See also
'Ailsa Craig: A Milestone in the Clyde';
William Shaw's long narrative poem, with notes, of 1805;
Duncan MacDonald's article, 'Ailsa Craig', in Scottish Field, November 1979, p.20
[All in Dailly ring file]

Norrie Hunter, Allurement of the 'Craig', in Ayr Advertiser, Th 27.7.1972, 8ae.

There is a chapter on Ailsa Craig in R Angus Downie, Bute and the Cumbraes, London & Glasgow, Blackies, 1934. [Copy at Glasgow Vennel]

Caro Ramsay, *Absolution*, Michael Joseph 2007 (ppk, Penguin, 2008), p.313 in ppk.
Ailsa Craig sat like a tea-cosy in a sea of watercolour blue.

Rosenberg, iii "… rises twelve-hundred feet above the water's surface like a newly-birthed planet, ever-present, intrusively watchful."

Once part of the barony of Knockgerran, hence its inclusion in Dailly parish. Passed from Earls of Carrick in 1404 to Abbey of Crossraguel, and subsequently to the Cassillis family.

GENERAL

AA, Th 13.3.1828, 4e Rock of Ailsa. To let.

AO, Tu 25.6.1833, 1b To let, from Whit 1834. 'There are several excellent dwelling houses now on the rock, which will answer the purpose of those wishing to make it a fishing station'. The rabbits were not killed last season and are in great numbers.

Pigot, 1837, p.257 (Girvan) 'The celebrated and extraordinary rock called Ailsa Craig is immediately opposite to, and 15 miles distant from Girvan, rising out of the Firth of Clyde to the height of a thousand feet. It is two miles in circumference; and the top, which is conical, is covered with a luxuriant crop of heath, grass and other plants, which feed great numbers of goats and rabbits. In one place the nettles form an impenetrable forest, six feet in height; and all the other plants likewise attain a proportionably gigantic size. All around, on the precipitous sides of the rock, uniformly nestle almost inconceivable numbers of solan geese, puffins and gannets, which flutter about, and produce an incessant deafening noise. On a long terrace or shoulder of the craig, at the elevation of 200 feet from the base, stands a deserted square tower, or castellated house, still very perfect as a ruin. Higher up issue two sparkling and beautiful springs of water, one of which forms a small marshy plain, covered with various plants, amongst others the *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* [corrected from original: it is the marsh pennywort], of extraordinary magnificence. The rock belongs to the Marquess of Ailsa, who draws from it a yearly rental of about £30, which is paid by the feathers of the fowls and the rabbit skins. Naturalists and botanists would find a visit of value, in increasing their knowledge of the vegetable world.'

AA, Th 7.8.1851, 1a Notice banning firing of guns 'for the purpose of disturbing the fowls, whereby the lives of the persons on the Craig have been endangered." The Marquis of Ailsa has put a gamekeeper on the island.

CENSUS 1861 585-2-45 Ailsa Craig cottage. Mungo Guthrie, W42, keeper of Ailsa Craig. B Newton on Ayr. + w sons: Andrew 6 and Mungo 4 b Kirkoswald. Housekeeper: Janet McMinn, u22, d Dailly.

Patton, 56 — There was a sailing trade to Ailsa Craig from Girvan, for which a Mr A Girvan built a small steamer, Ailsa, in 1906: there was also a tea-room built on the island.

Patton, 57 — The Ailsa trade was continued after 1924 by the Ailsa II (later Lady Ailsa), built at the Ailsa yard in Ayr. She was sold in 1932. 1934, m.v. Lady Ailsa. 1955, m.v. Lady Ailsa, which was fishing-boat like, and run by I. Girvan, grandson of A Girvan.

CH, F 6.6.1924, 2e — Ailsa II about to go into service. "Ailsa Craig is one of the most valuable assets which Girvan as a watering place - we do not say possesses - but which is our nearest neighbour, and the provision to visitors to explore the world-famous islet with its massive rock formations and its myriad of wild-fowl at a small cost, goes a long way to popularizing the town."

AP, F 9.1.1925, 2b — Lord Ailsa and his factor (Thomas Smith) are attempting to establish Soay sheep on Ailsa Craig. 11 have been consigned to Ailsa Craog, and are presently overwintering at Girvan Mains,

April 1955, F 13.12.2013, 17 — Offer of £1.5m from a nature trust expected this week by agents, Vladi Private Islands, Hamburgh, agents for Marquis of Ailsa. Lighthouses bought 10 years ago, for £85K, by Bobby Sandhu.

CASTLE

List 26 — Small keep, on south east side of the Craig. C&DA, iii, 206-208. B.

