



Elgin High Street Conservation Area

Part I: Conservation Area Appraisal

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February 2012

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FOREWORD

The preparation of conservation area appraisals by local authorities is encouraged to ensure that the special qualities which led to the designation are understood and preserved while, at the same time, promote appropriate development to enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area. How much do we really know about Elgin's remarkable historic environment, and are we guilty at times of taking it for granted?

The context for commissioning this suite of documents lies in Scottish Government policy, which reminds us that:

'The historic environment is part of our everyday lives. It helps give us a sense of place, well-being, and cultural identity. It enhances regional and local distinctiveness. It forges connections between people and the places where they live and visit'.

The conservation area appraisal more than amply meets these requirements and goes a great deal beyond. It reminds us just how important Elgin's historic environment is, and provides us with a new level of understanding as to how to appreciate and care for it. It provides a firm foundation upon which to begin building Elgin's heritage trail 'Castle to Cathedral to Cashmere', which will be of benefit as much to those living and working in the city as to those visiting it for the first time. On behalf of those who have commissioned this work, The Moray Council, the City of Elgin BID Company, the Elgin Fund and Historic Scotland, we urge you to read this document, not just to discover what makes Elgin so special, but to consider how we can all share the responsibility for caring for this small historic city in order to safeguard it for the enjoyment of future generations.



George McIntyre
Convener, The Moray Council

David Urquhart
Elgin BID, Chairperson

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Partnership Working Group, Chairperson

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0 Executive summary

The Elgin High Street Conservation Area Appraisal is the first of a suite of four related documents which are linked to a number of strategic economic initiatives which are being developed for Elgin. Although it satisfies the encouragement given by Scottish Government for local authorities to undertake conservation area appraisals where areas have been designated already, it meshes with three of the platforms set out in the June 2011 'Elgin City for the Future' report, specifically 'High Street First', 'The Visitor Economy' and 'Arts, Culture and Heritage'. It is timely having regard to the measures for the enhancement of the city centre already underway through the Elgin BID initiative.

The format of the report follows closely the recommendations set down by Scottish Government for undertaking appraisals, and the conclusions are underpinned by extensive audit work and historical research leading to new levels of understanding of this invaluable, but diminishing, resource. The findings have been publicised widely that Elgin fully deserves the category of 'outstanding' given to the area when it was first designated. As a clear indication of this there is a high density of listed buildings within the conservation area, with several Category A historic buildings considered to be of national importance. However, the audit work has resulted in recommendations for a review of the listings to take into account discoveries and those buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which have not been recognised adequately to date and which make a positive contribution to the outstanding historic townscape. Also, in common with many other features, they often have high levels of authenticity.

Apart from the qualities of the townscape - largely derived from the survival of the medieval layout of the burgh - the research has highlighted two areas of interest which have not perhaps been recognised previously. These are the legacy of original shopfronts that have survived unscathed from when they were inserted (a high proportion of them cast-iron), and the extraordinarily high standard of the stone carvings and architectural decoration to be discovered on the street frontages of the city's buildings. In addition, the closes have considerable potential to contribute to the regeneration of the city centre, more than they have done to date.

Change in the recent past has not been altogether kind to the conservation area. While the damage caused by improvements in transport infrastructure and the loss of venerable historic buildings for mediocre new developments has been stemmed, some of the damage has been incremental. It has resulted in some loss of authenticity which has affected the character and appearance of the conservation area, suggesting that it has not always been controlled effectively. Chimneyheads have been taken down and not replaced, and the area has been afflicted by the rash of windows and doors which have been replaced without regard to historical precedent, but perhaps less than some conservation areas.

It would be unusual for a visitor not to conclude that, despite the enhancement to the public realm that has been carried out, the city centre exudes a sense of decay and of economic decline. Redundant buildings and empty shop units all detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area, and three of the closes on the northern side of the High Street consist of rows of buildings which are

presently boarded up. The central area lacks activity at night, and too many of the upper floors are unoccupied. This, and the accompanying documents, set out measures by which the historic environment can play a positive role in the regeneration of the city centre.

Problems of occupancy rates and finding sustainable uses for historic buildings are compounded by the poor state of the much of the high level fabric of buildings. While this is manifested plainly in a lack of maintenance that has been carried out, the decay of stonework is a major problem which can only get worse unless swift action is taken. Elgin has some of the most attractive and durable sandstone on the Scottish mainland, but the widespread use of softer stone from quarries operating from the mid-nineteenth century has taken its toll.

One of the requirements when undertaking conservation area appraisals is for the boundaries to be reviewed, with recommendations made if changes are considered worthy of being implemented. In this instance while, after careful consideration, it is recommended that no changes should be made to the High Street Conservation Area boundaries, anomalies do exist at the southern edge which should be remedied. It is recommended that the boundaries of the Elgin South Conservation Area should be reviewed and amended accordingly. Recommendations are also made for addressing the physical linkages with the heritage assets that are now on the periphery of the conservation area as a consequence of building the relief road – with the castle at Ladyhill at the west, and with Grant Lodge, the Cooper Park and the Cathedral at the east. These issues are considered further in the fourth document of the series, the Interpretive Plan for the Heritage Trail.

Although the historical analysis in Section 3 of this document covers the history of the whole of the city – as indeed it must – the conservation area appraisal can only address the issues within the defined boundary as it is currently designated. The boundary, in itself, should not become a barrier. The area must remain connected to the other parts of the city which have an impact on the wider city economy if the city centre is to remain vibrant, and viable. To be effective, the recommendations set out in this suite of documents will require to be embedded within the planning system.

There is so much surviving in Elgin that is worthy of being celebrated. Furthermore, none of the problems identified within the conservation area are incapable of being resolved.

1 Introduction

1.1 Commissioning and brief

1.1.1 The Elgin High Street Conservation Area Appraisal has been commissioned jointly by the Moray Council, the City of Elgin BID Company, the Elgin Fund and Historic Scotland. It has been prepared in accordance with the Consultant's Brief for which tenders were sought during July 2011.

1.1.2 The tender submitted by Andrew PK Wright, Chartered Architect & Heritage Consultant as team leader was accepted by the Moray Council on behalf of the stakeholders late July 2011.

1.1.3 This document is the first of a suite of four documents focused on the Elgin High Street Outstanding Conservation Area. The documents have been commissioned by a consortium of bodies, which include the City of Elgin BID Company, the Elgin Fund and Historic Scotland, led by the Moray Council. The four documents are listed as follows:

Part 1 Conservation Area Appraisal

Part 2 Conservation Area Management Plan

Part 3 Action Plan

Part 4 Heritage Trail Interpretive Plan

1.2 Project team

1.2.1 In the preparation of this document the lead consultant has been supported by:

Jill Harden Archaeology of the burgh

Gemma Wild Buildings analysis, Buildings at Risk, and public realm audit

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The headings within this document follow in general terms those set down in the Appraisal Checklist in Planning Advisory Note (PAN) 71 *Conservation Area Management*. The methodology used for the study has been that set down in the same document.

1.3.2 Photographs have been taken of each of the properties within the conservation area for general record purposes on a street-by-street basis. Photographs appearing in this document, in the main, were taken during the month of August 2011 with a small number of photographs taken earlier in the year. Supplementary photographs have been taken of elements of construction, or features of the historic townscape deemed to give character and a sense of uniqueness to the conservation area. These are featured in Section 5.

1.3.3 Site visits have been supplemented by archival research into the history of the burgh and its buildings. Research has been carried out in the following locations:

- Moray Heritage Centre, East End Primary School

- The historic photograph collections held by the Moray Society at the Elgin Museum
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)
- Map Library, National Library of Scotland

1.3.4 Online research sources have included the following sources:

- Scran (site hosted by RCAHMS)
- Dictionary of Scottish Architects (site hosted by Historic Scotland)
- Statistical Accounts of Scotland (site hosted jointly the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow)
- Maps of Scotland (site hosted by National Library of Scotland)
- Pastmap (site hosted by RCAHMS)
- Valentine of Dundee historic photographs (site hosted by University of St Andrews Special Collections)
- George Washington Wilson historic photographs (site hosted by University of Aberdeen Special Collections)

1.3.5 The author's own library has been used as the basis of other research.

1.4 Credits, copyright and licensing of images

1.4.1 Credits for historic images selected from the above named sources are given throughout the document.

1.4.2 Historic images are reproduced under licence for copyright granted solely for publication within this document. Images should under no circumstances be reproduced without the consent of the named copyright holder.

1.5 Public consultation

1.5.1 A presentation was given in late October 2011 to the project stakeholders on the audit work undertaken, and on the principal findings and recommendations set down in the conservation area appraisal. There was general endorsement given to the conclusions and recommendations, and any comments provided at that meeting have been incorporated within the final draft of the document.

1.5.2 A public meetings took place at the end of November 2011 which was well attended by members of the public, local businesses and representatives of the key community organisations. A presentation was given by the project team on the four components of the project brief as noted in 1.1.3 above. The principles behind possible extensions to the conservation area boundaries, and why they had not been carried forward for recommendation at this stage was explained, and these recommendations were accepted. The final document takes into account feedback from the public consultation exercise.

1.5.3 The process has been widely publicised in the media. A further public consultation exercise was set up by the Council in January 2012. Printed copies of the documents were made available for inspection in the Public Library together with a slideshow of images of historic buildings and townscape. Comments were submitted at the end of the consultation period and have been considered; where thought necessary, the documents have been amended to take these into account.

1.6 Acknowledgements

- 1.6.1 The authors of the conservation area character appraisal are indebted to those who have assisted the archival research programme. Particular thanks are expressed to the members of the Moray Society for their generous help in sourcing images and making them available, and also to the staff of the Moray Heritage Centre. Historic images from both of these sources grace the pages of this document.

1.7 Date of the designation of the conservation area

- 1.7.1 The Elgin High Street Conservation Area was designated Outstanding in 1976.

1.8 Extent of the conservation area

- 1.8.1 The present conservation area, together with the boundary of the adjoining Elgin South Conservation Area, is shown in Appendix 13.1. During the course of the survey work it was established that there were inconsistencies in the line of the existing boundary to the south of the conservation area and to, a lesser degree, to the west. In part this is due to similar inconsistencies in drawing up the boundaries of the Elgin South Conservation Area which is not covered in this document.
- 1.8.2 Possible reasons for extending boundaries of the present conservation area, and why these have not been recommended at the present time are set out in section 10.1.

1.9 Status of the document

- 1.9.1 The recommendations set out in this document reflect several meetings that have been held with the steering group representing the interests of the principal stakeholders, at which representatives of the each and the Moray Council have been present. It reflects also feedback given at a workshop with Council stakeholders in relation to planning legislation issues to be addressed in the document. As noted above, it also takes into account the public consultation held during the months of January and February 2012.
- 1.9.2 Although a consensus view has been sought at all stages of the programme, the recommendations set out in this document have been arrived at independently and are presented to the Council and to the principal stakeholders for endorsement.

2 Background

2.1 Setting and topography

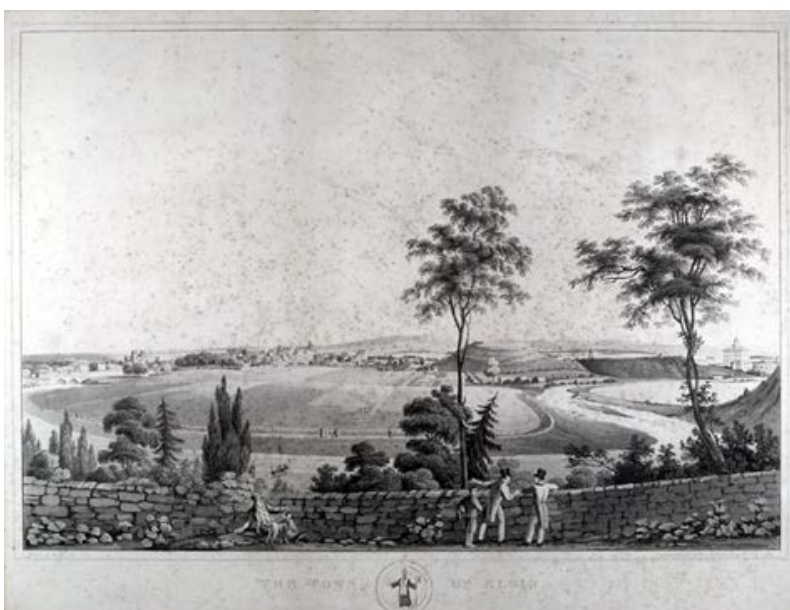
- 2.1.1 This part of the Moray plain, crossed by the meandering River Lossie, has been an agriculturally rich area for at least 4,500 years. Until medieval times it must have been a lightly farmed and wooded region in the slightly rolling landscape. Just as today the river must have regularly flooded the adjacent lower-lying ground on its winding path to the sea. Hence the development of farmsteads and small settlements took place on lands above the burns and rivers, often close to fords or confluences.
- 2.1.2 Such a situation is that where the medieval castle and burgh of Elgin developed, on a slight ridge just east of the convergence of the Black



Slezer's well known 'Prospect of the Town of Elgin' (1693) shows the cathedral to the left of the image and the castle at Ladyhill on the right in the far distance

Burn, the burn through Cloves, and the River Lossie. Elgin is situated on the south side of the river, the ridge of dry land falling to the east where the Tyock Burn flowed into the Lossie. This setting must have been a somewhat marshy and watery surround to dry land that afforded an attractive fording place over the River Lossie. The location would also have been regarded as a strongly defensible one, to the south of the flat Laigh of Moray and the once extensive Loch of Spynie and the sea beyond.

- 2.1.3 The historic core of Elgin, around which boundaries of the Elgin High Street Conservation Area have been broadly drawn, sits upon a ridge of ground rising gently towards the south, reflecting the original medieval layout. The northern boundary was largely determined by the floodplain of the River Lossie flowing around the haugh, and at one stage it is thought to have passed more closely to the ends of the burgage plots, or rigs, before adopting its present course.



L Clarke's view of Elgin from Brumley Brae to the northwest (1824) shows Dr Gray's Hospital with its dome, newly built at the west end of the city and the towers of the cathedral at the east © The Moray Council, licenser rcahms.gov.uk

- 2.1.4 In the medieval period the wider setting of the historic burgh would have included the royal castle at the west end of the High Street, and the cathedral set within its own walled citadel, or chanonry, on the lower lying land to the east, and this is represented clearly on Slezer's well known 'Prospect of the Town of Elgin' (1693). The rising ground surrounding Elgin in an arc from the northeast to the northwest has provided opportunities for historic viewpoints for artists, and for illustrating the key buildings of skyline of the burgh when seen from several directions. These views are difficult to recreate nowadays due to the expansion of the burgh boundaries and with woodland having become established in the intervening period.
- 2.1.5 The historic burgh was reasonably well situated in relation to the coastal harbours of the Moray Firth, and it occupies a key position on the east-west route from Inverness to Banff and Aberdeen which, for centuries, passed through the heart of the burgh.



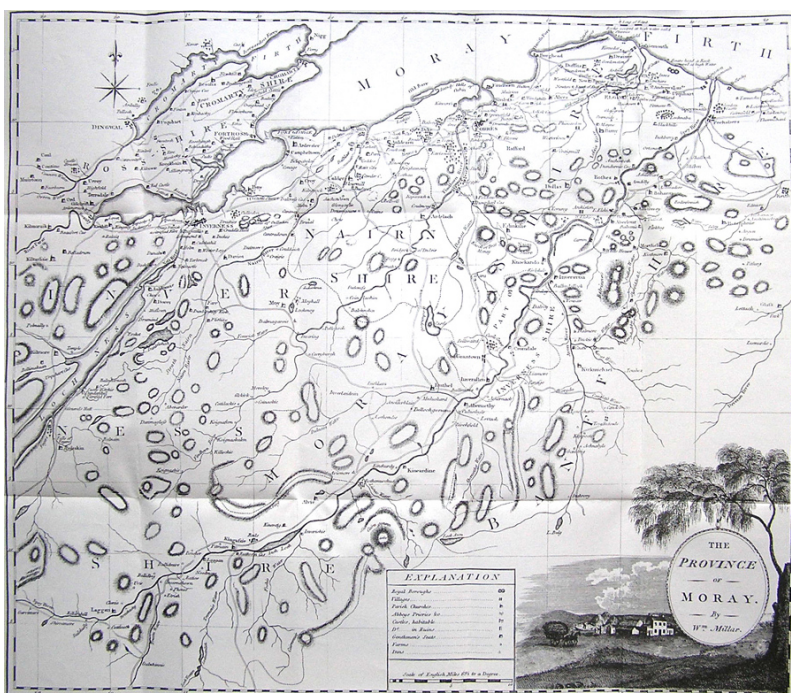
Detail from Clarke's view shows the profiles of the old Tolbooth and old St Giles Parish Church before the major improvements which took place from the 1820s

2.2 Geology

- 2.2.1 The geology of the Laigh of Moray is primarily of the Upper Old Red Devonian Sandstone, upon which Elgin is founded. Deep superficial deposits of varying stones may occur within the area from glacial action. To the north of Elgin a narrow band of Permian-Triassic sandstones occurs on the coastline between Covesea and Cummingston where freestone of an excellent quality has been quarried for centuries.
- 2.2.2 Several quarries were opened up in the vicinity of Elgin to provide sandstone for building purposes. Groome's *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland* (1883) noted that to the west of the parish the underlying rock was a whiteish-grey sandstone, while from a ridge to the north of Pluscarden a considerable quantity of stone was extracted in 1826 for the building of London Bridge. Known quarries operating at the end of the nineteenth century were at Quarrywood, Spynie, the Hospital Quarry, Newton, Bishopmill and Laverocklock. Quarrywood stone was used for the building of Anderson's Institution in the early 1830s.

2.3 Regional context

- 2.3.1 Elgin has, throughout history, been the administrative centre for what had been termed once the Province of Moray, a broad swathe of fertile and productive land stretching far to the west, beyond Inverness even. The concept of how important the Province had been was still promoted at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and was related to the 'prelatic extent' of the see of the medieval cathedral.



Map of the Province of Moray, prepared for the Elgin bookseller Isaac Forsyth in 1798, showing its historic importance and an area extending well beyond Inverness and the Great Glen

The Laigh was densely populated with towerhouses and castles, and the coastline of the Inner Moray Firth was dotted with the harbours that were essential for the trade that contributed to the prosperity of the burgh at various times in its history. It has always served a large landward area extending to the uplands of Strathspey to the physical barrier of the Cairngorm Mountains.

- 2.3.2 With the two tiers of administration introduced after Local Government reorganisation in 1975, while some power was lost to the east to Aberdeen as the administrative centre for Grampian Region, the District Council remained an effective unit, taking over the powers of the smaller burghs of the former county. Latterly the devolved powers have been restored as a unitary authority, for which the headquarters remain in Elgin. The Moray Council is a major employer in the area, and some of the problems of dispersed Council office accommodation across the city centre will be overcome when the annex to the headquarters at the former Safeway supermarket building at the east end of the conservation area opens. The relocation of office space brings with it the potential to increase vacant space within the local letting market or redundancy in the use of the buildings vacated.
- 2.3.3 Elgin continues as a centre of justice today, with the sheriff court located at the east end of the High Street.
- 2.3.4 Although Elgin is well positioned between Inverness and Aberdeen, and is on the principal transport routes, it has suffered from the consolidation of major regional retail activity in both of the larger cities. To some degree this has been offset by the St Giles Centre development, by attracting the Marks and Spencer store at the west end of the High Street and by the retail park schemes to the south of the city, all of which attract custom from the landward areas. However, it is inevitable that the conservation area is affected by the out-of-town retail developments and by the erection of the two large supermarket

stores on the periphery of the city centre. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of vacant retail premises and, at least in this respect, Elgin is no different to many small towns in Scotland.

- 2.3.5 Of greater concern for the health of the city centre have been the series of announcements relating to the uncertain future of the military bases in Moray, a threat which has been recognised by Government, by the Moray Council, by business leaders in the community and by the principal agencies. The conservation area appraisal, management and action plan and heritage trail are therefore components of a wider series of initiatives of which the ambitions of the City for the Future document sets out a comprehensive development blueprint.
- 2.3.6 Elgin continues in its role as a regional centre for the provision of professional and financial services, of which most are located within the conservation area and give valued life to its buildings. It is also a service centre for the landward area, with many of the facilities housed within the numerous industrial estates and retail parks on the periphery of the city centre. Key employers within Moray's economy in the drinks, textiles and food industries continue to have a presence in the city, either from having their headquarters located there, from opening sales outlets or from establishing new production facilities.
- 2.3.7 In the case of Johnstons' Woollen Mills there has been a marked increase in the numbers of visitors to the site following years of investment. Roughly a tenth of the numbers of those visiting Johnstons are attracted to Elgin Cathedral, which is in State Care managed by Historic Scotland. It is widely accepted that the city is underperforming in the area of heritage and cultural tourism considering the outstanding calibre of its heritage assets. Platform 4 of the 'City for the Future' final report, 'The Visitor Economy', recognises this deficiency.

3 Historical background and patterns of growth

3.1 The establishment and settlement of the medieval burgh

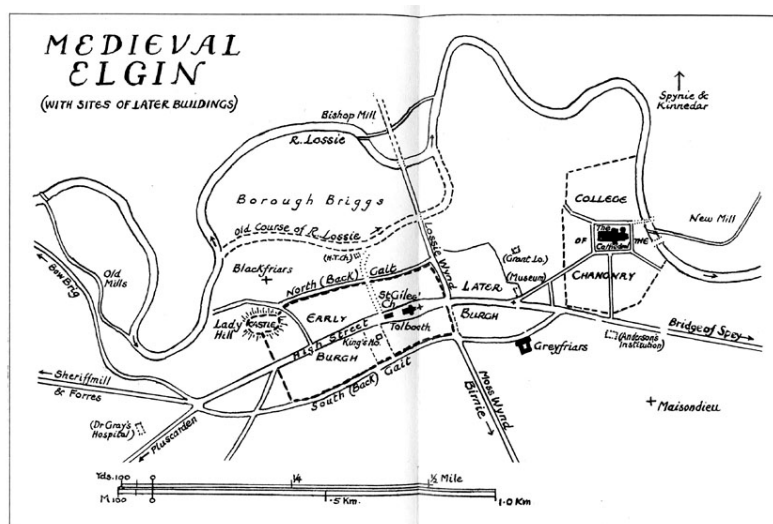
- 3.1.1 Settlement in the area around Elgin is well attested from prehistoric times with sites such as Quarrywood to the west, Birnie to the south and Bogton to the east. These, and numerous others, date from the 1st to 3rd millennia BC. This was a landscape of farming, fishing, hunting and gathering; it was then, as now, a region rich in resources. In time, political and economic power became concentrated in fewer hands, and so high status, defensible, settlements became *de rigeur*. Small forts and duns were constructed during the later Iron Age, sited along the hills that flank the south of the Moray plain. The location of what was to become Elgin a millennium later, situated close to the river and largely surrounded by marshland or regularly flooded water-meadows, was not chosen.
- 3.1.2 High status Iron Age and Pictish settlements in this region were dominated by Burghead, the over-arching centre of Pictish power in the north of the country for over 400 years. Such control over the surrounding landscape is reflected in the siting of early Christian sites, with an early church at Burghead itself and the focus of contemporary monastic settlement at Kinneddar. The discovery of the buried Pictish cross-slab in the graveyard around St Giles' Church in Elgin in 1823 is of significance in this respect. Presuming that it originally stood here it may well reflect the use of this dry land, at the confluence of several

watercourses, as a place of open-air worship in the eighth century AD. Pictish domination gave way to the power of the Norse earls for whom Burghead was also an important base from which the seaways of the Moray Firth could be controlled.



This aerial photograph shows clearly the extent of the structures of the royal castle erected on the motte and the foreworks to the north and west © Crown Copyright RCAHMS, licensor rcahms.gov.uk

- 3.1.3 Whether a chapel and associated small settlement developed in around Elgin in the ninth century is unknown. No excavated archaeological finds indicate that this was the case. However, the suggested Gaelic derivation of Elgin (little Ireland) can be interpreted as supporting the theory. Nevertheless, it is not until the twelfth century that there is clear evidence for the occupation of the site. David I (1124-1153) had one of a number of castles around the Moray Firth built here. Situated on the steep hillock at the north-western edge of the higher ground beside the River Lossie, the strategic location is obvious. William I (1165-1214) granted fourteen charters from this residence at Elgin, far more than the number granted from either Inverness or Aberdeen.



