EFVGA ALTERNATIVE WALK

Edinburgh's Old & New Towns

1.The City Chambers.

At the entrance to the City Chambers is a plaque which commemorates the home of Sir Simon Preston of Craigmillar, LP of the burgh. This is where Mary, Queen of Scots spent her last night in Edinburgh following her surrender at Carberry on 15th June 1567. From here she was taken to Loch Leven Castle and forced to abdicate.

The City Chambers was built as the Royal Exchange between 1753-1761. This was one of the improvements inspired by Lord Provost George Drummond. The idea was to encourage the merchants of Edinburgh to move their trade indoors and not outside around the area where the ancient Mercat Cross (demolished in 1756) had stood. The work was designed by Robert Adam and carried out by John Fergus. This a courtyard development open to the street through a single –storey rusticated screen. The Corinthian pilasters were added by John Fergus. The statue of Alexander and Buccephulus was sculpted by Sir John Steele in 1886. it originally stood in St Andrews Square but was moved here in 1916.

The Royal Exchange was a commercial failure and was taken over as the City Chambers in 1811.

In 'Humphrey Clinker' written in 1766 by Tobias Smollet, the author remarks that: *"All the people of business in Edinburgh, and even the genteel company. May be seen standing in crowds every day from one to two in the afternoon… as a force of custom, rather than move a few yards to an Exchange that stands empty on one side."*

2. Anchor Close

This Close dates back to 1521 and is named after the Anchor Tavern which was another popular Edinburgh 'howff'. The Close was the home of George Drummond

(1687-1766) who was six times LP of Edinburgh. He did more than any other citizen of his day to bring improvements to the Old Town and to promote the construction of the New Town.

The Close also held the premises of William Smellie the printer. Here was printed the 1st edition of the 'Encyclopedia Birittanica' in 1768 and the Edinburgh Edition of the Poems of Robert Burns in 1787. It was also the home of the Crochallan Fencibles, one of Edinburgh's famous 18th Century clubs. The name apparently came from an old Gaelic song – 'Cro Chalien' = Colin's Cattle sung by the landlord Dawney Douglas. Smellie introduced Robert Burns to the club.

3.The Mercat Cross

The Mercat Cross is where important national proclamations are still made. Interestingly until quite recently they were made 3 days after the event. This is because that was the time

that it took a fast rider to bring the news from London to Edinburgh. This Cross was restored in 1885 by William Ewart Gladstone, the local MP and Prime Minister. The Cross traditionally was the centre of Scottish burgh life. People would meet to chat, to exchange news and to conduct their business. There was also a darker side to the Cross as it was here that many executions were carried out. It also at the Cross that criminals were publicly punished, often with great cruelty. The Burgh Records for September 1652 describe how two unfortunate Englishmen, who had toasted the health of the exiled Charles II, were given 39 lashes and were then nailed by their ears to the gallows beside the Cross. This Cross was restored in 1885 by William Ewart Gladstone, the local MP and Prime Minister. Only the column has survived from the original.

4. The Great Fire 1824

In 1824, Edinburgh Council created the UK's first municipal Fire Brigade and took the brave decision to appoint a young twenty-four years' old builder, James Braidwood, as the burgh's first Firemaster. Braidwood had been born in Edinburgh and educated at the High School. He had joined his father's building firm and had trained as a surveyor. He thus had a very good working knowledge of building construction. Braidwood recruited his first firemen, known as 'pioneers' from men familiar with the building trade – masons, plumbers and carpenters. Realising that the height of Edinburgh's tenements would prove a particular challenge, he also recruited former sailors who were used to climbing at heights and to handling heavy equipment. Braidwood put great emphasis on training and physical fitness for himself and his men.

Within just two months of the brigade's formation, they were called into action. The fire started at 10.00pm on the night of 15 November 1824 in the premises of an engraver on the second floor of a tenement in Old Assembly Close, on the south side of the High Street. The burgh's Fire Brigade was quickly on the scene but their work was hampered by the height of the tenement buildings and the narrowness of the close which prevented the fire engines from getting near to the blaze. They also struggled to find a source of water. Their work was further hampered by the interference of Town Councillors who countermanded Braidwood's orders. All that night and the next day the fire spread. To the choking smoke and fiery embers was now added the thick masonery dust as some of the burnt tenement buildings came crashing down. Then at 9.00am on the morning of 16 November, the fire reached the Tron Kirk. The spire came crashing down but the building was saved. Fiercev winds blew the flames towards Parliament Close. Braidwood's statue stands on the spot where a team of fireman tried to stop the flames from reaching the historic Close.

