Edinburgh is dominated by its castle on its perch on an extinct volcano, known as Castle Rock. Whilst the use of the site defensively could date back as far as Roman times and the origins of the castle itself from the end of the 11th century[i], it was not until around 1130, during the reign of King David I, that Edinburgh was established as a royal burgh (and didn't actually become Scotland's capital until the reign of James III)[ii].

To the north of medieval Edinburgh lay the marshy depression which became the Nor Loch (and is now occupied by the railway and Princess Street Gardens). From here, a steep slope led up to Edinburgh (now Edinburgh's Old Town) and with the Castle on its rocky outcrop, the north and west sides of Edinburgh were adequately defended. So any walls were needed to primarily defend the south and east sides and it was for economic and defensive purposes that the first town wall (likely to be a timber palisade and ditch) was established sometime in the 12th century.
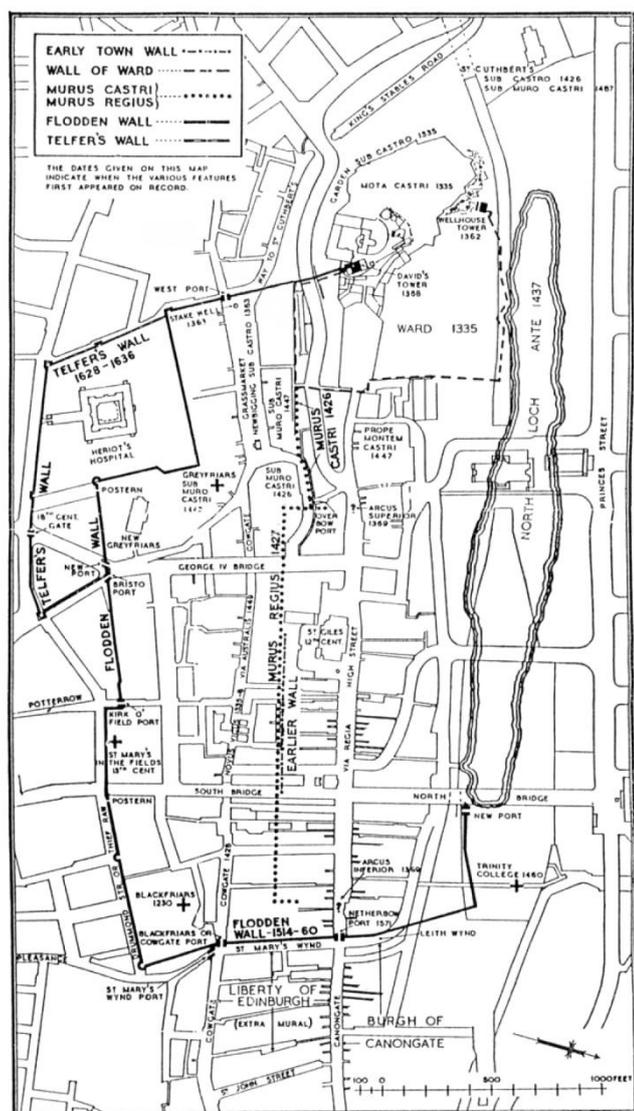
Edinburgh's defences, showing Flodden and Telfer Walls (after RCAHMS)

At various times though its history, Edinburgh would find itself at odds with the castle – it was not rare for one side to have control of the town whilst the other controlled its castle. Save for St Margaret's Chapel, nothing survives of the first castle - following its capture by Robert I (the Bruce) in 1314 from the English, he ordered the defences to be dismantled to prevent English re-occupation. The English did re-occupy the site in 1335 and rebuilt some of the defences but could not prevent the castle's recapture by the Scots under Sir William Douglas in 1341 and in 1356 David II set about rebuilding the castle, including a massive L–shaped tower at its eastern end which became known as David's Tower[iii].

