

City of Edinburgh Council

Edinburgh
Survey of Gardens and Designed Landscapes

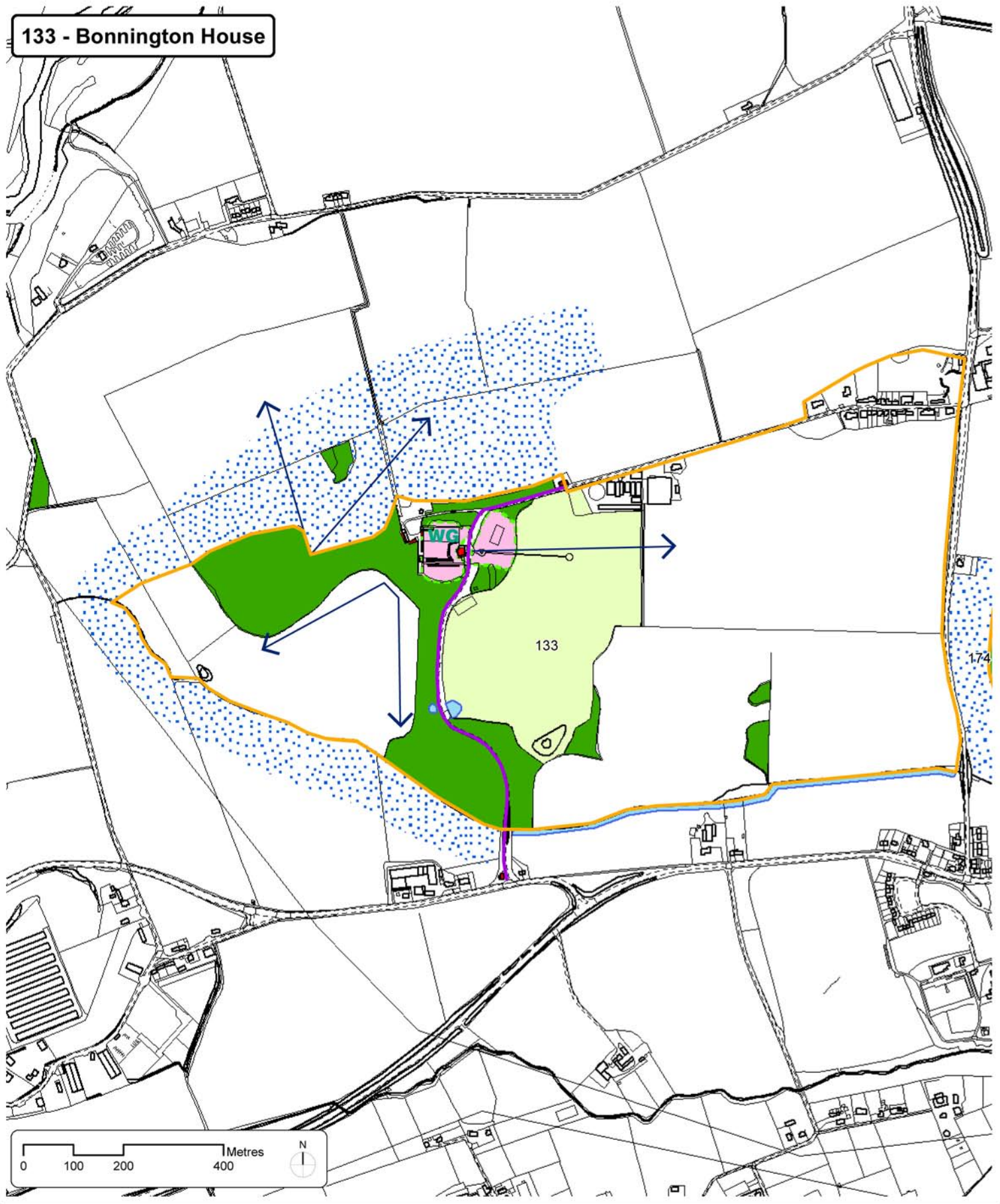
133 Bonnington

Consultants














Peter McGowan Associates
Landscape Architects and Heritage Management Consultants
6 Duncan Street Edinburgh EH9 1SZ
0131 662 1313 • pma@ednet.co.uk
with Christopher Dingwall
Research by Sonia Baker

