

A Guide to

# Historic Perth

## “THE FAIR CITY”

Set in the heart of Scotland, and located at the lowest historical bridging point on the River Tay, Perth has grown from a medieval market and trading town to become the vibrant focus for leisure and business activity in Perthshire.



This leaflet is a brief guide to the history of one of Scotland’s earliest and most important Royal Burghs. It will lead you through the main stages in the town’s development, with the map inside guiding you to a trail of information boards located around the historic centre, pointing out much more of the hidden history of Perth.

# Medieval Perth

The first settlement is likely to have started here in the late 10th century AD, with buildings growing up along the west bank of the River Tay (what became Watergate) and beside the route to the crossing point of the river (now High Street). The settlement developed around St John's Kirk, which was at the heart of the early town, and also gave Perth its other name – St John's Toun, which lives on in the name of the local football team St Johnstone FC.

King David I made Perth a Royal Burgh in the 12th century AD. Its location on the River Tay, and at the heart of the fertile valleys of Strathearn and Strathmore, led to rapid growth trading agricultural exports, and importing goods from areas including France, Spain, the Low Countries and the Baltic region. These goods entered and left Perth through the harbour which was originally located adjacent to the town centre.

Location Map of Perth

Perth was controlled by a Burgh Council, made up of a Provost and Baillies, which oversaw the organisation of markets and the collection of taxes for the crown. In 1210, the Merchant Guild was set up under the instruction of King William the Lion to work alongside the Burgh Council.

Of the buildings from the medieval burgh, only St John's Kirk survives, although greatly modified. The early burgh can, however, still be traced in the central street plan. Perth was one of the few walled towns in Scotland, and the line of this can be seen in the route of Canal Street, Methven Street and Mill Street, which mark out the boundaries of the early burgh wall and ditch. Street names, such as North Port (port from French meaning 'entrance') and Cutlog Vennel (vennel from French meaning 'small street') reflect its cosmopolitan past, whilst others, such as Skinnergate

