



The John Galt Way

Stage A northwards – Irvine to Saltcoats (13km, 8.1m)

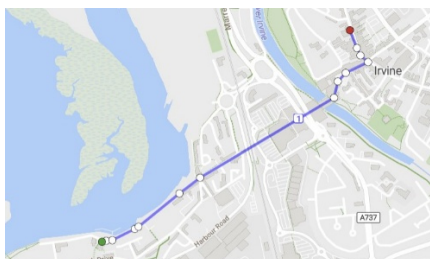
Waypoint 1 Harbour Arts Centre, Irvine ([events & exhibitions](#))

[What3Words ///even.sober.flips](#) (cafe, art gallery and toilets - built as a Mission Hall in 1888 - see [the Arts Centre history](#).)

We start at the harbour - busy in Galt's time - exporting over 25,000 tons of coal and importing over 6,000 tons of grain in 1819, when Irvine itself had 87 vessels and 517 seamen. John Galt's father was the captain of a West Indiaman (a profession appealing to the youth of Irvine!) sailing between Greenock and Jamaica. For more about the harbour visit www.irvineharbourside.org



+ Route details - Harbour Arts Centre to High Street (1.5km)



map (c) [OpenStreetMap contributors](#)

Enjoy the sea air from the Arts Centre up Harbour Street. Enjoy the vessels of the [Scottish Maritime Museum](#) - now or another time, visit the Linthouse Building (many fascinating exhibits) and the 1920's shipyard worker's flat. Follow Montgomery St - [see a portrait](#) - under the railway bridge. Enter the shopping mall and cross the river. Once into the pedestrian area overlooked by Trinity Church, walk to the road junction (Irvine Cross) and turn left onto the High Street, making for no.167, the Bank of Scotland, on the site of Galt's birthplace.

+ Eateries

The many eateries along the harbour include Gro cafe, the Ship Inn, Duncan's restaurant in the Arts Centre, Smalltalk coffee shop, the Harbour Lights public house, Puffers cafe at the Scottish Maritime Museum, the Niche restaurant and the award-winning Vanilla Joe's ice-cream shop. In Rivergate Mall there are Wetherspoon's The Auld Brig public house, Gregg's cafe and Freckleton's cafe.

Waypoint 2: Galt's birthplace, now 167 High Street (at the Bank of Scotland) [What3Words ///dips.pill.comical](#)

This bronze plaque (by Ayrshire artist Robert Bryden, R.A., in 1903) marks the site of the house where John Galt was born on 2nd May 1779. His family moved to Greenock in 1789. Irvine Burns Club lay a wreath here each year on the anniversary of Galt's birth.

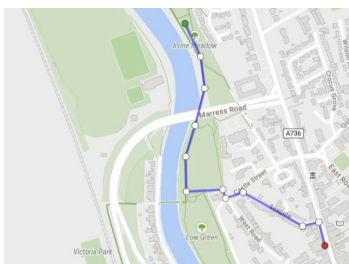
The **Wellwood Burns Centre and Museum** is only two minutes' walk to the north, on the opposite side, at 28 Eglinton Street, the red sandstone building with two Provost's lamps. Book your free museum visits via the website www.irvineburnsclub.org.



"I was a soft, ailing, and growing boy. I have no remembrance of the enjoyment of perfect health for many years, and yet I was not ill. . . When not engaged with my flowers [in the garden], I lounged on

my bed, which gave me a kind of literary predilection: all sorts of ballads and story-books were accumulated by me, and some of them have left impressions that still remain fresh and unfaded.
("Autobiography", 1833, p.9)

+ Route details - High Street to Burns Statue (0.8km)



map (c) OpenStreetMap contributors

Walk a short distance north to take the cobbled road on the left, Seagate, so called because it leads to where, in early medieval times, sea-going ships would beach or tie up on the river. Seagate Castle, on your right, is a mid-16th c. town house of the Earl of Eglinton. A misleading wall plaque claims that Mary, Queen of Scots, visited the castle on 1 August 1563, but records are clear that she stayed at Eglinton Castle.

