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UNIVERSITY
OF ABERDEEN

WALKING WITH HISTORY

A SELF-GUIDED
TOUR OF
KING'S COLLEGE





W E L C O M E T O T H E U N I V E R S I T Y O F A B E R D E E N

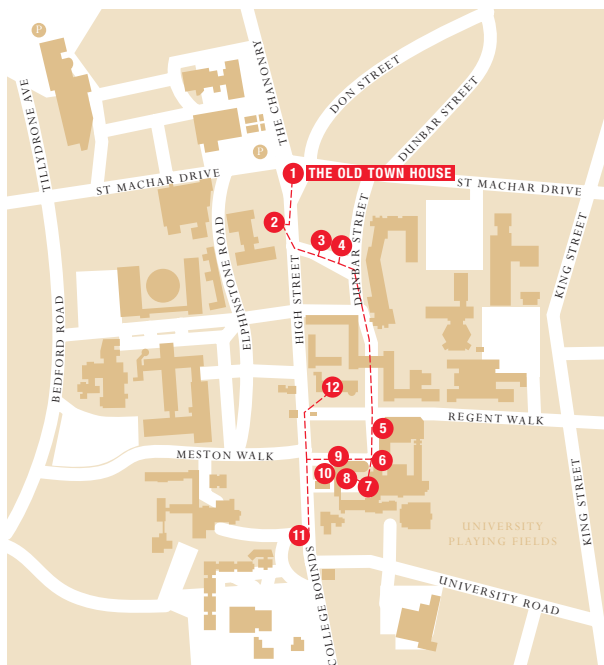
The University was founded in 1495 and was originally known as King's College. Aberdeen is the third oldest University in Scotland following St Andrews (1412) and Glasgow (1451). The founder was William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen, who had much support from King James IV of Scotland (1488-1513). Many of the old academic buildings survive at and around King's College and the modern University has grafted its new structures around this beautiful, ancient core.

Yet there is more to see in Old Aberdeen than just the University. There is a fine medieval Cathedral, named after Saint Machar, with its own precinct and early layout. And there grew close by the trading settlement of Old Aberdeen, which functioned as a formal Burgh with its own jurisdiction from 1489 to 1891. Its legacy presents a market area and the frontages of houses from the grandiose to the tiny, which belonged to a delightfully mixed urban society.

Over the centuries this combination of church, University and trading post has created a townscape that is unique in Scotland. Although always small in size, it enjoyed its high status. Finally hemmed in by the great City of Aberdeen, Old Aberdeen remains a historical gem of excellent visual quality. Today it is home also to a dynamic University with over 14,000 students.

This trail guide will give you a fascinating insight into some of the most interesting features of the campus. The tour is about 1 mile in length and, depending on speed, will take around 60-90 minutes.

KING'S COLLEGE CAMPUS



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1 THE OLD TOWN HOUSE

This widened area of the High Street was planned to give room for the old weekly open-air market of the Burgh. On a plinth stands the worn remnant of the market cross. Facing the market area is The Old Town House. This was the administrative headquarters of the Burgh, where the provost and bailies held court. Above the doorway is the Burgh's coat of arms with a Latin motto (touchingly appropriate for a small Burgh): Little Things Increase Through Harmony. The Old Town House was built in 1788 by George Jaffray to replace a previous one of 1702. Since 1891 it has housed various bodies: a church mission, a Masonic Lodge, a police unit (complete with old jail cells) and a library. The University of Aberdeen has recently conserved and refurbished this building, restoring it to daily public use. The Old Town House contains information on the University's teaching and research and is the new visitor information centre for Old Aberdeen. This is only one part of the University's major building conservation project for all of its historic buildings.



2 No. 81 HIGH STREET

Passing down the High Street, you meet on your right a handsome set-back mansion house at this address. It dates from about 1780 and was the town house of the family of McLean of Coll – an island estate in the Inner Hebrides on the western seaboard. Their links with Old Aberdeen probably originated from the habit, common among Highland landowners, of sending their sons to King's College. The house later belonged to the Rev. Samuel Trail who worked as a divinity professor from 1867 to 1887. It remained in Trail family possession until the 1970s. The walled garden attached has bricks made at Seaton Brickworks close to the east side of Old Aberdeen. Please note that this is a private house and that access to the grounds is not permitted.

