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# THE EXPERIMENTAL GARDEN OF THE ROYAL CALEDONIAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY: 'OUR FAVOURITE OBJECT'

DAVID AFFLECK

THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society (the 'Caley') occurred in 2009, and 2010 saw the 200th anniversary of the birth of gardener James McNab. The Experimental Garden at Inverleith, now incorporated in the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, was a major enterprise for both the Society and James McNab. This account is intended to record with gratitude those whose devoted efforts helped the Society deliver its visionary objectives and leave us a horticultural legacy to enjoy today.

## THE VISION

Modern management might describe the office bearers of the Caledonian Horticultural Society of 1819 as men with vision. First formed in November 1809 by seventeen men who met in the Physicians Hall, George Street, the new Society appointed their inspirational promoter, Dr Andrew Duncan, as their Depute President or Permanent Vice-President for nearly twenty years until his death in 1828. Lord Cockburn described him as 'one of the curious old Edinburgh characters' and acknowledged him as being 'very fond of gardening, and rather a good botanist' but added that 'this made him President of the Horticultural Society, which he oppressed annually by a dull discourse'.<sup>1</sup> And it was in his *Discourse* of 1819 that he announced the challenge: 'We have not yet been able to accomplish our favourite object of an experimental garden at Edinburgh'.<sup>2</sup>

On 8 December 1818, the General Meeting of the Society approved the proposal by the Council to establish by subscription an experimental and botanical garden under the title 'The Edinburgh Horticultural and Botanical Institution'. Two

acres were to be set apart for 'experiments in Horticulture and Vegetable Physiology and for attempts to naturalise Exotics', to which none but Subscribers (accompanied by the chief Gardener) would be admitted.<sup>3</sup>

The rest of the garden is to be devoted to the culture of such new or foreign sorts of culinary vegetables, fruit, and forest trees as may be recommended for trial; seeds, grafts, or plants of which if found worthy of cultivation, to be distributed among the subscribers. In this part of the garden, experiments will be made with the view of raising varieties from seed, in order to procure fruits that may be better adapted to the climate of Scotland.

The number of shares was to be limited to 500 and no individual was to be allowed to hold a greater number than two on the first subscription. The garden was to be within two miles of Edinburgh or as near as possible without the risk of being injured by smoke.

Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, the agricultural reformer, was one of the founding members of the Caley in 1809 and the emphasis on scientific method and practical horticulture in the society's experimental garden can be traced to his influence.<sup>4</sup> Sinclair had become President of the new Board of Agriculture in 1793 and thereafter was constantly involved in encouraging research into improvements in farming methods.<sup>5</sup> Just before the Caley was formed Sinclair asked Walter Nicol, a noted gardener and writer, to submit an essay on gardening in Scotland to the Board.<sup>6</sup> Nicol, one of the joint secretaries to the Caley, died in 1811 before it was completed, but the other joint secretary, Patrick Neill, took on the task at Sinclair's request and published *On Scottish Gardens and Orchards* in 1813. Sinclair was much concerned about crop failures and shortages of food during the French wars – Lord Cockburn recorded that 'the year 1816 closed bitterly for the poor. There probably never were so

many people destitute at one time in Edinburgh'.<sup>7</sup> In 1815 Sinclair had urged the Caley to send a deputation on a study tour of the Low Countries and on 1 August 1817 Patrick Neill, with John Hay and James Macdonald, set off from Leith for London and the Netherlands.<sup>8</sup> A report on the journey was published in 1823.<sup>9</sup>

The Caley's Horticultural Garden project was launched around the same time as the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh was searching for a site larger than that available at Leith Walk. The Regius Keeper, and Professor of Botany at the University, Daniel Rutherford, had taken on the challenge, and a new site was initially purchased by the Barons of Exchequer adjacent to the Palace of Holyrood. This plan, however, was subsequently cancelled following the death of Rutherford and the appointment of his successor, Robert Graham, on 15 December 1819.<sup>10</sup> The King's Park site was then thought to have unfavourable soil and aspect and the Barons were persuaded to purchase instead fourteen and a half acres of land at Inverleith owned by the Rocheid family.<sup>11</sup> A recently located archive belonging to John Linning, of the Excise Office in Edinburgh, contains a notice to members of the Caledonian

Horticultural Society on 5 October 1820 advising that they would like to use the 12 acres in the King's Park formerly earmarked for the Royal Botanic Garden.<sup>12</sup> It suggested that this should not be sold but appropriated to the purpose of a Royal Kitchen Garden attached to the Palace of Holyrood House and that it should be granted to the Society for 'experiments tending to the improvement of horticulture'. The Society would take on the whole expense of cultivation and conducting the experiments and 'it might be the means of improving by judicious experiment, the culture of every esculent vegetable at present used as an article either of food or luxury in Britain'.<sup>13</sup>

Nothing further seems to have happened on the King's Park site but by 1823 action had been taken to acquire an additional 8 acres at the Inverleith site, to the south of the new Royal Botanic Garden.<sup>14</sup> Graham later explained that:<sup>15</sup>

When the Botanic garden was formed in 1820, I foresaw the danger that would arise both to its beauty and usefulness if the ground now occupied by the experimental garden were to be built upon as threatened; and I pressed upon the Government the necessity for the purchase of the field . . . And by its means the south aspect is kept open and free from smoke whereas if streets had been built

