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A GUIDE AND COMPANION  
•

BOOK LOVERS'



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ALLAN FOSTER  
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# THE SOUTHSIDE

## INFIRMARY STREET

Site of the old Royal Infirmary

Where Arthur Conan Doyle was taught  
the science of deduction

The students were pouring down the sloping street which led to the infirmary – each with his little sheaf of note-books in his hand. There were pale, frightened lads, fresh from the high schools, and callous old chronics, whose generation had passed on and left them. They swept in an unbroken, tumultuous stream from the university gate to the hospital. The figures and gait of the men were young, but there was little youth in most of their faces. Some looked as if they ate too little – a few as if they drank too much. Tall and short, tweed-coated and black, round-shouldered, bespectacled, and slim, they crowded with clatter of feet and rattle of sticks through the hospital gate.

Conan Doyle describing his fellow students attending extramural classes at the Royal Infirmary in 'His First Operation' from *Round the Red Lamp* (1894)

In 1726 a Faculty of Medicine was founded at Edinburgh University, but before it could become a complete medical school the building of a hospital in which medicine and surgery could be practised had to be built. In 1729, through money raised by subscription, Edinburgh's first Royal Infirmary was opened in Robertson's Close, just

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Engraving,  
by Paul  
Sandby,  
of the Royal  
Infirmary,  
founded in  
1738



off Infirmary Street. Known as the 'Little House', it was only a six-bed hospital amid a city with a population of around 30,000, but it was a beginning. In 1738 a new and larger Royal Infirmary was founded, again by public subscription, on the south side of Infirmary Street (on your right walking downhill), a site now occupied by buildings which were once part of a Victorian school.

The new hospital, which was completed in 1741, had 228 beds and was on four floors, with an east wing for men and a west wing for women, and perched on the top floor was a 200-seat amphitheatre and operating theatre complete with glass windows in the roof for maximum light. This was progress, but to say it resembled hospital care as we know it today would be stretching it. Two of its most serious defects were a lack of understanding about hygiene and the dire inefficiency of the nursing system. Nurses were untrained and ignorant of what their proper duties were. They were underpaid, ill fed and poorly housed. They were servants rather than nurses, but in the mid-nineteenth-century one English woman changed everything. Her name was Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. Trained Nightingale nurses started to arrive at the Infirmary in the early 1870s, and hospital care began to resemble what we know today. But it still had a long way to go.

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The old and new Surgical Hospitals, which were once part of the Royal Infirmary (now owned by the University of Edinburgh) at the foot of Infirmary St

Conan Doyle entered the medical faculty of Edinburgh University at Old College a few years later in 1876, and began his extramural training at the Royal Infirmary, just a short distance away on the other side of South Bridge. Outside the walls of the faculty, in local hospitals and teaching establishments, under the auspices of experienced medical men, the extramural method of teaching was introduced at Edinburgh in 1855, allowing students to take at least half their classes extracurricularly. These classes were extremely popular, often outnumbering those within the faculty walls.

‘There were no attempts at friendship, or even acquaintance, between professors and students at Edinburgh,’ wrote Conan Doyle. ‘It was a strictly business arrangement by which you paid, for example, four guineas for anatomy lectures and received the winter’s course in exchange, never seeing your professor save behind his desk and never

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under any circumstances exchanging a word with him.'

His professors may have been businesslike and formal, but they were a group of remarkable men who made a lasting impression on him, and he accumulated many of their names, temperaments and idiosyncrasies in his memory for future use.

There was Professor Sir Robert Christison who taught *Materia Medica* (Pharmacology), an expert in toxicology, who once swallowed a poisonous calabar bean to register its consequences. Fortunately he survived, but Conan Doyle recalls the incident in *A Study in Scarlet* when Watson describes Holmes as 'a little too scientific for my tastes – it approaches to cold-bloodedness. I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think he would take it himself with the same readiness. He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge'.

