

Before the Tron Kirk: Mount Parnassus and a miraculous tree at the Salt Tron

Introduction – what the talk is about - 5 mins

[slide 1] First, I would like to thank the Scottish Historic Buildings Trust for giving me the opportunity to talk to you today about some aspects of my research, that touched upon the role of the Tron area during the early modern period, not only as a physical location with a practical use, but as a symbolic site, a site in which the city's identity and sense of self was repeatedly constructed, displayed, and negotiated.

The historical site in Edinburgh I am going to talk to you about today, is not actually the Tron Kirk – the ecclesiastical building constructed between 1636 and 1647 as instructed by King Charles I, to house the congregation displaced from nearby St Giles when he made that church a cathedral. The structure in which I am interested, and about which I am going to talk today, is the one that stood in that location before the Tron Kirk was erected – that is, the Salt Tron. Besides giving some factual information about the Salt Tron, and its appearance, I will look at it in its role as one of the few key locations assigned a primary role during the urban celebrations welcoming the Stewart monarchs into Edinburgh, in the years between 1503 and 1633. I will look, in a way, at the role of the Tron area as public stage for politicised entertainments; I see it not as an inactive, bland backdrop, but as a building and a space endowed with performative qualities, a building and an area which was speaking to those present as both performers and spectators during these historical civic events, but also to us, nowadays. The Tron, I believe, has a message to tell about the community's cultural life, the burgh's sense of self, and the relationship between the crown and the local authorities in the sixteenth century, and beyond.

I will start by presenting what is known about the Salt Tron – the purpose to which it answered, and what it might have looked like – as shown in three famous maps of the burgh from this period, all available from the National Library of Scotland. I will then introduce briefly the organisation and purpose of the royal ceremonies for the Stewart monarchs with which the Tron was associated – and if you have heard me speaking about triumphal entries before, you might be familiar with it, but I feel that a general introduction is very much needed – with particular consideration to the specific role played by the Tron as a commercial structure. Finally, I will zoom in on four particular topics or themes for the entertainments which took place in the Tron area, and which demonstrate the deliberate, effective way in which fashionable spectacle, political

messages, and urban spaces worked together in early modern Edinburgh. These topics are nature, genealogy, music, religion, and classical themes as appearing in large scale entertainments.

Three maps comparison, what is there? 10 mins

The name of the Tron name derived from an Old French word meaning weighing beam, but when I speak of the Salt Tron today I will include the immediate surroundings and local buildings associated with the actual beam, which were used also for commerce-related functions.

[Slide 2] The first map I would like to show you is Edenburgum, Scotiae Metropolis, by Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, printed in Cologne around 1582 as one of a collection of maps of European capitals. A close up reveals that there is nothing in Braum and Hogengerg's map to suggest that anything of importance is happening in what we know would be the area of the Salt Tron, but as you have probably already noticed to be the case here, Braum and Hogengerg's maps are not necessarily or always reliable, so this doesn't necessarily mean much. The accompanying text from the 1583 edition, discursively presents some of the noteworthy landmarks and geographical characteristics of Edinburgh in this period, from the proximity to the Forth and the port of Leith to the presence of the Arthur's Seat, from naming churches and religious institutions, to describing the Canongate and the Cowgate as major roads in and out of the city, to admiring the Castle and Holyrood Palace. But, unfortunately, no Salt Tron.

[Slide 3] However, some information can be gauged from a slightly earlier and slightly less well-known map of Edinburgh showing the siege of the Castle while it was held for Mary Queen of Scots in May 1573. [Slide 4] Here we do see, in a close-up, the two weighing beams of the Salt Tron, bottom right, and the Butter Tron top left; they are not as significant to the military action as walled defences or ports, but they are deemed important enough for their presence to be shown as part of the urban environment. [Slide 5] The last map I would like to show you from this period that illustrates the position of the Salt Tron is the well-known map from 1647 by Gordon of Rothiemay, with the densely built-up burgh of Edinburgh and the castle to the left of the screen, and the more verdant and spacious burgh of Canongate to the right hand-side with Holyrood Palace, the two burghs being separated from Edinburgh's walls and the Netherbow Port. [Slide 6] The location of the two weighing beams as shown in 1573 are visible now in more detail: the Butter Tron areas, where a succession of weigh houses had stood since at least the mid 1300s, is shown equipped with the weight beam and with the weigh house built around 1614 that stood here

