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### **Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time**

Born in Edinburgh, Daniel Wilson (1816–92) initially pursued an artistic career and spent time in Turner's studio. However, in 1846 he became a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland and devoted the rest of his life to archaeology, anthropology and university administration. He was active in the Society's attempts to save historic buildings in Edinburgh, and the city's built environment was the subject of this two-volume 1848 work, which is illustrated with engravings after his own drawings. In Volume 1, Wilson begins by tracing the city's history from earliest times. The latter part of the volume covers local antiquities and traditions, with each chapter looking at a different area of the Old Town. The historical detail, with references, is immense, and Wilson's enthusiasm for his city is evident throughout. His second major work, the landmark *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* (second edition, 1863), is also reissued in this series.

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Memorials of  
Edinburgh  
in the Olden Time

VOLUME 1

DANIEL WILSON



Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-06346-3 - Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time: Volume 1  
Daniel Wilson  
Frontmatter  
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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.  
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108063463](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108063463)

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This edition first published 1848  
This digitally printed version 2013

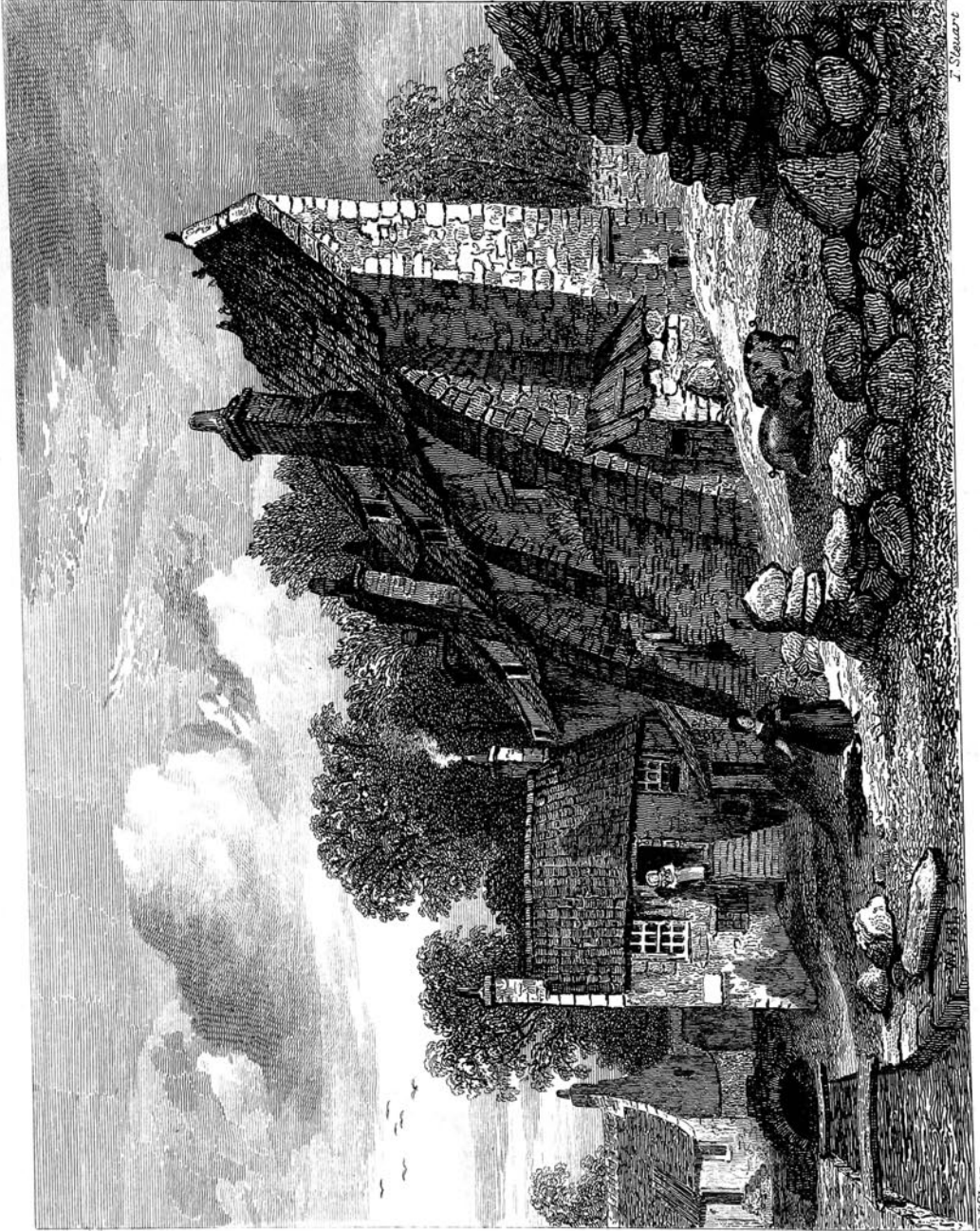
ISBN 978-1-108-06346-3 Paperback

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Cambridge University Press  
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ANCIENT HOUSE CANONMILLS.

Published by Hugh Paton, Adam Square, Edinburgh.

MEMORIALS  
OF  
EDINBURGH  
IN THE OLDEN TIME.

BY  
DANIEL WILSON, F. R. S. S. A.  
ACTING SECRETARY OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND.

Volume I.



EDINBURGH:  
HUGH PATON, ADAM SQUARE.

LONDON:  
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO.

MDCCCXLVIII.

Cambridge University Press  
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Printed by Hugh Paton, Adam Square, Edinburgh.



TO

**Peter Wilson, Esq.**

THESE

MEMORIALS OF EDINBURGH IN THE OLDEN TIME

ARE DEDICATED

*As a mark of sincere Gratitude and Affection*

BY HIS NEPHEW,

