



Edinburgh World Heritage Heritage Trails

Edinburgh in the time of Change:
From Jacobites to Geniuses, the 1700s.



The Royal Mile is rich with evidence of how 'Old Edinburgh' might have looked during the 1700s.

The 18th century was perhaps the time of the greatest changes for Scotland – and for Edinburgh in particular. It began with political union with England to form the new 'Great Britain'. It saw revolutions and rebellions but ended with a new, improved and prosperous country with a re-imagined capital city that became home to some of the country's greatest minds. The work of these men, and women, would leave a lasting mark not just on Scotland, but on the rest of the world.

The following is a suggested trail route that you could take from the Castle to the Palace. Do bear in mind that the Mile is frequently very busy and this trail will try to avoid areas that are already congested. However, at certain times of the year it may be impractical to take a large group to some areas - especially at the Castle and near the top of the Mile

Please note

- These notes are intended as guidelines for teachers, and not as a formal 'script' to be followed to the letter.
- It is also not necessary to do every stop on the route. Obviously, it would be advisable for teachers to pick and choose locations beforehand, depending on content and time that you might have.
- Pupils should be encouraged to engage with each location and discuss their own observations and feelings at each site. Some possible activity ideas are listed alongside the locations to help facilitate this.



[See the route](#)

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LOCATION 1 – Edinburgh Castle Entrance

Try to find a quiet spot near the entrance to the Castle on the right hand side.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Why were castles built?

Discuss with a partner and make a list of all the defences you can see that would have protected the castle?

Key points:

- The entrance to the Castle would have looked quite different during the 1700s - it has been added to in the years since. However, much of the rest of the Castle looked pretty much how you see it now.
- The Castle was designed as a place for protection, but also as a home for royalty. Bonnie Prince Charlie, for example, was keen to capture it, but in 1745 it was held by the British Army – loyal to the protestant king, George II.
- Although some are later additions, the pupils can see castle defences that would have been in place. You will see the deep ditch in front of the entrance, which would have been spanned by a drawbridge. They can also see crenellations for castle guards and gun loops with cannons looking out over the city.
- After at least one botched attempt to capture the castle by the Jacobites, Charles decided to give up on the idea as it was too strongly defended and moved on.

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LOCATION 2 – Edinburgh Castle Esplanade

Walk over to the fence on the right hand side and find a spot where you have a view down into the New Town.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Look at the view over Edinburgh.

- Can you pick out any buildings or landmarks that you recognise?
- For how long do you think they might have been there?

Key points:

- Look to the north (towards Princes Street). This view would have been very different in 1745. There was no city there, it would have been fields and farmland and there was a loch (the Nor' Loch) where Princes Street Gardens currently stands. However, by the end of the century, the landscape was to change a lot.
- After the Jacobite rebellion failed and the Union with England got stronger, Edinburgh no longer felt it needed to fear invasion and could expand beyond the old city walls.
- A competition was held to design a 'New Town'. A young man called James Craig won the competition with this design. The Nor Loch was drained to form the gardens and by the end of the 1700s this view of Edinburgh was taking a shape that we would recognise today.
- The rich and important people who had previously lived in the cramped streets of the Old Town started to move over to the New Town. The Old Town was still where trading and business would take place, but the residents were increasingly the poorer in society.

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LOCATION 3 – Cannonball House

Walk down to the bottom of the Esplanade to the right hand side. The first building after the Esplanade is the Contini Cannonball Restaurant. Look at the gable end from the Esplanade.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Can you find a cannonball embedded in the wall of this building?

How do you think it got there?

Key points:

- The house gets its name from the cannonball that is embedded in the stonework (you'll find it right in the centre about half way up the gable end, between two windows). See if you can get the pupils to spot it.
- There is a popular legend that it has been there since the Jacobite invasion and was fired by the Redcoats in the Castle. It is unlikely to be true – and clearly it missed its intended mark!

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LOCATION 4 – James’ Court and Lady Stair’s Close

Walk down the Mile on the left hand side. The street is narrow and busy, so care will need to be taken to keep the group together. Look out for the narrow entry into James’ Court on the left. Walk down it and you will find yourself in a spacious courtyard area where there will be plenty of space to gather the group.

