

# Stroll around Edinburgh: background notes

**Aim** The aim of the walk is to enjoy Edinburgh's suburbs, outlying areas, and Green Belt setting (while it still exists) by making use of footpaths, tracks, disused railway lines and riverbanks, ascending mine tips, passing alongside farmland, docks and seafronts, and heading through quiet housing-estates as well as shopping-centres and University campus. Each 7-mile leg begins, and ends, at a well-served public bus stop to form a 35-mile, almost totally traffic-free route.

WESTER HAILES - SPYLAW – COLINTON - BONALY - OXGANGS - FAIRMILEHEAD - KAIMES - GILMERTON - DANDERHALL - NEWHAILES - PORTOBELLO - SEAFIELD - LEITH – TRINITY - GRANTON - SILVERKNOWES - BARNTON - NORTH & SOUTH GYLE - WESTER HAILES.



## WESTER HAILES

In 1964, 297 acres of agricultural land at Wester Hailes was re-zoned for new housing. The Wester Hailes Amenity Association was formed to fight the proposal. Miss Margaret Kidd QC found against Edinburgh Council but was subsequently overruled by Willie Ross, the Secretary of State for Scotland, who gives his approval. [Nothing changes!] Work began in 1967 but the area was not substantially developed until the early 1970s, as reflected in the dominant dense housing style, of purpose-built flats and tower blocks. Nevertheless, while dominated by roads an early separation of pedestrian and car routes was established. In 1991 unemployment was 22%, compared to only 8% for Edinburgh as a whole, this helped put Wester Hailes within the bottom 20% of the UK for household earnings. The area suffered from a major image problem being identified with high levels of crime, alcohol, and drug dependency. In the 2000s Wester Hailes was chosen for urban rehabilitation. A newly formed Wester Hailes Partnership organised residents into 25 neighbourhoods to represent the community in the regeneration programme. A new section of canal allowed it to stretch unbroken from Edinburgh Tollcross to Falkirk. A large number of properties were renovated and some others - such as the high rise "slab block" flats at Hailesland Park demolished and replaced with newer "low-rise" housing. The original Wester Hailes farmhouse is long gone. It stood on our route, over the road bridge, at the 5-path junction, beside the SW corner of a prominent medium-rise block. Little if anything remains of the original field boundaries.

## SPYLAW & COLINTON

Between Wars ribbon development adorns the Lanark Road (and the northern side of Spylaw Bank Rd). Here our route crosses one of Edinburgh's sharpest deprivation divides (see Appendix A of the accompanying thoughts on urban sprawl). Once over the Lanark Road our route passes 1890s villas, and descends into Colinton Glen. The character of present day Colinton has been shaped by hundreds of years of history. Early inhabitants were attracted to the area by a fording place over the Water of Leith at the foot of what is now Spylaw Street. (We will meet five different rivers on our Edinburgh stroll, see Fig 2.) The opening of the railway line to Colinton in 1874 was to alter the character of the area completely. The fresh air and scenery attracted commuters, and the result was a slow spread of residential development. The dreaded Villadom. Robert Louis Stevenson was an early critic. He denounced the spread (especially at Morningside & Newington) *"Day by day, one new villa, one new object of offence, is added to another; the dimmest structures keep springing up like mushrooms. It is a danger which threatens the amenity of the town; and as this eruption keeps spreading on our borders, we have ever the farther to walk among unpleasant sights, before we gain the country air."* (From *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes*, first published in 1879.) Colinton now contains a great variety of buildings of various ages and types. These reached their highest aesthetic expression between 1880 and the beginning of the Great War, a period when Colinton attracted the most prominent of Scottish architects. These included the eminent Scottish architect Sir Robert Rowand Anderson (Portrait gallery, Old College Dome, McEwan Hall). He pioneered a form of villa development with steep crow-stepped roofs, in a Scottish Jacobean style, set in spacious plots and bounded by stone walls - so setting a precedent for later developments in the 1890s. Sir Robert Lorimer started a fashion in 1893 by adopting as a style and mode of construction his own individual interpretation of Scottish vernacular, e.g. the Colinton Rustic Cottages (2-storey houses with English Arts and Crafts features and traditional Scots detailing). Lorimer's Villas (eg 3 Spylaw Ave) are typically long, low, white-harled with steep roofs and monumental chimney stacks.



