

The tale of a tail



A self-guided walk along Edinburgh's Royal Mile

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**the stories of our landscapes
discovered through walks**







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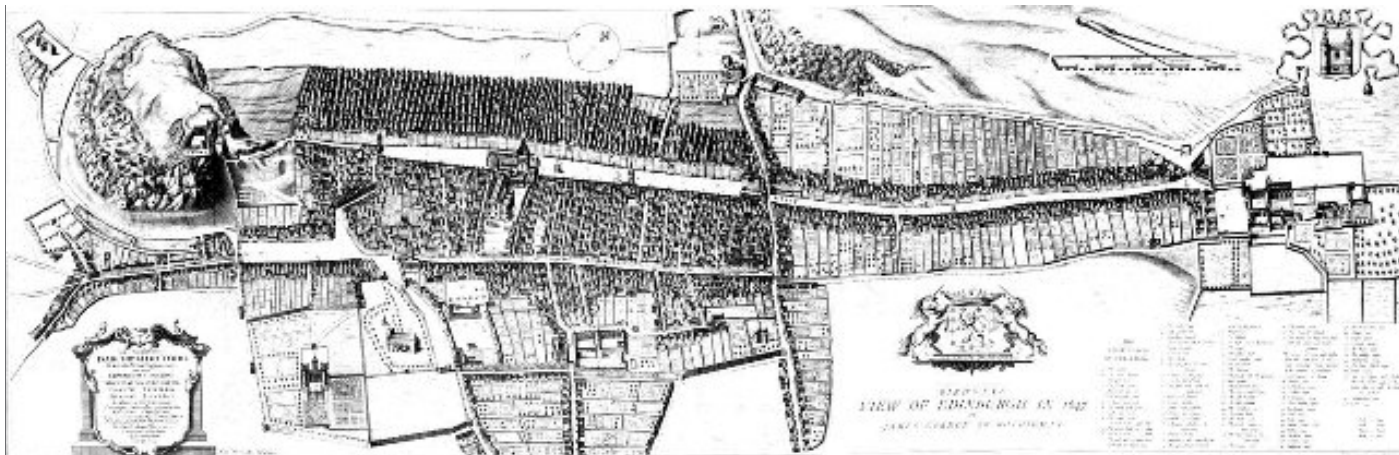
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The tale of a tail

Discover the stories along Edinburgh's Royal Mile



A 1647 map of The Royal Mile. Edinburgh Castle is on the left
Courtesy of www.royal-mile.com

Lined with cobbles and layered with history, the Royal Mile is one of the major routes in Edinburgh. Visitors come from worldwide to explore its charming alleys and vibrant shops. This famous street links Edinburgh Castle with The Palace of Holyrood and these buildings and others between them are familiar and popular attractions.

This walk explores some of the stories behind the Royal Mile. Along the way we'll follow Edinburgh's development, from an ancient town built below a dormant volcano to a modern city built on international trade.

We'll discover tales of kidnap and murder, hear dramatic love stories and find out the deeds of kings, knights and spies. We'll also find out why the Royal Mile isn't as it seems!

The walk was originally created in 2012. It was part of a series that explored how our towns and cities have been shaped for many centuries by some of the 206 participating nations in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. We hope you enjoy the walk.

Route map



Stopping points

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 1. Outside Edinburgh Castle | 8. Old Fishmarket Close | 15. Sugarhouse Close |
| 2. View down Castlehill | 9. Hunter Square | 16. Canongate Tollbooth |
| 3. The Hub | 10. John Knox House | 17. Huntly House (Museum of Edinburgh) |
| 4. James Court | 11. Cashmere shop, 28 High Street | 18. Panmure Close |
| 5. Ridell's Court and Close | 12. Mid Common Close | 19. Palace of Holyroodhouse |
| 6. St Giles' Cathedral | 13. Chancery of the Priory of Scotland | 20. Scottish Parliament Building |
| 7. Parliament Square | 14. Cross of St John | |

Practical information

Location	Edinburgh Royal Mile, Scotland
Getting there	<p>Train - The nearest station to the walk route is Edinburgh Waverley in the city centre. Regular services run from London Kings Cross, York, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Durham, Berwick, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen</p> <p>Bus - There are many local and long-distance services to the city centre. The bus station is just off Elder Street, near St Andrew Square.</p> <p>Car - Edinburgh is easily accessible from the north and south. The M8 links to Glasgow, the M74 and A1 to northern England.</p>
Start point	Castlehill, outside Edinburgh Castle, EH1 2NG
Finish point	Scottish Parliament Building, EH99 1SP
Directions from railway station to the start	<p><i>From Edinburgh Waverley</i> - Exit onto Waverley Bridge and cross over the road. Turn left and with Princes Street Gardens on your right continue up to a roundabout. Turn right into Market Street. At the end bear right at the crossroads and go up Mound Place and into Ramsay Lane. There are no steps but it is steep - so take your time. At the top of Ramsey Lane turn right. The entrance to the castle is ahead.</p>
Onward journey	To return to Edinburgh city centre and Waverley station at the end of the walk use Directions 23.
Distance	1 ½ miles

