



North Berwick

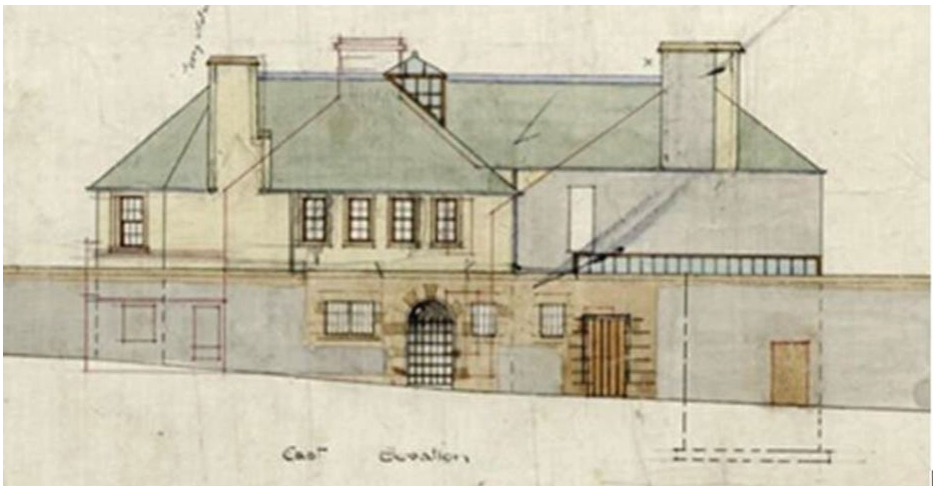
**The Abbey Farm
The Abbey Dovecot
The Curling Pond**

**Three things to see on a short walk
from North Berwick Station**

North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust
Heritage Guide

The Abbey Farm

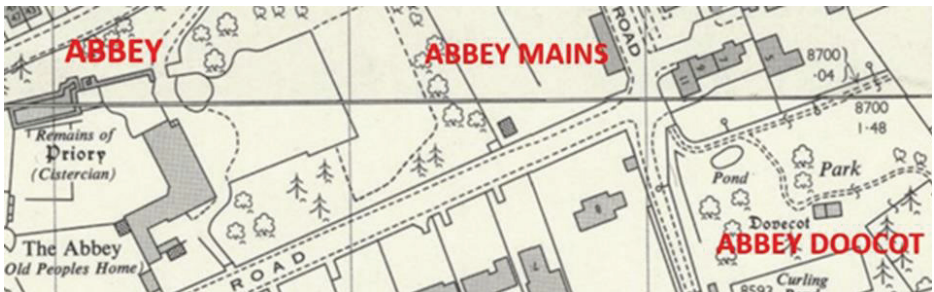
Starting from the station and walking up Station Road into Nungate Road, you see a large anonymous building on the left, the telephone exchange, and on the right, there is a large white-walled house with a red stone boundary wall incorporated into the house with a roll moulded arch door. The house is the 18th-century Abbey Farm farmhouse with extensive additions designed by J. S. Richardson. The house was modified in 1924 for Mr William Whitelaw, an MP, railway magnate and the first chairman of the LNER. The house was called 'The Nungate' before it was subdivided.



The telephone exchange is on the site of the Abbey Farm buildings, but a little further up Nungate Road on the left, at the end of a short cul-de-sac, there is a stone wall with an arched gateway leading into an area enclosed by single-storey houses converted from the Abbey Farm outbuildings in 1971.



The farm should be called either Abbey Mains or Abbey Farm but never Abbey Mains Farm ('mains' is Lowland Scots for farm). The farm belonged to the Abbey (St Mary's Priory) as the Abbey Home Farm, but after the dissolution of the monasteries it continued as North Berwick Mains. It existed until the turn of the 19th century.



Carrying straight on into Windygates Road (there is no street sign), you will see on your left a small wood – Dowcate Park. This was once part of the garden of Ingleholm (33 Clifford Road), home of Colonel John Weir who drowned on the *Titanic*.

‘The relatives of Colonel John Weir, who was passenger on the *Titanic*, have received the sad news by cable that there is no hope of his safety. Colonel Weir, although an American citizen, was Scottish by birth. He came as a visitor to North Berwick about six years ago, and took up house there, residing at Ingleholm.’ *The Scotsman*, 23rd April 1909

Entering the wood by the second pathway opening, a little further up the hill, you will enter a small clearing with a small patch of tarmac. This is the site of the Dowcote Park Curling Club curling pond.