Things to look out for and discuss:

This was an area where richer people lived in Edinburgh.

- How does it feel different from some of the narrow streets nearby?

Key points:

- James’ Court was built in the 1730s to create a bit of space for wealthy people in Edinburgh, before the New Town was built.
- This would have been a private courtyard, with its own sedan chair ‘garage’ and its own scavenger (or dung collector) to get rid of daily waste etc.
- It was home to many notable Edinburgh residents of the time – including the famous philosopher, David Hume and the writer, James Boswell.
- If you proceed round you will find yourself in Lady Stair’s Close and at Lady Stair’s House – the Writers Museum.
- Again, this was a grand house where a wealthy family lived in the 1700s and it still has their name – Lady Stair lived here in the 1720s.
- It is now the Writers Museum, which is free to visit, where you can find out about some of Edinburgh’s most famous writers.
- One of those writers was Robert Burns, who lived and worked in Edinburgh in the late 1700s. He would become one of the world’s most influential poets and his work is still celebrated around the globe to this day.

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LOCATION 5 – David Hume statue

Come back out onto the Mile and continue down the left hand side, crossing at the lights at Deacon Brodie's Pub. You will come to the big statue of David Hume outside the High Court building. If you can find a space for the group to stand you could cover the following.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Take a bit of time to look carefully at this statue

- What do you think of it?
- Do you have any questions you would want to ask about it?

Key points:

- David Hume was one of the world's most famous philosophers and one of the most important people of the 'Enlightenment'.
- David Hume was one of the first people who tried to understand and explain why people thought and acted in certain ways. His writing has influenced how we understand human nature today.
- This was a time in the late 1700s in Edinburgh when some of the greatest thinkers, writers, architects, artists and scientists all lived and worked in Edinburgh at the same time.
- He is dressed like an ancient Greek philosopher – though he was neither ancient nor Greek! It is purely to represent his status as one of history's foremost thinkers.
- His toe is especially shiny because students believe rubbing it will bring them some of David Hume's knowledge to pass their exams.
- David Hume himself would not have liked this as he definitely did NOT believe in superstitions. It's also bad for the conservation of the statue!

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LOCATION 6 – Heart of Midlothian

Cross the road towards St Giles' Cathedral and find the heart shaped mosaic built into the setts (cobble) on the pavement.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Discuss the design that you see in the cobbles.

- Is it like anything you have seen before?
- What could it possibly signify?

Can you find the brass setts (cobble) in the roadway? What might they be there for?

Key points:

- The brass setts that you see in the roadway mark the outline of the Old Tolbooth in Edinburgh. The different dates that you see marked on them signify where the outline was at different times, as it was often rebuilt or altered.
- The tolbooth had a number of uses. It was an administrative centre where, for example, tax was collected. Most famously, though, it was a prison where some famous prisoners were held before being taken out and executed nearby.
- One of the most famous prisoners was a Captain John Porteous, who had been in charge of the City Guard during a riot in 1736. Six Edinburgh people were killed under his orders and he was tried and imprisoned here. The local people were so angry with him, though, that they rioted, broke into the Tolbooth and hanged Captain Porteous from a pole.
- The heart shaped mosaic in the road actually marks the original doorway to the Tolbooth building. People still spit on the Heart of Midlothian, which is an old tradition. Legend says that people used to spit on the doorway as a sign of contempt. Nowadays it is supposed to be for good luck (or if you are perhaps a Hibs supporter!)
- Although the building is long since gone, the door is still at a place called Abbotsford in the Borders – once the home of Sir Walter Scott.
- Scott was one of Scotland's greatest writers who lived in Edinburgh as a young man in the late 1700s. One of his most famous novels is set in the Old Tolbooth in the 1730s and is called 'The Heart of Midlothian'. It tells the story of an especially turbulent and bloody time in Edinburgh's history.



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LOCATION 7 – Luckenbooths

If you look out onto the Royal Mile from here you will see more brass setts in the ground leading down to the right. These mark the outline of another prominent set of buildings that stood here in the 1700s called the 'Luckenbooths'.

