15 Jul 2026

HISTORY OF FIRST ADVENTURES & ITS LOCATION

Our Nursery

First Adventures is a locally owned family business which was founded in 1997: we have been operating from the same site for nearly 30 years. We are proud to have started serving generations of families within Linlithgow and in recent years have even found ourselves welcoming the children of some of our former attendees.

Throughout this time, First Adventures has remained focussed on putting children first and setting ambitious targets for the quality of its provision. Our management team, which includes a Manager and a Deputy Manager who have worked for the Nursery since its first year, also features a GTCS registered Primary Teacher who oversees our curriculum and Quality Improvement cycle.

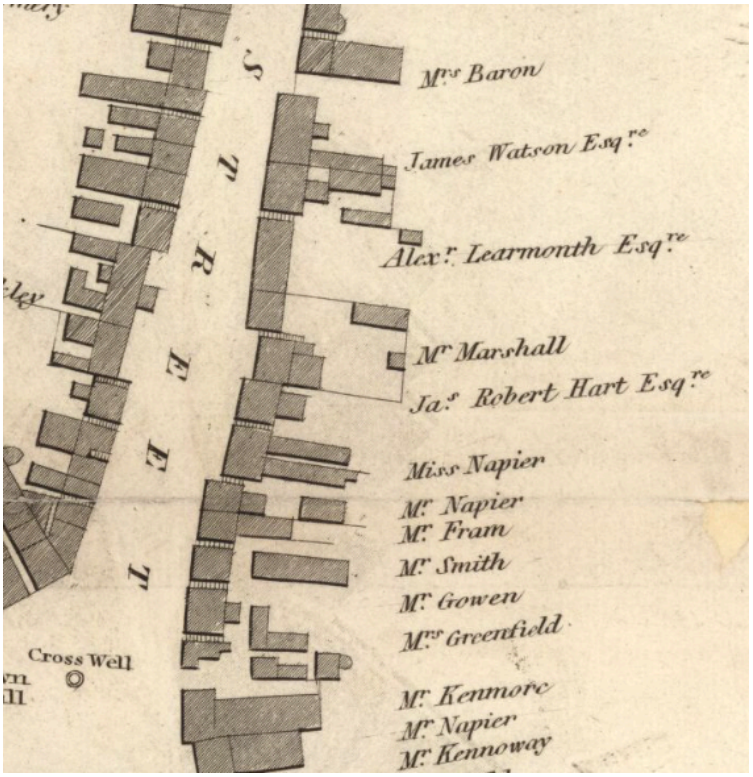
Founded by a Primary Teacher, the Nursery continues to be owned and led by education professionals - the current Managing Director, Andrew Carr, worked in international further and higher education for almost 20 years before taking over the business operations of the Nursery in 2020.

Our Site

We own and operate from one of Linlithgow High Street's most iconic buildings: "Turret Towers". Extensively remodelled inside, our main building and its gardens is a truly unique setting with a fascinating history.

Early Ownership

Long ago the area of the High Street where the Nursery is now was sometimes referred as being "of the Great Inns", presumably associated with the Royal Residence of Linlithgow Palace, these may have hosted various minor hangers on and others who travelled with the Royal Court.



Moving to more recent times, one of the first maps that allows us to accurately identify individual properties and residents comes from 1820 - a plan by John Wood. On this plan, we can see that both the Nursery property and that immediately to the East, the dentist's office and the house above, were owned by Alexander Learmonth, the Lord Provost of Linlithgow between 1802 and 1807. The rigg gardens originally associated with these properties extended all the way back to the canal, and are why the Dovecott sits in the "Learmonth Gardens" to this day.

In 1823 the properties passed to his son and trustees before being purchased in 1851 by "Janet McNiven and George Dougal" who is referred to in subsequent Sasines as "George Dougal, shoemaker". George appeared to have carried on his trade from the tenement itself, likely using the rigg behind to host workshops.

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Purchase by the Commercial Bank of Scotland

The Commercial Bank of Scotland first opened in Linlithgow in 1842 and was located where the sowing shop is now (next to Taste). It operated from that address for 17 years before it purchased the pair of tenements owned by Janet McNiven and George Dougal in 1859. It now owned all three buildings and the land behind.

