the burn. This led to where Kerelaw Mansion¹ was.

The estate of Kerelaw was originally the seat of Stephen Lockhart who was known to possess the property as long ago as 1191. Indeed, it is Stephen that the town of Stevenston is named after.

Kerelaw passed from the Lockharts to the Campbells of Loudon with Bruce granting them a charter of the land in 1318 and about this time the first castle was built. Again Kerelaw passed onto another powerful family; the Cunninghames of Kilmaurs and Glencairn.

The old castle was razed by the Eglintons in 1488 during their feud with the now Earls of Glencairn. A new castle was raised and occupied by several owners until 1787.

Kerelaw today is a fine looking ruin, as ruins go, with many architectural features; doors, windows, fireplaces and the like, still to be seen.



On to the next stop

Follow the footpath south to Campbell Avenue and continue to the path at the rear of McGregor Avenue. This path takes you along the Stevenston Burn to Glencairn Street. Cross Glencairn Street and follow the path beside the burn.

(For an easier walking route not using the burn path – continue on Campbell Avenue to Reid's Avenue and turn go to McGregor Avenue. Turn right again and continue to Glencairn Street, turn right and cross over to the burn path.)

(B) Deep Shank Pit, sunk 1678; first deep pit in Stevenston

On path next to 6 Townhead, KA20 3AG
OS Grid Reference - NS 26640 42180

Soon after Robert Cunninghame inherited his uncle's estate in 1678, he enthusiastically began work on surveying the coal field. He began his operations with the Deep Shank Pit to the east of Stevenston Kirk and Burn. He erected a water-wheel which harnessed the power of the Stevenston Burn. Buckets of water were wound up from the pit to the surface where they were emptied into a runnel that drained back into the burn. He also put down several shafts or pits in the coal-field, at considerable distances from each other, to ascertain the thickness, quality and declivity of the various

strata, as well as the position of the chief 'troubles'. The skill with which this survey was carried out provided detailed information of ongoing value to his successors.



He also drove a level mine for a mile and a half westwards through his own coal field and part of Lord Eglinton's to surface at Townhead, Saltcoats. The coal which was mined was carried up stairs on the backs of the wives and daughters of the colliers. Keeping mines free of water was always a major issue.

The Stevenston coalfield continued to be a site of innovation. An abortive attempt was made in 1719, only five years after the steam engine was first used in Newcastle and only the second that had been set up in Scotland, to instal a Newcomen engine. At only 18 inches in diameter, however, it was too small. Later, a new Boulton and Watt steam engine (an improved development of Newcomen's original model), constructed by John Nelson of Glasgow was installed. At 5 feet in diameter with 8 feet stroke and 15 and a half inch bore pumps, it discharged four tons of water a minute and was probably the first of its size in Scotland.

Now capped by concrete, the abandoned, flooded workings of the Deep Shank Pit was the probable source for the catastrophic flooding that killed 9 in the Auchenharvie pit in 1895.

On to the next stop

Continue south on the path to Main Street and turn right. Then turn right into Schoolwell Street. Walk up past the Champion Shell Inn² to the wall surrounding the church.

(C) Rev David Landsborough, 1779-1854; minister, naturalist and author

On graveyard wall next to 12 Schoolwell Street, KA20 3DL

OS Grid Reference - NS 26585 42141

The entrance to the graveyard³ is on Glencairn Street.

Born on 11 August 1779 at Dalry, Glen Kens, Kirkcudbrightshire, David Landsborough was educated at the local village school before moving to Dumfries Academy then to Edinburgh University in 1798 - sending his boxes by carrier and walking to Edinburgh from Galloway. David was a talented musician and one tutor suggested he make music his career. It is fortunate for the inhabitants of Stevenston, Saltcoats and Arran; the Church of Scotland (Established and Free) and the scientific study of the natural world that he ignored this advice and continued with his religious studies - though he could always be found with a flute in his pocket ready to play.

After receiving his licence, he preached at St Andrews in Edinburgh, without giving up his appointment as resident tutor in the household of Lord Glenlee a position he had held for 6/7 years. For a short time he was assistant to Rev Dr Auld of the Old Church, Ayr before being appointed to the Church in Stevenston. He was ordained on 26 September 1811. At the time of his appointment Stevenston Parish had a population of around 3000 and stretched from the Harbour at Saltcoats to Irvine Bar - a distance of some 5 miles.

He married Margaret McLeish, daughter of James McLeish, Port Glasgow on 18 March 1817 and they had 7 children, 4 sons and 3 daughters. Sadly his wife, to whom he was devoted, was in poor health and died on 9 November 1834. Three of his sons emigrated to Australia, one of them William became a famous Australian explorer.

