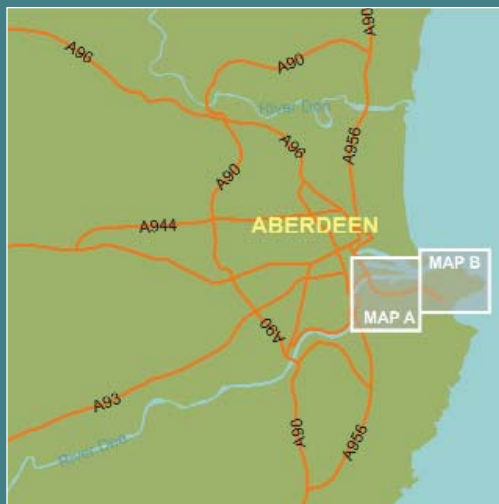


**Torry Industrial & Maritime Trail**  
is one of a series of themed trails  
being developed around the City.

Aberdeen City Council  
**'Regenerating the South of the City'**

Further details about these trails can be found at:  
[www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails)



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Aberdeen Visitor Information Centre  
**01224 288828**  
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# Torry Industrial & Maritime Trail

A guide to industrial & maritime Torry



# Torry Industrial & Maritime Trail

Over the centuries the people of Torry have derived much of their living from the sea. This leaflet explores Torry's maritime and industrial connections. Today the harbour area at Torry is dominated by the oil industry, which has done much to shape and influence the harbour we see today. This leaflet explores what was here before the great oil expansion of the late 20th century.

In the 1790s it was recorded that there were 36 men from Torry engaged in fishing in 6 boats. By the mid 19th century this had fallen to 3 boats with 6 men in each. Despite the temporary fall in numbers the fish caught were the same: haddock was fished in January and May; cod, ling and turbot were caught at a distance of 'several leagues' from the land and herring was fished from the middle of July.

Steam powered trawlers transformed the fishing industry from the 1880s and had a significant impact on Torry. As mechanised trawling grew, bringing an exponential increase in the catch, Torry became a centre for fish processing, shipbuilding and repair. Tens of thousands of people were attracted to Torry to work in these industries which led to the expansion of the town and building of many of the tenements we see today.

But it was not simply the sea that provided employment for the people of Torry. Archaeological evidence on Balnagask golf course shows the distinctive 'rig and furrow' marks left by medieval agricultural practices. In the mid 19th century it was estimated that the parish of Nigg contained 1885 Imperial acres under the plough. The employment basis of Torry was at its most diverse from the mid to late 19th century when the modern town of Torry, as we would understand it today, emerged. From then there were granite works (including polishing), iron foundries and a number of timber yards amongst many others. This leaflet looks at some of these industries.

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## 1 Tram Depot

Public transport to and from Torry was provided from 1891 by a horse bus service, which carried passengers at a penny a time (creels incurred a further penny charge). As Torry expanded demand for a tram route grew. Despite considerable public agitation and petitions the first Torry tram route was only half of what was wanted. Baillie Meff commented at the time that 'we could not get the Parliamentary Commissioners to believe that Torry was anything but a fishing village.' The first tram route to Torry, from Guild Street to St Fittick's Road, opened on 10 October 1903. A connecting link to George Street was not planned despite calls for this from Torry.

The Torry Depot was opened in 1904, at the corner of North Esplanade and Palmerston Quay. It was built in pink Corennie granite and drew some criticism for its extravagance. On 15 July 1905, an extension, between Bridge St and Guild St, was opened which also took in Torry. After 1910 the Torry Depot changed function: its allocation of tram cars was moved to Queen's Cross and it became the paint shop for the Dee Village central tram



*Torry Tram Depot*



*Tram on Victoria Road, before the First World War, courtesy of Aberdeen City Library*

works. The route was eventually closed on 28 February 1931. Numbers using this line had been falling steadily, especially after the introduction of buses, in 1921, to parts of Torry not served by trams.



*Tram rosette on Victoria Road*

## 2 Torry Brick and Tile Works

There were a number of Brick and Tile Works in Torry in the 19th century, all working at different times. The earliest one was established some time in the first half of the 19th century. These works were first mentioned when the lands of Torry Farm were being roused in 1859. The clay was described as of 'fine quality, and well situated for manufacturing purposes. The quality is ascertained by actual borings... There is a Brick and Tile Works already established.' It is not known whether or not a second company was definitely formed after 1859: however, one was in existence as late as the early 1880s. In 1882 the City of Aberdeen Land Association planned to feu off part of their lands to establish a brick works and Mr John Hector, manager of the previous firm, was tipped to become manager of the new one.

