

cigarettes and had bibles available. Their customers were RAF personnel and soldiers on exercises in the area and at Baldoon Airfield.

Winnie Anderson lived in one of the new flats and Wigtown is indebted to her for her wonderful collection of old photographs. Her mother Granny Whiteside helped in the canteen and made costumes for the Players.

*Turn right towards the county buildings.*

## 22. THE WIGTOWN PLOUGHMAN FORMALLY THE COMMERCIAL INN, 29 SOUTH MAIN STREET

A famous tea party was hosted here in 1840. It was seen as a 'great demonstration of loyalty by the spinsters of Wigtown on the occasion of the Queen's marriage... and attended by over thirty nymphs, many of whom the frosts of forty winters had passed'. (Fraser G. Anecdotes of Wigtown & Whithorn). In 1925, a grand event, catering by Mrs Jones, was held here to celebrate the 'coming of age' of the Burns Club. Guests included The Earl and Countess of Galloway and Jeannie Donnan,

'the Galloway Poetess'. In 1941, Margaret Barrie, a smart little lady who always wore black, became the new owner of the Commercial Inn, which soon became a favourite gathering place for servicemen during the war.

## 23. READINGGLASSES BOOKSHOP AND CAFÉ, 17 SOUTH MAIN STREET

ReadingLasses was the first new bookshop opened in Wigtown after it became Scotland's National Booktown. It is the only bookshop left in the UK specialising in Women's studies and books "by and about women". It is now owned by local women who work in the shop and they are an important part of its success and reputation as a cafe.

## 24. HISTORIC NEWSPAPER PREMISES

Once owned by a Miss Sparks as a boarding house and favoured by the teaching profession.

**The End**

# Wigtown Women's Walk

This map gives you details of some of the most amazing women of Wigtown. Many more women's stories, especially those who have made valued contributions to the community in the last few decades are still being collected.

**MOST OF THE HOUSES ARE PRIVATELY OWNED**

**Start at the front of the County Buildings**

### 1. THE SITE OF THE COUNTY BUILDINGS

Joan Agnew lived in the town house or 'market house' on the site where the County Buildings were built in 1862/63. Joan left Wigtown for London to become a companion of John Ruskin, a distant relative, art critic and social thinker, and a significant influence in his life. She was one of Wigtown's most influential figures. She went down to London to cope with the daily routines of housekeeping.

*Facing the door of the County Buildings walk to the left and go down Bank Street.  
Directly across – small corner house.*

### 2. NORTH MAIN STREET

Mrs McGuffie whose four sons all joined the First World War lived here. Her husband died in 1917. One son was invalided out and another twice wounded and on the next occasion had an arm amputated. Louis, her third son was tragically killed 5 weeks before Armistice after having performed outstanding acts of bravery. He was awarded the Victoria Cross and Mrs McGuffie collected it at Buckingham Palace from the King. She received a civic reception on her return in the County Buildings and her friend Mrs Savage across the lane at number 2 Bank Street, a lady of independent means, carried the medal through the watching crowd that they might see it.

### 3. THE SMIDDY, LOW VENNEL

Mrs Rita Coates worked tirelessly for the October Club before retiring. The October Club started early 1950s. Men only for a few years at different venues, it eventually re-opened in 2005 as a permanent site.

