



STANEHYVE ·TOLBOOTH TIMES·



Drawing of the Old Town Steeple from
around 1930



EDITORIAL

It has been a busy 15 years since a worthy group of Stonehaven folk got together to re-open our Tolbooth Museum, which, in the Spring of 2011, had been peremptorily closed and stripped by Council officials from Mintlaw, without any local consultation whatsoever. This shortsighted action was supposed to save money, but the Council did not realise the amount of support in Stonehaven for our Museum. STA was set up and has created a much loved Museum, enjoyed by thousands each year, both locals and visitors, and as you will see in this issue, still the most popular Museum under the Council. A highlight was the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2019, well deserved by the many volunteers who have given their time and effort to the Museum.

However, it has not always been plain sailing for STA, as while the Council have provided assistance over the years, they would not give STA a long lease or security of tenure of the Tolbooth building. About 5 years ago, it was decided that STA should apply for a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of the whole Tolbooth building and an application and business plan were duly lodged. We also learnt that the Council held a Tolbooth Fund with around £50,000 and which could be spent on the maintenance and repairs to the building, although no one could tell us why this had been kept a secret. We believe this Fund was set up originally by the Town Council when the Tolbooth was restored in the 1960s and included rents received over the years. Unfortunately, things have not progressed smoothly, or indeed quickly, over these past years and it is only now that we can confirm that STA are now the legal owners of the Tolbooth Museum from 25 March 2026.

The completion of the CAT has coincided with the Council eventually appointing contractors to carry out repairs to the Tolbooth building and fireproofing the division between the restaurant and the Museum. We are grateful to the many volunteers who helped empty most of our contents to a container in the courtyard to enable the works to proceed, and to put everything back again. Hopefully, The Museum can be reopened shortly. With Spring here at last, we can now look forward to a refreshed Museum and a busy season ahead.

Gordon Ritchie MVO DL

Editor



Stonehaven Harbour in 1913 showing works on the Middle Pier. On the Shorehead, you can see the Granary, (with the tall Gasworks chimney behind), the Marine Hotel, and the Ship Inn, all much as they are today. The Fish house next to the Ship Inn was converted to form the present restaurant. The tall warehouse next to the Ship Inn was to store grain or coal and was demolished around 1950. The house to the left of the Granary was damaged when the Mine exploded in 1944 and was later demolished.

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

Stonehaven Tolbooth Association

Old Pier

Stonehaven AB39 2JU

Phone: 07512 466329

Email: enquiries@stonehaventolbooth.co.uk

Scottish Charity No. SC043279

Front cover image A fine drawing of the Old Town Steeple from around 1930. Its official name is the Town House and was built in 1790.



MUSEUM SNIPPETS

By Andrew Newton

As we move out of Q4 of the last year into Q1 of the new year we always have a spring in our step as we face the challenges of another year. However, we did not expect the challenges presented to us in January and February of 2026. On 1st January we hosted 110 visitors but on 2nd heavy snow began to blanket the whole NE of Scotland and for seven days Stonehaven was virtually in lock down. The easing of the snow on the 9th was followed by a winter gale which, in turn, was followed by storm Ingrid. The result of this unexpected severe weather was a mere footfall of 274 - down 51% on January 2025. Unfortunately February was no better - persistent rain and 21 days in which the sun was not seen resulted in the lowest February footfall we have ever experienced. On 16th February we closed the museum to permit a large refurbishment.

Aberdeenshire Council own the entire Tolbooth building, or they did until 25th March but see elsewhere in this edition, and wished to carry out maintenance on the building; mainly exterior work but one significant activity was to insert fire proof and sound proof insulation between the ceiling/floor of the ground-floor museum and the first-floor restaurant. This work required that the museum had to decant the majority of its artefacts into temporary storage - a major upheaval which would not have been possible without the enthusiastic dedication of our volunteers. We hope to re-open very early in April.



MUSEUM SNIPPETS (cont'd)

For the last 14 years the Tolbooth museum has operating under the Live Life Aberdeenshire umbrella of directly or indirectly supported historical attractions in the shire. One facet of this arrangement is that we can compare ourselves against comparable organisations. The 2025 footfalls have now been released and it can be seen from the table below that the Tolbooth had nearly 8000 more visitors than the next most successful attraction (Farming Museum) and that we provided 53% of the total footfall. Impressive for a voluntary organisation!

