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# THE TREASURY AND THE EDINBURGH ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN, 1846-1914

IAN LEVITT

In 1890 a Departmental Committee established by the Treasury to review the funding of the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh noted that it had become 'a national establishment' which provided both 'general instruction' and 'enjoyment'. The former rested very much on its links to the University where the Regius Keeper was also entitled Professor of Botany and where the Garden was used for teaching and research. The latter reflected its use as one of the City's principal parks for recreation, some sixty acres laid out partly formally, partly as an arboretum and with associated Palm Houses and other buildings to display floras from around the world. The Committee especially commended the Garden's 'well-merited reputation for the excellence and interest of its collection of herbaceous plants, grown in the open air', which 'very materially supplemented' the work undertaken at the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew. It recommended that Edinburgh's annual Exchequer grant, which was separate from that received by the University for its purposes, should be increased to improve staff salaries as well as the provision of additional offices, a research laboratory and a new system of Palm and greenhouse heating. Lord Salisbury's Conservative Government accepted the recommendations and agreed to the alteration in salaries and certain minor works. The latter, which totalled £1,950, covered the renovation of class rooms and 'remodelling' the heating systems. Treasury ministers delayed consideration of the more substantial capital works until the Keeper and the Board of Works (the Government Department responsible for public buildings) had prepared detailed plans.

Although there have been works published on the Garden, generally they have concentrated on its horticultural development, its keepers, and

buildings.<sup>1</sup> The Garden's significance in promoting horticultural science cannot be disputed, nor can its importance as a place of public enjoyment, yet the accounts indicate little of the discussion that took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on its funding and indeed on the decisions that were taken within the Government to ensure that development. Equally, works that have been published on Edinburgh's history have mentioned the origins of the Garden, its extension and links with the University but usually without discussion of its construction and contribution as a public park designed to provide enjoyment and stimulate knowledge of horticultural affairs.<sup>2</sup> The role and importance of the Government in facilitating the Garden's development and maintenance has, at best, only fleetingly been referenced. This paper seeks to address that issue and detail the role of the Government, especially the Treasury, as it impacted on the Garden between 1846 and 1914, a period when Government intervention to promote education, science and the refined arts was firmly established and when, until late in that period, the belief in a policy of free trade and economic *laissez faire* was the dominant force in electoral politics. The two policies were not necessarily contradictory but for any institution dependent on Government funding there could be no assumption that automatic support would be forthcoming.

The Royal Botanic Garden (or Physic Garden) was founded in 1670 at Holyrood House, Edinburgh, and was merged later with two other Gardens.<sup>3</sup> It eventually occupied a 15-acre site adjacent to Inverleith Row in 1820, with a Palm House and associated buildings constructed at Government cost. By 1846, the Government was contributing £1,000 to its annual maintenance and as Edinburgh's Chair of Medicine and Botany, the Regius Keeper received

£100 per annum from the Vote for Universities, Scotland. 'Maintenance' included salaries for the Curator and other gardeners and the purchase of specimens not donated. Part of the Garden was set aside for 'medical plants'.<sup>4</sup> In 1823, the Caledonian Horticultural Society (established in 1809) acquired an 'Experimental Garden' (10.75 acres), which adjoined the Botanic Garden, on a seventy-year lease from the Office of Woods, Forests and Land Revenue, with an annual rent fixed at £140 (payable to Land Revenue).<sup>5</sup> The Government had bought the land at a cost of £4,000. In return, the Society constructed a Hall, a Winter Garden (which included an herbarium) and other horticultural 'appendages', and enabled its members to invite guests to visit. The rent was offset in 1833 when it received £200 per annum from the Board of Manufactures, taken from the £2,000 annuity received under the treaty of Union for the encouragement of the arts and manufactures. In return, the Society was obliged to return certified annual accounts to the Treasury indicating that its funds, 'by private subscription or otherwise', amounted to not less than £300, and that the total 'had been applied for the purposes of the Institution'.<sup>6</sup> Amongst its presidents were the Duke of Gordon and the Duke of Buccleuch with a membership that stretched from landed interests to market gardeners. It held an annual prize competition, published regular proceedings on its activities and encouraged market gardeners with new varieties of flowers, fruits, and vegetables.<sup>7</sup> There were two other Royal Botanic Gardens supported by the Government, at Kew Gardens, London, and at Glasnevin, Dublin. In 1845 Kew received approximately £2,300 grant aid and Glasnevin, £1,267 as part of the £5,910 grant towards the Royal Dublin Society.<sup>8</sup> Although it might appear that Edinburgh was financially less supported than Dublin, the Keeper's grant-aided salary, the student fee income and the £200 annual grant to the Society meant it was difficult to disentangle equivalence of support.

By 1845, the UK Treasury had taken a distinctive character, organisation and approach to public finance.<sup>9</sup> The First Lord of the Treasury was the Prime Minister, though unless it involved matters of 'high politics' left its general business to the Chancellor of the Exchequer who was 'answerable for the due collection of the Public Revenue' (through taxes and loans) and for determining the 'broad outlines

of Public Expenditure'. Significantly, this included 'the preservation of an equilibrium between that expenditure and the Revenue' with the responsibility to ensure that the annual Estimates of expenditure for each department was in 'accord' with Government policy.<sup>10</sup> The Chancellor was assisted by the Financial Secretary who was 'especially responsible for the Estimates' and the day-to-day financial matters that affected departments. Attached to the Treasury were the Government whips and throughout this period (except 1858-59), one of the whips (a Junior Lord of the Treasury) was responsible for Scottish business and thus expected to liaise closely with the Financial Secretary on matters of political importance north of the border. Much of the tightness of Treasury administration which followed the Parliamentary reform of 1832 reflected the emergence of business and professional class influence on everyday life.<sup>11</sup> Government was no longer one of patronage or a sinecure but a business where civil expenditure should be kept as low as possible within the general aim of public improvement. Of perennial concern to the Treasury were grant applications that covered the provision of a 'job', that is a post designed either to boost the salary of an individual official, or to create a new one. Much of the discussion that surrounded the Botanic Garden's application for increased funding, 1857-59, came from the belief that the Keeper was seeking such a post, erroneously as the officials eventually concluded (see below).

