HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC250	
Designations:	Scheduled Monument (SM90181); Garden and Designed Landscape (GLD00237)
Taken into State care:	1951 (Guardianship)
Last reviewed:	2019

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KILDRUMMY CASTLE

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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KILDRUMMY CASTLE

CONTENTS

1 Summary

1.1 Introduction

Kildrummy Castle in east Aberdeenshire, is one of the grandest castles of the classic courtyard type to have been built in Scotland. Located in the foothills of the Grampian Mountains on the headwaters of a tributary of the River Don called the burn of Back Den, it was probably begun in the second quarter of the thirteenth century by William, the 5th Earl of Mar.[1] Kildrummy was built as a D-shaped enclosure castle, with a mighty gatehouse at the entrance and four round towers defining the corners of a square behind it, linked by stretches of curtain wall. It was furnished internally by a chapel, great hall and private lodgings, and built of fine ashlar masonry. It sits at the crest of a steep natural scarp and is defended to the north and north-west by the deep ravine of the Black Den, and to the east, south and south-west by a massive ditch. The castle was built where routes from the south came together before going northward into Moray and Buchan. Its eventful history as a local seat of power stretched from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, but it was abandoned when the 22nd Earl of Mar was exiled for his support of the Jacobite cause in 1716. By the early nineteenth century it had fallen into its current ruined state. It was first scheduled in 1921[2] and entered State care in 1951.

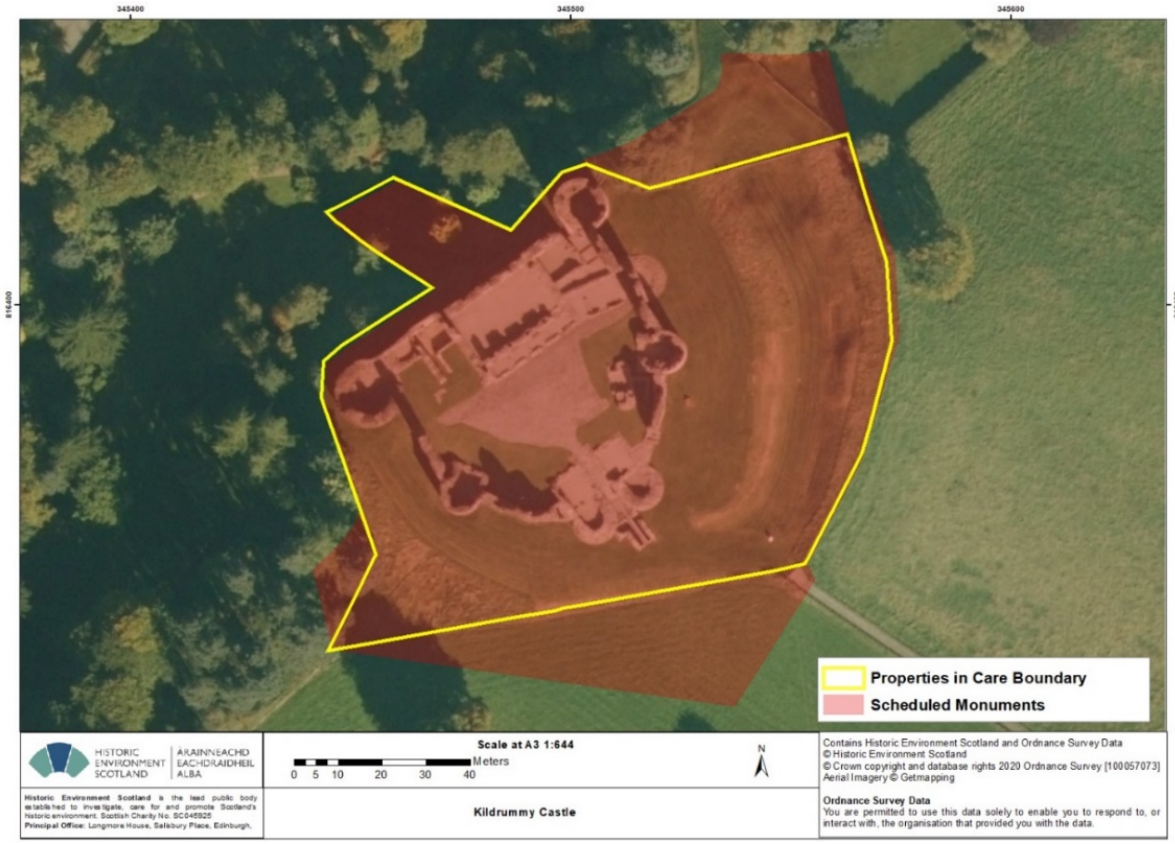

Figure 1: Scheduled Area and Property in Care boundary, for illustrative purposes only.

