

# A TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF CRAIGMILLAR PARK

*The following account of the historical development of the Craigmillar Park Conservation Area was written by Dr. Allen Simpson as a reference for use in the preparation of the formal Character Appraisal, which was published, by the City, last year. It has been printed here in full because it was thought to be of wider interest – Ed.*

**The great expansion of Edinburgh - as the administrative, legal, patronage and society centre of post-union Scotland - occurred in the late eighteenth century.** The city's bounds were extended to the lands beyond the Nor' Loch, and the North Bridge of 1768 gave access for the feverish construction of imposing classical terraces and squares which spread out to form successive phases of the 'New Town' of Edinburgh. However, the city's bankruptcy in the 1820s effectively halted the process, and when confidence returned and house-building again began in earnest, attention had shifted to the new southern suburbs. Here Edinburgh's more substantial merchants and professionals were enjoying the seclusion of what had become very fashionable villas on south-facing slopes, with distant views to Liberton and the Braids. Rapid development of villa policies to the south met a clear demand for high-quality houses with private gardens at a much lower density than in the New Town, and this type of housing progressed steadily southwards until the end of the century.

A major factor which stimulated the development southwards was the construction of the new southern approach to the city. This had begun in the late eighteenth century with the completion of South Bridge in 1788. By 1795 it had been proposed to continue this road south to open up more ground for house feuing, and by 1806 the road (as Minto Street) had reached the southern boundary of the Newington Estate at Mayfield Loan (now West and East Mayfield). This was still effectively a service road for this new development, but in about 1812 the broad avenue of Minto Street was continued southwards as a major new turnpike road, connecting to the existing network at the present Gilmerton Road and Liberton Brae. The impressively wide new highway became one of the principal approach roads from the south. It now forms the axis of the Craigmillar Park Conservation Area, and its existence has shaped the nature of the residential development of the district. (See central plan.)

The ground designated in 1997 as Craigmillar Park Conservation Area was open farmland until the 1850s, but it was never in single ownership. Rather, it falls into two distinct parts, each with a separate history, and is divided by the Pow Burn, whose valley runs from the west at Morningside across to the east, where it originally flowed to a flood plain at Peffermill before joining the Braid Burn. The northern section of the Conservation Area formed part of the lands of Mayfield, immediately to the south of the Newington Estate, whereas the central and southern sections to the south of the Pow Burn were part of the lands of the Gilmours of Craigmillar and Liberton.

The Pow Burn marked the southern boundary of the Burgh Muir, a large area of common ground, originally forested, which had been part of an early royal grant to Edinburgh, perhaps in the twelfth century. The northern boundary of the Muir was the Burgh Loch (later drained to become the Meadows).

Two ancient highways, to the south of Scotland and beyond, crossed the eastern end of the Burgh Muir. These were firstly the road from the Netherbow Port to Dalkeith (the present Dalkeith Road), and secondly that from the Bristo or Potterrow Port to Liberton and Dumfries, along Causewayside and then by the present Mayfield Road. These highways were connected at Cross-causeway, and they ran within a few hundred metres of each other across the Burgh Muir before diverging. The two roads enclosed an area of land, between Gibbet Loan (now Preston Street) and Mayfield Loan, which was feued off by the town in 1586 and which eventually became the Newington Estate. The line taken by the new turnpike road was over the open ground down the centre of the estates between the two old highways, and this now forms the spine of the Conservation Area.

The substantial grounds of Newington House were laid out in 1825 by the architect James Gillespie Graham in an intimate and sheltered villa development that did much to establish the special residential character of Newington. Gillespie's scheme now forms the core of the Blackett Conservation Area, which covers the southern half of the Newington Estate.

Minto Street continued as Mayfield Street (now Mayfield Gardens) through Mayfield (or Newlands) Parks, lying between the Newington and Craigmillar estates. It comprised a number of plots of land, originally feued off by the town from the Burgh Muir in the sixteenth century, which were united (hence presumably creating 'new lands') in 1704.

The Mayfield estate was acquired in 1863 by Duncan McLaren, a former lord-provost and future MP for Edinburgh, who by this time was living in Newington House. Mayfield was promptly feued for villa and terraced housing to a plan by David Cousin, who was to become Edinburgh's first City Architect in the 1870s, although the two terraces on the east side of Mayfield Gardens are the only parts of the original plan that were built. The area behind this frontage is the Cousin-inspired Waverley Park scheme, composed largely of semi-detached rather than single villas as Cousin had intended, and grouped around a contained communal garden area for residents. Beyond this a field had already been sold by Dick of Prestonfield in 1846 to the Metropolitan Cemetery Association, and it was laid out in 1848 by Cousin as the Newington Necropolis or Echobank Cemetery, accessed from Dalkeith Road. (By 1869, an additional carriageway entrance from Craigmillar Park had been constructed, along the south bank of the Pow Burn.) Together, these two areas comprise the Waverley Park Conservation Area. The west half of the Mayfield Estate (but excluding the houses on Mayfield Road itself) forms the northern section of the Craigmillar Park Conservation Area. By the time of McLaren's death in 1886, the lands of Mayfield were almost entirely built over.

