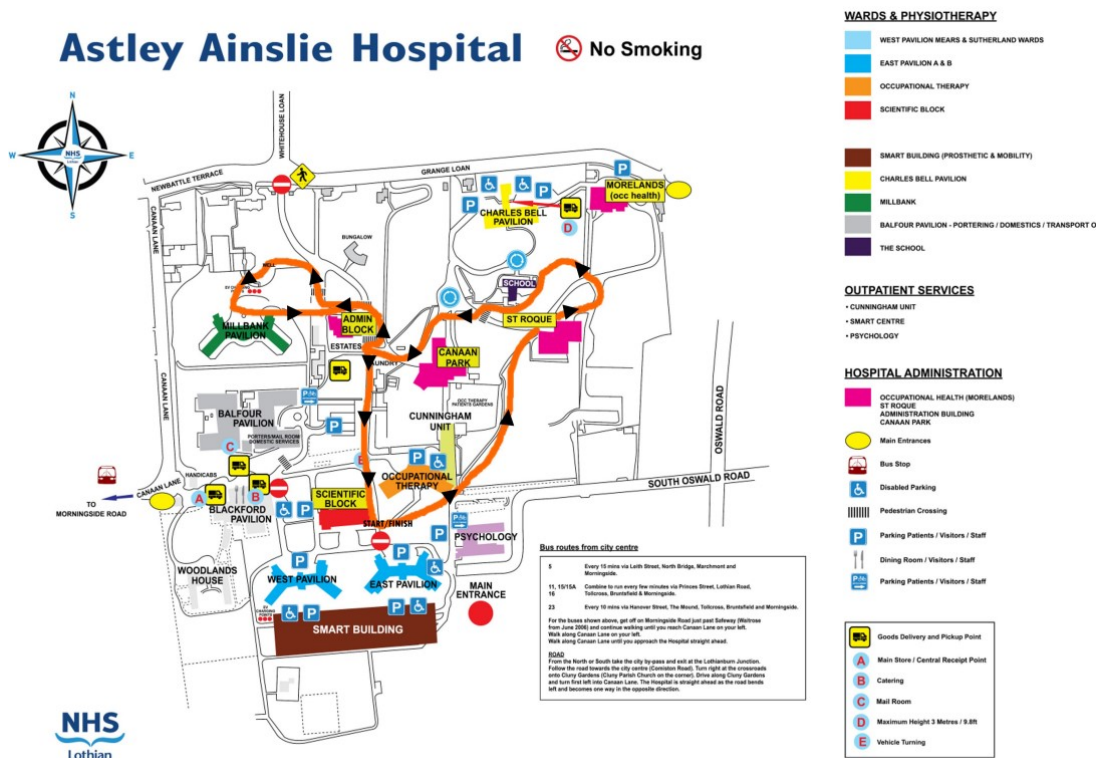


ASTLEY AINSLIE HOSPITAL GUIDED TOUR

Note: Amendments to the original 1981 transcript have been added in italics in 2023 as part of the celebrations for 100 years of Astley Ainslie Hospital



START – Scientific Block



800 years ago the houses of the old town of Edinburgh surrounded the foot of the volcanic rock on which stood Edinburgh Castle. To the south of the town the Burgh Loch covered the area which is now the Meadows and from the southern shore of the loch the ground rose upwards to the present Grange, Greenhill & Churchill district and then fell away to a valley along which ran the Pow Burn, from there it rose again to form the hills of Blackford, Braid & Pentland.

The land between the shore of the Borough Loch & the foothills of the Blackford & Braid Hills was covered by the dense forest of Drumselch and the area which is now the Astley Ainslie Hospital was within this forest.

If you look above the roof of the hospital building to the south you will see the Blackford Hill with the radio mast on top of it, and a little to your right looking between to two pavilions (*East and West Pavilions*) you will see the Braid Hills with the Pentland Hills showing in the distance. This great forest stretched from Easter Craiglockart Hill in the west to Gilmerton in the East. To get some idea of its size this would cover the greater part of the district of Merchiston, Morningside and Newington as well as part of Craigmillar and Liberton. During the last Ice Age much of Europe and America lay under ice sheets, rocks not far from here show evidence of wear from movements of the great ice masses.

This geological period the Pleistocene ended about 10,000 years ago and as the ice caps retreated northwards, this area was plentifully supplied with water from the many rivers & streams from the melting ice. These conditions were ideal for water loving trees such as Larch and Willow which flourished here 5,000 years ago. Over many hundreds of years as the ice moved away northwards this part of Scotland became much dryer and the Larches and Willows were replaced by trees which were less dependent on water and by the 10th century the forest consisted largely of Oak trees, the Willows were confined to the banks of the now less numerous water courses. The name Drumselch comes from the Gaelic druam scalach which means "Willow Ridge" and the name of this ancient forest is kept alive to this day in the Edinburgh district Drumsheugh.