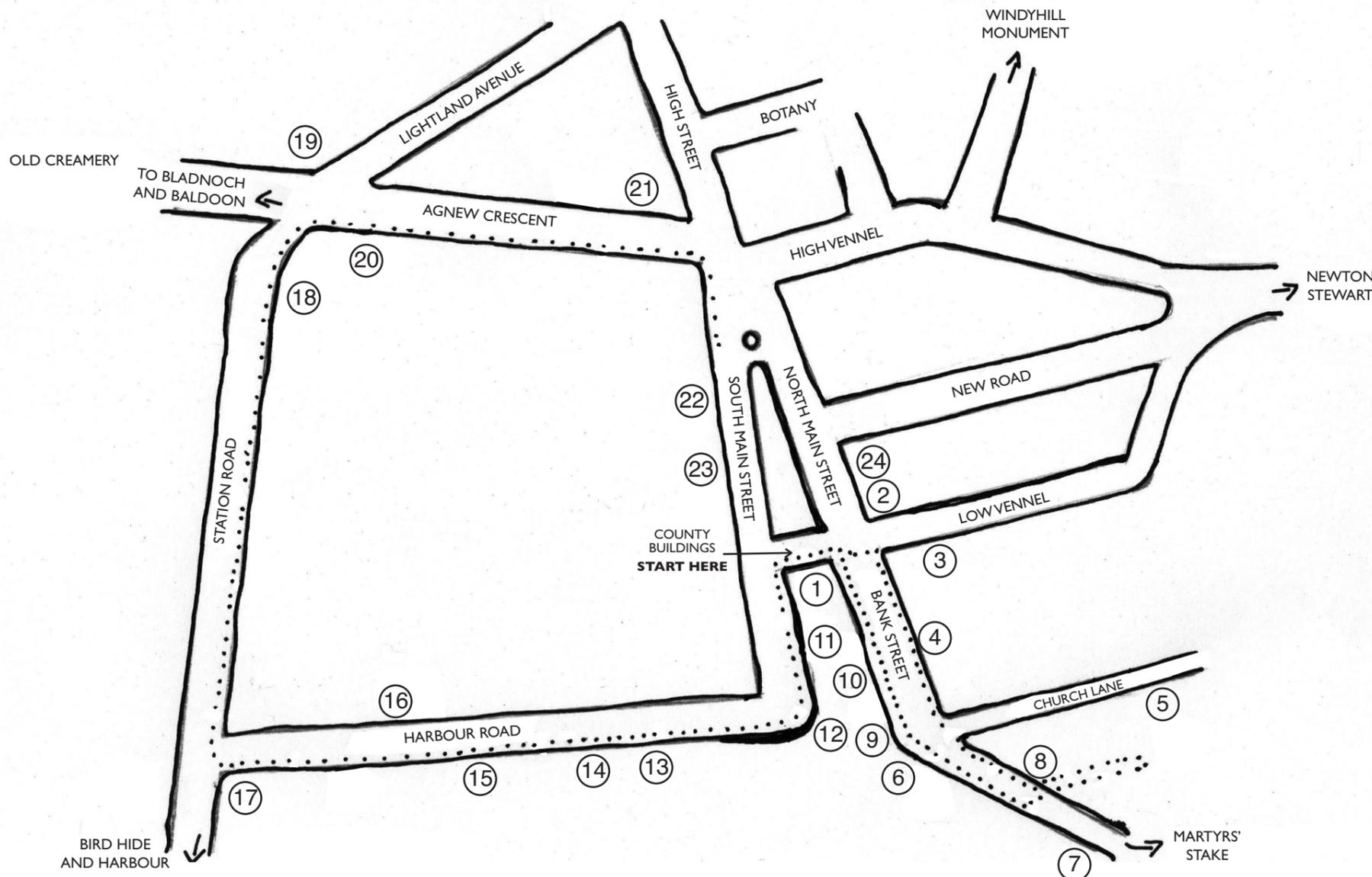
### 4. BANK STREET

Miss McKenna lived here and was an itinerant art teacher and well-known artist.

### 5. LAIGH HOUSE

Annie Tait Henry Cullen was a local girl whose father was in trade in town. She married her first husband, Kennedy Henry, an older man who ran a spirit merchant's shop in the main street. After he died of liver disease she married the local bachelor Minister, Rev James Cullen, who had recently been in breach of

# Wigtown Women's Walk



promise by another local girl. The manse was ‘Laigh House’ in Church Lane. Her daughters left a memorial to their mother at the church. Annie’s sister ran the post office, now the site of The Galloway Inn. Rosemary Baker and her husband now occupy the Laigh House. She is one of the founders of the Book Town, a well-respected lecturer and specialist book seller.

## 6. THE SITE OF THE BLACKFRIARS MONASTERY

Devorgilla, shared an inherited lordship in 1234 with her two sisters, there being no male heirs. She is famous for carrying a casket containing the embalmed heart of her husband, John Balliol (the founder of Oxfords Balliol College) for 20 years after his death. She was buried with the casket beside her beloved John, in Sweetheart Abbey, near Dumfries. She established the monastery of Blackfriars in Wigtown and Dundrennan Abbey.

