

# St. Andrew's House

An Edinburgh Controversy  
1912–1939





# ST ANDREW'S HOUSE

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1912-1939

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## THE YEARS OF CONTROVERSY: 1912-1933

On 20 July 1928 Sir Lionel Earle, Secretary of HM Office of Works, sent Sir John Stirling-Maxwell of Pollok, first chairman of the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland and a distinguished horticulturist, a list of seeds from Nepal. The best had gone, but he undertook to send any that remained if Stirling-Maxwell would care to try them. As an afterthought Earle added:

I forgot to speak to you the other night on the question of rebuilding the Calton Hill Jail, or the removal of the Jail and replacing it by properly and well-designed Government offices and a new Sheriff Court House to make room for the National Library of Scotland, which is on the tapis. I know that this will be a difficult problem and we shall have to invoke the aid, very considerably, of the Fine Art Commission for Scotland as regards the design, taking into consideration of course all the surroundings of the site.

Earle had been appointed to the Secretaryship of the Works by Asquith in October 1912, having made a reputation as a private secretary, firstly to the Earl of Dudley in Ireland and then to the Marquess of Crewe when Colonial Secretary and Secretary of State for India. Affable, if somewhat distant, and impressive in appearance, he was extremely well connected, with family friends including the Chamberlains, A J Balfour and Georges Clemenceau as well as the Asquiths. He was an accomplished linguist and horticulturist. At the Office of Works he had taken a particular interest in the Royal Parks and Ancient Monuments, the latter to such a degree that he himself was Board Chairman. He could also be a discriminating patron of architecture: as a private secretary he had successfully recommended Lutyens to Crewe and the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, and when at the Office of Works continued to recommend him, most notably for the Washington embassy. And, very significantly for the story of St Andrew's House, he had been instru-

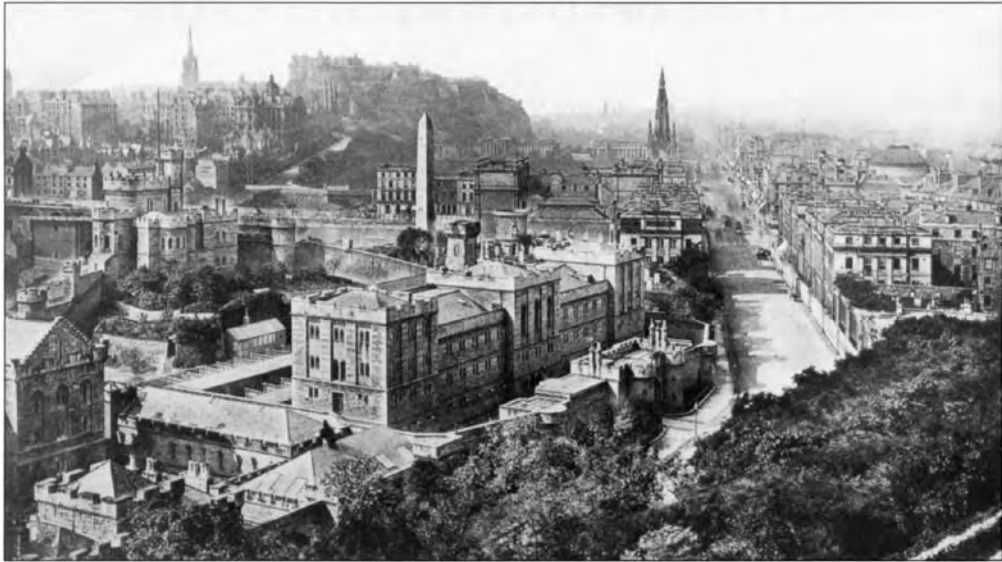
mental in setting up the Royal Fine Art Commission for England and Wales, leading to the setting up of The Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland in 1927. It was an action which later he must at times have had cause to regret.



*Sir John Stirling-Maxwell; drawing by Olly, 1937.*

Stirling-Maxwell was another quintessential figure of his generation, arboriculturist, antiquarian and the most important collector of architectural books between the wars. Tall and dignified, he was a man of infinite wisdom, patience and tact. He may well have guessed what Earle was really telling him: that the Office of Works, with the help of a few comments from the Fine Art Commissioners, was to undertake these buildings as an in-house project. It was the sighting shot in what was to be one of the greatest architectural controversies of all time although it is doubtful if either quite appreciated the scale of the passions which were to be aroused.

The proposal to build government offices on the site of the Calton Prison was not new. From the period of its construction the presence of the prison on the southern slope of Edinburgh's Acropolis, immediately adjacent to the national memorials to the Napoleonic Wars and the luminaries of the Scottish enlightenment, and to the Royal High School, had been regarded as an embarrassment. In *Memorials of His Time* Cockburn expressed a universally-held feeling that 'it had been a piece of undoubted bad taste to give so glorious an eminence to a prison. It was one of our noblest sites and would have been given by Pericles to one of his finest edifices. But in modern towns, though we may abuse and bemoan, we must take what we can get'. Nevertheless the earlier architects of the jail had done the best they could to mitigate the original error by imbuing the buildings with qualities of the Picturesque.



*The site: The Calton Prison from Calton Hill circa 1878. Robert Adam's Bridewell is on the extreme left.*

The first building on the site had been the castellated Bridewell, an impressive essay in geometric neo-classicism designed by Robert Adam on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon principle in 1791 and built in 1793-95. Under an Act of Parliament of 1814 this had been absorbed into a much larger castellated prison complex built in 1815-17 as part of the Waterloo Place works to designs by Archibald Elliot. This comprised a massive gatehouse to Regent Road with a large symmetrical prison block rising behind it, the whole of the site being contained on the south by a curtain wall with drum towers, the still-surviving Governor's House being the climax of the composition. As first built, the whole had the appearance of a castle of the reign of Edward I. Its Picturesque qualities had been further enhanced by Thomas Brown's towered East Division in the 1840s, but in 1881 Adam's Bridewell was replaced by the Middle Division, a conventional mid-Victorian prison block designed by Major-General Collinson which dwarfed everything around it and implanted in many people's minds a determination that the site should never again be so overburdened.

In 1911-12 the Asquith administration pushed through Parliament the Bill which, among other things, provided for a Scottish Board of Agriculture and the Scottish Land Court. Captain John Sinclair, created Lord Pentland in 1909, who had been Secretary for Scotland from 1905 and was an enthusiast for land reform, sought a centralised complex of buildings to house this board together with his other boards and various inspectorates. These Edinburgh dependencies of Dover House were then all housed in different premises bought or leased on an *ad hoc* basis. The Edinburgh branch of the Scottish Office itself was a small office at No 6 Parliament Square, a few doors along from the Office of Works branch office at No 3. The Local Government Board occupied a large house at No 125 George Street, while the Fishery Board had rooms in the Bank of Scotland a few doors farther east at No 103. The Prison and Lunacy Boards had houses (Nos 11 and 15) in Rutland Square, and the Scotch (sic) Education Department had the former Caledonian United Services Club at 14 Queen Street, supplemented by various outstations, while the newly-created Board of Agri-





*W. T. Oldrieve: model of scheme for offices on the Calton site, 1912.*

culture had found a temporary home in the former Tontine Hotel building at No 122 George Street. Several of these buildings were leased and from time to time there had been enforced removals and purchases.

Pentland proposed that these and the various other government offices not under his control should be centralised. He inspected the Calton site in May 1912, and on 28 August John Lamb, later Under Secretary of State, wrote to the Office of Works' Principal Architect in Scotland, W T Oldrieve, requesting him to prepare a scheme. Estimated to cost £306,816, approximately £49 million at 2009 prices, it was to have consisted of three large blocks in a 16th century Falkland Palace-inspired idiom, rather similar to Oldrieve's Aberdeen Post Office six years earlier. Oldrieve's architectural staff had recently been reduced from twenty-four to six, but he had the plans for the first block, together with a model of the entire scheme, completed by the autumn.

This proposal soon ran into demands for an open competition — a proposal which the Office of Works as ever stoutly resisted — but the Scottish Members of Parliament at first contented themselves with asking that Sir Robert Lorimer be appointed consulting architect. On 21 December 1912 he was asked to advise on the proposals for a fee of 300 guineas, worth approximately £49,250 in 2009. He reported in favour of combining the three blocks into a single building, but the Office of Works, finding his report insufficient value for money, persuaded him to produce a sketch design. No copy appears to have survived but later descriptions record that it consisted of two high blocks with a lower central link to reveal more of the hill as seen from North

Bridge. Pressure on Members of Parliament from the architectural profession and national sentiment resulted in questions on 9 January 1913 to Wedgwood Benn, Junior Lord of the Treasury who answered for the First Commissioner of the Office of Works, Earl Beauchamp, in the Commons. These brought about a reconsideration by a Scottish Departmental Advisory Committee appointed by the First Commissioner, comprising Pentland himself, the Lord Advocate (Robert Munro, later Secretary of State), C E Price MP, and the Marquess of Tullibardine MP who was later to figure importantly in the story as the 8th Duke of Atholl. Eventually on 10 February 1913, in response to a parliamentary question, Wedgwood Benn announced that an open competition would be held. But in the meantime Lord Pentland had been exiled by Asquith to Madras, and the next Secretary of State, MacKinnon Wood, was more preoccupied with other problems. The outbreak of war in August 1914 intervened without the competition ever being advertised. The project was shelved and in 1919 Herbert Ryle, one of Oldrieve's assistants, patched up York Buildings, a mid-Victorian block of stockbrokers' chambers, to provide a second temporary home for the Board of Agriculture which had now outgrown its premises at 122 George Street.

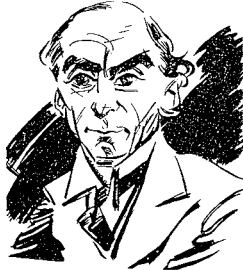
In January 1919 the 27th Earl of Crawford became Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and after 1921, when he also succeeded Sir Alfred Mond as First Commissioner, there seemed better prospects of the project for centralised offices being revived since he had, as Lord Balcarres, been among the members of parliament who brought about the decision in 1913 to hold a

competition. Early in 1924 the Scottish Office's proposals were ready enough to put before the Office of Works, but the new Secretary for Scotland, Lord Novar, who had recently returned from the Governor Generalship of Australia, lacked the political support his predecessor, Robert Munro, had enjoyed and with the departure of Lord Crawford as First Commissioner there was no longer any enthusiasm for the project within the Office of Works. On 8 April his successor, Earl Peel, announced that the Commissioners had rejected the Scottish Office's proposal on the grounds of expense. This was now estimated at £700,000 or £500,000 net, the estimated value of the existing buildings in the ownership of the Office of Works being £200,000. In March 1925 the Prison was vacated in anticipation of the Discontinuation Order planned under the Prisons (Scotland) Act of December 1926, and on 24 February 1927 the Army Council requested that the buildings be transferred to the War Office as the Headquarters of Scottish Command, then housed in *The Scotsman* building. In March Sir John Lamb, who had been appointed Under Secretary in 1921, reluctantly assented to the building being conveyed to the War Office. Plans for conversion were approved in June but when these were ruled out as too expensive by the Treasury, Sir John Gilmour, whose ministerial rank had been upgraded to one of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State in the previous year, immediately, on 13 October 1927, put in a second bid for the site. Gilmour was then in the process of presenting his Reorganisation of Offices (Scotland) Bill to parliament to transform the old Health, Agriculture and Prison Boards into three departments similar to the Scottish Education Department which had already been radically reorganised in 1918, and was shortly to promote the still more radical Local Government (Scotland) Bill of 1929.

Larger and more efficient premises were desperately needed: contemporary accounts describe how much time was lost in staff and public alike walking from one poky office to

another. The Edinburgh dependencies of Dover House now occupied no fewer than eighteen buildings, only three of which were Crown property. The Department of Health was spread over seven; the Scottish Education Department over three; the Fishery Board over two; and the Department of Agriculture over a further three. Scottish Command was similarly inconvenienced, being spread over five buildings. Between 1924 and 1928 Sir John Lamb had spent a great deal of time collating the savings likely to accrue from centralised premises, but as Gilmour's Bill had run into difficulty it was not until 24 February 1928 that a meeting of all the interested parties chaired by one of Earle's assistant secretaries, William Leitch (later Sir William Leitch) could be held to find a final resolution of the competing demands for the Calton and other sites. The Post Office required the Revenue Offices in Waterloo Place; the National Library, established by Act of Parliament in 1925, required the site of David Bryce's 1865 Sheriff Court on George IV Bridge under the terms of the agreement with the Faculty of Advocates whose library it had absorbed; the King's and Lord Treasurer's Remembrancer, on behalf of the Sheriff Court-house Commissioners, required a new Sheriff Court as Bryce's had been inadequate since 1912; and the War Office desired less expensive premises since *The Scotsman* buildings alone were costing it £3,000 per annum in rent.

It was agreed that the problem should be solved by building offices on the site of the Calton Prison, to accommodate the Secretary of State's departments, the dispossessed Revenue staff from Waterloo Place and the War Office staff, Colonel Thompson having agreed to abandon their proposals for the prison which he accepted would be substandard. It was also agreed that one wing of the new building would accommodate the new Sheriff Court, thereby releasing the site of the old for the National Library. At the close of the meeting Leitch sowed the seed of the future dispute by fixing a provisional cost of 2s 3d (£7.88 at 2009 prices) per cubic foot which he



J. Wilson Paterson;  
a drawing by Olly, 1938.

acknowledged would not permit of the standards adopted in the Houses of Parliament at Stormont.

Leitch then remitted the schedules of accommodation required to Earle's Chief Architect, Sir Richard Allison, who in turn appears at first to have delegated the problem to the Edinburgh office. While their plans were still in the preliminary stages the Secretary of State encountered a further slight local difficulty when on 19 October 1928 he was astonished to read in *The Scotsman* that Sir James Balfour Paul, Lyon King of Arms, 1890-1926, followed on the 24th by Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, Carrick Pursuivant, were making a bid for the prison as a new record office, a proposal obligingly dismissed as quite unnecessary in a confidential minute from the Deputy Keeper, George Augustus James Lee.

By 1928 the Edinburgh outpost of the Office of Works, now at No 122 George Street, was no longer the power in the land it had been, the architect for New Works and Ancient Monuments, J Wilson Paterson, never enjoying the title of Principal Architect in Scotland and being much more answerable to Allison than Oldrieve had been to Sir Henry Tanner and Sir Frank Baines. Although himself an able designer, Paterson appears to have been obliged to defer to one of Allison's lieutenants, A J Pitcher.

Throughout the year in which Paterson was engaged on drawing the various requirements of the client departments into a unified scheme, the project had become engulfed in controversy. The Sheriff Courthouse Commissioners, the Town Council and the legal profession did not appreciate their Sheriff Court being so distant from the Parliament House and the three law libraries, the Town Council proposing the present site in High Street in December 1928. The architectural profession, having won the battle for open competition in 1913, was in no mood to accept defeat. If

Stirling-Maxwell had indeed sensed trouble from Earle's low-key approach, his worst fears were confirmed in the following month. Among his Commissioners was Sir Robert Lorimer, unanimously elected president of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland on 1 June 1928. Once he had got wind of the Office of Works' intentions, Lorimer had little difficulty in arousing the emotions of a profession already hypersensitive to the encroachment of salaried architects on private practice with a speech — Earle described it as an outburst — which referred to the Office of Works as 'outsiders'. Nor did he have any difficulty in persuading Sir Walter Tapper, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, a body equally sensitive to the growth of central and local government departments of architecture, to write urging the importance of a good design. And, finally, he aroused an agitation within the Commission itself. Stirling-Maxwell found himself prevailed upon to write to Earle, reminding him of Lorimer's sketch designs of 1913, which he did in very guarded terms: being used as a front by the architect members and their painter and sculptor allies was something he was soon to resent.

Lorimer was in the event unable to find his copies of his sketch proposals and on 4 February 1929 he had to admit as much to Earle, grandly dismissing his carelessness with the assumption that Earle's people would be able to find their copies and requesting that he might call to discuss them. He was unlucky: Paterson's assistant, Herbert Ryle, remembered them but he could not find them either. Lorimer was in any event too late: the Office of Works scheme was now virtually complete. In February Stirling-Maxwell warned Earle that 'Edinburgh is much exercised over the new government buildings . . . I hope you will remember that it is no use bringing us in at the last minute to report on the details of the finished design' but, writing to his secretary at the Fine Art Commission, the painter Stanley Cursiter, who was then Keeper of the National Gallery, he accepted that no outside architect

would be employed, 'a pity but I am afraid that point must be taken as decided'. Cursiter, closer to both the architects and the Works officials, showed a shrewder appreciation of how the situation would develop when he warned him that 'the Office of Works seem quite willing to take on the massed battalions of the Architects so long as they can use the Fine Art Commission as a rampart' and that 'the difficulty in the Office of Works putting it before the Commission at this stage . . . is that they are uncertain our architectural commissioners would be more discreet than they have been in the past'.

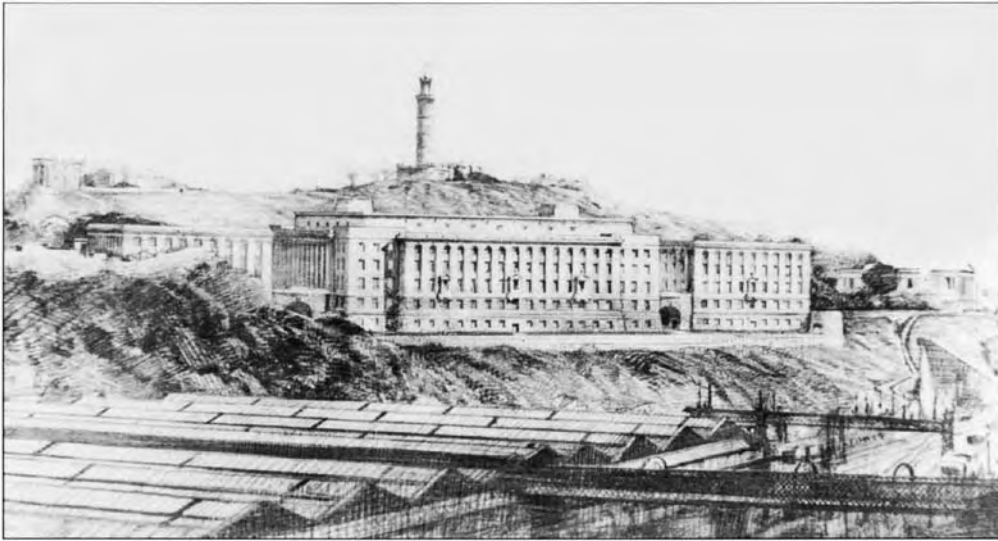
Paterson thus continued work on the project with Stirling-Maxwell's plea unheeded. By April, Gilmour, under pressure from his own Members of Parliament and the Edinburgh and Midlothian Councils, had become uneasy and wrote to the First Commissioner, now the Marquess of Londonderry, to say that he was unimpressed by the arguments against competition, suggesting that if one were held it was open to the Office of Works to submit a design. On selection he observed that 'other people employ professional architects and presumably find means of obviating undue expense in the design and erection of the buildings in view'. He threatened to put the matter before the Prime Minister and referred to the higher cost limits for the buildings at Stormont 'which no Scotsman would admit to be more important than those which will be erected on the Calton site, having regard to the unique position of the site and the effect of the buildings on the general appearance of the site'.