THE AUTHOR.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE Work now brought to a close, under the title of MEMORIALS OF EDINBURGH IN THE OLDEN TIME, was begun years ago, not with the pen, but the pencil. In the gratification of a taste for the picturesque relics of the past with which the old Scottish capital abounds, a considerable number of sketches and drawings accumulated, which acquired a value altogether apart from any claim to artistic merit, when the subjects of many of them disappeared in the course of the radical changes wrought of late years on the Old Town. Believing that the interest which these monuments of former ages are calculated to excite commands the sympathy of a numerous and increasing class, I was induced to prepare a selection of the drawings for engraving, and to draw up a slight descriptive narrative to accompany them; but the absence of desirable information in other works on the subject, and the accumulation of a good deal of curious material, led to a total change of plan, the result of which is now before the reader.

On referring to the works already published on the antiquities of Edinburgh, none of them seemed to embrace the object in view. Maitland's History presents a huge accumulation of valuable, and generally accurate, but nearly undigested materials; while Arnot furnishes a lively and piquant *rifacimento* of his predecessor's labours, embellished with occasional illustrations derived from his own researches; but—with one or two slight exceptions—neither of them have attempted to describe what they were themselves cognisant of. Both of the historians of Edinburgh seem, indeed, to have lacked that invaluable faculty of the topographer, styled by phrenologists *locality*, and the consequence is, that we are treated with a large canvass, composed in the historic vein of high art, when probably most readers would much rather have preferred a cabinet picture of the Dutch school. In striking contrast to either of these, are Mr Robert Chambers's delightful "Traditions." The author has there struck out an entirely new path, and with the happiest results. The humour and the pathos of the old-world stories of Edinburgh in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ere New Town and Old Town improvements were more substantial than the dreams of future reformers, are secured—not without occasional heightening touches from the delineator's own lively fancy. It is only surprising that the "Traditions of

Edinburgh” have not diffused an antiquarian taste far more widely than is yet to be found among the modern denizens of the Scottish capital.

