

'Privies and Other Filthiness...'

The Environment of Late Medieval Aberdeen c.1399-1650

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This talk will look at aspects of public hygiene in medieval Aberdeen with specific focus on the streets.

It was the role of the Council of the Royal Burgh then, as it is now, to deal with dirty streets. Council statutes dealing with street cleaning and maintenance begin in the mid-fifteenth century and this seems to be the same case across Scotland. To a limited extent, I will compare and contrast Aberdeen to other Scottish burghs and European cities generally looking at why they sought to clean their streets.

I want to deal with two issues; firstly who and what produced waste and secondly how that waste was dealt with. 'While urban environmental pollution is mainly industrial today, it was organic in the late Middle Ages.'¹ Principally, manure from all the beasts and offal from those slaughtered by the fleshers.

There were a large number of animals in medieval Aberdeen. Most households and families would have had sheep, chickens and possibly cows whilst it was incumbent upon all burgesses to have a horse. In terms of archaeological remains, large amounts of animal bones have been recovered from various digs throughout the city. The sheer number of animal bones is in one sense testimony to the extent of the problem.



Dog jaw



Dog bones



Dog and puppy radii

The problem is also testified to in the number of statutes dealing with the problems generated by keeping these animals. On 13 October 1531, the Council ordained:

¹ Nicholas, *Later Medieval City...*, p.331.

*'anent keiping of the kirk zard fra horse, ky, kuaffis, scheip, and swyne, and all wther beistis, the kirk dikis and stilis being sufficient that the beistis cane nocht haue entress, bot input be folkis other nycht or day.'*²

The importance of the churchyard being used, and that people were specifically putting animals there, is a reflection of the sheer pressure on available space.



Pig skull chopped down centre

On 7 November 1578, the City Council ruled that all pigs had to be expelled from the burgh within 15 days. After that time, any pigs found that did not have a home, or *cruffis* as it was called, were to be slain by the town's gravedigger and the carcass seized by the Council. This statute went on to specify that it was lawful for anyone who found a pig on their land, on Castlehill, Womanhill, in the Kirkyard or on the Links, to slay the pig.¹ Like the above statute, this demonstrates the extent of the problem. The pigs were all over all the common areas and leisure areas of the burgh as well as wandering through backyards.

One of the responses to the detritu (general nuisance) was to make sure that they were kept in strictly defined spaces, with heavy penalties for those not so housed.

In Peebles on 15 October 1470, it was *'ordanyt and statut that na swyn suld be haldyn out band na fund in na manys skath, vnder payn of slachter...'*³ On 16 February 1520, Stirling Burgh Council ruled that any pigs found out with of house would be subject to tinsal (seizure and escheating) and the owners to a fine of eight shillings.⁴ In 1521, Stirling Council raised the penalty for un-banded swine to the slaying of the animal with no legal recourse against the slayer; which may be an indication of the legal problems attendant with this issue.⁵ Stirling Council intended to enforce this statute. On 21 January 1525, David Greg was acquitted of slaying a pig belonging to Marion Broun.⁶

In Inverness on 4 October 1558, the Council passed a very similar statute.⁷ Inverness had made a similar regulation concerning geese. Thus, on 15 June 1559, Thomas Crone was found not guilty of slaying Matthew Paterson's geese on account of them being *'onlachful gud to be hadin bruch...'*⁸ These are the most problematic of the animals and this is why they find their way into the historical record in such large numbers.

² *ibid.*, p.143.

³ Chambers, (ed.) *Peebles... Records*, pp 163-4.

⁴ Renwick, R., (ed.) *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling. A.D. 1519-1666, with Appendix, A.D. 1295-1666*, (Glasgow, Glasgow Stirlingshire and Sons of the Rock Society, 1887) p.2.

⁵ Renwick, *Stirling...*, p.8.

⁶ Renwick, *Stirling...*, p.21.

⁷ Mackay, W., and Cameron, H., (eds) *Records of Inverness, Volume I, Burgh Court Books: 1556-86*, (Aberdeen, New Spalding Club, 1911), p.13. They observed that anyone who had pigs within the burgh had to remove them within five days after the date of the statute, after which it would be lawful for anyone to slay a pig that was found on their grounds.

⁸ Mackay and Cameron, *Inverness...*, p.32.

Packs of dogs were also more of a problem than as they remain in many developing countries, especially where middens are kept on the street and there is not a comprehensive solution to rubbish removal. A statute of 14 February 1623, reads:

'divers and sundrie complaintis hes beine maid to the magistrattis and counsall of the burghe, be certane persones duelling within the fredome and about the same, that thair is suche a great number of mastishe and cur doggis within this burghe, quha nichtlie wyrries and devouris thair sheip in great quantities...'

In response to this problem they resolved that anyone in possession of such a dog after 25 February was to pay the Dean of Guild a £40 fine, and assume responsibility for any sheep killed.⁹

It seems that Old Aberdeen had a problem with packs of stray dogs. These animals had in part been pets but also they had been herd dogs. Thus the butchers of Winchester kept dogs to herd animals and bait bulls. These problems were not unique to Aberdeen but were common across medieval Europe. Douai and Dijon maintained uniformed *dog bashers*; those of Bruges beat 1,121 animals to death in 1455.¹⁰ This all seems to be very draconian. In Stirling there is the case of Thomas Mosie on 7 August 1652, whose dog had attacked Marione Williamsone. The Council of Stirling found the dog guilty and ordered Moise *'to hang his dog presentlie...'*¹¹

Pigs, dogs and geese were the most problematic animals in all of the burghs and this is reflected very heavily in the historical records. Nevertheless, this should not obscure the large number of other sorts of animals that were in the burghs. The severity of these consequences is testimony to the extent of the problem.