Level	Gentle - a short city centre walk with no steps or climbs
Conditions	The walk is on a mixture of pavements and cobbled paths so wear suitable footwear. Make sure to take care when crossing busy roads.
Suitable for	<p>Families - take care of young children, especially at busy times of year (see Other Info below)</p> <p>Wheelchairs / pushchairs - an entirely step-free route though the streets are cobbled in parts</p> <p>Dogs - must be kept on a lead</p>
Refreshments	Plenty of cafés and shops along the route
Facilities	Free public toilets are available in Hunter Square and at the end of the walk at the Palace of Holyroodhouse
Other info	<p>The route can be very busy at weekends and holidays - especially during the Edinburgh Festival (August) and at Hogmanay (New Year).</p> <p>Edinburgh Castle is open daily from 9.30am to 5pm / 6pm (Winter / Summer hours). Entry by ticket only, booking advisable at busy periods. Tel: 0131 225 9846</p> <p>The Palace of Holyroodhouse is open from 9.30am to 4.30pm / 5pm (Winter / Summer hours) except during royal events. Check before visiting. Free entry to the café and shop, ticketed entry to the Palace. Tel: 0131 556 5100</p>
Tourist Information	Edinburgh Information Centre, 3 Princes Street EH2 2QP. It is next to Stop 3 of the walk or Tel: 0131 473 3868

1. A proud fortress

Castlehill, outside Edinburgh Castle

From almost anywhere in Edinburgh you will see the Castle looming high above the city. Like Rome, Edinburgh is built around seven large hills and Edinburgh Castle sits on top of Castlehill, 130 metres above sea level.

As we can see the Castle is on an ideal defensive location, high up and with panoramic views for miles around. As a result there has been a royal castle here since the twelfth century and the rule of King David I of Scotland.

Today Edinburgh Castle is Scotland's biggest tourist attraction. Over a million people visit it each year. Standing here it's possible to forget that the building was designed to keep people out rather than draw people in!

Over the centuries, many people have tried to take the Castle by force, including King Henry VIII, Oliver Cromwell and Bonnie Prince Charlie. So the Castle has been rebuilt and added to several times.

Look above the Castle's entrance for a Latin phrase - 'Nemo Me Impune Lacessit'. It translates as 'No one attacks me with impunity', or 'Nobody attacks me without a fight'. The phrase refers to the Castle's defences but also Scottish national identity. It is the motto of The Order of the Thistle, the Scottish order of chivalry, and other Scottish Regiments in the British Army.

You might also find it in your pocket - it is one of the mottos stamped on the rim of £1 coins.



Edinburgh Castle and motto
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 1

Turn your back on the Castle and look downhill along the Royal Mile.

2. The tale of a tail

View down Castlehill

The Romans referred to Edinburgh as Alauna, the 'rock place'. This is very fitting as Edinburgh's rocks shaped the city, especially the Royal Mile. Though Edinburgh Castle sits on almost sheer cliffs, the Royal Mile which downhill like a ramp. Have you ever wondered why?

Castlehill is around 350 million years old and was created during a volcanic eruption. The rock is technically known as a 'volcanic plug'.

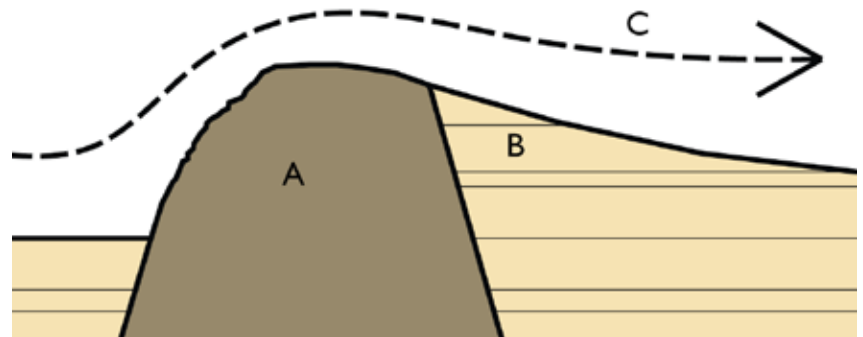


Diagram of a 'crag and tail' formation -
'A' is the crag formed by the volcanic plug and 'B' the tail of softer rock,
'C' shows the direction of ice movement.

© Jonathan Oldenbuck, Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

It formed when volcanic activity deep inside the Earth forced a stream of hot molten rock (lava) up to the planet's surface. The lava pushed through layers of softer rocks then rapidly cooled to form a very tough rock called dolerite. For millions of years this cone of dolerite stood buried.

Then from 2.5 million years ago the Earth's temperature cooled down and entered a series of Ice Ages. Much of Britain, from Scotland to north London, was covered in thick sheets of ice. When the Earth warmed up again (around 12,000 years ago), the ice began to melt. Some broke off in large heavy sections called glaciers. Gravity made glaciers melt downhill to sea level, carving valleys and river channels along their way.

But at Edinburgh the dolerite was too tough for the ice to wear down. Instead the ice was diverted over and around the dolerite. This created a 'crag and tail' formation. A crag is an exposed rock with a steep face, while a tail is a long slope on the other side. You can see similar effects on a beach at low tide - pebbles often create a v-shaped 'tail' in the sand where the receding waves have passed around them.

So though Castlehill was made by intense heat, the Royal Mile was shaped by ice. It's strange to think that by walking down it we are following the route of huge ancient glaciers.