3 WRIGHTS' AND COOPERS' PLACE



Passing across the High Street to a wide lane, notice the charming mixture of small single-storey cottages and major Georgian town houses. Ordinary townspeople lived close beside wealthier citizens. The lane is only one of fourteen running off the High Street. Building houses sideways along these lanes was an economical use of ground. Wrights were metal workers and Coopers were barrel-makers. It is likely that they worked elsewhere but that their trade organisations owned property here and drew rents from it. This lane is an excellent example of the restoration work carried out in Old Aberdeen in the 1950s and 1960s when many houses were in need of refurbishment. Initiated by the University, it was largely financed by the MacRobert Trust, a local body, and supervised by Robert Hurd and Partners, respected conservation architects of the day.

4 MACROBERT MEMORIAL GARDEN



At the end of Wrights' and Coopers' Place a Memorial Garden was created in 1965 by Robert Hurd to commemorate the life and work of Lady MacRobert. A small haven of tranquillity within a busy campus, its walls are made of granite and decorated with a lively mosaic that presents the family coat of arms – Not For Themselves But For Their Native Land.

The plants have been chosen because they are emblems of remembrance. Lady MacRobert lost three sons in Royal Air Force service between 1938 and 1941. During the war she contributed funds to assist in the purchase of a bomber aircraft named MacRobert's Reply.

5

ELPHINSTONE HALL



Moving down Dunbar Street, and as you pass through the Marchways, you see on the left Elphinstone Hall. Erected in 1931, this was the replacement (61 years later) for the demolished Common Hall on the Quadrangle. This Hall was intended for examinations and academic events but now also hosts concerts and receptions. The Linklater Rooms – named after the celebrated novelist, Aberdeen graduate and rector Eric Linklater – provide a more intimate space for meetings and functions.

The architecture of the Hall reflects that of the Chapel and New King's, and the bays of the cloister walk are based on those in St Machar's Cathedral's nave. The coats of arms on the frontage are those of notable benefactors and relevant local bodies. In economical fashion, some of the stonework is re-used material from the demolished Castle Newe, Aberdeenshire.



6

CROMWELL TOWER

As you walk along the front of Elphinstone Hall, you look directly at one of the most striking buildings of the campus. Completed in 1661, it later had Oliver Cromwell's name attached to it. Although he had no direct link the name may have been a kind of nickname, awarded because Cromwell ruled Scotland when the tower was in its fund-raising stages. In the mid-seventeenth century, the College began to feel the need to expand residential and teaching accommodation. The solution was a tower-house, popular among Scottish lairds since the thirteenth century. Building rooms on top of each other and under one roof is an economical use of materials, space and money. Windows have been altered over time, but the Tower still contains lecture and seminar rooms. At roof level there is a small observatory and an anemometer that measures wind-force. Walk through the space between the Tower and the back of the Chapel to get to the beautiful King's College Quadrangle.

7 KING'S COLLEGE CENTRE



This building dates from 1870, when it was created as the University Library. The main ceiling copies that of the chapel, which is located across the Quadrangle. Before 1870 the ancient Common Hall of the College stood here and was used for dining and meetings. The Centre now houses a major conference hall, used for academic and external occasions including Word – the University of Aberdeen annual writers' festival.

From the entrance look out to the Quadrangle, and you will see structures that are all on the original building lines of about 1500. The frontage facing the Old Aberdeen High Street was built in 1825 and the classrooms to your left in 1865. But the oldest item is the Chapel, to the right, preserved since the College's earliest days. Notice the Crown Tower – one of only two now in Scotland. It is a closed imperial crown, making the political statement that the King of Scots, James IV, had as much authority as the Emperor.

8 COLLEGE WELL



Situated in the centre of the Quadrangle, the College well is not fed by a spring but by natural water-seepage from the soil. The whole area of the College was originally wet and boggy – the water table is still near the surface. For an unknown period, this well was blocked up and was only rediscovered around 1930 when the pathways of the Quadrangle were being re-laid. Before modern water supplies, wells were very important. There was another one to the rear of the Common Hall, near the College kitchens.

As you continue towards the Chapel door at the far right corner, notice the many coats of arms on the wall. They belong to various benefactors from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth. The largest of them is the display of arms of the King of Scots.