Aside from the effluent produced by these animals whilst they were alive, they also caused problems in death. Fleshing obviously had a very noxious appearance to people especially with regard to the killing of the animals. On 12 October 1632, Aberdeen Council ruled:

*'na flesher w[i]t[h]in this burghe sall slay ony nolt sheip nor...bestiall wpoun the kingis hie streites nor w[i]t[h]out houss in tyme comeing wnder payne of fourtie shillinges...'*¹²

But a butchered animal also produces a considerable amount of gore, not all of which is used. In a statute of 10 March 1470:

*'[th]e ballies chargit [th]e fleshoures to haff wp [th]e shamlyes til [th]e fisch cross and [th]ame to brek [th]e fish in na vir place/and [th]at ilkane of [th]ame haf a sufficiant lome? Or veschel besyde [th]e stalie to cast in [th]e Refuse and fylth of [th]e fish / kepand [th]e stalies al tyme dicht and clene vnd[er]the pane of viij s of ilkane of [th]ai[m] vnforgefin.'*¹³

There always seems to have been a good number of fleshers in Aberdeen. Obviously it was an important trade and from at least the sixteenth century they proliferated and

⁹ *Extracts...*, II, pp 382-3.

¹⁰ Nicholas, *Later Medieval City...*, p.332.

¹¹ *Peebles... 1652-1714*, p.2.

¹² ACA, Council Register, Volume LII, Part 1, 22 September 1630-19 June 1644, p.31.

¹³ ACA, Council Register, Volume VI, 3 October 1468-30 December 1486, p.622. With transcriptions from the volumes of the Council Register, and any other manuscript sources, I have retained the original spelling and punctuation at all times. Exceptions relate to the thorn which has been translated as [th], as in [th]e; also any contractions have been expanded and I have, conjecturally, attempted to insert spelling that is consistent with scribe's normal patterns when doing so.

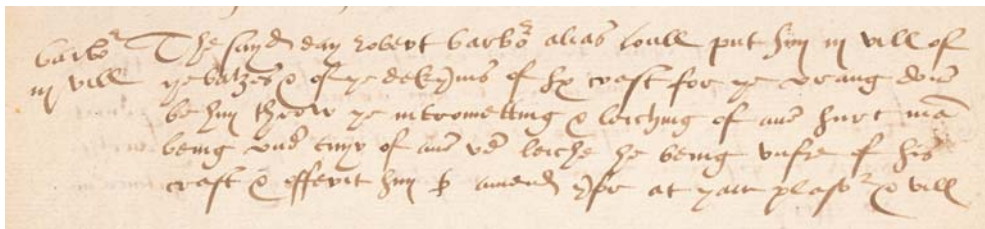
we have the names of sausage makers and a variety of other branches of the fleshing trade.¹⁴

Aberdeen's response to the problem of spilled intestines was simply to collect the offal. We don't know what then happened to it, interestingly they did not forbid putting it in the many midden heaps across the city. As early as 1250, the butchers of Bologna and Verona were required to take offal outside of the city. Ferrara required the butchers to establish themselves along the city streams, which may simply have substituted one pollution problem for another and to have pits next to their shops to collect the blood.¹⁵

However, it was not just the fleshers who produced particularly gory waste, there were also the leechers and the barber surgeons. The records of Aberdeen don't reveal much about this problem. Elsewhere they used a *blood trench* at Noyon and a *blood pit* at Ghent.¹⁶

Now we know there were a large number of leechers and barber surgeons in Aberdeen in the medieval period. The leechers were a trade having been formally incorporated. However, where they operated is a mystery, perhaps in their own houses.

In the case of smiths, there was a smithy row referred to at one point but nothing similar for leechers. In the case of Edinburgh, at excavations at Soutra just outside of the city, which was a medieval hospital, a pit was discovered which has been interpreted as a *blood pit*.



Barbers 16 January 1542

These groups and many more, all produced waste that was collected together in middens. The one exception was human bodily waste, which was generally put in a cess-pit. Curiously, there is little recovered so far in the way of written evidence concerning the treatment of human bodily waste in Aberdeen. Some medieval cities have produced some direct and indirect evidence. Paris paid *fifty masters* to remove waste from cess-pits, while Buda had a garbage collector called the *Manure Count*.

Many cities made individuals responsible for their own waste disposal, requiring them to take it beyond the city walls. Nicholas has noted that most cities had an *easement alley* or something similar. In the case of Aberdeen, in the *Chartulary of St Nicholas* is a rental dated 1587 with a reference to the land of the wife of John Murray '*lying in the Fuyl Gutter of the Castle Street...*'¹⁷ This might indicate a use of the area or rather it may simply have been descriptive of an odour in the area. There is also a reference to a *stank yard* in the Green in 1587¹⁸ and finally one reference to a rotten

¹⁴ *Miscellany of the New Spalding Club*, Volume I, 70, see also p.72 *passim*.

