

Aberdeen Green Trail

The heritage of Aberdeen's Green



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This booklet explores one of the oldest and most intriguing areas of Aberdeen. The Green has revealed evidence of prehistoric activity, was witness to the tumultuous events of the Reformation in 1560, to child kidnapping in the 18th century, whilst today it retains its own highly distinctive character.

In medieval times the Green was one of the four principal quarters of the city (the others being, the Crookit, the Even and the Fittie quarters, see map below left). These were the areas into which the city was divided for administrative and defence purposes. In medieval times the Green was very much a craft and trade area in the burgh. Indeed in a tax list of 1509 there were 38 female brewers working and selling ale in the Green. The Green was also something of a religious centre for Aberdeen.

The name, the Green, is slightly misleading. It refers both to the principal street in the area and to the area more widely. The street known as the Green was, in medieval times, known as the Green Gate, or Green Gait. Gate as a street name derives from a Viking or Norse word, Gata and means 'the way to'. In this sense the street name actually means the road which led to the green area, which presumably lay outside medieval Aberdeen, on the west of the Bow Brig.

Curiously, the Green, which was so central a part of medieval Aberdeen, was not within the system of town gates, known as ports. Aberdeen was never a walled city but was defended by a series of gates and ditches. Although the Green lay outside the gates, its people were still expected to have arms and be trained to defend the city. It is said, although the evidence is equivocal, that the army of Edward III defeated the citizens of Aberdeen in a battle in the Green in 1336 and then put the city to the torch.

Enjoy exploring the Green and finding out about its past and present!

Accesibility



All of the present day external locations are accessible.



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Fishwives selling on the Green. In the background is the Puffing Briggie (or bridge) that linked with Windmill Brae over the railway tracks. Approximately the same location as the Bow Brig crossed the Denburn and of today's underpass through the Trinity Centre car park. Puffing refers to the smoke from passing steam trains.

Picture Credits

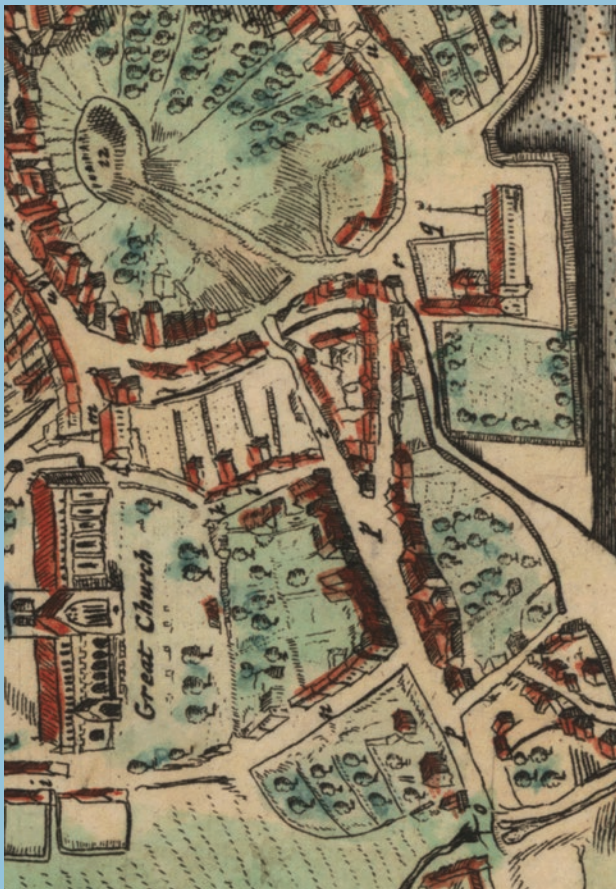
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Key to Parson Gordon's map of 1661

- i** Musick Scoote
- k** Correction House Wynd or Lane
- l** Correction House
- m** Towns Hospitall
- n** Airdies Wynd
- o** Bow Bridge
- p** The Greene or Bow Bridge Streete
- q** The Crofts or Tradsmens Hospitall
- r** The Tarnny Mill
- t** Midd mill in the Green
- v** Neither Kirk gate Porte
- x** Streete call'd the Neither kirk gate
- 11** Shippraw Porte
- 12** Saint Katherins Hill

