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# Canongate Wall: art, science and politics

Local Geodiversity Site Scottish Parliament Building Edinburgh

Lothian and Borders GeoConservation

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## How to find the Canongate Wall

The Canongate Wall at the eastern end of the Royal Mile forms the northern boundary of the Scottish Parliament buildings. [NT 26701 73889]

By Coach: Parking in Regent Road

By Car: Parking in Regent Road and at Our Dynamic Earth.

## Acknowledgements

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## Figures

(Front cover)

(Figure 1) View of the Canongate Wall, a curved concrete blast wall with Scottish rocks inserted.

(Figure 2) Details and photograph of the 28 individual rocks set in the Canongate Wall.

(Figure 3) How to find the Canongate Wall

## What is the Canongate Wall?

Under the façade of the Canongate building is the Canongate Wall. During the construction of the Parliament buildings a blast wall was incorporated into the design of the new structure. The wall is cast in concrete, 39 metres in length and 6 metres high at the highest point.

The concrete structure is embellished by a selection of Scottish rocks, some of which have Scottish texts carved onto the face. These texts were selected by a panel of MSPs together with a literature expert and include suggestions of suitable material submitted by the Scottish people. Hundreds of proposals were submitted and twenty four were chosen for the original design.

In 2010, to mark the tenth anniversary of the Scottish Parliament in 2009, two more stones were added using the same selection process as before. In total there are currently 28 panels of Scottish rocks, two of which have no inscriptions.

The overall design of the Canongate Wall was by Sora Smithson and contains a representative range of Scottish rocks carved by Gillian Forbes and Martin Reilly. Also incorporated are "Brewery Stones" recovered from the building demolished to make way for the new Parliament building. All the stone inserts are set in the large pre-cast concrete panels.

At the eastern end of the wall is a townscape based around the sketch by Enric Miralles (architect of the Scottish Parliament Buildings) of Edinburgh's Old Town as viewed from his room at the Balmoral Hotel on Princes Street in Edinburgh.

## Key to the building stones

1. **Easdale Slate** — Easdale Island, Argyll. "When we had a king..." Walter Scott Mrs Howden in "Heart of Midlothian" **Metamorphic**
2. **Cove Red Sandstone** — Annan, Dumfries & Galloway. "Let the words..." Psalm 19:14 **Sedimentary**
3. **Ardkinglas Slate** — Cairndow, Argyll. "From the lone sheiling..." Anon **Metamorphic**
4. **Whinstone (dolerite)** — Caldercruix, West Lothian. "This is my country..." Sir Alexander Gray **Igneous**
5. **Carmyllie Sandstone** — Angus. "What would the world be..." Gerard Manley Hopkins **Sedimentary**
6. **Errochty Sandstone** — Struan, Perthshire. "Then let us pray..." Robert Burns **Metamorphic**
7. **Conglomerate** — Dunbeath Beach, Caithness. No lettering **Sedimentary**
8. **Lewisian (banded) Gneiss** — Lochinver, Sutherland. "But Edinburgh..." Hugh MacDiarmid **Metamorphic**
9. **Ledmore Marble** — Ledmore Quarry, Highlands. "If a man..." Andrew Fletcher **Metamorphic**
10. **Corrennie Granite** — Aberdeenshire. "So, cam' all ye..." Hamish Henderson **Igneous**
11. **Clashach Sandstone** — Elgin, Morayshire. "tell us about..." Edwin Morgan **Sedimentary**
12. **Bressay Sandstone Shetland** "Who possesses this landscape?..." Norman MacCaig **Sedimentary**
13. **Kemnay Granite** — Aberdeenshire. "There is hope..." Charles Rennie Mackintosh **Igneous**
14. **Torridonian Sandstone** — Ullapool, Highlands. "Am fhearr as fhearr..." Proverb **Sedimentary**
15. **Caithness Flagstone (polished)** — Spittal, Caithness. "Abair ach..." Proverb **Sedimentary**
16. **Ledmore Marble** Ledmore Quarry, Highlands "Oh, dear me..." Mary Brooksbank **Metamorphic**
17. **Ardkinglas Slate** — Cairndow, Argyll. "O wad some Pow'r..." Robert Burns **Metamorphic**
18. **Pipe Rock** — Ledmore, Highlands. "Is i Alba..." Deòrsa Mac Iain Deòrsa **Sedimentary**
19. **Errochty Sandstone** — Struan, Perthshire. No lettering **Metamorphic**
20. **Cullaloe Sandstone** — Aberdour, Fife. "The rose..." Hugh MacDiarmid **Sedimentary**
21. **Knowehead Sandstone** — Dumfries. "To promise..." Proverb **Sedimentary**
22. **Easdale Slate** — Easdale Island, Argyll. "What a lovely..." Alan Jackson **Metamorphic**

