A Potted History of “Auld Reekie”
Edinburgh provides a beautiful and historic backdrop to the festival, a fact that many keen festival-goers are only vaguely aware of as they scurry from venue to venue. It probably took 3 or 4 years before we began to appreciate the surroundings. The objective of this chapter is to provide a potted history, covering: the period up to the middle of the 18th century when it was a small, smelly and generally unhealthy place to live as its popular name of “Auld Reekie” (Lowland Scots meaning Old Smoky) helps to imply; and its subsequent metamorphosis between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries into a beautiful, thriving, confident and sophisticated metropolis.

**Early History (Up to 1100)**

The rock on which the castle sits is a plug of ancient volcanic rock, while the final shape of Castle Hill, where there is a long ridge that descends gradually from the castle down to Holyrood Palace at the other end of the Royal Mile with slopes on both the north and south sides, is due to glacier movement from west to east.

Despite its obvious defensive advantages the Romans appear to have had no station of importance here. It is possible that they considered it to be too far away from the nearest harbour, that access was inconvenient, and that there was no food or water. The principal Roman settlements in the local area are to be found at Inveresk and Cramond, to the east and west of Edinburgh respectively.

The local Celtic tribe at the time of the Romans was the Votadini, and their descendants were known as the Gododdin. The area was under direct Roman rule for a short period (AD 138-162) but it subsequently became a buffer state with Hadrian’s Wall marking the edge of the empire. As a buffer state the area benefited from relations with Rome while not being under its direct control.

After the Romans, places like Edinburgh, where the fortifications were just far enough away from the sea, became more attractive. The earliest reference to the occupation of the rock is in the 6th century. According to Arnot, the ancient name was *Castell Mynyd Agned* (Fortress of the Hill of St. Agnes) and it was subsequently known as *Castrum Puellarum* because the daughters of Pictish kings and chiefs were housed and educated there. There is some dispute on the derivation of the name of the town: some claim that it stemmed from Din Eidyn (alternatively Dun Edin) which means hill face; while others assert that it came from “Edwin’s Burg” (Edwin was a 7th century Anglo-Saxon king).

This part of Scotland was conquered by Bernicia (roughly the North East of England which was populated by the Angles) when it defeated the Gododdin in 638. It was ruled directly from Northumbria until 671 when a sub-kingdom called Dunbar was set up. Around 954, when England came under the rule of a single Anglo-Saxon king, Edinburgh was abandoned to the Scots king Indulf.
The Middle Ages and Beyond (1100 – 1750)

As Edinburgh’s fortunes were initially attributable to the monarch let us commence with brief histories of the castle and Holyrood palace before dealing with the town itself.

The Castle

Edinburgh did not become the capital of Scotland until the late Middle Ages. Before that time the capital was wherever the king and his court happened to be, and hence Edinburgh was only one of several important centres, which included Stirling and Perth, although the castle certainly became a favourite residence from the 11th century.

The assorted buildings within the castle today date from various periods: the oldest building is St. Margaret’s Chapel, originally built circa. 1124 in memory of Queen Margaret, the pious wife of Malcolm III who had predeceased her in 1093. The castle walls date mainly from the mid 14th century. Their primary objective was to defend against attacks from the east, as the sheer drop on the western side afforded sufficient protection. There is little trace of buildings prior to James IV’s reign around the turn of the 16th century. He built a Great Hall although it is thought that there may well have been a hall back as far as 600 AD for the warriors of the British King Mynyddog.

By the 16th century the castle’s military significance was beginning to outweigh its function as a royal residence. Except in times of emergency the monarch preferred the relative comforts of Holyrood and the castle was used largely for the manufacture and storage of artillery. In the late 16th century the walls were destroyed and subsequently the eastern defences were transformed, including the building of a new gatehouse, subsequently known as the Portcullis Gate. Royal usage almost entirely disappeared, particularly after Oliver Cromwell’s forces had seized the castle in 1650 and they had begun to convert the Great Hall into barracks. The ditch in front of the eastern approach was also started in Cromwell’s time. Repairs after various assaults and improvements continued into the early 18th century.

The last attempt to take the castle was in 1745 when Bonnie Prince Charlie’s forces attempted unsuccessfully to seize it, and by the second half of the 18th century the castle had largely assumed its present day form. Although changes continued there was a gradual shift from a utilitarian attitude to the recognition of its historical importance. In its current guise the Esplanade, where the Tattoo is held, dates back to the mid 18th – early 19th century. In earlier times it had been used by the townsfolk as a promenade.

Holyrood & Canongate

Holyrood lies at the other end of the ridge from the Castle Rock. It was originally the site of an Augustinian abbey, founded by David I in 1128. The original church was replaced by a “cathedral-sized” building (1195-1230). This was built around the original which continued to be used while construction work took place, eventually being demolished once the new building was virtually in place. Flying buttresses were added in the latter half of the 15th century, a possible indication that the building was unstable. It survived various English invasions and it was here that Mary Queen of Scots was married to both Darnley and Bothwell. The roof collapsed in 1768 and the church became a ruin which can still be seen today.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, as Edinburgh came to be recognised as the capital of Scotland, the kings
began to show a preference for Holyrood as a place of residence, rather than the castle. This led to building work to create a suitably opulent residence for the king and his court and the palace gradually came to overshadow the abbey. James IV made some additions prior to his marriage to Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII, in 1503.

Further extensive work was carried out by James V in the mid 1530s prior to his marriages, first to Madeleine Valois who died very shortly afterwards and then to Mary of Guise with whom he had one daughter, Mary Queen of Scots. When James VI, the only son of Mary Queen of Scots, acceded to the English throne on the death of Queen Elizabeth I there was inevitably less focus on the palace with a natural decline which was exacerbated when it was damaged by Cromwell’s troops and poorly repaired.

Charles II never visited after he was restored to the English throne in 1660 on Cromwell’s death, but he ensured that the palace was suitably repaired. His brother, James II, a Catholic adherent, later insisted that the abbey was set up for Catholic ritual. When he was overthrown by William of Orange a mob descended and destroyed anything that smacked of Catholicism. General decay, including the collapse of the abbey roof, attracted tourists, particularly as the decay seemed to validate the marketing claim that this is how it was when Mary Queen of Scots was alive – Mary was as popular then as she is now. Subsequent renovation work was carried out by George IV in the 1820s, by Queen Victoria later in the century and by George V in the early 20th century. The monarch now spends one week in residence in July each year.

Between the castle and Holyrood lies the Old Town and Canongate. Edinburgh and Canongate were in fact separate royal burghs until they were eventually united in 1856. Canongate was part and parcel of the lands that David I bestowed on the Augustinians, the most opulent religious foundation in Scotland at the time. They also received St. Cuthbert’s, Corstophine and Liberton.

With the advent of the palace of Holyroodhouse Canongate, which was more spacious than Edinburgh, became popular with the nobility who set up residence there. A number of fine mansions built by the families survive today, including: Huntly House (c.1570), now the Museum of Edinburgh; Moray House built by Mary, Countess of Home in 1618; Acheson House (1633) which is named after the Secretary of State for Scotland during Charles I’s reign; and Queensberry House (1681) which now forms part of the Scottish Parliament complex. Built in 1591, the Canongate Tolbooth, now also a museum, was the administrative centre of the burgh.

It is interesting to note that theatre was generally frowned upon in Scotland, as the clergy considered it to be “a hotbed of vice and profanity”. Canongate was the home of the few attempts to establish it: the Royal Tennis Court was used as a theatre periodically during the late 17th and early 18th centuries when the Kirk’s objections were less vociferous; and Canongate Theatre (Tailor’s Hall on Cowgate) was used from 1727-1753. There was
not much theatre after 1753 until the Theatre Royal, sited in the New Town, began to establish itself in the early 19th century.

**Edinburgh – The Layout of the Old Town**

Tracking the early history of Edinburgh has been made difficult by the loss of records. Edward I of England, “The Hammer of the Scots”, removed records along with the Stone of Destiny (only recently returned) after invading Scotland at the end of the 13th century. Cromwell also removed records which were returned although some were lost in a shipwreck.

There is no evidence of any large settlement on the site of the Old Town earlier than the late 11th or early 12th century, although by the 13th century Edinburgh was playing host to Parliament and the provincial synod. Before this time it is thought that the local centre of population was on the eastern side of Arthur’s Seat. The original church in the area is thought to be St. Cuthbert’s, which reputedly goes back to the 7th century, while St. Giles on the High Street dates back to 854.

