

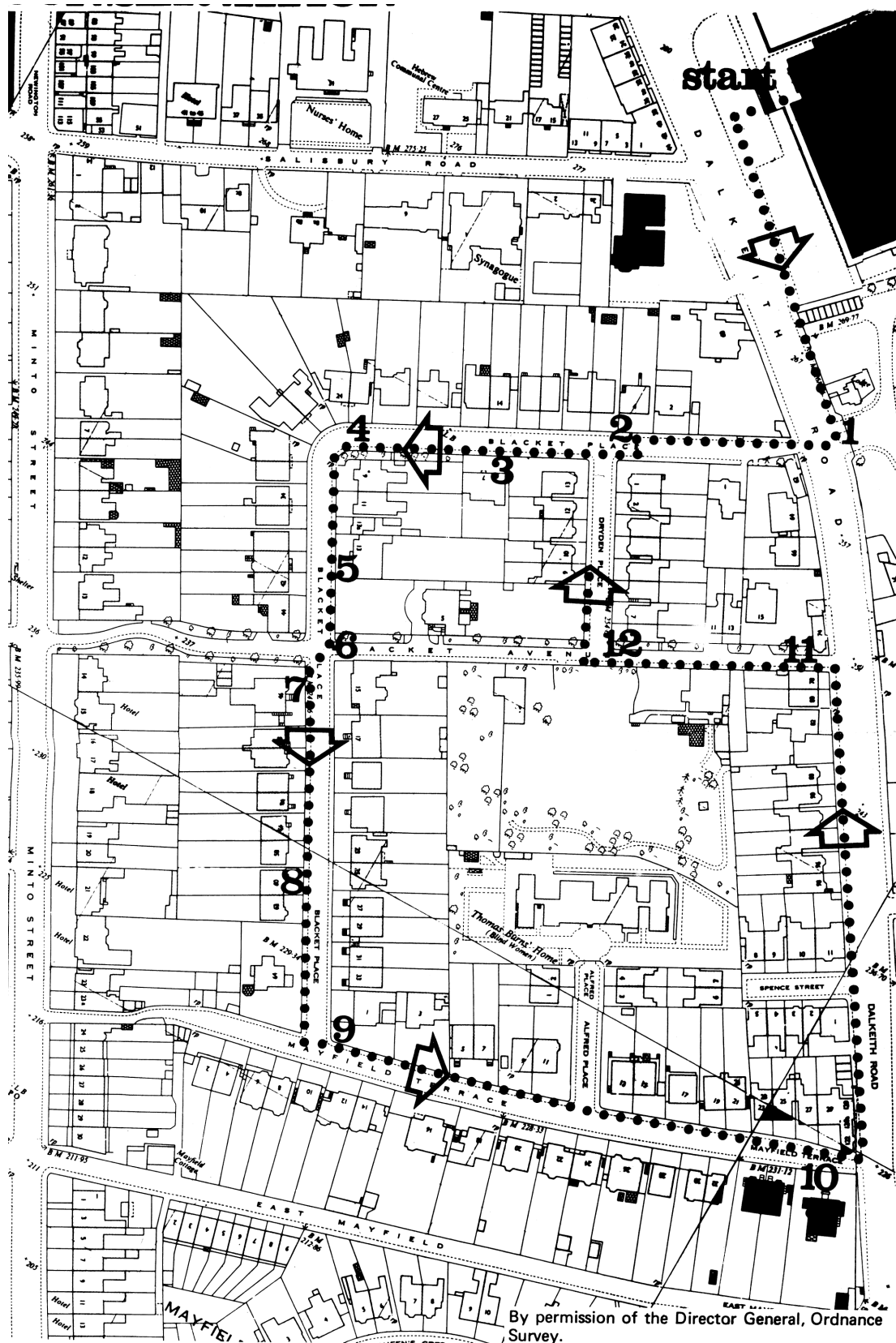
An Architectural Trail of the Blacket Area

Sketches by Frank White (Blacket Association)

original 1992; revised 2017

Start

- (a) Ignore the starting point on the plan and instead sit on the wooden bench in Dalkeith Road by the Royal Commonwealth Pool bus stop. The study area lies opposite, on the other side of Dalkeith Road.