His son David became minister of the Free Henderson Church in Kilmarnock.

David ministered not only to his parishioners religious needs but set about improving the conditions in the area including a new Church in Stevenston opened on 12 May 1833, teaching evening classes himself, a new school in Stevenston in 1840 and Kyleshill School, Saltcoats on 9 December 1839; he carried out a census of the parish in 1819, 1822 and 1836 which can be seen at The Three Towners' website.

In 1837 he furnished the account of his parish in Stevenston to the "Statistical Account of Scotland" and in 1842 the statistical account of Saltcoats, these can be searched for on the Edina website; in 1836 he assisted the Gaelic congregation to raise funds for a Church in Saltcoats, now North Parish Church.

At the time of the Disruption of the Church of Scotland 18 May 1843 some 474 Ministers left the Church, David was the leader of the Ayrshire Disruption Ministers. Unable to find land to build a Free Church in Stevenston the Church was built in Saltcoats on land donated free by Dr Dow, the son of

the Rev Robert Dow parish minister of Ardrossan 1739 to 1787. The church stood beside the Mission Coast Home, the site is now the Labour Club.



He kept a daily journal recording amongst other events the weather and plant and bird life in the locality. This interest in the natural history of his parish extended to the neighbouring island of Arran and his first publication in 1828 was a poem in six cantos about Arran. This led to the Irvine Burns Club offering him honorary membership which he gladly accepted. His other publications include articles for the "Christian Herald" and "Christian Treasury"; "Excursions to Arran" with reference to the natural history of the island (original selling price 3d); "Ayrshire Sketches", a little volume of religious biographies; a "Popular history of British Sea-weeds" and a "Popular history of British Zoophytes". He discovered 70 species of animals and plants new to Scotland and several species were named after him by other eminent naturalists of

his time.

David's ministry included several fund raising trips in 1832 to Fifeshire to plead the cause of the Scottish Missionary Society; in 1835 to the North and East of Ireland on a similar mission and in 1837 to Galloway to plead the cause of Church extension. In 1852 he was appointed by the General Assembly to the Presbyterian Church in Gibraltar where he served for 4 months, during which time he was also chaplain to the 26th or Cameronian Regiment stationed there. He visited Spain and Tangiers and on his return through Europe arrived in London to witness the funeral in November 1852 of the Duke of Wellington, the Iron Duke.

David was honoured with a DD by an American University. He was a member of the Philosophical and Natural History Societies of Glasgow; a member of the Linnean Society, elected an associate in 1849; a member of the Wernerian and Royal Physical societies of Edinburgh.

He ministered to his parishioners during the epidemics of cholera in Stevenston and Saltcoats, visiting the sick and dying. In the 1854 epidemic the disease entered the Manse killing two other members of the household before David caught the disease and after a short illness he died on 12 September 1854 in his 76th year and 43rd year of his ministry.

The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald in October 1854 reported that "hundreds attended the funeral and the shops were shut" and describes him thus "He was a model of a faithful Minister. Kind to a fault, conciliatory in deposition, anxious to do good, ever ready to stand by the bed of death, universally respected". A fitting tribute to an exceptional man. The Free Church in Saltcoats stills bears his name "Landsborough & Trinity".

(C) William Landsborough, 1825-1886; first European to cross Australia

William was born on 21st February 1825 in the Manse, Stevenston the son of Rev David Landsborough, naturalist and author and his wife Margaret McLeish. He and his brother David, later minister in Kilmarnock, attended Irvine Academy where they were both successful pupils winning prizes - David and William won joint second prize for Mathematics in 1839 and William won the prize for Drawing. They daily walked the 12 miles round trip to school.



He emigrated to Australia in 1841 following his two older brothers John and James, who were in New South Wales. He was a farmer and gold miner, making enough at the latter to buy a sheep station. He became an expert bushman and explored and named Mount Nebo in 1856. In 1857 he explored around Broad Sound, in 1858 the Comet and Nogao rivers and in 1858 with another explorer Stewart, the Bonar (Bowen) river. He also traced the Gregory and Herbert rivers to their sources.

In 1861, William was chosen by the Victoria and Queensland governments to lead a search for Robert O'Hara Burke and William Wills (other explorers of Australia) from the gulf of Carpentaria southwards. The journey was hazardous - shipwrecks, hostile Aborigines, lack of food being some of the dangers he and his party faced. The threat of flooding isolating his starving party caused him to return to Burketown in January 1862, before setting off again and discovering on 21 May 1862 at Williams station that Burke and Wills had perished. William continued his journey south to Melbourne and was feted as the first explorer to cross the continent from North to South.

