

## Semple Stories, Lochwinnoch's Glories

**Semple Stories, Lochwinnoch's Glories** was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Greater Renfrewshire and Inverclyde LEADER. Local people were involved in the researching of local history and in the recording of audio stories for this project to encourage visitors to explore this rich cultural landscape. The map below shows the location of the numbered points.

Within the boundary of the village of **Lochwinnoch** and the former Sempill estate, there are 36 listed buildings and three scheduled ancient monuments. At the 2011 census, the population was recorded as 2,880, however in 1695 the population was just 36 adults. The original village of Loch Whinnoch was overlooking the loch and centered around the church on Johnshill. Originally St Winnoc's Church [1, see map], it became St John's Church after the Reformation and is known locally as Old Simon, a name thought to have come from a man who used to wind the clock. The oldest remaining house stands at No.5 Johnshill [2]. An attached building, no longer there, was Jimmy Edgars Garage who ran busses for men to the barytes mine at Muirshiel.



The West Gates [3] were the grand, main entrance to the Semple Estate. On visiting, in 1887, Miss Ellen C. Semple said "Over the gate proper was a tall gothic arch of stone flanked on each side by two small stone buildings used for the gatekeeper".

The High Street is a Conservation Area, the new town of Lochwinnoch having been planned by William Sempill II in 1780. The **Industrial Revolution** was underway and textile mills were being built including one at Calderhaugh in which Lord Semple had a financial interest. The 'new town' was planned and accommodated workers who were leaving traditional forms of work for the mills, bleachworks and furniture factories. Not all the original buildings remain, but what you will notice is that even though houses were planned, they are not all identical. The library [4], a distinctive building which used to be the primary school and built by Colonel William McDowall in 1857, in a time when the parishes themselves were responsible for providing schools. A much larger school [5] was built at Calder Street on the edge of the village in 1905.



The **McKillop Institute** [6] was donated and constructed by a former resident and this area became the village's industrial centre. A large area behind Main Street, from the McKillop Institute down to the river had a gas works, three different cabinet and chair works [7] and a cooperage. The Calderhaugh silk mill [8] is the only remaining structure from this time and is now residential flats. On the opposite side of Main Street, now Lade Court, was a cabinet works, with a smithy on the corner and behind these houses, on now vacant land, the Lochhead cabinet works. Lochwinnoch furniture had a reputation for the quality of craftsmanship and was made from dark wood and usually had Queen Anne feet.

Formerly, in **Church Street** there was a courthouse and police station [9] which has high arching windows and doors and nearby is the Parish Church [10] completed in 1808 to replace the Auld Kirk at Johnshill. At one time there were three churches here but now there are only two. The Free Church [11] was at the end of the avenue of trees, just before the Parish Church and this is why the nearby pub is called The Three Churches [12]. Between the Parish Church and the United Free Church [13] used to be a primary school which later became the Struthers Aerated Water Factory [14] and is better known for its Krystal Klear Lemonade and Koala Kola.



In the past **Castle Semple Loch** and the Barr Loch were joined. However, damming, canalisation and drainage have all altered the landscape while controlling the flow of water to power the many mills in the area. Draining the land also allowed an increase in the growing of crops. The reduced level of the loch revealed a dugout canoe and possible crannog timbers.

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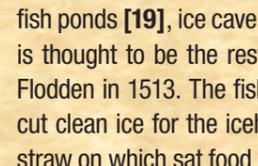
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## A Tour of Lochwinnoch

The Calder Bridge [15] and the causeway between the Barr and Castle Semple lochs were built as a result of court action taken against William McDowall I. Those on the south side could only access the village via a small ferry boat which ran between the narrowest parts of the shoreline. On the far side of the loch are the remains of the Peel Tower [16]. This fortification was built around 1550 to defend the estate but was occupied by the forces of the 2nd Earl of Arran in 1560.



Entering Castle Semple Country Park, you are now in the former Semple Estate. The origins of the Sempill family began in France and moved to England, following the Norman Conquest in 1066. After he took the throne in 1124, David 1st of Scotland encouraged Norman noblemen with the promise of lands and titles in exchange for their support. The Sempills moved to Castletoun on the north shore of Loch Whinnoch and renamed the house and loch as Castle Semple [17]. Only remnants remain of the Sempill's heritage such as the Collegiate Church [18] while the fish ponds [19], ice cave [20] and icehouse [21] appear to be later additions. The Collegiate Church is thought to be the resting place of John, 1st Lord Sempill, after he was killed at the Battle of Flodden in 1513. The fish ponds may have been a food source for the nearby clergy or a place to cut clean ice for the icehouse. These were refrigeration caves that had blocks of ice topped with straw on which sat food items. Renovation of the icehouse discovered a drainage ditch down to the fish ponds.



The McDowalls (1727) were the next custodians of the land; they knocked down the building and built a more fashionable one which we are more familiar with seeing images of today. They left their mark in the form of the Kenmure Hill temple [22] – a place for the ladies to have tea and watch the men hunt in the deer park below. Next came the Harvey family who held the land immediately around the 'castle' for roughly 100 years. They brought the railway into the heart of the village and although there are no trains today, the trackbed is now a Sustrans route. From behind the site of the former house which was damaged by fire in 1924 and demolished in the 1960s, you will discover an ornate, sandstone bridge [23].



