

Torry Battery Guide

Learn about this historic scheduled monument and stories within its walls

GREYHOPE BAY



This guide will help you discover the history of Torry Battery, explore the existing ruins, and imagine what it might have looked like at different stages in its past.

We are lucky to be situated in this scheduled monument which has had many lives throughout the years, from a training ground for the Volunteer Forces in the 1800s to a top nature watching spot today.

This guide contains information about key functions and features of the monument, along with stories from people whose lives are interwoven with Torry Battery.

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Images generously supplied by Syabil Azri Arian, Rosie Baillie and DC Thomson.



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Please feel free to borrow this guide during your visit to the Greyhope Bay Centre. Take it with you as you head outside to explore Torry Battery, but please remember to return the guide afterwards so it can be enjoyed by others.

The guide highlights specific parts of the monument of interest. Markings left on walls, windows into hidden rooms, and metalwork remain to provide a glimpse into what it may have looked like in the past. Can you use your imagination to fill in the gaps?

Do mind your footing while you are exploring the Battery; there are loose rocks, level changes, and hidden metalwork. Additionally, the battery is bursting with life, from swallows nesting in the battery walls to thriving wildflowers underfoot, so try to avoid disturbing wildlife.



**SCAN
& SHARE**

The story continues...

If you have a story or memory connected with this place, please share it with us using the code below.



THE MOVEMENT OF MAN AND SEA

Standing on this spot throughout history you would see Aberdeen changing dramatically, from the first settlements over 8,000 years ago to the 'Silver City by the Sea' today.

Ships have sailed out of the port of Aberdeen since at least 1136. In 1308, you would have seen Aberdeen Castle burning after being captured by Robert the Bruce. In 1824, gas lamps would have illuminated the city for the first time. In the 1870s, you would have seen the river Dee redirected as part of improvements to the port.

Can you spot...?

Marischal College, the second largest granite building in the world, in the distance.

Can you imagine...?

What the city would have looked like before the use of gas lamps.



TORRY BATTERY ARCHWAY

Torry Battery has stood guard over Aberdeen since it was constructed in 1860, as engraved on the iconic archway. Mr. Stewart of Peterhead, a well-respected builder known for his experience in harbour work and in the erection of lighthouses, was contracted to erect the nine-gun Battery for £9,500 and works began in 1859.

