

GORDON CASTLE

Walled Garden and Environs



An Historical Appraisal

CHRISTOPHER DINGWALL ~ GUIDELINES
WASHINGTON HOUSE, MAIN STREET, ARDLER,
BLAIRGOWRIE, PERTHSHIRE, PH12 8SR

□ dingwall@guidelines.demon.co.uk

January 2012

GORDON CASTLE, FOCHABERS

Walled Garden and Environs

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by Christopher Dingwall, landscape historian, at the request of Angus Gordon Lennox of the Gordon Castle Estate, with a view to informing the proposed restoration of the walled garden at Gordon Castle to beneficial and productive use. The eight acre walled garden, lying approximately 500m to the south west of Gordon Castle, is currently laid down to grass. The walled garden lies within Parish of Bellie, on the boundary between the historical counties of Elginshire and Banffshire, close to the planned village of Fochabers. Following the reform of local government in the 1970s, it lay for a time within Moray District, part of the Grampian Region. Moray is now one of the 32 unitary local authorities in Scotland established in 1996 under new local government legislation.
- 1.2 In preparing this report, reference has been made to records held by the **National Library of Scotland Map Library (NLS)**, the **Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS)**, the **National Records of Scotland (NRS)**, **Elgin Library (EL)**, **Moray Council Archives (MCA)**, the **Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE)**, and at **Gordon Castle (GC)**. The information gathered has been complemented a visit made by the author to Gordon Castle on Tuesday 1st November 2011. Information sources are acknowledged in the text in capital letters and/or in captions to the illustrations.
- 1.4 Particular attention has been paid to the family and estate papers known as the **GORDON CASTLE MUNIMENTS (NRS Ref. GD44)** now held by the **National Records of Scotland** at General Register House and at Thomas Thomson House in Edinburgh. These papers were formerly held at Gordon Castle. Following the sale of the estate to the Crown Estate Commissioners in 1937, the papers remained at Gordon Castle during World War II, while the castle was requisitioned by the War Department, but were subsequently removed by the Crown Estate, and deposited with the National Records of Scotland in 1950. The papers have been indexed, with the hand-list alone running to seven A4 volumes, and occupying 20-25cm of shelf space. Given the immense volume of papers, the hand-list was used as a mean of selecting those papers and plans thought most likely to throw light on the history of the walled garden in the 19th and 20th centuries. The majority of items studied were taken from bundles concerned with 'Garden and Policies' to be found amongst the **FACTOR'S ACCOUNTS AND RELATED PAPERS (NRS Ref. GD44 Section 51)**, from **LEDGERS AND CASHBOOKS (NRS Ref. GD44 Section 52)**, and from **ESTATE PLANS (NRS REF. RHP)**. Relevant item and/or bundle numbers are given in the text.

2. PHYSICAL SETTING

- 2.1 **Geology, Topography and Soils** ~ Although the policies of Gordon Castle and the neighbouring town of Fochabers are underlain by sedimentary rocks of Middle Old Red Sandstone age, deposited in the Devonian Period, the solid geology in this part of the Spey valley is largely obscured by unconsolidated late-glacial and post-glacial drift deposits in the form of sands, gravels and alluvium associated with the lower reaches of the River Spey. The resulting topography is comparatively subdued, though marked by river terraces, the sloping margins of which can be seen to have had a significant influence on the pattern of settlement, cultivation and tree planting. Under certain conditions, former courses of the River Spey are evident as crop marks in the fields and parkland surrounding the castle.
- 2.2 The House or Castle of Gordon and the old town of Fochabers were sited on areas of slightly higher ground within what was previously known as Bog of Gight – literally ‘windy bog’ – which ‘haugh’ land was naturally poorly drained and prone to occasional flooding by the River Spey. Its vulnerability to inundation was highlighted by the notorious Moray Floods of August 1829 which saw the Spey wreak havoc within the Gordon Castle policies. In his book *AN ACCOUNT OF THE GREAT FLOODS OF AUGUST 1829* (1873) Sir Thomas Dick Lauder’s described “...one breach of 186 yards in the park wall, which was likewise demolished in many other places, and free access being thus permitted to the flood, it tore up a number of beautiful trees, and spread over the grounds to within 125 yards of the castle”. An earlier “...prodigious flood of 1768” was noted by Rev. James Gordon in the [OLD] *STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF SCOTLAND* for the Parish of Bellie (c.1792). It may have been partly in response to this constant risk of flooding that the walled gardens which had previously occupied lower ground close to Gordon Castle were relocated, about halfway between these two dates, to their present more elevated position. The transformation of the estate from boggy ground to fertile farmland was not achieved without considerable effort and expenditure. In the *OLD STATISTICAL ACCOUNT*, passing mention is made of the Gordon Castle policies, in which “...many a costly drain has been employed to form the enchanting landscape it now exhibits”, and where the ground had been rendered fertile only “...by a long course of frequent manure”.
- 2.3 **Climate** ~ In spite of its northerly position within the British Isles, the Moray Coast has long been noted for its comparatively benign climate, defended as it is on the west and south by the Highlands, and protected from extremes of temperature by its proximity to the waters of the Moray Firth. Average daily temperatures range from c.17.5°C in July and August to between c.1°C and -1°C in January and February. Lying as it does in the rain shadow created by the Highlands, annual rainfall along the Moray Coast averages c.1,200mm (47.5 ins), with monthly variation from around 35mm (1.4 ins) in March to c.70mm (2.8 ins) in August. The area benefits from long hours of daylight in the summer months, with an average of around 5.5 hours of sunshine recorded daily in June. The microclimate that can be generated within a walled garden

– higher temperatures, shelter from wind, etc. – is therefore comparatively favourable for plant growth, especially in the summer months.

- 2.4 In the words of the Rev. James Gordon in the [OLD] STATISTICAL ACCOUNT for the Parish of Bellie (c.1792) “...we enjoy, upon the whole, a happy climate”. An interesting historical perspective on the climate can be found in the GENERAL VIEW OF THE AGRICULTURE IN THE COUNTY OF ELGIN OR MORAY, drawn up by James Donaldson (1794). Donaldson comments, among other things, on the necessity and value of stone walls and hedges to provide shelter for growing crops. The Rev. William Rennie in his NEW STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF SCOTLAND (1842) goes so far as to include a table of climatic data, with details of temperature, rainfall and wind, covering the years 1811 to 1820, which is said to have been “...extracted from a register carefully kept by an eminent naturalist, who long resided at Gordon Castle”. The identity of this person is not known.

3. EARLY HISTORY OF GARDENING AT GORDON CASTLE ~ 1550 to 1800

- 3.1 Although the marshy and heavily forested southern coastlands of the Moray Firth may have discouraged early settlers, there is evidence of progressive colonisation and land clearance from the prehistoric period through to Viking times. Gardening, in the sense that we understand the word today, is likely to have been introduced to Moray with the monastic settlements as early as the 12th century, most notably with the founding of the Cistercian Abbey of Kinloss in 1150, as a daughter house of Melrose Abbey in the Scottish Borders. Indeed, in his introduction to the RECORDS OF THE MONASTERY OF KINLOSS (1872), John Stuart mentions one William Culross, Abbot of Kinloss from 1491-1500, who is reputed to have “...laboured even to fatigue in the gardens, in planting and grafting trees and in other works of this nature”.
- 3.2 That the tradition of gardening in Moray continued, following the Reformation in the mid-16th century, and the consequent dissolution of the monasteries, is hinted at by John Leslie, Bishop of Ross (1527-1596) in his HISTORIE OF SCOTLAND, first published in Scots in 1596, in which he describes ‘Morayland’ as “...a part of Rosse [which] lyes upon the cost side ... a country alane by all the rest commendet with ws, for baith plenty and pleasure ... marvellous delectable in fair forrests, in thick wodis, in suiet sairing flouries, well-smelling herbis, pleasant medowis, fine quheit, and al kynde of stufte, orchards and fruitful gairdings”.
- 3.3 Evidence of enclosure and gardening at Bog of Gight or Gordon Castle at an early date comes from more than one source. Timothy Pont’s manuscript map of THE COAST OF BAMFF (c.1595) marks ‘Bogagyith’ as a four storey mansion or tower house with associated enclosure and planting, close to the settlement of ‘Fochabirs’. Another of Pont’s manuscript maps, of neighbouring ELGIN AND NORTH EAST MORAY (c.1595), with additions by Robert Gordon, also records ‘Bog of Gicht’ and ‘Foccobirs’, the former clearly depicted as a mansion within a substantial walled or fenced enclosure planted with trees. It was around this time that George Gordon, 6th Earl and 1st Marquess of Huntly (1559-1636), was



