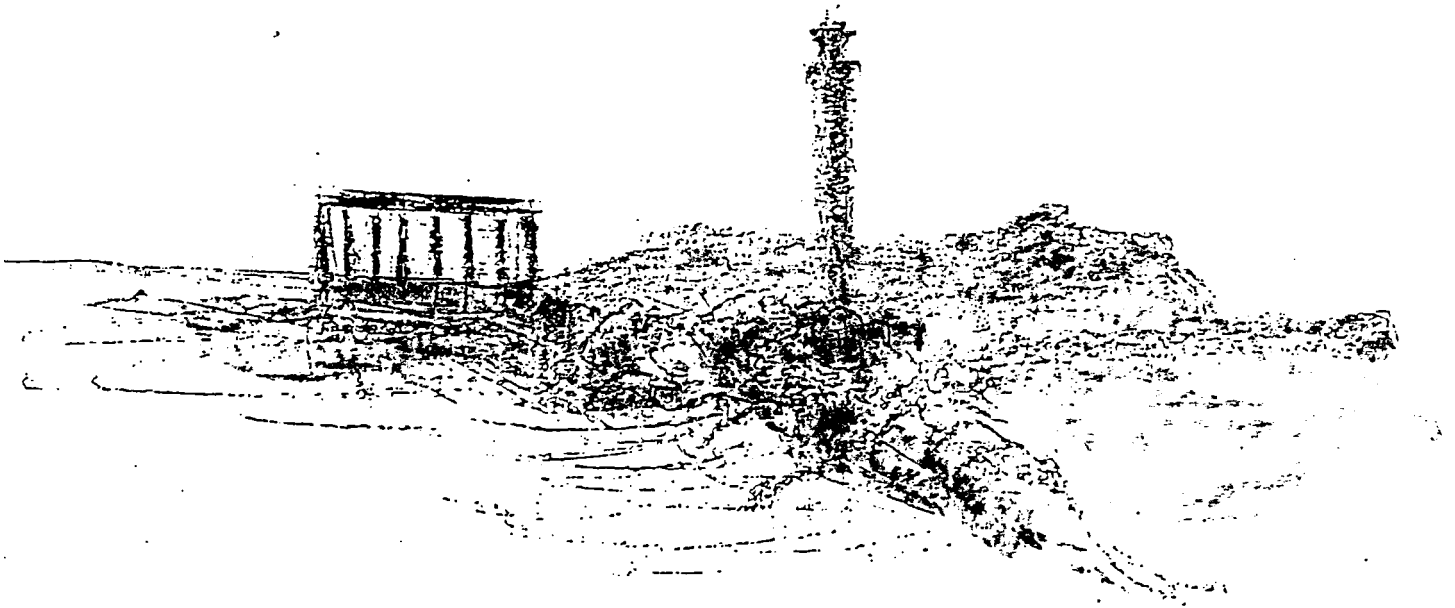


THE COCKBURN ASSOCIATION
The Edinburgh Civic Trust

THE CALTON HILL:



A review of the history, development and condition of Calton Hill
and recommendations for the future management of its hilltop park.

by Dr John Byrom BArch DLA PhD

OCCASIONAL PAPER No 2

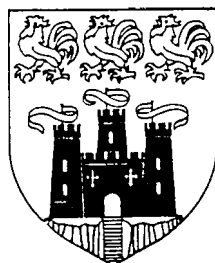
November 1996

THE COCKBURN ASSOCIATION

The Edinburgh Civic Trust

Trunk's Close, 55 High Street
EDINBURGH EH1 1SR

Tel: 0131-557-8686 Fax: 0131-557-9387



The Cockburn Association (The Edinburgh Civic Trust) was founded in 1875 and is one of the longest established civic trusts in Great Britain. Its objectives are to promote and encourage the maintenance and improvement of the amenity of the City of Edinburgh and its neighbourhood as well as to protect and conserve the City's landscape and historic and architectural heritage. The Association is a charity registered in Scotland (SCO11544) and is entirely supported by its membership.

