

Sciennes Heritage: Route

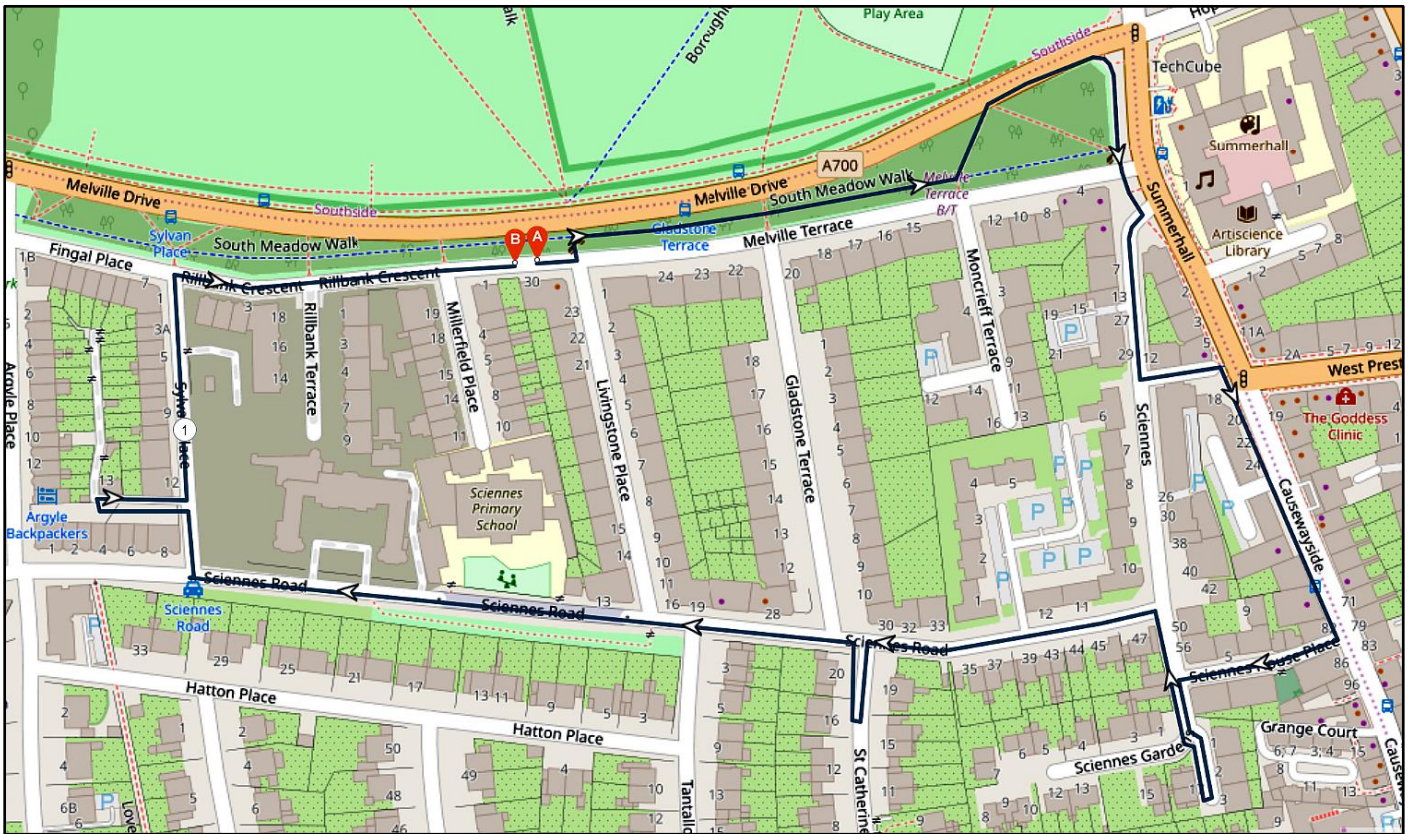
GETTING THERE: The stroll starts at Victor Hugo's Café at the junction of Melville Terrace and Livingstone Place. The café is a 1-minute walk away from the Gladstone Terrace bus stop on route 9.