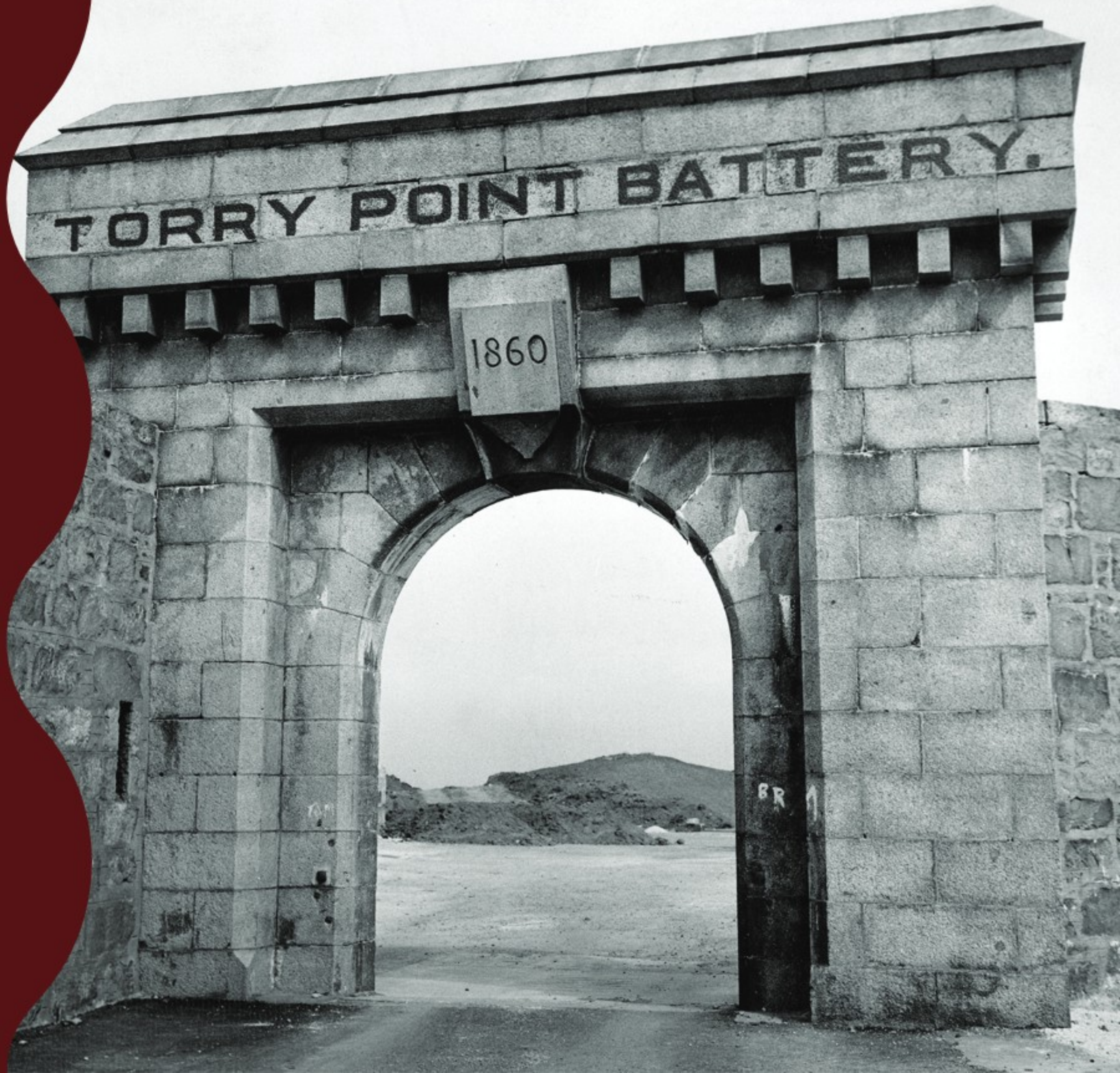
At that time, it was reported that the monument, which was built from Peterhead granite, was to be “a complete fort, with moat, drawbridge, tower, barracks for 90 men and officers, mortars, magazines, stores and cookhouses.”

Can you spot...?

The engraved date or even the faint lettering of ‘Torry Point Battery’ on the archway.

Can you imagine...?

All the different people who have walked through this archway since 1860.



THE GUARDHOUSE

As you enter through the archway, you will spot a structure on your left. This building was used as a guardhouse when Torry Battery was occupied by soldiers and as the caretaker's house when the battery served as emergency housing. Within the now roofless building is a main room with a central fireplace and two small rooms which were used as jail cells.

Can you imagine...?

Being held a prisoner in one of these cells.



WELL, WELL, WELL

While carrying out archaeological exploration work to better understand the site, we uncovered a well.

Hidden beneath the hard surface in front of the guard house, this beautifully intact well provided spring water which would have served the officers stationed here during WWI & WWII, as well as the families who lived here after the wars.

We were able to locate it using old drawings from 1906 but were very surprised to find it in such good condition. The well has been covered back up, which is good practice to protect archaeology, but we are exploring whether it could be revealed or used in the future.

Can you imagine...?

Having to collect water from a well rather than turning the tap on.



