

City of Edinburgh Council

**Edinburgh**  
Survey of Gardens and Designed Landscapes

**003 Atholl Crescent Garden**

**Consultants**














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Survey visit: May 2007

003 - Atholl Crescent



Key

- |  |                     |   |                          |
|--|---------------------|---|--------------------------|
|  | Site boundary       |  | Essential setting        |
|  | Ruined buildings    |  | Site of former house     |
|  | Principal buildings |  | Main drive               |
|  | Gardens             |  | Principal views or vista |
|  | Water               |  | Panoramic View           |
|  | Woodlands           |  | Walled Garden            |
|  | Parkland            |   |                          |

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THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

**SURVEY OF GARDENS AND  
DESIGNED LANDSCAPES**

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### 003 Atholl Crescent Garden

Parish Edinburgh

NGR NT 2440 7343

NMRS No NT27SW 783

Owner City of Edinburgh Council

Designations

Listing 1-22 Atholl Crescent including railings, lamp standards A

New Town Conservation Area

Edinburgh World Heritage Site

#### REASONS FOR INCLUSION

Atholl Crescent Garden lies within the New Town Conservation Area and Edinburgh World Heritage Site, but outwith the boundary drawn for the New Town Gardens in the *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland*. All the New Town communal gardens merit inclusion in this survey on account of their role in the urban form of the various phases of the New Town, their individual layout and features, and their continuing use and value to residents. Atholl Crescent Garden is included here to make up for this anomaly; it is the intention to properly list and include all the New Town gardens in the survey in time.

#### LOCATION, SETTING AND EXTENT

Atholl Crescent Garden lies in the West End of the city centre on the south side of Shandwick Place (A8) and is mirrored by Coates Crescent on the north side. The Garden can be entered from various points along Shandwick Place and centrally from Atholl Crescent road. Site area 0.02ha.

#### MAIN PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

1820s or after; renovated 1992.

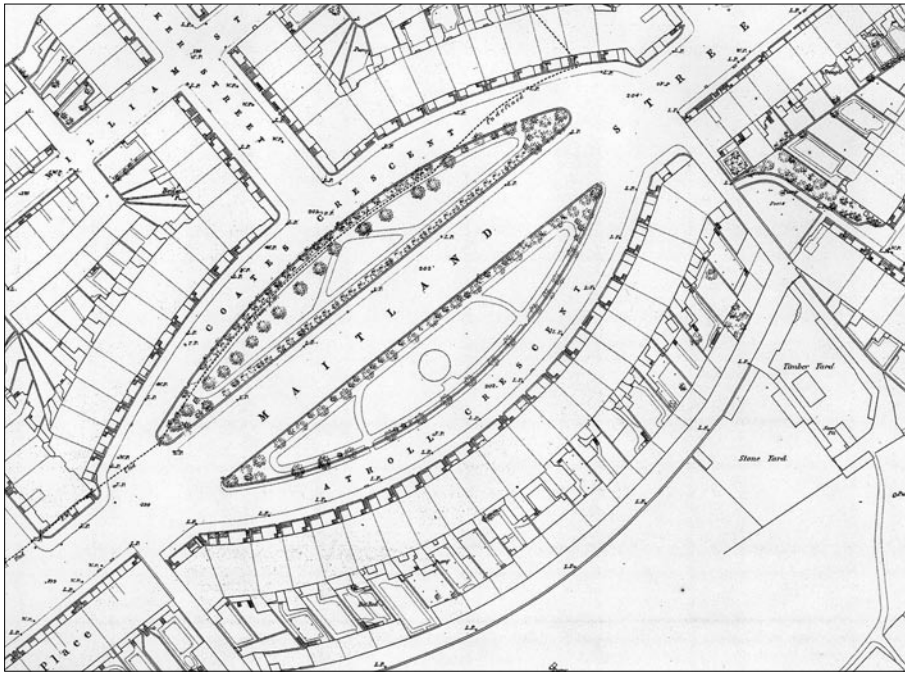
#### HISTORY OF LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

