

Exploring 19th century Elswick

This heritage trail takes you around some of the historic sites of 19th century Elswick. This was the period when Elswick was transformed from green fields to a dense urban area.

This circular walk starts and ends at the entrance to St John's Cemetery, Elswick Road, following the trail of the grand houses, parks and graveyards that were built during the 19th century.

Search

Search is a community-based voluntary project working in the inner west of Newcastle with and for older people. It has shop-front premises which provide a drop-in advice and information service for people of pensionable age and it runs a variety of groups and activities for over-fifties in community venues across the area.

In 2013 Search ran a programme of guided tours to explore the fascinating and varied history of the west end of Newcastle, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund's "All Our Stories" programme. This is one of a series of Heritage Trails based on these tours.

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Acknowledgements:

This guide was created by Judith Green with help from West Newcastle Picture History Collection and St James' Heritage and Environment Group. It is based on the guided tours developed by Pat Lowery for Search's Exploring our West End project. The images were supplied by West Newcastle Picture History Collection. The design of this guide was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund through the Exploring Our West End project.

Thanks also to all the participants in the Exploring Our West End project who contributed their memories.

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A heritage trail



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Start at the entrance to St John's Cemetery

Pass through the Gothic-style gateway of St John's (Elswick) Cemetery (1). This is the largest cemetery in Newcastle, covering 28 acres. It is worth spending some time here, but bear in mind that it covers a big area and it is not easy to locate particular graves.

Among the many interesting graves here is that of George Angus (2) grandson of the original founder of the George Angus leather business which later diversified into rubber manufacture and merged with Dunlop in the 1960s.

The Montagu Pit Disaster Memorial (3) commemorates the worst mining disaster in Newcastle. In 1925, 38 men and boys were killed when the Low Montagu Pit in Scotswood flooded. Most of the victims are buried in this cemetery. The carved stone memorial with its two statues is to be found to the left of the path leading west from the disused chapel in the middle of the cemetery (just below a low stone wall which marks the boundary of the Jewish burial ground).

You could also look for the grave of Dr Gibb (4), and the Fire Brigade Memorial (5) which commemorates three Newcastle firemen who were killed fighting a fire at Mawson Swan's chemists shop in Mosley Street in 1890.

Leaving the cemetery by the gates at the south east corner, walk along Westmorland Road, passing a grassed area on your left where several terraced streets of Victorian housing have been demolished. You will come to a high stone wall behind which is St Joseph's Home (6), visible through the gates at the east end of the wall. On your right you have a panoramic view of Gateshead including the Angel of the North. Just beyond here on the left is Elswick Park. This was the site of Elswick Hall (7). On the opposite side of Westmorland Road you can see St Michael's R.C. Church (8), an impressive building with fine interior features, built in 1889-91.

Cross over the road here and walk down Brunel Terrace. At the bottom of the street you can see St Stephen's Tower (9). This is the remaining part of the former St Stephen's Church, opened in 1868.

As you walk back up Brunel Terrace, take a detour along Wolsingham Street, formerly part of the now demolished Loadman Street Estate, and before that an area of 19th century terraced housing. Follow the green metal railings on your left, cutting down a path across the grass. You will come to the entrance to Elswick Dene (10), through metal gates bearing the sign Virginia House. Elswick Dene was formerly the home of the Cruddas family. As you leave, stop to consider the industries that were once around here. Nearby to the west was Elswick Colliery (11). To the south beyond the Scotswood Road was the site of Armstrong's (later Vickers) engineering works (12), and immediately to the east of Armstrong's was Richardson's leather works (13).

