

Welcome to this 'virtual guided walk' around the beautiful and ancient Royal Burgh of Crail in the company of one of Crail's most experienced and knowledgeable guides - Mr Raeburn Archibald.



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We're going to start our tour outside the **Tolbooth** at the western end of **Marketgate**, but before we do let's just spend a few moments talking about the history of Crail itself.

Clearly, Crail's roots lay in medieval times although there is evidence of early Christian settlements here as early as the 8th century.

First mentions of the town date back to the 12th century, but one can really say that our fame started when Crail was made a Royal Burgh in 1310 by Robert the Bruce.

Royal Burgh status was later confirmed by a well known Fifer - King Charles I who, believe it or not, was born in Dunfermline.

But what exactly was a Royal Burgh?

Introduced by King David I, Royal Burghs were there to encourage trade and as well as being given Royal permission to hold a Market privileges included Royal Protection. That meant that it could trade outwith the Royal Burgh. Its area was from The Kenly Burn at Boar hills as far south as Leven and made it one of the largest medieval markets in Scotland. In return Royal Burghs were required to provide troops for the Crown if requested.

Strategically situated between the ancient political centre of Fife - Dunfermline and the religious centre - St. Andrews, Crail is the oldest Royal Burgh in Fife and demonstrates just how important Crail was both as a trading town and as a stronghold for the Crown.

So, now we know a little about its history, let's have a look at some of the landmarks on our tour, starting with **The Tolbooth (1)**.



The Tolbooth was originally the administrative centre of the Burgh and housed the jail, but it wasn't always located where it is today. Originally it was sited in the **Marketgate** near the church but was allowed to degenerate into a rather poor state causing the Scottish Parliament of the day to order Crail to build a better Tolbooth more suited to the status of the Royal Burgh.

So a new, grander Tolbooth was built in 1598 on it's present site at a cost of 1000 merks (about £55). The lower part was the prison with upper and lower cells. The upper story contains the Town Hall and used to be entered from the back by a staircase. The windows are blanked off and painted to look like the other windows so that the residents opposite were not overlooked.



In 1702 - the 'Toon Knock' - or 'Town Clock', was moved from the church to a wooden tower atop the Tollbooth. This was clearly a much better location for the clock as its new position was much nearer the centre of the Burgh rather than somewhat on the edge at the Church. And if we remember that, in those times, as most of the population would not own their own timepieces the chiming of the Town Clock measured the passing of the day for the good people of Crail.



The wooden clock tower was replaced in 1776 by the current stone tower and shows a Dutch influence - not surprising given that Crail, at that time, had strong trading links with The Low Countries.

Indeed, the bell, which still chimes the hours today, was of Dutch origin and was cast in 1520. The bell still strikes the curfew at 10.00pm thirteen times to tell the residents to cover the fire and go to bed.

Although the bell remains, the hall to the side of the Tower was rebuilt in 1814 and a new clock installed in 1866.



On the side of the Tollbooth we can see an early version of the Town Crest - a fishing boat with four sailors representing the four original trades of Crail - today's crest shows seven sailors.

Before we leave the Tolbooth, look right to the top of the tower where you will see a 19th century windvane in the form of a Crail capon (herring), one of Crail's most famous exports.

And finally, we can see the 'Loupin stane' - a large stone positioned to assist you to get on and off your horse.



In medieval times if you wished to become a Burgess of the town you would be given a strip of land (tenement or Rigg) to keep animals or grow crops and you would be required to build a stone house within 2 years. The rigg was a long strip of land which is why Marketgate and Nethergate are so far apart. You'll see just how long these riggs were when you walk down Kirk Wynd a little later.



Looking at the houses here in **Marketgate**, we see many pantile roofs. These tiles were used from the 17th century, originally being imported to Scotland from the Low Countries, possibly as ballast in ships. In later years, the tiles were made in Scotland and their use spread inland from the East Coastal towns.

Move along to the **Mercat Cross (2)** which showed the burgh status. This was also where proclamations were made and punishments meted out – sometimes using the 'jougs' – a metal collar fixed to the cross in which miscreants would be locked, in effect a Scottish pillory.



Originally beside the Tolbooth the 17th century cross was moved to its present position in 1887 when the cap, a Unicorn, (the symbol of a Royal Burgh) and steps were added.



Crossing to the other side of Marketgate we find **The Auld Hoose (3)**. Above the front door is a marriage lintel dated 1686 reflecting one of the earliest owners of this ancient house - George Dishington and Isobel Strachan. The house is actually older than 1686 and a part of the garden wall has been dated to 1540. Next door is the much newer **Kirkmay House** built in 1817 and which shows a significant change in architectural styles over the previous two centuries.

