


May – important dates in the history of Edinburgh

What happened in May in years gone by? Here we have the dates to note this month.


This list of important dates in history is compiled by Jerry Ozaniec, Membership Secretary of the Old Edinburgh Club, membership@oldedinburghclub.org.uk




Day	Event
1st:	In 1589, the King (James VI) and Queen (Anne of Denmark) landed at Leith. And in 1612, the council instructed the treasurer to build and equip a song school in the Over Kirk yard in the same place where there was one many years before. Also in 1644, the burgh council renewed the order forbidding the wearing of plaids around and over the heads of women which was a custom adopted by strumpets, whores, and other indecent women to appear respectable.
2nd:	In 1597, bonfires lit up the night sky above Holyrood on the arrival in Leith of King James VI and his new Queen, Anne, daughter of the King of Denmark.
3rd:	In 1544, major hostilities in what Walter Scott later named 'The Rough Wooing' began with an attack on Edinburgh (illustrated) led by the Earl of Hertford and Viscount Lisle. 

5th:	<p>In 1508, the Provost, Bailies, and Council ruled that Fleshers should have their stalls and stands protected by stout canvas awning and the meat on sale covered with proper wrapping; also, that those selling the meat should be appropriately dressed with clean aprons.</p>
6th:	<p>In 1544, a letter sent to Lord Russel, Lord Privy Seal of England, the writer stated that: "It was determined ... utterly to ruin and destroy Edinburgh with fire. This we did not fully achieve ... However we set fire to three or four parts of the town." And in 1870, Sir James Young Simpson, who pioneered the use of chloroform in childbirth, died in Edinburgh. Also in 1941, a 1,000-pound bomb was dropped on Milton Crescent and 100 incendiaries at Jewel Cottages; four were killed and two injured.</p>
7th:	<p>In 1589, Anne of Denmark was crowned Queen of Scotland at Holyroodhouse. And in 1674, following an agreement with the town council, Mr Peter Braus, a Dutch engineer, began work on a project to bring water from Tod's Well at Comiston in a three-inch-diameter pipe. Also in 1711, philosopher and historian David Hume was born in an Edinburgh tenement; he attended Edinburgh University from the age of twelve. Finally in 1890, James Nasmyth, engineer and inventor of the steam hammer (who was born at 47 York Place, Edinburgh), died.</p>
8th:	<p>In 1366, at Holyrood Abbey, a Council was held in which discussion over a peace with England took place; it was agreed that the assessment to raise money for the King's ransom should be voluntary; the Scottish Mint was also ordered to strike new coins for this purpose. And in 1826, Sir Henry Duncan Littlejohn, surgeon, forensic scientist, and public health official, was born in Edinburgh.</p>

9th:	<p>In 1911, the famous illusionist The Great Lafayette died in a devastating fire at the Empire Palace Theatre in Edinburgh on Nicolson Street (now the site of the Festival Theatre). And in 1957, a massive fire at Bell's Brae in the Dean Village destroyed the premises of the largest theatrical costumiers outside London.</p>
10th:	<p>In 1506, King James IV issued letters ordering proclamations to be made at the Mercat Cross prohibiting the packing and parcelling of goods or merchandise in Leith and in the Canongate, or the shipment of goods until the same were examined in Edinburgh and Customs duty paid to the burgh. And in 1562, the marriage of John Fleming, 5th Lord Fleming, to Elizabeth Ross, one of Mary's Ladies-in-waiting, took place; the celebration took place in part on an artificial loch specially constructed for this in the area in Holyrood Park known as Hunter's Bog. Also in 1809, Andrew Bell, who was born in Edinburgh and co-founded the Encyclopaedia Britannica, died. Finally in 1843, Robert Adamson established his photographic studio at Rock House, Calton Hill Stairs in Edinburgh; he later teamed up with David Octavius Hill to form one of the most famous photographic duo ever.</p>
11th:	<p>In 1660, a report delivered to the council on St Paul's Work recommended that a seat be provided for the children in the community loft; that there should be five residents and the children sent there be divided among them; that beds and other necessities should be provided for the children; and that the boys should be apprentices for seven years and the girls for five.</p>