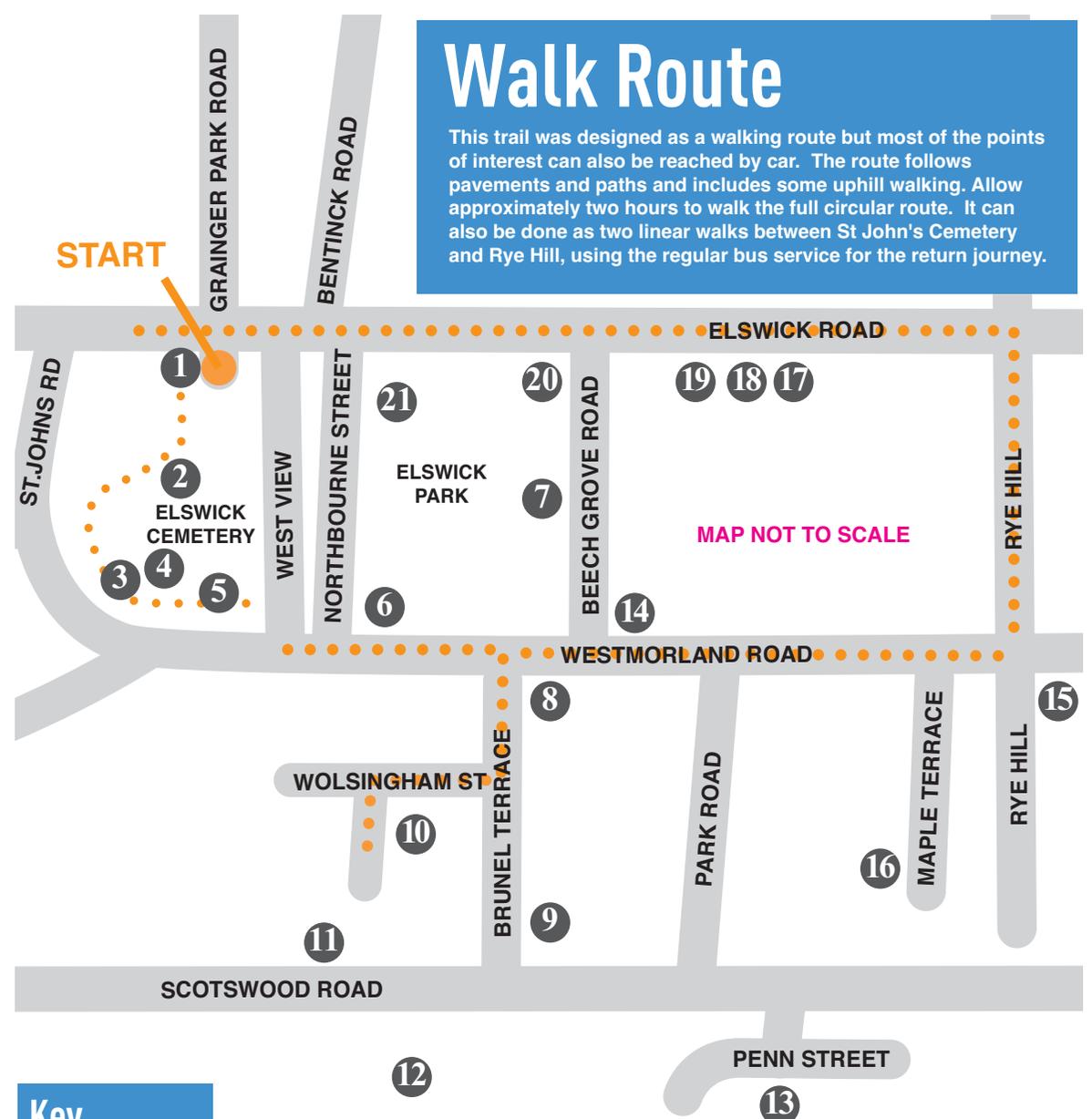
Retrace your steps back up to Westmorland Road and turn right, continuing along the road in the direction of the town. At the junction of Westmorland Road and Beech Grove Road is the site of the former Savoy Cinema (14). Continue for some distance until you reach the junction with Maple Terrace on your right. Further down this street is the Maple Terrace Masonic Temple (16), the oldest purpose-built masonic hall in Northumberland. Dating from c1870, this is still in use today. A short distance further along Westmorland Road you will come to Rye Hill. Here you can see Rye Hill House (15), a Grade 2 listed building dating from c1840 which was originally a house, then a hospital, and is now part of Newcastle College.

Cross Westmorland Road and walk up Rye Hill. At the top, turn left along Elswick Road. You will come to a stone wall on your left which marks the site of three former grand houses. First you will pass the site of a mansion now demolished, known originally as The Gables and later as Hopedene (17). Just beyond this is Ashfield Nursery and Parents Centre, formerly Ashfield House (18). Next to this is Elswick Lodge (19), built in 1844 for the railway engineer and steam engine pioneer, Robert Hawthorn, who first set up in business at Forth Banks in 1817. To see Elswick Lodge, take the next left turn to find the access road on your left.