Earle and Londonderry remained unmoved. Cost was not the only consideration in Earle's mind. He had a great deal of sympathy for Allison whose career had commenced promisingly in 1912 with the Science Museum at South Kensington and the skilful early modern Cornwall House for HMSO in Lambeth. But he had been passed over as Tanner's successor by the less senior Frank Baines and had to wait until Baines, by then Sir Frank, left for private practice in 1920. But even then the major commissions of the

1920s, Stormont and the Washington embassy, had passed him by and Earle was determined that he should design a few more really major buildings before he fell due to retire in 1934.

In May 1929 Londonderry extended the dispute south of the Border with a disastrous attempt to put the case for the Office's own architects as guest speaker at the dinner of The Architecture Club. He argued that competition could not secure the best design as the most eminent architects refrained from anything so speculative; that selection was not satisfactory either as this was the method employed in nine out of every ten buildings in the country and it was a matter of astonishment to him as to how all the bad buildings that existed came to be erected, and that where the private architect might have to rely on his own experience, the official architect had comprehensive information ready to hand and had a sense of discipline. 'Imagination was there but the exuberance of it was restrained so that the official architect was not guilty of the abortions which disfigured our countryside in the name of architecture.' This was not well received by the club which was presided over by Sir Laurence Weaver, the Editor of *Country Life*. Among others, Sir Brumwell Thomas complained in *The Times*, as did Sir Reginald Blomfield, who wrote in characteristically trenchant language of the Office of Works' attempt to create for itself a monopoly of design: 'the inordinate appetite of bureaucracies is a standing menace in the modern State, which should be closely watched and firmly resisted'. Even the ever-courteous Stirling-Maxwell was moved to describe Londonderry's speech as 'silly'.

By 25 June the Office of Works' drawings and model were ready for the Royal Fine Art Commission's inspection at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in which it then met. They comprised a large central quadrangle of offices linked by arches to the Sheriff Court on the west and a subsidiary office block on the east, the main elevations being all of the same height and continuously pilastered without any central emphasis.



*H. M. Office of Works: official perspective of Scheme 1, 1929.*

The central building was to provide 150,000 square feet at an estimated cost of £358,500, which represented a considerable scaling down from the 1912 proposals, while the east block was to proceed only if required, leaving an imbalanced design a definite possibility. Lorimer and his fellow architect commissioner, Sir George Washington Browne, now retired from active practice but President of the Royal Scottish Academy since 1924, called at the Portrait Gallery and reported to Stirling-Maxwell that they found them neither so good nor so bad as to enable them either to approve or condemn right away. They did, however, complain of the lack of individual identity in the courthouse, finding the whole commonplace without any charm or Scotch character, while welcoming the fact that no attempt had been made to make them picturesque as in 1913. They found it odd that there were no plans of the interior, which made comment on the elevations difficult and attributed their absence to a desire to withhold as much information as possible.

The Commission left it to Browne and Lorimer to report further but Stirling-Maxwell wrote an interim reply to Earle finding that the vulner-

able features of the design were the pilastered treatment, the architectural decorations which Lorimer had identified as being borrowed from the new Grosvenor House in London, and the equality of the three blocks, 'an interesting experiment in simplification but rather dearly bought since it sacrifices the grace which would result from the subordination of the wings to the central block'. He suggested to Earle that it might be helpful to bring along alternatives. Cursiter, as the Commission's Secretary, sought details of the internal planning but was curtly told by Earle that none had been prepared, only the volume of building required being necessary at this stage. Writing as the author of the Commission's terms of reference, he bluntly told Cursiter that the Commission's duty, as he understood it, was to approve or not as the case might be, or amend if possible, the proposed elevations, and it was on these points that it had to concentrate.

To Cursiter fell the thankless task of collating the Commissioners' views and composing a response. His draft rehearsed the quality of architecture to be found in the city and advised that the Commissioners regretted to report that they had failed

to find in the proposed design any expression, such as they hoped would have been clearly necessary, of a full realisation of the peculiar requirements of the particular circumstances. The proposed building does not express in any degree the character which might have been anticipated as desirable in a Public Building in Edinburgh on such a site, nor does the design seem to have particular reference to the character of the site as distinct from, for instance, any other site in a City Square, or an open position devoid of the essential characteristics present on the Calton Hill . . . the Commission cannot conceive that the Sheriff Court Building can be suitably indicated by a label attached to a building which in the other end of the axis is apparently repeated by an extension of the very utilitarian purpose of a block of offices

and submitted twelve questions which he desired the Commissioners to answer for his further guidance. Browne suggested that he might incorporate into it 'in your courteous and diplomatic language a paraphrase of the following terse sentence — The monotonous application of the same sterile theme to all four sides of all three blocks displays a lack of imagination hardly believable even in a public department.'

Stirling-Maxwell could see himself being manoeuvred into a very difficult personal position. Earle had set up the Commission and he had been a valued personal friend of Stirling-Maxwell's for some years, being a frequent guest at his houses at Pollok and Corrour. Much more seriously, as Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board for Scotland, Stirling-Maxwell was entirely dependent on him for goodwill, professional services and above all finance for the extensive programme of taking the most important monuments then at risk into care. And among his Commissioners was the Roman archaeologist, Sir George Macdonald, who not only shared his concern as Vice Chairman of the Ancient Monuments Board, but had a more direct interest in an early solution to the Scottish Office's accommodation problems. He had spent most of his working life in the Scottish Edu-

cation Department and on being appointed Secretary in 1922 had planned the removal of its headquarters from London to Edinburgh: although now retired, he was still acutely aware of the conditions in which his former colleagues were working, and had no wish to fall foul of Lamb or Gilmour. And he, too, was on visiting terms with Earle, having served with him on the Royal Commission on Museums since 1927. So Stirling-Maxwell and Macdonald decided they had to try to steer a middle course. In his response to Cursiter, Stirling-Maxwell doubted if the draft was the right attitude to take, arguing that the Commission should be constructive, and that the Office of Works block plan was a straightforward expression of the actual needs of the case which could be clothed 'in an architectural coat more in the Edinburgh tradition . . . The real difficulty which I dread tomorrow is that Lorimer and Browne may dig in their toes and take the line that it is not for them to improve the bad designs of a government department which refuses to call in an outside architect'.

The Commission met Earle and Allison on 5 July. Stirling-Maxwell's worst fears were again realised: Lorimer and Browne refused to 'wet-nurse' the Office of Works. While none of the Commissioners liked what was proposed, the Commission proved split between the professional and lay members as to how they should express their views. Eventually Sir John Findlay of *The Scotsman* was able to secure a more moderate expression than the professional members wished, but even so it left Stirling-Maxwell, who had not been able to attend the meeting and was then ill, utterly dismayed. He wrote to Cursiter indicating that there would have to be a new chairman. Cursiter was appalled that he might think him the evil genius who had produced the germ of the report and replied that, if so, it would also be necessary to have a new Secretary.

Nevertheless Cursiter had, in the meantime, managed to elicit some useful information. At the meeting Lorimer and Browne had sought a design in which a bold effect of light and shade

was secured by diversified massing rather than an effect of richness by the repetition of small detail and in response to that request Wilson Paterson called with the original sketches which Allison — whom Cursiter described as rather a hedgehog — had superseded by a final design of his own. Moreover Paterson had spoken to Allison who had proved not to be as gloomy as expected and was already considering new designs.

Stirling-Maxwell then thought he had better take matters in hand himself. He asked Lorimer's neighbour in Fife, the Earl of Crawford, the First Commissioner who had set up the Royal Fine Art Commission for England and Wales, and of which he was now Chairman, to explain to Lorimer the duty of the Commission and instruct him not to dabble in the politics of the Arts. He also wrote to Earle setting out the Commission's views, specifically seeking bold effects of light and shade, and above all, a relationship between the buildings and their rock foundations.

In June 1929 the Conservatives lost the election; Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister, William Adamson was appointed Secretary of State for Scotland and George Lansbury became First Commissioner. Lansbury asked the outgoing First Commissioner, the Marquess of Londonderry, to hold a meeting with all the interested parties on 4 July armed with a brief by Leitch, which laboured the difficulties of dealing with outside architects 'even with so reasonable and business-like a man as Mr Thornely (later Sir Arnold Thornely, the architect of Stormont)'.

These developments moved the new President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Sir Banister Fletcher (whose brother Morley happened to be Principal of Edinburgh College of Art), to enter the dispute on 9 July. He wrote to Ramsay MacDonald arguing that 'the best results cannot be hoped for unless the collective architectural ability is brought to bear upon the problem in the form of a competition' and that 'if designs are produced by one or more of a small group of departmental architects . . . the result will almost inevitably be a routine building of the

ordinary type', but he received no more than a blunt restatement of the Works position drafted by Leitch and signed by Earle. Lady Frances Balfour, daughter of the Duke of Argyll and widow of Eustace Balfour, the architect brother of the former Prime Minister, ever game for a dispute since her victory over Lorimer at the National War Memorial, questioned whether the Office of Works even knew where Edinburgh was on the map. Her letter was but one of hundreds in the large 'budgets' of press cuttings Cursiter regularly despatched to Stirling-Maxwell. By November the full import of Londonderry's speeches had become crystal-clear when it became known that Lansbury had instructed Allison and his staff to prepare plans for the new offices between Whitehall and the Embankment, for which Vincent Harris had won the competition of 1913-14, provoking an avalanche of leading articles and letters in the newspapers and architectural journals.

Lansbury's attitude to the Scottish Office's problems was even less sympathetic. When questioned in September he brusquely complained of being 'pestered for jobs'. He was induced to visit Edinburgh on 16 December to meet the Town Council and the Sheriff Courthouse Commissioners, at the suggestion of George Mathers MP, but, as *The Scotsman* commented, merely left the situation exactly as it was. Late on Christmas Eve, Major Walter Elliot, later to become Secretary of State, raised the design of the building in the Commons. Lansbury merely grumbled that the Calton question had taken up more time than any other since he had held office and dilated on the difficulties in the Post Office and the delay to the National Library. He asked that Allison be at least allowed to finish his plans but thereafter every answer he attempted to make was interrupted and he was reduced to proclaiming himself an innocent victim of circumstances before the House was mercifully counted out. His respite was brief. Sir Archibald Sinclair, soon to succeed Adamson as Secretary of State, returned to the charge in even more acid tones in January.

The general discontent at Lansbury's handling of the issue crystallised in a unanimous resolution of the Cockburn Association, the National Council of Women, the Faculty of Advocates, the Royal Scottish Academy, the Royal Scottish Society of Arts, the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, and five other societies, together with two Edinburgh MPs, Sir Patrick Ford and George Mathers. Marked 'Personal and Immediate', it was submitted to Ramsay MacDonald by John Begg, late Consulting Architect to the Government of India, on 3 January 1930. It hitched to the Calton controversy a much more ambitious proposal for the replanning of the southern half of central Edinburgh produced by Frank Mears, son-in-law of the visionary Patrick Geddes, in the previous February. Mears had submitted his proposals to Adamson on 14 December, but the joint societies' resolution now urged an immediate Royal Commission. Ramsay MacDonald took their resolution seriously, a deputation being invited to his native Lossiemouth to discuss it at The Hillocks on 7 January. No Royal Commission was appointed, but he did agree to a conference chaired by the Lord Provost on 26 February 1930. This was attended by Allison and Leitch, and it was agreed that the Town Council should obtain a provisional order to take the necessary powers for the improvement of the City under the Town Planning Act. It also appointed a representative committee which unanimously agreed on the Calton site, a decision which resulted in the Town Council attempting, a few months later, to take the initiative over the heads of the Secretary of State and the Fine Art Commission.

In March further adverse comments from the Office of Works on architects in private practice again provoked the Royal Incorporation. It wrote to every Member of Parliament complaining that such comments were

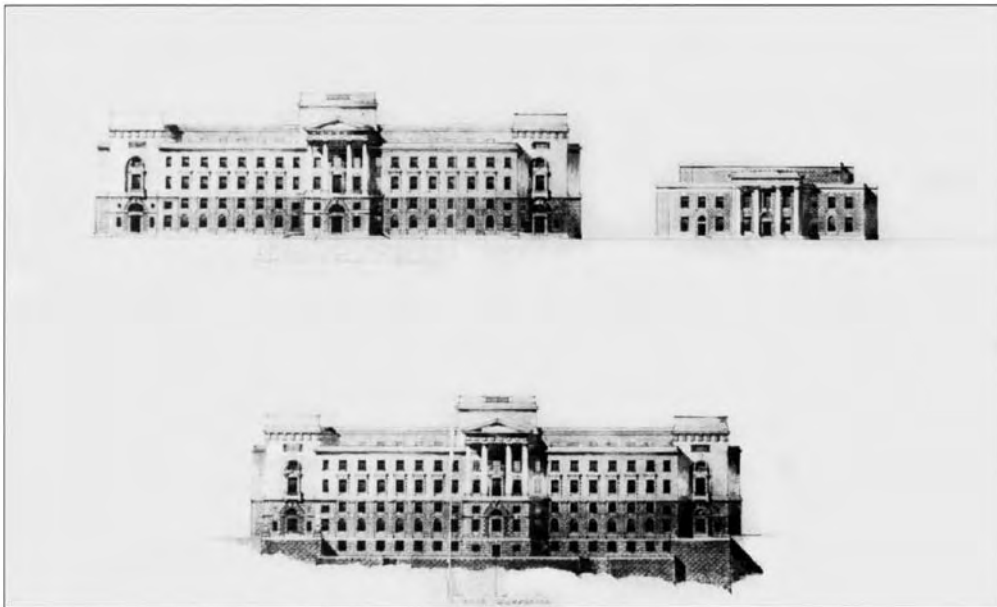
highly damaging to the Architectural profession in Britain [containing] assertions which are not substantiated by fact and are obviously designed to

mislead the Public and prejudice them against architects . . . [The] Council see in them what is tantamount to an unwarranted declaration of war on the profession and see no alternative but to accept the challenge. Neither the Profession nor the Public will be satisfied until the Office of Works is made to understand that it is the servant of the Public and not, as it would now appear to be, its master.

They reminded the recipients that they had been promised a competition in 1913 and that they would settle for nothing less.

In an attempt to meet Stirling-Maxwell's comments and break the deadlock Earle authorised a generous increase in Allison's cost limits to something nearer the Stormont level. In March, Allison sent drawings and a model of a completely revised scheme to the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Although it was later stated that this second scheme had been prepared by Allison personally, it was more probably, initially at least, the work of Wilson Paterson in conjunction with A J Pitcher of the London office, since Stirling-Maxwell found that Allison seemed to know very little about it. It comprised two units only instead of the previous three. The courthouse was given a separate identity as suggested, low two-storeyed and rusticated all over like George Dance's Newgate Prison in London (which had been demolished in 1902 but was still much admired) with a Doric portico. The main office block had been redesigned with recessed corner towers and Doric porticos high up on both north and south in an attempt to secure the bold effects of light and shade sought by the Fine Art Commission. Its further request that the building should rise out of the rock was met by raising it on a colossal rusticated substructure as at David Bryce's Bank of Scotland on the Mound which may have been regarded as an accepted Edinburgh method of overcoming the problem. The new design was slightly larger than the first, providing 171,000 square feet, and very much more expensive, the estimated cost being now £86,500 more at £445,000.





*H. M. Office of Works: Elevations of Scheme II, 1930, showing Sheriff Court on right.*

If conservatively designed in the style of twenty to thirty years earlier, the new buildings, had they been built, would no doubt have been of sufficient merit to warrant being listed now: Pitcher's Sheriff Court in the High Street gives a very fair impression of what they would have been like on a smaller scale. But by now nothing was likely to satisfy either the architects or the Commissioners and if Earle and Allison thought they had had a bit of luck in the unexpected death of Lorimer on 13 September 1929 they were mistaken. Washington Browne now led the professionals with a shrewder grasp of the practical politics of the matter than Lorimer. He was a man of strong will and commanding presence and neither age nor the loss of his wife and then of all three sons in the Great War had mellowed his fiery temperament. Initially, however, it was Lorimer's successor at the Fine Art Commission, the Glasgow architect, James Miller, who was asked to draft the report. He identified the main weakness in the concept as the disparity in height and the vertical treatment of the portico on the

south front which was 'at variance with the solid mass of the cliff below which demands a horizontal and restful treatment rather than the vertical, a principle which is well established from the best Greek and Roman examples'. Despite that clear advice the Commission was again deeply divided between the professional members led by Browne, and the lay members, led by Macdonald, on the actual wording and distribution of emphasis in their reply to the Office of Works. The final report took at least twelve drafts and seventy-five letters from Cursiter. Leitch wrote a hastening letter on 23 April 1930 to say that financial approval had been given on the 9th and on the 30th the most that Cursiter could say was that while all the Commissioners disapproved of the main building they were divided on the courthouse.

In June Earle held a further conference confined to the Office of Works proposals which was attended by all interested parties including the Lord Provost, T B Whitson, who had campaigned against the project on financial grounds in 1928. The Conference decided that only the

courthouse could and should then be built, partly out of consideration for Sir Alexander Grant of Forres (and of McVitie & Price, the bakers). Grant had made the establishment of the National Library possible with an endowment of £100,000 in 1923 and had offered a further £100,000 to help build it in April 1928. He was now in his sixty-seventh year and beginning to despair of seeing in his lifetime the results of his munificence. But it also emerged that the city, following up the decision of the representative committee appointed by the February conference, had decided to force the issue by asking that the two schemes be submitted to them for their consideration 'as a friendly action with a view to helping the Office of Works out of their difficulties'. Browne had not been invited but sent a thoughtful letter observing that 'no dexterity of elevational treatment could reconcile the vast mass of the Government Departments' Block with its setting or bring its huge bulk into scale with its environment'. While he proposed smaller separate blocks for the individual departments, his letter contained the germ of the final scheme: the blocks would not necessarily be uniform in height but 'they would be grouped and composed in harmony with each other, in due relation to the irregularities of the site and with regard to the other buildings on Calton Hill'. Even Earle was impressed and wrote to Stirling-Maxwell to say that he had always had in mind that the difficulty was not to overcrowd the site and recognised the risk of what he acknowledged could be 'a huge mistake'. As an insurance Earle took an option on the Port Hopetoun canal basin site in Lothian Road but allowed it to expire, having concluded that the price of the site would outweigh any financial advantage that might accrue from a more economical design.

