

# Sculpture & Curios Trail

Interesting objects in Aberdeen city centre



[#aberdeentrails](https://twitter.com/aberdeentrails)



# #aberdeentrails

Welcome to Aberdeen, our beautiful and historic city by the sea! The city centre has a hugely diverse range of sculptures ranging from traditional to contemporary and perform many functions such as the expression of ideas, commemoration, memorial, and remembrance.

Find out which one is a magnificent granite lion, which one is William Wallace, which one perhaps Scotland's greatest king, and which one was originally intended as a taunt to a complaining neighbour!

Have fun roaming around our beautiful city and finding out a bit about its history through the City Centre Sculpture & Curios Trail.

## Credits

Thanks to Sheila Towns for her contribution to the conception, development, writing and research for this booklet

## Picture Credits

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### No 15 King Edward VII

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### No 16 Kelly's Cats

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## Key to Symbols

Uneven or steep slope



Wheelchair accessible



Not wheelchair accessible



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# #beautifulABDN



## 1 Mannie and Castlegate Well

Situated at Castle Street, next to Shiprow (cobble surface nearby)

From 1708 until 1852, the Castlegate Well was a central part of the burgh's water supply. In the late 18th century a lead figure, commonly known as the Mannie, was added to the top of the well. The Mannie and Well were moved to the Green in 1852 and then returned to the Castlegate in 1973.



## 2 The Mercat Cross

Situated at Castle Street at centre of pedestrianised area (cobble surface)

Designed and made from sandstone by John Montgomery in 1686. Excluding the cost of the materials, the Mercat Cross was built for a fee of £1200 Scots. The decorative hexagonal base features six arches with pillars at each corner, gargoyles and medallions. Ten of the twelve medallions illustrate Stewart monarchs; namely James I to James V, Mary Queen of Scots, James VI, Charles I and II and James VII with the remaining two showing the Royal Arms and the burgh's

arms. Positioned above the parapet on a Corinthian capital is the white marble unicorn with a gilded horn. The shaft and unicorn are replacements from the mid 1990s; the originals are on display in the Tolbooth Museum. The Mercat Cross was a place where people gathered for markets, public punishments and Royal proclamations.



## 3 Gordon Highlanders Monument

Situated at Castle Street next to King Street

This three-dimensional bronze statue was commissioned by Aberdeen City Council and unveiled by the Colonel-in-Chief of the Gordon Highlanders, Prince Charles, the Duke of Rothesay. It had been campaigned for over a number of years and was selected following a national competition. The winning design features two Gordon Highlanders, dressed in historic and present-day uniform, one is from the early days of the Regiment and the other from its closing years before the amalgamation of the Regiment in 1994 when it became part of the Highlanders. These figures are set upon a rough granite block which forms a plinth. Find out more about this work, its unveiling and the sculptor Mark Richards at: [www.markrichards.eu/gordon-highlander/](http://www.markrichards.eu/gordon-highlander/)



## 4 Ceres (or Demeter)

On top of building on corner of Union Street and King Street, visible from Castle Street

Designed by local artist James Giles (1801-1870), for the portico of the then North of Scotland Bank. This colourful terracotta figure is of the Goddess of Plenty. The Goddess is accompanied by a British lion and holds a cornucopia of the fruits of the earth. Nelson Routledge Lucas and Company modelled this figure.





## 5 Robert the Bruce



Situated outside Marischal College on Broad Street

This monument, created by sculptor Alan Herriot, depicts the Scottish king Robert the Bruce on horseback, clutching the charter which he granted in 1319 to give Aberdeen feudal rights over the Forest of Stocket. The Robert the Bruce monument – voted for by the people of Aberdeen – has taken up prime position outside the revamped Marischal College, which reopened shortly afterwards as the city council’s new headquarters.

