

JAMES McNAUGHTON, COPPERSMITH

By Ken McNaughton

My 3rd great grandfather, James McNaughton, was listed in every Edinburgh Post Office street directory between 1797 and 1811 as a coppersmith on West Bow [1]. He operated his business there for fourteen years but is not mentioned before or after.

WESTBOW

To have his own business he would have been at least twenty, although of course, he could have been older. He must have been born no later than 1777. There were some other James McNaughtons in Edinburgh around that time. A corn merchant with the same name was listed on Silvermills 1805-6 and a teacher lived nearby 1808-14. A James McNaughton, merchant, was listed at 15 St. James's Square in 1794. He was listed as J. McNaughton in 1797. It's possible that he became a coppersmith and moved to Westbow.



Figure 2. West Bow ca. 1847, lithograph by James Duffield Harding after a drawing by George Cattermole [3].

Fig. 2 is set around 1847, thirty-six years after James left this address. It appears to be looking north from the southern end of Westbow. James would have been on the west side at left.

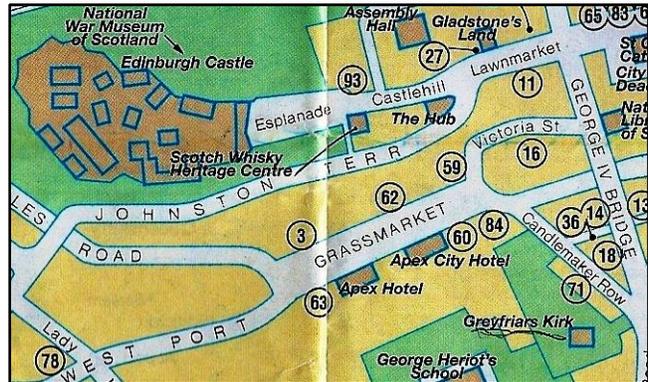


Figure 1. West Bow used to run from the intersection of Grassmarket with Victoria Street, then cut north to Lawnmarket [2].

