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# HISTORICAL NOTES ON CHESSELS COURT

R. IAN McCALLUM

*It is not only the best preserved but also the finest example of the 'mansion flats' that were once so common in the Old Town.*

RCAMS, *Inventory of Edinburgh*, 1951<sup>1</sup>

CHESSELS COURT was originally the name of a large tenement block built by Archibald Chessels, set back behind the south side of the street at the head of the Canongate. As all three tenements now surrounding the central grassed area have been referred to as Chessels Court since the refurbishment of the 1960s, the original Chessels tenement lying on the south side on an east-west axis is here designated Chessels Building (figs 1–3). It was erected in three parts, as a central block with east and west wings added later. As discussed below, the central tenement was probably built in the early 1740s; there is no firm evidence as to when the wings were added but it has been suggested on stylistic grounds that the west may have been the earlier, with the east wing, which straddles the remains of an old close, perhaps somewhat later.<sup>2</sup> To the south, looking over towards the Pleasance, are the remains of what was originally an extensive garden running down to Holyrood Road, partly occupied at present by buildings of Moray House College of Education.

Chessels Building is reached on the north side from the Canongate through a spacious modern pend, or through the remains of Pirrie's and Gullan's Closes; and from St Mary's Street on the west side through Boyd's Entry. On the north, where there is now a pleasant square with grass and trees, there were buildings until 1926. On the west side of the open court are a couple of older buildings (referred to here as the 'West Tenement') which have been almost entirely modernised inside;

on the north and east sides are modern tenements replacing older ones demolished or redeveloped by the 1960s.

## ARCHIBALD CHESSELS, WRIGHT

There is little direct information about Archibald Chessels. The Chessels family originated in the Parish of Cambusnethan, Lanarkshire. In the records of the Parish of Holyroodhouse or Canongate the marriage of 'Archibald Chessels, sone to William Chessells, in the Parish of Camnethan, and Janet Stewart, daughter to the deceased Robert Stewart in Bristo', is recorded on 1 January 1717.<sup>3</sup> He had a seat in the Tron Kirk in 1745.<sup>4</sup> Chessels appears to have lived somewhere near his new building at the Canongate Head, though it is not known exactly where.<sup>5</sup> 'Arch Chessalls, Wright' is listed in local tax records under Canongate & Leith Wynd 'without the Port' in 1752.<sup>6</sup>

Some information on Chessels' activities can be gleaned indirectly from accounts and correspondence about various projects undertaken by the architect and building contractor William Adam (1689–1748), and these also show links with the plasterer Thomas Clayton and the painter James Norie who are thought to have been responsible for the decoration of rooms in Chessels Building. Chessels was employed in alterations to Lawers House, Perthshire, for which Adam was commissioned by Colonel James Campbell in 1724. A very detailed and lengthy list of work including construction of doors, flooring, ceilings, stairs, sugar boxes, glazing and even a rat trap amounting to 'sterling £703: 19: 00: 1/2' was receipted by 'Archd: Chessels' in November 1728; the final



Fig. 1. North front of Chessels Building, including east wing, before refurbishment, 1957. (Photograph courtesy of Hurd Rolland Partnership.)



Fig. 2. North front of Chessels Building, including west wing and southern block of West Tenement, before refurbishment. (Hurd Rolland Partnership.)

attestation was by William Adam in 1732.<sup>7</sup> There is also reference in a letter of 1734 to Lord Somerville sending 'his [Adam's] wright Arch Chessels' on an unsuccessful errand to obtain some timber.<sup>8</sup> This is about the time that work was being carried out by Adam on The Drum (formerly Somerville House), which suggests that Chessels was involved in that between 1726 and 1734. In March 1743 Chessels, 'Wright in Canongate ... for these 20 Years past, and upwards', gave evidence to Commissioners in connection with William Adam's case against Lord Braco, testifying that when no specific agreement had been made payment for work done was by measure, though in small pieces of work he charged according to the number of days and of workmen employed.<sup>9</sup>

Chessels' name occurs in the accounts for the building of the Duke of Hamilton's 'dog kennels' by Adam at Chatelherault near Blantyre between 1731

and 1743, along with that of the plasterer Thomas Clayton who worked there from 1742 to 1746.<sup>10</sup> Clayton (1710–1760), who was English, worked in Scotland from about 1740 (when he was at The Drum) for the next twenty years and had a yard at Leith.<sup>11</sup> On 17 December 1744 Chessels was paid £150 for wright work by the Duke of Hamilton's agent Alexander Inglis, and again in July 1745 a further payment of £5, and payments of £70 in November 1747, £60 in May 1748, and £30 in December 1749.<sup>12</sup> In May 1748 Chessels with a mason Robert Mein submitted a detailed account for £156. 19. 6½ in respect of work on building the steeple of Hamilton Parish Church.<sup>13</sup>

Chessels also worked in association with James Norie senior (1684–1757), founder of the family firm that became the most successful decorative painting business in Scotland in the eighteenth century. Norie's first son, James junior, died in 1736 at the age of 25;



Fig. 3. Chessels Building from the south before refurbishment. At the right of the photograph Plainstanes Close runs between high walls and through the base of the building. (*Hurd Rolland Partnership.*)

the second, George, died in 1749 or 1750; and a third son, Robert, who died in 1766, had a son and grandson also called Robert who carried on the business into the nineteenth century; the heyday of the Norie family was in the 1730s and 1740s.<sup>14</sup> On 25 November 1740 a letter from William Adam outlined work by Norie in decorating a drawing room and bedchamber for the Duke of Hamilton; in the following months Adam described Norie painting landscapes, and 'the stuccatorian' Clayton hard at work. Payment was made by the Duke of Hamilton to Norie in October 1744.<sup>15</sup> In November 1744 Chessels and Alexander Inglis wrote to Norie from Hamilton asking for white lead and oil and brushes; Norie was to get ready frames for landscapes over the doors. Norie is addressed as 'Convinner' and was at the time Deacon Convener of the Wrights.<sup>16</sup> The following year on 10 September 1745 Chessels wrote from Hamilton to James's second son 'George Norrie painter at his shop opsite to Blackfriars Wynd' to order 12 stones of 'ground up whyte lead'. Again in April 1746 Chessels ordered 20 pints of best linseed oil from George Norie and sent his compliments to Mrs Norie, the Convener, and brother Robert. A similar order was sent the following month.<sup>17</sup>

Chessels died in 1767, having formed a Trust on behalf of his only daughter Helen in June that year. His will was proved in 1775 and refers to his daughter as spouse of James Scott, merchant in Edinburgh.<sup>18</sup> Among Chessels' trustees were Sir Stuart Threipland, physician; Bailie John Carmichael, merchant; and Henry Guthrie, writer in Edinburgh. Threipland was a distinguished Edinburgh physician who had been chief medical adviser to Prince Charles Edward Stewart during the 1745 rebellion, which necessitated his exile in France until 1747.<sup>19</sup> Chessels' will refers to 'my several houses, Tenements, Gardens and pertinents lying within the Cannongate Head within the royalty of Edinburgh on the south side of the High Street' (the

upper part of the south side of the Canongate as far down as the site of St John's Cross, although outside the Netherbow Port, belonged to the City of Edinburgh rather than the Burgh of Canongate).<sup>20</sup> He also left three shares with the stock of the Company or Copartnery known by the name of the Edinburgh Sugar Company. The sum involved was £3204, which made him a comparatively wealthy man, and further money was still owing from the Duke of Hamilton.

#### THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHESSELS BUILDING

In 1934, using a wide range of manuscript and published sources, Charles Boog Watson listed various properties at the Canongatehead acquired by Chessels.<sup>21</sup> Around 1730 he purchased land which he then used for erection of the West Tenement. Later purchases in the area were from Thomas Milne, mason (1748); David Pirie (1754); David Hume, dyer (1756); and Robert Walker, tanner (1763). In 1756 Chessels acquired land in Watson's Close from James Watson; and in 1764 he acquired a tenement from David Milne, merchant. At other times he also acquired land from

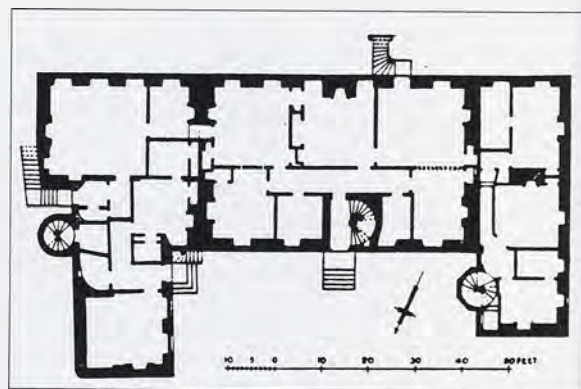


Fig. 4. Plan of ground floor of Chessels Building, 1951 (north at the foot of the drawing). The steps down into Plainstones Close are shown at the angle between the main block and the east wing. (RCAHMS; *Inventory of Edinburgh*, fig. 353.)