[1] The numbering of the earls of Mar is complex, with the line stretching back into the period before surviving written sources, and disagreement about whether some claimants should be excluded; this document follows the numbering used in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.
[2] Scheduled Monument Description accessible at:
http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90181

This is a staffed property, open seasonally, with ticketed entry. The castle is accessed from the carpark via a gently sloping gravel path; the visitor centre has step-free access[3].

1.2 Statement of significance

Kildrummy Castle retains the complete plan of a great thirteenth-century baronial curtain wall castle. It is the best preserved and least altered of the fortresses of this type in mainland Scotland, which represented the apogee of secular architecture before the Wars of Independence. As the centre of the earldom of Mar, the scale and sophistication of the castle clearly demonstrated the importance of the province as one of the great lordships of Scotland in the mid-thirteenth century.

With its tall donjon, polygonal plan, and sophisticated gatehouse, Kildrummy embodied the classic image of the medieval castle. The gatehouse was previously thought to have been rebuilt shortly after 1300 by Edward I of England, due to its similarity to the twin towers of Harlech Castle in Wales. However, examples of this design exist from antebellum Scotland: **Caerlaverock Castle**'s gatehouse was built in the 1270s and that of **Bothwell Castle**[4] in the late thirteenth century. This, combined with the very short period of English royal control, make it more likely that Kildrummy's gatehouse was constructed in the second half of the thirteenth century.

The castle, along with the earldom, was a major prize in the politics of late medieval Scotland, and the crown thus attempted to control it. After centuries-long legal proceedings it was recovered by the rightful heirs of its original builders. It continued to act as a local seat of power into the eighteenth century, when its well-preserved thirteenth-century features are thought to have been a source for the neo-medieval aesthetic ideas developed by its last notable occupant, the 22nd Earl of Mar, and his influential architectural protégé James Gibbs.

Figure 2: Annotated aerial view of Kildrummy, looking north-west. 1: Gatehouse; 2: Snow Tower; 3: Elphinstone Tower; 4: Great Hall; 5: Warden's Tower; 6: Chapel; 7: Former Kildrummy Castle Hotel.

[3] For further information on opening hours and access, see: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/kildrummy-castle/

[4] Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/

1 Assessment of values

2.1 Background

Kildrummy Castle is the historic seat of the earls of Mar. No contemporary source records its construction. A history written about 1630 claims that its architect was St Gilbert, Bishop of Caithness[5] (d. 1245), who was remembered as the builder of many churches and castles in the north of Scotland, including Dornoch Cathedral. If correct, this would suggest that Kildrummy was begun in the time of Earl Donald (fl. 1220s-1240s), rather than under his son Earl William, to whom modern historians generally attribute it.

Some of the most famous events in Kildrummy's history are associated with the Wars of Independence (1296-1342) in which the Scots defeated English attempts to conquer them. In 1306 it was captured by the prince of Wales (the future Edward II) from a defending force commanded by Robert the Bruce's brother Neil. In 1335 a Scottish garrison led by King Robert's sister Lady Christian or Christina Bruce successfully held out against a much larger pro-English army. The siege was broken by a relief force led by her husband Sir Andrew Murray, which quickly joined up with the garrison to destroy the pro-English army.

In the fifteenth century the main line of the Mar dynasty ended in the granddaughter of the last male heir. The castle changed hands between the royal family, claimants to the earldom, and powerful magnates acting as royal proxies (**Appendix 1**). In the early sixteenth century it was granted to the Elphinstone family by James IV, but after two centuries of litigation it was recovered by the restored earls of Mar in 1626, and remained their seat until the 22nd earl was exiled for Jacobite activities in 1716. After this, the castle was rapidly abandoned as a high-status residence, and fell into ruin by the early nineteenth century.

Kildrummy retains its original thirteenth century plan. It was built as an enclosure castle, with its towers linked by stretches of curtain wall. From the twin-towered entrance gatehouse, dog-leg lengths of rampart angled back on either side to two D-shaped towers. The principal domestic buildings - kitchen, great hall, and chamber block or "solar" – were set along the inner face of the rampart at the back. The overall plan is approximately symmetrical, and is often described as "shield-shaped" or "heptagonal".

Conventionally the twin-towered entry is described as the gatehouse; the two D-shaped bastions are known as the Brux Tower and Maule Tower; and the round towers at the rear are known as the Snow Tower and the Warden's Tower. The original names of the towers are discussed in **Appendix 2**. Also, retained here is the somewhat schematised orientation employed in previous discussions. The gatehouse is described as facing south even though it faces approximately south-west, with the result that the Maule and Brux Towers are classed as the south-west and south-east towers. The Snow Tower and the Warden's Tower are conventionally called the north-west and north-east towers, although they are actually located at the west and north angles of the plan.