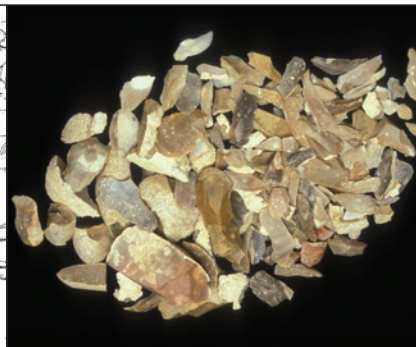
These are in the original spelling as used on the map



1 The Green in Prehistory

The story of the Green goes back to the earliest period of human activity in the north-east of Scotland as remains of a Mesolithic flint-knapping area were discovered by archaeologists during excavations in 1976. Tiny blades made from local honey-coloured Buchan flint, along with waste flakes and nodules, on top of the gravel subsoil, demonstrated that a flint craftsman had worked there about 8,000 years ago, making tools for fishing and hunting. Later excavation in the area revealed features and artefacts indicating a later flint industry continuing into the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. All these discoveries are very unusual in the context of a highly developed modern city.

Above: Artist's Impression – bird's eye view of the Green in 1450, by Jan Dunbar. **Below:** Artist's Impression of a flint knapper working in the Green and a selection of the flints found there.





Main image: Skeletons found at the site of the Carmelite Friary. **Detail:** Copper alloy wrist bracelet.

2 Whitefriars or Carmelites

The Carmelite monks, or Whitefriars, arrived in the Green in 1273. Over the 300 years that the Carmelites resided here, they built up close connections with the townspeople. This meant that hundreds of people left money, personal belongings and land to the friars as tokens of their gratitude to and love for the community. The community would never have been particularly large: perhaps half a dozen friars at the most at any given time. By the 15th and 16th centuries, the friars were involved not only with the community of the Burgh but were also involved in teaching at King's College.

At the Reformation of early 1560, their buildings were heavily robbed and documentary evidence suggests that many accessible items of stone, slate and timber were removed for re-use. However, archaeological excavations in the 1980s and 1990s revealed substantial portions of the friary church foundations as well as the west range of the cloister where the friars lived, worked and studied. Parts of the lead-piped friary water supply were also recovered along with numerous artefacts, fragments of painted and stained window glass, roof furniture, glazed floor tiles and book-cover decorations, which help to recreate a picture of how the friary looked and functioned. Personal items such as brooches, buckles, beads, and a bracelet were found mainly in association with the skeletons of over 200 individuals, friars and locals alike, who had been buried within the church and graveyard between the late 13th century and the Reformation. The site passed through various different owners and eventually came into the possession of Marischal College. Until the 18th century the College leased the land out, initially as a market garden before they laid the modern pattern of streets across the site in the late 18th century. The outline of the western end of the Carmelite Friary church is marked out in the car park off Rennie's Wynd where there is also a small information panel. Street names such as Carmelite Street still exist today!



3 Hadden's Mill

This was built on the site of what was once known as the Carmelite friars' kiln. The Mill dated from the 1750s and for the next 200 years it was an integral part of the life of the Green. Initially the concern was owned by Messers Hadden and Farquhar, later Hadden and Sons. The Mill specialised in spinning and weaving and by the late 19th century was one of the biggest carpet manufacturers in Britain. As well as being business magnates, the Hadden family were very prominent in local politics. The sons of the family went on to dominate local politics, filling the office of Lord Provost of Aberdeen four times in the 19th century.

Above: Windmill Brae looking towards the Green, the large building is part of Hadden's mill. Bow Brig is centre in the middle distance. **Below:** Denburn Valley looking towards the Green and the tall chimney of Hadden's mill, Bow Brig seen through Union Bridge arch.





4 Bow Brig

For many centuries this bridge, which spanned the Denburn, was the main overland entrance to Aberdeen, and the Green, from the south. It was here that all royal and important visitors to Aberdeen were received and offered the ceremonial gifts and cup of Bon Accord. The date for the building of this bridge is uncertain. There is a reference to a bridge here in 1453, although there had probably been one at this location from a much earlier time.



