

OLD TOWN Conservation Area Character Appraisal

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Town is the historic heart of Edinburgh and is interwoven with the narrative of Scotland's past. A unique quality of the Old Town is the clarity of its historical plan form against the background of a spectacular landscape. The plan of the Old Town has retained much of its ancient pattern and distinctive character. It is an environment of enclosed streets and dramatic changes of level with numerous framed distant views. The skilful use of land contours, the careful siting and design of individual buildings and groups of buildings, and the use of local stone, combine to create an intricate and varied character.

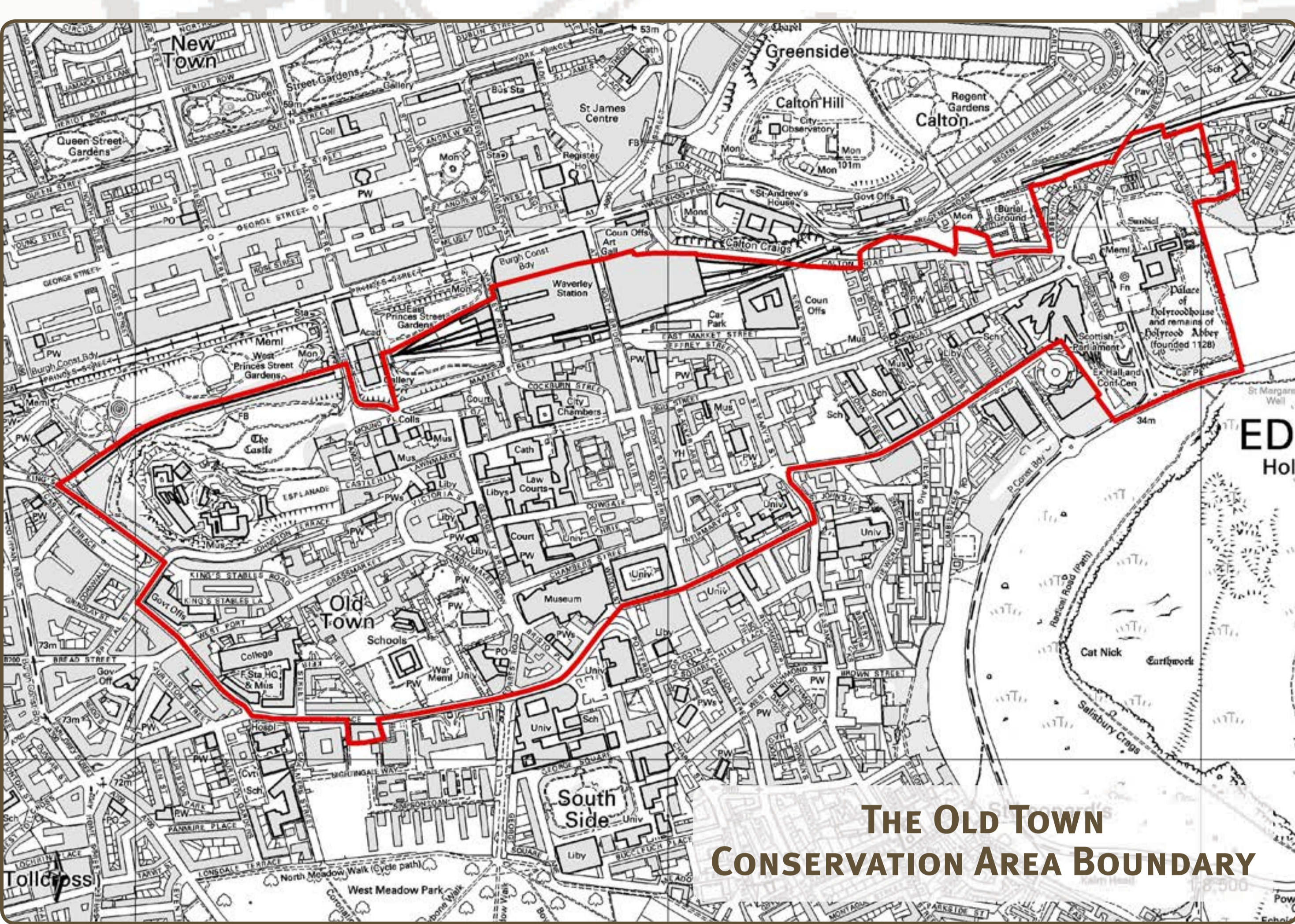
It is a microcosm of urban development, reflecting a long history from the earliest needs for shelter and protection, though cycles of intensification and expansion, with consequent phases of improvement, conservation or re-development.

The conservation area incorporates Scotland's ancient capital and is characterised by:

- the survival of the little altered medieval 'herringbone' street pattern of narrow closes, wynds and courts leading off the spine formed by the Royal Mile,
- its 16th and 17th century merchants' and nobles' houses,
- important early public buildings such as the Canongate Tolbooth and St Giles Cathedral,
- the quality and massing of stonework, and
- the density and height of its picturesque multi-storey buildings.

PURPOSE OF CHARACTER APPRAISALS

Conservation area character appraisals are intended to help manage change. They provide an agreed basis of understanding of what makes an area special. This understanding informs and provides the context in which decisions can be made on proposals which may affect that character. An enhanced level of understanding, combined with appropriate management tools, ensures that change and development sustains and respects the qualities and special characteristics of the area.



