3 Aberdeen City: Davidson Links with Science & Industry

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Aberdeen has been a centre of learning since the 15th century with the foundation of the university and the later Grammar School and other academies. Several important Davidson scientists have studied at Aberdeen University in their early years.

The local industries such as papermaking and shipbuilding have important Davidson references, and no doubt the newer industries such as the offshore Oil & Gas industries will also.

William Davidson also known as Dr D'Avissone, c.1593–c.1669 was born in Aberdeen and educated at Marischal College.

His ancestry can be linked to the **Davidsons of Auchinhamperis**. He is considered by some as the first Professor of Chemistry in Britain.

He emigrated to Paris, where he moved in Royal circles. He published his *'Philosophia Pyrotechnica'*, a manual of chemistry for his students in 1633. Later he was forced to leave France for the Polish court, but eventually returned to Paris where he died.

Portrait engraving of William Davidson, including his arms.

The "Davidson Building" in the Aberdeen Business Park named after Dr William Davidson.

George Davidson of Pettens [d.1663], was a Benefactor of the City of Aberdeen. We don't know his parents, but George Davidson was possibly connected with the Davidsons of Cairnbrogie. He never married. Although probably illiterate, he amassed a substantial estate and used his wealth to fund projects such as a bridge built over the Don, the building of the kirk walls of St Clement's Aberdeen, and a chapel of ease at Newhills. He also set up endowments for ministers at both St Nicholas' and St Clement's Churches in Aberdeen.

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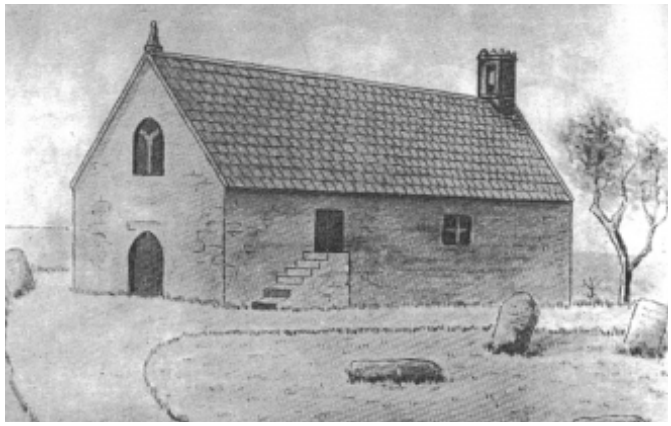
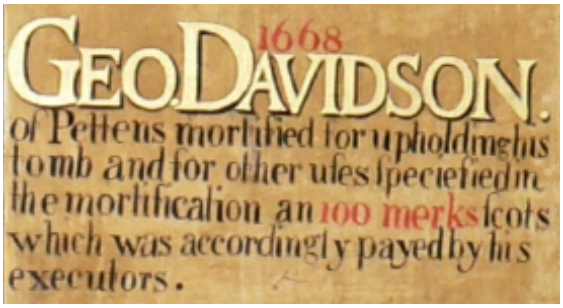


