

**THE ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY OF**

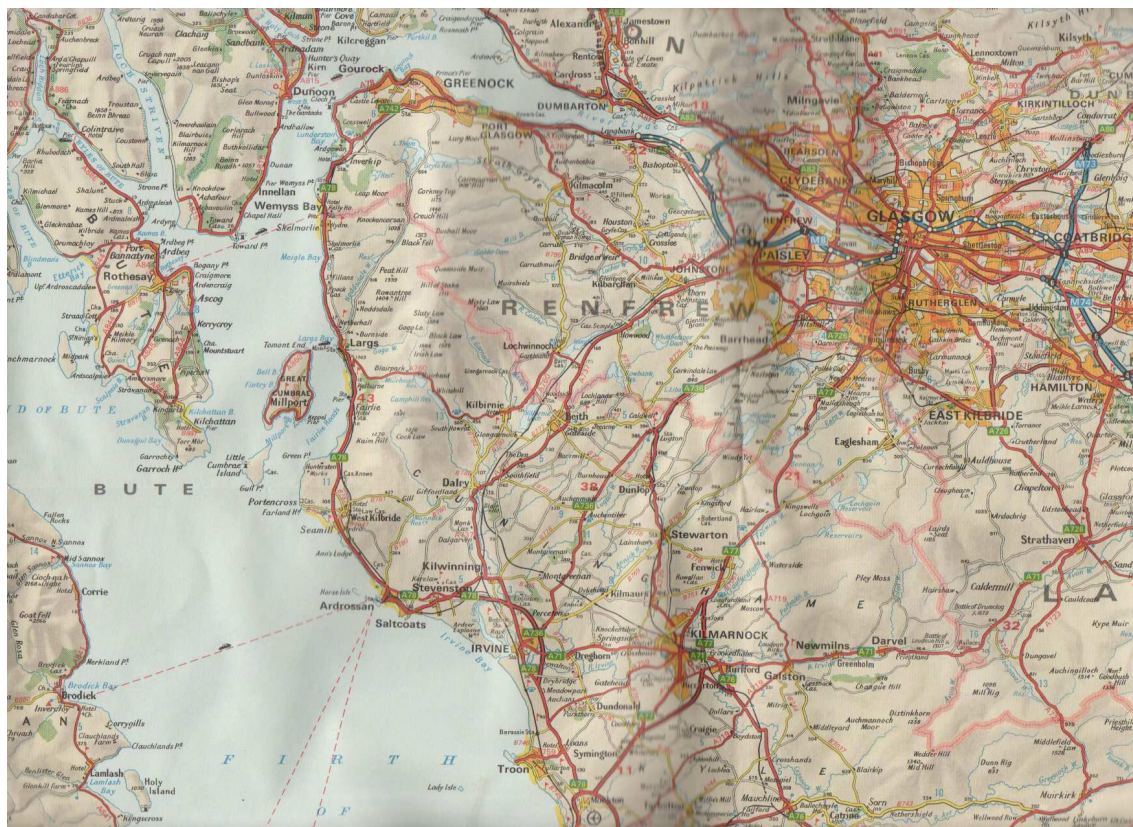
**SEAMILL HYDROPATHIC**

BY

**ROBERT GRANT PATON**

EYNSHAM

2015



## THE NORTH AYRSHIRE COAST OF SCOTLAND

This beautiful part of the West of Scotland is steeped in ancient history and over the years has given birth to many prominent people and introduced to the world many famous names.

St. Brigid, the patron saint of West Kilbride, is believed to have landed in this area in about 500AD when she arrived from Ireland carrying the Christian message to the then Pagan Scotland. The name “Kilbride” means “The cell (Church) of St. Brigid (St. Bride)”. It is reputed that she landed on that part of the shore which fronts Seamill Hydro. During the work of building the roadway past the present Seamill Hydro in 1878, 14 human skeletons were uncovered in roughly made stone kists, probably dating from early Christian times (400 – 700AD).

It was at Largs, some eight miles north of Seamill, that the marauding Vikings of Norway were finally defeated and driven from Scotland. This event took place at the Battle of Largs in October 1263. The battle, which took place just south of the town, is commemorated by “The Pencil” - a 21 metre stone tower, built in 1912, which marks the site of the battle.

About a mile to the north-east of West Kilbride, lies the estate of Crosbie. Here lived Sir Ranald Craufurd, the uncle of William Wallace, where, it is said, Wallace himself spent some time during his childhood. There is some suggestion that Wallace may have been born in the village of Ellerslie near Kilmarnock, although the version quoting the village of Elderslie near Paisley is generally preferred. Shortly after the birth of Wallace, Robert the Bruce, King of Scotland, was born in, and spent his boyhood at Turnberry Castle, some six miles north of Girvan, in 1274.

In 1347, King Robert II of Scotland, grandson of Robert the Bruce, married Elizabeth Mure (or Muir), a daughter of Sir Alan Mure of Rowallan, outside Kilmarnock. She is, incidentally, a forbear of the Patons of Largs. King Robert died in 1390 at Dundonald, near Ayr.

In the mid to late 1600s, Ayrshire was one of the main centres of the Covenanter uprising against attempts by King Charles II to regulate religious freedom in Scotland. This came to a head in 1679 under Richard Cameron, a minister of the Church of Scotland, who indirectly was responsible for the formation of the famous Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) Regiment. A follower of Robert Cameron and himself a prominent Covenanter was Captain John Paton. He was born in Airtnoch Farm at Fenwick. As a young man, he then served on the Continent as a soldier in the Protestant army of Gustavus Adolphus. On his return to Scotland he spent the rest of his life farming at Meadowhead near the village of Fenwick, not far from Kilmarnock.

Robert Simson, the eminent mathematician, was born in Kirktonhall House in West Kilbride in 1687. He died in 1768 and is buried in the churchyard at West Kilbride.

Somewhat later, in 1773, Thomas Brisbane was born in Largs. He trained in astronomy and mathematics before enlisting in the British Army under Wellington. In 1821 he was appointed Governor of New South Wales, Australia and founded the City of Brisbane in Queensland. He died in 1860 and is buried in Largs Old Kirk.

Perhaps most well-known is, of course, Robert Burns. He was born in 1759 in the house built by his father in Alloway, just south of Ayr, and brought up in the area. Best known for his evocative poetry, he is widely regarded as Scotland's national Poet. He died in 1796. The day of his Birth on 25<sup>th</sup> of January is much celebrated world-wide.

In modern times, Lena Zavaroni, was a child singing star. Born in Greenock in 1963 but brought up in Rothesay, she died, sadly, in 1999. Daniella Nardini born in Largs in 1968 of the Nardini family is a prominent actress. And Nicola Benedetti, the acclaimed Violinist, was born in West Kilbride in 1987.

## **SEAMILL AND ITS ENVIRONS**

Seamill is a small but beautiful place. It lies along the A78 on the North Ayrshire coast some 8 miles south of Largs, 5 miles north-west of Ardrossan and 25 miles North-west of the County Town of Ayr. Although physically joined to West Kilbride, about a mile to the north-east, Seamill is a separate village in itself. It has magnificent views over the Firth of Clyde to the Isle of Arran and its prominent mountain, Goat Fell, and also to the south-west as far as Ailsa Craig, some 30 miles distant. These views over the Firth are amongst the finest in Scotland and the sunsets there can be quite spectacular.

Seamill derives its name from a water-powered grain mill - the "Sea Mill" - situated on the Kilbride Burn on the north side of the A78. The exact origin of the Mill is unclear but it appears on Blaeu's Atlas of Scotland dated 1654. The mill was in regular use until 1922 after which it operated intermittently until it finally closed in 1940. Water to power the mill was taken by a channel from the Kilbride burn which itself discharges into the Clyde at the southwest corner of the present Seamill Hydro Hotel grounds. At the point where the channel diverts from the burn, the Glenbryde Hotel was later established. However that hotel closed in about 1980 and has since been demolished. A residential development has now been built on the site. Traces of an Iron Age fortification have been found nearby, by the Ardrossan Road, at the site of the house now called "The Fort".



**THE OLD GRAIN MILL AT SEAMILL, AYRSHIRE**



Seamill has a lovely sandy beach which leads northward into Ardneil Bay and Farland Head. Situated there is the old commercial fishing harbour (now disused) and hamlet of Portencross, although known, in 1846, as Port Crawford. There are two small and natural harbours there both formed from tidal inlets. A small pier was later built out from the North Harbour, possibly around 1900, but it was never used commercially. The famous Clyde paddle steamer "Waverley" once made a tricky excursion stop there on Easter Sunday in 1995. Off the harbour, about 400 yards from the shore and in 10 fathoms of water, lies the wreck of one of the largest ships of the Spanish Armada of 1588. This wreck, (Official Wreck No. 4084), although identified as Spanish, has only been slightly explored, and has never been recovered. However, a cannon, some 9 feet long and fashioned from brass, was recovered from the wreck and brought ashore. It was displayed for many years on the ground beside the Castle. This Tower house, dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, is the better-known part of Portencross. It was abandoned in 1739 when it was unroofed in a violent storm. It is an A-listed scheduled monument and is now under restoration.

