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## Book Reviews

E. Patricia Dennison, **The Evolution of Scotland's Towns. Creation, Growth and Fragmentation, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. Xv + 350. Illus, Paperback £24.99. ISBN 978 1 4744 3297 9.**

**I**t should be part of the Old Edinburgh Club agenda to place Edinburgh in the context of Scottish urban history as a whole. Members accepting this as an essential aim should place this book on their reading list. This is an example rich book based on the author's already substantial contributions to understanding and knowing Scottish towns. The many volumes of 'The Scottish Burgh Survey' should be better known than they are, although the monumental *Scotland's Parliament Site and the Canongate. Archeology and History*, (2008) should take pride of place, despite the reluctance of the Society of Antiquaries to market it with any vigour [best price however is on the Society's web site]. The author's biography of Canongate, *Holyrood and Canongate. A thousand years of history*, (2005) and the multi authored *Painting the Town, Scottish Urban History in Art*, (2013) can be added to the list.

The early chapters concern the medieval towns. Two stories are presented here. The Burgh, many related to the charters of David I, were legal and political structures. They were a means of imposing authority, the king, the guilds and the burgh courts. Behind their success was the material and economic activity. Few were greenfield sites. Most were linked to a castle, a bridge or a religious institution. Careful attention to sources has been paid in this section. The historian needs to rely on national surveys, usually for tax purposes, but above all on archeology.

There is an awareness of the physicality of the town. They were filthy places of middens, tanning pits, women brewing ale. Change involved a move from timber and thatch to places of stone, slate and tiles. The Reformation is presented as a process not an event. It was a process which led to the destruction of much Scottish art and culture.

A theme that lurks behind much of this is that of size. The medieval town was tiny. It is possible to walk across medieval Edinburgh in 20 minutes [It

did not include the burgh of Canongate]. The bulk of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century town could be covered in less than an hour. What followed was a spatial and population explosion. One of the most eloquent pages in the book is the last one, listing population totals. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Edinburgh added around half a million people to be housed, fed and employed. Best estimates for 1691 suggest 37,000 people. That is about the same as the number of students in Edinburgh University in 2017.

This brings us to the paradox of urban Scotland. Towns like Edinburgh were places of filth, disease, poverty and massive inequalities of class and gender. At the same time large numbers of people wanted to live in them. This tension is well indicated here. The mid 18<sup>th</sup> century saw the beginning of 'improvement': drainage, assembly halls, schools, and 'new towns' added to the old. The 19<sup>th</sup> century added a public sphere of civil society, improved housing associations, temperance and bible societies, schools and mechanics institutions.

The author has a special regard for the garden city, especially Rosyth. Then, moving to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are familiar themes: the impact of two wars, of the car, the increase in state intervention especially in housing, the tower block and road making. The book finishes with two distinctive themes and poses related questions. The first is a demand to respect the past and a questioning the destruction of the material evidence of the past. Patrick Geddes, who gets a place in this account, felt that people needed a sense of continuity with the past as well as improved living conditions. The new parliament building comes into focus here as does the St James Centre, both of them products of history which ignore the historical continuities of their site. The final challenge of the book is a review of the local government re-organizations of recent decades which destroyed the historical authority structure of the burgh. The author suggests that this brought an end to the civic pride of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and created local authorities with which it is difficult to identify, and which are vulnerable to the centralizing tendencies of the Holyrood government. We can no longer appeal to the Dean of Guild and few of us can name our local councillor.

A key feature of the book is an extensive and

well chosen bibliography and list of sources. This is an education in Scottish urban history in itself. This is a scholarly and accessible book and unlike much scholarship the paperback is produced at an affordable price.

*R J Morris*  
*School of History*  
*Edinburgh University.*

Sheila Szatkowski, **Enlightenment Edinburgh: a guide.** *Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2017, 118 pp., numerous illustrations. Paperback, £12.99. ISBN 978 1 78027 3730.*

This appealing, elegant and lively book would be an excellent companion for a first-time visitor to Edinburgh – a person who has an interest in the Golden Age of the city, or indeed of Scottish culture in the great period of the Scottish Enlightenment, and who wants to gain an insight into, or obtain an over-view of, the Athens of the North. But it is also a work that can be read with pleasure and profit by any resident of Edinburgh, native or other, who wants to know more or to be directed to people and places about which he or she may know something but who would like to learn more, or to have jumbled thoughts straightened out or more clearly directed. The book is the outcome of a good initial idea: my only regret is that it could not have been longer and the result (perhaps) rather differently configured.

