



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT REVIEW

ABERDEENSHIRE LANDSCAPE EVOLUTION AND INFLUENCES



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The Howe of the Mearns from the slopes above Laurencekirk © Lorne Gill/NatureScot
Evening light on the sand dunes and beach at Sands of Forvie National Nature Reserve,
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Dunnottar Castle, Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire. ©Lorne Gill/NatureScot
Bennachie from the east © Lorne Gill/NatureScot

This document provides information on how the landscape of the local authority area has evolved. It complements the Landscape Character Type descriptions of the 2019 dataset.

The original character assessment reports, part of a series of 30, mostly for a local authority area, included a “Background Chapter” on the formation of the landscape. These documents have been revised because feedback said they are useful, despite the fact that other sources of information are now readily available on the internet, unlike in the 1990’s when the first versions were produced.

The content of the chapters varied considerably between the reports, and it has been restructured into a more standard format: Introduction, Physical Influences and Human Influences for all areas; and Cultural Influences sections for the majority. Some content variation still remains as the documents have been revised rather than rewritten,

The information has been updated with input from the relevant Local Authorities. The historic and cultural aspects have been reviewed and updated by Historic Environment Scotland. Gaps in information have been filled where possible. Some reports have been combined where original LCA area coverage was very small.

The new documents include photographs. They do not include the maps or sketches from the original LCAs, but these are still available from the [NatureScot Information Library](#). Additional information can be obtained from the websites of;

- [British Geological Survey](#) www.bgs.ac.uk
- [Historic Environment Scotland](#) (Historic Land use Assessment, Gardens and Designed Landscapes, historic features and their designations, etc). www.historicenvironment.scot/
- NatureScot [Landforms and Geology](#) (more specifically the “Landscape Fashioned by Geology” series) and [About Our Landscapes](#) (soils; wild land; landscape character; designations etc.) www.nature.scot
- The relevant local authority, which will have information on landscape policies, etc.

The content of this document was drawn from the background chapter information in “NatureScot Review 102 – South and Central Aberdeenshire Landscape Character Assessment” 1998, Environmental Resources Management and “NatureScot Review 37 – National programme of landscape character assessment - Banff and Buchan” 1997, Cobham Resource Consultants.

If you have any comments, please email LCA_REVIEW@nature.scot

1. INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW



The area covered by this report.

Aberdeenshire includes a large diversity of landscapes. The vast and spectacular mountain scenery of the Cairngorms permeates the area, and their foothills extend in broad ridges almost to the coast. Gently rolling agricultural plains, incised by well-wooded river valleys, draw the eye over a smooth rhythmic relief. The coast shows a great variety of landforms including extensive dunes and wide beaches, sheer rocky cliffs, and many distinctive settlements and extensive views. Along the southern edge of the Grampians, the Highland Boundary Fault forms a sudden edge where the uplands drop to the agricultural expanse of the Howe of the Mearns.

Superimposed on this distinctive topography is a veneer of farmland, woods, moors and settlement. The built heritage is rich in castles, grand houses and planned settlements as well as towns, villages and steadings. The remnants of estate policies are evident in parts of the area, where beech avenues, hedgerows and small woodlands are distinctive features. There is also notable evidence of earlier inhabitants in the form of ritual remains such as standing stones and circles. Strong field patterns formed by hedgerows and stone dykes are also characteristic of agricultural landscapes in some areas.

The bulk of the population lives in small towns and villages in the lowland area, through which the main transport routes pass. These trunk routes radiate out from Aberdeen. All lowland areas are dotted with houses, villages and towns, linked by a dense network of roads.

The landscape has evolved through time, with the agricultural reforms of the late 18th Century acting as a dominant influence. Significant change has also occurred since the Second World War. Intensification of agriculture has led to the enlargement of farms, a reduction in semi-natural landscapes such as mosses and heather moorland, and the decline of woodlands and hedgerows.

2. PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology

Aberdeenshire lies at a transition of three distinct geological and topographic regions – Strathmore, the Grampians and the north-eastern Coastlands. The mountains of the Grampians and Cairngorms lie along its western edge from which long upland ridges extend eastwards, almost reaching the sea. The north-east coastlands form an extensive plain that spreads from the Grampians to the Aberdeenshire coast. Their complex geology supports a varied landscape. Where there are tracts of richer soils and more subdued relief, it is more densely settled. The Highland Boundary Fault transects the southern part of the area, and separates the complex metamorphic terrain to the north from the great sandstone vale of Strathmore to the south. Here, fertile red loams support a rich agricultural tapestry and the flatter relief contains an infrastructure corridor.

Bedrock

North of the Highland Boundary Fault the rocks are mostly from an assortment of rocks known as the Dalradian Supergroup. These are ancient, having been laid down as sedimentary rocks in Precambrian times about 600 million years ago. They were metamorphosed by intense heat and pressure, as a consequence of the Caledonian mountain-forming episode, to form rocks which are relatively resistant to erosional processes. Due to the pressure and squeezing, the rock layers were folded and sometimes turned upside down. The resulting fold structures can be seen in several places including Portsoy, near Fraserburgh and at Collieston.



Fold structure in rock, Whinnyfold, near Collieston © Gillian Forbes/NatureScot

The Dalradian rocks here form one of the major Dalradian groupings in Scotland. It is a classic area in which to study regional metamorphism, by which sediments are transformed by heat and pressure into more resistant rocks such as slates, schists and gneisses. The type of rock produced by metamorphism depends on the original composition of the sediments and also on the type of metamorphism applied to them. Where pressure was a greater influence than temperature, slaty structures resulted. The durable Dalradian slates which occur in the area have been sporadically quarried in the Banff-Aberdeen area. In contrast, the metamorphism of quartz-rich sandstones produced quartzite, a highly resistant rock which invariably results in high ground where it outcrops today. Mormond Hill, for example, is formed from quartzite. This rock has also been important in forming parts of the cliff-edged coastlines of the county. Quartzite, which is lacking in soil-forming nutrients, results in infertile soils and patches of moorland where it surfaces in the region. In addition, there are limestones in Banffshire which have been quarried for use in agriculture. The existence of lime in an area of acid soils was essential in providing a suitable environment for crop growth and forming the fertile triangle of this north-east corner of Scotland.

To the south, land was displaced vertically downwards during the period of Caledonian mountain building in the early Palaeozoic times. Subsequently, rivers flowing into the lowland from the northern mountains carried vast quantities of sediment which were deposited thickly in the 'valley' and now obscure the older Dalradian rocks.

Variations in the solid geology which can be discerned in the landscape include deposits of younger sediments such as Old Red Sandstone, which have not been altered by metamorphism. These outcrop southwards from Troup Head and Pennan on the coast.

The relationship between lithology and topography of this part of Scotland is often unclear, as subsequent fluvio-glacial or marine action has obscured the differences in rock types. The same rocks which inland produce some of the highest hills in the country, in the Grampians, form low-lying coastal plateaux in the north east. It would be expected that they would form a terrain more highland in character, considering also their location north of the Highland Boundary Fault. It has been suggested that the Dalradian rocks of the coastal plateaux may have been covered by a layer of more recent sedimentary rocks. The low-lying lands of Buchan may, therefore, be "the exhumed surface of the pre-Devonian floor after the more recent sedimentary veneer has been stripped away".

The distinct upland ridges that occur at the western edge of the study area were created by the same forces that shaped all of Highland Scotland, initiated by the closure of the ancient Iapetus Ocean and the formation of the supercontinent of Pangaea 400 million years ago. The collision of two huge land masses squeezed the Dalradian metamorphosed sediments up into a range of mountains known as the Caledonides which were then subject to prolonged and intense faulting, folding, erosion and volcanic upheaval that continued after the land masses separated 150 million years ago to create the Atlantic Ocean.

Different degrees of metamorphosis depended upon fluctuating pressures and varying temperatures as well as the chemical composition of the original rocks. The slates that can be seen along the Ridge of Foudland and the Tap o'Noth were created by pressure alone. The combined effects of heat and pressure caused the recrystallization of the rocks and the

development of platy minerals, such as mica, which can be seen in the widely occurring schists of the area; for example the upland Ridge of Foudland and the rolling farmland of Strathbogie. Coarser, more granular minerals became stretched into 'eyes' within schists to form the schistose grits and quartzose schists of the Kincardine Plateau and the coastal platforms of Formartine.

South of the Highland Boundary Fault there is a generally low-lying relief due to down-faulting and to the juxtaposition of highly resistant Dalradian rocks to the north and the tough Sidlaw volcanics to the south. The latter recur in bands near Laurencekirk, giving rise to the rolling, raised relief of the Garvock Hills east of Laurencekirk. These provide an excellent viewpoint from which to gaze to the moorland slopes of the Mounth, north of the fault, across the wide fertile plain of the Howe of the Mearns.

The Mearns are underlain by Lower Old Red Sandstone which was deposited by rivers descending from the Highlands during the Devonian Period. During this time the Caledonian mountains were rapidly uplifted and eroded, with rivers laying down thick deposits of sand and gravel, now the Old Red Sandstone. In the Mearns this is now lies beneath deep fluvio-glacial drift, derived partly from the Highlands and partly from Strathmore itself. Drift formed from Old Red Sandstone is revealed in vivid red soils and red sandstone buildings, establishing a strong theme within the area. Glacio-fluvial outwash and river deposits accentuate the flat terrain of the Mearns. Along and near the valley of the North Esk there is an extensive outwash plain created by the Pleistocene forerunner of this river system. The modern river now follows a channel through a series of river terraces. More resistant Old Red Sandstone in the Mearns (known as the Dunnottar Group conglomerate, after the recurring outcrop on which its namesake castle stands) is seen along its northern flank in the Strathfinella Hills.

Younger deposits, of the Middle Old Red Sandstone, occur along the Moray Firth coast around Gamrie and Pennan. These were accumulated on the southern edge of the Orcadian Basin.

