



## Traditional Shops and Shopping in Cupar, Fife



**Crossgate, Cupar in 1903**  
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**Historic Shop Conservation**  
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## Purpose of Report

This report has been commissioned by Cupar Heritage to investigate the history of shops in Cupar with a view to producing an exhibition on the history of shops and shopping in the burgh.

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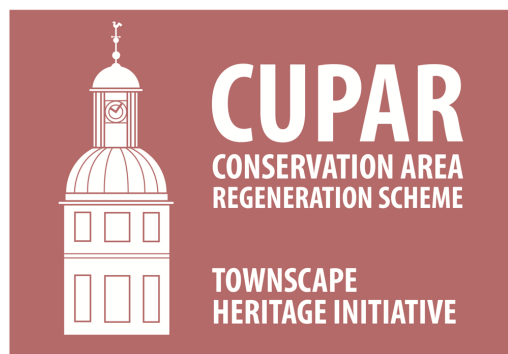
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**CUPAR HERITAGE**  
THE LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY FOR CUPAR AND SURROUNDING AREA

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## 1.0 Cupar: A Retail History

### 1.1 Introduction

Cupar has the hallmarks of its county town and Royal Burgh status. The market cross situated in the heart of the town centre is indicative of its long-held power to trade in goods. The nineteenth century civic buildings along St Catherine Street tell of the town's importance as an administrative centre. Set in rich agricultural environment, the Howe of Fife, Cupar was a vital place for retail trade, both for markets and later for fixed shops, attracting buyers and sellers from a wide area. The opportunities for traders would have been good and, as a result, Cupar thrived as a retail centre. However, there was constant competition with other nearby centres including St Andrews and Kirkcaldy and its powers diminished following the establishment of Fife Regional Council in 1975, when it became the administrative centre for North East Fife District Council.

Despite these changes and challenges, Cupar has retained a very respectable retail offering with a balance of independents and chain stores. The modest scale of the town centre is appealing and attractive and many traditional shopfronts survive.

This report examines the history of retailing in Cupar and explores the different architectural types of shops which form the townscape reflecting the growth and change in the town over time. It also considers the influence of local and national retailers and how they impacted on the prevailing architectural styles.

### 1.2 Early History of Cupar

Situated on the River Eden, Cupar is believed to have gained Royal Burgh status by 1328. This was a jealously guarded status as it permitted lucrative overseas trade. The location was an important crossing point and meeting of routes and grew to serve both travellers and the immediate rural environs. From an early time, Cupar had a role as an administrative centre. In the sixteenth century, the Sheriff of Fife held courts at the tolbooth, a significant building where taxes were collected and which sometimes doubled as a court room and prison.

Burgh gates or ports helped to control entry into the burgh and the collection of tolls (Mair, 1988:46). These ports no longer exist but are clearly seen on one of the earliest known maps of Cupar dating to 1642 (Fig 1). This remarkable drawing of the burgh shows the layout of the town between the two river crossing points. The important buildings of the castle, church and tolbooth and are also notable and the buildings fronting the streets have buildings behind stretching into the burgh plots. This map shows that there were five ports on the main entrance routes, all controlling who came in and out of the burgh and whether they had paid the taxes and tolls due. Martin (2006:20) notes that there were high walls which *'served to channel all traffic through the gates, where customs were charged on goods coming to market'*.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the majority of selling would have been through weekly markets and annual fairs, permitted under the rights of the Royal Burgh. Located in the wide area of Crossgate, the markets would have attracted people from the wider hinterland around Cupar. A map dating to 1654 (Fig 2) shows it as a substantial town within the surrounding countryside. Skilled tradesmen would have had small workshops connected to their dwellings. Wilkie (Undated, in Alan Godfrey Maps) notes that in 1707 Cupar was described as *'ane inland place having no trade but retail'*.



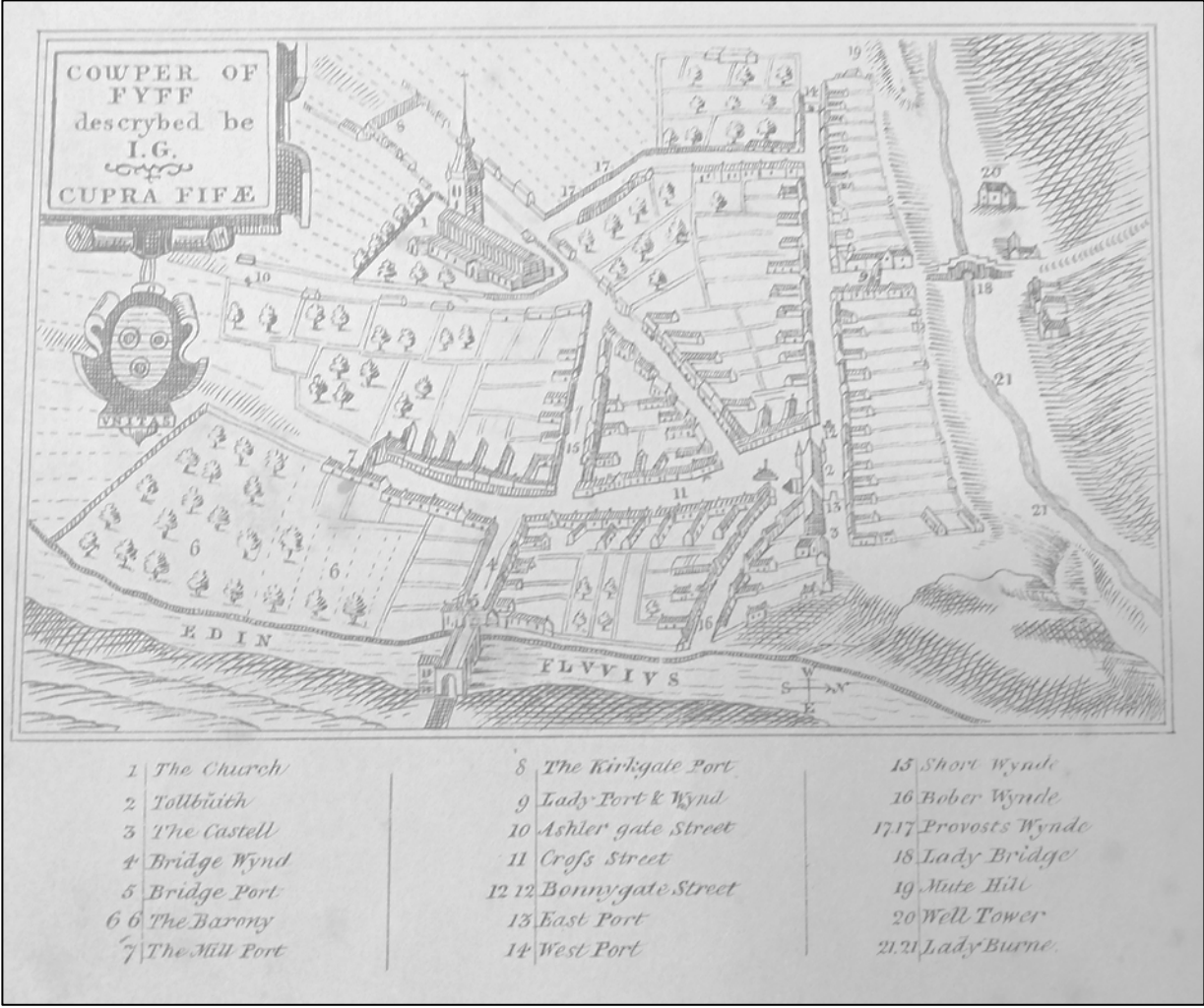


Fig 1: Cowper of Fyff by Mr James Gordon of Straloch, 1642

Source: Govan, 1851



Fig 2: Extract of 1654 map with Cupar (Cowper) visible as a crossing point on the River Eden

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Fig 3: Extract of map by John Ainslie (1745-1828) showing Cupar in 1775

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The town gradually expanded throughout the eighteenth century and a map of 1775 by John Ainslie (Fig 3) depicts a compact and well-formed town. In 1785, there were sufficient shops for them to attract taxation. The tax was levied on all buildings *'used as a shop, publicly kept open for carrying on any trade or for selling goods, wares or merchandise, by retail'* (SRO E.326/4). The amount of tax depended on the value of the shop, with those with a yearly rental of between £5 and £10 attracting sixpence in the pound, rising to 2 shillings in the pound for shops with a rental of over £25. Bakers were exempt. It would seem that shops in Cupar were limited as only one shop was liable for the Shop Tax in 1787/88 (National Records of Scotland).

