

6. Little Kaimhill Cottages, Kilbarchan Parish

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Introduction

Kaimhill cottages are situated in an acre of ground between the Locher and Gryfe Water, upstream of Craigends and Crosslee, between Kaimhill and Coalbog farms. This piece of land was the site of West or North Kaimhill, and one of many which changed greatly in the late eighteenth century, as the landowners integrated a number of small cottages or steadings to form larger more efficient farms.



Figure 21: Kaimhill Cottages

The site today consist of two cottages abutting each other, with various later additions. Both cottages were built in a style common to agricultural cottages in nineteenth century Scotland, but appear to date from different times. On the front of the cottages, the western cottage has its four corners built with dressed stone inband-outband quoins. In the eastern cottage, abutting stonework consists of random rubble, seemingly a later addition. The plinth courses running along the tops of the walls are also markedly different, the east cottage being a more elaborate style.

So, when were they built and by whom? By using information gathered from a number of sources ¹ a picture can be built up of the development of the cottages and the comings and goings of some of the people who lived in them.

¹ Including the census returns 1841-1901, old parish records, estate papers, newspapers and other local information.

Kaimhill

Kaimhill (Kemhil) appears on Timothy Pont's survey of Renfrewshire in the 1580s. In Craigends estate rentals in the seventeenth century, it is grouped along with Locherside, Manswary, Auchincloigh, Hairhill, Brokstoun and Meadow Brow ². At this time the rental was paid to the landowner in a mixture of cash and kind (Meal, Bear, Kain and Capons). By the Poll Tax Roll of 1695, two families are resident in Kaimhill, the Aitkens and Locheads. In the first accurate survey, in 1728, Kaimhill was split into three portions ³. The cottage site is named as North Kaimhill (with 33 acres of ground). Adjacent are South Kaimhill (also 33 acres) and East Kaimhill (25 acres). North and South Kaimhill stood facing each other on either side of Crosslee Road. Each had two rectangular buildings, or longhouses, forming an L-shape in plan (Figure 22), and East Kaimhill had a single building.

Apart from agriculture, the immediate area has a long history of coal and lime working reflected in the adjacent name Coalbog. Due to the value of its minerals, it would change hands many times. In 1745 James Milliken acquired parts of Craigends estate including Easter and Wester Kaimhill ⁴. From this time, North Kaimhill seems to have been merged into or renamed as West Kaimhill. In the 1750s the small scale military survey by William Roy only names a single settlement, 'Camehill', on the circuitous back road from Kilbarchan to the Bridge of Weir, crossing the Locher at Locherlip. From 1755, Milliken worked several coal-pits in Wester Kaimhill, and a lime work in Easter Kaimhill. The geology did not change at the Gryfe Water, the boundary with Houston Parish, and the workings continued under the river, to where eight coal pits and a collier's house are shown on Wester Barshagry farm (Goldenlee), on Houston Estate, in the 1780s.

James Milliken formally enclosed West and East Kaimhill in 1667-8. Many of the modern boundaries can be traced back before this to the 1728 survey, though we don't know if at that time they were defined by dykes, hedges, or simply a change in cultivation. We know a good deal about Kaimhill in the mid eighteenth century as Easter Kaimhill was occupied from 1740 until 1767 by the family of William Semple, author of the *History of the Shire* ⁵. Ainslie's county plan of 1796 shows West and East 'Kamehill' with a total of five buildings, though the survey is too small scale to give an accurate picture ⁶. By 1797 a tack for the farm of Kaimhill is in favour of William Drew, by Day Hort McDowall of Walkinshaw, who was the landowner at that time.

² J. Dodds, *The Diary & General Expenditure of Wm Cunningham of Craigends 1673-1680* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh 1887).

³ Boulton & Watt Collection, Birmingham, Survey of Craigends Estate by John Watt.

⁴ Semple (1782) p.127-9.; A bundle of papers in Glasgow City archives document Milliken's ownership of Kaimhill (T-MJ 387).

⁵ Semple, *History of the Site of Renfrew* (1782), p.127-9.

⁶ John Ainslie's map of Renfrewshire 1796 (Ainslie's' map was too small scale to accurately depict location and number of buildings).