By the end of the 12th Century, the town's existing defences were being improved and added to – records mention a West Gate by 1160, a South Gate in 1214 and the Netherbow Port in 1369[iv]. In 1362, the Wellhouse Tower was built beneath the north wall of the castle to protect its water supply. But the first recorded wall was known as the 'King's Wall' which was first recorded in 1427. In 1450, James II enabled the burgesses of Edinburgh to defend their city by the issuing of a charter:

'Forasmuch as we are informed by our well-beloved Provost and Community of Edinburgh, that they dread the evil and injury of our enemies of England, we have in favour of them, and for the zeal and affection that we have for the Provost and Community of our said Burgh, and for the common profit, granted to them full licence and leave to fosse, bulwark, wall, tower, turret, and other ways to strengthen our said Burgh in what manner of ways or degree that be seen most speedful to them. Given under our Great Seal at Stirling the last day of April, and of our reign the thirteenth year, anno 1450.[v]'

Thus, Edinburgh was one of only three Scottish towns (the others being Perth and Stirling) to be defended by stone walls.

The wall was still under construction twenty years later as on 28 April 1472, James III ordered the demolition of houses built on or close to the walls. Below the steep southern flank of what became the Royal Mile, and before the ground rose again ran a hollow which evolved into the Cowgate, a track for the cattle kept in byres in the burgh to go back and forth to pasture on the Meadows. In 1477, James III banned 'all quick beasts, kye, oxen' within the walls[vi].

The wall was about 1.5 metres thick and ran along the south side of the Royal Mile, above the Cowgate, from Castle Hill in the west towards St. Mary's Street in the east where it turned northwards to cross the Royal Mile, enclosing a space no larger than 0.8 by 0.4 kilometres[vii].

Following the disaster of the Battle of Flodden in 1513, the inhabitants of Edinburgh braced themselves for an English invasion and resolved to improve the defences and extend them to cover the Cowgate and Grassmarket areas (it was also an opportunity to control smuggling into the burgh). In February 1514, the French ambassador to Scotland, Sieur de la Bastie, wrote of Robert Borthwick, the master gunner, 'hes devisit bulwerkis and trinchis' (it is believed that this is the very first use of the term 'bulwark' in Scottish history) to be made before Edinburgh Castle and to 'stuff' the place with men and artillery[viii], although these works were not carried out. Never-the-less, it was decided to build a new wall, which became known as the 'Flodden Wall' and in early in 1514 the Town Council imposed a levy for its construction and work commenced (although it was not completed until 1560).

Wenceslas Hollar's 1670 view of Edinburgh from Salisbury Craigs. Clearly illustrated are the Flodden Wall and the Bristo Port (at 19), the Potterrow Port (at 20) and the West Port (22). Hollar indicates that the wall was connected to the castle. © Trustees of the British Museum

The wall was as high as 7.35m in places and around 1.2m thick, with rectilinear towers pierced by 'dumb-bell' loops[ix] (although these were probably designed for appearance since their function would be unaffected by adding an extra aperture to a gun-loop[x]), with a clear space of 3.6m on the inside and 7.2m on the outside of the wall. It is probable the wall connected to the castle – following the excavations which commenced in 1912, the site of a postern at the base of David's Tower has been identified. This would be the likely point of connection, something indicated on James Gordon's c1647 view of Edinburgh Castle[xi] and on Alexander Kincaid's 1784 plan of Edinburgh. Also, modern views of the southern flank of Castle Rock from the east do show a 'scar' descending the Rock. Whilst neither John Slezer's 1671 nor Theodore Dury's 1709 plan of the castle show the wall[xii], recent archaeological investigations on a site between the Grassmarket and Castle Rock do indicate that the wall in fact did connect to the castle (as well as suggesting that parts of the Flodden Wall were actually built upon earlier defensive walls)[xiii].