FOOTWEAR: Sensible shoes. Surfaces underfoot are of good quality throughout – by-and-large firm pavement, or asphalt. No steps.

ROUTE: A 1.2-mile long, clockwise circuit around the residential district of Sciennes in south Edinburgh – mainly on footpaths or pavements beside quiet roads and visiting two cul-de-sacs.

- Immediately on leaving the Victor Hugo Deli cross Melville Terrace and take the ramp down to the Meadows. This was once the location of the 'Burgh Loch'. Do not cross at the pedestrian lights, instead turn right along the footpath.
- In 80m bear left towards a second set of pedestrian lights. Do not cross at the lights, instead keep right and walk towards the pair of stone pillars, atop of which sit a 7-ft high unicorn and lion.
- A few paces beyond reach the busy Causewayside opposite the former 'Dick Vet', now Summerhall. Turn right, keeping on the pavement. Cross straight over Melville Terrace and to proceed dead ahead along Sciennes. After 80m turn left into Sciennes Place. Soon turn right along Causewayside. Basil Spence's former art-deco-style garage of steel, concrete and glass lies opposite after 70m.
- Continue ahead. Leave the bustle of Causewayside by turning right into Sciennes House Place. The former 'A' Division Police Station, Baronial with blue doors and corner turret, occupies one corner of the junction. On the right in Sciennes House Place is the Old Braid Fire Station (sympathetically converted into an office), and opposite it the Old Jewish Burial Ground.
- Further along the Place keep an eye on the stonework of the tenements. Rougher, older walling relates to the ancient back wall of Sciennes Hill House (built in phases from 1741). When this "country" house was first built it would have lain at the very edge of the city.
- At the T-junction, at the end of Sciennes House Place, turn left. Soon branch left into Sciennes Place. Arthur Conan Doyle lived briefly in the tenement at No. 3. Turn around and retrace your steps. At the Sciennes House Place junction keep ahead for 40m to reach the junction with Sciennes Road.
- Turn left. Walk forwards along the pavement of Sciennes for exactly 156 paces. Here the pavement turns a slight, but distinct, 167° obtuse angle. While no physical remains of the Chapel of St John nor the neighbouring Convent of St Catherine of Scienna (1518) can be found today, the angle in the pavement marks the position of the northeast corner of the walled plot which once enclosed the Convent. The alignments and layout of the roads in this area follow their original Mediaeval pattern.
- In a further 20m turn left into St Catherine's Place. A plaque in the garden of No 16 quotes some lines from Walter Scott's poem 'Marmion' and marks the location of the former Convent of St Catherine of Scienna. The district of Sciennes takes its name from the Convent.
- Retrace your steps back to Sciennes Road. At the corner find 21 St Catherine's Place. In 1881 it was the home of James Croll (1821–1890). A remarkable self-educated polymath who pioneered orbital dynamics, explained the origin of ice ages (correctly), and discovered (also correctly) the key feedbacks that drive global warming.

- Turn left along Sciennes Road. Tantallon Place marks the corner of the old boundary wall, of Grange Estate and of the old lane leading to Grange Farm.
- Opposite, on the right, is Sciennes Primary School. The school building outwardly looks very similar to the way it looked in 1892 when first opened. The next building along Sciennes Road (an imposing neo-Jacobean structure of red sandstone) is the former Sick Kids Hospital.
- 100m ahead turn right into Sylvan Place and then left along a narrow lane (an arrow points to No. 13). The white harled building to the right, one of Edinburgh's many 'hidden houses', is Sylvan House. In the 1790s, it became the summer home of Joseph Black (1728-99) – well known for his discoveries of latent heat and specific heat, and his work with carbon dioxide.
- Turn around and return to Sylvan Place. Continue, left, down towards the Meadows, with Georgian terraces on the left (c1835). Turn right along Rillbank Crescent (with bay windowed terraces built c1860) and return to the starting point of Victor Hugo's Deli where the stroll ends.



Better (semi-interactive and zoomable) version of map available at: <https://www.plotaroute.com/route/2527294>

Roy Thompson, March 2024