Igneous rocks

Three phases of volcanic activity occurred during the Caledonian Orogeny, resulting in the large masses of granite that recur throughout Aberdeenshire. Some, such as Bennachie, Hill of Fare and the Mounth, stand proud as resilient upland masses. Granites around Alford and Tarland, softer than their surrounding schists, were eroded into the lowland basins of the Howe of Alford and Howe of Cromar. Other areas, for example the 'freedom lands' west of Aberdeen and the outcrops near to Ellon have low relief almost indistinguishable from their surroundings but the prevalence of granite is seen in the frequent drystone dykes and scattered boulders.

A later phase of volcanic activity produced gabbros. These form a discontinuous semi-circular outcrop that runs from Portsoy to Maud, through Huntly, reappears around Inch and Oldmeldrum and then again around Methlick. These rocks were more easily denuded than those into which they were injected and thus correspond with tracts of lower land such as the wide strath of Deveron around Huntly, the Inch (or Garioch) Basin, and the saddle of moorland between the Mount of Haddoch and the Buck, west of Rhynie. Rich in such minerals as calcium, phosphorous and iron, the overlying tills of some of these areas, notably the Inch Basin, have been weathered into very fertile soils. Some of the igneous rocks were altered by metamorphism along with the older sedimentary rocks into which they were placed: an example is the vein of serpentinite, known as "marble," at Portsoy.



Bennachie from the east © Lorne Gill/NatureScot

A remnant of Middle Old Red Sandstone cuts across the gabbro between Gartly and Kildrummy. This soft rock is more easily eroded than the surrounding metasediments, a factor utilised by the River Bogie passing north and the River Don passing south. In this area the rivers cut wide straths, in contrast to the more confined, steep-walled corridors where they are forced through the hard schists.

Volcanic activity is famously preserved in the Rhynie Chert. This contains the silicified remains of ancient volcanic springs and their associated flora and fauna.

The coast

The upland remnants of the Grampians finally recede north-easterly towards the coast. The origins of this area are obscure: rolling terrain masks any differences in the underlying rocks. The most recent ice sheets, some 10,000 years ago, which spread along Strathmore, the Dee Valley and the Moray Firth, probably failed to override this area, as there are few signs of glacial erosion. It seems more likely that the topography of the coastlands is the result of both glacio-fluvial deposition from the meltwaters and lakes, and maritime deposition. Stepped coastal platforms can be deciphered in the landscape between sea level and 300 metres. These may have been formed by successive uplifting of the land, or by encroaching seas prior to the ice age.

The coastline of the study area shows a wide range of forms and structures, varying from sheer cliffs to sand dunes. Between the mouths of the rivers Don and Ythan, a 16 kilometre curve of sand dunes has grown up in front of the ancient cliff line of the post-glacial raised beach. This has been fashioned by the wind from the vast quantities of silt and sand which,

with fluvio-glacial outwash, were deposited by the sea during the last marine transgression. The dunes reach their peak at the mouth of the River Ythan, where the 'miniature Sahara' of the Sands of Forvie is created by seven large waves of dune sand. Immediately north of this, a band of tough quartzites extends to the coast creating the cliffs around Collieston, which form a small bay for this fishing village and contrast dramatically with the adjacent dunes. South of Aberdeen and as far as Stonehaven, an abrupt cliff line recurs as the quartz-mica-schists that fringe the Highland Boundary Fault extend to the coast. These rocks have been shaped into stacks, cliffs, arches and 'yawns'. Waves have etched out textural differences in the rock, and fluvio-glacial drifts and igneous dykes have helped to create landmarks such as the Bridge of One Hair, Castle Rock of Muchalls, Arnot Boo and Blowup Nose.

At Stonehaven, the Highland Boundary Fault is almost imperceptible, in marked contrast to its high rampart some ten kilometres to the south west. The jointing of the Old Red Sandstone as well as bands of igneous rock associated with the Tay Anticline have had a strong influence on wave erosion. The sandstone generally creates a more gentle seaward descent, for example south of Inverbervie. More resistant conglomerates of Old Red Sandstone create promontories such as the headland on which Dunnottar Castle stands, south of Stonehaven. Raised beaches are pronounced along this section of the coast and the land falls across one or more distinctive steps before reaching the sea over a fringe of sand or farmland.

South of St Cyrus, high, steep volcanic cliffs stand behind an intervening remnant of Upper Old Red Sandstone. Travelling south west, this widens from 100 metres to around a kilometre by the North Esk Estuary, supporting a fringe of salt marsh, dune and farmland.

Key Physical Features of the Landscape

Landform features

Hills

Long rolling ridges form a backdrop to many views in the area, particularly in the west where they are seen rising up above the river straths, such as the Dee and the Don, or around the basins of softer rock. Often over 500 to 600 metres high, they are underlain by a lithology whose complexity is not always revealed in the simplicity of the landform. Nevertheless, some form distinctive landmarks, such as Bennachie and Tap 'o Noth, both topped by important hillforts. The main groups of hills include the Ridge of Foudland stretching east to the Hill of Tillymorgan, the circular range that encloses the Howe of Alford and extends south east to the Hill of Fare, the Mounth which rises over the Howe of the Mearns on the edge of the Highland Boundary Fault and volcanic Garvock Ridges that run along the south east coast. The distant Cairngorms to the west form a particularly imposing skyline from some areas, such as Cromar. The north-east coastal plain is a low-lying area, mostly below 200 metres in height. Consequently, Mormond Hill, which rises abruptly above the Buchan plain to a height of 234 metres, is a conspicuous landmark despite its relatively modest height.

Straths

The precise form of the river valleys in Aberdeenshire depends very much on the rocks which accommodate them, and a single strath often exhibits a variety of profiles. Where the rivers pass through the harder schists, the straths form steep sided gorges, for example where the Don passes south of the Correen Hills and where the Deveron approaches Huntly. Through bands of softer rock, the profile widens and may be bordered by a flood plain; for example where the Don passes north-west of Dyce, where the Ythan passes Ellon, and on the Ugie.

The patterns made by the rivers show that some streams eroded back into the hills around their source, occasionally "capturing" other drainage systems. The twisting Deveron, for example, probably includes stretches of what were once other rivers. It may at one time have linked with the Ythan to flow into the North Sea instead of the Moray Firth.

Glacial Landforms

Distinct glacial landforms are uncommon in the study area. The ice of the most recent glaciation was confined largely within the Cairngorms, but glacial erosion and deposition features, such as kames and kettles, corries and u-shaped valleys, occur within and at the edge of the Grampians. The north-eastern parts of Aberdeenshire lay furthest from the centres of ice dispersal, and would have been in a more continental climate: colder ice flows are less efficient at weathering the underlying rocks than where the glacier base is at or near melting point. Evidence such as peri-glacial activity and thoroughly weathered granite suggests that parts may have been free from ice during the last glaciation. The overwhelming geomorphological character of the area is one that is little affected by glacial erosion, reflected in the absence of erosional landforms and the survival of weathered bedrock and Tertiary gravels, as on the Buchan Ridge. In a national context, the relative lack of glacial erosion and the extent of survival of pre-glacial relicts in the landscape is exceptional.



The Kippet Hills esker, Meikle Loch © Lorne Gill/NatureScot

Fluvio-glacial till deposited by meltwaters is widespread within the north-east coastlands and in Strathmore, and is partly responsible for the fertility of these areas. The interaction of various ice streams resulted in the seaward parts of the area being covered in fresh glacial till or debris, but the inner part contains older, weathered till, overlying deeply weathered rocks. This meant that, as the area became settled and cultivated, fewer rocks had to be gathered from these fields, with a corresponding reduction in the number of stone walls for field boundaries.

Raised Beaches

These are common features on the Aberdeenshire coast and are thought to be the result of relative changes in level between the land and sea, typically after periods of glaciation, when the land may have risen as the ice burden was removed. They may appear as shallow inland terraces or, closer to the sea, as steep cliffs. They can be seen at several stretches of the coast, for example between Cullen and Portsoy; they also exist along the coast to the north and south of Aberdeen.

Stacks, Cliffs, Arches and Yawns

Hard coastal rocks, such as sandstone conglomerates and quartz-mica-schists, are resistant to the erosive forces of the sea. Waves make little impact except on the lower rocks, and sheer or steep-faced cliffs result. Where lines of weakness or outcrops of soft rock occur, waves have a greater effect, forming features such as caves, arches, sea stacks and yawns. West of Kinnaird Head, the rocky coastline has been called the "Banffshire Riviera"; it exhibits a variety of cliff scenery, from the red sandstone at Troup Head to the intricately-detailed erosion in the metamorphic cliffs west of Gardenstown, which reflect the less uniform lithology of the metamorphic succession. These coastal forms are also pronounced to the south of Peterhead, where the Bullers of Buchan blowhole is located, and between Aberdeen and Stonehaven.



Bullers of Buchan, Grampian. ©Lorne Gill / NatureScot

Many of the sheer cliff faces which edge the coast are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), and are important for both their nature conservation and geological interest, for example, the Bullers of Buchan, and Gamrie and Pennan Coast SSSIs. These cliffs support large numbers of coastal breeding birds, and along some parts of the rocky coastline internationally important colonies are found. The Bullers of Buchan SSSI is particularly remarkable for colonies of cliff-nesting seabirds which include kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills, fulmars, shags and puffins. The sight, sound and smell of these seabirds, as they wheel and

screech overhead, or nest in crevices in the rock faces, contribute to the experience of this coastal landscape.

Cliff-edge vegetation is also important. In spring, the cropped grassland along the headlands is studded with flecks of colour from low-growing coastal plants. The extensive stretches of golden beaches, wind-sculpted dunes and deserted marshes form a striking contrast to the rocky coastline elsewhere, increasing the diversity of the range of plant and animal species to be found. The Cullen to Stake Ness Coast SSSI, for example, contains a number of areas which have a range of fresh, brackish and salt marshes. These are among the habitats on this coast which give sanctuary to over-wintering wildfowl and waders.

Dunes

Most of the soft coastline consists of dunes, although saltmarsh and shingle are also found. Dunes and sand beaches are the result of an accumulated mass of wind-blown marine sediment or fluvio-glacial till. Here, the sand and dune areas form some of the longest beaches in Europe. Near the Loch of Strathbeg, massive dunes provide one of the best examples of constructive dunes in the country. Erosional features such as blow-outs also occur, despite the relatively undisturbed location of the dunes. They are relatively mobile systems and, at Forvie at least, old field systems and ruins have been exposed in recent years by the shifting sands.



