



Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC161

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM13614)

Taken into State care: 1950 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2015

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SMAILHOLM TOWER



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SMAILHOLM TOWER

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2.6 Natural heritage values

The property is assessed as being of local importance for its natural heritage value and a full Statement of Natural Heritage Significance, with species lists, is available at Appendix 3. Some key features are:

- Bats roost within the tower
- Around the tower there are areas of semi-improved and un-improved neutral grassland, a habitat which is one of the most threatened lowland habitat types.
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Some individual plant species are quite rare for this location, all being towards the extreme of their distribution. Welled thistle, common mallow, common stork's-bill and white stonecrop are mainly found in the south east of the country and England. To find one is unusual and to find all four must be more than co-incidence. Perhaps they were introduced on the fleece of livestock or feed hay? English stonecrop was introduced from England and is rare here, it is more common in the west of Scotland.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Visitors

Smailholm's primary use is as a visitor attraction, attracting in excess of 6,000 visitors each year. The features which visitors most remark upon are:

- the dramatic setting and views
- history and the Border Reivers
- the Minstrelsy exhibition.

Smailholm is still perceived as a symbol of Borders identity and as a tangible link to border legend and storytelling traditions. These aspects make it a particularly valuable education resource for story telling and creative writing.

Local Community

Apart from its educational value accessed by local schools and its role as a tourist draw in a relatively remote area, Smailholm's chief value to local communities is probably its contribution to sense of identity and its landmark quality. It contributes powerfully to the popular notion of Scottish Borderers in medieval times, fiercely independent of authority and strongly bound by family loyalties.

Historic Scotland

A conservation project to address water penetration through the tower's roof was undertaken in 2011: grass and sedum were seeded into a clay base layer over the stone vault.

This project built upon other HS research into the use of soft-capping, primarily to protect roofless structures. Smailholm allowed the technique to be trialled for the first time over a whole roof and the results of ongoing monitoring will guide conservation activity this site, and also inform conservation practise in a wider context.

3 Major gaps in understanding

- Was there an earlier settlement at Smailholm Craig?
- When precisely was the tower built?
- How was the tower used following the Scotts' rebuilding after 1645?
- What was the nature and form of the surrounding archaeological landscape?

Associated properties

(other relevant local sites) - **Dryburgh Abbey Melrose Abbey**; Old Gala House, Galashiels. Abbotsford.

(other Black Douglas castles) - **Hermitage Castle**; Newark Castle; **Threave Castle**.

Keywords

tower house, yett, gunhole, barmkin, reiver, Pringle, Scott

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: timeline

12 th century	Smailholm parish church is built
1303 (May)	Edward I of England stays at Smailholm during his invasion
1408	Archibald, 4 th Earl of Douglas, inherits the demesne lands of Smailholm following death of his mother, Joanna, countess of Murray. In that same year, Robert Pringle (or Hoppringal), Archibald's squire and his ranger (factor) in the forest of Ettrick, is granted demesne lands of Smailholm by his lord.

Mid 15 th century	Probable building date for Smailholm Tower, including the tower, barmkin wall and hall and chamber block ¹ .
1455 1459	The downfall of the earls of Black Douglas. another Robert Pringle succeeds his brother George in Smailholm Craig.
1513	Four members of the Pringles of Smailholm are killed at the battle of Flodden.
1536	First mention of Smailholm Tower in the documentary record.
1544-8	During the 'War of the Rough Wooing', the Pringles of Smailholm suffer several attacks by English soldiers and reivers ('raiders') operating out of Northumberland. In 1548 John Pringle becomes an 'assured Scot' - that is, he swears not to attack Englishmen operating in Scotland in return for immunity from attack himself. No further raids are recorded.
Mid – 16 th century (post 1520)	Alterations to the top storey of the tower giving the present layout with two wall walks – the date for this is not certain.
1574	Andrew Pringle of Smailholm feus the greater part of Smailholm Craig to a kinsman, George Pringle of Wrangholm, retaining only the tower and sufficient pasture to graze four horses. By this date, Andrew is more comfortably residing in Galashiels (in the property now known as Old Gala House). He also appropriates one of the south aisle chapels in Melrose Abbey as the family burial lair, and is buried there in 1585.
1632	Sir James Pringle, Andrew Pringle's successor, retires to Smailholm Tower because of financial insolvency. He dies there three years later.
1640	In the Civil War between Charles I and his Scottish subjects, Smailholm Tower is temporarily occupied by Covenanters, led by Sir Andrew Ker of Greenhead, who beat off an assault by Royalists serving with Lord Ker's regiment of foot.
1645	The estate of Smailholm Craig, with its tower, is purchased by Sir William Scott of Harden, near Hawick, a relation by marriage of Sir James Pringle. He leases the property to his grandson, Robert 'Beardie' Scott, great-grandfather of Sir Walter Scott.
Later 17 th century	In the courtyard, the old hall and chamber block is mostly demolished and a new 2-storey house built adjoining the west side of the tower. It is likely that this house, rather than the tower itself contained the principal living accommodation for "Beardie" Scott's family

