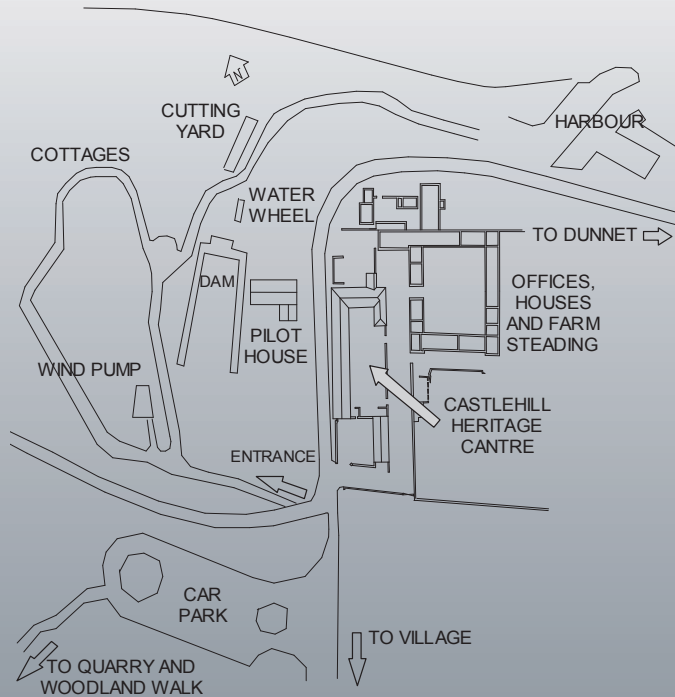


FLAGSTONE TRAIL



From the car park, enter the Flagstone trail through the wooden gate at the corner of the flagstone wall. Follow the footpaths in any order you choose to explore the fascinating history of the flagstone industry at Castlehill. Interpretative panels are situated at strategic points along the trail.

Whilst you are welcome to stray from the footpaths to examine features in more detail, you are advised to exercise extreme caution in respect of potentially hidden trip hazards and sudden changes in level.

Castletown Heritage Society would like to express its thanks to the late John Porter who provided much of the information contained in this leaflet.



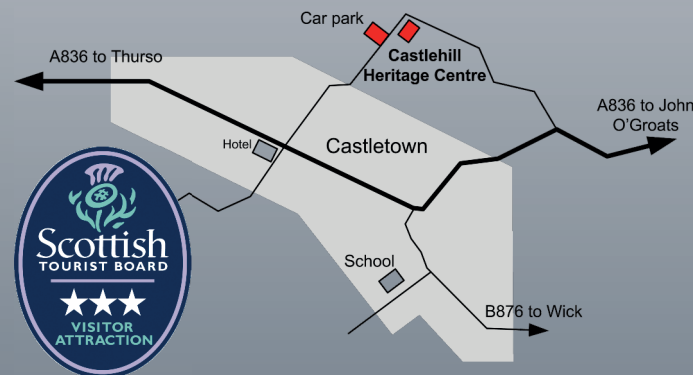
Castlehill Heritage Centre
is operated by
Castletown Heritage Society
Preserving the character, history and traditions of the Village of Castletown and the Parish of Olrig.

Registered Scottish Charity - SCO27858

Castlehill Heritage Centre is nestled on the coast just north of the village of Castletown in the far north of Scotland.

Signposted from A836 - at centre of Castletown village and also on approaching the village from John o'Groats.

Ample car parking directly opposite. Blue Badge car parking at door. Toilets, Heritage Garden and picnic area. Adjacent to Castlehill harbour.



Castlehill Heritage Centre
Harbour Road, Castletown
Caithness, Scotland, KW14 8TG

Phone: 01847 821120

Email: castletown.heritage@talk21.com

Web: www.castletownheritage.co.uk

Open all year

Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday
2pm to 4pm

Other times by arrangement
Garden and Centre are fully accessible

CASTLEHILL HERITAGE CENTRE FLAGSTONE TRAIL



Castlehill was the cradle of the Caithness Flagstone Industry which was begun in the late eighteenth century by James Traill of Rattar, Sheriff Depute of Caithness.

Our short walk follows the progress of a piece of flagstone as it journeys from the quarry to shipment from the harbour. It will reveal the remarkable history behind Caithness' most versatile and durable natural resource.

The Flagstone Trail at Castlehill

Flagstone had long been used as a building material in the north of Scotland for paving, field dykes, walls and roofing. When James Traill, Sheriff Depute acquired the Castlehill Estate in 1788 he recognised the potential of the material and set about production of pavement stone on a commercial basis. Flagstone was exported from Castlehill from the early 1790s.

