

Self-Guided Walk – Edinburgh from Waverley station and back

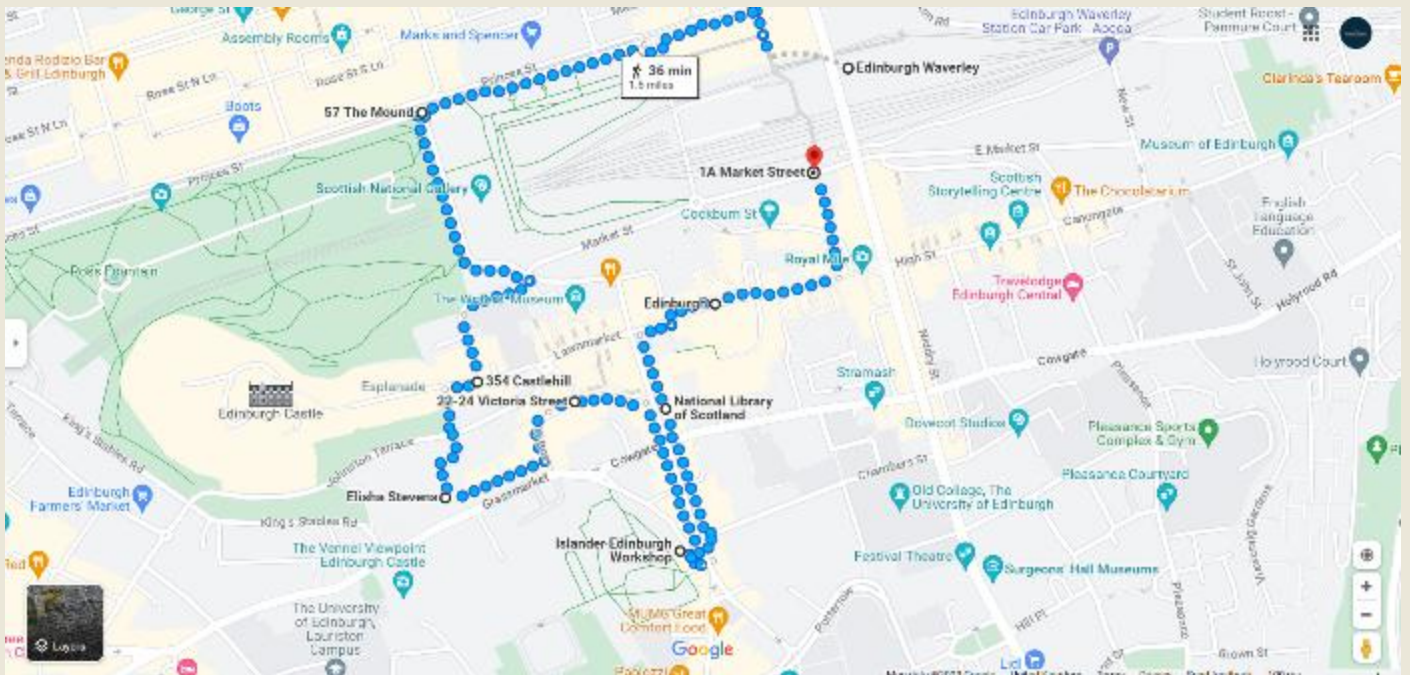
Edinburgh is an old and historic city and whilst there are lots of things to see, a lot of it is fairly central and in the general vicinity of the focal point – Edinburgh Castle. As a result, it can be a great city for walking as long as you don't mind steps! This walk isn't that long but has a lot of points of interest along it and also has a couple of step sections.

The walk starts and ends at different sides of Waverley station – so it's easy to find the start, and of course accessible by train. Many buses will also have Waverley station on their route and there is also a tram stop nearby.

In total the walk is 1.6 miles/ 2.5 kms and takes 36 minutes without stops. There are, of course, plenty of stops.

For any pictures, the named locations are blue circles, the walking routes red arrows. All other colour circles and arrows are to help but aren't part of the walk as such.

Here is a map of the entire route – all maps and images are from Google Maps as per their Geo Guidelines.



Step 1

Overview – Balmoral Hotel. Originally built as the North British (Railway Station) Hotel in 1902, the hotel is an Edinburgh landmark, and is known as a luxury hotel. It's built on the site of a chemist shop where chloroform was first used. It closed in 1988 for refurbishment and reappeared as The Balmoral in 1991. The name is gaelic for majestic dwelling. A huge clock can be seen in the tower, and it is set 3 minutes fast to help people get their trains on time. It is only set correctly on the 31st December each year.

There have been plenty of famous visitors over the years – Laurel and Hardy in 1932, Michael Palin in 1980 during a television programme about his rail journey, J.K. Rowling in 2007 (and where she completed the Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows book), and in 2010 Oprah filmed an hour-long show at the hotel, interviewing J.K. Rowling.

Directions – At Waverley station head for exit 1, Princes Street. There are steps or short escalators to take you up to street level. You will come out on Princes Street, the main thoroughfare through the centre of Edinburgh with numerous shops on one side, and the station and Princes Street Gardens on the other. At the top of the steps, just to your right, you will find the grand looking Balmoral Hotel and equally smart looking doorman should be there too.



Once you have finished here turn left along Princes Street, the second red arrow.

Step 2

Overview – Scott Monument. The Monument was built in memory of the famous author Sir Walter Scott. His works include *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy*, and the nearby station is named after his first novel, *Waverley*. This 61-metre spire is one of many monuments to the author and as well as it being an iconic sight in the middle of the city, you can even go up it.

Directions – From the Balmoral, walk back past the steps you used to exit the station – you are heading along Princes Street and you will see shops on the right-hand side of the street stretching along for some distance ahead. The red arrow below starts from the station exit.