Museum/ Attraction	2025 Footfall
Arbuthnot Museum	0
Aberdeenshire Heritage HQ	74
Aberdeenshire Farming Museum	9,894
Hareshowe	0
Banchory Museum	3,366
Banff Museum	1,165
Tolbooth Museum	17,799
Maud Railway Museum	1,037
Sandhaven Museum	0



LS LOWRY AND STONEHAVEN

By Gordon Ritchie

I enjoyed a family holiday in Berwick upon Tweed last summer and found it a lovely town with many interesting historical features. What caught my eye at various locations in the town were display panels showing paintings of Berwick scenes by the famous artist L S Lowry (1887-1976) and located exactly where he had sketched the scene. And in most cases, the scene was not much different today. Evidently, Lowry was very fond of Berwick and had several holidays there. I have always known of Lowry, probably first when there was a postage stamp of one of his paintings in 1967, and of course his famous matchstick men and women. A recent TV programme used tape recordings of Lowry from around 1972, with the painter portrayed by Ian McKellern and proved fascinating.

the LOWRY trail

Old Property (Main Street, Tweedmouth)

The origins of the painting date to the late 19th century when the artist, who was born in 1887, lived in the town. The scene is a typical street scene in the town, showing the old buildings and the people who lived there. The painting is a masterpiece of the artist's style, showing a busy street scene with many people and a dog. The scene is a typical street scene in the town, showing the old buildings and the people who lived there.

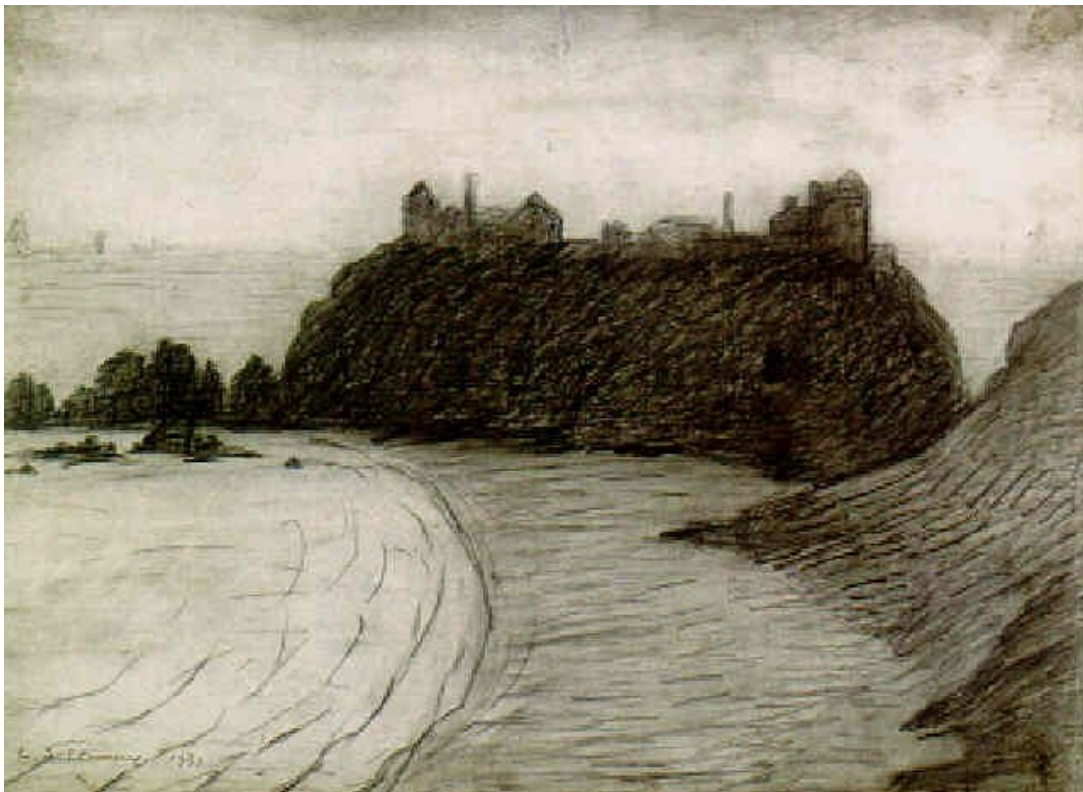
the LOWRY trail

Northumberland County Council
The Sir James Knott Trust
The Countryside Agency
The Berwick-upon-Tweed Preservation Trust



