

Quartermile Stroll, Additional Notes

- The Quartermile Complex.** The overall scheme consists of a mixture of new build apartments, apartments converted from nineteenth-century hospital buildings, new-build offices, housing, retail, and leisure outlets. In all, it encompasses 1,050 apartments, 370,000 square feet of office space, 65,000 square feet of retail and leisure space, numerous cafes and seven-acres of open landscape.
- The Edinburgh Futures Institute.** The University of Edinburgh is transforming the iconic, category-A listed Old Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh into the Edinburgh Futures Institute. It will include space for multidisciplinary collaboration, data-led innovation, education, and research. Also, rooms for co-working with industry partners, specialist learning areas including digital space, project rooms. Generous multi-functional spaces for events, festivals and major lectures are also planned, along with a public piazza, outdoor spaces, and Café.

Its interdisciplinary courses will focus on global and local challenges, all linked to cutting-edge research and to the big future issues facing our planet and societies. Note the distinctive skyline. The three-storey building is constructed of Hailes sandstone and features crowstepped gables and circular corner turrets, together with a bold square clock-tower.
- Simpson's Loan.** The Quartermile development named its main residential street Simpson Loan in honour of Sir James Young Simpson, a local Scottish obstetrician. The first physician to demonstrate the anaesthetic properties of chloroform on humans, especially the benefits of anaesthesia to childbirth. The Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion (which had its origins in the Edinburgh Lying-in Hospital which opened in 1793) previously occupied the west end of the street.

A clever unity of style, along the Loan, is created by the regular alternation of new glass curtain-walled buildings acting as a foil, or counterbalance, to the old stone-built Victorian hospital blocks. The "insertion" of these contemporary blocks amid the Victorian hospital buildings was controversial at the time. But many now feel it works extremely well and that to have slavishly tried to replicate or reinterpret the old structures would have been a mistake. Fosters and the City Council should be applauded for their boldness.

This junction typifies the mixed-use Quartermile Complex. A baker's shop to the left, hotel right [4], renovated C19th sandstone hospital block stands ahead, neatly and symmetrically flanked by new-build apartments in the signature clean lines of glass, aluminium plank rainscreen cladding and Juliet balconies of Foster and Partners. Also, substantial planters, trimmed hedges, street trees, bike-racks and near-by underground parking.
- The Residence Inn.** Originally planned as a much taller build. However, dramatic changes to the Quartermile development plans led to a smaller hotel and around 1000 new homes, compared to the 650 originally envisaged. A welcome change - it was even mooted that the impact of the original high-rise development could cause Edinburgh to lose its World Heritage Site status.
- Lister Square** is the public square located in the heart of the complex. Named after Joseph Lister, the "father of modern surgery and. An exceptional surgeon, who contributions raised operative technique to a new plane. Firstly, he introduced carbolic acid (modern-day phenol) as a steriliser. Secondly, he researched the role of inflammation and tissue perfusion in the healing of wounds. Thirdly, he advanced diagnostic science by analysing specimens using microscopes, and fourthly, he devised strategies to increase the chances of survival after surgery. However, his most important contribution, was recognising that putrefaction in wounds is caused by germs. Lister's great works led to a reduction in post-operative infections and made surgery safer for patients.

6. **Nurses Home.** It was originally intended to retain the handsome Nurses Home of 1890, fondly known as the Red Home, but the developers were given permission to demolish. A contentious decision. One of the 2-storey pedimented, mansard-roofed lucarned corner pavilions survives. Its red 'pressed' brick with yellow ashlar dressings and decorative banding, with swept bracketed eaves and with decorative ventilators provides a welcome memory.
7. **Quartermile 1 (Q1)** - the first office building at Quartermile completed in mid-2008 and home to world-class working space. In 2024 refurbished with enhanced sustainability features including LED lighting and the addition of a heat recovery system.
8. **Wharton Square (Q10).** Richard Murphy's very dense social housing development. It is often likened to the affordable inner-city municipal housing in Vienna. The most famous example of Red Vienna social housing being the Karl-Marx-Hof. These Viennese "superblocks" from the 20s and 30s don't look like ordinary social housing. They came into being a century ago, as part of an enormously ambitious building programme, when Vienna was awash with people uprooted by the collapse of the Habsburg empire at the end of WWI. Such municipal authorities commissioned schemes continue to remain popular on the continent.

Wharton Square has a sensitive design. The massing is eroded deliberately towards the southwest corner to admit as much sunlight as possible. While, in compensation for the small amount of communal space, many of the flats have their own generous roof terraces and corner balconies. The exterior of mottled grey terra cotta tiles makes reference to Foster's own (more expensive!) metallic cladding nearby. A double height entrance-space grants access to an octagonal central courtyard. A stepped profile adds skyline interest.

The scheme rises to five storeys around its central court before stepping up in height to culminate into two ten storey corner towers. This layout has been developed to maximise daylight into what is, of necessity, a relatively densely designed scheme but also to create a courtyard as a social heart to the scheme based on models of similar sized city blocks in Berlin and other European cities. Q10 had to strike a balance between affordability and quality whilst fitting in with the adjacent more expensive properties. The block contains a total of 98 properties for social rent and 76 for mid-market rent.

I have not been able to find out, but I wonder if the square is named after Thomas Wharton Jones (an eminent ophthalmologist and physiologist of the 19th century) who grew up in Scotland and studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh. He was an assistant to Robert Knox, then a lecturer on anatomy at Edinburgh. While working for Knox, Wharton purchased a body from William Hare, thus Wharton became caught up in the scandal surrounding the notorious body-snatchers Burke and Hare but was cleared by the investigating committee.

9. **The Meadows.** Originally, the entirety of park was taken up by a huge body of water known as the Burgh Loch, which acted as the city's main supply of drinking water until 1621. When instead piped drinking water was routed from the Comiston Springs the Burgh Loch was drained and transformed into today's grassy public park. After a prolonged period of rain, the Meadows can still flood to the depth of a foot or more with some ease.

We walk eastwards along the old shoreline with the individualistic tower-like ends of the old medical ward pavilions to our left. The distinctive turrets were to contain water-closets and a bath, which towers were separated from the wards by cross-ventilated lobbies. Often a balcony was strung between the towers, offering a small space for ambulant patients to sit out.