Old Kirk ruin at Forvie NNR © Eleanor Meikle/NatureScot

The distribution of plant species along this part of the coast is affected by both the rock type from which the sand has been derived, and by grazing pressure. Many of the dune systems are base-rich and are characterised by the presence of calcium-loving plants, such as kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), which can be found at Cruden Bay.

Landcover Features

A long history of cultivation, land improvement, grazing and clearance has removed many features of native landcover such as broad leaf woodland, pine woods and bog. These types of landcover survive only in areas which have been difficult to cultivate, usually due to topography. They are of great value for biodiversity and in supporting the variety of wildlife native to the area.

Woodlands

Almost 19% of Aberdeenshire is wooded, which is similar to the Scottish average. Much of this is commercial conifer planting. Woodland cover is greatest in the catchments of the Dee, Don and Deveron, with less in the more intensive agricultural areas of Buchan and the Mearns. Areas of semi-natural woodland are more extensive on Deeside and upper Donside.

Nationally, forestry is of value to the economy and supports around 25,000 jobs. Aberdeenshire makes a strong contribution to this.

- Native woods. There are few ancient woods in the study area, due to agricultural intensification across much of Aberdeenshire's lowland area. Most occur as pockets, mostly of pine and birch, on the steeper glen slopes, largely sheltered within Deeside and Donside between Alford and Kildrummy. The ancient woodlands of Gight represent some of the least disturbed native woodland in the Grampian lowlands. Many of the plant species found in the wood are those of undisturbed, long-established woodlands, and include a number of species which are scarce in north-east Scotland,
- Policy woods. These comprise mixtures of ornamental tree species that occur within parkland estates and often form part of a designed garden. These features tend to be most common within the Dee Valley and in the farmland to its north. They often include avenues, policies planting and shelterbelts.
- Coniferous forests. A common and pronounced landscape feature, coniferous forests occur widely on the upland areas as well as in scattered pockets on the low-lying farmland. Although a wider species mix is encouraged today, the most common species are Scots pine and sitka spruce, with lodgepole pine also relatively common.

Farmland

Mixed farmland. Land in Aberdeenshire varies in its fertility, the most productive areas occurring in the Inch Basin and in the Howe of the Mearns. Here, arable crops tend to predominate and are associated with large fields and widely spaced farms. But generally the farmland shows a pattern of mixed uses, with fields of grazing pasture interspersed with hayfields and arable crops. Many of the foothill areas that extend up to the coastal edge are utilised in this way, as are most of the lowland areas.

Upland pasture. Some areas below the Grampian ridges, but at relatively high elevations (between about 300 and 500 metres), are farmed almost exclusively as upland pasture. These areas are different to the more intensively farmed lowlands: fields have clear boundaries and are smaller in size, and grass crops provide a more uniform cover. These areas occur to the west of the study area: for example south of the Howe of Alford and north-west of Huntly.



The Howe of the Mearns from the slopes above Laurencekirk © Lorne Gill/NatureScot

Semi-Natural Habitats

Heather moor. Although widely encroached upon by coniferous forests, heather moorland occurs on most of the upland ridges, either forming isolated patches such as on the Correen Hills, or extensive tracts such as on The Mounth. It is dominated by heather but grasses and sedges also occur, and bracken and gorse extend into some areas. Heather moor has traditionally been managed for grouse by muir-burning to encourage new heather and deter woodland succession. This practice has declined with the onset of commercial forestry and the increase in sheep farming.

Mosses. A common feature of many lowland areas are mosses. They occur where flushes of damp ground have deterred land improvements for agriculture, and typically contain low-growing birch and rowan with an understorey of grass, rush and sedge and patches of heather. They are often very distinctive owing to their location amidst farmland. One example occurs at Wartle Moss on the A920 near Newseat.

Freshwater

Rivers. The main rivers of the area are the Dee, Don, Deveron, Ugie, and Ythan. The rivers often act as a focal point in the landscape, and provide a variety of habitats for plants and animals. The Dee is important for nature conservation and angling as well as its broad strath forming a natural and cultural landscape feature. The Don is also now known for salmon, but is more associated with agriculture and, in its lower reaches, for powering cloth and paper mills in the past. The Ythan and Ugie are typical lowland rivers, with broad valleys used for agriculture. They tend to have meandering and slow flowing sections with muddy substrates, although the Ythan has some sections with faster flows and stony substrates. Invasive species

are becoming a problem, for example Giant Hogweed along river banks. Ways of controlling this are being tried, for example using sheep on the upper Deveron.

Lochs. There are just two large lochs in Aberdeenshire. One is the Loch of Skene near Dunecht, east of Aberdeen. The other is the Loch of Strathbeg in the north east, which is managed as a nature reserve by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). It is the largest dune lake in Britain, and a landscape feature within the coastal dunes.



Loch of Skene © NatureScot

Bogs.

There are some notable peatland sites in the north of Aberdeenshire, In certain character types, such as the coastal farmland areas, raised bog contributes to the open appearance of the landscape. Peatland SSSIs include the Moss of Crombie, which is one of the few remaining areas of blanket bog and the location for a number of regionally rare peatland plants and Reidside Moss, which is an area of valley bog and central raised bog, important for containing plant species which are characteristic of eastern bogs, and others characteristic of western bogs.

3. HUMAN INFLUENCES

People have hunted and gathered, settled and farmed this area for at least 8,000 years. The necessary resources were all present: woodland cover for shelter and animals for hunting; rivers and sandy bays for fishing; and sources of flint for tools. It is also a reflection, perhaps, of the relatively fertile soils and the comparatively dry climate. The area has been highly influenced and shaped by human activity. In this respect, the area contrasts sharply with the Grampian Mountains to the south and west.

There are only small areas of immediately obvious, upstanding evidence remaining from the prehistoric and earlier historic periods. Nevertheless, these thousands of years of land use have had a dramatic impact on the landscape over time. The most visible influence on the landscape today occurred over the last 200 years, since the age of agricultural improvement and the introduction of quicker means of land-based communications.

Hunter-gatherers of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic

There is still uncertainty about when people first inhabited the landmass we now know as Scotland. Although it is possible that inhabitation took place during the Lower Palaeolithic, any archaeological evidence before the end of the Ice Age – the Last Glacial Maximum - has not been found as Scotland was completely submerged beneath ice sheets. However, based on evidence elsewhere in Scotland, it is probable that such communities would have been established here at least 10, 000 years ago.

Mesolithic Settlement (c 8000 BC – c 4000 BC)

After the last ice melted, the emerging landscape was gradually colonised by willow, birch and alder, creating a natural environment of woodlands and grasses. As the climate and soils improved, the landscape evolved into one covered with oak and Scots pine forests, birch, hazel and alder woodlands and grasslands, each in its own natural niche.

There is very little visibility of Mesolithic archaeological evidence in Scotland, with only a few sites identified by scatters of lithic artefacts known as microliths, cave and rock shelters and middens. As well as being relatively ephemeral in the first place, Mesolithic archaeological evidence is also more vulnerable to geological processes. Much of the Mesolithic evidence to date has also come from islands on the West Coast (e.g. Islay, Colonsay, Oronsay, Coll, Rum, Skye and Jura), perhaps reflecting the coastal bias of the landscape survey studies that have been undertaken.

Therefore, it is not clear to what extent the hunter-gatherers, who would probably have passed through the area, influenced this emerging environment. It is known that in this part of Scotland these peoples did not just keep to the coastal margins but followed their food sources many miles inland. They may even have controlled local forest fires to make hunting easier. They left their flint tools amongst the sand dunes all along the coast north of Aberdeen and along the rivers such as the Dee, as far inland as the Cairngorms. Significant palaeo-environmental studies have taken place in the Howe of Cromar and the results indicate that there was an impact on the climax vegetation about this time, which some experts have interpreted as being anthropogenic.

Early Neolithic Settlement (c 4000 BC – c 2700 BC)

This is the period when monuments first appear in the landscape, along with the domestication of wild plants and animals, the first appearance of pottery and new types of stone tools. Recent models for the transition from hunter-gathering to an economy based on farming suggest that the early farmers followed a 'slash-and-burn' type of agriculture. Farming may have been introduced to the area by incomers, whose origins may have lain amongst the farming communities of north-west Europe as evidenced by pottery fragments and flint tools.

Early Neolithic timber large houses known as 'halls' are among the earliest evidence for any Neolithic presence in this region. Examples include Crathes and Balbridie, on either side of the River Dee. Both of these sites contained evidence of cereal crop cultivation along with the gathering of wild plants including hazelnuts and crab apples. Although the animal remains were not well preserved, lipid analysis of the Crathes pottery has revealed that the occupants' cattle/sheep/goats had been used for dairying because traces of ruminant milk fats were found in them. The presence of Arran pitchstone at Crathes also indicates that the occupants participated in a network of wide-ranging contacts.

Den of Boddam, which is just south of Peterhead, contains the only flint quarry so far discovered in Scotland. Now visible as numerous hollows on the ground surface, the site is the major source of flint in Scotland and occurs mainly above the 91 metre contour on the ridge of high ground which runs westward for about 13.4 kilometres from the coast between Invernettle and Stirling Hill to west of Skelmuir Hill and Hill of Dudwick. The flint itself is yellow in colour and occurs in the form of gravel, pebbles, nodules and boulders. As well as being a useful material, it has been suggested, from anthropological studies of non-western societies, that the materiality of the flint and where it was quarried may have held symbolic and ritual significance.

Many of the Neolithic funerary and ritual monuments that appear at this time are positioned in relation to distinctive topographic features such as rivers, hills and mountains and are located near to routeways across and between different terrestrial and marine landscapes. Examples include Howe of Cromar, along the Dee, in the Garioch and on the gravel terraces of the Mearns. Barrows (earthen mounds) and stone cairns (burial monuments) at Dalladies by Fettercairn and Midmill by Kintore indicate that parts of the wooded or forested landscape had been cleared, because they are situated on skylines or terrace edges implying that they could be seen from afar. Indeed, the barrows were partly constructed of turves stripped from large areas of the land.