DATES OF DESIGNATION/AMENDMENTS

The Old Town Conservation Area was designated in July 1977 with amendments in 1982, 1986 and 1996.

The Conservation Area ranks as one of the most important in the United Kingdom, in terms of both its architectural and historic interest. Its significance is reflected in the extensive number of Statutorily Listed Buildings, the number of tourists that visit the area, and its international recognition as part of the UNESCO designated Edinburgh Old and New Town World Heritage Site.

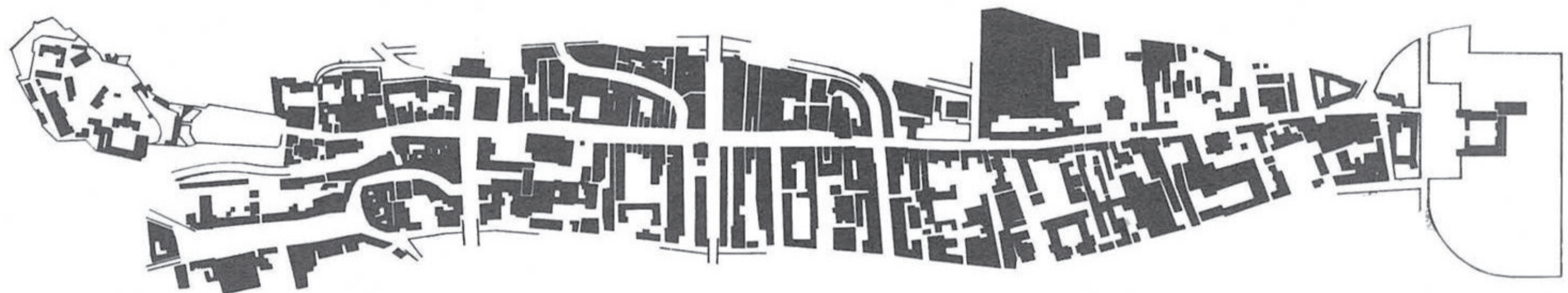
TOPOGRAPHY

The character of the Old Town owes much to the formation of its topography by prehistoric volcanic and glacial processes. The historic core respects the topography, sloping down from the Castle Rock to the Abbey and Palace of Holyroodhouse. Its multi-layered townscape of vertical facades builds up to a skyline punctuated by spires, domes, towers and the battlemented walls around the Castle.