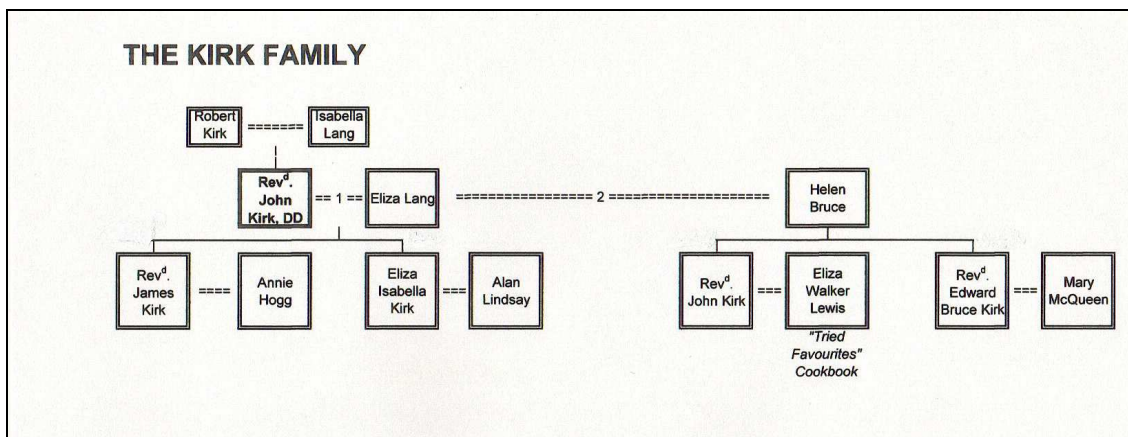


**PORTENCROSS SHOWING THE CASTLE AND OLD HARBOUR**

This castle may have been a royal residence at some time and is certainly reputed to have been the last resting place of the bodies of the early Scottish Kings whose bodies were being taken to the Isle of Iona for burial. After the Battle of Bannockburn in 1514, the lands of Arnele, including Portencross and the castle on it, were given to Lord Robert Boyd by King Robert the Bruce for services rendered at the battle.

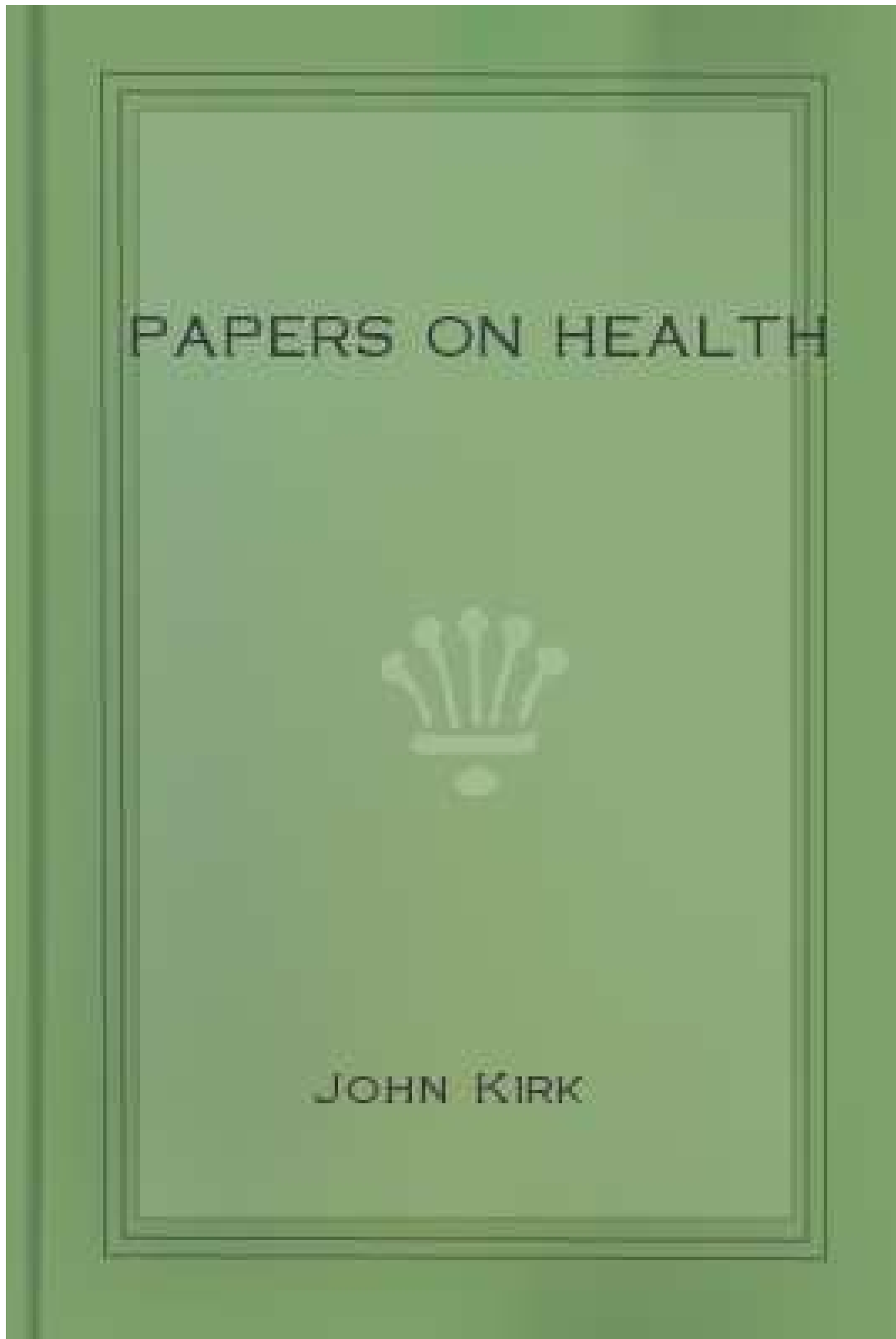
**DR. JOHN KIRK, DD**

The list of those who came from the ranks of ministers heavily involved in the temperance cause is long and includes the Rev. Dr. John Kirk (1813-1886). John Kirk was born in East Plean, Stirlingshire and was the son of Robert Kirk, a Forrester, and Isabella Lang. After local schooling, John was apprenticed, at the age of 16, to John Miller, Blacksmith in Bannockburn. However, he felt that he was much more suited to a more cerebral undertaking and was strongly called upon by the Lord to evangelise the teachings of Jesus Christ. John was then ordained in 1839 after study in Glasgow. John married his cousin, Elizabeth (Eliza) Lang of Kilmacolm, in 1840. They had a son, James who was born in 1846. A girl, Eliza Isabella, was born in April 1849. But sadly, John's wife Eliza died a few days after the birth as a result of complications. John, now with two small children, then married again in January 1851. His bride, now, was Helen Bruce, the daughter of a Merchant in Dunblane. John and Helen then had two children, John, born in 1853 and Edward Bruce, born in 1856. It is by no means unusual for sons to follow in their father's footsteps, but John's sons took this to a higher plane when all three were ordained as Ministers in the Evangelical Church: James in Belfast, John in Edinburgh and Edward Bruce in Barrhead in Renfrewshire. It is interesting to note that Edward Bruce Kirk officiated at the wedding of two of the children of James and Catherine Newbigging *(of which more later)*.



John Kirk was an ardent and charismatic preacher with a large following. Following his Ordination, he initially ministered in Hamilton, but was called to the ministry at Brighton Street Congregational Church in Edinburgh in 1845. This church has been described as “one of the largest places of worship in Edinburgh.” There he remained until 1876, when as a result of voice strain he was forced to give up his position. John Kirk was enthusiastic and with a huge personal conviction. His personal enthusiasm and conviction motivated no less than 23 men from his church to become Evangelical Union ministers during his 31 year ministry in Edinburgh. He was a staunch teetotaler. In 1853, he was a member of the Council of the United Kingdom Alliance for the Suppression of Liquor Traffic. He was also a fierce opponent of the smoking of Tobacco. He was awarded a Doctorate in Divinity and in 1860 he was appointed Professor of Pastoral Theology for the Evangelical Union of Scotland. He wrote many works which were widely circulated. Among the more notable of these were “The Way of Life made plain” (1842); “Light out of darkness” (1843) and “The Age of Man” (1866). He was also the author of a treatise on Political Economy with special reference to the temperance question.

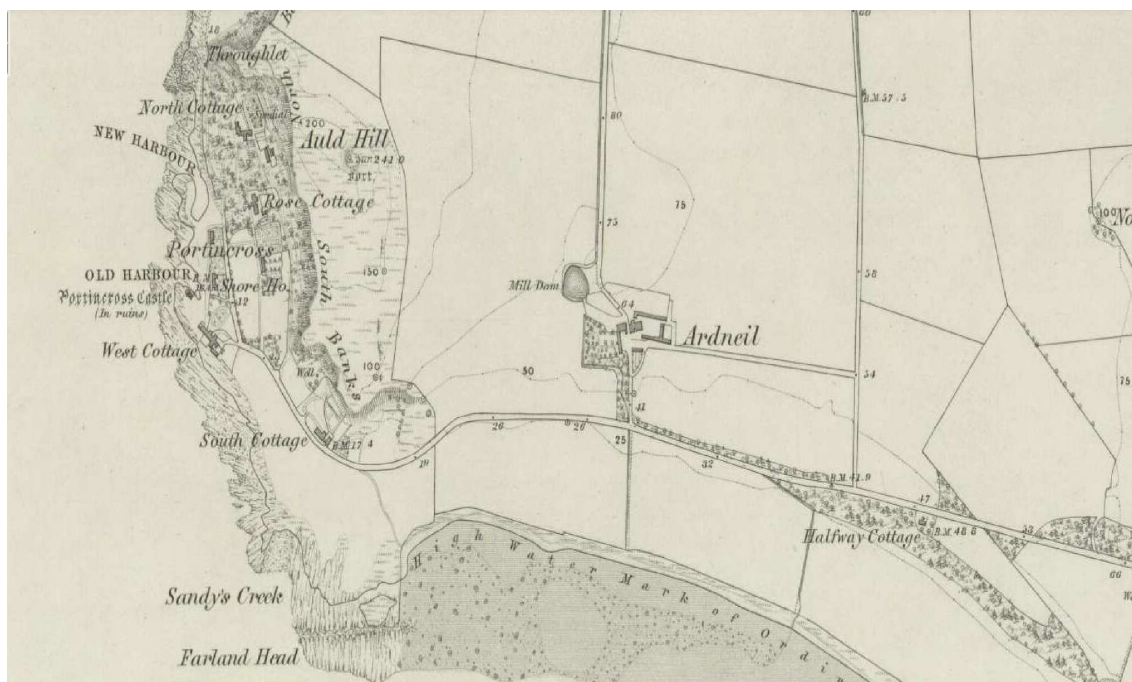
In somewhat indifferent health throughout his life, he had experienced the beneficial effects of Hydropathy in the late 1840s at the hydropathic establishment at Gilmorehill in Glasgow and again later as a patient of Roland East at Glenburn Hydro at Dunoon. As a result of his experiences he became an enthusiastic proponent of Hydrotherapy. He subsequently embarked on a major work on the subject which he entitled "Papers on Health". By 1875 the work, all 11 volumes, was complete and was published to considerable acclaim in 1876.



