

Seaton Park Trail & Guide

The park's history, trees & attractions



#aberdeentrails





Credits

Many thanks to Sheila Gordon and the Friends of Seaton Park

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Accessibility

 This trail is accessible but parts are loosely surfaced or on grass. The direct path down from the Chanonry is steep but there is a shallower route to the left. There are parking spaces in the park itself and limited spaces at The Chanonry. For disabled access to the Walled Garden (27) enter via 28

Transport

Old Aberdeen & Don Street: First Bus 20. First Bus 1 & 2 stop nearby on King Street as do Stagecoach buses for Peterhead, Fraserburgh & Ellon

Tillydrone Avenue (with access by Tillydrone Road): First Bus 8 & 19

There is parking in Seaton Park with access from Don Street

Cycling

Cycle routes: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/cyclemaps www.sustrans.org.uk

National Cycling Network Route 1 Dover to Shetland Isles passes the start of this trail. There is a bike rack beside Seaton Park's car park

Facilities

Seaton Park is open 24 hours. Automated toilet by the car park

During daytimes: Refreshments & hot food stand available on the road beside the play area and occasional ice cream van at the car park

Safety

Aberdeen is a safe city but it is best to visit the more secluded parts including this park during daylight



#aberdeentrails

This trail covers the stunning formal gardens in Seaton Park, one of our biggest parks and beside the historic Old Aberdeen, which has its own trail. It's filled with beautiful flower displays, lots of grassy areas for a picnic on a warm day, a playpark, and the River Don meanders alongside.

There is plentiful wildlife in the area due to the river including otters, swans – often with young cygnets, herons and even kingfishers. There are also unusual bird boxes in the park so look up and you may see nesting birds.

The park is formed on the central part of what was once Seaton estate and had many different uses over the years – in 1923, a racecourse for horse racing was built there! The rugby pitch area once featured an ornamental canal and the Chanonry park entrance wall has 'hidden' windows from a 1531 building.

Seaton House burnt down in 1963 and today a fountain marks its approximate location. The park was bought by Aberdeen Town Council in 1947 and the format was changed in the 1950s with the formal gardens being laid out. Interestingly, the name "Seaton" has nothing to do with the sea or a town but is a translation from Gaelic and means "peaceful retreat" – a very apt name for a beautiful park.

Seaton Park won the national title for Scotland's Favourite Park 2022. The competition was run by Fields in Trust, successor to the National Playing Fields Association. It is also the final port of call for the Keep Scotland Beautiful and Britain in Bloom judges, contributing towards previous wins for the city.

Top: *At Seaton Cottage On The Don, Aberdeen*, Sir George Reid 1841-1913

Left: Parson Gordon's map of 1661, note the marsh or 'Marish' on the right and river loops on the left. The river itself once looped through the park via this marsh

Cover: Cathedral Walk and St Machar's Cathedral by Ian Talboys



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1 St Machar's Cathedral

St Machar was a disciple of St Columba and legend has it that he instructed his pupil to build a church where a river crooks like a bishop's staff (see 7). St Machar built a heather-thatched hut here which was blessed as a holy place of worship. Additional churches were built on the site including by the Normans in the 1100s, when it became a cathedral. The St Machar's of today was constructed from the 1300s, reverting to a church after the 1560 Reformation. Its full story is told in **Old Aberdeen Trail** which compliments this one. The fortress-like building is a major presence standing guard over the park. As well as this magnificent landmark's photographic potential it has also inspired painters.

The Cathedral in Art

The beautiful architecture and picturesque setting of St Machar's Cathedral have captured the attention of many artists over the years. Various depictions can be seen in Aberdeen museum collections, spanning the 1600s to 1900s. The cathedral's exterior has been painted by well-respected artists such as Alexander Nasmyth 1758-1840, John Moir 1775-1857, Alfred Edward Borthwick 1871-1955, and James Furneaux 1935-2013. At times the Cathedral appears in the distance, with a lush green foreground and occasionally the River Don, whereas other artworks show the Cathedral up close. Where people and animals have been included, they've often been strategically chosen to aid an idyllic portrayal of the Cathedral and its surrounding. You might see cattle, a shepherd, a grave digger, a man in highland dress, or perhaps a woman with shawl and apron. Sir George Reid 1841-1913, opted for depicting the interior of the Cathedral, using pen, ink and wash on paper to capture the stained-glass windows and heraldic ceiling. If you were going to paint the Cathedral, what would be your focus?