until 1650, after which it was rebuilt again before being finally destroyed in the early nineteenth century. In the Salt Tron area, the Tron Kirk has already taken possession of the space, obliterating any other commerce-related building that might have stood here, but the beam is still visible, being listed in the explanatory key accompanying the map as *Libra* – that is Scales, with the Tron being *Templum ad Libram*, that is the Church of the Scales – the Tron Kirk. This indicates the long lasting influence of the Tron and its commercial role in the spatial memory of the burgh, and indeed the Kirk, as we know, has maintained that name today.

Introduction to triumphal entries – 5 minutes

[Slide 7] Now, having presented the Salt Tron site as a commercial space within the burgh, I will proceed to present the entertainments which were set in Edinburgh in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, before moving to the Tron's particular role in them. As many as nine triumphal entries -here in white- took place over 130 years, for as many as seven Stewart monarchs and royal consorts; these celebrated dynastical renovation, the beginning of independent rule by a monarch, their return from abroad, or their arrival as foreign spouses bringing useful international connections and rich dowries. One of these nine was unrealised, as Queen Madeleine, James V's first wife, died in 1538 before the planned ceremony could take place, and we only have a poem to commemorate the aborted event, while another was a local celebration *in absentia* for Mary Queen of Scots' wedding in Paris to the French heir to the throne in 1558 – but all the others saw the processional progress of a real guest parading through the burgh, and moving from location to location being entertained by pageants, speeches, and other performances. In this slide, you see also events in orange – these were courtly celebrations, sometimes paired with the civic events, sometimes independent from them – but I put them here also to emphasise how civic welcomes were only one aspect of a complex, nation-wide, well-developed landscape of politicised ceremonies and ritual use of civic and palatial space. In fact, one of the points of my talk today, is to illustrate how the culture of ceremony in early modern Scotland – as exemplified by the use of space at the Salt Tron and the kind of entertainments set up there – had really many points in common with what was going on elsewhere in Europe at this time. They were all, really, utilising the same visual and spatial language.

Slide 8 – From the point of view of the use of space, my research has demonstrated that the typical royal entry in Edinburgh was organised around a small selection of key urban locations. With some slight generalisation here -do ask be about the exceptions if you want to, later- the procession would gather outside of the civic gate of the West Port, to the west side of the

Grassmarket, would then proceed up to the now disappeared Over Bow, approximately on the site of present-day Victoria street, following a steep incline that led to the Butter Tron on the High Street. From here, it would descend towards the core group of buildings represented by the Market Cross, the Kirk of St Giles, and the now disappeared Tolbooth, then it would proceed down towards the Salt Tron, then further down to the Netherbow gate – after which, having exited Edinburgh, the royal procession was free to proceed towards the Palace of Holyrood, enjoying also those minor entertainments that the burgh of Canongate might have organised on the way. I would like to note, that triumphal entries took place all over Europe in this period, and a comparative approach with what was going on in other countries, can set the Scottish case study both within and apart from concurrent traditions – but if you are curious about this, you can ask me about it if you like during question time, or even better, you can buy my book – *Triumphal Entries and Festivals in Early Modern Scotland*, published by Brepols in 2020 – that tells you all you ever wanted to know about the spaces and ceremonies of Edinburgh in this period – and of course, about the role of the Salt Tron in these events.

Slide 9 – It is important to comment, that this route and these locations were not chosen at random, but were instrumental in creating the narrative of dialogue, constructive confrontation, and educational entertainment that the host – the civic authorities – wanted to deliver to their royal guests, to portray vividly to the most unaware, misinformed, or unsympathetic ruler what the burgh of Edinburgh was all about. The three colours I have used to visualise the key ceremonial locations of the procession - as I will call them, the triumphal stations – underline the three main characteristics and rights enjoyed by Edinburgh thanks to their status as royal burgh under the protection of and bound to the ruler. By setting stations at current and historical boundary walls, here marked in green, where welcoming ceremonies such as the delivery of the keys were performed, the burgh was demonstrating its right to erect such walls and to defend themselves. The imposing grandeur of the stations at the Kirk of St Giles and at the Tolbooth, in blue, demonstrated the significance of the community's religious identity and the burgh's right to self-administration. In red, the stations at the Market Cross, at the Butter Tron, and at the Salt Tron, represented the mercantile activities of the burgh, its rights to trade and hold markets, and the commercial roots of its financial prosperity.