Conan Doyle would have attended Sir Henry Littlejohn's lectures on medical jurisprudence. Littlejohn became Edinburgh and Scotland's first Medical Officer of Health in 1862. As police surgeon to the city he came into contact with many criminal cases and acted as expert medical witness for the Crown. He would also have had contact with Joseph Lister, founder of antiseptic medicine.

'There was also,' recalled Conan Doyle, 'the squat figure of Professor Rutherford with his Assyrian beard, his prodigious voice, his enormous chest and his singular manner. He fascinated and awed us. I have endeavoured to reproduce some of his peculiarities in the fictitious character of Professor Challenger. He would sometimes start his lecture before he reached the classroom, so that we would hear a booming voice saying: "There are valves in the veins", or some other information, when the desk was still empty.'

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The first Dr Watson Conan Doyle ever met was Dr Patrick Heron Watson, forensic expert and inspiration for Holmes's Watson. Joseph Bell, who became his model for Sherlock Holmes, lectured in clinical surgery at the Extramural School of Medicine and, in October 1878, Conan Doyle, now a second-year medical student with poor marks, paid his fee of four guineas and enrolled on Bell's course. That same year Conan Doyle was appointed as Bell's outpatient clerk, an experience he described in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures* in 1924:

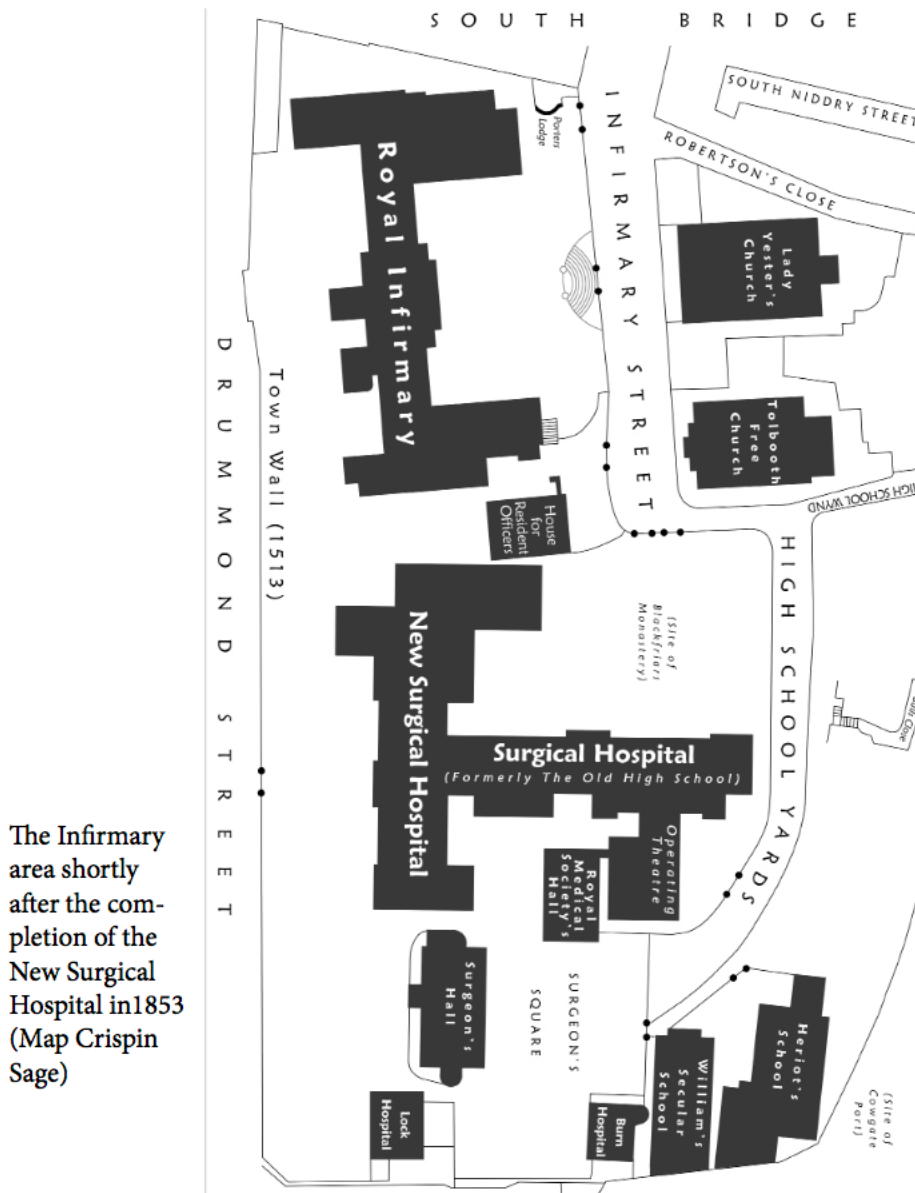
On my return [from an Arctic whaling voyage] I went back to medicine in Edinburgh again. There I met the man who suggested Sherlock Holmes to me – here is a portrait of him as he was in those days ... I was clerk in Mr Bell's Ward. A clerk's duties are to note down all the patients to be seen, and muster them together. Often I would have seventy or eighty ... I would show them in to Mr Bell, who would have the students gathered round him. His intuitive powers were simply marvellous. A case would come forward. 'Cobbler, I see.' [Bell would say.] Then he would turn to the students and point out to them that the inside of the knee of the man's trousers was worn. That was where the man rested the lapstone – a peculiarity only found in cobblers. All this impressed me very much. He was continually before me – his sharp piercing grey eyes, eagle nose, and striking features. There he would sit in his chair with fingers together – he was very dexterous with his hands – and just look at the man or woman before him. He was most kind and painstaking with students – a real good friend – and when I took my degree and went to Africa the remarkable individuality and discriminating tact of my old master made a deep and lasting impression on me, though I had not the faintest idea that it would one day lead me to forsake medicine for story writing.

