

historical background

selkirk

The name Selkirk is probably of Anglo-Saxon origin, but may be even earlier from the Selgovae tribe who lived here in Roman times. It dates from at least the 8th century AD and there was a church here from early Christian times. We also know it was the capital of Ettrick Forest, an ancient royal hunting ground. The burgh was famed for shoemaking and in 1745 received its most famous order for footwear: to supply 2,000 pairs of boots for Bonnie Prince Charlie's army. Unfortunately, for the Selkirk shoemakers, his army was defeated and the bill was never paid!

Later still, Selkirk became a prosperous textile-manufacturing town, originally relying on waterpower from the river Ettrick. Tartans and tweeds were exported worldwide and mile upon mile of military uniform cloth, which was "made in Selkirk", was supplied to troops in both world wars.

Although there is little early recorded history of the town, the hunting lodge developed into a castle (rebuilt in 1302 at a cost of £1372-13s-10d.) and was an important seat of Scotland's 12th century kings. Only the mound where it once stood now remains. Earl David, who later became King David I, established an abbey in Selkirk in 1113, possibly at nearby Lindean Kirk, bringing 13 monks from Tiron monastery in France: the abbey was moved to Kelso in 1128.



The Floden Memorial

Selkirk's Royal Charter was confirmed by King James V in 1535-6, in recognition of the role played at Flodden by the men of Selkirk and after all previous charters had been lost. The lands granted were extensive at about 11,200 acres (4,550 hectares). The men of Selkirk would constantly have to check all was well, by riding the boundaries to make sure

they remained secure and accurately positioned. Both

Flodden and the boundaries or Marches still play vital roles in the annual

Common Riding, which takes place every year on the second

Friday after the first Monday in June.

Medieval and early modern Selkirk was a small quiet town centred on the **Market Place** and defined by the **"Ring o' the Toun"**: a triangle whose sides are **Kirk Wynd**, **Back Row** and the **High Street**. The same street pattern is found in other local places with Anglo-Saxon roots such as Midlem, Melrose and Bowden.

The textile industry boom of the 19th century brought radical change to Selkirk with the coming of the mills, with the population more than quadrupling between 1791 and 1891. The riverside area expanded to include mills such as Ettrick, Linglie, Yarrow and Forrest, enlarging the burgh to many times its previous size. The A-listed Ettrick spinning and weaving mill has been conserved and converted to provide high quality business accommodation.

Today's Selkirk has the old medieval triangular plan at its heart but, although some are



Trail Plaque

selkirk

Georgian, the bulk of buildings are Victorian or later and many monuments and plaques of interest are from this period. To explore Selkirk's past, take a walk around the Ring o' the Toun starting and finishing at Halliwell's Close. The walk is approximately 1¾ miles long and should take about 1½ hours to complete.

In order to guide you, lettered plaques are sited along the route at specific points of interest and information about each of them is included in these pages. We hope you enjoy walking around Selkirk and that you have a pleasant stay in our town.



Kirkyard

selkirk town trail

HALLIWELL'S CLOSE (A)

The walk begins at Halliwell's Close: the Tourist Information Centre and museum are in one of the town's oldest dwellings. Inside, the museum tells the story of the Royal Burgh over the centuries, with the recreation of an ironmongers' shop, many exhibits and a video of the famous Common Riding festival. It also houses the Robson Gallery for exhibitions. Halliwell, after whom the close is named, was a one-time resident who was a wig maker; while the gallery commemorates Fred Robson who



Halliwell's Close

had the original idea to set up a museum of ironmongery.

In 1983, the property was taken over by the local authority, converted to its current use and is open seasonally.

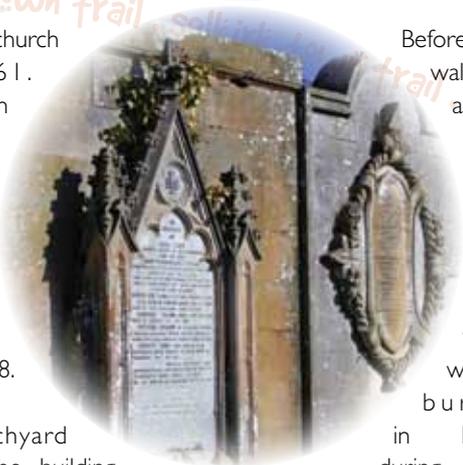
From the museum entrance, turn left to walk along the narrow 18th century cobbled close, typical of the style in Selkirk during the 18th and 19th centuries, and through the pend (arched close) into Market Place and turn right up Kirk Wynd.