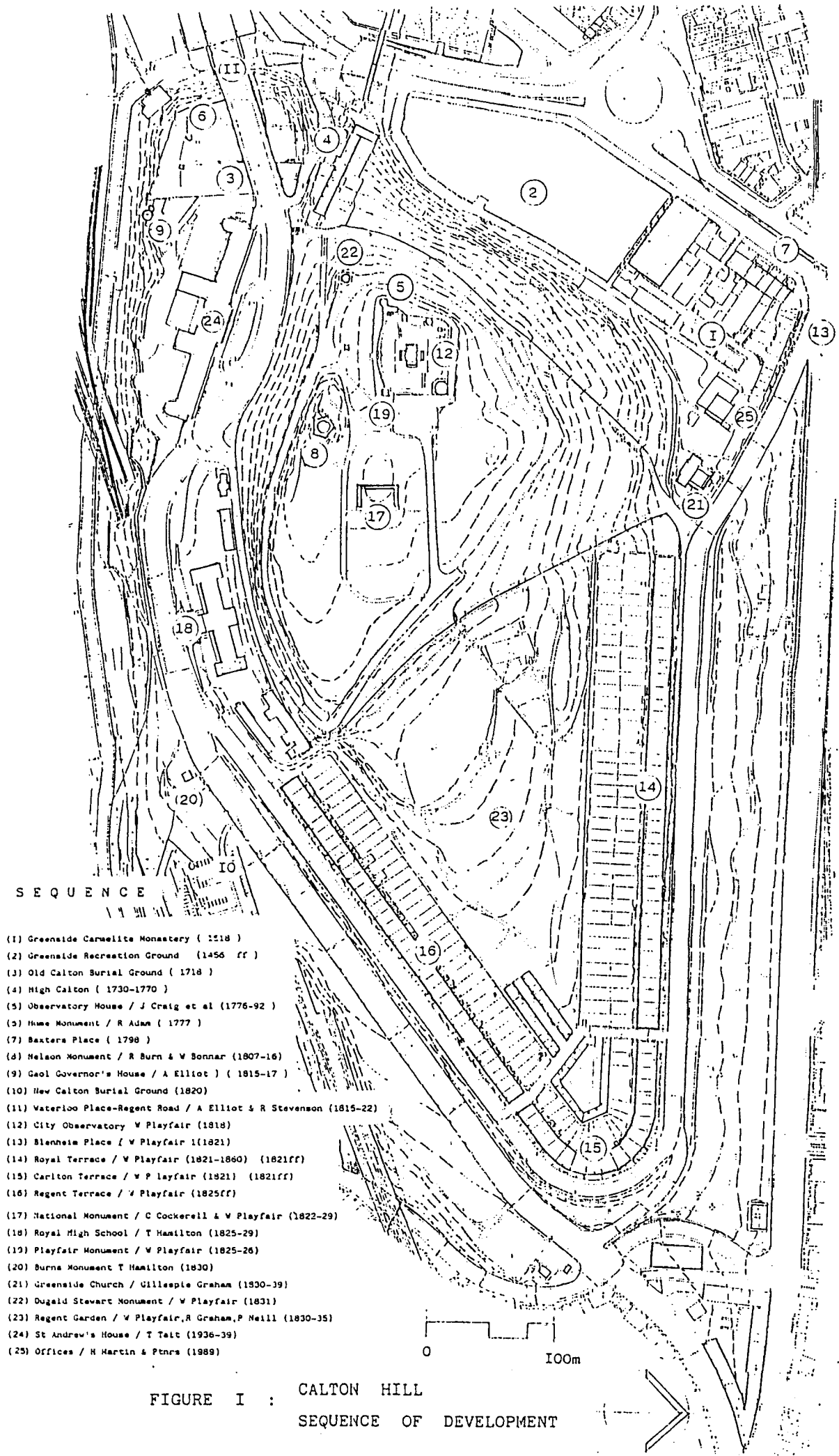
Dr John Byrom is a long-standing member of the Association's governing Council, and acts as its Open Spaces Advisor. He represents the Association on the Edinburgh Green Belt Trust and was, until his recent retirement, Director of the Master of Landscape Architecture Graduate Programme at the University of Edinburgh.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface:	page 4
Views:	6
Woodland:	7
Access:	7
Conclusions and Recommendations:	9

TABLE OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: Plan Showing Development Sequence
- Figure 2: Plan Showing Principal Views
- Figure 3: Plan Showing Means of Access
- Figure 4: Section Showing Improvements



SEQUENCE

- (1) Greenside Carmelite Monastery (1518)
- (2) Greenside Recreation Ground (1456 ff)
- (3) Old Calton Burial Ground (1718)
- (4) High Calton (1730-1770)
- (5) Observatory House / J Craig et al (1776-92)
- (6) Hume Monument / R Adam (1777)
- (7) Baxters Place (1798)
- (8) Nelson Monument / R Burn & W Bonnar (1807-16)
- (9) Gaol Governor's House / A Elliot (1815-17)
- (10) New Calton Burial Ground (1820)
- (11) Waterloo Place-Regent Road / A Elliot & R Stevenson (1815-22)
- (12) City Observatory W Playfair (1818)
- (13) Blenheim Place / W Playfair I (1821)
- (14) Royal Terrace / W Playfair (1821-1860) (1821ff)
- (15) Carlton Terrace / W P Playfair (1821) (1821ff)
- (16) Regent Terrace / W Playfair (1825ff)
- (17) National Monument / C Cockerell & W Playfair (1822-29)
- (18) Royal High School / T Hamilton (1825-29)
- (19) Playfair Monument / W Playfair (1825-26)
- (20) Burns Monument T Hamilton (1830)
- (21) Greenside Church / Gillespie Graham (1830-39)
- (22) Dugald Stewart Monument / W Playfair (1831)
- (23) Regent Garden / W Playfair, R Graham, P Neill (1830-35)
- (24) St Andrew's House / T Tait (1936-39)
- (25) Offices / H Martin & Ptnrs (1989)

