

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh
<i>Location</i>	Lothian Region, Scotland
<i>State Party</i>	United Kingdom
<i>Date</i>	11 October 1994

**Justification by State Party**

Edinburgh is a great city. Its architecture and its historical importance set it apart from most other cities of the world. This uniqueness is a consequence of its historic existence as a significant European capital from the Renaissance period, but there are other reasons. From an early date the city saw itself as great, and whenever this status seemed threatened Edinburgh responded in grand manner. Although in 1603 Edinburgh lost its royal presence, the decades immediately following witnessed a consolidation of the national architectural tradition. In 1707 Scotland lost its parliament; after a consequential period of decline and political instability, the city began a spectacular programme of civic expansion, driven by a desire for national prestige, and yet international in character. What should have been set-backs were turned, paradoxically, to bring out a staggeringly brilliant and exciting response. And then, much later, when in the 1860s parts of the Old Town had degenerated into slums, the civic response was a pioneering one for its time and, again, prestigious architecture of national stature was to result from this action.

The particular nature of Edinburgh's duality is unusual: on the one hand, on a high ridge is the ancient Old Town, while in contrast, and set apart on a fresh site, is the 18th century New Town. The former is on a spectacular site, the skyline punched through by the castle, the soaring neo-Gothic spire of Highland Tolbooth St John's and the robust, nationally symbolic, Imperial crown spire of St Giles, a feast of ancient architecture looking down on the New Town, which in contrast is a calm sea of ordered classicism, the whole framed and articulated by neo-classical buildings of world-class distinction.

The Old Town is of substantial interest in its own right. It contains two planned 12th century burghs; there are two early royal palaces (one within the castle), a medieval abbey, and a wealth of early buildings. The national tradition of building tall reached its climax in Edinburgh with tenements that must have been the world's tallest buildings of their age, some of them still to be seen. The New Town is important for two main reasons: for its uncommonly high concentration of world-class neo-classical buildings and for the amazing size of the area covered with classical ashlar-faced architecture, all consistent to a degree without parallel - and, perhaps crucially, all now surviving virtually intact. Edinburgh exerted great influence on the development of urban architecture through the development of the New Town.

Edinburgh has a long tradition of classicism, and also of maintaining close cultural and political links with mainland Europe. It represents the essence of the cultural traditions of Scotland as a European city, and is a European capital city itself. It bears testimony to the growth of Scottish civilization, to its church, to its law and its legal system.

**Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh constitute a *group of buildings*.

## History and Description

### *History*

Edinburgh's origins as a settlement extend back into prehistory, when its castle rock was fortified, and it may have served as a royal palace in the early historic period. The settlement that grew up was made a royal burgh by King David I (who also founded the nearby Abbey of Holyrood) in around 1125. The separate burgh of Canongate, founded c 1140, has long been incorporated within Edinburgh. It was just one of the newly chartered towns of the 12th century which set the country's political and economic development on a new plane, but by the late 15th century it was the capital of Scotland. It had become a great architectural symbol of nationhood for Scotland.

The Old Town grew along the wide main street stretching from the castle on its rock to the medieval abbey and royal palace of Holyrood. The town was walled from the 15th century onwards. It suffered badly during the English invasion of 1544, and most of the earlier buildings date from the rebuilding after this event. However, the later 16th century saw a steady increase in trade; by the early 17th century much of the wealth of the nation had come into the hands of the Edinburgh merchant elite, which resulted in considerable new building. The nobility also built town houses, which also contributed to the high quality of the domestic architecture of this period. From as early as the 16th century building control was enforced through the Dean of Guild: for example, as a precaution against fire all roofs had to be of tile or slate from 1621, and in 1674 this was extended to building facades, which had henceforth to be in stone.

At the end of the 19th century there had been a withdrawal from the Old Town as a result of the growth of the New Town. In 1892 Sir Patrick Geddes proposed that it should be regenerated by attracting back to it the university, the bourgeoisie, and the intelligentsia, by converting the High Street into "a collegiate street and city comparable in its way with the magnificent High Street of Oxford and its noble surroundings." His plan involved the reuse of older buildings where they still had utility, and many buildings were restored under his direction in the Lawnmarket. Although Geddes left Edinburgh before his vision could be fully realized, but his buildings remain. More restoration work was carried out as part of Sir Patrick Abercrombie's 1949 plan, though Geddes's concept of the High Street being reoccupied for residential purposes was abandoned.

The New Town developed as a suburban residential area for the nobility and for the merchant classes. The city, the charitable trusts, and the aristocratic landowners who promoted it insisted upon the finest materials being used, since they saw it as an enduring monument. That is why ashlar facing is used almost exclusively, instead of stucco. The New Town consists, in fact, of seven successive major development, each different from but closely related to its predecessors, a continuous programme of construction from 1767 to about 1890.

