



Old Edinburgh History Detectives

Old Edinburgh in the Time of the Victorians:
The Jekyll and Hyde City



Introduction

One of Scotland's most famous Victorians was a writer who was born and raised in Edinburgh. His name was Robert Louis Stevenson and he wrote some of the most famous stories ever written, including 'Treasure Island' and 'Kidnapped'.

One famous story is set in London – but it actually tells us a little bit about the city that he grew up in. It is called 'The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.' It is about a doctor who appeared to be one person during the day, but turned into a very different person at night. He was a man with two sides – a light side and a dark side.

Robert Louis Stevenson loved stories, and would have grown up being told the tales of infamous Edinburgh characters. You might want to look some of them up and find out more. Here are just a few of these great minds:

- Deacon Brodie – a respected businessman by day, a thief by night.
- Dr Knox - the famous surgeon, who bought dead bodies from the murderers Burke and Hare.

If you don't already know their stories, look them up!

However, he would also have been inspired by the city that he lived in. He once said 'the whole city leads a double existence' - a city just like Jekyll and Hyde. Edinburgh was a city with a light side and a dark side...

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A Changing World

During Victorian times the world was changing. A lot. New inventions and new industries were changing the way the world worked and how people lived their lives. Big factories and businesses were setting up in the cities all over Britain, meaning more and more were people moving there to find work. Edinburgh was no different – and it was getting bigger and bigger:

- In 1800 the city's population was about 90,000
- By 1841 it had doubled to about 180,000
- By 1881 it had reached 320,000



People on the Move

Many of the people who lived in Old Edinburgh at this time were migrants. This means that they had moved to the city from somewhere else to find work in the new factories and businesses.

Some had come from Ireland – in fact the Cowgate area of the Old Town became known as 'Little Ireland' because so many Irish people lived there.

Others had come from the Scottish countryside where life was very different, but very tough. Many of them spoke Gaelic and they even had their own Gaelic church near the top of the Royal Mile (it's still there today – see if you can find out where it is).

Old Edinburgh History Detectives

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Tale of Two Towns

Of course, none of these newcomers to the city could afford to live in the fancy New Town, and moved into the Old Town, which became far too overcrowded.

It wasn't long before places like the High Street, Cowgate, the Canongate and the Grassmarket became filthy, disease ridden, overcrowded slums.

In the meantime, the factory owners and businessmen who owned and ran these new industries could afford much better places to live. Many of them lived in the handsome houses of Edinburgh's light, spacious and grand New Town, while their workers had to work long hours in dreadful, dangerous conditions and live in filthy, overcrowded and run-down buildings.

More so than ever before Edinburgh was a divided city – the rich and the poor, the New Town and the Old Town, the light side and the dark side...

Generous Gents

However, some Victorians who did have money and importance also wanted to make life better for the poor.

Thomas Guthrie, for example, couldn't bear to see how terrible life was for many children in Old Edinburgh. There was no such thing as free education at this time and Thomas saw learning as being really important to give people a chance of a better life. As a result he started setting up 'Ragged Schools' all across the country so that poor 'ragged' children might have some chance to improve their lives.

Andrew Carnegie was another who believed in the importance of learning. He went to America and became one of the richest businessmen in the world – but he never forgot where he grew up. He thought education was very important and paid for thousands of public libraries to be built from his own money. One of these is in Old Edinburgh – see if you can find out where.

Technological Transformations

New inventions and technology were also changing people's lives in other ways. For example, the railway came to Edinburgh in the 1840s, when Waverley station was built. People could now travel all over the country much more easily than ever before.

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Fantastic Photographers

Photography was another new Victorian innovation and two of the most famous early photographers lived and worked in Edinburgh at the time. They were called David Hill and Robert Adamson.

As a result of the photographs that they took – along with others like them - we can learn a lot about the lives of the people of Old Edinburgh and we can see exactly what the city would have looked like...

Activity 1

Look closely at this Victorian scene – you could use a magnifying glass to look in more detail. It was taken in the Cowgate in Edinburgh in about 1900



Old Edinburgh History Detectives

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Look at the people in the photo. Some of these children would be about your age. Think about how they look, what they are wearing, the expressions on their faces, the hairstyles, their surroundings.

- **Think about:**

- What their lives might have been like back then.
- How different their lives might be from your life today.
- Imagine that you are one of the children in the picture and you have travelled 120 years through time to the present day.

Write about your experiences in this new, future world.

- What things might you find very different?
- How might it feel to be in this world today?
- Is there anything that you might not like?
- Is there anything that you might miss from your old life?

Old Edinburgh History Detectives

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Activity 2

Here are the population figures for Edinburgh from 1800 to 1881

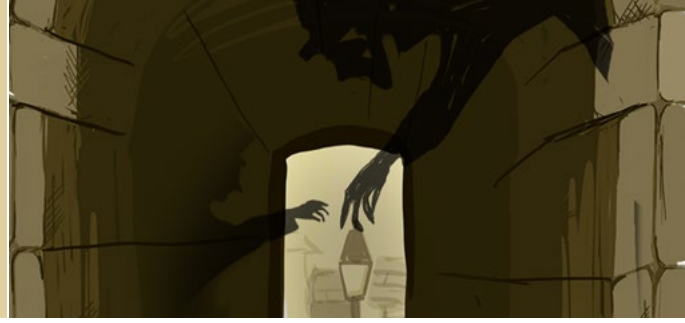
- 1801 - 90,000
 - 1821 - 150,000
 - 1841 - 180,000
 - 1861 - 222,000
 - 1881 – 320,000
 - 1901 – 413,000
- Can you draw a simple graph that shows how much the population changed from 1801 to 1901?

Now, look at this photograph of the Cowgate and the corner of Blackfriars Wynd (now Blackfriars Street) in 1856.



Old Edinburgh History Detectives

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Activity 2, continued

- Write down a few words or phrases that you might use to describe this street.

In 1850, Dr George Bell visited Blackfriars Wynd to see what it was like and he wrote a report about it. He explained that there was no running water and no drain, so 'all the filth of the place remains on the surface.'

He found 1,025 men, women and children living in just 198 rooms.

- Using these numbers, can you work out the average number of people who might live in one room?

As a result, many families lived in one small room without enough light, fresh air, warmth or sanitation.

Some of the rooms were described as measuring 5ft x 12ft (1.5m x 3.7m). A family of 7 might live in this size space.

- Measure an area 5ft x 12ft in the classroom, then mark it with string or something similar.
Now put 7 people inside that space. Can you imagine all sleeping, cooking and going to the toilet in that one space!
- Imagine that you are a migrant who has come to find work in Edinburgh. You might well have lived in Blackfriars Wynd.

Write a letter home to tell your family and friends what it is like to be in the city.

You might want to think about:

- The differences between Edinburgh and your old home.
- The differences that you see between the Old Town and New Town.
- Where you find yourself living.
- Your new friends and neighbours.
- The job that you do.
- What you think of the city.