

City of Edinburgh Council

**Edinburgh**  
Survey of Gardens and Designed Landscapes

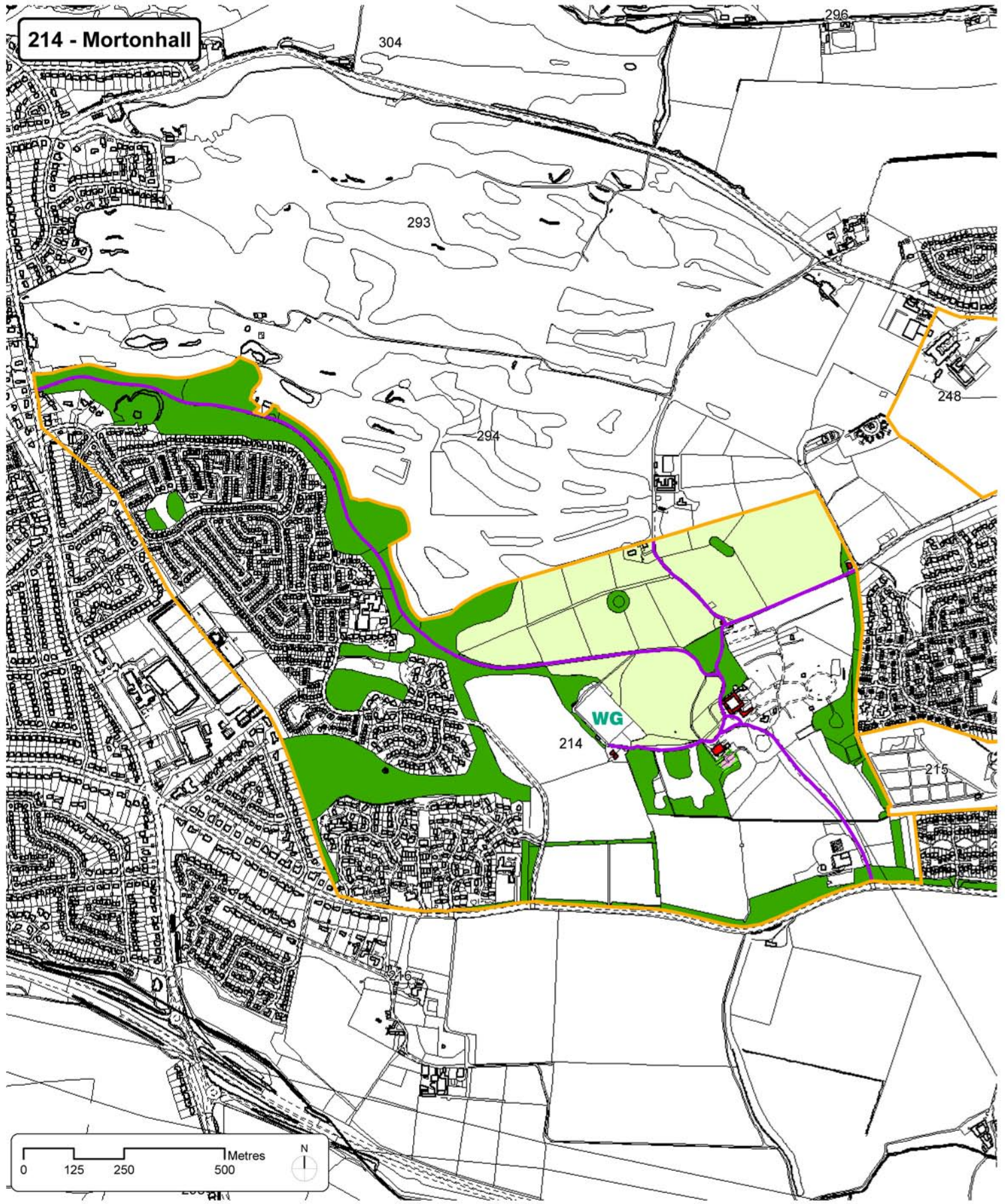
**214 Mortonhall**

**Consultants**














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Survey visit: July 2007

214 - Mortonhall



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

## 214 Mortonhall

Parish Liberton, later Edinburgh

Owners Private

Designations

Listing Mortonhall House with terraces, fountain, statue plinth & burial ground A  
Kennels & Mortonhall Gate C (S)  
Ice house C (S)  
Stable court & Granary B  
Dovecot C (S)  
Factor's house C (S)  
Walled garden C (S)