The Office of Woods, Forests, Land Revenues, Works, and Buildings was established in 1832 from previously separate offices with the function of collecting rents and other revenues from Crown estates, managing them and ensuring the 'superintendence' of public buildings.<sup>12</sup> The latter included lodges and fences in Royal Parks and Forests. Its expenses were paid out of Land Revenues, which in Scotland included 'unimprovable property charged upon private property' (feu duties and surplus teinds), and rents from Crown farms, salmon & fishings, and mines.<sup>13</sup> The Board was headed by three Commissioners, one of whose duties included oversight of Scottish revenues, whilst one of the others, the Commissioner of Works, maintained an Edinburgh office headed by a Clerk of Works, an architect or builder by profession. Any plan or design of new work and repairs to existing buildings required the Treasury's authority. If an estimate was exceeded, the Treasury

required a report with a plan and a supplementary estimate before it would sanction further work. The Commissioners were under direction to observe the orders of the Treasury, 'not being contrary to the provisions' of any Act of Parliament, and the sale or purchase of property that exceeded £100 required the Treasury to seek the consent of the Queen. In Scotland, Royal, public and ecclesiastical buildings included Holyrood and Linlithgow Palaces, Arbroath Abbey, Dunblane, Elgin, Glasgow and St Andrews Cathedrals, St Andrews Castle, the Court of Session and Offices, the Court of Exchequer and Offices, and the Hall for the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the last three at Edinburgh.<sup>14</sup>

In 1852, the Commissioner of Works was separated as an office from Woods, Forests, and Land Revenues principally 'to put an end to the practice of the employing Land Revenues for carrying out public works independently of Votes of Parliament'. After that date the Commissioners of Woods, &c. could not sit in Parliament whereas previously one of the three Commissioners was entitled to do so. Thus, whereas throughout the period Treasury control of expenditure on new public buildings and repairs was, in effect, all-encompassing, before that date Parliamentary control had been limited.

On the appointment of a new Keeper in 1845, the Botanic Garden presented the Treasury with a financial issue, not uncommon amongst the institutions it supported. In 1832, the previous Keeper had been awarded £8,000 to complete the conversion of grounds but, at the time of his death in 1845, the work had exceeded both this sum and the annual grant by over £500; it was evident that the fabric of the Palm House and other buildings required constant maintenance. The new Keeper, Professor J.H. Balfour, objected to the Treasury's decision to meet the deficit from the annual 'allowance' and, shortly before the fall of the Conservative Government in July 1846, indicated he 'was under the necessity of presenting a memorial' on the extent of the repairs required.<sup>15</sup> Balfour was aware that the Government had awarded £6,500 'for part of the expense of erecting the farmhouse and [Palm House] premises in the Botanical Gardens at Kew', the first instalment of a significant capital programme, the result of a campaign to ensure that the London Garden could continue to exhibit a range of otherwise exotic plants and trees from the rapidly expanding Empire.<sup>16</sup>

The Keeper submitted the memorial to the new Whig administration the following November (which included repairs to the Palm House and conservatories) and the Financial Secretary, John Parker, wrote to the Board of Works to assess the cost of the work required.<sup>17</sup> The report indicated that the repairs would cost £1,400 and the Treasury agreed that £854/12/- should be included in the 1847-4 Estimate for the Palm House and conservatories, with the remaining sum to renovate the Keeper's office, the chief gardener's house and the classroom authorised to be included in the 1848-48 Estimate.<sup>18</sup> With some delight the Government's Scottish Whip, W. Gibson-Craig, who sat for Edinburgh, pointed out the decision in his 1847 election address, adding that the Garden was there 'for your enjoyment' and that it 'was now placed under the superintendence of the Commissioners of Woods and Forests to be kept in order as a Government establishment'. It meant that the cost of the Garden's maintenance was attached to the Commissioners' estimates (within those for Royal Parks and Pleasure Gardens) and that the Scottish Clerk of Works was held responsible for any programme of construction, as well as repairs. Balfour could thus concentrate on his scientific work and the Garden's broad development.

The Keeper was not slow in appreciating the change in 'superintendence' and once the renovation and repairs had been completed, memorialised the Commissioners on the state of the museum and lecture accommodation, both of which, he said, suffered from poor ventilation and rot. The museum, which included the herbarium, he stressed, was 'impaired' by its physical state and affected the staff's ability to undertake scientific work. The Commissioners endorsed his view and sent the request to the Treasury. The new Whig Financial Secretary, W.G. Haytor, accepted the argument and £1,650 was inserted in the 1850-51 Estimates to enlarge the museum and provide 'fittings and other improvements'.<sup>19</sup> At the opening of the new lecture hall the *Scotsman* reported that 'a large number of influential citizens attended, amongst whom were observed the Lord Provost, Professor Christison, and Dr. D. Maclagan'.<sup>20</sup>

In autumn 1850, after the repairs were initiated, the Board of Woods reviewed the site of the Garden and the land immediately to the west, then held by the Fettes Trust, but feued for agricultural purposes. They approached the Trust on the possibility of

acquiring about nine acres to enable the Garden to be extended, either 'for the arrangement of the natural orders in the open ground', or as an arboretum, the latter of some interest as felled timber could be sold to support Crown revenues. Although the Office of Woods was informed that it was possible that the existing tenant would agree to surrender the lease, it was not until February, 1853, that the Keeper raised the issue formally stressing that, if the land was sold on the open market, it was likely that it would be developed for private housing, enclosing the Garden without the possibility of extension. Such, he said, would be a 'calamity'. The 1846 Whig administration had fallen from office in February 1852 and replaced by a minority Conservative Government which after a general election was, itself, replaced by a Peelite/Whig Government with W.E. Gladstone as Chancellor of the Exchequer and J. Wilson as Financial Secretary. Wilson, a successful businessman from the Borders (though he sat for an English constituency), like Gladstone, was committed to a fiscal policy of 'economic liberalism', especially the reduction of public expenditure and the abolition of trade tariffs. The Office of Woods was duly informed that the Treasury did 'not feel justified in authorizing the investment of the Land Revenue Funds in the purchase of a property, which will not yield an adequate return of income, for the benefit of the Royal Botanic Garden'.<sup>21</sup> The cost had been estimated at £4,000. When the request was repeated the following year, the Board received an equally abrupt reply, Wilson adding that,

'My Lords feel it right at the same to remark, with reference to the high value set on the land proposed to be purchased, that it appears to be doubtful under any circumstance whether the Botanic Garden ought to be further extended in a locality when land has become so valuable'.<sup>22</sup>

The response emphasised the policy underlying the Whig/Peelite attitude towards public expenditure. The Garden, like similar institutions, would require arguments that were both 'economical' in terms of cost to the Exchequer and of significant public benefit to merit Treasury endorsement.

