

STANEHYVE ·TOLBOOTH TIMES·



High Street, Stonehaven
Circa 1900



Editorial

After what has been a long process over several years and a great deal of time and effort by those involved, it was very satisfying that our local Councillors agreed last month that the whole Tolbooth building can be transferred to Stonehaven Tolbooth Association at a price of £1. This is still subject to final approval by another Committee, but we are hopeful that STA will soon be able to take full ownership of what is the most important building in Stonehaven, and to be able to preserve it for future generations. What was also most encouraging was the support of our local Councillors, who all appreciated the work we have done to set up an amazing Museum attracting many happy visitors, and to plan ahead for the future. It is also clear that we have encouragement from the public, who fully support our proposals. However, with ownership of the building, there will come greater responsibilities to maintain and improve a building which has suffered many years of low maintenance by the Council, even although they have for years been sitting on a Tolbooth Fund of £50,000, probably dating from the original fund set up by Stonehaven Town Council in 1958 to renovate the building.

Having achieved a great deal since the Museum was re-opened in 2011, this is the start of a new chapter for STA and will undoubtedly mean more work for your Committee. We can work towards making improvements to the existing Museum and there are, of course, plans for a bold and exciting extension, if the necessary funds can be found. Plans for paving the Inner Courtyard are well advanced to create what will be a useful space for outdoor displays and exhibitions. If you wish to be part of the exciting journey ahead of us, we shall be pleased to hear from you.

Gordon Ritchie MVO DL

Editor

If you have any stories or information you think could be included in future editions, please get in touch with either lizmkritchie@gmail.com or gritchie626@gmail.com

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MUSEUM SNIPPETS

Summer opening hours

The museum reverted to summer opening hours on 1st April—Wednesdays to Mondays. From 1.30pm to 4.30pm each day. Closed Tuesdays.

Sea Cadet Unit

Our close links with local youth organisations saw approx. 20 cadets and officers from local sea cadet unit TS Carron visit the museum on the evening of 1st April. Volunteers Ian and Clare showed them round the museum.

Globus Tours

The national tour company have been in touch and confirmed that in 2024 they will again be including a visit to the museum on their twice weekly tours of the area. They will be starting their visits in late April and will run throughout the summer on a Wednesday and Sunday evening.

Volunteers/ Volunteer Fair

With the move to summer opening hours, we ideally require 12 volunteers each week to open and operate the museum each day (closed Tuesdays). The Globus Tours also take place after normal opening hours (usually between 5pm and 6pm) and require further volunteers. In order to not overburden any of our current volunteers, we are always looking to expand our numbers. If you or someone you know might like to get involved at the museum, please get in touch by e-mail at enquiries@stonehaventolbooth.co.uk or pop in to see us and find out more. We are also taking part in a Volunteer Fair to be held at Fetteresso Church Hall on Bath Street from 3pm to 7pm on Thursday 25th April. Pop in for a chat and find out more.

Front cover image—The buildings on the left and the Town House and Steeple are still there today but the shops and houses on the right hand side have been replaced. At that time, there were about 25 shops in the High Street and you can see 5 in this photo. The Water Yett is on the left. The lad with the apron looks to be bending over to pick up his basket. Was it heavy? The shop of David Donald to the right of the Steeple was taken over by Charles McHardy who opened his butchers shop there in 1907.



MUSEUM SNIPPETS

Footfall for the last few months

The winter months have seen the harbour and beachfront area lashed by high winds and high tides/storm surges that have meant the museum was unable to open on 5 occasions—one weekend was on advice from the police who closed the Old Pier to all traffic.

Despite the bad weather a lot of people came down to the harbour area on 1st January to either take part in or watch the annual Nippy Dip. The museum opened to cater for all these visitors to the harbour and we welcomed more than 150 visitors that day.

Easter weekend at end of March and some brighter weather meant we saw some improved visitor numbers and we hope this will be the start of a good summer season. The figures below show that we still have some way to go to replicate the visitor numbers in 2018/19 but we are increasing year on year.