Elizabeth Campbell, widow of James Drummond, merchant; and further property from Thomas Milne. According to Boog Watson, Chessels Court was built on the lands of Elizabeth Murray and her husband Alexander Pirie, acquired from their son David Pirie, merchant, and from David Milne, mason; Chessels also obtained land by purchase and excambion from Elizabeth Dundas, relict of Thomas Pirie, writer.

Chessels Building was a speculative venture by Chessels to provide mansion flats for the well-to-do. In fact there are three sections to it, probably built at different times (fig. 4). The original, central, part is a three-storey block, over a basement, and with an attic flat in the gablet. The round-headed windows above the door light the stair that served the upper storeys. The west wing, which is the same height as the central part, extends northwards and has a semi-octagonal stair tower to the courtyard. On the other side there is a single-bay extension of the main block, before the main east wing projects north parallel to the west wing. This has an extra storey and two separate entrances, one serving the ground floor flat from the courtyard side and the other giving access from the east to a common stair for the remaining flats (the present internal stair replaced a later external stair tower which was demolished during the refurbishing, restoring it to its original position). The L-shape of the east wing reflects the need to retain and incorporate part of Plainstones Close, which ran through the basement.

Boog Watson argued from the evidence of the two editions of Edgar's plan dated 1742 and 1765, the latter including the words 'Chesels Build.' for the first time, that it was constructed between these two dates (fig. 5).<sup>22</sup> He also quotes from Town Council Records a reference to 'the new land built lately by Archibald Chesils, wright', dated 20 December 1748.<sup>23</sup> Although the date of construction of Chessels Building has been given as 1748, e.g. in the *Edinburgh* volume published

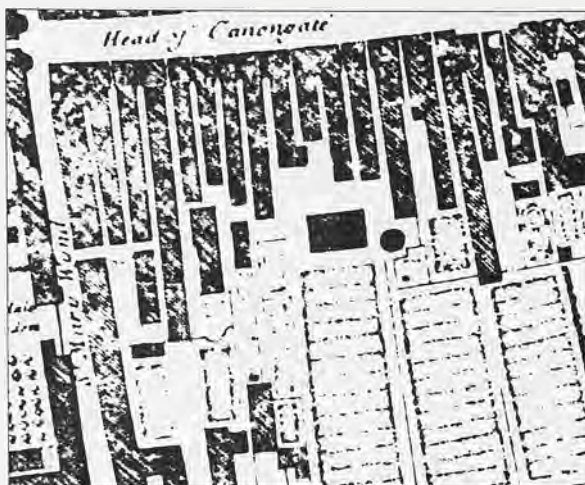
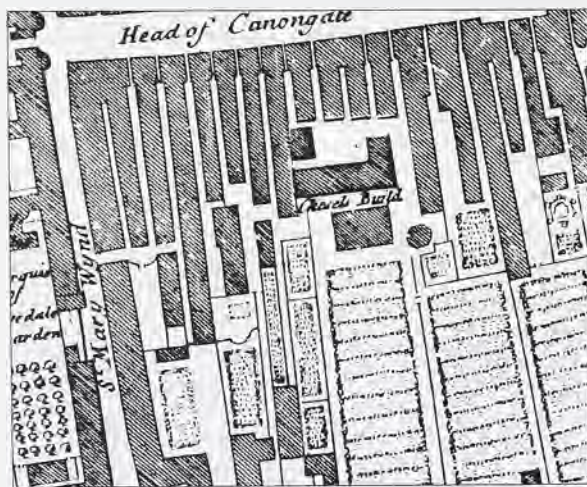


Fig. 5. Canongate Head from Edgar's Plan of Edinburgh. (a) 1742 edition: Chessels Building is shown as a large rectangular block, with garden running down to the South Back of Canongate. The round building to the east has not been identified. (b) 1765 edition: The new block to the north apparently labelled 'Chesels Build.' appears to have been inserted in error. (From *Dissertation* by Alyson Johnstone, 1983; see note 25.)



by the Royal Commission on the Ancient Monuments of Scotland,<sup>24</sup> Alyson Johnstone has argued that the original part of the building is in fact already present in outline on Edgar's 1742 plan.<sup>25</sup>

The 1742 plan (fig. 5a) shows a rectangular block lying between Pirrie's Close on the west and Plainstones Close on the east with no indication of east and west wings. From the position of Boyd's Entry

(from St Mary's Wynd) and the end of Pirrie's Land (now the West Tenement) it must be the centre part of the present Chessels Building. In the 1765 revision of Edgar's plan (fig. 5b) another block has appeared north of Chessels Building, which has been mistaken for it. The title 'Chessels Build.' appears between this and the earlier rectangular block – and might apply either to the latter or the former. The new building as shown in 1765 is L-shaped with an east wing, and with a small separate block that might represent a west wing, but the new addition of 1765 would face south into the 1742 Chessels Building, which itself has the garden area to its south as it has today. Johnstone suggested that the new buildings may have been inserted in error, duplicating the original block already present; there is no evidence that an east-west building corresponding to the added block was ever constructed, and indeed nineteenth-century prints (e.g. fig. 6) confirm that the buildings immediately in front of Chessels Building at that time were clearly much older.<sup>26</sup>

A drawing by Thomas Sandby (1723–1798) in the National Gallery of Scotland, showing Edinburgh from Salisbury Crags, illustrates a building which from its



Fig. 6. North front of Chessels Court, 1819. (By courtesy of Andrew Fraser; from J. & H. S. Storer, *Views in Edinburgh and its Vicinity*, 1820.)

situation, shape and size is almost certainly the central part of Chessels Building (fig. 7). It is without either of the wings, as shown by the position of the chimney stacks, and with the garden running down to what is now Holyrood Road, which is consistent with the building shown in Edgar's plan of 1742. Sandby, who is known to have been in Edinburgh as a military draftsman in 1743, 1745 and 1746, shows too the open ground to the south, with a retaining wall in the garden to the south of the house in the same position as one which is there now.<sup>27</sup> It confirms that the completion of the central part of the building must have been earlier than 1746, and also shows that the wings were later additions. The dates when the west and east wings were added are not known; they do not clearly appear on plans of the city until the 1770s, e.g. on the map of 1778 in Arnot's *History of Edinburgh*.<sup>28</sup>

Further evidence bearing on the dating of the building can be found in contemporary fire insurance records.<sup>29</sup> It appears that Chessels himself suffered a fire on 21 July 1741: 'Mr Chessels, joiner. A fire broke out in the forenoon in the house of Mr C on the S side of the Canongate, near St John's Cross: but the Magistrates having gone down with the Water Engines & co, it was soon extinguished.' On 13 February 1745 Chessels took out policies numbers 2754–2757 to cover 'Canongate South, Chessels Court, Chessels Tenement', as follows:

|      |                                    |
|------|------------------------------------|
| 2754 | 1st storey with cellars and garret |
| 2755 | 2nd storey                         |
| 2756 | 3rd storey with cellars and garret |
| 2757 | Garret storey dwelling home.       |

This clearly refers to the original central tenement, and gives an interesting light on the allocation of storage areas in basement and attic. It confirms that this block was built by 1745, though it is not known how soon after completion of building the policy was taken out.



Fig. 7. Part of Panorama of Edinburgh from Salisbury Crags, by Thomas Sandby, c. 1745, showing the free-standing central block of Chessels Building, just to the right of the join in the paper, with the garden running down to the South Back of Canongate. (By permission of the Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland; D3306.)

Chessels is described as 'Father to Helen Chessels, Canongate South at Plainstones Close foot in Duncan's Land', which might indicate his residence at the time.

