

2026 – v1

**JOHN SKINNER & SON,
BOATBUILDERS,
FOOTDEE, ABERDEEN,
1834 TO 1917.**



STANLEY BRUCE

Front Cover: Salmon Cobble 'OB 209' (Renamed 'Pedro') built by **John Skinner & Son** in 1911, courtesy of Paul Taylor.

This book has been published on an entirely non-profit basis and made available to all free of charge as a pdf. The aim of the book is to make the history of boatbuilder **John Skinner & Son** available to a wider audience. Currently there is very little on the internet or published about this Aberdeen boatbuilder.

If you have any comments regarding this book, or any further information, especially photographs or paintings I'd like to hear from you, and since this is an electronic edition, it will be possible to update and include any new information.

I can be contacted at bardofthebroch@yahoo.com

If printing this book, it is best printed as an A5 booklet.

**JOHN SKINNER & SON
BOATBUILDERS
FOOTDEE
ABERDEEN
1834 TO 1917**

**BY
STANLEY BRUCE**

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2026

1st electronic edition.

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Whilst I have taken great care in preparing this publication, I have of course relied on some previous historic information by others. Where conflicting information was found, I have added what seemed the most credible, at least to my mind, I therefore accept no responsibility for any errors or omissions.

Please treat all dimensions as approximate.

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Introduction.

The firm of **John Skinner**, boatbuilders was established in 1834, and they built small clinker-built boats until 1917. The firm remained a family concern for these 83 years. This is the longest that a boatbuilding company that has ever existed in Aberdeen. It was renamed **John Skinner & Son** c1865.

The boatyard was originally sited at No. 54 York Street, by 1856 it was moved to No. 18 York Street, and by 1862 it was sited No. 55 Wellington Street (near the Links), all Footdee, Aberdeen. All these premises were well-placed to accommodate the needs of the Aberdeen shipbuilders who needed small boats for their ships.

Described as boatbuilders, they built relatively small clinker hull boats, thousands of them. The Aberdeen Press and Journal in 1910 reported that the firm had built no fewer than 3,433 salmon cobs. These salmon cobs were built for salmon fishermen working locally on the rivers Dee and Don, and for fishermen working rivers all over Scotland.

In addition to the salmon cobs, they built yawls, river fishing boats and canoes. They also did repair work, dealt in second-hand boats and rented out boats.

During my research I discovered that at Fasadale on the north coast of Ardnamurchan, Scottish West Coast, a clinker-built salmon cobble boat built in 1911 by **John Skinner** which was not named but numbered '**OB 209**', has remarkably, survived for 115-years and can still take to the water if required.

Within the text of this volume, you will see that **John Skinner junior** as well as being a boatbuilder was a councillor and a prominent member of the community and spent a lot of his time involving himself in the Town Council, YMCA and church matters. He was a staunch Liberal, a justice of the Peace (JP), and was a tea-totaller.

So revered in the town was **John Skinner junior** that in Appendices A and B you'll find two different obituaries which were printed in the local press.

When I worked in **Hall Russell's** in the 1980's, we never built any small boats, we just bought them in. Occasionally a small carvel-built boat would come in for repair, and an odd plank or two would be replaced, so the boatbuilding skills were still there amongst the shipwrights and carpenters but not used daily.

In Appendix D, you'll find the names of fourteen other Aberdeen boatbuilders, some who were in business for many years and some only for a short period. Personally, until I did this research, I didn't realise there were so many.

Stanley A. Bruce, BSc., I.Eng., I.Mar.Eng., MIMarEST.

Former shipbuilder,

Hall Russell Ltd., A&P Appledore (Aberdeen) Ltd., 1980 to 1991.

Types of Timber Used.

A brief description:

The best timber to use for boatbuilding is hardwood such as oak, which was highly resistant to water and rot; which at this period was generally sourced from Scotland, England, America and the Baltic. The only timber better than oak was teak, which was more expensive and more difficult to source. However, cheaper timbers were used such as larch, cedar, elm or pine, you basically got what you paid for. Hardwood timbers such as oak were known for their strength and resistance to water, so therefore lasted longer.

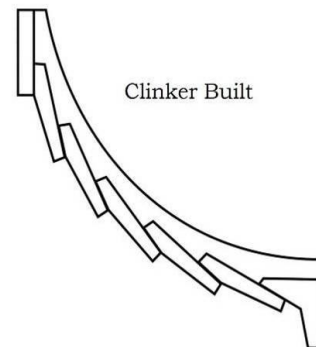
It was important for boatbuilders to check the grain of the planks for their natural curvature and select which side of the boat it would be best fitted on. Planks were chosen looking at the grain and used on the port or starboard side depending on the shape of the boat. On clinker-built boats sealant such as bitumen, wax, pitch or tar was often used between planks just to ensure a seal before fitting the nails which were usually made of copper.

The planks once cut to shape were steamed in a steam box prior to fitting to the boat hull, so they were easier to shape.

Clinker-Built.

On clinker-built hulls such as small boats built by **John Skinner**, the frames are erected first then the hull planks are laid on the frames and fitted over-lapping the adjacent plank to form the hull - starting at the keel and working upwards. This build method can only be used for relatively small vessels and boats, usually no more than forty feet long.

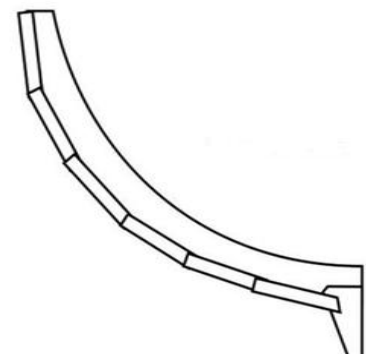
Also sometimes referred to as clench built.



Clinker Construction.

Carvel-Built. (Shown here for comparison only).