The site was part of the Heriot's Hospital lands (see Ainslie map 1804) and it was the George Heriot's Trust that commissioned their surveyor (Colvin 137),



View of Atholl Crescent  
Garden from west





*Ordnance Survey 1:1056 map  
1853-55*

Thomas Bonnar, to design Atholl Crescent in 1824-25 to balance the earlier Coates Crescent on the north side of what was originally called Maitland Street (name now limited to West Maitland Street to the west of garden). The result was a great 64-bay sweeping classical crescent. In 1912, alterations were made at the east end of the crescent to improve access to Rutland Square and create Canning Lane. Numbers 1-8 of these grand houses were later used as the Edinburgh College of Domestic Science between 1891-1970 (Byrom 358).

Bonnar originally planned a fountain for the middle of the garden but no more seems to have been heard of this (Byrom 356). A plan of 1823 (RCAHMS C13251) held by the Heriot's Trust indicates the considerable size of fountain that Bonnar envisaged. The garden ground was left to the residents as long as it was 'kept as open space, in good order and at their own expense' (Byrom 11). The small size and narrow shape limited the layout to a grassed central area with perimeter trees and shrubs, a footpath and a criss-crossing of paths to the entranceways (Byrom 18). Like many other residents' gardens it was meant as a 'private pleasure ground' in accordance with the developer's feuing conditions, with 'parapet walls and iron railings' (Byrom 356).

The railings were removed during the 1939-45 war and in 1948 Atholl Crescent Gardens passed into the care of the Edinburgh Corporation (Nimmo 34). In 1951 the garden was revamped (Byrom 358), and in 1992, the Council and Lothian and Edinburgh Enterprise Limited (LEEL) renovated and replanted the garden according to plans prepared by William Tucker Associates (Nimmo 35; PMA).

### Maps and Graphic Evidence

Ainslie 1804 shows the houses and gardens on Kirkbraehead at the west end of Princes Street before the construction of Shandwick Place / Maitland Street, with dotted lines annotated *New Road from Glasgow* showing the proposed street cutting through.

The Thomas Bonnar plan (with elevations) of 1823 shows perimeter trees along each side of the garden and scattered internal planting, with a central circular path the full width of the space encircling a pool and fountain. The Lancefield map in 1851 shows perimeter tree planting and a perimeter path within the tree line, the same as Coates opposite. The 1853-55 OS Town Plan shows the same features, in more detail, with a small central circle of small trees. Later 19th century OS maps show a similar arrangement.



*Ainslie 1804*

*View east along Shandwick Place with Atholl Crescent Garden on right and Coates Crescent Garden on left*



## COMPONENTS OF THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE

### Architectural Features

#### Atholl Crescent

A terrace of three storeys plus dormers in a single smooth sweep with ten shallow Ionic pilasters at the centre and five at each end, with cast-iron trellis balconies, designed by Thomas Bonnar in 1825.

Railings enclose basements and front steps with fleur-de-lis finials and integral lighting to the regular New Town pattern.

#### Boundary Walls and Railings

Only the ground plinth or low wall for the railings remains, with sandstone copes having a weathered front edge and retaining the roots of the railings that were removed during the 1939-45 war. Many copes have shifted either due to car parking manoeuvres on the Atholl Crescent side or other activities on the Shandwick Place side; a large section is missing at the east end.



*Shifted cope stones, Atholl Crescent*

#### Paths and Roads

A broad asphalt path runs parallel to Shandwick Place with a strip of granite setts (including tree planting positions) between the path and boundary plinth. At a right angle, a central path broadening out to a square of paving is laid in pinkish concrete slabs. This arrangement dates from the 1992 renovation and differs from the original layout. Surrounding roads and pavements are in asphalt and pinkish concrete slabs.

