



# Edinburgh World Heritage Heritage Trails

## Edinburgh in the time of the Victorians: The Jekyll and Hyde City



The look of Old Edinburgh changed greatly during Victorian times, as the city itself underwent big changes during this period of rapid industrial, technological and social development.

The 19th century was marked by a period of wealth and prosperity for Edinburgh that it had never experienced before. The whole city was changing but there were two sides to this story. It also became a time of great inequality as the rich got richer and the poor were left increasingly far behind. This, in turn, led to some of the greatest improvers and philanthropists coming to the fore to try to redress that imbalance.

Much of the city we see now looks very similar to the way it did in the Victorian period and is one of the reasons why Edinburgh is such a special place to visit. It is one of the reasons why it is a designated World Heritage site and why it needs to be cared for and preserved.

The following is a suggested trail route that you could take from the Castle. 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:

Have look at the outside of the Castle. It wasn't all built at the same time. Are there any parts which you think look older than others?

#### Key points:

- The Castle was no longer needed as a place for defence during the Victorian period and had long since stopped being a place for Kings and Queens to live in. Queen Victoria would have used the Palace of Holyroodhouse if ever she stayed in Edinburgh.
- However, it was still used as a military barracks for soldiers and was an iconic part of Edinburgh – people wanted to visit Edinburgh to see the Castle.
- As a result, the Victorians started to change parts of the Castle to make it look more like what they thought a Castle should look like!
- Thankfully some of their more outlandish ideas didn't get approved, but this gatehouse and entrance is all a Victorian addition.
- It is much more impressive looking than the simple gate that existed before and is probably one of the most photographed spots in Edinburgh!

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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:

- The view you see of Edinburgh now is quite similar to what it would have looked like in the Victorian era.
- The New Town had been built and expanded towards the Firth of Forth in the distance – providing accommodation and offices for the increasingly wealthy residents of that part of town.
- One of the biggest changes to Edinburgh at this time would have been Waverley train station, which was built in the 1840s.
- Controversially at the time, they decided to build it right in the heart of the city – running right through Princes Street Gardens. Local people were none too happy about this, but it provided an impressive location for visitors to step off the train – right into the shadow of the Castle.
- If you look to the right of Princes Street you will get a view of Calton Hill and its monuments. By the time Victoria became Queen, Britain had emerged from a long period of wars in different parts of the world. A couple of these monuments mark this fact.
- One of the most prominent is the National Monument – the one that looks unfinished, with the big pillars. It was built during the 1820s as a memorial to the Scots who had died fighting in the wars with Napoleon's France
- The tower that looks like an upside down telescope is Nelson's Tower, built to celebrate Admiral Nelson's naval victory at Trafalgar. If you look carefully, you should also be able to make out a ball shape in the top of it. It is an ingenious Victorian invention.
- At just before 1pm every day it rises to the top of the structure. Then – at precisely 1pm – it drops. This is a time signal for the sailors on the Firth of Forth so that they can set their clocks accurately.
- This wasn't much good on the frequently foggy days in Edinburgh, though, so an audible system was also devised – and the One O'Clock Gun came into being at the Castle.
- Neither of these are required any more, but they are Victorian traditions that still live on to this day.



### LOCATION 3 – Camera Obscura

Proceed down past the Esplanade and onto Castlehill. Just before you reach the Camera Obscura building turn left onto Ramsay Lane, just past the main entrance to Camera Obscura. You should see a doorway with an open bible engraved above it. If you can, try to gather the group here.

#### Things to look out for and discuss:

You might already know this building as a popular tourist attraction. Look carefully at it.

- Is there anything that makes it stand out from other buildings nearby?

#### Key points:

- Camera Obscura was established by a forceful Victorian lady called Maria Theresa Short, who bought this building and then built the Outlook Tower on the top of it.
- It was to serve as a people's observatory, where people could come and learn about science and art.
- The most popular part, though, was the Camera Obscura at the top. This was a clever Victorian invention that allowed you to see live images of Edinburgh projected onto a table – long before any of the modern technology we have today.
- After Mrs Short and her husband died, it was taken over by an important Edinburgh Victorian called Patrick Geddes, who was determined that the Old Town should not fall into decline.
- Geddes made sure The Outlook Tower continued to be a place where people could learn more about Edinburgh, its place in the world and the wider environment, and the importance of preserving our cities in a time of rapid change. The Camera Obscura continued to be the highlight for visitors – and still is today.
- It is because of the conservation work of Patrick Geddes, and others, that the Old Town wasn't completely demolished and that we still have many of the buildings that we can enjoy today.
- As a result of his work the worst of the Victorian slums were cleared away and people started to take an interest in the importance and history of the Old Town.

