



50 Fascinating Falkirk Facts

1. The name Falkirk is a Scots translation of “Eggesbreth” - “speckled church”: “eaglais” meaning church and “breac” speckled. It is presumed that early settlers built a church of variegated stone. In 1298 the town was recorded as “Faukirke”: “fawe” – speckled and “kirke” – church.
2. An ancient Falkirk Burgh motto, "Better meddle wi' the deil than the Bairns o' Falkirk" gave rise to the people of the town and the football team being referred to as “Bairns”.
3. In the First World War, a tank adopted as a wartime mascot by the people of the town was also named "The Bairn" in honour of this.
4. Leased to Falkirk FC. in 1885 Brockville Park was their home until the club moved to new premises at the end of the 2002/2003 season. The Brockville ground was demolished in 2003/2004 and the land is now home to a branch of Morrisons supermarket. There are several items of Falkirk FC. memorabilia on site including a turnstile from the old ground.
5. Sir Alex Ferguson once played for Falkirk FC. Transferring from Rangers in 1969 until his move to Ayr United in 1973 where he finished his playing career.
6. Some well-known rock bands have come from Falkirk District, including Arab Strap (late 90s/2000s) and The Cocteau Twins (80s).
7. Falkirk’s cattle market or “cattle tryst” was well established by 1710. This was a market held from August to October each year at which Highland cattle had been driven from all parts of Scotland to be sold, mostly to English buyers. They would either slaughter and process the meat locally or would drive them south. During the course of the 18th century Falkirk gradually replaced Crieff as the centre of the cattle trade.
8. The route of the Antonine Wall, built of stone and turf during the Roman occupation, passes through Falkirk district. Some of the best-preserved sections can be seen in the woods at Watling Lodge and Roughcastle, Bonnybridge; in the grounds of Callendar House, Falkirk; and Kinneil, Bo’ness.
9. Callendar House: The first stone building on the site was a tower house built in 1345 by William de Livingston after he was gifted the estates of Callendar by King David II. In 1783 the estate was bought by Aberdeen coppersmith Sir William Forbes, a self-made businessman and captain of industry who founded Carron Iron Works and was a driving force behind the industrial revolution in Scotland. Callendar House has now been restored to its former glory, and is now being developed as a major heritage centre by Falkirk Council.
10. The Carron Company was formed in 1759 as a partnership by three men: two Englishmen, Dr John Roebuck, a chemist, and Samuel Garbett, a merchant, and a wealthy Scottish shipowner, William Caddell.
11. The Carron Company was granted a lucrative contract to supply armaments to the British armed forces and also to the Russian Empire and the newly formed United States of America.

12. The Carron Company produced a wide range of goods including cast iron parts for James Watt's steam engine and made telephone kiosks and police boxes – like Dr Who's Tardis – well into the 1960's but the company went into receivership in 1982.
13. The junction of the Forth and Clyde Canal and the Union Canal is in Falkirk. The Falkirk Wheel replaces a series of eleven locks which lifted (or lowered) boats a height of 25 metres. It used to take several hours, or the best part of a day, to negotiate the locks but now the trip will take a matter of minutes. The locks were closed in 1933.
14. The Falkirk Wheel is a unique rotating boatlift. Officially opened in May 2002, by the Queen, it forms the centrepiece of the Millennium Link. The Wheel cost £17.5million out of a total budget of £84.5million for the canal scheme.
15. Falkirk is the birthplace of "Irn Bru". The drink was first produced by Robert Barr in Falkirk in 1901 under the name Iron-Brew. During World War II the British Government curbed production of 'non-essential' products, causing Iron-Brew to vanish from retailers' shelves until 1946. Around this time there was a move to tighten up legislation on product labelling. In 1946 Barr registered the new name 'Irn-Bru' for their product. It is unknown whether this was a move to dodge the labelling laws, as other soft drink manufacturers in Scotland produce their own versions of Iron-Brew and keep the original spelling to this day.
16. The Falkirk Steeple has been a landmark in Falkirk since the late 15th century. There have been three - the present one dates from 1814 - built to be the town's tolbooth and temporary gaol. The steeple appears on the crest of Falkirk F.C.
17. The current steeple lost its top in June 1927, when it was struck by lightning, but it was soon rebuilt. Fortunately, heavy rain had cleared the streets of pedestrians and there was only one casualty. Falling masonry claimed a Barr's delivery horse called "Iron Brew".
18. The timber for Captain Scott's ship "Discovery", built in Dundee, came from James Jones sawmill at Camelon.
19. McCowan's toffee is famous worldwide. It all started with Mrs McCowan from Stenhousemuir selling toffee from her kitchen window in the late 19th century. The first shop opened in 1905. According to the McCowan website, "The founder of McCowan's Ltd., Andrew McCowan, herded highland cattle in Perthshire as a youth almost 100 years ago". Today, the Highland Cow is a famous trademark of the company". The company went into Receivership in March 2005 but was soon bought and continues to trade under the McCowan's name.
20. In 1934 the largest haul of Roman coins ever discovered in Scotland was found at Falkirk, by workmen on the site now occupied by Tesco's store, together with a piece of cloth said to be the earliest example of tartan yet discovered. The coins and the "Falkirk Tartan" cloth are today in the care of the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.
21. Grangemouth used to be in Stirlingshire. Founded by Sir Lawrence Dundas in 1777, it was built as part of the eastern end of the Forth and Clyde Canal. Its original name was Sealock. Later the name changed to Grange Burn Mouth which flows into the Forth at this point.
22. In February 1939 Scottish Aviation announced their plans to provide central Scotland with what would be the largest airport in the country. Over 500 acres of land were secured and in July 1939 Grangemouth Aerodrome was officially opened. KLM flew a regular service to the Netherlands. During the war