[5] Gordon, 1630 (published 1813), 32

The curtain wall rose some thirty-five feet and the Warden's Tower around sixty feet high, while eighteenth century sources report the Snow Tower at well above a hundred feet tall. Two deep rock-cut well-shafts, reportedly over 100 feet deep, were sunk in the courtyard and in the basement of the Snow Tower. The castle was mostly encircled by an outer rampart, which stood on the crest of a massive ditch some fifteen feet deep and in places nearly a hundred feet wide, and which would have been spanned by a timber bridge. At the rear of the castle the steep gorge of the Back Den made this outer defence unnecessary. A postern gate beside the Warden's Tower led to an underground secret passage with a flight of around seventy steps down the slope towards a cistern tower on the shore of a lake.

Recent secondary sources have described the Snow Tower as a residential keep, but it may have had ceremonial and military elements. The Warden's Tower has conventionally been regarded as the residence of the garrison commander, but there is no evidence for this. The gatehouse, which contains fragments of residential chambers, may also have contained significant high-status accommodation. These problems are also discussed in **Appendix 2**.

Although it underwent several sieges, the main features of Kildrummy survived substantially intact. Repair work seems to have been largely limited to reinstating burned-out floors and roofs, and reconstructing collapsed sections of curtain wall. The most significant alteration was the conversion of the thirteenth century solar at the west end of the great hall into a tower-like lodging. This is traditionally assigned to the period when the castle was held by the Elphinstone family (1507-1626), and it has thus come to be known as the Elphinstone Tower. However, its actual date of construction is uncertain. There seems to be no justification for the tight attribution to the period 1507-1513 found in most modern sources.

A number of other visible modifications include the cobbled surface of the courtyard, the erection of a range of rooms along the south flank of the great hall, and the partial reconstruction of the chapel. It is argued in **Appendix 2** that these were likely an important architectural modernisation before the castle was abandoned as a high-status residence.

The castle was occupied until after 1700 but fell into rapid disrepair in the eighteenth century, with its masonry being plundered for building stone and lime. The ruination can be traced in successive descriptions of the Snow Tower. In the 1720s it remained largely intact, with only the uppermost chamber partially ruinous. By the 1780s the side of the tower facing into the courtyard had been brought down, and in 1805 the ruin collapsed completely, leaving only the stump which stands today.

2.2 Evidential values

The castle appears to have been extensively cleared during consolidation works in the years around 1900, which involved relatively dramatic repairs to some of the upstanding walling. More recent works have demonstrated that much of the disturbance at ground level was limited to post-medieval collapse and overburden.

The first ‘excavation’ took place in 1919 in association with consolidation works and was carried out by Douglas Simpson and a troop of Boy Scouts. This exposed much of the plan of the gatehouse, barbican, and barbican pit. Other works included the excavation of the well in the Snow Tower and two latrine pits. In 1938-39 Simpson carried out further excavation to uncover the so-called Watergate: a well chamber outside the curtain wall reached by what had been a passage leading from the postern gate through the north wall. The passage and chamber lies outside the guardianship area, although they are scheduled.

After the castle came into State care in 1951, an extensive programme of excavation was undertaken which targeted the towers, the great hall, the kitchen, chapel, gatehouse, and external defences. The cobbled courtyard appears to have been untouched, and since this was a late feature it suggests that much may survive beneath it. Also of significance is the area to the west of the gatehouse, where a substantial residential range of the sixteenth or early seventeenth century may have completely disappeared from view (**Appendix 2**).

An assemblage of archaeological objects has been unearthed at Kildrummy, and the assemblage as a whole was analysed in a 1964 report. Metal finds range from spurs[6] to door handles, many of them discovered c. 1900 in the well in the Snow Tower. Pottery fragments correspond to the usual range from medieval Scottish sites. The animal bones, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, suggest a diet including beef, pork, lamb, and the occasional deer, duck, wildfowl or oyster. Miscellaneous finds from excavations in the gatehouse included stone roof tiles, fragments of window glass, and the nails of a draw-bar.

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland volume, *In The Shadow of Benachie* (2009) appears to have been written up on the basis of a relatively straightforward site inspection and a review of the published excavation reports. It indicates that, notwithstanding the extensive consolidation and archaeological investigation, the potential for adding to our knowledge of the upstanding remains is high.

2.3 Historical values

Kildrummy embodies the classic image of a medieval castle with towers and ramparts, and the fragmentary buildings still convey a sense of the lifestyle of a thirteenth century Scottish earl and his household. The sequence of great hall, private chamber or “solar”, and tall donjon represents the core of the earl’s residence, and is completed by the chapel, the separate tower identified as the warden’s lodging, the kitchen and bakehouse, the additional accommodation and defensive positions in the Brux and Maule towers, and the gatehouse.