[slide 10] In reality however, the ruler's experience of the urban space as governed by trading requirements was more layered and complex: in coming into the city from one of the gates and heading up towards the High Street, the processional route mimicked the itinerary of the goods arriving daily into the civic space, before they proceeded to their allocated destination in the

market place. The whole of the Hight street through which the ruler passed, was really a multifunctional, elongated market place, where not only goods but services, skills, and job opportunities were also offered and sought with its two weighing locations at the two ends—the Butter Tron and the Salt Tron.

As this map of activities and trades demonstrates, engaging with a triumphal route through Edinburgh meant experiencing fully the burgh's commercial capability, in a powerful demonstration of the burgh's role as the crown's and the realm's economic capital. By passing through the city's districts and areas specialised in particular trades or manufacturing, the ruler took a tour of Edinburgh as a captain of industry inspecting the efficiency of a working factory – familiarising themselves with the areas for the commerce of cloth and haberdashery, with those for the trade of cattle and sheep, with the areas dedicated to grain and corn, and with the locations for making and selling hats and furs just to name a few, and of course, in the vicinity of the Salt Tron, with the important activity of weighing and selling salt.

The reasons for the inclusion of the Salt Tron in the Edinburgh narrative of festive celebration is now, I hope, clear. Although it could be seen merely as a utilitarian structure, the Tron was also part of a network of commerce-related areas and activities, whose prominence in the civic route focused the ruler's attention on the need to acknowledge and support the lucrative commercial enterprises of their capital city.

But what actually happened, at the Salt Tron, what were these entertainments like, what was staged here, and why? These are the questions that I will try to give an answer to in the next part of my talk. Before we proceed, I need to explain that unfortunately there are no illustrations of the decorative apparatus of these ceremonies, no drawing, paintings, prints, nothing at all – at most, we have detailed written descriptions of what was put on display or the viewer saw (and even in that case, as we will see, this needs to be taken with a pinch of salt) – and sometimes, we have tantalisingly short annotations from lists of expenses, suggesting for example something like 'a mantle was bought for the actor impersonating Jupiter at the Netherbow', suggesting that some entertainment involving a Jupiter with a mantle was performed at that location, but without providing much detail about it. So for the following slides, I have chosen related illustrations to give you a sense of what I would be talking about – but they do not specifically refer to an actual performance staged at the Salt Tron.

[Slide 11] one of the most interesting things we know happened at the Salt Tron during a triumphal entry, was the creation of an imposing artificial tree for the celebrations *in absentia* for Mary Queen of Scots' French wedding, in 1558, and bringing hopes of prosperity and fruitfulness for young Queen's new marriage. Putting together the accounts for the expenses related to this tree, it appears it was a magnificent, large summer tree made of intertwined branches, decorated with yellow flowers held in place by clay and twigs, with two dozen gold leaf tennis balls covered with cloth of gold, and with one hundred hanging cherries. The Salt Tron tree was no ordinary tree belonging to the natural realm, but an almost heavenly object bearing supernatural fruits, and testifying to the transformation of the urban space into a fruitful and captivating Garden of Eden for the time of the celebration. Its presence in the urban space, demonstrated the burgh's ability to control and tame the perceived wilderness and unruliness of the natural world, particularly in a country still considered to be as untamed, treacherous, and inhabited by supernatural beings as Scotland was. When in 1435 Aenea Sylvius Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, visited James I's court, he was disappointed to hear that the well-known local trees which produced fruits in the form of geese which came alive when dropped into water, would always grow further north than any location he might find himself in. The advent of a monarch was often indicated to have a reviving effect on a worn-out urban community, so Mary's tree in 1558 is in good company: in 1559 for the coronation entry of Elizabeth Tudor, a pageant showed how the arrival of the Queen transformed a withering tree into blossoming one, as a metaphor of London's expectations of beneficial effects brought forward by her reign.

