



Case information

Case ID	300018260
File Reference	HGH/B/GA/60
Name of Site	Town House including Municipal Offices, Court Houses and Tolbooth, Castle Street and 2 Broad Street, Aberdeen

Local Authority	City of Aberdeen Council		
National Grid Reference	NJ 94370 06358		
Designation No. (if any)	LB19990		
Designation Type	Listed Building	Current Category of Listing	A
Case Type	Amendment		

Start Date	2014 (Scottish Court Houses Listing Review 2014-16)
Decision Date	07/02/2017

1. Decision

In our current state of knowledge, Aberdeen Town House continues to meet the criteria for listing. The statutory listing address and the listed building record has been amended. The category of listing remains at A.

Previous Statutory Address	Castle Street and 2 Broad Street, Town House, Including Municipal Offices, Court Houses and Tolbooth
Amended Statutory Address	Aberdeen Town House including Municipal Offices, Council Chambers, Court Houses and Tolbooth, Castle Street and 2 Broad Street, Aberdeen

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

Aberdeen Town House was listed at category A on 12/01/1967. The listing was reviewed in 2007.

The building is located within the Union Street Conservation Area of Aberdeen.

2.2 Development Proposals

There is an approved Listed Building Consent application (Ref: 141462) for carrying out condition and suitability works, comprising of new lead work, re-slate rear elevations, slate work repairs to street facing elevations, dormer repairs, sarking board repairs, masonry repairs to all roof areas including works to the clock tower. Works are currently in progress (November 2016).

For further details see Aberdeen City Planning portal:

<https://publicaccess.aberdeencity.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=ZZZY9JBZSK655>

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

Aberdeen Town House was considered for amendment as part of the Scottish Court Houses Listing Review 2014-16. The amendment was considered in order to clarify the statutory listing address.

The Municipal Offices and Council Chambers were visited on 12/08/2015 and the interior and exterior of this part of the building were seen at this visit. The Town House has not been visited and has been assessed using available information, including photographs taken as part of the 2007 listing review.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

The building was found to continue to meet the criteria for listing. The later additions dating to around 1975 have been assessed and are considered to meet the criteria for listing.

An assessment against the listing criteria was carried out. See **Annex A**.

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 2, pp. 51-53.

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Listing Criteria*

Aberdeen Town House including Municipal Offices, City Chambers, Court Houses and Tolbooth, Castle Street and 2 Broad Street, Aberdeen

1. Description

Aberdeen Town House was built in 1868-74 by John Dick Peddie and Charles George Hood Kinnear. It incorporates the remaining part of the Tolbooth of 1615-29 by Thomas Watson of Old Rayne at the east, and includes the City Chambers to Broad Street, added in 1975 by the Aberdeen City Architect's Department, with Ian Ferguson and Tom Campbell Watson as its chief architects.

The 1868-74 Town House is a 4-storey and attic, 16-bay, Scots Baronial turreted municipal building with an advanced 6-stage corbelled and bartizaned square-plan, 5-stage clock tower with a spire to the west. The building is situated on a prominent and significant corner site in the city centre and is of grey granite ashlar. It has a base course, string courses, cill courses and a parapet. The ground floor has segmental-arched arcading and there are smaller, round-arched openings at the first floor. There are small gabled roof dormers with finials.

The Castle Street elevation has a central 6-panel 2-leaf timber entrance door. The central 5 bays have double-height segmental-arched openings at the second and third floors with bipartite windows and multifoil openings above. An advanced bay to the far right has the Tolbooth behind it. A vertical metal sundial is set high on the wall to the far right and carries the motto UT UMBRA SIC FUGIT VITA (Life flies like a shadow). The tower to the far left has a round-arched doorway with steps leading to a timber and glass revolving entrance door with a semi-circular fanlight above. Above the entrance is a corbelled balcony and the 5th stage of the tower has with louvred openings with clock faces set in the gables above. The spire is finialled and crocketed.