Top: *St Machar's Cathedral (looking East)*, 1868, James Cassie 1819-1879

Above: *St Machar's Moonshine* circa 1991, James Furneaux 1935-2013,
© the copyright holder



2 Bishop Dunbar's Hospital (remains of)

Two small infilled windows are still visible in the Chanonry wall, as are building traces on the park side. These are remains from 1531, of a hospital created for Gavin Dunbar, Bishop of Aberdeen, who was also responsible for St Machar's spires and heraldic ceiling. He petitioned King James V of Scotland to found a charitable organisation. In those days 'hospital' meant hostel or hospice, in this case a bede/almshouse for 12 poor men of the parish. In 1789 it relocated to Don Street's Bede House (see **Old Aberdeen Trail**) until the late 1800s. Bishop Dunbar's Charitable Trust then paid for accommodation costs throughout the city until as recently as 2009 when it was wound up. The drawing above is a 1796 copy of one made prior to demolition. The two surviving windows are on the left and the front door is at today's park entrance.



3 Viewpoint for Cathedral Walk

This is an ideal vantage point for Cathedral Walk (15), which was created about ten years after the land for Seaton Park was bought. An Aberdeen Journals photograph of 1957 shows gardeners creating the circular beds. There are 14 of these featuring many flowers and examples of topiary plus a large centrepiece with hanging baskets (see cover). The view perfectly frames the cathedral and was also aligned with where the former Seaton House (30) stood at the time this feature was created. The viewpoint itself is on the route of the high level walk along the top of what were once the Don's riverbanks (see 7).



4 Slate River Bed Garden

This composition was installed around 2017 by two of the park's gardeners, Derek and Kat. It includes hundreds of slates recycled from a friend's roof. It is a wonderful example of site-specific natural sculpture, a perfect miniature version of a form known as land art.



5 Seaton Estate

This stone trough is an original feature of Seaton Estate. The animals which grazed in and around today's Seaton Park were domesticated, for example, cows for the dairy which was situated in Don Street. Sheep were also once present and may even have been used to manage the grass in the early days of the park. The Seaton Estate used to be much bigger stretching from the River Don to the North Sea. What's now Hillhead Student Village and other surrounding areas were once fields (see map at 12). Over time, parts of the estate were sold off for other uses, for example when King Street was being built in the 1800s.



6 WWII Pillbox

This pillbox would have been part of the defences of the Bridge of Don road crossing. At the start of the war, with the fall of Norway and Denmark in May 1940, seaborne invasion to the northern coasts became a serious possibility. Had this happened, the country's main defences would have relied on holding the beaches for as long as possible and delaying the invading force by stop-lines. The pillbox has been built into the foot of the cliff of the old river terrace.



7 Former Course of the River Don (remains of)

Seaton Park was born out of an abandoned meander of the River Don. The steep hill below St Machar's Cathedral and the slopes opposite at Hillhead were once riverbanks. At that time the central part of today's park would have been on the opposite bank of the river, or may even have been an island like the ones on Parson Gordon's map (see intro). When meandering rivers change course parts silt up, often leaving a stranded ox-bow or horseshoe lake behind. Parson Gordon's map shows a 'Marish' where this lake may once have been, partly the site of the wetland (8). A further legacy of this marsh are the moisture loving rushes which grow on the ground east of the rugby pitch.