Examining the Statistical Account for Scotland, (1796) there were 31 shopkeepers (Fig 4). These are differentiated from specific trades such as hatters, bakers and butchers as these were part of trades guilds.

Although the term 'shop-keepers' is being used, the shops themselves would have been very primitive. Windows would have been small, in some cases with wooden shutters as glass was prohibitively expensive. A hanging pictorial signboard, similar to those used today by public houses, would have indicated the type of trade and to help attract customers. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, shopfronts with larger windows and the use of a fascia for signs began to emerge. These styles, often with Classical influences, originated in London in the 1770s but it would have taken time for the ideas to percolate through to other centres and particularly to smaller towns like Cupar. So, although there were people trading as shops, it is likely that it was early 1800s before shops as we understand them today with larger windows and a fascia were found in Cupar.



<i>of Cupar of Fife.</i>		171
STATISTICAL TABLE OF THE PARISH OF CUPAR OF FIFE.		
CONDITIONS AND PROFESSIONS, &c.		
Principal residing heritors *	7	Masons - - 21
Ditto non-residing †	9	Wrights - - 48
Attorneys or writers	12	Smiths - - 24
Clerks and apprentices to		Shoemakers - - 35
ditto	20	Glovers - - 5
Medical practitioners	5	Hatters - - 2
Clergymen	3	Barbers - - 7
School-masters	3	Saddlers - - 5
Private teachers	4	Candle-makers - 2
Mantua-makers	10	Linen-merchants - 6
Milliners	6	Shop-keepers - 31
House painters	2	Midwives - - 4
Stationers	2	Watch-makers - 3
Bakers and servants	19	Excise officers - 3
Butchers and ditto	16	Carriers - - 4
Brewers	5	Messengers - - 3
Tailors	29	Footmen - - 20
Dyers	5	
		Valued
<p>* Viz. Patrick Rigg, Esq; of Morton, James Wemyss, Esq; of Wemysshall, Henry Stark, Esq; of Teafles Charles Bell, Esq; of Pitbladdo, William Robertson, Esq; of Middlefield, Peter Walker, Esq; of Kungask, and John Swan, Esq; of Prestonhall.</p> <p>† Viz. the Earl of Crawford, Colonel Clephane of Carllogie, James Robertson, Esq; of Bargarvie, Oliver Gourlay, Esq; of Kilmoran, George McGill, Esq; of Kemback, Charles Maitland, Esq; of Rankellor, Henry West, Esq; of Foxtown, Miss Bell of Hilton, and Alexander Low, Esq; of Pittencrieff.</p>		
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Fig 4: Extract from Old Statistical Account, 1796 by Rev George Campbell, Vol XVII  
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### 1.3 Nineteenth Century Development

The nineteenth century was a period of significant and often rapid change in towns and cities across Scotland. The Industrial Revolution, wider availability of materials like cast iron and increased international trade all fed into the retail sector. At the beginning of the century, many burghs like Cupar were modest, serving a local area but as the century progressed, they met the changes head-on, expanding, building more houses, industry and shops. While markets continued to be held regularly, their importance declined significantly over the course of the century and by the end of the Victorian era the majority of shopping took place in fixed shops. In larger centres like Edinburgh and Glasgow, market halls were established to retain market selling whilst enabling the burgh authorities to exert control over trading practices. While markets and market halls remain a mainstay of English towns, they are not a feature of Scottish towns (Inverness being an exception).

A feature of the nineteenth century was the reconfiguration of towns and medieval street patterns. In the early 1800s, plans were drawn up to revise the layout of Cupar, with the removal of the Tolbooth and the insertion of a new street, St Catherine Street. These bold plans allowed a more elegant entrance to the town from the east terminating with the Town Hall of 1815-17 by Robert Hutchison with its lead covered cupola. Leading into the wide and straight Bonnygate, this street featured large dwellings set in grounds, including Preston Lodge dating to 1623. With the steady expansion of

retailing, domestic ground floors were converted to shops but some later tenements were purpose-built incorporating ground floor shops into the design.

Wood's map of 1820 (Fig 5) shows increased building density in the heart of the town with long burgage pots extending from the streets of Bonnygate and Crossgate. Following the improvements to create St Catherine Street, the width of Crossgate was retained allowing a place for markets to continue despite the increasing numbers of shops.



Fig 5: Extract of John Woods map, 1820  
©National Library of Scotland (NLS Ref EMS.X.009)

Official documents from the early decades of the nineteenth century remark on the attractiveness of Cupar. The *Great Reform Act Plan and Report* of 1832 notes that Cupar 'contains many new houses and presents the appearance of a thriving modern Town, well built and cleanly kept'. The main trade is reported as corn, mills and brewing as well as spinning and weaving of coarse linens. The presence of printing and publishing establishments is also remarked on ([maps.nls.uk/view/74491988](https://maps.nls.uk/view/74491988)).

In 1836, Rev Adamson and Rev Birrell writing the New Statistical Account noted the street improvements stating:

*'The principal change that has taken place in the town since the last account is the removal of the jail, and the town and county halls so as to open up the streets and improve the thoroughfares. The consequence is, that Cupar wears now the appearance of a clean and comfortable English town. Being lighted up with gas, during the night it has a very attractive appearance.'* (Source: [stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/](http://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/))

This period of improvement continued with the arrival in 1847 of the Edinburgh and Northern railway. A railway station designed by Thomas Grainger opened on the edge of the town centre. The route connected Cupar with Burntisland and ultimately allowed travel to Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen ([www.railscot.co.uk](http://www.railscot.co.uk)). Railways bring change and expansion with easier access to goods and materials and may mark a period of increased prosperity for a town including an expansion of the numbers of retail premises which respond to the economic opportunities. However, Martin (2006:217) suggests that Cupar did not benefit from the railway in the way that other towns did, perhaps due to the loss of passing trade and loss of importance as a market centre.

The first Ordnance Survey map in 1854 (Fig 6) notes a number of changes in the centre of Cupar with noticeable expansion of the town centre. The historic elements associated with trade including the Tolbooth, Market Cross and the ports have all been removed. There are many new hotels and bank premises including the Royal Hotel and Tontine Hotel in St Catherine Street and numerous inns and taverns in Bonnygate and Crossgate.



