

In Their Footsteps

*A travel companion to the world of Alexander Shearer & Annie Tyre
Ardrossan · the Castlereagh · Sydney & the Hills*

This is a guide for standing where they stood. It gathers the places in Alexander and Annie's story — what each one was to the family, what is still there to see, and what survives nearby to help you picture the rest — written for a descendant planning a visit. Where a building is gone, we tell you where it stood and what marks the spot now.

ITINERARY ONE

Ardrossan, Ayrshire

Ardrossan in Alexander and Annie's day (the 1880s-1910s) was a busy harbour-and-shipbuilding burgh on the Firth of Clyde — one of the "Three Towns" with Saltcoats and Stevenston. Coal and pig-iron went out from its docks; a shipyard rang on the waterfront; paddle-steamers ran day-trippers across to Arran; the railway tied it to Glasgow. People lived close, in stone tenement streets a short walk from the salt water. It is still a harbour town today — the docks now a marina ringed by housing — and the grid of streets the family knew is largely still on the map.

Plan your visit: [VisitScotland — Ayrshire & Arran](#) · Ardrossan is ~40 min by train from Glasgow Central, and the Arran ferry leaves from the harbour.

Ardrossan Harbour & the Barr & Shearer shipyard

HARBOUR SURVIVES · YARD GONE

This was the working heart of Alexander's town — the slipways, the clang of riveters, the steamers. By a genuine quirk the town's shipyard was founded in 1842 as **Barr & Shearer** (John Barr and James Shearer), later the Ardrossan Shipbuilding Co and Ardrossan Dockyard; it built minesweepers and small warships and employed some 2,300 at its WWI peak. *(The shipyard "Shearer" is a name-coincidence — no known connection to this family — but a good story to tell on the quay.)* Shipbuilding finished in 1990; the great harbour basin remains, now a marina with housing around it.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The old harbour basin and breakwater — the water Alex's ships worked from.
- The marina and quayside walk; waterfront heritage signage.
- The view out to Arran every Ardrossan child grew up with.

[Open in Google Maps ↗](#)

214 Glasgow Street & the Post Office

STREETSCAPE STILL THERE

By 1901 the Shearers were at 214 Glasgow Street, and after Alexander's father died his widowed mother kept the **Post Office on Glasgow Street** — the counter that held the family together. Glasgow Street is still a main street, and much of its Victorian/Edwardian terrace frontage survives, so you can walk the same pavement and picture the shopfront.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The period tenement and shop frontages along Glasgow Street.
- A current/former post-office premises on the street, if you can identify it locally.

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9 Harbour Place — where it began

STREET STILL THERE

Alexander was born at **9 Harbour Place** in 1887, right by the water; Annie was born close by in 1889 — the two grew up a street apart, near enough that the back greens nearly touched. Harbour Place survives in the old grid by the

harbour. Stand here and you are at the few hundred yards of streets where the whole story began.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The tenement streetscape of Harbour Place, hard by the harbour.
- The short walk up into the old town — their whole childhood geography.

[Open in Google Maps ↗](#)

16 Winton Place

STREET STILL THERE

This is where the story turns cold. Widowed Annie brought her three girls back here in November 1922, to her parents' home above the shop — and found she no longer belonged. Walking Winton Place in a grey wind, you understand why Australia had become home.

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Round out the day: [Lodge Saltcoats & Ardrossan No. 320](#) (where Alex was made a Mason in 1909), the Arran ferry from the harbour, the Ayrshire coastal path, and the period kirks of the Three Towns.

ITINERARY TWO

The Castlereagh — Coonamble & Mendooran

The country Alexander chose is wool-and-wheat plains on the Castlereagh River in central-western New South Wales. When he arrived the railway had just reached Coonamble (1910); Mendooran, downstream, was already the oldest town on the river, a crossing-point from the 1830s. Wide, dry, big-sky country — the "as far from the Firth of Clyde as a man could get" of his letters. Both towns are quiet today; Mendooran has leaned into its history, with painted murals all over town.

Plan your visit: [Warrumbungle Shire \(Mendooran & district\)](#) · about a 6-hour drive NW of Sydney; combine with the Warrumbungle National Park.

“Ardrossan” — 3771 Castlereagh Highway, Mendooran

THE NAME STILL STANDS

The keystone of the whole story. On this leased property (Portions 76/77) Alexander drove in a hand-painted sign with the name of his birthplace, and — remarkably — **the name "Ardrossan" still marks the land today**. To stand at the gate is to stand exactly where a Scottish seaman planted his home town in a dry NSW paddock, the paddock running down to the Merrygoen Creek.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The property name and gate on the Castlereagh Highway.
- The lie of the land down to the creek — the view of his 1917 vignette.