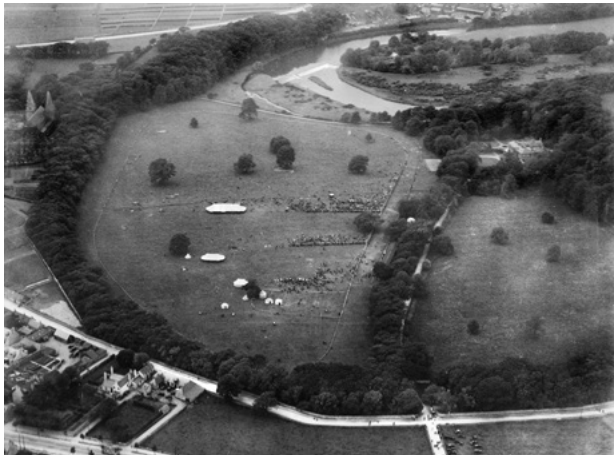
8 Seaton Park Wetland

Today's wetland was part of the former course of the river (7). This area has suffered since from flooding and attempts to drain it were unsuccessful. In 2016, it was transformed into wetland which now attracts a variety of wildlife. Various water birds visit including herons, ducks and nesting swans along with frogs and toads. Reeds and rushes improve water quality and attract dragon and damselflies. The wildflower area encourages butterfly and bumble bees with roe deer regular but secretive visitors. Migrating species such as swallows search for insects over the wetland in the summer.

9 Glacial Rock

This rock was dug up near the sports pitch area and is believed to have been carried down by a glacier which exited the park at this point during the ice age. It is a 'glacial erratic', one which differs from the size and type of rock native to the area in which it was found.





10 Seaton Racetrack (site of)

Aberdeen had horse racing on the beachfront links in the 1800s but its popularity waned. It was revived at Seaton Estate in 1923 with 30,000 people attending. The Bon Accord Handicap, named after the city's motto Bon Accord, was run over seven furlongs and had prize money of 25 sovereigns. The aerial photo shows the course – a loop around the outside of the whole southern part of what is now Seaton Park. In the marquees and tents licensed bars, refreshments and teas were available. Note also Seaton House upper right. However, interest dwindled and by 1928 the highest attendance was around 3,000. Due to the marshy ground the track could also be heavy going. An application made in 1956 to restart horse racing was turned down by Aberdeen Town Council.



11 Play Area & Mr Therm

Mr Therm and his carriages were used for transporting coal from Aberdeen Harbour until the closure of the city's former Cotton Street gas plant in the 1970s. The engine was transferred to Aberdeen Council for preservation, and placed in the play area here in 1974. It was originally built in Kilmarnock by Andrew Barclay & Sons. Aberdeen City Council worked with Friends of Seaton Park on its recent restoration, helped by funding from Aberdeen Harbour Board. The adventure playground was initially deemed an 'eyesore' although it went on to win the first Playground of the Year award by the National Playing Fields Association in Scotland in 1976.



Seaton Park Tree Trail

Trees are an essential part of our lives, providing the very air we breathe and filtering out harmful CO₂. This tree trail features highlights including past, present and future trees of the park.

Since the dawn of the earliest civilisations, trees have been an important landscape feature of towns and cities across every continent. Trees have adorned important buildings, monuments and avenues, providing contrast and form in urban environments for thousands of years.

Many old trees that have survived over the centuries are now increasingly being recognised as 'green monuments'. These unique trees have become woven into the cultural fabric of our society and have their own stories to tell – if we take the time to look!

If you would like to know more about Green Monuments and what you can do to protect our ancient natural and cultural heritage, please visit the Tree Council at www.treecouncil.org.uk

12 250 Year Old Elm Tree

The Wych Elm or Scots Elm (*Ulmus glabra*) is a hardy tree and a native to Britain and indeed Scotland. It is found all over but grows especially well in North-east Scotland. This particular old tree is remarkable for being the park's sole surviving native Scots elm. This species once formed a significant component of the woodland areas. Sadly they fell victim to Dutch Elm Disease which has killed many millions of elm trees worldwide. This is the common name of a fatal fungus spread by the elm bark beetle. It takes its name from the Dutch tree pathologists who carried out early research in the Netherlands. The word 'wych' means pliable referring to the twigs, once used as riding whips. Unaffected elms can live for hundreds of years providing many benefits for wildlife in old age, this one has been here since around the 1740s.