Edinburgh with Holyrood in the foreground, circa 1450 (Courtesy of Edinburgh City Council)

In the 12th century the Esplanade, where the Tattoo is now held, was a military zone. The market street was made up of Lawnmarket and High St. It was bordered by long narrow plots, 25 feet wide and 450 feet long (circa ¼ acre or one rood), running down the sloping sides of the ridge to the back lanes which ran parallel to the market street. Public paths between the market street and the back lanes were called wynds (as in to wend one’s way). The borders of the town comprised:

- on the north side (Princes St. side) it was at the end of the first set of plots, as the steepness of the incline prevented it going any further, and the Nor’ Loch, a man-made lake where the railway line and the lower parts of Princes St Gardens are now situated, provided a natural boundary;
- the eastern boundary was originally Blackfriars Wynd (now Blackfriars St), although it was eventually extended eastward at an early date to St Mary’s Wynd (St. Mary’s St) and Leith Wynd (Jeffrey St / Cranston St);
- on the south side it was initially Cowgate but eventually the outer lane was around the north side of Infirmary St and the south side of Chambers St;
- the western border was the Grassmarket which was around half its current length.

The population is estimated at around 2,000 in the early Middle Ages.

Friars were not allowed within a town under the old burgh code and therefore they were usually sited just outside the boundary. The Dominicans, called Blackfriars because of the colour of their robes, took up residence on the hill just south of Cowgate around 1230, having been given a house by the king, Alexander II.
Their land was roughly the area bordered by Cowgate, Pleasance, Drummond St, and Guthrie St. with Blackfriars Wynd affording them access to the town.

Cardinal Beaton’s House - Blackfriar’s Wynd

They were joined two hundred years later by the Franciscans, alias the Greyfriars, who were situated south of the Grassmarket on the site of the Greyfriars Kirkyard. Along with other Catholic establishments, they were destroyed during the Reformation in the 16th century.

The first town defence included the King’s Wall, which was built sometime after 1329 when Robert the Bruce granted Edinburgh a royal charter (the one that survives to the present day), although some date the wall as late as 1450.

As shown in the diagram above, the wall ran eastwards from the Castle Rock above the Grassmarket, crossed West Bow and then ran eastwards again halfway between High St and Cowgate, roughly level with the south gable of Old Parliament Hall. It cut gardens in two, resulting in people making openings in the wall to allow
normal movement.

On the north side, part of the defences were provided by the Nor’ Loch, an artificial lake probably dating back to 1340-1350 that was fed by a spring beneath the Castle Rock and retained by a dam at Halkerston’s Wynd (approximately where North Bridge now is). Over time it became a smelly mess, not least because human and animal waste tumbled down the northern slope of the burgh into it. It was used to dip and drown offenders against morality (usually women), and it was also a popular place for suicides.

On the south side Cowgate was a beautiful suburb that was outside the King’s Wall. Developed around 1460, it became the home of people such as the bishop of Dunkeld, one of which was Gavin Douglas the poet. It was said in 1530 to be “where nothing is humble or homely but all is magnificent”. It is difficult to imagine this today when Cowgate is a somewhat dreary place that is mostly in the shadow of George IV and South Bridges and the tall buildings that are adjacent to them.

Cowgate became enclosed when the King’s Wall was replaced by the Flodden Wall (1515-1520). It is claimed that this wall was built to keep the English out after the battle of Flodden Field (1513) when the Scots were heavily defeated by the English, losing the king, many nobles and over 10,000 men.

A Remnant of the Flodden Wall (corner of Drummond Street and Pleasance)

Some question that this was the reason for the wall, claiming that it was simply not up to the task. In various places houses (e.g. in St. Mary’s Wynd) and buildings such as Trinity Hospital which is now part of Waverley station, helped form part of the fortification. There were ports (gates) that provided the means of entrance and exit to the town, including: Netherbow (close to the corner of the Royal Mile and St. Mary’s St); Cowgate (at the junction with the Pleasance); Potterow; Bristow; and West Port (at the western end of the Grassmarket). The Flodden Wall was extended in 1620-36. Telfer’s Wall, as this section is known, encompasses Heriot, Lauriston and Teviot Places. The Flodden Wall remained the effective boundary of the town for several hundred years.

Notable Buildings

Apart from the castle the main buildings of note were initially clustered in the High St. There is evidence that a church existed on the site of St Giles as early as 854. In 1120 it was rebuilt in the Norman style but was subsequently destroyed during successive invasions. In 1387 the Provost commissioned the building of 5 chapels from which it is inferred that it was the parish church of Edinburgh, and in 1467 it became a collegiate establishment under the authority of a Papal bull obtained upon petition of the Provost and the magistrates.

The Luckenbooths were seven tall tenement buildings that were erected around the middle of the 15th century, sited in the middle of the High St, opposite St. Giles, which reduced the width of the High St. at this point to 15 feet. The name refers to closed (lucken) shops (booths), as opposed to open booths (market-style). The shops on the ground floor dealt in a wide range of goods and services. These included: Peter Williamson's Penny Post Office (he introduced the Penny Postal service to Edinburgh in the 1770s, following on from the pioneering work of William Dockwra who had created an efficient Penny Post in London as early as 1680); Alan Ramsay's circulating library, from which he 'diffused plays and other works of fiction among the people of Edinburgh'; and William Creech, the bookseller who was responsible for the publication of early work by Robert Burns, whose shop became the “natural resort of lawyers, authors, and all sorts of literary idlers who were always bussing about this convenient hive".
Just to the west of the Luckenbooths was the Tolbooth, a building that also dates back to the mid-15th century. It was the administrative centre of the town and one of several sites of public execution. Under pressure from Mary Queen of Scots it was extended around 1560, the extension being used for parliamentary sessions and law courts.

The Tolbooth was subsequently used as a prison which Sir Walter Scott made famous with his novel *The Heart of Midlothian*, published in 1818 – the Tolbooth being known as the Heart of MidLothian among the criminal fraternity. One of its more famous inmates was William Brodie. Deacon Brodie, as he is more commonly known, was a person of seeming good repute who used clay to take imprints of keys to shops and other establishments which he later burgled; it was the custom to leave the keys hanging in open view during the day. He was eventually caught and hanged although there were rumours that he cheated the hangman by the use of a harness and was later seen in Paris.

Both the Luckenbooths and the Tolbooth were eventually demolished in 1817. The outline of a heart set into the High St. today marks the spot of the main entrance to the Tolbooth, as shown below.

Alongside St. Giles, to the side of the High St., is Parliament Square. Parliament House was begun in 1631 and completed in 1640. It was used for the Law and Parliament, both activities moving from the Tolbooth, although Parliament eventually ceased to exist with the Act of Union in 1707 when Scotland was united with England.

Parliament Close, as it was called at the time, included various businesses on the southern side of the close: clockmakers, a newspaper (Beacon), law publishers, booksellers and a bank (including the original bank of James Coutts). Eventually, more room was required for the justice system and these businesses gave way as building work began at the beginning of the 19th century.

Further down the High St was the Mercat (or Market) Cross. It was originally sited near Anchor Close although the current version was erected just to the east of St. Giles in 1885. The Cross was the place where
important proclamations were read out to the populace, and where state criminals such as James Graham, the Marquess of Montrose (1650) and Archibald Campbell, the Marquess of Argyll (1661) were executed. Caddies lurked around here; they knew everywhere (a bit like taxi drivers), ran messages, and generally acted as gofers. Chairmen (sedan carriers) also loitered here in anticipation of business. Further east the Tron Kirk (founded in 1637) was built around the same time as Parliament House.

The most notable building that was not on the High St. was George Heriot’s School, known as Heriot’s Hospital, close to Greyfriars Kirk. It was started in 1628 but not completed until 1700. Designed by Inigo Jones, it is regarded by many as the grandest building in Edinburgh.

**Markets**

Markets were originally held at specified points on the High St. Around the turn of the 16th century, examples included: the Fruit & Vegetable market near the Mercat Cross; the Grain and Corn market between the Tolbooth and Liberton’s Wynd; and the Flesh Market between the site of the Tron and Blackfriar’s Wynd. One notable exception was the Cattle Market which was held near King’s Stable Road, as cattle were not allowed in the town. Gradually, the markets moved away from the High St, with the Flesh and Fruit & Vegetable markets transferring close to what is now Market St.

**Trade**

Various trade associations were incorporated in Edinburgh in the late Middle Ages, including: Hammermen (1483), Surgeons and Barbers (1505), Goldsmiths (1581), and Skinners (1586).

Edinburgh was to become renowned from the late 18th century onwards as a centre for publishing. Printing actually commenced in 1509, although the names of the printers are unknown until 1541 when Thomas Davidson was appointed the king’s printer. In the second half of the 17th century Andrew Anderson, who had previously been a printer in Glasgow, prevailed on other printers to apply for a patent in his name, by which they would be jointly vested with the office of the king’s printer. However, after his death the printers fell out and eventually sold the patent to his widow who doggedly enforced her rights, often having recourse to the law. Thus the expansion of the trade was constrained until the second half of the 18th century.

