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of Guelders' Fifteenth-Century
Built Legacy Relevant in Twenty-
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UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD AND THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Abstract

In 1460, Mary of Guelders embarked on an ambitious charitable foundation in Edinburgh, the magnificent Trinity collegiate church and hospital, which proclaimed her piety, wealth, and status as Queen of Scots. In 1848, the buildings were demolished to make way for the expansion of Waverley Station. The stones were deposited close to Calton Hill, with the City Council promising to relocate and restore the church building. After twenty years of vacillation, the now much reduced heap of stones was used to construct Trinity Apse at the bottom of Chalmers Close, on the edge of Edinburgh's Old Town. This article argues that today, this unique but little known and under-utilised heritage asset, which represents one of the oldest buildings in the UNESCO World Heritage site of the city of Edinburgh, deserves full recognition for its historical significance and its considerable potential to meet multi-stakeholder needs in a complex twenty-first century urban environment. Building on research that demonstrates the power of authenticity and historically informed storytelling, particularly for achieving affective and impactful heritage and tourism experiences, it is argued that the royal origin story of Trinity Apse makes a compelling case for achieving visitor engagement and placemaking steeped in affect. Decisions made by the City Council in the late nineteenth century are also analysed in order to demonstrate how the concerns and values of multiple stakeholders have been mapped onto the building historically, and how they might usefully inform decision-making regarding Mary of Guelders' architectural legacy at another pivotal moment in the building's future.

Keywords: Heritage; Trinity Apse; authenticity; queenship; Scotland; urban tourism; affect; placemaking.

Introduction

The death of Elizabeth II at Balmoral Castle in Aberdeenshire in September 2022 saw the attention of the world fall on Scotland and its historic environment and heritage, including the iconic Royal Mile and St Giles’ Cathedral, where the Queen’s body rested for two days. During that time, thousands of visitors congregated on the Mile to pay their respects and to be part of a historic moment.¹ Few likely knew, however, that they were a mere stone’s throw away from a building associated with the death and memorialisation of another queen: Trinity Apse, on the adjoining Chalmers’ Close (Figure 1).² The building, on which this article focuses, was once part of a larger foundation incorporating a collegiate church and hospital commissioned by Queen Mary of Guelders (d. 1463), widow of James II (d. 1460), in the mid fifteenth century.³ Though little known and underutilised by Edinburgh residents and visitors, this article advocates for the Apse, and its associated royal narrative, as a valuable heritage asset with rich potential to engage multivalent stakeholders and be a catalyst in urban placemaking today.⁴ Adopting a biographical approach to the Apse from the middle ages to the present day, and informed by scholarship demonstrating the power of authenticity and affect for achieving meaningful and sustainable engagement with urban heritage assets, it proposes a future vision for the Apse as a visitor attraction, which is guided by its rich history.

The Trinity Apse in Edinburgh: heritage challenges today

Trinity Apse is a historic building located within the Old Town Conservation area of the UNESCO World Heritage site of the City of Edinburgh.⁵ Now Grade A listed, the Apse, which

¹ “Thousands line Edinburgh’s Streets to see Queen’s Coffin,” *BBC News*, 12 September 2022, accessed 1 August 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-62869534>.

² We refer to the Apse to indicate the present building in Chalmers Close as that is all that remains of the original collegiate church. The rebuilt section of the collegiate church does not, in fact, correspond with the original apse of the collegiate church but the name has been in common usage since the building’s partial relocation to Chalmers’ Close from Leith Wynd in the nineteenth century.

³ Biographical accounts of Mary of Guelders can be found in Hayes, “The Late Medieval Scottish Queen”; Downie, *She is but a Woman*, especially Chapters 4 and 9; Marshall, *Scottish Queens*, 57-70.

⁴ “Placemaking,” *Our Place*, accessed 17 November 2024, <https://www.ourplace.scot/about-place/placemaking>; “What is Cultural Placemaking?” *Cultural Placemaking: Five10Twelve*, accessed 17 November 2024, <https://culturalplacemaking.com/>.

⁵ The Old and New Towns of Edinburgh became a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1995. Edinburgh World Heritage, “The UNESCO World Heritage site,” accessed 1 August 2024, <https://ewh.org.uk/the-unesco->

constitutes an amalgamation of the choir and apse of Mary of Guelders’ original collegiate church, is all that remains of the queen’s foundation of 1460.⁶ Over time, the church’s splendour and significance has been de-valued due to several overlapping factors, chiefly the substantial changes to its physical fabric and its re-location during the expansion of Waverley train station in the nineteenth century, but also due to shifting religious values, and the marginalisation of the female founder’s story by overwhelmingly male stakeholders.⁷ Today, reduced, reconstructed, and relocated, the Apse stands at the foot of Chalmers Close on the edge of the Old Town, little known and with its historic, cultural, and economic potential untapped, despite its tantalising proximity to the Royal Mile, the epicentre of the Old Town’s tourist footfall (Figure 2). Since the late twentieth century, the Apse has been owned by Edinburgh City Council, and is now only open to the public on an ad hoc basis. With the Council looking to find a new leaseholder for the building at the time of writing, its future accessibility, even as an occasional visitor attraction, remains uncertain.⁸

In this article, three key points in the building’s history are analysed: the fifteenth century, when the collegiate church was founded; the nineteenth century, when the building was dismantled and partially rebuilt; and the present day, when its future use is unclear. The first section elucidates the origin story of the Apse through a focus on its royal patron, Mary of Guelders, a queen who, like the building she established, remains little known in public discourse despite revisionist scholarship on her queenship over the past three decades.⁹ The queen’s fifteenth-century patronage narrative is established as an

[world-heritage-site/#:~:text=The%20Old%20and%20New%20Towns,designed%20landscapes%2C%20and%20conservation%20areas.](#)

⁶ Historic Environment Scotland (hereafter HES), “Chalmers’ Close (Between High Street and Jeffrey Street), Trinity College Church Apse, including Carved Stone Fragments and Boundary Walls: LB25747,” accessed 1 August 2024, <https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/LB25747>; HES, “What is Listing?” accessed 1 August 2024, <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/what-is-listing/>.

⁷ Cattanach and Rodgers, “Waverley Station.”

⁸ Previous proposals for a 25-year lease with Auld Alliance Limited (2020) and a 10-year lease with Crafting Cartel limited (2021) both fell through: “Finance and Resources Committee: 10am, Thursday 29 October 2020: Trinity Apse, Edinburgh—Proposed New Lease,” accessed 1 August 2024, <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/documents/s28333/8.4%20-%20Trinity%20Apse%2010%20Chalmers%20Close%20Lease.pdf>; “Finance and Resources Committee: 10am, Thursday 12 August 2021: Trinity Apse, Edinburgh—Proposed New Lease,” accessed 1 August 2024, <https://democracy.edinburgh.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=35960>.

⁹ See, for example, Delman “Mary of Guelders”; Delman, “Always at the Gate”; Hayes, “The Late Medieval Scottish Queen”; Downie, *She is but a Woman*; Marshall, *Scottish Queens*, 57–70.

authentic origin story for the building with the potential to inform and challenge twenty-first century audiences and to promote meaningful visitor engagement within the context of the wider heritage tourism landscape of Edinburgh’s Old Town. Consideration is then given as to why the queen’s foundation was dismantled and partly rebuilt in the nineteenth century, paying close attention to competing arguments made by different stakeholders, and thus steeping current debates about the value of heritage assets for placemaking in historicity. Finally, the building’s past is brought into dialogue with the more recent findings of the Trinity Network—an academic interest and advocacy group founded in 2018 with a view to raising awareness of the Apse and its history—to propose a new, twenty-first century narrative.



Figure 1. *Trinity Apse in 2022*. Image: Rachel Delman.

