



Old Edinburgh History Detectives

Old Edinburgh in a time of change:
from Jacobites to Geniuses



Introduction

Living in Old Edinburgh during the 1700s would have been very interesting indeed! All sorts of important events were happening in this city – from royal revolutions to the building of a brand new town, and lots more besides. Edinburgh was the place to be in the 1700s if you were looking for a bit of excitement, entertainment or enlightenment.

An Unpopular Union

In 1707 the Act of Union was signed in Edinburgh. This was an agreement that joined the parliaments of Scotland and England together to form the parliament of Great Britain.

Scotland would no longer have its own parliament in Edinburgh and the country would now be ruled from London. It was a deal that suited a lot of the rich and important people of Scotland – who saw an opportunity to get even richer and even more important. However, the ordinary Edinburgh people weren't quite so happy about it...

For several days the 'mob' rioted in protest up and down the streets and those who had signed the deal feared for their own safety. Eventually the army were called down from the Castle to put a stop to the protests.



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Jacobites at the Gate

There was also a royal revolution that came right to the gates of the city. Prince Charles Edward Stuart – or ‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’ – was trying to reclaim the throne of Britain that his family had carelessly lost in 1688.

After successfully marching down from the Highlands with his Jacobite army, he reached Edinburgh in 1745. The Jacobites were refused entry, but managed to rush the gate that once stood at the Netherbow and captured the city – much to the alarm of many residents.

The local ladies soon changed their minds, though, when they saw the ‘Bonnie Prince’ show himself off in Holyrood Park. It sounds like if he was chocolate he would eat himself! This is how he was described:

“Charles stood some time in the park to show himself to the people. He was in the prime of youth, tall and handsome, of fair complexion. He had a light coloured wig, with his own hair combed over the front. He wore a tartan short coat and a blue bonnet on his head. Then he mounted his horse because he rode well and looked graceful on horseback.”

He moved into the Palace of Holyroodhouse for his stay in Edinburgh and had himself proclaimed Regent at the Mercat Cross. This meant that he would be in charge of the country until his father returned from Italy to be crowned King.

The Castle, however, proved too difficult for him to capture and the government army refused to budge – though they were probably quite relieved when Charles and his men eventually left Edinburgh to invade England.



credit: National Scottish Portrait Gallery

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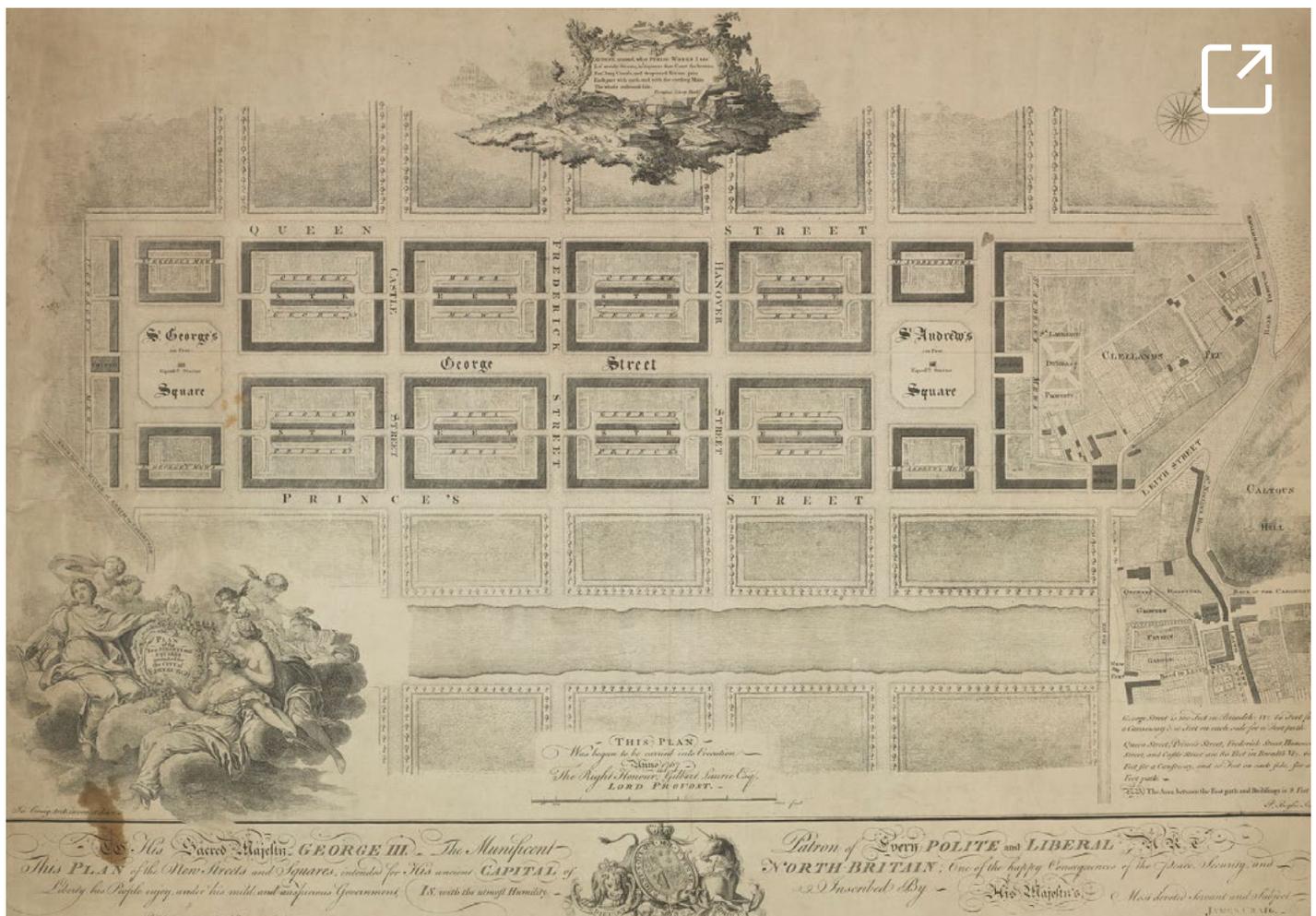
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A Nifty New Town