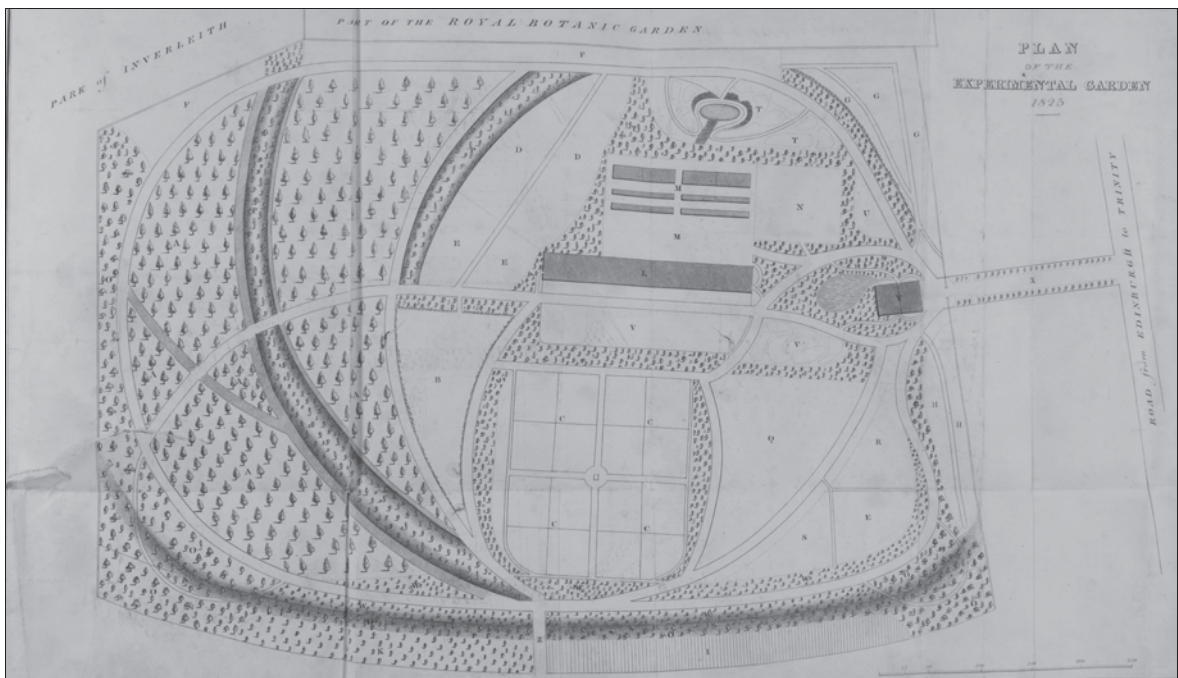


Fig. 1. Plan for the RCHS Experimental Garden, 1825. (Courtesy of RBGE Library; *Linning Papers*, pp. 121–122.)

## EXPERIMENTAL GARDEN OF THE CALEDONIAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

along the hill as was proposed, the lower part of the Botanic garden would have been shaded and in consequence of the shape of the surface would have been covered with smoke in our prevailing wind. I may further remark that the arrangements of the Experimental Garden have been made to harmonise with the Botanic Garden so as greatly to increase its beauty. Together they form an extent of garden ground which I have never seen equalled in beauty or appropriateness. Either would be greatly injured by the loss of the other.

The Barons of Exchequer had bought the land from James Rocheid in July 1824 and offered to give a loan to the Society of £4000 at 3.5% interest to be paid annually. The arrangement was then changed at the request of the Society who decided to lease the ground for 70 years and pay the annual interest plus feu duty. This mode of tenure (a redeemable lease) 'effectively prevents either them or us alienating even the smallest portion of this garden as some other corporate bodies have too frequently done, from these important purposes which we have obtained by Royal favour, to the private emolument of any individual however meritorious'.<sup>16</sup> In 1823 the Society had 1500 members paying four guineas each, and by 1824, 108 members had subscribed 20 guineas per share towards the project. With the help of a donation of £500 from the King and £700 remitted from subscribers in Bengal, the Society had raised a total of £4000 for the garden project.<sup>17</sup>

No time was lost in getting established on the site with the appointment of a Garden Committee with John Linning as its Secretary and Treasurer.<sup>18</sup> Work commenced in August 1824 by levelling the ground 'to a great extent on the south', a stipulation in the lease. This was done under the direction of Robert Niven who had done works of a similar nature under William McNab, Curator of the adjacent Royal Botanic Garden, and cost the Society £373. 6. 7.<sup>19</sup> By 1825 a site plan had been produced by John Hay with a plant specification compiled by William McNab (fig. 1: for further details see Appendix). The report of the Garden Committee in March 1825 refers to the enclosing walls being completed in a few weeks, the principal walks formed and the specified areas marked out.<sup>20</sup> By 1826 a dwelling house had been erected, designed by W. H. Playfair 'in the Cottage style', and estimates obtained for the erection of a greenhouse and hot house (fig. 2).<sup>21</sup> James Barnett, described as a young man and under gardener at the London Horticultural Society (where he had the management of the fruit garden), had

been appointed Superintendent, having been recommended by Mr Sabine, Secretary of the London Society.<sup>22</sup> Sabine, however, writing to William McNab, added a warning about 'his strange untoward temper and want of respect for anyone but himself and which if not reformed forthwith, must ruin him'.<sup>23</sup> The eastern approach had been completed by 1828, although the planned main approach from Inverleith Terrace on the south had not been started.<sup>24</sup> Planting was in progress with pears procured from Louvain, grafts of apples from the Archduke of Austria and the secretary of the London Society, 200 gooseberries from Mr Turnbull of Perth and the London Horticultural Society and 'fine peaches from New York'. Two hundred and fifty roses had been planted along the border of the southern terrace walk, the Vinery was now heated with hot water and the Stove prepared for a collection of pineapple plants. Dr Duncan, who had predicted his friends would be saying, in the words of Shakespeare, 'Duncan's in his grave', could now die content knowing that 'our favourite object' had been achieved.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 2. Photograph of RCHS Superintendent's Cottage, by W. E. Evans, c. 1900. Designed by W. H. Playfair, it is now the RBGE East Gate Lodge. (RBGE Library, 1/4FH38.)

### FROM DREAM TO REALITY

Four years later, in 1832, the first of many problems was to emerge when the Society delayed consideration of adding to the glazed houses, pits or frames because of the low state of funds.<sup>26</sup> The

wider work of the Caledonian Horticultural Society continued with their quarterly meetings and displays, papers on experiments, and publications. Once the experimental garden had been established, members of the Society were able to attend in the summer and enjoy special displays, sometimes provided by local nurseries, with music from the regiments based in the barracks at Piershill, and special rare plants supplied by William McNab from the Royal Botanic Garden.

