

KIRKINTILLOCH SHIPBUILDING

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For many years shipbuilding was an important industry in Kirkintilloch. There were two boat yards in the town, on the Forth and Clyde Canal, which between them built up a tradition which has made Kirkintilloch unique in the Scottish shipbuilding world. Kirkintilloch was Scotland's furthest inland boatbuilding centre.

J & J Hay

Two brothers, James and John Hay, took over the Townhead boatyard in 1867. They were in the canal trade and used the yard primarily to repair and maintain their fleet of vessels. Soon they began to build scoops and puffers to add to this fleet. It was for their puffers that they became famous. These boats were so called because the exhaust from their steam engines was turned up through the funnel, producing a puffing noise. The size of these boats was restricted to 66 feet by 18 feet by the canal locks.



Kirkintilloch, Basin. Aerial view, 1930



J. & J. Hay, S.S. 'Delta', built in 1881. Photographed at Kirkintilloch repair slip

P. McGREGOR & SONS, SHIPBUILDERS and ENGINEERS, Kirkintilloch, N.B.		
Work for Shipment Abroad a Speciality.		Steam and Sailing Yachts Designed and Built.
SALVAGE TUG FOR RUSSIA.		
SMALL PASSENGER AND CARGO STEAMERS, TUGS, &c.		

P. MacGregor & Sons, S.S. 'Proyda', salvage tug for Russia

P. McGregor

The first boat built at the yard in the Railway Basin was the 'Laburnum' in 1874. McGregor's built barges, lighters, tugs, small oil tankers, small motor vessels and passenger steamers. Many of McGregor's ships were exported to overseas destinations, such as Egypt and Brazil.

Some were too large to sail down the canal and required dismantling and reassembly elsewhere. 118 ships were built at this yard before it closed in 1921.

Puffers

"Inside" puffers such as the 'Caesar' or 'Hannibal' had flush decks and no bulwarks (sides) and were steered by tiller. They were shallow enough to allow them to operate in the canal's 6 feet of water. By 1913-14 seven Hay's puffers were being operated on the canal each carrying up to 100 tons of cargoes such as coal, timber, pig iron and sand.

"Outside" puffers such as the 'Druid' and the 'Tartar' were modified for coastal work. They had wheel steering, continuous bulwarks and derricks attached to the masts for loading and unloading cargoes. These boats carried coal for Caledonian MacBrayne's passenger and cargo steamers and malt, barley, and empty barrels to distilleries.



Kirkintilloch boatyard with puffers



J. & J. Hay, S.S. 'Serb', built in 1927. Hay's built over 60 puffers. They were launched sideways into the canal

The 'May Queen'

This passenger steamer was built at McGregor's yard in Kirkintilloch and operated between 1903 and 1917. Kirkintilloch man James Aitken sailed the 'May Queen', the 'Gipsy Queen' and the 'Fairy Queen' to Craigmarloch during the summer months only.

