

Aboon the Kirk

Interesting places in Liberton



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Foreword

In 2020, the year of Covid 19, when so much was not happening, including 'Doors Open', the Liberton Association decided to highlight some of the parts of Liberton within easy walking distance of the Kirk.

In the centre of this booklet is an outline map of the area where the numbered locations match the page describing each.

Anyone wishing to know more about any location should contact the Liberton Association by email and your questions will be directed to the relevant author.

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Liberton



The area of Greater Liberton was at one time considered to extend from Dalkeith to Musselburgh and across to the lands of Morton while today it is limited mainly to those places using the name of Liberton -

- Over Liberton - where Liberton Tower stands
- Nether Liberton - centred on the Inch
- Liberton Dams - at the foot of Liberton Brae
- Kirkton of Liberton - Liberton Kirk is and was central to the area recognised as Liberton.

There are many speculations about the origins of the name 'Liberton'. The most widely known is that it was 'leper town', although there is no record of lepers in the area at any time and the name existed before there were lepers in Scotland. Liberton was first recorded as a surname in the 11th century and as a place from 1128. Harris (1996) identifies the name to be from the Anglican *bere* - *barley*, *tun* - farm and *blid* being a slope *and* therefore meaning *the barley farm on the slope*. The spelling of the name changed over time from Libertune, Libertoun to Liberton .

Liberton became a part of the City of Edinburgh in 1920 and with the growth of housebuilding around it, its boundaries have become blurred.

1 Liberton Kirk



The first church on or near the present site was possibly a Celtic chapel as two Celtic monuments from the 8th and 11th centuries were found(1). In 1128, King David 1st gave land and entitlements to the Abbey of Holyrood and jurisdiction of the parish church of St. Cuthberts which had two chapels, one at Corstorphine and one at Liberton(2). The presence of “Our Lady’s Well’ near the church site is a probable reason for the chapel building. The monks of Newbattle Abbey travelling to Edinburgh, stopped at Liberton Chapel.

The chapel was central to a large area although with a small population and remained so after the reformation around 1560 when, undoubtedly without internal ornamentation, it became a part of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Internally the building, with a capacity of 1000, had areas owned by the landowners of the area with graves under the seating areas - these remain today but are not marked. Some ministers were also buried in the Kirk near the tower.

Although locally it is believed that a fire in 1814 destroyed the church structure there is no evidence of this in any of their church session minutes from 1792 to 1812. There is however an inspection report of 1812 (Schwarz 2021) due to the need for a larger church - marquees were erected for overflow! Ferenbach in his 1975 book mentions a fire but does not support the statement.

A larger stone building was built in approximately the same space in 1830. The partly wooden steeple was replaced with a stone one. The pulpit in the old and the new building stood to the side and not in the Gable centre, marking it as different from the Catholic format.



The old Kirkyard contains numerous interesting gravestones. Lt Thornton of Nivelle Cottage (walk 9) is buried against the south wall.

2. The Anderson Halls



At a congregational meeting in 1886, it was decided to erect a church hall in the vicinity of the church '*for congregational and general purposes*' and a hall committee was formed. The ladies of the Kirk held a bazaar and raised a significant £321. The minister, Rev. Gray, then applied to the Trustees of the Miss Anderson of Moredun Endowment for a grant and was awarded £600. In recognition of this contribution, the Building was named 'The Anderson Hall', a title still used today.

Miss Christian Anderson of Moredun was the last in her line. Her father, also a philanthropist, had bought the estate of Moredun and on his death, it passed to his son and two daughters none of whom had children. She died in 1886 and the estate was sold in 1888. Miss Anderson had allocated monies in her lifetime to build and support schools in the Gilmerton area, including the Gilmerton Female Industrial School, and allocated money in her will to continue their support. She left £10,000 in her will for other 'charitable purposes'.

3. Liberton Inn & School



The school and schoolhouse were located in the building adjacent to the church which was to become the Liberton Inn in later years. The old school and schoolmaster's house which adjoined the churchyard (Liberton Inn) were the supposed residence of Reuben Butler who was the sweetheart of Jeanie Deans, the heroine in Sir Walter Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*. It is also said that some of Oliver Cromwell's soldiers lived in it for a time and in the early 19th Century cockfights were held here with the bodies of the feathered warriors who were killed, becoming the privilege of the schoolmaster. This schoolhouse was sold by the School Board to Mr John Cochrane in 1889, a new schoolhouse having been recently built in the garden connected with the former building.

The Liberton Inn itself was in operation from the late 19th Century through the 20th Century, but closed in March 2016 following a drugs raid the year before. It was latterly a three-room pub with some remnants of 1930's fittings evident. The lounge to the rear was named the Reuben Butler lounge and could also be accessed from Kirkgate, being only open in the evenings and at weekends. After being closed for some time, the building has now been refurbished and converted into 4 private flats.

4. St Hilda's; 81 Kirk Brae

An abridged version of its history written by Peter Schwarz 2013



St Hilda's, as it is known today, was built for William Whyte a book and music seller, in 1837 and was then modestly known as 'Kirkbrae Cottage'. The name St Hilda's was adopted in 1901. Whyte was a lifelong bachelor and his 100-page will shows that he was thoughtful and generous - and a shrewd businessman.