Green Belt

Area of Great Landscape Value

Local Nature Conservation Site

Tree Preservation Orders

Heritage Trees

### REASONS FOR INCLUSION

A large estate landscape in the southern outer suburbs of Edinburgh on land rising towards Braid Hills to the north that survives with many features and areas intact but with other areas developed. Several new uses and planned public access have adapted the estate to its modern situation so that it has high value recreationally and scenically as well as in terms of its intrinsic historical and architectural values

### LOCATION, SETTING AND EXTENT

Mortonhall House and estate lie on the north side of Frogston Road (B701), which provides the main vehicular access, and south of Braid Hills. Originally the estate extended to Comiston Road (A702) /Braid Road on the west and Alnwickhill Road /Howden Hall Road (A710) on the east, although the Buckstone/Frogston (west) and Mortonhall/Alnwickhill (east) housing areas and Mortonhall Crematorium and Cemetery now occupy these parts of the land. The site is a significant component of green belt land which extends from the city boundary at the bypass (A720) on the south to Blackford Hill on the north. The south part of the site is fairly flat, rising progressively more steeply north of the house to give increasingly wide views southwards to the Pentlands and Lammermuirs. The estate appears to have extended to the track between Braid Hills Golf Course and Mortonhall Golf Course, including to the south top of Braid Hills. Site area approx. 162ha.

### MAIN PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

18th and 19th centuries; 20th century urban development and new uses.

### HISTORY OF LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Robert the Bruce gave Mortonhall estate to Henry St Clair of Roslin in 1317 (Rennie). John Trotter, first Baron of Mortonhall, bought the estate in 1635 (RCAHMS on SCRAN), probably from Alexander Ellis who owned it for a short time (Rennie). The 7th baron, Thomas Trotter (d1793) inherited in 1763 and demolished the original house in 1765. Apparently it was 'a fort-like structure with a drawbridge and moat' (RCAHMS notes on SCRAN). The present Mortonhall House was built close to the site of the earlier house for Thomas Trotter in 1769;

the architect was probably John Baxter Junior. A porch and service wing were added c1835, probably by David Bryce, and dormer windows were added in the 20th century, probably by James and Robert H Watherston (DSA). The Mortonhall estate contains a fine collection of ancillary buildings, many of which date from the 19th century, including the Factor's House (1835) and the kennels. The stable and granary complex is of the same date as the house (1769) and is probably also by Baxter (HS notes). Nearby Morton House is also 18th century and was at one time the Mortonhall Dower House, when the Trotters owned it.

Although parts of the estate have been sold and the house was converted into privately owned flats during the 1980s, the Trotter family still own the Mortonhall estate. The house and the family's 20th century history are typical of those of so many of the period. Of the three sons of the 11th Baron, Reginald and Edward, were killed in action in 1915 and 1916 respectively (Rennie). The family seat is now at Charterhall, Berwickshire.

The family vacated Mortonhall in 1939 and the property was taken over during the war as an army camp for the training of the Royal Engineers. Mortonhall House was leased to Edinburgh university in 1949, when it was used 'for a Marxist experiment in communal living' (HS notes). It was used in the 1950s and 1960s as a nursing home and then lay empty for a number of years. It was converted into 13 flats in the mid 1980s.

By 1995, part of the stables was in use as estate offices, and part had been converted as a restaurant and bar. Part of the granary was used for the nearby camping and caravan site toilet and laundry services (HS notes).

#### Mortonhall Golf Club, Braid Road

In 1892 the Morningside Golf Club took out a 15-year lease on land on the Braid hills belonging to Colonel Trotter of Mortonhall (MH Golf Club 10). The first 9 holes covered about 55 acres from Braid Road to Meadowhead Farm. In 1894 the club acquired the North field and, in 1897, a further 9 acres. In 1903, another 13 acres were added; in 1906, J H Taylor designed the course (MH Golf Club 56). In 1926, the club acquired the course for itself (Moreton 81) and James Braid was asked for his input onto the course layout. Some of his recommendations took a number of years to be implemented.

The clubhouse on Braid Road was designed by Sydney Mitchell in 1892-94; he worked on the building again, doubling its size and adding a floor in 1903-04.