From the base of Castle Rock, the Flodden Wall crossed the western end of the Grassmarket *(right)*, where the West Port was located, and then climbed along the Vennel where the Tower in the Vennel still remains *(overleaf)*. It then turned eastwards, along the northern edge of what is now George Heriot's School (previously Heriot's Hospital) before reaching Greyfriars Kirkyard (the wall still exists

here and a number of memorials have been subsequently built into it where it turned south for about 260m and then continued eastwards again *(overleaf)*.
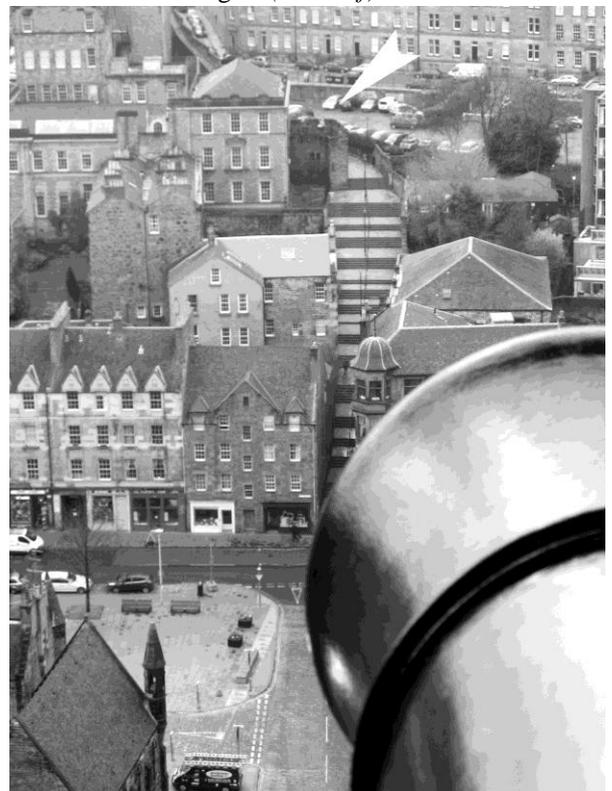
The view from the Half-Moon Battery showing the line of the Flodden Wall as it crosses the western end of the Grassmarket (the course is marked in the modern pavement by light-grey paving stones) before climbing up the Vennel. The Tower in the Vennel is arrowed at the top of the stairs

The Tower in the Vennel. The best preserved remains of Edinburgh's walls, showing one of the 'dumbell' loops
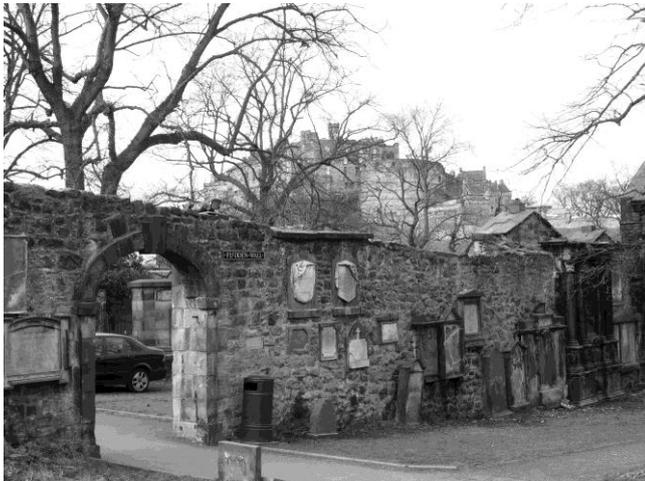
The Flodden Wall in Greyfriars Kirkyard (note the memorials which have been subsequently built into the wall)

It ran across what is now the Museum of Scotland (although the wall was recorded by the Ordnance Survey in both 1854 and 1877), the Bristo and Potterow Ports were located in this area, the former marked by the modern street at the rear of the museum. The wall continued along what is now Drummond Street before, turning north at the Pleasance (the Cowgate Port was located at the foot of the Pleasance) and enclosing the former Blackfriars Monastery. The wall then followed the line of St Mary's Street to the Netherbow Port, which stood across the Royal Mile (and is marked by a number of brass studs in the cobbles of the High Street). From here, the wall continued north to the Nor Loch, finishing at the New Port, but the course of the wall has been subsequently obliterated as a result of the building of the railway (although it would have followed the line of what is now Jeffrey Street initially before turning west close to the line of Market Street).