Fig 2. Edinburgh rivers

## BONALY

Bonaly was originally a small settlement that existed in its own right on the banks of the Bonaly Burn, close to the present-day site of Bonaly Tower. By the 17th century Bonaly was thriving. In addition to the dwellings of tenant farmers, there was a substantial farmhouse, several waulk mills, a skinnery, a distillery, a magnesia factory, and a flax mill. Urbanisation began with several large villas individually constructed on Bonaly Road in the 1920s and 1930s. Our route passes 6 Castlelaw Rd. – a Kininmonth & Basil Spence, 1933 - villa with Art-Deco detailing, Dutch gables, bell-cast roof, deep eaves, and slate-hung, flat-roofed

dormers. (This historically important building was essentially Basil Spence's very first commission). Urbanisation accelerated after the Second World War. Through the snicket we find Bungalow land.

## **OXGANGS**

Building started in 1953; before that Oxgangs was mostly farmland and was basically part of the countryside. The area now consists of large public housing schemes aimed at low to middle income groups. The majority of the former council-owned properties have been bought under the right to buy scheme. The route passes through the not unattractive Gallolee (a 1990s 'infilling' housing scheme, squeezed between the river and a 1950s development).

## **FAIRMILEHEAD**

The original Roman road to Carlops passed along present day Fairmile Ave. Largely developed in latter half of the 20th century. Morton House was the dower house of the Trotters of Mortonhall. The original east part dates back to 1709. Not far from the house the belvedere (a roofed architectural structure, freestanding or attached, and open on one or more sides - built in elevated positions to provide a view and capture daylight and fresh air - used in Italy since the Renaissance) stands impressive in a small field with great views to the Pentland Hills. It probably dates back to the early 18th century. Today Fairmilehead is a desirable residential area with a mix of low rise private housing, mainly detached or semi-detached but also some flats. Sadly much of the newer housing in mock Tudor style, the ever present noise of the by-pass, and general ambience is not to my liking.

## **KAIMES**

East from Mortonhall are the two Kaims, and these are the origin of the name; for Kaims signifies Camps or Fortifications. Prior to the construction of the Council housing estates of Burdiehouse, Southhouse, and Gilmerton Dykes in the 1950s the area that forms the Burdiehouse Burn Valley Park consisted of farms, country estates, and open countryside. Numerous villages, mills, and hamlets were to be found in and around the valley. Those living in Burdiehouse in the 18th and 19th centuries worked mainly for the Burdiehouse quarries and lime works, either directly or as carters. The route visits St Catherine's Balm Well - an historic spring. The original name of Liberton - may well have been Lepertown. During the Scottish Middle Ages, the unfortunate lepers who suffered that terrible disease were confined to the village and absolutely forbidden to approach the City of Edinburgh. The Well provided an attraction for afflicted lepers or those with other skin diseases, due to its black particles (drops of floating oil). The original well house was built in 1617 by order of James VI. Its ashlar Renaissance front Lintel dates from 1563.

## **GILMERTON**

Early records of Gilmerton go back to the 12th century. Its long history as a rural village is reflected in its former name of Gilmour's tun or "farm place". Gilmerton later developed as a coal mining centre from the 17th century and then as a lime working community in the 19th century. Its mining heritage explains why Gilmerton is one of the few larger villages in the Edinburgh area away from a water course. Roy's map, dated 1753, shows the layout of the village to have been very similar to its modern form. The true Main Street "Ravenscroft Street" formed a typical linear hilltop settlement. The fascinating Gilmerton Cove is a network of underground passageways and chambers hand-carved from sandstone. It was dug out of the rock, by George Paterson a smith, and finished in 1724, after five years hard labour. In the cave are several apartments, several beds, a spacious table with a large punch bowl, all cut out of the rock in the nicest manner. The Parish church dates from 1837 (Romanesque by John Adams. It has a shallow-pitch gable with buttresses, triple windows and a conical-topped bellcote. In 1934 Edinburgh Town Council acquired seventy-seven acres of ground at Gilmerton, and was in the process of acquiring more land with a view to

