Mayoral Speech  
Otago Scottish Heritage Council  
Tuesday, 1 August 2017

It’s great to have the opportunity to be here tonight and talk about our city’s Scottish heritage and our connections with our sister city, Edinburgh.

My intention is to examine what things Scottish made Dunedin the city it is, to what extent those influences still prevail, and how we might build on those as we forge our city’s path into the future and strengthen our interaction with our sister city, Edinburgh.

I must add that much of what I will say is based on my personal reflections. It is not received wisdom and certainly not Council policy.

We all know the story. A group from what was known as the Free Church of Scotland – formed in 1843 as a result of the Great Disruption – sought to establish a foothold in the burgeoning British colony of New Zealand.

After careful consideration and on the advice of the intrepid William Tucker, they chose a site at the head of Otago Harbour.

They named it Dunedin – derived from the original Scottish Gaelic name for Edinburgh. The Edinburgh of the south was born.

But let’s be clear. The aim was NOT to establish a great new commercial centre modelled on the successes of Edinburgh and Glasgow – more on that later. The impetus for the new settlement was a strongly held set of beliefs about a fairly pious and puritanical brand of Christianity, a belief in the democratic right of congregations (and communities) to choose their own leaders and clergy, a high value placed on education, literacy (and literature) for both boys and girls and a fierce egalitarian spirit – ‘a man’s a man for aw that’.

However, we also know the story of how barely more than a decade after Dunedin was reached by those first Scottish Free Church settlers in 1848, their plans for a little piece of pious and egalitarian Scotland in the south Pacific was turned on its head by the discovery of gold.

I don’t doubt that without that sudden influx of people from around the world, Dunedin would have been much smaller, much more pious and arguably much more Scottish than it is now.

The gold and the new opportunities that it brought made Dunedin a much more attractive place to people OTHER than those early settlers – including the English and the not so churchy Scots, who came to express more of the mainstream Scottish side of British Imperialism and mercantilism.

And let’s be clear about the late 18th century and early 19th century commercial and mercantile success of Scotland – rural Clearances with all their attendant misery – and particularly for Glasgow, whose wealth was built on plantation sugar, plantation tobacco and plantation cotton…..and the blood of countless slaves that worked those plantations.
But despite the arrival of all the other groups and cultures from Asia, Europe and America that descended on and contributed richly to Dunedin, the Gaelic influences remained.

You only need to walk the streets of Dunedin to see the connections with Edinburgh – in the street and place names. Princes St, Moray Place, Filleul Street, Dundas Street, York Place, Elm Row and Calton Hill – to name just a few.

And then there’s the architecture.

One of the, let us say, quaint and quirky things about Dunedin is how a grandly designed street map was suddenly imposed on less than co-operative topography of abrupt hillside and boggy swamps.

But I think we would all agree that the result is worth it – even if it must have driven some of the early street builders to distraction.

Although I might say that some of the boggy swamps still exercise our thinking and planning to this day.

But I would argue that historically there were two distinct “Scottish” influences on Dunedin. And we are justly proud of both of them. The first I have already outlined – that of the principled and egalitarian “small Scotland” tradition.

The second came with the wealth.

The advent of the Gold Rush, the enormous wealth and development it brought Dunedin brought, among other things, a flowering of late imperial architectural splendour best exemplified in the Scottish architect R. A. Lawson’s beautiful Dunedin buildings Knox Church, First Church and Otago Boys High School.

So what did the “small Scotland” tradition bequeath us?

First their system of education. They were great builders of schools and universities. So the first university in New Zealand, the first public girls high school in the southern hemisphere and eventually the first Fine Arts school and Polytechnic. The list goes on.

That emphasis on education for females undoubtedly contributed to the University of Otago allowing full access for women to degree course almost from day one. As a consequence Dunedin produced the first woman doctor and woman lawyer. Female emancipation had a strong Dunedin advocate in Anna Stout – the daughter of Scottish parents and wife of Robert Stout also a Scot with strong moral ideals.

**Egalitarianism** - History Professor Erik Olssen has done much to shine a light on the social melting pot of Caversham and South Dunedin – particularly the way the population seemed to eschew traditional demarcation lines of class, religion and trade.

**Social conscience** - The positive influence of Scottish egalitarianism helped create a much more democratic approach and helped Dunedin develop a social conscience on a level not seen in other parts of the country at the time.

In 1888 Rutherford Waddell delivered his now famous sermon on "The Sin of Cheapness".

His condemnation of sweated labour and the sin of covetousness spread like wildfire, eventually triggering a Royal Commission. That, in turn, led to social and labour reforms, transforming working and living conditions for a swath of working New Zealanders – reforms that made New Zealand the envy of many throughout the world. That started in Dunedin.

I should mention the fact Waddell was born in County Down – yes, the one in Ireland. But he had been brought up in the strong Presbyterian tradition, honouring those values carried here from Scotland.
Dunedin was the town where the Chamber of Commerce championed the rights of Chinese workers to the same rates of pay as Europeans – where local members of Parliament demanded that the government either try unjustly held Maori Land War prisoners or release them. That sense of justice and equity was accidental – no matter how narrow minded Dunedin Scots were in other ways.