FIG. 1 ~ DETAIL FROM TIMOTHY PONT'S MAP 'THE COAST OF BAMFF' c.1595
(NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND)

involved in the improvement of his estates. Though closely involved in the politics of the day, it was said of him by John Spalding in his *MEMORIAL OF THE TROUBLES IN SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND* (c.1640) that “...*he lovit not to be in the lawis, contending against any many, but lovit rest and quietness with all his hairt, and in tyme of peace he leivit moderatlie and temperatlie in his dyet,, and fullie set to building and planting of all curiouss devyses*”. In his book *THE SCOTTISH CHATEAU : THE COUNTRY HOUSE OF RENAISSANCE SCOTLAND* (2001) Prof. Charles McKean describes the aggrandisement of Bog of Gight at this time. This involved the formation of viewing platforms on the towers, and open galleries or loggias at first floor level, which would have afforded views over the surrounding walled gardens. These features are seen in John Slezer’s depiction of Gordon Castle c.1672, prepared for his ill-starred work on *THE ANCIENT AND PRESENT STATE OF SCOTLAND*, though not published until after his death in 1717.



FIG. 2. ~ GORDON CASTLE, DRAWING BY JOHN SLEZER c.1672, SHOWING GARDEN WALLS AND SURROUNDING PLANTING
(NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND)

- 3.4 Thereafter, accounts left by a succession of visitors testify to the opulence of the castle and its surrounding gardens. These include accounts by John Taylor the Water Poet, who speaks in his PENNYLESS PILGRIMAGE of 1618 of the “...sumptuous house named of Bog of Geethe” ; by Richard Franck in 1658, who writes in his NORTHERN MEMOIRS of the house of ‘Bogagieth’ with “...her lofty and majestick towers and turrets that storm the air, and seemingly make dints in the very clouds” ; and by Sir Robert Gordon of Straloch, whose ‘Description of the Two Shires of Aberdeen and Banff’, first published in the second edition of Joan Blaeu’s ATLAS NOVUS (1662) states that “...Bog of Gicht [is], an elegant and spacious castle built to a great height ... surrounded with charming gardens and an extensive park, which is enclosed with a strong wall”. An anonymous ‘Description of the Parish of Belly in the Enzie’ in the 1720s, first published in MACFARLANE’S GEOGRAPHICAL COLLECTIONS (1906) talks of “...the House of Gordon Castle, alias bog of Gicht, with large gardens, orchards, plantings, entries and parks”, with the town of Fochabers “...close upon the garden dykes on the south”.
- 3.5 A general impression of the character and extent of the gardens and plantations surrounding Gordon Castle in the first half of the 18th century can be got from the MILITARY SURVEY OF SCOTLAND, drawn up under the direction of William Roy c.1747. Though drawn at too small a scale to show the gardens, this map shows the castle to have been set within a series of broadly rectilinear fields and plantations. An axial avenue is seen to lead northwards from the north front of the castle, where it intersects at right angles with a cross-axial avenue leading from the east to the banks of the River Spey. To the south is a short canal, flanked by rectangular ‘wilderness’ plantations, leading to the east end of the neighbouring settlement of ‘Fockabers’.

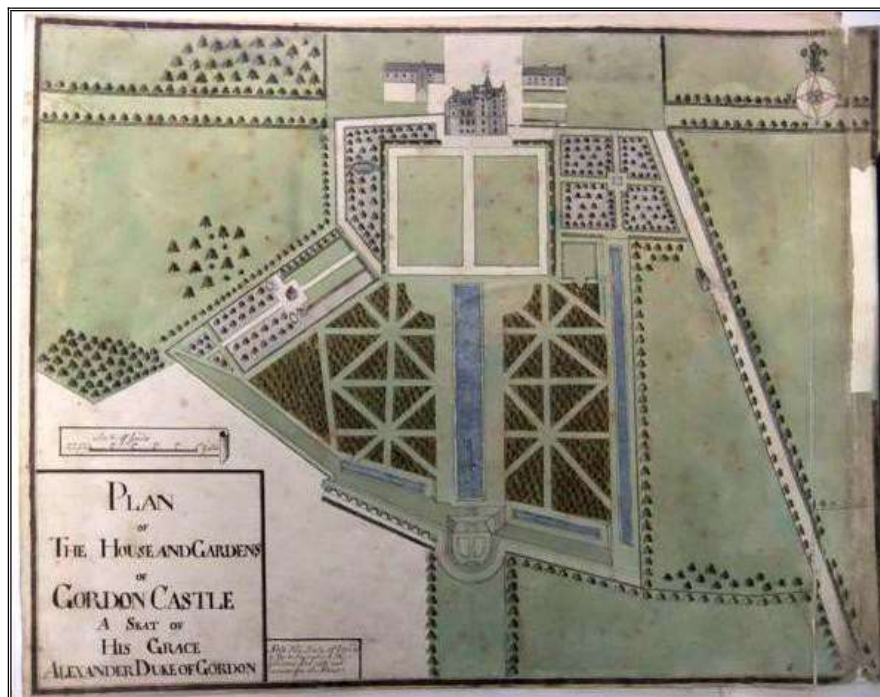


FIG. 3 ~ ANONYMOUS PLAN OF THE HOUSE AND GARDENS OF GORDON CASTLE C.1765 (NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND)

3.6 For a clearer indication of the character of the gardens in the first half of the 18th century, we can turn to an anonymous PLAN OF THE HOUSE AND GARDENS OF GORDON CASTLE (NRS Ref. RHP2379) bound into a volume of plans, thought to date from c.1765. Its dedication to Alexander 4th Duke of Gordon means that this plan must date from after the death of Cosmo George Gordon, 3rd Duke of Gordon in 1752. At the same time, the absence of wings from the drawing of the castle also helps to date the plan from before 1769, when John Baxter was employed by the 4th Duke to remodel and extend the castle. The aforementioned plan shows an irregularly shaped, walled enclosure to the south of the castle, embracing several different elements or components. To the south of the castle was a rectangular lawn or grass-plot, hedged to the east, north and west, but open to the south, with a peripheral walk and a central axial walk leading to the head of a canal, at the southern end of which was a fountain. The canal terminated at the foot of the terrace slope, on which a stepped earthwork in the form of a small amphitheatre would have allowed views back towards the castle. To the east of the grass-plot was a trapezoidal walled garden, divided by paths into four quarters, possibly planted as an orchard. To the west of the grass plot was another L-shaped garden, with paths leading to a third garden set at an angle of around 45°. With an axial path and a building at its centre, this is likely to have been part of the kitchen gardens serving the castle. The presence of further canals and ponds within the various enclosures would suggest that there was no lack of water in the area around the castle.

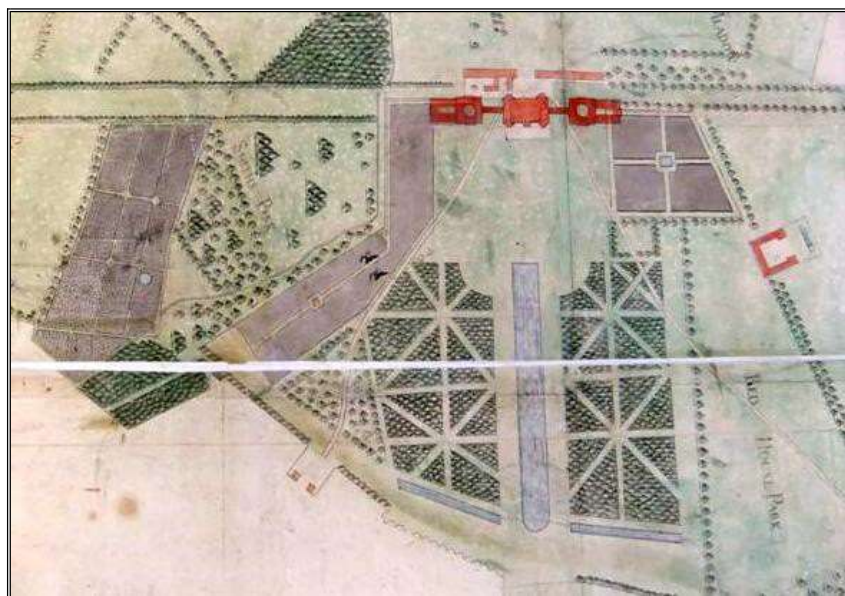


FIG. 4. ~ DETAIL FROM ANONYMOUS PLAN OF THE PARKS AT GORDON CASTLE, c.1768
(NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND)