Bow Brig, in this sense, means an arched bridge. In 1610, the Burgh Council noted that the existing bridge's arch was too narrow, so when the Denburn overflowed, the narrowness of the bridge caused the surrounding land to be flooded. So a double-bowed bridge was built.

The double-arched Bow Brig survived until the middle of the 18th century. The Denburn, however, continued to overflow, and latterly this was being aggravated by the two bows of the bridge. Following a major flooding of the surrounding area on 4 October 1746, there was a public clamour for the Brig to be rebuilt with one arch. The new Brig was begun in 1747 to a design by the mason, John Jeans. The Bow Brig was finally removed in the 1860s to make way for the Denburn Valley Railway. At that time, the arches of the Brig were taken to Union Terrace Gardens, where part of it was incorporated into the arches which support Union Terrace itself.

Top & left: Bow Brig in the background, seen through the arch of Union Bridge. **Above:** The last incarnation of Bow Brig, in the 19th century, from *Aberdeen in Bygone Days* by Robert Anderson.

5 Peter Williamson

A stone-built house on this site, sometimes referred to as a 'barn' was, by repute, associated with one of the darkest phases in Aberdeen's history. In the early to mid 18th century, a number of merchants and magistrates in Aberdeen kidnapped upwards of several hundred children from the city and shire and sold them off as indentured servants in the American colonies. Britain's American colonies were desperate for labour and merchants, in various parts of Scotland and further afield, used this as a cynical means to supply that labour and to make money.



Once kidnapped, the children were held in a variety of different locations around Aberdeen, including the Tolbooth prison (now a museum), a factory on the beach, and this house in the Green. Ships left Aberdeen for America infrequently and so the children had to be stored somewhere. Walter Cochran, town clerk depute, kept records showing how much money was spent in holding and shipping these children compared with what was made from selling them (normally at £16 per head). It was said that the merchants employed a piper to play outside the house to drown out the noise of the children.

The most famous of these children was Peter Williamson, known as Indian Peter. He later returned to Britain where he adopted the dress of native Americans and wrote a book about his life, a tireless self publicist, he was arrested in Aberdeen and tried for libel, for which



he was found guilty. The hangman burned the offending pages of his book (those which claimed that some of the merchants and magistrates of the town were deeply implicated in this process) at the Mercat Cross. He countersued the magistrates of Aberdeen at the Court of Session in Edinburgh, who found in his favour in 1762 and awarded him damages. It is from this later court case that most of what we know about this episode derives. The house itself was demolished in the late 19th century.

Top: The house known as 'The barn'. **Left:** Indian Peter, reproduced from a 19th century imprint of his book.

6 Aedie's House

The date of construction of this splendid townhouse is unknown.

However, it probably dates from the late 16th or very early 17th century and is said to be the work of master mason Andrew Jamieson, who was also responsible for what is now known as Provost Ross's House, part of Aberdeen Maritime Museum, in Shiprow.



The Aedies were prominent merchants and active in local affairs, in a variety of ways. David and his brother George were, for example, both Bailies of Aberdeen. One carved stone in a dormer window of the house bore the initials AE and CG standing for Andrew Aedie and Christian Guthrie his wife. Andrew was a maltman who died in 1604.

In the later 17th century, George Aedie owned the house, having inherited it from his brother David who was killed at the Battle of Justice Mills on 13 September 1644. George married Mary Jamesone on 28 October 1677. Mary was daughter of George Jamesone, the Scottish portrait painter, and grand-daughter of the master mason Andrew Jamieson.

Mary Jamesone's name is associated with four embroidered hangings which currently hang at the west end of the West Kirk of St Nicholas, showing scenes from both the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. These hangings may well have been part of the internal decoration scheme after Mary married George (her second marriage). It has been

suggested that George Aedie sold them to the town council in the late 1680s for £400 Scots, after Mary's death.



Top: Late 19th century photograph showing Aedie's House and Back Wynd steps. **Left:** Aedie's House, reproduced from *Miscellany of the Third Spalding Club*, Volume I.