AULD KIRK (B)

Continue uphill as far as the church and as you enter the Auld Kirk yard, take a few moments to read the Information Board on the right, which tells much of its history and the notable people buried or commemorated here. There has been a church on this site since 1152AD. The present ruin was built in 1747 and was

Kirkyard

the parish church until 1861. The Scottish patriot William Wallace was proclaimed "Guardian of Scotland" here in 1298.



The churchyard and later the building interior were both used as graveyards. On the back wall of the ruined kirk is a stone to the memory of one Patrick Fletcher, who was Deacon of the Weavers' Guild and died in 1675. Next to it is the oldest surviving tombstone, which is badly eroded and has only a faded inscription still visible. On the right as you are leaving the church is the restored Murray Aisle, where the maternal ancestors of the U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt lie.

Before you leave, follow the tarmac path and walk around behind the Auld Kirk to find another Information Board, titled 'The Kirk in the Forest', which contains interesting information about earlier religious activity on the site. Note the bare burial area where cholera victims were buried

in 1847 during an epidemic, then admire the view to the Ettrick and Yarrow valleys towards Philiphaugh where the Marquis of Montrose was defeated in the Covenanting Wars in 1645 and to Georgian Bowhill House, home of the Duke of Buccleuch. Selkirk castle once stood a little beyond the west wall. It declined



Kirkyard

selkirk

in importance after King Robert the Bruce granted the Ettrick Forest to the Douglas family, who governed it from Auld Wark. It was thought to have stood about half a mile from the ruined Newark Castle, which lies within Bowhill estate.

Retrace your steps to the entrance gate and turn right up Kirk Wynd to face the crossroads.



Souter Statue

SELKIRK REGIS (C)

As you approach the next site at the low walled flowerbed, you are standing in the heart of early Selkirk Regis, the Royal Town, with Castle Street on your right, which led to the site of the castle and the centre of power. The wooden castle was occupied by both sides during the Wars of Independence, with most of the construction done by the English. The site of

the current Sentry Knowe housing estate was where a lookout was posted and Gallows Knowe, across the road and up the hill, was where local offenders were hanged for the entire town to see.

The South Port in front of you, was once the fortified gateway guarding the old road to Hawick in the south and St. Boswells in the east. Known under various names, the most evocative remains Foul Brig Port because of the terrible smells from the nearby tanpits, where the leather was cured for shoe making. It was demolished in 1767.

This area of Selkirk is now a 1960s modern redevelopment on the site of the old medieval town: it won a Civic Trust Award in 1971. Many old and interesting buildings once stood here.

Before you turn left into Back Row, look for the small statue of the Souter (shoemaker) high on a house wall. Shoemaking was Selkirk's main trade before the arrival of the textile industry and the Shoemakers' Guild was founded in 1609; only being disbanded in the 1960s.

The trade lived on until 1975 when John Guthrie, the last shoemaker, retired but Selkirk remains full of "Souters" since it is the proud name given to the town's natives.

BACK ROW (D)

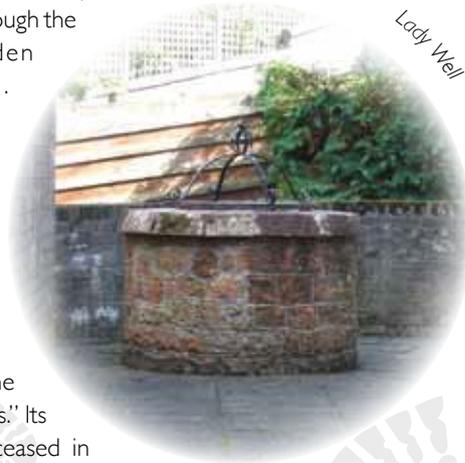
Turn left into Back Row, which is probably one of the oldest roads in Selkirk, but again this area has been redeveloped. Immediately after house number 66 is the next plaque and a stone inscribed: F M T B 1700. This is a marriage stone and commemorates the wedding of an apprentice mason who once lived on this site. It has already been saved twice during rebuilding phases.



Volunteer Hall

Continue down the street to the intersection with Tower Street. This road was developed early in the 19th century to create a new road to the south and is now part of the busy A7. Cross the road into the lower section of Back Row and look for number 37, where you can see the "Lady Well" through the garden gate.

