



# Ghost Buildings of Inverness

**High Street:** The current Town House was built 1878 – 1882 and replaced an earlier Town House which was originally built in 1708 as a town house for Lord Lovat. Behind it was the Commercial Hotel which was where the Duke of Cumberland stayed after the Battle of Culloden and Boswell and Johnson stayed on a tour of the Highlands in 1773. In front of the Town House was once a large fountain presented to the town by a Dr G.F. Forbes in 1880. Only the base and fountain survived its removal for road widening and these were relocated to Ladies Walk, opposite Bellfield Park.



On the corner of Castle Street, opposite the Town House, stood the old YMCA building, built in 1868, and latterly Grant's Tartan And Tweed Warehouse. It was demolished in 1955 but parts of it were rescued, principally the figures of Faith, Hope and Charity which were on the top of the frontage. These were salvaged and subsequently sold and ended up in a garden in Orkney before being bought back to Inverness in 2011 and placed on the riverside by Ness Bank Church.



Another of the lost old buildings of note in the High Street was a property on the site of W.H. Smith. This was once owned by the father of Hugh Miller's wife before becoming in the late 1800s a bookshop and stationers.



**Falcon Square:** Inglis Street Methodist Chapel built 1868, demolished 1985. Not the first Methodist Chapel on this site, original built 1797 by the first Methodist minister in the North. By 1868 the congregation had outgrown the earlier chapel and this chapel built. The rose window alone is reputed to have cost £1,200 (£112,000 in today's money). This was salvaged when the chapel was demolished and is to be incorporated into the new Castle Experience.

The Playhouse Cinema was opened in 1929 and destroyed by fire in 1972. The auditorium had seating for 1400 and was one of the first cinemas to be built for sound. It had a tearoom that was turned into a fairyland every Christmas that was greatly missed when the cinema burnt down. Jimmy Nairn, the photographer, was manager from 1941 to 1972. Location of many important civic events involving royalty and Prime Ministers.

Images are from the Am Baile photographic archive on the Highlife Highland website, unless otherwise specified.

**Drill Hall:** Opened 1889, demolished Nov. 2023. Designed as the headquarters for the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders. The battalion was mobilised from here at the start of the First World War. At the time it was also the base for part of the Highland Mounted Brigade Field Ambulances. Subsequently used as a backpacker's hostel.



From the Inverness Courier 6th November 2023. Picture credit: James Mackenzie



**The Empire Theatre:** Built 1912, demolished 1970. Originally a cinema – the Central Hall Picture House – seating 1,100. When the Theatre Royal burnt down in 1931, the Central Hall was converted into a theatre and renamed in 1934. Many top acts performed here including Harry Lauder, Stanley Baxter, the Hollies and T Rex.



**La Scala Cinema:** Opened in 1913, closed in 2001. Had a capacity of 1000 but was subsequently sub-divided into 2 and then 3 screens. When first opened it had a fountain in front of the stage, a tea room and a ladies' writing room. The world premiere of the 1996 film Loch Ness, starring Ted Danson was staged here. The last film shown was Casablanca.



19th century Queensgate

**Queensgate:** The old post office building, designed by local architect, Alexander Ross, built 1888-1890. Damaged by the 1890 earthquake and demolished 1966.



**The Caledonian Hotel:** Original hotel built 1780, enlarged in the 1800s and demolished in 1966. Once the most fashionable place to stay in Inverness. In Norman Newton's book 'Lost Inverness' he describes its demolition as "bringing to an end an era of opulence and luxury unsurpassed anywhere in the Highlands". It entertained royalty, the aristocracy, movie and pop stars in its famous ballroom, which had 1760 lights.



**The Ness Bridge:** Like the castle there has been a bridge in this location since the 11<sup>th</sup> century. For the first 600 years there were a number of wooden bridges but a more permanent stone bridge was constructed in 1685. This was washed away in a flood in 1849 and a suspension bridge was erected in 1855. This itself was demolished in 1959 and the current bridge built.

Paul Sandby  
Royay Academy of Arts



**The Castle:** First castle built on this site, c.1057. Subsequently besieged, demolished and rebuilt numerous times, most notably by Robert the Bruce, Mary, Queen of Scots and Bonnie Prince Charlie. Current castle constructed during the 1830-40s. Features on the back of the recently replaced £50 note. Soon to be the Inverness Castle Experience - "The existing castle buildings and esplanade gardens are being transformed from their original use as the home of Inverness' prison and courts into a celebration of what makes the Highlands of Scotland a special place to live, work and visit".

**Northern Meeting Rooms:** The Rooms were built 1790 by the Northern Meeting Society, which was founded 2 years earlier to promote the cultural life of the area. Upstairs was a ballroom and the Society's annual ball was the highlight of the social calendar, even attracting royalty – Prince Albert in 1847 and Princess Margaret on numerous occasions in the 1950s. The Rooms were closed in 1962 and subsequently demolished.

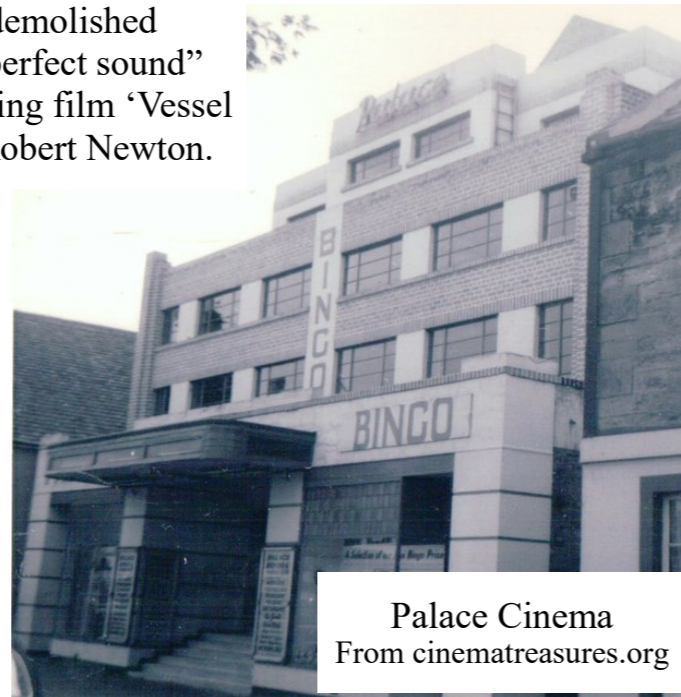


**Palace Cinema:** Opened 1938, bingo hall from 1963, demolished 2010. 1000 seat cinema. Billed as the "house with the perfect sound" and the only cinema on the west side of the river. Opening film 'Vessel of Wrath' with Charles Laughton, Elsa Lancaster and Robert Newton.

From www.arthurlloyd.co.uk



**Theatre Royal:** Opened 1882, seating for 800, destroyed by fire 1931.



Palace Cinema  
From cinematreasures.org



**Bridge Street:** Substantially altered in the 1960s when the road was widened and the latest road bridge built. Many of the buildings were hundreds of years old. Buildings adjacent to Bridge Street on Exchange Place (Castle Wynd) and Castle Street were also demolished at this time.