

## **RECREATION AND LEISURE** **PARKS AND GROUNDS**

The settings which landowners chose for their houses had much to say about them. From at least the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the design of parklands was a matter of fashion, fashions which continued to change. Parks, bounded by high walls, created privacy and distance (both social and spatial) from the rest of society. In effect, they were private theme parks.

Despite a century or more of decline, decay and neglect, there is still much that can be read from what remains of them today.

The earliest parks were the hunting reserves of royalty and aristocracy. Holyrood Park, Edinburgh, was one such. The idea of a park as a designed space came much later. This painting, by Thomas Fairbairn (1858), shows an **early park at Cadzow, Lanarkshire**, with ancient trees and the famous white cattle



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The general principals of applied landscape design in Scotland suggest an interesting contrast with the state of the landscape beyond the park dyke.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, whilst the landscape at large was fluid and organic in its lack of geometry, the parkland landscape was one of formal geometrical layout, with radiating avenues through planted woodland and grassland. As the agricultural landscape changed to one of geometrical formality, the parkland landscape took on a more naturalistic, fluid, ungeometrical layout, with winding drives and plantings moulded into naturalistic shapes.

There were other features to be found within parks and grounds. The outer perimeter, as already mentioned, consisted of a high, stone wall. Earlier examples of these are topped off with an outward sloping surface. Entry through the wall is controlled by lodges, small houses, often mimicking the architectural style of the mansion house and typically manned by elderly retainers. This **lodge** is at the entrance to **Howden House, Livingston**. These entrances were also gated, occasionally in grand style.



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Within the park there might be fanciful buildings, pretending to be Greek temples or Romantic ruins, but sometimes having a practical purpose, such as dovecote or even pigsty. This **folly** stands on the edge of **Kinnoul Hill, Perthshire**. Close to the house were the stables and carriage houses, with accommodation for grooms and coachmen. Concealed within the grounds might be an ice house.



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The impression of open prospects from the mansion house might be retained through the use of a 'ha-ha'. This is a sunken dyke which,

full height on its outer side, gave the impression of open space, whilst keeping the parkland livestock away from the house and its immediate approaches.

A **home farm steading**, where the landowner could play at farming, might also be accommodated within the park dyke. This fine example is in **Dyke and Moy parish, Moray**. A formal kitchen garden, which supplied the house, was another common element, strictly geometrical in its shape and internal layout, often with glass-houses to grow exotic fruits and vegetables.



Other, purely ornamental features might include a lake, or other body of water. This **lake** was in the grounds of **Balruddery House, near Dundee**. As with the layout of parkland, fashions in these matters changed over the years, from formality to informality.



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Many years of neglect and attrition have eaten away at this important component in the Scottish landscape. Parkland has been ploughed up, woodlands have been felled, ponds left to silt up, buildings left to decay – or even helped on their way with explosives! In recent decades, there has been an increased

interest in parks. It must be hoped that some of the best of what remains can still be saved, not least for the sake of its value as social history.

***To find out more:***

Buxbaum, T. *Scottish Garden Buildings, From food to folly*, Edinburgh, 1989

Tait, A.A. *The Landscape Garden in Scotland 1735-1835*, Edinburgh, 1980

Mowl, T. and Earnshaw, B. *Trumpet at a Distant Gate, The lodge as prelude to the country house*, London, 1985

Headley, G. and Meulenkamp, W. *Follies, Grottoes and Garden Buildings*, London, 1999

### **Looking at parks and grounds**

The grounds round a wealthy individual's house were an area where the owner could do what he or she liked, for the pleasure of his family and visitors. Where these grounds are accessible to you, often as country parks, you can think about how people arranged pieces of land according to their own taste, often without any practical purpose.

You can **think about** the layout:

- Is it intended to screen the big house from outside view? Or to give a good view from the house? Or both?
- How was it planned on give pleasant walks, and on larger estates drives in carriages?
- Were working buildings such as the home farm deliberately hidden from the big house?

Part of the owner's aim may have been to impress people.

- Is there a gate lodge beside enormous gates?
- Has the ground been landscaped to make artificial features such as ponds?
- Are there features which are designed to catch the eye, such as long avenues of trees or follies located in carefully-chosen places?

The grounds of big country houses were playgrounds for the rich.

- Can you find buildings or other structures which seem to have had no practical use?
- Are there buildings which are disguised as something else?

Few big houses are still run in the way they were intended to function. What has happened to the parkland of the one you are looking at?

- Has it been opened to the public and if so what sort of facilities (such as a car park) have been added? Do you think they alter the 'feel' of the estate?
- Has it returned to farmland, leaving isolated features that look out of place?