On South Marketgate near the Kirk Hall is a house **(4)** formerly occupied by **Kingo Family** of Forelands who were hand loom weavers. Above the door is a marriage lintel dated 1759 for the owners, Thomas Kingo and Barbara Ness. Thomas Kingo was deacon of the weavers of Crail in 1590. He sailed to Denmark to weave tapestries for the Kronberg Palace, Elsinor and took his son Hans with him. Hans married and had a son called Thomas who was born at Slagerup in 1634. He eventually became bishop Kingo of Fyen in 1682 and died in 1732. He was a celebrated hymn writer. A copy of his psalms published in 1689 (first addition) is in Crail Museum.



Crossing back over Marketgate once more we come to a house to the left of the church gates and where we will find at its corner the 'Blue Stane' **(5)**, a stone unlike any others in the area. According to local legend, it was thrown from the Isle of May by the Devil to damage Crail church. The stone split in mid-air, one piece landing here and the other landing on Balcomie Beach near Fife Ness, the most easterly point of Fife. There is an indentation on the stone where the Devil's hand has melted the rock - and it is considered good luck to slide down this. There are those who have come up with the ridiculous idea that the stone is a glacial deposit, such nonsense!

Almost opposite you and back across Marketgate are the Church gates **(6)** - erected as a war memorial after WW1. This was the site



of old school until 1824 and there may have been a school here in the 16th Century when Crail Church was elevated (in 1517) to a Collegiate Church.

The Church (7) itself was built around the mid 12th century and was consecrated by Bishop De Bernham of St Andrews in 1243. Originally the Church was dedicated to St Maolrubh of Applecross (rufus the red head) but later changed to St Mary when Celtic saints fell out of favour with the Roman Church.



In 1559 John Knox preached here before he went to St Andrews and the Crail congregation were enthused to tear down the rich tapestries and decorations for which the church was then famous.

Between 1648 and 1661 James Sharpe was parish priest. He later became Archbishop Sharpe who was murdered on Magus Moor in 1679. There have been only 6 ministers since 1790. The Rev Robert Glenning was the minister for the shortest time 1 May 1788 to the 25 April 1789. He became engaged to two ladies at the same time!

On the tower (built 13th century) there is a consecration cross and also scores made by Crail men sharpening arrow tips on their way to adjacent Bow Butts for compulsory archery practice. Inside the Church, there is a 8th century pictish cross slab somewhat worn as it was used as a paving stone.

The organ was purchased in 1936 from Hutchison's house in Kirkcaldy for £600 and is still in use having recently been refurbished.

Apart from Sunday services, to which all are welcome, the Church is open from 2pm to 4 pm Tuesday to Thursday in the summer.

Behind the Church lies The Dead House (8) built in 1826 to protect corpses from resurrectionists who sold new corpses to Medical Schools (as did the more infamous Burke and Hare). Bodies were kept here for 6 weeks in summer and 12 weeks in winter before interment to ensure that they were of no use to Medical Science.



There are thought to be around 20,000 bodies in the graveyard so tread lightly if you visit! There are WW2 Military graves from Crail Airfield, none due to enemy action but training accidents in the main.



Leaving the church by the church gates, cross over Marketgate once more and start walking down Kirk Wynd (9) - two Scots words 'Kirk' and 'Wynd' (pronounced as in wind up a watch) - Church Lane is the English equivalent. At the start and end of this Wynd, you will see large stones lying against walls – these are called Pall stones and they are to protect property from damage by horse drawn carts.



At the end of the Wynd lies Roome Bay (10) which at one time was proposed to be the site of a new Crail Harbour but no Government funding was available for the work so nothing came of the plan. The grassy area above Roome Bay has numerous benches dedicated to people who have held strong affections for the village. If you have time why not take a stroll around Roome Bay, sit on one of the

benches, gaze out to sea and soak in the beauty of the scene?

Overlooking Roome Bay is a 16th century Doocot (11) (Doo = Dove so Doocot is a pigeon loft), a medieval meat store for the Priory next door. Inside there are around 600 nesting boxes round the wall. Birds came and went by an entrance in the roof. When fresh meat was needed, the entrance was shut and using a ladder propped by a central pole, birds were selected for the cull. As well as a source of meat, the Doocot provided bird droppings to be used as manure for the vegetable gardens. At one time it was illegal to shoot a pigeon with the penalty being amputation of the hand! There were also laws about where you could site a Doocot to protect neighbours crops from being eaten by the doocot owner's birds.





