

# Looking back at historical dates in April

Each month Jerry Ozaniec, Membership Secretary of the Old Edinburgh Club, compiles a list of significant dates in the history of the capital.

**1st** In 1820, the Radical Rising (or War, also known as the Scottish Insurrection) began a week of strikes and unrest in Scotland, a culmination of Radical demands for reform in Great Britain and Ireland which had become prominent in the early years of the French Revolution but had then been repressed during the long Napoleonic Wars.

**2nd** In 1916, at 10 minutes to midnight a German Zeppelin dropped a bomb on a bonded warehouse in Leith; at midnight one fell in East Claremont Street, later another fell in Lauriston Place and one hit George Watson's College; and in Marshall Street, one landed outside number 16 killing 6 people; attempts to hit the castle failed but caused extensive damage in the Grassmarket. See <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/learning/first-world-war/zeppelin-air-raid-on-edinburgh-1916> for more. In all dozens of bombs were dropped killing 13 people and injuring another 24.



People examining the damage done in the Grassmarket.

**4th** In 1508, the first printed book in Scotland with a definite date – a vernacular poem by John Lydgate ‘The Complaint of the Black Knight’ – was produced; the press was set up in Edinburgh by Walter Chepman, an Edinburgh merchant, and his business partner Andrew Myllar, a bookseller, near what is now the Cowgate. And in 1617, John Napier, inventor of logarithms, died in Edinburgh.

**5th** In 1603, James VI, left Edinburgh for London to take the English throne.



The picture shows air raid damage at Junction Bridge Station and Largo Place; picture by JL Stevenson.

**7th** In 1941, two landmines were parachuted down on David Kilpatrick School, Leith; 34 incendiaries were dropped on Corstorphine and Cramond Brig; 3 deaths and 131 injured were recorded.

**10th** In 1866, construction of Waverley Station began, consolidating the former North Bridge and Canal Street Stations.





The photo shows improvement work in 1890.

**11th** In 1890, a fire destroyed the large paper-making and stationery establishment of Messrs Tullis & Company, 7 George Street, Edinburgh, and did very great damage to the adjoining property of Messrs Whytock & Reid, furniture supplier. And in 1895, the first electric lights were installed in the city. Also in 1911, Alexander Young, a mason, was hospitalised as a result of an accident during the demolition of Lothian Road School.

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**ACCIDENT AT THE USHER HALL SITE.**—A foreman mason, named Alexander Young, residing at 8 St Peter's Place, Edinburgh, was admitted to the Royal Infirmary yesterday suffering from injuries sustained by a fall at Lothian Road School, which is being demolished to make way for the Usher Hall. Young was engaged in the removal of a large stone by a crane from a staircase on the third flat. Part of the staircase gave way, and the man was thrown to the ground, about thirty-five feet below.

**14th** In 1582, the University of Edinburgh was founded by Royal Charter. And in 1670, Major Tomas Weir was executed by strangulation and burning for the crimes of witchcraft and incest with his elder sister at the Gallow Lea, a field on the road between Leith and Edinburgh where, 300 years later the bus garage at Shrubhill would stand. Also in 1736, the "Porteous Riots" took place after the hanging of a smuggler by the City Guard led by Captain Porteous; the Guard killed several people in the ensuing riot.

**15th** In 1641, Sir Robert Sibbald, Edinburgh university's first Professor of Medicine, co-founder of The Royal Botanic Gardens of Edinburgh, and President and founder of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, was born. And in 1710, William Cullen was born – an important member of Edinburgh society during the Enlightenment period and teacher of Joseph Black who was the greatest chemist of his age.

**16th** In 1424, (Palm Sunday) James I formally entered Edinburgh; this was a prominent religious festival in the medieval liturgical calendar, marked by public processions to invoke the entry of Christ into Jerusalem; by selecting this date, the formal arrival of James I could be incorporated into

the liturgy of the annual Palm Sunday procession. And in 1728, Joseph Black, physicist and chemist, known for his discoveries of magnesium, latent heat, specific heat, and carbon dioxide, probably the greatest chemist of his age, was born. Also in 1849, Mr Marshall opened a new Panorama in his Rotunda on the Mound titled the 'Gold Regions of California', displaying the towns of Monterey and San Francisco, the valley and river Sacramento, the Sierra Nevada, Marshall's Saw Mill where the gold was first found, and much more.