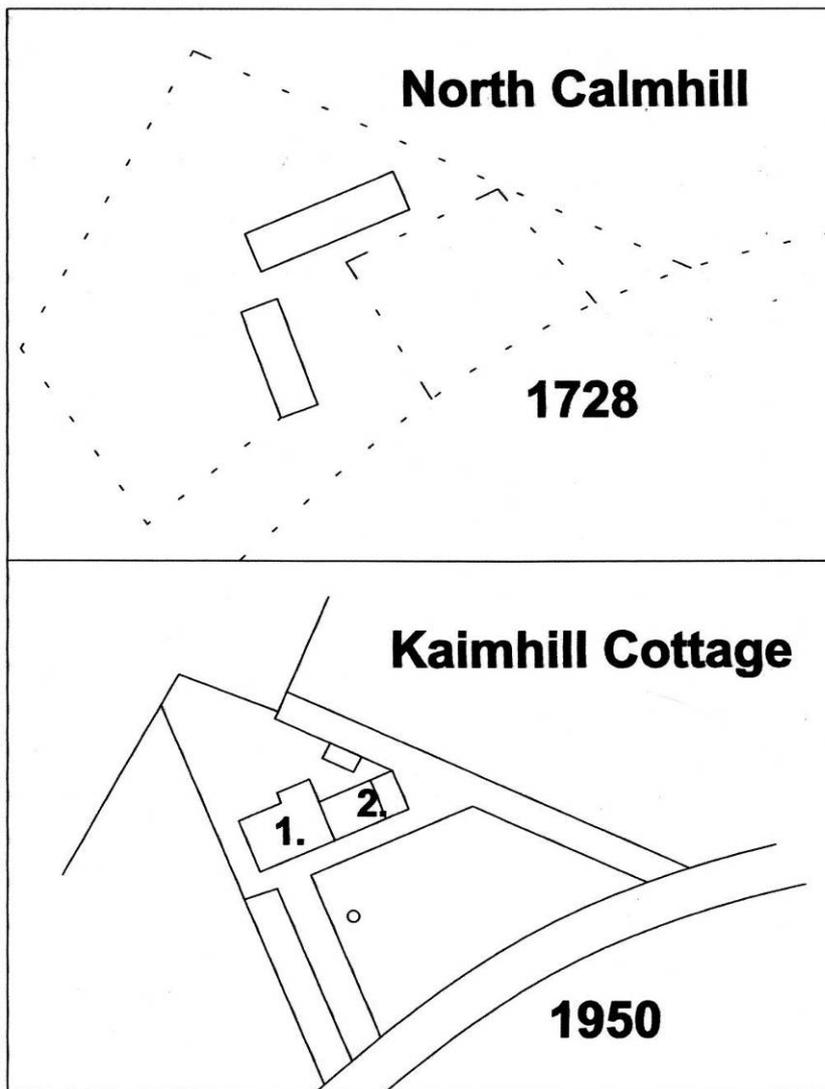


Figure 22: Plan of Kaimhill Cottages by Watt (1728) and OS (1950)

In 1801 John Barr of Coalbog and his wife Mary Lyle purchased houses and an acre of ground in Coalbog 'being part of the lands of Kaimhill' ⁷. In 1802 McDowall of Walkinshaw was in negotiation with Cunningham of Craighends with a view to the sale of various lands including Kaimhill ⁸. By 1809 the traditional 4 merk land of Kaimhill was seized by John Cunninghame ⁹. In 1811 John Barr, mason at Kaimhill, gave evidence on behalf of the laird of Craighends in a dispute over old buildings at nearby Bankend. Barr must have given a good impression, for at a later date he was the overseer at Craighends, continuing in the Cunninghams' employ until March 1827, when he retired to Little Kaimhill. He died by 1836 and was buried in Kilbarchan East Church graveyard, leaving a widow.

⁷ Feu charter by Day Hort McDowal of Walkinshaw, 23rd November 1799.

⁸ The valuation included twenty years purchase of John Barrs feu at £4 per annum.

⁹ with annual feu duty of £4 payable by John Barr, vassal in part of Kaimhill and Coalbog.

By 1841 ¹⁰, the head of house was John Craig, coalminer, his wife Mary, their three daughters and a female farm servant. Also resident was John Barr's widow Mary, age 75, of independent means. John Craig was probably employed in the coal pits being worked to fuel the nearby limeworks by the side of the Gryfe, the access road to which ran alongside the cottage site. Half the output of coal was allowed to be sold, but the other half was to be used exclusively for burning the lime. A plan of Kaimhill coal and lime works survives for 1828, when both the coal and lime were being worked underground ¹¹. Gunpowder was used by the 'lime blasters' to break up the limestone. A mineral railway connected the pits and the lime kilns. In 1829 twenty coal and lime miners were employed. The nearby farms, including Locherlip, lodged a number of miners and labourers around that time. Kaimhill was a main source of coal for central Renfrewshire, supplying as far away as Kilmacolm. By the 1820s Kaimhill was back in the hands of Craighends ¹².

