

‘Knowing Your Place’ A Place-Name Walk in Aberdour

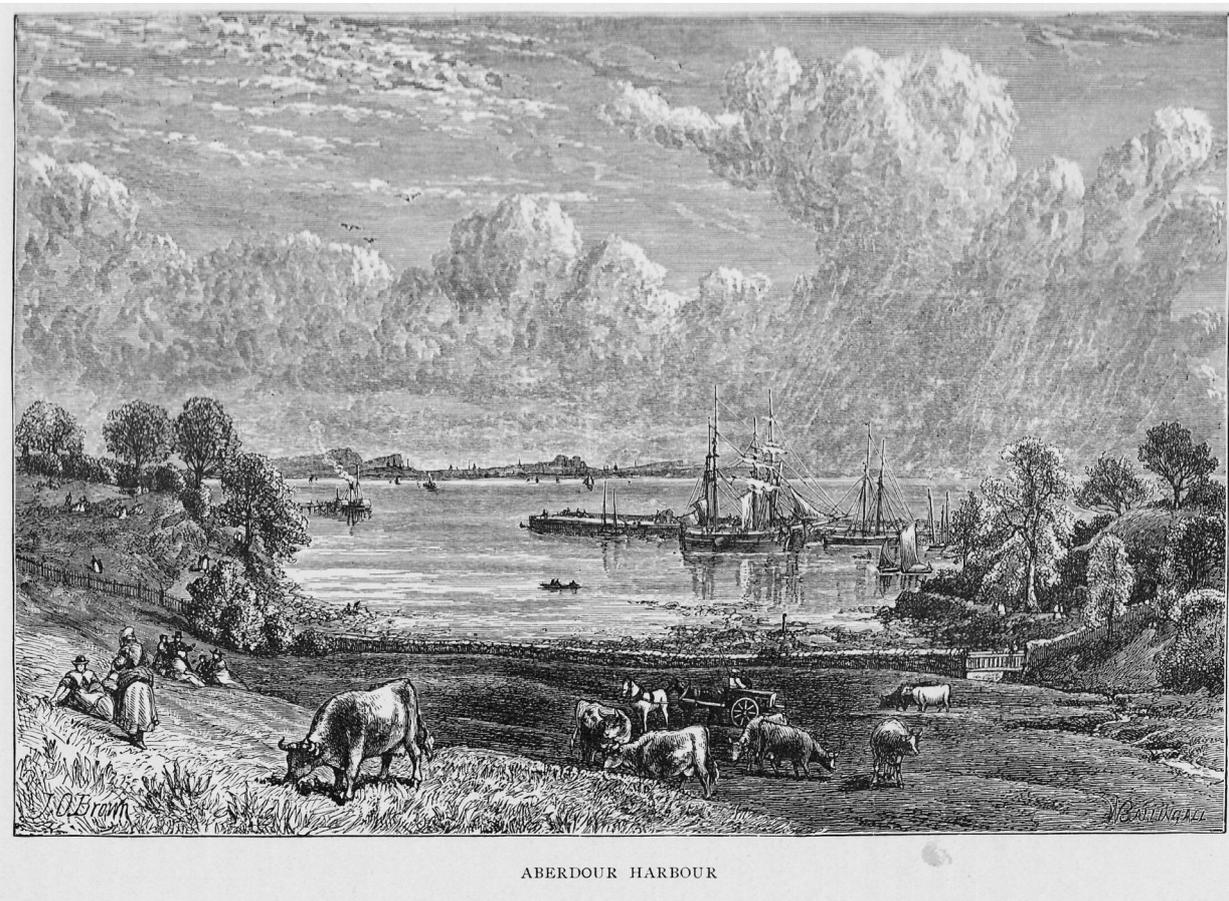


Fig. 1. Engraving, Aberdour Harbour, late 1800s, drawn by J. O. Brown, from Millar 1895 ii, 156.

**Compiled and introduced, with a place-name commentary,
by Dr Simon Taylor**

**An exploration on foot of some places and their names in and around Aberdour.
Duration: about 3 hours. Stout footwear recommended.**

A Place-Name Walk in Aberdour

Introduction

What is a place-name walk? It is a walk through past and present, through landscape and language. It is an attempt to see the modern environment through the eyes of the people who gave it the names which we still use today, taking the names themselves as our guides.

