

Mavisbank Estate

Loanhead, Midlothian

Visual Topographical Assessment

Introduction

Addyman Archaeology were commissioned by the Mavisbank Trust to complete a visual assessment and walkover survey of a localised area of the Mavisbank House policies, on the eastern side of the walled garden. The assessment was designed to feed into a wider proposal to install a path network around the estate, linking up and formalising existing path routes and providing access to the house itself.

The route of the proposed path network (*Figure 1*) was established by the Mavisbank Trust (contact Lesley Kerr) in conjunction with the Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust (ELGT contact Charlie Cumming).

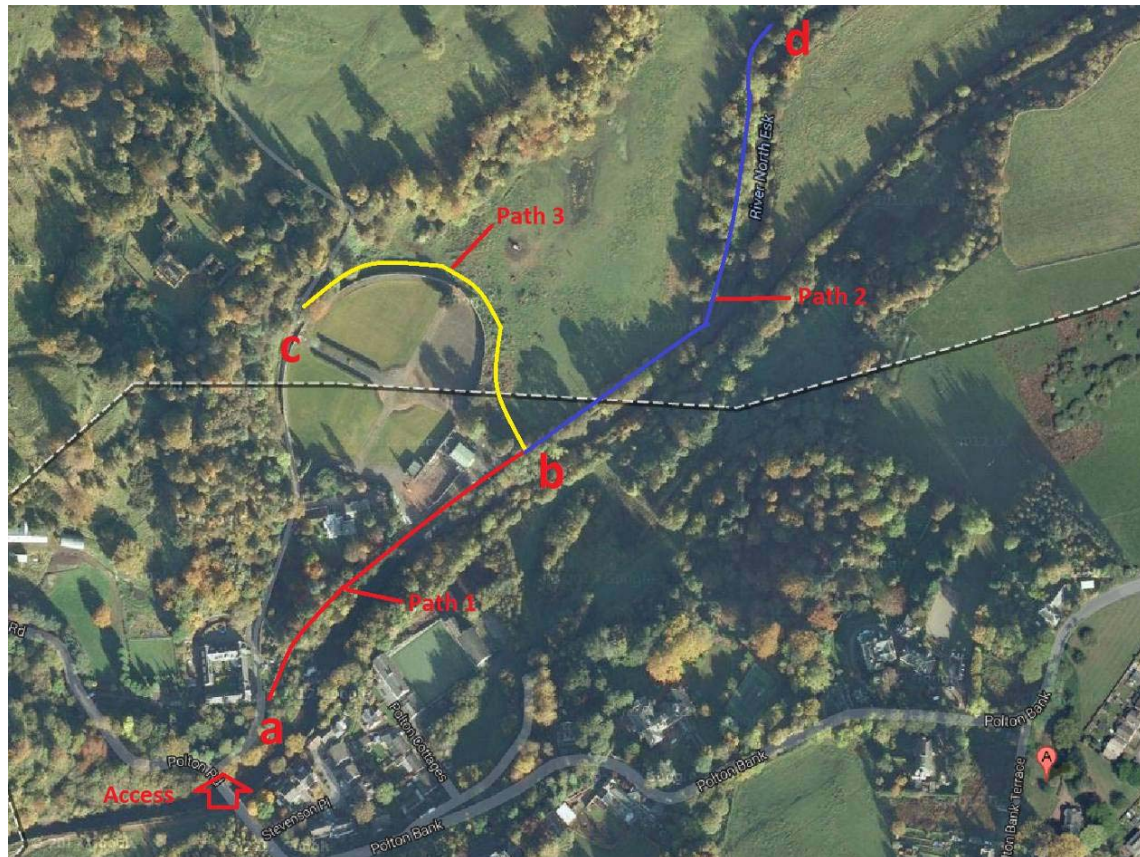


Figure 1 Indicative routes of proposed path networks (Edinburgh and Lothians Greenspace Trust after www.google.co.uk)

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Historical Assessment

For a detailed historical assessment of Mavisbank House and Estate the reader is referred to the *Mavisbank Conservation Plan: Landscape Report, February 2005* by Mark Turnbull Landscape Architect and *Mavisbank House and Policies: Conservation Plan, January 2005* by Simpson & Brown Architects. The following brief synopsis will focus upon how an understanding of the historic development of Mavisbank Estate may affect the placement of the route of the proposed path network.

