



Case information

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| Case ID | 300016434 | | |
| File Reference | HGH/A/LA/432-440 | | |
| Name of Site | George Square 16 and 17 (LB28809); George Square 18 (LB28810); George Square 19 (LB47583); George Square 20 (LB47584) George Square 21 (LB28813); George Square 22 (LB28814); George Square 23 (LB28816); George Square 23a and 23b (LB28815); George Square 24 (LB28817); George Square 25 (LB28818); George Square 26 and 26A (LB28819); George Square 27 (LB28820); George Square 28 (LB28821); George Square 29 (LB28822) | | |
| Local Authority | City of Edinburgh Council | | |
| National Grid Reference | NT 25741, 72894 | | |
| Designation No. (if any) | LB28809, LB28810, LB47583, LB47584, LB28813, LB28814, LB28815, LB28816, LB28817, LB28818, LB28819, LB28820, LB28821, LB28822 | | |
| Designation Type | Listed Building | Current Category of Listing | A |
| Case Type | Amendment | | |
| Received/Start Date | 2015 [University of Edinburgh Listing Review] | | |
| Decision Date | 13/06/2016 | | |

1. Decision

14 listed building records have been merged into a single listing under LB28810. This record has been updated and the statutory address has change to include all buildings between 16 and 29 George Square. There has been no change to the listing category which remains at category A.

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| Proposed Statutory address | 16 - 29 (inclusive numbers) George Square, including boundary walls and railings and excluding the 2012 extension to the rear of number 24, Edinburgh |
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2. Designation Background and Development Proposals



2.1 Designation Background

These buildings were listed at category A on 14/12/1970.

These buildings are within the South Side Conservation Area.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

Numbers 16-29 George Square were considered for review as part of the University of Edinburgh Estates Review.

Number 16-22 and 27, 28 and 29 were visited on 05/08/2015 and 21 and 22 were visited on 26/08/2015.

The interiors were seen of these buildings during the visits on 05/08/2015 and 26/08/2015.

While all buildings were seen from the exterior, the interiors of 23, 24, 25, and 26 were not seen.

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

The building was found to no longer meet the criteria for listing.

An assessment against the listing criteria was carried out. See **Annex A**.

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 2, pp. 51-53.

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Listing Criteria* 16-29 George Square, Edinburgh

1. Description

James Brown, 1767-1779. Numerous alterations and additions including enlargement of attic storeys with new dormers: William Smith and Sons, joiners, 1882 (mansard roof at numbers 16 and 17); James Bow Dunn 1890 (number 21); Arthur Colville & Co, builder, 1911 (number 18); James Jerdan 1896, dormers and oriel window at rear (number 20); Reginald Fairlie, 1912, extension at rear (number 26); University of Edinburgh Department of Works, 1953 internal alterations and additions to numbers 27 and 28.

4- and 5-storey, 3- and 4-bay, mainly rectangular plan classical style houses which form a terrace, (23a and b single storey and basement insertion 1779). The terrace is now a series of university departments, offices and houses. Numbers 16-22 squared snecked pink and cream Craigmillar rubble sandstone with blue whin pinnings; numbers 23, 23a and 23b, 24-27 coursed rubble with snecked ashlar dressings; numbers 28 and 29 Craigeith ashlar. All set on ground sloping north to south and forming the west side of George Square.

Numbers 16-22 and 28 architraved doorpieces; numbers 23, 25-27 Roman Doric doorpieces; number 24 Ionic doorpiece; numbers 25-27 raised long and short quoins; number 29 arched openings at ground floor, plain doorpiece with elaborate fanlight; number 23a and b arched openings at ground floor with central Venetian window.

Mainly 12-pane glazing in timber sash and case windows with some large pane glazing. Tall corniced gable stacks with yellow clay cans.

Most interiors were seen in 2015. Many have been altered and connected internally but still retain elements of outstanding Georgian interior schemes, staircases with decorative iron balusters and timber handrails, marble and timber chimneypieces, panelled timber doors, fine decorative cornices and some timber dadoes as well as some good late 19th century elements.

The grandest houses on the west side are those nearest the south end, numbers 27, 28 and 29, the last being the architect James Brown's own house. The steeper slope of the ground enabled higher ceilings at this end of the street while approximately maintaining the window levels on the facades. Numbers 27 and 28 are 4 bays wide. Their interiors are particularly well-detailed. The stairwell of 27 is the grandest in the square with good 18th century staircase with fine ironwork and timber rail and panelling on the walls which may be an early 19th century addition, although the frieze at ceiling height with gryphons and anthemion decoration may be earlier. On the ground floor the former dining rooms of 27 and 28 were positioned at



the rear and stretched the full width of the buildings. Both have outstanding plasterwork. Number 27 has a good arched buffet recess which is probably a 19th century addition. On the first floor both in 27 and 28 the drawing rooms also at the rear of the buildings above the dining rooms and have similarly fine plasterwork; number 27 has a coffered ceiling and a timber and gesso chimneypiece while number 28 has a chimneypiece of cream and ochre marble. The interior finishes of number 29 are simpler.