#### Garden Planting

All current planting dates from the 1992 renovation apart from one mature elm at the east end on the road side. Ten other limes and maples line the main road boundary with about thirty other trees in the grass behind including oak, hawthorn, hornbeam, Himalayan cherry, Asiatic birch, rowan and Southern beech (*Nothofagus*). A mature hawthorn hedge encloses the garden on the crescent side. The grass areas are left long along the back strip that includes bulb planting and there are two rectangular beds for annual bedding.



*Garden planting components*

#### Views and Vistas

The garden is arranged virtually to mirror Coates Crescent Garden on the opposite side of Shandwick Place, although Coates is slightly longer and thinner and has no grand central memorial. The central axis of Atholl Crescent Garden and the path on this line is aligned with that of Coates Crescent Garden and the Gladstone memorial that is positioned there. Although designed for this site in 1902, it was opposed by the proprietors and relegated to the west side of





St Andrew's Square from 1917 until 1955, when it was re-erected here. *The Scotsman* photographs show the former position and re-erection works.

The view along the street with the two gardens and crescents either side, together with the axial view at right angles, are among the classic views of the New Town.

#### Visual Intrusions

The central square of concrete slabs appears purposeless and the material is substandard for this kind of New Town space. One bus shelter has been insensitively sited, breaking through the boundary wall. Otherwise it is the condition of the cope and lack of railings or suitable alternative that detracts from the quality of the space.

#### Area of Influence

Atholl Crescent Garden must be considered in tandem with Coates Crescent Garden and their respective crescents in any urban design issues that affect either.

#### PUBLIC ACCESS

Public garden with open access and no impediments to movement.

*Symmetry about axis and Gladstone memorial in Coates Crescent Garden, including lighting columns but not Atholl Crescent path*



*Relocation of Gladstone memorial to Coates Crescent Garden in 1955*



*East end of Atholl Crescent Garden with bus shelter breaking through boundary*

## FUTURE MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL

A programme of repairs to the boundary wall and copes is required, together with consideration of replacement of the railings to their original pattern or a suitable alternative design. The integrity of the boundary should be preserved by relocating or redesigning the bus shelter and preventing more or the same.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overall

Atholl Crescent Garden with Coates Crescent Garden and their respective crescents form an important 'gateway' to the city centre of Edinburgh in urban design terms and they are among the most valuable urban form features combining geometrically planned built space and gardens in the New Town. While the garden has been altered from its original form, it remains a simple layout and continues to have a useful role.

### Work of Art

Outstanding

### Historical

Some

### Horticultural / Arboricultural / Sylvicultural

Little

### Architectural

Outstanding

### Scenic

Outstanding

### Nature Conservation

Little

### Archaeological

None

### Recreational

High

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## Sources – Primary

### Maps

John Ainslie *Old and New Town of Edinburgh and Leith with the Proposed Docks* 1804 NLS

Wood & Brown *Plan of the City of Edinburgh* 1823 NLS

Wood & Brown *Plan of the City of Edinburgh* 1831 (Colour) NLS

Ordnance Survey *Edinburgh Town Plan* 1849-53 NLS

Lancefield Johnston's *Plan of Edinburgh & Leith* 1851 NLS

First edition Ordnance Survey (1852) Sheet 2 NLS

Ordnance Survey *Edinburgh Town Plan* 1876-77 NLS

RCAHMS C13251 copy of original held by George Heriot's Trust

**Sources – Secondary**

Byrom, Connie 2005 *The Edinburgh New Town Gardens 'Blessings as well as beauties'* Birlinn pp358-362

Colvin, Howard 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 1995 *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840* Yale University Press

Gifford, John et al 1984 *The Buildings of Scotland, Edinburgh*: Harmondsworth, Penguin

Harris, Stuart 1996 *The Place Names of Edinburgh*, Gordon Wright Publishing, Edinburgh

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