0 100m

FIGURE I : CALTON HILL
SEQUENCE OF DEVELOPMENT

PREFACE

Essential background relevant to the character and management of Calton Hill is given in five references. The first and most important of these is:

Stark W. Report to the Right Honourable Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council of the City of Edinburgh and Governors of George Heriot's Hospital on the Plans for laying out the Grounds for building, between Edinburgh and Leith. Edinburgh 1814.

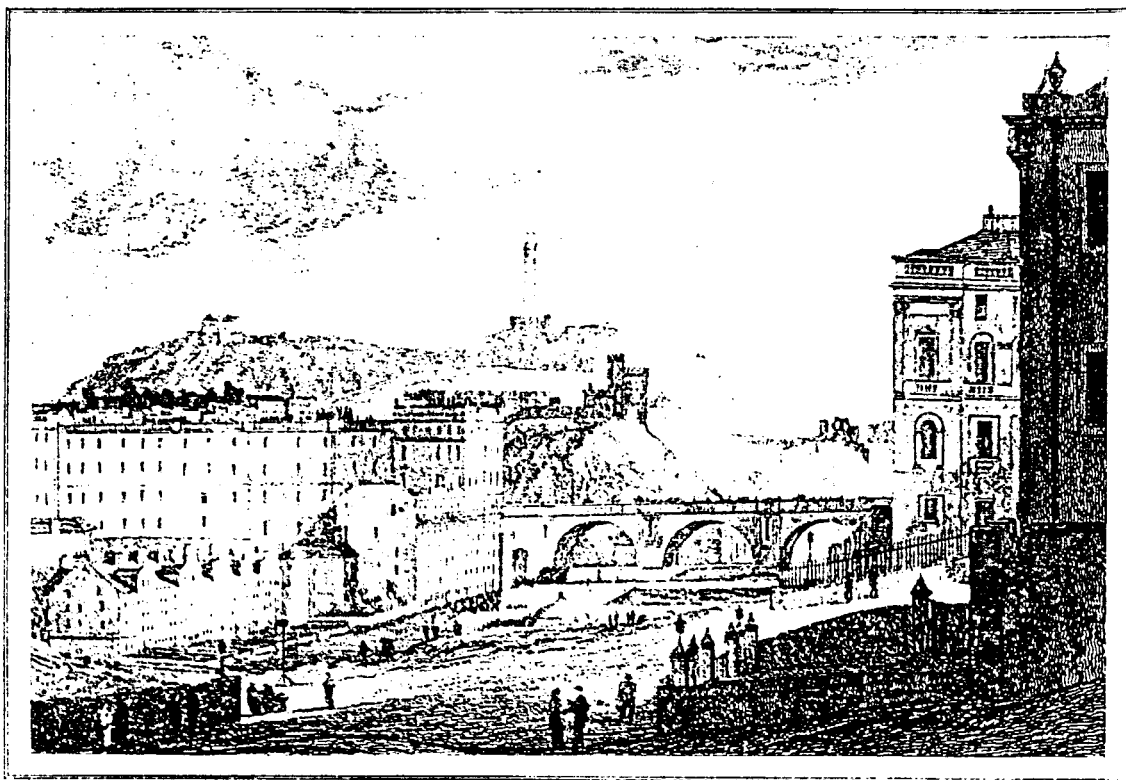
The modern history of Calton Hill begins effectively in 1811 with the competition held for a new town of some 125 hectares and extending from the hill down to Leith. None of the 32 designs submitted was considered suitable, but the observations of the prominent architect William Stark (as above) were accepted as a guide to the final development. In 1818 Stark's former pupil William Playfair was given the commission and his design adhered closely to the spirit of Stark's advice.

Stark had three particular points to make about the hill: firstly, that the hilltop should be retained as a public park to exploit "the most splendid and diversified views . . . to be found assembled in the immediate vicinity of any large city and within the compass of a few minutes' walk." Secondly, that the hillsides should be generously tree planted by the inclusion of a generous balance of open space specifically for this purpose. "Trees and town buildings," he observed, "must surely be admitted to assimilate well together, since our best landscape painters, Claude and the Poussins, never tired of painting them, nor the world of admiring what they painted." And thirdly, he ventured that the approximate level of Princes Street extended eastward and carried around the mid-flank of the hill, well below the hilltop, offered the best opportunity for building development.