By this time, Dr. Kirk (by now designated Professor) was, of course, now freed from his pastoral duties at Brighton Street Church, and was able to devote much of his time to the study and application of Hydrotherapy to grateful patients. His original magnum opus, which had run to several editions, was later edited by his son, Edward Bruce Kirk, and published as a single volume in 1899, with a further edition in 1904.

Dr. Kirk was very familiar with the area around Seamill and West Kilbride, since he had spent many happy holidays with his family in Millport on Arran and also at Portencross. It was at Portencross that he built, in the 1860s, a substantial property which he named “Ardneil House”. This property, on the road into Portencross, is now shown on current maps as “Kirkfield House”, and stands on the south-east side of the crossroads due south of Ardneil Farm.

After retiring from his Brighton Street Church, and although living at his home at 17 Greenhill Gardens in Edinburgh’s Newington district, he was to spend many happy hours and days in his retirement in Portencross. It was while there that he was able to recommend and discuss their treatment with patients at nearby Seamill Sanatorium which had been established in 1880. Dr. Kirk died in Edinburgh on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1886. He is buried in the Grange Cemetery in Edinburgh.



**ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP OF PORTENCROSS IN 1855** (AYRSHIRE SHEET 10.7)

In 1903, the resident of Ardneil House is listed as the Reverend John Kirk. This John Kirk, himself an ordained Minister, is the son (born 1853), of Dr. John Kirk by his second wife, Helen Bruce. His wife, Elizabeth Walker Kirk, the mother of their six children, was the author of the best-selling and popular “*Tried Favourites Cookery Book*”. This remarkable work was originally published in 1900 and was an instant and outstanding success. And although Eliza died in 1917, the book continued in publication and by 1948 the book, of 316 pages, had run to 26 editions and sold nearly a million copies. Indeed, the work is still readily available today from many second-hand Booksellers. It is even available today as a digital edition.



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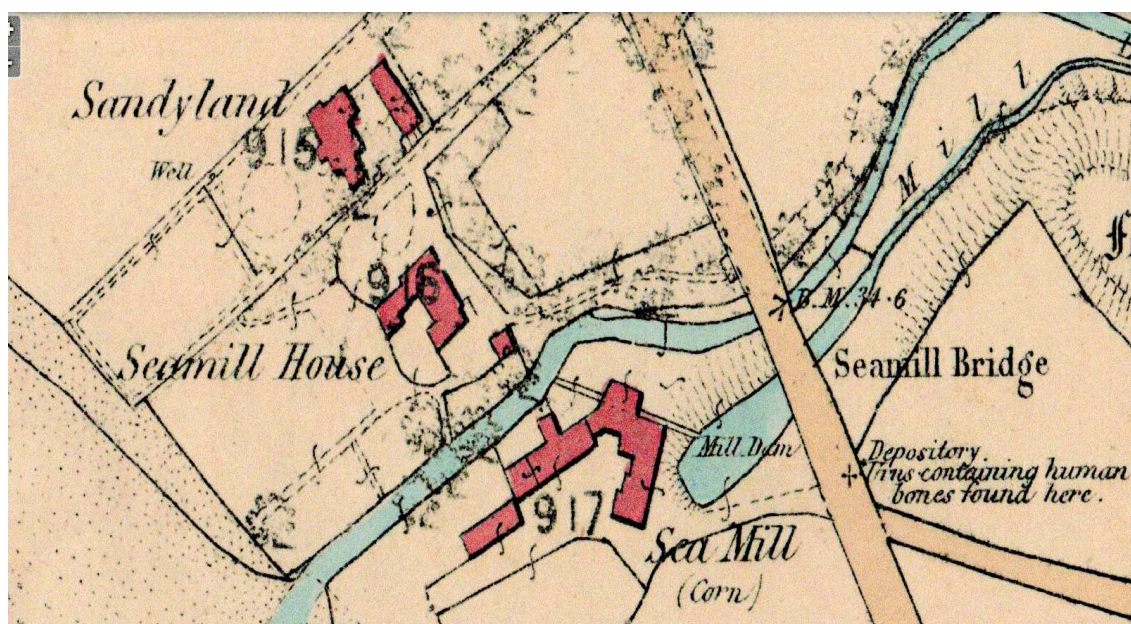
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Amongst the many reviews the book has received over the years a typical example reads "The secret of the success of *"Tried Favourites"* is its simplicity. Directions are clear and concise, and every recipe seems to have been included." (*Edinburgh Evening News*).

## SEAMILL SANATORIUM AND HYDROPATHIC

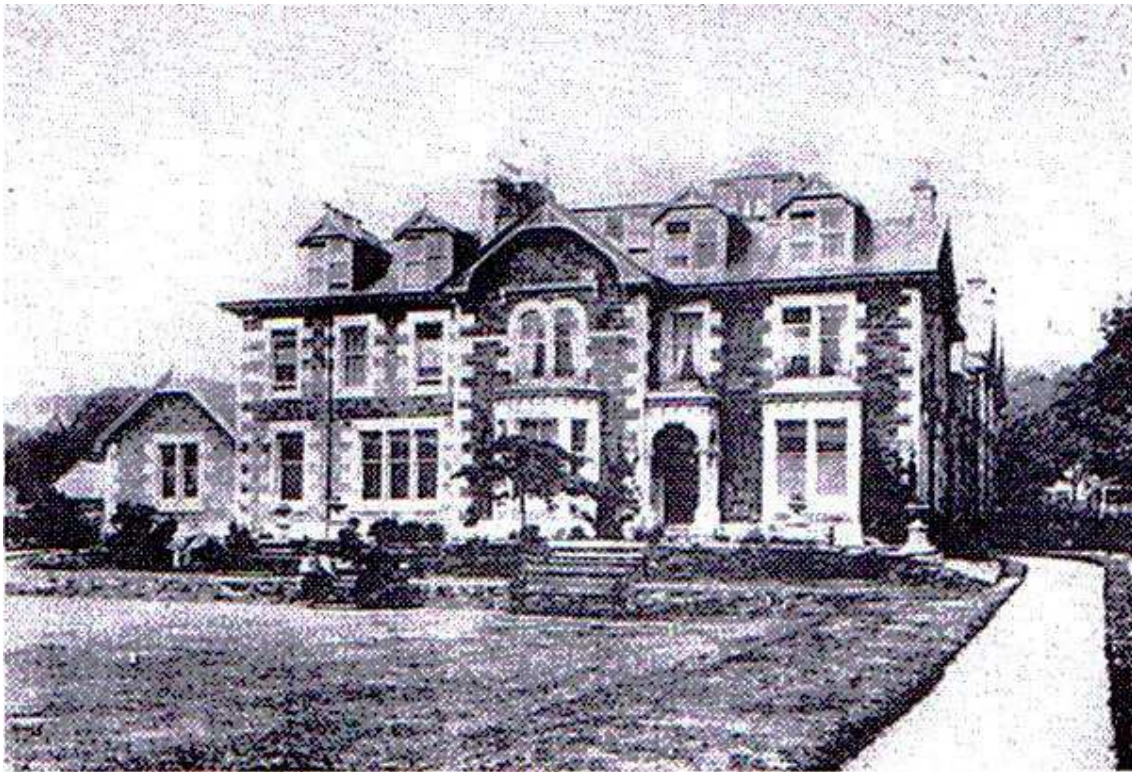
Following on from the publication of Dr. Kirk's "Papers on Health", there was felt a great need for some formal establishment to be set up where the treatment expounded in his "Papers" could be provided by trained attendants under his personal supervision. A suitable site, fronting the shore, was found at Seamill on the North Ayrshire coast, in the parish of West Kilbride and part of the Lands of Kirktonhall. In 1879, a large villa which was called "Sandyland", was bought by a group of gentlemen for the purpose of establishing there a Sanatorium "on the understanding that, according to his convenience, the Professor would attend and give advice on basis of the treatments expounded in his "Papers on Health"". In fact, Dr. Kirk visited and attended to patients at the Sanatorium on a weekly basis for the first few years of its existence.



**ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP OF SEAMILL 1855** – (25 INCH: MILE - Ayrshire, Sheet 10.12)

This particular area was chosen because its special advantages of soil, climate, and scenery recommended it. The soil along the shore is almost pure sand, and dries rapidly after rain. The area is renowned for its dairy cattle and the abundance and excellence of its potatoes. The climate is extremely mild, high hills sheltering the whole region from north and east winds, and the Arran mountains, intervening some sixteen miles over the sea to the west, collect much of the rain. Hence, although near some very rainy districts, the Seamill neighbourhood is peculiarly sunny and dry. In winter, the sun reflected from the water, and beating on the face of the hills, makes the shore climate most genial, and when other places only a few miles away are encased in ice, flowers will be blooming in the gardens at Seamill. The choice of location may also have been influenced to some extent by the opening of the railway station at West Kilbride in May 1878. This is on the railway line between Glasgow and Ardrossan which continues onwards to Largs. The station is just a little over a mile from Seamill.