Key points:

- The Luckenbooths were a row of tenement buildings that ran down the centre of where the street is now.
- 'Luckenbooth' means 'Locked shops'. The ground floor of this row of houses were all shopfronts.
- This is where some of the great works of the Enlightenment were published as well, by the publisher William Creech.

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LOCATION 8 – St Giles’ Cathedral

Next to the Heart of Midlothian is St Giles’ Cathedral (or the High Kirk as it would properly have been known). The church is free to enter if you want to spend time inside, though a donation is expected at the entrance.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Look carefully at the building in front of you. There has been a church at this site for hundreds of years.

- How might you describe it to someone?
- How does it make you feel?

Key points:

- This has long been a prominent feature of the Royal Mile. It was at the centre of religious life – and reform - in Edinburgh at this time.

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LOCATION 9 – Parliament Square

From the entrance to St Giles, turn right and walk around the church to the other side. This will take you into a car park which is now part of the law courts.



Things to look out for and discuss:

Think about the space that you are now standing in. Look at the buildings all around you.

- How might you describe them?
- What sort of business might go on here?

Key points:

- The building on the right hand side as you enter the car park is still called Parliament Hall, though now it is part of the law courts.
- You can actually still enter the hall and is free of charge (though you have to go through a security barrier).
- It was the site of Scotland's Parliament until 1707. It would have looked quite different back then.
- 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 Great Britain 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 Union would also bring new wealth to Scotland, which was struggling financially after some disastrous investments.
- However, at the time, many of the ordinary Edinburgh people weren't quite so happy about it. Taxes were being raised and for several days the 'mob' rioted in protest up and down the streets. Some of those who had signed the deal feared for their own safety and eventually the army were called down from the Castle to put a stop to the protests.

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LOCATION 10 – Mercat Cross

Continue around St Giles Cathedral and back out to the Royal Mile. You will come to the Mercat Cross (the monument with the unicorn on the top).

Things to look out for and discuss:

You will see designs all around the Mercat Cross. They each represent something to do with Edinburgh.

- Do you recognise any of them?
- What do you think some of them mean?

Key points:

- This is not actually the original site of the Mercat Cross, but it stands very near to it and was a prominent monument during the 1700s. The Mercat Cross would have been at the centre of old town life at this time.
- It was a place where trading would take place (the 'market' cross).
- It was also where people would gather to gossip and catch up with the local news. Strangers to the town might come here to get directions or find a guide (or 'cadie') who would help them get around the town.
- Public proclamations were made from the balcony above, and this is still done for important events today.
- It was also a place of public punishments and executions. Smaller crimes might see you locked in the pillory or stocks all day to be humiliated and shamed. More serious crimes could result in hangings, which people turned out in their thousands to watch.

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LOCATION 11 – Adam Smith statue

Right next to the Mercat Cross you will see the statue of Adam Smith.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Take a bit of time to look carefully at this statue.

- What do you think of it?
- Do you have any questions you would want to ask about it?

Key points:

- Adam Smith was another important character during the Enlightenment. He was also a great thinker, like his friend David Hume. Adam Smith was responsible for new ways of thinking about how we could run the economic affairs of a country and wrote a world famous book called 'The Wealth of Nations.'
- There were so many great thinkers living in Edinburgh at this time that a visitor standing at this spot was famously quoted: "Here I stand at the Mercat Cross and can, in a few minutes, take fifty men of genius by the hand."

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LOCATION 12 – City Chambers

Across the road you will see the City Chambers. You could take the group across there and gather them just inside the columns.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Think about the space that you are now standing in.

- How might you describe it?
- What sort of business might go on here?

There are narrow, steep streets to the left and right of this building – but none here. Why do you think that is?

Key points:

- The City Chambers was built in the mid-1700s as a new indoor trading centre.
- When it was built, several old streets were demolished and the City Chambers was built on top of them. The remains of these streets can still be visited today.
- The City Chambers was never actually used for its original purpose because people preferred to do their business in the streets.