## 7. CROFT – AN – RIGH

Dr Mary Broadfoot Walker lived at Croft-an Righ, which is the same site as Devorgilla’s monastery cross. She was the daughter of Alexander Davidson Walker, a solicitor practising in Wigtown, and Mary Broadfoot Walker. Mary was brought up in Wigtown primarily by her mother, her father died just five years after marriage. Her mother died in 1949, Mary pursued a distinguished medical career. She studied at Edinburgh University but, as a woman, was not permitted to take her final examinations there. She did so at Glasgow University where she qualified as a medical practitioner. In 1934, she was awarded a gold medal and MD at Edinburgh University for pioneering work on Myasthenia Gravis. In 1963, Mary was awarded the Jean Hunter prize by the Royal College of Physicians for her work on nervous exhaustion. She also wrote about St Gilda’s and Devil’s Dyke. Her younger sister Gracie also qualified as a doctor from Edinburgh University and Croft-na-Righ passed to her daughter with Mary’s death in 1974.

## 8. THE MARTYRS’ GRAVES

The graves of the two Margarets are in the Churchyard Cemetery just beyond the medieval ruins. Margaret Maclaughlin, aged 63, and Margaret Wilson, aged 18 years, were sentenced for “nonconformity” for attending field-preachings. On 11th May 1685 they were tied to stakes in the sea while the tide was advancing, looked on by the Laird of Lagg and a vast crowd of spectators. You can see a monument to all of the Covenanter Martyrs on top of Windyhill behind the town, inland. The harbour was then near the stakes before the river was redirected.

*Walk back up Bank Street on County Buildings Side.*

## 9. HELEN LENOIR, 19 BANK STREET (BAYVIEW HOTEL/ GARDEN CENTRE)

Helen Lenoir 1852-1913 (nee Susan Helen Couper Black) lived here, the daughter of G C Black, a writer. Following her studies at London University she taught mathematics but went on to pursue careers as an actress, a stage manager and in business. Helen spoke several languages and worked as a secretary to Richard D’Oyley Carte whom she later married, Arthur Sullivan of Gilbert & Sullivan was the best man. She played a significant role in managing the D’Oyley Carte Opera Company and left her quite considerable fortune to her brother.

## 10. PAMELA HILL, 11 BANK STREET

Pamela Hill was born 1920 and lived here for a time. She now lives in London and has written 75 books. Her first one, Flaming Janet, was about the mistress of King James IV, written in 1954. Most of her books are historical novels. In 2010 she is still writing!

*Pass along in front of County Buildings – turn left down Harbour Road.*

## 11. FAIRHOLME, 4 SOUTH MAIN STREET

*(Private house on the left)*

Previously known as ‘The Wylies and Seat House’, this dwelling built in the early eighteenth century was the Private or Venture school, Wigtown Ladies School, probably run by the Misses Wylie at the end of the nineteenth century. Joan Agnew’s (See 1) aunt resided here so may well have entertained Ruskin as her relative.

## 12. ROCHDALE – NOW APPLGARTH

Grace Mitchell – benefactor, singer and church member.

## 13. DONNA BREWSTER

Donna lives in Harbour Road, local historian and author.

## 14. BETTY MCGOWAN MBE

Betty lives in Harbour Road and was honoured for her continuing work for the community.

*Walk down Harbour Road.*

## 15. DUNMORE HOUSE, HARBOUR ROAD (Private house)

The school was built initially by the Free Church sympathisers in 1844 and run by 24 Trustees only one of which was a woman, Susan Couper Black, related to Helen Lenoir. A daughter of the teacher at that time, Agnes Husband was named outstanding female student at Edinburgh University. It was bought by Miss Jessie & Miss Annie McClelland and became a private girls school which also took boarders who came from the surrounding area, staying during the week and travelling home at weekends often by train.

## 16. OLD PRISON HOUSE or CLINTZ HOUSE HARBOUR ROAD (Private House)

Notice the tall chimneys. This was a very early version of central heating and ventilation in a prison. One of the four prison cells has a fireplace, which was for the women. The men’s cells had none. Women also worked as Matrons of the Prison. ‘Married to the job’, their husbands were the “Keepers of the Prison”. Here are some of the women who were incarcerated there or who worked there:

**Mary McFie McNearney**, born in Garlieston in 1791?, wife of the Keeper of the Prison, is recorded in the Census of 1851 and 1861 as Matron of the Prison.

**Jane McNearney**, born in Minnigaff in 1823, their daughter-in-law, is recorded in the 1871 census as Matron of the Prison.