3.7 Another anonymous plan entitled PLAN OF THE PARKS AT GORDON CASTLE (NRS Ref. RHP 2382) said to date from c.1768, but probably of a slightly later date, shows the castle with the new wings added, but with little apparent change to the layout of the gardens. Whether or not he had been encouraged by the ‘prodigious flood’ which occurred in that year, the Duke seems also to have begun to set about the remodelling of the landscape, as changing fashion

dictated. In a brief ‘Explanation’ at the foot of the plan it states “...*This plan exhibits the situation of all the different Parks and Plantings &c. within the outside wall at Gordon Castle stood 1768 & 9. ... The Outside Boundary of the New Garden at Cotton Hill is Markt*”, to which is added “*Nota ; The whole is laid down by the same scale of squares of Mr. Robeson’s New Plan*”. Professor Alan Tait, in his account of *THE LANDSCAPE GARDEN IN SCOTLAND 1735-1835* (1980), suggests that this may refer to Robert Robinson, a pioneer in the business of landscaping in the style of Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown, who had formed a partnership with Edinburgh nurseryman William Boutcher in 1760. Robinson, who claimed to have acted as draughtsman to Brown, is known to have worked at other Scottish estates in the North East of Scotland, including *Monymusk* (c.1762), *Banff Castle* (c.1764), *Castle Grant* (1764) and *Cullen House* (c.1766). Sadly, ‘Mr. Robeson’s New Plan’ does not appear to have survived. We can assume, however, that if Tait is correct in equating Mr. Robeson with Robert Robinson, his design would have involved sweeping away the formal gardens around the house, to replace them with parkland, and removing the kitchen gardens to another part of the estate at some distance from the house.

- 3.8 Direct parallels can be found in the development of other estates of similar rank at this time. At *Blair Castle* (Perthshire) the walled garden, which used to lie next to the castle’s western front, was replaced by a new nine acre walled garden a quarter of a mile to the east of the castle during the 1750s ; at *Taymouth Castle* (Perthshire), the castle gardens were removed c.1750 from in front of the castle to a new site near Newhall, half a mile to the east ; at *Inveraray Castle* (Argyll) a new walled garden was built some distance away to the north east of the castle c.1755. At *Glamis Castle*, indecision about the location of the new garden meant that it was several decades before the new garden was built around a quarter of a mile from the castle, across the Glamis Burn. At Gordon Castle, as in other cases, the remodelling of the landscape was part of a country-wide process of enclosure and ‘improvement’, which involved the expansion of the policies, the diversion of roads, and the resettlement of local communities in new planned villages. Thus, at Gordon Castle, [Old] Fochabers, the site of which lies beneath today’s walled garden at Gordon Castle, was replaced by the new town of Fochabers, founded in 1776, a short distance to the south. At Inveraray, the old village close to the castle was done away with, and the new town of Inveraray built further away during the 1770s. At Taymouth Castle, it was the existing settlement of Kenmore, by a crossing point on the River Tay, which became the focus of new building on the edge of the enlarged park.
- 3.9 Although the ‘Explanation’ on the 1768 Gordon Castle plan speaks of the ‘New Garden’ at Cotton Hill, this probably refers to what is now known as the Quarry Garden, to the north east of the castle, which feature lies on the western flank of the hill. If there was a redevelopment and expansion of the kitchen gardens at this time, it seems more likely that this took place to the west of the existing castle gardens, on ground to the south of the western cross-avenue, between Smiths Park and Foaling Park, an area shaded grey and

stippled on the plan. If this garden was ever created, it may have been short-lived, as it occupies an area now crossed by the sweeping west drive leading from the main gate to the castle. What is clear from a comparison of this and later plans, is that the Fourth Duke's plans for the remodelling of the estate continued to evolve. It is also clear from papers in the Gordon Castle Muniments that he called on the services of Thomas White, another landscape designer in the style of Lancelot Brown, who was paid for a 'general design' and 'attending the improvements' on several occasions between 1786 and 1790 (GCMGD44/51-374/4/2-4). Although White's design plan has not survived, we can see the dramatic changes which occurred in the wake of his involvement in John J. Roy's PLAN OF GORDON CASTLE AND PARK, dated 1808 (NRS Ref. RHP 2383). In less than twenty years all trace of the formal gardens around the house had gone, leaving only a fragment of the southern avenue in an otherwise tree-studded park, crossed by sweeping carriage drives. On Roy's plan the 'new' (i.e. existing) walled garden is shown in its present location.

4. FORMATION OF THE NEW WALLED GARDEN ~ 1800 to 1820

- 4.1 Whether driven by practical or aesthetic considerations, it seems that the decision had been reached some time during the final decade of the 18th century to relocate the walled garden(s) from the lower ground immediately to the south and west of Gordon Castle to the slightly higher ground of the neighbouring terrace, on the site formerly occupied by the village of [Old] Fochabers. By this time [New] Fochabers was becoming well-established, further to the south. Evidence of the gardens conception may be found in an unfinished, undated and untitled plan (NRS Ref. RHP 2385) of part of the Gordon Castle policies, drawn by Thomas Milne, on which some features are marked in ink and coloured wash, and others are sketched in roughly in pencil. The plan appears to be more of a discussion document than a finished plan, and is not easy to interpret.

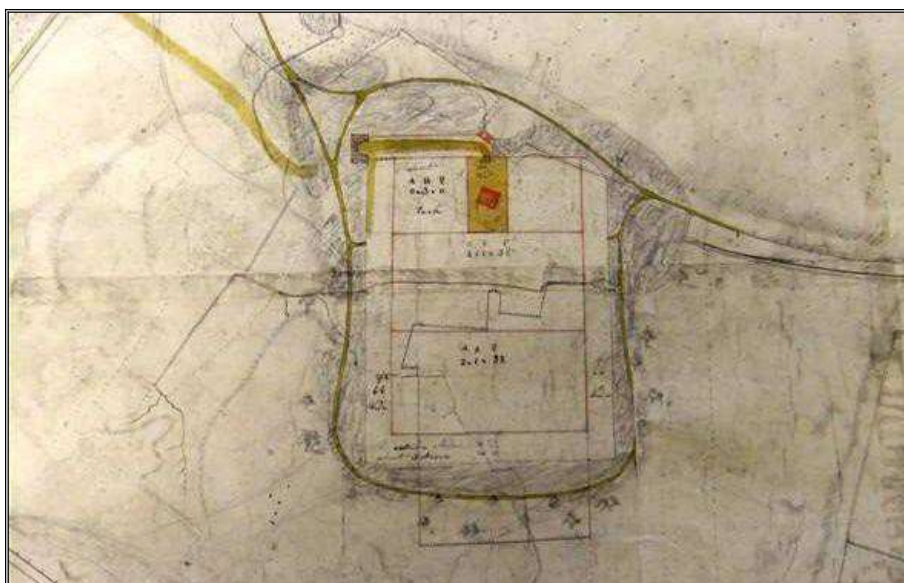


FIG. 5 ~ DETAIL FROM UNDATED PLAN BY THOMAS MILNE, SHOWING PROPOSED GARDEN AND OLD FOCHABERS C.1780 (NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND)