2. Assessment Against the Listing Criteria (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 51-52

Criteria for determining whether a building is of 'special architectural or historic interest' for listing under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/9/contents]

To be listed, a building need not meet all the listing criteria. The criteria provide a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions.

2.1 Age and Rarity

George Square (originally George's Square) was laid out in 1766. Only a small proportion of the original plan remains. The feuing plan which was engraved in 1779 but which must have been drawn up by 1766 when the first house was occupied shows houses on four sides, each side divided into two stretches of terrace by central narrow lanes, except on the north where the gap was wider and off-centre to allow Ross House an uninterrupted view to the south. The west side of the square had gardens but no outbuildings immediately behind them, the site being constricted by 'George's Mews Lane' and beyond what is now Middle Meadow Walk. Some of the coach houses and stables for this stretch of the square survive at the south west at right angles to this side of the terrace. The houses on the east had coach houses and stables with access from Windmill Lane, although these are no longer extant. Ainslie's map of central Edinburgh (1780) confirms that this layout as indicated by the feuing plan was executed (with the exception of the building which was inserted in the lane in the west terrace in 1779) as the lane was considered 'inconvenient' especially in the winter when the prevailing west wind blew into the square). Ainslie's 1780 map also shows that there was an incomplete stretch of buildings at the south east corner, which were completed a few years later.

The concept of building houses in squares was not a new one. In England it was developed in London in the years after the Great Fire. However the first square to have a properly laid out garden at its centre was probably Soho Square, London, built in 1681 by the Earl of Macclesfield. Squares quickly increased in popularity as pleasant, airy places to live and houses sold quickly. Many squares at this time were set among fields and had views of the open countryside. However by 1725 frequently squares had become choked with rubbish and were the focus of crime and anti-social behavior. The St James's Square Act of 1726 created a board of trustees with the power to make a regular charge on residents for the maintenance of the square. This was a turning point, and many other squares followed suit with their own Acts. The Portman Estate was developed in the 1760s with Portman and



Manchester Squares among the first to be built (1764 and 1770 respectively). In Dublin grand squares, for example Merrion Square, were also being developed in the 1760s. The development of grand squares was a feature of Georgian town planning which was prevalent from the mid-18th century to early 19th century across Britain but had a particular impact on the development of Edinburgh.

The tradition of tenement building, which dominated the Old Town, had already been challenged in Edinburgh by the 1760s. Argyle Square (on site of the Museum of Scotland and now demolished) built in 1742 consisted of houses intended for single occupation by one family. James Brown planned Brown Square (originally Brown's Square) in the 1750s. It was almost complete in March 1764. This was on a small scale but was well received in the 'Edinburgh Advertiser' at the time: 'That very elegant square called Brown Square, which in my opinion is a very great beauty to the town is now almost finished'. John Adam designed a row of houses speculatively in Adam Square which were approved by Dean of Guild in 1761. Although called 'Adam Square' in fact it was simply a block of houses on one side. The originality of the scheme lay in the concept of a terrace of full houses and in the details of the design. It appears to have been the first terrace in Scotland to be built with a unified frontage, a precursor to the frontages in Charlotte Square thirty years later.

The individual houses in George Square generally followed the standard Georgian pattern developed in London in the early 18th century, three bays wide with the entrance door to one side and therefore seen as individual buildings the houses are not a rare type. However seen as a whole the square was the earliest and most ambitious scheme of unified town planning attempted in Edinburgh to date. Like the squares in other parts of England and Ireland at this time, George Square had a set of rules and regulations which were strictly enforced. The residents were limited in what they could do both in terms of activities and alterations to their buildings (such as the height of their chimney stacks) but the design of the house was the choice of the client. Residents were allowed privileges such as access to the Meadows via a gate on the west side of the park belonging to Mrs Lockhart of Carnwath. Commissioners were appointed to attend to lighting and cleaning the streets. In 1772 they advertised the 'let' of the dung in the square.