By the 1740s the tradition of wood panelling was waning and stucco was fashionable; living rooms had a low dado, pine styles and plaster panels painted or covered with silk damask.<sup>30</sup> Fine decoration adorns many of the flats, including paintings on plaster and ornamental fire surrounds; in at least one flat the wooden shutters have carved mouldings (fig. 8). The ornate plaster work on the walls in Chessels Building is thought to have been carried out by Thomas Clayton when the flats were built – Ian Begg, architect with Robert Hurd during the restoration of Chessels Court in the 1960s, comments that the plaster work is in places rather

crushed between the cornice and the frame, as if the plasterer were used to working on a grander scale with greater ceiling heights.<sup>31</sup> The ornamental plaster work is to be found not only in the centre part but also in both wings (which argues for an early date for the wings). The paintings are on plaster above the fireplaces, in carved wood surrounds, and are attributed to members of the Norie family. James Norie senior, founder of the firm, died in 1757, and assuming that the decoration of Chessels Building took place in the 1740s the work would probably have been by him, or possibly by his son Robert. John Gifford has commented on one of these overmantel paintings that 'the ruins of an improbable building set in a landscape with a city in the distance are Continental themes. The





Fig. 8. Interior in No. 4/1 Chessels Court, showing fire surround and overmantel plaster decoration. (By courtesy of the author; from *Scottish Georgian Interiors*, Edinburgh 1987.)

execution is provincial rather than Parisian; but this was not intended as great art. Its prevailing greys and greens ensured that it took its place in the overall decoration of the room rather than standing out as an assertive statement'.<sup>32</sup> James Norie senior's self-portrait in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery has a shadowy illustration of the same type in the background.<sup>33</sup>

#### NEIGHBOURING CLOSES

Chessels Building is now reached on the north side from the Canongate through a wide modern pend (replacing the old entrance to Plainstones Close), or through the remains of Pirrie's and Gullan's Closes (the layout of the neighbouring closes at the end of the nineteenth century is shown in fig. 9). Gibb's Close lay at the back of the West Tenement; Robert

Gibb a coachmaker had a yard at the foot of Gullan's Close.<sup>34</sup> William Burke (of Burke and Hare) was accused of strangling Mary Paterson at his brother's lodgings in Gibb's Close in 1828.<sup>35</sup> In recent times the St Giles-Canongate Boys Club started by the Rev. Ronald Selby Wright in 1933 was in the Canongate Church Hall which stood between Gibb's and Gullan's Closes; it had originally been the Mission Hall of St Thomas's Episcopal Church, Rutland Place.<sup>36</sup>

A tenement built in the north-west corner of the front court in 1780, which filled what is now the gap between the north end of the West Tenement and the back of the Canongate houses, was demolished during the work in the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> The tenements fronting the Canongate on the west side of Chessels Court had been replaced under the Improvement Act of 1867 which also led to the rebuilding of the old St Mary's Wynd as the modern St Mary's Street.<sup>38</sup>

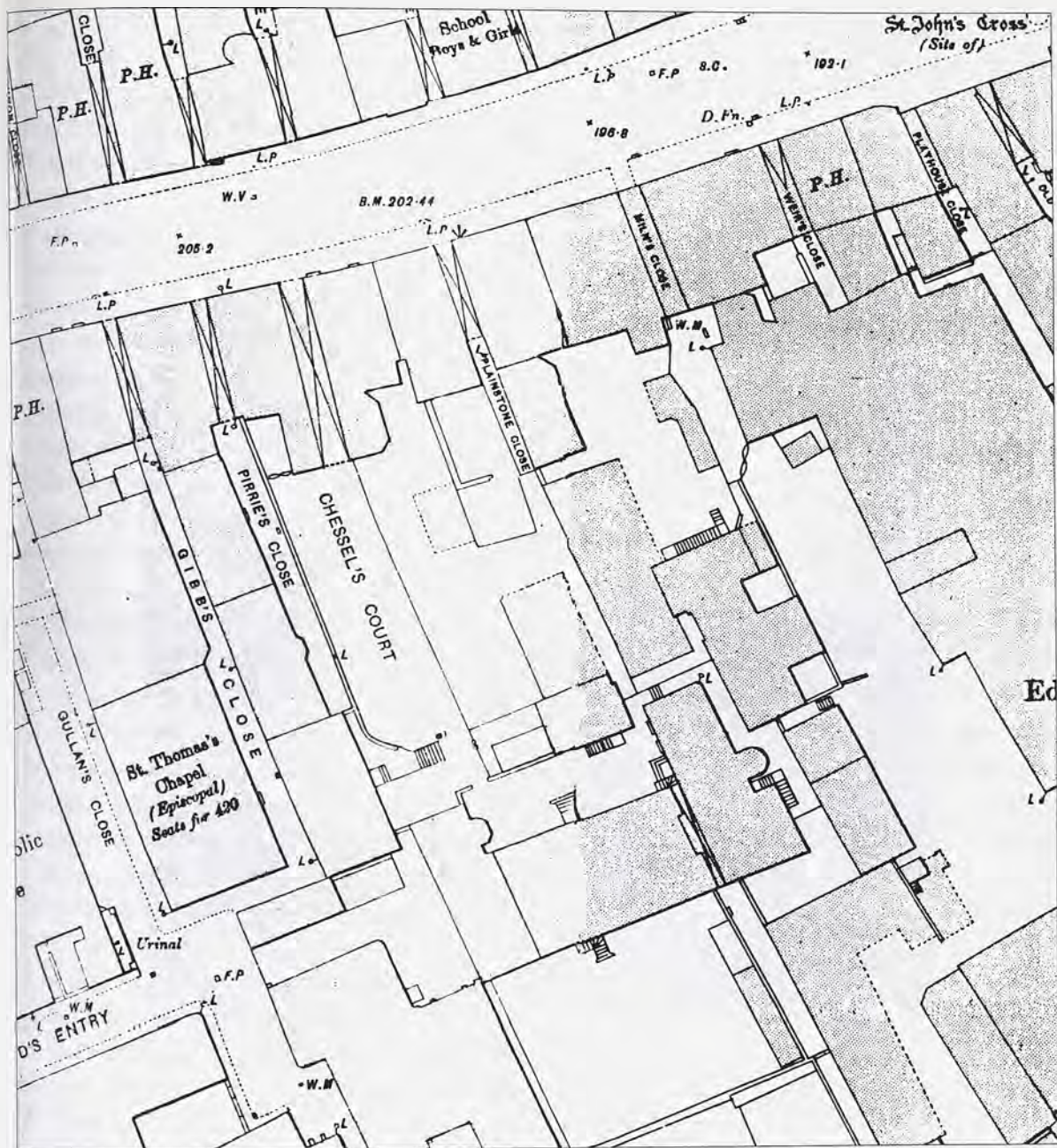


Fig. 9. Part of Ordnance Survey plan (1:2500, Edinburgh sheet III.8.11 and 12), 1894. (By courtesy of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.)

The west sides of the houses lying between Plainstones Close and Pirrie's Close are shown in a number of old maps and prints. The engraving by Storer in 1819 (fig. 6) shows these houses partially

masking the front of Chessels Building, while Simon's etching in 1885 (fig. 10) looks north to the old entrance to Chessels Court from the Canongate.<sup>39</sup> The buildings which formed the west



Fig. 10. View north from Chessels Building, showing the pend from the Canongate and the backs of the buildings on the west side of Plainstones Close; etching by Frank Simon, 1885. (By courtesy of Andrew Fraser; plate 8 from *F. W. Simon, Bits of Old Edinburgh, 1885.*)

side of Plainstones Close were finally removed in 1926, and the ground was laid out as open space.

Until the refurbishment of Chessels Court in the 1960s it was possible to follow the line of Plainstones Close south from the Canongate and under the east end of Chessels Building down to Holyrood Road. This is shown in many maps of the

Old Town but as it is often unmarked in the section under the building it is easily overlooked. The Ordnance Survey plan of 1894 shows the close and the buildings along the east side of the courtyard which contain the southwards extension of Plainstones Close to the section under Chessels Building and down to Holyrood Road (fig. 9). In

1993 plaques indicating the line of Plainstones Close were placed by the City of Edinburgh District Council in the present pend, on the east wing of Chessels Building and on the former west wall of the close to the south of the building.

Plainstones Close – the name probably indicates that it was paved with flagstones rather than cobbles from an early date – contained a number of picturesque old houses with timber projections over the outside stairs. Bruce Home commented in 1908 that the close, which used to be a favourite subject for artists, had been destroyed some years before.<sup>40</sup> James Drummond drew two views of the close in 1848–49, one looking north and the other south, and noted the arms of the Incorporation of Tailors of the Canongate over the door to their hall on the west side of the close.<sup>41</sup>

The close formed the eastern boundary of the original Chessels Building and when the east wing was added the close was incorporated by building over it. The lane was left as a passage with access to its lower end by descending a short flight of steps and passing below the extension. The section of the close under the building was used as an air raid shelter during the 1939–45 war. In the architect's drawing for the Canongate Redevelopment Plan in 1952 the line of the close wall and the stair to the basement are shown as to be removed: the opening at the north was blocked off, and the south end was closed by a rubble wall, with a door from the cellar area to the garden.<sup>42</sup> The line of the close can still be seen in the basement flat (No. 6b, converted from cellars in 1981) and in that flat's garden where a section of the east wall of the close remains, with that of the former Child Garden as the west boundary. In Flat No. 5 above there is a wide stone arch which could have spanned the close. Photographs of Plainstones Close before redevelopment and erection of the Moray House

buildings (e.g. fig. 3) show the old pear tree and a red hawthorn tree which are still in the garden area of Chessels Building.