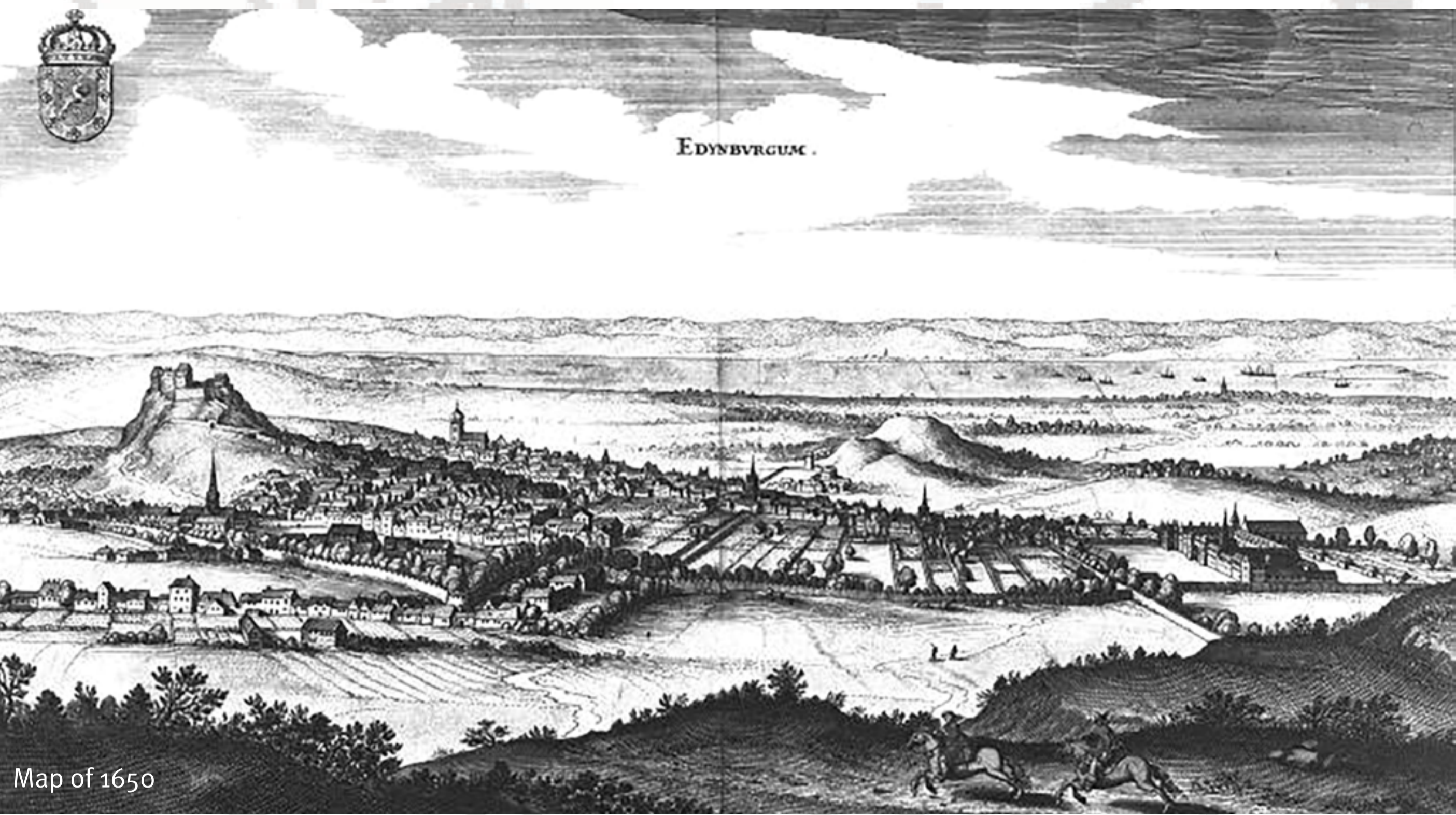
SETTING AND EDGES

The Old Town is visible from many land and sea approaches to the city. Though part of the continuous built-up form of the city in distant views, the Old Town is surrounded to quite a considerable extent by a natural setting.



DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

The Old Town ridge and the natural constraints of the former loch and slopes on its long sides, helped to dictate a linear settlement form which is still clearly evident today. The Royal Mile forms the spine of the Old Town, the main thoroughfare and processional way of old Edinburgh linking the Castle and Palace.



VISTAS AND VIEWS

The topography of the Old Town makes it both very visible and provides a wide range of dramatic views. The Castle dominates views from all over Edinburgh and the Old Town skyline can be seen from a range of near to distant views from many locations especially to the south, west and north.

Your views

We would now like your views on the draft Old Town Conservation Area Character Appraisal. The draft appraisal is summarised in this display. To see the full document and access the on-line questionnaire, please visit the Consultation Hub at consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk If you have any queries regarding the appraisal or the consultation process, please contact jack.gillon@edinburgh.gov.uk