[Slide 12] In being able to evoke and also to control supernatural natural forms for the delight of the monarch and of the celebrating community, the burgh is also setting themselves up as worthy counterparts of courtly entertainments in wealth, inventiveness, and craftiness. The tree built for the 1558 celebration at the Salt Tron – with its miraculous produce of gold balls, cherries, and yellow flowers – was extremely similar to that built for the tournament held by James IV at Holyrood Palace in 1507, when there were payments for 200 leaves for the tree of Esperance built for the occasion, plus eighteen dozen more leaves for the same tree of Esperance, and six dozen flowers for the same, with nails and wire to hang the lot. For a similar tree realised for the 1508 tournament, besides the expenses related to flowers and leaves, payments were made for the making of 49 *peris* [p e r i s] for the tree of Esperance – these might be actual artificial pears as in miraculous fruits, to parallel the golden balls hanging from the 1558 tree, or given the trade of the artisan who was paid for them, small hanging decorative plaques, maybe carrying insignia. Both the civic 1558 tree and the 1507 and 1508 courtly ones were substantial, richly ornamented objects, pointing at both spaces as magically fertile.

A second kind of entertainment staged at the Salt Tron to which I would like to draw your attention, is related to the use of genealogical themes to flatter the entering monarch, celebrating the Stewarts' impeccable lineage. In a period during which newcomers with tenuous claims to the throne obtained the crown through victory in battle – see for example, Henry VII Tudor – the Stewart dynasty could more confidently than other see the coat of arms of even distant ancestors displayed with celebratory intent, going back at least in principle even as far as the Roman times.

For the 1579 entry for James VI, at the Salt Tron paintings representing the genealogy of the Kings of Scotland were shown. This was the triumphal entry marking the coming of age of James VI as young but nominally adult ruler, and I'd like to note that in this instance I would be curious to know how the small problem of James VI's most immediate relatives was solved, as his mother Mary Queen of Scots was very much alive, and in captivity in England at the time, clamouring for the Scottish throne to be returned to her.

[Slide 13] For the entry of Anna of Denmark in 1590, a tree decorated with May leaves and green plants was erected at the Salt Tron, with the coat of arms and genealogy of the Scottish Crown hung on the left of it, and those of Denmark on the right. On the branches of the tree, to the left and to the right of the trunk as if on a ladder sat young boys dressed as kings, wearing crowns, shields and sceptres, to represent each family's royal ancestors. James VI and Anna's common ancestor King Christian I was represented by a young man in armour lying at the basis of the tree, borrowing the religious iconography of the Tree of Jesse to represent Jesus' ancestors. The allusion to the biblical tree of Jesse made monarch's messianic role explicit; even more explicitly, in London in 1432, two trees were represented together to display the genealogy of young King Henry VI and that of Christ respectively. The idea of trees as representation of genealogical renovation also appealed to the prospect of dynastical rejuvenation that dynastical marriages brought forward, with future offspring being indicated for example by the green branches joyfully waved by actors impersonating James V's ancestors to welcome his bride Margaret Tudor into Aberdeen in 1511.

Again in the vicinities of the Salt Tron, on the topic of genealogical displays, Margaret Tudor in 1503 was shown a scaffold decorated with her family heraldic supporter of the Lancastrian and Tudor greyhound, paired with the Stewart unicorn, and also a display of interlaced Scottish thistles and English red roses, dynastical signs promising the symbolic growth of new forms of hybrid life. To exemplify this, I have used here the interlaced roses and thistles from the Treaty of Permanent Peace signed by Henry VII and James IV in 1502, during the negotiations that will lead to the Stewart-Tudor wedding just one year later.

