

## Eco network visit to Dalbeattie

Dalbeattie, the “Vale of the Birches” is the industrial town of Kirkcudbrightshire. Founded just over 200 years ago with the utilisation of water power, it was home to mills for over a century. The development of granite quarrying meant full employment for decades, as the local stone became part of Sydney Harbour and London Embankment.

Now largely residential, the large employers apart from Howie’s sawmill, have long departed.

There is still much to be gained from a visit to Dalbeattie, with the local forest being home to the Seven Stanes cycle challenge.

The local area network of eco congregations visited Dalbeattie, the granite town in June. Led by the local minister, Rev Norman Hutcheson, who had seen Dalbeattie become the second eco congregation in Scotland, along with Ian McMickan, the congregations eco contact, the group visited key sites of interest in their walk around the town.

Dalbeattie Museum (<http://www.dalbeattiemuseum.co.uk/>) was the first stop. Here are gathered objects of ordinary life from across the community over the last two hundred years. Pride of place was the presentation on the Titanic, whose First Officer on the night of the collision and inking was a brave local man. William Murdoch. The Museum has rebuilt part of the granite setts on the floor, and created a corner where local granite workers are shown working the granite in one of the many finishing shops that were once part of the town life. The upper floor is a wide collection of household articles that would be in daily use over the years. Admission to the Museum is free, and will always make for an interesting day out.



Across the town, the next stop was the old Port of Dalbeattie. Although silted up badly, the line of the port is clearly visible, and easily recalls the days when ships would be pulled up by horse, and then loaded and unloaded. At its peak 16 vessels could be moored at the port, and imported goods came into Dalbeattie such as rags, from Liverpool, guano, grocery goods, to stock the cellars of the shops on Dalbeattie's High Street and lime. Exported goods were granite along with kerbstones and setts, paper, hides, bricks and tiles, bobbins, grain and fertiliser.

Nearby is the Allotment (<http://www.dalbeattiematters.co.uk/features.asp?ID=395>) project in Dalbeattie. Home now to dozens of gardeners, it is a fabulous site to see flowers and vegetables growing and cared for on good soil on the edge of the town. Founded only two years ago, the Association already has had to acquire more land to cope with the demand of local people. Within the first year there were 48 holders, and the number has increased as more land has been acquired.



Then to the Church, for light refreshments, and discussions. The Church had been part of a study by the Crichton Carbon Centre, the Masters Level faculty of the University of Glasgow staff, on carbon reduction. The study had illustrated the difficulties of heat loss in a church building, where some 60% of all heat loss was through the walls, and not through the windows as had been previously thought. High roof insulation had already reduced loss at that level, but it has left the church leadership with questions rather than answers.

There are many reasons to visit Dalbeattie, but the old rhymster put it best when he said  
*Dalbeattie is a bonny place*  
*Upon the Dubb o Has*  
*In it there's mony a thrifty wife*  
*An mony a bonny lass*