- Grangemouth was a centre for the training of fighter pilots from Britain and all parts of the Commonwealth as well as Poland and Czechoslovakia. After the war ideas on civil aviation changed and the great plan was gradually abandoned.
23. Bo'ness, or Borrowstounness, is derived from the old village name of "Borrowstoun" (the area at the southern edge of the town) and "ness" – a point projecting into the sea. The new town grew up around a thriving harbour – hence Borrowstounness.
 24. A report from the New Economics Foundation in 2005 found that Bo'ness Town Centre was one of the least "cloned" towns in Britain, because of its range of local character shops. It listed Bo'ness in the "Top 10 home towns with most local identity". A town trail is available online at www.bo-ness.org.uk
 25. Bo'ness town centre is being upgraded as part of a Townscape Heritage Initiative. This will complement plans to build hundreds of new homes, shops and restaurants around the town's historic harbour. The plans have seen house prices rise – and RBS recently named Bo'ness as the best place for first time buyers to buy in Scotland (and second in the whole of the UK).
 26. The oldest building in the town centre is thought to be Dymock's Buildings (c. 1650) recently restored by the National Trust for Scotland and now used as housing for elderly people. The building – with traditional orange lime-rendered walls – was officially re-opened by Prince Charles in 2004. There are occasional tours as part of Doors Open Day celebrations.
 27. Prince Charles's late wife, Princess Diana, was a visitor to the Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway, which attracts around 50,000-60,000 visitors a year. The restored railway featured buildings from across Scotland, and a great range of international rolling stock. The railway provides trips from the station, near Bo'ness Harbour, to Birkhill – where visitors can explore a clay mine. The line and station are frequently used for TV and film productions, from Hollywood films to making BBC's Balamory!
 28. The Clay Mine allows visitors to see 300 million year old fossils and discover the story about fireclay mining. Experienced tour guides will meet you from the train at Birkhill Station and take you down into the beautiful Avon Gorge before entering into the caverns.
 29. Nearby Kinneil Estate is a beautiful park at the western edge of Bo'ness. The steam railway line borders the site, which includes the ruins of a medieval church, a Roman fortlet, a cottage used by inventor James Watt and a historic mansion, Kinneil House, which dates back to the 16th century. There are also extensive woodlands, two ponds – plus swans and other wildlife.
 30. The Kinneil fortlet was part of the Antonine Wall, which is bidding to become a World Heritage Site. The Kinneil fortlet is the only excavated fortlet to be seen along the complete length of the Wall. Part of a Roman road into the fortlet is exposed at Kinneil, along with posts marking out the boundary of the fortlet. The name Kinneil means "Wall's End" – although the eastern edge of the wall is actually at the other end of Bo'ness. Some would say it's close enough!
 31. The story of the fortlet and the rest of Kinneil's amazing history is told in Kinneil Museum, which is open Monday to Saturday from 12.30 p.m. to 4 p.m. The museum features a gift shop and audio visual show. Admission is free.
 32. Items on show in Kinneil Museum include Roman artefacts and examples of Bo'ness Pottery. The town was a leading pottery producer and examples are now prized collectors' items.

