

Berkman back to the Gorbals

By [Brian Berkman](#)

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Being dyslexic can have unintended consequences. Sometimes, even as I type, I use a 'b' instead of a 'd' and transposing numbers happens, especially when I'm not paying careful attention, all too often.



Edinburgh Castle.

Looking now at my grandfather's birth certificate, I see the mistake I made. He was, according to the Register of Births, born on 16 January 1890 in the Gorbals district of Glasgow, Scotland. I applied for a copy of this birth certificate in 1999 when I investigated obtaining an Ancestral Visa to live in the UK. At the time, I committed his birth address to memory - 14 Adelphi Street, Glasgow and confidently asked the taxi at Glasgow's Queen's Park train station to take us there when we visited in June this year.

Looking for roots

My father, Meyer, was just 13 when his father Nathan Morris Berkman, after whom I take my second name Morris, died. All I remember my father saying about him was that he spoke in a Scottish brogue. I know that he was a specialist in grading animal hides and opened a butchery, Central Meat Supplies, in Voortrekker Parow, Cape Town where the family settled after moving from District Six but how or why they initially came from Scotland I have no clue.

I thought if I were able to see some of the things that he saw while growing up in Scotland that it might give me an insight into a man I know near to nothing about.

Soon after arriving in Edinburgh's Waverley train station - almost five hours after departing London's King's Cross, I made plans to take another train to Glasgow which is about 30 minutes away.

Even Edinburgh's new town is over 250 years old (not to mention the ancient cobbled streets and closes, what they call alleys, of the old town which dates back to the 900's) so the first thing you notice about Glasgow as you walk from Queen Street station, into the city town, is the impressive Victorian square and its layout as a well-designed city from the start.

Finding connections

Despite being mid-summer it poured non-stop with rain - there are, I'm told, only a few dry days in Scotland! In fewer than 10 minutes our taxi brought us to Adelphi Street in The Gorbals. The chatty driver, a portly man in his late sixties wearing a tartan cap, said he often took visitors, mostly Americans, to addresses in the Gorbals in search of ancestors. At the time my grandfather lived there it was a slum of quickly built shanties to accommodate mostly immigrants in search of work on the burgeoning dockyards on the River Clyde. Adelphi Street juts right up to the riverbank and there is still an old school there that I'm certain would have stood there in Nathan Morris' time. Perhaps he even went there.

I felt satisfied enough just walking around where his house might have been and felt a special connection to my ancestor. For the rest of my short visit I wondered at the kind of impression the cities would have made on him.

I wondered, in Edinburgh, as I gazed up at the electric blue of the vaulted ceiling in St Giles' church or The High Kirk, Edinburgh as it is properly known, if my ancestors, Jews, escaping religious and economic persecution in Eastern Europe, would have visited such a building to marvel at its majesty or if, indeed, they might be allowed to. I imagine they were probably poor and perhaps not appropriately dressed. Just three



generations on, I owe so much of my own success and privilege to my parents and grandparents for their sacrifices especially for the education that allowed me to have a broad and interested view.

Just four rooms... and worth the stay.

They would certainly have felt right at home walking the Royal Mile - rightly the most famous part of Edinburgh's Old Town that stretches between Holyrood House and the Edinburgh Castle or climbed to the top of Carlton Hill and Arthur's Seat, the name of the hill, to view the city below.

Now a better place to visit

Despite its proximity to a palace - Queen Elizabeth lives at Holyrood House when in the city - The Royal Mile is jammed with interesting shops and pubs and, a hundred years ago, would have been as busy with people selling their wares and eating and drinking as it is now. It smells much better today - one of the reasons why the New Town was built was because sewage overwhelmed the old one.



Every meal is carefully prepared to delight.

Next time I visit I'd like to take an underground tour of the old city and discover the catacombs. There are some ghoulish stories from Auld Reekie, the name the Victorians called the city because of the smell from sewage and smoke. It is very easy to imagine what it might have been like walking down the closes during those times. Those who believe in the paranormal regard this part of the city among the most active paranormal places on earth and there are many tourist-oriented activities geared to them. Scotland is, of course, most famous for whisky and for being the birth place of golf but it is also so much more than that. This year, The Year of

Natural Scotland, their tourist organisations are promoting different aspects of the land including The Natural Larder that focuses on natural produce.

A highlight

A highlight of our visit, given my restricted diet of no carbohydrates, no sugar or no alcohol, was a gourmet dinner at the Michelin-star awarded Paul Kitching 21212 Restaurant with Rooms at the foot of Carlton Hill. The cuisine served here is much celebrated in the United Kingdom and they continue to win many prestigious awards but what impressed me was the willingness with which they responded to my peculiar diet. I have never had a fine-dining experience before that was such fun without me feeling that I was missing out on items that sugar and carb eaters at the table were enjoying.

The Natural Larder is totally in sync with Paul's attitude and commitment to using the best local suppliers. Scotland has a great reputation for its delicious local produce, and is gaining more and more recognition on an international scale for its respected chefs, world-class producers and the diversity of the cuisine. Following on from the Year of Food and Drink, The Natural Larder is an opportunity to further promote Scotland's food and drink offering and natural produce, as well as its high quality restaurants such as 21212.

Other Year of Natural Scotland highlights include The National Park of Loch Lomond which has 21 mountains, 22 lochs and 50 rivers easily accessible within half an hour of Glasgow. In Glentress Forest, just an hour from Edinburgh, you can walk almost endlessly without signs of civilisation. It is well-known by mountain bicycle riders. The famous North West Coast has beaches, coastal walks as well as fishing and sailing opportunities. Golf's The Ryder Cup will be played at Gleneagles next year while in Grampain, near Aberdeen, there is a 13-castle historic trail.



The dining room.

Just four rooms - but worth the stay

The night we dined at 2121 we stayed in their deluxe accommodation. There are just four rooms available and all are exclusively furnished with modern décor touches like lights built into the floor and the most generous bathroom that has a

tub large enough for a family. We looked out onto a pretty private garden which is backend of Carlton Hill. Other rooms look over Edinburgh and on a clear day I'm told you can see the sea. 21212 is the kind of place you simply don't want to leave. Breakfast, included for overnight guests, is deserving of its own Michelin-star. South African's with Premium Virgin Active Club membership can use the Virgin Active gym very nearby. See www.21212restaurant.co.uk.

Our other night was spent in self-catering accommodation at The Knight Residence which has all the five-star hotel amenities but in a converted apartment block. I really liked that my name was on the front door buzzer so someone coming to visit while we were there needn't remember the apartment number. Even though it is a self-catering unit there was a generous welcome pack of milk, filter coffee, tea, bread and even Scottish shortbread biscuits. We used the Sainsbury's on the corner to feed ourselves very affordably and the washing machine/dryer would be very useful for a longer stay. <http://www.theknightresidence.co.uk/>.



With Kitching in the kitchen, you're guaranteed to enjoy the repast.

Connect with Jeremy Hawkings of Connoisseurs Scotland who represents 21212 and more than 30 of the land's most superb properties at jeremy@luxscot.co.uk. You can book to dine and stay at 21212 by emailing reservations@21212restaurant.co.uk

While looking at my grandfather's birth certificate in preparation for this article I noted the dyslexic error I made. His address was not 14 Adelphi but 41 - I had gone all the way from Cape Town to the wrong place. Turns out I wasn't the only making mistakes. The birth certificate also lists my grandfather as Nathan Moses and not Nathan Morris as my parents and his tombstone have it. Perhaps, from now on, you should call me Brian Moses Berkman instead.

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