

# Introduction

The association between the Marymass Festival and Irvine Carters' Society can be traced back to the 17th century.

Marymass has its origins in the medieval cult of Mary, mother of Jesus. Irvine's church was dedicated to her and the town's main annual fair was celebrated on the 15th August, the day of her assumption.

Today, the Marymass Festival attracts around 50,000 people over 12 days to celebrate the historic traditions of Irvine and its people.

On Marymass Saturday, one of the largest horse-drawn processions in Scotland leads the crowd to Irvine Town Centre to witness the Crowning of the Marymass Queen. The parade, led by the Captain of Irvine Carters, then makes its way to Irvine Moor, where a full afternoon of sporting events takes place, including one of the world's oldest horse race meetings and the legendary Greasy Pole competition - a quirky Marymass tradition which sees teams attempting to climb a 20ft pole coated in grease to retrieve the 'coveted ham'.

With over 80 different events, the Festival runs each August for 12 days.

# Contacts

For further information on the history of Marymass and the Irvine Carters' Society please contact:

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For details on this year's Marymass Festival events programme, please visit:  
[www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/marymass](http://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/marymass)

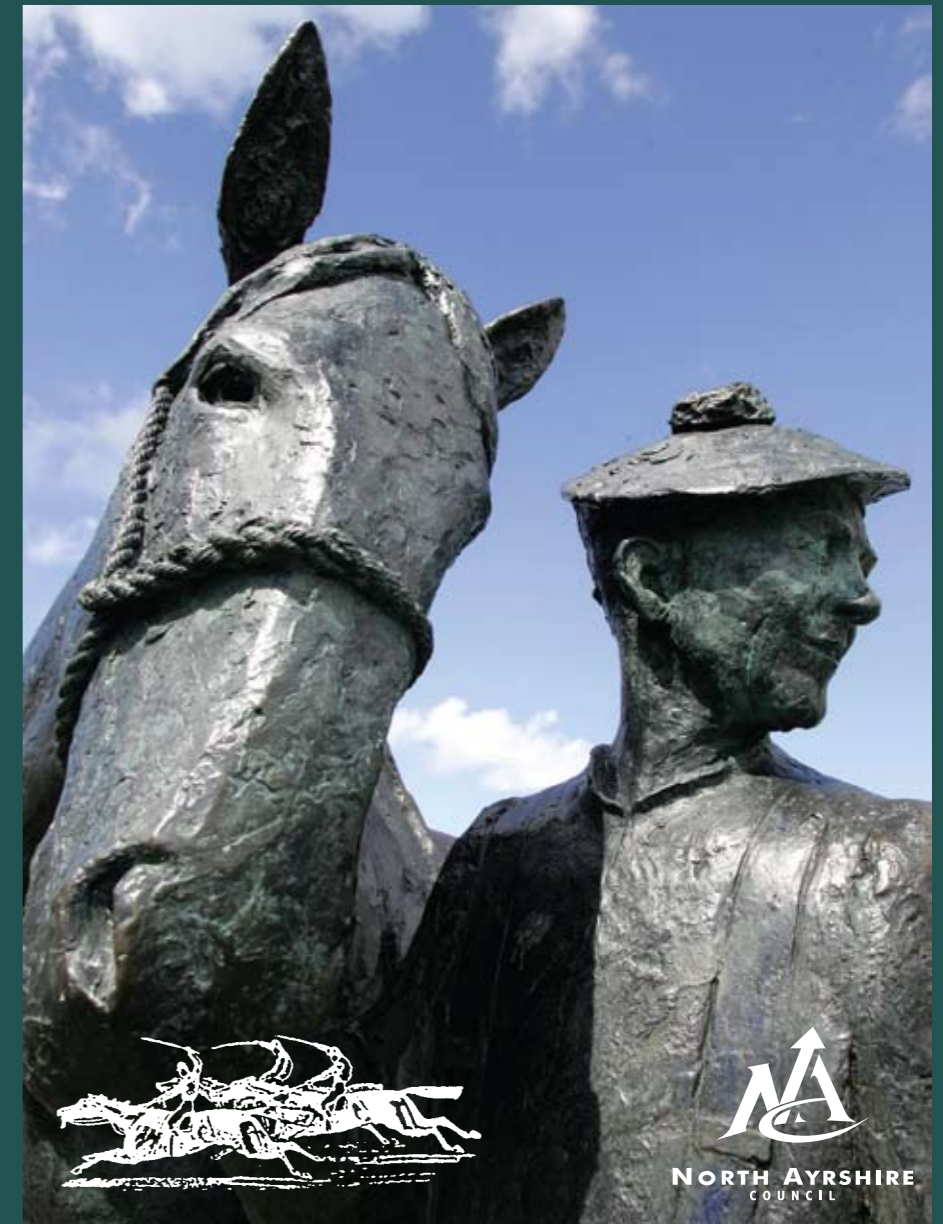


# A Brief History of the

# Marymass Festival & Irvine Carters' Society



Marymass Festival circa 1897



# Marymass Festival Timeline: From the 6th Century to the Present Day

## 6th Century - St Inan is associated with bringing Christianity and the concept of the Virgin Mary to Irvine

**1205** - Earliest mention of St Mary's Church in Irvine. Built on the site of the present Irvine Old Parish Church

**1297** - Treaty of Irvine signed

**1314** - The Battle of Bannockburn. Legend has it that the Irvine Carters fight for Robert the Bruce. Victory to the Scots - Robert becomes Robert I, King of Scotland

**1323** - First evidence of growing popularity for Mary worship in Irvine when Thomas Baxter pledges five shillings annually "to the service of the Blessed Virgin"

**1372** - King Robert II, grandson of Robert the Bruce, grants a Royal Charter to Irvine, thus establishing it as a Royal Burgh

**1374** - King Robert II grants a large charter of land to the Burgh of Irvine for the common good

**1540** - Irvine's Marymass Fair recorded for the first time by George Adam, a Burgh Officer

**1560** - Scotland's Reformation of the church means the end of veneration of saints. St Mary's becomes the parish church with the removal of its altars and the parade