It was in 1883 that Seaton Brick and Tile Company moved from Seaton to Torry, to part of the area now covered by Crombie Road. The company utilised the seam of clay which runs down the east coast of Scotland. There were two Brick and Tile works at Seaton and one at Strabathie at Black Dog, north of Aberdeen, which all used clay from this seam. According to Leadingham, commenting in 1902, 'The brick works... were an extensive business, and employed a large number of men. But the supply of clay becoming scarce, the works were removed to the Black Dog, a few miles passed the Bridge of Don.'



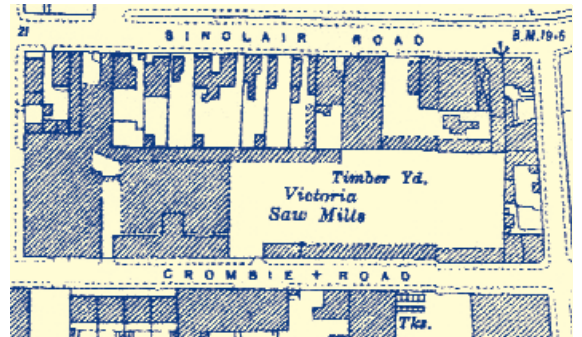
*Demolition of the Torry Brickworks chimney in the early 20th century, courtesy of Aberdeen City Libraries*



*Map showing the brick kilns c.1800*

## 3 Cordiner and Sons Limited, Sinclair Road

This firm was initially started in Cove Bay in 1879. The great grandfather of the current owners bought the business for £85 and initially produced small fishing craft and lifeboats. The firm moved to a site on the banks of the River Dee and then to its present location in 1909, when Torry docks were being built. The needs of the fishing industry saw the company diversify into production of herring barrels and fish boxes. In 1954 the company purchased Silverbank Sawmills at Banchory in order to be self supporting in its supplies of native soft woods. By the 1970s the company owned a number of forested areas and dealt with the operation of box manufacturing from tree to box in its entirety. By the 1980s Cordiners was also providing boxes for core samples for the oil industry.



*Saw Mills in Torry from 1925-6 Ordnance Survey Map, courtesy of Ordnance Survey*

## 4 Fiddes Saw Mills

William Fiddes and Sons Limited was another of the saw mills and box-making businesses which flourished in Torry. It was started in about 1878 and produced boxes throughout its history for a variety of different uses, including for brewers, distillers, fish, fruit and vegetable

producers and latterly soft drinks manufacturers. In 1902 it was described as 'one of the largest box making firms in the north of Scotland.' By the 1970s it had a number of subsidiary businesses at Craigmyle Sawmills and Kemnay and Longside Sawmills. The business was closed in December 1977.

## 5 Ross's Smoke House, Sinclair Road

During the medieval period Aberdeen was famous for its 'sweet red' salmon. Today many firms carry on this ancient and honourable trade. The firm of John Ross JR (Aberdeen) was started as a salmon-smoking business in 1857. Today the firm employs about 50 people and exports its salmon to 38 countries. Most of its fish is smoked the traditional way, in the old brick kilns, and much of the preparation work, including filleting and salting, is still done in the time-honoured fashion, by hand. The firm's brick kilns have been used for over 150 years. In February 2008 Historic Scotland designated two of their ovens as category B listed buildings.

## 6 John Lewis & Sons Ltd. Shipbuilders 1907-1976

The shipbuilding firm of John Lewis & Sons Ltd. specialised in cargo and fishing vessels. Andrew Lewis, who built up a marine engine production and repair business in Aberdeen, established the company in 1907. The firm constructed its first ship in 1917, at a time when the First World War was creating a demand for new ships. Lewis constructed coasters and drifters but later concentrated on cargo vessels. During the Second World War, Lewis built more than thirty vessels, including minesweeper trawlers and patrol vessels. The company continued to specialise in steam and diesel trawlers after the War. One of their most famous vessels was the *Fairtry*, the world's first purpose-built factory stern trawler. In 1968 Lewis also built Aberdeen's last sailing ship, the training vessel *Malcolm Miller*.