building a civic airport. Our route makes use of part of an old footpath system, sheltered from the weather by stone walls or buildings, which linked between houses the school, village hall, open spaces and the countryside. The population of Gilmerton has increased rapidly over the years; from about 1,000 at the 1841 census, to over 13,000 now.

## DANDERHALL

The village includes a large amount of council housing — although much of this is now privately owned by the occupiers. Danderhall was formerly a "mining village", supplying labour for the nearby coal mines. Monktonhall was the last to remain open, struggled on until 1997. The mining community in the area employed 2000 men at the height of production. On the occasion of Margaret Thatcher's death the former miners of Monktonhall gathered in a local graveyard, popped corks, swigged whisky, and, doused by rain, cracked morbid jokes. "*Maggie's in hell and she's shut down three furnaces already*" said one, with a sour laugh. "*It's something we've waited a long time to see.*" was a typical comment. Former MSP Tommy Sheridan said: "*Thatcher's legacy for these people is closed pits, drug addiction, and unemployment.*"

## NEWHAILES

Newhailes is a 17th-century (neo-Palladian) villa. Built by James Smith (c. 1645–1731), who pioneered the Palladian style in Scotland, having had come across Palladio's villa designs when studying in Rome. Smith fathered 18 children by his first wife and another 14 children by his second wife. The house was significantly added to in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century by the Dalrymple family, who were influential figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. Newhailes' enormous library was the jewel of the Scottish enlightenment. In the 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century there was a lot of political intrigue in Edinburgh following the two unions with England and the two Jacobite "uprisings". The Dalrymple family, being lawyers, were usually on the right side of events. Servants scurried along a tunnel, which still exists - this extraordinary passage was buried under earth banks and designed to make the servants invisible to the eyes of the family. The house, located on a raised beach, is set in an important 18th century designed landscape with woodland walks, open parkland, remains of water-gardens and built features including a shell grotto and classical summerhouse.

## PORTOBELLO



Fig 3. The 99-flake

An old Edinburgh village. By the 18th century it had become a haunt of seamen and smugglers. It is said that in 1742 a cottage was built on what is now the High Street (close to the main junction with Brighton Place) by a seaman, who had served under Admiral Edward Vernon during the 1739 capture of Porto Bello, Panama, meaning literally "beautiful port or harbour". By the century end Portobello was developing in two ways. First in 1770, a Mr. Jameson discovered a valuable bed of clay near the burn, and built a brick and tile works, and later established an important earthenware pottery industry. The population grew so that Portobello became a thriving village. Secondly Portobello developed into a fashionable bathing resort with bathing machines (1795), new salt-water baths, and later a large open air heated swimming pool (where the actor Sean Connery once worked as a life guard) were opened. The Esplanade was created in 1876.

