

Ramshead walled garden - site history

The prominent position occupied by the walled garden is an ancient site. The c.1799 construction largely remains but was not the main garden for very long.

Author: Anthony Shaw

(for [East Renfrewshire Designed Landscapes and Gardens Group](#))

Site and origins of Ramshead

Ramshead is recorded as a Mure property in 1617 (1) and is again referred to as the location of the mansion constructed around 1715 (2). The terms Brandy Hill (3) and Ramsydhill (4) are also found in relation to the same vicinity. The earliest map reference is the name Ramsy shown on Pont's map of around 1590 with the location confirmed on Bleau's map of 1654.

Derivation of the name may relate to the physical appearance of the prominent rocky knoll on which the garden sits, overlooking the valley of the Lugton Water. The name Brandy Hill seems to have been common from the late 18th century but disappeared during the early 20th century. The term does not appear in the Ordnance Survey Name Book entries (5) of around 1856 but is mentioned in Pride's work of 1910 in connection with the Brandy Well (6).

The gardens lie on the gentle slope of the hill and face due south. The following images show the gardens viewed from the east and from Uplawmoor.

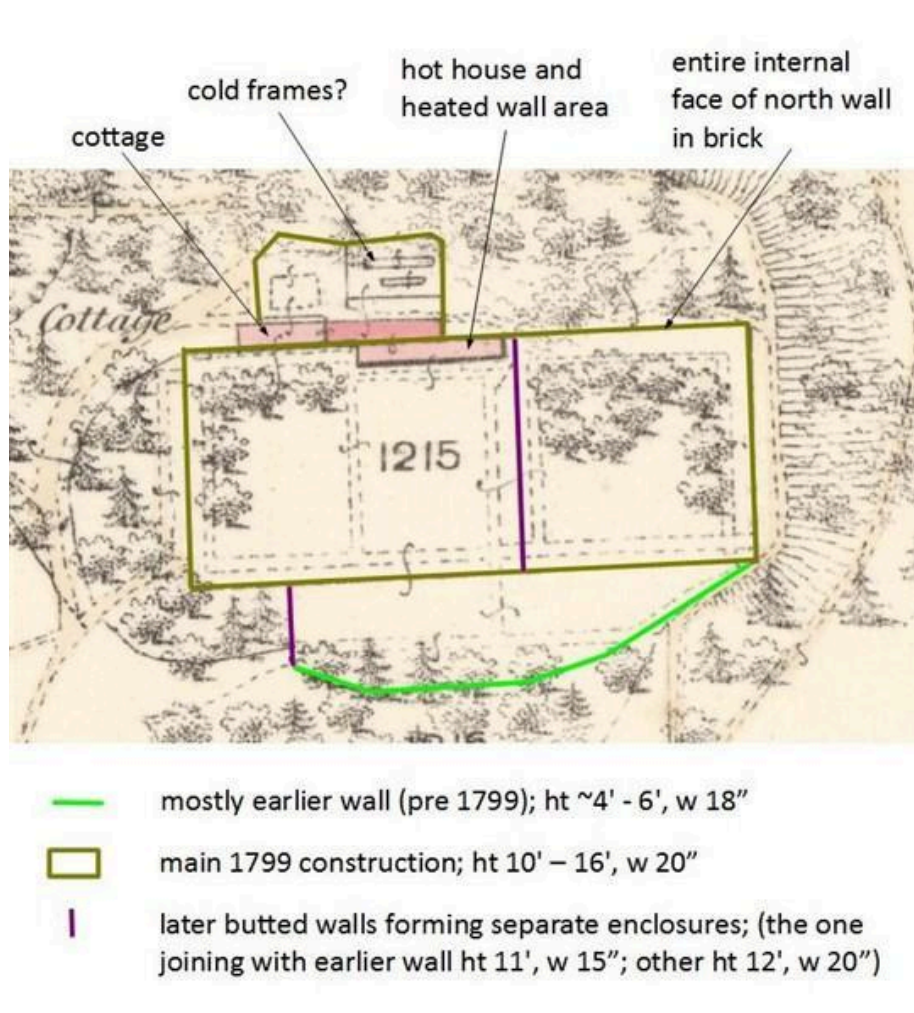


