

Edinburgh World Heritage Trust is a charitable company limited by guarantee. Registered in Scotland No. 195077. Scottish Charity No. SC037183

Find out more at [www.ewht.org.uk](http://www.ewht.org.uk)

The New Town has grand terraces and imposing monuments, but also more ordinary homes and the traces of everyday life in the 1800s. Today this historic area has not only a wealth of historic buildings, but also galleries, cafes, restaurants and independent shops that are well worth a visit.

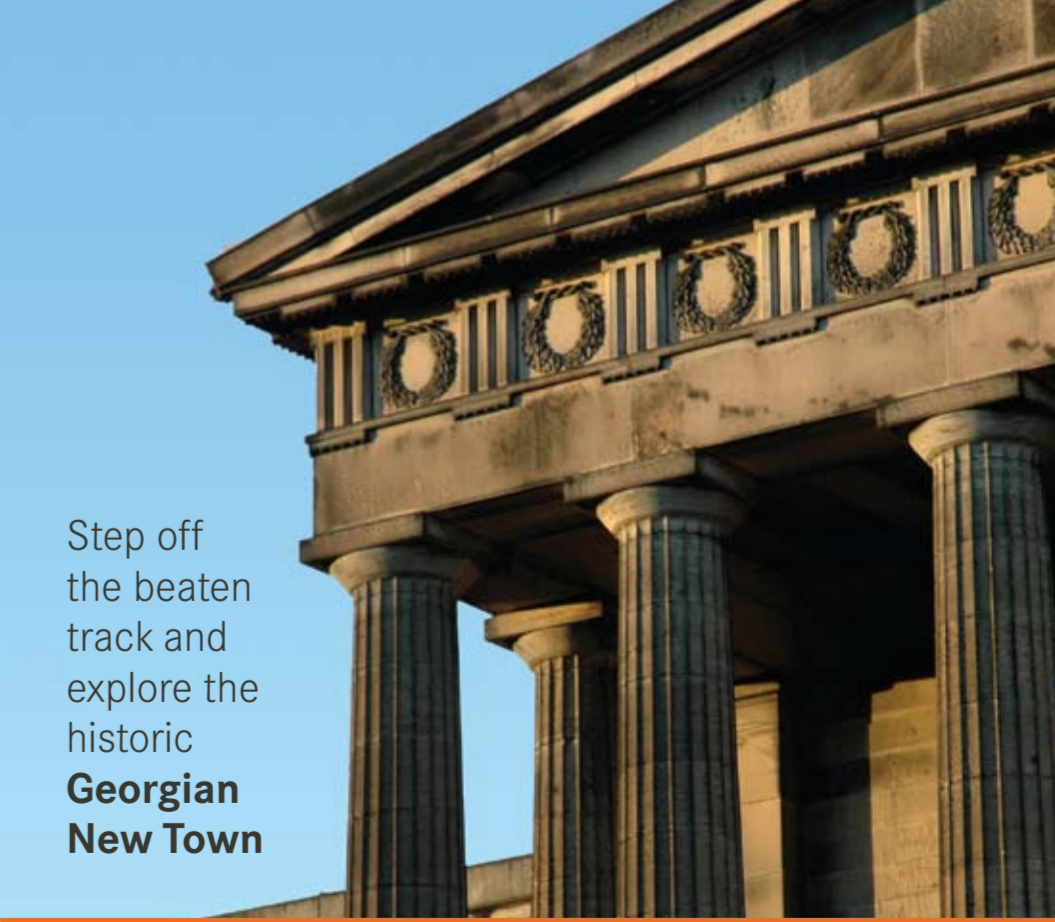
Simply walking its streets gives a real sense of the past, and how life was lived 200 years ago. This was a time when the authors Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen were at the height of their fame. Britain was emerging victorious from the long Napoleonic Wars with France, and George IV finally became king after a long regency.