- 4.2 Faint dotted lines marked on Milne's plan in black ink would seem to indicate the position of pre-existing roads and tracks. Superimposed on this is the outline of a rectangular garden, drawn in red ink, and subdivided into three parts by internal walls running from east to west. Within the northernmost section, itself divided into three smaller parts, a house or similar building is marked in red. Embracing the whole on the east, west and south sides is a strip of ground noted as being 66 feet wide, delineated in black ink, and referred to on the plan as 'the outside slips'. The estimated acreage of the garden, which is marked in each section on the plan, amounts to around eight acres, close to the acreage of the present garden as calculated by the Ordnance Survey. Marked in ink and yellow wash are roads and paths surrounding the garden and linking to the main drive to the west. Of the other features marked on the plan in black ink, the most noteworthy is probably a ditch or rivulet seen to run across the projected garden from east to west from a small pool to the east of the garden, linking to other drains or rivulets to the west of the garden. Surrounding trees and planting are sketched in roughly in pencil. The absence of the Fish Pond and other features from this plan may help to date the plan. Although tentatively dated c.1775 in the National Records of Scotland's DESCRIPTIVE LIST OF PLANS IN THE SCOTTISH RECORD OFFICE (1970–Vol.2, p.106), it seems likely that the plan is of a later date. A thorough comparative analysis of features seen on this plan, with a view to establishing a more precise date, has not been possible in limited time available. Another small and unattributed watercolour SKETCH OF PART OF THE PARK OF GORDON CASTLE (NRS Ref. RHP 2386), which depicts both the new walled garden and the Fish Pond, is also tentatively dated c.1775. This date is surely incorrect, as the plan also marks Thomas Telford's Spey Bridge, which was only begun in 1801, and did not open until 1804.
- 4.3 Although there are occasional references to be found to the construction of new garden walls within the Gordon Castle policies prior to 1800, (e.g. NRS Ref. GD44/51/555/6 – dated 1789) these do not appear to refer to the present Walled Garden. There can be little doubt that almost all of the construction work on the present garden took place during 1803 and 1804. For example, vouchers dating from May, June and July 1803 refer to payments being made to "...S. Grieg for paring and smoothing a field for making bricks", to "...James Moggach carting sand and turf to the brickmakers", to "...Alexander Cormack for digging out the foundation of the south east side of the garden wall", to "...William Logie for building part of the stone foundation of the east wall of the garden" (NRS Ref. GD44/51/570/2-3). The following summer saw the work continuing, with payments made between May and August 1804, for example to "...Alexander Cormack for souring lime to the garden wall [and] riddling over the last year's lime that lay thro' the winter", to "...Peter Boyn for carting divots and sand to the brickfield", to "...Peter Boyn and Robert Shand for carting sand and water to the masons at the garden wall", and to "...William Logie for freight and expenses of a cargo of stones from Burghead for coping to the garden wall" (NRS Ref. GD44/51/572/2). The building of Lakeside House may have been more or less contemporary with the construction of the Walled Garden, as the same

bundle of papers records payment being made to a Mr Leitch “...for *plaistering the front of the room above the conservatory*” – see also an undated PLAN OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF VINERY’S, CONSERVATORY AND ADJOINING HOUSE (NRS Ref. RHP 2388). It is worth noting that brick was probably chosen for the building of the garden walls, in preference to natural stone, because of its ability to absorb solar heat, and radiate this to assist in the ripening of wall-fruit.

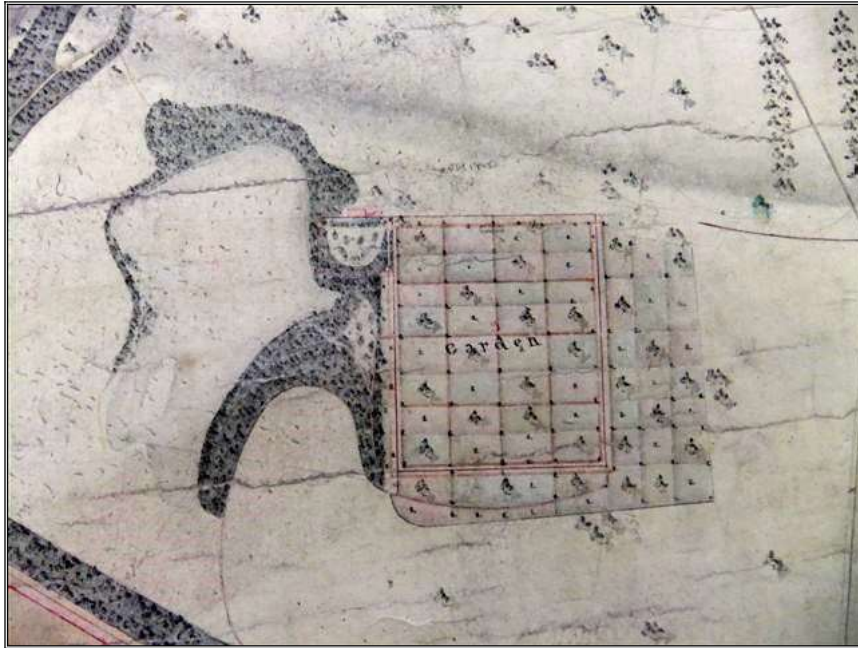


FIG. 6 ~ DETAIL FROM PLAN OF GORDON CASTLE AND PARK BY JOHN J. ROY 1808
(NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND)

- 4.4 It is John J. Roy’s plan of 1808 (NRS Ref. RHP 2383), noted earlier, which confirms that the new garden had been all but completed by that date. The main **Walled Garden** is shown as a rectangle, divided by paths into 16 sections or plots. Slip gardens are shown outwith the main garden wall to the east and south. **Lakeside House** and outbuildings, drawn in red, and the small walled garden are shown at the north-western corner of the main walled garden. The south side of Lakeside House, within the garden, is shown as fronted by a conservatory, with vineries on each side, and the small garden itself as planted with an informal but broadly symmetrical arrangement of shrubs or flower beds. On Roy’s plan the **Garden House**, at the centre of the north wall of the main garden is not shown, though a small structure has been marked in pencil within the garden wall. To the west, the Fish Pond is shown as partly surrounded by planting and shrubbery walks. To the north, the site of the formal gardens in front of the castle is marked as open parkland, planted with a scatter of trees.
- 4.5 As with the construction of the Walled Garden, it is the tradesmen’s vouchers which reveal that building of the **Garden House** took place in the summer of 1811. Between June and August of that year payment was made, for example, to “...*James Mogach for drawing stons for the Garners hous from the quarie of Breas*

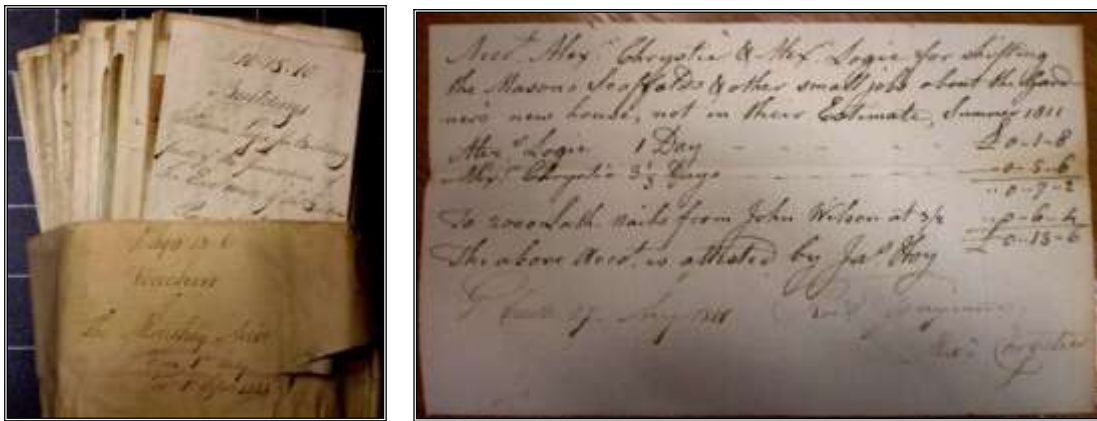


FIG. 7 & 8 ~ TRADESMEN'S VOUCHERS FOR GARDEN WALL (1803) & GARDEN HOUSE (1811) FROM GORDON CASTLE MUNIMENTS (NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND)

and the Waterside”, to “...Alex Chrystie and Alex Logie for shifting the mason’s scaffold and other small jobs about the gardner’s new house”, to “...John Bowie for sawing wood for ... sarking for the gardner’s house”, to “...Alexander Murdoch for carting slates from Torrymount to the gardner’s house”, and to Mr. Donald for “...lime shells for plaister to the gardner’s house” (NRS Ref. GD44/51/590). An intriguing footnote attached to Historic Scotland’s LISTED BUILDING REPORT for the Garden House (HB Number 1627) observes that “...The raised ‘eyebrows’ of the front roofline and the segmental-headed first floor windows are reminiscent of Sussex traditional building. This stylistic influence may have come from the Goodwood Estate, property of the Dukes of Richmond and Gordon”.