David Rhind's Commission (1859)

As you might have spotted, over the doorway to the old bank office there is a date - 1859 - marking the beginning of construction on the building which now stands at 53/55. The Commercial Bank had decided to demolish the previous building before beginning their project, wanting to construct something which would give its customers the impression that their money was safe and secure.

The design was laid down by David Rhind, who was something of an in-house architect for the Commercial Bank, having designed their main branch on George Street. While their head office followed a neoclassical pattern, to match the surrounding architecture of the New Town, much of Rhind's work, including our Nursery building, was constructed in "Scottish Mock Baronial" style. It is David Rhind whom we have to thank for the turret rooms, tower and "bartizan corbels" - as well as the tiny stone cannons (which were presumably there to scare off would be bank robbers).

From its inception, the building appears to have been divided into a street facing office, which served the public, and two upper floors which housed the clerk or branch manager.

Glen & Henderson

After construction of the new bank building was completed, the Commercial Bank of Scotland sold off the two other tenements to the East, retaining the garden of 49/51 in its, now expanded, title. These were bought by Robert Riddoch Glen, who, along with William Horn Henderson, comprised the law firm "Glen & Henderson" (personally, I'd have chosen "Riddoch & Horn" - much more Dickensian), whose offices now occupied number 49 (where the dentist is today).

Not content with legal business alone, Glen and Henderson were also Clerks to the Commercial Bank of Scotland and local legal functionaries: much of the Sasine records from this period are written in their hand, and Robert Glen even goes so far as to refer to himself in the first person at times when recording his own property dealings.

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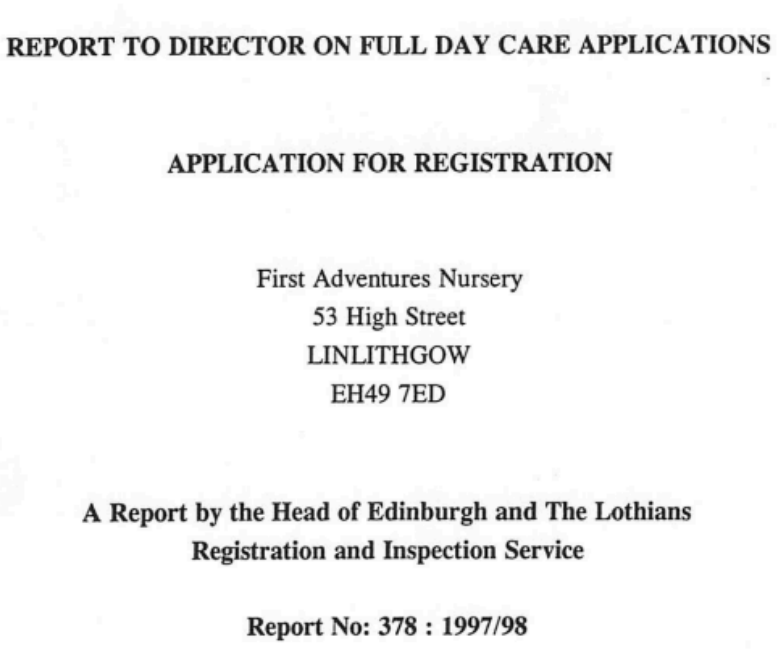
Above the doorway of 49 High Street it is still possible to see the initial “RGR”, marking the time of the eponymous law firm at this address. From the valuation rolls, which begin around this time, we can see that Robert Glen lived in the property above his firm’s offices. William Henderson, who held property elsewhere in Linlithgow, isn’t recorded as living above the bank but may have done so at some point shortly after its completion.

Both Glen and Henderson seem to have remained at the bank until their respective deaths. Robert Glen, who died earlier than Henderson, in 1889, is commemorated in a window in St. Michaels church:

The War Years and After (1918 - 1996)

Staff at the Scottish & Commercial Bank served in both the First and Second World War.

During WW1, Michael Henderson, son of William Henderson, was shot and killed at Loos on the 27th of September, 1915. He was serving as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Black Watch, having been a commissioned officer since 1895 when he served as a part-time volunteer with the Lothian Regiment.



