

Aberdeen Jacobite Trail

A guide to Aberdeen's Jacobite history



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1707	Union of Scotland and England's Parliaments
1715	<p>The last Stuart monarch, Queen Anne, died without any children and the succession was George, Elector of Hanover in Germany, who became George I of Great Britain</p> <p>Autumn The first Jacobite Rebellion with the Old Pretender, James Francis Edward Stuart, who was the Catholic son of King James II and VII of England, Scotland and Ireland and deposed in favour of his Protestant sister</p> <p>A rebel Jacobite council was elected in Aberdeen</p>
1716	<p>February The Rebellion was over after the rebels were outnumbered, and The Old Pretender fled from Scotland</p>
1745	<p>August Bonnie Prince Charlie (Prince Charles Edward Stuart) started the Jacobite Rebellion at Glenfinnan, they capture Edinburgh, and win the Battle of Prestonpans</p> <p>Aberdeen occupied by government forces but they left, taking all the town's arms and munitions with them</p> <p>Aberdeen elected a rebel council again and they set about raising provisions and uplifting taxes to help the Jacobite cause</p> <p>November The Jacobite army enter England, reaching Derby on December where they decide to turn back</p>
1746	<p>February Government forces under the Duke of Cumberland enter Aberdeen and legitimate order was restored</p> <p>April The Battle of Culloden held with a decisive government victory, where the Jacobite Rebellion ended and Bonnie Prince Charlie fled across Scotland to France. He escaped to Skye on a boat disguised as the maid of Flora MacDonald, and to Benbecula, and onto France. With the Jacobite cause lost, he spent the rest of his life on the Continent apart from one secret visit to London</p> <p>July A total of 96 Jacobite prisoners were held in Aberdeen's Tolbooth awaiting trial</p>



James VII and II from Aberdeen's mercat cross

The Jacobites and Bonnie Prince Charlie are amongst some of the most romantic figures in Scottish history, on the backdrop of one of the most bloody times.

Bonnie Prince Charlie's lost fight at the Battle of Culloden in 1746 and subsequent flight across the wild moors, just tantalising out of reach of the government forces and then dressing up as Flora MacDonald's maid in a boat to the Isle of Skye, is one of the most well-known of Scotland's stories.


The history of the Jacobite Rebellion stems mostly from religion, when Catholics were being deposed and outlawed in favour of Protestants. The 1707 Union of Scotland's and England's Parliaments aggravated the situation and, in 1715, Queen Anne died without any children and the succession went to the protestant, George, Elector of Hanover in Germany, who became George I of Great Britain.

The major Jacobite rebellions were played out against George I in 1715, by James Francis Edward Stuart (the Old Pretender son of the former James VII of Scotland) against George II in 1745, and by his son Prince Charles Edward Stuart (the Young Pretender, Bonnie Prince Charlie).

The Battle of Culloden on 16 April 1746 was the final confrontation of the Rebellion with the Jacobite forces being decisively defeated by the government forces. The Jacobite casualties are estimated at 1,500–2,000 killed or wounded compared to the government losses of 50 dead and 259 wounded. After the Battle, lords and clan chiefs who had supported the Rebellion were stripped off their estates, and wearing tartan was outlawed except as a uniform for the British Army.

But what many people don't realise is that the rise of the Jacobites didn't take place just in Inverness and the Highlands – it was all over Scotland. Aberdeen had an important role to play in both of the major Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745 and a role in the general struggle of the Jacobites against the government of the day.

Have fun roaming around our beautiful city and discovering our connections to the Jacobites!

 All of the locations are accessible.

William and Mary from a coin of their reign



Queen Anne



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Front Cover: James Francis Edward Stuart, the Old Pretender, courtesy University of Aberdeen Historic Collections.

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1 Mercat Cross

Aberdeen's mercat cross dates from 1686 and was the traditional heart of the burgh. At the cross, new monarchs were proclaimed – a locked staircase led from ground level to the top where announcements were made. The symbolism in making the announcement from this spot was important to the Jacobites and on 20 September 1715, the Old Pretender was declared king at the mercat crosses of Aberdeen and Old Aberdeen.



New Aberdeen's mercat cross

Old Aberdeen is to the North, incorporating the cathedral and college, which was a separate town from Aberdeen until 1891.