The next known occupants of Kaimhill cottage was John McGilchrist, his wife and six children. John was a coal and lime master from Balgrochan and Bankier, Campsie, north of Glasgow. Presumably he took on the lease to operate the Kaimhill Coal and Limeworks. McGilchrist's son William was born in Campsie Parish about 1844, but his daughter Jane was born in Kilbarchan about 1846, indicating their move to Kaimhill between these dates. In 1850 McGilchrist was still working Bankier, where he hit a quantity of Alum shale which was a valuable ingredient in the 'fixing' (permanence) of textile dyes. A budding entrepreneur, he sought to undercut the much larger Hurlet and Campsie Alum company ¹³. His negotiations were unsuccessful and in October 1859 McGilchrist was bankrupt, described as "John McGilchrist, late coal master in Bridge of Weir, now farmer at Leitchbank, north of Balgrochan, parish of Campsie." Leitchbank, with 18 acres, had been advertised as recently as March 1858, with an asking price of £1,300, also the adjoining property of Orchardhill with 5.5 acres. Bankruptcy doesn't seem to have had a serious effect on John McGilchrist, as the 1861 census shows him still resident in Leitchbank, farming 25 acres, also operating as a linen merchant. Later he was the toll keeper at Lawmuir Toll, New Kilpatrick (1881 census) and eventually died at Hardgate, Duntocher, in 1886 at the age of 94.

The first evidence of two separate cottages (Nos.1 & 2 in Figure 22) was in 1841. These were on the footprint of the original 1720s longhouse. This was also the first census to detail the number of rooms having one or more windows, thereby providing an insight into the internal layout of each cottage. One cottage was of one room only (probably No.2 in Figure 21) and was occupied by James Livingston, aged 82, retired farmer, his wife Agnes and their son Alexander. James Livingston originally came from Drymen in Stirlingshire, and had worked the farm of Ravenshaw in Erskine parish, where he was listed in 1841 and 1851. The other cottage (No.1) had two rooms and was occupied by William Woodrow, aged 36, grain miller from Kilbarchan, his wife Agnes Gilmour and their two young sons. William and Agnes were married in Paisley in February 1856, their first child, John was born the same

¹⁰ This and all subsequent refs. to 1841, 1851, 1861, etc are sourced from the relevant census.

¹¹ Cunningham of Craighends papers, Glasgow City Archives.

¹² Glasgow City Archives Cunningham of Craighends Papers (eg T-LX 14/ 57-62)

¹³ Skillen, B., Mines & Minerals of Campsie and Baldernock (1997), p24.

year in Kaimhill, so it is likely that they took up residence there when they were married. William was a son of John Woodrow in nearby Lochermill. He was a farmer of 16 acres and a builder employing seven masons and five labourers. The cottage was conveniently close to his place of work at Lochermill. William and his family eventually left their Kaimhill cottage sometime between 1865 and 1867 and set up home at the nearby farm of Pannel. They eventually left Kilbarchan parish altogether and moved to the farm of Linns, at Torthorwald, Dumfries, where he died in May 1894, his wife in 1892.

In 1871 only one cottage was occupied, having two rooms, the tenants being James Stevenson, aged 35, carter, from Kilbarchan, his wife Ann Caldwell, and their daughter and son. James was born in Kilbarchan in 1837, son of John Stevenson in Barnbeth. He married Ann Caldwell at Threeply, Kilbarchan, in 1866, and may well have set up home at Kaimhill at this time. By 1881 they were living with James' widowed father, now aged 89, at Barnbeth, then by 1883 they were living at Lochermill. The Stevensons of Barnbeth ran a potato merchants business from a yard in Church St. in Johnstone ¹⁴. As a carter, James Stevenson maybe took care of the transportation of their potatoes; the outbuilding at Kaimhill cottage could have been for stabling his horse. By 1885 James Stevenson and his family were resident in Mathieson Street, Hutcheston, Govan, he was now a dairyman and ran a dairy at Sandyfaulds Road. His wife and daughter carried on at the dairy after his death in 1892.

Hugh McLachlan was another occupant who appeared and left in 1872 ¹⁵. He was originally from Campsie in Stirlingshire, had worked in a grain store in Glasgow and eventually became an agent in West Africa. He doesn't appear to have taken to life at Kaimhill, or perhaps he got a good offer for the property, for by November 1872 he sold it to William Fulton, farmer at nearby Waterstone and went back to the big city of Glasgow ¹⁶.

