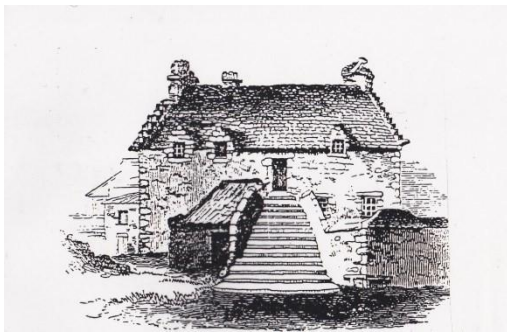




BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Broughton Tolbooth 1582–1829

New Series Number **27**

Summer 2026

A heritage trail with a difference.

March 2026

John Yellowlees

Many of us are aware of the significance of Blue Plaques mounted on particular buildings of historical note, but probably have not understood the reason for Red Plaques, several of which are located in the Broughton area. On the 2nd of March 2026, John Yellowlees, Honorary Rail Ambassador for Scotrail, gave us a whistle-stop breakdown of the history of these plaques and some of their locations. There are 201 throughout Britain with 41 of these in Scotland. The Churchill Barriers in Orkney have the most northerly plaque at present.

The Transport Trust was founded in 2009 with Princess Anne, Princess Royal as its patron. The plaques are officially called Red Wheels and celebrate Britain's rich transport history. They highlight sites and structures of transport importance, whether road, rail, water or air and all information can be found on the Transport Trust website and/or in QR Codes beside each plaque.

The red wheels can be found by following this link

<https://www.nationaltransporttrust.org.uk/red-wheels>

Nominations for these plaques come from the general public as well as historians.

Railways are of course the easiest to denote but canals and pioneering car factories are also included in the list, with the first electric car created in Edinburgh at the Madelvic Factory in Granton being one of these. Some of the early railway sites are

- Tranent - Cockenzie Waggonway (1722), see photo on next page.
- The Innocent Railway, Edinburgh,
- Alloa Waggonway,
- Kilmarnock & Troon Railway (the first Scottish public railway)
- Monklands and Kirkintilloch Railway.

Those celebrating roads include

- Annandale St Bus Garage. (right)
- Churchill Barriers
- Trams at Shrubhill and Leith.

Some of the water and air transport plaques include.

- The Union Canal
- Kelvin Aqueduct
- Crinan Canal and Caledonian Canal at Fort Augustus
- Skye Ferry
- Rothesay pier.
- Bell Rock lighthouse and Granton Lighthouse
- Glenelg Ferry,





In The Edinburgh area plaques may be found at HMS Claverhouse; unveiled by Baroness Goldie, Scotland Street tunnel, unveiled by John Cameron CBE (with the assistance of the Broughton History Society); Water of Leith at Slateford, unveiled by John Cameron and Richard Baird; Granton Gas works; Victoria Swingbridge; Haymarket Tramshed; the Edinburgh and Dalkeith Railway and Leamington Lift Bridge on the Union Canal.

At the unveiling of the Powderhall plaque (seen below) John Cameron made a suggestion that perhaps a heritage trail could be created in Broughton, as it has several plaques: one at Shrubhill, another at the Lothian Bus Depot in Annandale Street, one at the Scotland Street Tunnel and finally the most recent one at the Powderhall Stables on Broughton Road.

John concluded his talk with details of several new plaques that are due to be unveiled this year. These include Monklands and Kirkintilloch Railway, the Highland Main line, General Wade's Bridge, and finally Coatbridge Sunnyside station.



With such a rich and varied transport legacy in Scotland these distinctive plaques provide an easy way to display and capture fascinating and slightly quirky historical information.

All images from NTT [website](#)

Jenny Bruce

Talks Programme to Dec 2026

- 7 September** Eric MELVIN John Kay, Edinburgh Street Characters during the Golden Age.
- 5 October** John LAWSON First Burgesses of Edinburgh
- 2 November** Barclay PRICE History of the Cafe Royal
- 7 December** Christmas Soirée

Between the Old and New Towns. The Development of the Mound, Princes Street and its Gardens

April 2026

Dr Patricia Andrew

I'm sure many of us still think of the city of Edinburgh in the 18th century as the Old Town, the mediaeval heart of Edinburgh, laid out like a fish bone between the castle and Holyrood Palace, in complete contrast to the carefully planned and ordered grids, squares and crescents of the New Town sitting proudly to its north, tempting the better off inhabitants of the Old Town to cross the increasingly foetid dumping ground of the Nor' Loch for a better, cleaner life.