George Square was also a pioneer in the concept of a central semi-private garden area as opposed to many earlier British and Continental examples which had communal areas suitable for public gatherings and entertainments. James Brown clearly intended the gardens to be ornamental pleasure grounds, which were to be kept 'in good order and in an ornate manner' as indicated in his rules. It was not until 1813 that animals were removed from the railed off central area and gardens established. That year the proprietors organised for the Commissioners of George Square District to employ a person to prepare a plan and estimate the expense of laying out the ground after which John Hay, gardener, was employed to carry out the improvements. Robert Kirkwood's map of 1817 shows planting around the edges and around a central circular feature with paths leading to the four sides of the square.

James Brown purchased the lands of Ross House in 1761 from the architect John Adam. Feuing began in 1766 and the first houses were occupied (numbers 4 and 6)



later that year on the north side, followed by several others in 1767 on that same side. The formal feuing plan, dated 1779, which shows the streets which Brown developed over the whole area he purchased included the area from Buccleuch Place on the south to Teviot Row on the north and as far east as Chapel Place (now Buccleuch Street). George Square lies at the centre of a larger urban scheme fitted within the grounds of Ross House. The George Square scheme dates from the same year as James Craig's original New Town plan (he won the competition in August 1766). George Square was outwith the city boundary and, being privately developed by James Brown, was not subject to the jurisdiction of the city fathers. Craig's New Town was much longer in gestation and Craig himself, unlike Brown, was not responsible for the design of the houses. The construction and therefore occupation of George Square was much faster than the formal squares in the New Town of Edinburgh.

The terrace of houses on the west, numbers 16-29 were built from 1767 to 1779, beginning at the north end, number 16 followed by 29 at the south end and then in a fairly erratic pattern, presumably as feus were taken up, the last to be built being number 28 near the southern end. As described above, the houses in the southern end were larger than those at the north. From early advertisements in newspapers, it would seem that all the houses always had attic rooms. Early views of the square suggest that these attic rooms were lit in many cases by small roof lights rather than dormer windows on at least three sides of the square – for example in the view of George Square by Alexander Carse (1799) which shows the south side and parts of the west and east sides. Apart from numbers 16-20 where the window and door levels remain constant, the buildings gradually step downwards toward the south.

George Square is the earliest surviving square in Edinburgh and an important example of mid-18th century town planning, predating the New Town by several years. The west side is the only complete surviving side of the square.

2.2 Architectural or Historic Interest

Interior

Numbers 16-29 George Square have been altered at various different times and several have been connected internally to enable horizontal circulation, but many early features are still in place which significant interest in listing terms. Number 16 has good surviving plasterwork in the hall and principal public rooms on the ground floor; number 17 has an apsidal end to the drawing room at the front, possibly unique in the surviving terraces in the square. Number 18 has good Victorian plasterwork in the principal ground floor room. Number 27 has a particularly well detailed interior dating from the 18th century (for example in the staircase) with 19th century alterations (for example the insertion of the buffet niche in the former dining room at the rear).

Plan form

There are two distinct layouts in the terrace on the west of the square: those in the upper part of the terrace had all the public rooms on the ground floor while those in the southern section had the dining rooms on the ground floor and drawings rooms



on the first floor. There is also variation in the position of the staircases: some have the staircases in the centre of the building and are top lit by cupolas; in others, such as 27, 28 and 29, the stairwell is positioned at the front or rear of the building and lit by external windows.

By comparing the accommodation described in early advertisements for the sale or let of houses in the square, it is possible to see that there was considerable variation in the sizes of houses. The main difference which dictated the layout of the rooms was whether the house was three or four storeys. The houses at the south end were considerably larger than those at the north of the terrace.

Technological excellence or innovation, material or design quality

The mason Michael Nasmyth was responsible for the construction of the square and to him is probably owed the variety of stone used and the variety of tooling on it.

It has generally been assumed that during the course of development of the square the use of rubble walls with whin pinnings gave way to more regular coursing and dressed ashlar but, in fact, this is not borne out by studying the dates at which the buildings were occupied. In this terrace, the walls of numbers 16-22 are of rubble with pinnings. The earliest of these, number 16, was occupied by 1767 while the latest one by 1775, number 20. Both are of rubble with pinnings. Number 29, James Brown's own house, which is of dressed ashlar, was built and occupied by 1770, thus predating number 20 by five years. Therefore there must have been an element of choice by the client: the early buildings are not all of rubble and later ones of dressed ashlar. It has been suggested that it may have been intended that the rubble walls were to be stucco rendered as was the case in St Andrew Square. However, Arnot, writing in 1779, described the walls 'built partly of blue whin and partly of free stone, put alternately in a chequered figure, resembling the stuff that sailors' shirts are made of' which suggests they were left exposed.