In the Wars of Independence it was besieged by the future Edward II of England, and later defended for the Scottish cause by Lady Christina Bruce, sister of Robert I. Appropriated by David II in the mid-fourteenth century, its subsequent history is

[6] E.g. see: www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/archives-and-collections/properties-in-care-collections/object/iron-spur-16th-century-post-medieval-kildrummy-castle-25856

associated with many colourful characters of late medieval Scotland, including the bandit-turned-viceroy Earl Alexander, and James III's royal favourite Cochrane, before it was granted to the Elphinstone family in 1507. The rebuilding of the chamber block into a tower house belongs to this period and is conventionally attributed to the Elphinstones.

The castle was recovered by the heirs of the original earls in 1626. The foundations of new frontages for the great hall and chapel, and fragments of post-renaissance carved details, may indicate that the restored earls conducted a more sophisticated architectural updating than is usually realised. The flight of the 22nd Earl of Mar to France in 1716 brought Kildrummy's history as a seat of power to an end. In its abandonment it inspired important architectural innovations by the exiled Earl of Mar and his protégé James Gibbs (see **Appendix 2**).

The fourteenth century cartographer who drew the Gough Map singled out Kildrummy for one of their rare sketch depictions of individual buildings and in the early seventeenth century Robert Maule produced an accurate analysis of its military design. The Episcopalian clergyman and antiquary Charles Cordiner recognised that the grandeur of the architecture was designed for display rather than simply defence, and the progressive intellectual James Anderson framed its history in a struggle between beneficial government and unaccountable aristocracy.

The castle stood at the centre of a larger landscape including a garden, an orchard, and quarry, plus the woodland, the burgh of Kildrummy, and the surrounding barony and earldom. Its location is thought to have been selected for the control it offered over major lines of communication into Moray, but also probably reflected proximity to the quarry, used throughout the Middle Ages to provide high quality building-stone for castles and churches in the north of Scotland.

2.4 Architectural and Artistic values

Kildrummy Castle is an important Scottish example of a thirteenth century courtyard castle. Along with **Bothwell Castle**, it is thought to have been influenced by the Château de Coucy in France, built by a nobleman whose daughter married Alexander II of Scotland in 1239. However, wider parallels have been cited, including castles built in the first quarter of the thirteenth century at the command of Philip II of France, and those erected in Wales in the 1280s by Edward I of England. Elements of the plan may have been influenced by the layout of a new royal palace built at the Tower of London by Henry III of England in the 1220s-1230s (**Appendix 2**). Overall, Kildrummy symbolises the wide cultural horizons of thirteenth-century Scotland.

As a measure of its significance in the eyes of contemporaries, it is noteworthy that Kildrummy is prominently depicted on the fourteenth-century Gough Map, denoted not with a stylised symbol, but a sketch which depicts its tall towers and ashlar stonework. It is the only building in Scotland to be so drawn; and across the length and breadth of Great Britain, the only other buildings similarly singled out are Windsor Castle and perhaps the Tower of London, the two great strongholds of the English monarchy.

Kildrummy's walls and turrets are carefully positioned so that almost the entire perimeter is protected by overlapping arcs of fire from its archery positions, including the rounded outer faces of its bastions (see **Appendix 2**). The sophisticated construction illustrates the technological skill of thirteenth century masons, whose capabilities range from the detail of thirteenth-century window tracery, arrow-slits and latrine chutes, through the sustained craftsmanship which went into fashioning the squared ashlar stonework, to the distinctive design of the entrance to the Snow Tower. A corridor concealed within a curtain wall is not unusual, but when that corridor contained an indoor drawbridge, it deserves to be noted as a memorable feature which was both playful and practical.

Among the disarticulated architectural fragments which survive at Kildrummy, a number attest to a late rebuilding in a broadly renaissance or baroque style, a period of its architecture which is not well understood. The castle also had an unexpected influence on eighteen century neo-classical architecture, when the 22nd earl and James Gibbs adapted the key motifs of its thirteenth century design into a more modern architectural idiom. These points are also discussed below in **Appendix 2**.

Figure 3: Interior view of chapel, looking north-east

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic value

Due to its location on the crest of a slope, the castle is almost hidden until one walks up the slope, but the sense of discovery is an attractive feature of the site. The most complete part of the castle is the north-west angle with the Warden's Tower and the chapel gable (Figure 3). The most impressive view of the whole site is probably obtained from the former Kildrummy Castle Hotel on the far side of the Back Den, where the Warden's Tower, the chapel gable and the ruins of the Elphinstone Tower combine into an architectural focus. It is perhaps no coincidence that the former

hotel was built as a private home for Colonel James Ogston, who bought and preserved the ruins.

