



# Designed Landscapes

---

Christopher Dingwall

---

This is part of the series *Essays on the Local History and Archaeology of West Central Scotland*, commissioned for the Regional Framework for Local History and Archaeology, a partnership project led by Glasgow Museums, with representatives from the councils of East Dunbartonshire, West Dunbartonshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire.

## Introduction

This essay is concerned with 'designed landscapes', a generic term adopted by government agencies and others in Scotland towards the end of the twentieth century to describe those parts of our historic environment that have been consciously laid out and planted. Landscaping may be for aesthetic or recreational reasons, for example to enhance the setting of a building, or for more functional purposes, such as the growing of flowers, fruit and vegetables. Gardens and other designed landscapes reflect both their natural environment – the local topography, soil and climate – and what can best be described as their cultural environment – the social and economic circumstances of their creators, and the fashion of the period or periods in which they were created. The term embraces everything from the extensive grounds that provide the settings of grand country houses to villa landscapes, town gardens and allotments, as well as including other places such as botanical gardens, public parks and cemeteries.

Figure 1. Western Necropolis, Glasgow. Established in 1882, the Western Necropolis took its inspiration from the Glasgow Necropolis and other so-called 'garden cemeteries' in and around Glasgow. It was one of several non-denominational cemeteries developed in the mid nineteenth century to answer the huge demand for burial space created by the rapidly expanding city. Garden cemeteries, often sited on hilltops, were designed as recreational spaces, where the contemplation of death was made less painful by careful layout and design.

Gardens and other designed landscapes differ from most other aspects of the historic environment in that they are dynamic, changing both in a cyclical sense with the seasons, and in an evolutionary sense through the natural processes of growth and decay of their living components. Left to themselves, the living elements will die and disappear, leaving little or no trace of their former existence. Where they survive and evolve, the resulting landscapes may become multi-layered, displaying features from a number of different periods. As well as requiring special knowledge and skills to interpret, designed landscapes also offer unique challenges to those involved in their conservation.

## The Long History of Landscaping

It is well-nigh impossible to summarize the history of gardening and landscaping in a paragraph or two. That said, gardens and other designed landscapes have long been an integral part of the landscape of Strathclyde. Gardening as we understand it today probably came to the area in around the twelfth century via monasteries, which brought to Scotland ideas and skills from mainland Europe. There is also an increasing body of evidence suggesting that most high-status houses in the later medieval period possessed walled gardens and parks. During the seventeenth century, a time of increasing peace and prosperity, many landowners remodelled or rebuilt



© Christopher Dingwall



Figure 2. Springburn Park, Glasgow. Incorporating one of the highest points in the city of Glasgow, Springburn Park was developed from the 1890s onwards as a public park for the northern suburbs of city. It was created on part of the neighbouring agricultural estates of Mosesfield and Cockmuir, which were acquired by the Glasgow Corporation in 1891, and has a range of features including a rock garden, a boating pond, bowling greens and a variety of sports pitches. The park is well-used by local people for both formal and informal recreation.

their houses and improved their estates, often with new planting and enclosure. Most landscapes of this period, and up to the mid eighteenth century, were broadly rectilinear or geometrical in form. In contrast, those of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century were more naturalistic in style, characterized by sinuous lines and tree-studded parkland. In the early to mid nineteenth century many new plants were introduced to Scottish gardens from different parts of the world, thanks to the efforts of generations of plant hunters. The Victorian and Edwardian periods were marked by a revival of formal gardening, with many landowners investing money generated from the profits of industry and trade. This was also the era that brought us public parks and garden cemeteries, intended to serve the rapidly expanding populations of towns and cities (figs 1 and 2).



Figure 3. The Hidden Gardens, Glasgow. These gardens, which opened in 2003, are a good example of modern and innovative garden design, and serve as a peaceful and family-friendly green space in a busy part of Glasgow. The gardens were developed on the site of an old tram depot in Pollokshields, and care has been taken in their design to incorporate elements that reflect the history of the site.

The wars that marked the twentieth century brought with them dramatic changes in people's social and economic circumstances: many families were no longer able to maintain their old houses and estates. Consequently, during the middle part of the century many country houses and their gardens declined, and estates fragmented. While some landscapes survived by adapting to new uses, many succumbed to pressure for residential and industrial development, especially on the urban fringes of Glasgow and other towns. Against this general trend, significant new gardens have been, and are still being created (fig. 3), though in much smaller numbers and on a much reduced scale.

