Explore Historic Leith

Leith is an area with a long and fascinating history. This guidebook has been produced to invite you to explore the area for yourself, as a local resident or a visitor, and find out more about Leith’s hidden gems.

The book has been developed in partnership between the Leith Local History Society and the City of Edinburgh Council. Thanks and acknowledgement must go to the History Society and in particular their Chair, Mr Jim Tweedie, whose excellent work and extensive knowledge has helped in the production of this guidebook.

I hope you enjoy using this book as a means to find out more about Leith, its people and its history.

Cllr Gordon Munro
Leith Ward

The Leith Guidebook

As the Chair of the Leith Trust, it gives me considerable pleasure to offer an endorsement to this fine and valuable guidebook to Leith.

Leith has for centuries been both the marine gateway to Edinburgh and its economic powerhouse. So many of the grand entries to our capital city have come through Leith, most significant of which was the arrival of King George IV in 1822, at the behest of Sir Walter Scott. As to economic impact simply look up at the friezes and decoration of many of our older buildings to see the care that our predecessors took to provide a built environment of which to be proud, based on their wealth.

The Leith Trust seeks to promote a current engagement between “Leithers” and visitors to our community, in a real sense of enhanced community engagement with shared interests in the protection of our environment, the celebration of our heritage and the development of educational opportunities for all. We can be bound together in demolishing the artificial boundaries that any community, anywhere in the world can thoughtlessly create, and instead create a real sense of trust and pride in each other and the settings in which we live and work.

This guidebook will help you navigate our highways and byways, the tales of those long past and of the present day and allow you to share our sense of pride in the ‘Left Bank of Edinburgh’ where as a glittering oyster there is always some grit!

Sir Andrew Cubie, CBE
Chair, The Leith Trust

‘Leith has for centuries been both the marine gateway to Edinburgh and its economic powerhouse.’
How to use this guidebook

This booklet aims to help you plan a walking tour around the historic sites of Leith. You don’t have to follow a specified route to see all the sites and it is left to you to plan your own journey. You may want to devise several routes around the area.

All the sites have been numbered, starting with Queen Victoria’s statue at the Foot of Leith Walk, because it is very easy to find.

Most visitors will arrive in Leith via Leith Walk, from where you will have a choice of directions from which to start your tour.

Whatever direction you take, the Leith Local History Society hopes that with the help of this booklet you will find lots to interest you in and around historic Leith.

Sometimes the booklet mentions the interior of buildings. This does not always mean that these buildings are open to the public and you will be able to look inside. However, some of the buildings mentioned in the booklet may be open during the annual ‘Edinburgh Doors Open Day’ event, which is held in September.

For more information please visit: www.cockburnassociation.org.uk

Introduction

The earliest mention of Leith is in the Foundation Charter for Holyrood Abbey from 1128, when David I gave the existing harbour and land on the north side of the river to the Abbots of Holyrood. Later, the lands on the south were given to Peter, one of his Anglo Norman friends. Peter took the name of the lands he was given and became Peter de Lestarig – or Restalrig as we know it today. The King established a new harbour on the south side, where the Water of Leith entered the Forth (where the King’s Wark is today).

During the Middle Ages, Trade Guilds (or Incorporations as they are known in Scotland) were established in Leith. The town of North Leith was a Burgh of Regality under the Burgh of Canongate, and the town of South Leith was a Burgh of Barony down from Logan of Restalrig. Since Edinburgh held superiority over Leith, it declared these ‘unfree’ and inferior to Edinburgh Incorporations.

After the loss of Berwick to England, Leith became the principal port of Scotland as the border trade of wool and skins then came through Leith. It helped that Edinburgh was the capital, and it was Edinburgh’s money which supported the expansion of Leith.

Leith continued as the largest and busiest port in Scotland until the trade routes to the Americas opened and Glasgow and the west took over in the 18th century.

Leith has a long and fascinating history. Occupied and fought over by the Scottish, English and French through the centuries, it has seen many changes. The Burgh of Leith gained its independence from Edinburgh following the Burghs Act of 1833, but this came to an end when the two were joined in 1920.

Although Leith has now lost its shipbuilding and some heavy industries, it has diversified and we now see a new Leith emerging.

The Leith motto is ‘Persevere’. That is what Leith has done over the years and will continue to do so in the future.