Today we have all of these just as Stark advised: the hilltop park, the eastward extension of Princes Street flanking a succession of fine buildings and set within generous woodlands. The design sequence by which this was achieved is summarised in Figure 1 and is described in a second essential reference:

McWilliam C (editor). The Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh. 1984 (refer to Chapter 12: Calton)

Briefly, the Calton landscape we have inherited was laid down largely between 1815 and 1835 (Figure 1) by the Heriot Trustees and the Town Council, and in their commissioning of work from the engineer Robert Stevenson and the architects Elliot, Hamilton, Playfair, Burn, Bonnar & Gillespie Graham. It had no coordinating masterplan but, with Stark's advice, came together as a series of deft improvisations. Common to the understanding of all the participant designers was a sure grasp of the language and method of Georgian picturesque improvement. The Scottish bible of this method in late Georgian times and a further essential reference in our understanding of the Calton landscape was:



DESIGNED BY JEWELL

ENGRAVED BY W.H. LIZARD

NORTH BRIDGE CALTON HILL &c.

from Head of Earthen Mound.

Alison, A. An Essay on Nature and Principles of Taste. Edinburgh: 1st Edition, 1790; five other editions to the 6th Edition, 1825.

Alison was an Edinburgh minister and his essay a persuasive restatement of Georgian aesthetics. His message was that all artistic, literary and musical expression, including landscape painting and improvement could be reduced to two categories of association, things sublime by association, and things beautiful by association: Things sublime being evoked by the rough, the craggy and the threatening, and by castellated and Gothic building forms; and things beautiful by benign, tree-framed, pastoral vistas touched with classical pavilions.

The Sublime and the Beautiful are to be found, finely placed and balanced on Calton Hill in a landscape unmatched in Georgian urban improvement, not only in its scale and the central open prominence of its site, but in the skilful handling of its skyline; and most of all in the quite exceptional quality of its ensemble of neoclassical buildings finely set with their lawns and woodlands and in contrast with the rock sides and their castellated Gothic towers.

The first official acceptance of the quality of this landscape came in 1970 with the designation of the Calton Conservation Area. The report supporting this designation is a further essential background reference:

City of Edinburgh Town Planning Department: Calton Hill Conservation Area. Edinburgh, 1969.

In recognition of the wholeness of this landscape, the Cockburn Association would like to recommend that the boundaries of the original conservation area be now revised to include The Burns Monument, the New Calton Burial Ground, the Regent Road Park, the cliff face down to Calton Road and also the woodland of Hillside Crescent adjoining the London Road.

One fifth and final background reference is useful in providing necessary information on the hill:

University of Edinburgh Department of Extramural Studies and Edinburgh New Town Conservation Committee. The Calton Conference. Edinburgh, 1983.

This reports on the proceedings of a conference held in 1983 to consider the future of the hill. Improvements recommended were listed at the back of the report, but sadly very few of these have been acted upon. The head of the service road has had token bollards and tree planting added to it but this has not prevented a further large erosion of the hilltop grass surface. No large scale tree planting has been carried out. The pump house obstructing the view down Princes Street has still not been removed and no new rest or sheltering points have been added.

The biggest change in use of the hilltop since 1983 has been the use of the Observatory east dome to house the Edinburgh Experience. This now draws some