Boog Watson lists Thomson's and Year's (or Yair's) Close as former names of Plainstones Close.<sup>43</sup> Recent local oral tradition refers to it as Bloody Mary's Close, and suggests that it was haunted.<sup>44</sup> For example, a lady who was born in the pend building on the Canongate in 1944, and now lives in the USA, remembered it as Bloody Mary's Close. As a child it appeared to her dark and frightening; it had an alcove in the section under Chessels Building in which someone could hide. It was lit by gas and the lamp was often broken.<sup>45</sup>

#### OCCUPANTS OF CHESSELS COURT

On 18 February 1767 an advertisement appeared in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*: 'To be let, a house in Chessels Buildings, neatly finished and fit to accommodate a genteel family. For further particulars enquire at Mr Chessels, the proprietor, in the Court adjoining'. This may suggest that Archibald Chessels was living in his development just before the time of his death in 1768, but it is often difficult to distinguish Chessels Building from neighbouring tenements in contemporary records.

James Boswell, Samuel Johnson's friend and biographer, lived in Chessels Court for a year from May 1770. In a letter to his friend Johnston of Grange on 31 May 1770 he wrote: 'We got into our house in the Canongate, on Friday last. It is really an admirable one; but we have little use of it just now: for all the fore rooms are painting. We submit to that inconvenience in order to have a future elegance'.<sup>46</sup> In May 1771 he moved to James's Court in the Lawnmarket, and it was there that he entertained Johnson, though Johnson stayed in Boyd's Inn (the

White Horse), close beside Chessels Court.<sup>47</sup>

*Williamson's Directory* for 1773–74, the first for Edinburgh, lists 'James Mason, grocer, head of Chessals's court', and 'Sir Stewart Threipland, physician, Chessals's court' (Threipland had been one of Chessels' executors in 1767).<sup>48</sup> The 1775–76 *Directory* includes Sir Hugh Seton of Touch, Wynn Johnstone of Hilton, John Hutchison, staymaker, Henry James, glover, Mrs Cunningham, William Scott, and James Scott, merchant (Chessels' son in law), in Chessels Court; with Mrs Aitchison, midwife, and Mrs Sinclair 'below' Chessels Court; Mrs Farquharson, grocer, and 'Mills Thomas, tea, china, glass, etc.' described as 'front of' Chessels Court; and John Thomson, spatterdash maker, 'opposite' Chessels Court (presumably on the north side of the Canongate). In May 1776 Lady Katherine Gordon (1751–1797), daughter of the third Duke of Gordon, wrote a letter to Charles Gordon WS (of Braid and later Cluny) from an address in Chessels Court about her financial affairs.<sup>49</sup>

The Excise Office was in Chessels Building from 1769 to 1794.<sup>50</sup> Sir Lawrence Dundas, Keeper of Excise from 1774 to 1781, was listed in his official capacity at Chessels Court in the 1774–75 *Directory*, though by this date he had built his own palatial residence on the east side of St Andrew Square (by coincidence, it was to this building, now the head office of the Royal Bank of Scotland, that the Excise Office moved in 1794).<sup>51</sup> The *Directory* for 1773–74 also includes 'John Caw, assistant secretary excise', and 'John Bonar, depute solicitor excise' in Chessels Court.<sup>52</sup> In 1779 Archibald Chessels' widow applied for a water pipe from the Fountain Well to the Excise Office.<sup>53</sup> In 1788 the notorious Deacon Brodie and accomplices attempted to rob the Excise Office in Chessels Court but failed, and Brodie was subsequently arrested and hung.<sup>54</sup>

On 16 June 1781 James Clark announced the opening of Clark's Hotel 'for the reception of the nobility and gentry' in Chessels Building, with public rooms which were 'perfectly elegant and airy', furniture 'neat and entirely new', and 'every convenience for carrying on that business with propriety' (it is not clear which parts of the building were occupied respectively by Clark's Hotel and by the Excise Office).<sup>55</sup> Clark, 'Farrier to His Majesty', had previously run successful livery stables at the head of the New Road in the South Canongate, below Chessels Court, later expanding into a former brewery area with a supply of soft water, for exercising horses in sheltered circumstances. The hotel, however, was not a success, opening just as rival establishments were beginning to thrive in the New Town; in 1783 the building was advertised to be let, 'neatly fitted up and conveniently situated for the business either of a hotel or inn'. Clark kept stables near Chessels Court until 1795. The first storey flat in Chessels Building, described as 'the south east middle tenement', was bought by Clark at auction in 1794, when the building was sold by roup in three lots for the Creditors of Archibald Chessels and his daughter Helen Scott.<sup>56</sup>

James Laurie, Town Clerk of Edinburgh from 1851 to 1860, was born in 1799 and came to Edinburgh in 1808, where he lived for a couple of years 'in the second flat above the shop of the front land of Piries Close, Canongate'.<sup>57</sup> His memoirs contain descriptions of some of the residents of the neighbourhood: 'For some years prior to Whitsunday 1806, John Gray, the once celebrated Town Clerk of Edinburgh, lived in the second flat upstairs of the front land of Chessel's Court, Canongate, and his nephew Charles Cunningham in the third flat, while the first flat was occupied by Mr. Joseph Brown, baker, the famous Canongate Bailie ... My uncle, John Grieve, went into John Gray's house, when he left it in 1806.' Although John Gray WS is included in the *Directory* for 1794–95 at 'Chessels

buildings' it is probable that the flats described above were all in the tenement in front of Chessels Court facing on to the Canongate.<sup>58</sup>

Robert Chambers described an extraordinary dinner in 1829 with a Mrs Irving aged 91 who lived in a neat, self-contained mansion in Chessels Court, in the Canongate, along with her son, General Irving, and some members of his family. After the meal they ascended to the drawing room (which may have been in the present flat No. 4/1, with dinner being served in the basement where the kitchens and servants' quarters were likely to be). Mrs Irving, who was descended from Dr Anderson of Anderson's Pills fame, could remember the Highland soldiers in Edinburgh at the time of the 1745 rebellion; she died in 1837 at 99 years of age.<sup>59</sup>

In general, the early nineteenth century saw the transfer of the professional classes from the Old to the New Town, but a social mix was retained for some time. *Gray's Annual Directory* for 1832–33 (the first directory to list names by address as well as alphabetically) gives the residents of Chessels Court (240 Canongate) as: Sir William Wardlaw, bart.; Mrs Gregory, teacher; Mr Steele, tin plate worker; J. Clark, slater; Peter Finlay, late spirit dealer; Joseph Brown, esq.; and Jos. Norman, wright and undertaker. The official *Post Office Directory* for 1833–34 (which, not to be outdone, rapidly adopted the same layout) added the names of W. Purdie, surgeon, and G. Gird, leather-merchant. James Grant noted that in 1854 'an aged maiden lady of a very ancient Scottish stock, Elizabeth Wardlaw, daughter of Sir William Wardlaw, Bart., of the line of Balmule and Pitreavie in Fifeshire', died in a house at Chessels Court.<sup>60</sup>

The Ordnance Survey plans of 1852 and 1870 show a police station in the West Tenement at Chessels Court, probably in the basement and lower floors between the two stairways.

In 1867 there was a disastrous explosion and fire in

premises at Chessels Court. Thomas Hammond, a fireworks maker and tobacco dealer, was making rockets in the basement of a shop which fronted on to the Canongate and whose rear formed the north-west side of the open court. The shop was in an eighteenth-century block and lay between a pend and Pirries Close to the west. Sparks ignited two kegs of gunpowder with a consequent explosion and fire with the loss of five lives as people were trapped on the upper floors.<sup>61</sup> The present pend is further east than the original, whose site is now marked by a common stair.