Sheila Szatkowski (in another life a former Honorary Secretary of the Old Edinburgh Club) writes crisply and effectively, and employs some happy phrases and uses many pleasing expressions to describe the places and people in her guide. Her husband, Josef, has taken innumerable beautiful photographs. Mark Blackadder has produced an elegant and interesting, if rather busy, design. There is a most interesting and telling selection of lapidary quotations, set cheerfully in different colours in the margins of many pages. These margins also carry the picture captions; but frequently they also host narrow text boxes and a host of small-scale images. There are lots of maps, both contemporary and modern, the latter highlighting the places (buildings and sites) discussed in the chapter texts. This is a

handsome and extremely well-illustrated production, a fact that makes its relatively low price all the more praiseworthy.

At the outset, Sheila Szatkowski tells us that this is a personal selection of places and people and that whatever ‘opinions and deviations in objectivity and accuracy’ are the author’s alone. Good! This smacks of independent thinking, and very welcome that is. Her judgments are generally shrewd and sensible. However she is perhaps slightly unusual, perhaps, in interpreting the reach of the Enlightenment so generously in chronological terms. She sets its termination at the round date of 1850, though at one point she actually includes Sir David Brewster as ‘one of the greatest Enlightenment figures’ and he died in 1868 (having been born in 1781) – which does make the intellectual phenomenon fairly long in the tooth. Many would see its apogee as lying between about 1760 and 1790, and most would see the death of Scott in 1832 as its symbolic end, if indeed it would not be more accurate to snuff out its guttering candle even earlier than that. But ‘the Scottish Enlightenment’ is a much later, retrospective term: the titans of the eponymous age had no real concept of living through any such epoch, even if they must have been aware that it was an extraordinary period in social and intellectual history in which they strode the streets of the small city that was its hot-bed.

The book proclaims ‘no designated walking routes’, as such, unlike the recent guide to the Edinburgh of Robert Burns which I reviewed in *BOEC*, 12. However, in practice, we do follow such routes, and are directed to do so by the occasional remark such as ‘further on there is...’. The Enlightenment city is split into some eight designated areas, and we are provided with a good selection of details taken from historical maps, and with modern specially-drawn plans.

In her very first sentence, and in an especially apposite phrase, the author describes Edinburgh as having a ‘Janus face’. By which she means the New Town and the Old, the towns or Reason and Romance, these divided not just physically and architecturally but also by outlook and by what we see them as representing: two aspects of the human psyche, the Classical (or Enlightened) and the Romantic (or tempestuously mediaeval). But she (and the book’s blurb) also state that the New Town is the ‘physical embodiment’ of the Scottish Enlightenment. Is that,

in fact, really so? Where actually lay its ‘beating heart’? An invidious question, maybe. But much of the New Town development post-dates the ‘Enlightenment’, even though we may see ‘New Edinburgh’, retrospectively, as the physical or material symbol of progress, politeness, rationality, etc. David Hume moved down The Mound and across the Nor’ Loch only in the last few years of his life. James Hutton never followed the tide of gentility northwards. Almost all of the legendary vibrancy of ‘Enlightenment Edinburgh’ actually remained centred on the Old Town: there was the ‘Tounis’ College, there the Parliament House, there the Advocates’ Library, there the Cross of Edinburgh at which John Amyat claimed that he could with a few minutes greet fifty men of genius by the hand. And as we look at the schematic plan on Szatkowski’s page vi we see clearly that the actual New Town (First, Second or Northern, Eastern, Western – whatever) is really only part of the book’s concern. Sheila Szatkowski’s remit extends (in section 8) to Newington and thence to Duddingston and even as far as Newhailes. Why not include also Trinity, or the elegant Georgian resort of Portobello? But maybe sea-bathing is not really a very ‘Enlightenment’ diversion, despite the fact that J. G. Lockhart holidayed in Porty. The book ends rather abruptly with a quotation about the late Lord Hailes. One does wonder if the publisher trimmed the text over-scrupulously in pursuit of economy: if so, it is a real shame. But at least he left in the morsel of text describing, and the image showing, Birlinn’s own splendid staircase at West Newington House (pp. 107-8)! Sheila Szatkowski omits Leith, writing that it merits of book of its own; so maybe we shall see, before too long, a volume on Leith Luminaries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Reviewers are obliged to spot mistakes and omissions. My main substantive critical observation is that I should like to have seen a rather bigger book which would have mentioned the homes and haunts of even more Enlightenment luminaries. As hinted at before, this is quite probably the publisher’s paring-back of a text what might have been fuller or even better illustrated. Sometimes one follows this or that street and wishes to know who *else* lived there or what *other* ‘Enlightenment’ connections might possibly have been addressed. There are a few slips but none which detracts from the pleasure and interest of turning the pages of this pleasing book.