The next building is the Volunteer Hall, which was built in 1867 as the Drill Hall of the local "reservists." Its military uses ceased in the early 1970s. Beyond it is the Masonic Lodge.



Lady Well

MASONIC LODGE (E)

The 1887 Masonic Lodge is in dressed sandstone and was built to replace an earlier lodge. The material is not local and reflects an age of improved transport, when masons were no longer restricted to local material. In contrast, the earlier cottage opposite

was built before the use of dressed stone and has no cornerstones, so would be much older than other houses in the street. The

roof has a much higher pitch at the gable end on the left of the cottage and this shows it was originally thatched; a new

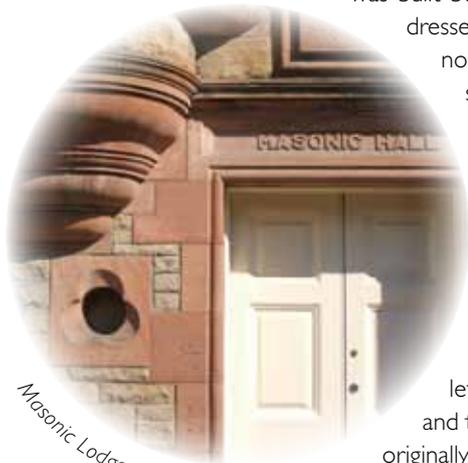
slate roof would have been built in the 19th century, when Burgh law outlawed thatched roofs as a fire hazard. The present

red sandstone Masonic lodge was built in the 19th century to replace the earlier lodge in the Market Place. One of the first lodges in Scotland, it was originally called Lodge No 1, but the lodge in Kilwinning claimed to be first, so the compromise was that both then became called Lodge No 1². The story is told that Robert Burns, the national poet and a mason himself, on a visit to Selkirk with a better-dressed companion, asked to be let in to the earlier lodge to stay for the night. He was scrutinised, was judged to be 'too scruffy' and not being recognised, was refused admission! He was not best pleased!

Continue along the street towards the monument at the junction.

MUNGO PARK (F)

The site marker is on the wall of the house (now council offices) on your right; it was here that the pioneering African explorer Mungo Park was apprenticed to Dr. Anderson, courting and marrying his daughter. This corner is also the site of the memorial stone

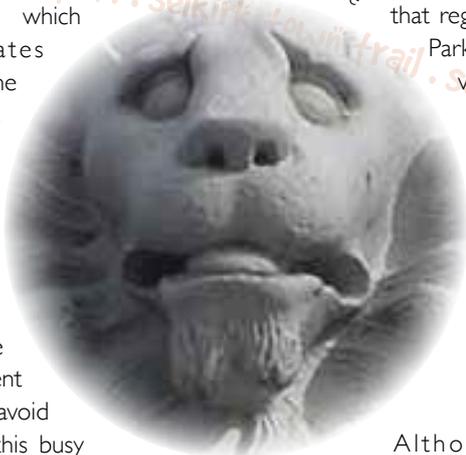


Masonic Lodge

dated 1985 which commemorates the Riding of the South Marches to mark the 450th anniversary of the regranted Town Charter.

As you explore the monument take care to avoid the traffic at this busy corner, which is also close to another entrance to old Selkirk, protected by the then East Port (gate).

The statue to Mungo Park, erected in 1859, was designed and sculpted by Andrew Currie. In 1905 the fine relief bronze panels, by Galashiels' sculptor Thomas Clapperton, were added to depict Park's travels in the Niger and in 1913, the corner life-size figures of Peace, War, Slavery and Home Life in



Lion's Head on Statue

that region added further enhancement. Park was born in 1771 in the Yarrow valley a few miles away. In 1795 he sailed to the Gambia to lead a team exploring for the course of the Niger. In 1797 he returned to Scotland having managed to follow the course of the Niger River for almost 400 miles.

