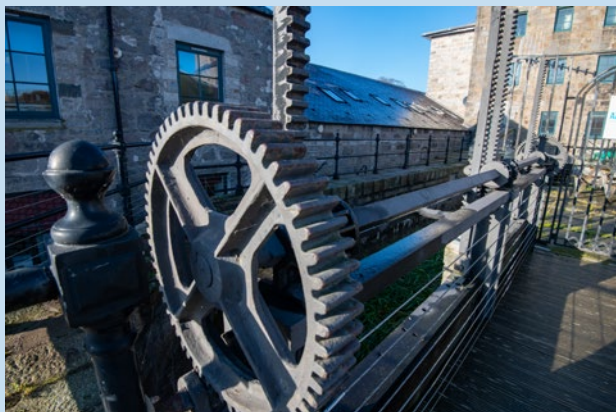


Donside Heritage Trail

Nature & industry of the lower Don



[#aberdeentrails](#)



Many thanks to Professor Jorg Feldmann of Aberdeen University for his initial research and inspiration for this trail.

Picture Credits

All images © Aberdeen City Council unless otherwise stated

Unless indicated below all images are courtesy of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Collections

Above: 22 Grandholm Mill sluice gate. **Cover:** 14 Woodside Works drive wheels, both pictures by Ian Talboys

Images at 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13 (lower), 16, 20, 21 (upper) are used courtesy of Aberdeen City Libraries/Silver City Vault www.silvercityvault.org.uk

Photos at 1, 2, 8, 15, 17, 22 (lower) & 23 courtesy of Ian Talboys

Top image for entry 13 © A Pirie and Sons Ltd

Lower image for entry 14 © University of Aberdeen

Lower image for entry 19 © National Museums Scotland

Historical maps: Reproduction courtesy of the National Library of Scotland

Accessibility



Mostly accessible but covers uneven ground with some steep slopes and parts can get very muddy. Access from Persley Walled Garden and Persley Bridge down to the riverside is steep. The lower path along the riverbank between there and Grandholm Bridge is not suitable for buggies or wheelchairs. Likewise the path to the mill lade Intake (19) on the north bank.

Transport

This trail is intended to be walked or cycled but please see above advice.

The following buses run between locations on the trail and central Aberdeen:

Bridge of Don: First Bus 1 & 2, Stagecoach for Ellon, Peterhead & Fraserburgh

Persley Bridge: First Bus 8 & 18, Stagecoach for Inverurie

Diamond Bridge: First Bus 18 & 19



#aberdeentrails

Welcome to a trail guide for along the River Don, one of two rivers in Aberdeen, and an area teeming with history, wildlife and beautiful waterside scenery.

People have lived and worked along the River Don since the earliest times and this trail explores some of the relics of Aberdeen's industrial past and some of the better-known mills on the lower reaches of the Don, as well as highlighting the river's continuing role in the city. The river has been used as a power source to drive processes and machines for hundreds of years, and this really developed in the 1700s when there were several mills along the river, with many becoming large concerns and household names such as the inventor of the Crombie coat, John Crombie at Cothal Mills.

The textile mills have all closed however there is machinery and buildings along the river which stand testament to this fine part of the city's history. Nowadays, the River Don is home to a wealth of wildlife including salmon, otters, kingfishers, herons, along with stunning woodland walks and a park with one of the most beautiful formal gardens in Aberdeen. It also runs adjacent to Old Aberdeen which has its own history and buildings to discover.

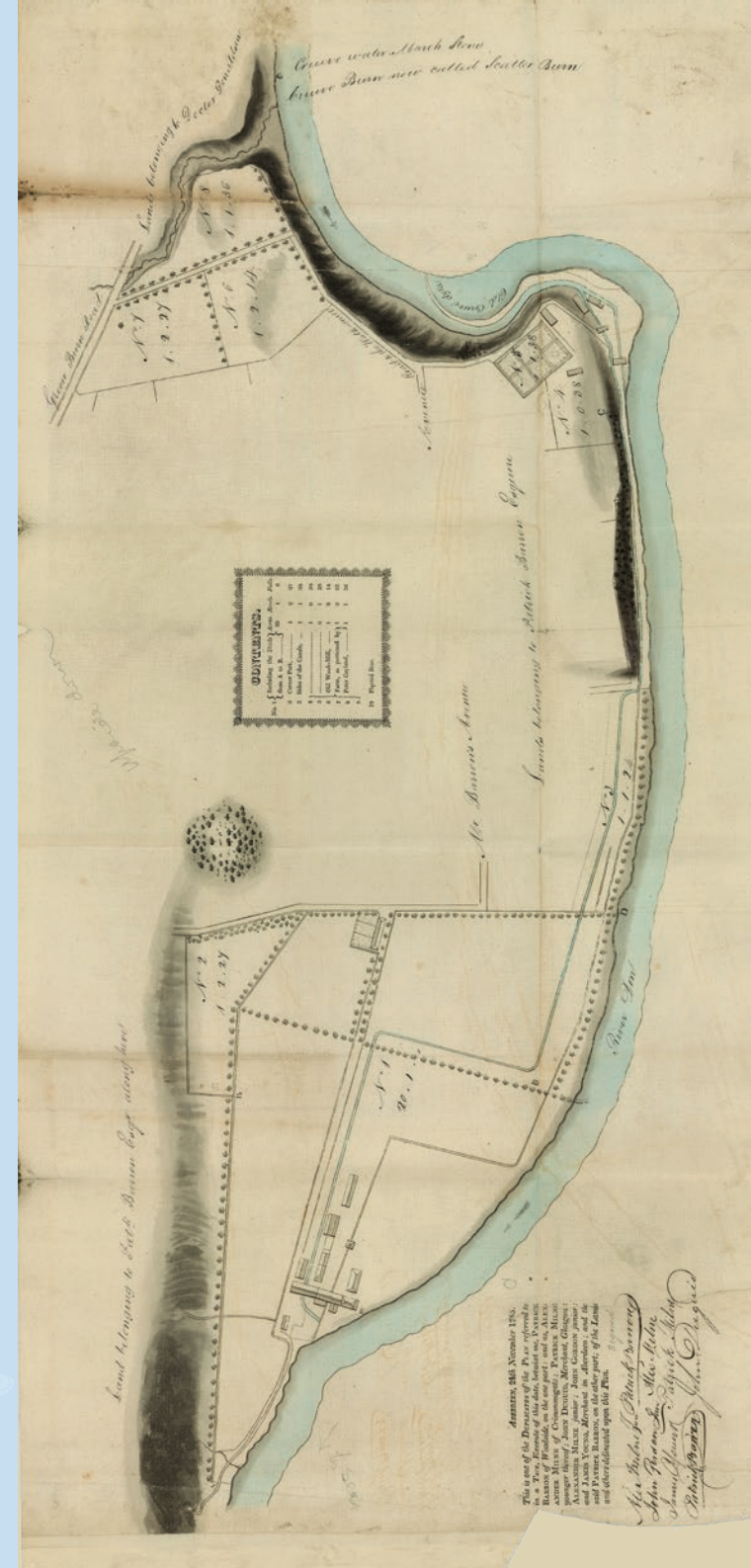
Have fun discovering the history, wildlife and buildings along the River Don!