¹⁵ Nicholas, *Later Medieval City...*, p.331.

¹⁶ Nicholas, *Later Medieval City...*, p.333.

¹⁷ Cooper, *Chartulary...*, p.165

¹⁸ Anderson, *Fasti...Mariscallani...*, p.37.

row in the town in 1477 (incidentally described as between the lands belonging to two *carnifex*).¹⁹

In London City ordinances required that privies be lined with stone and that they be in cellars or in yards. Cess-pit crews cleaned them for a fee; this was usually required at intervals of two years.²⁰ In the case of Aberdeen, cess-pits have been found but often contain other midden material. This perhaps indicates that they were not exclusive cess-pits or that they may have later become contaminated by midden material. So far, no later medieval/early modern cess-pits have been found. Along with the lack of written evidence this may be evidence waiting to be discovered. The only evidence that I have is from the title of the exhibition; '*Privies and other filthiness...*' The privies were put in the Greyfriars place showing that any available space would very soon have become congested.



Excavating rubbish or cesspit



Excavating rich medieval midden material

The streets were thus littered by animals, the waste they produced, and by large amounts of rubbish collected on the streets into large midden heaps. The first step in dealing with this problem was to pave the streets. Some cities began paving their central areas with timber and crushed stones in the twelfth century; major streets with gravel in thirteenth century; and markets with cobblestones.

Philip August ordered Paris to be paved in 1184 and in London under Edward I, each wardmoot elected four street inspectors. From 1303 pavers operated citywide.²¹ In 1235, Florence had some paved streets and was completely paved by 1339. In 1253,

¹⁹ *Registrum...* I, p.312.

²⁰ 'Most cities had a dead-end 'Easement Aley, 'Ordure Street', or something similar near the main market.', Nicholas, p.332. Few houses had latrines, except certain larger stone houses. The result was a large number of cess-pits. Noyon forbade residents to pile up waste in front of their doors for more than three days, or dump it in abandoned houses or in the ditches or city towers. 'The houses of the Tucher and Behain, prominent merchants of Nuremberg, had cess-pits of 30 metres, but they were only cleared every thirty years.' First cess-pits were generally wood but as the period wanned they were increasingly of stone. Nicholas, pp 332-4.

²¹ Nicholas, *Later Medieval City...*, p.334.

Perugia paved its main square, 1268 saw the paving of the main streets and by 1294 the Government undertook to pave all of the public thoroughfares.

For Scottish cities the evidence is slighter and it is hard to know when paving began. The best guess may be that it happened in the thirteenth century or possibly earlier. Certainly in Aberdeen we know that streets and thoroughfares began to acquire names in the thirteenth century, which may in itself be significant. Parts of late thirteenth century Fittie Wynd have been found by archaeologists.



Modern cassies and medieval cobbles

The first evidence for a paid calsaymaker in Aberdeen dates to 1399.¹ Before 1300, Brussels and Louvain had offices for street maintenance called *Chaussées* with masters and they rendered their own accounts by 1326. The pavers of this group were led by a *chef-de-chantier*, generally a mason.

The issue of keeping the streets clean really begins in the fifteenth century. In the archaeological record all middens found in the backyards of tenements are dateable until the early 1400s, after this they seem to disappear from the archaeological record.²² At this time, there seems to be a very clear change in rubbish disposal methods in Aberdeen. Perhaps it was the case that people began simply to pile more rubbish on the street frontage when the pressure of space on the backlands increased; it was from this time that more and more riggs were subdivided. From this period there may have been an increased need to clean the streets, although of course as both the historical record and investigation of the extant historical record is incomplete then this remains a supposition.

In Aberdeen on 13 September 1479:

*'[th]e ald[er]ma[n], [con]sel, and com[mun]ite, has grantit to Sande cowtes for [th]e m[en]di[n]g of [th]e causais and [th]e guttars of [th]e toune and to halde al [th]e gates of [th]e toune clene / [tha]t al me[n] may haf honest and clene passage throuch all [th]e toune / of ilke fyre hous a peny And of al vtheris, outebrges, and inbrgessis, and Indwellares havand chavm[er] or house a peny to be pait twyse in the [y]er m[er]t[n]ymes and witsunday...'*²³

This statue is important as it shows streets and gutters were in existence in the mid fifteenth century, and as it may be the appointment of the very first street cleaner (although it is hard to tell if he was a boss of a staff or if he undertook the work himself). What is also important is how this service was to be paid for: by a tax on the community and that tax to be weighted according to the value of each persons property. In essence, this is an early Council Tax to pay for clean streets and Sandy Cowtis is the first name of an Aberdonian street cleaner to come down to us.

It has been argued that this concern for the streets demonstrated in the fifteenth century is primitive.²⁴ That is to say that the concern here is to keep the streets open and not blocked up, and that this is primitive when held in contrast to modern

²² *Aberdeen and Indepth View...*, p.94.

²³ ACA, Council Register, Volume VI, 3 October 1468-30 December 1486, pp 599-600. See also, *Extracts*. I, p.37.

