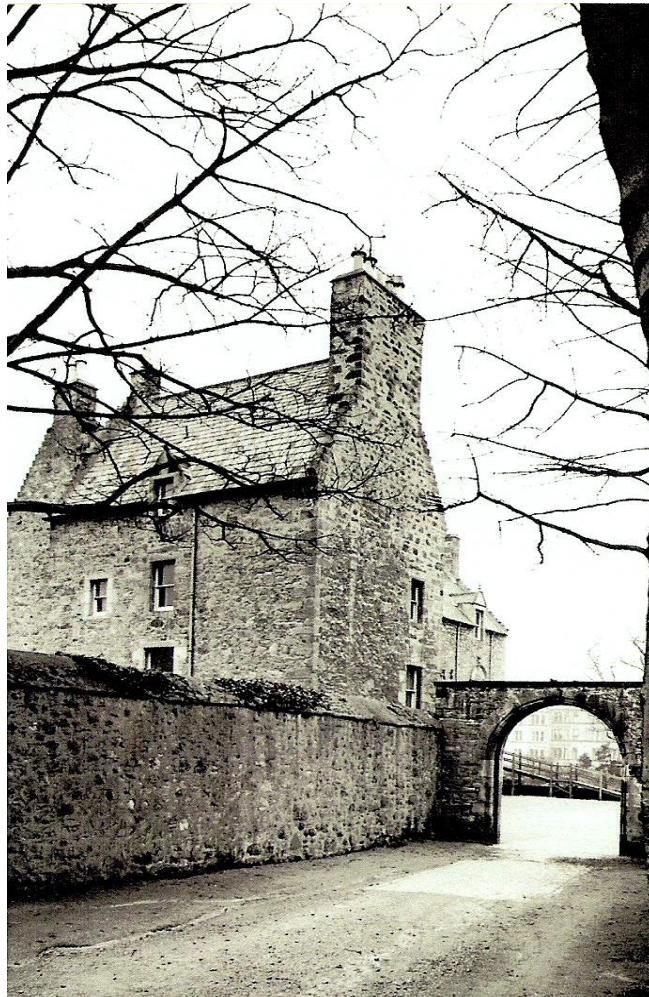


Bruntsfield House
by Ann Landels and Grace E. Milne,
Class 1L (1966)



The above picture is of the entrance arch of the old house. It is now the main entrance of the new James Gillespie's High School building.

“Near where Edina’s smoky turrets rise,
And Arthur rears his bold and lofty head,
Where the green meadow broad expanded lies,
And yellow furze the sporting links bespread,

By tallest elms and spreading beech concealed,
From vulgar eyes – from busy care retired,
To tender melancholy alone revealed,
Or love, by truth and gentleness inspired,

An ancient pile of Gothic structure stands,
Whose massy walls still brave the lapse of years,
Once retreat of rude confederate bands,
Or safe asylum to a virgin’s fears.

No longer now the seat of war’s alarms,
For gentler sounds are echoed here around,
Sacred to genius here th’enthusiast warms,
Or pensive walks as o’er enchanted ground.

No longer on the jarring hinges sweeps
Th’unwieldy portal as in times of yore,
Secure within the peaceful owner sleeps,
Nor dreams of wounds, or pants for human gore.

Musing within these limits oft I rove,
A slave to love’s alternate hopes and fears,
With heedless footsteps pace the silent grove,
And vent the sorrows of my heart in tears”

The above verses, descriptive of Bruntsfield House in its more peaceful days, were written in June 1790 by a young man to his lady-love, a Warrender. Not that these days have always been peaceful. The name Bruntsfield is reputed to have come from Stephen Bruntsfield, who was brutally murdered on the Borough Muir in the fifteenth century on his way to the Castle. Richard Brown, the first recorded owner, is supposed to have been a descendant of one, Richard de Browne, who was beheaded along with Sir David de Brechin, who was known as the Flower of chivalry, and two others in 1320, having been found guilty of conspiracy against Robert the Bruce by the Black Parliament.