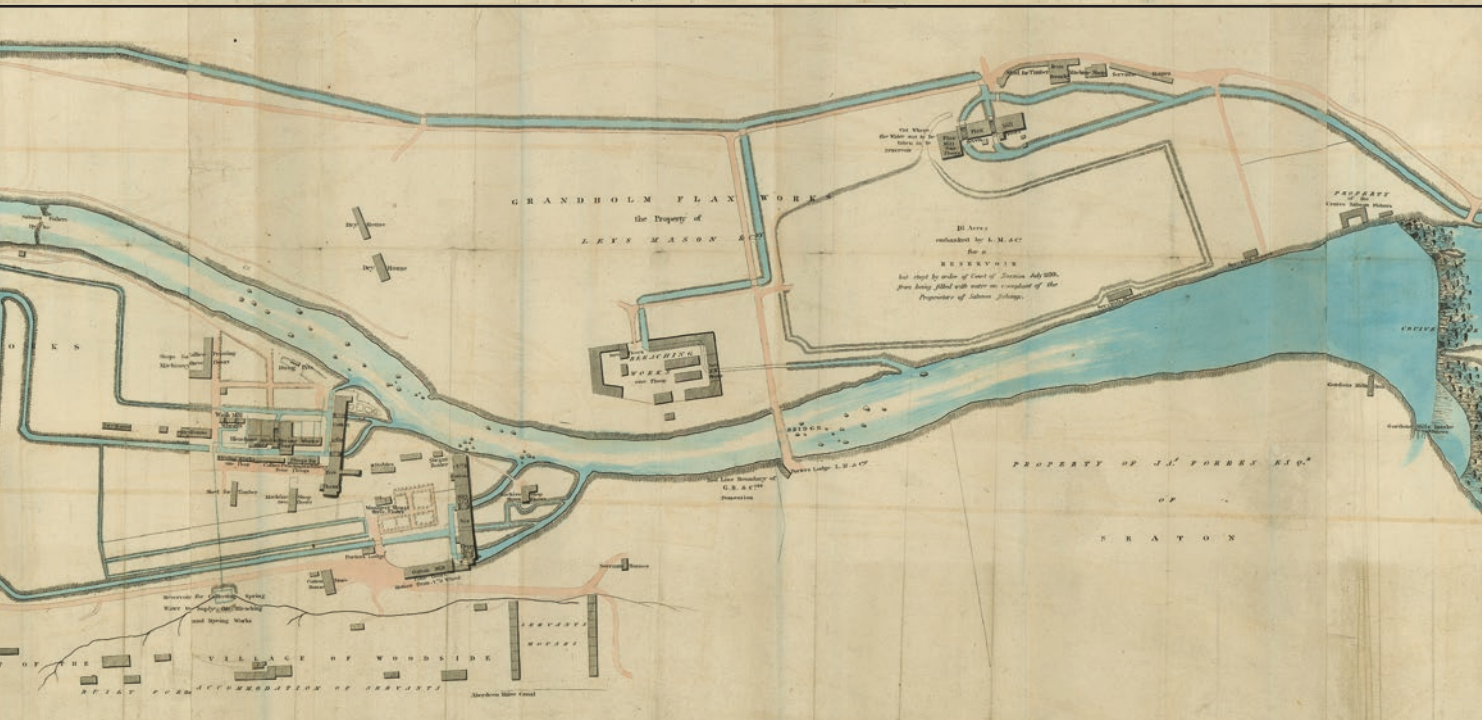
Above: Brig o' Balgownie in the snow



Show off your photos on Instagram @aberdeen_cc

#beautifulABDN



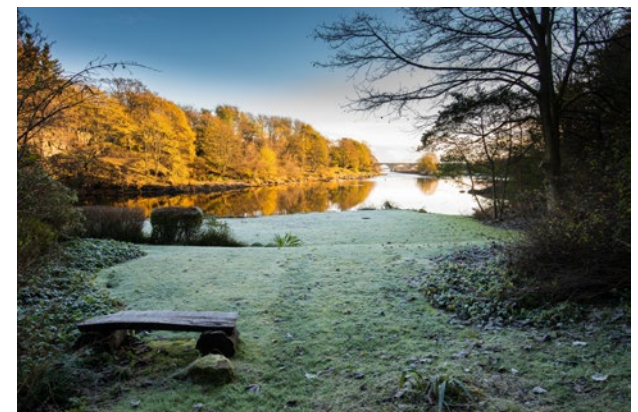


Previous page: 1785, South side of the River Don from the Scatter Burn (formerly called Cruive Burn) to just before Grandholm Bridge. Please note this plan is 'upside down' by conventional standards with south at the top.

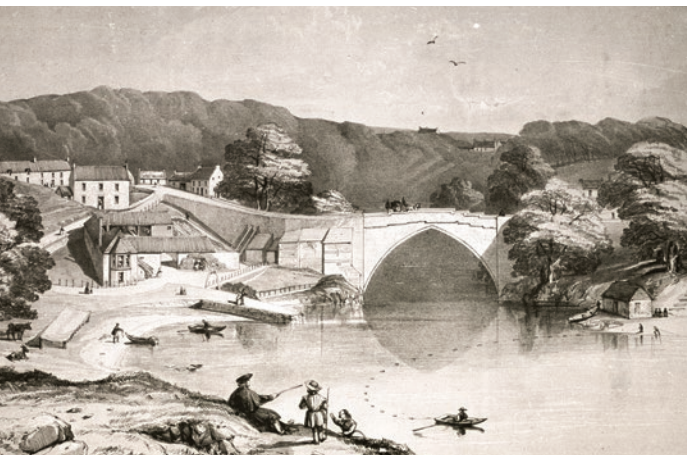
Above: 1886, River Don from Persley to Grandholm showing, top, Persley Bleachfield (roughly at Persley Bridge) and mill lades, below, Woodside Cotton Works, south of the river and Grandholm Flax Works north.



- 1 **European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre**
Often visible from the coast here is the offshore wind farm in Aberdeen Bay. Known as the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre, construction began in October 2016 with first power generated on 1 July 2018. There are 11 turbines – at the time of deployment they were the world's largest and most powerful single turbine model. The facility also features other new technologies including suction bucket jackets (the base of the turbines) and 66kV cabling, which boosts the transmission of energy produced from the turbines to the onshore substation. A €3million scientific research programme to understand the environmental impacts of offshore wind is currently being funded and facilitated at the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre (EOWDC).



- 2 **Donmouth Nature Reserve**
Donmouth has been managed as a local nature reserve since 1992 due to its rich and varied wildlife. It is a great place to watch birds with redshanks, turnstones, oystercatchers present all year round. In the summer, sandwich terns and common terns plunge dive into the river to catch fish and if you are lucky, you might see an otter or a harbour seal. It is also home to a wide variety of plants including northern marsh orchids and birds-foot trefoil and the wildflowers attract many kinds of butterflies and other insects.