Wheat and six-eared barley were recovered from the Neolithic site at Balbridie by Banchory, providing evidence of an arable as well as pastoral economy. The mapped distribution of artefacts such as stone axes and pottery gives an indication of the areas which might have been cleared for use during this period. Taken together, these indicators imply that the landscape must have been undergoing fundamental change in comparison with the Mesolithic period.

It is likely that the forests were partially cleared to permit cultivation of crops such as wheat and barley and the construction of enclosures for domesticated animals. These clearings were probably extended and cyclically abandoned; it is unlikely that the climax vegetation would

have re-established itself. Forest clearance had a significant impact on the landscape, one which continued until the woodland cover was reduced to the extent it has reached today.

Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Settlement (c 2700 BC – c 1500 BC)

As the soils lost their fertility and new ground was opened up, the earlier clearings may have been abandoned and only later re-used. The picture seems to be one of an increasing area of land in use with larger areas in the Mearns and the Garioch and along the Don, revealing remains of the period.

The Early Bronze Age evidence seems to confirm this view of an increasingly open landscape, particularly along the gravel terraces of the Mearns, throughout the Garioch and, to some degree, along the Dee and the Don. By this period there is likely to have been a landscape of grasslands and woods rather than dense forests, certainly in the areas that were most favourable in terms of accessibility by water or on foot, soil type, climate and height above sea level.

There are numerous recumbent stone circles in the area. These Bronze Age stone circles which are unique to the Grampain region comprise a recumbent stone flanked by two uprights which are usually the highest stones in the circle, and often the other stones are graded in height. Many recumbent stone circles are located on elevated positions and are positioned to have wide ranging views over the landscape. Views towards these monuments are also an important part of their setting as many are on elevated ground and appear skylined against the horizon. This is particularly evident at standing stones/Tyrebagger stone circle just outside Aberdeen, although its elevation also commands extensive, wide-sweeping views over the surrounding land.

Examples such as Loanhead of Daviot and East Aquhorthies by Inverurie, Nine Stanes by Banchory, Tomnaverie near Tarland were built in this changing environment, where clearances could provide open views of the surrounding landscape and significant topographic features within which it may have been regarded as part of the 'sacred geography' of the prehistoric worldview. East Aquhorthies demonstrates this particularly well, as the summit of Bennachie is visible from the monument and is framed by two of the stones. This 'framing' or reference to distinctive hills/mountains is also particularly evident at Tomnaverie.

It is considered likely that such monuments held ritual ceremonies at certain times of the seasonal calendar, perhaps in order to observe and celebrate movements of the sun, moon and stars. Because this necessitates good views towards the sky, this suggests a degree of wider woodland clearance both in and around the monuments, although the actual extent of this is presently unclear.

Beaker cists and finds of Early Bronze metalwork also suggest that prehistoric Aberdeenshire was a well-settled area during this time. The large monument complex at Broomend of Crichton in Port Elphinstone contains a cist, henge, a stone and timber circle with multi-phases site and a range of artefacts which hint at the important status of this place.

Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Settlement (c 1500 BC – c 1000AD)

About 1,500 BC the archaeological evidence of human settlement changes from that associated with burial, ritual and ceremony to that associated with dwellings and related

structures. Results of palaeo-environmental studies also suggest environmental changes. Brought together, it has been suggested that there was a peak of population and land-use around 1000BCE, before climatic changes connected with the cooler, wetter conditions of the Sub-Atlantic period occurred. Palaeo-environmental work has shown that around the Howe of Cromar there was a marked decline in tree pollens matched by a rise in herbaceous and cereal pollens at c 400 BC. This was accompanied by a gradual increase in the erosion of soils - an indicator of arable farming.

Relatively few settlements have been excavated and therefore dated to the period before the climatic deterioration. However, recent excavations in and around Rhynie at fortified and other sites are providing more evidence about people that lived at this time. One example of this are the ongoing excavations at Tap O'Noth which is one of the largest and most spectacular hillforts in Scotland. Consisting of 21 hectares, the fort includes more than 100 house platforms between the stone rampart and wall and a rock cut well or cistern. Its elevated position at 563 metres AOD commands views over a huge sweep of the north-east of Scotland including the North Sea and the Moray Firth, and to Sutherland and Caithness in the North. The importance of the monument includes its role as a defensive structure, its prominence in the landscape and its relationship with other monuments in the vicinity, including other forts such as the nearby Cnoc Cailliche, Upper Wheedlemont and others in the wider vicinity such as Mither Tap, Bennachie.

On-going excavations will hopefully provide more evidence about how people were using the land at this time. These particular summit hillforts, along with that at Dunnideer by Inch, reflect the extent of settlement at this time from the seashore to the high hills, although some of these sites may only have been used at certain times in the seasonal year. Given that some of these forts are timber-laced, it is likely that woodland cover must still have been quite extensive as large amounts of timber would have been needed for their construction.

During and after the climatic deterioration of c1000BC, farming evidently continued, although the land chosen for arable use would have reflected the constraints imposed by a colder and wetter climate; stock rearing would have continued to be very important. However, only a few settlements, like Bellmuir near Methlick and Old Kinnord near Dinnet, have survived as upstanding monuments and aerial photography has shown that the extent of these stone walled and timber framed houses was quite widespread. They are sometimes associated with souterrains, or earth houses, a specific type of wood or stone-lined underground structure possibly used for storage but more likely used for ritual purposes, usually dating to the Iron Age. An example is located at Culsh by Tarland.

The Romans (1st to 4th Centuries AD)

The impact of the Roman army during this period, as exemplified by marching camps, such as those at Raedykes and Kintore, is often considered to have had little permanent impact on this area. However, it is worth considering that the creation of Roman temporary camps to accommodate the tents of the army in the field, is testimony to the existence of tracts of country over 50 hectares in extent unencumbered by substantial woodland cover. This was important as such camps would have been located in positions in the landscape with uninterrupted views to minimise the risk of ambush.

These camps have an inherent potential to contribute to our understanding of Roman campaigns, the ethnicity and identity of soldiers and potential camp followers, as well as details of their construction, use and place within the various military campaigns in this area. Of the camps in Aberdeenshire, extensive excavations at Kintore, a camp of around 44 hectares, have provided invaluable information about the operations of the Roman army on the march. Although still subject to debate, this camp is thought to relate to campaigns in the 1st century AD (Flavian campaigns, named after that family of Emperors). Elsewhere, Normandykes Roman Camp encloses an area of 44.3 hectare and is situated on a low ridge on the north side of the River Dee. It is probably of a similar date to Kintore, and includes six gates defended by *tituli*, with much of its perimeter recorded through crop markings visible on aerial photographs. There are some upstanding remains of a rampart and ditch, with probably a later wood enclosure boundary on top. Some small-scale archaeological excavations have been undertaken which have demonstrated the survival of some features within the interior of the camp, which may be ovens.

Durno Roman camp, northwest of Inverurie, comprises the remains of the largest Roman temporary camp north of the Antonine Wall. It survives through the buried deposits of the camp's defences which are visible as cropmarkings on aerial photographs. Excavations in the 1970's aided with the identification of its perimeter. The potential for buried remains in the ditch and the camp's interior is considered to be extremely high.

The Picts (1st Millennium AD)

The Picts are the indigenous inhabitants of what we now know as eastern and northern Scotland, who were given their name *Picti* by the invading Romans and lived in the first millennium AD. The main archaeological evidence comes from symbols on standing stones and other objects, place names containing the word 'Pit' and diagnostic square burial sites. Pictish symbol stones are perhaps the most visible part of the Pictish archaeological landscape. Although few are in what could be described as their original location, they tend to be found located next to routeways or at church sites and many are re-used prehistoric standing stones. Given this, it is important that their relationship with the wider landscape is considered.

They were the direct descendants of the Iron Age people whose farms dotted the landscape under the rich plough lands of the Laich of Moray and whose few defensive sites sit atop small promontories by the rivers that flow through the area. An indication of their extent can be gleaned from surviving settlement remains on high ground, the distribution of later Pictish place names across the area and symbol stones. Among some of the most impressive examples of symbols stones were found at Barflat near Rhynie and include the so-called 'Rhynie Man' which is currently in Aberdeenshire Council's headquarters. There is also the Craw Stane which is still *in situ* on a south-facing slope just below the crest of a hill in a field overlooking the valley of the River Bogie to the east and the site of St Luag's church to the north-east. There is a strong visual relationship between the stone and Tap O'Noth and recent evidence suggests that the two sites are contemporary. The area surrounding the Craw Stane was excavated recently and the so-called 'high status' artefacts recovered include substantial metal-working evidence and a range of Continental imports, suggesting that this was an important power centre. Because settlement evidence for this period is rare, the evidence for Pictish buildings at Rhynie is also extremely important.



The Crow Stane near Rhyrie, Aberdeenshire © Lorne Gill/NatureScot

Early Historic, Medieval and Postmedieval Settlement (c 1000 AD – 1750 AD)

The trend of human habitation appears to have been focussed on defensive sites and the establishment of small settlements, together with the development of early Christian monasticism and a hierarchical early medieval feudal society. Early Christian monasteries were founded at Monymusk, Turriff, Old Deer and Aberdour (Dundarg), probably during the 7th and 8th Centuries.

Concentrations of population in Aberdeenshire in the medieval period were located in coastal districts and the eastern parts of Mar and the Garioch. The settled areas penetrated the mountainous interiors along the main river valleys such as the Don and the Dee. However, there were also large swathes of thinly-populated land such as the uplands like the Mounth that separates Aberdeen's Deeside from Angus and the Mearns to the south, and the Cairngorm plateau that extends west from Mar, or zones of poor and stony or boggy land like the interior of Buchan.

This period reveals a picture of large areas of open farmland with settlements constructed from field clearance stones and boulders, turves, wattle and daub, and some timber, set within an undulating countryside interspersed with small woods. Most people continued to live at or near subsistence level, although the way of life of the upper echelons of society changed a great deal. But all of society was affected by warfare and plague, which are documented as having visited this area on a regular basis throughout the medieval period. Buchan was devastated during the "herschip" (plundering) which was carried out by Robert the Bruce after he defeated the Comyn Earl of Buchan in 1308. It is thought that around a third of the population of Scotland died of the plague in 1349-50, which struck again in 1362. This must

have resulted in the abandonment of some farming settlements on the margins of cultivatable land.