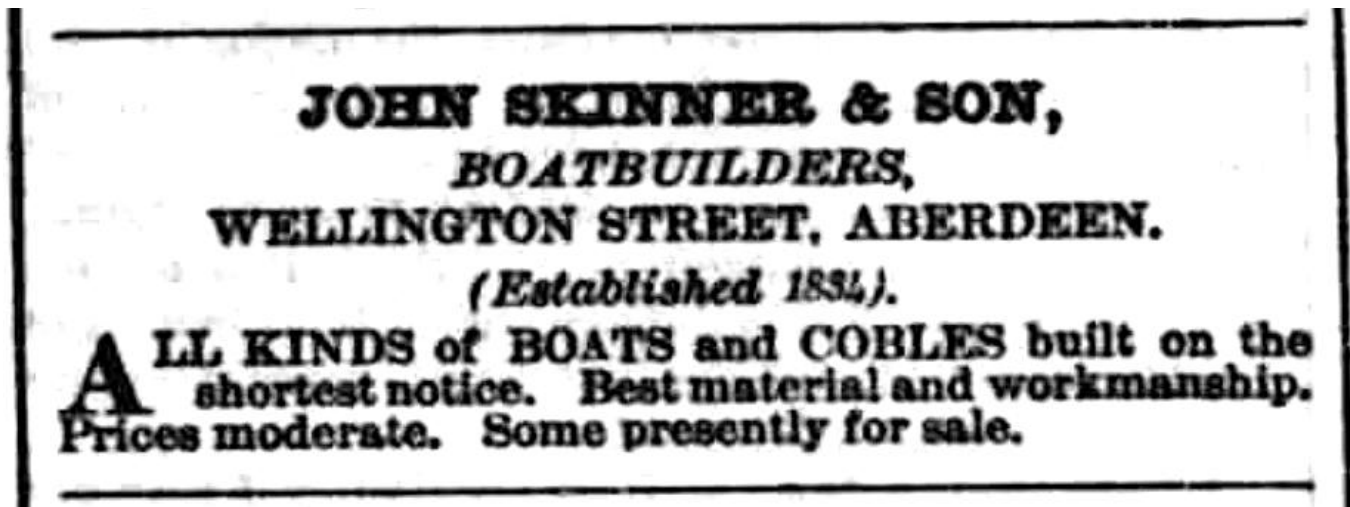
In this method the hull planks are fitted aside one another, edge to edge, not over-lapping as in a clinker-built vessel. The gap between the planks was then caulked by hammering oakum (recycled rope fibres) or caulking cotton into the gaps between the planks. Older methods involved covering this with tar. When the vessel enters the water, the fibres expand and contribute to the watertightness of the hull.



Carvel Construction.

Timeline

1834: The business was established. (Northern Advertiser (Aberdeen) - Tuesday 23rd March 1880). However, I could not find an entry in the Aberdeen Post Office directory for this date, or it may have commenced on such a small scale that no entry was made.



Advertisement published in the Northern Advertiser (Aberdeen) 23rd March 1880.

1840/45, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **John Skinner**, boatbuilder, home No. 2 Catto Square. (First mention of **John Skinner** in the Directory as residing in Aberdeen).

1845/46, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **John Skinner**, boatbuilder, No. 54 York Street, home No. 9 Catto Square.

1846/51, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **John Skinner**, boatbuilder, No. 54 York Street, home St. Clement-Street.

1856/57, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **John Skinner** boatbuilder, No. 18 York Street, home No. 8 York Street.

1859/61, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **John Skinner** boatbuilder, No. 18 York Street.

1862/64, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **John Skinner** boatbuilder, Wellington Street, near the Links.

1865, Aberdeen Post office Directory: Name changed to **John Skinner & Son**, boatbuilders, Wellington Street.

1868, 30th July: The Stonehaven Journal reported that Lizzie, second daughter of **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder**, Aberdeen married Mr William Duff, Merchant, Glasgow, at No. 24 Summer Lane, Aberdeen on 23rd July.

1878, 9th May: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: "***FIRE IN A BOATBUILDER'S YARD A FOOTDEE.** Early yesterday morning fire broke out in the boat-building yard of **Messrs John Skinner & Son**, Wellington Street. The fire originated in a wooden shed, and when it was first discovered the erection was one mass of flame. The alarm was given, and the policemen on the beat at once procured a hose pipe, but in consequence of the low pressure of water very little could be done to extinguish the conflagration. By this time another shed had become ignited, and both were blazing furiously when the hose reel arrived from the police office. Attempts were now made to save some of*

the property in the buildings, but to no purpose. A row of cellars near at hand had taken fire, but the flames were put out before any damage was done. The fire, which commenced about 20 minutes past four, was got under, but, not before the two sheds had been burned to the ground, about six o'clock. Nearly 50 pairs of oars in one of the erections were burned to cinders, and a large quantity which was lying outside was so much charred that they were rendered almost useless. Two boats in the other shed were also destroyed, but a third was fortunately saved. Had the wind been high the whole of the neighbouring property, a large portion of which is wooden buildings, would no doubt have been totally destroyed. The damage is estimated at £150; but the property is only insured for £70. The origin of the fire is unknown." The Edinburgh Evening News 9th May 1878 reported that the two boats burned were in an advanced state of construction.

1878/79, Aberdeen Post office Directory:

Boat-builders.

Forrest, James F., Provost Blaikie's Quay.

Forsyth, Alex, L., & Sons, York Street.

Robertson & Matthew, Provost Blaikie's Quay.

Ross, D. & J., Provost Blaikie's Quay.

Skinner, John, & Son, Wellington Street, near the Links.

See Appendix D for more details of other Aberdeen boatbuilders.

1881, 27th December: Isabella Sim (or Skinner) wife of **John Skinner** died suddenly while sat in her chair at her home at No. 14 Wellington Street in the presence of **John Skinner** and her two daughters. Doctor Macquibban was called and determined the cause of death as heart disease.

1883/84, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **Skinner, John** (of **J. Skinner & Son**), home No. 14 Wellington Street.

1883/84, Aberdeen Post office Directory: **Skinner, William** (of **J. Skinner & Son**), No. 14 Wellington Street.

1883/84, Aberdeen Post office Directory:

Boat-builders.

Forrest, James F., Provost Blaikie's Quay.

Forsyth, Alex, L., & Sons, York Street.

Lewis, John, Provost Blaikie's Quay.

Ross, D. & J., Provost Blaikie's Quay.

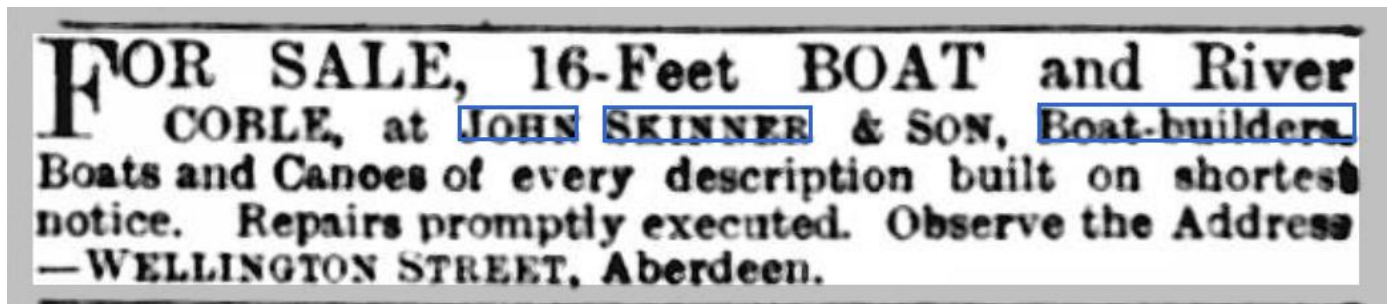
Skinner, John, & Son, Wellington Street, near the Links.