Eventually this was made possible, as we heard from Dr Patricia Andrew in her well researched and illustrated talk on 13th April. We learned how the variously hilly, rocky and swampy ground, where the modern railway and Princes Street now run, was overcome by draining, bridging and developing with gardens, galleries and monuments, which allows us to admire the more complete city centre known to residents and visitors today.

Using maps, drawings, paintings and old photographs from the 18th century onwards, we were taken through a roughly chronological history of how the links between the Old and New Towns came about. Images from artists such as Sandby and Nasmyth show how, other than the well-established castle, only Allan Ramsay's house, sitting above what is now Princes Street Gardens, and the Nor' Loch were visible to the north of the castle itself. It was increasingly realised that the loch, used by horses for drinking and

residents for washing clothes, was simply becoming a dumping ground, so it was vital to drain the water held back by a dam to the east of what's now Waverley Station. At roughly this point there was a first attempt to create a road link from the Old Town to the north by the North Bridge, which collapsed soon after being built.

By this time the New Town was beginning to be developed and about two million tonnes of the excavated soil was used to create an 'earthen mound' from Princes Street to the Old Town near St Giles Cathedral. Although the Mound provided a useful link between the Old and New Towns, horses found it difficult to cope with the steep and soft surface, so, as



shown in an etching by John Kay (left), six men were required to pull a carriage with several ladies aboard until the surface had firmed up with time. The town council encouraged residents to use the Mound as a shorter route and another Kay image shows Princes Street busy with well-dressed people who were now residing in the New Town. Another image by Major General John Brown, an amateur artist, shows the steep descent into the gardens and the Mound being built.

An early 19th century engraving of Edinburgh from Register House shows many lamp standards and a generally built up look and another image shows the rebuilt North Bridge and the new Bank of Scotland at the top of the Mound, as it still is today, although much altered. What really caused this whole area to become more widely appreciated was the visit in 1822 of George IV. A view from that time from Calton Hill of the royal procession heading westward down Princes Street shows how this was now clearly a significant part of Edinburgh.

However, there were still disagreements. At this time the laws banning Episcopal worship were repealed allowing new churches, e.g. St John's on Princes Street, to be built, but some residents of the New Town didn't want their views spoiled, so a new bylaw stopped further building in this area. Contemporary paintings show Princes Street becoming much greener and, although it was originally intended that the street should be for residential use only, shops started opening, some rising to the first and second floors. However, it has very little residential use today.

An 1825 Naismith image (next page) shows the early construction of the new Royal Institution (today's RSA) and the Nelson Monument on Calton Hill. The New Club moved to Princes Street in 1837, indicating that it was becoming more fashionable. In order to encourage the increasing fashionability of the New Town, artists such as Nasmyth tried to make the views of the Old Town more attractive, which is one of the

aspects that attracted me to come to Edinburgh 130 years later. Soon the Royal Institution was completed, although its façade, originally sporting some Egyptian style embellishments, was altered in 1831 to its current design.

We also learned that the fashion to create 360 degree panoramas of towns and cities was first instigated in Edinburgh from Calton Hill by an Irish artist, Robert Barker. One of these shows our part of Edinburgh including Picardy Place and the old village of Broughton, increasingly being engulfed by the northern New



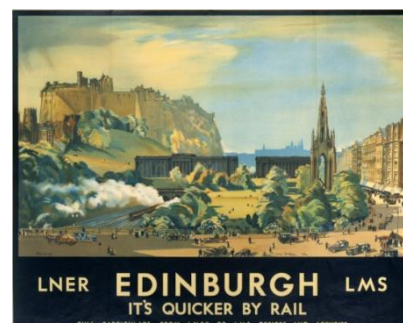
Wikipedia Public Domain

Town development. In the middle of the 19th century, which notably featured the construction of the Scott Monument (opened in 1846), there are images of a travelling menagerie behind the Royal Institution and a nursery and market garden east of the Mound. There were also a number of speculative designs for further developments in this area, including domed buildings at the top of the

Mound and an early design for the National Gallery, none of which saw the light of day.

