

# QR Trails Stonehaven

## The Tolbooth

The Tolbooth is the oldest building in Stonehaven, built in 1570 as a storehouse for Dunnottar Castle by William Keith the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl Marischal of Scotland, the Lord of Dunnottar. The Keiths were one of the foremost families of Scotland.

The building is of Sandstone constructed with two floors and a “crow’s claw” roof that would have been originally thatched. The North wall of the Tolbooth is a rare example of the use of crushed sea shells as the “bind” in the mortar used for the stone work.

The Tolbooth stood alone on its peninsular until the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century when work on the North quay was completed and a collection of stone houses began to draw-up alongside and in the cup of the Harbour foreshore.

The building served as the Town House, Prison and the Northern Circuit Court for Kincardineshire from 1600 to 1767. A Parliamentary Act of 1600 moved the Court from Kincardine to Stonehaven and the only suitable location was the upper floors of the Tolbooth.

The Court tried many varied cases including Agnes Moffat (1600) who was taken from the Tolbooth in chains, paraded through the Old Town streets and hanged on Gallow Hill in Dunnottar Woods for the theft of five sheep. The Court and Tolbooth received some of its more notable victims after the failure of the 1745 Jacobite rising.

From the time that William III of England took the throne in 1688 Episcopalianism, strong in the Grampian area, fell from favour, and things got worse after the 1715 Jacobite rebellion. Following extensive Episcopalian support for the Jacobite cause, harsh penal laws were passed making it illegal for Ministers to preach to more than nine people at the same time. After the Episcopalians renewed their support for the Stuarts in 1745, the full weight of Hanoverian vengeance came down on them - the number of those attending services was reduced to four, and Episcopalian churches were burned to the ground. ....including those in Stonehaven.

It was in this atmosphere that three local ministers were brought to the Tolbooth to answer charges that they had preached to more than the legal limit. In front of an angry crowd composed mainly of their parishioners, the three clergymen: Reverent John Troup, John Petrie and Alexander Greig were denounced by informers, found guilty and sentenced to a period of incarceration in the Tolbooth.

The Ministers spent six months in the Tolbooth , but, despite this, they continued to administer to their flock as best they could as their congregations gathered outside the iron barred North window of the Tolbooth. The Reverent Troup would entertain them with and other prisoners within the Tolbooth with spirited renditions on the bagpipes. The devotion of the Episcopalian fisher folk of Stonehaven is best illustrated by the women who would bring new-born babies to the prison window, after wading through knee-deep seas and scrambling over rocks to have them baptised.

The building reverted to storage uses after 1767 and gradually dilapidated over the next two centuries. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was utilized at various times as a Chandlers and storage for lime.

During both the 1st & 2nd World Wars it was used for the storage of munitions. The roof and upper floor were badly damaged in 1944 by a “friendly” floating mine that exploded in the harbor. Further damage was caused by the great storm of 1953.

During the 1950s only the lower floor was utilised due to the extensive damage of the upper floor and roof. The back room was used by the Stonehaven Town Council Cleansing Department and the front rooms again housed a Chandlers and small boat building repair works. The last small boat made in the late 1950s (the Gannet) lies still intact not 200mts away in one of the small wooden fishing sheds on the North quay side.

In the early 1960s subscriptions from the residents of Stonehaven provided funding to renovate the building and turn it into a Museum celebrating the history of the Tolbooth and Stonehaven. The ground floor flagstones came from the nearby ruin of Dunnottar House situated in Dunnottar Woods. The Museum occupied the upper floor and was officially opened by Her Highest the Queen Mother in 1963.

One of the rooms was given over to a special display about the Scottish Episcopal Church, in memory of the three of that Church’s priests imprisoned in the Tolbooth during the winter of 1748-49.

During the early 1970s the Museum was moved to the building’s ground floor and the upper floor leased out for restaurant purposes

The Aberdeenshire Museum Service is currently looking to transfer the Museum to a Community Group.