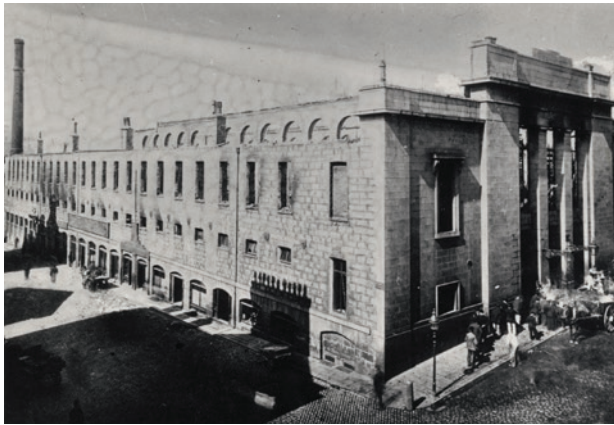
The Mannie in the Green, 1934.

7 Site of the 'Mannie'

Today the statue known as the Mannie sits in the Castlegate but for over a century it was in the Green. The Mannie is the only example of leaden sculpture in the city. In 1706, work began on laying lead water pipes from outside the city to a new fountain in the Castlegate. The statue itself was added to the top of the fountain some time after 1710. A wooden statue had originally been planned but the carver never executed the work and so a lead sculpture was erected.

The Mannie was originally located in the Castlegate, where the Mercat Cross sits today, but it was moved to the Green in 1852. It was not until the early 1970s that the Mannie was moved back to the Castlegate, not to its original location but to a new site across the road from the Tolbooth. In fact when it was moved back to the Castlegate, it and the Mercat Cross had swapped positions. But for well over 100 years, the Mannie was a key part of life in the Green, and to this day the statue is affectionately known by Aberdonians as 'the Mannie in the Green'.

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8 Market Buildings

This was designed by Archibald Simpson working with his long time rival John Smith. Aberdeen Market came near the end of Simpson's life: he died at the age of 57 just five years after its completion in 1842. Markets had been held in the Green for some time and this effectively brought them under cover in a bow-ended hall over 100 metres long, with an arcaded upper level containing shops. It was seriously damaged by fire in 1882 and then rebuilt with a wrought iron roof. Not only did it sell a wide range of goods but it also continued the Green market tradition of being a meeting place for farmers. Simpson's buildings were demolished in the early 1970s and replaced with the current market buildings.

Above: Aberdeen Market after the great fire of 29th April 1882.

Below: The interior of the New Market.



9 Redfriars or Trinitarians

The Redfriars were one of four orders of friars in medieval Aberdeen, two of which were based in the Green (the others were the Whitefriars, see 2). Friars are members of a religious order who live by strict rules in large urban populations in order to minister to the needs of the poor.

The Redfriars' primary duty was to raise money to pay ransoms demanded on Christians taken hostage either on pilgrimage, trade or crusade to the Holy Land. It has been said that their friary was founded in 1211 by King William the Lion, who gifted to them his 'palace' in the Green. Whilst there is no evidence to back this up, it is quite likely that the Redfriars had been in the Green since the 13th century.

Although friars and friaries were not supposed to own land or be wealthy, they did establish very close relations with some of the prominent and important families in the town, including the powerful Menzies of Pitfodels family who dominated burgh politics from the 15th century onwards. By these means the Trinitarians did become a rich institution with considerable interest in lands in and around Aberdeen, in particular in the Ferryhill area.

The friary came to an end at the Reformation, which reached Aberdeen in January 1560. The City Council's records reveal that mobs came into the town from Angus and Mearns and attacked the friary. It is said that the friary was burned to the ground and that one friar died during the attack. A portrait of the alleged martyr, with the inscription 'Saint Francis of Aberdeen. Martyred, 4th December, 1559' survives in a church in Majorca. There is no evidence to back this story up and it seems that the Reformation in Aberdeen was a largely peaceful affair. There is no record of any deaths as a direct result. The friary buildings were still standing in 1661, when the first map of the town was drawn and no later documents show that the friary had been burned. The fate of the individual friars is less clear: many of them were simply pensioned off by the government, some converted to Protestantism and some remained Catholic but left for the Continent.



