

**REMINISCENCES OF
PORT AND
TOWN OF LEITH**

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Reminiscences of Port and Town of Leith by John Martine

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JOHN MARTINE

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BY

JOHN MARTINE,

AUTHOR OF "REMINISCENCES OF THE ROYAL BURGH OF HADDINGTON," ETC.



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PREFACE.

THE Port and Town of Leith present a field rich in historical, traditional, and antiquarian treasures. Many old authors—Maitland, Kincaid, and others—have handed down to posterity the history of its rise, progress, and trade importance.

In 1827, Mr Alexander Campbell published whatever was valuable and interesting as collected from former historians, a volume entitled "Tales, Traditions, and Antiquities of Leith, with Notices of its Trade and Commerce, &c."

In 1851, Dr D. H. Robertson, a native of Leith, published his interesting archæological work, "The Sculptured Stones of Leith, &c."

In 1853, Mr William Hutchison, author of "Flying Shots," published "Tales and Traditions of Leith," with notices of its antiquities. In 1865, Mr Charles Drummond, bookseller, published a new and revised edition of Hutchison's work.

The following pages are humbly submitted to the public, in the hope that they may be found readable and interesting.



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THE SHORE.

WHEN a person in the present day walks along the Quay or Shore of Leith, he cannot but be struck with the absence of vessels. If half-a-dozen or so are lying along the quayside, from the top of the Coalhill to the lower drawbridge, it is an exception to the ordinary state of matters. Such was not the case long ago. It may be interesting at the present day to note some particulars of Leith fifty to sixty years ago, and some stories connected with the town in 1826 and some years afterwards, which came under the notice of the writer. For a very long period of years before 1826, the Shore of Leith was the principal quay for discharging and loading vessels, especially coasters. The new dock, as it was then called, was only finished in 1806. The Coalhill, as its name imports, was the quay where coal cargoes were discharged. Between the upper drawbridge and the lower one, the Newcastle and Hull traders, the three London companies, and the Inverness one had their berths. The Glasgow and Greenock tug-boats lay on the north side. The Lerwick trader, the *Fidelity*, a stout, trig, full-rigged schooner (Captain Aim), used to lie on the north side of the Coalhill, next to Innes's shipbuilding yard. A busy place the Shore of Leith

was in those days on the arrival and departure of the London and other smacks. The London and Leith Old Shipping Company, which was originally a Berwick one, was transferred to Leith in the beginning of the century. Long ago the goods from London to Leith, &c., were carted from Berwick by waggons with three or four horses in a string, or transhipped from Berwick to Leith in small craft, which must have made the charges on them for freight and carriage very costly, and the long transit very inconvenient to merchants. Persons going to London by sea in those days had to go to Berwick and take shipping there in the Berwick smacks. The Berwick shipmasters and their descendants long continued to navigate the vessels of the Old Shipping Company. The Berwick names of Nesbitt, Crabb, Johnston, Charters, Crow, &c., were long known in Leith. The smacks were stout-built ships of 140 to 180 tons register, able to stand very heavy seas. They had a tall thick mast with a heavy running-out bowsprit, and a very large mainsail. They made quick passages with a fair wind, but were sometimes two to three weeks on the passage when contrary winds blew. Six to nine of them have been known to have come into the harbour on a change of wind in one tide. During the war times they were well armed, and carried six 18-pound carronades and two 4-pound guns.

It is recorded that the Old Shipping Company's smack the *Queen Charlotte* (Captain Nesbitt) was once attacked by a French privateer, of fourteen guns, betwixt Cromar and the Spurn. Captain Nesbitt and his crew, aided by his passengers, stood bravely and manfully to their guns, and gave the Frenchman such a