

Beat: News

Edinburgh City Centre Historical Re-enactment Rides Again

Edinburgh Riding of the Marches

Edinburgh, 11.09.2023, 17:14 Time

USPA NEWS - Edinburgh City Centre Historical Re-enactment Rides Again

The Edinburgh Riding of the Marches, Scottish event, took place on Sunday 10th September, celebrating a return to the streets of Edinburgh, following a three-year gap.

The event celebrates the modern-day re-enactment of the ancient custom of riding the boundaries, or 'Marches' of Scotland's Capital City, a symbolic tradition of inspecting the Common Land of Edinburgh which dates back to at least 1579.

The inspection of the Common Land in Edinburgh was carried out until the demise of the practice in 1718; however, it was revived in 1946 for a special 'Riding of the Marches' to celebrate peace and the end of the war; 70 riders took part and were met by crowds 'reaching Royal dimensions' upon their return to the Royal Mile.

The modern-day event sees two Principal representatives selected every year to take on the roles of 'Captain and Lass'. The requirement is that they are residents of Edinburgh and have a passion for their city's history, heritage and future. The applicants do not need to know how to ride a horse (but it helps!) as they can be put through careful and rigorous training by one of Scotland's oldest riding schools, Edinburgh-based Tower Farm Riding Stables. In 2020 Jay Sturgeon – then a 23 year old Executive Assistant at Edinburgh Council and 21 year old Abbie McDowell, a Riding Instructor at Tower Farm Riding Stables, were chosen to represent Edinburgh in these coveted roles. However, as the Covid-19 virus took its hold on the world, this young pair – who are also best friends – quickly realised that their year in office would be uncertain.

Three years on, Jay, now a Project Manager in Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership and Abbie, who gave birth to her first child at the beginning of August, will finally get to complete their journey. On Sunday 10th September they led nearly 300 horses and riders on the epic 26-mile route of the Edinburgh Riding of the Marches, ending with a grand cavalcade up Edinburgh's famous Royal Mile. Joining the procession of horses will be riders from the 29 Riding Towns of Scotland, wearing their traditional coloured sashes, who all celebrate their own Common Riding Festivals and Events every year as well as riders from across the globe.

This year, in a break from recent tradition, the City of Edinburgh's Lord Provost and Lord Lieutenant, The Rt. Hon. Robert Aldridge, joined the event for the first time, making the journey up the Royal Mile on horseback, accompanied by the Lord Provost's Consort and by the Council Leader Cammy Day. The modern-day event has been supported by Lord Provosts since its revival in 2009, however the Provost played a more active role in the custom's ancient history, with archives from 1584 recording that the "nichtbouris of Edinburgh were instructed to meet together at 5.00am at the Provost's house and be ready to inspect the Marches" from where they embarked on an inspection of the Marches of the Common Land, to check for raiders and encroachment.

Led by the Captain of the 'Trained Band' (Town Guard), the Lord Provost, Bailies and Burgesses, commenced on horseback, challenging and making a record of all those who were found to be attempting to steal or build on the land that belonged to the common people. Towns people who were found not to be taking part, were fined!

In a special addition to this year's event, Highland Ponies from all over the UK, will be joining the ride as part of the Highland Pony Society's Centenary celebrations. The breed was a favourite of The Late Queen Elizabeth, who was Patron of the Society, with a large breeding herd on The Balmoral Estate.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-23446/edinburgh-city-centre-historical-re-enactment-rides-again.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSIV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Daren Frankish | R Swinney

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619