But just as Earle was adopting a more considered approach to the problem, the Lord Provost's Committee unexpectedly opted for the first scheme, perhaps because it thought it had the better chance of being built, since it was the cheaper, subject to such adjustments of detail

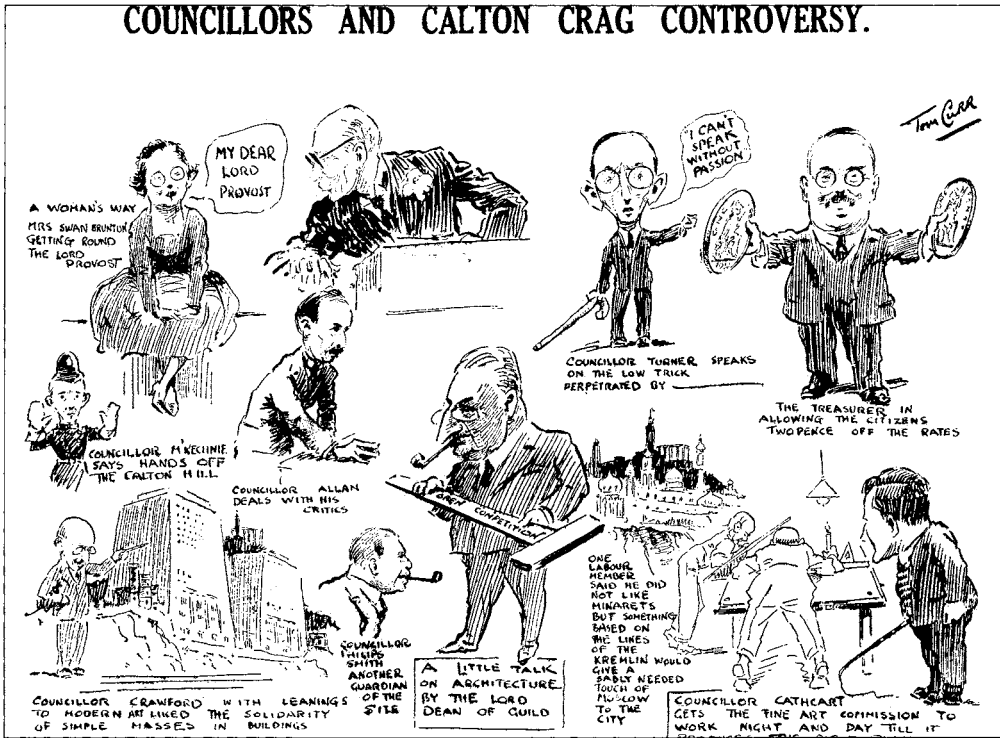
which might be suggested by the City Architect, Ebenezer J Macrae. The committee also requested that the Sheriff Court be re-sited in the High Street as proposed by the Town Council in December 1928, the plans thereafter to be submitted for its approval. This move rather took the Office of Works officials by surprise as they thought they had bought the agreement of the Sheriff Courthouse Commissioners to the removal of the courts to the Calton site by undertaking to meet the whole of the cost instead of the usual half in April 1929. So Earle was now forced to ask the Fine Art Commission, which had remained divided on the courthouse, to think again. Cursiter drafted a report such as he thought his chairman would accept, provoking the sculptor Pittendrigh Macgillivray to write in wrath on the Commission's lack of frankness:

A procedure of mere obstruction or vague negation on the side of the Commission: and a resistance of what appears to be some occult personal element on part of the Board of Works, should be brought to a close. The Commission should be set free from this profitless and time-wasting entanglement; over which it has no real power of construction, or modification.

In the event of nothing more definite being done to clear the air and free the Commission, I shall feel obliged to withdraw from any further share in the responsibility and waste of time involved.

Before the Commission could reply to the Office of Works, Earle, incensed by the thought of Macrae tinkering with Allison's designs as a kind of local fine art commission, sent the City an ultimatum to the effect that if it was not prepared to accept the plans of the Department the project would be abandoned. At this point the Town Council did not really know what it was being asked to approve. It emerged on 21 July from an interview with Earle by a *Scotsman* correspondent that Scheme I, which the Town Council had preferred, would have to be completely revised because of changes in the Sheriff Court requirements. Nevertheless on 23 July, by thirty-two

## COUNCILLORS AND CALTON CRAG CONTROVERSY.



Lord Provost Whitson presides over his Council; cartoon by Tom Curr, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 19 October 1930.

votes to seventeen, the Town Council yielded approval in principle for Scheme I though still reserving the right of the City Architect to amend it.

Since the general public still had no idea what the scheme looked like, or what the Royal Fine Art Commission thought of it, John (later Sir John) Summerson, then a lecturer at Edinburgh College of Art, encouraged one of his students, Pat Ronaldson, to memorise the official perspective. His sketch of it was published in *The Scotsman* the following morning and was likened by the nationalist poet Lewis Spence to a 'cross between the Lamasarray at Lhasa and a Kirkcaldy Linoleum Factory'. On 27 July Professor Patrick Geddes solemnly declared from the Outlook Tower, 'We really must not allow it', and on the same day the architectural members of the Town Planning Committee delivered a formal protest against the decision taken to the Lord

Provost. On the following day, Lansbury, under pressure from Ernest Brown and other MPs offered a truce, giving a pledge that nothing would be done until Parliament reconvened. He was already too late: on that very day the Cockburn Association, presided over by Lord Elphinstone, decided to raise a Calton Hill Scottish National Committee.

This might have remained a relatively local affair had not both the design and Lansbury's handling of the matter provoked the interest of the legendary 'Bardie', Brigadier-General the 8th Duke of Atholl, who had as Marquess of Tullibardine (hence his nickname) sat on the committee which decided on a competition in 1913, and whose Duchess had taken a continuing interest in the subject on succeeding him as member of parliament for West Perthshire. A serious antiquary like his father and shortly to become foun-

der of the National Trust for Scotland, the Duke had been a fearless soldier since his early youth. He had served in the Sudan and Boer wars, he had raised and commanded The Scottish Horse, and he had survived Gallipoli. He owed no political or inter-departmental debt of any kind. When Sir Alfred Mond (First Commissioner 1916-21) had proposed a huge all-British Memorial in Hyde Park, the Duke had not hesitated to declare that Mond 'had not the right to speak for the Scottish nation . . . if the Scottish nation wanted a memorial they would put it up with their own hands in their own country and with their own money'. He felt that yet again the Office of Works had treated Scotland with insufficient sensitivity and respect. Since he knew Earle as chairman of the Scottish National War Memorial Committee, and had liked him well enough to invite him to stay, he at first wrote him a firm letter on the subject on 4 September. Earle's reply dismissed Ronaldson's drawing as 'a complete travesty' and, while otherwise tactful, stated:

but we are determined to build the Government Offices ourselves as we have more experience as regards the housing of large masses of officials than any private architect can possibly have,

servicing only to make matters much worse than they had been. Within days the Duke and Lord Elphinstone had mustered a Scottish National Committee membership list headed by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Duke himself, the Duke of Montrose and the Marquess of Aberdeen. It included half the Scottish nobility and gentry, industrial magnates, provosts, writers and others prominent in public life. It met in the Caledonian Hotel on 12 September and arranged a public meeting in the Usher Hall on 24 October to be presided over by Lord Rosebery. In the wake of that thunderclap, Cursiter concluded that the Royal Fine Art Commission's still unpublished report might be more effective as a myth than put in cold print. On 30 September he wrote to the Office of Works only very briefly, advising them that the Commission, while still

seeking to be of help, had not changed its views and that 'whatever its merits, and however well it might look as one of the many palatial structures that line Whitehall, it would scarcely in this particular position fit into the natural surroundings or rise happily from the rock which is their central feature'.

Having lost what he described as 'the battle against misrepresentation', Earle turned in despair to Ramsay MacDonald. MacDonald's terse reply 'All this Edinburgh business has been most disappointing' did not help him much, and two days later on 14 September, after a meeting with Stirling-Maxwell and the Lord Provost, Earle and Londonderry were as good as their word: rather than give in to the employment of an outside architect they formally abandoned the project. Ramsay MacDonald did, however, write a personal letter to the Lord Provost. He regretted that

the proposals of the government have been allowed to be clouded by so much misrepresentation and inaccuracy. No one knows better than you the very great desire of the government not to do anything with the Calton site which does not fulfill three conditions:

- i) the use of the site in such a way as will add to, rather than detract from, the appearance of the city;
- ii) the co-operation of the Edinburgh City Council;
- iii) the approval of the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland.

I have never yet known of an important building put up without the expression of different opinions as to its merits and defects, but the controversy which has been worked up in this instance is unique in its recklessness.

While agreeing with Earle that Ronaldson's sketch was a travesty of the original, he then began to give hints of his own views on the development of the site which he was to express still more clearly later:

The design of the new Sheriff Court House I think can be most appropriate, and can add to, rather



*A. J. Pitcher and J. Wilson Paterson: Sheriff Court 1934-37. Pediment by Alexander Carrick.*

than detract from, the appearance of the hill. If the requirements of the large government offices cannot be set on the hill, they must go elsewhere; and as regards that, it may be assumed that the mind of the Government is perfectly clear.

MacDonald also made it clear that building the National Library, of which he was himself a trustee, at the Calton site was not an option. Although the Cockburn Association and the Scottish National Committee had included the preservation of David Bryce's fine Italianate Sheriff Court House of 1865 in their recommendations, he made it clear that the agreements reached with the Faculty of Advocates in 1923-25 had to stand. Although controversy was to rage on unabated, the Scottish National Committee, having achieved its immediate objective, cancelled its booking of the Usher Hall and waited for the Government to make its next

move. It made none. By mid-October Sir Thomas Holland, principal of the University, was proposing an Athenaeum for the learned societies as more appropriate to the Acropolis of Modern Athens.

Throughout the financial crisis of 1931 the project remained dormant despite a constant barrage of letters, resolutions and lobbying from the unions and the Labour Party District Committees. Only the Sheriff Court was actively pursued. It was not built at Calton as Stirling-Maxwell and Ramsay MacDonald had wished. In a letter to Sir Patrick Ford, Grant had conceded that the Sheriff Court would be better adjacent to the Parliament House and the law libraries even if it meant that he might not live to see the results of his munificence in a completed National Library. The streetblock on High Street between Bank Street and St Giles Street was compulsorily

acquired under parliamentary powers as proposed by the Town Council in 1928, but Pitcher and Wilson Paterson had to suffer the indignity of having their High Street facade redesigned for them — much to its benefit — by Browne in his capacity as Fine Art Commissioner before the building was finally erected in 1934-37. Adamson tried Lansbury again, but after enquiries had been made to see if a bank or commercial firm would build the project, Lansbury replied that in view of the current commitment to the Sheriff Court and the National Library and increased financial stringency, it was not practicable to embark on further large-scale building schemes in the city and as a final depressing note advised him that ‘the larger hirings could be regarded as assured for a further ten years’. Patrick Laird, the under secretary in charge of the project for the Scottish Office, minuted in despair that ‘the whole business is lamentable’.

When the Conservatives returned to office in August, Londonderry again became First Commissioner but was predictably no more helpful than Lansbury had been. But after only two months he was replaced by Major William Ormsby-Gore MP, later Lord Harlech. Although Earle was still in office, Ormsby-Gore’s style was quite different from that of his predecessors: he wrote important letters himself, the more personal ones often being handwritten. Recipients he knew well he addressed by their forenames; their letters were usually signed ‘Billy Gore’. On 14 June 1932, having won some leeway on new projects as a result of the establishment of the employment committee, he wrote to the new Secretary of State, Sir Archibald Sinclair, tentatively reviving the project for the government offices which he thought should include a flat and a couple of reception rooms for the Secretary of State.

I understand when you or any Minister goes to Edinburgh on public duty he has not only to stay but hold conferences etc in the North British Hôtel (sic). This is an outrage!

He suggested that they might talk about the second scheme which he apparently preferred, add-

ing — and giving a fair impression of the misrepresentation of Scottish views within the Office —

I am told that quite apart from the finance the snag is that the Edinburgh people want a pseudo-Gothic erection with turrets and crockets and not an Athenian Building! My people here hold first to Athens in preference to a “Maison de Jacques Coeur!” At any rate can you blow in to my room here to talk things over — with or without my Chief Architect Allison who is personally responsible for the designs I have to show you. You may think them bloody, but if Allison is present a less forceful epithet will be tactful.

Earle took no further part in the controversy after his confrontation with the National Committee, although he remained Secretary until 31 January 1933. His memoirs of his public life, *Turn over the Page* (1935), although not lacking in candour, make no mention of what must have been the most vexatious project in his whole career at Storey’s Gate, leaving his readers to draw their own conclusions from what was surely an oblique reference to his own feelings on the subject, that Allison ‘never once to my knowledge let us down on the technical or artistic side’. He was succeeded by Sir Patrick Duff who was content to leave meddling with the thistle and coping with the Scottish Office’s ever-changing requirements to Ormsby-Gore and Leitch.

There was nevertheless a great deal of activity in Earle’s last months. Dissatisfaction grew, and more ominously the Duke of Montrose, an ally of the Duke of Atholl, whose name had appeared next to his at the head of the membership list of the Scottish National Committee, had convened a group to agitate for a measure of self-government. The Committee seemed set to take on new dimensions. Ormsby-Gore’s consideration of the project was further hastened by a wide-ranging debate in the Commons in November 1932 in which the novelist John Buchan, member for the Scottish Universities, made a memorable speech on Scotland’s progressive loss of identity and demanded not only a Scottish policy, which he claimed the Scottish Office had

never had, but ‘an outward and visible sign of Scottish nationhood’ in the form of a dignified and worthy building for the Scottish administration. The parliamentary support he aroused forced Ormsby-Gore to galvanise the Office of Works staff into pulling the scheme together and by the following month he was ready to place a memorandum before the Cabinet. Nevertheless in writing to Sir Godfrey Collins, who had replaced Sinclair as Secretary of State earlier that year, Ormsby-Gore still felt obliged to follow Office of Works policy although Collins had made it clear that he wanted a competition: but he did leave the door just slightly ajar on the possibility of selection on the basis of past performance rather than a competitive design. Ormsby-Gore argued that competitions were unsatisfactory because they might be won by a young, inexperienced architect whose design might require drastic change and be a heavy task for the official architect in general control; that limited competitions were also unsatisfactory as the most eminent men would hesitate to compete; and that selection on the basis of executed work had proved a better option, but was still likely to prove unsatisfactory and possibly unproductive.

Ormsby-Gore argued that if Collins forced him to adopt the course of a selected architect, the result might well be that the scheme had to be abandoned yet again as the case for a concentration of offices depended upon whether it could be justified on financial grounds; that this was already difficult to achieve on the Calton site which called for a building of more notable architectural treatment; and that choosing an architect in private practice would therefore represent a further financial penalty which would weigh heavily against the viability of the scheme. He advised Collins that a selected architect’s scheme might well not be realisable within the financial limits especially since ‘as a general rule the outside standard of construction and finishing for this type of building is more expensive than that of the Department’, proceeding to explain that:

the Department, as the result of many years of experience, has evolved a technique of construction which it knows to be both economical and satisfactory, but it may find itself in a position in which it is unable to secure its purpose merely because the architect takes up the position that having been selected to design and control the execution of the building he should be left a free hand to carry out his conception in the manner he thinks best . . . I am bound to say that there is considerable strength in the Departmental view that if the building for the Calton site is designed outside the Office the cost of the scheme may be anything from £70,000 to £100,000 in excess of what it would otherwise cost . . . The question is whether the selection of an outside architect, whatever his nationality, is worth this avoidable expenditure of public money. At the same time the prejudice against a Government Department operating on the Calton site must not be lost sight of and some measures would probably have to be taken in advance to counter the possibility of attack.

From later correspondence it emerged that the Office’s economical technique of construction relied mainly on reinforced concrete rather than steel, reduced ceiling heights and on adopting cheap cement-faced lightwells rather than the noble courts of G G Scott’s and J M Brydon’s offices in Whitehall. A great deal of research effort, some of it probably garnered from earlier disputes with client departments, was devoted to a background paper extending as far back as 1772 in an attempt to support Ormsby-Gore’s case. It was divided into four parts, open competition, limited competition, selection from a list of nominated architects, and selection without competition. Of the five open competitions it was noted that only one (The Houses of Parliament, 1835) had been fully carried out and had cost three times the estimate with a twenty-year dispute on fees; a second (The Admiralty, 1883) had been only partly carried out; a third (the Home, Foreign and India Offices, 1857) had eventually gone to the architect placed third; in a fourth the winner had died while the fifth had been abandoned. Limited competitions were

found to have had no better a score: one had been carried out (The National Gallery, 1832), in two the judges failed to make a clear recommendation while in the fourth (South Kensington, 1890) the winner had eventually been reappointed after £2,800 had been paid in abandonment fees. Selection had a better if rather depressing score; in two cases (The War Office and the Parliament Street/Great George Street Offices, both 1898) the architects had both died during construction; in a third (the British Museum extension, 1904) the building had leaked; and in the fourth case (Stormont, 1921) the original two building schemes had been redesigned as one and £22,560 paid in compensation. Selection without competition, beginning with Robert Adam's Register House (1772), was found to have a rather better record although not without its share of disputes. In brief the finding was that competition, limited or unlimited, was an evil to be avoided and that selection had problems of financial control and ran the risk of abortive fees.

Collins appears to have been coerced into accepting the departmental line, however unwillingly, to keep the project moving at all. So as part of his tactic of advance measures to counter the possibility of attack Ormsby-Gore proceeded, as he himself put it, circumspectly and without rushing any fences. He developed a new incremental strategy of preliminary phases in which the layout, general outline and finally, at the thick end of the wedge, the elevations, would be determined by his departmental staff. But at the Royal Fine Art Commission Ormsby-Gore now faced a rather less conciliatory chairman, Lord Hamilton of Dalzell, who conducted much of its business from such diverse addresses as the Hotel Metropole in Monte Carlo, the Jockey Club at Newmarket and 'Jimmy Rothschild's'. The Commission now also had a new secretary, A E Haswell Miller, Keeper of the Scottish National Gallery, Cursiter having succeeded Sir James Caw as Director. On 19 December 1932 Ormsby-Gore proposed to Hamilton that while funds for the project were 'on the knees of the gods' the Com-

mission might give its opinion on the general lines of the development without detail as the question of layout was no less important than skyline and elevation. He acknowledged that on this occasion the Commissioners should have full information on departmental requirements and volunteered Allison to advise them. On Collins's advice he suggested that the Lord Provost should also be present.

The Commission met Ormsby-Gore, Allison and the Lord Provost, Dr W J Thomson, who was accompanied by his town Clerk, Sir Andrew Grierson, on 25 January 1933. Ormsby-Gore put two questions only to them, firstly was the site suitable and, if so, secondly, should the Governor's House and the boundary wall be retained? The first was answered in the affirmative and the second in the negative. Allison then produced a block plan and schedules of accommodation. Washington Browne and James Miller both agreed that the layout was a great improvement on previous schemes: the Lord Provost merely wanted a building as quickly as possible. But Browne still feared

that a simple building of the magnitude required would be incompatible with the aesthetic requirements of the site as by its bulk it would overwhelm the beautiful buildings on the hill, all of which were of moderate size and some quite small . . . the most satisfactory solution would be by a group of buildings adjusted to the irregular contour of the area and varying in plan so that each of the units would be more in scale with the hill itself as well as the buildings on it.