L S LOWRY AND STONEHAVEN (cont'd)

On a visit, a few years ago, to the Aberdeen Treasure Hub (where they store all the paintings in the City collection), I found a Lowry painting, but not a local scene. It turned out, however, that Lowry had travelled widely in Scotland and also spent time in Wick, where he painted local scenes. And he must have visited Stonehaven in 1931, as he sketched the attached drawing of Dunnottar Castle. Viewing the Castle from the north, and probably on a dull and murky day, it does not have any figures. He loved looking at the sea, in all its moods, and there looks to be ships passing. I assume that perhaps, Lowry walked up to the War Memorial on the Black Hill from the Harbour, and stopped briefly to sketch the Castle. Presumably, if he had gone further, he may have sketched the Castle in more detail. And I wonder if he did not take time to sketch Stonehaven Harbour from the Bervie Braes, before he went on his way. However, it is fascinating to learn that Stonehaven was visited by one of the 20th Century's most famous painters.



L S Lowry sketch of Dunnottar castle from 1931.



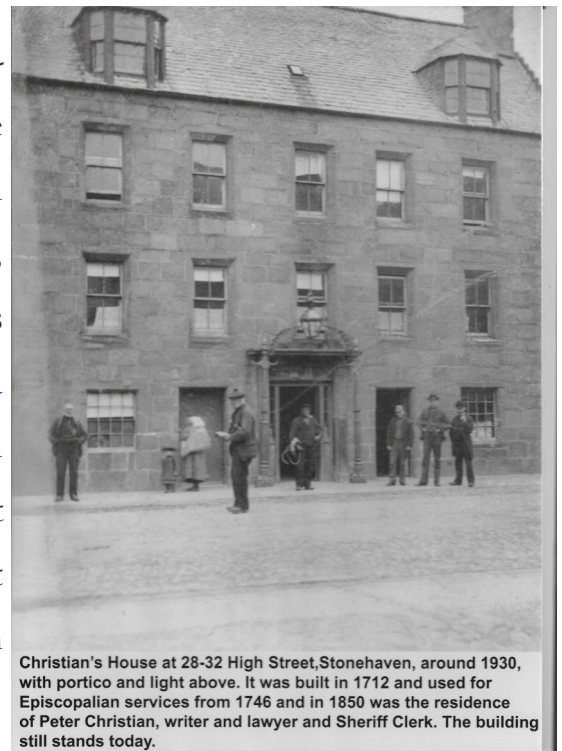
REVEREND ALEXANDER GREIG

By Douglas Cusine

This name may not mean much to many residents of Stonehaven or the surrounding area, but his claim to fame, or infamy, is that, along with two others, he was imprisoned in the Tolbooth for 6 months in 1748. The three were Episcopalian ministers whose crime was contravening a statute prohibiting preaching to more than 5 persons at any one time. In 1746 and before, Episcopalians were out of favour and they had supported the Jacobites during the 1715 and 1745 Rebellions. Apart from Greig, the others were Rev. John Petrie, from Drumlithie, and the Rev. John Troup, from Muchalls, whose grave is to be found in the churchyard of St Mary and St. Nauchlan (St. Mary of the Storms), the ruins of which are beside the first fairway at Stonehaven Golf Club. Troup was born in 1701 and died in 1776.

The point of the article is that there is a mystery surrounding where exactly Greig's crime was committed.

There is a plaque outside Christian's House at Nos. 28-32 High Street, and it says "...around 1746, this house was used by Rev. Alexander Greig...when...legislation forbade congregations larger than five." (The house, which is a listed building, was built in 1712, and was the home of a Peter Christian. His son, who was a lawyer, had a hand in the extension of the harbour in the early 19th century, as he instructed Robert Stevenson (uncle of the author) to prepare a plan, part of which involved blowing up a large rock between what is now the Fish Jetty and the south breakwater).



Christian's House at 28-32 High Street, Stonehaven, around 1930, with portico and light above. It was built in 1712 and used for Episcopalian services from 1746 and in 1850 was the residence of Peter Christian, writer and lawyer and Sheriff Clerk. The building still stands today.