After the Jacobites were defeated at Culloden, and Edinburgh no longer feared invasions, it could grow beyond its old, defensive city walls. The town had become so overcrowded it needed more space for its people and it was decided that a 'New Town' should be built on the other side of the Nor' Loch.

In 1767 a competition was held to design this 'New Town' for Edinburgh. A young man called James Craig won the competition with this winning design:



He became responsible for creating the town that we know so well today. In a very short time the old Nor' Loch was drained to make way for Prince's Street Gardens and Edinburgh would grow beyond all recognition.

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Beautiful Buildings

Now, at this time, architects (house designers) were travelling around Europe looking for new ideas. It became very fashionable to use designs from Greece and Italy. The Ancient Greeks and Romans loved columns – they had them everywhere.

Take a look around next time you're in the New Town, you can hardly move for classical columns!

City of Genius

It was also around this same time that Edinburgh became known as 'a city of genius'; many of the greatest writers, thinkers, artists, scientists, inventors and architects lived and worked in Old Edinburgh by the late 1700s. In fact, there were so many of them that one visitor famously said;

"Here I stand at the Mercat Cross and can, in a few minutes, take fifty men of genius by the hand."

In fact Edinburgh also became known as the 'Athens of the North' at this time, because of its great buildings and the great thinkers who lived her.

Many of them were good friends who would eat, drink and socialise together – sharing ideas and making new discoveries. It was an exciting time that has become known as 'The Scottish Enlightenment'.

Here are just a few of these great minds. You might want to look some of them up and find out more:

- *Robert Burns – poet and ladies' man*
- *Adam Smith – absent minded economist*
- *James Hutton – genius geologist*
- *Alison Rutherford – party planner and friend to the stars*
- *David Hume – philosopher, historian, eater and drinker*
- *Robert Adam – ace architect*
- *Joseph Black – chemist and card shark*