## 6 The Russell Head



This is attached to the south-east corner of Provost Skene’s House George Russell (1810-1899) carved this stone effigy of himself. Russell owned a building at 35 Ragg’s Lane, in which

he ran a bakery. The Town Council closed the bakery as it was near a sewer. Believing his neighbour had complained to the council, Russell carved this effigy and fixed it to his premises so that Stephen, his neighbour, would always see the gargoyle pulling a face. The Russell Head was fixed on the corner of Provost Skene’s House sometime after the demolition of Ragg’s Lane in 1959.



## 7 Poised



Situated within open courtyard area of Marischal Square

Internationally renowned sculptor Andy Scott built a world-class public artwork in Aberdeen in the shape of a five-metres tall leopard called Poised. Scott works internationally from his studio workshop where he creates prominent public artworks for private, corporate and civic clients. His prodigious output now numbers in excess of 80 projects across the UK including the famous Kelpies in Falkirk and internationally, and this was the first time he has delivered an artwork of this scale in the Granite City. Poised, which weighs just over two tons and sits proudly atop a ten metre high steel column, was designed to bring a real presence and sense of drama to the atrium space of Marischal Square. The sculpture was inspired by symbols on Aberdeen City Council’s historic coat of arms, and is also a symbol of regeneration in the city.







## 8 Sea Fantasy



In landscaped area in front of Provost Skene's House

This bronze sculpture is by Aberdeen-born artist Thomas Bayliss Huxley-Jones FRBS, ARCA (1908-1969). At the centre of the water pool are two dancing figures. Other works by Huxley-Jones include the fountain and gilded figure of Helios, the sun god of Greek mythology, located in the central courtyard of BBC Television Centre in London. He also cast a bronze sculpture of David Livingston, the African explorer, which stands in a niche on the Royal Geographical Society building, London. In 1953 Huxley-Jones won the Jean Masson Davidson Medal; the Society of Portrait Sculptors' highest award for distinguished services and outstanding achievement. His work can also be viewed at Rosemount Square (see entry 24).

## 9 Moon Table

This can be found on the upper storey roof garden at the St Nicholas Centre

Accessible via ramp at Flourmill Lane

Abstract bronze on a plinth of granite by Roland Piche (b.1938). The sculptures Trumpet Leaf, Two and Moon Table were commissioned through the Aberdeen City Centre Development Scheme. Lord Provost Henry E. Rae unveiled the three sculptures in October 1985.



## 10 Trumpet Leaf

To be found on the upper storey roof garden at the St Nicholas Centre

Accessible via ramp at Flourmill Lane

This work is carved from Clipsham Limestone by Paul Mason (b.1952, Bolton, died 2006). The simple leaf shape of the sculpture takes on the identity of a trumpet. This is an instrument of celebration and joy, or warning and alarm. Mason studied at the Bolton College of Art and Design (1970-1), Wolverhampton Polytechnic (1971-4) and the Royal Academy Schools (1974-7). Until his death in 2006, Mason was a major contributor to public art throughout the United Kingdom. His involvement included the regeneration of Tudor Square in Sheffield and sculpture works at Grizedale Forest, Cumbria. Mason was artist in residence at the Tate Gallery, St Ives (1996), Gloucester Cathedral (2000-01) and held numerous solo and group exhibitions of his contemporary sculptures. He became Professor of Sculpture at Derby University in 2004.



## 11 Two

On the upper storey roof garden at the St Nicholas Centre, on the wall near Upper Kirkgate

Accessible via ramp at Flourmill Lane

An abstract relief in bronze panels by Scottish artist Gavin Scobie (born 1940, Edinburgh, died 2012), dated 1984. Scobie is recognised as having been one of Scotland's most important contemporary sculptors, living and working in Ross-shire and London. Reflected in a sculpture exhibition held in London in 1982 was Scobie's interest in the spontaneous work of the Nigerian people of the Nok culture. This period, two years prior to the production of Two, also saw the output of a series of drawings and clay relief faces which displayed a more relaxed and rougher approach than previously seen.



