

**THE BOOK OF THE OLD  
EDINBURGH  
CLUB FOR THE YEAR  
1908. FIRST VOLUME**

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The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club for the Year 1908. First Volume by Old Edinburgh Club

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**OLD EDINBURGH CLUB**

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March 1909

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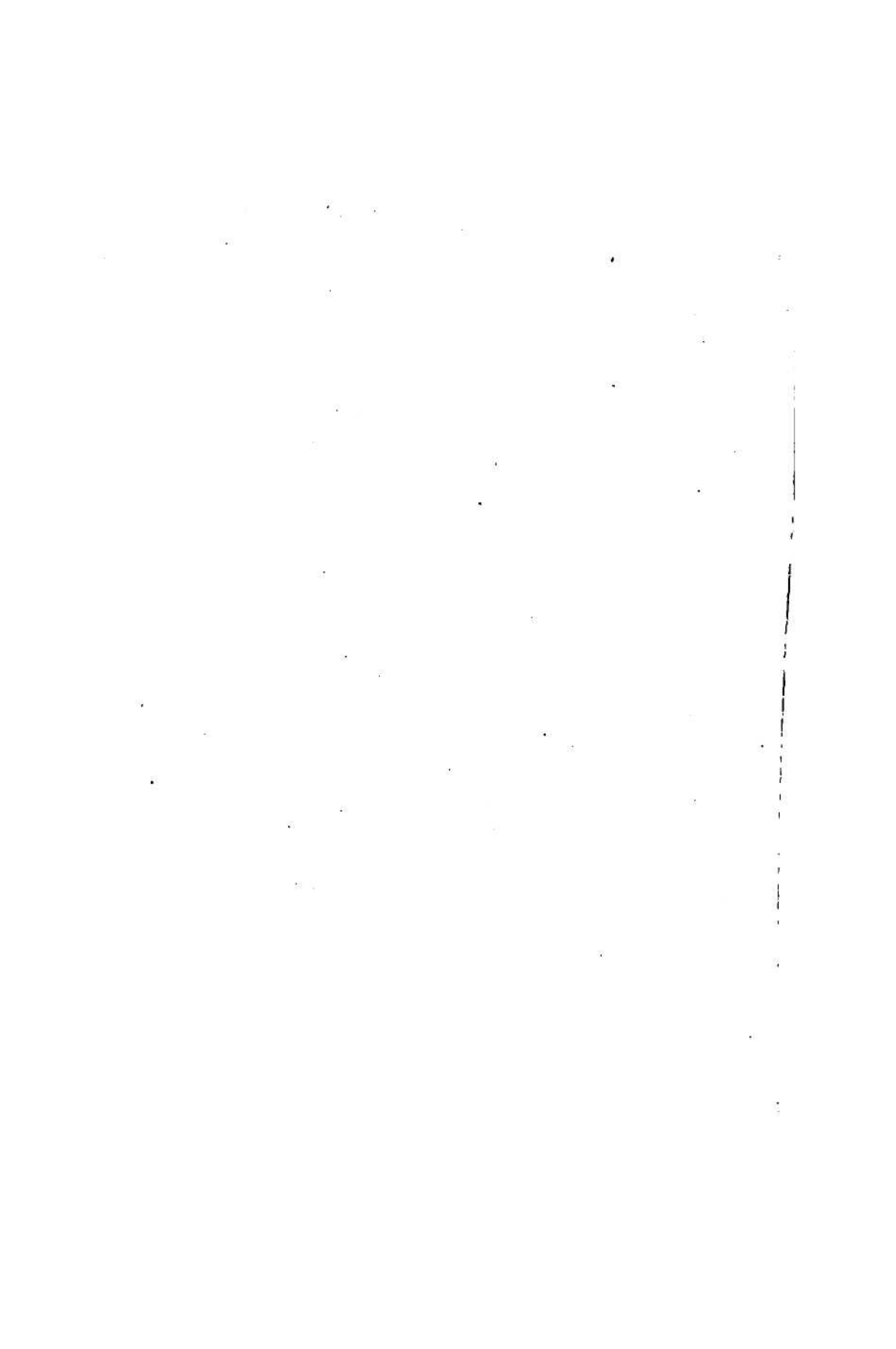


EDINBURGH

PRINTED BY T. AND A. CONSTABLE  
FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE CLUB

1908







PROVISIONAL LIST OF OLD HOUSES REMAINING  
IN HIGH STREET AND CANONGATE OF  
EDINBURGH

'Mine own romantic town. . . .  
O, be his tomb as lead to lead  
Upon it's dull destroyer's head.'