The Quarry

The stone was obtained from the quarry which ran from below the car park opposite the Heritage Centre and extended up through Castletown village for almost one mile.



The readiness of Caithness sandstone to be split into thin slices or flags (from the Norse word 'flaga' - a flag) occurred because 370 million years ago a Great Lake covered the whole of the north of Scotland and out into the North Sea. The bed of this lake was formed by successive layers of sediment. As each layer was deposited it was dried by the sun, creating planes of material (including dead fish - *fossils*) along which the rock now splits. The flags were raised by hand using levers. Very little blasting was employed as it tended to break up the rock. In 1902 when the quarry was at its height of production, 35,363 tonnes of flag was produced, valued at £23,239 – a huge sum in those days.

The Windpump and Dam



Before the introduction of a steam engine in 1861 the stone was quarried in dry weather and cut in wet weather when there was water to fill the dam. The old windpump tower is now a scheduled ancient monument and a unique feature of the site. Originally the tower had a box on the top containing the drive mechanism which had four vertical sails.

The box was able to be rotated to face the wind. It was used in the very early days to pump water draining out of the quarry. The water was pumped into the dam and was then fed through the two sluices to operate an overshot waterwheel. This then powered the saws.



The sluices that fed the overshot wheel can still be seen today

The Harbour

In the early days of flagstone production, loads of flagstone were ferried out to larger ships anchored in the bay - a very hazardous process.



James Traill therefore commissioned construction of a harbour by James Bremner, a native of Keiss, who became famous as a wreck raiser and harbour builder.

The harbour, which commenced operation in 1825, was overlooked by Castlehill House, destroyed by fire in 1967.

The flagstone produced in the cutting yard was brought to the quayside by means of trolleys and loaded by hand on to the small schooners. At first the product was shipped to ports down the east coast of Scotland and England, but as the product became famous it was exported all over the world, as far as Australia and South America. The Strand and the concourse of Euston Station in London were paved with Caithness stone which was famed for its quality and durability.

The Cottages

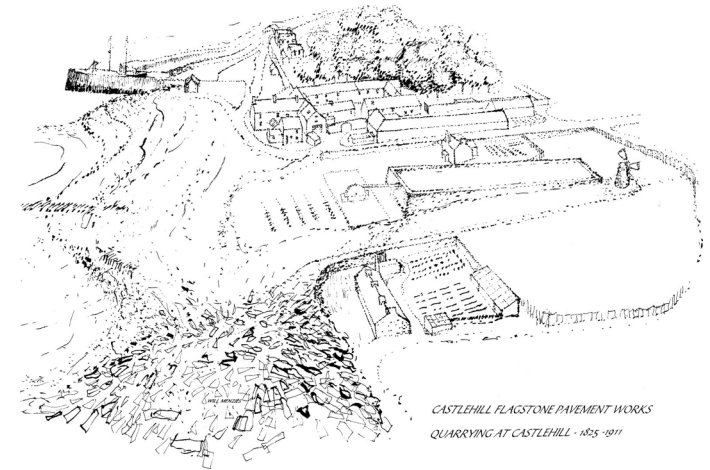


Some of the quarry workers lived in the two cottages at the north edge of the works. Life was simple, but they had a

garden and probably kept some livestock. The derelict remains reveal the use of native stone in providing the floors, walls and roofs. Water was obtained from a well just beyond the tunnel which gave access from the cutting yard. The cottages were continuously occupied until the 1940's.

Originally the cottages were further from the sea. Over the years the waters of Dunnet Bay have encroached on the site, eroding some of the area. To the east of the cottages is the cutting yard where the odd shaped 'as quarried' stones were cut into squares and rectangles.

The Water-wheel and Cutting Yard



The stone was originally cut by hand using a rough toothed saw held in wooden guides on the flag and pulled back and forward by two men.

Later, by the 1840's, mechanical saws were in operation, powered by the water wheel set in the pit in front of the dam. These saws were supported on strong frames about 15 feet high, the base bolts of which may still be seen. Two pivoted arms swung the saws to and fro across the surface of the flag.

Water was used as lubrication and long boxes above the saws held coarse sand which trickled down into the saw cut and acted as an abrasive. Although several stones could be cut at the same time, progress was slow and a cut could take two or three hours.

In the early years of the twentieth century 500 men were employed here. Due to the competition from concrete paving and the high cost of carriage, the works at Castlehill closed in the 1920's.