(b) From the wooden bench you can see the simple, well-proportioned front and pillared entrance of 58 Dalkeith Road (1812) opposite. Conversion to public house and restaurant use has preserved this fine building, but has also entailed the erection of the unfortunate signs.

The extension to the north is modern, fronted with stone from the high wall, now removed, previously bounding the property on Dalkeith Road. Despite the stone front and the careful alignment, the shortened windows and the absence of a pitched roof make the extension an uneasy neighbour for the old house.

- (c) To the left of No. 58 is the uncommonly elegant Arthur Lodge, No. 60. Part of the rear elevation is seen from this point of the most interesting single building in the area, designed by [Thomas Hamilton](#) (architect of the Royal High School on Calton Hill). Built 1827–30 for the jeweller [William Cunningham](#).



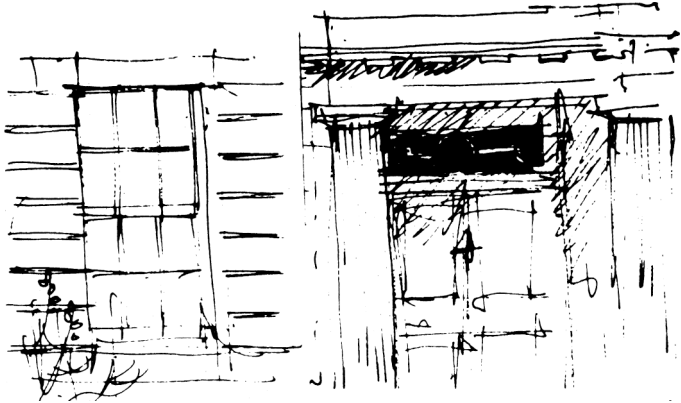
Stop 1

- (a) Walk down the left-hand pavement of Dalkeith Road to the entrance to the Pollock Halls of Residence, noting the complex and subtle roof design and the upper part of the walls of Arthur Lodge. (For a viewpoint of the house front, with its tall pedimented centrepiece between block pedimented wings, their single windows in tapered architraves between perfectly smooth panels incised with the motif adopted by the Blacket Association and a recess for a statue, walk into Blacket Place and look through the Arthur Lodge gates.)
- (b) Note the opposite pillared entrance to Blacket Place, one of four such pillared entrances to this area. These gate piers are thought to be by [James Gillespie Graham](#), the leading exponent of the gothic revival in Scotland, and responsible for the 1825 street plan of the Blacket area.
- (c) The lodge adjoining, one of three such lodges on Dalkeith Road, has had its appearance much altered by the substitution of red tiles for the original slated roof. The character of the lodges is distinctly rural, reflecting the intention of the original plan to 'secure to the several lots within the gates all the privacy and convenience of country residences'.

Stop 2

- (a) Now cross Dalkeith Road and enter the north half of Blacket Place – classical unity in diversity built c.1829–77. After noting the simple character of No.2, cross to south pavement for a view of No.4. This house, built before 1835, exemplifies many of the features to be found in the upper part of Blacket Place. The massive portico with its Doric pillars will be found at almost all of the houses, as will the fine, rubbed ashlar stonework of the facade with the continuous horizontal rebates to each course of the lower storey and the smooth plane of the upper storey enriched by the mouldings framing each window. The astragal design of fanlight is however unique in the Blacket area, as is the style of cornice

supported by plain modillions. A very small section shows the pattern of the original cast-iron railings. (As you progress through Bracket Place you will see that the railings are gradually being restored.) Note the use of Georgian astragals here and at No. 6.



