



# **Peebles**

## *Town Trail Guide*





### INTRODUCTION

The Peebles Town Trail has been set up by Scottish Borders Council and Scottish Borders Tourist Board. The aim is to provide you with an added dimension to local history and give a flavour of the town's development.

The name Peebles probably derives from the ancient Cumbric (an early form of Welsh) word *Pebyl*, meaning "a place where tents are pitched".

Approximately 4 km (2½ miles) long, the Trail should take about 2 hours to complete. Those with less time to spare may wish to reduce this by referring to the map in the centre pages.

In order to guide you, numbered plaques are sited along the route at specific points of interest and information relating to them can be found within this leaflet. As some of the sites along the Walk are houses, we ask you to respect the owners' privacy.

We hope you will enjoy walking around the Town Trail and trust that you will have a pleasant stay in Peebles.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historic core of Peebles – the Old Town - lies to the west of the junction of the River Tweed and Eddleston Water. By the reign of King David I (1124-53) Peebles was already a Royal Burgh. King William I (1165-1214) “The Lion”, confirmed that the two chief courts of justice were to be held annually either in Edinburgh or Peebles.

During the Wars of Independence, King Edward I of England visited Peebles in 1301 and 1306. Edward appointed his man - William de Dureme - sheriff in place of Sir Simon Fraser of Neidpath, who had joined with William Wallace in his attempt to free Scotland.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries many visits were made to the town by the monarchy, King James III in particular was a frequent visitor. Peebles was relatively untouched by the conflicts - both internal and external - that characterised life in the Borders at that time. There were however three major events in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In late 1549, Peebles was almost completely razed by the English: in April 1585 the population of the Borders was directed by King James VI to meet at Peebles in May in an attempt to halt the “*crimes committed on the borders*” i.e. the reiving or cross border raids and, from 1650 – 51, Cromwell’s Army occupied the town.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century was not a good time for Peebles as poverty and hunger were common in the Burgh. In 1741, 1774 and again in 1783 the council found it necessary to purchase food for the inhabitants. The Industrial Revolution did not immediately affect Peebles and recovery from these dark years was slow.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of progress from a poor start when the town was described in 1801 as being “*stagnant and almost lifeless*”, due in no small way to the privations of the previous century. The arrival of the Railway in 1855 brought an increase in trade and the growth of industry brought a deal of prosperity and expansion. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the increased ownership of the motor car after the Second World War, led to an improved road network and the line closed in 1962.

Today, Peebles is the third largest town in the Borders and occupies both banks of the River Tweed. The road network enables people to travel easily to Edinburgh or elsewhere in the Borders. Through all the changes of recent years, Peebles still retains its historic layout and there is much to interest the visitor.

It is recommended that you should start the Peebles Town Trail at the symbolic centre of a Scottish market town, the Mercat Cross.

**MERCAT CROSS.** Situated in Eastgate (formerly Cross Gate), the Mercat Cross of Peebles confirms the town's former trading status. Around the Cross, public markets would be held, proclamations made to the people of the Burgh and criminals punished. In 1406, Sir Richard Umfraville, Vice-Admiral of England, attacked the town on market-day and stole the goods on sale. In an account of the event, it was reported that he "*made great spoil of the wares there collected, causing his men to measure out the cloth with their bows and spears*". In 1524, James Tweedie and his accomplices "*appeared in their shirts, to make confession of and crave forgiveness for, the barbarous murder of John, Lord Fleming*" but we do not know if they received any other punishment.

The traditional Peebles market day was a Tuesday and by the 1560s, there were five annual fairs held in the town and by 1770, there were seven.



*Mercat Cross*

The Cross of Peebles is an unusual design. The shaft is octagonal with a capital decorated with rich carvings depicting fish and strawberries. These are taken from the Arms of Peebles and the Fraser of Neidpath family respectively. A four-faced sundial and a wind-vane were added to the top of the Cross to celebrate the restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660.

In 1807, the Mercat Cross was in such a ruinous condition that the council ordered its removal. Luckily it was not disposed of, as the town's people were opposed to it being removed at all. In 1858 it was returned to the council and placed in the quadrangle of the Chambers Institution (21). It was re-erected on its former site at the junction of High Street, Northgate and Eastgate in 1895 and was moved slightly to the east in 1965. Today the Cross may have lost its meaning as a trading centre but the people of Peebles are still proud of the landmark.

Walk along the right hand (north) side of High Street.