3 Brig O' Balgownie

The early history of the Brig O' Balgownie is obscure but it seems likely that Robert the Bruce oversaw its completion. Earlier bridges would most likely have been wooden but it was certainly a stone bridge sometime before 1453, when a mason was employed to do repairs. The entire bridge was effectively rebuilt between 1607 and 1611. Buttresses were added about 1877, giving us the bridge we see today.



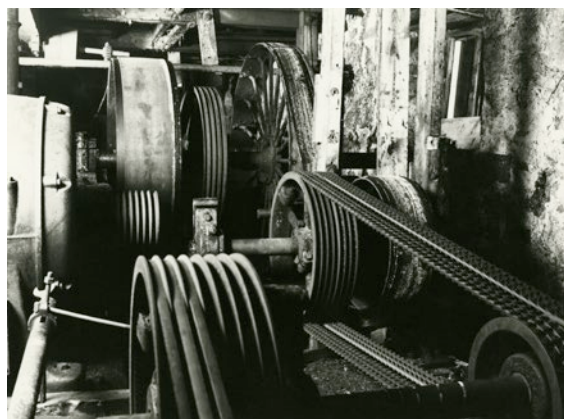
4 Nether Don Salmon Fishing station

The former Nether Don salmon fishing station, now converted to private homes, is shown as Corff House on an 1802 map before it became a fishing station. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey map shows it as a fishing station but named as Whitehall. By the 2nd Edition map the name has changed again to Nether Don. At the front, the house had an archway of whale jaw bones taken from Captain Forsythe's ship in 1850 from Wellington Inlet whilst on search for the Franklin expedition. These are centre left above the pier in the top illustration.



5 Seaton Park

The park is formed on the central part of what was once Seaton estate. In the 1600s, this was held by the Gordon family and passed into the hands of the Forbes family in the 1700s. It was under this family that Seaton House (above) was built, designed by James Gibbs. It was built of brick, not stone, and more closely resembled a French or Belgian chateau than a north-east estate house. By marriage, the estate passed to the Hay family who were lairds of Seaton until the last laird, Malcolm Vivian Hay, in the early 1900s. The house burnt to the ground in 1963 and today a fountain marks its approximate location. Seaton Park, Balgownie and Old Aberdeen are included in the **Old Aberdeen Trail**.



