

City of Edinburgh Council

**Edinburgh**  
Survey of Gardens and Designed Landscapes

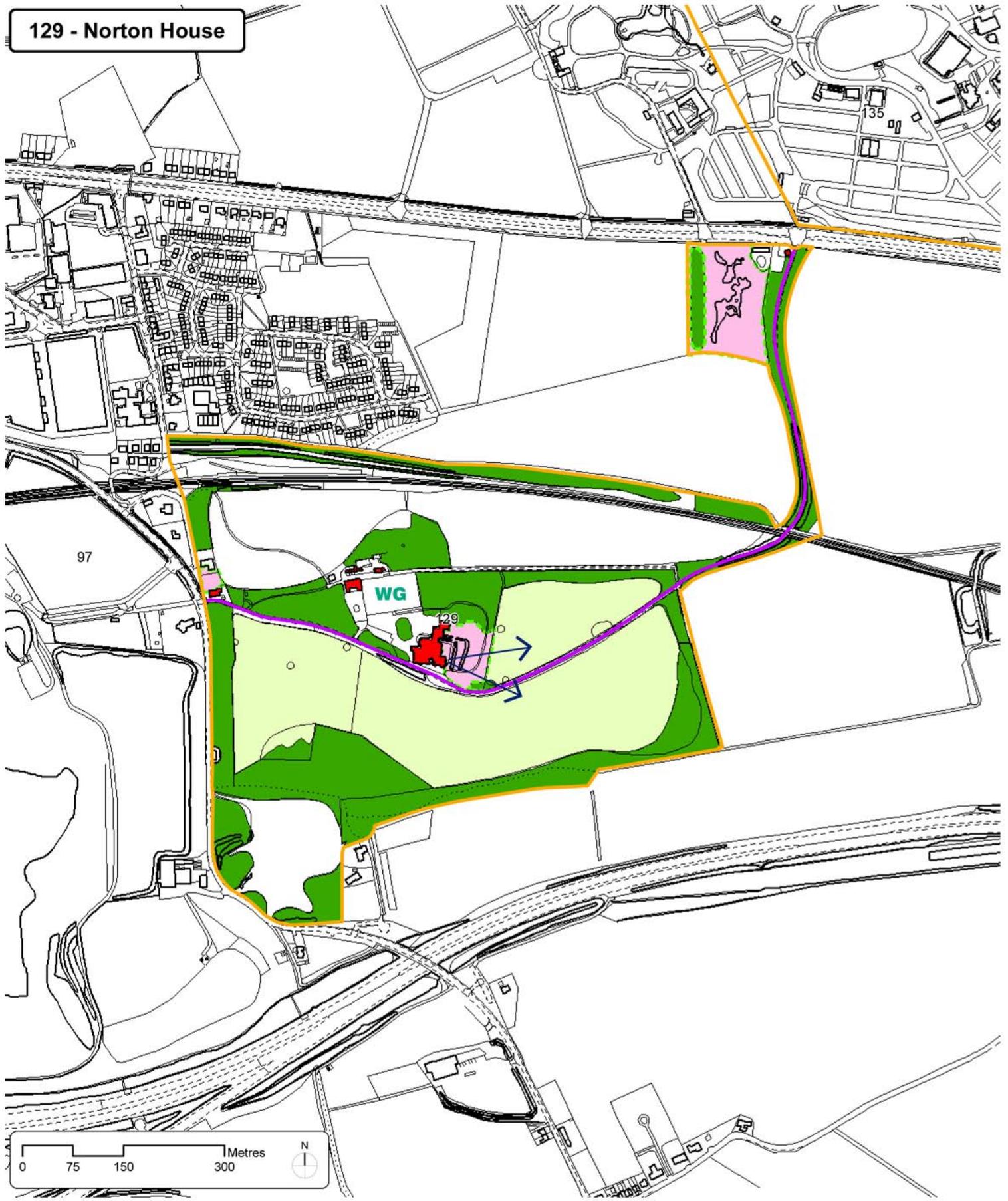
**129 Norton House**

**Consultants**

Peter McGowan Associates  
Landscape Architects and Heritage Management Consultants  
6 Duncan Street Edinburgh EH9 1SZ  
0131 662 1313 • pma@ednet.co.uk  
with Christopher Dingwall  
Research by Sonia Baker

