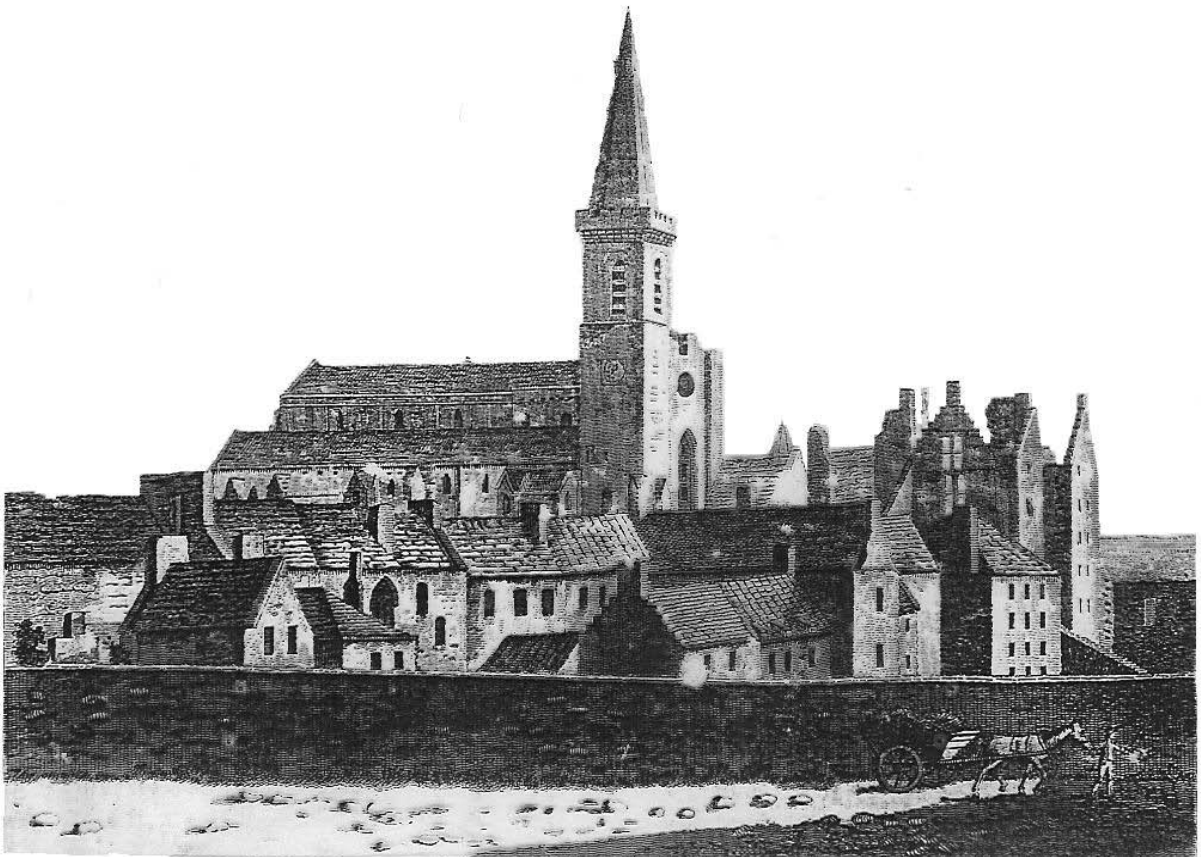


HISTORY OF BRIDGE STREET

DUNFERMLINE



S. Hooper. Published 1st March 1791.
Street.

Dunfermline Abbey from new Bridge

Compiled by Sheila Pitcairn, F.S.A. Scot., L.H G

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HISTORY OF BRIDGE STREET

DUNFERMLINE

The authorisation of toll charges in 1753 marked the first extension of the mid-Scotland turnpike system north of Firth of Forth, and it was to be another thirty-five years before any toll roads were introduced into Fife. As a measure to attract private capital to bring about improvements along a national highway, it was seen to be a good thing, but only the people of the western end of Fife stood to benefit appreciably from this development. The act was extended to include two other roads in that district namely those to the Towns of Dunfermline, Torryburn, and Culross; and also the road from the said Queens' Ferry, through Inverkeithing to Burntisland and Kirkcaldie. The burgh of Dunfermline did divert some of its state labour to the road to Torryburn in 1756, but even by 1780 the work had not extended beyond Crossford. [The Roads of Fife by Owen Silver]



Old road through fields at Urquhart to Abbey

In the year of 1774, Mr George Chalmers had a new road started from Pittencrieff Toll to the West, by making a deep cut in the rock, with gun powder and the building of a bridge, in order to cross the ford, between Pittencrieff, and Urquhart farm, this was completed in 1777. The new road, joining Pittencrieff, Urquhart and Crossford, was completed in 1780. The Urquhart Cut's gradient was eased out one slack winter.