Agriculture at this time, in common with the rest of Scotland, would have been run on an infield/outfield system. Nucleated settlements, known as "fermtouns" were scattered across the landscape, each surrounded by an almost permanently cultivated "infield". This, together with the less intensively farmed "outfield" which lay beyond, produced a limited range of crops such as oats. Grazing was provided on common ground and on those parts of the outfield under fallow. In places, for example the Ythan valley, the old cultivation ridges (broad rig) which were formed to facilitate drainage, can still be seen. In upland areas, there was a slightly different pattern, with pastures and settlement remains known as 'shielings' on higher land at a distance from the settlement.

From the 12th Century, the nature of land holding began to change particularly in the east and south of Scotland where the crown's authority was greatest. This saw the creation of new lordships, often associated with the construction of castles, and the creation of administrative sheriffdoms, which overlay the tradition pattern of administration by local thanes. Land was now held from the king, or a superior lord, in exchange for military service. This period saw the introduction of new and innovative structures that can still be encountered in the landscape including castles, monasteries of the major European religious houses, a system of parish churches and burghs (trading centres). However, the imposition of feudalism continued to sit beside existing system of landholding and tenure and it is not clear how this change impacted on the lives of the ordinary people.

Earth and timber castles such as the motte and bailey as the Bass and Little Bass, Inverurie and moated sites such as Lumphanan were constructed from the 12th Century. Despite the coming of masonry castle, they continued to be built and occupied into the later medieval period. By the 13th Century, masonry castles were being constructed – such as at Kildrummy, where the Earl of Mar built a state-of-the-art enclosure castle. At Huntly Castle (the Pele of Strathbogie), the original motte and bailey was superseded by a large L-plan towerhouse, although the motte was retained as a feature of the castle complex. By the late 16th Century, Huntly Castle had been transformed into a Renaissance Palace by the region's most powerful family – the Gordons.

In the later medieval period, tower houses became the dominant form of residence for Scottish elites. They provided a degree of security but were also a means of displaying wealth, social status and martial knowledge. Aberdeenshire has a number of particularly fine towers concentrated in region of Mar. These include Midmar, Castle Fraser, Cragievar and Crathes Castle which are believed to have involved the prominent family of masons, the Bells of Midmar, either in constructing them or significantly adapting and enlarging existing towers. Tower houses rarely stood alone but were situated within a wider castle complex and at examples such as Tolquhon Castle, the complex developed into a courtyard castle surrounded by gardens.

As throughout Scotland, the parochial system developed during the 12th and early 13th Century, with 85 parishes in Aberdeenshire, which reflected the relatively resource poor nature of the area in the medieval period. This is also reflected in the relatively few major monastic houses that were founded in Aberdeenshire, the Cistercian Abbey of Deer being a notable

exception. Other institutions included Monymusk Priory, an Augustian House originated as a Céili Dé community, which ‘reformed’ and adopted the rule of St Augustine, and Fyvie Priory, a dependency of Tironensian Arbroath Abbey. Deer Abbey survives as extensive ruins, while Monymusk continues to serve as a parish church. The majority of rural parish churches were simple single cell structures, and the remains of many survive as ruined structures, sometimes much altered after the reformation, within burial grounds. As the parish system developed, parish church were often paired with a castle, and were the twin foci of burghs.



Dunnottar Castle, Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire. ©Lorne Gill/NatureScot

Royal Burghs (trading centres) were established at Aberdeen, Inverurie, Kintore and Banff before 1214 AD, as well as a number of baronial burghs by the early 16th Century, but of these only Aberdeen was a of similar scale to burghs like Dundee, Perth or Edinburgh. Banff was the centre of the Sherrifdom of Banff, with a major Royal Castle and became a substantial trading centre, particularly in salmon to the continent. Some, like the deserted burgh of Rattray, were simply large villages that developed around a castle and parish church. On a larger scale, Fraserburgh was founded in 1546, and a short-lived university was founded there in 1592. The town of Peterhead developed in the mid-seventeenth century as a spa town fashionable with Grampian lairds.

Royal forests were created for deer hunting during the 12th and 13th Centuries across much of central Aberdeenshire, resulting in strict controls over the taking of wood and game and the grazing of domesticated animals: no longer was all land available to most people. Traces of one of the enclosure dykes delimiting such a preserve survive to the north of Fettercairn at Arnbarrow Hill (Kincardine Deer Dyke). But the decrease in the extent of woodland continued, such that post-medieval travellers actually commented upon the lack of trees in the area. The major source of fuel must increasingly have been peat, extracted from the bogs of the area.

But most of these had been worked out by the end of this period, presumably resulting in serious fuel shortages.

Farming only gradually changed, with parts of its arable extent being evident today because of the survival of the curved broad-rig system of cultivation, as in the landscape at Waterhead in Glen Dye and Wood of Schivas by Ythanbank. This system left large areas of ground as unploughed land between the rigs or as uncropped areas lying outside the infield/outfield system. The rearing of stock continued to be a very important aspect of agricultural production, with the associated need for hay fields to ensure that some stock could be successfully over-wintered. Old estate maps show that apart from head dykes to keep stock from the arable land, there were few enclosures. The impact of grazing animals, particularly goats and sheep, must have severely restricted any natural regeneration of the tree cover.

The Agricultural Revolution (c1750 – 1900)

Changes in the joint township run-rig agriculture system did not occur until the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. The introduction of new farming methods was very variable and depended on the stimulus of the landlords. Tenants were encouraged to enclose fields and drain less productive lands. Once cleared and drained the new, lighter, horse-drawn ploughs could be used, thus avoiding the need for ox-drawn teams of up to eight beasts strong. A regular system of crop rotation including grass leys was introduced along with new techniques such as cross-ploughing, weed-cleaning, and timing. Dunging was no longer restricted to a few heavily cropped plots. The landscape throughout the lowlands of Aberdeenshire changed dramatically.

General Roy's map, which was produced in the wake of the 1745 Rebellion and covered all of Scotland, suggests that farming townships, and therefore nucleated settlements, were a characteristic of the area. It was around this time that significant changes in the landscape began to occur because of the instigation of agricultural improvements, a process which continued into the nineteenth century. Crop rotation, tree planting and enclosure were the agents of change. Road dykes, walls, and farmsteads were introduced, as were new roads, dovecotes, ice houses, bridges and other features. Marshes were drained, field sizes were increased, and the land was cleared of stones, with the boulders subsequently being used as field boundaries known as consumption dykes. A map of the area produced in 1828 (Thompson) shows that by this time most farming townships had been broken up and replaced by single farms amongst the newly enclosed fields.

At the same time as agriculture was changing, water-power was being harnessed to enable a certain amount of industrial production in the area. Numerous corn mills, fulling mills and lint mills were established, both resulting from and stimulating the diversification and expansion of cropping systems. Following thousands of years of removal, new woodlands were established by the larger landowners around their estates. The small burghs of Kintore and Inverurie developed and other settlements, such as Laurencekirk, gradually grew in size or were established. Lines of communication - turnpike roads from 1798 onwards, the Port Elphinstone canal serving Inverurie and the Garioch, and eventually the railways - were built to service the needs of commerce.

The wealth generated by all these improving activities enabled mansions to be either built anew as at Cairness, or around existing castles as at Slains. The gardens and policies of these

grand houses introduced a new element to the rural landscape, for example at Duff House and Pitfour.

Also introduced during the late 18th and early 19th Centuries was the planned village, a particular feature of the north of Aberdeenshire. Planned villages were designed and laid out as a whole, during a period of various agricultural and social changes. Harbours and fishing villages were constructed at Pennan, Gardenstown, Whitehills, Macduff and Buchanhaven. Inland, the villages of Strichen, Fetterangus, New Byth, New Leeds and Cuminestown are examples of settlements newly constructed in this period which have a significant impact on the landscape of today.

New, more permanent houses were built in the country as well as in the villages and towns. Castles were altered and mansions with extensive parklands were established, as at Leith Hall by Huntly and Castle Fraser. Smaller urban and rural homes were built of stone, increasingly granite, initially using clay mortar, which was soon replaced by lime mortar. Gradually, slate roofing tiles were introduced, replacing thatched roofs of turf, heather and straw.

The impact of all of these developments was to convert Aberdeenshire into one of the major agricultural production areas within the United Kingdom. It led to the form of the landscape that is familiar today. The fields were enclosed, sometimes by earthen banks or by hedging, but more commonly with stone dykes. Whins were deliberately planted as a source of cattle fodder, and woodland plantations were established. Even areas of moorland which had been abandoned were brought into cultivation. This resulted in a managed landscape with few areas of natural or semi-natural land cover. Areas of apparent heath land, as at Foudland, were utilised, in this case as slate quarries.

Agriculture and fishing provided the dominant sources of income for the area, and this had an impact upon the landscape. Some villages, such as Turriff, grew into towns acting as market and service centres for the agricultural hinterland. The railways came, facilitating communications and the export of produce. Maud, conveniently located at a railway junction, grew from a hamlet to become the largest livestock market in the region. The fishing villages on the coast were much more self-contained, huddled into restricted gaps in the cliffs. Pennan is the best-known example of these settlements; Gardenstown has recently expanded uphill to spill out onto the ground above the cliffs. The town of Peterhead had become a thriving fishing port by the end of the 17th Century, and between the 1780's and 1820's it was the main whaling station in Britain.

The Contemporary Landscape (c1900 – present)

Aberdeenshire has continued to be a region of mixed farming, with the lower lying areas supplying feed to fatten the beef stock which has been, and remains, the major agricultural export of this area. The introduction of wire fencing in the late-19th Century allowed the removal or decay of many of the drystone dykes that were such a prominent feature of the landscape of the improving farmers of the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. The basic field pattern has remained, though the tendency towards amalgamation and the introduction of mechanised vehicles has led to an increase in field size. The emphasis on pastoral farming in the rolling countryside has meant that there has not been the same incentive to produce the very large fields familiar elsewhere.

