

Strathpeffer before the Spa

People have lived in the Strathpeffer valley for over 5,000 years, as shown by Neolithic burial chambers and axes, and Bronze Age burials and round houses. From about 800BC, the Knockfarrel hillfort to the east was defended, and perhaps lived in. Remains of the vitrified rock, melted during what must have been a catastrophic fire, can still be seen. The crannog, an artificial island, on Loch Kinellan to the west also probably dates to this period (see *Extending your Walk*).

In Strathpeffer itself, the first surviving evidence is the Eagle Stone (18). In the Medieval period



Loch Kinellan

Castle Leod (19), seat of the Clan Mackenzie, was built. The Loch Kinellan crannog was also re-used by another branch of the Mackenzies. In the 17th or 18th century the crannog probably became a hunting lodge.

Until the 19th century there was

no Strathpeffer, just four main farms: Kinellan, Park, Kinnettas and Ardival. The growth of the village was due to the conscious development of the area into a spa resort.

Strathpeffer Spa

The benefits of the sulphur and chalybeate (iron-rich) wells in the area began to be exploited in the late 1700s. A wooden pump room was erected in 1819. This was replaced in 1829, and extended in 1871. A second pump room was built c. 1860 and still survives. After 1861 the Cromartie estate invested more in the Spa, encouraging building of much needed accommodation and expanding facilities.

The coming of the railway in 1870 helped, although due to opposition by a local landowner the village was bypassed. The nearest station was Achterneed until the branch line to the Spa opened in 1885. Sleeper trains went from London to Strathpeffer.

Many hotels and large villas were built. The Spa Hotel advertised itself as the earliest. It burned down in 1942 while in use as a wartime hospital. Its rival, the Ben Wyvis Hotel, was built in 1879. Many of the villas were designed to be let to visitors during the season. For example, the houses opposite the Community Centre were built by Donald Mackenzie in 1889. He made his fortune in America – and named his house New York Villa. Many of the houses you pass on the trail date from the last two decades of the 1800s and into the early 1900s.



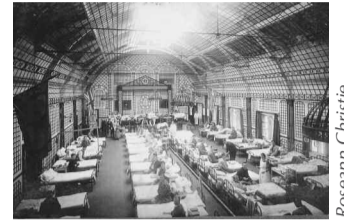
New York Villa

Many doctors consulted in the village. Visitors came from as far afield as the Continent and included royalty and famous people of the day such as Sir Ernest Shackleton and Robert Louis Stevenson. The poor were allowed free water, and later a hospital was built for poor invalids (14). The bathing rooms had the most advanced facilities. There were concerts, excursions and sporting pursuits.

Wartime Strathpeffer

During WWI many buildings in Strathpeffer were taken over (6 9 17). After the war, the fortunes of the Spa declined.

WWII brought another brief, and changed, focus. Many hotels and houses were taken over to accommodate military personnel. The A.T.S. had training in the Ben Wyvis Hotel, where there is also said to have been a military jail. Training exercises were run in areas around the village. Prisoners of War based in a nearby camp at Brahan helped at many of the farms around, including Ardival.



The Pavilion during WWI

Postwar Strathpeffer

After WWI the Spa never revived, but coach tours now bring many visitors to the surviving hotels. The Pavilion continued to hold concerts and attracted coach loads of music fans until it gradually fell into disrepair. Now fortunately restored, it again offers a range of entertainment and events.

Extending Your Walk

Golf Course

At the top of the hill from the square is the Golf course, commanding good views of the area. The course was laid out by renowned course designer Willie Park.

Loch Kinellan

Well marked paths from the village take you to Loch Kinellan, the site of the crannog. Kinellan was one of the original four farms in the valley.

Jamestown

A footpath from Elsick House at the west end of the village takes you to the estate village of Jamestown, with its picturesque derelict Free church (built 1861-2) and a number of old cottages.



The Maze and Knockfarrel

Walk up the Ardival road, passing one of the original four farms. After climbing the stile near the woods, bear left on the path where you will find a 'maze', a collection of large boulders telling the story of Highland geology. The path (steep in places) continues to Knockfarrel.

'The Heights'

Take the Achterneed turning to the east of Strathpeffer for a drive to a crofting landscape with lovely views south. The Neil Gunn Viewpoint, a memorial to one of Scotland's famous authors, also has a prehistoric cup and ring marked stone (accessible by wheelchairs).

This leaflet was researched and produced by a local group led by Susan Kruse of ARCH in 2015, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Mackenzie New York Villa Trust, in a joint project run by ARCH and Strathpeffer Community Centre.



Fiona Newton

The Pump Room (which is also the local tourist information office) has copies of materials produced in the project as well as displays about the village. Copies of the full listing of sites recorded can also be found at Strathpeffer Community Centre, The Highland Museum of Childhood, Dingwall Library, and on the ARCH website (www.archhighland.org.uk), Strathpeffer Community website (www.strathpeffer.org) and Strathpeffer Community Centre website (www.strathpeffercommunitycentre.org.uk). Information about individual sites has also been submitted to the Highland HER (her.highland.gov.uk) and Canmore (canmore.org.uk) heritage databases.