In 1857 the house was bought by a stationer, George Murray, who died in 1867. Next, it was occupied and extended by Dr David Brodie, a medical graduate of St Andrews, and his wife. They added a third storey at the North end and added the front rooms, which are separated from the rest by a former outside wall.

Brodie became the first Physician superintendent of the new Institution for Juvenile Imbeciles at Larbet in 1863, having previously been running the Edinburgh Idiot Asylum in Gayfield Square as a profit-making concern. He set the house up as an 'institution for juvenile imbeciles of the upper classes' and renamed it 'Columbia Lodge'.

The house was next bought by Catherine Jockel who first appears in Glasgow in the 1841 census as the wife of a sausage maker (both were immigrants from Germany). Mrs Jockel ran a successful dress and embroidery shop in George Street. She renamed the house 'Kirkbrae House'.

Mrs Jockel had a daughter, Louisa Stolz, who, with her daughter Rosa, shared the house after she was widowed. Mrs Jockel died in 1899. Rosa went to George Watson's Ladies College and graduated from Edinburgh in 1898 with a third class honours degree in classics. She and her mother started St. Hilda's school in 1901 supported by her own enthusiasm and the goodwill of some eminent folk. The school motto was '*Gentil Herte Kytheth Gentillesse*'. They built the rear wing and staircase as accommodation for the pupils and gradually acquired Springwood Park and other adjacent buildings. When the school moved during Hitler's war, the various buildings were used by the Forces, but the name remained.

The school's 1940 evacuation to Ballikinrain Castle became permanent. The building was split into flats as it remains now. Some of the room divisions are rather quaint, with breeze block walls resting on floor boards.

The house as it was in 2021.



5 Kirk Brae



The building is situated at the corner of Kirk Brae and Mount Vernon Road. It is often referred to as the 'Smithy' but as the attached map shows, it did not serve that function. The local Smithy was where Margiotta's shop now stands on Lasswade Road.



The building is still of interest as a traditional late 17th, early 18th century Cottage - a symmetrical single-storey 3-bay cottage with deep set openings, steeply pitched roof and thackstones. The walls consist of random rubble with a set sandstone base course. It has typical 8 pane lying pane glazing in

timber sash and case windows. Ashler coped skews, coped ridge stacks with thackstones, and graded grey slates.

6. New Village School/Nursery

Mount Vernon Road



The new village school is the building still seen today on Mount Vernon Road and was built in 1873, with a second storey added in 1898. It was a primary school until it closed in July 1965, due to a falling roll, but is now used as a Nursery School by the City of Edinburgh Council, having places for up to 60 children from the age of 3 to school age.

The present day Liberton Primary School is located on Gilmerton Road,. This was built in 1954 and this school is a two-storey building set within extensive park grounds

7. Mount Vernon Cemetery and Chapel



Mount Vernon Cemetery was founded by the Archdiocese of St Andrews & Edinburgh in 1895. The land on which it was founded was known as Mount Vernon - why it was so named is unclear although the 'Mount Vernon' in both Glasgow (1742) and Washington DC (1741) were named after Admiral Edward Vernon RN (1684 -1757) who also is credited with the name 'Grog' for the rum issued to the crew when at sea.

Since its inception, almost 38,000 people have been laid to rest within it. It is still the city's only Catholic cemetery. There are 38 Commonwealth burials of the 1914-1918 war and 57 of the 1939-1945 war here. Those whose graves are not marked by headstones are named on a Screen Wall memorial. In addition, the Commission maintains 2 non-war graves and 2 Belgian, 1 Italian, and 30 Polish war graves in this site.

There is a small chapel within the grounds which is used for special services in November during 'The Feast of All Souls'. This is an occasion when Catholics pray with 'particular intensity' for the Holy Souls in Purgatory.

8. Mount Alvernia Convent **107 Lasswade Road**



The land for the convent was purchased in 1896 by a group of nuns belonging to the closed order of Poor Clares. The building when complete belonged to them.

The nuns had limited contact with the locals, as some of their produce, eggs especially, could be purchased by ringing the bell at the large gate on Lasswade Road. The convent had a phone from 1910.

In 1938 5 nuns were expelled from the convent and although they took their case to the court in Edinburgh, the reason for their expulsion was not given. They lost the case and were evicted.

In 1939 the Roman Catholic Church attempted to change the use of the building and to move the bodies of the nuns buried there but they too lost their case. In 1994 they tried again to enable the site to be sold for a housing development but the families of the 24 nuns buried there

successfully opposed them and an Edinburgh sheriff refused that application.

The convent closed in 1992 and the remaining nuns moved to Humble in East Lothian. The building, which was listed, was vandalised and damaged by fire while the cemetery was overgrown when it was bought in 1994 for conversion to homes.

When planning permission was sought the proposed houses were described as being of a *'simple manner to allow the listed building, the chapel, to remain the dominant feature of the site'*.

The cemetery was maintained and a stone wall with a locked gate was erected around it.

10. The First Liberton Hospital

Hospitals for 'Incurables' were becoming very common in Britain in the late 1800s and Edinburgh created its own. In 1875 the first such hospital for 22 Incurables was built at Salisbury Place. This was built and extended by donation and as the largest of £10,000 was from the estate of a Mr J W Longmore, his name was given to the building which was opened in 1880 as the ***'Edinburgh Hospital for Incurables'***.

