

# Edinburgh's pioneering Wellington boot factory reborn

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The people of Fountainbridge in Edinburgh are this weekend celebrating the reopening of a building they love - a symbol of their industrial past and a reminder of how their community was shaped by the Wellington boot.

The North British Rubber Factory, later Hunter Boot Ltd, first opened its doors in the 1850s. It pioneered the world's first Wellington boot, supplying 1.2million pairs to soldiers during the First World War to help them deal with the flooded conditions of the trenches. It was also the birthplace of the modern motor car tyre and the first ever traffic cone.

At its height, the factory site covered 20 acres and employed 8,000 people. It was central to Edinburgh's development and economy, and the livelihood of its population for over five generations. As late as the 1950s, it was still the city's largest industry employing over 3,000 people.

## Decline, dereliction and renaissance

By the late 20th century the site was in decline and until recently it has been languishing on the Buildings at Risk register.

Today, the North British Rubber Factory has a bright new future as a new creative industries hub and world-leading printmaking facility for artists across Europe.

It was the Edinburgh Printmakers that has been at the forefront of saving this site. It reacted to the growing demand for printmaking facilities and the growth of Edinburgh's creative industries.

With National Lottery support, it has brought the abandoned historic building back as a cutting-edge facility which include:

- an open access print studio
- traditional and digital processes
- a dedicated learning space
- artist accommodation
- art galleries
- a shop
- café
- print archive

Edinburgh Printmakers is now a contemporary hub of creative enterprise benefiting people living and working nearby, bringing a sense of pride to the people who call this area home, and offering an exciting addition to Scotland and Edinburgh's cultural scene.

Edinburgh Printmakers first exhibition opens to the public on 27 April 2019.