'One Touch' tours of the village and archaeology of the area, produced by the Strathpeffer Initiative, can be rented from the Pump Room or Museum of Childhood, or the app can be downloaded (see Strathpeffer Community website for details).



Cover photographs - top left: Nicholson Mackenzie Hospital (Fiona Newton), top right: Lower Pump Room (Margaret Spark), bottom left: Pavilion during WWI (Roseann Christie) and bottom right: Victorian Station (Iain Sarjeant).

A Walk Around Strathpeffer



'Near here is a valley, birch woods, heather and a stream... No country, no place was ever for a moment so delightful to my soul.'

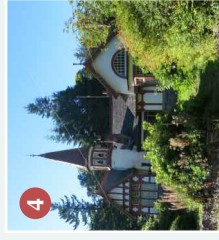
Robert Louis Stevenson,
on his visit to Strathpeffer, 1880



A Walk Around Strathpeffer

The Square

1 The Square is the heart of the village, close to the main buildings of the Spa. The shops have changed over the years. The Pharmacy has been here for over 100 years, and retains some interior details.



2 Spa Cottage, 3 White Lodge, and 4 Heatherlie

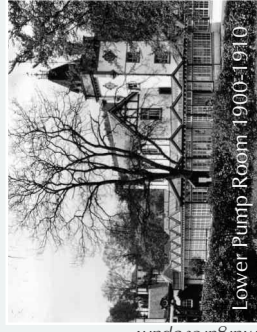
Spa Cottage and White Lodge are two of the oldest houses in the village. A short walk behind White Lodge is Heatherlie, originally called 'The Studio' when it was built in 1897, and home to a photographer. In 1904 it was a bank.

5 The Shieling / Tigh Mile Annas

This timber building in a style of a Swiss chalet is on the site of one of the wells. It was a lending library, and at some time after 1904 became a shop known as Tigh Mile Annas, so named by its Irish owner, selling knitwear and fancy goods.

6 Highland Hotel

Built in 1911 by the Highland Railway Company, the hotel was also used during WWI as a hospital, and in WWII for military families.



7 The Lower Pump Room, and 8 Upper Pump Room

Visitors came to the Spa to drink the waters and bathe at the pump rooms. The Lower Pump Room was demolished in 1950, but the Upper Pump Room can be visited and has good displays and information about the Spa in its heyday.

9 Pavilion

The Pavilion, based on the design of a casino at Baden-Baden, opened in 1883 to provide a large entertainment venue for Spa visitors. During WWI it was an American Naval hospital and during WWII used for concerts and dances. After years of neglect it has fortunately been restored.

10 Former doctor's surgery and Commercial Bank of Scotland

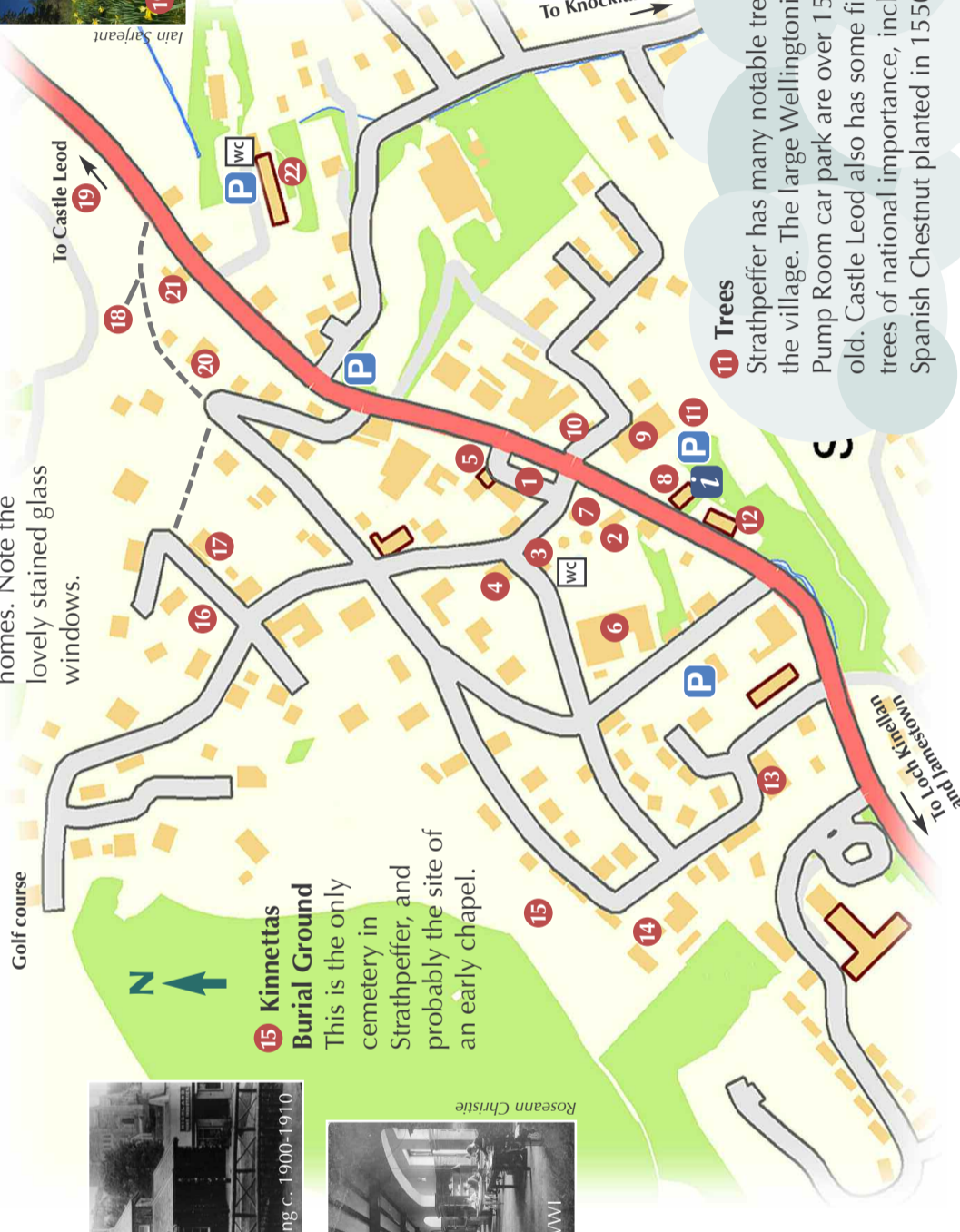
This quaint building in the grounds of Craigvar was one of the many doctor's surgeries in the Spa – so many we could have made a trail of buildings doctors have used! Later from at least the 1940s until the 1990s the building was a bank.