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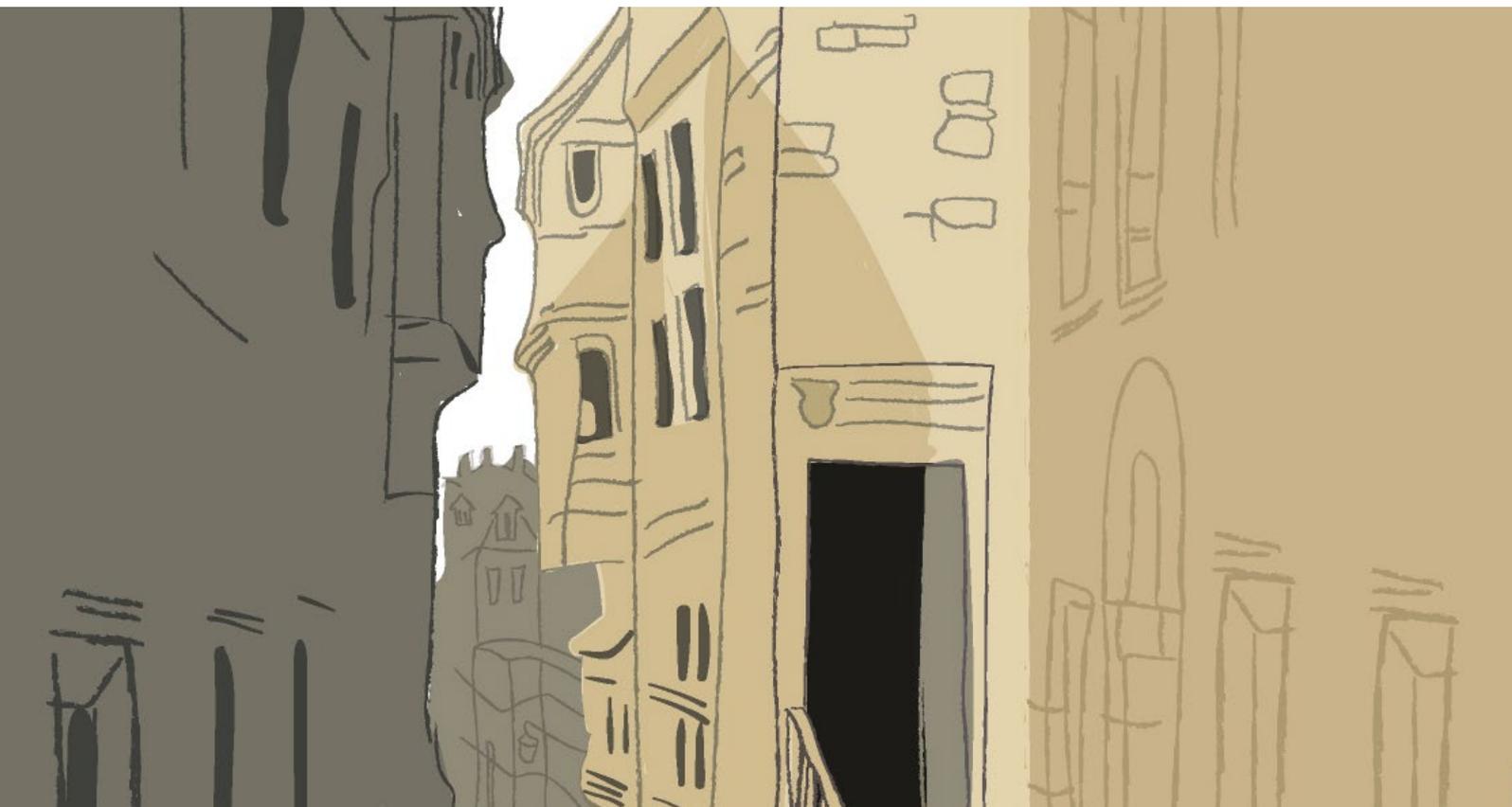
Old Town Decline

Now this all sounds wonderful, but – of course – if you wanted to live in this lovely New Town, you needed to have money. And lots of it.

As a result all the rich people moved over the bridge to their airy, spacious, grand homes and away from the cramped, overcrowded, smelly Old Town. That part of the city was now left for the poor. And it quickly fell to ruin.

The great and the good would still spend time in the Old Town carrying out their day to day business – and perhaps visiting the pubs and oyster cellars for some evening entertainment. But they wouldn't stay too long.

In fact you definitely didn't want to be hanging around the old closes come 10 o'clock at night. This was when the inhabitants of the Old Town were officially allowed to empty the toilet waste out into the streets to the cries of 'Gardy Loo'. Now that cry actually means 'Watch out for the water'. But it wasn't water that would be raining down on passers-by – that's for sure...



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Activity 1

Look carefully at these two maps.

- Map 1 is from 1765 – not long after the Jacobites and before the building of the New Town
- Map 2 is from 1836 – after the New Town was built.



credit: National Library of Scotland

As you can see they are quite different, the second map shows a much bigger area. You might have to look quite carefully to find similarities.

- Can you find the Castle on both maps?
- Describe some of the main differences that you can see when you compare both maps.
- List some of the features that stayed the same.

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Activity 2

- Imagine that you are a TV news reporter and that you have been given the job of putting together a special report on Edinburgh in the late 1700s.

As part of the report you need to let people know about the great changes that have taken place in Edinburgh since the New Town has been built.

But you also have to make people aware of the effect that this has had on the Old Town and the people who live there.

You could choose to interview people from both sides – the Old Town and New Town – and get them to tell their stories.

- Working in small groups, research and write a script of your report. You could then act it out – or even film it!

Try to include information on:

- The differences between the Old Town and New Town
- What the lives are like of people living in each part of town
- Some of the interesting personalities that you might meet in Edinburgh

You will have to work together to do some more research into what life was like in Edinburgh at the time

In order to help with your research, you could get further information here:

- Watch some of the [‘Adventures of Edward Topham’](#) and read his letters
- [Follow the story of Jock and Tam as they transport people round the streets of Old Edinburgh](#)
- Take a look at [‘Enlightenment Made Easy’](#)