#### Maps and Graphic Evidence

Shown on Adair 1682 as a house with tower in a small enclosure. Roy c1750 shows *Mortoun Hall* on the north side of a series of tree-lined enclosures with a more substantial belt on the west.

Knox 1816 shows a house among irregular enclosures with naturalistic beds and blocks to the west. This basic plan is shown in more detail on Sharp Greenwood and Fowler 1828 with the house set in parkland, a walled garden to the west, a courtyard of buildings to the east and a long sinuous drive to Buckstone. The first OS maps from 1852 onwards add fine detail showing ornamental planting on the west side of the house, south of the walled garden (laid out as a quartered square in the south part, and with two more 'quarters' on the north), including walks, a bowling green and fountain, plus a pigeon house and ice house in the vicinity; to the east a tree belt follows the Stenhouse burn.

### COMPONENTS OF THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE

#### Mortonhall House

A tall mansion of three storeys and basement on a square plan with 5 bays on each side; projecting pedimented portico on north-facing entrance front; overlooks tall-hedged terraced garden spaces on south. HS notes that garden access from the house was by iron staircases from the 1st floor, now removed.



*Mortonhall House in 1945  
from The Scotsman (SCRAN)*



*Mortonhall House from the  
north-east*



*Stables, now bar and  
restaurant*

*Main entry from Frogston  
Road along Mortonhall Gate  
with Klondyke Garden Centre  
and pylons; arboretum and  
tree belts in background*



### Stables

Large square courtyard of stables and offices in grey sandstone, single storey with arched and pedimented entrance on west and corner 'pavilions', now converted to Stables Bar and Restaurant and serving camping site and other visitors.

### Lodges

West Lodge, Braid Road: greatly altered lodge and part of gates remain.

East Lodge, Howden Hall Road: was B listed but now demolished, probably to make way for new crematorium entrance in 1960s.

### Other Estate Buildings

#### Factor's House

Meadowhead Farm, east of golf course, now used as riding stables.

Kennels, south-west side of walled garden; also north-west corner of campsite area

Walled family burial ground amongst trees to east of house. 0.10 ha (HS notes; not seen). Other estate houses and cottages, plus some other modern houses, eg. on west side of Meadowhead drive.

### Walled Garden

Large walled garden over 1 ha in area, unused horticulturally and laid to grass, used for events, said to be 19th century but probably earlier in part, with arched entrances to north, west and east, several other doorways, including one on south with date of 1877 on inside lintel and door with decorative ironwork; walls generally rubble stonework but brick lined on part of east side; several phases and evidence of former building on walls; cold frames along west outside wall; extensive ruins along north outside wall, free-standing and lean-to; Gifford (p491) refers to a 'corner pavilion' which is no longer present. NSA (p18) notes 'admirable and most productive gardens with forcing houses at Mortonhall'.

### Other Features

Pigeon house or dovecot to east of house; ice house (late 18th century) under large mound near edge of parkland to north-west of house.

### Estate Walls

A low mortar-bound rubble estate wall with distinctive chunky coping remains along Frogston Road for much of its length; also along part of Braid Road. Substantial half-dyke along west side middle section of Meadowhead drive.

### Mortonhall Golf Club

Rambling building on Braid Road with red brick ground floors, harled first floors and prominent roof in red tile, with dormers; described by Gifford as 'picturesque cottage style'; built in 1892-94 and extended in 1903-04.



*Meadowhead*



*Mortonhall Golf Club, Braid  
Road*



*Campsite*

*Walled garden*

### Klondyke Garden Centre

Modern industrial shed with projecting covered areas and fenced external display spaces, plus car park, near Frogston Road.

### Mortonhall Campsite

Site for touring caravan and tents, with small permanent/residential caravan area in north-west corner; timber construction site buildings.

### Drives and Paths

South Drive or Mortonhall Gate: main approach, blacktop surface with speed humps serving house, campsite, bar, restaurant and garden centre.

North-west drive: attractive long approach from Braid Road with tree belts either side; drybound surface; used as footpath, bridleway and service access.

East Drive: survives as Stanedykehead Road leading to Alnwickhill Road

### Gardens

No planted gardens remain, although the terraced enclosures and arboretum planting are of design or arboricultural interest.