6 Kettock's Mill Weir

This weir, and the lade intake with sluice, are associated with Kettock's Mills on the opposite bank, a former corn or meal mill dating from the early 1800s. However, a mill is first mentioned here in 1540 and appears on Parson Gordon's map of 1661 (right) along with Gordon's Mill (7). The photo above shows some of the machinery in situ before the mill was converted to residential use in the 1980s.





7 Donside Urban Village

This site, also known as Gordon's Mills, has a long and complicated history. There has been a mill in this area from at least the mid-1500s, but it has changed functions several times. The earliest known use is corn milling. In 1696, Patrick Sandilands established Aberdeen's first paper mill on the site, although it was closed by 1703. Then came textile mills, with a carpet mill, a corn mill and a woollen mill on the site by 1867. In 1888, papermaking returned, the firm becoming the Donside Paper Company and the dominant industry on the site. The above picture is circa 1928. These works closed in 2001, bringing about 450 years of industrial activity to a close.



8 The Donside Hydro

The Donside Hydro became operational in 2016 and was Scotland's first urban community hydro scheme and the UK's widest Archimedean screw turbine. It was built, owned and is run by Aberdeen Community Energy, a community benefit society. As well as providing clean energy for the local community, the income generated is used for social and environmental improvements to the area. The hydro scheme is fed by a new lade, although there was a previous watercourse here preceded by cruiwe dykes, a dam and weirs.

9 Grandholm Foot Bridge (no access)

After World War II, a bailey bridge for pedestrians was erected here near to the former works' gate for Grandholm Mills.



10 Grandholm Road Bridge

In 1810, the firm of Leys, Masson & Co aimed to make access to Grandholm works easier by constructing a wooden bridge over the Don, with a small lodge. The bridge became known locally as the 'White Bridge'. The picture above shows dinner hour workers crossing this. It was replaced in 1922 by the present steel road bridge, below, built for Crombie Woollen Mill (who took over in 1859) by the Motherwell Bridge Company. Andrew McKessock, born in Woodside in 1904, remembered seeing a dozen or so Italian ice cream carts gathered at Grandholm Bridge on pay night. He and other local boys helped push the carts back up Don Street, in the hope of getting a free 'slider'.



11 Jacob's Ladder (no access)

Built by Leys, Masson and Company in 1810 and called the White Ladder originally, it picked up the name Jacob's Ladder in the following decades. The original stairs were very tight and could take no more than three abreast. It was repaired in 1892 and the one which remains today was built in 1921: costs were shared between the Council and Crombie. Jacob's Ladder is seen to the right above.

12 March Stone 50

This stone is at the end of Don Terrace. Described in 1698 as adjacent to 'the old Ford of the Dirra-dyke...' The trail also passes March Stone 49 (18). Please see this entry for more information about these stones.

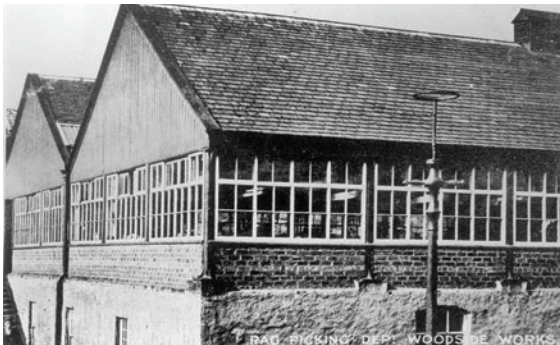


13 Woodside Works

This site first saw industrial use in the mid-1700s with records indicating a waulk mill and a copper mill. In 1775, Gordon, Barron & Co leased the land and the use of a lade and established a printfield and bleachfield. One of the partners – an A Milne – knew Sir Richard Arkwright, the English inventor and leading entrepreneur of the Industrial Revolution at this time. Arkwright allowed a delegation from Aberdeen to visit his mills. In 1785, Gordon, Barron & Co secured a 99-year lease (needing more land and fuller command of water) for a printfield, the manufacture of cotton and linen cloths, and a cotton spinning mill.

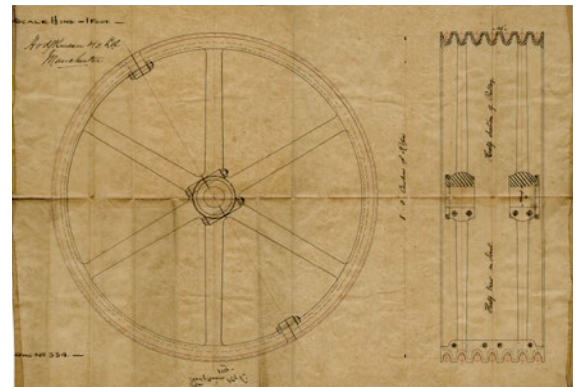
In a report to the House of Commons in early 1800s, Gordon, Barron & Co employed 976 people. The population of Woodside village was noted as 2,000, largely due to the works. The old spinning mill was built in 1778 and extended in 1786. A larger spinning mill (6 floors) followed in 1793, followed by two large weaving sheds. In about 1839, a large preparing mill was built between the spinning mills – measuring some 197 ft long by 50 ft wide. There were two large water wheels and two smaller wheels, whilst a powerful marine engine was added in 1837 and named “Victoria”. Bleaching and cloth finishing happened onsite.