MR GEORGE CHALMERS



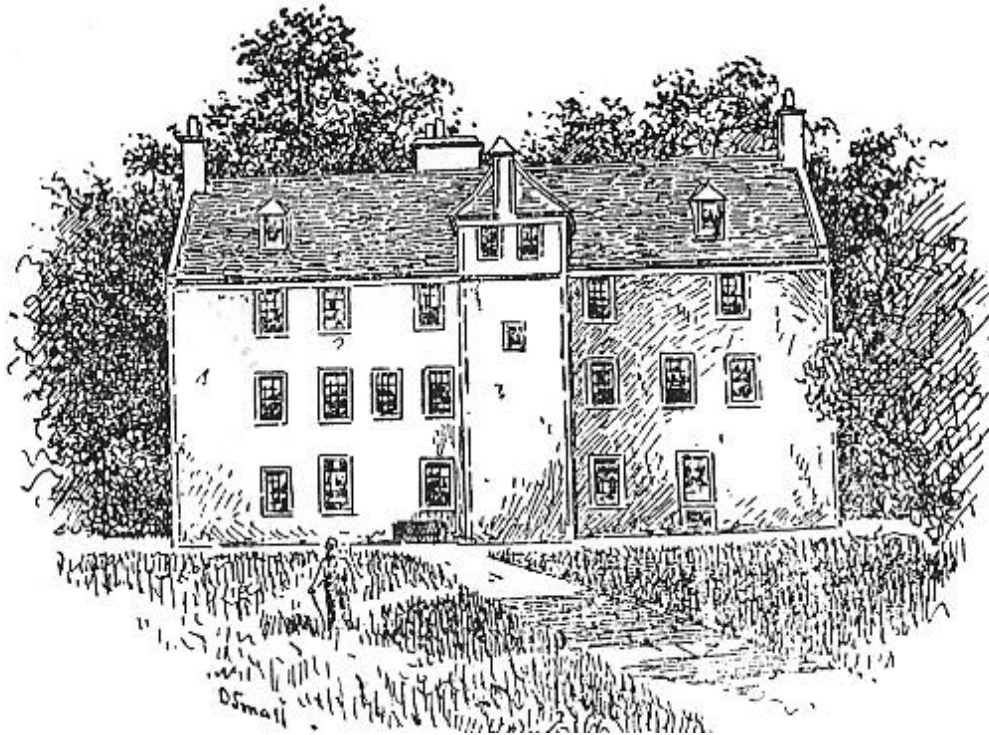
City Chambers Dunfermline

The earliest reference to George Chalmers, as an indweller occurs in the Roll of Guild Brethren and Burgess 1744. Milne Court, Edinburgh is designated his residence and place of business. He married Grizell Millar in 1751. He was a founder member of the St Giles or Secret Society of Edinburgh 1754. This learned Society met in the Advocates Library and included among its aims the promotion of the Reading and Speaking of the English Language in Scotland.

From 1750 until 1788, Chalmers pushed the interests of the Convention of Royal Burghs in his capacity as Assessor to various Coastal Ports: - Eyemouth 1750; Queensferry 1757; Anstruther Easter 1758-59; Pittenweem 1761 etc. As Commissioner to Parliament in London he was an instrumental in improving the Postal Services between Edinburgh and London, reforming the more drastic of the commercial tariffs.

In 1764, because of transportation of heavier classes of goods, the Convention of Royal Burghs of Scotland were prompted to seek a canal to connect the rivers of Forth and Clyde. George Chalmers acted on behalf of the Convention and forwarded a new scheme “for a larger canal to the depth of ten feet etc.”

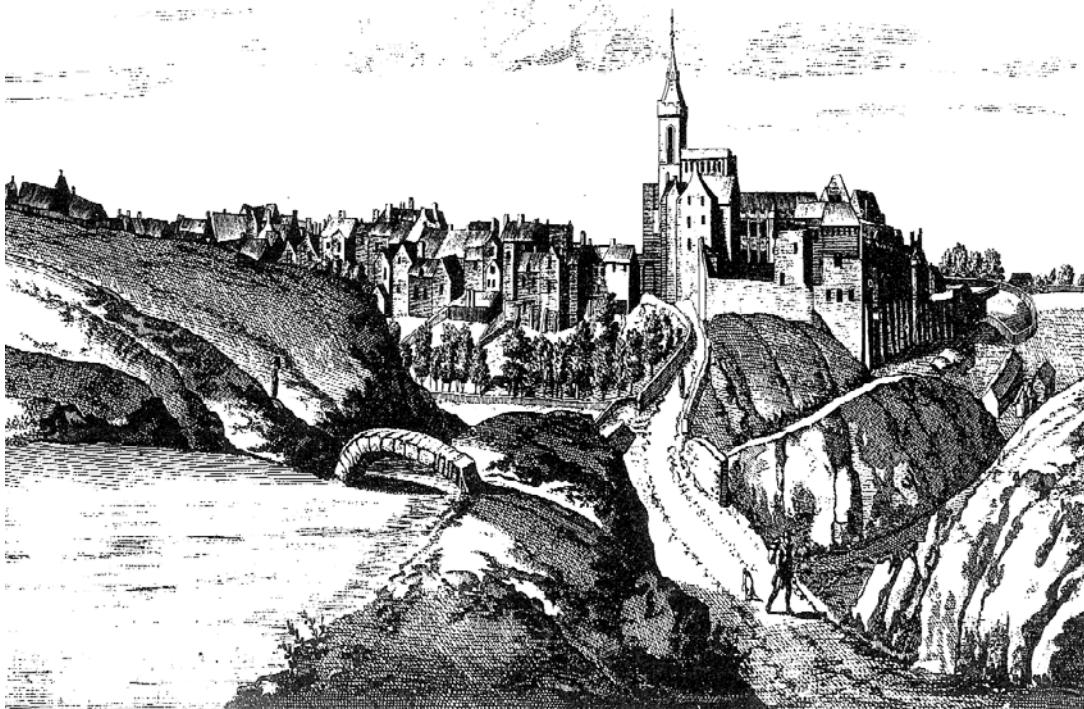
In 1765, Mr George Chalmers Esq., Merchant in Edinburgh purchased from Captain Archibald Grant of the 39th Regiment the estates of Pittencrieff for a sum of, £13,500. A Merchant of Edinburgh, Laird of Pittencrieff, Banker, Coalmaster, Ironstone-quarry-master, Grain-dealer, and Shipper from Iberia to the Carolinas, “an iron in every fire”.