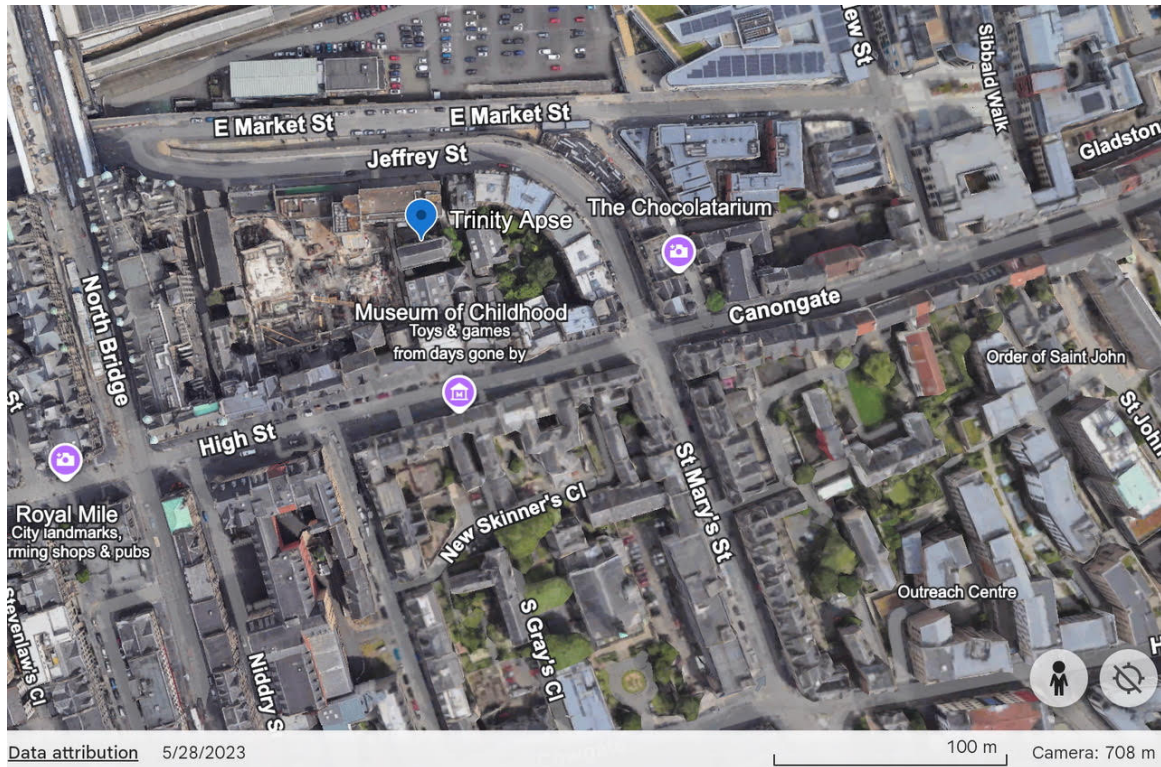


Figure 2. An aerial view of Trinity Apse. Google Earth 10.81.0.0 (5/28/2023) Trinity Apse, Edinburgh 55°57'03"N 3°11'08"W, elevation 84m [online]. Available from: <https://earth.google.com/web/search/trinity+apse+edinburgh/@55.95083769,-3.18581594,66.07593136a,642.14095289d,35y,0h,0t,0r/data=CiwiJgokCcJ5Sijp-UtAEfpdsUWI-UtAGdKDY3KscAnAIe-ahg70hwnAQgIIATIpCicKJQohMVJoSU9jTF9EYWOWS0QtbzIzSG5xeWh0WHBBTVZFRGtwIAE6AwoBMEICCABKCAjQyJ-AARAB> [Accessed 06 June 2025]

Authenticity, Affect and Placemaking

As a case study, Trinity Apse's rich yet chequered history speaks to wider conversations around the precarity of heritage assets in ever-changing cityscapes, and their contribution to urban placemaking today.¹⁰ Post-pandemic discourse has placed heightened emphasis on the importance of heritage sites as catalysts for societal change around issues such as inclusion, public value, and health and wellbeing.¹¹ Sector leading bodies such as Historic

¹⁰ "Protecting Built Heritage: New Inquiry to Examine how to Safeguard Historic Buildings and Attractions," UK Parliament, 16 December 2024, accessed 22 January 2025, <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/8742/protecting-built-heritage/news/204436/protecting-built-heritage-new-inquiry-to-examine-how-to-safeguard-historic-buildings-and-attractions/>.

¹¹ Sofaer et. al., "Heritage Sites, Value, and Wellbeing," 1121; "Heritage, Health, and Wellbeing: A Heritage Alliance Report," *The Heritage Alliance*, accessed 1 February 2024,

England have also championed the transformative role that meaningful engagement with the past through underappreciated heritage assets can play in relation to the future prospects of people and places, growth and renewal, and for addressing large-scale societal challenges going forward.¹² At a more local level in Edinburgh, the Cockburn Association, founded in 1875 with the aim to “protect preserve and promote” the city’s built heritage, has recently called for creative ways to imagine the city’s future with an emphasis on conservation, inclusion, and health.¹³

Heritage and tourism studies have shown that meaningful, satisfactory, and sustainable engagement with heritage sites is predicated upon authenticity which, in its simplest form, is the need to establish original or historical context for a place or space.¹⁴ Authenticity has long been considered an “essential element” within the International Cultural Tourism Charter for the recognition and protection of heritage assets.¹⁵ For visitors to heritage sites, it not only provides reassurance that a building or object has the “factual certitude” that they are typically seeking, but can also generate emotionally authentic and affective responses, which are, in turn, tied to identity and sense of self.¹⁶ In the city of Edinburgh, UNESCO regards the level of authenticity as “high.”¹⁷ The city’s 2020 tourism strategy, however, identified increasing authenticity in Edinburgh’s heritage offer

https://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Heritage-Alliance-AnnualReport_2020_Online.pdf

¹² Historic England, “Heritage Action Zones: Breathing New Life into Old Places,” accessed 10 December 2024, <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-action-zones/breathe-new-life-into-old-places-through-heritage-action-zones/>.

¹³ The Cockburn Association, “Our Unique City: Our Future after Covid 19-the dramatic global impacts of Covid-19 mean we need to reimagine the future of Edinburgh,” accessed 1 August 2024, <https://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/unique-city/manifesto/>.

¹⁴ See Wood, “A Review of the Concept of Authenticity in Heritage,” 16. For debates over what constitutes authenticity, particularly in relation to Edinburgh’s Old Town, see Harwood and El-Manstrly, “Authenticity.” Authenticity in relation to heritage sites more broadly is discussed in the Nara document on Authenticity, which was drafted in Nara, Japan. See United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO hereafter), “Convention Concerning the Protection of the World and Natural Heritage.”

¹⁵ International Council on Monuments and Sites, “International Cultural Tourism Charter.”

¹⁶ Doyle and Kelliher, “Bringing the Past to Life.”

¹⁷ UNESCO World Heritage Convention, “Old and New Towns of Edinburgh,” accessed 19 February 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/728>.

as the “single most important thing that the city must do for the future health of its tourism industry.”¹⁸

The demolition of Trinity Church and its partial rebuilding in a nearby location, coupled with dramatic and ongoing changes to the surrounding urban landscape, makes for a complex relationship to authenticity.¹⁹ In 1970, Historic Environment Scotland awarded the Apse the highest category listing, which is unusual for buildings that have been dismantled and then relocated and rebuilt, as in most instances the authenticity of the original is regarded as having been compromised. The designation, however, marks Trinity Apse as a building of “*special* architectural or historical interest” and an “*outstanding* example of a particular period, style or building type,” as clearly evidenced in the reconstructed building’s recognisable form as a medieval gothic church into the present day.²⁰ The eventual decision to rebuild the foundation, even in part, during the nineteenth century, as discussed in more detail below, also demonstrates an intention to create continuity between past and present and to capture its essence or spirit of place through its revived use as a site of worship following the reconstruction.

Beyond the bricks (or rather, stone) and mortar, the archival evidence for Trinity Collegiate Church and hospital provides an origin story for the building grounded in factual certitude.²¹ Places, as Martyn Evans, the Creative Director of the Cathedral Group observes, need stories; “new-build glassy offices and blocks of flats that aren’t connected to the history of the places where they are built don’t have stories. Stories are what makes a place unique.”²² Place-based stories that are informed by authentic, historical narratives, such as that relating to Trinity Apse, also have the power to engage, and, in turn, inform the identity and sense of self of those who engage with them. Personification in heritage sites, as Siân Jones argues, “creates an intimate relationship and a direct connection between the people who work in them and ‘inhabit’ them today and those who built and

¹⁸ “Edinburgh 2020: The Edinburgh Tourism Strategy,” accessed 19 February 2024.

<https://www.etag.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/EDINBURGH-2020-The-Edinburgh-Tourism-Strategy-PDF.pdf>.

¹⁹ For authenticity and reconstruction see Bold, “Reconstruction.”

²⁰ HES, “What is Listing?” Italics authors’ own.

²¹ For the relationship between storytelling and authenticity see Lipscomb, “Historical Authenticity and Interpretative Strategy at Hampton Court Palace.”