David Hume didn’t die in 1766 (surely a typo for 1776), and James Court appears on the appropriate map in the wrong place. It is the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland not the Institute; the south side of Middleby Street has house of two storeys not just one; Allan Ramsay’s second wife came from the family of Lindsay of Evelick, not Evelix. It is surprising that the Roubiliac statue of Lord President Forbes of Culloden is overlooked. Holyroodhouse is the correct name for the Palace. Was the notably eclectic, inventive and flexible Robert Adam *really* an architect distinguished for his ‘rigid and clean-cut Palladian style’? But all these quibbles can be forgiven in an author who writes so neatly of Botanic Cottage (now relocated to, and reconstructed and revived at the Royal Botanic Garden) as an ‘Enlightenment classroom’; or who praises the inscription – it just happens to be this reviewer’s own composition – on the plinth of the Hume statue as ‘a most apt’ summary of the career of the man who was the single greatest figure of Enlightenment Edinburgh.

*Iain Gordon Brown*

Robert G.W. Anderson (ed.), **Cradle of Chemistry: the Early Years of Chemistry at the University of Edinburgh**, *Edinburgh: John Donald, 2015. xviii, 198p £25 hbk, ISBN 978 1 906566 86 9.*

Few university departments can justify having a volume of essays devoted to their history, but Chemistry at Edinburgh does. *Cradle of Chemistry* prints the lectures given at a conference in 2013, held to celebrate the tercentenary of the creation of the chair of chemistry. The first professor was James Crawford, and he was followed by Andrew Plummer in 1726, when the Edinburgh medical school was created by the appointment of four young and active teachers, by William Cullen in 1755, Joseph Black in 1766 and Thomas Charles Hope, who gave Black’s classes from 1795/6 and succeeded him in 1799. Hope taught until 1843.

Black is the largest single figure in the book. He was unusual in that he was both a highly creative research scientist and a brilliant and hard-working teacher. He made his reputation through the discovery

of 'fixed air', now known as carbon dioxide, and its important role in combining with other chemicals, and through the development of the concepts of latent and specific heat. Thus established as a discoverer, he was able to attract the students whose fees made up much of his income, and to build his reputation as a teacher by assiduous preparation, particularly of his chemical demonstrations.

This is an unusually coherent set of conference papers, held together by a chapter by John Henry near the beginning, on the nature of Scottish science, and at the end by Hasok Chang, on what characterised chemistry at Edinburgh University. The writing is clear and very fully referenced, and the index adequate. The forty-seven illustrations, mostly of buildings, the archaeological excavations in the Old College, and chemical apparatus, are clear, informative and a valuable complement to the text.

The editor's judgement is that 'This volume contains the closest investigation of a period of chemical history as seen through the medium of a teaching institution.' (p.6) This is sound. The book evokes the reality of the development and operation of an institution in which teachers encouraged or hindered their successors, took up or rejected new ideas, and in which dedicated students looked at their professors with both admiration and scepticism. The portrait is convincing, and splendidly varied, covering archaeology and the histories of ideas, universities, teaching methods and the material culture of chemistry. Two chapters explore the story of the Department in the century after Black, including a brush with literary history through pages on the student career of Arthur Conan Doyle.

At a few points the book leaves university premises, most notably when Peter Morris re-examines the question of where Joseph Black lived from 1786 – the house in which he died. He identifies it as a building in Nicholson Street, which had to be demolished after a 1982 fire in the disco which was then on the site. Straw intended to give character to a country-and-western night was accidentally set alight, an ironic cause of destruction for Black's house given the importance of heat and temperature in his thinking.

