Historical Journeys along the Rivers of Galloway

A glance at a map of South-West Scotland shows a relatively low-lying coastal region divided by rivers flowing generally, north to south from hills forming part of the Southern Uplands, into the Solway Firth. This document is concerned with 7 of these rivers, which flow mainly in Galloway, the historic counties of Kirkcudbright and Wigtown, and they are listed below, most easterly first. When the project is complete, an account of the historical journeys along each of them, will be accessible in a nested document by clicking on the river name in the list. A very important part of this project has been the thorough investigation of the watermills in all the catchments by Alastair Robertson. Tables at the end of each individual river account present the locations and types of watermills operating after 1750. The river journeys have been entered as they were completed, and this is the last instalment, making available all the accounts. In addition a nested document giving an overview of the information on watermills, has been added and it includes a summary table for the 810 watermills (591 threshing mills), that have been found. Notice that this table includes the watermills on lesser streams, in addition to those in the catchments of the main rivers.

1. [Water of Urr](#)
2. [River Dee](#)
3. [Water of Fleet](#)
4. [River Cree](#)
5. [River Bladnoch](#)
6 & 7. [Water of Luce & Piltanton Burn](#)
8. [Overview of the Watermills in Galloway](#)

As indicated, there are many lesser streams away from the catchments of the named rivers in Galloway, but the selection includes the largest by any measure, i.e. length, discharge rate, or catchment area.

As with the other journeys in the series, those along the rivers of Galloway have been in an important sense virtual, in that I have not tramped for significant distances along any of the river banks, though I have stood beside all of them at many points along their courses. Over the years, I have made many trips to the region, and as well as observing the rivers, I have visited the majority of the sites of interest, mentioned in the document, thereby obtaining many of the photographs which I present. However, the critical step of finding links between these points, so as to depict continuous passages down the rivers, has depended greatly on 2 sources, namely Google satellite views, and the digitised old maps available on the National Library of Scotland (nls) website.

As regards sites of interest, public access is available to many of them as they are owned by Historic Scotland, or the National Trust for Scotland; some in private hands are also accessible, but others are not. If the latter are not visible from beyond the boundaries of the property, I have respected their status by doing little more than mentioning them in passing. Where access is available occasionally or conditionally, and I have not visited, I have sometimes used photographs taken from the internet, mostly acknowledging their provenance. In other cases, usually near sources of rivers, stretches were simply beyond my reach physically nowadays, and I have used photographs from any available source to illustrate that part of each river journey.

Otherwise, I have referred to many documents, including books, monographs, published learned papers and websites; those which have been most helpful, on the journeys, are listed together in the bibliography which appears after this introduction, but it is right to highlight entries in the RCAHMS and British Listed Buildings websites which have been indispensable, and can be used to fill out many of the short accounts presented here. I should also mention the Statistical Accounts of Scotland published in the 1790s and 1840s; parts useful to me were accessible on several websites. Maps on the previously mentioned nls website, together with the Scotland's Oldest Bridges website and my own Historic Bridges of Britain website, have made it relatively easy to consider the history of most of the old bridges crossing the rivers. The nls website has been a key tool for identifying the sites of water mills, enhanced recently by a map developed by the 'Water to Steam – Mills in Scotland' project. Websites focussed on settlements of all sizes have been useful, while many old mansions are now hotels and event venues, and publish interesting publicity material, as do tourism organisations. This will have to serve as an all-embracing acknowledgement, because preparing a full listing of everything, consulted, probably hundreds of sources, would hardly have been practical, though I should acknowledge that Wikipedia has proved an easily accessible 'fact checker', especially on historical matters which derive mainly from my extensive reading over a long period; my memory has not been infallible.

This is not an academic monograph, so I have identified helpful sources here, and do so similarly for some specially relevant in the individual river journey accounts, but do not repeat the reference each time a statement is based on information drawn from them. There is another area in which my acknowledgement of sources may be seen as minimal, namely for the photographs I include. Many of them are my own, but others are not. Where the latter are rare on the internet, sometimes because they were obviously difficult to obtain, I give the name of the person wielding the camera. Where there is a profusion of like-photographs on the internet, my choice has been fairly arbitrary, and I hope that this blanket acknowledgement of my gratitude will suffice, remembering that I will derive no pecuniary advantage from the document. If not, then any aggrieved party can contact me by way of the response mechanism on my master website, and I shall remove the offending item, though I hope this recourse will not be necessary, because all contribute to the accounts.