²⁴ Mair, Craig, *Mercat Cross and Tolbooth*, p.??.

legislation which is based upon an understanding of the underlying links between dirt and disease. In other words, where we are concerned with public hygiene, in the fifteenth century they were concerned simply with the appearance of the burgh. Moreover, part of this argument is that we have a modern large and sophisticated bureaucracy and machinery to deal with these issues, whilst in the medieval period they dealt with them in an *ad hoc* and unsophisticated manner. The former part may be truer than the latter part in this regard.

Certainly at first glance the evidence might seem to support this assertion. An earlier statute of 12 October 1477 ordered the streets to be cleaned up in order to deal with *'[th]e venales [th]at ar closit and [th]at thai ger [th]am be red and oppinyt...'*²⁵ So here the object was the opening up of streets and does not seem to relate to any understanding of dirt or disease. The appointment already quoted of Sandy Cowtes in 1479 states that the streets are to be cleaned in order that all men might have *'honest and clene passage...'* so the concern is again for passage, but the word *clene* is used here. The sixteenth century sense of that word was that it related to a process of clearing and removing, rather than to our modern understanding of hygiene.²⁶

This was Aberdeen Council's preferred response for many years. On 9 October 1496, the Council made a resolution:

*'[th]at ane persone sall halve [th]e haile comond gates and veneles of Abirdene clene and well dichitit be [th]e sicht of [th]e tovne for [th]e quhilke he sal have ane peny of ilkane fyr house ane peny of ilkane marchand butht and craftsma[n] buthis.'*²⁷

In Peebles the response was slightly different. On 18 January 1468 the Burgh Council of Peebles appointed John Naper the *dychtyrof the gat* to keep the streets clean, presumably a separate office to the calsaymaker, perhaps a better initiative.²⁸

By the sixteenth century more people were needed. On 9 October 1506:

*'[th]e hail toun consentit [th]at four personis salbe chosin quhilkes sale clenge and dight [th]e haile four partes of [th]e toune and have it clene as efters and kerry [th]e filch [th]airof to [th]air commond myddinges for [th]e quhilkes ilkane fir hous sale pay to [th]ame j penny in [th]e [y]eir.'*²⁹

This statute would seem to imply that large communal middens were now being created by the municipal authorities (early rubbish tips). At any rate, this is indicative of progress of an increasingly professional and bureaucratic response to the issue.

Then, as now, a royal visit prompted a more systematic clean up. Ahead of one such visit in 1511 there is a fascinating statute of 30 April 1511. It ordained

'for [th]e clengeng of [th]e towne agane [th]e quenys [c]oming [tha]t [th]e belma[n] pass throu all [th]e hail towne and [com]mand and charge all man[ner] of personis [tha]t has ony myddingis apone [th]e forgait befor [tha]r [y]ettes and dowres to devoid red and clenge [th]e samyn betuix [th]is and Sondag vnder pane of xls vnforgiven ... [comm]andit [th]e fore officairis

²⁵ ACA, Council Register VI, p.500.

²⁶ Robinson, *Consise Scots Dictionary*..., p.100.

²⁷ ACA, Council Register Volume VII, 10 February 1486-20 September 1501, p.672. *Extracts*, I, p.422 has a regulation which is substantially the same but dated to 9 October 1494, perhaps that refers to a different statute, although given the replication of the dates and the general reputation of the *Extracts* it would seem to have been misdated by two years.

²⁸ Chambers, (ed.) *Peebles... Records*, p.156.

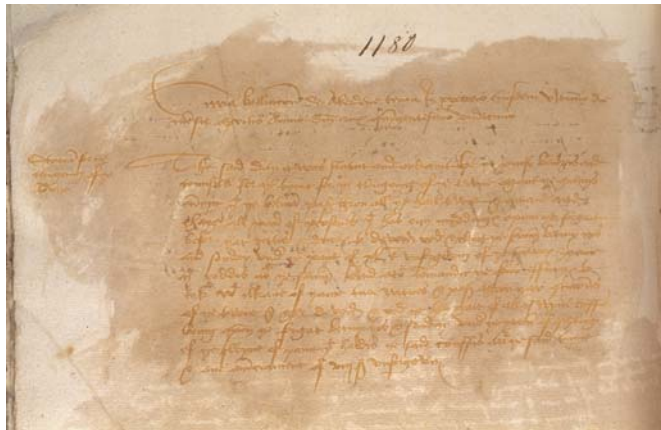
²⁹ ACA, Council Register, VIII, 4 October 1501-14 July 1511, p.615.

*to tak withilkane of [th]ame twa witnes and pas throug thair quarteris of [th]e
toun and ger devoid and red [th]e heygait of al swyne crvffis being apoun
the forget...vnder pane of escheting of the swyne...*³⁰

But this was not enough. On 4 May 1511 the Council ruled that:

*'...all pynouris, haffand hors, within the brught, to enter tomorne at the nixt,
and clenge the toun of all myddingis, and no labour to be done be tham
quhil the toun be clengit...*³¹

This perhaps points to the scale and extent of doing the job properly. Perhaps this should be held in contradistinction to the normal scale of the solution?