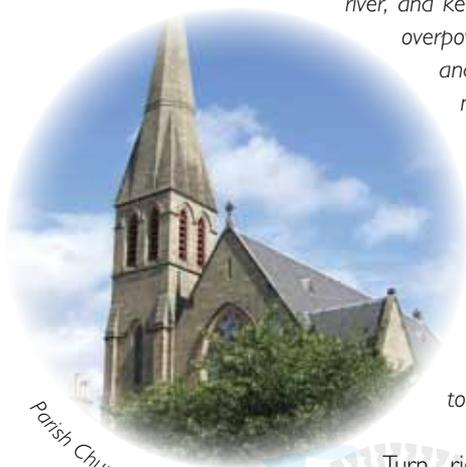
Although he returned to practice medicine in the Borders at Peebles, the lure of Africa proved too strong and he returned to lead his final ill-fated exploration in 1805. After much hardship and with few of his company remaining alive, they were ambushed near



Mungo Park Statue

Boussa in what is now Nigeria. The account reads:

“The people began to attack, throwing lances, pikes, arrows and stones. Mr. Park defended himself for a long time: two of his slaves at the stern of the canoe were killed: they threw everything they had in the canoe into the river, and kept firing; but being overpowered by numbers and fatigue, and no probability of escaping, Mr Park took hold of one of the white men and jumped into the water, and was drowned in the stream attempting to escape.”



Parish Church

Turn right beyond the Georgian house and the council office to arrive at the Victorian splendour

of the parish church dated 1880, which was built in an early Gothic style with a spire 130ft high. The building was originally known as the Lawson Memorial Church, in memory of a famous local cleric. Although Selkirk was originally a small town, by the boom textile years at the end of the 19th century it was served by nine churches, when it had once only required two. After the church you will come to the Selkirk Bowling Club boundary wall and the marker for the next site.

VICTORIA HALLS (G)

Look across the road to see the Renaissance style red sandstone Victoria Halls, whose foundation stone was laid in 1895 and was paid for by public subscription. It was completed two years later in Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee year. The nearby impressive fountain, an example of Victorian flamboyance, was transported from the old Philiphaugh House when it was being demolished and has recently been renovated.

Victoria Halls

The statue in front of the building is one of the most famous and evocative in the Borders: The Flodden Memorial. The renowned Borders sculptor Thomas J Clapperton was commissioned in 1913 (the 400th anniversary of the Battle of Flodden) to design the bronze Fletcher Memorial, dedicated to the Selkirk men who fell in the conflict.



sweeping it low, like a scythe, to show that all were slain. This poignant act is remembered every year at the Selkirk Common Riding in the final ceremony of the Casting of the Colours, when the Standard Bearers in turn take their flags and cast them in a prescribed pattern to the old tune of "Up wi' the Souters o' Selkirk". After the last flag is cast, the lament "The Liltin" is played, known throughout the world as "The Flowers of the Forest."

From the statue, retrace your steps towards the Mungo Park monument and the High Street. Immediately on your right at the



Flodden Memorial

selkirk

town map

- A** Halliwells Close
- B** Auld Kirk
- C** Selkirk Regis
- D** Back Row
- E** Masonic Lodge
- F** Mungo Park
- G** Victoria Halls
- H** Black Swan Hotel
- I** County Hotel
- J** Old Selkirk Prison
- K** Forest Inn
- L** Pant Well





selkirk



next road junction is another memorial by Clapperton from 1931. It commemorates the local poet James Brown and the quotation is from his best-known work "Selkirk after Flodden." In the widow's lament, she says,

*"Then I tum to
my sister
Jean,
and
my
arms
about
her twine."*

Opposite the Mungo Park monument and on the right is the Roman Catholic Church, built in 1866 by Hope-Scott of Abbotsford beside a chapel-school, which had already been established by the Duchess of Buccleuch. Continue along the High Street.

Swan Plaque



THE SWAN AND THE BLACK SWAN (H)

Further along High Street and across the road above no. 42, opposite the plaque, is the fine stone frontage of a building with an engraving of a swan. This was the site of the hotel known both as "The

Swan" and "The Black Swan",

where French officers who were prisoners of war were billeted during the Napoleonic War: The two shop fronts below are decorated in their doorways with Edwardian tiles by Duncan of Glasgow: with the initials of the Buttercup Dairy Company and then the butcher J.A. Waters, whose name is on the glass door and initials on the mosaic entrance floor to the second shop.



Clapperton Memorial to James Brown

You now pass the former offices of the Southern Reporter, Selkirk's weekly newspaper, which was first issued in 1855. Although the business outgrew this site, the stone engraving above the door remains a memorial to the paper's founder George Lewis, who owned a grocers' business in the town.



