

# UNITED KINGDOM

## Old and New Towns of Edinburgh

### Brief description

Edinburgh has been the Scottish capital since the 15th century. It has two distinct areas: the Old Town, dominated by a medieval fortress; and the neoclassical New Town, whose development from the 18th century onwards had a far-reaching influence on European urban planning. The harmonious juxtaposition of these two contrasting historic areas, each with many important buildings, is what gives the city its unique character.

### 1. Introduction

**Year of Inscription**

**1995**

**Agency responsible for site management**

- Edinburgh World Heritage Trust  
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### 2. Statement of Significance

**Inscription Criteria**

**C (ii), (iv)**

### Justification as provided by the State Party

a) General

Edinburgh is a great city. Its architecture and its historical importance set it apart from most other cities of the world. Partly, this greatness - this uniqueness - is a consequence of its historic existence as a significant European capital from the Renaissance period, but there are other reasons. From an early date the city saw itself as great, and whenever this status seemed threatened, Edinburgh responded in grand manner. Although in 1603 Edinburgh lost its royal presence, the decades immediately following witnessed a consolidation of the national architectural tradition - a fact illustrated most forcibly by Heriot's Hospital (1628), which resembles a royal palace rather than the school it was built to be. In 1707 Scotland lost its parliament. After a consequential period of decline and political instability, the city began a spectacular programme of civic expansion: driven by a desire for national prestige, and yet international in character. What should have been

set-backs were turned, paradoxically, to bring out a staggeringly brilliant and exciting response. And then much later, when in the 1860s parts of the Old Town had degenerated into slums, the civic response was a pioneering one for its time: and again, prestigious architecture of national stature was to result from their action.

The particular nature of Edinburgh's duality is unusual: on the one hand, on a high ridge, is the ancient Old Town, while in contrast, and set apart on a fresh site, the 18th century New Town; the former on its spectacular site, the skyline punched through by the castle, the soaring neo-gothic spire of Highland Tolbooth St John's and the robust, nationally-symbolic Imperial crown spire of St Giles; a feast of ancient architecture, looking down on the New Town, which in contrast is a calm sea of ordered classicism, the whole framed and articulated by neo-classical buildings of world-class distinction.

Scotland is associated with many things: one of the greatest of these is the intellectual tradition, which her scholars carried abroad. (For instance, between 1411 and 1560 the University of Paris had 17 rectors who were Scots.) The importance of the role which Scotland had on the European stage is well recognised. But this can be focused yet further, for Edinburgh holds a key role in this tradition, in that this city was for a time the centre of the Scottish Enlightenment, that period during which such enormous intellectual advances were made. This is the same city which these philosophers and others of this 'Hotbed of Genius' helped to create: having a respect for the old (to the extent that revived 'Old Scots' architecture is seen throughout much of the Old Town), while simultaneously pioneering the new, with sometimes astonishing new ideas worked through at the Scott Monument, the Royal High School and many others, consciously contributing to the collective idea of city as monument.

Scotland's reassertions of Edinburgh's status led at last to its role as capital being re-assessed; in the 1880s, when a Scottish Office was established. From the 1930s the country was - indeed, still is - administered from St Andrew's House, one of the finest and largest buildings of its period, dramatically sited near a cliff-top, as if in response to the castle which is set diagonally opposite. Culture, to a degree, was nationalised and firmly centred in Edinburgh, with the creation of institutions such as the National Library: all emphasising the validity of Edinburgh's claim to be called national capital.

In its own right, the interest of the Old Town is substantial. It contains two of King David I's new-

planned 12th century burghs - Edinburgh (founded c.1125), and the once-separate burgh of Canongate (founded c-1140). It also contains two early royal palaces (one within the spectacular castle), a medieval abbey and a wealth of early buildings. The national tradition of building tall reached its climax in Edinburgh with tenements which were surely the world's tallest domestic buildings of their age - and some of which are still to be seen. This tradition was powerfully re-invigorated in the 19th century by the City itself, whose Improvement Act tenements are important for their sociological interest as well as for their architectural quality. So also are the buildings which were the subject of Patrick Geddes's pioneering experiments in town planning: early tenements revitalised for new and socially-sensitive uses, and the results of his experiments are still there to see. The New Town is important for principally two reasons; its having an uncommonly high concentration of world-class neo-classical buildings, and for the amazing size of area covered by classical, ashlar-faced architecture, all consistent to a degree without parallel; and perhaps crucially - all now surviving remarkably intact.

#### b) Religion

Edinburgh is the headquarters of the Church of Scotland. Missionaries from the Church of Scotland have had a worldwide influence. In the New Town, within St Andrew's Church, took place the Disruption in 1843, leading to the establishment of the Free Kirk of Scotland, largely reunited with the Church of Scotland in 1929.