This report by Christopher Dingwall
Survey visit: May 2008

133 - Bonnington House



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

133 Bonnington

Parish Ratho, later Edinburgh (South Lodge by Coxydene within West Lothian)

NGR NT 111 691

NMRS No NT16NW 9.00

Owners House and core landscape private; wider landscape also privately owned, divided between neighbouring farms

Designations

Listing Bonnington House (with balustraded wall) A
Bonnington Sundial A
Bonnington Dovecot A

Designated as Countryside in the *Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan* (2003).

REASONS FOR INCLUSION

Bonnington House is important country mansion in a prominent location, the landscape setting of which has a significant impact on the rural landscape on the western approaches to the city, especially via the A71.

LOCATION, SETTING AND EXTENT

Bonnington House and its designed landscape occupy a prominent position at the western extremity of a broad whale-back ridge which runs westward from the basalt outcrops of Craw Hill (NT 128 693) and Tormain (NT 129 697), on the east bank of the river Almond. There is core landscape of densely planted policies surrounding the house, set within a much wider landscape framework of field dykes and satellite plantations. This wider landscape is effectively bounded to the south by an unnamed tributary of the Gogar Burn running from west to east close to the A71 Calder Road; to the east by the B7030 Bonnington Road / Cliftonhall Road; and to the north and west by unclassified roads and a short section of the B7015. Access to the house and landscape is from Bonnington Road on the east, via the hamlet of Bonnington and West Bonnington Farm, and a gate-lodge at North Lodge; also from the south via a drive and lodges at Coxydene (in West Lothian). Site area 95.6ha.

MAIN PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

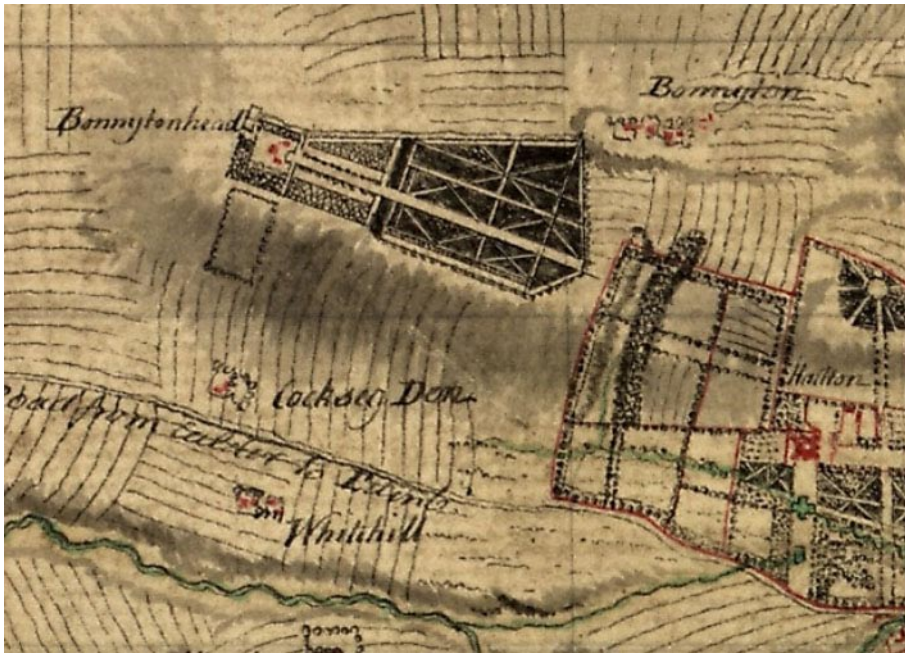
17th century, with major changes and additions in 18th and 19th centuries; gradual decline and fragmentation in later 20th century.