Balfour had already appreciated the context of Treasury support. Following a breach in the Palm House roof by fronds in 1852, he initiated a campaign to secure a second and larger House, 'for the Metropolis of Scotland', a position endorsed by the

Town Council.<sup>23</sup> In August, 1853 the Board of Works agreed that a new house should be constructed and £6,000 was entered into its Estimate for the following year.<sup>24</sup> It learned subsequently that the lowest tender exceeded the estimate by some £3,370, the result of the rising cost of materials (especially stone) and wages. The Treasury refused to accept the revised estimate and instructed that the Board should consult more widely on the design (and with the Director at Kew Gardens) without negating the principle of a larger house.<sup>25</sup> An amended design resulted in a much smaller excess of £376 which the Treasury accepted.<sup>26</sup> Securing local support - and the Council was Liberal in sentiment - was certainly essential, as was the embarrassment of the Board of Woods, but not if an estimate was exceeded too widely.

By 1856, the Society faced both a falling membership and an increase in the maintenance cost of its garden, the latter principally due to the enlarged horticultural operations, and, after some internal deliberation as to its future, sought rent remittance for the Garden from the Treasury. George Arbuthnot, the Auditor of the Civil List, referred the matter to the Scottish Whip, Viscount Duncan, who agreed that the request could be dismissed outright.<sup>27</sup> Wilson duly informed the Society;

'I am to acquaint you that My Lords have no power to remit the rent in question which forms part of the Land Revenue of the Crown. I have at the same time to observe that you hold the ground under a beneficial lease, inasmuch as the rent received amounts to no more than 3½ per cent on the purchase money of the property and that the circumstances of your paying that rent was taken into consideration when the arrangement was made for the payment to them of £200 a year, subject to certain conditions...'<sup>28</sup>

Subsequently, the Society approached the Board of Works to explore the surrender of its lease and offer the Garden to the Botanic Garden. The Board reported favourably, indicating that the latter could use the Hall to good advantage, and otherwise establish an arboretum on the vacated land.<sup>29</sup> It knew that the Keeper was keen to expand the University's teaching curriculum and establish an arboretum which, through its advice, could also assist afforestation in Scotland.

Some months later, Balfour applied for an augmentation of £500 towards the Garden's annual maintenance.<sup>30</sup> It would form part of the Vote for the University, as before. Amongst others items, he cited the additional cost of maintaining the land shortly to be acquired on the Garden's western boundary

(about 2.5 acres), and the new Palm House which was expected to be opened the following year.<sup>31</sup> (The Garden would then approximate 17 acres.) The Commissioner of Works, Sir Bernard Hall, who had pressed successfully for the additional land in the 1857-58 Estimates, had been particularly keen to acquire it from the Fettes Estate, principally to protect the new Palm House by a line of trees from the westerly winds. It was believed the trees would reduce the incidental repairs that it perennially required. For his part, in his letter the Keeper added that the Garden directly supported the education of 200 University 'medical and general pupils', that it was 'at all times accessible to the public' (annual visitors totalled nearly 40,000), that it supplied 'large quantities of plants and flowers' to the Government's School of Design (at the Royal Institution) and as 'the only Royal Botanic Garden in Scotland it ought to be well supported'. Treasury officials advised Wilson to take a cautious approach as they were aware that the Board of Works thought that part of the Society's lease could be transferred to the advantage of the Garden. 'The project', they said, would 'lead to a claim for more money, and we had better have before us the whole question'. In response to the Keeper's claim and, as yet, a formal application on the transfer of the Society's grounds, Wilson minuted,

'This is a class of expenditure which I am desirous to limit as much as possible. There is a growing dislike to aid for such local purposes. Draw a minute giving a civil refusal'.<sup>32</sup>

The Keeper was informed that the claim was refused 'on account of the extent and nature of other demands for the support of scientific institutions'.<sup>33</sup> It was a response that was somewhat economical in actuality; support for scientific works had certainly increased that year by £430, but offset by a £1,000 reduction in the grant for the Royal Society.

In February the following year, Wilson, without consultation, instructed that the £200 per year awarded to the Society from the annuity under the treaty of Union should be withdrawn to assist the newly opened National Gallery of Scotland.<sup>34</sup> There had been sustained pressure within the City for the Gallery to be appropriately endowed as an equivalent to others in European capitals. His minute further stated: 'the great objects to which the [Horticultural] society was established having been accomplished,

it has been intimated... to my Lords that it is about to be discontinued...' and that the Board's annuity should be more 'strictly' applied to the objects of art and manufacture. The Conservative Government took office later that day, with Disraeli as Chancellor, though the Treasury understood that Wilson had intended to review the Garden's funding and the Board of Works' recommendation towards the Society. The new Government refrained from reviewing Wilson's minute (despite the lack of consultation with the parties involved), but confirmed the feu charter for the western extension (the land became available for occupation at Whitsunday).<sup>35</sup> The Board of Works could then re-assemble the stone wall on the western boundary and the Keeper set out the ground with screening trees.

In early 1859 the Caledonian Horticultural Society sought formally the transfer of its Garden, recompensed by the Government writing off its accumulated debt (£800), but ministers found themselves faced with the Botanic Garden having exceeded its annual Vote (due to the maintenance of the new Palm House and maintaining the additional land). Sir Stafford Northcliffe, the Financial Secretary, after meeting the Keeper (at the Treasury), promptly briefed Disraeli on the history of the Society's grant and the Garden's financial difficulty which had led the Keeper to seek an increase of £500 in annual grant. Northcliffe believed that its offer was worth exploring. Surrendering the lease would entail a minimum of £400 in compensation, the amount reflecting the construction cost of its Hall and which 'the Crown was bound to pay at the expiration of the lease if the lease is not renewed'.<sup>36</sup> He then added;

'But Dr. Balfour's application for the augmentation of the grant... and that by so large an amount as £1500 a year [from £1,000], complicates the question. No doubt the Garden is well conducted, and is very useful, and no doubt any increase in the grant would be well applied, but grants of this kind have a great tendency to grow, and unfortunately every expenditure is the parent of further claims. Such has been the case with the Palm House, which, after costing upward of £6,000 to build, is now assigned as one of the grounds for asking an increase in the annual grant. And such would probably be the case with the new ground, if it were added to the Garden. In a year or two we should be told that more labourers were required to keep it in order, and that a further addition to the grant was necessary.

