

# *Dalrymple Crescent: a snapshot of Victorian Edinburgh*

*by  
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## **Synopsis**

This book takes as its starting point a street in the Grange district of Edinburgh. Built during the expansion of Victorian Edinburgh, the area comprises mainly detached or semi-detached houses within their own private gardens bounded by high stone walls. It was developed by the growing middle class of merchants and professionals in Edinburgh who were seeking a more secluded environment in which to raise their families, and is one of a number of areas built around Edinburgh in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Dalrymple Crescent shares the characteristics of much of the Grange and although there have been substantial interior modifications, the overall appearance of the street has not changed much since Victorian times.

However, the real interest of the street is the diversity of people that built and lived in it during the latter part of Victoria's reign. In the forty years between the building of the Crescent and the end of the century, over 140 families were associated with the street. Based mainly on official records, this book traces the history of these families, and in doing so uncovers a rich history of Scottish middle class life in Victorian times. With this as a beginning, it looks at some of the social, economic and political issues that confronted the people of the Crescent, as well as their personal experiences.

Dalrymple Crescent was not the most prestigious street in the Grange, and this very fact means that for many residents their sojourn in the street was also a snapshot of their own lives; some were newly married, and moved on to exclusive locations, while others saw Dalrymple Crescent as a suitable place for retirement. The study of their lives shows the similarities and differences between then and now.

The book is divided into four broad sections. The first gives a historical introduction to Edinburgh, the Grange, and the initial development of the Crescent. The second gives the history of the families associated with the street; first the builders and

developers, secondly the residents (and their servants), and thirdly a group that had more complex connections with the street. In this section the lives of a number of citizens of note are examined in the context of their contribution to the city, Scotland and beyond.

The third section looks at the Crescent over the four decades; for each decade it gives an introduction to some historical events, it recounts the events in the street from a contemporary point of view, and finishes with some key issues that the *Scotsman* newspaper addressed on one particular day (The morning after census day).

The final section draws together the main points that have emerged from the above, and reflects on the lives of our Victorian predecessors, identifying the interesting similarities and differences that have been uncovered. This section demonstrates how the study of life in one small area can give an insight into other areas of Edinburgh, and indeed of national trends.

An Appendix discusses the methodology used in investigating the houses of the street, describing the sources and techniques used to piece together the lives of the residents and owners.

### **Biography**

I trained as a Computer Scientist at Edinburgh University. After a brief spell in Birmingham I returned to Edinburgh and spent most of my working life in a Social Science Research Centre based in Edinburgh University. During my final years at the Centre I was responsible for number of European Union research projects. After retiring I started to research the history of our house, and then our street, and I found that my previous experience came in useful, both for writing and for data management.