These names are guides also to the languages of the past: for Fife these are chiefly **Pictish**, **Gaelic** and **Scots**, together spanning around 1,500 years, with some names going back even further, perhaps into the first millennium BC, names such as **Fife** itself, or the river-names **Leven** and **Ore**. This rich linguistic past contains so-called dating horizons, so a name coined in Scots, such as **Couston**, can scarcely be older than the thirteenth century; one coined in Gaelic, such as **Dalachy**, cannot have been coined much before c.900 AD, nor much after 1150, although it is first recorded in the 14th century; while Pictish **Aberdour** could go back to the eighth century or even earlier.

There are another two languages which have contributed important names in Aberdour: **Norse** has given us **Humbie**, containing the common Norse word *bý* ‘farm’; while **French** (spoken for a time in the Augustinian monastery of Inchcolm, who held much land in and around Aberdour) has given us **Bouprrie** (*beau pré* ‘fine meadow’).

On this walk we will encounter names from many different times, each one telling us something unique about the place, for example an ancient church site, a place of medieval assembly, a place of public execution, a brewery, sailors and salt pans, as well as the names of a variety of landowners, such as the Knights Templar and the Sisters of St Francis.

A word about the lay-out: main names are given in **bold** followed by one or two early forms of that name in *italics*, along with the date when the form was recorded. The meaning of a word or place-name is given in single inverted commas.

The Route

Starts in front of Aberdour Station [built 1890]; over the railway bridge, along platform 2, then across the main road, heading ‘over Easter’ or ‘over the burn’; on right is Aberdour Castle, on left **Hillside** with Inch Marton Hill and Plantation behind [*Hilsyd* 1636; Scots name, formerly called **Brewlands of Newton** (*the brewlandis of Newtoun* 1605), indicating the presence there of the local brewery; **Newton** (*Neuton* 1420), another Scots name, was part of **Inch Marton** (*Eglismarten* c.1350), ‘church of (St) Martin’, containing a Pictish word **eglēs* ‘church’; the lands of Inch Marton originally stretched east almost to Murrel Terrace; stone coffin found in Inch Marton Plantation in 1820s – perhaps a clue to the whereabouts of the original church?]; flowing below Hillside is the **Dour Burn** [Pictish **duvr* ‘water’, compare Welsh *dŵr* ‘water’], with former mills upstream at Mill Farm (the mill for Wester Aberdour) and a former **sawmill** [*sawmiln* (?) c.1750] below the north side of the road bridge.

Once over the burn, on the left is **White Law** [*The White Law* c.1750, described as *a pretty mount*: perhaps the site of the barony court?], now with a house on top; then past a house called **Templeland** [*the temple of Inchemartyne of Aberdor* 1540; lands formerly belonging to the Knights Templar, taken over by the Knights Hospitaller of St John in 1312].

Along the Main Street of Easter Aberdour to site of the **Old Manse**, west corner of Murrel Terrace and Main Street, earlier the nunnery of St Martha, founded 1474 to provide care for pilgrims coming to **the Pilgrims Well** [*le pilgramyswell* 1479] near St Fillan’s Kirk. The lands attached to the nunnery were once known as **Sisterlands**, now **The Glebe**, as they later supported the minister in the manse which was built on the site of the nunnery. Up Murrel Terrace to the Murrel Road, formerly providing access to the rigs (strips of land) in the Aberdour Acres (see Fig. 2); named after the house (formerly farm) of **The Murrel** [*Muriel*’ 1328: Gaelic *mòr ail* ‘big rock or cliff’, in this case a rocky brae]; up the Murrel as far as the farm-track to **Humbie** [*Humbie* 1574: Norse ‘dog farm’?], from where you can see the rocky brae of The Murrel to the north-west. Turn right up the track and through the farm-yard. Please remember this is a working dairy farm, so proceed with care and consideration, leave all gates as you find them, and be prepared for serious glaur.