## Listing and Protection

It is only in the last twenty-five years that gardens and other designed landscapes have come to be recognized in their own right as part of Scotland's cultural heritage, and that their history has been regarded as a legitimate subject for academic study. In contrast to the listing of buildings, which began soon after World War II, the systematic listing of gardens did not begin until the 1980s. The first stage in this process culminated in the publication in 1987 of *An Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland*, which included descriptions of 19 landscapes within the Regional Framework for Local History and Archaeology study area that were regarded as being of national significance. A review of the *Inventory*, begun in 1993, has resulted in around ten new sites being added to this list. Although the *Inventory* is a valuable resource, we should be aware of its shortcomings, arising from the short time allowed for the compilation of the entries, most of which were based on limited research into secondary sources, and on a single site visit.

The *Inventory* cannot be regarded as anything like an accurate reflection of the scale of the resource as a whole. Experience gained from surveys of designed landscapes in other parts of Scotland suggest that the number of significant designed landscapes in any given area may be up to ten times that of the sites listed in the *Inventory* – a recent survey of Ayrshire identified 141 significant landscapes in comparison with just 14 included in the original *Inventory*. Nor have these surveys taken into account places where a congregation of smaller landscapes can be seen to possess what can best be described as 'group value'. In the absence of a more comprehensive list, and a consequent lack of recognition within Scotland's system for town and country planning, designed landscapes are peculiarly vulnerable to neglect and/or pressure from development. This means opportunities are lost to maximize the benefits that can come from designed landscapes, whether through the maintenance and enhancement of landscape character, or by realizing the recreational opportunities which many of these places offer.



© Christopher Dingwall

There is a consequent need for more systematic and focused research, to gain a better understanding of the resource as a whole, if historic gardens and other designed landscapes are to be offered protection comparable to that afforded to other facets of our cultural and natural heritage. While the Scottish Government's *Scottish Historic Environment Policy: October 2011* recognizes that '*... there are many sites across Scotland which do not meet the criteria for national importance, but nevertheless make an important contribution to the local historic environment and landscape character*' (fig. 4), it also makes it clear that it sees local authorities as being responsible for taking the lead in compiling lists of these sites, and in developing appropriate policies for their protection.

## Research Opportunities and Methods

Given the present state of our knowledge about the history of designed landscapes in Scotland – the last general overview of the subject was published as long ago as the 1930s – the opportunities for original and detailed research are manifold. Researchers might usefully follow the lead given by North Lanarkshire, East Dunbartonshire and East Renfrewshire Councils, and by other local authorities outwith the Regional Framework for Local History and Archaeology study area, who have undertaken broad-based surveys that have sought to identify and document all designed landscapes within a defined area. This may lead to more narrowly focused studies of individual landscapes and their history, or of groups of landscapes dating from a particular period. Valuable information can also be generated by thematic studies focused on specific topics – for example on the history of public parks, garden cemeteries, school gardens, local horticultural societies – or on the role played by particular individuals who have influenced the business

of gardening and landscaping, whether landowners, gardeners, designers or nurserymen.

Designed landscapes can generally be broken down into identifiable components that contribute to landscape character. For instance, in the landscapes associated with country houses, the house generally serves as a focal point (fig. 5), set within a framework of formal gardens, parkland and ornamental planting, circumscribed by walls and gate lodges, knitted together by carriage drives and paths, and often embracing other buildings. Often the influence of



© Christopher Dingwall

Figure 5. Wishaw House, North Lanarkshire. The one-time country seat of Lord Belhaven of Biel, Wishaw House was surrounded by extensive landscaped grounds with fine views over the South Calder Water. Like many other places in the Central Valley of Scotland, it became a victim of industrial development, and of changing economic and social circumstances in the twentieth century. Although the house was demolished in 1953, leaving only the foundations, elements of its designed landscape can still be traced on the ground.

these landscapes extends well beyond the immediate grounds, whether in the form of views, or in the pattern of field dykes, hedges and other boundaries to be found in rural areas. Other landscape types such as public parks and cemeteries have their own sets of standard and more unusual components (fig. 6). It is through the analysis of these elements that we can hope to understand designed landscapes, and plan for their ongoing management as part of our historic environment.

Investigation into the history of gardens and other designed landscapes will require researchers to combine information from a variety of sources. These sources include:

- maps of the area, some of which date back as far as the 16th century, and which, when viewed in succession, can throw much light on the evolution of landscape;
- original documents and plans, whether still in private hands or preserved in libraries and archives;
- published sources, whether historical publications such as the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*, parish histories and travellers' journals, or more modern publications;
- pictures, in the form of paintings, drawings, photographs, postcards and the like.

