

Edinburgh

Survey of Gardens and Designed Landscapes

264 Balerno Villas

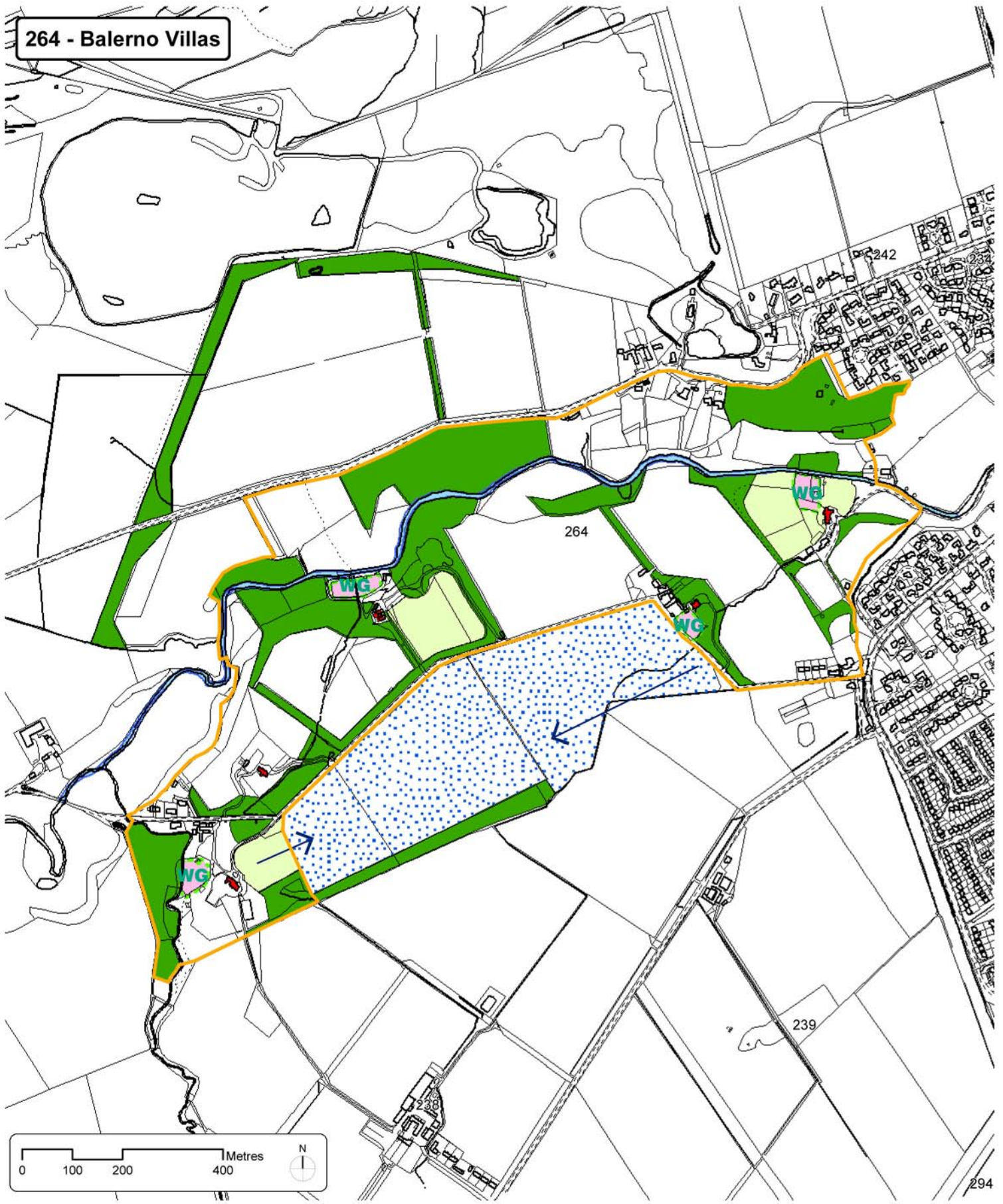
including Bankhead House, Glenbrook House (formerly Birkfield or Birch Hill), Glenpark House (demolished), House of Cockburn (formerly Westbrook), Johnsburn House and Larch Grove