Continue along Elswick Road. After crossing Beech Grove Road, you will pass the former Stephenson Library building (20), on your left. A short distance further along, just beyond the end of Elswick Park, was Elswick House (21), the home of Sir W.H. Stephenson who gifted the library to the city. The site is now occupied by the Marie Curie Cancer Centre. Continue along Elswick Road to your starting point at the gates of St John's Cemetery.

Walk Route

This trail was designed as a walking route but most of the points of interest can also be reached by car. The route follows pavements and paths and includes some uphill walking. Allow approximately two hours to walk the full circular route. It can also be done as two linear walks between St John's Cemetery and Rye Hill, using the regular bus service for the return journey.



Key

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|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ① Entrance to St John's Cemetery | ⑧ St Michael's Church | ⑮ Rye Hill House |
| ② Grave of George Angus | ⑨ St Stephen's Tower | ⑯ Maple Terrace Masonic Temple |
| ③ Montagu Pit Disaster Memorial | ⑩ Elswick Dene | ⑰ The Gables/Hopedene |
| ④ Grave of Dr Gibb | ⑪ Elswick Colliery | ⑱ Ashfield House |
| ⑤ Fire Brigade Memorial | ⑫ Vickers-Armstrong's Elswick works | ⑲ Elswick Lodge |
| ⑥ St Joseph's House | ⑬ Richardson's leather works | ⑳ Stephenson Library |
| ⑦ Elswick Park and Hall | ⑭ Savoy Cinema | ㉑ Elswick House |

Elswick

Elswick did not become part of Newcastle until 1835. Before that it was a separate township - an area of green fields and farms with few houses or streets. The main industrial activity took place underground where coal had been mined at least as long ago as the 12th century.

The 19th century changed the face of Elswick. One of the first developments was the building of Elswick Hall and Estate by John Hodgson in 1810. Soon afterwards came the first significant housing developments, prompted by the pressing need to cater for the growing population of the nearby town of Newcastle. Another key date was the extension of the Newcastle to Carlisle railway in 1839 which improved transport to and from the area for both goods and people.

The 19th century saw rapid industrial development in Elswick. In 1847 W.G.Armstrong and his partners bought land on the banks of the Tyne for a new engineering factory. Originally set up to make hydraulic cranes, this was to become one of the most important armaments manufacturers in the world. Other industries developed along the riverside, including a leatherworks and a lead works. Several of the factory owners and other local businessmen built grand houses for themselves further up the banks.

As the century progressed, more and more homes were built in Elswick for the ordinary families who worked in the growing industries. Most of its richer residents left their grand houses for more rural retreats. The population of the area grew from 3,500 in 1851 to 59,000 in 1901, and by the end of the century Elswick had become a densely built-up urban area.

① St John's Cemetery

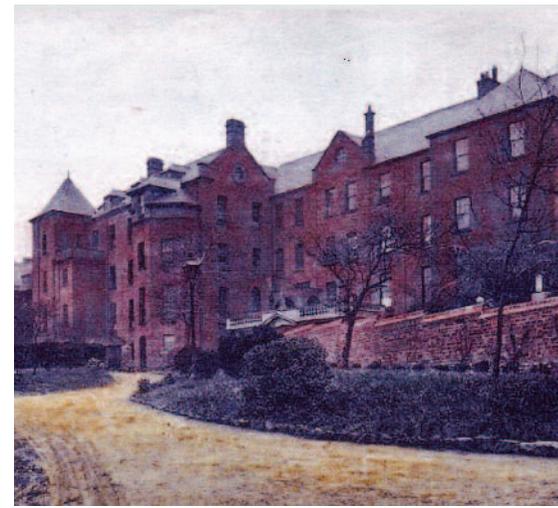
Pictured here in 1889, the cemetery was opened in 1857 to replace the graveyard of St John's Church in Grainger Street after a major cholera epidemic had led to the closure of all the graveyards in the town. Almost 105,000 people have been buried here since it opened.

Image: st john's cemetery 1889



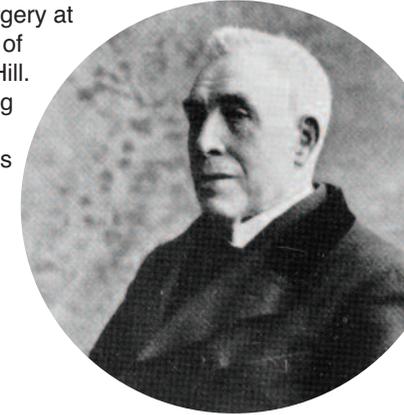
⑥ St Joseph's House

St Joseph's House has been here since the 1890s. It is run by a religious order, the Little Sisters of the Poor, as a residential home for older people.