The First New Town originated in the proposals of Lord Provost Drummond, published in 1752 and embodied in an Act of Parliament the following year, which envisaged the development of the City's lands to the north of the Old Town, linked by an urban viaduct, the North Bridge. The rectangular layout was the work of James Craig, redrawn after consultation with John Adam. The second New Town followed in 1801-2, planned by Robert Reid, the King's Architect, and William Sibbald, and located to the north of the first. It breaks away from the strictly rectangular plan with some curved terraces. The Third New Town, the work of Robert Brown from 1813 onwards, essentially continues the approach of its predecessors.

This pattern changed with the Fourth New Town, planned by William Henry Playfair. Instead of imposing a grid-iron upon the landscape, the buildings exploit the contours, view, and trees in a romantic manner. The Fifth New Town, built from 1822 on the lands of the Earl of Moray to designs by J Gillespie Graham, cleverly links the first three New Towns as a unified scheme. It was intended to be a self-contained enclave for aristocrats and professional gentry. The Sixth New Town followed in the 1850s on Lord Provost Learmonth's Dean Estate, to the north of the Water of Leith, linked since 1831-32 with Queensferry on the other side of the estuary by a bridge designed by Thomas Telford. The final New Town brought the hitherto detached Raeburn estate together with the rest.

Although the original idea was that the New Town should be a purely residential suburb, it rapidly proved to be attractive to business and government, and it rapidly drew this element of the city away from the Old Town. It was to become the location for some of the finest public and commercial monuments of the neo-classical revival in Europe. Monuments symbolic of Scotland's past were grouped together on Calton Hill, in the aspiration to build the "Athens of the North."

### *Description*

The **Old Town** is dominated by *Edinburgh Castle*, a medieval military fortress extended in Renaissance times with a palace square and by army barracks in the mid 18th century. Of especial interest are the 12th century St Margaret's Chapel and the Great Hall of 1500. At the other end of the "Royal Mile" are *Holyrood Abbey and the Palace of Holyroodhouse*; once one of the wealthiest abbeys in Scotland, it was adapted by the Scottish Kings from the late 15th century. The Palace is largely as rebuilt in the 1670s, with some earlier elements surviving. The ruins of the nave of Holyrood Abbey, begun in 1128, abut the Palace on the north.

The *Parliament House and High Court of Justiciary* comprises the two-storey L-plan Parliament House, a key building of the Scottish Renaissance by Sir James Murray of Kilbaberton in 1632-39 and neo-classical additions and extensions by Robert Reid and others in the early 19th century. The *City Chambers* (town hall) on High Street are the work of John and Robert Adam (1753); the plan is that of a private square protected from the street by a single-storey rusticated screen. The *Canongate Tolbooth* of c 1590 is identified by its powerful turreted steeple. Other notable public buildings are *George Heriot's School* (1628-60), *Surgeons' Hall* (1829-32, Playfair), and the *Old College of the University* (1815-27, Robert Adam, completed by Playfair).

Among the churches in the Old Town, the *Tolbooth St John's Church* (1839-44, James Gillespie Graham with A N W Pugin) is a striking landmark with its 74 m high steeple. The *High Kirk of St Giles* in the High Street is of medieval origin, but the present external appearance dates essentially from the early 19th century. The early 17th century *Tron Kirk*, now used for exhibitions, has an early 19th century steeple. The Presbyterian *Canongate Church*, with its churchyard, dates from 1688 and has an interesting aisled cruciform plan. The Old Town also boasts a striking range of 19th century commercial buildings and domestic buildings from the 16th century onwards.

The **New Town** is most noteworthy for its planned ensembles rather than individual buildings. However, there is a number of notable public buildings, including the *Register House* (1774, Robert Adam), the *Royal Scottish Academy* (1822-36, W H Playfair), the *Assembly Rooms* (1787, John Henderson), the *Royal High School* (1829, Thomas Hamilton), and the monuments on Calton Hill.

### **Management and Protection**

#### *Legal status*

There is a multiplicity of owners in Edinburgh, including substantial holdings by the Crown.

The nominated area contains several outstanding Conservation Areas, where protection is exercised by the District Council under the supervision of the Scottish Office. Within these there is a large proportion of statutorily protected ("Listed") buildings of architectural and historic significance. Any intervention requires authorization by the planning authority (the District Council), with powers reserved to the Secretary of State, operating through Historic Scotland, the Government agency responsible for built heritage issues in Scotland.

#### *Management*

The responsible agencies are Historic Scotland, Lothian Regional Council, the City of Edinburgh District Council, Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee, Edinburgh Old Town Renewal Trust, and Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Limited.

