



King Street

A Place Of Quality

KING STREET, in the heart of Stirling, connects the steep historic streets leading to the Castle with modern shopping in The Thistles and The Marches.



Its broad proportions and elegant buildings invite the visitor to venture upwards to explore the narrow streets beyond. Its history is one of successful businesses, local and national, who sought to impress customers with grand facades and intricate carvings. Creamy local sandstone intersperses with interlocking red Dumfries masonry, contrasting with blue-grey slates and whinstone setts.

It is a beautiful street with an impressive business pedigree.

Front Cover: King Street in 1950s ©Stirling Council Archives
Opposite: King Street in 1930s © Scottish Motor Museum
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A Street of Quality

Known in medieval times as the High Gait, the street formed part of the historic route which led from the Barras Yett up through the winding streets of the Royal Burgh to the market place on Broad Street and the Castle beyond. By the eighteenth century it was known as Quality Street but, in 1821, became King Street celebrating the coronation of George IV (1762-1830).

The opening of the new bridge across the Forth in 1833 led to the creation of Murray Place crossing the foot of King Street. Together with the coming of the railway in 1848, commercial activity shifted to the lower town heralding new opportunities for businesses. By the 1880s it was described by Francis Groome as being 'wide and well-built' and its neighbourhood as 'constituting the business centre of the town'.

By the early twentieth century, the street boasted no less than six banks, three hotels and numerous established Stirling family businesses including Graham & Morton, Thomas Menzies and McAree Brothers together with

an entrance to the Stirling Arcade. King Street was very much the place to be and to be seen.

In recent years, the focus of the street has changed again as banks have moved to modern shop premises, the traditional banking halls now converted to pubs, restaurants and shops. Sadly, none of the long-established family businesses have survived. In spite of these changes, the street remains a jewel in Stirling's crown with impressive buildings which reflect its past status as the commercial heart of the burgh. The history of these businesses is stamped into the townscape and endures despite changing occupiers.



Plan of The Town of Stirling from Actual Survey by John Wood 1820
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A Place for Banking

In 1791, there were three banks in Stirling. By the 1860s, of the town's seven banks, five were located in King Street, rising by the end of the nineteenth century to six, all bringing their own architectural qualities to the centre of Stirling.



These regal buildings tell a story of the flexing of financial muscle and shifts in banking power as smaller banks were swallowed up by bigger organisations with associated naming and renaming of branches.

Most have now moved from the street in favour of modern banking premises with shopfronts.

The oldest purpose-built bank in the street is 50-52 King Street, designed by William Burn (1789-1870) of Edinburgh in 1833 for the Bank of Scotland. Its striking Classical appearance was described in the New Statistical Account (1841) as 'beautiful'.

Nearby, 22-24 King Street was erected around 1846 in the style of David Hamilton of Glasgow for the Union Bank of Scotland by architects Black and Salmon of Glasgow. Robert Black (1800-1869) practised in Glasgow and by 1838 he was the architect to the Union Bank. Intricate carvings in the blond sandstone make a distinctive contribution to the architecture of King Street.

The Royal Bank of Scotland premises at 21-25 King Street were designed by Edinburgh architects Peddie & Kinnear in 1863. John Dick Peddie (1824-1891) secured the business of the Royal Bank in 1854 and was responsible for many of their premises around this time.

A One Guinea note of the Stirling Banking Company dated 1 July 1797
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Dick Peddie, Todd & Jamieson of Edinburgh subsequently redesigned the ground floor in 1938, introducing a granite frontage with Greek Doric columns.

The design, 1930s Art Deco, uses fashionable materials like bronze and polished granite. Although the bank vacated some years ago, the thistle and letters “RB” set into bronze railings remain an enduring legacy of the Royal Bank’s occupation.

