

Markinch Heritage Group

Balbirnie – background

Balbirnie is in the [Historic Environment Scotland's Designated Inventory & Designed Landscapes](#) which lists Scotland's most important gardens and designed landscape.

The main phases of landscape development took place around 1779, 1815 and 1849-1875.

A collection of rhododendrons was introduced in the 1850s and now forms one of the most significant collections of rhododendrons in the east of Scotland, comprising around 200 varieties from India, China and the Himalayan provinces. The collection is clearly labelled throughout the grounds.

There are many trees also planted around 1850, including a giant sequoia raised from the first seeds in Scotland in 1853 as well as five county champion trees including a Nikko fir and an Oriental spruce. A row of monkey puzzle trees includes the tallest example in Fife.

The Balfours continuously occupied Balbirnie from 1642 to 1969 when it was sold to Glenrothes Development Corporation. After refurbishment work they used Balbirnie House as offices before being sold for £1 and converted to a hotel in 1989. Balbirnie House was built in a classical style in the 1600s and remodelled and added to over the years until around 1860. The estate made its wealth predominantly from agriculture and coal, deposits of which have been worked here between the 1400s and 1930s.

The railway through Markinch was actively promoted by the family. At substantial cost they financed the section extending two miles north and south but recognised the utility of this development in assisting industrial activities within their estate.

The railway proved useful in another way. When the Balfours were residing in their London property, it is said fresh butter from their own dairy would be sent by train from Markinch.

A significant part of the park is now an 18-hole golf course laid out in two 9-hole loops.