Following his marriage to Caroline Hollingworth Raine on 30th December 1862, they left Australia for a trip to Britain. On 25 May 1863, the Royal Geographical Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London presented him with a Gold Watch for his exploration in Australia. On 17th February 1864, William gave an entertaining lecture to a packed audience in the Free Church in Saltcoats about his experiences and explorations in Australia. The data he used shows vividly how Australia had grown in the time he was there "The great extent of Australia was nearly equal to Europe. 50 years ago the population was only a few thousands - now upwards of a million. Then whole exports were £100 now at twenty million yearly. Then a few thousands sheep now twenty millions". His brother David gave the benediction at the end of the lecture.

William was a member of the Legislative Council for Queensland, He was a police magistrate and Commissioner of Crown lands in Carpentaria. He was awarded £2000 by the government to reward him for his explorations. With this he bought lands an Loch Lamerough at Caloundra. He wrote a book

about his expedition for Carpentaria and kept journals, which are held in the Oxley Library, Brisbane. After the death of his first wife, leaving him with 3 daughters, William married Maria Theresa Carr, nee Carter, in Brisbane on 8 March 1873, with whom he had 3 sons. He died on 16th March 1886 and was initially buried on his land but in 1913 his remains were moved to Toowong cemetery where a monument was erected in his honour. The Landsborough name continues to this day in Australia for example Counties of Landsborough in Queensland and New South Wales, town of Landsborough in the Sunshine Coast region and Parish of Landsborough in Flinders Shire as well as inlets and mountains.

On to the next stop

Continue on Schoolwell Street to the High Road⁴ and turn left down Glebe Street. At the bottom of Glebe Street turn right into Boglemart Street. At the end of Boglemart Street is Auchenharvie Academy and playing grounds.

(D) Seabank House and Nelson's Tower, built c.1812

Auchenharvie Academy, Saltcoats Road, KA20 3JW

NS 25967 41677

The plaque is on the main gate to the academy.

On the site now occupied by Harvey's Leisure Centre, Auchenharvie House was also known as Seabank over its long life. The original house was erected around 1708 by Robert Cunninghame, who had established the biggest, most productive colliery in Ayrshire but had incurred increasing debts in doing so.



Seabank was probably a replacement for the ancient Auchenharvie Castle, which stands in ruins near Torranyard, three and a half miles to the north east of Irvine. After the death of Robert Cunninghame in 1715, the family were faced with a long series of debt-related court cases and effectively lost control of the coalfield and harbour that he had established. It was not until Robert Reid Cunninghame (1744-1814) took over the

running of the estate in 1770 and formed a partnership with the Rev. Patrick Warner of Ardeer as the Stevenston Coal Company that the family's fortunes really improved.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Robert Reid Cuninghame rebuilt the house as his profits from mining grew. 'Sheltered, and sweet, and cheerful, Sea Bank presents itself on the west, with its green fields and woody braes, and Martello tower, and mounted battery', is the description given by Rev. David Landsborough in the 1834-45 Statistical Account. The tower was Nelson's Tower that had been erected prior to 1812 when invasion from France was feared. Now demolished, this was a circular tower with splayed base, the upper portion adorned with a corbelled parapet.

The house passed to new owners after the death of Robert Cuninghame in 1868 and the house was rebuilt once more, taking a low baronial appearance, with addition of corbie-stepped gables and bay windows. The house was probably renamed Auchendarvie at this time. The last private owner of the house was James Kirkland, a Saltcoats solicitor. In 1947, the house was sold to the council who converted it into an experimental school for girls which operated until around 1972, when it closed and the building was demolished. By this time Auchendarvie Academy had been erected in the grounds.

On to the next stop

Retrace you walk back along Boglemart Street to the town centre and cross over to the library with the Warner Fountain⁵ outside. Also note the Stevenston Provost Lamp across on the other side of the Main Street.

(E) Ron Geesin, born 1943; musician and composer

Stevenston Library, 1 Main Street, KA20 3AB
OS Grid Reference - NS 26593 42018

Ron Geesin is a musician and composer who has worked in the music industry all his life. He has released albums and produced sound tracks for television and cinema. Famously he worked on Pink Floyd's Atom Heart Mother and received a rare credit on the album cover.