Browne estimated the additional cost of his group scheme at 12½% which he considered would be justified by the result; Miller thought 20%, Allison 25%. But Browne's views secured the support of the painter Sir D Y Cameron, the stained-glass artist Dr Douglas Strachan, and of Hamilton of Dalzell who later advised Collins that it would enable the scheme to be built incrementally when finance for the whole was still in doubt. Undeterred by the Lord Provost's forcefully expressed impatience with the whole pro-





*Sir George Washington Browne: model of grouped buildings scheme, 1933.*



*H. M. Office of Works: model of Scheme III, 1933.*

ceeding, the majority of the Commissioners backed Browne's concept. Allison was requested to produce a block plan and sketches showing how it might be achieved, at which point he irritably remarked that he wished some members of the Commission would get down to the drawing board themselves.

Although now seventy-nine years of age, Sir George rose to the challenge. On 3 February he wrote to Hamilton that while it was no part of the function of the Commissioners to contribute a professional solution to the problems that came before it, he accepted it as a challenge that he should set forth some indication of what he meant.

So I sat down at my drawing board with the block plans and schedule of accommodation which Sir Richard was good enough to furnish the members with, and I enclose a tracing of the result.

The schedule shows that there are three major departments and a group of minor departments to be housed and it gives the floor area required for each department. These with an allowance of 10% for future expansion of staffs amount to a total of 170,000 square feet, 138,000 for office accommodation and 32,000 for storage, or as stated in round figures at the bottom of the sheet of diagrams, 140,000 and 30,000 respectively. To this has to be added some 33½% for corridors, stairs, lifts, cloakrooms, lavatories and walls, giving a gross of say 227,000 super feet, for which the diagram, plan and sections prepared by HM Office of Works makes provision.

I have adhered to these figures in my diagram which shows a group of four buildings, one for each of the three major departments and one for the group of minor departments. I have also adhered to the number of storeys shown on the Office of Works diagram except in the case of the block for the minor departments which is 2 and 3 storeys *lower* than the block occupying the same position in the Office of Works plan. The primary advantage of this and of the detachment of the four blocks is at once obvious in the grouping of the whole composition; a low building to the south — which is the main exposure of the site — with the higher building behind, and the two flanking

buildings of a height midway between. Other advantages are:— the additional sunshine, light and air admitted to the "area" which is no longer enclosed — the enormous reduction in scale compared to other buildings on the hill by breaking up the mass into four units — the detachment of the units giving alternations of solid and void with their consequent alternations of sunshine and shadow — the better lighting and ventilation of each building — the opportunity of designing each building exactly to meet its own requirements freed from the compulsory uniformity of the two halves of one great building.

In preparing his scheme, Browne probably had at the back of his mind Miller's thoughtful report of 1930 advocating a horizontal building up of masses as in Greek and Roman antiquity, even though Miller did not share his views on breaking the building up into separate units as he made clear in a private letter to Hamilton on 13 February. But Allison's chance remark, although he may not have realised it at the time, had provoked Browne into producing an admirable solution to the worst feature of all three schemes — the enclosed central court, the elevations of which were not to have been of white glazed brick as Browne had charitably supposed, but cement faced over common brick. The generations of Scottish Office staff who would have had to look out into this Kafkaesque lightwell have good cause to be grateful to him.

On the same day as Browne wrote his letter, Collins prepared a Memorandum for the Cabinet and the Committee on Trade and Employment suggesting the cost might have to be raised to £500,000. But on receipt of his copy Ormsby-Gore wrote to him advising him that he was wholly opposed to peppering the Calton Site, or any other site with separate buildings, his objections being financial, administrative and aesthetic. He remained of the view that the increased cost would be 20-25% and dismissed Browne as

an old man, who belongs to the old school of architects and likes the "Picturesque". All the younger architects would disagree with him and

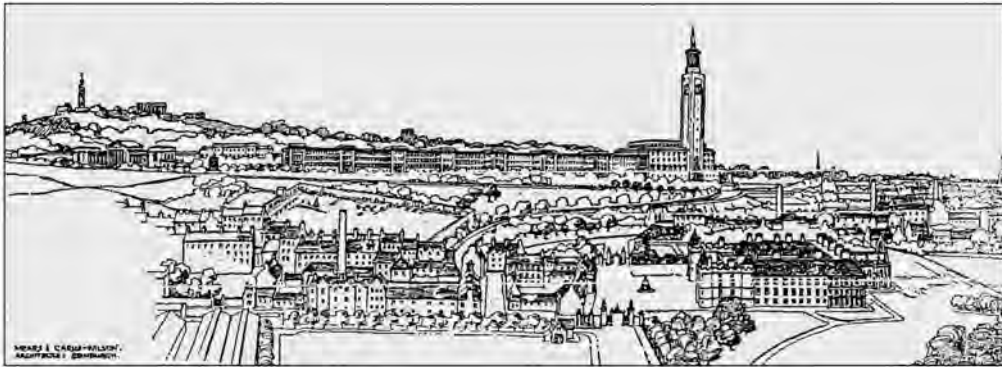


*The Calton site from the SE in 1930: with the demolition of the prison blocks the curtain wall took on new qualities of the Picturesque.*

no architect worthy of employment on such an important project would satisfy his personal taste . . . There is a real gulf in these matters between twentieth and nineteenth century ideas . . . but if in order to satisfy lay opinion in Scotland it is necessary for us to ask the Treasury to pay the additional sum which the employment of an outside architect would involve, I do implore you not to ask me to agree to open competition — really to avoid competition of any kind.

Had Ormsby-Gore been mischievously shown photographs of Browne's late French Gothic and Francois Ier buildings of forty years earlier? Perhaps. The reference to a 'Maison de Jacques Coeur' quoted earlier from the letter Ormsby-Gore wrote to Sir Archibald Sinclair in July 1932 suggests as much. Certainly Ormsby-Gore did not seem to know that Browne — 'that

woman' he noted in irritation on the back of his papers — was still in demand as assessor in competitions for some very modern buildings indeed and, as a member of the Board of Governors of Edinburgh College of Art, was a frequent visitor to the studios of the senior students. Allison was meanwhile devoting a good deal of quantity surveying effort to defeating Browne's scheme, the main additional cost elements being identified as 157,000 superficial square feet of stone-faced facades as against 98,000 mainly because of the higher standard required for the internal court, nine staircases as against five, four passenger lifts as against three, and nine lavatory stacks rather than six, resulting in a cost of £450,000 as against £360,000. He did, however, come to recognise that Browne's solution for the central quadrangle had its merits in terms of daylighting



*Frank Mears and Carus-Wilson: alternative scheme for Regent and Carlton Terraces site, 1933.*

and partially revised his design, eliminating the top floor at the centre of his south range, to give it a better chance of success. But before the case against Browne's proposal could be despatched, Hamilton had held another meeting of the Royal Fine Art Commission as a result of which he requested comparative models of Allison's and Browne's schemes to be made. More worryingly, he expressed his personal feeling that it would be better to leave the site of the prison unoccupied: a by-product of the delay was that Elliot's surviving curtain wall, now relieved of the crushing mass of prison buildings rising above it, was beginning to be admired. And when the Office's calculations were sent to the Commission on 21 March and duly remitted to Browne for his comments Browne swiftly proved that he was by no means as geriatric as Ormsby-Gore had supposed: the Office's figures were wrong. After the Commissioners' meeting on 12 May Haswell Miller advised Sir Patrick Duff that Browne had

... informed the Commission that, while his scheme contemplates providing the 170,000 super feet of floor space detailed in the schedule of accommodation furnished to the Commission ... as provided by the single building, three of the four buildings would be one storey less in height than is shown in the section of the grouped scheme in your diagram. If, as seems to be the case, the figures of cost for the grouped scheme have been calculated on the basis which appears to be indicated, it looks as if they had been loaded with a cost which does

not properly attach to them. If so, the comparison of cost between the two schemes must be fallacious.

The Office of Works recalculated its costs in more detail to achieve their figure but they had begun to lose the battle. On 5 April *The Scotsman* published a scheme which the Cockburn Association had commissioned from Frank Mears and Carus-Wilson. It proposed Regent and Carlton Terraces as an alternative site — chosen because, being all owner-occupied, they did not involve any infringement of the Rent Restriction Act — and echoed the general grouping of Playfair's terrace with bolder projections but ended at the east end in an assembly hall and a colossal tower inspired by that of Ragnar Ostberg's Stockholm Town Hall. This scheme had some parliamentary support but by that date Ormsby-Gore and Collins were beginning to be conscious of still more influential pressures. By June, Patrick Laird was beginning to be hopeful of a selected architect and on 29 June Ormsby-Gore sounded out Ramsay MacDonald who had no confidence at all that the Scottish architects would do any better than the Office of Works. MacDonald ruefully remarked that his own view was a very simple one which no-one would satisfy: it would be better simply to clear the site. 'Any modern building must be a sort of plaque stuck on the face of the Hill'. He thought the only architectural solution was a hilltop castle corresponding to the

Castle itself which he recognised was impossible. He returned to the Mears proposals submitted to him by John Begg in January 1930 which envisaged the town-planning of a biggish central area on the south side of the city. That, he thought, would have enabled the buildings to be in town, but observed that

Again that is impossible, I am told, on account of its expense — a thing by the by which I cannot really understand, seeing that every bankrupt country in Europe can find money for such worthy undertakings.

On 7 July the Cabinet considered a Memorandum from Ormsby-Gore in which he conceded that the new Government offices on the Montagu House site in Whitehall and in Edinburgh should be designed by selected architects, the selection committee to include Ormsby-Gore himself, the Chairmen of the Royal Fine Art Commissions, the Chief Architect, the President of the Royal Institute of British Architects and the President of the Royal Academy. The Chancellor of the Exchequer demurred in respect of the Edinburgh buildings but Collins, still Secretary of State, held his ground and the cabinet accepted his view. If anyone still entertained any thought of securing a review of that decision when the actual expenditure came to be authorised, the subject was finally closed by a letter to Ormsby-Gore from the Hon Gerald Chichester, Assistant Secretary to Queen Mary, on 20 July informing him that:

Her Majesty recently read in the paper that it is proposed to build on the Calton Hill Site — Edinburgh — where the old prison used to be. As this is a very important site in that City, both The King and Queen are naturally very anxious that nothing unsightly may be erected there, which would spoil the general outlook of the city.

‘Their Majesties, as you know, take a great interest in the City of Edinburgh, and they do hope that something noble and worthy of this site may be built.

The Queen would be very grateful if later on the plans and designs of the proposed building may be submitted to Her Majesty for inspection by The King and Herself.

Ormsby-Gore sent a provisional reply on 21 July by which date George V had also taken an interest in the subject, his private secretary, Clive Wigram, securing a copy of Ormsby-Gore’s memorandum to the Cabinet which the Queen read

with much interest . . . All the King and Queen hope is that a building will be erected worthy of, and in keeping with, one of the most beautiful sites in Edinburgh. Perhaps you will very kindly keep the Queen informed from time to time of the progress made in this direction.

A few days later he was able to write formally that in view of the exceptional national importance of the scheme an architect in private practice would be appointed, the Queen conveying her grateful thanks from HMY *Victoria and Albert* on the 26th of the month.

By 1933 the Edinburgh end of the Scottish Office had grown enormously. The planned 170,000 square feet was now barely adequate for the Secretary of State’s own departments, only 5,000 square feet being left over for future expansion. The Inland Revenue’s staff of 247 had to stay where they were in Waterloo Place and even the agreement reached with Scottish Command in 1928, when it agreed to relinquish the site, had to be broken. The scheme was now confined to housing the eight departments with which Ministers and the public were most in touch, Health, Agriculture, Education, the Fishery Board, Prisons, Lunacy and Mental Deficiency, Juvenile Welfare and After Care and National Insurance.

In the autumn there was predictably a good deal of lobbying on behalf of those considered for selection. Lord Weir, in a well-argued letter, pressed for the inclusion of James Miller who was now seventy-three. J Henderson Stewart MP sought a place for Lorimer’s successor, J F Matthew; a stationer in Largs pleaded for the

Canadian architect Bernard Dangerfield; and Sir Godfrey Collin's aunt, Miss Hope Pattison, wrote to 'Dear Gofaie' recommending Alfred Greig as 'James's cousin'. Some of these names were passed on to Sir Giles Gilbert Scott as President of the Royal Institute of British Architects but none was included in the final twelve.

The selection committee was a three-stage affair. The first meeting was at the beginning of December to determine the architect for the Whitehall site but had a consequential effect on the Scottish selection on 11 December. It was quickly decided that only three of the names submitted, Vincent Harris, Arthur Davis and Thomas Tait, were, by reason of the quality of their work and experience, capable of taking on the Whitehall buildings. Tait, the effective senior partner of the London-Scottish practice of Burnet, Tait and Lorne, was then eliminated because he had such a good chance of securing the Edinburgh buildings at the Scottish meeting. Lord Crawford, Chairman of the Royal Fine Art Commission for England and Wales and Sir William Llewellyn, President of the Royal Academy, preferred Davis but Scott and Allison strongly supported Harris. Their reasons are not recorded but they probably felt that Harris had been unfairly deprived of his competition win in 1929.

Ormsby-Gore may also have felt a moral obligation since he gave Harris his casting vote. In reporting the Whitehall result to Collins, Ormsby-Gore acknowledged that the Calton buildings should go to Tait in deference to national feeling, but suggested that the National Library should go to Arthur Davis as his banks showed that he would make a splendid job of the library hall. He advised against Dr Reginald Fairlie, the only other Scot on the list of twelve, as having no experience of such large and specialised undertakings as the National Library. At the Scottish meeting Crawford and Llewellyn were replaced by Collins himself, John Begg, President of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland and sender of the joint societies resolution four years earlier, and the painter Sir D Y Cameron for the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland, Hamilton and Browne having declined, the latter because of his 'four score years' and 'oft-infirmities'. They accepted Ormsby-Gore's suggestion of Tait readily enough, but on being joined by Lord President Clyde for the National Library they firmly rejected Davis in favour of Fairlie. After twenty-one years of controversy and debate there was finally agreement on an architect for the Calton site.

## THE ARCHITECT: THOMAS SMITH TAIT AND THE PRACTICE OF SIR JOHN BURNET, TAIT AND LORNE



*Thomas Tait:  
drawing by Olly, 1938.*

Burnet, Tait and Lorne! In their background paper on competitions and selected architects the Works staff had done their best to ensure that they would *not* be appointed. Burnet and Tait they remembered all too well as the perfectionists who had built the Edward VII Galleries at the British Museum, Burnet having been selected without overmuch consideration of the Office's own schemes. Although twenty years had passed since the completion of the galleries resentment was still keenly felt: the fact that the galleries had been widely regarded as the finest classical building erected in England since St George's Hall in Liverpool did not amount to a significant consideration in the minds of the Works staff: the fact that variations in detail as Burnet perfected the design in the course of execution had been so extensive that the work had to be entirely remeasured in settling the contractors' accounts most certainly did. Moreover the roof had leaked: the Office had entertained hopes of suing him and taken solicitor's opinion but before an action could be raised the contractors corrected the defects themselves. And Francis Lorne, whom the older members of staff could dimly recall as a very junior assistant in the office in 1912, now had very good connections within the Prince of Wales's circle, particular friends and clients being the Marques de Casa Maury and Mrs Dudley Ward, who was to become the Marquesa in 1937.

Ormsby-Gore made no reference to his officials' comments on the Burnet practice either at the selection committee or in his report to Col-

lins. Of the three architects short-listed as having firms large enough to undertake the project, Tait was the only possible choice if yet another confrontation with the Scots was to be avoided. His appointment had a certain inevitability about it. By 1934 the practice of Burnet, Tait and Lorne, although based in London, had assumed the role of flagship to the entire Scottish architectural profession. As a result of Burnet's virtual retirement, it was now active in Scotland, accepting commissions in competition with the original Glasgow firm of Burnet, Son and Dick which had been a separate partnership since Norman Aitken Dick had been put in charge of it in 1909. Almost every Scottish architect could identify with the practice of Burnet, Tait & Lorne to some degree. Many of the leading architects in central Scotland had worked in either the Glasgow or London offices in the days when they were more closely related, while the remainder knew someone who had. The London firm was now that in which almost every aspiring student hoped to find a place. For the first time a firm of Glaswegian origin was the undisputed premier Scottish practice, bridging the old architectural divide between the academic east and the more adventurous commercial west. Even if Lorimer had lived it was a development which would not have been long delayed. Lorimer's surviving partner, John F Matthew, had only just begun to come to terms with the new architecture as his sons Robert (later Sir Robert) and Stuart joined the practice at a time when it had become evermore obvious that the trend was towards international modern and French, German, Dutch, Scandinavian and American modern in particular. The Burnet practice had always been cosmopolitan in outlook: Burnet had studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in 1875-77 under Jean-



*Sir John Burnet (with T. S. Tait): Edward VII Galleries, British Museum, London 1905-14.*

Louis Pascal and Henri-Paul Nénot who were to remain lifelong friends and were in turn to become known to Tait. Burnet had been the first Scot to enrol there. He had also travelled extensively and become a corresponding member of institutes and academies not only in Europe but – from 1896 onwards – in the USA where he had cousins and a brother-in-law. There he became a corresponding member of the Beaux Arts Cosmos Club, enabling him to make the acquaintance of the leading American Beaux Arts architects, most notably Charles McKim.

In the best tradition of the Ecole, Burnet took his role as *patron* very seriously and ran a teaching office with an *atelier* atmosphere. Goodhart Rendel described him as having ‘a tremendous love of order and system. He never lost hold of the essentials and thought no-one in England knew anything about them’. He made it a firm principle – which was expounded to the staff and which Tait was to adhere to and quote with equal conviction – to develop from the needs of his client

first the plan, then the construction, and only then the elevations. Small-scale sketch elevations were then handed out to the leading draughtsmen to be developed, endlessly experimented over with tracing paper – rubbing out was not allowed – studied under a giant reducing glass and miniaturised again, the results being then enlarged again, sometimes photographically. Although Tait himself was not to work that way beyond the initial sketch stages – he knew all too well how the draughtsmen complained that they were being systematically driven mad – these methods were the key to the boldly-scaled detail, which was to characterise Tait’s work as much as it had Burnet’s.

Very exceptionally, Tait had been engaged by Burnet directly to the post of personal assistant at the early age of twenty-one in 1903 because ‘he appeared to have the capacity for work’. Born 18 June 1882, the son of John Tait, a Paisley stonemason, he was already acquiring quite a reputation for the brilliance of his draughtsmanship. He



had been apprenticed in 1896 to the Paisley architect, John Donald, from whom he acquired a profound interest in the work of Donald's former master, Alexander Thomson. Earlier in that same year, 1903, he had won a free studentship for evening classes at Glasgow School of Art where he received his first taste of Beaux Arts teaching from Eugene Bourdon, and was in due course to win three King's Prizes, including a first in architecture and a second in decorative art. Working directly to Burnet, Tait soon absorbed the teaching of the Ecole as profoundly as if he had been an *élève* himself, his manner of designing in both composition and detail evolving so directly from decades of developing and improving Burnet's ideas that Tait's career was to be in many respects the logical extension of Burnet's, although he was to bring to it a wider range of continental and transatlantic influences and a power and imagination which were very much his own.