A former resident born in 13 Chessels Court (now No. 5) in 1907 began work as a butcher but later became a foreman maltster at one of the many small breweries in this area. His father was employed at the washing shed by the Edinburgh and Leith Brewery. He remembers a candle snuffer in the wall to the right of the door into the east wing of Chessels Building approximately where the ventilator of a heating system is now. It was admired by an American who wanted to buy it, but his mother would not sell. Not long after this it was stolen.<sup>62</sup>

James Bone described Chessels Court in decay in 1911, by which time its faded splendour had given rise to strange superstitions.<sup>63</sup> It was:

a decayed and melancholy *land* that still faces its little forecourt with a certain stateliness. Its dull, darkened rooms bear carved insignia and arms of forgotten families, and in its dim chimney panels faded nymphs in golden brown groves shimmer a little in the firelight, while heavy plaster symbols, that have long lost their meaning, still decorate the mantelpieces and door-heads. In one room in the west wing there is a white plaster festoon in high relief on a panel over the mantel which affected in an eerie way the doited old granny who lived there. She connected it in some way with a child's mort-cloth, and when a stranger came into her room she would take him by the arm and say, 'Look, look at thon cloth. D'ye ken what it's for? There's a dead wean ahint it.' It is certainly an eerie *land*. Its now dingy glories bring the old life near to us, and one's thoughts drift back to the dead and gone gentlefolk who once came and went by these tall doors and looked out of the beaded windows.

## THE DEAF AND DUMB INSTITUTE, 1814-24

The engraving by Storer of Chessels Court in 1819 is captioned the 'Deaf and Dumb Institution' (see fig. 6). The Edinburgh Institution for the Education of Deaf and Dumb Children was founded in 1810 and held classes in various places until 1814 when Chessels Building was purchased. In the Annual Report for 1815, the Clerk and Cashier David Brown WS recorded that 'the General Meeting on 23 February 1814, in considering the advantages of purchasing a house for the use of the Institution, authorised the Secretary to take such steps as he should think prudent, with regard to the house and garden then for sale in Chessels Court, Canongate'.<sup>64</sup> It was arranged to pay £1000 for it but there was also 'considerable expence' in repairs (£150) and in fitting up a room as a schoolroom; references to the garden suggest that the Institution occupied the central ground floor flat and its basement. There were about 45 children being cared for then in the charge of Robert Kinniburgh, the second headmaster (from 1812 to 1847), and his wife. The boys were taught shoe-making; the girls sewing. There was still a sum of £200 owing in 1818 but the accommodation was by then regarded as defective in that it was insufficient to allow separation of sick children from healthy during a typhus fever epidemic which affected a number of pupils, though not fatally. The money had still not been paid by 1820.

In the Report for 1822 the inadequacy of the accommodation for its 52 pupils was detailed: the playground was too small and did not allow sufficient separation of boys and girls; it was 'accessible on every side to communication with a neighbourhood not calculated to further the objects of the Institution, in training up the children in the way of religion'; there was crowding in the schoolroom and sleeping rooms and the eating room

was so small that only half the pupils could dine at the same time; in short 'the whole arrangements of the house are, owing to the inadequate extent of the accommodation, widely different to what they should be in such an Institution'. In 1824 it was reported that a site had been chosen at Distillery Park (off Henderson Row, at Canonmills) on which to build a new school, and this was occupied in May 1824.<sup>65</sup> It is unclear when the Chessels Court premises were sold or to whom.

## THE EDINBURGH SOCIAL UNION

In 1897 the management of some of the housing at Chessels Court was taken over by the Edinburgh Social Union.<sup>66</sup> This was a philanthropic organisation founded in 1885 after a visit by Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) to Octavia Hill in London to learn about her work in improving slum property. The Union was not only concerned with living conditions but also promoted craft activities amongst the slum dwellers, and through a system of volunteer rent collectors aimed to advise and help their tenants while ensuring that rents were paid and the moneys ploughed back into maintenance and repairs. The Union acquired control of a variety of properties, many of them in the Canongate; it owned none but by agreement with the proprietors it managed them and sought to improve them. Geddes himself ceased to play a prominent part in running the Union after about 1893 but remained a Member (supporter).

When the Union took on '4 Chessels Court and 8 Pirries Close' in 1897, it required an outlay of £21. 15. 8 for maintenance. It is not clear exactly which buildings in the Court were included, but reference to the old numbering system prior to refurbishing suggests that they were the tenements on the west side of the Court. However, between 1911 and 1915 there

are entries in the annual accounts of sums from £3 to £5 towards care of the garden at Chessels Court, which suggests that Chessels Building was also being managed.

By 1904 the Union was responsible for 32 properties and those in the Canongate included houses in Gullan's Close, Old Playhouse Close, Panmure Close and Brown's Close; later it was also responsible for Bible Land and houses in St John Street. From about 1934 properties were being evacuated under the Canongate Slum Clearance Scheme; Chessels Court was still listed in 1953 though with no rents shown, and after that it no longer appears.

#### ST SAVIOUR'S CHILD GARDEN, 1906-77

The St Saviour's Child Garden was started in 1906 by Miss Lileen Hardy in a small mission hall in Brown's Court belonging to Old St Paul's Church, Jeffrey Street. It was the second kindergarten in the city, as the Edinburgh Free Kindergarten had started in 1903 in Galloway's Entry, moving three years later to Reid's Court in the Canongate. On 1 October 1908 St Saviour's moved to Chessels Court, taking over the house of a Canongate brewer.<sup>67</sup>

Miss Hardy published an account of the development of St Saviour's Child Garden in 1912, which includes photographs of the children and their activities.<sup>68</sup> She described the new accommodation at Chessels Court:

The house is really a beautiful one, good proportions, panelled walls, lovely cornices, coats of arms and oil paintings over the fireplaces, and – most dear to a Kindergarten's heart – abundance of cupboard room. The garden is on the south side, sheltered, and, for the district marvellously secluded. In front of us there is nothing but breweries on a much lower level, so that it is practically open, and we have a fine view of Salisbury Crags. One small piece of ground has been under cultivation, and boasts an ivied wall, and a real pear-tree.

The premises at that time were formally No. 8 and the kindergarten was mainly in what is now the ground floor house in the central part of Chessels Building (No. 4/1). It included the cellars (now two basement flats, Nos 4/1b and part of 6b) to which there was access by means of a stair from the present kitchen of No. 4/1 as well as from the common stair. There were also at one time or another doors leading to the flat in the east wing (No. 5) and a stairway ingeniously constructed in a cupboard from the middle of the three public rooms in present flat No. 4/1 up to the corresponding room in the first-floor flat above (No. 4/2).<sup>69</sup>

Children were accepted at 5 years and the classes numbered 16-18. The children wore washable overalls – blue with red collars. The school was run on Froebel principles and had close links with Old St Paul's Episcopal Church; A. E. Laurie, Rector of Old St Pauls, was Chairman of the Management Committee. There was a daily routine for the children, weekly visits from Canon Laurie, a play centre in the evenings. Old photographs show an altar in the present sitting room of the ground floor flat, on the south wall between the window and the garden door. At a later date the altar was in front of the fireplace in the middle of the three ground floor rooms.

Miss Hardy was incapacitated in 1931 after slipping on ice,<sup>70</sup> and was succeeded by Miss Ursula Herdman, who had obtained a Vans Dunlop scholarship and trained as a Froebel teacher at Roehampton. She added a nursery department for two year olds, developed the garden parties which had for long been held at Chessels Building and composed stories which the children could act. She died in 1953 from transverse myelitis. A small bronze plaque on the former Wendy House in the garden records that it was erected in her memory.

During the 1939-45 war the school was evacuated to Ovenscloss House, two miles from Selkirk, and



Chessels Court was empty for five years. Following Miss Herdman's death in 1953 the school for children aged 5 to 7 which was held in the upper flat was closed. In 1956 the school was given notice to move when the restoration work on the building started, but with the promise that it could return in due course.<sup>71</sup> During the refurbishment of Chessels Court the children were accommodated in the hall of Canongate Kirk, previously St Thomas's Episcopal Mission, which was removed at the end of the Canongate Redevelopment Scheme. The school returned to its refurbished accommodation in Chessels Court when the scheme had been completed in 1964. Increasing costs led to the school being run by the local authority from 1960 until it closed in 1977. In 1994 one of the last pupils to have been at St Saviour's, and the last to have been baptised in Chessels Building, presented to the Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh, some children's books and two cotton smocks which she had worn as a five year old.

In a map of the area dated 1956 the name Michaelis Nursery is attached to a building on the east side of Plainstones Close, in the north-east corner of the court; the grassed central area is labelled Child Garden.<sup>72</sup> This was a private nursery school which was started in 1941 by Margaret Wylie. It closed in 1959 when its premises, a workshop on three floors, were demolished. The school is described as having a good sized garden, with numbers of birch trees and flower beds, which was used by the children and maintained by the Outlook Tower Open Spaces Committee.<sup>73</sup>

#### THE GARDEN, CHESSELS BUILDING

The garden is referred to in the deeds in 1795 as a small parterre or planted shrubbery consisting of 14 falls of land or thereby.<sup>74</sup> A fall (faw) was 6 ells

square; an ell (elue) was a measure containing 37 inches; 14 falls would be about 5000 square feet. The original garden extended behind the original block of Chessels Building, to the west of Plainstones Close, down to Holyrood Road, as shown in early maps, and in Sandby's drawing (fig. 7). The southernmost part, at present occupied by a lecture theatre and laboratory building of Moray House, has had several structures on it over the last 200 years, including St Mary's Brewery cooperage in the early part of this century.<sup>75</sup> Buildings are shown in the lower garden by 1852 in the first Ordnance Survey map.