Elm



13 70th Anniversary Orchard

These apple, cherry, pear and plum trees were planted in 2017 for the 70th anniversary of the park's purchase. Two of the apples are Scottish heritage fruit. James Grieve is named after the Edinburgh fruit breeder who produced the apple. Bloody Ploughman takes its colourful name from Scottish folklore. A gamekeeper is said to have shot a ploughman caught stealing apples. His grieving widow received his body and the bag of apples. In despair she threw them into her garden where one is said to have grown into a tree with blood-red fruit. The other apples are three dessert varieties, bright Red Falstaff, Beauty of Bath, Egremont Russet, Bramley, used in apple pies and tarts plus Grenadier, a cooking apple. There are bottle shaped Conference and bell shaped Williams pears, dark red-black Sunburst and deep red and sweet Stella cherries, purple Damsons used for jam and two plums, yellow Warwickshire Drooper and Victoria, named after Queen Victoria.



Deodar Cedar



14 The Tandoori Tree

The staff and patrons of the Brig Inn Bar, part of the Shish Tandoori at the Bridge of Don, had a fund raiser and chose Friends of Seaton Park as their local charity. They invested this kind gesture in a tree to replace ones brought down in the winter gale of 2018/19. It was sourced from Italy and is a Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodora*), an evergreen conifer native to the Himalayas. Its name comes from the Sanskrit devadāru meaning 'wood of the gods' and amongst Hindus is worshiped as a divine tree. It is the national tree of Pakistan and the state tree of Himachal Pradesh, India. The tree is naturally insect repellent and fungus resistant and was traditionally used to build religious temples and today to make incense or distilled for cedar oil.



15 Cathedral Walk

Although known for its flower displays (see 3) this also features a varied collection of bushes and trees chosen for their vibrant colours. Deciduous species include deep scarlet maple, almost fluorescent yellow and green sycamore plus a variety in variegated cream and green. Coniferous species include cypresses from darkest green to lemony yellow, lime coloured larches with clumps of fine spiky needles and yews with holly-green leaves in delicate fronds.

Yew



Larch



16 Auld Alliance Sycamores

The handsome sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) or 'plane' may have been introduced by the Romans or even earlier by the Celts from Europe. The mature sycamores, overlooked by St Machar's Cathedral, are thought to be daughter trees of original trees planted in commemoration of the Auld Alliance during the 1400s. Meaning Old in Scots, this was a 1295 pact between the kingdoms of Scotland and France. Sycamore is one of the commonest trees on the British landscape providing an important source of pollen and nectar for bees and other insects and is a host to many lichens and mosses.



17 Queen's Green Canopy Oak

The Queen's Green Canopy was a unique tree planting initiative in 2022 to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee, celebrating 70 years of service. Native to Scotland, the Oak (*Quercus*) produces both male flowers, distinctive furry catkins, and tiny females which produce the tree's seed, an acorn or oak nut, although only after around 50 years. The tree contains tannic acid to protect itself and its seeds from fungi and insects. From the earliest days its timber was used for ship and house building, tannin from its bark for tanning leather, and its sawdust used for oak-smoked food such as salmon.



18 70th Anniversary Seven Sweet Chestnuts

Introduced by the Romans, the sweet or Spanish chestnut (*Castanea sativa*) produces an edible fruit. Best known here in its festive form, as immortalised in Nat King Cole's version of *The Christmas Song*. They are also made into flour, used in soups and stews, candied, and chestnut purée used to create dessert dishes. In Italy its wood barrels are used to age balsamic vinegar. The horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) is also present here, introduced to the UK in the 1500s as an ornamental tree from its native Greece and Albania. Its distinctive but inedible fruit are known as conkers. Used in a traditional game dating from the 1800s they are threaded with string and struck together to see whose is toughest! The tree's English name comes from the traditional use of conkers in treating horse ailments.



19 Ancient Tree Trunk

This large tree trunk was unearthed by contractors working on the wetland and is believed to have been deposited when Seaton Park was still part of the River Don (see 7). Burial in a wet mineral-rich sediment away from oxygen slows decomposition as minerals seep into the wood helping to preserve it and creates petrified wood over many thousands to millions of years. This process eventually replaces wood and other organic matter like dinosaur bones with an exact facimile stone fossil.