²² Martin Evans, quoted in Historic England, “Heritage Counts 2014: The Value and Impact of Heritage,” accessed 29 July 2024, <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2014/value-impact-chapter-pdf/>.

lived in them in the past.”²³ Where these stories bring alternative or marginalised figures of history such as women to light, they can additionally disrupt notions of what the past was like in a way that can challenge, add to, and complicate visitors’ internal construction of their own lives and the history in which they are situated.²⁴ As such, meaningful and long lasting engagement with heritage is created through personal and emotional connections, and a sense of identity and belonging; factors which collectively fall under the umbrella of the “psychology of heritage.”²⁵

As both a concept and a methodological approach, a psychology of heritage lens recognises feelings and emotions as valid measures of worth alongside more tangible outcomes.²⁶ These previously overlooked stakeholder concerns are high on today’s heritage agenda and are being driven forward by evidence for the role that heritage assets can play in promoting a sense of belonging, satisfaction, and pride in place.²⁷ Initiatives such as the 2021 “Feeling Towns” project have collected evidence relating to feelings of civic pride and place attachment to “complement the more dominant econometric approaches towards culture, regeneration and local economies.” Their aim is to create evidence-led changes in public policy in line with UK governmental priorities around communities and placemaking and to produce “new, shared understandings of the complex roles that pride and place attachment play in local government regeneration strategies.”²⁸ Policy-facing work on “Creative Repurposing” in urban contexts has also demonstrated how emotional and affective measures can provide powerful metrics for success in local regeneration.²⁹

²³ Jones, “Experiencing Authenticity at Heritage Sites.”

²⁴ Fielding, “Going Deeper than Emotional Impact.”

²⁵ Madgin, “Why do Historic Places Matter.”

²⁶ Madgin, “Why do Historic Places Matter.”

²⁷ “Feeling Towns: The Role of Place and Identity in Governance and Local Policy,” accessed 1 August 2024, <https://www.andtowns.co.uk/feeling-towns>; Bristow et al., “Creative Repurposing and Levelling Up”; Shaw et al., “Townscapes.”

²⁸ “Policy Paper: Levelling Up and the United Kingdom,” 2 February 2022, accessed 1 February 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>; “Levelling Up Phrase to be Erased, Says Minister,” *BBC News*, 9 July 2024, accessed 1 August 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c0veqgr7lw4o#:~:text=The%20new%20Labour%20government%20is,successful%202019%20general%20election%20campaign>.

²⁹ Bristow et. al., “Creative Repurposing.” Creative Repurposing refers to the process by which intangible heritage, such as local histories, traditions, and sense of place, is combined with the historic built environment to cultivate place-based regeneration.

The arguments made here also resonate with wider research showing that people's feelings about the places they experience as residents and visitors are bound up with feelings about the past and future prospects for those places too.³⁰ Looking through a psychology of heritage lens enables better understanding of the heated civic debates regarding the competing claims for economic value set against cultural and emotional benefits which led to the dismantling and relocation of part of Trinity church in 1848. So many of the areas of tension articulated in twenty-first century discussions regarding the meaning and value of built heritage, and the complex and often competing priorities informing such tensions, resonate with that earlier encounter. It is argued here that debates articulated then demonstrate a precedent for the more holistic conceptions of heritage value being articulated and theorised in scholarship today. As such, they might usefully contextualise twenty-first century heritage decision-making within a long view of placemaking and urban regeneration to inform future decision making.

The transdisciplinary approach adopted here aligns with recent research on the power of collaboration to enact lasting, affective change in the communication and reception of past narratives for public consumption, and for achieving sustained and meaningful place attachment.³¹ Academic discourse is brought into dialogue with heritage tourism and community and wider stakeholder concerns to assess both the perceptions and experiences of built heritage values in Edinburgh today. In this, the discussion reinforces calls to expand the "palate of heritage theory" and to integrate the views of "non-expert users" while nevertheless remaining attentive to complexities and tensions present within multi-agency collaboration.³²

This study additionally endorses recent calls to promote radical, imaginative thinking to generate new meanings and bring history and historic buildings alive.³³ Recent work on "Creative Repurposing," for example, advocates for imaginative, multi-agency interventions, which sometimes diverge from traditional conservation measures.³⁴ In this regard, co-created outputs, underpinned by the historical research initiated by the Trinity Network could, it is argued, generate creative and affective engagement with the Apse to

³⁰ Shaw *et. al.*, "Townscapes," 12; Lewicka, "Ways to Make People Active"; Lewicka, "Place Attachment, Place Identity, and Place Memory."

³¹ Fielding, "Going Deeper than Emotional Impact," 408–435; Madgin and Howcroft, "Advancing People-Centred, Place-Based Approaches."

³² Tolia-Kelly *et al.*, *Heritage, Affect and Emotion*; Smith and Campbell, "The Elephant in the Room."

³³ Rietveld and Rietveld, "Hardcore Heritage."

³⁴ Bristow *et. al.*, "Creative Repurposing."

enhance appreciation and potentially even help secure its future as a publicly accessible heritage asset. To imagine a creative and sustainable future, however, it is first necessary to consider the Apse's 500 year+ history.

Mary of Guelders and Trinity Collegiate Church

In the origin story of Trinity Apse, we find a rare marriage of archival and built heritage centred on the ambitions of a late medieval queen with potential to excite, educate, and challenge modern audiences' perceptions of the building and the medieval past. As the founder of Trinity collegiate church and hospital, Mary of Guelders is identifiable as a royal woman whose decision to leave her mark on the Scottish landscape over half a millennium ago not only provides a historical account of the Apse's conception but has wider implications for our understanding of women's historic contributions to Edinburgh's built heritage.³⁵ Mary of Guelders is lesser known in popular and academic discourse than queens regnant, such as Mary, Queen of Scots and Queen Victoria, both of whom are memorialised in the cityscape of Edinburgh through statues and wider interpretation. Her piety, power, and energetic architectural patronage, however, finds tangible expression in the vestiges of her foundation now on Chalmers' Close.

Mary, who had spent her youth at the ducal courts of Guelders and Burgundy before moving to Scotland to marry James II in 1449, commissioned the collegiate foundation in 1460 following the sudden death of her husband at the Siege of Roxburgh.³⁶ It was from that point, and until her own death in 1463, that she also governed Scotland as quasi-regent on behalf of her young son, James III. In their original location, both the collegiate church and accompanying hospital, which was inhabited by thirteen bedesmen supported by the queen's charity, stood on the outskirts of Edinburgh in what was then St Ninian's suburb, overlooking the Nor Loch (now Princes Street Gardens) to the west, and next to Leith Wynd, the main road linking the city of Edinburgh to the Port of Leith, to the northeast (Figure 3).³⁷

³⁵ Delman, "Mary of Guelders"; Delman, "Always at the Gate."

³⁶ For Scotland's relationship with Guelders see Ditchburn, "The Place of Guelders in Scottish Royal Policy." Many historians have argued that the project was begun by James II and continued by Mary of Guelders following her husband's death. Revisionist scholarship, however, reevaluates this view, arguing that an insistence on James' involvement is likely the product of longstanding structural misogyny as patrons routinely named family members and monarchs in collegiate foundation documents regardless of their actual involvement in the works. See Swarbrick, "A Magnificent and Sumptuous Work"; Delman, "Mary of Guelders."

³⁷ Wilson, "St Ninian's Suburb."

The foundation of collegiate churches and hospitals such as Trinity Collegiate Church gave medieval men and women opportunities for outwardly displaying their faith and their concern for the afterlife, with the prayers said in them intended to lessen the founder's time in Purgatory.³⁸ Despite being part of a commonplace spatial grammar of elite piety, chantries and hospitals were nevertheless shaped by the wishes and preferences of their individual founders. Queen Mary dedicated her foundation to the praise and honour of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, St Ninian—to whom she appears to have had an especial dedication—and all saints.³⁹ The buildings included a perpetual college, or collegiate church, which was designed to secure masses for the souls of the queen, her deceased husband, and their families in perpetuity. Mary chose the church as her preferred burial location.⁴⁰

As what was intended to be the largest collegiate church in Scotland had it been completed, the foundation was a magnificent statement of the queen's role as the curator and custodian of familial and personal memory at a point when her husband's death was fresh in the Scottish political consciousness.⁴¹ An energetic and determined patron, Mary was very much the driving force behind the building and the upkeep of her foundation, evidenced by the presence of her personal seal on contemporary documents, and her close interest in its associated daily activities. Mary's care for all aspects of its construction and provision made it "a personal as well as a spiritual project and a visible sign of her queenship" and she reserved the ongoing right to make any amendments or additions to its rules and statutes of her foundation.⁴² It was created at considerable expense, with the queen investing over £1000 from her personal funds into the project. The tierceron vault, bosses, and elaborate foliate carving created under the trusted guidance of John Halkerston, Master of Works, and reintegrated into the Apse by the architect, John Lessels, in the nineteenth century, are still indicative of a grand and sophisticated mausoleum today.⁴³ Within, the chapel was sumptuously furnished in accordance with Mary's religious and personal preferences, although all that survives of the moveable furnishings is the

³⁸ Cowan, *Death, Life, and Religious Change in Scottish Towns*, especially 17–52.

