

# **Edinburgh in history – November**

**There are many notable dates in November. These facts have been unearthed for us by Jerry Ozaniec, Membership Secretary of the Old Edinburgh Club the city's local history society, concerned with all aspects of the city's history and development.**

The club has a full diary of talks and this month the talk is at the Augustine United Church on 16 November 2022 when Lindsay Paterson will talk about Secondary Schools in 20th Century Edinburgh: Social Divisions and Intellectual Excellence.

1st: In 1695, the Bank of Scotland was founded by an Act of the Scottish Parliament. And in 1828, Rumford Medal-winning Balfour Stewart was born at 1 London Row in Leith, the son of William Stewart a tea-merchant, and his wife, Jane Clouston. Also in 1897, Naomi Mitchison (née Haldane), author, poet, and politician, was born in Edinburgh; Mitchison was a campaigner for women's issues and a lifelong Socialist.



2nd: In 1593, King James VI issued a proclamation that no one should trouble the papist Lords but treat them as faithful and true subjects.

3rd: In 1698, the Darien Expedition of about 1,200 persons landed at "Caledonia" in Panama; this was the first phase of an ambitious scheme to establish a Scottish colony in Panama for the purpose of creating an overland route that connected the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

4th: In 1601, a pitched battle was fought between 2 Border families, the Kers and Turnbells, and resulted in the murder of Thomas Ker.

5th: In 1854, Susan Edmonstone Ferrier, Scottish novelist (Scotland's "Jane Austen"), died in Edinburgh and is buried in St Cuthbert's Churchyard. And in 1879, Edinburgh-born mathematician and physicist James Clerk Maxwell, died; his most notable achievement was to formulate the classical theory of electromagnetic radiation, bringing together for the first time electricity, magnetism, and light as different manifestations of the same phenomenon. Also in 1940, six 250

pound bombs fell around Corstorphine Hill.



James Clerk Maxwell

7th: In 1892, the Empire Theatre opened.

8th: In 1736, playwright Allan Ramsay opened Scotland's first public theatre at Carrubber's Close off the Royal Mile in Edinburgh; the theatre was short-lived due to the disapproval of the Protestant kirk.

9th: In 1847, Sir James Young Simpson delivered Wilhelmina while chloroform was administered to her mother, Jane Carstairs, the first child to be born with the aid of anaesthesia.

10th: In 1955, the C&A Modes department store fire on Princes Street ranks as one of the worst that the city of Edinburgh has ever witnessed.

11th: In 1608, the council proclaimed that bonfires should be

lit on 5 November each year to celebrate the escape of the King, the Queen, their children, all the estates of the realm, and the Parliament of England from the treason intended that day in 1605 by certain English Catholics; people who did not build bonfires would be stripped of their citizenship.

12th: In 1869, Edinburgh University admitted female medical students for the first time; however they were not able to graduate, as women were not allowed to practice on medical wards; as an aside a woman, masquerading as Dr James Barry, actually took a medical degree at Edinburgh University in 1812 and became an army surgeon.



The Alexander Stoddart statue of two characters, Alan Breck Stewart and the 17-year-old David Balfour from Kidnapped by Robert Louis Stevenson on St John's Road. . Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

13th: In 1850, author Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh at 8 Howard Place.

14th: In 1601, Thomas Armstrong and Adam Steill (AKA 'The

Peckit') were hanged at the Mercat Cross; Armstrong had murdered James Carmichael and Steill was described as one of the most notable thieves that ever rode a horse. And in 1910, the poet Norman Alexander MacCaig was born at 15 East London Street.

15th: In 1824, fire broke out about 10 o'clock at night in a second floor workshop in Old Assembly Close, belonging to the engraver, James Kirkwood; this turned out to be one of the most destructive fires in the history of the city, destroying the High Street, Parliament Square and the Tron Kirk over 5 days. And in 1996, the Stone of Destiny was ceremonially returned to Edinburgh from Westminster Abbey where it had been installed by King Edward I 700 years previously, in 1296.

16th: In 1093, Queen Margaret died at Edinburgh Castle. And in 1789, the Grand Master Mason of Scotland laid the foundation stone of the University of Edinburgh's Old College (then the New College). Also in 1956, a sea of spectators filled Hanover Street to watch the 'last' trams come down the Mound; later the 'last' tram entered the Shrubhill depot.

18th: In 1870, the Surgeons' Hall Riot took place as a result of misogyny shown to the Edinburgh Seven, a group of women fighting for the right to train and practice as doctors led by Sophia Louisa Jex-Blake.





The Basil Spence building on Canongate. PHOTO Tom Duffin for Edinburgh World Heritage

19th: In 1976, Scottish architect Sir Basil Spence died; he was educated at George Watson's College in Edinburgh and the Edinburgh College of Art; one of Spence's earliest commissions was a design for the Southside Garage at Causewayside which he

designed in his distinctive Art Deco style.

21st: In 1958, construction on the Forth Road Bridge began. And in 1959, the 'penny-tenement' at 6 Beaumont Place collapsed making 19 families homeless.

24th: In 1572, John Knox, a leader of the Scottish Reformation, died in Edinburgh. And in 1861, at around ten past one on the morning an immense 16th century Edinburgh tenement containing at least 77 inhabitants suddenly gave way and collapsed to the street below; the building was located on the north side of the High Street between Bailie Fyfe's Close on the west and Paisley Close on the east.

26th: In 1892, the original Jenners department store building was destroyed by fire.

27th: In 1593, King James VI issued a proclamation of absolution in favour of the papist Lords.

29th: In 1681, the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, was granted its charter by King Charles II.

30th: In 1996, fifteen days after the return of the Stone of Destiny, thousands of people lined the Royal Mile in Edinburgh to watch troops escort it from Holyrood Palace up to Edinburgh Castle. And in 1998, Queen Elizabeth II opened the modern extension to what is now the National Museum of Scotland.

If you wish to know more about the [Old Edinburgh Club](#) then email [membership@oldedinburghclub.org.uk](mailto:membership@oldedinburghclub.org.uk)



National Museum of Scotland. Photo: Martin P. McAdam  
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