The outer earthworks remain impressive, and the combination of countryside, woodland and mountainous hunting preserves reflects the pattern of land use documented in the area since the Middle Ages. However, it takes some effort to imagine the complex layout which once surrounded the castle, including formal gardens and a medieval orchard, two “natural” (i.e., old growth) birch woods – one to the south, the other overhanging the Back Den at the rear – and a quarry in the Back Den, documented in the fifteenth century but probably in use from the twelfth.

The site was adapted as the setting for an impressive garden by Colonel Ogston, in which a broad range of plants was laid out with great artistic effect within the dramatic ravine and earlier designed landscape. It is now designated as Garden and Designed Landscape GDL00237: Kildrummy Castle[7], which incorporates a wider area beyond that in State care (See Figure 4).

2.6 Natural heritage values

The property in care mainly comprises open parklands with mown grass, with a good display of flowering species displayed in the ditches and fence margins (including birds-foot trefoil and vetch species). The site is not currently protected by any natural heritage designations.

The local bedrock geology belongs to the Tillybrachty Sandstone Formation, with Glaciofluvial deposits of gravelly loam[8].

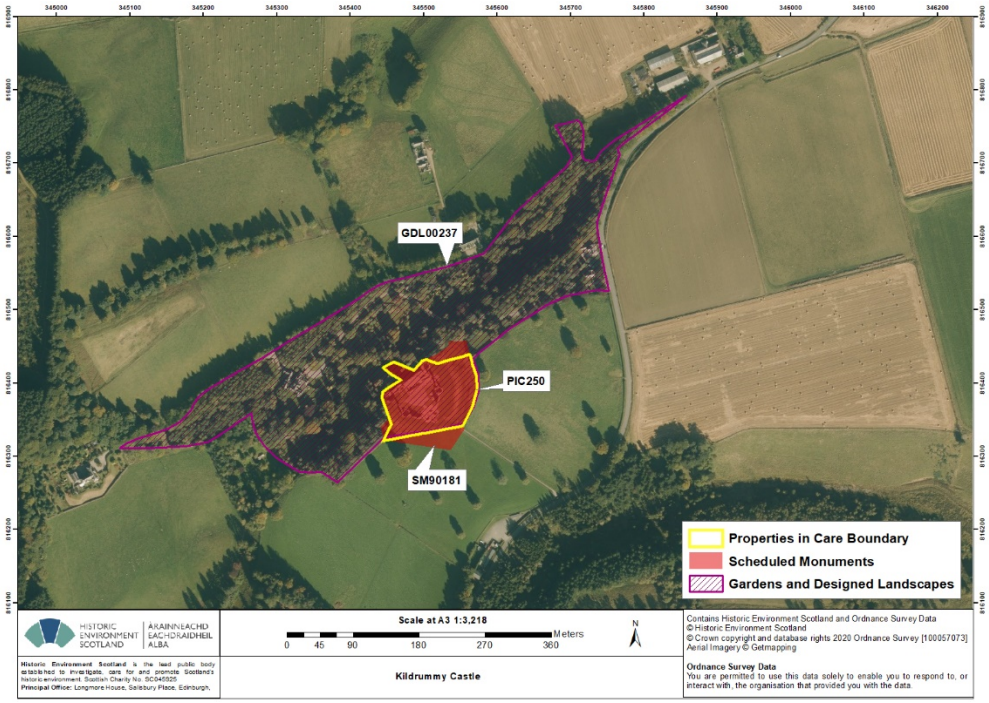

Figure 4: Extent of Garden and Designed Landscape GDL00237. For illustrative purposes only.

[7] http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/GDL00237
[8] British Geological Survey, Geoindex, accessible at: http://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Kildrummy Castle is open seasonally, and in 2018 received over 4,000 visitors between April and October[9]. Its main significance today is as a heritage site.

It was the historic centre of the earldom of Mar between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, but since then has essentially lain abandoned. It has significance for a number of families, most obviously as the seat of the Mar and Erskine families. There are now two separate branches holding earldoms derived from the historical provincial lordship, headed by the Countess of Mar and the Earl of Mar and Kellie. The castle is also prominent in the story of the Elphinstones, who held it for over a century, as well as having been controlled at various times by members of the Bruce, Stewart, Crichton, and Gordon families.

The castle's architecture is a unique example of a major thirteenth century Scottish castle that was not subject to significant subsequent structural rebuilding. Notwithstanding its ruined state, it retains a well-preserved range of architectural features. It has particularly strong potential as a teaching resource to illustrate élite society and craftsmanship in Scotland before the Wars of Independence. The proximity to the ornamental gardens in the Back Den adds to the site's range of uses and values[10].

As the castle has a chapel, the site has the potential to inform our understanding of medieval Christianity and specifically the day to day religious requirements of a great lord. No burials were found associated with the chapel during excavations, although eighteenth century sources describe the basement as the family vault of the earls of Mar and claim that there was an adjacent burial ground within the castle precinct. A source of 1851 reports the survival of at least one medieval grave slab, though this is not now in evidence.