33. The museum also features a picture of the “Bridgeness Slab” – a decorated Roman tablet found in the Bridgeness area of Bo’ness. Channel 4’s Time Team recently voted it one of the top Roman finds in Britain. The original slab is now on show in the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh’s Chambers Street. However, the local community has plans to have a new replica made and put on display in Bo’ness.
34. Kinneil House features some of the best examples of Renaissance Wall paintings in Scotland. The paintings were discovered during demolition work in the 1930s, saving the imposing house from destruction. Since then there has been partial rebuilding work. The house is open to the public occasionally. A local group, The Friends of Kinneil works with Historic Scotland to provide access, normally free of charge. Open days are usually very busy.
35. The House was home to the powerful Dukes of Hamilton – who have been close to British monarchs throughout history. The current Duke is the Queen’s Representative in Scotland.
36. The other large mansion in the town is Carriden House – at the eastern edge of the town. It offers bed and breakfast facilities.
37. Bo’ness offers good opportunities for walkers. Trips through Kinneil Estate, and from Carriden to Blackness, were listed in walking guides promoted by national newspapers last year. VisitScotland’s Walk Scotland website has details <http://walking.visitscotland.com/walks/centralscotland/>
38. The Hippodrome, the first purpose-built cinema in Scotland, perhaps in the UK, is to be refurbished and re-opened as both cinema and heritage centre in Bo’ness. Designed by local architect Matthew Steele, a contemporary of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the Hippodrome is both a beautiful & historic building. Designed in 1911, it will once more be a focal point in Bo’ness Town Centre.
39. To celebrate the announcement of the reopening of the Hippodrome Cinema, Bo’ness Real Ale Appreciation Society has commissioned a commemorative glass. The price of beer was raised by two pence in 1744 to pay for the cost of upkeep of the harbour.
40. The Bo’ness Children’s Fair Festival – thought to be the largest event of its type in Scotland – is held on the last Friday every June. The Fair features the crowing of a Fair “Queen” – and a large procession through the town. Children who feature in the fair have arches or house frontages erected in front of their homes.
41. George Forrest (1873-1932) born in Graham’s Road, Falkirk is responsible for introducing many of today’s well-known garden plants. From his explorations in China and Tibet, he collected over 30,000 specimens including rhododendron, camellias, magnolias, Himalayan poppies, lilies, primulas and gentians. These plants were of such horticultural potential that they aroused great excitement in gardening circles. He died in Yunnan (China), where he is buried.
42. There are six “doocots” in the Falkirk area – some intact, some in ruins. They were built to supply fresh meat to the “big house” during the winter when fresh meat was scarce.
43. “BIG in Falkirk” is Scotland’s National Street Arts Festival. Big in Falkirk, packs a lot into two days: spectacular outdoor theatre, international street arts, live music, comedy, children’s entertainment and more. This is Scotland’s biggest free multi-arts festival of international outdoor theatre. Big in Falkirk presents some of the most popular names in music having previously welcomed Snow Patrol, The Stranglers, Deacon Blue, Bob Geldof and Midge Ure. The festival has also

managed to secure acts just before they hit the big time, with McFly, Orson and Sandi Thom celebrating Number One singles during or immediately after playing at Big in Falkirk.

44. "BIG in Falkirk" 2007 is on Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 May.
45. The area's main local paper, The Falkirk Herald, is the biggest-selling local weekly paper in Scotland. It was the founding title for what is now Johnston Press – which recently purchased The Scotsman. Not bad for a firm from Falkirk.
46. William Wallace has strong links with the Falkirk area. The district is littered with references to the Braveheart hero, who is thought to have grown up in the area. Wallace famously lost his battle in Falkirk – featured in the Mel Gibson blockbuster. The site is thought to have been where the new Falkirk Stadium now sits. Football battles continue to this day.
47. Talking of stars, 24 actor Keifer Sutherland has Falkirk connections. His grandfather, Tommy Douglas, was born in Camelon, near Falkirk, before moving to Canada, aged seven.
48. In Bo'ness, generations of miners are being honoured by a new mining memorial being constructed in the town centre. Bo'ness was one of the first places in Scotland to have coal mined. Its last pit closed in the 1980s.
49. Talking of history, the local library in Bo'ness is a visitor attraction in its own right. It's an amalgamation of new build, with an old inn and a warehouse building added into the new layout. It features a fine display of local history photographs.
50. Finally, Falkirk is renowned for the warm welcome it gives visitors. But you'll have discovered that by now.