Tom Scott bust

The building next door was the birthplace of the artist Tom Scott RSA (1854 – 1927) and is commemorated by the bronze bust high on the wall. Scott was the son of a local tailor who studied art in Edinburgh. He went on to become a water colourist whose paintings

are much prized today. He is buried in his hometown at the Auld Kirk in Kirk Wynd.

Although long gone, the first factory in Selkirk stood in the High Street. Rodgers Inkle (linen tape) factory employed 28 people and one of their tasks was to take the linen to be bleached in the fields on sunny days. The work is still remembered because Selkirk has a street named Bleachfield Road.



County Hotel

COUNTY HOTEL (I)

As you carry on along High Street, on your right is the County Hotel, formerly the Grapes Inn, a good example of an early 19th

century coaching inn. It was frequented by Sir Walter Scott and was a meeting place of the Forest Club: the site was visited by many famous men including James Hogg, Robert Southey, the Duke of Wellington and John Wesley.

The great Hungarian revolutionary hero, Louis Kossuth (1802 – 1894) also stayed there briefly in 1856, while on a fund-raising speaking tour of Scotland.

Above the portico is the life size statue of Red Dog Souter, a successful greyhound owned in the 19th century by the proprietor. Inside the hotel is a ballroom with musicians' gallery.

The Market Place is dominated by the Scott monument by Handyside Ritchie, dated 1839. It was erected on the site of the old tollbooth – (town hall and prison) by “the Gentlemen of the County” and shows Scott in his Sheriff’s robes. On the pedestal are the arms of Scott, the arms of Selkirk, a winged harp and a Scots thistle.

This area would have been the focal point of the medieval burgh, where the long lost market cross would have seen proclamations, punishments and markets: medieval records show meat, fish, butter, cheese and salt were all traded. Fragments of the mercat cross may have been incorporated into the Pant Well of 1898.

As you pass house number 9, note the small round white fire insurance plaque of a thistle above the door for the “Caledonian Insurance Company.” Before municipal fire services existed, private companies would only fight fires if a plaque confirmed the owner had paid his insurance. Now turn right at the



Sir Walter Scott Monument

corner and go down
Ettrick Terrace and
follow the road
as it bends
to the right
and begins
dropping
down the
hill.

**SELKIRK
PRISON (J)**

At the arched
gateway on the right
is the stone entrance to
the old Selkirk Prison, which was built in 1803
to replace the tollbooth. It was bought in 1886
by local historian Thomas Craig Brown who
converted it and added a Reading Room. He
presented the building to Selkirk for use as a
library and this remains its current use. Above
the gateway is a carving of the Burgh Seal
depicting the Virgin and child and a building,
which would represent the long-lost Selkirk
Abbey.



Courthouse

The present Sheriff Courthouse, across
the road, has been in use since 1870
and also served as the County
Buildings before County Councils
were abolished in 1975. The
rope decoration above the
main door was carved by a local
stonemason. The
basement
originally
housed
the
police
station,
cells and the
sergeant's
accommodation
while the building
was linked to the jail
by an underground
passage, now bricked
up.



Selkirk Prison

Cross the road here and retrace your steps
up the hill to the War Memorial. It was

designed in 1922 by Sir Robert Lorimer and has a bronze statue of Victory and Peace by Thomas J. Clapperton. The names of the war dead are listed on bronze plates. There are nearly 300 names from World War I, largely casualties from the Gallipoli campaign of 1915.



Burns Plaque

Walk uphill to the right of the memorial, past the site of the old Selkirk brewery which is now sheltered housing and around the left corner to the junction of The Valley with The West Port. Turn right to walk down the hill towards The Green.

FOREST INN (K)

In 1787 Robert Burns stayed here in the Forest Inn, which once stood on this site and wrote his "Epistle to William Creech." It was said he received an unfriendly welcome from other drinkers and passed a solitary evening writing the letter in verse to his Edinburgh publisher. The row of houses, which included the inn, was demolished in 1878 when the road was widened. Jumping up and touching the marble plaque is supposed to bring you luck!

Across the road is the entrance gate to the Haining, a privately owned mansion once the seat of the Pringles of Haining. About 300 yards from the gate, replacing an earlier one, the present house was built in the Palladian style and dates from 1794 with alterations in 1819. There is a pleasant walk in the woods by the loch, which the owner permits the public to use. The site of the old Selkirk castle lies in the grounds, at the highest point about 200 yards towards the town from the house. The area has never been excavated archaeologically. The site was excavated recently to study archaeological remains.