HISTORY OF LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

The house and associated landscape appear to have their origins in the 17th century. Additions to the house in the early 18th century were accompanied by



Bonnington House and formal walled garden



Roy's map c1750

the creation of the extensive formal landscape seen on mid-to-late 18th century maps. A reduction in formality combined with additional tree planting to the west and south, likely to have been connected with enclosure and agricultural improvement, evidently took place before the early-19th century, by which time new clumps and belts were in place. The latter half of the 20th century has seen a progressive decline in the coherence of the design, accelerated by a fragmentation of ownership.

Although the name occurs in records from an early date under a variety of spellings – Bondington (c1315), Bonyntoun / Bendingtoun (1329), Bonyngtoun (1371) as noted by Harris (2002) – it is unclear whether the place was much more than a fermtoun, until the building of the original mansion house in 1622. Having been connected with Robert de Erskine, it came into the ownership of Sir James Foulis, Lord Colinton, in the 17th century, subsequently passing to the Durhams / Cunninghames of Belton and Bonnington, and the Wilkies of Ormistoun by 1822. Additions to the house are recorded c1720 and 1858. Later residents are recorded as a Mrs. Anderson (1868), Reginald Collie (1902) and the Salvesen family (late 20th century). The house, with much of its core landscape and policies, continues in single private ownership, having last changed hands c1998. The wider designed landscape, including several outlying plantations, is now subdivided between neighbouring farms and managed largely as arable and grazing.

Maps and Graphic Evidence

Blaeu's map (1654), based on the earlier work of Timothy Pont c1590s, the name *Bonitoun*, without any associated planting or enclosure, may be intended to show the fermtoun of that name. Adair's *A Map of Midlothian* (1682) shows what appears to be a mansion of *Bonitonhead*, though without associated enclosure or planting like that to be seen on nearby Hatton. By the time of the Roy's *Military Survey of Scotland* (c1750) the house of *Bonnytonhead*, with projecting wings, is seen standing to the west end of a compact, densely-planted landscape, with a long easterly avenue or axial vista aligned on the house, flanked by plantations, cut through with walks or rides in a formal criss-cross or 'wilderness'. The surrounding landscape is depicted as unenclosed rig, with a small area of uncultivated land on the hill ground to the west of the house, and a single rectangular hedged or tree-lined grazing park or enclosure to the south of the house. Armstrong's *Map of the Three Lothians* (1775) shows a similarly compact pattern of formal planting to the east of the house, with a southerly approach from Coxydean.

By the time of Knox's *Map of the Shire of Edinburgh* (1816) the wider landscape had been enclosed with stone walls and/or hedges, reportedly fertilised with the help of manure from Edinburgh, sheltered by tree-belts and plantations to the south, and formed into a series of rectangular tree-lined fields to the north – most likely in the course of the general agricultural improvement in the Parish of Ratho at the end of the 18th century, as described in the [Old] *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1790s). The outline of the eastern part of the formal landscape seen on earlier maps, though not the eastern vista, remained visible in the shape of the fields of West Bonnington into the mid-19th century, as seen on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps (1850s). By this time there was an informal park, largely surrounded by planting, to the south and east of the house. The first decades of the 20th century saw the western hilltop clump linked to the core policies by new planting, at the same time that the planting to the north and east began to fragment. This process has continued through the remainder of the 20th century, with the western woodlands retaining much of their structure and character, while the eastern woodlands are in decline or have all but disappeared.

COMPONENTS OF THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE

Mansion House



House and north drive

The mansion house of seven bays and two main storeys, with basement and dormers, was last remodelled in 1858 in the Jacobean manner, comparable with Heriot's Hospital in Edinburgh. This embraces the remains of a much earlier house of 1622, itself extended c1720 (McWilliam). The east (entrance) front looks across a balustraded light-well to open parkland, the west (garden) front overlooks a formal, enclosed, walled garden. A kitchen extension at the south side of the mansion house now occupies the footprint of a former conservatory.