Ronald Cant's map of Medieval Elgin, from the guide prepared for the Elgin Society

- 3.1.4 The building of a royal castle, initially in timber but soon enlarged and of stone construction, resulted in the development of a settlement to its east. Separate from the immediate environs of the castle, David's royal burgh was laid out in orderly fashion. As many as 100 long,

narrow burgage plots were created, running at right-angles to the High Street. A church dedicated to St Giles was built towards the east end of the main thoroughfare, set in the wide, open space of the market area. By the close of the twelfth century Elgin, with two large mills by the River Lossie, was established as an important economic centre for the region.

- 3.1.5 Elgin's status was enhanced further by the papal creation of the new cathedral seat for the Bishop of Moray here in 1224, following the gift of land from Alexander II (1214-1249) at some time during the preceding decade. Located at a distance from the eastern edge of the burgh, the cathedral was eventually to become a jewel in Scotland's religious heart, the third largest cathedral in the country. The extent of the surrounding lands, with the manses of 23 canons, was defined by an enclosing high wall pierced at four points by gates, of which only the Pans Port survives. At much the same time Alexander II gifted lands for a Dominican Friary north of the castle and a decade later established a Maison Dieu for the poor, some distance south of the cathedral chanonry wall.

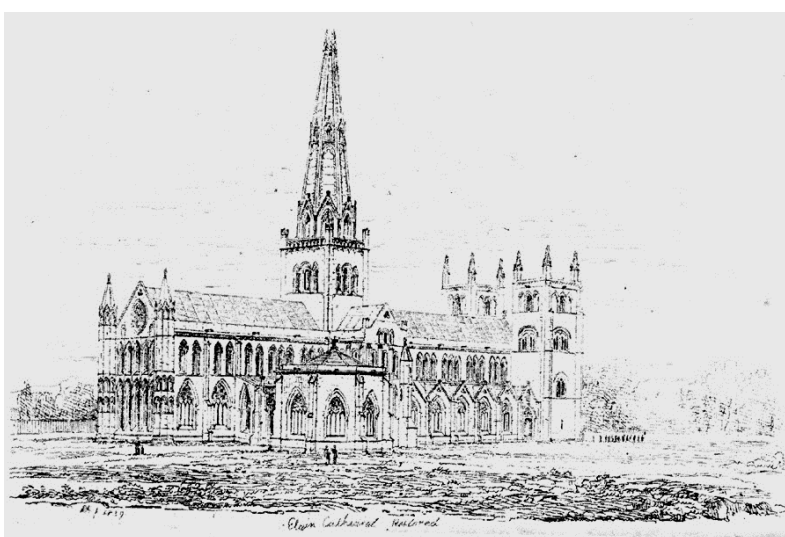


Symbols of the guildry: a reused stone lintol carrying the date 1686 appearing in one of the closes at the west end; the stone is mutilated by surface cabling

- 3.1.6 In 1268 Alexander III gave the burghers of Elgin the right to establish a merchant guild, confirming their power to control and tax trade throughout the area. The royal burgh was clearly a thriving economic, political, social and religious hub, with a population of around 600. Edward I of England spent time here in 1296, and again in 1303, a reflection of the importance of the city and its cathedral.
- 3.1.7 Although the 'good castle' had been slighted in 1297, it was repaired after the Wars of Independence. Security returned and the burgh prospered, expanding eastwards towards the chanonry wall and westwards to the foot of the castle hill as the population grew to over 1,000. Entry into the burgh was controlled at four ports, none of which survive today; there are no records of a town wall. Instead, the backlands of the burgage plots, c100m in length, were demarcated by dykes which formed the edge of the North and South Lanes. This system must have worked well enough, for the customs collected during the fourteenth century, while the burgh was in the hands of the Earl of Moray, were not insignificant.
- 3.1.8 However, the close of the fourteenth century was a period of turbulence for the burgh and cathedral, with the destruction wrought by the Wolf of Badenoch in 1390, followed around a decade later by the incursions of the men of the Lord of the Isles. Although both town and cathedral were repaired and rebuilt, subsequent decades saw the merchants of the burgh having to address problems associated with increasing difficulty of access to coastal harbours, with changes in the

course of the River Lossie and the silting up of Loch Spynie. Such challenges were not easily overcome.

- 3.1.9 Nevertheless, the burgh must have maintained some of its importance, even if it did not experience growth like that of Aberdeen or Dundee. There must have been wealth to be had from the mills and town, for the Crown reclaimed the burgh in the 1450s, following political disturbances in the region. James II took hospitality in the chanonry of the cathedral in 1458, and could have visited the Precentor's Manse which dates to this period. James IV visited the cathedral on numerous occasions between 1494 and 1509. He must have seen the result of the collapse of the central tower in 1506, but it was not until 1538 that it was rebuilt by Bishop Hepburn with its awe-inspiring steeple.



D Alexander's vision of Elgin Cathedral before the Reformation (1839)

- 3.1.10 Burgh taxes must have been used for a tolbooth that housed the gaol, but it was not until the sixteenth century that some funds were used to establish a grammar school. The foundation of a Franciscan Friary in 1479, just beyond the east boundary of the enlarged burgh, reflects the largesse of at least one of the burghers of Elgin at this time. Others must have used their wealth in other ways. But it seems unlikely that anything of the medieval burghers' townhouses that would have stood along or behind the High Street have survived behind today's facades.
- 3.1.11 Neither the impact of the Reformation of the 1560s – with the ruination of the cathedral, its manses and enclosing wall, and the closure of the friaries – nor the economic developments of the seventeenth or nineteenth centuries, have obliterated Elgin's medieval origins. The pattern of the street layout, the burgage plots and their closes, the castle to the west and the cathedral to the east, are all fundamental features of today's busy city. The survival of these features from Elgin's historic past is of considerable significance, regionally and nationally.

3.2 Growth of the burgh from 1560 to 1700

- 3.2.1 The years after the Scottish Reformation began somewhat inauspiciously when, in 1567, the lead from the cathedral roofs was stripped and sold to pay for the support of the government army and, while there seemed to be some remorse expressed over this act of desecration it was never to be replaced. It signalled the death knell for

the fabric of this magnificent church which continued unabated for centuries.

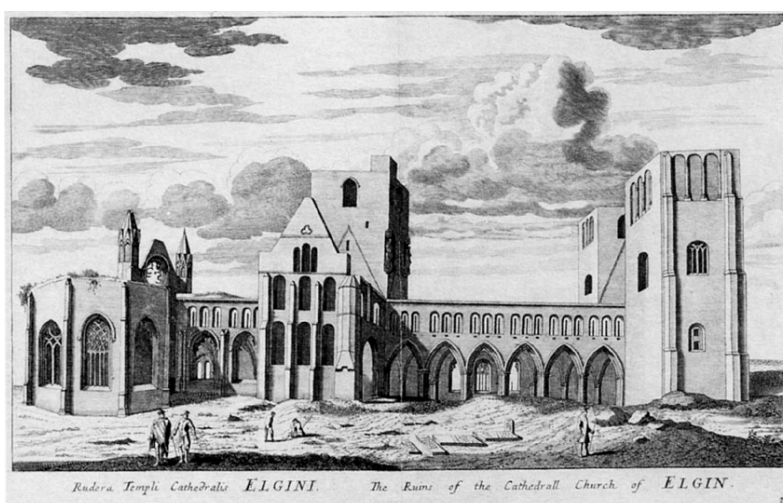
- 3.2.2 The leaded spire and tower to the cathedral had come crashing down in 1505, only to be rebuilt by Bishop Hepburn in the 1530s. It is shown on Timothy Pont's sketch of Elgin for his map of Scotland, believed to have been surveyed in the late sixteenth century, and indeed Taylor, the Water Poet, who visited in 1618, remarked upon this impressive sight:

From thence I went to Elgin in Murray, an ancient citie, where there stood a faire and beautifull church with three steeples, the walls of it and the steeples still standing.

The walls were not to stand for much longer, for in 1637 the choir roof was blown down in a gale, causing considerable damage. The central tower fell in 1711 and caused yet further damage, bringing down with it the walls of the north transept and the nave arcades. According to Bishop Pococke it had been weakened by grave digging at its base. Slezer prepared the last known illustration of it before it fell.



Timothy Pont's depiction of Elgin from his late sixteenth century map: the cathedral appears to be missing its steeple. Spynie Palace and Spynie Loch are shown at the top of the image © National Library of Scotland



Slezer's view of the ruins of Elgin Cathedral (first published 1693) shows the central tower before it fell in 1711

- 3.2.3 Although the Reformation scarred the fabric of the cathedral permanently, it had little effect, at least initially, on the college and the

chaplains who retained their manses, conducting their business much as they had always done. Ecclesiastical property was passed to the Town Council, but in reality it ended up in the hands of the nobility. One such beneficiary was Alexander Seton, Lord Fyvie, and 1st Earl of Dunfermline, who had been appointed commendator of Pluscarden. He rose to the position of Lord High Chancellor in James VI's government in 1604, at a time when he was undertaking a second stint as Lord Provost of Elgin. His armorial panel survives in one of the closes where it has been displayed, but in most other respects memories of this important nobleman and politician seem to have faded in Elgin with the passage of time.



Alexander Seton's armorial panel, displayed in Masonic Close

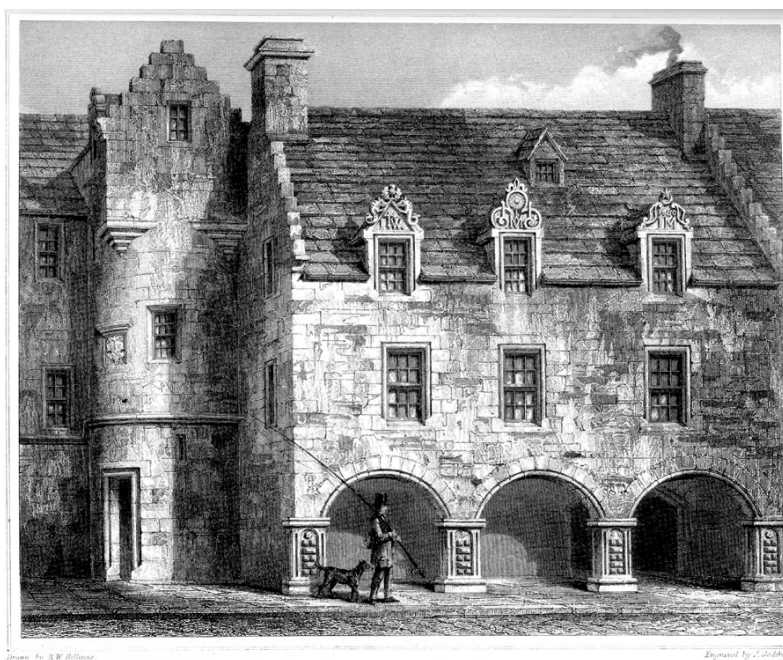
- 3.2.4 The historical accuracy of Timothy Pont's memorable sketch of the city in the late sixteenth century (previous page), viewed from the south, has been analysed by historians and burgh archaeologists who have confirmed it as being so. In his mapping he shows the locations of the ports, with the city and chanonry encircled by walls and ditches. The cathedral is shown still very largely intact at the east end and the castle at the other. The towers of the townhouses of the leading noblemen are also clearly shown, while at the heart of the city stands the old parish church of St Giles.
- 3.2.5 Elgin's prosperity during this period can be attributed to the success of its lairds and merchant burgesses alike in trading with Holland and the Hanseatic ports. Luxury goods such as wine, spirits, silks, and ironware would be imported, while the export trade was founded on merchandise derived from the rich resources of the Province of Moray, including grain, salted salmon, malt and beer. In the seventeenth century there were, at one stage, no less than eighty brewers in Elgin exporting considerable quantities of ale to Norway and the Baltic ports in addition to the usual destinations.
- 3.2.6 The success of Elgin's export trade could be guaranteed only from securing suitable harbours along the coastline of the firth. With Spynie Loch silting up there was an undue reliance on the harbours at the mouths of the River Findhorn and the Spey. Interest in setting up a harbour at Lossiemouth surfaced early in the seventeenth century, but it was not until 1694 that land had been acquired for the purpose and a harbour erected some time thereafter. It seems that it had a positive

effect on trading, at least for the period leading into the first decades of the eighteenth century.



Blaeu's map (1654) conveys an image of Elgin as a prosperous, tightly knit city of towers, with the remains of the castle to the west at Ladyhill © National Library of Scotland

- 3.2.7 Elgin could boast a merchant guild (conceded to the burgh in 1234) made up of Masons, Wrights and Smiths serving the building industry. Other trades were represented by the Websters (weaving), Cordiners (shoemakers), Glovers, Baxters (bakers), and the Fleshers (butchers). There were other trades active in the burgh, sometimes known as Oddfellows, who were not recognised in the guildry.
- 3.2.8 Study of economic league tables measured by burgh stents (or national taxes) throughout the seventeenth century, is instructive. Historically, the burghs of the Inner Moray Firth fell far behind Inverness in terms of output. Whereas in 1557 Elgin was recorded 22nd in the roll, a position that changed relatively little until the mid-seventeenth century, by the end of the century it had risen to 13th place, and in 1705 it had peaked to 9th, ahead of Inverness even. It is hard to reconcile this with the claim that, in 1695, the merchants had been complaining of difficult trading and a burden of indebtedness, although this may have been attributable to the outlays on establishing the harbour.
- 3.2.9 This period is marked on the High Street by the survival of three merchant's houses, each of them built in within the very short space of six years, from 1688 to 1694. While they are not the earliest of the houses surviving on the street – that claim rests with the Tower, built for the bailie Alexander Leslie in 1634 – they are remarkably similar in appearance with an architectural confidence that suggests influences from the foreign towns with which the merchants were trading. The key features that marked them out are the arcades, or piazzas, of open arches supported on squat sandstone pillars, the steep roofs clad in heavy stone slates and with crowstepped gables. As a consequence of the audit work a further former merchant's house has been identified right on the eastern boundary of the conservation area, also carrying the date of 1694 on one of the skewputts. Although the building has been much molested, it establishes the fact that the High Street, and its fine array of merchants' houses, extended this far eastwards at this stage of the burgh's history.
- 3.2.10 Slezer's well known 'Prospect of the Town of Elgine', published in the first volume of *Theatrum Scotiae* in 1693 (page 6) shows the burgh at a high point in an illustrious history. The city is well confined within the original medieval straightjacket, although some development has occurred roughly in the area beyond Lossie Wynd where the north port



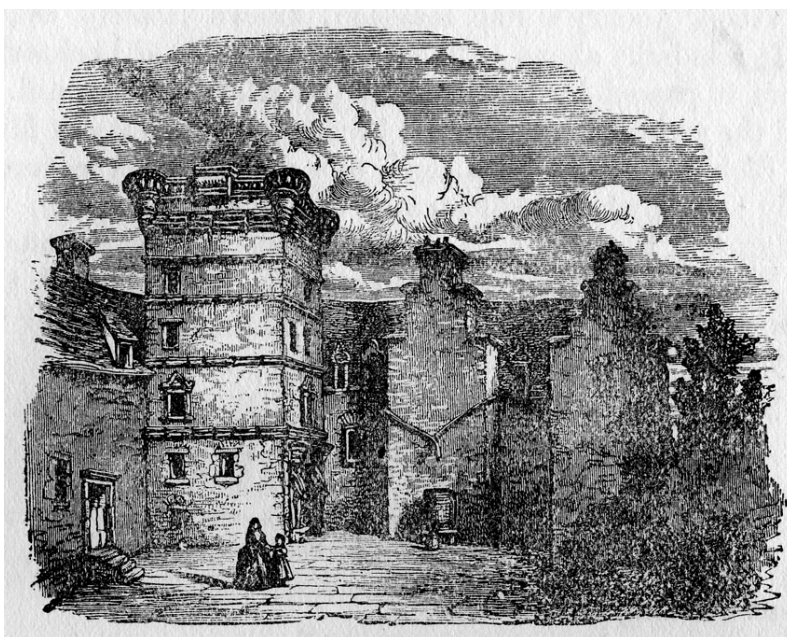
A fine merchant's house of 1680 at 101 High Street with elaborate piazzas, adjacent to The Tower of 1634 shown on the left of the engraving, drawn by Robert Billings. It was demolished in the late nineteenth century.

had been located. The skyline is dominated by the cathedral, parish church and the castle (by now the profile is much diminished when compared with Pont's sketch), and the townhouses of the noblemen are still prominent elements clustered around the west end of the cathedral. Here, in relative close proximity to one another, were the mansions of the leading potentate of the North, the Marquis of Huntly, the Mackenzie laird of Pluscarden, and the Innes family's Dunkinty House, part of the original college.

- 3.2.11 The tower of a fourth residence, that of Thunderton House, is also prominent on the ridge. On the site of a former royal residence, after passing through several families it came into the possession of the Sutherlands of Duffus in 1650. They built the tower and extended the western part to form the mansion house with a courtyard facing north towards the High Street, the subject of the familiar sketch by which it is recognised today, but one which is almost impossible to reconcile with the building's current appearance.
- 3.2.12 Slezer's image is matched by the description of Elgin provided by Daniel Defoe, which must have followed a visit in the first decade of the eighteenth century, or thereabouts. He was impressed enough to write:

As the country is rich and pleasant, so here are a great many rich inhabitants, and in the town of Elgin in particular; for the gentlemen, as if this was the Edinburgh, or court, for this part of the island, leave their Highland habitations in the winter and come and live here for the diversion of the place and plenty of provisions; and there is, on this account, a great variety of gentlemen for society, and that of all parties and opinions. This makes Elgin a very agreeable place to live in, notwithstanding its distance, being above 450 measured miles from London, and more, if we must go by Edinburgh.

His praise for the city proved somewhat short-lived; by the time that another giant of British literature, Samuel Johnson, had visited with his travelling companion James Boswell later in the century, it was a different story altogether.



Thunderton House, shown before it was mutilated by the city improvements carried out by John Batchen in the early nineteenth century

3.3 A century of stagnation from 1700 to 1800

- 3.3.1 It is difficult to establish to what extent Elgin's prosperous trade with Holland and the Baltic ports collapsed as a consequence of the Act of Union of 1707 and the taxation that followed it, but certainly by the 1720s the trade of the maltsters and brewers was in recession; by the mid-century it was heavily reliant on home consumption with deliveries being made only as far as Inverness. By the end of the century it had faded out almost completely, with the old malt barns occupied by weavers' looms.



D Alexander's sketch of the fifteenth century Little Cross (1838) shows Braco's Banking House, one of three surviving merchants' houses built with piazzas; all traces of thatched cottages of the type shown in the illustration seemed to have disappeared from the city centre by the end of the nineteenth century. The arcade had been filled in later in the century, but was restored to its original state by the early twentieth century

- 3.3.2 The rapacious William Duff of Dipple and Braco capitalised on the buoyancy of Elgin's trade at the beginning of the eighteenth century when he set up his banking house in the merchant's dwelling built by John Duncan and Margaret Innes in 1694 near to the Little Cross,

known now as Braco's House. Operating from Elgin as a merchant and money-lender across the North of Scotland he became one of the wealthiest men of the time, laying the foundations of the wealth of the Earls of Fife, a family which enjoyed a long association with Elgin.

- 3.3.3 The parish minister recorded in the 1790s that trade with Holland had continued into the 1740s, but by the end of the century it was confined to the home ports, and was by then mainly for imports only. Bishop Pococke, passing through on his third tour of Scotland in 1760, noted the rise of the textile industry. Before then, Elgin had been participating as most burghs of the North East in the lucrative stocking trade. The travelling cleric observed that there was a well established linen industry which in addition to stamped linen cloth was producing blankets and coarse cloth, and that it was mainly for home consumption. He noted, however, that the city's market was a good one, and he remarked also on the shops there. By the end of the century over forty shops had been established.
- 3.3.4 The manufacture of linen cloth was a staple industry of considerable value to the community, but it gave way gradually to a revival in woollen manufacture stimulated by the improved quality of wool from sheep introduced into the uphill landward area. Seventy weavers were active by the end of the century, and Alexander Johnston, who had set up originally as a linen and flax merchant at Newmill in 1797, moved quickly into carding wool by the beginning of the nineteenth century. By 1810 he was weaving on narrow and broad looms.



Roy's map (1747-1755) shows the High Street extending to the castle and well connected to the chanonry at the east, with buildings lining South College Street and North College Street © British Library/ National Library of Scotland

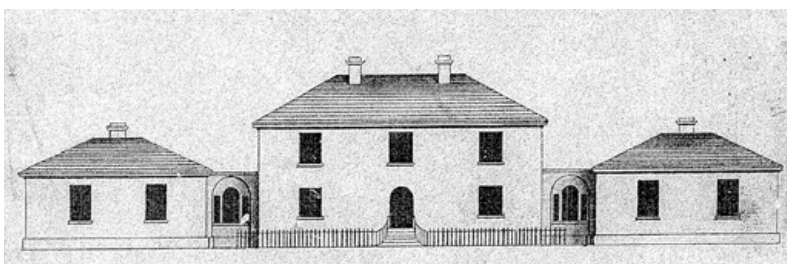
- 3.3.5 Roy's mid-eighteenth century map shows very clearly the extent of the city at that time. The High Street extends westwards to just beyond the castle at Ladyhill, while at the eastern end of the burgh the remnants of the enclosure to the old chanonry can be made out, with South College Street and North College Street dividing at the Little Cross. Cross streets running north and south from the High Street were confined to North Street, Lossie Wynd, and the old School Wynd which was straightened out later to become Commerce Street. Greyfriars Street seems well formed but the north and south back lanes do not appear to have been used as thoroughfares by this time.
- 3.3.6 The rate of building slowed down during the eighteenth century, if not quite to a standstill. From the first half of the eighteenth century the most significant buildings are to be found at 15-25 High Street and although they have been heavily restored in the late twentieth century



A Valentine image, c1920, shows the building at 15-25 High Street of 1728 in close to its original state, with early shopfronts and harled walls. The shopfronts were enlarged in the interwar years, and then in 1971 the ground floor was given a range of arches, the fenestration was changed and the harling removed, changing its appearance and character © University of St Andrews Special Collections

the tall roofs with crowstepped gables and the primitive Venetian window mark them apart. There are old dwellings on the west side of Braco's Close, and some of the former dwellings of Harrow's Inn Close, closest to the High Street, are likely to date to around the mid-century, but could be earlier.

- 3.3.7 Elgin's merchant burgesses were not without ambition, even if the circumstances of trading had fallen back. They made approaches to Scotland's leading architects of the day on more than one occasion. Thus we find the King's Master of Works, James Smith (son of a Forres mason burgess) preparing designs for a new steeple for the Muckle Kirk in 1719, and William Adam having been approached for a similar task in 1734. The first real architect of distinction to complete a building in the city was the son of William Adam, Robert, author of the design of a villa in 1766 for Lady Innes, the favoured aunt of James Grant of Grant. Grant Lodge was located roughly in the area where the townhouse of the Mackenzies of Pluscarden had been and its extended policies were the key to establishing the Cooper Park in the first years of the twentieth century.



Robert Adam's design for Grant Lodge (1766) can be seen at the heart of this unfulfilled proposal by John Paterson for extending it with pavilion wings in 1789 © National Archives of Scotland

- 3.3.8 Travellers generally considered Elgin to be a good town, despite having seen better days. Among the first of them, William Burrell, admired the High Street in 1758 and noted that 'The houses are built on piazzas, which contribute much to gain a traveller's opinion in favour of them'. Thomas Pennant in 1769 formed a similar view of the city, but in 1773 Samuel Johnson and James Boswell seemed

perplexed as to why the city had fallen on hard times as they considered the likely full extent of the piazzas which caught their eye and their purpose. 'Elgin seems a place of little trade, and thinly inhabited' said Johnson, while Boswell noted 'It must have been a better place formerly'.

- 3.3.9 The timing of their visit, and an unsavoury meal at what is believed to have been the Red Lion hostelry on the High Street (which may have influenced their judgement), marked a low point in the fortunes of the city. The French aristocrats, Alexandre and François de Rochefoucauld, on their way to the Highlands in 1786 saw Elgin differently, echoing what Edward I had said that it was a 'good town', and they added it had 'one beautiful street'.

- 3.3.10 By 1798 the Elgin bookseller Isaac Forsyth, author of 'The Survey of the Province of Moray' seemed to brim with confidence about the future of the burgh. He remarked:

The town is well built; the houses, in general, are either new or of late improved, according to the modern ideas of handsome accommodation: it consists of one principal street, in a winding course, for little more than a mile, from east to west, widened to such breadth towards the middle of the town as to have a church awkwardly placed upon it.....

His views about the merits of the church were unequivocal, saying that it appeared 'a low clumsy misshapen building, at once deforming and incumbering the street'.



