

QR Trails Stonehaven

Stonehaven Harbour

Stonehaven harbour has a long history and was used as a “haven” (safe place) for settlements long before even Agricola, the famous Roman General, used it when he came North in AD84 to suppress and subjugate Galgacus the Celtic ruler of Caledonian.

The harbour and the town of Stonehaven or “Stanehyve” more than likely took its name from the large rock in the middle of the harbour. However, it was also known for many centuries as “Stinkyhyve” by Scandinavian seafarers and traders because of the prodigious smell from the tanning hides within the Town, its unsavoury sanitation and accommodation of pirates and picaroons or rogues!

The first part of the harbour development was undertaken by the 5th Earl Marischal of Dunnottar in the early part of the 17th Century. This was improved by the 9th Earl in 1700 with the completion of the north pier. On the north part of the harbour or north quay side, is the Tolbooth, built by the 5th Earl Marischal in 1570, the harbour offices and outer sea wall.

In 1754 as a prelude to developing the south side of the harbour the clearing of numerous stones that “fouled” the harbour bed was undertaken. This was done by the citizens of Stonehaven. Over 200 were listed, by the town managers, to do the work and very few defaultedone who did was a Robert Burnes cousin to the famous Robbie Burns whose father, grandfather and great grandfather lived and farmed around the Stonehaven area.

Further developments to the south part of the harbour would have to wait until 1812 and the removal of the huge rock (“Craig-Ma-Cair” in Gaelic) that sat in the middle of the harbour by Robert Louis Stevenson’s grandfather, a renowned civil engineer of the time, employed by the Stonehaven Town Council to remove it.

After the “blasting of the rock” the Stonehaven fishing industry began to progress particularly herring fishing. By 1875 the Stonehaven fishing fleet comprised of 88 vessels...some 200 fishermen. At its peak in 1900 over 200 vessels employed nearly a 1000 men and 300 women. The women (the “silver darlings”) baited lines, mended nets and gutted the fish.

It is difficult to image today how busy Stonehaven harbour was in those days. Fish landings were 12-15 million tons!.... 25 carters carried the fish away while 5 coopers furnished the barrels needed onsite. It was said that the harbour was so full of fishing boats that a person could walk across them from one side of the harbour to the other!

Naturally fishing became the mainstay economic activity within the Stonehaven Community. However, by the 1930’s all that had virtually disappeared with the advent of steam, motor trawlers, foreign competition which “fished-out” the herring shoals.

Today the harbour is home to quay side “pubs”, marine and pleasure boats with the odd vessel here and there employed in catching lobsters and shrimps.