³⁹ Marwick, *Charters and Documents*.

⁴⁰ When the chapel was dismantled in the nineteenth century, two female skeletons were identified. One was re-interred at Holyrood Palace, although debate remained as to which of the two was the queen. See Laing, "Remarks on the Character of Mary of Guelders"; Wilson, "Notes of the Search for the Tomb of the Royal Foundress."

⁴¹ Delman, "Mary of Guelders."

⁴² Harrison, "Fresh Perspectives on Hugo van der Goes' Portrait," 122.

⁴³ Swarbrick, "Medieval Art and Architecture," 74.

Trinity Altarpiece, made several years after Mary's death during the reign of her son, James III, and now housed in the nearby National Gallery of Scotland.⁴⁴ The resident bedesmen and the prebendaries, who were tasked with saying masses around the queen's tomb and were expected to exhibit exemplary behaviour, added to the performance of splendour and piety.⁴⁵ Although Mary died before she could see the project completed, the foundation has long been regarded as one of the finest examples of medieval gothic architecture in Scotland, a view which fuelled the heated nineteenth-century debates and continues to inform present-day concerns regarding its future use.⁴⁶

Mary's original wish to be buried within a foundation of her own making, separate from her husband at Holyrood, demonstrated that she had ample wealth to afford an impressive burial site indicative of her queenly status. It was also a tangible expression of a woman's personal choice and agency over where and how she and her family were to be remembered at a time when female agency was limited due to the patriarchal power structures of medieval society. The foundation demonstrated Mary's charity on a grand, public scale through its sophisticated architectural design and its prominent original location on a busy thoroughfare frequented by pilgrims and visitors travelling to and from the continent. As Leith Wynd was the road on which Mary herself had travelled along when arriving on Scottish shores ahead of her marriage, the location of the foundation also likely honoured the queen's symbolic position as an intermediary or peace weaver between her natal and marital homes, and her lifetime relationship to the people of Edinburgh (Figure 3).⁴⁷

The account of Trinity Apse's foundation paints a vivid picture of the cultural, spiritual, and political landscape of fifteenth-century Scotland, with concurrent potential for multilayered appeal in a twenty-first century context. The building celebrates the story of one of Edinburgh's most illustrious residents in an area where the lives of other notable figures, and especially royalty, are foregrounded. Beyond this, Mary's account, and by

⁴⁴ Brown, "Lay Piety in Later Medieval Lothian," 89; Swarbrick, "Medieval Art and Architecture," especially 87–188; Tolley, "Hugo van der Goes's Altarpiece"; Harrison, "Fresh Perspectives on Hugo van der Goes' Portrait," 120–137.

⁴⁵ Marwick, *Charters and Documents*. See also Brown, "Lay Piety," 88.

⁴⁶ Rickman, *Essay on Ecclesiastical Architecture*, cited in Wilson, "St Ninian's Suburb," 138. See also Swarbrick, "Medieval Art and Architecture," 73–74.

⁴⁷ For the location of the foundation as spatially symbolising Mary of Guelders' role as peace weaver, see Delman, "Mary of Guelders," 222. For more general explorations of the intercessory roles of Mary and other late medieval Scottish queens, see Downie "She is But a Woman," especially 81–124; Hayes, "The Late Medieval Scottish Queen," especially 47–52.

association the Apse, has considerable affective and disruptive potential as it provides an alternative perspective on popular narratives of the late medieval period, and medieval cityscapes more broadly, which have traditionally been male-centred.⁴⁸ Though Mary, as a queen, might be considered exceptional, she was also a daughter, wife, widow, and mother, as well as a businesswoman, entrepreneur, and political player, all of which speak to roles and challenges navigated by women into the present day.⁴⁹ As a queen born overseas who chose to be memorialised in the Scottish landscape, Mary of Guelders' narrative also invites broader consideration around placemaking, belonging, and identity, themes with obvious contemporary synergies in a city with a multi-cultural population and high numbers of international visitors each year. The intended purpose of the foundation as a touchstone between the queen and the urban populace additionally sheds light on the relationship between the royal family and the local community, and particularly how subjects interacted with monarchs and their families both during their lifetimes and through their posthumous legacies. Linked to this, Trinity was bound up with spirituality, philanthropy, and care, returning us to questions of value and wellbeing, and the role that the Apse, as a modern-day heritage asset, might play in fostering a sense of historically-informed community wellness over five centuries on.

While Mary's patronage narrative has latent and multivalent potential for provoking conversations around topics of contemporary interest such as inclusivity, belonging and migration, royal-lay relations, and health and wellbeing, it is necessary to acknowledge how and why the Apse's present-day circumstances have come about, and the barriers to engagement that have arisen as a result. A relative paucity of academic research on Mary's queenship and the foundation's history until recent times is but one of many factors that have influenced the building's present-day status. Since the fifteenth century, it has been at the heart of a complex web of shifting and often competing stakeholder concerns, as most acutely expressed through the heated debates surrounding the building of Waverley train station in the nineteenth century. The post-medieval context, to which we will now turn, has significant implications for understanding the delicate balance of ideology and

⁴⁸ Delman, "Always at the Gate," 62–84; Macknight, "Gender, History, and Heritage in Ireland and Scotland."

⁴⁹ Such an approach to pre-modern women's lives was adopted at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, where Bess of Hardwick, Countess of Shrewsbury, was used as the inspiration for an exhibition featuring contemporary female portraiture. See "'We are Bess' Exhibition at Hardwick Hall, National Trust," *University of Roehampton*, accessed 18 November 2024, <https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/activities/we-are-bess-exhibition-at-hardwick-hall-national-trust>. See also "Rewriting the Script: The Works and Words of Esther Inglis," *The University of Edinburgh*, accessed 26 January 2025, <https://exhibitions.ed.ac.uk/exhibitions/rewriting-the-script>.

pragmatism which continues to govern decision-making processes around urban heritage assets, and for establishing the opportunities and challenges that will likely arise when seeking to bring Mary of Guelders' story to the fore in a way that is both authentic and responsive to the needs of twenty-first century audiences.

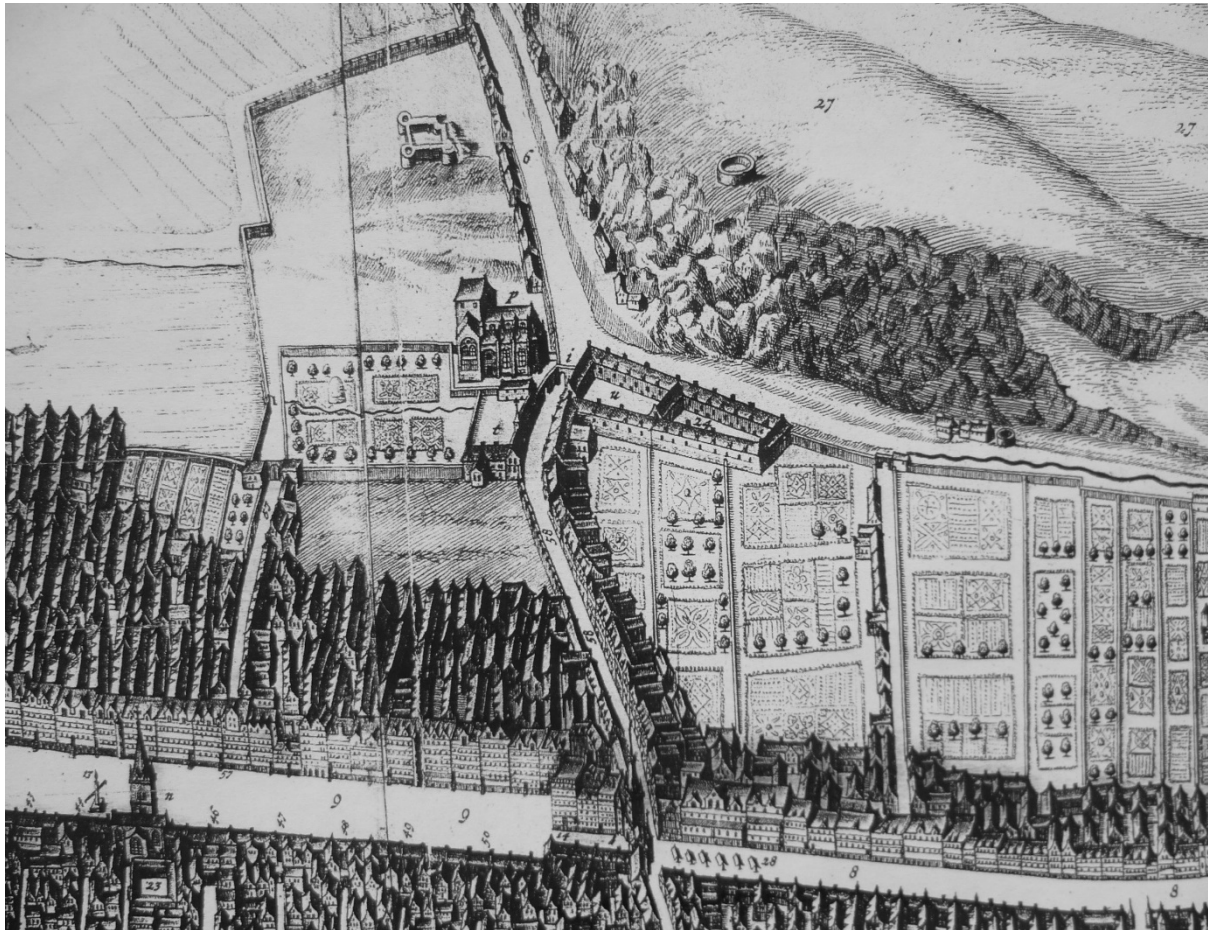


Figure 3. Trinity Collegiate Church, James Gordon of Rothiemay's map of Edinburgh, 1647.