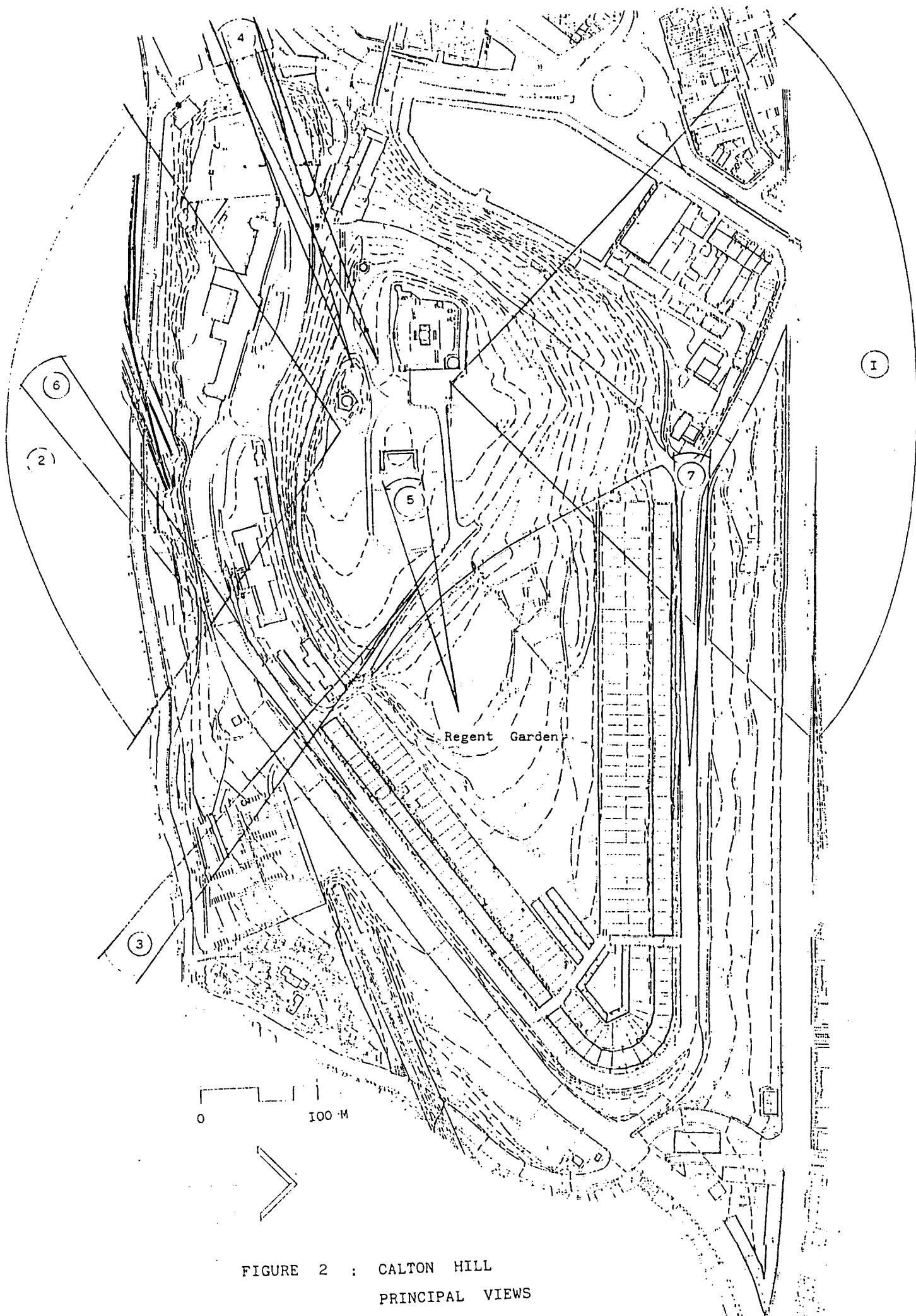


FIGURE 2 : CALTON HILL
PRINCIPAL VIEWS

20,000 visitors a year and together with increased use of the hilltop by tour coaches underlines the issue most important in the future management of the hill - namely to establish a desirable upper carrying capacity for it and against which to test all new proposals.

The following sections examine this in more detail by taking each of Stark's three design points in turn, the hilltop views, the generous provision of woodland, and the means of access to the hill.

VIEWS

The views from Calton Hill are exceptional at all levels, and they culminate in the magnificent 360° panorama up and down the Forth to be had from the top platform of the Nelson monument (385m above sea level). Figure 2 shows seven principal views from the upper ground levels of the hill.

Views 1 & 2 (Fig.2) combine to give the visitor to the upper park triangle an unrivalled opportunity to quickly place the City in its surroundings. View 1 (at 310m) allows a 180° sight of the estuary from Berwick Law to the Forth bridges. It is at its best in late afternoon light with the sun coming through a partial cloud cover. View 2 (at 325m) places the spine of the Old Town against the skyline of Holyrood Park, a view which is into the light and therefore dramatic throughout the day.

Views 3,4 & 5 (Fig.2) are exceptionally fine point vistas. No.3 is focused across to Arthur's Seat, a distance of some 2000m and without a single building in it - a view probably unique in all city centres. No.4 is the celebrated view down Princes Street and from two positions, one of which is ruined by the brick pumphouse clumsily placed in 1965 across its foreground.

View 5 is of the National Monument across the ha-ha from within Regent Gardens. This is brilliantly successful in borrowing the hilltop, and is certainly one of the best examples of the use of the ha-ha in Britain. The view is best seen in winter. Views 6 & 7, along Regent and Royal Terraces, are terminated by the spires of Tron Kirk and Greenside Church respectively.

Principal views towards the hill return along the line of those shown in Fig.2. Other views of significance are those eastwards from Castle Rock and the head of the Mound: westwards along the line of London Road; southwards from Ferry Road to Portobello; and northwards from the high ground of the Braids and the Pentlands. In all these the open side profile of the National Monument is of great importance. Southward views from the northwest are largely obscured by the St James Centre.