Continue down the track past Humbie Woods and Humbie Cottages on your left, almost as far as the stretch of main road known as the **Mains Brae** [*Maines of Abirdour* 1574: ‘mains or demesne land’ is land held directly by the laird, first mentioned in Latin as *terre dominice* in 1377]. Just before reaching the main road, make a short detour up to the left along the footpath marked ‘To Dunearn’. This is the old road to Kirkcaldy: a well-preserved ‘hollow way’, its importance as a thoroughfare now only preserved in the name of cottages further up the hill called **Long Gates** [Scots *lang gates* ‘long roads’]; as far as the wood by **Gallows Knowe** [*Plantation at Gallows Know* c.1770, where those condemned to death by the local barony court would be publicly hanged: its conspicuous position beside an old road is typical]. From this wood there are extensive views westwards along the coast.



Fig. 2. Detail from RHP1022 c.1750 (north on the left), clearly showing the division of *The Aberdour Acres* into individual strips or rigs; all this was swept away by about 1770, creating the large fields we are familiar with today (see Fig. 3).

By permission of National Archives of Scotland.

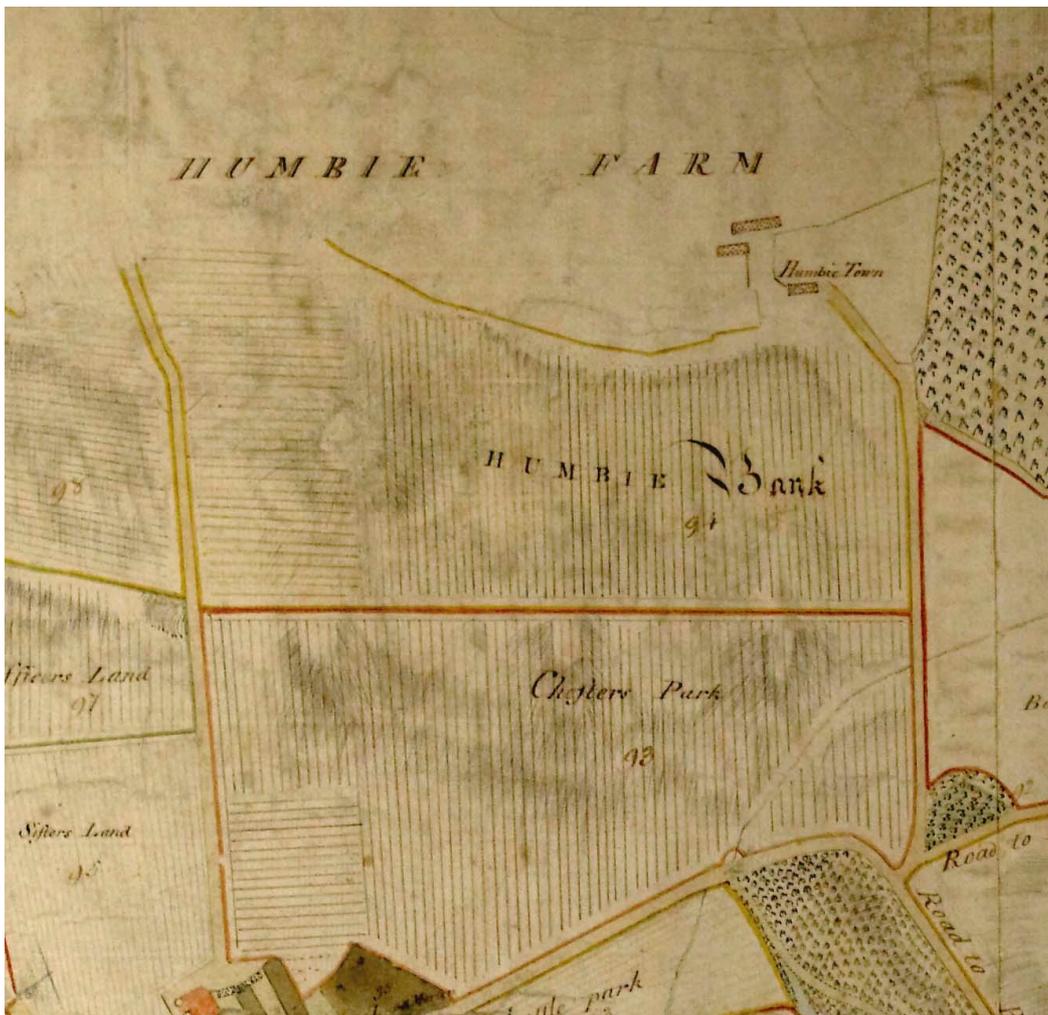


Fig. 3. Detail from RHP1023 c.1770 (north at top). This shows roughly the same area as Fig. 2, but after the creation of the post-enclosure landscape of large fields. *Chesters Park* contains modern Humbie Terrace; *Sisters Land* contains The Glebe.

By permission of National Archives of Scotland.

The wood by Gallows Knowe is beside the lands of **Dalachy** [*Dauchy* 1377, *Deachy* 1574, containing Gaelic *dabhach* ‘davoch’, a large unit of land]. Retrace your steps down the old road; cross the main road to the pavement, then go down the Mains Brae to the village, turning left at **Murray Place**. [Originally called New Street, when the block of flats in Murray Place was acquired by the Murrays of the George Hotel, Burntisland, they changed it to Murray Place (MacDonald 1981, 