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When Bell made Conan Doyle his outpatient clerk, it gave him the opportunity to study Bell's methods at close quarters. The position of clerk, although a privileged one, was a common post to be given to a student. It was a sharp learning curve, which taught a student to think fast, write fast, and communicate swiftly with patients. Often there would be 70 or 80 patients to assemble and

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Left: Joseph Bell in surgical gown  
Right: Joseph Lister, founder of antiseptic medicine and aseptic surgery

write notes on before Bell began his outpatient clinic, and woe betide Doyle if he didn't have them ready on time. He would then usher them in, one by one, to a large room in which Bell sat surrounded by students, where, 'with a face like a Red Indian, [he would] diagnose the people as they came in, before they had even opened their mouths. He would tell them their symptoms. He would give them details of their lives, and he would hardly ever make a mistake.'

This was an age before X-rays and scans. What Bell was trying to do was to emphasise to his students the use of the powers of perception: taste, touch, smell and what they could hear through their stethoscopes. To do this he had various tricks up his sleeve. One of them was a classic, which to this day may possibly be used as an example to medical students.

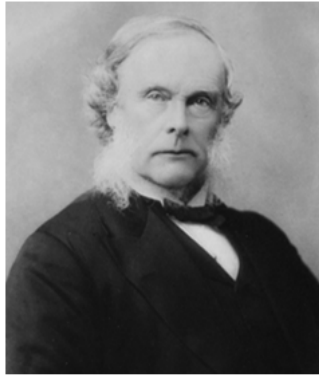
Bell would hold a phial of bilious looking liquid aloft for all his students to see. 'This, gentlemen, contains a most potent drug. It is extremely bitter to taste. Now I wish to see how many of you have developed the powers of observation that God granted you. But sir, ye will say, it

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can be analysed chemically. Aye, aye, but I want you to taste it – by smell and taste. What! You shrink back? As I don't ask anything of my students which I wouldn't do alone wi' myself, I will taste it before passing it around.' Bell would then dip a finger into the obnoxious liquid and place it in his mouth, followed by an expression of disgust. 'Now you do likewise,' and the students proceed to pass the phial amongst themselves. When the vile concoction eventually returned to Bell he would sigh in despair, saying 'Gentlemen, I am deeply grieved to find that not one of you has developed his power of perception, the faculty of observation which I speak so much of, for if you had truly observed me, you would have seen that, while I placed my index finger in the awful brew, it was my middle finger – aye – which somehow found its way into my mouth.'