A major event in the history of the experimental garden was the replacement of James Barnet by James McNab as Superintendent of the Experimental Garden. In April 1836 the Garden Committee decided that there was a need for increased income from sales.<sup>27</sup> One month later, they concluded that Barnet was not co-operating and decided to dispense with his services at Martinmas.<sup>28</sup> Despite an acrimonious period, with forty members calling for a special meeting to review that decision, it was accepted that there had been a lack of co-operation with other bodies and that they could not altogether free Barnet from blame.<sup>29</sup>

The relationship between Barnet and the Council of the Caley clearly broke down, though Barnet appears to have had initial support from many members.<sup>30</sup> A new member who may have played a role was a Lt. Col. Martin, formerly of the East India Company Regiment, who was elected an ordinary member of the Caley in September 1835.<sup>31</sup> The Council minute for 2 October refers to him being 'accidentally present and invited to assist Sir Henry Jardine in the chair'.<sup>32</sup> He then appears to have become a member of the Garden Committee at its monthly meetings, sometimes jointly with the Council, but he is not listed after 1836, and died soon after these events in 1839. In 1835 he was also involved in taking sequestration action against the Town Clerk of Pittenweem, who had been involved in a political dispute in the East Neuk involving his wider family when James Balfour of Whittinghame had been elected as the Member of Parliament in the area in 1823 to 1827. The victimisation experienced by the Pittenweem Town Clerk has been analysed.<sup>33</sup> Could this partly have been a re-enactment of another conflict?<sup>34</sup>

It was to be a strange six months while Barnet served out his time. At the anniversary dinner of 1836, held in the Hopetoun Rooms, Queen Street,

with Sir John Hope in the chair, about fifty members were treated to 164 dishes of fruit, 42 of which were supplied by Barnet (under notice of dismissal) and his four gardeners.<sup>35</sup> Then on 10 September, the Secretary called a special meeting having learned that notice had been given to the foreman gardener and the women who looked after the bothy. It was resolved that 'no more hands should be dismissed while the orchards are full of fruit'.

The post of Curator of the experimental garden was advertised and there were six applicants who had excellent testimonials, including Robert Fortune of the London Horticultural Garden.<sup>36</sup> James McNab, the son of William, had been closely involved with Patrick Neill, Secretary to the Caledonian Horticultural Society, as an assistant from 1828 to 1834 but originally decided not to apply for reasons that remain unclear. The minutes record that Dr Graham, Professor of Botany (who was also Regius Keeper) wrote to inform the committee that 'the feelings which for a long time had rendered Mr McNab very reluctant; and indeed caused him absolutely to refuse to become a candidate for the situation, had now been removed'. It was decided that McNab was the best candidate for the job, which he accepted in November 1836 with an annual salary of £100, free house, coal and candles. The committee agreed to consider installation of a water closet and a supply of gas to the house.<sup>37</sup>

A new chapter of the experimental garden commenced, but not until major problems had been resolved. The full contents of the committee action in relation to Barnet at the time are recorded in the Society's Minute Book.<sup>38</sup> One of the first problems was addressing the state of the garden, and gaps in records for plant sales and plant stock. Tracking down details of people who had requested plants and not received them was difficult, at the same time finding that plants had been removed without being properly recorded. There were later issues about the condition of the vacated house, abusive comments scratched on some window frames and the removal of fittings without permission.

There had been a major incident on the evening of 20 May – the day the committee had decided to end Barnet's contract – over serious damage to plants in the Royal Botanic Garden, especially magnificent *Erica* plants 'which were to have graced the show

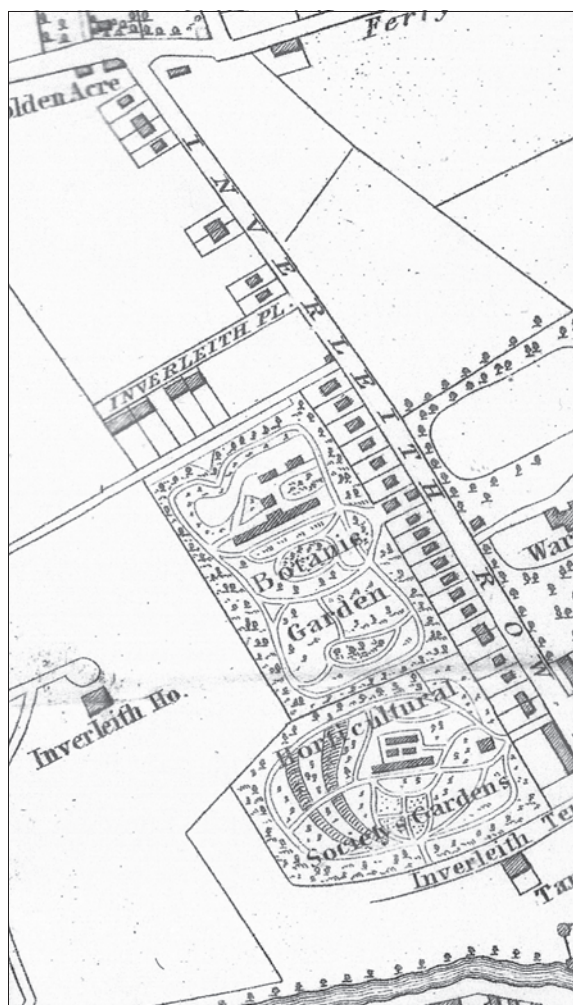


Fig. 3. Plan of Royal Botanic Garden and Caledonian Horticultural Society Garden from W. H. Lizars' plan for the *Post Office Directory*, 1835. (Courtesy of Andrew Fraser.)

planned for 4th June 1836' (fig. 3). The committee had to investigate the matter in a scrupulous way, as 22 varieties of plants in the Caley's experimental garden had also been cut or torn up, including a *Magnolia grandiflora* that had been cut down. Great interest was shown in footprints where the boundary wall with the Royal Botanic Garden had been scaled, and efforts were made to protect the imprints with a glass cover. Anonymous letters were received from different parts of the country, which all added to the mystery. As to who did the damage, nothing could be proved. Barnett denied that the decision of the committee and the damage could be connected and was quoted as saying at 10 am on 21 May that the

Council 'may offer what reward they chose but the person will never be discovered'. The detailed reports include: 'Mr Barnett is reported to have said that the resolution to displace him of 20th May was come to with the view to appointing James McNab'. Another comment was that neither Barnett nor his foreman went into the Botanic Garden to see the damage done there: 'The person must have some motive but the only one seems to have been some sort of desperate revenge against Mr McNab and his splendid heaths in the first place and then in an attempt to disguise the matter, by cutting plants in the experimental garden'. The issue continued until 15 November 1837 when the Council and the Special Committee agreed that a hundred copies of a statement on the dismissal of Barnett were to be circulated.