9).] On down **Morayvale** [built in the 1950s, the name partly inspired by Murray Place, partly by the neighbouring land-holder the earl of Moray?]; over the railway line into the recreational land, formerly **Kirk Shots** [Scots **shot** or **shott** ‘a piece of ground, especially one cropped rotationally; a division of land’]



Fig. 5. Detail from RHP1022 c.1750. *Kirk Shots* now contain Murray Place, Morayvale, the railway line and the primary school. By permission of National Archives of Scotland.



Fig. 6. Kirkshots Park post-enclosure c.1770 (RHP1023). By permission of the National Archives of Scotland.

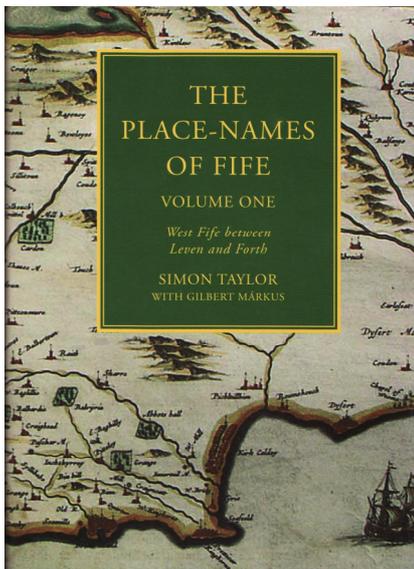
Join **Hawkcraig Road** [formerly *the Fishergates* c.1750; now named after the cliffs (The) **Hawkcraig** [*Hallcraig* 1703 ‘the crag near the *hall* or castle’ (Aberdour Castle)]. Past the ruins of **The Teinds Barn**, the barn where Inchcolm Abbey stored its teind or tenth (English English *tithe*) from Aberdour parish [*Teind barns Park* c.1770, the once and future **Long Haugh** (*the Long Haugh* c.1750), Scots *haugh* ‘low-lying land by water’].



Fig. 7. Detail from RHP1022 c.1750: *the Long Haugh*, now the recreational area behind the Silver Sands (formerly *White Sands*). The name *the Fishergates* applies either to the southern part of the road later to become Hawkcraig Road, or to the rigs running down to Sailors Well. By permission of the National Archives of Scotland.

To the viewpoint looking out over the harbour, over the original **Aberdour** [*Abirdoure* 1179; *Aberdouer* c.1195, Pictish **aber* **Duvr* ‘the mouth of the Dour Burn’], and over **Mortimers Deep** [*Mortimers Deep* 1710], the name preserving the local legend of the coffin of de Mortimer, lord of Aberdour, being unceremoniously dumped in the Forth on its way to burial in the Augustinian monastery of **Inchcolm** [*ecclesia Sancti Columbe de Insula* c.1165, *Sanct Columbis Inche* 1531; *Inchcolme* 1583; Gaelic ‘island of Columba’], which is also clearly visible from here.