2023/24	Museum	Clock tower	Total	Days open	Average Daily footfall
December	548	143	691	11	63
January	681	55	736	9	82
February	478	215	693	6	115
March	779	352	1131	11	103
TOTALS	2486	765	3251	37	88

	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
December	434	254	Covid	1218	1777
January	669	Covid	Covid	1056	1119
February	628	438	Covid	813	1562
March	645	444	Covid	180	1595
TOTALS	2376	1136		3267	6053



The Market Square around 1955.

Four worthies are enjoying a seat whilst others are having a game of draughts on the Plainstones. The silver car in the centre is a Standard Vanguard belonging to John McIntosh, Butcher, as recalled by his son Neil, who ran the business until he retired in 1990. The Market Bar can be seen and also James Clark, Grocer, which was later the shop of Andrew Buchan. Next to the Crown Hotel is The Leather Shop.



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

by Madge Mackie

Growing up as a child in the 1950s

Madge Mackie was brought up with her siblings in the Auld Toon and she has written down her memories of growing up in the 1950's. These memories were recently shared on Stonehaven's local online newspaper—The Bellman in February 2024. Here is the article as printed.



The Backies

The sundial at the Old Pier

All the rubble from knocking down the old houses in the 30s 40s 50s and 60s to build the Council houses was dumped down the Backies which now accommodates the car park, the fishermen's huts, the sewage works and the lifeboat portacabin. Prior to this the sea came right up to the sea wall protecting the town from the sea.

Water Yett

The Water Yett which is half way up High Street was open with no door on it and led down to the Carron River which ran along the wall past the Water Yett and right out to sea. At high tide when we were young in the 50s you could not get round the rocks from the Water Yett to the backies because the sea water came right up to the wall.

In the past the fisherman used to go down the Water Yett to use as a toilet before they went to sea. The Council bought this property in the 60s and converted it into flats for let and covered the entrance with a door.

High Street (formerly known as Market Street)

Ross's Building stood at the junction on High Street and Keith Place and was a very tall building with rickety wooden stairs. James Michie The Director of Education for Kincardineshire in the 60s 70s, was brought up in this house and his mother still lived there when we were children. This is where there is a garden now with the Alison rowing boat in it



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

New Council Housing

The houses opposite Keith Place were knocked down in the 50s and new Council houses built. This was where the green lady was said to roam. I got my picture taken in the hole where the excavations were as this had become famous as the area where the Green Lady roamed. This photo was published in the P & J. These houses which were knocked down were part of the houses which wrapped round the Old Town Clock, down High Street and onto the Shorehead. The new ones on the Shorehead were built on a piece of waste ground opposite number 96 where we used to play bools (glass bools, steelies and stone bools) At this time the drains on High Street were gullies and we used to play our bools there as well.

After the new houses were built we used to play games in the street just outside the lifeboat shed (which at that time was a coal store owned by the Taylor family who live in Arbuthnott Street) Games we played were hide and seek, cricket, kick the cannie and rounders and would stop playing to watch any car which came down but they were few and far between We had a dog called Scottie who loved to sit in the middle of the road here so he could hear my dads boat come round the breakwater and went to meet him. Scottie was reluctant to move and any car driver would have to get out and shift him.

Mr. Burnett who owned the granary and a lorry haulage business which was based along the Shorehead (where the yacht club building is and opposite the jetty) used to drive down in a grand old car with a St Bernards dog in the back seat, which used to amaze us as children.

Further up High Street

Opposite the Water Yett is an old house with carving of a baby round the door. This house was preserved and turned into houses let by the Council.

Next to it beside the post box was Marshalls bike repairs shop and next to that was a small house with rooms for let, Then there was a building which sold gas fittings and gas mantles. I was asked by an old lady down the pier to run a message for her and to go and buy a gas mantle for her for her gas light and when I was taking it back I accidentally touched it and it disappeared I was quite upset and didn't understand where it had gone. These buildings were knocked down in the 50s to build more Council housing.