*Orders for the cleaning of
Aberdeen before a royal
visit 1511.*

Aside from this issue of a royal visit, a brief look at the evidence so far should be in order. In all of the statutes quoted, the concern has been to see the streets kept *clean*, but that the sense of that word may have been ordered and tidy. In most of these statutes there is a concern to keep the streets *ditched*. Again the fifteenth and sixteenth century sense of this term may be that it related to cleaning up by sweeping and making tidy.³² These words and their sense might point to the fact that these statutes were primitive as already outlined, but of course it is hard to penetrate effectively and fully, exactly what was meant by a specific word in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the sense was mutable from person to person.

The primitive argument can be mitigated against by showing that as they began to respond to this problem their response became more sophisticated and bureaucratic; less ad hoc and more regularised. On the other hand, there are other areas of public hygiene or even consumer protection where the medieval city did have a modern response. A statute laid down by the Four Burghs prior to 1424 recognised the link between rotten meat and illness (or perhaps more accurately between rotten meat, illness and loss of profits!) What seems to be the case is that it is best to judge medieval Aberdeen on its own merits rather than by ours in this regard.

By the mid sixteenth century the evidence starts to point to some rather specific problems. Both the Gallowgate and the area between the two burghs were often singled out as being particularly dirty.³³ In the sixteenth century, the Council's preferred response to the problem continued to be the appointment of the calsaymaker to maintain the integrity of the street surfaces and to keep them clean.³⁴

³⁰ ACA, Council Register, Volume VIII, 4 October 1501-14 July 1511, p.1180. *Extracts...*, p.81.

³¹ *Extracts...*, p.82.

³² *Concise Scots Dictionary...*, p.145.

³³ ACA, Council Register, Volume XV, 5 October 1535-7 September 1538, p.598, c.f. *Extracts*, I, p.156.

³⁴ ACA, Council Register Volume XVI, 30 September 1538-16 September 1541, p.7.

However, to bolster this policy came a series of fines for people who disposed of rubbish in an *unsociable* manner. On 25 February 1539 the Council:

*'chairgit all [th]air nichtbouris within or without [th]e portis of [th]is towne, [th]at thai nor nane of [th]air s[er]uandis casty[n] ash nor fulze on the gat w[ith]in the portis of [th]is towne in tyme cu[m]yng and als chargit [th]ame to tak away [th]e myddyngis filth muk on [th]e gait betwix [th]is and freday nixt cuming... And gif ony be fundin castane or layng ash on [th]e gait in ty[me] cu[m]yng, [th]at it selbe lesum to ony man fyndand [th]am doying [th]e same to tak away thair [filth]....'*³⁵

Throughout the sixteenth century the process of increasing professionalisation continues. By 1545, part of the duties of cleaning the civic centre of the town seem to have fallen to the bearer of the town's hand bell. On 19 March 1545, Walter Lesly was ordained to *'cause clenge and hald clein the mercat and cawsay about the croce...*³⁶ So, at least the heart of the town had an officer dedicated to cleaning it. However, the Council's *cleansing department* at times still required to be supplemented by extra labour. On 9 November 1543, *'[th]e [con]sell ordanis the pynouris to help to dycht and clenge al the calsaïs of [th]is guid toune euery pynour his day aboutt...*³⁷

Despite the occasional need for supplementary help the Council's response was increasingly sophisticated. In 1571 there is a record about repairing both the town's streets and those outwith the burgh's ports.

On 5 October 1571, the baillies reaffirmed a statute:

'maid [th]e [y]eir preceding for seing and conduceing of twa calsay makkarris, to big and reforme all [th]e Calsyis in [th]is towne or w[i]t[h] out [th]e portis [th]airof quhair it is expedient And to begyn w[i]t[h] out [th]e portis quairof it is maist necessar And [th]e saidis calsy makkarris to haif ilk ane of [th]ame being sufficient craftismen twa s[hillings] ilk wark day and [th]air ordinar expe[n]ss of meit and drink and [th]is to be payit to [th]ame as follo[w]is viz of euery free burges of gild and honest craftismen euery man his day about twa s[hillings] and [th]air meit and of sobir craftismen to gyf rwa s[hillings] w[i]t[h] out [th]air meit / and of sobir craftismen inlakis [th]air meit in [th]e said sobir craftismen defalt to have four s[hillings] in [th]e day.'

This statute went on to specify that a master of work was to be chosen.³⁸ Again, we see the structure and organisation of this process growing. Importantly, this may be the first attempt (yet uncovered) to repair the streets outside of the burgh. This may reflect a growing sense of the arbitrary division of inside and outside. The streets outside of the burgh were undoubtedly as important to the general appearance of the burgh and as to communication, as those inside. It is highly likely that they had been subject to either formal or a more informal regulation by the Council prior to this statute.³⁹

³⁵ ACA, Council Register Volume XVI, 30 September 1538-16 September 1541, p.164, c.f. *Extracts*, I p.154, however the transcription is poor and very inaccurate.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.216.

³⁷ ACA, Council Register Volume XVIII, p.13, *Extracts*. I, p.192.

³⁸ ACA, Council Register Volume XXVII, 3 February 1568-27 March 1573, p.600.

³⁹ Other evidence from Volume XXVII of the Council Register concerning streets refers to people having built shops under the stairs on the forgaits which had *'diminissis [th]e passage of [th]e streittis to [th]e greyt deformaty of [th]is gud toune and hurt of [th]e comound weill...*' p.279. This was hardly a new problem.