St Giles and Parliament Hall though were saved. It was Edinburgh's weather that finally came to the rescue. Fortunately the wind eased and a downpour on 17 November eventually put out the fires. Thirteen lives were lost including those of two firemen and many people were injured. The damage was immense with twenty-five tenements, some eleven storeys high, totally destroyed and many others damaged. A Committee of Inquiry exonerated Braidwood. The Firemaster was 'head-hunted'. He was appointed as the first Firemaster of London in 1833 and, at the age of 61, was tragically killed while on duty in 1861 at the Tooley Street Dock Fire.

5. Parliament Hall

The oldest part of Parliament House is Parliament Hall, which the Town Council of Edinburgh, at its expense, had built as a permanent home for the parliament, and as such is the oldest extant purpose built parliamentary building in the British Isles. It was completed in 1639 to the design of James Murray. It has a dramatic hammerbeam roof made of Scandinavian oak, which may have been designed to evoke Parliament Hall at Stirling Castle, a previous home to the Scottish court. After the Act of Union 1707 the Parliament of Scotland was adjourned, and the building ceased to be used for its original function. The Hall was used for the sitting of courts, but in recent times has been subject to restoration work and now remains open as a meeting place for lawyers. In 1822 King George IV was entertained here to a lavish banquet by the Town Council.

Beneath Parliament Hall is the Laigh Hall which original contained stabling for the members of the Scottish Parliament – The Three Estates. For many years it housed the records of Scotland before the opening of Register House at the East End of Princes Street in 1785.

6. The Tolbooth

The Tolbooth's earliest reference is 1385 when it was damaged by the occupying army of Richard II. It was visited by many Scottish monarchs including Mary, Queen of Scots who attended Parliament here; held many famous prisoners and was the scene of many executions. Perhaps the most infamous incident took place in 1736 when the commander of the Town Guard, Captain Porteous, was dragged from the Tolbooth cells and lynched by an angry mob. Despite the promise of a large reward, no-one was ever punished for this outrageous crime. The incident inspired Sir Walter Scott to write 'The Heart of Midlothian', the 8th of the Waverley Novels published in 1818. The Tollbooth was finally demolished in 1817.

7. The Last Public Execution (20th June, 1864).-This was the execution of George Bryce, the 'Ratho Murderer' who had cut the throat of his former girlfriend. He was hanged on the morning of 20th June 1864 before a crowd of between 20000 – 30000 jeering people. Bryce went to his death calmly muttering to himself "keep composed; keep composed." The most infamous criminal hanged here was William Burke, executed in front of a crowd of 40000 in January 1829.

8. George IV Bridge.-

This was designed by Thomas Hamilton, architect of the Royal High School building in Regent Road. It was built between 1827 – 1836 and was named in honour of King George IV who had visited the City in 1822. The bridge linked the Old Town with the spreading suburbs to the south. The bridge is 300 yards long and has 8 arches, only 1 of which is visible. Its construction saw the destruction of many old properties including Old Bank Close and Libberton's Wynd, home to Dowie's Tavern, a favourite Edinburgh drinking howff.

9. Brodie's Close.-

Named after Francis Brodie, Deacon of the Wrights of Edinburgh and a member of the Town Council, whose notorious son, William, also Deacon and a Council member, was hanged at the Tolbooth for burglary in 1788, alongside his accomplice George Smith. Previously it had been known as Cullen's Close after Lord Cullen who died in 1726. The earliest part of the property dates to 1570

10.Baillie McMorrans House & Riddle's Court.

The house was built in 1590 by Baillie John McMorran, Edinburgh's richest citizen. The Court originally ran down to the Cowgate but was split when work started on the later-named Victoria Street in 1827. John McMorran had been a servant of the Regent Morton who was executed in 1581 for his part in the murders of Rizzio and Darnley. In September 1595 John McMorran was shot dead by 10 years old William Sinclair a pupil at the High School. In 1598 his brother Ninian McMorran entertained King James VI and his young wife Anne of Denmark to dinner. The building is now The Patrick Geddes Heritage Centre.

Riddle's Court is named after George Riddle, a wright who purchased it in 1728 and extended it. He built up-market apartments for better-off citizens. Amongst the first residents was David Hume. The property was saved from destruction by Patrick Geddes.