Next to this building was a lane and then there was a very tall building which stood on its own. It had rooms for let and on the ground floor there was a room which housed the Shepherds Club where a lot of the fishermen saved money every week for a rainy day. There was a free standing well like the Duthie Well standing against it. This house was knocked down and this is where the garden is now at the bottom of King Street.



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

Further up High Street

Further up High Street opposite the Cannon (this is the point used by locals as the boundary of the old town) there was an electrical shop where the first TVs were displayed in the window and you could watch the programmes from the street. We used to watch The Wooden Tops when we were coming home from school. Next to that was the old Bank House which was empty and where we went to the Girls Club which was held on the ground floor. We made crafts, played table tennis, listened to pop music on a record player and entered quizzes with other clubs as far away as Aberdeen. These buildings were knocked down to build more council housing leaving the lane which separated them from Dunnottar School.

When we went to Dunnottar School initially they just had outside toilets with no roof on them. From Primary 3 - 7 the floors of the classrooms were either on a slope or steps. When I reached P 3 the floor was steps and when we went back the next year that floor had been flattened. In primary 4 the floor had a slope and the next year they were also flattened. Then in P 5 we had steps which were flattened the next year. By the time we reached P 6, which was upstairs, P6 and P 7 had flat floors. This had been an ongoing improvement of the school.

The Stonehaven library was based in the school upstairs and the public were allowed in to change their books on a Wednesday afternoon and we were all told to be very quiet. It moved to Allardice Street in the late 50s. Toilets were installed inside the school in the mid 50s and from then we had to go across the road to the drill hall for our gym classes and had to carry the bean bags and equipment across the road. Our school parties were also held in the Drill Hall. The council eventually bought this ground and built more Council Houses.

On the same side of the road where the hole is for the overflow of flood water used to be public gardens and next to these gardens was Stewart the scrappy building where we used to take rags up round the back of the building and get money for them. This building is still standing. In the 50s there was an ice cream shop called Poppy Mary Anns there which sold delicious ice cream. The man who served you was very severe but his wife was nice. They lived in one room at the back of the shop.

Further down High Street opposite Cool Gourmet was Knowles the Grocery shop. They sold biscuits from boxes and put in a bag to be weighed. When these boxes were nearly finished they were decanted into a large box and sold by the box as broken biscuits. My mum always bought these and would turn the box upside down onto a clean dishtowel and picked out all the whole biscuits and put into a separate tin to give to visitors when they came. The rest was put back in the box and we were allowed to help ourselves when we felt like it.



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

Next to Knowles was Katie Cormacks sweetie shop (now the dog grooming shop) which was our favourite place. In the 50s we got a shilling on a Saturday and we went to Katie Cormacks for sweeties (smacherie) and would get penny dainties, lucky bags, rhubarb rock, sherbet fiz, liquorice (which we made into a drink which had to be under the bed for a week and then we shook the bottle and drank the fiz) and gobstoppers - the list goes on. We then went to the picture house in Allardice Street to watch the matinee which cost 9d for the cheap seats. The shilling did not last long.



Offtae the tattie pickin'

Further down the street you come to the cross where Donald's the baker was (later taken over by The Cross Bakery). When we went to the tatties picking we would go there before we were picked up at 7 o'clock in the float lorry and go through to the bake house and bought butteries straight from the oven to take to the tatties with us. Yum.

Further down the Street you come to Keith Place where at the entrance was an old house with steps outside and an Archway underneath the building gaining access to the backyard where Knowles the grocer kept some vans. This house was also demolished and new Council houses built.

Further down Keith Place there was a row of buildings which in the 50s was used as a store. In the middle of the square these buildings made, Maimie Pirie who lived in High Street put up a wooden garage. These buildings were also bought by the Council who built more Council Houses.

Shorehead and Harbour area

Where the lifeboat shed is now was a coal shed owned by Mr. Taylor the coal merchant. Next to this shed (now the Old Pier Cafe) was a garage which repaired cars.