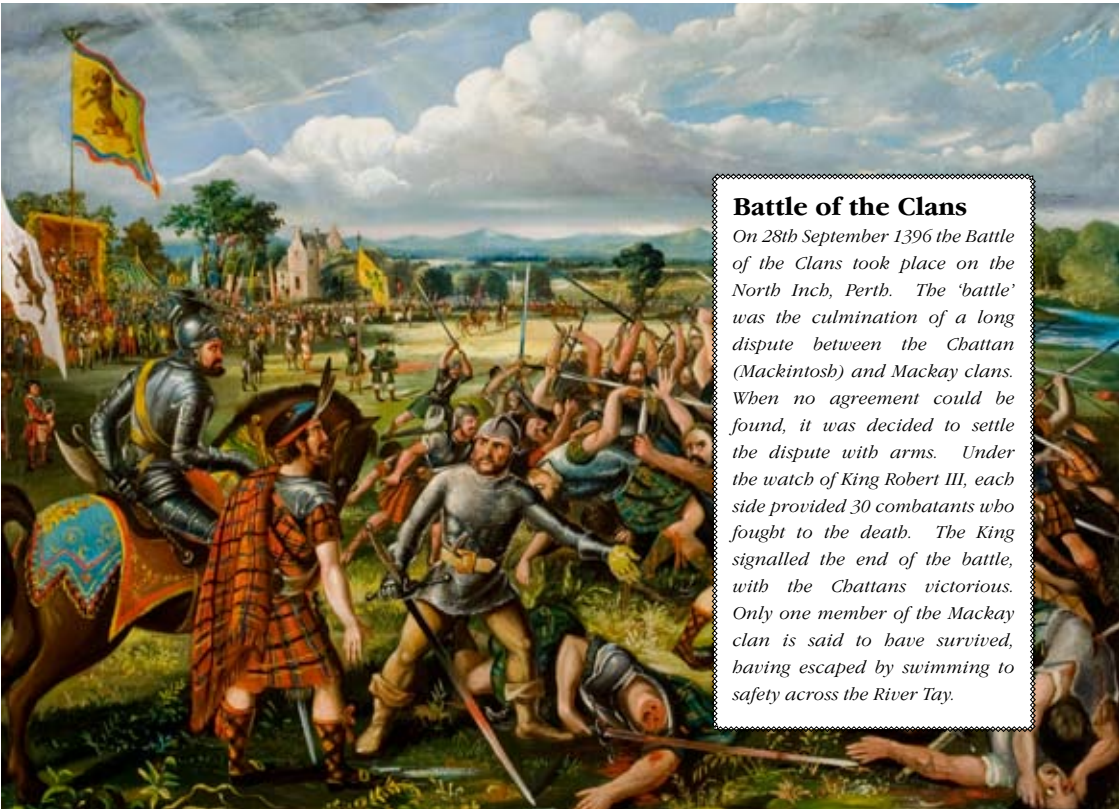
## Charter of 1210

*The importance of the early Royal Burgh of Perth is reflected in the earliest surviving Royal Charter for the town, granted by King William the Lion in 1210, creating a Merchant Guild to work alongside the Burgh Council. The Guild was made up of the successful merchants who took part in trade within the burgh. Although 800 years have passed, the Guildry Incorporation of Perth continues today, functioning as a **XXXX (to follow)***

(the street of the animal skimmers and related trades) and Fleshers Vennel (the street of the butchers), reflect some of the activities which occurred in the burgh.

### **The Glovers Incorporation**

*The Glovers were a powerful and wealthy craft, focused on the production of gloves and other leatherwork. Their activity was focused on the area of Skimmergate, close to the Skimmers who provided the leather. The Glovers witnessed increasing prosperity through the medieval period, becoming one of the main landowners in the area, before a gradual decline in the proceeding centuries, with the last working glover recorded in the 19th century. Today the Glover Incorporation of Perth functions primarily as a **XXXXX (to follow)**.*



### **Battle of the Clans**

*On 28th September 1396 the Battle of the Clans took place on the North Inch, Perth. The 'battle' was the culmination of a long dispute between the Chattan (Mackintosh) and Mackay clans. When no agreement could be found, it was decided to settle the dispute with arms. Under the watch of King Robert III, each side provided 30 combatants who fought to the death. The King signalled the end of the battle, with the Chattans victorious. Only one member of the Mackay clan is said to have survived, having escaped by swimming to safety across the River Tay.*



# The Reformation and Renaissance: Perth in the 16th-17th Centuries

By the 16th century there were three friaries and a monastery located just outside the burgh boundary. The Franciscan Greyfriars were located to the south (in the area of the South Inch); the Carmelite Whitefriars to the west (in the area of Longcauseway); the Dominican Blackfriars to the north (behind the Museum and Concert Hall); and the Carthusian Monastery to the south-west.

Influenced by the spread of new ideas from the continent, John Knox preached his sermon against idolatry in 1559 in St John's Kirk. It is said the sermon so inflamed the listening crowd that they destroyed much of the kirk's Catholic furnishings as idolatrous, and then proceeded to destroy the town's friaries and monastery. Local place-names still hold a link to this past.

## The Friars Pot

*'The Friars' Pot' incident of 1543 was an infamous moment in Perth's history. The story goes that as a reaction to both the increasingly wealthy and luxurious lifestyle of the monks, and a long-running dispute over access to land (the monks are alleged to have refused access to land commonly used by the townspeople for archery practice), a group of Perth residents took matters into their own hands. Breaking into the Blackfriars Monastery, they caused damage to the buildings, and are rumoured to have decided to ridicule the monks by setting off around town with the pot containing the friars' dinner.*

Shortly after the Reformation, the lands of the Greyfriars became the burial ground for the town, and it still holds some of the earliest gravestones in Perth. The graveyard was robbed of many headstones by Oliver Cromwell's forces during their occupation of Perth in 1651, to construct the citadel which stood on the South Inch.



The Carthusian Priory was eventually replaced by a hospital founded in 1589 by King James VI on or near the site of the monastery. The original hospital was short lived, however, as it befell the same fortune as Greyfriars: demolished to provide construction material for the citadel by Cromwell's men. The current hospital building dates from 1749.