¹ Use of blue text indicates events which can be directly related to the surviving fabric at Smailholm

1729	'Beardie' dies, leaving his widow to live out the rest of her days in the decaying tower. His son, Robert, meanwhile builds a new farmhouse, Sandyknowe, close by.
1772	Sir Walter Scott, then 18 months old, is brought to Sandyknowe from Edinburgh for health reasons. He spends the next five years there, playing in the shadow of the old tower. That experience, coupled with the Border tales told to him by his Aunt Janet, have a profound imaginative effect on him, which he subsequently pays homage to, for example in his epic poem <i>Marmion</i> , published in 1808 - ' <i>And still I thought that shatter'd tower/ the mightiest work of human power...</i> '
1814	Walter Scott publishes the earliest historical and archaeological account of the tower in his <i>Border Antiquities</i> . Shortly before his death, in 1831 he pays an emotional final visit to Smailholm in the company of the noted artist, Turner, who makes sketches.
1950	Smailholm Tower is taken into State care.
1970s	Masonry consolidation of the tower house is completed, and missing floors and windows reinstated.
1979-81	Archaeological excavations are carried out over the entire area of the surrounding barmkin.
1983	The Saltire Society purchases (with help from the Scottish Tourist Board) a private exhibition on 'Scott and his <i>Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border</i> ', created by two local artists, Anne Carrick and MacDonald Scott, and donates it to Historic Scotland for permanent display in the tower. The artefacts found in the excavations are also put on display.

Appendix 2: Summary of archaeological investigations

Archaeological investigations carried out in 1979-81 resulted in the entire barmkin being excavated. These determined, among other things:

(i) the west courtyard was originally provided with two single-storey buildings, placed to north and south of a central entrance path - a hall and chamber block along the north side, and a two-roomed kitchen block on the south side. Nothing was found that could reliably date the construction of either structure.

(ii) during the 17th century, the hall/chamber block was comprehensively rebuilt as a two-storey L-shaped self-contained house. The standing remains of the fireplace in the south wall date from this period (the original hall had a brazier stance in the centre of the room), as does the

fireplace in the east wall of the easternmost chamber. The upper floor was presumably reached by a timber stair in the narrow room at the west end.

(iii) no well was located anywhere.

(iv) the east courtyard was never built on, but used as garden/open space throughout the tower's time as a residence. The barmkin wall on this east side had subsequently been rebuilt much thinner and on a slightly different alignment, possibly because the original had collapsed or failed.

(v) artefacts were few. Most were retrieved from a trench excavated immediately to the north of the tower, directly below the latrine outlets.

Field survey, carried out on the ground around Smailholm Tower at the same time as the archaeological excavations, proved beyond doubt the considerable archaeological potential here. Remains of houses with attached yards, run-rig cultivation and enclosures are littered everywhere - so too drainage gulleys leading to the mill pond (Timothy Pont marks a mill on his 1580s map and one is mentioned in 1636).

Under the Historic Scotland Minor Archaeological Works on PIC, three short programmes of archaeological monitoring have been undertaken. None of the following revealed anything of archaeological significance.

March 1999:	Monitoring of assessment of stability of bedrock
January 2000:	Recording of an undated stone lined drain in the castle car park
April 2012:	Recording of new stepped access to the castle