The 17th century Tolbooth is a rubble, square-plan castellated tower with corbelled balustraded parapet and clock faces on 3 sides and which is partly enmeshed in later buildings. Its polygonal steeple has blind round-arched openings and a decorative lead spire. It is internally connected to the 19th century Town House to the west.

The windows on the street elevations are predominantly plate glass in timber sash and case frames. The roof has grey slates and there are tall, narrow, coped ridge chimney stacks.

The interior was seen in 2007 and has an impressive decorative scheme with detailing dating from the 17th and mid 19th century. The municipal offices and courts have a central granite imperial stair with a galleried landing and there is a further tall open-well spiral staircase with a decorative cast iron baluster and timber rail. The main reception hall has timber panelling, a fine decorative timber hammerbeam roof and a minstrels' gallery. There are other timber panelled rooms with coffered ceilings, one of which has heraldic shields. There is decorative plaster cornicing and

4 and 6 panel timber doors throughout and several large classical, granite chimneypieces. The courts are largely modernised, but one court has timber pews, gallery and bench. The Tolbooth has stone-flagged floors, a narrow spiral stair, several small internal rooms, some of which are vaulted with original heavy timber iron bound yetts. There is a remnant of round-arched pilastered arcading at the west wall and a timber bell frame.

The City Chambers on Broad Street is linked to the Town House by a raised corridor. It is a 4-storey, flat-roofed building, dated 1975, with paired vertical full height columns and contrasting grey walls. There are pilotis to the north, forming an open space under the first storey and there is curved advanced first floor window at the west elevation. The majority of the windows are narrow vertical openings.

The interior was seen in 2007 and has a 1970s decorative scheme, including a cantilvered steel staircase and a double-height, timber panelled council chamber.

2. Assessment Against the Listing Criteria (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 51-52

Criteria for determining whether a building is of 'special architectural or historic interest' for listing under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents]

To be listed, a building need not meet all the listing criteria. The criteria provide a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions.

2.1 Age and Rarity

Aberdeen Town House largely date from three periods; the Tolbooth of 1615-29, the substantial remodelling and extension of the Town House from 1868-74 and the new City Chambers from 1975.

In 1616 Thomas Watson, a mason from Old Rayne in Aberdeenshire, was employed to build a Tolbooth in Aberdeen. A Parliamentary Act, passed in 1597, required all burghs to erect prisons and the Tolbooth was also the place where tolls and customs taxes were collected and where the burgh council held their meetings. Over the next 200 years the Tolbooth was extended; a steeple was added in 1629 and the tower extended in 1704. In 1818-20 a new court house to the north of the town house was built to designs by John Smith, which involved the rebuilding of the south (street) elevation of the Tolbooth and completing significant internal alterations. Smith's Town House and court was replaced by the Peddie and Kinnear building and only the prison tower, or warehouse of the Tolbooth remains. The large scale Ordnance Survey map of 1866 shows the layout of the former Town House, with the courtroom to the rear. In 1975, the building was extended to the north by the city's Architect's Department and this extension houses the City Chambers.

By the second half of the 19th century there was a growing impetus for improved municipal buildings and many town halls were built or extended, including Aberdeen, Edinburgh (1859 and later) and Glasgow (circa 1890). Also, as part of a comprehensive review of the adequacy of Scottish sheriff courts under the Sheriff Court Houses (Scotland) Act of 1860, the accommodation at Aberdeen court house was found to be inadequate, and it was recommended that the Town House be

redeveloped as part of an improvement scheme. The local administrative body at the time, The Commissioners of Supply, appointed a committee to obtain plans for a new sheriff court and Town House and a limited competition was held in 1861 between the Town's architect William Smith, James Matthews and Peddie & Kinnear, with the latter's elaborate baronial design being chosen.

Royal Assent was given to the Aberdeen County and Municipal Buildings Act 1866 which gave permission for a court house for the county and city of Aberdeen; a hall for public meetings; a Town House for the City with offices for Staff and a building for the accommodation of the Police Commissioners and their staff. Work commenced in 1867 on the demolition of buildings on the site (including the old Town House) at the junction of Castle Street/Union Street and Broad Street.

