

# Portobello Architecture Heritage Trail

This guide will help you find out more about Portobello, Edinburgh's seaside resort. The trail is approximately 1.7 miles in length and should take you about 1 - 1½ hrs. to complete.

## Origins

Portobello takes its name from a cottage built around 1753 and lived in by one George Hamilton who tradition has it had been a sailor and had taken part in the capture of Puerto Bello in Panama in 1739, after which he named his house. However, the house was built by a farmer named Peter Scott for his shepherd and although a George Hamilton lived there in 1753, it is not known if he had ever been a sailor.

## A Regency Spa

In the early 19th Century, Portobello became a fashionable Regency Spa with many wealthy families building permanent homes or renting houses for the summer. The beach was developing as a bathing place for the wealthy and the discovery of mineral wells led to the layout of Portobello, between 1800–1830, as a fashionable watering place. During this period, many fine Georgian streets and crescents were built as people also realised that Portobello was an attractive place in which to live all year round.

## A Victorian Resort

In Victorian and Edwardian times, Portobello became a holiday destination for all classes of people, including day trippers from Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Promenade was completed in 1866 as well as a pier, built in 1870, demolished in 1917. Old postcards of Portobello show a crowded beach so packed with people that you can hardly see the sand. Portobello became a parliamentary burgh in 1833, with its own burgh council, but lost its independent status in 1896 when it became part of Edinburgh.

## An Outstanding Conservation Area

Today Portobello retains its character as a seaside resort. There are still amusement arcades on the Promenade as well as fine indoor baths and a sailing club. Behind the Promenade however lies the main attraction of Portobello, a wealth of elegant Georgian houses and streets. It is for this reason that the main part of Portobello has been designated as an outstanding conservation area.

## A Guided Tour of Portobello

As well as containing many fine buildings and interesting industrial sites, many famous people have lived in Portobello. The following route indicates places of architectural and/or historical interest.

 The walk starts outside the Town Hall in the centre of Portobello. 1



The design of the border is taken from the ironwork on the balcony of a house on the Promenade

#### 1 The Town Hall

Opened in 1914 to honour an obligation to local citizens following Portobello's amalgamation with Edinburgh. This is the third of Portobello's town halls, the first being the Baptist Church (site 19) and the second the Police Station, (site 2).



*On the opposite side, further west lies:*

#### 2 The Police Station

Completed in 1877 as the second town hall and designed by Robert Paterson, it is a jolly piece of Scottish Baronial architecture with pepper pot turrets.



*On the same side of the High Street, further west lies:*

#### 3 "Shrub Mount", home of Hugh Miller

Behind 76-80 Portobello High Street stands "Shrub Mount", home of Hugh Miller, the famous Victorian journalist and geologist who wrote "Testimony of the Rocks". On Christmas Eve, 1856, he shot himself in a room overlooking Portobello High Street.

*Cross the High Street, head west then turn left into:*

#### 4 Adelphi Place

Notice the former mission hall of 1863 on your right [Photo back panel]. Head up into the Adelphi development of single storey brick and stone artisan cottages, many of which were built in the 1860s by Thomas Tough for the workers in his pottery.

*Retrace your steps to the High Street. Cross over, then head west, turning right into Bridge Street. The cottage on the left is:*

#### 5 No 3 Bridge Street, Sir Harry Lauder's Cottage

This was originally two cottages, Nos. 3 and 5. No. 3 is traditionally reputed to be the birthplace of Sir Harry Lauder, the famous music hall entertainer. He was born in Portobello on August 4th 1870 and achieved worldwide fame with his portrayal of a mean, canny, daft Scot. He died in 1950.



*Walk down Bridge Street towards the sea. On your left you see:*

#### 6 The Kilns

Built on the site of the old harbour, are two kilns, 1906 and 1909, the last two surviving bottle kilns in Scotland, and previously part of Buchan's Pottery. Nearby stood Rathbone's, later Gray's Pottery. [Photo back panel]

*Walk east along the Promenade, past the amusement arcades and turn up Beach Lane where you see:*

#### 7 The Tower

An octagon, built in 1785 in stone and Portobello brick as a summerhouse or folly for "Shrub Mount". The walls contain medieval stone carvings and column capitals and 17th Century architectural fragments which are thought to have come from the Mercat Cross in Edinburgh, the University buildings in South Bridge Edinburgh and St. Andrew's Cathedral. The adjoining mansion was added in 1856.