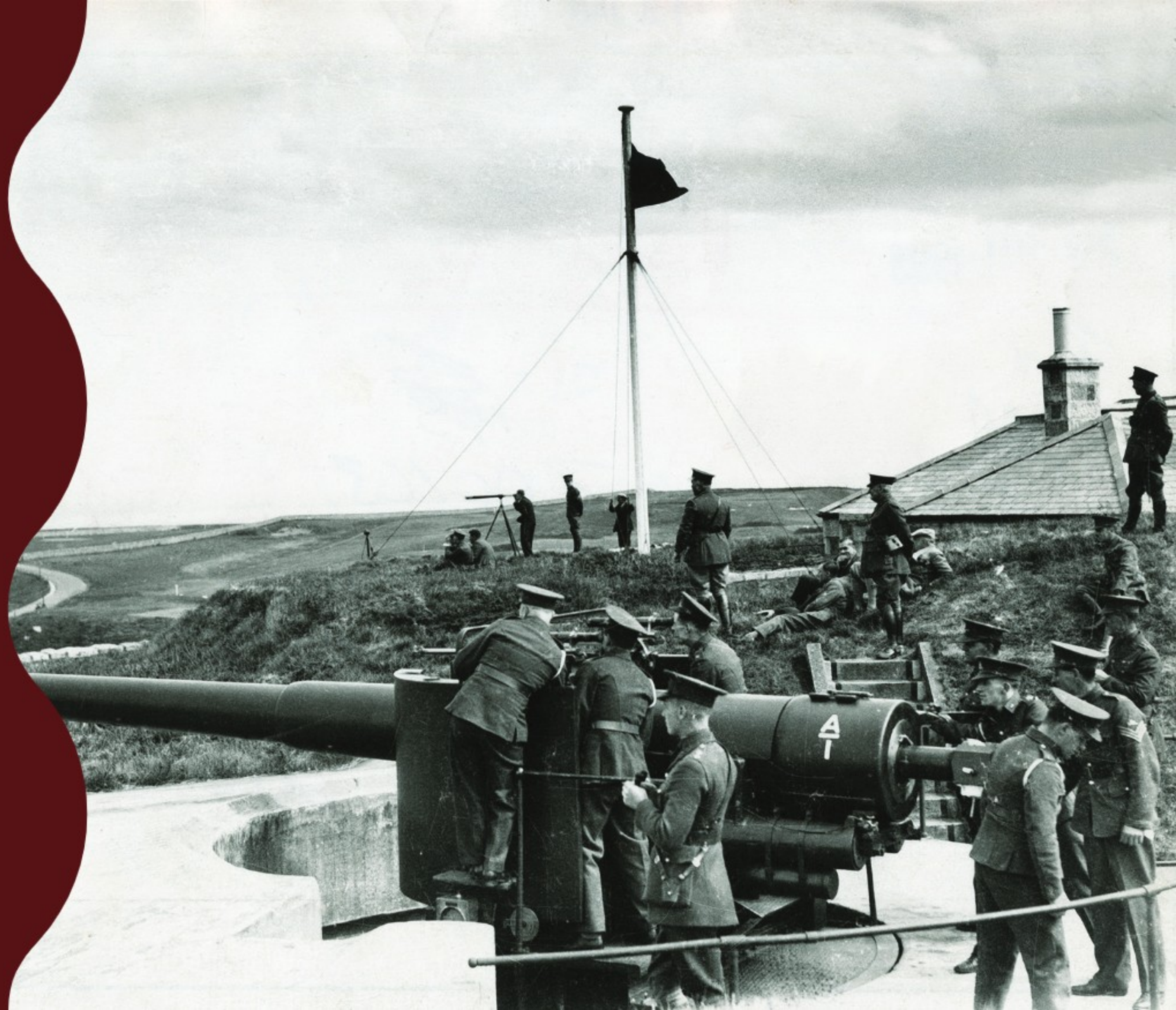
GUNNING PLACEMENTS

When it was first built, the Battery was armed with nine heavy guns (six 68-pounders and three 10-inch shell guns). You can now only find two of these gunning placements in good order with steps leading up to them; the first close to the archway and the other hidden at the south end of the Battery.