Upon the whole I am disposed to think that the wisest course would be to endeavour to effect an arrangement for closing with the Horticultural Society, buying up the residue of their term, and turning the whole or a portion of their ground to profit as building ground. The Hall, which the Royal Botanic Garden covets for an

Herbarium, might perhaps be preserved. Enough of the ground might be let or feu'd off to bring in the present rent of £140. The residue might then be handed over the Royal Botanic Garden, and the £200 a year [previously] paid to the Society out of the funds of the Board of Manufactures might be added to the grant to the Garden, without any increase in the charge on the public'.

Disraeli agreed with Northcliffe. Like its predecessor the Government was equally under pressure to secure Parliamentary support for its budget which, due to the combination of the Crimean War and the Indian mutiny, remained considerably out of 'equilibrium' and the advice of James Howard (a past Whig MP), one of the Commissioners of Woods, was sought on dividing the Society's land, partly 'for the purposes of the Land Revenue', and partly for the Botanic Garden.

Howard temporised his reply by indicating that the Society had not offered to surrender its lease unless the ground was transferred in whole to the Botanic Garden whose small site prevented the establishment of an arboretum. He also commented that he doubted the rental value of the land proposed for private development, believing that it was unlikely it could be used for building purposes, though no reason for his view was provided. Northcliffe was unpersuaded; his officials had advised previously that the Keeper determined the Garden's expenditure by reference to his 'own requirements', rather than the level of the annual grant.<sup>37</sup> It was not evident that the policy would be curtailed if the claim was approved. Indeed, the officials believed that the offer was 'a very fine one and indeed a liberal one'. After confirmation from the Board of Works as to the level of outstanding debt that would consume much of the following year's grant, the Minister minuted:

'My idea was that we should accept the surrender of the Horticultural Society lease, should get the Board of Manufactures to pay the £[blank] which they will pay to the Horticultural Society to the Botanic Garden, should assign to the Botanic Garden the Hall of the Horticultural Society and a portion of the ground, and should let the rest so as to diminish the expense to which the Govt. will otherwise be put. I think I assented also the paying the debts of the Botanic Garden.

At all events... prepare the letter so as to show that we cannot agree to giving the whole ground, nor to materially increasing the annual grant'.<sup>38</sup>

The impact on public expenditure, he had concluded, would be slight, though no specific amount was determined as to an increased grant, other than £200 given previously, nor the amount to be offered to the

Society in compensation apart from the £400 specified in the original deeds. The Keeper accepted the offer which included the Hall, the winter conservatory, the Gardener's cottage and the ground immediately adjacent to the Botanic Garden. The Office of Woods was asked to provide a more detailed estimate of the value of the Society's land proposed for rental. For its part, the Society was not informed of Northcliffe's decision, its request to surrender the lease remaining unanswered.

On the formation of Lord Palmerston's Liberal Government in June, 1859, the Keeper sought clarification that the following year's Estimate would include the elimination of the Garden's debt and an increase in the annual grant but the Treasury delayed consideration of the matter until Gladstone, the Chancellor, began to formulate the Government's general budgetary position. When announced in February, 1860, it entailed raising income tax to eliminate the £5million deficit, the further reduction of import duties and the enunciation of a policy to contain future public expenditure within tight fiscal restraint. In anticipation of altered budgetary principles, Howard reported at the end of July, 1859, that under the Land Revenue Acts, Northcliffe's proposal would not raise enough rent from the conversion of part of the grounds as private gardens for nearby properties above the £140 a year paid by Society; apart from the buildings to be transferred, the land required for an arboretum meant fewer than four acres would be available for rent. He reported also that the Commissioner of Works was unwilling to seek a Supplementary Estimate to cover the Keeper's claim for additional grant-aid.

In November, Balfour renewed his claim for settling the debts and additional grant aid. Although he re-iterated the desire to acquire the Society's Garden, Treasury officials thought his claim was in a more 'intelligible shape' than previously (and evidently not intended to procure a 'job'). In total the Keeper sought £627 to clear the debt, an additional £400 per annum for maintenance and £100 per annum to maintain the Society's grounds as an arboretum.<sup>39</sup> Samuel Laing, the Financial Secretary, wrote a detailed minute to Gladstone which stated;

'I must ask you to be good enough to look at this as any increased grant for Edinburgh, however small, is sure to bring upon us demand from other places, and as a Scotch member I should like to be justified by your authority either in granting or refusing the request.

Taken *per se* I think there is a strong case and Arbutnot [Auditor of the Civil List] is of the same opinion,—

The question whether the State should support the Botanical Garden at Edinburgh is well as at Kew and Dublin, is hardly an open one. We have for many years voted an annual grant of £1000 for this purpose, and have lately added a Palm House and other objects at the public expense which are a main reason why the grant has become insufficient. ...there is no doubt that it really is so, and that Professor Balfour's management had been economical and that the sum stated by him is really the lowest for which the Gardens can be properly maintained.

This shows £627 required to clear of debts there and £1400 a year for annual maintenance. This is independent of the proposal to accept the offer of the Horticultural Society which would require an additional special grant of £850, and £100 a year for maintenance. No doubt this latter arrangement is desirable and if we can afford it as it gives the Botanic Garden additional space for an Arboretum at a trifling cost, and the Horticultural Society has some claim on us, as their debt of £859 for which they offer to give up the Garden with buildings and which has cost £300, is partly owing to a grant of £200 a year which has been given them for many years, being abruptly transferred to the Edinburgh School of Art, which they ... to the rent of £140 a year to the Crown.

However this case is not so strong as that of the existing Botanic Gardens.

