

An Art Deco Society Self-Guided Walking Tour

Aberdeen



#4

Aberdeen

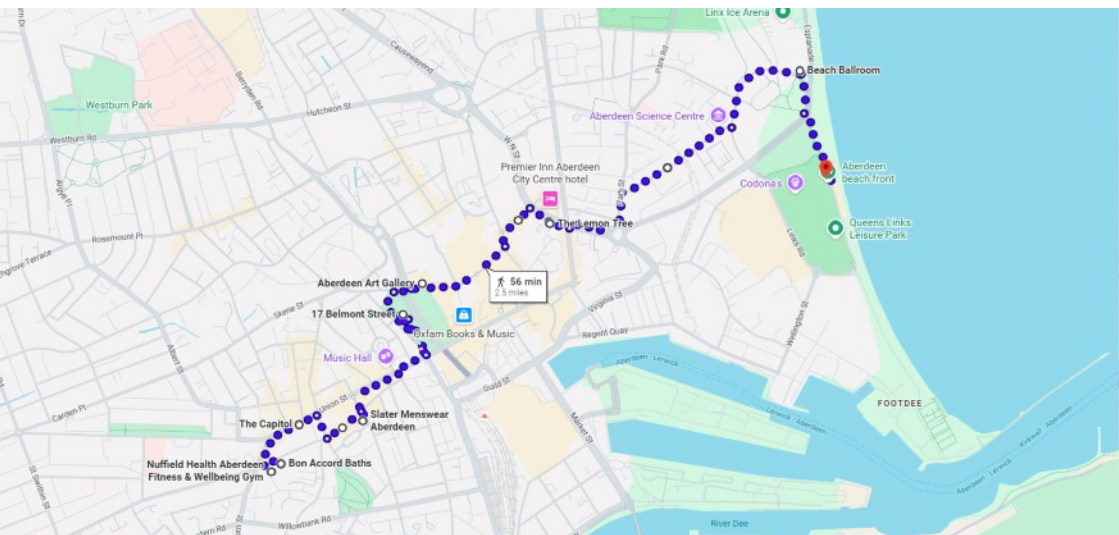
Welcome to the fourth in a series of self-guided walking tours from the Art Deco Society UK. This first part of this walk is approximately 1.5 miles long, and will take you on a route along Union Street with a loop around the city centre of Aberdeen stopping at 5 Art Deco gems, plus 3 bonus non-deco stops. The main bus and train stations are a 10 minute walk to the Bon Accord Baths starting point.

If you chose to continue with the extension walk from the Lemon Tree, you will visit the Esplanade and a further 2 Art Deco sites. This section of the walk is approximately an additional 1 and $\frac{3}{4}$ miles. There is ample parking at the Esplanade so you may chose to park there and walk or take a local bus or taxi to the Bon Accord Baths to start the tour, picking up your car at the end of the tour. Alternatively you can walk or take a bus back to the bus or train station.

Sites visited are:

1. The Bon Accord Baths
2. Nuffield Health Centre (formerly the Regent Cinema)
3. The Capitol
4. Slater's Menswear
5. The Lemon Tree
6. The Beach Pavilion
7. The Esplanade Arcade

Click map image to link to Googlemaps



I. Bon Accord Swim Centre

Start at Bon Accord Baths Justice Mill Ln, Aberdeen AB11 6EQ.

The building is not currently open to the public, except by arrangement or for events. It's being managed by Bon Accord Heritage, a registered charity working to restore and reopen the facility under community ownership.

Designed by architect Alexander McRobbie of the Aberdeen City Architects Department, construction on the huge swimming complex began in 1937, and it was opened on 30 August 1940. The structural system is reinforced concrete and masonry. The street elevation is faced in granite ashlar. The building houses a large swimming pool, health suite and public baths for the use of people with no indoor plumbing. The inside still retains many original features, including some 1930's gym equipment, but after closure in the 1990's the building fell into disrepair and has been heavily vandalised. It was Category B listed in 1991.

More information can be found on the save [Bon Accord website](#) and a video of the 1940 opening ceremony can be found on the [Nation Library of Scotland Website](#)



Walk south west on Justice Mill Lane for 1 minute to the Nuffield Health Centre

2. The Regent (Nuffield health centre)

This former cinema was originally the Regent and was then taken over by the Odeon. Opened in 1932, it took only 7 months to build. Designed by T Scott Sutherland and built by Pooles Theatre chain, it is built into a hill and the constructions involved to removal of a mill pond. The build cost £32 000 (approx. £2.6 million) and the auditorium could hold 2100 people. The Cinema finally closed in 2001. The building was C listed in 1998.