On the 4th of June 1381, King Robert II granted a charter to Alan de Lawdre, giving him possession of the mansion and lands of Bruntsfield formerly belonging to Richard Brown

(sometimes Browne and occasionally Brand). Alan de Laudre founded the Laudres of Haltoun. He was a grandson of the Laudres of Quarrel Wood and the Bass Rock. (The name is variously spelt in the old charters as Laudre, Lawdre, Lawder, etc.). He was Justiciar of Scotland South of the Forth and was present at the Battle of Halidon Hill. The Laudres were adherents of Wallace and Bruce.

On 18th April 1452, these lands were forfeited by King James II who granted a charter to his Queen, Mary of Gueldres, of the lands of "Haltoun and Plat Broumysfelde" (Bruntsfield). However, the Lawders later returned to Royal Favour, and in 1490 James IV granted a charter to Sir Alexander Lawder of Haltoun restoring to him the lands of Brounisfield (Bruntsfield); but Sir Alexander did not keep the restored lands for long because, on the 14th August 1497, they were conveyed to his third son, Sir Alexander of Blyth, and his wife, Doneta Paterson. When he died the entire forty-one-acre estate went to his nephew William Lauder.

In May 1544 the ravaging armies of Lord Hereford, Protector Somerset of England, who was endeavoring to force a marriage between Mary, Queen of Scots and Prince Edward of England, destroyed the first house. In September 1547 the then owner of the lands, Sir Alexander Lauder was killed at Pinkie Cleuch on "Black Saturday".

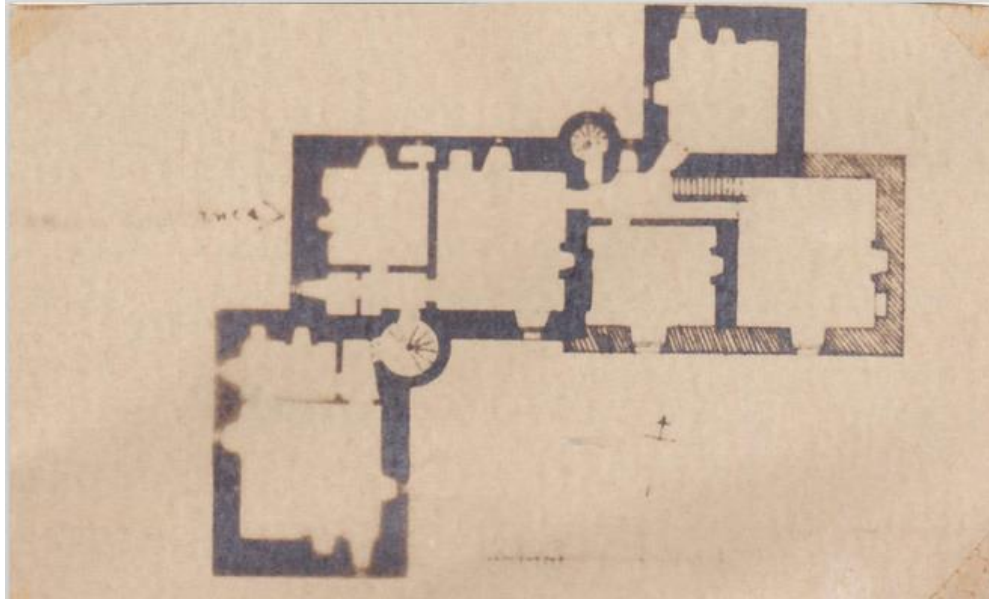
The house was rebuilt in the latter half of the century. After a romantic courtship, Sir Alexander Lauder, descendant of the above, married his heart's desire, Anna Belenden. With this marriage the house of Bruntsfield and its grounds were separated from the Halton estates.

Sir Alexander and Lady Lauder conveyed their mansion house to John Fairlie, a burgess of Edinburgh, and his wife, Elizabeth Westoun, in Life Rent.

Fairlie carried out extensive alterations and additions to the building so that the house, as it now stands, largely constitutes a monument to him. His initials and those of his wife appear above many of the dormer windows. His monogram and that of his wife, with the date 1605, appear above the large windows of the former drawing-room, and above the modern entrance which he erected.



The plan below is of the Bruntsfield House of John Fairlie's time and shows very clearly the "Z" plan common during that period.



The imposing structure which he built was originally graced by boughs of ivy. To the West and elegant staircase descends from the first-floor drawing-room to the ground, affording direct entrance from outside. The staircase how has railings but formerly had hedges by its sides.