Heritage values contested, 1845-1854

Mary of Guelders' fifteenth-century royal story, as articulated here, makes a compelling case for the recognition of Trinity Apse as a central asset in cultural placemaking today. This was far from the case in 1845, however, when the land on which the Trinity Church and hospital stood was purchased by the North British Railway Company to expand Waverley Station, and in 1848 the Trinity buildings were demolished to make way for what is now Platform Two (Figure 4). Trinity church had, for many years, functioned as a parish church and the adjoining hospital was administered by Edinburgh council and was still in

use at the time of the purchase. Following the dismantling, a long and acrimonious debate ensued as to whether the church should be rebuilt, and most contentiously, where.



Figure 4. *Trinity Collegiate Church and North British railway*, c 1848, sepia photo, Royal Collections Trust © His Majesty King Charles III 2024

The main opposition to the North British Railway Company’s plans was mounted by the political reformer, Robert Gourlay, in what was termed a “Memorial.”⁵⁰ Gourlay’s stated intention in compiling the *Memorial* was to ensure “the improvement of Edinburgh” which he regarded as an “opportunity for illustrating the science of city-building and the study order and beauty.”⁵¹ Analysed closely for the first time here, Gourlay’s compilation includes letters, newspaper reports, and the minutes of Town Council proceedings spanning almost a decade, from 1845 to 1854. The sometimes dramatic, often farcical

⁵⁰ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*. A Memorial is an established documentary form which sets out a clear case to be presented to a judge and includes detailed testimony and evidence.

⁵¹ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, x.

transactions adopt flowery, emotive and, in places, libellous language and involved eminent Edinburgh and national figures, all of whom were men.

The buildings' royal significance and the feelings of their nineteenth century supporters appear to have been ignored, and Mary of Guelders' powerful narrative was forgotten. Few references were made to the royal origins of the foundation other than in the proceedings of the Town Council on 12 November 1845 when a separate "memorial" from the Society of Antiquaries "deplored and remonstrated" against the "unprecedented and savage Gothicism" of the proposed destruction, "the church having been founded by Mary of Guelders and one of the few ancient ecclesiastic buildings in Edinburgh."⁵² Coupled with this, when the church was dismantled, the identification of two female skeletons sparked independent yet lively discussions around the identity of the queen that were bound up in gendered assumptions of the time, resulting in further minimisation of Mary of Guelders' agency and legacy as patron.⁵³

Proponents for the church's preservation instead widely emphasised the building's aesthetic and spiritual qualities. Lord Henry Cockburn of Bonaly, a champion of architectural conservation, protested in 1845 that "The country is an asylum of railway lunatics...And anyone who puts in a word for the preservation of scenery, or relics, or sacred haunts, is set down as a beast, hostile to the "poor man's rights", "modern improvement" and the "march of intellect."⁵⁴ Here, Cockburn appears to have been advocating for the aesthetic benefits of built heritage, and what today might be articulated as the intangible value of heritage for well-being.⁵⁵ Despite his spirited intervention, in 1848, in what he deemed to be a "lamentable and irreparable blunder" and "one of the best ways of spoiling the beauty of Edinburgh," the church was taken down, the stones were numbered, and deposited in a heap on Regent road close to Calton Hill (Figure 5).⁵⁶

⁵² Town Council Proceedings, 12 November 1845, recorded in Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, 48.

⁵³ Laing, "Remarks on the Character of Mary of Guelders," 566–577; Wilson, "Notes of the Search for the Tomb," 554–566.

⁵⁴ "Biography of Henry Cockburn," *The Cockburn Association*, accessed 30 August 2024, <https://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/history/biography/>. Henry Cockburn was the inspiration for the current Cockburn Association, which has demonstrated ongoing support for the work of the Trinity Network.

⁵⁵ Hoare, "The Practice and Potential of Heritage Emotion Research," 956.

⁵⁶ Cockburn, *A Letter to the Lord Provost*.

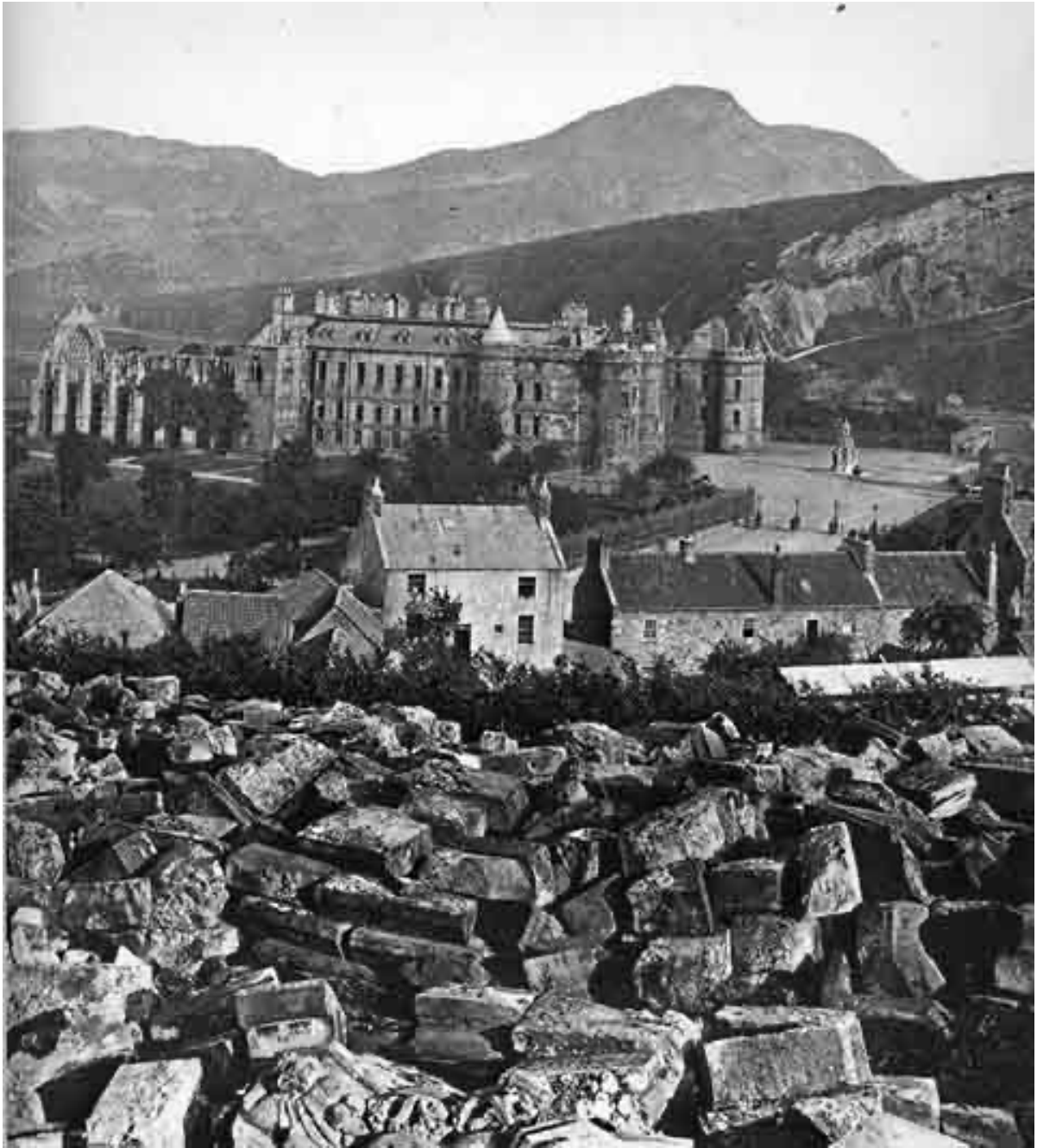


Figure 5. Holyrood from Calton Hill with Trinity stones in foreground, photo, Thomas Vernon Begbie, 1850, Museums and Galleries Edinburgh.