Directions 2

Walk down Castlehill to the junction with Johnston Terrace. On the right is a former church with a spire which is now called The Hub. Stop outside of it.

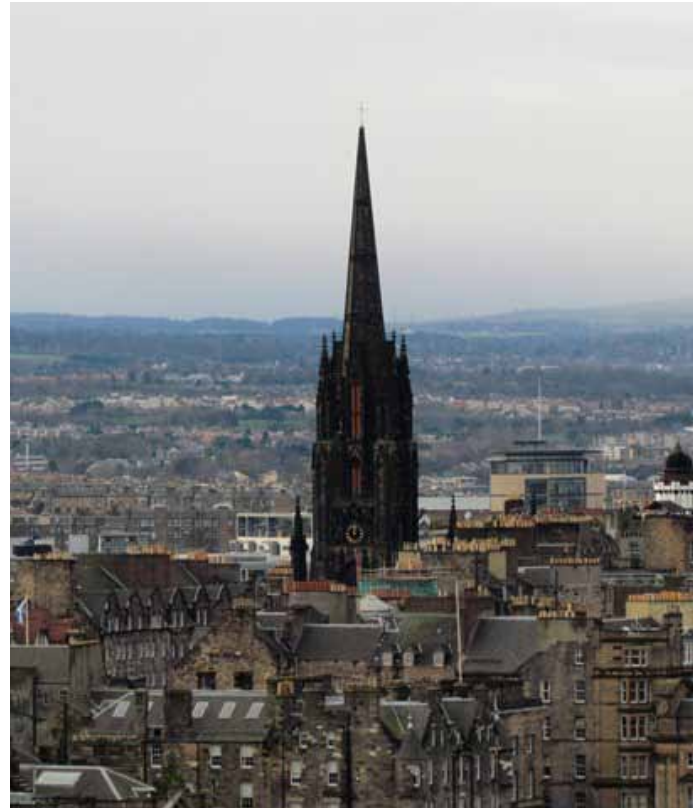
3. An international hub

The Hub

The building now known as the Hub was originally called the Victoria Hall. It was built between 1842 and 1845 as a church and assembly hall. It was designed by J Gillespie Graham and Augustus Pugin.

The spire is the highest point in Edinburgh city centre, dwarfing all of the buildings around it. It is deliberately imposing and provides a good example of architecture known as Gothic Revival. The term 'gothic' refers to a style of thirteenth-century buildings in southern Europe. This ornate style became especially popular with Victorians who reproduced it in buildings across the Empire.

The Hub is now the centre of the annual Edinburgh Festival. The Festival is held every August and is actually a series of festivals that include music, literature, dance, opera, visual arts and comedy. Together they make up the largest arts festival in the world.



The Hub spire towering over the Old Town
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

There are over 250 venues and more than 2,500 different shows, totalling around 30,000 performances. During Festival season visitors flock to Edinburgh from throughout the world and the city's population can grow from about 450,000 to over 1 million people.

Directions 3

From here, the walk goes the whole way down the Royal Mile to the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Sometimes there is only a short distance between stopping points and you will have to look carefully for signs. One of the first alleyways on the left hand side of the Mile is James Court. Go down the alleyway into James Court and stop inside the courtyard.

4. Enlightening times

James Court

Along the sides of the Royal Mile are many narrow side streets, known as closes or 'wynds'. Some of them lead to courtyards like this. Others are alleyways and staircases that cut through to elsewhere in the city. A few are closed off and private property.

Take your time to explore the closes – they are all different and often have interesting features and histories.

James Court for example was one of the places where the Scottish Enlightenment developed. The Enlightenment was a period in the eighteenth century that saw Scotland lead great advances in philosophy, economics, engineering, architecture, medicine, geology, archaeology, law, agriculture, chemistry and sociology.

By 1750 Scotland was one of the philosophical and intellectual centres of the world. Leading Enlightenment figures included Francis Hutcheson, Alexander Campbell, David Hume, Adam Smith, Thomas Reid, Robert Burns, Adam Ferguson, John Playfair, Joseph Black and James Hutton.



Take time to explore the Royal Mile's closes, there are many surprises tucked away, like this view of the Scott Monument
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



David Hume's statue
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

There are statues throughout the city of many of these characters. As we continue, see how many you can spot. A statue of philosopher David Hume, for example, is a short way down the Royal Mile outside the High Court. Look closely and the big toe on his right foot is shiny. This is because people have taken to rubbing it for good luck, especially students before exams.

Hume lived here in James Court. Look for a Latin phrase inscribed above one of the windows - 'nisi dominus frustra'. This is Edinburgh's motto and appears on the city's coat of arms. It can be translated as 'Without the Lord all is in vain'. Its appearance here is rather ironic given that David Hume was suspicious of organised religion.

Another resident of James Court was the diarist James Boswell. Boswell brought his friend Doctor Samuel Johnson here to visit. Johnson wrote one of the first successful dictionaries. Figures like Hume, Boswell and others proved influential across Europe and beyond. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries Scotland's intellectual, technological and social developments had worldwide impact. Scottish Enlightenment ideas were held in high regard, leading to mass emigration by Scottish thinkers and inventors.



Details of James Court
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 4

Go back onto the Royal Mile. Cross over to the other side and look for Riddell's Court. Stop inside the courtyard.