John Lewis workers



Launch of the trawler 'Summerlee' from John Lewis in 1956

## 7 Wood Group

In 1972, John Lewis & Sons Ltd. was taken over by the Wood Group. The Group had a number of fishing industry interests, including vessel ownership and fish processing. However, by this date, it was expanding into services for the oil industry. In 1976 a new 1600-ton slipway was constructed by the Wood Group, suitable for the repair of offshore supply vessels. The yard then began to concentrate on such repair work, although it continued to build occasional vessels until the 1980s.

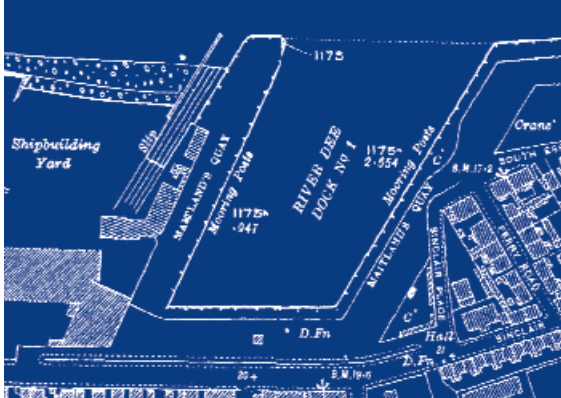
## 8 Site of Dee Ferry Boat

For centuries the ferry boat shuttled people between Pocrá Quay on the north shore of the Dee and Torry on its southern shore. The ferry was latterly operated by means of a rope strung across the river. The rights to run the ferry were lucrative and the Council regularly sold (or rouped) them to the highest bidder.

The ferry was eventually replaced by Victoria Bridge, following the Dee Ferry Boat disaster of 1876. April 15th 1876 was a feast day and a holiday for most people in Aberdeen. There was a fair at Torry and many people were crossing the Dee by ferry in order to get to it. People waiting at Aberdeen had become impatient waiting for the ferry to arrive. When it did they pushed onto the boat without allowing time for those already on board to disembark. The boat set off, overloaded with more than 70 people. The ferry started to shake in mid stream, the rope was loosened and the boat drifted. As she capsized a number of passengers were able to swim to safety, but 32 people drowned.

## 9 River Dee Dock

By the early 20th century, Aberdeen was Scotland's leading white fish port and with this came the need for expanded quayside facilities. The River Dee Dock was built between 1909 and 1915 and was used to provide servicing for the fishing fleet. It was also the site for tankers to offload petroleum to the large tanks on shore.