Strategic and local planning are the responsibility of the Regional and District Council respectively. In accordance with United Kingdom planning legislation, a series of plans has been prepared and is in force covering the protection and conservation of the Old and New Towns; there is a regular review and updating procedure for these plans.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

The rehabilitation of the Old Town began after World War II, with Abercrombie's plan of 1949; its efficacy may be judged from the fact that the population has doubled since 1969. The need for conservation and restoration in the New Town was not recognized until the late 1960s. A survey carried out by the Edinburgh Architectural Association in 1970 was followed by an international conference, the outcome of which was the establishment of the Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee, which utilized Government and City aid to initiate a major programme of repair and rehabilitation.

### *Authenticity*

The level of authenticity in Edinburgh is high. It retains its historic role as the administrative and cultural capital of Scotland and has preserved both its layout and its stock of high-quality buildings to a remarkable degree.

## **Evaluation**

### *Action by ICOMOS*

ICOMOS consulted its International Committee on Historic Towns and Villages. An ICOMOS expert mission visited Edinburgh in February 1995.

### *Qualities*

Edinburgh's unique coupling of medieval Old Town and classical New Town, each of enormous distinction in its own right, has created a town of extraordinary richness and diversity, without parallel in anywhere in the world. Its aesthetic qualities are high, it had a profound influence on town planning in Europe and beyond in the 18th and 19th centuries, and it is generally recognized to be a major centre of thought and learning. Moreover, Edinburgh retains most of its significant buildings and spaces in better condition than most other historic cities of comparable value.

### *Comparative analysis*

The uniqueness of Edinburgh is expressed in the preceding paragraph. Whilst comparisons might be valid, for example, between the New Town and Bath, the claims of Edinburgh for World Heritage status are, quite properly, based on the integration of 18th and 19th century new planned quarters with the historic Old Town.

### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

During the ICOMOS expert mission in February 1995 there were lengthy discussions on the boundaries of the proposed World Heritage site. Historic Scotland, the Government agency responsible for preparation of the nomination dossier, was severe in its policy of excluding areas where doubt might be cast upon their appropriateness for World Heritage status. These include the St James Centre of the 1970s, Arthur's Seat, the East End new town blocks, the core of Stockbridge, George Square, and several minor locations. Whilst ICOMOS understands and respects the decisions taken by Historic Scotland, it would urge a more lenient approach to some of the excluded areas, in order to enhance the thematic unity of the nominated zone. It is hoped that these proposals will be considered by the State Party, though ICOMOS does not consider this to be a case for referral.

## **Recommendation**

ICOMOS recommends that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

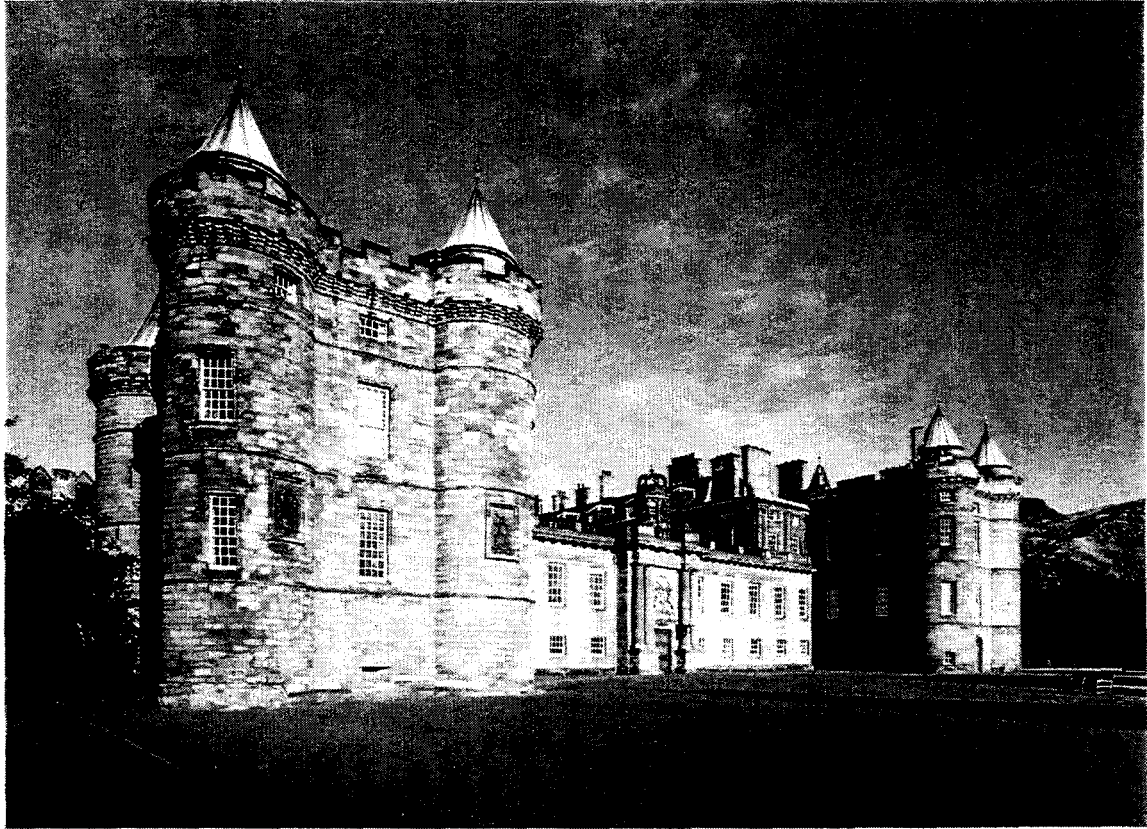
The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh represent a remarkable blend of the urban phenomena of organic medieval growth and 18th and 19th century town planning. The successive planned expansions of the New Town and the high quality of the architecture set standards for Scotland and beyond.

