



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
Edinburgh College of Art

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## UOA C13

ARCHITECTURE, BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING



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### RESEARCHER

Chris Rankin

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### OUTPUT TITLE

*The Dunbar Battery*

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### OUTPUT TYPE

Landscape Design

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### DATE

2017

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FIG. 1

View looking west across the amphitheater and coastal garden.  
Photo Rankinfraser Landscape Architecture.



## 01 / STATEMENT

This practice-led research output is a new public gathering and performance space within the Category B Listed Lamer Island Battery in Dunbar. The civil defensive bastion was built in 1781. The new battery design exploits the site's palimpsest, using the layers of history to inform and guide the design and distribution of various contemporary interventions.

The project demonstrated how a cross-disciplinary approach to design in the public realm under the leadership of regeneration landscape architects can impact positively on communities locally and further afield. As a work of conservation, adaption and renewal, the project provides a model for the radical reinvention of coastal ruins and the greater understanding and dissemination of Scottish coastal history.

A process of archaeological investigation preceded and informed the design work at each stage. A responsive and sympathetic approach was taken to the discovery of further elements of historic interest as they were uncovered during the course of construction. The most significant new structure, the amphitheatre, is integrated into the void formed by the walls of the former hospital building so as to leave the trace of the hospital untouched. Community engagement was continuous over the course of the project with a dedicated website set up to gather views and inform local residents of progress.

Since its completion in spring 2017 the battery has hosted numerous musical concerts, private functions, performances, and a Christmas carol service. The space continues to be maintained by local people including those who care for the coastal garden. In addition to its increasing use by local people the new battery plays an important role in attracting visitors to the town from further afield.

The project has been published in a number of journals and websites internationally and has received a number of national design awards.

## FIGS. 2 &amp; 3

Photographs from two of the many public events and performances that have been hosted in the new space. Photos courtesy Dunbar Community Council.



## 02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

This research output is a new public gathering and performance space within the Category B Listed Lamer Island Battery in Dunbar.

The civil defensive bastion was built in 1781. The site subsequently housed a hospital for infectious diseases and a military hospital during WWI. It later fell into ruin, and in 2009 the Dunbar Harbour Trust engaged rankinfraser to prepare a feasibility study researching how the battery could be re-imagined as an attraction for visitors and as a local resource, particularly considering its coastal setting, rich history and complex topography.

Chris Rankin has been on the academic staff in the Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture since 2001 and is also a partner in rankinfraser landscape architecture. He led all stages of the research, design, construction and evaluation of the Dunbar Battery project.

The public space design consists of a new gently sloping access path linking the structure to the harbour, new pathways within the battery, a new performance area with associated timber amphitheatre, specially commissioned contemporary artwork by Donald Urquhart, a coastal garden, the re-opening of vaulted stores, new furniture, lighting, interpretive elements and signage.

The battery design exploits the site's palimpsest, using the layers of history to inform and guide the design and distribution of various contemporary interventions. The inventions were not intended to compete with, or overpower, the historic structure. Rather, the design works seek to amplify the existing spatial character whilst transforming the space into a multi-functioning public arena.



**FIG. 4**  
View across the new amphitheatre  
to the coastal garden. Photo  
Rankinfraser Landscape  
Architecture.

## 03 / ORIGINALITY



FIG. 5  
View of the new amphitheatre  
and performance space. Photo  
Rankinfraser Landscape  
Architecture.

The project demonstrated how a cross-disciplinary approach to design in the public realm under the leadership of regeneration landscape architects can impact positively on communities locally and further afield.

As a work of conservation, adaption and renewal, the project provides a model for the radical reinvention of coastal ruins and a greater understanding of Scottish coastal history.

The conservation approach was aligned to a new and innovative public art strategy, ongoing public performance programme and community ownership and management. Given the specific context and brief, the project demanded an original response beyond heritage conservation.

The project was developed by a team that incorporated the skills of conservation and repair using traditional materials and techniques derived from contemporary public art and community led public space design. The design team included an artist, civil, structural and electrical engineers, lighting designers, a historical researcher and interpretive and graphic designers.

## 04 / RIGOUR

A process of archaeological investigation preceded and informed the design work at each stage.

A responsive and sympathetic approach was taken to the discovery of further elements of historic interest as they were uncovered during the course of construction. The most significant new structure, the amphitheatre, is integrated into the void formed by the walls of the former hospital building so as to leave the trace of the hospital untouched.

Community engagement was continuous over the course of the project with a dedicated website set up to gather views and inform local residents of progress. A site-specific contemporary artwork, a series of consultation events and a local schools engagement project were key elements of the project.



FIG. 6  
*Sea Cubes* artwork by Donald Urqhart. Photo rankinfraser landscape architecture.

## 05 / SIGNIFICANCE



FIG. 7  
View of the new access  
path leading to the battery.  
Photo Rankinfraser  
Landscape Architecture.

Since its completion in spring 2017 the battery has hosted numerous musical concerts, private functions, performances and a Christmas carol service.

The space continues to be maintained by local people including those who care for the coastal garden. In addition to its increasing use by local people the new battery plays an important role in attracting visitors to the town from further afield. It complements other visitor attraction in Dunbar including the John Muir Birthplace museum, Dunbar Castle and the harbour.

The project has been published in a number of journals and websites internationally and has received a number of national design awards (see Appendix, page 23).

- AJ Architecture Award
- AJ Retrofit Award
- Landscape Institute Award – Highly Commended
- Civic Trust Award – Regional Finalist
- Scottish Civic Trust – Commended
- Scottish Design Awards – Commended

The project was published on the Built Environment Forum website (see Appendix, page 23).

The BEFS is an umbrella body for organisations working in the built environment in Scotland. Drawing on expertise in a membership forum it informs, debates and advocates on the strategic challenges facing Scotland's historic and contemporary built environment.

The project has also been published in the Chinese journal *Landscape Architecture Frontiers* (see Appendix, page 23).

FIGS. 8-11  
Photos of the site prior to  
works starting in 2016. Photos  
Rankinfraser Landscape  
Architecture.



FIG. 12  
Planting detail. Courtesy of Fraser  
Stewart, Friends of the Dunbar  
Battery.





FIG. 13  
Drone photo of the site during construction. Photo courtesy of Alistair Clark.



FIG. 14  
Drone photo of the completed space.  
Photo courtesy of Alistair Clark.





FIG. 15  
Aerial view. Photo courtesy  
of Maclean Photographic.

## 06 / APPENDIX

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### Awards

AJ Architecture Awards, 2017.

<https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/story.aspx?storyCode=10025952>

Landscape Institute, 2018.

<https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/awards/2018-li-awards/>

Scottish Civic Trust My Place Awards, 2018.

[https://myplacescotland.org.uk/awards\\_entry/lamer-island-battery-dunbar/](https://myplacescotland.org.uk/awards_entry/lamer-island-battery-dunbar/)

Civic Trust Awards, 2018.

<https://www.civictrustawards.org.uk/uploads/2018RegionalFinalists.pdf>

### Websites

Built Environment Forum website.

<https://www.befs.org.uk/resources/historic-environment-case-studies/care-protect/lamer-island-battery/>

### Publications

Chinese journal, *Landscape Architecture Frontiers*.

[www.lafrontiers.com](http://www.lafrontiers.com)



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