You can see the top of the Monument in the above picture. As you go along Princes Street you will cross Waverley Bridge (it doesn't really look like a bridge) where you will have this view.

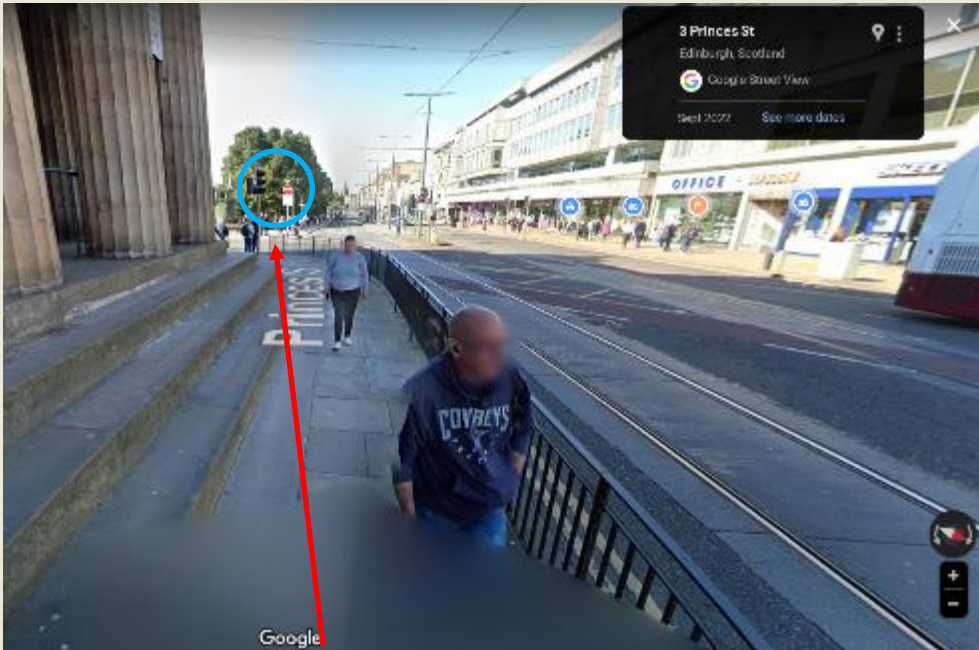


After the Monument just keep going along Princes Street.

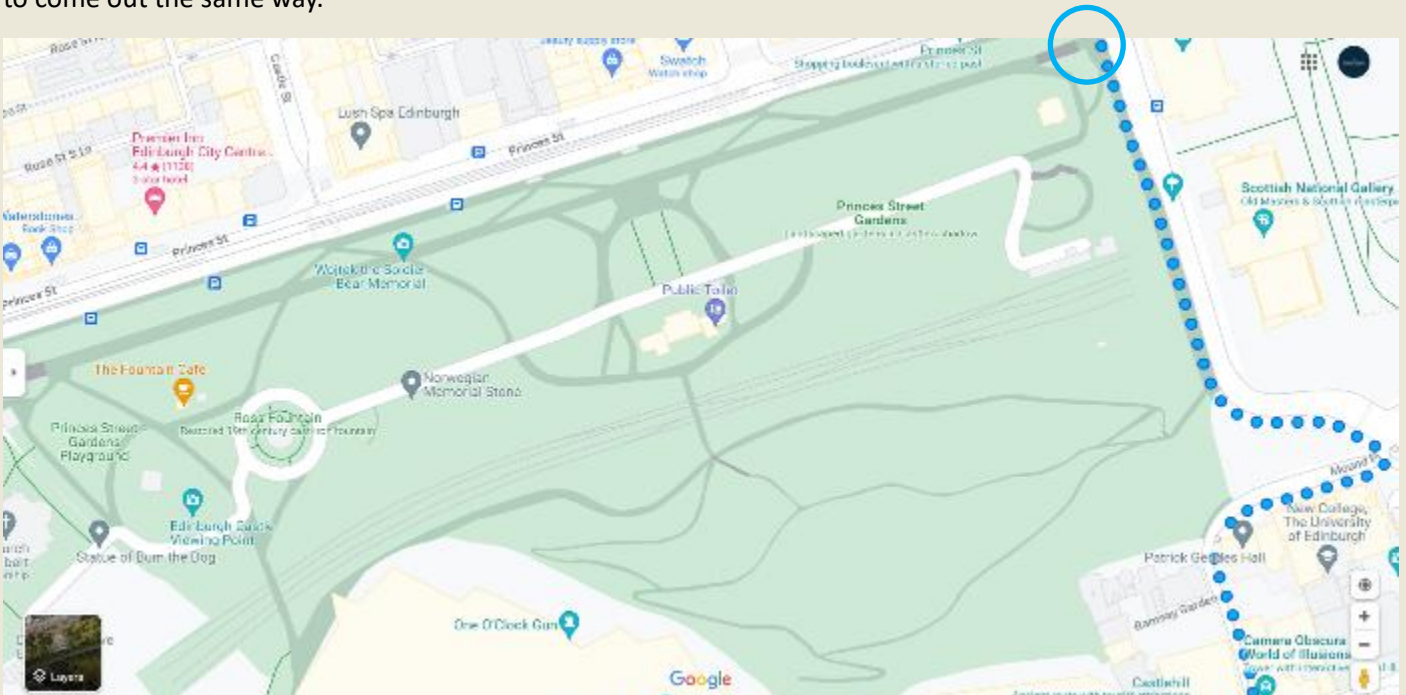
Step 3

Overview – Princes Street Gardens. This area was known as the Nor Loch and the boggy ground was used as a large rubbish tip. It had originally been created as part of the castle defences but would regularly flood with sewage from the Old Town above. Inevitably it became a dumping ground including of the occasional body. With the late eighteenth century development of the New Town it was drained in the 1820s and the gardens formed. They sit under the castle with formal planting, various statues, entertainment areas and a stunning fountain.

