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ARBROATH Heritage Trail

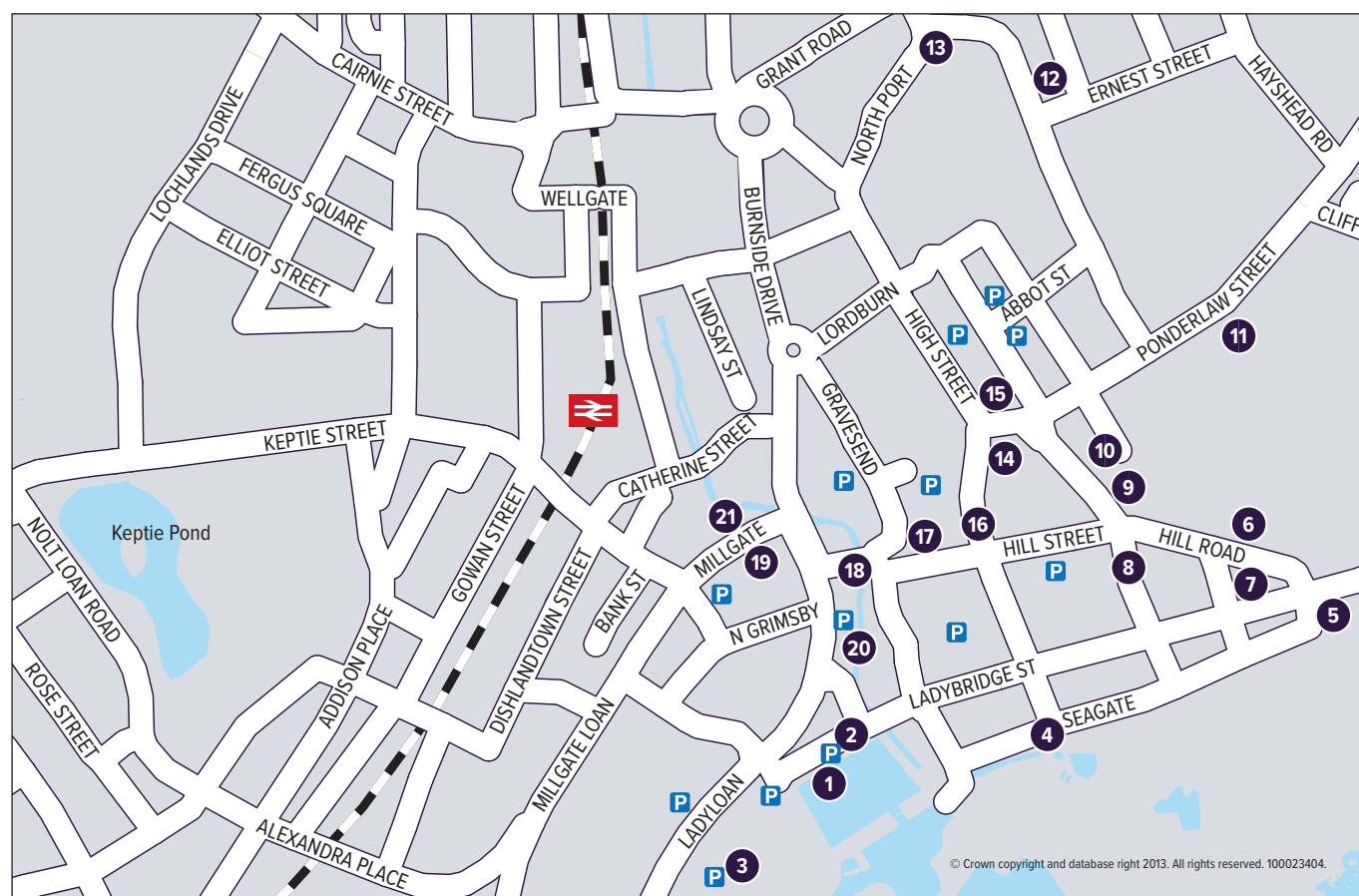


Welcome to Arbroath! Starting at the harbour, this is a 1½ hour heritage trail that will take you on a journey through the historical delights of Arbroath's significant past.