### Arboretum

A substantial area of open woodland adjoining the west side of the house including cypresses, thuyas, hemlocks, yews, Norway spruce, *Cedrus deodara*, *Cedrus libani* (very large), and large mixed broadleaved trees including cut-leaved and purple beeches. Site interpretation states that trees were grown from some of the earliest seed imported from the west of America. The Arboretum includes the space of the former bowling green, a damaged semi-circular inscribed fountain (still functioning but overflowing to surrounding area) and plinths with no statues. Good views between trees to house.

NSA (1835-45, p18) notes 'A sycamore tree at Mortonhall said to have been planted in 1700 measures 14 feet [in circumference]'

### Tree Belts and Woodlands

The most substantial tree belts are those either side of the North-west drive which have appeared as a prominent features on maps since the early 19th century. These remain comprising mature mixed broadleaves with Scot pine, yew and rhododendron, with good oak and beech locally. The belts make a very attractive, if shaded route and also define the edge of the Buckstone area and Mortonhall golf course. Secondary belts and large clumps remain within the area developed for housing. Other significant but less substantial belts runs along Frogston Road, the west side of Mounthooly Loan, west side of the Alnwickhill/ Mortonhall areas and west side of Meadowhill Drive.

### Parkland

Parkland on each side of the house seen on 19th century and maps has now been greatly reduced with the area north-west of the house between the walled garden and campsite the only significant surviving parkland; includes large

*Arboretum**Buckstone housing through north-west drive tree belt*

*Major trees belts and route of  
north-west drive*



mature beech, sycamore, lime and Scots pine. South of the house the parks are largely devoid of trees and in agricultural use (arable or set-aside). Few old trees remain in the campsite area.

#### **Mortonhall Golf Course**

Exceptionally fine course on account of its topography including narrow valley section defined by rock faces, the heights of Braid Hills and outstanding views. Enclosure by bold tree belts on the south-west is supplemented by tree planting of various ages including older Scots pines and young small-growing ornamental trees, larger tree blocks and more natural vegetation areas.

#### **Boundary and Field Enclosures**

In addition to the walls mentioned above, tree rows and hedges along the more agricultural boundaries are also an important component of the landscape.

#### **Water Features**

The channelised Stenhouse burn runs through the former parkland south of the house but is not a prominent feature.

#### **Views and Vistas**

Fine views over south Edinburgh to the Pentland and Lammermuir Hills from rising ground to north of house; outstanding panoramic views from Braid Hills south top.

*Parkland north-west of the  
house, with ice-house on right*





*View from south top of Braid Hills with Mortonhall Golf Course, Buckstone housing, major tree belt along south-west boundary and Alnwickhill housing on far left*

### Visual Intrusions

A HV power line runs to the park and terminates with a pylon south of the campsite. Two telecoms towers on Braid Hills are a very prominent intrusion. The Klondyke Garden Centre near the Frogston Road estate entrance is large and prominent in this location, only partly screened by the roadside tree belt.

### Area of Influence

The defined site, although substantial, is greatly reduced from the original estate area. Features of the designed landscape, particularly tree belts and clumps within the Buckstone area, survive in adjoining developed area to the west and east.

### PUBLIC ACCESS

Several public features (arboretum etc) and commercial facilities (campsite, bar, restaurant, garden centre) give the site a high degree of public use. This is complemented by well planned and signed path network developed by the Mortonhall Estate in association with the Paths for All Partnership, Edinburgh Greenbelt Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage, with provision for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

### FUTURE MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL

The site is generally well managed to a certain level with good provision for public access, although there is no public car park as such and perhaps this is not to be encouraged. Parkland tree planting is in need of restocking both in the surviving area north-west of the house and in the fields to the south where it has been lost. The future of agricultural use in these areas is questionable and management for other objectives may be an option. The arboretum also needs attention to conserve its value, both in terms of restocking and enhancing the collection and physical conservation of the fountain and plinths.

### ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Overall

Outstanding regional significance due to the extent of the remaining features of interest, the natural topography and views from the site and a high standard of public facilities and access; in many ways an exemplar of management and survival of a designed landscape in an urban fringe or suburban setting.

#### Work of Art

Some



*Signpost and visitor information*



**Historical**

Some

**Horticultural / Arboricultural / Sylvicultural**

High

**Architectural**

Outstanding

**Scenic**

Outstanding

**Nature Conservation**

Some

**Archaeological**

Some

**Recreational**

High

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NLS National Library of Scotland [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)

NMRS National Monuments Record of Scotland

SCRAN Scottish Cultural Resource Access Network [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk)

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