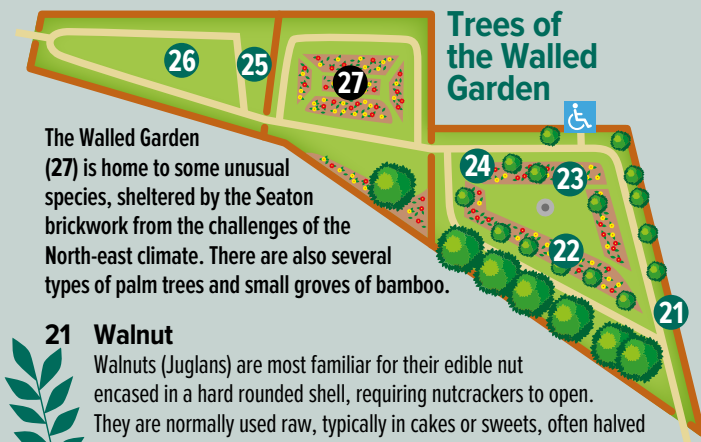
Sweet chestnuts

20 Lord Hay's Road – Beech & Lime Trees

Named after the last laird of Seaton, this carriage driveway was originally for horse drawn carriages and led to Seaton House (31). There was a former lodge on the road's north side at the junction with Don Street. Many of the original avenue of trees survive today with the oldest mostly beech and lime but with a variety planted since. This feature is part of the original designed landscape of the estate, in contrast with the natural woodland seen elsewhere (see map at 12).

The majestic beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) with smooth silvery-grey bark is a native of southern Britain, introduced into Scotland over the past 200 years, where some of the largest trees are now found. The word 'beech' originates from the ancient German word 'bok', from which we get the English word 'book' – from the practice of writing on thin, cut sheets of beech bark. The two large beeches at Tillydrone Road (42) were aged in 2020 at approximately 226 & 278 years old. With girths of over 4m and heights of 28m, among the largest in the city.

The lime or linden (*Tilia platyphyllos*) was known as the 'tree of a thousand uses' by the Romans. It was often coppiced and the soft wood, which does not warp, used to make cups, ladles and bowls as well as rope and netting from the fibrous bark backing (bast). In spring and summer bees are attracted to the nectar-filled flowers.



Trees of the Walled Garden

The Walled Garden

(27) is home to some unusual species, sheltered by the Seaton brickwork from the challenges of the North-east climate. There are also several types of palm trees and small groves of bamboo.

21 Walnut



Walnuts (*Juglans*) are most familiar for their edible nut encased in a hard rounded shell, requiring nutcrackers to open. They are normally used raw, typically in cakes or sweets, often halved or crumbled as decoration. Walnuts can also be pickled, in some countries they are candied and walnut oil is used as a food dressing.

22 Tree of Heaven

This temperate tree (*Ailanthus altissima*) is native to parts of China and Taiwan. It is used in traditional Chinese medicine and also, there and beyond, as a host for the silk moth. However outside of careful cultivation it can spread rapidly and be hard to control.



23 Golden Rain Tree

Introduced to Europe in 1747 this ornamental tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) is native to China and Korea but is also called Pride of India. After flowering the fallen blooms create a shower of golden rain petals, it then develops paper lantern-like seed pods.



24 Sweet Gum



Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) is native to temperate parts of North and Central America including Mexico. The common name is from its gum resin which as the Latin suggests is amber coloured. This was used for medicine and to make chewing gum. It is also an important American hardwood, particularly used for plywood and veneers.

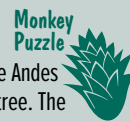
25 Japanese Maple



Unsurprisingly this small tree or shrub (*Acer palmatum*) is native to Japan but also grows in Korea, China and other East Asian countries. The first specimen reached the UK in 1820 and it is loved worldwide not least for its delicate leaves in striking colours. Varying from yellow-lime to dark green, orange to dark red and deep purple.

26 Monkey Puzzle

This spikey leaved tree (*Araucaria araucana*) is native to the Andes mountains in Argentina and Chile, where it is the national tree. The species is a 'living fossil' dating back 200 million years. The sharp leaves were protection from grazing dinosaurs. It was introduced to England in 1795 where it got its common name. Its original habitat does not share any territory with monkeys so the puzzle is purely hypothetical. It has edible seeds like large pine nuts but these only grow after 30-40 years.