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LOCATION 13 – Old Town Closes

Continue down the Royal Mile on the right hand side towards the crossing at the North Bridge. As you walk down look out for the names of the streets on both sides. You might want to take the group into one of the closes – Borthwick’s Close, for example, to give them some idea of the height of the buildings and how steep and narrow the closes were.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Look out for the names of the streets as you walk down the Mile. Can you work out how each of them got their names?

How do you think it might have felt to live in one of these streets 300 years ago?

Key points:

- The name ‘close’ generally referred to a private street that could be gated, or closed, at either end. Alternatively you might see the word ‘wynd’ (eg. Bell’s Wynd) which generally referred to a street with more public access.
- Generally the streets were named after a business or trade that took place there (e.g. Fishmarket Close) or named after a particularly notable resident (e.g. Borthwicks Close).
- In the early 1700s Edinburgh was hemmed in by the city walls for defence. As a result the town could not expand out the way, so the buildings were built higher to accommodate more people.
- This also meant that the rich and poor would often live in the same buildings and share a common stairway. It was a great way to understand how other people lived and is possibly one of the reasons why so many ideas and great thinkers came out of Edinburgh at this time.
- Just looking down one of these closes will give pupils some idea of what an Old Edinburgh street would have been like – narrow, steep, dark and smelly.

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LOCATION 14 – Tron Kirk and Bridges

Continue down the right hand side of the Mile until you reach Hunters Square and the Tron Kirk. You will hopefully find a reasonable sized space for the group here.

Things to look out for and discuss:

The busy road that you see here is called the South Bridge – but it doesn't look like a bridge. Why not? What is missing?

Key points:

- The Tron Kirk would have been a significant building in Edinburgh in the 1700s. It would have been a main meeting place.
- It was the location of the salt tron – which is where salt was weighed and priced. Salt was a very important commodity at this time and punishments for trying to cheat people could be very severe. It might involve being nailed by the ear to the weigh beam itself.
- The church used to be bigger, but was partly demolished in the late 1700s to make way for the bridges that would take people to the New Town.
- The North and South Bridges to the left and right of the traffic lights, were built in the 1700s to take people to the new parts of the city that were being built. The buildings that you see on the left of Blair Street, leading down from Hunters Square, were built against the arches of the Bridge, which is why they are no longer visible.
- You can enter the Tron Kirk for free, where you will now see a display that explains more about Edinburgh as a World Heritage Site.

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LOCATION 15 – Wellhead at John Knox House

Cross the North Bridge at the pedestrian crossing and cross to the left hand side of the Mile. Walk down until you reach John Knox House.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Look carefully at the square shaped structure here.

- What features can you see on it?
- Have you any ideas what it might have been used for?

Key points:

- Outside John Knox House you will see a square shaped structure. This was one of the city wellheads.
- In the 1700s water was pumped down the Royal Mile from a reservoir near the Castle. It was collected at these wellheads.
- People queued up with their buckets (or 'stoups'). You would rest the bucket on your knee and pump the water into it. You can see where the handle for the pump used to be. You can also see where the stone is worn away from people putting their feet beneath the pump.
- It was also a great place for getting all the local gossip as they queued for water. There were several of these wellheads positioned along the length of the Mile.

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LOCATION 16 – Netherbow / World’s End / Flodden Wall

Walk a little bit further down to near the corner of the street at the crossing. If there is enough space to stop, you could point out the following.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Look out for brass markers in the road here. Do you have any thoughts about what these might represent?

Key points:

- Across the street you will see ‘World’s End Close’ and the World’s End pub. To all intents and purposes, this was ‘the end of the world’ for Edinburgh citizens. The old city walls used to run down St Mary’s Street. If you went beyond the World’s End, you be outwith the safety of the city walls.
- The brass setts in the road at the traffic lights mark the site of the old Netherbow Port. ‘Netherbow’ literally means ‘back gate’ and during the 1700s would have been one of the main entrance points to the city.
- This is where Prince Charles and his Jacobite army entered the city in 1745 before their victory at nearby Prestonpans.
- Although the Netherbow Port was supposed to keep invaders out, the Jacobites were able to storm in quite easily and Edinburgh fell into Jacobite hands – though they never captured the Castle.



