

## Grange House, Wyvern Sculptures

### Introduction:

Following a request from the Residents Association of the Grange in Edinburgh a site visit was made to inspect two 'B listed' wyvern sculptures and their supporting pillars in Grange Loan. The inspection was carried out from street level and a more detailed inspection would require scaffold access. The back of the pillars were not inspected as access could only be gained through private gardens.

The sculptures once formed the capping elements for two sandstone gate piers that provided an imposing entrance to Grange House. This house was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and was substantially extended by William Playfair in 1827. It subsequently fell into a state of disrepair in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was finally demolished around 1937.

The upper portion of the gate piers include wyverns supported on a coronated pedestal; below this is an ionic capital; the supporting pillar is made up of staggered square blocks with fluted decoration alternating with blocks carved with congelation (rustication resembling icicles) descending from swags or drapery decoration.

The sculptures have been moved more than once and are currently situated on the north side of Grange Loan. One of the sculptures is at the entrance to Lovers Loan. The other is situated approximately 100metres further east on the same side of the street.

### Condition:

The general condition of both wyvern sculptures is good and the carving remains well defined and stable. In both cases there is evidence of loss including the wing tips, tail end, ears, tongue and details of the crown. This damage does not appear recent and may well have occurred when they were moved from their original position.

The westerly sculpture has a fracture through the tail which appears stable and is probably a repair to previous damage. The pedestal below the crown decoration displays an old fracture which has been repaired and pointed in the past – this damage may be associated with oxide jacking caused by an internal ferrous dowel. Under the lower jaw of the wyvern is a small daub of blue paint. The surface of the sculpture is colonised by a thin layer of green biofilm growth no doubt encouraged by an overhanging cherry tree. Localised areas of black pollution products are evident however these deposits are relatively light and whilst this could be regarded as visually detrimental it does not impact greatly on the performance or condition of the stone.

The carving of the ionic capital remains clearly legible however there is evidence of deterioration in the form of disaggregation of the sandstone along its natural sedimentary bedding. One of the volutes facing the street is damaged where a large fragment has broken off although this may be old damage?

The fluted pillar stones below are suffering from superficial and localised areas of granular disaggregation but this will not impact greatly on the stones longevity as a structural element. The whole pillar has a slight lean to the west and there is evidence of movement where it abuts the adjoining wall as the joints of the masonry have opened.

The easterly sculpture is in a similar condition however other than the obvious losses to the carving it is free of fracturing. The pedestal below the crown decoration displays an old

fracture that has been previously repaired and pointed – this damage may be associated with oxide jacking caused by an internal ferrous dowel. The surface of the wyvern and the capital are colonised by a thin layer of green biofilm growth promoted by the overhanging tree branches. Light deposits of atmospheric pollution soiling are evident particularly on the wyvern and the capital but of minor consequence in terms of the preservation of the carving. The capital is in good order with only minor areas of disaggregation most evident on the fluted decoration where the natural bedding structure is exposed. The fluted pillar stones below are suffering from localised areas of granular disaggregation but this loss is fairly superficial and not of any concern. Some ‘ghosting’ of previously applied graffiti is apparent on one of the lower stones of the pillar.

#### Recommendations:

It should be noted that as the wyverns and pillars are category ‘B Listed’ any works will require listed building consent.

Taking a minimum intervention, conservation approach the sculptures do not require extensive works to continue in their present condition. My recommendations would be as follows:

- Hand cleaning using only water and a medium nylon or natural bristle brush to remove the growth and superficial soiling.
- Re-pointing of fractures on the wyvern and pedestal using a colour matched acrylic mortar.
- Re-pointing of bedding joints in the column and the wall where necessary using a lime mortar.
- Applying a survey ‘tell-tale’ to monitor any further movement in the westerly pier or monitoring the re-pointed wall for newly formed fractures.
- Some local consolidation of disaggregating stone may be considered particularly on the capital stone of the westerly pillar.
- Treatment to remove the identified graffiti and the paint splash should be considered but only if this can be achieved without further damage of the stone.
- If necessary the over hanging branches should be cut back to avoid future damage should these limbs break. This would also reduce the amount of biological growth forming.

Were a more restorative approach taken then the following additional intervention could be considered:

- Replacing the missing carved elements such as the wing, tail and ear tips as small stone indents scribed to the broken face.
- Laser cleaning to remove the black pollution soiling..
- If ongoing movement is detected in the westerly pillar it may be necessary to dismantle and rebuild to avoid possible future collapse.

Some of the suggested recommendations should be within the capability of a good monumental mason. However others such as laser cleaning and surface consolidation may require the services of a conservator. Historic Scotland can provide the names of contractors who will be able to quote for the work if necessary.



Westerly wyvern and supporting pillar



Easterly wyvern and supporting pillar



General views of the wyverns





Evidence of movement at the base of the westerly pier

S. Gordon  
Head of Applied Conservation

Historic Scotland  
7 South Gyle Crescent  
Edinburgh EH12 9EB

7 July 2011