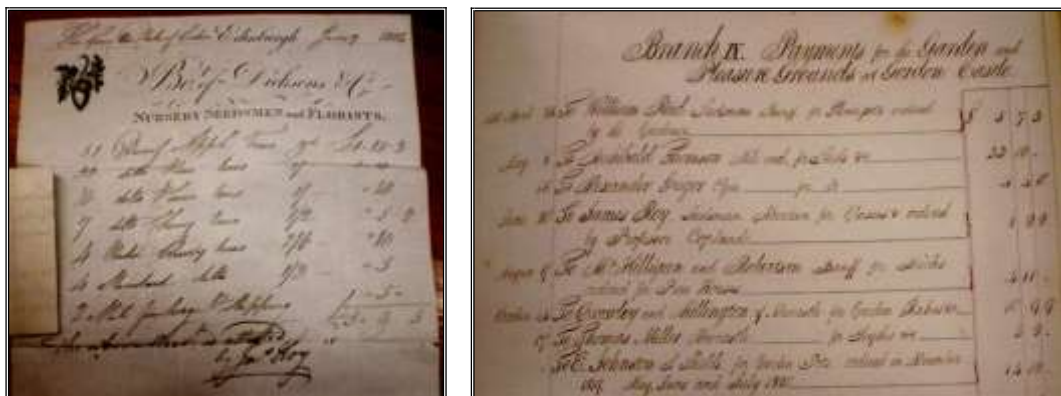


FIG. 9 & 10 ~ INVOICE FOR PLANTS FROM DICKSON & CO. EDINBURGH 1804, & EXTRACT FROM GORDON CASTLE ACCOUNTS 1820 (NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND)

- 4.6 Within the limited time available for this study, it has not been possible to study the various plant lists which are to be found amongst the Gordon Castle papers. Of particular interest in this regard are accounts for the garden and policies, including trees, seeds, flower pots and garden tools for the period 1800 to 1814 (NRS Ref. GD44/51/375/1-3). Fairly typical is an account from ARCHIBALD THOMSON, NURSERY AND SEEDSMAN of Mile End, near London, dated 28 January 1802, which lists apricots, nectarines, figs, plums, apples, pears, cherries and almonds. Other documents mention shrubs such as rhododendron, along with a huge variety of flowers and vegetables, too numerous to mention. Another account from DICKSON’S NURSERY, SEEDSMEN

AND FLORISTS of Edinburgh lists apple, pear, plum and cherry trees bought in January 1804. Nor did the Duke and his gardener confine themselves to a single supplier. Thus, ESTATE ACCOUNTS for 1820 (NRS Ref. GD44/52/200/6) record the purchase of flower pots from William Reid of Banff and E. Johnston of South Shields, of seeds from Archibald Thomson of Mile End and Alexander Grigor of Elgin, of garden tools from Crowley & Millington, Thomas Miller and William Hawks, all of Newcastle upon Tyne, of glass ‘...for the Pine Houses’ from John Smith of Aberdeen, and of lime shells from Andrew McPherson of Gibston. Taken together with numerous pay-lists for the gardeners and labourers (e.g. NRS Ref. GD44/51/570/2), these combine to give an impression of what must have been a busy and productive garden, overseen by the then Head Gardener John Mitchell.

5. THE GARDEN IN ITS HEYDAY ~ 1820-1938

- 5.1 Given the paucity of pictorial evidence from the 19th century, our best impression of the Walled Garden in its 19th century heyday is probably gained from two very similar and near-contemporary sources, namely a PLAN OF GORDON CASTLE POLICIES AND HOME FARM by George Gordon, dated 1860 (NRS Ref. RHP 2385), and the FIRST EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:2,500 map of 1870 (Banff Sheet VII-10). The first of these shows the ‘Kitchen Garden’, much



FIG. 11 ~ DETAIL FROM PLAN OF GORDON CASTLE POLICIES AND HOME FARM BY GEORGE GORDON, 1860
(NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND)

as on John Roy’s 1808 plan, to have been divided by an axial and cross axial path into four large plots, each of which was subdivided in turn into four plots by subsidiary cross-paths, creating sixteen plots in all, those to the north of the main cross-axis being slightly shorter in length from north to south, because of the lie of the land. The plot in the north eastern corner of the garden is shown as occupied by five glasshouses and an adjacent flower garden or nursery bed. At the western edge of the garden was a small square plot, just south of the main cross axial path, itself subdivided into four by cross-paths – perhaps a children’s garden or flower garden. A peripheral path led round the whole,

close to the encircling wall. The plan shows all the paths within the garden to have been planted with regularly-spaced fruit trees, most likely to have been apples, pears, plums and/or cherries, which may have been pleached (i.e. interwoven to create a continuous screen or hedge) or grown as espaliers (i.e. trained against a supporting framework). The plots are shown as cultivated, presumably for the production of soft fruit, vegetables or flowers. Each plot is divided in two by another line of trees. Although there is no indication of ornamental planting on this plan, it is probable that, as in other gardens of the period, the principal paths were edged with flower borders.

- 5.2 The **Lakeside House Garden** is shown to have been laid out with an axial path and peripheral path, and to have been planted with trees and/or shrubs at this time. An enclosed area to the east of the Walled Garden is marked on George Gordon's 1860 plan as **Cottage Garden**, implying perhaps that this was more ornamental than functional, an impression strengthened by the layout of lawns and paths. Outbuildings are marked to the north of the Cottage Garden, while to the south a path leads round the south eastern corner of the Walled Garden to another area, which is best described as the **Southern Slip Garden**. This was planted with trees, some trained against the south-facing wall, and seems to have included a small circular summer house or roofed structure near its southern edge, in line with the axial path in the Walled Garden. From the western end of the slip garden a continuation of the path gave access to the woodland and shrubbery walks around the **Fish Pond** or **Lake**, and to the avenue leading to the Episcopal Chapel in beside Castle Row, in the neighbouring village of Fochabers.
- 5.3 The **Garden House** is marked on George Gordon's plan as 'Mr. Websters', a reference to John Webster (1814-1890), long-serving head gardener to the Duke of Richmond at Gordon Castle during the second half of the 19th century. We can get a good impression of his career from a biographical notice published in the *GARDENERS' CHRONICLE* (New Series Vol. 3, Part 1, 1875). As so often



FIG. 12 ~ PORTRAIT OF HEAD GARDENER JOHN WEBSTER, FROM *GARDENERS' CHRONICLE*, 1875 (ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN EDINBURGH)

proves to be the case in the 19th century, John Webster was the son of a gardener, born in Blanerne, Berwickshire, from where he moved to Manderston with his father. Thereafter, successive posts took him via Dalquharran in Ayrshire, and Whittinghame in East Lothian, to Claremont in Surrey, where he served for a short time as foreman in the fruit department under fellow-Scot Charles McIntosh, author of a number of influential books such as *FLORA AND POMONA* (1829-31), *FLOWER GARDEN* (1838), *GREENHOUSE, HOTHOUSE AND STOVE* (1838), *ORCHARD* (1839) and *BOOK OF THE GARDEN* (1853). After several years spent at Eartham (Sussex), where he won medals for show orchids, Webster was appointed head gardener at Gordon Castle, where he remained until his death in 1890.

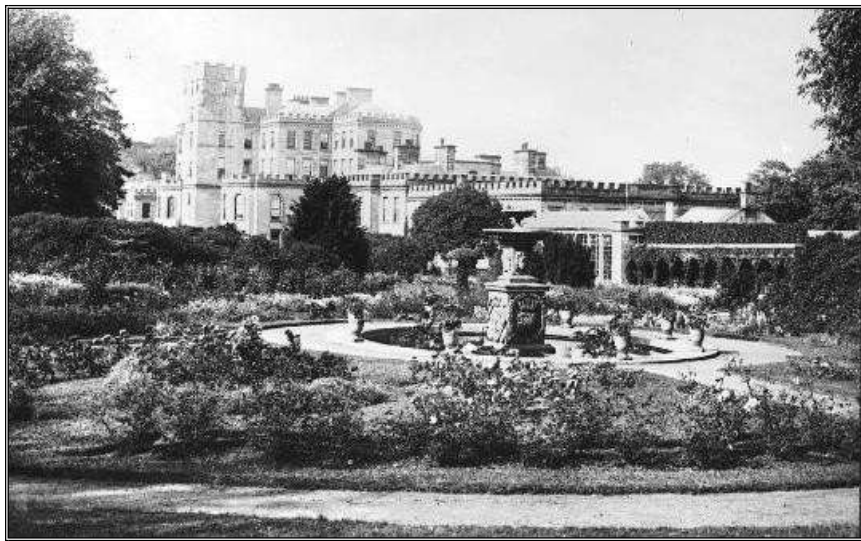


FIG. 13 ~ FORMAL GARDENS AT THE SOUTH SIDE OF GORDON CASTLE, PHOTOGRAPH BY G.W. WILSON C.1880
(UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN)

5.4 As well as taking over the management of the existing Walled Garden and policies, Webster was also responsible for the reinstatement of extensive formal gardens in front of Gordon Castle, in which task he was assisted by the well-known surveyor and prison architect Sir Joshua Jebb (1793-1863). Jebb is probably best known for his design of the equally grandiose landscape setting of Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum or Hospital in Berkshire. It has so far proved impossible to obtain a copy of John Webster's obituary from the *JOURNAL OF HORTICULTURE AND COTTAGE GARDENER* (Vol.20, 1890), which may contain additional information on his life and career. Incidentally, it is interesting to note from a petition recorded in *THE LONDON GAZETTE* that, on 12 May 1866, Webster applied for a patent "*...for the invention of a new method of hoeing, raking and rolling gravel walks, and in apparatus therefor*".