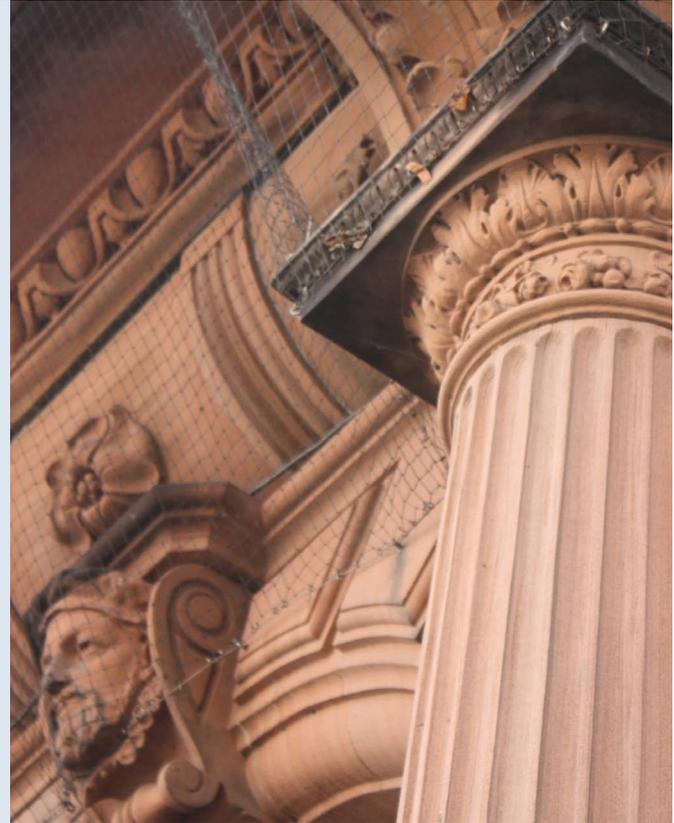
2 King Street was sold in 1888 by the Drummond Tract Depot to the British Linen Company. Established in 1746 by Royal Charter to promote the manufacture of Scottish linen, in the 1760s the company moved into banking. It was the first bank to set up individual branches. Renamed the British Linen Bank in 1906, it became a subsidiary of Barclays Bank in 1919, and in 1971 was taken over by the Bank of Scotland as their merchant banking arm until 1999. The Bank subsequently moved to other premises and the ground floor became a shop with offices above.



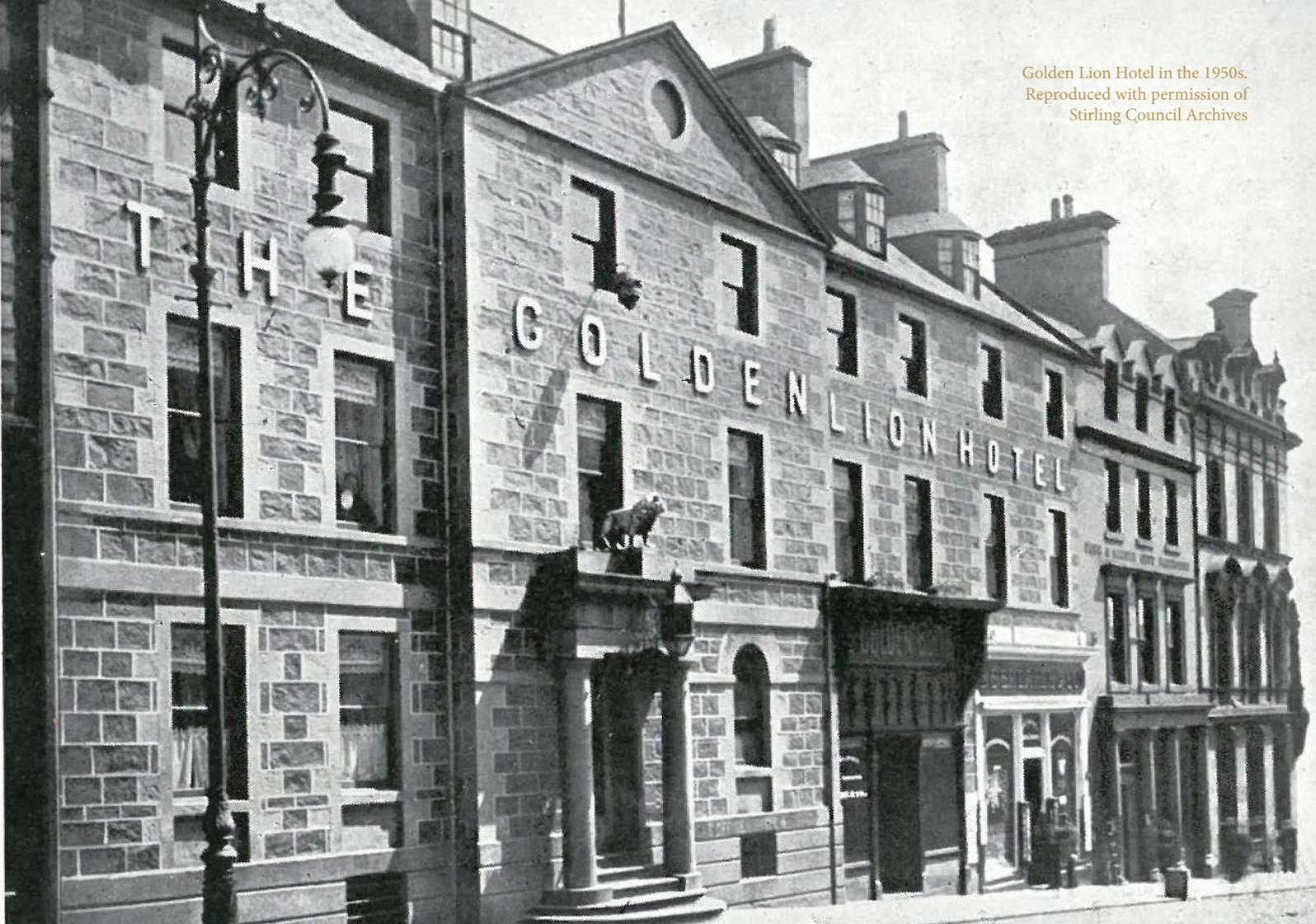
65 King Street, the Clydesdale Bank's purpose-built premises, were designed in 1899 in a Renaissance style by James Thomson (1835-1905) of Glasgow firm, Baird and Thomson. It was built by local man and former Baillie, William Gourlay. With a base of pink Peterhead granite and above Locharbriggs red sandstone, the richly sculptured masonry was carried out by Glasgow sculptor, Mr James C. Young.