Directions – From the Scott Monument you need to continue along Princes Street. The next road on the left is the one you need to take and is called The Mound. But before you do so Princes Street Gardens will be directly ahead of you. Do note the columns on the left – we'll come back here in the next step.



The above (and below) blue circle is the north-east corner of the gardens – if you decide to go into them, it's easiest to come out the same way.

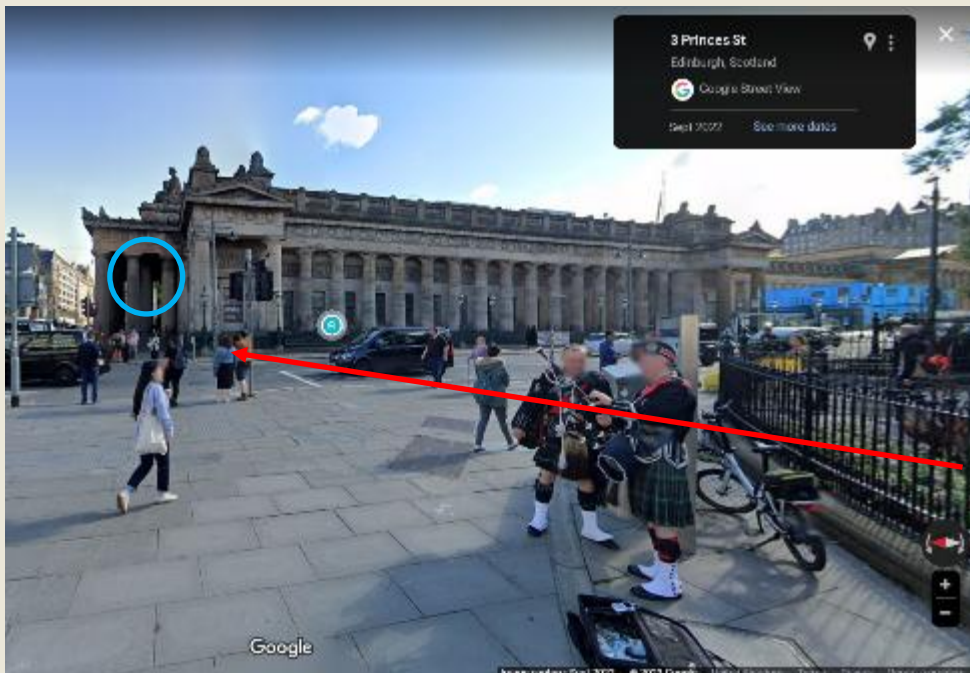


If you have gone into the gardens, come back to the north-east corner of them.

Step 4

Overview – Royal Scottish Academy and Scottish National Gallery. The Royal Scottish Academy was founded in 1826, remains independently funded and aims to support visual arts, in particular promoting contemporary Scottish Art. The Scottish National Gallery was designed by Playfair (who also designed much of the New Town) and it opened in 1859. It has an international collection although there are a lot of Scottish pieces, and the collections dates from the Renaissance to the start of the twentieth century.

Directions – Just before you got to The Mound you passed the entrance of the Royal Scottish Academy. From the north-east corner of the gardens just cross The Mound and the entrance is almost on the corner of that road with Princes Street. Here's the view from there towards the entrance.



And when you have finished there just turn left up The Mound. You will find the Scottish National Gallery along there on the left, as follows. The first building is the end of the Royal Scottish Academy, so just walk past that.



When you have done you will be turning left to continue along The Mound.

Step 5

Overview – Castle Hill. This is the last section of road of the Royal Mile before you reach the official approach to the castle, the Castle Esplanade. Further down the hill it is called Lawnmarket. Off Castle Hill you will find the Scotch Whisky Experience and the Camera Obscura. The Experience offers tours, tutoring, a shop, restaurant and bar. The Camera is almost two hundred years old and offers a illusions, lights, colours and a virtual tour of the rooftops of Edinburgh.

Directions – From the last gallery on the Mound you will have turned left. The road will curve to the left and then come to a junction where you need to turn right onto Mound Place in front of the building you can see above, the Assembly Hall.



Mound Place will then turn left and become Ramsay Lane, narrowing as it does so and going uphill. Just keep going straight as shown below.



At the end of the red arrow above you will have reached Castle Hill.

When you arrive at the top of Ramsay Lane turn right (towards the Castle Esplanade) and this will be your view.



The red circle is the Scotch Whisky Experience.

The green circle is Camera Obscura.

The orange circle is the castle.

As already shown, you will have turned right on arriving at Castle Hill.