Mavisbank House was constructed between 1723 and 1727 by Sir John Clerk Maxwell in conjunction with the architect William Adam. The House was placed within a carefully constructed designed landscape, of which the walled garden upon the floor plain below and to the S of the main house was an integral part – completed in 1724.

William Roy's *Great Map* of c.1750 is the first clear depiction of the house set within the designed landscape. This map shows the walled garden as perfectly circular and not the sub-oval shape it appears today. Previous assessment of the walled garden by Tom Addyman as part of the 2005 conservation plan (see gazetteer) concluded that the original walled garden circuit had actually been oval on plan, this confirmed by the surviving sections of the original circuit on the north side of its principal cross-axis. It was suggested that the garden was designed to appear circular when viewed from the principal apartment of Mavisbank House, and had been assumed as such by Roy.¹ The area immediately to the north east of the Walled Garden, where Path Three is proposed, is shown as heavily wooded on Roy's map.

The first accurate depiction of the estate is the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1852. Unfortunately the 25 inch to 1 mile OS series did not cover the area of Mavisbank, but the 6 inch to 1 mile version shows the land north east of the Walled Garden to have been cleared of trees and also shows that the course of the River Esk had been considerably straightened by this stage. Evidently in response to the river works the perimeter wall bounding the south side of the walled garden was realigned further north and its curvature somewhat 'flattened'. This work is also clearly evident on site, where the walling of the southern parts of the garden is clearly of a different build. This realigned wall is the one that currently borders the route of Path One and Path Two. No major subsequent modifications to this area of the Mavisbank policies seem to have taken place, other than the placement of a footbridge over the river by the publication of the 1894 OS 6 inch to 1 mile.

A plan of Mavisbank produced in 1877 shows a small building attached to the rear of the Walled Garden. By the production of the 1892 OS map (*Figure 1*), a cricket pavilion has replaced this structure and the area to the north east of the Walled Garden has become a 'cricket ground'. Small ancillary structures have also appeared north of the pavilion.

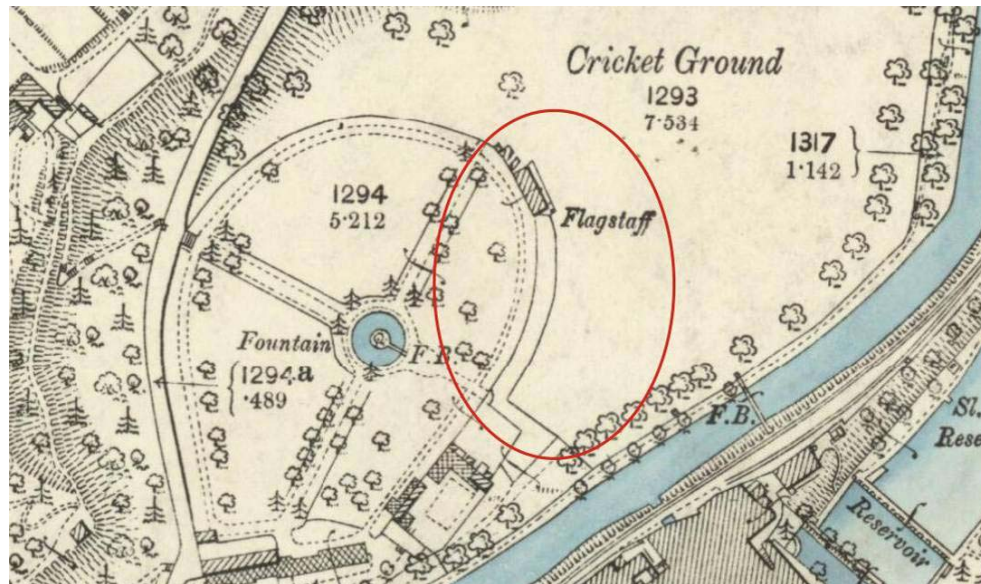


Figure 2 Extract from OS 25 inch to 1 mile Edinburgh 008.09, Surveyed 1892-93, Published 1895. This is the first map to show the cricket pavilion with associated smaller ancillary structures to the N (indicated red) (NLS)

By the latter half of the 20th century the cricket pavilion has been demolished and in the 1980s a stable block has been constructed (Figure 3). This appears to have been built to the south of the site of the cricket pavilion, the placement of which may be indicated in the image below by a large rectangle of grey concrete.