John Fairlie also built a fine kitchen on the ground floor with a handsome arched fireplace which is still perfectly preserved. The whole ground floor is vaulted and the 1605 wing is also groined, but without ribs.

The South-West turret has a large thistle-shaped finial carved in stone. John Fairlie while he was making refinements to the old house, also added a wing to the East. He demolished the original south front, rebuilding it with a handsome projection eastward. this addition has large windows on the first floor: over them are circular pediments with carved stone thistle finials, and containing the monograms and initials of John Fairlie and his wife bracketed in the common style by the date 1605. The pediments and their adornments are all old. The original entrance was in the East front of the South-West tower and had a pediment over the doorway with a panel above for a coat of arms. Both are evident in the following pictures.



The North Turret is very picturesque. It is probable that in its original state it appeared somewhat different from its present form, and that there was some kind of open baritzan at the top from which a view of Edinburgh Castle could be obtained.



This would explain the meaning of the upper projection, and the space for standing room would be obtained inside by making the roof behind of the same slope as that of the roof adjoining to the West.

From the North-West, the house may be seen as it existed for about three centuries, excepting the previously mentioned staircase and possibly the change of a window here and there. The old entrance gateway and part of the surrounding high wall still remain. The

architect is unknown, but the style is that of the old traditional Scots Manor-house. Walter Scott took ideas of stone bears at Tully-Veolan Castle in “Waverley” from Traquair, the entrance and Plan of the house being drawn from Bruntsfield.

In 1645 when the plague hit Edinburgh, a victim of its cruel grasp was buried in the House grounds. When the ground was feued, the gravestone was moved to within the precincts of the House. The following inscription is on the stone:-

This Saint Whos Corps Lyes Buried Heir
Let All Posteritie Adimeir
For Upright Lif in Godly Feir
Wheir Judgments Did This Land Surround
He with God Was Walking Found
For Which From Midst of Feirs
He’s Cround
Heir To Be Interd Both He
And Friends By Providence Agrie
No Age Shal Los His Memorie
His age 53
Died 1645

The stone bears the typical winged scroll, skull and crossbones and shield. On the shield is engraved the letters “M.I.R.”. The “M” surmounts the shield and in all probability indicates that the corpse had held the degree of Master of Arts.



William Fairlie, grandson of John Fairlie, registered a contract of alienation in the Books of Council and Session. the contact was formed between him and the Crown. The son of the

foresaid William Fairlie, also William Fairlie, took seisine of the house before the Bailies of the Canongate, on 1st April, 1679. The Charter was dated at Kensington on 29th April, 1679.

On the 26th of July 1695, William Fairlie sold Bruntsfield House to George Warrender of Lochend, one of the Bailies, and afterwards Lord Provost of Edinburgh under three sovereigns, William and Mary, Anne, and George I, who made him a baronet in 1715. Sir George Warrender's ancestors were the de Warrenders of Picardy, one of them having come to Scotland in the train of Mary of Guise and Lorraine. Sir George Warrender died on 28th August 1725 and the house passed to his son, John.

The Lauders of Haltoun became extinct in the seventeenth century, and their representation devolved on the Maitland Family by the marriage of Elizabeth Lauder, the heiress of Haltoun, with Charles, Third Earl of Lauderdale. Miss Warrender inherited that descent through her paternal grandmother, Lady Julian Maitland so that after a lapse of 300 years the descendants of the original possessors inhabited the old house again.

Hugh Warrender, an old bachelor, died in 1820, and the house passed to the Rt. Hon. Sir George Warrender, M.P., who, on the 12th of May 1869, after finding that the number of windows exceeded the number of rooms by one, surmised that there must somewhere be a secret room. He made a thorough investigation and eventually forced from an old woman, who acted a caretaker, the information that behind the arras in one of the rooms there was an entrance to a secret chamber. After pulling down the arras on the wall he found, and forced open, a door and was the first person to enter the room for many long years. There were deep bloodstains on the stone floor, ashes in the grate, and a skeleton was later found buried beneath the window. It is suggested that this concealed room with so shady a history was either a hiding place in troubled times which has been discovered and the unhappy occupant slain, or the chamber of a dearly loved child who had come to an untimely and possibly violent end, after which the tragic little room had been hurriedly sealed up. With the passing of time, its existence was forgotten except by some faithful retainer who handed on the knowledge to his or her successor who swore a vow of secrecy and in due course passed on the secret in the same way.