Pittencrieff House

The new Laird was a very public spirited and enterprising gentleman, who, it was said did not appreciate the ancient road to Dunfermline passing so close to his Mansion House in Pittencrieff estate.

When Chalmers suggested the provision of a New Road into the Town of Dunfermline together with a New Tolbooth and Townhouse (with cost divided between himself and the Burgh the entries show how the City Fathers and Guilds and Crafts were determined from the date in to drive as hard a bargain as they possibly could exempting themselves the while from an expense towards the scheme and finally insisting that the Laird of Pittencrieff carry all expense; they even demanded the materials from the demolition of the Old Tolbooth.

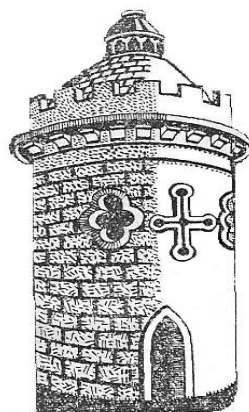


John Slezer (d. 1714). *Theatrum Scotiae*. London, 1693.
Old road through Pittencrieff to the Abbey.

Previously the road to Dunfermline from the west found its track, through the flat fields eastward from the Urquhart Brig, through the Pittencrieff Woods, over the glen bridge and into the town by the Palace yard.

Mr Chalmers' objectives were partly to remove the Public road to a greater distance from his own Mansion House in Pittencrieff and partly to make an easier access to the town from and to the West.

Chalmers removed the coach-road some four hundred yard to the north of its ancient situation, to a position out-with the environs of the Old House of Pittencrieff, thereby granting privacy to himself and family, and excluding the good folk of Dunfermline. Mr Chalmers had new elegant officer-houses built and a pigeon-house (Gothic Dovecot) and fruit wall.



Dovecot in Pittencrieff Glen

Mr Chalmers sought the condemning and removal of the old Tolbooth, (Townhouse). Henderson in the Annals tells us - Of this old building there have been several views. As we have been told it was a large building of three storeys. The upper story was of timber the two lower storeys were of stone. In the second or middle storey were the Clerk's Writing Chambers and the Council Room, where meetings of Council had been held from "time immemorial" dignified with the title "SENATUS FERMELINODUNENSIS TENTA IN PRAETORIS". Above the door of this middle storey there was a large representation of the Royal Arms and immediately in front a great stone stair projected and led down to the street, spreading out fan shaped as it descended.

It took the Town Council three and a half years and twenty-four meetings between 16th November 1765 and 3rd May 1769 before they would comply with his wishes.

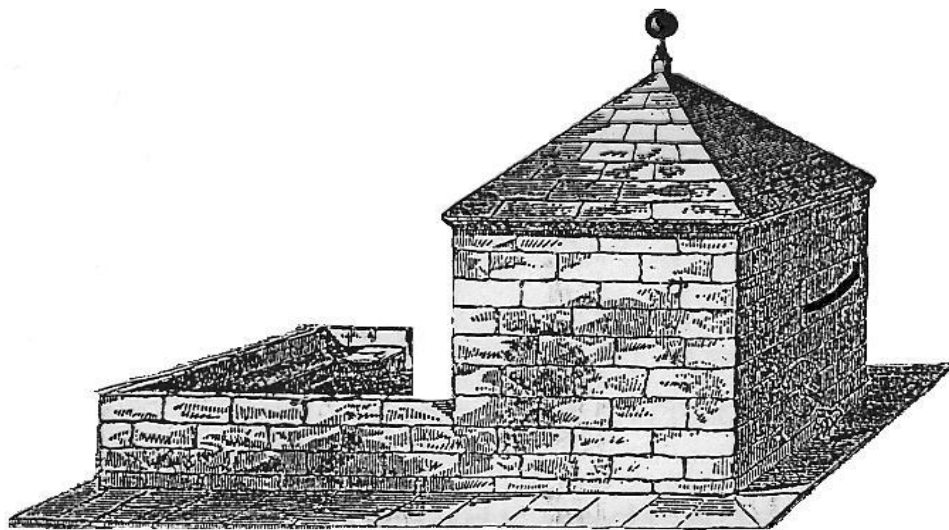


Tolbooth

Under this stair there was an archway known at one time as the Toolbooth Port, which appears to have been large enough to allow "a cart of hay to pass under it". This archway formed a connection between the Kirkgate and the Collier Row. In the lower storey were the LIME HOUSE (in which the meal-market was once held) the LAICH PRISON and a cellar at the back called "BULLS' HOLE", while another on the west had the name of "WITCHES HOLE, THIEVES' HOLE."

Close to the back of the prison there was a high wall, and a wicket-gate, which led down to the Back Burn. The upper storey was used as a debtors prison, above which, on the roof slates in front, was a small wooden belfry, in which hung the Council Bell, which was rung for meetings of the Curia Capitalis Burgi de Dunfermlyne, as it is sometimes styled in the Burgh Records.

The Tyron-burn or Mill-lead ran in front of the old Townhouse from which the inhabitants had the privilege of drawing water, and there were low dykes, which were indented by stairs leading down to its margin.



