

A Short History of Peterhead (1911)

PETERHEAD, a municipal and police burgh, and seaport of Aberdeenshire, the most easterly town in Scotland. Pop. (1901), 11,794. It is situated about 33 m. by road E.N.E. of Aberdeen and 441 m. by rail, via Maud Junction, on the Great North of Scotland railway, from which there is a branch line. The town is built of the red granite for which it is famous, and the quarrying of which for home and foreign use constitutes an important industry. Among the principal buildings are the town-house (1788), with a spire 125 ft. high, and the Arbuthnot museum and art gallery.

In front of the town-hall is a statue to Field Marshal Keith (born at Inverurie Castle, 2 m. north-west, in 1696), which was presented to the burgh in 1868 by William I. of Prussia, afterwards German emperor. Peterhead is one of the Elgin district group of parliamentary burghs, with Banff, Cullen, Elgin, Inverurie and Kintore. It formerly had an extensive trade with the ports of the Baltic, the Levant and America, and was once a sub-port to Aberdeen, but was made independent in 1832. It was also for a long period the chief seat of the Greenland trade, but the Arctic seal and whale fishery is now extinct.

The north and south harbours lie between the town and Keith Incha suburb at the extremity of the peninsula on part of which the town is built and the isthmus dividing them is pierced by a canal crossed by an iron swing-bridge. In the north harbour are two graving docks. A third harbour has been built, the area of the three basins amounting to 21 acres. In addition to the granite quarrying and polishing, the leading industries are ship- and boat-building, agricultural implement works and woollen manufactures. The herring fleet possesses more than 600 boats and the annual catch averages nearly 200,000.

About a mile to the south is the convict prison for Scotland. Since 1886 the prisoners have been employed upon the construction of a vast harbour of refuge, for which the breakwater extends from Boddam Point northwards across the bay. This great undertaking (intended to be completed in 1921) was designed by Sir John Coode (d. 1892). Peterhead is the terminus of a cable to Norway. About 6 m. south of Peterhead are the famous Bullers, or Roarers, of Buchan, an enormous rocky cauldron into which the waves pour through a natural arch of granite with incredible violence, in a storm.

The town and lands belonged of old to the Abbey of Deer built in the 13th century by William Comyn, earl of Buchan but when the abbey was erected into a temporal lordship in the family of Keith the superiority of the town passed to the earl marischal, with whom it continued till the forfeiture of the earldom in 1716. The town and lands were purchased in 1720 by a fishing company in England and, on their failure, by the Merchant Maidens' Hospital of Edinburgh for 3000, who are still the overlords. Peterhead, made a burgh of barony in 159; by George Keith, fifth earl marischal, was the scene of the landing of the Pretender on Christmas Day 1715.

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