SEE ALSO: Conan Doyle, Surgical Hospital, New Surgical Hospital, Surgeon's Hall Museum, Old College, St Andrew Square, Mauricewood, Dean Cemetery, Robert Louis Stevenson.

FURTHER INFORMATION: In 1879 a new Royal Infirmary was opened on Lauriston Place, and the old Royal Infirmary buildings on the south side of Infirmary Street were demolished in 1884.

FURTHER READING: A. Turner, The Story of a Great Hospital, The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh 1729–1929 (Oliver & Boyd, 1937).

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## High School Yards Former High School of Edinburgh and alma mater of Sir Walter Scott

I was never a dunce, nor thought to be so, but an incorrigibly idle imp, who was always longing to do something else than what was enjoined him.

J.G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (1837–8)

Facing you at the foot of Infirmary Street is the former building of the old High School in High School Yards. In October 1779, at the age of eight, young Wattie entered the second class, taught by Mr Luke Fraser, 'a good Latin scholar'. Younger than most of his classmates, Wattie's Latin was rusty, and he made little headway, until three years later when he entered the class of the headmaster, Dr Adam. Through Adam's inspirational teaching, Wattie began to learn the value of knowledge, and what before had been a burdensome task evolved into a lifelong love affair with Latin poetry and prose.

In J.G. Lockhart's *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (seven volumes, 1837–8) he fondly recalled his schooldays:

Among my companions, my good nature and a flow of ready imagination rendered me very popular. Boys are uncommonly just in their feelings, and at least equally generous. My lameness, and the efforts which I made to supply that disadvantage, by making up in address what I wanted in activity, engaged the latter principle in my favour; and in the winter play-hours, when hard exercise was impossible, my tales used to assemble an admiring audience round Lucky Brown's fireside, and happy was he that could sit next to the inexhaustible narrator. I was also, though often negligent of my own task, always ready to assist my friends; and hence I had

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a little party of staunch partisans and adherents, stout of hand and heart though somewhat dull of head – the very tools for raising a hero to eminence. So on the whole, I made a brighter figure in the yards than in the class.

Scott's father also employed a private tutor for him during these years, but in the spring of 1783 he left the High School to spend the summer with his Aunt Janet in Kelso, prior to entering university in the autumn.

SEE ALSO: Birthplace of W.S., childhood home of W.S., town-house of W.S., Lasswade Cottage, Parliament Hall, Greyfriars Kirkyard, St John's Churchyard, The Heart of Midlothian, Holyrood Park, The Writers' Museum, Old College, Sciennes Hill House, Scott Monument, Assembly Rooms, J.G. Lockhart, Portobello Sands, Canongate Kirkyard.

FURTHER INFORMATION: The High School of Edinburgh, known today as the old High School, was built in 1777 by Alexander Laing at a cost of £4,000. In 1829, a new Royal High School was opened on the side of Calton Hill to be closer to the expanding New Town and the old school closed.