5. Royalty, rioting and regeneration

Riddell's Court and Riddell's Close

We are now at Riddell's Court and Close. The close is the access alleyway and the court is on the inside. This area has all sorts of interesting stories associated with it.

The two L-shaped buildings of Riddell's Court were built in about 1590 for Bailie John McMorran who was then the wealthiest merchant in the city. In 1593 McMorran hosted a grand banquet here that was attended by King James VI.

Two years later, McMorran met a sticky end. He was caught up in a riot at Edinburgh High School and was shot dead by one of the schoolboys. They were protesting after being refused a holiday!



King James VI (left) and architect Patrick Geddes
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Other notable residents include David Hume, who lived here before settling at James Court. In 1887 the building became a hall of residence for the university. Look out for an archway inscribed 'Vivendo Discimus' or 'By living we learn'. This commemorates Patrick Geddes, a Victorian lecturer and town planner, who hosted summer school classes here.

Geddes also helped to regenerate Edinburgh's Old Town. As well as a pioneer in town planning he believed that the physical environment affected people's mental well-being. Outside Scotland, Geddes designed some of the street layouts of Tel Aviv and also worked in Bombay and Madras. He was a keen Francophile and in 1924 he also founded the College Des Ecosais, or Scots College, in Montpellier.

Directions 5

Go back out of Riddell's Close and turn right down the Royal Mile staying on the right hand side. Stop outside of St Giles Cathedral.

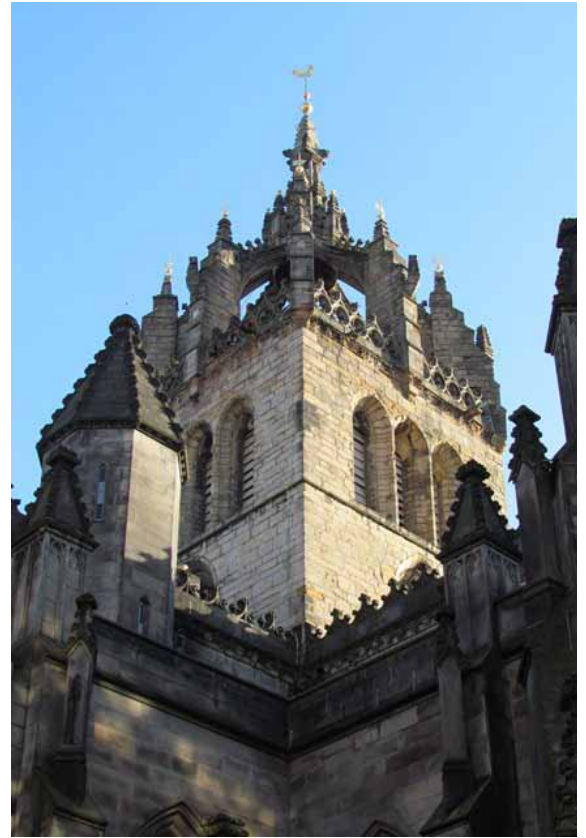
6. To the hermitage

St Giles' Cathedral

With its famed crown spire St Giles' Cathedral is the historic City Church of Edinburgh. It is named after St Giles who was a seventh century hermit (and later abbot). St Giles is usually shown protecting a deer from an arrow which had pierced his own body. A fine relief of this image can be found over the Cathedral main doors.

Images like these above a building's entrance are called 'tympanums'. Tympanums are semi-circle or triangle shaped decorative walls. Apart from a structural role, supporting the doorway beneath, a tympanum tells a visual story. When many people couldn't read or write, such images were like an early form of advertising that everyone could view.

The cathedral is well worth a visit and if you have time do take a look inside. Among the features to explore are the font, stained glass and grand organ. There are also many memorials to notable city residents, including a statue of John Knox, who served as Minister at St Giles until 1572. We will hear more about Knox a little later.



St Giles Cathedral spire and Stevenson memorial
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain



Another to look for is a fine bronze of the writer Robert Louis Stevenson. Mounted on a wall, his memorial shows him sitting on a couch with a pen in his hand. The image was based upon an earlier painting, with a small yet significant difference. In the original painting Stevenson isn't holding a pen but a cigarette.

Directions 6

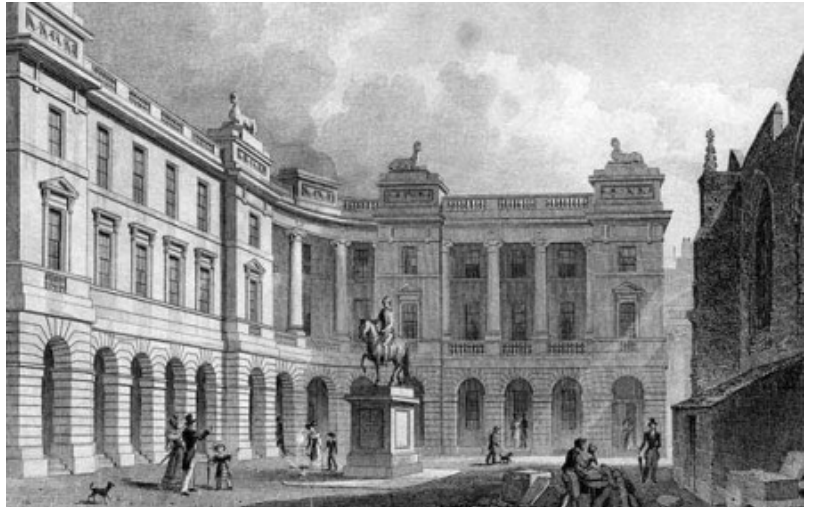
Continue into a square at the side of the cathedral and stop by a statue of a man on a horse.