Another important component of triumphal entries, and one that was indeed adopted at the Salt Tron, was musical entertainments. In 1579 for James VI, the dynastical display organised at Salt Tron and previously mentioned, was accompanied by a number of trumpets played melodiously, and loud voices cried ‘Welfare to the King!’”. In 1633, a considerable number of choristers, an organist and many musicians were positioned in the belly of a giant mountain constructed at the Salt Tron, and from within their hidden position they performed an air written for the occasion. This giant mountain sounds intriguing, I know, and I will tell you more about it later, just hold that thought for now. In general, musical and vocal performances were frequently adopted and well-received entertainments of both civic and courtly spectacles, with performers also in costume to emphasise the messages embedded in their tunes: in 1579, King James VI was welcomed at the Overbow by an actor personifying Dame Music herself, with a group of followers, who demonstrated their skilfulness by singing and playing the viol, while Mary Queen of Scots during the 1566 banquet for the baptism of baby James, was entertained by musicians clothed like maids, singing and playing upon a variety of instruments. Musical instruments – displayed, if not actually played – accompanied a representation of Minerva in 1633 at the Market Cross, as personification of cultured pursuits, in opposition to the weapons accompanying the representation of Mars facing the goddess, and representing the threats of warfare. To illustrate my point about the role of music, and its ubiquitous appearance including at the Salt Tron, I have chosen one of the many illustrations of carts loaded with musicians, appearing in Hans Burgkmair’s representation of an idealised triumphal entry of Emperor Maximilian I – one can only imagine the cacophony of these multisensory, immersive experience.

On the topic of the significance of the acoustic element in the construction and perception of triumphal entries, I would like to mention a project I am currently drafting, and which I hope I will have the funds to undertake next year. This project investigates the role of sound – rather than of the much-explored visuals – in creating an immersive, participatory experience for the audiences of early modern civic spectacles – and by extension, contemporary ones. The case study is Edinburgh in 1633, as location of King Charles I’s spectacular entry in 1633. Rendered 3D acoustic simulations of what participants heard at key locations will be created by cross-referencing documentary evidence on the auditory elements of the 1633 spectacle, and information regarding the chosen locations’ acoustic characteristics. This project will prompt scholarly discussion on the role of the acoustic component in building collective rituals in early modern civic spaces, also compared to the acoustic performance of contemporary Edinburgh spaces. It will contribute to the ongoing debate on the role of the digital as a research tool in the Humanities, and it will engage the public with historic and existing urban heritage, through user-

friendly audio commentaries. This project originated in my own experience as a spectator of the procession for Queen Elizabeth from Holyrood Palace to St Giles in 2022, where I realised the visual limitations of being part of a congregated crowd, only able to see the slither of the celebration taking place in front of me, and partially at that – while the sounds of the events, from shooting of the cannons to approaching marching bands – really connected me with significant events happening elsewhere on the processional route. Hopefully, in just over a year time, you will be able to walk down the Royal Mile and position yourself at one of the seven triumphal stations where entertainments were organised for King Charles I in 1633 – say, at the Salt Tron - and find yourself immersed in the acoustic experience of being part of the audience of the event.

Another topic that was well represented during triumphal entries was that of religion, and we do have an example of something of this kind taking place at the Salt Tron, and involving Mary Queen of Scots, whose return from France as a Catholic Queen, in a country which had started leaning towards the protestant faith in her absence, and where a strong character like John Knox was giving sermons about the unnatural rule of women, was complicate to say the least. Mary had on her side the impeccable legitimacy of her claim to the throne, and the remarkable lack of qualified candidates of either faith to take her place. Still, her entry into Edinburgh on her return from France in 1561 represented an opportunity for the burgh to question her about her faith, express their displeasure and mistrust, in a display of straightforward, unadorned criticism that is rare to find in generally much subtler, more conciliatory triumphal celebrations. What happens at the Salt Tron symbolises well the religiously charged atmosphere of this entry, but also the issues related to possibly conflicting sources seeing the event through the filter of their own agendas or the information in their possession.

John Maxwell Herries' Historical Memoirs collecting written sources from the reign of Mary Queen of Scots, reports how at the Salt Tron there was a speech made arguing for the abolition of the mass from the kingdom, and on the scaffolding the image made of wood, of a priest saying mass in his vestments – that is, a Catholic priest – was set on fire in plain sight of the crowd and of the queen, to the great displeasure of the Queen and her French retinue. However, in the letter from eyewitness Thomas Randolph to Cecil, dated 7 September 1561, the writer describes how the Catholic Earl of Huntly advocated for the cancellation of such a controversial display, and a less openly outrageous one took its place, showing a more open-ended representation of the Israelites' God's vengeance upon the biblical idolaters Coron, Dathan, and Abiram, whose effigies shown in the act of performing blasphemous sacrifices were burned. With the Reformation happening half way through the period I am interested in, religious topics represented as a