In 1904-05, with Burnet's encouragement and some help from his father, Tait travelled extensively in France, Belgium, Holland and Italy before joining the select team Burnet took with him in 1905 to Montague Place in Bloomsbury to design and build the Edward VII Galleries at the British Museum, the others being David Raeside, Theodore Fyfe, Andrew Bryce and James Henry Wallace, the latter two later to have important roles in the building of St Andrew's House. By 1910 Tait had achieved the leading role within the office, having a large hand in the design of the Kodak Building on London's Kingsway, an American-influenced early modern office and warehouse building which was to be an important influence on the design of British commercial buildings in the inter-war years. But early in 1914 Tait left Montague Place, partly as a result of disagreements arising from his having entered a magazine competition without Burnet's consent (had he come first instead of second it might have been overlooked) and having assisted the rival firm of Trehearne and Norman in his spare time, and partly to widen his experi-

ence. He obtained a post with the Beaux Arts modernist Donn Barber in New York, where he briefly met Frank Lloyd Wright. Travelling with Tait was his future partner, Francis Lorne, who had been an assistant in Burnet's Glasgow office in 1910 and had made an exploratory visit to America in the previous year. Later in that same year Tait declined a request from Burnet to rejoin the firm as junior partner, preferring to return as chief assistant to Trehearne and Norman, an appointment which ended in 1915 as a result of the Great War, the remainder of which he spent as a draughtsman at Woolwich Arsenal. In 1918 as a result of his selection as one of the architects to the War Graves Commission, Burnet invited him to return to Montague Place as his partner, David Raeside also becoming a partner in the capacity of office manager.

Throughout the 1920s Burnet and Tait became progressively as modern as the conservative tastes of most of their clients would allow. Much of their work consisted of war memorials, all distinguished by a geometric classical-modern simplicity. Of the large building projects the earlier were, surprisingly, the more modern: the French classical-modern Vigo House, Regent Street, the London department store of R W Forsyth, and the American-inspired Adelaide House, London Bridge (both 1920-25) the mul-lioned facades and giant cornice of which had consciously Egyptian qualities in their massing for which Burnet despatched Tait to Egypt, where they had, very conveniently, been entrusted with the Port Tewfik war memorial. More conservative was the Second Church of Christ Scientist, Palace Gardens Terrace, London (1923-26), a refined Early Christian design in brick which was the first building which Tait designed solely in his own name. Lloyd's Bank on Cornhill (1927-29) and the Unilever Building at Blackfriars Bridge (1929-32) were also rather more conservative than their predecessors, presumably in deference to the wishes of the clients, both being huge London office buildings with colonnaded or pilastered upper floors, as in the alternative schemes

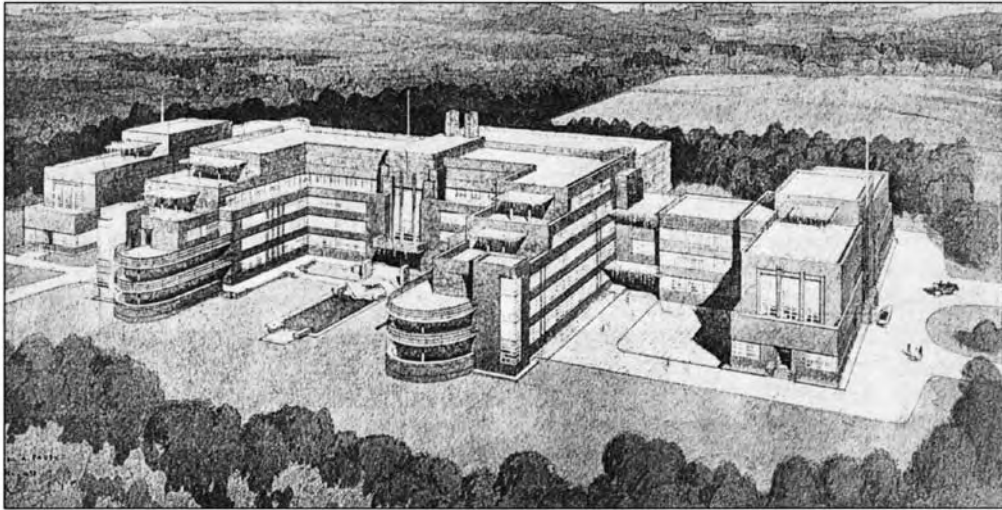


*T. S. Tait: Daily Telegraph Building, Fleet Street, London 1927-29. Stepped-back massing anticipates composition of the central block of St. Andrew's House. (drawing by J. D. M. Harvey)*

for Adelaide House. These were still strictly academic in their detailing but in Carloli House, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1926-27) and the Daily Telegraph Building in London's Fleet Street (1927-28), the latter in certain respects anticipating the composition of the future St Andrew's House, a markedly less historical approach to classical detail was evident. But while these massive commercial stone-faced classical piles were under construction, Burnet and Tait were reorganising the practice for the change which they knew must come within the next few years. Burnet's role as assessor on the international jury for the League of Nations Building competition in 1927 had given them a unique preview of the most advanced architectural thinking throughout the world, while frequent visits to the Continent had made them aware of the work of Robert Mallet-Stephens, Andre Lurçat and Le Corbusier in France and the De Stijl group in the Netherlands. In 1927-30 Tait designed an exceptional series of flat-roofed cubist houses, notably Le Chateau and four streets of smaller houses at Silver End, Essex for W F Crittall, the window manufacturer, The Haven at Newbury, Berkshire, for Dr Alan Simmons, and West Leaze, Aldbourne, for Dr Hugh Dalton, the future Chancellor of the Exchequer. Except for 'New Ways' Northampton (1925) by the German architect Peter Behrens, these were the first houses of their kind to be built in Britain and were developed mainly from American and French prototypes. To assist with these changes in the direction of the practice Burnet and Tait engaged three exceptional assistants, Clifford Strange, Franz Stengelhofen, a Londoner of German extraction who had trained and practised in Trier, Germany, and Frederick MacManus, a Dubliner who had worked for Clough Williams-Ellis and had just returned from a year with W L Sturrock New York, the last, very exceptionally, being allowed to design some of the houses at Silver End.

The years 1929-30 brought further and still more dramatic changes in the firm. Neither Bur-

net nor Tait had ever had much interest in making money as such and David Raeside, their office manager, had died in 1928. The management of the office's finances, in particular finding enough money to provide for the retirement of Burnet, thereafter fell largely to Burnet's secretary, Helen Lorne. She proposed that her brother Francis Lorne, then an associate in the giant American practice of Bertram Goodhue Associates which he had joined in 1923, should replace Raeside as business partner, a role for which he appeared peculiarly suited, having been author of the manual *Architectural Office Administration* published in 1921. He joined the office in October 1930, Burnet thereafter preferring to make such contribution as his chronic eczema allowed from his home at Farnborough. Tait soon discovered that Lorne was not content to be a mere business manager, as Raeside had been. His style was very different from Tait's avuncular wing collar image; he was extremely sharp, he wore stylish American clothes and received clients in silk shirts without a jacket, unheard of at the time. His approach to business was also very different. He cultivated publicity; he went out and sought work; and he ferreted out the proprietors of underdeveloped sites, secured their agreement in principle to sell, and, when he had assembled enough, set about finding clients for them. He kept the number of staff to just under twenty, a figure it was seldom allowed to exceed, although the firm was one of the three or four largest practices in the country (Montague Place, even with a makeshift drawing office in the garden, could not accommodate any more), and ruthlessly cleared out the more conservative of Burnet's assistants. He put the survivors — Bryce, Wallace and Ferguson — on overtime at time and a quarter rates. To replace the old guard Lorne brought with him the New York architect Slater-Ellis who had temporarily closed his practice because of the Wall Street crash of 1929 and recruited an amazing team of politically radical — one even communist — colonials and Scots Americans who swiftly brought to a close the formal office protocol of



*T. S. Tait: Freemasons' Hospital, Ravenscourt Park, Hammersmith, 1930.*

Burnet's day. These included the New Zealanders Edward Armstrong, Lipscombe and Minson; the Australians Oscar Bayne and Henry Pynor; and Lorne's own brother-in-law, L Gordon Farquhar from the United States. All were men of exceptional ability: of particular interest in terms of experience were Bayne and Pynor who had both worked their way across the United States, the latter having worked for Frank Lloyd Wright and brought with him an important collection of drawings from that office; he also had experience of large-scale office organisation and construction having been in charge of a huge international team of architects and draughtsmen in Russia during the period of the Five Year Plan. Gordon Farquhar's background was even more valuable since he brought to the office experience with the Beaux Arts skyscraper builder Raymond M Hood, architect of the Rockefeller Centre in New York, features of which were to influence the design of St Andrew's House. The office was now split into two separate sections, Tait's and Lorne's, Tait retaining the older staff and recruiting new staff from Scotland as he needed them, while Lorne took charge of Stengelhofen and the colonials. Denis Bethune Williams provided a common structural engineering

service and checked the measurements on every drawing which was to leave the office, while Gordon Farquhar and Helen Lorne attended to the accounts and the office administration.

These changes were accompanied in that same year by the radical shift in architectural direction for which Tait had been preparing. It was exemplified by the Royal Masonic Hospital at Ravenscourt Park, Hammersmith, for which Tait had won the competition in 1929. His design was revolutionary in plan and servicing but was still modified neo-Georgian with steep dormered roofs in elevation. In 1930, although still planned on formal symmetrical lines, it was completely redesigned in a Dutch-American flat-roofed idiom, the reception block having hints of H F Mertens's works at Rotterdam for Unilever, Tait's client at Blackfriars Bridge, while the main ward block had a number of features, notably the semi-circular ended wings, which were to appear again at St Andrew's House. It brought him the RIBA Gold Medal for the best building of the year in 1933. Tait never wavered from the path of modernity again. The style of Ravenscourt Park was further developed in his competition designs for Norwich Municipal Buildings and in his scheme for the Brook House site in London's

Park Lane where his client did not secure the site; at the Curzon Cinema in Mayfair for the Marques de Casa Maury, where he made some deft improvements on Lorne and Stengelhofen's design, Tait adopted the style of the Dutch architect, Dudok; and at the Mount Royal flats on London's Oxford Street he and Lorne again drew inspiration from the Netherlands, for some details perhaps from F A Warner's Atlanta House in Amsterdam. With the economic difficulties which beset the country from 1931 onwards the firm went into a relative decline in business which was weathered without losing key staff by a 10% wage cut, but even the slump was turned to advantage, Francis Lorne and Oscar Bayne taking the opportunity to produce the architects' bible of the 1930s, *The Information Book of Sir John Burnet, Tait & Lorne*, published in 1933 which consolidated the firm's position as the premier British practice of the decade.

St Andrew's House — it was not to receive the name until 1939 — was thus designed within an office which was highly international in both outlook and personnel. But those who worked in that office have always emphasised that while Lorne made heavy use of the most gifted of his assistants, Tait designed everything himself, down to the smallest details. He drew upon the experience of Lorne, Farquhar and the others in much the same way as he drew upon the American and European books — several of them Russian — obtained for him by the bookseller Alec

Tiranti. Wright, Mallet-Stephens, Dudok and Mendelssohn and Le Corbusier are remembered as having been particular favourites, the three last interesting him particularly because they had been trained as engineers. But like Burnet before him, he never copied. He was an acute observer who took in the design principles of what he saw and grafted them to his own, resulting in an interpretation which was entirely personal. His approach was always extremely thoughtful, endlessly studied and perfected in a haze of tobacco smoke until he was satisfied that the result would be as functionally efficient and as refined as he could possibly make it. In order to reserve as much time as he possibly could for the drawing board and the organisation of his team within the office, he allowed himself very few visitors — before 1930 he left that to Burnet and Raeside and after that to Farquhar and the most senior assistants. Although he could be robust and genial in personality, he was very unassuming, some even finding him rather shy. He neither had a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce like Burnet, nor did he ever drive himself, preferring to be driven by his sons Gordon and Kenneth in their MG as and when they could manage. Unlike Burnet, who was a skilful manipulator of committees, he took no very active part in the Royal Institute of British Architects beyond its golf club. He secured his place on the Institute's short list of twelve on merit alone.

## DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION, 1934-39

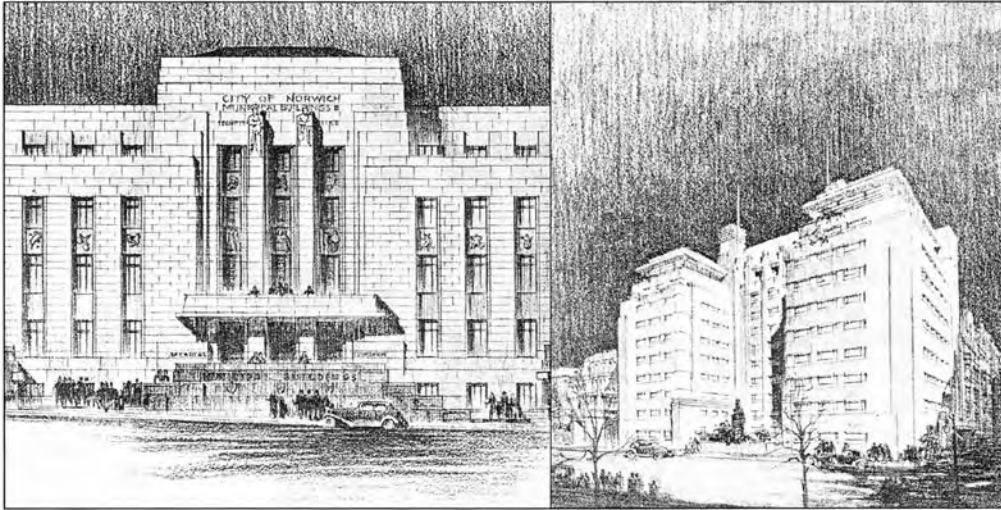


*Andrew Bryce:  
drawing by Olly, 1938.*

After twenty years of controversy as to how St Andrew's House should be designed, Tait found he had only four and a half months to plan the actual building. His agreement with the Office of Works required the scheme to be finalised by the end of June 1934 but he did not receive his full brief until 20 February. By that date he had evidently done as much work on the project as he could as he wrote by return to say that it would be inconvenient to incorporate the Prisons Department (which had earlier suggested itself better excluded as former inmates had a bad habit of calling) and the Juvenile Welfare Office. These would have raised the floorspace required beyond his cost limit in any event. Allison's final scheme had provided him with a general arrangement, and to improve its composition and daylighting in accordance with the Royal Fine Art Commission's wishes he adopted the massing of Browne's central quadrangle, telephoning him on 19 February to discuss it. Further photography of the model which Wilson Paterson had had made of it was arranged by Haswell-Miller. In the elevations Dutch, French and American ideas were integrated into a symmetrical Beaux Arts modern concept. Henri-Paul Nénot's compromise design for the League of Nations building, produced in collusion with his old friend and British juror, Burnet, following the confused competition result of 1927, certainly had some influence on the composition of the main elevation. Its immediate precursor was, however, Tait's own design for the Norwich Municipal Buildings competition of 1932, which

had been placed second; the excellent but unbuilt design for a block of flats on the Brook House site in London's Park Lane, made in the same year, was happily rather similar in its massing to the north facade of the court as proposed by Browne, and provided the central elements of the composition as seen from the south. To supervise the project Tait selected the most senior of his assistants, Andrew Bryce, who had been part of the original British Museum team and had fulfilled a similar role at the Daily Telegraph Building. Bryce was a fine draughtsman and an excellent manager. Those who worked for him recalled that he had no fingernails at all, having bitten them to the quick in his anxiety to meet the standards of perfection expected of him. By 3 March Tait was already reported as having the plans a long way towards completion and by April the scheme had been costed at £421,875.

Tait's design was less uncompromisingly modern than Lorne and Stengelhofen would have made it but it was probably as modern as he dared risk. Predictably it received no warm reception from the Office of Work's professional staff. If they had anticipated a classic design as safe as Thornely's Stormont, having quoted to the selection committee Tait's Lloyd's Bank in London's Cornhill as a guide to the sort of building he would provide, they were mistaken. Allison's successor James (later Sir James) West, best known as the architect of the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell, was soon complaining of the individualistic nature of the architecture and since Queen Mary's Stuart and Georgian tastes were all too well known to him, his concern was perhaps more than personal. More seriously Pitcher had examined Tait's estimates, and while finding them broadly correct as to actual building costs, pointed out that they did not include demolition



*T. S. Tait: City of Norwich Municipal Buildings, competition design, 1932. Central section of elevation.*

*T. S. Tait: design for flats for Brook House site, Park Lane, London 1932.*

of the remaining parts of the jail (£8,000), site works (£10,000), fees (£21,000) or supervision (£3,000) bringing the gross cost to £464,500, rather more than the cost of Allison's second design at the prices then current.

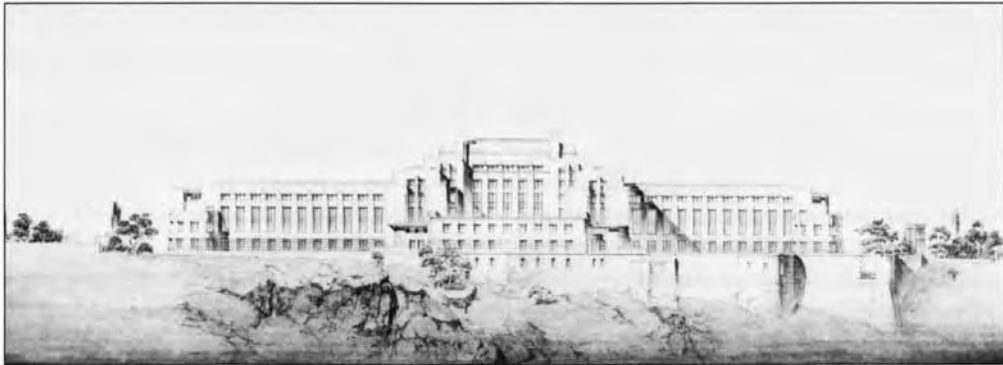
Earle's successor as secretary, Sir Patrick Duff, supported by West and Leitch, confronted Tait with these figures on 27 April 1934, stressing that the Government was still not committed to the project and that to have a real chance of success he had to provide the same accommodation for a figure nearer £350,000, approximately the cost of Allison's first scheme as approved by the City. Tait handled this unwelcome proposition surprisingly calmly, stating that while he was quite prepared to consider the position afresh, such a building could not be built for less than 2s 3d per cube foot if the building was to be stone-faced. West suggested reducing the floor heights from 12-14 ft to 11 ft and reducing the corridor space, the latter being a saving Tait had already made. He undertook instead to consider the elimination of Allison's wing blocks as these were the most expensive elements in the scheme, the utilisation of the lower ground floor as staff

accommodation, an increase in the size of the central block, and a reduction in refreshment room accommodation.