Changes in agriculture have initiated the greatest impacts on the landscape, particularly since the 1950s. Fiscal and strategic policies aimed at increasing yields, improvements in farming technology, and fluctuations in economic markets, have all contributed to this change. Agriculture is the main land-use, with both arable and pasture being important. Forestry is localised, with relatively few large plantations. Fishing has developed into a major industry in the area. Today a pattern of larger scale farm units in the east, and smaller farms in the more upland and less favoured areas to the west, has emerged.

Hedgerows are present in some parts of the area, with many localities displaying a variety of species: beech and holly on lands owned by estates; gorse in the western uplands and more marginal areas close to the northern coastline. In many areas, farm boundaries were traditionally marked by ditches and stone walls. As farms have amalgamated and changed hands, and field sizes have increased, hedgerows have been removed - almost a third have gone since 1940 and walls have been left to decline.

Any economic stimulus that there might have been to establish new woodlands was destroyed in 1866, when tariffs were lifted thus allowing cheap timber to be imported directly to Aberdeen from the Baltic and elsewhere. Existing woodlands were allowed to decline and were not replanted. It was not until the scarcity of the national timber supply was realised, during the First World War, that there was an incentive to plant trees both by grants and by the establishment of the Forestry Commission. Its successor bodies became a major landowner in this area. Most of the Forestry Commission forests were sited on less fertile ground, such as the lower slopes of Bennachie and the western side of Kincardineshire. But many smaller forests were also planted. They have all made a major impact on the landscape. Today, broad expanses of intensively farmed land are occasionally intersected by pockets of policy plantings on estate lands, for example in areas close to Old Deer, the Ythan valley at Fyvie and the north Deveron valley.

Quarrying the mineral resources of the area, for its hard slates, and sands and gravels, has been carried out on a small, scattered scale for many years. The quarries are largely concentrated in the east. In the late 20th Century, the impact of oil and gas infrastructure has become significant. The St. Fergus Gas Terminal dominates the coastal area between Peterhead and Rattray Head. Other new technologies with visual impacts include the masts and dishes of defence warning systems high on Mormond Hill, and civil aviation beacons to the west of Fraserburgh, for example at Windyheads.

During this period some of the smaller farms and crofts were abandoned or amalgamated into larger units. This was accompanied by rural depopulation so, by 1980, there were only 6,000 farm workers in the whole of the Grampian area. Similarly the smaller fishing ports such as Johnshaven, Inverbervie and Portlethen did not have the harbour or transport facilities to survive. Much of the rural population moved to the market centres such as Inverurie and Banchory; or to Aberdeen or outwith north-east Scotland.

The trend of rural depopulation was stemmed in certain places by the widespread use of the motor car, which allowed many rural settlements to survive as commuting zones. The increasing affluence and work opportunities established by the oil industry in the 1970s and the 1980s led to the re-occupation of some abandoned areas and large new housing estates

were built in places such as Kintore and Inverurie. Some villages near Aberdeen, such as Westhill, increased greatly in size. Some small scale industrial sites were located in rural areas, particularly in businesses servicing the farming, forestry and energy industries.

The area has experienced tourism for most of the 20th Century and onwards, but its impact on the landscape has been localised. At Cruden Bay, following the construction of the railway, a large and luxurious hotel was built with the intention of rivalling Gleneagles. The venture eventually failed, and the building was demolished. On the north coast, Macduff enjoyed some success as a resort and Peterhead was frequented as a spa town; tourism here was fuelled by the presence of a railway service. Shooting on the moors and fishing in the rivers and on the coast also attracted visitors to the area. Increasing car ownership and the loss of the railways led to a wider spread of tourist destinations, but the traditional fishing villages and the castles of Aberdeenshire remain popular attractions.

Peterhead is the northern point of the Peterhead to Aberdeen *strategic growth area*. Peterhead is also the northern hub of the '*Energetica* area' (that runs south to Aberdeen City). Energetica is promoted in NPF3, aimed at transforming the area into a high quality lifestyle, leisure and global business location showcasing the latest energy and low carbon technology.

Onshore wind turbines began to be built in Aberdeenshire from around 2005, capitalising on the windy conditions across the region. There are relatively few large wind farms here compared to the rest of mainland Scotland: there are more often significant numbers of modest-sized turbines in small groups or singly, concentrated in lowland agricultural areas. This pattern is linked to the structure of land ownership in the region, where there are many farmer owner-occupiers, rather than few larger land ownerships typical of other parts of Scotland. The cumulative landscape and visual impact of the numerous consented developments has become increasingly apparent. The larger groups are in the south of Aberdeenshire or in the north-west near Huntly. The turbines at the coast in Aberdeen Bay are visible from Aberdeenshire and there are floating turbine at some distance from Peterhead, and one off Stonehaven as part of a planned small array of turbines.

Tourism, Recreation and Amenity

Aberdeenshire contains a number of well-known tourist facilities and provides an important recreational function for both local residents and international and domestic visitors. Its assets include:

- the proximity of the Grampian Highlands providing both summer and winter recreation for walking, biking, fishing, skiing (downhill and cross country) and shooting;
- features such as Bennachie, Tap o' Noth, Deeside and the spectacular coast and its villages;
- a network of routes by road and rail, as well as footpaths and bike trails, which enable visitors to access the best views and to experience different scales and types of landscape;
- the historic and cultural interest of Aberdeen, Banchory, Huntly and other towns and villages;
- the numerous archaeological remains (particularly the stone circles and Pictish symbol stones), castles, historic estates and designed gardens which provide destination points for trips, including Pitmedden Gardens, Haddo House and Crathes Castle.
- a range of mixed facilities including golf courses, horse riding, cross-country ski trails, formal built leisure and sports facilities, country parks and bird sanctuaries.

The natural and cultural landscape of the area is therefore a key economic asset.

Within Aberdeenshire Deeside contains the most popular visitor attractions, owing to its scenery, landmarks, sporting facilities, accessibility, and Royal connections. It also provides access to the heart of Aberdeenshire and the Cairngorms. Pressures from tourism on this area are therefore greater than on most other parts of the study area. Other areas tend to supply more local recreational needs or target people with special interests such as in historic sites, motorsport events such as rallying, Nordic skiing near Huntly, or birdwatching. The estates and rivers of Aberdeenshire support a flourishing sports shooting and fishing trade. Golf courses are mostly on the coast and near Aberdeen.

Aberdeenshire has a range of accommodation including hotels and guest houses. There are also caravan parks and campsites, particularly on Deeside and along the coast. Visitor trails have been established, aimed at drawing motorists more widely throughout the region. They include the Castle Trail and the North East 250.

Planning and other policies

Funding policies influence the landscape as particular initiatives are favoured over others. Planning policies and guidance also influence development and land use. The council's Forestry and Woodland Strategy, Local Nature Conservation Sites, and its local landscape designation (Special Landscape Areas) all inform change in the landscape. Promotion of good practice in conservation and craftsmanship is encouraged by the Aberdeenshire Design Awards held every second year, with a focus on high quality design of new projects and renovation of existing buildings. Its increasing popularity is testament to the continued awareness of the importance of good design in development. The Aberdeen City and Shire Design Review Panels aim to encourage good design within the planning process before development reaches the approval and construction stages.

Key human-made features of the landscape

Archaeological Remains

The earliest remains which have left a visual legacy date from Neolithic times. Evidence of small-scale yet permanent changes to the landscape dating from this period can be found at the flint quarry pits at Den of Boddam, south of Peterhead, where distinctive depressions in the landform can still be seen. Most remains from the Neolithic period are ceremonial or funerary in nature. Other burial or ritual monuments from the later Neolithic/early Bronze Age remain as landscape features, such the four-stone setting at North Burreldales, Alvah; the white quartzite kerb cairns at Logie Newton, Auchterless; and the large stone cairn at Memsie, which is a significant relict from the Bronze Age.

A few sites have survived from Bronze Age and Iron Age farming as ruins, for example the unenclosed house platforms near Fordyce, and the promontory forts of Cullykhan near Pennan and Cleaved Head east of Macduff. There is also the souterrain, a stone-lined underground passage, at Culsh near Tarland. These features do not impinge upon their surroundings to a noticeable degree.

Archaeological Features include:

- Long mounds or cairns. Relatively scarce in Aberdeenshire, these features date from between 4000 and 5000 years ago and comprise grass-covered ridges and mounds

of earth or stone of between 20 and 100 metres in length. They were originally used for burial. The Blue Cairn of Balnagowan near Tarland is an example of a long cairn, while a long mound (grass covered cairn) can be seen at Capo near Laurencekirk. Surviving long cairns and barrows form low distinctive mounds on the skyline, as at Longmanhill near Macduff or on terrace edges, as at Cairn Gatto north of Cruden Bay. Frequently, these burial mounds are further emphasised by long shelterbelts of beech trees, often planted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

- Recumbent stone circles. These are a type of megalithic monument unique to the north-east region. They are a frequent and obvious feature of the Aberdeenshire landscape and can be found throughout the area, generally on the crests of terraces or hills. The standing stones form a circle, typically between 10 and 20 metres in diameter, whose two tallest members lie to the south-west, flanking a huge, horizontal slab. Dating from Neolithic times, about 4000 years ago, their function is unclear but is likely to have been connected with ritual ceremonies. They are widespread in the Insh Basin, but good examples can also be seen at Loanhead of Daviot and Nine Stanes by Banchory.
- Henges. Dating from around 4000 years ago, henges comprise a circular ditch, sometimes with a prevailing outer embankment. The flat circular centre would once have contained a circle of timber stakes, as revealed by post holes. They are between 10 and 50 metres in diameter and were used originally for ritual purposes. These are uncommon in the Aberdeenshire landscape.
- Pictish symbol stones. These date from around 1500 years ago and they occur frequently throughout Aberdeenshire, where around 50 are recorded. They take the form of standing stones about 2 metres in height and have figures and shapes carved into them, usually in pairs; their associated meaning is now lost. Good examples of symbol stones are at Brandsbutt near Inverurie and at Rhynie, where a collection occurs. Symbol stones incised with animals remain in Fyvie and Tyrie kirkyards, indicating that these were once Pictish burial sites.
- Hill forts. These comprise ditches and embankments which follow closely the landform of hills, utilising outcrops of rock within their own fortification. As well as eroded ditch and bank structures, they may include tumbledown drystone dykes and are thus often perceived as much more recent structures. They date from between 700BC and 500AD and examples include one at Dunnideer near Insh and one at the Tap of Bennachie.
- Early Pictish forts have been excavated at Cullykhan (which has been settled since the late Bronze Age) and Dundarg.
- Mottes. These medieval features date mostly from the 1100s. They appear as steep sided mounds, some 30 metres in diameter and about 4 metres high. They are sometimes created from sculpted glacial drumlins, or may be purpose-built. Good examples can be seen at Inverurie, Lumphanan and Crathes.
- Monastery. The round-arched ruins of Deer Abbey, are remnants of a Cistercian foundation established in the thirteenth century along the banks of the South Ugie.