In the early days of the Child Garden there was a middle garden and a lower garden, access to which was down a ramp from the south west along which were at one time the Stations of the Cross. There is a photograph dated 1913 of children in this lower garden, which was cobbled, and there is still an apple tree there, perhaps the sole survivor of several more.<sup>76</sup> Much of the present upper garden was covered with asphalt from its days as a playground, most of which has now been removed, and there was a well remembered sand pit below the steps from the house.

A sculptured stone memorial set into the south wall of the west wing of Chessels Building overlooking the garden has a memorial niche in which there was a small madonna and child with the inscription beneath: 'To the Fragrant Memory of Another Mary, Mary Maclagan 1878-1915'. The statuette was removed when the school closed and has been refurbished and placed on the wall of the Warriors' Chapel in Old St Paul's.<sup>77</sup> Mary Maclagan had a long connection with Old St Paul's Church (there is another memorial inscription in the church); she was a Sunday School teacher and visitor for it, and was known to the St Saviour's children as Miss May. She had girls from the Child Garden for holidays at her home in Comrie, where she was buried in the churchyard.

During the latter days of the school a pedestrian bridge giving direct access from Gullan's Close to the Child Garden was built from the south-west part of the present garden of flat No. 4/1b across the space which had previously had a brick-built structure on it, and where a block of flats has now been built. The gap in the west boundary wall where this bridge was is now closed with bricks.

#### THE REFURBISHING

The importance of the buildings at Chessels Court was recognised in the lists of historic buildings in the Old Town drawn up by Bruce Home in 1908 and by Ian Lindsay in 1939.<sup>78</sup> In plans for the Royal Mile produced in 1945 by E. J. MacRae, City Architect, Chessels Court was considered suitable for development for cultural and administrative uses: with selective demolition and rebuilding 'there could be formed a delightful group of buildings which might have the character of say the Inns of Court in London, and the whole of this might be used for a group of Associations which could have their rooms round this courtyard'.<sup>79</sup> The Abercrombie Report in 1949 recognised that the area could be made suitable for housing but only in a comprehensive scheme which removed the nearby industrial properties.<sup>80</sup> In the 1950s plans were drawn up by the City for refurbishing Chessels Court as part of the overall redevelopment of the upper part of the Canongate. Government funds became available by 1952 allowing the Edinburgh architect Robert Hurd to devise plans for redevelopment, and this was carried out between 1957 and 1966.<sup>81</sup> The top storeys of the tenements on the Canongate, west of the then pond, were removed in 1957 in order to give more light to Morocco Land on the other side of the road. Houses to the south in Gullan's Close were also removed in 1956 to give more

light at the back, and the 1780 tenement between Pirrie's Land and the Canongate tenements was pulled down.<sup>82</sup> The interiors of the West Tenement buildings were replaced entirely except for the splendid original stone staircase with mahogany rail and balusters in the southern block.<sup>83</sup>

Work on Chessels Building began in January 1961; it was soon apparent that there were serious structural problems. The entire roof had to be renewed, and the attic level of the central block was converted into an extra flat. Ian Begg, who joined Hurd to form Robert Hurd and Partners in 1953, recalls that there was substantial decay in the whole building and that its central spine, a timber and stud partition, was severely overstressed. In an effort to save the southern half of the building's interior its northern part was removed and a brick spine wall inserted. The old timber spine was fixed back to this so that the integrity of the southern rooms in the central block was maintained but at the expense of those on the north. Some decorative features were reinstated in the northern rooms, though not necessarily in their original sites because of changes in shapes and use of rooms. The original overmantel paintings were almost indecipherable below many layers of yellowing varnish but were carefully restored by Harry Woolford, of the National Galleries of Scotland. Plasterwork was restored and paint stripped to reveal the original detail of wooden mouldings. Traces of gold leaf discovered on the acorn-carved cushion frieze in the mantelpiece in the main room of the first floor flat in the central block hint at an extraordinarily opulent treatment, more to be expected in a grand country house (see fig. 8). Begg notes that the work was done as a job on the Housing Budget, following the 1953 Housing Act that empowered the Corporation for the first time to borrow money for the maintenance of existing properties. The job was expected to meet normal house-building financial constraints; special grants were required from the Lord

Provost's fund to make up shortfalls and allow for use of stone.<sup>84</sup>

In the west wing eight windows to the south were enlarged to conform to those in the main block and three windows on the west wall were sealed up.<sup>85</sup> The nineteenth-century stair was removed from the outside of the east wing of Chessels Building. It was unsatisfactory in structure and function and there was evidence of an older stair inside the building. Old stone newel ends from Golfer's Land across the Canongate, which was being demolished at the time, were used for a new internal stair. When surveyed by the RCAMS in 1951 Chessels Building had exposed rubble masonry (as seen in figs 1–3) but the back-set dressings indicate that it would originally have been faced with lime mortar, and harling was applied during refurbishment in the 1960s.

The detailed ownership of the Chessels Court buildings is difficult to trace, but the whole tenement appears to have been the property of the Corporation of the City of Edinburgh (later Edinburgh District Council) by 1963. In the 1950s

there were many single room flats with separate entry from common stairs. During refurbishment most of these doors were closed off and the original pattern of flats was restored. Almost all have since gradually passed into private ownership. In 1980 Edinburgh District Council proposed to sell what was described as a twelve-roomed house (the former St Saviour's accommodation) to the Edinburgh Festival Society as official residence for the Director of the Festival, but this was turned down and it was eventually sold privately and subdivided into three smaller flats (Nos 4/1a, 4/1b and 6b).<sup>86</sup> The whole block is A-listed both for its exterior and its interiors. The refurbishment of Chessels Court was an important landmark in the history of architectural conservation in Edinburgh and the retention of housing in the Old Town. Ian Begg comments that 'there is no doubt that today we as architects would not enjoy anything like the freedom in restoration or conservation work; but my feeling is that continuity of life within buildings was a much stronger force'.<sup>87</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

Alyson Johnstone has provided much useful information, both in personal discussion and in giving access to her 1983 Honours MA History of Art dissertation on Chessels Court (see note 25 below). Ian Begg, architect in Robert Hurd and Partners during the Canongate redevelopment scheme in the 1950s and 1960s, has kindly given many details on the refurbishment of Chessels Court. The author acknowledges help in various ways from (amongst many others) Sara Brand, Kitty Cruft, Andrew Fraser, James Gilhooley, the late Stuart Harris, Mary Herdman, Walter Makey, Gladys Purves and Robin Rosie. Thanks are also due to the staff at the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments Scotland (RCAHMS); to Arthur Temple, archivist of Old St Pauls; to Joyce Brown of Hamilton District Council; and to the Hurd Rolland Partnership, Rossend Castle, Burntisland, for access to original records of the Chessels Court refurbishment. The Hurd Rolland plans are now in the National Monuments Record Scotland (NMRS), RCAHMS.

1 Royal Commission on the Ancient Monuments of Scotland (RCAMS), *Inventory of The City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1951), pp. 180–181.

2 *Ibid.*

3 See Charles B. Boog Watson, 'Some Notes on Chessels Court' (1934), typescript, with newspaper cuttings, in Edinburgh Room, Edinburgh City Libraries (ECL), YDA 1990 C52 (Accession G18050).

4 D. Butler, *The Tron Kirk of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1906), p. 177.

5 For example, Chessels is apparently recorded as living in Duncan's Land, foot of Plainstones Close, in 1745 (see Fire Insurance records discussed below, note 29).

6 James Gilhooley, personal communication. Gilhooley did not include the Head of the Canongate in his published *Directory of Edinburgh in 1752* (Edinburgh 1988), compiled mainly from the tax rolls for Window and Annuity Taxes.