View of Ramshead walled gardens from the valley floor



The walled garden

The diagram below illustrates the main phases of the walled garden construction. The wall dividing the main area of garden and butting onto the north and south walls, was clearly added at a later date. The same simple evidence applies to the wall that completes the rounded enclosure to the south. Further details on various features are illustrated in the accompanying document, *Ramshead walled garden - structures and construction details*.



Annotated extract from OS 25 inch sheet c.1856(7)
map image courtesy National Library of Scotland

Events in the life of the gardens

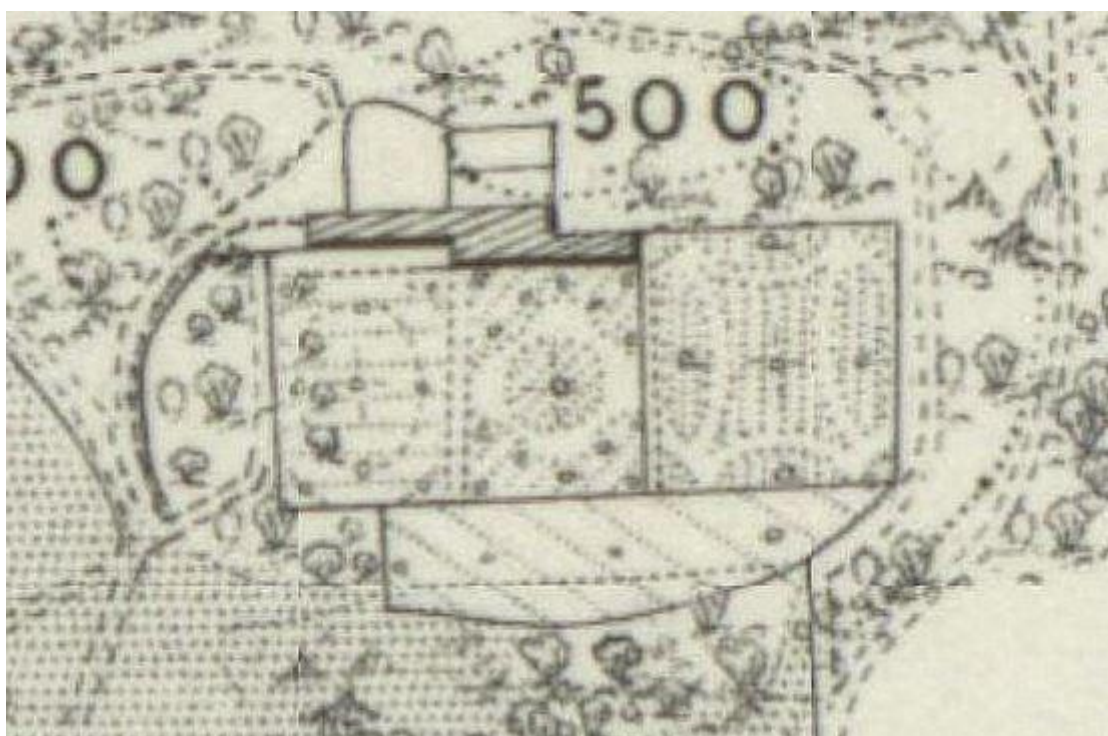
Constructed around 1799 and incorporating a hot-house

We know that the gardens were newly constructed around 1799. This is shown in correspondence from Clementina Hunter Blair to her brother David, written whilst staying at Caldwell with her sister Anne Hunter Blair (wife of Wm Mure of Caldwell) on 17 June 1799 (3)

Also, from an account rendered in 1800 to William Mure from James Findlater of Paisley, we know that there was a hot-house constructed around the same time (8). The account refers to "*Two Divisions of Hothouses including Iron work, Locks etc...*" along with "*wood for Two Cisterns*", with a total cost of £238 2s 6d.