**THE ORIGINAL BUILDING OF THE SEAMILL SANATORIUM - 1879.**

The Sanatorium was founded in 1879 and opened for business in 1880. The original building, a substantial villa in its own grounds, represents the first part of the present Seamill Hydro structure, and initially accommodated some 12 patients. A North Wing was added in 1890 under the direction of the Scottish Architect Thomas Smellie. Further extensive additions were made between 1920 and 1925.

In September 1881 a limited company (SC 1055) was incorporated for the purposes of "acquiring the property and carrying on a Sanatorium at Seamill" This Company was formed to fulfil an Agreement with the original purchasers of the Land and Property and to place the management of the Sanatorium on a more professional footing. The first directors were Robert Simpson (Sr), a merchant in Glasgow; Thomas Kennedy, a draper in Moffat; and Simon Henderson, a baker in Edinburgh. The nominal Capital of the Company was £6,000 divided into 600 shares of £10 each.

By the date of the first General Meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1881, there were 14 original investors in the Company. These investors had, in total, subscribed £835. Some seven years later, on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 1888 there were 26 investors and the paid up capital of the Company was £2,560. However, by this time, its purpose had been fulfilled and the Company was placed into voluntary liquidation. It was then formally wound up on April 16<sup>th</sup> 1892. Although the details are not known, it is more than a probability that the Liquidation was as the result of James Newbigging, then manager, making a purchase of all the shares. It was at this point that he became proprietor of Seamill Hydropathic.

Of the initial shareholders in 1881, six were mainly traders and local to the area. A few, however, came from further afield: Edinburgh, Dumfriesshire and even London. Apart from the local traders whose connection might well have been

prompted by a commercial interest, it is interesting to speculate as to the reasons that might have induced the others to invest – an interest in or practical experience of Hydrotherapy perhaps, or even a personal knowledge and friendship of Dr. Kirk?

It is one of the fascinating coincidences of life that one of the first shareholders in Seamill Sanatorium Ltd. was Hugh Paton, Butcher, of West Kilbride. Hugh, who had subscribed for two shares in the company, was the father of 9 year old Dewar Paton who, 15 years later, was to marry Mary Helen (*see below*), the eldest daughter of James Newbigging, who was, by that time, Proprietor of the Hydro. Hugh Paton's early involvement with the Sanatorium may, one can speculate, yield a clue as to how Mary and Dewar were later to meet.

The Sanatorium was soon considerably extended with the North wing comprising the Lounge, salt water Swimming Pool and Turkish baths being added in 1890. A few years later an additional wing was added at the rear of the building.

The Sanatorium provided various types of 'baths' - both of salt and fresh water - and was enhanced by the Hydropathic's own spring. This spring water was still on tap within the Hydro in the 1960s and may perhaps be available there today. The baths provided relief from Sciatica, Rheumatism and Lumbago and could be likened to a modern day health spa. The Swimming Pool was filled with seawater and there was a "Sauna". Hot and cold sea water and fresh water baths were also much in use. Qualified nurses attended to the guests.

Seamill was one of the last and smallest of the Scottish Hydropathic establishments. The Census for 1881 (April 3<sup>rd</sup>) showed 12 patients and 4 staff in residence. It is interesting to note that Dr. Kirk was not present in the Hydro on that date, rather he was visiting in Saltcoats. The situation in 1891 was further improved with 18 patients attended by 11 staff. The Sanatorium continued to be well-regarded and was increasingly successful and in 1904, the Sanatorium was reported as accommodating almost 100 patients and guests.

In 1906 the "West Kilbride Guide" described Seamill Hydro in these glowing terms:

*"Beautifully situated on the Firth of Clyde, with grounds leading directly onto the shore, it commands a magnificent prospect. From the front door, more than a hundred square miles of land and sea lie open to view. To the West across the Firth rise the majestic peaks of Arran; to the North are The Cumbraes, Bute and the Argyllshire hills; while to the Southward one can descry Ailsa Craig, and follow the outline of the mainland as far as the entrance to Loch Ryan. There is a fine suite of bathrooms, comprising hot and cold, fresh and sea water; sea water swimming pond; Turkish, steam, vapour, spray &c. All baths are free to residents.*

*Treatment on the lines laid down by Professor Kirk in his "Papers on Health" is a special feature of the establishment. The success of that treatment has been acknowledged on every hand. In many cases of Sciatica, Rheumatism, Lumbago, sea water bathing has been found a speedy and effective cure.*

*There is an excellent 18-hole golf course within a few minutes' walk from the Hydro, and visitors are allowed to play at moderate daily or weekly charges."*





**THE MAGNIFICENT VIEW TO THE SOUTH-WEST OVER THE FIRTH OF CLYDE FROM SEAMILL  
HYDRO** *(AILSA CRAIG CAN CLEARLY BE SEEN IN THE LEFT-CENTRE DISTANCE).*



**SUNSET OVER ARRAN FROM SEAMILL BEACH**

## JAMES NEWBIGGING AND HIS FAMILY



— **James Newbigging** (1842 – 1911)

James Newbigging was born on 19<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1842 in Carnwath, Lanarkshire. He was one of five children to his parents, James Newbigging and his wife, Janet Prentice.

By 1866, James had moved to Edinburgh and found occupation as a Master Joiner and Wheelwright. In that year he married Margaret Haddow, Spinster, of Shotts. Margaret died in July 1868, just 23 years old, and five months after giving birth to their son, also named James.

After the death of Margaret, James's older sister-in-law, Marian Tweedie, joined him from Canada as his housekeeper. A few years later, in June 1871, James re-married. His bride was Catherine McMillan, Spinster, a Domestic Servant living in the Dean district of Edinburgh. Catherine, aged 26, was a native of Dores, a small village nestling on the shores of Loch Ness, about 6 miles south-west of Inverness, where her father was a shoemaker.

James and Catherine, living in Edinburgh, had seven children together. Their eldest son, John, was born in 1872, Thomas Duncan, (1873), Mary Helen (1874), Janet Prentice (1876), Catherine (1879), and Marion Grierson.

Some months after the birth of their daughter, Marion, in May 1881, the Newbiggings moved from Edinburgh to Seamill Hydro, where James took up the position of Head Bathman and Manager, living in "The Lodge" at the entrance to the grounds of the Sanatorium. Then, at Seamill, nearly four years later, their youngest child, a son, was born in February 1885. This later arrival was named Duncan Robertson Newbigging.



**James and Catherine Newbigging and family.**

*[Courtesy of Bronwyn Fraser]*

It is reported that in 1882, Dr. Kirk requested James Newbigging to join him at Seamill. And so James, together with his wife Catherine, and their (then) seven children, joined him there in that year. Exactly why Dr. Kirk chose James, and also why James accepted his invitation, is not known. John Kirk and James Newbigging clearly knew each other. James was certainly a member of John Kirk's Evangelical Union Congregation at the Brighton Street Church. The Minister certainly knew James and must have been impressed by his outgoing personality, his diligence and talent for hard work and with his ability for making people feel at ease in his presence.

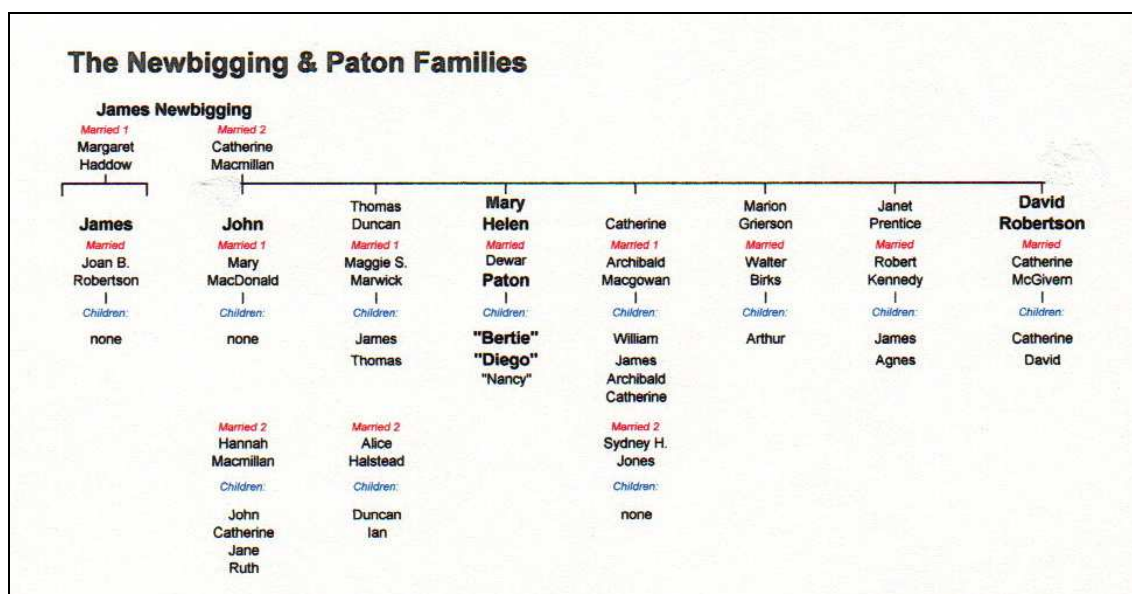
James joined Seamill Hydropathic in 1882, as Head Bathman and Manager, with his wife, Catherine, as Housekeeper, and only a few years later, on the death of Dr. Kirk in 1886, became sole proprietor. He was a member of the Evangelical Union church in Ardrossan. James was obviously successful in his endeavours as was his wife, Catherine, who became Matron and gave personal attention to the lady patients.