An 18th century engraving of the old High School



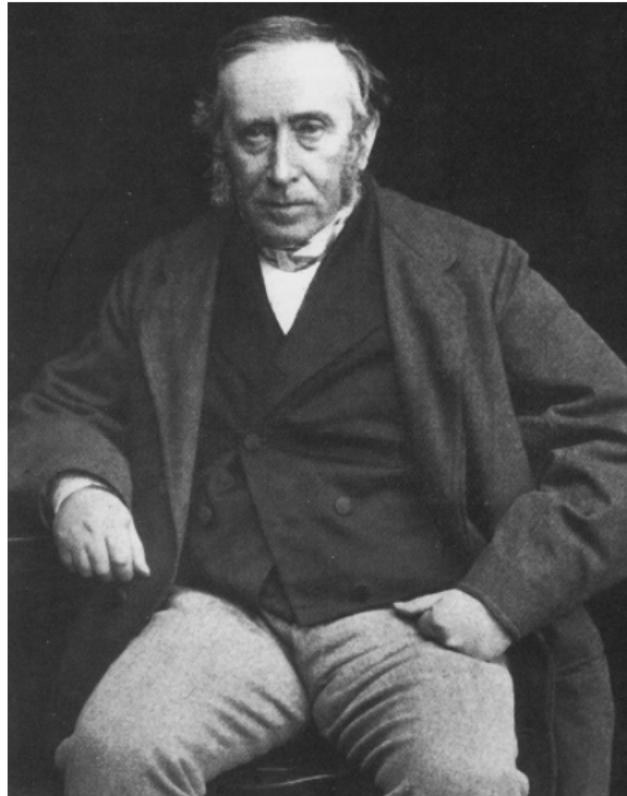
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High School Yards  
The Surgical Hospital  
Where Joseph Bell studied under  
'The Napoleon of Surgery',  
Dr James Syme (1799-1870)



'The Napoleon  
of Surgery':  
Dr James Syme

After the closure of the old High School in 1829, the building reopened as a surgical hospital in 1832, and became part of the Royal Infirmary. It was here that Joseph Bell taught his students, including Conan Doyle, the art of surgery. But who introduced Bell to the skills of deductive reasoning? Who were the men who honed his analytical mind? There were several medical legends on the faculty during Bell's student years, all of whom would have affected his development, including Joseph Lister, surgeon and antiseptic pioneer; James Young Simpson, Professor of

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Midwifery and anaesthetic pioneer; and surgeons James Miller and James Spence, but the one who rose head and shoulders above them all, in Bell's eyes, was his mentor, Dr James Syme, affectionately known as 'The Napoleon of Surgery'.

Syme was the son of an Edinburgh lawyer, who taught clinical surgery at the Infirmary for thirty-six years, from 1833 to 1869, and who had a formidable reputation as a teacher and a surgeon. He was not a showy or elegant surgeon. He had no flourish or dash, but his knowledge and skill saved many lives. One of Syme's assistants commented that 'he never wasted a word, a drop of ink, or a drop of blood'. Joseph Bell was closer to Syme than most as Syme had chosen Bell as his dresser. Bell wrote:

Unless it was raining, the students attending Syme's wards might, if they chose, run down a steep flight of stairs, past one or two old houses, across a square of rough gravel surrounding a plot of measly grass, generally decorated by old broken iron bedsteads or decaying mattresses, to a low two-storied building in severely classical style ... In the angle, dark and confined, of the lower floor of the Surgical Hospital admitting to the general surgical waiting rooms ... The large operating theatre, a really finely-proportioned and well-arranged building, with some small wards, house surgeon's rooms – extended beyond the main lines of the old High School, and formed part of a quaint old square, now nearly demolished, called Surgeon's Square ... I saw Dr. Syme daily for the greater part of his last fifteen years. His hospital life was on this wise – two clinical lectures a week, operations two days more (perhaps three), a ward visit when he wished to see any special cases ... before his select class he examined each new and interesting case that could walk in ... Mr. Syme then and there made his diagnosis, which to us young ones seemed magical

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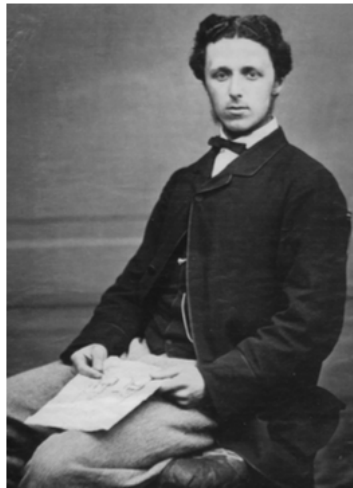
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and intuitional ...