Step 6

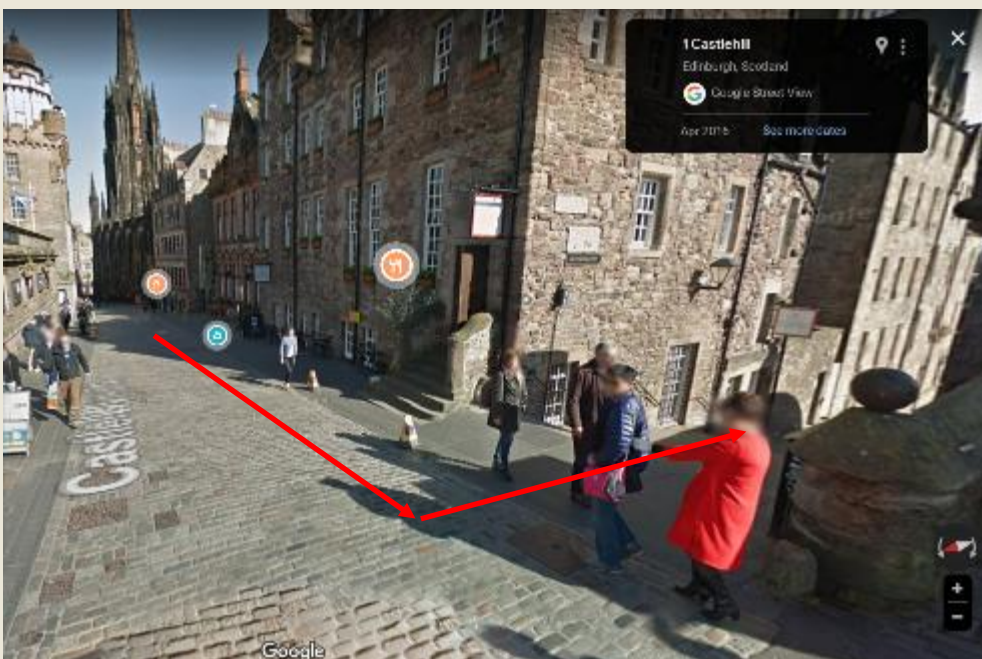
Overview – Grassmarket. This is a large and fairly open former market square. It actually sits in a hollow. It is mentioned as early as 1363 and from at least 1477 was an area used for the selling of cattle and horses, the name thought to come from an area at the end that was used for the animals to graze.

From about 1800 it began to be populated by increasing numbers of immigrants, mostly from Ireland, and by the 1840s was a squalid and overpopulated area with, typically, twelve people to a double room, unscrupulous landlords looking people in at night. Despite efforts to improve the area it remained associated with the poor and homeless until the 1980s. It has been improved over the years since but is still a busy area, and there are various pubs, restaurants and hotels in the area.

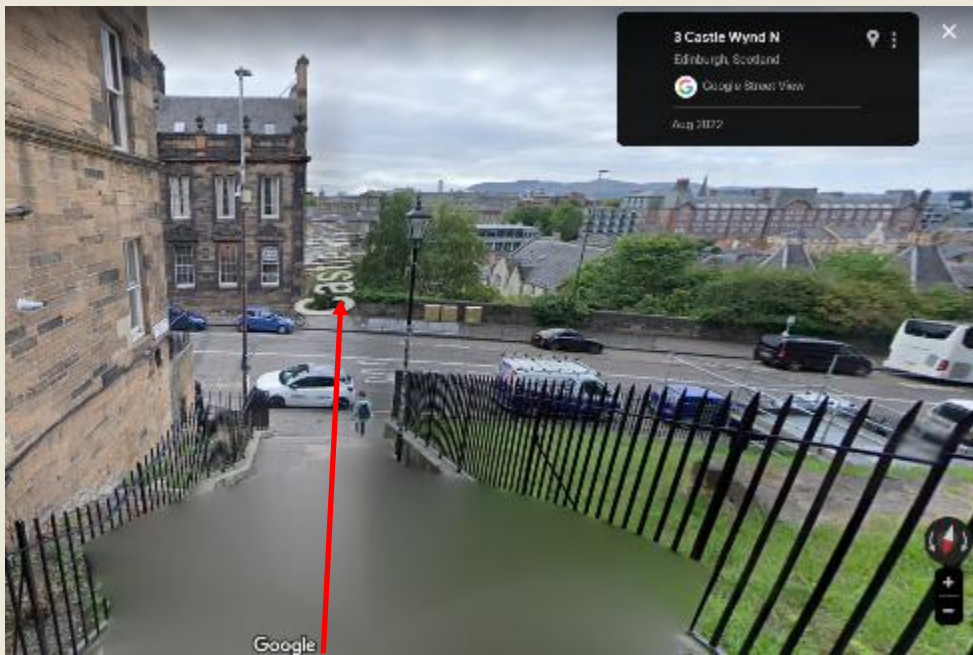
At the eastern end you will find the Covenanters' Memorial, marking where over 100 Covenanters were hung in the late seventeenth century, members of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland that were at odds with the Crown.

Directions – From Castle Hill you will continue up the hill towards the Castle. Just as you reach the start of the Castle Esplanade you need to take a left turn onto Castle Wynd. Steps go down.

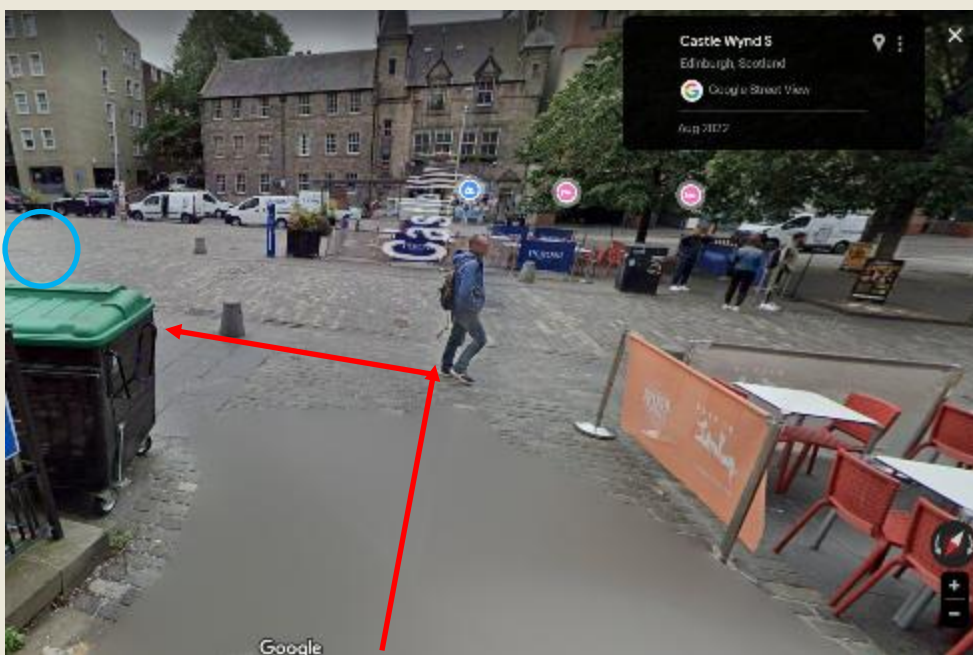
As an aside, opposite the entrance to Castle Wynd you will find the Witches Well – a memorial for all burnt in Edinburgh after being accused of witchcraft. It's attached to the tartan mill shop and is often planted with flowers.