Gordon, Barron & Co continued until 1851 after which the ground was bought up by Alexander Pirie and Sons of Stoneywood and became a branch of their papermaking business. The mill site was used to prepare rags for the nearby Stoneywood papermill works (known by locals as ‘the rugger’) which employed about 400 people.



14 Drive Wheels

These two pieces of machinery align with buildings added at Woodside between 1899 and 1924, when the mill was used by Alexander Pirie and Sons as a ragmill. They are designed to transfer motive power between other elements no longer present but the details have been lost. Machines were certainly common in the processing and preparation of rags for papermaking. The structure shown on the cover and nearer the river is by Barry, Henry and Company, Aberdeen ironfounders which begun in 1790. From 1890, engineering sales became more important and the firm specialised in power transmission equipment, such as this.



The second structure, top, features a flat belt wheel marked Fraser Arbroath. A drawing very similar to the larger rope pulley wheel with seven grooves survives in the Pirie and Sons archive from 1884 commissioned from Hodgkinson & Co in Salford – picture above. There are no details given about where it was to be used but the records suggest that they were commissioned to drive machinery when there was insufficient water to do so. It's entirely possible that this is one of the wheels bought at that time, as Pirie and Sons was definitely investigating its rights to use the lade here and the flow of water was found to be obstructed in places.

The multi-grooved pulleys on the two structures appear to be aligned and if so, may have used cotton driving ropes between the two shafts.



15 A Pirie & Sons Sluice Gates

These sluice gates are clearly marked “A. Pirie & Sons 1919” and form a bridge over two lades. The wide shallow lade under the two culverts or arches was the main lade taking water from the Don at the sluice north of Persley Walled Garden and followed the line of the river to north of Woodside House before splitting – one branch running to the central area of the mill, the other running along the river north of the mill. This replaced and cut off an older lade, which came under the smaller archway nearer the river. This older lade has been infilled and lies under the footpath to the east of this point although edging stones can be seen on the path.



16 Persley Castle ‘The Barracks’

This medieval style fortress above the riverbank is first mentioned in a record dated 1797. It was built by Gordon Baron and Company for the accommodation of children employed at their cotton mills (later Woodside Works). Young lads who lived there were called “bun (bound) boys” because they were all apprenticed to the calico-printing business. By 1803, it was sold on, seemingly because the residents were a nuisance to neighbouring Woodside House.



17 Persley Walled Garden

When Woodside Estate was put up for sale in 1857, the gardens were described as being over 76 acres, with rich soil and many shrubberies and a very superior walled garden, well stocked with fruit trees and berry bushes.

With the passage of time, the walled garden became derelict and overgrown and there was doubt over its ownership. Aberdeen Town Council acquired and restored the garden and it was formally dedicated on 19 July 1997 by Lord Provost Margaret Farquhar JP as part of the Scottish Trade Union Congress centenary and in commemoration of Workers’ Memorial Day. A granite obelisk was dedicated to those who lost their lives in industry, commissioned by Aberdeen Trades Council and manufactured by A & J Robertson (Granite) Ltd.

Although known locally as Persley Walled Garden, it should perhaps really be known as the Woodside House walled garden, as Persley is on the north side of the River Don. The ruined building at the top of the riverbank, directly behind the garden, is the estate’s former Summer House.

18 March Stone 49

These stones mark the historic boundary of Aberdeen’s Freedom Lands which date back to the times of King Robert the Bruce. The term March comes from the 1500s name for a boundary. The earliest were probably natural

features such as burns, large stones or cairns. The original March Stone 49 is located where the Scatter Burn and River Don meet, east of the bridge. It is marked as Cruive water March Stone on the plan at the start of this booklet. After 1790, they were replaced by numbered stones like these with the letters ABD for Aberdeen. Stone 50 is at the end of Don Terrace (see 12). The full story of Aberdeen’s Freedom Lands and March Stones is told in the **Boundary Stones Trail**.





19 Mill Lade Intake

This is the start of the one-mile-long mill lade that was constructed by Leys, Masson & Co. in the late 1700s to service its factory downstream at Grandholm. Several hundred people were employed for years in its construction, cutting through twenty feet of perpendicular rock in places. The company was investing heavily at this point, building a seven-storey mill, bridges over the lade, a bridge over the Don for workers from Woodside, and a huge bleachfield.

The lade runs through Persley Den, and the mill owners constructed a bridge across the water to provide access for workers and transport to and from the mill. In the 1890s, the lade was supplying 15,000 cubic feet of water per minute to a water wheel 25 feet in diameter, 20 feet 6 inches in width, weighing 100 tons and generating 200 horse power. Manufactured by Hewes and Wren in 1826, the wheel was later replaced, and sold to Alexander Pirie & Sons, who installed it at Woodside Works. There it continued to power machinery and drive a generator until 1965. It is now in the National Museums of Scotland collections in Edinburgh.



20 Persley Den

Persley Den is a wooded valley formed to create a lade to take water to the Grandholm Mills. Today it offers a quiet walk away from the busy roads of Danestone where you can enjoy hearing many woodland birds or even spot a roe deer. Many of the elm trees have been killed by Dutch elm disease but even the dead trees are home to a host of insects and fungi. Listen out for the drumming of greater spotted woodpeckers. Amongst the trees you will find the relicts of the sluice gates that once controlled the flow of water into the lades. The old postcard above shows the bridge over the lade.