[Open in Google Maps ↗](#)

Annie's shop & the family town block, Mendooran

TOWN SURVIVES · SITES PART-CONFIRMED

This is where Annie made her stand as a widow — first a sewing trade, then a fruit-and-refreshment shop on the main street, **next door to Stitt's hairdresser**. Quite separately, George Colley and Annie owned a **town block on Bandulla Street** (Allotment 6, Section 8) — bought 1924, put in Annie's name in 1929, sold 1939; it is now the town's tennis courts. The town itself is the oldest on the Castlereagh, and since the 1990s local artist Karin Duce has covered its buildings with murals of bullocks, sheep, horses and rural life; in the old butcher's shop you'll now find the award-winning Blue Sky Cheese.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The 1920s main-street shopfronts — Annie's shop stood beside Stitt's.
- The Bandulla Street tennis courts — the family's old town block.
- The heritage murals through the town centre; Blue Sky Cheese (Wed-Sat).

[Annie's shop ↗](#)

[Town block ↗](#)

Mendooran Cemetery — Alexander's grave

STILL THERE

Alexander Shearer was buried here on a December day in 1921, some hundred Oddfellows and Masonic brethren following him out. His headstone carries the **square and compass** of his lodge — the same tie that, years later, would school his daughters. The cemetery is a recognised heritage site and the grave can be visited.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The Shearer headstone with the Masonic emblem.
- The pioneer section — the company he was buried among.

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Coonamble & “Wheatlands”

TOWNS SURVIVE · FARMS PRIVATE

Coonamble is where Alexander first built a life — a carpenter in Namoi Street, a prize-winning singer at the eisteddfod, and where daughter Meg was born at “Roslin” in Warrana Street in 1915. North of Mendooran lay George Colley's “Wheatlands”, the 1,358-acre farm of his good years. The town streets are walkable; the farms are working land best seen from the public road.

[Coonamble \(Namoi St\) ↗](#)

[“Roslin” ↗](#)

[“Wheatlands” ↗](#)

ITINERARY THREE

Sydney & the Hills

Sydney is where the story begins and ends in Australia — the harbour the broken *Loch Katrine* was towed into in 1910, the church the couple married in in 1914, and the orchard country of the Hills district where Annie and George saw out their later years. The North Shore and the Hills were leafy, churchy, orchard country between the wars; today they're suburban Sydney, but real fragments survive.

Plan your visit: [Destination NSW — Sydney](#) · all the sites below are an easy day's driving around northern Sydney.

St John's Uniting Church, Neutral Bay (the marriage church)

STILL STANDING · HERITAGE-LISTED

On 28 July 1914, two days after Annie stepped off the ship, she and Alexander married at the Neutral Bay Presbyterian Church. The building — on Yeo Street, opened in 1890, architect Charles Slatyer — still stands and is now **St John's Uniting Church**, on the NSW State Heritage Register. You can stand at the door they walked out of as husband and wife.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The 1890 sandstone church on Yeo Street and its heritage-listed pipe organ.
- The streetscape of old Neutral Bay around it.

[Open in Google Maps ↗](#)

Check visiting times with the congregation before you go.

Balcombe Heights Estate, Baulkham Hills (the daughters' school)

ORIGINAL BUILDINGS SURVIVE

Because Alexander was a Mason, his daughters could board at the **William Thompson Masonic School**, opened at Baulkham Hills in November 1922 for children left in hard circumstances after the war — at its peak home to 364 children. The school closed in the 1970s and The Hills Shire bought the site, now **Balcombe Heights Estate**. Several original buildings still stand — dormitories, classrooms, the gymnasium, staff cottages and the Georgian Revival administration block — so you can walk the grounds the Shearer girls knew.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The Georgian Revival central administration block.
- The surviving dormitories, classrooms and gymnasium.
- The school's war memorial / avenue of honour on the estate.

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“Brucehaven”, Kenthurst & Castle Hill — the orchard years

DISTRICT SURVIVES · ORCHARD PRIVATE

George and Annie's "**Brucehaven**" orchard (about 137-151 **Kenthurst Road**, Portion 51, 40 acres, bought 1939) sat in the Hills orchard belt, and Annie's last long chapter played out nearby at **7 Church Street, Castle Hill**. The orchards have mostly given way to housing, but the district keeps its heritage layer — **Castle Hill Heritage Park** preserves a slice of the old orchard-and-bushland landscape, and Kenthurst still has period homesteads to evoke the orchard era.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- The Kenthurst Road orchard frontage — the lie of "Brucehaven".
- Castle Hill Heritage Park — remnant orchard-era landscape and Blue Gum forest.
- Kenthurst's surviving period homesteads and rural fringe.

[“Brucehaven” ↗](#)

[7 Church Street ↗](#)