

City of Edinburgh Council

**Edinburgh**  
Survey of Gardens and Designed Landscapes

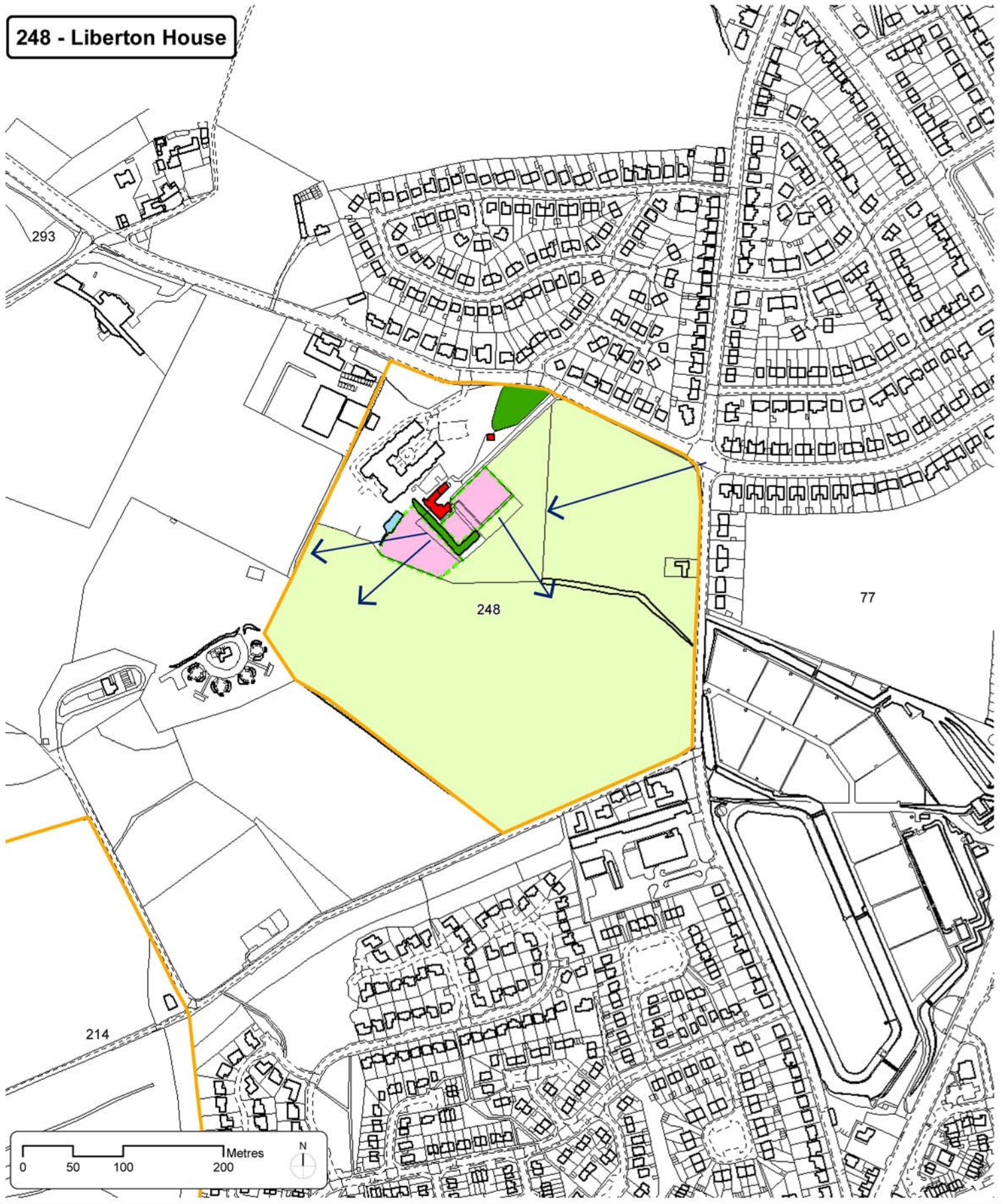
**248 Liberton House**

**Consultants**














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Survey visits: July 2006, March 2008