Left, Isaac Forsyth's dislike: the Old Tolbooth and the Muckle Kirk disfiguring the Plainstones before the civic improvements of the nineteenth century

- 3.3.11 Forsyth makes an interesting point, one borne out later by the Victorian photographers taking views of the city from Ladyhill, in that he observed that while the closes might accommodate between eight and ten dwellings occupied by distinct families, but most terminated in gardens thereby 'affording a more immediate access to the country than the few public avenues offer'.
- 3.3.12 Improvements to the public realm seemed to herald his confidence, and in 1786 the resurfacing of the Plainstones seems to have been organised by the Town Council. One proprietor made himself unpopular by demolishing the old west port in 1783, but the Council relented, and in the spirit of improvement instructed the other ports to be taken down, the last of them being removed in 1797.

3.4 Civil infrastructure improvements and expansion – the burgh from 1800 to 1914

- 3.4.1 The city's second Renaissance began somewhat uncertainly. The 'jocular auctioneer' (as he was known) John Batchen acquired Thunderton House in 1800, and in the spirit of public improvement and private commercial gain sacrificed the old house by dismantling the most interesting parts in order to drive Batchen Street and Batchen Lane, now Thunderton Place, through the site. What has been left of this orgy of destruction makes little sense of what was once one of the city's finest historic buildings.
- 3.4.2 The initiatives in improving Elgin's public realm and infrastructure were long overdue, but the first half of the nineteenth century saw considerable investment by the Town Council, bodies such as the Roads Trustees, and private individuals, with a generous contribution being made by the Earl of Fife. Thus we see the roads and pavements resurfaced in the early 1820s, gas lighting introduced by 1830, the first phase of piped water brought into the city centre by 1845, a second in 1850 and public sewers introduced. The noxious shambles were removed from the streets and accommodated in a new market hall building by mid-century.



This early photograph shows William Burn's Assembly Rooms (1822) and a fine Italianate bank of 1857, swept away in the late twentieth century orgy of redevelopment which afflicted the city, while the venerable building of the early seventeenth century where Batchen had his shoemaker's business was replaced around 1880 by Alexander Marshall Mackenzie's building at 147-149 High Street © The Moray Society

- 3.4.3 The insertion of Batchen Street into the city fabric increased pressure on the cross-city circulation, necessitating the widening of North Street in 1822. Although this saw the loss of yet another venerable building – on this site had once stood Calder House of 1634 – the streetscape gained a distinguished new classical building in the form of the Assembly Rooms by William Burn. Ironically it was to fall, for exactly the same reason, in 1970.
- 3.4.4 In reality, although the Town Council sought to make improvements, the stimulus for change came from an unexpected quarter: from the philanthropy of those brought up in the burgh and who had left to join the army, amassing their fortunes from acts of bravery and diligent service in the Honourable East India Company. A surgeon, Dr Alexander Gray, became the first benefactor, donating the sum of £20,000 in 1815 for the building of a hospital for the sick and poor. In

an inspired act of patronage he engaged James Gillespie Graham, one of Edinburgh's leading architects.

- 3.4.5 From hereon, those commissioning civic buildings exercised considerable care over the choice of their architect. When the decision was taken to replace the Muckle Kirk in 1826, Archibald Simpson of Aberdeen was appointed. Not everyone approved of the loss of the old parish church, and not for the first time there were sharply divided opinions expressed over the loss of what some in the community saw as history being swept away unceremoniously. The views of Cosmo Innes in this respect have been well reported elsewhere. In 1819 the poet laureate Robert Southey railed against the views being expressed by Isaac Forsyth over the need to remove decaying eyesores at the heart of the city. He wrote, somewhat pointedly:

The city has an ancient air, and an appearance of decay about it; but an old church and an old prison standing in the middle of a very broad street certainly ornament the place instead of disfiguring it...

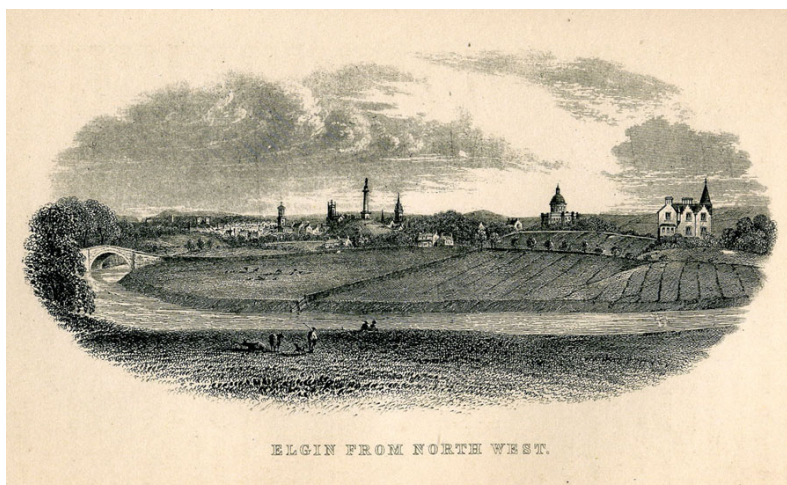
Both were swept away: the church in 1826, and the tolbooth in 1843.



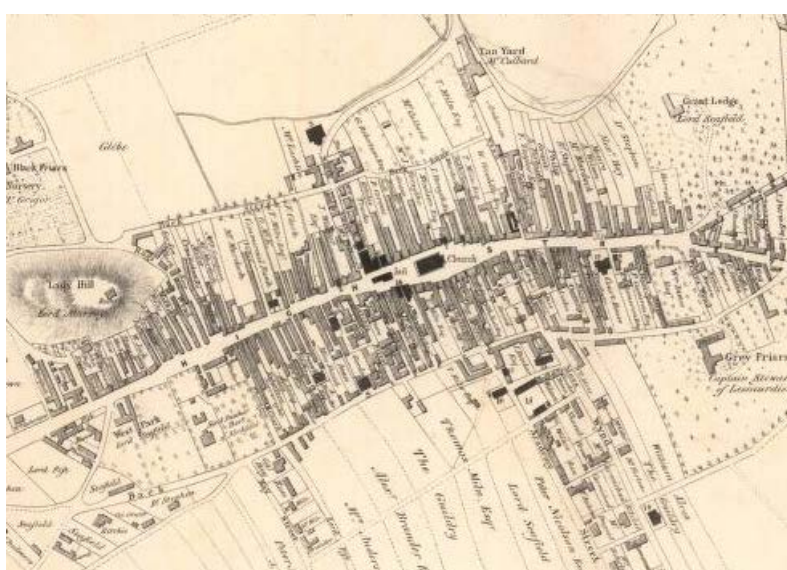
St Giles Church, by Archibald Simpson, dominates Elgin's skyline and the Plainstones, seen here (1868) with the fountain designed by Thomas Mackenzie

- 3.4.6 Opinion seemed to be equally divided over the merit of Simpson's chaste and beautiful temple – now regarded as one of the finest neoclassical buildings in Scotland. The highly distinguished Highland engineer and Forres loon, Joseph Mitchell, tore into the young architect, berating him for his design 'said to be Grecian, but really of no character'. A gazetteer of Scotland published mid-century summed up the debate with 'though it may be said that a new town has sprung up, but the old has, in a measure, cast its skin....'. Robert Billings had already commented in the mid-1840s 'Few places impress, in what remains, a deep regret for what has gone'.
- 3.4.7 Simpson went on to create a building of great distinction for the other public benefactor, General Andrew Anderson. Once more the site for the institution he funded – for education of the young and the care of the elderly – was strategically placed, to be highly visible on the eastern approach to the city. Completed in 1833, with its shallow dome and portico it cannot be missed, and with Dr Gray's Hospital it would have spoken volumes to visitors of Elgin's cultured transformation.
- 3.4.8 The domed buildings at each extremity of the city added to an already interesting skyline. This was to be added to further by the tall column at Ladyhill celebrating the life and achievements of the Duke of

Gordon in 1839. The spire of the South Church appeared on the skyline in 1853 followed by the Perpendicular tower of what was to become the United Presbyterian church on Moss Street (1858).



Elgin's skyline was transformed by the late 1850s, shown here viewed from the northwest, from *Morayshire Described* (1868)

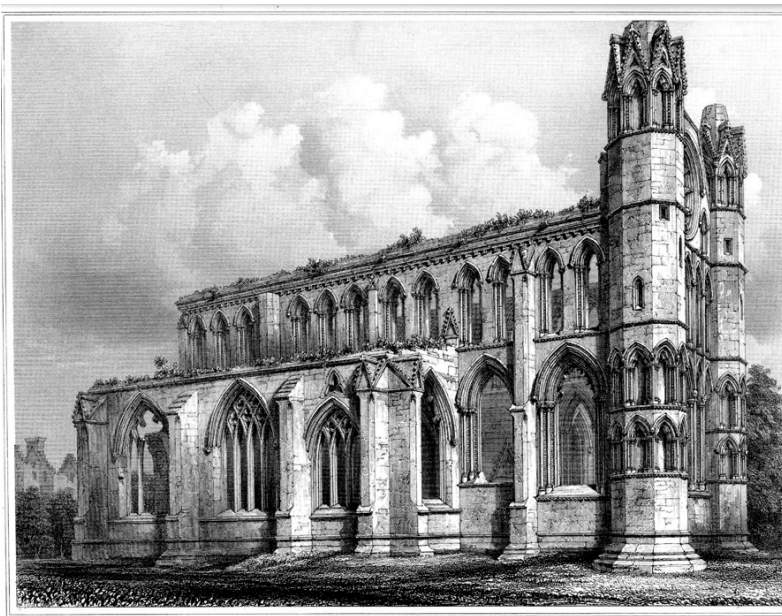
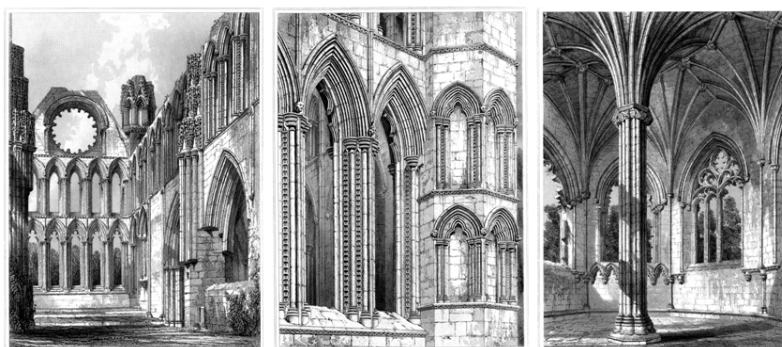


John Wood's map of Elgin (1822) (upper) and Robert Ray's map of Elgin (1838) © both National Library of Scotland

- 3.4.9 Subtle changes in the townscape can be seen by comparing Wood's map of 1822 with Ray's of 1838 (previous page). While superficially they may seem similar, the changes to the principal thoroughfares are instructive, not least to the degree that they indicate the constraints imposed on the townscape by these older buildings. Already it can be seen that the burgh was expanding southwards on the sunnier slopes following the line of the trunk road leading into the city from Rothes. By 1835 it was being said that the south side was preferred for building, and in 1868 J&W Watson would state in *Morayshire Described* that the High Street was being 'forsaken by the well-to-do merchants and the wealthier class of tradesmen' for the suburbs.
- 3.4.10 Expansion of town was prompted by a number of factors, not least improvements made to transport links across the area, made possible by the building of bridges across the major watercourses in the immediate vicinity of the city. The increase in the population was attributed in 1835 to those leaving the landward area, seeking employment and accommodation in Elgin for which the blossoming textile industry was seen as a major employer. Around this time retailing continued to be an important sector of the local economy, and we learn that the city was home to an established community of capitalists, professional men, retailers, artisans and labourers.
- 3.4.11 Further expansion came about from the arrival of the railways in 1852 after which Elgin was to become a major interchange for the companies operating the lines. The Morayshire Railway, Highland Railway and the Great North of Scotland Railway had both separate and shared termini, and competed with one another for traffic. The population increase peaked in 1861, and was there was a dramatic increase in the forty years between 1841 and 1881 when the population rose by roughly a third, from 4,493 to 6,286.
- 3.4.12 At the height of electioneering in 1820 the peace of the eastern end of the city was shattered by what has been termed the last clan rising in Britain. While, in some respects, it was an amusing display of misplaced but affectionate clan loyalty, and of enmity between two leading families of the area – the Grants and the Duffs – had matters got out of hand without the tactful intervention of the authorities a serious fracas could have resulted. Grant Lodge saw major improvements carried out by A&W Reid to drawings prepared in 1849, and around this time there had been major investment in the surrounding parkland.
- 3.4.13 Regarding the cathedral, public and private conscience was pricked at last, although its ruinous, and deeply embarrassing, state was tackled, in the end, largely by the efforts of a single individual. The retired shoemaker, John Shanks entered into the history books and his herculean efforts were admired by those who visited the site who never failed to remark upon his presence. Robert Billings encountered him when preparing his series of stunning drawings of the cathedral, describing him in the following way:

He was a thin, lank, spider-looking being, clad in obsolete costume, with a quiet, earnest enthusiasm in his manner – a sort of Old Mortality, whose delight it was to labour among the ruins and tombs.

He had another supporter in the eminent circuit judge, Lord Cockburn who, after Shanks's death in 1841, pushed hard for him to be commemorated with an appropriate memorial. When it was finally erected he had to express his disappointment on seeing it, saying it was 'ill-engraved'. Although there had been a measure of intent on behalf of the State for the repair of the fabric of the cathedral, it was



ELGIN CATHEDRAL.
THE CHOIR FROM THE SOUTH EAST.

Robert Billings's drawings of Elgin Cathedral, first published in 1848, show the fruits of John Shanks's herculean efforts in tidying up the site singlehandedly

not enough for the people of Elgin who included the words in the memorial 'while not even the State was doing anything for its preservation...'

- 3.4.14 Cockburn held a deep affection for Elgin. He once mused on where he might wish to retire to, dismissing Nairn, but considering that Forres would be more salubrious. He added:

And Elgin would do better still. I am not sure that, except Perth, there is a nicer provincial town in Scotland.

He was not alone in his views. Groome's *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland* (1883) considered Elgin to be 'one of the brightest and most picturesque little towns in Scotland'.

- 3.4.15 The Ordnance Survey map of 1868 (following page) shows the extent to which the city had expanded, mainly towards the south where some of the suburbs had been laid out. All the street blocks which are closest to what is the present south boundary of the High Street conservation area had been laid down by this time, with a reasonable density of development having been achieved.

- 3.4.16 The Assembly Rooms aside, the institutional buildings tended to gather at the east end of the High Street. The first to appear was the



The Ordnance Survey map of 1868 shows the extent to which the town had extended southwards to meet the railways © National Library of Scotland



The Little Cross and Thomas Mackenzie's Elgin Museum (1843)

fine courthouse (completed 1841) by Elgin's first architect of note, William Robertson, followed by the Elgin Museum (completed 1843, architect Thomas Mackenzie). The brainchild of the energetic Elgin and Morayshire Scientific Society founded in 1836, it would have been the first private museum in Scotland to open its doors had the museum at Montrose not opened fractionally sooner. A&W Reids' fine sheriff court of 1864-6 sat next to their uncle's earlier building, once more a finely wrought essay in classicism.

- 3.4.17 Commerce Street was the next street to be superimposed on the medieval layout, replacing the old School Wynd. It was devised in the late 1850s so as to establish a more suitable direct route into the city centre from the railway stations. As its name suggests, it provided further opportunities for retail development at the corner with the High Street, and along the length of the street, although some of the frontages were not developed until later in the century. A bank and the Elgin Club of 1869 were built here, both distinguished buildings in the continuing classical style by A&W Reid.



Commerce Street, around the turn of the twentieth century © The Moray Society

- 3.4.18 As the century progressed, South Street assumed increasing importance as a retail thoroughfare from its earlier role of accommodating the stabling to the principal hotels of the High Street. The market hall was accommodated here mid-century, to which the fine vaulted arcade at Newmarket Close gave direct access from the High Street. Hotels remained a part of the street scene, mainly at the eastern end of the street, where they were closer to the point where visitors to the city would arrive from the railway station. The appropriately named Grand Hotel by Reid & Wittet (1898) incorporates fine carved detail and stained glass. The 1868 map (page 23) indicates the extent to which development of the sites had been sporadic, and many of the backland sites to the High Street were not to be developed until the interwar years of the twentieth century.



South Street in the mid-1930s, before the Argyle Buildings were erected in 1937 on the site of the Eagle Hotel © The Moray Society

- 3.4.19 The central part of the High Street, and to a lesser extent the western length of the street, were transformed from the early nineteenth onwards to create the streetscape which is so much admired today. As a regional centre of growing importance the banks made their mark on the streetscape from an early date, and branches of national banks continued to open and redevelop sites well into the late nineteenth century. The stranglehold of classicism finally gave way



The south side of the High Street at the Plainstones in 1852 shows James Grant's house of 1776 - the tallest at that time - and the arcaded ground storey giving access to the Newmarket; the building with the Venetian windows at the corner of Batchen Street stood until the late twentieth century © The Moray Society



Sydney Mitchell's reconstruction of the Muckle Cross, dismantled in 1792, shortly after completion in 1888 © RCAHMS, Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk

to frontages inspired by more varied styles for commercial premises, notably in Peddie & Kinnear's bank of 1876 on the south side of the High Street of which the upper sections were taken down, unfortunately, when the frontage was rebuilt in 1976. From studying historic photographs the full extent to which the street had been

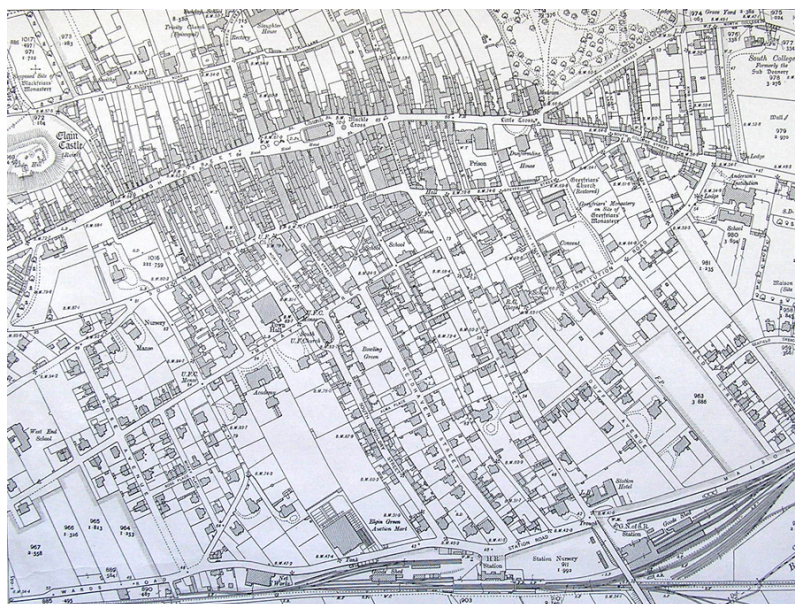
transformed and older, domestic-scaled buildings swept away can be appreciated. Buildings heights rose, especially in the central retail area.

- 3.4.20 After Thomas Mackenzie's elegant fountain had been erected on the site of the old tolbooth (1845), the public realm continued to improve. In 1888 the Edinburgh architect Sydney Mitchell was called upon to resurrect the design of the Muckle Cross on its original site to the rear of St Giles Church, from which the original had been removed, without sentimentality, in 1792 with the other street improvements.



Ramsays' store, the photograph taken shortly after opening in 1904, is now part of the St Giles Shopping Centre. This impressive frontage was extended to the west, for which the three storey building was demolished. The stone carvings around the large window openings of the extension were never completed. The store became Benzie & Miller, and was latterly Arnotts', part of the House of Fraser dynasty © The Moray Society

- 3.4.21 Retailing dominated the streetscape of the principal thoroughfares of the city, with many good shopfronts introduced, most of them cast iron, springing up in large numbers everywhere after 1875. As the new century dawned the redevelopment of sites across the city centre continued unabated, and several buildings display datestones from this era, the last of them 1916 at the Union Buildings at the head of Lossie Wynd. Two distinguished retail facades were added during the first decade of the twentieth century heralding a new direction in their scale and ambition. They dominate the north street frontages of the High Street of the city centre, and of the two, the store built for Ramsays the drapers in two phases, one of them dated 1904, is now the tallest building on the High Street, assumed into the St Giles Centre modern shopping complex.



Second Edition of the Ordnance Survey map (1904) © National Library of Scotland

- 3.4.22 The energetic transformation of Elgin's High Street from a century or so of demolition - some of it painful - and rebuilding, was for the moment at least complete, and reflects the growth of the city and its prosperity over this period. Between 1881 and 1911 Elgin's population had grown by around 31%, at a significantly greater rate than most of the other burghs of the county. This growth is reflected in the expansion of the wider city, the full extent of which can be appreciated from studying the Second Edition 1904 Ordnance Survey map.



Postcard of the Cooper Park c1905, reproduced courtesy of Janet Trythall

- 3.4.23 The same map also reveals the extent to which the east end of the city had been transformed by the generous act of Colonel George Cooper, continuing the honoured tradition of benefaction by private individuals for the benefit of the community. Under the direction of Alexander Marshall Mackenzie, who had been brought up in the town, the policies of Grant Lodge, already much improved by the investment in the property by the Earls of Seafield, saw the parkland laid out and the lodge altered to become the city's public library and art gallery. This hugely valuable recreational asset was opened, to great public acclaim, in 1903, and provided an appropriate setting at last for the glorious west façade of the cathedral with its twin towers.

3.5 A regional administrative centre: growth and change from 1914 to the present

- 3.5.1 The difficult interlude of the Great War was marked in Elgin by a memorial which was positioned prominently on the Plainstones. Designed by the distinguished Edinburgh sculptor, Percy Portsmouth, it was unveiled in 1921.
- 3.5.2 After the war the city recovered quickly, unlike some of the towns of the North where growth had been fuelled by the herring fisheries or was reliant upon manufacturing. Investment could be seen in the appearance of new shopfronts, often inserted into older buildings, and in the way that South Street was transformed with a number of gap sites having been filled in, or older properties to the rear of the closes demolished to make way for new development. The Lido Café, Mann's store, Junner's store and the Picture House (1926) all appeared during the interwar years on the same side of the street. Further along the street, JD Yeadon's book store was erected in 1931 on the corner with Greyfriars Street, and Argyle Buildings replaced the Eagle Hotel in 1937.
- 3.5.3 The fabric of the city was adjusted to accommodate two large leisure buildings which were inserted during the 1930s. At the west end of the High Street, set back down one of the closes, the Playhouse cinema was built in 1932 to compete with the Picture House on South Street which had been erected six years previously. At the east end William Robertson's fine court building was demolished to permit a start to be made on the new County Buildings in 1937, although they were not to be completed until well after the Second World War. The loss of one of his finest buildings was compounded by the demolition of the finely proportioned townhouse with the bay windows, which had faced east from Forsyth's Close. The exposure of the tall blind gable of the adjoining property, and the meek attempt at displaying a set of carved pedimented dormer heads in the ground floor arcade, are poor compensation indeed.



East end of the High Street looking towards the city centre, before the erection of the County Buildings in 1937 © The Moray Society

- 3.5.4 Agriculture suffered during the Depression years and the city saw an influx of labourers leaving the countryside to seek work. Elgin consolidated its position as a regional centre and, although the population had fallen slightly by 1921, it had more than recovered ten years later.

- 3.5.5 The tensions that had once accompanied major change to the fabric of the city resurfaced in the post-war years. In 1946 the Elgin Society was formed, later to renamed the Moray Society. An appreciation of Elgin's unique heritage was raised with the publication commissioned jointly from Ronald Cant and one of Scotland's leading authorities on historic buildings, Ian G Lindsay, building upon the firm foundations of HB Mackintosh's 1914 book *Elgin Past and Present*. The leaflet proved popular, and was updated and reprinted several times.
- 3.5.6 Conservation interests were consolidated when the Elgin Fund was established in 1964, in which the Harrison family of Johnstons' Woollen Mills played a significant role. It vied with the Banff Preservation Trust as the first organisation of its type in the North of Scotland for saving buildings at risk and, through sensitive adaptation and new building, acting as a catalyst for urban regeneration. Both organisations were highly regarded across Scotland, anticipating by several years the model of building preservation trusts which were really only established after the European Architectural Heritage Year in 1975. A number of historic buildings on the High Street benefited from the grants scheme of that year.