*Head east along the Promenade. The next street is:*

#### 8 Bath Street

A mixture of building styles, distinguished Georgian villas, (Nos. 18-20), lively Victorian tenements, (Nos. 29-39), and a former Art Deco cinema, (1938).

*Walk back down Bath Street, and turn right into Straiton Place. The next street on the right is:*



Detail from the Coade Stone Pillars



A.J.D  
1877



**9 Regent Street**  
One of the most complete of Portobello's Georgian streets, laid out in 1815 by Lewis Wallace. Outstanding is Waverley Cottage, No. 48, c.1830.



*Further east, along Straiton Place, on the right, is:*

**10 Marlborough Street**

Contains several elegant Georgian villas. No. 24, Wellington Cottage, had a nautical light, now replaced, the original being used to guide ships on the Forth.

*Walk down to the Promenade again, passing:*

**11 The Prince of Wales Fountain, c. 1860**

This fountain was presented to the people of Portobello by a Mr. Paterson who had been Portobello's Town Clerk from 1836-1874. This part of the Promenade was named the Prince of Wales Terrace in 1860. [Photo back panel]

*Continue east along the Promenade. At the foot of Bellfield Street are:*

**12 The Public Baths**

Opened in 1901 and recently modernised. The provision of public baths was one of the stipulations of the 1896 Act of Amalgamation with Edinburgh.



*Continue up Bellfield Street. Half way up on the right is:*

**13 The Parish Church**

Built in 1809 by William Sibbald and since altered. The clock tower was added in 1839.



*On the opposite side is:*

**14 No. 37 Bellfield Street, home of John Lockhart**

Lockhart was the son-in-law and biographer of Sir Walter Scott, who frequently visited this house. It was for Lockhart's younger son that Scott wrote, "Tales of a Grandfather".

*Walk down Bellfield Street and east along the Promenade. The second street on the right is John Street, at the foot of which are:*

**15 The Coade Stone Pillars**

Forming the focal point of Portobello Community Garden, these 3 early 19th Century pillars used to stand elsewhere in Portobello. Restored and re-erected here in 2008, with the aid of a Heritage Lottery Grant, the two smaller pillars are identical to the chimneys of Dalmeny House, c.1814, near South Queensferry. The origin of the larger pillar is unknown. [Photo front cover]

11

6



20

4

19

19



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 Walk up John Street and stop at the foot of:

## 16 Abercorn Park

Two houses overlooking the park deserve mention. No. 5 John Street, (1840), displays external shutters and an elegant porch, while opposite, 13-17 Pittville Street, (1835), boasts a portico on a much grander scale. At the top of the park is a granite memorial to Dr. Hugh Dewar, (1866-1914), erected by his patients.



 Cross the top of the park and head west along the High Street towards the Town Hall. On the left, just after St. Mark's Place is:

## 17 St. Mark's Episcopal Church.


Opened for worship in 1826 and consecrated in 1828, it is an elegant neo-classical building with a bowed centrepiece, its grounds containing several military and naval tombstones.



 Continue west along Portobello High Street. After the converted church, turn left into Windsor Place. Half way up, on the right, you will see:

## 18 15/17 Windsor Place

A two storey villa, c.1840, with unusual Gothic bay windows.

 Return to the High Street, turn left and continue west. On your left is:

**19 The Baptist Church, 185 Portobello High Street**  
Designed in 1862 by David Bryce as Portobello's first town hall, near the site of Portobello's original cottage. Notice the impressive skyline and the griffin gargoyles. [Photo back panel]

 Continue west to the traffic lights and turn left up Brighton Place. On the left you will see:

**20 St. John's Roman Catholic Church, (1903-1906)**  
A highly individual building, mixing Gothic and Arts and Crafts, its huge spire dominates Portobello's skyline. The architect was J.T. Walford [Photo below & back panel]

 Just beyond the church is Brighton Park, around which was laid out:

## 21 The Brighton Development

Laid out c.1823 by the architect John Baxter. Distinguished one or two storey villas are linked by single storey wings. One of the least altered and most attractive areas of Portobello. Brighton Park contains an 18th Cent. stone sundial which formerly stood in the grounds of the Tower. Opposite, Sandford Gardens (1825), displays graceful iron balconies.



 Turn back down Brighton Place to the traffic lights and turn left. You are now back at the Town Hall and at the end of your walk.

*We hope that you have enjoyed your walk and have learned a little about the history and architecture of Portobello.*