The following Memorials of old Edinburgh differ perhaps as much from the picturesque traditions of the latter writer, as from the stately historic quarto of Arnot, or from Maitland’s ponderous folio. They are pen and pencil sketches, professing, in general, considerable minuteness of outline, though with a rapid touch, that precludes very elaborate finish. Accuracy has been aimed at throughout, not without knowingly incurring the risk of occasionally being somewhat *dry*. I am well aware, however, of having fallen short of what was desired in this all-important point, notwithstanding an amount of labour and research in the progress of the work, only a very small portion of which appears in its contents. Some hundreds of old charters, title-deeds, and records of various sorts, in all varieties of unreadable manuscript have been ransacked in its progress; and had it been possible to devote more time to such research, I have no doubt that many curious and interesting notices, referring to our local antiquities, would have amply repaid the labour. Of the somewhat more accessible materials furnished in the valuable publications of our antiquarian book-clubs, abundant use has been made; and personal observation has supplied a good deal more that will probably be appreciated by the very few who find any attraction in such researches. In the Appendix some curious matter has been accumulated in a small type, which readers of tender eyes and moderate antiquarian appetites will probably avoid—to their own loss. I am not altogether without hope, however, that should such readers be induced to wade through the work, they may find antiquarian researches not quite so dull as they are affirmed, on common report, to be; since, in seeking to embody the Memorials of my native city, I am fortunate in the possession of a subject commanding associations with nearly all the most picturesque legends and incidents of our national annals.

In selecting the accompanying illustrations, the chief aim has been to furnish an example of all the varieties of style and character that were to be found in the wynds and closes of old Edinburgh. The majority of them have some curious or valuable associations to add to their interest, but some were chosen for no other reason than to illustrate ancient manners, all records of which are rapidly disappearing. Their accuracy is their chief recommendation. It would have been easy to have embellished them with spurious additions, such as are of frequent occurrence in the illustrated candidates for the drawing-room table. Their claim to any value, however, rests solely on their being true Memorials of old Edinburgh, as it has come down to us from former generations. If they should appear somewhat plain, and sparingly furnished with ornaments, the best apology is, that our old Scottish style of architecture—apart from ecclesiastical edifices—partook of the national character;—it was solid, massive, and enriched with little display of ornament, yet exhibiting as a whole, an accidental, but striking, picturesqueness, altogether beyond the reach of elaborate art.

## PREFACE.

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In the progress of the work I have been indebted for much kind and valuable assistance to some of the most zealous students of Scottish literary and topographical antiquities. To Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Esq., I am under special obligations for many curious reminiscences of the olden time; for free access to his valuable museum of antiquities, which rivals the more famed collection of Abbotsford; for the use of some of the rare treasures of his library; and, indeed, for an amount of courtesy and kindness for which any acknowledgment I can offer is a very inadequate return. To David Laing, Esq., I owe the use of a book of pencil sketches, drawn by Mr Daniel Somerville in 1817 and 1818, which has enabled me to recover views of several ancient localities demolished before my own sketching days. The use which has been made of these sketches is acknowledged on the several plates. To Mr Laing's well-known courtesy I have been still more indebted for access to rare books, and other curious sources of information which were otherwise beyond my reach. To Mr William Rowan of New College Library, I have also to express my obligations for valuable materials derived from original sources, and still more from the stores of his singularly retentive memory. From W. B. D. D. Turnbull, Esq., I have received, in addition to much friendly assistance, free access to his extensive library, well known as probably the most perfect collection in the kingdom on his own favourite studies of Topography and Heraldry. To Robert Chambers, Esq., Alexander Smellie, Esq., and the Rev. Principal Lee, as well as to others, I have to return thanks for much kind and unexpected aid.

