

## OLD & NEW TOWN WALKS (3)

### **The Netherbow Port**

The Canongate remained a separate burgh until 1856 when it was merged with Edinburgh. 'Canongate' means the way of the canons or monks, ('gate') is an old Scots word for a street). The monks came originally from Holyrood Abbey which lies ahead of you at the foot of the Royal Mile. The brass plaques mark out the site of the Netherbow Port, one of the principal gateways into the burgh. Many famous Scots, including David I, James IV, Mary, Queen of Scots, Charles I and Bonnie Prince Charlie have passed by here on their way to Holyrood, as has our present monarch Queen Elizabeth. It was through the Netherbow that the English smashed their way and the Jacobites sneaked their way in capturing the burgh in 1544 and 1745 respectively. The Netherbow Port was demolished in 1764. The clock was given to the Orphan Hospital located close to the Calton Hill. When this was demolished to make way for the Waverley Station, which was opened in 1848, the clock then was moved to the new Orphans' Hospital at the Dean, now the Dean Gallery, part of the National Galleries of Scotland.

### **Morocco Land to Moray House**

Look across the Canongate for the little statue of a Moor set above the street level. This marks the site of an old tenement known as Morocco Land. Edinburgh tradition tells of the arrival of a fleet of Moorish pirates in the year 1645. Edinburgh was stricken by plague and too weak to defend itself. All seemed lost. However (so the story goes!), the Moorish captain turned out to be an Edinburgh man, Andrew Gray. As a youth, he had escaped from the Tollbooth and fled the burgh. He fell in love with the Lord Provost's daughter; they married and settled in what came to be known as Morocco Land.

Across the road is the site of Gibb's Close. Mary Paterson, one of the last victims of William Burke and William Hare was murdered in 1828.

About 40 paces further on you will pass Chessel's Court, an attractive 18<sup>th</sup> century development and scene of the famous Deacon Brodie's botched attempt in 1788 to rob the Excise Office located here. Brodie fled to London and from there to Amsterdam but was arrested on the eve of his departure to New York. He was brought back and hanged in October 1788 before a crowd of thousands of spectators.

Ahead of you now, you can see the impressive balcony and pyramid-capped entrance to Moray House, a fine surviving example of a 17<sup>th</sup> century townhouse.

The property was built originally in 1628 for the Countess of Home and then passed to her daughter, the Countess of Moray in 1645. It is now the Moray House School of Education, part of the University of Edinburgh. Oliver Cromwell stayed here in 1648 and again in September 1650 after his victory over the Scots at the Battle of Dunbar. The first floor room facing onto the balcony has a beautifully decorated original plaster ceiling. Traditionally this is where Cromwell set up his headquarters during his occupation of Edinburgh.

In May of that same year a wedding party was being held in this room. This was the celebration of the marriage of the Marquis of Lorne, son of the powerful Earl of Argyll to Lady Mary Stewart, eldest daughter of the owner of the house, the Earl of Moray. The guests were interrupted by a noise from the street outside. They crowded to the windows and onto the balcony to see below them a cart guarded by soldiers and on that cart was the chained figure of the Marquis of Montrose. A great champion of the defeated King Charles I, Montrose had been captured and brought into Edinburgh to face trial. Traditionally the wedding guests shouted abuse at the fallen hero while it is said that the Countess of Argyll spat on him. Montrose was executed as a traitor on the gallows next to the Mercat Cross. Ironically both Argyll and his son were later to suffer a similar fate.

Cross over the Canongate to house number 185. This is known as Bible Land because of the inscription above you. The property was built in 1677 by the Incorporation of Cordiners or Shoemakers. If you look above the inscription, you will see a carving of a shoemaker's rounding knife.

### **The Canongate Tollbooth and Huntly House.**

This is a reminder that for centuries the Canongate was a separate burgh. This was the council headquarters from where the business of the Canongate was carried out. The present building dates from 1591 replacing an older building that stood on this site. The building was refurbished at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a clock added. Until 1834 this was used as a debtors' prison. If you look closely you can see again the arms of the Canongate represented by a stag's head and a cross.

