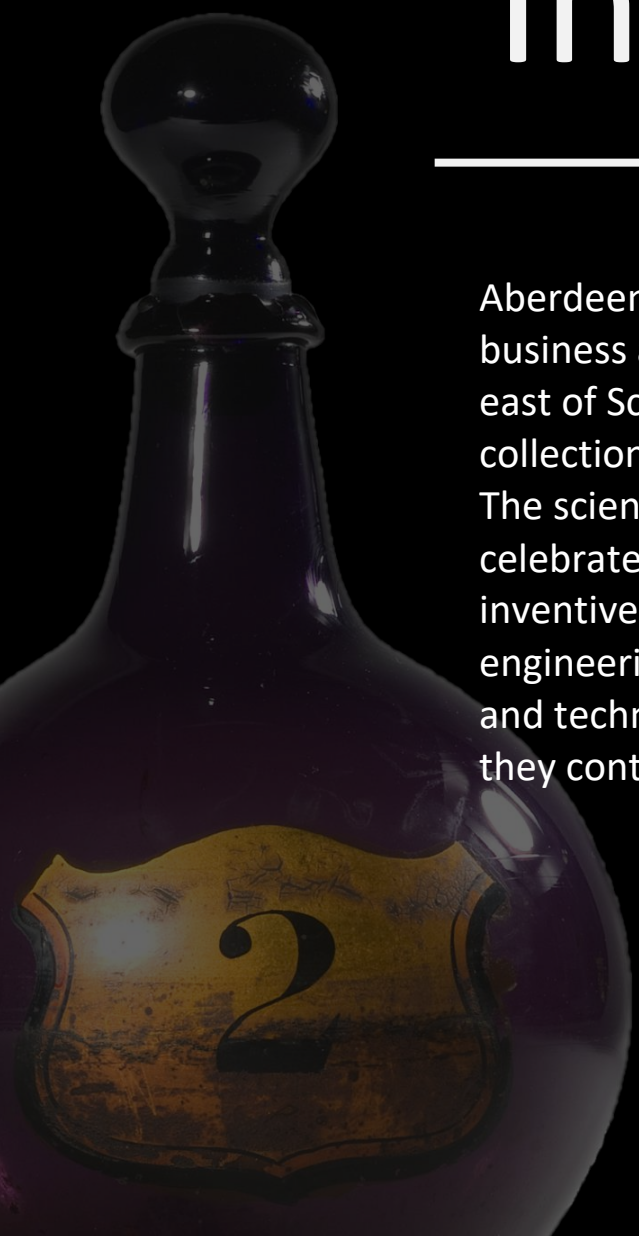
Science and Industry



Aberdeen’s place as the centre of business and industry for the north east of Scotland is shown in the rich collection.

The science and industry collection celebrates the achievements and inventiveness of local people through engineering, science, manufacturing and technology, and the products that they continue to export to the world.

Granite

Aberdeen is the Granite City.

Over the past two hundred years Aberdeen exported its products, machinery and expertise in working this material all over the world. Rubislaw Quarry in the West End of Aberdeen, pictured in action here, produced over six million tons of granite.