Jim Tweedie
Leith Local History Society
www.leithlocalhistorysociety.org.uk
### Historic events in Leith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1128</td>
<td>The earliest recorded mention of Leith in the Foundation Charter for Holyrood Abbey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1559</td>
<td>The town is first fortified during the 1559 - 1560 Siege of Leith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1651</td>
<td>The Mercurious Scoticus, one of the first Scottish newspapers, is printed in Leith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1670</td>
<td>Sir James Stanfield sets up a brewery in Leith, the largest industrial unit in Scotland at the time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1680</td>
<td>The teaching of mathematics begins at Trinity House to teach boys navigation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1744</td>
<td>The world's first rules of golf are drawn up to be used on Leith Links.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>Permission is given for the construction of Leith's first dry dock.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>The first steamship service from Leith to London begins.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>The first intravenous treatment for cholera is given in Leith by Dr Thomas Latta.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>The passenger/cargo ship SS Sirius (the first to cross the Atlantic under its own power) is built in Leith by Robert Menzies &amp; Sons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Charles Drummond produces the one of the world's first greetings cards in Leith – a New Year greetings card.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>The Victoria Swing Bridge is completed – the largest swing bridge in the United Kingdom at the time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Leith Hospital is the first hospital in Scotland to admit female medical students to its wards for clinical training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Leith Nautical College opens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Electric trams arrive in Leith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>The first aeroplane to fly in Scotland is built by Gibson and Son in Leith.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guide to historic Leith

1. Queen Victoria's Statue
2. South Leith Parish Church
3. St Mary's Star of the Sea Church
4. Edinburgh Guru Nanak Gurdwara
5. Edinburgh Hindu Mandir and Cultural Centre
6. Mohiuddin Jamia Masjid and Education Centre
7. North Leith Parish Church
8. Trinity House
9. Old Leith Town Hall/Council Chambers
10. Assembly Rooms and Exchange Buildings
11. Corn Exchange
12. Robert Burns' Statue
13. Leith Bank
14. King's Wark
15. Along the Shore
16. The Signal Tower
17. The Sailor's Home (now Malmaison Hotel)
18. Scotland's Merchant Navy Memorial
19. Harpoon Gun
20. Victoria Swing Bridge
21. Victoria Quay (Scottish Government Building)
22. Ocean Terminal/Royal Yacht Britannia
23. Leith Fort
24. Leith Library and Thomas Morton Hall
25. Norwegian Seaman's Church
26. Hibernian Football Club
27. St Ninian's Manse
28. The Citadel
29. Custom House
30. Lamb's House
31. The Vaults
32. Public Art
33. Dr Bell's School
34. Leith Victoria Swim Centre
35. Golf on the Links
36. The Drill Hall
Queen Victoria's Statue

The statue of Queen Victoria was sculpted by John S. Rhind and unveiled in 1907 with great pomp and ceremony. In 1913, further side panels were added to commemorate Queen Victoria's visit to Leith in 1842 and her review of the volunteers who served in the Boer War.

Queen Victoria did not actually land in Leith. She arrived by a steamship that needed the deep-water facilities at Granton. However, she passed through Leith on her way from Lord Rosebery's house at Dalmeny to Dalkeith Palace (the home of the Duke of Buccleuch). A triumphal arch was quickly erected in Great Junction Street outside Dr Bell's School in time for the Queen's arrival and she was greeted by the Provost of Leith.

This is a focal point for the exploration of historic Leith. From this location you can access Great Junction Street, Duke Street, Kirkgate or Constitution Street, all of which contain buildings mentioned in this guide.

South Leith Parish Church

The church was built circa 1483 by the Trade Incorporations of Leith, the largest of which was the Master Mariners of Trinity House. It was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and was known as the 'New Kyrk of our Ladie of Leith'.

It suffered during the 'Rough Wooing' of 1544 and 1547 by the English. During the 1559 - 1560 Siege of Leith both English and Scottish artillery destroyed the chancel, transepts and central tower. After 1560 when the Reformation was confirmed, what remained of the nave was considered sufficient for Protestant worship.

The church as you see it today was reconstructed and restored in 1847/48 by Thomas Hamilton.

The present tower shows the arms of four consecutive monarchs. The north face displays the arms of King James VI and the west shows the arms of King Charles I.

In the front porch are the arms of Marie de Guise (widow of James V) and Mary Queen of Scots.

www.slpc.co.uk

St Mary's Star of the Sea

The Catholic mission in Leith was founded by Father Thomas Carlyle in 1847 and it soon became evident that they needed their own church. To meet this need, the parish purchased the 17th century Balmerino House in 1848 to be used as church, school and presbytery.

Plans were drawn up by the architect Augustus Pugin and the first Eucharist presided over by Archbishop Gillies in 1854. In 1859 the Oblates of Mary Immaculate arrived to serve the parish.

In 1861 a new presbytery was built, but by 1900 the church had become too small and a new aisle was added.

St Mary’s Primary School was built in the church grounds in 1903 until it moved to Yardheads in 1938 and then to Leith Links in 1979. The old school was renamed the Stella Maris Centre and continued to serve the community until 2004.