#### **HIGH STREET** (north side)

The '*new town*' centred on High Street, was developed from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The street level that you see today is lower than it was in the past. In 1846, High Street was lowered by almost 1m (3 feet) drains were built, projecting stairs removed and pavements laid. Opposite the Chambers Institution (21) there is a close called Dean's Wynd. This used to connect the Dean's House - which was located near this spot - with the Cross Kirk via Bridgegate. Behind numbers 18 - 20 is the site of the Burgh killing-house dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century or before. This continued in use until 1908 and is now an open yard but you can still see evidence of the lean-to slaughter booths

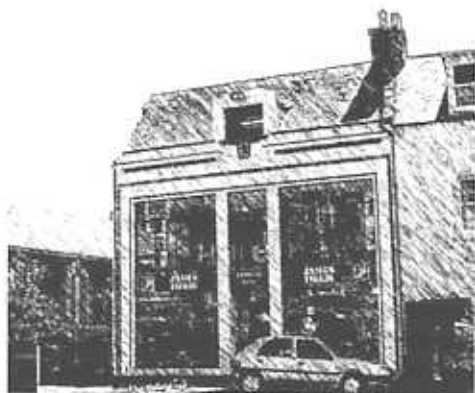
**24 - 28 HIGH STREET (1).** This building - which is opposite the Tourist Information Centre - was built for the Turnbull family in 1724 and the family owned the building and carried out their trade as bakers for seven generations. At first floor level you will see a carved stone panel with a pair of wooden peels (shovels) a scuffle (mop) and two figure 4s, these are the traditional symbols used by baxters (bakers). Below is the inscription "God provides a rich inheritans: 1724: W.T.". Immediately to the left is a shop, which at one time was where the local militia was housed and prisoners held before the burgh prison was built at the end of High Street. By entering the close, you can see some old parts of the building at the rear.



*St Michaels Wynd (2)*

Go down the wynd to the Eddleston Water, locally called The Cuddy. Here there was a ford across The Cuddy and a port - or entrance - through the town wall.

Walk along the river side downstream towards the Cuddy<sup>2</sup> Bridge. The original bridge was replaced in 1857 after four centuries of spanning The Cuddy. The bridge you see today was built in 1984 and even though it is a modern bridge, its arched concrete structure is faced with whinstone to blend in with the surrounding buildings. Walk up the steps at the side of the bridge and turn left. *Those with push chairs or wheel chairs should return up St Michael's Wynd and turn right to head along High Street.*



*A Shoe Shop (1)*

**ST MICHAEL'S WYND (2).** Half way along High Street between numbers 48 and 50, which date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, St Michael's Wynd makes its way towards the Cuddy Pool on Eddleston Water<sup>1</sup>. Notice the mock cannon water spouts and the slightly projecting second floor. The three dormers with gablets at roof level have carved finials - a star, a thistle and a crescent - giving a 17<sup>th</sup> century feel. If you look above the entrance to St Michael's Wynd, you will see a fine sundial from which Greenwich Solar Time can be read.

<sup>1</sup> *Early records refer to this as the Peebles Water.*

<sup>2</sup> *Cuddy - from Dutch 'kajute', a small room built into the underside of a bridge so that a suspected witch could be held above running water.*

**BANK HOUSE (3).** On your left at the end of High Street is a rather unassuming building on the corner. It is built on the site of the Chapel of the Virgin, which dated from the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. King David II, by charter in 1367, gave to

*"...the chapel of Saint Mary newly founded with the Burgh...our mill of Innerlethane..."*

The chapel was demolished in 1780, at which time the '*Peebles Silver Arrow*' was discovered where it had been hidden in order to save it from being carried off as booty by Cromwell's troops when they occupied the town in 1650 - 51. The Royal Company of Archers<sup>3</sup> used to meet annually to compete for this prize, although they now meet only every six years. Until the Town House (20) was built in 1753, Bank House was a meeting place for the Town Council. More recently, it was to this house that the author of '*The 39 Steps*', John Buchan, paid many visits and his sister (who wrote under the name O. Douglas) lived and wrote from here. Unfortunately, the building was partly demolished in 1975 to allow the Cuddy Bridge to be widened.

At this end of High Street, at a point close to the road junction stood the West Port. This port was fortified by a building known as '*The Steeple*', which was built between 1488 and 1496. It was built adjoining the chapel and for many years, served as the town jail and a meeting place for the Town Council. The construction of the Town House (20) in 1753 saw the removal of the Steeple in 1776 and no trace remains but there is a plan in the Chambers Institution (21).

<sup>3</sup> *Royal Company of Archers: the monarch's official Scottish body guard.*

**PARISH CHURCH (4).** The Parish Church is built on Castlehill, site of Peebles Castle. The site occupies the land immediately at the junction of the Eddleston Water and the River Tweed. In 1783, a church was built here and was dedicated the following year when the first minister, Dr Dalgleish, said "*I dedicate our new church, called St Andrew, to the service of God*". It was demolished on 23 April 1885 and the present imposing building took its place. This building terminates the view to the west from High Street and has a wonderful crown steeple on the corner. If you look up, you will see the Burgh Arms carved in stone. This panel was saved when the 18<sup>th</sup> century church was demolished.



*Parish Church (4)*

On the right hand side at the foot of the steps is Peebles Sheriff Court, with its tall octagonal chimneys, which was built in 1848. Here also was the Burgh Prison. The town's jail had been located in the '*Steeple*' but in the early months of 1775 a vault on the north side of High Street, opposite the Town House, was purchased to serve as a jail. The vault proved to be unsatisfactory as inmates were frequently being supplied with food and alcoholic drink by the town's people.

