

# Dundas relative hits out at 'farce' after replacement plaque installed

A descendant of Henry Dundas involved in removing an "inaccurate" plaque from the Melville Monument says his row with the council has "descended into farce".

Bobby Dundas' Melville Monument Committee (MMC) took the plaque off the base of the statue last September after he dismissed the inscription's claim his controversial ancestor was "instrumental" in delaying abolition of the slave trade as "cartoonishly inaccurate". The council replaced the brass plate this week and said it would seek to recover the cost from the MMC.

Reacting, Mr Dundas said the local authority's "five-year fixation" on the legacy of the prominent 18th century politician had "descended into farce".

He said no request had been received to pay for the plaque and was "confident the city has no claim"

He said "The plaque is a joke. Most people who follow the controversy know that now.

"The plaque presumes that Henry Dundas and his government could have ended all British slave trading, all at once, overnight, with a single enactment in 1792, and not a single

slave would have been trafficked to the Caribbean after that day.

“This is ludicrous. Eminent historians from around the world, including anti-Dundas historians, agree that such a result was impossible.”

Mr Dundas said the council was “engaged in a battle against historical accuracy” and added: “They may have restored the plaque but they have lost all credibility and respect – with historians and more importantly, with the public.”

Meanwhile the police are continuing to investigate “a report of a theft from a monument in St Andrew Square, Edinburgh”.

Edinburgh Council leader Cammy Day said as the new plaque was installed on Monday, March 18: “Since the original plaque was stolen last September, I’ve been clear that we will not allow the actions of a minority to derail the important ongoing work to address the legacies of slavery and colonialism in our city.

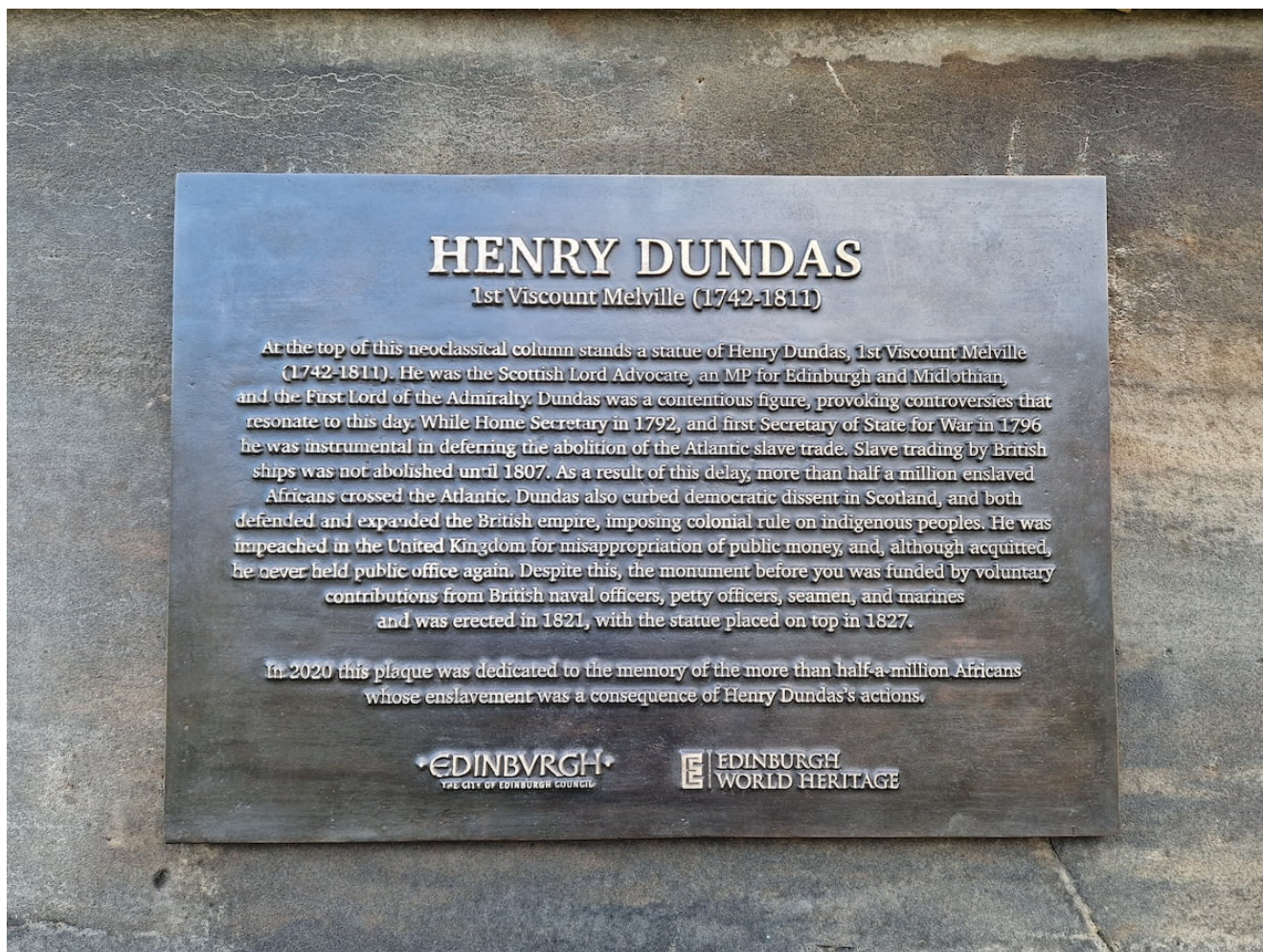
“Following the refusal of the Melville Monument Committee to return the original plaque, we filed an official report with Police Scotland in October. This investigation is ongoing, and our legal team will continue to monitor the situation closely.

“We’ll also be seeking to recover the costs of this replacement plaque from the Melville Monument Committee.”

However Mr Dundas said Cllr Day “and his cronies” had ignored “peer reviewed academic recommendations” which contradicted the plaque’s inscription.

“It’s disheartening to witness individuals in positions of ‘power’ abusing their authority so blatantly and negligently. Over the span of five years, they haven’t consulted any genuine, respected, reputable historians for their perspective,” he said.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter



## 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.

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