From 1999 until 2004, thanks to the generosity of Sir Tom Farmer, the church and presbytery were refurbished and the new pastoral centre was built.

On 10 December 2004 the new Stella Maris Centre was opened by Sir Tom and Lady Farmer.

www.stmarysstarofthesea.org

Edinburgh Guru Nanak Gurdwara

Situated at 1 Sheriff Brae, this building started life as St Thomas’ Church. The church was built in 1843 with money donated by Sir John Gladstone. He was Member of Parliament for Lancaster and a friend of Leith’s first Provost. He was also the father of William Gladstone, who was Prime Minister four times during the 19th century.

In 1976, the building was purchased by Edinburgh’s Sikh community for use as their Gurdwara. The part of the temple used for worship is located in the upper part of the original church. The ground floor houses a community centre.

There was an arson attack on the building in 1989, but recovery was swift and the Temple was re-inaugurated at a large multi-faith gathering led by Edinburgh’s Lord Provost Eleanor McLaughlin.

www.edinburghsikhs.com
Edinburgh Hindu Mandir and Cultural Centre

The building was formerly used as St Andrew’s Church, which is now located on Easter Road. The church belonged to a group who originally left the Church of Scotland in 1733 over the question of patronage. Patronage relates to the right of the local land owner, rather than the congregation, to select the minister. Over time, patronage was abolished and most of the splits in the Church of Scotland were repaired. Most of these churches joined together again in 1929.

Extensive renovation has been carried out on the building, supported by the local Hindu community, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council. The building re-opened in 2011 as the Edinburgh Hindu Mandir and Cultural Centre. At the opening ceremony Lord Provost George Grubb commented that it was pleasing to see the building returned to its original glory.

The building has now become a hub for the Hindu community of Scotland and is used for arts and culture, religious and community activities.

www.edinburghhindumandir.org.uk

Mohiuddin Jamia Masjid & Education Centre

This building (formerly the Junction Road Church) was the first to be constructed on Great Junction Street. The building was originally used as a relief church. The foundation stone was laid in March 1824 and the building opened for worship in January 1825. In 1929 they reunited with the Church of Scotland.

In 1975 they were joined by St Thomas’ Church from Mill Lane, to form the St Thomas - Junction Road Church. They in turn amalgamated with St Andrew’s Church, on Easter Road in October 2009. The Mohiuddin Trust has owned the building at 123 Great Junction Street since 2012, which is now used as the Mohiuddin Jamia Masjid and Information Centre. The Mosque is open for daily prayer (five times per day) and the centre is managed with help from volunteers within the local community.

www.mohiuddintrust.org.uk

North Leith Parish Church

The church opened in 1816 when the expanding congregation moved from St Ninian’s, Quayside. The building was designed by William Burns (an Edinburgh architect) along similar lines to Falkirk Town Hall.

The church was constructed to generous specifications and with high quality materials formed from 70 foot lengths of pitch pine brought from North America. The design is dependent on symmetry. It is laid out as a Presbyterian church with the pulpit central and prominent, with light coloured plaster walls and upper storey windows to catch the light. The church has remained virtually unaltered since 1816.

Its site in Madeira Street made it a focal point for the area intended as Leith’s ‘New Town’. The imposing view looking up Prince Regent Street towards the church is really something worth seeing.

In 1941 the Church suffered from blast damage when a land mine shattered a large area of North Leith. It reopened in 1950 following restoration and refurbishment. The church has remained virtually unaltered since 1816.

www.nlpc.org.uk

Trinity House

Although the present Trinity House dates from 1816, the Fraternity of Master Mariners can trace its origins back to 1380. A charter from King Robert II gave them the right to levy a tax known as ‘Prime Gilt’, which they levied on every ship which entered Leith Harbour. This tax, along with a portion of the profits made by each captain after a voyage, helped to provide for widows and orphans of men lost at sea.

Trinity House played a large part in the education of boys by teaching them mathematics for use in navigation at sea.

The building is now known as the Trinity House Maritime Museum and is in the care of Historic Scotland.

The museum contains many treasures of Leith’s past including stories of captains and their memories of voyages. It also has a large collection of maritime artefacts and paintings.

Guided tours can be arranged through Historic Scotland.

www.trinityhouseleith.org.uk

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www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk
Old Leith Town Hall/Council Chambers (Leith Police Station)

This imposing building was erected in 1827 as a court house. Following the Burgh Act of 1833 Leith became an independent burgh. The council, consisting of 16 councillors, moved into the court house. This became the council chambers but still housed the burgh court. The cells were in the same building so that prisoners could be brought straight up to be charged. The jail was attached to the north side of the building facing Constitution Street and this part still retains its original interior.