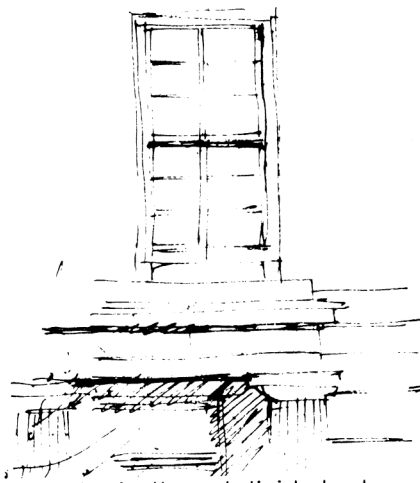
Window note: Generally, Georgian astragals indicate the earlier houses; however some of the older houses appear to have had undivided sash windows from the first and there are some examples where later larger-paned windows have had 'Georgian' astragals substituted. There are also probably some where plate glass has been substituted for earlier astragal windows.

- (b) Continuing westwards along the south pavement (and noting the deodar tree at No. 8) you can see how the elements found at No. 4 have been used elsewhere in different ways. Nos 6 and 8 form a single block with the porches at either end.

At Nos 10 and 12 the porches have been combined to form a large central feature of the facade, with a corresponding central projection of the upper storey and the cornice – the usual arrangement for the semi-detached blocks in the part of the street. The window mouldings at Nos 10 and 12 may be compared with those seen earlier. Both types will be found elsewhere.

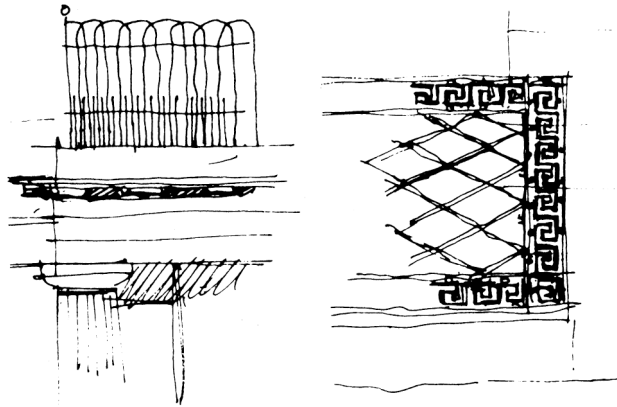
A section of the original railings between Nos 12 and 14 was of a different pattern to those at No. 4. The patterns vary throughout the area.

The bootscrapers recessed into the foot of the wall beside the gates are a minder of street conditions in the 19th century.



Stop 3

- (a) No. 7, now sympathetically subdivided, shows many similar features. It uses the horizontal arrangement of astragals first introduced towards the end of the Georgian period. Note the substantial pillars rising from the garden wall – a feature to be found elsewhere.
- (b) Opposite: The decorative ironwork of the balconies of Nos 18–28 deserve notice. Nos 20, 22 and 24 use the Greek key pattern with effect. Nos 18 and 20 have the stones of the lower storey bevelled on all four edges, in place of the more usual horizontal rebates.



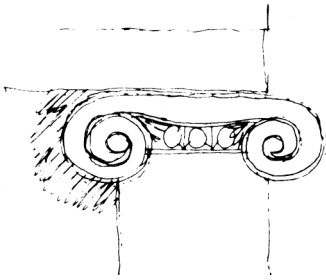
- (c) The shrubbery with its rustic paling may seem little more than a token of the planners' intention; but the general effect of the planting both in the shrubbery and in the private gardens is very successful; and here and elsewhere in the area the tall trees as well as the smaller trees and shrubs set off the regularly ordered and carefully designed houses to advantage.