ICOMOS, September 1995

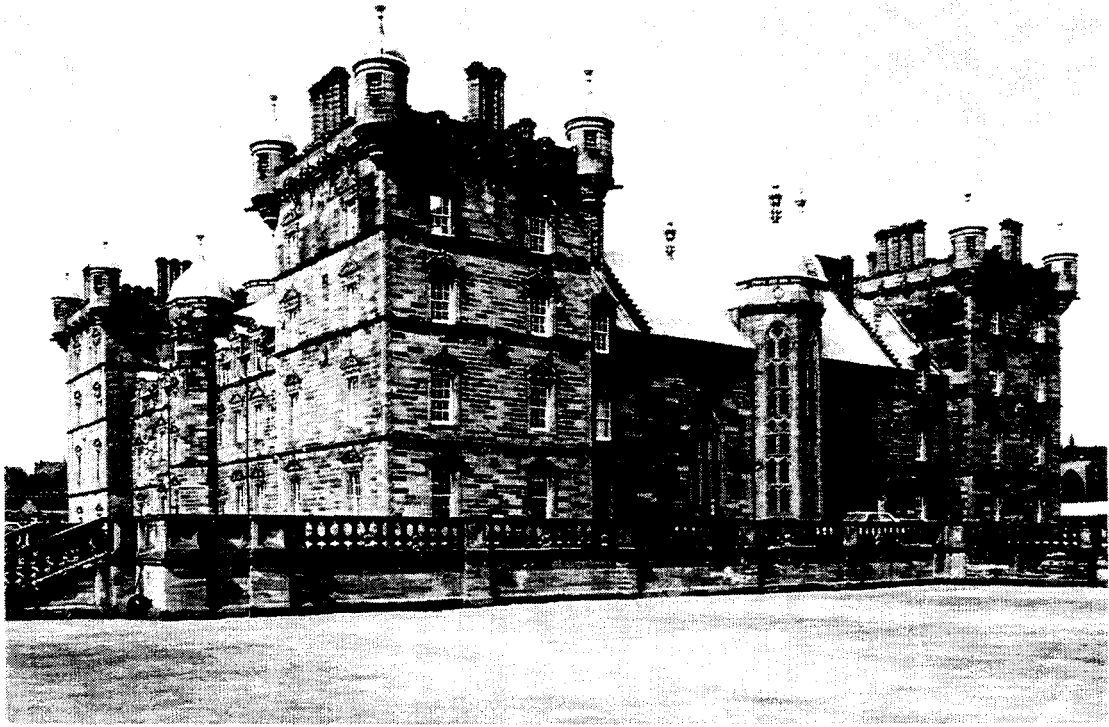


Edimbourg : vue aérienne de la "vieille ville" (partie inférieure de la photographie) et de la "nouvelle ville" (partie supérieure)

Edinburgh : Aerial view of the Old Town (bottom of the photograph) and New Town (top)



Edimbourg : palais d'Holyroodhouse (1672) /  
Edinburgh : The Palace of Holyroodhouse (1672)



Edimbourg : la George Heriot's School (1628-60) /  
Edinburgh : George Heriot's School (1628-60)



Edimbourg : partie nord de Charlotte Square (première "nouvelle ville",  
à partir des années 1770) /

Edinburgh : The north side of Charlotte Square (First New Town:  
from 1770s onwards)





Edimbourg : Abercromby Place (deuxième "nouvelle ville" :  
1801 /

Edinburgh : Abercromby Place (Second New Town: 1801)