

Edinburgh's prince of streets

The Grand Old Duke of York and Albany stands tall, watching over Edinburgh Castle esplanade.

But the question is, why is he there?

Both Princes Street and Frederick Street are supposedly named after this particular Duke.



Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

We are all familiar with the nursery rhyme:

*Oh, the grand old Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men;
He marched them up to the top of the hill,
And he marched them down again.*

*When they were up, they were up,
And when they were down, they were down,
And when they were only halfway up,
They were neither up nor down*

So who was he and why is there a nursery rhyme named after him?

The statue celebrates Prince Frederick, the second son of King George III.

The bronze was sculpted by Thomas Campbell and depicts Frederick as a Field Marshal. According to the notice next to the statue: "Frederick's sole field command, during the Flanders Campaign of 1793-5, ended in defeat."

As you may know Flanders is mainly a flat plain, and it is

thought the nursery rhyme was created to mock Frederick's poor performance on the battlefield.



Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

It is believed that he never visited Edinburgh so it is strange that he is remembered through the naming of both Princes Street and Frederick Street.

Another capital mystery!



Princes Street. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

And one which has been solved by one of our readers, John Campbell, who writes: *"Frederick (born 1763) was indeed a bit of a booby on the battlefield, but once he was evacuated from Flanders to London in 1794 (only 31 years old), he was (after a decent interval) appointed Commander in Chief of the Army in 1798. Second son of the King and all that. Conscription had been introduced and the army was a rabble, being under the command of aristocratic nobodies and badly organised. In that role, he enjoyed much success, raising 30 regiments to face the massive growth of the French forces under Napoleon, with whom England (the UK, I suppose) was at war, though on European soil.*

"He strongly censured and diminished the practice of buying commissions (known as "political jobbery") and improved life for the troops by taking major steps for their accommodation, food and other provisions, rewrote the penal code, modernised training, and instituted many other improvements to uniform and general conditions. So his statue is there not because he was a well-connected military failure, but because he was an ardent, zealous and successful reformer of military life.

"He fell from grace owing to a scandal over his mistress, Mary Anne Clarke, who used her position as his mistress (he was separated from his German wife Frederica, the daughter of Frederick of Prussia) to promise commissions to officers, and she unwisely took money for doing so. But Frederick himself

escaped conviction by Parliament, though only by a majority! Frederick Duke of York resigned his post in 1809, but soon returned to his post until 1815 when he was publicly acclaimed for his work on army reform by Parliament.

“After the death of Queen Charlotte he was appointed “Guardian of the Person of the King”, his elder brother (George IV). He died of dropsy (edema, or swelling owing to fluid retention) in 1827 and was laid in state, and buried in St George’s Chapel, Windsor. The Duke of York’s School in Chelsea is named after him, and he has another statue in Waterloo Place, St James’ Park.”