11. The West Bow.

Until the early 1800s, the main approach to Edinburgh from the north and the west was up this steep winding street. There were no steps in those days, so the last stretch up to the Royal Mile must have been very tough going. This was the route taken over the years by hundreds of condemned criminals who were led past here from the Tollbooth, the town gaol, to be executed in the Grassmarket down to your right at the foot of the West Bow. The houses at the foot of Victoria Street are original and date back to the 17th century. One of the most infamous prisoners to be dragged down here was the accused witch Grizel Weir who along with her brother Major Thomas Weir was executed in 1670.

12. Mylne's Court.

The earliest essay in open courtyard planning in the Old Town. Built in 1690 to the design of Robert Mylne, 7th in his family to be the Royal Master Mason for Scotland. He was also responsible for much of the extension work on Holyrood Palace ordered by King Charles II.

The 8 storey north block is entered by a stair at the 3rd storey level. The six storey octagonal tower is a notable feature. Like most of the Old Town, Mylne's Court became seriously overcrowded in the 19th century. The census of 1851 recorded 468 people living here. The Court was saved from demolition by Sir Patrick Geddes. The Court was restored as University Halls of Residence in 1968.

13.James Court.

Named after James Brownhill, the wright, who built this open-court development between 1723 -1727. It became very much a 'des res' for those Edinburgh citizens who could afford the high rents asked for. Amongst the well-known residents were David Hume and James Boswell who entertained Dr Johnson here in 1773. Boswell had taken over Hume's apartment when he moved to the New Town.

14.Gladstone's Land.

Purchased by Thomas Gledstanes in 1617. He converted the much older property and extended it some 20' into the Lawnmarket. Notable features include the segmental arch, the outside stone stairs, the shuttered windows and the recreated workshop at street level. The property was acquired by NTS in 1934.

15.Lady Stair's Close.

Built in 1622 for Sir William Gray of Pittendrum, a wealthy merchant. His initials and those of his wife, Geida Smith, are carved above the doorway. At the start of the 18th century it was the home of the beautiful young widow Lady Primrose. The cruelty of her late husband had persuaded her not to remarry. However the celebrated Earl of Stair was determined to have her hand. She refused all his advances. In desperation he bribed his way into her house and in the morning he stood at the street window with nothing on to give the impression that he and Lady Primrose were in a relationship. Poor Lady Primrose felt obliged to marry him to protect her reputation. At first it was a very unhappy marriage as the Earl of Stair, like many of his contemporaries, was a very heavy drinker. One night when drunk, he assaulted his wife. Although bruised and bleeding, Lady Stair did not have her injuries attended to. Instead she sat in her chair while her drunken husband slept. When he awoke next morning he was so shocked to see what he had done, that he promised never to drink again. After that the couple enjoyed a long and happy life together. For many years until her death in 1759, she was the queen of Edinburgh Society. She was reputedly the first in Edinburgh to have a black servant in her household.

By the late 19th century, the north, west and south wings had been demolished, only the east wind survived and was under threat. The property was saved by Sir Patrick Geddes who persuaded the Earl of Rosebury, head of the Primrose family, to restore it and to gift it to the City in 1897.

16. Planning for a New Town (I would suggest telling this story in Lady Stair's Close)

Lord Provost George Drummond deserves the credit for Edinburgh's famous New Town. In 1752 a committee of leading citizens petitioned Parliament for permission to extend the royalty to enable a new town to be built on the green fields to the north of the Nor' Loch. Permission wasn't granted until 1766. In anticipation the Council announced a competition to design the planned New Town. The competition was won by a young, previously-unknown 23 year old architect, James Craig. His design was a simple 'grid iron' of parallel streets balanced at either end by elegant squares each with a grand church. At the insistence

of King George III, this New Town was to be a celebration of Great Britain and the royal house of Hanover. The principal street, running along a natural ridge of higher ground was to be named George Street after the King himself and his son the Prince of Wales, Hanover Street celebrated the family name of the King and Frederick Street after the King's late father and his second son the Duke of York. The original plan shown to George III had the southern street, in the shadow of the Castle and the Old Town, named 'St Giles Street' after Edinburgh's patron saint. King George was not best pleased with this suggestion! He is reported as having stamped his feet and shouted:

"Hey! Hey! What! What! St Giles Street! Never do! Never do!"

To be fair to the King, he was not being anti - Edinburgh or anti-Scottish. St Giles was also the patron saint of lepers and beggars and the district of St Giles in London was a hotbed of crime and loose living. So the name was changed to Princes Street after the King's sons. The two squares were to be named after the patron saints of Scotland (St Andrew) and England (St George). Unfortunately there already was a George Square in Edinburgh so the western square was named instead after George's wife and his eldest daughter both named Charlotte. Between the principal streets, two lanes were to be built for merchants, tradesmen, servants and stabling. These were to be named after the emblems of Scotland and England – Thistle Street and Rose Street.