10 Trades' Hall

After the Reformation, the buildings vacated by the Redfriars (see no. 9) had a number of different uses. Until 1606, the site was mainly used as a dump by the residents of the Green, but in that year Alexander Davidson, a

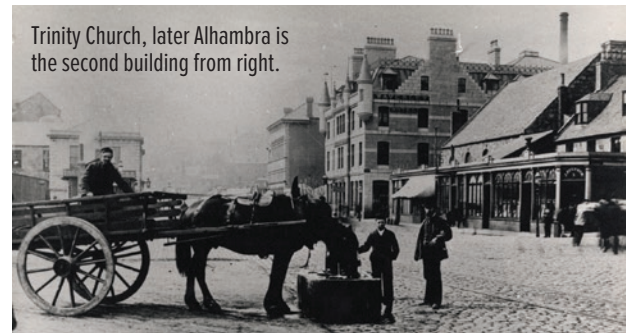
timber-man from St Andrews, was given permission to build a ship, called *The Bon Accord*, in the friary's garden. In 1631, the buildings and grounds were sold to William Guild who in turn made the lands over to the Incorporated Trades. These were a series of crafts guilds which had evolved in Aberdeen over the centuries. Today there are seven: the fleshers; bakers; hammermen; tailors; wrights and coopers; shoemakers and the weavers. However historically there were others including the leechers, all led by a Convener Court. The Trades adapted these buildings which they were gifted: they built themselves a hospital (retirement house) and meeting place. The Trades raised £2200 from themselves and appealed to the Burgh Council for assistance as well. Once these works were completed, they built themselves a new gateway. The Trades worshipped briefly in the old Redfriars chapel but they mainly attended services in St Nicholas Kirk, so the Trinitarian chapel was let to other congregations (see 11).

The other buildings of the Redfriars were adapted and largely rebuilt over the centuries to fit the needs of the Trades. These survived until the mid 19th century, when the Aberdeen Railway came to this area and the creation of new streets, namely Exchange Street and Guild Street, eventually sealed the fate of these structures and they were taken down in the 1850s. When the buildings were being taken down it was reported that many skeletons (from the Redfriars' graveyard) and remains of buildings were found. At this point, the Trades transferred to a new building on Union Street, erected in 1846 and designed by John Smith, from where they subsequently moved to their current site on Holburn Street.

Opposite: Photograph of the Trades' Hall site in the 19th century.



Trinity Corner in 19th century, reproduced from E. Bain, *A History of the Incorporated Trades*.



Trinity Church, later Alhambra is the second building from right.

11 Trinity Church

The old church of the Redfriars (see 9) was pulled down in the 1790s and replaced by a new one. At the end of 1793, the Town Council appointed Reverend George Gordon to the vacant East Church of St Nicholas. Many of the parishioners protested vigorously about both the choice of candidate and the mode of election. When they were ignored they felt called upon to leave the congregation and set up their own place of worship.

The church, along with a session house and manse, was built at a total cost of £2000, raised almost entirely through the efforts of those who had walked out of the South Church of St Nicholas. On Sunday 27 April 1794, the church was opened for public worship by Dr Cruden, minister of St Fittick's Church at the Bay of Nigg. The first minister of the church was the Reverend Robert Doig.

By 1825, the weekly attendance averaged about 1200, with a membership, which exceeded 1400, scattered in all parts of the city. The minister at that time, the Reverend David Simpson, was highly respected and had a tendency to take strong attitudes on certain subjects. It was said of him that he was a 'ringleader among the teetotalers who infest the town'.

Simpson's sympathies lay very clearly with the Disruption in 1843, when 450 ministers of the Church of Scotland broke away to form the Free Church of Scotland, the main contention being over the right of a wealthy patron to appoint the minister of his choice to a church. After the formation of the Free Church, Mr Simpson preached his last sermon at Trinity Church on 11 June 1843, which incited the congregation to leave with him: almost all of them did.

Ultimately the church buildings were sold in 1881 and were converted and opened as the Alhambra Music Hall, rival to the nearby Her Majesty's (later Tivoli, 13). The Alhambra was one of several locations in Aberdeen where the public could experience the delights of the electro-graphic cinematograph, but it was also the winter quarters for the small zoo opened by John Sinclair in 1906, boasting the 'finest collection of lions, bears, wolves and hyenas in the north of Scotland'.