27 The Walled Garden

A few secondary estate structures, including a stable block (28) and these walled kitchen gardens, outlived the manor house (31). The remaining walled area encloses delightful sheltered gardens, which were originally used to grow vegetables and fruit. The bricks used for the walls came from the Seaton Brickworks. Seaton Brick and Tile Works made bricks, tiles, chimney and flower pots and were themselves near the park, between King Street and the Old Town Links. Amongst the colourful flowers and shubbery look out for the tailor's dummy cleverly reinvented as the *Venus de Milo*.

28 Former Stables (private property)

These survived the house but were also brought down by fire in the 1970s. In 1985, architect William Cowie sympathetically developed nine houses and flats, incorporating the original granite gable wall remnants of the former stables buildings, as seen from Don Street. This forms the corner of the extensive original red-brick former kitchen gardens. The courtyard is private except for disabled access to the Walled Garden (27). As well as stables there were once kennels on the other side of the track.



29 Sports in the Park

From the early days, pupils of former Aberdeen Academy/Central School played here. Winter hockey and rugby, summer athletics with running tracks, high and long jump by the play area, discuss and hammer at the Cathedral end. Aberdeen Football Club, the Dons, practiced in the 80s at what's now the rugby pitch area. Including captain and Scotland player Willie

Miller and his European Cup Winners' team (see [Aberdeen History Trail](#)). Manager Sir Alex Ferguson and assistant manager Archie Knox, also a Scotland Player, are seen in the park above. Cricket was played on the same field in the 90s and Scottish Rugby helped pay for the current training pitch in 2014. The park also hosted worldwide youth competition, Aberdeen International Football Festival 1981-2010, and summer wildflowers still mark the old pitch lines in the centre of the park. Today you may see American football, soccer, netball, hockey, frisbee, ping-pong at the outdoor table and watersports, see kayaking at entry 39. The park's bicycle rack commemorates Aberdeen-born Neil Fachie's Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games track cycling gold medal.

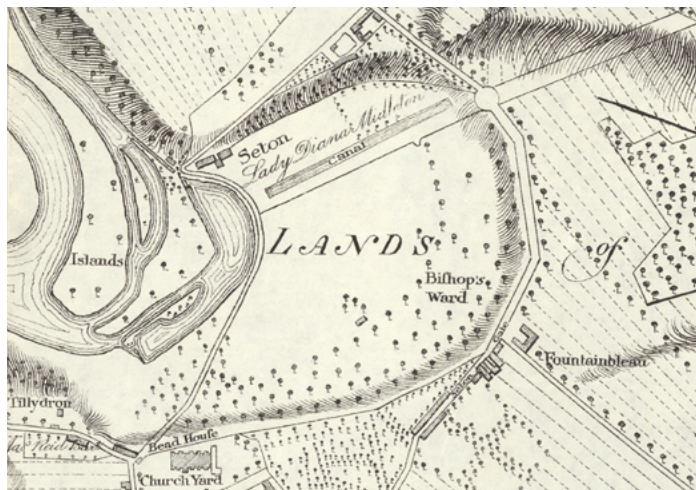


30 Seaton House Well

Maps of 1926 show a former well further up the hill towards the Walled Garden (27). The old remains can still be seen but by 1955 the new well is at this site. The source has possibly been diverted and the well relocated nearer to the former house. The well itself may date from different eras. It has a small trough in dressed granite, probably for pets or working dogs but the main part is in a less formal rustic style. The alcove may have been for drinking cups, jugs or ornamental sculpture.