In 1898, Macdonald's Scottish Directory and Gazetteer contained the following entry:- *Seamill Hydropathic, Seamill. Hot sea-water baths. Massage by certified masseur. Prospectus, on application, from J. Newbigging, proprietor.*

The Sanatorium was subsequently described by Edward Bruce Kirk in his 1904 edited edition of his father's "Papers on Health" in the following terms:

*"Here treatment was carried on with great success, until it became evident that larger premises were needed. In 1882, Mr. James Newbigging was secured by Dr. Kirk as manager and head-bathman, and worked under Dr. Kirk until the latter's death in 1886. Mr. Newbigging then bought the establishment. Since that time, it has constantly increased in size and efficiency until it now accommodates close on a hundred patients. Very many have come to Seamill almost or quite hopeless, and have left it with health restored and vigour renewed. It ought to be mentioned here that in all his dealings with this establishment Dr. Kirk never had any pecuniary interest in it, always giving his services free. Nor has the writer, or any of Dr. Kirk's family, any pecuniary connection with the place. All information as to the establishment may be had by writing to the Proprietor or Manager, Seamill Sanatorium, West Kilbride, Scotland."*

In 1886, on the death of Dr. Kirk, James Newbigging became the sole proprietor of Seamill Hydro, although at that time he did not own any shares in the holding company. He and Catherine with their seven children, together with James's son James, by his first marriage, to Margaret Haddow, lived in the small house called, variously, "Hydro Lodge" or "Hydro Cottage" (now demolished) on the Ardrossan Road beside the then entrance driveway in the grounds of the Hydro.



James (jr) son of James and Margaret Haddow, was born in 1868. He had married, in 1903, Joan Brown Robertson, daughter of a local grocer in Fairlie. James and Joan had no children. Joan died in 1947.



James and Catherine's eldest son, John, lived in the house nearby called "Claremont". In the Census of 1891 for West Kilbride, under the entry for Seamill Sanatorium, John Newbigging, age 19, is described as being employed as a masseur. John married Mary Macdonald in 1898. They had no children and sadly Mary or "Polly" as she was always known died in 1902. John then remarried, in 1904, Hannah Macmillan, who came from Harrogate. They had four children: John, Catherine, James Heron (*see below*), and Ruth.

Management of the Sanatorium was always very much a family affair. In 1901, James's two eldest sons, James and John (*aged 32 and 28 respectively*) were involved, with their parents, in the running of the Hydro. James as a Tailor and John as a Masseur. It is certain that John and Catherine's other children, in their late teens and early twenties, also lent assistance to their parents and to the guests.

Thomas Newbigging, being a Medical Student at Glasgow University, would have been particularly helpful. The experience he gained at Seamill was no doubt most useful in gaining his Medical Degree in 1896. After qualifying, he married Maggie Marwick in 1897 and settled down as a GP in Crawfordjohn near Abington in Lanarkshire. They had two children – James, who died at the age of 6 years, and Thomas. Sadly, Maggie died in 1902. Thomas married again, in 1907, to Alice Mary Helstead, of Bradford. Thomas, continued his Medical Practice in Crawfordjohn and with Alice had two children – Duncan and Ian. Thomas died in Lanark in 1948.

The youngest of their children, and the only one to be born at Seamill, was David Robertson Newbigging, who joined this world in February 1885. After schooling, David enrolled as a Veterinary Student at Glasgow University. He did not take his degree but became a farmer. He took on the management of the farm at Routdaneburn at Dalry which his father had purchased a few years earlier. Unmarried, he lived there with a housekeeper, Catherine McGivern and her younger brother, a general farmhand.

Of the four daughters, Janet married a Doctor of Medicine, Robert Pettigrew Kennedy, in 1909. They lived in Coatbridge for a while before moving to Yorkshire, where their two children – James and Agnes were born. Both of whom, eventually, were shareholders in the Hydro.

On the outbreak of The Great War, Robert enlisted and was Commissioned in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and served with distinction until the war ended. He and Janet, with their two children then emigrated to South Africa and settled in Potgeitersrus (*now Mookopane*), North Transvaal.

Catherine Newbigging married Archibald Macgowan, a Commercial Traveller, in 1899. They had four children and, and after living in several places for a few years returned to Seamill with their children, to live at the house called "Seaview", in the Hydro grounds. Their youngest child, Catherine, was born at Seamill in 1910. Archibald died at Seamill in 1921. Some years later, in 1927, at St. Enoch Station Hotel, Glasgow, Catherine married Sydney Hughes Jones, a Bank Clerk from London. Catherine was appointed a director of the company following the death of Mary Helen in 1932 (*see below*). Interestingly, Catherine, in 1927, gave her address as the Marine and Curlinghall Hotel in Largs, as did her daughter, also named Catherine.

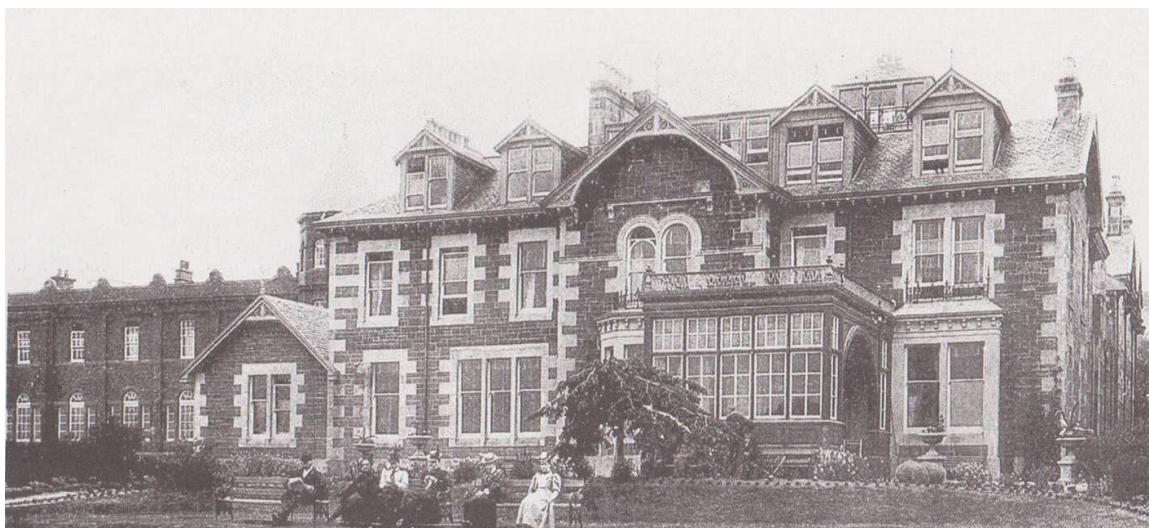
The youngest of James and Catherine's daughters was Marion Newbigging. Marion married a Provision Merchant, Walter Hutton Birks, in 1906, and settled down in Middlesborough. They lived there, in Claude Avenue, in a house named "Routenburn". They had one child – Arthur, born in 1907. Some years later the family moved to Hastings. Marion died there in 1966.

However, of all James's children, most is known about Mary Helen, the eldest of his and Catherine's four daughters. In 1900, at the age of 26, she was working in the Sanatorium's kitchen. For which it seems, she may have had full responsibility. She may have studied Cookery and Domestic Science at Glasgow but this has not been established. A photograph of her in the Sanatorium's kitchen appeared in the first edition of Mrs. E.W. Bruce's "Tried Favourites Cookery Book" (*q.v and see photo below*).

Mary Helen married in 1906. Her husband was Dewar Paton (*the author's grandfather*), Bank Agent of West Kilbride, whose father, as we have already seen, was one of the first shareholders in the Seamill Sanatorium in 1881. She was 32 years old and Dewar was 34. They settled in West Kilbride in a large comfortable red sandstone house called "Rowallan" at the corner of Overton Drive and the Yerton Brae.

Mary was an extremely practical, industrious and creative woman – and very productive. Her grand-children have retained many items of her personal handiwork. Among these, an ornately carved Piano Stool and a matching magazine rack are two examples, together with many items of napery of Irish linen carefully handcrafted and decorated with picked needlework. Soon after her marriage to Dewar Paton, she installed a hand loom in the hallway of their house "Rowallan". As a consequence, it was common practice that every person entering or leaving the house had to add one row to the current work in progress!

Mary and Dewar had three children, Robert "Bertie", James "Diego" (pronounced "Deego"), and Agnes "Nancy", each of whom was a shareholder in Seamill Hydropathic. However, only "Bertie" and "Diego" were actively involved in the management of the Hydro, although "Nancy" was made a director in 1953 following the death of her uncle, David.



**Seamill Sanatorium in 1900.**

The original building was purchased in 1879 and opened as a Sanatorium in 1880 but extensive additions were made to the building in 1882 under the design of the Architect T. Smellie, of Kilmarnock, These can be seen above (*on the left of the main building*) as compared with the picture of the original building.



MARY NEWBIGGING IN SEAMILL HYDRO KITCHEN. (1900)

In Slater's Directory of Ayrshire for 1903 Seamill is described as "*a small village on the sea shore, about 1 mile from West Kilbride. It is a delightful summer resort and has a good Hydropathic establishment, Mr. James Newbigging being manager.*" Elsewhere in that publication, he is also listed as being the proprietor.

In the Guide to West Kilbride, published in 1906, the Hydropathic is described in particularly favourable terms, "*From small beginnings what great things arise*" is the thought that strikes us as we look at this almost palatial establishment, which was founded, with room for twelve patients, by the late Dr. Kirk of Edinburgh, and now accommodates nearly 150 individuals. This success has been won largely by foresight and enterprise. Everything about the institution is up-to-date; splendid baths have been added and all things that minister to the comfort of the afflicted have been secured. The Seamill air, supplemented by the almost magical efficacy of the Baths, has wrought wonders and as a consequence the establishment has a very great reputation. Folks suffering from nervous breakdown, disorders of the blood, rheumatism and kindred complaints have been distinctly benefited by a stay here."