Fig 6: Extract of Ordnance Survey Town Plan of Cupar, 1854

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**Table 1: Retailers in Bonnygate and Crossgate, Cupar 1825-1903 from Post Office/ Trades Directories**

Retailer	1825-26	1861	1878	1903
Baker	8	5	7	6
Bookseller/ stationer	1	4	4	4
Bootmaker	5	10	2	9
Confectioner	1	3	6	5
Draper	8	10	10	12
Druggist/ Pharmacy	2	2	2	3
Fishmonger	0	0	2	1
Flesher/ butcher	6	3	3	4
Grocer/ spirit merchant	22	17	17	16
Hairdresser/ perfumer	2	2	1	2
Ironmonger	6	3	3	1
Saddler	5	3	3	3
Tobacconist	2	0	3	4
Toy dealers	0	2	3	2
Watchmaker/ jeweller	4	3	3	4

Source: Online trades directories.



Comparing the numbers of shops listed in Post Office Directories for Bonnygate and Crossgate at intervals from 1825 until 1903 (Table 1) this shows how some shop types emerged such as fishmongers as selling moved from market stalls to fixed shops. Other trades such as ironmongers decreased quite significantly whereas tobacconists increased in number. From the trades directories it can be seen that shop numbers in general increased and expanded into smaller streets in Cupar (See Section 2.0 Shopping Streets in Cupar, p11).

In 1862, the Corn Exchange was erected in St Catherine Street and a Provision Market was held there. Wilkie (Alan Godfrey Maps, Undated) notes that by the 1890s Cupar was primarily a market town:

*‘With its rich agricultural hinterland the town was a popular and important centre for inter-regional trade. A weekly corn market was held on Tuesdays while cattle markets were held each month’.*

Cupar witnessed significant change over the course of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the century in 1817, the Market Cross dating to 1683 was moved to allow the redevelopment of the centre of the burgh and placed on the hill above Wemyss Hall. This symbol of trade was returned in 1897 to the centre of the Burgh, an inscription on the base indicating its history:

*By the desire of the community  
The above shaft and unicorn were  
On the application of Provost MacQueen  
Restored to the town by  
David Wemyss Esq of Wemysshall  
And were erected here by public subscription  
22 June 1897*

As a symbol of burgh status, its return to the centre of the town must have been a significant event.

## 1.4 Twentieth Century

Over the course of the twentieth century, traditional retailing has seen many challenges including two World Wars, periods of major recession and significant infrastructure changes with a greater focus on car ownership. Cupar has not escaped these wider economic and social influences. The increasing impact of chain stores and supermarkets has played its part in both influencing the architecture of towns including Cupar and in having an impact on the type and location of shops.

Edwardian architectural influences are certainly evident in the streetscape but the interwar period seems to be more limited and perhaps the Art Deco styles did not appeal to the residents. Pride (1999:111) notes that *‘The 1930s style made little impact on conservative Cupar’*. In spite of this, there are a small number of surviving 1930s shopfronts which are good examples of the period.

In the post-war period, many small towns were directly affected by the extensive closure of railways as a result of the Beeching cuts. Cupar was fortunate to escape this and undoubtedly this will have helped with the town’s prosperity. However, the 1960s and 1970s were also a time when many traditional shopfronts were replaced by poor modern examples. Writing in 1975, McWilliam says *‘Anyone who remembers the outstanding collection of shopfronts that Cupar boasted 20 years ago will be disappointed today. But it still has its most basic assets; a compact centre intensively used, distinctive skyline and layout and beautiful yellow sandstone’*. Cupar is certainly not alone in having suffered such losses of historic fabric. The recent funding through the CARS/THI scheme has helped to restore some of these historic buildings and shopfronts.



## 2.0 Shopping Streets in Cupar

Bonnygate and Crossgate were, and remain, the principal shopping streets. St Catherine Street has more limited retailing and when built in the period 1812-1817 was focused on civic purposes with the County Buildings. Hotels and banks also featured in the street together with the Corn Exchange. During the nineteenth century, as retail opportunities increased, there was expansion into the smaller side streets including East Burnside, Lady Wynd, Kirk Wynd and South Bridge. At its height, at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Cupar had extensive shops covering a significant variety of trades. The Post Office Directory for 1903 indicates that there were shops in the following streets:

- Bonnygate
- Burnside
- Crossgate
- St Catherine Street
- Kirkgate
- Lady Wynd
- Millgate
- Provost Wynd
- Short Lane
- South Bridge
- West Port



Fig 7: Corner of Lady Wynd and Burnside- shops are still evident here but many have limited adaptation and retain a domestic appearance.

With changes in shopping habits, the numbers of shops needed across towns in Scotland has reduced. This has resulted in vacancy and the loss of some shops to alternative uses such as offices or domestic. The shops most vulnerable to this are those on the edges of the core retail area. Here, the viability of the shop can be precarious and over time, the numbers of shops in the side streets where there is less footfall has reduced significantly.

This is a wider trend which continues with threats from online shopping and supermarkets as well as changes to other key occupiers such as banks. Service shops such as hairdressers are more common and trends for certain goods or services such as e-cigarettes, tattoos and charity shops mean that there can be change and often less permanence to the retail offering than in the past due to the more transient nature of these businesses. The idea of having long-established family firms, a constant of shopping in Cupar and elsewhere, is in decline. This has an impact on the architecture as shops become residential and the style of the frontage may be changed to accommodate the new use.

The main shopping streets in 2018 are:

- Bonnygate
- Burnside
- Crossgate
- St Catherine Street
- Lady Wynd

There are also small numbers of shops in Millgate, West Port and South Bridge.



Fig 8: South Bridge has a small number of shops

These changes are part of the history of a town. Shopping streets are dynamic and respond to market forces, fashions and trends. They have always been places of innovation and change which is what makes town centres of such interest.

### 3.0 Evolution of Shop Styles and Features

Shopfronts in town centres represent a variety of architectural eras creating a timeline in the extant buildings. Themes may emerge where there are periods of prosperity, lack of growth or other influential economic changes. Although Cupar was an important county town with markets and civic buildings, its shops retain something of a small town appearance with smaller retail units which tend to appeal more to independent traders. However, national retailers such as Woolworths together with smaller chain stores such as DE Shoes have also had a presence and an impact on Cupar's architecture.

The appearance of the townscape and the shopfronts is also influenced by the materials used. They help to map the change in the frontages over time. Sandstone is the predominant material in the Cupar townscape and this material is an important contributor to the design of the shopfronts. Materials associated with the interwar and post war periods are also evident including terrazzo, Vitrolite, bronze and etched glass.

While some retail centres exhibit particularly strong themes, such as cast iron in St Andrews, Cupar has no dominant style other than that of modest shopfronts which reflect the variety of retail types which have existed in the town over the past century and more. This means that the retail streetscape is varied and interesting with shops and associated cross-section of materials from different periods present.

#### 3.1 Domestic Style

These are shops where there is very limited adaptation (Fig 9). They may have had a timber signboard above the entrance or may have the name painted on to the string course or lintel above the door. The windows were occasionally enlarged but often were the original size found in the domestic property. Shops could therefore spring up easily with minimal cost or adaptation and revert back to domestic if circumstances changed and the shop was no longer required. This type of shop is generally found in small towns and villages. They are not a feature of larger retail centres.



Fig 9: Margaret Williamson, grocer, 1 Short Lane, Cupar, early 1900s is typical of a domestic style shop with very little adaptation

Source: Martin and Penrice, 1998



Although Cupar was a prosperous town, not all shopkeepers would have had the funds to invest in a major reconstruction to install a proper shop frontage. This required significant intervention involving the insertion of cast iron beams or columns to allow the openings to be enlarged. More extensive glazing would also have been required for the larger windows which was potentially expensive for a retailer with limited means. Domestic styles are often found in side streets, away from the core retail area. The more affluent retailers located in the prime spots and used their funds to create impressive shopfronts in the latest fashionable style. Retailers of more modest means tend to locate in secondary locations with lower levels of investment in their shopfronts. Although these shops have more limited adaptation, they are often very attractive premises (Figs 10 and 11) and, if selling small goods do not have the same need for a large display window.