#### c) 18th century planning

Edinburgh exerted great influence on the development of urban architecture through the development of the New Town: first, the plan of the New Town became highly influential throughout the rest of Scotland in the way it separated the uses and classes that had so mingled in the Old Town. Of comparable importance, the particular influence of Robert Adam at Charlotte Square was to show how grandeur could be imposed upon an otherwise plainly orthodox row of terraced houses, so as to raise rationalist urban design to a new pitch.

#### d) Neo-classicism: Edinburgh's international links

Scotland has a long tradition of classicism, and also of maintaining close cultural and political links with mainland Europe. The last-mentioned has been noted above with respect to scholarship, but applies also in the field of architecture, where the integration of Scots with other cultures is clearly seen both visually and through documentary references. Links with Italy and with France were

particularly significant. For instance, documentation identifies European architects and masons such as John Morrow, "born in Parysse" [Paris], active in Scotland in the 15th century; French master masons were involved in the royal work of King James V, most notably in the 1530s, perhaps including Holyrood, while at the end of the 16th century, William Schaw, King's master of work, had visited the royal palaces of Denmark, and had been to France and other countries. Besides the French links, this Europeanism is seen in the Italian influence of the late 16th century, but also much earlier in the work of King James IV, notably at his great hall (within Edinburgh Castle), where Italianate Renaissance corbels dating from the early 16th century are still seen. While in the early 17th century there is no evidence of Sir James Murray of Kilbaberton, architect of the Parliament House, or William Wallace, master mason of Heriot's Hospital, having travelled abroad, Murray's partner, Anthony Alexander, is known to have travelled in Europe. The generally Danish or Scandinavian architecture with which the last three are associated may owe its origins to the developing Scots links with these countries, while Edinburgh's Tron Kirk of 1636, by John Mylne, demonstrates a sensitive appreciation of Dutch ecclesiastical architecture. Sir William Bruce, architect of Holyroodhouse, was certainly in Holland in 1659-60 and may have included France in his travels of 1663 as his associate Alexander Edward certainly did in 1701-02. James Smith, architect of the Canongate Kirk, studied in Rome, apparently in 1671-75. Even although his studies were at first for the priesthood, as initially were those of the London-Scot, James Gibbs from 1703) he set the precedent for Edinburgh's subsequent neo-classicists.

It is known that William Adam never travelled further beyond Scotland than to England. Nevertheless he appears to have had direct or indirect correspondence with the architect Earl of Mar in his Paris exile, from whence the Earl outlined the concept of the First New Town in 1728 for George Drummond, John Adam and James Craig to follow. The central pavilion of William Adam's Infirmary, regrettably demolished in 1879, echoed that of Soufflot's exactly contemporary Hotel Dieu at Lyon to a degree which is unlikely to have been wholly coincidental, while the basic concept of John Adam's Exchange (now the City Chambers) was essentially French even if the detail was Gibbsian.

From 1750 a will to study in Rome, even at some personal hardship as in the case of the Mylnes, was marked. The first to go was Sir William Chambers,

architect of the Dundas Mansion (now the Royal Bank). Although born in Sweden, educated in England, and ultimately London-based, he was descended from old Aberdeenshire landed families. He made three journeys to China in the 1740s, studied under J F Blonde<sup>1</sup> in Paris in 1749 and spent the years 1750-55 in Rome. The next to travel to Paris and Rome appear to have been William and Robert Mylne, of the family of the Royal Master masons. They were in Paris in October 1754 and in Rome by the end of the year. Robert had a particularly distinguished record, winning the Concorso Clementino and becoming a full member of the Academy of St Luke in 1759. William's work was represented in Edinburgh by the old North Bridge, Robert's by St Cecilia's Hall and by the still extant but much altered Whitefoord House in the Canongate. The Mylnes were closely followed by Robert Adam who made the full Grand Tour, had the honour of a plate dedicated to him by his close friend G B Piranesi, and reached Spalato in 1757, his studies there inaugurating his brilliant career in London. His Register House, Edinburgh University and Charlotte Square are among the most important monuments of earlier Scottish and indeed European neo-classicism, the latter being erected when his career was concentrated on Scotland, and on Edinburgh and Glasgow in particular.

Adam was followed in 1761 by John Baxter who studied in Rome and was admitted a full member of the Academy of St Luke in 1767, and in 1774 by John Henderson. Their work was austere neo-classical as can still be seen at the former's Merchants Hall and Baxter's Place and formerly at the latter's Assembly Rooms prior to the addition of the portico in 1818. The London-Scottish architect James Playfair, whose original training is still unclear, was visiting Paris, where he was deeply influenced by the Revolutionary School, from 1787 and interrupted practice to study in Rome in 1792-3. Although his business was predominantly Scottish, and although he died in Edinburgh in the following year, no building in Edinburgh can be identified as his for certain. Nevertheless his work had an immediate effect on the earlier work of Archibald Elliot who appears to have worked for him. Elliot subsequently had an office in London as well as in Scotland, becoming from 1815 one of Edinburgh's pioneer Greek Revivalists. Although most of James Playfair's drawings were sold out of the possession of his family, his designs were ultimately to have an effect on his son, William Henry, only four when his father died.

