

# 8: Edinburgh, a Tale of Two Cities

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## A. Arrival

### 1. Class title 1 (view from Calton Hill)

The first hour of this class will be about Edinburgh as a physical **place**; the second will concern the **sense** of being there. Sense and place, like the title of the course. But that is not what I mean by **Two Cities**.

### 2. Arrival video (Tale of Two Cities)

Take the train to Edinburgh's **Waverley Station** and come up to the surface to Princes Street, or take the tram from the airport to more or less the same place, and you will be immediately struck by the contrast between the Castle towering above you to the South, with the jumble of buildings on its lower slopes, and the fine shops and orderly layout of the Georgian city to the North. More than any other place we have visited in this course, Edinburgh is two cities in one: two utterly different environments, from two different periods, clearly differentiated from one another, yet both within an area you can walk round easily in a morning. They are known as the Old Town and the New Town respectively. Each has its history, each has its atmosphere, both are beautiful, yet neither is more important than the other. Here they are on a map; and here is the opening of a long video by a young woman called Alice Loxton that I'll be sampling throughout this hour to back up my points

### 3. Schematic map of Edinburgh by date

### 4. Loxton video, opening

### 5. View from the Castle to the Forth, and Water of Leith

Every other city in this course, except perhaps Vienna, had been articulated by water, but Edinburgh is different. Yes, you can see the **Firth of Forth** at the end of many streets in the New Town, and this opens to the sea, but the water is two miles away, and the small river that flows through the city, the **Water of Leith**, is rural and picturesque, quite different from the Tiber or even the Arno. No, the dominant feature in Edinburgh is clearly the Castle, and in this respect it is closer to **Salzburg** or even to **Athens**.

### 6. Athens, Salzburg, Edinburgh

This similarity is one of the reasons why Edinburgh has the nickname **Athens of the North**. Also, of course, the number of neoclassical buildings in the New Town, the fact that it also lies a couple of miles above its port (Pireus in one, Leith in the other), and most importantly the role it played as the center of the **Scottish Enlightenment** in the 18th Century—more on which later.

## B. Rising from Rock

### 7. Section title B (bronze model)

I have not seen this myself, but clearly it is a relief map of Edinburgh cast in bronze, a kind of map for the blind. It shows very clearly the distinction between the **Old Town** on Castle Mound and **the New Town** laid out below. But I am showing it for another reason. Before Edinburgh had any human inhabitants, it was geology. Castle Rock is essentially a volcanic plug of magma that broke through the surface, hardened, and provided a kind of shield for the glaciers parting on either side of it, but leaving a descending slope on the far side which eventually became the High Street of the medieval town.

### 8. Arthur's Seat and Calton Hill

### 9. Map of Edinburgh showing hills

Even more prominent than Castle Rock, however, is an actual extinct volcano just East of the city, known as **Arthur's Seat**, together with the slightly smaller **Calton Hill** just to its North. As you see, these dominate many views of the city, which nestles in between these ancient volcanic landmarks. Calton Hill has become the site of several neo-classical monuments, built in the 18th and 19th centuries, but Arthur's Seat remains quite rugged; Alice Loxton climbs it.

### 10. Edinburgh from Calton Hill (repeat of class title)

### 11. Edinburgh from Arthur's Seat

### 12. Loxton on Arthur's Seat

## C. One Mile Downhill

### 13. Section title C (pipers of the Black Watch on the Royal Mile)

### 14. The Monarch Moves Downhill

Edinburgh Castle is now used as an army barracks, so the actual buildings within its walls are a miscellaneous and mostly unimpressive lot. But from the 12th Century at least, it was the royal residence and thus the capital of Scotland. In the early 16th Century, James IV built a new palace near **Holyrood Abbey** a mile away at the foot of the long slope leading up to the Castle. This was added to by various monarch, becoming the **Palace of Holyrood House**. It was there, for example, that Mary Queen of Scots took up residence. The road from the new lower palace to the upper one, roughly a mile long, became the central spine of the Old Town, known as **The Royal Mile**. The video showed the pipers of the Black Watch regiment marching down from barracks to palace..

