



JOHN KNOX HOUSE TOUR GUIDE



Station 1 – The Luckenbooths

Station is in the bookshop, in between the windows and the bookcases.

During the time of John Knox and James Mossman, what is now the reception area was a local **shopping centre**. The jeweller's shop was placed prominently at the front windows. In the gallery where the book cases are, five or six other trades displayed their wares, including a cutlery maker, a furrier and a tailor. Each pillared section in the gallery had a **luckenbooth** or 'locking booth' for daytime display. Each trader also had a cellar for storage and manufacture below.

Step into the gallery to feel the **original external wall** and see the cellar stairs. Then step back into reception. In the 16th century there was also access to the shops next door through the archway that now leads to the modern part of the **Scottish Storytelling Centre**.



Station 2 –John Knox House Exterior

Station is located outside. Please exit the bookshop and look at entrance to John Knox House.

The John Knox House looks so picturesque that people have said it is a reproduction or fake! In fact, it is Edinburgh's **only surviving medieval mansion** complete with its overhanging timber galleries.

There were multiple entrances that led to the shops or booths on the ground floor, and to the foreland house and backland house to the rear, which were originally separated. The frontage is particularly grand with its classically correct Doric columns and wreaths.

The **coat of arms** is that of the Mossman's, royal goldsmiths to the medieval Stewart kings and makers of the Scottish crown. The initials can be read vertically or horizontally. JM and MA indicate the marriage of **James Mossman** and **Mariota Arres**, an heiress who owned the house.

Following their marriage in 1559, the house was subject to a **major upgrading** including this new stone façade. The **sundial** shows Moses receiving the light of God symbolised by the Sun on Mount Sinai. When Jesus in the New Testament was asked what the most important thing

in the Law of Moses, he said, “Love God and your neighbour as yourself”, which is carved on the façade in Scots as follows:

“Luve God abuve al and yr nychtbour as yersel.”

James Mossman was a traditional Catholic. He was devoted to the Queen Regent Marie de Guise, and then to her daughter **Mary Queen of Scots**. However, the house was also to become associated with **John Knox**, the great enemy of the two Catholic Queens. Due to the belief that Knox had lived here, the house has been repeatedly **saved from demolition**. There is a possibility that the great reformer died in the house, but it was not his manse or a permanent residence in Edinburgh.

If you move towards the road you can see the outside stair or fore stair that led into the upper part of the front house.



Station 3 – The Netherbow Tower

Station is located on the outside stair at the side of John Knox House.

This is the **halfway point** of the Royal Mile. Looking downhill, you can see Holyrood with Aberlady Bay in the far distance. Look uphill to **St Giles’ Cathedral** and Edinburgh Castle.

John Knox was the **first Protestant Minister** of St Giles’ Church after the Scottish Reformation in 1560. This half-way point is called The Netherbow or Lower Bent. Until 1764 when it was demolished, the **Netherbow Port** divided Edinburgh from the separate burgh of the Canongate. The Port, Edinburgh’s principal gateway, was first sited beside John Knox House and then moved in 1513 after the Battle of Flodden to the crossroads below. Beyond the gates, people said, was the **World’s End**.

The contemporary Netherbow Tower beside you displays two features from the gateway. The **sculptured panel** of 1606 commemorates the escape of James VI and I and Queen Anne from the Guy Fawkes ‘Gunpowder Plot’. It bears James’ personal motto “Beati Pacifici” (“Blessed are the Peacemakers”) and “God Save the King”.

At the top of the Tower is **Edinburgh’s City Bell**, commissioned by “the senate and people of Edinburgh” from Holland in 1621. It bears the mottoes “To God be the Glory” and “Wha Daur Meddle Wi Me?” You can see the bell from further down the street.

The Netherbow Port was reconstructed and elaborately ornamented in honour of James VI and I after he moved to London in 1603 to become the first ruler of England and Scotland. The people of Edinburgh wished to remind him that he had another capital city in the north.

Please move back inside the house to continue your tour. The introduction to the museum is through the swing door to the left of reception. Mind your head under the low doorway.

Please take time to listen to the dramatized audio tape in the seated area before continuing up the turnpike stair to Station 4 on the landing.



Station 4 – Spiral Stair (Turnpike)

Station is located inside the museum, on the first floor landing of the Turnpike Staircase.