This report by Peter McGowan  
Survey visit: June 2007

129 - Norton House



Key

- |  |                     |   |                          |
|--|---------------------|---|--------------------------|
|  | Site boundary       |  | Essential setting        |
|  | Ruined buildings    |  | Site of former house     |
|  | Principal buildings |  | Main drive               |
|  | Gardens             |  | Principal views or vista |
|  | Water               |  | Panoramic View           |
|  | Woodlands           |  | Walled Garden            |
|  | Parkland            |   |                          |

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**SURVEY OF GARDENS AND  
DESIGNED LANDSCAPES**

Peter McGowan  
Associates with  
Christopher Dingwall

## 129 Norton House

Parish Ratho, later Edinburgh

NGR NT 136 719

NMRS No: NT17SW 53

Owners Private/Commercial

### Designations

Listing Norton House, B  
North Lodge, gate piers and policy walls C (S)  
Railway bridge B  
Walled Garden B  
Former stables, now The Norton Tavern B  
Former West Lodge, now Demijohn Cottage with boundary wall  
and gate piers C (S)

Green Belt

Tree Preservation Order

Heritage Trees

### REASONS FOR INCLUSION

A compact estate designed landscape with most of the traditional features focused on a mid 19th century house, that survives with its principal built and planted features, although with recent built additions to the Norton House Hotel facilities.

### LOCATION, SETTING AND EXTENT

Located to the west of the city and south of the A8 Glasgow Road opposite Edinburgh Airport and Ingliston (135) and south of the Glasgow-Edinburgh railway; main access from a drive leading off the A8, also from Baird Road on the west. Norton lies on gently sloping ground with a north aspect rising to a minor ridge along the south boundary. Site area 44.5ha.

### MAIN PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

Early and mid 19th century (parts of the landscape appear to pre-date the house).

### HISTORY OF LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT

Norton dates back to the 13th century with the earliest date mentioned being 1290 (Harris 471). Allan de Lauder bought Norton in 1377, together with other lands in Ratho parish, including Hatton. It is probable that it was sold in 1797 (Hannan 100) when the large estate of Hatton was sold to Sir James Gibson-Craig of Riccarton, who divided it up into six properties, which were then sold again (Small). Certainly the house of *Nortoun* comes and goes on maps from 1682 onwards, variously appearing as a place of some grandeur and as ruinous (Sharp et al 1828). In 1810, John Deas Thomson (also named as proprietor of Gogar Mount in 1816) owned land at Norton (NAS RHP 83635) but the estate of Norton belonged to the Hon Baron Norton in 1813 (NAS RHP 9621).

The new house was described as 'now finished' in the New Statistical Account, so was probably built around 1838-40. It was 'the property of Alexander Berwick Esq (NSA 92). The architect is unknown, although it is cautiously described as 'in the style of David Bryce' by Historic Scotland and as 'a two-storey mansion of honey-coloured sandstone'.



Ordnance Survey 6" map  
1850s

Alexander Berwick was the occupant until at least 1857; possibly the owner of Alexander Berwick & Co. Brewers that owned a brewery in Gentle's Close, Holyrood, between 1822 and 1858 (Scottish Brewing Archive), when the company was beset by financial problems. That would partly explain why Norton was rented out to M Holmes *farmer* in 1862, and George Watson *farmer* in 1868 (County Directory).

In the 1890s, Norton's occupant was Sir John Usher of Norton and Wells, JP for Midlothian, a member of the brewing family. He and his wife Mary instigated a 'transformation...[that was] eclectic' (McWilliam 369), favouring Jacobean and Classical styles (HS). After Sir John's death in 1904, his son Sir Robert Usher owned Norton, at least until 1925.

Norton House had become a hotel by 1975 (Tweedie & Jones 80), with the accompanying modern touches (HS) including a conservatory. Norton has retained the buildings typically associated with a small county estate: including stables, walled garden, kennels, keeper's cottage, and lodges and gates

In 2000 there was an application for the development of an outdoor driving range, pitch and putt course and health centre (99/2901/OUT); not implemented. In 2002 there was an application for a 36-bedroom extension to the hotel with leisure and conference facilities in the walled garden (02/03342/FUL) by Fletcher Joseph on behalf of Hand Picked Hotels. This development was under construction at the time of survey in 2007.