### 15. Drawing and map of the Old Town

### 16. On the Royal Mile today, with Gladstone's Land

Through necessity, Edinburgh was constructed on a very narrow site. As the city grew in population and importance, the only way to go was up. The original residential buildings in the Old Town were called **lands**: tenements of six to ten stories in height, separated by narrow passageways: **closets** or **wynds**. Even though only a few of the original buildings remain, the result is a general verticality that is still the visitor's experience of the Edinburgh Old Town today, as in this photo of my own. It is also found in the streets directly below the Castle on the south, built right up against the Rock

#### 17. Victoria Street, abutting Castle Rock to the south

Another consequence is social. Unlike other cities where rich and poor, professionals and tradesmen, would be separated by district or quarter, here the separation was vertical. The well-to-do lived on the middle floors all over the city, with the less fortunate occupying the cellars and attics, below or above them. The different classes would pass each other on the stairs or meet in the streets. I'm sure this did not make for a Utopian society, but it surely contributed to the humanistic thinking that was so important to the later Scottish Enlightenment. However, 18th-century light emerged from 17th-century squalor; here once more is **Alice Loxton** to explain.

#### 18. Alice Loxton on the Old Town

## D. From Squalor into Light

#### 19. Section title D

#### 20. Map, highlighting Old and New towns

Now let's look at the founding of the **New Town**, a bit to the North of the Royal Mile, originally designed by the 27-year-old **James Craig** (1739–95). I'll let **Alice Loxton** continue the story.

#### 21. Alice Loxton on the New Town

#### 22. Bute House, Charlotte Square

Loxton goes on to say that the first sites in the New Town were sold to buyers who could use any style, provided they stuck to Craig's plan. But to finish the project off, the Council brought back the most eminent Scottish architect they could find, the celebrated **Robert Adam** (1728–92). Rather than give you a formal tour of his work, I will play the first 3½ minutes of a splendid video I found on YouTube; the whole thing is on the website. I have replaced the modern pop music by a more period-appropriate *Minuet*, by the Scottish composer **Thomas Erskine, Earl of Kellie** (1732–81)

#### 23. Tour of the New Town

#### 24. Map, highlighting Princes Street Gardens

#### 25. Alexander Nasmyth: *Edinburgh Castle and Nor Loch* (1824, NGS)

However, there was a problem. Between the Old and New Towns, there was a deep ravine, filled in part by a body of water called the **Nor Loch**. Later Scottish artist **Alexander Nasmyth** (1758–1840) might make it seem Romantic, but in fact it was full of sewage and the bodies of executed criminals.

### 26. Transformation to Princes Street Gardens

Connecting the New Town with the Old required draining the loch, replacing it with gardens, and easing access to the upper level by building a bridge across the ravine at one point, and creating an artificial graded slope further along, known as **The Mound**. When it became necessary to build a railway station later, **Waverley** was created by tunneling under the gardens. Here is a time-lapse video.

### 27. Princes Street Gardens, time-lapse video

## E. Postcards

### 28. Section title E (postcards)

Depending on time, I'll end this hour with postcards of some sights in or near Edinburgh that I have not yet covered: the **Forth Bridges**, the port of **Leith**, **Dean Village** on the **Water of Leith**, Calton Hill, and the **Scott Memorial**.

### 29. Forth Bridge

The **Firth of Forth** just north of Edinburgh, is a long river estuary, meaning that anybody from Edinburgh who wanted to go further north had first to travel 37 miles upstream to the lowest bridge at **Stirling**. Most people took the ferry from **Queensferry** instead. This was so until 1964 when a road bridge was opened, but the earlier Forth Bridge, which opened in 1890, took rail traffic. It has become a symbol of Edinburgh and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### 30. All three Queensferry bridges

### 31. Forth Bridge tee shirt

The first road bridge was opened in 1964, and the ferry closed down. However, the bridge soon exceeded its design capacity, so when the M90 Motorway (Interstate) was extended beyond Edinburgh, a **new bridge** was built to carry it. This opened in 2017 and is known as the **Queensferry Crossing**. The three bridges side by side gave rise to this delightfully punning tee shirt.