Featured on the building are a series of heads of eminent historic figures including James V, Mary Queen of Scots, Wallace and Bruce as well as representations of art, science and culture including Michael Angelo, James Watt and Mozart.

The opulent interior once contained Sicilian marble walls and flooring and a telling room lined with carved oak. Two stained glass windows celebrated the arms of Stirling and Glasgow, the bank's headquarters. The property has been occupied as a public house for many years.



Golden Lion Hotel in the 1950s.
Reproduced with permission of
Stirling Council Archives



A Place to Stay

The oldest building in King Street is the Golden Lion Hotel with its majestic lion on the entrance porch.



The building is distinctive for its 'Aberdeen Bond' pattern of stonework. Built in 1786 and possibly designed by Stirling architect and mason, Gideon Gray (d.1791), it was originally known as Wingate's Inn after the owner James Wingate. By the mid-nineteenth century it was the Golden Lion. Robert Burns visited in August 1787 and famously wrote the 'Stirling Lines' on a window pane having been saddened by the state of Stirling Castle. The treasonable comments upset the Town Officials. Burns later returned to smash the glass and although the pieces were retrieved they were then destroyed when the hotel suffered a fire in 1949.

The street also hosted Gill's Temperance Hotel (formerly Dowdy's Hotel) and the Arcade Temperance Hotel. The Temperance Movement began in America



in the 1820s in response to concerns over excessive drinking. Coffee and tea rooms offered a non-alcoholic alternative to drinking in public houses.

A Cyclists' Touring Club plaque can be seen on the wall above the shop at 5 King Street. Originating as the Bicycle Touring Club in 1878, its emblem of a winged wheel indicated where cyclists were welcomed. Over 130 years later, and renamed Cycling UK, it continues to promote cycling. The plaque was restored by Stirling City Heritage Trust in 2012.



THE STIRLING LINES

BY ROBERT BURNS

*Here Stewarts once in glory reign'd,
And laws for Scotland's weal ordain'd;
But now unroofed their palace stands,
Their sceptre fallen to other hands;
Fallen indeed, and to the earth,
Whence grovelling reptiles takes their birth;
The injured Stewart line is gone.
A race outlandish fills their throne;
An idiot race, to honour lost;
Who knows them best, despise them most.*



A Place for Business

The prestige of King Street attracted aspiring local businessmen who developed their retail trade to become household names in Stirling.

DRUMMOND TRACT DEPOT, 2 KING STREET

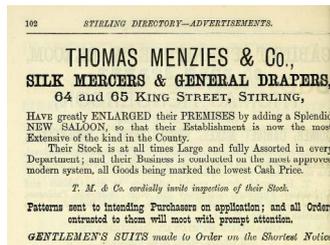
The Stirling Tract Enterprise was set up in 1848 by Peter Drummond (1799-1877) to publish religious tracts which promoted observance of the Sabbath. Designed in a Free Renaissance style by the architect brothers 'The Hays of Liverpool', this highly ornate sandstone building was erected in 1861 in a prominent corner location. The builder, James Paterson, was also responsible for Allan Park South Church and villas in Victoria Place.

The level of detail is remarkable, from a simple date stone in the wallhead chimney to barley twist columns. The façade once had a large carved panel featuring two angels. This richly sculptured building has ovoid dormers which mirror its contemporary building at number 36. The business moved to larger premises in Dumbarton Road in 1888, the King Street building having been sold in 1887 to the British Linen Company.

The Stirling Tract Enterprise Company ceased operations in 1980.