Facing you on the opposite side of the street as you stand on the corner of High Street is the three storey former Caledonian Railway Hotel, which was built in 1886. Until its closure in 1954, the Caledonian Railway Station was located just over the River Tweed. Built as the hotel for passengers of that railway company, the ground floor is now used as a newsagent's shop. You should notice the fine Dutch gabled chimney stack with its *oculus*<sup>4</sup> window, fine leaded windows and carved stone panels.

Walk across High Street towards Tweed Bridge.

**TWEED BRIDGE (5).** Like the Cuddy Bridge, there has been a stone bridge over the River Tweed at this point since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which probably replaced an earlier wooden structure. Between the destruction of the medieval bridge at Roxburgh in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the construction in 1754 of a bridge at Kelso, some 67km (42.5 miles) downstream, there were no bridges across the Tweed between here and Berwick.



*Tweed Bridge (5)*

In November 1628, it was decided that a port should be built on the bridge to guard the western entrance to the town. The bridge was lengthened by three arches in 1799, widened by 4m (13 feet) in 1834 and by a further 5.75m (19 feet) in 1900 to its present width of some 12.25m (40 feet) - much wider than its original 2.5m (8 feet) width. The dolphin lamps on the bridge are contemporary with

the 1900 widening. Today, the bridge still forms an essential transport artery to the town.

From the town side of the bridge, turn left down Port Brae and walk under the bridge. From beneath the bridge it is quite easy to see the evidence of the various widenings, the earliest arches perhaps being from the late 1460s. Continue upstream to the peninsula below Castle Hill.

**PEEBLES SWIMMING POOL (6).** On the lower ground near the river is Peebles Swimming Pool, designed in 1983 by the Edinburgh architects Morris & Steedman. If you have time, the pool provides an excellent opportunity for a relaxing swim. The pool occupies the site where the Rood Mill was located which was first mentioned in town records in 1461. This grain mill was converted to a *waulking*<sup>5</sup> mill in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it continued in use until it was burned down in 1965. The water which powered the mill was diverted into the lade from the cauld which you can still see in the River Tweed.

On the higher ground to your right is the site of the town's Royal Castle, which was built during the reign of King David I (1124 - 1153). It was in Peebles that his son, Henry, drowned in 1152. The prince was buried in Kelso Abbey, near the Royal Castle of Roxburgh. The Castle guarded the approach to the Old Town from the south (over Tweed Bridge) and from the east (over the Tree Bridge). Protection would also have been given to the 'new' town which had begun to be built to the east sometime in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> *Oculus*: a lens shaped opening.

<sup>5</sup> *Waulking* - the process of shrinking cloth by beating or pressing.

The castle was probably deliberately demolished by the Scots during the Wars of Independence in order that it did not fall into the hands of the English. After 1327, the castle no longer appears in official documents and this would seem to indicate the time of demolition. Between the removal of the final remains of the Castle in 1685 and construction of the first parish church in 1783, the ground was used as a bowling green.

In 1828 a local gas company was formed in the town and the council decided to install gas street lamps. The first site suggested for the gas works was a part of the Old Town Green just over the Cuddy but it was decided to site the works behind the Parish Church. Here they remained until 1905, when an increase in gas use led to the works being re-sited to the east of the town - although these have since been removed.

Continue to the junction of the Cuddy and the Tweed and cross into Old Town via the footbridge. If you look up the Tweed, in the distance you can see the Fotheringham Bridge, named after a local resident who became Mayor of Johannesburg in 1937. He gifted the town money towards the construction of the bridge, which opened in 1953. Now turn right and head along Old Town Green.

**OLD TOWN (7).** Having crossed the footbridge, you are in the Old Town of Peebles. Head up the steep hill called Old Town Vennel (originally South Vennel) and you arrive at what would have been the Old Town's market place. Early plans show that the layout of the town was one street with houses lining the edge. The Abbot of Arbroath had lodgings directly opposite Old Town Vennel on the west corner of what is now Young Street. This was probably gifted to Arbroath Abbey for the use of the Abbot

or his representatives when visiting Cross Kirk (9). In return, the donor would hope for salvation and eternal life. The buildings of the Old Town have been replaced gradually over the centuries and the area has a different character to High Street.

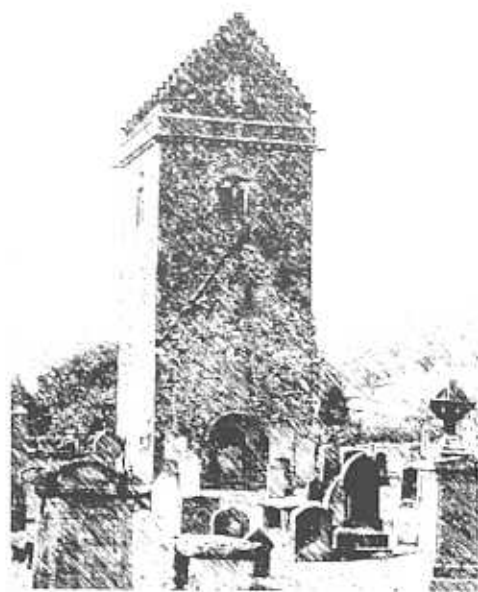
Turn left and continue towards the edge of the town until you reach St Andrew's Kirk<sup>6</sup>.