The New Town has grand terraces and imposing monuments, but also more ordinary homes and the traces of everyday life in the 1800s. Today this historic area has not only a wealth of historic buildings, but also galleries, cafes, restaurants and independent shops that are well worth a visit.

Edinburgh's New Town is the largest and best preserved example of Georgian town planning anywhere in the UK.

Use this trail to help you explore this fascinating area of Edinburgh's World Heritage Site.

# ATHENS OF THE NORTH



Step off the beaten track and explore the historic **Georgian New Town**



In 1822 the Edinburgh artist Hugh Williams held an exhibition of his watercolours of Athens displayed alongside views of Edinburgh, inviting visitors to see the likeness in the setting of the two cities. The idea caught the popular imagination and soon many were using the phrase 'Modern Athens', to describe the city.

Edinburgh had started to build its New Town in the 1760s but it had few grand public buildings, and as the city grew so did calls for suitable monuments. At first the architecture of ancient Rome had been the inspiration, but by 1800 the ruins of ancient Athens were seen as the model to follow. In fact ancient Greek styles were influencing everything from hair-dressing to tea sets.

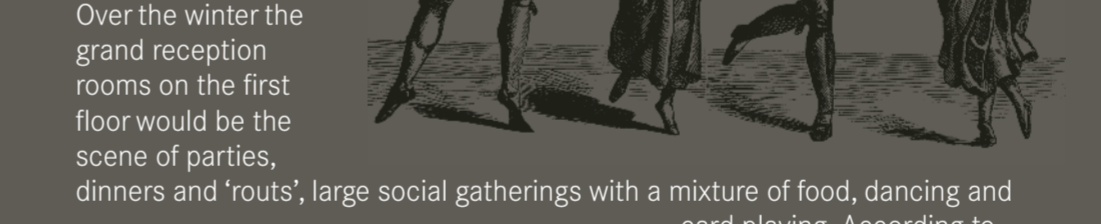
Edinburgh re-branded itself 'Athens of the North' to express its growing importance and sense of achievement.

## WHY ATHENS OF THE NORTH?

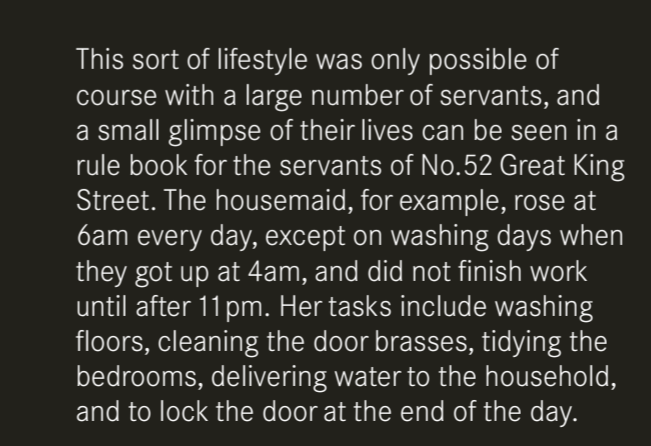
Edinburgh re-branded itself 'Athens of the North' to express its growing importance and sense of achievement.

## LIVING IN THE NEW TOWN

New Town houses were designed for fashionable entertaining at home. Over the winter the grand reception rooms on the first floor would be the scene of parties, dinners and 'roust', large social gatherings with a mixture of food, dancing and card playing. According to her daughter, Lady Grant of Rothiemurchus's social calendar in 1817 involved "Five or Six dinners, two small evening parties, and one large evening one, a regular roust" which "paid my mother's debts in the visiting line each Winter."