In later years, our connections with Scotland have diminished, and certainly with Dunedin’s relative decline in commercial strength over most of the past 80 years, Dunedin has not been able to trumpet its grand Scottish traditions with quite the resonance we used to. But we have developed newer Scottish connections.

The first movement towards creating a Sister City link with Edinburgh was in February 1973, when the Scottish Export Committee of Dunedin’s Scottish Council recommended that a ‘twinning’ relationship with Edinburgh be formalised.

Their letter to the Dunedin City Council suggested that, not only was it appropriate for a “city of pipe bands and many other manifestations of Scottish heritage” to have a relationship with the Scottish capital, but there would also be commercial and industrial opportunities.

The Dunedin City Council resolved in early 1973 to support the link with Edinburgh and an invitation was sent to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh.

A formal resolution confirming the establishment of an official sister city relationship was exchanged on 1 July 1974.

That was 40 years ago. And as our economic focus has turned more to the Pacific our relationship with Edinburgh has become more of a cultural one with several exchanges in recent years.

I was fortunate to lead a delegation to Edinburgh in July of 2014 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of our sister city relationship. While there, we attended a bespoke series of events and meetings with Edinburgh’s arts community which aimed to stimulate art links and activities between the two cities.

One of the things I learned from that visit – and it stuck with me – was the degree to which Edinburgh views and defines itself as a creative, literary, artistic city. Dunedin has been able to learn an enormous amount from Edinburgh’s experiences across a range of initiatives.

Of course, the cultural links between Dunedin and Edinburgh were further strengthened in late 2014 when Dunedin joined Edinburgh as a UNESCO City of Literature.

Edinburgh had the distinction of being the first City of Literature when it joined the UNESCO Creative City Network.

They were incredibly supportive of us when we applied to also attain that status.

There are synergies with our cultural connection with Edinburgh and our own creative renaissance.

Those literary connections remain strong.

Scottish migrants brought the literature of Robert Burns to Dunedin – the man whose statue looks over our city’s heart. Robbie Burns never came to Dunedin, but his nephew Thomas Burns was enormously influential. His presence in our city is unmistakeable.

Many Dunedin writers continue to draw their inspiration from Burns and Scottish tradition.

Dunedin’s UNESCO City of Literature Status not only reflects these proud traditions, but also the many other elements which have been woven into our city’s multi-cultural tartan.
There have been other cultural exchanges in recent years including those made as part of the MOMENTUM, Edinburgh Festivals international delegate programme, run by the British Council and Creative New Zealand.

I am mindful that we are probably not as relevant to Edinburgh as Edinburgh is to us – so it is an area we need to work on. But, nevertheless, the relationship is there and works both ways.

There was a recent visit here by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh combining his role as the Chair of the Edinburgh Tattoo – and he absolutely loved it. These visits help refresh and reset the connection.

We could not find a more solid reminder of our connections than the Edinburgh Stone – recently relocated to the steps on the western bank of the Water of Leith, opposite the University of Otago’s iconic Clocktower.

The move was prompted by a request from the Dunedin-Edinburgh Sister City Society, which worked with the University to select a site.

It was a most appropriate move, especially considering members of the Free Church of Scotland – Thomas Burns and James Macandrew – lobbied for the endowment of land for the University, which followed the Scottish model when it was founded in 1869.

Formed from Aberdeenshire granite rock by Sylvia Stewart in 2007, the Stone has a sister piece named Ōwheo, made from a basalt volcanic magma rock lifted from the Water of Leith in 1999, which sits on the Edinburgh waterfront. A reminder for them of their connections with their little sister in the south.

How Scottish are we today?

We may not quite be the city of pipe bands we were 40 years ago when we first proposed our sister city relationship with Edinburgh, but the many other manifestations of Scottish heritage the original proposal talked about still remain.

We have our own tartan – a Scotsman still stands guard beside our coat of arms with a Maori warrior on the other side. We even have our own haggis ceremony.

So I would cast the question a slightly different way. What aspects of our Scottish inheritance still have resonance and potential as we develop our relationships in the wider world and as we redefine who we are as a city? And how much of that has parallels perhaps with Edinburgh?

I look forward to the continuation of the relationship between Dunedin and Edinburgh – there is much we can learn from our big sister.

She has forged her place as a city of festivals, of arts and culture – we have many parallels there.

She has also forged her place as a centre of democracy and Scottish independence – not fearful to speak up and put an alternative point-of-view. I see parallels there for Dunedin as well.

What will that relationship look like in future decades? I don’t know. But what I do know is that the communication channels remain open and I look forward to seeing what the relationship holds.

I am extremely proud of the values that those first Scottish settlers planted here nearly 170 years ago.
I personally may have gibbed at the puritanical expectations, and certainly the kirk’s strict temperance. But the sense of social fairness and egalitarianism, the expectation of education for my granddaughters as well as my grandson and the value placed on creativity as a result, and the strong demand for a democratic say for everyone – these I am immensely thankful for.

These are the values – Scottish values – that have underpinned this city’s development and indeed survival. They are also the values we can include in our city “brand”, both in our interactions with our Mother city Edinburgh, but also with the wider world.

That’s who we started as and I’m proud to claim who we still are.

Dave Cull
Mayor of Dunedin