

First edition Ordnance Survey map. Not to scale.

3.10 The Site Peripheries

In 1821 John Wood's plan shows a relatively narrow road following the water's edge between the Ness and Castlehill. This was called Gordon Place at the time, but is now called Castle Road. It is assumed that originally the 18th century military fortifications made use of the river on the West side and the implied terraces and ditches suggested on Hanoverian plans were subsequently smoothed away as part of the 19th century landscaping to the new Court House. It is also presumed that the stone, partly-retaining, boundary wall, extending the length of Castle Road and up View Place dates from this time.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1868 shows housing extending the length of Castle Street, but we know that this bank suffered a number of landslips, the most notable in 1932 when several houses were destroyed (without loss of life).

There were further landslides in 1954 and eventually the remainder of the buildings were demolished and the bank stabilised in 1967 as part of road widening works. These created what is now the Council car park on Castle Street and opened up the present view of Castlehill that would previously have not existed.



'Castleyard' in the early 20th century. Copyright Am Baile.



A view from the Courthouse looking South prior to 1932. This shows the castellated gatehouse and how the esplanade was hemmed in by buildings on the East side. Copyright Am Baile.

3.11 Timeline

For ease of reference the key dates in development of the overall site are listed on the timeline below.

1040	Macbeth, the Mormaer of Moray succeeds to the throne of Scotland
1124-53	The reign of David I, King of Scots. It was during this period that Inverness became a royal burgh
1165-71	Likely founding date of St Mary's, the parish church roughly on the site of the present High Church built in 1769-72
1228	Inverness burnt during a revolt against Alexander II (1214-49)
1308	Inverness captured by Robert the Bruce on his route to kingship
1411	The first wooden bridge destroyed by The Lord of the Isles on his way to the battle of Harlaw
1412-15	The Earl of Mar builds the first stone castle at Inverness
1436	First mention of the Tolbooth. It was again rebuilt in 1670 and 1789-92
1475	The earliest reference to the Mercat Cross
1508	The Earl of Huntly is appointed justiciar of the North by James IV. The Gordons would retain the position and castle until 1748
1560	The Reformation
1562	Mary, Queen of Scots lays siege to Inverness castle after being refused admittance by Alexander Gordon, the Earl of Gordon's Lieutenant-Governor. The castle is subsequently captured and Alexander Gordon is hanged



The building, much remodelled, in which Mary, Queen of Scots is reputed to have slept during the siege of 1562. This building stood on the North side of Bridge Street until 1969.

- 1585-95 Timothy Pont carries out the fieldwork for his maps that are eventually published by Blaeu in 1654. This clearly shows the castle (Pont map 8) and the bridge (Pont map 5)
- 1607 Union of the Crowns
- 1620-24 The loss of two bridges across the Ness
- 1638 The National Covenant
- 1649 The castle is besieged by Montrose during the Covenanting Wars
- 1651-60 Much of Scotland occupied by Cromwell
- 1652-7 The period over which the citadel was built by order of Oliver Cromwell
- 1670 The Town Council purchase a tenement, the former town residence of Lovat Fraser, on the site of the present Town House
- 1685 After a period of 21 years without a bridge, the first stone bridge across the Ness is built with funds raised by voluntary contributions. It takes the form of 7 arches and includes a prison cell. One of the coat of arms placed on this bridge at the time is subsequently rescued when the bridge is swept away in 1849 and placed on the gable of the present Town House when it is built in 1882
- 1689 The castle is garrisoned and fortified following the first Jacobite uprising
- 1693 Slezer's views of Inverness published in *Theatrum Scotiae* clearly shows the castle that was blown up in 1746
- 1697 The first paving of the streets takes place
- 1707 The Act of Union
- 1708 Construction of the first Town House on the site of the building purchased in 1670