Work started on this first phase of the New Town in 1767 and was not finished until 1811 when Charlotte Square was completed.

17. The Mound.

It certainly was not planned by James Craig. It just appeared as the result of the builders of the New Town simply dumping the excavated soil and stones from the foundations of the houses and gardens. It has been estimated that some two million cartloads were dumped by the builders. This ever-growing 'Earthen Mound' was seen as a convenient short-cut between the Old Town and the expanding New Town. In 1781, George Boyd, a clothier living in Gosford's Close in the Old Town, put down planks on the Mound to make it easier for him to reach his New Town customers. He was followed by Lord Provost Greive who had bought a new house on the corner of Hanover Street. Soon the Mound became a popular, if at times muddy, causeway. Many contemporaries were outraged. "One of the greatest mistakes committed as a matter of taste" raged one "was the erection of the Earthen Mound across the beautiful valley of the loch." There was no going back however and in 1834 the Mound was paved and lit.

18. The Top of the Mound

If you look to the top of the Mound you will see on the left, the impressive bulk of the headquarters of The Bank of Scotland founded in 1695. Work started on the Bank's headquarters in 1802 and it was extensively rebuilt in the 1860s. The tall building on the right above the grass is New College, designed by William Playfair, opened in 1850 originally as a teaching college for the Free Church of Scotland. Behind it through a courtyard is the Assembly Hall built in 1859 as the meeting place for the General Assembly

of the Church of Scotland. It is also a very popular location for theatrical productions during the annual Edinburgh International Festival.

19. The National Galleries

Work started on the first building, originally the Royal Institution now the Royal Scottish Academy, in 1822. The building is modelled on a Greek Doric temple. The statue of a seated Queen Victoria by Sir John Steell, was added in 1844. The architect was William Playfair, who over the course of a career spanning some 50 years was responsible for designing many of Edinburgh's most famous buildings. The building now has a permanent art collection and regular exhibitions.

The National Gallery of Scotland on your right was started in 1845, the architect was again William Playfair. Again you can see the strong influence of Greece with its Corinthian columns and Ionic porticos. (Playfair also designed the railway tunnel beneath the Mound)

20. The Scott Monument

The winner of a competition organised in 1840 to identify a fitting memorial to Sir Walter Scott (d 1832) was won by 'a modest country joiner', George Meikle Kemp who had entered his design under a pseudonym, 'John Morvo', a 16th century mason who had worked on Melrose Abbey. Kemp was heavily influenced by the current fashion for Gothic architecture and by the remains of Melrose Abbey. The monument is decorated with statues from the writings of Scott and other Scottish authors.

Work started in April 1840 and the foundation stone was laid in August 1840. The statue is 180ft in height and 55ft. at its base. The total cost of the monument was £15650. This was the only known building designed by Kemp who died tragically in the Union Canal in 1844 just before the monument was completed. The statue of Scott with his favourite dog Maida fashioned by Sir John Steell, was added in 1846 at a cost of £2000.

Before we leave the foot of the Mound, cross over the road and enter this section of Princes Street Gardens. There you will see Edinburgh's colourful mechanical Floral Clock. The Clock, the first such clock in the world, was created in 1903 by John McHattie of the City Parks' Department. A new design is planted each year using some 35,000 plants. They used to be planted separately but now are planted in specially-designed containers. The statue above is of Allan Ramsay, the 18th century Scottish poet, whose equally famous son, also Allan, was a well-known artist.

21**. Hanover Street & the Statue of George IV**

There are still some original houses here that can be pointed out. The statue of a svelte George IV is by Francis Chantrey who was knighted for his efforts. The statue was erected in 1831 to celebrate the King's famous visit to Edinburgh in August 1822. It has to be said that the statue is very flattering! King George was by then 58 years old and years of over-eating and heavy drinking had left him very overweight. Although standing only about 5' 2" (160 cms), George weighed nearly 19 stone (120 kgs) and his waist in 1795 was measured

at 51" (130 cms)! No wonder that Sir Walter Scott privately referred to George as *"our fat friend."*

22. St Andrew's Church

The present building was erected following a competition to choose a design. The competition was won byMajor Alexander Fraser. Work started in 1785.

It has a Corinthian portico with an unusual oval auditorium with fine plaster work on a flat ceiling. The spire, added in 1789, was designed by William Sibbald.