National recognition for Elgin's regeneration efforts: the Civic Trust Award plaque attached to the arcaded merchant's house at 44-46 High Street

- 3.5.7 Some of the inspired work in saving Elgin's buildings at risk appears to have commenced before the Elgin Fund was constituted – the plaque announcing the Civic Trust Award given for the restoration of the merchant's house at 44-46 High Street is dated 1959. The first project to be undertaken by the Fund was at Masonic Close, 15-19 High Street, where the building of 1728 (altered already at ground floor in the interwar years with the insertion of new shopfronts) was heavily restored to suggest, perhaps, that it is a building of late eighteenth century date rather than one erected at the beginning of the century. To the rear an impression is given that it was a new building which had been created although, in all other respects, it was a successful scheme. It left a clear message that it was not necessary to pull down historic buildings when seeking to make city improvements, a lesson which was barely heeded at the time.
- 3.5.8 Against this highly developed conservation awareness which was backed by Elgin's leading citizens keen to preserve their heritage, it seems surprising that the city was embarking on a period in its history which saw the greatest damage inflicted upon its medieval layout and some of the city's key historic buildings. A succession of ill-advised schemes in the 1960s and 1970s wreaked damage to the historic townscape, and the replacement buildings were of dubious quality. The greatest damage was caused by the banks and national retailers.
- 3.5.9 In 1970 the fine Assembly Rooms, and the good bank building of 1857 adjacent to it (see page 21), fell prey to the redevelopment of the High Street frontages following the widening of North Street some years before work on the relief road was begun. The damage to one of Elgin's more pleasant streets was compounded by the featureless modern extension to Woolworth's store on the opposite side of the



The destruction of North Street, seen here in the 1950s: the Assembly Rooms at the head of the street were demolished in 1970, while the houses on the left had disappeared for the building of Elgin's relief by the end of the decade. The buildings adjacent to the Assembly Rooms have survived, and are in use as solicitors' offices.
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street. Scale-less, and featureless flat-roofed extensions appeared to the rear of the new buildings of this era causing untold visual damage to the backlands, and especially to the closes where they were built over. More buildings were lost with the insertion of the new frontage for the Fine Fare store, which became Boots the Chemist at a later date.

- 3.5.10 It is no coincidence that some fine 1930s shopfronts, for which Elgin was noted at one stage, were lost in the scramble for modernisation and rebuilding. Among the finest and least altered example to have survived is that at Burton's shop on the High Street, but there are also a couple of good shopfronts from this era on Batchen Street.



Burton's shopfront retains its bronze shopfront of 1936 with the chevron window pattern characteristic of the time; it also features two inscriptions recording the opening of the store by members of the Burton family

- 3.5.11 Further to the west, a fine Italianate frontage of 1852 was taken down for the new Royal Bank of Scotland development. In the central area Peddie & Kinnear's distinguished gothic frontage of 1975 was replaced by a new Bank of Scotland building one hundred years or so later, leaving the ground floor arcade as a hollow gesture to preservation. On the eastern section of the High Street a large redevelopment site at Nos 45-71 opened up after the needless demolition of a row of typical early nineteenth century buildings, and the loss of a venerable seventeenth century building, by then in use as a garage and in a poor state of repair. These buildings, and the contribution they made to the townscape, can be seen in the photograph on page 29. The replacement buildings of 1970 are too low in scale, too repetitious and, furthermore, they damage the public realm to the rear.
- 3.5.12 Arguably, the worst act of official vandalism was yet to come: Elgin's acute trunk road traffic congestion resulted in the relief road being inserted on the north side of the city between 1979 and 1981. Unlike the contemporary Forres by-pass, which preserved the historic town in its entirety, it hugged the northern boundary of the old medieval burgh but separated it from the areas to the north and east to which it had been connected for centuries. The planned view on North Street towards the fine gable of William Robertson's Holy Trinity church was interrupted, as were the links to the new Town Hall, a modern building of some distinction built in the early 1960s to the design of Rowand Anderson Kininmonth & Paul and now listed. More disastrously the historic linkages with the Cooper Park, Grant Lodge and the cathedral were severed.
- 3.5.13 From studying old photographs, the other loss that can be identified to the character of the conservation area from this period had been the historic finishes to the closes. The majority of them had retained cobbled surfaces, open stone-lined drains and stone paved surfaces. Most of these finishes have since been removed and replaced with inferior materials such as concrete, precast concrete paving slabs or paviers, or even loose rolled gravel.



The St Giles Centre shopping development seen from Bishopmill; the Town Hall is in the foreground

- 3.5.14 Elgin struggled to accommodate large buildings within the established urban grain of the city centre at a time when out-of-town retail centres

were being actively discouraged. The William Low supermarket on South Street and Thunderton Place (later Tesco, and now TK Maxx) was the first large multi-storey development to be accommodated. A considerable effort was made to minimise the impact on the conservation area, with only moderate success.

- 3.5.15 The need to underpin city centre retail activity saw the comprehensive redevelopment of sites to the north of St Giles with the demise of the Arnotts department store in the mid-1990s. To a certain degree this had been facilitated by the proximity of the relief road. The scheme allowed for the relocation of the bus station. The facades of older buildings were retained to minimise the impact on the historic townscape. Although the scheme was a large one, its bulk was broken down convincingly in the blind gabled elevations facing north, and the overall heights were deferential to the tallest of the structures on the High Street. There are, however, local problems of scale, and walking around the edges of the development where the walls are unrelieved by openings is an unpleasant experience for pedestrians.
- 3.5.16 Major improvement of the central area came with the public realm enhancement and creation of the pedestrianised area, laid out in 1995, which has had lasting benefits.



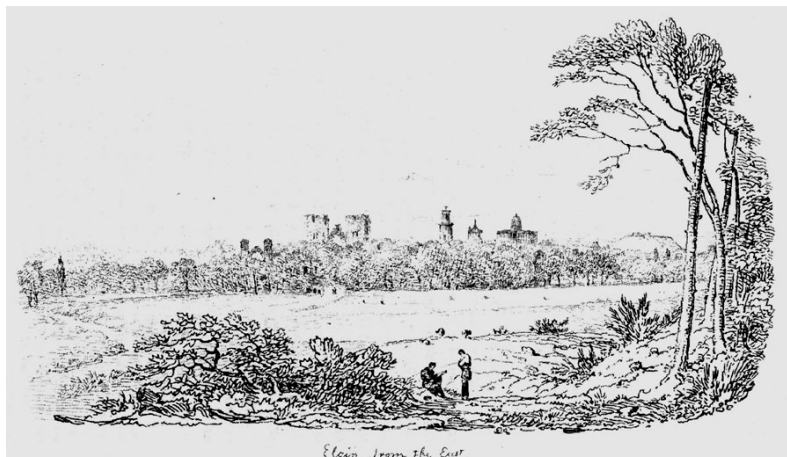
Improvements to the public realm at the heart of the city

- 3.5.17 Recent redevelopment schemes, while less sizeable, have been more contextual in repairing damaged parts of the conservation area. A small retail and office scheme at the south end of Thunderton Place, completed in 1990, draws its inspiration from historicist references to the earlier architecture of the city centre. The larger bulk of the Marks & Spencer retail outlet at the west end of the High Street proved more challenging, but it is now an accepted part of the townscape. It was completed in 2004.
- 3.5.18 Out-of-town shopping centres, and a declining local economy, have combined to make retail activity fragile in recent years. These threats are exacerbated by the risk of the closure of the military bases which has placed the city, and the neighbouring towns of Moray, potentially in a worse situation than most small towns in mainland Scotland, as has been acknowledged in the Town Centre Regeneration Case Studies, published by Scottish Government in 2011. However, despite these challenges Elgin remains an attractive regional centre in which

the uniqueness of its historic environment is perceived as one of its major assets.

4 Character assessment

4.1 Setting and views



D Alexander's view of Elgin from the east, appearing in Rhind's *Past and Present Sketches of the State of Moray* (1838) is now difficult to recreate

- 4.1.1 Due to the extent to which the conurbation has sprung up in the areas where, historically, good views were to be had of Elgin – in an arc from the northeast to the northwest – characterised by the well known views by Slezer (1693) and Clarke (1824, both page 6), it is somewhat difficult now to obtain an impression of the setting of the centre of the town in which the principal monuments of the parish church at the centre, the cathedral and castle, dominated the skyline on the ridge. Latterly this assemblage was added to by the domes of the two institutions added at each end of the town, rather like bookends to the principal street running through the centre, of Dr Gray's Hospital and General Anderson's Institution.



George Washington Wilson's remarkable glass plate photograph of the 1870s taken from the top of the Gordon column at Ladyhill shows clearly the medieval layout of the burgh and the extent to which gardens and greenery infiltrated the closes to the north of the High Street © University of Aberdeen Special Collections

- 4.1.2 It is still possible to obtain this impression from certain locations in, and around, the city. An outstanding view, favoured by the picture postcard photographers of the Victorian era, is from Ladyhill in which an understanding of the layout of the medieval burgh and how it expanded over time can still be enjoyed. Other important views are

from the open expanses of Cooper Park to the north, and on the approach towards the city on the descent from Bishopmill.



Views of the outstanding historic townscape from the east, west, and towards Dr Gray's Hospital terminating views along the High Street looking west



Framed view of the cathedral along North College Street, with which there is no longer any direct physical connection due to the relief road (compare with below): the prospect would be improved by relocating the green lamp standard even if nothing else were to be considered



Picture postcard of the Little Cross around the end of the nineteenth century, showing the road leading from the fork at the eastern end of the High Street leading towards the chanonry © The Moray Society

- 4.1.3 Because of the topography, and with the rising ground southwards of the High Street, when the city centre is viewed from the south the key monuments tend to be obliterated by the taller buildings on South Street. The tower of the former United Presbyterian Church on Moss Street, somewhat deformed now after having been reduced in height, is given undue prominence when viewed from this direction.
- 4.1.4 Views into the city centre at each end of the High Street at the major roundabouts of the relief road are significant in that they reveal the attractions of the historic townscape, of street facades made up primarily of traditional buildings undulating with the gentle changes in direction. There is only a glimpse to be had from outside the conservation area the east end where some of the most outstanding townscape can be seen, but it is a memorable sight.
- 4.1.5 Views out of the conservation area are also of considerable interest. Among the best are long views looking out from the edge of the Plainstones towards the west end of the High Street, which focuses on the dome of Dr Gray's Hospital in the distance, reviving a historic view which has been interrupted somewhat by the relief road.

- 4.1.6 There are a number of set-pieces in the views southwards from the conservation area, made possible by the adoption of grid planning which characterises much of the Elgin South Conservation Area. The portico of the old Academy (now Moray College) and the steeple of the South Church are effective stops to views from South Street. Further east there are attractive views of the surrounding hills enclosing the city to the south.
- 4.1.7 The relief road has had a harmful effect on views out from the conservation area in cutting off the centre from the historic areas to the north and east of the centre of the old burgh. When the cathedral is viewed from the area in front of the museum it is possible to gain an impression of how the road led out from the city centre towards the chanonry, but only on those occasions when the heavy traffic on the trunk road is light.

4.2 Activity and movement



North side of the High Street at the Plainstones

- 4.2.1 At times the city centre can appear bustling, especially during the middle of the day. The attractive pedestrianised area surrounding St Giles Church, where the principal shops are located, is a popular feature with the open expanse of the Plainstones often enjoyed as recreational space. In good weather coffee shops and cafes spill out onto the public spaces, and this is not just confined to the sunnier south side. The streets of the city centre are noticeably busier when street markets and other events are organised. This use of public space can be seen also on Thunderton Place and, to a lesser extent, on South Street.
- 4.2.2 The pavements of the High Street at the west end are usually busy at peak times, and this remains a positive sign, despite the number of shop closures. Pavements at the east end of the High Street are also busy with a concentration of shops in the area closest to Lossie Wynd, and with the movement of pedestrians towards the central area. Batchen Street, with a number of active shops, is also a busy thoroughfare, but South Street is much less busy than it had been once with a number of retail shop closures having occurred. Movement of pedestrians is often related to the ready availability of car parking, and tails off noticeably towards the east end of the conservation area.



Looking towards the east end of the High Street

- 4.2.3 Activity in the closes is variable. Often closes with no active frontages in the long line of buildings will be used on grounds of convenience if on a shortcut to the High Street, but too many of the closes are underused and their potential left unrealised. Among the most successful of the closes is Harrow's Inn Close which houses a range of early eighteenth century buildings: although entered by a narrow pend from the High Street, and affected by a blind wall from the adjoining unattractive modern development along part of its length, historic building frontages and active retail and business units give it life and vitality. It is also wider than most of the closes of the city centre.



Access to the High Street has been blocked off at both ends of the close shown on the left, adjacent to St Giles Centre; Harrow's Inn Close is shown on the right

- 4.2.4 Out of hours movement within the city centre tails off dramatically to the point that the central area surrounding St Giles Church is dead by the early evening. The frontages by this time are inactive and curiously, perhaps, many of the shops fail to take advantage of the opportunities for lighting to give greater visual interest, and create a presence beyond normal retail hours, or even during the short daylight hours of the long winter months.
- 4.2.5 By comparison, the lengths of the High Street to east and west of the centre are more animated by the numbers of fast food outlets, restaurants, bars, clubs, cinema, and by the taxi ranks. The cinema contributes less than it might to night time activity as it is down one of the closes, and movement tends to be restricted between it and the car park to the north adjacent to the relief road.



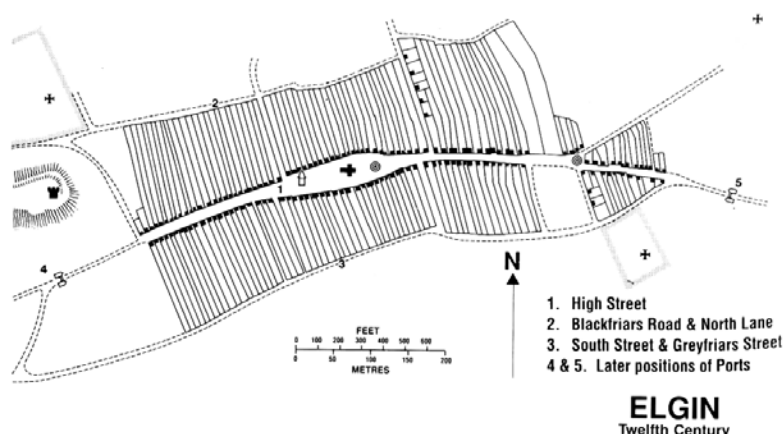
The central area at night is devoid of activity

- 4.2.6 Vehicular movements within the city centre seem much improved by the traffic management system which has been introduced, which keeps the pedestrianised area surrounding St Giles Church substantially free of any traffic, although vehicles enter the area occasionally. The recent improvements carried out at Batchen Street, which have seen this formerly busy thoroughfare turned into a pedestrian area, have made this street much more attractive and accessible than it had been previously.
- 4.2.7 The availability of car parking, and the cost of parking, are clearly sensitive issues which have a direct effect on the footfall of shoppers throughout the city centre. It also affects office workers who must be car-dependent. The multi-storey car parks at Thunderton Place and at the St Giles Centre seemed always to be underused when the fieldwork was carried out. The Council has been monitoring the impact of increased charges for car parking.
- 4.2.8 It is difficult to be precise about the extent to which the city centre benefits from tourism. Visitors seem to be drawn more to locations beyond the boundaries of the conservation area or on its periphery – to the cathedral, and to Johnstons' Woollen Mill at Newmill, and to a lesser extent, perhaps, to the Cooper Park and the museum. One of the sister documents, relating to the provision of a heritage trail, addresses this issue.

4.3 Street pattern and urban grain

- 4.3.1 The view from Ladyhill confirms the extent to which the city has retained its medieval layout of the principal street, with closes at right angles to it on the old burgage plots or rigs, where buildings are (with the sole exception of twentieth century interventions) of a significantly smaller, or descending scale. This is particularly noticeable in the survival of closes to the north of the High Street.
- 4.3.2 The frontages of the principal street reflect, to a very large extent, the patterns of the original burgage plots, with the more important buildings always on the street elevations. In many cases where sites were comprehensively developed during the nineteenth century for commercial uses, most of the properties are double or even triple-fronted to create more impressive buildings which are expressive of their function as banks, shops or hotels. In many cases the original uses will have now lapsed. In only a couple of instances, significantly less than in other comparable historic burghs, is a building gable-

ended to the High Street, reflecting the width of the original burgage plot.



Elgin's medieval layout in the twelfth century, from Robert J Naismith's *The Story of Scotland's Towns*



The Elgin High Street Conservation Area viewed from Ladyhill – the view should be compared with the historic image on page 36

- 4.3.3 As a consequence of the variations in plot widths and building heights, a historic townscape of great interest emerges. This is heightened by the changing planes of the street frontages following the line of the original High Street, with the characteristic widening out of the area at the heart of the burgh where the old parish church and the tolbooth once stood, and where the street fairs were housed.
- 4.3.4 South Street retains a few of the characteristics of the old medieval back lane in terms of wandering street frontages, but much less than the High Street. The old back lane to the north has been obliterated effectively with the insertion of the relief road. By contrast, Batchen Street and Commerce Street, new streets inserted during the nineteenth century, are straight, and much more regular in appearance, incorporating no structures from earlier periods on the street frontages. Behind Commerce Street on the east side some earlier buildings from the old city fabric have been incorporated within later buildings.
- 4.3.5 The sinuous lines of the High Street frontages are reflected in the curving lines of the closes set out on the old burgage plots, a common

characteristic of medieval historic burghs. In Elgin these are particularly well defined, but mostly on the north side despite the intrusion of the relief road. They add considerable interest to the variety of the townscape and remain under-used as an asset.



The merchants' houses with the piazas on the left contribute to a historic townscape of great interest

4.4 Historic townscape

- 4.4.1 Although significant numbers of venerable historic buildings were destroyed in the late nineteenth century, and also throughout the twentieth century, there is sufficient remaining to provide a visitor with an impression of the high importance of Elgin in the past, and that it had been a place of substance until the first decades of the eighteenth century.
- 4.4.2 These impressions are reinforced by the extent to which historic buildings survive from most periods and make a strong contribution to the townscape, the pattern and layout of which reflect so clearly its medieval origins. The repetitive nature of the wall openings to the windows of the upper storeys, when seen as a ribbon in the long views down the High Street, contribute strongly to this impression which is one that has not been destroyed wholly by modern redevelopment.



Interest and variety in the historic closes

- 4.4.3 Even though some of the closes have been curtailed in length, or neutralised in other ways by modern developments, sufficient survives to permit an appreciation of their special townscape values. In some instances these values have been enhanced by sensitive redevelopment by bodies such as the Elgin Fund, and by housing associations. On the south side the range of historic buildings lining the west side of Harrow's Inn Close is among the best examples.



Braco's Close, at the east end of the High Street

Braco's Close at the east end of the High Street is a rare survival which, remarkably, has retained its historic buildings and, at the same time, preserving early cobbled surfaces.

- 4.4.4 It is recognised that some of the key elements within the historic townscape giving Elgin such a strong sense of identity fall outside the boundaries of the conservation area, an issue which has been compounded by the insertion of the relief road. This has severed the city centre from the direct linkages with Ladyhill upon which the castle stands, with the Cooper Park, and with the cathedral and the historically important area of the chanonry.



Aerial view of the conservation area (1975) before the relief road was inserted to the north © RCAHMS (John Dewar Collection), Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk

4.5 The evidence of historic photographs

- 4.5.1 Charles McKean, author of the RIAS Illustrated Architectural Guide for Moray, is on record for having said of Elgin that 'The mid 20th century was unkind to it'. However, the city is remarkable for the degree to which early photographs of the principal historic buildings and



Comparison between George Washington Wilson images of the 1870s and 1880s with contemporary images of the same scenes (1)



Comparison between George Washington Wilson images of the 1870s and 1880s with contemporary images of the same scenes (2)
All historic images © University of Aberdeen Special Collections

streetscape, from the middle of the nineteenth century, have survived. These photographs are reasonably well known as a result of having appeared in a succession of publications from the last quarter of the twentieth century up to the present time, in which the loss of important buildings within the centre of the city, replaced by modern buildings, has been highlighted. *Elgin Past and Present*, first published in 1980, is especially instructive as it illustrates how sites appeared both before, and after, redevelopment. The large collections of historic photographs and other pictorial images are held primarily by the Moray Society and by the Council, at the Moray Heritage Centre. Images from these sources have been reproduced throughout this document.

- 4.5.2 Comparison of photographic images taken by George Washington Wilson, probably in the late 1870s, and those taken from similar viewpoints today shown on the preceding pages, are instructive. The earlier photographs reveal that Elgin, unlike some of the other burghs of the Inner Moray Firth, had good paved streets of granite cobbles, and that the preference for softening the appearance of the central area with trees had not yet commenced. Nowadays it is difficult often to see the facades of the buildings in city streets because of the tree growth, unlike in Victorian times.
- 4.5.3 Historic photographs confirm the extent to which the central area had still to be subjected to the intense commercial pressures which accompanied the redevelopment of sites. These pressures were

unrelenting up to the First World War and resulted in a general increase in building heights. A similar impression is given in the view towards the west end of the High Street where a number of sites were still to be redeveloped, but not to the same characteristic general height as the buildings around St Giles. Despite the rise in height, there was still a measure of 'civic harmony' in that the dominance of St Giles within the townscape does not appear to be challenged in either height or scale.

- 4.5.4 With the possible exception of the view towards St Giles from the east, the photographs confirm McKean's thesis regarding the generally damaging effect of modern development. The loss of historic buildings of such considerable distinction, one of them being the Assembly Rooms (most probably by William Burn) - for the widening of North Street - has been particularly regrettable as has been noted already. Despite the mediocrity of the structures that replaced them, at least it might be said of them that they retained a sense of the rhythm of the streetscape from using vertical elements in the design. Sadly this cannot be said of the prominent corner building that replaced the *douce* early nineteenth century two storey building with twin Venetian windows at the junction between the High Street and Batchen Street.
- 4.5.5 The photographs reveal, perhaps surprisingly, that much of the historic townscape has survived over the years. This is, perhaps, most noticeable in the upper storeys of the facades where the regular rhythm of traditional window openings has been preserved almost without change. The greatest differences between the two sets of photographs point not only to the loss of important historic buildings, but to shopfronts and signage having been altered. The rhythm of the openings of the original shopfront openings is visible in the earlier images, while signage tends to be confined to the depth of the structural fascia, although there are examples of advertising and painted signs at the upper storeys, the remnants of which can still be made out today on some of the facades. Buildings in the late nineteenth century were well maintained with no instances of vegetation growth at the higher levels, and the twentieth century preference for painting of the woodwork of windows bright white had not yet arrived.

4.6 Spatial relationships

- 4.6.1 At the west end of the High Street the lengthy approach to the Plainstones is reinforced by the ribbon of unbroken lines of the street frontages. On the approach from the east the character of the street is more varied, resulting from the widening out of the street at the Little Cross where the roads diverged and from the landscaped area to the front of the courthouse and the Council headquarters. The vista looking eastwards is closed off effectively by the fine mid-Victorian building with the decorative iron balustrade.
- 4.6.2 In common with many historic burghs the central area widens out around key public buildings following the medieval layout – here, the old parish church and tolbooth have been replaced by one of Archibald Simpson's finest neoclassical masterpieces, St Giles Church. With a replica of the old market cross erected in 1888, and formerly a place for the burgh's fairs, it is now a welcoming meeting place of a generous size. The area enclosed on both sides by tall buildings of an appropriate height for the width of the space.
- 4.6.3 The formality of the street facades contrasts markedly with the historic closes, approached through narrow openings from the street –



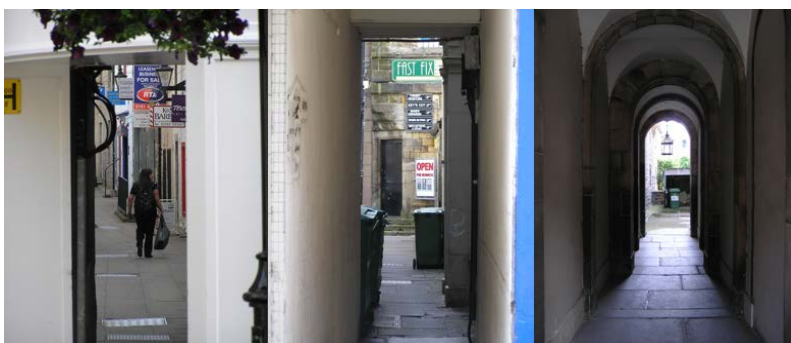
The building aligned north-south at the east end of the High Street provides an effective stop where the road forks left in the direction of the cathedral, and the setting for the Little Cross



Entry to Red Lion Close

in the earlier buildings these are normally generous in width, and vaulted, but as commercial pressures increased and ground floor space for retail use was at a premium the openings narrowed down to nothing more than slim passages. Glimpses of the closes from the High Street are an important element of the townscape. Elgin has a rich legacy of closes which have survived, although there are in fact relatively few which have not been curtailed in length by twentieth century redevelopment. A significant number of them have been drastically affected.

