

# Ten Fantastic Facts and Legends of Edinburgh Castle, Scotland

1. Edinburgh Castle is built high on an impressive 700 million year old extinct volcano called Castle Rock, in the middle of what is now the city of Edinburgh. People have lived on Castle Rock since the Bronze Age, around 850 BC, and there has been a royal castle on the site since at least the 12th century.

2. Through the ages the castle has been used as a royal residence, a prison, and an army garrison. It is the most important castle in Scotland and has been at the center of numerous wars, having been attacked and besieged many times. Now it is a national monument, museum and tourist attraction.

3. Today, the buildings of Edinburgh Castle date from the 12th century to the 18th Century. St Margaret's Chapel is the oldest building on the site and also the oldest building in all of Scotland. It was constructed in the early 12th century in memory of Queen Margaret. It is said that the Queen died of a broken heart in 1093 when she received news of the death of her husband, King Malcolm III.

4. Many dark dungeons exist at Edinburgh Castle, where prisoners have been locked up and forgotten. Some you can still enter as a tourist. One very deep, nasty pit-prison is hidden below the floor of King James' birth chamber. No one knows who may have been thrown down there.

5. The 'Stone of Destiny' or 'Stone of Scone' is kept at the castle with the crown jewels of Scotland. The stone is the traditional coronation stone of all Scottish and English Kings and Queens and has been much fought over by England and Scotland over the ages. As legend has it, the real stone was swapped for a fake either in the 13th century or the 1950's, and to this day the authentic stone is still secretly hidden.

6. There are many castle mysteries. One tale warns University of Edinburgh students not to pass through the castle gates or they will fail their final exams: the legend has terrified young, dewy-eyed undergraduates for centuries.

7. The castle is also one of the most haunted places in Scotland, one famous ghost being the Lone Piper. As the story goes, a few hundred years ago secret tunnels were discovered deep underground, running from the castle to other places in the city. A piper boy was sent down to investigate, instructed to constantly play his pipes, so those above could chart his progress through the tunnels. When the playing suddenly stopped, they went and searched for the piper boy but he had vanished. His ghostly pipes can still be heard playing in the castle to this day, as he eternally walks the dark tunnels beneath.

8. In the castle's Great Hall there is a little barred window high above the fireplace; in Scotland these holes



are called 'laird's lugs' (Lord's ears). In the early 16th century King James IV would spy through this little hole to eavesdrop on meetings taking place in the Hall below. So effective are 'laird's lugs,' as a means of eavesdropping that when Gorbachev planned his visit to the castle for a conference in 1984, the Soviet national security insisted the hole be bricked over.

9. The famous event of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo takes place every August in front of the Castle on the grand esplanade at nighttime. This fantastic atmospheric spectacle is attended by thousands and is televised around the world. The Scottish regiment parade in traditional kilts, and Scottish songs are played on hundreds of bagpipes (Cultural Fact) and drums, followed by performances and fireworks. At the end, a lone piper stands spotlighted high on the castle ramparts, playing a mournful tune in memory of the dead.

10. Edinburgh Castle is also home to Mons Meg cannon, the enormous medieval supergun made around 1449. This cannon fired huge solid stone cannon balls- three times the size of your head. Each weighed 400 pounds and could be fired as far as 2 mile! The ritual of firing the One O'Clock Gun still continues to this day, which takes place precisely at one o' clock on every day of the week (except for Sunday). This ritual began in 1861 as a time signal for ships. For 26 years the Gun was fired by a man nick-named 'Tam the Gun' until he died in 2005. Now the Gun is fired everyday by 'Shannon the Cannon.'

