

Points of Interest Around Dalkeith

Dalkeith Park House

Right outside the gates to Dalkeith Country Park, on the north side of High Street, is Dalkeith Park House. This was the residence given to consecutive chamberlains of the Duke of Buccleuch and was originally built in 1834. The house is now divided into five flats. Nearby is Militia House. The building is octagonal shaped with a stair tower. It was occupied by army officers until 1864.

The Corn Exchange

In the mid 1800's Dalkeith led the grain market in Scotland. On market day High Street could be seen lined with some 1000 carts. To make the market more efficient it was decided to build an indoor market place. The Corn Exchange was the largest interior grain market in Scotland at the time. Although no longer a market, the corn exchange, still stands on the south side of High Street today. On either side of the main entrance is a door, one for taking in sacks of grain, and one for taking them out.

The Tolbooth

Down the street from the Corn Exchange and built in 1648, the building began to be used as a tollbooth for the administration of the town in the early 1700's. It served as a place for law and order and featured a prison in the west half, a court room on the east, and a dungeon known as the 'black hole' below ground. In front of the building there is a circle of stones to mark the spot where the last public hanging in Dalkeith occurred in 1827.

High School Close

Across the street from the Tolbooth is High School Close, which leads to three important buildings. The first is the Masonic Lodge, built in 1766, which played host to the Society in Dalkeith. Behind the Master's chair in the Lodge room is a wall cavity, which housed a strong box holding the Lodge funds before the time of banks in Dalkeith. Four keys were required to open it, and each was held by a different person.

To the left of the Lodge is a building that, at different points, served as a parochial, grammar, or high school. The existing building was erected in 1760, but there is evidence of at least two earlier buildings dating back to the 16th century. In 1914 the students were transferred to King's Park school (renamed the High School) and the building was turned into a factory.

To the west of the old school is the Headmaster's House. It was built in 1828 and contains four spacious ground floor rooms as well as nine rooms above, a kitchen, laundry, etc. The school headmaster was expected to provide board for students who required it.

St. Nicholas Buccleuch Church

The present main body of the church was finished in 1420, although there is evidence that there has been a chapel on the site since roughly 1350. Much of the original stonework exists today, including the parts allowed to fall into ruin following Reformation of 1560. The area was closed off as a “monument of idolatry” and decay eventually caused the roof to cave in. Just a few years ago volunteers were allowed to go in to clear away an accumulation of debris and vegetation and to do some slight restoration work. In the process they discovered the coffin of the infant son of General Monck, who served as Cromwell’s chief in Scotland around 1655. The unroofed part of the old church also hosts the tombs of the early 16th century Earl of Morton and his wife Princess Joanna.

Brunton’s Close

Brunton’s Close, built in the 18th century, portrays a typical Scottish high street with its cottages featuring red pantiles and stone walls.

Co-operative Store

The former Dalkeith Co-operative Society was built in 1888 and dubbed the “People’s Palace”. It included a grocery, butchery, ironmongery, drapery, bakery, millinery, and boot and tailoring departments. The building is Scotch Baronial or Tudor style with a Flemish clock tower.

Newbattle Lodge

Up Newmills Road lies the West Lodge of Newbattle Estate. The gateway is designed with a turret and embattlements and is said to be a copy of an ancient gateway to Rome. It was commissioned by the Marquis of Lothian in the middle of the 1800’s.

London Road

London Road provides examples of typical late 18th century period town buildings. The cottages, built for some of the more affluent tradesmen, were built right up to the pavement.

Fairfield House

Nearby London Road is Fairfield House. The house, built in 1809, now serves as part of the Midlothian Council’s office campus. It was, however, originally the home of the Mushet family who owned a successful iron foundry nearby. One notable feature of the house is the stain-glassed windows.

Black Bull Inn

On the corner of Lothian Street and Buccleuch Street is the 1905 Black Bull Inn. It was originally built as a Gothenburg public house. The theory surrounding the Swedish theme was that people wouldn’t drink as much if most of the profit were used to improve facilities. It is no longer part of the Gothenburg arrangement.

Municipal Buildings

Built in 1882 on top of the Town's water reserve, the building served as the home of the Town Council. The tablet above the front door signifies the shields of the Graham, Douglas and Scott families, who held Lordship over Dalkeith. The town's motto, in Latin, is also carved onto the building: "Once the Keeper, always the Defender".

St. David's R.C. Church

Built in 1854, the church relieved local Catholics from their previous place of worship, the upper part of a barn, accessible only by ladder. It features a collection of paintings and statues as well as an organ dating back to 1864.

Watch Tower

The watch tower was built in the Old Edinburgh Road cemetery in 1827 and supplied with armed guards to deter grave robbers, who would steal fresh bodies to sell to Surgeon's Hall in Edinburgh for medical experimentation. Previously, cast iron safes would have to be placed over coffins to protect the deceased, but this proved costly and burdensome.

West Parish Church

The church was built in 1840 to house the overspill of the St. Nicholas parish church congregation. However, it stood empty for ten years after completion due to a serious disruption in the Scottish Church, which resulted in a loss of one-third its members. From 1951-54, while St. Nicholas underwent repairs, the congregation was moved to West Parish. By the time the work was completed, the church membership had recovered enough to justify using both churches.

The Ironmill

Ironmill Park was the home of two different iron foundries from 1648 until the end of the 18th century. It supplied the Duke of Buccleuch with a variety of iron products such as gates, picks, garden spades, railings, shovels and cart wheels. Since the iron foundry's close the mill converted to a flour and barley mill and later as an engine house for the town's water supply. They are currently private homes.

Other Sites Around Dalkeith

Cross Keys Hotel (182 High Street)

Old Meal Market Inn (4 St. Andrew Street)

Buck's Head Inn (Buccleuch Street)

St. John's & King's Park Church (Eskbank Road)

Harrow Hotel (2 Eskbank Road)

Water Tower (Across from St. David's Church)

A Wee History of Dalkeith

In 1369 Sir James Douglas became First Lord of Dalkeith. In 1377 he built a chapel that would eventually become part of the present day St. Nicholas church. In 1575 the Fourth Earl of Morton, built Dalkeith castle, a magnificent palace that was “richly adorned with pictures and tapestries”. In 1650 Cromwell’s army came to Dalkeith. His officer, General Monck, was selected Commander in Scotland and thus the government of the country was based out of Dalkeith castle. After Cromwell Dalkeith was not a part of national military importance until the Jacobite uprising in 1745. Before the mid 16th century there is little indication that Dalkeith had any economic importance. However, this changed in 1540 when the town was given right of manufacture and control over local trade. By the 1570’s Dalkeith was producing its own money and its mint was a rivalry to the one in Edinburgh. By the mid 19th century Dalkeith was an important market town and could claim the best grain market in Scotland. It was a major supplier to Edinburgh and the borders. From the 18th century on coal-mining also contributed to the growth of the town. On the political front, Dalkeith’s government had been feudal for centuries, controlled by the Douglas family. However, in 1642 the rights were passed to the Scot of Buccleuch. In 1760 Trustees were appointed to solve the dilemma of the poorly cared for streets and the lack of clean water. They introduced regulations that led to more sanitary conditions in the town. However, in 1878, with the Trustee’s realizing they were ill equipped to deal with the growing problems involved with evolving industry, Dalkeith’s first town council election was held. This made Dalkeith the last place in Scotland to abandon the non-elected system of government. But by 1975 Dalkeith was one of the most advanced and progressive small towns in Scotland. Around this time the Town Council was disbanded and Dalkeith became part of the wider Midlothian government. Today, with outlying districts, Dalkeith has a population of approximately 15,000 people.