After his appointment began at Martinmas, it was only a matter of weeks before James McNab had his own first problem with his new employers, and it was over the issue of how best to deal with overgrown fruit trees. The Garden Committee wanted him 'to cautiously prune the orchard at the start of the next season' and told him to consult Mr Smith of Hopetoun, Mr Young of Riccarton and other very experienced members of the Society on the propriety of thinning the trees. He decided to go to his friend Robert Brown of Perth, his father William McNab, and Mr Oliver of Dysart as well as Mr Young, who all agreed that the trees should be considerably thinned. His report said the Council could consult anyone else they wanted and get their opinion in writing but that something had to be done to the trees in their present state. The Council then agreed that he should act on the advice he had already obtained.<sup>39</sup>

The Society was now in a process of change, moving from the zest for knowledge and discovery to a competitive culture, cash values and the award of prizes and trophies. The minutes show that in 1838 a thousand tickets were printed for a big exhibition supported by three of the Edinburgh nurseries and the Royal Botanic Garden, while the next year, just over two hundred tickets were sold for an Exhibition and Promenade in June and £21 was collected at the gate. New regulations for the admission of working gardeners to avoid them examining the plants at the time of the promenade were introduced and by 1842, the committee began

the erection of an Exhibition Hall which was to be funded by private voluntary subscription. This proposal was first raised on 2 December 1841 and by 17 December a special committee under Sir Henry Jardine as convenor was appointed with power to get the proposals printed and circulated.<sup>40</sup> The task of collecting subscriptions was given to James McNab. On 17 January 1842, it was reported that over £300 had been received and William McNab along with Charles Smith and James McNab were given the task of selecting a site and preparing a plan and specification. At the next committee meeting, on 19 February, David Cousin, the appointed architect, produced plans and drawings for the hall (fig. 4).<sup>41</sup> It was first used for a Fruit and Dahlia exhibition on 23 September despite still getting estimates for the doors and windows for the basement area on 7 September! The total costs including the fittings are recorded as £843. 1. 9, but there was a shortfall in subscription income and an overdraft had to be sought. The speed of the procurement of the building is commendable and the Hall Committee were able as early as 1 December to merge with the Garden Committee. At that same December meeting, it was noted that plans were being made by a number of individual members to commission a bust in marble of the Society's Secretary Dr Patrick Neill from John Steell RSA and sanctioned the plan to place this in the Society Hall.<sup>42</sup>



Fig. 4. Photograph of RCHS Hall by R. M. Adam, c. 1905. Designed by David Cousin, it is now the RBGE Caledonian Hall. (RBGE Library, 1/1L50.)

The building was not just used by the Society for exhibitions; it also served as a library, lecture room, museum, and venue for exhibitions and, in later years, a herbarium. The new hall was a great success but the Society was now in debt. There were disputes about who could buy floral displays, which took up the time of the gardeners – some members thought that they had a right to this service. Local nurserymen also wanted more access for their own events. James McNab had taken over much of the administration of the Society and introduced new initiatives to increase the membership such as trying to encourage the support and participation of head gardeners at private estates.<sup>43</sup> In 1849 William McNab died and James moved to his post as Curator at the Royal Botanic Garden. By that time, he had carried out the duties of Curator, Depute Treasurer, Collector and Clerk, which took four pages of the Caley minute book to record.<sup>44</sup> The post was taken on by William Wilson Evans, who had been employed at the garden for the previous seven years.

Correspondence from Charles McIntosh, head gardener at Dalkeith House and a noted writer on horticulture at the time, offers a clue to the wider pressures facing the Society at this time. He had fallen out with the Council of the Caley because he wanted to run an exhibition and they were afraid he was going to set up an alternative group. He also had strong views about what he called 'sham flower shows' and in a letter of 30 December 1850 to a member of the Caley Council, he wrote 'I am glad I am not at their abominable meetings or dinner. I do not care a farthing candle for the whole lot of them'.<sup>45</sup>

The year of 1851 was a crisis period for the Caledonian Horticultural Society. Patrick Neill and Sir Henry Jardine died that September, Professor Dunbar in December, and there was no Treasurer, with the auditor having to do the accounts. Professor John Hutton Balfour, the new Regius Keeper, took on the post of Secretary and James McNab appears to have assisted the Caley officers.

A Council member, Charles Kane Sivewright of Cargilfield was clearly frustrated at the condition of the garden in the 1850s, arguing that more plants should be sold to help with revenue expenditure and that the feelings of the nurserymen should be ignored 'as they were more inclined to support the Zoological

garden than the Society'.<sup>46</sup> He appears to have been primarily a lover of horticulture and a champion of what needed to be done in the garden but then had the misfortune to have shares in a bank that collapsed and, having unlimited liability, he was sequestered for his share of the debts, a sum of £7000. Forced to sell his house and lands, he moved to Portobello.<sup>47</sup> In 1858 he wrote to Charles McIntosh complaining there seemed to be a great want of interest in floriculture and florists after proposals for an August show of carnations were not favourably received. Earlier, in 1856, he had complained to McIntosh that letters he had sent to be published had been rejected as they would have been 'offensive to the Society'. This was at a time when some of the nurserymen wanted to run exhibitions in the garden, to which they would donate cups, and hoped they would attract some of the significant growers from England. Events such as the Grand Dahlia and Hollyhock exhibition were run for a few years with some of the proceeds to the Society.