**17th** In 1341, Edinburgh Castle was retaken by a ruse perpetrated by 4 men; one disguised himself as an English merchant purveying wine and beer and agreed with the Governor to deliver it the following morning; once the gate was opened to him, he and his armed followers overturned the carriage where the goods were purported to be, sounded a horn to call Douglas and his band who rushed in and recovered the fortress. And in 1766, James Craig's winning entry for development of Edinburgh's New Town was approved. Also in 1800, Catherine Sinclair, Scottish novelist and a writer of children's literature which departed from the moralising approach common in that period, was born at 9 Charlotte Square in Edinburgh near which there is a memorial to her; she is credited with discovering that the author of the anonymous Waverley Novels was Sir Walter Scott; she wrote many bestselling books in a variety of genres but was most celebrated for her wide-ranging charitable work and as one of the most prominent philanthropists of 19th century Edinburgh; she introduced public bench seats to the city (a feature which remains popular to this day), founded and financed the Volunteer Brigade for the boys of Leith, opened a school where girls from working class homes were taught domestic work, provided shelters where cabmen could relax while waiting for 'fares', and opened special cooking centres which provided low cost meals for the poor.





Each month the Old Edinburgh Society remind us of the historical significance of each day of the month. The Catherine Sinclair Monument on St Colme Street is important in



April as it is when Catherine Sinclair was born. Photo © 2023 Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

**18th** In 1992, the final performance in the Grassmarket premises of the Traverse Theatre company was acted; the theatre re-opened in a custom-made building beside the Usher Hall.

**21st** In 1703, the Edinburgh Fire Act which appointed a company for quenching fires in the City was passed by the Council. And in 1824, the Edinburgh Fire Brigade, one of the first in Scotland and arguably the first municipal fire service in the world, was formed.

**22nd** In 1614, the Council decided to abolish the school holiday on the Saturday before Palm Sunday on advice from the Kirk Session. And in 2005, sculptor and artist Sir Eduardo Paolozzi died; born in Leith, he was a founder of the Independent Group, which is seen as a precursor to the '60s British pop art movement.



Work by Sir Eduardo Luigi Paolozzi which has since been



removed from the former RBS building at Edinburgh Park. Photo: Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

**23rd** In 1669, the Council ordered that all the fleshers should keep no more than one or two strong dogs and to keep them confined so that they do not molest citizens passing to and from the flesh market.

**24th** In 1558, Mary, Queen of Scots, and François, Dauphin of France, (photograph below) were married in Notre Dame Cathedral; Edinburgh celebrated with a procession, a scripted play, and fireworks. And in 1825, novelist R M Ballantyne, who wrote 90 books, the best known of which was "The Coral Island," was born in Edinburgh.



**27th** In 1601, James Wood of Bonnington was beheaded at the

Mercat Cross at six in the morning for destroying the buildings at Bonnington which his father owned but which he felt should have been his; Archibald Cornell, the town officer, was hanged for illegally seizing and selling a man's house and pictures belonging to the King and Queen.

**28th** In 1472, King James III authorised the burgh to construct defensive ditches, build bulwarks, walls, towers, and turrets against another English invasion. And in 1624, the Council responded to complaints by the merchant booth-keepers against the portable stall-holders over the frequent selling of goods licensed for sale in the booths; the Dean of Guild was ordered to warn the kramers to desist or face serious consequences. Also in 1742, Henry Dundas, the powerful politician known as the "Uncrowned King of Scotland", was born in Edinburgh.

**29th** In 1659, steps were taken to remove houses of ill-repute from the vicinity of the College.

**30th** In 1470, Pope Paul II issued a bull freeing the Collegiate Kirk of St Giles and its clergy from the jurisdiction of the Bishop of St Andrews in response to the petition by King James III, the provost, balies, and community of Edinburgh. And in 1520, a bloody skirmish broke out on the streets of medieval Edinburgh between rivals James Hamilton, 1st Earl of Arran, chief of Clan Hamilton, and Archibald Douglas, 6th Earl of Angus, chief of Clan Douglas; referred to as Cleanse the Causeway, the fighting was the result of a protracted monarchical struggle between the two rival houses, both angling for supremacy within the court of the infant King James V of Scotland. Also in 1717, Robert Irvine murdered John and Alexander Gordon at a picnic held on grounds which are now the New Town in an attempt to retain his employment; these boys were his students and had seen him attempt to seduce their father's, Mr James Gordon's, maidservant.

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