The council were paid £16,000 by the Railway, with an implicit proviso that the money be used to relocate and rebuild the church. The funds, however, were dissipated and, several years later, many of the stones had gone missing. Window traceries, intricately carved bosses, and characterful heads found their way into gardens and parks all over

Edinburgh, with some still being identified today.⁵⁷ With the remaining stones, rebuilding began in 1872 and the truncated church, now reduced to the Apse, was completed in its present location at the bottom of Chalmers Close on Jeffrey Street in 1877, a few hundred yards from its original site.⁵⁸

Public opinion, as expressed in letters to press, indicated that the location was an unsatisfactory compromise after numerous sites had been suggested and rejected because there was no clear vision for the future use of the church. One proposed option was the cemetery of Ireland's Woodyard which, although close to the original location and within the parish boundary, afforded limited opportunities for visibility and access and was regarded by some as an "undesirable" neighbourhood.⁵⁹ The costlier option of Princes Street Gardens appears to have found greater popularity with the general public, although it was denounced by the Council of the then Architectural Institute of Scotland on the grounds of threatening to disrupt the contrasting yet harmonious aesthetics of the Old and New Towns.⁶⁰ Gourlay shared in a widespread desire to retain the foundation's visual prominence, even resorting to the imaginative yet impractical suggestion of perching the rebuilt church on top of an existing school building, thus prioritising aesthetics over access.⁶¹

In 1849, the year after the church was demolished, Cockburn followed up on his initial diatribe with another polemical tract.⁶² Edinburgh was divided regarding the future of the church, the arguments levied resonating with still relevant tensions around the relationship between preservation, sustainable development, and economic growth.⁶³ Views were aired touching on civic and national pride and identity, and how and why built heritage should either be preserved or removed in the name of progress. In letters to the

⁵⁷ A 2023 Jean Guild Award funded by the Old Edinburgh Club has facilitated research for a photographic and written survey "Reviving the Trinity Stones." This will document their life history from Bearford Quarry in 1460 to their present locations all over Edinburgh.

⁵⁸ "Edinburgh, High Street, Chalmers Close, Trinity College Church, Apse," *CANMORE: National Record of the Historic Environment*, accessed 1 August 2024, <https://canmore.org.uk/site/52250/edinburgh-high-street-chalmers-close-trinity-college-church-apse>.

⁵⁹ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, 4. The Edinburgh Evening Courant was an influential broadsheet newspaper which ran from 1718–1871. See Brown, "The Market for News in Scotland."

⁶⁰ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, 5, 28.

⁶¹ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, Plate VII.

⁶² Cockburn, *A Letter to the Lord Provost*.

⁶³ Sara Wilkinson and Hilde Remøy, "Heritage Building Preservation vs Sustainability? Conflict isn't inevitable," The Conversation UK, accessed 08 December 2024, <https://theconversation.com/heritage-building-preservation-vs-sustainability-conflict-isnt-inevitable-83973>.

press from a cross-section of Edinburgh society, as collated in the *Memorial*, Trinity Church was deemed “the finest relic of antiquity in Edinburgh,” “a noble ecclesiastical monument of the fifteenth century,” “the most interesting ancient monument in Edinburgh,” and “a magnificent specimen of Gothic architecture” by those in the preservation camp.⁶⁴ The language of the letters conveys a sense of the recognition of intangible values, the fervent civic pride in the structure and the emotional ties to the past. Drawing on the Victorian delight in the romance of the gothic, literary and artistic, images from the period shortly before the foundation’s dismantling and relocation also emphasise its perceived picturesque aspects, showing people at leisure within its environs (Figure 6).



Figure 6. *Old Trinity Church, Edinburgh*, 1848, oil on millboard, Henry G. Duguid, 21.60 x 29.20 cm, Creative Commons.

Among those who wished to preserve the church in situ was the nationally acclaimed artist, critic, and lover of the gothic, John Ruskin, who made a pencil sketch of

⁶⁴ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*.

the church in one of his many visits to the city.⁶⁵ In 1853, he gave a lecture in Edinburgh in which he engaged directly with the Trinity debate by condemning the proposed site for the church in East Princes Street Gardens. Ruskin might be considered ahead of his time in matters of heritage preservation, and in his writing on gothic architecture it was the intangible aspects which he stressed, which were felt, rather than seen.⁶⁶ According to Timothy Chandler, "feeling is a fundamental part of Ruskin's aesthetics," praising the benefits of acquiring "a romantic feeling...the truest part of your being, even truer than your consciences' in relation to gothic architecture."⁶⁷ This early recognition of the value of an "authentic" aesthetic experience resonates with the current theories of the emotional psychology of heritage and what is termed a "people-centred approach," whereby the "feel of a place, stories about the place and embodied experiences of place" are given equal consideration alongside tangible architectural value."⁶⁸

The importance of the "embodied experience" had been recognised and eloquently argued in a petition as early as December 1853, signed by 1400 Edinburgh citizens and read to the Town Council. A key argument was that the city should:

Possess objects of interest, objects of antiquity, associated with the history of our country...because these not only gave an interest to the inhabitants themselves, but they were the means of drawing others to the city.

and crucially that:

some might imagine that a mere object of beauty was not a matter of any great value, because it did not produce anything in the shape of money but there could be no greater mistake.⁶⁹

It was believed that such a fine example of architecture as Trinity Church was an object in which all the inhabitants, "not only the higher but the humbler ranks, felt an

⁶⁵ John Ruskin, "Trinity College Chapel Edinburgh, 1838," pencil on paper, 23.7 x 33.9 cm, *Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery*, accessed 22 November 2024, <https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=6569&index=12&total=97&view=viewSearchItem>

⁶⁶ Town Council Proceedings June 1854, recorded in Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, 41.

⁶⁷ Chandler, "Feeling Gothic."

⁶⁸ Madgin and Howcroft, "Advancing People-Centred, Place-Based Approaches"; Madgin, *Why do Historic Places Matter*, 4.

⁶⁹ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, 96–106; and as reported in *The Courant*, 8 December 1885.

interest."⁷⁰ This prescient nineteenth century view acknowledged that local stakeholders and visitors to the city not only desired, but benefited from, access to a building for its intangible qualities distinct from any money-making abilities. Recent studies on people-centred, place-led approaches resonate with these earlier views and indicate that emotional and affective engagements may also encourage economic growth.⁷¹ This is what might be argued for the future of the Trinity Apse as its twenty-first century narrative is articulated.

Reviving the Trinity in the Twenty-first Century

Between its reopening in 1877 and the present day, the Apse has served multiple purposes, including as a revived place of worship and a brass rubbing centre. Responding to a relative paucity of academic and public knowledge about the Apse and its history, and a lack of a sustained visitor experience, in 2018 an interdisciplinary group of academics founded the Trinity Network with the view to building knowledge and interest in Mary of Guelders' foundation and its history through research-informed interventions and public engagement activities.⁷² The members assembled due to their relevant academic interests in the Apse and its history, and are all local stakeholders in that they have resided in Edinburgh and its surrounding environs. Beginning with informal conversations and an online conference attended by 200 international delegates, the network has since developed to bring lectures and events to public audiences in Edinburgh alongside more "traditional" academic publications, including a forthcoming edited volume and this article.⁷³ Network members have also built connections with local stakeholder groups, including the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Old Edinburgh Club, the Morningside Heritage Association, Scotland's Churches Trust, the Cockburn Association, and The Crannie, the body which represents residents living in the vicinity of the Apse. The Network itself, and the supporting societies, have been involved in hosting in-person

⁷⁰ Gourlay, *The Best Site for the Trinity College Church*, 96.

⁷¹ Madgin and Howcroft, "Advancing People-Centred, Place-Based Approaches."

⁷² "Reviving the Trinity," accessed 1 August 2024, <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/trinitynetwork/>.