248 - Liberton 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

## 248 Liberton House

Parish Liberton, later Edinburgh  
NGR NT 268 693  
NMRS No NT26NE 9.00  
Owners Divided ownership, private and corporate  
Designations  
Listing Liberton House, Walled Garden, Gates and Gatepiers A  
Liberton Dovecot A  
Green Belt  
Area of Great Landscape Value

### REASONS FOR INCLUSION

Liberton House is a typical, though now increasingly rare, example of a Scottish laird's house or villa of c1600 with 17th, 18th and 19th century additions, located south of central Edinburgh, but retaining much of its rural setting. The recently restored house and period gardens are exemplary and make an important contribution to the character and quality of the landscape of the Braid Hills.

### LOCATION, SETTING AND EXTENT

Liberton House and its associated landscape are located in part of the Edinburgh City Green Belt, bounded to the north by Liberton Drive, to the east by the Alnwickhill Road, to the south by an unmetalled and unclassified road at Stanedykehead, and to the west by open farmland on the eastern slopes of the Braid Hills. The only vehicular access to the house and associated walled garden is from the north, via a gate and walled drive from Liberton Drive. The house is clearly seen from local roads and from the adjoining Braid Hills, and has extensive outward views to the west and south-west over open fields to the Braids and to the more distant Pentland Hills. The south view towards Stanedykehead is limited by rising ground, while views to the north and east are confined by the topography and by 20th century built development. Site area 14.3ha.

### MAIN PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

Origins in early 17th century; additions in 18th and 19th centuries; erosion and fragmentation in 20th century; core now restored.

*New garden in the period style  
of the house incorporating  
retained fruit trees*



## HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Liberton House is likely to have possessed significant gardens and grounds from the time of its first building as a country house in the 17th century. Documentary and field evidence show that the house and gardens stood for more than two and a half centuries within a walled and tree-lined park, traces of which survive.

Although the house is known to have been altered and extended on several occasions, it is difficult to put a precise date on the garden features, including much-repaired rubble walls, some of which date back to the 18th century. The estate, which appears to have reached its greatest extent in the 19th century, suffered from fragmentation during the 20th century, with a consequent decline in its character and integrity – a process, which involved the removal of trees and the demolition of much of the former park wall. New ownership of the house has resulted in a partial reinstatement of its landscape setting.

The history of the barony of Upper Liberton has been traced as far back as the 14th century by Harris (1996) and others, with one record for 1453 noting the proprietor as John Dalmahoy. The Little family began to purchase land at Liberton from 1522 onwards, with William Little, Provost of Edinburgh from 1586 to 1591, recorded by Good (1893) as having purchased the Barony of Over Liberton from Alexander Dalmahoy in 1587, after which the family must have lived in the nearby 15th century fortalice of Liberton Tower. According to Gifford (1984) Liberton House was probably built c1600 for a second William Little, though other authors such as Good have proposed a much later date of 1675. The house was added to and altered by subsequent members of the family and tenants, to the extent that McKean (1992) described it as ‘... *badly mauled over the centuries*’. Work is recorded in the 1890s, 1920s, 1930s and 1950s, by which time ownership had passed from the last member of the Little family to live there, General Sir Gordon Gilmours of Inch. Plans by Mr and Mrs Margiotta during the 1980s to turn Liberton House into a country club came to nothing. Following a fire in 1991 which left the house badly damaged, the core of the estate was acquired by Nicholas Groves-Raines architects. The north-west corner of the landscape, formerly the site of offices and service yards associated with the house, was redeveloped in 1995 as the Braid Hills Nursing Centre, owned and managed by BUPA. Adjacent to this, though just outwith the park boundary, is the privately owned Tower Farm Riding Stables (formerly part of Upper Liberton Farm), established in 1972. A planning application by Hart Estates Ltd for residential development within the east half of the parkland, refused by City of Edinburgh Council, was the subject of an appeal in 2006. This was determined by the Scottish Executive in favour of the objectors, with the consequence that the site remains undeveloped for the present.