### **The Gowrie Conspiracy**

*An alleged assassination attempt was made by Alexander Ruthven, the Earl of Gowrie, and his brother John on King James VI at Gowrie House in 1600. The popular account of events suggests that the Ruthvens' lured the king to Gowrie House under false pretences, in an effort to kidnap or murder him. The plan was to take the king hostage within Gowrie House. The conspiracy failed, as the King was able to alert his attendants, with both the Earl and his brother killed in the resulting struggle. Whether this was a genuine assassination attempt, or an invention by the king's entourage to remove a disloyal family remains a mystery. What is known is that the king survived, and in 1603 succeeded Elizabeth I as James I of England, thus uniting the Scottish and English royal houses.*

Perth's strategic and central location continued to make it an important settlement during this period. In the 17th century the town was chosen for a number of meetings of the Scottish Parliament. Perth continued to be an important trading centre, although international trade declined during this period, with the focus turning to the exchange and export of local produce.

The local nobility and wealthy merchants built their houses next to the River Tay, along Watergate and Speygate. One of the most impressive of these buildings was Gowrie House, located near to the present day junction of South Street and



Tay Street. The building subsequently became an artillery barracks before finally being demolished in the 19th century.

Perth has long been popular with visitors and travellers, both friend and foe, due to its strategic and central location, and boasts what is claimed to be the oldest hotel in Scotland, the Salutation Hotel, on South Street, with the original building dating to 1699. Although nothing of the original structure survives today, the present building possesses one of the most impressive Late Georgian façades in Perth.

### **The North and South Inches**

*To the north and south of the town centre are two areas of parkland known as the North and South Inches. The word 'inch' comes from the Gaelic for 'island' and reflects the boggy nature of the area. Granted to the town by King Robert II in 1374, in the past they were used for numerous activities, including cattle grazing, linen drying, and as the focus for fairs and exhibitions. The South Inch was even used to hold horse races from 1613. Today they are mainly used for recreation, although the South Inch also hosts the Perth Show, a county agricultural fair, each summer.*







Buildings mentioned in text



Areas and streets in text



Location of interpretation panels



# Georgian Perth (1714 - 1837)

Into the 18th century Perth maintained its traditional agricultural base along with related crafts such as leather-working. With the increasing mechanisation and use of labour that characterised the Industrial Revolution, new industries developed including textiles and whisky.

Water was a key factor in the industrial development of Perth, and provided the power to turn the wheels of the mills which were established along the Lade, the wet ditch which had marked out the medieval burgh's defences. The Lade in the town centre partially survives underneath today's streets, notably Mill Street. Some of the old mills still stand, at the Upper and Lower City Mills.

## **The Fair Maids House**

*The Fair Maid's House is one of the most famous buildings in Perth, largely due to the imagination and creative writing of Sir Walter Scott in his tale *The Fair Maid of Perth* published in 1828. Although Scott's work was one of invention, the myth has continued to prove popular. The building was also used as the meeting house of the Glovers Incorporation, one of the most prominent and influential guilds in Perth.*

The Georgian period saw the expansion of the town beyond the medieval burgh boundary, initially to the west with the development of New Row, Leonard Street and the Pomarium. On the eastern side of the burgh, the construction of Perth Bridge from 1766-71 was the cause of a







great deal of building activity. This was to be the first across the Tay at Perth since the old bridge collapsed in 1621. It led to the remodelling of the street plan within the burgh, with George Street cutting through the old settlement to provide a link between High Street and the new bridge.

At the north end of George Street stands Perth Museum and Art Gallery, one of the most distinctive buildings in Perth, the design partly influenced by the Pantheon in Rome. The earliest part was built in 1822-4 as a rotunda museum and monument to Thomas Marshall, former Lord Provost of Perth. It still dominates the view along George Street today. The Museum has been collecting objects of historic, archaeological, scientific and artistic significance since the late 18th century and is today recognised as holding collections of national significance.

In the late 18th century further expansion of the town was laid out to the north and south. The area between the medieval burgh and the North Inch was planned as a 'New Town' comprising Charlotte Street, Atholl Crescent and Place and Rose Terrace. The frontage of Rose Terrace, designed by celebrated architect Robert Reid, is particularly impressive. The central building: the Seminaries, incorporated Perth Academy and the Grammar School, alongside a number of other smaller schools from within the burgh. With views across the Inch, Rose Terrace is considered to be one of the finest examples of Georgian style outside of Edinburgh.