The exterior was originally decorated in bands of terracotta & neon, while the interior was neutral with blue, red & brown accents and gold velvet upholstery. Although designed for the 'talkies', it was also designed to convert back into a theatre in case cinema as an art form was only a passing fad!! Although cinema did prove popular, variety shows were occasionally staged there during the 30's.

From the Regent, turn right onto Holburn Street walk a couple of minutes and at the end of the street turn right on to Union street.

Walk for 3-4 minutes to the Capitol at 441 Union Street. For the best view of the frontage cross the road at the lights.



3. The Capitol (411 Union Street)

Built in 1933 by Clement George and Marshal Mckenzie the Capitol replaced Aberdeen's 1st cinema, the Electric Theatre (built in 1901). With a 2000 seat capacity, it was advertised as Aberdeen's wonder cinema. It had a mezzanine tea lounge and a Compton organ, as well as state of the art holophane lighting, one of the first installations of its kind in the UK. This apparently gave 17000 colour combinations which could be projected in time to music.

The last word in glamour, the original colour scheme was pale blue and silver to reflect the sea, but after receiving complaints it was too cold, it was redecorated in purple and gold. The ladies toilets had Hollywood style fluted makeup tables in black, cream and mint green (one of our local members assures us that the ladies toilet fittings were still in situ in the early 2000's when she went clubbing there, and it was like walking onto a Hollywood film set!). The exterior was outlined in neon, and floodlight in white at night in the German 'night architecture' style'.



Closed as a cinema in the 50's, it became a music venue and then a club in 2002. By 2010 it was threatened with demolition, and permission was granted to build a 7 storey hotel. However a more sympathetic renovation was carried out in 2016, retaining all original foyer decorations and the tea room. The proscenium and organ were also salvaged, but are not currently on display. The building is now an office block. The building is open Monday to Friday if you would like to see the lobby. If it is not open, the beautiful lights can still be seen through the glass doors.

Aberdeen public library holds a copy of the souvenir opening brochure and the Kay family, descendants of the original owners, still have the gold key which opened the cinema on it's inauguration.

Next stop 9 minute walk approximately. Walk down Union street for approximately 4 mins, turn right down Bon Accord Terrace (2 mins), then turn left on to Bon Accord Street. Walk along Bon Accord street (in the opposite direction to the Bon Accord Baths) for approximately 3 mins. Slaters Menswear takes up the last block on the road and the frontage is on the corner.

4. Slaters Menswear (10 Bon-Accord St)



Formerly Jackson's car garage and showroom, it was started in 1933 and finished in 1937. Built by Mackenzie of Marshal Mackenzie (same firm of architects that designed the Capitol) this building is now B listed. This is a rare example of Granite built art deco with no other material used as decoration. Still retaining some original windows, the main feature is the wonderful original clock.

10 minute walk to next location. Walk back down Bon Accord Street towards Union Street. Turn right on to Union Street and cross to the opposite side. Walk for 4 minutes and turn right into Union Terrace Gardens. Walk through Union Terrace Gardens. (This is an opportunity for a toilet stop.)

Bonus stop 1: Union Terrace Gardens.

These reopened at the end of 2022 after a £28 million refurbishment as part of the Aberdeen masterplan to invigorate Union Street and the beachfront and encourage accessibility, walking and cycling. Take some time to enjoy the gardens if it's a nice day.

Walk up the steps at the other end of the gardens onto Rosemount Viaduct (wheelchair users or those with mobility issues may have to go back up the ramp on to Union Street, walk round the upper road, Union Terrace, and turn right on to Rosemount Viaduct.) At the top of the steps out of the gardens turn right and walk along Rosemount Viaduct on to Schoolhill, past Aberdeen Art Gallery.

Bonus stop 2: Aberdeen Art Gallery.

Not Art Deco, but another Marshal Mackenzie designed building, opened in 1885 and extended in the 1920's. Excellent gallery, nice café - well worth a visit if you have time. [The Gallery website](#) has interesting videos of the 1920's renovation.



Continue following Schoolhill round to Upperkirkgate, passing Marischal College on your right.

Bonus stop 3: Marischal College And Aberdeen Town House.

Built between 1835 and the early 1900's. Owned by university of Aberdeen, it's been leased by and now houses Aberdeen city council. The college was founded in 1593, the 2nd college in Scotland not affiliated with the catholic church (after Edinburgh) and was founded originally to train post-reformation ministers. Urban legend has it that it was Hitlers favourite UK building and would have been his residence had he won WWII!