Further down the pier the women used to sit on the steps or bring their own stools outside Mrs. Leslie's house in the Old Pier (the house with the steps outside) to have a bleather. As children we had to go away and play so we would not hear what they were talking about. One summer day they were sitting bleathering when a couple of visitors passed by and commented "look at those poor children they have no shoes" My mother was incensed so she commented "excuse me but they do have shoes they just don't have them on." We had good shoes for school and church and gym shoes for playing in the harbour which were often wet as we played near the water so we would remove them and run around in our bare feet.



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

As children we played in the Tolbooth (which we called the Old Jail). In the courtyard at the back which is going to be improved, the older children had swung ropes over the rafters so we could use them as a swing. At that time the area was partly covered with a roof. One time we were playing jumping the rafters when one of us jumped onto a wooden part and fell through the floor. Luckily he was unhurt but it made us all a little more careful.

During the 50s the light house which was at the end of the pier was damaged in a storm and there was a gap between the pier and the lighthouse. It was a good place to cast your fishing lines. The older children would go down on to the upturned pier and cross the gap at low tide to the lighthouse. Very dangerous!

In the winter we would come home from school on a cold night and pour water down the slipway outside 96 and go in and do our homework and have tea. Everyone would come out after tea and the slippy had frozen over so we could slide down to the water's edge. I don't remember anyone actually falling in.

In the 30s there was not a boom to the entrance of the inner harbour. In a storm our dad had to put long ropes on his boat and float it in the middle of the harbour so it would not get bashed against the walls or sunk. They had to sit on their boats all night. When the boom was first put on it was placed on the far away pier so the fishermen had to run the gauntlet of the weather to put it across the gap in the pier during a storm.

In the 50s the boats landed their fish on the outer pier in boxes to be sold and bought by buyers from Aberdeen. They used to shout out how much they were prepared to pay for a box. At that time there were boxes of all different sort of fish - cod, skate, haddock, flat fish and monk fish. Mr. Rankin from Stonehaven held the sales and gathered the money for the fish to pay the fishermen. He also had a shed on the south pier and sold diesel for the boats and he was an agent for insurance for the fishing boats. I see that that shed has been knocked down and the area cleared recently.

We were well fed as children (4 of us). We had fish everyday disguised one way or another as this was free (fishcakes, eggfish pie, fish and white sauce, fried fish and fish soup (not my favourite). We also bartered with the farmers so had lots of vegetables and eggs.

My dad had a shed round the backies where he would mend creels and nets. He sold this shed to Mr. Taylor who lived in Old Pier and had claimed the ground at the back of his house (which had been filled in by all the rubble from the knocked down houses) as his deeds said his property went to the sea and he wanted the land my dads shed was on. He wanted to make a caravan park there and when he succeeded with his claim he leveled the ground and also built a toilet block for the caravanners. He paid a good price so my dad sold. However this had a detrimental affect on us as he used to take his line ropes basket into the living room and scrape the hooks of rust at the beginning of the winter season. The scraping noise used to make you shiver.



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

In the 50s the braes at the far side of the harbour came down and sunk boats. After this the piling at the top of the braes was put in to stop the Braes moving again. The Braes were repaired the following summer and we heard the thumping all summer long.

My father and uncle were instrumental in getting payment from the government for fishermen when they were unable to go to sea due to bad weather. They wrote to members of parliament to assist them in their appeal and the members took it up on their behalf in parliament and got an act passed so they could apply in bad weather for payment when they could not get out to sea in bad weather.

When summer visitors came for their holidays to Stonehaven the Council employed an Entertainments Manager to organise events for them like Sand Castle competitions and Poddie fishing competitions (you got a prize for the smallest fish caught, the largest caught and the most fish caught). These were held once a week all through the summer. During the summer there were dances held on the pier beside the backies with the music being provided by a band comprising of a pianist, drummer and fiddle who played on the back of a open top lorry.

At this time there were lots of rowing boats for hire in the harbour. The owner Mr. Yeoman also bought a few banana shaped boats which were popular with the visitors. You had to pay for these boats by the hour which we could not afford but we always managed to chum up a visitor and showed them how to row.

