

# EDINBURGH CASTLE RESEARCH



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# EDINBURGH CASTLE NAMES



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## SUMMARY

The names of the different components of Edinburgh Castle shed a little light on its varied history, the people who created it and the expectations of later visitors. The following names are considered:

- The Lion's Den
- The Butts Battery
- Hawk Hill
- Mill's Mount
- Foog's Gate
- Devil's Elbow

## THE LION'S DEN

Menageries containing exotic animals were a common feature of Renaissance palaces, and Scotland was no exception. The lion was regarded as a royal beast. Keeping a lion provided not just an object of curiosity. It was the living embodiment of the Scottish royal arms, a symbol of royal power. Lions were known to have been kept at Holyrood Palace during the 16th century. James IV had a lion, a civet cat and two bears. A lion house, which had four stone vaults, was erected there in 1512 (TA, IV, 372).

The Holyrood menagerie was maintained until at least the end of the 16th century. There was a payment in 1595 for the maintenance of the lion, lynx and 'the rest of the pettis and beistis' (Dunbar 1999: 209). The central courtyard of the palace of James V at Stirling is also known as the Lion's Den. There, the attribution is less secure, although a lion was known to have been taken to Stirling for the celebrations that accompanied the baptism of Prince Henry in 1594.

The upkeep of a royal menagerie in Scotland ended after the Union of the Crowns and the movement of the court to London. But the concept of a lion's den became embedded in the popular imagination through knowledge of the Bible and depictions of Daniel in the lion's den. One well-known example, reproduced in engravings, was the painting of Daniel in the Lions' Den by Rubens, formerly in Hamilton Palace and now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, USA. This depicted Daniel in a cave-like space. Thus a cavernous space or gloomy cell was how the public envisaged a 'lion's den'.

This popular concept of the lion's den was accepted by early tourists eager to see sites associated with romantic figures, in particular with Mary Queen of Scots. Some 19th-century guidebooks for Holyrood Palace pointed out how the North Garden there, in the time of Mary Queen of Scots, contained a lion's den (Wilson 1860). More imaginative writers such as Jacob Abbott in his *Mary Queen of Scots* even managed to locate a lion's den at Linlithgow Place, in one of the towers of the artillery bulwark on the east side of the palace. It was described as 'a round pit, like a well, which you could look down into from above ... There is a hole, too, at the bottom, where they put the lion in' (Abbott 1878: 22-3).

According to popular descriptions, Edinburgh Castle possessed not one but two lion's dens - one adjacent to the Esplanade and the other in the Half Moon Battery.

### **The Lion's Den by the Esplanade**

Robert Chambers (1825: 63) considered the Lion's Den to be on the northern slope of the esplanade:

Between the obelisk and the walls of the Castle he will observe a low archway, which is popularly called the LION'S DEN, and is supposed to have been the place of confinement of some lion kept for the amusement of the Scottish monarchs.

This was repeated by Wilson (1848: I, 131):

On the northern slope of the esplanade, without the Castle wall, there still exists a long low archway, like the remains of a subterraneous passage, the walls being of rubble-work, and the arch neatly built of stone. Until the enclosure and planting of the ground excluded the public from the spot, this was popularly known as the Lion's Den, and was believed to be a place of confinement for some of these animals, kept, according to ancient custom, for the amusement of the Scottish monarchs, though it certainly looks more like a covered way to the castle.

### **The Lion's Den by the Half Moon Battery**

The upper part of the Half Moon Battery was occupied by three water tanks, at least two of which were erected after 1794. A plan of 1794 by the engineer, Henry Ruyard, shows proposed water tanks below the Half Moon Battery with a pump and filtering cistern on the battery with underground tanks there (NLS MS.1649 Z. 03/54a).

This is mentioned in an 1811 description of Board of Ordnance property within the castle which described it as adjoining a forge that was built adjoining the Palace Block, against the inner face of the Half Moon Battery:

The forge is a small irregular old building on the outside of this room at the north east end of the ancient state prison [Palace] built of brick with tiled roof. Outer dimensions length 8 feet, breadth 6 feet, height 6 feet. Contiguous to the workshop is a vaulted room called the Lion's Den used as an Ordnance Coal cellar. Inner dimensions length 20 feet, breadth 7 feet, height 9 feet. (NA WO55/2392)

It is probable that the forge was the 'toofall' (lean-to structure) that was described as new when it was roofed in 1670-1 (NAS E28/118). The 1811 description conforms

to the northernmost of the rooms within the Half Moon Battery. This chamber is shown on a copy of a plan of 1858 as a 'cellar unoccupied' (NAS RHP3546/1).