Ron was born on 17th December 1943 in Buckredden Maternity Hospital in Kilwinning (as was the norm then). And then brought up in the family home in Stevenston until moving as a small boy. Now read Ron's own words about his early life and the origins of his unusual name:

My father, Kenneth Frederick Geesin (b. 1913) got a job at the Glengarnock branch of Colvilles Constructional Ltd.

where he met my mother, Joyce Malcolm, who lived in Glengarnock and was working in the main Colvilles Ltd. office. They got married in Glasgow 'to be swanky' and managed to get a house in Stevenston, 21 Hillcrest Drive. It was cheap because it was near the Ardeer Factory, and if the German's had hit that, there would have been no house!

The name Geesin comes from the village of Gissing in Norfolk. The progression goes: Gyssynge (Norfolk, C14); Geesing (Leicestershire, C16); Geesin (Leicestershire, C18). Those who could not write almost always got 'Geeson' written for them.

From one large family in Muston, Leics., in 1850, one brother moved to Gateshead and two emigrated to America, one of whom formed the existing American branch of Geesin. My paternal Grandfather, from the Gateshead branch, became an engineer and moved around Britain a lot: Gateshead; London; Bournemouth; Glasgow; Lutterworth, where my father was born. Following on in that pattern, my father duly deposited me in Ayrshire! All this could be explained as part of the 20th century explosion as a direct result of the Industrial Revolution, much propelled by Mr. Nobel!!

Ron is still being creative - releasing new music and most recently publishing his history of the making of Atom Heart Mother 'The Flaming Cow'.

On to the next stop

Continue up Main Street to Townhead Street

(F) Edward Boyd, 1916-1989; writer

Townhead Christian Fellowship Church, 7 Townhead Street, KA20 3AQ

OS Grid Reference - NS 26702 42060

Edward Boyd was born at 5 Townhead which is now the Fellowship's car park.

Edward Boyd was a crime writer who produced mainly radio, television and film scripts. Boyd was born in Stevenston on 11 May 1916 at 5 Townhead Street (now the site of the Christian Fellowship Church car park).

He created TV series such as *The Odd Man* (1960-63), *The Corridor People* (1966) and *The View from Daniel Pike* (1971-73) starring Roddy McMillan as a Glaswegian private detective. His film work included *Robbery* (1967) which starred Stanley Baker and Frank Finlay. This won him the 1968 Writers' Guild of Great Britain Award for Best British Original Screenplay which he shared with Peter Yates and George Markstein.



Some of his scripts were adapted for book form with other authors such as the above *The View from Daniel Pike* with Bill Knox. *The Dark Number* which he co-wrote with Roger Parkes in 1973 won the Grand Prix de Littérature Policière International Prize in 1975.

He died in Glasgow on 17 December 1989 and a collection of his scripts was deposited with University of Glasgow Library.

On to the next stop

Go past the library and turn left down New Street to the masonic lodge.

(G) Francis Love, 1781-1860; poet

Stevenstone Thistle & Rose Lodge No. 169, 54 New Street, KA20 3HD

OS Grid Reference - NS 26650 41853

Love was a keen freemason and the lodge has a painting of him inside.

Francis Love was born in Stevenston on 19 April 1781, the son of Robert Love, coachman, and Elizabeth Lockhart. During his lifetime Francis was well known in the West of Scotland, particularly in Masonic circles, as a poet and song writer. He was associated with the Stevenston Thistle and Rose Lodge for 59 years, holding all the various offices. He was well respected not only in Stevenson but also in neighbouring lodges who showed their esteem tangibly by conferring honours on him and presenting him with gifts for example his Ayrshire friends in Glasgow held an entertainment for him and presented him with a silver mounted snuff box containing money.

He was an active member of four different charities in Stevenston, devoting time to furthering their interests. Francis was an ardent admirer of Robert Burns and paid tribute to him in songs and verse. Though Burns is now universally admired this was not so in the first half of the 19th century when his

admirers were unpopular and Burns' faults were enlarged out of all proportion. In 1848 Francis delivered a poem to the Irvine Burns club in support of Burns, one verse of which is



*"Though Robin had his fau'ts we ken
He was the whale o' social men!
A' you that's fau'tless just come ben
An' cast a clod at Robin"*

Francis philosophy was that of the Old Testament - "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone".

Most of Francis' poems and songs have a local flavour but some have a strong political flavour notably "The Kilmarnock Burgh Election Ballad" and "The Toon Meal Pock", which outlines the conditions of poverty in Stevenson at the time of the formation of the Anti Corn Law League in 1839. A book of his poems was published posthumously in 1863 and due to public demand a second edition was issued in September

1886 by the Stevenston Thistle and Rose Lodge.

