

Argyll Square

In 1844 the original parliamentary boundary was measured from a point in the centre of the square to a radius of ½ mile. Robert Stevenson was commissioned by the town council to measure the boundary and also draw a plan of Oban's main streets. His charge for the work was £5 5s.

Royal Hotel

In 1883 The Oban Times reported that Dr Campbell had purchased the burned down corner of Airds Place and Argyll Square and planned to build a first class temperance hotel estimated at £16,000.

The design is Tuscan architecture described as a less ornate style but no less imposing. On the ground floor are a large number of shops with the fashionable plate glass windows. There are 47 bedrooms within the hotel and the entrance was described as being so large a horse and carriage could drive straight through into the reception area. The staircase was considered to be a major feature of the hotel. Advertisements describe it as being 'six feet wide and so easy of ascent that the effort is scarcely felt. To aged people this is a recommendation'. The bedrooms were all located in the floors above the reception and rooms in the tower had the most commanding views. At the very top of the building is a hexagonal shaped cupola.

In 1885 the owner tried to build in the lane to the right of the hotel. His application was turned down by the council. The primary reason being the lane had to be left so that the 'drunks and incapables and other customers of the police can find their way to their solitary quarters'.

McKelvie Monument

In the centre of the square is a memorial to Dr Robert Balfour McKelvie erected in 1905, four years after his death.

Born on Arran in 1836 he graduated from Glasgow University in 1858. After working for a short time in Ayrshire he was appointed Parochial Medical Officer for Appin and Lismore and shortly after his area was extended to include Ardchattan and Muckairn. His district covered about 18 miles by 7 miles so he had to travel extensively by ferry to reach his patients. He quickly developed a reputation for great care and skill for all his patients both rich and poor. In 1875 he moved to Oban to take up the position of Medical Officer following the death of Dr McGillivray. His responsibilities included the Lorn Combination Poor house and medical officer for the Police, Post Office and Lighthouse Board.

Following the outbreak of infectious disease in 1897, land was secured to build a hospital on the edge of Oban. However there was no money available to build and equip the hospital. Dr McKelvie provided money for a small isolation hospital to be

built which became known as the McKelvie Hospital. The accommodation comprised four wards, a separate administration block and an ambulance shed. The cost of the building and equipment was approximate £2,000.

The hospital opened on 18th October 1897. There were so many people at the opening ceremony that the proceedings had to take place outside. In recognition of his work in establishing the hospital, the townspeople had arranged to present Dr McKelvie with a golden key. But such was his dedication to his work that on the day he was away visiting his patients.

He died on the 5th November 1901, he never married but dedicated his life to his work. He was buried in Oban Parish Church Cemetery.

Dr McKelvie had lived in 21 Argyll Square (above Anderson Banks) and contributed £1,500 towards the building of an isolation hospital which opened in Oban in 1897.

The memorial which is the form of a drinking fountain was erected at a cost of £230. The octagonal structure is between 19 and 20ft high and made entirely of granite placed on a base of three steps. The monument has two drinking fountains and top of the fountain is a column, with the seal of the burgh of Oban carved into the top. The inscription reads

*Robert Barbour McKelvie MD
AD 1836 – 1901
Medical Officer to the parishes of Lismore and Appin 1860-1875 Kilmore and
Kilbride 1875 – 1901
'A man he was to all the country dear'
Erected by his friends*

The McKelvie memorial replaced the Jubilee Fountain erected in October 1887. The Jubilee Fountain was made of cast iron and consisted of a dome supported by four pillars with a drinking fountain underneath and stands on an Arbroath stone foundation. It was painted maroon with the prominent parts being in gilt. It had four drinking cups which were attached to the structure by chains and above the basin was a figure of a stork also in gilt. It was surmounted by a lamp having three arms. The cost of the Jubilee Fountain was £30. It had replaced an even earlier fountain. When the McKelvie monument was built, the Jubilee Fountain was moved to Dungallan Park.

Tolerable inn at Oban

The exact location of the inn described as 'tolerable' by Johnson and Boswell during their visit in 1773 is unknown. Boswell House in Argyll Square was so called as it is supposedly the site of the inn although there is no evidence of this. In 1785 the Duke of Argyll's Factor suggested he consider establishing a 'Publick House' on his lands in Oban as the only 'Publick House' in Oban was operated by Hugh Stevenson.

The exact location of Hugh Stevenson's public house is unknown although it was likely to have been where McPhee's Estate agents/Waterstones is situated as he later built a large house on this site. The accommodation was probably very basic as a traveller in 1785 described it as 'a public house of the very worst sort'.

Oban Prison

Oban's first legal prison cells were located behind the Police Station which was located close to the present Clydesdale Bank. In 1867 prisoners could be detained for up to 3 days and in 1888 the Secretary of State for Scotland stated that prisoners could be kept at Oban for a period of up to 14 days. If prisoners were to be detained for longer than 14 days they would be sent to the prison in Inveraray.

Ice cream

Argyll Square was the location of Oban's first ice cream shop which opened in 1896. However Mr Rossi, the owner, came in for criticism by many of the town councillors as he sold ice cream on a Sunday!