7. A horse and a heart

Parliament Square

Parliament Square was originally built in 1632 by paving over St Giles' churchyard. It is named after Parliament House, which stands opposite St Giles and served as a parliament building and civil court.

In the 1700s this square was the bustling centre of Edinburgh's business district. Outside the parliament building were a variety of jewellers, watchmakers and bookshops. Most of the buildings we can see date from the early 1800s though, after the area was twice destroyed by fire.



Parliament House (1829) by Thomas H Shepherd
© Peter Stubbs www.edinphoto.org.uk

This statue of King Charles II on horseback was erected soon after his death in 1685. The oldest statue in Edinburgh, it shows the king as a Roman general complete with a laurel wreath on his head. His father, Charles I, was executed during the English Civil War and when Charles II eventually became king in 1660 the event became known as the Restoration.

Rather fittingly, this statue of him has been restored several times. It is made from lead with a wooden and steel frame inside. Over time the frame decayed and the heavy lead became badly cracked. Before one set of repairs in the eighteenth century, the statue was left in a prison yard for 11 years. King Charles II's latest restoration was in 2011.

Before we return to the Royal Mile itself, look in the ground of Parliament Square for the Heart of Midlothian. This heart-shaped pattern in bricks marks the doorway of the original Canongate Tollbooth. The Tollbooth was a courthouse and jail. Many traders and residents hated the building and used to spit at the door as they passed by. When Parliament Square was redesigned, the Heart was placed on the site. Folklore says spitting on the Heart ensures good luck.

Directions 7

Walk around the back of St Giles Cathedral and turn right to continue along the right hand side of the Royal Mile. Stop when you find Old Fishmarket Close. The entrance is decorated with sculpted fish.

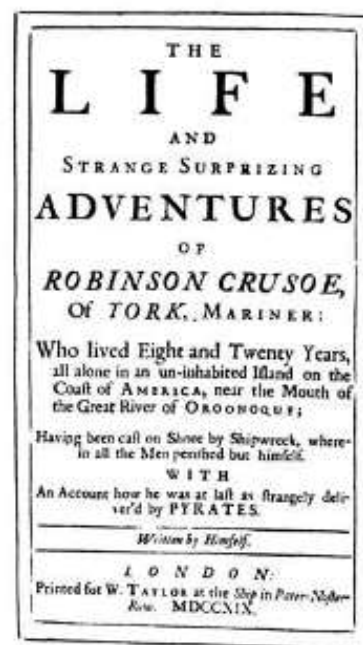
8. Fishy tales

Old Fishmarket Close

Edinburgh sits just inland from the south bank of the Firth of Forth, a major channel to the North Sea. As a result fish have been traded in this city since at least the sixteenth century.

Old Fishmarket Close is named after a fish market that used to be held here. It was once described as “a steep, narrow stinking ravine”. Today the decorative fish over the entrance to the close show what kinds of fish were available, including plaice, cod and herring

The east coast of Scotland shares fishing areas with Iceland, Norway and the Faroe Islands. But Old Fishmarket Close also has a link to warmer waters.



Robinson Crusoe, 1719 first edition title page
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

In 1707 the author Daniel Defoe is thought to have worked here as a secret agent for the English government. At that time the Treaty of Union was being prepared, to unite Scotland with England and create Great Britain under a single monarch.

Twelve years later Defoe published Robinson Crusoe, often regarded as the first English novel. The story was based on the true-life experiences of Scotsman Alexander Selkirk. Selkirk was a sailor who became marooned off the coast of Chile on the Pacific Island of Mas a Tierra. Following the success of Defoe’s book, Mas a Tierra was later re-named Robinson Crusoe Island.

Directions 8

Continue down the right hand side of the Royal Mile. Stop when you reach Hunter Square outside Tron Kirk.

9. What's in a name?

Hunter Square

We've come off the Royal Mile itself for a moment to think about one of its most surprising features. Many people assume that the Royal Mile is a mile-long street named after the royal castle and palace at either end. But things are a little more complicated.

First, the area referred to as the Royal Mile is actually a series of streets - the Esplanade, Castlehill, Lawnmarket, the High Street, Canongate and Abbey Strand. Look carefully for road signs with these names on throughout our route.



One of the streets that makes up the Royal Mile
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The second complication is that the Royal Mile isn't technically a mile long. Instead it is a 'Scots Mile', a historic measurement 1,976 yards or 1.1 miles long. The official distance of a mile is 1,760 yards. This standard definition was set after an international agreement in 1959. Before then, many countries and regions used their own local measurements. There have been different length 'miles' around the world for centuries - the name 'mile' comes from the Roman 'mille passus' or 'thousand paces'.