21 Persley Quarry

The streets on either side of the river served the former mills and are still extensively setted (cobbled). Settmakers made cassies (cobble stones) for roads and Aberdeen setts were also used to pave streets in London. This 1920s photograph shows a settmaker at nearby Persley Quarry where the scrap metal business on The Parkway is now located. Skilled men were required to break the huge granite blocks into manageable sized pieces and many came from across Scotland to work in the Woodside area. The quarry industry here came to an end in the early 1900s with many of the quarrymen of Woodside emigrating to Redgranite USA. The wooden shelter or 'skaithie' provided a wind break of sorts for these men who had to sit on blocks of granite patiently working on the hard stone.



22 Grandholm Mills / Crombie Mills

Grandholm Mills was a vast complex that produced textiles from the 1700s to 1991. In 1792, Leys, Masson & Co moved its enterprise from its first site at Gordon's Mills to the north bank of the Don. Headed by Provost Thomas Leys, it was probably Aberdeen's most important textile company and invested heavily in the improvements to the new site as mentioned in entry 19. The company appears to have been keen to provide for their employees, setting up a subsidised works canteen for the 1000-strong staff, medical facilities and sick benefit, a bowling green and farm produce.



Leys, Masson & Co went bankrupt in 1848 and the site, struggling through various initiatives under Grandholm Mills, was eventually taken over by J. & J. Crombie in 1859. The Crombie firm transferred its woollen production from Cothall to the former flax mill at Grandholm, and proceeded to establish a world-renowned woollen company, especially famous for its overcoats including the Crombie coat worn by British Royals and The Beatles. Over half its output was exported, including producing the coats of the Russian Army.



23 Mother Earth

Grandholm Village was built by Cala Homes who commissioned this sculpture as part of the development. It was created by Andy Scott sculptor of the famous *The Kelpies* in Falkirk and *Poised*, in Aberdeen's Marischal Square and his then assistant George Potter taking around 6 months to complete, and was installed in 2005.

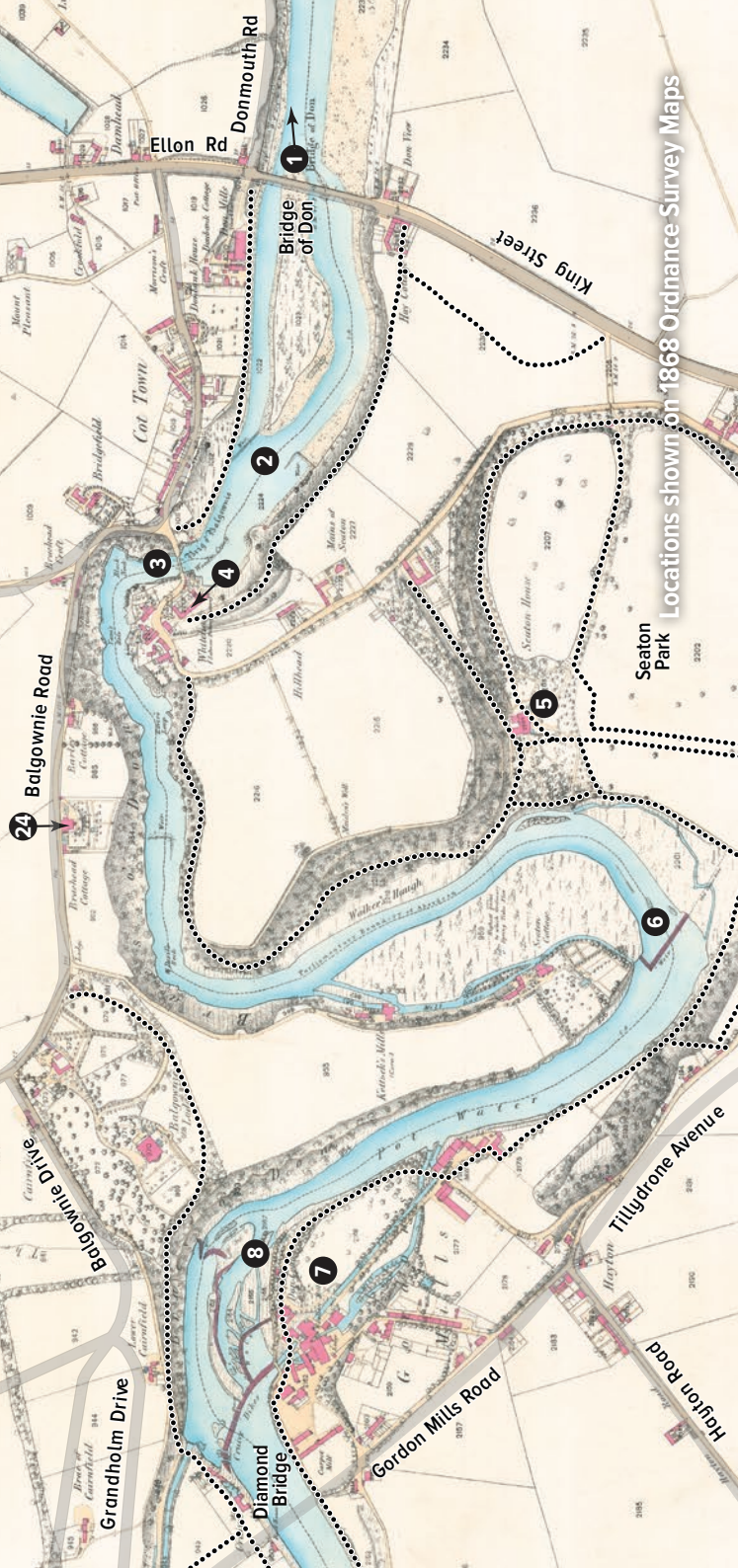


Mother Earth is draped in a steel 'fabric' to represent the cloth weave of the Crombie Textile Mills (see 22). The big cats or leopards are representative of those in the city of Aberdeen's coat of arms. The work involved a welded steel technique, using a variety of different bars and plates, including profile cut 'spots' for the leopards.