### Maps and Graphic Evidence

*Norton* appears on Adair's manuscript and engraved maps (1682, 1735) as a house with a tower among trees; Roy (c1750) shows the name only. In 1828 Sharp et al's map shows a semblance of the existing landscape structure with a house as ruins. The 1st edition OS 6" map of 1852-53 shows the new Norton House with garden ground on the east set in a rectangular parkland landscape with boundary tree belts of varying width served by a bent main drive running east-west. The main Edinburgh-Glasgow railway runs close by to the north, with the north or east drive approaching from a north lodge on the Glasgow Road via a bridge under the railway; another lodge lies at the west end of the drive, close to Ratho Station. North-west of the house is a walled garden with a *Hot House* and a stables block on its west. The parkland on the south and east is stocked with individual trees or small clumps of trees.

*Norton House and south  
frontage*



## COMPONENTS OF THE DESIGNED LANDSCAPE

### Architectural Features

#### Mansion House

A two-storey asymmetrical gabled house with Tudor-Jacobean details to a rambling plan, said by Historic Scotland to be in the style of David Bryce and dated c1838 with additions and remodelling for the Ushers in the late 1890s including elaborate Renaissance porch. Now Norton House Hotel.

#### Stables

Single range of one-and-a-half storeys with short projecting arms with contrasting window surrounds and quoins etc, located on west side of walled garden. Possibly dates from 1843 and first converted to a restaurant (by 1992?) – The Norton Tavern; now a Conference Centre. Historic Scotland commented that the original conversion ‘... allowed the original grouping and purpose of the stables to remain apparent.’



*Stables block, conference  
centre*

#### Lodges

**North Lodge** L-plan single storey lodge, thought to be earlier than the house, but also in the style of David Bryce. Low quadrant walls to a curving plan and piers with ornate moulded caps form the entrance; pedestrian gate pier removed and laying nearby in shrubbery; no iron railings or gates; obtrusive signs.



*North gates*

**West Lodge** L-plan single storey lodge in red sandstone, again in ‘the style of David Bryce’; now called *Demijohn Cottage*. New rubble wall beside drive and to allow for sightlines at junction. Continues as red sandstone boundary wall with semi-circular coping.

#### Walled Garden

NAS RHP 9621 1813 *Plan of the Estate of Norton ... belonging to the Hon Baron Norton* has a *New Garden* located in the position of the present walled garden. Other sources date the walled garden to c1840. It measures approx. 500 x 800m, lies to the north-west of the house, is attached to the former stables, and has a door in each of its walls. Construction of leisure and conference facilities in the walled garden was in progress at the time of survey; the proposals show a proportion of the area retained as garden or lawns.



*Walled garden under  
development, June 2007*

#### Other Buildings: Kennels, Keeper's Cottage, bothies

The Kennels (NT 1350 7204), Keeper's Cottage (NT1354 7204) and bothies lie on the north of the stables and are not listed. The Kennels are neglected, still roofed but collapsing at the east end. Keeper's cottage forms the rear of the stables and is a one-and-a-half storey building, harled and white-painted, with two original and one flat-roofed modern dormers; apparently in residential use.



*South park seen from North drive with parkland trees and south boundary tree belt*

### Bridge

The single span Tudor Gothic railway bridge dates from c1842 when the Edinburgh and Glasgow railway opened. The original spanning structure has been replaced by reinforced concrete beams supporting the track. The original stone facing, buttressing etc is falling away on the south-east, supported by timber shoring; cast-iron details including a four-centred arch girder and sections of ornamental balustrade. A flight of stone steps on the north-east leads to a path at track level.



*Railway bridge, North drive*

### Drives and Paths

#### North Drive

The long approach from the Glasgow Road under the railway and into the park proper is lined with trees and shrubbery; blacktop surface in good condition.

#### West Drive

Short drive between the house and West lodge runs between the main park and ornamental woodland; blacktop surface in good condition.

### Gardens and Policy Planting

#### Gardens

A small garden area lies on the east side of house with grass terraces on three levels and red whinstone chipping paths with perimeter planting of individual trees and shrubs, allowing views to the parkland and Arthur's Seat. The terraces continue around the north side of house and give way to lawns enclosed by shrubbery dominated by *Rhododendron ponticum* with a small conifer collection including four Wellingtonias, four deodars, one oriental spruce, cypresses and yews.

*Shrubbery and tree group in garden north of house*

A garden of some interest lies on the west side of North lodge enclosed by massive landform on west and south formed with boulders and a water garden with edges and shoreline made with more boulders and smaller stones, planted with ornamental conifers and broadleaved trees, shrubs and aquatic species.