⁷³ "Online Conference: 'Reviving the Trinity: New Perspectives on 15th-Century Scottish Culture,'"

University of Edinburgh, 27 March 2021, accessed 1 August 2024

<https://medievalartresearch.com/2021/03/03/online-conference-reviving-the-trinity-new-perspectives-on-15th-century-scottish-culture-university-of-edinburgh-27-march-2021/>. An open-access journal was

chosen for this article to ensure that all stakeholders, irrespective of institutional affiliation, can access the content.

events, including a public Open Day at the Apse in May 2022 and follow-on events and lectures.⁷⁴

Ongoing conversations and the accumulation of written and verbal feedback from attendees at events organised by the Trinity Network to date demonstrate an appetite for more activities centred on the Apse, and the story of Mary of Guelders in particular.⁷⁵ A body of data suggests an evident desire on the part of respondents to engage with the building and its history, and the value of Queen Mary of Guelders' story as a "hook" or focal point for engagement rooted in historical authenticity. 91% of survey respondents at the initial Open Day in May 2022 said they wanted more events on the Apse and its history, while a further survey circulated following a talk given by Network members to the Morningside Heritage Association saw all respondents indicate that they would like to see Mary of Guelders' story told as part of future interpretation at the Apse. The growing demand for further activities at and about the Apse, coupled with open channels of communication between the Trinity Network and local stakeholder groups, is increasingly demonstrating that people care for and value the Apse, its history and its future.

As a potential heritage destination, the building poses both challenges and opportunities. At present, public access is rare. A permanent interpretation panel on the outside gates, which includes introductory information about the Apse and its connections to Mary of Guelders and James II, is currently the only on-site interpretation available to those viewing the exterior of the Apse from Chalmers Close (Figure 7). An in-situ collection is also lacking, with associated objects and archives scattered across Edinburgh in the National Gallery, the National Museum of Scotland, and other public and private sites throughout the city.

⁷⁴ "Trinity Apse Open Day," *Cockburn Association*, Accessed 1 August 2024, <https://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/event/trinity-apse-open-day/#:~:text=Friday%2020th%20May%202022%20from%2010.15am>

⁷⁵ Feedback surveys circulated as part of the first Trinity Apse Open Day in May 2022 received 33 responses from the 70+ attendees who visited the Apse throughout the day. The surveys were supplemented by a visitor book, which by the end of the event had received 40 signatures, among whom were members of tourist groups from Sweden and the United States, who happened to be passing through Chalmers Close when the Open Day was taking place. Of the 33 survey respondents, 30 said they would like to see more events on the chapel and its history in future. A further survey completed by Morningside Heritage Association members, who visited the Apse as a follow up to a lecture, provided more data. Building on the initial survey, the second survey included more questions relating to knowledge and appetite for events and interpretation focused on Mary of Guelders. Eleven of the fifteen attendees responded to the survey. Further survey data will be collected at future Network events.



Figure 7. The information board on the main gates to Trinity Apse on Chalmers Close, Edinburgh in 2022. Image: Rachel Delman.

While the relative emptiness of Trinity Apse may present challenges in that there is little for visitors to see, it also provides opportunities for creative interventions. In the

past, the building has been used by the Culture Service as an ad-hoc venue for high-profile performing arts and festival events, including for a week-long installation inspired by the hosting of the COP26 Summit in Scotland and for staging events during the globally renowned Edinburgh Fringe Festival.⁷⁶ Appetite from survey respondents for creative interventions suggests the Apse is highly valued as a performance space, seemingly on account of its acoustics and aesthetically pleasing and atmospheric environs. Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents from the 2022 Apse Open Day indicated a desire for further non-invasive interpretation including music, concerts, talks, lectures and off-site digital content, largely with a focus on local and medieval history and with opportunities for community involvement (Figure 8).

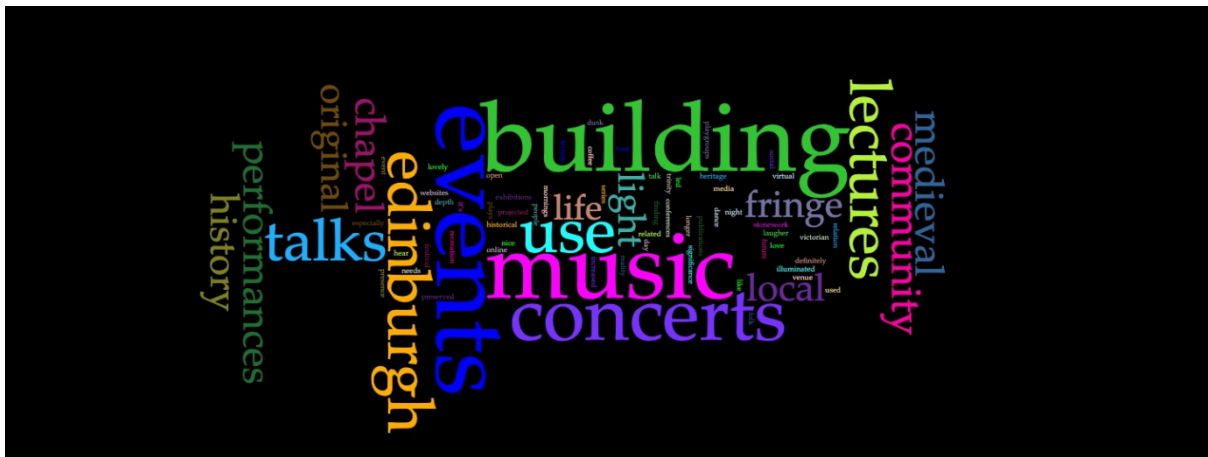


Figure 8. Word cloud created from visitor feedback collected at the initial Trinity Apse Open Day in May 2022. The graphic collates qualitative responses to the types of events visitors would like to see going forward. The larger the word, the more frequently it occurs in feedback. Created using Voyant Tools.⁷⁷

As far as the authors are aware, none of the past events that have taken place at the Apse, other than those organised by the Trinity Network, have been directly grounded in historical research on the building and its history. Historically informed interpretation could thus provide a promising avenue for future multi-stakeholder collaborations, particularly given the appetite for this in initial survey feedback.⁷⁸ In line with that, and

⁷⁶ Brian Ferguson, “One of Edinburgh’s Oldest Buildings to Host Culture Project Inspired by Climate Crisis,” *The Scotsman*, 18 January 2022, accessed 1 August 2024, <https://www.scotsman.com/whats-on/arts-and-entertainment/one-of-edinburghs-oldest-buildings-to-host-climate-crisis-culture-project-3531136>.

⁷⁷ Voyant Tools, accessed 18 November 2024, <https://voyant-tools.org/?corpus=68da80070930f7eebe54ddb276317625&view=Cirrus&visible=75>.

⁷⁸ For a model example of such approaches, see Clarke, *Medieval Cityscapes Today*.

the members' own academic research interests, the Trinity Network has been endeavouring to articulate the royal narrative of Mary of Guelders in an accessible and engaging way and her story will be a central element of the research going forward.

Elsewhere in the UK, non-invasive storytelling centred on the lives of medieval queens in an urban context has elicited positive responses. In 2018, one of the authors co-designed and authored a panel display and walking tour centred on two medieval queens of England, Isabella of France and Margaret of Anjou, for Coventry's Heritage Open Days. Titled "Royal Women of Influence in Medieval Coventry," the project drew attention to an under-utilised historic building, and to the lives of two royal women whose stories, despite their elite social standing, had been absent(ed) from the city's heritage narrative.⁷⁹

The project outputs, which resulted from a collaboration between the University of Oxford and the Historic Coventry Trust, were rooted in place-based historical research, which communicated the two women's connections to Coventry (a city better known for its post-World War II history than for its medieval heritage) in an engaging and non-invasive way. Freestanding interpretation panels outlining the history of late medieval Coventry and thematic treatments of the lives of the two queens and their Coventry connections included illustrations by a local artist alongside reproduced images of relevant manuscripts, illuminations and objects. They were displayed across two rooms in the Drapers' Hall, a Grade II listed, nineteenth-century building, which at that point, much like Trinity Apse, was otherwise empty and regarded by the Historic Coventry Trust as an undervalued heritage asset with which locals and visitors rarely had chance to engage. Paper copies of the walking tour were made available to attendees, and (at the time of writing) digital versions remain freely available to download online.⁸⁰ Sites featured in the walking tour include those which the queens are known to have visited, patronised, and been in residence.

In the initial four days of opening, the display attracted 2,000 visitors and was accompanied by ticketed talks and Press events. It has since been re-displayed on three more occasions, including during Coventry's 2021 City of Culture celebrations.⁸¹ Feedback

⁷⁹ "Royal Women of Influence in Medieval Coventry: Isabella of France and Margaret of Anjou," Medieval Coventry, accessed 1 August 2024, <https://medievalcoventry.co.uk/royal-women-of-influence/>.

⁸⁰ "Royal Women of Influence in Medieval Coventry Exhibition Leaflet," Historic Coventry Trust, accessed 25 November 2025, <https://medievalcoventry.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Royal-Women-of-Influence-in-Medieval-Coventry-Exhibition-Leaflet.pdf>.