The ‘turnpike’ or spiral stair gave access to the upper floors of both the front and back houses. The Mossman’s used the house as a place of business and of manufacture as well as their home. Goldsmiths were jewellers, pawnbrokers and money lenders. Apprentices and relations were accommodated in a domestic space above. Managing the household was a demanding professional task for Mariota Arres, Mossman’s first wife.

Likewise, when John Knox lived here during the **siege of Edinburgh Castle**, the house would have been constantly busy with messengers, visitors, and servants, including Knox’s secretary Richard Bannatyne. Even in his last illness, Knox’s pronouncements and views were given great importance. By this time John Knox was married to his second wife, Margaret, and had three daughters in addition to two sons from his first marriage.



Station 5 – Book room

Station is in the book room to the left. Please mind your head on the low doorways, they are made of stone!

The Reformation began in Europe and involved those like **Erasmus**, who remained Catholic; reformers as well as Protestants like **Martin Luther, Calvin** and **John Knox**. The movement arose because scholars were rediscovering the languages and cultures of the past, so putting ideas in their original historical context.

With the **invention of printing press**, along with the spread of education in the growing towns, meant that debates on religion and politics became widespread. Protestants wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible for themselves in their own languages rather than Latin which belonged to educated elite.

In case 3 you can see the **Bassendyne Bible**, the first English Bible to be printed in Scotland. It was printed in the Netherbow in 1572–3. Amongst the important European figures in these debates were Knox’s teacher John Mair, a Catholic philosopher, and the poet and historian George Buchanan. His **“History of Scotland”**, which is also in case three, argued that rulers were subject to the sovereignty of the people and that unjust monarchs should be deposed.

John Knox himself was to write a **“History of the Reformation in Scotland”** but it is more a passionate defence of his cause and his actions than an objective history. This can be seen in case 5.

One of the key arguments between Protestants and Roman Catholics was about the role of the **Mass or Communion** service in Christianity. The debate between John Knox and the Abbot of Crossraguel was printed in 1563 in the Netherbow. It is at the foot of [case 5](#).

The Victorian painting hanging over the fireplace is by **William Dyce** and shows Knox conducting the first Protestant Communion in Scotland on a secret visit in 1557–8. Knox is depicted like Jesus at the Last Supper.



Station 6 – Mossman Room

Station is located in the adjacent room.

In the early 16th century before the 1560 Reformation, Edinburgh was a wealthy and expanding town. The Mossman's were prominent in the city's economic life because of their goldsmith's craft.

In the 16th century this room would have had panelling, perhaps ornamented with carvings. The work table below the window displays the **tools of the goldsmiths' craft**. Mossman often made jewellery for Mary Queen of Scots. In addition, the Mossman's acted as the **royal assay**, responsible for ensuring the coinage had the correct balance of precious and base metals.

Some of the Mossman's wealth was used to sponsor the Church, in particular the magnificent town Kirk of St Giles. The goldsmiths shared a Chapel there with the hammermen or metalworkers, dedicated to their patron **Saint Eligius** who is in the niche on your left. **The Blue Blanket** or Banner of the Holy Ghost hung in the Chapel. You can see a replica of the banner on the far wall. In the Chapel, masses were said for dead craft members and meetings held to dispense charity to widows and orphans.

The twentieth century **ceramics** above the fireplace are by **Seljko Kujundzc** and are reproductions of coins made while the Mossman's were keepers and assays to the Royal Mint. The coins feature portraits of the Stewart monarchs.

The **fireplace** itself is a fine example of Dutch tiling dating to the early 17th century. The elaborate vase of flowers was the trade sign of the **Bloempot tile factory** in Rotterdam.

Security was an issue in those times and the small strongbox in the case to the right of the fireplace would have held jewels or gold coins. Minting coins was a highly skilled craft. The **Royal Mint** in the Mossman's time was at Holyrood Palace. The display case next on your right contains Scottish coins from the 1559-72 period.



Station 7 – Castle Gallery

Station is located beyond the Mossman Room.

Mossman's life and prosperity ended tragically in a civil war between supporters of the now exiled Queen Mary and supporters of the new Protestant regime of her infant son James.

Pawning the crown jewels to buy weapons, Mossman participated in a **three-year defence of Edinburgh Castle** for the Queen and using his knowledge of minting he produced coins bearing Mary's head. These were both capital offences. When the Castle fell in 1573 Mossman was among only three of the defenders selected for **execution**. James Mossman was dragged backwards up the street in a low cart and was hanged at the **Mercat Cross** beside St Giles' Cathedral.