- 7 Scottish Record Office (SRO), GD237/99. Chessels seems to have considered that he had been underpaid, as he added at the end, 'not that ther is not of thirty pounds ster that the sd Colonel has not delivered up tho not is dated on Feb 15th 1728'; the alterations were completed by 1740.
- 8 John Gifford, *William Adam, 1689–1748: A Life and Times of Scotland's Universal Architect* (Edinburgh 1989), p. 36; National Library of Scotland (NLS), MS 16555, f.151.
- 9 Chessels was Witness XV in the lawsuit concerning payments to Adam for work on Duff House, Banffshire. The printed depositions relating to the case provide information not only on William Adam's architectural practice but also on the names and practices of the tradesmen involved in the building and decoration of Duff House. See *Printed Papers relative to the Court of Session Process: William Adam, Architect against William Duff, Lord Braco* (photocopy in NMRS, from originals in possession of Sir Howard Colvin).
- 10 SRO, National Register of Archives, NRA(S) Survey 2177, Bundle 877 (Duke of Hamilton).
- 11 G. Beard, *Decorative Plasterers in Great Britain* (London 1975); Clayton's son, also Thomas, born in 1743, was a plasterer too.
- 12 SRO, NRA(S) Survey 0332, Bundle F2/739 (Duke of Hamilton).
- 13 SRO, NRA(S) Survey 0332, Bundle F1/873 (Duke of Hamilton).
- 14 James Holloway, *The Norie Family* (National Galleries of Scotland, Scottish Masters No. 20, Edinburgh 1994); see also 'William Aikman, James Norie and the Patronage of John, 2nd Duke of Argyll', in James Holloway, *Patrons and Painters: Art in Scotland, 1650–1760* (Edinburgh 1989), pp. 48–67.
- 15 SRO, NRA(S) Survey 0332, Bundle F1/926. No. 28 (Duke of Hamilton).
- 16 SRO, NRA(S) Survey 0332, Bundle C3/1365 (Duke of Hamilton). Norie was Convener of the Wrights in 1743–45: see list of Trades Councillors in *Historical Sketch of the Municipal Constitution of the City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1826), after p. 72.
- 17 SRO, NRA(S) Survey 0332, Bundle C3/1367 (Duke of Hamilton).
- 18 SRO, Edinburgh Testaments, vol. 123, part 1, 1774–75. 6 September 1775. James and Helen Scott had three sons, Archibald, William, and James; there were also four daughters.
- 19 Threipland became MD in 1742, and in 1744 a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, which was then in Fountain Close at the foot of the High Street. From 1766 to 1770 he was President of the College, where his medicine chest is still preserved. See W. S. Craig, *History of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* (Oxford 1976), pp. 645–646.
- 20 See Stuart Harris, 'The Laplee Stone' and 'St John's Land', in *The Place Names of Edinburgh: Their Origins and History* (Edinburgh 1996), pp. 384, 545.
- 21 Boog Watson, 'Notes on Chessels Court' (note 3); see also Charles B. Boog Watson, 'Notes on the Names of the Closes and Wynds of Old Edinburgh', *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club (BOEC)*, 12 (1923), pp. 1–156, p. 113. Boog Watson noted that the land on which Chessels Court lies may at one time have been Templar property.
- 22 For the two editions of Edgar's plan, see William Cowan, *The Maps of Edinburgh, 1544–1929*, 2nd edn, edited by Charles B. Boog Watson (Edinburgh 1932), pp. 30–36. Edgar died in 1746. The issue dated 1742 was engraved by P. Fourdrinier and published in William Maitland, *The History of Edinburgh*, in 1753; the 1765 issue was updated by 'an Eminent Engineer', whose identity is not known.
- 23 Boog Watson, 'Notes on Chessels Court' (note 3).
- 24 RCAMS, *Edinburgh* (note 1).
- 25 Alyson Johnstone, 'Chessels Court: The Rehabilitation of an Eighteenth-Century Court in the Canongate', unpublished dissertation for MA Honours History of Art (Edinburgh University June 1983). Johnstone suggested that the central block of Chessels Building may even date from the late 1730s based on the style of the interior decoration.
- 26 Bruce J. Home, *Old Houses in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh c. 1906), includes a drawing of Chessels Court that is substantially the same as the print by Storer (fig. 6), but dated '1788' and with eighteenth-century figures introduced as a reminder of its part in Deacon Brodie's downfall (see note 54 below).
- 27 Fig. 8 in Mungo Campbell, *Drawings and Watercolours of Edinburgh in the National Gallery of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1990), catalogued as c. 1745.
- 28 Armstrong's plan, 1778, in Hugo Arnot, *History of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1779); see also Ainslie's plan, c. 1780, reproduced in David C. Simpson, *Edinburgh Displayed* (Edinburgh 1962), though the exact dating of this issue is debatable.
- 29 James Gilhooly, *The Edinburgh Recorder 1720–1840* (Dunedin Antiques, Edinburgh 1990), pp. 520–521, 650 (copy in NMRS). A later entry (12 September 1796) records 'Helen Chessels, d[au]ghter] to Archibald Chessels, wright, deceast, spouse (relict) to James Scott, merchant. Canongate South at Plainstones Close Foot'.
- 30 RCAMS, *Edinburgh* (note 1); this gives a useful description of the decorative features surviving in Chessels Building in 1951. Note that a number of displaced decorative details were moved to other locations during refurbishment in the 1960s so

- that more flats could enjoy a sense of continuity (Ian Begg, personal communication).
- 31 Personal communication.
- 32 John Gifford, 'An Edinburgh Fancy', in *Scottish Georgian Interiors* (Edinburgh 1987), pp. 52–54; this article has colour photographs of one of the paintings and of a plaster cartouche in the first floor flat of the central block.
- 33 Reproduced in Holloway, 'Aikman, Norie and John Duke of Argyll' (note 14), p. 60.
- 34 Boog Watson, 'Names of Closes' (note 21). There is a description of life as a postilion in Gibbs's coachyard in the mid eighteenth century in John MacDonald, *Travels in Various Parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa* (London 1790), reprinted as *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman* (London 1927), pp. 15–22.
- 35 For a recent account see M. H. Kaufman, 'Another Look at Burke and Hare: The Last Day of Mary Paterson – A Medical Cover-up?', *Proceedings of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 27 (1997), pp. 78–88.
- 36 See David Ford, 'D. T. K. Drummond and the Foundation of St Thomas's Episcopal Church', *BOEC*, New Series 4 (1997), pp. 51–67, p. 60.
- 37 This tenement is shown in photographs in Johnstone, 'Chessels Court' (note 25).
- 38 'A new and quite commonplace tenement ... quite lately erected in front of Plainstones Close' is mentioned by Bruce J. Home, 'Provisional List of Old Houses remaining in High Street and Canongate of Edinburgh', *BOEC*, 1 (1908), pp. 16–17.
- 39 For another view very similar to that by Simon (fig. 10), see J. Munro Bell, *Old Edinburgh Closes: Twelve Etchings* (Edinburgh 1884), No. 9.
- 40 Home, 'List of Old Houses' (note 38).
- 41 James Drummond, *Old Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1879), contains lithographic reproductions from drawings made in earlier years; see plates LII and LIV. For the Tailors see W. H. Marwick, 'The Incorporation of the Tailors of the Canongate', *BOEC*, 22 (1938), pp. 91–131. There is another view of the upper part of Plainstones Close in Munro Bell, *Old Edinburgh Closes* (note 39), No. 3.
- 42 Archive of the Hurd Rolland Partnership, Rossend Castle, Burntisland: Canongate Redevelopment, Chessels Court Area, sheet CC/S/2 (now in NMRS).
- 43 Boog Watson, 'Names of Closes' (note 21).
- 44 Stuart Harris (personal communication) judged the name Bloody Mary's Close a recent invention: 'The style is unlike any other close name I can think of. Since upper Plainstones Close lost the buildings on its east side [in the 1920s] the connection with pend and southern part must have been weakened and may have been lost thereafter.' Correspondence in the Hurd files in February 1960 mentions 'Bonny' Mary's Close, this being Robert Hurd's preferred variant, but the name is not recorded elsewhere.
- 45 Personal communication.
- 46 Ralph S. Walker, *The Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnstone of Grange* (London 1966), p. 260. His first house after his marriage to Margaret Montgomery in 1769 was in the Cowgate, near the Excise Office. Walter Makey comments that the case of James Boswell illustrates the dilemma which faced a fairly well off Edinburgh resident at this time. The collapse of part of North Bridge in 1769 had put a stop to building in the New Town and nobody could be sure when it would start again. The Old Town, dilapidated though some of it was, was still the heart of Edinburgh. The attraction of the newer developments, like Chessels Court and James's Court within the Old Town, were thus considerable, but James's Court was closer to the Law Courts and the social life of the town.
- 47 'On Saturday the fourteenth of August, 1773, late in the evening, I received a note from him that he was arrived at Boyd's Inn, at the head of the Canongate': Frederick A. Pottle and Charles H. Bennett (eds), *Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LLD, 1773* (London 1963), p. 11.
- 48 *Williamson's Directory for 1773–74* (facsimile reprint, Edinburgh 1889). Threipland is listed in Gilhooley's *Directory of Edinburgh in 1752* (note 6) as Sir Stuart Threipland, Fountain Close.
- 49 Edinburgh University Library, Gordon MS, La II 499, Box 1.
- 50 Latterly it also occupied another small adjoining building, referred to in evidence given at the trial of Deacon Brodie (see note 54 below). References to stairs and possible escape into the garden by a window suggest that the main premises may have been in the lower storeys of the central block.
- 51 For some account of Dundas see Iain Gordon Brown, 'John Kay's Satires on Sir Lawrence Dundas', *BOEC*, New Series 3 (1994), pp. 123–130.
- 52 *Williamson's Directory, 1773–74* (note 48), in the 'Appendix' of names omitted from the original issue. For Caw and Bonar, see Zella Ashford, 'The Connoisseurs Identified?', *BOEC*, New Series 2 (1992), pp. 15–21.
- 53 Boog Watson, 'Names of Closes' (note 21), p. 113.
- 54 See, for example, John S. Gibson, *Deacon Brodie: Father to Jekyll and Hyde* (Edinburgh 1977, reprinted 1993).
- 55 James H. Jamieson, 'Some Inns of the Eighteenth Century', *BOEC*, 14 (1925), pp. 132–134; see also Marie W. Stuart, *Old Edinburgh Taverns* (London 1952), pp. 110–111.
- 56 The sale, by Archibald Swinton, Clerk to the Signet, as