⁸¹ "The Queen in the Coventry Tapestry" Exhibition Launch event, 4 May 2023," Medieval Coventry, accessed 1 August 2024, <https://medievalcoventry.co.uk/the-queen-in-the-coventry-tapestry-exhibition-launch-event-4th-may-2023/#:~:text=The%20exhibition%20Royal%20Women%20of,and%20closes%20on%201st%2>

from the initial Open Days indicated that the event was popular with visitors and that the stories of the two medieval queens informed and captivated audiences. One visitor wrote:

Excellent display panels. The theme of two royal women gives an alternative perspective on history. This with the leaflet shows that there is so much more to Coventry which will undoubtedly come as a surprise to many people.

The comment demonstrates that, despite their status as women of the highest social echelons, the stories of medieval queens, such as Mary of Guelders, nevertheless have the power to challenge common pre-conceptions about women's historic contributions to urban spaces. By drawing attention to under-appreciated built heritage through the lens of medieval queens and their urban interventions, the project met stakeholder needs through non-invasive yet long-lasting outputs.

"Royal Women of Influence" resonates with the aims of the Trinity Network in that both aim to tell the stories of medieval queens through the built environment of predominantly post-medieval landscapes. Edinburgh, however, differs from Coventry in that it is a world-renowned tourist destination with a high visitor footfall and a more developed visitor offer. UNESCO recently identified that 41% of visitors were aware that Edinburgh was a World Heritage Site before visiting and 17% thought that its World Heritage status influenced their choice to visit.⁸² The Apse therefore has a ready-made audience, particularly given its proximity to star heritage attractions of the Old Town, including Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood Palace.

One way in which the Trinity Network is seeking to raise the profile of the Apse is by collaborating with neighbouring heritage sites and initiatives to tell Mary of Guelders' story. Following Trinity Network discussions with Mercat Tours, a well-established enterprise which specialises in walking tours to historic places in the city, the Apse is now included in their Royal Mile itinerary and the story of Mary of Guelders' foundation explained.⁸³ In response to the fragmentation of archives and objects across the city of Edinburgh, one of the authors is also working in collaboration with the lead archaeologist

[0July.&text=association%20with%20Coventry%2C%20a%20walking%20tour%20leaflet%20is%20available%20here.](#)

⁸² "UNESCO: Case Study 4: Old and New Towns of Edinburgh," accessed 1 March 2024,

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/sustainabletourismtoolkit/guide4/edinburgh/#:~:text=The%20World%20Heritage%20Status%20Report,Heritage%20status%20influenced%20their%20choice>.

⁸³ Mercat Tours, "Secrets of Edinburgh's Royal Mile," accessed 18 November 2024,

<https://www.mercattours.com/tours/history-walks/view-tour/secrets-of-edinburghs-royal-mile>.

from Edinburgh Council, an expert in historic building stones from the British Geological Survey at Heriot Watt University and other local stakeholder and community groups to create off-site interpretation and engagement in the form of a self-guided trail. The planned output seeks to map detached stones from Mary of Guelders' foundation that have been identified in various locations across Edinburgh. To maximise reach, the information will be published online as well as in leaflet form that will be made available in museums and tourist information locations.⁸⁴

Wider changes currently afoot in the Old Town might also be leveraged to the benefit the Apse's future as a heritage destination. In association with the Scottish Story Telling Centre, the Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust has been developing a Literature House in the historic John Knox House with the intention of making the Netherbow area, directly adjacent to Trinity Apse, a literary quarter. It aims to:

provide Edinburgh with a unique opportunity to transform its understanding of itself and its literary story for the 480,000 residents of the city, and for the visitors that walk its streets. It is a capital project which will cherish and bring new life to one of Scotland's most important medieval buildings, acting as a catalyst for the transformation of the Literary Quarter at the Netherbow, and reaching out across the city and the nation through its programming.⁸⁵

John Knox's House, built in 1490, is recognised above as "one of Scotland's most important medieval buildings."⁸⁶ With origins predating this by thirty years, Trinity Apse also has a compelling tale to tell. The penned-in location of the reconstructed Apse, a direct result of planning decisions taken by Edinburgh Council in the late nineteenth century, along with subsequent developments to the surrounding area, continues to have implications for the future of this royal building. Growing interest in the medieval heritage nearby, however, may provide opportunities for the Apse to feature in broader

⁸⁴ The recent online exhibition celebrating the life of the seventeenth-century writer, Esther Inglis, curated by Anna Nadine-Pike for the University of Edinburgh, has proven successful in digitally connecting the disparate manuscripts associated with Inglis to raise awareness of her life and times. See "Rewriting the Script."

⁸⁵ "Edinburgh's Netherbow SCIO, Trustees' Annual Report for the Year Ended 31 March 2022," accessed 1 March 2024, <https://oscr-docs.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/sc046095-2023-24-accounts-edinburghs-netherbow-scio-final-redacted-f299cd1e-f503-f011-bae3-0022481aaa33.pdf>.

⁸⁶ "The Literature House," *Edinburgh City of Literature*, accessed 25 November 2024. <https://cityofliterature.com/literature-house/#:~:text=John%20Knox%20House%20is%20one,money%20to%20help%20save%20it!>.

regeneration efforts in the coming years. The Scottish Storytelling Centre could provide either a promising model for the Trinity Network to follow or even a "home" for the story of Mary of Guelders' foundation if the Apse itself cannot be used for this purpose.

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate the rich potential of Trinity Apse, an underappreciated heritage asset with an associated royal narrative, as a catalyst for twenty-first century urban heritage experiences and placemaking underpinned by authenticity and affect. It has argued that the story of Mary of Guelders, told through the vestiges of the foundation she commissioned, has latent potential to excite and engage modern audiences. The origin narrative of the building not only complements other royal narratives told as part of the wider heritage tourism of Edinburgh's Old Town, but also speaks to themes of inclusivity, belonging, affect, and wellbeing which are salient in heritage discourse today. As such, it aligns with the priorities of both UNESCO and Edinburgh's tourism strategy to improve the authenticity of the city, and with wider and growing recognition across the sector of the importance of heritage assets in helping to provide solutions for pressing issues in twenty-first century public policy.

The post-medieval fate of Mary of Guelders' foundation, and particularly the heated debates around its dismantling in the nineteenth century, examined here for the first time, powerfully demonstrate how competing stakeholder demands have been mapped onto the building historically. Though couched more obviously in aesthetics than the twenty-first century language of wellbeing and placemaking, those calling for the chapel's preservation historically nevertheless advocated for intangible values beyond hard economics, arguments which resonate with the more holistic measures being adopted in relation to the value of built heritage today.

The initial findings of the Trinity Network indicate that people continue to care about the built medieval heritage of the cities they inhabit and visit and value the intangible benefits that heritage assets such as Trinity Apse – and their rich histories – provide. Since its inception in 2018, the Network has continued to expand and garner support and has identified a core group of engaged local stakeholders for whom the history and future of the Apse, and its associated royal story, matter. Plans for a coordinated programme of work going forward, informed by ongoing research, evaluation and feedback, will look to diversify and strengthen engagement with the Apse through co-created interpretation and outputs.

In its current form, the building presents both challenges and opportunities for accessibility and engagement. The continued lack of clarity around potential lease holders makes planning for Open Days and events in the building complex. The City of Edinburgh Council have to date, however, looked favourably on requests for access, recognising that drawing attention to the importance of this historic building may help secure its future. Initial consultation also suggests that a combination of non-invasive and remote/digital offerings, informed by academic research and designed in consultation with local stakeholders, could create satisfying visitor experiences and enhance pride in place. Off-site interpretation, including the current Reviving the Trinity Stones project and collaborative initiatives with local sites and bodies, are also intended to help alleviate ongoing unpredictability around onsite access and create a more holistic heritage experience going forward.

Mary of Guelders could have hardly imagined what would become of her royal foundation in the several hundred years following her death. Despite the passage of time, and its chequered history, the queen's church has remained a constant—in one way or another—in Edinburgh's cityscape, albeit not for the reasons, or in the form, the queen originally intended. Built with the specific aim of memorialising a queen and her family, Trinity has come to mean different things to different people, and in many ways can be seen to symbolise the ongoing tensions between historicity and renewal that remain at the heart of cityscapes and urban planning today. The presence of mourners flocking to the Royal Mile in September 2022, however, is a reminder that continuity always exists alongside change. For its late medieval audience, Trinity no doubt elicited similar feelings of pride, affect, and intrigue felt by those partaking in the memorialisation of Queen Elizabeth II, just a short distance away. Hidden in plain sight, and at another pivotal moment in its story, Trinity Apse's next chapter rests upon a complex web of factors. Its rich history, however, makes a compelling case for a dynamic and sustainable future.

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not publicly available on account of containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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