
Building stones of Edinburgh's South Side

Andrew McMillan and Richard Gillanders with contributions from David McAdam and Alex Stark

[Full colour illustrated PDF download](#)

Figures

(Front cover)

(Figure 1) Map of walk route showing numbered locations.

The route

This tour takes the form of a circular walk from George Square northwards along George IV Bridge to the High Street of the Old Town, returning by South Bridge and Chambers Street and Nicolson Street. Most of the itinerary lies within the Edinburgh World Heritage Site.

The recommended route along pavements is shown in red Building Stones of Edinburgh's on the diagram overleaf. Edinburgh traffic can be very busy, so TAKE CARE; cross where possible at traffic light controlled crossings. Public toilets are located in Nicolson Square near start and end of walk. The walk begins at NE corner of George Square.

Further reading: McMillan, A A, Gillanders, R J and Fairhurst, J A. 1999 [Building Stones of Edinburgh](#). 2nd Edition. Edinburgh Geological Society.

Lothian & [Borders GeoConservation leaflets](#) including [Calton Hill](#), and Craigeith Quarry

Acknowledgements

Text: Andrew McMillan and Richard Gillanders with contributions from David McAdam and Alex Stark.

Map adapted with permission from The Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh (Pevsner Architectural Guides, Yale University Press), by J. Gifford, C. McWilliam and D. Walker) Front photograph of George Square in the 1950s courtesy of Agnes Barr. Other photographs © Andrew A McMillan.

Designed by Derek Munn

Printed by Winter and Simpson, Dundee

© Lothian & Borders GeoConservation 2012

Introduction

Local sources of Carboniferous (359–299 million years old) sandstone, for example from Craigmillar, Craigeith, Ravelston and Hailes quarries, provided builders, masons and architects with the excellent raw material that was used over several centuries. During the latter part of the 19th century, as local supplies dwindled and transport systems developed, sandstone was brought from quarries further afield, including West Lothian (Binny, Hermand, Humbie), Fife (Cullalo, Grange, Longannet), Stirlingshire (Polmaise), Dumfriesshire (Corsehill) and northern England (Blaxter, Darney, Doddington, Prudham). Many 20th C. buildings in Edinburgh used a variety of rock types as stone cladding (thin panels) to concrete and steel structures. Today, stone is used for conservation and repair as seen in the indents (replacement

blocks) found in many buildings.

This leaflet describes a selection of buildings on a circular walk starting and finishing at George Square. Dates in brackets refer to the date of construction or other developments of the buildings, noting the principal architects and builders.

Two new bridges were crucial to development south of the Grassmarket/Cowgate hollow. Access from the old town was not easy until the building of South Bridge (1785–88) and George IV Bridge (1829–34). George Square, laid out by James Brown, (1766 –1785) was the first development beyond the Old Town. Originally some 60 houses, Nos. 28–59 were built of Craigleith Sandstone, a source of fine stone for ashlar work from the west side of the city. Redevelopment in the 1960s for buildings of the University of Edinburgh involved demolition of Nos. 30–54, including No. 33 which was the Scottish office of the Geological Survey of Great Britain, 1906 to 1928.

Photographs ([See PDF](#))

- No. 60 George Square
- Fossils in Roach stone
- No. 20 George Square (detail)
- McEwan Hall
- Telfer Wall
- Greyfriars Bobby with plinth of Shap Granite, Cumbria
- National Museum of Scotland
- Central Library, George IV Bridge
- George Heriot's School from Victoria Terrace
- Royal Mile at foot of Lawnmarket with Bank of Scotland in Mound Place and part of High Court of Justiciary, right
- University of Edinburgh Old College Dome
- Entrance to the University of Edinburgh Old College
- Surgeons' Hall

The walking tour

1 No. 60 George Square (1774–79) [NT 25919 72995] local dolerite (black igneous rock) and pink sandstone from Craigmillar. Columns of portico are of grey micaceous sandstone.

2 University George Square Lecture Theatre (1967, Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners) [NT 25926 72890] clad in Carboniferous sandstone from Wellfield quarries (Huddersfield).

3 University Library (1967, Basil Spence, Glover & Ferguson) [NT 25807 72852] cladding round base of Larvikite, a black Scandinavian granite; ramp parapet to west is clad in pale yellow-grey Portland Roach stone with Jurassic fossil bivalves and gastropods.

4 West side Nos. 29–28 Craigleith Sandstone, droved ashlar. Nos. 27–23 (1770–75) [NT 25762 72884] Roman Doric and Ionic columned doorpieces and cherrycock pointed pink Craigmillar sandstone and dolerite rubble with dolerite snecks.