The police station is on the corner of Queen Charlotte Street and in 1864 they took over a terrace of Georgian houses incorporating them into the town hall complex. Leith amalgamated with Edinburgh in 1920 despite a plebiscite showing the majority of people in Leith opposed to this.

The Council Chamber remains as it was the day the council left and is owned by the City of Edinburgh Council. The entire building is now occupied by Police Scotland.

www.scotland.police.uk

Assembly Rooms and Exchange Buildings

The Assembly Rooms were opened in 1785 and extended in 1810 as Leith Exchange and Assembly Rooms. The Exchange was then the commercial heart of the Port of Leith. It contained a hotel, a large reading room, a library and sale rooms. It also had ballrooms on two levels.

In the mid 20th century the Assembly Rooms were a popular venue for dances and wedding receptions and for a time in the 1950s was a public dance hall. The building has now been converted into flats and commercial offices.

Corn Exchange

At the corner of Constitution Street and Baltic Street lies the Corn Exchange. As Leith was the centre of the grain trade in Scotland it was a busy place.

Built in 1861 as an open marketing hall, this building has fulfilled a variety of functions in its lifetime and has recently been re-launched as the Creative Exchange, a flexible workspace for people working in creative industries.

Perhaps the one outstanding feature of the building which is often overlooked is the frieze which runs the length of the west side of the building down Constitution Street. Sculpted by John Rhind, it depicts cherubs engaged in various agricultural activities.

www.creativeexchangeleith.com

Robert Burns’ Statue

The statue to the Bard was made by David Watson Stevenson and erected in 1898 by the Leith Burns Appreciation Society. Thousands of Leith residents attended the unveiling.

The statue has been moved around that area of Bernard Street to suit the traffic needs of the busy junction.

The panels around the plinth depict scenes from Burns’ poems.

What was Burns’ connection with Leith? There does not appear to be a close connection, but in a letter to his friend Gavin Hamilton he describes dining at a friend’s house in Leith while they ‘danced, sang and drank until late enough’ and where he met a pretty girl. Sounds like Rabbie right enough.
Leith Bank

The Leith Banking Company was set up in 1792, with the partners being mostly local merchants. By 1806 the bank was trading from the elegant two storey building on Bernard Street and issuing its own bank notes. It even expanded with branches in other towns and had a tent for business at markets and agricultural shows.

It met with hard times in the 1830s and in 1842 had to close down. It was followed by the Edinburgh and Leith Banking Company which eventually merged with the Clydesdale Bank.

Today the premises are occupied by the IT company UniTech.

www.unitech.co.uk

The King’s Wark

As Leith was a busy port, to regulate trade James I (1406-37) set up a Custom House at the harbour mouth. This was known as ‘The King’s Wark’. It became a storehouse and arsenal and his royal descendants added to it until it became a large group of buildings stretching along what is now Bernard Street and south as far as Broad Wynd. There is no evidence of it being a royal residence but we do know that there was a Royal (real) tennis court there, which is a cross between a tennis and squash court. A fine example of such a tennis court can still be seen at The National Trust for Scotland’s Falkland Palace and Gardens in Fife which is reputed to be the oldest court still played on today.

The building is now home to a well-known, award winning Leith pub, also called the King’s Wark.

www.thekingswark.com

Along the Shore

One of the first things you see along the Shore is the street sign ‘Timberbush’. This marks the site of a timber market where, from the late 16th Century, wood brought in from the Baltic was stored and traded.

Opposite Timberbush is a plaque which marks the spot where King George IV landed on his visit to Scotland in 1822. This was the first visit of a reigning monarch since 1650, and was stage managed by Sir Walter Scott.

In front of the new dock gates there stands a bust of John Hunter, who was born in Leith and became the second governor of New South Wales from 1795 - 1800. This was sculpted by the Australian artist Victor Cusack and unveiled in 1994.

Nearby is another sculpture, that of a man relaxing on a bench. This is a statue of Sandy Irvine Robertson OBE (1942 - 1999), a local wine merchant and founder of the Scottish Business Achievements Awards Trust. The bench was commissioned by his friends and sculpted by Lucy Poett ARBS.

You will also see a slate construction by the sculptor James Parker, containing three discs commemorating the lives of the musicians Boz Burrell (1946 - 2006), Tam White (1942 - 2010) and Derek “Del Boy” Allen (1933 - 2001).

www.lucypoett.com
www.victorcusack.com.au
www.drystonesculpture.co.uk
Scotland’s Merchant Navy Memorial

Scotland’s Merchant Navy Memorial is situated at the Shore, near to the former Sailors’ Home (now the Malmaison Hotel). The design follows a tradition of naval columns which goes back to classical times. The memorial scenes are all cast in bronze and the column itself is of bearl sandstone.