The hospital was not a 'home' for patients, including children, as they required medical and nursing care. The diagnoses covered - cancers, TB and 'affectations' of the heart and nervous system

'which having become incurable and are no longer suitable for general hospitals, but still urgently require care which only institutions such as ours can give'.

The Hospital was a great success and so there was demand for more beds. The high number of TB cases persuaded the Board that the building should be outside the city, in the country and Liberton was chosen. This was opposed by a local farmer who considered that it brought a risk of infecting his cattle!

The cost was also covered by donations, with the largest being from the estate of Miss Martha Brown. Miss Brown was the last of her family and was very generous with her wealth during and after her life. Her estate in Ayrshire was called Lanfine, and her 'Lanfine Trust' gave £21,000 to this new hospital - £6000 for construction; £14,000 as an endowment fund for the maintenance of patients with consumption and £1000 for an outdoor structure



Liberton Hospital 1906
Liberton Hospital showing outside facilities for T.B. patients

to give patients time outside. The Trust also in 1908 started giving bursaries at Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities which are ongoing.

With other donations the Liberton Hospital was completed in 1906. The land had been bought from Sir Robert Gilmour of the Inch who was incidentally, the vice chairman of Longmore Hospital Board. The total cost worked out at £500 per bed.



Hospital

Building 2023

Press reports of the opening by the Duke of Buccleugh described the building as grey stone with a red roof, but the stone contained iron oxide which turned pink as it rusted over time as shown in the photograph above.

The rules for admission stated that priority was given to the dying and that there was no admission to any 'mental defectives' or anyone with a mental disease or epilepsy. Admission also required a certificate of moral character from a relative or medical attendant along with a certificate of their condition, care needed and if they might be troublesome or unpleasant. Patients were required to pay 25/- a week if able. Non payers, if found to have possessions would have the costs recovered.

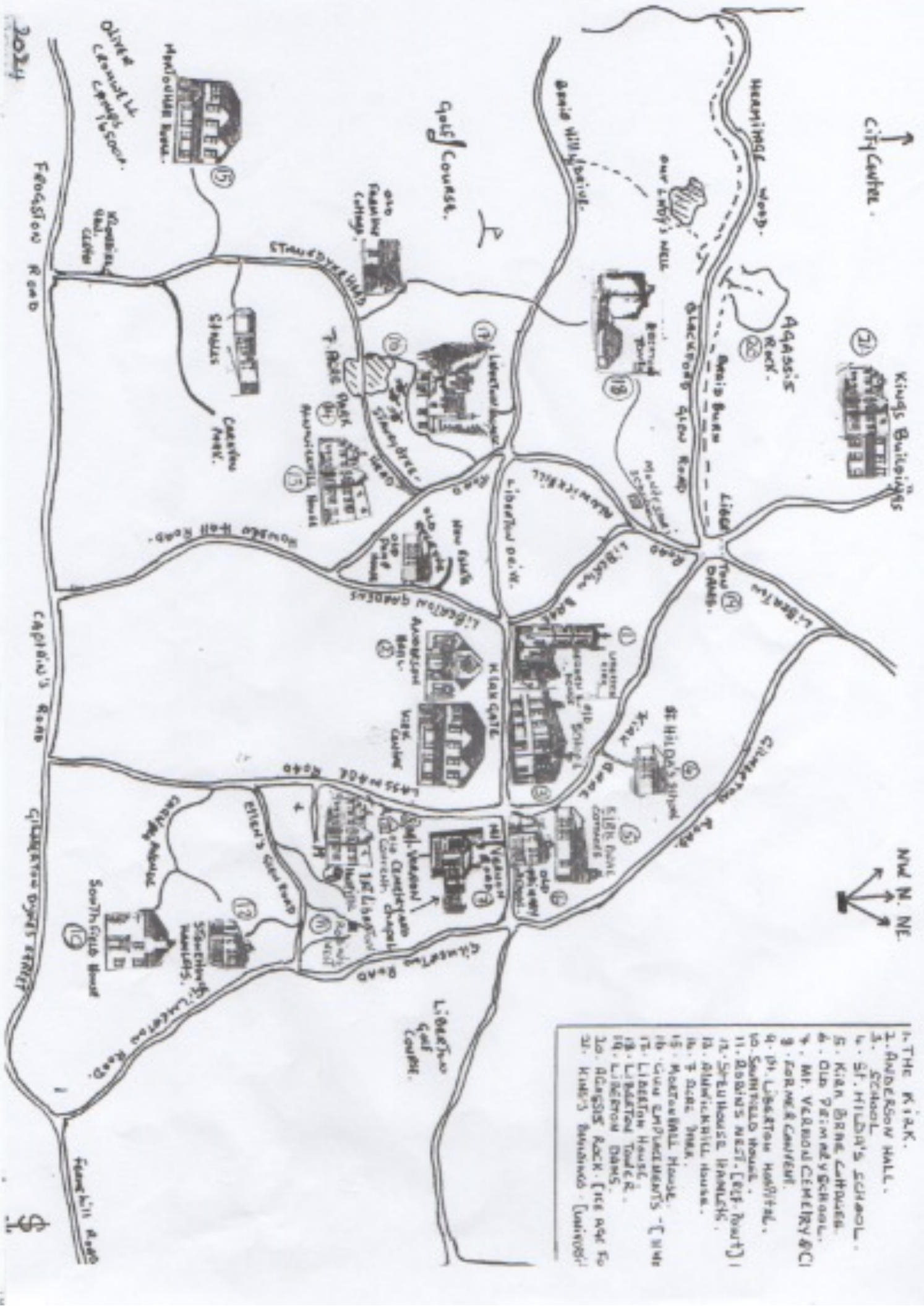
Although incurable and not expected to survive more than a few months many did because of the good food and care they were given - a few for more than 20 years. The RULES stated that '***In the event of the patient***

