



Edinburgh in 1681, both had been recognised and honoured as botanists. Sibbald had been appointed Physician and Cartographer Royal to King Charles II in 1670, with instructions to write and publish the natural history of Scotland, including its flora, and 'the geographical description of the kingdom'. Balfour, described by Sibbald as 'a man of excellent wit who had improved by his travels for fourteen years',<sup>4</sup> had qualified MD in Caen in 1662 and worked in St Andrews before moving to Edinburgh in 1670.

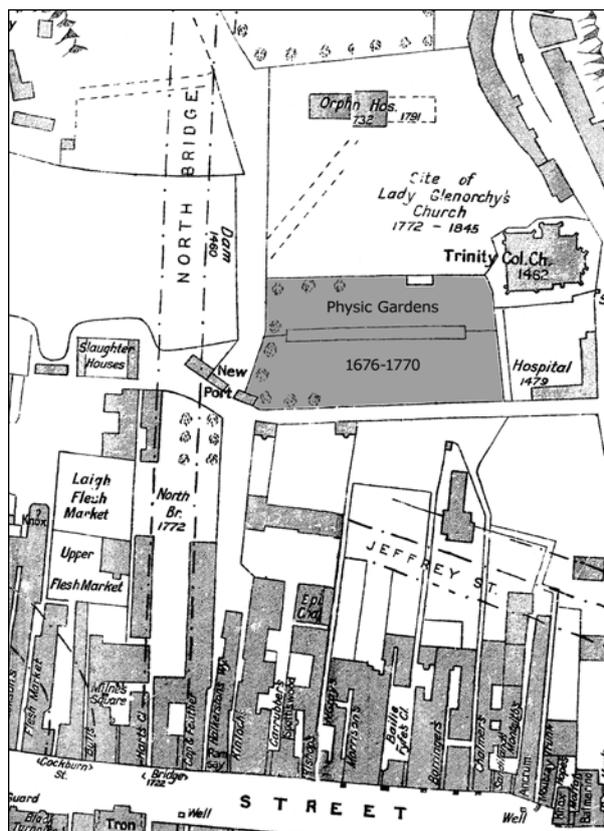
The two physicians rented a 40-ft x 40-ft allotment in St Anne's Yards from John Brown, a gardener in the King's (Royal) Garden. The extensive yards were adjacent to the southeast corner of the Palace of Holyrood House grounds, the site of today's public car park for the Palace and the Scottish Parliament. Diligent research has failed to find precisely where the allotment was. This was not, as some have suggested, the physic garden of the Royal College of Physicians, which was founded in 1681, by which time the St Anne's Yards site was no longer in use; nor was it the King's ('Royal') Physic Garden, which is shown on maps as being much larger and inside the Palace grounds, beside the building known today as Queen Mary's Bath House.

Sibbald and Balfour were fortunate to find and appoint a talented, virtually self-taught young gardener, James Sutherland, whose fame as a botanist was later matched by his reputation as a numismatist. The first plants were from Sibbald's own garden at Kipps, from Balfour's Edinburgh garden and from Patrick Murray, Baron of Livingstone, who was famous for collecting seeds, plants and exotica. Before long the St Anne's Yards garden had 900 plants. Young physicians collaborated in designing the garden, donating plants and giving financial assistance. As Sibbald and Balfour had hoped, they were quickly producing enough plants for their own herbal preparations and for sale to fellow physicians and apothecaries. Initially, the surgeon-apothecaries resented the new garden, rightly suspecting that it heralded a college for the physicians, but before long they were sending their apprentices to be taught by Sutherland.

Sibbald intended the gardens primarily for tuition in botany, secondly for 'the enlightenment of apothecaries and surgeons' and thirdly as the basis for a pharmacopoeia, which Sibbald had long seen as a priority and prerequisite for a college of physicians and which was eventually published in 1699.<sup>5,6</sup>

## THE SECOND PHYSIC GARDEN ASSOCIATED WITH PHYSICIANS

By 1676 it was obvious that a larger garden was needed. Balfour negotiated with the Town Council a 19-year lease to Sutherland of a garden in the northeast of the city, by Trinity Hospital (Figure 2). Sibbald, writing in Latin, provided a detailed description of this garden, part of which is presented here in translation:



**FIGURE 2** The site of the Trinity Physic Garden in relation to the North Bridge, Jeffrey Street and Trinity College Church and Hospital, from William Edgar's map of 1742. (Reproduced by permission of Edinburgh Central Library)

To the west of it is the so-called North Loch, which is there terminated by a wall and a mound. The loch, restrained by this barrier, empties its waters, on occasion like a waterfall, into another somewhat lower channel, which, also artificially constructed of stone, carries the water quietly through the middle of the garden for its whole length. To the south the garden has the city wall, on the east Trinity Hospital, on the north there is the pleasure garden which adjoins the Collegiate Church. It is everywhere enclosed by a wall and is separated by a reasonable interval from both public and private gardens. The length of the garden from east to west is about 300 ft, its breadth from south to north is 190 ft.

The garden is divided into six rectangular plots, three on each side of the canal; half on the south side, half on the north. Each plot has its distinct beds with footpaths between them. There are several paths on each side of the canal, which runs through the garden, and other paths surround the garden just inside the walls, and these are extended next to the boundary walls. In the first and second plots (which lie towards the north and are separated from each other by a hedge) all the plants are arranged in beds according to their order in the Pinax [schema] of [the Swiss

botanist] Caspar Bauhin and very accurately divided, in accordance with the genera and species, into their proper classes. These two plots are separated from the third, which lies to the north of them, by a privet hedge. This same third plot is a flower garden in which flowers and the more showy plants are arranged in beds.

These three plots with their paths form the northern part of the garden, which slopes gently from the wall on the north down to the channel in the middle of the garden. It has an excellent southerly exposure. The other half of the garden, extending southwards from the channel, is more shaded on account of the ground being flatter and the height of the city wall. In it there are three plots with beds, walks and paths. In the fourth plot, lying to the north near a well, is situated a place of instruction for medical students in which plants used in medicine are arranged in beds in alphabetical order, as in dispensaries.

The fifth plot, next to the preceding one on the west, contains a pond where aquatic plants are grown and also a nursery in which certain of the more useful plants are grown and propagated for transplanting. A privet hedge divides the sixth and last plot from the fifth plot. The sixth, to the northwest, is an arboretum in which shrubs and trees of every kind, whether fruit bearing or not, are neatly arranged. Along the enclosing walls the longest beds are to be found, in which some of the rare plants are grown under protection from the injurious effects of the climate by bell-shaped glasses and small frames. Moreover, the walls are everywhere covered with very beautiful shrubs. Roses of every kind are planted in beds at the side of the canal and also shrubs remarkable for their fragrant flowers. It has three entrances or gates, one on the west and two on the east, through which there is access from the various quarters of the city.

There are in the garden not only quite a number of plants indigenous to this country, but also plants from both hemispheres, especially those which have been distributed through all countries for the cure of sickness and disease; here almost all have been gathered together and grow quite well. The total number of all the plants is approximately 2,000, of which the worthy keeper of the garden, James Sutherland, Master of Arts and student of medicine, will shortly issue a catalogue.<sup>7</sup>

In 1676 the Town Council incorporated this new garden into the Town's College (as the University of Edinburgh was known in its early years).<sup>8,9</sup> The following year the Council agreed to pay Sutherland an annual salary of £20, with the responsibility for running all three gardens – Curryhill, St Anne's Yards and Trinity Hospital.

With the Trinity Hospital site flourishing, Sibbald and Balfour, as official visitors to the garden, recommended that the rental of the St Anne's Yard site be discontinued. Meanwhile, the King's Garden, or Royal Garden, in the grounds of Holyrood, a very much bigger garden than any in the city prior to the present-day Royal Botanic Garden, continued as a flower, vegetable and herb garden. This garden was exclusively for the occupants of the palace under the oversight of the King's Gardener; it was only intermittently under the direction of a doctor.

In 1689, during an assault on Edinburgh Castle, orders were given for the North Loch to be drained via the channel described by Sibbald. As a result, the garden was covered with six inches of mud, garbage, human and animal sewage. Sutherland and his staff saved a few plants and within a year had received hundreds of gifts of further plants and seeds from around the world to restore the site as a demonstration and teaching garden.