Patterns of Settlement and Transport

Aberdeenshire is well settled, with only upland areas, such as the Mounth, remaining generally uninhabited. To the west, towns and villages tend to congregate within the straths and low-lying basins. To the east, the flatter landform presents fewer constraints to development and settlements are distributed more evenly across the land. Transport corridors follow a similar pattern, confined along the straths of the Dee, Don, Deveron, Bogie, Ythan, and also

expanding across the north east coastlands to form a complex network. Aberdeen is the focus for all of the major roads and the influence of road infrastructure on the landscape becomes greater the nearer one gets to the city.

The traditional pattern of settlement in Aberdeenshire is of nucleated towns and villages which grew up around a central market or bartering centre, and scattered steadings. Any linear patterns along roads have derived from more recent development during the late 19th and 20th Centuries. The planned towns and villages are widespread; and many larger towns have a planned core; for example at Huntly. With Aberdeen's dominance over trade and commerce, few settlements grew to any great size. This trend can be seen today with a scarcity of large towns and the continued dominance of Aberdeen over much of the area's commercial and economic activity.

Traditional settlement patterns have often been obscured by rapid development - mostly housing - that was stimulated by the late 20th Century oil boom and the considerable employment opportunities it has established in Aberdeen and around. This is especially true of towns within 10 to 30km of Aberdeen, where new housing estates have grown on the periphery; for example at Stonehaven, Portlethen, Kenmay, Inverurie, Newmachar, and Oldmeldrum all of which have a distinct nucleated core enclosed by an expanding fringe of modern houses. Westhill was established as a wholly new town, essentially to provide accommodation for workers in Aberdeen. Many settlements, including Westhill, have associated business or industrial parks to support the energy industry. These tend to be groups of large buildings, often located on the outskirts of the town or village.

Outwith the main towns are a large number of small villages and hamlets, sometimes with a community core of a shop, pub and school in addition to houses, but often a collection of four or five houses. Originally established as accommodation for farm workers, they now often provide rural housing for a commuting work force. With widespread *ad hoc* new housing development in the countryside, many such settlements have become drawn out along roads, and separate settlements sometimes become coalesced and lose their separate identity.

Improvement of strategic routes is ongoing, including the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and dualling of the A90 between Aberdeen and Ellon. There are also the dualling of more stretches of the Aberdeen – Inverness railway line and construction of a new station at Kintore.

Vernacular Buildings

Aberdeenshire possesses a rich variety of architectural styles and forms. Impressive mansions and castles present distinctive features. In the main towns and villages, historic cores contain many characteristic churches, dwellings and hotels. The vernacular style of rural building has frequently been replaced by modern structures, but old farm buildings, and cottages made of local stone remain a frequent sight, particularly in more upland areas. Differences in colour are characteristic: on the coast, whitewashed cottages are a familiar feature within old fishing villages, clustered together with their gable ends facing the sea. In the Howe of the Mearns, the prevalence of Old Red Sandstone can be seen in the pinkish and red coloured buildings, for example in Fettercairn. Granite is a frequently used building material and its tones can be quite variable; in Aberdeenshire deep greys tend to prevail.

Vernacular buildings are often in sheltered locations whereas modern houses are often sited to take advantage of views. Vernacular buildings in the area are usually small, one-and-a-half storey buildings that are either stone or wet harled and are associated with stone dykes. Modern houses tend to be larger with a flatter roof and different wall materials. They are usually set within surrounding gardens.

Traditional farmhouses are of a similar style: stone built, with slate roofs, and arranged with larger steadings in the form of a three-sided or four-sided courtyard for compactness, convenience and shelter. Building stone varies according to the area from which it was quarried: mostly granite but also red sandstone in the Mearns and western Buchan. Doors and windows are frequently painted in rich colours such as ox-blood red, deep green or blue. The cottages and farm buildings to the east of northern Aberdeenshire tend to be slightly larger than those to the west, perhaps reflecting the increase in size of the farm unit.

These old farmhouses, surrounded by a compact arrangement of farm buildings, tend to nestle in the dips of hill slopes or in the valley bottoms of this undulating landscape. They are visually linked to the land by associated clumps of mature trees, frequently deciduous, such as beech and sycamore, or more occasionally coniferous species. Although gardens are bounded by clipped beech or hawthorn, hedges of either species are only to be found as field boundaries alongside the river valleys or in old estate farmland. Gorse is the most commonly occurring hedge plant elsewhere. Stone dykes were once commonly used as field boundaries around the coast where glacial moraine was deposited, and therefore consist of a variety of stone types. In places, including inland, these form “consumption dykes” where they were extra wide to use up more of the many stones garnered from field clearance. Post-and wire fencing is replacing many of the standard stone dykes. The large square fields which characterise the farmed landscape of the area have now almost completely obliterated any traces of the sinuous ridges of pre-improvement cultivation.

The mediaeval layout which forms the heart of the royal burgh of Banff is still intact. One burgh which has now all but vanished under sand is at Rattray, north of Peterhead, after the inlet to the sea on which it stood silted up following a great sandstorm in 1720.

Planned Villages

Agricultural improvements led to the transformation of the countryside, through the increase in the scale of fields and the draining of marshes. It, was accompanied by the consolidation and establishment of communication routes and the construction of new buildings. Prior to these changes, settlement had consisted of small, nucleated “fermtouns” and “kirk-touns”. This settlement pattern was altered in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by the development of planned villages.

Small towns and villages were established as new settlements although some, such as New Deer, were founded around existing hamlets. Inland, villages such as Fetterangus, Cuminestown, New Byth, New Pitsligo, New Leeds, New Deer, and Mintlaw sprang up in the mid-to-late 1700s and early 1800s, many of them housing the displaced cottars or crofters from small farms, who had been affected by the consolidation of the Improvement Age. Landlords often expected these new villages to become centres for local industries such as spinning and the weaving of flax and wool.

Villages were often built along a street, in a square or rectangle, with a small depth of grid layout. This regular layout was intended to cope with further development resulting from the expansion of trade from within the village. Front gardens were discouraged; consequently, small, double-fronted, single-storey houses directly on the street are very typical. The location of these villages determined whether they were built from grey or pink granite, or red sandstone. The linen works or watermills which were often part of the village were built on the outskirts, and are frequently fringed by trees. Many churches were built or rebuilt during this period and the church tends to dominate the skyline of the planned village.

Coastal Settlements

The coasts of Aberdeenshire have been settled for as long as its agricultural heartland has been farmed. The early wealth of the area derived from the seas. Settlements such as Portsoy and Banff originally developed as trading ports, and there are also the fishing towns of Peterhead and Fraserburgh. Some of the most striking buildings of these towns survive around their harbours.



Portsoy Harbour © Lorne Gill/NatureScot

Many of the smaller fishing villages were transformed into planned settlements during the eighteenth century. Crovie and Pennan, crammed at the base of sheer sandstone cliffs, consist of a row of fishermen's cottages, "like a brood of young seafowl nestling with their head under the dam". The gable end of almost every house faces onto the sea. In comparison with the planned inland villages, these fishing settlements are colourful - white-washed walls contrast with red pantiled and grey slated roofs, and the bright paintwork of doors and window frames.

Castles, Estates and Designed Gardens

The agricultural wealth of Aberdeenshire and the proximity of Aberdeen City have nurtured the development of numerous estates and stately homes, mostly during the 18th and 19th Centuries. Aberdeenshire has more castles per acre than elsewhere in the British Isles. They range from hillforts, clifftop ruins and mediaeval fortresses to Scots Baronial castles and mansions.

The establishment of parks and gardens was a popular means of displaying wealth during this time and many of these estates now include mature policy woodlands with a variety of ornamental species, as well as more formal gardens, many of which are designated. In some areas these parks and gardens, as well as their stately homes and castles, make an important contribution to the landscape. For example, west of Aberdeen, between the Dee and the Don, the heavily wooded character of the area is largely due to these policy woods.

Some of the earliest castles date from the 11th to 14th Centuries, for example Delgatie near Turriff, Dunottar on the coast by Stonehaven, Huntly Castle, and Kildrummy on Donside. In the 16th and 17th Centuries a number of distinctive tower-houses, such as those at Braemar, Corgarff, Craigievar, Craigston, Delgatie, Gight and Towie Barclay, were built. Mock fortified rather than truly defensive establishments, other mansion houses now resemble "chateaux" rather than castles in plan, as one enters through a groin-vaulted vestibule and passes through a series of vertically separated processional rooms. Although Gight is in ruins, others which remain, such as Leith Hall, are still intact, their rubble walls harled in soft shades of white, pink or cream. Craigston and Towie Barclay, which are located near Turriff, are further emphasised by the use of locally available red sandstone as architectural dressings.



Slains Castle, Cruden Bay, Grampian. ©Lorne Gill / NatureScot

The construction of a number of courtyard manor houses in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries indicates the peace and prosperity of northern Aberdeenshire at this time. These mansions differed in plan from the tower-houses, exemplifying the Scottish Renaissance tradition of creating a courtyard of principal apartments, which was usually extended from an existing tower. Although Auchmedden, Slains, Philorth and Iverugie are now ruinous, the House of Boyne and Pitsligo are still sufficiently intact to convey an idea of their past importance. Fyvie Castle may be a similar adaptation upon an earlier quadrangular castle of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Estate Policies

The increasing momentum of agricultural improvements in the 18th and 19th Centuries was accompanied by the extension of existing estate policies, and the creation of a number of new estates and mansions.