#### A CHANGING CULTURE

The early years of the Caley and the men involved in its launch have been reported on by others, with many detailed accounts in the Caley *Journals* over the years.<sup>48</sup> The present account of the history of the Experimental Garden has emerged from a social analysis of people exercising power and their aspirations for the future of the Society. The initial objectives of encouraging the horticulture of Scotland in all its branches, by offering prizes for the improved cultivation of vegetables, fruits and flowers was clearly based on the pursuit of knowledge. The first two joint secretaries, Dr Patrick Neill and Walter Nicol did not have long together to sustain their planned structure. Thomas Dickson, who replaced Nicol after his death in 1811, was a nurseryman from a family business, and seems to have been keen to win awards rather than just exhibit from an early date. In May 1810, while a member of the judging committee, he was involved in an issue over awards for seedling polyanthus when the committee could not agree between his submission and that of Mr McDonald of Dalkeith. The matter had to be referred to the General Quarterly meeting which decided there should be no award as 'no premium had been awarded for

polyanthus', i.e. polyanthus had not been listed on the schedule of prizes. Although Dickson was awarded a gold medal for an explanation for potato disease this was largely based on original work by Sir George Buchan Hepburn. Dickson died on 29 May 1817.<sup>49</sup>

This inconsistency in the awarding of medals can be identified throughout the first forty years while Patrick Neill held office. It appears to reflect a tension between the competitive entries and the desire to recognise important contributions relating to new varieties or horticultural experimental practices. But it also highlights an early issue between representatives of the Edinburgh nursery trade and the non-trade members, a tension that can be traced throughout the first hundred years of the Society's activities and which helps to explain the development of the shows and the later near demise of the Society. For example, a controversy arose in July 1837 when a silver medal was awarded to a Mr Kelly of Messrs James Dickson & Sons for the best grown exotic plant in flower. A week later, it was acknowledged that a mistake had been made as private cultivators had to compete with dealers, and seven shillings and sixpence was awarded to William Lawson, gardener to Dr Neill.<sup>50</sup> After thirty years, competition and rewards were becoming more significant. Controversy appears again in a letter of June 1840 which considered the propriety of offering Dahlia prizes not only to nurserymen and to 'practical gardeners' but also to amateur cultivators.<sup>51</sup>

Times were changing. By 1851, it was noted that ticket sales had been in decline for some years and other shows were being developed, such as a proposal to hold a Scottish Horticultural Exhibition to which the florists in Scotland should be invited and the organisers wanted the use of the Society's garden.<sup>52</sup> The award of a bronze medal was as expensive as the engraving of the silver medal and was to be replaced with the award of a certificate of merit, though it too would be expensive (fig. 5).<sup>53</sup> Articles for exhibition continued to be provided, with at least six Edinburgh nurseries taking part in June 1849. The practice of donating special prizes of money had already been introduced as an option for nurserymen but amateurs who cultivated their own plants were still eligible for the silver medal. Then in 1852, there is the first reference to a donated silver





Fig. 5. RCHS Certificate of Merit, July 1851. Note the views of the Caledonian Hall and the Winter Garden building. (RBGE Library, RCHS Archives.)

cup for the grand Dahlia and Hollyhock Exhibition and the partial allocation of the £9 surplus proceeds for second, third, fourth and fifth prizes.<sup>54</sup> And with the developing emphasis on competition and monetary award came complaints such as that of a Mr John Carstairs that he had left twenty four heads of asparagus on the table at 11 am but had been disqualified as the judges, although of the view that his were the best, found only twenty three. He was to be advised that steps would be taken to prevent the occurrence of such things in future.<sup>55</sup>

The Society archives for the early 1850s contain limited references to the development of other exhibitions and flower shows at this time but there are some clues of a more extensive network evolving. It was the Society's exhibition facilities in the garden

that appear to have encouraged collaboration with the first proposal in 1849 for a Horticultural Exhibition to be held in August 1851. All Scottish florists were to be invited and the organisers, who appear to have been linked to the North British Agricultural Society, wanted the use of the garden. It would appear this proposal did not progress but change was in the air and market forces and new developments in England began to predominate the Society's affairs and develop into a crisis in the next decade. A useful recollection of this period is to be found when in 1909, James Whytock, then President of the Scottish Horticultural Association, included the topic of flower shows in his presidential address on the theme 'Gardening Problems Today'. He told his membership at their annual meeting that the

history of flower shows was one of continual change and reflected on the autumn show in the Caley's Experimental Gardens as:<sup>56</sup>

consisting of long rows of stands of Hollyhocks and Dahlias in a lean-to house, interspersed with a few florists' flowers. In another house were some plates of fruit, including grapes. The few vegetables that were shown were laid on the grass. There was a band and a very fashionable assemblage from two to four. All cleared away their exhibits at five, and those that came forty or fifty miles were home by eight.

This description appears to relate to the early 1850s, after James McNab had resigned his post as Curator.

#### CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Tension existed within the Council membership on the future of the Caley garden, resulting in Professor Balfour's resignation as Secretary and George Lawson's as Clerk in September 1856 (though Balfour returned as Secretary in 1860). In December 1856 it was agreed by the Council on a committee recommendation that the garden should be handed over to the Government, to be added to the Royal Botanic Garden next door. In 1857 it was reported that while there were 380 members on the roll, 9 had died, 24 had resigned, 38 had refused to pay arrears and 109 should be struck off, leaving a membership of 200 and an income of £220. Only two shows were held in 1858 and 1859 and there are references to other meetings 'apparently of forming an Association in place of the Society'.<sup>57</sup>

Looking back at the period of eight years between 1856 and 1864, it seems a nightmare of raised expectations and lack of Government support. The Council were under pressure to hand over the management of the garden to Messrs Peter Lawson and Sons as early as 1857. They had nurseries at Goldenacre and were interested in taking a nineteen year lease. Sir William Gibson Craig (1797–1878), a former MP for Edinburgh, moved at a meeting in November 1857 that it would be more beneficial to hand over the garden to the Government, which was supported by the majority of the Council (fig. 6). While Sir William sought help for this proposal with the Government in London, the Office of Woods and Forests kept demanding payment of the rent and the arrears and in 1859, the annual grant of £200 was withdrawn without notice, having been reallocated to the Edinburgh School of Design. Apparently, there

was no willingness to remit the rent, which in 1862 led to arrears of £631. 2. 6, and there were still Council members wanting to hand over the management to Lawson's nursery.<sup>58</sup> By December 1862 the Government indicated their willingness to accept surrender of the lease but were offering only £400 for the value of the buildings, which had cost the Society upwards of £3000. The Council agreed to accept half of that sum and Sir William arranged for the Duke of Argyll to visit the garden, following which he agreed to take the matter up with Mr Gladstone. Meanwhile, it was proposed that the Society should amalgamate with the short-lived rival Edinburgh New Horticultural Society. But the first task was to resolve the future of the experimental garden. A Special General Meeting was called for 12 May 1864 which fortunately was able to take the decision to give up the lease and accept £1000 for the value of the buildings, provided the liability for the rent arrears ceased. Council member David Smith WS described the arrangement as 'a great boon conferred on the



Fig. 6. The young William Gibson Craig, by Henry Raeburn, c. 1818–20. (Courtesy of Heriot Watt University Archive, Records Management and Museum Service.)