Operating as the main garden until around 1865?

The Ordnance Survey 6 inch 1st edition of around 1856 provides a detailed image of the planting layout within the walled gardens. Traces of the tracks shown on the 25 inch map (shown above) can still be found but they are not present on the 6 inch version.



Detail from OS 6 inch 1st edition c.1856(9)

Map image courtesy National Library of Scotland

From the Estate Papers of around 1844 it appears that the heated rear wall may have been under repair. Although difficult to read, the account from Robert Wilson of Neilston(10) mentions *22 Days Repairing fleuis* (flues?) and the purchase of a quantity of *fire brick*, possibly indicating the continuing use of the hot-house. Other entries in the same archive show that Robert Wilson was employed on many other builder work activities by William Mure around this time.

The late 1840's would appear to be the most likely time that the Ramshead garden was sub-divided. A range of major projects were under way including "*Deepening Lugton Water*", "*Drainage at Caldwell*" and most relevant, "*Repairing and building Garden Walls*". (11)

'New Gardens' established around 1865

An entry in the accounts of 1869 (12) shows

Caldwell Permanent Improvement

Mens Wages planting at Melon field, and New Gardens next Road from march 1868, to August 1869

A likely explanation for the establishment of the New Gardens is the problem of water supply to Ramshead. The following factors support this theory -

- In William Gemmel's recollections from his childhood (13) at Ramshead he described how his job each day on returning from school, was to fetch two pails of water from the pump. Thus, even in the early 20th century, the water supply for Ramshead was inconvenient, being the pump associated with the 1715 mansion, approximately 175 metres from the cottage.
- The New Gardens site is immediately below an existing spring on the adjacent hillside from which a gravity fed piped supply would have been easily feasible.
- An early fear of climate change. In his book, *Great British Weather Disasters* (14), Philip Eden writes

The dry years of the 1850s led to a widespread fear that the climate was actually getting drier and that existing water supplies might fail,....

Late 19th century upgrade of estate properties

A cottage adjacent to the New Gardens is built and the cottage at Ramshead was upgraded. Probably around the same time, as the stonework and style at Ramshead is similar to the New Gardens building. No clear evidence of a date for this has emerged although the census records(15) may hold a clue. The following table shows extracts from the census data from 1871 until 1901.

Census	Property description and occupants summary
1901	'Old Gardens Caldwell' George Gemmel, 'Land Steward' plus 5 family and female 'General Servant', age 13
1891	'Caldwell Old Garden House' William Dippie, 'Land Steward' with wife and female 'General Servant', age 20
1881	No record found for the Gardens. William Dippie, 'Land Steward', and his wife recorded as occupying Hall of Caldwell
1871	'Caldwell Gardeners House' Adam Baxter 'Gardener', age 29, only occupant listed

It seems likely that the much improved property (suitable for the Land Steward from Hall of Caldwell) was under construction around 1881. Earlier census entries include three schedule entries in 1841, all for 'Caldwell Garden', indicating that there may have been bothy accommodation as well as the gardener's residence.

Into the 20th century - the Land Steward's house

By the time of the 1895 Ordnance Survey the hothouse at Ramshead has disappeared, most likely as part of the activities associated with the establishment of the New Gardens, where a new range of heated glasshouses and extensive cold frames have appeared.

The above census detail indicates that the Old Gardens Cottage had become the residence of the Land Steward. A picture from around 1910 shows the house and garden with some of the Gemmell family.



Ramshead walled garden around 1910

To the left of the house is a plum tree referred to by John Gemmell in his recollections(16) “...he found, at an early age, that by reaching out from his dormer window, armed with a pair of long fire tongs, he could reach the plums on a tree nearby.”