## Trivia:

- The classic ice-cream cornet with a flake pushed in it, the "99", is widely thought to have originated at Arcari's Ice Cream parlour at 99, Portobello High Street (our route passes its door); when the Italian owner in the mid-1920s broke a Flake in half and stuck it in an ice-cream. A Facebook group is now calling for a giant statue of a 99 ice cream cone to be erected in celebration.
- Hugh Miller stonemason turned geologist, pioneering researcher into fossil fish, religious reformer, founder of the Free Church, lived in a house on Tower Street. [Behind the white door at 76-82 Portobello High St., on our route] His villa, Shrub Mount, was built between 1770 and 1780. Now much altered, it partly survives. The Tower, erected about 1785 also remains, built not as a house as such, but as a summer house at the bottom of the garden. Miller committing suicide in 1856 - a single shot in the chest. The revolver, rusted from lying overnight in Miller's bath, was taken to the gunsmith who had sold it to discover how many bullets had been fired. The gun was handed over to the foreman, Thomas Leslie, with the spoken words "Mind, it is loaded". Leslie, who had worked with guns for 25 years, examined the rusty safety-catch. He held the gun up to his eye and lifted the hammer to count the bullets. At that instant the pistol went off, blowing his brains out. Leslie, was buried in Grange Cemetery on the same day as Miller.
- The tiny cottage at 3 Bridge Street (also on our route), was the birthplace of music hall entertainer Sir Harry Lauder, born 1870, son of a skilled potter. He became (in the 1910s) one of the most popular and highest-paid entertainers in the world. He wrote the poignant song "*Keep Right on to the End of the Road*" in the wake of his son's death (a captain killed in WWI action, 1916). Perhaps best known for his long-standing hit "*I Love a Lassie*" also "*Roamin' in the Gloamin'*", and "*A Wee Deoch-an-Doris*" - essentially "A drink at the door" i.e. a final drink taken before parting. Described by Sir Winston Churchill as "*Scotland's greatest ever ambassador*". Saying, "...by his inspiring songs and valiant life, rendered measureless service to the Scottish race and to the British Empire."

## SEAFIELD

Seafield Cemetery and Crematorium laid out in 1887. Located at its eastern end, the B-listed crematorium is built in the Art Deco style, with a pseudo-classical portico. The chapel represents a distinct break with the traditional style of church architecture and has been described as "subdued cinema style".

## LEITH

Leith, despite its proximity to Edinburgh has always been a distinct place. Established in the 14<sup>th</sup> C. Up until the late 16th century, Leith comprised two separate settlements on either side of the river. South Leith was the larger and controlled by the lairds of Restalrig, It was based on trade and had many merchants' houses and warehouses. This was where ships offloaded their cargoes at The Shore. North Leith was effectively a mere fishing village consisting of one street, now Sandport Street and Quayside Lane. Leith was the principal port and commercial centre of Scotland until the 1700s when Glasgow took over that role, with the growing trade to the Americas rather than to the Continent. Leith was officially merged with Edinburgh city in 1920 even though its inhabitants voted five to one against the move in a referendum. The docks at Leith underwent severe decline in the post-Second World War period, with the area gaining a reputation for roughness and prostitution. Our route passes Constitution St. Old Leith Town Hall, a neo-classical job of 1827. Opposite it, at 92 Constitution St, is the grandest of the late C18 houses of Leith, with its giant Corinthianesque pilasters topped with urns. Also of note, at this corner, is St John's Church with its Tudor front and upper octagonal tower. A particularly old house, of exceptional architectural quality, built around 1610 and tucked away down Water's Close is the five storey Lamb's House. This was once one of the grandest town houses in Leith. This Scots-Hanseatic style house has gables galore and a steep pitched roof. It was both residence (middle storey) and ware-houses (above & below). In the 1650s Scotland was ruled by

Oliver Cromwell’s London-based government. Leith was occupied by a Cromwellian army commanded by General Monck. He built a large pentagonal construction with walls faced with hewn stone. It had five bastions, with barracks and stone building for magazines and stores and also houses for the governor and officers. It is hard for us today to realise the full size. The stone arch (our route passes) in Dock Street is all that remains to remind us of the Citadel. This East gate has a vaulted segment arch with hoodmoulds (a dripstone, moulded projection from a wall over an opening to throw off the rainwater). Its parapet is a conjectural restoration by the City Architect! We also pass North Leith Railway station. (This terminus of the former Leith Citadel passenger Station is immediately adjacent to Tizo’s). The line opened in 1846 and closed to passenger traffic in 1947.