Arbroath owes its origins to the Abbey founded in 1178 by King William I (the Lion), who granted the monks the right to establish a burgh with a port and weekly market. Founded as a burgh of regality, with the Abbot as its representative in Parliament, the town received its royal charter from James VI in 1599. The Abbey, already outdated, was formally dissolved in 1608; even before this it had become a vast stone quarry, and by the 18th century, when the Town Council condemned the practice, much of the burgh must have been built of Abbey stone. Masonry which fell accidentally was still being re-used well after this time.

For much of its history Arbroath consisted only of three main streets (High Street, Marketgate and Millgate), and a number of cross streets. In 1742 its inhabitants numbered about 2,500. The great expansion of the flax industry in the late 18th and 19th centuries, together with textile and general engineering, brought enormous change. Mills and factories sprang up along the Brothock Burn, using its water for power, and many of Arbroath's older streets and now vanished "wyndies" were built to house incoming workers. The use of local Old Red Sandstone imparts a russet warmth to the old town, though imported stone is also used, while flagstones from the nearby Carmyllie Quarries (once a major export) is occasionally evident in the form of grey stone roofing slates.

Arbroath was formerly known as Aberbrothock, deriving its name from the Brothock Burn, which enters the sea at the foot of the High Street. The shortened version of the name came to dominate in the early to mid 19th century. In 1394, Arbroath's first harbour was built, a simple shielding wooden construction known as the Abbot's Harbour because it was maintained by Abbey funds. In 1725 this was replaced by a new harbour built on the site of the present Wet Dock. The resulting increase in trade brought new wealth to the town, and the fine late Georgian houses in Shore reflect the taste and affluence of the times.



- 1 The present harbour, now developed as a marina, dates from 1877. The Harbour office occupies the site of the mediaeval Chapel of St Mary, known as the Lady Chapel.
- 2 Near the old Harbour office is a memorial to the crew of the Robert Lindsay lifeboat who lost their lives in 1953.
- 3 West of the Harbour stands the Bell Rock Signal Tower, a late Regency style complex built in 1813 as the signalling station and shore base for the famous Bell Rock Lighthouse, 11½ miles out to sea. Today, the lighthouse is automatic and the Signal Tower houses Arbroath's popular museum.
- 4 Walk around the harbour edge to the lower end of Marketgate and continue along the Old Shore Head (so called because it lay opposite the Abbot's Harbour) to Danger Point and the "Fit o' the Toon". This old part of Arbroath retains much of its vernacular



Hamilton Green



Brothock Bridge



Top: Harbour; Bottom left: Robert Burns Statue; Bottom right: Seaton Cliffs

character, and a number of outside stairs and stone-slatted roofs are still in evidence. The Old Brewhouse looks much as it did when erected by a shipmaster around 1700; in fact it has been completely rebuilt. "Danger Point" is an ironic comment upon the sea's encroachment here; originally two more houses stood between the Old Brewhouse and the shore. These houses were once the targets of Captain Fall's pirate attack on the town and harbour in 1781.

This is the heartland of the famous "Arbroath Smokie" industry. Haddock was cured in special sheds behind the rows of fishers' cottages, suspended over smoking pits known as "barrels". Despite its name the smokie is a comparative newcomer to Arbroath, having arrived after 1830 with the fishers themselves. Prior to this the main fishing village in the area was Auchmithie, some three miles up the coast.

- 5 Seagate (once the main entrance to the town from the east) and South Street bring one to the entrance of Victoria Park, opened in 1897, to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. A road leads from here to Whiting Ness, the start of Arbroath's red sandstone cliffs, passing on the way St. Ninian's (or Ringan's) Well, a reminder of a now vanished mediaeval chapel dedicated to this early Celtic missionary. The cliff-top path has been made into a Nature Trail and extends all the way to Auchmithie.
- 6 From the park gates it is worthwhile climbing Boulzie Hill for its fine sweeping views over the coast and the town, offering a view of Arbroath's "castle" as the 1885 Water Tower on Keptie Hill is often called. Alternatively, take the easier gradient along Hill Road past Colin Grant's Shoe Factory (1882) now converted into flats after many years as the Marine Ballroom.