The coat of arms rescued from the bridge when it was swept away in 1849

- 1714 Hannoverian Accession - George I
- 1715 Jacobite rebellion
- 1719 The castle is reported as in ruins following the Jacobite uprising in 1715 during which it was taken by Mackintosh of Mackintosh on behalf of James only to be recaptured by Kilravock and Lovat for the King
- 1725 General Wade appointed Commander-in-Chief, North Britain
- 1726-30 Around this date Inverness castle is extended and converted into a fortified barracks and renamed Fort George in honour of the King at a cost of £50,000
- 1746 The Fort George on Castlehill is blown up as one of the final acts of the conflict of 1745-6
- 1747 Work commences on the new Fort George at Ardersier
- 1750 The Town House of 1708 is enlarged in 1750
- 1760 The Highland Clearances begin
- 1768 Date the present Mercat Cross was relocated from the middle of the Exchange
- 1769-72 The Old High Church is rebuilt on, or close to, the medieval footprint
- 1776 The streets of Inverness are lit
- 1777 The Burgh Council purchase a fire engine.
- 1782 Removal of the town ports (gates)
- 1789-92 The Tolbooth and Steeple are rebuilt. From 1688 the Town Council have been meeting elsewhere, paving the way for the improvement of the Court and Prison on the site
- 1790 The Northern Meeting Rooms are founded
- 1790 The tower on Castlehill collapses



Inverness in North Britain - Lewis Petit 1716. Copyright NLS.

- 1792 The Inverness Academy opens
- 1796 The paving of the streets of Inverness. These were first recorded as being cleaned in 1746 by order of the Duke of Cumberland
- 1804 The Northern Infirmary is established to replace Dunbar's Hospital
- 1811 The population of Inverness reaches 10,750, more than 5 times of that in 1668
- 1815 the Literary Institution, The 'Atheneum' is founded
- 1817 Bridge Street widened to 10.3m
- 1821 John Wood's map of Inverness
- 1822 Opening of the Caledonian Canal
- 1824 Inverness Gas and Water Company founded, with gas lighting introduced from 1826 and the first sewers introduced in 1831 under Joseph Mitchell
- 1825 The first museum in Inverness is established
- 1831 Agreement is reached with the Duke of Gordon for the County Commissioners to purchase Castlehill
- 1833 Burgh Police (Scotland) Act significantly alters Local Government in Scotland and marks the beginnings of democratically elected Councils
- 1835 The Prisons Act established the requirement for prison inspection in Scotland
- 1836-38 The Court House on Castlehill is built in this period to the designs of William Burn
- 1836 Regular coach route to Perth established



The bust of William Tyler Fraser which was placed within the Courthouse, partly in recognition of his role in its establishment.

- 1848 Building of the Prison on Castlehill to the design of Thomas Brown II
- 1849 On the 25 January 1849 the stone bridge built in 1685 is destroyed in a flood. The burgh coat of arms is rescued and subsequently built into the new Town House
- 1855 The construction of the new suspension bridge.
- 1857 The General Police Act (Scotland) required each Scottish County and Burgh to establish a police force
- 1873 Duncan Grant of Bught leaves the Burgh £5,000 towards the cost of a new building. The eventual cost was £13,500. This bequest is celebrated in the family crests of Grant and Macrae being placed in the centre window of the civic hall within the new Town House
- 1875 Publication of the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey of Inverness. This map was actually surveyed in 1868
- 1876 Local practice Matthews and Lawrie win the national competition for the new Town House
- 1877 Following The Prisons (Scotland) Act of 1877 the Prison system is nationalised
- 1878 The demolition of the Old Town House dating from 1708
- 1882 The new Town House, to the design of William Lawrie, is formally opened by the Duke of Edinburgh
- 1889 Inverness-shire acquires a County Council in 1890 under Local Government (Scotland) Act 1889



A photograph from 1878 at the time of the demolition of the old Town House. Copyright Am Baile.

- 1894 The Council Chamber in the Town House is extended to a design by John Hinton Gall who inherited William Lawrie's practice
- 1898 Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee is commemorated by a set of new windows in the Town House designed by JH Stewart and executed by William Meikle & Sons, Glasgow
- 1900 The Mercat Cross is restored and installed in its present location
- 1904 Potentially the date for the present 18-20 Castle Street, now part of the Town House
- 1904 Ross and Macbeth convert the former Prison to County Offices and Police Station, inserting a County meeting room. This follows the building of Porterfield Prison in 1903 and the transfer of the prison function away from Castlehill
- 1905-07 Construction of the extension to the Town House designed in 1904 and won in competition by James R Rhind
- 1921 The first cabinet meeting held outside London is held in the Town House on 07 September 1921 in order to discuss the Irish crisis. Among those present are King George V, Lloyd George (PM), Austen Chamberlain, Stanley Baldwin and Winston Churchill
- 1929 King George V visits Inverness and receives the freedom the city outside the Town House
- 1932 Land slip on Castle Street destroys two properties. A further land slip takes place in 1954



The Town House bedecked for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1898. Copyright Am Baile.



