



**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC196

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90153)

**Taken into State care:** 1933 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2004

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# GLENLUCE ABBEY



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# GLENLUCE ABBEY

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- The abbey consists of the remains of a Cistercian abbey that was probably founded in 1191/2 by Roland Lord of Galloway.
- The church was set out to the common Cistercian 'Bernardine' plan, with the monastic buildings set out around a cloister on the S side of the church, and show evidence of much rebuilding at various stages.
- There are the foundations of two complexes of buildings to the SE of the claustral ranges.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- The abbey was founded by Roland Lord of Galloway in 1191/2, and was colonised from his grandfather's foundation of Dundrennan; its initial endowments included much of the land of Old and New Luce.
- A list of the abbey's 81 properties (drawn up for the Earl of Cassilis in 1573/4) suggests the basis of the abbey's endowments had been the lands of Gillepatrick, who had been killed in 1185.
- It was associated with the Galloway rebellion of 1235 against Alexander II, and Abbot Robert was deprived in the aftermath, being replaced by the prior of Melrose.
- The abbey depended heavily on sheep farming, and developed close trading links with both Ireland and the continent.
- The abbey was frequently visited by James IV when visiting the holy places of the SW.
- From c.1500 the community suffered from a series of extended disputes over rival claims to the abbacy or commendatorship. In 1545-6 the abbey was invaded by the earl of Cassilis and Gordon of Lochinvar, who were attempting to impose their own claimants, and in 1560 the latter expelled the monks.
- After the Reformation the Gordon family held the abbey for a considerable period, but in 1619 it was granted to Gavin Hamilton, bishop of Galloway.
- Shortly before 1896 major works were carried out by the architect Peter Macgregor Chalmers. These included: repairing the S wall of the choir; taking down and rebuilding the S transept gable; extensive excavation within the S transept; rebuilding of collapsed vaulting springings in the S transept chapels; limited excavation in the nave to establish the number of piers; clearance and re-flooring of the chapter house. In the course of this work some water pipes were found which provided particularly important evidence for the abbey's water supply.
- The abbey was taken into state care in 1933.

## Archaeological Overview

- There was extensive excavation in the S transept and chapter house, and more limited excavation in the nave shortly before 1896.
- There was minor excavation between 1927 and 1930 in advance of taking the abbey into state care in 1933; but the main clearance excavations were evidently carried out after the abbey had been taken into state care between 1933 and 1936, with subsequent minor works.
- It is likely that excavation to modern standards would reveal far more evidence for the layout and history of the abbey.

## Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The church was laid out to the standard 'Bernardine' Cistercian plan, with a short rectangular presbytery, and with symmetrical transepts with aisles for two chapels on the E side of each. There was evidently a clearstorey rising above the transept chapels and, as at the mother church of Dundrennan, there was a solid wall between chapels and presbytery. The night stair from the monastic dormitory was in the SW corner of the S transept. There was a defined square crossing which was presumably surmounted by a short tower. The nave was of six aisled bays. The monastic choir was in the two E bays of the nave, and the crossing piers may have been flattened towards the central space to accommodate them; the choir was enclosed by a pulpitem on its W side, and there was presumably a rood screen further W. The W front was pierced by three doorways.
- The remains of the abbey are very fragmentary, but enough remains to show that the church is characteristic of later 12thC architecture of the Cistercian order, both in the use of the 'Bernardine' plan and in the use of piers and responds of clustered-shaft type.
- There is some evidence for slight changes of detailing as the work progressed, as seen in the change from a slender shaft to a more substantial shaft for the arch at the entrance to the presbytery
- However, the detailing of the water-holding bases and moulded caps suggest that much of the work was carried out in the earlier decades of the 13thC. On the limited evidence available, construction of the church must have proceeded rapidly, and the form of the W doorway, which had keeled engaged rolls alternating with disengaged shafts appears to be little later than the transept chapels.
- An unusual feature of the church was a stair turret corbelled out of the upper part of the S transept gable wall, which may represent a later modification; it may have terminated in a turret above the roof level.
- Below the dormitory on the first floor, the E range housed a sequence of sacristy/library, slype, chapter house, parlour and dayroom, all of which were contained within the parallel walls of the range. There was a smaller latrine block at the S end.