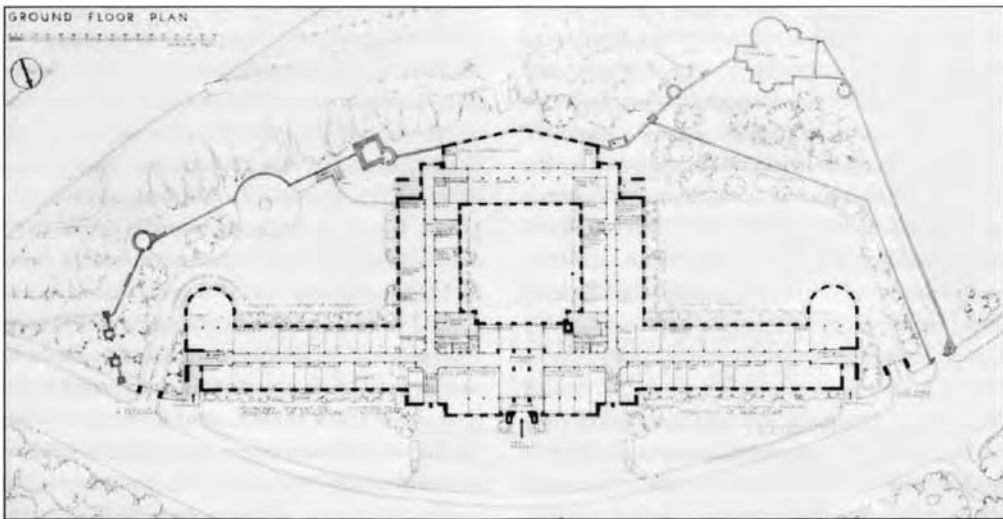
By 22 May he had finalised the plans to 1/16" scale and reduced the cost of the building by omitting the projecting wings at the extremities of the composition, shortening the main side wings by one bay, reducing the area of the semi-circular ends to those wings, re-allocating part of the provision for future expansion into the lower ground floor, decreasing the area of the lavatories and reducing the height of only the top floor to 10 ft, providing a total accommodation of 140,000 sq ft, 30,000 less than previously proposed. This brought the cost down to £380,000, plus £33,400 for fees and site works, total £413,000, thereby achieving a reduction of £41,875. Six days later he was summoned again in an effort to secure further economies. He conceded that the engineering services could be on hanging brackets in the corridors rather than in ducts with crawling space, providing the desired saving of £8,000 in floor heights. By reducing the margin for future expansion, he agreed to eliminate a further two bays of the total length, the loss



*North elevation.*



*South elevation.*



*Ground-floor plan of St. Andrew's House as proposed, 1934. Reproduced by kind permission of Sidney Newbury.*



of floorspace being partly made up by relocating the refreshment area in the roof. Electric thermal storage was suggested as a further saving but rejected by both Tait and West. These further economies were now estimated to reduce the cost to £384,000 but within a year the reductions in floor space were to prove catastrophically mistaken. By 15 June Tait was able to report that the cost had been still further reduced to £351,875. The layout of the resulting scheme is best described in excerpts from Tait's own descriptive report, prepared on 29 June:

In designing the new building careful surveys have been obtained not only of the site itself but of the surrounding country and of the monuments on the Calton Hill side, and particular consideration has been given to the architecture of the High School buildings adjoining, as well as the general architectural character of Edinburgh. I have also carefully studied the views expressed by the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland and I consider a design has been obtained which will not only give His Majesty's Office of Works the accommodation it requires, but also a building which will be eminently suitable to its surroundings. The site is a unique one with the existing stone wall to the South rising sheer out of the cliff side and the Calton Hill mound with its varied and picturesque monuments forming an ideal background for the new building. Not many Architects have had the good fortune to be asked to design a building for such an imposing and dramatic situation.

In considering the design it was felt necessary to express the long low lying lines of the hillside without interfering with its outline or the monuments crowning its crest. In other words it will grow out of the landscape and appear to be part of it, composed in such a way that the wings gradually receding and varying in height will culminate in the central block and form one fine piece of sculpture work. The design is simple and sculptural rather than decorative but carried out with that strength and refinement expressive of present-day sentiments and also so essential to a building which is to form an addition to probably the most beautiful city in the world.

In the centre of the building on the front facing

Regent Road will be carved four symbolic figures representing "Education", "Health", "Agriculture" and "Fishery". Over the entrance doorway will be carved the Lion Rampant of Scotland.

Architecturally Edinburgh is divided into two sections, the Old City and the New Town. Princes Street Gardens divide these two sections. On the South side is the Old City with its ancient Scottish Architecture; the North side is almost entirely Classic. It is on this side that the new building is to take its place and must, therefore, be Classic in character to harmonise with its surroundings.

The whole of the facades of the building will be faced with freestone acquired locally if possible. The lower walls of the central courtyard where not seen from the surrounding roadways will be in "Faience" ware so as to form a reflecting surface for light to the Offices. The South connecting wing has been made low in height so as to allow of the sun's rays from the South penetrating the central courtyard for lighting the rooms on the lower floors. This treatment not only provides the necessary light to the rooms but is an essential feature of the architectural composition.

The roof will be of low pitch and covered with copper so as to present a clean roof line when viewed from the top of the Calton Hill. The flat roofs used as terraces would be finished with asphalt and squared paving.

The planting of the site with grass, shrubs and trees should have very careful consideration so as to give charm to the scheme, and assist in the beautification of the city.

The Lower Ground Floor plan houses the Boiler House and Engineering Services placed centrally on the plan and contains the storage necessary for the Departments on the Upper floors. Here is placed the Service Court so that the service vans, lorries and tradesmen's carts can have easy access for goods well out of sight and not forming an obstruction to road traffic.

The Ground Floor plan shows Car Parking space and entrance to the service courtyard.

The main Entrance is placed centrally and will give access to the lifts serving the upper floors.

Four passengers lifts are provided in brick shafts and are arranged so that access to any particular



*T. S. Tait: project sketch, 1934.*

Department can be reached direct without having to cross one Department in order to get access to another.

Two suites of lavatories are provided on each floor to give adequate accommodation for male and female staffs.

Secondary entrances are provided at each end of the building to serve the Departments of Agriculture and Education.

The walls and floor of the Entrance Hall will be lined with Lunel or Botticino marble kept severely simple in design. The floors of the corridors will be in coloured Korkoid or similar material to ensure that there will be no noise penetrating the adjoining rooms from the traffic along the corridors. The floors of the office will be covered with Battleship linoleum for warmth and quietness. Staircases will be in non-slip precast terrazzo treads and risers. All doors will be flush type with glass panels (where required) to corridors for lighting purposes.

The Conference Rooms are placed on the Third Floor in a position central for all Departments.

The Department for the Secretary of State is placed on the Fourth Floor with the private rooms looking South, commanding a fine view of the Old City and Arthur's Seat.

On the top floor is placed the Refreshment Room for the Staff. This room could seat approximately 900 in three services and is intended for light luncheons and teas.

The report contained a few surprises, not least the suggestion that consideration should be given to reviving the old North-Eastern Railway's proposal to electrify the east coast main line in the interests of the cleanliness of the building and of others along the line.

Sir Patrick Duff was much less conservative in his tastes than either Allison or West. On 3 July, honouring Ormsby-Gore's undertaking to keep the King and Queen informed, he sent Tait's sketches to Buckingham Palace and wrote to Wigram,

Mr Tait's proposed building is tucked well into the hillside without breaking up the outline of the hill from wherever it is looked at: and I am fain to confess that this Department, which, in a sense, has lived with this problem for years past, cannot but admire the resource and ingenuity which Mr Tait has shown in planning a building which I think avoids the objection of overloading the hill or obliterating its fine outline and yet will give us the accommodation that is required. One hardly gets from the sketch the realisation of how the different blocks of the building are set back and of the skilful way in which the mass has thus been broken up, but the sketch indicates how sympathetic the building is to the architectural features of the buildings in its neighbourhood. Incidentally, the colouring of this particular sketch is a bit bleak and makes the building look somewhat staring, which is a little misleading.

It must have been with relief that Duff and Ormsby-Gore read Wigram's report of their Majesties' opinion of the sketches, sent on the 7th of the same month

The King and Queen studied them with great interest and agree with you that Mr Tait has shown great resource and ingenuity in planning his building.

Doubtless they found the general composition skilful. Wigram's letter contained no com-

ment on the elevational treatment and if they had doubts they refrained from expressing them. The approval of the Royal Fine Art Commission was less guarded. Tait presented his scheme personally on 16 July and after due consideration the Commissioners

desired to express their high appreciation of the designs submitted by Mr Tait and congratulated him on his achievement.

Hitherto Duff and Ormsby-Gore had found the scheme financially as well as aesthetically satisfactory. They now felt that it had been proved to their satisfaction that a suitable building could not be erected on the Calton site for less than £425,700. This figure resulted in an estimated net annual charge of £31,548 as against £24,246 for the scattered premises hitherto occupied, the additional charge (or loss as they expressed it) being £11,302 which they thought manageable. But within a few days their calculations had been overtaken by events.

The Office of Work's test bores showed that the site was not all solid rock as supposed. They revealed 'clayey sand', 'firm sand', 'forced ground', 'sandy clay' and worst of all 'running sand' and a surprising quantity of water, to a considerable depth before rock was reached, adding £18,000 to the bill. This additional foundation cost might have been written off as an unforeseen extra had not the Office's Chief Quantity Surveyor, in a last-ditch effort to wring further economies out of the scheme, recalculated Tait's basic building cost at £445,000 as against Tait's £397,000; West, helpful for once, thought his quantity surveyor's figure on the high side and put it at about £420,000. Ormsby-Gore was sufficiently alarmed to refuse to allow *The Scotsman* to publish the scheme on 27 July lest the Treasury cancelled the whole project. West proved quite remarkably near the mark when an independent quantity surveyor engaged by Tait, Oswald E Parratt, recalculated the whole scheme at £432,000 which included £8,000 for additions to the central block and £4,000 for alterations to the prison wall suggested by the Royal Fine Art

Commission. The eventual cost was put at £425,000, West accepting that building costs in Scotland might be slightly lower than in London. Tait advised in September that the work should be divided into two contracts, thereby securing more time to refine the design of the superstructure.

On 8 October 1934 Neville Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer gave Ormsby-Gore consent to proceed on the understanding that other Works estimates for 1935 and 1936 would be kept as low as possible. On the 17th Tait's report, carefully abridged and with electrification of the railway tactfully reduced to a hope, was released to the press. Approval for the scheme was granted by the City's Town Council on 3 November 1934, the building warrant being issued on the 22nd, enabling Thaw and Campbell to begin the first contract, excavating the site, levelling the prison curtain wall and laying the concrete foundations. Thereafter the design of the superstructure was drawn out to a larger scale under the supervision of Andrew Bryce by Margaret Brodie and W D Ferguson, the drawings being dated December 1934. The requirements of the Scottish Office did not remain static, however, and before their ink was dry Duff had had to ask for an increase in floor area of 6,000 square feet to accommodate additional staff recruited for the Department of Agriculture, even though a fair number of additional staff places had been created by the omission of cloakrooms in October. By now it was too late to make radical changes if the programmed completion date of February 1939 was to be achieved. Tait found the required floor area by blasting the rock under the east wing, enabling him to deepen it by one floor at an additional cost of £6,000 and by reshuffling the allocations of the Departments of Health and the Board of Control, the total cost of the building being recalculated accordingly in January 1935 at £433,200, equivalent to over £39 million at 2009 prices.

Tait did not remain satisfied with the December 1935 scheme for very long. Esme Gordon and

others who worked on the project recall that, like Burnet, Tait strove for perfection without regard for cost in draughtsmen's time, although he was careful to ensure that it was not as apparent to the Office of Works as it had been at the British Museum. In June 1935 the composition of the central block was considerably changed when the staircases were stepped back from the central part of the front elevation and made more spacious internally. At the same date, having developed his ideas on how the building should be enhanced by tubbed cypresses, shrubs and hanging plants at the terraces and balconies, he eliminated the low-pitched copper roofs from the wings, substituting flat roofs. These he proposed to lay out as roof gardens with tubbed shrubs, as had already been proposed at the flat roof of the southern range of the central court which was overlooked by the Secretary of State's apartments. This proposal was vetoed, although the intention remained in respect of the southern roof terrace until the outbreak of the Second World War.

By January 1936 Tait had turned his mind to the sculpture. For the four great symbolic figures then proposed for the main front he nominated Sir William Reid Dick, leading to some sharp differences with West who thought the sculpture should have gone out to tender – Tait justifying Dick on the ground that he was 'entirely in sympathy with my work' – and subsequently between the Office of Works and Dick himself. To avoid further disagreement Tait agreed that a select list of sculptors should be asked to tender for the secondary stone carving, Alexander Carrick securing the heraldic panel, and Phyllis Bone the heraldic lion and unicorn. No such difficulty arose in respect of the bronze doors for the main entrance, the commission for which Ormsby-Gore gave to Walter Gilbert as his own nominee.

While the sculpture was under consideration Tait had further thoughts on the choice of stone. At the time of the press release in October 1934 he had proposed to use a Scottish stone acquired

locally if possible but none of the Scottish quarries was able to supply a buff sandstone in sufficient quantity and he was thereafter obliged to look at the Northumberland quarries, particularly Darney. Within Scotland only red sandstone from Dumfriesshire was available in the quantities required but its colour was thought alien to the site. But having been obliged to cross the Border anyway, he opted for Portland stone, which he subsequently claimed had been in his mind from the beginning; and perhaps it had, since he had already used Portland in a sandstone setting at Carliol House, Newcastle, in 1927. Duff agreed, but thought he must first consult the Royal Fine Art Commission, proposing its use to the Commissioners on 19 February. James Miller, having used it himself in his recent bank buildings on Bothwell Street and West George Street in Glasgow, strongly supported Tait but the other commissioners led, as ever, by Sir George Washington Browne, voted for sandstone. Nevertheless Portland had influential lobbyists, notably its local member of parliament, Lord Cranbourne, who pressed the point with the argument that Portland company deserved the Government's support as it gave holidays with full pay to its territorials.

On 30 April Tait appealed to West after the contract prices for stone had come in, showing that Portland was appreciably cheaper. His letter shows that his preference was aesthetic rather than financial:

As you are aware I am very anxious that Portland Stone should be used for this building; my design has been made out on this understanding, and you realize that even the mouldings must be affected by the material which is used. My idea of this building is that it should stand out as a fine piece of sculpture work, relying on its silhouette, massing and grouping to give it its greatest architectural quality. As this building stands isolated from any other buildings it should not conflict with them as far as colour or stonework is concerned. Owing to its exposed position, particularly to the south, the wind and rain should keep it clean and white and

give it a distinction without interfering with the amenities of its surroundings.

You will understand that practically the only buildings in Edinburgh which have retained their colour without being affected by the soot are the buildings carried out in Craighleith Stone, but it is impossible, owing to the closing down of these quarries, to use this material.

Another point in favour of Portland stone is that there is no question whatever in obtaining supplies and working this stone, in order to complete the contract in the specified time, but I doubt very much if the Darney Stone Firm, whatever efforts they make, could undertake this work in the time specified.

There are, however, certain sections of this work where Darney stone could be used, such as the South Block occurring immediately over the retaining wall. This would match the existing work and help to "marry" the old boundary walls with the Portland stone above.

Tait's vision of the building was thus of a great white pile with roof gardens of evergreens, standing out luminous against the hill on a platform of darker sandstone terracing. After a visit to Edinburgh to consider the proposal on site, West felt as wary of using Portland stone in Edinburgh as the Royal Fine Art Commission had been. He referred to the unsatisfactory appearance of J M Dick Peddie's Edinburgh (now Commercial Union) Insurance building (1908) on George Street, finding the effect unacceptably chalky in relation to adjoining buildings. He therefore advised the First Commissioner against it, strengthened in his views by Fairlie's intention to use Northumberland stone at the National Library.

In May 1936 Tait made final revisions to the composition of the central part of the main frontage widening it to seven bays instead of five, resulting in six figures by Reid Dick instead of four. This alteration was requested by the Office itself in order to reduce the areas of blind wall and make the division of the offices within more flexible. Dick had now also developed his concept of

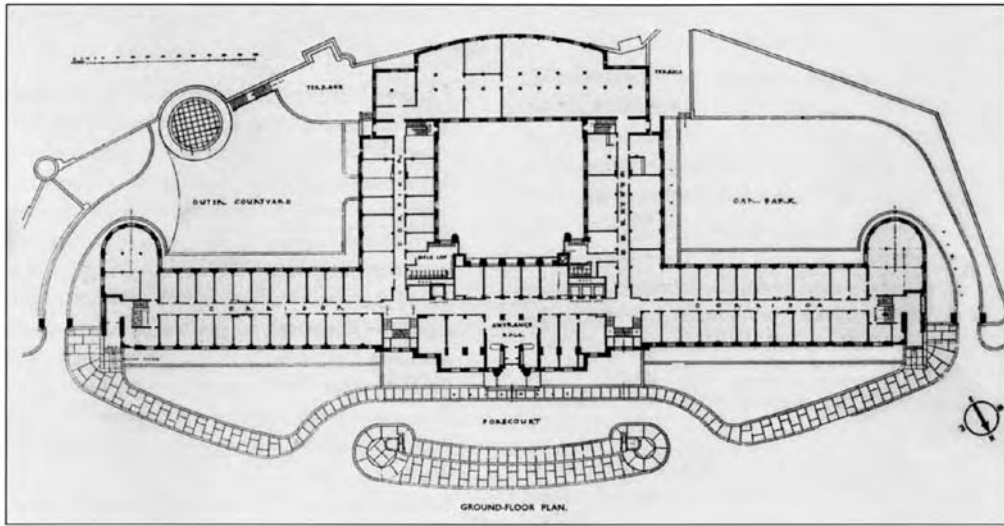
the figures rather beyond those at Tait's Royal Masonic Hospital, as Tait's letter of 24 August shows:

I herewith send you his quotation for this work amounting to £1,000 for each figure. You will remember that only £850 was provided in the approximate cost of the building for this work but when these estimates were taken out my idea had been to provide only caryatid type of figures, but since preparing the models with Sir William it was found that this would not be very satisfactory as it would be impossible to give the various symbols sufficient distinction with this type of figure. The figures are now 13'0" high and you will remember that a considerable amount of extra work has been added in order to give the figures sufficient character.

I should be glad if you could see your way to grant this extra cost as the figures are practically the only enrichment we have on the building with the exception of the cartouche over the main doorway and the two side lion panels, and on a building of this nature and national importance I feel that only the best sculpture work we can obtain should be employed. You will remember also that two extra windows have been added to this central group which necessitates the addition of two further figures, making six instead of four as originally intended.

West had become nervous of the increasingly rhetorical nature of the design and had ordered a plaster model of the central part of the design to be made in February 1936, but after a visit to Reid Dick's studio on 14 May Duff and Ormsby-Gore gave their approval.