The west side contains two of the grandest houses in the square, numbers 27 and 28, which are four bays wide. The first occupant of 27 was the advocate, the Hon Henry Erskine, a son of the Earl of Buchan, while that of 28 was Thomas Wright a 'merchant in Dantzic'. Generally speaking the houses in the northern stretch of the terrace were found to be too small by the late 19th century as many of the alterations involved enlargement of the attic floors and in one case in 1886 connecting two houses (numbers 23 and 24) to make one larger property.

Although George Square was conceived as a unified scheme there was considerable variation in house design as described above and variation in material. On the north side the houses were described in 1816 as 'mean and unequal height, mostly consisting of a sunk floor, principal floor and attic storey'. Surviving images suggest some houses were similar to those on the upper part of the west side of the square. Certainly the houses on the east, numbers 55-60 had an additional storey compared to those in the north part of the west. Therefore although Brown laid down clear rules for all inhabitants regarding, for example height of chimneys, he did not insist on consistency in the overall scheme. The buildings on the south side and on the southern stretch of the east side of the square were a mixture of flats and houses. However generally the houses were two or three storeys with sunk



basement and attic with the doorway to one side of a three-bay arrangement. A measure of homogeneity was guaranteed by the simple classicism of the porticos and the regulated style of windows (including the dormers as originally built) and doors. The variation in height necessitated by the slope of the ground is balanced by a certain discipline imposed on them with groupings of houses of similar height and detail, 16-23, 24-25 and 27-29.

James Brown (1729-1807) was the second son of a William Brown of Lindsaylands, a Commissioner of Supply. James Brown's older brother was George Brown, an army officer, who became the laird of Elliston and Lindsaylands on his father's death in 1757 and was Receiver-General of Excise in Scotland. The square was named after him. Nothing is yet known of James Brown's training but as the son of a landed gentleman, he may have had a scholarly rather than a practical training. He may have relied on pattern books in his early designs. The purchase of the lands of Ross House in 1761 and the development of George Square and surrounding area was Brown's next work after Brown Square. The scale of George Square is completely different from Brown Square which seems to have had no more than five houses on the north side and less on the east and west sides. Brown developed the areas around George Square in the 1780s and was involved in various projects such as the Riding School and the development of South Bridge. He was one of the trustees engaged to ensure that the Act of Parliament for building South Bridge and the wide range of improvements connected with this were carried out. Other trustees included the Lord Provost, the Rt Hon James Hunter Blair, the Rt Hon Henry Dundas of Melville, the Rt Hon Islay Campbell Lord Advocate.

As noted above, Brown was responsible for the feuing plan and for the design of the houses in George Square, unlike James Craig whose input into the New Town was restricted to drawing up the plan. Although Brown was one of the promoters of the Riding School in Edinburgh and purchased the site (which is now occupied by Surgeon's Hall), he did not design it himself but chose Robert Adam to do so in 1763-4. In the 1780s Brown planned Buccleuch Place but in March 1783 he advertised for plans and estimates for George's Square Assembly Rooms. It was to occupy an almost central position in Buccleuch Place with a view north down the east side of George Square. From this and from the absence of any major works (with a couple of exceptions such as Bellevue House) he seems to have perceived himself more as a businessman and designer and promoter of town planning developments than as an architect but his achievements as the former are significant.

Setting

Numbers 16-29 George Square form the west side of George Square, the only surviving complete side. The ground level slopes gently first and then more steeply toward the south, numbers 27-29 accessed from a raised railed pavement.

This terrace backs onto George Square Lane and beyond onto Middle Meadow Walk and therefore both east and west aspects are prominent in the townscape. Unlike the east side of the square which is in close proximity to late 20th century buildings, the terrace still conveys some sense of the 18th and 19th century enclosed area of the square. It continues to make an important contribution to the streetscape.



George Square was part of a larger scheme of house development devised by Brown which stretched from Teviot Place in the north to the lanes behind Buccleuch Place at the south. The open semi-rural aspect to the south provided by the Meadows is much as it was when the square was complete.

Regional variations

There are no known regional variations.

2.3 Close Historical Associations

Close historical associations with nationally important people or events whose associations are well documented and where the physical fabric of the building is also of some quality and interest can be a significant factor in selection. The fabric should reflect the person or event and not be merely witness to them.

From the time it was built George Square was popular with the aristocracy and leading citizens of Edinburgh. There were many notable residents of this part of George Square, including several advocates and solicitors. Sir Walter Scott's father, Walter Scott, WS, was the first resident of number 25 and Scott spent his boyhood years there. The advocate Thomas Hog of Newliston was the first resident at number 24.