So if it isn't a mile or one street, where does the Royal Mile's name come from? The answer is a 1920s guide book titled 'The Royal Mile'. The book established this part of Edinburgh as a tourist attraction and the name has stuck ever since.

Directions 9

Go back to the Royal Mile and cross over the junction of North Bridge and South Bridge. Continue downwards until you reach John Knox House on the left hand side.

10. Knock Knox

John Knox House

Built around 1470 this house is the only original medieval building left on the Royal Mile. It is named after John Knox, a controversial religious reformer from the sixteenth century. You may have seen his statue inside St Giles Cathedral.

Knox was born near Edinburgh in 1505 and became one of the most influential churchmen in the Reformation. This movement began when the Pope refused to grant King Henry VIII a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. The Reformation soon spread throughout Western Europe and led to national churches breaking their ties with Catholic Rome.



John Knox House (1829) by Thomas H Shepherd
© Peter Stubbs www.edinphoto.org.uk

John Knox is often regarded as the founder of the Church of Scotland. In 1559 Knox led the Lords of the Congregation, a group of powerful nobles at the forefront of the Reformation, into Edinburgh. Knox was elected minister of Edinburgh and played a major role in establishing Protestant styles of worship that became accepted throughout the country.

This building became known as John Knox House from the nineteenth century onwards. Knox is thought to have lived here briefly, although a plaque in Warriston Close marks the site of another house Knox might have owned. Either way, his links to this house saved it from demolition and it is certainly worth a visit - look out for the devil hiding in the painted ceiling!

Directions 10

Cross over the road to the Cashmere shop opposite John Knox House.

11. Copying cashmere

28 High Street

Here we can see evidence of another of the city's major trades – cashmere. Cashmere is a fine warm cloth, named after the region of Kashmir in India and Pakistan.

Several modern shops on the Royal Mile sell cashmere but the trade stems from the late-eighteenth century. British merchants and soldiers working in India brought back Kashmiri shawls. With their distinctive floral leaf design, inspired by the Babylonian tree of life, these shawls became very popular.



Multi-coloured cashmere
© Paloetic, Flickr.com (CCL)

They were very expensive to buy though so demand grew for a cheaper domestic version. Edinburgh already had an established weaving industry, specialising in linen damask weaving. In 1777 William Mortimer produced the first imitation Kashmir shawls in Scotland. Other weavers such as George Richmond and James Mitchell followed suit and the industry took off.

The first shawls appear to have been printed and brocaded but in 1798 Mitchell produced the first woven cashmere shawls. A fashion for muslin sheath dresses, which could be rather cold in winter, helped to make the shawls very popular.

Most of the evidence for the Edinburgh shawl industry comes from the Board of Trustees for Fisheries and Manufactures in Scotland. This was an early Board of Trade that tried to encourage industry by giving prizes to various trades including textiles. The first prize for a Kashmir-inspired shawl was awarded to Mortimer in 1781. A decade later George Richmond had 13 looms in operation. Production reached its peak between 1800 and 1820 when over 1,000 weavers were employed creating Kashmir-inspired shawls.

Directions 11

Continue down the Royal Mile across the junction of Jeffrey Street and St Mary's Street. Look across the road for Mid Common Close and a small sculpture on the wall above the entrance.

12. A romantic adventure

Mid Common Close

This block of buildings is known as Morocco Land. The reason lies high on the wall above Mid Common Close. Look up for a little statue of a Moorish man resplendent in a turban and necklace.

The story behind it relates to the seventeenth century and a young Edinburgh resident named Andrew Gray. In 1633 Gray was sentenced to death for rioting. Apparently he helped to burn down the Provost's house during riots after the coronation of Charles I (the Provost was the equivalent to an English mayor).

To escape the hangman's noose Gray fled from the city by sea. He soon landed in Morocco where he made his fortune. Then in 1645 Gray returned to Edinburgh. The city was then riddled with the plague and Gray's cousin had fallen seriously ill. To complicate matters, this cousin was also the Provost's daughter.

Gray helped to tend her back to health and his execution order was cancelled for his good deeds. The happy couple married and moved into a building near here. The block became known to locals as 'Morocco Land'. The statue, said by some to be Gray's royal patron the Emperor of Morocco, commemorates the dramatic story.



Moorish statue, Mid Common Close
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 12

Continue down the right hand side of the Mile. Turn into the archway of St John Street. Stop outside the second building on the right with the iron gates.

13. An ancient order

Chancery of the Priory of Scotland

Turning off the Royal Mile again for a moment we come to the Chancery of the Priory of Scotland, or the Scottish headquarters of the Order of St John.

The Order of St John has its origins in the ancient Order of the Knights of St John, who went to the Crusades – not to fight but to look after knights who were sick. They were known as the Knights Hospitaller.

Here in St John Street is where the Knights of St John were believed to have lived in the Middle Ages. This building dates from 1798, though the Order is much older. It evolved from an eleventh-century hospital for pilgrims in Jerusalem and is now an international charity that works in over 40 countries.

The Order is probably best known today for the St John's Ambulance service that provides first aid and first aid training. But St John's Scotland is unique in that it they work overseas with St John's hospitals in Jerusalem and Malawi.



A 14th century painting of the Grand Master and senior members of the Knights Hospitaller
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

Directions 13

Retrace your steps through the arch. Turn left back up the Royal Mile for a few metres and look for a black and white cross in bricks in the road. When you find it, stop on the pavement beside it.