This northernmost chamber was a late medieval addition to David's Tower, its gunloop enhancing its defences (Ewart and Gallagher 2014: 38). There is no evidence of its being used to house a lion. Indeed, unlike at Holyrood, there is no evidence that there was ever a lion in the castle.

## THE BUTT'S BATTERY

A butt was a turf mound erected to carry a target for archery. There was normally a pair of butts, one at each end of the range. Various laws were passed in the 15th century to encourage the practice of archery as a military skill. In 1457, for example, James II ordained that bow butts were to be set up in each parish and archery was to be encouraged, rather than 'fut ball and the golf' (Brook 1894: 334). It is more likely that the butts at Edinburgh Castle were used mostly for aristocratic recreation. For reasons of safety, they were placed at an outlying part of the castle. The bow butts at Linlithgow Palace were in a similar position, at the bottom of the slope, next to the loch.

### **Archery for an infant king**

The earliest reference to the butts is in the Treasurer's Accounts for 1516 when there was a payment:

Item, the xvi day of Julii, for biging of the kingis buttis in the castell iii li. (TA V, 112)

The king in question was James V, then aged four years. He had been under the care of his mother in Stirling Castle after his father, James IV, had died at the battle of Flodden in 1513. In 1515, James and his younger brother Alexander, Duke of Ross, were forcibly removed from the care of Queen Margaret by the new Regent, John Stewart, Duke of Albany, and taken into protective custody at Edinburgh Castle. Albany seems to have taken seriously the care and education of the young king. James was given a small household within the castle. His servants were supervised by Sir David Lindsay of the Mount, and Gavin Dunbar, future archbishop of Glasgow and chancellor, served as his tutor. James's uncle, Henry VIII, and other foreign princes gave the young king gifts of clothing and miniature weapons (Thomas 2004).

The butts are mentioned in relation to gun positions in 1567, with artillery pieces noted as being 'between the butts'. They continued to be maintained when needed. There is a payment recorded in the accounts of the Masters of Works Accounts for 4 August 1628, relating to the repair of the butts in Edinburgh Castle. Twenty-eight horse loads of turf were brought to the castle from the park at Holyrood as part of the repairs in advance of the visit of Charles I to Scotland. It evidently was thirsty work and the men were rewarded by drinks:

Item to James Ker and Hendrie Fentounis horsmen for leiding of xxviii laidis of fail from the park to the castell for mending of the buttis thair at iiiis the laid is v lib xii s.

Mair to thair men to drink vi s. (MW II, 210)

Butt's Battery is shown on David Watson's plan, of 1747, An exact plan of part of Edin Castle showing the situation of the powder magazine (NAS MS.1645 Z.02/07a). Grose (1797: I, 24) describes a winding stair 'which leads down to a place called the Butts'.

## HAWK HILL

A plan of 1675 by Slezer, now in the British Library, marks 'Intended Batterie on the Hawks Hill to command the highways on that side' (Anderson 1913: 20). It was recorded that, in the siege of Edinburgh castle in 1689, 'The Governor appointed a centinell on the Hauks Hill, to give notice as soon as a mortar piece fired' (Bell 1828: 55). The triangular battery is shown, unnamed, on the plan of Edinburgh Castle made in 1709 by Talbot Edwards (NLS MS.1649 Z.03/58a). Romer's Plan of Edinburgh Castle of 1737 plan shows 'The Hawk Hill' (NAS MS.1645 Z.02/04d) and the same on Skinner's plan of 1750. Kinaid in his History of Edinburgh (1787: 137) only mentions that 'upon the right is Hawk-Hill'. This is repeated in Grose (1797: I, 16).

'Hawk', referring to the bird and occurring as a component of a place name, is recorded in Scotland from the 14th century ([www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hawk](http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hawk)).

Wilson (1848: I, 131) says that 'until the erection of the new barracks' it was known as Hawk Hill, 'and doubtless indicated the site of the falconry in earlier times'. James Grant in Cassell's Old & New Edinburgh (1887: I, 76) comments that it was 'where kings and nobles practiced falconry of old'.