Back at Kaimhill by 1881, some substantial changes had taken place to the cottages, which can be seen between the first and second edition Ordnance Surveys. The western cottage had been extended to the rear and the eastern cottage to the east. Dormers may also have been added at this time. Both cottages now comprised five rooms each. One was occupied by William Fulton, the owner of the property, now retired from farming at Waterstone, and his wife Margaret ¹⁷. He died at Kaimhill Cottage in November 1881, his wife having died earlier the same year. Presumably it was this cottage which was advertised to let in July 1882 - "Bridge of Weir, Kaimhill, cottage of four rooms and a kitchen, to let for August/September. Apply stationmaster at Bridge of Weir."

¹⁴ The business was declared bankrupt in June 1881.

¹⁵ Hugh and his wife Mary had moved from their residence in Dumbarton Road, Glasgow to Kaimhill Cottage.

¹⁶ Fulton's family had Kaimhill connections since the 1830s.

¹⁷ Fulton was one of three brothers who had moved into farms in the area, his brother John worked Kaimhill farm, his brother Thomas worked Lintwhite, and the family originally came from Midgehole in Neilston.

The other cottage was occupied from 1873 by Hugh Wallace, aged 52, his wife Jean, son James and daughters Annie and Jeanie ¹⁸. Hugh Wallace was born in Kilmarnock about 1829, and was a journeyman mason. He had worked for a time in Glasgow before returning to Kilmarnock and marrying Jean Wylie in 1864 at Hurlford. By 1868 he appeared to have his own building business with a yard in Hill Street, Kilmarnock, and by 1872 was employing five men. He then left Kilmarnock. It may have been Hugh Wallace who carried out at least some of the substantial changes to the cottages between 1871 and 1881. However, an article in the Glasgow Herald of 11th January 1883 gives a picture of his last known movements.

“Bridge of Weir man missing - Hugh Wallace, mason, resident at Kaimhill Cottage, missing for about three weeks. Last seen in Bridge of Weir village on his way home and is supposed to have a considerable sum of money on his person, but nothing has since been heard of him although enquiries have been unceasingly made and the neighbourhood searched.”

The search continued, but his body was found in the river Gryffe near Knowes farm in the parish of Houston. There is a ford across the Gryffe close to the farm, and he may have been washed up on the shallows there. He had been missing since the night of the 11th of December. There was no mention of the considerable sum of money on his person, but the inventory of his assets revealed that he had a total of £182 to his credit in various banks, so an unlikely candidate for suicide. Perhaps he was making his way home via the ford on the river Gryffe between Goudielee and Coalbog farm and lost his footing.

In the 1891 census his widow Jean was living at Bankhead House in Bridge of Weir with her two daughters, Annie working as a dressmaker and Jeanie a student teacher. Jeanie later found a position as a teacher at Lochwinnoch Glenhead Public School ¹⁹. She was well regarded, for in 1902, as schoolmistress at Glenhead she was “the recipient of handsome gifts subscribed for by the scholars and many friends in the district.” Her mother, Jean Wallace, had returned to Ayrshire and died in 1898 at Crosshands, midway between Hurlford and Mauchline. In 1883 the Trustees of the late William Fulton sold the property to John Hill, farmer at nearby Sandholes

In 1891 only one cottage was occupied, the one with six rooms. The residents were George McKenzie age 29, his wife Jeanie, their sons George, Ralph and John, daughters Jenny and Florence, and Maggie McDougal, domestic servant. Since son Ralph was born in Houston in 1885 and son John was born in Kilbarchan about 1888, this family likely took up residence about 1886/87.

George McKenzie was born in Paisley about 1861, and was a photographic artist ²⁰.

¹⁸ Jeanie was born at Kaimhill on 17th Aug 1873.

¹⁹ This was a small rural school at Newton of Beltrees on the south side of Lochwinnoch Loch. The position carried a salary of about £70 and a free house (1889) and had a school roll of about 44 pupils (1881).

²⁰ His father, also George McKenzie was one of the early photographic artists and had established his business in Paisley in 1850 till 1877, then Edinburgh, 1878-81, Dunoon, 1882-85, and Paisley 1882-97.

George jnr. combined photography with painting which promised a brilliant future and also exhibited in the R.S.A. While he was living at Kilbarchan his studio was at 195 Dumbarton Road, Glasgow. In 1894 when returning from Houston House where he had been to put the finishing touches to a picture for Lady Speirs, he caught a chill and died a week later, in the Old Gaelic Manse, Oakshaw, Paisley ²¹.