In places such as St Mary's and north of the High Street, it is likely that the 'wall' took the form of strengthening an existing line of buildings[xiv]. There were six ports located in the Flodden Wall (as well as a number of small posterns), but of these, only the Netherbow Port took the form of a large fortified gateway (a drawing of 1544 shows it as a wide arch flanked by two round towers). Repaired in 1538, it was blown open by the Earl of Hertford's English force on 06 May 1544, who subsequently burned the town in

what became known as the 'Rough Wooing'. A clock tower was added to the structure in 1571 and again repaired in the early 17th century[xv] and demolished in 1764.

Engraving titled: 'The Netherbow Port from the East. Taken down 1764'. Inscribed: 'Drawn by D Wilson, Engraved by W Forrest'. (SC932534 © RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk)

The Rough Wooing was just one of a series of disasters that befell Edinburgh in the 16th Century, as further disturbances took place during the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-67) and its aftermath. In 1558, the Protestant Lords of the Congregation marched on Edinburgh, taking control of the town with little difficulty and forcing the Regent, the French Mary of Guise (and widow of James V) to fall back on Leith which she had fortified as part of a chain of citadels which included Eyemouth, Dunbar, Leith and Inchkeith. Piero Strozzi fortified Leith in accordance with current Continental thinking[xvi] with the result that Leith could boast the most modern fortifications to be found anywhere in the British Isles (it should also be noted that generally, artillery failed to produce any noticeable change in Scots fortification[xvii]).

Following the forced abdication of Queen Mary, Scotland's nobility was divided between her supporters and those of her son, the infant James VI (who was represented by a number of regents). In May 1571, Edinburgh, held on behalf of the Queen by William Kirkcaldy of Grange, was besieged by the forces of Regent James Douglas, 4th Earl of Morton. In what became known as 'The Lang Siege[xviii]', the Netherbow was barricaded; the walls repaired and nearby houses pulled down to improve fields of fire and to prevent their use by the besiegers. Unable to make headway, the besiegers soon withdrew but returned on 16 October, this time under Regent Mar. Although the defences had again been strengthened, the besiegers breached the Flodden Wall but were turned back by the

inner defences. This siege was lifted on 21 October although the town was blockaded until July 1572 when a truce was agreed which handed the town over to the Regent's party and forceds Grange to retreat to the castle[xix].

A contemporary view of the 1573 siege of Edinburgh Castle. This shows the Flodden Wall connecting to David's Tower

The siege of the Castle continued until the spring of 1573, when English forces in support of the Regency, pounded the castle so relentlessly that by its end the castle lay in ruins. Repairs would take two decades. From the ruins of David's Tower grew the Half Moon Battery[xx], an essay in the 'reinforced castle' style which had gone out of fashion on the Continent more than half a century before[xxi]. The Half Moon Battery protected the castle's eastern and south-eastern approaches, aspects that were more vulnerable to attack, especially when the town and castle were occupied by opposing forces. The Half Moon Battery was to prove its worth in 1640 when Alexander Leslie's Covenanter army laid siege to the castle during the second Bishops' War (the Covenanter's had taken the castle easily in 1639, but a year later, the Castle was back in Royal hands, under the governorship of Lord Ettrick). Whilst the risk of collateral damage to the town did limit the use of the cannon mounted in the battery, the Castle successfully resisted assault, starvation finally forcing its surrender in September 1640[xxii].

In 1618 the town council bought land to the west of Greyfriars Kirk and between 1628 and 1636 enclosed it by the Telfer Wall. The rubble-built wall ran south from the Tower in the Vennel (this section is visible today[Figure 6]) to Lauriston Place; it then turned east, running as far as Bristo Street, where it returned north (this section is also visible) to the Bristo Port in the Flodden Wall, enclosing an area which is now largely occupied by George Heriot's School. The Telfer Wall was named after its mason, John Taillefer[xxiii].