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LOCATION 17 – Canongate Tolbooth/Entrance to Canongate Churchyard

Continue down the left hand side of the Royal Mile until you come to the People’s Story Museum. It is quite a long way down the Canongate from the junction, but it might be worth pointing out places such as Chessels Court and Moray House (on the right hand side) which were areas in which wealthier residents would have lived. The People’s Story Museum is inside the old Tolbooth building (the one with the distinctive clock). You should be able to find a suitable space here outside the entrance to the churchyard.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Look carefully at the building.

- Are there any features that you are curious about that make it different from others nearby?

Take a bit of time to look carefully at the statue.

- What do you think of it?
- Do you have any questions you would want to ask about it?

Key points:

- The Canongate makes up the bottom part of the Royal Mile and was not part of Edinburgh in the 1700s. It is where a lot of wealthier families would have lived.
- Just like the centre of Edinburgh it had its own Tolbooth, which is still standing here. It also had its own Mercat Cross, which you can see nearby in the graveyard.
- Across the road you will see Huntly House, a wealthy merchant’s home which now houses The Museum of Edinburgh, that tells the whole story of Edinburgh’s history.
- The People’s Story museum, in the Tolbooth, tells the story of the people of Edinburgh over the centuries.
- The statue at the entrance to the cemetery is of Robert Fergusson. Robert Fergusson was a Scottish poet of the late 1700s who wrote in Scots. He may not be as famous, but his work inspired Robert Burns to also write in the Scots language. He died aged just 24 and is buried in the graveyard towards the back of the church building.

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LOCATION 18 – Canongate Kirkyard

Enter the graveyard and walk round to the left hand side. The graveyard is full of the graves of significant Edinburgh characters, but one of the most famous is situated against the back wall of the Tolbooth, inside the graveyard. There are actually markers in the ground to lead you there.

Things to look out for and discuss:

As you walk around the graveyard, perhaps take a closer look at one or two of the different graves.

- Are there any that stand out?
- Are there any that are a bit different?
- Perhaps take a note of them or take some pictures.

Key points:

- Adam Smith is buried here – you saw his statue further up the Royal Mile. He is famous for being one of the greatest thinkers of his time and his ideas are still very influential today.
- He was also famous for being very absent minded and he would often talk to himself while he took himself on long walks.
- Other significant characters you could visit from the period are Robert Fergusson, Agnes Macle hose (Burns' 'Clarinda') and town improver, George Drummond, who was responsible for approving the plan for Edinburgh's New Town.
- For more information, these two websites have useful maps and information that you could follow:
 - www.canongatekirk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Enlightenment-Trail.pdf
 - ewh.org.uk/maps/canongate-kirkyard-map/

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LOCATION 19 – Dunbar’s Close

Walk just a short distance down from the graveyard entrance and look out for the entrance to Dunbar’s Close (it’s easy to miss). Enter the close and you will find yourself in a garden.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Take a moment to look around the space that you are in.

- What do you think of it?
- How does it make you feel?
- Why might you want to come here if you lived in Edinburgh 300 years ago?

Key points:

- The garden has been laid out and kept as an example of the type of garden that would have existed in the 1700s.
- Dunbar’s Close, and the closes nearby, were inhabited and visited by some of the great thinkers of the Enlightenment. It’s not hard to imagine them walking and talking in gardens like these, away from the noise and commotion of the Royal Mile.

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LOCATION 20 – Palace of Holyroodhouse

Continue walking down the Mile into the Abbey Strand, where you come to the gates of the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

Things to look out for and discuss:

Look out for designs on the walls and the gates here. What might these symbols represent?

How would you compare this building with the Castle? Do you see any similarities? Any differences?

Key points:

- This is still the main home of Scotland's kings and queens when they are in the country.
- After the Act of Union in 1707, the monarchs spent even less time here, but it was famously occupied by Bonnie Prince Charlie for five days during the Jacobite rebellion in 1745.
- The Palace had been completed by his great uncles in the previous century – this is pretty much what Charles would have seen when he arrived in Edinburgh.
- During his short stay, Charles paraded himself for the public in Holyrood Park, much to the delight of the local ladies.
- He also had himself proclaimed Regent – which meant that he would be in charge of the country until his father returned from Italy to be crowned King.