Fig. 7. Photograph of James McNab, 1871. (RBGE Library, Portrait Collection.)

inhabitants of the City by this large addition to the Botanic Garden'. Due to the tenacity of Sir William Gibson Craig and his supporters, the eight years of negotiation was successfully concluded and Dr Duncan's experimental garden vision had ended.

And finally there is the dedication of James McNab, clearly committed to the value of the experimental and demonstration garden and, fortunately, becoming the inheritor of the land in his office as curator of the RBGE (fig. 7). There can be no doubt that James McNab's commitment from 1836 saved the dream of Dr Duncan from oblivion and

that his continuing commitment from 1849 to its final disposal by the Society helped to maintain the garden while the Council struggled with the need to adapt its objectives and future after 1850. Looking back, it is surprising that the transfer took so long. It is perhaps worth concluding with the extract of the comments by David Smith WS on behalf of the Council as recorded in the minutes of May 1864.<sup>59</sup>

Every Commissioner of Woods who has looked at it and even the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister who have come to look at it, have been satisfied with the propriety of the arrangement. But while they have not met us so favourably in spirit or so readily as we think they ought to have done, yet I think the only course we have to pursue is to approve the report.

The Society has to be grateful to Mr McNab who for the past three or four years managed the garden for us without fee or reward, giving us much time to keep things together and I believe our debt to the Bank instead of being only £300 would have been double that amount . . .

The Council expect that under the Director of the Botanic Garden, the grounds will still be used for experimental purposes and that it will present the means of forming an arboretum remembering that this was one of the original objects of the Society. I sincerely hope that this is a promise that is intended to be fulfilled for I am quite sure it will reconcile the subscribers to the arrangement proposed.

In December 1864, the Society amalgamated with the rival Edinburgh New Horticultural Society.<sup>60</sup> Professor Balfour demitted office after 14 years as Secretary: the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society and the Royal Botanic Garden went their different ways. James McNab introduced changes to the landscape and in 1877, William Robinson referred to him in a tribute edition of *The Garden* as 'among the faithful few who never deserted the beautiful hardy flora of our gardens for the famous red and yellow streaks that sometimes disfigure even our great botanic gardens'. He died in 1879, survived by his wife Elizabeth and their six children, and was buried alongside Dr Patrick Neill at Warriston Cemetery.

# EXPERIMENTAL GARDEN OF THE CALEDONIAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

## APPENDIX

### *Plan of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society Garden, 1825*

The plan of the RCHS Experimental Garden prepared in 1825 (fig. 1) was accompanied by a key which detailed the intended uses of the different sections (RBGE Library, Linning Papers, pp. 121–122). The list below is derived from a summary prepared by Leonie Paterson, RBGE Archivist.

- A. *Orchards for Standard Apple, Pear, Plum and Cherry Trees.* The space was designed for 550 fruit trees of the best varieties procured from the UK, Europe and America so that it could be ascertained which would grow best in Scotland.
- B. *Central Enclosed Experimental Garden.* Enclosed by a holly hedge and with a locked door, this space was for select experiments only.
- C. *The Culinarium or Kitchen Garden.* A space designed for testing a wide range of both common and little used culinary vegetables.
- D. *Compartments for Storing or Growing Stocks* of different kinds for grafting or budding.
- E. *Nurseries* for rearing seedlings, offsets, cuttings, and layers of the rarer trees and shrubs.
- F. *Principal Wall.* South facing, it could be used for growing finer fruit trees such as peaches, nectarines, pears, apricots, cherries, almonds, figs, quinces and hardy grapes.
- G. *Walled Experimental Garden.* Enclosed and locked space with west and south facing walls for the naturalisation of tender exotics.
- H. *The East Slip.* A west facing 8 foot wall here for growing new varieties of dwarf fruit trees and there was a border for raising new plants from seed.
- I. *Eastern Division of South Slip.* A fine border sloping to the south well adapted for the cultivation of strawberries and where it was hoped the confusion surrounding the different species and varieties in Scotland could be clarified.
- K. *Western Division of South Slip.* Intended for small fruits such as gooseberries, currants and raspberries.
- L. *Proposed Site for Hot-house* for tropical fruits and ornamental plants.
- M. *Framing Department,* 150 x 100 feet, for ananas and melon pits, cucumber and gourd frames, with room for different earths, composts and manures.
- N. *Enclosure,* sheltered by an evergreen hedge for greenhouse shrubs to be kept outside over summer.
- O. *General Arboretum.* For large trees and tall shrubs producing dry capsules and fruits little used as food to provide shelter, ornament and scientific variety.
- P. *Raised Belts.* These divided the orchards, provided shelter and were used to grow small fruits such as guins, mulberries, medlars, azeroles, mountain ash, crabs, barberries, chestnuts, walnuts, filberts, hazel and cob nuts.
- Q. *Compartment for Perennial Herbaceous Plants.*
- R. *Compartment for Desirable Annuals,* and for naturalising more tender exotic species.
- S. *Section for Agricultural Plants* such as grasses and clovers for experiments to promote this branch of horticulture.
- T. *American Shrub Department.* It was proposed to have a pond for aquatics and a rock garden for alpines.
- U. *A Space for Plants with Striped or Variegated Leaves.*
- V. *Ornamental Flower Borders* for carnations, pinks, ranunculuses, anemones, tulips, hyacinths, etc.
- W. *The Rosary,* forming a border on each side of the south terrace walk containing all the known species.
- X. *Entrance from Trinity Road [now Inverleith Row]* with a cartway into the frame ground.
- Y. *Site of the Gardener's House* with committee room and apartments for keeping and arranging seeds.
- Z. *Proposed south entrance to the Garden* [never realised].