Brought up by his scientist uncle Professor John Playfair, the younger Playfair was apprenticed to the pioneer Scottish Greek revivalist William Stark,

architect of the Signet Libraries. As in the case of the elder Playfair, Stark's initial training is unknown but he was in St Petersburg, then a microcosm of European neo-classicism, in 1798 and had visited Holland, probably *en route*. As related earlier, it was he who led Edinburgh away from gridiron street planning to a Romantic Classicism in which the contours of the land and any existing planting were exploited rather than levelled.

The younger Playfair belonged to that remarkable group of architects who dominated the Edinburgh architectural scene from the 1820s. Although two of its leading members, including Playfair himself, were London-trained, the influence of contemporary German rather than London architecture is at times marked. The oldest of the group was James Gillespie Graham, born in 1776, who although in later years extremely well-off, appears not to have travelled, at least not in his early life. Neither did Thomas Hamilton, born 1784, although his Royal High School leaves little doubt that he must have been familiar with the latest architecture in Munich, even if only on paper. In 1808-11 William Burn and c.1813-16 the younger Playfair worked in London for Sir Robert Smirke, profiting from his first-hand knowledge of Greek antiquity and later from that of another Smirke pupil, Charles Robert Cockerell, who also studied Greek antiquity at first hand. Playfair also worked for Benjamin Dean Wyatt, and, like his father earlier, had seen the latest French architecture, having made a tour with his Paris-based uncle William in 1816. As with Hamilton, Playfair's work from the early 1820s onwards was profoundly influenced by Schinkel, some of his drawings being very similar in character to those in Schinkel's *Sammlung*. Despite the Imperial Roman grandeur of his British Linen Bank, there is no evidence that David Bryce travelled in his earlier years, but that other giant of the Graeco-Roman phase of the early 1840s, David Rhind, most certainly did in the early 1830s.

Although substantial sections of the northern and western areas of the New Town were designed by untravelled and rather more secondary architects such as the King's Architect, Robert Reid, the City Architects Thomas Bonnar and Thomas Brown (the former subsequently architect to the Heriot Trust), the influence of those who studied in Paris, Rome, St Petersburg and London, cascaded down into their work, most spectacularly so in the case of James Milne, architect of the Raeburn estate whose Playfair-inspired crescent, terrace and associated streets are among the finest individual performances.

Within the coherent Romantic classical concept of architecture and landscape there is a variety and invention which extends far beyond the contrast of the New Town with the Old, or the inclusion of the occasional gothic church or palatial Elizabethan institution for Picturesque effect. Each development has an architectural character of its own, whether post-Adam or neo-Roman or neo-Greek, which is as marked in the geometry of the planning as it is in the elevations, each reflects not only the architect who designed it but the vision and ambition of the councillors who controlled the city and perhaps even more so that of the classically-educated lawyers who controlled the charitable and private family trusts which promoted a city punctuated with pilastered and colonnaded pavilions and generously planned private gardens. Throughout the whole, and particularly in the developments of the 1820s, is evident an intention not merely to establish the Athens of the North as one of Europe's greatest capital cities, but as a worthy counterpart to the city of classical antiquity.

e) 20th century town planning

Sir Patrick Geddes, founder of modern town planning, used Old Edinburgh as his laboratory; and in it first put his ideas into execution.

f) The Culture of Scotland

Edinburgh represents the essence of the cultural traditions of Scotland as a European city, and is a European capital city itself. It bears testimony to the growth of Scottish civilisation, to its church, to its law and its legal system. The then physical form of the city was a key factor in the Enlightenment.

g) Old and New landscapes

The juxtaposition of Old and New Edinburgh offers an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble which epitomises significant stages in human history - the Renaissance city on the rock versus the rationalist city on the plateau.

h) Land use

Edinburgh is an outstanding example of the development of human settlement and land use; in the Old and New Town it is possible to witness the growth of a Renaissance capital city, its limitations and its opportunities, and its rejection by changing social patterns and different aspirations in the 18th century. In no other city in the world is the contrast between those two ideas so marked. The integration of built form with open space exhibits similar contrasts.

i) Cultural activity

Edinburgh is tangibly associated with events - being the host of the world's largest number of annual cultural Festivals - and with living traditions - being the home of Scottish law, the Scottish legal, medical and architectural professions and the Scottish church. It is the site of the nation's national museums, galleries, archives and library, and of its heritage administration. It contains Scotland's only active Royal Palace, and is the centre of the country's civil administration.