improving so much as to no longer require hospital treatment, or found in any other respect unfitted for further treatment in the hospital, such patients would be discharged by order of the Admitting Committee’.

The rules also allowed passes for outings or visits but if return was delayed discharge would be considered. Males and females were separated and there was no entry to wards of the opposite gender.

Demand was greater than capacity and in 1914 the adjacent Nivelles Cottage was purchased for £1432-14s-05d to increase the bed count, but as workmen were unavailable due to WW1 it became the Nurses’s Home. It has long since been demolished but is marked on the plan above along with the open areas for TB patients.

The main 1906 structure of the hospital is to be retained in the proposed building plans for the site.



1. THE KIRK.
2. ANDERSON HALL.
3. SCHOOL.
4. ST. HILDA'S SCHOOL.
5. KIRK BONE COTTAGE.
6. OLD PRIMITIVE SCHOOL.
7. MT. VERNON CEMETERY & C.
8. FORMER CEMETERY.
9. ST. LIBERTON HOSPITAL.
10. SOUTHFIELD HOUSE.
11. ROBINS NEST. (Left-Right).
12. SPURHOUSE BRANCH.
13. ALBERTHILL HOUSE.
14. T. DICK HOUSE.
15. MORTONHILL HOUSE.
16. CURE EMPLOYMENTS - (W.H.R.)
17. LIBERTON HOUSE.
18. LIBERTON TOWER.
19. LIBERTON DAMS.
20. AGASSIS ROCK. (See map for Kings Buildings).
21. KINGS BUILDINGS.

11. Southfield House History: Dr Morag A Bryce

Mansion, sanatorium, hospital, apartments. 1875 - 2020

The present-day Southfield House was designed by architect John Chesser as a mansion house for the Croall family in 1875. In 1902 it first became the Royal Victoria Hospital and then a sanatorium and farm colony for treating tuberculosis patients before antibiotics were available or the NHS was created. In the 1960's it was an NHS hospital caring for elderly patients and it was finally developed in 2000 into ten privately owned apartments.

Southfield before 1875

The baronial mansion that was rebuilt in 1875 for the Croall family was in fact the second Southfield House. Historical accounts indicate that there was a mansion house on the Southfield Estate from the late 17th Century. It was of a similar layout to the existing Southfield House and built on the same site. The gardens and estate were once much larger than they are today. A number of the ancient oak, lime and chestnut trees remain today giving shelter for birds and squirrels and shade to the gardens. The property today also includes the Glen area, with the Stenhouse burn running through it, bounded by the high stone wall running along Ellen's Glen Road. Local people and walkers will have noted the dramatic 'wall collapse' that happened early this year following heavy demolition work.

Owners of the first Southfield House included Patrick Miller of Dalswinton, Bruce of Kennet and Sir William Forbes of Scottish banking fame. The estate then was described as follows: *"It scarcely amounts to twenty acres. It is completely enclosed and laid out with great taste. The house is neat and rendered exceedingly commodious by the additions lately made. The garden, the plantations, and pleasure grounds, merit the utmost applause. This everyone must be sensible of who visits them. years. All the fine improvements here have been accomplished in a very few Southfield was a mere piece of outfield ground, belonging to the barony of Stainhouse."*

The earlier Southfield House was in the possession of the Croall family from 1849 when Mr. John Croall who ran a stagecoach company, purchased it from Bruce of Kennet.

Not much detail is known about the design of the house before 1875 but it had some very illustrious visitors. Sir William Forbes one of Southfield'.

earlier owners was head of the banking firm of Forbes, Hunter, and Company, now known as the Union Bank of Scotland.

“Sir William was a gentleman of the highest breeding, the head of the most cultivated and elegant society in the city, and a link between the old Scottish aristocratic families to which he belonged by birth. The rising commercial opulence with which he was connected by profession, as well as the literary circle with which he was intimate from his acquirements, brought him into contact with men immortal in English history - Dr Samuel Johnson, Edmund Burke, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dr Oliver Goldsmith, and many others. Dr Johnson, along with his biographer Boswell, are thought to have spent a night at Southfield when on a trip to the Highlands.”



The end of an era,

John Croall's son David, lived at Southfield House with his wife and five daughters from 1875 until 1902. The Croall family have a burial plot that can be seen in the older part of Liberton Kirk cemetery. Southfield's days of baronial grandeur, servants' quarters, billiard rooms and wine cellars were coming to an end at the turn of the century. Baronial mansions were becoming expensive to keep and required a great many staff. As the country approached the First World War, conscription led to further shortages of the domestic labour needed to run these large houses and many were turned into military hospitals and convalescent homes.

