

## EDITORIAL

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The conservation of historic parks, gardens and designed landscapes is central to the remit of The Garden History Society (GHS) – and one that it has carried out since its formation fifty years ago in 1965. In England, as a statutory consultee since 1995, the GHS's conservation officers, now working closely with local county gardens trusts, advise government agencies, local authorities and others on issues affecting historic parks and gardens identified by English Heritage as being of national significance, and included on the *Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England*, and also on appropriate non-registered sites.

In Scotland, the GHS is not a statutory consultee in relation to planning proposals which may affect gardens and designed landscapes, as Historic Scotland advises on sites included in *An Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland*. However, the GHS does offer expert independent advice on *Inventory*, and non-*Inventory* sites and works with local authorities and community groups for the identification, recording and protection of historic gardens and landscapes in Scotland.

Historic gardens and designed landscapes are part of Scotland's national identity and, together with its architectural heritage, are of particular significance in Edinburgh's New Town. The GHS is, therefore, pleased to be able to devote a special online issue of its academic journal *Garden History* to the proceedings of the 'Edinburgh Gardens and Squares Conference' held on 26 September 2014. Developed by the GHS and delivered by Historic Scotland, the conference was supported by Edinburgh World Heritage Trust, Cockburn Association, Architecture History Society Scotland and Built Environment Forum Scotland. This special issue has been made possible by the generosity of The Charlotte Square Proprietors, Lyon & Turnbull Auctioneers and Valuers, Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust, Colin Ellis and Michael Baynham, and the conference speakers who have willingly offered their expertise in the articles featured.

The focus of the conference was the Scottish Enlightenment, its impact on science, sociology and urban planning, and how these influenced the design of Edinburgh's New Town. Following an address by Kristina Taylor on behalf of the GHS, the day-long conference began with talks that explored the historic significance of the New Town and how the development of its gardens and squares compared with those in other European countries. This session was followed by one that considered social and cultural aspects with talks covering the layout, features and use of gardens and squares, and the particular significance of Edinburgh Western Cemetery and Calton Hill.

In addition to emphasizing the historic significance of the New Town, a second aim of the conference, as stated in the brochure, was to 'celebrate and investigate how their enjoyment can be maximised for the benefit of the social, economic and cultural life of the city in the twenty-first century'. This was admirably explored in the afternoon sessions not only by an examination of Edinburgh's spaces but also by examples from London and other European cities. Edinburgh's New Town is a tribute to its designers and builders, but as several speakers emphasized and quoted from John Byrom's forthcoming Edinburgh garden handbook: 'Gardens are by nature dynamic, they change as they grow, they change in use, and they change by the values placed on their future. [...] Every change is a challenge to informed management in striking a just balance between old and

new.' This conference has surely provided guidance on how this balance can be achieved through sensitive conservation management planning.

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