

MSP hopes Melville plaque will remain in place

The City of Edinburgh Council has granted approval to a planning application to remove the plaque on the Melville Monument.

It was warned that this [does not mean the plaque can be removed](#) as further consent is required from the owners around the square, but the approval has been met with dismay. The plaque was intended to explain the background to the statue, considered important after the Black Lives Matter campaign.

Responding to the news that the application to remove the Melville Monument plaque on the statue of Henry Dundas expanding on his role in slavery, as recommended by Edinburgh Council, has been approved, Foysool Choudhury MSP for Lothian said: “When the new plaque was installed on the Melville Monument in 2021 to include information about Henry Dundas’ role in slavery, the wording was agreed by Council leaders and informed by discussions with Sir Geoff Palmer and heritage experts.

“It is not clear now why the plaque should be removed two years later.

“The Council accepted the historical statements on the plaque when installed in 2021 and to remove it now, because a descendent of Dundas wants it, without valid evidence to be removed, would be unjust and a step backwards in our fight to redress Scotland’s historical role in slavery and colonialism.

“The plaque installed on the Melville Monument in 2021 was a right step towards exposing the truth of Scotland’s past and generating trust with the communities who this past has affected.

“To remove it now, after the Council dedicated the plaque to the enslaved people who suffered, many as a result of Dundas’ actions, would cause severe damage to this trust. The plaque concept allows the public to educate themselves.

“We need to embed unbiased history in the infrastructure of our city, so that these monuments can become sites of education instead of celebrations of past injustices.

“Installing plaques which highlight accurate truth without excuses of historical figures’ actions will help to redress historical prejudices and educate the public on parts of Scottish history which have caused decades of hate, racism and discrimination.

“We need to make things right, but removing this plaque now would be a step backwards and a terrible injustice to the communities who have fought to have the truth about Dundas recognised, a man who Burns called ‘slee Dundas’ before he exploited slaves and colonial people.

“I am pleased that it was said by a councillor that the truth on the plaque should not be “whitewashed”. I fully support this statement.

“I hope that the plaque will remain and permission to remove the plaque will not be given by those who own and control the monument.”

The wording on the plaque reads:

“At the top of this neoclassical column stands a statue of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville (1742 – 1811). He was the Scottish Lord Advocate and an MP for Edinburgh and Midlothian,

and the First Lord of the Admiralty. Dundas was a contentious figure, provoking controversies that resonate to this day. While Home Secretary in 1792 and first Secretary of State for War in 1796 he was instrumental in deferring the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. Slave trading by British ships was not abolished until 1807. As a result of this delay, more than half a million enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic. Dundas also curbed democratic dissent in Scotland.

“Dundas both defended and expanded the British empire, imposing colonial rule on indigenous peoples. He was impeached in the United Kingdom for misappropriation of public money and although acquitted, he never held public office again. Despite this, the monument before you to Henry Dundas was funded by voluntary contribution from officers, petty officers, seamen and marines and erected in 1821, with the statue placed on top in 1827.

“In 2020 this was dedicated to the memory of the more than half a million Africans whose enslavement was a consequence of Henry Dundas’s actions.”

HENRY DUNDAS

1st Viscount Melville (1742-1811)

At the top of this neoclassical column stands a statue of Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville (1742-1811). He was the Scottish Lord Advocate, an MP for Edinburgh and Midlothian, and the First Lord of the Admiralty. Dundas was a contentious figure, provoking controversies that resonate to this day. While Home Secretary in 1792, and first Secretary of State for War in 1796 he was instrumental in deferring the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. Slave trading by British ships was not abolished until 1807. As a result of this delay, more than half a million enslaved Africans crossed the Atlantic. Dundas also curbed democratic dissent in Scotland, and both defended and expanded the British empire, imposing colonial rule on indigenous peoples. He was impeached in the United Kingdom for misappropriation of public money, and, although acquitted, he never held public office again. Despite this, the monument before you was funded by voluntary contributions from British naval officers, petty officers, seamen, and marines and was erected in 1821, with the statue placed on top in 1827.

In 2020 this plaque was dedicated to the memory of the more than half-a-million Africans whose enslavement was a consequence of Henry Dundas's actions.

• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

EDINBURGH
WORLD HERITAGE

Henry Dundas temporary plaque later replaced with one intended to be permanent. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com



Lord Dundas in St Andrew Square. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com