Turn back up the hill to re-enter the old town at the West Port, the old gateway, which was demolished in 1771; about 30 yards beyond the Queens Head Inn and above the entrance to the shop front numbered 18 to 20 is another marriage stone from 1622.



Marquis of Montrose

As you continue towards the Market Place, look across the road above house number 3, where a plaque marks the site of the house where the Marquis of Montrose spent the night before the battle of Philiphaugh in September 1645. He and his cavalry were quartered in Selkirk, but his cannon and infantry were across the valley near

Philiphaugh House. Next day, after he was defeated, he fled while his Irish infantry with their wives and children, whose safety had been assured, were all killed. This was a revengeful act by General Leslie's men and Selkirk people played no part in this dreadful massacre.

You now pass the Town Arms inn; a good example of Victorian public house architecture, where the Selkirk coat of arms and sculptured head of drunken Bacchus all contribute to the exterior decoration.

The alley entrance beside the inn is known as Bogies Close; look along it to gain a glimpse



Bacchus Head

local men who fought in the Boer War.

Stained Glass Window



Walk across to the base of the Scott Memorial to discover the cobbled octagon on the traditional site of the Mercat Cross.

Behind the memorial stands the Town Hall, originally built as the courthouse in 1803 to replace the tollbooth. The spire is 110 ft (33 m) high to its weathervane. The bronze plaque beside the main door dates from 1935 and marks the 400th anniversary of the Town Charter. Every evening at 8pm the curfew bell rings in the Town Hall. This custom dates from the days when houses were thatched and all domestic fires had to be doused or covered,

to prevent the unattended home fires setting light to the thatch at night.

The Courtroom inside is where Sir Walter Scott dispensed justice from 1799 for over thirty years. As Sheriff-Depute, Scott's role was essentially that of a county judge. After it ceased to be a court, it became the Town Hall and the Burgh Council met there until their abolition in 1974.

The Court Room now houses a fascinating museum, containing a lot of local information, which includes Scott's associations with the area, as well as his contemporaries,



Town Hall

selkirk

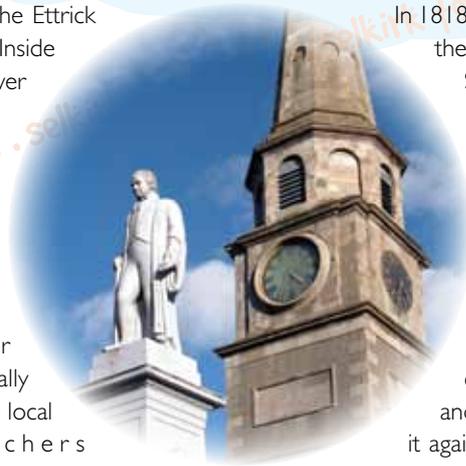
Mungo Park and James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. It is open seasonally. Inside you will also find the Selkirk Silver Arrow.

The Selkirk Silver Arrow was a prize inaugurated by the Royal Burgh of Selkirk in the year 1660 and was competed

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Selkirk Silver Arrow



In 1818, Sir Walter Scott, the noted writer and Sheriff of Selkirk, unearthed the largely forgotten Arrow and arranged for the Royal Company of Archers to come to Selkirk and compete for it against local archers.

They won it and took it to Edinburgh. The Burgh requested it back in 1835 and the Royal Company of Archers agreed to deliver it up, but never handed it back.

In 1985 the original letter from Selkirk commissioning the making of the Arrow in July 1660 was discovered among old papers rescued from a bonfire in 1940. The letter recounted how 'Ane Egyptian' (a Gypsy)

was caught trying to sell a 'quarter pound of silver plate' to a Selkirk Merchant but then escaped leaving the silver behind which was thereupon sent to Edinburgh and used to make the Arrow.

The Royal Company of Archers agreed in 2006 to share the display of the Arrow with the winner's medallions in its elegant silver frame and it can be seen in the Courthouse in the Market Place during the summer.

Thus, nearly 350 years after it was made, the Arrow has returned to its original home, and another page has been added to Selkirk's unique and fascinating history.

To complete your Ring o' the Toun walk, back past the Pant Well and re-enter Halliwell's Close. If possible take time to visit the fascinating museum.



Victoria Falls Fountain

selkirk



This leaflet is also available in large print and various computer formats by contacting the Planning and Economic Development on 01835 825060



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