*John Burnett*

Alan Sutton (ed.), **An Edinburgh Diary 1793-1798**. Stroud: Fonthill Media Ltd 2016. 47. *illus.8-page colour insert. Family tree, 5 maps. Hardback 448 pages £25. ISBN 978-1-78155-484-5.*

Edward Witts maintained his lavish lifestyle after inheriting his father's wool stapling business in Gloucestershire which failed in 1790 possibly from neglect resulting in bankruptcy six years later. Left to live on a few hundred pounds a year he was forced to move to a cheaper location. Edward, his wife Agnes together with their three young sons Francis, George and Edward relocated to Edinburgh in July 1793 in order to secure their children's education and escape the stigma of bankruptcy.

Agnes meticulously recorded daily events in her diaries from 1788-1824. The five Edinburgh years have been skilfully edited by Alan Sutton and reproduced in *An Edinburgh Diary 1793-1798*.

Agnes was from a mercantile gentry. A devout Anglican, she was charismatic, extrovert, popular and pushy. Her vibrant personality secured her a place in Edinburgh society and as her social whirl expanded many a visiting card was exchanged. She was invited to the best society homes and events. Agnes records on one severely cold December day that out of ten visits she made only four were effective. Agnes was often seen sharing a well-off friend's carriage or a theatre box belonging to a society acquaintance. She was entertained more than she entertained keeping costs to a minimum.

The diary entries were factual and formal rather than personal. Her opinions were not recorded and her feelings were suppressed, even when reflecting upon the death of her youngest son in 1794 from dropsy of the chest at the age of eleven. Christmas day entries reflects visitors or visits omitting the children's reaction to the festival. Edward Witts was always referred to as Mr Witts. Each daily diary entry commenced with the weather then recorded visitors, visits walks or trips. Evenings at home were generally spent writing letters, reading, playing cards, cribbage or cassino. Agnes recorded on 31 December 1793 that she had received 185 letters and sent 191 letters. Entertainment consisted of concerts, Balls at the unfinished Assembly Rooms, theatre performances, entertaining friends or more often being entertained

by the local gentry.

Upon arrival in Edinburgh the Witts family settled temporarily a 2 George Square while seeking for a more desirable residence. They were listed in Thomas Aitcheson's Edinburgh Directory 1797-8 as living at fashionable 18 North Hanover Street. The diaries intimated that they intended purchasing the property financed from a marriage settlement of £300 p/a which the creditors could not claim. Agnes often visited the roup or auctions for furniture or visited Trotter's warehouse in Stockbridge village, for quality used furnishings.

The Witts attended church twice on a Sunday and often during the week. It is unclear which church Agnes referred to as 'our own church' where they had a family pew. Sometimes she referred to attending 'the new church' which is equally ambiguous. She did however, attend Greyfriars new church, the Charlotte Chapel, St Andrews church (where she boasted sitting in the Lord Provost pew), St George's church, the Tron church and St Peter's church.

The illustrations are pleasing and the local scenes give the flavour of the Edinburgh at the time of the Witts residence. John Kay's numerous etching reflect both Edinburgh society and the life style of the day. An insertion of forty colour plates include family and friends together with a portrait of Edward Witts and one of Agnes painted by Joseph Wright of Derby which is also reproduced on the dust cover.

Agnes Witts diaries are a good primary source revealing the life and values of a society family living in Edinburgh during the Enlightenment. Alan Sutton has included numerous end notes to aid the modern reader. I was fortunate to meet Alan at the book launch last year who admitted that deciphering the diaries had taken many years of hard work which is apparent when viewing a reproduction of a diary page on the frontispiece. Considering Agnes's untidy hand writing, lack of punctuation and poor spelling he has done it very well. I was also introduced to Francis Witts, Agnes's great, great, great grandson and his cousin described fondly as a half Witt! It is perhaps fitting that Francis wrote the forward to his relative's diaries. It is envisaged that more of Agnes's diaries will be published in the future but that is another story and another book .