Once used as a look out to keep an eye on approaching enemy, it is now used as a peaceful place take in the sea and city views. Many people use these spots to come sit and think about loved ones lost.

*“You lingered there in the North Sea air
And dreamed of what could be,
As four grey ships unmoored their slips
Pushed hopeful out to sea.”*

Excerpt from ‘Bess’, a memoriam poem by Jonathan Hopkins.



AMMUNITION STORES

Like so much of the Battery, the central ammunition store has been demolished. If you look closely, you will see bricked up doorways on either side of the remaining gun emplacements. These were smaller ammunition stores for each gun.

Today, these stores are now a haven for visiting swallows, who build their mud nests here. In the spring and summer look out for them flying quickly over your head as they feed on insects. If you're really quiet and stand back, you may spot them dart in and out of the ammunition store while feeding their young.

Did you know...?

The 200-pound Armstrong guns which were here at one stage were said to have a firing range of 12 miles, which is as far as reaching Newburgh.



THE CURTAIN WALL

Old drawings of Torry Battery show a continuous defensive wall, but today much of the sea facing section of the wall is not visible. An archaeology dig revealed that the wall remains, deep underground. It had been lowered, likely to accommodate new guns, and has since been covered over by rubble and soil.

Around the curtain wall you will spot loopholes - narrow slits in the walls which soldiers would have placed their guns through. They were later used, when the Battery became home to families, as a place to store glass milk bottles and keep them cool.

Can you..?

Count all the gun slits in the curtain wall?



BARRACKS, STOREHOUSES, HOSPITAL, & OFFICER'S ACCOMMODATION

Along the wall and in what is now a large empty yard, there used to be barracks, storehouses, officer's accommodation, cookhouse and even a hospital.

Some of these structures remain, such as the small store attached to the inner wall to the southeast. Others have been fully dismantled, but traces remain, such as the box-like marks on the inner wall, marking where walls and roofs of the barracks had been.

Can you imagine...?

This now quiet and empty place filled with buildings and bustling with soldiers.



EMERGENCY HOUSING

The inter-war years saw the start of a housing crisis, and the Battery was used as temporary housing. Following WWII, the barracks were used again as emergency housing for 20 local families until 1953.

Life here was not always easy; those who lived at the Battery recalled how it was often bitterly cold, the Torry Coo (the foghorn at Girdleness) kept them awake at night, and they were often hungry.

There was a strong sense of community as families would gather around fires together, share fish, and all the children would walk to school together.

Did you know...?

Some people have fond memories of their time living here as children and still consider Torry Battery their home.



PARTIAL DEMOLISHMENT

After the Battery was vacated, the site fell into disrepair. The guns were removed, and a partial demolition of the Battery was carried out in 1959.

The remaining buildings had no windows and doors, and some were also missing floors and roofs. A 1962 Evening Express article referred to Torry Battery as “one of the city’s biggest eyesores.”

The Battery became a playground for local children, whose concerned parents campaigned for it to be levelled and made safer. Despite their pleas, no further demolition work was carried out and Torry Battery became a place for people to enjoy the outdoors.

Can you imagine...?

Playing hide and seek in the Battery as a child.



A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Partial demolition didn't deter people from visiting Torry Battery. It became a playground for children, with local people recalling playing on the ramparts and finding flares to throw at one another. People also recall gathering there for picnics with their families, or to boil buckies (periwinkles) they had collected from the shore.

The site continues to be visited by people walking their dog, taking photographs, enjoying nature, watching harbour traffic, and those wanting to remember and connect to lost loved ones.

Did you know...?

Torry Battery was designated by Historic Environment Scotland as a Scheduled Monument in 2000.



DOLPHIN WATCHING

Today, Torry Battery is well known as a place to watch bottlenose dolphins in the harbour; people visit from all over the world to catch a glimpse of these impressive marine mammals.