To John Sinclair, Esq., City Clerk, and to James Laurie, Esq., of the Sasine Office, my thanks are due for facilitating my researches among the city charters and records, as well as to many others, whose obliging assistance has in various ways lightened the labour of the work. It is impossible, indeed, to do more than allude to these. In searching for the charters and title-deeds of old mansions, by which alone accurate and trustworthy information could in many cases be obtained, I have met with the frankest co-operation from strangers, to whom my sole introduction was the object of research; while the just appreciation of such courtesy has been kept alive by the surly or supercilious rebuffs with which I was occasionally arrested in similar inquiries. Some of the latter have been amusing enough. On one occasion access to certain title-deeds of an ancient property was denied in a very abrupt manner, while curiosity was whetted meanwhile by the information, somewhat testily volunteered, that the deeds were both ancient and very curious. All attempts to mollify the dragon who guarded these antiquarian treasures proving unavailing, the search had to be abandoned; but I learned afterwards, that the old tenement which had excited my curiosity,—and which, except to an antiquary, seemed hardly worth a groat,—was then the subject of litigation between two Canadian claimants to the heirship of the deceased Scottish laird; and the unconscious archæologist had been set down as the agent of some Yankee branch of the Quirk-Gammon-and-Snap school of legal practitioners!

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In acknowledging the assistance I have been favoured with, I must not omit to notice that of my friend Mr James Drummond, A.R.S.A., to whose able pencil the readers owe the view in the interior of St Giles's Church, which forms the vignette at the head of the last chapter. To the Rev. John Sime, I am also indebted for the drawing of the ground-plan of St Giles's Church, previous to the recent alterations, an engraving of which illustrates the Appendix; and to the very accurate pencil of Mr William Douglas, for several of the inscriptions which illustrate that peculiar feature of our ancient buildings. The remainder of the vignettes are from my own sketches, unless where other sources are stated, and for the correctness of these I am responsible, nearly the whole of them having been drawn on the wood with my own hand.

It may be desirable to state, that the historical sketch comprised in the first seven chapters of the Work was written, and nearly all through the press, before I found time to arrange a large collection of materials in the form in which they are now presented in the Second Part. I have accordingly, in one or two cases, somewhat modified my earlier views. The opinion expressed on p. 50, vol. i., for example, as to the total destruction of the whole private buildings of the town in 1544, I am now satisfied is erroneous, and various edifices are accordingly described in succeeding chapters, the walls of which evidently suffered no very great injury from that destructive conflagration.

I am far from conceiving that the materials for an antiquarian history of Edinburgh are exhausted, though probably nearly all has now been gleaned from traditional sources to which any worth can be attached. There is, indeed, no lack of such legends to those who choose to go in search of them. The Scottish antiquary finds an amount of sympathy in his pursuits, among the peasantry and the lower classes of the town population, which, however it be accounted for, he will look for in vain among the more educated, as a class. The tenants of the degraded dwellings of the old Holyrood aristocracy cherish the memory of their titled predecessors with a zeal that would do credit to the most accomplished editor of the Blue Book. One half of the old wives of Edinburgh prove, on evidence which it would be dangerous to dispute, that their crazy mansions were once the abodes of royalty, or the palaces of Scottish grandees, while the monotony of hackneyed tales of Queen Mary and Cromwell—the popular hero and heroine of such romances,—is occasionally varied by the ingenious embellishments of some more practised story teller. Modern local traditions, however, are like the modern antiques of our ballad books; their genealogy is more difficult to trace than the evidence of their spuriousness. One might, indeed, pardon the fictions of antiquarian romancers, if they brought to the aid of the memorialist such skilful forgeries as Chatterton furnished to the too credulous historian of Bristol; finding in the unfailing treasures of the old muniment chest of St Mary's, Retcliffe, and the versatile parchments of "*The gode priesta Rowley*," whatever the diligent antiquary wished to discover! The exorcisms of such disenchanters as the modern architect