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




This report by Christopher Dingwall
Survey visit: October 2008

264 - Balerno Villas



294

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 | | |

EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

**SURVEY OF GARDENS AND
DESIGNED LANDSCAPES**

Peter McGowan
Associates with
Christopher Dingwall

264 Balerno Villas

including Bankhead House, Glenbrook House (formerly Birkfield or Birch Hill), Glenpark House (demolished), House of Cockburn (formerly Westbrook), Johnsburn House and Larch Grove

Parish Currie, later Edinburgh

NGR NT 153 661 Bankhead House
NT 144 658 Glenbrook House
NT 147 662 Glenpark House (site of)
NT 144 656 House of Cockburn
NT 156 660 Johnsburn House
NT 156 663 Larch Grove

NMRS No. NT16NE 89 Bankhead House
NT16NW 54 Glenbrook House
NT16NW 73 Glenpark
NT16NW 53 House of Cockburn
NT16NE 103 Johnsburn House
NT16NE 163 Larch Grove

Owners Private; estate and individual owners

DESIGNATIONS

Listing Bankhead House, Walled Garden, Bridge, Gate, Railings B
Glenbrook House, Outbuildings, Railings, Gates and Gate-piers C(S)
Glenpark former Stables B
Glenpark former Gate-lodge (The Boathouse) C(S)
House of Cockburn (Westbrook) with Boundary Wall, Gates and Gate-piers B
House of Cockburn (Westbrook) Cottage, Stables and Mill B
Larch Grove, Stables and Gate-piers B
Larch Grove former Gate Lodge to (now 8 Bridge Road), with Boundary Walls, Railings and Gate-Piers B

Green Belt

Area of Outstanding Landscape Quality

Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (part)

Ancient Woodland, SNH designation (part)

REASONS FOR INCLUSION

This primarily rural landscape embraces several villas or small country houses that were developed in the late-18th and 19th centuries on land that was formerly part of the extensive Cockburn Estate. As well as providing the immediate setting for several listed buildings and part of the wider setting for the settlement of Balerno, the planting contributes significantly to broader views from the A70 Lanark Road, and from the unclassified Glenbrook Road and Johnsburn Road.

LOCATION, SETTING AND EXTENT

Six small country estates, described for the purposes of this study as the *Balerno Villas*, lie adjacent to each other on the south side of the Water of Leith, immediately to the west of the settlement of Balerno. McWilliam draws attention to Balerno in the *Buildings of Scotland, Lothian* (1978, 62 & 87-88). Together, the houses, their policies, parkland and associated roadside and field boundary planting

form a compact and fairly well-defined grouping, the south boundary of which is largely defined by Glenbrook Road and Johnsburn Road, the north boundary is the A70 Lanark Road, the east edge is formed the settlement boundaries of Balerno and Ravelrig, and the west edge is formed by boundary plantations that separate the area from more open country to the west. The five surviving houses – Glen Park House was demolished in the mid-20th century – are all approached from the south via drives from Johnsburn Road and Glenbrook Road.

Given that they lie close to each other on land which was formerly part of the neighbouring Cockburn Estate, and that there have been periods when more than one of the estates concerned was possessed by a single owner – Johnsburn House and Larch Grove estates were combined for a period in the 19th century (NAS RHP 82765, Peutherer 32) – the internal landscape divisions are not easy to confirm without additional research. Balerno and its environs are not easy to confirm without additional research. Balerno and its environs were described, somewhat disparagingly, by Charles McKean in *Edinburgh : An Illustrated Architectural Guide* (1992) as comprising "... corrosive housing leaking into delightful upland countryside, and large private villas of Edinburgh's equestrian elite".

Although the site includes several villas and their policies with a history of separate ownership, much of the core farmland and woodland appears to come under the management of the Glenpark Estate.