**ST ANDREW'S KIRK (8).** There was a church at Peebles at least as early as the first quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and it is recorded that the church of St Andrew of Peebles was founded in 1195. In 1549, Peebles was burnt by an English force, possibly under the Earl of Hertford - just as Dryburgh, Jedburgh, Kelso and Melrose abbeys and towns had been four years earlier - as part of Henry VIII of England's unsuccessful attempt to have Queen Mary marry his son. The church was so severely damaged that in 1560 the parishioners abandoned the building and transferred to Cross Kirk (9).

Between November 1650 and May 1651 the town was occupied by a force of 3000 Cromwellian soldiers. It is believed locally that the army's horses were stabled in the ruined St. Andrew's Kirk. No longer in use as a place of worship, stones from the kirk were taken in 1663 for the widening of Tweed Bridge. St Andrew's was 'restored' zealously by William Chambers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>6</sup> *Note that if you continue on this road, you arrive at NEIDPATH CASTLE. The history of the Castle can be traced back to the Wars of Independence in the 13th and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. Traces of the old garden and terraces are still there and a full history of this fascinating building is available at the Castle. No visit to Peebles would be complete without visiting Neidpath.*





St Andrew's Kirk (6)

which unfortunately had a detrimental effect on the historical value of the building. There are many fine old gravestones to be found in the graveyard.

Walk around the graveyard and then turn left towards town along St Andrew's Road and Cross Road until you reach Cross Kirk. This is probably the route of the path which linked the two. Both streets are now quiet residential streets with houses dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**CROSS KIRK (9).** The ruins of this church, together with some fragments of some domestic buildings, lie to the north of the town centre and would have been outside the limits of the medieval burgh. The kirk was named after a cross which had been found on the site in 1261. The 14<sup>th</sup> century chronicler Fordoun gave an account of the probable events:



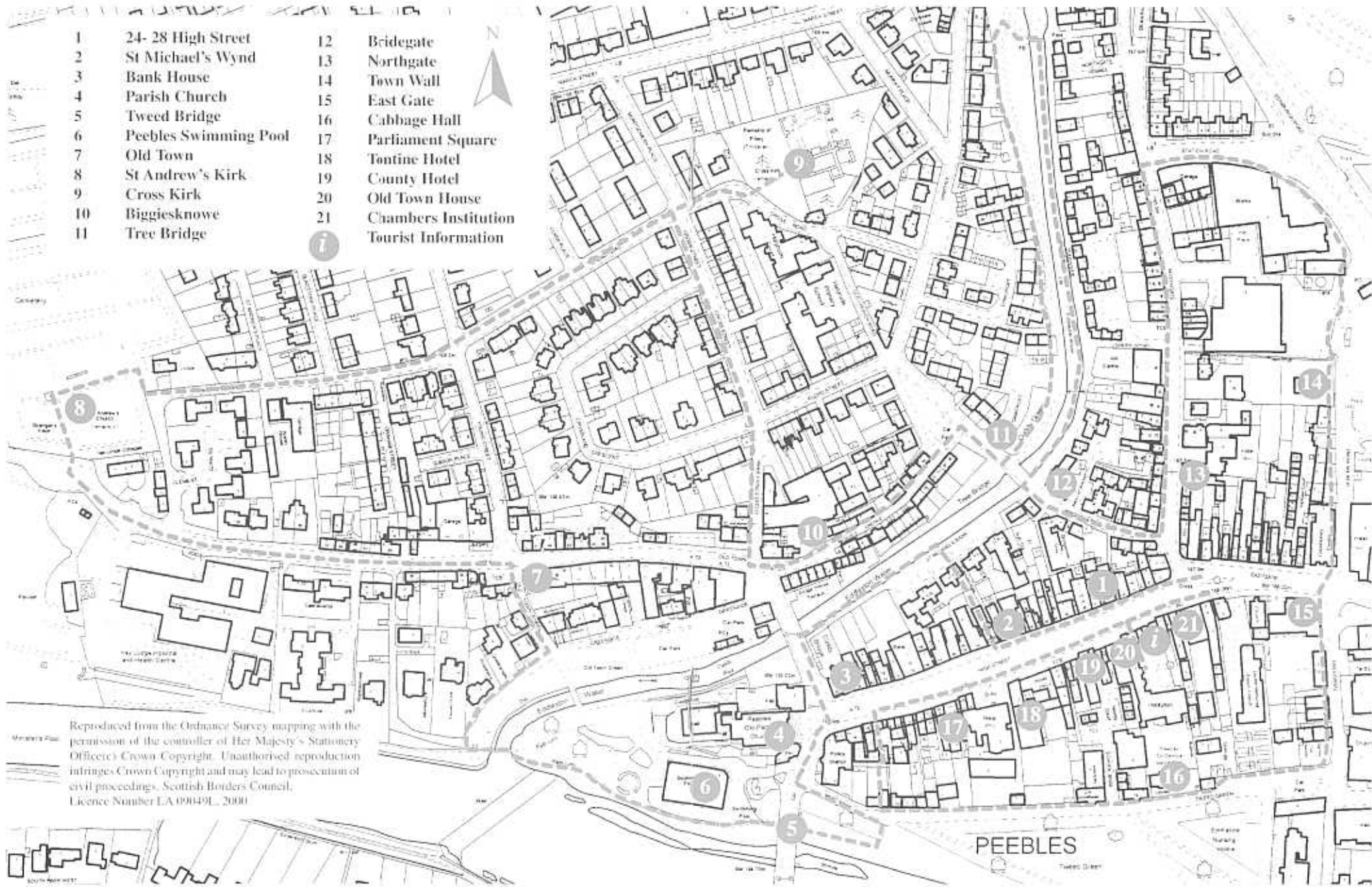
A Cross Kirk (9)