From this we can see that there was considerable competition for the building of small boats in Aberdeen at this period. See Appendix D for more details of other Aberdeen boatbuilders.

1885, 2nd January: The Evening Gazette (Aberdeen) reported as follows: *“Social Gatherings. Aberdeen – West North Street Evangelistic Association. – The Sabbath School in connection with above mission held their annual social meeting and Christmas tree on Hogmanay night in Littlejohn Street Hall. The chair was occupied by Mr A. P. Hird, superintendent. The hall was tastefully decorated for the occasion, and two trees were loaded with useful articles of clothing, the value of which was about £10, kindly provided by the teachers and friends of the mission in the city. After the children, numbering about 200, were supplied with tea, Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder, gave them a very suitable address. Over £1 worth of books and other prizes, the gift of a friend, were specially awarded for merit in attendance, after which the tree prizes were distributed, each scholar getting something...”*

1885, 4th April: The Weekly Free Press and Aberdeen Herald reported that **Mr John Skinner jun., boatbuilder** was nominated as a candidate to the Aberdeen School Board. Also nominated was **Alexander Hall Wilson**, shipbuilder. (I never found who was elected).

1885, 6th, 10th, 13th and 25th April: The Aberdeen Free Press published the following advertisement:



FOR SALE, 16-Foot BOAT and River CORLE, at JOHN SKINNER & SON, Boat-builders.
Boats and Canoes of every description built on shortest notice. Repairs promptly executed. Observe the Address — WELLINGTON STREET, Aberdeen.

1885, 21st April: The Aberdeen Evening Express reporting on the Aberdeen Liberal Association / St Clements Ward, reported that **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder** was elected a member of the executive. On the motion of **Mr John Skinner, Mr James McHardy (Hall, Russell & Co.)** was re-elected secretary. **McHardy** was also elected a member of the executive.

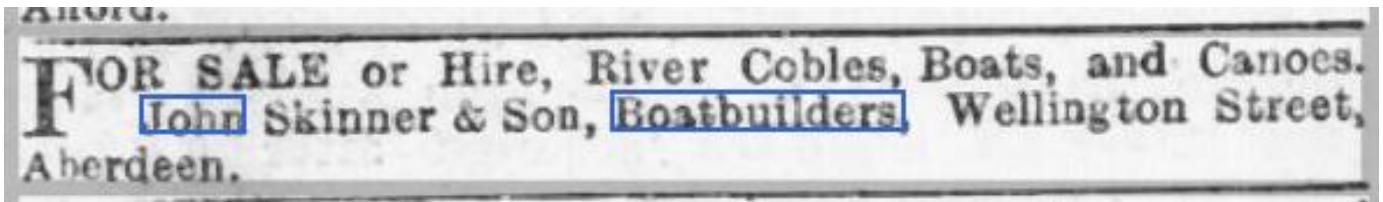
1886, 9th June: The Aberdeen Free Press reported on a dispute between **John Skinner, boatbuilder**, who was the superintendent of the St Clement's Free Church Sunday School. Mr McBeath one of the Sunday School teachers and a Deacon of the church had recently obtained a grocer's licence for the sale of spirituous liquors. **Mr John Skinner** an ardent temperance reformer dismissed Mr McBeath from his position as a teacher on the grounds that to his mind someone who sold liquor could not be a consistent Sunday school teacher. The matter was raised to the Church session who were divided on the subject, put it to the Presbytery for resolution. (I could not find any article telling the outcome).



Old Free St. Clement's Church,
Prince Regent Street.

1886, 12th June: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: “*ABERDEEN – TEMPERANCE PRINCIPLES AND CHURCH WORK. – A novel question came before a private sederunt of the Aberdeen Free Presbytery on Tuesday. It arises out of controversy which has occasioned quite a flutter of excitement in St Clement’s Free Church. About a month ago one of the Sunday school teachers Mr Peter McBeath, West North Street – obtained a grocer’s licence for his premises in Gallowgate, but he never imagined that the holding of such a certificate would disqualify him for the work of a Sunday school teacher. It appears, however, that the superintendent, **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder**, who is a tee-totaller, took a different view of the matter, and Mr McBeath was called upon either to withdraw from the Sunday school or relinquish his licence. The latter gentleman naturally resented the action of the superintendent, and the matter was brought before the Sunday School Teachers’ Association. The meeting was attended by about thirty members, and by a majority of four it was decided that Mr McBeath’s connection with the liquor traffic was incompatible with the duties of a Sunday school teacher. Mr McBeath was accordingly dismissed, and he appealed to the kirk-session against the arbitrary action of the superintendent. **Mr Skinner** contended that thirty years ago he was vested with full power in regard to the appointment of his teachers and that this carried with it the authority to dismiss. The kirk-session failed to come to an agreement, and a reference was made to the Presbytery. Parties were not called, but Mr McBeath attended the meeting on Tuesday. Having considered the facts of the case, the Presbytery appointed a committee to endeavour by communication with the parties to arrange an amicable settlement.*”

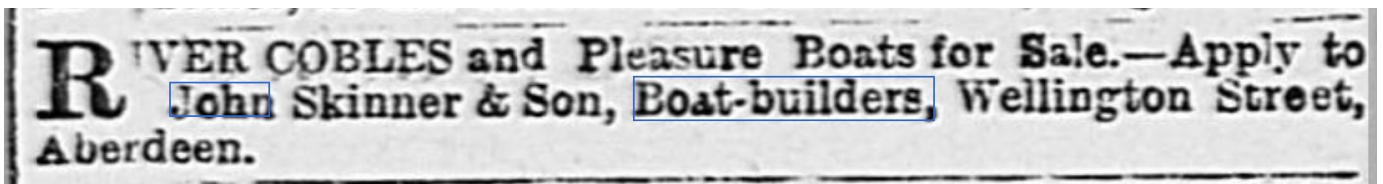
1886, 29th July: The Aberdeen Press and Journal published the following advertisement:



FOR SALE or Hire, River Cobles, Boats, and Canoes.
John Skinner & Son, Boatbuilders, Wellington Street,
Aberdeen.