## 12 General Charles Gordon



Outside Robert Gordon's College and Aberdeen Art Gallery, Schoolhill

This bronze figure by Scottish sculptor Thomas Stuart Burnett (1853-1888) was a donation from the Clan Gordon. General Charles Gordon wears his regimental uniform of the Royal Engineers. Gordon's military success was based on his role in the Crimean War (1853-65) and cemented during his time in China in the early 1860s. General Gordon was killed at Khartoum on 26th January 1885, at the end of one of the most famous sieges in history. His career, although sometimes controversial, has generally always enjoyed a good reputation, as can be seen in the 1966 film *Khartoum*, in which he was depicted by Charlton Heston.



## 13 War Memorial Lion



Corner of Schoolhill and Blackfriars Street, near the Art Gallery

The rugged granite lion was designed by an Aberdeen sculptor, William Macmillan RA (1877-1927) and the work carried out by James Philip, using silver-grey granite from Kemnay, which is lighter in colour than the granite quarried from Rubislaw. The lead mason was James Philip assisted by George Cooper. Arthur Taylor's granite yard was in Jute Street and it was from this yard that James Philip produced works of notable skill and artistic merit: including work for the Titanic memorial in Liverpool and Inverurie war memorial, as well as the statue of Edward VII in Aberdeen. The sculpture was unveiled on 29th September 1925 when King George V opened the new Cowdray Hall and Art Museum. William Macmillan is also recognised for designing the World War I Victory Medal.



## 14 The Well of Spa



At the corner of Skene Street and Spa Street

This ornate sandstone gable-end entrance is all that remains of the vault that was gifted to the City in 1635 by George Jameson. Jameson, a Scottish portrait painter who lived in Schoolhill, drank the waters daily and highly praised the spring, known as the Spa, which ran under Woolman Hill. The curative powers of the waters were well known to physicians of the time and its virtues were extolled in an early printed book of 1580. Unfortunately the Spa was vulnerable to flood damage. This wall was rebuilt in 1670 after it fell into disrepair following a violent torrent in the Denburn in 1650. It was moved and renovated by Dr James Gordon of Pittlurg in the mid 19th century. Two cups hung from chains and the people of Denburn regularly used the water until they were connected to the city's water supply. Finally, in 1977 it was skilfully restored by Moray Stone Cutters of Birnie.



## 15



## William Wallace



Rosemount Viaduct, opposite His Majesty's Theatre

William Grant Stevenson (1849-1919) designed this enormous bronze. Stevenson was born in Ratho, Midlothian and trained at the Royal Scottish Academy. William Wallace probably never visited Aberdeen, although his chronicler writing 150 years later (Blind Harry) tells a fanciful tale of his exploits in the North East of Scotland.

## 16 Albert the Prince Consort



On Union Terrace, in the garden area opposite His Majesty's Theatre



Unveiled by Queen Victoria on 13th October 1863, two years after Prince Albert's death. The grieving Victoria, still distraught at the death of the prince, described the unveiling thus: "I was terribly nervous. Longed not to have to go through this fearful ordeal... too painful, too dreadful".

The seated bronze by Baron Carlo Marochetti RA (1805-1867) was originally sited on Union Street until 1914. Born in Turin, Marochetti settled in Paris in 1827 and was awarded The Legion of Honour in 1839. To escape the Revolution of 1848 he came to England and was elected a royal academician in 1866. Prince Albert wears the uniform of a Field Marshal and the robe of the insignia of The Order of the Thistle, the highest Honour of Scotland. The badge motto is 'Nemo me impune lacessit'; 'No one harms me with impunity'.

## 17 Robert Burns



Halfway along Union Terrace, above the gardens

This bronze by Henry Bain Smith (1857-1893) was cast in July 1892 and unveiled two months later. The daisy held by the national bard recalls his popular poem 'To a Mountain Daisy', written at the plough in April 1786. Burns personally identified with the daisy's fate and despairingly reflected on his own circumstances at the time.