Then if it was a lecture day, a tremendous rush of feet would be heard of the students racing to get the nearest seats in the large operating theatre ... Chairs in the arena were kept for colleagues or distinguished strangers; first row for dressers on duty; operating table in centre; Mr. Syme on a chair in left-centre. House surgeons a little behind, but nearer the door; instrument clerk with his well-stocked table under the big window. The four dressers on duty march in (if possible in step), carrying a rude wicker basket, in which, covered by a rough red blanket, the patient peers up at the great amphitheatre crammed with faces. A brief description ... and then the little, neat, tyro sees at once a master of his craft at work – no show, little elegance, but absolute certainty, ease and determination; rarely a word to an assistant – they should know their business.

In 1859, Joseph Bell graduated. Ten years later, in April 1869, James Syme suffered an apoplectic seizure and was forced to retire from the chair of clinical surgery. He died on 26 June 1870, aged 70, and was interred in the family vault at St John's Episcopal Church, at the West End of Princes Street.



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Left: Joseph Bell  
when he was a  
young medical  
student

Right: The old  
Surgical Hospital.  
Formerly the  
High School of  
Edinburgh



SEE ALSO: Conan Doyle, Surgeons' Hall Museum, Old College, Royal Infirmary, St. Andrew Square, Mauricewood, Dean Cemetery, Robert Louis Stevenson.

FURTHER INFORMATION: The buildings in High School Yards are now part of Edinburgh University, but the public are free to wander through the grounds. The old Surgical Hospital with its pillared entrance faces you at the bottom of Infirmary Street. The operating theatre referred to by Bell was behind the main building and was part of the wing which projects into the square at the rear, now fronted by a modern extension. A plaque can be seen to the right of the entrance (behind the pillars) dedicated to Syme and Lister. Surgeons' Square can be seen by walking through the tunnelled passageway to the right of the entrance. Here you will find the 'steep flight of stairs' and the 'plot of measly grass' (now a neat lawn) described by Joseph Bell. The stairs divide the old seventeenth-century Surgeons' Hall (on your left) and what became known as the New Surgical Hospital built in 1853, and which is now part of the university (on your right). The land that is now High School Yards was once the site of the monastery of the Black Friars, the Dominicans, which was destroyed by an accidental fire in 1528.

FURTHER READING: R. Paterson, *Memorials Of The Life Of James Syme, Professor Of Clinical Surgery In The University Of Edinburgh, Etc.* (1874) (Kessinger Publishing, 2008); E. M. Liebow, *Dr. Joe Bell* (Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982).

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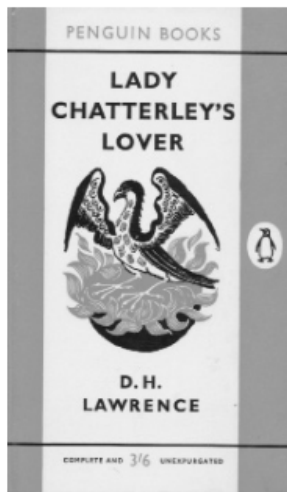
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## CHARLES STREET

Site of The Paperback, the  
first paperback bookshop in Britain,  
and the infamous burning  
of Lady Chatterley's Lover

Sexual intercourse began  
In nineteen sixty-three  
(which was rather late for me) -  
Between the end of the "Chatterley" ban  
And the Beatles' first LP.  
Philip Larkin, from 'Annus Mirabilis' (1967)



The 1960 burning  
of Lady Chatterley's  
Lover outside The  
Paperback. Jim  
Haynes second  
from the left in  
front of the rhino  
head. Photo Alan  
Daiches

Jim Haynes hailed from Louisiana, and in the fifties he was conscripted into the US Air Force, and posted to Kirknewton, near Edinburgh, where his primary duties were listening in on the Russian Air Defence System. 'Almost immediately,' wrote Jim, 'I went to see the base commander and said, "I've been up to the University and they said I can go to classes. May I have permission to have permanent night duty and to live in a small room off the base at my own expense?" He said, "My boy, of course, we will try to help anyone who wants to further himself."

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I didn't want to further myself; I just wanted to escape the military. But he gave me permission.'