3 Major gaps in understanding

- Was there a castle or fort on this site before the thirteenth century?
- What is the exact construction sequence of the towers and curtain wall sections?
- Was the Warden's Tower the residence of the garrison commander, as is normally assumed, or a private lodging for members of the earl's family (see **Appendix 2**)?
- Where in the castle did the late architectural fragments originate, and can they be used to date the evolution of structures such as the Elphinstone Tower more precisely?
- Which parts of the structure were affected by consolidation in the years around 1900?

[9] Opening hours and access information are available at: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/kildrummy-castle/

[10] The gardens have previously been managed by a local trust and open to the public; please check current access arrangements before attempting entry.

- What is the exact date and nature of the outer defences beyond the curtain wall?
- What was the nature of the surrounding landscape when the castle was in use? How does this relate to the traces of designed landscape that would later be incorporated into Colonel Ogston's Edwardian garden?

4 Associated properties

- **Bothwell Castle, Caerlaverock Castle, Dirleton Castle** – All thirteenth century baronial curtain wall castles. Bothwell in particular has many similarities to Kildrummy.
- Alloa Tower – Family seat of the Erskine earls of Mar.
- **Corgarff Castle** – Was built on lands held by the earl of Mar.
- Doune of Invernochty – A massive earthenwork castle, with evidence of masonry construction on the summit, which served as the caput of the earldom before the construction of Kildrummy.
- Kildrummy Old Parish Church – Built around 1300, it would have been the local parish church to the castle and part of the medieval baronial landscape.
- Dornoch Cathedral - Associated with St Gilbert, bishop of Caithness, who is identified in a seventeenth century source as the architect of Kildrummy Castle
- Château de Coucy, France – The Snow Tower appears to have shared features with the donjon at Coucy.
- Harlech Castle, Wales – The gatehouses of Harlech and Kildrummy are very similar.

5 Keywords

Kildrummy Castle, curtain wall, donjon, gatehouse, Snow Tower, Brux Tower, Maule Tower, Warden's Tower, barbican, earldom of Mar, Edward I, Neil Bruce, Alexander Stewart, Elphinstones, Erskines.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Timeline

c.12th century - There was a settlement at Kildrummy before the castle was built. The place name means the “church on the ridge”, and originally referred to an early religious focus about a mile and a half east-north-east of the castle, which became the medieval parish church. South of this church, a burgh (market town) was also founded, in the area of the modern Nether Kildrummy and Milltown of Kildrummy (see **1264**). Within the site of the burgh, about a mile east of the current Kildrummy Castle, stand what appear to be the remains of its twelfth-century precursor - an earthwork motte, on which a stone tower or hall was subsequently built. Nearer the castle, a quarry was in operation by the twelfth century, when it supplied building stone for the new pro-cathedral of the bishops of Moray at Mortlach. It is not clear whether the new castle built in the thirteenth century initially shared the name of the parish and burgh, not least because “church of the ridge” was an incongruous name for a fortress - a significant proportion of early sources refer to the castle instead as “Kyndromy”, with the more suitable meaning “headland of the ridge”. It also seems to have borne the name of Snowdon or Snawdoun, which literally means “high ground where snow lies”, but which also evoked the legend of King Arthur, where it was a name for the castle where the Round Table was located.

1239 - King Alexander II married Marie de Coucy. This was significant for the history of both Kildrummy and **Bothwell Castle**, as the new queen’s father Enguerrand III de Coucy was completing a grand new château at Coucy near Calais which seems to have served as an important architectural model for these two great castles in his son-in-law’s kingdom. Although the early history of the castle is uncertain, it is often suggested that Kildrummy Castle was built for William, the 9th Earl of Mar, who was earl between the 1240s to the 1270s, replacing the great earthwork castle at Invernochty as the main seat of the earls. Largely on the basis of the existence of Kildrummy, Earl William is sometimes said to have transformed the position of earl from a semi-independent, but provincial, lord, into a great feudal baron who served the crown on the national and international stage. However, the earthwork castle at Invernochty and the evidence for an earlier motte near Kildrummy parish church suggests that this was really the culmination of a cultural synthesis with roots extending back into the twelfth century and beyond.[11] A seventeenth-century source[12] claims that the architect was St Gilbert, bishop of Caithness (d. 1245), who was remembered as the builder of many castles and ecclesiastical buildings in northern Scotland, including Dornoch Cathedral. If this is correct, it is likely that Earl William's father, Earl Duncan, initiated the building project around 1240.

c. 1180 - William, Earl of Mar, who had probably overseen much of the construction of Kildrummy Castle, was succeeded by his son, Earl Donald. The new earl had a son with the ancient Pictish name of Gartnait, sometimes referred to in older

[11] This was already argued in the 1920s by Douglas Simpson: “Kildrummy Castle, in my opinion, is not so much the opening of a chapter of history as the culminating point in a long period of previous historical development, of which the great fortress itself is at once the outcome and the climax”. Simpson (1929), p. 105.
[12] Gordon 1630 (published 1813), 32

scholarship using the fifteenth century Scots language spelling “Gratney”, or the alternative spelling “Garnet”.