An examination of other Hawkhill place names strengthens the possibility of the origin in hawking rather than as a place notable for the wild bird. There is a Hawk Hill near Lochend, Edinburgh. This was situated c.0.4km to the north of Restalrig Castle (now Lochend House), once a notable site where, in April 1560, there was a skirmish between the English army and French troops during the siege of Leith (Harris 1991: 364). An examination of the other seven Scottish Hawkhill place names in the OS Gazetteer reveals at least another two examples that can be closely associated with castles. There is a Hawkhill 0.5km east of Craigmillar Castle, Edinburgh, and another situated 0.25km south of Kincardine Tower.

As with the Butts, there may be a connection with the young James V. In 1517, there was a payment to Morton, the falconer, 'for keping of the kingis halkis [hawks] in Edinburgh' (MW I, 160), although it is unclear if they were kept in the castle rather than at Holyrood. The king was also in Craigmillar Castle in 1517, where he was taken to avoid the plague, which had broken out in Edinburgh (TA V, xi).

## MILL'S MOUNT

There are various renderings of this name with both Mill and Milne in common usage. Both mean mill, and elsewhere it could be explained as a mill mound. There is such a Milne's Mount in Berwick recorded in June 1594 (Border Papers I, 536, no. 957). The likely explanation, however, is that it is named after Robert Mylne, the king's master mason, who was engaged in constructing various fortifications and other structures in Edinburgh Castle in the late 17th century. Many details of this work were specified in a contract of 1677 (NAS E67/13/1/13). A further report on the condition of the castle was compiled in 1679 by Charles Maitland (later 3rd Earl of Lauderdale) (NAS E37/22). It is only in 1688 that a name is given to this part of the defences. The contract of 22 August 1688 lists repairs by Robert Mylne, master mason of 'the New Battery Commonly called Milnes Mount' (NAS E28/578/12).

Thereafter, variations on the name appear, a not unusual practice in 18th-century writings. John Romer's plan of the castle of 1737 names 'Mills Mount' (NLS MS.1645 Z.02/04d). Grose mentions a battery called 'Miln's-mount' (Grose 1797: I, 25). Grant in 1850 describes it as 'a battery called Milnes Mount' (Grant 1850: 266).

It can, therefore, be presumed that, as with Dury's Battery, the battery was named after its creator, the master mason, Robert Mylne.

## FOOG'S GATE

A gate is marked in this position on early maps of the castle, but the earliest record of the name is on John White's plan of 1735: the 'Foggy Gate and road' (NLS MS.1645 Z.02/09). Shortly afterwards, John Romer's plan of 1737 shows 'Fog's gate and road' (NLS MS.1645 Z.02/04d). On Skinner's plan of the castle of 1750 it is marked as 'Foog's gate and Road' (NLS MS.1645 Z.02/08a).

Foog's Gate was the innermost gate of the castle, the last in a series of defences that led from the eastern outer gateway. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the usual way of referring to a particular gate was by its number in this sequence. Early descriptions are not helpful. Grose (1797: I, 16), for example, only describes it as 'a third gateway: entering which, upon the left hand, is the shot yard'.

Possible derivations:

No one with the name of Foog or similar has been found to be associated with the castle.

The Scots word 'fog': a moss used as a thatching material or for packing walls (Pride 1996: 34; [www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/fog](http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/fog)). Other meanings appear to be derived from fog/moss in the sense of old/moss-covered.

The Dictionary of the Scots Language defines 'foogie' as follows ([www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/foggie\\_n2](http://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/foggie_n2)):

a) a veteran or time-expired soldier first recorded 1785 as a nickname for an invalid soldier, citing Grose 1785;

b) an old, decrepit or out-of-date person: first recorded in 1790.

The first instance of 'Foggy Gate' on a plan, in 1735 (see above), is therefore much earlier than its use as recorded in dictionaries. The earlier date, however, does not exclude its use to mean an old soldier. Companies of invalids were first formed in 1719 from out-pensioners of Chelsea Hospital. In 1741, they were renamed the Royal Invalids, in 1751 became known as the 41st Regiment of Foot and in 1782 as the 41st (Royal Invalids) Foot. An inspection of the regiment noted its extremely elderly officers. The youngest was aged 42 and the average age of the ensigns was 63. Of the latter, one was 71 and blind. One lieutenant was aged 80 and the major was 82 (Messenger 1994: 41). The description of the soldiers as decrepit was, therefore, justified.