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

**I**T may be safely affirmed that, since 1860, two-thirds of the ancient buildings in the Old Town of Edinburgh have been demolished.

It goes without saying that a large number of those old buildings had necessarily to be removed in the interests of hygiene, and of a healthy recoil from the congested conditions under which our forefathers found themselves constrained to pass their lives. Had these desirable, and indeed indispensable clearances been effected with discrimination, and with a due regard to historic, literary, and æsthetic considerations, there might still have remained ground for a few sentimental regrets; but the common sense of the community would have recognised and accepted the inevitable, and there might have been, even from the standpoint of the artist and archæologist, a certain gain from the isolation and added conspicuousness of the more important examples which it had been deemed desirable to retain.

Unfortunately, the actual process has been widely different. Destruction, widespread, ruthless, and indiscriminating, has been the rule; rarely has any consideration beyond the most baldly utilitarian been allowed to influence the decision, and the result is that a large proportion of our most valuable historic and

architectural remains has been irretrievably lost to the city and to posterity.

This process, which has gone on practically unchecked for over sixty years, has now reached a point when, if aught of the venerable aspect and romantic interest of our city is to be maintained, an entirely different policy must be inaugurated. A united and vigorous effort must be made to rescue from the hands of the house-wrecking Philistine all that is possible of the few relics which still survive. Failing such effort the fatal 'too late,' must be the epitaph of the famous Old Town of Edinburgh.

The following attempt to record the existing, or recently existing, ancient buildings may, it is hoped, be of service as a practical basis for such an endeavour at conservation.

BEGINNING at the Esplanade, on the south side stands a building, popularly known as 'The Cannon Ball House,' dating from the reign of Charles I. It has survived three sieges, and has been a good deal knocked about and altered, so that its general aspect is more modern, but here and there it bears traces of its antiquity, and its date, 1630, crowns a dormer window on the west side. Its name, 'The Cannon Ball House,' is derived from a bullet said to have been fired from the Castle in 1745 and still sticking in the wall.<sup>1</sup> This house exhibits the unique peculiarity of stone grooves above and below the windows for outside sliding shutters. Immediately to the east stands the new Board School, erected nearly twenty years ago on the site of the stately mansion of the Duke of Gordon, governor of the Castle in 1689, the doorway of which, surmounted by the ducal coronet, has been rebuilt into the wall of the School-house at Boswell's Court.

To the east of the new Board School stands a handsome old tenement of hewn stone entering from Boswell's Court (so

<sup>1</sup> This legend is open to question.

named from a medical man there resident at the end of the eighteenth century). A doubtful tradition associates this land with the Earls of Bothwell.

These are the only ancient buildings remaining on the south side of Castlehill. On the north side—behind the reservoir—stands a group of houses erected by Professor Patrick Geddes, called Ramsay Garden, and reached from Ramsay Lane. Incorporated in this group we find the oddly shaped house known as 'The Guse Pie,' built for himself by Allan Ramsay the poet, and the somewhat later row erected by his son, the painter. These buildings are found in Edgar's Plan, dated 1742.

At the east corner of Ramsay Lane we come to 'The Outlook Tower,' the lower portion of which is antique, the upper part raised and remodelled for 'Short's Observatory.' This tenement is traditionally associated with the Laird o' Cockpen—not the great magnate who is supposed to have inspired Lady Nairne's lyric, but the more obscure proprietor who had been a boon-companion of Charles II. in his days of adversity, and having consequently been deprived of his patrimony, recovered his lands by playing the old Scots tune 'Brose and Butter' as a voluntary in the Chapel Royal, St. James's, in presence of the King, subsequent to the Restoration. Eastward from 'Outlook Tower,' and standing considerably back from the street, is the southern part of a good old house known as 'Lord Sempill's House.' The father or grandfather of this nobleman married Mary Livingstone, one of the 'Four Maries.' Between the gable of this house and the street front extends a row of ancient buildings, but the house facing the street is modern. This exhausts the list of ancient houses on the north side of Castlehill, but it may be worthy of note that the modern buildings of the United Free Church College, extending from this point to Milne's Court, almost exactly cover the site of the ancient group of buildings known as Mary of Guise's Palace.

On the same (north) side of the street, and immediately east