1886, 18th December: The weekly Free Press and Aberdeen Herald reported as follows: "There are only three firms of boat-builders in Aberdeen – **Messrs John Skinner and Son**, Wellington Street; **Messrs A. L. Forsyth & Son**, York Street; and **Mr John Lewis**, Point Law. The trade of the former firm consists principally in the construction of salmon fishing cobbles, of which they have this year made 36, a somewhat smaller number than usual. They have also made several pleasure boats, but the repairs done in the yard have not come up to the average. The **Messrs Forsyth** have had principally to depend upon repairing and the manufacture of material used in boats, as has **Mr Lewis**."

1887, 19th May: The Aberdeen Evening Express published the following advertisement:



RIVER COBLES and Pleasure Boats for Sale.—Apply to
John Skinner & Son, Boat-builders, Wellington Street,
Aberdeen.

1887, 31st May: The Aberdeen Free Press published the following advertisement:



COBLES, Suitable for Angling, Net, or
Ferry, for Sale. JOHN SKINNER & SON, Boat-
builders, Wellington Street, Aberdeen.

1887, 29th October: The Weekly Free Press and Aberdeen Herald reported on the Aberdeen Municipal Elections, and for the St Clements Ward **Mr McHardy (Hall, Russell & Co.)** nominated the present and retiring representative, Mr Peter Clark, advocate. Mr John Brand, fisherman, seconded. **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder**, nominated Mr J. C. Thompson, bookseller.

1888, 9th February: The Aberdeen Free Press published the following advertisement:



RIVER COBLES (New, Second-hand) for
Sale; also, SHIP'S BOAT. SKINNER & SON, Boat-
builders, Wellington Street, Aberdeen.

1888, 25th February: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported on the AGM of the Liberal Association in the St Clement's Ward, and that **John Skinner, boatbuilder** was elected as chairman.

1888, 5th April: The Aberdeen Free Press published the following advertisement:



1889, 5th April: The Aberdeen Free Press published the following advertisement:



In lean times ship and boatbuilders often built boats speculatively simply to keep the workforce employed, this yawl selling cheap may have been such a boat.

1888, 1st May: The Aberdeen Free Press reported on the 20th annual meeting of the Aberdeen Sabbath School Union held in the YMCA Hall on 30th April 1888, attended by a large company. On the platform amongst other prominent members of the community was **John Skinner, boatbuilder**.

1889, 27th June: The Aberdeen Free Press reported on open air temperance meetings held at the Castle Gate, Aberdeen under the auspices of the Aberdeen Temperance Society and the Permissive Bill Association. **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder** occupied the chair at the third meeting which was held on 26th June 1889.

1890, 30th October: The Evening Gazette (Aberdeen) reported on Aberdeen Town Council elections, and that **John Skinner, boatbuilder** had been nominated to stand for the St Clement's Ward. Dr Robertson was elected with 678 votes, and **John Skinner** got 426 votes.

1890, 4th November: **John Skinner** addressed a meeting of the electors in the St Clements Ward in the Commerce St Public School. Mr Proctor who chaired the meeting said that **John Skinner** was the best representative for the working classes in the Ward.

1890/91: **John Skinner & Son**, boatbuilders, Wellington Street, near the Links, home address of **John and William Skinner**, No. 14 Wellington Street.

1890/91: In the Aberdeen Post Office Directory **John Skinner** is given as a Director of the Aberdeen Building Company Ltd. (See below).

Aberdeen Building Company, Limited.

Incorporated 1877. Capital, £10,000.

REGISTERED OFFICE, - - 10 COLVILLE PLACE.

DIRECTORS.

Henry Jackson, M.D., *Chairman.*

W. J. Booth, boilermaker
John Bremner
George Copland, joiner
Alexander Kidd, mason
David Millar, surveyor

James Minty, inspector
William Robertson, plasterer
James Doig, staff sergeant
Alexander Duncan, mason
John Skinner, boat builder

Manager—James Gordon. *Law Agents*—Edmonds & Macqueen.

Bankers—North of Scotland Bank, Limited.

*John Skinner, Director of the Aberdeen Building Company, Limited.
(1890/91 Aberdeen Post Office Directory).*

1891, 1st January: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported on the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The usual watch night services took place in front of a large attendance in the hall of the Institute. **John Skinner, boatbuilder** was on the platform of organisers and gave an address to the audience.

1891, 1st April: The Aberdeen Evening Express reported on Aberdeen School Board Elections. including the nomination of **John Skinner, boatbuilder**, nominated by Baillie McKenzie. The newspaper also reported on the Citizens Committee also attended by **John Skinner**.

1891, 15th June: **John Skinner, boatbuilder** gave an address at an open-air temperance meeting held at the Correction Wynd, Aberdeen.

By 1895: **John Skinner, boat-builder** was residing at No. 14 Wellington Street.

1892, 17th February: The Aberdeen Evening Express reported that the annual general meeting (AGM) of the Aberdeen Liberal Association, the members of the St Clement Ward re-elected **John Skinner, boatbuilder** as chairman of the Ward.

1892, 20th October: The Aberdeen Free Press reported on nominations for the Rosemount Ward, **John Skinner, boatbuilder** was asked if he would stand.

1892, 22nd October: The Aberdeen Evening Express reported that **John Skinner, boatbuilder**, after request by the committee of the Liberal Association had put himself forward as a candidate for the St Andrew’s Ward in the forthcoming election.

1892, 4th November: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported on the city of Aberdeen municipal elections at Aberdeen, and the results for the St Andrews ward (2 seats) were as follows: Dr A.T.G. Beveridge – 448, **John Skinner, boatbuilder** – 687, and Alexander Bowman, butcher – 673.

1897, 22nd May: The Dundee Advertiser reported on the Fisheries exhibition in London, amongst the exhibits were:

Model of Trawl nets by Messrs Duthie Brothers, ropeworks.

Otter boards and net for surface water fishing, trawl beam and net for ground fishing and ship's gig, by the **Aberdeen and Tyne Boatbuilding Company**.

Photographs of angling coble with special fittings and bag net salmon coble, lent by **Messrs John Skinner & Son**, Wellington Street.

Several models of steam trawlers and other vessels by **Hall, Russell & Co.**, engineers and shipbuilders.

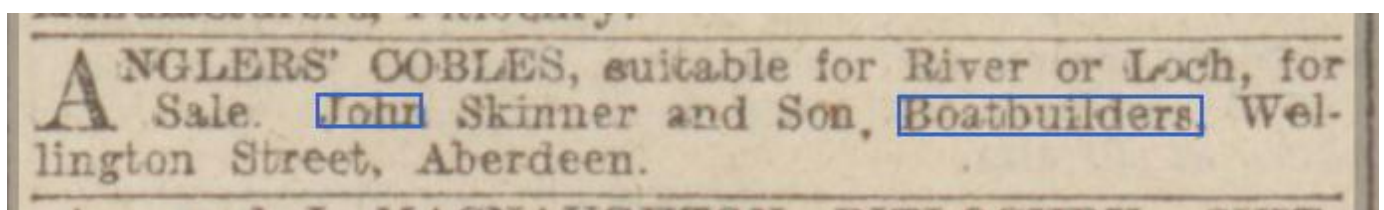
Three models, three photographs, five drawings and printed matter by **Alexander Hall & Co.**, engineers and shipbuilders.