The remains of the Telfer Wall, looking northwards. In the middle distance is the Tower in the Vennel, where the Telfer Wall joined the Flodden Wall. Above is the castle

By the 17th century the King's Wall had been almost completely absorbed within later buildings. But in 1650, in response to a new English threat the mason John Mylne (1611-67) and the stonewright John Scott strengthened the Flodden and Telfer walls and constructed artillery emplacements. A line of earthworks linking Edinburgh to Leith was also constructed (Leith Walk now occupies the line of these defences), but following defeat at Dunbar (3 September 1650), Edinburgh fell to the English, although the castle held out for a further two and a half months. Resisting mining, mortars and naval demi-cannon shipped from England, the castle finally surrendering on 24 December[xxiv], although the fact that its governor, Colonel Walter Dundas, quickly entered English service following the surrender, together with the reserves of provisions and the lack of damage to the fabric of the castle itself suggests betrayal[xxv]. A new stone fort was built in Leith by Mylne in 1650, and this subsequently became the site of Leith Citadel[xxvi], built in 1656[xxvii].
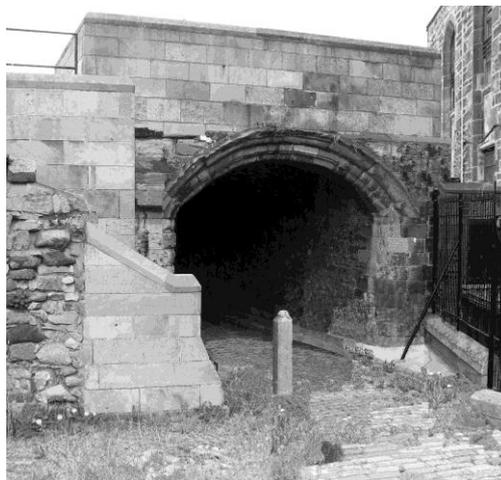
The entrance to Leith Citadel – the only remaining part of the Citadel built in the 1650s

The Jacobite rebellions of 1689, 1715 and 1745-6 each impacted upon Edinburgh. The castle declared briefly for James VII/II before surrendering to Williamite forces in the summer of 1689, and in response to the 1715 rising, emplacements were built by Captain Theodore Dury (the remains of Leith Citadel, now used as a prison, were captured by the Jacobites in 1715, and prisoners released). Thirty years later, in September 1745, the citizens of Edinburgh responded to the approach of the Jacobite army by throwing up earthworks under the direction of Colin Maclaurin, a professor of mathematics. But they offered no resistance as the Camerons seized the city gates on the night of 16-17 September. Four days later, Government forces under General Cope were defeated at Prestonpans, leaving Edinburgh Castle isolated. However, a year "live and let live" relationship prevailed with the 85- -old Governor Guest not interfering in the Jacobite-controlled city as long as provisions continued to come through to the garrison[xxviii].

Demolitions to the walls began soon after the end of the Jacobite threat in 1746. First to go, in 1762, were the bastions of the Telfer Wall along Lauriston Place which were demolished as they were obstructing traffic. The Netherbow survived until 1764, when it too was removed as an obstruction to traffic. The West Port and the Potterow Port were removed in the 1780s[xxix].

Undoubtedly, Edinburgh's military strength lay with the castle, and compared with other towns of similar standing elsewhere in Europe, Edinburgh's walls appear as something of an afterthought, and out-dated (whilst Edinburgh was still in the process of completing the Flodden Wall, elsewhere in Europe, bastioned artillery fortifications were starting to be introduced). But the walls, along with the network of closes and narrow passages that are still a feature of the Old Town to this day, did have a military value, as Edinburgh faced hostile forces on no fewer than 8 separate occasions between 1570 and 1745. But one should not view Edinburgh's defences from a purely military perspective as they were not constructed solely for military purposes. As well as their defensive function, they also assisted with internal security, and, as highlighted previously, helped combat the smuggling of goods in and out of the town. The walls with their associated ports enabled the passage of goods, livestock and people in and out of Edinburgh to be controlled (and no doubt permitted the collection of any toils and duties) and helped control the spread of disease. The walls defined the boundary of the royal burgh for more than two centuries, enclosing an area of 56.6 hectares, during which time the population of Edinburgh increased from 10,000 to 30,000[xxx].