At the top is the crown of the Merchant Navy crest and depicts two wooden clipper ship bows and two steel ship bows, fastened by four sails.

The upper panels represent the variety of merchant ships through history, while the middle panels portray the destruction of war. The images at eye level are of the trading routes of the world and the figures on the shelves depict scenes of everyday life in the Merchant Navy. Ground level scenes commemorate the educational role of the Leith Nautical College and its training ship T.S Dolphin.

The monument was sculpted by Jill Watson, Sculptor. The stone work was designed with assistance from Benjamin Tindall Architects. The bronze was cast and installed by Powderhall Bronze, gilded by Graciela Ainsworth and the masonry was constructed and finished by Bob Thompson.

On 3 September 1939 the SS Athenia was sunk by a U-boat and became the first casualty on the first day of World War II. Since 2000 this day has been recognised as Merchant Navy Day.

The memorial was unveiled in 2010 by HRH Princess Royal, Patron of the Merchant Navy Memorial Trust (Scotland).

www.merchantnavymemorialtrust.org.uk
www.jillwatsonstudio.co.uk
www.graciela-ainsworth.com
www.powderhallbronze.co.uk

© Merchant Navy Memorial Trust
The Harpoon Gun

The harpoon preserved on The Shore reminds us of an industry that was once very important in Leith, namely whaling. Nowadays we regard whaling with distaste. Within living memory it was, however, regarded as a valuable source of food, oils and of raw materials for industry. Whale oil was, for instance, used in the manufacture of margarine and soap.

There were two distinct phases to the whaling industry in Leith. From 1616 until 1842 Leith whalers sailed to Arctic waters, mainly around Greenland. This was an uncertain business with ships running the risk of being crushed by ice or, in times of war, captured by enemy warships. In the early 18th century a ‘boiling house’ was established in the Timber Bush.

It was still in use in the early 19th century when it was owned by Peter and Christopher Wood. When blubber boiling was taking place a strong pungent oily smell spread through the town – it was known locally as ‘Woods’ scent bottle’.

In 1908 a new phase of whaling started when Christian Salvesen & Son sent a whaling fleet from Leith to the Antarctic. They established a whaling station called ‘Leith Harbour’ in South Georgia. By 1911 their whaling fleet was the largest in the world. For many Leith people the whaling industry was a valuable source of employment until whaling ceased in 1963.

Victoria Swing Bridge

Bridges have always been important as a means of connecting north and south Leith. The first bridge was made of stone, and built downriver by the Abbot of Holyrood in 1486. However, fixed bridges impeded shipping on the river and the stone bridge was demolished in the 18th century. It was replaced by a drawbridge that could be lifted to allow boats through.

A swing bridge is another means of allowing shipping to pass. The Victoria Swing Bridge was completed in 1874. It carried double rail and road tracks with a footpath along each side. When it was built it was the largest swing bridge in the United Kingdom, and it was last opened in 1964. Nowadays the rail tracks have been removed and with a new road bridge running parallel to it, it is solely for pedestrian use.

For those interested in the technical features of the bridge, it was originally hydraulically operated, but this system was later replaced with a bowstring swing bridge.

Victoria Quay (Scottish Government Building)

Construction of this prize-winning building started in 1993 on the site of the 1806 East Old Dock, as part of the development of Victoria Quay. The Queen officially opened the building in 1996.

It was released to the then Scottish Office in 1995 and allowed the accommodation of more departments in one place than ever before. In 1999, following parliamentary devolution, it passed to the Scottish Executive, now Scottish Government.

Particular care was given to artistic features in the interior. Paintings were borrowed from the Scottish Arts Council’s collection and permanent features were also created.

In addition to the Scottish Government building, housing and retail development of the quay has also taken place. An attractive gateway commemorating the quay’s fishing past completes the area.

www.scotland.gov.uk
The Royal Yacht Britannia is berthed next to the Ocean Terminal Shopping Centre, which has over 50 retail stores, as well as coffee bars, restaurants and a cinema.

Now a five-star visitor attraction, Britannia was home to Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family for over 40 years. The Royal Yacht travelled over one million miles, representing Britain and the Commonwealth. Visitors can follow in the footsteps of royalty to discover the heart and soul of this most special of Royal residences.

Ocean Terminal was built on the site of the famous Ramage and Ferguson (and later Henry Robb) shipyards. Many thousands of ships were built by the thousands of men who were employed in the shipyards.

The Kobenhavn (a training ship for Danish Navy Cadets), which was built by Ramage and Ferguson, was the largest sailing ship ever built in the UK. Launched in 1921, she was lost at sea in 1929.