At the foot of Seagate, cross Castle Street, pass the 'West Road Centre' (the former fire station), and take the lower path along the river - or the upper path with two seats to enjoy the scene, but steps afterwards. At the river, follow the cycle route "(73) [7]" (it is also the Ayrshire Coastal Path and the New Town Trail), to pass under the road bridge, and on to the statue of Robert Burns.

+ Buses and parking

The High Street is served by many bus routes, the main one being the Ardrossan-Kilmarnock no. 11 (mostly double-deckers) at 15 minute intervals or oftener. Car parking is behind the High Street, on East Road, with closes (alleys) giving easy access.

Waypoint 3: Robert Burns statue

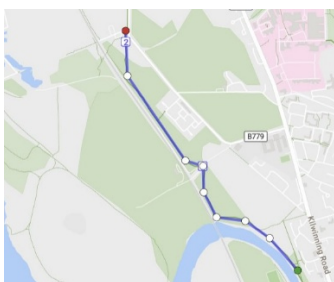
[What3Words ///rungs.offers.behind](#)

(A path through the houses connects with the main road at the Police Station.)

This 1896 statue is highly regarded, as a fine one of the poet, who is facing south towards his birthplace of Alloway. After admiring the statue, continue to follow the River Irvine towards the railway and on to Bartonholm recycling centre, following the NCW7 cycle path.



+ Route details - Burns statue to Bartonholm (2.0km)



map (c) OpenStreetMap contributors

Continue past the weir and follow the bend of the river to the railway, which you then keep to your left. On your right is the Cadgers' Racecourse, named from the races held by the itinerant carriers or carters; it hosts the Irvine Carters Society races at the Marymass Fair each August. The tall pole is the Greasy Pole, which teams of young men attempt to scale each August as they try to carry off the ham wired at the top. Cross the Bogside Golf Club access road (deviate a few steps to the railway bridge for a view over the Golf Course; beyond it was Bogside Racecourse, the venue for the Scottish Grand National until 1965, the oval shape on the map). Stay on the east side of the railway – keep on the NCW7 cycle path.

+Buses and parking

The no.11 bus (Kilmarnock - Ardrossan) has a stop near the Police Station. See the next Waypoint for details of access and parking at Bartonholm.

Waypoint 4: Bartonholm (recycling centre)

[What3Words](#) [//verve.famed.vast](#)

Imagine away the modern sign! You are near the fictional “**rural village of Garnock . . . pleasantly situated between Irvine and Kilwinning**”, the home of the Pringle family in ‘The Ayrshire Legatees’, where Dr Pringle, the incumbent minister, is “much loved by his parishioners”. Galt’s ‘Garnock’ was probably **Bartonholm**, a coal-mining hamlet, which lay on the other side of the 1839 railway. In later years, the 350-person hamlet produced three Scottish amateur golf champions (Hamilton ‘Hammy’ McNally, Jimmy Walker and Jack Cannon). Half a mile further to the west was another long-gone mining hamlet, **Snodgrass** – is this why Galt named the other local minister as Dr Snodgrass?

The Pringle family in the novel went first to Irvine to take “the coach to Greenock”.

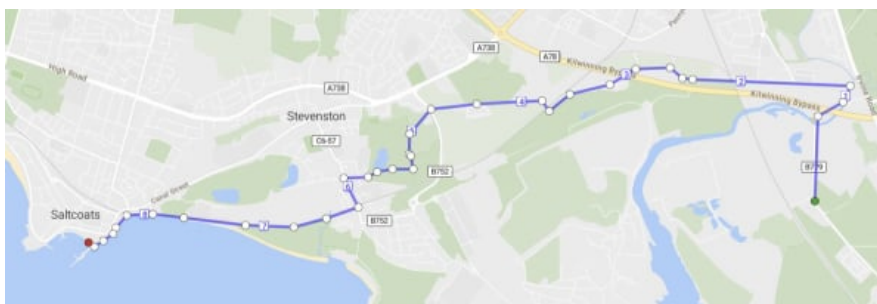


*“On New Year’s Day Doctor Pringle received a letter from India informing him that his cousin had died at Hyderabad and left him his residuary legatee. The same post brought other letters from the agent of the deceased in London. . . . It was determined that, as soon as arrangements could be made, the doctor and Mrs Pringle should set out for the metropolis; and, as Rachel had now a “prospect before her”, that she should accompany them. . . . The doctor had been for many years the incumbent of **Garnock, which is pleasantly situated between Irvine and Kilwinning** . . . and was much loved by his parishioners.”* (‘The Ayrshire Legatees’, Chapter 1)