Two years later on 3 August 1573, Walter Browne calsaymaker was appointed to maintain the cleanness of the streets. The statute goes on to make provision for two shillings of wages for every day that he was working. Moreover they ordered that he was 'to haue ane rowme in [th]e gray freiris place...'.⁴⁰ The Grayfriars place it seems had become something of a general dumping ground. Crucially in the same year, the same accounts reveal that £4 was paid to 'William Findlaye, calsaymaker, for making the calsey without the Gallowgett porte...'.⁴¹ Findlaye seems to have retained the job of calsaymaker for a number of years. In 1597 the Treasurer of the Council paid him £12 for having laid down calsay on the bow brig.⁴²

Evidence from other burghs during the sixteenth century points to different patterns. On 10 April 1561, Stirling Burgh Council ordered the sale of chalices of St James and St Peters altars in order to pay for repairing their calsies.⁴³ In Inverness the Council used fines but did not seem to employ someone in particular.⁴⁴ Whilst in Aberdeen the holder of the office of the hand bell was responsible for cleaning the Castlegate area, in Inverness it was the case that Will Anderson, who had cleaned the calsies got the hand bell by way of a reward.⁴⁵

On 15 November 1567, Thomas Waus accused John McGillewye of storing his muck in this manner to the point where no one could pass through the vennel but for 'myre to thair kneis...'. The Council ruled that he had to remove this midden in fifteen days under pain of tinsal of the muck (which again points to the value of the muck).⁴⁶ The blocking off of certain vennels remained a problem in Inverness⁴⁷ with evidence suggesting that their sole concern was to keep the streets open.

The evidence from Glasgow is of a financial nature. On 19 November 1577, Glasgow Burgh Council observed that they had no common goods to sell to pay for the calsaymaker that they had appointed for a period of two years. Consequently, they decided to take up a tax of £200.⁴⁸ Glasgow had to apply to Dundee to borrow their calsaymaker.⁴⁹ Glasgow's approach, in common with other burghs, seems to have been piece-meal. Often in Glasgow the solution to an issue was a local one focusing on a certain area, or indeed was in fact taken up by a private citizen.

In Aberdeen, the approach is one of appointing the calsaymaker to clean the roads. After a series of these appointments a regular workforce emerged in the sixteenth century. Aside from these in the sixteenth century, fines were used to encourage people to assist in the valuable work of the calsaymakers. At other times the town's pioneers or semi to skilled workmen were drafted in to help when the workload got too much for the Council workmen. Only one area had a definite officer; the mercat cross area in the Castlegate was kept clean as part of the regular duties of the town's bell man.

Despite the occasional need to draft in extra workers the response became more sophisticated with specific areas being targeted, common midden heaps being

⁴⁰ ACA, Council Register, Volume XXVIII, p.60.

⁴¹ *Miscellany*, V, p.118.

⁴² *Miscellany*, V, p.122.

⁴³ Renwick, *Stirling*, p. 78.

⁴⁴ Mackay and Cameron, *Inverness...I*, p.38.

⁴⁵ Mackay and Cameron, *Inverness...I*, p.63.

⁴⁶ Mackay and Cameron, *Inverness...I*, p.157.

⁴⁷ Mackay and Cameron, *Inverness...I*, p.235.

⁴⁸ Marwick, J.D., (ed.) *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow, A.D. 1573-1642*, (Glasgow, SBRS, 1876) p.64.

⁴⁹ Marwick, *Glasgow...*, p.69.

created, and better facilities for those appointed to keep the streets both inside and later outside the burgh clean. All of these people and services were paid for by means of a tax levied on the people of the town and weighted according to the means of those being taxed (in effect municipal solutions to this age old problem have varied little in the fundamentals of approach over six odd centuries).

So judged by their own merits and against other burghs, Aberdeen's response does seem to be quite good throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Whatever the underlying concern for these moves, the result was that Aberdeen Burgh Council became more systematic and professional in its approach, this is a natural tendency. The Council became concerned for a growing area and dealt with it quite effectively, judged by their own standards this seems to be sophisticated. Purely in terms of how regular and sophisticated the response was, Aberdeen did have a response that involved appointing a number of officers and more men over time, with more money, and an actual office. Responses from other burghs seem to have been more ad hoc and possibly less effective.

As we move through the sixteenth century there might also be a growing awareness of the connections between dirt and disease. There is the increasingly common use of the term *filth* or *filthiness* in these statutes, a word which simply does not seem to have been used previously. Sybil Jack has argued that in Ayr in 1544 when the Council heard of the approach of plague they cleaned the streets.⁵⁰ Perhaps this indicates an awareness of dirt and disease (or perhaps desperation). In Inverness, there is some evidence which mitigates against this, whilst in Aberdeen the evidence mitigates in favour.