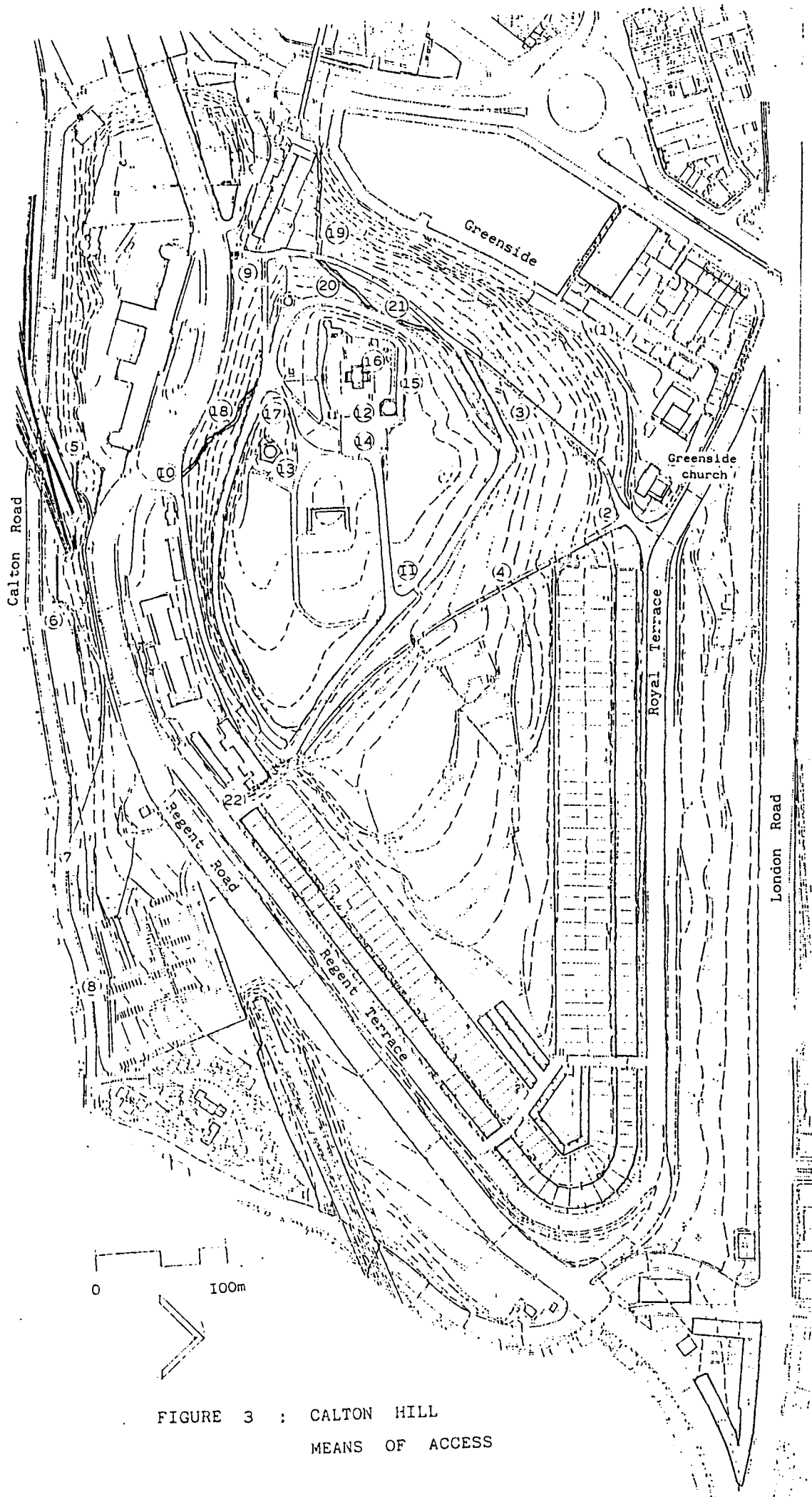


FIGURE 3 : CALTON HILL
MEANS OF ACCESS

WOODLANDS

William Stark's advice about woodlands has proved itself in the value of the now mature planting flanking the London & Regent Roads, and Regent, Royal and Carlton Terraces. The success of this planting in its boldness and simplicity may be best seen from Holyrood Park. From here also it will be seen to need some finishing touches: particularly around the upper margins of the hilltop, in order to extend the visual effect of the well established woodland of Regent Garden beyond the garden boundary wall; and also to build up the wind shelter on the hilltop between the main views.

There is an important future duty-of-care and management in all these woodlands, existing and proposed, to maintain a good balance of age and species diversity using the round crowned forest deciduous species preferred by the Georgians as part of their aesthetic of the Beautiful, and to maintain a simple sweeping overall effect.