5.5 There is little change apparent between George Gordon's 1860 plan and the *FIRST EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:2,500* map (Banff Sheet VII-10) drawn up in 1870. That said, there is a distinction between the conventional signs employed on the Ordnance Survey map to represent trees – those in the Cottage Garden and Southern Slip Garden possibly meant to indicate fruit trees, in contrast to the mixed broadleaved and coniferous policy planting

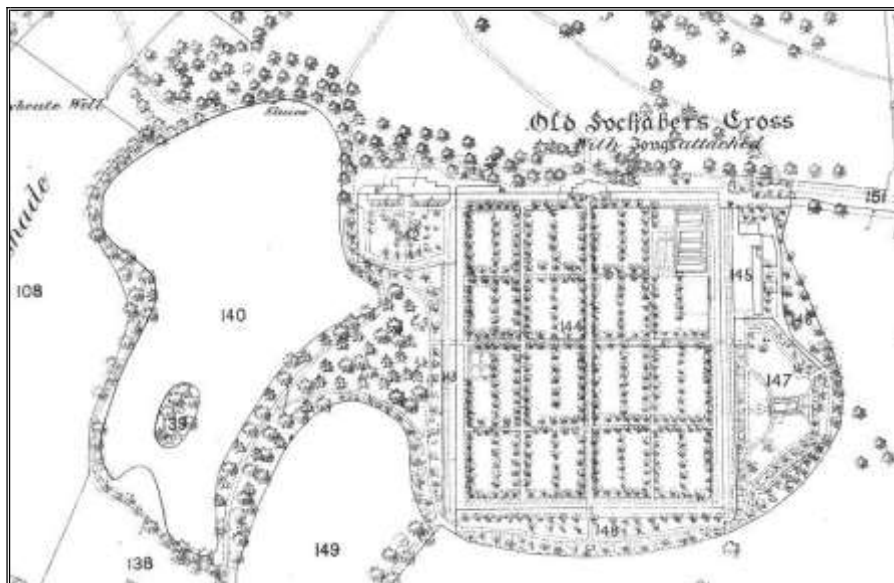


FIG. 14 ~ EXTRACT FROM FIRST EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP 1:2,500, 1870
(NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND)

surrounding the neighbouring Fish Pond or Lake. The SECOND EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY 1:2,500 map (Elginshire Sheet IV-5), drawn up in 1902, shows only minor changes. Eight glasshouses are shown in place of the five seen on the earlier map, with a ninth range set at right angles to these, running from north to south, on the footprint of the present Mackenzie and Moncur range, the date of which has yet to be determined. The small garden plot by the western wall is not shown. Although no internal planting is shown on the later map, this does not mean that the fruit trees within the garden had been removed. Rather this was the result of a decision taken by the Ordnance Survey in 1893 not to show the internal layout of walled gardens in such detail as in earlier editions (see *ORDNANCE SURVEY MAPS: A CONCISE GUIDE FOR HISTORIANS*, by Richard Oliver, 2005).

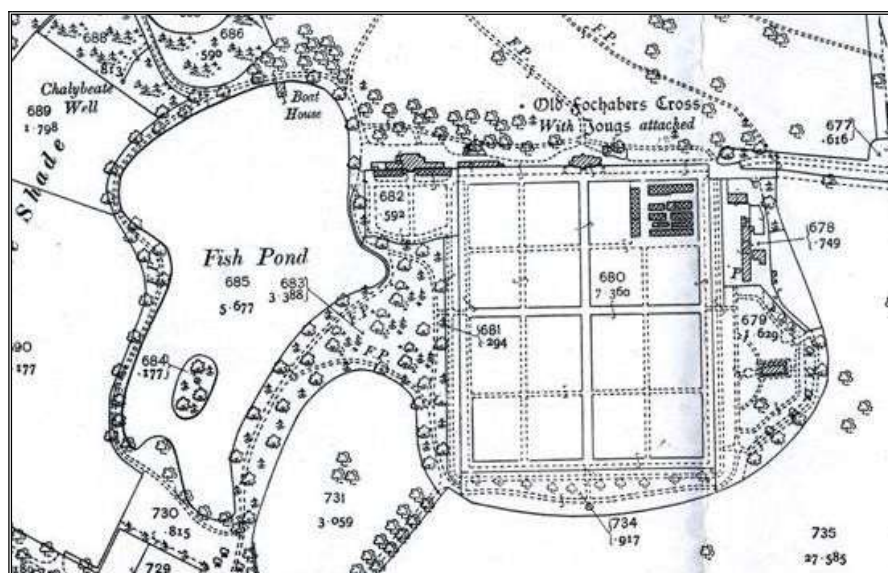


FIG. 15 ~ EXTRACT FROM SECOND EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP, 1:2,500, 1902
(NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND)

5.6 Almost exactly contemporary with the SECOND EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY of 1902 is a report headed 'Gordon Castle and its Gardens', published in the GARDENERS' MAGAZINE (22 August 1903), written by W. Kelly. Kelly refers to the gardens and grounds as "...a splendid tribute to the exquisite taste and skill of Mr. Charles Webster, head gardener", who seems to have inherited the post from his father. Although much of the report is concerned with the ornamental gardens and wider policies, a paragraph is concerned with the Walled Garden. In Kelly's words "...Proceeding to next to the extensive fruit and kitchen gardens, and vineries, a very profitable hour is spent in examining their well-cultivated quarters, and the excellent crops to be seen on all sides. These gardens have long been famous for the abundance and high quality of the fruits they produce ; and even in untoward seasons, when the majority of orchards and gardens display poor crops of fruit, Mr. Webster can show many varieties in abundance. The same fruitful feature may be observed in the vineries and other glass structures, which are all fully stored with the fruits, flowers and plants in demand in the ducal establishment. Everything presents the appearance of skilful and successful management, and gives much pleasure to all who have the good fortune to visit the gardens. Leaving the gardens, the walk winds past the ornamental ponds...". The report includes one of very few photographs of the interior of the Walled Garden known to exist, being a view

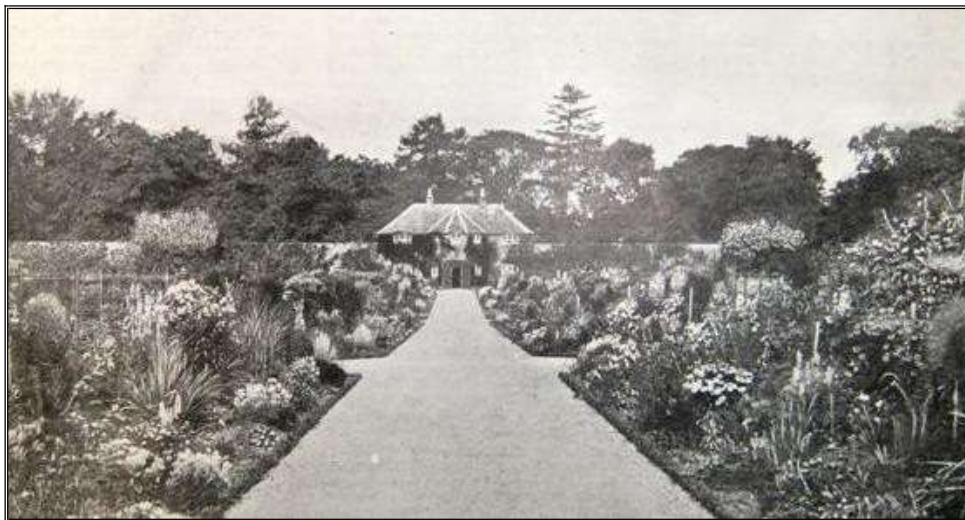


FIG. 16~ VIEW OF AXIAL WALK AND GARDEN HOUSE, FROM GARDENERS' MAGAZINE, 1903
(ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN EDINBURGH)

of part of the axial walk looking northwards to the Garden House. Taken from a point a short distance to the south of the first cross-path, this shows a broad, well kept gravel walk, flanked by broad borders, planted with a mix of herbaceous perennials such as phlox, asters, lupins and the like. Just visible on either side are the six foot high wooden posts supporting trelliswork against which fruit trees would have been trained. In the distance, against the north wall, on either side of the Garden House, are seen fan-trained fruit trees. Beyond the north wall of the garden, behind the Garden House, is seen a mature mixed woodland. A picture from a family album (GC Collection & Website) shows a near identical view of the garden in 1911. In both pictures the south front of the Garden House is seen to be covered with Virginia creeper or a similar climber.