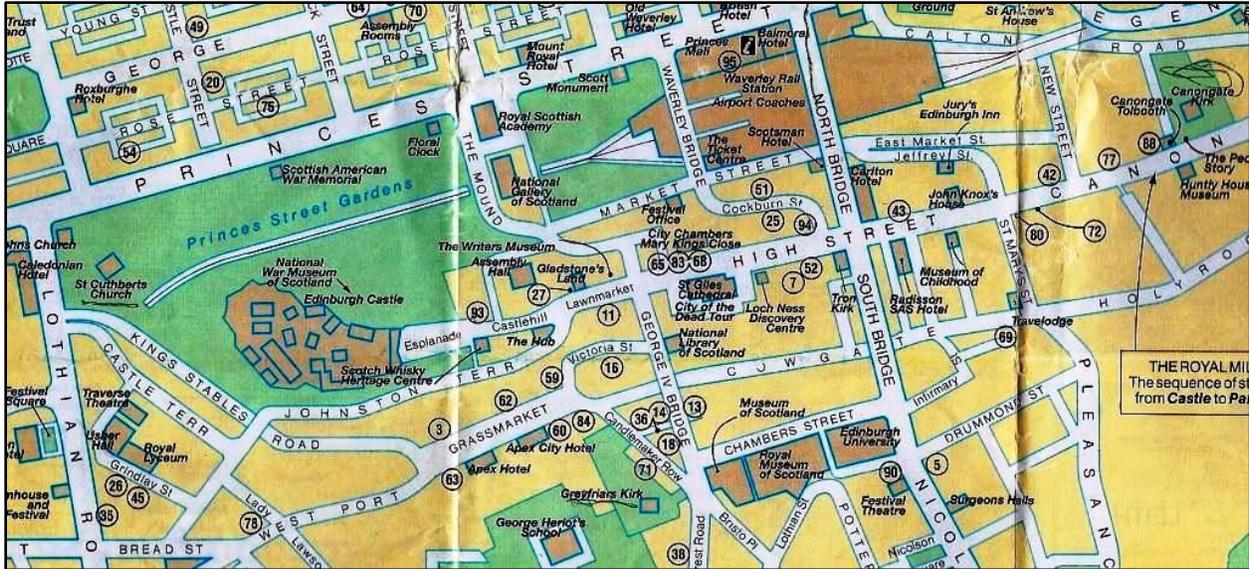


Figure 3. Map of Edinburgh showing locations of churches and West Bow

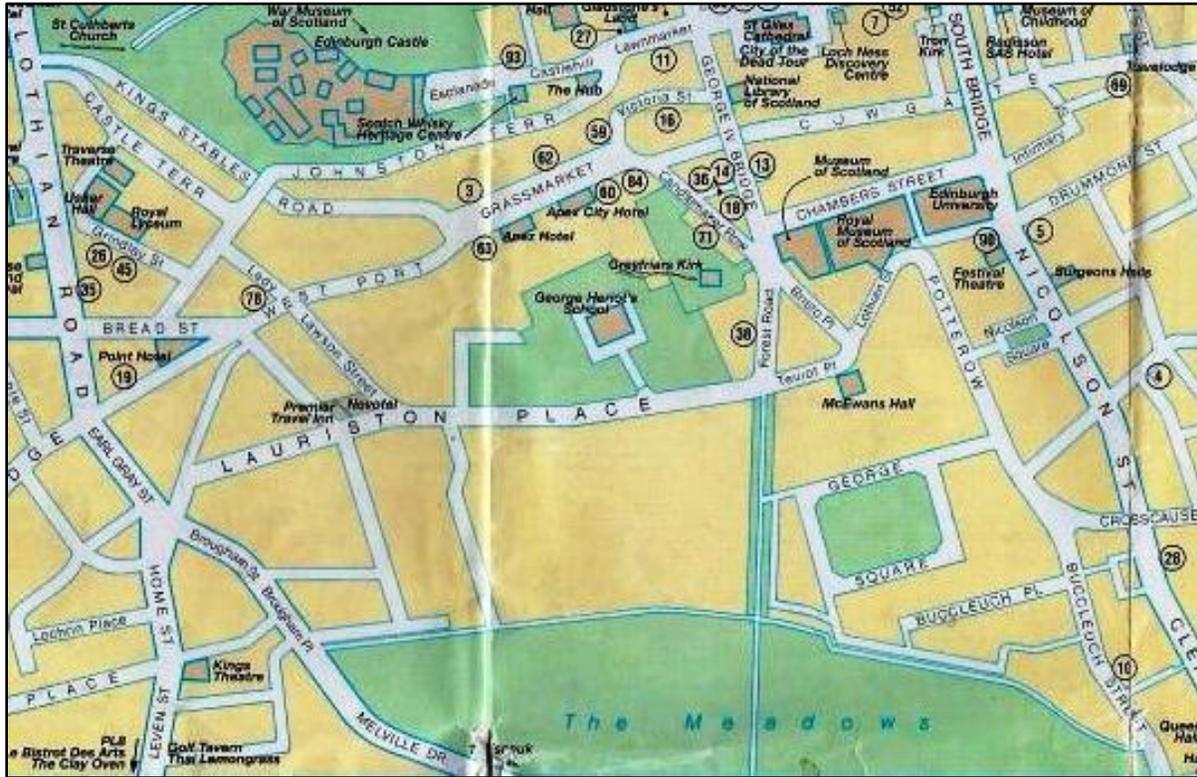
This was the industrial hub of the old town, a smelly, bustling place of workers surrounded by noisy inns and livestock [4]. Here at the East End corner, the Grassmarket connects with the steep West Bow which was the principle entrance to the old town from the West. The gallows were situated near this corner and many criminals were publicly executed here. At the end of the 19th century the gallows were removed, but the adjacent Bow well built in 1681 still stands there. This steep section survived the road improvements of 1827, resulting in its present day alignment with Victoria Street. It housed the nobles and aristocrats of the city, gradually changing to a noisy bustling area of coppersmiths, tinsmiths and metal beaters. Fortunately the present five-story buildings have retained their original features. Victoria Street is possibly one of the most charming and colorful streets of Edinburgh. The shops in this area were once described by James Ballantine [1806-77, artist and author] as dealing in the necessities of life, homely merchandise, curios and knickknacks with which they were generally crammed to the door.