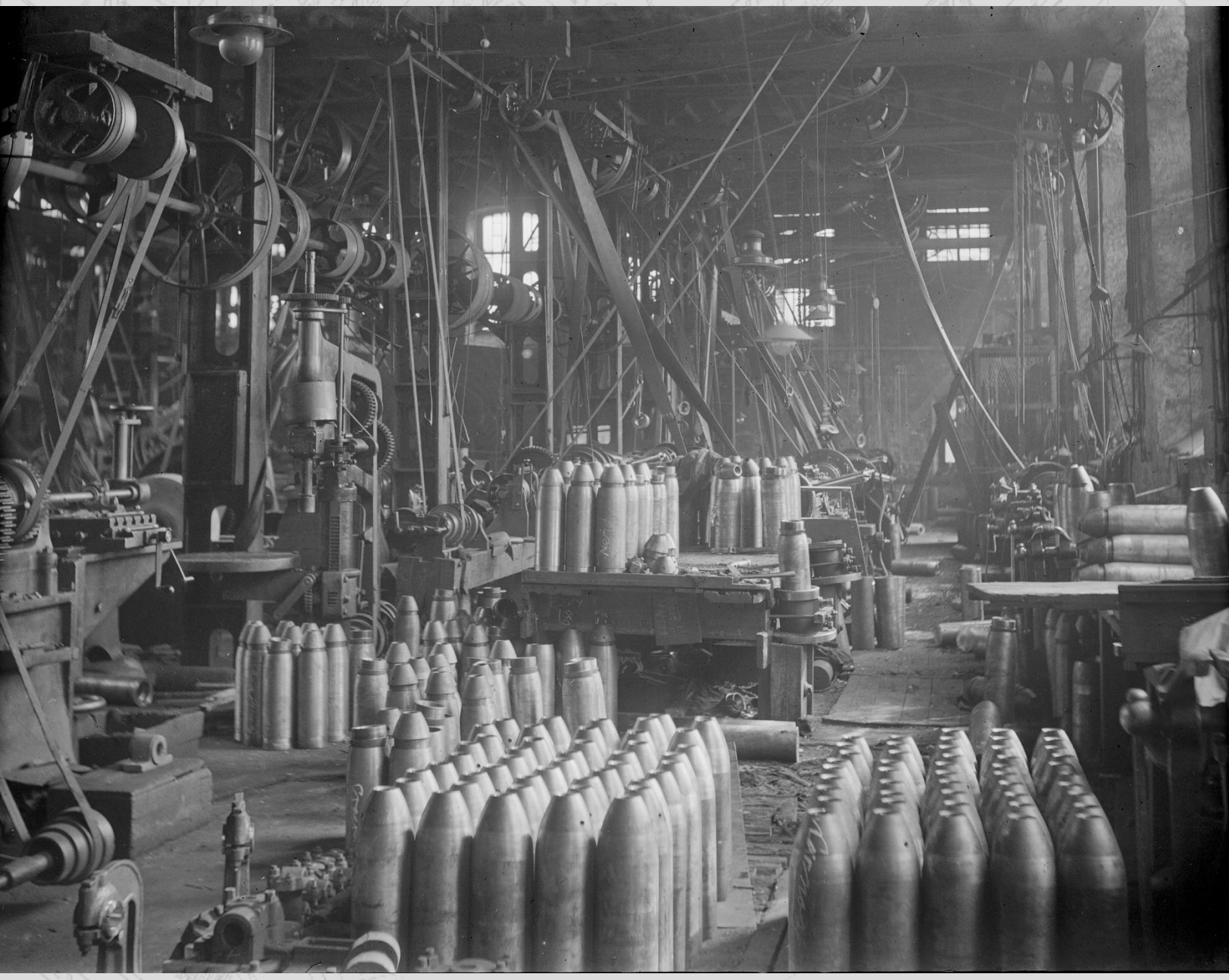
Not only grey granite was quarried around Aberdeen and worked by the city merchants (see the courtyard of Aberdeen Art Gallery).
This slab of Correnie granite is a classic 'showpiece' of the trade.

Engineering

The collection holds engineering drawings, photographs and related objects used in the engineering industry of Aberdeen.

Bridges made in Aberdeen were once exported all over Britain and the world. Harpers were famous for their suspension bridges, this example was a model made for the Calcutta (Kolkata) Exhibition in the 1880s.

Barry Henry & Cook made material handling equipment for large heavy industrial plants that were the mainstay of the UK economy. This image shows the re-purposing common to Aberdeen's engineering heritage which again has come to the fore with the response to Covid-19.



Medicine

The medicine collection includes the contents of Davidson and Kay Pharmacy of Albyn Place Aberdeen, as well as the George Shepard nursing collection and other items, including prescription books and surgical equipment.