- Trustee for the Creditors of Archibald Chessels and for Helen Scott his daughter and only child, was held in Johns Coffee House 'during the running of an half hour sand Glass in the Lotts'. It was sold again in 1867 by Mrs Susannah Clark, widow of Thomas Clark, bookseller and publisher and presumably a descendant of James Clark, to James Hay, baker in Canongate, from whom it passed to the Trustees of the Edinburgh and Leith Brewery Company and later the Edinburgh United Brewers Company. It passed to Charlotte Playfair of Marchmont in 1912 who in turn transferred it to the Trustees of St Saviour's Child Garden in 1944. (See note 74 below.)
- 57 W. Forbes Gray, 'Reminiscences of a Town Clerk', *BOEC*, 14 (1925), pp. 150, 168-169.
- 58 For example, Joseph Brown is listed at 240 Canongate in the *Directory* for 1818-19, though at Chessels Court in 1825.
- 59 Robert Chambers, *Traditions of Edinburgh* (New Edition, Edinburgh 1868), p. 39.
- 60 James Grant, *Old and New Edinburgh*, 3 vols (London 1880-83), II, p. 23.
- 61 *Scotsman*, 10 October 1867. The fire is mentioned in R. G. Heddle, 'Extracts from the Diary of the Rev. James Aitken, DD, 1864-1875', *BOEC*, 33 (part 2 1971), p. 70 (10 October 1867); and the story is retold in James U. Thomson, *Edinburgh Curiosities* (Edinburgh 1996).
- 62 Personal communication; there is a photograph of the family taken in 1912 outside their house. Another story involves a Mrs Gordon who lived in Chessels Court; she often heard heavy breathing outside her front door, like someone resting after climbing steep stairs, but there was never anyone there. Her brother-in-law sleeping in the main room of the house with the bed partly in a richly carved recess, fled when he woke to see a tall woman dressed wholly in black with a wide shift, and with a black veil. She was said to be the ghost of a woman who hanged herself in the recess. See James Bone, *Edinburgh Revisited* (London 1911), pp. 166-170 (retold in A. J. Wilson, D. Brogan and F. McGrail, *Ghostly Tales and Sinister Stories of Old Edinburgh*, Edinburgh 1991, p. 164).
- 63 Bone, *Edinburgh Revisited*, pp. 166-167; there is another description of Chessels Court on pp. 131-132. A revised edition, with different illustrations, was published as *The Perambulator in Edinburgh* (London 1926).
- 64 Copies of the annual reports are held in Donaldson's College for the Deaf, West Coates, Edinburgh.
- 65 The building in Henderson Row was sold to the Edinburgh Academy in 1977.
- 66 Annual Reports of Edinburgh Social Union, 1885-1955: ECL, Edinburgh Room, YHV 250 E23 S.
- 67 See A. M. M. Swanson, *The History of Edinburgh's Early Nursery Schools* (Edinburgh 1975), which has a section on St Saviour's Child Garden (pp. 19-23).
- 68 Lileen Hardy, *The Diary of a Free Kindergarten* (London 1912); an updated third edition was published in 1917. The book had begun as a series of letters about her work, and in its near final form exists in at least two typescript copies, one at Old St Paul's Church and the other in the Edinburgh Room, ECL. There are also collections of photographs (many duplicated) at Old St Paul's Church and in private hands, showing aspects of the Child Garden's activities both inside the building and in the garden itself, where various social events took place. The Museum of Childhood, Edinburgh, has a book of photographs of the Child Garden which was presented to it by Old St Paul's Church - it is dated 1906 but has many photographs a few years later than that. In the Edinburgh Room, ECL, is a foolscap manuscript document with original photographic prints, entitled 'St Saviour's Child Garden: The Life History of a Slum Child', which is likely to have been written by Miss Hardy in the early years of the kindergarten ('Presented by St Saviour's Child Garden, 4 Chessel's Court, Edinburgh 1977'). A further copy in the Edinburgh City Archives (ECA) is described as 'appeal literature (?1910)' - it is not known if it was actually printed and issued. A photograph published by C. S. Minto (*Victorian and Edwardian Edinburgh from Old Photographs*, Edinburgh 1988) entitled 'A Child Garden in Chessel's Court in the Canongate about 1905' (*sic*), shows small children with a teacher sitting on the grass area to the north in front of Chessels Building, with the original pend and 1780 building in the background - it is unclear whether this was the same Child Garden or not.
- 69 The internal stair between flats No. 4/1 and 4/2 (made possible by a donation of £150 from Mrs Doris Jack, a publisher's wife) was put in so that Miss Herdman could have access to her bed-sitting room in the first storey flat without having to encounter 'the foulness of cats and children on the common stair'; it also gave access to two rooms in the flat above for classes. In the west wall of the south-west room of flat No. 4/1 there appears to have been an opening into the living room of the flat (now No. 5) in the west wing at some time, via the cupboard door to the right of the fireplace. The school kitchen was in what is now the north-east bedroom of flat No. 4/1 where there was a sink at the window to the square, and the south part was open into the south-east room by a large space which is now closed to complete the room wall.
- 70 Miss Hardy was an exacting leader with high standards and was not always easy to work with; a former teacher commented in her old age that 'there was no money but lots

- of fun' (personal communication).
- 71 In 1956 a fund-raising seven page pamphlet '1906-1956: Our First Fifty Years' over the initials MCF, which gave a history of the school from its foundation, was on sale for one shilling.
- 72 ECA, plan dated 22 March 1966.
- 73 Swanson, *Early Nursery Schools* (note 67), pp. 83-87.
- 74 SRO, General Register of Sasines, County of Midlothian, book 16248, f.235.
- 75 The map accompanying Home's 'List of Old Houses' in 1908 (note 38) shows St Mary's Brewery at the bottom of the garden on Holyrood Road.
- 76 Photograph in private hands. Another photograph in Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (London 1915), labelled 'A childrens garden in Old Edinburgh' (fig. 23, p. 103), might perhaps be part of the lower garden but it is difficult to be certain.
- 77 Information from Arthur Temple.
- 78 Home, 'List of Old Houses' (note 38); Ian G. Lindsay, *Old Edinburgh*, 1939 (Edinburgh 1939).
- 79 City of Edinburgh, *The Royal Mile, Report by the City Architect* (Edinburgh 1945), p. 11; see also *Second Report* (1947).
- 80 Patrick Abercrombie and Derek Plumstead, *A Civic Survey & Plan for the City and Royal Burgh of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh 1949), p. 63.
- 81 A City Architect's plan dated 22 March 1956 shows the Canongate/Chessels Court area before the reconstruction of the 1960s (ECA). There are detailed survey drawings and photographs in the archives of the Hurd Rolland Partnership (now in NMRS), showing original features that were intended to be retained or reincorporated.
- 82 Johnstone, 'Chessels Court' (note 25).
- 83 Mentioned in Bone, *Edinburgh Revisited* (note 62), pp. 113-114.
- 84 Personal communication.
- 85 Johnstone, 'Chessels Court' (note 25). The design of new sash windows for the building includes Victorian-style moulded horns at the bottom of the upper sash and a more modern profile for the glazing bars.
- 86 *Scotsman*, 7 November 1980.
- 87 Personal communication (1997).