1899, 3rd July: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reporting on plans of new buildings in Aberdeen reported on "...alterations and additions in connection with dwelling-houses on the north-west side of Wellington Street, for **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder** per Mr John Rust, architect..."

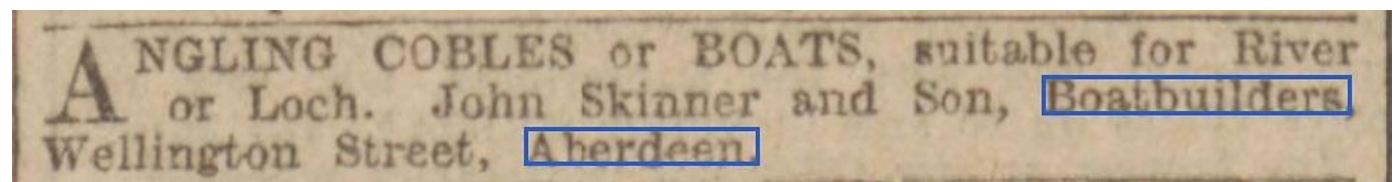
1900, 3rd November: The Aberdeen People's Journal reported on nomination of candidates for the Aberdeen municipal elections. There were two vacancies in the St Clements Ward and **John Skinner, boatbuilder** along with Mr George Reid, merchant, Mr W. H. Smart, provision manufacturer, and Mr John Ross, jun., fishcurer. My understanding is that **John Skinner** and John Ross were both elected as councillors.

1903, 25th March: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported on the Annual General Meeting of the Aberdeen Building Company Ltd., in the Café Buildings, Shiprow. The meeting was chaired by **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder**.

1903, 22nd June: The Aberdeen Press and Journal published the following advertisement:



1905, 30th June: The Aberdeen Press and Journal published the following advertisement:



1906, 21st March: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: "LAUNCH OF A MOTOR SALMON COBLE. A motor salmon coble for the Aberdeen Harbour Commissioners was launched at the harbour yesterday. The boat was built by **Messrs John Skinner and Sons**, Wellington Street, and was lowered into the water by means of a steam crane. Among those on the quayside who witnessed the launch were Captain Crombie, harbourmaster, and Mr R.

Gordon Nicol, harbour engineer. At first the craft did not seem to go very well, but after some adjustment of the mechanism, it steamed ahead all right."

1907, 13th June: Aberdeen Press and Journal reported on the marriage of **John S. Ross, boatbuilder of Messrs J. Skinner and Sons** to Mary Jane Swapp daughter of George Swapp, retired **iron-moulder**, Aberdeen, on 12th June, at 180 King Street.

1910, 10th March: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: "NEW SALMON MOTOR COBLE. SUCCESSFUL TRIAL RUN. The '**Comet**', the newly launched motor coble belonging to Mr John Hector, salmon merchant, made a very satisfactory trial run in the Dee and the Aberdeen Harbour yesterday forenoon. The coble is intended for use in the Moray Firth at Mr Hector's Pitgaveny and Gordonstown fishing's and is a new departure in the salmon fishing industry on that coast. The boat was built by **Messrs John Skinner and Son, Footdee** and including this one, that well-known firm have built no fewer than 3,433 salmon cobles. It is 26 feet long, and 8 feet 6 inches in beam, and is modelled after the lines of the motor coble built for Aberdeen Harbour Commissioners about five years ago, though several improvements have been introduced. The limited space in such a boat is now comparatively little encroached on by the motor and the propeller-tunnel, so that there is not the same objection by fishermen to the innovation as formerly. Those having fishing stations working from harbours will doubtless soon realise the advantages of such efficiently fitted craft, and cobles without motors will become a thing of the past, at all events where distances are concerned. The engine of the '**Comet**' is an 8 h.p. "Primus" made by Karl Heineman, Gothenburg, which, though not as yet familiar in this country, has a great reputation in Swedish waters. It has peculiar advantages, and it has simplicity and reliability, matters of importance to fishermen unaccustomed to machinery. It has neither valves nor cams, and has only three movable parts, a feature which commended itself to the experts of the party who were present at the trial run. The engine is of the two-stroke, single-cylinder type, the fuel supplied being crude oil, otherwise very coarse and cheap paraffin. The danger of an explosion, to which petrol is so subject, is thus reduced to a minimum. The propeller is a "Meissener" made in Hamburg and is reversible. The blades are "concha" shaped specially adapted for shallow draught boats. Such blades, it may be said are much in favour with yachtsmen. The propeller is placed in a tunnel running along the centre of the boat, tapering fore and aft, and thus any damage while crossing nets in the water is effectually prevented. While the nets are being fished, the engine, being furnished with a clutch, is not stopped, but merely thrown out of gear. The installation work has been very efficiently executed by Messrs Clyne, Mitchell and Company, Ltd. The party on board at the trial run included: -Mr James A. Ross, harbour engineer; Mr Archibald Powrie, lessee of salmon fishing's; Mr William Hean, representative of the Belfast Ropework Company; Mr Mitchell, of Messrs Clyne, Mitchell and Company, Ltd.; **Mr John Skinner, boatbuilder**; Rev. W. D. Innes of Cowie, and Mr A. I. McConnochie, C.A."

1911, 27th April: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: "Motor Salmon Coble for Ardnamurchan, an Aberdeen Invention. **Messrs John Skinner and Sons, boatbuilders,**

*Aberdeen, have recently completed the construction of a motor bag-net salmon fishing coble to the order of Messrs A. Powrie and Company, Ardnamurchan. The boat, which is intended for work on the West Coast of Scotland, is the third of its kind. Its two predecessors were also built by **Messrs Skinner and Son**, who make a speciality of this type of boat, the invention of **Mr John Skinner**. The new craft is fitted with a tunnel, in which the propellor works entirely under cover- an important consideration as it obviates the risk of the nets fouling the screw. The propelling agent in this case is a 7.9 hp Kelvin motor, supplied by the Bergius Company, Glasgow. On its sea trial, at the end of last week the coble gave entire satisfaction to the Messers Powrie who were on board during the trials. They also expressed their satisfaction with the whole work and admired the fine model of the coble. The boat rows six oars, so that in an emergency, it can be used at its ordinary work.*

This salmon coble boat was registered and given registration number **'OB 209'**, and is thought to have worked the salmon nets at the north coast of Ardnamurchan out of Fascadale up to the late 1960's.

c1977: Alistair Maclean towed this boat to Mull and fitted a new Lister engine and converted her to "whipstaff steering", put in new floorboards and changed her colour from grey to blue. He sold her in 1982.