This pharmacy jar is from Davidson and Kay.

Once a common sight in high class pharmacies, such expensive hand painted and gilded fittings had been largely forgotten by the 1970s reflecting the changing role of the pharmacist and the new strict regulations governing the supply of medicines.

Davidson and Kay and its sumptuous interior was the epitome of everyone's idea of a pharmacy.

Visitors to the city would be taken there to view the powders and potions contained in elaborate glass jars, and the mahogany lined walls.

The Cosmos

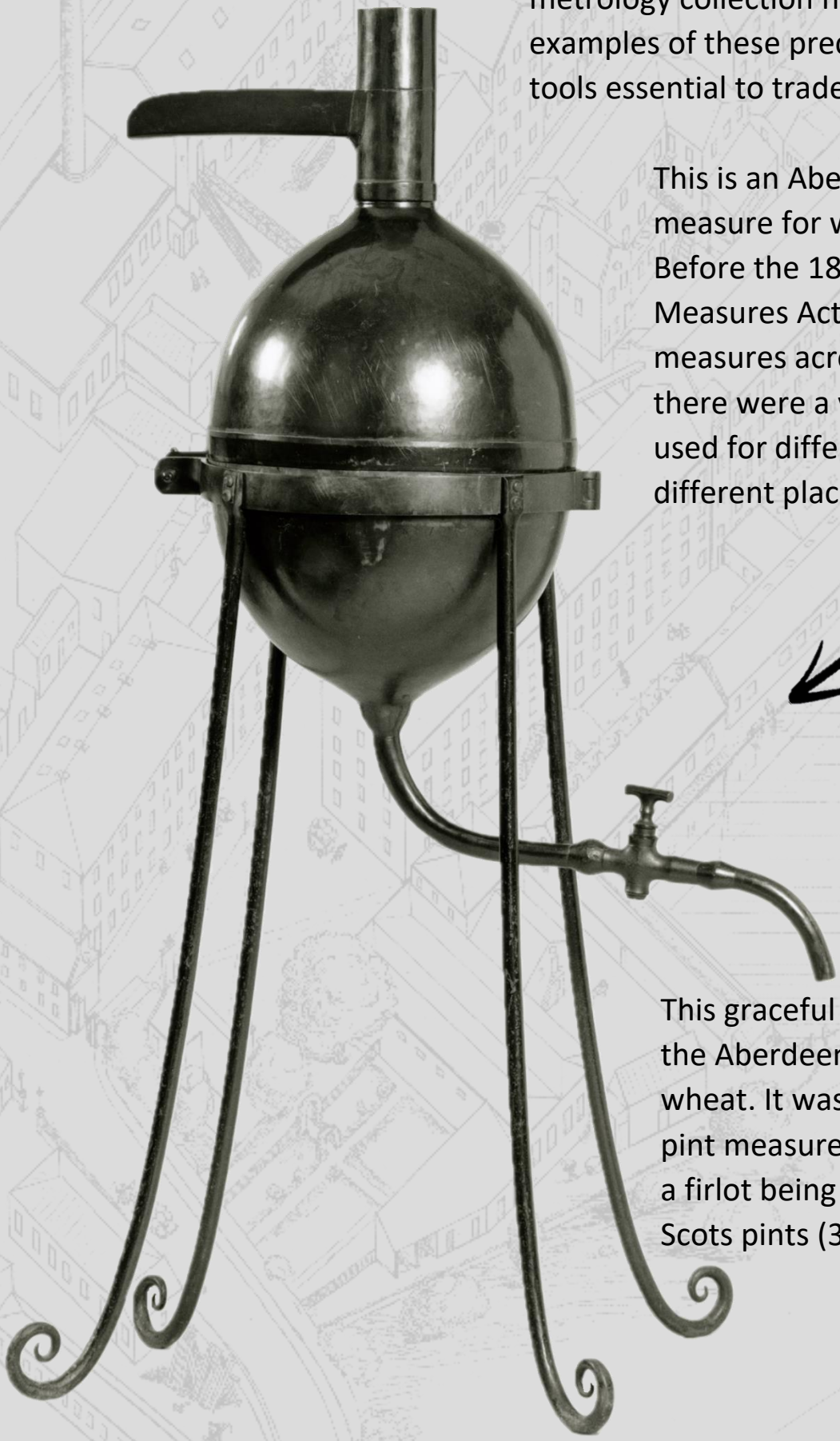
Sir David Gill, astronomer, may have looked to the heavens, but like many Aberdonians was quick to adapt technology. He quickly used the invention of photography to permanently record what he saw from his observatory.