*"...In the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Alexander [III] a magnificent and venerable cross was found at Peebles... on the outside of the stone was carved 'the place of Saint Nicholas the Bishop' ('locus sancti Nicolai episcopi')...the King on the advice of the Bishop of Glasgow caused a handsome church to be built there in honour of God and of Holy Rood" .*

It is possible that the recording of the inscription is incorrect but there is now no way to check this. It may be that the real inscription was NEITANOS SACREDOS or "Neitan the Priest [Bishop]" as a stone with this ancient inscription was found in a wall in Old Town. This stone is now to be found in the Tweeddale Museum in the Chambers Institution (21).

In 1474 the Kirk became a house of Trinitarian friars, founded by King James III. The Trinitarian Order (or 'Red Friars') was founded in 1198 and was dedicated to obtaining the release of Christian prisoners from the Saracens. Along with St Andrew's, Cross Kirk was razed in 1549 by the Earl of Hertford and was ruinous eleven years later when the friars were dispersed. Cross Kirk was used as the parish church for Peebles between 1560 and 1784 when the site was

<sup>2</sup> *Holy Rood - The holy cross.*



- |    |                       |    |                      |
|----|-----------------------|----|----------------------|
| 1  | 24- 28 High Street    | 12 | Bridgegate           |
| 2  | St Michael's Wynd     | 13 | Northgate            |
| 3  | Bank House            | 14 | Town Wall            |
| 4  | Parish Church         | 15 | East Gate            |
| 5  | Tweed Bridge          | 16 | Cabbage Hall         |
| 6  | Peebles Swimming Pool | 17 | Parliament Square    |
| 7  | Old Town              | 18 | Tontine Hotel        |
| 8  | St Andrew's Kirk      | 19 | County Hotel         |
| 9  | Cross Kirk            | 20 | Old Town House       |
| 10 | Biggiesknowe          | 21 | Chambers Institution |
| 11 | Tree Bridge           |    | Tourist Information  |

Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey mapping with the permission of the controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office(s) Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution of civil proceedings. Scottish Borders Council, Licence Number EA 09049L, 2000

finally abandoned<sup>8</sup>. It then fell rapidly into disrepair before being taken into government guardianship in 1925 and it is now a Historic Scotland monument.

From Cross Kirk, return to Cross Street and turn left downhill towards Old Town. This should bring you to the end of Biggiesknowe on your left, into which you should turn.

**TREE BRIDGE (11).** Before the Cuddy Bridge was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Tree Bridge was the main entry point to Peebles from the west, along with the ford at St Michael's Wynd. Even though the bridge you see before you today is modern (it dates from 1994) the old name is still used. As was common in Scottish market towns, there was a toll house at the principal entrances to the town. Remains were found in the late 1980s of one such toll house near the east end of the bridge. In the days before rail and road transport, cattle were moved along drove roads to get them to markets. Tree Bridge lay on one of these drove roads that came from Falkirk beside the River Forth.

Staying on this side of the river, walk upstream across Cuddy Green.

This area of the town was associated with weaving for many years and mechanisation changed weaving into a moderately sized and efficient industry. The two main weaving mills were called Tweedside and Damdale Mills, the latter of which was built here. Demands changed over time and the Damdale Mill was demolished in 1968 to make way for housing. Prior to the building of Damdale Mill, the town's Old Corn Mill was sited here. The earliest surviving reference to the corn mill is in the reign of Alexander II (1214-49) when he gifted the hospital of *Solva* (Soutra<sup>9</sup>) a quantity of meal yearly from the mill of Peebles. There is a



*Cuddy Bridge (11)*

plan of the Old Corn Mill in the Chambers Institution (21).

Continue for about 400m until you reach the footbridge called Cuddyside Iron Footbridge. This simple bridge crosses at one of the narrower points of the river. From it you can see the old ford by which river crossings could be made until recent times. Return downstream by Cuddyside to Tree Bridge and the end of Bridgegate.