There are few details of how the ownership of the house passed from the Croall family to the Royal Victoria Hospital in the 1920's but Southfield House changed its drawing rooms and nurseries into the wards and nurses' quarters needed to become a sanatorium. The authors of this account live in the apartment that was once the nurseries, servants' quarters and nursery scullery of the Croall family.

Southfield Hospital and Sanatorium 1902 – circa 1960

In the pre-antibiotic era infectious diseases like tuberculosis were often death sentences. Living conditions and sanitation were poor and houses overcrowded. The NHS as we know it today did not exist before 1948 and pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) killed 50% of sufferers within five years. Long spells were spent in sanatoria, and patients were often exposed to the elements, winter and summer, as part of the treatments.

Southfield Sanatorium patients stayed for a minimum stay of six months. Patients were selected based on the likelihood of recovery, so that only patients who were likely to improve were allowed entry to the institution. Many of these were young children. In the days before the NHS, treatment at Southfield had to be paid for, at a rate of around £2 10/- a week (equivalent to around £168 today – and for at least six months – amounting to £4368!). Local authorities were obliged to provide sanatorium treatment, so patients from other parts of Scotland would be sent to Southfield for treatment. Other organisations could also pay - usually for their subscribers, for people who worked in certain professions, or for charitable cases.

In Edinburgh in the late 1880s physician Sir Robert Philip pioneered the Edinburgh Scheme, which took a three-strand approach to tackling tuberculosis through prevention, detection, and treatment. Isolate, track and trace for TB, was revolutionary at that time. From care home to private apartments.

The greater part of the surrounding landscape was sold and developed for housing from 1995 onwards, and the mansion house was converted to private flats in 2001. The developer retained most of the original features of this grand old house, vaulted central hall with stained glass windows, high ceilings, shutters, a cobbled courtyard and baronial fireplaces. As the house is a B-listed building, the owners at Southfield all work together to preserve the external building and gardens that constitute the amazing heritage of this house.

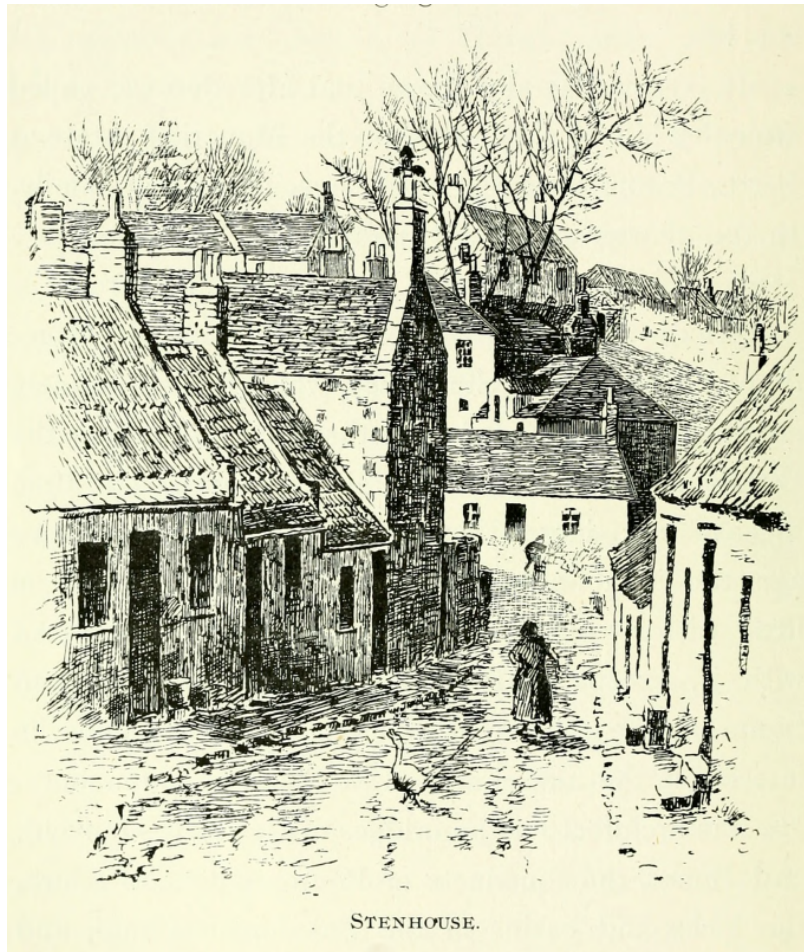
11. Ellen's Glen Road and The Robin's Nest

Ellen's Glen Road extends from Gilmerton Road to Lasswade road and was originally a part of Stenhouse Hamlet (detailed in walk 12).



Entering from Lasswade Road, Southfield House can be seen through the trees on the right. The first cottage on the road is 'Ellen's Glen Cottage' but this name is a recent addition. The next house (29 Ellen's Glen Road) is much older and was the original Robin's Nest Inn. In front of the building is a well with a metal canopy. Roses grow on it but they should be white as this is the required payment to the crown - if asked for.