The Renfrewshire Heights which includes Hill of Stake (522m), is within Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. The house, built around 1850, [24 not on map] is no longer there, but would have occupied the area of the visitor centre for Muirshiel Country Park. In 1877 the estate was owned Lord Francis Conyngham MP, 2nd Marquis of Conyngham, who built a memorial for his parents in the grounds. The surrounding moorland was managed for grouse shooting. Further up the glen, at Queenside Muir, there was a quarry and mine for the mineral barytes [25 not on map]. From 1895 the seam has been mined and from 1947 it was carried out on an industrial scale with shafts drilled to around 200 metres/660 feet. The mine closed in 1969 as it was no longer profitable and in places the ground had sunk requiring parts to be fenced off for safety. Located at the mine, a wind up audio device is available to hear some of the stories of Harry Pratt who used to drill out the barytes and set the explosives.



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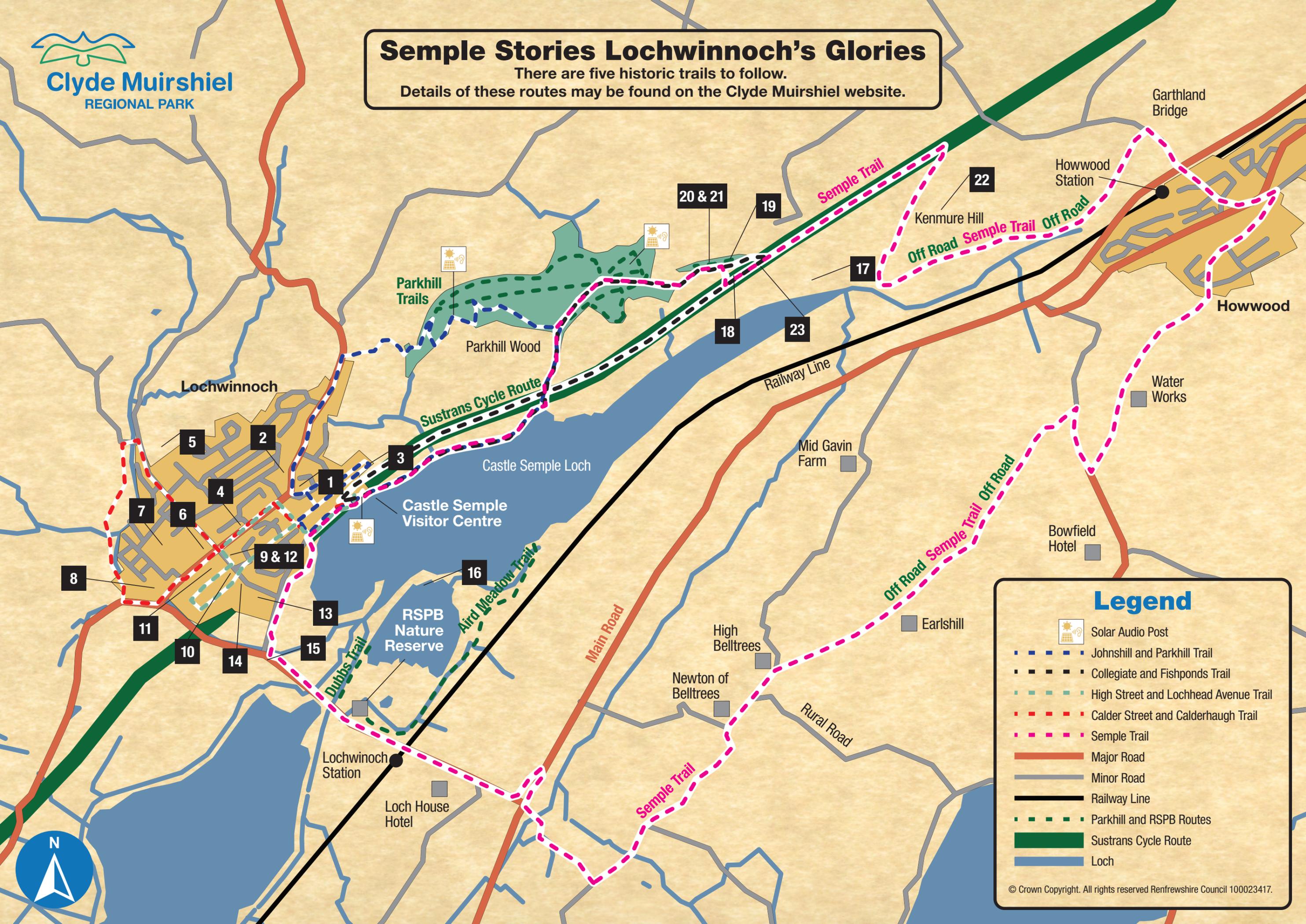


The Hill of Stake in Lochwinnoch.



# Semple Stories Lochwinnoch's Glories

There are five historic trails to follow.  
 Details of these routes may be found on the Clyde Muirshiel website.



### Legend

-  Solar Audio Post
-  Johnshill and Parkhill Trail
-  Collegiate and Fishponds Trail
-  High Street and Lochhead Avenue Trail
-  Calder Street and Calderhaugh Trail
-  Semple Trail
-  Major Road
-  Minor Road
-  Railway Line
-  Parkhill and RSPB Routes
-  Sustrans Cycle Route
-  Loch

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