Please turn to your left and go down the grassy slope towards the gap between the Occupational Therapy Dept on your left and the Day Hospital (*now Psychology Department*) which is the long wooden building directly in front of you.



This commentary should be started again when you go into the garden through the gap in the wall.



This pleasant glade is part of the garden of the 19th Century villa off St Roque

The wooded area is very different to the ancient forest of Drumselch with its great oaks which gave shelter to wild creatures both animal and human. Outlaws and vagabonds escaped from justice to the forest where they robbed travellers going to and from the south.

The forest was King David the 1st of Scotland's favourite hunting ground and it was somewhere within this forest that the King narrowly escaped death when he was unhorsed by a great stag when he was hunting with his companions on a holy day. It is said that an emblem of the holy cross which David was wearing struck against the stag and frightened it away. In thanks giving for this seemingly miraculous rescue from serious injury David founded the Abby of Holy Road in 1128.

About the year 1143 David gifted a large part of the forest to the city of Edinburgh as the Burgh Muir. With the exception of four large estates which had already been granted under Royal charter, all the land between the Burgh Loch and the Pow Burn this hospital's south boundary is the course of the burn and bounded by the present Bruntsfield Road and Morningside road on the West and Dalkeith Road on the east belonged to Edinburgh. It was about this time that the city was referred to as the "Royal Burgh of Edinburgh". The King's gift to the city consisted of about five square miles in area. The grounds of this hospital stands on just under 1% of the Burgh Muir but the many historical connections of this 42 acre site are worth noting during this short tour of the grounds.

During the next three hundred years the citizens of Edinburgh made little if any attempt to develop the Burgh Muir. This densely wooded area acted as a protective barrier, against armies marching on the city from the south, although this did not always have complete success. The masked ranks of Edward I army tramped across this area on the way to do battle with William Wallace at Falkirk.

Wallace's troops were beaten and this was his last great battle on Scottish soil.

But the armies of the Earls of Murray and March defeated foreign mercenaries under the command of Guy, Count of Namur in this area 1335.

One hundred and fifty years later James III assembled a large army on the Muir prior to a raid into England but this force only got as far as Lauder when fighting between sections of the Scottish army brought the enterprise to an untimely end.

Please move up this path a short distance until it bends to the left just beside the hedge.

To the right of the path you will find six little stones (*now 10 stones*) set into the grass – you may be able to make out the names and dates inscribed on the stones in this little animal cemetery.



On the left of the path you will be able to see over a gate into a cultivated area which is being developed as a garden to be tended by patients with varying disabilities (*now unused*). Until recently an ancient sunken well with a pump could be seen in the middle area. This is one of four possible site of the little chapel of St Roque, which this tour will visit where the people of Edinburgh faced another terrifying enemy.....The Plague, the Black Death.

The Black Death was said to have reached Europe from China being carried the trade routes and is reported to have been in Egypt in the 6th century. They came to Scotland several times between the 12th and 16th centuries and this remote part of the Burgh Muir was used as a quarantine area for the city of Edinburgh.

Plague victims and contacts were brought to the Muir in an effort to contain the dreadful sickness, and at the peak of each epidemic mass graves were dug close to this spot.

In the year 1502 King James the IV instructed that a small chapel dedicated to St Roque the Patron St of plague victims, was built on the Burgh Muir and that priests should offer spiritual and physical help to the many victims brought out from Edinburgh.

The exact sight of the chapel is not now known but a map of the area dated 1817 shows a house called St Roque and towards which you are heading.

Please continue up the path until you come to the seat (*seat is now embedded into the tree – you can see metal parts of it at the base of the tree*) in the shelter of a Spanish Chestnut tree.



In the year 1503 a happier event occurred when the daughter of King Henry VII of England came to Edinburgh to be married to King James IV of Scotland. This Royal marriage was an attempt to improve relations between the two neighbouring countries. Princess Margaret's Tudor surrounded by a colourful escort and accompanied by the Earl of Surrey was met at Dalkieth by James. With all their attendants the two of them crossed the Burgh

Muir on their way to a great reception from the citizens of Edinburgh. And this was exactly 100 years before the union of the crowns in 1603.

After the death of Margaret's father the old quarrel between Scotland and England broke out again when King Henry the VIII of England was at war against France.