In 1901, both cottages were occupied, one with three rooms and one with five. The larger cottage was occupied by William Lee, retired farmer, his wife Jeannie and son John. William Lee was born in Kilbarchan about 1832. After spending his early years as a farm servant/ ploughman at Law farm he took on the nearby Dampton farm ²². He died there on the 14th June 1906 and was buried in Kilbarchan cemetery.

The smaller cottage was occupied by Hugh Keith, his wife Mary and their three sons and five daughters. Hugh Keith was born in 1855 at Bowmore, Islay, eldest son of Gilbert Keith and Mary McDiarmid. Shortly afterwards, about 1856/57, they moved to the village of Lochwinnoch. About 1872 the Keiths took a lease of the long established blacksmiths shop at the North Gate of Castle Semple on the back road from Howood to Lochwinnoch ²³. By 1881 Hugh and his three brothers, Gilbert, Duncan and Donald, all blacksmiths, and their sister Mary, were living with their parents at the smithy at North Gates. Their father Gilbert was a carter. In 1887, Hugh married Mary Nelson, daughter of the overseer at Castle Semple. The family fortunes appear to have improved from this point. In 1891 Hugh was farming at Burnfoot in Kilbarchan ²⁴, a small farm a few hundred yards from the smithy at North Gates. His father and brother Duncan were working the farm at Moniabrock, Lochwinnoch. Apparently the brothers took on contracting work, unsuccessfully it seems, for in October 1896 Hugh Keith, farmer and contractor, also in Moniabrock, was bankrupt ²⁵. Then two months later, in December, Hugh was charged with having travelled from Glasgow to Howood on the 20th October without having paid his fare. He pleaded not guilty, but after hearing evidence Sheriff Cowan found the charge proven and imposed a fines of £2 5s, or 14 days in jail.

In 1898, his wife's uncle, William Robertson, died in London. He was a partner in the firm of Boyd & Co. Ltd., Engineers and Shipbuilders, Shanghai, a sizeable concern formed in 1862 and owners of an engine works and various docks there. He had a residence in Ayr, also at Eaton Avenue in Hampstead. He was unmarried and bequeathed a legacy of £500 to his niece, to be retained by his trustees and the interest to be paid annually to her as an aliment during her lifetime. The following year, when Hugh and Mary's second son was born he was named William Robertson Keith. William grew up to be a private in the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and was killed at Buzancy, France, on 23rd July 1918. The cottages and land of Little Kaimhill were now the property of William Hill, spirit merchant of

²¹ After his death his widow continued photographic work at Brannocklie, Prieston Road, Bridge of Weir. (1896-1903).

²² There was a roup or sale at Dampton farm in May 1899, presumably William Lees clearout before retiring to Kaimhill cottage.

²³ Part of the buildings are still standing there.

²⁴ Advertised in November 1887.

²⁵ List of Scotch Bankrupts, cited to be examined on 13th Oct in the Sheriff Court Buildings, Paisley, and subjected to sequestration.

Johnstone. In 1899 he sold the property to the trustees of the deceased William Robertson for £530, the additional £30 being paid by Mrs Mary Keith.

In 1901 Hugh Keith was a railway contractors foreman, most likely on the Johnstone, Lochwinnoch, Dalry railway which was then under construction and a source of much local employment. Hugh died at Kaimhill in 1928, and was buried in Kilbarchan cemetery, where his headstone also commemorates his family and his son William the soldier. From 1899 the cottages at Kaimhill remained in the possession of various members of the Keith family for about the next 70 to 80 years, finally becoming burnt out and ruinous.

At the same time, Kaimhill farm across the road expanded. In the period after the second world war, the farmland east from Kaimhill to Barochan Road was split into ten smallholdings²⁶. The area between the cottages and the Gryfe was dominated by Bridge of Weir sewage works, one of the earliest of its kind. Apart from farming, there were still signs of the intensive coal and lime industry at Kaimhill. Of numerous lime kilns in the surrounding area, one clamp kiln remained in the yard on the north side of Kaimhill farm, which had burnt lime for agricultural use. By the 1914 Ordnance Survey only the great buttressed draw kiln by the Gryfe survived, accessed by the track heading north from Little Kaimhill cottage. By 1950 the well serving Kaimhill cottages (shown as a circle on Figure 22) was abandoned.

The present owners of Little Kaimhill Cottages have expended a tremendous amount of time and effort into reclaiming the land from a state of utter dereliction. The comparison between its present state and the retrospective view of the ruins on Google Earth is quite staggering! Hopefully they will continue the work and Little Kaimhill will be resurrected from the ruins of John Barr's cottages.

²⁶ 1:2500 Ordnance Survey (1950 edition).