In November Tait and Bryce were obliged to report that they were somewhat behind with the schedules for the superstructure as a result of a shortage of quantity surveyors, Bryce complaining to West that the activities of the various Government Departments were 'attracting to their service many of the best fellows who would otherwise be working for private practitioners'. It was not until March that the foundations were sufficiently complete for the second



*Plan as built.*

contract to begin. The main contract was won by Jackson Brown of Giffnock, Redpath Brown providing the steelwork, and Diespecker & Co of London the structural floors. Esme Gordon drew out much of the stonework details and to supervise the contract a branch office was opened, first at No 7 St Colme Street and later at 44 Charlotte Square where James Henry Wallace — a Lord Clerk of Works as Esme Gordon has described him — was in charge, R H Fernie being clerk of works at the actual site. Bryce was now also in Scotland, based at Bellahouston, Glasgow, supervising the construction of the Empire Exhibition planned for 1938.

The foundation stone was laid by the Duke of Gloucester at the commencement of these contracts on 28 April 1937, but by November the building was again found much too small as a result of the recommendations of the Gilmour Committee on Scottish administration. Tait was instructed to stop work on the partitions and attend a meeting on 26 November. The allocation plans agreed in 1935 had provided for a total staff of 1,250 with an unallocated reserve of 12,832 square feet, sufficient for a further 140, and a reserve of 70 seats scattered elsewhere, providing another 210 staff places in all. The

Department of Health now had 715 staff instead of the original 605 and was forecast to rise to 765; the Department of Agriculture 520 as against 392 at the time of the previous enlargement, with a forecast of 545; other departments had had smaller increases resulting in a forecast deficiency of 156 places. Moreover, the Gilmour Committee had also recommended the amalgamation of the Prison Department, hitherto excluded from the scheme, into the Scottish Home Department resulting in a further influx of staff for whom there were no places. A further complication arose in July 1938 when J Henderson Stewart MP enquired whether the 1933 proposals to provide a flat for the Secretary of State could be revived, the Marquess of Bute's offer of Acheson House in the Canongate having been declined. Various proposals to achieve an increase in floor area were aired, including the roofing over of the central court at ground level, additional floors on the wings, both of which were considered structurally and aesthetically impracticable, and a further building on the site of the Governor's House.

Eventually it was concluded that the least obtrusive way of providing the accommodation was an extension of the eastern annexe at the



*The east pavilion under construction, October 1937.*



*east pavilion, 1989.*

lower ground, ground and first floor levels, a corresponding western extension at the same levels, together with a new building under the car park to provide storage, all of which were estimated to cost a further £83,000, far more than they would have done had they been planned at the beginning, and only the new building under the car park was executed. One final amendment, much to Tait's annoyance, was made as the building was approaching completion in February 1939. The location of the Secretary of State's apartments had been moved from the fourth floor to the fifth, then back to the fourth and finally to the fifth floor, the southern windows of which were recessed to form a terrace. Colonel John Colville, who had succeeded Colonel Walter Elliot as Secretary of State in the previous year, visited his proposed office and found a parapet rising outside his windows. He did not think it allowed him to see out sufficiently and requested that it be lowered. West tried to dissuade him but he was insistent and the parapet was duly reduced to 2ft 6ins so that Colville could have a downward as well as an upward view when seated at his desk. The altered parapets remain as the only flaw in Tait's detailing.

The final stages concerned the tidying up of the site. The Governor's House now became an object of controversy. Colville disliked it and wrote to Duff in May 1939 requiring it to be removed. Duff was wary of further controversy and consulted the Royal Fine Art Commission. In June the Commission changed its mind and advised that it should be retained. Tait, who had originally intended to demolish it, had also come to appreciate the contribution it made to the setting and demurred on the ground that

Edinburgh is a City of picturesque qualities and the castle rock and adjoining buildings along the Calton Hill and its various Memorials figure largely in this picture. The retention of the Governor's House would ensure that this picturesque quality was not disturbed,

and on this occasion his advice was accepted.

The First Commissioner, now Harold Ramsbottom, wrote to Colville that

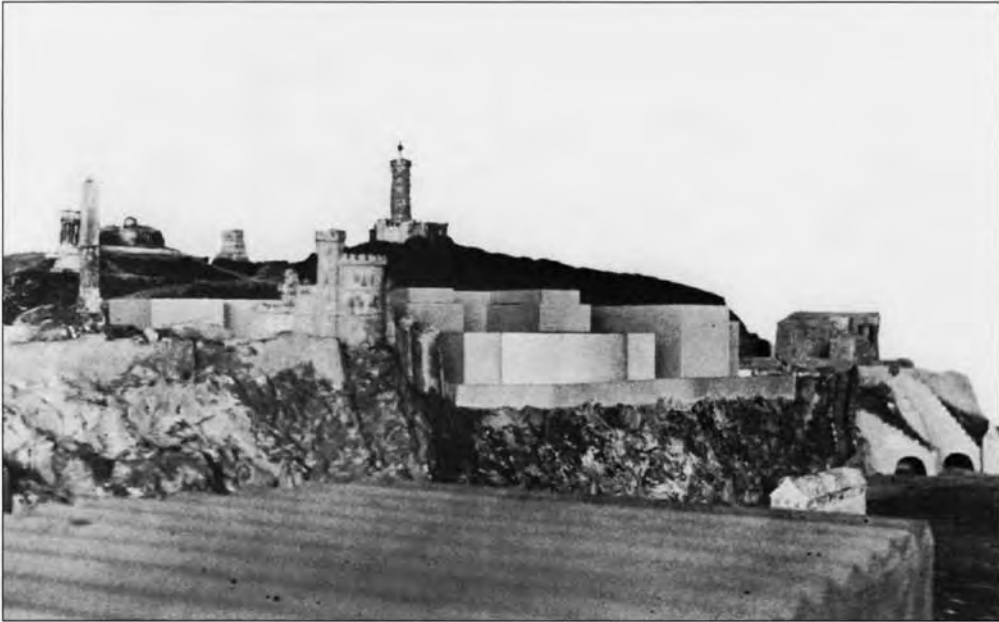
By good fortune and management we have in recent years avoided controversy in respect of the new Government Buildings and I think it would be rather a pity to expose ourselves to one when the issue is not of much moment one way or the other.

The forecourt was laid out in the spring of 1939. The lighting pylons, which gave it a whiff of the atmosphere of Tait's Glasgow Empire Exhibition in 1938, had been planned from the beginning but were now given 50 ft flagpoles. Dr J McQueen Cowan, Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden, was consulted and gave advice on the planting and tubbed shrubs planned for the roof terraces which conflicted with Tait's proposals, but after a short and sharp disagreement, Tait conceded defeat and revised his scheme. The planting was begun by Dobbies in the autumn of 1939 but was not completed.

In the same month the New Government Buildings finally became St Andrew's House. In response to a radio programme numerous suggestions had been received varying in unsuitability from The New Tolbooth to Thistlecuk: St Andrew's House was Colville's personal choice. A Royal opening was planned, Tait designing the dais in August and commissioning Walter Gilbert to design a gold key for his bronze doors. The First Commissioner, now Sir Philip Sassoon, advised Colville to consult George VI's secretary, Sir Alexander Hardinge, who arranged the date for 12 October 1939, but with the outbreak of war on 3 September, the ceremony was cancelled.

On the following day, 4 September, the date fixed for the reconstitution of the Scottish Home Department under the Reorganisation of Offices Act 1939, the staff began to move in. The move-in continued until late October, severely handicapped as a result of the removal contractor having had his men called up for military and civil defence duties and his transport commandeered for other purposes. The Department of Health





*Sir George Washington Browne: model of grouped offices scheme, 1933, showing stepped-back massing of central block.*



*View of completed scheme from North Bridge, 1939.*



*Royal visit, February 1940. Left to right: T. S. Tait, Queen Elizabeth, Mrs Colville, Sir Horace P. Hamilton, Col. Colville, King George VI, D. L. MacIntyre, V.C.*

and the Department of Agriculture divided the ground, first and second floors, the former occupying the eastern half and the latter the western. The Scottish Education Department took possession of most of the third floor and the Scottish Home Department the fourth. Although the Scottish Furniture Manufacturer's Association had lobbied for furnishing appropriate to the building, the departments brought their furniture with them, some of the carpets from the old offices even being recut to fit. They also brought their four war memorials which they had sought to have erected in the entrance hall, much to Tait's consternation as they varied in size, design and material. Eventually they were placed at the appropriate corridor intersections, where they still remain, as much a memorial to the original occupation of the building as to those who fell. No one quite knew what to do with the key. It was eventually sent to Buckingham Palace in December, but George VI returned it when he was

finally able to make an official visit on 26 February 1940.

Sir George Washington Browne died on 15 June 1939, having remained in Edinburgh just long enough to take satisfaction in seeing the massing of the building realised as he had conceived it before moving to Shropshire to spend his last weeks with his daughter. Tait had the satisfaction of showing the Duke of Kent over the building on 3 December 1939, followed by the King and Queen in February 1940, but his career had been cut short in its prime by the Second World War shortly thereafter: he became Director of Standardisation at the Ministry of Works and the fine Colonial Office building he had designed for the Westminster Hospital site never proceeded although redesigned in a severer classical form after the Second World War. He died at his Scottish home, Scotrea, Strathtay, on 18 July 1954. His architectural services to the Empire at St Andrew's House, the Empire Exhibition of

1938, Sydney Harbour Bridge and other major bridges in Rhodesia, and at Bangkok and Cairo had been matched only by Lutyens and Baker, but he accepted no honour of any kind, although he had been approached on the subject of a knighthood in 1938. He was not the sort of man to

whom such things mattered much: although he had never studied at the Ecole itself, he had achieved the dream of every Beaux Arts-trained architect, to design a truly great Government building.



## ST ANDREW'S HOUSE AS BUILT: ITS PLACE IN WESTERN ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1920s AND 1930s

The new Government building . . . is a conception worthy of its dominating position on the Scottish "Acropolis" which while taking away nothing of the beauty of the older surrounding buildings, exhibits so significantly the artist's mind through a direct scientific approach to the problem before him. The problem here is of economic expression of the Administrative purpose of the Building in terms of beauty, dignity and refined simplicity. Here is proof that architecture in our country, so long trammelled with traditional ornament and lacking in original thought, is again vibrant with imagination and in step with the progression of a great (or transitional) age.

So wrote Tait in the press release he drafted for the Office of Works on 29 June 1934. It is perhaps the best statement of his design aims and has a Burnetian ring about it. St Andrew's House was built very much as then described in his 1934 report, the key sections of which are quoted on pages 39, 40, except that the number of passenger lifts was reduced from four to three.

Tait designed his building as a fully steel-framed structure on a 12 ft grid. The origins of his design are extremely complex and the ultimate result very personal. The overall massing, as recounted on page 36, was developed by replac-



*The south front of the main block from the court showing the steel frame being encased in concrete, April 1938.*

ing the central block of Allison's third scheme with that of Browne's as recommended by the Royal Fine Art Commission; but in order to improve the composition still further, Tait heightened Browne's north block and reversed Allison's L-plan wings, pushing them northward to produce a single truly monumental facade, some 530 ft long, towards Regent Road and integrate the building more deeply into the hillside as seen from the south. As described in his report (see page 39) the massing of the whole is skilfully stepped to answer the profile of the hill itself as seen from North Bridge, Jeffrey Street and Market Street, and to merge into the hillside as seen from Holyrood.

Stylistically St Andrew's House still has a marked Burnetian feeling in the monumentally scaled detailing, particularly around the entrance, but it is primarily American Beaux Arts modern, a style that is again beginning to be understood and appreciated. In their perhaps over-influential book *The International Style* (1932) Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson dismissed the work of the Beaux Arts modernists as 'applied verticalism', championing the unbroken horizontal window bands of what they considered to be the true international style as exemplified by Tait and Lorne themselves at the Mount Royal flats and in their schools, sanatoria and office blocks of the mid to late 1930s. Succeeding generations of architectural critics have consistently adopted their view of what constituted the mainstream of architectural development in the 1920s and 1930s and until very recent years have written as if no other school existed. Franco Borsi's *The Monumental Era* (1986) is almost equally polarised in the opposite direction. A balanced history of the period has yet to be written.

Tait himself variously described St Andrew's House in his 1934 report both as 'classic' and 'sculpturesque' and made it clear that the 'classic' was a conscious design decision to relate the building to the other neo-classical monuments on and around Calton Hill. Classic it certainly is

in execution, with its finely polished Darney stone elevations, channelled at the ground floor and laid in the alternately deep and shallow courses of Greek antiquity, executed with a precision worthy of the best German and French neo-classicists. In its general outline, with its massive rectangular central block and lower pilastered wings, it is reminiscent, as earlier observed, of Nénot's League of Nations Building at Geneva. However forgotten now, it was at the time the international image of a great legislative building: the massing of Allison's third scheme appears to have been modelled upon it and Tait's first sketches may have had a closer relationship to it than is now apparent as a result of the deletion of the return wings at the ends to reduce costs. But there the resemblance ends. Nénot still adhered to the old classical formula of shaft, entablature and cornice, even if in simplified form, as indeed did Carlu, Azema and Boileau's Palais de Chaillot built for the Paris International Exhibition of 1937 a decade later. The central block of St Andrew's House differs markedly in style in having neither entablature nor cornice and in being clasped between stair towers, the tall windows of which are split, Dutch style, by granite mullions. Its subtly battered walls step back in receding planes to an unemphasised parapet ornamented only by bands of shallow relief enrichments, discs on horizontal reeding below, and a fluted frieze punctuated by stylised art deco thistles above. On both north and south the composition belongs to the Mayan-inspired 'step-back' school of monumental composition favoured in the 1920s and 1930s by such American architects as Raymond M Hood, Holabird and Root and Gilbert Underwood. Their propagandist was Hugh Ferriss in the visionary project drawings of whose *Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929) St Andrew's House would have fitted very happily, albeit on a much smaller scale than Ferriss's vast symmetrical skyscraper layouts. They found their realisation in the Rockefeller Centre in New York, the planning of which had been in the hands of Farquhar's former employer, Raymond Hood.



*Regent Road frontage from the east, 1989.*

Tait's architecture is also a great deal more rhetorical than Nénot's severe stripped classicism. The base of the composition of the main front is a monumental oblong projection clasped in pylons, two storeys high, with semi-circular bastions rising into stylised thistle heads flanking Walter Gilbert's bronze entrance doors. Its blind upper part is in fact a screen wall, concealing the windows of the clerestory of the entrance hall and its flanking offices: it was originally intended as a giant planter for tubbed greenery, complementing the specimen evergreens planned for the massive square, granite planters which flank the entrance steps, and the long granite beds which run along the whole of the north elevation. Above Tait adopted, as at the Royal Masonic Hospital and the Norwich competition design, oblong piers or mullions rising into symbolic half-length figures 13 ft high in preference to the giant order of his otherwise related Daily Telegraph Building in London's Fleet Street of 1927. Tait described these as caryatids, but they differ from those of classical antiquity in that they do not bear the entablature on their heads but are set against it in high relief.

The concept of adopting massive symbolic figures as a modern alternative to the traditional classic giant order for monumental buildings appears to be of Finnish origin. Eliel Saarinen's

pioneer 'step-back' composition for the Helsinki Parliament Building (1908, not built) featured giant symbolic figures at the approaches and over the entrance portico, and at his Helsinki Railway Station (1910-14) such figures were actually built. These were full-length and applied sculpture rather than integral parts of the structure. In Michel de Klerk's competition design for the State Academy of Art and Design, Amsterdam (1917, placed second, not built) which has hints of the composition of both Tait's Masonic Hospital buildings and of St Andrew's House, the symbolic figures are set between the mullions above the window heads, as in H F Mertens's Unilever Works at Rotterdam, the design of which derived from it. At the State Capitol, Lincoln, Nebraska (1920), Bertram Goodhue adopted square columns rising into half-length figures much as at St Andrew's House, but in association with large round-headed windows. Much closer in concept and arrangement to the Masonic Hospital and Norwich designs was the facade of Gilbert Underwood's Omaha Union Station, Nebraska (1929-30), which probably provided the basic idea for at least the Norwich design. At the St Andrew's House facade the Norwich scheme was triumphantly expanded, first from three bays to five and finally to seven. Tait's sculptor, Reid Dick, made an important contribution to



*Detail of east and west doors.*

the design by recommending that the arms and symbols should extend beyond the width of the shaft and not be confined within it as in Gilbert Bayes's figures at the Masonic Hospital, making St Andrew's House the most impressive twentieth century expression of the caryatid order concept, certainly in Britain and possibly in the whole of the western world.

The flanking wings, twelve bays long, with the windows at the 12 ft centres of Tait's grid as in the central block, are similarly of the Raymond Hood school although rather more Beaux Arts in their detailing. Their ground floors are channelled on the north facade, but above, at first and second floors, they have a giant order of pilasters which die into the wall short of the subtly emphasised parapet as in the British Empire Building and La Maison Francaise building at the Rockefeller Centre in New York. Esme Gordon has recorded that at one stage Tait planned to flute these pilasters, until he and Bryce pointed out that the steelwork would be perilously near the surface. Inset within them are two storeys of metal-framed windows made by Rowe Brothers of Liverpool, set in a subsidiary order of thin slivers of pilasters supporting Beaux Arts vousoired entablatures as at the central block. Above, the top floors are set back with V-plan mullions ris-

ing into Tait's characteristic stylized Art Deco thistles, forming terraces which were intended to have tubbed conifers and planters but were never supplied. The parapet at the upper level is similarly unemphasised as at the Rockefeller buildings. The vetoed roof gardens were again probably suggested by the Rockefeller Centre buildings, where the still extant sheltering topiary hedges survive to give an impression of what was in his mind. The original finish of the Rudapta roof terraces was tiles, buff with touches of colour. At the time of opening these were, as a compromise, laid out with flower boxes but the practice was not continued. At the end elevations are secondary entrances with Dutch-school canopies, cantilevered from slabs of black Bon Accord granite, and rectangular metal and glass staircase bays. These are sheltered by projecting roofs on stone spheres, a favourite Tait device. The fine gates at the secondary entrances have stylised lion medallions and were made by Thomas Hadden of Edinburgh, as were the flanking vehicular gates to the car parks and central court.

In his 1934 report Tait described the south front as having been conceived as 'one fine piece of sculpture work' and so indeed it is, rich in the dramatic effects of light and shade and diversified massing sought by the Royal Fine Art Commission, the deeply shadowed fifth floor gallery adopted from his earlier Brook House design expressing (as it eventually turned out) the Secretary of State and the Permanent Under Secretary's apartments. As first proposed in 1934 the low southern forebuilding over the railway tracks had a V-plan frontage, giving the centre of the south front something of the form of the bows and superstructure of a giant ocean liner, but in the final scheme it was redesigned as the segmental bow proposed by Browne. Esme Gordon has recorded that Tait took endless trouble over the inner facade of the central building, working and reworking the angles which are punctuated by the glass-block walls of the lavatory stacks and the pylon chimneys. The western serves the boiler



house, the eastern is a dummy. These chimney features cost Tait a good deal of difficulty as the Office of Works was strongly in favour of a free-standing chimney for simplicity of maintenance, a disfigurement which Tait was concerned to avoid. The stepped back masses of the central block, particularly impressive as seen from the roof terrace over the southern forebuilding, form a composition in which Hugh Ferriss would have seen the realisation of his dreams. As at the east and west wings the southern roof terrace was originally surfaced in buff tiles, answering the buff faience spandrels at the courtyard windows. Tait intended that it should be a fine roof garden which the windows of the main block would overlook, but with the outbreak of war, the tubbed *Hypericum Olympicum* and flower beds specified for it were never supplied.