- 4.6.4 In spatial terms the closes, where they survive, add to the richness of the historic townscape. While many of the closes are narrow, they often lead to interesting and unexpected spaces, and to attractive private gardens at the heart of the city centre. At the east end of the High Street, the inspired work carried out by the Elgin Fund in saving rundown buildings in the closes and opening them up imaginatively for new courts and gardens, combined with sensitive new development



Entries from the High Street into the closes (all here on the North side)

creates spaces of high amenity and an attractive environment. From a later period of development of the city, the street entries into private courts off South Street can lead to some attractive small scale spaces and gardens which are particularly well suited to residential use, creating privacy.

4.7 Trees and landscaping



Trees soften the approach towards the conservation area from the east

- 4.7.1 Trees planted within the central area some years ago are nearing maturity, and while they break down what would be otherwise large open spaces and provide dappled light in strong sunlight, at some stage they will begin to interfere with an appreciation of the buildings within the space and surrounding it. There is already a hint that this is happening when comparing the photographs on page 45 where an appreciation of St Giles Church, and of the market cross, is impaired.



Trees at the heart of the conservation area provide colour, shade, texture and scale

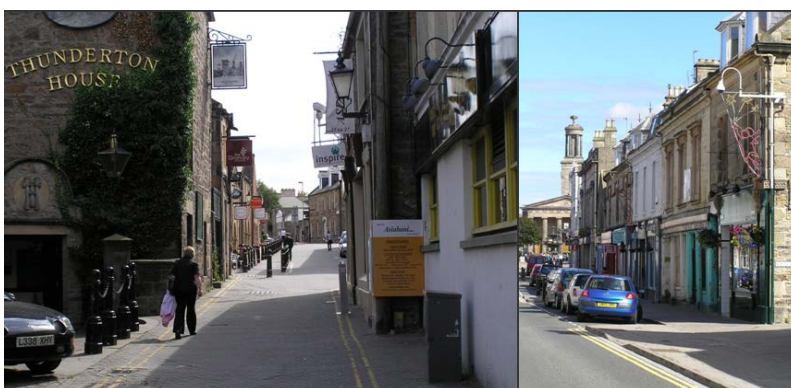
- 4.7.2 Historic photographs provide an impression of how important trees and gardens had been in the past in softening the edges of the closes on the north side of the city centre (see page 36). This swathe of greenery extended to the east end of the burgh where the entry into Cooper Park was made in the early twentieth century to link Grant Lodge with the High Street. These relationships were severed permanently when the relief road was constructed, although at the east end of the conservation area trees still play an important role in softening the edge of this busy artery around the city centre.
- 4.7.3 At the western extremity of the conservation area the mature trees within the large walled garden of the private house at St Michael's provide welcome relief in the townscape, acting as a transition between the villa developments to the immediate west and the buildings on South Street, where the majority are built up on the back of the pavement line. The finest tree specimen within the entire conservation area sits prominently within the garden to Highfield House adjacent to the road junction.



Mature trees set in the grounds of large villas at the west end of the conservation area

4.8 Character areas

- 4.8.1 For the purpose of the conservation area appraisal there are three distinct character zones. They are considered in turn traversing from west to east.



Character area 1: Thunderton Place and the south side of the High Street at the west end

- 4.8.2 The **first character area** is bounded to the north by Alexandra Road; to the east by Batchen Street and North Street; to the south by South Street, and to the west by Murdoch's Wynd and Northfield Terrace. In general the tallest buildings are found at the eastern end of this length of the High Street, with no buildings greater than three storeys

in height approximating to a domestic scale, but often with an attic storey. There is some variation in height along the facades of the principal street with a significant number of buildings having two storeys and an attic. The density is relatively low, with the several of the buildings on the High Street continuing in retail use.

- 4.8.3 There are some large twentieth structures on the northern side of the High Street replacing the old closes, and are of doubtful architectural quality. They include the cinema, the Royal Bank building, and the extension on North Street to the rear of the former Woolworths store. The Marks and Spencer store is from the early twenty-first century and, while a large building, it responds to the townscape setting. The closes at 211 and 233 respectively retain the greatest numbers of dwellings in the closes on the north side, each with a number of listed buildings. There are large numbers of gap sites, partially as a result of the exposure of the ends of the old closes from the building of the relief road where there are large open spaces available for car parking.
- 4.8.4 To the immediate south of the High Street the old closes have been curtailed in length from modern development, carried out in two separate phases, the first of which was the social housing development around which the multi-storey supermarket and car park, built originally for William Low, was later erected. It has damaged the setting of the earlier scheme.



The development built originally for William Low has in some respects had a negative impact on the conservation area

- 4.8.5 With the exception of the incongruous flat-roofed Comet store at the west end of the street, the south side of South Street supports little retail activity, and anticipated the more the suburban villa developments to the south of the city centre. Here the traditional street and close layout gives way to a notional grid plan of which South Street marks the northern edge. Two churches are located here, of which only one is in use; both buildings make a positive contribution to the townscape.
- 4.8.6 The **second character area** is the central zone of the conservation area, marked by Alexandra Road to the north; Lossie Wynd to the east; South Street to the south; and Batchen Street and North Street to the west. Although a number of traditional closes have survived to the north of the High Street, the density of development is greater, reflecting increased commercial activity over this sector which is focused primarily upon the High Street. A number of buildings reflect

the scale of former commercial activity, having warehouses to the rear, the features of which can still be recognised.

- 4.8.7 Buildings on the High Street are generally taller within this zone, and with an increased scale reflecting greater floor to ceiling heights more suited to their commercial functions. In architectural terms, some of the finest buildings of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are found here. Ramsays' department store, now part of the St Giles Centre, is the tallest building but its height remains deferential to the parish church. Buildings are predominantly three storeys in height.



Problems of relative scale: the blind walls of the St Giles Centre contrast with developments of a traditional scale and appearance within the adjoining closes

- 4.8.8 To the north of the High Street there has been extensive modern redevelopment. The St Giles shopping centre retains the street facades of the High Street buildings, and extends to the relief road to the rear of the site where the bus station is currently located. Although the apparent bulk of this large building has been broken down, the skyline is largely unaffected by its presence, but there are inevitably problems of scale, especially where the blind walls of the retail units meet the traditional closes alongside to the east of the site. It seems surprising at first sight that some of the more interesting traditional closes have survived here, but they are well knitted with the urban fabric of the area.



Variations in scale: South Street

- 4.8.9 Within the middle street block the closes are generally well used as a direct thoroughfare from the High Street to South Street, although the majority of them have been spoilt somewhat by the redevelopment of the High Street frontages which has had an adverse effect on the character of the backlands. The best preserved, and most attractive of

the surviving closes, is Harrow's Inn Close, and it is also the busiest of the routes through the street block. At the western end of the block many of the structures within the backlands are no longer accessible and there is extensive redundancy of use at the present time. There are some large structures within the backlands, some of them of a large scale, the impact of which is heightened by ground levels rising towards South Street.

- 4.8.10 The frontages of South Street are highly varied adding to its interest and character. The former Grand Hotel appears one of the tallest of the buildings in the whole conservation area, largely because it is located on a ridge. Other tall structures are Gordon & MacPhail's corner building and the four storey tenement and former warehouse at the corner with Batchen Street. In other respects the scale and numbers of storeys vary, and in the middle of the street there is a pair of semi-detached villas set back from the pavement line with small front gardens. Once more the buildings in the backlands to the south of the street assume the character and scale of the adjoining residential area.
- 4.8.11 The tower to the former United Presbyterian church on Moss Street, despite losing some of its original detailing and height from advanced stone decay, remains a landmark building which is visible from afar and throughout the conservation area.



Commerce Street is little changed from when the buildings were first erected

- 4.8.12 The **third character area** is bounded by Alexandra Road to the north; Greyfriars Street to the south; and by Commerce Street and Lossie Wynd to the west. In scale it is more like the first character zone to the west, but the area has by the largest surviving numbers of the earliest buildings of the historic burgh from the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and includes all three of the distinctive arcaded buildings which remain dominant in the streetscape. There is less retail activity here than in the other character zones.
- 4.8.13 The area incorporates large civic and institutional buildings which include the Council headquarters, the Sheriff Court, the Elgin Museum, and the former Elgin Club on Commerce Street. The former Safeway supermarket will become an annex to the Council's headquarters. There are large car parking areas associated with the Council buildings.
- 4.8.14 Building heights are variable, and once more this contributes to the character of the townscape – there are some tall buildings within the

streetscape with buildings of up to 3½ storeys in height while, in contrast, there are good shopfronts which are single storey on both the High Street and on Commerce Street. There is a good grouping of historic buildings around the Little Cross.

- 4.8.14 Closes to the south of the High Street have been affected by redevelopment. Red Lion Close and Shepherd's Close, to the rear of the pair of late seventeenth century merchants' houses are particularly sensitive, and the artificially raised car park to the council buildings has a negative impact upon them. The adaptation of the closes to the north of the High Street where the Elgin Fund has been active enhances the conservation area, while Braco's Close is the best surviving of all of the closes with the highest levels of authenticity.
- 4.8.15 The townscape on this length of the High Street has suffered from the insertion of the retail development at Nos 41-71, and this has had a negative effect on the backlands area which has been given over to large areas of tarmac surfaces for car parking and servicing the retail units.



Streetscape at the east end of the High Street

- 4.8.16 This zone supports the greatest number of modern social housing developments. Four storey tower blocks are prominent features close to the boundary with the relief road, whereas other developments are of a significantly smaller scale and make a more positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 4.8.17 Mature trees are an important component of this character zone within the conservation area, especially at the east end where the edge of the relief road is softened. The trees here relate to the mature specimens on the other side of the road surrounding Grant Lodge.

4.9 Negative factors

- 4.9.1 The character and appearance of the Elgin High Street Conservation Area has suffered from a number of negative factors - a significant number are related to unsympathetic modern developments. Others can be attributed to the poor appearance of many of the buildings from the agents of decay and a lack of maintenance, and from the effects of a declining local economy.

- 4.9.2 While in one respect at least the insertion of the relief road has been beneficial in reducing the impact of vehicular traffic on the city centre, in another it has caused untold damage to the historic environment. In one fell swoop it severed the historic core of the city from the open recreational ground to the north and civic buildings such as the Town Hall, and it violated the continuity of the High Street at both ends.
- 4.9.3 Particularly damaging has been the severance of the historic links to the city's recreational and cultural assets of the castle, Grant Lodge and the Cooper Park, and the cathedral. Virtually the only direct physical link now is the elevated pedestrian footbridge, which although reasonably well used, acts as a physical barrier to movement.



The ragged northern edge of the conservation area where it meets the A96 relief road

- 4.9.4 A further effect of modern development has been the impact on the patterns of the traditional closes, which have suffered in many instances from having been curtailed in length. Buildings of uncertain architectural quality have either been replaced or disturbed the distinctive pattern of the old burgage plots, or have been exposed by injudicious demolition, leaving poorly defined spaces surrounding them. This is particularly noticeable in the areas given over to public car parking at the northern boundary of the conservation area.



Problems of vegetation growth from lack of maintenance; the tree growing out of the wallhead on the right image has brought down the rainwater pipe

- 4.9.5 A less obvious consequence from the redevelopment of sites in the historic core of the city centre has been the marked negative effect on surrounding spaces from structures which are large in volume, and of

uncertain architectural quality. They have an impact on the quality of the space in the backlands and the closes which abut them. These spaces tend to be unattractive, and become less inviting as circulation routes. The closes often lack life, and some are completely inaccessible. In some closes the buildings have slipped recently into redundancy with windows and doors blocked or boarded up.

- 4.9.6 There are marked differences between daytime and night-time activity, especially within the central retail area. At night the public spaces are dead, and better use could be made of lighting to make the spaces and building frontages more attractive.



Empty shop units at the corner of South Street and Batchen Street

- 4.9.7 With the local economy in decline, redundancy, or the under-use of historic buildings within the city centre, has had a noticeable impact upon the character and appearance of the conservation area. Most obvious to the eye are shopfronts lying empty, buildings which give an impression of having been abandoned, and the under-use of the upper floors above the shop units. Poor impressions of the health of the conservation area can be compounded by the obvious difficulties encountered over maintaining properties, manifested in vegetation growth overhanging gutters and sprouting out of projecting cornices and parapets.



Residential development at the west end of the conservation area which fails to match the urban grain of the townscape in form, height, and materials

- 4.9.8 In relation to maintaining the continuity of street frontages Elgin has relatively few gap sites, but where they do exist within the townscape

they have a harmful effect. Behind the facades of the buildings of the principal streets there are significant numbers of undeveloped sites, many of which have become overgrown and look unkempt.

- 4.9.9 In the absence of effective guidance throughout the conservation area, planning decisions do not always appear to have been well founded. An example of this is the recent residential development approved upon appeal, but only after a public inquiry. It sets a poor precedent for the western end of the conservation area. The building is taller than the characteristic general height of the surrounding properties, a problem exacerbated by the fact that it is constructed of modern materials which jar with the appearance of the surrounding buildings, and has an intrusive non-traditional roof form of reflective metal.
- 4.9.10 Other issues relating to the loss of authentic finishes and fixtures, and other conservation issues, are referred to later in this document (5.5).
- 4.9.11 Guidance regarding the harmful effect of permitted development on the conservation area and Article 4 Directions is given in Section 10.2.

5 Buildings analysis

5.1 Standing archaeology



Salvaged armorial panels and archaeological features are to be found on buildings and boundary walls throughout the conservation area

- 5.1.1 The Little Cross stands in the street near Elgin Museum. It was apparently first erected in 1402 to mark the limits of the Cathedral Sanctuary. In its present form it is set on a flight of steps and consists of a tall column capped by a sun-dial dated 1733, during which year the cross was remodelled. Its copestone with carved figures is clearly

from a much earlier structure. The sundial and top of the column are now in the museum having been replaced in facsimile in 1941.

- 5.1.2 The Mercat Cross of Elgin, first mentioned in 1365, and commonly known as the Muckle Cross, stood until around 1792 on a site just east of St Giles Church. The structure removed at that date seems to have been erected in the reign of Charles I, around 1630, and consisted of a hexagonal platform or raised balcony 4m high, from the centre of which rose a tall shaft surmounted by the Scottish Lion. The lion alone survives, and the present cross, erected on the old site in 1888, is, in all other respects, a restoration.
- 5.1.3 Numerous armorial panels from the seventeenth century onwards have been placed for view in the closes off the High Street. These are of particular interest when it is possible to de-code the meanings of the arms and identify the individuals recorded in the initials. Elgin's prosperous merchant class of these centuries could be brought to life through such decorative carvings.
- 5.1.4 There are bound to be various instances of standing archaeology that are currently not visible. Hidden within building facades could be post-medieval, or even medieval, traces of the houses that have been superseded. In the backlands or along the streets there may be covered wells – one with a copestone of 1642 is known to exist near the Little Cross. Elgin has such a rich medieval and post-medieval history that it is inconceivable that all upstanding remains of the millennium are known.

5.2 Gazetteer of selected buildings

- 5.2.1 The conservation area contains 108 list entries. Each list entry may cover more than one building. This includes 6 Category A-listed buildings; 39 Category B-listed buildings; and 63 Category C(s) listed buildings.
- 5.2.2 A gazetteer of 50 selected buildings is presented in Appendix 13.3. Buildings and historic structures within the conservation area as it is presently designated have been selected for their architectural and historic interest from four phases – before 1800; 1800-1850; 1850-1900, and 1900-40. There are no buildings of the twentieth century selected on merit after 1940. Groups of buildings, where individually the buildings may not be worthy of special note here, but the group as a whole contributes to the townscape quality of Elgin, have also been included. Some unlisted buildings of special note have been selected which may be suitable for listing.
- 5.2.3 It should be noted that there are many buildings within the conservation area which, while they have not been selected individually for the gazetteer, make a positive contribution to the historic townscape.

5.3 Architectural distinctiveness

- 5.3.1 Elgin has enjoyed phases of rebuilding which document the city's rising fortunes. The city's tendency to take the latest fashion, and its aspiration to be the sophisticated capital of the North, are well documented in the historic buildings of the conservation area.
- 5.3.2 The earliest buildings that appear in the townscape date from the seventeenth century. This was a period in which visitors to the town remarked on the 'piazzas' – arcaded ground floors which were once

very prolific. Today only three remain, and they are among the earliest buildings of the High Street. All of these buildings feature crowstepped gables, found on early buildings throughout the conservation area, enlivening the roofscape.



Distinctive carved monograms and dates carved on skewputts of late seventeenth century merchants' houses

- 5.3.3 Elgin entered a period of decline in the late eighteenth century when Boswell found a 'place of little trade, thinly inhabited'. However by 1820 Elgin was prosperous once again, and by 1840 it had been transformed into elegant neoclassical town with the customary institutions. This period saw the loss of many earlier buildings but the town had become quite upwardly mobile and the new buildings reflected its aspirations. It is from this mid-nineteenth century period that we see so many of the High Street's fine commercial buildings, banks, and shopfronts. Bartholomew's *Gazetteer of the British Isles* (1887) tells us that by then the town had seven banks. Original and fine shopfronts survive in the High Street, Commerce Street and Batchen Street from this period. Although many have suffered alterations and the insertion of modern signage, they are certainly capable of being recovered.



Carved architectural detail on the doorcase of a former bank (1867) designed by Peddie & Kinnear

- 5.3.4 Elgin was never a town with much sentimentality. The townspeople were keen to keep up with fashions, often at the expense of antiquity. Writing in 1860, historian Cosmo Innes says, 'I cannot but feel some indignation at the vulgar modernising which Elgin has undergone in our time. The irregular tall houses standing on massive pillars and arcades...are poorly exchanged for the prim and trim square modern houses and shops'. This attitude is perhaps best exemplified by the decision to demolish the Muckle Kirk and replace it with St Giles. In other towns the old Muckle Kirk might have been repaired and altered, but in Elgin they had the confidence to remove it, and replace it with the modern and austere Greek Revival church we see in the High Street today, designed by one of the leading architects in the North East.
- 5.3.5 Elgin has always had a strong sense of civic pride and this is manifested in the carved initials, arms, and dates liberally scattered over its buildings. Where earlier buildings themselves have been lost, carvings from many were saved, and placed in new buildings and walls, adding considerable character and interest to the streetscape.

5.4 Elgin's architectural dynasties



Supremely well carved stonework to pedimented dormers was a feature of Thomas Mackenzie's work, and also that of his son, Alexander Marshall Mackenzie, architect of 147-9 High Street (1880); the window of the gablet on the left is modelled on that of Duffus Manse in the Chanonry, taken down in 1838

- 5.4.1 Elgin is remarkable for having engendered two dynasties of distinguished architectural practices during the nineteenth century, a true indication of its growing importance as a regional centre and of the aspirations and patronage of its leading citizens. Until then, leading architects had been appointed for the civic and institutional buildings of the city. **James Gillespie Graham** (1766-1855) of Edinburgh was appointed as the architect for Dr Gray's Hospital at the west end of the High Street, while **Archibald Simpson** (1790-1847) of Aberdeen was engaged for the replacement of the old Muckle Kirk at the Plainstones with the new St Giles Church (1828). He was also engaged by the trustees of General Anderson's Institution for the new domed building and school (1831-3) at the eastern approaches to the city.
- 5.4.2 **William Robertson** (1786-1841) is believed to have set up practice in Elgin around 1823 and became well established within a few years with projects across the whole of the North of Scotland. He was the architect of Dr Bell's Academy, Inverness (1839, now Farraline Park), and in Elgin he was the architect for the courthouse of 1837, sadly demolished a century later to clear the site for the Council

headquarters. He was also the architect of the British Linen Bank at 115 High Street (1839, which still stands).

- 5.4.3 Upon his death, the practice was taken over by his nephews, **Alexander and William Reid**, who ran a successful practice which saw the office relocating from Elgin to Inverness from around the mid-1840s to the mid-1880s. A third nephew, Charles, also entered the profession and became a partner of James Maitland Wardrop, practising in Edinburgh under the name of Wardrop & Reid. The Reids retained a firm foothold in Elgin and were responsible for a number of finely detailed and crafted buildings in the conservation area, including the Sheriff Court (1864-6) and the Elgin Club (1869). John Wittet was taken into partnership in 1893, and this long-lived practice is still in existence, practising as **Wittets Ltd**.

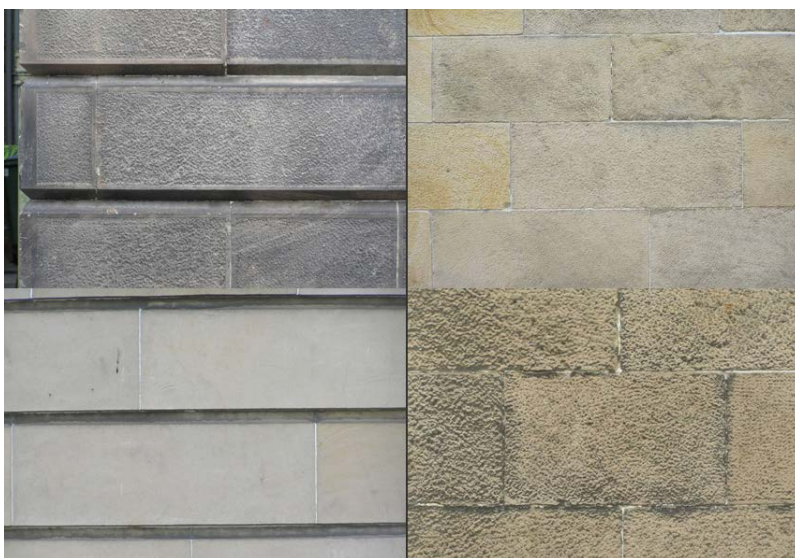


A&W Reid's work at The Elgin Club on Commerce Street (1869)

- 5.4.4 The second dynasty was founded by **Thomas Mackenzie** (1814-54), a native of Perthshire who was trained in Archibald Simpson's Aberdeen office before moving to Elgin to become the principal assistant to William Robertson. When Robertson died in 1841 he set up on his own account, achieving instant success from having been appointed as the architect for the Elgin Museum. By 1844 he merged with James Matthews of Aberdeen when the practice name became **Mackenzie & Matthews**, with offices in both locations. Mackenzie's work in Elgin was distinguished by its innate good proportions, and by fine architectural carving to dormer windows. He was the architect of the fountain at the Plainstones (1845), and of the Duke of Gordon's monument at Ladyhill (1839).
- 5.4.5 Thomas Mackenzie's son, **Dr Alexander Marshall Mackenzie** (1848-1933), was articled to his father's former partner in Aberdeen, James Matthews, before working in David Bryce's office in Edinburgh. During the 1870s he carried out a number of commissions in Elgin while still with Bryce. By 1877 Matthews had taken him into partnership, changing the name of the practice, a little confusingly, to **Matthews & Mackenzie**. After Matthews's death in 1893 Mackenzie practised in his own name. He was the architect of Marischal College, Aberdeen (1900 onwards) but he never forgot his Elgin roots, winning the competition for the design of the Town Hall (1884, later destroyed by fire). He was related by marriage to Sir George Cooper, and laid out the Cooper Park and carried out the refurbishment of Grant Lodge for the new public library and art gallery (1903). The success of the practice continued well into the twentieth century with Mackenzie's son, **AGR Mackenzie**, running the practice's London office.

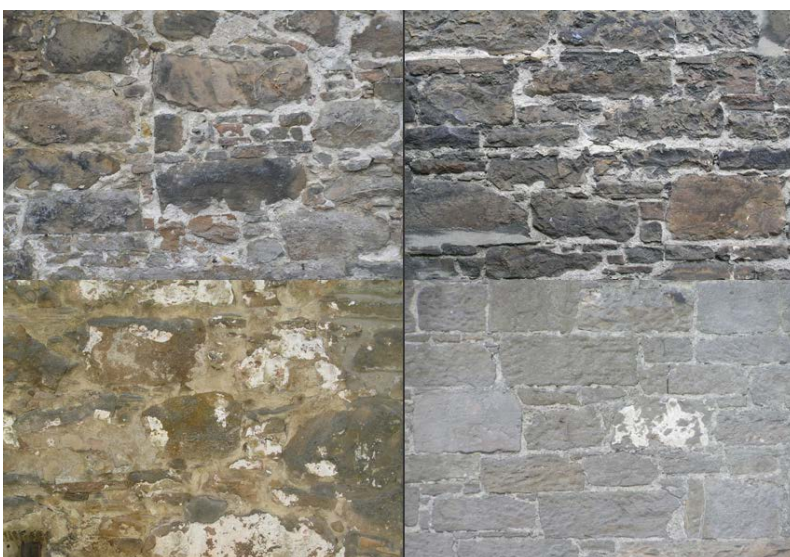
- 5.4.6 These two influential dynasties of architects made a lasting mark on the quality of Elgin's buildings, but they were by no means the only architects at work in the city. Other architects whose work is found in the conservation area are **Charles Doig** (1855-1918) and **RB Pratt** (1864-1937), the architect of the Ramsay department store at St Giles Building.