The first newspaper to be printed in Edinburgh, indeed in Scotland, was the short-lived Mercurius Scoticus (1651). Subsequently, the Edinburgh Gazette, which did not report on local news, was founded in 1699, and the Edinburgh Courant, a forerunner of the Evening News, in 1705.

Finance was another area of business where the city would eventually become renowned. The Bank of Scotland was founded in 1695, and the Royal Bank of Scotland in 1727. Fire insurance companies came into existence around the same time: Friendly Insurance Office (1720), London-based Sun Fire Office (1733), and later the Liverpool Office (1777).
The Justice System

Parliament came into existence sometime around the late 12th to early 13th century. For the majority of its existence before the Act of Union in 1707 the members were known collectively as the Three Estates, reflecting its make-up, viz. prelates, lords and representatives of the burghs. It initially acted in a judicial as well as a legislative capacity – Scotland being a fairly lawless place at the time.

Too many causes were being dealt with by the king and his council, and several attempts were made to solve this problem, including the formation of the Daily Council during the reign of James IV (early 16th century).

However, a major breakthrough occurred in 1532 when James V, who was short of funds after recent wars, approached Pope Paul III for assistance. The Pope granted a tithe on the Church in Scotland on condition that a corporate legal body, the College of Justice, was established.

At its inception it dealt with civil and criminal law. While Scots law was influenced by the Roman-based codes to be found in Europe and by common law in England, it is unique. The Court of Session, Scotland’s Supreme Court, came into being at this time. Originally, it consisted of 15 judges - 7 churchmen, 7 laymen and a president (usually a churchman). In addition, the Lord Chancellor could preside and vote, while the king could appoint 3-4 lords.

The College of Justice covered not only judges, but also advocates (barristers), writers to the signet and clerks of session. Thus the legal system which was to become one of the mainstays of Edinburgh’s economy was born and the body of legal literature which had been very slim prior to this time subsequently started to increase.

Charitable Institutions

A number of organisations were set up to help the poor. The first was Trinity Hospital, sited where Waverley Station is now and forming part of the Flodden Wall. It consisted of two buildings: the first was founded in 1460 by Queen Mary of Gueldres (wife of James II), and the second by the Magistrates & Town Council after the Reformation. For a time the two buildings co-existed on opposite sides of Leith Wynd. As time went by it seemed to become more a place for the genteel. Pensions came into being for certain people who were not in the hospital, “out-pensioners”. It was eventually demolished in the 1840s to make way for the railway.

Edinburgh has two renowned posthumous philanthropists, George Heriot and George Watson. Heriot was a goldsmith, jeweller to James VI of Scotland and I of England. With no dependants at the time of his death in 1624 he is reputed to have left over £50,000 in his will, the majority being bequeathed to the town council “for building and endowing a hospital for the maintenance and education of indigent children”. It took its first boys in 1659. Watson was an accountant by trade, who left £12,000 to be used “for the maintenance and education of the offspring of decayed merchants”. Watson’s Hospital received its first boys in 1741.

The Royal Infirmary (to the south of Cowgate) was founded in 1729 as a charitable institution for the relief of the sick poor. Subscriptions came from many sources and the Infirmary had particularly strong support from the Town Council through the Lord Provost, George Drummond, and from the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Surgeons.

Main Historical Events

Edinburgh eventually started to make “the front pages” of history with four key episodes in the two hundred years between the mid-16th and mid-18th centuries: John Knox and the Reformation; the high drama which surrounded Mary Queen of Scots; the Covenanters; and finally the romance of the Jacobite uprisings which culminated in the failed attempt of Bonnie Prince Charlie to regain the British crown for the Stuarts.

John Knox & the Reformation

John Knox originally entered the Catholic priesthood but by 1545 he was a Protestant, becoming a follower of George Wishart, a Protestant reformer who was burnt as a heretic by Cardinal Beaton in 1546.
Having taken refuge in St. Andrews castle, Knox was subsequently captured by French and Scottish forces and spent 19 months serving in French galleys. After his release in 1549 he spent time in the north of England, acting as a royal chaplain. However, the accession of the Catholic Mary Tudor to the English throne in 1553 led him to flee to the continent, spending most of his time in Geneva and Frankfurt.

Back in Scotland, a number of Scottish nobles with Protestant sympathies banded together in 1557 to form a group known as the Lords of the Congregation. The most powerful nobleman was Argyll who could muster an army as large as the monarch’s. He was joined by Glencairn, Ruthven, Boyd, Ochiltree and several others. Lord James Stuart (later the Earl of Moray) joined their ranks when he broke with Mary of Guise in 1559 – Mary, the mother of Mary Queen of Scots, was acting as regent. By October that year the vast majority of the nobles had joined the group, Bothwell being a notable exception.

At this point Knox was invited back from Geneva to lead the Reformation. The nobles rode to Edinburgh and deposed Mary of Guise as regent, but she took refuge in Leith and fought back with the help of French forces. The nobles appealed to the English for military help; William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth’s advisor, was keen to assist them but she was less inclined. Skirmishing, largely of a political nature, came to an end in the middle of 1560 with two key events: the death of Mary of Guise and the Treaty of Edinburgh (described in the section on Mary Queen of Scots).

The actual move to Protestantism was ultimately achieved without any great degree of trouble. With Mary of Guise’s death and Mary Queen of Scots being in France, a parliament was called in August without the sanction of the crown. It abolished Papal jurisdiction over Scotland and approved a Calvinist “Confession of Faith”. Mary Queen of Scots refused to ratify the acts on her return to the kingdom, and it was only when she was deposed in 1567 that the acts were actually implemented.

Knox was appointed minister of St. Giles in 1560. From his pulpit and in his recorded discussions with Mary, he sailed very close to the wind, defying her authority and railing against her religion. From the perspective of the 21st century, his demeanour may appear unyielding, unpleasant and unproductive, but the momentous issues of the time probably shaped his approach. Whatever view is taken of him, he was undoubtedly the man for the moment that the Scottish reformers required, leading them to the Presbyterian manner. He died in 1572 and was buried in St. Giles Churchyard.

Mary Queen of Scots

As a piece of drama, Mary’s story stands head and shoulders above the others. I have attempted several times to reduce the size of this piece as it is blatantly too long for a book of this sort, but I keep coming back to the view that it is a tale worth telling – so you will have to forgive me.

Mary was arguably unsuited to be a monarch; she was gregarious and found it difficult to keep her emotions in
check. While this made her popular (then and now) it was not calculated to help her cause. The other major ingredients of her story include: Scotland’s auld alliance with France which was a perennial problem for England, but more particularly during Queen Elizabeth I’s reign when England was continually under threat from the Catholic powers of Europe; the fact that she was a young woman and unlike Elizabeth lacked the steady and continuing support of a strong privy council; a more difficult, scheming, untrustworthy set of noblemen it would be difficult to find anywhere; and the problems caused by her Catholic religion at the time of the Reformation, in particular the open criticism of her by John Knox.

All this resulted in a series of events that would be criticised as implausible if it had been written as a work of fiction. Mary has been a focus of attention ever since her execution in 1587: from an early biography in 1624, to Schiller’s play Maria Stuart (an excellent version of which was performed in 2005 at the Donmar Warehouse in London with Janet McTeer as Mary and Harriet Walter as Elizabeth), to the steady stream of biographies in modern times, and on to the various films and TV dramas which mainly appear intent on showing that her story is not implausible enough for some people in the media.

Mary’s troubles began early in her life when her father, James V, died 6 days after her birth in 1542 and she was crowned Queen of Scots in the following year. Over the next four years “The Rough Wooings” took place - various attempts made by English and Scottish factions to marry Mary or her mother, Mary of Guise. Mary of Guise skilfully kept all the suitors at bay and eventually managed to get her daughter to France in 1548 where the Guise family were close to the wheels of power. Ten years later she was betrothed to the dauphin who became Francis II of France in 1559 and she became Queen of France.

This success was short-lived. 1560 was a bad year for Mary: her mother died in June, followed by her husband Francis II in December. Catherine de Medici, Francis’s mother, took control and ensured that Charles IX, her 10 year old son, was proclaimed as king. Mary was not in Catherine’s plans at all, nor was the Guise family. In 1561 as the Guise clan started to withdraw from the French court, Mary decided to return to Scotland. Lord James, her illegitimate half-brother, and soon to become the Earl of Moray, came over to France to discuss her position and he eventually gained her trust. Lord James was in alliance with: James, the Earl of Morton who vacillated in his support during Mary of Guise’s struggles with the nobles until he was confident that he knew which way the wind was blowing; and William Maitland, Secretary of State to the council of nobles, the cleverest of the three who was a committed Protestant and a friend of William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth’s chief advisor. This trio dominated policy-making initially.
status quo, i.e. both religions should peacefully co-exist, as indeed was largely the case across the country. Knox, not a PC sort of chap, had previously written *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), a diatribe against female rulers, and he had subsequently argued that Mary of Guise and Mary Queen of Scots could lawfully be deposed by the nobles.