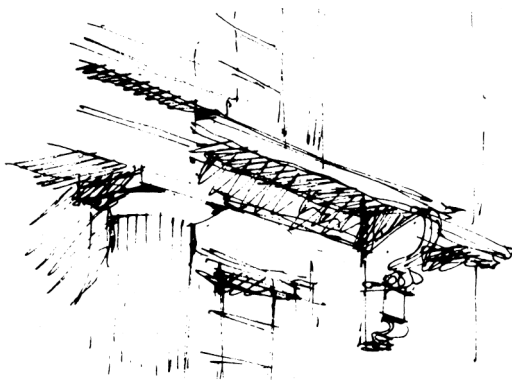
Stop 4

- (a) From the corner, the general view to the east shows the north side of Blacket Place with Arthur's Seat in the background; and the view down the street to the left shows the overall pattern continuing with variations to Blacket Avenue.
- (b) Nos 26 and 28 form an important building, one of the first to be erected in the area, seen from the whole length of both arms of Blacket Place. As befits a building in a unique position, it has a special character. The central, four-pillared portico is formed of Ionic pillars, having a more elegant and less massive appearance than the Doric pillars elsewhere; and the ironwork of the balcony is also more delicate. It seems remarkable that a 20th-century bay

window could have been inserted into this building without destroying its effect; but there it is; and the fine building makes its impact still.



- (c) Nos 9 and 11, very much later, solidly Victorian, are very different in style; their balcony balustrades politely echo the balustrade that crowns the bold facade of No. 13 (Blacket House).



Stop 5

- (a) Blacket House, with its single Doric portico on a larger scale than usual, has scrollwork supporting the stone canopy over the windows. Note the horizontal astragals, as at No. 7. The coach house alongside has been neatly converted into a small dwelling house.



- (b) Opposite: Nos 30–42 continue the pattern already seen. Nos 38–42 form the only block of three houses in the area, requiring a new disposition of the porticoes here set equidistant along the facade. The third storey of No. 42 is a modern addition which fits in quite

well.

- (c) No. 44: Another distinctive house terminates the group. Here the main facade forms one smooth plane on both storeys, creating a simpler effect reinforced by setting the Doric pillars close to the front wall and having no projection above, but partly offset by repeating the upper-storey window mouldings on the lower storey. The window proportions are distinctly different from those elsewhere. The apparent simplicity and rural atmosphere of No. 44 provides a terminal contrast to the long sequence of similar but varied frontages, as No. 2 did at the other end of the group.

Stop 6

- (a) On the corner of Blacket Place and Blacket Avenue, stop to admire the tree-lined Avenue with its marked curve sheltering the inner streets from the traffic of Minto Street – a feature of the Avenue since 1805 when it was simply the drive leading to Newington House. The view to the east through the arch of trees is of Arthur's Seat.



- (b) The last remaining setts are to be found at the crossing here and at the east end of Blacket Avenue. Necessary but ugly road signs intrude here.

Stop 7

- (a) on the south half of Blacket Place there is a contrast in styles, with four classical villas. After crossing to the right pavement, look at No. 15 – Newington Cottage – the first house in this half and one of the earliest in Blacket Place, with its Tuscan portico and pediment. The original iron gate posts remain. Tall forest trees including poplar seen behind give emphasis to the single-storey effect.



Contrast No. 15 with No. 46, the last house built in Blacket Place (1877). Its lofty Victorian proportions have not prevented it from being successfully converted into four houses. Iron gate posts remain here too.

- (b) No. 17: Similar details with variation as No. 15 – note its one remaining octagonal chimney stack on the right-hand side.
- (c) Nos 19 and 21 are smaller with differing doorway and window patterns but in the same charming style. Each of these classical villas is joined to its neighbours by stone doorways.

Step 8

- (a) Look next at Nos 23–25, built c.1855–60, three storeys high and basement, of interest to architectural historian and thought to be the work of [James Gowans](#), architect of Rockville, Napier Road ('the Chinese Pagoda House' now demolished) because of its similar decorative stonework.
- (b) Contrast with No. 60 (opposite). This is in the 'Balmoral style' with interesting use of wood on gabled doors and windows, each topped by its finial. The finials of the adjoining house have been sawn off.



(c) Continue along the south pavement, passing Nos 27–33, a later development of the north Blacket Place style with similar use of Doric porticos and rusticated stone frontage on the ground floor,

but much heavier and with narrow plate glass windows in front, grouped in threes and twos.

Window note: Astragals in front windows were not used in houses built after No. 21 Blacket Place. These houses instead had larger windows using the 'new' plate glass. However, the 12-paned Georgian pattern continued to be used at the back of many later houses, e.g. on the east side of Blacket Place, north side of Mayfield Terrace and in Alfred Place.