Castle Wynd will go down a few sets of steps with landings in between and then reach a road, Johnston Terrace. Cross that as shown below and continue along, and down, the next part of Castle Wynd.



This next leg of Castle Wynd will go down a little more then turn right then left. Keep going and it will go down one more time before reaching Grassmarket on its north side towards the western end. You will turn left to enter Grassmarket itself.



The second red arrow above is turning east and that is the direction the route will take from here.

Step 7

Overview – Victoria Street. To many this street is the heart and soul of Edinburgh's Old Town. It's climbing curve is full of colourful buildings, a mix of shops, bars and restaurants. And they aren't just at street level either, with a higher level balcony on the left as you climb up the cobbles.

It was built in the early 1830s to give a more sympathetic connection to the new George IV Bridge than the narrow and steep West Bow, and as part of the regeneration of the area. And if you have an interest in Harry Potter you will see why it is considered one of the inspirations for Diagon Alley.

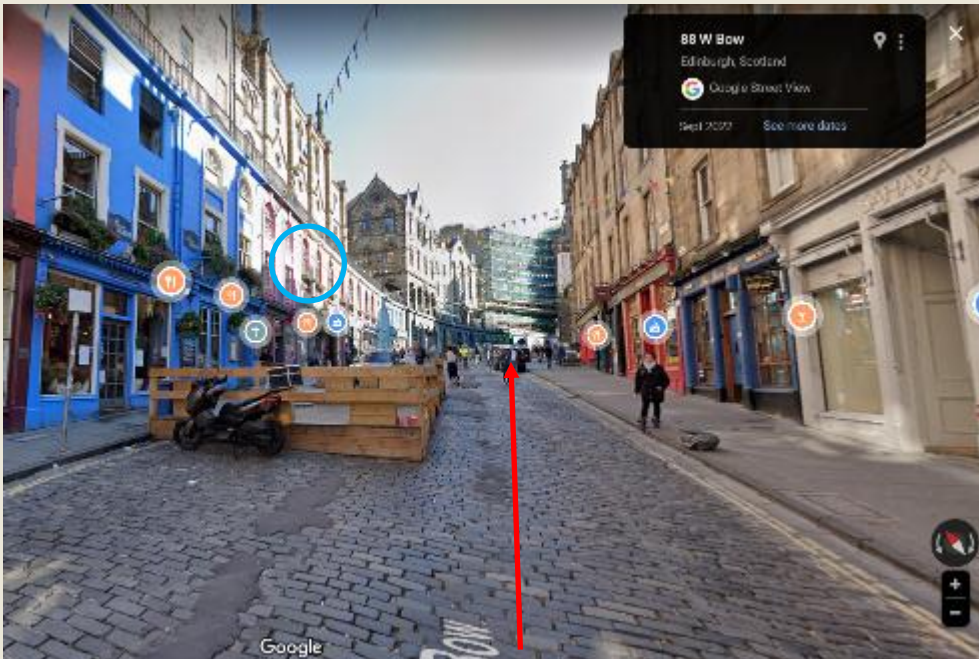
Directions – At the eastern end of Grassmarket you will take a left that goes up hill (West Bow) and then curves to the right – Victoria Street. The red circle shows you the Covenanter Memorial mentioned earlier.



And here is the view into West Bow. Note the water fountain (red circle) in the middle of the road.



Once you get to the end of the third red arrow above Victoria Street will climb ahead of you. Just keep going.



The route will continue all the way to the end of Victoria Street.

Step 8

Overview – Greyfriars. The name comes from a group of Franciscans invited to the area by King James I in 1447. They settled here a couple of years later but were forced to flee during the Reformation in 1560 after the church was ransacked by a mob. Their friary was dismantled and Mary Queen of Scots gave the land over as a burial ground. A new church was built, and completed by 1619.

Since then the church has had a varied history – it was a place of confrontation in the build up to the Bishop's Wars, was used as a barracks for Cromwell's cavalry in the 1650s and it was from here that General Monck announced his support for the Reformation. In the early eighteenth century it was used as a gunpowder store that exploded in 1718, destroying the tower and in 1845 suffered a terrible fire.

The Kirkyard has a number of notable Edinburgh residents interred in its grounds. And if Harry Potter is of interest you will find Thomas Riddell, Robert Potter, William McGonagle, Elizabeth Moodie and Margaret Louisa Scrymgeour Wedderburn, all names used in part by J.K. Rowling.

Greyfriars Bobby, the statue on the street outside, commemorates a dog that slept on its masters grave until its own death 14 years later.

Directions – At the end of Victoria Street turn right onto George IV Bridge.



You will go over Cowgate and then over Merchant Street. Your view as you reach the next junction at this level will be as follows.



At the end of the red arrow above you will find the statue of Greyfriars Bobby and need to turn right. There will be a lane ahead that heads into Greyfriars Kirk and you need to head in there – it's just to the left of the Greyfriars Bobby pub.

Here's the view looking towards the Kirk. That's marked by the blue circle and Greyfriars Bonny is the red circle.



Once you have finished at Greyfriars Kirk just come back out the way you came.