14. X marks the spot

St John Cross, 229 Canongate

Here in the road is a cross of St John or a Maltese Cross. At busy times it is very easy to miss in the traffic. It is the same type of cross as ones on the building that we just saw. The cross marks the site of the original standing cross of St John. The cross also marked the boundary between Edinburgh and the Burgh of Canongate.

The Royal Mile's continuous streets are actually part of two distinct areas. The lower end is in a former borough called Canongate. Canongate is named after the canons of the now-ruined Holyrood Abbey and up until 1856 the area was given 'burgh status'. In other words Canongate was a separate town from the rest of Edinburgh.



St John cross in the road at Canongate
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Long before then Canongate had become a hub for crafts and trading. The Confession of Faith, signed in 1638 by a large number of Canongate's residents, indicates that a broad cross-section of craftsmen lived locally. Over 50 tailors signed along with 32 wrights, 25 weavers, 15 dyers and 8 saddlers. As trading opportunities increased in the seventeenth century connections between Canongate and the wider world became stronger still, as we will see.

Directions 14

Continue down the right hand side of the Royal Mile. Stop when you reach Sugarhouse Close.

15. A sweet story

Sugarhouse Close

One of the major trades in Canongate takes us to the West Indies. Edinburgh's port, Leith, became Scotland's centre for West Indian trade. Vessels could be fitted out more easily at Leith than on the River Clyde in Glasgow. Leith was also a cheaper place to operate than London because trading here meant avoiding English duty charges.

As a result many West Indian planters made Leith a base for their consignments. One of the major industries that resulted was sugar refining. The first house in Edinburgh for baking sugars was set up at Leith in 1751.



Sugarhouse Close sign
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The land here at Sugarhouse Close was originally owned by the Earl of Dunkeld but between 1752 and 1824 the principal business conducted on this site was sugar refining. Raw sugar cane was brought into Leith from the Caribbean and processed here. Sugar refining was hot, dangerous and physically demanding work.

In 1829 this site was purchased by MacFie & Sons, a company with a long history of refining in Glasgow. The company moved here after their Leith refinery, established in 1804, burnt down for the second time. The MacFie & Sons Edinburgh Sugarhouse continued operating even after the Leith refinery was rebuilt. It finally closed around 1840 and the company was later absorbed into Tate & Lyle.

Directions 15

Look directly over the road to the Tollbooth Tavern, the building with the pointed clock tower.

16. The old lock up

Canongate Tollbooth

Canongate Tollbooth is the oldest building in Canongate and one of the landmarks of Edinburgh's Old Town. Built in 1591, this was where town tolls and duties were paid.

The building was also a council chamber, police office and a notorious jail. The Tollbooth has a colourful history including an exorcism.

Many prisoners detained at the Tollbooth were sent to the Caribbean for seven years hard labour on plantations. After completing their sentence they could return to Scotland or remain in the colony. Before departure however all the captives were marked - women had their faces branded with an iron while men had an ear cut off.

The Tollbooth building was remodelled from 1875. The large clock tower was added in 1884 and interior floors were combined. This larger space is now the home of the People's Story Museum.



Canongate Tollbooth clock tower
© Kim Traynor, Geograph (CCL)

Opposite the Tollbooth are World's End Close and the colourful World's End pub. The origins of this name can be traced to the sixteenth century when Edinburgh was still a walled city. Look carefully for a set of metal plates spanning the road. They mark the site of a gateway in the wall that allowed access in and out of Edinburgh.

Poorer residents couldn't afford the toll to come back into Edinburgh, so they lived inside the city walls all their lives. This spot beside the gate became the end of their world.

Directions 16

Continue along the right hand side of the Royal Mile. Stop after a very short distance by the Museum of Edinburgh, a large building with gold writing on the walls.

17. A better life

Huntly House

This grand building is Huntly House. It was created in 1570 when three small houses were merged. This part of Canongate was home to metalworkers, known as hammermen, and bakers. Hence the close at the end of this building is called Bakehouse Close.

Look up at the walls. The building was also called 'The Speaking House' because of the decorative panels of Latin mottos we can see. In particular look for the motto with a picture of wheat sheaves. It reads 'spes altera vitae' or 'hope for a better life'.

To early agricultural people a good wheat harvest assured plenty of bread to keep their community alive throughout the winter. Wheat sheaves became symbols of successful harvest and were associated with nourishment and healthy life.



Wheat sheaves on Huntly House
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The wheat sheaf symbol dates back to ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia in present-day Iraq. Wheat sheaves can be found in other parts of Edinburgh, including Dean Village. The 'spes altera vitae' motto also appears elsewhere on the Royal Mile, such as in Advocate's Close.

Huntly House is now the Museum of Edinburgh and is well worth a visit to find out more about the city's history. The museum entrance is through Bakehouse Close.

Directions 17

Cross over the road and walk down the left hand side of the Mile. Stop when you reach Panmure Close.

18. The wealth of nations

Panmure Close

This is the last of the Royal Mile closes we will visit. This small alley is linked to very big ideas. From 1778 Panmure Close was home to the economist Adam Smith, one of the leading figures in the Scottish Enlightenment.