### Maps and Graphic Evidence

The earliest evidence of planting associated with Liberton House is to be found on Adair's map (1682), which shows *Over Libertoun* standing within a walled or fenced enclosure, planted with trees. The first detailed depiction of the estate is on Roy's map (c1750), which shows the house on the north side of a walled garden, lying towards the north end of a much larger walled enclosure or park, planted round with trees – the park wall presumably responsible for the naming of *Stanedykehead*, which appears on maps from the early 18th century. Laurie's map (1763) also shows *Upper Liberton* and associated buildings, with planting to the south, while Knox (1816) shows the tree-lined park of *Libberton Place* with a central division. The same tree-lined park was recorded by the Ordnance Survey (1852) with the associated Name Book describing it as ‘... *a good house with suitable offices, all in good repair, with 158 acres attached ... used as a country residence*’. Although there is little evidence of the precise nature of the planting, Warrender (1890) describes ‘... *the old house of Liberton to the west of the village ... [with] an avenue of limes leading down to it, on one side of which stands the dovecot*’, while Geddie talks of ‘... *the manor house of North or Upper Liberton, enclosed among tall trees and garden walls, with its dovecot*



Roy c1750



Ordnance Survey 6" map  
1885

*House and garden with Braid  
Hills in background*



*beside it*'. Cant (1987) describes the house as standing '*... at the end of an avenue of elm trees*'.

Putting these accounts together with field evidence, we can infer that the original policy planting was broadleaved, being a mixture of lime, elm, sycamore and beech. Although the late-19th century Ordnance Survey (1893) shows the landscape little changed from the earlier Ordnance Survey map, subsequent maps and aerial photographs record the progressive loss of avenue and parkland trees during the 20th century.

## COMPONENTS OF THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE

### Mansion House

A complex laird's house of 17th century date, with 18th and 19th century extensions. Extensively restored in the late 20th century following a serious fire, part of the building now serves as a private dwelling and part as architects' office. Adjacent yards and farm offices to the north of the mansion were demolished in the 1990s, and a BUPA care home for the elderly was built on the site in 1995.

### Drive

The main approach to the house is from Liberton Drive, by way of a gated entrance. A couple of old elms survive of the original avenue, variously described as being composed of elm and/or lime trees. Several large wind-swept poplars, presumably planted in the early-to-mid 20th century to replace the original trees, now stand to the east of the drive, while a mixed-species and mixed-age stand of trees lines part of the drive in front of the dovecot, on its west side. Elsewhere, the planting is gappy. Consequently, the effect of the avenue is largely lost.

### Garden

The house lies towards the north-west side of a part-walled garden, which rises south-eastwards in a series of terraces from the Liberton Burn. Several



*Gates and drive*

*Garden terrace wall*





*Dovecot and drive wall with  
elms and poplars*

well-rotted stumps just outwith the rubble-built garden walls, recorded by the Ordnance Survey (1852), indicate that the gardens were once shaded by large trees, most probably elm and/or lime. Several mature trees, including a large beech of 150+ years, with several younger birch and pine trees, form a small grove within the garden enclosure on rising ground to the west of the house. An entirely new formal garden layout has been created on the garden terraces overlooked by the house, defined and sub-divided by hedges of beech and yew, enclosing parterre-like box-edged beds between grass path, containing herbaceous flowering and foliage plants and vegetables in different beds, and retaining some old fruit trees. New ornamental planting, including a beech hedge and hornbeam maze, has recently been added to the west of this.

#### Park

The outline of the grazing park that once surrounded Liberton House can be easily traced in the partial remains of the stone wall which once surrounded it and in the few surviving trees, mostly ash, which were formerly at regular intervals along this wall. Most of the surrounding park would have been visible from the uppermost terrace of the garden around the house.