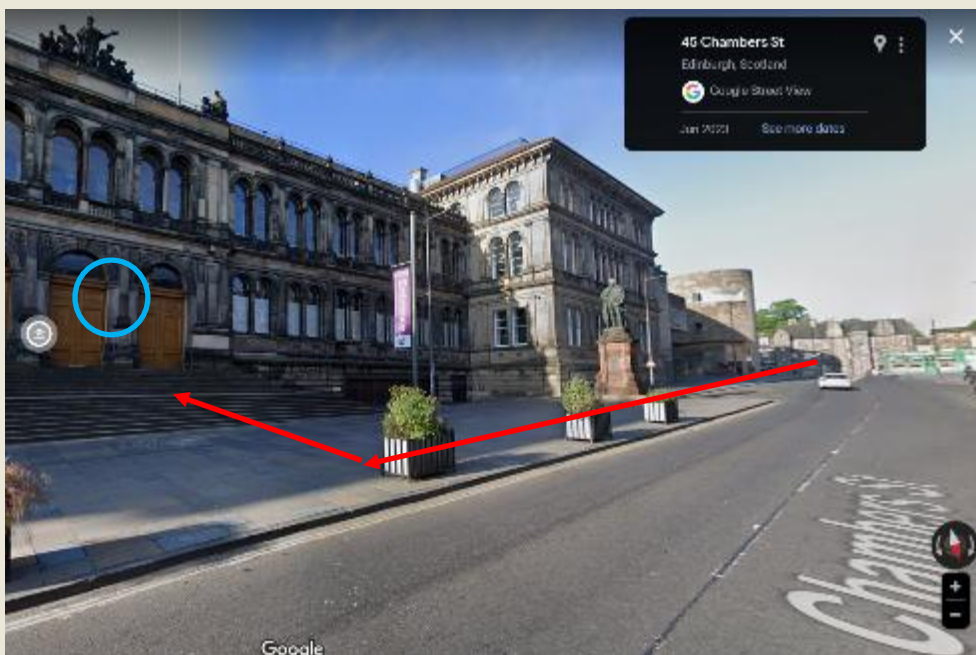
Step 9

Overview – National Museum of Scotland. The museum was formed in 2006 when two former museums merged. The Museum of Scotland's collections of Scottish antiquities, culture and history were joined to the Royal Scottish Museum's collections of science, technology and natural history. They still have their own identify, the former in a new building, the latter in its original home that dates to 1861. Items within range from Dolly the Sheep to Ancient Egyptian finds to one of Elton John's outfits to the Scottish Maiden, the country's version of a guillotine.

Directions – You passed the end of the museum just as you turned for Greyfriars Kirk. As you come back out the end of it is directly ahead (these are the newer buildings).



The above red arrows show the way to the main entrance. From Greyfriars first cross George IV Bridge then turn left before turning right into Chambers Street. You will find the entrance just along on the right, after a statue of William Henry Playfair.



Once done head back to George IV Bridge.

Step 10

Overview – National Library of Scotland. A Scottish library dates back to 1689 but the building here was completed in 1956. The collection has grown over the years leading to an extra buildings being opened on Causewayside in 1989 and 1995. It is one of only six libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland that is a legal deposit library, meaning it logs a copy of every book in the United Kingdom. You can access the reading rooms to access the primary collection. Within there are some notable works such as a Gutenberg Bible, a first folio Shakespeare, the Glenriddell manuscripts of Burns, Darwin's covering letter that went with *Origin of the Species* and the last letter written by Mary Queen of Scots.

Directions – From the museum turn left onto Chambers Street and head back to George IV Bridge. There, turn right.



You will go back over the same two roads as you did earlier and the library is on the right straight after you cross Cowgate.

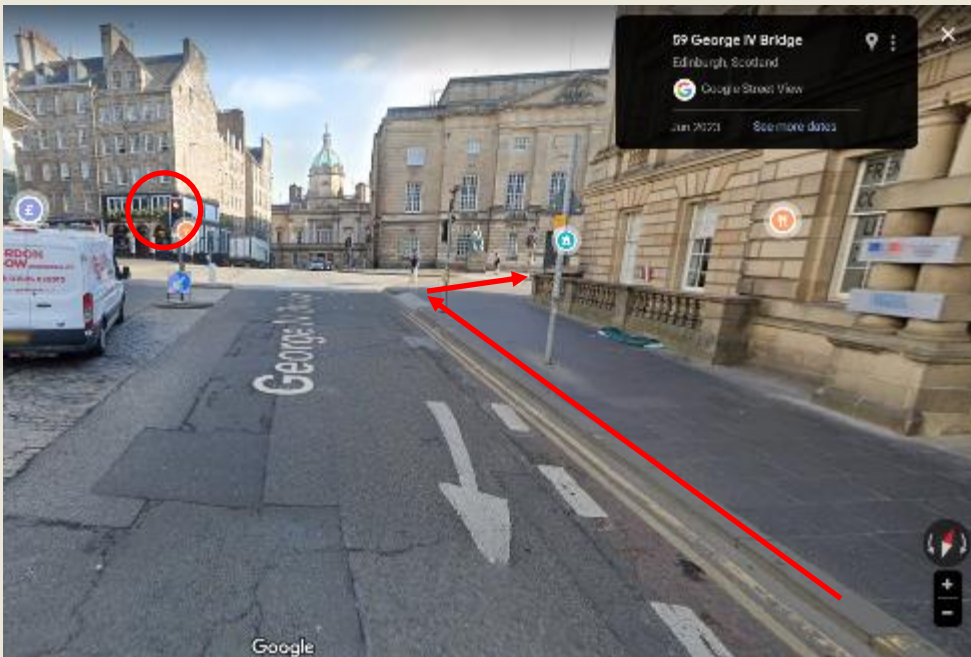


Once you have finished turn right onto George IV Bridge.