REPORT TO DIRECTOR ON FULL DAY CARE APPLICATIONS

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION

First Adventures Nursery
53 High Street
LINLITHGOW
EH49 7ED

A Report by the Head of Edinburgh and The Lothians
Registration and Inspection Service

Report No: 378 : 1997/98

Here Come the Children! (1997 - 2001)

In 1997, First Adventures was founded by Linda and Martin Carr. Within months of opening its doors, Gillian and Jennifer (our manager and deputy manager) joined us - which was just as well, because the Nursery was an immediate success.

Initially, the Nursery occupied the first floor of the building, which was leased from the bank, but within a year it had expanded to include the second floor as well (which was hastily repainted from its original deep chocolate brown). At this time, the bank occupied all of the ground floor and children had to access the gardens by going out of the front door and down the alleyway (as the two parts of the building didn’t connect internally).

The Nursery Grows (2001 - 2020)

Demand continued to outstrip supply and when the property at 43a became available, the Nursery purchased it for use as a baby unit. Planning permission was granted and further planning permission for an access route which involved piercing the tailrigg wall was also obtained.

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The gardens were first centrally planned and laid out at this time and Teddy Bear House was redeveloped by adding an extension to the front (where the entranceway is) and extending the conservatory to the rear.

During this time, the bank continued to operate from the street facing portion and ground floor of the building. Internally, Turret Towers was remodeled through the removal of interior walls, opening out both playrooms, and the addition of kitchenettes and the Nursery office (which used to be a baby room before becoming a rather small, awkward library). These investments in the property were followed by the purchase of the building by the Nursery in 2008, the bank now operating as our tenant.

The Site Today (2020 onwards)

The nursery continued to grow and develop throughout after the purchase of the main property and the decision by the RBS to close its branch and withdraw from its tenancy in 2020 provided an opportunity to remodel more of the interior.

First though, the Nursery had to survive the COVID-19 Pandemic, which we did thanks to the support of our fantastic staff and parent community. To help ensure proper “bubbling”, the Nursery was granted planning consent for an outdoor classroom - our “Wild Wood Lodge” - which enabled a group of our Junior Pre-School children to operate outside, keeping groups separate and ensuring fewer disruptive closures.

After the completion of the Lodge, the next challenge was to make use of the ground floor portion of the building - the street facing bank branch and the offices to the rear. The street facing branch was retained as a commercial rental property.

Most recently, the Nursery has continued to make investments in its estate through stonework renovations, the installation of air sourced heat pumps and the maintenance and replacement of windows.

Our Gardens

The gardens owned by First Adventures are part of Linlithgow’s historic “tailriggs” - strips of land which extended back from the High Street frontages to Strawberry Bank on one side, and The Peel on the other.

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The original rigg for our building likely included what is now known as Learmonth Gardens, where the Dovecot is to be found, as we know that two of the tenements were owned by the Learmonth family. When the Edinburgh - Glasgow railway line was constructed, from 1839 onwards, the land along the back of the High Street tenements was truncated, each rear parcel being sold to the North British Railway company one by one.

Despite their shortening, the riggs continued to be used both as commercial spaces and domestic kitchen gardens. Shoemakers had their workshops behind our building and stables, yards, animal pens and storage sheds could be found behind almost every building between St. Micheal's Well and the West Port.

In letters dating from the 1880s held in West Lothian County Archives as part of the Henderson Collection, WIlliam Henderson bemoaned the difficulty of managing what he called the "fruitery" - a walled or hedged area (shown on the OS Town Plan of 1856) located where our vegetable patch and compost area is today. Some tenants found the upkeep to be a burden and the Commercial Bank (inevitably perhaps) seems to have resorted to taking care of the gardens themselves.

The gardens have been used as long as the Nursery has been on the High Street (since 1997), but they were first centrally planned by the Nursery in 2003. The original layout plan and disposition of play areas was developed in collaboration with Historic Environment Scotland, who were so pleased with the result that they gave us an award following the realisation of the plan at the end of the year.

Our rigg remains the only truly commercially operating rigg within Linlithgow. Of course, many of the riggs have been built over entirely and others have been developed with smaller, new buildings which host restaurants or other businesses. But in none of these locations is the original fabric of the rigg itself intrinsic to the operation of the business - outdoor play is part of the UNCRC and an indivisible part of our provision: no garden, no Nursery.

We believe that there is no better way to keep the historic tradition of the working tailriggs alive than through the very serious business of children's play.