The villas, their policies and the wider agricultural landscape with its field dykes, plantations and tree-lined roads combine to form an Area of Outstanding Landscape Quality. The course of the Water of Leith, which runs through the north part of the area, and a short length of the tributary John's Burn, are a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. Parts of the woodland between the A70 Lanark Road and the Water of Leith are defined by Scottish Natural Heritage as Ancient Woodland. Total site area 77.8ha.

MAIN PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

Enclosure before c1750; sub-division and development, mid-to-late 18th century and 19th century.

HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Initial and partial enclosure and planting of what was a previously unenclosed landscape of cultivation rigs and heathland would appear to have occurred some time before c1750. The subsequent sub-division of the ground into smaller estates began in the mid-to-late 18th century and continued through much of the 19th century. The present landscape framework was already in place by c1850 and has seen little change in the last 150 years, save for the expansion of the village of Balerno into a dormitory suburb of Edinburgh.

All six villas were built in the 18th and 19th centuries on land that was formerly part of the extensive Cockburn estate, owned by George Watson's Hospital in the early 18th century (Tweedie & Jones 68). Development appears to have begun in the mid-18th century with the construction of Bankhead House, which first appears on Laurie's map of 1766. McWilliam (1978) refers to alterations to the mansion house c1810, not long after which McRitchie was noted as the occupant. The farm/offices complex, part of which was still being described by Historic Scotland (1994) as '*... in a poor state of repair*', has now been converted for domestic use. House of Cockburn, formerly known as Westbrook, is said to have been built for Mr. Goode, a merchant with Jamaican connections, who emigrated to Australia in 1790. Later owners or occupants are recorded as Giles c1815, McRae c1832 and Sang around the turn of the 20th century, with Buchanan Smith noted by Tweedie (1975) as running a dairy business in the 1970s. Glenpark – sometimes named Glendaroch – appears on maps from c1810. The original date of construction is unknown, though records speak of successive alterations and additions being planned or undertaken during the 20th