of Mary's image through the town is banned

**1563** - Mary Queen of Scots stays one night at Eglinton Castle before passing through Irvine on her way to Ayr

**1568** - Irvine Carters reputed to have fought on Mary's army with Hew, third Lord Eglinton, at the Battle of Langside

**Early 17th Century** - The Marymass Fair is now under the control of the Earls of Eglinton, as Lords of Cunninghame. This lasts until 1747 when guardianship passes to the Town Council

**1670** - The date of foundation on the Irvine Carters flag, where the motto "Once a year we ride in state" appears

**1707** - Irvine Harbour becomes the third most important port in Scotland after American trade was opened to Scottish enterprise

**1753** - Due to the introduction of a new calendar, Marymass week is now held on the third Monday in August. The Carters are formally constituted as a society and receive responsibility for the Fair

**Late 18th Century** - Marymass is now a week long fair: Monday is the annual sale of local wool and linen on the Moor; Wednesday a horse fair is held at Townhead and on the Saturday - its back to the Moor for horse racing

**1832** - Due to a Cholera epidemic in Irvine, Marymass is cancelled this year. Dancing parties are discouraged and the pubs shut early

**1834** - Irvine Council ceases payments to the Irvine Carters for Marymass and it goes into decline until this decision is reversed in 1851

**1864** - Marymass Saturday Parade first visits Seagate Castle. Everyone sings Auld Lang Syne

**1869** - The Town Council bans the Irvine Carters' from selling liquor on Marymass Saturday at the Moor

**1890** - The Monday wool and linen sale has been dropped and now the Wednesday horse fair is under threat. Marymass has now become mainly a social affair

**1914** - Marymass stops for the duration of the First World War. It had been waning in popularity but saw resurgence after the Great War

**1928** - The Carters decide to revamp their parade with the introduction of a Queen and four Marys to commemorate Queen Mary's visit to Irvine

**1939** - Marymass stops for the duration of World War Two and resumes in 1947

**1952** - Irvine Town Council want to introduce motorised vehicles to the Marymass Parade. Irvine Carters' Society object and the proposal is scrapped. Permission is granted for a fairground at Marymass

**1972** - Irvine Town Council grant permission to pull down the Town Bridge

**1998** - Irvine Carters' Society introduce the Fourth Port Parade to the Fullarton area of Irvine

**2000** - Reunion of former Marymass Queen and Marys brings in the new millennium

**2010** - All previous Marymass Queens are invited to attend. The Festival is advertised on television for the first time with record numbers attending