12. Stenhouse Hamlet



Turning into Ellen's Glen Road from Lasswade Road, Ellen's Glen Loan is on the right side. It starts with a very steep hill and a canopy of trees; running on the right is the Stenhouse Burn joining the Burdiehouse Burn at the bottom.

This area was once Stenhouse hamlet with its name being changed to Ellen's Glen, in the 1966 because the council had named a large estate on the other side of town 'Stenhouse'. Ellen was the sister of Robert Alexander who died young and, as he owned much of the land, he applied her name to a house in the area. On one cottage he engraved 'Ellen's Glen' hence its use. He replaced the cottages (in the sketch above) with red bricked houses using the same bricks he had used to construct the local water works and adding his and his wife's initials to the front - Robert Alexander and Mary Smith.

Stenhouse probably derives from an early stone house in the area. The road running through it and the lanes at it's start and finish are the remnants of the Via Regis or King's Highway, which was first mentioned in 1283 as an ancient path used by the monks from Melrose and Newbattle Abbeys as their route to Edinburgh, stopping at Liberton Kirk. The road was also used by the Gilmerton carters taking coal, lime or sand into Edinburgh. Returning empty, the horses raced down the hill and one very large stone, a pall post, remains today which was to prevent the cart wheels from damaging the buildings.

Many of the houses have their own stories but suffice to say the one named 'Burnside' was originally the toll house at Mayfield Road on the site of Mayfield Church. The building was demolished and, stone by stone, brought to the Glen where it was rebuilt. It has since been extended.



The photograph below show the toll house with its twin roof on the left and the rebuilt version on the right.

Stenhouse Hamlet had a small population but within it had 5 witches. Today this area is a peaceful haven.

The Burdiehouse Glen Park is signed at the bridge and if followed leads to Lasswade road or continuing further to Burdiehouse.

13. Alnwickhill house



The original house at Alnwickhill ,was built in the late 1700s, and to be the first asylum for fee paying mentally ill in Scotland. Briefly, around 1840, it admitted paupers but by 1841 it was the home of George Boyd partner in Oliver and Boyd Printers.

Having passed through many owners in 1861 but in 1861 became 'A Reformatory for fallen Women' which means unmarried mothers - there being no such arrangement for unmarried fathers. The census of that year shows Agnes Nelson, a former missionary, was matron and that there were 22 others in the house. In the 1871 and 1891 census the house had the same matron, 6 staff and 30 'inmates'.

The building was replaced in 1891 by Robert Wilson as a 'Home for Prostitutes' , the title lowering the status of it's occupants further.

Today it is a dwelling House

14. Seven Acre Park

Seven Acre Park is sited on former farmland and is situated to the north of the Netherbank housing estate, between Mortonhall, Liberton and the Braid Hills and can be accessed either along Stanedykehead off Alnwickhill Road or from Netherbank View.

There are five main entrances to the park and it is bordered by the Netherbank housing estate to the south and east, farmland to the north and Mortonhall Caravan/Campsite to the west all of which gives it the feeling of being out in the country.

As the name suggests, the park is 7 acres (2.8 hectares in area) and is a pleasing open park area which provides space for games such as football as well as having an area with multi-gym exercise machinery, however the most popular area is probably the secure children's play area, catering for children from 3 to 14, which is always busy even when the weather is inclement. There are also many benches and picnic tables in the park.

The park provides an essential green space in the area and as well as being laid out with attractive trees and flower beds and hundreds of daffodils in Spring, it provides wonderful views of Arthur's Seat, Blackford Hill, Liberton Tower and over to Fife and is well-used by people of all ages.

The park was adopted by Edinburgh Council around 1999, and the amenity land (which constitutes the park) was gifted to the Alnwickhill Proprietor's Association in 2003/4. The park also boasts a signposted woodland walk which has many excellent wood carvings of woodland animals as well as explanatory signs concerning flora and fauna.



15. Mortonhall House



The Mortonhall estate adjacent to Frogston Road today has a garden centre, caravan and camping park and a restaurant but once extended over a vast area of farming lands incorporating farms at Blackford, Bowbridge, Buckstone, Frogston, Morton and Greenbank.

‘Morton’ is derived from the Anglian ‘mere tun’ as the farm on the bank of the mere (Harris 2002). Morton is recorded from 1182 and Mortonhall from 1404. The land was given to Sir Henry Sinclair by King Robert the Bruce in 1317 and passed to the Trotter family who acquired the estate in 1635.

The estate is said to have had a moated defensive centre which was replaced by the current building in 1796. Some accounts describe the building as ‘austere’ but it is of its time. Later additions blend in well. The house was divided into modern apartments and is private.

A recent archaeological dig in the caravan park found remains of an army camp from WW1 and WW2 near Mounthooly Loan. The first camp had been used by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and in the second war the 16th Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry. The researchers identified that postwar the buildings were used for displaced East Europeans. (Kirby et al 2013 Journal of Conflict archaeology)

16. Gun Emplacements

17. Liberton House



Liberton House is an A Listed fortified house and situated at the end of an avenue of elm trees off the south side of Liberton Drive.

Liberton House or Place as it was also known was the residence of the Littles of Upper Liberton. It is thought the house was built c.1605 and the Littles moved there from Liberton Tower when it was abandoned in 1610.