In previous centuries Leith was one of Scotland’s major ports. There was constant commercial traffic with coal exported and grain, wine, timber and other merchandise imported.

During the early 1900s ships constantly sailed in and out of Leith Docks. There were daily sailings to Queensferry, Aberdour, Kirkcaldy, North Berwick and cruises around the Bass Rock, as well as sailings to London three days a week and, for the rich, cruises to Holland and Belgium. Nowadays, Leith is still a commercial dock, and is also a popular destination for cruise ships from all over the world.

www.royalyachtbritannia.co.uk
www.oceanterminal.com

In 1779, under the command of John Paul Jones (‘Father of the United States Navy’ - or pirate!), the ‘Bon Homme Richard’ sailed into the Forth with two French ships. Their intention was to hold Leith and Edinburgh to ransom. Fortunately a storm blew up and Jones and his ships were blown out of the Forth. After this event it was realised that Leith had no protection and with plans afoot for new deep water docks, it was decided to build a fort in North Leith. The task was given to James Craig of New Town fame and the Fort was constructed in 1780. The Royal Artillery took over the fort in 1793.

This fort never fired a shot in anger and the last parade was in 1957 when the army left the fort, ending 164 years of connection with Leith. A gun (or cannon) was taken from the Fort up to Edinburgh Castle, for the first ever firing of the famous One O’clock Gun.

In the 1960s social housing was built in place of the Fort. This housing will in turn be replaced by new homes designed by Malcolm Fraser Architects and parts of the walls remain to remind us of Leith’s past.

www.malcolmfraser.co.uk

Thomas Morton Hall is part of the complex known as Leith Town Hall – a name for the complex which was never a town council headquarters, but actually a public building erected after the amalgamation of Edinburgh and Leith. It has a marriage suite upstairs which combines with the Registrar’s office attached to the south side of the library. It is more commonly known as the Leith Theatre complex now. The Thomas Morton Hall, Foyer, Marriage Suite and Main Theatre will be managed as a centre for arts, education, and events by the Leith Theatre Trust during 2014. They will be working towards the restoration of the Main Theatre and bringing it back into use.

Leith Library was originally opened in 1929 but suffered extensive bomb damage in 1941. It was re-commissioned as a library in 1955, but like all libraries its role has changed over the years and issuing books is now only one of the services it provides. Arts and crafts, games nights and other events for children and young people regularly take place here.

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/libraries
www.leiththeatretrust.org
Norwegian Seaman’s Church

In 1863 Johan Storjoh, a divinity graduate from Bergen travelled from Norway to Edinburgh to study. He found that there was no church for the Scandinavian seamen to worship in and so he set out to establish one. The Scottish architect James Simpson and Johan Schroder of Copenhagen designed the church, which was built in 1868 by the Norwegian Seamen’s Mission.

There is a stone in the garden called the Vim Stone, named after a ship (sailing from Norway) which ran aground in 1937 and was letting in water. However, a fragment of rock broke off and plugged the hole in the ship, which meant that it reached Leith safely. The rock fragment was removed from the ship and carried to the church, where it remains in the garden to this day.

Since 1989 the church has been the premises of the Leith School of Art, although it is still consecrated and used by the Norwegian community for special services and events.

www.leithschoolofart.co.uk

Hibernian Football Club

Hibernian Football Club was formed in the Cowgate area of the city in 1875, but since moving to the first Easter Road ground in 1880 they have been considered very much a Leith team.

The club has often been leaders in the field: The first British side to take part in the European Cup, the first with what was considered to be ‘real’ floodlights, the first in the entire country to feature shirt sponsorship and the first Scottish football club to install under soil heating.

Formed in the early days to satisfy the needs of the poor, the involvement with the community still exists to this day through the Hibernian Community Foundation, a charity set up for the local community with a focus on health, fitness and wellbeing; community football and learning and education.

Proud of its traditional links with Leith, Hibernian has one of the best stadiums in the country, a state of the art Training Centre and the necessary infrastructure to ensure future on-field success.

www.hibernianfc.co.uk
www.hibernianinthecommunity.org.uk
www.hibhistoricaltrust.org.uk

St Ninian’s Manse

A chapel to St Ninian was built by Robert Bellenden, Abbot of Holyrood, in 1493. This was altered and extended over the years, with a large church and manse being built in the 1600s. The distinctive Dutch style steeple was built in 1675. If you look at the building today you will see many dates which tell the story of its numerous extensions.

In 1606 St Ninian’s became North Leith Church, but as the village of North Leith grew it became too small for the congregation. As a result the congregation moved to a new church in Madeira Street in 1816.