### 32. The Shore, Leith

**Leith** is now incorporated into Edinburgh, but it was once a separate city with a proud record in many areas: the first to provide free education for boys (and later for girls), the first to have an electric tram system, and so on. Its once-busy port declined in the 20th century, but has recently been restored; if it looks a little like the waterfront at **Bergen**, it is because both were once part of the **Hanseatic League**.

The revitalization has included the building of new apartments in most price ranges, and the opening of some of the best restaurants in Edinburgh, plus the building of a modern Port and shopping center.

### 33. Views on The Water of Leith

The river that flows into the sea at Leith is known as **The Water of Leith**. It flows through the middle of Edinburgh, but it would be possible to visit the city and not even know it was there, because it nestles in a wooded ravine just to the west of the New Town. The whole thing has been opened up as a walkway, and provides one of the loveliest ways to get a break from noise and traffic. One of the delights is to come upon **Dean Village**, originally a separate community of grain mills and houses for the people who worked there.

### 34. Dean Village

### 35. Monuments on Calton Hill

I included a postcard of **Calton Hill**, which rises abruptly at the East end of Princes Street. It is another volcanic legacy, but smaller than Arthur's Seat; it has been the site of numerous monuments from the neo-classical era on, but I haven't time to list them.

### 36. Burns, Scott, and the Scott Memorial

For the most conspicuous monument in Edinburgh is right there in the middle of Princes Street itself: the memorial to Scottish author **Sir Walter Scott** (1771–1832), who did more than any other single figure in the 19th century to put Scotland on the cultural map of Europe. It is an amazing structure to honor a mere writer—not even Shakespeare has such a monument—but then the Scots take their writers very seriously. You probably won't find many people in Edinburgh today who has read much Scott, but just about everybody knows something by **Robert Burns** (1759–96). Burns posed as a simple farmboy and wrote in Lowland Scots dialect, but he hobnobbed with the intelligentsia of the Scottish Enlightenment and was accepted as their equal. It is fitting, therefore, that when the Scottish Parliament opened its 2016 session in front of the Queen, the Scots folk-singer **Midge Ure** should have begun the proceedings by singing a Burns song. I put up the words, but didn't translate them; the gist is that, despite all the trappings of rank and wealth, "A man's a man, for all that."

### 37. Midge Ure at the Scottish Parliament: "A man's a man for a'that"

### 38. Class title 2 (fact chart, repeat)

## F. Scotland in Sound and Story

### 39. Section title F (Edinburgh Tattoo)

#### 40. Menu of Hour 2

Preparing that first hour took me much longer than I thought, so for the rest of the class, I am going to have to rely on readymade videos even more than I usually do. The theme is “Scotland in Sound and Story.” What you have just seen combines both: the sound of the bagpipes of the combined Scottish regiments during the **Tattoo**, presented nightly during the Edinburgh Festival, on the forecourt of the Castle, commemorating all the history enshrined in it and in the city generally. From there, I have a poem, something factual about the **Scottish Enlightenment**—all those philosophers and scientists who were the personification of the New Town—and **a whole bunch of music** of different kinds. Stay tuned!

#### 41. Hannah Lavery

**Hannah Lavery**, a poet, playwright, director, and performer, was appointed Edinburgh **Makar** (Scottish equivalent of Poet Laureate) in 2021. Here is a poem. *Edinburgh is a Story*, filmed I think during the COVID shutdown. It is long, but sums up much of what I’m trying to do in this class.

#### 42. Hanna Lavery: *Edinburgh is a Story*

#### 43. George Street (“Welcome to the Scottish Enlightenment”)

The founding of the New Town in the later 18th Century pretty much coincided with the rise of the school of empirical thinkers in philosophy, political theory, literature, science, and medicine known as the **Scottish Enlightenment**. I had intended to do a whole section on the revolution in thought that inspired, among other things, the American Constitution, but this scrap of video from the BBC will have to suffice. There is no commentary that comes with this, so I don’t know the presenter.