The first British Cabinet meeting held outside London is held in Inverness Town House on 7 September 1921. Copyright Am Baile.

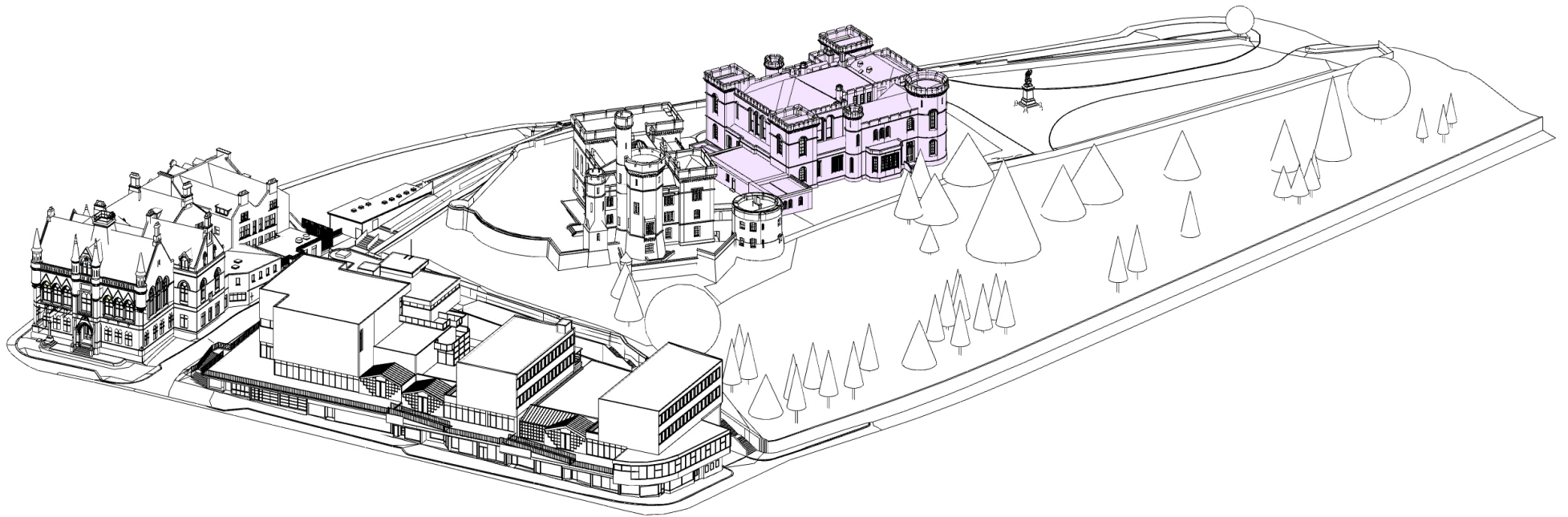
- 1959 The demolition of the suspension bridge built in 1855. This had been planned in 1938 but the war intervened
- 1961 The Town Council award the redevelopment of the south side of Bridge Street to Murrayfield Real Estate
- 1963-67 The demolition of the south side of Bridge Street commenced in 1963 with construction underway in 1965-67 to the design of Ian Burke, Martin & Partners
- 1967 Properties on Castle Street are demolished to make way for the carpark and 18-20 Castle St is absorbed into the neighbouring Town House. This follows successive land slides on this bank resulting in a decision to clear and strengthen the bank, at the same time widening Castle Street to improve traffic flow
- 1969 The north side of Bridge Street is demolished and rebuilt
- 1973 The initial extension of the Town House on Castlewynd. This was a vacant yard on the previous map dated 1956
- 1973 Local government reorganised
- 1976 A second courtroom is inserted into the entrance hall of the Couthouse
- 1978 Present boiler House annex to the Town House likely to be constructed at this time
- 1981 The Burgh Mercat Cross receives its category B listing
- 2015 Highlife Highland undertake an initial feasibility study into the reuse of the court buildings on Castlehill following a decision by The Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service to relocate to a new building
- March 2018 Work begins on site for The Inverness Justice Centre for The Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service. The design is by Reiach and Hall architects. This will pave the way for the reuse of the court buildings vacated on Castlehill from 2019



Demolition of Castle Street 1967. Copyright Am Baile.