Bankhead farmstead

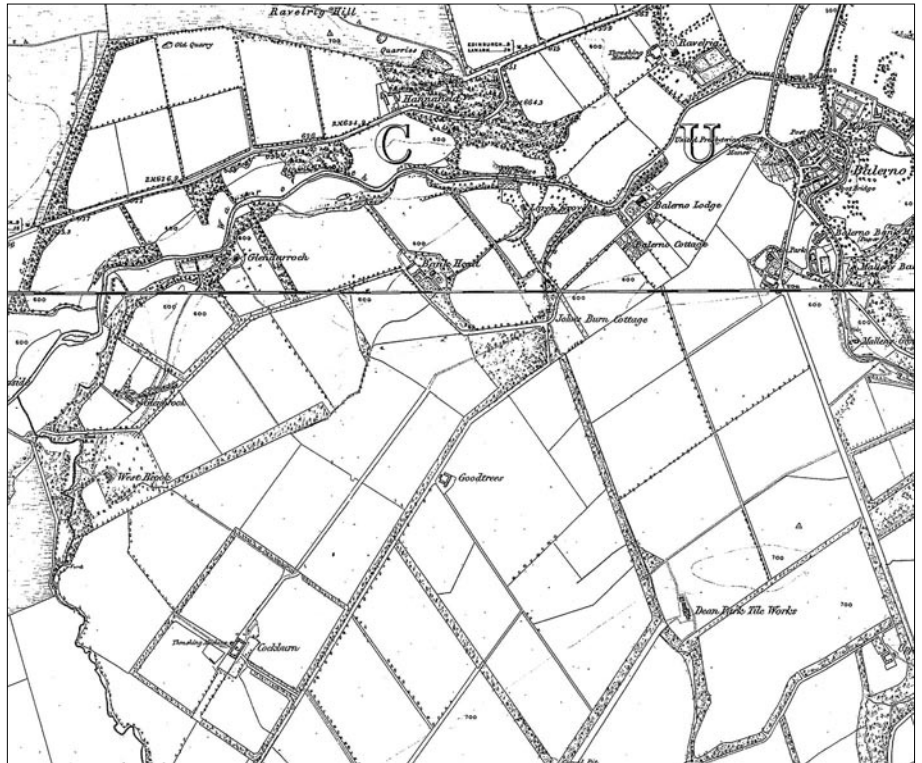


Glenbrook lodge



Glenpark, 'The Boathouse' lodge

Ordnance Survey 1st edition
6" map 1852-53



century. Associated names are Morrison c1830 and J W Thomson, shipbroker of Leith, after 1881, the last occupants of the house being of the same name. The house was demolished after 1939, since when the walled garden (NT 146 662) has been adopted by neighbouring Glenbrook House. The original house site stands vacant, though the early 19th century stable block and a single gate-lodge on Glenbrook Road, curiously named *The Boathouse*, still survive. Larch Grove also appears on maps from the beginning of the 19th century, owned or occupied variously by Morison in the 1830s, Gairdner in the 1840s, Hill in the 1860s and 1870s, and Menzies in the 1890s. McWilliam (1978) puts a date of 1890 on the present house, though Historic Scotland's description (1994) speaks of it as dating from c1845, with later 19th and early 20th century additions. Glenbrook House, which is described by Historic Scotland as dating from the earlier 19th century, and which appears on early maps as *Birkfield* or *Birch Hill*, is recorded as being occupied by farmer and grain merchant J McK Brown in the 1880s. Johnsburn House is a substantial Arts and Crafts house, built on the site of an earlier and smaller house of the same name, the estate of which seems to have been linked to neighbouring Larch Grove. This is suggested as the site where Prof. Fergusson of Edinburgh University is most likely to have "... made a variety of agricultural experiments on a small property ... which he has changed from a bare heath to a scene distinguished for beauty and fertility" (OSA). Later owners of Johnsburn House are recorded as Morison for much of the 19th century and Macpherson in the early 20th century.

Maps and Graphic Evidence



Roy's Military Survey c1750

Cockburn House is marked as *Coleburn* on Blaeu (1654) and as *Colburn* on Adair (1682), without apparent enclosure and planting thereabouts. Roy's Military Survey (c1750) shows that initial enclosure and planting of a substantial part of the Cockburn Estate, including the part between Cockburn House and the Water of Leith where the villas were built, had taken place before 1750. This enclosure took the form of rectangular, hedged or tree-lined parks, along with one larger and two smaller block of trees. Although the cruciform pattern of enclosures immediately around Cockburn House has survived, the other boundaries seen on Roy's map have been replaced by later planting and field divisions.



Thomson map 1832

Later maps from Laurie (1766) and (Thomson 1832) onwards show new planting being introduced as the setting for the various villas. Of the six villas, three – House of Cockburn, Glenpark and Larch Grove – are shown by Sharp, Greenwood and Fowler (1828) as having associated parkland, albeit small in extent. The new landscape of narrow tree-belts, tree-lined roads and policies is apparent on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey (1852-53). There has been little subsequent change in the extent and pattern of planting.

COMPONENTS OF THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE

Shelterbelt and Block Planting

Narrow tree-belts, mostly of mature mixed broadleaves with a few Scots pine and other conifers, form the basic landscape framework and give the area a well-wooded appearance when viewed from neighbouring roads. There are a few small blocks of more recent infill planting, some of it coniferous. Species noted include ash, elm, lime, oak, horse chestnut and sycamore with some pine and spruce. The woodlands are typical of a mixed-use estate with sporting interest. Virtually all of the woodland is managed under the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme (Mark 3), which operated between 1994 and 2003.

Field Boundary and Roadside Planting

Within the broader framework of tree-belts described above, regularly-spaced roadside and field boundary trees, mostly ash, beech, lime and oak, some of them with drystone dykes, contribute significantly to landscape character.