Weary of the military, Jim was soon granted early release and pursued his idea of starting a bookshop next to the university. With his demob money he went in search of premises, and, walking along Charles Street next to the university, he spotted an old junk shop at No. 22A, which he acquired and converted into 'a real bookshop' in 1959.

I started by writing letters to publishers, saying that I was going to start a paperback bookshop, it was going to be mainly for the students and staff of the University of Edinburgh, and that if they wanted to trust me with their books I would sell them and pay them. Of course, this was early days, when the paperback revolution hadn't really come to Britain, and there I was, quite unknown and demanding credit ... but the books just started rolling in. And so The Paperback opened ... It was an immediate success: the only bookshop in Britain to stock every serious paperback in print, not just British paperbacks but a wide range of American and European ones ... Mine was the first bookshop to arrange paperbacks by subject, rather than publisher ... I also sold a lot of books that were supposedly not to be sold for one reason or another – so-called obscene publications ... So when Penguin published *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, I naturally placed a very large order. Then suddenly the word went out that there was going to be a court case and that we were not to sell *Lady Chatterley*. Despite that, I found more and more people coming into the bookshop demanding it and of course I sold it.

One day a curious woman came in and asked if I had *Lady Chatterley* in stock. I said, 'Yes' and she said, 'Can you save me a copy? I'll be right back', and left. I thought there was something funny going on so I rang up Alan Daiches, a photographer friend, and the local press.

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They all came by in time to witness the return of the woman. She arrived holding a pair of coal tongs; she put the money down and wouldn't touch the book, but picked it up with tongs and carried it out in front of the bookshop. There she poured some kind of liquid, probably kerosene, on top of the book and proceeded to rant and rave and put a match to it, 'this iniquitous document'. The scene was documented by Alan, who had his camera there, and made all the papers in England and Scotland – even some international press. It added substantially to the shop's notoriety – everyone talking about this crazy woman burning Lady Chatterley's Lover outside The Paperback. I even got a letter of support from Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin, who later visited the shop on several occasions.

The rhino head was discovered by me when walking down Princes Street one sunny morning with a friend. Workmen were carrying it out of The New Club. When they said they were going to destroy it, I asked if I could have it. They were pleased to give it to me. My friend and I took it to Charles Street in a taxi and by chance there was a spike available to hang it immediately onto the wall.

The Paperback evolved, becoming not just a bookshop, but a salon, a coffee house, a gallery, and a meeting place, all squashed within its quaking shelves of books. There were also concerts and readings



by writers, notably the great Russian poet, Yevgeny Yevtushenko, and French writers Nathalie Sarraute, Marguerite Duras, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Jim also

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co-founded The Traverse Theatre on the Lawnmarket in 1963 and became a catalyst for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. The Paperback closed in 1967.

SEE ALSO: The International Writers' Conference.

FURTHER INFORMATION: A bronze sculpture of a rhino head marking the site of The Paperback in Charles Street was unveiled by Jim in 2012, and can be seen protruding from the wall of Edinburgh University's Informatics building. The identity of the mysterious book-burning lady remains unknown, although she was rumoured to have been a missionary in Africa. But she was also a symbol of the moral conflict of the time, which would determine the path of human rights. And when Lady Chatterley's publisher, Penguin Books, was eventually acquitted by the jury at the Old Bailey on 2 November 1960 of charges under the Obscene Publications Act, it became a signpost for human rights and the floodgates slowly began to open with the decriminalisation of homosexuality, abortion reform, the abolition of capital punishment and theatre censorship, and radical changes in the divorce laws. To this day many people still dismiss Lady Chatterley's Lover as a sex romp, but then it was really about the freedom of the written word and a reflection of the constrained social mores of its time. Penguin Books dedicated the second edition of Lady Chatterley's Lover to the Old Bailey jury.

FURTHER READING: C. Rolph, *The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Limited* (Penguin, 1990); J. Haynes, *Thanks for Coming* (Faber & Faber, 1984); *Thanks for Coming! Encore!* (Polwarth, 2014).