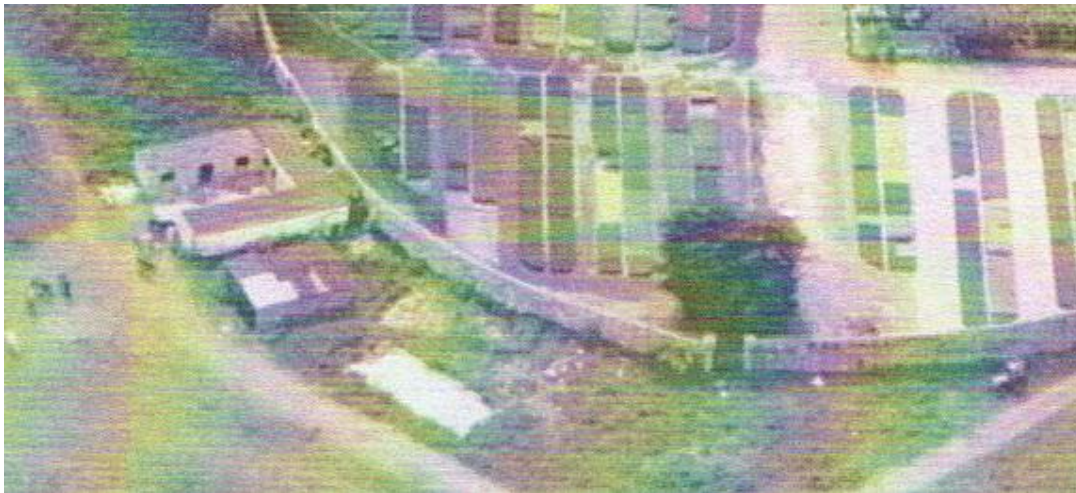


Figure 3 Detail of aerial (c.1980s) looking south west showing stables and ancillary buildings on the east side of the Walled Garden. Note these are not attached to the boundary wall and the existence of the concrete 'plinth' to the right of the structures (Ian Parsons Architect as provided by Lesley Kerr)

Visual Assessment

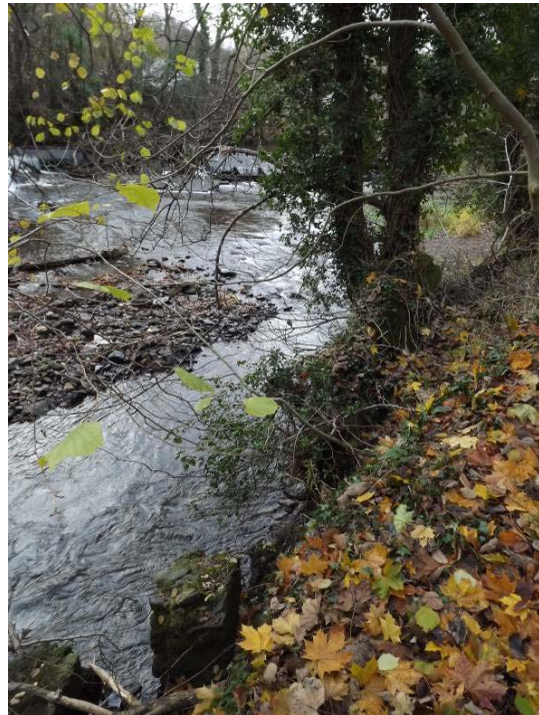
Path One (Figure 1)

Access to the site is provided from Polton Road and follows an established path along the western bank of the River North Esk. The route of this pathway follows the line of the River and forms a narrow strip of land bordered to the west by a substantial masonry wall which stands over head height.

No archaeological features were noted along the length of Path One, although areas of bonded masonry collapsed (*Plate 2*) into the North Esk indicated the possible earlier presence of revetting walls in this area damaged due to erosion.