At any rate, there is a more definite change in the seventeenth century on a national level. At the Convention of Royal Burghs held in Selkirk in July 1608, a missive of several points of business was received from James VI. One of the points of business reads:

*In regard that the lying of the mwk and fewell in grit heapis and myddingis vpoun the hie streitis, or within any vther place of our saidis brughis and cityis, is nocht only noysum to all strangeris and passengeris bothe in smell and sicht bott is daingerous also in tyme of plague, being a special nwrescher thair of, that thairfoir thai sould appoint the streitis of thair tounis to be keipit cleyne; as also that within thair grit cityis and tounis skaviengeris may be appointit...*⁵¹

This was out of a concern that on an upcoming tour of the country the monarch would not be embarrassed. Glasgow Council took this seriously and immediately created a statute to this effect on 16 July 1608. The statute stipulated that all middens were to be cleaned away from streets and closes within fifteen days or the same to be escheat to common use, and that no swine were to be in the burgh but not locked up. The Council quoted James' letter and the link with disease as the reason underlying their decision.⁵²

There is always however a gap between expectation and reality. Glasgow certainly took James' missive to heart, but for the next three years the Convention of Royal Burghs carried this over as a point of business rather than to enquire how many burghs had followed through. Perhaps indicating how low down the list of priorities this point was. A look at the records of Aberdeen does not reveal a move by this

⁵⁰ *Towns in Tudor and Stuart Britain...*, p.83.

⁵¹ *Records of the Convention of the Royal Burghs of Scotland, 1597-1614*, p.253.

⁵² *Marwick, Glasgow...*, p.285.

missive, rather the response here remained the same. On 3 May 1607, the Council noted that both the Grayfriars church and close had become a public nuisance. They noted:

'the doris and the lockis thair of brokin, stowin and away takin, ane commoun place for keeping of menis tymber and materiallis, without licence of the magistratis or counsall, the wtter yett or cloise entering thair to maid ane commoun vennell, jakis, priuies, and vther filthines cassin and tumeit thairin, to the gryt dishonour of this burgh, and verie noysum to sic as seis the same, or passis thairby...'

In order to resolve this robust approach of the people to waste disposal and storage, it was ordered that new locks be put on the entry and that all goods be moved out of the church if not claimed within 48 hours.⁵³ Thus, the stated reason for this clean up was that the dirt was to the dishonour of the burgh. This shows that the evidence for why the town was cleaned up at any time could be self contradictory.

In 1617, James VI planned to visit Aberdeen. Ahead of his visit, the Privy Council wrote to the town Council laying down certain conditions that ought to be met for the impending royal visit. Amongst these, it was stated:

*'your streets and vennels be kept clene, and that no filthe nor middingis be seine vpon the same; and in speciall, that the commoun way betuixt your toun and the Auldtoun be kept clene...'*⁵⁴

In response to this, the Council made the following statute on 19 March 1617: *'all the ilestis, hoillis, and deformities in the calseyis, to be repairit and helpit with all convenient diligence, conforme to the directioun...'*⁵⁵

On 1 February 1627, the Council passed a lengthy statute regarding the keeping of the streets free from middens. They began by noting: *'the kinges hie wayes and passages entering to the burh at all partes of the samen ar sicklie poluted and abused be ane great mudle of middings gaddert and laid thairvpoun...'* by both residents of the burgh and by those living out with the burgh.

This statute examined the problem in some degree of depth and noted that *'in tyme of wett wather the passages that passes be the samen ar fethile spaied with dub and fulzie, besydes that the cornes grow an thairabout in the symer tyme ar tred wnder futt and distroyed be the passangeres...'*

The Council then ordained that in order to deal with this situation they would order to have all middens *'to be careit to outland lordes landes lyand out with the territorie and fredome of the towne...'* the same was to happen to any middens that had accrued within the town. The fine for non-removal within ten days was ten pounds.⁵⁶ Again, this reflects the growing need to deal with the problem outside of the burgh. However, the transportation of the middens to the outland lords implies that there was some value to be had from the middens.

On 16 March 1636, the Council *'appoyntis Hew anderson to tak ordour with those that layes fulzie on the kingis hie streitt in the gallogett and wnder staires thair of and to confiscatt al that salbe fund lying thairon any longer space then tuentie foure*

⁵³ *Extracts*, II, p.290.

⁵⁴ *Extracts...*, II, pp 349-50.

⁵⁵ *Extracts ...*, II, pp 350-1.

⁵⁶ ACA, Council Register, Volume LI, Part 1, 25 September 1622-1 September 1630, pp 236-7.

hous...⁵⁷ This is the first time that there is a concern for cleaning up an area of the town which is not immediately visible.

Despite these last few pieces of evidence, the seventeenth century does mark a change. The process of street maintenance was more professional and regular. The streets were being kept clean, although more dirt was tolerated then than is now, and the reasons for the cleaning were becoming more sophisticated. However, the evidence in this regard is not one hundred percent clear. In terms of the water supply, it is a lot better from quite early on.