The other threat to Mary was England, and in particular the Treaty of Edinburgh (1560) which had been signed without Mary or Francis’s agreement. The parties to the treaty were the Scottish nobles, the Guise family and England. It called for the French to get out of Scotland; for France to recognise Elizabeth as the rightful Queen of England with Francis and Mary dropping their claims; plus it contained a surveillance clause allowing England to intervene in Scotland if it was thought necessary to uphold the Protestant religion and expunge Catholic and French influences. This treaty was forever to be a problem to Mary, not least because she was pushing to be named as Elizabeth’s successor in the event that Elizabeth had no issue.

The next problem was marriage. Mary’s preferred choice of husband was Don Carlos, the son of Philip II of Spain. Knox, for one, was strongly against this idea. Other possible candidates that were thought to be in the running were Charles IX, the king of France (over Catherine De Medici’s dead body!), and the Archduke Charles of Austria who was favoured by the Guises. Elizabeth wanted to have the final say whoever was proposed. Lots of wild rumours circulated, e.g. that England would be given to Philip of Spain as a dowry if she married Don Carlos. Elizabeth proposed Dudley, her favourite, but then prefabricated.

Meanwhile, Mary secretly had her eye on Darnley. Being the son of the Earl of Lennox (Scottish) and Margaret, a niece of Henry VIII, he had a claim on the English throne, just below Mary in the overall pecking order - she was a great granddaughter of Henry VII. Lennox and Darnley were unwittingly allowed by Elizabeth to return to Scotland, and she was extremely unhappy when she eventually heard of Mary’s plans, ordering them to return to England while Mary insisted that they stay in Scotland. Moray, who was against the marriage and refused to sign a document pledging his support, was dismissed from court and outlawed along with various other nobles. For a week or two Mary thought that she was actually in love with the young nineteen year old Darnley, but she quickly realised that it was simply a marriage of convenience when his true behaviour began to shine through; he was generally arrogant, wilful and a schemer. However, he was knighted, made a baron and the earl of Ross all in a single afternoon and, after the marriage took place on July 29th 1565, subsequently given the title of King of Scotland.

Darnley immediately started to act as if he was the ruler and his wife subservient. He communicated with European powers having decided that Catholicism should be restored, his motive being political rather than religious. Mary put him in his place and, not surprisingly, the marriage began to go downhill rapidly.

He started plotting against Mary, his father having a secret rendezvous with Argyll, the most powerful noble, at which an offer was made to Moray and other exiled lords in England that, in return for their support in granting Darnley “crown matrimonial”, Darnley would switch sides, pardon them and forbid the confiscation of their estates. He would also re-establish the religious status quo. In essence, everybody would benefit except Mary. Maitland who was out of favour at the time was also on their side along with Morton. The plot needed a scapegoat and Rizzio, Mary’s private secretary, was chosen. Maitland fanned the flames by telling Darnley that Rizzio and Mary were rumoured to be having an affair. Rizzio was Italian, and thought to be a papal spy; he was somebody that everybody could hate.

Darnley signed the bond for the plot, even stating how and where it might be done. On March 9th, 1566 at 8pm in the evening Darnley led Lord Ruthven and an accomplice up the secret stairs that came out in the Queen’s bedchamber. Mary, Rizzio and others were in a small room off the bedchamber having supper. Darnley went into the room to talk to Mary while Ruthven and his accomplice opened the main door to the bedchamber where Morton and the other conspirators, 80 in all, were waiting. They burst into the room, dragged Rizzio to the outer chamber and killed him. Darnley did not join in but somebody used his dagger and left it in the body to signify his involvement. With Rizzio dead the conspirators fled and Morton sealed the gates and doors of the palace. The earls of Bothwell and Huntly, who were loyal to Mary, heard the commotion and assuming that something was going on, also fled Holyrood.

Darnley’s tasks were now to get Mary to pardon the conspirators and to prevent the land forfeitures. Mary,
who was by now pregnant, played for time by pretending to miscarry. She used the time to persuade Darnley that the Lords were not to be trusted. Why should they do anything to help him once they had their pardons and their estates? Darnley was persuaded and the two fled to Dunbar, 25 miles away, from where Mary eventually returned with an army that had been assembled by Bothwell and Huntly. She offered pardons to the rebel lords who had been against the marriage, along with the return of their estates if they withdrew temporarily to their own houses and made no attempt to intercede for Darnley’s co-conspirators in the Rizzio plot. Argyll and Moray agreed and were restored to the Privy Council although Maitland was excluded. Branded as rebels with their lands forfeited, Morton, Ruthven and others fled to England. Darnley publicly denied involvement but Mary was shown the bond that he had signed by Moray. Meanwhile, Mary rewarded Bothwell with the captaincy of Dunbar, granting him the castle and surrounding estates.

After Mary gave birth to James, Darnley took up plotting once more, seeing her attempts to restore order among the various lords as moves to marginalise him. Amid all this turmoil Mary and Elizabeth seemed to be coming close to an agreement. This had started with Mary asking Elizabeth to be her son’s protector. This proposed agreement would confirm the substance of the Treaty of Edinburgh but without a lot of the detail. However, just as they were nearing a consensus Darnley was murdered.

Maitland had raised the idea of a plan to get rid of Darnley by a divorce. Argyll was in favour, as subsequently were Huntly and Bothwell, but Moray was not convinced. While Mary considered that divorce was satisfactory in theory, she was worried about where it might lead and therefore preferred the status quo. Over Christmas and New Year at Stirling Mary was persuaded to pardon the majority of the Rizzio plotters. Morton immediately arranged a meeting with Maitland and Bothwell on his return to plot against the “treacherous” Darnley.

Mary was concerned that Darnley planned to kidnap her son James and rule as regent and she wanted to keep an eye on him. She persuaded him to return to Edinburgh from Glasgow, the Lennox stronghold where he was currently sulking, on the pretext that she could nurse him (he was suffering from syphilis), promising that sexual relations would be resumed once he was cured. Darnley relented and moved into the old Provost’s lodging at Kirk o’ Field. This was his idea as his vanity did not allow him to be seen at court, pustules and all, until he had recovered. The house adjoined the Flodden Wall, the back gate coming out on Thieves Row (now Drummond Street).

Mary visited him several times, including the evening of Sunday 9th February when she returned to Holyrood at 11pm. At around 2am there was a large explosion and the building was destroyed. Darnley’s body was found over the other side of Thieves Row with no sign that he had been burnt or blown there. He had been strangled. It is assumed that he heard noises prior to the explosion and presuming that something was up he got out through a window that led down to Thieves Row via a rope and chair where he was seized by the conspirators.

Over the centuries there has been much speculation about who was involved in the plot and its execution. Local gossip put Bothwell in the frame, while Mary was put in the court of public opinion by leaders and others, indicating that either she was involved or at the very least she “looked through her fingers”. Morton was almost certainly involved along with Bothwell; Argyll and Huntly were in full support; and Moray was aware of what was going on, but he simply watched while events unfolded.

Mary was now alone and exposed, and she needed somebody to rely on; that person was Bothwell. Lennox accused Bothwell of his son’s murder, but he did not dare to attend the subsequent trial in Edinburgh as the court and surrounding area were full of Bothwell’s men. Unsurprisingly, Bothwell was found not guilty and Lennox fled the country. Moray also went into exile, though voluntarily.

In a similar manner to Darnley, Bothwell quickly became arrogant and assumed more power. He tried to get the Lords to sign a bond stating that he was innocent of Darnley’s murder, and that they would support him in any wooing of Mary. Some Lords signed but others did not, particularly Morton and Maitland. Matters deteriorated further when Bothwell abducted Mary at Almond Bridge and took her to Dunbar where she stayed for 12 days. It is said that he raped her there but this is probably untrue.
The rapid increase in Bothwell’s power caused the conspirators to fall out and the Lords now got together to plot against him; Morton, Argyll, Atholl, and Mar were the main instigators. Meanwhile, Bothwell had arranged a quickie divorce from his wife and he married Mary on the 15th May, a mere 3 months and 5 days after Darnley’s murder. One month later, the Scottish lords confronted Mary and Bothwell at Carberry Hill, just east of Edinburgh. Mary eventually surrendered on condition that Bothwell was allowed to leave. He fled to Scandinavia via the Orkneys and Shetland. Mary was imprisoned at Lochleven castle where she was forced to abdicate, and on 29th July 1567 the one year old James VI was crowned with Moray appointed as regent.

Mary managed to escape from Lochleven in May of the following year but she was defeated at Langside 11 days later. Fleeing across the border to England, expecting help which was not forthcoming, she was detained, effectively under house arrest, until her eventual death twenty years later in 1587.