At about this time, Seamill Sanatorium and Hydropathic was incorporated as "Seamill Hydropathic Ltd", and on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1906, became a (Private) Limited Liability Company, Registered in Scotland (No: SC006322). The Ardrrossan & Saltcoats Herald edition dated November 9, 1906 reported that "*among the public companies registered last week was that called "The Seamill Hydropathic".*"

The principal object of the Company was "to take over as a going concern the business now carried on at Seamill, in the County of Ayr, as a Hydropathic and Sanatorium and all of the Assets and Liabilities of the Proprietor of that business in connection therewith".

The company was incorporated under the Companies Act 1900 (Sec. 2 (3)) under which it did not invite members of the public to subscribe for its shares. The Capital of the company on Incorporation was 12,000 shares of £1 each.

The initial shareholders were James Newbigging and his immediate family, thus:

James Newbigging, Seamill, Ayrshire, Portioner.	5000 shares
Catherine Newbigging, Seamill, Ayrshire, wife of Jas. Newbigging.	5000 shares
James Newbigging, Junior, Hydropathic Manager, Seamill, Ayrshire.	250 shares
John Newbigging, Seamill, Ayrshire, Portioner.	250 shares
Janet Prentice Newbigging, Seamill, Ayrshire, Spinster.	250 shares
David Robertson Newbigging, Seamill, Ayrshire, Veterinary Student.	250 shares
Thomas Duncan Newbigging, Abington, Physician.	250 shares
Mary Helen Newbigging, Seamill, Ayrshire, Spinster.	250 shares
Mrs. Catherine Macgowan (née Newbigging), Glasgow, married.	250 shares
Mrs. Marion Birks (née Newbigging), Middlesborough, married.	250 shares

The Articles of the Company specified that the appointment of James Newbigging (Sr) was as Governing Director and the appointment was for life and with virtually absolute powers over the company, its operations and its management. James Newbigging (Jr) is listed as Secretary of the Company. There were no other directors.

The Hydropathic continued to develop and to prosper and its reputation as a haven of peace and restoration grew ever wider, under the active and progressive management of James Newbigging and his family.

However, James Newbigging died suddenly, after a very brief illness, on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1911. His death was widely reported and an obituary appeared in the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald a few days later.

***"James Newbigging, Seamill. Over a wide area would the news of the death of Mr. James Newbigging, of Seamill Hydropathic, spread consternation. The sad event occurred on Monday. Mr. Newbigging was widely known, for his clientele was large, and his genial personality was not the least of the attractions of the popular hydropathic at Seamill. A native of Carnwath in Lanarkshire, Mr. Newbigging came to Seamill about 25 years ago as the manager of the then comparatively small sanatorium. Prior to that time he had followed the trade of a joiner in Edinburgh, where he came in touch with the late Professor Kirk, at that time proprietor of the Seamill establishment. After managing the concern for two years, Mr. Newbigging purchased the business in 1888, and straightway set himself to the task of extending it. Under his care, the hydropathic grew steadily in public favour, and the accommodation for visitors had to be increased year by year, until at the present day it is a large establishment, equipped in the most modern manner. A man of strong character and active intellect, he was a most interesting conversationalist, a fact which accounted in some measure for the success of the enterprise to which his later years had been devoted. Attached to the Evangelical Union denomination, he took a keen interest in the work of the E.U. Congregational Church in***



*Ardrossan. His wife predeceased him only four months ago, and he is mourned by a family of four sons and four daughters, all of whom are married save the youngest son.” [Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald, 8 Sept. 1911]*

From 1886, James Newbigging was the Governing, and sole, Director of Seamill Hydropathic Ltd. However, on his death, three directors were then appointed. These were his two eldest sons, James and John, together with his eldest daughter, Mary Helen. Although, by this time married and with her own family, Mary took a keen and active interest in the affairs of the Hydro and continued as a director until her death in 1932. That interest was then carried on, following her death, by her husband, Dewar Paton, and their two sons, Robert and James.

James Newbigging died on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1911, at the age of 68, just over four months after the death of Catherine, his wife of forty years. He was a convivial and popular man by all accounts, strong-willed and with a great character. His passing was deeply mourned. On the death of their parents, their shareholdings in the company were divided among their eight children. The management of the Hydropathic was then placed in the hands of three of his children, James, John and Mary Helen. All became directors of the Company. Each of whom remained a director and shareholder until their deaths.

In the Probate Inventory of James Newbigging's estate, he is described as the registered owner of 5000 shares of £1 each in Seamill Hydropathic Ltd (fully paid) and numbered 1 to 5000. James Newbigging was also the owner of "Routdaneburn" farm at Dalry, some twelve miles from Seamill. It can be reasonably supposed that the ownership of this dairy farm was extremely beneficial to the guests at the Hydropathic, in that fresh produce would be regularly available at all seasons of the year. This view could be reinforced by the fact that James's youngest son, David Robertson Newbigging, was at that time, the tenant farmer at Routdaneburn. Under the terms of his father's Will, David was granted the option to acquire the farm and all therein.

James Newbigging was also the owner of the nearby houses "Spottiswood" and "Claremont" in Seamill. The former of which he had purchased in 1906.

Following the death of his father, James Newbigging, the Hydropathic was managed by John Newbigging, then aged 39, and who was, at that time, the Company Secretary and Assistant Manager and living in the house called "Claremont".

John's wife, Mary "Polly" (Macdonald), had died in 1902. John and Mary had no children. However, John married again, in 1904, to Hannah (Macmillan) of Harrogate. They then had four children: John Alexander, Catherine, James Heron (*see below*) and Ruth Elizabeth. They all lived in the villa "Claremont" together with a domestic servant, Jeannie Wright, from Irvine. John continued to manage the Hydro until his death on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1938.



**A VIEW OF THE FRONTAGE OF SEAMILL HYDRO IN THE 1920S**



**AN AERIAL VIEW OF SEAMILL IN 1938** *[THE HYDRO CAN BE CLEARLY SEEN IN THE CENTRE]*

Further additions and alterations were then made during the years 1920-25 by the Architects T.P. Marwick & Son of Edinburgh. Additional work was carried out in 1934.

A cocktail bar was added in 1962, thus ending the Hydro as a Temperance establishment which it had remained for 82 years. The ballroom and Conference Centre were added in 1967.

When John Newbigging died in 1938, his half-brother, James, son of James Newbigging by his first wife, Margaret Haddow, then became manager of the Hydro until his own death in 1942. It appears that James was both a traveller and a keen photographer. In November 1887, the Ardrossan & Saltcoats Herald reported that James had given a Magic Lantern entertainment which was apparently well-received. In 1898 he gave an illustrated lecture on the subject of "A trip up the Rhine". In April 1899, he was elected a Vice-President of the Ardrossan and District Camera Club, and in 1901, its President. James married Joan Brown Robertson of Fairlie, in 1903. Joan, aged 31, was a spinster and both parents were deceased. Her father had been a grocer. James and Joan had no children. Joan died five years after her husband, in 1947, at Hydro Cottage in the grounds of the Hydro, where they had lived since their marriage.

When James Newbigging died in 1942, the only surviving child of James and Catherine Newbigging was David Robertson Newbigging. He was a farmer at Corrachave at Sandbank near Dunoon, and was persuaded to take over the management of the Hydro, which he did in 1944. He was the youngest of James and Catherine's children, and was the only one to have been born at Seamill. He had studied at the Glasgow Veterinary College and had been a farmer throughout his adult life. As we have already seen, he was the tenant at Routdaneburn Farm at Dalry which had been bought by his father in the early 1900's. He had married his housekeeper, Catherine McGivern in 1914. They then had two children, Catherine (1915) and David (1917).

Upon his father's death in 1911, David sold Routdaneburn Farm, which he had inherited under his father's Will, and purchased Bents Farm at Pinwherry further to the south of Ayrshire. Then, in 1914, David and Catherine McGivern were married. They had two children, Catherine and David.

After many years as a sheep farmer, David sold Bents Farm and took over Corrachave Farm at Sandbank on the beautiful Cowal Peninsula just north of Dunoon, Argyll. However, in 1944, he and Catherine gave up the farm and moved to take up management of the Hydro and resided in the Lodge "Hydro Cottage" at Seamill.

On John Newbigging's death in 1942, his nephew, Robert Charlton "Bertie" Paton, a lawyer and Mary Newbigging's elder son, who had been a director of the Company for a number of years was then elected Chairman of the Company. *(see Newbigging & Paton Family Tree above)*

David Newbigging collapsed and died suddenly of a Heart Attack in October 1951 at the Ice Rink in Ayr. His wife, Catherine, a shareholder of Seamill Hydropathic Ltd, died in 1966, at Kilmun by Dunoon.

On David's death, James Newbigging Paton, the younger son of Mary Helen and Dewar Paton, was encouraged to take over the management of the Hydro. James was a farmer. Interestingly enough, he was never called or referred to by his given name of James. He was always called "Diego" by everyone – be they family members or just casual acquaintances - although quite why this should have been remains a mystery to me!



“Diego” had been educated at Strathallan School in Perthshire. After leaving school, he then spent a year at the West of Scotland Veterinary School in Glasgow (in the same first year as “James Herriot”) before taking up farming as a full-time occupation. He had married Mary McIntyre of Poteath Farm at Hunterston in 1937. They had two children, Dewar and Catherine. In 1940, Diego and Mary took over the farm of “Nether Rigg” at Closeburn, near Thornhill in Dumfriesshire. However, following his Uncle David’s death he moved, with his wife, Mary, and their two children to Seamill and took up residence in “Hydro Cottage” in 1952. He continued as manager until the Hydro was sold in 1965.