The rendering of the name as 'Foggy' in 1735 could be the misunderstood transcription of a local name by John White, a Board of Ordnance engineer based in the Tower of London.

In 1853, an contribution by a certain J.L to the journal *Notes & Queries*. (Anon. 1853: 154) discussed the body of men known as the 'castle foogies', stating that the writer had 'a most vivid recollection of the Castle Foggies. They were an invalid company, and my recollection of them goes as far back at least as 1780'. The Edinburgh Castle Company of Invalids was one of four stationed in Scotland, the others being at Stirling, Fort George and Dumbarton (Reid 1995: 37-8). A Company of Invalids was stationed at the castle between 1793 and 1797 (NA WO12/11601).

As Foog's Gate was the innermost of the castle gates, it presented the least threat, and perhaps a guard of 'foogies' was often deemed sufficient for the purpose.

## DEVIL'S ELBOW

The Devil's Elbow is the name now given to the walkway on the south side of the Great Hall. Arrangements at the east end of the Great Hall, however, have changed. Originally, the walkway was approached from the east by a steep passage leading from the south side of Crown Square, which turned sharply on to the present walkway. The steepness of this turn, in combination with the height of the ramparts, led to the present name. The former access is shown on a plan of 1719 by the Board of Ordnance engineer, Thomas Moore (NAS MS.1645 Z.02/01b) and that of Charles Tarrant (NAS MS.1645 Z.02/14b). The section inside the building was altered when a new staircase was erected and the name became applied to the exposed wallwalk below the Great Hall.

### **The Devil's Elbow and Devils**

There are many places whose unusual topographic location imparts a sense of strangeness that, in the popular imagination, could be associated with the devil, for example, the Devil's Beef Tub, near Moffat. In the 16th and the 17th centuries,

the Devil was considered to be a very real person and strange parts of buildings were thought to encourage his presence. James VI, in his *Daemonologie* published in 1597, took this very seriously:

for some of them sayeth, that being transformed in the likeness of a little beast or foule, they will come and pearce through whatsoever house or Church, though all ordinarie passages be closed, by whatsoever open, the aire may enter in at. (*Daemonologie* Book III, 32)

The 'ordinarie passages' into houses could be afforded protection from such evil by ritual protection marks. The name of the unidentified part of the castle that was, according to a document of 1688, 'commonly called where the devill flew out' would seem to be connected with such beliefs in the supernatural (NAS E28/579/1/9).

The 'Devil's Elbow' was common as a place name applied to a sharp turn in a road or river. The best-known Scottish example is perhaps the summit of the Cairnwell Pass at the head of Glen Shee, but this place name appears to have become widely known only during the increase of tourism during the Victorian period. It does not, for example, appear on the 1st edition OS map of the area.

The first known instance of the use of the name 'devil's elbow' at Edinburgh Castle was in 1811. On 22 April of that year 49 French prisoners escaped from Edinburgh Castle by descending the walls at the Devil's Elbow. This was recorded in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* (1811: 87):

22nd – Wednesday night, about 11 o'clock, 49 French prisoners, among whom was a captain, (who also contrived to get away with his baggage) escaped from the south-west corner of their prison, in Edinburgh castle. They had cut out a hole through the bottom of the parapet wall, below the place commonly called the Devil's Elbow, and let themselves down by rope.

It is likely that the Devil's Elbow reached the popular imagination after the publication of *St Ives* by Robert Louis Stevenson in 1897. Stevenson chose as his hero the French captain mentioned in the above account, Jacques St Ives. Chapter 6 tells how:

we had made out to pierce below the curtain about the south-west corner, in a place they call the Devil's Elbow. I have never met that celebrity; nor (if the rest of him at all comes up to what they called his elbow) have I the least desire of his acquaintance. From the heel of the masonry, the rascally, breakneck precipice descended sheer among waste lands, scattered suburbs of the city, and houses in the building.

The Devil's Elbow in Edinburgh Castle reached its maximum use between 1757 and 1814, when it was part of the compound for prisoners of war of various nationalities as well as French. The Devil's Elbow as a place name is also common in North America. Notable examples that possibly would be familiar to the Americans among the prisoners include a very sharp bend on the Mississippi River and, perhaps more likely, the Devil's Elbow at Bluffon, Savannah, South Carolina.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- NA National Archives, Kew  
NAS National Archives of Scotland  
NLS National Library of Scotland

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