William Cecil had always wanted to get rid of her, but Elizabeth, while acknowledging that she was a problem, recognised her as a queen - and all that went with that - and hence she prevaricated. However, Mary inevitably became a focus for Catholic plots as Cecil had feared and the Babington plot eventually led to her downfall. The idea of De Mendoza, the expelled Spanish ambassador in London, was a coup d’etat which would include a Catholic uprising, a Spanish invasion, the seizing of Elizabeth, and Mary’s triumph. The plotters contacted Mary via Anthony Babington, a rich young Catholic gentleman, to ask if she would support them. Unfortunately, the letter was intercepted and Walsingham, Elizabeth’s spymaster, allowed the game to continue in an attempt to trap Mary. She dutifully obliged by giving the conspirators the go ahead, thus signing her own death warrant. She was beheaded at Fotheringay in 1587.

Although Mary was not ruler material she has generated a great deal of sympathy, mainly because she was blown about by stronger forces, by events that seemed to be outside her control, by her relative youth (she was still only 24 in the climactic year of 1567), and crucially by the lack of any strong and loyal advisers. However, despite her trials and tribulations it was Mary’s son, James VI, who succeeded to the English throne when Elizabeth died in 1603.

The Covenanters

The Reformation in Scotland had been led by John Knox who brought Calvinist beliefs. After Knox, Andrew Melville (1545-1622) proposed a new system of church courts and synods which included the demand that Episcopalian properties, tithes and lands should be handed over by the crown. The response from the English crown was to reaffirm the king as the head of the church with the bishops as its managers, although there was some relaxation including the suspension of the role of the bishop. Tension was heightened when Charles I threatened, to the alarm of landowners, to take back the church’s rights to property and tithes.

Another source of tension was the desire of Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, to impose a new prayer book on the Scots; the Book of Common Prayer was based on Anglican ideals. This resulted in the so-called Prayer Book riot at St. Giles on 23rd July 1637. Jenny Geddes and others objected to the book being read from, stating that it was nothing short of the Mass. She threw her stool and prayer book at the dean. Several attempts to expel the “rabble” and to continue the service failed, and ultimately the bishop was forced to flee. Subsequently, the minister at Greyfriars Kirk refused to read from the book.

Laud’s decision to go ahead with these reforms was both the cause and pretext for revolt. In 1638 at Greyfriars Kirk representatives of the Scottish people gathered to sign a “National Covenant”. This document: restated the struggle against popery; declared resistance to changes in worship not approved by free assemblies and parliament; and pledged to defend their religion against all comers.

Charles regarded them as rebels and assembled an army, but he eventually relented temporarily until the General Assembly in Scotland abolished the bishops when he once again assembled an army. However, Charles was having his own troubles with the English Parliament which led to the outbreak of civil war in England. In 1643 the Covenanters entered into a “Solemn League and Covenant” with the English Parliamentarians. In return for military help this would have given a uniform Presbyterian religion to both England and Scotland. This was adopted for the Kirk in Scotland, but not in England.
After Charles’ execution in 1649, the Scots proclaimed his son (the future Charles II) king of Scotland on condition that he accepted Presbyterianism and the covenants. He duly signed. However, this was totally unacceptable to Cromwell and led to his triumph at the bloody battle of Dunbar with survivors being exiled to America and Ireland.

When Charles II was eventually restored to the monarchy in 1660 after Cromwell’s death he reneged on the deal by reintroducing the bishops and the Book of Common Prayer. In 1661 there was a resolution that the Covenant be burned and a bill declaring that the “Solemn League and Covenant” was illegal. The Act of Uniformity (1662) banished all ministers who did not have a bishop’s licence, 300 being ejected from their manses (official homes). There were skirmishes between the two sides but a Covenanter army of 5,000 was eventually defeated at Bothwell Brig. The persecution of Covenanters led to thousands migrating to Ireland.

The subsequent accession of the Catholic James II in 1685 only exacerbated matters, as he openly supported the mass and the appointment of Catholics to senior positions. The call for William of Orange to take the crown and his subsequent victory at the Battle of The Boyne in 1690 eventually assured the Protestant succession in Britain and, along with it, tolerance of Presbyterianism.

**Jacobite Uprisings**

After James II was replaced by William of Orange and Mary (James II’s daughter by his first marriage) there were three major attempts to restore the Stuarts to the throne.

In 1689 the most prominent figure in the first attempt was John Graham, Earl of Claverhouse, who defeated the Protestants at the battle of Killicrankie (1689) although he was himself killed. However, the Jacobite resistance was subsequently defeated at the battle of Dunkeld later the same year. After the battle of the Boyne in the following year James II and his supporters fled to France.

The Act of Union which joined England and Scotland in 1707 was not well received in Scotland. Sections of the populace felt oppressed, particularly as the country appeared to be full of English tax collectors. This discontent encouraged James VIII, the son of James II of England. In 1715 John Erskine (Earl of Mar), known as “bobbing John” because he changed sides and later informed on many of his allies, raised the clans. An indecisive battle at Sheriffmuir was followed by defeat for the Jacobites at Preston. James VIII, subsequently called The Old Pretender, landed at Peterhead in anticipation of success, but the defeat forced him to retreat back to France.

In 1745 the third and most famous Jacobite uprising was led by Charles Edward Stuart, son of James VIII, known both as the Young Pretender and Bonnie Prince Charlie. His army won a victory over the English at...
Prestonpans, near Edinburgh, and stayed in the town for six weeks, although they failed in their attempts to take the castle. While Edinburgh had made ready to resist him, it was somewhat half-hearted, particularly on the part of the Lord Provost, Archibald Stewart.

In the event Charles’ men rushed in to the town through the Netherbow Gate at first light when it was briefly opened to allow a coach out. There were lots of hurrahs, with people seeming to become Jacobites overnight although few actually joined Charles’ army. The Royal Bank of Scotland converted notes to coin to pay the army – sneaking the gold and coin out from the castle where they had previously taken it for safekeeping - a matter of some embarrassment to them ever since. British government resumed within two weeks of Charles’ departure from the town and Provost Stewart was carted off to London to be tried for neglect of office although he was subsequently acquitted.

George Drummond who had actively promoted resistance, though cynics say that it was politically motivated, was rewarded by regaining the Lord Provost position in 1746, one of six occasions that he was to hold the post.

As for Charles, his army marched south, getting as far as Derby before they fell out among themselves. Without any support from the Scottish Lowlands, the English or the promised French force that never materialised, they eventually retreated. In spite of a skilful retreat and victory over the English at Falkirk (1747), Charles made the fateful decision to engage the English in the battle at Culloden. The English were led by the Duke of Cumberland, subsequently known as “Butcher Cumberland” to the Scots. The Scots were cut down by cannon fire and any of them that made it to the English lines were killed.

Charles escaped and was hounded for months by the English. He eventually managed to escape to France via the Isle of Skye with the help of Flora McDonald who dressed him up as her servant “Betty Burke”. Charles’s fortunes never recovered and he became an alcoholic. After his death in 1788, his brother Henry Stuart became the last Stuart Pretender. The cause died out, except for sentiment and a large number of Jacobite songs.

**The Golden Age**

During the course of the 18th and early 19th century Edinburgh witnessed an astounding metamorphosis from a small, dirty, smelly mediaeval town to a thriving, sophisticated, highly civilised municipality that was a match for anywhere in Europe.

By the close of the 17th century, Edinburgh had remained roughly the same physical size, limited to two main streets. The increases in population, which was circa 20,000 by 1700, only served to make living conditions even more unpalatable within this confined space where water had only recently been provided by leaden pipe to selected points on the High St and where drainage was largely non-existent. Trade was limited, Scotland being one of the poorest countries in Europe. Life for the citizens was largely dictated by the Kirk that, not dissimilar to many religions, strove to determine views on all aspects of life. The power of religion can be illustrated by the fact that in 1697, a student named Thomas Aikenhead was charged with blasphemy and subsequently hanged.

However, changes were afoot. In the field of education the intellectual benefits of Europe's first public education system in modern times were beginning to be felt. While the High School dates back to 1519, the University was started with the help of James VI, college building commencing in 1581. Rollock, first principal of the college, known as King James's College, was also a professor and he was shortly joined by two others. James endowed the university with certain church lands and tithes in the counties of Lothian and Fife. It was fully controlled by The Town Council until the advent of the 1858 Universities Act. In the field of medicine where Edinburgh achieved world renown the first professors were appointed in 1685. Strong academic relationships with France, where the Enlightenment was underway, and Holland gave the Scots access to European thought, in sharp contrast to the more insular English institutions.