By 1695 the Town Council reported that 'the Physic Garden is in great reputation both in England and foreign nations, by the great care and knowledge of Mr James Sutherland' (by then also King's Gardener). Supported by Sibbald, the Council duly appointed Sutherland Professor of Botany in the Town's College. Sibbald negotiated with the surgeons that Sutherland might use each of the gardens to teach surgical students who were prepared to pay an annual fee of £1, a useful supplement to Sutherland's meagre pay.

The Trinity Hospital site ceased to be a physic garden in 1763. However, its garden, hospital and church survived until 1854, when they were cleared to make way for three railway stations, which later coalesced to become Waverley Station. Today, there is a plaque commemorating the physic garden adjacent to platform 11 at Waverley.

## PHYSIC GARDENS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ROYAL COLLEGE

Between 1695 and 1724 there were at least two more physic gardens. Maps of that period show a 'physic garden' immediately adjacent to the property shown as 'Physicians' Hall' in Fountain Close (where the physicians are known to have met, although it was never officially designated Physicians' Hall), lying south of the High Street near today's Blackfriars' Street (see Figure 1). The garden was so popular with the general public that 'the physicians had it fenced off, entry only being possible with a key obtainable from the College'. There is no record of which physician was in charge of this garden.

A much larger piece of ground, lying to the southeast of the Town's College and due west of the Infirmary (roughly at today's South Bridge and Nicolson Street), opened in 1728 and was used as a physic garden. It is presumed to be the one leased from the Town's College

in 1724 by the physicians John Rutherford, Andrew Sinclair, Andrew Plummer and John Innes. These four Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh successfully sought permission to rear plants and conduct chemical experiments there, at their own expense, in order to supply apothecaries with reliable drugs.<sup>3,10,11</sup> Patients from the Infirmary were permitted to walk in this garden.<sup>3</sup>

There is no record of either of these two gardens having been officially designated the Physic Garden of the Royal College of Physicians, just as there are no records of any more gardens having been developed on the Curryhill site.

## KEY INDIVIDUALS, 1714–1922

Even in the records of the time there is much confusion about the titles of posts held by both gardeners and physicians. For example, 'Royal Gardener' could, on occasion, mean the gardener responsible for the Royal Garden within the grounds of Holyrood House or the gardener appointed by the monarch. Some gardeners, such as Sutherland, were responsible for the care and development of all the gardens; others for only one or two sites. Professors of Botany were originally appointed by the Town Council but did not necessarily teach in the 'Toon's College', later to be known as the University.

### William Arthur

The accession to the throne of George I in 1714 meant that Sutherland was no longer King's Botanist with responsibility for the Royal Physic Garden. The new king's appointment of William Arthur was surprising and, fortunately, brief. Born in 1680, Arthur had studied medicine in Leiden under Herman Boerhaave, graduating MD in 1707. He then returned to practise in his home town, Elie, before moving to work in Edinburgh in 1714. He was soon accepted in high society but had no reputation whatsoever in botany, hence the surprise when he was appointed Regius Keeper and Regius Professor. What was not appreciated at the time was that Arthur was a fervent Jacobite who would play a leading role in a failed attempt to take over Edinburgh Castle in the 1715 rebellion. He fled to Rome, dying there in 1716. He had made no contribution to Edinburgh's physic gardens.<sup>12</sup>

### Charles and George Preston

The appointment in 1706 of Charles Preston as Professor of Botany seemed promising. He had been taught botany by Sutherland and studied medicine in France, Holland and Flanders, graduating MD in Rheims in 1696. He then went on a tour of western Europe and spent some time visiting many of the leading scientists in London, returning to Edinburgh in 1697. In the following year Preston matriculated at Aberdeen University, which offered medical doctorates but had no medical school, gaining his second MD in 1699. On returning to Edinburgh he was

summoned to appear before the RCPE and fined for seeing patients in Edinburgh without the College's licence to do so. In 1704, still not having paid the fine, he was appointed Secretary and Librarian of the College.