## TRINITY

Trinity is a leafy district of northern Edinburgh (sometimes referred to as Leith’s Grange). The area was principally developed in the early 19th century, as a mansion house district. Victoria Park traces its history through a number of confusing name changes. It was originally known as Bonnington Park and was part of an estate that included Bonnington Park House (built 1789). To the east ‘the Dudleys’, of the 1880s and 90s, had houses remarkably advanced for their time. They boasted of having a “complete and effective system of sanitation”, and had hot and cold water throughout with internal bathrooms. The houses incorporated many advanced fittings, including heated towel rails. Victoria Park came to be dominated by the presence the railways, but in 1983 Edinburgh District Council embarked on an ambitious environmental improvement programme. The railway line that bisected the park was removed and landscaped. Our route makes use of many of these old lines (Fig. 3) especially the first railway to Granton Harbour, The Edinburgh Leith & Newhaven Railway which opened on 31 August 1842. The line was originally horse-drawn, and ran from Scotland Street, in the New Town to Trinity Crescent, near the Chain Pier. The line was soon extended (1846) from Trinity over a bridge (Trinity Bridge) and along the shore to Granton Harbour. Train ferries (which conveyed goods wagons) and passenger ferry boats crossed the Firth of Forth from Granton to Burntisland. This was the world’s first train ferry. The service commenced on 3 February 1850. Thomas Bouch designed the ferry slip (link-span). From 1850 to 1890 this line was part of the main East Coast railway to Perth, Dundee and Aberdeen. Most of the passengers who died in the Tay Bridge disaster (28 December 1879), had travelled by this route a few hours previously. Goods trains ran until 1986 following which the line was lifted and the embankment beside Lower Granton Road removed in 1991-1992.