The places described are all fairly near to the rivers in question, and although I have allowed myself the occasional detour, I have mainly stayed within the catchments. The aim has been to keep the rivers and their tributaries central to the narrative, rather than using them as a vehicle for a wider study of the lands around them. An ever-present temptation, when producing a document of this type, is the inclusion of too much information. I have read a few such narratives and some give details of every settlement, so that no place stands out. Here, I have tried to preserve a sense that anywhere given more than a passing reference has 'earned' it, because of some distinctive or unusual feature(s). My attitude towards historical figures associated with the rivers has been similar, with short biographies, only for the most influential. My associate, Alastair Robertson and I give considerable attention to water mills and old bridges, because in a special sense, they are buildings of the rivers, as opposed to just being near to them.

This is an appropriate place to acknowledge the major input from my brother, Alastair Robertson who has prepared the sketch maps, which show the river courses and locate the water mills on each of them; as indicated above, these items appear at the end of each account of a river journey. In this regard, only those mills operating in the period between the 18th and 20th centuries are included, as others cannot in general be located with the

same confidence, unless, as in a very few cases, they have left remains. I would stress particularly the work Alastair has done to assemble data on threshing mills, which has resulted in a far more complete picture of their numbers and distribution, than has appeared elsewhere. When this project is completed, his data would be a very useful addition to the map resulting from the 'Water to Steam – Mills in Scotland' project.

It is wise at the outset to consider the hoped-for readership for a piece of work like this. I have visited the area regularly over many years and viewed most of the towns, villages, mansions, ruins and other artefacts described, but in a largely unstructured way. As a result, I have missed seeing things, which would have been of considerable interest and have certainly not followed an optimal path. So, apart from reflecting an abiding interest in rivers, and everything physically associated with them, the document uses the courses of the rivers to provide a logical and coherent way of viewing points of interest near to them. I would hope to assist visitors and local residents, who might like to trace a stretch of river and view features and artefacts there. I suspect that I have less to say to those with real knowledge and expertise about the region, but some may be like me, in wishing to read critically, anything dealing with a topic of interest, and comments will be welcomed.

Even though it is a negative note on which to end, I should make it clear that there are aspects of the rivers which are hardly touched on in the document. Although I do try to identify nature reserves and areas of special scientific interest, I have little to say about the plant and animal life in and around the rivers, nor do I have much to say about fishing. There is nothing in the document to aid the navigation by any canoeist or boating enthusiast, and that includes finding hostelries, though I would hope that my account might enhance the enjoyment of any journeys, they make along the rivers concerned, by identifying artefacts they might see in passing and by suggesting stopping-off points. These interests seem to be well catered for by specialist websites nowadays, in truth, rather better than some of the topics which I consider. Finally, I make the point that these are not folksy accounts; I don't give space to those who might be termed local worthies, rather mentioning people who have become known, well beyond their locality. I do occasionally stray into the realms of folklore, and provide a few personal reminiscences of little general import, but I have tried to produce a serious, fact-based document.

My short bibliography follows on the next page, though some other sources, mainly websites, are given in the body of the documents.

References/Bibliography

Title	Author (s)	Published	Date
Medieval Religious Houses - Scotland	Cowan I.B. & Easson D.E.	Longman	1976
Agricultural Statistics in Scotland before 1866	Houston G.	The Agricultural History Review Vol. 9, No. 2 (1961), pp. 93-97	1961
Discovering Galloway	McLeod I.	John Donald	1983
The Castles of South-West Scotland	Salter M.	Folly	2006
Water Mills in Scotland 1550 - 1870	Shaw J.	John Donald	1984
Water and Wind Power	Watts M.	Shire	2005
Account of the Number of People in Scotland in 1755	Webster A.	Various Modern Transcriptions	
Lead and Leadmining	Willies L.	Shire	1989

Websites

Site	Comment
britishlistedbuildings.co.uk	
rcahms.gov.uk	Scottish historic buildings
maps.nls.uk	Digitised historic maps - indispensable
gridreferencefinder.com	Convenient access to Google & OS maps
drtomsbooks.com	My own compendium of ancient bridges
en.wikipedia.org	
ceh.ac.uk/index	Hosts the National River Flow archive
https://scotlandsoldestbridges.co.uk	Comprehensive survey
https://historicbridgesofbritain.com	
http://www.douglashistory.co.uk/history	Information about an important family
http://www.castlesfortsbattles.co.uk	Information about castles

I have accessed many guide books and websites dealing with specific sites and places in the search for information while preparing the document. Where I have used actual content like photographs, I normally state the source in the text, but to include all the sources which have given me hints or ideas would make for an overly long reference list for a document which is not a learned paper. Any reader wishing to follow in these footsteps needs only to enter the relevant entity in a web search engine.