Following the advent of photography, images from the likes of Hill and Adamson, James Ross and Robert Thomson show further developments in this area including Waverley Bridge and the new railway cutting through the gardens. In 1850 the foundation stone of the National Gallery was laid by Prince Albert, although yet again some residents didn't want new buildings spoiling their views of the Mound and the Old Town. The neo-Gothic style of the Scott Monument itself didn't receive universal praise, in comparison to the classical lines of the new gallery, especially from critics such as Charles Dickens, whose wife was from Edinburgh. However, New College, originally built for the Free Church of Scotland, and which dominates the top of the Mound, is in a Tudor Gothic style.

Although most of the major buildings in the Mound and Princes Street Gardens area had been completed by the 1850s, developments continued above the gardens around the octagonal Ramsay House, which underwent improvements in 1856 by Robert Billings. Later paintings of views of the castle, such as one by Sam Bough, show smoke coming from trains passing through the gardens, which perhaps give it a more romantic or mysterious air. The farewell of George V and Queen Mary from Waverley Station in 1911 maybe heralded the fashion for the striking railway posters of the 1920/30s (see right).



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A few other smaller additions occurred in the garden in the 20th century, for example the first moral clock (1903), the Ross Fountain in West Princes Street Gardens (offensive to modern taste, according to some, when it was built in 1872) and the Ross bandstand (1935, replacing the earlier one of 1877). Potentially more devastating was Patrick Abercrombie's plan to have two deck walking levels on Princes Street (only partly undertaken) and to make the west end station the main one, now of course closed.

More recent statues in Princes Street Gardens include a bronze mounted trooper, the 1927 Scottish American war memorial of a kilted soldier with a frieze behind and a modern henge from 1952. More recent still is the bronze statue of Wojtek the bear, who came to Scotland in 1946 after wartime service and ended his life in 1962 at Edinburgh Zoo. Other wartime related memorials are those to the victims of the Holocaust and Ann Frank.

This talk, which provided us with many new and interesting images of this part of Edinburgh between the Old and New Towns, was very well received by a large audience of appreciative members and several visitors who joined the society.

Richard Love

Andy started his presentation by asking us what the pictured chimney-shaped structure in St Mark's park was. He answered this at the end.



In the 18th century the Water of Leith was a favoured subject of landscape artists, a pastoral idyll with the city distant, much in keeping with the romantic trend of the era. These depictions also reflected its industrial nature, albeit in a romantic manner. The fall of the watercourse at 1,250 feet in just 25 miles and its termination at a port meant it was important for industry. There were a very large number of mills along its length. Water provided motive power, later replaced by steam, but also was a vital source for many industrial processes or for their cooling. And it was a convenient place to dump waste. As steam power became more important, maintenance on the lades reduced and they began to silt up, and more sewage collected. Also new industrial and chemical processes introduced all sorts of new waste products into the river. In the early 19th century, the flow was highly seasonal. There were no compensation reservoirs to regulate its flow, so in the winter and

when it rained it was deeper, frequently a raging torrent, in the summer it could all but dry up to nothing. Progressively the principal springs supplying the river began to be adopted for drinking water supply. Compensation reservoirs were built at this time, these were less to store drinking water, and more to help control and maintain its flow for industry. Other developments meant that the natural waterflow was interrupted and it became controlled

In 1817, with the First New Town barely complete, the waste from this and the Old Town mostly flowed into the East Foul Burn system and off to the Forth at Fillyside. However the Second New Town meant Edinburgh was expanding into the catchment of the Water of Leith. It was not suited to being a sewer - as its flow was highly seasonal and much of that diverted through the mill lades. The raw sewage of 100,000 people was by now discharging directly into it.

