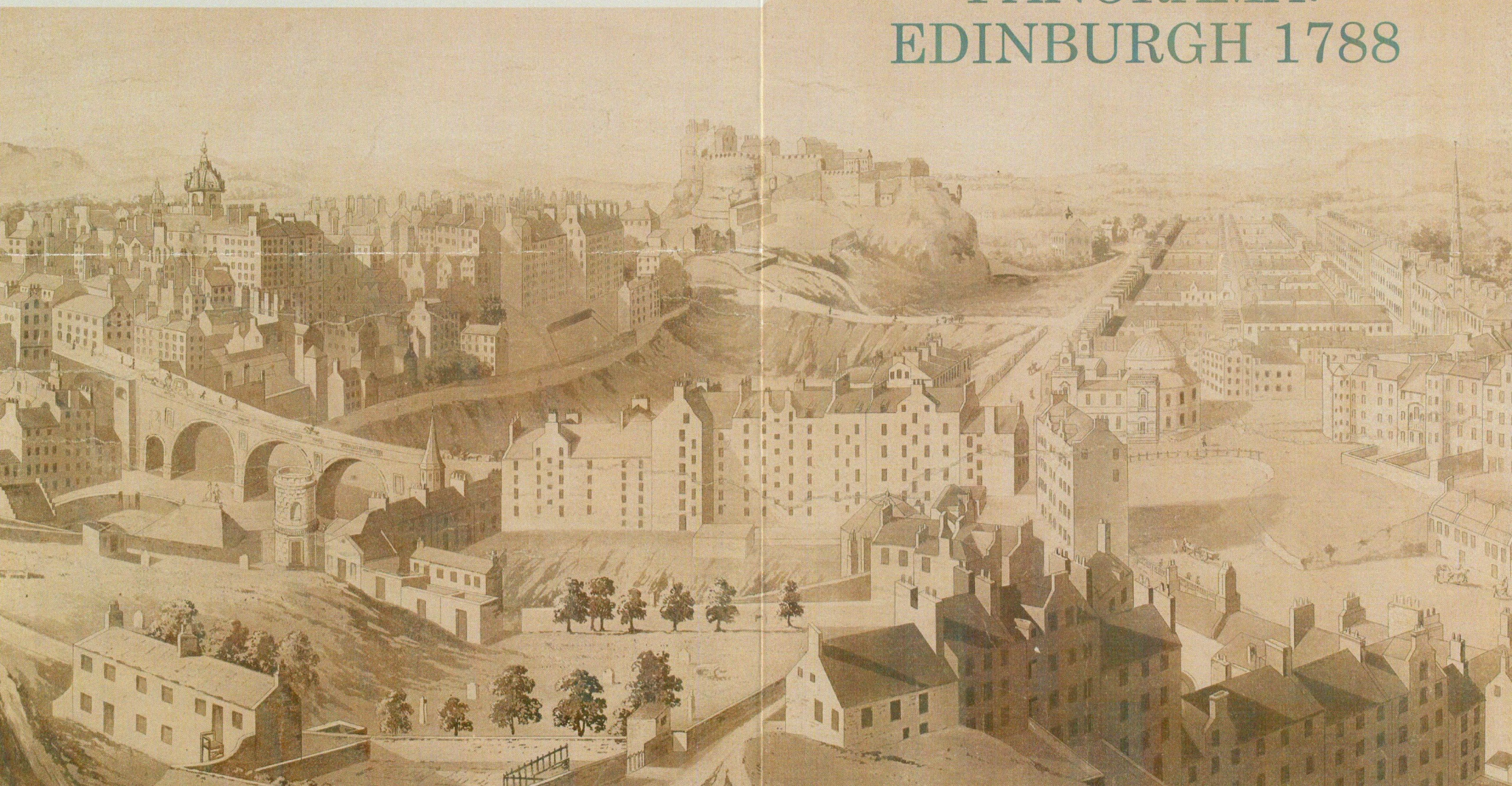


HM General Register House,
2 Princes Street, Edinburgh, EH1 3YY

THE FIRST PANORAMA: EDINBURGH 1788



BARKER'S INVENTION

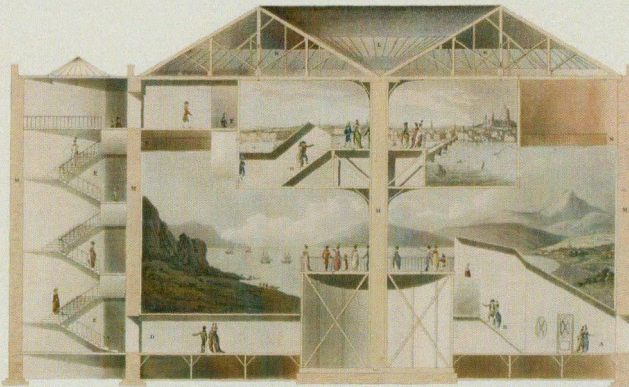
This reproduction at the National Records of Scotland showcases Robert Barker's invention of the 'panorama', a method for presenting the surrounding view in one picture. With the help of his young son Henry, Barker created the first panorama in Edinburgh in 1788. Barker went on to produce views of other cities and scenery and displayed them to great success in the late 18th century.