9 KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL



Created by Bishop Elphinstone, the Chapel was the heart of the Early College and occupies one whole side of the Quadrangle. Detailed guiding-boards are available just inside the entrance doorway. You enter first the public nave, now a War Memorial – the University's tribute to its fallen. Then pass through the elaborate doorway of the oak screen. On it once stood the Rood or Cross. You are now in the Choir where seven services were performed daily until the Reformation of 1560. On each side are the finely carved stalls for staff and students (52 in total). These stalls (1500-09) are a unique survival in Scotland. The black marble slab before the pulpit is the only remnant of the tomb of Bishop Elphinstone buried at the heart of his College. If you turn to face the opposite end of the chapel you will see the outstanding Chapel organ – this was installed in 2004 and designed by the French master organ builder Bernard Aubertin.

10 ELPHINSTONE MONUMENT



Go out now to the front of the Chapel by walking under the Archway that leads you from the Quadrangle to the High Street. You will see an imaginative version of the founder's tomb. Bishop Elphinstone is not buried here, but in the Chapel. The original tomb became severely damaged, but this bronze and marble monument creates a handsome modern substitute. The sculptor was Henry Wilson, an Englishman, who worked on it in Venice from 1912 to 1926. It proved to be over-large inside the Chapel and was placed here in 1946.

Above is the splendid west front of the Chapel. Notice the gilded Latin inscription recording the laying of the foundation stone on 2 April 1500. Bishop Elphinstone chose the date to link his Chapel with the same day that Solomon began to build the Temple in Jerusalem. Above are the arms of King James IV, his wife Margaret Tudor, an English princess, and James' illegitimate son Alexander, the archbishop of St Andrews, who was killed at the battle of Flodden in 1513 with his father.



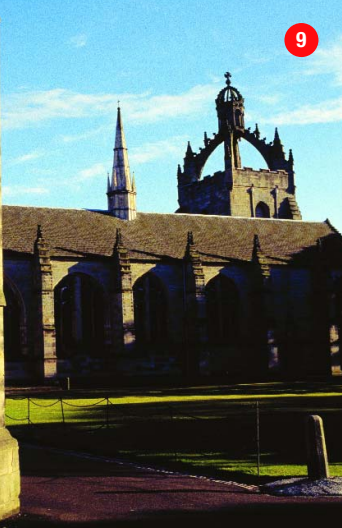
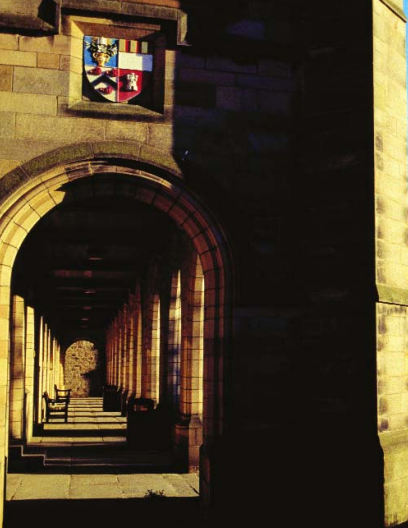
11 POWIS GATES

Turn left along the High Street and, about 50 yards down, pause to look across the street at this imposing gateway. This has no original link with King's but was erected in 1834 by Hugh Fraser Leslie of Powis – the lively owner of a straggling estate lying to the West of Old Aberdeen. The minaret towers of the structure may suggest a Turkish influence. Above the arch is the coat of arms of the Fraser Leslie family. Another shield at the back carries busts of three black slaves, commemorating the family's link with the grant of freedom to the slaves on their Jamaica plantations. Mr Leslie's fantasy gates may have been designed to underline his view that he was as important as the College. The entrance now leads to the Crombie and Johnston Halls of Residence.



12 NEW KING'S

Travelling right, further up the High Street is a heraldic gateway that carries the royal arms at the top, plus those of Bishop Elphinstone and of the University. Beyond the gateway, New King's, completed in 1913, was the first item of academic building expansion since the mid-seventeenth century. It contains lecture and seminar rooms, and its architecture is thoughtfully designed to reflect and harmonise with that of the Chapel although over 400 years lie between them. The small cobbled way beside the gateway appears to have no purpose, but its name was Berowald's Wynd (Lane) and it once led to property of Berowald Innes, Bursar of the College about 1600. The Old Brewery behind New King's has a history of brewing back to 1505 but is now staff offices. Outside the building you will see Kenny Hunter's specially commissioned statue *Youth With Split Apple*.



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