Crime and punishment were brutal realities of sixteenth century Edinburgh. The **scold's bridle** at the bottom of the case was the punishment for gossiping, slander or verbal abuse. It was fitted over the gossiper's head and locked in place. Talking or eating were limited, since any movement of the mouth could cause a severe piercing of the tongue due to a spike inside the gag.

The siege of Edinburgh Castle between 1569 and 1573 caused a lengthy blockade of the town and huge damage to property. The plan displayed in the Gallery was reproduced in "*Holinshed's Chronicle*", probably from eye witness information.



Station 8 – The Reformation Room

Station is on the second floor, up the stairs and in the first room on your right.

When John Knox returned to Scotland in 1559 from exile in Europe it was to take part in a **Protestant revolution** against the Catholic and French rule of Marie de Guise. The aim was to depose Marie de Guise and abolish the legal authority of the Pope in Scots Law, along with the Mass.

This was achieved but Knox had wanted to go much further, establishing a godly society and using the wealth of the Church to set up schools and social security in every parish. He was frustrated since the nobility wanted the lands and wealth of the Church for themselves, and that Mary Queen of Scots maintained her mother's support for Roman Catholicism.

However, Knox became an icon of later Scottish values of **education, equality and hard work**. The stained-glass image is by **James Ballantyne**, the Victorian artist and popular poet. The painted panel over the fireplace depicts the Biblical story of Lot and his daughters; Sodom and Gomorrah are burning in the background.

It is sometimes wrongly said that the Reformation banned the visual arts in Scotland. Religious art was excluded from churches but thrived in domestic decoration and printed books.



Station 9 – The Stair Entrances

Station is on the landing at the top of the stairs. Please take care as the doorways are very low.

The top of the turnpike stairs shows the increasing difference in level between the front and back sections of the house clearly showing the **originally separate properties**.

After James Mossman's death his widow and second wife, Janet King, eventually recovered the house as her "marriage portion" or, in effect, pension. Sub-letting and subdivision became the order of the day as this landing shows. It is the lobby for a separate residence with its own front door and door knocker. In the 17th century, despite the differences in level, sub-division became by floors with each resident occupying back and front rooms, foreland and backland. In front of you is the principal room of the fine second floor residence of that later period which continued to be occupied by the landowning or merchant class, though not on the Mossman's scale of affluence.



Station 10 – The Oak Room

Station is located through the doorway, inside the Oak Room.

In 1561, despite the Protestant Revolution led by John Knox, Mary Queen of Scots had returned to occupy the Scottish throne. Many Scots presumed that the good old days had returned and that the traditional Catholic faith would be restored. In fact, Mary's return was the signal for bitter religious and political conflict, not least between Knox and the young Queen.

The Mossman's rejoiced at Mary's return and redecorated this to be their **main room**. They established a pattern of elaborate decoration continued by succeeding occupiers. The tiles in the fireplace were rescued from other Old Town houses which were demolished in the 19th century.

The **painted ceiling** you can see today probably dates from around 1600 and is a riot of imagery and originally a collection of strong colours. There are signs of the **zodiac, winged fairies and devils**. These patterns existed as painters' conventions from which clients could select. Here the client's taste seems to have been wide-ranging, exuberant and humorously bawdy.

The painted panel on the left of the room depicts the Biblical story of Cain and Abel. Note also the replica of a **Jacobean kist** with Masonic symbolism. This belongs to the same mood and atmosphere – the time of witchcraft trials, religious persecution and new philosophies.

You can listen to a conversation between Mary Queen of Scots and John Knox by pressing the button on the panel on the chest or kist. (If you have difficulty hearing the audio, please see transcript of conversation by the kist)



Station 11 – Memorial Gallery

Station is located beyond the Oak Room in the tiny gallery traditionally believed to have been John Knox's study.

Despite their profound differences, both Knox and Mary Queen of Scots were sincere religious believers. Tragically the politics of the day put them in opposing camps and led to much suffering and to death.

The royal **lion carving** above the fireplace is dated 31st October 1561, the year of Mary's return to Scotland.

John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots both left moving **last prayers**.

“And so I end rendering my troubled and sorrowful spirits in the hands of the eternal God earnestly trusting at his good pleasure to be freed from the cares of this miserable life and to rest with Christ Jesus, my only hope and life.” *John Knox*

“Into thy hands, oh God, I commend my soul.” *Mary Queen of Scots*

We hope that you have enjoyed the tour of John Knox House. Please make your way back to reception and continue your visit with the Storytelling Centre, Café and Exhibition space.