Preston's appointment as Professor of Botany was followed in May 1706 by his appointment as Keeper of the College Garden, at a salary of £15 per annum (by comparison, Arthur had been paid £50 for his post at Holyrood). At this time surgeons saw themselves as prescribers and dispensers of medications on a par with physicians, and so made full use of Preston: their apprentices had to attend his classes at 4 am and be back in their master's shops by 7 am. Preston, however, soon lost his initial enthusiasm for his work: the documented decline in the Trinity garden is usually attributed to this loss of motivation. He built up a small medical practice but died a bachelor in December 1711, aged 51, leaving an estate of less than £20.<sup>11,12</sup>

Charles Preston was succeeded as Professor of Botany and 'Intendant' of the physic garden at Trinity Hospital by his brother George, about whom even less is known than his elder sibling. George had sufficient but meagre training as a surgeon and served for a short time in the army before becoming an apothecary and Professor of Botany in 1713, as well as a teacher of botany to surgical apprentices. Interestingly, he was required to pay £40 to lease the Trinity garden, even though he was the Intendant, and although medicinal herbs were grown there he frequently had to travel to London and the Continent to purchase sufficient herbs for his own practice as well as for selling to apothecaries.<sup>9</sup>

George Preston retired in 1738, disheartened and disillusioned. The gardens were seldom visited by the public, insufficient herbs were grown for even one apothecary's needs, few apprentices came to study, only one gardener worked there and, judging by the minutes of its meetings, the Town Council was even less interested in them than he and his brother had been. This was the nadir of Edinburgh's physic gardens.<sup>11</sup>

### Charles Alston

With the appointment of Charles Alston the fortune and reputation of the physic gardens rose dramatically. He had succeeded Arthur in the Royal Garden, maintaining and developing it where previous physicians had failed to do so and continuing to give lectures. He came under the patronage of the Duchess of Hamilton (whose husband was the hereditary keeper of the Palace of Holyrood House), who tried unsuccessfully to interest him in a legal career. She then appointed him her principal servant, before persuading George I to make him King's Botanist, Professor of Botany and Materia Medica, and Overseer of the Royal Garden, all for a salary of £50 per annum. Knowing that Alston might lose these posts and income if a new king

chose to appoint someone else, the duchess made arrangements for £500 to be available to him in such an eventuality.

The 33-year-old Alston, recognising how untrained he was, went to Leiden to study botany and medicine under Boerhaave. He graduated MD Glasgow in December 1719, and two years later became a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. In 1725 he became College Secretary, a post he held for 21 years. When George II came to the throne, Alston was confirmed in his posts but could not become Professor of Botany at the University until George Preston vacated the chair in 1738. For the next two centuries the post of King's Botanist in Scotland was linked with the Chair of Botany at Edinburgh University. Although it had never been intended as a public physic garden, the Royal Garden gradually lost its importance as Trinity's reputation grew, particularly when Alston taught botany there in the summer months and materia medica in the winter.<sup>11</sup>

Alston had several books and scientific papers published, maintained a thriving correspondence and exchange of plants and seeds with Boerhaave, and put the gardens on a sound footing for the first time in their history. His work was continued with the appointment of one of his students, John Hope.

### John Hope

John Hope started his medical studies in Edinburgh, interrupted them to study botany in Paris and returned to complete his medical training in Glasgow. He qualified in 1750, after which he was licensed by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. On Alston's death he succeeded to the Chair of Botany and Materia Medica and was appointed King's Botanist in Scotland and Superintendent of the Royal Garden in 1760, at a salary of £50 per annum. Among his many achievements was the separation of botany and materia medica; new chairs were established for each. For the first time the professorship in botany was a university appointment and not a Town Council one, and the position of King's Botanist and Garden Superintendent became a life appointment.

Hope's greatest achievement, however, was the purchase in 1760 of land to the west of what today is Haddington Place (part of Leith Walk), for the creation not of a physic garden but a botanic garden with a small herbarium, providing space for larger shrubs and trees. This was a major change, and not only in name.<sup>2,5,8,9</sup>

### The Leith Walk Garden

The new site occupied five acres and was divided into two sections. The east section, which Hope called the School of Botany, was for plants arranged systematically. On each side were plants, trees and shrubs with medicinal properties. In the west section were the 140-ft long conservatories and hothouses, as well as a pond for

aquatics and the *Sylva Botanica*, a collection of trees with medicinal properties. In 1763 the plants and shrubs were transferred from the Trinity Hospital site to Leith Walk, and Hope obtained from the Crown a permanent endowment for the garden of £119, 3 shillings.