Extensive tree planting was undertaken around existing buildings such as Fyvie Castle, and new manor houses such as Cairness House, and Duff House at the mouth of the River Deveron. Several related artefacts still exist such as the Bridge of Alvah over the Deveron, the Icehouse, the Fishing Temple, and the Mausoleum at Duff House; the Observatory, Temple of Theseus and Chapel at Pitfour; and the magnificent stables at Aden. Mature deciduous trees provide a dominant feature, including dense woodland, avenue trees and. Beech and hawthorn hedgerows frequently line the narrow winding roads and demarcate field boundaries. Hilltop copses of beech and, sometimes, Scots pine emphasise the land form in many areas.

Some of these houses and policies are affected by new development such as housing or recreational facilities, used to enable restoration or continuation of the main house or other features. Blairs College near Aberdeen is an institutional example, a previous seminary and college; Fasque in the south and Ury estate near Stonehaven are others.

Infrastructure and communications

Along the eastern seaboard lie two prominent landmarks: the complex outlines of the St. Fergus Gas Terminal and the solid mass of the electricity power station on the outskirts of Peterhead. Its chimney stacks are landmarks for a wide area.

Transmission line upgrades and new sub-stations are occurring in places, for example the expanded substation and high voltage converter Station at Blackhillock near Keith and a new 275kV sub-station south west of New Deer. Potential new inter-connector infrastructure could result in considerable changes in the Peterhead area.

Mormond Hill, in the north east of the shire, is the site for several communications installations, on its summit. The Civil Aviation Authority installation near New Aberdour is also prominent in this landscape. Small-scale quarries and other mineral extraction developments are scattered throughout.

4. CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Few travellers passed through the open agricultural landscape of north east Aberdeenshire in the 18th or 19th Centuries. Those who did, such as Johnson, seemingly had little interest in the terrain: "Our way afforded us few topics of conversation. The ground was neither uncultivated nor unfruitful; but it was still all arable. Of flocks or herds there was no appearance. I had now travelled two hundred miles in Scotland, and seen only one tree not younger than myself". The main points of interest for artists such as Charles Cordiner, James Giles, and J.C. Nattes, and topographers such as Daniell seem to have been the ordered landscapes around the castles, mansions and towns or, more occasionally, dramatic coastal features such as Troup Head and the Bullers of Buchan. Legends associated with the coast and its castles were also the inspiration for Bram Stoker, who wrote "Dracula", his most famous novel, after his stay at Slains Castle.

The transformation of the countryside through the agricultural improvements of the 18th and 19th Centuries wrought great changes on the landscape. However, it is the influence of humans upon the land, and the associated harsh lifestyle, that seems to have interested the writers, painters and musicians born in north east Aberdeenshire in the 19th and 20th Centuries, rather than the purely scenic qualities of the landscape.

Artists, Photographers and Film-Makers

The wide open agricultural lands of north-east Aberdeenshire provided solace for Sir George Reid (born in Aberdeen: 1841-1913) who, although renowned as a portraitist, regularly returned to the north-east to produce fine colour or pen-and-ink landscapes, particularly of snow or evening scenes. George Wilson (born near Cullen: 1848-1890) also gained inspiration from the landscape for his water-colours. Perhaps the most successful in translating his feelings for north-east Aberdeenshire, and its coastline in particular, into "fresh, colourful, yet delicate" views, was the artist William Grant Murray (born Portsoy: 1877 - 1950). Of great importance in the development of Scottish painting was James Cowie (1886-1956), one of the best known painters to have worked in Scotland this century. He was born at Netherton of Delgaty, and it was the countryside of the Idoch valley in the heart of Buchan that formed the background to many of his paintings.

On Deeside, Joseph Farquarson of Finzean, nicknamed "Frozen Mutton Farquarson" was renowned for his snowscapes at dawn or dusk that featured farm workers and sheep. James McBey (1883 – 1959) was a war artist in WW1, known for etchings.

The village of Catterline, on the coast south of Stonehaven, was home to several artists. Prime among them was Joan Eardley, one of the outstanding figures of post-war Scottish art. She was celebrated for her paintings of Glasgow children and the Aberdeenshire coast.

Trained as an artist, George Washington Wilson (born Forglen area: 1823-1893), mastered the techniques of photography in the early 1850's, for which he is widely known today. Although most of his work consisted of portrait photography, there is detail in the background of his pictures which could be of interest to landscape historians. His work concentrated on the Aberdeen and Deeside areas. He gradually diversified his trade, and by the 1880's he was probably the largest producer of topographical views in Britain.

Other photographic or postcard collections of note include the Bodie Collection, which focuses on the towns and people of Banffshire, rather than the agricultural and coastal landscapes, and those held in the local museums of the District, for example at Aden Heritage Centre.

More recently, in 1983, much of the filming of "Local Hero", which was produced by David Puttnam and directed by Bill Forsyth, took place in the fishing village of Pennan on the north coast. The appeal of the village to tourists increased dramatically since the release of the film, and the red telephone box which featured is now a popular photographic subject for visitors to the area.

Dunnottar Castle, just south of Stonehaven, served as Elsinore in Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film of "Hamlet" and in the 2015 film adaptation of "Victor Frankenstein". It is also said to be the inspiration for DunBroch castle in Pixar's 2012 animated film "Brave". A recent TV dramatisation of "Stonemouth" by Ian Banks was filmed in Macduff.

Authors

Whether written in Doric - the dialect of the area which is almost a language in its own right - or in English, the pieces that have been published by north-east writers were steeped in the difficulties of life rather than an appreciation of the surrounding landscape. An exception to this is the poem that Byron wrote on "Dark Lochnagar" or "Lachin y Gair". Byron lived in Aberdeen until he was ten, and legend has it he learned to swim in the River Don by the Bridge of Balgownie in the city.

Fictional writings were penned by Lorna Moon (born Strichen: 1886-1930), and Flora Garry (born New Deer: 1900-2000). The former emigrated to the United States and wrote scripts for Hollywood; she also wrote of Buchan village life as she remembered it, "Behind lace curtains", in "Doorways in Drumorty" and "Dark Star". The latter wrote poems in Buchan Doric, also concentrating on the people rather than the places, and the farming way of life. Some poems do refer to the agricultural and landscape changes that took place last century. For example, Flora Garry's 'Bennygoak and Other Poems' describes the reclamation of heather and whin to agriculture:

"It was jist a skelp (large area) o the muckle furth,
A sklyter (expanse) roch grun,
Fin granfadder's fadder bruke it in
Fae the hedder and the funn (whin).
Grandfadder sklatit (slated) barn an byre,
Brecht water to the closs,
Pat fail-dykes (low turf walls) ben the bar braeface,
An a cairt road tull the moss".

Other authors continued the tradition of Aberdeenshire writings. John C. Milne, for example, found the inspiration for much of his poetry in the corner of "yon braid Buchan lan" near Memsie where he was born, drawing upon memories of his childhood and impressions of mankind's influence upon the landscape, such as the "muckle heap o'stanes" that formed Memsie Cairn, and the furrows which ran "straucht and clean fae Tyrie Burn te Pickerstane".

George Bruce (born Fraserburgh: 1909) had various collections of poems published in the late 1960's and early 1970's, including "Landscapes and Figures: a selection of poems". His words conjure up the landscapes and rugged seascapes of his native Buchan, as well as the durable qualities of the people. David Toulmin (born Rathen: 1913) also published late in life. His recollections of farm labouring life in the "wet, clarty soils of Buchan", as mentioned in his book of short stories, "Hard, Shining Corn" are austere and stark. They have been favourably compared with the writing of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, whose family moved when he was young to live in the Mearns, from where he produced classics such as "Sunset Song".

Peter Buchan (born Peterhead: 1917-1992) wrote poems and short stories about the fishing folk. Believing that there was more to the area than the farmed land, he declared that: "Buchan athoot the sea is jist like tatties athoot salt!". His first book of prose "Fit Like Skipper", was followed by a collection of short stories and poems. He is best remembered as "the caretaker of the Doric language", producing "Buchan Claik: a Dictionary of the Doric" with David Toulmin.

It is, perhaps, in the Doric language that one can best gauge the relationship of those who lived in Aberdeenshire, prior to the 1950's, with the land and the sea. It has so many seemingly foreign words that an outsider could be forgiven for thinking that here was another country. The Reverend James Forrest, a Lomnay minister who wrote about the Buchan dialect in "The Book of Buchan", had his own curious theory on why Buchan people speak as they do. He thought that they preferred clearer vowels "owing to their windswept fields, as well as from their nature". The survival of the Doric is a reflection of the out-of-the-way nature of the land, the independent spirit of the inhabitants, and a very difficult way of life.

More recently, Stuart MacBride has written a series of crime novels centred on a fictional police detective based in Aberdeen. The city and shire feature as settings.

Musicians

The Reverend John Skinner of Longside (1721-1807) was a songwriter known to Robert Burns, and it was he that was responsible for "Tullochgorum" and other ballads much praised by the poet. Peter Buchan (born Peterhead: 1790-1854) collected ballads of the north-east, and is famed for his publication of over forty such songs in 1828, "Ancient Ballads and Songs of North Scotland". However, it is the joint work of Gavin Greig (schoolmaster at New Deer: 1856-1914), and the Reverend James Duncan of Lynturk (1848-1917), that is of most renown. They collected, separately, all that they could of surviving oral tradition in the later 19th Century. Most bothy and cornkister ballads, including "Mormond Braes" and "Barnyards o'Delgaty", were collected by them, and in total they preserved some 3500 songs and 3300 tunes.

Thus these ballads have survived, and the fiddle and accordion clubs thrive once again. The Buchan Heritage Festival, held in Strichen every May, is a reflection of the wish to preserve a living history of music and song, the Doric language and a distinct identity. It is the way of life which is recorded in these ballads, not the natural environment in which the songsters worked: it seems that it is the people who influence the landscape, rather than the other way round.