#### Views and Vistas

There are inward views across open fields from Alnwickhill Road and Liberton Drive, in which Liberton House and its gardens are seen against a backdrop of the Braid Hills and the more distant Pentland Hills. Although the house and formal gardens are enclosed and sheltered, there are broad outward views from the garden terraces and walks, south across fields/parkland towards Stanedykehead, and west towards the Braid Hills and Pentland Hills. The house and gardens enjoy views to the north and east across adjacent fields/parkland, though these are circumscribed by built development along the neighbouring roads.

#### PUBLIC ACCESS

There is no public access to the walled gardens surrounding Liberton House, or to the neighbouring grounds of the Braid Hills Nursing Centre. Outwith the



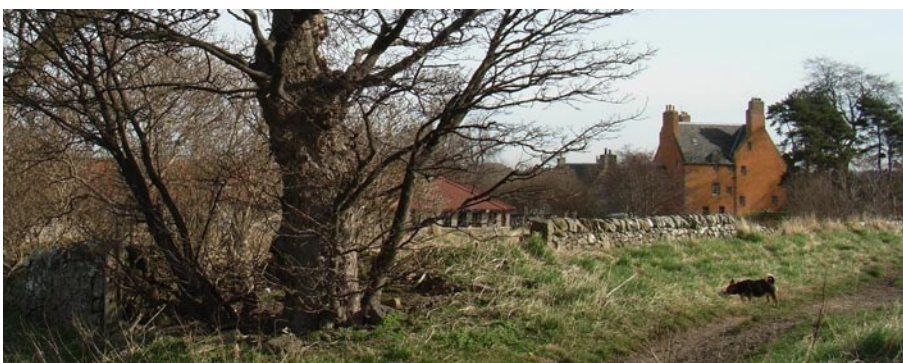
*Garden boxed vegetable beds  
with arbour*



*New lime walk in garden with  
vista to hills*



*Park wall and trees*



*Park wall and trees*

garden walls the land is in agricultural use, whether for arable cultivation and/or grazing. The line of the park wall can be followed on foot from the entrance gate to Liberton House, eastwards along Liberton Drive, southwards along Alnwickhill Road, westwards along Stanedykehead, and thence across fields to the vehicle track that leads down past Tower Farm Riding Stables to Liberton Drive. The tracks at Stanedykehead and/or near Tower Farm are well used by dog-walkers and horse/pony riders.

#### **FUTURE MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL**

The walled gardens surrounding the house, largely abandoned and overgrown before and following the fire in 1991, have been progressively replanted in an appropriately formal style by Nicholas Groves-Raines as the setting for the restored 17th century house. Although new elements have been added to the garden layout successively over the last fifteen years, more ornamental planting could be added to enhance the setting of the house still further. The approach to the house could be improved by the felling of the over-aged poplars and the replanting of the avenue, with lime in place of elm. A more ambitious scheme could involve the reinstatement of the former park boundary, involving reconstruction of the encircling wall and the replanting of trees at regular intervals along its length – using ash, sycamore, beech and oak. A high priority should be given to protecting the inward views towards Liberton House, especially from Liberton Drive and Alnwickhill Road, and the outward views from the house and gardens over the surrounding park and towards the Braid Hills and Pentland Hills.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

##### **Overall**

The restored A-listed mansion house has outstanding architectural significance, both locally and nationally. Although not seen the principal views from the house and gardens, the neighbouring developments of the Braid Hills Nursing Centre and the Tower Farm Riding Stables have a significant impact on the visual character and historical integrity site, reducing its value. The gardens have a high value both horticulturally and as a work of art, in their own right. Overall the site has outstanding local significance and some value in a national context.

##### **Work of Art**

High

##### **Historical**

High

##### **Horticultural / Arboricultural / Sylvicultural**

High

##### **Architectural**

Outstanding

##### **Scenic**

Outstanding

##### **Nature Conservation**

Little

##### **Archaeology**

Little

##### **Recreational**

Some

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