The only form of sewage "treatment" was the "Irrigated Meadows", a system of fertilisation and pasture production, any cleansing of the water was a side effect, it largely removed the heavier solids which would settle out. These meadows grew multiple crops of fodder each year which fed the city's horses and dairy cows. This was not a very effective water treatment system although it reduced visible pollution and smell somewhat, but the vast majority of all the new discharges from the growing city bypassed it entirely.

It was not until the second cholera epidemic of 1848-1849 that it was finally proved and widely understood that water polluted by sewage had a pivotal role in spreading disease - something the Irrigated Meadows could do nothing about. Fortunately, Edinburgh had never used the Water of Leith as a drinking water supply. The 'miasma' theory of disease had held that the smell was as bad as the microbes. It was now clear that something had to be done. There were of course interminable bureaucratic conflicts; Leith and Edinburgh were separate burghs and there was no single authority or jurisdiction along the river. In 1853 the Edinburgh Police Commission ("Police" back then were mainly concerned in handling the city lighting, cleansing, sanitation, weights and measures, some taxation etc. Law enforcement was something they did on the side.) engaged David & Thomas Stevenson - to look at the state of the lower river. (These are of course Robert Louis Stevenson's uncle and father.)

Their chemist, Macadam, found beyond where the City's sewers began to enter it from the irrigated meadows, "*the quality deteriorated drastically*". He didn't mince his words. The river was receiving raw sewage which collected in "*hot-beds of decomposing filth from which abundantly offensive gases were diffused*". The report recommended clearing the riverbed of unnecessary obstructions where sewage accumulated (weirs and lades), and building an "*interceptor sewer*",

that is one that intercepted all the existing sewer outflows discharging into the river, collected their output, and made sure they never found their way into the river. Whereas the first part was done the second was not. This really just meant that the sewage got to Leith more easily. As the river slowed in the basin of the Port of Leith it settled out of the water.

ANNO VICESIMO SEPTIMO & VICESIMO OCTAVO

VICTORIÆ REGINÆ.

Cap. cliii.

An Act for the Purification of the Water of *Leith*,
by Interception and Conveyance into the Sea of
the Sewage falling into the same, and otherwise;
and for other Purposes. [30th June 1864.]

Leith began to lobby Edinburgh for a joint solution to the problem and eventually, after much wrangling, an interceptor sewer was started in 1864, completed 3 years later. It follows the course of the Water of Leith, from the "Irrigated Meadow" at Roseburn park to the Black Rocks off Leith. It runs along the riverbanks in places and along the riverbed itself in others.

This sewer explains that mysterious "chimney stack" by the weir in St. Mark's Park - many might imagine it's from some long-gone mill, but it's a vent or stink pipe. It allows built-up gases to vent into atmosphere and in a storm-surge gives compressed air somewhere to safely exit. It is sited here at a low point where the sewer dips beneath the river. This went a good way to solving the sewage problem, but other industrial pollution increased which didn't smell so bad and was known to not be immediately harmful to health, so it was not then considered an issue. Ultimately however it was too small, with no capacity for future growth. Clearly action was needed - but the problem was upstream of Edinburgh and this involved 8 different authorities, once again the bureaucracy proved difficult.

Eventually a larger interceptor sewer was built in 1889, much longer than the 1864 sewer, 22.5 miles, designed by the Burgh Engineers of Edinburgh and Leith, with the Stevenson brothers again acting as consultant engineers. It had 50 years "built in" capacity for growth, a novel concept at the time, unlike the 1864 sewer. It has a vent chimney stack, inaccessible for years on industrial brownfield wasteland behind Leith St. Mary's Primary School, now an unusual feature outside some new and expensive townhouses – one wonders if the owners actually know what this does (it's still in active use).



Images courtesy Andy Arthur

Its success in cleaning up the watercourse may be judged by the fact that within 6 years the Town Council had to pass bylaws protecting the fish now living in it.

Andy concluded by saying that the Victorian Interceptor sewers are still a core part of the city's modern sewage network, but they have left a legacy of around 60 "combined sewer outflows" which, when inundated by storm rains, allow raw sewage to overflow into the river.

Jim Eunson