Within, St Andrew's House has no really large spaces beyond the entrance hall since the function of the building was administrative and not legislative. The general arrangement of the two-storied entrance hall, where the first floor corridor becomes a gallery, is again reminiscent of Raymond Hood as at the RCA Building at the Rockefeller Centre. Tait's original intention was to extend it right back as a spacious reception area overlooking the court but his proposal was regarded as wasteful and he was instructed to partition off the rear area as a single large room (since reinstated as Tait intended). The entrance hall has a Travertine floor inset with a St Andrew's Cross and its walls, columns and corridor balcony front are lined with Perrycot marble, a form of polished Portland stone, all executed by J Whitehead & Sons of Kennington Oval, London. At ground floor level the Perrycot facings extended along the corridors of the central block into the twin main staircases, but the unity and clarity of the original arrangement has, unfortunately, had to be interrupted by the insertion of fire doors. The use of Perrycot extends to the doorcases at the upper levels of the central block only. In the wings the doorcases are simply detailed in timber and integrated into the overall



*Detail of stair, with ironwork by Thomas Hadden.*

design of the partitions. These have continuous window bands of borrowed lights and horizontally-reeded friezes (some panels since replaced) which provided a very neat disguise for the suspended corridor services specified by the Office of Works to reduce the overall height. Tait proposed that the floors of the corridors and offices should be oak block at 7s 5d a yard as 'having greater mobility and permanence', but the Office feared that his choice had been made on aesthetic rather than practical grounds and adhered to their standard Battleship linoleum at 4s a yard except in the corridors, where the quieter Ruboleum (since replaced by carpeting) was allowed. Tait designed the clocks (further clocks were added at the third, fourth and fifth floors to a later design provided by Tait in 1949) which were made by Gents of Leicester. He also designed the door furniture which was provided by N & F Ramsay of London and the elegant glass disced light fittings made by



*Entrance hall.*



*The Secretary of State's room, 1939.*

Troughton and Young of Knightsbridge, Best and Lloyd of Birmingham and Hailwood and Ackroyd of Morley, Leeds.

Only at the main stairs, the conference rooms and the Secretary of State's apartments did the Office allow higher standards of finish. The stairs are spacious cantilevers with terrazzo-faced risers and have the characteristic Burnet, Tait and Lorne trick of staggering the position of the flights by one riser, thereby avoiding the problem of swan-neck rails at the turns. The rails themselves are elegant art deco with a further variant on the thistle motif and were made by Thomas Hadden. At third floor level the five conference rooms and their waiting rooms are of simple but very elegant art deco design, panelled from floor to ceiling in Indian silver grey-wood with Indian laurel bands executed by Veneercraft of London. The end rooms have Hoptonwood stone hearths without flues, occupied by still-surviving electric bar fires of elegant white metal design with obelisks. These rooms are divided by

partitions which can be lowered into hollow walls beneath to give double and triple size conference rooms; that they still function efficiently after half a century of use is a tribute to their makers, Glasgow Engineers Ltd. The tables and chairs were made by Mackintosh of Kirkcaldy to designs on which Lord Bilsland's Committee for Art and Industry advised, and the windows were curtained with Donald Brothers of Dundee's Glamis fabric. At fifth floor level the Secretary of State's room is rather similar in treatment but was panelled in walnut obtained from a tree planted by Mary Queen of Scots at Balmerino Abbey, a historic association which increased the cost by £50. The adjoining rooms of the Under Secretary of State and the private secretaries are also of a rather higher standard than the other offices, with dadoes of Nigerian walnut. The clerestoried restaurant at the fifth floor was also a room of some consequence but has regrettably been remodelled. Its kitchen was in its day remarkable in having a dishwashing and sterilis-



*Conference rooms, 1989.*

ing machine. Also now modernised after half a century of service are the boiler room and control room, a very well-ordered layout with three Economic boilers and two tanks made by Wilsons of Glasgow. All the equipment was installed with singular neatness by Hugh Twaddle & Son of Glasgow who, with justifiable pride, commemorated their work with a large inscribed plate.

Even if St Andrew's House, as a purely administrative building, lacks the large-scale internal spaces of municipal projects of the inter-

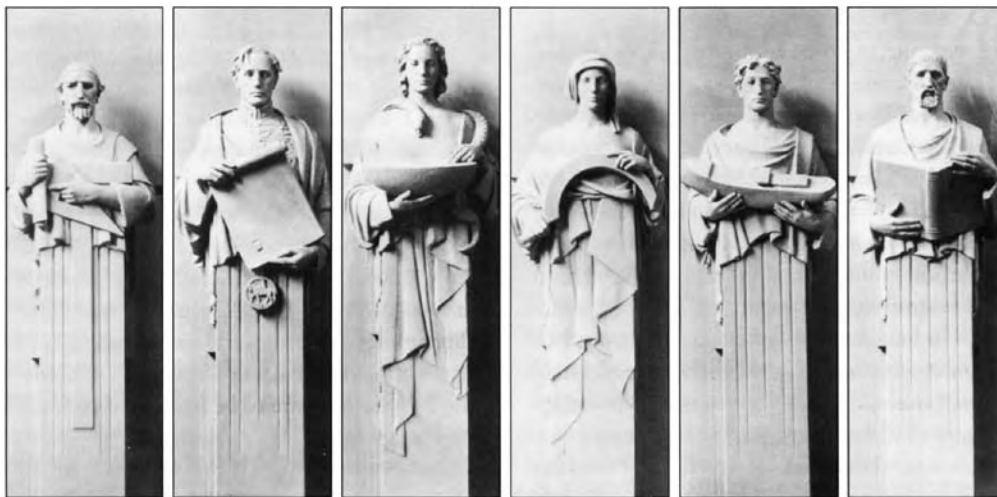
war years such as at Swansea and Norwich, it nonetheless ranks with Adams Holden and Pearson's University of London Senate House as the greatest British public building of the inter-war years. The Senate House surpasses it in scale but not imagination: its handling of stepped back composition is less consistently skilful and its facades lack Tait's masterly handling of receding and interlocking planes. It is not in Britain but rather among the great North American capitols and other major public buildings of the inter-war years that its peers are to be found.

## THE SCULPTURE

Tait, like Burnet before him, attached the greatest importance to the quality of the sculpture on his buildings and had a marked distaste for commonplace building sculpture. For the great symbolic figures he insisted on Reid Dick as sole nominee in January-February 1936, but for the remainder he agreed to competitive tender from a small number of carefully selected sculptors, Alexander Carrick, RSA, Thomas Whalen, James H Clark, ARSA, and Phyllis Bone. Tait had hoped that Archibald Dawson, whom Tait knew well and who had been much employed by the Glasgow practice, would secure some of it, but he became too ill to be included. West accepted Dick as sole nominee very unwillingly and cut his fees (see pages 42, 43): Alexander Carrick and Phyllis Bone were the successful tenderers for the remainder of the work.

**Sir William Reid Dick** (1879-1961) who modelled the caryatid figures on the Regent

Road facade, was born in Glasgow and studied at Glasgow School of Art until 1907. He had been acquainted early with Burnet and Tait, being employed by the former to execute the caryatid figures of R W Forsyth's store at 30 Princes Street, Edinburgh in 1906-08. Thereafter he had moved to London, studying at the City and Guilds School at Lambeth. He had exhibited at the Royal Academy since 1908, establishing a reputation which led to a long series of major official commissions, beginning with the Kitchener Memorial Chapel in St Paul's Cathedral, London for which Tait had designed his studio. He had been elected ARA in 1921, RA in 1928 and knighted in 1935, later (1938) becoming sculptor to George VI. For Burnet and Tait he had already executed the huge sculpture group *Controlled Energy* at Unilever House, Blackfriars, London (1931-32), when Tait selected him to execute the sculpture at St Andrew's House in preference to Gilbert Bayes who had executed



*Sir W. Reid Dick: Sculpture; left to right: Architecture, Statecraft, Health, Agriculture, Fisheries, Education.*



*Alexander Carrick: Plaster model of Heraldic Panel, 1937.*

those at the Royal Masonic Hospital or Ravenscourt Park. The original figures were Health, Agriculture, Fishery and Education: Architecture and Statecraft were added to the commission in May 1936 when the central part of the facade was widened from five bays to seven. The price finally agreed (see page 43) was £900 each, Dick entrusting the actual carving to Alexander Carrick following the approval of the models by Ormsby-Gore, Duff and West at Dick's St John's Wood studio on 14 May 1936. They were completed in October 1938.

**Alexander Carrick** (1882-1966) was entrusted with the heraldic panel over the main entrance. Carrick had been born in Musselburgh and had begun his career as a stone-carver in the studio of Birnie Rhind, later studying at Edinburgh College of Art and the Royal College of Art, London. He had returned to Edinburgh College of Art to teach in 1914, becoming Head of Department in 1928. Elected an associate of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1918 on his return from military service, he had been responsible for a number of major war memorials in the early 1920s and had quickly established a reputation as an architectural sculptor, being employed by the 4th Marquess

of Bute on the extension of the Animal Wall at Cardiff Castle; by Lorimer on the Scottish National War Memorial; by Leslie Grahame Thomson at the Reid Memorial Church, Edinburgh; and by the Office of Works on the statue of Wallace at Edinburgh Castle and the pediment of Edinburgh Sheriff Court. At St Andrew's House Carrick modelled the sculpture from sketches provided by the Lyon King, Sir Francis Grant and Sir Thomas Innes of Learney. His tender was £1,100; he was allowed six months from January 1937 for the model and nine months for the carving.

**Phyllis Mary Bone** (1894-1972) was primarily an animal sculptor. She was entrusted with the heraldic lion and unicorn and their associated Saltire shields at the pylons flanking the main entrance, together with the stylised thistle, shamrock and rose enrichments at the semi-circular piers flanking the door itself. Born at Hornby, Lancashire, she had come to Edinburgh as a child and had studied at Edinburgh College of Art before proceeding first to Paris and then to Italy. She had been much employed by Lorimer for animal sculpture, notably at the Scottish National War Memorial; St John's Church, Perth; St

Peter's RC Church, Morningside, Edinburgh; the Zoology Buildings of Edinburgh University; and Stowe School Chapel, Buckinghamshire, before being invited to tender for her work at St Andrew's House. Her tender was £560 for the heraldic animals and £70 for the pier enrichments. She was allowed four months from January 1937 for the models, and two to three months for the carving.

**Walter Gilbert** (1871-1946) was a cousin of the great late Victorian and Edwardian sculptor Sir Alfred Gilbert and was considerably older than the others. He was selected at the instance of Ormsby-Gore who took a particular interest in his work and was responsible for the choice of subject matter, Tait's original idea having been armorial panels representing the cities of Scotland. Tait nevertheless came to think highly of him, subsequently employing him at Sir Ernest Oppenheimer's Anglo American Headquarters Building at 44 Main Street, Johannesburg. Born in Rugby, he had studied at Birmingham Art School and South Kensington before proceeding to further study in France, Belgium and Germany. On his return he had taught at Rugby and Harrow, before joining the Bromsgrove Guild where, with Louis Weingartner, he had executed the gates and screen at Buckingham Palace under the supervision of Sir Aston Webb. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott was also an admirer of his work and entrusted him with the reredos at Liverpool Cathedral. At the time of his St Andrew's House commission he was also engaged on bronze doors for the restaurant and dining rooms of RMS *Queen Mary* for the Cunard line. Years of working on numerous Masonic Temple projects had given him a somewhat mystical cast of mind, and it was perhaps his accompanying paper as much as the design of the doors which troubled Sir John Lamb and the Secretary of State, Colonel Walter Elliot, when they received them in November 1936 from Earl Stanhope, who had succeeded Ormsby-Gore as First Commissioner in June. After observing that Carrick's coat-of-

arms would be the visible sign of the greatness of Scotland, Gilbert wrote:

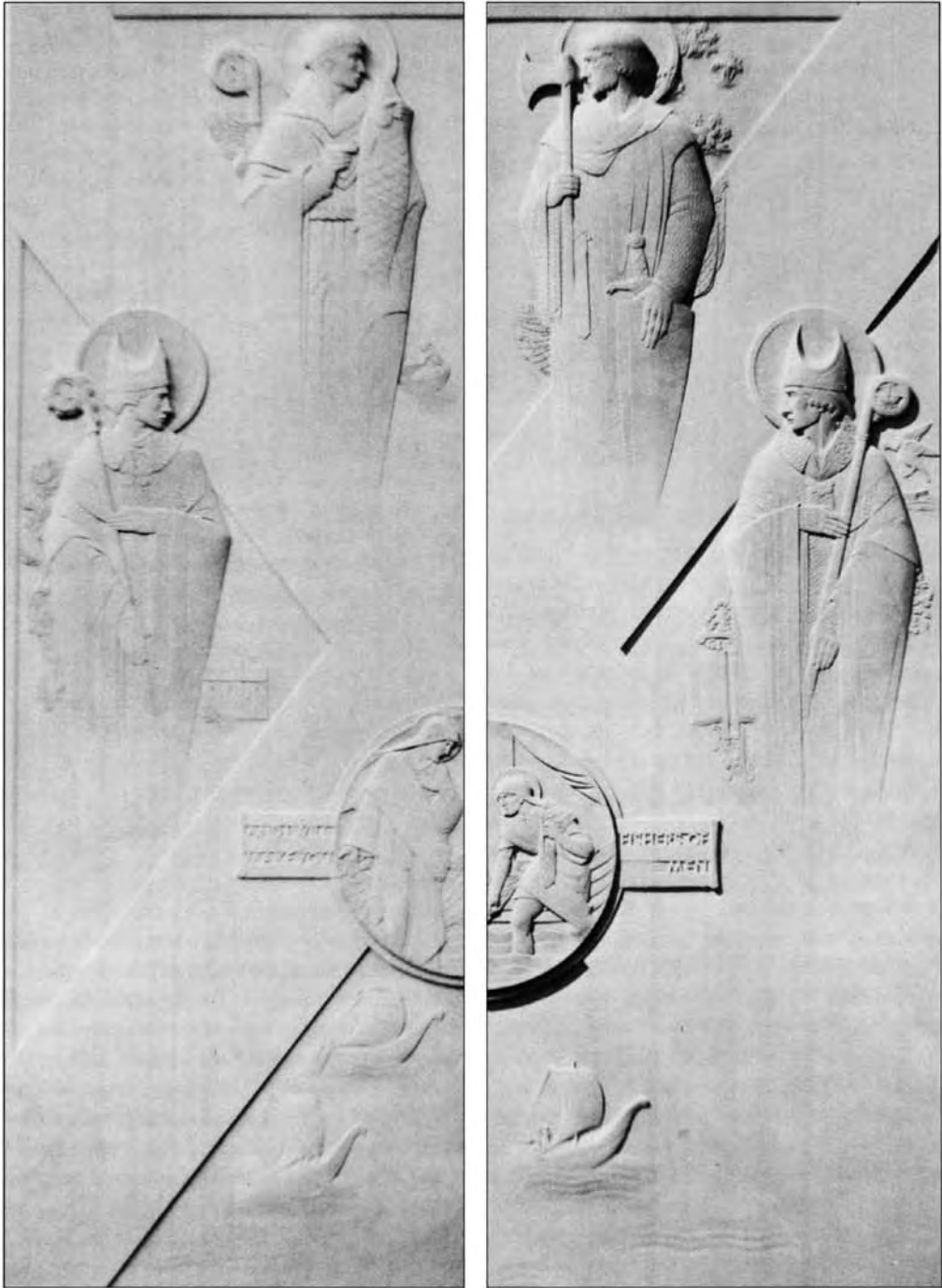
But on the doors I have endeavoured to inscribe something more difficult to express, viz the Soul of Scotland. This should be, I think, visualized as though we have opened out the secret recesses of the heart of man.

The slightness of the relief and the disappearance of the figures into the ground attempts to express this vision of the part those wise counsellors and welders of the nation in the past have taken. But the heart of the story, the secret of the greatness and their inspiration I have endeavoured to express as still existing close to the hand of man. So I placed the relief depicting the call of St Andrew, the guide of the destinies of Scotland, which symbolises the call of service from all men for the fellowmen, at the point of the door where the handles come which all men grip on opening to enter the building. This "call for service" still exists and the whole poetry of the door rests in the story which unlocks it.

His letter was accompanied by a lengthy paper on the roles of the individual saints, St Andrew ('Follow me and ye shall be fishers of men'), St Ninian, St Kentigern, St Columba and St Magnus.

Elliot raised the matter first with Ormsby-Gore as the person who had originally commissioned the doors. Under pressure Ormsby-Gore suggested self-contained panels in the Florentine manner to overcome Elliot's objection to the design being divided when open. Elliot then persuaded Earl Stanhope to instruct the design to be changed accordingly in January 1937, but Stanhope was unable to persuade Tait, who threatened to make the doors plain bronze rather than accept the panelled treatment suggested by Ormsby-Gore. They were eventually executed by the great architectural metal and ceramic firm of H H Martyn & Co of Cheltenham, who completed their work on 5 January 1939. The doors are nine feet wide and twelve high. The cost was £1,100 for the doors and £287 for the door frame.

Gilbert was also entrusted with the design of



*Walter Gilbert: model for bronze doors.*



the gold key for the doors with which George VI was to have opened the building. The Office of Works undertook to pay for the gold and Tait for the actual work. Beyond ensuring that it actually fitted the lock, it was never used.

**The War Memorial** in the entrance hall was the subject of a competition won by D S Macphail of the Department of Agriculture, Aberdeen, in July 1948. It was modelled and cast by Charles Henshaw and unveiled in 1950.

## SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The principal sources for the information given in this account have been the files relating to the site and the building in the care of the Scottish Record Office. The Office of Works files comprise MW 5/61 (selection of Calton site and proposals of 1912-13); MW 5/133 and MW 5/102 (design and construction); MW 5/134 (Reid Dick sculpture); MW 5/135 (Carrick and Bone sculpture); MW 5/103 (Gilbert's bronze doors); MW 5/106 (planting); and MW 5/211 (newspaper cuttings, 1928-30). The Scottish Office files are HH 45/44 and 47 and the Royal Fine Art Commission's RF 21/1-3. I owe a particular debt to Dr Athol Murray, Mr George Barbour, Mr Colin Johnston and Miss Alison Rosie, not least for a massive volume of photocopying without which the task could not have been accommodated with other departmental commitments. Dr Murray and Mr Barbour also kindly checked the text. At the National Monuments Record I was indebted to Miss Cruft and Mr Ian Gow who provided me with excerpts from Dr Reginald Fairlie's papers, Mr Charles McKean and Mr Sebastian Tombs at the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, who prepared the St Andrew's House Exhibition in parallel, and also kindly shared material they had found with me. Sir John Summerson read the text and provided further information on Pat Ronaldson; and Professor A J Youngson corrected and clarified the references to the setting up of the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland, of which he was then chairman.

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DAVID M WALKER