5.5 Materials & architectural features



Examples of sandstone ashlar masonry applied to the street elevations

- 5.5.1 The building material for external walls in Elgin is primarily a pale, golden yellow sandstone. There is evidence to suggest that stone from different quarries were used for different uses in Elgin for example walling, roofing, or carved details. The local Moray sandstone from Quarrywood, is rather soft, making it ideal for carving but prone to decay, a problem which is now evident in many buildings in the conservation area, and which has resulted in the loss of architectural detail and fine carving.



Examples of rubble masonry walls found mainly in the closes

- 5.5.2 The earlier and more modest buildings are of rubble, or coursed rubble, construction, with snecked lime pointing and often with dressed margins. Later nineteenth century buildings tend to be ashlar,

particularly where they front the High Street or South Street. Where shopfronts are ashlar sandstone they are now generally painted but would have been left unpainted when first erected. There is evidence of some brickwork in buildings in the closes and chimneys. Evidence of clay or earth mortars was observed in fabric from the late seventeenth century, but these are not common.

- 5.5.3 There is little evidence of surviving historic lime harls, of which only fragments have been observed in some of the closes. While Braco's Banking House, the Red Lion Inn and 50-52 High Street were all finished with cementitious wet dash harls during their refurbishment in the 1960s and 70s, harled finishes within the conservation area are mostly now cement dry dash renders.
- 5.5.4 The earliest buildings were roofed with distinctive stone slabs, some of which are known to have come from the Leggat quarry, New Spynie. Later buildings would have been roofed in West Highland slate traditionally laid in diminishing courses, but there is evidence also of slates from other sources, probably local, having been used. These early slate roofs are now rare. Later slate roofs use a machine cut slate with a more uniform size and appearance which would have been brought in by the railways. Some traditional roof finishes appear to have been replaced in an imported slate, which rarely matches the texture, coursing and colour of the original roof. The roofscape is predominantly of blue slate (see page 42), but in some cases the original roof finishes have been replaced unattractively with concrete tiles. Roof ridges are generally in stone, clay or lead; although in some cases zinc may have been latterly substituted for lead. There are a few examples of decorative ridges of red tiles.



Distinctive stone slates survive on a few roofs of the late seventeenth century houses

- 5.5.5 Crowstepped gables are found on the earliest buildings in the conservation area, and among the buildings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be found carvings and datestones on the skewputts (see page 59). A common feature is the use of pedimented wallhead dormers, sometimes with datestones, and elaborate carving in the pediment. Later dormers of the nineteenth century often have distinctive carved finials. Good examples of, mostly yellow, chimneycans survive, with some ranges intact. There are examples of both decorative and plain designs.
- 5.5.6 Decorative metalwork is common on the buildings of the late nineteenth century, where architectural details such as finials and balustrading add character. There are a few good examples of gates at the entrances to the closes even though the majority have been lost to the war effort, and patterned cast-iron rainwater goods have survived relatively well.



A sampler of the wide array of traditional shopfronts to be found across the conservation area

- 5.5.7 A good number of original nineteenth century shopfronts have been retained and make a considerable contribution to the townscape. These are mostly in cast-iron, but also of ashlar sandstone, both painted in a variety of colours. Good examples are found at 27-33 Batchen Street and 184-188 High Street. An excellent Art Deco shopfront is found at Burtons on the High Street, with original bronze grilles and chevron patterned lights, and with foundation stones inscribed with the names of the original owners and the date when the shopfront was installed (1936) (page 33). A good interwar shopfront remains at 30-32 Batchen Street with a tiled frontage, stained glass and awnings. Where modern signage has been incorporated into traditional shopfronts, this is not always successful, but could be easily remedied.

5.6 Impact of Change on Authenticity



Examples of masonry decay, which in some instances has resulted in the loss of carved architectural detail

- 5.6.1 A significant problem within the conservation area is the loss of historic fabric from masonry decay. This is likely to be due to the particular characteristics of the sandstone used and has resulted in loss of architectural detail, which is particularly significant given the

level and high quality of carved detail in Elgin. In some cases masonry repairs have been carried out, with only varying levels of success.

- 5.6.2 A relatively high proportion of cast-iron rainwater goods remain, although some is in poor condition, blocked, cracked, or with sections missing, causing damage to the historic fabric and exacerbating masonry decay. Frequently cast-iron has been replaced, or repaired with PVC sections, and it is not uncommon to find this material failing also, being of flimsy construction. Blocked gutters and extensive vegetation growth appear to be a particular problem in the closes, made worse because of access difficulties for carrying out effective maintenance.
- 5.6.3 Replacement windows and doors are commonplace, often with a variety of styles utilised across one building. Compared with some conservation areas large numbers of original doors have survived. Replacement windows are rarely a close match to those that have been replaced. Historic glass and windows does remain in upper floors, particularly on South Street.



Traditional paneled doors have survived in reasonable numbers throughout the conservation area

- 5.6.4 Many ground floors have seen extensive structural changes to accommodate retail usage, often triggered by the introduction of new shopfronts. Shopfronts themselves have been subjected to many changes, generally the insertion of new windows, doors, and new fascias, although in many cases where the original cast-iron or ashlar shopfront is unaltered these could be remedied easily. The recent removal of modern signage from 186-188 High Street has revealed a hand painted fascia beneath, offering some evidence that further historic signage may be retained below later interventions.



Shopfront at 186-188 High Street (see also below)

- 5.6.5 Traditional dormers make a significant contribution to the historic townscape in enlivening the roofscape, with some good examples of lead and cast iron finials. Dormers have mostly been retained but the character of many has been altered with new windows, rarely matching the original fenestration. The character of several buildings in the closes of the conservation area has been affected adversely by the addition of unattractive box dormers.

5.7 Buildings at Risk

- 5.7.1 Buildings at Risk identified during the street survey audit are detailed below.

The Elgin Club, Commerce Street

The Elgin Club has been vacant since its closure in 2002. While the building is in fair condition it is at risk from redundancy of use. Plans were approved by the Moray Council in 2009 for redevelopment of the site as a hotel and leisure complex, but work is yet to begin on site.

107-109 High Street

The majority of the building is vacant, above the shop premises on the ground and first floors. Some vegetation growth observed to upper levels.

175 High Street

Formerly the offices and printrooms of the *Northern Scot*, with the buildings along the full length of the close with windows and doors boarded up.

211 High Street

The listed buildings within the close have been renovated at some stage but are presently unoccupied, with windows and doors boarded up. The properties are visible from the car park to Marks & Spencer's store.



The former dwellings in the close at 211 High Street are boarded up, and are visible from the public car parks adjacent to the A96 Trunk Road

239 High Street

Original cast-iron shopfront, boarded up. The whole building is vacant and advertised for sale. Timber sashes to the upper floors. Considerable amount of masonry decay observed to first and second floor. Some indenting work has been carried out to second floor.

135-135b High Street

A range of rubble-built cottages, accessed from the High Street via a pend. The buildings fall within the curtilage of the C(S)-listed Nos. 135-

139 High Street. The buildings appear to be in a very poor condition. After several applications to demolish, conservation area consent was granted in 2003, which has now expired.

186-188 High Street

Original shopfronts, dormers and 12-pane sashes. The building is currently vacant and in poor condition with slipped slates and broken rooflights. The modern shop signage has been removed revealing hand painted signage for a confectioner underneath. The dwellings to the rear are potentially attractive. The property is currently being marketed for sale as a development opportunity.



The arched entry to the Newmarket Close and the structures in poor condition to the rear

130 High Street: Newmarket Close

A former bar set behind the building on the street façade and large building housing a former leisure and fitness club approached the close which has attractive vaults and pilasters. The structures appear to be in poor repair with extensive vegetation growth apparent. The building within the backlands has been reduced to a shell as a result of fire damage.



Properties behind 76 High Street

76-78 High Street

Mid-nineteenth century stone rubble-built range to the rear of a shop in use; the chimneyhead has been removed from the gable and doors

and windows are boarded up.

66-68 High Street

Mid-nineteenth century corner block with Commerce Street. Ground floor shop unit vacant, upper levels appear vacant also. Vegetation growth at upper levels.

Greyfriars Street: Former Church Hall

Large structure carrying the date 1897, prominent within the townscape, formerly affiliated with St Giles Church, declared surplus to requirements and currently advertised for sale.



Junners' former shop on South Street

South Street: former Junners shop

An Art Deco style shop frontage with wide shop windows, and large warehouses to the rear. The building is vacant and the ground floor boarded over. An application for Conservation Area Consent to demolish part of the shop in 2007 was withdrawn.

5.8 Redundancy or under-use

- 5.8.1 Relatively few buildings within the conservation area are totally vacant. Levels of vacancy to upper floors above commercial premises have been confirmed by the April 2010 'Space in Use Survey' and vary according to the use of the property. Hotels, guest houses and solicitors' offices tend to result in all useable floors being occupied, but where retail premises occur vacancy rates on the upper floors are significantly lower. In some premises returning upper floors to use may be compromised by the removal of separate doors and staircases as a consequence of expanding the sales area of the shop.
- 5.8.2 It is difficult to establish levels of use in closes, where it is not always clear if a building is in active use. However, boarded up or blank windows and doors in these areas contribute to an air of neglect and underuse, particularly in the closes to the north of the High Street.

6 Public Realm Audit

6.1 Street furniture and hard landscaping

- 6.1.1 Historic photographs of the late nineteenth century show a cobbled road surface to the High Street, with stone pavements and kerbstones (pages 45 and 46). The area of stone paving to the front of St Giles Church on the High Street is known as the 'Plainstones'. This area is the town's former marketplace and is now the location for local events and performances.



Valentine image of the Plainstones in the 1950s © University of St Andrews Special Collections



The Plainstones, with Percy Portsmouth's war memorial of 1921

- 6.1.2 Mid-twentieth century images show the Plainstones surrounded by an area of small cobbles with stone pavement slabs and tarmac road surfaces. The High Street was pedestrianised in the mid-1990s and a new cobbled surface laid. The pedestrianisation of Batchen Street has been achieved during the autumn of 2011. Outside the pedestrianised area the surface finishes are generally standard and unremarkable; road surfaces are generally tarmac with concrete flagged pavements and concrete kerbstones.

- 6.1.3 The resurfacing of the High Street has perhaps exposed the patchy public realm of the closes, which would benefit from enhancement. Historically the closes were cobbled, and Mary Byatt tells us that many were cobbled up until the mid-twentieth century. The only close to retain a cobbled surface is Braco's Close. Remnants survive elsewhere, particularly where closes have been gated, or otherwise closed off, and remained inaccessible. Some closes have remnants of the stone drain that would have run down each close to carry waste water to the High Street. Seceder's Close at 166 High Street, which is gated at both ends and is now only visible from the upper floors of the car park behind, contains original cobbles and a drain.



Finishes in the closes and evidence of former drainage channels

- 6.1.4 Many of the closes are in private ownership and the surface finishes vary considerably. Some closes such as Walker's Close at 175 High Street have very poor public realm, in this case an unmaintained concrete surface, although with some remnants of a stone drain on the eastern side. The public realm in the closes in this area of the High Street in particular tends to be poor quality and unmaintained. In some of the closes there are problems with surface drainage. The close at 203-205 High Street has a simple gravel surface, which does little to enhance the historic character of the area. This creates an unpleasant pedestrian environment and gives an air of neglect. This is particularly important in this area where these closes link at their northern end to car parking on the fringes of the conservation area, and have the potential to form a pedestrian link to the High Street for visitors.



Poor standards in the public realm of the closes, with a gravel finish for car parking (left) and concrete surfaces (right)

- 6.1.5 Other closes have been repaved with stone or, more commonly, concrete paving slabs and paviors, and occasionally with cobbles set in the verges. Some consistency between the closes where

improvements are carried would perhaps help to provide a simpler and coherent image and quality of pedestrian experience throughout the conservation area. There are successful examples of repaving with stone effect concrete slabs and cobbles to the verges, but some other repaving projects are rather lacking in character, such as Masonic Close, where plain concrete flags and pink gravel have been used. The adjacent close, Kilmolymock Close, is attractively laid out with salvaged stone flags.

- 6.1.6 'Rig' boundary walls are of considerable historic importance. Perhaps the best surviving example is found at 211 High Street, at the northern end of Victoria Close. The wall here is around 2 metres high and of rubble stone construction. Many walls have been lost or damaged through lack of maintenance. Part of a damaged historic wall can be found in the close at 203-205 High Street. There are surviving examples of rubble boundary walls bound with clay mortar within the conservation area and a boundary wall of mass unreinforced concrete from the late nineteenth century was observed to the rear of buildings on South College Street, an unusual form of construction given the ready availability of building stone. Other walls in this area are likely to date to the late seventeenth century.



Rarities in the conservation area: a 'rig' wall and a boundary wall of rubble stonework bound with clay mortar, and of mass unreinforced concrete

- 6.1.7 The conservation area contains a significant number of 'heritage' style items of street furniture, such as finger signs and visitor information boards. While these are generally unobtrusive imposed with insufficient care, they can have a cumulative cluttering effect on the townscape, while adding little to the character of the place. The finest townscapes often have the minimum amount of street furniture. There is an opportunity to make signage for pedestrians and other street furniture individual interesting and reflect local character.
- 6.1.8 Negative factors identified during the public realm audit should be balanced against recent enhancement schemes which have been progressed by the Council and by Elgin BID. Inward investment has seen improvements in street furniture, the underpass below the relief road at the foot of North Street transformed, public realm improvements at the Little Cross and electronic information points introduced to the city centre in addition to the pedestrianisation of Batchen Street referred to above.

6.2 Utilities infrastructure

- 6.2.1 Infrastructure for utilities in general seems to have been well considered and is not generally intrusive. Street lighting is well handled throughout the conservation area with traditional lamp standards the length of the pedestrianised High Street and in many of the closes. Otherwise, standard street lamps have been adopted or mounted on buildings, which is generally unobtrusive.

- 6.2.2 Some of the lighting throughout the conservation area appears tired, and unappealing. Although St Giles Church is well lit at night, there are now better, and more dramatic forms of architectural lighting, of which the lighting of the Gordon column at Ladyhill is a good example.



An over-reliance on sodium street lighting, the partial illumination of the tower of St Giles, and a lack of lighting to ground planes and trees suggest opportunities for enhancement

- 6.2.3 Surface cabling is occasionally found on buildings, which can detract from their appearance. Satellite dishes seem to be confined to faces of buildings in the closes, perhaps due to the commercial nature of much of the property on the main streets. These fittings do have a marked negative impact on the historic townscape where they accumulate.



Concentrations of satellite dishes placed prominently on buildings, surface wiring and overhead lines all detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area

- 6.2.4 Other features having a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area are poorly positioned, or over-prominent, security alarms and CCTV cameras; air handling units and heat exchangers together with associated pipework and brackets, and prominent air extractor terminals, or flues, of which there are many examples to be seen on the rear elevations of buildings or within the closes.

6.3 Road signs

- 6.3.1 Road signs can add considerably to the clutter to be found throughout the public realm, particularly where directional signs appear at road junctions, or in controlling traffic at the thresholds to pedestrianised

areas – for instance, at the Plainstones and Thunderton Place, where they become intrusive.

6.4 Historic signs

- 6.4.1 There are some delightful examples of painted cement rendered signs to be found on old buildings, providing information on the names of businesses which have long disappeared and the nature of their trade. Many of these signs are now quite badly faded.
- 6.4.2 There are occasional survivals of old road name signs in blue enamel, or earlier pattern cast nameplates to closes which add to an appreciation of the history of the city. Although there are now much fewer than they were at one stage, there are good examples of traditional painted house numerals still to be seen.



Old painted cement rendered signs, although fading, provide a fascinating insight into past uses of buildings and the names of the business proprietors



Wall signs and painted house numerals

6.5 Christmas decorations

- 6.5.1 With cutbacks in budgets, and increased health and safety risks for those at work in public places, Elgin has suffered, as many historic towns, from Christmas light decorations having been left in place permanently throughout the whole year. This has a marked adverse effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area as indicated in the photographs on pages 35 and 37.

6.6 Interpretation

- 6.6.1 Much of the interpretation to be found around the conservation area is hesitant, difficult to locate and highly variable in terms of appearance and in the information conveyed to those perambulating the city centre. This matter is being addressed in more detail in the evaluation and proposals for the heritage trail (Part 4 of the suite of documents).

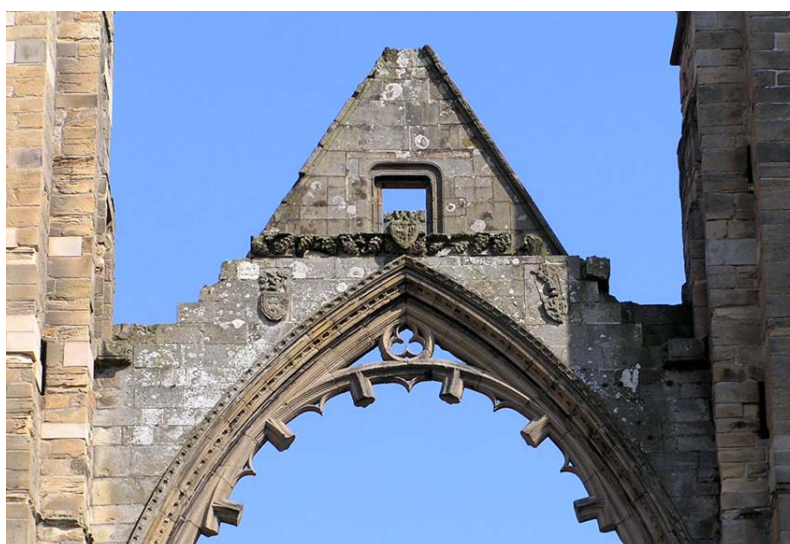
6.7 Negative factors

6.7.1 Negative factors arising from the public realm audit are summarised as follows:

- Public realm in the closes is patchy. Surfaces tend to be particularly poor and unmaintained in closes to the north-west end of the High Street. In other areas, repaving efforts are inconsistent and characterless
- While public realm at the High Street end of the closes is generally satisfactory, the opposite end, where visitors are likely to park, tends to be poor
- Satellite dishes proliferate in the closes
- Street furniture and signage is of a standard 'heritage' design; there is the potential for a more creative approach in the conservation area
- Intrusive road signs

7 Significance

7.1 Summary of significance



The arms of James I flanked by those of Bishop Columba of Dunbar (right) and the see of Moray (left) framing the gable at the west front (1422-35)

As monuments, damaged or decayed they may appear, but Elgin still retains the potent symbols of a medieval power base – of the royal castle set upon its motte at one end of the historic burgh, and at the other, the cathedral which demonstrates most vividly the power invested in the church and the prelates, surrounded by its own walled enclosure of the college, or chanonry. At its peak just before the Scottish Reformation the college was home to the manses of no less than twenty five canons. Somehow the importance of the cathedral has been suppressed over time, or perhaps forgotten even. At the end of the nineteenth century, architect antiquarians, who travelled extensively and knew their gothic cathedrals well, would claim that comparisons lay not within Scotland, nor even with England. They looked to Europe in seeing beyond its ruined state.

Set on a sloping ridge adjacent to the winding course of the River Lossie, the skyline of the city has given rise to some memorable historic images, not least those by Timothy Pont in the late sixteenth

century, and Slezer's well known prospect, first published in 1693. They give an impression of the important position of the city in relation to the Province of Moray, and of the 'champaign district' to which the Victorians referred to when describing the fertile plains of the Laigh of Moray which fuelled its economy.

Elgin is remarkable for having enjoyed a long and close association with the most influential families of the North East. It had been such a civilised place at more than one stage in its history that the leading members conducted their business affairs from here, or lived in comfort in large townhouses. Although they had the status of lairds, they were involved as the merchant burgesses in trading with the Baltic and Dutch ports. Their names read like a roll call of the leading members of the Scottish aristocracy: Alexander Seton, Lord High Chancellor of Scotland, 1st Earl of Dunfermline and twice Provost of the city; the Marquis of Huntly (latterly, the Dukes of Gordon); the Duff Fifes, and the Seafield Grants. The city is exceptional for the extent to which old armorial panels, datestones and fine architectural carvings from the venerable buildings that were destroyed to make way for improvements were salvaged, set aside and recycled in new buildings, sometimes appearing in the most unexpected places.



Lintol with an intertwined monogram and year date salvaged in a building erected around the turn of the twentieth century on Lossie Wynd

The pre-eminence of the merchant class may no longer be represented by a tolbooth or town-house at the heart of the burgh – sentiment was overridden in the 1840s when the old tolbooth standing on the Plainstones was pulled down as part of the civic improvements underway at the time. However, the prosperous merchants in the late seventeenth century have left their mark with the three houses of impressive grandeur, each one of them built within the space of just six years in the late seventeenth century. Located at the east end of the High Street, their arcaded ground storeys, or 'piazzas', reflect architectural influences from the countries with which they were trading. More of these houses existed at one stage before they were pulled down unceremoniously in the nineteenth century, leaving early travellers with the false impression that the whole of the High Street must have been arcaded in this manner.

After the cathedral, Elgin's crowning glory lies in the survival of its sweeping medieval layout. It takes the characteristic form of a principal street opening up around the parish church of St Giles, with burgess plots extending outwards in the form of rigs to meet the back gaits, or lanes. It was of a scale that the English monarch, Edward I, who passed through in 1296, and again in 1303, was sufficiently impressed to refer to it as 'a good towne' on the first occasion of his visit. It has resulted in a historic townscape of a very high order which has somehow been preserved despite the very worst ravages of the late twentieth century. This orgy of unnecessary destruction has been unremittingly heartless in terms of the loss of historic buildings and

urban fabric, and soulless in terms of the architecture which has replaced them.



The dome of Gillespie Graham's Dr Gray's Hospital dominates the view along the High Street towards the west

But it would be a gross mistake to rest the case for Elgin's magnificence purely on its Pre-Reformation origins. It stumbled through the eighteenth century when its former importance was recognised by travellers, and not without wonderment. The French nobleman Alexandre de Rochefoucauld, travelling with his brother and a Polish mentor on a tour to the Highlands in 1786, could remark pithily, but with some accuracy, that 'Elgin is the capital of a shire, a fairly large town with one beautiful street'. In doing so he noted Elgin's growing ascendancy as a county town, and by the first decades of the nineteenth century its citizens were flushed with pride, and invested in heavily the rebuilding of the city. In this, in essence the city's second Renaissance, they were spurred on by the extraordinary generosity of two of its sons who had made their fortunes abroad, with nothing but affection for the place in which they grew up. In acts of inspired patronage they appointed two of Scotland's leading architects to realise their dreams, and their elegant domed buildings act as markers at each end of the long, winding High Street to those entering and leaving the city, to remind them of its importance.

Sentiment for the past was swept away when, in the 1820s, the Muckle Kirk was dismantled for one of the finest neoclassical buildings in Scotland. It was also one of two fine civic buildings in the city by Archibald Simpson. It would be only a matter of time before the old tolbooth would be swept aside to reveal the full magnificence of the portico as a set-piece within the townscape, and to permit an appreciation of the graceful tower, surmounted by its Choragic Monument, presiding over the conservation area just as it did when it was first erected.

Sober classicism in Elgin survived well into the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and although leading Edinburgh architects were invited to design institutional buildings, increasingly the two competing architectural dynasties, founded by William Robertson and Thomas Mackenzie respectively, demonstrated their undoubted capabilities leaving a legacy of fine buildings well beyond their adopted home city and across the whole of the North of Scotland. Offspring would return occasionally and leave their own mark on the

city – such was the case when Alexander Marshall Mackenzie returned to build the Town Hall of 1884, and to lay out the Cooper Park which opened to public acclaim in 1903.



A&W Reid's finely proportioned tower to the former United Free Church (1858) on Moss Street dominates the view on Commerce Street looking southwards in the 1930s: sadly, as a consequence of advanced stone decay, the tower has since been reduced to little more than a stump © The Moray Society

Late Victorian and Edwardian buildings maintained the ambitions of past generations, and the high architectural standards of the previous era. Fuelled by improved transport links, in a period of unprecedented expansion the city exploded with new buildings, often at the expense of the old. From this legacy the conservation area has been left with a wealth of traditional shopfronts, many of them of cast iron.

An astonishing, and hitherto unrecognised legacy, is the remarkable display of carved stonework which adorns the buildings of the city centre. It reflects a long tradition of highly skilled craftsmanship. Elgin's masons relished the opportunity of shaping and carving the sublime sandstones from the Laigh of Moray, and they have left a lasting testament to their abilities and ingenuity, which is only at risk of being snuffed out by the agents of decay.



