

Danny Weston – My Edinburgh Inspirations



Danny Weston is the Edinburgh-based author of four novels, and was today announced as the winner of the Older Readers (12-16 yrs) category of the [Scottish Children's Book Awards 2016](#) for his chilling novel *The Piper*. The Scottish Children's Book Awards are voted for entirely by children and celebrate the most popular children's and young adult books by Scottish authors or illustrators. Danny has put together a list of the five places in Edinburgh that he finds most inspirational when researching his stories.

My Edinburgh Inspirations.

Philip Caveney (Danny Weston)

Edinburgh is a city steeped in literature – walk along its streets and alleyways and you cannot help but soak up so many ideas and influences that will worm their way into your mind and turn into great ideas for stories.

1. The Real Mary King's Close

The first time I visited the Close I was spellbound by its creepy atmosphere. MKC is a seventeenth century street beneath the Royal Mile. Used as foundations for the new Royal Exchange in 1753, it is in effect, a time capsule, unchanged since the days when it was a bustling community. In 1645, there was an outbreak of bubonic plague there and that gave me the idea for the first book of my Edinburgh trilogy, **Crow Boy**. It tells the story of Tom Afflick who after an accident on a school visit to the Close, goes back in time to be the apprentice of a villainous plague doctor.

2. Arthur's Seat

Can an extinct volcano be an inspiration for a book? Yes, it can! In the National Museum of Scotland, I saw eight tiny coffins, discovered on the slopes of Arthur's Seat in 1836, by schoolboys who had gone hunting rabbits. Each coffin contained a tiny dressed doll. For years people speculated about who might have put them there and why. I linked the coffins to the serial killers, Burke and Hare, and I had the idea for the second book in the trilogy, **Seventeen Coffins**. When the book was released, my wife and I climbed Arthurs Seat at dawn and hid three copies up there, to be claimed by whoever discovered them. So far only two have been found...

3. The Writers Museum

What better inspiration for a writer than this lovely museum dedicated to the lives of three authors – Robbie Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson? The latter provided the inspiration for the third book in the trilogy, **One For Sorrow**, in which Tom meets RLS and helps him to create one of the most seminal books in history – Treasure Island! There's a scene in the museum, where Tom's stepfather, Hamish, transforms into a hideous 'Mr Hyde!' I must mention my own Mr Hyde, my alter ego, Danny Weston. He'll tell you that even though his debut novel **The Piper** isn't even set in Scotland, let alone Edinburgh, it's nevertheless been influenced by all the ghostly locations and eerie stories I've picked up around this fabulous city. Now of course, he's gone and won an award, so I suppose there'll be no stopping him!

4. The Waters of Leith

When city life feels oppressive, wander down to Stockbridge and take a stroll along **The Waters of Leith**, where herons fish in the shallows and where you'll also see the iconic statues of Anthony Gormley. They got be thinking about statues in general. There are some fabulous ones in Edinburgh but only

two that commemorate women! My upcoming book, **The Calling**, is set during the festival on the one magical night of the year when all humans in the city sleep for 24 hours and the statues come alive. But one fateful year, a boy manages to stay awake and witness it all!

5. The King's Theatre

This beautiful old theatre has one of the most opulent interiors I've ever seen and the place just oozes history. It was on a visit there that I spotted an old handbill featuring a ventriloquist's dummy and that got me thinking. The resulting story was too dark for me, so I handed the credit over to Danny Weston. The book is called **Mr Sparks** and I'll warn you, it's a creepy tale indeed!