The church was the scene of the 1843 Disruption of the Church of Scotland led by Dr Thomas Chalmers. On May 18th he led 470 ministers and elders from a meeting of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Watched by thousands of people, they marched to Tanfield Hall, Canonmills and there convened themselves as the Free Church of Scotland with Dr. Chalmers appointed as the first Moderator.

22. James Clark Maxwell

At the east end of George Street is the statue of the Scottish physicist and mathematician James Clark Maxwell (1831 – 1879). He is perhaps best known for his work in electromagnetics and quantum physics. In 1861 he produced the world's first permanent colour photograph. His work paved the way for the digital age. In the millennium poll—a survey of the 100 most prominent physicists—Maxwell was voted the third greatest physicist of all time, behind only Newton and Einstein.

23. Thistle Court

The little house on the left of the Court is in fact the first house to be built in the New Town. It was built in 1767 for John Young and the foundation stone was laid by James Craig. Young was awarded £20 by the Town Council for being the first to make his home in the New Town. As you can see, it is a rather modest building and certainly not what the Town Council had wanted to see in their grand New Town! So regulations were introduced to ensure that every house that was to be built on the main streets was to be built of dressed ashlar stone; have three stories and a sunken basement; have its own entrance and a street frontage of no more than 48 feet (14.4metres).

24. St Andrew's Square

St Andrew's Square, considered at one time to be one of the richest squares in Europe because of the concentration of banks and insurance companies, marks the eastern end of the original New Town of Edinburgh. Amongst the first residents of the newly-completed square in 1778 were the Earls of Aboyne, Dumfries and Dalhousie. The future Lord Henry Brougham was born in no. 21 in 1778. Brougham was to become a leading politician and served as Lord Chancellor from 1830 - 1834. He was one of the leaders of the campaign to abolish the Slave Trade. He was the designer of the Brougham, a four-wheeled, horse-drawn style of carriage that was named after him.

25. The Melville Monument

Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville. (1742-1811) was admitted to the Scottish Bar in 1763 and appointed Solicitor-General in 1774. He was M.P. for Midlothian (1774) and appointed as Lord Advocate in 1775 and President of the Board of Control in 1784. He was a close ally of William Pitt and was dubbed 'the uncrowned king of Scotland.'

In 1791 he was appointed as Secretary of State for the Home Department and created Viscount Melville of Dunira in 1802. Melville was a director of the East India Company and has been accused of obstructing the campaign to abolish slavery. Under Pitt he served as Secretary of War and First Lord of the admiralty.

In 1805 he was impeached for 'gross malversation and breach of duty' as Secretary of the Treasury but after a two week trial in the House of Lords he was acquitted. He retired to his estate of Dunira in Comrie and died there in 1811.

The monument was designed by the well-known Edinburgh architect William Burn and erected in 1820. The monument, which stands 42.6 metres high (140 feet), proved to be extremely challenging to complete. Robert Stevenson the famous lighthouse engineer and grandfather of the well-known Edinburgh author Robert Louis Stevenson, was brought in to assist. He used the crane that had helped construct the Bell Lighthouse to put the monument in place.

The statue of Dundas, sculpted by Sir Francis Chantrey, was added in 1823. A plaque records that the cost of £8000 was voluntarily subscribed by the officers and men of the Royal Navy. You have to wonder though what choice the ordinary seamen had in supporting the project!

26.The RBS Building

The Royal Bank was originally built as the town house of Sir Lawrence Dundas, a member of one of the most powerful families in late 18th century Scotland. He was a banker and a businessman who had made a fortune supplying the British Army in the Seven Years' War (1756 – 1763). When Dundas learnt of the plans for the New Town he bought up the land where James Craig had intended the church of St Andrew to be built. To the dismay of the Town Council, Dundas proceeded to build this grand private house, modelled on Marble Hill House in London, in the popular classical style of architecture. It was rumoured at the time that Sir Laurence, who was a heavy gambler, lost his new home over a game of cards. Dundas though was so fond of his house that he paid for another house to be built for the man who had beaten him. Sir Lawrence died in 1781.

The building became the headquarters of the Royal Bank of Scotland in 1825. The statue in front of the Bank building is of Sir John Hope, 4th Earl of Hopetoun. Hope was a distinguished general during the long French wars and commanded the famous regiment, the 92nd Highlanders. The statue showing him as a Roman commander, was commissioned by the Town Council and unveiled in 1834.

The Western Alternative

The Assembly Rooms, George Street.