One of a number of carved canine heads at The Tower, 103-105 High Street

Throughout the early twentieth century Elgin, as a regional centre, continued to grow to the extent that it remained prosperous in the

1930s. The post-war years may have been unduly harsh to Elgin, but they have not destroyed its heritage in its entirety. Recognition of its outstanding values is resurfacing once more in the face of the oppressive economic changes which afflict today's global society.

8 Issues

8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 Several issues have been identified during the audit, highlighted below. It is envisaged that – with the exception of addressing any shortfall in the statutory lists, primarily a matter for the Moray Council to take forward with Historic Scotland – clear guidance can be offered in respect of each through the sister document to the conservation area character appraisal, the conservation area management plan.

8.2 Shopfronts and signage

- 8.2.1 Retailing activity has been, through the centuries, of considerable importance to Elgin and this is reflected in the fine legacy of traditional shopfronts which have survived. There are good examples of largely unaltered traditional stone shopfronts from the early nineteenth century, and with the frenzy of rebuilding that took place towards the end of the century cast iron shopfronts with their large panes of plate glass became the norm through the city centre. Numbers surviving are surprisingly high when compared with elsewhere. There are good shopfronts from the era when the insertion of iron beams permitted large spans to be introduced to shopfronts with almost negligible shop window framing in order to maximise on the amount of glass, and also good shopfronts from the interwar years of the twentieth century. Their importance to the streetscape, and to the wellbeing of the city, has been recognised by Elgin BID.



Shopfront on Batchen Street which has preserved the original cast iron pillars and moulded lintol, door, fanlight, and vents in the stall risers; the lettering has been kept within the depth of the fascia

- 8.2.2 Reasonable numbers have survived with their original fittings, including decorative cast iron stall riser panels, blind boxes, doors and fanlights, encaustic floor tiles and original ironmongery, but they are vulnerable to incremental change as part of ongoing modernisation programmes – or when a new owner takes over the premises. Replacement of original features from decay or wear is a problem

from which many have been subjected across the whole of the conservation area.

- 8.2.3 In many instances, although there are exemplars to be seen, the appearance of traditional shopfronts has been damaged by unsuitable decorative schemes which can conflict with those of adjoining premises, and the architectural unity of individual street blocks. More commonly, damage has been caused by uncontrolled signage, either from applied signs fitted over the original fascias that are too deep, obliterating the features of the shopfront, or from letters and logos being too large. Plastic signs with computer-generated images or lettering are becoming more commonplace, replacing traditional forms of painted signs or signs with embossed letters in relief. A few signs are back-lit, but in most cases lighting has been considered having regard to the fact that the premises fall within a conservation area.



Example of a shopfront having a disruptive effect in the streetscape: colours are strident, lettering is poor and the fascia oversized, while the shopfront is a modern replacement

- 8.2.4 In a minority of cases security roller shutters have been installed. They have a negative impact on the conservation area, and obliterate the architectural detail of the shopfront.
- 8.2.5 Guidance on the repair and improvement of traditional shopfronts would be of immense assistance to business owners throughout the conservation area, and will help consolidate Elgin BID's current programme.

8.3 Decay of carved stonework and advanced masonry decay

- 8.3.1 Elgin's carved stonework, much of it inaccessible and at high level – of which there are excellent examples from the early seventeenth century through to the twentieth century – is by far and away one of the city's greatest unrecognised assets. Carved stonework may be discovered in datestones, pedimented dormers, urns embellishing parapets, armorial panels and in decorative architectural detail. It is invariably of a very high standard indeed.
- 8.3.2 Were it to be lost, or made unrecognisable through inappropriate repair, there would be a considerable loss to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Furthermore, crucial information about those who lived on the site, commissioned the work, when they did so, and the nature of their businesses could no longer be available to future generations in interpreting the historic buildings of the city centre.



Skilled carved stonework of the mid-nineteenth century

- 8.3.3 Elgin and the historic burghs of the Inner Moray Firth have produced generations of stone masons – historically, mason burgesses were key members of their community and some would evolve into becoming skilled architects in their own right. By the nineteenth century, with the taste for neoclassicism taking an increasing hold, stonework was beautifully crafted – an examination of the work of A&W Reid reveals the extent to which their designs were reliant on consummate craft skills. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century inferior stones were being quarried, which were significantly easier to shape for general building work and into mouldings, and for elaborate carved work.



Carved stonework detail to a projecting bay window obliterated from stone decay; weathering back of the face of the stone can be seen around the joints in the ashlar masonry

- 8.3.4 Some of this material has weathered disastrously, but Elgin is by no means unique in this respect. Mouldings have disappeared, and in the worst cases the ornamentation has been cloured off the face of the wall, disfiguring the appearance of the building. Carved work providing information about the history of the site can disintegrate. Among the worst affected buildings is the former United Presbyterian church at the head of Moss Street of 1858 – the decay is universal, and has affected the structure to the extent that the parapet has had to be taken down to be rebuilt at a lower level (see page 77).

- 8.3.5 Problems with decaying masonry of inferior quality are not confined solely to carved work, and in the course of carrying of the fieldwork numerous examples were encountered of chimneyheads, finials and other exposed features which were heavily decomposed, and in some instances could be considered unsafe even. Often it could be seen that attempts at repairing the problem, for instance from using dense cement mortar or render, has only exacerbated the problems of decay and instability of the sandstone.
- 8.3.6 There needs to be greater awareness of the sources of appropriate building stones to be used in remedial work, and how to identify which stones have been used in the past. Such advice, which should extend to mortars and conservation techniques for repairing badly decayed masonry, would be of direct benefit to property owners and to tradesmen alike.

8.4 Redundant buildings



Vacancy of the upper floors of this property has led to neglect and has a negative effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area, and an impact on adjoining properties

- 8.4.1 Buildings that are redundant - displaying their redundancy in obvious ways with protective boarding, or where windows are boarded up and broken glass has not been repaired - have an immediate negative effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area. While in certain cases redundancy may have come about because of property neglect, this does not always appear to have been the case and the majority of buildings are eminently capable of being saved and given continuing, or new uses.
- 8.4.2 In the current challenging economic climate, the problem of redundancy within the conservation area has worsened from when the Buildings at Risk Register (BARR) survey was undertaken in 2008.
- 8.4.3 Fiscal measures may have to put in place by way of grants and perhaps other incentives, at least in the short term, to encourage owners to seek investment in their property as part of a wider series of initiatives for the area.

8.5 Planning blight: bringing the closes back to life

- 8.5.1 Significant blight has resulted from unsympathetic modern developments carried out in the latter half of the twentieth century having an effect on the backlands behind the High Street, and on the historic closes, the lengths of which have been curtailed unattractively

in several locations. Some of the most noticeable damage to the conservation area has been caused by road improvements, for instance from the insertion of the relief road to the north of the city centre and from the widening of the head of North Street.

- 8.5.2 In two of the closes, both in the west character zone and to the North of the High Street, buildings for the entire length of the close have been boarded up, and are no longer in use.
- 8.5.3 The replacement of buildings within the closes, as a direct consequence of redeveloping frontages on the High Street, has been particularly damaging to the conservation area. When the old buildings were knocked down, replacement buildings called for a significantly larger footprint extending towards the rear of the site. Banks and shops operated by national retailers adopted this policy in order to maintain a presence on the High Street which affects, in the main, the closes in the central character zone where commercial pressures are at their greatest. The former cinema on South Street, now a bingo hall, creates similar problems for the close on its west boundary from its tall blind walls.



Closes blighted by twentieth century developments within the backlands, resulting in bland walls lacking in interest

- 8.5.4 The consequence of this is that closes adjacent to these sites are heavily compromised in terms of their potential attractiveness to pedestrians. Blank walls tend to dominate, and the display of archaeological relics, where they occur, do little to overcome blandness and lack of interest. Spaces to the rear elevations of these large flat-roofed extensions where they have been opened up, for instance on the north side of the conservation area, have a negative impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 8.5.5 Development policies need to be put in place to ensure that the full potential of the closes, as heritage and economic assets, are exploited to the maximum. They should be made as attractive as possible through a variety of measures which may include improvements to the public realm and lighting. The closes have the potential to increase pedestrian access to the principal shopping streets, and to improve permeability through the dense built form of the street blocks of the central area.

8.6 Property neglect

- 8.6.1 Extensive vegetation growth overhanging gutters, sprouting out of open joints in high level masonry, and growing on damp masonry

within the closes from ill-maintained rainwater goods, create a poor impression of general decay and neglect, especially where they are highly visible. Worse, it has the potential to cause serious damage to the internal fabric of properties and affect property values adversely.



Appreciation of the skyline of a fine late nineteenth century buildings is marred by trees growing out of gutters and open joints in masonry at high level

- 8.6.2 Elgin is not unique in having this problem, which in part reflects the high cost of maintaining buildings due to their height, and restrictions on access. The Elgin BID initiative in surveying the properties in order to identify problems and potential solutions, and in providing practical advice to property owners is to be welcomed, and the take-up for the scheme and its success should be monitored closely.

8.7 Designations: statutory list entries



A fine range of late nineteenth century buildings on Commerce Street with high levels of authenticity, complete with the original cast iron shopfronts, panelled doors and rich carved architectural detail, some of which has been lost at high level

- 8.7.1 As noted in the preceding sections, the architectural quality of the buildings of the principal streets of the conservation area is high, reflecting several centuries of economic prosperity. This applies equally to the buildings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These structures make up the lifeblood of the streets and are expressive of a flush of civic pride and confidence at a time when the city was at its most prosperous and expanding. Many of the architectural features of these buildings are distinctive and some are

idiosyncratic, giving the city its special character and a strong sense of identity.

- 8.7.2 A first glance at a map of the conservation area (Appendix 13.2) showing the numbers and density of the listed buildings may suggest that they have been well covered in the last survey. However, this was undertaken as long ago as the early 1980s. While the lists are generally reliable in relation to buildings erected previous to the mid-nineteenth century, and other buildings reflecting the work of well known architects, it appears that the value and importance of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings, and the contribution they make to the exceptional qualities of the historic townscape has not been fully recognised to date.



Building at 18-20 North College Street, on the eastern edge of the conservation area, identified during the street survey as a former merchant's house of 1694, albeit heavily altered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

- 8.7.3 Society's values change from one generation to another. A relatively young building considered unworthy of listing some thirty-five years ago may be perceived quite differently today. Accordingly a number of buildings have been identified which could be put forward for consideration for listing, and they include the discovery of a structure dating back to at least 1694 at the extreme east end of the conservation area. In other cases there appears to be an argument for raising the category of listing on grounds of architectural, historical or townscape merit. Overall, an even greater density of listed buildings within the boundaries of the conservation area is no more than might be expected for a former historic burgh of exceptional importance in which so much original fabric of quality has survived.

9 Development opportunities

9.1 Gap sites and undeveloped land

- 9.1.1 There are virtually no gap sites occurring in the street frontages of the High Street, with the possible exception of the open space left over at the western extremity of the conservation area following the demolition of the rear properties of the close at 237 High Street to accommodate the relief road at the point of arrival at the city. While the new corner buildings on the opposite side of the street may not be distinguished architecturally, they do at least have the merit of turning the corner between the High Street and Northfield Terrace.

- 9.1.2 Following the demolition of single storey workshops on the north side of South Street some years ago a gap site has opened up which at present houses a private car park. The gap in the streetscape is disruptive, and a view is opened up to the rear of properties on the High Street which were never intended to be seen in this context from such an elevated platform.
- 9.1.3 Within the central character zone there are some large former warehouse structures of mid-twentieth century date which are undistinguished architecturally, and have a marked negative impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area. They are particularly visible within the townscape when the conservation area is seen from Ladyhill. Tied in with this, many of the buildings in the heart of the commercial block to the south of the High Street are either redundant, or grossly underused, creating an unattractive environment. Some of these structures are so deep within the backlands that it had not been possible to record them to any great extent. The west character zone also suffers from a number of unattractive large mid-twentieth century buildings to the north of the High Street which make no positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area, and they have become more exposed to view than hitherto with the opening up of the ends of the closes to the relief road.



Undeveloped gap sites within the backlands of the central character zone of the conservation area: the development shown in the right image has stalled

- 9.1.4 Within the closes a number of gap sites were observed from demolitions having taken place over the years, which is considered to be detrimental in diluting the close-knitted historic urban grain of the closes. Some of these spaces are completely enclosed, occurring at the heart of the conservation area. They are overgrown with vegetation, and are generally unkempt. In one or two of the closes development has commenced but has been abandoned due to the current economic downturn.
- 9.1.5 In conjunction with returning redundant buildings back to use, planning policy should be developed to encourage the appropriate redevelopment of any gap sites, backlands and the closes in order to return life and activity to the conservation area. Such policies should ensure that the comprehensive redevelopment of the area to the north of the relief road, under consideration as part of the proposals for the City of the Future programme, must not be at the expense of draining life away from the closes and those other underdeveloped parts of the conservation area.

- 9.1.6 While car parks located in proximity to the principal shopping streets are an important consideration, there is often the impression given that they have been accommodated in leftover spaces after planning decisions have been taken. While part of the solution is to be found in the two multi-storey car parks falling within the conservation area, car parks on the periphery of the conservation area are unattractive, resulting in large areas of tarmac, making no positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. As with other negative issues identified for the conservation area a strategic approach might resolve the problem and release land for development, providing a much-needed opportunity to restore the characteristic urban grain. Solutions may be found, perhaps in the larger part, through the City for the Future proposals under consideration at the time of preparing this document.

10 Planning action

10.1 Review of conservation area boundaries

- 10.1.1 Criteria for the designation of conservation areas, and their relevance for considering extending the conservation area boundaries, are set out in Annex 3 to the Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) (July 2009) and have been taken into account in the recommendations that follow.
- 10.1.2 The boundaries of the conservation area have been drawn tightly around what is known to be the extent of the original medieval layout of the historic burgh, modified on the north side to recognise the line of the relief road, and foreshortened on the west side where the High Street has been intersected by the relief road and Northfield Terrace. A boundary line has been drawn around the property boundaries to the south of South Street to acknowledge the contribution of the whole of the street to the townscape.
- 10.1.3 Minor anomalies abound in the present boundaries. At the southwest edge of the conservation area the modern flat-roofed Comet showroom is incorporated within the boundary, together with the modern tower of the Mansefield House Hotel, while the B listed former manse adjoining it, now part of the same hotel, is not included.



Set-piece within the townscape: the portico of Elgin Academy viewed from South Street along the length of Gordon Street. Only the buildings closest to the camera on either side of the street are within a conservation area.

- 10.1.4 At the junction with Moss Street, the whole of the street block which includes the former United Presbyterian church is included, and this highlights a particular problem that the boundaries of the designated

Elgin High Street and Elgin South conservation boundaries are not coterminous with one another, with the exception of one short length along Greyfriars Street (see Appendix 13.1). The logic of this is difficult to comprehend as the streets falling between the two boundaries are no different in character, or in their architectural distinctiveness, to those falling within the Elgin South Conservation Area. It is also the case that at the western end of the High Street Conservation Area, two of the streets looking southwards from South Street - Gordon Street and North Guildry Street - are set-pieces within the townscape focusing on the portico to the old Academy and on the steeple of the South Church respectively. Curiously, neither of these key buildings falls within the Elgin South Conservation Area.

- 10.1.5 Accordingly it is recommended that, in preference to changing the boundaries of the High Street Conservation Area, as the character and appearance of the areas affected are more closely aligned with the Elgin South Conservation Area, it would be preferable to embark upon a process for reviewing the adjacent boundary and extending it to meet the present boundary on South Street. As such, no further action would be required following the adoption of this conservation area appraisal, other than to encourage the Council to undertake a comparable appraisal for the Elgin South Conservation Area by which the boundary review would be evaluated in a fully considered manner and subjected to public consultation.
- 10.1.6 The manner in which the present conservation boundary has been drawn up reinforces the enforced separation between the city centre and the Cooper Park and cathedral as a consequence of the relief road having been introduced. It is of interest to note that the Cooper Park had at one stage been designated a conservation area, but this was later rescinded as the area was not considered to be at risk necessarily, and was also protected by historic environment designations in the Local Plan. Visually the historic connection can still be appreciated from standing in front of the Museum (see page 38), looking towards the cathedral down North College Street, and from the opposite direction.



Visual continuity in the historic townscape, disrupted by the intervention of the city's relief road, looking towards the Museum along North College Street

- 10.1.7 Careful consideration has been given to extending the conservation area boundary eastwards to incorporate the properties on North College Street, with the boundary extending as far as Pans Port. The length of King Street could be included, but if enacted, the boundary

would need to be drawn to leave out the modern housing developments which have been introduced within the quarter. The cathedral, in the care of Historic Scotland, is well protected by its statutory ancient monument designation. Buildings on North College Street would meet the criteria of designation as a conservation area - in particular attention is drawn to a significant B-listed building of c1760 next to the relief road which is presently redundant, with windows boarded up.

- 10.1.8 Consideration has been given also to the potential merit of extending the conservation area at the western extremity to take in the castle, the Gordon Column and the set-piece memorial scheme erected after the Great War at the foot of the steps leading to the castle at Ladyhill. As the cathedral, the castle and its setting are protected by its designation as a statutory ancient monument.
- 10.1.9 On balance, it is considered that no changes to the conservation area boundaries should be made at the present time. The reasoning behind this is as follows:
- restoring links between the existing conservation area and the key historic sites on its periphery may be more effectively achieved by improving physical links, public realm enhancement and through the proposed heritage trail than by extending the conservation area boundary on paper
 - the retention of the existing boundary at the west end of the conservation area permits a measure of control over the quality of any redevelopment proposed for the future at the Comet site, while the Mansfield House Hotel corner site is within the curtilage of the B-listed structure and subject to conservation area and listed buildings controls

10.2 Article 4 Directions

- 10.2.1 There are no Article 4 Directions in place for the Elgin High Street conservation area at presently designated and, given its considerable importance and the risks identified during the audit work from incremental change from uncontrolled or permitted development, this appears to be a serious anomaly.
- 10.2.2 Article 4 Directions are at present under review by Scottish Government and may lead to the amendment of heritage protection legislation, or further guidance. Depending on the outcome of the review, in principle the application of Article 4 Directions, or their equivalent, throughout the conservation area should be pursued in order to ensure that effective controls are in place to protect levels of authenticity which, when compared with some conservation areas are still relatively high, but are being eroded rapidly.

10.3 Enhancement and development strategy

- 10.3.1 Enhancement of the conservation area will come from addressing the issues set out in Sections 8 and 9, and in relation to the public realm in clause 6.7.1.
- 10.3.2 By far the most significant way in which the conservation area can be enhanced and revitalised is from the adoption of a strategic approach in order to attract long term investment in the city centre. This should address the sensitive redevelopment of gap sites, replacing redundant structures which make no positive contribution to the character and

appearance of the conservation area, the return of redundant buildings into compatible uses, and bringing life back into the closes.

- 10.3.3 Given the importance of the issues and the sensitivity of the conservation area to change, it will not be enough to react to applications for the redevelopment of sites on a piecemeal basis. A strategic approach should be taken through the preparation of masterplanning briefs for selected sites, or on a street block basis, which should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity. Masterplanning should consider how sites might be acquired to release their full development potential. Guidance on considerations of scale and height, materials, and for maintaining the urban grain of the conservation area should be incorporated. Without these guidelines being put into place a poorly designed scheme could cause untold damage and reduce opportunities for enhancement and redevelopment.
- 10.3.4 Opportunities for the enhancement of the conservation area may be dependent, to a certain extent, on realising the ambitions set out in the City for the Future proposals, but delay in carrying them out should not be cited as a reason for doing nothing in the short term.
- 10.3.5 At the other end of the scale, while some of the changes might be regarded as being superficial they can have an instant result. The initiative for maintaining properties in the conservation area, and for cleaning out gutters and removing vegetation has had some noticeable success already even though the scheme has been introduced only recently.
- 10.3.6 The promotion of repair work undertaken to high conservation standards, and the recovery of authenticity where original features of the historic townscape have been lost or harmed by poor remedial work, will leave a lasting legacy. Understanding the legacy left by the work of the Elgin Fund in saving ancient buildings and in finding new uses for them at a time when they were being destroyed throughout the conservation area should give real cause for hope. Not only will the character and appearance of the conservation area be enhanced, but there is also the real potential of improving craft skills for those engaged in the repair and maintenance of historic buildings. The conservation area management plan and action plan will be crucial to the success of this initiative.



Exemplary standards in the enhancement of a traditional shopfront at the junction of Commerce Street and South Street – original panelled doors have been preserved, cast iron ventilator panels at the stall risers have been retained, colours are subdued, the blind box has been retained, and the shop name lettering is subtle and retained within the depth of the fascia

- 10.3.8 It is readily acknowledged that residents of the city and of the wider Council area will be drawn to the centre of Elgin for the quality and attractiveness of the shopping experience. While ease of parking, accessibility, and the quality of the public realm are considerations, existing shopfronts have considerable potential to be made more attractive than they are at the present. The eye is drawn to shopfronts at ground level perhaps more than any other aspect of the historic townscape. There are excellent examples of traditional shopfronts to be found, and a number of them have been enhanced sympathetically, adding considerably to an appreciation of the outstanding qualities of the townscape.
- 10.3.9 Opportunities have been identified for the enhancement of the public realm within the conservation area, to build upon the success of the scheme carried out at the Plainstones in the 1990s, the quality of which has, in the main, proved to be enduring. Improvements in the closes may be more difficult to achieve if they are in private ownership, but financial help should be made available, and actively encouraged, in order to raise standards and achieve the desired levels of pedestrian movement. There are already good examples of where this has taken place.
- 10.3.10 Other aspects of the public realm which could be enhanced relate to the choice of street furniture, directional signage, sporadic interpretation panels and the removal of unnecessary street clutter and road signs.
- 10.3.11 There is a perceived need to make the city centre more attractive at night through the use of architectural lighting, which can be used to significantly better effect in highlighting key buildings within the historic townscape and in improving levels of personal safety.
- 10.3.12 Enhancement of the conservation area should take into account the need to interpret the historic townscape effectively, and in ways which are integrated with the public realm which would be of potential benefit to visitors and to residents alike.
- 10.3.13 Overall, it should be recognised that the enhancement of the conservation area depends on an integrated approach which is tied in with strategic planning and development objectives, rather than upon focusing on individual elements of an improvement programme. The primary purpose of these measures should be to ensure that Elgin survives as an attractive place to visit, and in which to do business.

10.4 Enforcement

- 10.4.1 The success of the measures set out in this document and in the conservation management plan for securing the future of the conservation area will depend upon effective measures being adopted for planning enforcement. It is accepted that this may have to be introduced gradually, given the extent to which there has been a precedent for unauthorised development. To some degree this is likely to have been occasioned by a lack of understanding, to the layperson, of the complexities surrounding historic environment legislation. Accordingly there would be merit in raising awareness of the issue for the benefit of property owners throughout the conservation area.
- 10.4.2 During the fieldwork the poor state of much of the masonry at high level was observed, where materials are subject to the greatest exposure and for which repairs may be challenging in terms of securing safe access. The problems are noted in clause 8.3 of this

document. This is likely to be a continuing problem and will require constant vigilance to ensure that decaying masonry does not descend into a structurally unsound, and dangerous, condition.



Masonry in a dangerous condition, at risk of falling and causing injury or damage to persons or property

11 Conservation management – strategic objectives

11.1 Guidance in relation to historic environment legislation

- 11.1.1 Guidance in relation to the interpretation of current historic environment legislation should be referred to when considering the management of change, proposals for new development within the conservation area, and any proposals outside the conservation area which have the potential to affect its setting.
- 11.1.2 Specific reference should be made to the general principles set down in the relevant clauses of Scottish Planning Policy (2010) and in Historic Scotland's Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) (July 2009). Further guidance is provided in the Managing Change in the Historic Environment series of publications focusing on selected topics, published by Historic Scotland towards the end of 2010.

11.2 Conservation principles

- 11.2.1 In any scheme established for the repair and enhancement of the city's historic buildings within the conservation area, consideration should be given to creating a greater awareness of the importance of the traditional buildings, of the skills required to repair them, and of the underlying principles that should be applied when repairing authentic historic fabric.
- 11.2.2 Although considerable damage has been caused to the historic buildings within the conservation area from uncontrolled incremental change – for instance, from the loss of the original windows and doors, and replacement with modern alternatives which rarely match the original patterns, loss of the original rainwater goods, the application of modern cement renders – it is not necessarily the case that the changes are irreversible. It can be demonstrated that some of the changes will have caused harm to the underlying fabric and, possibly also, the structure of the building. Encouragement should be given always to regaining the authenticity of historic buildings that have the potential to make a positive contribution to the townscape by

restoring original features that may have been lost or damaged – for instance, the patterns of original windows and doors - and by reinstating the original appearance of walls and external finishes.