**23. Glen Tilt Marble** — Blair Atholl, Perthshire. "Put all your eggs..." Andrew Carnegie

**24. Grey Granite** — Dunbeath Beach, Caithness. "Scotland small?..." Hugh MacDiarmid **Igneous**

**25. Ross of Mull Granite** — Fionnphort, Mull, Argyll. "The battle..." John Muir **Igneous**

**26. Lewisian Gneiss** — Lochinver, Sutherland. "Bright is ..." Robert Louis Stevenson **Metamorphic**

**27. Iona Marble** — Iona, Argyll. "Work as if..." Alasdair Gray **Metamorphic**

**28. Giffnock Sandstone** — Glasgow. "Sweet Ghosts..." George MacDonald **Sedimentary**

## Key to quotations

1 When we had a king, and a chancellor, and parliament-men dour ain, we could aye peeble them wi'stanes when they werena gude bairns - But naeboddy's nails can reach the length o' Lunnon. **Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) Mrs Howden In "Heart of Midlothian"**

2 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. **Psalms 19:14**

3 From the lone sheiling of the misty island

Mountains divide us, and the waste of seas -

Yet still the blood is strong, the heart is Highland,

And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

**Anonymous "Canadian Boat Song" First appeared 1829**

4 This is my country,

The land that begat me.

These windy spaces

Are surely my own.

And those who toil here

In the sweat of their faces

Are flesh of my flesh,

And bone of my bone.

**Sir Alexander Gray (1882-1968)**

"Scotland"© John Gray

5 What would the world be, once bereft

Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,

O let them be left, wildness and wet;

Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

**Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) "Inversnald"**

6 Then let us pray that come it may

(As come it will for a' that) That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,

Shall bear the gree, an' a' that. For a' that an' a' that,

It's coming yet for a' that, That Man to Man the world o'er,

Shall brithers be for a' that.

**Robert Burns (1759-1796) "A Man's A Man for A' That"**

7 Conglomerate - no lettering

8 But Edinburgh is a mad god's dream

Fitful and dark,

Unseizable in Leith

And wildered by the Forth,

But irresistibly at last

Cleaving to sombre heights

Of passionate imagining

Till stonily,

From soaring battlements, Earth eyes Eternity.

**Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978) © Carcanet Press**

9 If a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation.

**Andrew Fletcher (1655–1716)**

10 So, cam' all ye at hame wi' freedom

Never heed whit the hoodies croak for doom

In your hoose a' the bairns o' Adam

Can find breid, barley bree an' painted room.

**Hamish Henderson (1919–2002) "The Freedom come all ye" © Mrs K Henderson**

11 tell us about last night

well, we had a wee ferintosh and we lay on the quiraing. it was pure strontian!

**Edwin Morgan (1920–2010) Carcanet Press**

12 Who possesses this landscape?-

The man who bought it or

I who am possessed by it?

False questions, for

this landscape is masterless

and intractable in any terms that are human.

**Norman MacCaig (1910–1996)**, A Man in Assynt Birlinn Press

13 There is hope in honest error; None in the icy perfections of the mere stylist. Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868–1928)

14 Am fear as fheàrr a chuireas 'Seas fheàrr a bhuaineas. **Seannfhacal**

He who sowest best reapest best. **Proverb**

15 Abair ach beagan is abair gu math e. **Seannfhacal**

Say but little and say it well. **Proverb**

16 Oh, dear me, the wadd's ill-divided,

Them that work the hardest are aye wi' least provided, But I maun bide contented, dark days or fine,

But there's no much pleasure livin' affen ten and nine. Mary Brooksbank (1894–1980), Oh Dear Me (The Jute Mill Song)

17 O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us

To see oursels as others see us!

It wad frae monie a blunder free us

An' foolish notion.

**Robert Burns (1759–1796) "To a Louse"**

18 Is i Alba nan Gall's nan Gaidheal is gaire is blath is beatha dhomh.

It is Scotland, Highland and Lowland that is laughter and warmth and life for me.

**George Campbell Hay (1915–1984) "The Four Winds of Scotland"**

© W L Lorimer Memorial Trust

19 Errochty sandstone - no lettering

20 The rose of all the world is not for me.

I want for my part

Only the little white rose of Scotland

That smells sharp and sweet - and breaks the heart.

**Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978) "The Little White Rose" © Carcanet Press**

21 To promise is ae thing, to keep it is anither. Proverb

22 What a lovely, lovely moon. And it's in the constituency too.

**Alan Jackson (1938–) "The Young Politician Looks at the Moon"**

© the author

23 Put all your eggs into one basket -and then watch that basket.

**Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919)**

24 Scotland small? Our multiform, our infinite Scotland small?

**Hugh MacDiarmid (1892–1978) "Scotland Small?" Carcanet Press**

25 The battle for conservation will go on endlessly. It is part of the universal battle between right and wrong. John Muir (1838–1914)

26 Bright is the ring of words.

**Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894) "Songs of Travel"**

27 Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation.