In the year 1513 James decided against advice both human and supernatural to raise an army to march on England in order to give support to his French neighbours, the "Auld Alliance". In August of that year this gallant Scottish King commanded all able bodied men between the ages of 16 and 60 to muster on Edinburgh's Burgh Muir. The exact number of men who camped on the Muir is uncertain with various reports stating anything from 30,000 to 100,000 but without doubt the scene from this spot must have been well worth seeing. The tents and banners of the Scottish nobles were erected over a great area surrounding the chapel of St Roque. Although the King himself did not camp on the Muir he worshipped in the little chapel not far from where we are now.

Legend tells that at the time when this vast array was encamped on the Burgh Muir of Edinburgh a voice was heard at midnight at the Mercat Cross. Several people reported that they hear it cry out the names of many of the Scottish nobility who were then camped on the Muir. When this force was mustered James led this section of his army south to join up with sections coming from the West and the Border areas. He then led the Scottish army to do battle with the English at Flodden Field. The Commander of the English force was the Earl of Surrey the same man who had escorted Margaret Tudor to Scotland ten years before.

It's been said that the Royal standard of King James IV was hoisted on the Burgh Muir but it appears that the new standard was not ready in time and with other banners had to be hurriedly sent on after the army and was not in fact hoisted until the main army mustered close to Flodden. This great Scottish fighting force comprising the major part of the country's Nobles, Bishops, Priests and the common men, the flowers of the forest, suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the English army when thousands of men perished including the King and many of his nobles. Amongst the dead were all but one of those who had been named by the supernatural voice at the Mercat Cross.

When the news of this terrible defeat reached Edinburgh, the churches including the little chapel of St Roque were filled with mourning widows preying for help in the face of this terrible disaster.

One hundred and thirty seven years later Oliver Cromwell camped with his army at Fairmilehead, and the advance of his troops on Edinburgh met with resistance on the Muir. The presence of the Cromwellian soldiers at that time may have resulted in many Biblical names being given to localities and which still can be found in nearby street names, Canaan Lane, Jordan Lane, Eden Lane and others.

About this time the Pow burn became known as the Jordan Burn.

Please continue along this path until it comes to the front entrance of the villa of St Roque.



Your attention is drawn to the lantern beside the door, this shows a fearsome looking lizard stalking a terrified bird. It is completely coincidental that this building houses senior officials of the South Lothian District. *(The function of St Roque has changed many times over the years including as the headquarters for Lothian Primary Care NHS Trust then Edinburgh Community Health Partnership followed by Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership until around 2013. Following their departure it has housed an NHS Lothian capital planning team, Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS) community team, physio at home and the community respiratory team)*

Our ancestors who travelled through the forest and across the Burgh Muir in past years have had to be careful of wild beasts and outlaws within the forest, from now on you are asked to travel with care as the remainder of this short tour will be on the roads which are used by vehicles in the hospital.



Morelands villa is the house you can see to the north. Please cross the road to the foot of its garden and beside the wall dividing it from the adjoining property and sheltered by a willow tree, you will see an ancient draw-well with what could be a font beside it. On the map of 1817 this was marked as the site of the chapel, but it is not a very strong contender for this title. With so many plague victims and contacts occupying huts on the Muir no doubt a plentiful supply of water was required and there may have been more wells than the three which are now known about. No doubt this part of the Muir was chosen because of accessible water as well as for its remoteness.

During the epidemics a large cauldron was kept constantly boiling in which to boil the clothes of plague victims. Two baileys of the Muir superintended all primitive medical treatment, they wore long grey gowns with white St Andrews crosses on the front and back and carried a long crook with a white cloth attached, with this they stirred the huge

cauldrons. Although medical knowledge did advance during the centuries when the plague came to Scotland at this time the two forms of treatment most widely used were isolation on the Muir and prayer.

The clergy at these times were in close proximity with the plague victims and it has been suggested that the deaths of many priests from the plague hastened the eventual reformation in Scotland. Plague victims and contacts were brought to the Muir with all their possessions, needless to say they were not all so ill as to be unable to eat or drink. Sir Robert Fairley who owned the nearby Braid Estate during the time of Mary Queen of Scots gave over his three brew houses at Little Egypt which was just over the Pow Burn and a little to the west of the hospital grounds to supply beer for the sick folk on the Muir.

If you look to the right of Morelands you will see a building just beside the hospital gates, this is the WRVS cafeteria (*this moved to Balfour Pavilion in the late 1980s*) which although it does not supply beer does fulfil much the same function for today's hospital patients. (*The building referred to at the hospital gates is now used as a private nursery*).



The name of the farm "Little Egypt" is said to have been given to the site where gypsies had an encampment.