2005 to 2017: She was kept at the Eyemouth World of Boats Museum, stored outside mostly. When the museum was forced to close, she was bought by a man from Hartlepool.

2021: She returned to Ardnamurchan, thanks to Paul Taylor and the committee of the Ardnamurchan Heritage and History Association (AHHA) and is safely stored in a shed at Fascadale, and beautifully painted. *You can read more about the boat online at:* <https://fascadalefishings.com/ob209-a-long-voyage/>



'OB 209' in Dervaig, Isle of Mull, probably the last photo as a working salmon coble. (Courtesy of Paul Taylor).

1911, 22nd June: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: *“BIRCH ROD FOR YOUNG THIEF. Baillie Allan is a believer in the birch rod as a corrective for youthful lawbreakers. The instrument of flagellation was requisitioned yesterday, when George Fowler Skinner, a young boy from Wellington Street, pleaded guilty at the Children’s Court to the theft of several small articles from the premises occupied by Messrs John Skinner and Son, boatbuilders, Wellington Street, on the 14th inst. The Fiscal (Mr Robert Lamb) said the boy broke into the office through a pane of glass, and after he got in, he stole the articles mentioned. Unfortunately, he had been in court so recently as last month, when he was charged with theft. He had been giving his mother, who was a widow, a good deal of trouble lately. Baillie Allan was of opinion that the lad was qualifying for a reformatory. He did not know that he was doing right in not sending him to one even now. The sentence was punishment with four strokes of the birch rod.”*

1912, 11th October: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: *“POINT LAW MOTOR FERRY BOAT. A motor ferry boat has been built for the Aberdeen Harbour Commissioners by Messrs J. Skinner and Son, boatbuilders, Wellington Street. The new boat is to take the place of the one plying between the north side of the Albert Basin and Point Law. The old boat was driven entirely by manual labour, and the wire rope which was required for it will be dispensed with.”*

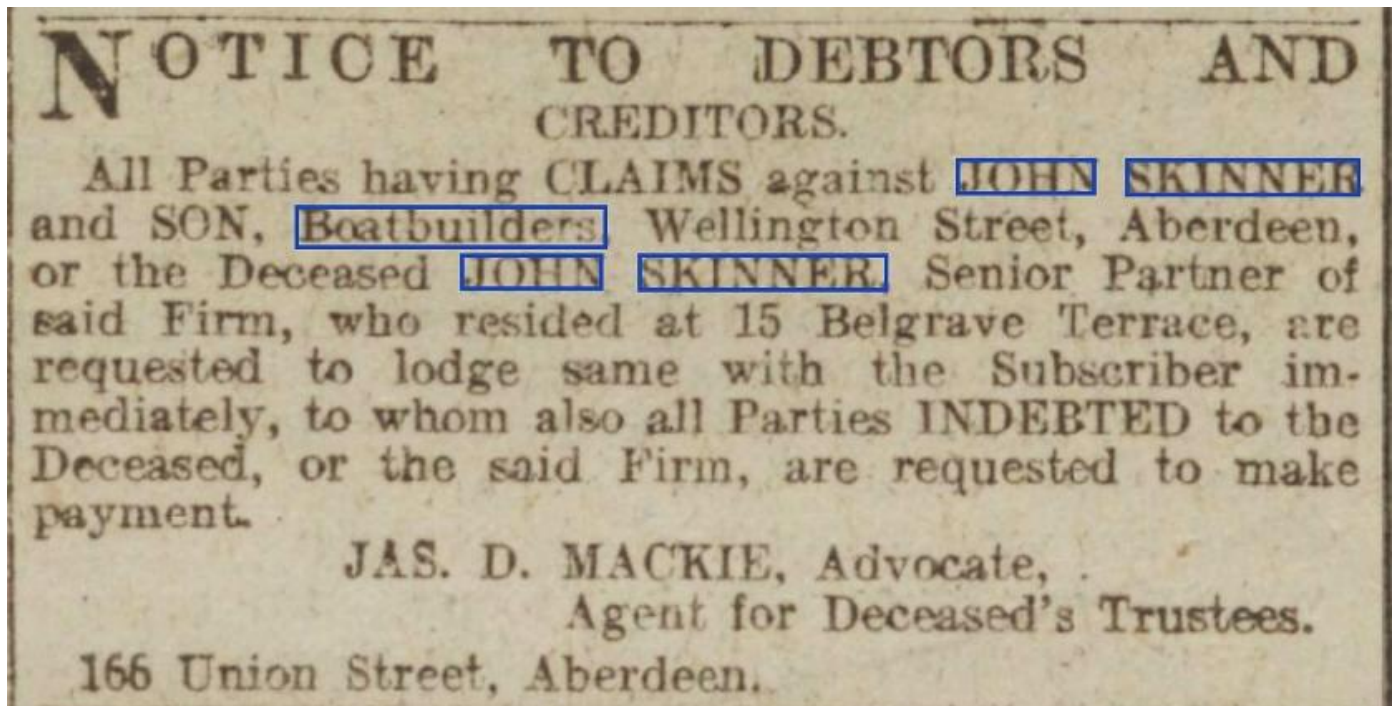
1916, 20th June: Mrs John Skinner died at 15 Belgrave Terrace, Aberdeen. (See Appendix for her obituary).

1917, 12th March: The Aberdeen Evening Express published the following death notice:

“SKINNER. – At 15 Belgrave Terrace, Aberdeen, on 11th March, John Skinner J.P. (John Skinner and Son, Boatbuilders). Funeral on Wednesday 14th March at 2.30 p.m., to Allenvale Cemetery. Friends, please accept this (the only) intimation and invitation. No flowers.”