Down **Donkey Brae** (a reminder of Aberdour's Seaside Resort past?), to **The Sailors Well**, a reminder of its maritime past, this name now given to the whole of the rocky beach as far as the Dour Burn, but originally applied to the small well, now dry, its rusted metal pipe still visible to the left of the steps; round by harbour to the **Ballast Bank**, another reminder of Aberdour's maritime past as a port for coal export; past **Boathouse Rocks** [*Boat house* marked here c.1750], looking along the **Black Sands** [so named from the large amounts of sea coal washed up here, and in contrast to the **White Sands** (*the White Sands* c.1750), now called **The Silver Sands**], to **Pans Rocks**, site of saltpans [*Salt pans* c.1750]. Up the Shore Road past **Seaside Place** [the lands of *Seysyde* 1559] and **Manse Street** [the manse re-sited here in 1802], through what was once known as the **New Town** (developed from c.1800), past the steep **Cuttlehill** on the right [*Cuthilhill* 1559; Scots *couthal hill* 'hill of the local, open-air court'; Scots *couthal* is borrowed from Gaelic *comhdhail* 'assembly, meeting'], crowned by an obelisk erected by the earl of Morton when he acquired this land from the earl of Moray in the early 18th century. Past **Caulfield Cottage** by the Bowling Green on the left [probably *coal field*, reputedly a weighing place for coal to be exported at the harbour; on the corner of Park Lane, formerly **Coal Wynd**]; turn right into **Livingston Lane** [named after Livingston's Dairy which stood where the car-park now is] past the recently built **Telny Place** on the right [*Telny* 1377; it lay on Morton lands but we do not know where: perhaps near Torryhills east of Humbie Wood] to the Spence Memorial Clock at the station forecourt, where the walk terminates.



Full details of all these names, and many more in and around Aberdour, can be found in:

The Place-Names of Fife, vol. 1: West Fife between Leven and Forth, by Simon Taylor with Gilbert Márkus (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006) 623 pp.

Price £24

Available from the publisher or the author

Full details of most of the place-names encountered in the walk can be found in *PNF 1* (see inset). For each name these details include: early forms, with their date and source, and the context in which they are recorded; a full discussion of its language and meaning, and how it relates to the landscape; and (for most names) the local pronunciation. This information will not be repeated here, but I will take the opportunity to add some names and details omitted from *PNF 1*. All the names in this section are listed in alphabetical order.

HAWKCRAIG

the *Crag* 1592 *Cal. State Papers Scot.* x, 736 [earl of Bothwell's men land at 'the Crag at Aberdeen', an editorial error for 'Aberdour']

Hallcraig 1703 Adair/Sea-Coast (Forth)

the *Hawkcraig* 1787 gravestone, St Fillan's Kirk, Aberdour [John Morrison, 'who fell to his death from the Hawkcraig and was killed on the spot 20 June 1787']

Hawk Craig 1856 OS 6 inch 1st edn

Scots *hall* + Scots *craig*

The eponymous *hall* is Aberdour Castle; the reinterpretation of the first element as SSE *hawk* had already occurred by 1787, and was well embedded by the time of the OS in the early 1850s, the OS Name Book noting: 'A steep rocky brow or precepice [*sic*] partly covered with Brushwood and trees, The southern part of it is Whinstone and used for the repairs of Roads. It is well known by the name of Hawk Craig from the fact of the birds called Hawks frequenting it. No one in the neighbourhood knows it by the name of Hall Craig except Mr Barr' (OS Name Book 134, 40). Mr Barr, we know from other OS Name Book entries, was the factor of the earl of Morton. It refers to the whole headland, at the inland (north-west) edge of which stands Aberdour Castle (NT19 83), at a similar elevation, while the south-eastern extremity (NT20 84) is called Hawkcraig Point on OS Pathfinder 395 and OS Explorer 367.