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### The Ragged School

#### Key points:

- This particular part of the Camera Obscura building also housed the famous Victorian Ragged School. This was the original doorway – marked by the open bible above it.
- Thomas Guthrie was a popular Victorian minister who was most concerned by the amount of poor children who roamed the Edinburgh streets begging and often turning to crime. The local jails were becoming full of these ‘ragged’ children being punished for all sorts of petty crimes.
- Thomas Guthrie believed that a better answer to this problem would be to provide them with an organised school environment. He set up his first ‘Ragged School’ in here.
- The school was strict and the days were long, but the children received a proper education, as well as clothing and regular meals.
- People laughed at Guthrie’s plans and thought they would never work. However, there is no doubt that, as a result of his charitable work, the lives of many of the children of Victorian Edinburgh were saved and vastly improved. There is a prominent statue of Thomas Guthrie on Princes Street to mark his contribution to the city.
- So, the Camera Obscura building is not just a modern day tourist attraction, but was also the place where two of the greatest Victorian improvers did their best work – Thomas Guthrie and Patrick Geddes. Without them, and people like them, the Edinburgh we know today would have been very different.

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### **LOCATION 4 – Highland Tolbooth Kirk (The Hub)**

Proceed down to the right hand side and you will be at the entrance to the large old church, which is now 'The Hub'.

#### **Things to look out for and discuss:**

Look at the building in front of you. It was built during the Victorian times.

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

#### **Key points:**

- The spire at the top of this church is highest point in Edinburgh
- It was built in the 1840s and the foundation stone was actually laid by Queen Victoria herself.
- One of the congregations who used it were Highlanders, many of whom would have moved to Edinburgh from rural areas to find work. As a result, services used to be held in Gaelic.

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### LOCATION 5 – Lady Stairs House/Makar’s Court

Continue down the Lawnmarket on the left hand side until you come to the entrance to Lady Stair’s Close. Enter the close and you will come into a courtyard where there is plenty of space.

#### Things to look out for and discuss:

Look carefully at some of the paving stones around this courtyard. See if you can find anything written on them. This is called Makar’s Court.

- What do you think a ‘makar’ might be?

#### Key points:

- Lady Stair’s House dates from the 1600s, but it now houses the Writer’s Museum, where visitors can learn more about some of Scotland’s most famous writers.
- Probably one of the most famous writers of the Victorian era was Robert Louis Stevenson, who was born and raised in Edinburgh. The bottom floor has an exhibition all about his life. It is free to enter.
- Stevenson was fascinated by stories he had grown up with of famous Edinburgh characters, like the thief, Deacon Brodie, and the murderers Burke and Hare.
- He was also fascinated by the city of Edinburgh - he once said ‘the whole city leads a double existence’, a bit like Deacon Brodie himself, who was a respected businessman and politician during the day, and a thief by night.
- One of his most famous books is the ‘Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde’ – the story of a man with a dark side and a light side.

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### LOCATION 6 – Brodies Close/Deacon Brodies Pub

Come out of Lady Stair's Close and proceed to the traffic lights. At the junction you will be at Deacon Brodie's pub (if you have the opportunity, pupils could check both sides of the pub sign hanging outside). Across the road you will see Brodie's Close, with a statue of Deacon Brodie standing outside. Cross the road to the other side of the Mile (where you see a Bank of Scotland branch and an old police box). If you can find more space in this area, you could point out the following from here:

#### Things to look out for and discuss:

Robert Louis Stevenson was a famous Victorian writer who based one of his novels on the character of Deacon Brodie, who lived near here.

- Can you think of any other real characters who have had books written about them?
- If you were going to choose a character that you know to write a story about, who might you choose? Why?

#### Key points:

- Brodie's Close is named after Deacon Brodie's father, who was a successful furniture maker. This was an important Edinburgh industry at the time and he was a well-respected member of the community.
- It is also where William Brodie was born before following in his father's footsteps as a businessman and local politician.
- However, he used his status to enable his night time burglaries until he was eventually captured and hanged nearby – outside St Giles Cathedral.
- This is also where the execution of the murderer William Burke took place – he sold his victims' bodies to the Medical School for dissection.
- Look down the street to the left at the big building with the dome on it. This is the Bank of Scotland headquarters. It was not only new industries that were making Edinburgh wealthy in Victorian times, but also financial and legal organisations like the big banks.

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### LOCATION 7 – Victoria Terrace/Victoria Street

Walk along George IV bridge to the top of Victoria Street, you will see a Pizza Express where you can find a bit of space outside.