1917, 15th March: The Aberdeen Press and Journal reported as follows: *“FUNERAL OF MR J. SKINNER. The funeral of Mr John Skinner, J.P., boatbuilder, Aberdeen, who died on Sunday at his residence, 15 Belgrave Terrace, took place yesterday to Allenvale Cemetery. It was well attended by the general public. The services at the house and the grave were conducted by the Rev. James Muir, Melville United Free Church, and the Rev. Dr. T. T. Matthews. The pallbearers were – Mr William Skinner (brother), Mr James A. Duff, Mr John S. Ross, Mr Alexander Ross, and Mr William Ross (nephews), Mr J. Swanney, Mr James G. Gregor, and Mr William Dunn. The general mourners included ex-Lord Provost Maitland, Colonel the Rev. James Smith, the Rev. Robert Semple, the Rev. A. D. Donaldson, the Rev. J. S. Stewart, Mr J. F. Anderson, Mr Brown, city chamberlain’s department, Townhouse; Mr James G. Mearns, Townhouse; Mr J. D. Mackie, advocate; Mr Alexander Duncan, Mr Alexander Gordon, Fountainhall Road; Mr Henry Lyon, Mr Henry Rankine, Osborne Place; Mr James Marshall, Mr Alexander Esslemont, Captain Crombie, harbour master; Mr R. G. Nicol, harbour engineer; Mr G. F. Duthie, Dr Rose, Mr James Wilkie, Mr James Porter, cashier; Mr Duncan Clarke, Mr George Murray, etc.”*

1917, 16th March: The Aberdeen Press and Journal published the following notice:



1943, 24th August: The Aberdeen Evening Express published a notice regarding the death of John Skinner Ross, retired boatbuilder as follows:

“ROSS. -At a nursing Home in Aberdeen, on 23rd August 1943, John Skinner Ross, retired boatbuilder, 83 Fonthill Road, hisband of Mary J. Swapp. Funeral on Thursday 26th August, at 2 o'clock (service at 1.45), from North Church, Queen Street, to St Peter's Cemetery. No flowers, and no mournings by his desire.”

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- 1 Various local newspaper articles, as detailed in the text.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Paul Taylor for the photographs of salmon cobble 'OB 209'.

Websites

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www.emuseum.aberdeencity.gov.uk Information on over 3,000 Aberdeen built ships.

www.clydeships.co.uk Information on >40,000 Scottish built ships.

www.fascadalefishings.com Information on salmon cobble 'OB 209'.

Appendix A.

Obituary of John Skinner junior.

Aberdeen Evening Express - Monday 12th March 1917.

***“Death of Mr J. Skinner, J.P., Aberdeen.** “The death occurred yesterday, at 15 Belgrave Terrace, Aberdeen, of **Mr John Skinner J.P., of Messrs John Skinner and Son, boatbuilders. Skinner's** illness lasted only a few days. He had been at business as recently as last Tuesday. A native of Aberdeen, **Mr Skinner,** during a long life, devoted himself conspicuously to the service of the community. He had been head of the firm whose premises are in Wellington Street, for over 30 years, succeeding his father the late **Mr John Skinner.** He was best known as a worker in the religious and social spheres, but a number of years ago, was also prominent in the municipal life of the city, having, represented St Andrew's and Clement's Wards as a Town Councillor for various terms. His last association with the Council was in 1895. **Mr Skinner** laboured long in St Clement's United Free Church, where held the office of elder. His activities were directed especially to Sunday School and Bible Class work. For various periods he was president and vice-president of the Aberdeen Young Men's Christian Association and took an active part in general temperance and evangelistic movements in the city. For the past 17 years **Mr Skinner** performed a great work in connection with the New Porthill Sabbath School. He was president of the Porthill Sabbath School Association, and also superintendent of the senior division in the school. His labours were very effective. In the Aberdeen Sabbath School Union, he held a prominent position. having formerly been president and vice-president, while he had been a member of committee from the institution of the Union; but he retired from active participation in Sunday School service last spring, after 52 years of devoted toil on behalf of the movement. The occasion was marked by the presentation, from the Sabbath School Union, of a beautiful, illuminated address in album form. Home and foreign mission work owed much to his lifelong endeavours and interest, which was extended with special kindness to the Livingstonia Mission. An ardent Liberal, **Mr Skinner,** up till the last, was a member of the South Division Executive of the Aberdeen Liberal Association. For a long time, he was chairman of the Aberdeen Building Company. He gave up that office some years ago. Mrs Skinner died only last year, and **Mr Skinner** is survived by two sisters and a brother.”*

Note:

I have also added the obituary published in the Aberdeen Weekly Journal - Friday 21st April 1916 in the following appendix, as it contained other information.

Appendix B

Obituary of Mr John Skinner junior.

Aberdeen Weekly Journal - Friday 21st April 1916.

***MR JOHN SKINNER.** In the history of Footdee **Mr Skinner** has played an active and important part. He was born in the district, he lived in it for the greater part of his life, and, although now resides in another quarter, his business of boatbuilder takes him daily to his old haunts. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that **Mr Skinner** is still in active service directing with unflagging industry the business of which he is the head. From an early age he took a deep interest in religious work of many kinds. With the venerable Dr T. T. Matthews, of Madagascar, who is still among us, and others who have long since passed to their rest, but whose memories are yet fragrant, **Mr Skinner** was identified with various forms of Christian effort, but always very specially with those on behalf of the young. He began Sunday school work in an old building in Loch Street, for many years he was superintendent of the Congregational Sunday School of St Clement's United Free Church, and then he was teacher of a Bible class in Melville Church, and superintendent of the forenoon children's church in the Guestrow Mission, carried on that time by the Melville congregation. More recently he held for a long period the superintendency of the New Porthill Sunday School, that splendid model of Sunday school institution with which there will always be associated the name of its founder—the late Dr Reith. **Mr Skinner** was connected with the Aberdeen Sunday School Union from its inception, and his name has appeared in every annual report from 1869 to 1916. He was sixteen times elected to the vice-presidency and three times to the presidency. It would be difficult say how many of the Sunday School Conventions **Mr Skinner** has attended throughout the country. He was repeatedly elected a delegate, and it is not too much to say that there is no man in Aberdeen better known in Sunday school circles throughout Scotland. While Sunday school affairs held first place with **Mr Skinner**, his activities were conspicuous in other directions. He was for 25 years member of the committee of the Y.M.C.A., and for eight years was vice-president. His own ward of St Clement's sent him to the Town Council as its representative for seven years, and he was for nine years a governor of Gordon's College. In temperance and political affairs and in every movement of social reform he has been an ardent worker. Now, after 52 years of active service as a Sunday worker, he has retired on account of advancing years, but his spirit is still willing, and his intellect is as keen as ever. His record is such as anyone might covet. In his early days his heart was set on Foreign Mission work, and had it not been for domestic claims and responsibilities which, the eldest of the family, he bravely shouldered, he would have been one the pioneer party accompanying Dr Laws when set out to found the Livingstonia Mission. Yet who knows but that he has exerted as great an influence at home? Such men are required in Aberdeen as well as in Central Africa. **Mr Skinner** has been, if the term may be allowed, a sort of lay "Bishop of Fittie," and, through the young people who have passed through his hands in the Sunday schools, his influence has indeed gone to the ends of the earth. In Mrs Skinner he has had a wise, helpful, and sympathetic fellow-worker, who has now shared in his honour as she*

shared for so many years in his labours. May the worthy couple have a quiet and happy and peaceful eventide."