[#getoutthere](#)



12 Catholic Apostolic Church

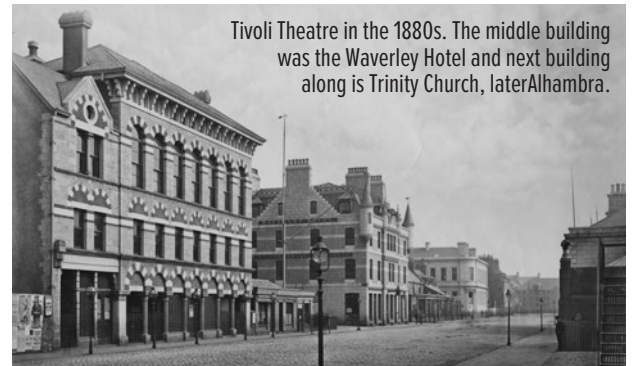
This building has had a remarkable life: by turns a church, a banana warehouse, a café and now bar. It was built in 1880 for the Catholic Apostolic Church, a church movement which had developed from the 1820s and preached the imminence of the second coming of Christ. The church declined significantly in the 20th century, but a congregation remains active to this day in various parts of the world. The church was noted for its love of symbolism and some of the decorative scheme can still be seen inside what is now a pub. This building was in fact only a church for less than 20 years. In 1896, it having been found to be too small and inconveniently positioned, alternative premises on Bon Accord Terrace were purchased and the church congregation moved away. After that the building was taken over by Knowles, who used it as a banana ripening warehouse. It was formerly Café Musa and is now the Hop & Anchor, the first Draft House pub outside London.

The market on the Green at the turn of the 20th century.