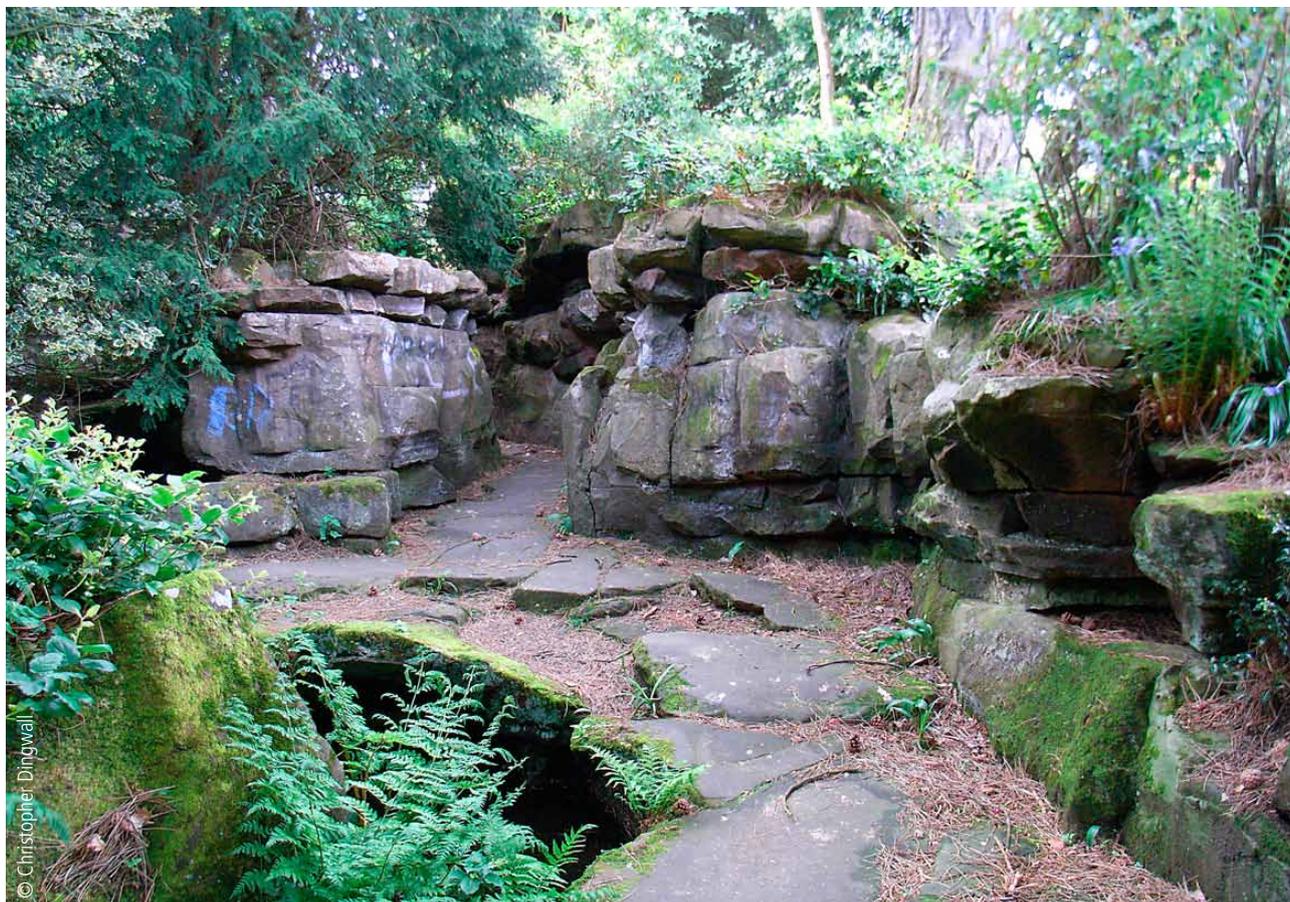
Information gleaned from these sources can generally be combined with evidence gathered from field observations to tell the story of a particular landscape.

## Conclusion

---

It would seem sensible for there to be a regional forum created in which experience could be shared and information exchanged on a regular basis. This would help to avoid duplication of effort, and ensure that regional standards are set and maintained. The forum could usefully draw on the knowledge and expertise of voluntary bodies such as the Garden History Society in Scotland and the Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland, which would be able to view local research within a broader context, and provide links with other institutions and organizations.