Hope's grandfather, Lord Rankeillour, had been a Senator of the College of Justice, and his father a respected Edinburgh surgeon. The family had influence with, among others, the Earl of Bute and the Duke of Portland, which Hope used to his advantage to secure the site for the gardens and further financial support in subsequent years. In 1776, £600 was granted, together with an additional annual grant of £50, rising to £100 in 1785.<sup>12</sup>

Much of the garden's success was due to John Williamson, the Principal Gardener and Hope's research assistant. On his death in 1780 Williamson was succeeded by Malcolm McCoig, who himself died in 1789, three years after Hope. Williamson, McCoig and Hope (who served as President of the RCPE from 1784 to 1786) were a remarkable team, cataloguing all the known flora of Scotland and somehow obtaining specimens of plants rarely seen or thought extinct. Sadly their planned book, *Flora Edinburgensis*, on which all three had worked for many years, was never published. One of their students, the surgeon William Roxburgh, went on to become superintendent of the Calcutta Botanic Garden and published a catalogue of the flora of India. Another, Archibald Menzies, later became famous for his work on the herbarium and for cataloguing Scottish flora.<sup>12</sup>

### Daniel Rutherford

Daniel Rutherford, appointed in 1786 to succeed Hope, was famous as a chemist, physician and botanist. He was the son of John Rutherford, President of the RCPE from 1752 to 1756; Daniel later became President himself in 1796–98. He graduated MA before gaining his Edinburgh MD in 1772, and then studied botany in England, France and Italy until setting up practice in Edinburgh in 1775. In November 1796 the Town Council appointed Rutherford Professor of Medicine and Botany at the University, and a month later he was made Regius Keeper of Botany at the University, Keeper of the Botanic Garden and King's Botanist, with a salary of £50 sterling.<sup>9,10,12</sup>

Rutherford's 33 years in charge of the Leith Walk gardens were memorable, largely because of the 12 Principal Gardeners he oversaw in that time. By 1810, however, a lack of funds and (some claimed) Rutherford's disinterest led to a decline in the garden. The improvement over the next few years can be attributed to a new Principal Gardener, William McNab, previously Principal Gardener at Kew, who had been recruited and recommended by no less an authority than Sir Joseph Banks, to whom Rutherford had written. It remains a mystery why McNab accepted the post with its immense challenges for one third of his salary in London.

Hope had left nearly 170 medicinal plants, less than a quarter of which were included in the *Pharmacopoeia* of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Yet the Leith Walk site was extending beyond medicine-centred botany: throughout the whole garden there were more than 4,000 plants. Rutherford therefore, long before his death in 1819, worked for a move to a larger site.

### Robert Graham

Robert Graham came to the Leith Walk Garden from Glasgow, where he was the first Professor of Botany. The third son of a Stirling GP, he studied medicine at Edinburgh University and became apprenticed to a surgeon. After gaining his MD and becoming a Licentiate of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1808, he spent some time at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, before setting up in general practice in Glasgow.

On 5 January 1820 Graham was appointed Professor of Medicine and Botany at Edinburgh University by the Town Council. At the end of the same month he was appointed Regius Professor of Botany, Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden and King's Botanist by the Crown 'to commence from the 15th day of December last' – proof that the Crown had acted before the Town Council which in its turn made an appointment without discussion with the Crown. Despite his newly increased salary of £100, Graham was still forced to take on some private medical practice and teaching.

The biggest challenge facing Graham was finding a new site for the garden and then to move everything from Leith Walk. One site had been identified near Holyrood; it was attractive because most medical students lived on the south side of the city, it was near the King's Garden and the Infirmary and, as was seriously suggested, Salisbury Crags would be ideal for rock plants. The proposal was rejected and a preferable site, Broompark, of 14½ acres, was found adjacent to the Garden of the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society in Inverleith. Between 1820 and 1823 thousands of plants, shrubs and mature trees were moved from Leith Walk to Inverleith. The trees were uprooted and transported by an ingenious device designed by William McNab and his son, James. To this day similar devices built on the McNab design are still in use. Scarcely had the move been completed when James Rocheid, the owner of the Broompark estate who had lived in Inverleith House, died, making it possible to acquire more land.<sup>12</sup>

A herbarium, a physic garden in all but name, was established adjacent to the Caledonian Society's hall in the southern part of the garden. In 1864 the garden was extended by ten acres when the experimental garden of the Caledonian Society was acquired, and the site adjacent to the hall became the Royal Botanic Garden herbarium.<sup>12</sup> Further extensions were made in 1876 and 1888–89 under the last physician to be associated with the physic gardens, Sir Isaac Bailey Balfour.