31 Seaton House and Canal (sites of)

This Georgian mansion (above) dated from the mid-1600s but was built in several stages, the most striking designed by James Gibbs in 1725 for Colonel John Middleton MP. Unusually this was built of brick like a French or Belgian chateau and these came from Seaton Brickworks (see 27). The Don left its mark here too with tidemarks on the library's silk wallpaper from floods in the 1800s. The estate eventually passed to the Hay family who were lairds until they sold the land in 1947. The house was due to be redeveloped for a café but was destroyed by fire in 1963. The grounds once had the unusual feature of an ornamental canal. This water feature stretched from near Don Street to near the end of today's Cathedral Walk. Long but shallow, such garden canals were fashionable amongst country estates of the time. It can be seen on Roy's military survey completed in 1755 and on George Taylor's 1773 map below. This pre-dates the golden age of industrial canals, including our region's own Aberdeenshire Canal which opened in 1806.





32 The Hay Memorial Fountain

This was built in 1984 to commemorate the last Laird of Seaton, Malcolm Hay and his wife Ivy née Wigmore. In 2017, for the 70th anniversary of the park's purchase from the Hays, 70,000 crocus bulbs were planted on the slope behind the fountain by Aberdeen City Council staff and councillors, Friends of Seaton Park and many other volunteers.

33 2091 Time Capsule

This stone marks a time capsule buried on 26 June 1991. It is an initiative of Linkfield Academy but includes work by several city schools. Their enclosed work imagines life in what was then 100 years time.



34 Lady James Hay's Well

This path and riverside were the subject of *Dyce v. Lady James Hay*, a case finally decided at the House of Lords in 1852. Robert Dyce, a magistrate living locally, brought an action on behalf of himself and Old and New Aberdeen residents. The claim was for access to land in Seaton Estate said to have been previously enjoyed by the public. Dyce's action failed but times change and this is again publicly accessible land, with a 'right to roam' elsewhere via the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003. The well was dedicated in 1861 but is named Maiden's Well on 1868 maps.



35 Woodland Walk to Brig o' Balgownie

Unlike the fast-flowing River Dee the River Don meanders slowly through mostly agricultural lands. However here it unexpectedly enters a dramatic and twisting gorge with an impressive highlight, the soaring arch of the oldest bridge in Scotland, the medieval Brig o' Balgownie. It was immortalised in Lord Byron's epic poem *Don Juan* and is surrounded by the charming old settlements of Balgownie and Cottown of Balgownie.



36 Walker's Haugh and Highest Tidal Point

This name dates back to the estate and possibly earlier (see 34). A haugh is simply the Scots word for a low-lying riverside meadow. The southern end marks the 'highest point to which ordinary spring tides flow'. This divides the river into freshwater and partial saltwater habitats. Some wildlife like otters thrive in both but some are particular to one. This tidal point is far closer to the sea than the River Dee's at Garthdee.

37 River Don Heritage Trail

This cairn and eight others form a three mile riverside trail from Persley Bridge to Donmouth, but can be followed in either direction. They explore Lower Donside's industrial legacy of water-powered mills as well as newer features and wildlife. Highlights include some modern takes on water and wind power. There is Aberdeen Offshore Wind Farm and Donside Hydro, a modern community power generator using one of the world's earliest hydraulic machines, an Archimedes screw. See also **Donside Heritage Trail** which compliments this riverside walk.



38 Mr Therm Mural

This was painted between May and July 2017, taking about 100 hours. It was created by an Art Group working out of Seaton Community Centre as part of their course. The teacher produced the design and the group met one afternoon a week to create the artwork. The teacher drew all the detail and the group plus volunteers did the painting. As well as *Mr Therm* (11), the ancient St Machar's Cathedral (1) establishes its place in contemporary street art. Look out also, both in the mural and beyond, for the wildlife and natural residents of the park depicted. Including the majestic Heron, symbol also of the Friends of Seaton Park.



39 Aberdeen Kayak Club

This club has been based here for the past 40 years. Olympic Gold C2 (doubles) medal winner Tim Baillie, on left with partner Etienne Stott right, and World C1 Champion David Florence honed their skills on the waters. The wires and poles are a slalom course, similar to those for skiing. The water is accessed via a small boat wharf west of here.

40 Kettock's Mill Weir/Cruives Dyke (remains of)

The neighbouring Woodside area was once called the Land of Cruives (see [Woodside Local Area Trail](#)). The cruive here extended from the weir to the path, see 1868 map below. Cruives are a rubble dam or dyke with box-traps for catching Salmon. They require a Crown license and are effectively consigned to history. Weirs raise river levels to supply channels called lades which ran water-powered machinery at the former Kettock's Mill opposite. Water entered here and exited down-stream opposite the north end of Walker's Haugh (36). The rusty sluice gates can still be seen and these controlled the entrance and exit of water.



