

Cramond

— An Ancient Village in Edinburgh —

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by Duncan JD Smith



Every European city has its place to which locals like to escape. Given the chance, the Viennese escape to the leafy Wienerwald, while residents of Madrid might take the *cercanías* train up to El Escorial for cool breezes and a dose of history. In Edinburgh, one might on a summer's day retreat to the beach at Portobello or take the bus out to Dr Neil's lochside gardens at Duddingston.

Another good antidote to the bustle of Edinburgh is to take the bus to Cramond. Just eight kilometres from Edinburgh city centre, this delightful waterfront village is located where the River Almond joins the Firth of Forth. Its attractions include a ruined Roman fort, a mediaeval tower house and an offshore island reached by a tidal causeway. Visitors should alight from Lothian Bus 41 at Cramond Glebe Road, where there is a sign for the village. It is worth reflecting that although Cramond has been part of Edinburgh since 1920, it has a very long history of its own. Indeed archaeologists have unearthed evidence for a Mesolithic campsite here; nomadic hunter-gatherers evidently made this their home as early as 8500 BC. This makes Cramond the earliest known site of human settlement in Scotland.

Shortly after passing the 18th-century Manse, where the skating minister Reverend Robert Walker (1755–1808) in Henry Raeburn's famous painting lived, Cramond Kirk appears on the right. Rebuilt in 1656 it retains a sturdy late-mediaeval tower from the 15th century and occupies the site

LEFT: One of several iron grave markers in Cramond Kirkyard (photo © Duncan JD Smith).

We came down here by night train [...] We paid Mama a visit at her really charming residence at Cramond, quite near the sea, with beautiful trees, and very cheerful.

Prince Albert, writing in his diary on 7 August 1860 about a visit to Cramond he and Queen Victoria made. The couple visited Victoria's mother.

of Cramond's first place of Christian worship built around 600. The kirkyard is interesting because it contains the ruins of a Roman fort uncovered in 1954. The Romans arrived here in 142 AD and by order of Emperor Antoninus Pius built a fort and harbour to protect the Antonine Wall. The fort was later used as a base by Septimius Severus in his campaign against Scotland's rebellious tribes.

The fort was rectangular in plan, with walls 15 feet high and a gate on each side. Inside were barracks, workshops, granaries and a commander's house, whilst outside there was a bath building and civilian settlement. An extraordinary Roman survival is the Cramond Lioness dredged from the river in 1997 by a local boatman. Depicting a lion devouring a shackled man, the sandstone sculpture probably once adorned the tomb of a military commander and is now displayed in the National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street in the very heart of Edinburgh.

After the Romans departed in 212, Cramond was occupied by the Votadini, a tribe of Iron Age Celts, who named their settlement *Caer Amon* ('fort on the river') from which the name 'Cramond' is derived. Thereafter little is known of Cramond's history until the mediaeval period, when the first Cramond Kirk was built. In the 1400s a summer residence was created here for the Bishops of Dunkeld, in whose diocese Cramond lay. What remains is a rather charming tower

house at the end of Kirk Cramond. The Lairds of Cramond lived here until the 1680s, when they built the imposing Cramond House nearby, which was visited by Queen Victoria (see quote above).

Returning to Cramond Glebe Road, descend now to the village proper, which is made up of late 18th-century lime-harled cottages typical of the Lothians. That no houses stand on the right-hand side except for the Cramond Inn is because these were cleared in 1826 to improve the appearance of the laird's estate!

Beyond is the harbour and the waterfront, which was created in the 1930s over a shoreline of glacial boulders. The most interesting buildings here are the former maltings and brewhouse at 2 Riverside, once part of the original village inn. They are now used by the Cramond Heritage Trust as a local history museum.

At the far end of the waterfront is a tidal causeway giving access to Cramond Island. Lying about one-and-a-half kilometres out to sea, the island can only be reached by foot during the two hours either side of low tide (see www.seabritain.co.uk for tide times). The causeway runs at the foot of a row of concrete pylons constructed as an anti-shipping boom during the Second World War, when the island was fortified to prevent enemy vessels entering the Firth of Forth.

This explains the gun emplacements where the causeway joins the island and the engine room in the north-east corner of the island that powered

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the various defences. Also on the north side are the concrete footings of barracks, where the island's garrison once lived.

Archaeological evidence suggests that pre-historic people visited the island and the Romans probably did, too. More recently it was used for farming and was renowned for its oyster beds. A jetty on the island's north-west shore may be mediaeval and there are remains of a 19th-century farmstead in the centre, where sheep were kept until the 1960s.

Return now to the bus stop on Cramond Glebe Road and walk down School Brae. Here you can find evidence of Cramond's time as an industrial

The submerged tidal causeway leading to Cramond Island. The concrete pylons were a wartime addition to prevent the passage of ships (photo © Duncan JD Smith).



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Downstream stands the manager's house and workers' cottages of the long-demolished Cockle Mill (now a café and B&B), with a silted up dock opposite from where finished goods were barged down to the firth, and eventually shipped as far away as India. Upstream at Cramond Falls are the ruins of Fairafar Mill, with its impressive weir and race. The square socket holes in the rocky river bank once supported a horse-drawn tramway used to transport stone from nearby Craigie Quarry down to another set of docks, where it was then shipped to Leith and used in the building of Edinburgh's New Town. Between 1771 and 1860 these mills were owned by the Cadell family, whose idiosyncratic cast-iron grave markers can be seen in Cramond Kirkyard.

Visitors in need of more fresh air and exercise might consider walking east from Cramond along the foreshore to Granton. On a good day, there are fine views across the Firth of Forth to the Fife coast and the various intervening islands: Inchmickery, Inchkeith and more. ■

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This article is adapted from Duncan JD Smith's latest book "Only in Edinburgh: A Guide to Unique Locations, Hidden Corners and Unusual Objects" published by The Urban Explorer. Other titles in the "Only In" series, all written by Duncan, cover Berlin, Budapest, Cologne, Hamburg, London, Munich, Paris, Prague, Vienna and Zurich.