

This section should be set out in chronological form and should include information on the way the site has developed and changed since it was first recorded, using dates and maps where possible. The names of owners, architects or designers involved, and relevant historical events should be recorded, and the sources noted.

The Stracathro Estate is located in Strathmore, an area of exceptionally productive agricultural land. It has enjoyed good road links with Aberdeen to the north and Dundee to the south since the 18th century and is also situated comparatively close to the port of Montrose. It has existed as an estate since at least 1566 when Sir Robert Lauder acquired the lands and township (terras et villam) which had been in the ownership of the cathedral at Brechin until the Reformation. The estate subsequently changed hands in 1647 and again in 1656 when it was acquired by the Turnbull family in whose possession it remained until 1764. The first indication of the existence of a house on the estate is on Robert Edward's map of Angus of 1678 where two houses are shown on the north bank of the Cruick Water close to the church.

Despite the existence of a building shown on estate land on Robert Edward's map, John Ochterlony of The Guynd, writing in c. 1682 says of 'Strickathroe' that "Turnbull hath a good estate in it", but he makes no mention of either a house, a garden or yards. Writing some sixty years later, William Seton, in his *Description of the Parish of Forfar* (1743), sited the 'House of Strickathrow' a 'large' half mile SSE from the church, suggesting that it was situated south of the Cruick Water. This is the location of buildings shown in Roy's Military Survey (c. 1745-1752) which contradicted Moll's siting of the house to the north of the Cruick Water (1745). Also shown on Roy is the first evidence of rectangular enclosure and plantings on a north-west/south-east axis running up the Hill of Stracathro and over the public road which passed just below the crest of the hill on the north side. The status of the approach to the house is not clear although there appears to be an avenue of sorts or a vista coming in from the west between two wooded enclosures and leading directly to the house. There is also a long, straight track, not linked with the house, which runs along the boundary of one enclosure and leads to a second on the north-west/south-east axis referred to above. These two enclosures have not been planted, suggesting that the fields are in the process of being taken out of run-rig and into either arable cultivation or grazing. In contrast, the largest, highest and most southerly enclosure which crossed the public road appears to have been densely planted out with trees. The boundaries of all the enclosures, which are contiguous, are marked in red, indicating stone dykes, fences or combined hedges and ditches planted with hedge trees. The two areas of plantings constitute the beginnings of a designed landscape, but not yet an integrated design incorporating the house.

John Ainslie's map of 1794 provides the first evidence of a unified designed landscape which includes both the house and its setting, a landscape possibly designed by Patrick Cruickshank who purchased the estate prior to the death of the previous owner, Dr John Mackenzie in 1775. Some ten rectangular enclosures bounded by shelter belts are shown surrounding the house. The house itself was approached directly by a long, straight, avenue, tree-lined on one side, which descended from the public road referred to above before crossing the recently constructed lower road which lay along approximately the same line as does the modern A90 constructed in the 1990s. Unusually, it turned to the right in front of the house, then ran along the east front before making a left and then a right 90° turn and continuing on to the church. The avenue shown by Ainslie is different in intent from that shown on Roy. It was part of the overall design for the house and its setting. It made statements about landownership, wealth

and power whilst providing a commanding view over the house and its setting to impress visitors. Looking back from the house, the semi-circle at the head of the avenue on the public road could have been cut out to provide a location for an ornamental object to take the eye of the observer up the hill from the immediate surroundings of the house, as suggested on the later 1862 OS map. The construction of straight entrance avenues as indicators of status began in Scotland in the Restoration period and they became the height of fashion. The first use of the word 'avenue' in English is credited to the much travelled John Evelyn in a diary entry of 1654¹. The extent of their proliferation is shown in Roy's Military Survey with some 60% of country seats shown to have such an approach². By the late eighteenth century, however, such avenues were seen by some as "vulgarly rectilinear, direct or abrupt"³ and not in keeping with the more informal style of the age. However, as is the case with Stracathro, they often remained in the landscape, although not always as the prestigious features they had once been. The Stracathro avenue is the one remaining identifiable feature of the landscape associated with the eighteenth century house, probably the second to be built on the estate and the immediate predecessor of the present house designed in 1827 by Archibald Simpson for Alexander Cruickshank and completed c. 1830⁴

The avenue does not line up with the nineteenth century house, indicating the selection of a new site to the north-west of the former house for the Alexander's neo-Palladian mansion, possibly in a bid to distance the house from the recently constructed lower public road. It is also likely that the choice of location was made to take advantage of the borrowed landscape offered by the view up Glen Esk which can be seen from the drawing room and was reflected in a mirror which used to hang over the fireplace⁵.