Robert Barker (1739-1806) of Kells, Ireland, was a successful painter of portraits and miniatures. While taking a walk on Calton Hill in Edinburgh he was struck with an idea of capturing the breathtaking view of Scotland's capital. He wondered if it was possible to give the whole view in one picture. Barker thought this might be accomplished by a 'square frame fixed at one spot on the hill: he would draw the scene presented within that frame and then shifting the frame to the left or right, he would draw the adjoining part of the landscape' turning around on the hill top until he obtained the view on all sides. The views would then be put together in a circle and the viewer positioned in the centre.

Barker called his invention 'La nature a coup d'oeil' or 'nature at a glance'. A method of recreating a realistic view of a landscape in a circular painting.

BARKER'S SUCCESS

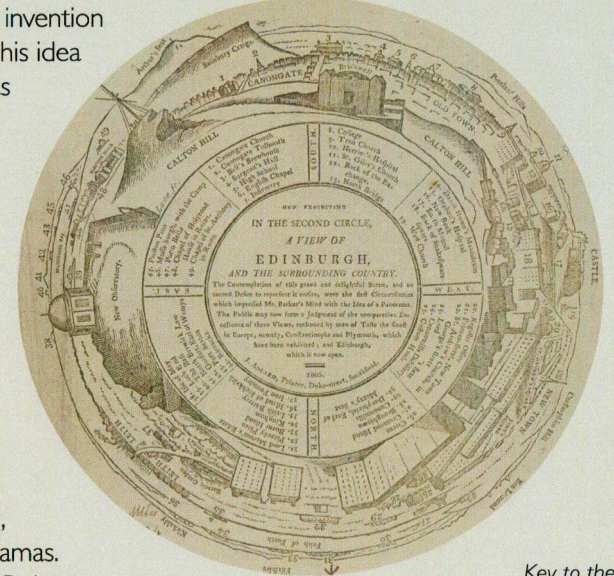
Barker charged his 12-year-old son, Henry Aston Barker, to make the initial drawings of Edinburgh from the Observatory on Calton Hill. From these, Barker created the final large scale landscape painting which was exhibited. Barker's chosen medium was watercolour, and he finished the 25-feet in diameter painting in the Guard Room at the Palace of Holyroodhouse.



Design for the Panorama Rotunda, Leicester Square, by Robert Mitchell in Plans, And Views In Perspective, With Descriptions, Of Buildings Erected In England And Scotland, (London: printed for the author and sold by J. Taylor, 1801). Image courtesy of the University of Edinburgh.

Barker was so convinced that his invention would be a success, he patented his idea in 1787. In 1788 the drawing was shown at Archer's Hall (now located at 66 Buccleuch Street) and in the city's Assembly Rooms in the New Town to great success. It was later on display in Glasgow.

Barker took his idea to London. A permanent structure was built and business established. Alongside his son others, such as John and Robert Burford (father and son), were employed in creating panoramas. Robert Burford worked for both Robert and Henry Barker, eventually partnering with Henry in the purchase and running of a panorama establishment in the Strand, London.



Key to the Panorama of Edinburgh and surrounding countryside. City of Edinburgh Council - Libraries www.capitalcollections.org.uk

'LARGE AND ELEGANT'

It is apt that we exhibit a reproduction of Barker's first panorama of Edinburgh in a similar circular space, the Adam Dome of General Register House (GRH).

Designed by architect Robert Adam, GRH is over 250 years old and was depicted in this first panorama along with the burgeoning of the city's New Town. The building was constructed in two parts and Barker's scene shows the South façade (facing Princes Street), the first half of the East and West ranges, and the spectacular Adam Dome. In the 1820s the building was completed in full to Adam's original design.

Learn more at www.nrscotland.gov.uk/panorama

This panorama reproduction was created by the University of Edinburgh and loaned to the National Records of Scotland by Jenny Bruce.

Front and back cover image: Panoramic view from Calton Hill (section 3), Edinburgh. City of Edinburgh Council - Libraries www.capitalcollections.org.uk