Francis, a weaver throughout his life, married Agnes Cockburn and had 10 children some of whom moved to America. The family are recorded in Rev David Landsborough's census of 1819, 1822 and 1836 living at Cow Roding, Stevenston and in the official 1841 and 1851 census living at New Street, Stevenson. Francis died on 11 July 1860 at Townhead Street, Stevenston. A monument was erected to his memory in Stevenston High Kirk Churchyard, funded by the various lodges in Ayrshire.

On to the next stop

Cross over New Street to the cemetery gates.

(H) Cholera victims, 1845-1871; some 606 killed by epidemics

New Street Cemetery, New Street, KA20 3HG

OS Grid Reference - NS 26664 41797

This is where the majority of Stevenston's cholera victims were buried.

In 1871 a memorial was erected by the workmen at Ardeer Ironworks. The inscription was, "In this plot rest 606 inhabitants of Stevenston who died between 5th August 1845 and the 15th April 1871". These people had died as a result of the plague, ie. Cholera. The first outbreaks of cholera had arrived in Britain in 1832 but the most severe spread came in 1848-1849. Many parts of the UK were affected both rural and urban. In North Ayrshire the cholera pits were built to bury those who had died from the disease. Barrmill, Beith, Irvine, Dalry and Stevenston all had pits.

Cholera is believed to have been brought to Britain by soldiers serving in India. The reasons for the rapid spread of cholera were due to the insanitary conditions of the time with little means of removing human and animal waste, few washing facilities, dung heaps being near to drinking wells and general lack of hygiene meant the disease spread quickly.



Symptoms of cholera were sickness, deafness and blindness lasting about seven hours before death.

Mention is made by Dr Craig in his Report on Cholera in Scotland 1848-1849 that a man from Kilwinning took the disease to Stevenston.

As a consequence of the outbreaks the government was forced to pass legislation which would improve the sanitary conditions for the poor. Locally a sanitary committee was set up to regulate sanitation and such moves had the effect of ending the scourge of this dreadful disease.

On to the next stop

Continue down New Street (note the building on the right with the flag pole – this is Stevenston's War Memorial⁶), onto Station Road, over the level crossing at the station and onto Shore Road. Go down Shore Road and turn left at the Ardeer Parish Church into Caledonian Road.

(I) Alfred Nobel, 1833-1896; inventor of dynamite

Caledonian Road, KA20 3LF

OS Grid Reference - NS 27252 41152

Plaque on wall next to bus stop. Caledonian Road was the main access to Alfred Nobel's factory. Indeed this street was once called Dynamite Road.



Chemist, Engineer & Arms Manufacturer, Swedish born Nobel was the holder of 350 patents for discoveries that included dynamite, gelignite and the blast cap. Following the death of his brother, a French newspaper erroneously printed an obituary of Alfred which condemned him for the invention of dynamite, supposedly provoking him to set aside the bulk of his estate to fund the Nobel prizes after his death; these include three prizes for science, one for literature, and a fifth (the 'Peace Prize') for the person or group that best promotes international fraternity.

From the viewpoint at Stevenston point, there are views of the Ardeer peninsula where Alfred Nobel founded the British Dynamite Company in 1870, starting production in Ardeer in 1873. By 1926, the company had coalesced into Imperial Chemical Industries, while Nobel Industries continued as the ICI Nobel division of the company, shipping industrial explosives to destinations around the world.

This is the end of the trail.

¹ This was the home of Kenneth Campbell, the Victoria Cross winner, who has a plaque in the Saltcoats Heritage Trail.

² Behind the Champion Shell Inn is a short road called the Pun Brae where a Bronze Age burial cist was uncovered in 1908.

³ Many local residents of note are interned here including David Landsborough and Francis Love. In the crypt under the church are the tombs of the Hamiltons of Kerelaw, Warners of Ardeer and Cunninghames of Auchenharvie.

⁴ Further up the High Road on the right is Mayville once the home of Lesley Baillie (1768 – 1843) who's beauty inspired Robert Burns to pen two poems about her.

⁵ Originally this had a trough for horses attached and two wells to hold drinking water. It was unveiled in 1910 – a gift to the town from Patrick Warner of Ardeer.

⁶ The War Memorial Institute is Stevenston's War Memorial. The monument on the front of the building lists the roll of honour for both World Wars and properly states the dates of the First World War as 1914 – 1919 as the war didn't end until the Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28 June 1919.

The Institute also served as the town's Municipal Building when it was a burgh from 1952 to 1975.

Also note the gate posts these are made of cast iron from the Merry and Cunningham Ardeer Iron Works. Look out for more of these gate posts when walking the Heritage Trails of Stevenston, Saltcoats and Ardrossan.