### Isaac Bailey Balfour

Isaac, the son of John Hutton Balfour, Royal Botanist and founder of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh, graduated with first-class honours in botany in 1873. He gained his doctorate in 1875 and in 1877 qualified in Edinburgh with honours in medicine. In 1884 he became Professor of Botany in Oxford, finally working in Edinburgh with much distinction from 1888 to 1922. He was the last doctor to be intimately involved with what became the Royal Botanic Garden and the last to teach medical students; subsequent lecturers were all non-medical botanists.

## THE PHYSIC GARDENS AND MEDICAL STUDENTS

From the days of Curryhill and St Anne's Yard until 1960 the physic and botanic gardens of Edinburgh were used as places where medical, surgical and apothecary students could be taught a subject regarded as being as important as anatomy and materia medica. Botanical lectures to medical students had been given by doctors from 1670 until 1922. As pharmacology advanced, however, so the need for a knowledge of botany diminished. From the 700 medicinal plants listed by Sibbald, the only herb-based medications still being described in 1960 were colchicine, senna, digitalis, aspirin, the opiates, ergotamine, cocaine, curare, ipecacuanha and rhubarb.

## THE PRESENT-DAY COLLEGE PHYSIC GARDEN

In 1996 a new physic garden was created by horticulturalists of the Royal Botanic Garden in a courtyard of the RCPE. The garden was designed as a tribute to Sibbald and the other medically and surgically qualified botanists who followed him. It has four beds, the first honouring the classical Greek and Roman herbalists as well as containing medicinal plants listed by Emperor Charlemagne to aid his troops. The second bed focuses on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the influence of William Turner; the third reflects the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while the fourth bed celebrates the use of plants in medicine today and looks to future research into new compounds.<sup>13</sup>

## DISCUSSION

Although scanty, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century records of Edinburgh's physic gardens demonstrate both the political and diplomatic acumen and vision of Sibbald and Balfour. Neither man, however, could possibly have foreseen that what had started as an allotment would become one of the world's greatest botanic gardens 300 years later, its evolution guided and inspired by many of the 'greats' in Edinburgh medicine. Sibbald would have been pleased that the early gardens contributed to the founding and standing of the RCPE and its pharmacopoeia. He is commemorated in the College's physic garden to this day.

This small study inevitably raises questions:

- What discussions took place between Sibbald and the Incorporation of Surgeons and Barbers about the shared use of the Curryhill site? Relations between surgeons and physicians were fraught in the mid to late seventeenth century, so collaboration here might have been diplomatically useful. Did the physicians want to use their gardens for teaching apothecaries as a bargaining tool against the surgeons?
- Why did Sibbald lease the Trinity Hospital site when so much of the Curryhill site was ripe for development? Studies of Council records do not suggest that it was protected as a 'greenfield' site.
- Why did the RCPE persist with the Trinity site when they could have taken over the site leased by the four Fellows (Rutherford, Sinclair, Plummer and Innes), adjacent to the new Infirmary and the University and so near the meeting place of the College before it moved to George Street? College Council minutes cast no light on this, never mentioning this garden after 1724.
- Why did botany lectures for medical students persist until 1960 when most of the original herbal/botanical remedies had long since dropped out of use? Presumably other remedies might still be found.

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## FURTHER READING

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It is striking that some of the botanists/physicians involved with the gardens were prepared to give up lucrative medical practice for botany or, if they started in botany, to train in medicine. Equally revealing is how readily Edinburgh Town Council boasted of their gardens while paying scant attention to the reasonable requests and recommendations of the physic garden superintendents. Little credit can go to the Town Council, which persisted in paying a pittance to its gardeners even when it knew how much more those gardeners could earn in London. While the Council often seemed to ignore suggestions about how to improve the various gardens, however, they were always ready to take credit for them and their influence.

The reasons for the success of Edinburgh's physic gardens lay elsewhere: with their outstanding head gardeners, from Cathcart and Raeburn at Curryfield to Sutherland, the McNabs, Williamson and McCoig, as well as the physicians themselves.

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