

The Old Edinburgh Club highlights significant dates in October

The Old Edinburgh Club looks back over the years at the significant dates in Edinburgh's history.

1st October In 1560, the Dean of Guild accounts recorded the sale of the jewels of the Collegiate Kirk of St Giles for well over £850. And in 1568, the Bannatyne Manuscript, the most extensive collection of early Scottish poetry in existence, was published by George Bannatyne, an Edinburgh merchant. Also in 1763, the contract to construct the North Bridge was signed. Finally in 1788, Deacon William Brodie was executed for theft.



Picture by Alexander Hay Ritchie depicts "The Execution of Deacon Brodie and George Smith"

2 October In 1854, sociologist and town planner Patrick Geddes was born; he was responsible for transforming sections of Edinburgh's Old Town, which had become slum areas; although the idea of slum clearance by knocking down houses was a popular one, Geddes preferred to work with existing buildings where possible, believing that knocking down poor housing simply transferred the problem to another, often worse, area.



Patrick Geddes

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4 October In 1989, a gas explosion rocked the heart of the city on Guthrie Street causing the deaths of two people.



Damage caused by the Guthrie Street explosion

5 October In 1785, a balloon flight by the Italian aeronaut Vincenzo Lunardi took place from Heriot's School, Edinburgh, to Ceres in Fife.

6 October In 1508, in a charter under the great seal, King James IV gave the provost, bailies, and council power to rent or feu the common muir (grassland) and common myre (rough land) to increase the public purse; he also granted the same lands for the construction of houses and the making of parks and pleasure grounds on them.

7 October In 1796, Thomas Reid, a joint founder of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, died. And in 1940, eleven people were injured by bombs around Marchmont.

8 October In 1518, the provost, bailies, and council ordered the inhabitants of the burgh to wash and clean the street as far as the centre of the roadway in front of their houses or booths as well as the vennels in the High Street and the Cowgate from all kinds of rubbish and filth by Monday evenings

under pain of a fine of eight shillings.

9 October In 1506, King James IV ratified the Charter incorporating the Surgeons and Barbers. And in 1867, at around midday a fire broke out in the ground floor of the premises of fireworks maker Thomas Hammond, a blaze that would ultimately claim the lives of five people – mostly children, with a further nine badly injured; it was reported that Mr Hammond had been in his shop filling one of his rockets with powder, when a spark from an unknown cause ignited the small missile in his hand and within minutes, the whole shop was ablaze since the shop was packed to the gunnels with fireworks and other combustibles. Also in 1900, Alastair George Bell Sim, CBE, Scottish character actor, was born in Edinburgh. Finally in 1909, a Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) demonstration attracted thousands of suffragettes to the streets; the procession began at Bruntsfield and ended at Waverley Market via Lothian Road and Princes Street.



WSPU demonstration

10 October In 1802, the Edinburgh Review was first published

“to erect a higher standard of merit, and secure a bolder and purer taste in literature, and to apply philosophical principles and the maxims of truth and humanity to politics”. And in 1900, Alastair George Bell Sim, Scottish character actor, was born in Edinburgh at 94 Lothian Road; he set up a school of drama & speech training in Edinburgh which was attended by his future wife.

11 October In 1511, King James IV's "Great Michael" was launched from Newhaven Harbour. And in 1593, whilst riding to a meeting concerning the laws of Scotland, King James VI met the excommunicated (catholic) Lords.



The drawing of the 'Great Michael' by J Gibson can be found at Trinity House in Leith.

12 October In 1907, 20,000 people gathered at the Fit o' the Walk for the unveiling of the statue of Queen Victoria

designed by John Stevenson Rhind.



Image by Maxine Dundas

13 October In 1713, painter Allan Ramsay was born in Edinburgh; among Ramsay's best-known works are portraits of David Hume, King George III, and a portrait of the Duke of Argyll. And in 1801, the ratification of the proclamation of peace between Britain and France saw the Edinburgh Volunteers on parade in the meadows and then marching down to Princes Street; the city was full of spectators.

14 October In 1512, the provost, baillies, and council took steps to counteract the contagious disease described as 'pestilence', which had recently broken out; if anyone in the burgh fell ill, the responsible adult was required to report the illness under pain of banishment & the burning of their property and whatever other physical punishment deemed appropriate.

15 October In 1475, the Wrights (carpenters and joiners) and Stonemasons were granted their Seal of Cause and the use of the aisle and chapel of St John the Baptist in St Giles'

College Kirk to enable them to offer daily divine service. And in 1880, Dr Marie Stopes, founder of the first modern birth control clinic, was born in Edinburgh; however her legacy has some less salubrious aspects as the article illustrates. https://cmfblog.org.uk/2019/05/07/marie-stopes-history-erases-ugly-facts-to-create-a-mythical-feminist-hero/?fbclid=IwAR2YcMwtdfWcgnpHUCS20K7LXd1dHjPw-W1LCEAfYc3jZpzEqU_Qi9Aklwo Also in 1902, Edinburgh's Balmoral (originally the North British Station) Hotel opened its doors for the first time.