- On the S side of the cloister was the refectory block, which in its only certainly known form projected at right angles to the cloister. The refectory hall must have been at first-floor level, and at ground-floor level was a series of more utilitarian rooms, including what appears to have been a brewhouse. These alterations may date from the later years of the abbey's life, when the conventual buildings were being adapted for changed forms of religious life. To its W, and separate from it was the kitchen. The slightly arbitrary relationship of these structures to the cloister suggests that their plan may represent a modified arrangement.
- On the W side of the cloister, which would originally have been occupied by the lay brethren, the range appears to have been modified at a late stage as a residence for the commendator.
- Parts of the cloister arcade, consisting of a series of relatively small arches was reconstructed in c.1939.
- Located to the SE of the cloister fragmentary remains of two extensive ranges of buildings have been found. The more northerly of these has usually been identified as the infirmary, though its connection with the latrine and thus with the monks' dormitory, could suggest that it was the abbot's residence, since in this location it could be claimed that the abbot was living in common with his monks. The more southerly complex is perhaps more likely to have been the infirmary; its U-shaped arrangement of structures is comparable with a complex at Deer Abbey, to the SE of the abbey church there, which is also thought to have been the infirmary.
- Of the monastic buildings, the most complete is the chapter house. Of square plan with a central pier carrying 4 compartments of 4-part vaulting, and being entirely contained within the range, this was of a type that had probably been common since the 13thC (as at Cambuskenneth). But its closest analogies, as seen particularly in the pair of (heavily restored) windows of essentially revived geometric form, are with Crossraguel, which may be attributable to Abbot Colin (1460-90). However, the rather heavy detailing of the mouldings and foliage decoration in the Glenluce chapter house is clearly later, and is perhaps unlikely to be of before the early 16thC.

### Social Overview

Not assessed

### Spiritual Overview

- The abbey was the spiritual home of a community of Cistercian monks for 360 years.
- It was a house of prayer, and was presumably intended to be a place of burial for its founders.
- The abbey church later became the burial ground for the local community.

## Aesthetic Overview

- A description of 1684 by Andrew Symson affirmed that Glenluce was still a 'pleasant valley' as its name suggested; he said that 'the steeple and parts of the walls of the church together with the Chapterhouse, the walls of the Cloyster the gatehouse with the walls of the large precincts are for the most part yet standing'.
- Although away from the beaten track, it was sufficiently well known to attract the attentions of Francis Grose, who published a view of it when in agricultural use in 1789.
- In the 19thC it was the subject of a number of a number of paintings, in which it usually acted as a backdrop to bucolic scenes.
- Although perhaps not the most architecturally impressive or dramatically located of Scottish monastic ruins, the combination of attractively ruined buildings and delightfully rural setting give the remains great appeal.

## What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- The paucity of documentation is a major difficulty in understanding the history of the house.
- There is a need for study of the abbey both as a monastic house and as a land-holding institution within the context of Galloway.
- There is a need for a fuller analysis of the architectural evidence and research into its wider context.

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

- The foundation of the abbey was an important element in Roland of Galloway's plans for the semi-independent lands of Galloway.
- The abbey buildings were a significant channel for the importation of new architectural ideas into the region.
- The chapter house, although relatively heavily restored, is one of the most complete monastic buildings to survive in Scotland.
- The abbey's remains include some of the most extensive evidence for buildings beyond the main claustral complex.
- The evidence for the piped water supply is unusually extensive.
- A number of groups of tiles of possibly 14thC and 16thC date were found during excavations which, although of varying quality, are of major importance for the understanding of floor tiles in Scotland.

### Associated Properties

Other Cistercian houses with significant structural remains: **Culross Abbey, Deer Abbey, Glenluce Abbey, Melrose Abbey, Sweetheart Abbey**; Balmerino Abbey, Kinloss Abbey, Saddell Abbey.

Other major works of late-12<sup>th</sup>-C church architecture: **Arbroath Abbey, Holyrood Abbey, Jedburgh Abbey, Kelso Abbey, St Andrews Cathedral.**

Other chapter houses of centralised square plan: **Cambuskenneth Abbey, Crossraguel Abbey, Glasgow Cathedral, Jedburgh Abbey.**

Keywords Cistercian, monastic, early Gothic, water supply