Return back to the Nethergate (**12**) - originally the home of the weaving community and artisans of Crail. At No 21 lived James Williamson - who was a bone setter (because people couldn't afford a doctor). He operated 1880 - 1900ish and allegedly screams were heard coming from his house as bones were being re-set!

With the coming of the railway (1869 ish) there was a change in fortunes as a tourism industry developed. One catalyst for this was the building of Downies Terrace (**13**) (on your left) built by Mr Downie of Balcomie (a farmer) who rented out these buildings as holiday homes.



As we go past the bottom of Tolbooth Wynd (**14**) (on your right), we are walking over an underground burn (stream). This enters Crail from the St Andrews Road then goes under the High Street and at one time flowed through the stables of the Golf Hotel. It was then open but people kept falling in – perhaps after over imbibing in the Golf! - so it was covered over but after heavy rain you can clearly hear it flowing beneath your feet. It comes out into the open again on your left alongside a narrow path that leads down to the sea.

Beyond here is the British Legion hall (**15**) - opened in 1824 as the Town School when it was moved from outside the Church- it later became a library and is now British Legion Hall.



Rumford numbers 5 & 6 was originally the poor house (**16**). Here also is an example of one of the first National Trust for Scotland's small homes restoration project designed to save old buildings from being demolished.



There is a walkway (17) round the site of now demolished Crail Castle which probably dated from the 12th century by David I and probably destroyed in 1544 by troops of Henry VIII.

At a corner overlooking the harbour (18), there is Panorama drawn by a local man showing the view out to sea. The nearest Island is the Isle of May which was once a religious site and later was used for a lighthouse, the original being a fire lit atop a stone tower, today electricity is used. The Island is now a nature reserve with many breeds of birds, including ever popular puffins, and also a breeding ground for seals. Here also is a sun dial mounted on a fossilised tree stump. Below, in the sea is Maggie Inglis hole, which in olden times was a witch testing area. A poor individual suspected of witchcraft would be bound up and flung in the hole at high tide. If she broke free this demonstrated that she was in league with the Devil and so she was put to death. If she drowned, she was clearly innocent and so got a Christian burial. For details of other medieval crimes and punishment, see Crail Museum.



Descending Shoregate (19), we pass a tea room and gallery and then arrive at the harbour (20). The main breakwater is thought to date from the 16th century and built with Dutch assistance. In 1820s the West Pier was added by the well known Scottish lighthouse and harbour builder, Robert Stevenson whose grandson was Robert Louis Stevenson, author of novels such as Kidnapped, Treasure Island and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.



At the end of the breakwater (21) you will see a pile of long wooden beams and a crane, this was used to make a harbour entrance barrier by lowering the beams into grooves cut in either side of the entrance. This was to protect vessels from stormy waters.

Near the start of the West Pier and adjacent to a white cottage is a steep walkway - called the Hens Ladder **(22)** – leading up to the West Port. If you look back to sea from the Ladder, and if it is low tide you will see that the entrance to the harbour is dangerous as there are many rocks. The solution was simple and elegant, landward you will observe 2 white towers each with a metal basket on top, nowadays housing a red electric light and formerly a fire. To get the correct approach to the harbour from sea, mariners lined up these two towers or by night, the two fires.



At the top and on the main road, there is a Catholic Church **(23)** which was disused and bought with help from Polish Forces stationed in the area during WW2. Inside there is an icon to a Polish Saint and of course, Polish people are back in the area working on local farms.

The tour now takes us back towards the starting point. On the way, on the right, we pass The Maltings, the site of the former Brewery. In the graveyard near the Deadhouse is a tombstone to the Key family who were brewers. The male adults all seemed to live to their 80s and 90s which is as good an advert for beer as any!

Now head for the Golf Hotel **(24)**, passing a selection of shops and an art gallery. The hotel is early 18th century – a list of former owners is in the bar if you are looking for an excuse to go in – but it is thought that there was an inn here from 14th C. It was in the Hotel that in 1786 was founded Craik Golfing Society, the 7th oldest golf club in the world. Note that the first floor is built out and overhangs the entrance. This was a device to give more space on the first floor whilst allowing traffic to pass unhindered. As you have to descend a few steps to get into the hotel you might be forgiven for thinking that the building has sunk into the ground! In reality, the road has risen over the years as extra layers of stone and tarmac have been laid down.





Up to the left on the St Andrews Road there is another pictish stone (25) in a park on the left of the road. This is the standing stone of Sauchope which was moved from the Balcomie Road (on the way to the golf course) for safety. The word Sauchope is derived from two Scots words – Sauch: A willow and Hope: a Bay. The bay in question is near the Balcomie Road and now has a caravan site.