REVEREND ALEXANDER GREIG (cont'd)

Back to the plaque. It was put in place when Archie Watt, retired Depute Head of Mackie Academy, was chairman of Stonehaven Heritage Society. In his book, *Highways and Byways around Stonehaven*, (p. 10) Watt narrates that Greig preached in Christian's House. It is located on the north side of High Street. You can find this statement in many other places, but "Is it accurate?" Maybe not, because it is difficult to reconcile with a similar statement (p.15) but this time, the house is Major Thomson's House which was next to the Water Yett, again on the north side. In yet another place, Watt says that such church services took place in Christian's House, Major Thomson's House "and elsewhere." (p. 34) "The Black Book of Kincardineshire" mentioned below also mentions the Major's House in this connection. (p. 32).

In Elizabeth Christie's book, *The Haven under the Hill*, (p. 13) she says that Greig lodged in a house on the south side of the street. Miss Christie does not identify where Greig lived, but from the description, it can only be Ogilvy of Lumgair's house at 51 High Street. (It is likely that these Ogilvies were Episcopalians, as they supported the Crown against Cromwell, and it may not be stretching things to suggest that he might have preached there. However, that may not be so, as there was an Episcopalian Chapel nearby, also on the south side of the street.) That said, the Episcopalian Chapel (later St. James' Church) was originally in what is was formerly the Sea Cadets' building, next to "The Cool Gourmet" on the south side of High Street. The records of St. James' Church disclose that there was a Chapel on the High Street, as early as 1715. Archie Watt says 1737. Whatever the date, it was nearly burned by the Duke of Cumberland in 1746, but it was stripped of its contents. What is significant for present purposes is that Miss Christie says that Christian's House was used for Episcopalian services.



REVEREND ALEXANDER GREIG (cont'd)



Around 1900, a quiet High Street, Stonehaven. Christian's House is on the left and the white house on the right in the centre is the House of Ogilvy of Lumgair, both still standing.

Going back to Watt, he says that it is likely that Christian's House was the place, as there is a stained-glass window in one room which, "it is believed may have been used as a...chapel." Courtesy of Councillor Sarah Dickinson, I have seen photographs of the rear of the property and there is no sign of any stained-glass window.

Possibly the most accurate source for identifying where Greig preached prior to his trial, is the court papers which, in part, are replicated in James Anderson's, *The Black Book of Kincardineshire*, (pp. 28-29). The trial took place in Stonehaven on 5th December 1748, and in it, three (of 23) witnesses specifically mention, "the house on the south side of the High Street," and two identified the house as one where the lower part was occupied by Peter Cushnie(ey). There is no mention of Christian's House or Major Thomson's House. That evidence clearly puts the "offending" location on the south side of the street, and most likely the Chapel. That does not exclude the possibility that the other houses were used by him at the time, but if that was so, the charge would have said something like, "and in other houses in the High Street."



REVEREND ALEXANDER GREIG (cont'd)

It is impossible to say how many practising Episcopalians there were in and around Stonehaven at the time, but it is well established that people came from Muchalls and Skateraw (Newtonhill) to have their children baptised and in the Tolbooth, there is a replica of a painting which shows a minister (most likely John Troup) baptising children from a window. The original painting is in Brechin, but the window is still there at the top of the steps leading to the Tolbooth Restaurant. It is not in doubt that more than one place was used for these “illegal” church services – e.g. there are ruins of John Troup’s chapel in the grounds of Muchalls Castle. There was a church (presumably an Episcopal Church) in Drumlithie which was burnt by the Duke of Cumberland in 1746. What is also not in doubt is that Alexander Greig was not imprisoned for preaching in Christian’s House on the occasion which featured in his trial, but rather in the former Episcopal chapel.

As it and other places were used for church services, one wonders how people, especially those from the surrounding area, got to know who was preaching and where. Mobile ‘phone, smoke signals, Notice in “The Leader”? One would guess not.



Around 1918. A view further down High Street, Stonehaven, showing Cheeker’s Well on the right. The tall building on the left is Major Thomson’s house which was used for Episcopalian services after the 1745 rebellion. Most of the buildings have been rebuilt and the Well has gone.



DUNNOTTAR SCHOOL PHOTO 1925

By Gordon Ritchie



When removing items from the Museum before the start of the recent works, this fine photo fell out of an old Mearns Leader annual of 1932. It shows a senior class of 1925 at Dunnottar School. The quality is excellent, far better than later school photos, and you can clearly see the expressions on their faces. All are presumably dressed in their best and I like the girl with the long necklace. Sadly we have no names but I can think of Captain John Wood of Sirocco, Slug Road, who would have been 11 in 1925, and is maybe in the photo.

Please let me know if you recognise any names.