Sir George was deeply interested in his discovery and even went to the length of sending some scrapings of the stains on the floor to be tested in a forensic laboratory. The tests proved positive. The rooms became known as the Ghost Room, and from that arose the legend of the Green Lady said to walk the grounds. Sir George Warrender died on 12th May 1901 and his lands were held by Trustees. The days of Bruntsfield House being a Lord's mansion were nearly over.

In 1935, Edinburgh Corporation (now City of Edinburgh Council) bought the old house from Sir John Warrender, a successor to Sir George, and it lay unused for a number of years until, on 29th October 1941, part of the building was opened as a training school for Incident Officers by Councillor Tom Stevenson, the then Chairman of the A.R.P Committee. At the end of the war the Corporation converted the house into flats for the homeless of the city. It was also at this time that the ground floor began to be used by James Gillespie's High School for Girls, Infants Department. Edinburgh nearly lost the subject of this history when, in the early hours of the morning of 14th April 1953, fire broke out. The Fire Brigade was called and fortunately saved the building, but the water from the firemen's hoses did considerable damage, and even filtered down to the infant's classrooms. The top floor of the house was completely gutted, and the fifteen tenants were removed to Glenlockhart. The alarm had been raised by Mr J. Buchan, the gardener, at 3.20 am.

On July 12th of the following year, the Education Committee endorsed a decision made before the war to build a new Secondary Department for James Gillespie's High School, whose primary department was already situated within the grounds to the West of the House. The new school was begun in the early part of 1964 and now, in mid 1966, the new school is nearly finished. The architects who designed the new school were careful to include in their plans as many of the original trees and lawns as possible so giving to the School, surroundings which are not only pleasant but also of character.

The area of the new [1966] school buildings, excluding that of Bruntsfield House, is 90,667 sq.ft. During the excavations the workmen uncovered an old ice-house. Unfortunately, it had to be covered over owing to the needs of the school plan.

Considerable alterations have been made to the 1605 entrance to the House, although the wing that John Fairlie built has been left intact. The beautiful ceilings, which are decorated in some sections with gilt paint, have been preserved. The East wing is the Music Department and consists of two Music rooms and one Music practice room. To the South of the Music Department is the new Assembly Hall, which is 3,861 sq. ft. In area. This included 911 sq. ft of stage.

A great asset to the school will be the indoor swimming pool, which is situated between the modern Gymnasium and the large Library.



Between the Assembly Hall and the main block of classrooms, there has been formed a small flagstone paved quadrangle. The ancient evergreens growing in this space have not been removed, but the flagstones placed around about them, so that they serve as a reminder of former times when these grounds were parkland.



A single-storey block to the West of the main classrooms will accommodate the Arts and Crafts Departments. [This was later changed to accommodate Arts and Commercial Rooms and the Crafts Department moved to the Science Block.]



Between this block, consisting of seven rooms, and Bruntsfield House there is a three-storey building, which contains seven Science Laboratories, two Geography Rooms, one Commercial Room and two Typing Rooms. [This was later changed to accommodate the Crafts Department and Domestic Science Rooms and the Commercial Department moved to the Art Block.]

Behind Bruntsfield house stand the Dining Rooms, and near the Warrender Park Road entrance is the Boiler House.

It is self-evident that the Authorities have, while erecting the new school in the most approved modern style, taken pains to incorporate as much of the ancient buildings as possible, and to preserve the historic atmosphere. A final example is the preservation of the pre-existing stone arch and massive iron studded gates forming the main entrance from Whitehouse Loan. The closing two verses of the poem quoted at the beginning of this history are, therefore, thanks to the City Fathers and their Architects, still apposite, videlicet: -

“The arched gateway open still invites,
The curious traveller to pause awhile,
Instructs the grave – the gay but ill delights,
Nor asks the vacant for a single smile.

High o’er its top the branching elms ascend,
And gild their summits in the evening beam,
The creeping ivy ruins constant friend,
Clasps its worn sides and enters every seam”

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Photographs were taken by Ann Landels on her Box Brownie camera