The Tron Well with handle for pumping water
A small iron hook on the left for the pillory

The old Pillory and Stocks, instruments of ancient justice stood in front of the Town House on the Causagait, Hie-gait or High Street.



STOCKS



PILLORY



Branks for the mouth

In ancient time, customs or tolls were collected at the several ports of the burgh, the paid tolls in money, were brought every evening from the ports to the booth or BUITH of the old prison hence the origin of the name Tolbooth, Toll-buith or TOWNHOUSE.

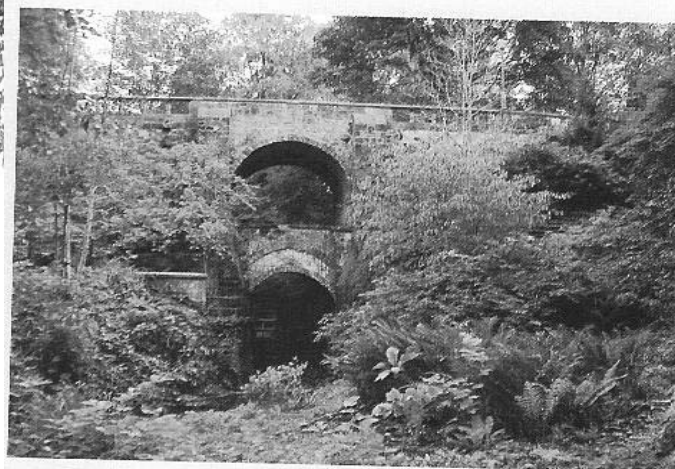
16th May 1607 there were proposed improvements to the Tolbuith.

The Ancient Praetoria or Tolbooth of the Burgh, whose upper storey was made of timber, was probably burnt in Dunfermline's Fire 25th May 1624, when accidentally some burning wadding or tow from a fired gun fell on the heather or thatched roof of a house near the Rottan Row, and from here spread until about three fourths of the town was destroyed. Dr. Chalmers tells us The Burgh Records do not inform us as to whether or not the Town-house of this period received damage or if it was burnt down but that would be no surprise to those who know that these Records do not allude to the fire at all. It is very probable, however that the Praetoria was partly burnt for a house next to it on the south, and which was connected with the prison was destroyed.

As examples of the power exercised by the Kirk Session in 1648, "5th March 1648: It is ordainit that Margaret Nicholson, spouse of Alexr. Dempster, the fiddler, shall stand with the branks on her mouthe the next Friday, being the market day, two hours before noon, for her common scolding and drunkenness, and that for the publick example of others." On 22nd October, 1648, "it is enacted that as Janet Robertson still goes on with her lownerie and profanity, notwithstanding the act formerly made against her, that she shall be carted and scourged through the toun, and market with ane hot iron, and to be banished from the parochie, and refers the execution hereof to the magistrates." (Chalmers's Book of Days)



Tower Bridge Pittencrief Glen
By Patton.



Double Bridge as it is now.

The Tower Bridge (Double arched) was the only means of access to the town from the west until George Chalmers built a new bridge up stream in 1770.

The old Town House, which stood across the bottom of the High Street, was removed during the months of May and June of 1768 to make way, for the New Bridge (Bridge Street).

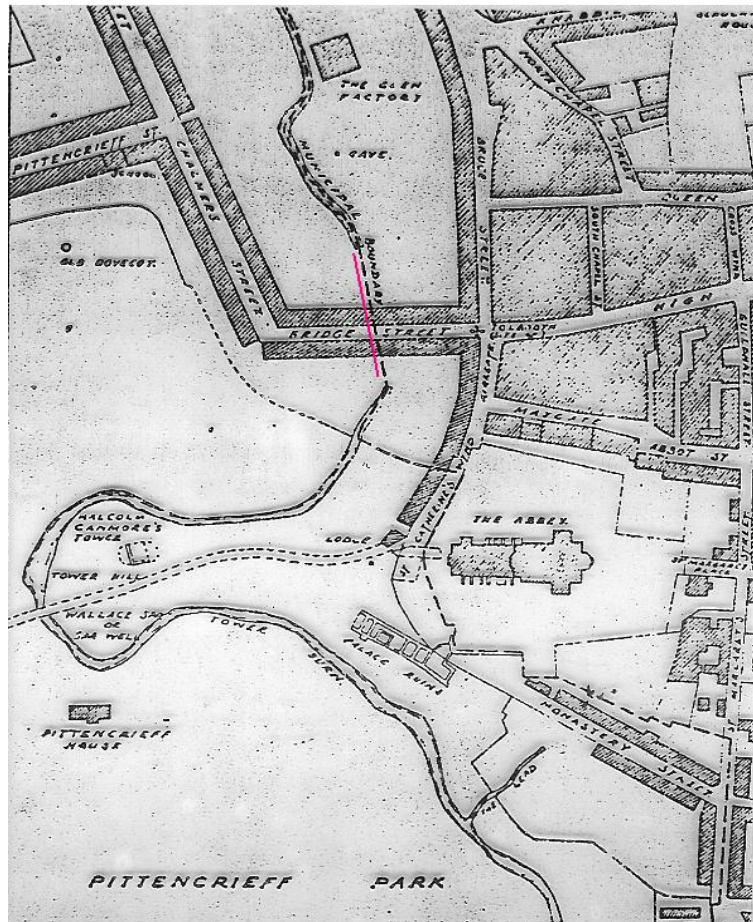


First Town House

The cost of the work, which Mr. Chalmers undertook was upwards of £5,045.10s and was finally completed in the year of 1770.