Figure 6. Rock Garden at Rosshall Park, Glasgow. In the 1880s the wealthy Glasgow industrialist James Cowan commissioned James Pulham & Son, among the foremost garden designers of their time, to build an artificial rock garden in the grounds of his mansion at Rosshall, in the Crookston area of Glasgow (then in Renfrewshire). The mansion house is now a private hospital, but the grounds, including the rock garden, were acquired by the Glasgow Corporation in 1948 and now serve as a public park.



© Christopher Dingwall

## Select Bibliography and Further Reading

---

Binney, M, Harris, J and Winnington, E (1980) *Lost Houses of Scotland*, London, SAVE Britain's Heritage.

Colvin, H (1995) *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architecture 1600–1840*, Newhaven and London, Yale University Press.

Desmond, R (1984) *Bibliography of British Gardens*, Winchester, St Paul's Bibliographies.

(1994) *Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists*, London, Taylor & Francis with the Natural History Museum.

Dingwall, CH (1995) Researching historic gardens in Scotland: a guide to information sources, *Scottish Natural Heritage Review*, no. 54.

Garden History Society in Scotland (1994) *Strathclyde Region Garden Survey: An Interim List of Non-Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Strathclyde Region*, unpublished report for Scottish Natural Heritage and Strathclyde Regional Council.

Holmes, M (1986) *The Country House Described: An Index to the Country Houses of Great Britain and Ireland*, Winchester, St Paul's Bibliographies.

Land Use Consultants (1987) *An Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland*, Glasgow, Countryside Commission for Scotland and the Scottish Development Department Historic Buildings and Monuments Directorate. [Much of this information, along with details of additional sites, is now available online, through Historic Scotland's website.]

Tait, AA (1980) *The Landscape Garden in Scotland 1735–1835*, Edinburgh University Press.

### Architectural guides

Although they do not give anything like comprehensive coverage of the Regional Framework for Local History and Archaeology study area, there is valuable information to be found in a number of architectural guides.

In The Buildings of Scotland series:

Gifford, J and Walker, FA (2002) *Stirling and Central Scotland* [including East and West Dunbartonshire], Newhaven and London, Yale University Press.

Williamson, E, Riches, A and Higgs, M (1990) *Glasgow*, London, Penguin.

In the Illustrated Architectural Guides series of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS):

McKean, C, Walker, D and Walker, FA (1989) *Central Glasgow*, Edinburgh, RIAS.

Peden, A (1992) *The Monklands*, Edinburgh, RIAS.

Small, S (2008) *Greater Glasgow*, Edinburgh, RIAS.

Walker, FA (1986) *South Clyde Estuary*, Edinburgh, RIAS.

Walker, FA and Sinclair, F (1992) *North Clyde Estuary*, Edinburgh, RIAS.

### Libraries and archives

Details of the resources available from libraries and archives located within the Regional Framework for Local History and Archaeology study area may be found in *Exploring Scottish History* by M Cox (1999).

In addition, researchers may wish to avail themselves of additional resources available from the following institutions, all located in Edinburgh:

- the National Library of Scotland (Main Library and Map Library);
- the National Archives of Scotland;
- the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland;
- the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

### Online resources

An increasing amount of information from the above-mentioned libraries and archives is available from their websites:

- [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)
- [www.nas.gov.uk](http://www.nas.gov.uk)
- [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk)
- [www.rbge.org.uk](http://www.rbge.org.uk)

In addition, information may be obtained from the following:

- [www.canmore.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.canmore.rcahms.gov.uk)  
Canmore is an online guide to the photographs, prints, drawings, architectural plans and other material held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, searchable by place name or keyword.
- [www.pastmap.org](http://www.pastmap.org)  
A map-enabled query system for Scottish national and regional archaeological and architectural datasets.
- [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk)  
Scran (Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network) is a database of images covering many aspects of Scotland's cultural heritage, gathered from a variety of sources, searchable by keyword.
- [www.tara.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.tara.rcahms.gov.uk)  
The Aerial Reconnaissance Archives (TARA) is an evolving website that aims to make available online both vertical and oblique aerial photographs from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland collections, some of them dating back more than fifty years.

However, researchers are reminded that the information selected for inclusion online is limited in scope, and may even be erroneous in some cases. Researchers are encouraged to refer to primary sources wherever possible.