Newhills Church near Aberdeen

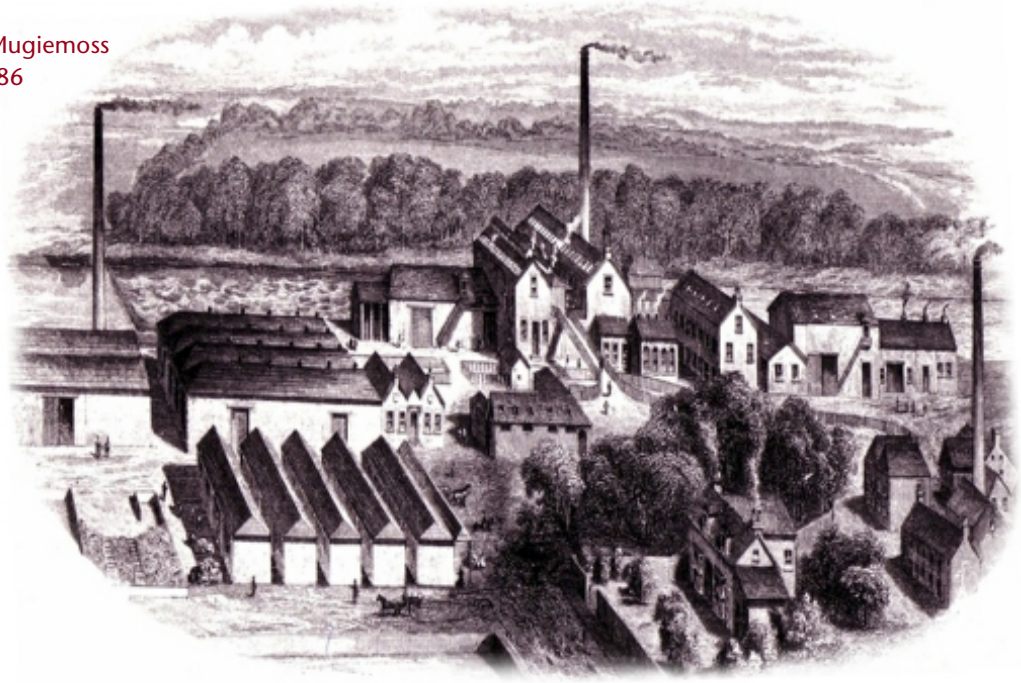
Memorial Plaque: St Clement's Church



Mortification Board: Town House

The massive Grave and Headstone of George Davidson set in the West Wall of the Kirkwall of St Nicholas Church, Aberdeen with the Latin inscription.

A Print of the Mugiemoss Papermill in 1886



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An Aerial View from the 1990s

Charles Davidson who originally came from Tarland in about 1760 was the founder of the papermaking business at Mugiemoss. He was the son of a dyer and was trained as a wheelwright; later he worked in partnership with Charles Smith at nearby Stoneywood. By 1811, he was on his own, having taken out a 57 year lease for land alongside the river Don at Mugiemoss.

There were family members still involved with the business as late as the 1970s.

The rivers Don and Dee, which almost encircle the city of Aberdeen, have made this an attractive area for papermaking since the 1690s.

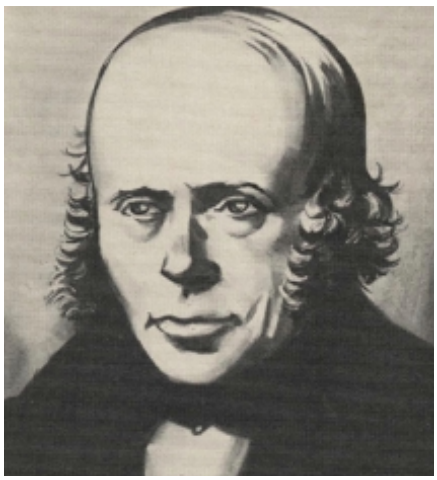
The long tradition of papermaking came to an end in 2005, when the Davidson mill, by now under the ownership of BPB, ceased production.

Robert Davidson, 1804–1894, known as the "Father of the Electric Locomotive" was born in Aberdeen, the son of a grocer from Forgue. He was educated at Marischal College, Aberdeen.

He enjoyed a prosperous career as a chemist and dyer in Aberdeen and in the North East of Scotland.

However Robert also developed small electric motors and was demonstrating these by 1837, without realizing that William Taylor was doing the same thing in the USA.

Although not able to pursue his engine developments through lack of support, he did live long enough to be able to celebrate the opening of the City and South London Tube as the first Electric underground railway in London in 1890. He died in Aberdeen.



Robert Davidson

Sir James M. Davidson

James Davidson, 1857–1919, was born in Argentina to Scots parents whose ancestors came from Perthshire. His early education was at the Scottish School in Buenos Aires; subsequently he studied medicine at Edinburgh, London, and Aberdeen. He graduated from Aberdeen in 1882 and started an eye clinic in the city. This was the start of a long and distinguished career as Ophthalmic Surgeon in Aberdeen and London.

He was one of the first in Britain to appreciate the importance of X-ray medicine, becoming head of the British School of Radiology. He was the leading radiologist of the country and was knighted for his work.

Arms of
Sir James M. Davidson

John Davidson, 1878–1970, was born in Aberdeen, and educated at Robert Gordon's College and the University of Aberdeen where he also worked until 1911.

He emigrated to Canada, and was appointed the first Provincial Botanist of British Columbia in 1911. He developed a botanical garden near New Westminster, which was later moved to the University of British Columbia; a move which involved 25,000 plants.

John Davidson was a key person in the development and teaching of Botany at the University from 1917–1945. He was also a keen photographer and conservationist all his life.

John Davidson

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