The house is L-shaped with a courtyard and has altered considerably over the years. The date existing on the lower portion of the house is 1675. On the south west corner there is a fine angle dial around the top of which is the motto "AS. THE. SVNE. RVNS. SO. DEATH. COMES." The same motto, 'As the sun runs so death comes', is found at Inch house (which passed to the Littles) and is on the sundial above and left of the front door. Above the dial, the corner is rounded and enclosed with a carved scroll containing the arms of Little and the initials "W L 1683" being William Little, (great grandson of William Little the Lord Provost) who inherited Liberton House in 1662. When William Little died childless in 1686, the estate passed to his nephew, William Rankine, who assumed the name of Little. This latest William Little married Helen, the daughter of Sir Alexander Gilmour, 1st Baronet, of Craigmillar.

The distinctive colour of the house comes from blood being mixed with lime in the mortar; the more blood, the darker the colour which was an indication of wealth.

William's great-great grandson would succeed to the Craigmillar property upon the death of Sir Alexander Gilmour, 3rd Baronet, in 1792, taking the name Little Gilmour of Liberton and Craigmillar. The Gilmours would own Liberton House right into the 20th century.

The house has tall ornamental iron gates at its entrance bearing the letters LH which were formerly painted in gold. The driveway goes past a bee wall for 5 hives on the east side and a 17th Century dovecot on the west side which is a rectangular building with a lean-to roof and crow stepped gables and contains more than 1,000 nesting places although it is said that despite active encouragement, birds will not nest here for some reason.

Perhaps this may have something to do with the fact that the house is supposed to be haunted. Apparently an apparition is said to have appeared on numerous occasions over the years in a variety of forms. Three of which are said to be firstly, Pierre a French nobleman who is supposed to whistle unexpectedly, especially near the dovecot; secondly, a female member of the Little family who was imprisoned in Edinburgh for assisting the Covenanters and thirdly, a Cavalier in costume and headgear of the 17th Century. Although no sightings have been reported in recent years, voices have been heard and electrical apparatus has malfunctioned without any obvious human intervention.

During the 20th Century the house was unoccupied for a number of years and suffered neglect. It was bought by the Margiotta family in the early 1980's who had plans to develop the house into a leisure and country club which was a very ambitious plan and was to incorporate a tinted glass pyramid but fortunately this venture did not take off. Latterly the house fell into disrepair and was vandalised, resulting in a fire in 1991 which caused extensive damage to the roof. However, it was then fully restored and refurbished by the Architect, Nicholas Groves Raines who has refurbished many similar houses such as Peffermill House, another tower house at Craigmillar Park and Lambs House in Leith in 2010 where he now lives. He lived in Liberton House for a time and operated his business from there after renovating it and its renaissance garden. It is now a private family home

18 Liberton Tower



Liberton Tower is a square tower house which provides a good example of a typical noble residence of its period. It is located in Over or Upper Liberton on the east side of the Braid Hills and commands outstanding views over Edinburgh.

The tower was probably built in the 15th Century but by whom and when is unknown. It is a 4-storey rectangular block, 35ft long, 25 ft. wide and 45ft high with a pitched roof of stone slabs surrounded by a parapet walk. It has a fine prospect overlooking Edinburgh and stands 590 ft. above sea level. The interior was divided into two by a semi-circular vault and each vaulted compartment was divided into two storeys. The first floor was used for storage. The entrance to the Tower is by a door on the east side, up a staircase, 16 feet from the ground and on the level of the hall. 2 cannon balls, deposits of charcoal and smashed pottery suggest that the tower was caught up in the fighting around Edinburgh in 1650 when Cromwell invaded Edinburgh as part of the Third English Civil War.

The tower was abandoned in 1610 and subsequently used for agricultural storage when the Littles moved to the more elegant Liberton House nearby. The tower fell into disrepair over the years being used as a farm store, byre and piggery right up until the 1990s, when its owners, the Liberton Trust, granted the Castles of Scotland Preservation Trust a lease of one hundred years. The tower was then repaired and restored by the architects Simpson & Brown in 1994 and made available for holiday lets although it is now empty and looking for a new owner.

19. Liberton Dams - Blackford Glen Road



The area known as Liberton Dams is shown on Adair's map of 1682 and is an ancient hamlet. The area does today contain a dam, but originally it had two mill lades, known in Scots as 'dams'. One powered mills in the hamlet, but eventually the two lades combined and powered the mill at Nether Liberton. Water from springs at Comiston was first used to supply Edinburgh in 1676. Between 1704 and 1720 the wooden pipes were replaced by iron ones. The hamlet also used a steam pump in 1788, with a workforce of twenty to pump water from the Braid burn into the water supply for the City of Edinburgh. This was overtaken by a major engineering effort to take water from Comiston to the city after the formation of the Edinburgh Water Company in 1819. The raised bank behind the houses on the immediate right when entering the road, is a very large water pipe. Some of the stone houses on the left on entering the road were built by George Good, whose workshops were at the bottom right of Gilmerton Road, known as Good's Corner.

20. Agassiz Rock

Blackford Hill Nature Reserve



Blackford glen Road is a popular and scenic route for dog walkers, joggers and gentle walkers heading into the Hermitage of Braid.

Louis Agassiz was a Swiss geologist who in 1840 identified the scratches on this rock as having been caused by glacial ice which had shaped the valley.