The development of the court house as a building type in Scotland follows the history of the Scottish legal system and wider government reforms. The introduction of the Sheriff Court Houses (Scotland) Act of 1860 gave a major impetus to the increase and improvement of court accommodation and this provision of central funding was followed by the most active period of sheriff court house construction in the history of the Scottish legal system and many new court houses were built or reworked after this date.

Court houses constructed after 1860 generally had a solely legal purpose and did not incorporate a prison, other than temporary holding cells. The courts were designed in a variety of architectural styles many relying heavily on Scots Baronial features to reference the fortified Scottish building tradition. Newly constructed court buildings in the second half of the 19th century mostly dispensed with large public spaces such as county halls and instead provided bespoke office accommodation for the sheriff, judge and clerks. At Aberdeen, however, the court and its associated rooms are integral to the large building of the Town House, and the court accommodation lies to the rear, with the Council rooms to the front.

Aberdeen Town House is of outstanding architectural significance, as it was the first major municipal complex to be built in Scotland since the City and County Buildings in Glasgow of 1844 and its fine Scots baronial design was immensely influential in the design of later municipal and judicial buildings in Scotland. The 1975 extension is a fine example of 1970s civic architecture and coincided with the reorganisation in 1975 of Scottish local authorities into regions with the City of Aberdeen coming under the auspices of Grampian Region. In the same period, recent unprecedented success in North Sea oil extraction had a significant impact on public building projects in the city. The Tolbooth is one of Aberdeen's oldest buildings and its integration with the two phases of the newer municipal buildings makes this building, as a whole, the embodiment of civic affairs in Aberdeen and the administrative centre of Aberdeen since the 17th century.

2.2 Architectural or Historic Interest

Interior

The interior detailing of the Tolbooth and the Town House predominantly dates to the mid-19th century remodelling of the site and is of very high quality, especially to the

municipal rooms. It demonstrates the wealth of 19th century Aberdeen and is appropriate for the important civic status of this building. The detailing includes a splendid geometric staircase leading to a magnificent double height hall at the first floor and Heraldic decoration to the ceiling in the manner of St Machar's Cathedral (listed at category A, LB19957).

The Tolbooth cells are particularly rare as many from the 17th century no longer survive.

The interior of the 1975 extension is of a high quality design and specification, confirming the confidence of the city at this time. Of particular note is the timber lined Council Chamber and the cantilevered steel and glass staircase.

Plan form

The building sits on a corner site and incorporates the earlier Tolbooth. Both of these have informed the asymmetrical and extensive plan form of the building. The retention of the Tolbooth has historical interest. Internally, the layout of the rooms is typical in having offices on the ground floor with the more elaborate and public rooms on the 1st floor.

Technological excellence or innovation, material or design quality

As prime civic buildings, courts and town houses usually had a significant amount of decorative work on the exterior and Aberdeen Town House is no exception to this. The building is a masterful composition of Scots Baronial features with Franco-Flemish influences and demonstrates the confident adaptation of this mid-19th century country house style to public architecture. The features of this style were reminiscent of those used in traditional fortified Scottish buildings and include bartizans, machiolations, balconies, a prominent tower and crow steps, and were highly appropriate for the use in a building connected with law and justice and important municipal functions.

Peddie and Kinnear were the first to use this style for this municipal and court building at Aberdeen and other court buildings quickly followed suit including Selkirk (David Rhind, 1869-70, listed at category B, LB 43747), Kirkcaldy (James Gillespie, 1893, listed at category B, LB44108) and Greenock (1867, Peddie and Kinnear, LB34133, category B).

This imposing tower, the continuous arcading and the ornate interior decoration all contribute to the importance of the building. The arcading is a particularly impressive streetscape feature. Rising above the wallhead at the east end of the buildings is the elaborate spire of the old Tolbooth and this is balanced by the dominant square tower of the west end.