The old church was sold and for some time was used by other religious groups and later for commercial purposes, including a warehouse. In 1997 the Cockburn Conservation Trust purchased the building and it was restored for office use.

The building is presently occupied by Simpson & Brown Architects.

www.simpsonandbrown.co.uk

The Citadel

After Oliver Cromwell defeated the Scottish army at Dunbar he occupied both Edinburgh and Leith. Under his Officer in Charge, General Monck, Leith was made a free port but he used the Leith buildings and churches to house his artillery and munitions and to stable his horses.

He needed a new fort or citadel and this was built in North Leith, on the site of the medieval chapel of St Nicholas. Construction was completed by 1656 but it was never used during conflict and after the Restoration in 1660 it was used for industrial purposes. Some of the first glass making factories in Leith were housed here.

The Citadel gradually fell into disuse and all that remains above ground today is the old Eastern Port or gate which opened on to what is now Dock Street.

Hibernian Football Club was formed in the Cowgate area of the city in 1875, but since moving to the first Easter Road ground in 1880 they have been considered very much a Leith team.

The club has often been leaders in the field: The first British side to take part in the European Cup, the first with what was considered to be ‘real’ floodlights, the first in the entire country to feature shirt sponsorship and the first Scottish football club to install under soil heating.

Formed in the early days to satisfy the needs of the poor, the involvement with the community still exists to this day through the Hibernian Community Foundation, a charity set up for the local community with a focus on health, fitness and wellbeing; community football and learning and education.

Proud of its traditional links with Leith, Hibernian has one of the best stadiums in the country, a state of the art Training Centre and the necessary infrastructure to ensure future on-field success.

www.hibernianfc.co.uk
www.hibernianinthecommunity.org.uk
www.hibhistoricaltrust.org.uk

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**Custom House**

As a major port, Leith had a Custom House from a very early date. In the Middle Ages customs duties were either ‘petty customs’ or ‘great customs’. Petty customs went into the Common Good funds of the Burgh – in Leith’s case these went to the funds for Edinburgh and Holyrood Abbey. Great customs provided a major source of revenue for the King and the Church. Officials called ‘customars’ were appointed to collect the King’s customs and ensure that he was not defrauded. From the 15th century the Custom House was located in the King’s Wark (site number 14 in this guidebook).

A new Custom House was erected on the northern shore of the river in 1812. It was designed by Robert Reid, one of the architects involved with the second New Town of Edinburgh, and the impressive coat of arms over the entrance is that of George III.

The building is presently owned by National Museums Scotland.

www.nms.ac.uk

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**Lamb’s House**

The Lamb family, very influential and rich Leith merchants, are said to have entertained Mary Queen of Scots on her return from France in 1561. However, there is no evidence that this took place on this site.

Built in 1610 by Andro Lamb, a Hanseatic merchant, the house is a fine example of an early 17th century merchant’s house used as both family home and warehouse.

In 1938 the house was saved and partly restored by the 4th Marquis of Bute whose son gifted it to the National Trust for Scotland in 1958. Following exterior restoration work, interior changes and the addition of a single storey hall built by the Edinburgh and Leith Old People’s Welfare Council, the building was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 1962.

Now owned by Groves-Raines Architects, it houses their offices and the Consulate of Iceland with residential accommodation on the upper floors.

www.grovesrainesarchitects.com

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**The Vaults**

From the Medieval period, wine was imported into Leith. Ships sailed from Leith to Bordeaux and returned with large quantities of wine for the Court, the Church and the nobility. Later there was an extensive trade in wines from Spain and Portugal.

It was difficult to transport the wine to Edinburgh for sale, as the route was a challenging journey over about a mile and a half of muddy uneven track. Leith merchants found ways round this requirement and used the deep cellars of the building known as the Vaults for storage of wine.

The building dates from 1682 and presently houses the headquarters of The Scotch Malt Whisky Society. It is Category A listed.

www.smws.co.uk

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**Public Art**

One of the most striking examples of public art in Leith is the mural in North Junction Street, which measures around 100 feet square. A group of local people involved with the Leith Local History Project supplied the subjects for the mural which includes shipbuilding, dock life, children at play, and (a strike demonstration) the National Hunger March of 1932. This was painted by the artists Tim Chalk and Paul Grime in 1986. There are also gable end murals in Admiralty Street, Bonnington Road and Halmyre Street.

Another example of public art in the area is the final sculpture of Antony Gormley’s work Six Times, which is located at the end of the old West End Pier (now in ruins). The life sized sculpture looks out towards where the river course meets the sea. The six sculptures that make up the work were commissioned by the National Galleries of Scotland. They are positioned in various locations along the Water of Leith, between Leith Docks and the National Gallery of Modern Art.

www.chalkworks.com
www.paulgrime.co.uk
www.nationalgalleries.org
Dr Andrew Bell was born in St Andrews in 1753. He studied at St Andrews University and was ordained into the Church of England. He served at an Episcopal Chapel in Leith and then became an army chaplain in India.

