

# High School Yards steps now reopened to the public



The steps at High School Yards have been reopened today with an art installation by Edinburgh artist Callum Innes. This takes the shape of newly formed steps all the way from the Cowgate, but also includes a camera, LED screen and video involving pupils from Panmure St Ann's nearby.

The historic steps, which link the Cowgate and High School Yards, were closed in 2003 after reports of anti-social behaviour. Their restoration is the result of an 18 month partnership project to revive the route between The City of Edinburgh Council, [Edinburgh World Heritage](#) and [The University of Edinburgh](#).

[The Edinburgh Reporter NEWS](#) from [Phyllis Stephen](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Transport and Environment Convener, Councillor Lesley Hinds, who helped open the steps, said: "The incredible transformation of High School Yards steps is testament to the partnership working by all those involved in this project, including members of the local community.

"The vast improvement to the area, featuring Callum Innes' innovative artwork, will not only create a safer and more attractive atmosphere for those working, living and studying nearby, but will enhance this lesser-used end of the Cowgate."

As well as significant conservation work, including the renewal of railings and the addition of gates to close the stairs off at night, the refurbished steps will feature a bespoke installation by Callum Innes.

Aiming to reclaim the area as a public space, the artwork uses

an infrared camera to capture the movement of people as they climb the steps, projecting their silhouettes onto a large LED mesh screen above them, revealing a hidden section of the stairs.

Short clips of silhouetted movement, created by Innes in collaboration with young adults from the nearby [Panmure St Ann's Centre](#) and artists Catherine Payton and Tom Nolan, also play on a loop when the stairs are empty.

Artist Callum Innes said: "By placing an infrared camera half-way up the steps we make a hidden part of the steps visible, relaying live footage of silhouetted figures to be superimposed onto the changing colours of the screen.

"The installation directly engages both the architecture of the steps and the public for whom they serve.

"In conjunction with the development of the work, I wanted to involve local school children in creating recorded silhouettes that can run on the screen when the steps are closed, or at quieter times."



Adam Wilkinson, Director of Edinburgh World Heritage, said: "This exciting project demonstrates again how neglected areas of the World Heritage Site can be transformed to the benefit to the city, through an innovative mixture of heritage conservation and public art and collaborative working.

"Our funding has helped to conserve these Victorian steps to the highest standard, but Callum's work fundamentally transforms our perceptions of this space, adding both enchantment and safety. The High School Yards Steps have now been reclaimed as useful public space, supporting an oft-overlooked area of the Old Town."

The regeneration of the steps was an important aspect of the

design of the University of Edinburgh's new [Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation \(ECCI\)](#) building at High School Yards, Scotland's only low carbon innovations hub and the UK's greenest historic building.

ECCI Executive Director Andy Kerr said: "The regeneration of the steps opens up routes that connect the newly renovated ECCI building and surrounding area to the Cowgate, Drummond St and other parts of the city at large.

"ECCI's core aims are built around bringing people together to solve the complex problems associated with climate change, so it is absolutely fitting to have improved the connectivity and sustainability of the building in this way, and in such an innovative and creative way."

The renovation of High School Yards steps was first proposed in 2013, when the Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation opened to students, many of whom would use the route to access the Old Town.

By improving the appearance of the steps and limiting night time entry – gates will be closed between 8pm and 9am – it is hoped that anti-social behaviour, littering and graffiti will be deterred.

The total cost of the work was £214,536 and is jointly funded by Edinburgh World Heritage, the University of Edinburgh and the City of Edinburgh Council's Neighbourhood Environment Projects budget, which offers local groups the opportunity to deliver projects.

Find out more about the processes involved in the restoration of the steps on [Edinburgh World Heritage's website](#).