He was a pioneer of astrophotography and developed accurate ways to measure astronomical distances using his heliometer – a complex viewing device currently in Aberdeen's collection.

The collection includes his early, highly detailed, glass plate images of the moon.

Metrology

Referring to weights and measures, the metrology collection holds some fabulous examples of these precision-engineered tools essential to trade and industry.



This is an Aberdeen firlot measure for wheat from1811. Before the 1824 Weights and Measures Act which standardised measures across the country there were a variety of measures used for different things in different places.

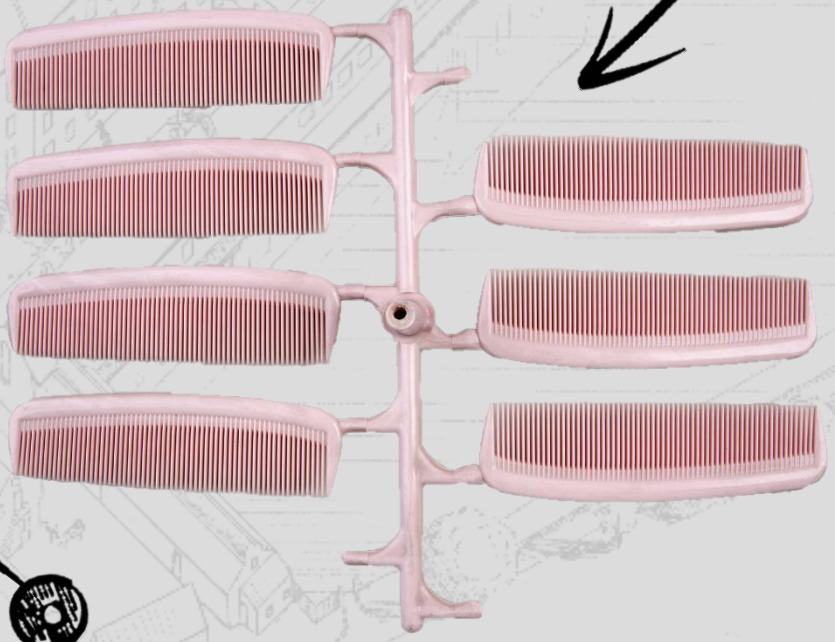
This graceful object was used by the Aberdeen authorities for wheat. It was based upon a Scots pint measure in use in Edinburgh, a firlot being approximately 21 ¾ Scots pints (35 litres).

Combworks

The making of combs was a major industry in Aberdeen, beginning with horn, and latterly using synthetic materials.

A moulded horn ornamental back comb from the mid-1800s.

Injection moulded plastic ‘Nuroid’ combs still on the manufacturer’s sprue, 1960s.