1264 - Negotiations were under way for King Alexander III to grant burgh privileges to Kildrummy, though this probably represented an augmentation of the existing rights of the burgh beside the Don, allowing a community which had previously been restricted to internal trade within the earldom of Mar to do business directly with merchants from beyond its borders.

1292 - Donald, Earl of Mar, supported the Bruce family’s claim to the vacant Scottish throne against their rivals the Balliols. Although the Balliol family were initially successful in the contest for the throne, the alliance between the Bruce and Mar families was embodied in twin marriage alliances between their heirs. Earl Donald’s eldest son, Gartnait, married a granddaughter of “Bruce the Competitor”, and her brother Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick, married Gartnait’s sister Isabella. This Earl of Carrick eventually became King Robert the Bruce, and the royal line subsequently descended through Princess Marjorie, his daughter by Isabella of Mar..

1296 - The start of the Wars of Independence, in which the Scots resisted English attempts to impose political overlordship. In 1296 Edward I of England, ‘Hammer of the Scots’ visited Kildrummy. He had forced the Scottish king John Balliol to abdicate, then marched north to Elgin, and called at the castle on his return south, staying two nights between 31 July and 02 August 1296, before pressing on south. While the king was there, two of his household knights, Sir Thomas de Bicknor and Sir John De Merk, took the surrender of a number of Scots, while two criminal cases were heard by the English army’s military court. Earl Donald, who had surrendered to the English king when Balliol abdicated, probably accompanied him, but was subsequently required to go into temporary exile in England.

1297 - With most of Scotland briefly placed under an English occupation regime, Earl Donald, like many other Scottish nobles, agreed to serve Edward I of England on a planned campaign in France, and was allowed to return to Scotland to prepare. Meanwhile, his son and heir Gartnait of Mar had remained at home, and was one of the local leaders appointed by the English to suppress a revival of resistance in the north of Scotland. Over the subsequent weeks, Scottish forces rallied and drove out the English, and it is almost certain that Kildrummy came back under the control of the Scots. What is less clear is what happened to Earl Donald and Gartnait as they cease to be mentioned in contemporary documentary records at this point, and the next we hear, Gartnait’s young son Donald had succeeded to the earldom (see **1302**). It is seems likely that they both switched back to join the Scottish cause, and it can be inferred that Gartnait had succeeded as earl, but no explicit record appears to survive.

1302 - By this date, Earl Gartnait’s young son Donald had succeeded to the earldom. During a year-long truce in the ongoing Wars of Independence against England, his uncle, Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick, abruptly switched to the English side; in exchange he was acknowledged by the English as his nephew’s guardian, and gained English support against plans to restore the rival Balliol dynasty to the Scottish kingship. It is generally assumed that Bruce gained control of Kildrummy Castle as part of this agreement, but it seems clear that the other major castles in

the area - Coull, Aboyne and Aberdeen - remained with the Scots at this time. The only practical way for Kildrummy to come into the English allegiance was if a pre-existing garrison already loyal to Bruce and Earl Donald changed sides. This would have had the effect of making any attempt by Bruce's rivals to appropriate the castle into a violation of the truce rather than an internal Scottish matter. It is also possible that control had already been usurped by the powerful Comyn faction, loyal to Balliol and hostile to Bruce, and, if so, it is likely that they retained control until the king of England arrived in person with an army (see **1303**).

1303 - Edward I of England visited Kildrummy for a second time, staying for several days in October 1303. Once again, as in 1296, he had invaded Scotland and made a progress into the north in an attempt to impose political overlordship, this time reaching as far as Banff and Lochindorb. Once again, he visited Kildrummy as he returned south, remaining there for about a week.[13] It is unclear whether control had been held by an isolated pro-English garrison since the earl of Carrick's defection nearly two years previously (see **1302**), or if his stop at Kildrummy took the form of a brief siege to compel the surrender of a Scottish garrison.

1305 - Edward I of England conceded that Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick, was authorised to appoint the keeper of Kildrummy, effectively placing the castle under Bruce's control. This was part of a new constitutional settlement by which the English king attempted to pacify Scotland under his overlordship, and may have been a new arrangement - it came with the caveat that Bruce was to "answer" for the garrison commander, i.e. he was legally responsible if the garrison surrendered or defected.