## 18 King Edward VII



At the corner of Union Street and Union Terrace

Aberdeen's most elaborate granite sculpture was designed by Alfred Drury RA and carved by James Philip. On a plinth of polished red Peterhead granite the sovereign holds a sceptre with the cross and an orb. Edward wears the robes of the Order of the Garter, the most senior and oldest order of British chivalry. Below the statue is a bronze ornamental frieze.



To the left is the figure of peace, Britannia, breaking a sword. In the centre stands Scotland's patron saint, Andrew and his shield. Positioned on the right are three figures called 'Imperial Unity'. Britannia is seated centrally with her left arm encircling a figure emblematic of the Indian and

African peoples.

A third figure representing Canada and Australia extends a hand of friendship to be kissed by 'The Mother of Nations'. The motto, that of the Order of the Garter 'Honi soit qui mal y pense' translates as 'shame on him who thinks this evil'.



*This image from 1984 shows punks congregating at the base of Edward VII, a common sight at that time*



## 19 Kelly's Cats

### Union Bridge

Cast iron leopard finials on Union Street Bridge designed by Sidney Boyes, a master at Grays School of Art, Aberdeen. The parapets were added when the bridge was first widened (1905-08). The cats were cast by William Wilson and erected on the bridge in 1910. The name Kelly's Cats is actually a misnomer, as only the bronze panels which are placed on the bridge were designed by Aberdeen architect William

Kelly ARSA, FRIBA (1861-1944)

and installed in 1908.

Further widening and the addition of shops in 1964 led to the removal of the southern parapet, which can now be found in Duthie Park. During the summer of 2005, a hundred replicas of the famous Kelly's Cats, which adorn the railings of

Union Bridge,

Aberdeen were given to artists to decorate. These were on display around the city, before being auctioned off for the Catwalk charity project.



## 20 George, 5th Duke of Gordon

### Golden Square

Designed by Thomas Campbell (1790-1858) of Edinburgh. This work was the first large public statue in Aberdeen and the first statue in Britain to be carved in granite. Monumental sculptors Macdonald and Leslie used their specialised tools and expertise to copy Campbell's model and skilfully make the statue from one block. Originally placed in the Castlegate, it was moved to Golden Square in 1952.



## 21 Langstane

On the corner of Dee Street and Langstane Place  
Close access limited due to narrow kerb. However it is clearly visible from across the street

Roughly dressed slab of grey granite, possibly a march or boundary stone, or part of a now vanished stone circle. It has stood in its present location from the mid-18th Century and inscribed about 1850.



## 22 Archibald Simpson Stone

This stone can be seen in the raised garden at the centre of Bon Accord Square

Access by high steps which have no handrails

This granite block was originally produced for the George VI Bridge spanning the River Dee, near Duthie Park. The stone commemorates Archibald Simpson (1790-1847), an Aberdeen architect who was



responsible for shaping much of our Granite City. Simpson is noted for his work on the city's Union Street, Aberdeen Music Hall, the Old Royal Infirmary and several churches including St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral. He also made contributions to Marshall Mackenzie's Marischal College, which is said to be the second largest granite building in the world after the Escorial Palace, near Madrid.