For better-off Edinburgh folk, the Assembly was one of the highlights of their winter social calendar. This was a weekly dance started at the end of the 17th century. These popular assemblies were held in the Old Assembly Close and then from 1756 in the New Assembly Rooms in Bell's Wynd off the High Street. Young men and women would dance under the strict supervision of a lady-directress charged with ensuring good behaviour. For many years, the dances were supervised by the formidable Miss Nicky Murray, a sister of the Earl of Mansfield. One contemporary recalled that:

"These Assemblies began about five and stopped at eleven. As the bells of St Giles rang out the hour, Miss Nicky waved her fan, the fiddlers stopped playing and the dancing was at an end…

When the Assembly was over, footmen hastened to get their ladies into their (sedan) chairs, after which the chairmen trotted off with their burdens preceded by link-bearers (with their torches) and accompanied by gallants with hat in hand and swords at side."

Clearly for those young people whose families had moved to the New Town, it was far too much trouble to travel all the way back up to the High Street, so money was raised and a new Assembly Rooms was planned. It was built to a design of John Henderson in 1784. The portico was added in 1818.

Try to imagine the scene with carriages drawing up at the door and beautifully-dressed young ladies being escorted into the building by servants carrying torches. It would appear though that the ladies had to wait for their male escorts to arrive – often the worse for wear!. Here is how one contemporary, Hugo Arnot, described the scene:

"Gentlemen reeling from the tavern flustered with wine stumbled into an assembly of as elegant and beautiful women as any in Europe."

The Assembly Rooms were also used for more formal occasions. It was here at a dinner arranged in his honour in 1827, that Sir Walter Scott first publicly acknowledged that he was indeed the author of the famous Waverley Novels which included such tales as 'The Heart of Midlothian', 'Rob Roy' and 'Ivanhoe'.

Here too popular authors of the day would give readings from their books. Charles Dickens made several visits. On one occasion though in 1861, the organisers had issued too many tickets and the hall where Dickens was to read from his ever-popular story 'A Christmas Carol' was packed to overflowing. Several people fainted and many were crushed but undeterred Dickens completed his reading to thunderous applause.

The Assembly Rooms were also the setting for two Highland Balls held to honour King George IV during his famous visit in August 1822.

Continue west along George Street. No. 81a was the home of Eugene – Marie Chantrelle who was hanged in 1878 for poisoning his young wife Elizabeth Dyer. Chantrelle had come

to Edinburgh to take up a position as a French teacher. He was forced to marry one of his students, 17 years' old Elizabeth Dyer when she became pregnant. The marriage was not a happy one.

In October 1877, Chantrelle took out a life insurance policy for his wife for £1,000. On New Year's Day 1878 a maid found Elizabeth lying dead in bed in their house here in George Street. I

At first it was thought that her death had been caused by a broken gas pipe found under the bed. However, Dr Henry Littlejohn, Edinburgh's Medical Officer of Health, was very suspicious. He asked for a further post-mortem to be carried out. Traces of opium were found in Elizabeth's body. Chantrelle was arrested and charged with the murder of his wife. He was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. The execution took place at the Calton Gaol on 31st May 1878. Chantrelle's execution was the first to be carried out in private in Edinburgh.

Thistle Street, Frederick Street and Queen Street.

The narrow street, Thistle Street that you have just walked along was like Rose Street, originally intended as a more modest street with homes for shopkeepers, servants and tradesmen. There was also stabling. However, such was the desire to obtain a house in the expanding (and increasingly expensive!) New Town, that the houses were soon taken over by professional people and even people of rank. Amongst the more colourful of the earlier residents were Charles Edward Stuart, the self-styled Count of Albany and his brother John Sobieski Stuart. They claimed to be the grand-sons of Bonnie Prince Charlie, the exiled leader of the Jacobite cause who had been defeated at the Battle of Culloden in April 1746. They dressed extravagantly in Highland costume and were welcomed into society. In fact though, they were imposters. Far from being members of the royal Stuart family in exile, they were the sons of Captain Thomas Allan of the Royal Navy.

Behind the remaining original houses you can still see some of the surviving stables - a reminder that the New Town was built in the age of horses and carriages. Thistle Street continues westwards first as Hill Street and then as Young Street, the names of the two builders James Hill and John Young who developed each section.

Work started on Frederick Street in 1786. The street was named after Frederick, the Duke of York, second son of George III. He is perhaps better known as the incompetent general of the nursery rhyme 'The Grand Old Duke of York'.

Now look at the buildings around you on Queen Street. Here you will find a greater concentration of the original 18th century houses of the first New Town. The gardens to the north of you belong to the residents and were laid out in 1823.