In 1798 a second 'New Town' was laid out between Canal Street and the South Inch, which involved filling in the medieval ditch. The main feature of this development was Marshall Place, with its elegant Georgian townhouses commanding fine views of the South Inch. In 1801 St John's Street was created as an extension of the route from George Street to South Street, and the later addition of Princes Street created a link with the turnpike road to North Queensferry, and Edinburgh beyond.

IMAGE

view across Inch for Rose Terrace: Perth from Boatland 1985.314

Piped water and gas were first introduced to the town in the 1820s. The Old Waterworks on Marshall Place was constructed in 1832 and was the brain-child of Dr Adam Anderson, the Rector of Perth Academy. He was charged by the Council with providing a satisfactory water scheme for the town. It used a complex system of pipes drawing water from the River Tay, and a steam engine to pump the water into the upper part of the building which held a reservoir. So impressive was this engineering feat that the King of Prussia ordered a similar construction for Berlin in 1837. The Waterworks now functions as the Fergusson Gallery: housing the largest collection of art-works by the Scottish Colourist John Duncan Fergusson.

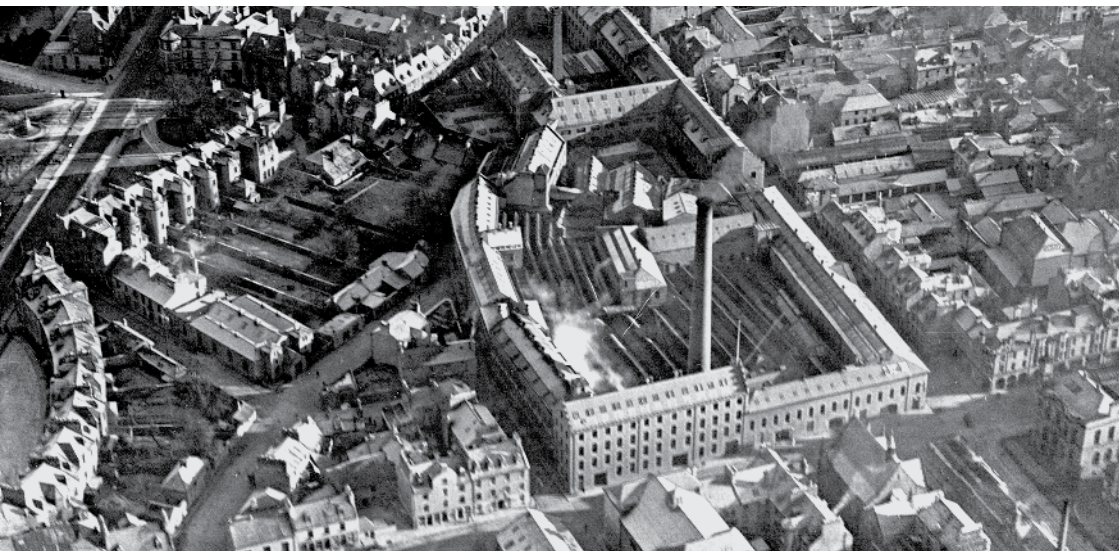
# Victorian Perth (1837 - 1901)

By the late 18th century Perth and the surrounding area had 23 known small stills. Although these declined into the 19th century, the town maintained its role in the whisky trade by focussing on blending and bottling. A number of the most famous names in whisky are associated with Perth, including Arthur Bell & Sons, John Dewar & Sons Ltd. and Matthew Gloag & Son Ltd. The headquarters of the latter, which also operated as major wine merchants, can still be seen, at the corner of Mill Street and Kinnoull Street. Here, the keen eye can pick out the carving of vines on the upper part of the aptly named Bordeau House.

Although demand declined with the end of the Napoleonic Wars, linen production continued to be important for Perth into the later 1800s. New steam-powered linen works were established in the town in the 1860s. Probably the most famous name is Pullars of Perth, which developed in



the weaving and dye-working industries before moving into dry-cleaning. The Pullars Works was located on the corner of Kinnoull Street and Mill Street. The building was redeveloped in 1999: the façade of the building was retained, with the interior altered, and now serves as Perth & Kinross Council offices. The Victorian innovation of using cast iron beams and columns within structures is visible within the building.