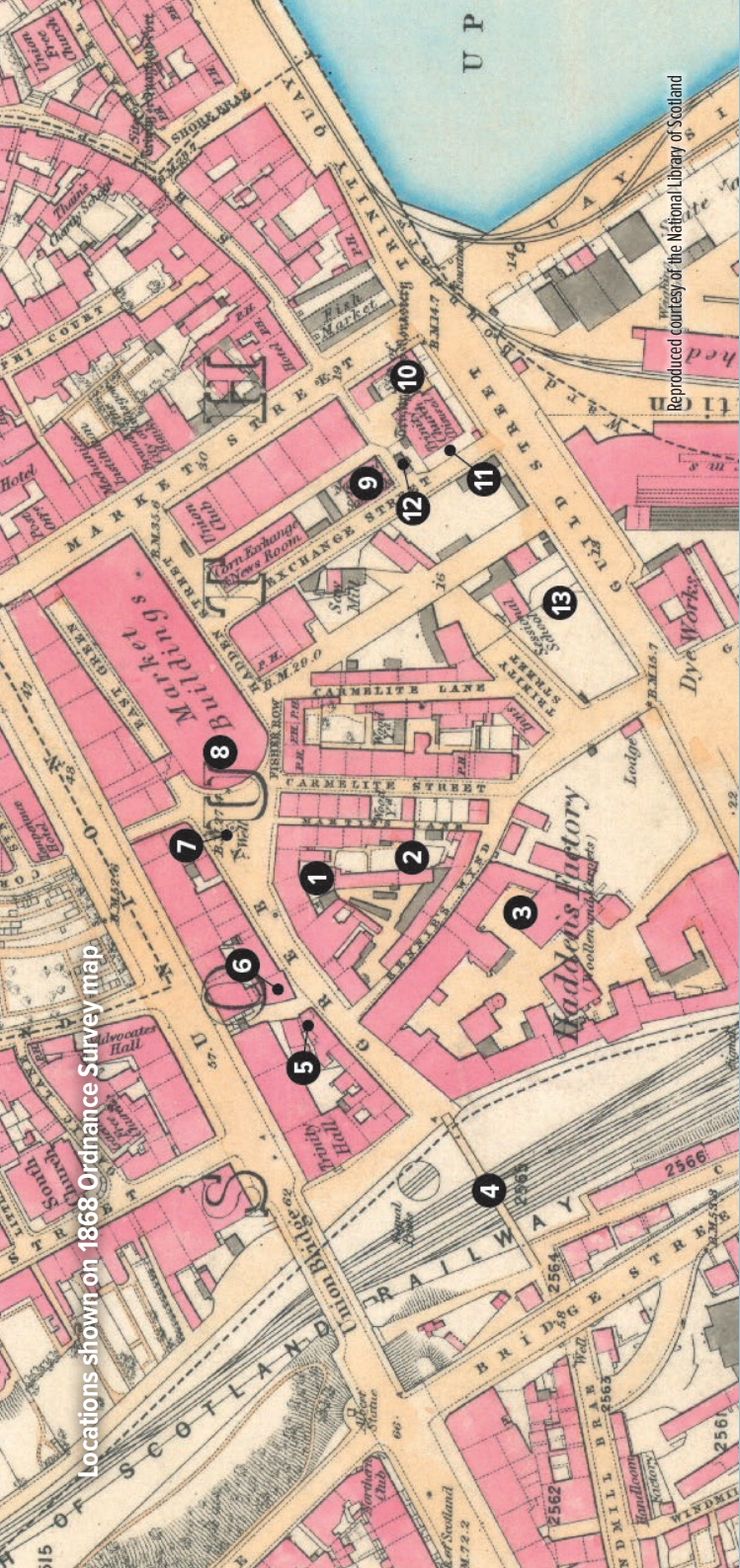


13 Tivoli

Although generally known as the Tivoli, this theatre was opened in 1872 as Her Majesty's Theatre and Opera House, to the design of architects James Matthews of Aberdeen and C B Phipps, a London-based architect brought in as a consultant. It was built at a cost of £8400 and is credited with being the first theatre in Scotland to use concrete on any considerable scale. The inaugural play was Lord Lytton's 'Lady of Lyons'. The auditorium was rebuilt in 1897 by the famous theatre architect Frank Matcham, but then closed temporarily following the opening of the larger His Majesty's Theatre on Rosemount Viaduct. This theatre was extensively reconstructed in 1909, again by Matcham, and opened in July 1910 as the Tivoli. The Tivoli was refurbished again in 1938, but eventually fell foul of changing tastes and the advent of TV. It became a bingo hall in 1966 and by the 1990s over 500 players entered its doors daily. The impact of the National Lottery and the beginnings of internet-based bingo with larger jackpots brought its closure in 1997. This much loved building was then at the centre of many calls for it to be re-opened. A grant from the Green Townscape Heritage Initiative in 2010 allowed works to make the building safe and to reopen its doors to the public as a theatre.



Tivoli Theatre in the 1880s. The middle building was the Waverley Hotel and next building along is Trinity Church, later Alhambra.



Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Scotland

Locations shown on 1868 Ordnance Survey map



Nuart and Painted Doors Project

Today the Green showcases the spectacular painted walls and other works of the international artists of Nuart and the colourful Painted Doors Project. The art on display ranges from huge murals to intimate painted doorways by local artists, Lego filled cracks in walls and street furniture painted to look like miniature tower blocks. East Green and Carnegie's Brae, under Union Street, are home to an ever-changing street art zone.

Street art tours start at the Green from Spring to Autumn. See the Nuart website below for dates and times. Further details of all the street art can be found at the following websites: www.2019.nuartaberdeen.co.uk and www.visitabdn.com/listing/painted-doors

Secrets of the Green

Leafing the Green was a two year writer in residence project focused on The Green Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) area of Aberdeen. Funded by Creative Scotland's **Partners** programme, the THI and Aberdeen City Council.

A visual legacy is the Secrets of the Green plaque trail. This was conceived by Leafing the Green Writer in Residence, Ramen Mundair. It consists of eight plaques forming an interactive poetry and art installation, each providing an engaging insight into the local history of the Green. The plaques are located at various sites in and around the Green – see how many you can find!

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| <p>Secrets of the Green A18</p> | <p>Secrets of the Green A18</p> | <p>Secrets of the Green A18</p> | <p>Secrets of the Green A18</p> |
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Green Trail

The heritage of Aberdeen's Green



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This is one in a series of themed trails in Aberdeen City, visit the website to see more: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails

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