**BRIDGEGATE (12).** Pronounced Briggate, this street leads from Eddleston Water to Northgate. It derives its name from the Tree Bridge across the Eddleston Water. Here was the tolbooth of Peebles, the first mention of which was in 1487. This is the only medieval tolbooth site in the country which has been excavated. The ground floor plan comprised two rooms covering an area at least 12 metres (40 feet) long by 5 metres (16 feet 6 inches)

<sup>8</sup> *Even before this, in the 1650s and 60s, stones were being removed from the Kirk to Tweed Bridge (5).*

<sup>9</sup> *Soutra - the site of a medieval hospital which lies to the west of the A68 on the northern boundary of the Scottish Borders.*

wide. Access to the upper floor (where there was a council chamber and other public offices) would have been by an external stair. It was common for the basements of tolbooths to be rented out for storage or shops but Peebles is curious in that the basement was used as a tannery in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century.

From 1570, the tolbooth was served as a schoolhouse during the Beltane fair<sup>10</sup>. The schoolmaster was ordered by the council to “wait upon the bairns and not go hunting or pursue other pleasures without licence from the aldermen”. As the school day started at six in the morning and finished at six in the evening, six days a week, it seems unlikely that the master would have had much time for ‘hunting or other pleasures’.

Within Mint Close - on the right at the top of Bridgegate - was Dr Cockburn's School, which was open from 1810 to 1840. This later became the house of Dr Robert Craig. One of his patients was an Irishman called William Hare who later gained notoriety as the partner of William Burke. After a series of grave-robbings and murders in order to supply the Medical School in Edinburgh, they were both caught. Hare gave King's Evidence (thus escaping the death penalty) and told all he knew. As a result of the evidence given by Hare, Burke was hanged in Edinburgh.

The house at the end of the street on the right is called Cunzie<sup>11</sup> Neuk, which literally means ‘coin corner’.

Turn left into Northgate.

<sup>10</sup> *The right to hold the Beltane Fair was granted in 1621. It was to be held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of May and was to continue for 48 hours. The modern Beltane Festival was re-introduced in 1899 and takes place in mid June.*

**NORTHGATE** (13). Leading directly to the northern port of the town, Northgate was the main entrance to Peebles from Edinburgh prior to the closure of the railway in 1962. Number 5 - 7 was once the home of Mungo Park, the Borders born explorer of Africa. As a doctor of medicine, he practised in the town from 1801-04. The door handles are richly detailed in an ‘art nouveau’ style<sup>12</sup>. Next door is the Masonic Hall built in 1716. Above the door you can see the Latin inscription “*In Deo est Omnia Fides*” meaning “*In The Lord Is All My Trust*”.

It was in this street that the Abbot of Arbroath had a lodging (possibly on the site of the *Cross Keys Inn* or *Cleitum Inn*) which he and his followers could use during his visits to Cross Kirk (9). This inn itself is an L shaped building dating from 1693 although it has been altered several times over the years. Opposite the hotel are two shops which used to be the stables for the hotel.

Originally the inn was the town house for Walter Williamson of Cardrona and you can still see his initials picked out in the roof slates. The building was once called the Yett, which is the Scots word for ‘gate’, a name derived from its close position to the North Port in the Burgh Wall. Later, Sir Walter Scott based the character Meg Dodds from his novel “*St Ronan's Well*” on Meg Ritchie, one of the 18<sup>th</sup> century landladies. It is said that Meg Ritchie still haunts the building, especially her former bedchamber.

Further up the street on your right is a small public garden with an ornate water pump, which used to be a public drinking fountain. At the junction of Ushers Wynd and Northgate was the North Port. Although no trace exists of it today, there is a plan of it in the Chambers Institution (21). Continue up the street and turn right into Dean Park, which was formerly Station Road.

<sup>11</sup> Pronounced ‘cunie’.

As the name Station Road suggests, the North British Railway station was located here. This was another of the town's railway stations and brought passengers and freight from Edinburgh and the north. The railway came to Peebles when the line was opened formally in July 1855. In 1864 a branch line was built to Innerleithen and Galashiels. Due to the infamous 1960 Beeching review of the railway system, the line was closed in 1962 and part of the track bed later became a section of the Peebles to Edinburgh road.

Follow the road round to your right, going into the car park, which used to be the railway yard and there is now a market held here every Thursday. Here you will see one of the last reminders of the railway, a simple brick building with a wooden front, which was formerly a guards' shed.

**TOWN WALL.** (14). The town was divided into nominal quarters in 1465. These were based on the four principal streets of the time, Highgait, Crossgait, Northgait and Briggait. In 1569, Regent Moray urged "*the biggin of ane wall about the burgh to resist the invasioun of thevis*". The work was undertaken by a mason called Thomas Lauder in 1570, at which time the ports of the town were incorporated into the wall. The wall was to be built to a height of 4.25 metres (14 feet) and a thickness of 1.1 metres (3 feet 6 inches) and was to be built of stone and lime with a turf coping. Strict guidelines were imposed on the town for keeping the wall in good repair. To the rear of the car park, you can see a part of the town wall with the remains of a corner tower. Notice the gun port at pavement level. This is the last remaining section of the wall that used to surround Peebles.