41 Granite Garden

This feature contains 22 granite blocks, each weighing between three and five tonnes that depict the various types of granite found in the regional vicinity of North-east Scotland. Each block was labelled by carving the name of the quarry it came from and surrounded by typical plants that could be found in natural rock outcrop environments. Granite colours to look out for are red Peterhead, silvery Kemnay, Corrennie's salmon and Dyce's blue-grey. There is also a variegated pink and grey from Corrennie Quarry.



42 Tillydrone Road and Chanonry Port

Before turnpike roads, this was the main Aberdeen to Huntly route via Inverurie. It started opposite the Cathedral as shown on Roy's military survey maps of 1747-55. The large beech (left) was a young tree back then (see entry 20). Tillydrone Road was the site of a historic stone gateway, Chanonry Port. It was located near the end of the granite flagstones where the road narrows (see above). Built mid 1400s, demolished circa 1725. It had an effigy of the Virgin Mary above it and a tablet with a carved pot of lilies and scripture requesting Hail Mary benediction on passing. Ports, from the Latin for gate, were for defence or isolation from plague. It was one of four guarding the cathedral precinct. The others were at each end of the Chanonry, Cluny's Port (south) and Chaplain's Port (east) and one of unknown name but in an area later known as Seaton Port. This was on a former road to the cathedral from Don Street as shown on Parson Gordon's map (see [intro](#)).



Please note the River Don's former course is speculative. The outer riverbanks are known (see 7) but it pre-dates detailed maps
Likewise the canal is shown on early maps which don't fully match those of today and when the river was very different (see 31)

Hillhead Student Village

Don Street – surfaced route to Brig o' Balgownie

River Don Heritage Trail

Don Street

Approximate site of canal

Approximate former course of River Don

Old sluice gate

River Don Heritage Trail

Steep path with steps

River Don

Weir

Seaton Park Tree Trail

Approximate former course of River Don

Tillydrone Avenue

Tillydrone Road

Site of Chanonry Port

The Chanonry

1 St Machar's Cathedral

Site of unnamed port *

Don Street

King Street



Seaton Park Trail & Guide

The park's history, trees & attractions



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43 Tillydrone Hill or Motte

This defensive mound wasn't a medieval castle motte as first thought. In fact it is far older than 1,000 years, dating back 4,000 to its origins as a Bronze Age burial site. That stone cairn or similar construction forms the core of the mound, which was later developed to create an Iron Age defensive position around 2AD. This had a wooden stockade around the top which most likely enclosed several buildings. It's possible there may once have been a wall and ditch around the base. It is shown on Parson Gordon's map (see intro) and above on G&W Paterson's map of 1746.



44 Benholm's Lodge/ Wallace Tower

This fortified Z-plan townhouse had a very urban past in New Aberdeen. Built around 1588 as Benholm's Lodge it was outside the town walls and as today initially stood alone. The coat of arms are the Knights of St John and the Keith family. The knight with faithful dog is probably from St Nicholas kirkyard. In 1895 it became the Wallace Tower pub, likely a corruption of well-house, but in 1965 Marks & Spencer expanded and paid for relocating it here. Tillydrone Community Development Trust is raising funds to reopen it for community use including a café and possible exhibition space. See also **Old Aberdeen Trail**.

45 Sacrist Downie's Cairn

This folly stood at the former Berryden House, near Kittybrewster, but was moved here in 1926. Sacrist Downie, a porter, is said to have kept strict order amongst King's College students. They resented this and subjected him to a fake trial and mock execution, which became all too real when he died of fright. Happily, as the enigmatic verse on the plaque hints, this is a monument to an urban legend. However, the city has many true horror stories and dark tales, as told in **Bloody Aberdeen Trail**.

#aberdeentrails



This is one in a series of themed Aberdeen City trails. All are available via the free **GoABZ** mobile app and at www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails



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