Hand in hand with intellectual progress came improved trading conditions that eventually resulted from the Act of Union (1707) which saw Scotland joined with England. Many Scots were extremely unhappy with this move, and indeed some still are to this day. As Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe* and sometime English spy in the town, wrote at the time "the Jacobite and the Presbyterian, the persecuting prelatic non-
jurors and the Cameronian, the Papist and the reformed Protestant, all parled together, joined interest and concerted measures against the Union’. However, to hard-nosed business men the advent of free trading arrangements with the rest of the British Empire, coupled with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, brought significant economic benefits, particularly after 1745. While Glasgow was probably the greatest beneficiary, eventually becoming the largest manufacturing centre, Edinburgh also gained: finance, publishing, increased trade through the nearby port of Leith, and later on brewing all helped to bring increased prosperity. Importantly, access to British government money provided the town with funds for some of the infrastructure projects that were a prerequisite for its expansion.

The Scottish Enlightenment

From these foundations arose Edinburgh’s golden age, of which the most famous element, certainly the most publicised, was its role in the Scottish Enlightenment (1740-1800). The main players in this philosophers’ feast were David Hume, Adam Smith, Francis Hutcheson and Adam Ferguson.

David Hume lived in Edinburgh for a good part of his life. Although he was never given a professorship he is arguably seen as the most important thinker of the Scottish Enlightenment. A moral philosopher, he was concerned with the nature of knowledge and he developed ideas relating to evidence, experience, and causation. He wrote his Treatise of Human Nature at 26 and spent the rest of his life explaining and refining it. In the aftermath of Aikenhead’s execution for blasphemy, philosophers had to tread carefully. Around the middle of the 18th century the Kirk was split into: zealots (called the high-flyers) who considered that they should dictate all aspects of life; and those who were more broad-minded, such as Alexander Carlyle. As part of their attempt to stop free-thinking, the “high-flyers” attempted to excommunicate Hume in 1756, but they were defeated by 50 votes to 17. The attempt was probably attributable to the fact that while some saw him as a deist (faith comes from reason as opposed to revelation or tradition), others simply viewed him as an atheist.

Adam Smith, a professor of logic and subsequently moral philosophy at Glasgow University, had a house in Canongate. His Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations was one of the earliest attempts to study the historical development of industry and commerce in Europe and helped to create the modern academic discipline of economics. The book provided one of the best-known intellectual rationales for free trade and capitalism, and it is still used (and abused) today in economic discussions and political harangues. The Wealth of Nations which covers selfishness followed on from his other major work, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, which is concerned with how human communication depends on sympathy between speaker and listener.

Although philosophy is the most-celebrated area, there were significant movements in other areas, particularly in science. Edinburgh quickly rose to a renowned position in the world of medicine. The medical school was founded in 1726 by Alexander Monro (primus), continued by his son Alexander (secundus) and later by his grandson Alexander (tertius). Many students were attracted to Edinburgh by the quality of the teaching. The
The demand for bodies for dissection led to the unsavoury, not to say illegal, occupation of the “resurrection men” who serviced the demand by digging up recently buried people, and ultimately to Burke and Hare (1827-8) who murdered people and sold their bodies. Alexander Monro (primus) was a key promoter and early clinical lecturer at the Edinburgh Infirmary which opened in 1729. From the beginning the teaching of medical students was an important aspect of the Infirmary, which was granted a Royal Charter in 1736.

Individuals of distinction in other fields included: William Cullen (chemist/physician); James Hutton (geologist); Robert Wallace (mathematician); Alexander Carlyle (churchman); Hugh Blair (preacher and man of letters who took the chair of rhetoric and belles lettres); James MacPherson (poet and writer); Allan Ramsay (poet) and his son, also Allan, who was a painter.

A number of clubs and societies were founded that provided the opportunity for social and political discussion among the intellectuals of Edinburgh, including the Select Society (1754-1764), The Poker Club (founded 1762), and the Royal Society of Edinburgh (founded 1783).

One result of this intellectual ferment was that society slowly began to become more genteel with the inclusion of women and the advent of men who began to drink less and mix more. Dancing, though obviously frowned on by the Presbytery, gained in popularity. The original Assembly Rooms was situated in West Bow (circa 1710) but it was attacked by fanatics and the experiment was given up. A second attempt was made in 1723 on a site in Patrick Stiell’s Close (or Old Assembly Close) on the south side of the High St. A subsequent move to Bell’s Wynd in 1756 was followed by the opening of the current Assembly Rooms in George St. in 1787.

After 1745 when women were arguably more Jacobite than the men, being attracted by the romantic ideals involved, they became more educated and involved in commerce. In particular, the interest in fashion resulted in a proliferation of shops, businesses such as haberdashery and perfumery which offered some women a degree of independence.

**Clubs**

It should be made clear that while society was gradually becoming more genteel, the bachelor society remained popular, particularly the club, largely an 18th century invention. Each club had a theme: some were moderately serious; some were trade-related; some had Masonic overtones; while many were based on some weak joke. They usually met in a tavern which rather gives the game away - they were mostly an excuse for drinking and eating.

In *Traditions of Edinburgh*, Robert Chambers recounts one variation of drinking everybody else under the table. A gentleman would give out the name of a lady as the most beautiful in creation and drink one bumper (typically of claret). Another gentleman, by way of challenge, would give out a name of another lady who was the most beautiful in creation, and he drank two bumpers. Others could join in, as the number of bumpers increased. You can see where this is going … whoever was left standing, his fair Delia was declared the beauty supreme by all those present. Chambers mentions the following clubs *inter alia*. 
The Cape Club met at several taverns. It had quasi-masonic rituals and members had nicknames, e.g. the poet Robert Fergusson was called Sir Precenter. The name of the club was said to be based on a weak jest that related to a burgher from Calton who perennially struggled to leave the tavern and get out of the Netherbow Gate before it closed at 10pm.

The Easy Club founded by Allan Ramsay, where each member took the name of a Scottish poet.

The Club, frequented by Scott, met for the consumption of oysters, claret and rum punch.

The Wig Club was a sex club. They venerated a wig which was reputedly made from the pubic hair of women.

The Antemanum ("before hand") Club boasted of the state of their hands.

The Pious Club met in a pie house. They were unsure whether their name arose from their piety or from the pies that they ate (… it gets worse).

The Spendthrift Club was based on the idea that a good night could be had for fourpence halfpenny. The amount gradually increased to over a shilling (not totally due to inflation).

The Boar Club – all members were boars … fines imposed for calling a gentleman by his proper name.

The Hell-Fire Club was a fairly common name given to clubs across the UK and Ireland that were claimed to have a blasphemous, anti-establishment and anti-morality stance.

The Sweating Club sounds like a place for young men. After closing time they chased innocent people around the streets, jostling and pinching them until they sweated.

The Dirty Club where the members did not wear clean linen.

The Odd Fellows whose members wrote their names upside down.

The Bonnet Lairds whose members wore blue bonnets.

The Doctors of Faculty Club whose members, dressed in wig and gown, were regarded as physicians.

The Facer Club – where a member who could not down his drink in one had to throw the remainder in his own face.

Expansion of the City (1750-1850)

As Edinburgh expanded, there was a veritable explosion in building development and related infrastructure projects over this period. It is difficult to know whether it is better to simply relate events chronologically or to approach it subject by subject. I have opted for the latter method. Bartholomew’s map (dated 1920) on the National Library of Scotland’s web site provides a useful chronological view of building progress.

The Situation In 1750

There had been some building prior to the 1750s: Milne’s Square (1688), Milne’s Court (1690-1700), James Court (1720s), Argyle Square (1742), while Brown Square and Adam Square were in progress in the 1750s. However, the size of the town and its topographical layout were constraining factors.

George Drummond, Lord Provost on six occasions between 1725 and 1762, was the driving force behind bold plans to change the face of Edinburgh. They included: extensions to the royalty (the burgh) to both the north and south of the existing town; bridges to connect these new districts to the Old Town; and the conversion of the Nor’ Loch into a canal with terraced gardens on each side. In addition, there were proposals for erecting an
Exchange on the north side of the High Street, and for building on the ruins in the Parliament Close for the increased accommodation of the different courts of justice.

The Exchange Building (now City Chambers) was started in 1753. The finances were messy with the undertakers losing money. The building was never completed as proposed and it was never used for its original purpose, which was to house merchants.

**Infrastructure**

This is the point to bring in the relatively unromantic subject of infrastructure. Edinburgh’s growth had always been heavily constrained by its natural geography. Significant expensive infrastructure work on roads and bridges was a prerequisite to expansion.

The first project was the building of the North Bridge to connect the Old Town to what would become the New Town. It commenced with the drainage of the Nor’ Loch which began in 1759. Tenders were invited for the bridge in 1763, and again in 1765: a contract was eventually signed in August 1765. The bridge was opened to pedestrians in early 1769. However, in August 1769 part of the side-walls of the south abutment of the bridge collapsed, burying 5 people in the ruins. It was eventually completed for use in 1772 with the addition of balusters. The current North Bridge was opened in 1895.

A second route from the Old Town to The New Town was planned. An advert appeared in 1782 informing builders in the New Town that they would be allowed to lay down earth and rubbish from the foundations of houses or other ways on the south side of Princes St where the proposed embankment would be. Nothing more was heard of the scheme except that the Mound, as it was simply termed, continued to grow.