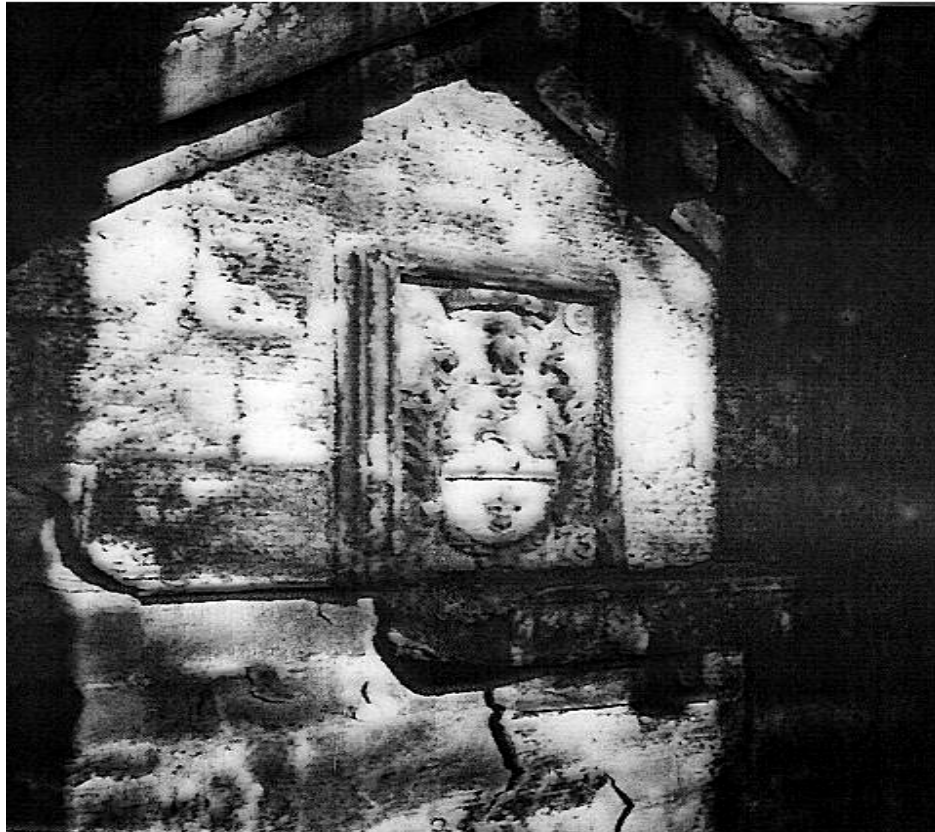


The new Bridge, this Bridge is concealed from the view on the street, as it lies about 56 feet under the causeway in Bridge Street (nearly under the middle of the Street). It was built to form an arch channelled Tunnel, which was 294 feet long and rising 12 feet high and 12 feet wide. This was to allow the Aqua de Fern or the Fern burn, Tower, Toun or Back Burn, to run through it.



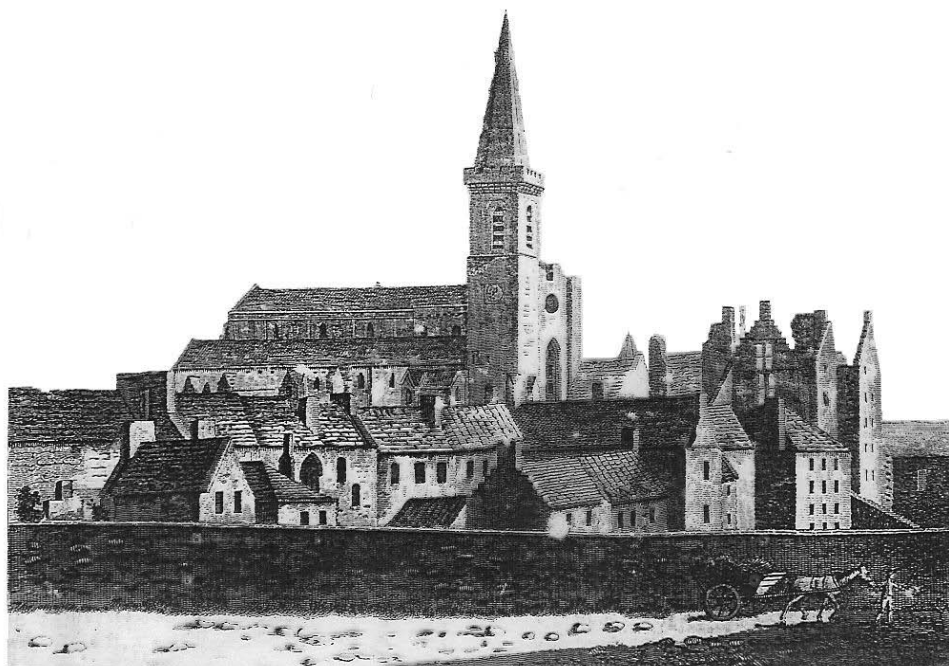
The map shows new Bridge (Street) over the burn

An imaginary line, was supposed to extend from the key-stone of the Bridge on the north face of the arch, to the key-stone of the Bridge on the South face. This formed the boundary line, which separated the Burgh of Dunfermline from the suburb and estate of Pittencrieff. Under the south key-stone on the arch itself, is a built-in pediment showing The Chalmers Coat of Arms, with the date of 1773. [Annals of Dunf.]