By that time, the Hydro had 40 guest rooms and was in significant need of refurbishment. Dewar and Mary Helen’s elder son, Robert Charlton Paton (the author’s father), a lawyer by profession, was a director of the company from 1938 and Secretary of the company from 1942. He became Chairman of the Company after the death of James Newbigging and remained so until it was sold in 1965.

“Diego” Paton’s son, also called Dewar, was chef at the Hydro for a number of years. Later, after the sale of the Hydro, Dewar owned and managed the 9-room “Glen Eldon” hotel on the Greenock Road in Largs. The hotel continues in business, but has since been renamed and is now called the “Woodhouse Hotel”.

Mary Helen Paton (née Newbigging) died in 1932, aged 57. Her husband, Dewar, died in 1950 at the age of 79. When Mary died her shareholding in the Hydro was divided between her siblings, her husband and their three children.



**MARY HELEN NEWBIGGING**



**JAMES “DIEGO” PATON**



**ROBERT “BERTIE” PATON**

On David’s death in 1951, the directors of the Company were Patons – “Bertie” and “Diego” - Mary and Dewar’s two sons.



When the Company was later sold, in 1965, the directors and the several shareholders were still all family members – Newbiggings and Patons – grandchildren and great-grandchildren of James and Catherine Newbigging.

Seamill Hydro, was always a popular venue and a successful business. It was owned and managed by the Newbigging family almost from its inception in 1880 until 1942. Thereafter, although the shareholders continued to be mainly direct Newbigging family members, the direction and management of the business was in the hands of the Paton's. It was very much a family affair, and indeed continues to be so to the present day, although under a different family.

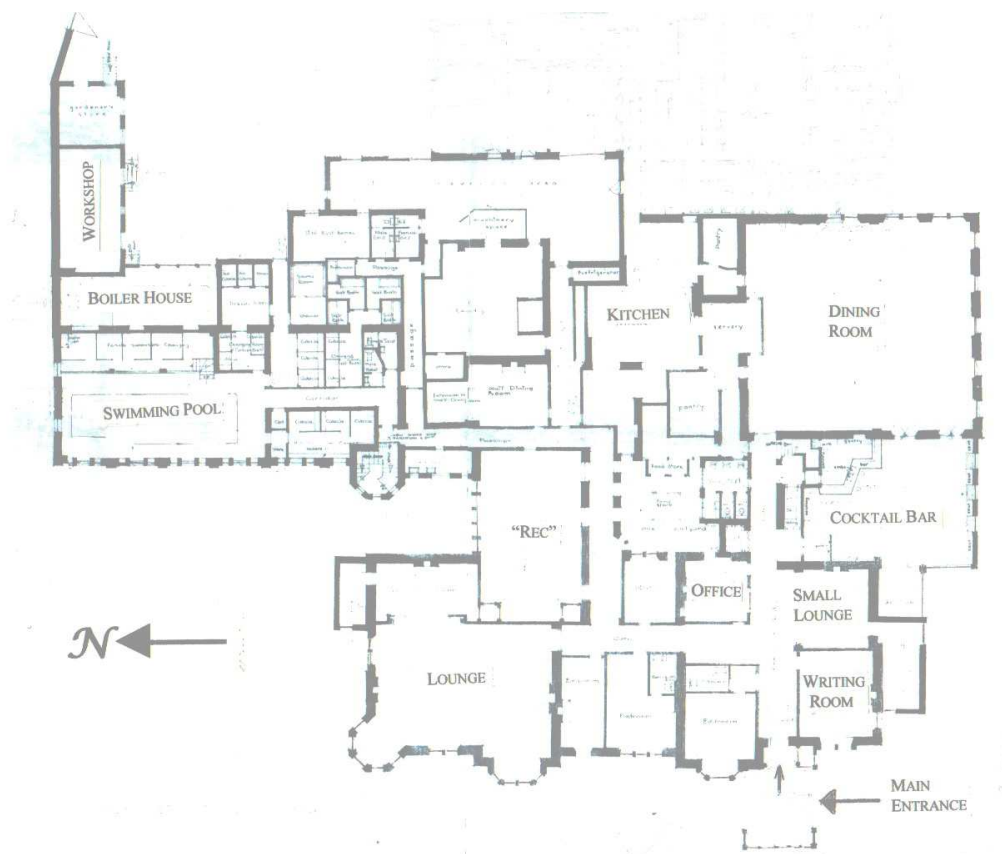
From small beginnings, the business was grown and developed under first, James Newbigging, then after him, by his sons John and James. By 1965, Seamill Hydro, although by then in need of further development, was a thriving business and a popular, if somewhat traditional, seaside hotel. Since then it has secured investment and undergone a remarkable development. Today, it is one of the foremost and most sought-after venues for Weddings and many other memorable functions.

### ***The author has vivid personal memories of Seamill Hydro:***

*As a young boy throughout the 1940s, I spent many happy hours both at the Hydro and its beautiful grounds and also on the magnificent beach which fronts the hotel. The sandy beach was perfect for building sandcastles, or walking in the surf at the water's edge, and searching for flotsam washed up in the high tide mark. A favourite occupation was scrabbling in the rock pools at the mouth of the Kilbride Burn searching for crabs and other sea creatures which had been stranded by the out-going tide.*

*In those days, the Hydro grounds were entered from the Ardrossan Road, via a divided "In" / "Out" driveway. [There is now a completely new entrance to the hotel grounds; the former entrance and also the adjacent "Hydro Cottage" has been demolished]. On the left as you entered the driveway, set back and behind a tall hedge, were the staff houses. Beyond these, at the end of the slightly raised planted strip which formed the division of the driveway was the large covered car park almost the size of an aircraft hanger!. In front of this stood an old manual petrol pump. The drive then continued down the south side of the Hotel, past the house called "Seaview" on the left, always known as "The Annexe", between "The Annexe" and the sea wall was a large tree around the base of which, in springtime, was the most luxurious carpet of bluebells! While immediately behind this was the Tennis Court.*

*The drive continued and curved round to the right ending inside a very large glassed-in porte-cochère beside the steps to the main entrance to the hotel. On the lawn on the seaward side of this Porte-cochère was a Weeping Elm tree. This remarkable tree is a prominent and lovely feature which stands proudly there to this day.*



**Seamill Hydro Layout Plan in 1965**

*On arriving at the main entrance to the Hydro, guests would alight inside the porte-cochère in comfort and were completely sheltered from the elements. To the west of this porch and covering the entire frontage of the hotel was a large lawn extending between the front of the hotel and down to the sea wall overlooking the beach. A footpath ran northwards along the front of the building, between the building and the lawn, past the large Summer House up to a large sliding door which led out onto the Sandy Road. I remember that there was always a strong smell of salt sea air at the Hydro regardless of the time of year. The views over the Firth of Clyde from the front of the Hydro are quite spectacular. Beside the front porch a footpath led down the south side of the lawn, past the Weeping Elm, to a small shelter and a heavy sliding door at the top of a flight of steps leading down to the magnificent sandy beach which fronted the hydro and stretched northward along the coast, past the golf course to Ardnail Bay and Portencross just over a mile distant. .*

*From the porch-cochère, some wide steps led up to the main front door of the hotel and, on passing through, a long corridor stretched away forward to the Dining Room. On entering the hotel, immediately on the left was a large bedroom, beyond this was a wide staircase leading up to the bedrooms on the first floor. Past this staircase was a corridor leading left to the "Big Lounge". At the entrance to the Lounge, this corridor then turned right and continued past the "Recreation Room" or "Rec" as we knew it. This was a large parquet floored room with a small stage at its western end, and on which was an overstrung upright piano, on which my father ("Bertie") used to play traditional jazz tunes. Opposite the door into the "Rec", on the wall of the corridor, was a brass tap with a large filter attached which was the outlet for the spring water for which the Hydro was well known. It was reputed to have therapeutic qualities, it may well have done but I thought it tasted awful! Past the "Rec", the corridor turned left. On the right, just at the turn of the corridor, was the entrance to the staff Dining Room, the Laundry and the kitchen. Past this entrance, the corridor passed a door on the left. Inside this was a stone tower with a steep and narrow spiral staircase that ascended up to the bedrooms on the first floor. Opposite this door, the corridor ended. Here was the entrance to the Baths. In this area was the salt-water swimming pool, as well as steam rooms, and rooms with salt- and fresh-water showers. There was a balcony above these rooms overlooking the pool where guests could change or relax. On the wall opposite the balcony was a long wall containing several large windows which gave in a great deal of light. It was here I had my first swimming lessons – the Baths were often little used on Sundays and my parents used to take me there and we would spend a couple of hours swimming in the pool and afterwards having hot salt-water showers.*

*Returning to the hotel main entrance: past the entrance to the corridor just described, was "Reception" or the "Office" as we knew it! This was the nerve centre of the hotel. It was a small room and in it was a large desk, two comfy chairs either side of a small fireplace and a 10-line "Doll's Eye" switchboard on the right just inside the door. There was also a small safe and, of, course, a set of pigeon holes for all the room keys and guests' mail. An opening with a vertical sliding shutter looked out over the corridor and onto the "Small Lounge"*

*On the same side, and beyond the "Office" were the Gent's toilets and beyond that, on the left, almost at the Dining Room doors was a steeply-sloping downward narrow passage that led to the "Boots Hall" - always referred to as "The Boots". This was where the "Boots Boy" lived. His workplace was in a*



*small cubicle at the end of this passage. It was his job, every evening when all had retired to bed, to collect the shoes which guests would leave outside their bedroom door and to take them to the "Boots Hall" where he would clean and polish them before returning them, in immaculate condition, and placing them outside the door of their respective owner's bedroom. He doubled as general porter and errand boy as well as dealing with all the menial tasks required of such a person in a busy establishment.*