Fig 10: 16 Millgate, Cupar has a domestic style ground floor used for retail purposes but with very little adaptation.



Fig 11: Shops at 63 Bonnygate in a building restored with funding from Cupar CARS/THI with simple signboards typical of domestic style shopfronts.

### 3.2 Arched Openings

An early style of shopfront is the use of regular arched openings within the masonry walls. This was popular from the early nineteenth century as purpose-built premises for their regular and symmetrical appearance. West Nicholson Street in Edinburgh dating to 1815 (Fig 12), has a series of arched openings with a string course above which could be used for the name of the business.



Fig 12: West Nicholson Street, Edinburgh dating to c1815 with ground floor arched openings which allow single or double shop units.

The expansion and remodelling of Cupar during the early nineteenth century also saw the introduction of tenements with ground floor arched openings. While some have since been remodelled to create larger openings, the building at 31 Bonnygate is a good example of this type (Fig 13). This was Reid & Sons Italian Warehouse for many years. It also retains its cast iron balconies at first floor which are typical of the period. Historic photographs also indicate that the building on the corner of Crossgate and Bonnygate (1 Crossgate) was occupied by a saddlers and had fine arched openings (Fig 14).



Fig 13: 31 Bonnygate  
Early nineteenth century with arched  
openings to the ground floor.



Fig 14: 1 Crossgate had arched openings,  
later altered to create plate glass windows  
©St Andrews University (Valentine Collection785161)

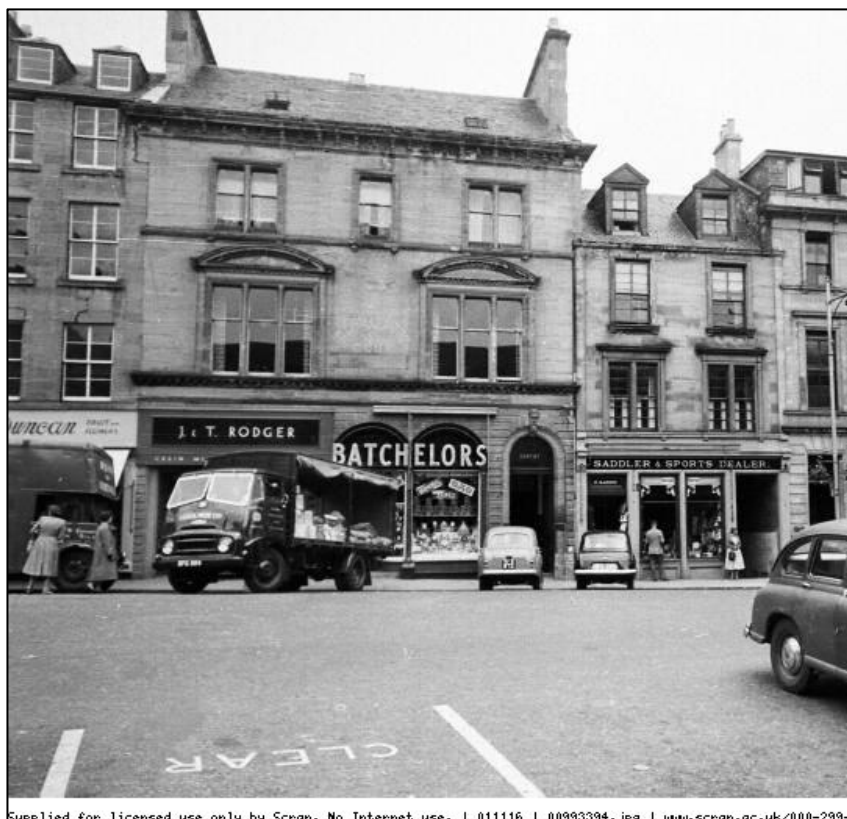


Fig 15: 8-12 Crossgate with arched openings

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There are few records detailing the architects who designed buildings including shopfronts, in Cupar. The poor survival of Dean of Guild Court plans partly explains this. However, it is known that John Milne (1823-1904) designed 10 Crossgate for draper William Foote (Fig 15). According to Frew (1991) the highly glazed frontage was considered to be '*elegant and tastefully designed*' with extensive use of plate glass and cast iron columns from Shotts Foundry in Leith. While cast iron was widely used in shop design towards the end of the century, in the mid nineteenth century it was still limited in its use for shops although not unheard of. In Glasgow during the 1850s, there were many cast iron warehouses constructed and this set a trend for buildings which were more open making use of the combination of plate glass and larger openings allowed by the use of structural cast iron.

### 3.3 Square-headed Openings

By the mid nineteenth century, square-headed openings were fashionable and replaced many of the arched designs. The introduction of cast iron beams during this period allowed openings to increase significantly in width. These created a larger window and therefore greater light and display. As electricity was not widely available until the twentieth century, larger windows with increased natural light made the interior of shops much more inviting. In some buildings, evidence remains of earlier arched openings. The tenement at 56-62 Crossgate has an arched fanlight to the central close entrance and a blocked arch to the side pend. It is likely that originally these window openings were arched. The shopfront at number 58 retains stallrisers with prismatic glass blocks to allow light into the basement (Fig 17).





Fig 16 & 17: 56-62 Crossgate, early nineteenth century tenement with ground floor shops. Number 58 has stallrisers with prismatic glass to allow light into the basement

The increasing use of cast iron beams over the course of the nineteenth century to create larger and larger openings with greater expanses of glazing meant that the arrangement of square-headed openings was the style which prevailed.

### 3.4 Console Brackets and Pilasters

From the 1830s, the use of console brackets to mark the end of the fascia gradually became a feature of shopfront design gaining considerable popularity in the latter half of the century. These take various forms, the early ones are typically fluted scrolls reminiscent of Classical architecture (Fig 18) but they were altered and adapted and allowed shop designers to mark their particular stamp on their shopfront designs. The most elaborate are 'Bookend' consoles which were particularly fashionable in the 1880s and 1890s. These are the largest type of console brackets and are very decorative.

Console brackets are an important feature in shopfront architecture. In some areas there will be similar brackets found on a number of shopfronts, probably as a result of a particular tradesman or architect. In Cupar, there are several pedimented console brackets (Fig 20) and a small number of Bookend consoles (Figs 21 and 22).



Fig 18: 9 Hospital Street, Perth is a mid-nineteenth century shopfront with fluted scrolled console brackets.



Fig 19: Scrolled bracket with egg and dart detail  
Crossgate



Fig 20: Pedimented console bracket  
Crossgate



Fig 21: 13 Bonnygate with 'Bookend' consoles



Fig 22: Fanciful design of console bracket dating to the early twentieth century, 94 Bonnygate

Pilasters were used to frame shopfronts from the end of the eighteenth century but were most widely used from the mid-nineteenth century. They can be of stone or timber and may be plain, fluted or decorated with geometric details. Like console brackets, they are an important architectural detail in shopfront design.

They are not a particularly dominant feature in Cupar as the use of signboards with console brackets is a more common arrangement (Fig 21). However, they are present on a few Victorian shopfronts such as 18 Millgate which has plain pilasters (Fig 23).



Fig 23: 18 Millgate, Cupar has square windows which are typical of shopfronts dating to the latter half of the nineteenth century

### 3.5 Edwardian Shopfronts

The first decade of the twentieth century was a continuum of the Victorian era but, details and use of materials emerged which makes them distinctive from their earlier cousin. The styles of the Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau periods were particularly influential. Materials which predominate include the



use of stained glass, mosaic, ebonised hardwoods and curved glass. Edwardian shopfronts can be particularly beautiful and are often executed in a very high quality, well-crafted materials.