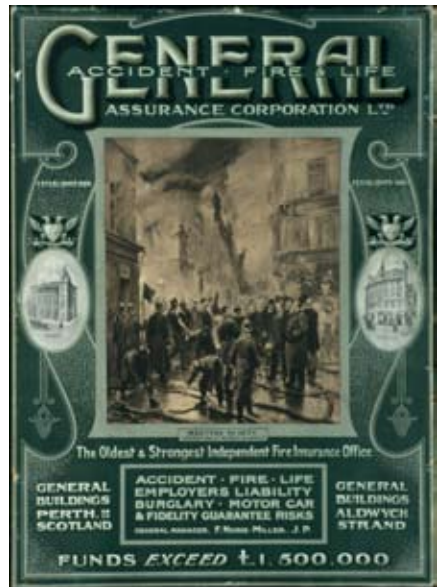




The first railway station in Perth was built in 1848, and from 1866 Perth, known as the 'Gateway to the Highlands', was the assembly point for the Caledonian, Highland and North British Railways. The arrival of the railways tended to concentrate industries on the north and west sides of town. It was seen as crucial to the development of industry in Perth, with the town's location at the meeting point of a number of different lines allowing the transport of produce throughout Britain and to the Empire.

Perth contains a number of fine Victorian buildings which reflect the confidence of the period. One of these is the Central Bank building at 50 St John's Street, which now operates as Lakeland. It was designed by architect David Rhind in 1846, with an Italian renaissance style. The building exudes success, with the bank wanting to publicly display their financial stability. The fine internal decoration can still be viewed.

Another major development for Perth was the creation of The General Accident Fire and Life Assurance Corporation (the GA) in 1885. Its offices were originally located at 44 Tay Street. Founded by a group of Perthshire businessmen, the GA was the first company to insure against burglary. With the success and rapid growth of the GA new offices were quickly sought, with the construction of their new headquarters on a site at the



junction of Tay Street and High Street, now occupied by Perth & Kinross Council.

This new building had a frontage facing onto Tay Street. Constructed in the 1870s and 1880s, Tay Street was a major engineering works which involved the creation of a raised embankment and street along the shore of the river, stretching from the South Inch to Perth Bridge. Originally tree-lined, the buildings and offices which grew up along the new street reflected Perth's development as a business and administrative centre of great economic importance.



# Modern Perth (20th - 21st Century)

Perth has continued to grow through the 20th and into the 21st centuries, with a population rising to over 43,000 by 2001. This development has seen great changes within the historic core of the town, with many of the buildings which still follow the lines of the medieval streets constructed during this period.

The 20th century saw the continued growth of the Perth economy, particularly in insurance and banking. General Accident's expansion led them to vacate their premises on Tay Street in 1983, moving to a custom-built international headquarters on the outskirts of the town. A number of mergers have now seen the loss of the name, but the company Norwich Union still has a major presence in Perth.

A number of developments in the later 20th and start of the 21st century have created a new and modern appearance for Perth. The flood defences which line the Inches and Tay Street, constructed in 1999-2001, were one of the most significant engineering works the town has witnessed. The remodelled Tay Street incorporates a number of sculptures and, at the end of High Street, a viewing platform of the river.

The construction of the Concert Hall in 2005 not only provided Perth with a state-of-the-art auditorium, but also allowed a glimpse of the town's earlier history to be seen through archaeological excavation. Finds from these and other excavations can be seen in the neighbouring Perth Museum and Art Gallery.



A Guide to

# Historic Perth



Perth is a vibrant city situated in the heart of Scotland. In 2010 the town celebrates the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Burgh of Perth when King William the Lion granted the Royal Charter. With a unique mix of independent and international retailers, award winning restaurants, popular farmers markets and numerous opportunities for entertainment, Perth continues to be a popular place to both live and visit

## Contact information:

Perth Tourist Information Centre	01738 450600	Perth and Kinross Council	01738 475000
Perth Theatre & Concert Hall	0845 6126320	Perth Racecourse	01738 551597
Perth Museum & Art Gallery	01738 632488	Perth Leisure Pool	01738 492400
A.K. Bell Library	01738 444949	Public Transport: Traveline	0871 2002233
Fergusson Gallery	01738 441944		



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