

The new buildings

By the turn of the millennium the old tram sheds and hangar had outlived their useful working lives and plans were made to rebuild the bus depot and build a new global headquarters for FirstGroup on the existing site.

HQ at King Street

It was a major task keeping the bus depot and Group headquarters operating whilst the new facilities were built around them. The old hangar was the first to go and the new bus depot built, whilst the HQ building was constructed alongside St Peter's Street.

In early **2010** the bus depot became operational and the old tram sheds were demolished, whilst the headquarters staff also moved in to their new offices.

Finally, the King Street building was fully refurbished into modern office facilities, and the new reception area opened off King Street through the original coach entrance to the barracks - a very fitting conclusion.

395 King Street today represents the best of the past and the brightest of the future where history will surely continue to be made.



The history of 395 King Street Aberdeen: 1862-2010



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Welcome to 395 King Street, Aberdeen. Today it is the global headquarters of FirstGroup plc, with a state of the art bus depot, but since being built in 1862 this has been a very interesting address.

Military occupation

In 1861 the Commissioners of Supply for the County of Aberdeen announced plans to build a depot for the Royal Aberdeenshire Highlanders - a volunteer regiment. It was to lie between 'Love Lane' (later St Peter's Street) to the North and Advocates Road (from the current site entrance to King's Crescent) to the South, facing onto King Street. It contained a large drill court - 370 feet long by 140 feet wide, and would be "of plain design but with a couple of towers at the angles giving it a baronial appearance". It was to be well landscaped as it is today. The design was by William Ramage, formerly assistant to renowned local architect Archibald Simpson.

At first, the drill court had sheds and open shelters along its sides, but they were soon converted to barrack rooms.

The depot was completed in 1862 but an outbreak of typhus in nearby Gallowgate and Causeway End saw the regiment sent to Fort George to complete their training.



In the mid 1870s the barracks were to be dispensed with, but in 1880 the regiment was enlarged with an extra 300 men and in 1882 became the 3rd Battalion the Gordon Highlanders.

In 1900/1901, during the Boer war, troops were sent from King Street to Cape Town, but in 1902 the Barracks reverted to their peacetime role.

In 1905, 21-year-old Pipe Major George Stewart McLennan (the youngest in the British Army) organised the first pipe band at the barracks.

Tram works

In 1912, the War Office relinquished the barracks and Aberdeen County Council prepared plans, in three phases, to eventually have a major workshop for the overhaul of trams and buses. However in 1914 when war was declared the army rented the barracks back from ACC for training soldiers.



Flats during housing shortage

Soon after the war, the tram sheds were erected, but in 1919 a severe housing shortage in Aberdeen saw the King Street building converted into 45 one, two & three roomed flats until 1932.

During this time bus and tram overhauling became centralised at King Street and required big extensions.

As the bus fleet grew, space became short and in 1937 the ground to the South of Advocates Road was earmarked by ACC for 'transport services'.

Work did not start until 1951 when an RAF hangar from Greenock was erected on the site "with heating, lighting and everything else necessary for the proper maintenance of transport bus services". Advocates Road through the site was eventually closed in 1956.

In 1958, the trams were phased out and King Street was given over entirely to the care of the Aberdeen Corporation fleet of 230 buses.

Change of ownership

In August 1975, Aberdeen Corporation became Grampian Regional Transport (GRT).

The old hangar was updated in the early 80s then in 1986, following de-regulation of the bus services GRT became GRT Ltd. In January 1989 the management and employee buyout of the company was completed by Moir Lockhead and his team. The company became GRT Holdings plc. Following a merger with Badgerline plc, FirstBus plc was formed in 1995 evolving into FirstGroup plc, now the world's largest surface public transport operator, with bus and rail interests in the UK, Europe and America.



But not all Gordon Highlanders moved out...

In 1915, Captain Beaton, an army officer during World War 1, returned from the trenches in France after sustaining head injuries. After treatment and recuperation he was later transferred to King Street barracks. In March 1918 he received his orders posting him back to France, but Captain Beaton had endured enough. The following morning his body was found hanging in the south east turret of the building, which at the time was used as the Officers' Mess. The Captain has since been known to haunt the building and has been spotted in full regimental dress by members of staff on several occasions.