**Sarah McKenzie**, born in 1834 in Ayrshire, wife of the Inspector of Police and Keeper of the Prison, is recorded in the 1891 Census as Matron of the Prison.

**Prisoners:** in the 1851 Census, **Elizabeth Blacklock**, a 17 year old ‘sewer’ from Dalbeattie; **Elizabeth McCreadie**, unmarried, 29 years, a house servant born in Wigtown; **Agnes Mitchell**, married, 34 years, from Ireland; **Mary Riddick**, married, 43 years old, and agricultural worker from Ireland; **Mary Conway**, married, 26 years, a ‘pedlar’ from Dumfries. In the 1861 Census, **J.S.**, a married washerwoman from Wigtown and **J. McN**, not married, an outdoor worker from Newton Stewart.

## 17. STATION HOUSE (Private House)

Miss Gwyneth Roberts, born in India, lived here from 1971 to 1990. Her mother was one of a large family, her father the Wigtown bank manager, James McLean. Gwyneth was headmistress of the Quaker School in Wigton, Cumbria and, after WWII, organised the care of refugee children in Germany. She was active in the Girl Guide movement, supporting and encouraging the Wigtown guides until she died.

Point out Baldoon – ahead in the distance and the tragedy of Janet Dunbar (Bride of Lammermuir). She was Janet Dalrymple of Carscreugh and the basis of Sir Walter Scott’s novel.

*Turn right at end of Harbour Road and walk up Station Road*

## 18. DUNURE, formerly BARBADOES VILLA

Miss Margaret McGuffie, born in Barbados in 1812, lived in this house for almost 60 years during the Victorian era. Margaret’s mother was a free mulatto woman in Barbados and her father was a Mochrum saddler who having established a business in Barbados, returned to Wigtown to build this Caribbean-Georgian style house bringing with him his acknowledged daughter, but not his son who remained in the Caribbean. Mr McGuffie became Provost of Wigtown before his death in 1861, at which time Margaret inherited the house outright. Known locally as the ‘black lady’, she lived on in Barbados Villa, with white servants, until her death in 1896. The children of her brother in Barbados were left a legacy from her estate which was large enough to enable the entire family to migrate to America. Donna Brewster, local historian and author of several books, who lived in the house until recently, researched the life of Margaret McGuffie and her family in Barbados and Liverpool. In “The House that Sugar Built”, she describes what Margaret McGuffie’s life might have been like in the Victorian times in which she was often excluded from society because she was seen as ‘different’.

## 19. BENOIR

Diagonally at end of Station Road on the corner. Built for Dr Lilico and his wife who out-lived him and rented out the surgery premises to a visiting dentist. Until recent retirement this is where the country’s smallest books were published by Helen Macdonald and her husband. Helen Macdonald founded the Wigtownshire Astronomical Society in 1998 and in the 60s personally flew a Tiger Moth aeroplane.

Road to left leads to Bladnoch and Old Creamery, which opened around 1902. Married women were not originally given employment. Blue Bell Margarine, manufactured by SCWS, was sold throughout Scotland. The girls who made this had a group of singers and called themselves the Blue Bell Entertainers. Following on from that group the Wigtown Players was formed after the Second World War and Nancy Burgess has played a major role in keeping it the heart of community life. Sheila Caldwell also lives near Nancy. She was the first Cornet’s Lass in Wigtown. Her Aunt Peggy McColl was a pupil at Dunmore School for Girls.

*Turn right up towards the town.*

## 20. BEECHWOOD ACRE PLACE

Mrs Jessie Coupland (nee Janet McCulloch Paton) was born in 1875. Her Grandfather was a local tea merchant. She lived at Beechwood from 1937 and was prominent in Wigtown public life becoming a town Councillor in the 1930’s. She was the first and only Lady Provost of the town from 1945-1952. Outlived her husband by many years and died in 1960. One of her daughters also Jessie but known as Bunty, taught English in Japan and was interned during the second war, and taught in the prison camp. She returned to Beechwood after the war.

## 21. CHURCH OF SCOTLAND FORCES CANTEEN, AGNEW CRESCENT

The canteen was a long one-story wooden building demolished in 1945/6 rebuilt as new flats next to the Grapes Inn. Teams of volunteer ladies were organised through two local Churches of Scotland. They made sandwiches and teas, sold