*River Dee Dock from 1925-6 Ordnance Survey Map, courtesy of Ordnance Survey*



*Ships berthed at River Dee Dock*

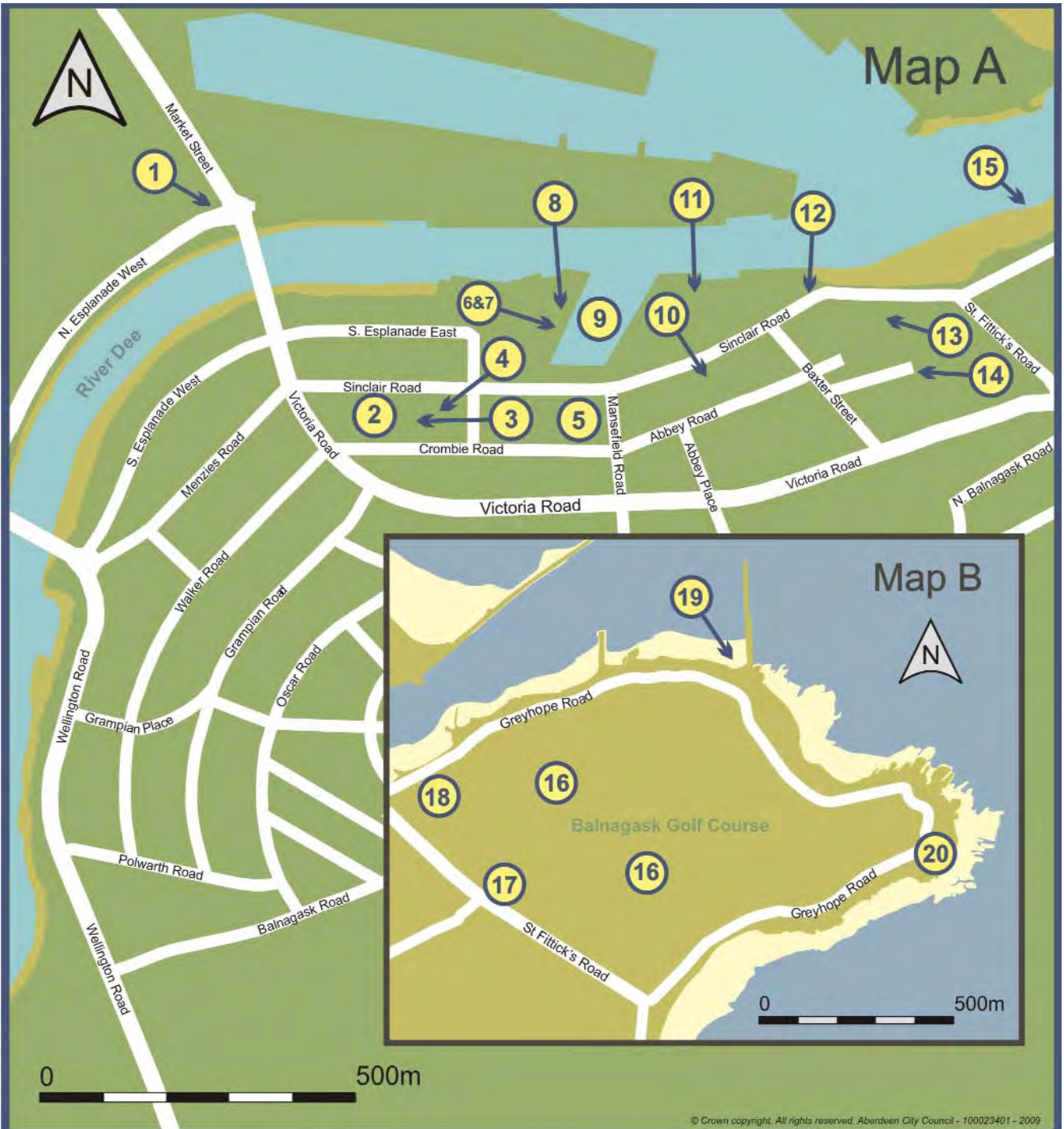
## 10 Leading Lights

The two leading lights at Torry were erected in 1842. They mark the navigation channel into the harbour, showing red when it is safe to enter and green when it is dangerous. The towers are constructed of cast iron. For many years, there was a keeper of the lights who lived in a cottage next door to the western light. The western tower had to be relocated towards the end of the 19th century as harbour improvements altered the position of the safe navigation channel. The lights are now controlled from the Marine Operations Centre across the harbour at the base of the North Pier.



*Eastern leading light and (inset) interior of western leading light*

# Map A



# Map B





*Detail over entry to Torry Syphon House*

## 11 Torry Syphon House (Sewage Outflows)

This little granite structure formed part of the Girdleness sewage outfall system, a massive engineering project, which began in 1900, with the aim of creating a new waste disposal system for the City of Aberdeen, in response to expansion of the population and an increased awareness of the importance of good sanitary conditions. The sewer had the capacity when built to discharge up to 81 million gallons per day, a quantity equal to 300 gallons per day per person for an estimated population of 270,000, a design which looked well ahead



*Exterior of Torry Syphon House*

to the future. Over three miles in length, the sewer comprised two sections, one north and the other south of the Dee, joined by a tunnel through which the sewage is syphoned beneath the river. This little house sits over the shaft on the Torry side of the tunnel. There have been adaptations to the sewage system over the century of its existence, notably the large treatment facility constructed in the Bay of Nigg in 2000, but this structure and its companion across the river, at Point Law, are still in use. The penstock and valve house, which sat above the Victorian outflow at Girdleness, (see No 20) controlling the flow of waste and allowing seawater in to flush the sewer, can still be seen, although today it is part of an emergency overflow system.