Chalmers Coat of Arms 1773

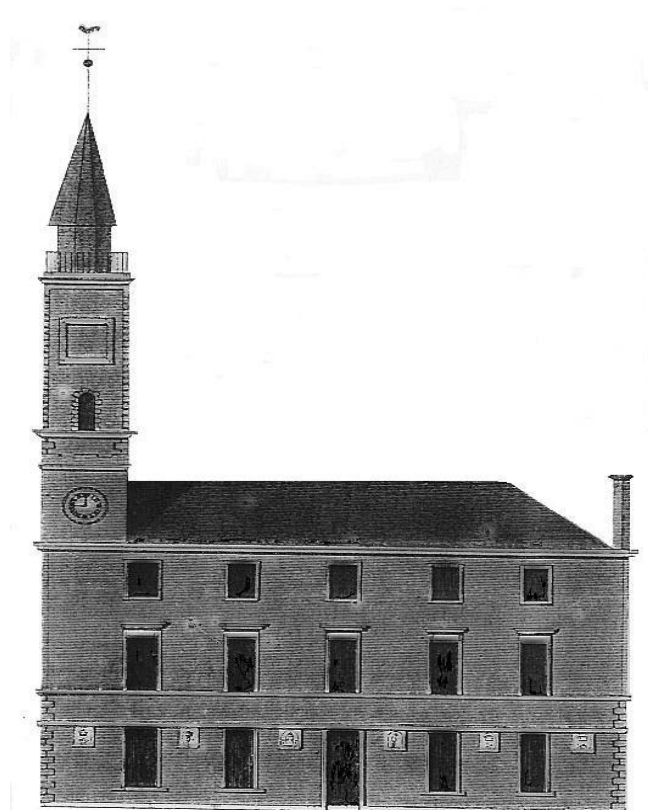
The direction of the Bridge is due North and South, thereby putting the position of the Street at right angles, which made the filling up of the hollow on each of its sides a massive task.



At the time, a constant and daily stream of carts, loaded with earth and rubble, which was brought from the foundations of old houses and other places, was emptied down, and about the Bridge. Thomas Chalmers who built the Bridge was known to say, "It took no less than 32,550 cubic yards of solid earth equal to 40,000 art loads, down both sides of the Bridge," and became known as the Back Braes or Back of the Town.

It was not until 1770 that the street was brought up, to an even level with the High Street then making it possible for traffic to use. At the back of the Town, and at the depth of 40 feet or so below the foundations of what was the New Inn (City Hotel) on the right face of the brae, close by the burn there was, before the Bridge was built, at the bottom of the High Street and old barn and stable and a bit byre. Further south of them, was a slaughter house, access was by going down the Tolbooth close, and one or two other closes in the Kirkgate, and Colyeraw (Bruce Street). About 30 feet or so below the west end of the Tolbooth, on the brae and not far from the burn was a Smithy, which belonged to Sandy Trails.

On the west it is bounded by what is now, Chalmers Street and on the east it unites with the western end of the High Street at a point of the intersecting Streets of Kirkgate and Bruce Street. The first building, erected on the Bridge was the Tolbooth, sometime in 1769 and at the laying of the foundation stone; there was a grand procession and music.



The second Town House built 1771



The Cannon, Photograph by A. P. Taylor.
[Ebenezer Henderson. *Annals of Dunfermline*. Glasgow, 1879, p. 533.]

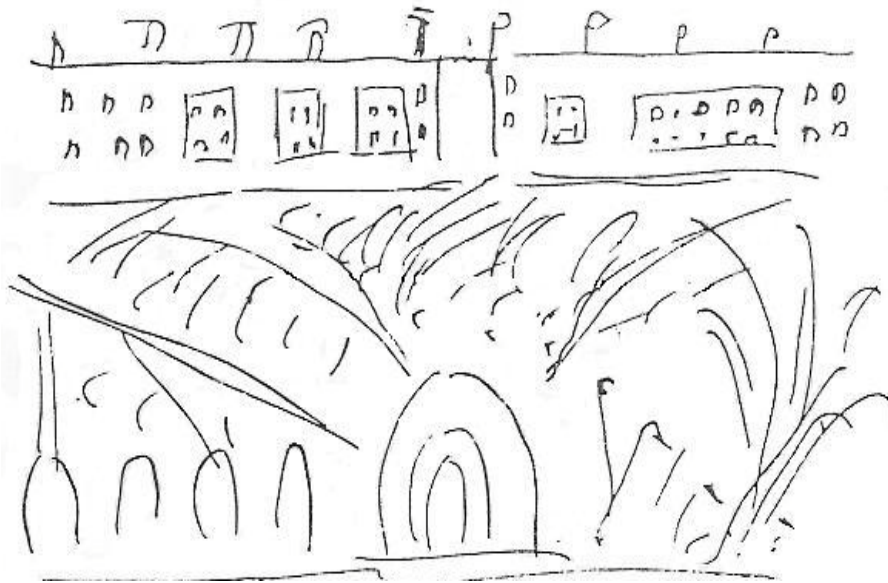
The new tolbooth is built a little to the South of the old one, on a site at the south-east end of the new brig entry. Its form is oblong, lying due east and west. The front faces the new street (north), and is 66 feet long, 26 feet in breadth, and 20 feet in height (outside measure). The walls are about 3^{1/2} feet thick. There are four sunk apartments under the street level; one for the keeper, a black-hole for desperadoes, and two for holding the town's lamps, oil, and scavenger's besoms, &c. Above the level of the street the building consists of one storey; front to the north, which has a large door in the middle, with two large windows on each side of it. In the middle of spaces, between the door and the windows, at their top are six small-carved stones. On the east side of the door-top is a carving of the Town's arms; on the west side is one of St. Margaret; the other four consist of Crowns, Harps, Roses &c. This street storey contains the Council-room, on the west, which is 29 feet long, 18^{1/2} feet broad and 12 feet high. The rooms on the east are the clerk's writing-rooms and closet. The end fronting the east has a large window in it like the rest of the windows, and below it is a grated small window for air to the black hole. In the southeast corner [top of Kirkgate] is the steeple, the weather-cock of which is 99 feet above the causeway. At the foot of the steeple there is a door with the royal arms cut on a stone over it, and the date 1769. The upper part of the tower contains the bell and the dials and works of the town clock. The steeple is 12 feet square. From the street to the bartizan is 80 feet; and the timber-slatted cone above it is 16 feet high, and the iron stalk above for weather-cock 3 feet 2 inches. [Henderson's Annals p.494]