- 11.2.3 In general historic fabric should be repaired using like material.
- 11.2.4 Conservation is not purely about preserving the historic environment – it is also about the management of change. The need for change should, in general, be encouraged and welcomed, but there should be a presumption always to preserving and repairing historic fabric where it has survived in an authentic state.
- 11.2.5 Where historic fabric has been altered, or features removed or lost over time, they should be restored to an earlier known appearance or state, verified always by archival or pictorial evidence (for which there is a large resource of historic images available to assist targeted research) or the evidence of the building itself. Restoration, or returning of fabric to a known earlier state, should never be conjectural.
- 11.2.6 In general, conservation practice and philosophy should observe the relevant guidance set out in Historic Scotland's publications, and in relevant international conservation charters.

11.3 New development within the conservation area

- 11.3.1 Wherever it is appropriate new development should be encouraged in the conservation area. It should preserve and enhance the established urban grain which has a strong identity in Elgin throughout each of the three character areas which have been identified. The scale and form of new buildings, or of extensions to existing buildings, should never be such as to overpower the existing historic buildings within the townscape, and should have regard to those elements of scale and height and the topography of the site identified in Section 4.

11.4 Conservation area management plan

- 11.4.1 The general principles set out above are expanded in the sister document, the Elgin High Street Conservation Area Management Plan, to which reference should be made.

11.5 Conservation area boundaries

- 11.5.1 Although the recommendation set out in 10.1.9 is for no change being made to the present conservation area boundaries, attention is drawn to the deficiency with which the respective boundaries of the Elgin High Street and Elgin South conservation areas have been drawn up which will require action to be taken by the Council.

11.6 Funding sources and opportunities

- 11.6.1 Working with other stakeholders, priority projects for carrying forward will be identified and will form the basis of the Action Plan. In addition to seeking funding for priority projects, and given the identified need for urgent repairs to be undertaken to important historic fabric, a programme for building repair grants should be established based on an application for Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) funding from Historic Scotland.

- 11.6.2 Consideration should also be given to the potential benefits for the community from a Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) project for the town centre, administered by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).
- 11.6.3 Other strategic funding opportunities may present themselves for elements of the programme for enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 11.6.4 The preparation of applications for funding and the administration of the funding schemes, if approved, will require dedicated staff to be appointed by the Council.
- 11.6.5 Opportunities of working with established Building Preservation Trusts (BPTs) should be examined for priority projects identified in the applications to funders, or for Buildings at Risk (BARs) which have been identified within this document.
- 11.7 Buildings at Risk Register (BARR)**
- 11.7.1 The staff of the Buildings at Risk Register (BARR) team at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) should be notified by the Council of any buildings identified in Section 5.6 of this document to be added to the BARR.

12 Monitoring and review

12.1 Monitoring of the conservation area

- 12.1.1 The Council should seek to work with stakeholders representing the interests of the community in monitoring the health of the conservation area and any measures put in place to preserve and enhance its amenity. It is strongly recommended that an external monitoring and advisory group should be established for this purpose, to work closely with the Council's officers and the elected Members. The steering group already set up for the purpose of supervising the conservation area appraisal and heritage trail project, with expanded membership as appropriate, may provide a suitable basis for this.

12.2 Performance indicators

- 12.2.1 It is recommended that performance indicators should be established whereby the external monitoring group would monitor the success, or otherwise, of the conservation programme. Depending on whether a BID for CARS funding is successful, the indicators could be, for instance:
- the redevelopment of undeveloped sites which preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area
 - improvements to shopfronts and fascias
 - reduction in the number of empty shops
 - return to use of vacant floorspace at the upper floors of properties on the High Street
 - reduction in the number of entries on the Buildings at Risk Register (BARR)
 - evidence of improved conservation standards being adopted
 - evidence of improved skills in the conservation of historic fabric
 - enhanced public realm, for instance in the number of private closes improved

- review of the success of any CARS/THI schemes, priority projects, and any other publicly funded works
- review of the impact of guidance set out in the conservation area management plan
- tangible evidence that interpretation introduced in conjunction with improvements to the public realm are responding to the needs of visitors and residents

12.3 Review: arrangements within the Council

12.3.1 Review of the conservation area character appraisal and the conservation area management plan should be instigated in the first instance by the managers of the committees listed in 12.3.2. It should take into account feedback from the conservation area monitoring group and an evaluation of agreed performance indicators as recommended in 12.2 above.

12.3.2 Recommendations following any review should be considered by the Planning and Regulatory Services Committee, and by the Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee of the Council, or their equivalents, at the time when the review is carried out.

12.4 Frequency of review

12.4.1 The conservation area appraisal and the conservation area management plan should be reviewed on a regular basis. It is suggested that this should be quinquennially, or timed to suit the preparation of a new Local Plan.

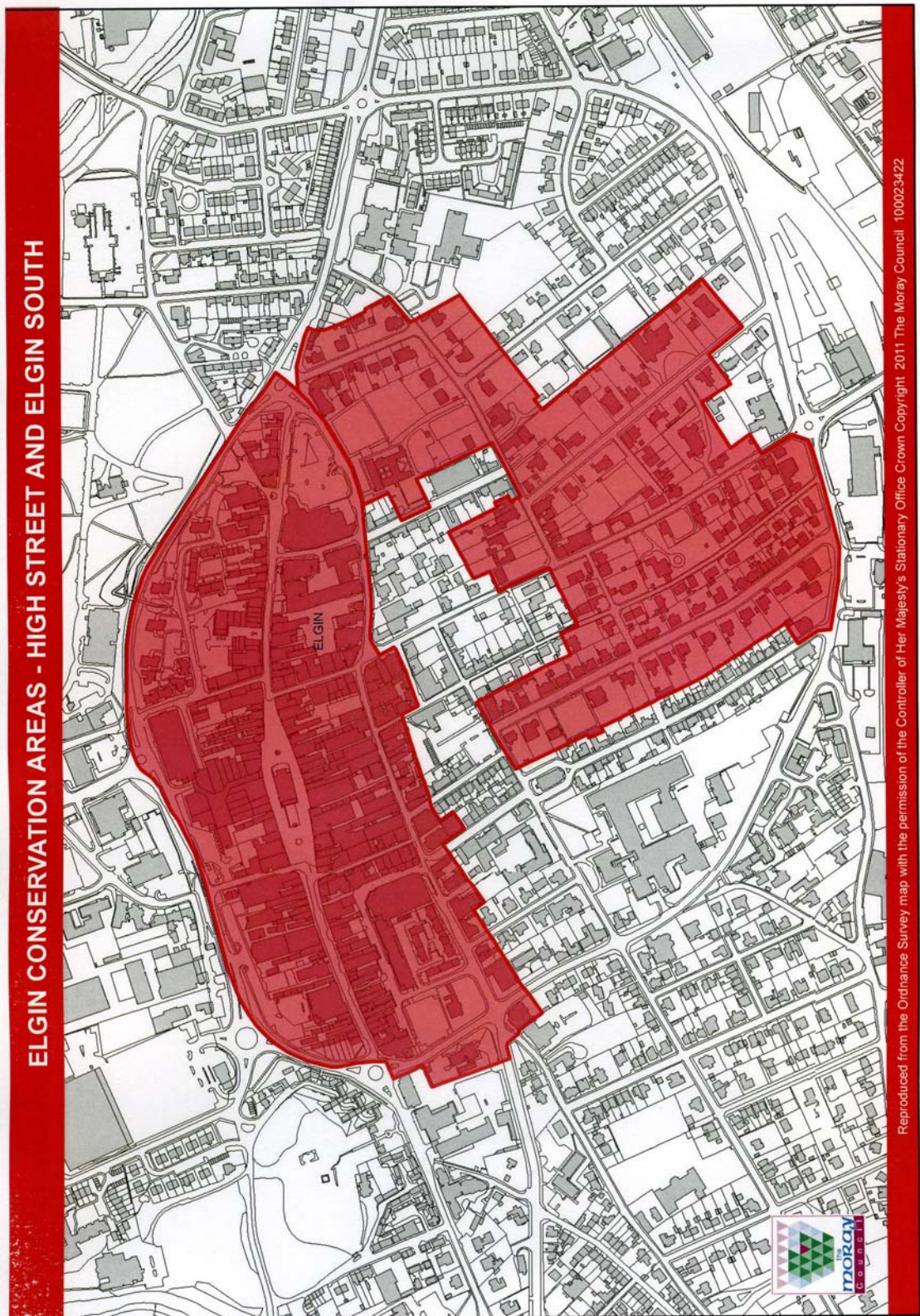
13 Appendices

- 13.1 Existing conservation area boundaries
- 13.2 Listed buildings within the conservation area
- 13.3 Gazetteer of selected buildings

Appendix 13.1

Existing conservation area boundaries

Boundaries shown are for both Elgin High Street and Elgin South Conservation Areas



Appendix 13.2

Listed buildings within the conservation area

ELGIN CONSERVATION AREAS - HIGH STREET AND LISTED BUILDINGS



Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office Copyright 2011 The Mapbox Limited 10002422

Appendix 13.3

Gazetteer of buildings

Gazetteer of selected buildings

The conservation area contains 108 list entries. Each list entry may cover more than one building.

Buildings and historic structures within the conservation area as it is presently designated have been selected for their architectural and historic interest from four phases – before 1800; 1800-1850; and 1850-1900 and 1900-1940. Groups of buildings, where individually the buildings may not be worthy of special note here, but the group as a whole contributes to the townscape quality of Elgin, have also been included. Unlisted buildings of special note have been selected, which may be suitable for listing.

It should be noted that there are many buildings within the conservation area which, while they have not been selected individually for the gazetteer, make a positive contribution to the historic townscape.

Before 1800

	<p>Braco's Banking House, 7 High Street Dated 1694. Arcaded ground floor. Pediments dated 1694 and initialled I D, with star of Innes and initialled M I. Initials and date repeated on skewputts. Building served from 1703 to 1722 as banking house for William Duff of Dipple and Braco. Stone slabs for roof appear to have come from Leggat's Quarry, New Spynie. Restored and harled circa 1976. Now serves as shop with dwelling above. Arcades filled with large windows. Category A-Listed.</p>
	<p>Red Lion Inn, 42-46 High Street Merchants House dated 1688. Dated on skewputt. One of few remaining houses with piazza (arcaded ground floors with squat pillars) Formerly Red Lion Inn, where Dr Johnson once dined. Renovated 1980. Cobbled and paved pend with stone runnel on eastern side. 2 flanking wings to rear which include early 18th century, single storey 3-bay dwelling; rendered and lined as ashlar. Further 2-storey, 4-bay wing of 18th century date with much remodelling. Roof now slated, would have been stone slabs as at 50-52 High Street. Category A-listed.</p>







50-52 High Street Merchants house of 1694. Contemporary 3-storey irregular 2-bay gabled and crowstepped wing to rear. No remaining original internal features except portions of stair. Further 2-storey, 3-bay building of 17/18th century date giving onto close. Dated on skewputts, in initials AO and IH for Andrew Ogilvie, merchant, and Janet Hay his wife. Pend and close repaved with stone runnels. Original stone slab roof and catslide dormers. Restored 1959 by Ashley Bartlam Partnership. Category A-listed.








Little Cross, High Street The finial may date from the original cross of 1402. Ionic capitals, shaft, plinth and sundial may all date from a 1733 rebuilding. Repaired 1867. Present sundial and finial is a 1941 replica, original in Elgin Museum. Original site of cross erected by Alexander Macdonald in 1402 at entrance to Cathedral Chanonry. Category A-listed.



The Tower, 103-105 High Street Dated 1634 (oldest building in the High Street) then remodelled by Dr Mackay after 1859. The tower is only surviving portion of house built by Andrew Leslie of Glen of Rothes, merchant and magistrate of Elgin. Datestone and pediment bear arms of Leslie and Abernethy, initials A.L. and I.B. for Andrew Leslie and Jean Bonyman his wife. Rubble built circular tower of 2 stages with small square cap house corbelled out at 3rd stage. Tower now attached to 3-storey remodelled asymmetrical house. Modern shop front at ground floor with cast iron balustrade above.




	<p>25 High Street 18th century. Renewed shop windows and doorway. Vacant on ground floor. Appears to have been heightened for the dormerhead storey (list description). Restored by Elgin Restoration Fund in 1971. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>25A, B & C High Street Late 18th/early 19th century. 12-pane sashes. Cast iron lamp bracket and lamp affixed to wall. Restored by the Elgin Fund in 1971. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>23 High Street Circa 1700. Altered 1853. 3 wallhead dormers with carved pedimented gables in the style of Thomas Mackenzie, the centre bearing 1853 date, those flanking with initials W M. Restored by Elgin Restoration Fund in 1971. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>15-17 High Street Dated 1728. Ground floor remodelled 1971 by John Wright for Elgin Fund but had been altered already from the original arrangement. Ground floor of both buildings now symmetrically treated with centre segmental-headed arch to pend (original), flanked by 3-bay shop fronts, with 20th century segmental-headed doorways and windows replacing earlier square-headed windows and doors. Formerly was harled in the late 19th century, stonework now bare, though recently reharled to rear. Home of Kilmolymock Lodge of Freemasons. Masonic Close much altered. Category B-listed.</p>

	<p>5a & 5b High Street Early 18th century. Stone slab roofs. Characterful cobbled close in something like original form although alterations have been made to the dormers. Single storey & attic cottages. Harled. Early chimneyheads and crowsteps. Category B-listed.</p>
 	<p>Thunderton House, Thunderton Place Early/mid 17th century, probably incorporating earlier work but remodelled and reduced in size to present L-plan in 1822. The 17th century house survives only at the south elevation with the four 17th century pedimented dormers carved with Duffus, Dunbar, Innes and Mackenzie monograms, and the north gable with grouped rectangular and diagonally set stacks. The courtyard elevations are largely of 1822 and are liberally decorated with carved stones from previous buildings. Tower and west wing demolished in early 19th century to make way for Batchen Lane. Category B-listed.</p>
 	<p>18-20 South College Street Dated 1694 on skewputt to the rear. Retains crowsteps to the rear also. Front elevation much altered. Now roughcast with a variety of modern windows. Recommend for listing on grounds of age.</p>

Buildings from 1800-1850







	<p>Elgin Museum Thomas Mackenzie, 1842, opened 1843. Growing collection required additions, 1896. Alterations and additions, A Marshall Mackenzie and Son, 1920. Italianate style is the embodiment of Elgin's Capital of the North aspirations. Additional hall to N (1896), rubble with top light. Museum Hall (dated 1921); single storey; ashlar. Category A-listed.</p>
	<p>St Giles Church, High Street Archibald Simpson, 1825-28. An outstanding Greek Revival church. Replaced the Muckle Kirk in a display of the town's 19th century confidence. Pulpit installed in St Giles 1980 from Newington Parish Church, Edinburgh (now Queen's Hall). Category A-listed.</p>
	<p>165-167 High Street Dated 1811. Some 12-pane glazing remains. Early/mid 19th century 2-storey rubble wings to rear. Date on keystone above pend entrance. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>115 High Street Circa 1830-40 with later 19th century alterations and additions. Timber sashes w/curved glass. Formerly British Linen Bank. Only façade remains. Ground floor altered. St Giles Shopping Centre now occupies the space behind. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>101 High Street Circa 1830. Shop and narrow flat-headed entrance to pend at ground floor; rendered and painted. Mansard slate roof. Category B-listed.</p>






	<p>54 High Street Early 19th century. Ground floor shop front of circa 1900. Timber sashes to first and second floors with one modern replacement in uPVC. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>76-80 High Street Circa 1840-50. Stone shopfronts on ground floor. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>114-116 High Street Circa 1820-30, architect unknown but style of William Robertson. Modern ground floor shop and pend entrance leading to Harrow Inn Close. 6 over 6 sashes to front elevation. Curved sashes to angled bay. Marriage stone to No.114 in the close carved 'AA MZ 1620' and 'AS MG 1725'. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>128-132 High Street 1848. Visible on 1859 painting of Burns' Centenary, which shows the ground floor arcaded. Ground floor once held the stalls of the New Market. Modern shop fronts and paired round-headed arched entrance to pend. Arches in the Newmarket Close now bricked up and the close leads to a public house. Staining & vegetation growth to masonry. Windows in 5th bay now blocked up. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>164 High Street A and W Reid, 1845. Formerly Caledonian Bank. Modern windows and signage to ground floor. One over one sashes to 1st floor on front elevation. Six over six sashes to the rear. Category B-listed.</p>

	<p>184-188 High Street Earlier 19th century. With original stone shopfronts. Whole building currently vacant & on the BARR. Recent removal of later signage has revealed traditional painted signage. Original 12-pane sashes. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>Highfield House, Northfield Terrace Built circa 1820 as a town house. Formerly Northfield (renamed 1869) and property of the Dunbars of Duffus and Northfield. Appears in Wood's Town Map 1822 as property of Sir Archibald Dunbar. Completely renovated inside because of dry rot, the interior is now of steel frame and bricks. A modern doctor's surgery has been added on the north. The setting has now been almost totally lost. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>Elgin High Church, South Street 1843. Church Hall to rear: A and W Reid and Wittet, 1903-4. Original galleried interior. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>Fountain on the Plainstones, High Street Thomas Mackenzie, 1844-46. For many years the fountain lay dry, its tiers used for floral displays. As part of the regeneration of the town centre, the fountain was recommisioned in 2002. Category B-listed.</p>


Buildings from 1850-1900

	<p>161-163 High Street A and W Reid, 1856. Former bank building. Modern shop front to High Street. Category B-listed. Large modern extension to rear on North Street.</p>
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	<p>147-149 High Street A Marshall Mackenzie, 1880. Vacant upper floors. Carved details. Timber sashes with curved glass. Modern shopfront (Santander). Banffshire slate roof. Wallhead pediments, copied from those on Ritchie's House formerly on the site, demolished 1880, bear initials of the architect owner, A Marshall Mackenzie. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>141-145 High Street Peddie and Kinnear, 1876. Former Royal Bank of Scotland. Richly carved centre doorpiece with bracketted pediment. Ashlar in good condition. Upper floors are offices. 'PK' for the initials of the architects and '1876' carved. Good example of neo-classical 19th century commercial building. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>Ex-servicemen's Club, 9 High Street Andrew Heiton, Perth, 1893. Known as St Giles. Modern wing to rear. Rebuilt after fire damage, circa 1974. Panel at entrance dated 1576 with IC IC for Cumming of Lochtervandich, whose house stood on this site. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>1&2 North College Street Corner site of North and South College Streets. Mid 19th century, appears on OS 1868. Category B-listed. Possibly by A&W Reid.</p>
	<p>Sheriff Court, High Street A&W Reid 1864-66 Elegant neoclassicism. Remarkably unaltered inside (McKean). Parapet originally decorated with 10 urns. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>58-62 High Street Mid 19th century corner block to High Street & Commerce Street. Modern shopfront to ground floor on High Street. Original round headed sash windows to first & second floors. Category B-listed.</p>

	<p>82-86 High Street Matthews and Petrie, 1857 Former Union Bank. Courtyard behind probably same period. Wrought iron gate at entrance to pend. Paved with stone slabs. Ground floor much altered. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>94 High Street Later 19th century. Modern shopfront to ground floor. One over one timber sash windows to upper floors on front elevation. Two over two sashes to the rear. Category B-listed. Decorative iron balustrading.</p>
	<p>96-100 High Street Mid 19th century pair. Modern shopfronts to ground floor. Some loss of decorative detail at rosettes on eaves band due to stone erosion. Upper floors vacant. Replacement sash windows to front elevation. Previously the site of the Fife Arms Hotel. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>134-136 High Street Late 19th century. Modern shop front. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>56-58 South Street Charles C Doig, 1894, alterations to ground floor shop front, also by Doig, 1962. Significant masonry repairs have been carried out. Category B-listed.</p>


	<p>Elgin Club, Commerce Street A and W Reid. 1869. Built for Elgin Club and functioned as gentleman's club until 2002 when the building closed. Datestone over door reads: Inst. 1864 EC 1869. Planning consent has been approved to alter and extend the Elgin Club to create an entertainment venue and boutique hotel. Currently on the BARR. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>Muckle Cross, High Street Sydney Mitchell, 1888. Present cross replaces that erected 1630 and destroyed 1792. Gifted by a native of Elgin, William McAndrew of Little Horkesley, Essex. The original cross was erected in the cemetery surrounding St Giles where markets were held, before both were removed in 1792. The original lion rampart is of 1630. Category B-listed.</p>
	<p>27-33 Batchen Street Late 19th century pair retaining a high level of historic fabric. Original cast-iron shopfronts at ground floor. Paired doors in centre. Timber sashes above. Original mansard roof with dormer windows retaining some historic glass. Recommend for listing.</p>
	<p>21-25 Batchen Street Late 19th century pair with original cast-iron shopfront at ground floor left. Modern shopfront to right. Original 4-over-1 timber sashes above. Original mansard roof with dormer windows. Recommend for listing.</p>
	<p>28-30 South Street Corner block dated 1886. Carved initials "TF JM", J lost due to stone erosion across facade. Excellent 1930s oriel window to Academy Street. Historic glass in upper floor sashes. Modern shopfront at ground floor. Recommend for listing.</p>
	<p>St Giles Church Hall, Greyfriars Street Dated 1897. Crowstepped central gable to Greyfriars Street. Original timber windows and doors. Slated roof with clay ridge tiles. Stone balustrading at eaves level. Currently vacant and advertised for sale. Recommend for listing.</p>







	<p>12-16 Commerce Street Later 19th century single storey bank building, possibly by A&W Reid. Moulded base course connects to stonework at earlier A&W Reid Elgin Club to north. Later timber shopfront to right with decorative columns. Mixture of pink and yellow sandstone. Stone balustrading at parapet with urns, and some vegetation growth. Recommend for listing.</p>
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Buildings from 1900-1940

	<p>Lido Cafe, 33 South Street Dated 1927. Art Deco corner facade, with carvings and parapet. Glazing may be modern replacement. Recommend for listing.</p>
	<p>10-11 North College Street Dated 1905. Asymmetrical pair of idiosyncratic houses with fishscale slate roof and Arts and Crafts influences. Gable to left and 2-storey bay with ogee roof on right. Recommend for listing.</p>
	<p>St Michael's, Northfield Terrace Early 20th century (does not appear on 1905 OS map, built before 1938). Built as a rectory, now in use as a dwelling. Category B-listed.</p>

Groups

	<p>Harrow Inn Close Close used for small commercial businesses. Terraced houses from the early 18th to early 19th century, some with crowstepped gables, early pattern of chimneyheads and steeply pitched roofs. Several carved stones salvaged from earlier buildings. Later insertions to ground floor but some 1st floor windows remain in situ. Close is repaved with concrete flags with cobbles along verges.</p>
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 	<p>Miller's Close Inhabited close of early 19th century rubble dwellings. Fine example of decrease in scale of houses in a close from the High Street. West side of the neighbouring close is lost leaving rubble elevation of Miller's Close buildings exposed. Close is paved with concrete slabs with some vestiges of cobbles at the verges.</p>
 	<p>Victoria Close Mostly 19th century rubble walled buildings, now painted, and many doors and windows boarded. It is not clear which of the buildings are in use. Mary Byatt states that as recently as 1978 the close was still cobbled. It has now been repaved with concrete slabs but retains perhaps the best surviving 'rigg' wall at the north end.</p>
 	<p>Charles' Close & Forsyth's Close Range of earlier and mid-19th century dwellings with modern amenity housing. Dwellings in Forsyth's Close restored with modern windows and box dormer. One classical doorpiece. Two closes joined by small courtyard garden. Closes have been repaved, though vestiges of stone drain survive in Forsyth's Close. A stone marker survives where the old communal tap was fixed. Remains of rig wall at north end of Charles' Close.</p>

	<p>12-32 Batchen Street later 19th century 2-storey commercial buildings (12-26 dated 1883). 24-26 painted facade. Good surviving shopfronts. No's 12 & 26 stone shopfronts. Variety of poor replacement windows above. No's 30-32: good interwar tiled shopfronts with stained glass and awning.</p>
	<p>1 South Street & 7-25 Commerce Street Run of commercial buildings from corner of Commerce Street and South Street. 1884 on datestone and initials 'DF'. Good surviving 19th century cast-iron shopfronts. Original piended dormers. Recommended for listing.</p>
	<p>Braco's Close Whitewashed 18th & 19th century dwellings, retaining some crowsteps, chimneyheads and stone slab roofs. Later 19th century slated dwellings to east, dated 1828. Close retains historic cobbled surface.</p>