Other Estate Buildings and Structures



South lodge and gates

Offices and other functional buildings of various dates lie to the west of the house. A short distance to the north are a substantial crow-stepped archway and a small bee-hive dovecot. An obelisk sundial stands in the centre of the formal garden to the west of the house and a stone-edged pool and fountain to the east. A modern *temple* by Ian Hamilton Finlay stands in woodland to the west of the house, with sculptures and other ornamental structures by a variety of modern artists located in different parts of the landscape.

South and North Drives and Lodges



North lodge

The principal drive to the house is from the south, guarded by a substantial South Lodge on the B7015 road at Coxydene (in West Lothian). This runs through a block of mixed-age, mostly broadleaved policy woodland to approach the house from the south. A secondary service drive, with a more modest North Lodge, follows the north edge of the landscape (as depicted on Roy's map) from





Dovecot garden with walled garden behind

the B7030 Bonnington Road through the hamlet of Bonnington, and past West Bonnington Farm. This would have allowed access to the walled garden and offices without the need for working traffic to pass in front of the house. A small southerly offset from this, edged with recently-planted pleached limes, links with the south drive in the forecourt at the east front of the house.

Formal and Walled Gardens

The east (entrance) front of the mansion house overlooks an area of mown grass lawn, dotted with mixed mostly broadleaved specimen trees and shrubs, including two or three very old limes, which may be the last remnants of the early formal planting seen on Roy's map. The broad axial vista running eastwards from the house has been reinstated, and is emphasised by a gravel path which leads round a centrally placed fountain and onwards across the neighbouring park. The north gable of the house overlooks a small formal garden edged with a low beech hedge and pleached limes, and planted with shrubs and topiary trees, at the north side of which stands a cylindrical rubble-built and stone-slatted dovecot. The west front of the house overlooks a substantial walled garden, the central part of which has been restored as a formal garden, with box low hedges and ornamental planting. The northern-most section of the walled garden is currently used as a piggery, but is intended to become an orchard and extension to the formal garden. The southern-most section of the walled garden is laid down to grass, with a large Wellingtonia and a cedar of Lebanon, probably dating from the mid-to-late 19th century, standing next to each other at its western end.

Core Policy Woodland

The core policy woodland, which lies to the west and south of the mansion house, is largely of mixed-age broadleaved trees such as oak, beech, birch, sycamore and lime, with a scatter of other species including Scots pine and



Fountain and vista

South-east tree clump



North-west tree clump



Orchid sculpture and house



North park wall



South park wall



larch. A central block of woodland, which embraces the walled garden, is linked by narrower belts of planting to two other blocks – a hill-top plantation to the west and a separate block of planting to the south with the south drive running through it. Although some trees are over 100 years old, no veteran trees were noted, save for the old limes east of the house. The grouping of the trees on the higher ground means that the woodland is particularly prominent in views from the surrounding area. There are extensive outward views from paths which run through part of the woodland.

Inner Parkland

To the east and south-east of the house, separated from the pleasure grounds by a rubble-built haha topped with a dressed stone cope, is an area of parkland, recently brought back into the core landscape by the present owners, with a view to enhancing the parkland setting of the house, as seen the mid-19th century Ordnance Survey maps. The early 18th century axial vista running east from the house crosses this area in the form of a recently-planted double avenue of chestnut and beech trees, centred on a 15m high steel sculpture of an orchid.

Outer Parks and Walls

Beyond the core landscape, within the wider landscape defined above, the landscape is subdivided in places by rubble-built stone walls, along which can be seen the remnants of regularly-spaced field boundary planting. The innermost walls, to the east of the house, which appear to follow the lines of the landscape as depicted on Roy's map, are approx. 2m high, finely built of rubble-stone with mortar and topped with a rubble-stone cope. To the south are the remains of walls of similar style, built of dry-stone and of slightly lesser height of c1.75m. To the north are dry-stone walls c1.5m high, formerly planted along their length at regular intervals with oak trees, only a few of which now survive.