The South Bridge Act was passed in 1785 to provide access to and from southern parts, such as George Square. This was a substantial piece of civil engineering, numerous old buildings having to be demolished. It was one thousand feet in length with nineteen arches. It is not obvious that it is a bridge as the infrastructure is hidden by the properties that were built on either side of it, the only clue being where it passes over Cowgate. It was opened to foot passengers in July 1788 although Robert Adam’s design was more grandiose than what was subsequently built.

The building of Waterloo Place and Bridge to provide access to the east of the town was a very large scheme, being more expensive than Craig’s New Town. Work took seven years and it was usable from 1819. The bridge is 50 feet above a deep ravine. Although it was built for access, it is obvious that beauty as well as utility was taken into account.

Various schemes were proposed concerning further roads to the south, west and north of the Old Town. In the finally agreed plan the road to the west required the building of King’s Bridge, a relatively small project that
was finished in 1833. To the south of the High St., George IV Bridge was completed in 1834, while to the north the Mound took its current dogleg from the junction of Lawnmarket, High St and George IV Bridge. There were financial troubles with these and related developments and several acts of parliament were required to complete them.

**Architectural Influences**

Neoclassical architecture, which was readily adopted in Edinburgh, was a movement that appeared in the 18th century, partly as a reaction against Baroque and Rococo styles but mainly out of a desire to return to the purity of ancient Greece and Rome. Also, around this time the ideas of formal planning and symmetry had become accepted. Among possible reasons why the New Town has been a success there are two that are prominent. Firstly, there was the Scottish system of feuing where a landowner could sell land for development but retain *sine die* full control over what was to be built there without paying for anything himself. He was known as the feudal superior, whereas the person that had practical and legal ownership of the property, including the right to occupy, was known as the feuar. This feudal-based system that dates back to the Middle Ages is now in the process of being abolished. Secondly, the New Town was a product of the Enlightenment when Edinburgh had an intelligentsia that was sufficiently large that its voice on architecture and its association with nature had to be heard.

In the area of public building there are three particular architects that are synonymous with Edinburgh’s label, "the Athens of the North".

**James Craig (1744-1795)** spent most of his short career in Edinburgh. His fame rests primarily on his initial design for the New Town. His other works included the Physicians Hall on George St and the Old Observatory on Calton Hill.

**Robert Adam (1728-1792)** was born in Kirkaldy, the son of an architect. After studying at Edinburgh University he did the Grand Tour of Europe and returned, well-versed in classical and Italian Renaissance architecture. Based in London, his subsequent work was largely classical. Apart from many works in and around London, including the Royal Society of Arts and the remodelling of Syon House, he was involved with Register House, South Bridge, The Old College of Edinburgh University and the Bridewell on Calton Hill.

**William Playfair (1789-1857)**, born in London, the son of the architect James Playfair came to live in Edinburgh as a boy. He built a considerable private practice in Edinburgh before designing in 1820 Royal Terrace, Carlton Terrace and Regent Terrace in the New Town. His most important works include the Royal Scottish Academy, the National Gallery of Scotland, New College and Assembly Hall, the Royal College of Surgeons, Donaldson's Hospital, Advocates' Library and the National Monument on Calton Hill. He also enlarged the Old College of Edinburgh University following the death of Robert Adam.

Youngson, in his renowned work *The Making of Classical Edinburgh*, puts his finger on the pulse when
indicating what makes Edinburgh special, “First, in the visual conjunction of the Old Town and New Town anyone walking along Princes St. today is presented with one of the most eye-catching views in Europe, and must experience at the same time a wonderful sense of space and, if he or she has any imagination at all, of the passage of time. Secondly, the New Town even now retains its late eighteenth and early nineteenth century public buildings, crescents, squares, palace-fronts, churches and gardens almost as they were planned. ... the tout ensemble is without parallel in scale, uniformity of general style, and state of preservation.”

And thirdly, as he relates, Le Corbusier said that it is the soul of the city that counts; its humanity; its civilisation. That soul is provided by the people who live in the New Town. Fortunately, there are still many of them.

Public Buildings

Register House, Scotland’s Public Record Office, was originally planned to be built on the north-west quarter of the garden of Heriot’s Hospital. However, this site was not considered to be central enough, and the eventual decision was to site it opposite the northern end of North Bridge where the foundation stone was laid in 1774. Building work was somewhat staccato due to a lack of funds, and the resultant work which was completed in 1788 corresponded to only two thirds of the original design. Further development was carried out in the 1820s.

The foundation stone for Edinburgh University was laid in 1789 and a call for subscriptions was made in the following year. Building slowed and then halted as the Napoleonic wars took their toll. Work eventually recommenced in 1815 and continued until 1828.

The Mound was the site of significant building work. Close to the top of the Mound the Bank of Scotland building was completed in 1806 although it was subsequently much changed in the 1860s. Meanwhile, at the bottom the Scottish Royal Academy was built in two stages: the initial building being put up in 1822-1825; but having decided that it was not big enough it was extended in 1832-1835 by 60 feet, side porticos being added with a double rather than a single set of columns at the front of the building.

Scottish Royal Academy

The Free Church College and Assembly Hall (on the site of Mary of Guise’s house) was built 1846-1850 and led indirectly to the building of Playfair Steps while the Scottish National Gallery was added (1850-1857). Just further along, to the east of the Mound, is the (Walter) Scott monument, 180 feet high and described as a “gothic fantasy”, it was finished in 1846.

Calton Hill was also the scene of considerable building work. The Old Observatory (Craig) was built between 1776 and 1792 while the New Observatory (Playfair) was begun in 1818. The National Monument on Calton Hill, a replica of the Parthenon where the great and good might be buried, never really got going through a lack of funding although a start was made in 1823. The Royal High School, a replacement for the original High School, was built in 1825. The school has since moved to Barnton. A plan to use the building as a temporary home for the Scottish Parliament never materialised and the Scottish National Photography Centre is now keen to be housed there permanently. On the subject of schools, the Edinburgh Academy was built in Henderson Row around the same time (1824).
The New Town

Plans for the New Town, on land that was largely owned by the Council, had been requested in April 1766. Six plans were received and in August of that year James Craig’s plan was judged to be the best. After some delay the plan was adopted in July 1767.

Of particular note is that although it is a basic grid design that consisted of three interconnected main streets (George St, Princes St, and Queen St.) the external edges, i.e. the south side of Princes Street and north side of Queen St were not to be built on, thus giving an “airy and pleasant” aspect. The original plan shows gardens on the south side of Princes St, leading to a canal which would replace part of the Nor’ Loch.

George St included a square at each end with a church at the farthest end of each square. Unfortunately, the plan for a church in St Andrew’s Square never came to pass because Laurence Dundas, a successful entrepreneur, built a beautiful Palladian villa on the spot; he originally owned the land just to the rear of the site. This property is now owned by the Royal Bank of Scotland. St Andrew’s and St George’s Church was eventually sited near the east end of George St. At the west end St George’s church was built in its planned position on Charlotte Square.

Youngson states “it may be said in that the New Town has suffered a twin misfortune in its churches, for St Andrew’s is the right church in the wrong place, and St George’s is the wrong church in the right place.”

The approximate order of building is shown in Table 1 on the following page. The building of Princes St and George St. proceeded in keeping with these developments, but Queen St and Rose St were slower. George St was said by Farington to be out of proportion, i.e. the modest height of the buildings did not sit with the width of the street.

At the west end of the New Town Charlotte Square with its unified frontage proceeded slowly due to the impact of the Napoleonic Wars.

Meanwhile, there was a dispute concerning building on the south side of Princes St where John Home had acquired land at the east end, adjacent to North Bridge. The dispute between feuars (property owners) and the Town Council eventually went all the way to the House of Lords, with the feuars winning. The judgement was that no building was to be allowed west of what is now Waverley Steps.

Ideas for extending Craig’s New Town on the ground to the north of Queen St (in the direction of the Firth of Forth) centred on two main features: a circus (Royal Circus) and a square (Drummond Place), joined by a straight line (Great King St).

Building generally proceeded down the hill from Queen St to Stockbridge, as shown in Table 2 on the following page.
A water supply was arranged although the feuars (property owners) paid a large share of the cost, as well as being responsible for sewers, streets and pavements.

At the bottom of the hill, on land owned by the artist Henry Raeburn, Raeburn Place, Dean St, Ann St and St Bernard’s Crescent were developed between 1823 and 1825.