*Northgate* (13)

In common with other towns in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Peebles suffered from the plague. There was an outbreak in 1605 but this seems to have been contained as the sick were ordered to remain in their own house on pain of death. When Edinburgh was affected in 1624 the council of Peebles exercised special precautions when admitting strangers to the town, indeed from 1572, anyone leaping the wall three times was condemned to death. Repairs to the town wall were undertaken and the ports were strictly watched from six in the morning until eight at night.

In 1649, an English army was in the area and the council ordered adjoining proprietors to carry out repairs and clear away rubbish from the outside face of the wall. The wall was repaired again in 1718 in response to the unsettled nature of the country after the 1715 Jacobite attempt to restore the Stuart monarchy. By 1791, the town wall was no longer required and it had already begun to be removed due to its poor state of repair.

Walk down Venlaw Road, following the line of the wall, until you reach Eastgate.

<sup>12</sup> *Art Nouveau – style of art & architecture dating from 1880-1914*

**EASTGATE (15).** Formerly the site of the East Port, this eastern gateway to the town was guarded by a barniken with 'artillery' mounted on top of it, which was built in 1488. This building was referred to variously as East Wark, Newark and the Crocehouse. The Port was badly damaged when the English razed the town in 1549. It was at least part ruinous in 1691 when it was reported:

*"The magistrats and counsell considring the great hazard that thair is in that old rotten volt of the East Port standing, quhich is sua rotten that considerable pairt thair of does fall and people old and young are in great hazard thairto".*



**Town Wall (14)**

Taking care, cross the street and walk down Tweed Brae. To the left, along Walkers Haugh, is the area called the Gytes, a word derived from the lade called a goit (or ditch). The lade powered a wool waulking mill which was abandoned in 1760 and was replaced by a new mill on the Eddleston Water. No trace of the mill exists today although there is a plan in the Chambers Institution (21). Turn right into Tweed Green. On the corner is the Old Rectory which was built in 1804 as the residence of the Grammar

School Rector. It was altered extensively in 1888.

Tweed Green is the town's common land and used to be outside the protection of the wall. In 1682 there was a serious riot in the town when the council decided to let out portions of Tweed Green. This aroused indignation amongst the inhabitants who would have been deprived of free grazing. On 1st March, while the council was sitting in the tolbooth, a large crowd assembled to protest against the proposals. Two of the protesters were imprisoned for their part in the demonstration. The day they were jailed, the prison was raided and the men freed. The following day, a further 300 rioters assembled at the Mercat Cross.

On the right, built on a terrace overlooking the green and approached by three flights of steps is the Leekie Memorial Church, which was designed in 1875 by the architects Peddie & Kinnear. The spire is 42m (146 feet) high and forms a landmark for the town. The former manse is now a private house called Tweed Villa.

**CABBAGE HALL (16).** This house has occupied this site since the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the name is quite distinctive. It is possibly derived from being built in the grounds of the Old Town House (20) perhaps on the vegetable garden. The house was at one time the schoolmaster's house.

Looking south towards the river, you can see Priorsford Bridge spanning the Tweed to Ninian's Haugh. This iron suspension bridge was erected by public subscription in 1905. The main span of the bridge is 29m (96 feet) with a span of 8m (28 feet) to each river bank. When the river is low, the foundations of the railway bridge can be seen close by downstream.

Half way along Tweed Green is School Brae. This was the site of the town's Postern Gate, the back gate to the town. After the wall was removed, two schools were constructed. The English School to the west was built in 1766 and the Grammar School (with a G over the side gate and a carved St Andrew's Cross above the central first floor window) to the east was built in 1812. If you look on the east gable wall of the Grammar School is a carved trefoil window. Both schools were in use until 1900.

Look up School Brae and you can see the former Corn Exchange. This was built in 1860 for the trade of corn from the surrounding area. Its useful life was short however, as the Caledonian Railway arrived in Peebles in 1864, the second railway to serve the town. There was no way in which the exchange could compete with the two railway companies and corn trading ceased shortly thereafter. The building still exists and is still called the Corn Exchange. The 'Labour Bell' can be seen on the building. This was rung at 6 and 10 o'clock in the morning, 2 o'clock in the afternoon and 8 o'clock in the evening. There is a collection of shops in School Brae where you can buy high quality craft goods.

Just before Port Brae - the hill that takes you up to the Tweed Bridge - turn right up the close called Stinking Stairs to enter



Old Grammar School (16)

Parliament Square. Those with prams or wheelchairs, please note that access to Parliament Square can be gained by continuing up Port Brae and returning along High Street for a short distance.

**PARLIAMENT SQUARE (17).** Accessed from Tweed Green via the 'Stinking Stairs', a name which may be a reference to the fact that a tannery and brewery were at one time located at the bottom of the close. If you continue up the close and up the stairs (please mind your head) you arrive in Parliament Square. This humble cobbled square is - according to local legend - the site of an emergency parliament following the capture of King David II<sup>13</sup> at the Battle of Neville's Cross on the outskirts of Durham on 17 October 1346. King David was imprisoned in the Tower of London and was not released until 1357. A more likely origin for the name is to commemorate the Union of the Parliaments of England and Scotland in 1707 as many of the buildings in the Square date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century but may be built on older foundations. The Square was re-cobbled and a paved surface laid by Scottish Borders Council in 1999 with financial assistance from the European Regional Development Fund.