Across the road from you is another surviving house of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In fact this is a group of 3 houses built in 1517 and then extended and linked together in 1570. The houses were originally entered from the adjoining Bakehouse Close that could be closed and defended when trouble threatened. The property was purchased in 1647 by the incorporation of Hammermen of Edinburgh who rented out the apartments. In 1753,

one of the residents was the Dowager Duchess of Gordon. The property is known as Huntly House but there is no historical record of any connection with this titled family.

### **The Canongate Kirk**

The striking Canongate Kirk was built in 1688 using money left to the burgh by Thomas Moodie. The Church was to house the congregation evicted from Holyrood on the orders of King James II. He wanted to use the church at Holyrood to accommodate the Knights of the Thistle, the Scottish Order of Chivalry. The King though never had the opportunity to meet with his Knights at Holyrood as that same year he was forced off the throne because of his Roman Catholicism. The Coat of Arms between the front windows is that of Thomas Moodie, the benefactor. The Royal Coat of Arms that you can see above the rose window is that of James's daughter Mary and of her husband William who replaced James in 1688. Above the Coat of Arms you can again see the emblem of the Canongate.

The churchyard is perhaps better-known than the church because of the many famous people buried here, including Adam Smith, the famous economist.

### **Queensberry House.**

The imposing Queensberry House, a 17th century mansion was once owned by the Marquis of Queensberry, and is now part of the complex of buildings that comprise the Scottish Parliament. By a curious coincidence, it also played a part in the days leading up to the demise of the previous Scottish Parliament which voted to end centuries of independence in 1707. Although Scotland and England had shared the same monarch since 1603, by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, relations between the two countries had deteriorated. Rather than risk matters getting worse, commissioners were appointed by both countries to see whether terms could be agreed for a treaty of Union. The Marquis of Queensberry was one of the most important of the Scottish commissioners. The proposed Treaty was deeply unpopular. On the night of the final vote, Queensberry escorted by his servants left for Parliament House. Queensberry House was left deserted apart from a young servant boy and the violently insane James Douglas, the Earl of Drumlanrig, the 10 years old eldest surviving son of Queensberry. Imagine the scene when Queensberry returned from the Parliament to discover his son sitting in front of the kitchen fire turning the spit on which was impaled the body of the unfortunate servant. Traditionally Queensberry had his son strangled on the spot. However the boy was sent from Edinburgh he was spirited away to a family estate at Calverley in West Yorkshire. He died there in 1715 and was buried in the local churchyard.

### **The White Horse Close, Holyrood – Parliament, Abbey and Palace.**

Move down further and on your left you will come to the White Horse Close. This charming courtyard dates originally from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is thought to have been named after the white horses of Mary, Queen of Scots that were traditionally stabled here. Some 200 hundred years later, this quiet courtyard would have been filled by Highland officers from the Jacobite army of Bonnie Prince Charlie who were quartered here in September 1745. They clattered past where you are standing on the morning of 30<sup>th</sup> October on the ill-fated journey that would end in such bloodshed on the battlefield of Culloden in April 1746.

Move (carefully) across the road and stand in front of the two old buildings that face you. These are surviving houses of the early 1500s known as the Abbey Strand. Now look at the Parliament building across the street. The new Scottish Parliament came into being by an Act of Parliament in 1998. Following a referendum of the Scottish people held in September 1997, a Parliament returned to Scotland for the first time since 1707. This Parliament was given certain devolved powers such as responsibility for Education and Health. Other matters such as Foreign Policy and Defence remain as the responsibility of the UK Parliament at Westminster.

The building was officially opened by Her Majesty the Queen on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2004. The Scottish Parliament building remains highly controversial but worth a visit. Nevertheless it is the home of Scotland's Parliament and as such plays a significant part in the life of 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland.

Finally make your way to the gate and railings to the left of the Holyrood Palace courtyard. Next to the Palace itself you can see the ruins of what was Holyrood Abbey. Holyrood (meaning Holy Cross) Abbey grew to be one of the richest in Scotland. For centuries, kings and queens of Scotland were baptised, married and buried here. The abbey was severely damaged when an English army sacked Edinburgh in 1544. Although repairs were carried out, the abbey never regained its former grandeur. When the roof collapsed in a storm in 1768, the surviving buildings were abandoned.

Finally we have Holyrood Palace started in the 15<sup>th</sup> century by James IV but not completed until the late 1600s. The north-east tower is the only surviving part of the original Palace and it was here that Mary, Queen of Scots took up residence on her return to Scotland in 1561.