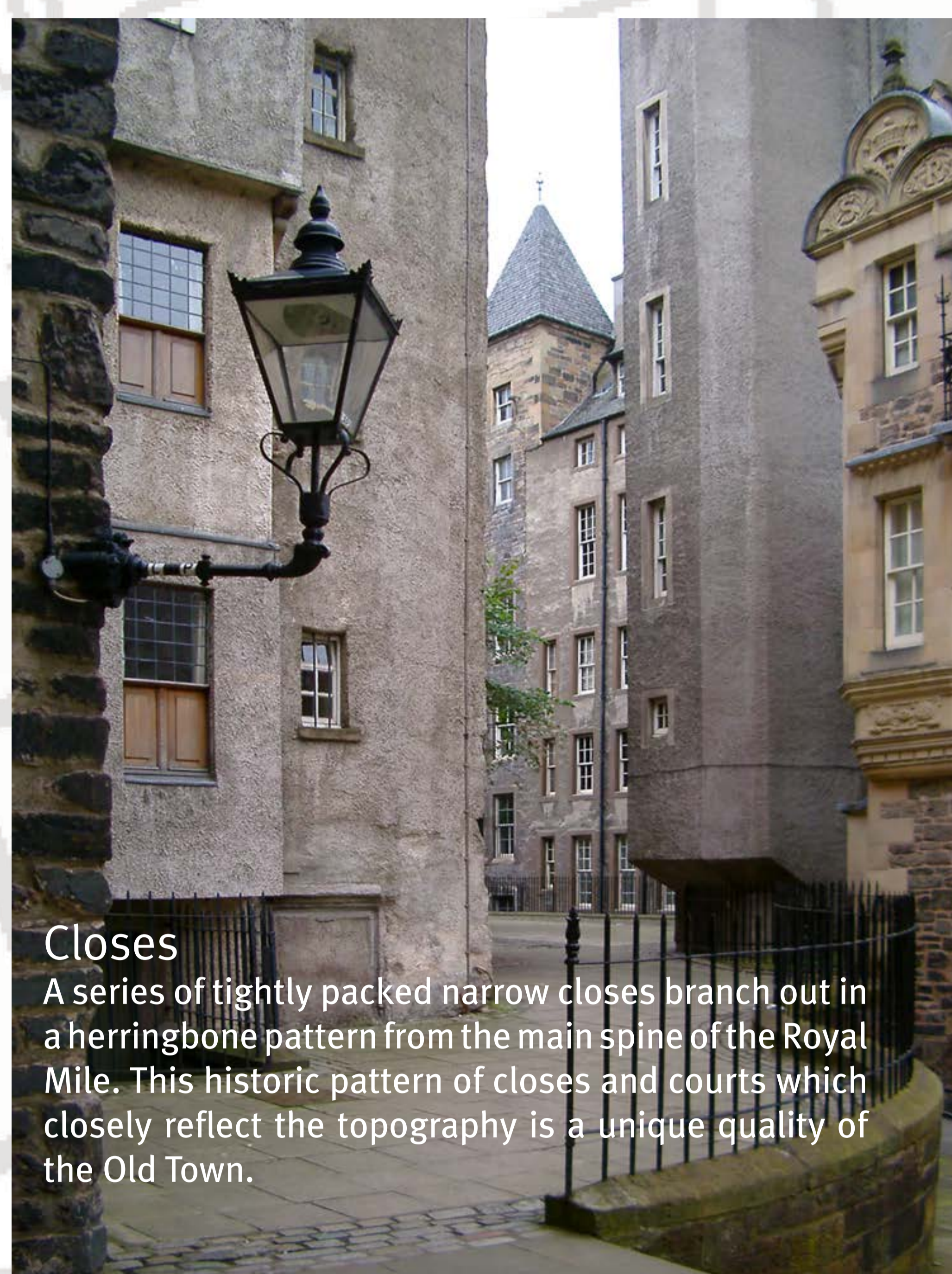
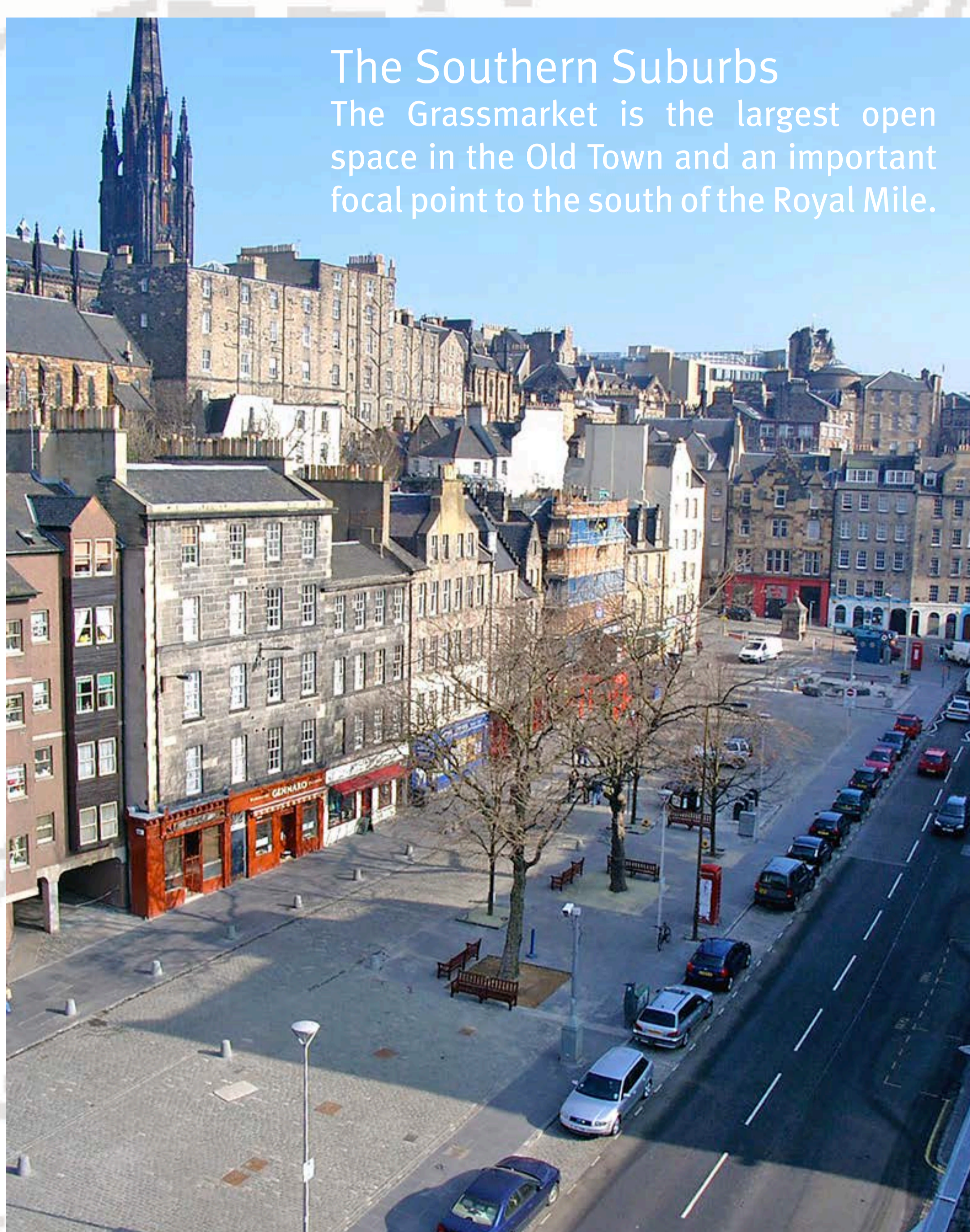
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STREETS

The durable architectural character of the Old Town is based around the main medieval streets of the Royal Mile - a sequence of five historic streets (Castlehill, Lawnmarket, High Street, Canongate and Abbey Strand). The original dense medieval urban fabric has been overlain by a series of Georgian and Victorian street improvements: North Bridge, South Bridge, George IV Bridge, Johnston Terrace, Victoria Street, Cockburn Street and Jeffrey Street.



The Southern Suburbs
The Grassmarket is the largest open space in the Old Town and an important focal point to the south of the Royal Mile.