# BOOK OF THE OLD EDINBURGH CLUB

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

The early archives of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society (RCHS), held in the Library of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), include a series of Minute Books from its formation in 1809, bound copies of the first four published *Memoirs* of the Society and various supplementary papers. The RBGE Library also holds a recently discovered uncatalogued volume of the papers of John Linning, who was Secretary and Treasurer of the Garden Committee of the Society, hereafter referred to as 'Linning Papers'. The Minute Books do not include Annual Reports or the series of 'Discourses' by Andrew Duncan from 1811 to 1825, some of which were published in the *Memoirs* or are included in the Linning Papers.

- 1 Henry Cockburn, *Memorials of his Time* (Edinburgh 1856), pp. 285–286. Andrew Duncan Senior (1744–1828) was Professor of the Institutes (Theory) of Medicine in the University from 1790 to 1819.
- 2 RBGE Library, Linning Papers, Discourse, 2 December 1819, p. 1.
- 3 *Ibid.*, *Prospectus*, 1818, p. 1.
- 4 Rosalind Mitchison, *Agricultural Sir John: The Life of Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, 1754–1835* (London 1962); David Affleck, 'All the President's Men: "Horticultural Sir John" and the East Lothian Connection', *Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian and Field Naturalists' Society*, vol. XXVIII (2010), p. 36. Sinclair's writings and contacts may also have influenced the founding of the London Horticultural Society in 1804 and the eventual establishment of its experimental garden in the 1820s: Brent Elliott, *The Royal Horticultural Society: A History 1804–2004* (London 2004).
- 5 Mitchison, *Agricultural Sir John*, pp. 137–158; National Archives of Scotland (NAS), 'Plan for establishing a Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement', GD103/2/456.
- 6 Patrick Neill, *On Scottish Gardens and Orchards* (Edinburgh 1813), p. 30.
- 7 Cockburn, *Memorials*, p. 306. See also Robert Brown, *Letters on the Distressed State of Agriculturalists* (Edinburgh 1816); and Richard D. Torrance, 'The Summer that never was', *Scottish Genealogist*, LVII, no. 2.
- 8 RCHS Minute Book, vol. I, pp. 162, 210–212.
- 9 Patrick Neill, *Journal of a Horticultural Tour* (Edinburgh 1823).
- 10 Graham was appointed by the Crown as Regius Keeper with effect from the date of Rutherford's death, and by the Town Council as Professor of Medicine and Botany on 5 January 1820: Harold R. Fletcher and William H. Brown, *The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, 1670–1970* (Edinburgh 1970), p. 103.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 12 Linning Papers, pp. 29, 32.
- 13 The wish to establish an experimental garden is also attested by Duncan's Discourse of 1819, recording the award of gold medals to Samuel Parkes, Fellow of the Linnean Society of London, for his memoir on the use of common sea salt for the purposes of horticulture, and to James Macdonald for his experiments on the culture of onions, and that Mr Parkes and Mr Macdonald had been able to use 3 acres of ground for one year to experiment on three different subjects, the preparation of opium from the *Papaver somniferum* and *Lactuca sativa*; the culture of carrots; and the culture of onions: Linning Papers, Discourse, 2 December 1819, p. 3.
- 14 *Ibid.*, Discourse, 4 December 1823, p. 3.
- 15 Letter from Graham to the Secretary, Dr Patrick Neill, 7 May 1833: RCHS Minute Book, vol. III, p. 28.
- 16 Linning Papers, Discourse, 2 December 1824, p. 6.
- 17 *Ibid.*, Discourse, 5 December 1823. The subscriptions from Bengal had been collected with the help of Dr Wallich, Superintendent of the Botanic Garden of Calcutta. After 31 December 1825 non-members could acquire a transferable share for £25.
- 18 *Ibid.*, Report of the Garden Committee, 5 March 1825, p. 8. Members of the Garden Committee of September 1824 were: William Grant of Congolton (until 1825); Dr Robert Kaye Greville, 1 Wharton Place; Daniel Ellis, 47 Great King St; Dr John Yule, 23 York Place; William McNab; and John Linning, Garden Treasurer. The appointment of Grant as chairman is interesting. His father, William, was a wealthy advocate who died in 1821. But it was the son, William, a Captain in the Foot Guards, who had the interest in horticulture; he had supplied rare apple trees to the Drum estate in 1824 and provided a sketch for a hot house in 1823. He was made a Vice President in 1826 but died in London in November 1827. William McNab was also involved in ordering plants for Drum in 1823.
- 19 William McNab had been foreman at Kew until 1810, when appointed Curator of the RBGE.
- 20 The east entrance had been opened and 'immediately within this entrance will be placed the Gardener's House': Linning Papers, Report of the Garden Committee, 5 March 1825, p. 6.
- 21 'Since the former report, an excellent dwelling house in the Cottage style from designs furnished by Mr Playfair has been built for the Superintendent or Head Gardener': *ibid.*, Second Report of the Garden Committee (n.d.), p. 2. No plans have been found. The 'cottage-style' house is at what is now the east gate to the RBGE, and was restored in 2010 to provide a cafe and various facilities.
- 22 *Ibid.*, Barnett's first training was under his father and then under William McNab at Kew. A transcription of Barnett's letter of acceptance to William McNab, dated 31 January 1826, is in RBGE Archives, McNab Scrapbook 1, p. 150.
- 23 *Ibid.*, Scrapbook 1, p. 150.
- 24 RBGE Library, RCHS Papers, miscellaneous file, Third Report of the Garden Committee, 20 August 1828. The Inverleith Terrace entrance was never made.
- 25 Cockburn, *Memorials*, p. 286. Duncan's other special project was to have a Professor of Horticulture at Edinburgh University, 'not for instructing ordinary gardeners but for cultivating a taste for gardening among students of every class, particularly Divinity'. Correspondence in the Linning Papers discloses that this should be Dr Patrick Neill, one of the first Secretaries to the Caledonian Horticultural Society from its formation: Linning Papers, Undated letter proposed at meeting of the board on 12 January 1820.
- 26 RCHS Minute Book II, minute of 16 February 1832.