**As provided in ICOMOS evaluation**

Qualities: Edinburgh's unique coupling of medieval Old Town and classical New Town, each of enormous distinction in its own right, has created a town of extraordinary richness and diversity, without parallel in anywhere in the world. Its aesthetic qualities are high, it had a profound influence on town planning in Europe and beyond in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it is generally recognized to be a major centre of thought and learning. Moreover, Edinburgh retains most of its significant buildings and spaces in better condition than most other historic cities of comparable value.

ICOMOS recommends that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria ii and iv:

The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh represent a remarkable blend of the urban phenomena of organic medieval growth and 18th and 19th century town planning. The successive planned expansions of the New Town and the high quality of the architecture set standards for Scotland and beyond.

**Committee Decision**

Bureau (July 1995): the Bureau recommended that the Committee inscribe the nominated property on the List on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv) considering the site is of outstanding universal value as it represents a remarkable blend of the urban phenomena of organic mediaeval growth and 18th and 19th century town planning. The successive planned expansions of the New Town and the high quality of the architecture set standards for Scotland and beyond.

Committee (1995): the Committee decided to inscribe this property on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv) as it represents a remarkable blend of the two urban phenomena: the organic medieval growth and 18th and 19th century town planning.

- Statement of Significance adequately defines the outstanding universal value of the site

- Proposal for text has been made by State Party as part of the management plan which will be submitted in due course for consideration by the World Heritage Committee

#### **Boundaries and Buffer Zone**

- Status of boundaries of the site: inadequate
- Buffer zone: no buffer zone has been defined
- Changes to boundaries and buffer zone proposed by State Party

#### **Status of Authenticity/Integrity**

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

### **3. Protection**

#### **Legislative and Administrative Arrangements**

- Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997; Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997; Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979; Town and Country Planning (Grand Development Procedure) (Scotland) Order 1992 (GDPO); City of Edinburgh District Council Order Confirmation Act 1991
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

### **4. Management**

#### **Use of site/property**

- Urban centre

#### **Management/Administrative Body**

- Steering group set up in 1997
- Site manager on full-time basis
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: national; regional; local
- The current management system is sufficiently effective

#### **Action(s) proposed:**

- Implementation of the recently completed management plan

### **5. Management Plan**

- Management plan is being implemented (to be adopted in January 2006)
- Implementation commenced: September 2005
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Edinburgh World

Heritage Trust reporting to Historic Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council.

### **6. Financial Resources**

#### **Financial situation**

- Municipal budget (City of Edinburgh Council)
- Trust budget (Historic Scotland)
- Sufficient

### **7. Staffing Levels**

- Number of staff: 8 full-time

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation
- Average: education, management
- Bad: interpretation, promotion

### **8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques**

- Conservation professionals at Edinburgh World Heritage Trust
- Training provided upon demand
- Training available for stakeholders

### **9. Visitor Management**

- Visitor statistics: e.g. 1,23 million (entries Edinburgh Castle), 2004/05; 13 million bednights in City of Edinburgh in 2003
- Visitor facilities: visitor centre, museums, shops and other urban centre facilities
- Visitor management plan

### **10. Scientific Studies**

- Condition surveys, archaeological surveys, transport studies
- Studies used for management of site, as carried out by Edinburgh WH Trust and City Council
- No specifically agreed research framework

### **11. Education, Information and Awareness Building**

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on publications

- Poor awareness of World Heritage among: visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities
- Promotion programme to be established
- Plans for an education programme
- Special exhibitions
- Web site available ([www.ewht.org.uk](http://www.ewht.org.uk))
- Local participation: at WH Trust Board; consultation for management plan

- Weaknesses: poor promotion, poor awareness by local community

**Future actions:**

- Implementation of management plan
- No assistance from World Heritage Fund required

**12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)****Reactive monitoring reports**

- World Heritage Committee sessions: 27<sup>th</sup> (2003); 28<sup>th</sup> (2004)

**Conservation interventions**

- Conservation and restoration works: detailed archaeological investigation in the Cowgate site following the fire; St Giles Cathedral conservation plan in connection with major conservation initiative; Edinburgh Castle;
- Present state of conservation: good

**Threats and Risks to site**

- Human made: development pressure; tourism pressure
- Inappropriate development, particularly in terms of height and scale
- Exercise of planning control system, which will be assisted by the management plan in preparation. City of Edinburgh Council is developing Tall Buildings Policy and Historic Scotland will be consulted on this

**13. Monitoring**

- Formal monitoring programme
- Key indicators: character and townscape; buildings and historic fabric; existing communities and uses; traffic and transport management; opportunities for enhancement; promotion of the site and World Cultural Heritage

**14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions**

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation, economic
- Strengths: funding for repair and conservation of buildings; development of management plan; review of the City Council's conservation funding programme