- 5.7 The account of another visit to the garden is to be found in the ELGIN COURANT AND COURIER for Friday 31st October 1924 (MA Collection). Headed ‘Fruit Growing in Moray : Gordon Castle Orchards’, this describes a visit to the Gordon castle gardens by members of the Moray Field Club and Elgin Horticultural Society “...under the superintendence of Mr. Charles Webster, the head gardener ... Mr. Webster conducted the party over the orchards, and his description of the different kinds of fruit-trees were very much appreciated by the visitors, to whom his son, Mr. Webster junr. also was most courteous and obliging in imparting information”. This hints at a third generation of the Webster family working in the gardens. Among the visiting party were a Mr. J. Ames, named as a lecturer in horticulture at the College of Agriculture, and a Mr. H.H. Corner, named as College Organiser for Moray and Nairn, who described “...some recent experiments in the castle gardens, with the view of eradicating the disease known as gooseberry mildew”. In examining the fruit, the party was described as having passed “...masses of lovely roses, still blossoming profusely, and magnificent beds of antirrhinum ... [and] a magnificent display of sweet peas, still lingering in their glory”.
- 5.8 Noted amongst the fruit grown in orchards “...at the west side of the gardens”, apparently outside the garden walls, were several varieties of apples, including Warner’s King, Newton Wonder, Bramley’s Seedling, Lane’s Prince Albert, Bailey Neilson, along with “...two curious pear-shaped apples”, named as Golden Beurre and Worcester Permain. “In what is known as the kitchen garden, next entered, apple trees were to be observed trained on espaliers [including] Rivers Early Codlin, Lord Stradbroke, and Baron Wolseley ...”. The report also mentions soft fruit, notably gooseberries and redcurrants, and their experimental treatment with insecticides such as polysulphide of ammonia and lead arsenate, substances now considered as hazardous to health. As the article records “...Not the least interesting part of the afternoon’s visit was the inspection of what is known as the fruit room in the castle grounds. It is a thatched house which, surrounded by espaliers higher than the walls of the building, represents the last of the dwellings in what was old Fochabers ... In this little darkened building, used as a store room for fruit, there were laid out on the table a tempting display of figs, nectarines, peaches, greengages and lovely apples (all of uncommon size, some weighing a pound each) ... It is impossible to enumerate anything like the hundreds of sorts of apples that Mr. Webster has grafted, budded and reared with such fastidious care in espaliers, cordons and standards”. Several other apple varieties are named, along with a “...rich variety of pears to be seen in the gardens”. It is noteworthy that a number of metal tags, of varying style and date, are to be found attached to the garden walls, indicating the varieties of fruit being grown – for example ‘Buerré’ and ‘Conference’ (pears), Coe’s Golden [Drop] and [Précoce de] Bergthold (plums). Also noteworthy is what appears to be a specially constructed wooden viewing platform and steps, leading up to a concrete pillar set above the garden gate at the south end of the main axial walk in the Walled Garden. The derelict condition of this structure prevented closer investigation on the occasion of the author’s visit.

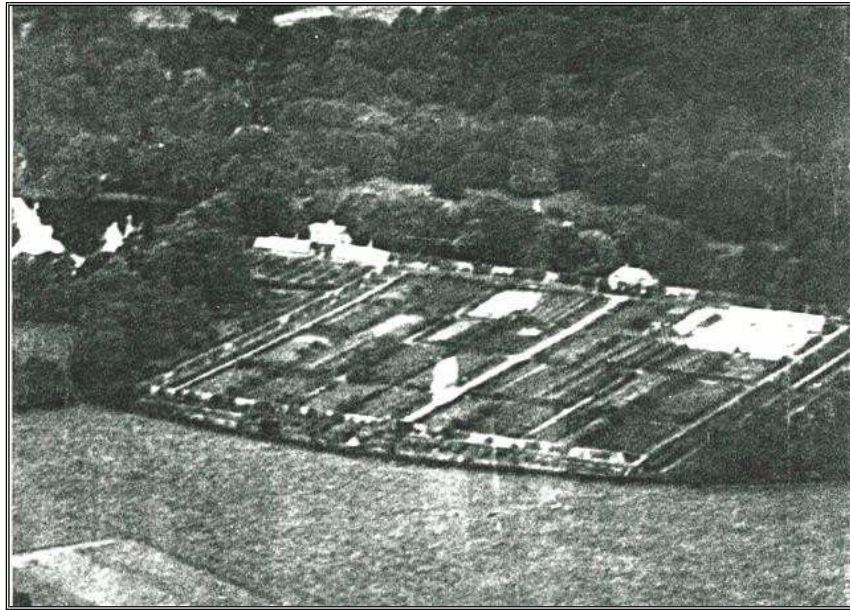


FIG. 17 ~ OBLIQUE AERIAL VIEW OF WALLED GARDEN AND LAKESIDE HOUSE BY ARGUS, 1928
(GORDON CASTLE COLLECTION)

5.9 Complementary to, and nearly contemporary with the aforementioned written account, is a very early OBLIQUE AERIAL VIEW of the garden which bears the notation ‘Argus A23P, Fochabers : 24.9.28’ (GC Collection), apparently taken from an altitude of around 600 feet, from a position to the south east of the garden, in September 1928. Though lacking in clarity, and somewhat foreshortened by the angle of viewing, it is possible to see that the Walled Garden was still well-maintained and in full cultivation at this time. Fan-trained fruit trees are visible on the garden walls. Although the **Cottage Garden** is not clearly seen, the **Southern Slip Garden** is seen to be planted with trees, and the **Lakeside House** garden laid out as an orchard, with several lines of fruit trees running from north to south. All of this was to change in the 1930s, with break-up of the Gordon Castle estate, and its sale by Frederick Gordon Lennox 9th Duke of Richmond, to the Crown Estate Commissioners in 1937, as a result of crippling death duties.

6.0 RECENT HISTORY OF THE WALLED GARDEN ~ 1938 to 2011

6.1 The house served as a hospital for a time during World War I. Not long after their sale to the Crown Estate Commissioners in 1937, the castle and part of the grounds were requisitioned by the War Department, and served as a barracks during World War II. An aerial photograph taken in May 1946 (RCAHMS-TARA Ref. SB00681-3182) shows the greater part of the garden still apparently cultivated, though with only remnants of the internal structure planting of fruit trees still apparent. The Cottage Garden and Lake House garden are seen to be planted with fruit trees, with another separate rectangular area of orchard planting in the Triangular Park to the north of the garden. The Southern Slip Garden appears to have been largely unplanted, save for a fringe of trees and shrubbery along its southern edge. A copy of *The MAGAZINE OF FOCHABERS*, published by Elgin Courant & Courier in 1948 (EL Local History

Collection – p.39) recorded the subsequent lease of the castle to Scottish Family Holiday Limited, a non-profit society formed under the Industrial and Provident Society legislation. In the same publication was an advertisement for Gordon Castle Market Garden, in the name of James G. Taylor. This offered “...*fruit, flowers and vegetables at their best ... flowers for all occasions ... shallot seeds and special stocks of soft fruit plants ... [and] table poultry*” (EL Local History Collection p.61).