He was appointed as superintendent at the Madras Male Orphanage Asylum – an orphanage for soldiers’ sons. There he devised a system under which some of the older boys were given a lesson and then had to teach the other boys. He brought this system, known as the ‘Madras System’ back to Britain and by the time of his death in 1832 there were around 12,000 schools using it.

The building in Great Junction Street is no longer used as a school but has been converted into housing on the upper floors and Dr Bell’s Family Centre is on the ground floor. This is a drop-in family centre which provides a range of support services and facilities for local families with young children. There are also plans for the Himalayan Centre for Arts and Culture to open in 2014, in the part of the building that once housed the swimming pool.

www.drbells.co.uk
www.himalayancentre.org

Known to generations of Leithers as ‘Vickies’, the history of the Victoria Baths can be seen on the building itself. It was opened on 30 June 1899 by Provost Richard Mackie and was a proud achievement for Leith Town Council.

The Council appointed a Baths Sub-Committee who met at least seven times a year to decide on such matters as the appointment of a heating engineer, attendants, opening times and to make sure that costs were reasonable.

Leith Swimming Club used the pool from the time the baths opened and regularly held galas there.

At a time when few private homes had bathrooms, the Victoria also provided private plunge baths at either 6d (2.5 pence) for first class or 3d (1 penny) for second class. Season tickets were available for both swimming and bathing.

In more recent times the baths have been modernised and renamed as the Leith Victoria Swim Centre.

www.edinburghleisure.co.uk/venues/leith-victoria-swim-centre

The earliest mention of golf in Scotland dates from 1457. King James II instructed that the game be ‘utterly cryt downe and nocht usyt’ as it interfered with lawful, patriotic and essential archery practice. By 1505 however, James IV was enthusiastically playing the game, as there is mention of money for the king’s golf balls and clubs to ‘play at gowf at Leithe’. There were many hazards as the common ground was used for drilling soldiers, exercising horses, drying clothes, grazing cattle, weapons training, holding fairs and breeding food rabbits, not all simultaneously.

The world’s first rules of golf were drawn up in 1744 to be used on Leith Links.

A new statue of John Rattray is being commissioned by the Leith Rules Golf Society. John Rattray was the first captain of the club at the Links in 1744 and the signatory to the first rules. It is planned that the statue be designed by renowned Fife sculptor, David Annand.

www.leith-rules-golf.co.uk
www.davidannand.com

The Drill Hall was built in 1901 as the headquarters of the 7th Leith Battalion the Royal Scots.

This building is historically connected to a disaster that greatly affected the Leith community. The battalion was involved in the Gretna Train Disaster in 1915, and sadly over 200 people, including many young soldiers, were killed. The bodies of the victims were laid out in the Drill Hall, before the funeral procession to Rosebank Cemetery on Pilrig Street. A memorial stone stands in the cemetery and is flanked by two panels listing the names of all those who died in the disaster.

The Drill Hall has now been converted into an arts and education centre and is managed by Out of the Blue Arts and Education Trust.

www.outoftheblue.org.uk
Books about Leith

Campbell, Alexander – ‘The history of Leith, from the earliest accounts to the present period with a sketch of the antiquities of the town’ (William Reid and Son) 1827

Dick, Iain – ‘A Wee Look at Auld Leith’ (Persevere Publications) 1985 (ASIN B001PDQQ1G)


Irons, James – ‘Leith and its Antiquities from Earliest Times to the Close of the Nineteenth Century’ (Subscribers) 1898 (ISBN 9781845301491)


Mason, John (MA, PhD, FEIS) – ‘The history of Trinity House of Leith’ (McKenzie Vincent & Co. Ltd) 1957


Robertson, D.H (MD, FSA, Scot.) – ‘Sculptured stones of Leith with historical and antiquarian Notices’ (William Reid and Son) 1851


Wallace, Joyce – ‘Further Traditions of Trinity & Leith’ (Birlinn, Limited) 1990 (ISBN 9780859762823)


Some of these books are now out of print, but others are available to borrow from Leith Library and the Edinburgh and Scottish Collection in Central Library.

www.edinburgh.gov.uk/libraries
www.facebook.com/edinburghcentrallibrary

‘The Leith motto is ‘Persevere’. That is what Leith has done over the years and will continue to do so in the future’.

The City of Edinburgh Council
Inspiring Capital

www.edinburgh.gov.uk

Persevere

www.leithlocalhistorysociety.org.uk