Earlier on, did you spot a statue of him near St Giles Cathedral? Smith gave lectures in Edinburgh from 1748 and was a member of the city's Philosophical Society. His work as a tutor allowed him to travel to France where he met other intellectuals including Voltaire and Benjamin Franklin.

While he was in France, Smith started writing a book on economics that would change the world. An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations was published in 1776. It is usually known by its shorter title - The Wealth of Nations.



Engraving of Adam Smith,
Wikimedia Commons (CCL)

The book set out the arguments for a free market economy and was highly influential. Economists and thinkers throughout Europe have followed Smith's ideas. In fact the book probably contains the origins for the current economic model of Western Europe and the USA.

Directions 18

Continue down to the end of the Royal Mile. Cross the road at the mini roundabout and in front of you is the Palace of Holyroodhouse. Go down towards the iron gates and stop in the palace grounds.

19. A retreat and an attack

Palace of Holyroodhouse

Today the Palace of Holyroodhouse is the official Scottish residence of the British monarch. It is open to the public except for days when it hosts state ceremonies and royal social events.

The current palace dates from the seventeenth century. The site is much older though – it dates back to Holyrood Abbey which was founded in 1128 by King David I of Scotland. The Abbey ruins stand next to the Palace.



The Palace of Holyroodhouse
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Like Edinburgh Castle, this is a popular visitor attraction that has seen conflict in the past. In 1688 King James II (known as James VII in Scotland) fled Britain to avoid the invasion of the Dutch prince William of Orange. William took the throne and became King William III. Despite his exile James II maintained support from the Catholic community, especially in Scotland and Ireland. His followers were known as Jacobites.

On 17 September 1745 James's grandson arrived in Edinburgh to try and reclaim the throne for his family. This grandson was Prince Charles Edward Stuart, better known as Bonnie Prince Charlie. Charles declared his father, James Edward Francis Stuart, was the rightful King of Scotland and some 60,000 people lined the Royal Mile to welcome the prince.

But his attempt to regain the throne was not a success. Unable to capture Edinburgh Castle, he set up court in Holyrood Palace and stayed here for five weeks. His officers were based at the end of the Royal Mile in White Horse Close.

His plans to regain Scotland ended in April 1746 with defeat to the Duke of Cumberland at the Battle of Culloden. The Prince returned to his birthplace – Rome – and lived the rest of his life in exile.

Directions 19

Turn your back on the gates and carefully cross the road in front of the modern Scottish Parliament Building. There are stone seats outside if you would like to sit down.

20. From historic castle to modern city

Scottish Parliament Building

This dramatic building is the Scottish Parliament. Before the foundation of the United Kingdom, Scotland was an independent state with its own parliament. This changed in 1707 when the Act of Union allied Scotland with England. As a result Scotland was ruled from London and did not have its own parliament for another 292 years.

After increasing pressure from the Scottish Nationalist movement Scotland was granted its own legislature and work on a new Scottish Parliament building began in 1999.



The windows of the MSP building, Scottish Parliament
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

An international competition was held to design the building and the winning entry came from Enric Miralles from Catalonia in Spain. Sadly Miralles died before it opened in 2004.



Local granite in the walls
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

The building has won several architecture awards including the 2005 Stirling Prize. It is actually a series of buildings each designed in different styles. Miralles' plan was to reflect Scottish national identity. Scottish materials were used such as local granite, oak and sycamore while the grounds are home to Scottish wildflowers and plants.

The roof line was designed to recall nearby Salisbury Crags, another volcanic rock formation. The unusual windows on the MSP building are inspired by Henry Raeburn's painting, *The Skating Minister* - though some have compared the shapes to hairdryers. The seats outside are shaped like fishing boats, reflecting Scotland's strong ties with the sea.

The national imagery continues inside. For example, the roof of the debating chamber features a series of saltire crosses, similar to those on the Scottish flag.

We have now reached the end of our walk and the modern parliament building is a fitting place to finish. With its mixture of international design and traditional Scottish symbols, the Parliament symbolises Edinburgh's status today as a city built on native talent but open to outside influences.

Our journey along the Royal Mile hasn't only taken us from Edinburgh's oldest to newest public buildings. We have also followed Edinburgh's development. Long before its notable people and historic buildings this was a landscape shaped by volcanic eruptions and melting ice.

We hope you have enjoyed the walk!



Some of the sights of the Royal Mile
Rory Walsh © RGS-IBG Discovering Britain

Directions 20

To explore the Royal Mile keep the parliament on your left and retrace your steps back uphill. To get to Waverley train station continue up the Royal Mile until you reach Cockburn Street on the right hand side. At the end of Cockburn Street cross over Market Street onto Waverley Bridge. The station is on your right.

Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people and organisations for their assistance in producing this walk:

- **Alasdair McLeod** for researching the walk and providing the commentary
- **Jenny Lunn** and **Caroline Millar** for editing the walk materials
- **Rory Walsh** for additional research and providing photos
- **Nick Stanworth, William Dyson** and **Christine McKenna** for their assistance
- **Peter Stubbs, Ian Smith** at **Scottish Pictures** and **RoyalMile.com** for kind permission to use archive images
- **Craig Cormack, Paul Joseph, Jonathan Oldenbuck, Paloetic** and **Kim Traynor** for additional images reproduced under Creative Commons Licenses





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