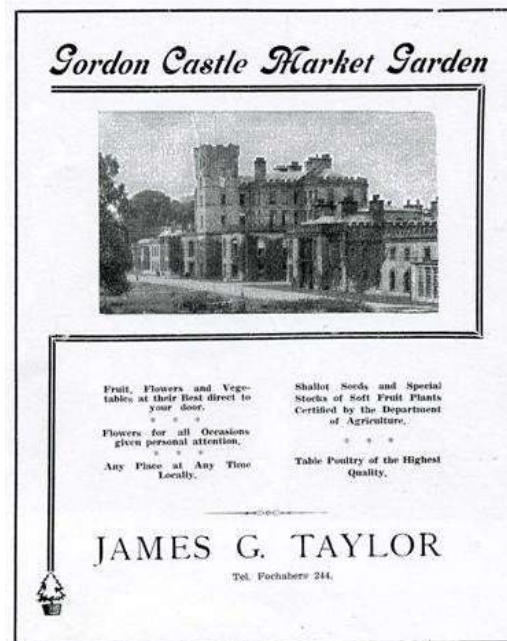


FIG. 18 ~ ADVERTISEMENT FOR GORDON CASTLE MARKET GARDEN IN *MAGAZINE OF FOCHABERS*, 1948 (ELGIN LIBRARY, LOCAL HISTORY COLLECTION)

- 6.2 It was in 1953 that General Sir George Gordon Lennox brought the core of the Gordon Castle estate back into family ownership, and set about rescuing and repairing the castle, and remodelling and simplifying the surrounding gardens. On an aerial photograph taken in April 1954, the following year (RCAHMS-TARA Ref. SB001975-0132), the Walled Garden is seen to be in cultivation, though with little or no sign of the internal structure planting. As in the earlier photograph, orchard trees are still visible in Lakeside House Garden and the Triangular Park, while the Cottage Garden is seen to have been replanted, possibly with soft fruit. The Southern Slip Garden appears unplanted, though still with its fringe of trees and shrubbery. At this date the ground between the castle and Walled Garden is seen to be well planted with a scatter of trees of mixed age, and mixed species. The ground to the west of the lake appears to have been intensively cultivated, perhaps as an extension to the Walled Garden.
- 6.3 Further changes are evident on another aerial photograph taken in May 1972 (RCAHMS-TARA Ref. SB004129-010), by which time the greater part of the Walled Garden, along with most of the Cottage Garden, and neighbouring fields to the south and west, are seen to be given over to commercial raspberry growing, with the narrow rows of canes clearly visible. Lakeside House

Garden appears empty or only recently planted with raspberries. The Southern Slip Garden appears to be maintained, though unplanted, and without its fringing trees and shrubbery to the south. Ground to the west of the lake would appear to have been devoted to raspberry growing at this time. To the north, the orchard ground in the Triangular Park appears neglected and overgrown. Outwith the Walled Garden and its immediate surroundings, the most noticeable changes seen are the removal of many of the trees from the ground between the castle and the Walled Garden, presumably to render the ground fit for cultivation, along with the underplanting of the woodland on the neighbouring bank with commercial conifer species. Yet another aerial photograph taken in early summer of 1986 (RCAHMS-TARA Ref. SB004284-020) shows further, albeit modest, changes. The Walled Garden, Lakeside House Garden and the greater part of the Cottage Garden are seen to be wholly devoted to raspberry growing at this time, along with parts of neighbouring fields to the south and east. The orchard ground in the Triangular Park is seen to have disappeared, while the new conifer planting on the neighbouring bank is becoming more apparent.



FIG. 19 & 20 ~ VERTICAL AERIAL VIEWS OF WALLED GARDEN FROM 1953 & 1972, SHOWING CHANGES IN SURROUNDING PLANTING. (ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE ANCIENT & HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF SCOTLAND)

- 6.4 The Gordon Castle gardens are recorded in Allan Little's book *SCOTLAND'S GARDENS* (p.192, 1981) as having been opened to the public for a number of years by General Sir George and Lady Gordon Lennox under Scotland's Gardens Scheme (SGS), for charitable purposes. The garden appears in the SGS Handbooks for 1982, 1984, 1987, 1989, the Scheme's Jubilee year of 1991, and again in 1993, though not thereafter. *AN INVENTORY OF GARDENS AND DESIGNED LANDSCAPES IN SCOTLAND* (Vol. 3, pp. 238-243, 1987) notes that when the garden was opened in 1984, it attracted some 600 visitors. An SGS POSTER advertising its opening on 10 September 1989 is amongst items in the archive at Gordon Castle (GC Collection). This describes the main attractions as "*...roses, shrubs and specimen trees*". Although the walled garden does not appear in the publicity for the garden opening, Little's brief description of Gordon Castle speaks of the "*...large walled market garden some distance from the house, containing several glasshouses, fruit trees, soft fruit, and acres of vegetables*".



FIG. 21 ~ ADVERTISEMENT FOR OPENING OF CASTLE GARDEN UNDER SCOTLAND'S GARDENS SCHEME, 1989
(GORDON CASTLE COLLECTION)

6.5 A photographic survey made by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in September 1996 includes photographs of the Walled Garden – for example, two external views taken at the north eastern entrance (RCAHMS Ref. D/02612, D/02613), one internal view taken looking north along the main axial path towards the Garden House (RCAHMS Ref. D/02620), and a fourth of the surviving Mackenzie & Moncur glasshouse range (RCAHMS Ref. D/02623). The garden is also clearly seen in several oblique aerial views of Gordon Castle and its policies taken in August 2006 (RCAHMS Ref. DP019276-019288). Also relevant to the present study is THE DEFINITIVE PLAN OF THE TOP FRUIT AT GORDON CASTLE WALLED GARDEN (GC Collection), being a list of the wall-trained fruit trees compiled by Colin Stirling in 2005. The surviving wall-trained fruit trees have been maintained, with many still productive.

7.0 SITE SIGNIFICANCE AND EXISTING DESIGNATIONS

7.1 **Gardens and Designed Landscapes** : The national significance of the Gordon Castle landscape, including the Walled Garden, was recognised through its inclusion in the *Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland* (1987) – Vol.3, pp. 238-243. In the ‘Assessment of Significance’ the landscape is judged to be of ‘**outstanding**’ interest as a ‘*work of art*’, for its ‘*historical*’ associations, and for its ‘*architectural*’ features ; to be of ‘**high**’ significance from a ‘*scenic*’ and ‘*nature conservation*’ standpoint ; and of ‘**some**’ significance from a ‘horticultural’ point of view.

7.2 **Listed Buildings** : The Walled Garden at Gordon Castle comprises several closely related features and structures which have been given Listed Building

status by Historic Scotland. Thus, the *Large Walled Garden* and *Small Walled Garden* (HB No. 1626), and the *Garden House* (HB No. 1627) were listed ‘Category B’ in 1971, together with *Lakeside House* (HB No. 1628). Also listed ‘Category C(S)’ at the same time was the nearby *Old Fochabers Market Cross* (HB No. 1629), located in the triangular park just to the north of garden. The listing of *Lakeside House* was upgraded to ‘Category A’ in 1988.



FIG. 22 ~ GORDON CASTLE WALLED GARDEN ~ OBLIQUE AERIAL VIEW 2006
(ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE ANCIENT & HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF SCOTLAND)

7.3 Other Information : There is currently permissive pedestrian access to much of the Gordon Castle policies, though not to the private gardens next to the castle. Although the Walled Garden was not advertised as part of the visit, Gordon Castle Gardens were opened by General Sir George and Lady Gordon Lennox for one day per year on several occasions between 1982 and 1993, under Scotland’s Gardens Scheme, in aid of Charity.



GORDON CASTLE WALLED GARDEN AND GARDEN HOUSE, NOVEMBER 2011
(CHRISTOPHER DINGWALL)

- 7.4 A ground-based photographic survey of buildings on the Gordon Castle, carried out by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland in 1996, included several views of the Walled Garden. An aerial survey of the estate, including the Walled Garden was carried out by the Royal Commission in 2006. Old Fochabers Cross is noted in Moray Council's Sites and Monuments Record (Numlink 16894).

CHRISTOPHER DINGWALL ~ GUIDELINES
WASHINGTON HOUSE, MAIN STREET, ARDLER,
BLAIRGOWRIE, PERTSHIRE, PH12 8SR

TELEPHONE 01828 640433
E-MAIL dingwall@guidelines.demon.co.uk

23 January 2011