Stop 9

(a) At the corner of Blacket Place and Mayfield Terrace – Victoriana c.1855–1877 – it can be seen that the road on the right narrows to a lane into Minto Street.

(b) Turn left along Mayfield Terrace (in effect less of a terrace than Blacket Place) Here the more exuberant but very solid Victorian styles are slowly but surely returning to favour for large families in search of space and gardens. Stone setts were replaced by tarmacadam for reasons of safety.

Details of interest: Slightly 'baronial' curved porch at No. 1. Both Nos 1 and 3 are gabled, as at 60 Blacket Place.

Nos 5–7 are identical in style to Nos 27–29 Blacket Place. Note the effect of stone cleaning and replacement of front gardens with tarmacadam. The interior details have been carefully retained.

(c) Alfred Place: This area was planned in 1825 but not built until 1836–76. Thomas Burns Home was built in 1929, on the site of the orchard behind Newington House. This was the only 20th-century building within the gate pillars but in the early 21st century it was replaced by modern houses that are sympathetic to the character of the area.

(d) Continue along the south side of Mayfield Terrace, noting some good trees. A sycamore has been allowed to remain in the roadway.

Other details of interest: No. 20 has a rough stone plain frontage with scroll-decorated doorway. No. 17 has a very heavy stone balcony, while in Nos 19–21 the pilasters have now taken the place of the pillared portico of the earlier houses.

Stop 10

(a) At the east end of Mayfield Terrace, lying behind its curtain of ash trees, is the classical Georgian Newington Lodge (No. 38). This outstandingly fine house, and one of the very earliest in the area, was home of the pioneer photographer [David Octavius Hill](#) for the last years of his life. Once painted dark grey, it was found impossible to remove the paint without damaging the stone; it is now off white.

Details of interest: Mock balusters below windows; interesting stone work below front-door level; carved plaque above delicate portico; and attractive curved wall in west side.



- (b) The road now passes through the narrow gate piers into Dalkeith Road. Turn left past the lodge at these gates and on past Victorian Spence Street, now much changed by hotel development and Nos 82, 80 and 78, three older houses (c.1830). The original name for this part of Dalkeith Road – Craigie Terrace – can be seen here.
- (c) Turn left into Blacket Avenue through the third set of gate pillars (the fourth set are at the west end of Blacket Avenue) with its lodge (No. 74). Notice how quickly the traffic noise is lost.

Stop 11

- (a) No. 15 Blacket Avenue was built shortly after 1830 and is one of only four houses ever built on the north side of Blacket Avenue. Set behind its high wall, notice its pretty Ionic columns.
- (b) Nos 11 and 13, well maintained, are of a later date (c.1877). Note relics of interesting ironwork.

Stop 12

- (a) Before turning right into Dryden Place, look down the Avenue with its fine arch of trees towards No. 5 Blacket Avenue, Belleville Lodge, c.1835, which became the 'big hoose' of the area after Newington House had passed out of private hands. It also has the largest private garden of the inner streets in which a cow was kept in the 1880s until milkmaids were no longer available from Newington.
- (b) [Dr Benjamin Bell](#) (1749–1806) planted the trees in the Avenue to lead to his house and grounds. Newington House was completed in 1805 and demolished in 1966. A good many of these trees are therefore mostly 200 years old, or more. The fencing and the trees in the wooded borders are owned and now maintained by a partnership between the residents and the council. The roads themselves remained the property of residents within the gate piers until the 1930s. The lodge keepers were employed to maintain the wooded strips and (until the beginning of the 20th century) close the gates at night (see *An Edinburgh Childhood* by Eleanor Sillars). Newington House itself lay behind the high wall

- with its entrance facing north. The site with many fine trees important to the area is now owned by Edinburgh University.
- (c) Walk up Dryden Place, neat, regular and retaining all its front gardens intact, to rejoin the north half of Blacket Place opposite Nos 6 and 4.