**The Drummer Boy**



***This extract came from a book about Edinburgh’s secret underground spaces.***

**1:** One of Edinburgh’s most famous underground legends revolves around the discovery of a tunnel in the dungeons of Edinburgh Castle in the early nineteenth century. The City Council was curious to find out where this newly unearthed passage went, but the entrance wasn’t large enough to allow exploration – unless the explorer happened to be a particularly small one.

**2:** Since there were no small adults in the vicinity, the Council decided to send a 10-year-old boy into the tiny aperture to see where the tunnel went to. This may sound like a heartless thing to do, but in those days, thousands of orphans were employed to climb inside the chimneys and sweep them – so many Edinburgh children were used to crawling through small, dark spaces. To be fair to the councilmen, they did give the lad a tiny drum – and told him to beat as he went. That way they could monitor his progress.

**3:** The child wriggled into the cold black passage and wormed his way out of sight, frantically beating the drum. As the faint rat-a-tat sound travelled under the High Street, councilmen followed safely along on top, listening to the poor lad’s progress. At a spot just short of the Tron Church, the drumming stopped. It did not start again.

**4:** Edinburgh Council had a dilemma. Though life was cheap among the city’s slum children they couldn’t keep sending 10-year-old after 10-year-old into the tunnel – there was no telling how many they might get through. Instead the council quietly sealed the entrance back up. It was never reopened.

**5:** Does the tunnel still exist? Did it ever exist? Or is it simply a fairy tale to scare unruly 10-year-olds? Edinburgh Castle is a military garrison and is hardly likely to give away details of a passage running right under its fortifications. But it does seem entirely possible that such a tunnel is real. The Castle was often under siege, and many ancient fortifications used secret passages to sneak messages and important persons through enemy blockades.

**6:** The legend itself takes many forms. In one popular version it was a bagpiper who was sent underground. This version seems rather dubious (to be honest, the whole thing sounds a bit suspicious), if a burly soldier with a set of pipes could fit into a tunnel there wouldn’t be many people who wouldn’t.

**7:** And local residents will tell you that on some nights, if there is no traffic around, a faint but frantic drumming can be heard below the streets around the Tron Kirk. In 1994, a woman on a private tour of the underground vaults collapsed after hearing the drummer boy story. When she came to, she told her astonished companions the reason for her fainting fit. She had heard a drumming behind her just before the story was told.