. . . and, on their return:

“a shout announced that a carriage was in sight. It was answered by a murmuring response of satisfaction from the whole village. In the course of a few minutes the carriage reached the turnpike: it was of the darkest green and the gravest fashion; a large trunk, covered with Russian matting . . . occupied the front . . . the blithe faces of the doctor and Mrs Pringle were [seen]. The boys huzzaded, the doctor flung them penny-pieces, and the mistress bawbees . . . the old men reverently took off their hats and bonnets . . . all the village dogs came baying and barking forth . . .” (‘The Ayrshire Legatees’, Chapter 10)

+ Route details - Bartonholm to Saltcoats harbour (8.7km)



map (c) OpenStreetMap contributors

(There are no internal paths on the reserve to minimise disturbance to bird life. You can view the reserve from the hide, cycle-path or the grass path beside the river. For the hide, enter the field over the stile by the gate and approach the hide from the back to avoid spooking the birds you hope to observe. Dog walking is discouraged.) From the bridge there are good views of the Ardeer dunes, described on Armstrong’s map as the Ardeer Hills. There, in 1870, Nobel established his explosives, and later chemical, works; in WWII the works employed 13,000 people; in the 1980s and ‘90s, the redundancies were disastrous for the local economy. Looking over that area now, you need to imagine a huge industrial complex with tall chimneys and a massive cooling tower - which collapsed overnight in a 1972 storm.

Continue on to the bridge over the R Garnock. On the left is the Scottish Wildlife Trust’s [Garnock Floods](#) Nature Reserve, an important wetland sanctuary for duck, geese and waders.

At the north side of the bridge, cross the road to the New Town Trail - also cycle route (73) 7 and a

Core Path. The Way passes under the A78 and winds upriver along a wooded bank into Kilwinning, a town known for the Eglinton estate to the east and the ruins of its ancient Abbey in the centre. Where a cycle route comes in from a bridge on your right, turn left and keep straight on, unless you wish to detour into Kilwinning. Follow the cycle way through an industrial estate to join Byrehill Road, passing under the railway to Ayr, then the A78 at Todhill Farm, then the railway to Ardrossan. Pass the caravan park and Ardeer Mains farm on to the B732. Cross this road to enter Ardeer Park, passing the miniature golf course and along an old earthwork dam. After passing an ornamental loch, you join New Street in Stevenston. Turn left towards the railway. After the level crossing, either continue on the NCN73 (on our map) or walk down Shore Road to the west end of Stevenston Beach Park to follow the coastal path westwards.

The strange grey shoreline rock on the Beach Park promontory to the east is iron slag, the remains of the slag bin of a 19th c. iron works built near Ardeer coal pits. Follow the path along the sea wall to the harbour, taking care if it is stormy.

+ Road links

Bartonholm is on a side road, the A779, which leads from Kilwinning Road to the River Garnock - no through road north to the bypass, though access is possible southwards from the bypass to Bartonholm. Therefore, it is easily reached by car either from Irvine or from the bypass, and there is enough opportunity for parking on the roadside. Saltcoats harbour is on the access road beside Aldi and Iceland superstores.

Waypoint 5: Saltcoats harbour

What3Words: [///wharfs.quicksand.just](https://www.what3words.com/wharfs.quicksand.just)

(next to Aldi and Iceland stores)

Saltcoats, once a small fishing village, gets its name from the cottages of folk who evaporated salt from seawater for the curing of fish - "salt-cots". When coal was found, the harbour was built in 1684 for its export; in 1772 a two-mile canal was dug to bring coal to the harbour. In 1812, on land reclaimed from the sea, a horse-drawn railway was built. The harbour could handle up to 24 vessels (of 20 to 200 tons) exporting coal, salt and textiles, and importing fish and grain. The seaward extension was added in 1847. Just north of the harbour are three sea-water bathing pools, no longer popular!



Extra info panels in this stage are:

James Montgomery (of Montgomery Street)

Galt's birthplace before demolition c. 1860

The Gallows Stone

More on the Burns Statue