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- 27 RCHS Minute Book III, p. 201, 9 April 1836.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 204, 20 May 1836.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 221, 11 July 1836.
- 30 A letter of 10 June 1836 to Barnet, signed Pat Neill, says 'I may mention however for the satisfaction of yourself and friends that there was not the slightest imputation against your moral character and that I shall be ready to bear testimony to your thorough knowledge of your profession': RCHS Minute Book III, p. 321.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 33 The play 'Taking on the System' by Andrew Dallmeyer is based on the biographical account of James Simpson, Town Clerk of Pittenweem, by David Affleck (2005). Both documents are lodged in St Andrews University Library, Special Collections Department.
- 34 The man who convened the meeting of members 'into the propriety of the conduct of the Council in dismissing Mr Barnet' was an Allan Maconachie. It is not clear if he was related to the Robert Maconachie who was given the life rent of Clint and Papple on James Balfour's Whittinghame estate c.1830 and who had been close to Balfour in India in 1809 (it was James Balfour of Whittinghame who provided financial help to the Pittenweem Town Clerk after the sequestration action by the Martin family). In one of the reports of 1837, Allan Maconachie discloses that he was induced to take part in the enquiry. While there is a person of that name listed as an advocate, the exact identity cannot be verified.
- 35 RCHS Minute Book III, record inserted after the minute of 31 August 1836. The actual date of the dinner is not given.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 257, 22 October 1836.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 264, 9 November 1836.
- 38 *Ibid.*, pp. 290–329. An earlier recommendation was to record an abridged form of the report on the state of the garden and the cottage.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 285, 28 January 1837.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 252, 17 December 1841.
- 41 The building, beside the Rock Garden, now used for exhibitions and meetings by the RBGE, is still called the Caledonian Hall.
- 42 The bust of Neill, which belongs to the Sibbald Trust, is currently in the RBGE foyer.
- 43 The meeting approved 'a form of Permanent Admission ticket for Head Gardeners and ... to distribute the [150] tickets forthwith to Head Gardeners likely to be competitors at the September meeting': RCHS Minute Book V, p. 394.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 189. An interesting proposal was made by James in June 1844 to keep 4–6 pigs to help with the cost of manure. It is not clear whether this was acted on.
- 45 Charles McIntosh, author of *The Book of the Garden*, was editor of the Horticulture section of the *Agriculturalist and Journal of Horticulture* published by David Guthrie until about 1849/50. There are letters from Guthrie to Professor Balfour in Vol. 6 of the Balfour papers held at the RBGE Library. A letter of 11 February 1851 from Guthrie to Balfour refers to the hostility of McIntosh to the Caley. It also adds that a proposed new journal 'would prevent the establishment by Mr McIntosh of any other Horticultural Journal'. An earlier letter of 30 December 1850 to Charles Sivewright, prompted by support to him after an insult, predicts that 'another Society will soon be established'.
- 46 This early zoo was set up at Claremont Street near Broughton Park.
- 47 For Sivewright's bankruptcy papers see NAS, CS 280/53/11. Sivewright bought Cargilfield in East Trinity Road in 1846. He and his wife, Lucy Vivian, had been born in England. His father, Francis, was a stock exchange broker. He was married in 1832 and he described his position then as worth £10,000, helped with an inherited fortune and his wife's marriage settlement worth £500. The property at Cargilfield cost £1800 and included the feu hold of the adjacent property at Bellfield. He had been a resident Director of the Edinburgh Silk Farm Co for 18 months where he lost £1200 to £1300. His two sons attended Edinburgh Academy and both later resided in Jamaica where they died in 1884 and 1901. Prior to his financial disaster, Mr Sivewright was also secretary of the Scottish Pansy Society and active in running their shows for a brief period (and a hyacinth exhibition in 1856): RCHS Minute Book VII, 13 October 1853, 5 March 1857.
- 48 For example: Donald Mackenzie, 'The History of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society', *Transactions of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society* (1934–39), vol. V, part 2; D. M. Wemyss, 'Caledonian Hall', *RCHS Journal* (1990), pp. 54–60; J. B. Barclay, 'Patrick Neill MA LLD FRSE', *RCHS Journal and Year Book* (1989), pp. 6–11; Connie Byrom, 'James McNab', *Caledonian Gardener* (1997), pp. 44–52; Connie Byrom, 'Dr Andrew Duncan Senior', *Caledonian Gardener* (1999), pp. 5–20.
- 49 His departure from the Society is not referred to in the minutes and may be linked to a Trust Deed and Settlement signed in 1814 and relating to the business partnership dissolved in 1812. See David Affleck, 'Crossing the Boundaries', *Scottish Local History*, issue 71, winter 2007.
- 50 RCHS Minute Book III, p. 365, 15 July 1837.
- 51 *Ibid.*, IV, p. 131, 6 June 1840.
- 52 *Ibid.*, VI, p. 381, 31 October 1850.
- 53 *Ibid.*, V, p. 250, 6 February 1845; VI, pp. 465–469, 10 July 1851; VII, pp. 1–2, 31 July 1851. The first coloured proof was presented to Patrick Neill.
- 54 See Connie Byrom, 'All that Glitters', part 2, 'Mid-Life Crisis', *Caledonian Gardener* (2003), p. 51.
- 55 RCHS Minute Book, VI, p. 456, 19 June 1851.
- 56 'Presidential Address', *Transactions of the Scottish Horticultural Association* (1909), p. 61.
- 57 RCHS Minute Book VIII, p. 21, 16 February 1858.
- 58 Heads of agreement for a nineteen and a half year lease had been drafted in November 1857: RCHS Minute Book VIII, p. 8, 3 November 1857.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 142, Special General Meeting of 12 May 1864.
- 60 RCHS Minute Book, vol. VIII, p. 218. The Caley's name was retained partly because of its Royal Charter and also a legacy from Patrick Neill. A similar situation arose when the Society amalgamated with the Scottish Horticultural Association in 1920.