The comparison with other Botanic Gardens supported by public grants stands thus —

Vote for annual maintenance

| Kew     | Dublin                                                              | Edinburgh                                            |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| £13,500 | £6049 to Royal Society who support Botanic and [Zoological] Gardens | 1000 £ now<br>1200 formally<br>1400 or 1500 proposed |

I think that under any ordinary circumstances there would be a fair case for the grant, but there are conditions.

1. Whether we must not resolutely refuse all expenditure not absolutely indispensable
2. Grants to Edinburgh bring demands from other places. We had an instance in the case of the P[ost] Office, and Dublin is pressing for more money for pictures because Edinburgh got a grant for the National Gallery. Edinburgh has certainly fared well of late. P[ost] Office £100,000  
Industrial Museum 40,000  
National Gallery 30,000

Still it does for quite follow that the Botanic Garden (which is specially useful for the University and School of Medicine) should be starved because we have been prodigal elsewhere.<sup>40</sup>

The Edinburgh press had already raised the issue of grant-aid, commenting; 'As a model botanic garden, Kew takes precedence of all others in this country. Second to it is the Edinburgh Botanic Garden, the superintendence of which has considerable cause to complain of the absence of sufficient funds for keeping up the gardens to the present state of efficiency, while, owing to the absence of funds, additional

land recently acquired are not laid out. The apathy of public men [MPs] towards these gardens is not very credible' and whose lack of action undermined the Garden's usefulness to science.<sup>41</sup> Gladstone accepted Laing's argument but stressed,

'It would, I fear, be indecent to allow the amount of debt to continue; but we should ask how it arose and, if we were not duly appraised beforehand, should admonish a little. I think also that... this new land must have been acquired by our authority or must have it brought into cultivation and been kept so. Dr B[alfour] speaks of the lowest estimate. We must be sure that the estimate is a real and sufficient one. I see no reason why the application of the Horticultural Society should not stand down'.<sup>42</sup>

The Chancellor's minute caused some considerable correspondence between the Keeper, the Board of Works, the Office of Woods and the Treasury on the debt which delayed the inclusion of Laing's proposal in the Estimates for the forthcoming financial year. Finally, after Gladstone visited Edinburgh in April 1860 and concluded that local opinion was seeking a resolution to the matter without embarrassment to the Government, Laing minuted that the debt incurred should be taken from Civil Contingencies with the increased maintenance added to the Universities (Scotland) Vote.<sup>43</sup>

In late 1863, the Society renewed its efforts to relinquish the lease. It was nearly £1,000 in debt and enlisted substantial support to secure an agreement with letters sent from Gibson-Craig (now Lord Clerk Register) and the Duke of Argyll (the Lord Privy Seal) to Palmerston.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the Keeper sought additional grant-aid above the level previously approved. Gladstone's response was sharp:

'... It is proposed, taking all the items, to make the charge nearly double what it was in 1859. ... I think we must take some step and I would begin by calling for a Report from the Office of Works on the question what portion of the ground can properly and conveniently be feued or let on building lease, and what income it will yield.

I am not sure, but I think there is a good deal of frontage, if I remember rightly the way the roads lie.

Land close to the public garden would, I apprehend, be eligible and popular and I think that while the expense account to the proposal is too considerable relatively to the subject matter we might properly fall back on Sir S. Northcliffe's judicious idea.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout 1864 Gladstone continued to press his view, on one occasion suggesting that the southern part of the Society's Garden could be leased for market gardening.<sup>46</sup> (The loss of rental income on the lease would add £4,000 to the national debt, the



original cost of the land.) After a detailed report by Howard which indicated that the lease prohibited the conveyance of manure through the Society's southern frontage, that the rental income of any lease intended for building purposes would not materialise for a number of years and that 'the inhabitants of Edinburgh' were unlikely to accept 'as a permanent and suitable concession to their interest' the loss of recreational space, Treasury ministers agreed to the original proposal with the Society's debt written off and additional support for the combined Garden.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, Treasury ministers had found it difficult to resist the argument that, once established as a Government supported institution with a national presence – Queen Victoria visited in 1861 – the Garden's interests could not be disregarded.<sup>48</sup> Both may have originated as the result of Crown patronage in earlier times but, by the mid-nineteenth century, professional opinion sought a different relationship in the support of horticultural science. As Gibson-Craig told the Society, 'it was very important that Edinburgh with the greatest medical school in the Kingdom should have [the Herbarium] maintained [and that] it would be useful for proprietors of the land for experimental trials on trees which were best adapted for the [Scottish] climate'.<sup>49</sup>

After the purchase of the Society's grounds, Balfour sought to consolidate the Garden's position as the 'Kew of the north'. In 1868, through the Board of Works, he sought approval for the construction of a house to grow and exhibit half-hardy trees. The Board estimated the cost at £1,100 but the Conservative Government's Financial Secretary rejected the application though no explicit reason was offered except that the Board of Works' annual repair and maintenance Estimate had been increased from an average of £760 over the previous five years to £1,133 and a further £120 added as an allowance to Keeper in lieu of a house (the latter having been awarded after an unsuccessful application for an increase in salary).<sup>50</sup> The following year, Balfour was able to secure the support of Lyon Playfair, the Liberal MP for Aberdeen and Edinburgh Universities, in a deputation to the newly elected Liberal Government's Chancellor, Robert Lowe. The Board of Works had already informed the Treasury that they had sought the advice of Kew's Director who after visiting the Garden wrote that, 'he considered that [it] was not complete without a Temperate House as affording the

only means of exhibiting to the public the vegetation of our colonial possessions'.<sup>51</sup> Following the meeting, the Chancellor's Private Secretary minuted;

'The Chancellor...has informed them that the work cannot be included in the Estimates for 1869-70. He held out some hope, however, that it might be provided for in the following year.'<sup>52</sup>

Lowe had already confirmed an increase in the Garden's maintenance allowance and its annual grant-aid now exceeded £3,000. Authorisation for the half-hardy house was delayed until the 1871-72 Estimates as in June, 1869, the Treasury had agreed to sanction an £455 excess on maintenance for the previous year.<sup>53</sup> Part of the excess related to the setting-out of the Society's grounds, which was noted with enthusiasm by the press;

'The effect of this [new] arrangement will in time become perceptible over the whole country, as owners of property, by inspecting the gardens, can now make a much more judicious selection of trees for planting' and added that 'one of the greatest improvements, however, is the fitting-up of the horticultural hall as an herbarium, which when finished, promises to be second only to that at Kew'.<sup>54</sup>

Embellished by the success and the tacit acknowledgement of comparison to Kew, the Keeper sought support for the acquisition of land immediately to the west as an arboretum as had been argued some twenty years previously. Balfour understood that the Fettes Trust was soon to offer it for sale.<sup>55</sup> The Garden would be almost doubled in size and he contended that as well as a place of recreation, the addition of arboriculture to the curriculum would increase the number of students and assist 'foresters' generally in land management. The cost of the purchase and some additional land held by a private owner (to round off the boundary) was estimated at £28,000.