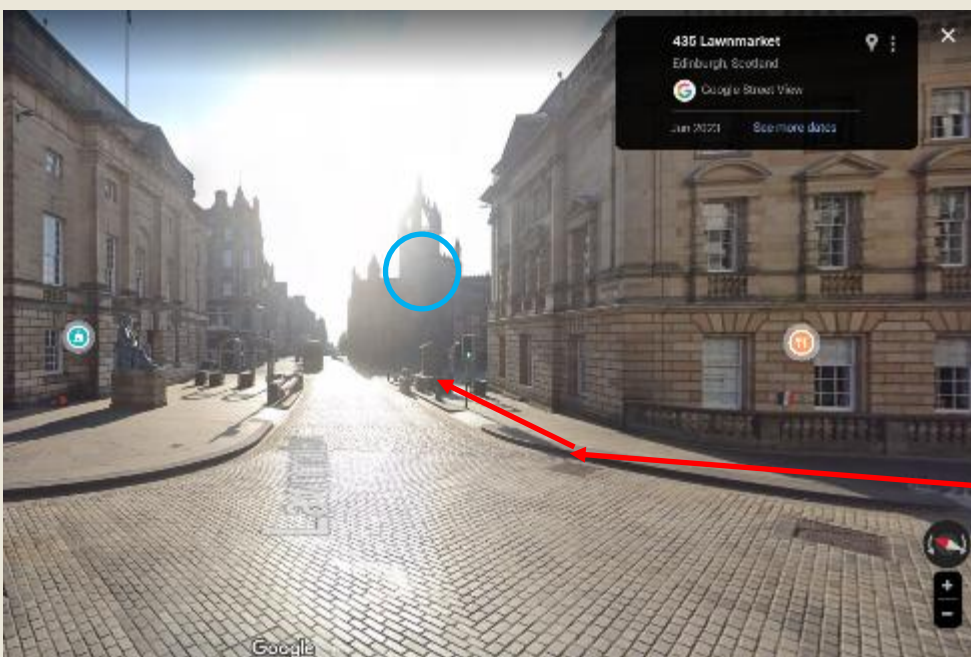
Step 11

Overview – St. Giles’ Cathedral. The building was begun in the fourteenth century and extended until the early sixteenth, on the site of a church that probably dated from the twelfth century. It was then subject to various alterations after the last two hundred or so years, including the addition of the Thistle Chapel. It has played a part through Scottish history and one of its previous ministers was John Knox, who led the Reformation in Scotland and founded the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. In the sixteenth century it was partitioned so that church services could continue alongside secular work – including the hosting of the Scottish Parliament and even serving as a prison. It has played two important roles in modern times, as the location for the laying at rest of Queen Elizabeth II and then where King Charles III received the Scottish Honours.

Directions – After the library carry on along George IV Bridge. You will come to a junction and here need to turn right onto High Street, part of the Royal Mile. On the opposite corner is Deacon Brodie’s Tavern (red circle), named after a cabinet maker of the eighteenth century who moonlighted as a housebreaker who had a gambling problem. Also, if you looked left at the junction, you would see the top of the castle in the distance.



As you make that turn you will immediately see St. Giles’ Cathedral ahead on the right.

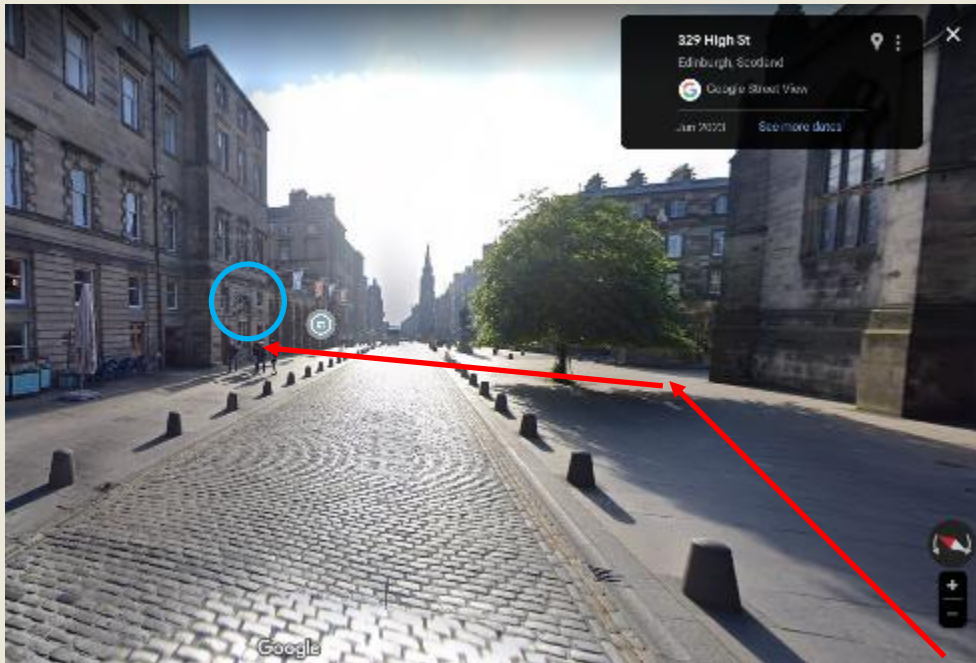


Once finished at the Cathedral turn right to continue along High Street.

Step 12

Overview – Mary King’s Close. Edinburgh of old was a maze of narrow streets with tall buildings, with living conditions generally unhealthy. In this area many streets were demolished but some were also built over when the Royal Exchange was built in the eighteenth century. This was one that was built over. It was “rediscovered” years later and can be visited. It’s had a reputation for hauntings since the seventeenth century.

Directions – When you get to the end of the Cathedral you will find Mary King’s Close on the other side of the road.



Just before you cross at the rear of the Cathedral, do also note the Mercat Cross, that marked the original marketplace of Edinburgh. And once done just turn left from Mary King’s Close to continue along High Street.