4.0 Conservation Audit

While the previous section explored the historical context to the development of the site as a whole, this section will describe each different type of heritage and place it in a wider heritage context.



4.1 The Court House (South Block)

The Historic Environment Scotland listing describes the Court House of 1836 – 38 as follows:

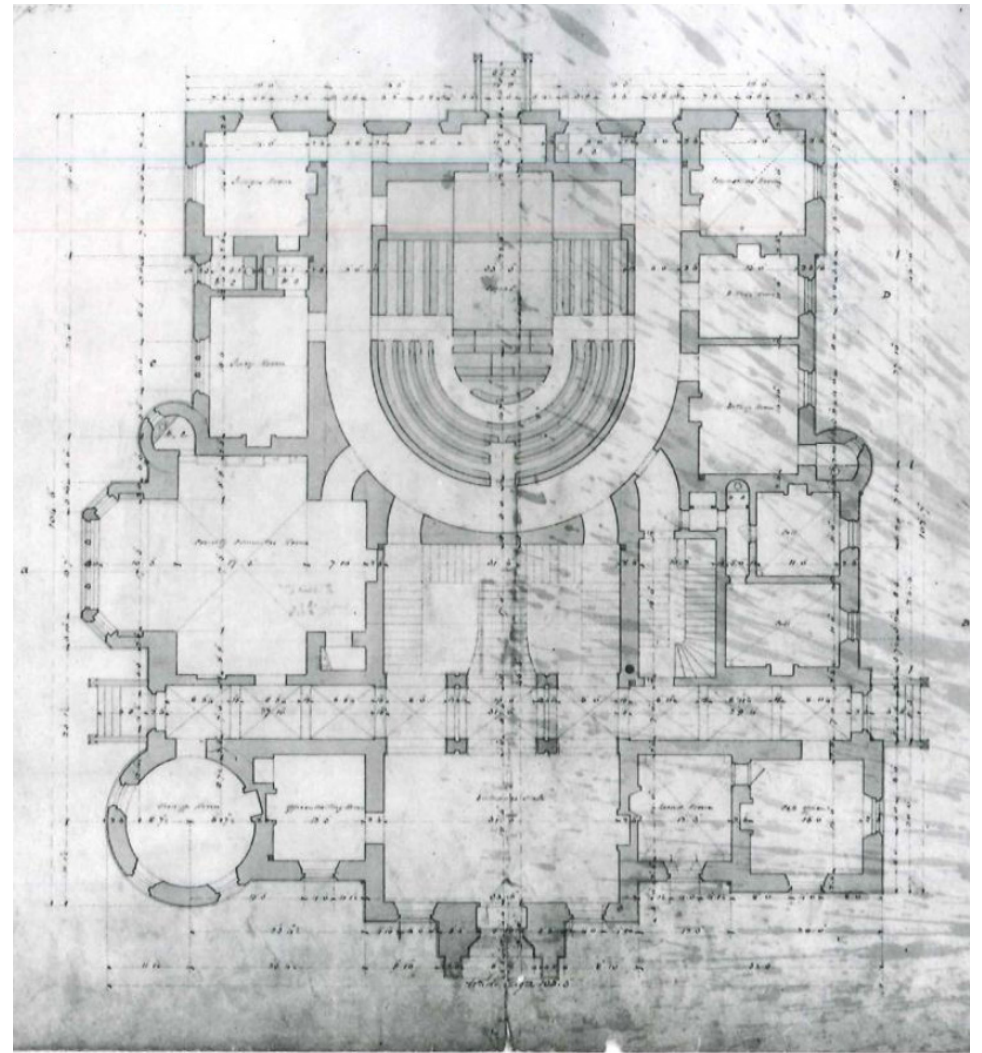
“Two storeys, with seven bay ashlar principal (South) elevation, and advanced and raised centre three bays; bay to the left (West) has a round tower; bay to the right (East) has a square plan tower. There is a centre round-arched door piece under the gablet and flanked by heavy buttresses. Predominantly round-arched windows linked by continuous hood moulding, the first floor windows at second and third bays are tri-partite. Crenellated parapet, machicolated at towers and with crosslets at towers and centre”.