5 Nos. 22–16 (1767–74), [NT 25752 72928] the earliest surviving houses also with cherrycock pointing, have been restored to show probable original appearance. Pavements on north and west sides of the Square are made of sharp flakes of dolerite placed vertically into ground, known as horonizing. Road setts mainly dolerite.

6 Former George Watson's Ladies College, No7 (1876, MacGibbon & Ross), [NT 25861 73009] elaborate carvings, including name, in sandstone. Good example of modern stone replacement.

- 7 Edinburgh University Union** (1887, Sydney Mitchell 1887) [NT 25880 73096] Hailes Sandstone, laminated.
- 8 McEwan Hall** (1888–97, Sir R. Rowand Anderson) [NT 25821 73122] Carboniferous sandstones Polmaise (Stirlingshire) and Prudham (Hexham, Northumberland). Small red sandstone columns are of Triassic St Bees Sandstone from Corsehill (Annan).
- 9 Adjacent Medical School** (1886, Sir R. Rowand Anderson) [NT 25749 73119] also Polmaise stone.
- 10 Former Royal Infirmary** undergoing a major renovation. [NT 25660 73085] Scots baronial style by David Bryce begun 1872 and finished by his nephew John (1879). Succeeded William Adam's George Watson's Hospital (1738). Stone used from Hailes and Cullalo (Fife). Buildings laid out in a pavilion system, isolation of blocks allowing air to circulate.
- 11 Telfer Wall**, (1628–36) Lauriston Place. [NT 25659 73134] An extension of Flodden Wall to incorporate George Heriot's Hospital. Rubble construction mainly of local sandstones.
- 12 Former Charity Workhouse**, (1739–43) [NT 25699 73191] harled tenements in Forest Hill off Forest Road. Sandstone from City Quarry (Burgh Muir). Remnants were remodelled as dwelling houses down Candlemaker Row.
- 13 Greyfriars Kirk** (1602–20). [NT 25655 73283] Uses second-hand stone from Convent of Sciennes. Munitions magazine in west tower exploded 1718. New church built (1722) to the west, with a wall dividing New Greyfriars from Old Greyfriars. Fire destroyed most of Old Greyfriars (1845), then rebuilt. Building restored recently with coloured lime harl. Graveyard contains the best collection of 17th C. monuments in Scotland. Notable figures buried here include James Hutton, Founder of modern geology and William Adam, architect.
- 14 The bronze sculpture of Greyfriars Bobby** (William Brodie, 1872) [NT 25698 73299], at the head of Candlemaker Row, sits on a plinth of polished Cumbrian Shap Granite, with prominent pink feldspar crystals. Greyfriars Bobby with plinth of Shap Granite, Cumbria
- 15 National Museum of Scotland extension** [NT 25717 73307](completed in 1998 to International competition — winning design of Benson & Forsyth, 1991). Cladding of mottled yellow and orange Permian sandstone from Clashach Quarry (Hopeman, Moray). Pavements on both sides of street grey Devonian Caithness Flagstone, durable fine laminated sandstone. Near the museum is Bristo Port, the site of the Society of Brewers (or Greyfriars) Quarry which supplied rubble stone for Parliament House (locality 29
- 16 National Museum of Scotland West Wing** (1885–89), Chambers Street, [NT 25827 73343] Hermand sandstone (West Calder), sculptured figures (1861) Doddington sandstone (Northumberland).
- 17 Crown Office**, (1886–88), [NT 25779 73358] formerly Heriot-Watt University, Prudham sandstone (Northumberland).
- 18 Sheriff Court extension** (1997) [NT 25723 73337] Catcastle Sandstone (Barnard Castle, County Durham). George IV Bridge (1829–34) is an elevated street above the Cowgate with houses built up on both sides; two open spans. Buildings include: 19–21.
- 19 The Augustine United Church** completed 1861, [NT 25676 73423] tower recently restored with Blaxter sandstone, (Otterburn, Northumberland).
- 20 Central Library** (1887–90, George Washington Browne) [NT 25646 73440] elaborately carved Polmaise sandstone (Stirlingshire).
- 21 National Library of Scotland**, (started in 1938 & completed 1955, Reginald Fairlie), [NT 25637 73554] Blaxter sandstone (Northumberland) on grey granite.
- 22 Victoria Street** (1867–8), [NT 25612 73483] Scots Baronial style India Buildings display fine vermiculated work. No. 1 occupied by the Geological Survey (1869–1879).

23 Victoria Terrace [NT 25491 73443] is raised above street. From far end are fine views in foreground of crow-stepped gables and irregular slated roofs, in the middle distance old buildings of Grassmarket, and beyond in the far distance George Heriot's Hospital (School) (1628–1660, William Wallace, King's Master Mason from 1617), Ravelston, Craigmillar and Craigleith stone, the last used for refacing (1833).