It is typical for people of significant social standing to be associated with buildings such as those found in George Square and this association in itself is not a significant factor in the case for listing.

3. Working with the Principles of Listing (HES Policy Statement, 2016) Annex 2, pp. 53

In choosing buildings within the above broad headings particular attention is paid to:

- a. special value within building types*
- b. contribution to an architecturally or historically interesting group*
- c. the impact of vernacular buildings*
- d. authenticity*

When working with the principles of listing 16-29 George Square has particular interest under a, b, and d

- a. This terrace forms one side of George Square which was the earliest and most ambitious scheme of unified town planning attempted in Edinburgh to date.
- b. This terrace is an important component of the original square.
- d. This terrace is the only remaining complete side of George Square. Many interior features also remain intact including fine staircases, chimneypieces, timberwork and cornicing.

4. Summary of Assessment Against the Listing Criteria**



Numbers 16-29 George Square designed by the architect James Brown in 1766 and built from 1767-1779 is an important surviving component of the square. George Square was the earliest, largest and most ambitious scheme of unified town planning attempted in Edinburgh to date. The classical details of the doorpieces and regulated style of windows give the terrace coherence although there is considerable variation in the materials used in construction and in the height of the terraces. The concept of terraces with individual houses designed for occupation by one family was relatively new in Edinburgh where tenement living had been the norm and proved an immediate success with the aristocracy and leading citizens. The alterations to this side of the square are mainly at attic level on the façades; at the rear the alterations are largely confined to enlargement of windows and extensions at ground level. Many early interior features survive along with good quality later detailing. It continues to make an important contribution to the streetscape.

In our current state of knowledge it continues to meet the criteria for listing.

5. Category of Listing

Categories of listing are non-statutory and buildings are assigned a category (A, B or C) according to their relative importance following the assessment against the criteria for listing.

Category definitions are found at: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/heritage/historicandlistedbuildings/listing

George Square is a very important early example of coherent town planning the first of its type in Edinburgh and is of national importance and category A is the appropriate category of listing.

6. Other Information

An advertisement in the 'Caledonian Mercury' on 2 January 1771 describes number 16 the northern most houses as having on the ground floor a dining room with large light closet, drawing room and small parlour, two bed chambers on the upper floor, a large light closet to one of them and dressing room adjoining the other, three garret rooms, two of which had fireplaces and one without, while below stairs there was a large kitchen, pantry, laundry and larder and a 'fire room' for the servant, wine cellar, with 'catacombs' and three other vaulted cellars in the forecourt.

In contrast a house in the southern part of the square was described in 1773 as having a 'kitchen, two pantries, four cellars and three good rooms on the ground floor, with large back-court and garden. On the parlour-storey, three rooms and two closets. On the principal storey, three rooms and three closets. On the bedroom storey three rooms and three closets. On the garret storey three rooms, besides several presses and many other conveniences'. It is known therefore that the houses at the south end of the terrace were considerably larger than those at the north end.

7. References

CANMORE ID (<http://canmore.org.uk>): 117068 (Nos 16-17); 117069 (No 18); 117070 (No 19); 117071 (No 20); 117072 (No 21); 117073 (No 22); 117082 (No 23); 122535 (Nos 23a and 23b); 117081 (No 24); 117083 (No 25); 122667 (No 26); 122668 (No 27); 122669 (No 28); 122670 (No 29).

Maps

Ainslie, J (1780) *Map of Central Edinburgh*. Edinburgh: John Ainslie
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Edinburgh City Archives, Dean of Guild plans: Nos 16 & 17, 13 April 1882 (for W Bowman Macleod); no 18, 16 March 1911 (for Dr Robert John Johnston); no 20, 7 May 1896 (for John Gibson); no 21, 3 April 1890 (for Robert Anderson); no 26, 12 September 1912; nos 27 and 28 21 August 1953 (University of Edinburgh)

Newspapers

The Edinburgh Advertiser 6 March 1764
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Designations: Report on Handling



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<http://www.londongardenstrust.org/history> [accessed 1 September 2015]

* This assessment is based on our current state of knowledge and has been prepared for the purpose of consultation or to provide a view on the special interest of a building. This assessment is a consultation document and will form the basis of any new or updated listed building record should the structure be listed. The content of this assessment may change to take into account further information received as a result of the consultation process.

** A building may be found to meet the listing criteria but in some circumstances may not be added to the list. See 'When might Historic Environment Scotland list a building' at www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/historicandlistedbuildings/whatwelist