In early 1874 the Liberal government was replaced by Disraeli's second administration with Sir Stafford Northcote as Chancellor and W.H. Smith as the Financial Secretary. The Keeper submitted his formal proposal to acquire the Fettes ground at the end of the year. Smith, on reviewing the proposal, balked at the cost of acquisition (as well as the additional maintenance) and told Northcote;

I do not think the Government can propose a Vote for £28,000 to enlarge the Edinburgh Botanic Gardens. Parliament has not been asked for many years to vote money for the acquisition of Parks or Gardens for London. When it was

proposed that Crown land set apart for building purposes should be maintained as a portion of Victoria Park permanently, the Govt. of the day required that Board of London to purchase it and when it had been paid for they agreed that it should be maintained as a portion of the Park.

I think that we should follow that precedent and say that if the City of Edinburgh or the University will purchase the additional land required and hand it to the Office of Works to be added to the Botanic Gardens, we will ask Parliament to vote the additional yearly cost of maintenance involved by the increased size of the Garden.<sup>56</sup>

Northcote noted the observation and minuted that 'we may properly offer this' to the Town Council or the University but he 'would certainly not buy the land'.<sup>57</sup> When, in response, the Lord Provost suggested a compromise that the Government should contribute half of the cost of purchase, Smith remained adamant that ministers were 'unable to depart from the decision already taken'.<sup>58</sup>

The Town Council took nearly a year to agree the purchase of the proposed arboretum land and the Bill that it would require. It transpired the maximum sum it set aside, £18,406, was sufficient to purchase the Fettes-owned land without the northern strip which the Trustees wished to reserve for building purposes, Inverleith House (situated in the centre of the park), and the privately held land immediately to the west.<sup>59</sup> Fettes could not be dissuaded from its offer, except that it was prepared to insist that the frontage of the proposed villas should face the arboretum. Smith accepted that the offer and capital sum from the Town Council did not meet the stipulation set by Northcote and initially believed that the Treasury should withdraw from the project. On reflection, after reports from the Board of Works on the suitability of the amended site and the possible use of Inverleith House as the official residence of the Regis Keeper, he minuted;

'If there are difficulties in way of the Town Council acquiring this particular plot of land, and if these difficulties could be relieved, as seems probable, by the Government's agreeing to purchase Inverleith House, My Lords could be prepared to propose to Parliament a vote of £3,000 for that purpose'.<sup>60</sup>

He added that the land held privately 'should be included within the proposed Arboretum' and would 'acquiesce' in the surrender of the land that Fettes wished to retain on the basis that the privately-owned land 'must be the more valuable addition to the site of the Arboretum'. Smith met the Lord

Provost later that month and made a further effort to ensure the acquisition of the northern plot by offering the prospect of the Government acquiring the privately-owned land. The Fettes Trustees remained adamant and made it clear that they could offer the land at lower than value on the basis that they would achieve a higher value for villas on the northern plot which would have an unrivalled view of the City. The Financial Secretary accepted that the failure to persuade Fettes 'need not be regarded as fatal to the scheme' and that the villas did not imply 'disfigurement' as they would provide shelter on the Arboretum's northern perimeter.<sup>61</sup> He confirmed the offer to purchase Inverleith House and £1,900 for the privately-owned land. The purchases, Smith knew, would not cover all the Government's commitment to the Arboretum as the agreement with the Town Council implied maintenance. The Board of Works had indicated that setting out the grounds in an appropriate manner would involve surrounding the perimeter with a parapet wall and railings and at its western entrance a gate lodge with stone pillars. The cost was estimated as £3,670. Smith asked the Board to inform the Town Council that the Government would honour its maintenance agreement, but reserved 'the fencing and laying out of the ground' to the Board and the Treasury's 'further consideration'.<sup>62</sup> After pressure from the Town Council and Fettes, the Minister clarified that the Government 'must reserve their own discretion' and could not be bound by any agreement between the Council and Fettes.<sup>63</sup>

Smith meant what he had indicated and once the lowest revised estimate, £3,495, for the parapet wall and railings was received, insisted from his own knowledge of the trade that the Board of Works would be able to obtain iron railings at a quarter of the estimate provided.<sup>64</sup> The Board duly complied and provision, at a cost of £2,264, was authorised the following summer.<sup>65</sup> His successor, F. Stanley, in order to maintain the Royal Parks and Pleasure Gardens expenditure at a similar annual level (there were wider financial pressures on the Government), decided to postpone for a year an estimate (£1,800) for the construction of additional University classrooms and setting out the Arboretum, the latter which had been expected to cost £2,100.<sup>66</sup> An estimate (£150) for the construction of a butler's pantry at Inverleith House was subsequently agreed, though not without some Treasury hesitation, the Financial

Secretary being advised that,

‘The Treasury is sure to have to make this provision sooner or later, it is only reasonable, and it is as well to forestall the questions in Parliament, letters, and visits of Scotch MPs.’<sup>67</sup>

He responded, ‘I quite agree’. The press noted with satisfaction the conversion of Inverleith House and once work had commenced on the Arboretum, observed, ‘The public are therefore to be congratulated on the near prospect of enjoying this important addition to the pleasure grounds of the city...the view [from the House] has for the background the bold outlines of the Pentlands, Braid Hills, and Arthur’s Seat, with the Castle rock and Calton Hill in the mid-distance, and the close piled buildings of the city covering the nearer slopes. ...When [the trees] have been planted, the park will present a singularly attractive piece of woodland scenery’.<sup>68</sup>

The Universities (Scotland) Act, 1889, altered the system of grant-aid to the four Scottish universities from individual historic allocations to a block grant administered by a Scottish Commission. Gladstone’s Liberal Government, 1880-85, had drafted a Bill that would have seen the Arboretum retained as a public park but the original Inverleith Garden and the Caledonian Horticultural Society grounds transferred to the University, much in response to the 1878 Scottish University Commission recommendations (responding to Balfour’s evidence) that additional class-rooms and a research laboratory should be constructed, the latter very much a response to advances in medical science.<sup>69</sup> Gladstone, who was also Chancellor, thought the claim had altered the balance of interest in the Garden and, with the increased number of medical students at the University, the fee income received would be adequate for any capital investment. (He proposed a block grant some fifteen percent higher than the average annual historical allocation to smooth any objection.) Although Treasury officials were by no means certain that the Government owned the Garden, the Town Council had purchased one of the two original 18<sup>th</sup> century Gardens. Salisbury’s Conservative Government, 1886-92, maintained the same provision in its Bill.