The setting for the house created by Alexander Cruickshank was essentially informal, consisting of what A.J. Warden calls "the fine existing gardens"⁶ in the immediate environs of the house to the north and west, a park to the south of the house and a deer park. An impression of the appearance of the former park can be obtained from the few remaining nineteenth century specimen trees and clumps which remain on the land now largely occupied by Stracathro Hospital. Later in the nineteenth century a number of sequoias were planted, as was the case in many Angus estates. Potential replacements were planted in the mid-twentieth century⁷.

For the most part it is not possible to comment in detail on the development of the gardens themselves since access for the survey was not granted. One exception to this is the 'naturalistic' but entirely man-made water garden consisting of a lily pond and a weir which is crossed by the road which remains a public right of way to the church. The cast iron three-arched neo-Tudor road bridge with mullioned spandrels and delicate balustrades was to an 1828 design by William Atkinson⁸. A delicate footbridge, also of cast iron, crosses the water feature a short distance above the road bridge. The 1832 plan of the estate does not include the lily ponds and bridges suggesting that they might have been a later addition using an earlier design, unless, of course, the survey preceded the printing of the plan by several years.

¹ Hewer, S. 'Searching for Evidence of the Scottish Baroque in William Roy's Military Landscape' in *Scottish Archives* 2010 Vol. 16, 23

² Hewer, 2010, 31

³ Loudon, J *A Treatise on Forming, Improving and managing Country Residences*, 1806, Vol. II, p 590-592

⁴ Gifford, J 2012 *The Buildings of Scotland: Dundee and Angus* 671

⁵ Personal Communication

⁶ Warden, A.J. 1885 *Angus or Forfarshire, The Land and People*, 169

⁷ Personal Communication

⁸ Buxbaum, T. 1989 *Scottish Garden Buildings*, 91 & 93

Also in view from the public road and the area around the walled garden is the network of paths in the present garden, probably dating from Alexander Cruickshank's time.

A short distance from the walled garden, between the garden and the lily pond, there is a stable block which Gifford dates to c.1830. Given the similarity between the roof of the belvedere and that of the doo'cot at the centre of the stable, it is very likely that they were designed and/or constructed at the same time, although not necessarily by 1830 if the 1832 plan was executed shortly after the survey was undertaken.

Attached to the south wall of the walled garden there are two wings said to have provided shelter for a large herbaceous border which used to run the length of the wall. Across the track which winds round the perimeter of the walled garden, there is some evidence of an orchard to supplement the fruits trees in the garden and, beyond them, two large copper beech trees which frame the view from the belvedere referred to above.

It is stated above that the avenue is the only remaining identifiable feature of the eighteenth century landscape. However, it is possible that the extant D-shaped walled garden sited west-north-west of the present house, but without the 19th century belvedere and central glasshouses, could have served the earlier house referred to by William Seton in 1743 and shown on John Ainslie's map of 1794. Eighteenth century estates had to be self-sufficient and could not have existed without the mean of growing fruit and vegetables, an undertaking requiring high walls to cope with the Scottish climate. No cartographic evidence of another walled garden exists however, and it has to be said that the present walled garden would have been at an unusually long distance from the assumed site of the earlier house in an area where there are quantities of dressed stone and the remains of cellars⁹.