16 October In 1430, King James II of Scotland was born at Holyrood Palace to James I and Joan Beaufort. And in 1774, Scots poet Robert Fergusson died aged 24; Robert Burns privately commissioned and paid for a memorial headstone of his own design, which was erected in 1787; the stone was restored in April 1850 by the poet Robert Gilfillan; in the later nineteenth century, Robert Louis Stevenson intended to renovate the stone, but died before he could do so; the epitaph that Stevenson planned to add to the stone is recorded on a plaque added to the grave by the Saltire Society on the Society's 50th anniversary in 1995. Also in 1939, The first raid of World War II on the Forth took place in which the City of Edinburgh Fighter Squadron (No 603) shot down the first enemy aircraft over Britain since 1918 after an attack on the Rosyth naval base on the Firth of Forth. Finally in 1940, more bombs were dropped onto Edinburgh this time targeting the railway and the palace.

17 October In 1548, the French troops in Edinburgh started a fight in Edinburgh over a culverin sent for repair and several Scots were killed on the Royal Mile; D'Essé organised a night raid on Haddington to increase their popularity among their potential Scottish supporters; the raid was repulsed but while the French were away from Edinburgh the townsfolk killed some of their wounded. And in 1720, Margaret Hall, also known as Ailie, was murdered by her husband Nicol Muschet of Boghall

(sometimes Muschat or Mushet); Muschet's or Maggie's Cairn is a memorial to her near its original spot in Holyrood Park.



Maggie's Cairn

19 October In 1687, Scotland's first public hire sedan chairs became available in Edinburgh; the new fleet of six hire sedans were plain black with a covered roof and were an alternative form of transport to the horse and carriage. There were two sedan chair shelters, one in Riddles Court in the upper town and one in Tweeddale Court for the lower town, which still exists (on the right-hand side coming through the archway). Edinburgh's sedan chairs were unique in that the seat was at 45 degrees to the poles so when going up and down a close or the High Street itself you were always sitting straight up. And in 1954, Kenneth Campbell Stott, Scottish stage, television, and film actor, was born in Edinburgh.

21 October In 1920, Edinburgh and Leith merged into one metropolitan area.

22 October In 1589, King James VI began his sea journey to Norway, sailing from Leith around ten o'clock at night. And in 1861, the foundation stones of both the main Post Office and the National Museum of Scotland were laid by Prince Albert in his last public engagement before his death.

23 October In 1706, a mob attacked the house of Sir Patrick

Johnston, a strenuous promoter of the Treaty of Union; he escaped but the increasing mob rambled through the streets threatening destruction to the promoters of the Union; the riot was eventually quelled but not until the army was called out.

24 October In 1694, Alexander Monteith petitioned the council for a gift of bodies for medical dissection from among those who died in the Correction House and foundling babies who died upon the breast which the council duly granted. And in 1796, artist David Roberts was born at Duncan's Land in Stockbridge, then a village near Edinburgh.

25 October In 1809, the Jubilee of the accession of King George III was celebrated with a series of ceremonies which included laying the foundations of King George III's Bastion and Military Works to protect the docks, harbour, and the town of Leith.

26 October In 1660, captains and colours were allotted to the Town Companies; citizens aged between 16 and 60 were required to provide sufficient arms and gather when called by beat of drum; the companies had to patrol the streets at night, watch for robberies at burials & public celebrations, and parade at the Riding of Parliament. And in 1779, Henry Thomas Cockburn of Bonaly, Lord Cockburn, Scottish lawyer, judge, and literary figure was born.



Cockburn depicted on a building in Cockburn Street

29 October In 1624, Janet Hunter and John Gilmour were both forbidden to continue repairing their houses with straw and thatch since it was against the Act of Parliament issued against the use of thatch in roofing. And in 1740, James Boswell, author of Samuel Johnson's biography, was born in Blair's Land on the east side of Parliament Close behind St Giles' Cathedral. Also in 1923, Calton Jail saw its last hanging.

30 October In 1815, the first Edinburgh Musical Festival began; it lasted until 5 November. And in 1886, the Edinburgh International Exhibition ended. Also in 1960, the first kidney transplant in the United Kingdom was performed by Sir Michael Woodruff at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

31 October In 1739, James Craig, the Scottish architect who designed the layout of the first Edinburgh New Town, was born.

Compiled by Jerry Ozaniec, Membership Secretary of the Old Edinburgh Club, membership@oldedinburghclub.org.uk



The new prison and Duguld Stewart's Monument, Calton Hill, 1887. Photo: The Cavaye Collection of Thomas Begbie/City Art Centre/Capital Collections.