The Bill was generally well received. The universities had been consulted over its draft clauses, but during its 1888 House of Lords Committee proceedings, the Liberal politician, the Earl of

Aberdeen, raised objection to the Garden’s transfer, citing the Town Council’s concern that the University,

‘might not spend as much on the Garden as was now spent. They might feel that there were other matters which had a prior claim on their consideration.’<sup>70</sup>

The Scottish Secretary, Lord Lothian, felt obliged to respond ‘that this was a matter entirely in the hands of the Treasury, and that it was out of his power to agree to [any] Amendment’. Later in the year, the Chancellor, George Goschen, after a detailed review of the Bill, accepted the objection noting that the Regius Keeper similarly feared the Garden would be ‘starved of funds’ and the Town Council’s added concern that it might close as a public park.<sup>71</sup> He also agreed that the University annual maintenance grant would be transferred to that of the Royal Parks and Pleasure Gardens. Although the quantum of grant-aid to the Garden was therefore unaffected, the Board of Works and the Treasury accepted that a Departmental Committee was necessary to review the respective liabilities of the State and the University, given that it provided the teaching of botany students, and that the Keeper had proposed an extensive scheme of improvement, including the research laboratory canvassed earlier. Ultimately the Committee agreed that the Garden should be maintained on the lines established at Kew (albeit concentrating on trees, plants and other floras suitable for a more northerly location) and that the University should assume responsibility for ‘all the requirements of academical teaching’.

A decade after the Committee’s Report, once the works it recommended has been completed (except the research laboratory) at a cost of £7,505, the annual grant-aid totalled £8,300. It was twice the level of Glasnevin, though, as in the 1840s, it remained substantially less than at Kew.<sup>72</sup> The number employed had grown to over a dozen staff – gardeners, museum assistants, foremen, gate-keepers and park attendants - with additional patrol staff for week-day evenings, Sundays and public holidays. To further the Garden’s work, the Keeper of the period (the son of J.H. Balfour), pressed the Board of Works for the completion of the Committee’s recommendations except that instead of a bid for £1,000, sought a more substantial building that would encompass research facilities, a new herbarium (to be moved from the sometime Caledonian Society Hall)

and offices. The bid, £14,000, was considered by the Conservative Government but due to the financial exigencies attached to the Boer War, refrained from its inclusion in the 1903-04 Estimates, and again the following year.<sup>73</sup> Although the incoming Liberal administration of 1905 agreed to the cost of a new fern house (£2,410), the Treasury believed that the State had no responsibility for a research laboratory or offices for University purposes. The difficulty that ministers faced was that, although both Liberal and Conservative Governments, 1891-1905, had followed the Committee's recommendations, no 'formal compact' had been agreed with the University. Equally, the Garden also provided courses for non-university students (including foresters supported by the Board of Agriculture). With Scottish MPs, headed by the University's representative (J. Batty Tuke), pressing that without the building 'the teaching of natural science in Scotland would be seriously menaced' and the Scottish Education Department indicating that the new teacher-training curriculum would require Botany instruction at the Garden, the Treasury accepted the claim but at lower estimate, £9,500.<sup>74</sup> The first portion of the laboratories was entered into the 1909-10 Estimates, and the second two years later, though its completion was delayed by objections from local residents that the planned frontage would be out of line with other houses on the west side of Inverleith Row and otherwise 'form a permanent obstacle in the vista of a fine thoroughfare, which must of necessity become a great artery to a future residential district'.<sup>75</sup> A compromise was eventually reached (at a cost to the Town Council which had approved the plans) and the building line was moved back from 25 to 30 feet from the centre of the roadway.<sup>76</sup> The laboratory and other offices were opened in 1913.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the Edinburgh Botanic Garden was focused primarily on the requirements of University medical education but with the allied Caledonian Horticultural Society grounds, maintained an interest in horticultural improvement throughout Scotland. State interest, both financially and in terms of management, was limited to a belief that such should occur at the local level, in Edinburgh's case, through the University, the Town Council, and voluntary effort. Grant-in-aid was never intended to cover all exigencies. Yet, although the Garden had been endowed in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century

as a public scientific institution, after the Whig governmental reforms 1832-41, the notion of civic improvement had taken root. Enlightenment was not simply a product of the mind, it was also a period when public interest in the arts, the natural world and the pursuit of leisure increased. The new Regius Keeper, appointed in 1845, witnessed Edinburgh's drive to acquire a National Gallery and a National Museum and could see the public investment at Kew, as well as the support given to Glasnevin. Edinburgh, and for that matter Scotland, could not be left out, hence, with the support of the Board of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues sought to ensure the Botanic Garden held equivalence in stature, certainly with Kew and Glasnevin, but also with other such national gardens throughout Europe. The Treasury of the period was undoubtedly a department focused on the notion of 'equilibrium' in State finances, and held a reputation for scrutinising claims on the Budget with an almost 'penny-pinching' mentality, but it was also a political body, as seen in the whips' advice on local sensitivities. The Garden had its fair share of such treatment, most notably in the renovations that occurred after 1846, the attitude towards the excess in the cost of the new Palm House, and in the acquisition of ground, whether for an Arboretum to the west, or the Caledonian Horticultural Society premises. Local opinion mattered, or rather its marshalling, but such could be constrained if the Treasury believed that the claim was excessive, added difficulties to the general budgetary position, or might establish a precedent that could be utilised again by Garden interests, either in Edinburgh or elsewhere.

