

Edinburgh: The World's First City of Literature

We cultivate literature on a little oatmeal . . .

Edinburgh is world-renowned for its magnificent architecture – from the grandeur of the Georgian New Town to the closes and wynds of the historic Old Town, the monuments of Calton Hill to Edinburgh Castle at the top and the Palace of Holyroodhouse at the bottom of the Royal Mile. Rich in history, the city has known battles and plague, poverty and great riches, religious persecution, grave robbers, The Enlightenment, The Union and eventual devolution and its history has shaped its streets and buildings. Complementing the built environment, and often inspired by it, is the literary heritage of the city. Authors, writers, poets and thinkers have lived and worked in Edinburgh through the ages, from James Hogg, Walter Scott, Robert Burns and Robert Louis Stevenson to modern day authors Ian Rankin, J K Rowling, Iain Banks, Irvine Welsh and Alexander McCall Smith.



The stories are in the stones, streets and monuments, and visitors and residents alike can wander through Edinburgh's streets soaking up the atmosphere that has inspired so many. Where else can you follow in the footsteps of Rankin's Inspector Rebus or explore the locations found in McCall Smith's 44 Scotland Street series? Where else can you learn about Deacon Brodie, respected cabinet maker by day, thief by night and the inspiration for Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, or find out more about Joseph Bell, the surgeon whose diagnostic approach to cases inspired the character of Sherlock Holmes? Which other city has named its railway station after a novel? Or one of its football teams?

Edinburgh was the first UNESCO City of Literature in the world, receiving the designation in 2004. The idea of a formal 'City of Literature' designation came about because four book lovers thought that Edinburgh, and indeed Scotland, should take on responsibility for the future development of a literary culture that has distinguished and enlightened our country's past. They wanted to share the literary culture of this capital city with the world, to celebrate the literary greats of the past and to embrace and encourage future literary developments. Edinburgh was proposed not as the city of literature but as part of a growing network of cities. The idea was not about competition but about aspiration and partnership. This marked the beginnings of a global enterprise, a network of cities of literature celebrating, sharing and developing their literary culture. Melbourne and Iowa City have recently joined Edinburgh to become UNESCO Cities of Literature with others expected to follow shortly.

The Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust is the driving force behind the city's efforts to share and

expand its literary culture and as well as co-ordinating a wide range of literary activities and events, the Trust runs a city-wide reading campaign every year. Each February, Edinburgh's residents are encouraged to all read the same book at the same time. Thousands of free books are given away through libraries, schools, community centres, shops, cafes and restaurants and there is a full programme of events, including performances, films, readings, debates, discussions and tours. The author is usually Scottish, often from Edinburgh or with strong Edinburgh connections, and the book is chosen to appeal to the widest possible audience. In previous years titles have included Robert Louis Stevenson's classic Scottish adventure story *Kidnapped*, the darker and gothic *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde*, and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*.



Edinburgh is also host to the largest public celebration of words in the world – the Edinburgh International Book Festival – which takes place in the heart of the historic city each August. Started in 1983, the Book Festival takes place in an ever expanding tented village in the tranquil oasis of Charlotte Square Gardens in the heart of the New Town and brought over 750 writers to the city this year from 45 different countries. The first choice of venue in 1983 was Princes Street Gardens. However an ancient by-law (now repealed) prohibiting the sale of books and printed materials in the Gardens meant that Charlotte Square became the home of this, the largest public book festival in the world.

Over 200,000 visitors enjoy discussions, readings and Meet the Author sessions with authors, poets, journalists, commentators, politicians, photographers and illustrators from all over the world. Running alongside the general programme is the highly regarded Children's Programme which has grown to become a leading showcase for children's writers and illustrators. Incorporating workshops, storytelling, panel discussions, author events and book signings, the Children's Programme is popular with both the public and schools alike, and now ranks as the world's premier books and reading event for young people.

In addition to the Writing Museums and Libraries which can be found through, Edinburgh celebrates its literary roots in a wide variety of ways. A number of literary walking tours have developed where visitors can wander through the streets, on a Book Lovers Tour, or a Literary Pub Crawl. If you have a favourite author or book, you may enjoy the Trainspotting tour, or the Rebus Tour. The Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust is currently developing a series of free walking tours – the first of which, taking in a number of the locations featured in Alexander McCall Smith's 44 Scotland Street series – is available for download from their website. Others, including Robert Louis Stevenson's *Edinburgh* and Sir Walter Scott's *Edinburgh*, will follow during the year.

Around every corner, you can find other reminders to Edinburgh's writers, past and present – poet Robert Fergusson is striding down The Royal Mile outside the Canongate Kirk, Sherlock Holmes himself stands on Picardy Place, the birthplace of his creator, Arthur Conan Doyle. Alan Breck and David Balfour, the two heroes of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, stand proud on the Corstorphine Road, and a small memorial to Stevenson himself stands in a grove of silver birches in Princes Street Gardens. The most prominent is the monument to Sir Walter Scott, towering over Princes Street and Princes Street Gardens. It's well worth the trip up the narrow and twisting stair to the top for the views across the city.



The Scott Monument is one of Edinburgh's architectural treasures featured in a series of new podcasts on the City. The City of Literature Trust has collaborated with the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust to create ten short podcasts exploring some of Edinburgh's most famous landmarks, their architectural history and curiosities and their literary links – from Calton Hill to Princes Street Gardens, The Netherbow to The Canongate, from Robert Louis Stevenson to Daniel Defoe, Ian Rankin to Quentin Jardine. Using quotes from writers, poets and some of the classic stories inspired by the built environment of the city, the podcasts are designed to provide a guided tour of Edinburgh, revealing some of the hidden gems and history of the city for visitors walking around the streets, or at home planning their trip. Or even for the city's residents, wanting to know a little more about the landmarks they pass every day.

A new addition to Edinburgh's literary scene is the Poetry Garden in the recently re-developed St Andrew Square, in the heart of the Georgian New Town. St Andrew Square, which is now open to the public for the first time in over 230 years, is being developed as a new space for celebrating poetry in the City of Literature. The new space will link to work by the Edinburgh Makar, as well as plans for National Poetry Day. The possibility of physical expressions of poetry is being investigated, as well as ways to help school and community groups use the space to celebrate poetry. St Andrew Square will become a place where poetry new and old is heard, read, displayed, promoted and enjoyed.

The designation UNESCO City of Literature is a permanent one, and one of which the city of Edinburgh is justifiably proud. From the writers of the past, celebrated in statuary, in the National Library and the Writers Museum, to contemporary authors found in the Scottish Poetry Library, The Scottish Book Trust or the Scottish Storytelling Centre, and showcased at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, a thriving publishing industry, and a strong academic element, there is much to be proud of.

The City of Literature Trust is a portal for all literary events and activities taking place throughout the city, and their website can direct you to anything you need to know. For information on book signings and author appearances, literary events and activities, literary tours, the Stories in Stone podcasts and the free walking trails visit www.cityofliterature.com.

Residents and visitors alike cannot help but brush up against the city's literary heritage whenever they walk through the streets. And Edinburgh is a city for walking, whether following one of the free literary trails, or just wandering where the mood takes you, come and be inspired by the stories in the stones.

By Frances Sutton, Edinburgh International Book Festival

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