## PREFACE.

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of St Giles's, however, have put to flight more pleasant facts, and fictions too, than the inventive genius even of a Chatterton can restore; while popular periodical literature, diluted into halfpenny worths of novelette and romance, has so poisoned the pure old springs of tradition, that one detects in the most unsophisticated *grand-dame tales* of the present day, some adulteration from the manufactory of the literary hack. This it is which makes it so reasonable a source of regret, that Arnot should have stalked through the purlieus of old Edinburgh, elevated on historic stilts, at a time when a description of what lay around him, and a relation of the fireside gossip of the stately old Scottish dames of the eighteenth century, would have snatched from oblivion a thousand curious reminiscences, now altogether beyond recall. To a very different and much less attractive source, we are compelled to turn for the chance of recovering some of those curious associations with which the picturesque haunts of old Edinburgh abound. My own researches have satisfied me, that the clues to many such still lie buried among the dusty parchments of old charter chests; but their recovery, must, after all, depend as much on a lucky chance as on any very diligent inquiry. It has often chanced that after wading through whole bundles of such dull M.S.S.,—those of the sixteenth century frequently measuring singly several yards in length,—in vain search for a fact, or date, or other corroborative evidence, I have stumbled on it quite unexpectedly when engaged in an altogether different inquiry. Should, however, the archæological spirit which is exercising so strong an influence in France, Germany, and England, as well as in other parts of Europe, revive in Scotland also, where so large a field for its enlightened operations remains nearly unoccupied, much that is valuable may yet be secured, which is now overlooked or thrown aside as useless.

Antiquarian research has been brought into discredit, far less by the unimaginative spirit of the age than by the indiscriminating pursuits of its own cultivators, whose sole object has too frequently been to amass “*a fouth o' auld nick-nackets*.” Viewed, however, in its just light, as the handmaid of history, and the synthetic, more frequently than the analytic, investigator of the remains of earlier ages, it becomes a *science*, bearing the same relation to the labours of the historian, as chemistry or mineralogy do to the investigations of the geologist and the speculations of the cosmogonist. In this spirit, and not for the mere gratification of an aimless curiosity, I have attempted, however ineffectually, to embody these MEMORIALS OF EDINBURGH IN THE OLDEN TIME.

D. W.

EDINBURGH, *Christmas* 1847.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-108-06346-3 - Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time: Volume 1  
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# MEMORIALS OF EDINBURGH.

## PART I.

### HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS.

#### THE PAST.

TO THE FRONTISPICE OF ABRAHAM BISSETTS BOOKS OF THE OLD MONUMENTS OF SCOTLAND.

Twixt Was, and Is, how various are the Odds!  
 What one man doth, another doth vndoe:  
 One consecrates Religious Workes to Gods,  
 Another leaues sad Wrackes and Ruines now.  
 Thy Booke doth shew that such and such things were,  
 But, would to God that it could say, They are.

When I pererre the South, North, East, and West,  
 And mark, alace, each Monument amis;  
 Then I conferre Tymes present with the past:  
 I reade what was, but cannot see what is;  
 I prayse thy Booke with wonder, but am sorie,  
 To reade olde Ruines in a recent storie.

*Poetical Recreations of Mr Alexander Craig,  
 of Rose-Craig. Scoto Britan. 1633.*

ST ANTHONY'S WELL.

A silver stream, as in the days of yore,  
When the old hermit of the neighbouring cell  
Bless'd the clear waters of St Anton's Well ;  
And yon grey ruins, on whose grassy floor  
The lambkins browse, rung out the matin bell,  
Whose voice upon the neighbouring city fell  
Waking up 'mong its crowds old hearts that wore  
Griefs like our own ; sounding to one the knell  
Of ruined hopes, to which another heeds  
As joyful music on his marriage morn.  
Up yon steep cliff how oft light steps have borne  
The wedding or the christening train ; where weeds  
So long have grown the chapel altar stood,  
And daily pilgrims knelt before the Holy Rood.

Thus fashions change, while Nature is the same ;  
The altar gone,—the chapel's crumbling walls  
O'erlooking there the Stuarts' ancient halls,  
Deserted all and drear ; with but the fame  
Of buried glories giving them a name ;  
Where yet the past as with a spell enthalls  
The wanderer's fancy, rapt in musing dream  
Of ancient story, helping it to frame  
Old scenes in yon grey aisles, when mass was sung,  
While Mary—hapless Queen—knelt low the while,  
And thrilling chaunts and incense filled the aisle ;—  
Vain dream !—Of all that there so fondly clung,  
Nought save the daisy and the blue harebell  
Breathe their old incense by St Anton's Well.