**TOLBOOTH STIRLING**

**History and Heritage:**

From 1226 Broad Street was Stirling’s most notable street and for more than six hundred years was a focus for the entire Burgh. One of Scotland’s most important markets was held here, serving the central lowlands and southern uplands.

The town’s Tolbooth dominated Broad Street and was the point at which taxes were paid on entering and leaving the town and was a focus of commercial activity in Stirling from the fifteen century. The Tolbooth was strategically placed on the main thoroughfare leading to Stirling Castle in an area where nobility and politicians lived.

The Tolbooth was extended with a jail and courthouse being added to the south side of the building in the early part of the 19th Century.

**Architecture:**

By 1698 the Tolbooth had fallen into disrepair and between 1702-1705 was rebuilt to the designs of Sir William Bruce. His design’s most striking feature is the tower facing Broad Street with its pavilion roof. Although this kind of architectural feature could be found in many Scottish buildings of that period, it is now extremely rare.

We know that a new bell was ordered from Holland in 1698. This bell was recast in 1864 and is the bell you can still hear to this very day.

In 1703, Duncan Kerr of Falkirk was commissioned to make a new clock for the steeple. In the following year he was asked to supply a new staff, globe and weathercock. The surviving weathercock is thought to be that supplied by Kerr, as it bears a repair consistent with a repair made by him after it had been blown down and damaged.

Gideon Gray extended the Tolbooth in 1785 and it was Gray’s building that was redeveloped by Edinburgh based Richard Murphy Architects into the current iteration of the building.

Some interesting discoveries were during the redevelopment of the Tolbooth,

a hidden staircase was revealed in what was the courtroom, now the Tolbooth’s main auditorium. It was first thought that the staircase led prisoners up from the ground floor to the heart of the courtroom but it now seems that it was designed to enable the members of the jury to go straight into the courtroom. You can see the beginning of the secret staircase on the ground floor.

A full skeleton lying cross-armed in its coffin was also discovered. This skeleton is believed to be the body of Allan Mair, the last man to be publicly hanged in Stirling.

The Tolbooth is a listed Category 'A' building. Many of the original features of the building have been restored by conservation architects Simpson and Brown.

**Crime and Punishment:**

From at least the sixteenth century, the Tolbooth housed prisoners in its booths, sometimes referred to as vaults. The booths were directly underneath the municipal offices and were also used for a variety of other purposes such as mercantile stores and shop units.

Allan Mair, the last man to be publicly hanged on Broad Street in October 1843 may well have spent his last hours in these death cells.

The old internal jail doors of the Tolbooth date from between c1705-1810 and have been restored. Many of the doors are cross-boarded with dovetailed joints and some still have the old cast iron grids where jailors or wardens would peer in at prisoners. Some of the doors still have their original timber locks. One of the doors has a number of gashes and knife marks, possibly made by a disgruntled prisoner locked up in the room hundreds of years ago.

**Arts and Culture:**

According to Auld Biggins\*, throughout the nineteenth century Stirling was not well provided for in terms of concert and lecture halls. As a result, The Tolbooth’s Courtroom was often used for this type of event.

By the end of the nineteenth century, much of the historic Old Town had lost its status with the development of King Street, Murray Place and Port Street all nearer the river. Commercial activities were no longer a feature of the Old Town and throughout the twentieth century land was redeveloped for residential use at the expense of cultural and commercial development.

By the latter half of the twentieth century, the Tolbooth was finally no longer used for any civic purposes. Instead it began to house a variety of arts and cultural activities, including artists’ studios, concerts and theatre shows.

In November 2001, the Tolbooth became the building you see now, which is undoubtedly one of Scotland’s most innovative new buildings. Breathing a whole new lease of life into the Tolbooth, the new architecture continues a long history of extensions, demolitions and renovations bringing the Tolbooth back to life right at the heart of Stirling.

**The Radical Uprising:**

The Radical War, a week of strikes and unrest in Scotland in 1820 in which workers, particularly weavers, sought reform of the electoral system and uncaring government. The two principals, Hardie and Baird, were tried at Tolbooth and sentenced to death by hanging and then decapitation. They were executed outside Tolbooth and are commemorated by a plaque at the Tolbooth.

**Further Reading:**

Tolbooth today – [www.stirlingevents.org](http://www.stirlingevents.org)

Local History Soc - <https://www.stirling-lhs.org/tolbooth-as-prison.html>

Architecture <http://www.richardmurphyarchitects.com/viewItem.php?id=2485>

Baird & Hardie - <http://www.stirlingarchives.scot/2015/09/24/murdered-cause-justice-truth-liberty-accounts-relating-execution-baird-hardie-stirling-8th-september-1820/?LMCL=WfOG1l>

<http://www.stirlingarchives.scot/tag/baird-and-hardie/>

\*Auld Biggins extract