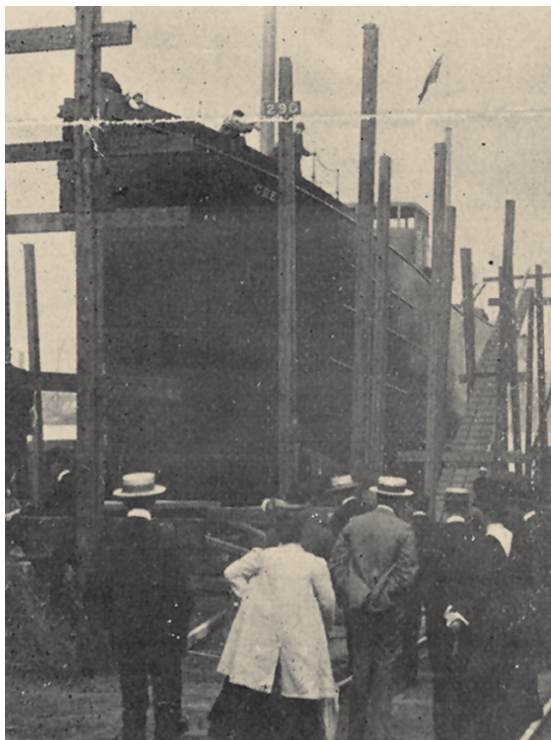


*Interior of Torry Syphon House*

## 12 John Duthie Torry Shipbuilding Co. Ltd.

The last in a succession of Duthie-owned shipyards was located in Torry. This business, run by John (son of Captain Alexander Duthie and grandson of John Duthie), operated between 1904 and 1925. John had been a partner at the Footdee yard of John Duthie, but in 1904, set up in partnership with his brother-in-law, Walter G Jameson, and John Fiddes, who had worked for the Footdee firm.

The drifter *Choice*, launched by Lord Provost Walker on 31 March 1904, was the first vessel built by the company. During its career, the yard's output consisted almost entirely of fishing vessels, many for North East owners. The yard did not build engines and these were often supplied by local companies, such as J Abernethy and Clyne Mitchell.



*Launch from John Duthie Torry Yard, 1906*

## 13 Torry Research Station

When this was set up it was part of what was then The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Station specialised in research and development of fish processing and handling. It was closed in 1996 and the residue of its functions dispersed to other research institutions including the adjacent Marine Laboratory.

## 14 Marine Laboratory



*Marine Laboratory*

The Fisheries Board for Scotland was established in 1882 to research fishing techniques and ways of enhancing fish stocks in the North Sea. This body evolved into today's Fisheries Research Services. The first Laboratory was established in the Bay of Nigg in 1898. In 1899 a hatchery was added to study the effects of releasing young plaice on fishing stocks.

The Laboratory was moved to Wood St, in Torry, in 1923. The building which it now occupied had been built in 1917 by the Admiralty as an apprentices' hostel for Duthie shipyards. The operation was expanded following the Second World War and in 1948, a Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory was established at Pitlochry as a sister organisation. Subsequently field stations were established at Loch Ewe, Loch Torridon and Loch Duich.



*Torry Marine Lab and Hatchery from 1901-3 Ordnance Survey Map, courtesy of Ordnance Survey*



Today the Laboratory uses the Fisheries Research Vessel *Scotia* as the principal means of collecting specimens and data. The Laboratory has researched fish cultivation and disease, as well as fishing gear and fish behaviour that has helped the industry in the design of efficient ways of sustainable fishing. The institution's work assists in the setting of the yearly Total Allowable Catch limits for the North Sea.



*Marine Laboratory*

## 15 Torry Pier

During the medieval and early-modern periods, because Aberdeen's harbour was tidal and prone to silting up, large ocean-going vessels had to berth at Torry, or occasionally as far inland as Footdee. Smaller vessels ferried their cargoes and men into Aberdeen. This pier was planned in 1607, in order to facilitate these larger vessels. It was financed with money provided by Aberdeen Burgh Council as well as voluntary labour. The scheme was subject to several delays and difficulties, despite a tax of £4 per tun on all imports of wine to help finance the operation. Work seems to have been completed around 1612, at a total cost of some £50 6s 8d.

Work on the pier remained ongoing during its history: in 1623-4, £33 8s 4d was spent in repair. Later, in 1649-50, it was extended by ten feet, at a cost of £18 6s 8d Scots. Considerable rebuilding work was carried out at the pier between 9 May and 8 September 1670, at a substantial cost of over £2000.