**Alasdair Gray (1934–) © Canongate Press (paraphrased from Dennis Lee's Civil Elegies. Toronto: Anansi, 1972)**

28 Sweet ghosts in a loving band

Roam through the houses that stand-

For the builders are not gone.

**George Macdonald (1824–1905) "Song"**

# Canongate Wall

## Art Science and Politics



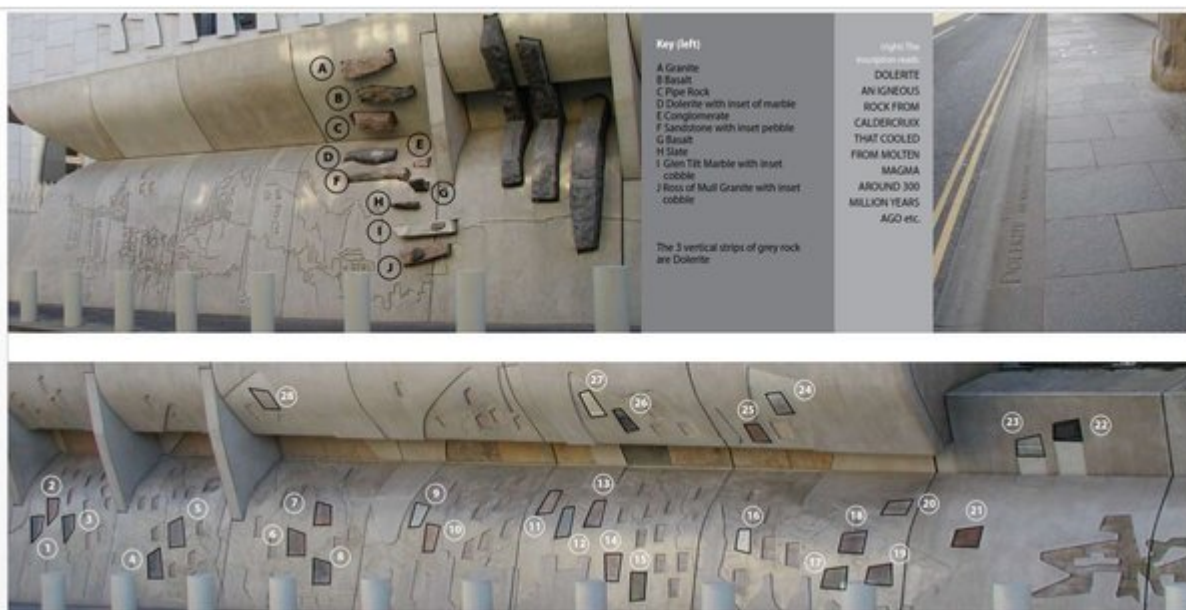
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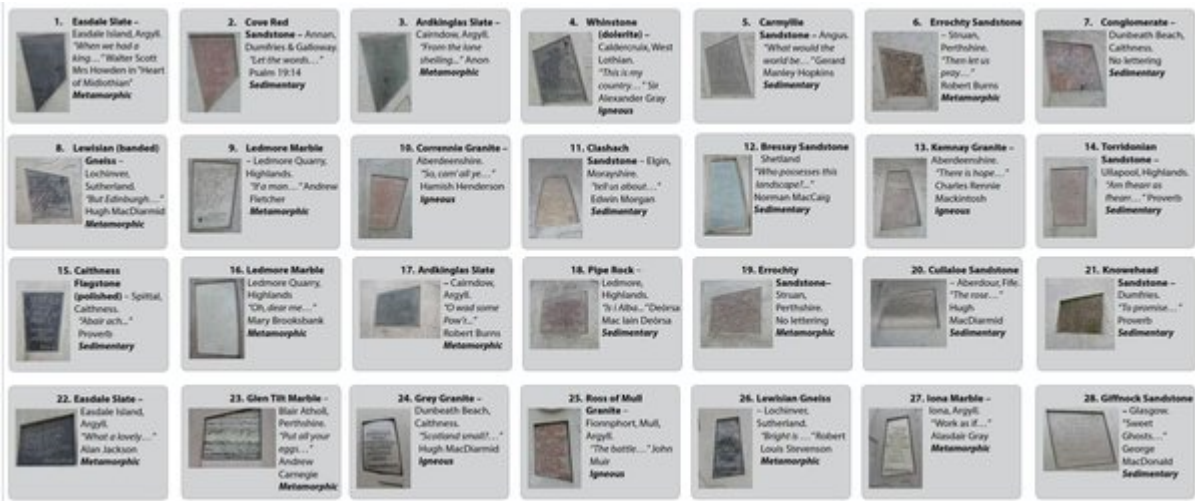
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Front cover.



View of the Canongate Wall a curved concrete blast wall with Scottish rocks inserted.



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