George Chalmers' found time in 1776 to sit for his Portrait by Henry Raeburn then a young painter of twenty; this Portrait is in the City Chambers of the City and Royal Burgh of Dunfermline

Chalmers Bridge Street, made access to the Town from the west easier, and communications thereby opened up, as did opportunity to the inhabitants within his Estate. He encouraged Feuing, and improvements to be made; the privilege was soon and extensively taken advantage of.

The first dwelling house built was on the west end of the tolbooth, which was built about the year 1773 or so, and it was in this House in 1780 that the Rev. Mr. Smith breathed his last. The last House, built on the Street was in 1824, to the West gable for the first built house. We therefore have the first built and the last built house standing together side by side. 1773 to 1824 a span of 50 years between the length and time to complete Bridge Street with its neat double row of houses and shops, and their hanging gardens behind.

Bridge Street with its neat double row of houses and shops



With their hanging gardens behind.

Bridge Street, continued right into Chalmers Street, named after the projector and executor of the scheme, and thus opened up into Pittencreeff Street, Woodhead Street, Buffies Brae and Golfdrum Street. With this large growing population to the West, the Town opened up, and it both benefited and ornamented the Town is how many saw the changes.

I've known this town for several years
when housing was but thin
I think it now to me appears
nearly as large again

Two hundred and twenty seven feet
that is the bridge's length
Twelve feet in breadth fifteen in height
the whole is of great strength

By building added on the west
on the estate of Pittencreeff
There's Baldred's Burn & Golfdrum
and likewise the foot path

But on this place where now we stand
I never knew much odds
Where the Monarchs of this land
before had there abodes

Dunfermline bridge upon the west
it is of modern date
Chalmers late of Pittencreeff
he was the Architect

Just north from this a house and arch
did stand across this road
Where in my young days the cocks did fight
to school; boys that belong'd

This bridge did cost five thousand pound
by Mr Chalmers paid
And all to beautify the town
from it he sought no aid

The only alteration here
this house is taken down
And all does contribute I'm sure
to beautify the town

The above extract is from David Patton's Rhyming History of Dunfermline 1813.

George Chalmers introduced enclosures, scientific fertilisation and rotation of Crops. He anticipated by some few years the agrarian recommendations of Sir John Sinclair Bt. founder of the Board of Agriculture and Instigator of the Old Statistical Account of Scotland commenced 1791 (Excluding the benefits occurred from the cultivation of Crops on Blackburn of Pittencrieff, Wester Rosyth, Wind-law Hilton etc.) for which he was his own Agent of Sale the territories yielded a value store of Coal and Ironstone.