#### Parkland

The small parkland area east of the house and the main area south of the drive have sparsely scattered mature, declining or dead trees including a purple beech, elm (dead), horse chestnuts, lime, oak, sycamore and a Corstorphine sycamore (yellow form); a few limes along the north side of the drive; no restocking; old iron tree-guards are embedded into some tree trunks. Main park grazed by cattle; north park ungrazed. Bits of iron estate fencing and cast-iron gateposts remain with added timber post and wire; all in poor condition.



*North drive, planting*



### **Tree Belts and Woodlands**

#### **North Drive planting**

Planted very consistent with a mix of mature beech, horse chestnut, lime and Turkey oak with mainly evergreen smaller trees and shrubbery including box, hawthorn, holly, laurels and yew.

#### **West tree belt and shrubbery**

Planted with beech, lime, oak, sycamore and yew, with laurels, holly and rhododendron; unmanaged with dead and fallen trees, tall leggy yews etc.

#### **North-east tree belt**

Runs along the north side of North park: beech, elm, lime, oak and sweet chestnut, sycamore (large) and yew, mixed age with regeneration of most species, plus holly native privet and rhododendron.

#### **South boundary tree belt**

On a slight ridge; comprises mixed broadleaves with conifer infill restocking.

### **Views and Vistas**

View east to Arthur's Seat possible from garden terrace and house; otherwise quite secluded given its location, screened by boundary and rail-side belts

### **Visual Intrusions**

New build development in the walled garden is an obvious intrusion but may also be seen as a way of limiting the impact of these new buildings; the degree of intrusion of the new residential block will need to be judged after completion although it is well grouped in relation to other buildings.

### **Area of Influence**

A long northern park between the north drive and Ratho station appears to have formerly been part of the estate landscape (together with other fields further north) but was divided in two by the railway in the 1840s. Earlier 19th century maps suggest that the structure of the landscape was already present before the c1838 house, although within a few years the railway effectively limited the designed landscape to its south side, as we see it today.

### **PUBLIC ACCESS**

The gardens and woods are accessible to residents and other guests although little is done to encourage the use of belts in terms of signs, surfacing etc; a mown path leads through the long grass of North Park. The level of public use is not known.

## FUTURE MANAGEMENT POTENTIAL

Hotel use provides a long term future for the house and landscape although pressure for expansion and additional uses is a concern. Parkland restocking and woodland management within the context of an overall conservation management plan is required. Greater use could be made of the grounds by residents and the public with some planning. It would be unfortunate if the neglected estate buildings are not restored and put to positive use during the current programme of new building. The present additions are grouped within the area of the older buildings and future development pressure affecting the wider grounds and more open areas should be resisted. The viability of grazing in the longer term, as the surrounding area becomes more developed, may be an issue.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Overall

A good example of a modest and compact designed landscape providing the setting of a B listed house that retains most of its features in some form and contributes to the local scenery through its boundary tree belts.

### Work of Art

Some

### Historical

Some

### Horticultural / Arboricultural / Sylvicultural

Little

### Architectural

High

### Scenic

High

### Nature Conservation

Some

### Archaeological

Little

### Recreational

Some

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## Sources – Primary

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Adair/Cooper *A map of Midlothian* – Counties of Scotland printed version -1735 NLS

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Sharp, Greenwood and Fowler *Map of the County of Edinburgh* 1828 NLS

Knox, *Map of the Shire of Edinburgh*, 1816 NLS

Thomson, *John Thomson's Atlas of Scotland*, 1832 NLS

First edition Ordnance Survey (1852) Sheet 5 NLS

Ordnance Survey *Parish map* (1898-1904) NLS

Ordnance Survey (1915) Sheets II SE, II SW and parts of sheets VI and X  
Linlithgowshire NLS – paper copies

NLS National Library of Scotland [www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)

RMS Reg Mag Sig Register of the Great Seal of Scotland, Edinburgh

NMRS National Monuments Record of Scotland

SCRAN Scottish Cultural Resource Access Network [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk)

Plans at National Archives of Scotland (NAS), Register House Plans (RHP)

RHP 83635 1810 Plan of the lands of Norton property of John Deas Thomson

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### Additional sources not consulted

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NAS RHP81141 1925 Plan of Glasgow-Edinburgh road... between East Ingliston Cottages and Gogar Stone showing ground required from Sir Robert Usher bt.

NAS RHP 9621 1813 Plan of the Estate of Norton ... belonging to the Hon Baron Norton. Shows landscape much as it was in the later OS maps; has a 'new garden' located about where and of the size of the walled garden. Seen but no copy obtained.

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