As of September 2012, the walled garden is laid out as shown in the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map published in 1865. The central section of the curved wall supports a range of three glasshouses and above them, a belvedere. There are five gates, one of which is situated in the centre of the straight south wall. Interestingly, the belvedere and main glasshouses are not shown in the garden on the estate survey of 1832 although they are said by Gifford to be of c. 1830¹⁰. However, what is shown on the plan on the eastern side of the loop of the D is a curved iron-framed peach house of the kind popular at the end of the eighteenth century. This cartographic evidence suggests that the belvedere and central glasshouses were additions to an existing structure, possibly dating from the eighteenth century. The failure of the centre point of the main range of glasshouses to line up with the door in the centre of the south wall is also indicative of an addition to an existing garden and the problems of introducing a rectilinear structure into a curved wall. The presence of mature yew trees in the area of the walled garden also suggests cultivation of the area earlier than the nineteenth century. The question is whether the perimeter walls of the garden were built in the eighteenth or the nineteenth centuries. Ainslie provides no clues since he never includes walled gardens. Equally, no walled garden is shown on the estate plan of 17???. However, absence of such a feature on a plan concerned essentially with agricultural productivity is not unusual and does not prove that the garden was not in existence at the time.

Alexander Cruickshank's ownership of Stracathro lasted twenty years. His trustees sold the property to Sir James Campbell in 1848. Sir James was succeeded by his son, Sir James

⁹ Personal Communication

¹⁰ Gifford 2012 *The Buildings of Scotland: Dundee and Angus* 674

Archibald Campbell on his death in 1876¹¹. A.J. Warden is fulsome in his praise of the gardens as he found them in 1885, referring to the lawn in front of the house as “closely shaven, verdant, and of mossy softness”. He also comments on the young trees in the park which are thriving well, the choice flowers and plants in the gardens, the vineries, greenhouses etc and states that “Behind the house the contour of the ground admits of variety in the ornamentation, and it is turned to good account” – no doubt a reference to the mouth of Glen Esk¹².

Since 1914 the house and grounds have been occupied from time to time for medical purposes, the house serving as a military hospital in the 1914-1918 World War and then reverting to the Campbell family before being leased to the Department of Health in 1938. Andrew Graham Patrick, Charles Geddes Soutar, Maclaren Soutar Salmond and William Salmond were all involved in the layout of the hatted wartime hospital in the park in 1940. The house and 203 acres of gardens and parkland were finally sold to the government in 1949, the balance of the agricultural land remaining with the Campbell family. By 1977 the estate of Stracathro, as opposed to the NHS holdings, was owned by the laird of Careston Castle.¹³ In 1980 One hundred and seven acres of land was bought back into the estate from the NHS by Hugh Campbell-Adamson. Ordnance Survey maps from the 19th century through to the present suggest that few changes have been made from the nineteenth century layout. Whilst in the ownership of the Campbell-Bannerman family, it is said that fruit from the garden was sent to London daily by train from Montrose¹⁴.

The walled garden was sold privately in c. 1997 and is now maintained and limited restoration work is undertaken when possible. Planting is mixed and includes herbaceous borders, shrubs, soft fruit and vegetables with some wall fruits. Whilst the beds, paths and growing areas were neglected following their cultivation during the Second World War (1939-1945), the pear, fig and mimosa in the central section of the main glasshouse range have been there since the building of the glasshouses and are thriving, as is a peach tree. The mimosa is said to be associated with the Free Masons and used in floral arrangements in the house to signify the adherence of the family to the organization in the nineteenth century. In addition to the main glasshouse range there is another glasshouse alongside the north wall between the main range and the former peach house, possibly that shown on the 1922 Ordnance Survey map. Outside the garden and part of the additions which included the belvedere, known as the ladies’ sewing room¹⁵, there is the elegant stairway to the belvedere itself, a bothy for the gardeners and a line of single storey offices. There is also a pineapple pit, two further glasshouses and the sites of others now removed.

In 2003 the house and stable block were sold by the NHS and returned to private hands. Following the sale, significant quantities of leylandii were planted around the south-eastern, southern and south-western perimeter of the garden grounds belonging to the house backed up by lap fencing in order to maintain privacy.

¹¹ <http://gdl.cdlr.strath.ac.uk/mlemen/mlemen019.htm>

¹² Warden, A.J. 1885 p.172

¹³ Illsley, W.A. 1977, *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, (Vol. 26), The County of Angus, Arbroath, Herald Press, 240

¹⁴ Personal Communication.

¹⁵ Personal communication.

The Stracathro Hospital site is always open and it is possible to walk through to the walled garden from the most northerly of the hospital car parks to the walled garden which is normally open during working hours.