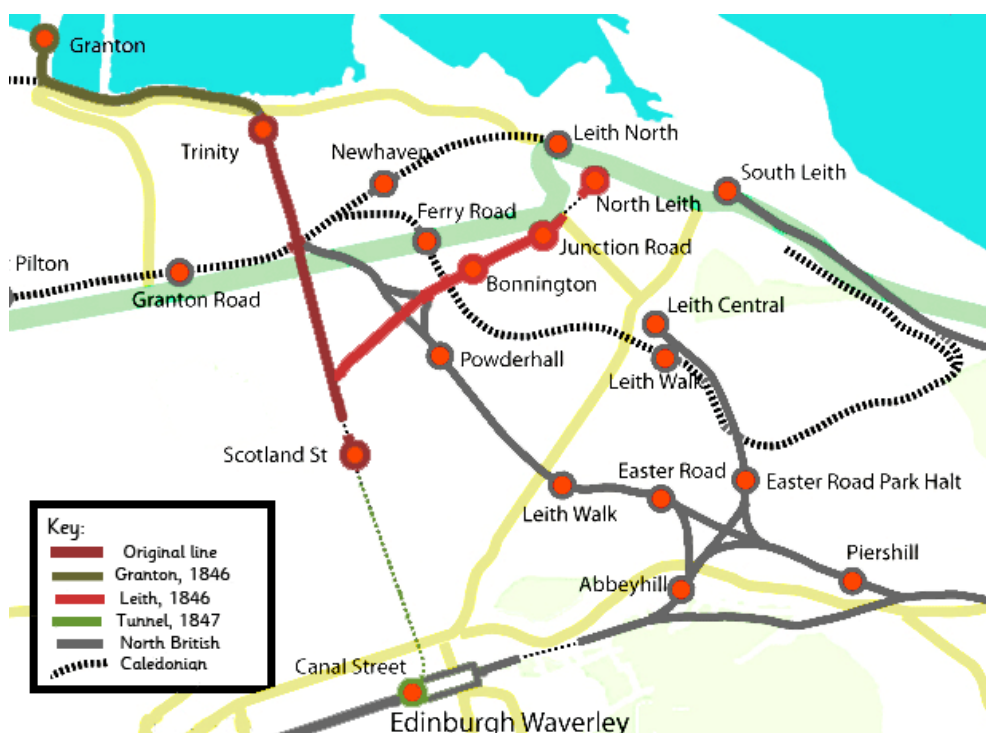


Fig 4. Old railways

## GRANTON

Unlike many places that are now part of Edinburgh, there was no long-standing village or settlement in the Granton area. Caroline Park House was first built in the late sixteenth century (about 1585). No roads existed at the time and it occupied quite an isolated location beside the Firth of Forth. [The 2nd Duke of Buccleuch named the house and estate after his daughter]. Later the eastern part of the area, at Trinity, gradually developed into a residential area in the early nineteenth century when large detached houses were built on the higher ground. On the waterfront, a chain pier was built in 1821. This was a time when steamships were becoming more common, and it was easier for them to use quite a lightly built pier – sailing ships generally were pulled into their moorings by capstans turned by a large number of men, which needed a substantial stone pier. Steamers provided services from the Chain Pier to various ports in Fife, and to places like Stirling, but also to Aberdeen and London. Until the 1840s, when long distance railways were built, the only alternative way to get to Aberdeen or London would have been by stagecoach. The main change in the Granton area took place in the 1830s. The Fifth Duke of Buccleuch, who owned much of the land, constructed a major harbour that could be used at all states of the tide, unlike the existing harbour and docks at Leith. Along with Granton Harbour came houses, at first for construction workers and later for employees at the harbour. Some of these still exist. The buildings on Granton Square date from 1838. Also the two-storey brick houses on Lower Granton Road - No, it's not a lighthouse...It's the former Northern Lighthouse Board Depot. To the east, East Cottages and Wardie Square (both c1840) were built by the Duke. Until 1920, the boundary of Leith passed through Wardie Square, and can still be identified as different paving has been maintained in the two parts. Over the years Granton Harbour has seen a wide variety of cargo vessels, importing timber, esparto grass, petroleum and many other cargoes, and exporting coal (from the earliest days) and manufactured products such as electrical equipment. (A major industry in the Edinburgh area was printing and publishing, and this required paper. Esparto grass was used to produce good quality paper. It was imported from southern Spain, and later N. Africa. Esparto grass was still being brought into Granton, and taken onwards by rail, until at least 1970. A large gas works built in 1902, was Scotland's largest gas producer, but ceased production in 1987. Large quantities of coal were required, and were brought by rail. During the World War II, the Gas Works was a target for bombing, although it was not actually hit.



Fig 5. Granton Gas HQ

## **SILVERKNOWES**

Until the late 19th century an area of farmland. This area was built up over a long period, from the 1930s to the 1960s. The old Silverknowes farmhouse remains in the centre of the development. In the early 1930s Silverknowes was a contender with Gilmerton as a place to build the city's first airport. Then in 1934 Glasgow tenement builders McTaggart & Mickel purchased land to the west of the estate. The streets were laid out as a series of concentric semi-circles. Peculiarly, these semi-circles never actually meet. Much of the development was private housing. Silverknowes farmhouse was used by McTaggart & Mickel as their builder's yard. Silverknowes was a very desirable place to live and was named as the garden estate of Edinburgh. The homes proved very popular, and building work resumed after the Second World War with construction to the east. Right-to-buy legislation of the 1980s has resulted in much of the public housing being bought by the tenants. Before reaching the housing, our route passes Silverknowes Golf Club house (1964). It is of an elegant domestic design, brick, board marked concrete & timber roofs with the main rooms above (for the view).

## **BARNTON**

The overall character is of an affluent, leafy suburb. The old Barnton Estate incorporated the former lands of [Old] Barnton House (or Castle) and Cramond Regis. Following the combination of the two estates, a curving carriage drive, or avenue, was built, linking the two houses across the park. Our route follows the old carriage drive. Barnton Avenue West and Barnton Avenue East preserve its line. Development of both the eastern and western ends of Barnton Ave. began in the early years of the 20th century, with the construction of a number of large villas on either side of the avenue. Cramond Regis, or King's Cramond, is said to have been a royal hunting seat, in early 1300s belonged to Robert the Bruce. Cramond Regis passed through the hands of many families. Nothing now remains of Cramond Regis. The site of the house itself is under number 31 Barnton Ave. West. Barnton Castle is under numbers 38 and 40 East Barnton Ave. Sir Robert Barton who was master skipper of The Great Michael, King James IV's great battleship which was built at Newhaven in 1511, was one of the owners of Barnton House (replaced by New Barnton House, which then lasted until around 1920). Old entrance gates can still be seen on the corner of Whitehouse Rd. and Barnton Ave. West.

