

by Kate Davies



Visiting Edinburgh? You too can walk in the steps of Jane Gaugain! Several centuries of knitting heritage are written through this beautiful and dramatic city, and you can experience it in the best way possible—on foot! This near-circular walk covers 4 miles around the centre of Edinburgh, and should take 2-3 hours from start to finish. You can break it up with a cup of tea (or two), if you like and some knitting. Edinburgh is a hilly city, and there are a few steep gradients around the closes of the old town, and Dean Village.

## 1. North Bridge

Your walk begins at the crossroads of the High Street (part of the “Royal Mile”). Turning North, you walk past Jane Gaugain’s Edinburgh beginnings: the locations of the tailor’s business established on North Bridge by her father, and the stationery and haberdashery shop owned by John James Gaugain, her future husband. The original buildings no longer exist, but Gaugain’s shop was located where the Balmoral Hotel now stands.



*edinburgh castle, circa 1870*

## 2. Register House

During the early medieval period, Scottish wool was a prized commodity. The Register House on the corner of Princes Street houses a document that reveals just how valuable it was—the 1182 trade charter from Philip of Flanders to the Monks of Melrose Abbey (a few miles outside Edinburgh). The monks kept sheep; these sheep produced luxurious fleeces; and these fleeces were exported to Bruges, to be woven into fine cloth by Flemish weavers. Pack-horses laden with Melrose fleeces would pass slowly through the centre of Edinburgh on their way to be shipped out from the port of Leith.



*princes st, circa 1900*

### **3. 63, George Street.**

A fine example of eighteenth-century town planning, George Street (named after King George III) was the grandest street in the New Town, generously proportioned and linked by two imposing public squares, one of which (St Andrews Square) became the most exclusive address in nineteenth-century Edinburgh. At number 63—the building that is now Crombies Menswear—stood Jane Gaugain's knitting emporium. Here, in the 1840s, you would have been able to buy the latest shades of Berlin and Shetland wool, as well as the fashionable patterns written by Gaugain herself.



#### 4. Stockbridge and the Waters of Leith

Walking down Frederick Street, once the site of the auction rooms and stationers business of Jane's husband, John James Gaugain, you descend out of the New Town into the lovely village of

Stockbridge. Ahead, there are fine views of the Forth Estuary and the rolling hills of Fife, and on your right (if you are so inclined) is the Edinburgh branch of McAree Brothers yarn store. Your path now follows the beautiful winding Waters of Leith. Downstream from Stockbridge once stood several woollen mills, and the flow of the river was dammed and diverted to power the machinery.



*St Bernard's Well, Stockbridge*

## 5. Dean Cemetery

Crossing the bridge at Dean Village, you walk up a wooded hillside to Dean Cemetery, the final resting place of Jane Gaugain. Her grave is unmarked, but we know she is buried in the cemetery's "section H". Jane is in good company. Many eminent Scots are buried in Dean Cemetery, including Dr Joseph Bell, said to be the real-life inspiration for Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. "Sauntering here," according to one Victorian guidebook,, "you cannot divest yourself of the idea that you are wending your way through some Highland Glen." Whether you nurture Highland fantasies or not, Dean Cemetery is still a very beautiful and melancholy place.



*near jane gaugain's unmarked grave*

## 6. Lawnmarket, West Bow

The Lawnmarket is so-called from the linen and wool market that used to be held here at the thriving heart of the Old Town. The steep closes around Edinburgh Castle were famous for their textile and tailors shops—and indeed they still are. In 1825, West Bow was apparently home to an enormous “woollen warehouse.” There is no warehouse there now, but you will find K1 Yarns boutique and tea-room instead. Stop here for a welcome cup of tea, and to knit with Katherine, Sarah and Ysolda.





*photo courtesy of k1 yarns*

## 7. National Museum of Scotland

Your journey ends in the textile galleries of the National Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street. The museum preserves several different editions of Jane Gaugain's works as well as many wonderful examples of nineteenth-century knitting and weaving. You can learn about Scotland's different regional variations and specialities, including Fairisle colourwork, Sanquar knitting, Shetland Lace, Paisley shawls and, of course, tartan. Among the Museum's fantastic collection of nineteenth-century woollen textiles are the remnants of a pattern carefully worked in Berlin wool. On the back of one tiny piece is written the name "Gaugain."

[Download a pdf map of the walking tour](#)

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