Roadside ash trees on
Glenbrook RoadHouse of Cockburn (right of
centre) and park

*Roadside lime trees on
Glenbrook Road*



Gardens and Policies

The six principal houses or villas provide focal points within the wider landscape framework where the planting is more ornamental in character. Although the houses themselves are well hidden, their gate-piers and gate-lodges are noteworthy features on the public roadside. Of the three houses with more extensive policies, House of Cockburn appears well maintained, with parkland, kitchen garden and ornamental ground still under active management. Larch Grove is less intensively managed, with the kitchen garden no longer in use and parkland planting largely depleted. The policies of Glenpark are largely degraded, with vestigial remains of parkland planting and the walled garden effectively abandoned, although reportedly transferred into to the ownership of neighbouring Glenbrook House. The gardens and wooded policies of the three remaining properties of Bankhead House, Glenbrook House and Johnsburn House are much smaller in extent and appear to be fairly well maintained.

*View from A70 – plantations in
western approaches*



Views and Vistas

The incised nature of the valley of the Water of Leith and the pattern of planting means that, with the exception of Bankhead House, the principal buildings are largely hidden from view. The principal views are those from surrounding roads – of the west edge of the plantations from the western approaches and the

*View west of Larch Grove to
Pentland Hills*





*Water of Leith valley near
Glenbrook*

settlement of Glenbrook, of the woodlands around Larch Grove from the A70 Lanark Road near Hannahfield, and of the largely agricultural landscape in the valley of the Johnsburn Valley from Glenbrook Road.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Formal public access to the attractive rural landscape close to the settlement of Balerno appears limited, with few if any signs of an organised footpath network. With much of the area used for grazing and shooting, public access is evidently discouraged over much of the area. There is little or no opportunity for parking or walking beside the dangerously busy A70 Lanark Road, from where some of the best views are to be had. Although there is a degree of public use along to the valley of the John's Burn, this is largely confined to Glenbrook Road. Those straying from the public highway are liable to be challenged by gamekeepers.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL

With much of the area actively managed as grazing land or for field sports such as pheasant shooting, and with most of the land being designated as green belt, there seems little immediate threat to its rural character. That said, changes in housing policy at national or local level could see marginal or urban fringe land such as this coming under greater pressure for development in the future. From an aesthetic point of view, if landscape character is to be maintained, there is a need for more active management of key landscape elements such as the drystone dykes, some of which are becoming gappy and broken down, and of the roadside and field boundary trees, many of which are mature to over-mature. There would be benefits both to the public and landowners from development of a public footpath network, giving access to viewpoints and less sensitive areas of the landscape while reducing the conflicts that currently exist between pedestrian and vehicular traffic. It is important that the value of the Water of Leith as a wildlife corridor is not overlooked.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overall

The wooded policies and more extensive roadside and field boundary planting associated with the Balerno Villas, much of it of 19th century origin, combine to form an attractive rural landscape on the western approaches to Edinburgh. Although the individual landscapes are small in extent, and may be seen as lacking sophistication, their mature planting combines with the local topography to create a visually attractive landscape of high local significance, providing the setting for a group of locally significant houses.

Work of Art

Little

Historical

Some

Horticultural / Arboricultural / Sylvicultural

Some

Architectural

Some

Scenic

High

Nature Conservation

High

Archaeology

Little

Recreational

Some

Sources – Primary

Maps

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Laurie, *A plan of Edinburgh and places adjacent*, 1766 NLS

Armstrong, *Map of the Three Lothians*, 1773 NLS

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First edition Ordnance Survey (1852) Sheets 5 and 11 NLS

Parish map OS (1898-1904) NLS

NLS = National Library of Scotland www.nls.uk

RMS Reg Mag Sig = Register of the Great Seal of Scotland, Edinburgh

NMRS = National Monuments Record of Scotland

SCRAN = Scottish Cultural Resource Access Network www.scran.ac.uk

www.merchantrnavyofficers.com/benline Family firm of the Thomsons of Glen Park

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RHP 140877/2 1911 Attic and roof plans Larchgrove Balerno

RHP 141179 1929 Proposed bungalows – note on reverse Larchgrove, Balerno
plans

RHP 20590 early-mid 19th century Plan of the estate of Cockburn, the property
of George Watson's Hospital

House of Cockburn garden visible on large scale vertical air photos: OS
65/50/136-7 flown 1965 RCAHMS

NAS RHP 82765 1809 Plan of Larch Grove and Johnsburn, the property of Dr
Alexander Morison