#### Things to look out for and discuss:

Another famous writer used this street as inspiration for a place called 'Diagon Alley' in her books.

- Is there a location that you know that you might use in a story?

#### Key points:

- Edinburgh continued to change during Queen Victoria's time. Some old streets were being knocked down and improved, like this one here. Victoria Terrace and Victoria Street, that you will walk down, are good examples. They were, of course named after the Queen.
- Lots of the buildings that you see on this street are grand old Victorian buildings too – like the India Buildings directly opposite. India was part of the British Empire at the time, and Queen Victoria was also the Empress of India.
- Next to the India Building, on George IV Bridge, is the Central Library (across the road from the National Library of Scotland). It was built with money donated by a famous Victorian businessman called Andrew Carnegie.
- Andrew Carnegie made his millions in America, but he never forgot his home country. He thought education was very important and paid for thousands of public libraries to be built from his own money – that is one of his most famous.

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### LOCATION 8 – Grassmarket

Take a walk down winding Victoria Street, past all the colourful shopfronts, and you will be in the Grassmarket. You should be able to find some space in the pedestrianised area outside Bidly Mulligan's pub.



### Things to look out for and discuss:

Take a few moments to have a good look around the area where you are standing.

- What do you think of this area?
- How is it different from the Royal Mile?
- What do you think a space like this might have been like 150 years ago?

### Key points:

- This has always been a busy part of town and very much at the centre of Old Town life. It has been a market place, a main meeting point and a place of public executions (see if you can spot the outline of a hanging scaffold in the pavement).
- During the Victorian period, though, the Old Town had been left to fall into ruin as the wealthy had all moved to the New Town.
- This whole area of Edinburgh became a place where new arrivals to the city, seeking work, would live as it was cheaper.
- Directly across the street – next to the Castle Rock chip shop – you will see Warden's Close. It was described as 'perhaps the most wretched close in Edinburgh'
- The inhabitants were Irish immigrants, living in dirty and overcrowded conditions. One description explains that 'In one room alone at the top of the house, between sixty and seventy people have been known to sleep during the harvest season'.
- It was famous among Edinburgh doctors for having more people suffering from fever and disease than anywhere else.
- One doctor described it 'from the top of the close to the bottom, one continuous pool of wet, filth and pollution.'
- The Grassmarket also became known as 'Little Italy' for a while because so many Italians migrated here. They often worked as ice cream sellers or musicians out on the streets.



### LOCATION 9 – Greyfriars Bobby

Cross the Grassmarket at the pedestrian crossing and proceed up to the top of Candlemaker Row, where you will find Greyfriar’s Bobby’s pub and Greyfriar’s Church. The small statue of Greyfriars’s Bobby is at the corner, more than likely surrounded by tourists. You could gather the group inside the graveyard, where you will see Bobby’s orange coloured gravestone facing you.

#### Things to look out for and discuss:

Look at the orange coloured headstone at the entrance to the graveyard.

- What is unusual about it?
- What are your thoughts about it?
- Do you have any questions about it that you would want answered?

#### Key points:

- The story of Greyfriar’s Bobby is probably one of the most famous and romantic stories from Victorian Edinburgh – though there are a few different versions!
- Bobby is supposed to have been the loyal pet of an Edinburgh policeman, John Gray, who had his beat in this area.
- When John died, he was buried in the graveyard – you can see his headstone nearby. Bobby was so upset he refused to leave his master’s side and could be found sleeping at his graveside every night.
- He became a bit of a celebrity and was looked after by locals who would feed him, he even had a shelter built in the graveyard.
- The Lord Provost had a special collar made for him to establish that Bobby was allowed to roam in the area.
- When he died, aged 16, he was buried alongside his master and a wealthy donor contributed money for the statue to be erected in his honour.
- You will see his statue as you leave to cross the street. You’ll notice that his nose is all shiny but DON’T be tempted to stroke it. This is NOT an Edinburgh tradition, but a recent fad made up for tourists. All you are doing is destroying poor Bobby for future generations to enjoy.

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### LOCATION 10 – Chambers Street

Cross George IV Bridge onto Chambers Street and past the new Museum of Scotland building until you are at the steps to the National Museum of Scotland. You will see two statues facing you on the left and right hand side.

#### Things to look out for and discuss:

This is a building that you may well have visited before. It has been a museum since it was built in Victorian times. Look at it from the outside.

- What features stand out for you?
- What words might you use to describe it?
- How does it make you feel?