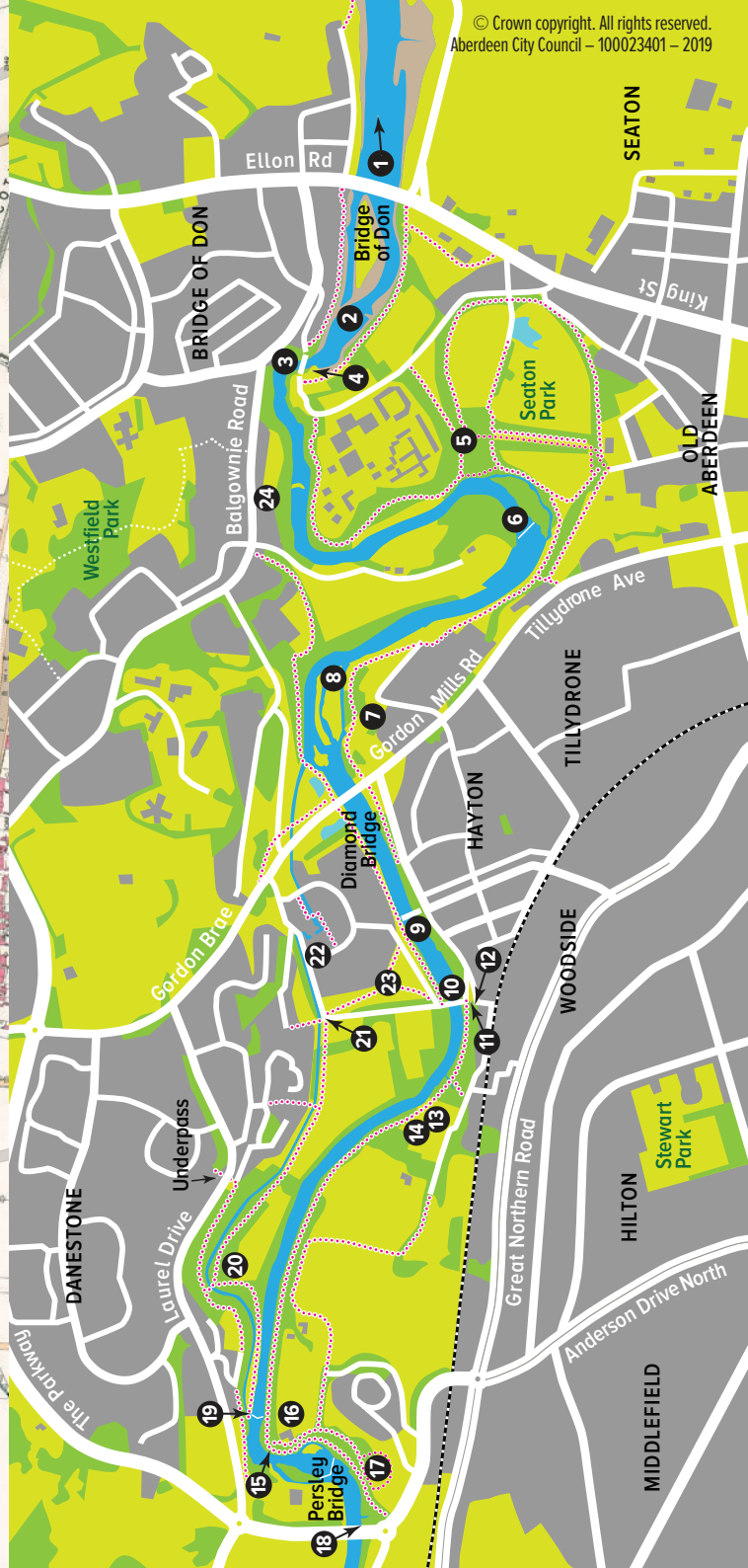
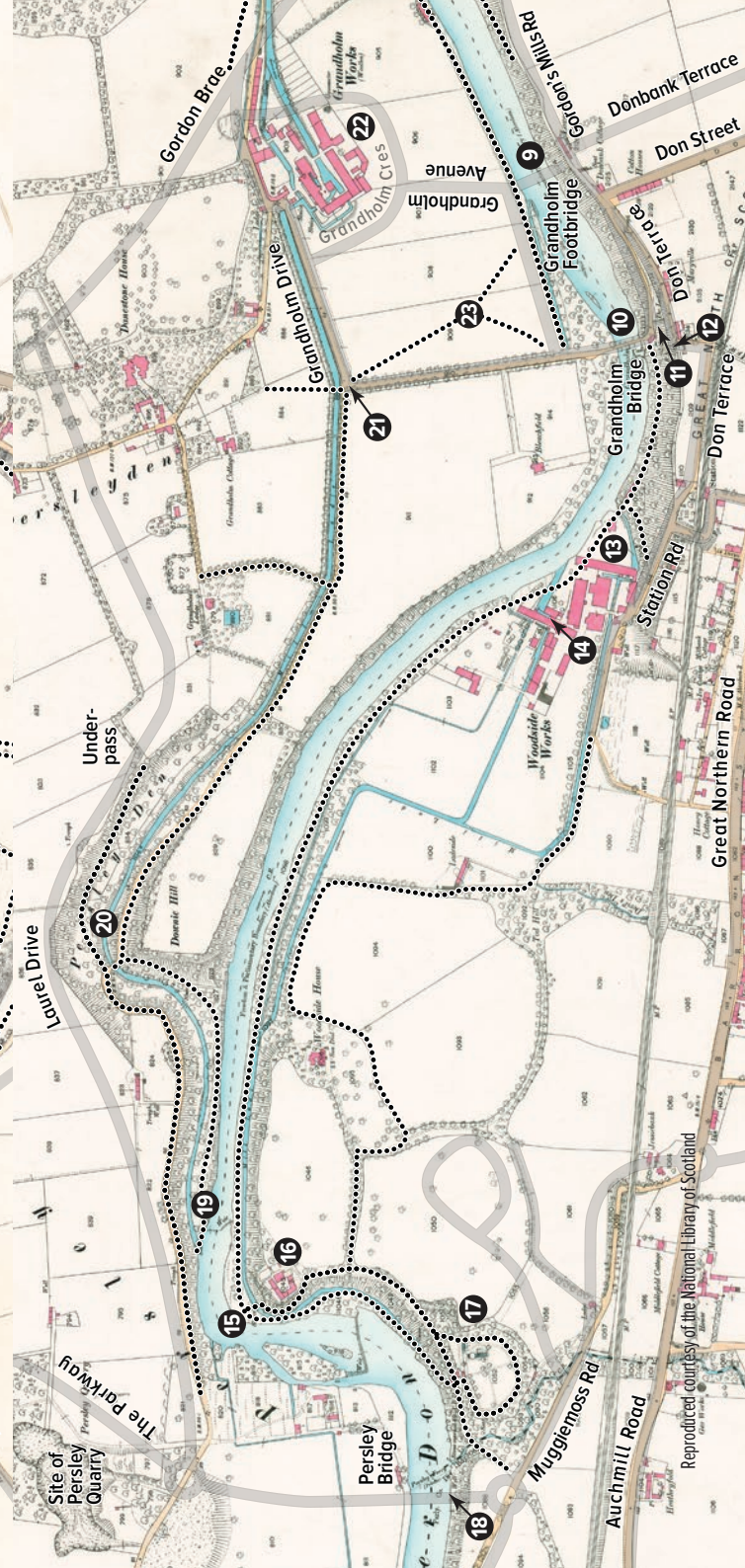