West of the Harbour stands the Bell Rock Signal Tower, a late Regency style complex built in 1813.





Arbroath Abbey

- 7 The shoe factory was founded in 1862; this was one of a number of famous shoemaking firms in the town, the other being founded in 1857 by Samuel Fairweather, and Fraser's, best known for engineering, who also invented canvas rope soled shoes.
- 8 Newgate House, near the corner of Hill Road and West Newgate was built around the early 1600s by the Carnegie family using stones from the Abbey. It is probably Arbroath's oldest surviving example of secular architecture. A very similar house can be seen in Marketgate. The house once sat on the edge of the burgh within its own estate but the land was gradually feued off during the 18th century. The house was refurbished around 1800 when the Adam style doorway was added, and was later restored by the Angus Housing Association.
- 9 Hill Terrace, built in the early 19th century, comes as a contrast after the vernacular fishers' quarters with its ashlar facings, decorative guttering and fashionably elegant air.
- 10 This was the site of the old burgh school, replaced in 1821 by a new Academy and refurbished as the Public Library, opening on 14 June 1898.
- 11 A short distance up Ponderlaw (named after the Abbey "ponder" who looked after its woods and forests) and best seen from the entrance to Springfield Park is the octagonal Wesleyan Methodist Chapel of 1772.

Ponderlaw marks the southern end of the Abbey precinct wall, and in former times it would have been bounded on the north side by a high wall, broken only by the south east or Darn Gate. Now, however, one can approach the Abbey via the Abbey Streets, which were laid out after the Town Council acquired the precinct in 1753, or by Barber's Croft, which probably commemorates a local family rather than the gentlemen who trimmed the monk's tonsures.

- 12 Arbroath Abbey stands on a low terrace above the Brothock Valley. Founded in 1178 by King William the Lion and dedicated to his friend, the martyred Thomas Beckett, it housed some 40 monks of the Tironensian order. The cruciform church is transitional in style, the great West Doorway Romanesque, the rest a pointed-arched style of early 13th century date. Only the southern side, with its famous "Round O" window remains to any extent complete.

En route to the Abbey note the Abbot's House, the only surviving conventional building; mainly of 15th-16th century date but overlying an early vaulted sub-croft. It has been used for many things since the Reformation including a thread factory in the late 18th century. Continue through the Pend, and emerge on the outer side of the Abbey Gatehouse which flanks the great West door. Its imposing appearance (the portcullis features on Arbroath's coat of arms) is deliberate, for this, the main gate, controlled the flow of visitors and commercial traffic to the precinct. For all that it was a place of seclusion, the Abbey, with all its great patrons, was also an important centre of temporal affairs. At no time was this shown more strongly than on 6 April 1320 when the Scottish Barons under King Robert the Bruce assembled here to sign the famous Declaration of Arbroath, its stirring words probably composed by Abbot Bernard de Linton himself. Arbroath Abbey is an Ancient Monument in the care of Historic Scotland.

- 13 Hamilton Green, sloping down to the High Street, commemorates the Marquis of Hamilton, the last Commendator of the Abbey. By this time it had become common practice to grant abbeys and bishoprics a reward for service or to win support, and Arbroath's last Abbots included the 15 year old Earl of Moray, Cardinal David Beaton and the Duke of Lennox.

Walk down the High Street, an ancient route bordering the Abbey precinct. The old name for the

upper part of the street, Eleemosynary (Almonry) Street, recalls the practice of distributing alms to the poor and needy.