A feature of entrances is the use of mosaic tiles (Fig 25). These tend to be inspired by Art Nouveau type designs but may also incorporate names of the shopkeeper. Mosaics are a very decorative and attractive material which is hard-wearing. Their use on shopfront design tends to be associated with the very late nineteenth century up to the 1920s when they became less fashionable and were replaced with use of terrazzo, marble and black and white geometric tiles. True mosaic is an expensive material to lay as it is very labour intensive. Tile manufacturers also designed mock mosaic tiles or patent mosaic which have the appearance of mosaic but are actually larger tiles. Once screeded they very successfully mimic true mosaic but at a significantly lower cost.



Fig 24: 106 Bonnygate is a good example of an early twentieth century shopfront. At one time it was the Ladyburn Dairy.



Fig 25: 106 Bonnygate has a decorative mosaic entrance typical of the early twentieth century

### 3.6 Interwar Period

During the 1920s and 1930s, shopfront designers made use of new materials to create more minimalist designs. The Paris Exhibition of 1925 inspired new approaches to shopfronts with a move away from the elaboration of the Victorian and Edwardian eras and a change from the reliance on timber, cast iron and ceramics. Instead, clean and shiny materials such as chrome, Vitrolite (a coloured structural glass), polished granite and terrazzo (a composite ceramic) were used to create Art Deco designs. Console brackets and pilasters were unfashionable and shopfronts had a much simpler and cleaner design approach where geometric designs were favoured.

The impact of this period in Cupar seems to have been relatively modest compared to other locations, but there are some intact examples which demonstrate the development of retail styles and materials in this period. Vitrolite was once a widely used material with black being the most popular colour. It allowed shopfronts to be clad quickly and create a sleek and modern look. It is now a rare material and few Vitrolite shopfronts survive in good condition. At 36 Bonnygate (Fig 26), there are small areas of black Vitrolite surviving. The glass panels are substantial but also vulnerable to damage as this material is no longer manufactured it is difficult to repair Vitrolite shopfronts. This shop was once occupied by shoe firm Easiephit (Fig 27). See <https://buildingourpast.com/2017/09/09/the-story-of-easiephit/> for further information on their history.



Fig 26: 36 Bonnygate is a typical 1930s shopfront with a deep fascia and small areas of black Vitrolite survive.



Fig 27: Shows the shop in 1958 occupied by shoe retailer Easiephit, part of Greenlees & Sons.  
©St Andrews University (Valentine Collection 785423)



Where Edwardian and Victorian shopfronts used tiles for entrances, during the interwar period, the preference was for terrazzo, black and white tiles or marble. Geometric patterns were favoured to create a dramatic entrance. While some shops used bright colours such as green Vitrolite, the most fashionable colours were black and white, combined with chrome. Use of bronze window frames was also widespread.

The shopfront at 56 Bonnygate is a particularly good example of a 1930s shopfront (Fig 28). Although clad in mosaic, it is possible that this is a later replacement of Vitrolite dating to the 1960s. It has a deep entrance which is a style favoured in this period and marble has been used to create a diamond shape (Fig 29). The door is almost fully glazed with margin panes around the edges, also typical of the 1930s.



Fig 28: 56 Bonnygate is a 1930s shopfront with later alterations to clad it in mosaic.  
(Photo date: 2006)



Fig 29: The entrance at 56 Bonnygate is deep with a marble lobby floor using a geometric black and white design.  
(Photo date: 2006)



### 3.7 Combinations of Styles

It is rare that a shop has only one architectural period evident. More commonly, there will be elements from a variety of periods as parts of a shop have survived and been added to or altered depending on the particular needs of the shopkeeper at the time. Fashions change and materials can wear out. Retailers often want to stamp their own design on their frontage but may not want to completely remove what is already there due to the expense involved.

Many of the shops in Cupar show elements from different periods of construction and improvement.



Fig 30: 90 Bonnygate contains elements from the turn of the twentieth century such as dentilled cornice but there are other features such as a marble stallriser and showcase which are more typical of the 1930s.

## 4.0 Retailers in Cupar

A townscape is created through the combination of distinctive local architecture and materials. The history of the people and the businesses also underpins this architectural history. These businesses were both local firms who became well-established and also national chains such as Woolworths who brought their particular brand style. These social and architectural histories are intertwined to create the shopping streets of Cupar. Understanding these companies and their influence helps to explain the appearance of Cupar town centre.

### 4.1 The Co-operative Society

The Co-operative Movement had a significant impact in Scotland, particularly in mining areas such as Ayrshire and the Lothians. However, their influence also extended into villages, towns and cities across Scotland. They were a vital element of the Scottish retail sector and offered a full service of all possible needs but also had a membership who gained from a Dividend every year if the society was successful. They were a significant employer as they often had a wholesale business and farming associated with the supply of their retail outlets. Co-operative Societies kept excellent records as they had to report annually to their members. Many published books to celebrate their successes. The Cupar & District Co-operative Society published a detailed history in 1939 commemorating 50 years of the society.

The Cupar and District Co-operative Society was established on 26 October 1889 and the first shop was opened at 61 Bonnygate, leased from a Mrs Elder in 1890. As they outgrew these premises, land was purchased at 99 Bonnygate in 1909 and new premises with a bakehouse at the rear erected. The shop included a grocery and a drapery. These were opened on 30 September 1911 (Fig 31 and 32).

The Society continued to grow and expanded premises were opened in April 1934 designed by St Andrews architect, Frank Pride (1896-1970) (Fig 33 and 34). This cost around £10,000 and was formally opened by Mr Peter Michie, President (*Fife Free Press*, 28 April 1934). The new shopfront incorporated enlarged windows with integral blinds.

Co-operatives typically had individual shops devoted to particular retailing. In the case of the Cupar & District Co-operative, the main shop had a variety of departments including a drapery, hardware and fleshing (butchers) together with a furniture store on the first floor. The pharmacy was located at 27 Bonnygate (Fig 37). The terrazzo entrance with the mortar and pestle incorporated into the design survives and indicates the earlier use of this shop (Fig 36).

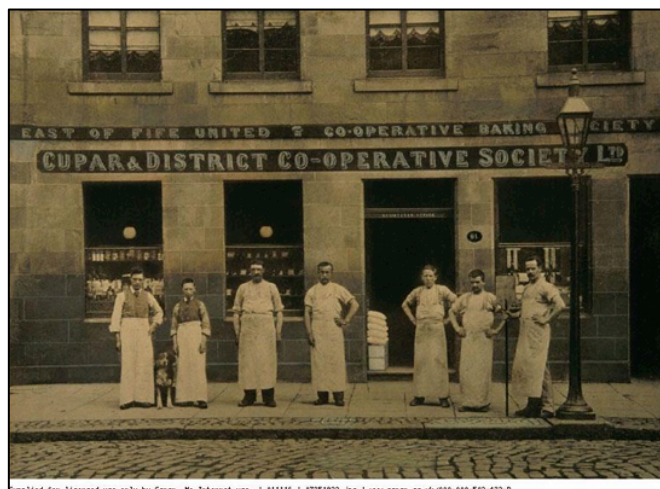


Fig 31: Cupar & District Co-operative Society, 61 Bonnygate prior to the redevelopment of the site.