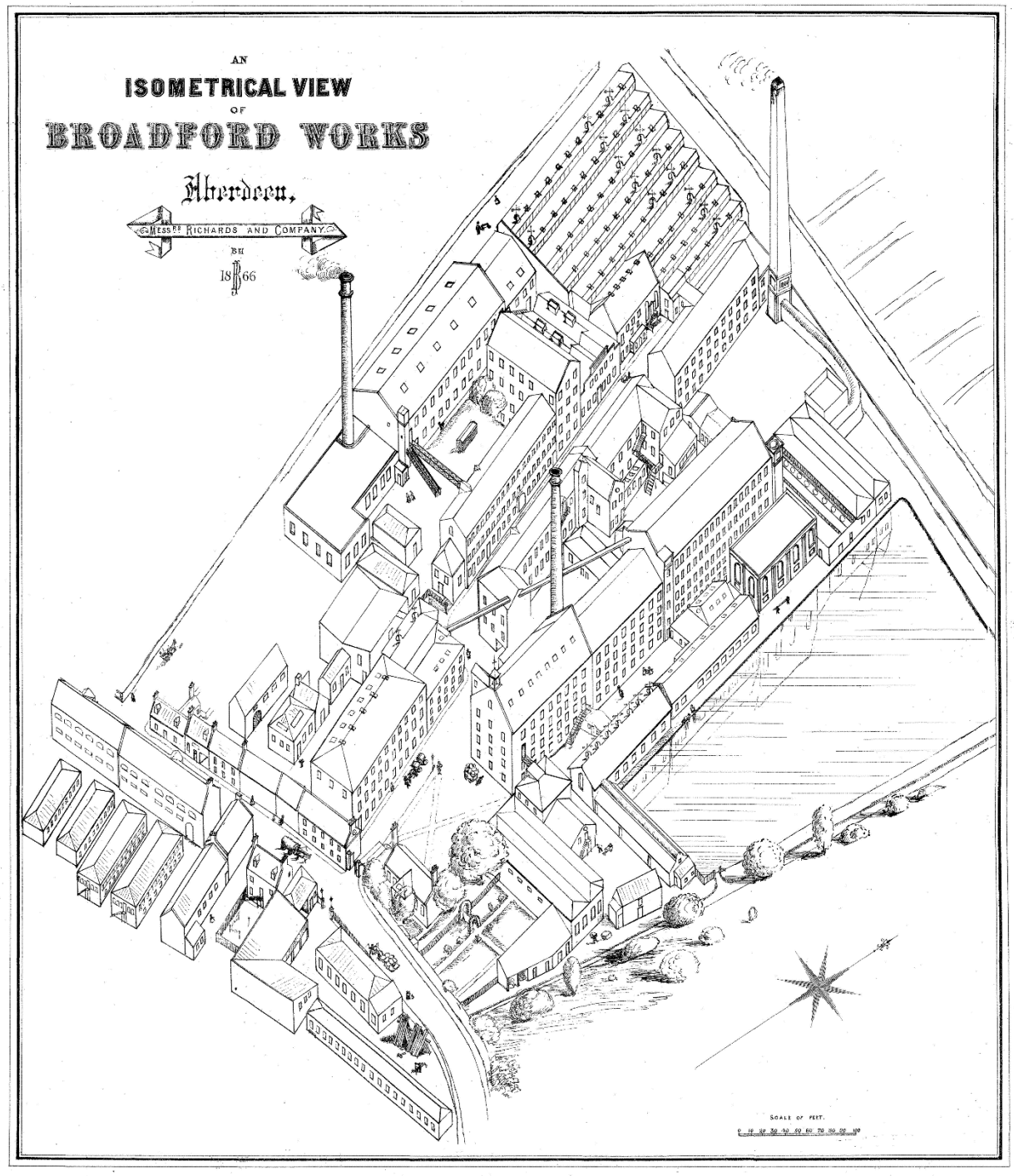


This goblet was made for one of the major ‘expositions’ where the Aberdeen Combworks were regularly awarded prizes for their products.

Textiles

Broadford Mills was one of the earliest ‘fireproof’ weaving mills in Britain.

It grew to employ thousands of Aberdonians. It made a variety of products including vulcanised hoses, as well as latterly synthetic carpets and its products exported worldwide.



Papermaking

Stoneywood mill was opened in the late 1700s and was making high quality papers within a few years.

It still operates today, and produces paper for security, archival purposes as well as for the major design studios.

Papermaking was originally purely rag based, Stoneywood was one of the pioneers in using Esparto grass and other materials to allow greater and cheaper production.