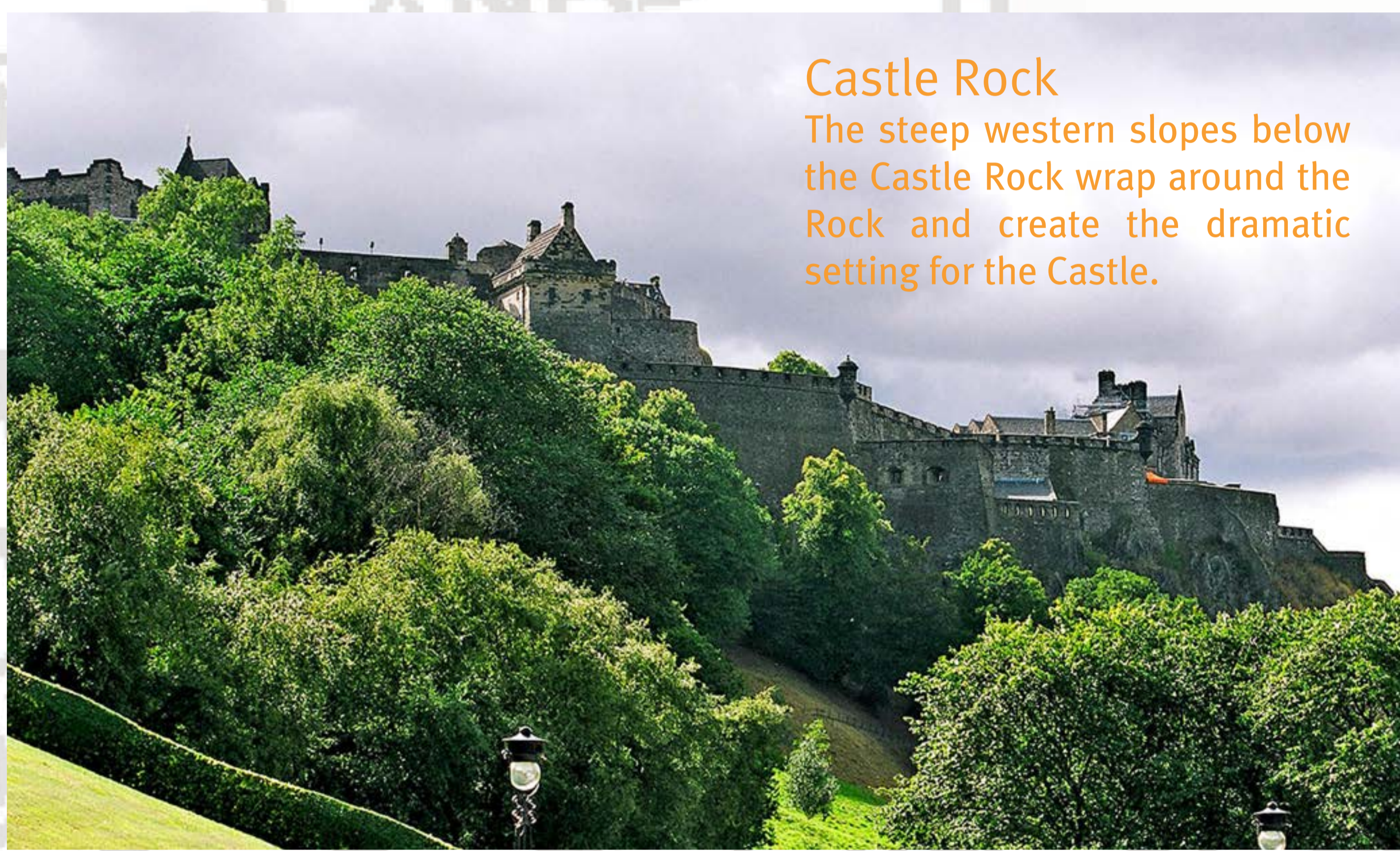


Closes

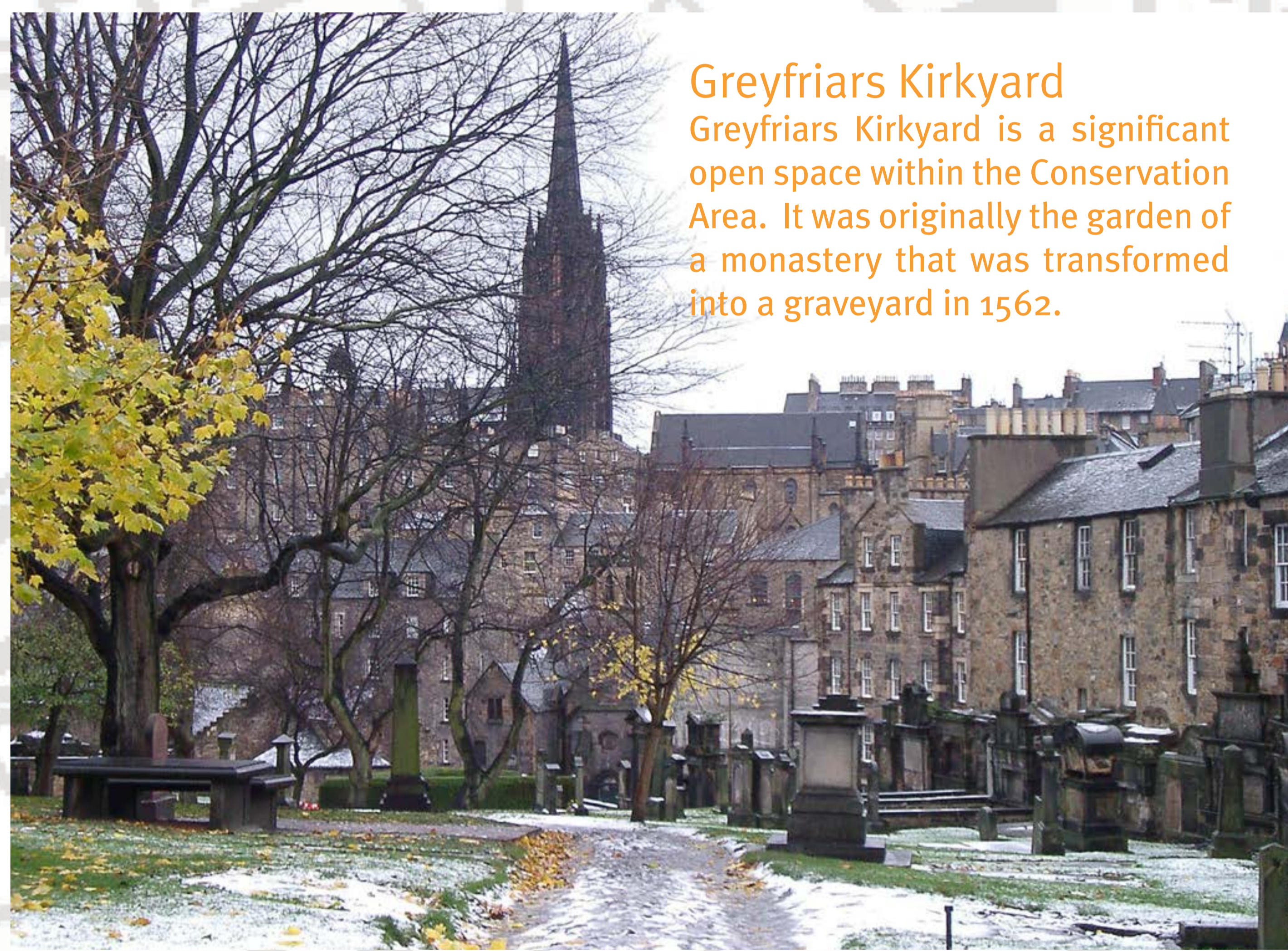
A series of tightly packed narrow closes branch out in a herringbone pattern from the main spine of the Royal Mile. This historic pattern of closes and courts which closely reflect the topography is a unique quality of the Old Town.