Left: The bronze  
rhino head,  
Charles St.  
Right: Jim  
Haynes,  
Paris, 2016

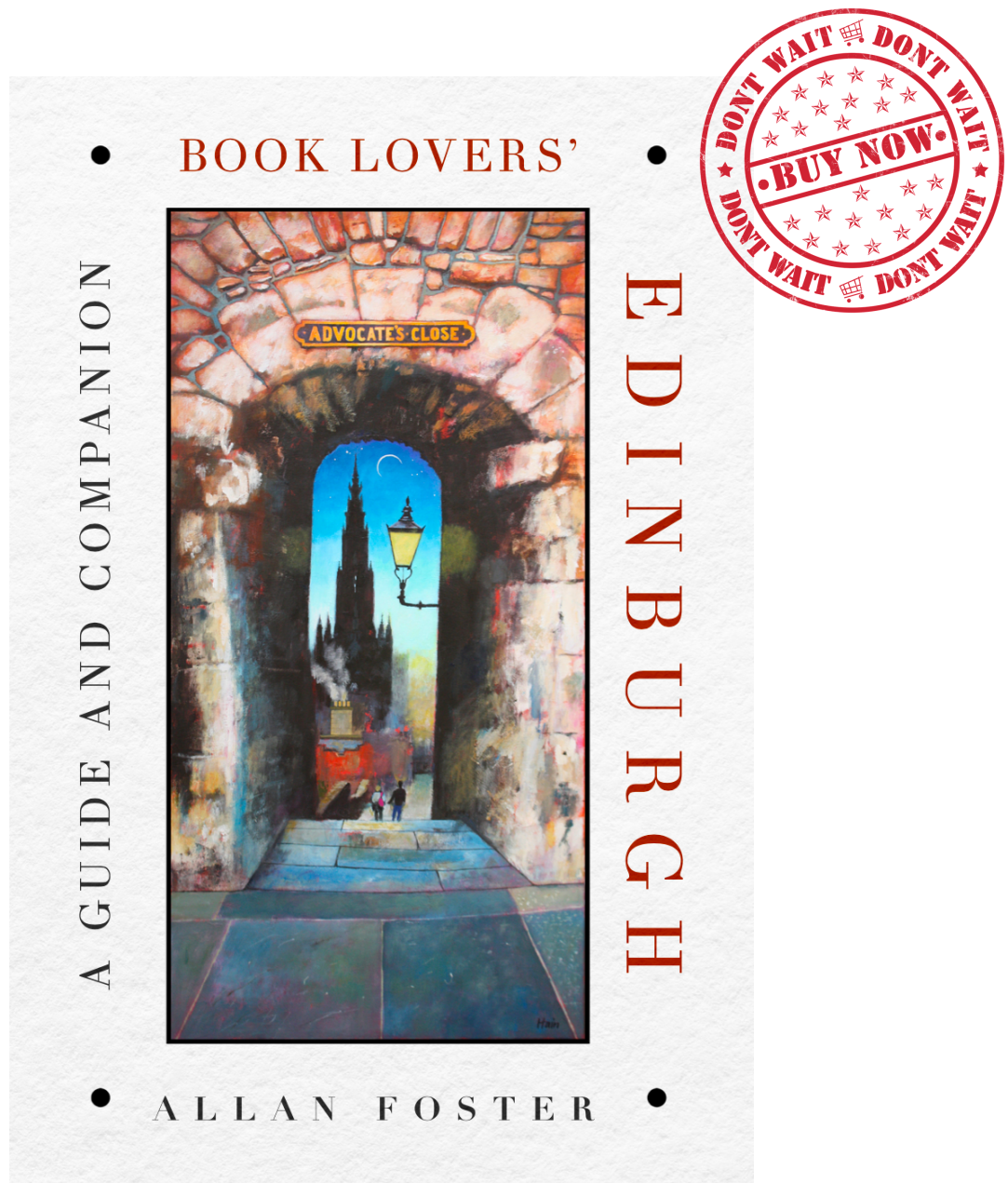


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