C&DA, iii, 206-208 — On a ledge about 300' above the shore, the only approach to which is by a very steep and narrow footpath. Its history is quite unknown. The structure bears some resemblance to Kildonan Tower (Arran). The door is on the east, or seaward, side, with an outer stair deduced from marks and projections. Taking advantage of the slope of the site, a vaulted basement is formed under the eastern portion of the ground floor. This was entered by a trap in the landing at the entrance door and may have been either a store or a prison. It had one very small loop for ventilation. Opposite the entrance door, another door gives access to the vaulted ground floor room, 14' by 11', with three small loops for lighting. The door in the north wall of the landing is modern and may occupy the position of a loop for lighting the landing. A straight staircase leads to the first floor, and is continued as a wheel stair. First floor: apartment 11' 3" by 8' with two windows in the south wall, and a small loop in north wall. An arched fireplace of full width and an oven in the north west angle. There is also an aumbry in the north wall. Also on the first floor there is a small vaulted room, c. 6' square, over landing. It has an oblong window, 2' wide, 7' above the floor. There is an opening in the wall between these two rooms, possibly therefore they are kitchen and larder. Above this there appears to have been a second floor. Now almost entirely destroyed, but there are recesses at the angles, probably indicating turrets. There are few features to indicate age. The thinness - 2' 6" - of the walls and arrangement of stair and rooms seems to connect it with style and date of border keeps of the beginning of C16. There is a possible courtyard on the north side, 30' long by width of keep, indicated by a continuation of the east wall.

Heron, 1790s — Reported in KS 7.6.1884. 'It has on it a ruined castle by the direction of Phillip II of Spain about the time when he had hopes to add the British Isles to the dominion of Spain'.

GASWORKS

\- — from 1883. See Refs under Lighthouse.

LIGHTHOUSE

List 27		Built 1868. Groome, i, 35. CS.
AA, 1.3.1883		Proposed erection of lighthouse, signal station and fog-horn.
AA, 8.3.1883		Engineers to be Messrs **D & T Stevenson**, Edinburgh.
AA, 6.12.1883		The Commissioners of Northern Lights have instructed Mr **James Keith**, gas hydraulic and heating engineer, of London, Edinburgh and Arbroath, to erect one of his patent mineral oil gasworks, of large capacity, on Ailsa Craig. It is to be used for driving the fog signal apparatus and to light the lighthouse presently erecting.
AA, 19.8.1884		Superintendence of the erection of the lighthouse is by Mr **Nicolson**, the experienced Inspector of Works for the Commissioners.
AA, 23.4.1885		It is expected that this summer will see the works completed, the tower lighted and the fog signals in full operation.
AA, 4.6.1885		Contains a long description of the various buildings, e.g. tower 25' high, terminating in a band of granite work, upon which the 10' high lantern tower rests.
AA, 12.2.1886		Head keeper to be Alexander Greig, from Ness.
AA, 18.3.1886		Lighthouse lighted for the first time on Monday evening last, 15th March 1886.
AA, 3.5.1886		The fog signalling apparatus, completed about two years ago, designed and carried out by Mr Charles Ingray, CE, Victoria St., London. [AP 21.2.1936: machinery invented by C Ingray, London]
AA, 7.4.1921		Retiral of Alexander Thomson, head lighthouse keeper on Ailsa Craig. Came to island in 1883 to fit up the gas plant. Retiring to Sanda. [C&I: Died in Girvan 19.12.1931]
AA, Th 13.3.1952, 8e		Obituary of James Robertson, c1857-1952, estate mason at Culzean. He is said to have worked "on the hanging staircase in Ailsa Craig Lighthouse".

PIER

AA, 24.8.1922		180' timber pier is being constructed for the shipping of granite. Engineer: G M Holmes Douglas, of Kyle Dennison & Laing, Glasgow.

QUARRIES

DETAILED DESCRIPTION of curling stone manufacture in BI 19/227, February 1909.

WILSON

nr		Besides curling stones, causeway setts were quarried from c.1905 to c.1914.
AA, 14.2.1907		Ailsa Craig reportedly let for roadstone quarrying to William Wilson, quarrymaster, Glasgow.
CO 3/12/2/3	NBSC 10.5.1907	Workmans' Cottage, Ailsa Craig, for William Wilson, Glasgow.
AA, 24.2.1910		Ailsa Craig Granite Quarries Ltd registered last week to continue the business of William Wilson, one of the directors.
CO 3/12/2/4	FLC 1.7.1910	2 2A cottages, Ailsa Craig, for Ailsa Craig Quarries Co Ltd.
ACC Planning, A512		December 1948. Work and win minerals, Ailsa Craig, for A. & J. Girvan. Approved, June 1951.

GIRVAN

AP, F 11.1.1946, 4d		Died, Monday, aged 68, Matthew GIRVAN, of Gowanbrae, Maidens. t the age of 17 he went to work on Ailsa Craig with his father, and succeeded him in the curling stone business which he (his father) had founded about 80 years ago. Matthew Girvan ran the business for about 50 years. The company was A & W Girvan. The business continued through the war. 200 pairs of stones, for Canada, were lost with the *Athenia* in 1939. w, 2s, 3d - one son, James, is involved in the quarrying.

AA, Th 28.10.1954, 14c

Died 20th October 1954, Archibald S Girvan, 78, skipper and tenant/manager of the Ailsa Craig Quarries.

TEA ROOM
Patton, 56

There was a sailing trade from Girvan to Ailsa Craig, for which a Mr A Girvan built a small steamer, Ailsa, in 1906: there was also a tea-room built on the island.

© Rob Close 2026