12th:	<p>In 1905, a notice from the public health office outlines what measures were taken at the port of Leith in the wake of the first cases of bubonic plague being discovered as they scrambled to stop rats from getting onto vessels; it was established the family had the dreaded bubonic plague and officials wasted no time in taking measures to stop it from spreading further; tragically, the man (named as John Hughes) died but his wife and children survived; remarkably, not one of the 30 other residents in the tenement contracted the disease.</p>
13th:	<p>In 1870, Sir James Young Simpson, the West Lothian physician who pioneered the use of chloroform in childbirth, was buried in Warriston cemetery; the day had been declared a holiday in Scotland, and more than 100,000 people lined the streets of Edinburgh to see the funeral cortege pass by.</p>
15th:	<p>In 1567, Mary, Queen of Scots married James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell, her third husband; the marriage took place according to Protestant rites in the Great Hall at Holyrood.</p>
16th:	<p>In 1402, at a Council-General held in Edinburgh, King Robert III (whose Christian name was John) officially pardoned the Duke of Albany (Robert, the king's next younger brother) and the Earl of Douglas for the death of David Stuart, Duke of Rothesay (the king's son and heir apparent); N.B. Since the troubled reign of King John Balliol, the name John was considered unlucky for a King of Scots.</p>

17th:	<p>In 1532, King James V established paid judges to sit as the Court of Session, the highest civil court in Scotland. And in 1617, King James VI returned to Edinburgh for the first time since 5 April 1603. Also in 1870, pioneering photographer David Octavius Hill died; he is buried in Dean Cemetery beneath a sculpture of him created by his wife Amelia Paton.</p>
18th:	<p>In 1843, after intense debate, 121 ministers and 73 elders led by Dr David Welsh, the retiring Moderator, quit the Church of Scotland General Assembly at Edinburgh's Church of St Andrew in George Street, to form the Free Church of Scotland.</p>
19th:	<p>In 1589, Anne of Denmark, Queen of Scotland, made her formal entry into Edinburgh with great pomp and joy. And in 1815, Catherine Thomson "Kate" Hogarth, later wife of English novelist Charles Dickens and mother of his ten children, was born at 8 Hart Street, Edinburgh.</p>
20th:	<p>In 1747, Edinburgh-born James Lind began a controlled experiment which demonstrated that citrus fruits could prevent scurvy, a disease contracted by sailors on long voyages; the lime juice which eventually became standard issue to British sailors gave rise to the term "limey" as a name for a Brit overseas. And in 1856, Helen Hopekirk, pianist and composer, was born in Portobello.</p>
21st:	<p>In 1650, James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, was executed by hanging at the Mercat Cross; his head was removed and stood on the "prick on the highest stone" of the Old Tolbooth outside St Giles Cathedral until the beginning of 1661. And in 1874, the foundation stone of St Mary's Cathedral (pictured) was laid by the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry; inside the stone was placed a bottle containing a copy of the Trust Deed, the Edinburgh Post Office Directory, Oliver and Boyd's Almanac, newspapers, and coins. </p>

22nd:	<p>In 1691, the council granted permission to Mr Mathias Fase, a Dutchman, to exhibit 3 Turkish people (a man, a woman, and a little boy) at any location in the Canongate. And in 1859, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (pictured), author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, was born in Edinburgh at 11 Picardy Place. </p>
24th:	<p>In 1853, the Adelphi Theatre in Broughton Street was completely destroyed by fire.</p>
25th:	<p>In 1726, the first circulating library opened in Edinburgh. And in 1859, the last performance at the Theatre Royal in Shakespeare Square was staged. Also in 1896, the Foundation Stone of the New North Bridge was laid (pictured). </p>
27th:	<p>In 1661, Archibald Campbell, 8th Earl and 1st Marquis of Argyll, was beheaded on the Maiden at the Mercat Cross; his head replaced that of Montrose, his royalist enemy, on the Tolbooth. And in 1928, Thea Musgrave, composer of opera and classical music, was born in Barnton.</p>
28th:	<p>In 1811, Henry Dundas, 1st Viscount Melville, died in Edinburgh at the age of 69; Dundas was a lawyer and politician whose professional career led him into disrepute, ending with him becoming the last ever person to be impeached in the House of Lords; his deft and almost total control of Scottish politics during a long period when no monarch visited the country, led to him being pejoratively nicknamed King Harry the Ninth; he became infamous for obstructing moves to bring about an end to the slave trade in the 1790s. And in 1905, construction of the King's Theatre in Edinburgh commenced.</p>
29th:	<p>In 1573, the siege of Edinburgh Castle finally ended. (Illustration is of the finale of the siege.) </p>

30th:	In 1936, Portobello Open Air Pool was opened at a cost of £90,000.
31st:	In 1878, Eugene Chantrelle, a Frenchman, was executed by hanging within Calton Jail for poisoning his wife, Elizabeth. And in 1962, the Gaumont cinema in Edinburgh was destroyed by fire. Also in 2014, Trams formally returned to Edinburgh streets. ❌



31 May 2014 First trams call at Princes Street PHOTO © The Edinburgh Reporter