The 1975 extension to the buildings echoes the vertical form and fortified character of the Victorian Town house in the full height double columns and the small, narrow windows. The building is also conceived on a similar grand scale and to a high specification.

The partnership of Edinburgh architects of John Dick Peddie and Charles George Hood Kinnear existed between 1856 and 1878 and it continued as a leading practice in Scotland up to the Second World War. Kinnear's earlier association with William Burn and David Bryce was a significant influence on the practice. The

partnership was very successful from the beginning and there were numerous commissions for high status public and commercial buildings, schools and churches across Scotland. Aberdeen Town House is considered to be one Peddie and Kinnear's best buildings.

Thomas Campbell Watson was born in November 1914 and carried out most of his work in Aberdeen. He was the Aberdeen City Architect from 1970-1975.

Setting

Castle Street, also known as the Castlegate, is one of the oldest areas in Aberdeen and has been the market place since the 12th century. The Town House and Tolbooth are the dominant buildings in this area, emphasising the traditional civic history of the site and the tower is a major landmark in the city.

The building is situated within the Union Street Conservation Area of Aberdeen City.

Regional variations

There are no known regional variations.

2.3 Close Historical Associations

There are no known associations with a person or event of national importance at present (2016).

3. Working with the Principles of Listing (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 53

In choosing buildings within the above broad headings particular attention is paid to:

- a. special value within building types*
- b. contribution to an architecturally or historically interesting group*
- c. the impact of a grouping of buildings*
- d. authenticity*

When working with the principles of listing Aberdeen Town House has particular interest under a and d.

a. Aberdeen Town House is an outstanding example of a civic building in a central location.

d. Aberdeen Town House has retained much of its external form and has a wealth of internal features. The addition of 1970s City Chambers was conceived on a similar scale and ambition as the 19th century phase.

4. Summary of Assessment Against the Listing Criteria**

Aberdeen Town House, including municipal offices, court house, Tolbooth and city chambers, is a significant example of civic architecture and is of outstanding importance because of its fine and influential Scots baronial design with exceptional interior scheme, conceived by the highly respected architects Peddie and Kinnear. The imposing scale of the building with its landmark tower and its striking grey and

white 1975 extension, dominates the east end of Union Street in Aberdeen city centre. It incorporates an early 17th century Tolbooth, one of the oldest buildings in Aberdeen and its integration with the newer Municipal buildings provides a connection between the old burgh of Aberdeen and the new-found confidence and wealth of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is the embodiment of civic affairs in Aberdeen.

In our current state of knowledge it continues to meet the criteria for listing.

5. Category of Listing

Categories of listing are non-statutory and buildings are assigned a category (A, B or C) according to their relative importance following the assessment against the criteria for listing.

Category definitions are found at: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/what-is-listing/>

Category A listed buildings are those of national or international importance, either architectural or historic. When compared with municipal buildings and court houses of a similar date and size, the architectural and historic interest of the Aberdeen Town House is considered to continue to be most appropriately recognised at category A, denoting its national significance.

6. Other Information

N/A

7. References

Canmore: <http://canmore.org.uk/> CANMORE ID 20154

Maps

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The Scottish Civic Trust (1983). *Historic Buildings at Work*. Glasgow: Scottish Civic Trust. p.44-45.

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Dictionary of Scottish Architects. Aberdeen Municipal Buildings and Tolbooth at http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/building_full.php?id=211922 (accessed 29/12/2014).

Dictionary of Scottish Architects. Thomas Campbell Watson at http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=400253 (accessed 24/11/2016).

Other Information

Walker, D. M. (2002) Peddie and Kinnear. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of St Andrews.

* This assessment is based on our current state of knowledge and has been prepared for the purpose of consultation or to provide a view on the special interest of a building. This assessment is a consultation document and will form the basis of any new or updated listed building record should the structure be listed. The content of this assessment may change to take into account further information received as a result of the consultation process.

** A building may be found to meet the listing criteria but in some circumstances may not be added to the list. See 'When might Historic Environment Scotland list a building' at <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/what-is-listing/>