④ Dr Gibb

Dr Charles Gibb is best known as a character in the song "Blaydon Races". Some of those injured when the bus wheel flew off sought medical help from him. The real-life Dr Gibb had his surgery at the bottom of Westgate Hill. The building still stands today and is marked by a plaque.



⑦ Elswick Hall

The Hall's most famous resident was the developer Richard Grainger who lived there from 1839-42. The land was later given to the City Council to create a park, and in 1981 the Hall itself was demolished and a swimming pool built where it used to stand.

Image: Grainger's home, Elswick Hall, demolished in 1978



10 Elswick Dene

Elswick Dene, designed by John Dobson c1850, was the home of the Cruddas family for many years. W.D.Cruddas and his father George were businessmen who played an important role in the development of a number of local companies, notably Armstrong's engineering works.



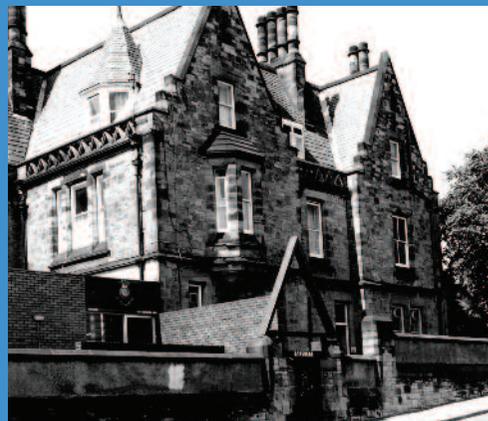
12 Armstrong's factory

Established in 1847, Armstrong's (later Vickers) engineering works covered a huge 50 acre site along the banks of the Tyne between Scotswood Road and the river until its closure in the 1970s. A business park now occupies on the site, with a pleasant riverside walkway along its southern edge.



17 Hopedene / The Gables

The Gables was built as a house for members of the Richardson family who owned Elswick leather works. After they sold the house in 1919, it became a maternity hospital. In 1949 it was taken over by the Salvation Army. Re-named Hopedene, it became a maternity home for single women. The building was demolished in the 1990s.



18 Ashfield House

Ashfield House, which now houses Ashfield Nursery and Parents Centre, is a Grade 2 listed building. It was built about 1830, also for members of the Richardson family who owned the leather works



13 Richardson's leather works

The leather works opened in 1863 and became one of the area's leading industrial concerns. Adjacent to the leather works were some streets of terraced housing owned by the company and rented to its workers. The housing was demolished in the 1970s soon after the factory closed.



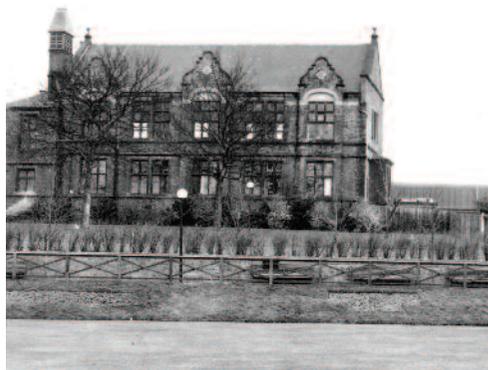
14 Savoy Cinema

The Savoy Cinema opened in 1932 in a former church building dating from 1896 and housing the Beech Grove Congregational Church. Seating almost 800 people, the cinema closed in 1966 following a fire.



20 Stephenson Library

The Stephenson Library was given to the city by local businessman and philanthropist, Sir William Haswell Stephenson, who also built Heaton Library and the Lady Stephenson Library in Walker. The Elswick Library closed in the 1980s and is now the home of the West End Women and Girls project.



21 Elswick House

Elswick House was the family home of Sir W.H.Stephenson from the 1880s. Stephenson was Mayor of Newcastle seven times and in 1903 had one of the mayoral barges in his garden. During the 20th century the house was used at different times as a children's home and a school until it was demolished. The Marie Curie Cancer Centre now stands on the site.