*Plate 1 Looking SW along the route of path one
(Addyman Archaeology)*



*Plate 2 Collapsed masonry along the route of path one
(Addyman Archaeology)*

Path 2 (Figure 1)

The proposed route of Path 2 continues north east and then northwards along the route of the River North Esk. Unlike Path One, Path Two is bordered to the west by modern fencing, or degraded masonry walls, with much more space available. The pathway remains well used and in areas the surface of the path is built up and revetted by the presence of masonry walling (*Plate 4*).

The remains of the footbridge noted on the 2nd edition were visible, but no other archaeological features were recorded. No archaeological features will be affected by a formalisation of this path network.



Plate 3 Looking SW along Path Two towards the walled garden



Plate 4 Revetting wall along the route of Path Two, building up this area to form a raised pathway

Path 3 (Figure 1)

Unlike Path One and Path Two, Path Three cuts across an area where no clear path network currently exists. Desire lines cross the site in this area, following the natural route the topography allows towards Mavisbank House, and essentially skirting around the Walled Garden.



Plate 5 Looking SW towards the Walled Garden

As discussed above, a number of structures are known to have existed along the outside perimeter of the Walled Garden. Of these, the cricket pavilion is the most significant, but some smaller structures preceded this and stables were built adjacent in the latter half of the 20th century. The location of the cricket pavilion can clearly be discerned by the window features in the perimeter wall of the Walled Garden (*Plate 6*).



Plate 6 Looking W across the site of the pavilion

Walking around the perimeter of the Walled Garden, there is clearly potential for surviving remains. The area directly adjacent to the wall is characterised by undulations and mounds crowned with high vegetation. Much of this appears to be detritus from gardening and landscaping activities, but concrete foundations are discernible immediately adjacent to the windows in the boundary to the Walled Garden. Whether these relate to the construction of the cricket pavilion, or later re-use of the building is unclear. A similar concrete foundation pad was noted to the south east on the location of the stable block.

The desire lines naturally avoid these higher areas and sweep gently around the Walled Garden, only coming closer to the Walled Garden after they have passed the concrete plinth at the site of the cricket pavilion. As the route passes by the entrance through the Walled Garden, it comes much closer to the wall. It is possible that there may be earlier path networks in this location linking up with the entranceway.



Plate 7 Looking SW from the cricket pitch across the entrance into the Walled Garden

Two possible alignments of Path Three were discussed on site, a junction with Path One and Path Two (marked B on *Figure 1*) and an existing access through the fence line slightly further north (*Plate 8* and *Plate 9*). This second entrance seem to be formed from an attempt to drain the Cricket Ground area, but has subsequently been used for access. The desire lines here link up with those that sweep around the Walled Garden.



Plate 8 View looking W to the proposed new entrance to Path Three



Plate 9 Looking E along the drainage ditch and desire lines to the proposed new entrance to path Three

No other landscape features were noted east of the desire lines. The area of the cricket pitch was undulating and heavily disturbed by animals.

Conclusions

The formalisation of the existing paths along the west side of the River North Esk (Path One and Path 2) poses no risk to any archaeological features. Areas of this path network are at present narrow and under danger of eroding into the River and it is felt any stabilisation and improvement of these will provide protection for the walls and features associated with the designed landscape to the west.

Path Three crosses close to an area where structures are known to exist. In consultation with Charlie Cumming of ELGT, it was felt that the new path should follow the route of the existing desire lines. Two concrete foundations were noted along the length of the Walled Garden perimeter. Both of these extended 15m from the wall. It is felt that Path One should avoid these foundations for both archaeological and practical reasons, with a further buffer of c.1.5m. There is clear evidence that the Walled Garden was compressed after the realignment of the River North Esk and it is possible that remnants of the original east garden wall will survive in the area adjacent to the Walled Garden and crossed by Path Three. Although both possible alignments of Path Three from the River North Esk are acceptable, the more easterly of the two is preferable, avoiding the area immediately adjacent to the Walled Garden and any possible disturbance with earlier buried remains there. After Path Three passes the site of the cricket pavilion, this will be free to continue curving around the Walled Garden.

Addyman Archaeology recommend that a watching brief is maintained on all ground breaking works around the periphery the Walled Garden in the area of the cricket pitch.