ACCESS

Stark's advice on access and levels has given us the chief components of the present landscape, easily accessible at mid-level along the extended line of Princes Street, but difficult above and below (Fig.3). Footpath access to the hilltop is limited to those physically able and willing to climb the 200 or so steps up from the Regent Road and a further 200 down to Greenside Place and to Calton Road along the North back of Canongate.

The hill footpaths are numbered in Fig.3 and the contour interval of 3 metres indicates their gradient. From Greenside the only footpath is a steep, narrow ramp at (1) along the back boundary of Greenside Church. This links with a broad path from Royal Terrace (2) forking westward up a steep rough stepped ramp towards Rock House (3) and southward to follow the boundary wall of Regent Garden (4).

From the Calton Road & North back of Canongate there are four foot paths: to the west the aptly named Jacob's Ladder up the rockface beside St Andrew's House (5); further east two stepped ramps branching and connecting Regent Road (6) and the Burns Monument (7); and further east still, a gated connection through New Calton Burial Ground (8). All of these end at Regent Road and have no further connection to the hilltop except by side detour either to the main footpath up from Regent Road at Rock House (9) or along the only service road to the hilltop at (10) behind the old High School.

These bring the visitor to the upper park triangle, a rough grassland of 0.38ha contained within a broad combined path and road (11) at a level some 15m below the entrances to the Observatory (12) and the Nelson Monument (13). A tarmac spur from this path/road carries up to a turning circle and parking area (14). This

brings the visitor to a footpath enclosing the Observatory and Observatory House (15). Both of these levels give onto the principal views north and south, and these may also be enjoyed from within the Observatory Garden (16) and at the sides of the Nelson Monument (17). A further climb of some 200 steps brings the visitor to the panorama from the top of the Nelson Monument. All of these footpaths are and should remain rugged and windswept, but their lighting and rest points need review.

The biggest deficiency of access to Calton Hill is its one and only road to the upper park triangle (10), cut tightly against the rockface behind the Old High School. This is scarcely wide enough to allow two cars to pass and has a very inadequate and sharp turn at its head. These shortcomings have been and are both a blessing and a curse: a blessing for those wishing to limit vehicle access to the upper triangle as much as possible; and a curse for those seeking to increase the number of visitors using vehicles. Apart from giving or denying such usage, the road has an essential function in providing service and emergency access to the Observatory, the Nelson Monument and for grounds maintenance.

From the summary given of present means of access, and in addition to the inadequacy of the service road, a number of deficiencies are at once apparent. For people approaching the hill on foot from Princes Street, footpath access is reasonably direct and convenient (9), but an additional flight of steps to the upper park triangle needs to be built further east at position (18) to serve the heads of the three paths (5,6 & 7) carrying down to Calton Road and the North bank of Canongate. A more serious deficiency is at the head of the bridge from the St James Centre where an additional main footpath is now needed to allow direct access from here again to the upper park triangle at (19). Minor connecting paths at (20) and (21) are also needed to recognise short cuts up and down from adjacent levels. The potholed and washed off surface of the stepped ramps at (9) need immediate repair, and additional street lighting to make safer the night use of this thoroughfare around the North side of the hill.

A suggested additional path (22), linking the hilltop directly with the Burns Monument, and through New Calton Burial Ground to Holyrood Palace would require the acquisition of a narrow strip of ground at the side of the present East boundary of the old High School. It would seem worthwhile to at least examine this alignment while waiting for a decision on the High School's future.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

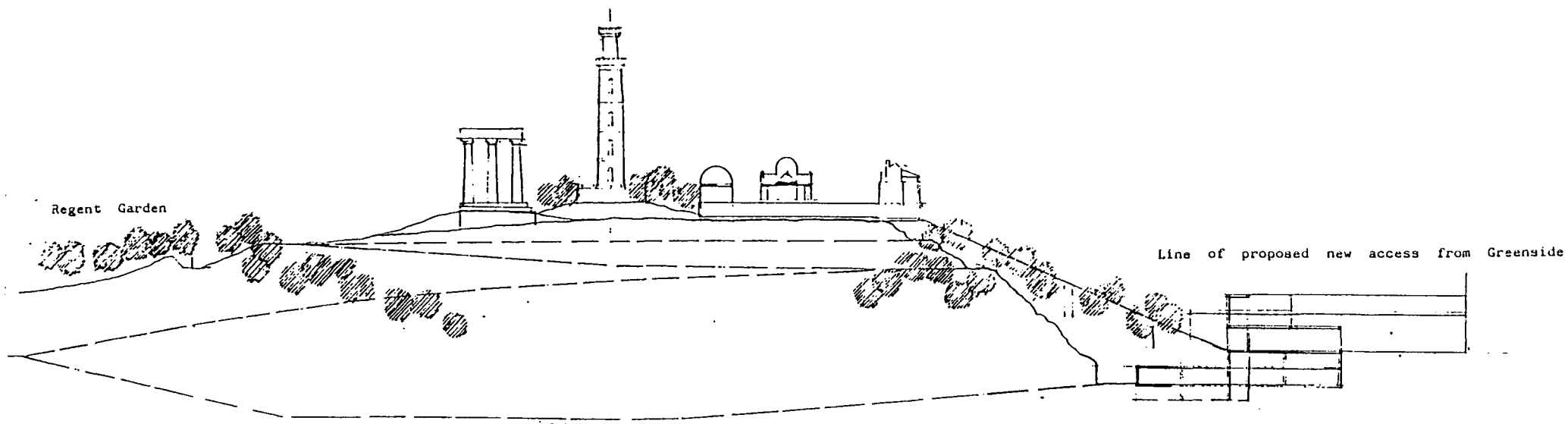
From the preceding, we summarise the following points concerning the importance of Calton Hill:

1. The Calton Hill development as a whole is of world importance as an exercise in town planning. Its value as an adjunct and eastern terminus of Edinburgh's Georgian enclave has been justly recognised in its inclusion within the recent World Heritage Site;
2. As an urban landscape improvement it is unmatched as an essay in the Georgian aesthetic of The Sublime and The Beautiful;
3. As a public park, The Calton Hill has not yet been accorded adequate recognition for its historical importance. It is among the very first of all purpose-built British Town parks, and in Scotland is predated only by Robert Owen's park at New Lanark;
4. It offers an ensemble of neoclassical pavilions and monuments of such outstanding excellence that Athens might almost be dubbed the Edinburgh of the South;
5. Apart from the distinctive skyline of its pavilions and monuments, Calton Hill's most valuable asset in everyday usage is in the short bracing experience it offers of rising quickly clear of the surrounding city into the freedom of its wide, windy, cloud filled vistas. These two features provide the hill's essential spirit of place;
6. Calton Hill's upper park triangle, for all it contains, is a very small space (0.38ha). It is the most intensively used public grassland in Edinburgh and is degrading under the pressure of visitor numbers.

From the above six points, we conclude that the key to successful future management of the hill landscape lies in accepting that the hill's present level of usage by 350,000 visitors a year cannot be greatly increased. On this basis we make the following recommendations:

1. There is a minimum immediate need for a 5-10 year programme of capital improvements to the existing fabric of the park in response to the present pattern of usage and on the assumption that the hilltop parking capacity for cars and tour coaches is not increased. Such a programme should begin with a detailed review of the distribution and condition of all footpaths. Redundant footpaths should be removed, new ones added where needed (Fig.3), and all those kept should be thoroughly repaired. Supplementary lighting is needed along the main footpaths and rest points exploiting views and wind shelter. Grassed edges in the upper park triangle should be related to a simple cutting pattern, leaving areas roughcut where usage is light. The sides of the park

removal of tour coaches from top



new tree planting below & framing hilltop vistas

FIGURE 4 : CALTON HILL
SECTION SHOWING SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS
(LOOKING SOUTH FROM PICARDY PLACE)

below the vistas of Figure 2 need building up in clumps of new tree planting to match those in Regent Garden and soften the abrupt transition at the boundary wall. Lastly, accumulated clutter should be removed including the pump house disfiguring the view along Princes Street (Fig.2);

2. Given the preceding improvements and present hilltop vehicle access/parking, we recommend further consideration be given to the use of Observatory House and its side garden as a cafe, serving present visitor numbers and with accommodation included for a resident caretaker/parkkeeper. If this is accepted, then the conversion should be as unobtrusive as possible;
3. With a more radical and farsighted approach to management we believe that the hill could accept an increase in visitor numbers up to a total of approximately 500,000. To achieve this without further degradation, the hilltop must be cleared of its clutter of tour coaches. Car parking beyond service and emergency access needs must also be strictly limited to certain agreed categories of user and within a quota. Given these restrictions we would favour an entirely new means of visitor access to the hilltop along the line shown in Figure 4. This might take the form of enclosed viewing escalators or a rail funicular; beginning at the present roof level of the Greenside car park and with bus access directly off and onto Leith Walk, and connecting directly with the St James Square footbridge; the whole developed as part of a privately developed leisure centre extending over the rest of the Greenside garage, and reflecting the original recreational use of this site. Set within flanking woodland, and well away from the back of Rock House and its neighbours this new access might bring visitors to a new point of arrival against the west outer wall of the Observatory. This could be connected directly to a new building linking Observatory House and the east dome, and be kept below the line of the existing wall. It is important, though, that this linkage be made without disturbing the Astronomical Society of Edinburgh's use of the Observatory.