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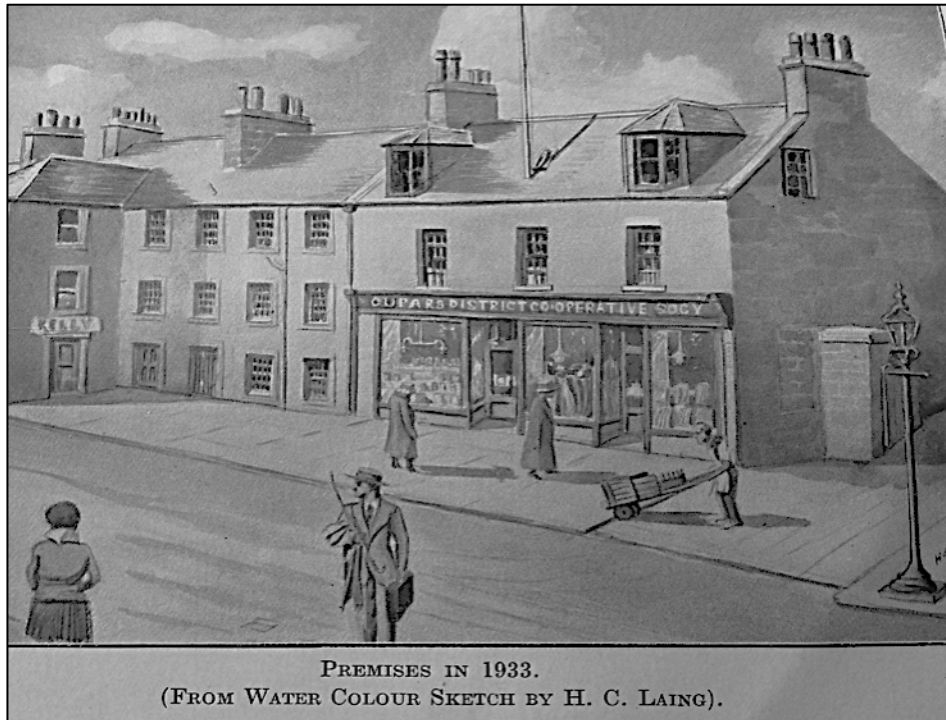


Fig 32: Drawing of the Co-operative at 99 Bonnygate in 1933 prior to redevelopment in 1934  
Source: History of Cupar & District Co-operative Society Ltd, 1939



Fig 33: Cupar & District Co-operative Society, 99 Bonnygate, Cupar, 1930s  
© Mr David Logie. Licenser [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).



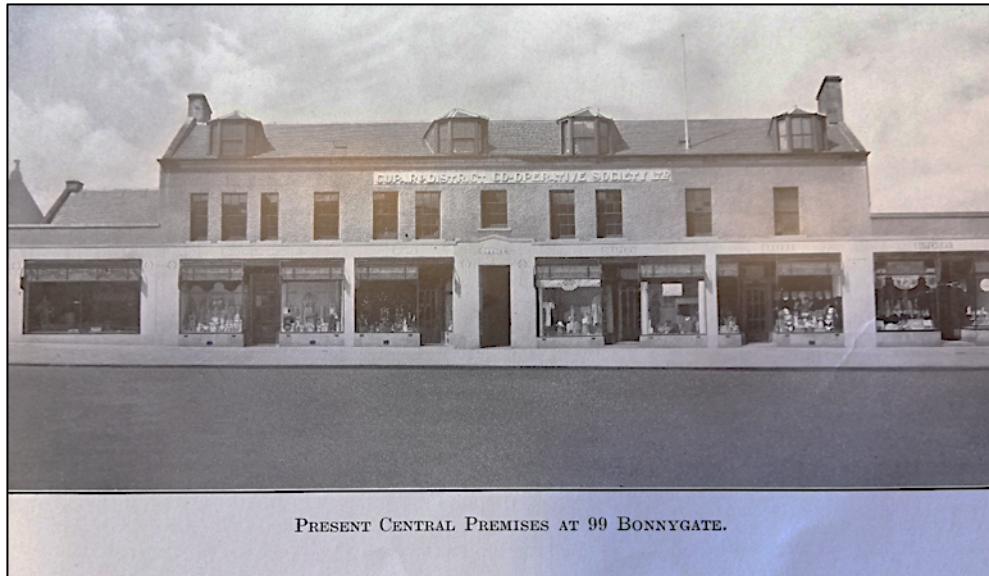


Fig 34: The redeveloped Co-operative in the late 1930s  
Source: History of Cupar & District Co-operative Society Ltd, 1939



Fig 35: The Co-operative is still located at 99-103 Bonnygate



Fig 36 & 37: Former Co-op pharmacy at 27 Bonnygate. The shop was re-fronted in the 1930s and retains many original features dating to this period including an interesting terrazzo entrance with a mortar and pestle design.

**Cupar & District**

DEPARTMENTS:  
GROCERY, DRAPERY, FURNISHING, HARDWARE,  
FLESHING, BAKERY, BOOT AND SHOE,  
BOOT REPAIRING, HAIRDRESSING

BRANCH:  
MAIN STREET, SPRINGFIELD

PHONE ..... CUPAR 2235  
SPRINGFIELD ..... CUPAR 2282

CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD.

99 BONNYGATE  
CUPAR-FIFE

All Communications to be addressed to the Society and not to individuals

*September 1940*

<i>Bank to Begin</i>	<i>142. 0. 9</i>	<i>Cash Sales</i>	<i>4423</i>	<i>3. 2</i>
<i>6/6 - -</i>	<i>981 18. 8</i>	<i>etc collected</i>	<i>2064</i>	<i>4. 6</i>
<i>CS Purchases</i>	<i>14386 4. 3</i>	<i>Transfers Out</i>	<i>5588</i>	<i>13. 4</i>
<i>HM Purchases</i>	<i>120 14. 0</i>	<i>Shortages &amp; Dep.</i>	<i>334</i>	<i>16. 0</i>
<i>Transfers In</i>	<i>69. 8. 0</i>	<i>Debts to Bank</i>	<i>443</i>	<i>16. 9</i>
		<i>Stock to Bank</i>	<i>2558</i>	<i>15. 9</i>
		<i>Reduction in Prices</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>3. 0</i>
		<i>Goods to Refuses</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>18. 0</i>
<i>Spares</i>	<i>94. 14. 3</i>	<i>Debts to Cupar</i>	<i>204</i>	<i>9. 2</i>
	<i>15695 2 11</i>		<i>15695 2 11</i>	

*CWMC 150.1069*

Fig 38: Headed paper from the Cupar & District Co-operative Society Ltd which states the various departments at the store including drapery, hairdressing and hardware.

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## 4.2 Chain stores

A chain store is one which has multiple branches in different locations. Usually the branding is the same throughout so that they are instantly recognisable. This was a feature of many chain stores which became established at the end of the nineteenth century. They used signage on the shopfront, blinds, stallriser and interior to reinforce their brand image. In the early years of the twentieth century, there was significant competition as numbers of dairies and grocers expanded rapidly and sought to establish their customer base.

Cupar was a large enough town to attract a number of chain stores. Some, such as the Buttercup Dairy Company, Maypole Dairy, DE Shoes and RS McColl's were looking for modest premises and were satisfied with small lock-up shops as long as they were in a central and prominent location. Other stores needed much larger premises, such as FW Woolworth. In some cases they would be purpose-built to meet their exact requirements.



Fig 39: RS McColl were located on Bonnygate, opposite the Market Cross seen here on the left with the blind, in the 1960s. They later moved to St Catherine Street.