potentially controversial, complex topic for those organising and taking part in these civic ceremonies, trying to acknowledge, express, challenge, or support relevant sets of beliefs as circumstances dictated. Shared religious beliefs could unite a pious monarch and the assembled crowds, as it did in 1503 when popular James IV spontaneously – or so it appeared – intoned the *Te Deum* during the civic procession welcoming Margaret Tudor into Edinburgh – or could divide and bring into question their relative positions, as in 1561 when Mary Queen of Scots's reception of the translated Bible publicly gifted to her during her entry was noticeably less than enthusiastic, or so at least it is reported in John Knox's account of the event, a source which could possibly be accused of partiality.

[Slide 16] And now for the grand finale, I will go back to one of the most eye-catching and complex entertainments in the Salt Tron's history as triumphal station, that is, the hollow mountain built there for Charles I's entry in 1633, from whose cavities a heavenly melody performed by musicians and singers could be heard. Again, we don't have any illustration of this event, so I made do with the mountain designed by Peter Paul Rubens for the joyous entry into Antwerp of Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand of Spain in 1635, and printed in 1642. We do however have a triumphal booklet, that is a printed account of the event meant for general distribution, where the entertainments set up at the various station are described with a good level of detail. Like the Antwerp mountain, the mountain built at the Salt Tron was populated by performers, recognisable by their attire, their classical attributes, and sometimes their scutcheons [scatchn] or coat of arms. The superior character of this mountain was clear from the description already, as it is described as built in imitation of Parnassus, displaying a globe of glass atop a great pyramid. The mythical mountain itself was a wondrous sight, covered in many varieties of rocks and vegetables, and including a pyramid of great height, surmounted by a globe of glass, and with clean water springing from its cavity, to represent the river Hippocrene sacred to the Musus.

[Slide 17] The mountain is in fact inhabited by a crowned, golden haired Apollo seated amongst his companions, the Muses. To have an idea of how this group might have been like, we can look at the group of Apollo and the Muses created by Hans Holbein the Younger around 1533, and probably used as part of the decorative apparatus designed for the coronation entry into London of Queen Anne Boleyn. In the Scottish pageant, the Muses held mottoes and symbols recalling some of Charles' family members: Melpomene had the symbol of King James, Thalia that of Queen Anna, Eutherpe that of Prince Henry, Charles' late eldest brother, and Clio had the symbol used by Charles when he was still a prince – interestingly, Charles' sister Elizabeth of Bohemia is absent from this family representation possibly because of her perceived limited political relevance at the time. The mountain was also populated by a number of worthy past and present

Scottish scholars, from biblical commentator Sedulius Scotus (died 828 CE), to very contemporary humanists and writers like Sir David Lindsay and George Buchanan. This collection of Scottish intellectuals, both lay and religious, both ancient and contemporary, offered English-raised Charles a ‘crash-course’ in the antiquity and credibility of Scotland’s history and culture. On the topic of the iconography of Charles I's Edinburgh pageant in 1633, I'd like to draw your attention on the excellent article by David Bergeron published in 1996, which discusses the appearance and significance of this mountain and its inhabitants in detail. This elegant, complex, large scale entertainment made use of a variety of well-known visual devices, reimagined and reinterpreted the concept of biblical worthies to illustrate the country’s lively cultural scene, and adopted classically inspired references to Mount Parnassus and its divine inhabitants and the language of emblems, creating a layered iconography speaking to and recognisable by local and international audiences alike. The construction of the structure itself, large enough to contain a numerous party of musicians, solid enough to support about two dozen performers standing on it, and containing complex piping to feed a display a fountain – to say nothing of the pyramid and the glass globe - demonstrates technical skills, artistic abilities, the availability of significant funds, and the capacity to coordinate and bring to completion such a project.

[Slide 18] And now for some conclusions. I hope I have demonstrated today, through my brief investigation of the main events taking place at the Salt Tron in the early modern period, that this was much more than a prosaic weigh beam with a purely utilitarian function. Instead, through the iconography at display there during triumphal entries, the Salt Tron becomes a symbolic location telling the spectators much about the centrality of commerce in shaping the relationship between burgh and crown, and indeed a fitting location for the appearance of a divine Mount Parnassus, and of a miraculous tree.