Now please turn west, that is to your left and go back along the road towards the hospital school which you will see on your right hand side. Under the willow trees reminiscent of the ancient forest, you should note the interesting bird bath with its inscriptions from Alice Through The Looking Glass and, just to the rear of the school the alphabet boulder. Both of these are the work of the sculptor Maxwell Allan.



During the plague the practitioners whose services were of most use were in fact early community medicine specialists. While the dreadful injuries inflicted in hand to hand

fighting in the many battles had given surgeons experience to improve their skill and knowledge, so the plague presented different problems. It is recorded that a certain James Henderson a town surgeon through his good care and diligence spared nought the hazard of his ain life and contracted the said sickness in his ain body with the loss & death of his wife in the same disease of pestilence. He could be said to be Edinburgh's first medical officer of health. His duties included visits to this quarantine area and for his services he was exempted from paying the "auld toon" taxes. His son in law Lawrence Cockburn also a surgeon visited a ship "The Good Fortune" at Leith which had a history of sickness & death during a voyage. He quarantined the ship for 23 days at Alloa and this is probably the first record of a medical man acting as a port medical officer.

In this area of the hospital school you are now near to the spot which is considered to be most likely to have been the sight of the Little Chapel of St Roque.

On the left of the road you will see a long high mound of earth entirely covered by trees and vegetation this has been thought to be the sight of the mass graves but recent hospital building required excavation into the mound and no bones were discovered. It is possible that this mound is some of the earth which was dug from the pits and that the graves are in the flat area between the mound and the villa of St Roque.

Towards the end of the 13 century St Roque was born in Narbonne on the Mediterranean coast of France. He died 32 years later in Montpellier only some 50 miles from his birthplace, but during these years he had travelled to Italy where he devoted his short life to caring for victims of the plague. He contracted this terrible condition himself. At that time the medical school at Montpellier was the centre of medical learning in Europe. Although the site of the chapel on the Muir is not certain. The name of the place where he died is still remembered by the district $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to the north west of here which is called Montpellier.

In all five chapels dedicated to St Roque were built in south and central Scotland and each had a plague cemetery beside it. The isolation of plague victims and those who had nursed them was widely practiced in the countries of Europe which experienced the dreadful pestilence. Those who nursed plague victims were secluded for 10 days before coming into contact with fellow citizens. The clergy was ordered to examine the sick and to report to the authorities on pain of being burned at the stake. The word quarantine originated at this time and comes from measures carried out in the small republic of Régusse on the Eastern shore of the Adriatic. All immigrants were required to land at a special landing stage built a considerable distance from the city and were required to remain there for 40 days. The Italian words for this period of 40 days were "quaranta giorni". A severe epidemic of the plague came to Edinburgh in the year 1585 and resulted in such terror amongst the citizens that the then Lord Provost and many of the town Baileys fled to the comparative safety of the countryside until the epidemic appeared to be over. This resulted in such a loss of wealth to the city that in order to bring in the necessary revenue the town council resolved that part of the Burgh Muir should be leased and divided into convenient portions.

Over the years the great trees of the forest were cut down to such an extent that there was a glut of wood on the market and the magistrates gave leave to the Burgesses to build wooden fronts to the stone houses in the High street of Edinburgh. This resulted in the width of the street to be reduced to less than 15 feet in places. Many of the trees were used to build the great merchant ships and men of war at that time. Part of the Muir were

quarried to provide sandstone for buildings and small feus for dwelling houses, malt barns and cow sheds obliterated the former picturesque Muir.

After the reformation, the little chapel of St Roque eventually became a ruin and to this day its exact spot is not known. Although Sir Walter Scott is said to have played amongst its ruins when he was a boy.

The next part of the tour will take us up to the 19th century.



Please continue on this main road with the villa of Canaan Park on your left until you come to a grassy slope with a shelter beside it (*the wooden shelter has been replaced by a Friends Pathway bench*). Again you are asked to be very careful of possible traffic at this section as drivers of approaching traffic from either direction cannot see very far ahead here. The commentary will continue at that site.

By the year 1817 the area to the east of the village of Morningside was well developed with many imposing country houses established in their own grounds, including those we have already passed. Canaan Park, St Roque, Morelands cottage and the one which is the next stopping place which was called Canaan Cottage. By the year 1877 Morelands cottage was called just Morelands and Canaan cottage was called Canaan House (*now called the Admin Block / Building*).

Now please go through the gap in the wall with the two stone “chindits” (Burmese word for winged stone lion) on top on either side (*these are now missing*) and follow the road to the right and then to the left until you are at the front entrance of Canaan House.

The commentary will continue at that point.