The hills of the area are the larval remains of long extinct volcanoes. The hardness of the volcanic rock made it ideal in road construction and the area was quarried from 1826 - 1853.

21. Our Lady's Well

‘Our Lady’s Well’ or as it was known in ancient times ‘The Lady’s Field and Well’ is situated in the lower part of the Tower field - just opposite the Agassi Rock area and the Braid Burn bridge which takes you into the Hermitage from Blackford Glen Road.

Thomas Whyte mentions ‘A Holy Well’ in his survey of 1792 - ‘as being on the nor west side by the rivulet, called the Braid Burn near which there’s a well which has the appellation of Our Lady or Virgin Mary’s Well - that it’s crystallised water was famous for it’s strong current, salubrity and lightness. It is probable that this Well dates from long before Liberton Parish was formed by St Cuthbert around the 11th or 12th century.

In an 1851 survey it was described as being situated in a hollow on the lower part of Liberton Tower Mains Farm near the Braid Burn and being dedicated to St. Mary.

Some 50 years ago the field area underwent drainage improvement and it is likely the Well area became covered - there is now an underground stream which flows into the Braid Burn near the Braid Burn bridge just to the right of a small settlement. This stream is documented as ‘flooding heavily in winter’. There is also a probability that a small church or washing facility structure could have been nearby - this has long gone.

22. The Kings Buildings Campus: Edinburgh University

Following the First World War, the UK government increased the funding for the education of more doctors, scientists and engineers, as shortages of these skills and the need to forge technological change had been made apparent during wartime. By comparison with Germany, the UK's funding for science was woefully inadequate.

Increasing specialisms in the sciences required smaller departments and had led to an increased demand for laboratory facilities for teaching and research. Science student numbers had dropped dramatically during the war, but surged to over one thousand by 1919, with returning and deferred students increasing the numbers applying.

Buildings and laboratories allocated to the sciences on the Central Campus around George Square, the Medical School at Teviot Place and Old College, were over capacity. The rapid expansion of science facilities in the Old College and surrounding premises had reached a critical point, relieved only temporarily by the removal of Mathematics to Chambers Street, and Agriculture and Forestry to George Square.

The Chemistry laboratories, located in floors above the Medical School at Teviot Place, had become hopelessly inadequate, and plans for a new Department of Chemistry in High School Yards had been abandoned at the outbreak of war in 1914. The Departments of Engineering, Natural Philosophy and Geology were also seriously short of teaching and research space in the centre of town, and new laboratory and experimental facilities were urgently required. (Engineering in particular had undergone rapid expansion, from 15 undergraduates in 1901 to 120 students in 1911.) The newly instituted Chair of Zoology in 1919 was also a trigger for expansion, requiring new accommodation.

Many possible plans were discussed, most involving keeping all departments in the centre of town, but all were short-term solutions. Principle Sir James Alfred Ewing was looking for a more permanent solution, and so he looked to the sparsely populated south of the city.



Early map of the Liberton West Mains Site, before construction of The King's Buildings campus

The new campus at Liberton West Mains Farm

The Royal Observatory on Blackford Hill was constructed eighteen years before the war, where undergraduate teaching was already taking place. The nearby West Mains Farm was an appealing prospect, with a low-cost open field with main road access, with plenty of land for future developments, in an unpolluted environment for scientific experiments. This seemed like an ideal for construction, but the two-mile journey from existing facilities was seen as a disadvantage.

The prospect of new, purpose-built teaching and research buildings won the argument. The University bought Liberton West Mains Farm in 1919, for the relocation and expansion of its science departments, firstly focused on Chemistry, Zoology and Geology. 90 acres of the 115-acre site were set aside for development, the remainder being leased to the Craigmillar Golf Club.

The Chemistry Building began construction in November 1919. The innovative ideas and drawings of the Head of the Chemistry department, James Walker, formed the basis of the building design, with teaching rooms interspersed with research laboratories. The Chemistry Building is now known as the Joseph Black Building. The original, 1-storey building had a saw-tooth roof with lighting, and large windows, which were

unusual architectural features at the time. Walker ensured that the building was mainly constructed from red brick – preferring to spend the money on internal features. One of Walker’s innovations, criticised at the time, but now recognised as forward-thinking, was to design the building to be constructed in phases, with future extensions in mind; his foresight was justified when the second floor was added in the early 1950s.



Aerial photo of King's Buildings in early 1921

The Royal opening and naming of the campus

Before the site was purchased, the University launched a major appeal for funding of this new campus, endorsed by King George V. The King was invited to lay the foundation stone for the Chemistry Building, still under construction in mid-1920, and as part of the ceremony the King gave his permission to use his name collectively for the new site. At 2pm, on the 6th of July 1920, The King's Buildings campus officially came into existence. It took another seven years before Chemistry was joined by any other science facility.

Further information about the KB Campus be found at:-

<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/200405889-joseph-black-building-university-of-edinburgh-kings-buildings-david-brewster-road-edinburgh-edinburgh#.X4RYCS9Q0Wo>

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/science-engineering/news-events/doors-open-day-kings-buildings>

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THE LIBERTON ASSOCIATION

***The Liberton Association aims to
protect and promote the interests of
the residents of the Liberton Area***

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