24 Lawnmarket of the Old Town [NT 25502 73545] comprises late 17th and early 18th C. tenements (lands) & closes. Nos.312–320 have ashlar fronts. Off Lawnmarket are: Mylne's Court (1690, Robert Mylne), Fisher's Close (c. 1700) Gladstone's Land (c. 1620). Thomas Gladstone was a merchant. Arcading demonstrates a continental influence.

25 Bank of Scotland, founded 1695 (1802–6, extended by David Bryce, 1865–70), Mound Place. [NT 25599 73655] Binny sandstone (1846) with indents of Stainton sandstone (County Durham) (1986).

26 High Court of Justiciary former Sheriff Court (1934–37 A J Pitcher & J Wilson Paterson), [NT 25638 73592] at top of High Street. Darney sandstone (Northumberland).

27 David Hume Statue (1997 Alexander Stoddart) [NT 2562 7359] sits on plinth of yellow Clashach sandstone.

28 St Giles Cathedral [NT 25723 73600] with its late 15C. Spire faced with Cullalo stone (1829–33, William Burn). Cullalo recently used for repairs on S. side.

29 Parliament House (1632–39, Sir James Murray of Kilbaberton HM Master of Works). [NT 25747 73540] Original ashlar work from Ravelston and Burgh Muir. Facade refaced with Craigleith stone (1807–1810, Robert Reid).

30 Charles II statue (c. 1685) [NT 25751 73551] taken down in 1824 for rebuilding of St Giles' and Signet Library (1813). Reinstated with new plinth of Craigleith (1835). Original marble inscription tablet retained.

31 Mercat Cross [NT 25675 73588](originally 15th C. with its capital of that date) rebuilt (1617) by John Telfer and John Mylne (senior). Removed (1756) and re-erected (1866). Restoration (1885) Hermand sandstone (West Calder). Present shaft replacement by City Architect (1970).

32 City Chambers, Royal Exchange (1753–61, John and Robert Adam; builder John Fergus), [NT 25773 73628] Craigleith and Longannet sandstones. Additions: Prudham sandstone (1904) and the Cockburn Street extension (1934) Darney sandstone.

33 Tron Kirk (1635–1647, John Mylne, Master Mason to Town & Crown), [NT 25932 73640] built for the displaced congregation of St Giles when it became a cathedral. Sandstone from Society and Craigleith quarries. Roof covered with copper from Hamburg (1647). Building of North Bridge and formation of Hunter Square (1785 and 1787) led to the shortening of kirk to E, W & S. Dutch steeple with covering of copper destroyed in the Great Fire of 16th Nov 1824. Steeple rebuilt in Humbie sandstone (Winchburgh) and largely refaced with Darney sandstone (1974–76).

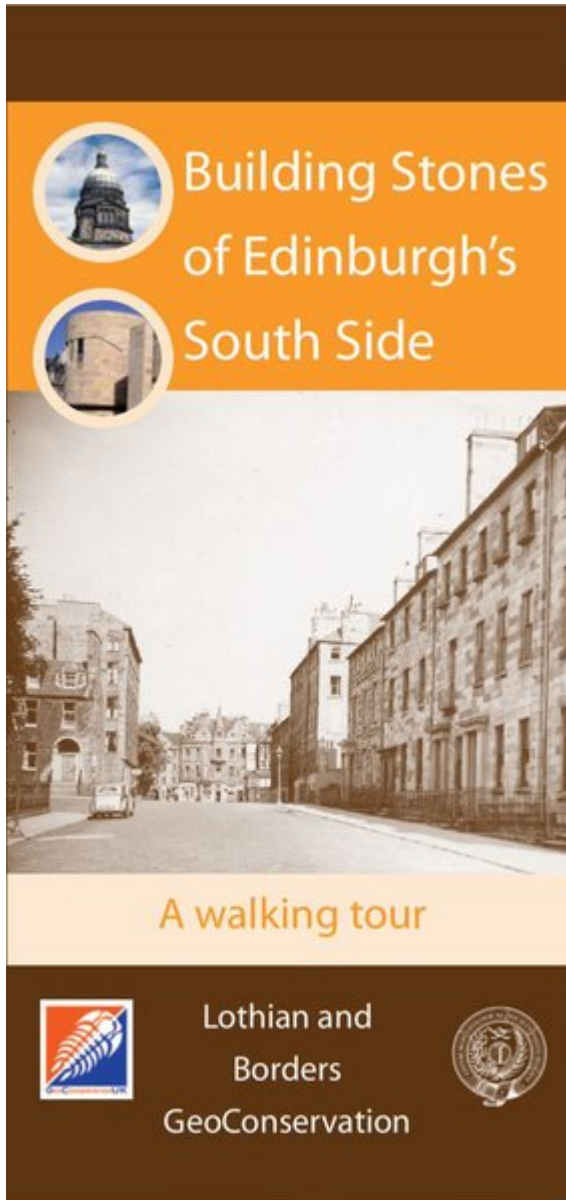
34 South Bridge (1775–88, Alexander Laing), [NT 25978 73521] 19–arch viaduct. Prepared the way for building of University and provided access from old town to Nicolson Street and George Square.