SPACES

Open spaces within the Conservation Area have a wide variety of different characters.



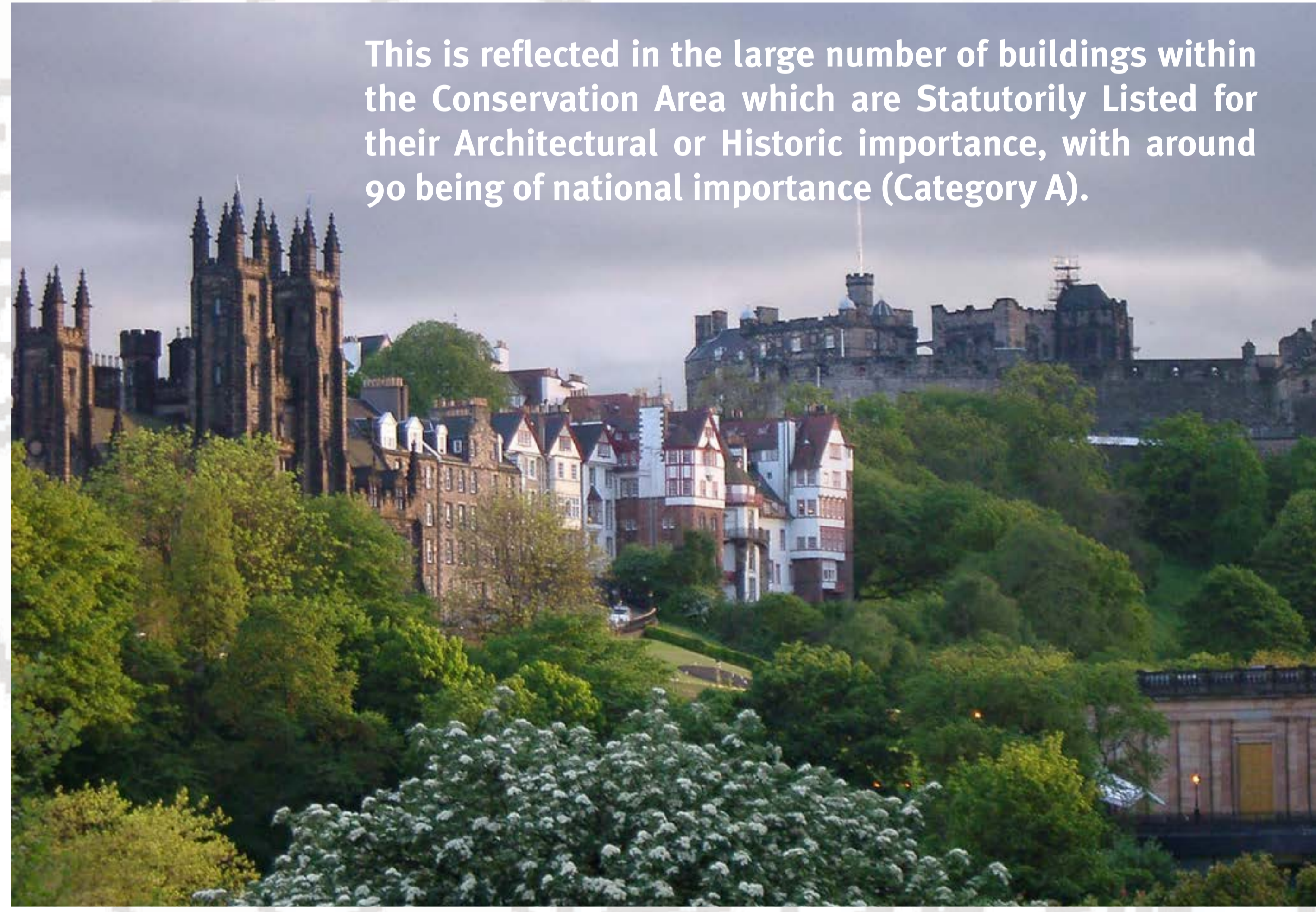
Castle Rock
The steep western slopes below the Castle Rock wrap around the Rock and create the dramatic setting for the Castle.



