

# OUT OF TIME

Portencross was once a busy place, with fishing, farming and tourism at the heart of it's activities. Yet, it has somehow escaped many of the developments that have taken place in the past 150 years, becoming the beautiful, sleepy village you see today.



'Portencross', William Young, 1886. By permission of East Ayrshire Council Arts and Museums

## FOR TEACHERS

What would it have been like to have been a farmer or fisherman in Portencross during Victorian times? How different would that have been from today?

Look at the social history of your own city, town or village. What were the main industries and what did people do for fun? What stories can you find out?

How have holidays changed in the past 100 years. Where do pupils go for their holidays now? Where did their parents go - and their grandparents? Can you work out a way to display this, perhaps using maps of Scotland, the UK and the world?

How many different sources of power are there in Scotland? How many of these can you find within 50 miles of your own school? Find out about microgeneration.

## CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE LINKS

### LITERATURE

- LIT 2-16a
- LIT 2-16a
- LIT 2-18a
- LIT 3-18a

### SCIENCE

- SCN 2-04b
- SCN 3-04b

### TECHNOLOGIES

- TCH 2-02b

### SOCIAL STUDIES

- SOC 2-04a
- SOC 3-04a
- SOC 2-09a
- SOC 4-09b
- SOC 2-13a
- SOC 3-13a

## FRIENDS OF PORTENCROSS CASTLE

This leaflet was produced by Friends of Portencross Castle (FOPC).

FOPC is a recognised Scottish Charity (No. SC028181) dedicated to conserving the castle and providing access to the building.

In 2007 FOPC was awarded grant support from The Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland and the Architectural Heritage Fund. With additional support from local charities, North Ayrshire Council and many individuals, FOPC was able to raise just over £1 million pounds for the costs of the project. Grant support does not include maintenance. As a result FOPC has to raise costs for staff, maintenance, education materials, website and overheads. We will remain open with the help of donations and by having events and functions at the castle.

**Please donate if you can. You can become a Guardian. Find out more from our web site [www.portencrosscastle.org.uk](http://www.portencrosscastle.org.uk) or pick up details at the castle during opening hours.**



# A SOCIAL HISTORY OF PORTENCROSS



Mending the nets: courtesy of Alastair Sheddin and West Kilbride Civic Society



PORTENCROSS, WEST KILBRIDE



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[www.portencrosscastle.org.uk](http://www.portencrosscastle.org.uk)

Postcards: Courtesy West Kilbride Museum



Heading home by the Throughlet: courtesy of West Kilbride Museum

## WORKING LAND AND SEA

During the 1800s, farming and fishing were the main activities in and around Portencross, with around 40 farms in the parish by the end of the 1800s. Around 30 fishing boats worked from Portencross, employing as many as 150 men. Crews of four people caught herring, cod and oysters or collected kelp. After Portencross Castle was abandoned in the 1700s, it was used for storage of nets and other fishing equipment. The last local family to fish commercially from Portencross was the Shedden family: John Shedden and his sons Jack and Ronald. The boys were the last of five generations of the Shedden family to fish this part of the coast. They spent 50 years as salmon fishermen, finally retiring from the sea in 1980.

Ayrshire is favoured for dairy farming and potatoes. In 1917 the winter storage of potatoes around Glasgow failed and the Portencross 'earlies' helped to save Glasgow from a severe food shortage.

## PORTENCROSS POWER

In the late 1900s, Portencross and the Hunterston peninsula were subject to compulsory purchase orders to build power stations and a coal and ore terminal. These purchases displaced farmers and resulted in the energy companies owning many of the houses in the village and Portencross Castle itself. The field at Northbank, seen in the illustration of The Throughlet above was earmarked to develop yet another station, Hunterston C, but this was never built. During the 1980s the government sold much of the land it had bought, including Portencross village but not the castle, giving village tenants and farmers first option to buy. In 1998 FOPC was formed in response to the news that the castle was for sale as a private home. It proved impossible to find a conservation body willing to take on the castle, so in 2005 FOPC took ownership and initiated a determined search to find funding for its repair.



Postcard of P.S Juno (paddle steamer) at Portencross.: courtesy of North Ayrshire Libraries

## 'DOON THE WATTER'

Can you imagine coming to Portencross for your holidays? During the Victorian era, many of the ports and islands in the estuary of The Firth of Clyde were hugely popular holiday destinations. Those who worked in the industrial towns further up the River Clyde were keen to get away from their everyday lives and holiday resorts developed along the Clyde estuary. At its peak, by 1900, 300 steamers operated on the Clyde, and there was enormous competition for passengers. Although the number of steamers then declined, going 'doon the watter' remained popular until the 1960s.

Portencross also became a tourist destination during the late 1800s and early 1900s and a pier was built around 1911 to accommodate steamers. However, its exposed location made it difficult to sustain a regular service, so it was used more to ship local produce up the Clyde to market and for the coal trade.

## THE RAILWAY THAT NEVER CAME

What would a railway line have meant for Portencross? In 1899 a new railway line was proposed by the Glasgow and South Western Railway, which already served the ports and steamer services on the west coast. The line would have run from Seamill to Fairlie via Portencross and Hunterston. At the time, potatoes were one of the main crops grown at both Portencross and Hunterston, and they needed to be taken to market in Glasgow. There was also a return trade in dung from Meadowside Key in Glasgow where cattle were landed from Ireland and elsewhere. The dung was at that time freighted by rail then carted from West Kilbride station to the potato fields. Unfortunately, Portencross farmers, along with those from the surrounding area, weren't happy with the prices proposed by the rail company. This caused delay, and then the outbreak of World War I in 1914 killed off the proposal altogether.

The proposed railway route at Portencross: courtesy of West Kilbride Museum