Appendix C.

Obituary of Mrs John Skinner.

Aberdeen Press and Journal - Friday 23rd June 1916.

*THE LATE MRS JOHN SKINNER. PIONEER IN SCOTLAND OF THE KINDERGARTEN SYSTEM. A-correspondent -writes: — A large circle friends will have heard -with deep regret of the death of Mrs John Skinner, which took place suddenly June 20, at 15 Belgrave Terrace, Aberdeen. Mrs Skinner occupied a remarkable place in the life of Aberdeen and was one the City's best-known social and Christian workers. She lived to a great age of 83 and was practically in harness till the end. Mrs Skinner was the youngest daughter of the late William Knowles, timber merchant in Aberdeen, and was the last survivor of the Misses Knowles who in 1858 established the school which is still carried in Carden Place by the nieces of the original founders. She was educated under the late Rev. A. Storie, of Inch, of whom she was a favourite pupil. At the time of her marriage, in 1880, with ex- Councillor **John Skinner, of J. Skinner and Son, boatbuilders, Aberdeen, Miss Williamina was engaged in educational work. About the year 1876 she was attracted to study of Froebelian methods and was the pioneer in Scotland of the Kindergarten system, which she introduced into the school a separate department. After her marriage Mrs Skinner, though never losing her interest in the progress of secular education, was more closely associated with every movement to promote the religious and social welfare of the city. All her life she had been interested in Sabbath School work, first connection with St Clement's Free (now U.F.) Church, and later with Melville Church, and then, since 1898, at Porthill Sunday School, of which her husband was until quite recently the energetic and devoted President. At Porthill, Mrs Skinner also carried on the Mother's Union, a society that has done much for the mothers and children of the district. For many years she was an active member of the B.W.T.A. and was for several years President the Aberdeen branch of the Association. Mrs Skinner was universally beloved. By her departure Aberdeen loses one who served the community faithfully to the end. It was a privilege to know her; her rich and original mind powerfully influenced for good all with whom she came in contact. Among the relatives of the late Mrs Skinner now settled out Aberdeen is the well-known author, Mr J. D. Symon, who is a nephew."***

Appendix D Aberdeen Boatbuilders 1830 to 1930.

The dates in this table came from various Aberdeen Post Office Directories and local newspapers.

Builder	1835	1840	1845	1850	1855	1860	1865	1870	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930
William Minto & Co.	1834 to c1837																			
George Neilsen	1835																			
William Neilsen		1835 to 1843																		
Thain		c1837 to c1843																		
John Skinner	1834 to c1865																			
John Skinner & Son								c1865 to 1917												
Alex J. Forsyth						c1860 to c1862														
Alex. L. Forsyth & Sons							c1862 to c1893													
George Smith							1867 to c1870													
James F. Forrest										c1878 to c1889										
Robertson & Matthew										c1878 to c1879										
D. & J. Ross										c1878 to c1887										
John Lewis										c1886 to c1912										
James Cordiner										c1885 to c1921										
William Connon											c1890 to c1901									
Aberdeen & Tyne Boat Building Co.												1893 to c1908								
Stephen & Mitchell														c1900 to c1901						
Builder	1835	1840	1845	1850	1855	1860	1865	1870	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910	1915	1920	1925	1930

You can see from above seventeen different companies building small boats in Aberdeen during this period, so quite a lot of business, however a maximum of six at any one time, and from c1860 to c1862 only two companies.

See the next page for addresses of the above boatbuilders.

Aberdeen Boatbuilders 1830 to 1930 Addresses:

Boat Builder	Address	From	To
John Skinner	Wellington Street, Footdee.	1834	c1865
John Skinner & Son	Wellington Street, Footdee.	c1865	1917
James F. Forrest	Provost Blaikie's Quay.	c1878	c1889
Alex. J. Forsyth	New Pier.	c1860	c1862
Alex. L. Forsyth & Sons	York Street, Footdee.	c1862	c1893
Robertson & Matthew	Provost Blaikie's Quay.	c1878	c1879
D. & J. Ross	Provost Blaikie's Quay.	c1878	c1887
John Lewis	Point Law.	c1886	c1912
William Connon	Albert Quay.	c1890	c1901
James Cordiner	Torry.	c1885	c1921
Stephen & Mitchell	South Esplanade East.	c1900	c1901
Aberdeen & Tyne Boat Building Company	Raik Road.	1893	c1908
George Smith	New Pier.	1867	c1870
William Minto & Company	York Street, Footdee.	1834	c1837
George Neilsen	York Street / St Clements Street, Footdee.	Unknown	1835
William Neilsen	York Street, Footdee.	1835	1843
Thain	Footdee.	c1837	c1843

Note: Some of the shipbuilders (not included here) at this period, occasionally built small boats, an example is **William Rennie**, Footdee, I have him in a volume of his own in my shipbuilder's section.

Other Titles.

A total of 2,302 pages of Aberdeen shipbuilding history is available online to date:

<p>Aberdeen Concrete Shipbuilding Co., Ltd., Torry, Aberdeen, 1918 to 1920 (2018), 31 pages.</p> <p>Walter Hood & Co., Shipbuilders, York Street, Footdee, Aberdeen, 1839 to 1881 (2018), 220 pages.</p> <p>LESLIE: Ship-owners, Shipmasters, & Shipbuilders of Aberdeen (An Introduction) (2018), 150 pages.</p>	 <p>2018 - v1</p> <p>ABERDEEN CONCRETE SHIPBUILDING CO., LTD., TORRY, ABERDEEN, 1918 TO 1920.</p> <p>STANLEY BRUCE</p>	 <p>2021 - v2</p> <p>WALTER HOOD & CO., SHIPBUILDERS, YORK STREET, FOOTDEE, ABERDEEN, 1839 TO 1881.</p> <p>CELEBRATING THE 150-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAUNCH OF THE THERMOPYLAE.</p> <p>STANLEY BRUCE</p>	 <p>2018-v1</p> <p>LESLIE: Ship-owners, Shipmasters, and Shipbuilders of Aberdeen, An Introduction.</p> <p>STANLEY BRUCE</p>
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Further Books in this Series.

Further books in this series are planned and will all be available to read online or download as a pdf, free of charge at www.electricscotland.com on 'The Shipbuilders of Aberdeen' page.

Other Books by this Author.

(Free pdfs are online at www.electricscotland.com).

Shipbuilding in Footdee, Aberdeen (2025), [available for the Kindle only](#).

John Watson, Shipbuilder, Whitehills & Banff 1830 to 1879 (2025) free pdf online.

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~~~~~ **THE END** ~~~~~