It is perhaps hard to appreciate that when the first residents moved into these houses, they had open country behind them running down to the Firth of Forth beyond. Writing in 1824, William Chambers, the famous Edinburgh writer and publisher remarked that:

"Many are still alive (who) remember the fields bearing a rich crop of wheat that now bear houses. Game used to be plentiful on these grounds, in particular partridge and hares."

Perhaps the most famous early resident of Queen Street was Sir James Young Simpson who lived for many years at Number 52. It was here on the night of 28th November 1847 that he and two medical friends, Drs Keith and Duncan, discovered the anaesthetic properties of chloroform. The search for a means of overcoming the pain of surgery and of childbirth had for years challenged the medical profession. On that night in 1847, Simpson and his friends inhaled chloroform from individual glasses and napkins. The next thing that Dr Simpson remembered was finding himself on the floor with his friends snoring beside him. Dr Simpson was hailed as a saviour throughout the medical world. Honours were showered upon him but he continued in a typically modest way to carry out his work as a doctor. Queen Victoria had chloroform for the birth of her 7th child Prince Leopold, the Duke of Albany in 1853. Dr. Simpson died in November 1847. A grateful nation offered his family a tomb in Westminster Abbey in London. This was offer was however declined and Simpson is buried in nearby Warriston Cemetery. His funeral was attended by 1700 men in deep mourning and the procession was watched by a crowd of over 100000 people, many of them in tears.

Before continuing your tour, look over Queen Street Gardens towards the north. The original householders had a clear view over the Firth of Forth towards Fife and the Highland mountains beyond. This view was interrupted in 1807 when work started on an extension to the New Town. The governors of George Heriot's Hospital (now George Heriot's School) sold land that they held for residential development. Again the idea was for a series of parallel streets running from Heriot Row in the south to Fettes Row in the north. The connecting streets with Hanover Street and Frederick Street were named after leading figures and places of the day such as Prime Minister Pitt, Henry Dundas, Viscount Melville, Admiral Howe and St Vincent, scene of a famous naval victory over the French in 1797. This development was completed to the west by the construction of the Royal Circus in 1823. In the meantime a further extension was started to the west with the development of the adjacent Moray Estate in the 1820s for residential housing. These were houses on a grand scale designed by the architect Gillespie Graham. He took the inspiration of Royal Circus to create three sweeping curves, Randolph Crescent, Ainslie Place and the grandest of them all, the 12-sided Moray Place. The developer, the Earl of Moray stayed in Number 28.

Sir Walter Scott and Castle Street

Sir Walter Scott lived here in No. 39 from 1802 to 1826. Much of his best work was written in the study of this house. Scott has already made a couple of appearances during our tour. Although not as widely-read as he once was, Scott dominated 19th century British literature. As most of his stories and poems were set in Scotland it is not surprising that he was nicknamed 'The Wizard of the North'. Scott was born in Edinburgh's Old Town. He trained

as a lawyer and in time became the Clerk to the Court of Session. As a 15 year old he had a brief meeting with Robert Burns when the poet paid his first visit to Edinburgh in the winter of 1786-1787.

Scott came from a well-known family from the Scottish Borders. He developed a passion for tales and legends from his native land. His first published works were however poems rather than stories. In 1802 he wrote 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border' then 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel', then 'Marmion' and in 1810, his best known poem 'Lady of the Lake'. He now turned his hand to the writing of historical novels. 'Waverley' was published in 1814 with tremendous success. Other titles followed in quick succession. However the identity of the author was kept secret; the books were published with "by the author of 'Waverley'" on the title page. While many suspected that Scott wrote the stories, it was not until 1827 that Scott finally acknowledged that he was indeed the author of what became known as 'The Waverley Novels.' In all, 26 titles were written. Scott enjoyed tremendous success with such tales as 'The Heart of Midlothian', 'Rob Roy' and 'Ivanhoe'. At one time he was earning in excess of £10000 a year from his writing. In 1811 he purchased the little farmhouse of Abbotsford near Melrose beside the River Tweed in his beloved Scottish Borders and set about converting it into the stately home that can still be visited today. Scott was responsible for obtaining Royal permission for Edinburgh Castle to be searched for the long-lost honours of Scotland in 1817. There was a tremendous outpouring of rejoicing when the ancient Crown, Sceptre and Sword of State were discovered in a locked box. Scott was knighted for his services. He masterminded the royal visit of King George IV in 1822. Disaster though struck in 1826 when his publishing house collapsed. Scott felt honour-bound to repay his share of the debts. He was forced to give up Abbotsford and to sell this house in Castle Street.