Trivia:

- There is a tale relating to how King James V (1512-42) was attacked while crossing Cramond Brig. A local farmer came to his rescue and was rewarded with land at Braehead. The King requested that the hands of every monarch to cross the bridge should be washed by Jock or his descendants. Jock's house still stands south of the bridge. Unfortunately this appears to be a story made up by Sir Walter Scott and the house itself could not possibly date to the time of James V. The cottage appears to be no earlier than 18th century.

## **CAMMO**

The Cammo Estate is a large public park. The house was built in 1693, and the surrounding parkland set out in 1710-26. Cammo's integral structure and layout is an excellent early example of 'The Landscape Movement'. It became the fashion among landowners at the time. The idea being that the grounds around a main residence should be designed in a natural-looking way instead of being regimented and formal. A superb collection of mature parkland trees, including a very large ash tree with 161cm girth, possibly the biggest and oldest tree in city, remain. The house was bequeathed to the National Trust for Scotland in 1975 but, in 1977, was torched twice by vandals. The house was considered unsafe and was reduced to its external ground floor walls. The Council now maintain the grounds and operates a ranger service. Cammo is thought to have been the inspiration for the "House of Shaws" in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel Kidnapped.



Cammo Tower is a 19th-century water tower for Cammo House. Other remains include the ruined stable block, a formal canal, a bridge, a landscaped hillock, and the lodge which now houses a small visitor centre.

## **NORTH & SOUTH GYLE**

South Gyle lies on the western edge of the city to the south and west of an extensive area of former marshland once known as the Gogarloch, which lay on the edge of Corstorphine. Most of the buildings in the Gyle are of recent origin (post the 1980s), with the exception of some farm workers' cottages and an interesting, early 1970s council estate abutting South Gyle railway station, at S. Gyle Gdns. Our route passes through its four courtyards arranged on either side of a pedestrian spine. It remains neither overtly folksy, nor overly urban in character. Another interesting housing development, that our route visits, is S Gyle Park. This attractive Scottish neo-vernacular estate (1979-1997), with mini-tower houses, was developed in several stages by MacTaggart & Mickel. The Gyle Shopping Centre opened in 1993. The landscaped Edinburgh Park, is pleasant business park, designed by Richard Meier, an American abstract artist and architect, whose geometric designs make prominent use of the colour white. Some of his more iconic buildings include the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art and the Getty Centre in Los Angeles. Indeed South Gyle may be Britain's largest urban sculpture park. The huge slab of fossiliferous rock at the entrance to Gyle Centre comes from the Atlas Mountains in Morocco. Outside Gyle Shopping Centre you cross a river of stones created by the leading Scottish artist, Ian Hamilton Finlay. He translated trees into a row of classical columns and their bark into barques or boats. Twelve of the fifteen sculptures celebrate 20th century Scottish poets. The central feature of the Business Park is a series of three lochans which give the effect of a canal. They follow the route of the former Gogar Burn, which takes its name from the British word, cocra, meaning a crooked stream. Planting includes Brazilian Giant Rhubarb (with the largest leaves of any hardy plant in the UK). Also the Foam Plant which look like handfuls of soapsuds; and the Ostrich Plumed Fern.



Fig. 6 Walk end. Canal at Wester Hailes

## **THE CALDERS**

The area was built on relatively early (1956) compared to the rest of Wester Hailes with the construction of 537 prefab houses, which creating a mini-estate. However, in 1966 the prefabs were bulldozed to make way for higher density housing and the erection of 1,300 houses and flats. The end section of Calder Crescent is all that remain today from the prefab street layout.