THE HUGHSES

the *Heughs* c.1750 RHP1022

Hewes c.1770 RHP1023 [twice; once *the Hewes*]

The Hughses 1856 OS 6 inch 1st edn

Scots *heuch* or *heugh*

'Precipice, crag, cliff, a steep hill'. The name, always in the plural, applies to the steep and wooded slopes above the railway line between Aberdour and Burntisland.

MORTIMERS DEEP

Mortimers Deep Sibbald 1710 [1803, 92]

Mortamers Wiet 1828 Knox/Forth Basin [or possibly *Wiel*]

Mortimers Deep 1856 OS 6 inch 1st edn

‘It is reported, that Alain the founder being dead, the monks carrying his corps in a coffin of lead, by barge, in the night time, to be interred within their church, some wicked monks did throw the samen [‘the same’] in a great deep, betwixt the land and the monastery, which to this day by the neighbouring fishing-men and salters is called Mortimers Deep’ Sibbald 1710 [1803, 92]. See Taylor 1992 for more details.

Abbreviations and References

NOTE THAT ALL THE MAPS ARE AVAILABLE ON-LINE AT
www.nls.uk/maps

Adair/Sea-Coast: ‘The Description of the Sea-Coast and Islands of Scotland, with Large and Exact Maps, for the Use of Seamen, by John Adair, Geographer for that Kingdom’, 1703, NLS MS.1651 Z.69/01.

Cal. State Papers Scot. i: Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, vol. 1, 1547–1563, ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh 1898).

DOST: Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue, ed. W. Craigie and others 1937–2001. See also DSL.

DSL: Dictionary of the Scots Language/Dictionar o the Scots Leid, an electronic edition of two earlier works, the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and the *Scottish National Dictionary*, on-line at **www.dsl.ac.uk/**

Knox/Forth Basin Knox, James, *Map of the Basin of the Forth*, Edinburgh 1828.

Millar, A. H., 1895, *Fife: Pictorial and Historical* (2 vols.) (Cupar).

OS Name Book: Ordnance Survey Object Name Books containing all names (with their variants and the names of informants and other sources), descriptions and other notes collected during the surveying for the first edition 25 inch and 6 inch 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps; unpublished, available on microfilm in RCAHMS Library, Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh and NAS West Register House. The Fife and Kinross-shire OS Name Books were compiled in the early 1850s and are also available on eleven CDs, along with an index, from Fife Council.

PNF 1: The Place-Names of Fife, vol. 1 (*West Fife between Leven and Forth*), Simon Taylor with Gilbert Márkus (Donington 2006).

RHP: Register House Plan, West Register House, National Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Sibbald, Robert, 1710, *The history, ancient and modern, of the sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross with a description of both, and of the Firths of Forth and Tay and the islands in them; in which there is an account of the royal seats and castles; and of the royal burghs and ports; and of the religious houses and schools; and of the most remarkable houses of the nobility and gentry, with an account of the natural products of the land and waters*, (Cupar; 2nd edn London 1803).

SSE: Standard Scottish English (language).

Taylor, Simon, 1992, *Mortimer’s Deep* (Nairn).



Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Fife Council and the *Celebrating Fife* team for their support and encouragement in this undertaking; the University of Glasgow, in particular Professor Thomas Clancy; and all who took part in the original walk of 11 September 2010 on which this booklet is based. I am also very grateful to L. A. Reid for drawing the route map.



Fig. 8. Aberdour and environs in 1775: detail of Ainslie's Map of Fife. Courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland. Note that *Downara* (lower left corner) is a typographical error for *Downans*, a name that has survived in Downans Plantation, the wood immediately south-west of Dovecot Park; while *Belles Rock* is Bellhouse Rock, now better known as (The) Bell Rock.



AS = Aberdour Station; B = The Ballast Bank;
 C = Cuttlehill; S = The Sailors Well; V = Viewpoint

Fig. 9: Sketch map of Aberdour, the red arrows showing the course and direction of the walk as described in this booklet. *Drawn by L. A. Reid.*

copyright: Simon Taylor
 Aberdour 2011

Printed by Pandaprint, 104 Park Rd., Rosyth KY11 2JL
 Tel. 01383 417 847

e-mail: enquiries@panda-print.co.uk