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### FW Woolworth, 31 Crossgate

The variety store Woolworth's opened a store at 31 Crossgate in March 1954 in premises previously occupied by ironmongers, Gillies & Henderson (*Dundee Courier*, 3 Sept 1953). This was store number 834 for the retailing giant who eventually had over 1200 premises (Morrison, 2015). Originating in the USA in 1897, Frank Winfield Woolworth (1852-1919), first traded in Britain in 1909 in Liverpool. Expansion was quick and sustained and a feature of Woolworths, unlike some other retailers such as Marks & Spencer, was that they established branches in small but thriving towns such as Cupar.

In 1967, plans were approved for the demolition of the existing building and the erection of a new store on the site at a cost of £110,000 designed by the in-house architects at Woolworths ([www.scottisharchitects.org.uk](http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk)). Although the early Woolworths architecture was distinctive, some of their later designs were quite bland and the premises in Cupar which replaced the rather splendid Victorian building (Fig 41) were no doubt more practical for retailing but were certainly not of particular architectural merit (Fig 42). Woolworths entered administration in November 2008 and the last stores closed in January 2009. Stores were occupied by other retailers and the Cupar shop has been occupied by Poundstretchers.





Fig 40: Crossgate, c1910 – the building on the left was to become Woolworths in 1954.  
© St Andrews University Library. Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).



Fig 41: 21 Crossgate in 1960s prior to being demolished and the site redeveloped in 1967  
© Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).



Fig 42: The former Woolworths in Crossgate, 2018

### The Buttercup Dairy Company, 21 Bonnygate

The Buttercup Dairy Company was started in 1904 by Andrew Ewing (1869-1956). His first shop was at 136 Commercial Street, Kirkcaldy but, he soon expanded the business and he developed branches across Scotland with headquarters in Leith and eventually there were over 200 branches (Scott, 2011). Shops featured in many small towns including Brechin, Selkirk, Carnoustie and Keith as well as in larger centres including Edinburgh and Glasgow. The shops had a distinctive tile scheme which was used consistently in all premises, although the design has some minor variations. The tiles were designed by Glasgow tile firm James Duncan Ltd but were manufactured in the Potteries area of England by T&R Boote (Lennie, 2009).

Each shop had a tiled mural on the panel in the lobby featuring a girl with a cow together with a mosaic floor in the entrance. Examples survive throughout Scotland with a particularly intact shopfront at 138 High Street, Dunbar (Fig 44).

The shop at 21 Bonnygate, Cupar retains some of the features of a Buttercup Dairy Company shop, including the console brackets which have a fluted design, the original door and the tiled stallriser (altered) (Fig 43). However, the tiled panels have been significantly altered to remove the distinctive Buttercup Dairy features. The mosaic floor which normally has the letters 'BDCo' has been replaced with the letter 'M' (Fig 45). The decorative panel has been replaced with plain green tiles (Fig 47 and 48). It is suggested that the premises were occupied after the Buttercup Dairy by the Maypole Dairy Company who were a rival retailer (Herd, 2015; Johnston, undated). This would explain why the lettering BDC had been replaced with an 'M' although as the Maypole Dairy Company had their own distinctive tile scheme this would have been an unusual move for them.



Fig 43: 21 Bonnygate, Cupar



Fig 44: 138 High Street, Dunbar



Fig 45: 21 Bonnygate, Cupar- altered mosaic



Fig 46: 138 High Street, Dunbar- original mosaic design





Fig 47: 21 Bonnygate, Cupar-altered lobby panel

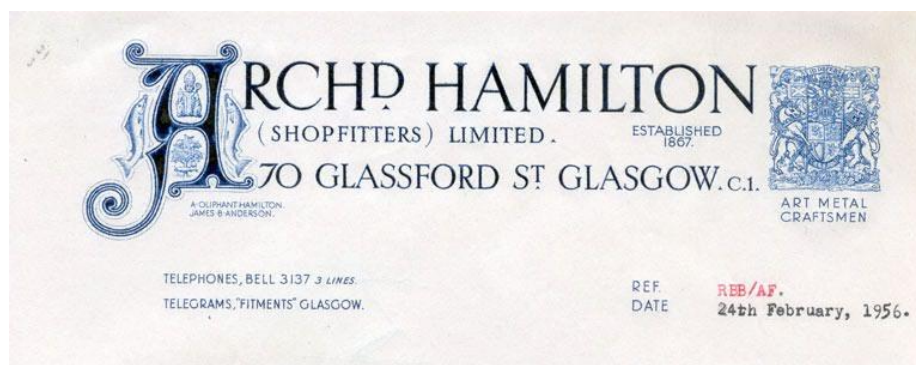


Fig 48: 138 High Street, Dunbar showing original design

### DE Shoes, 32 Crossgate

DE Shoes began in the Overgate in Dundee in 1867 and was originally known as William Smith Wholesale Boot Manufacturer before trading as the Dundee Equitable Boot Depot, later becoming DE Shoes. The company has a long association with the Dundee, Angus and Fife areas with shops established in a number of the towns in these counties as well as across Scotland. The Cupar store was established by 1899 (*Dundee Advertiser*, 22 April 1899) and remained until the company's closure.

The shopfront was designed and installed by Glasgow shopfitter, Archibald Hamilton (Fig 49) whose name is on the blind rail (Fig 52). They were a major firm who carried out commissions throughout Scotland. It is likely that they were employed by DE Shoes to carry out a number of improvements across their chain of shops. Retailers often favoured shopfitters rather than architects because they could provide a 'one-stop shop' all-trades service providing the design and installation, often with a quick fit-out service. They could also design interior fittings such as showcases. Shopfitters grew steadily in numbers in the early twentieth century and were particularly dominant in the interwar years when many shops were re-fronted and modernised.



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Fig 49: Letterhead from Archibald Hamilton, Glasgow shopfitters, dated 1956  
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With bronze window frames and blinds, etched glass and a terrazzo entrance this shop is typical of the period. The period favoured materials such as Vitrolite (a coloured glass) or green marble cladding, bronze for window frames and terrazzo for entrances. Blinds were integral to the design so that they were flush with the shopfront when closed. Etched glass was also popular, incorporating geometric designs.

The DE Shoes business closed all its stores in 2013.



Fig 50: 32 Crossgate, formerly occupied by DE Shoes is a good example of a 1930s shopfront with bronze window frames, blinds and etched glass to the clerestory



Fig 51: 32 Crossgate, terrazzo and marble entrance floor. The insert to the marble is a later addition, perhaps as a result of a worn area of the softer marble.



Fig 52: 32 Crossgate, bronze window frames and blinds with etched glass. There is a small name badge on the blind with the name Archibald Hamilton, shopfitters, Glasgow.

### 4.3 Family Firms

The role of family firms is important in the retail history of any town centre. Cupar had a number of retailers, some of whom still trade today, who have a long association with the burgh. In some cases, the names are so well known that even though the business has changed hands the trading name is retained as a familiar and reassuring brand.

#### **Fisher & Donaldson, baker and confectioner, 21 Crossgate**

The bakery, Fisher and Donaldson, is very well known in Fife. First established in Cupar in 1919, it was subsequently taken over in 1946 by AH Milne who continued to trade under the name of Fisher & Donaldson. He purchased the Church Street, St Andrews premises in 1951, which had formerly been run by established St Andrews bakery, John Armit. There are now Fisher and Donaldson branches in Fife, Dundee and Perth.

The Cupar shopfront (Fig 53) is modern with a traditional style fascia set within an early nineteenth century tenement. The first floor windows have leaded glass, a detail often associated with first floor tearooms. It was common for bakeries to have a tearoom associated with their business to help sell their goods. During the nineteenth century, the Temperance Movement promoted abstinence from alcohol and Temperance hotels grew in number along with tearooms which allowed people to meet and socialise without alcohol.