On that sad day, 15th March, 1826 Scott wrote in his diary:

"This morning I leave number 39 Castle Street for the last time. What a portion of my life has been spent there! It has sheltered me from the prime of life to its decline and I must now bid goodbye to it. So farewell poor number 39!"

Scott moved into lodgings in St. David Street where he continued to write. As a break from writing his historical novels, Scott started work on his 'Tales of a Grandfather' in 1827 for his beloved 6 years old grandson, John Hugh Lockhart, nicknamed Hugh Littlejohn by his grandfather. Sadly the little boy died in 1831 and the series of stories was left unfinished. By now Scott was in poor health. A cruise to Europe was cut short and he was brought back to die in Abbotsford in 1832. Scott is buried in Dryburgh Abbey.

Charlotte Square.

Charlotte Square is the finest square in the City and has been designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Work started on Charlotte Square in 1792 with Robert Adam appointed as architect. He died though later that year but much of his original plan was implemented. The northern side was designed to look like the front of a palace with a grand entrance in the middle. In fact there are 11 separate houses here. Again you can see clear evidence of

the popular classical style with the Corinthian columns and the sphinxes on the roof. By now, the Council had relaxed its regulations to allow for larger windows and entrances. Whereas the first New Town houses shared a common entrance from the lanes at the rear, these houses had imposing entrance lobbies decorated with individual fan windows. Whereas the ground floor and above were of dressed ashlar stone, the servants' quarters below ground level were of rusticated stone.

These were very superior houses indeed! The first house to be completed (Number 6) was bought by Mr Orlando Hart, originally a shoemaker and now Deacon of the Guild of Cordiners for £10000, a colossal sum in those days. A study of the earliest residents of Charlotte Square confirms that the New Town had indeed attracted some of the wealthiest families not just of Edinburgh but indeed the whole of Scotland. John Lamond of Lamond (a Highland Clan Chief) lived in Number 7; Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster in Caithness moved into Number 6. He was a most energetic and interesting man. Amongst his many achievements was the publication of 'The First Statistical Account of Scotland.' This was a most ambitious enterprise. Sinclair, at his own expense, wrote to every Church of Scotland parish minister (there were more than 900 of them!) and asked them to answer a series of questions about their parish. He was interested to know about such things as location, population, agriculture, industry, education, significant changes since 1760, any events of note and so on. The returns from the parish ministers were published as they arrived back with Sir John. In all 21 volumes were produced between 1791 and 1799. These give a unique insight into life in Scotland at the end of the 18th century.

Sir John had a very large family and had to move to a bigger house round the corner in 133 George Street. He had 2 children by his first wife and 13 by his second! Like their father, the children were all very tall, either just below or over 6 feet! It must have been quite a sight to see them on their way out together. Their neighbours joked that the pavement should be renamed 'The Giants' Causeway'

The tea merchant Sir William Fettes, twice Lord Provost of Edinburgh, lived in Number 13. From very humble beginnings in Edinburgh's Old Town he rose to become one of the richest men in Scotland. He left money to found a school which as Fettes College, is today one of Scotland's most famous public schools which can count former Prime Minister Tony Blair as one of its pupils. Lord Cockburn, the eminent judge lived in Number 14. His memoirs 'Memorials of his Time', published in 1856 shortly after his death, give a colourful account of Edinburgh life in the early 19th century. Cockburn was an early conservationist and his name is preserved in 'The Cockburn Association', the leading Edinburgh conservationist organisation.

What was St George's Church stands at the west end of the Square. Robert Reid's design replaced that of Robert Adam. Work commenced in 1811 and was completed in 1814. Those familiar with St Paul's Cathedral in London will see a similarity in the dome but on a much smaller scale. In 1964, the church was moved and the building is now West Register House.

Numbers 5, 6 and 7 were gifted to the National Trust for Scotland by The Earl of Bute in lieu of death duties. Number 6, known as Bute House, is the official residence of the First

Minister of Scotland, the leader of the Scottish Government at Holyrood. Number 7 has been faithfully restored and furnished by the National Trust as it would have been in the 1790s when it was the home of the Lamont family. It is open to the public and well worth a visit.

Cross over and see if you can spot in the street outside, the iron manhole that covers the coal hole; the foot-scrapers to take the mud of your shoes and the sconces, used to extinguish the torches of the servants who had escorted you to the house.

Finally the gardens are the setting for the annual Edinburgh International Book Festival. The statue is of Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria. He died of typhoid in 1861. The statue, sculpted by Sir John Steell was unveiled by Queen Victoria in August 1867. The widowed queen knighted Steell for his work.

Eric Melvin

July 2019