After 1870, there was a noticeable acceptance that the claims of the Garden could not be dismissed on general fiscal grounds as it often had. Much now depended both on its scientific merit and public notions of civic improvement. The acquisition of the Inverleith grounds for an Arboretum certainly appealed to Scottish landed interests (and the University which was keen to extend the Garden's curriculum beyond medicine), but if other capital cities had botanic gardens that were used also as pleasure gardens, so should Edinburgh. Twenty-eight acres could not be said to be equivalent to the pleasure gardens that other cities enjoyed. The Town Council's willingness to contribute financially towards the Inverleith purchase, which added four pence on the rates, highlighted the commitment of the locality and

enabled the Treasury to justify public expenditure on the Garden's deepening involvement in arboriculture.

The discussion leading up to the reform of University finance in 1889 sharpened the Treasury's attitude towards the Garden as a scientific institution and teaching establishment. It had not been the intention of the 1889 Act to subsidise the University beyond the quantum of grant-aid that Scottish universities shared. Yet, despite the recommendations of the 1890 Departmental Committee on seeking to clarify the 'compact' between State and the University, ministers found Scottish opinion too well entrenched to accept a Garden that was not 'modernised' in the light of scientific opinion. The City might have

accepted that Edinburgh should not seek to replicate Kew in all its work and concentrate on the cultivation of plants, trees and other floras adaptable to its location, but it believed that the State should maintain investment that would foster such cultivation. Neither was it a position that the Chancellor of the period, Lloyd George, was prepared to contest. By 1914, Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden was a research establishment, a teaching institution and a place of public enjoyment of a different order to that in 1846 - one that developed in line with contemporary concepts of civic and educational improvement, heavily supported by the State.

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- 21 TNA T1/5797A, bundle 8,775, minute 8,775, 3 May 1853.
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- 23 *Scotsman*, 'Royal Botanic Garden', 22 Jun. 1853; ECM, minutes, 26 Jul. 1853
- 24 *Scotsman*, 'Edinburgh Botanic Gardens', 27 Aug. 1853; *1854 (172-I-VII) Public works and buildings, Estimates, &c., 1854-55*
- 25 TNA T1/5949A, bundle 15,292, minute 15,292, 9 Oct. 1855
- 26 TNA T1/5986B, bundle 4,329, minute 4,329, 18 Mar. 1856

- 27 TNA T1/5988B, bundle 5347, minute 5,347, 9 Apr. 1856
- 28 TNA T1/740, minute, 5,347, 10 Apr. 1856. The Society's President was the Duke of Buccleuch, and its Secretary, Professor Balfour.
- 29 TNA T1/6070A, bundle 11,454, minute 11,454, letter, 13 Feb. 1857
- 30 *ibid.*, minute 11,454, letter, 9 Jul. 1857
- 31 The Estimate for 1857-58 included '£914 ordinary works, repairs, &c., £173 purchase of trees on the ground to be feud adjoining the western boundary, £62/10/- annual Feu Duty of 2½ acres of ground to be added to the Garden at £25 per acre, £450 taking down boundary wall along western extremity, and re-erecting it to enclose the additional ground to be acquired, £376 difference of expense between the amount of tender and sum voted for the new Palm House'.
- 32 TNA T1/6070a, bundle 11454, minute, 11454, c.15 Jul. 1857
- 33 TNA T1/6070a, bundle 11,454, minute 11,454, 18 Jul. 1857
- 34 TNA T1/6101, bundle 19,531, minute, 19,531, 25 Feb. 1858
- 35 TNA T1/6174, bundle 21,259, minute 6,955, 15 Apr. 1858
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- 37 TNA T1/6218, bundle 18,830, minute 3,317, 26 Feb. 1859
- 38 *ibid.*, minute 4,848, 7 Mar. 1859
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- 43 *ibid.*, minute 6,872, 28 Apr. and minute 9,138, 7 Jun. 1860. The 1860-61 Estimate permitted £563 for ordinary works, repairs, &c., the usual £100 for the Professor of Botany, and £1,000 Garden's allowance.
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- 46 TNA T1/6519A, bundle 17,496, minute 4,423, 26 Mar. 1864. Ministers agreed to part of the Keeper's request, including £650 for enlarging and improving his accommodation and the herbarium, £751 for the repair, painting and maintenance of the Palm Houses, Conservatories, Forcing Houses, and Pits, Museum and class rooms, including the Superintendent's and Gardeners' dwellings, see; *1864 (103-I-VII) 1864-5. Estimates for civil services. 1864-65.*
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- 48 *Scotsman*, 'Royal Family in Edinburgh', 12 Oct. 1861
- 49 *Scotsman*, 'Experimental Gardens', 13 May 1864. Among those in support of the transfer was R. Christison, Professor of Medicine, Edinburgh.
- 50 TNA T1/6854A, bundle 2677/69, minute 1894, 3 Feb. 1868. Balfour's University salary had been set at £881 by the 1861 Scottish Universities Commission, and the Treasury saw no reason to increase his remuneration within the Vote for Scottish Universities.
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- 52 *ibid.*, minute 20 Feb. 1869
- 53 TNA T1/7097A, bundle 15,278, minute 1,037, 6 and 15 Feb. 1871
- 54 *Scotsman*, 'The Botanic Garden – extension and improvements', 29 Mar. 1869
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- 57 *ibid.*, minute, 12 Jan. 1875
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- 59 For a description of the House, see J. Gifford (et al.), *Edinburgh: the buildings of Scotland*, 575; HMSO, *An inventory of the ancient and historical buildings of the city of Edinburgh* (1951) 221-22
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- 64 TNA T1/7551A, bundle, 18,719, minute 15,083, 21 Sep. 1876
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- 72 *1901 (46) 1901-2. Estimates for civil services for the year ending 31 March 1902*
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- 74 *ibid.*, minute 1,224, 21 Jan. 1909; *1909 (54) 1909-10. Estimates for Civil Services for the year ending 31 March 1910; 1911 (63) 1911-12. Estimates for civil services for the year ending 31 March 1912*
- 75 *Scotsman*, 'Town Planning Act and despoliation of Inverleith Row', 17 Dec. 1909; 'The addition to the Botanic Garden laboratory', 15 Sep. 1911; 'Leader', 27 Jun. 1912
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