Nowadays the street contains some fine late 18th and 19th century frontages. Look out for the 1911 former Co-operative shop building on the corner of Church Street which, near the roof, bears a representation of the Bell Rock Lighthouse (built 1811). As you pass Lordburn, now a street but once a stream flowing into the Brothock, think of the crocodile who escaped from a circus around the 1870s and made a dash for freedom through its waters. From Lordburn, once the site of a massive tannery, to Kirk Square, the High Street was formerly known as Rotten Row. Number 202, the red building now containing a shop front and said to have led to the Abbey Orchards, is the sole survivor of an older generation of buildings. Although now completely renovated, this was an 18th century gable house.

- 14 The handsome building, now offices and shops, at the south east corner of Kirk Square was once the White Hart Hotel; there has been a popular “howff” and staging post here since the 16th century though the present building dates from 1821. Both Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott stayed in the old White Hart Inn.

Kirk Square, previously Kirk Wynd, has been the site of Arbroath’s Parish Church since 1580, when stone from the abandoned Abbey dormitory was used to construct the first of three churches on this site. This Church also incorporated the south west corner tower of the Abbey precinct, which still remains today, encapsulated in the present steeple of 1832.

- 15 The present church (built in 1896), now houses an Angus Council office, and contains in its East gable a fine window designed by Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones commemorating former Town Clerk John MacDonald. Prior to the building of the first Parish church Arbroathians had to make their way to either St Vigeans Church (a large part of the town sits within St Vigeans parish) or to the tiny Lady Chapel in Ladyloan.

Below Kirk Square the High Street widens out. This was the old town centre and market place, its former name, Copegate, coming from an old word meaning “to buy”.

A few metal studs in the road marks where the market cross once stood, topped by a unicorn. It was removed in 1746 as a traffic hazard! Arbroath has had three town houses. The first was built in 1686 and stood on the east side of the High Street, serving as

the council’s meeting house and as a prison. It fell out of use in 1779 when the magistrates opted to relocate to a building on the site of the Guildry Hall. The old tolbooth was demolished to make way for the Commercial Bank of Scotland.

- 16 The Guildry Hall was shared with the merchants for many years but the Council built a fine new Town House in 1808, designed by David Logan. After 1975 it took on a new role as a Sheriff Court for many years.
- 17 Go through the Pend between the Town House and neighbouring Guild Hall to Market Place, where you find an ornate building opened in 1855 as a Corn Exchange but better remembered as the Olympia Cinema; it is now a restaurant and bar. The building on the corner of Gravesend (named after a mediaeval graveyard) was built in 1841 as the Police Office and jail; the latter closed in 1862 owing to a shortage of offenders.
- 18 You have now reached the spacious square known as Brothock Bridge, claimed, when it was built in 1840, to be the widest bridge in the world. At the time it was one of many bridges, big and small, which crossed the Brothock.
- 19 Back at the Brothock have a look upstream at the former heartland of industrial Arbroath. In the late 18th and 19th centuries Arbroath was one of the principal flax towns in Scotland, producing mainly sailcloth and coarse linen. At the peak of the industry over 30 spinning mills, weaving shops, and rope works drew their power from the Brothock, along with other off-shoot industries such as textiles and engineering works such as those of Shanks and John Fraser.
- 20 Brothock Mill on the corner of Millgate (now converted to flats) was the first steam-powered mill in Arbroath; its Boulton Watt engine was installed in 1806 and was inaugurated by James Watt himself. The name Millgate however commemorates not a textile works but the far older burgh meal mill, which stood here in mediaeval times. Slightly upstream Webster’s 1873 Alma Factory was transformed into a housing development in 1996.
- 21 Head down Burnside Drive and East Grimsby (an old name this, from our Viking past it means Grim’s field) and pause at the small stone building (now occupied by a fast food take away). This is the old lifeboat shed erected in 1865 when the station, established in 1803, and one of the oldest in Scotland, was formally taken over by the R.N.L.I. From here it is a short walk back to the harbour and the end of the trail.

Angus Heritage Trails

Angus has a unique heritage and its towns are well preserved, unspoilt and full of character. Each of the main towns has a heritage trail as well as a variety of museums, galleries, historic sites and buildings to be enjoyed.

It is easy to travel to Angus thanks to good transport links.



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