In the 50s the harbour was lit with gas lighting and the learie came every night to light them in the winter.

There used to be public toilets at the top of the slippy. These were knocked down in the 80s and new ones built down beside the Backies.

As teenagers the Marine Hotel was the place to be and they were one of the first hotels to provide stovie suppers and were so busy that people were sitting on the stairs eating them.

Paths

There used to be a path which took you from the Shorehead to Botany Bay along the bottom of the cliffs. On the way you passed an area where they used to remove sandstone for building some of the houses in the Old Town. This area often smelt of gas.

Just past Botany Bay you could go up the path called the Tartan Roadie to the top of the cliffs. You could then come back along the cliffs to the top of the harbour and come down the path called The Inspector which ran all the way down to the back of Dawson Buildings next to the gas works. We used to sledge down this path in the winter. Because girls did not wear trousers my mum would cut the sleeves off old jumpers so we could use them as leg warmers when sledging.



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

Paths

There was a gully at the edge of this path which you had to be careful and not steer into and there was a well half way down where water ran continually. The path that cut off from The Inspector to take you back down to the harbour was called The Sandy Roadie. This came out at the bottom of the Braes next to the last house on the Shorehead. There was also a path that went from the Shorehead up to The Inspector from the house along a bit from the last house where Drew Lawson now stays. The other way to get up the Braes was up Castle Street. When we were small these were old houses which were again knocked down by the Council and new council houses built.

Our Uncle Bob had a room in a derelict house in Love Lane where he used to make toys for us as children. This building is now gone and is an open space. It was a very rickety building.

As a child our mum lived in Cowgate where a lot of the fisherfolk stayed and they used to sort and bait their lines in the courtyard. They only had two rooms so a lot of families stayed there,

It was a tradition to burn the braes in the spring every year, which we children did and the fire brigade used to come and put the fires out!

We had lots of freedom as children but we had our boundaries which we were not allowed to go beyond. We always did what we were told. One day the older children decided to go to Downie Point (which we called Spongie Brae because the grass was spongie) and by this time we were old enough to join them. However one of the younger children decided to follow us and I kept turning round and telling them that they were not allowed and to go back. They would not take a telling so I took their hand and took them back to the Shorehead. I had not been aware that we were being watched (which was usually most of the time) by people who lived on the Shorehead and as I passed their houses I got a telling off for taking the young ones to Spongie Brae. I was most indignant as I was the one who turned around and took them back. Most unjust.



Children at play at the harbour



AULD TOON, STONEHAVEN MEMORIES

Other properties

The gas tank was still there when we were children. There was also a gas showroom at the top of King Street adjacent to the gas works yard. Shepherds Hall was owned by the gas company and they used to put on cooking demonstrations which we liked to go to as you got to eat what they cooked. The Council now own this building.



Looking down from Bervie Braes to site of former Gas Works

At the top of New Street was a building where they made wooden toys (now the private housing development of Kingsgate). Our mother worked there when she was a young girl. She also worked in the net factory which was based where Carron Gardens is now. She then worked as a clippie on the buses. During the war she was asked if she would come back as they were short of staff. She had a baby my older brother Jim by then. Her mother looked after him for her. As part of her outfit on the buses (which had very little heating) was a pair of trousers which she loved as they kept her warm but her mother did not approve.

In New Street just at the back of Dunnottar School was Mathiesons Sweetie Shop. They made sweeties and the family had built a sweetie factory halfway up New Street where they made their sweeties. Their son was involved in the process of making sweeties but sadly he was killed in a motor bike accident. After this they closed the shop and turned the factory into their house. The shop was knocked down together with a couple of other houses next to it and new private housing was built there.

Another building and business the fishermen used was Findlay Main who had a shop just before the main bridge over the Carron (this building was knocked down when the bridge was widened in the 70s) It sold lots of items for boats so was like a ship chandlers.

Taken from an article first published in The Bellman online in February 2024