If you were to build a museum today, would you build it to look like this? How might your museum be different?

#### Key points:

- Although life for the poor in Victorian Edinburgh could be very rough indeed, some people were trying to change things for the better.
- Many believed that educating people could help to improve people's lives – like Andrew Carnegie and his libraries. As a result, museums became very popular and this huge museum is a very good example.
- It was built in the 1860s and showed off all sorts of weird and wonderful objects that had been collected from across the world. It remains a hugely popular and free attraction.
- The two Victorian gentlemen facing you in the statues were also big Victorian improvers. If you are facing the Museum, the one on the left is William Playfair.
- William Playfair is probably one of Edinburgh's most famous architects and was responsible for the design of some of Edinburgh's most famous Victorian buildings and monuments, like the big art galleries on the Mound and the National Monument on Calton Hill.
- The character on the right is William Chambers. Chambers became a famous publisher, along with his brother, and was responsible for publishing famous encyclopaedias and dictionaries that are still used today.
- William Chambers went on to become Lord Provost and was responsible for trying to improve the Old Town by building new, better streets and buildings. This street, for example, was one of them - and is named after him.

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### LOCATION 11 – Cowgate - Blackfriar’s Wynd

Cross to the other side of Chambers Street and make your way down to the Cowgate via Guthrie Street. Cross over the Cowgate at the nearby crossing (to your right) and walk a little way down the left hand side, under the bridge, until you reach the entrance to Blackfriar’s Street.



### Things to look out for and discuss:

Compare pictures of this area with those from the Victorian era.

- Can you spot any similarities and differences?
- What words might you use to describe what life was like for someone living here 150 years ago?

### Key points:

- The Cowgate was one of the poorest parts of town in Old Edinburgh.
- It was sometimes known as ‘Little Ireland’ because it attracted a lot of migrant workers from Ireland. Many of them were escaping from a terrible famine that had devastated their country in the 1840s.
- They hoped to find work and a better life in cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh and ended up living in slum areas like this was at one time.
- One of the worst streets to live in was Blackfriar’s Wynd – which is now Blackfriar’s Street that you see here.
- In 1850, Dr George Bell visited Blackfriars Wynd to see what it was like and 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. Some of the rooms were described as measuring just 5ft x 12ft
- As a result, many families lived in one small room without enough light, fresh air, warmth or sanitation.





### LOCATION 12 – St Patrick’s Church

Keep walking down the Cowgate until you come to South Gray’s Close. Walk up South Gray’s Close until you come to the entrance to St Patrick’s Church. It should be quiet here.

#### Things to look out for and discuss:

Edinburgh’s two most famous football teams were formed near here during the Victorian period. Leisure time would have been very different 150 years ago compared with today, but some things were the same.

- What similarities might there have been with how you spend your free time today?
- What might have been very different?

#### Key points:

- St Patrick’s Church became a Catholic Church in 1856 to cater for the number of Catholic Irish immigrants living in the area.
- Further down the Cowgate were a number of big industries, especially breweries, where people hoped to find work.
- At the time, Irish people were discriminated against and looked down upon – partly because they were Catholic. They lived in some of the very worst slums in this part of Edinburgh.
- During the Victorian period football was becoming more popular and a football team was established here at the church in 1875 to provide a leisure activity for young men and to help integrate the Irish migrant community into Edinburgh life.
- The club was called Hibernian, an Irish word for ‘Ireland’. Another club was also formed very nearby (in Dumbiedykes) by young men who attended a dance hall at weekends. They called themselves Heart of Midlothian (after a novel by Walter Scott).
- The two teams played their first match on Christmas Day 1875 in the Meadows. This actually caused some controversy at the time, because a lot of people refused to recognise Hibernian because they were ‘Irish’. They weren’t allowed to join the new league at the time as a result.

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### LOCATION 13 – John Knox House and Storytelling Centre

Keep walking up South Gray's Close, right along Skinner's Close and you will come out onto the Royal Mile at Tweeddale Court. You'll find yourselves across the road from John Knox House and the Storytelling Centre. You could cross the road here and find a space in the area around 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 wells where people would queue to collect water.
- However, in the 1850s improvements were being made and a new, more efficient water supply was being installed, so these wells were no longer in use.
- Areas like this would have been busy with people selling their wares on the streets. A common sight seen walking up this street, for example, would have been fishwives from Newhaven.
- As you can see from this drawing, they would collect fish in large baskets that they would carry on their backs all the way up to the Royal Mile.
- They would draw people's attention to their fish for sale with cries of 'Caller Haddie' and became a colourful part of Victorian life in Old Edinburgh