

PUBS IN NEW LUCE 1839-1939

The 1839 new statistical account stated that New Luce had three pubs and three shops serving around 180 villagers, most of whom provided labour or trade services to the surrounding farms. The roads and farmhouses had recently been improved, commerce was thriving and new cottages were being built along Main Street.

The three pubs mentioned in the statistical account were not necessarily those known half a century later. The 1841 census is not very helpful – it names Janet Kenmuir (shortly to marry Thomas McKenzie, farmer at High Airieolland), William McMillan and Thomas Hannah as 'Sho' possibly shorthand for shopkeepers, but there's no mention of where or what their properties were. None of the occupants are named as innkeepers. The OS map produced in 1848 does not name any pubs or shops though it does show a building at the junction of Main Street with the Stranraer road, exactly on the site of the Stair Arms. There were no houses on the east side of Main Street except for a long single building approximately where nos 15-21 Main Street sit now. This looks like an inn – might it be the 'middle pub' mentioned by our grandfathers? The pubs would have been substantial buildings – they had more rooms with windows (1861 census) than any other property except the manse. There is no obvious sizeable property on the 1848 map for the third pub.



Janet McKenzie appears in the records again as a licensed grocer and spirit dealer in 1851 and innkeeper in 1855 but the location of her premises, whose valuation is amongst the highest in the village, isn't specified. The first valuation rolls in 1855 do not distinguish between residential and commercial premises – perhaps in reality there wasn't much of a distinction, and business was conducted out of the front room or at the back door of private houses.

The Commercial Hotel:



By 1861 Janet McKenzie's establishment was named as the Commercial Hotel (now 27 Main Street). Janet continued to run the hotel until 1877, shortly before her death at Dranigower, when the business passed to her nephew Charles Kenmuir. But Charles didn't own the hotel – ownership passed to Mrs Mary Hutchison, maiden name McKenzie, in Dranigower and later Daljarrock. She remained the owner until her death at Markdhu Cottage in 1901.

McKenzie's Hotel, later the Kenmuir Arms:

McKenzie's Hotel is marked on the site of the current Kenmuir Arms in the 1893 map. It's difficult to pinpoint when the hotel started up. At least two apparently separate businesses were operating in the village from the 1850s but not concurrently so they may both be earlier names for the same inn. In 1851 Thomas McCarlie occupied the Prince of Wales Inn – location unknown. In 1851 and 1855 Samuel Hannah was a grocer and spirit dealer in a substantial private house. Neither was around by 1861, 1865 and 1871 when Alexander Roxburgh, spirit merchant, was running Roxburgh's Inn (owned by John McMicking, teacher). In 1875 Roxburgh's Inn had vanished but James McKenzie was a grocer in a house, shop and stable owned by John McMicking – location unknown but almost certainly the same premises as Roxburgh's Inn. Finally in 1881 James McKenzie was the owner and innkeeper at McKenzie's hotel and remained so until his death in 1896. The hotel was temporarily unoccupied at the turn of the 20th century.



The Stair Arms:

The only Inn occupying a building which existed on the 1848 map. William McMillan, variously described as shopkeeper, grocer, or spirit dealer, occupied the premises from 1841 to at least 1871, with his wife Janet Hall, daughter Jessie and latterly his granddaughter Joan McKenzie.



William died in 1876. During his tenure as innkeeper the building had been owned by Alexander Douglas, mason in Stranraer. In 1875 it was owned by Alexander's daughter Annie, born in 1833, who had married Peter Collins, a Stranraer stonecutter, in Govan in 1853. At this time of Annie's ownership William Erskine was the innkeeper and occupier.

In 1881 Alexander Collins aged 26 was listed as the innkeeper living with his 22 year old sister Annie, presumably the children of Peter and Annie Collins. The younger Annie Collins married Robert McJannet, farmer in Mains of Larg, later in 1881. Robert took over as owner and innkeeper until at least 1895 and died in 1900. Annie had died in 1894 aged only 36. In 1901 their daughter Maggie Ann McJannet, housekeeper, occupied the inn but the 1905 valuation rolls show that ownership had passed, not to Maggie Ann, but to Robert's nephew Henry McJannet, a draper in Norfolk.