The bridge over the Pow Burn at the end of Mayfield Gardens, where the original Mayfield toll-house stood, marked the City limits until 1882 and also boundary of the estates of the Gilmours of Liberton and Craigmillar, in which the central and southern sections of Craigmillar Park Conservation Area are located. The lands of Inch and Craigmillar had been purchased by Sir John Gilmour in 1660 (with those of Upper Liberton subsequently added by marriage) and the Gilmours resided initially at Craigmillar Castle, moving to Inch House in the late eighteenth century.

The cultivated fields to the north and west of Inch House were farmed from Liberton West Mains, on what is now West Mains Road. The southern boundary of the farm was the Braid Burn, which flows east over a marshy flood plain (at Inch Park and the present Cameron Toll shopping centre) where it would have protected the original fifteenth-century fortified tower, which stood on an 'inch' or island. The difficult crossing of this area was improved in about 1830 with the construction of what became Lady Road, built at a higher level between the new turnpike road and Dalkeith Road.

Clearly encouraged by the success of the feuing of Mayfield, Sir Robert Gordon Gordon-Gilmour embarked in about 1870 on a feuing plan that would extend the villa development southwards into his own lands. The Post Office Directory plan for 1873 shows as 'feuing ground' a network of proposed streets, including a crescent-shaped communal garden area, proposed for 'East Craigmillar Park', to the east of the main road. Villas are shown already in place on the main road, which was now named Craigmillar Park. The Directory of 1877 also shows the more geometric terraced proposals, in which David Cousin was involved, for 'West Craigmillar Park'.

Newington had grown rapidly, and in 1865 Edinburgh's first medical officer of health, Henry Littlejohn, described it as 'the most densely-peopled' of the suburban districts. This type of urban expansion was only possible with improved transport systems. For Edinburgh, this was the heyday of the hackney carriage and the horse bus, and many of the larger villas had their own stables and carriages. Horse-drawn trams were introduced in 1871, and the 1873 Directory map shows the terminus of the Newington line beyond the bridge over the Pow Burn and just within Gilmour's lands. By the late 1890s it had been extended to Liberton Brae. As significant, was the opening of the Edinburgh Suburban & Southside Junction Railway in 1884. This took passengers on a circular route connecting a number of outlying districts to Waverley Station and for part of its southern leg it followed the valley of the Pow Burn, sections of which had to be culverted. Newington Station, entered from the end of Craigmillar Park, was a principal stop, and its name helped establish the understanding that 'Newington' applied to the whole district and not merely to the more narrow confines of the Newington Estate.

To accommodate the new development of Craigmillar Park, the old Mayfield toll-house was moved to the end of Lady Road, which was the City boundary from 1882. The turnpike road between Mayfield Toll and the foot of Liberton Brae (known initially as Nether Liberton Road and later Liberton Road) intersected a much earlier road to Newbattle, part of which is the present-day Gilmerton Road.. This old road had crossed Gilmour land from Powburn (on Mayfield Road), then passed the village of Nether Liberton just west of Inch House and on to Gilmerton. The northern part of this old highway was removed (perhaps as late as the 1830s), leaving only the present T-junction at Goods Corner on Gilmerton Road.

The removal of the old highway gave Gilmour unencumbered flexibility in the layout of his 'West Craigmillar Park' development. The southern section of this development was designed to have a high-level crescent above the main road and separated from it by a communal garden. This crescent, originally called South Craigmillar Park (and later Gordon Terrace), has some fine and substantial red-sandstone villas, constructed for

wealthy Edinburgh merchants in the closing years of Victoria's reign. At the southern end of the crescent, the gardens are cut by the line of the Braid Burn, beyond which is a small public garden in the angle of Liberton Road and Mayfield Road.

The southern boundary of the Conservation Area also marks the edge of the Edinburgh Central Plan area, and it forms a clear visual boundary between the planned urban area of stone-built Georgian and Victorian houses in the City and the mixture of modern suburbs and semi-rural (and now commercial) development to the south. The visitor entering the City by road is immediately aware of this boundary at the junction of Lady Road with Craigmillar Park, and it is an important feature of the Conservation Area. The boundary of the built-up environment was always intended to be here because it marks the natural outer perimeter of the park land round Gilmour's Inch House.