*Gillian Ferguson, November 2017*

Valerie E Weighill, **Morningside Toll-House Edinburgh, 2017, 28pp.**, available from the author at *Drungans, New Abbey, Dumfries, DG2 8EB, £4.00 including postage & packing.*

As its subtitle, 'A history of the road north to Edinburgh Old Town and south to Fairmilehead and beyond' indicates, this A5 format booklet covers more than the story of the building that is currently the café at the entrance to the Hermitage of Braid. The first 10 pages give a brief outline of the history of turnpikes and toll roads in Scotland with particular reference to the Wester Hiegait from the Old Town out to Biggar and Moffat and improvements to it during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The focus is very much on the history of the road itself rather than on events associated with it. Thus, whilst we learn that, when it came to widening the turnpike, a golf course took precedence over a row of workmen's cottages, there is no mention of the last public hanging (in 1815) at the scene of the crime for highway robbery in Scotland marked by the 'Hanging Stanes' set in the roadway of Braid Road. The author has made wide use of the collection of digitised maps of Edinburgh on the National Library of Scotland website in identifying the toll bars in the south western suburbs of Edinburgh. Their positions and the locations (and relocations) of the various milestones along the Wester Hiegait are plotted on a very clear sketch map in the centre fold. One quibble is that the text is, here and there, rather too brief and lacking in detail, particularly in dates.

In the remaining five pages or so of text the author outlines the history of the Morningside Toll House built when the toll bar at Wrightshouses was moved out to Morningside in the mid-1850s. She gives a date for the move of the bar of between 1853 and 1856, presumably because it does not appear on the Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1852, but is marked on the NLS's digitised copy of W & AK Johnstons' map of Edinburgh, Leith and suburbs of 1856. This, and all the other maps referred to in this review, are available on the National Library of Scotland's website, [maps.nls.uk](http://maps.nls.uk). There is a problem with using this map as evidence that the toll was at Morningside in 1856. As Mrs Weighill points out, the toll bar at Wrightshouses is still marked on

the same map. On the NLS's on-line copy the word 'Toll' at Morningside is much less distinct than the rest of the printing of the map. It looks very like a later annotation and not part of the original lettering on the map. Corroborative evidence that the toll bar was most probably moved in late 1855 or early 1856, is, however, provided by Lizars' maps for the annual Post Office Directory where the toll bar first appears at Morningside on the edition for 1856-1857. The toll bar and house both caused the cartographers some difficulty. On the Johnstons' maps from 1856 to 1879 (and Bartholomew's from 1864 onwards) the toll bar and house are shown on the north side of the Jordan Burn whereas the Ordnance Survey plan of 1877 clearly shows them to have been south of it. Although Lizars correctly located the toll bar to the south of the burn, the toll house is shown as an addition to a rectangular building lying parallel to the road and not as the separate structure it was. This building is shown on Lizars' maps from 1834 to 1860 but is not present on Murray and Pringle's map of 1832, the OS maps of 1852 or 1877 or on any of the Johnstons' maps from 1833 onward. If it ever existed it had gone by the time the bar was moved and the toll bar could not have been associated with it. It makes one wonder how assiduous the cartographers were in checking their details on the ground.

Much of the account of the first phase of the life of the house (including the reasons for moving the toll) is based on Smith's *Historic South Edinburgh* but Mrs Weighill has added more detail from census records about the original toll keepers.

The MorningsideToll House is one of South Edinburgh's peripatetic buildings. Milestones are not

the only structures that can be moved. The taking down and re-erection elsewhere of substantial buildings was not as rare as one might think in nineteenth century Edinburgh: there are at least four examples in the Morningside / Bruntsfield area alone. Some time after the turnpike system was abolished in Scotland in 1878 the toll bar was removed. This was probably in 1882 as it is shown on the Bartholomew's map for the Post Office Directory of 1882 but not on that of 1883. The toll house was blocking the development of the site for the Braid United Presbyterian Church and it was thus moved south to become the lodge house for Hermitage of Braid. Here again the author has added some useful detail from the census and other sources to that available in *Historic South Edinburgh* and brought the story of the house up to date.

The booklet concludes with six pages of references to a wide variety of sources (from Froude's *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle* to the *Midlothian Ordnance Survey Name Books*) as well as copious notes giving such detail as the probable derivation of the name Tollcross. (It is not from a road toll bar at the current junction.)

This is a fascinating pamphlet with a number of interesting original photographs. It whets the appetite to know more about the history of this historic road and is a good starting point for further research. It is a useful addition to the library of anyone interested in the history of this area of Edinburgh.

*Edward Duvall*