Twentieth century confusions.....:

Then followed a round of musical-inns. By 1905 Charles Kenmuir had left the Commercial Hotel and owned the Kenmuir's Hotel on the river – he had obviously purchased McKenzie's hotel around the turn of the century. James Baird, a former insurance agent and son of local dyker/farmer/would-be property magnate Fergus, now ran the Commercial Hotel, owned by Thomas Hutcheson of Daljarrock. James was also running the Stair Arms (owned by Robert McJannet's nephew Henry), along with his sister Margaret.

The Commercial Hotel was renamed the Temperance Hotel and passed to Peter Fenion, general dealer, around 1910. It didn't last long in this guise and is not mentioned in the 1915 valuation rolls. It became a private house, owned and occupied by Peter Fenion and family.

James Baird must have purchased the Stair Arms by 1906, when he used it as security for a loan of £100 – it is possible that the loan was taken out to buy the hotel itself. He continued to run the hotel until his death from alcoholic poisoning in February 1913. On the death of his wife Elizabeth Hutchinson Skinner the following year, her sister Margaret Edmunds became the licensee as executor of her sister's estate. It



appears this arrangement wasn't automatic – the police were opposed to extending the temporary licence as Margaret had supplied a bottle of whisky to a group of men who turned out to be inebriated. They didn't even drink the whisky on her premises, so the objection seems a little harsh! The matter must have been resolved, as Margaret continued as tenant/licensee after the estate was wound up and ownership of the hotel passed to James's sisters Jane (Meikie) Baird, Margaret Irving and Mary

McDowall, along with the bond raised by James with the hotel as security. The bond was due for repayment in early 1915. Fergus Baird bought the hotel for £110 in August 1915 to allow his daughters to pay off the bond. On the same day as this sale was being arranged, Charles Kenmuir offered to buy the hotel for £120. The Baird family lawyer advised Fergus and Meikie to accept the offer as he believed the value of the property would decrease, as licensed premises would soon be unsaleable.

Fergus didn't take up Kenmuir's offer. He retained Margaret Edmunds as innkeeper at an annual rent of £14. After Fergus's death the hotel was sold to Margaret Edmunds and was still in her hands in 1935. By 1938 the valuation rolls did not mention the name Stair Arms, but Margaret Edmunds owned a substantial private house, which is almost certainly the hotel and was let out to tenants. Margaret's husband Samuel had died

in 1937 and she herself had moved to Wolverhampton. The hotel buildings were eventually knocked down around 1980 and replaced by a small terraced garden.



Eventually the Kenmuir association with New Luce hostelry also ended with Charles Kenmuir's retirement in 1922. Charles Kenmuir had two daughters, Nellie and Isabella, the 'Kenmuir lassies'. They married respectively John Blackwell and John Niven McQuistin, somewhat late in life in 1938. Despite the strong tradition of women innkeepers in the village, neither daughter had wanted to run the business in 1922. The hotel was briefly owned by TH Brownlie, a former Glasgow Tramways engineer, before he was advised on medical grounds to move to warmer climes. In October 1922 the licence was transferred to its new owner William Irvine, who also acquired a shop and hall at the same time – these had previously been owned by Charles Kenmuir and were probably the two storey building at the back of what had been the Commercial Hotel.

Connections between the hotels continued. In April 1924 William's eldest daughter Jessie married Andrew, son of Samuel and Margaret Edmunds of the Stair Arms. Sadly Jessie drowned just over a year after the marriage, and Andrew did not take over his parents' business. And William had his own battles with the licensing authorities. Not long before Jessie's death he had been convicted of selling liquor outside of hours back in November of the previous year, which the prosecution alleged was not an isolated incident. Presumably the fine was paid as the licence was renewed and he continued to trade. William chose to keep the Kenmuir name for his hotel and renamed it the Kenmuir Arms in the early 1930s. William retired to Rhonehouse between 1935 and 1938, when the hotel was owned and occupied by William D Leckie.

The Kenmuir Arms continued to operate into the 21st century. In 2019 the hotel was bought by New Luce Community Trust, with the help of a grant from the Scottish Land Fund. It was completely renovated inside and out, and relaunched in 2023.



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Early photographs from www.newlucehistory.co.uk

Information on licensing issues and background on William Irvine courtesy of Mike Irvine.