Earthworks and Water Features

A substantial ornamental earthwork with ponds, to a design by Charles Jencks, has been created in the parkland and woodland to the south of the house. Apart from the small pool and fountain to the east of the house, the only other water feature worthy of note is the small burn, which marks the southern edge of the designed landscape.

Tree Clumps

There are several mixed broadleaved clumps in the outer landscape (at grid refs. NT 103 692, NT 109 693, NT 113 687 and NT 117 687) mostly of oak, beech and sycamore, which are prominent in both outward and inward views, but are increasingly neglected and degraded, characterised by fallen trees and dumping of stone and other materials.

*Core woodland from west*

Views and Vistas

The outward views from the house are dominated by the recently-restored axial vista to the east of the mansion house, closed c2km to the east by the rising ground of Tormain and Craw Hill. There are more extensive outward views from paths within the core policies, southward across neighbouring farmland and the headwaters of the Water of Leith towards Dalmahoy Hill and the Pentland Hills, and northwards over Kirkliston and the Almond Valley to the Firth of Forth.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Although there is no formal public access to the landscape at present, the current owners are in the process of developing a sculpture park within the parkland and policies, with the intention of opening this to the public in 2009. Footpaths will lead visitors to different parts of the landscape where they will see artworks by notable contemporary artists such as Charles Jencks, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Anish Kapoor and Antony Gormley. Educational groups are already making use of the landscape and of some of the stables and other office buildings, which have been converted, into flexible workspaces.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL

The short-to-medium term future of the core designed landscape, comprising the formal gardens, parkland and policy woodland appears to be assured under the existing owners, who are seeking to consolidate the landscape through the purchase of surrounding land when the opportunity arises, through renewal and/or reinstatement of historical elements, and through the introduction of new features. Their intention to open the greater part of the landscape as a sculpture park will have obvious public benefit. The principal threats appear to be to the wider designed landscape, partly through the decline and loss of historical features such as the surviving stone walls, field boundary planting and tree clumps, all of which show neglect, and partly through the threat of built development on adjacent farmland which is important in outward views from the core landscape. While the continuity of the core landscape seems to be assured for the foreseeable future, the character of the surrounding landscape will continue to decline without more positive management, with a consequent decline in its scenic value.

*View to north-east with tree clump*

Land within the south eastern corner of the designed landscape is identified in the *Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan (2003)* as affected by Transport Proposal T8 : A71 Western Section Upgrading. Land within in the north-eastern corner of the designed landscape is noted in the *Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan (2003)* as a Hazard Consultation Zone.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overall

The Bonnington House landscape has a recorded history of more than 250 years, though only traces remain of the formal landscape seen on early 18th century maps. The present landscape, developed in the later 18th and 19th centuries, continues to provide the setting for a house and associated buildings of national significance. Although recent management has preserved the integrity and enhanced the core landscape, the overall condition of the site is diminished by the neglect and unsympathetic management of the wider landscape. In spite of this, the prominent position and high visibility of surviving woodland gives the site a high value in scenic terms. Taken as a whole the landscape is considered to have high regional value.

Work of Art

High

Historical

High

Horticultural / Arboricultural / Sylvicultural

Some

Architectural

Outstanding

Scenic

Outstanding

Nature Conservation

Some

Archaeology

Some

Recreational

High

Sources – Primary

Maps

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Thomson, John Thomson's *Atlas of Scotland*, 1832 NLS

First edition Ordnance Survey (1852) Sheet 5 NLS

Parish map OS (1898-1904) NLS

Ordnance Survey (1908) Sheet VI NW NLS – paper copies

NLS National Library of Scotland www.nls.uk

NMRS National Monuments Record of Scotland

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

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