

Southside sleuth uncovers past life of Edinburgh's tenements

The ups and downs of traditional tenement life in Edinburgh is proving a huge social media hit thanks to the research of writer Diarmid Mogg.

Diarmid chronicles the colourful lives of past residents of the city's tenement buildings, scouring newspaper articles and public records archives to build up a picture of bygone days.

A Parliamentary Reporter at the Scottish Parliament by day, Diarmid became curious about the once grand tenement buildings that he often passes when walking to his home in the southside.

His threads on Twitter have proved hugely popular and he now receives requests from people eager to find out about events at specific addresses which have childhood or family links.



Diarmid Mogg, uncovering the city's past tenement by tenement – photo by Ellen Jackson

Diarmid said: “Quite a lot of tenement buildings look a bit neglected but some are over 200 years old and have been home to countless people and families. There was one particular door which was horribly bashed and covered in graffiti, but it must have been a nice tenement when it was built and it caught my eye.

“I took a picture of the door and started doing some research, looking for the address in the newspaper archives, and a few stories instantly popped up, so I pulled them altogether and put them on Twitter.

“You can get hundreds of results, most of which are irrelevant or not very interesting, but once you cut through all the chaff it's like panning for gold and you find little nuggets.”

An alarming number of Southside residents appeared to have

fallen out of windows, causing severe injury or death, as was the case at 59 Causewayside, one of a row of six tenements built in the mid-19th century.

In 1945, George Dickinson was celebrating the end of the war and had enjoyed a great deal to drink when visiting his niece Janet Buckle, he “fell to his death from a rear window just after midnight on VJ Day”.

Diarmid said: “It sometimes seems like falling out of windows was some sort of Edinburgh tradition, like spitting on the Heart of Midlothian.”

Another resident at number 59 was police constable Lewis Dallas, who died in his flat aged only 39 from tuberculosis, but his 17 years on the force ensured that the city police band and pipers, along with 260 officers in full uniform, walked four-a-breast as they accompanied his funeral cortege to the Grange Cemetery.



Tall tales from Edinburgh's tenements – Diarmid Mogg – photo by Ellen Jackson

At 24 South Clerk Street, Diarmid tells the story of grocer George Grieve who had a shop on the ground floor and established and ran a friendly society for 54 years which had around 2,000 working class members investing any pennies and shillings they could spare each week.

When George developed senile dementia it became apparent that for about 20 years he had been fiddling the society's books and the savings fund was several thousand pounds short. He was forced to sell his shop, stock and furniture to repay the stolen money and "moved to a flat in Morningside, where he lay in bed for the next four years, until an infection in his congested lungs killed him at the age of 75".

Diarmid added: "Some of the tenements are a bit tired looking now but they have got a really interesting history from the

generations of people who lived there, and there is a big contrast between these great domestic histories and the shabbiness of the streets now. If anything comes out of this, I'd really like people to take a bit more care of the buildings they live in and that they walk past, and stop doing graffiti on them."

- You can find Diarmid Mogg's tenement stories on www.tenementtown.com and on Twitter @diarmidmogg