To the west of Heriot Row, the Earl of Moray’s feu was built between 1824 and 1827, the centre line being Randolph Crescent, Ainslie Place and Moray Place – Moray Place is arguably the grandest part of the New Town. Meanwhile, building continued again in Charlotte Square with construction on the south side between 1811 and 1820. Moray paid for nothing in the way of infrastructure and Heriot’s, the other major landowner, paid for very little. The majority of the cost was borne by the Council.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew’s Square</td>
<td>largely feued before 1780</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrew’s St</td>
<td>circa 1780</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. David’s St</td>
<td>circa 1780</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover St</td>
<td>built by 1790</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick St</td>
<td>built circa 1792</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castle St</td>
<td>building commenced circa 1792</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly Rooms</td>
<td>completed in 1787</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Square</td>
<td>first feued in 1792</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Square</td>
<td>2/3rds of north side built by 1800</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. James Square</td>
<td>built 1775-80</td>
<td>Demolished in 1960s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Original New Town Building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heriot Row</td>
<td>1803-1808</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland St</td>
<td>1807-1819</td>
<td>See Note 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica St</td>
<td>1807-1819</td>
<td>See Note 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abercromby Place</td>
<td>1814-1819</td>
<td>See Note 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great King St</td>
<td>1814-1823</td>
<td>See Note 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India St</td>
<td>1819-1823</td>
<td>See Note 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Circus</td>
<td>1820-1823</td>
<td>See Note 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester Place</td>
<td>1822-1824</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland St</td>
<td>1824-1828</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – Initial Extension of the New Town
Note 1 - they were built in a uniform manner, although differences in decoration were allowed, controlled by a Street Plan and by a single contract between the Governors of Heriot’s Hospital, the major landowner; the City of Edinburgh; and the other owners, George Winton, James Nisbet and Thomas Morison.

To the east of Craig’s New Town, Duke St, Elder St and York Place were built between 1799 and 1804. Further east, the Calton Hill development, otherwise known as the Edinburgh-Leith New Town, was completed in the 1820s. It included Royal Terrace and Hillside Crescent. This development, while it makes use of the natural contours, suffered as the westward movement of the New Town tended to attract the richer house-buyers.

West of Princes St, on land largely owned by Sir Francis Walker, Hereditary Usher of the White Rod in Scotland, Shandwick Place, Athol and Coates Crescent were built by 1825 while Stafford St. and Melville St. were started about the same time. It took until 1850 for the New Town to reach Belford Road, and by 1860 Manor Place formed the western edge.

There is the question of who actually owned the properties in the New Town. According to Youngson the owners included: some members of the aristocracy; lawyers (who were prominent); a good number of country gentlemen; a surprising number of widows (of men of substance); some merchants; and a few nabobs (people who had made their fortune in India). Between 1800 and 1830 there were gradual changes as businesses started to move in, particularly on Princes St (especially east of Hanover St) and in St. Andrew’s Square.

The Old Town

With the large migration to the New Town, the Old Town went into decline. As people of note moved out, large numbers of the poor moved in, including Irish immigrants who had fled the potato famine. Accommodation was often sub-divided as the population of the Old Town doubled between 1800 and 1870 although there was no increase in the number of new buildings.

Parts of it were extremely unhealthy with outbreaks of cholera and typhus. Henry Littlejohn, Edinburgh’s first medical officer of health, wrote a report in 1862 detailing the unsanitary conditions, which resulted in William Chambers, the Lord Provost, instigating the City Improvement Act of 1867. This led to wholesale demolition and rebuilding.

Some parts of the New Town were also unsatisfactory despite being relatively new: Rose St, Thistle St and Jamaica St, places that had been earmarked for the better off artisans, were overcrowded and had no water closets or sewers.

Somewhat ironically, George Square on the south side of the Old Town remained popular – it was considered an “in” place to live; Walter Scott lived there for some time before moving to Castle St in the New Town.

The Railway

The railway arrived in the 1830s and 1840s. The initial proposal in the 1830s for the Glasgow to Edinburgh link was to go through Princes St Gardens and terminate at what is now Waverley Station. Feuars in Princes St managed to fight it off. They had paid to have the place drained and converted into private gardens where they
could wander, and keys were later given to other “suitable people” for a fee. The line was therefore terminated at Haymarket.

With the general success of the railways a second attempt to get through to Waverley was made in the 1840s. This turned out to be successful although the feuars received some compensation and efforts were successfully made to hide the railway so that it would not be seen from the drawing rooms on Princes St.

Expansion into the Suburbs

Dean Bridge (1831) which traversed the Water of Leith opened up access to the north of the New Town and general expansion into the suburbs subsequently began, gathering pace from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Newington and Grange on the south side were joined by Morningside, arguably Edinburgh’s most famous suburb, which changed from a small secluded village that consisted of little more than a row of thatched cottages in 1850 to a middle class suburb by 1880.

Canongate lost its royal burgh status and became part of Edinburgh in 1856.

Along with this expansion of the city the population increased rapidly, growing from 50,000 in 1750, 100,000 in 1800, 200,000 in 1850, to 400,000 by 1900. One of the final pieces in the jigsaw was the inclusion of Leith within Edinburgh’s boundaries in 1920.

Leith

Going back to the 12th / 13th centuries there had been two separate entities, North Leith and South Leith. North Leith was part of the lands bestowed on the Augustinians by David I while South Leith came under the Laird of Restalrig. The main story of Leith until the 19th century concerns South Leith.

Records from the mid 13th century show that Leith was already a port but it came more into prominence after Berwick, the major commercial Scottish town in the early Middle Ages, was attacked by Edward I towards the close of the century and many of its inhabitants were killed. Some of Leith’s trade was with England, particularly down the east coast, but it was affected by the periodic hostilities that flared up between the two countries. This led to increased trade with France, Netherlands, the Flemish and countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. A range of goods were traded with wool being a major export.

Unfortunately, the laws governing trade disadvantaged places such as Leith, which were termed “unfree” towns. The system favoured “free” towns such as the royal burgh of Edinburgh. For example, goods that passed through an area were subject to tax by the local overlord, except goods from royal burghs which were exempt. In addition, Edinburgh, being a royal burgh, had a monopoly on trade in its area, the Sheriffdom of Edinburgh which stretched from the river Almond in the west to just beyond Levenhall in the east, included Leith. Finally, free burghs such as Edinburgh had a total monopoly on foreign trade. The upshot of these laws was that goods going into and out of Leith were totally under the control of Edinburgh merchants. Leith was
effectively prevented from benefiting from the trade going through its own port.

These trading laws, unfair to modern eyes, were only one part of Leith’s grievances. The inequities were compounded by a series of moves which saw Edinburgh gradually assume the role of overlord of the majority of the town. Edinburgh burgesses had realised that they could maintain and strengthen their trading privileges if they owned the town, and gradually possession of South Leith passed from the Logans of Restalrig to the burgesses of Edinburgh.

The first chink of light in Leith’s woes did not appear until 1755 when the Court of Session ruled that, while a royal burgh could seize and confiscate “unfree” goods that were brought in by the people of Leith or others, they could not otherwise hinder their importation, and it was obviously impossible for Edinburgh to keep its eye on everything.

However, Edinburgh’s control of the harbours and docks persisted until 1826 when it was eventually relinquished, in part due to their deterioration. Just after this, Leith became a burgh in 1833 as part of the Burgh Reform Act and the trading restrictions were lifted. The period from the mid-18th to mid-19th century coincided with a dramatic increase in trade, the main commodities being grain, flax, hemp, wood, tar, iron, and food-stuffs. A large range of local industries were developed around the same time, including oil-works, glass works, sugar house, rope making, canvas, soap, candles, sail-making, timber, biscuit making, and milling.

Leith enjoyed almost a century of independence before it was eventually amalgamated with Edinburgh in 1920 after Edinburgh’s boundaries had been reviewed and Leith was known to be suffering financially at the time. A plebiscite was held to gauge public opinion in Leith. However, while the vote was overwhelmingly against amalgamation, it was forced through.

The 20th Century Onwards in Brief

When viewed from an overall historical perspective the 20th century can be seen as a period of economic expansion with a relatively static population size (estimated to be 468,000 in 2007), of occasional architectural mistakes in the New Town, most notably the disaster that is St. James centre, and of Edinburgh’s rise to become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, helped immeasurably by the creation and growth of its popular summer festivals during the second half of the century.

On the political front the most important event happened towards the close of the 20th century when the Scots voted in favour of a devolved legislature at a referendum that was held in 1997. The subsequent Scotland Act of 1998 allowed the formation of a Scottish Parliament with selected powers that were devolved from the UK Parliament. The Scottish Parliament met for the first time in May 1999. For the initial five years of its existence
it convened at the General Assembly Hall of the Church of Scotland while its permanent home at Holyrood was being built. This was a controversial building development, principally because the actual cost of £414m so far exceeded the original estimate of around £50m.

It remains to be seen if Scotland will eventually move to full independence as the Scottish National Party (SNP) and some sections of the population desire, and thereby return to the position before The Act of Union (1707). If it does Edinburgh will become even more of a focal point in Scottish life.