[i] TRABRAHAM, CHRIS, *Edinburgh Castle*, (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 20 and p. 22.
[ii] FRY, MICHAEL, *Edinburgh: A History of the City*, (London, 2010), p. 48.
[iii] TRABRAHAM, CHRIS, Op Cit., pp. 23-4.
[iv] GIFFORD, JOHN, McWILLIAM, COLIN, and WALKER, DAVID, *The Buildings of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 84-5 and FRY, MICHAEL, *Edinburgh: A History of the City*, (London, 2010), p. 48.
[v] MARWICK, JAMES DAVID (editor), *Charters and other documents relating to the City of Edinburgh, AD 1143-1540*, (Edinburgh, 1871), pp. 70-71.
[vi] FRY, MICHAEL, Op Cit., p. 81.
[vii] CATFORD, E. F., *Edinburgh: The Story of a City*, (London, 1975), p. 18.
[viii] MACIVOR, IAIN, 'Artillery and Major Places of Strength in the Lothians and the East Border, 1513-1542', in CALDWELL, DAVID H. (editor), *Scottish Weapons and Fortifications, 1100-1800*, (Edinburgh, 1981), p. 105.
[ix] Ibid., p. 105.
[x] CRUDEN, STEWART, *The Scottish Castle*, (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 217.
[xi] KENYON, JOHN and OHLMEYER, JANE (editors), *The Civil Wars: A Military History of England, Scotland and Ireland, 1638-1660*, (Oxford, 1998), p. 223.
[xii] TABRAHAM, CHRIS and GROVE, DOREEN, *Fortress Scotland and the Jacobites*, (London, 1995), p. 29 and p. 47).
[xiii] LAWSON, JOHN A., and REED, DAVID, *Conservation and Change on Edinburgh's Defences*, (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2003), (SAIR 10).
[xiv] CULLEN, W. DOUGLAS, *The Walls of Edinburgh*, (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 1.
[xv] KERR, HENRY F., 'Notes on the Nether Bow Port' in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, (1933), vol. 67, pp. 297-307.
[xvi] FRY, MICHAEL, Op Cit., p. 103.
[xvii] DUFFY, CHRISTOPHER, *Siege Warfare: The Fortress in the Early Modern World, 1494-1660*, (London, 1979), pp. 85-7.
[xviii] TRABRAHAM, CHRIS, Op Cit., p. 32.
[xix] POTTER, HARRY, *Edinburgh under Siege: 1571-1573*, (Stroud, 2003), pp. 60-65, pp. 85-6, pp. 105-6 and p. 135.
[xx] FRY, MICHAEL, Op Cit., p. 105.
[xxi] DUFFY, CHRISTOPHER, Op Cit., pp. 85-7.
[xxii] OSBORNE, MIKE, *Sieges and Fortifications of the Civil Wars in Britain*, (Leigh-on-Sea, 2004), p. 58.
[xxiii] CULLEN, W. DOUGLAS, Op Cit., p. 1.
[xxiv] DUFFY, CHRISTOPHER, Op Cit., p. 156.
[xxv] OSBORNE, MIKE, Op Cit., p. 58.
[xxvi] Ibid., p. 80.
[xxvii] Leith's fortifications is the subject of a future paper to be published in *Casemate*.
[xxviii] DUFFY, CHRISTOPHER, *The Fortress in the Age of Vauban and Frederick the Great, 1660-1789*, (London, 1985), p. 172.
[xxix] COGHILL, HAMISH, *Lost Edinburgh*, (Edinburgh, 2004), p. 14.
[xxx] CULLEN, W. DOUGLAS, Op Cit., p. 1. ♠