



North Berwick

**The
Walltower House**

A brief history

North Berwick Environment and Heritage Trust
Heritage Guide

The Lodge

At the south end of Quality Street in North Berwick is what is now called 'The Lodge' – a courtyard separated from the street by a low wall with a metal gate and railings dating back to 1803. On the east side is a large house, still new at that time, which is 'The Lodge' proper; on the west side is a high wall bearing traces of old buildings which still existed in 1803; and on



The courtyard from Quality Street

the south side is another much older large house, facing down the street, called the 'Walltower House'. (The name comes from what was probably a watchtower situated on the high ground behind the house.)

Before 1800

Before it was closed off in 1803, the courtyard was the southern end of North Berwick's market square, then called Cross Street, because the market cross stood there. This street ran from the harbour, past the south-west corner of the square, to St Andrew's Well, the main water supply of the town. Its line is marked by a high wall which is the back wall of the buildings that lined the street. For a large part of the 18th century there was a distillery on the east side of the street at this point; with its owner's house, it stretched across what is now East Road.

In the latter half of the 17th century North Berwick was a desolate place, having suffered badly from the devastation caused by war in the 1540s and again in 1650, which makes it very difficult to trace the history of the buildings. It was then that James Millar, a baker in the Canongate in Edinburgh, was acquiring property in East Lothian and may have also already owned or rented property North Berwick. He recognised a prime site and bought a strip of four crofts (a croft was a strip of land large enough to contain a house and a small area to cultivate) along the southern boundary of the burgh 'with the common street of the burgh on the north and the street leading to St Andrew's Well on the west side'. He took possession of the property on 2nd August 1675. There he built the Walltower House. There was already a single-storey croft house, known

as ‘the house with the red-tiled roof’, at the western end of the strip on the street leading to the well. Next to it was the ruined west wall of what appears to have been quite a large house. James Millar incorporated this wall into his three-storey house where it can still be seen in the basement. The main doorway of this house was on the north side on the lowest floor but – because the level of the courtyard has risen – this has been in recent times replaced by a doorway which is on the original first floor. On the east side of the house he built a range of outbuildings, which no longer exist, but which contained stables, cellars and a granary.

The Millar family owned this house for 71 years, letting it to tenants for some of the time. It is described as ‘one of the best in town’ in a court case brought in 1740, when the tenant, a



The Walltower House; the old croft has become a three-storey addition on the right

Captain Dalrymple, and his landlord objected to the building of a shed by the owner of the distillery next door. They claimed that it would interfere with access to their stable. The real reason was more likely to have been the ‘smoak and stench of the distillery’.

In 1736, Sir Hew Dalrymple, the 2nd Baronet of North Berwick, succeeded his father in the Barony of North Berwick. The lands of this barony surrounded the burgh but did not include it. He identified the site of the Walltower House as suitable for a mansion house for the barony – a large house in North Berwick would give the Dalrymples status in the burgh, as well as easy access to all parts of their estate. There was also the possibility of creating a small estate (now the Lodge Grounds), as the adjoining land to the south belonged to the barony. When, in 1744, he learned that the Millars were looking for a buyer for their property, he instructed his man of business in North Berwick to look into the matter; he reported back that the house was probably worth £220, ‘having a fine garden, well-walled’. Sir Hew bought the house, taking possession of it on 5th January 1747. During the 1750s he planted trees in front of the house, probably



Walltower: 18-century additions

including the present large chestnut tree – the Town Council insisted that this be done at his expense. He made considerable additions to the house, putting in three large reception rooms, one above the other on the south-east side of the building. He then added a whole wing on the west side, incorporating the former croft house (which had remained as a separate house until this time). However, it seems the house was still too small and, in the 1770s, he built a larger house at Leuchie, south of North Berwick. The Walltower House remained in his hands and, when the distillery next door failed and the land became derelict, he bought it on 22nd November 1774. It was on this land that ‘The Lodge’ was built in the last years of the 18th century, to be a dower house for the widows of the Dalrymple family.

After 1800

For most of the 19th century, according to the Censuses, the Walltower House was let to townspeople. The Lodge was first occupied by two widows of the Dalrymple family – Lady Janet and Lady Jane in succession.

After Lady Jane’s death in the 1750s, it was let to relatives of the Dalryell family of the Binns in West Lothian, and by 1881 it had become a private hotel. In the late 1880s, now joined to the Walltower House by a passage and a conservatory, it became the home of Sir Walter Hamilton Dalrymple the 7th Baronet, with Leuchie House being let out.



The Lodge

The family returned to Leuchie in the 1930s, but in 1939 sold the houses and Lodge Grounds to the Town Council of North Berwick. The council had elaborate plans, still under consideration in 1959, to demolish the buildings and use the site for new council chambers and a community centre. These plans were never implemented. Instead, the buildings were acquired in 1962 by the National Trust for Scotland, which renovated them and sold the flats created to private buyers under its Little Houses scheme.