16 Dunnichen / Kildonan

This was built as the Kildonan Hotel in 1890. In WWI and WWII it was a convalescent home for troops. In 1947 it was divided into two semi-detached homes. Note the lovely stained glass windows.

Note the cast iron dormer and details, which were supplied by a noted Glasgow firm.



15 Kinnettas Burial Ground

This is the only cemetery in Strathpeffer, and probably the site of an early chapel.



Margaret Spark



Highland Christie

18 Eagle Stone

The Eagle Stone has carved Pictish symbols, dating probably between the 7th to 9th century AD. There has been much debate on the meaning of the symbols. This stone also features in local lore. A prophecy by the Brahan Seer (a shadowy 17th century prophet) warned that if the Eagle Stone falls for a third time, ships will sail up the valley and moor to the stone. Having already been moved twice, it is now firmly cemented in place.

Note: the path to the Eagle Stone is not suitable for wheel chairs and can be slippery in places.

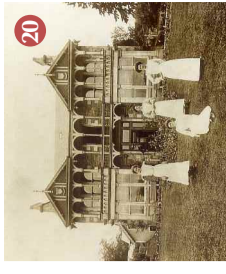


19 Castle Leod

The castle is the ancestral home of the Earls of Cromartie. The grounds are noted for their heritage trees, and the castle interior as a good example of a late medieval/early modern tower house castle. The mid 18th century map on the Billiard room wall is superb! Open on set days in the year.

20 Timaru and 21 Red House

From the top of the drive leading to the station you can see two of the elegant villas from the late 1800s. Timaru was built in 1877 by Donald MacLennan from the Heights of Achterneed who made his fortune in New Zealand. The Red House (1880) is in the arts and crafts style.



Highland Museum of Childhood

22 Strathpeffer Station

The well preserved Victorian station opened in 1885 and closed in 1951. It was used by visitors to the Spa as well as troops during the war. It now houses a Museum of Childhood, shops and a tea room. Note the hand carved pillar at the entrance.



11 Trees

Strathpeffer has many notable trees within the village. The large Wellingtonia near the Pump Room car park are over 150 years old. Castle Leod also has some fine heritage trees of national importance, including a Spanish Chestnut planted in 1550.

12 St Anne's Episcopal Church

With the increasing popularity of the Spa new churches were built, including a Church of Scotland (to take over from the parish church in Fodderty), an Episcopalian Church, a Free Church and a United Free Church. The foundation stone of St Anne's was laid in 1891. It was used before it was completed and consecrated in 1900.

14 Nicolson MacKenzie Memorial Hospital

The Nicolson MacKenzie Memorial Hospital provided treatment for poor invalids from 1896. Given to the NHS in 1948 it finally closed in 1993.



13 Kinnettas Steading

Kinnettas steading and farm house still survive from the original farm. The steading later became a garage when cars began to be used in the village. During and after WWII films were shown here.



This trail takes you around some of the interesting buildings in Strathpeffer. A good place to start is the Square, where you can see a number of buildings when standing opposite the shops.

The walk should take about an hour (excluding Castle Leod), and there are additional extensions recommended overleaf. Most of the way is suitable for wheelchairs, except for the Eagle Stone and the path leading down from nos. 16 & 17. See alternative route by road avoiding the path.

Please respect private property and do not enter buildings and gardens. Please take care on the busy main road.