

EdinburghLife

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and the Lothians

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Swanston

Picture perfect village

Alex Salmond & Albert Reynolds at The New Club

Happy Birthday Duke of Edinburgh

Summer Fashion

Martin Wishart's Summer Recipes

WIN

A watercolour portrait of your home!

International Festival & Fringe Guide

Book and Jazz Festivals

Barry Cryer

- Master Comic

Danube Street

A colourful past!

New Broom at Tattoo



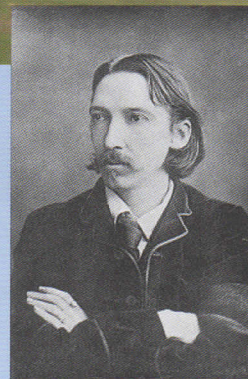
PLUS Eating Out | Property | Auctions | Society | Crossword

The area of Swanston which has been a Conservation Area since 1975, lies on the foothills of the Pentlands, and is one of the most beautiful areas on the southern outskirts of Edinburgh.

It contains a very historic and picturesque village which has changed little over time. However, the working farm, golf course and club have undergone a great many modifications in recent times.

Swanston is perhaps most famous for writer and former resident Robert Louis Stevenson. In 1761 Swanston Cottage was built. Robert Louis Stevenson's parents, Thomas and Margaret leased Swanston Cottage as a summer residence for the period of their only son's late 'teens and twenties, from 1867 to 1880, and there is an engraving on the cottage, commemorating the fact. The cottage sits separately from the village, and is now a very private residence.

It was here that Robert Louis Stevenson wrote his novel *St Ives*, describing the cottage in detail. He also told a quaint story in his *Edinburgh Picturesque Notes*, about a local whisky distiller and the Excise man! It makes a fascinating read. Today a 'lawful dram' can be enjoyed at one of many pubs dotted around Swanston, one of which is the Hunter's Tryst – itself steeped in fascinating history, if you believe in ghosts!



Swanston

- A hidden gem

Robert Louis Stevenson's holiday haunt is an historic village of thatched cottages, surprisingly close to the city but very much off the beaten track by Fraser Paterson

The village itself is reached by Swanston Road, which runs from Oxfangs Road, near Hunter's Tryst.

The first record of Swanston Village appears in 1214 AD as part of the district of Redhall. An agreement was struck between a farmer, called Sveinn, and the local Anglian landowners, to work the land. The spelling of Sveinn's ton was then changed over the centuries to finally end up as the

modern documented Swanston.

The upper section of the village of Swanston, about 600 feet above sea-level, grew up in the early eighteenth century around the farm and originally consisted of nine thatched cottages. The thatched cottages still remain but during renovation by the City Council in 1964 the nine cottages were made into seven. All the properties are now privately owned.

The former school house was built

in the 18th century. Children used to travel from as far afield as Bowbridge, Lothianburn, Comiston House, Fordel and Dreghorn to attend the school! The farmhouse which was also built around that time, and has since been developed into luxury apartments.

At the turn of the 20th century the slate roofed stone cottages of New Swanston were built on three sides round a grassy area just across the burn from the old village. These were



originally farm worker's cottages. Ten of these are now available on a long let basis.

Above Swanston Village across Lothianburn golf course, there is a small wood known as the 'T' Wood. In 1766 the laird of Mortonhall who was head of the Trotter family, planted the wood as a memorial to a member of the house who fell in battle. It is actually in the shape of a Greek cross, but appears as a 'T' shape when seen at a distance from the North.



Just below the village lays a dog walker's car park. Parking is free, and a very short walk up through woodland brings you out at the cottages. From there one has several walks from which to choose. These include a walk around the periphery of Lothianburn Golf Course (which is laid out across acreage adjacent to Swanston but on the other side of the Swanston burn), or one of two more stretching walks, up either Caerketton or Allermuir. Caerketton is the one you can see directly in front of you. The large scree which runs down its steep slope was caused by over grazing many years ago. Indeed, sheep used to graze on both Lothianburn and

Swanston golf courses until the early 1990's! At 1618 feet Allermuir is only 50 feet higher at its summit than Caerketton, and has an even steeper climb near the top. It lies to the right of Caerketton, and is a longer walk to reach.

After your exertions you can unwind with a well earned bite to eat and refreshments in the fantastic new golf clubhouse that is situated right beside the walker's car park. It is open to the public, and provides food of an excellent quality, both on the snack and restaurant menus. Much local produce from the farm's own livestock is utilised, as well as that of local producers. The views from the main balcony of the clubhouse are superb!



The farm is still used today. The sheep now graze in the hills above Swanston golf course. Highland cattle do likewise. There are also a large number of free range hens on the farm, which can be seen in the fields just below the village.

The old steading, initially constructed in the mid 1800's, used to be one of the most advanced of its day, using the most up to date Victorian farming machinery. It is now made up of a livery, 8 business units, and six holiday cottages. The holiday cottages and business units were created during renovations of the steading between 2001 and 2003.

Recently Swanston Golf Course has seen heavy investment by the McClung family who are landlords for much of the area, including a new short course of six holes and created in an area just below the new chalet style clubhouse. The original course retains its hilly character, and provides an excellent test of patience, perseverance, and short game skill, which you will need to pass with flying colours to produce a good score!

So, if you've never been to Swanston, perhaps now is the time!

For more information on Swanston, visit www.swanston.co.uk or www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/edinburgh/swanston



Did you know?

Robert Louis Stevenson's father and grandfather were in the lighthouse business. His grandfather, who was also called Robert, was the engineer for the construction of the world famous Bell Rock Lighthouse offshore from Arbroath.

Alison Cunningham - or Cummy as Robert referred to her - was his nanny. After the Stevensons departed the cottage she lived in the gatehouse of Swanston Cottage with her brother, from 1880 to 1893. Her initials can still be seen carved into the lintel above the door, denoting the period of her stay. She spent the final years of her life in Morningside.