From Upperkirkgate, turn left on to Gallowgate, then right on to Littlejohn Street. Walk to the end of the street and turn right on to W N St (A956). Walk 1 min.

5. The Lemon Tree

Described as 'international style', this was built in 1936/7 as the St Katherines club by the Young Women' Christian association. It's been a pub, a community arts group and a Vegetarian restaurant and is now a well-known music venue.

There is a proposal to develop it, designed by Richard Murphy architect, as part of the 'masterplan' which also saw the redevelopment of the gardens. The current Art Deco frontage will be retained, but sadly will become the rear entrance/stage door and the extension and little cottage at the back (down Shoe Lane) will be demolished and replaced by a glass block main entrance fronting onto a newly developed square.

If you would like to stop the tour at this point, walk up Shoe Lane and complete a circuit round Marischal College back to the Art Gallery and Union Street.



WALK EXTENSION TO BEACH BALLROOM AND ESPLANADE

An additional 60 - 90 minutes will be required for this extension.

Leaving the Lemon Tree, cross the road and continue to walk along W N St (A956) towards the roundabout. Take the first exit, on to Park Street. After a couple of minutes turn right on to Constitution Street. Walk for approximately 15 minutes until you reach a T junction. Turn left on to Links Road. Follow links road for approximately 7 minutes until you get to the Beach Ballroom.

6. The Beach Ballroom: Check for opening times on their website. You can book afternoon tea and check event listings online.

In the mid 1920's a competition was held to design a ballroom as part of the 'beach improvement scheme'. The winning design, by Thomas Roberts & Hume of Bathgate, cost £50 000 to build and is of brick and stone construction with buff faience cladding. It opened with a masked ball and carnival on 3rd May 1929. With it's hexagonal ballroom with a steel sprung floor, it was famed as one of the best ballrooms in Scotland and was a popular attraction in the 30's and 40's. Further developed with the addition of the Star Ballroom in the early 60's, the ballroom hosted a number of famous bands in the 50's and 60's, including the Beatles. Now a category B listed building and sill owned and operated by the council, it was sympathetically renovated after a fire in the early 90's. A further extension and refurbishment is planned for the centennial in 2029, hopefully uncovering the original pyramidal roof which was lowered during one of the previous refurbishments.



7. 1930's Shop Parade – a little way along the esplanade from the Beach Ballroom is a parade of 1930's shops, hosting café's and ice cream shops. Wander along for a well-earned coffee, lunch or ice cream cone!

Sadly, there is little information on these buildings. In 1929, John Henry Illes built a Pleasure Park behind the arcade. Illes was an amusement entrepreneur originally from Manchester and was involved in several amusement parks around Britain. During a visit to New York he obtained the European rights to the design of the latest roller coasters. He built the Scenic Railway roller coaster in Aberdeen; it rose 100 feet in the air at its highest point, but was destroyed by fire in 1940. Other attractions included rides such as The Caterpillar, The Whip, Water Dodgems, and the Brooklyn Racers (petrol driven cars). It's unclear if the shops were built as part of the amusement park, but they were built around the same time.



Further Afield

We hope you have enjoyed this little tour around Aberdeen. The route in for this walk is necessarily selective, but Aberdeen and surrounding area has a surprising number of art deco buildings. If you would like to discover further buildings in the area, the below are recommended:

The Rosemont Buildings (AB25 2AD) - municipal flats completed in 1946

Harlaw Academy (AB10 1RG) - 1930's school building

The Douglas Hotel (AB11 5EL) - built in 1937 and still operating as a hotel

Northern Hotel (AB25 3DH) - A former hotel, currently unused.

Nearby Stonehaven (AB39 2RD) is a lovely town to visit and boasts an art deco lido (offering heated sea water swimming April - September and weekend only cold water swims in winter. Wetsuits mandatory!). You can have an Indian meal in the old Carron tea rooms and admire Scarth Craig, an ex-telephone exchange now sympathetically converted into a private home.

And finally, Tarlair Lido (AB44 1AE) is an hour's drive up the coast.

If you'd like to read a bit more about art deco in Aberdeen, there's an [article on our website](#) that might be of interest.





The Tarlair Lido Pavilion - image Wikipedia creative commons

This guide issued by the Art Deco Society and is not affiliated with any of the buildings listed. Any questions or queries regarding the guide should be directed to ADSUK and not to the owners of the buildings.

Not all buildings are open to the public, and therefore you should respect private property, be courteous to any staff encountered, and to never enter private property without prior permission.

Regarding the use of mobile phones whilst on the tour, please be aware to the potential of phone thefts, and to be vigilant at all times.

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