This sort of lifestyle was only possible of course with a large number of servants, and a small glimpse of their lives can be seen in a rule book for the servants of No.52 Great King Street. The housemaid, for example, rose at 6am every day, except on washing days when they got up at 4am, and did not finish work until after 11pm. Her tasks include washing floors, cleaning the door brasses, tidying the bedrooms, delivering water to the household, and to lock the door at the end of the day.



the plainest design with a circular 'ushion' topped by a square 'abacus';

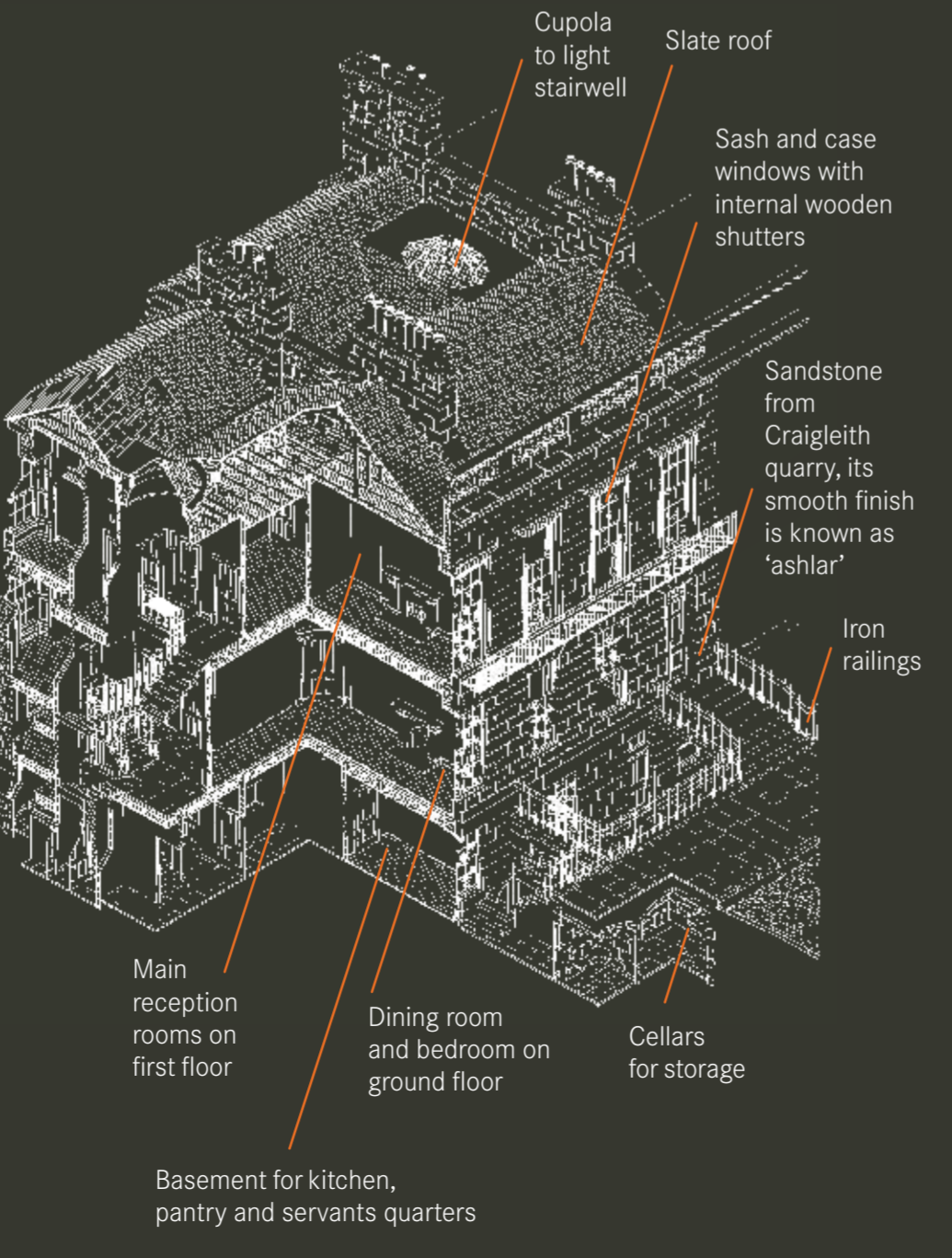


the most decorative with flowers and leaves underneath scrolls.