In 1745, events at the cross took a more dramatic turn. On 25 September 1745, the rebels intended to make a similar announcement. Under the command of the Laird of Strathgogie, the rebels could not find the keys to the cross and so an armed party was sent to Provost Morison's house. The first party failed to find him so a second party was organised with instructions to make it known that unless Morison surrendered himself, they would burn down his house. By these means, they found the Provost and marched him at sword point to the Town House and then onto the roof of the cross. A further armed party had by this time rounded up a number of the councillors and two bailties, who were also marched at sword point to the cross. All of the Council officials were forced onto the top of the cross, along with James Petrie, Sheriff Substitute of Aberdeen, who declared the Young Pretender king and toasted his health. Petrie attempted to force Morison to toast Charles as monarch, which Morison refused to do. Petrie then poured wine down Morison's chest in a mock toast.

2 Tolbooth

Aberdeen's Tolbooth, properly the Wardhouse Tower of the Tolbooth (Aberdeen's prison) was built between 1616 and 1629 and had a significant role to play in the 1745 rebellion. After the declaration of the Young Pretender as king, the Laird of Strathgogie ordered all of the town's bells to be rung and the doors of the Tolbooth to be opened, freeing all of the prisoners, no doubt earning himself some dubious allies.



Aberdeen's Tolbooth

After the town was 'liberated' by Cumberland's forces in 1746, it was to the Tolbooth that known and suspected Jacobites were taken prior to trial. On 17 May 1746, William Murdoch, then keeper of the gaol, made a note of the names of the 34 prisoners he had received into custody. Three days later, on 20 May, this number had risen to 46 names, and by 25 July had reached a staggering 96 prisoners 'in the Tolbooth for treasonable practices...'. There followed a campaign of collecting statements of evidence against and confessions from these prisoners.

What is striking about the lists of prisoners is the social class involved. The majority were craftsmen or servants, few if any being professionals or merchants. Thus William Murdo, shoemaker in Aberdeen, James Thom, servant, George Wallace, George Wales and John Main, white fishers in Fittie, were all imprisoned. Although an Episcopalian preacher, William Strachan, and one advocate, Thomas Mosman, were questioned, they do not appear as prisoners in the Tolbooth.

Today the Tolbooth is Aberdeen's Museum of Civic History. One of the cells, now known as the Jacobite cell, explores this part of its history. An interactive model of Willie Baird, a real prisoner from 1746, sits next to his Jacobite compatriots James Innes and Alexander Annand and tells visitors his sorry tale, whilst the prisoners await trial and sentencing.



4 Kirk of St Nicholas

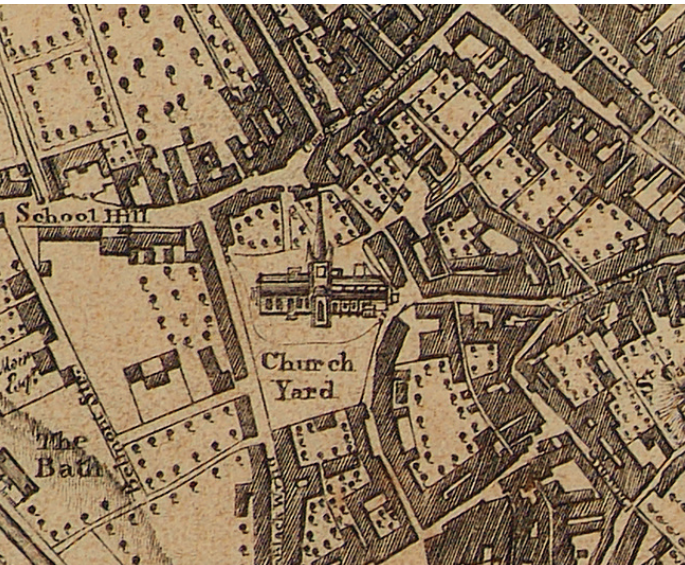
In 1715, the day after the Old Pretender was declared king at the mercat cross, elections were held for a new Council. Those loyal to the Hanoverians absented themselves whilst the Jacobite councillors met in the East Kirk of St Nicholas in order to elect a rebel Council: they elected Patrick Bannerman as Provost and John Leslie, John Burnett, William Simpson and John Fyfe as baillies.



St Nicholas Kirk

Writing his memoirs later, the brother of the Earl Marischal declared that this was done in order to shake off the 'double yolk, and [to] free themselves from slavery and usurpation by the restoration of king James 3rd...'. It has been reported that during the 1745 rebellion Cumberland's troops stabled their horses in the West Kirk of St Nicholas, which at that time was derelict. Both the West and East Kirks used by the Jacobites have since been replaced, the West Kirk in 1755 and the East in 1837-8.

