

The Lawn and Central Woodlands, Heriot-Watt University



The Lawn and Central Woodlands of the Edinburgh campus of Heriot Watt University has consistently achieved a Green Flag Award since first entering in 2012.

Initially used as an army command centre in World War Two, when a bunker was built under the garden, but what lay on top became neglected. Much hard work and horticultural expertise were needed to bring the garden up to standard in recent years.



The overall campus is 115ha and the university parks and sports pitches area team includes 17 people. Site Manager and head of landscape, Jim Swan said: "They do everything from laying paths, preparing ground for buildings and cutting grass and hedges - every year we trim 4.5 miles of hedges, mostly by hand.

"We drew up a five-year landscape-management plan to accompany the Green Flag Award application."

The lawn, historic garden and surrounding wooded areas were originally laid out as the formal gardens of a country house that dated back to the 15th century. Formal gardens were laid out in the 18th century in the prevailing picturesque style.

Later owners added collections of exotic trees and plants and the garden design is an overlay of several periods. Maintenance therefore has to take account of historical features, conservation, and biodiversity, maintaining the mix of indigenous and exotic plants and supporting wildlife.

Since the university acquired the Riccarton Estate in 1969, care has been taken to safeguard the tranquillity and quality of this area. The site conservation committee is consulted on all aspects of landscape conservation, maintenance and management.

Today, key features of the site include a lawn dating back at least 200 years and containing more than 38 plant species as well as dome and drum yew trees. A grassed Velvet Walk bordered with yews, holly and laurel overlooks three mature woodland areas, stone walls and a private family cemetery.

"The university has published a series of booklets for visitors outlining the history, sculpture, landscape and tree walks," says Jim.

"We hope gaining another Green Flag Award will encourage more visitors and recognise the achievements of the university and its partners in sustaining the historic gardens."