The first thing to notice in this description is that it describes only the building frontage, the original axial approach from the Gatehouse, and in doing so, recognises that the building is still basically symmetrical and classical in its layout despite its castellated appearance.

The establishment of a Court House or County Building style in the early 19th century appeared to consciously distinguish them from the established civic architecture of the Tolbooth, with its vertical emphasis, and instead favoured horizontal.

Architects were also striving for a vocabulary that expressed awe and reverence for the law and civic authority. A preference for neo-classical was often used to express this and examples are the Court House at Perth (Robert Smirke, 1819) or at Ayr (Robert Wallace, 1818 – 22).

The Architect of the new Court House, William Burn (1789 – 1870) was the son of a Mason and Architect from Edinburgh, Robert Burn (1752 – 1815), who is best known for designing the Nelson Monument on Edinburgh's Calton Hill (1807 – 14). William served his apprenticeship with Sir Robert Smirke (1780 – 1867) and would go on to become one of Britain's most prestigious Architects of the period, known for his Greek revival public buildings and for developing the style known as Scottish Baronial.



William Burn, plan dated 1833

This work in Inverness however pre-dates this full blown castellated Baronial style and comes from that intermediary phase where castles were more generic in design and owed more to the work of Robert Adam (1728 – 92) where for example at Dalquharran (1790), a classical form has applied to it a castellated style without direct reference to Scottish castles. John Gifford, in the Buildings of Scotland series, is more dismissive, calling Inverness “an ashlar fronted toy fort”.

It is however, innovative in that it may be the first, and certainly is the first Scottish Court House to be built in a castellated style.

It was not however the earliest Prison as Archibald Elliot had previously continued the defensive castellated style of Robert Adam’s Edinburgh Bridewell (built posthumously 1795) when remodelling it to form Calton Prison, in 1815.

Perhaps it was the fact that Burn’s original commission in 1821 had been for both a Prison and Court House that suggested that the castellated was appropriate or more likely a wish among the Commissioners of Supply that Inverness should once again have a Castle that resulted in this break with the norm. Whichever it was, the use of a castellated form still clearly signifies the secular authority that would be expected for a court building.

Possibly it is also the fact that William Burn’s involvement had first been discussed as far back as 1822 that the built form of 1838 was perhaps already behind the times, as by this time the transition in his architectural style from the castellated to the Scots Baronial had taken place, first at Tynninghame (1829) and then the almost contemporaneous Invergowrie (1837). Alongside these developments and the work of others like David Hamilton at Dunlop House in 1831 – 34, William Burn was also drawing on the ‘Neo-Tudor’, possibly best seen at Inverness in the interior detail.

The Historic Environment Scotland listing continues by describing the interior as follows:

“The interior to the Court House (was seen in 2014) and is arranged with the Court and Public Offices, Faculty Library and Courtroom on the ground floor, all accessed from a large centre Hall with colonnade opening into an imperial stair rising under a coffered barrel vault”.

The building has a clear plan and is basically symmetrical. At the heart of the building is an essentially unaltered staircase lit from high-level windows. This was once approached axially until a second Courtroom was inserted, but is now served by the lateral East – West corridor terminating in doors at either end.

Behind the staircase and surrounded by a horseshoe corridor is a D-shaped and galleried Courtroom lit by high-level windows and with a classical coffered ceiling. The design cleverly ensures that the Court House windows are never overlooked, despite the original intention that access would be available for the public to the roof in order to enjoy the view.

This space retains its Gothic sounding board canopy above the Judge’s bench, but the ground floor furnishings, including dock and witness box, were replaced in the 1980s, save for the consoled curvilinear bench ends. Likewise the raked gallery seating set over the horseshoe corridor has been removed and a flat floor inserted.

Although this court layout is not unique, and a similar example pre-dates it at Smirke’s Perth County Buildings (1819), the semi-circular plan is unusual.

The overall plan of the building, which is reminiscent of Burn’s country house planning, also set a precedent and a similar plan is used by Peddie & Kinnear at Greenock Sheriff Court in 1863.

While at ground floor level on the East side of the Court House, there are offices, a service stair and accommodation for the jury, the West side that enjoys views across the Ness contain a suite of offices for the Sheriff, the Judge and what became the Faculty Library from at least 1907, was originally the County Meeting Room.