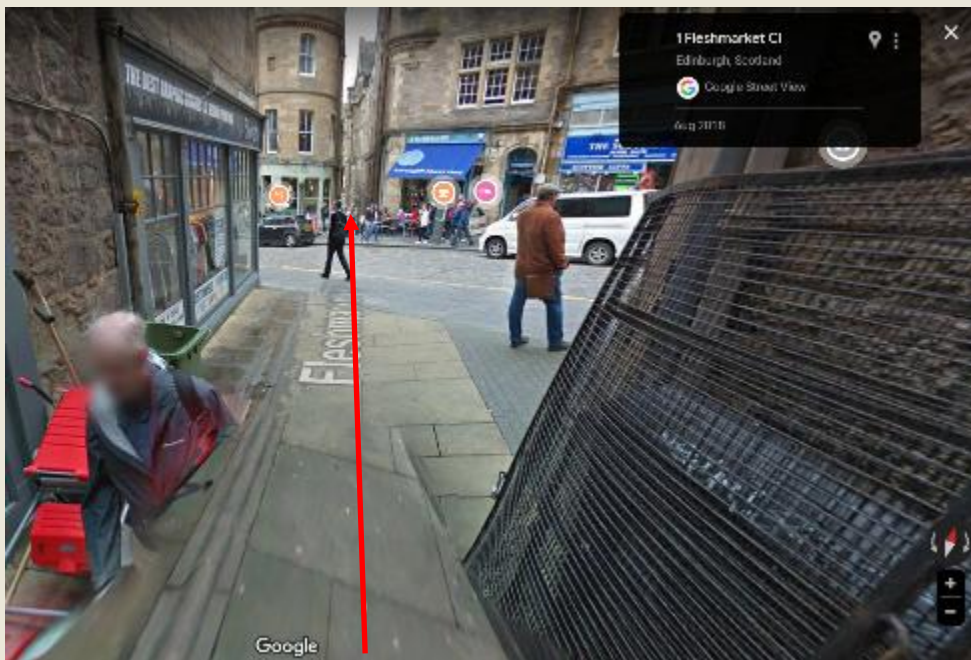
Step 13

Overview – Fleshmarket Close. All along the Royal Mile you will see narrow passages, called closes. These were the former narrow streets that people lived on – such as the previously mentioned Mary King’s Close. Today many of them are either thoroughfares or lead to courtyards. This one is a thoroughfare and is also the name of a famous crime novel by Ian Rankin.

Directions – As you head down the Royal Mile (this section being High Street) you will pass the various closes. Fleshmarket Close is on immediate left of The Albanach pub, just before Cockburn Street, that is on the other side of the pub.

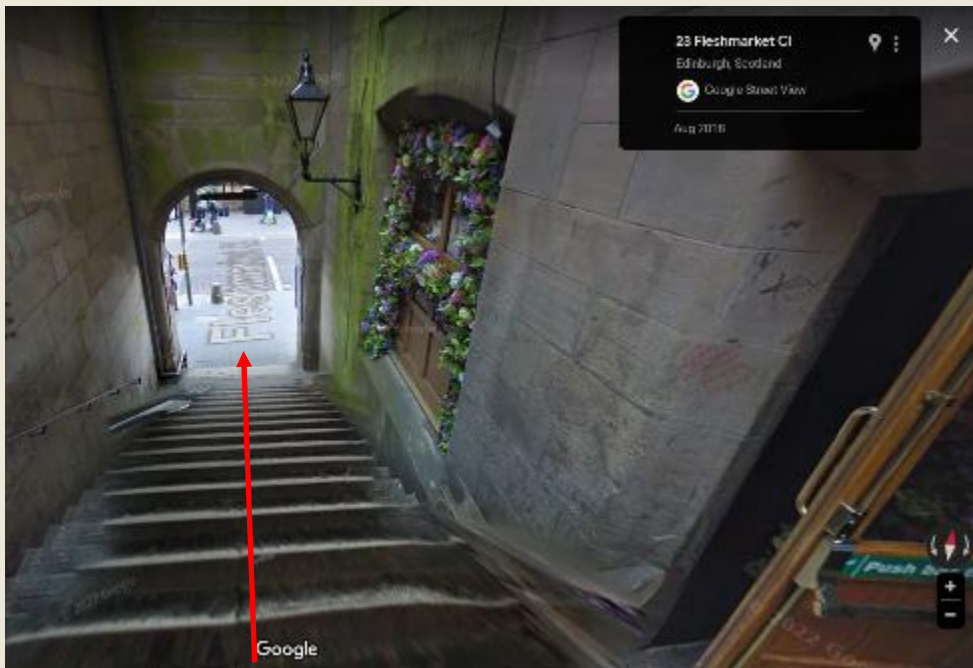


As you head along Fleshmarket Close it will open where it meets the previously mentioned Cockburn Street. You need to cross that street and then enter the second leg of Fleshmarket Close at the end of the red arrow below.



The start of the second section sits between Laila’s and Southern Cross Café. This second section goes down some steps and really gives a feel for the old streets and housing of this part of Edinburgh.

At the end of Fleshmarket Close you will come out onto Market Street.



And on arrival at Market Street you will be opposite the entrance to Waverley station & remember that you are now on the opposite side of the station to the one where the route began.



That's the end of the route – if you used a bus or tram to get to Waverley you can walk through the station to get to the other side.

Here are some great links – any of these that are entry only should be exactly the same price as booking direct but have the real advantage of being cancellable until just before the visit (normally 24 hours but do check the listing.) We earn a small affiliate fee if you book via one of our links, helping us create more of our montages – click a picture or scan the QR code.

Edinburgh Castle – entry and guided tour



Mary King's Close – entry and guided tour



You'll find many more links on our Edinburgh main page.