There are traces on nearly every wall of the garden that they were at some time covered by wall grown plants.

Caldwell House becomes a hospital in 1929

In 1929 Caldwell House was converted to a hospital having been sold around 1924. The Mure family moved out around 1909. Some obvious upgrading of the estate infrastructure took place with a network of water pipes being installed along with lighting of access roads.

Little is known about what happened at the Ramshead walled garden other than at some point, a steady deterioration in the condition of the property and garden. The property was

converted into two flats, possibly in 1973 as this date is indicated on roof timbers of a first floor bathroom addition. Around 1970 extensive conifer plantations appeared including within the walled garden.

Estate sold into private hands around 1987

Ramshead Cottage, the walled gardens and the land extending south to Caldwell House was one of several lots offered for sale on behalf of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The picture of the house is taken from within the walled garden from a position similar to the 1910 image. The picture below, of the state of the garden walls, was taken later when wall repairs commenced. They illustrate a low point in the garden's history. The property had not long been vacated (there was food in a fridge!) but it was soon vandalised and an attempt made to set it on fire. Much of the heated portion of the north wall had collapsed. Clearly there had been no effective maintenance of the property by the hospital authorities for some time.



Restoration work soon began.



Many of the walls were in poor condition



William Gemmel, (age 90+), a son of the former Land Steward, visiting the property around 1992.

Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to Anne Sparrow and Anne King for assisting with locating some of the material referred to from the Mure of Caldwell Family Papers, at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.

References

1. Dobie, James D. *Cunninghame, Topographized by Timothy Pont 1604–1608, with continuations and illustrative notices*. Glasgow: John Tweed, n.d.

2. Semple, William. *The History of the Shire of Renfrew*, p180. Paisley: Alex. Weir, 1782.
3. Hunter Blair, Clementina. 'Letter from Clementina Hunter Blair to her brother David', 17 June 1799. Original is held at Blairquhan, home of the Hunter Blair family.
4. 'Correspondence from James Cunningham, Livingstone'. May 1731. MS 4941, f243. Mure of Caldwell Family Papers, National Library of Scotland.
5. 'Renfrewshire OS Name Books, 1856-1857'. Accessed 5 February 2014. <http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ordnance-survey-name-books/renfrewshire-os-name-books-1856-1857/renfrewshire-volume-18/47>.
6. Pride, David. *A History of the Parish of Neilston*. Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1910.
7. 'Ayr Sheet IX.5 - OS 25 inch 1st edition, Scotland, 1856'. Ordnance Survey, 1858. National Library of Scotland. <http://maps.nls.uk/os/25inch/view/?sid=74951642>.
8. 'Account from James Findlater, Paisley, re hothouse installation'. Manuscript, 1800. MS 4963, f2. Mure of Caldwell Family Papers, National Library of Scotland.
9. 'Ayrshire, Sheet IX - OS Six-inch 1st edition, survey 1856'. Ordnance Survey, 1858. National Library of Scotland. <http://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch/view/?sid=74425797>.
10. 'Account from Robert Wilson, Neilston including hothouse flue repair(?)'. Manuscript, 1800. MS 4972, f3. Mure of Caldwell Family Papers, National Library of Scotland.
11. 'Household papers 1846-55'. 1846. MS 4964 f113, f127. Mure of Caldwell Family Papers, National Library of Scotland.
12. 'Invoices and receipts for work done on the Caldwell Estate, 1861-1890', 1869. GD1/1314/2. National Records of Scotland.
13. Gemmell, William. 1992. Conversation with author at Ramshead.
14. Eden, Philip. *Great British Weather Disasters*. A&C Black, 2008.
15. 'Genealogy Scottish family birth records census ancestry Scotland uk - ScotlandsPeople'. Accessed 1 March 2015. <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/>.
16. *Caldwell Parish Church Newsletter*. 1992. 'Stealing the plums', February.