



History of the Development of St Andrews Harbour

In its earliest form, the harbour consisted of the unimproved shores of the Kinness Burn, whose waters were deflected towards the East (from the original Northwards direction of flow) by the natural rock skerries on the shore of St Andrews Bay. Vessels using the harbour in the mediaeval period presumably beached themselves in the estuary for loading and unloading purposes.

In the 14th century the lands of St Andrews Priory were enclosed by the building of the precinct wall which remains a prominent feature adjacent to the present day harbour. The wall had a substantial gateway (the Mill Port) opening onto the harbour at The Shore and the wall itself confined non-Priory traffic approaching the harbour to a narrow strip of land on the left bank of the Kinness Burn. The narrowness of this strip of land between the Priory Wall and Harbour became increasingly a problem over the years and has had a significant effect upon the subsequent development of the quays in the Inner Harbour.

By the later 16th century it is clear that built quays and piers were in existence at the harbour. The Geddy Plan¹, of c.1580, clearly illustrates structures of timber and stone flanking the entrance channel to the harbour and extending ell inland along the burn. The line of the present North Pier at its shoreward end relates to these 16th century structures, although the present form of the pier is largely the product of 18th and 19th century rebuilding.

This North Pier is a classic example of Scottish vernacular harbour work. It comprises a pier of rubble construction, with a substantial bulwark on its seaward face, to protect the wide quay from overtopping seas in heavy weather. The course of the pier is somewhat crooked, reflecting the strategy of the builders to construct it from strong point to strong point along the natural rock skerry which forms its foundation. The dry-stone, rubble construction of this pier gives it great character and the surfaces reveal many examples of repairs to the pier, using a variety of different strategies for placing the stones. The outer, seaward face of this pier contains in places re-used stone with rolled moulded margins, presumably coming from the ruined castle or cathedral in the 18th and 19th centuries. The North pier has a number of important features along its length, including cyclopean stone mooring pawls, stone stairs leading to the bulwark and a stone slipway in the harbour where the pier joins the Shorehead quay. There is also a stone-built ramp at the root of the pier leading down onto the shore. This ramp is of indeterminate age but it connects with a rock-cut roadway leading towards the castle, where there was an important landing beach. The outer, seaward end of the North pier is of 19th and 20th century date, reflecting efforts to improve the access to the harbour in heavy weather. It is of typical Victorian and later cement construction, much more rectilinear than the earlier work at the shoreward end. This later extension is fitted with cast-iron mooring pawls.

At its Western end, the North Pier turns through a right-angle where it joins the Shorehead Quay. This quay face is of coursed masonry with wooden bandering at intervals along its length. It is backed by a wide quay, extensively used by local fishermen for their gear, and a roadway. At the Southern end, this Shorehead Quay connects with a short transverse pier that extends into the harbour separating the Inner and Outer Harbours. This short pier is of considerable age, appearing in the Geddy Plan. The end of it has been extended at a more

¹ An image of the Geddy Plan can be found on the website of the National Library of Scotland,
<http://digital.nls.uk/golf-in-scotland/elite/geddy-st-andrews.html>



recent date to accommodate the sluice gates, which are first mentioned in the early 18th century² (Douglass, 1728), but which have been replaced on a number of occasions since. The main function of these gates today is to flush sediment from the Outer Harbour, but closing the gates also serves to provide a quieter lie for vessels in the Inner Harbour during heavy weather. The present gates are a set transferred to St Andrews, reputedly from a site on the Caledonian Canal. They have a winch associated with them for opening the gates. [Ed. Since writing, the gates described were swept from their hinges during a storm in the autumn of 2012. New gates of the same design, but having improved hydraulic operation were installed in June 2013].

Upstream from the sluice gates the face of the quay opposite The Shore is of well-coursed masonry, backed by a narrow quay and roadway. The Priory Precinct wall opposite this quay shows the remains of the Harbour Master's Office, built as a lean-to structure South of the Mill Port leading into the Priory Precinct. South of this office can be seen blocked door and window openings for a series of booths which are of much earlier date. The stonework is 16th century in type and the booths may be just discerned on The Geddy Plan. Their presence here suggests considerable importance for the Inner Harbour as a commercial centre in early modern times. The line of the quay wall on The Shore is angled outwards into the harbour just South of the Mill Port. This represents a later modification to the harbour, to widen the roadway to assist the turning of vehicles coming through the Mill Port and heading for the Outer Harbour. Recent archaeological evidence, arising from repairs to the quay wall in the Inner Harbour, show that this process of widening at this point has occurred more than once, most recently in 1846.

The right bank of the Kinness Burn is flanked at the Inner Harbour by links and in the Outer Harbour by a stone cross pier, having a later groyne on its outer, seaward, face. At the seaward end, the links have been revetted with a stone wall and a number of wooden huts are located there. The stonework of the Cross Pier is more homogeneous than that of the North Pier and is of a different, distinctive pattern. It is of the 18th century date. The cement groyne dates from 1900 and was built to protect the harbour mouth from the surge reflected from the beach at the East Bents during heavy weather. One interesting feature in the harbour close to the inner face of the Cross Pier is the remains of several wooden posts socketed into the natural rock. These may be the remains of the timber and stone pier shown in the Geddy Plan at this location and are worthy of more detailed research.

In summary, the harbour at St Andrews developed from a mediaeval creek-mouth haven without built harbour-works. By the 16th century the creek mouth was protected by an extensive pier and bulwark to seaward and had linear masonry quays within to accommodate shipping. The separation of the Inner and Outer Harbours was present at this date and was later, in the 18th century, reinforced by the introduction of gates between the two basins. There has been an intimate relationship between the harbour and the Priory since the 14th century and the Priory Precinct wall has had an influence upon the development and widening of the quays, particularly at The Shore in the Inner Harbour. The protective North Pier and bulwark were extended in the 19th century and other improvements were made in the attempt to make the harbour safe, but it remains today a tidal harbour, dry at low water (unless the gates are used to retain water in the Inner Harbour). It is in all respects a good example of the vernacular tradition in Scottish harbour works.

² William Douglass, *Some historical remarks on the city of St. Andrews in North-Britain. With a particular account of the ruinous condition of the harbour ... and of what importance the repairing of it will be, to all concern'd in trade and navigation.*, London 1728