Gilmour's 'East Craigmillar Park' scheme was slow to feu behind the main road, and a significant change in land use occurred in early 1895 with the news that Gilmour had leased all the remaining unfeued land to form a 9-hole golf course. This was a time of rapid growth in popular golf and the new club advertised its accessibility by train and tram for city workers. Unlike many contemporary clubs it was not exclusive nor indeed was it all male – from the outset it was open to women players and to visiting women's and mixed clubs. In late 1895 it built a small club-house, which still stands in the playing field at the end of Crawford Road. This was by the well-regarded architect and designer Alexander Lorne Campbell (1871-1944), and it is his earlier recorded independent commission, presumably obtained through his brother, who was one of the joint-secretaries of the club. It is an elegant arts-and-crafts building with a structural timber frame and a slated gambrel roof. Lorne Campbell's design provides an open viewing verandah to the south, and another to the east, originally enclosing a shallow bay window from the principal room, overlooking the ninth green and first fairway and commanding a view across to Craigmillar Castle.

Because Gilmour's agents renewed feuing on Lady Road in 1904, leading to the loss of one of the fairways, Craigmillar Park Golf Club moved to a new site on Blackford Hill. The original pavilion was sold to the Edinburgh Northern Hockey Club, and was also used by other sports clubs and by St Margaret's School, which had opened in East Suffolk Road in 1890. The pavilion remained in use as changing rooms until 1995, and was modernised and extended in 1984. In 2001 it was C(S)-listed by Historic Scotland, principally because of the association with Lorne Campbell.

Gilmour soon abandoned the 1873 feuing plan for East Craigmillar Park, and applied the land to a completely different purpose. In 1905 a new system of teacher training had been introduced by the government, and a campaign had begun to build new colleges at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen. The need to provide halls of residence for women students was recognised, and in Edinburgh the future Moray House College of Education (ultimately part of Edinburgh University) joined with four other educational bodies to set up a charity to carry this aspect forward. Gilmour's land at East Craigmillar Park, which had been identified as early as 1910, was purchased in 1913, and financial support from the Carnegie Trust helped ensure exceptional quality for the buildings. The buildings at both Moray House and Craigmillar Park were by Alan Keith Robertson (1881-1925), architect to the Scottish Education Department. Through his partner Thomas Swann (1883-1925), Robertson was familiar with Sir Robert Lorimer's circle of assistants, and appears to have been strongly influenced by Lorimer-inspired designs for Canadian university buildings at McGill and Edmonton. In Edinburgh, Robertson's three mansard-roofed halls, grouped around a grassed quadrangle, are masterpieces of Lorimer arts-and-crafts design, reminiscent of these Canadian campus buildings.

These three halls were occupied in session 1916-17. The remaining two linked halls on the east side, to complete the quadrangle, were added by Robertson's assistant and successor Frank Wood. They were completed in 1927 to a slightly simplified specification - eliminating, for example, coal fires and therefore chimneys for each bedroom, and using a render finish on the rear of the buildings. A gate lodge was provided at the entry off East Suffolk Road, but the planned lodge at the main entrance on Lady Road (at the present Cameron March) was never built. The whole complex is considered outstanding in UK terms, and was B-listed in 1974.

A major component of the special character of the building complex is its very sheltered rural setting and the high quality of views into and out of the site. In particular, the field at the north end of the site provided the sports facilities which were considered essential when the site was purchased, and this has remained an open playing field with dramatic and uninterrupted views of Arthur's Seat to the north. The field forms an integral part of the setting of the halls and it makes a significant impact on the character of East Suffolk Road and Crawford Road. The hostel site was bought by Moray House from the charity in 1979 and was sold to developers in 1998.

The hostels themselves have recently been converted into residential accommodation, but after a Public Inquiry in 2001, it was ruled that the playing field should not be developed but should remain as open space.

The other prominent building at this site is the former Craigmillar Park Free Church by Sydney Mitchell and George Wilson, 1898, which was B-listed in 1997. This red sandstone perpendicular Gothic church, now converted to form part of St Margaret's School, has an incomplete tower, but is delightfully complimented by an adjoining octagonal hall. It was placed so as to close the vista at the end of East Suffolk Road. However, the pleasing rustic effect of this has been somewhat compromised by the intrusion of a major new building for St Margaret's School in 2001.

Nearby, on the main road, is the more severe Craigmillar Park Church, by Henry Hardy and John Rutherford Wright, 1878, with a hall set back from the street and added in 1899. This was B-listed in 1997, as was Charles Leadbetter's imposing Royal Blind School of 1874, although only the Craigmillar Park gatehouse of this is currently included in the Conservation Area. The other notable church building in the Conservation Area is Hippolyte Blanc's Mayfield Salisbury Church of 1876-79 (the spire added in 1894) in French Gothic style, B-listed in 1970

**Dr. Allen Simpson**

### **Sources:**

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The author is also indebted to Prof David Walker for comments made in the course of the Newington Campus public inquiry, 2001.

**See map below**



# S-E EDINBURGH IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

== : NEW ROADS