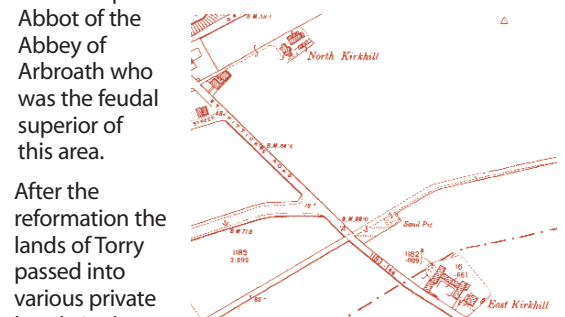
*Torry Pier, from John Slezer's view of 'New Aberdeen from the Blockhouse', of 1693*

The pier was again repaired in 1707, partly with timber from a Dutch boat wrecked at Black Dog, north of Aberdeen. Eventually it was demolished in 1810, after the harbour engineer John Smeaton had questioned its usefulness in a report recommending a series of harbour improvements.

## Farming

### 16 Rig & Furrow on Balnagask Golf Course

It is easy, and quite right, to associate Torry with fishing and maritime industries but it is also true that the area was largely agricultural until relatively recently. Some of the oldest indications of farming in the area are at Balnagask Golf Course. These distinctive rig and furrow marks are those left by medieval farmers working in the area. Medieval open fields contained a patchwork of furlongs, i.e. the area over which the plough was dragged: it was always dragged in one direction, year after year, which gives rise to a highly distinctive pattern in the ground. The long narrow strips of the furlong were called rigs and the pattern left by years of repeated one-directional ploughing are called rig and furrow (or in England ridge and furrow). During the medieval period the farmers leased their lands from the Abbot of the Abbey of Arbroath who was the feudal superior of this area.



*East and North Kirkhill Farms, from 1901-3 Ordnance Survey Map, courtesy of Ordnance Survey*

After the reformation the lands of Torry passed into various private hands. In the 1790s Torry incorporated

362 acres of oats, 169 acres of bear, 18 acres of peas, 54 acres of potatoes and 70 acres of turnips. A further 114 acres, part of which was hay, produced food and helped pasture 46 working oxen, 230 cows, 209 sheep, 12 goats and 87 horses. Balnagask Estate, latterly held by the Davidson family, owned several farms in the area, including Mains of Balnagask. Many farms survived in Torry until quite recently. East Kirkhill farm (see No **17**) is one of the last surviving farm buildings in an area once heavily cultivated.



North Kirkhill Farm (**18**) in the 1880s

## 19 Quarries

Quarrying here began in the mid 18th century. In March 1766 John Adams, an architect from Edinburgh, presented a petition to Aberdeen Burgh Council asking for permission to begin extracting rocks from quarries in the Bay of Nigg. Adams proposed an initial lease of 21 years with a one year trial period built in and reviewed every 3 years. The Council quickly agreed and Adams accepted. Later on 22 August 1766 the agreement was extended to include all of the land from the Bay of Nigg down to Cove. Quarrying was extensive in the area through till the 19th century. For some time stones extracted from quarries in the Torry area were used as paving stones in London.

## 20 Sewage Valve House

This once elegant, but now rather downtrodden building was constructed as part of the massively engineered sewage outfall system created for Aberdeen as the result of a scheme drawn up in the years 1896-98 (see No **11**). This Penstock and Valve House provided an automatic flap that prevented the sea from backing up the sewer, but opened when required by pressure of sewage. The building itself was constructed by John Morgan. The line of the sewer tunnel, which was dug through substantial rock cuttings in places, can be clearly observed on the shore between the Valve House and Nigg Bay.

# Aberdeen's other Heritage Trails

Torry Industrial & Maritime Trail is one of a series of heritage trails under development within the City. In addition to some path improvements and information panels, each trail will have a companion leaflet, which can be found in the Aberdeen Visitor Information Centre and other outlets throughout the City

The trails include:

### **Aberdeen's People and Places**

a guide to Aberdeen's Commemorative Plaques

### **Aberdeen's Granite Trail**

a guide to Aberdeen's Granite Industry

### **Aberdeen's Maritime Heritage Trail**

a guide to Aberdeen's Maritime History

### **Aberdeen's North Sea Trail**

a guide to Aberdeen's Coastal Heritage

### **Aberdeen's March Stones**

a guide to Aberdeen's March Stones & Freedom Lands

### **Aberdeen's Sculpture Trail**

a guide to public sculpture in Aberdeen

### **Old Aberdeen Trail**

a guide to Old Aberdeen

### **Torry Churches Trail**

a guide to Torry's Churches

### **Torry Coastal Trail**

a guide to Torry's Coastline

### **Torry Urban Trail**

a guide to urban Torry