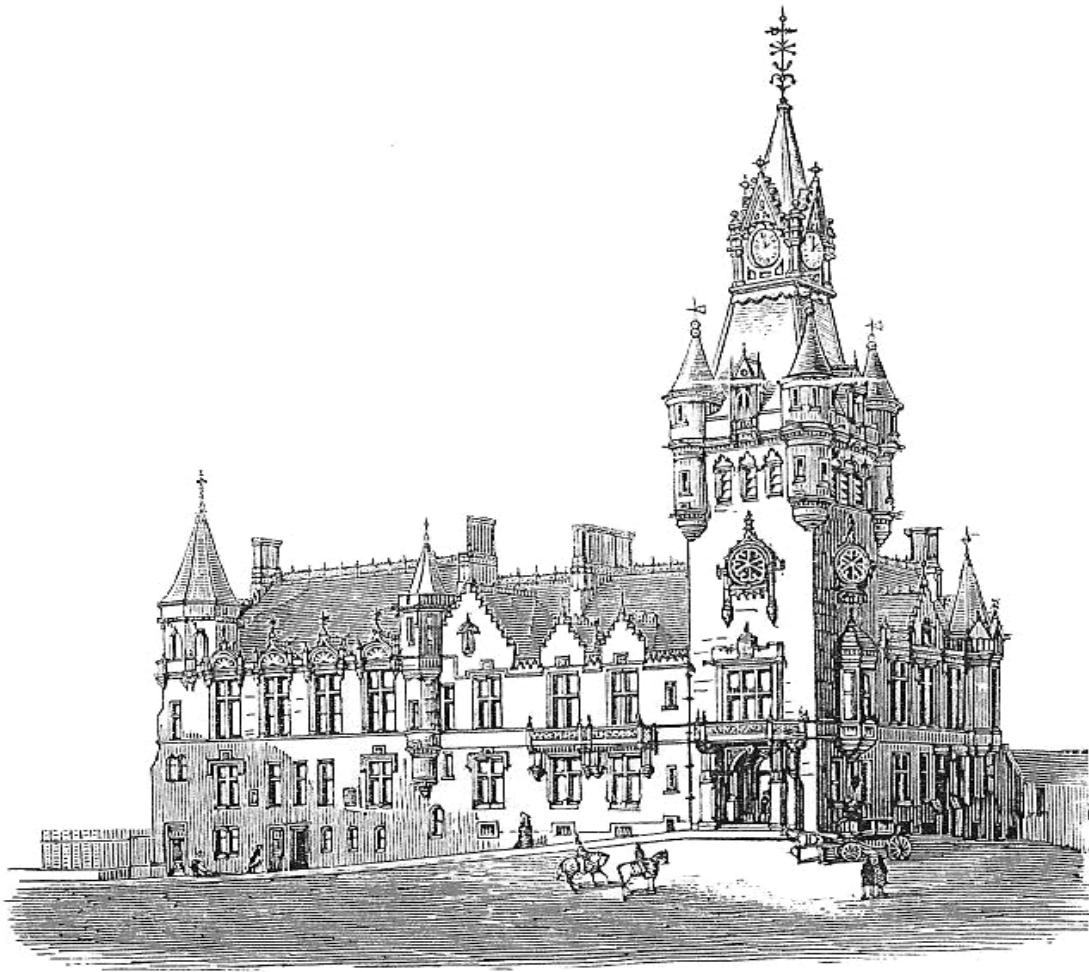
The distribution of these commodities was facilitated by the Laird's Private Harbour at Brucehaven close by the fishing port of Limekilns on the Firth. The Harbour of Brucehaven, Coalfolds, warehouses and other buildings etc. [Dunf. Press Aug.1961]

In 1793 Lord Elgin had briefly returned to the scheme, originally suggested to his father by George Chalmers of Pittencrieff, of constructing a wagon-way direct to Dunfermline, which would run through Pittencrieff parallel to the Coal Road to the Colton coal depot, to enable him (Elgin) to convey the coal from his mines beyond the Carnock Road, which now included those which had belonged to George Chalmers, as well as several workings in Baldrige leased from Pitfirrane. In 1793, therefore he signed a contract with Captain Phyn, who now owned Pittencrieff etc. [The Elgin or Charlestown Railway by D. McNaughton p.19]

Mr. George Chalmers fortunes waned, financial troubles forced him to relinquish Pittencrieff and other Fife properties, in 1782, when the Lords of Council and Session ordered judicial sale by adjournment.

New Town-House – 11th October 1876 The Foundation-Stone of this new building was laid and a grand Masonic procession took place, with orations delivered on the occasion. The Foundation-Stone, according to our note, is located near the foot of the Steeple-door (top of Kirkgate), north foot of the door, on a level with the first door. It was a mark of the continuing commercial prosperity that the Linen Weaving brought Dunfermline last century when it was at the height of the industry's success.





City Chambers

It is quite the most ornate building in the burgh. Like so many town halls, of the time it was designed in the elaborate late French gothic style. It replaced the old town house on the same site, which was pulled down to make room for it. The architect was J. D. Walker of Edinburgh, who was given a budget of £20,000. This was very generous for the time when you remember that the population of Dunfermline in the 1870s was only about 20.000.

The clock tower was an afterthought, not part of the original design; it added a total of 43 feet to the height of the structure.

The New Town-House (City Chambers) was opened for municipal business about the month of April or May 1879.



**FROM - HISTORICAL AND STATISTICAL ACCOUNT
OF THE TOWN AND PARISH OF DUNFERMLINE**

By Rev Peter Chalmers Vol.2 p.123

Mr George Chalmers, merchant in Edinburgh, and proprietor of Pittencrieff in 1767, began his bridge over the ravine, as a new approach to Dunfermline from the west, in July of that year, three years after the commencement of the building of the North Bridge of Edinburgh, the foundation of which was laid the year previous. But although that bridge was begun in 1763, from some interruption in the manner of its construction it was not finished nor opened to the public till 1772. It was most probably from it that Mr Chalmers took the idea of his Dunfermline Bridge, which was completed and opened in 1770, and which has proved so great an advantage both to the Pittencrieff estate and to the inhabitants of Dunfermline. The proprietor of Pittencrieff, by stipulation with the burgh, is bound to uphold the bridge.

The following report, from a few gentlemen appointed to inspect this bridge, and presented to the Town Council at the meeting held on the 5th August 1857, affords some information relative to the present state of it: -

“In terms of an appointment, we have examined the bridge over Tower Burn below Bridge Street. We found that the original structure extends to the length of two hundred and seven feet. It is in a good state of repair, and appears to have been a very substantial and well-done job. There has been an extension at each end. The south extends twenty-eight feet, and the north sixty feet. These portions have not been so well done at first, and they are not so close and substantial looking now. The north has been done with wasting stones, and some of them are a little decayed. The west abutment of south extension is a little out of repair, but none of these defects in our opinion, are such as to cause apprehension for the stability of the structure.”

From a conversation, which followed, it appeared to be the opinion of the Council, that it was only the central portion which the proprietor of Pittencrieff estate was bound in the bond with the burgh to keep in repair.



END