#### 44. BBC video: the Scottish Enlightenment

#### 45. National Gallery of Scotland

A somewhat later product of the Scottish Enlightenment was the foundation of the **National Gallery**, a neoclassical building at the foot of The Mound. While the galleries in Vienna and Amsterdam are much larger, I have a special affection for this one because it is so compact, although it contains masterworks from every period of Western art. It is obviously special for Scottish artist **Lachlan Goudie** too, as we see in this video, made to promote the reopening of the gallery after COVID. I will put the whole thing on the website, but for now am just concentrating on his depictions of Scottish subjects.

#### 46. Lachlan Goudie on the National Gallery of Scotland

#### 47. Scottish Chamber Orchestra

Here is another COVID-era photograph, rather bizarre in that it shows member of an orchestra playing at a safe distance from one another in an empty room. My own professional connections with Edinburgh were with Scottish Opera and the Scottish National Orchestra, the establishment groups. But this is the

**Scottish Chamber Orchestra**, founded in 1974 after I had already left Britain, though I have heard it a couple of times on visits back. There was a special excitement about its concerts, which I hope is captured by this video and the first few minutes of its recording of *Whisky Mouth*, a piece by Scottish composer **Jay Capperault** (1989– ); the video is a bit grey, but the music isn't!

[48. Scottish Chamber Orchestra promo](#)

[49. Capperault: \*Whisky Mouth\*, opening \(Scottish Chamber Orchestra\)](#)

[50. Edinburgh Festival posters](#)

The first **Edinburgh International Festival** was founded in 1947 by **Sir Rudolf Bing**, who later came over here to run the Metropolitan Opera. Intended to facilitate the reemergence of the major European artistic organizations which were still staggering from the War, and readily available, the Festival grew rapidly into one of the major showcases for classical music, theatre, and art. My own first job as an assistant was with the **Festival Opera** in 1967, involving companies from Florence and Vienna, as well as from Scotland itself. Almost simultaneously, a separate festival grew up around the official events, as performers from all over came to Edinburgh to install themselves in church halls and pub basements all across the city. The **Fringe** has since grown to a size that swamps its original parent. Living in Scotland from 1963 to 1968, and going back several times since, I would say that a major part of my artistic education has come from repeated visits to the Festival or Fringe. Here is a brief promo of the Edinburgh Festivals generally, followed by a longer one about the Fringe, narrated by its director **Shona McCarthy**.

[51. Edinburgh Festivals promo](#)

[52. Fringe promo](#)

[53. Fascinating Aida](#)

Looking for something that would represent both the Festival and the Fringe, I thought of this late-night concert by an all-woman group called Fascinating Aida. It is actually a Festival event, given in a temporary space called the Spiegeltent, but it is also the sort of thing you might expect on the Fringe. Their song, "So sorry, Scotland," was highly topical at the time, but it needs some explanation now.

[54. Scotland and Brexit](#)

The performance was in 2016, just after the Brexit vote was taken. I am not quite sure of the mechanics of this—what the song actually expected the people of Scotland to do—but you'll get the general gist; it obviously meant more to the audience there and then. **Nicola Sturgeon**, who is referenced several times, was then the First Minister of Scotland; **Nigel Farage** was the leader of the Brexit Party in England. I should also warn you of a couple of prominent four-letter words, one in each verse.

[55. Fascinating Aida: \*Brexit Song\*](#)

[56. The Proclaimers](#)

Finally, **The Proclaimers**, a Scottish rock duo formed in 1983 by the twin brothers **Craig and Charlie Reid** (born in Leith in 1962). As you see, they made their considerable reputation without doing anything much to look cool, and they don't look any cooler now. But their biggest hit, *Sunshine on Leith* (1988), went platinum in Canada and Australia and spawned a movie; I'll put a trailer to it on the web. I've

chosen to end with their song, *The Streets of Edinburgh*, largely because the video is such a perfect blend of the tourist Edinburgh and aspects of the city familiar only to people who live there.

57. The Proclaimers: *The Streets of Edinburgh*

58. Class title 3 (fact chart, repeat)