### 23 Endangered Dreams

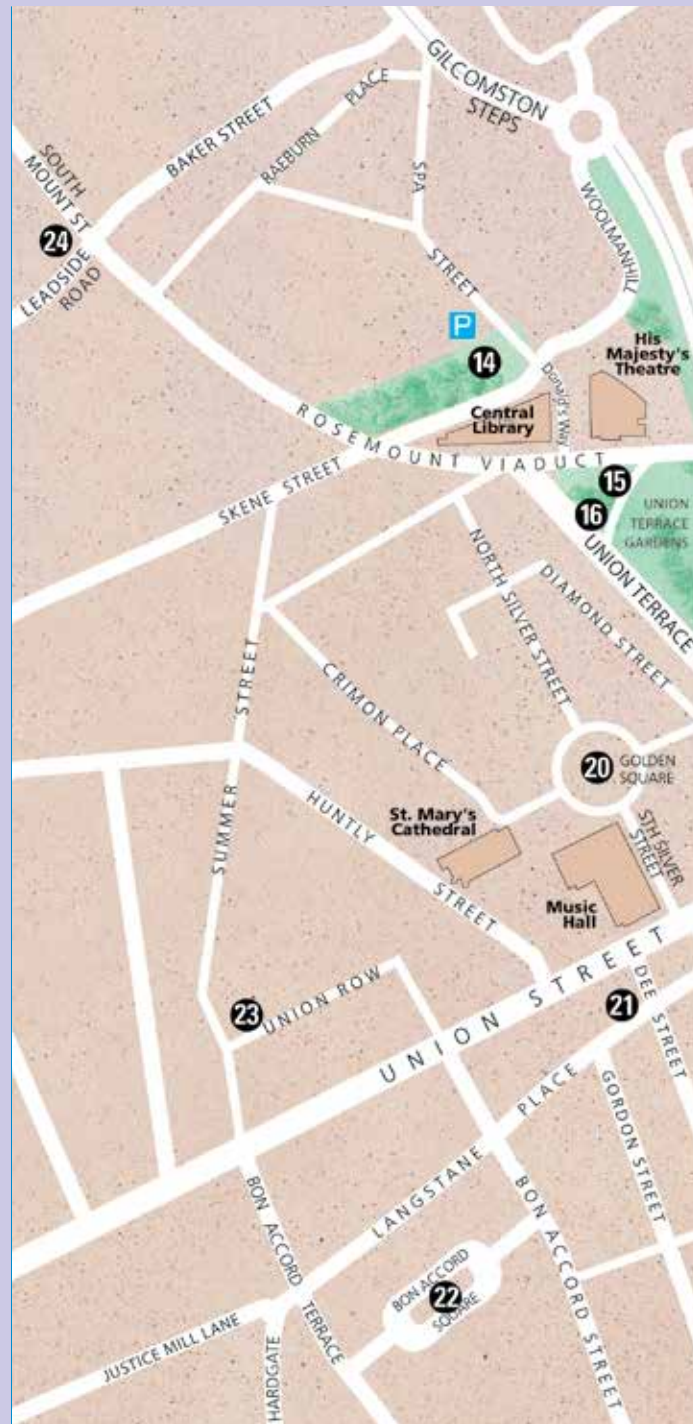
On the side wall of Rustico Italian Restaurant on Union Row, near the corner with Summer Street Bordalo II continued his 'Big Trash Animals' series of sculptures at Nuart Aberdeen with a nod to Scotland's national animal – the unicorn, which was first used on the Scottish royal coat of arms by William I in the 12th century. The piece, which is made