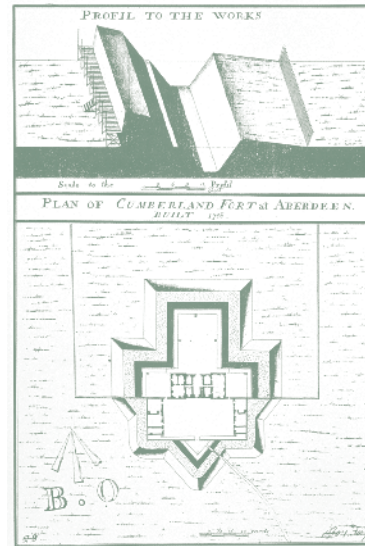
A survey of Aberdeen by John Home in 1769 showing St Nicholas Kirk



5 Robert Gordon's College

In early 1746 when Cumberland arrived in Aberdeen with 5 regiments of Dragoons (heavy mounted cavalry) and 16 of Foot (infantry), some of his troops were quartered at what was then the newly-built Robert Gordon's Hospital. The troops made a number of necessary alterations to the buildings. The windows were bricked up whilst a defensive ditch was dug around the building.

During groundwork to create an extension to the library at Robert Gordon's College in 2000, archaeologists from Aberdeen City Council Archaeological Unit uncovered a portion of ditch, which they were able to excavate prior to the digging of foundation trenches for the new building. Finds dated the ditch to the 18th century and suggest it was part of the works executed by Cumberland's troops. Amongst the finds were fragments of bowls and stems of clay pipes and fragments of beer bottles, evidence of some of the refreshments enjoyed by Cumberland's troops before they marched off to Culloden. In 1747, a debate emerged as to reparations being paid to the hospital for damage done by Cumberland's troops. The College treasurer petitioned the Council, which in turn petitioned the King for recompense. Something of a compromise was eventually reached when goods (including timber) left by Cumberland's troops in Gordon's were rouped off to the highest bidder.



Plan of Robert Gordon's Hospital when it was occupied by the troops



Marischal College as it would have appeared at the time of the 1745 rebellion, from University of Aberdeen Historic Collections

6 Marischal College

During the 1715 rebellion, a number of teachers at both Marischal and King's Colleges were Jacobites. The Old Pretender landed at Peterhead on 22 December 1715 and travelled to Fetteresso, near Stonehaven, where a number of teachers had come to greet him. Later, on 3 March 1746, the Duke of Cumberland held a ball at Marischal College, to which all the great and the good in Aberdeen were invited. Whilst this was a social affair there was also, no doubt, a political motivation behind it: Cumberland and his officers would have noted carefully who attended and who did not, and how those who did attend behaved themselves.



Marischal College in the early 20th century

#getoutthere



7 Provost Skene's House

On 25 February 1746, only two days after the rebels had left Aberdeen, the royal army entered Aberdeen. Two days later, Cumberland himself had entered the burgh. He was met at Schoolhill by the magistrates and councillors loyal to the government, who then took him to his lodgings at Skene's House. What is now known as Provost Skene's House is a rare architectural survival in Aberdeen dating, in part, from the mid 16th century. By turns it has been a high quality residence, a slum lodging and now a museum.

For many years, the House was known as 'Cumberland's' or 'Butcher Cumberland's Lodging'. Provost Skene's House is to become a new visitor attraction that will tell the story of local people who helped transform the wider world. It is currently closed while work takes place to renovate and refurbish the building.



The Duke of Cumberland, courtesy of National Portrait Gallery of Scotland

The Collections

Aberdeen City Council

Aberdeen City Council's currency collection contains more than 100 coins of the first two Hanoverian kings of Great Britain, George I and George II. These coins would have been in general circulation throughout the country at the time of the Jacobite rebellions. Denominations range from the splendid gold guinea to the humble farthing and among the George II examples are several which bear the dates 1745 and 1746.



Touchpiece used by the Young Pretender

Representing the exiled Stuart dynasty are two propaganda medals of the Old Pretender which bear on their reverses the Latin word *Reddite* meaning 'restore (my kingdom to me)' and also a Scottish silver guinea coin struck in the 19th century from dies prepared in 1716. Perhaps most interesting of all are three small 'touchpieces' issued by the Old Pretender, here known as 'James VIII' and his two sons who are styled 'Charles III' and 'Henry IX'. It was believed that the glandular disease scrofula could be cured if the sufferer carried a coin or medal which had been touched by a person of royal blood and these unusual silver pieces were specially struck for use in the 'touching' ceremony.

Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections contain a flintlock pistol said to have been used at Culloden. The Collections also contain a number of items related directly to Bonnie Prince Charlie including a piece of red tartan said to be from his waistcoat and a piece of the mast of the ship, Culloden, upon which Charles made his escape from the Highlands following defeat in 1746.

University of Aberdeen

In 1919, William MacBean, who was born in Nairn and built his career as a businessman in New York, donated his outstanding collection of printed Stuart and Jacobite material to Aberdeen University. Consisting of more than 4,500 books and pamphlets, 1,600 prints and 100 broadsheets, – much of the material is contemporary with the period – the collection covers every aspect of the uprisings, from the broader aspects of British political history, to military events, intrigue and propaganda. Overall, the Collection is regarded as the most comprehensive resource on the Jacobite era outside the British Library, and contains accounts, including proclamations, by the principal protagonists, as well as the writings and poetry of respective supporters and more neutral observers. As texts, they vary from closely reasoned and careful argumentation to the factious and downright scurrilous.

The prints themselves include portraits, depictions of historical incidents and geographical and topographical subjects.

Important Jacobite themes are also found amongst the 4,000 archive collections held by the University. The baneful effects of the 1715 Jacobite rising, and the removal of many teaching staff because of their support for James VII's son, can be seen in the records of both King's and Marischal College.

And among the family papers held by the University are the letters of Alexander Forbes, Lord Pitsligo (1678-1762), from Fraserburgh, political theorist and Jacobite army officer in both uprisings.

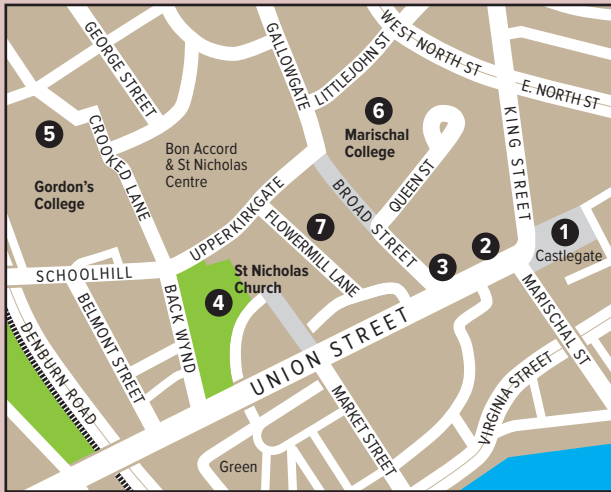
The University's museum collections also include a variety of material dating from the 18th century, including some items closely associated with the Jacobite sympathies of the colleges. For example, both King's College and Marischal College commissioned a series of paintings of monarchs to display their loyalty to the Stuart and then Hanoverian monarchs, while in the years after 1745, King's College employed the Jacobite artist Cosmo Alexander to restore paintings in the collection. There are also many other relevant items which have joined the university's museum collections since their establishment in the later 18th century and these include coins, medals, weapons and jewellery.

Dispatch box of Field Marshal Keith, from University of Aberdeen Historic Collections



Commemorative medal of the Battle of Culloden, from University of Aberdeen Historic Collections





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10 April 1746 In presence of the Governour
 Compared William Murray Merchant in Aberdeen
 who was called by the Governour upon Account that
 he had been some time out of Town And being
 Examined Declared that he went out of this Town
 the fifteenth day of March last to Newcastle &
 to order the baggage due out of that place to the Army
 And being thus ordered by his Wife that there was
 little to be feared in Town and that he might take the
 Opportunity of visiting his friends in the Country
 Upon which he went to the house of David Gordon
 in Dehlophen (who is Married to his wifes Sister) And
 Stayed there till Monday last that he came back
 to Newcastle Six Miles from this Town where he
 Stayed till yesterday that he came in to this Town
 And was willing to Make Oath that During all this
 time he has had no Correspondence with any of the
 Rebels
 James Morrison Juror
 Alexander Robertson
 The Governour appoints the said William Murray
 to find bail to appear before the Magistrate & Governour
 of this Town at all times when called for under the
 penalty of one hundred pound Sterling money
 James Morrison Juror
 Alexander Robertson

Confession of Will Murray held in the Tolbooth after the Battle of Culloden, courtesy of Aberdeen City Archives



Locations shown on Alexander Milne's plan of Aberdeen, surveyed 1789

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