35 Old College (1789–1827, Robert Adam, completed William Playfair). [NT 25984 73358] Doorway framed by six monolithic pillars of Craigleith sandstone (1791). Sandstone from Grange Quarry (Burntisland) used to support dome (1887, R. Rowand Anderson).

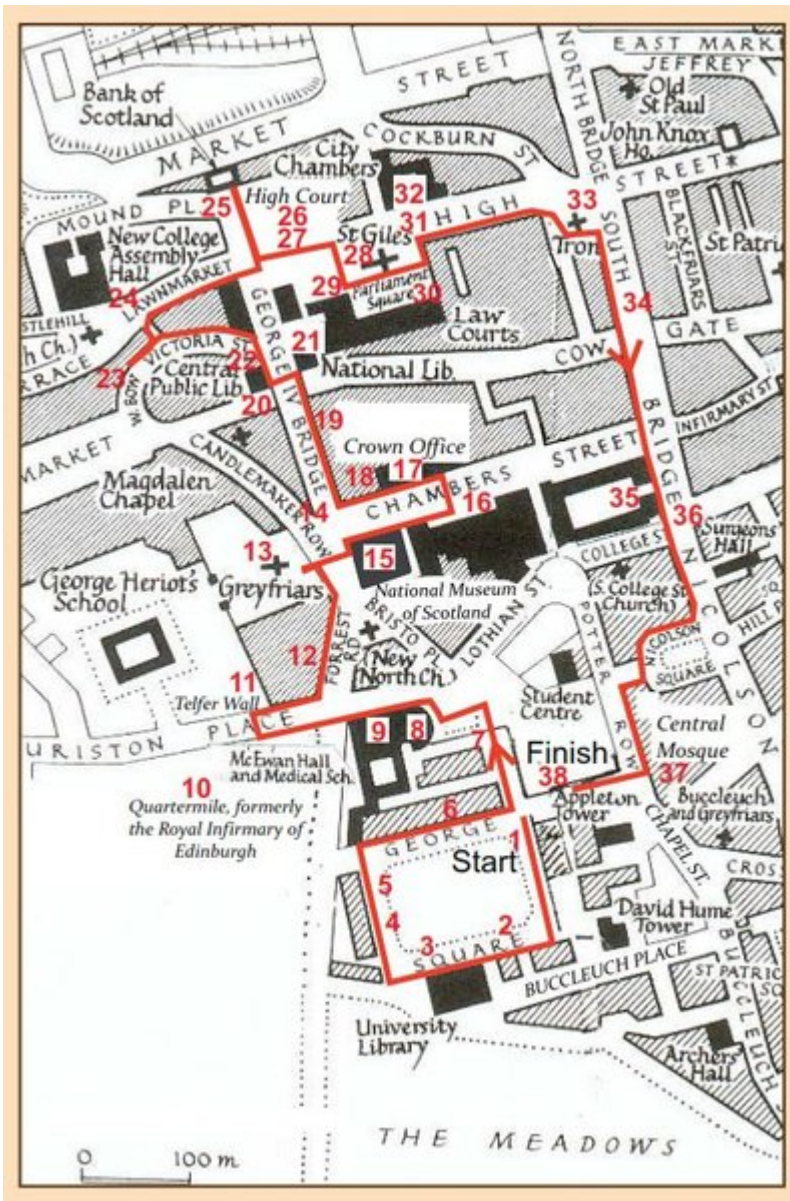
36 Portico and front of Surgeons' Hall (1829–32 W.H. Playfair) [NT 26065 73255] sandstones from Humbie and Cullalo. Additions (1890) Craigton Quarry (Winchburgh).

37 Mosque and Islamic Centre, (1998, Basil Al-Bayati) Potterrow, [NT 26019 73063] clad with Dunhouse (Staindrop) and Blaxter (Otterburn) Carboniferous sandstones; base of Baltic Brown orbicular granite. Just to south, Windmill Lane, connecting Chapel Street to George Square, is near site of a 17th C. quarry, as in Quarry Close on West Crosscauseway.

38 Dugald Stewart Building and University Informatics Forum (2008, Bennetts Associates Architects) [NT 25942 73064] clad in honey-coloured Leistadter sandstone from Kichheim (near Frankfurt, Germany). Inspace building clad in Dunhouse Grey limestone (County Durham).



Front cover.



Map of walk route showing numbered locations.