

Andrew Davidson, Inverness Monumental Mason and Sculptor, 1841-1925

Inverness today prides itself on being labelled the capital of the Highland. It is certainly a key location in the Highland history of the Clan Davidson. A hundred years ago, Andrew Davidson, a native of the town was in his prime as one of the key sculptor/stonemasons in the Highlands. During the latter half of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, Andrew Davidson created some fine sculptures. Today, many examples of his work and that of the firm which he co-founded can be seen in Inverness and across the Highland region.

Andrew Davidson was born in Inverness, the son of Donald Davidson, a weaver. He started his career as a stonemason and later became a sculptor. He and his brother Donald Davidson [1830-1905] formed the business D & A Davidson which was based in Academy Street, Inverness. This firm created a reputation as quality stonemasons which continued to trade under this name long after the deaths of the founders. The firm's name tag frequently found inscribed at the base of many memorials in the kirk yards and cemeteries in Inverness and across Northern Scotland is a sign of how much in demand the firm was across this region.

At some stage, Andrew concentrates on his career as a sculptor. He travels, studies, and works in Rome, but Inverness is his true home. His work, and that of the firm, has stood the test of time. Inverness has recently successfully campaigned for restoration of the famous The Three Graces statue [*Faith, Hope, and Charity*] which used to sit on the roof of a former department store in Inverness until the late 1950s. The statue lay neglected in a council store for several years. It was then sold, and years later it was found in an Orkney garden; now restored and back on display [2011] at ground level, close to Ness Bank Kirk, Inverness overlooking the river.



The Three Graces Statue

This last year [2014], as part of the nationwide project to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the start of the First World War, the Inverness War Memorial in Cavill Gardens has been fully restored. This is a good example of one of

the public commissions undertaken by Andrew Davidson. Unfortunately and sadly, it has suffered from vandalism periodically over the years. Elsewhere, across Northern Scotland examples of other major war memorials created by the Davidsons can be found at Halkirk, Caithness, and Kyleakin, on Skye, Kiltarity, just north of Inverness. The Halkirk item is probably unique in that it features a woman and child rather than a fallen warrior.

Inverness War Memorial

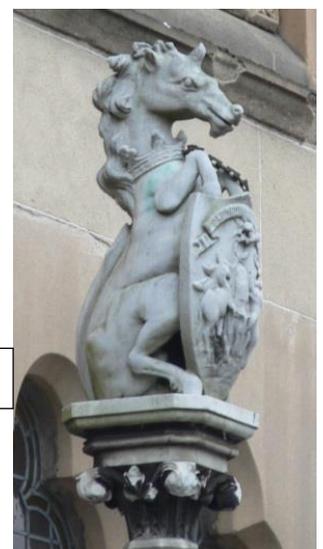


In Inverness, there are several other public examples of Andrew's craftsmanship to be found. Inside the Town House there is a bust of William Mackintosh, Provost of the Burgh in 1880; and inside St Andrew's Cathedral there is a spectacular marble pulpit, as well as bust of

Bishop Robert Eden, founder of the cathedral. Outside the Town House, the finely carved Unicorn and the Town Arms on top of the historic Mercat Cross has survived a century of the weather and pollution. At one time, another item by Andrew Davidson, the decorative Forbes fountain was also located outside the Town House. Sadly, this item has been removed to an isolated location in Ness Park where it is now barely recognisable, with no supporting signage. Perhaps his finest commission, so often photographed by visitors without them knowing the sculptor, is that of Flora Macdonald on Castle Hill, Inverness.

Unicorn and Armorial Shield on the Mercat Cross

We owe Andrew Davidson and his brother Donald, and the masons of their firm a great deal for the quality of their work still to be found in the kirk yards, and for the Andrew's fine work as a sculptor. Inverness can be rightly proud of this sculptor.



The Inverness Courier dated 10th April 1925 carried the following obituary.

Well-Known Sculptor: The late Mr Andrew Davidson

The town of Inverness has lost one of its oldest and best known-citizens by the death of Mr Andrew Davidson, sculptor, who has passed away in his eighty-fifth year. Mr Davidson was in failing health for a considerable time, but his friends had looked forward to meeting him on his return to Inverness in the summer. He died in Edinburgh, and his remains were interred in the Dean cemetery yesterday. Mr Davidson was a native of the town, to which, in his professional capacity, he brought no little honour. His sculptural work has been admired for design and execution, and is to be seen in all parts of the North of Scotland. Fine examples in Inverness are the Flora Macdonald monument on the Castle Hill, the marble font in the Cathedral, and the bust of the late Rev. Dr. Macdonald, of the High Church, in the Town Hall. These remain to keep Mr Davidson's memory green in his native town.

Flora Macdonald statue on Castle Hill



Mr Davidson and his late elder brother carried on the business of sculptors, under the name D. and A. Davidson for many years, and latterly the business has been in the hands of Mr Wm. Cumming, nephew of Messrs. Davidson. The firm has carried out many important missions in the north, including recently handsome memorials to heroes of the Great War. Mr Andrew Davidsons's artistic talent and skilful craftsmanship have been evidenced in all those works, and given the firm an outstanding position.



The late Mr Davidson spent much of his time away from Inverness. He did a great deal of his work in Rome, partly to facilitate his study of his art, and partly, we believe, in the interests of his health, which in the latter years of his long life was unequal to the changes and rigour of our climate. But he was always a loyal son of Clachnacuddin, familiar with its story and deeply interested in its welfare. Indeed he might be described as a typical Invernessian. His quiet, sane outlook, his modest manner which concealed wide knowledge and culture, his speech also, those of the best stamp of citizen of the old school.*

Bishop Robert Eden in St Andrew's Cathedral

Mr Davidson's antiquarian love was expressed in his interest in the old burying-grounds of Inverness, the Chapel Yard, and the High Churchyard, where he spent many an hour in discerning and deciphering the oldest stones, afterwards writing interesting notes on the subject in the columns of the "Courier". The need for improving and clearing these burial grounds was emphasised by Mr Davidson and no doubt the steps taken to that laudable end were due to his suggestion. It afforded him personal satisfaction to have seen the improvements carried out. Though never seeking office or position, Mr Davidson was a public-spirited townsman, a kindly unassuming friend, and interesting link with the old order of things. He is survived by Mrs Davidson, who is also a native of Inverness, and has the sympathy of many old friends in her loss.

* "son of Clachnacuddin" was a familiar way of saying 'a native of Inverness'

Shown below is an undated hand coloured photo postcard which includes three of the Davidson items in their original locations outside the Town House. *The Three Graces* looking down on the High Street, *The Unicorn* looking out from the top of the Mercat Cross immediately outside the Town House, and *The Forbes Fountain*.



The remains of *The Forbes Fountain* now located overlooking the river in Ness Park look rather forlorn, having lost all its original ornate superstructure. What one sees today bears little resemblance to what must have been a grand addition to the street landscape. These remains in this location seem somewhat out of place and with no context or explanation.



The remains of the Forbes Fountain in its new location in Ness Park.