

# A flotilla to celebrate the canal's 200th birthday will take place this weekend

*by Bridget Stevens, Merchiston Community Council*

Thousands of people come from all over the city and beyond to walk, jog or cycle along the Union Canal towpath, admire the flora and fauna (ducklings and daffodils in the springtime right through to brambles and bats in the autumn) and to enjoy adjacent Harrison Park, which proudly flies the prestigious Green Flag awarded by Keep Scotland Beautiful exclusively to high quality green spaces.

But the main attraction is the Union Canal itself – between the Lochrin Basin at Fountainbridge and the old boathouse at Ashley Terrace alone you can at all times of the day and night see a variety of small craft moored or moving on the water.



Ashley Terrace boathouse

Opened in 1822 as a means of bringing minerals, especially coal, to the capital, the Union Canal was initially highly successful. However, the inauguration in 1842 of the Glasgow-Edinburgh railway line diminished its value as a transport medium and it fell into relative decline, becoming underused and under-appreciated.

The opening of the Millennium Link in 2001 and of the Falkirk Wheel in 2002 connecting the Union Canal with the Forth & Clyde Canal changed all that, and signalled a huge revival of interest in this amazing waterway. This interest is growing all the time and will be celebrated in an exciting programme of community events taking place on the weekend of 20 and 21 May to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Canal.

14-year old Viktor Seifert, a pupil at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh, has composed a special piece of music, *Union Caledonian 200*, commissioned by renowned Edinburgh based luthier (maker of stringed instruments) Steve Burnett.

Burnett has also marked the bicentenary by making a set of four stringed instruments partly crafted out of wood from a willow tree which blew down in Harrison Park nearly twenty years ago. The premier performance of Viktor's composition will be played on these unique instruments by The Union Caledonian 200 String Quartet on board the Panacea canal boat at Harrison Park on Friday 20 May at 1.30pm.

Scottish Waterways for All, working in partnership with Scottish Canals, are organising a large flotilla of boats on the Union Canal over the weekend 20 – 22 May.

Flotilla 200 will start on the morning of Friday 20 May from both ends of the canal, with boats initially mustering at Lochrin Basin in the east, and the Falkirk Wheel in the west.

Boats coming from the Edinburgh end will stop off at Harrison

Park, where at 1.30pm boaters and spectators will be able to enjoy Viktor's eagerly anticipated new composition.

The programme of events at this muster point at Harrison Park is being organised by the newly-formed Edinburgh Union Canal Society, whose volunteers have for several months now been working on repairs to the handsome but somewhat dilapidated boathouse at the Ashley Bridge.

The flotilla will then head west towards the next meeting point at the Prince Charlie Aqueduct in Slateford. The two separate flotillas, from east and west, will converge at Manse Road Basin in Linlithgow on Saturday 21 May for a programme of afternoon and evening entertainments.

Full details of Flotilla 200 can be found at [www.flotilla200.live](http://www.flotilla200.live) and you can look at the timings of events and what is on [here in this booklet](#) – or scan the QR code below.

DRAFT V12 - 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022

200  
Celebrating  
200 years  
1822 - 2022



Flotilla Booklet V12

Scan code to read



Everyone is warmly invited to be part of these bicentenary celebrations.

Union Canal Flotilla 200 is one of many events to celebrate this important milestone in the history of Scotland's canal network.

More information on the year of celebrations can be found at [scottishcanals.co.uk](http://scottishcanals.co.uk)

Anyone interested in becoming involved with the Edinburgh Union Canal Society is encouraged to visit [www.eucs.org.uk](http://www.eucs.org.uk) OR email [info@eucs.org.uk](mailto:info@eucs.org.uk) OR contact EUCS Chairman Andrew Burns on 07880 502 212.

