

## Roman Camp History

The Roman Camp got its name from the conspicuous earthwork visible across the meadow to the South of the gardens. This is believed to be Roman, and there is indeed a remains of Roman Fort at Bocastle to the North of the Town. The Fort covers four acres and was occupied during the first century AD, being one of the highland line forts constructed by the Romans to protect their conquest of the lowlands of Scotland. The North and East ramparts are easily recognizable. However the River Leny has eroded the North side of the site at the Camp and the coming of the railway obliterated the South side.

The House has been added to as the requirements of successive owners have changed it to meet their needs.

It was originally a modest 17<sup>th</sup> Century manor house on the estates of the Earl of Moray, one of Scotland's most ancient families who married into the Royal Family when an early ancestor became the husband of Christian, the sister of Robert the Bruce. Another Earl was regent of Scotland during the childhood of King James VI and I, the son of Mary Queen of Scots.

It is likely that at that time the Earls of Moray used the house as a shooting lodge. They had larger residencies more suitable to the demands of their lives elsewhere and at Crief.

In 1897, the property was acquired by Reginald Brett, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Esher, GCB GCVO (1852-1930), one of the most remarkable men of his generation, confidant of Kings and Prime Ministers during the reigns of Edward VII and George V, creator and first Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Governor of Windsor Castle and, as Secretary of the Office of Works, a significant patron of the arts.

Lord Esher married the daughter of the Belgian Minister at the Court of St James and their son Maurice married one of the most celebrated light comedy actresses and picture postcard beauties of the day, Zena Dare. Guests at the Roman Camp thus included diplomats and politicians such as the Prime Ministers AJ Balfour and Ramsay MacDonald, soldiers and writers – Earl Haig and JM Barrie, even Colette en passant – and theatrical beauties and artists such as Lily Elsie, Ellaline Terriss and Scottish Painter DY Cameron. Maurice Brett was Lord Esher's second son, a soldier and later assistant keeper of the London

Museum, which Lord Esher was instrumental in founding. The daughters broke away, Dorothy Brett became an artist, associating with the avant-garde writers and painters who visited Ottoline Morrell at Garsington in Oxfordshire (though some of them, Carrington for example, were also visitors to the Camp), and then following DH Lawrence and his wife to New Mexico, where she spent the rest of her life. Sylvia Brett married Vyner Brooke, the last White Rajah of Sarawak, a part of what is now Malaysia, and ended her days in Barbados.

Lord Esher left the Roman Camp to Maurice. His older son Oliver, later 3<sup>rd</sup> Viscount and, among other things, the first chairman of the Arts Council, had been given the former family home in Berkshire, Orchard Lea, on his marriage. But Maurice Brett died in 1934, only four years after his father, and the double death duties necessitated the sale of the house. Lady Wilson, who lived at Invertrossachs, bought Roman Camp and turned it into an Hotel.

Lord Esher's remodelling of the Roman Camp in several stages from 1909 was undertaken by a young architect called Gerald Dunnage of Stewart & Paterson, a Glasgow firm noted for their Churches and public buildings – though they also built another house with literary connections, Elrig in Wigtownshire, the family home of Gavin Maxwell, author of Ring of Bright Water and many other books including one on Elrig itself.

The most obvious additions were the towers on the North and East sides, one of which contains a tiny stone Chapel, but Lord Esher also added the Library, the Drawing Room and the guesthouse, turning the modest manor house into a substantial home that could receive many house guests. The Guesthouse is connected to the main building by a long passage, once lined with Lady Esher's tapestries. A series of these depicting English Cathedral's, signed EE, Eleanor Esher, and dated 1937-39 (for she retained an interest in the house after it was sold and continued to live in Callander for much of the year) now hangs in the large circular restaurant, which is the latest addition to the house.

The garden is extremely beautiful and was largely the creation of Lord and Lady Esher. The herbaceous border was justifiably admired and the walled garden, within the attractive curve of its rubble walls, was embellished with pieces of statuary, mainly Italian. The most outstanding of these are a marble wellhead of the Romanesque period, richly wrought, and an elaborate columnar sundial.

The rhododendron garden was always known as Sir Harry's Garden although the identity of the Sir Harry who allegedly gave the rhododendrons is uncertain.

During the Second World War, the gardens were maintained in immaculate condition by prisoners of war under the direction of Lady Wilson, and thanks to the devotion of staff, has remained a feature of the hotel to this day.

Most of the cottages of the Estate are Victorian, the one known as the Bairns House having been where the Hon. Maurice Brett's children stayed during their visit's a happy family home of which they retained the fondest memories. Built in 1860, it is now the attractive guesthouse, Orchard Lea, named for the Esher's other home in Berkshire.

The Roman Camp Country House Hotel last came up for sale in 1988, and was bought in 1989 by the Brown family company of Farquhar Mathieson Hotels, which at the time owned Auchterarder House in Auchterarder and Dalgair House in Callander. Eric Brown and his wife Marion have managed the house since then. They seek to maintain the atmosphere as it has always been. Try to keep the house with a "come into our home" feeling, as much as possible, using an abundance of freshly cut flowers from the garden'. The new restaurant, Drummond Suite opened in 1997, transforming a walkway through to the walled garden into the beautiful room seen today.