*Just inside the main entrance front door, on the right-hand side, was the "Writing Room". It was here that, in 1962, my fiancée, Pamela, was introduced to the whole family. It was on the occasion of the Annual General meeting of the Hydro, and most of the shareholders had assembled to attend the meeting. Included in that august gathering was "Aunt Kate" – this was Catherine McGivern, widow of David Robertson (uncle David) Newbigging. Pam afterwards described her introduction to the family as a quite nerve-racking experience – although she apparently passed with flying colours!*

*Further along this passage, and opposite the "Office" was an open area called the "Small Lounge". Beyond that, towards the Dining Room was the Public Telephone in a small kiosk [where now is the entrance to the Cocktail Bar] and beyond this, at the end of the corridor and immediately to the right of the Dining Room door, was a steep curved stair, rising over the telephone kiosk, which lead up to the bedrooms on the first floor.*

*At the very end of the passage facing the main entrance to the hotel was the Dining Room. This was very large, with the ceiling being supported by several large round columns. On the left on entering, and behind a screen was the Servery where two doors lead into the kitchens. Often on Sundays, my parents together with my brother, in a high chair, and myself would have lunch in the Dining Room. But frequently, we all stayed in the Hydro on Saturday nights. My brother and I would be put to bed and one of the staff would kindly agree to look in on us occasionally to make sure we were sleeping soundly, while my parents would enjoy a leisurely dinner and the evening together. The next day we all then enjoyed both breakfast and lunch in this grand room.*

*In my early childhood, probably at the age of 3 or 4, both the Glasgow Rangers and Celtic Football teams used to come and stay, every year, at Seamill Hydro for a "Week-End Away" (on separate occasions, of course). Because my father was at the hotel most weekends (as a director), I got to kick a ball about with both teams on the front lawn at the hotel. I must be one of the few people in the world who can legitimately claim to have kicked a football about with both the Rangers and the Celtic teams! During the war years, my father, who was a member of the Clyde River Patrol, used to attend occasional live firing practice sessions on an anti-aircraft gun that was situated on the foreshore, at South Inch, between Seamill and Ardrossan. The gun was, I think, a Bofors, but I could well be mistaken. There was a small encampment here where occasional gunnery training sessions were held. These were organised by the RNR shore training establishment, HMS Graham, Whitefield Road in Glasgow.*

*During the war years and for a few years afterwards, the "Hydro" had a Rolls Royce Estate car, known to everyone as "The Hydro 'Bus". This was employed to take guests and their luggage to and from the railway station at West Kilbride. It was a very majestic vehicle and the rear body was constructed largely of wood in what, I think, is called "Countryman Estate" style, which was also*

*known in those days as a “Shooting Brake”. I am not sure but I think it may have been a 1939 Rolls-Royce Wraith Binder Estate Wagon.*



**A ROLLS-ROYCE ESTATE CAR SIMILAR TO THAT USED BY SEAMILL HYDRO IN THE 1940S**

*I have many very fond memories of Seamill Hydro when I was a child. It is a very popular and successful hotel now – as indeed it was in my childhood – but it has been extensively modernised and extended over the last 30 years; with the Dining Room extended and a large Ballroom added. Where the Ballroom is now, was the Laundry. This was always a busy and confusing place with clouds of steam and machinery belts driving overhead.*

*At the entrance to the Hydro grounds – at the top of the “Out” driveway on the left-hand side, and next to the Ardrossan Road, was “Hydro Cottage” [also known as “The Lodge”] where my uncle, James Newbigging Paton and his wife, Mary, lived in the 1950’s and 60’s, with my cousins, Dewar and Catherine. James was universally known by the nickname “Diego”. He was originally a farmer, but was made manager of the Hydro in 1952. He was manager there until the Hydro was sold in 1965. The Lodge is no longer there, having been demolished, along with the former entrance and driveway to create a new and larger entrance to the grounds of the hotel further along the Ardrossan Road.*

*Between “Hydro Cottage” and the Laundry was an extensive vegetable garden with flower beds at the side. On the north side and beyond the Laundry was the Boiler House and built against the Sandy Road wall was a two-storey building that contained the Engineer’s Workshop and above it his apartment. The Engineer was responsible for all maintenance on the site including the large boiler and calorifier to pump and heat fresh- and sea-water for the Baths. On the other (South) side of the entrance driveway was the Garage - a huge metal*

*barn-like structure with, at its entrance, a manually-operated petrol pump, where the guests' cars and the Hydro "Bus" were refuelled. The kitchen garden between the rear of the Hydro and Ardrossan Road was extensive. Hens were also kept and there was a Piggery. This latter gave rise to a complaint to the local Council in 1958 about a pervasive smell. However, after thorough investigation the complaint was decided to be without foundation.*



**THE AUTHOR'S DAUGHTER, FIONA, ON THE FRONT LAWN AT SEAMILL HYDRO IN 1967**

*The Hydro, up until the mid 1960s, was very traditional and old-fashioned and, both in structure and configuration, little changed since its inception, although some extensive additions were made in the early 1920's. It was unlicensed until the late 1950s, Afternoon tea was always served in the Lounges at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Dinner was always served at 8pm. Two gongs were sounded before Dinner: the first gong, struck at 7pm, was the signal to dress for Dinner, the second gong – struck at 8pm – was to announce that Dinner was now being served. The Dining Room was very large with two lines of circular pillars supporting the roof. The "Servery" was behind a large moveable screen on the left as you entered and on the East wall, opposite the entrance, was a large fireplace with, above it, a huge oil painting of "The Monarch of the Glen".*

*On the beach side of the hotel, on the north side of the lawn and backing onto the Sandy Road, was a magnificent large Summer House (most likely erected in about 1905). This was a wood and glass two-storey building, on the ground floor of which was stored all the equipment for croquet, tennis and putting that the guests might require, while in the upper floor room, surrounded by a large veranda, was the Billiard Room. My father, who greatly enjoyed a game of snooker, frequently played there. He told me once that he thought that Joe Davis had played on the table when he was a guest at the Hydro. [This Summer House, at the present Hydro, and still with its original structure, is now called "The Tea Room"].*





**THE SUMMER HOUSE ("TEA ROOM") AT SEAMILL HYDRO (2013)**

*It is a great pleasure to me to know that many of the happy childhood memories I retain of my times at Seamill Hydro, have also been experienced, in later years, by my wife and young daughter.*

Seamill Hydro has always been a popular venue for functions in the area and a great many clubs and associations have regularly enjoyed its hospitality and facilities. Newspaper reports of a whole variety of functions have appeared over the years. Prominent among these are Glasgow Celtic FC; West Kilbride Country Dance Club; West Kilbride Women's Unionist Committee; West Kilbride Burns Club; the local Company of the Boys' Brigade; West Kilbride Badminton Association; West Kilbride Bowling Club; and many others. Swimming lessons were given in the Swimming Pool, Mannequin Parades, and Whist and Bridge Drives were frequently held there. Other events included Dinner Dances, Special Lunches and Dinners over Christmas and New Year. The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald regularly reported that the Hydro was extremely busy with all accommodation fully booked.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that a grandson of James Newbigging, James Heron Newbigging, was Crown Agent in Kuala Lumpur in 1942. He was then, for many years, with the Attorney General's Office in Tripoli in the Kingdom of Libya until the coup by Muammar Gaddafi in 1969. James Heron was born in West Kilbride, in 1908, the son of John Newbigging and Hannah McMillan. He married Janet Sievwright, a nursing sister, whom he met in Kuala Lumpur, in 1940. He and his wife retired to Islip near Oxford where he died in 1987. He was a shareholder in Seamill Hydro and while overseas gave as his UK address, "Claremont", Seamill, West Kilbride, Ayrshire.

Throughout its long history since 1882, the Hydro has been managed by first, James and Catherine Newbigging then by their second generation family, followed then by their third generation, the Paton family. Since its opening in 1880 and until 1965, the Hydro has had exclusively, as its shareholders, members of the Newbigging and Paton families.

Due to the ill-health of its Chairman and a shortage of development finance, it was felt necessary to seek new owners of the enterprise who would be able to continue its development in a more modern age. It was thus that on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1965, Brisbane Glen Estates of West Kilbride, acquired all the shares in Seamill Hydropathic Ltd. Thus was drawn to a close some 83 years of ownership by the Newbigging and Paton families. Brisbane Glen Estates was founded in 1929 by Robert Barr, the Largs-born millionaire ship-owner, whisky magnate and philanthropist. He was also the owner of the Carlung and Kirktonhall Estates. After his death in 1939, his company and estates continued to flourish and a considerable portion of his wealth was inherited by his granddaughter, Miss Mary Percy, who was the majority shareholder in Brisbane Glen Estates Ltd. For most of her adult life, Miss Percy lived at, and was the very active manager of, the farm at Yonderfield, West Kilbride. She died in 1984 aged 74 years of age.

In 1988, Seamill Hydro was again sold. It was bought then by the Sweeney family who have modernised and invested heavily in the Hydro. Family members run the Hydro today and have created a spectacular and profitable enterprise. Seamill Hydro is still a family business!



**THE WEST FRONTAGE OF SEAMILL HYDRO HOTEL IN 2014.**

Seamill Hydro Hotel is still a private company, and is hugely successful. In 2012, a new restaurant, "The Orangery", was opened and in the same year the family announced that it had concluded a financing arrangement with Santander Bank in the sum of £3m to further the development of the hotel.

The Sweeney family have developed what was a rather run-down establishment into one of the most spectacular hotels on the south-west coast of Scotland. It now has 94 guest rooms and is much sought after and is well-regarded as a prestige venue for both weddings and conferences in the West of Scotland. The Baths - swimming pool, sauna and steam room - have all been extensively refurbished and greatly modernised.

In addition, Glenfoot House Hotel, further south along the road towards Ardrossan, is an annexe to the Hydro. This is also owned and managed by the Sweeney family.



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