## PILLARS, PORTICOS AND PILASTERS

The architecture of Edinburgh's New Town draws inspiration from ancient Greece and Rome. Look out for these features as you walk around.

## THE NEW TOWN HOUSE



The first completed project was at 23 Fettes Row, and was officially unveiled by the Queen Mother in 1975. Today the brown plaques which mark the buildings seen throughout the New Town.

By the 1960s parts of the New Town were in very bad condition, and there was a clear risk that many historic buildings could be demolished. Ironically it was the modernist architect Sir Robert Matthew who led efforts to save them, using his influence as a government adviser to raise the issue. An army of architects, surveyors and students organised by the Edinburgh Architectural Association took to the streets to assess the scale of the repairs needed. The results of their hard work were then discussed at a major conference held at the Assembly Rooms in 1970, and the outcome was that the government and the city council decided to act. The Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee was formed, to offer grants to help home owners with the cost of repairs.

## SAVING THE NEW TOWN

We can still enjoy the New Town today because of the efforts of an army of volunteers.

## BUILDING THE ATHENS OF THE NORTH

The New Town was designed and built by Scotsmen, and for some it made their fortune.

The New Town gave the opportunity for Scottish architects to make their mark. James Gillespie Graham, for example, came from a very humble background, but a commission from the earl of Moray to design an extension to the New Town gave him a big opportunity to make his name. Perhaps the architect most associated with the New Town, though, is William Playfair, who designed the Royal Scottish Academy, the National Gallery, and assisted in the National Monument.



The specialist craftsmen who provided the all-important finishing touches also did well from the New Town building boom. The furniture maker William Trotter, the house painter David Ramsay Hay and carpet manufacturer Richard Whytock all made their fortune from providing fashionable interior decoration.



The stone masons who actually built the New Town were relatively well paid, however the work had serious effects on their health. Stone dust meant that many to suffered lung problems by the time they were 45. Writing in 1823 Professor W.P.Allison Edinburgh University said: "...there is hardly an instance of a mason regularly employed in hewing stones in Edinburgh living free from symptoms to the age of fifty."

① The Dugald Stewart Monument

(William Playfair, 1831) Professor Dugald Stewart was one of the period's greatest philosophers, who taught moral philosophy and political economy at the University of Edinburgh.

**Look out for...** the plumed urn on top of the monument.

② The National Monument



(Charles Cockerell and William Playfair, 1822-29) This monument to Scots who died in the Napoleonic Wars was to be an exact copy of the Parthenon in Athens, but after the funds ran out only twelve columns were built.

**Look out for...** the lintels on top of the columns are the largest pieces of stone ever quarried in Scotland.

⑪ The National Gallery of Modern Art

(William Burn, 1825-28) Built originally as John Watson's Hospital, an orphanage for the 'maintenance and education of destitute children'.

**Look out for...** impressive Greek Doric portico.

⑫ The Dean Gallery

(Thomas Hamilton, 1830-33) This building too was originally an orphanage, the Orphan Hospital of Edinburgh which moved here from the Old Town.



**Look out for...** the clock comes the Netherbow Port, once the main entrance to the city demolished in 1764.

⑬ Dean Cemetery

A tranquil green space first opened in 1846, with many classically inspired monuments and tombs including the grave of William Playfair.

**Look out for...** the James Buchanan Monument, like those on Calton Hill inspired by the Monument of Lysicrates in Athens.

③ The Burns Monument

(Thomas Hamilton, 1831-35) Designed to commemorate the poet Robert Burns, this was modelled on the Monument to Lysicrates built around 334BC in Athens.



**Look out for...** the tripod on top of the monument was the trophy awarded to the winner of an annual chorus competition in ancient Athens.

④ The Royal High School



(Thomas Hamilton, 1825-29) Inspired by the Temple of Hepaestus overlooking Athens, the High School is perhaps the single building that most justifies the city's title of Athens of the North.