Continue through the Square and pend until you arrive back on High Street.

### HIGH STREET (SOUTH SIDE)

**TONTINE HOTEL (18).** This hotel is the only building on High Street which is set back a substantial distance from the main building line. By doing this, a small open square is created. The hotel was built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is believed that French prisoners of the Napoleonic War were employed to construct the building. It opened

<sup>13</sup> King David II was the son of King Robert I, The Bruce.

for business in 1808 to provide additional accommodation when the Cleikum Inn became inadequate as a coaching inn. The hotel gets its name from the way in which it was funded, the tontine principle. The concept behind this is that a group of subscribers paid a subscription from which a dividend was paid. As each subscriber died, the dividend for the remainder increased until the last survivor took possession of the property. The public rooms are well proportioned and to the rear there is a fine bow window overlooking Tweed Green and the river.

In front of the hotel is a pink granite fountain dedicated to Professor John Veitch who was born in Biggiesknowe (10). Veitch was a much respected professor of logic at both St Andrews and Glasgow Universities. This memorial was at one time a public drinking fountain although it is long since disused.

On the opposite side of the street you can see the former Playhouse Cinema. Built in 1932 during the golden age of cinema, this is a simply detailed 'art deco'<sup>14</sup> building. So different from the distinctly Scottish architecture of the surrounding buildings, the former cinema has aged with the town and now does not look at all out of place. The advent of television in the 1950s and 60s saw cinema attendance decline and eventually led to the closure of the Playhouse and its conversion to a shop. You should now turn right to head along the south side of High Street.

**COUNTY HOTEL (19).** Dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was first known as the 'Harrow Inn', then 'The Commercial' before becoming the County. Like the Tontine, this was once a

<sup>14</sup> Art deco - style of architecture typical of the 1930s, characterised by its geometric shapes.

stage for the coaches to and from Edinburgh. The front of the building is simply a façade covering the older structural core. At the east end of the building on the ground floor is a barrel vaulted portion, indicative of a typical 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century structure. This type of house is called a 'bastle house', which comes from the French word *bastille*.

**OLD TOWN HOUSE (20).** In July 1749 the council, following the practice of the other Royal Burghs that "*have of late built new houses commonly called Town Houses*" decided to construct such a building in Peebles. An old property on the south side of High Street was purchased. The grounds of this property extended down to the town wall on Tweed Green. The Town House was duly built on the site in 1753. During the Napoleonic Wars, French prisoners of officer rank were held here.

The Burgh Arms are carved high up on the building. The carving has been done in reverse, indicating that it may have been copied from the stamp of the Burgh seal. The council was asked to sell the Town House in 1841 in order to build a new jail but they politely declined.

**CHAMBERS INSTITUTION (21).** This building is locally called the Queensberry Lodgings after the Queensberry branch of the Douglas family. William, second Earl of



Old Town House (20)



March, purchased the building in 1696. He had one son, also called William, who was born in the Lodging in December 1725 and eventually became the fourth Earl of March in 1778. Old Q as he was called, cared little for his properties and spent a great deal of his time in London living an extravagant life. Old Q died in 1810 and in spite of his lifestyle, he left personal property estimated at about £1,000,000.

Dr William Chambers (co-founder of the famous publishers) who was born in Biggiesknowe (10), gifted the building to the town in 1859. Chambers substantially altered the building and added to it to include a library, reading and study rooms and an art gallery for public use. These can all be accessed from the door in the corner on your right as you enter the quadrangle. Within is the 'Secret Room' - so called because it was closed to the public for many years. The room was opened to the public in 1990. Here you will find a reproduction of the marble frieze taken by Lord Elgin from the Parthenon in Athens. There is also a copy of the "Triumph of Alexander" dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chambers also had a "Great Hall" built which forms one side of the quadrangle and is entered separately. A further alteration to the building was carried out in 1912 when

the library was extended, funded by the Dunfermline born philanthropist Andrew Carnegie.

In the courtyard of the building is one of the finest war memorials in the Borders, dating from 1922. Brilliant mosaics based on a 12<sup>th</sup> century design surround the bronze tablets with the names of the dead.

Return now to High Street.

On the south side of High Street adjacent to these buildings in Peebles, this shop is probably built on much older foundations. These have been covered. We hope that you have enjoyed this trail and gained an insight into the town's history and architecture. We trust that you will return to Peebles in the near future.



*Chambers Institution (21)*

Scottish  
Borders  
COUNCIL



This project is part-financed by  
the European Regional Development Fund

Published in 2000 by the Department of Planning and Development  
Designed by the Graphic Design Section, Scottish Borders Council  
Printed in the Scottish Borders by Buccleuch Printers Hawick, 2000