THOMAS MENZIES LTD

Former Baillie Thomas Menzies set up a drapery business in 1861, initially in partnership with a Mr Melrose. Their warehouse at 36 King Street was constructed using decorative cast iron columns to create an open and light façade, perhaps inspired by the great cast iron warehouses of 1850s Glasgow. A saloon was soon constructed at the rear, a fashionable department store addition. Success continued and as the business flourished they acquired space within the Crawford Arcade. Menzies, a household name in Stirling, closed several years ago and the building is now flats with ground floor shops. The 1930s marble and bronze shopfronts were restored in 2012 by Stirling City Heritage Trust.



Advert for Thomas Menzies & Co

The Stirling Directory. 1870-71.
Stirling: Duncan & Jamieson (©
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“wonderfully vulgar”

How Charles McKean (1985) described
the ovoid dormers at 36 King Street.

THE STIRLING ARCADE

Arcades epitomise fashionable retailing and were particularly popular during the nineteenth century. Nash and Repton's Royal Opera Arcade (1815) in London was the first British example.

The Argyll Arcade in Glasgow followed in 1827, designed by John Baird Primus (1798-1859) and is today a specialist jewellers' arcade.

The Stirling Arcade was designed by John Mclean (c1833-1888) for enterprising businessman William Crawford (1836-1894), a local china merchant who owned property in King Street and Murray Place. He saw the potential in linking the two streets to form an arcade. The brave development comprising 2 hotels, 39 shops, a 1200-seat theatre, and 6 dwellings was erected between 1879 and 1882 at a cost of £30,000.

In 1931, the theatre became a cinema but subsequently closed in 1939 with the outbreak of war and perceived fire risk due to restricted access.

The Stirling Arcade has been renovated in recent years and remains an important speciality shopping centre with independent retailers and cafes. The city is fortunate to have one of the very small number of nineteenth century arcades which survive in Scotland.



THE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY

The Co-operative Movement served communities across the country with its particular retail service where members had a say in the organisation and benefited from a 'Dividend'. The Stirling Co-operative Society had shops in Cowane Street, Upper Craigs and Broad Street before adding 14-18 King Street to its portfolio in 1899. This purpose-built tenement had three ground floor shops, a drapery with a rear saloon, a boot shop and a grocery shop. To the rear there were offices, a Boardroom for committee meetings and a warehouse.

Designed in red sandstone by Stirling-based architects McLuckie and Walker. Andrew McLuckie (1843-1911) of Lennoxton and Ronald Walker (1859-1911) from Argyll undertook designs for many domestic villas and mixed commercial/ domestic tenements including 55 King Street (McAree Bros, 1894) and 32 Spittal Street / 25 Baker Street (Lawson Ltd, 1899).



The building with its two conical turrets bears a panel stating when the Co-operative Society was formed together with decorative carvings representing the Movement. Many of its buildings feature beehives, a wheat sheaf and clasped hands symbolising co-operation, unity and working together. The contraction of the Co-op means that the Society no longer occupies the building but it remains in retail use with flats above.



The Athenaeum

With its tall spire projecting from the horseshoe-shaped building below, the Athenaeum is the essence of King Street's ambition and pride.

Located at the head of the street in the gushtal between Spittal Street and Baker Street, it is a Category A listed building. The architect, William Stirling I (1772-1838) of Dunblane, designed and redesigned many local buildings including Kippendavie House and Kippenross House.

It opened in January 1817 as a reading room and library with a ground floor shop. The library had an annual subscription of



Aerial view of Stirling, 1954, with the Athenaeum's steeple visible at the head of King Street. © Newsquest (Herald & Times). Licensor www.scran.ac.uk

15d in 1866 although it also offered non-members the chance to borrow stating that ‘strangers admitted free of charge for not more than one month’. The street was a place of learning with a further library located at 10 King Street, the Macfarlane Free Library, founded in 1855 by John Macfarlane.

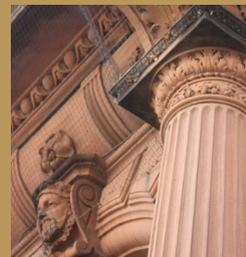
Further aspiration for the status of this building saw an entrance porch with the statue of heroic William Wallace (1274-1305) added in 1859.

From 1875, the building was used as Burgh offices only to be superseded by the completion in 1918 of the nearby Municipal Buildings. Today, it has ground floor shops with offices above.

*“...a handsome structure,
highly ornamental to the
neighbouring streets having
a lofty spire with a bell”*

The New Statistical Account (1841)





SOURCES

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Thank you to Stirling Council Archives for providing historic images for use in this publication.

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Winged Wheels
www.wingedwheels.info/index.htm

SCRAN
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