**Look out for...** the impressive Doric portico.

⑤ Waterloo Place and Regent Bridge



(Archibald Elliot, 1815-19) Designed to give a new and grand entrance to the city, the advice of lighthouse engineer Robert Stevenson was also needed as the road actually has to span a wide valley.

**Look out for...** the inscriptions over the Corinthian Regent Bridge and the massive Ionic porticos flanking the Princes St view to Calton Hill.

⑥ St Andrew Square

The square was one of the first parts of the New Town to be completed in the 1770s, and by the 1820s its character had started to change with shops and a hotel moving in.

**Look out for...** in the entrance of No.36 St Andrew Square a plaque on the floor marks the spot from where the New Town was first planned.

⑦ The Royal Scottish Academy and the National Gallery

The Royal Scottish Academy (William Playfair, 1822 - 26) and the National Gallery (William Playfair, 1854) These two classical temples to the arts are built on earth dug out for the foundations of the New Town.

To provide a firm foundation 1800 piles were driven into the ground joined by wooden bars.

**Look out for...** the sphinxes and statue of Queen Victoria on the roof of the Royal Scottish Academy.



⑧ No.39 North Castle Street

Home for many years to the famous author Sir Walter Scott.

**Look out for...** the library and dining table from this house can now be seen in the Writers' Museum in Lady Stair's Close off the Royal Mile.

⑨ Charlotte Square



Regarded as a masterpiece of urban architecture, Robert Adam's design set the standard for much of the rest of the New Town. It disguises a terrace of town houses behind a grand 'palace-front'.

**Look out for...** the trumpet shapes in the railings, used to snuff out the torches of 'link-boys' who would light your way home in the days before street lamps.



⑩ William Street



Home today to a variety of small independent shops, these streets have a great period atmosphere with many original Georgian shopfronts. In fact they are regularly used as a location for period films.

**Look out for...** the iron balconies under shop windows to allow customers to get a closer look at the goods on display.

⑪ Broughton Street

The village of Broughton was swallowed up by the building of the New Town from 1808. Today this street is home to an interesting variety of cafes, bars, delis and independent shops.



**Look out for...** nearby is the Broughton Place Church, an impressive classically designed building dating to 1836 and recently converted into an auction rooms.

⑮ ⑯ Moray Place & Ainslie Place

(James Gillespie Graham, 1822) Possibly the grandest addresses in the New Town, these circuses were built on land owned by the earl of Moray.

**Look out for...** No.28 was built for the earl of Moray himself, perhaps the grandest address of all?



⑰ Kay's Bar

Tucked away in Jamaica Street and easily missed, this small and cosy building was once a coach house and later became the office of John Kay & Son wine and spirit merchant.

**Look out for...** wine casks are still on display inside.

⑱ St Stephen's Street

A street of real Georgian character with many original shopfronts, and home to a variety of independent shops and bars.

**Look out for...** the arched entrance to the old Stockbridge Market with its Doric columns.

⑲ St Stephen's Church

(William Playfair, 1827-8) The view down the hill to St Stephen's, with the coastline of Fife in the background, is one of the most photographed in the New Town. Up close you can appreciate the sheer scale of the building, in particular the huge flight of steps and scrolls, or volutes, that leads to the main entrance.

**Look out for...** the clock with the longest pendulum in Europe.



⑳ Broughton St. Mary's Church

(Thomas Brown, 1822-24) When opened in 1824 this became the parish church for many of those living in the New Town, such as the lighthouse engineer Robert Stevenson.

**Look out for...** the pulpit inside the church is a rare original example, based on the ancient Monument of Lysicrates in Athens.



⑭ St Bernard's Well

Built to enable fashionable society to take the local spring waters. Although taking the waters was considered good for the health, at least one commentator described the taste as 'like the washings of a foul gun barrel'.

**Look out for...** the statue of Hygeia, goddess of health and hygiene.



Explore more of the New Town with our mobile tour