Greyfriars Kirkyard
Greyfriars Kirkyard is a significant open space within the Conservation Area. It was originally the garden of a monastery that was transformed into a graveyard in 1562.

MAJOR BUILDINGS

The Conservation Area includes numerous buildings of outstanding architectural and historic importance, and international significance.



This is reflected in the large number of buildings within the Conservation Area which are Statutorily Listed for their Architectural or Historic importance, with around 90 being of national importance (Category A).

DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE

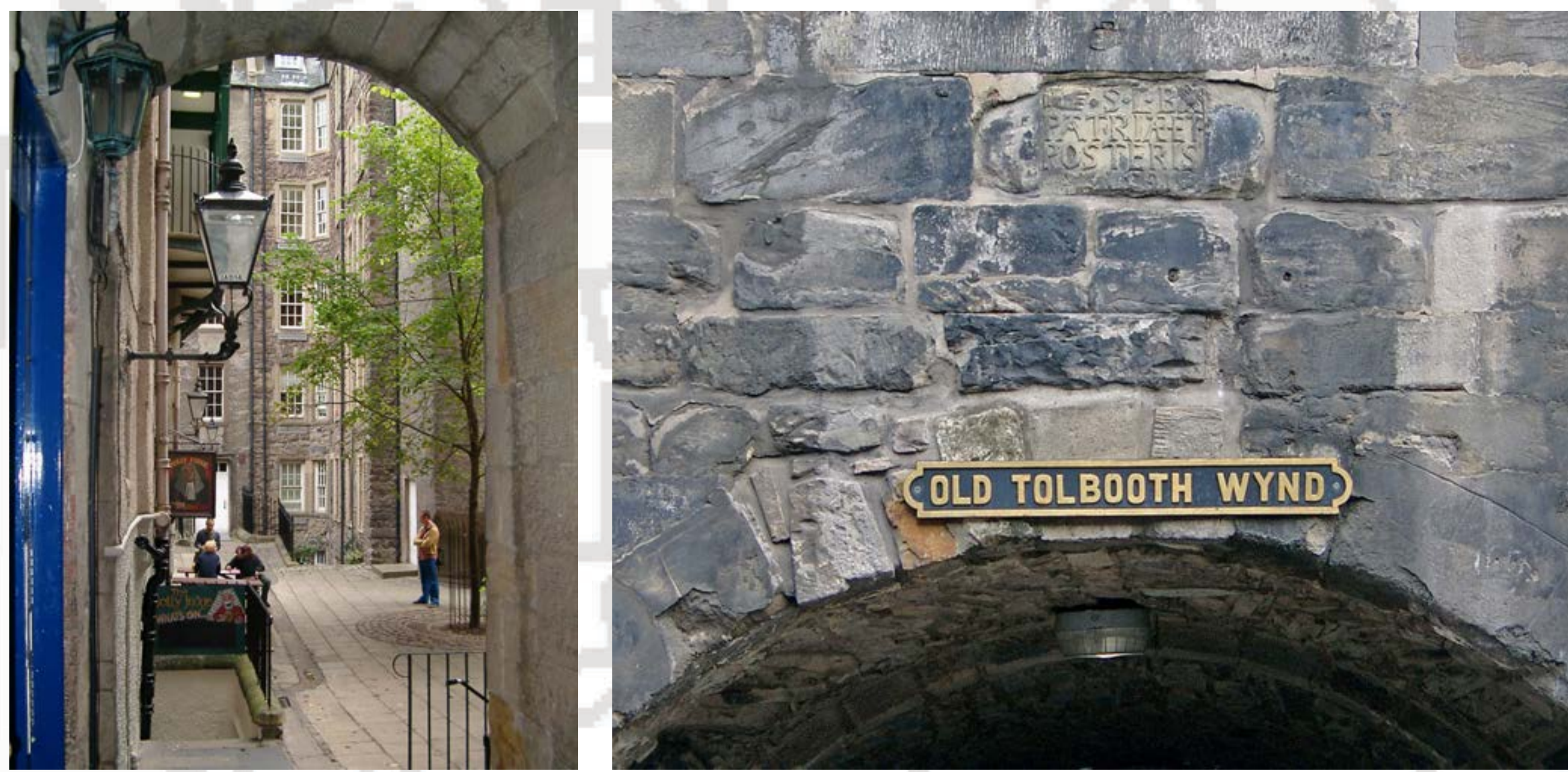
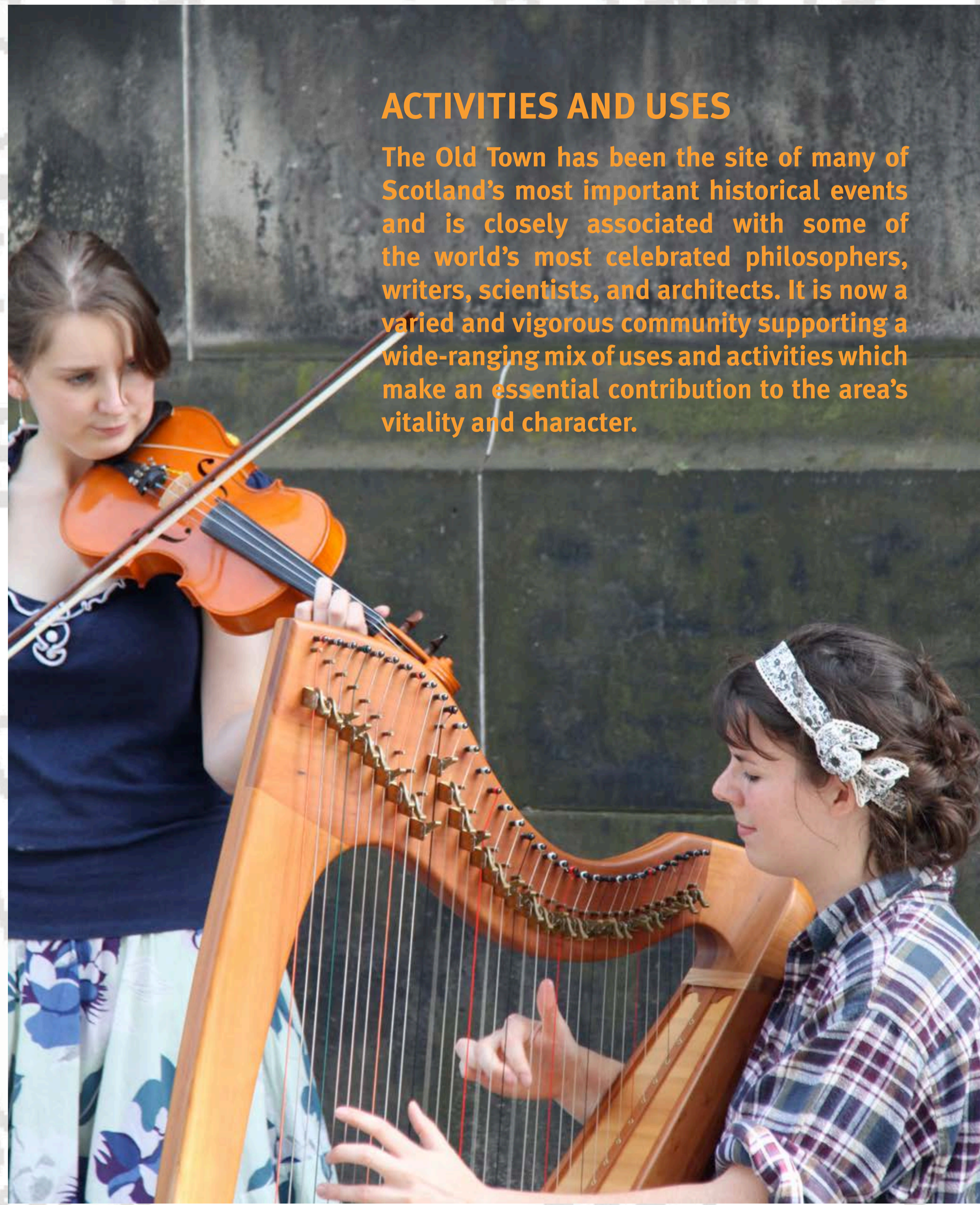
An important and outstanding collection of high-quality domestic architecture survives forming the background of the Old Town, and the setting for the greater monuments. They are the outward reflection of Edinburgh's history: with their traditional proportions, gables and dormers, crow steps, pends and wynds, and carved inscriptions.



The domestic architecture of the Old Town is still largely dominated by tenements.

ACTIVITIES AND USES

The Old Town has been the site of many of Scotland's most important historical events and is closely associated with some of the world's most celebrated philosophers, writers, scientists, and architects. It is now a varied and vigorous community supporting a wide-ranging mix of uses and activities which make an essential contribution to the area's vitality and character.



Assessing Development within the Old Town Conservation Area

The richness of the Old Town's natural setting and built heritage is considerable. It is this complexity and diversity which make it attractive, yet make these qualities hard to define. It also has a fragility and human scale which often does not sit easily with the demands of present day development requirements. These are qualities and conflicts that must be resolved if the character of the Old Town is to be sensitively interpreted and enhanced.