The dolphins you see here are part of a population of around 150 - 200 dolphins who travel between the Moray Firth (north) and the Tay (south). Due to the chilly waters in the North Sea, our dolphins have extra blubber to keep them warm, making them the largest in the world.

There's an 80% chance of seeing dolphins here on any given day. Keep your eyes peeled for other marine mammals including harbour porpoise, seals, and the occasional orca sighting in spring or minke whales in the summer.

Did you know...?

Fully grown bottlenose dolphins can reach up to four metres long!



THE PORT OF ABERDEEN

The Port of Aberdeen is the oldest existing business in Britain and continues to play an important role in the city to this day.

The port receives over 7,000 vessels each year - from container ships to ferries and vessels serving the offshore energy industry to cruise ships. It even hosted the Tall Ships Races.

Today, many people enjoy visiting the Battery to watch the harbour traffic. How many different types of boats can you see?

You can learn more about the vessels coming in and out of the harbour if you visit marinetraffic.com.

Can you spot...?

The black and white pilot boat guiding the ships safely out to sea.



GREYHOPE BAY CENTRE AND CAFE

The Greyhope Bay Centre was opened in 2022 as an off-grid community centre and cafe.

We host talks, creative workshops, educational classes, and more to help people connect with each other and the coastline.

To learn more about the work we do, our events, and how you can get involved, visit greyhopebay.com, or speak to one of our friendly volunteers!

Did you know...?

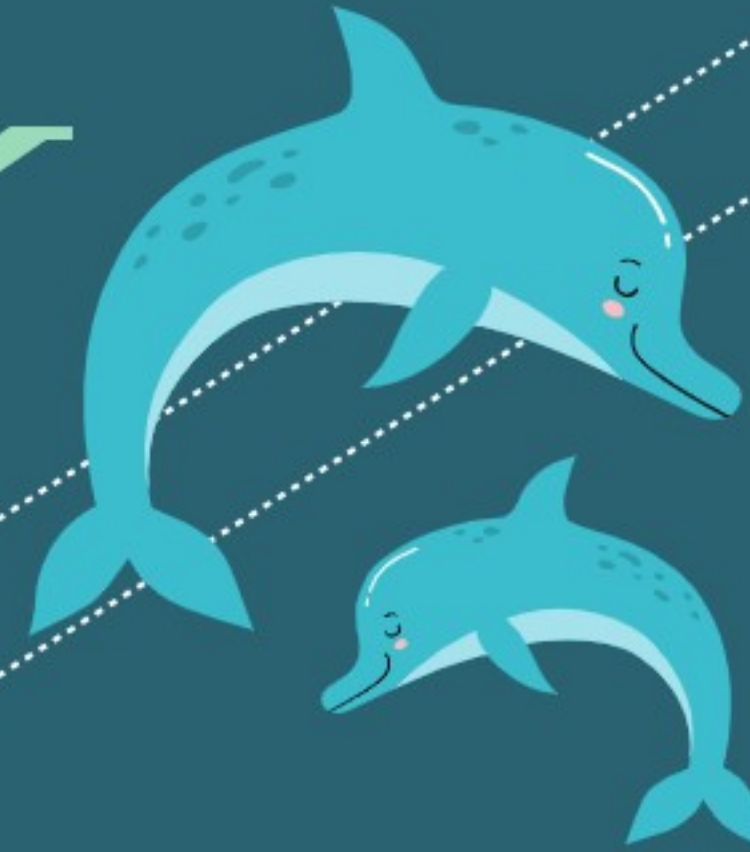
The water we use at the Greyhope Bay Centre and Café is treated rainwater.



LET US
KNOW WHAT
YOU THINK



North Breakwater



South Breakwater

Old South Breakwater



Kirkwall - Aberdeen
Aberdeen - Lerwick

GREYHOPE BAY

Greyhope Bay Centre

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