Canaan House is now the Administrative centre for the Astley Ainslie Hospital. In front of the house on either side of the entrance you will see ancient stones with the emblems from the passion of Christ carved on them.



Please go forward to the stones so that you can see the emblems at the top end of each of them. *(One full stone with base plus 4 bases remain)*

At one time these stones were thought to have come from the chapel of St Roque but illustration of the chapel in its later years showed it to be a very simple building and quite unlikely to have had such ornate decoration. It is now almost certain that these stones came from the 15th century Trinity College Church which stood on the site of the present Waverley Station. After its demolition many of its fine carvings were taken to the country residence in this district to act as garden ornaments.

Please continue up the road towards Millbank Pavilion. This ward stands on the site of the former Millbank House another of the fine 19th century buildings.

When you come to the wall *(before the barrier)* with the line of shrubs & trees to the right hand side of the road please cross the grass on the far side of this boundary and close beside it and go the double gates in the wall which are ahead of you *(no longer gates just a gap in the wall once you go through the space at the end of the hedge / wall)*. Turn to your left and go along the wall and you will find a further collection of carved stones again thought have been originally in Trinity College church.



Continue along the line of the wall and on your right hand side hidden amongst the trees you will see another ancient well. This is the last of the suggested sites for the little chapel on the Muir.



To your left you should see a gate in the wall which you should go through.



You are now facing the site of the villa of Millbank. This is shown on the map of 1817 as being the most extensive of any of the fine buildings on this tour.

In the year 1842 Dr James Syme took over the house, he was to become professor of surgery in Edinburgh and a leading surgeon in Europe, he developed the extensive grounds of the house and in the greenhouses grew grapes, orchids, peaches and even bananas. The garden had a fine collection of heaths and azaleas made a magnificent showing. After the house was demolished to make way for this hospital ward the gardens & greenhouses were well kept until they in turn were removed to make room for the geriatric unit (*Balfour Pavilion*).

Such was Professor Syme's fame both medically and socially, that visitors to this house included very many well known names in the 19th century. Thomas Carlyle stayed here and in 1869 Charles Dickens consulted Syme about a lameness of the foot when he was in Edinburgh on one of his reading tours. During the British Association meeting in Edinburgh in 1850 the Professor gave a grand dinner in Millbank House in which he entertained one hundred nobleman and gentlemen. It must be remembered that at that time this house and its neighbours were out in the country and well away from the city of Edinburgh.

Professor Syme's daughter married Joseph Lister the pioneer of antiseptic surgery in the drawing room of this villa in 1856. A plaque can be seen in the ward commemorating this happy event. During his career Lister studied the researches of Louis Pasteur and advanced the knowledge of infectious diseases a further medical connection for this little section of the Burgh Muir.

Please go back to Canaan House and turning to your right continue down the road with the sights of the car parking area and buildings for the geriatric unit (*Balfour Pavilion*) on your right hand side. The area of the car park was, until recently part of the peaceful and sheltered sunken garden of Canaan House and the building of the geriatric unit covered the area once renowned as the gardens of Millbank House.

Again please be very careful when you come to the crossroads at which you should continue straight on past the end of the building on your right (*Scientific Block*).

Make your way to the place where this tour started, and the commentary will continue there.

The tour finishes where it started but more than 700 years separate the first event – the granting of the Burgh Muir to Edinburgh and the final event which is another beginning. The area in front of you which you can see between the wards and which slopes down to the Jordan Burn is not shown on the maps as having been part of the properties of any of the houses in the area. It is shown as being called Blackford Braid and at the beginning of this century was a lady's nine hole golf course. A very large boulder which can still be seen in the ground close to the West Pavilion was a natural hazard to the golfers who played this small course.



But during the nineteenth century Morningside was still isolated from the city of Edinburgh. The land in between the Burgh Muir of Edinburgh was slow to be developed for one simple reason. All dwellers in Greenhill and Morningside were subjected to a turnpike rate not levied on those who lived in Newington. The toll bar was at Wrights houses which were close to the Barclay church and just south of Tollcross and all vehicular traffic paid tax. Everyone going from Morningside back to the city by omnibus paid tuppence extra as toll on each journey. Private carriages also paid this levy one shilling was charged for very railway parcel delivered. For this reason feuing was very protracted. A public meeting held in 1852 eventually forced the removal of the toll bar to the foot of Morningside road and after this considerable development of the area began. A map dated 1877 shows the street plan very much as it is today.

One year before the date of this map an event occurred which was to have far reaching results. David Ainslie of Costerton made his will.

The story of how that will resulted in the founding of the Astley Ainslie Institution and eventually of the hospital as it is today would take longer to tell than has this short journey through 10 thousand years.

That modern story must wait for another day.