Fig 53: Fisher and Donaldson bakery, 21 Crossgate

### **JA Scott, drapers, 74 Bonnygate**

This firm was established in 1907 by James A Scott at 74 Bonnygate in the ground floor of the Freemasons Hall. The building was erected in 1811 as a Masonic Lodge and is a Category B listed building. The elegant parent building has pilastered upper floors and tall windows at first floor level and is described as '*Provincial Classical*' by Gifford (2000:166).

The building suffered a serious fire in 1941, spreading from the Masonic Hall to the shop and although damaged inside, the exterior was intact (*Fife Free Press*, 11 January 1941).

Scotts originally traded as a general draper but now specialises in ladies wear and remains a family firm today. The ground floor shop is very traditional in appearance and retains its rectangular entrance with storm doors (Fig 54). The simple lettering signage is sympathetic to the building (Fig 55).



Fig 54: JA Scott, 74 Crossgate in a building dating to 1811



Fig 55: Lettering at 74 Crossgate

### **John Gilmour, Newsagents, 94 Bonnygate**

Also established in 1907, this business was typical of the multiple trades carried on by a stationer who was a bookseller, stationer, bookbinder and printer of local postcards. Small towns often had a business of this type who could produce local materials such as tourist guides, postcards, trades directories and other printed materials which were particular to their area. Gilmour also had a toy shop at 24 Bonnygate from 1912 (Martin & Penrice, 1998:20). The business was sold in 1950 to Agnes Miller (*The Scotsman*, 3 November 1950) and although sold on subsequently, it retains the name of John Gilmour Newsagent.



The building is late nineteenth century, is Listed Category C and is noted for its original shopfronts. The two shopfronts form a mirrored pair although are now both combined internally (Fig 56). The shopfronts are of a typical traditional design with a small recessed lobby and at the head of the window the clerestory is narrow for a ventilator, a feature commonly seen in Edwardian shopfronts. The pilasters have an unusual diagonal pattern and the console brackets are very large, decorative and fanciful in design. A postcard which probably dates to soon after the shop was opened shows the shopfront with the vent grille surviving and what appears to be a tiled stallriser (Fig 55). The fascia board had particularly fine shadow lettering.



Fig 56: Gilmour's when first opened  
Source: John Gilmour, Stationer, Fife



Fig 57: 94 Bonnygate

### J Galloway, draper, Crossgate

The firm of J Galloway was established in 1858 by James Galloway (1837-1902) as a drapers in the heart of the burgh. On his death, the business was run by James Hendry Galloway (1864-1922) which was then inherited by his niece, Miss Taggart, on his death and was subsequently run by her family. It was later purchased by William Peattie, an employee of Galloways ([www.fifetoday.co.uk](http://www.fifetoday.co.uk), 2 Aug 2007).

Located in the ground floor of the Burgh Chambers, the shop is situated in a very prominent building which was erected in 1815-17 as part of the redevelopment of St Catherine Street by Provost John Ferguson. The entrance is on the curvature of the bow front and the shop windows were later enlarged and the frontage clad with timber (Fig 59). The business of JH Galloway closed in 2007 after 149 years of trading but remains in use as a shop.



Fig 58: J Galloway, Crossgate, 1905

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Fig 59: JH Galloway, Crossgate in the 1960s

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### **Williamson, grocers, 15 Crossgate**

This grocers shop in Crossgate started as James Wilson in 1790 and was subsequently run by Tom Wilson. On his death, it was inherited by his cousin, William John Williamson but run by his mother Mrs Williamson and the shop became known as Williamson & Son (Fig 60). Provost Williamson became a well-known figure in Cupar and was elected in 1895. He died in 1929 (Obituary, *St Andrews Citizen*, 23 February 1929).

The shopfront remains as a simple double-fronted shop central entrance and two windows and is occupied by Couper Carpets.

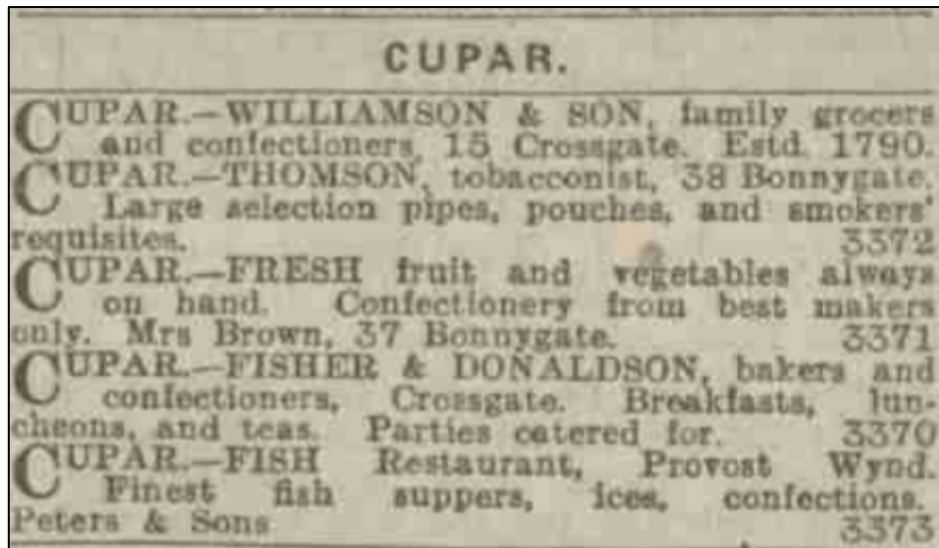


Fig 60: Advert in *Dundee Courier*, 24 August 1922 stating that Williamson & Son were established in 1790

Image © D.C.Thomson & Co. Ltd. Image created courtesy of THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD

#### J&G Innes, stationers, 20 Crossgate

John Innes established the *St Andrews Citizen* newspaper in 1870 and took over the *Fife Herald* shop at 8 Bonnygate which had been started by the Tullis family as stationers in 1797. He subsequently went into business with his brother as J & G Innes and, in 1923, moved to the premises at 20 Crossgate (Martin & Penrice, 1998:48). There is little left of the original shopfronts but the names of the newspapers are still present on the façade of the building (Fig 61).



Fig 61: Signs on the façade of 20 Crossgate indicating the occupation by J&G Innes



## 5.0 Conclusion

Cupar has an auspicious and long-established history as a centre for trade. From its earliest origins as a Royal Burgh it was a magnet for buyers and sellers. The original street plan of the burgh has endured (Fig 62) but with some remodelling in the eastern entrance with the development of St Catherine Street in the early 1800s.

As the nineteenth century progressed, shops became well-established in Bonnygate and Crossgate, initially sitting alongside the regular street markets. Eventually weekly markets and annual fairs diminished as retailers preferred the warmth and security of a shop. With the arrival of the railway, Cupar became a particularly attractive place to live and work and shop numbers gradually increased and the type of shops available also expanded.



Fig 62: Aerial view of Cupar showing the dominant streets of Bonnygate, Crossgate and St Catherine Street

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The architecture of the townscape is influenced primarily by the dominant use of sandstone along with other traditional materials such as slate. The styles which prevail are modest in height and scale with some prominent, classically-inspired buildings. The shop architecture reflects the layers of businesses who have occupied the premises and stamped their particular requirements or fashions. Long-established family businesses have competed alongside national chains for space and customers. All have contributed to create a varied streetscape, a timeline of changes in shopping habits dating back through two centuries of trading.

While undoubtedly Cupar has lost numerous historic shopfronts, there are many which remain and are of architectural interest. Behind this are fascinating businesses which have left an enduring stamp on the burgh.

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- 24 August 1922
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23 February 1929

3 February 1951

*The Scotsman* 3 November 1950