On 9 October 1496, the following entry was engrossed in the Council Register:

*'it was statut and ordaint y[a]t nay licstres bartores baxtares nor craftesmen sulde weshe yai[r] claitis lyrddis? sroins? Nor vthir stuf in ye [co]mond Revollis lochis and nor waist And nay fische guhtt nor Red claitsh nor sundre vyle nay Infectit stuf be weshing nor casting in the samy[n] / And y[a]t nay dranschys be halding one ye same wat[er]s...'*⁵⁸

Later, on 9 October 1508:

*'it is statut ande ordaint be [th]e prouest bailzeis ende counsaile [tha]t [th]e litstirs of [th]is burgh sale wesche ale [th]ar clais at [th]e burne passand fra [th]e west end of [th]e loche to [th]e dene burne / Ande [th]at nay litstares slryunars cordonares nor craftesme[n] sale wesche [th]ar stuf in [th]e loche nor comone riuelis of [th]e toune in tyme to cu[m] / And sale clois [th]ar ventes of [th]ar guttares in and fra yar workes hous / Ande sale distron ye samyne and cast nay filcht in ande out of [th]ar work hous in to the loche nor riuelis w[i]t[h]in xxiiij houres nixt hereftir.'*⁵⁹

On 12 September 1632, a statute passed concerning the erecting of fountains within the town. It reads:

'considering the great necessitie quhairin...the toune standis throw want of poore and cleane watter to serve thair houssis, and that for the most pairt of the watter quhairwith they ar presentlie servit, comeing onlie frome the loche is filthillie defillit and corruptit, not onlie be gutteris daylie rynning in the burne, but also be litsteris, and the washing of clothes, and abwssing of the watter in sindrie pairts...'

In order to remedy this the Council were resolved to erect fountains in the town at the expense of the town.⁶⁰ Curiously then even as late as 1632 the loch formed the primary water supply for the town. A week or so later, at a meeting at the Tolbooth, the whole town voted unanimously to agree to the relevant stent being set down in order to facilitate this.

Again, the records of other burghs demonstrate similar concerns. On 10 October 1522 Stirling Burgh Council ruled that no one was to wash their clothes in the town's burn, for *fyling of the bourn* under pain of eight shillings unforgiven.⁶¹ Thus, in Peebles on 14 October 1555, the Council ordained:

⁵⁷ ACA, Council Register, Volume LII, Part 1, 22 September 1630-19 June 1644, p.253.

⁵⁸ ACA, Council Register, Volume VII, 10 February 1486-20 September 1501, p.671.

⁵⁹ ACA, Council Register, Volume VIII, 4 October 1501-14 July 1511, pp 879-880.

⁶⁰ *Extracts...*, III p.50.

⁶¹ Renwick, *Stirling*, p.17.

*'all hempt and and lynt [was] to be removed furth of Peblis Watter to vther placis for corrupting of the watter, vnder pane of eschaeting the samin to the officeris...'*⁶²

In Glasgow the Council there ruled on 3 October 1581 that: *'na hydis, skynnys, ischewis, nor na other filthie thingis...'* were to be washed in the Malyndoner burn, under pain of eight shillings for the first fault, confiscation of goods for the second, and warding and corporal punishment for the third.⁶³ The increasingly severe scale of punishments is undoubtedly testament to the scale and extent of the problem (or possibly to the severity of Glasgow Council at that juncture).

In terms of water, there was a clear recognition of the link between pollution and disease from early on, whilst in terms of street cleaning and midden removal, the evidence is more equivocal and it does seem to take a considerably longer period of time for certain ideas about hygiene to filter down to street level.

I would also like to balance out the picture of a dirty smelly medieval city with a picture of a smaller more rural city where people were indeed much more at the mercy of the environment. There are no real descriptions of medieval Aberdeen proper, however Parson Gordon does make a number of telling references. Although some references may clearly be coloured by Gordon's passion for Aberdeen, he does show that it is a city ringed by a well-cultivated area: the burgh crofts. He writes:

*'The fields nixt to the gaits of the citie are fruitfull of corns, such as oats, beir, quheat, etc., and abounds with pastures; bot anywhere yow pas a myll without the toune, the countrey is barran lyke, the hills craigy, the plains full of marreshes and mosses, the fields are covered with heather or peeble stons, the corne fields mixt with thes bot few.'*⁶⁴

Therefore, the city did have a cultivating impact upon the immediate countryside.

*'Vpon the east syd of the cittie and of Futtie ther lyes many fair fields, fruitfull of corns, quheat, bear, oats, pease, and pot herbs and roots. Thes are marched by the fields near the sea syde called the Lynks.'*⁶⁵

Whilst he described the area immediately surrounding Old Aberdeen as *'enclosed with little hills, pleasant corne fields, very fruitfull, and with pastures mixed amongst the polwghed fields.'*⁶⁶ Gordon goes on to say that *'The air is temperat and healthfull about it...'*⁶⁷ This seems to be at variance with other evidence, but it is well to remember that Aberdeen is by the north sea and the strong winds off of the sea may have helped clear any smells from the city.

Parson Gordon paints a rather rural scene of the interior of the town also. He notes:

*'Many houses have ther gardings and orcheyards adjoyning; every garding hes its posterne, and thes are planted with all sorts of trees which the climat will suffer to grow; so that the quholl toune, to such as draw neer it upon some syds of it, looks as if it stood in a garding or litle wood.'*⁶⁸

⁶² Chambers, (ed.) *Peebles... Records*, p.218.

⁶³ Marwick, *Glasgow...*, p.90.

⁶⁴ Innes, C., (ed.) *Aberdoniae Vtiusque Descriptio Topographica. A Description of Bothe Touns of Aberdeene*, By J.G., (Spalding Club, Edinburgh, 1842) p.1

⁶⁵ *Descriptio...*, p.18.

⁶⁶ *Descriptio...*, p.21.

⁶⁷ *Descriptio...*, p.1.

⁶⁸ *Descriptio...*, p.9.

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