The Abbey Dovecot

On the south side of the clearing, on the top of a slope, there is the Abbey Farm dovecot. In summer it may be difficult to see because of the undergrowth.



1970



2021

The dovecot was built in the 17th century. It is a double-lectern dovecot with nesting places for 1,320 birds.

A dovecot, or dovecote and doocot in Scots, is a structure intended to house pigeons or doves. Dovecotes may be free-standing or built into the end of a house or barn. They generally contain pigeonholes for the birds to nest. Pigeons were introduced into Britain by the Normans. They mate for life and breed almost all year round, each pair having on average two chicks every two months.

Early purpose-built dovecots in Scotland are often of a 'beehive' shape, circular in plan and tapering up to a domed roof with a circular opening at the top. In the late 16th century they were superseded by the 'lectern' type, rectangular with a sloping roof. In the Middle Ages having a dovecote was a feudal privilege that was restricted to barons, abbots and lords of the manor. The laws were relaxed around 1600 and after this date many farms had dovecots.



Dirleton Castle beehive doocot

Before the introduction of root vegetables into the crop rotation in the late 17th century there was little fodder to feed animals over the winter months, so most were slaughtered and the meat was preserved by being salted, dried or smoked. Pigeons provided eggs and fresh meat all year round and these were particularly needed in winter. Pigeon fledglings, squabs, were a welcome source of fresh meat and considered a delicacy. They were harvested when they were about four weeks old – by this time they have reached adult size but have not yet flown and the breast meat is tender. Squab has dark meat and the skin is fatty, like duck. It has a milder taste than other game.

Olivier de Serres, writing at the turn of the 16th century, said: 'No man need ever have an ill-provisioned house if there be but attached to it a dovecot, a warren and a fishpond wherein meat may be found as readily at hand as if it were stored in a larder.'

Dovecot Park Curling Club Pond

On the floor of the clearing you will see a small area of tarmac which is being overgrown. This is the site of the curling pond of the Dowcote Park Curling Club, founded in December 1909.



Pieter Brueghel the Younger, 'Winter Landscape with a Bird Trap'

Curling developed as a winter sport played on ice in both Scotland and Holland in the 16th century, a little like bowls but played with heavy stones. The appearance of curling falls within the period of the 'Little Ice Age' when the mean global temperature fell by about 1°C. In the northern hemisphere this period was notable for very cold winters when even moving water froze. In Scotland curling was played on frozen lakes, lochs and ponds.

'NORTH BERWICK.—The members of the North Berwick Curling Club competed yesterday for their medal on Sir Suttie's lake at Balgone and was won by Mr John Wallace with nine points. Lord Elcho's County Cup will be played for on Saturday if the frost continues. Sir George having kindly placed his pond at the disposal of the curlers for the occasion.' *The Scotsman*, 18th December 1874

In the early 1800s the winter temperature started to rise, and it became necessary to create shallow temporary ponds which froze more readily. The specific heat of water is high and it can store large amounts of heat, so the smaller the volume of water the more quickly it freezes for a given air temperature below zero.

In 1833 Mr J. Cairnie published a book, *Essay on Curling and Artificial Pond Making*, describing how to build stone-lined ponds of regular dimensions with water only about 30cm deep. Cairnie ponds became popular. Towards the end of the 19th century tarmacadam became available. It can be rolled very flat and it became possible to build ponds where the water could be only a few millimetres deep and which froze much more quickly and frequently. Because they were made with tarmacadam and required only a sprinkle of water, they were called sprinkle or tarmac ponds. In North Berwick the Dowcate Park Curling Club sprinkle pond was used until the 1960s.



‘NORTH BERWICK.—With a continuance of the frost curling was in progress at the new pond in the Dowcate Park, North Berwick. A club designated the Dowcate Club Curling Club has just been formed, the office-bearers for the season being as follows:- President, Mr WJ Mure CB.; vice president, Sir William Gardiner-Baird Bart.; and hon. secretary and treasurer, Mr RM Mackochie.’
The Scotsman, 22nd December 1909