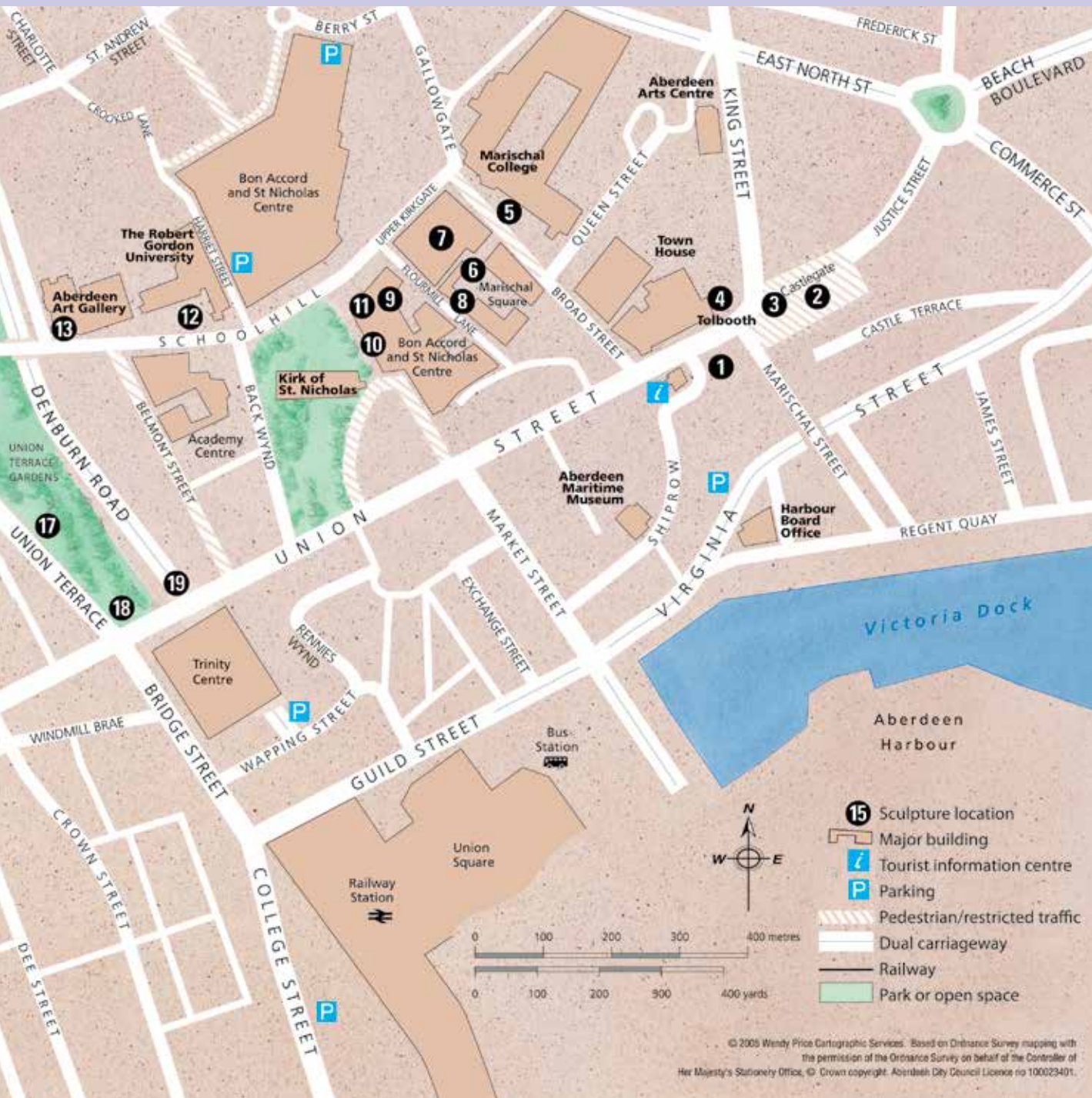


entirely from end of life materials gathered from Aberdeen and the surrounding area, alludes not only to the threat that pollution poses to animals but to the human race, our dreams, customs and ideas.

### 24 Spirit of the Winds & Spirit of the Rains

On Rosemount Square at Leaside Road and South Mount Street These two carved granite bas-relief sculptures are by Thomas Bayliss Huxley-Jones FRBS, ARCA (1908-1969). He was also Head of Sculpture at Gray's School of Art and created Sea Fantasy (see entry 8).

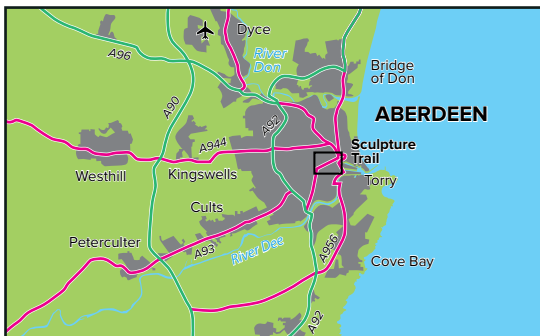






# Sculpture & Curios

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