COPPERSMITH

Coppersmiths make artifacts from copper. There is an image on the Web of an early 19th century oval copper jelly mold with a pineapple top made for a leading Princes Street confectioner. They also may have made memorial plaques. At the top of the heap was William Forbes of Callendar (1756-1823). He began work as a coppersmith and won a government contract to sheath ships' hulls in copper. He made a fortune equivalent to \$1 billion today and bought large estates near Falkirk. The only surviving son of James McNaughton—John Ross McNaughton, my great great grandfather—departed Greenock in 1837 with his young family for Australia in the *William Rodger*, which was sheathed in “yellow metal” [5]. Yellow metal (60% copper, 40% zinc and a trace of iron) was patented in 1832 by George Muntz and was hugely successful in replacing copper sheathing on the bottom of boats. [This reminds me of a joke I came across as a child and had no context for until now, more than sixty years later. *Dowager: “Are you copper-bottoming it my man?” Workman: “No. I’m aluminiuming it Mum.”*]

The father and grandfather of William Forbes were both coppersmiths; William involved several of his brothers in the business.

Figure 4. Portsburgh stretched from Lochrin in the west ((bottom left) to Drummond Street in the east (top right) and from King's Stables Road in the north (top left) to the Meadows in the south (center bottom).



FAMILY

After James McNaughton had been listed in the West Bow as a coppersmith for seven years, he and Christian Ross gave up their names for marriage on 27 January 1804 in the historic parish of Canongate (Fig. 3 top right). Christian was the daughter of James Ross, mason, but I could find no such person listed in the Edinburgh directories for 1800 or 1804. The first child of James and Christian, Lauchlan Ross, was born on 20 February 1810 and baptized at Old Gray Friars parish on 7 April. Gray Friars is immediately south of West Bow, center bottom in Fig. 3. A child, Lauchlane McNaughton, was buried in Gray Friars on 15th December, so they seem to have lost their first child at 10 months. There is no further record of Lauchlan. James is listed on West Bow for the last time in the directory of 1811-12. Another son, John Ross, was born on 12 May 1814 and baptized in St. Cuthbert's Church on 23rd May (center left in Fig. 3). This time James was identified as a coppersmith in Portsburgh.

PORTSBURGH

Edinburgh Castle is a fortress built on a rocky volcanic outcrop, so the only way up is a winding path. For visitors coming from the steep western side, it was necessary to proceed east on Westport, pass through the bustling Grassmarket, wind up the narrow West Bow and turn sharp left on Lawnmarket on the gentler eastern slope. Central Edinburgh was a royal burgh. Portsburgh was created in 1649, a small and ancient district of south central Edinburgh just

outside the walls, west of the Grassmarket (Fig. 4). Portsburgh was a burgh of barony, distinct from a royal burgh, and granted to a tenant-in-chief, a landowner who held his estates directly from the crown. It took its name from the West Port (entrance) to Edinburgh. The area of Portsburgh was abolished in 1856 but the name survives in Portsburgh Square off the West Port. We don't know if James and Christian McNaughton lived on West Bow, where he worked, between 1804 and 1811. When their son John was born in 1812, James gave his location as Portsburgh. Some houses in 1869 on West Port, part of Portsburgh, are shown in Fig. 5, with the castle in the background.

Figure 5. Houses in the West Port 1869 from a drawing by Mrs. J. Stewart Smith [6].



There is a lot we don't know about James McNaughton. We don't know where and when he was born. We don't know anything about his parents, or if he had siblings. We don't know where and when he died. This story is intended to flesh out the few things we do know about him. The last Scottish Chief of Clan McNaughton died in Edinburgh in 1773, apparently without issue. James McNaughton, my 3rd great grandfather, was born in Edinburgh about the same time.

REFERENCES

1. [Edinburgh Post Office Directories 1794-1814](#), National Library of Scotland.
2. Edinburgh City Guide Map.
3. [West Bow, Edinburgh](#), ca. 1847, Allinson Gallery.
4. [Landscape Views of Edinburgh](#), The Unique Collection, The D&A Collection, Isle of Arran.
5. McNaughton, Ken, [The McNaughtons of Edinburgh and Kirkintilloch](#), Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide.
6. [Houses in the Westport 1869](#), Edinphoto.

NOTES

I am indebted to David McNaughtan of the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide for discovering a death notice for Lauchlan McNaughton, for finding that James McNaughton, coppersmith, was listed on West Bow and for alerting me to the online street directories for Edinburgh. This work is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any medium without written permission from Ken McNaughton, 3778 College Avenue, Ellicott City, MD 21043; phone/fax: 410-418-9340; kjmcn@comcast.net (10 March 2012).

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