24 Thomas Glover House

Much has been written about the life and times of Thomas Blake Glover (see the **Scottish Samurai Trail**), and many myths have grown up around him. What we do know is that he settled in Japan as a young man, where he was a successful merchant. This led him to broker trade deals with companies back here in Aberdeen, including the building of modern war ships such as the *Jho Sho Maru*. He was also the agent in Japan for Crombie's cloth (see entry 22). In Japan, he is revered for modernising and industrialising the country. The Glover family lived here from 1864 for some twenty years. Whilst Thomas himself didn't live here, he visited this house on a number of occasions and it no doubt played host to some of Thomas's Japanese 'students' when in Britain. Thomas Blake Glover probably stayed here when he was in Aberdeen negotiating the contract for the *Jho Sho Maru* on behalf of the Higo Clan.



Locations shown on 1868 Ordnance Survey Maps



The Wildlife of Donside

Fish of the Don

- Sea trout • brown trout
- Salmon • Flounder (at Donmouth)



Insects & Amphibians

- Common frog • Common toad • Common & Black darter dragonflies
- Emerald, large red & blue-tailed damselflies, • Common blue, small tortoiseshell, red admiral & small heath butterflies



Birds of Donside

- Grey heron
- Great spotted woodpecker
- Gooseander
- Goldeneye
- Mute swan
- Dipper
- Mallard
- Buzzard



Mamals of Donside

- Otter • Roe deer • Fox
- Pipistrelle bat
- Red squirrel
- Daubentons bat



Birds of Donmouth

- Redshank • Turnstone
- Oystercatcher
- Dunlin • Herring gull
- Common gull • Osprey
- Black-headed gull,
- Cormorant
- Sandwich tern
- Common tern



Mamals of Donmouth

- Otter • Fox
- Harbour seal
- Roe deer



Partial saltwater

Highest tidal point

Freshwater

Donside Trail

Nature and History of the Lower Don



© Crown copyright. All rights reserved. Aberdeen City Council – 100023401 – 2020



This is one in a series of themed trails in Aberdeen City, visit the website to see more: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails

#aberdeentrails

For further information contact

Visit Scotland Aberdeen iCentre
01224 269180
www.visitscotland.com

Visit Aberdeenshire
www.visitabdn.com
follow on Instagram
[@visitabdn](https://www.instagram.com/visitabdn)

For public transport information contact Travel Line
www.travelinescotland.com

For a large text version contact
03000 200 293