1306 - Robert Bruce claimed the Scottish throne and was crowned king on 27 March 1306. After his defeat by the English at Methven in June he sent the women of his court, including his wife and daughters (and perhaps also his young nephew Earl Donald) north to Kildrummy. The protection of this party was entrusted to Sir Neil Bruce, King Robert's brother, who defended the castle when it was besieged by the English that summer.

The siege may have begun at the start of August when the English viceroy Aymer de Valence arrived in Aberdeen, but it gained new emphasis a month later with the arrival of the prince of Wales, Edward of Carnarfon, newly-knighted and out to "win his spurs". In addition to the prince's powerful military retinue of nearly two hundred mounted men, two English earls brought their companies of men-at-arms to the besieging army, and scattered references in English documents reveal the arrival of other units of soldiers. On 24 August a company of twenty-four Welsh infantry detached from the prince's retinue for prisoner escort and collected advance pay at Corbridge as they prepared to rejoin him at Kildrummy. On 25 August a messenger hurried north from Berwick with letters for all the English-appointed sheriffs north of the Forth, instructing them to provide assistance. The same day Sir Edmund Hastings, the captain of the major English garrison in Perth, recruited a company of

[13] *Itinerary of King Edward the First throughout his Reign, A.D. 1272-1307, Exhibiting his movements from time to time, so far as they are recorded*, ed. H. Gough (Paisley, 2 vols., 1900), vol ii, p. 230, shows that the English bureaucrats travelling with the king, or at least attempting to keep up with him, were at Kildrummy on 7th-9th October, but Bain, *CDS*, vol. ii., No. 1402 shows that the king himself was there from at least 4th October; on 9th or 10th, he may have quickly reversed his route to Kinloss (ibid. Nos. 1399-1401), before turning south again.

eighty archers, perhaps Irish, to march north and reinforce the besieging forces. The next day, a platoon of nineteen crossbowmen marched out for the same purpose, and on 28 August, a ship from Burton upon Stather in Lincolnshire sailed from Perth with a cargo of malt to make beer for the prince of Wales' household at the siege.[14]

At some point the royal women slipped out of the castle and headed north, perhaps attempting to reach Orkney, which at this time was under the lordship of the king of Norway, Bruce's brother-in-law. They reached the sanctuary at Tain, north of Inverness, where the earl of Ross handed them over to the English. In mid-September 1306, after a siege of some six weeks, the castle fell, apparently when a fire started in a building being used to store supplies. It spread through much of their rations and firewood, forcing the garrison to surrender. According to the detailed fourteenth century narrative in John Barbour's *Brus*, the fire was due to treachery when a traitor named Osbourne used a red hot iron coulter being worked in the castle smithy to set fire to grain stored in the great hall, leading to a dramatic sequence of events in which the fire began to appear through the hall roof, first resembling a winking star and then the light of a rising moon. The garrison took shelter on the wall-walk on top of the curtain wall, protected from the flames by the internal parapet, while simultaneously fighting off an English assault. The English managed to set fire to the castle gate but were unable to enter due to the heat of the fire, and withdrew for the night. The garrison meanwhile successfully walled up the entrance with stone, but with most of their supplies destroyed, they were forced to surrender the next day. Local versions tell slightly different stories - in particular, the fire is said to have occurred in the Warden's Tower, hence its more traditional name, the Black Lardner (i.e. burnt larder), first documented as early as 1611. The version known to the parish minister in the late eighteenth century, included in his report in the *Statistical Account* (see **1795**) claimed that the red hot iron was thrown in by the besiegers through the tall windows of the chapel, and that the escape by the royal women was achieved through the secret passage leading to the wellhouse on the Den Burn. Meanwhile, the notes to the third edition of "the Don poem" (see **1797**) seem to have been the first source to explicitly identify the traitor Osbourne as the castle's blacksmith, further claiming that he came from nearby Greenstyle, and concluding with the traditional folk tale motif that he was paid his reward by the English in the form of a fatal draught of molten gold (as told in the recent BBC TV series, *Castles: Britain's Fortified History*, the story has taken another turn, and this is now a punishment subsequently inflicted on him by the Scots).

The prince of Wales seems to have remained at Kildrummy into early October before departing south, but the English were evidently reluctant to leave an exposed garrison, and instead the castle was partially dismantled to render it useless. Barbour records that a "quarter" of the castle was pulled down by the English, and as the stretch of curtain south of the Snow Tower (described in the early seventeenth century as the "south quarter") shows signs of rebuilding, it was presumably this section that was pulled down. King Robert's brother Sir Neil Bruce, the local baron Sir Alan Durward, and a third knight named Sir Alexander Murray were all taken

[14] The Welsh were led by Dafydd ap Rhys, probably the prince's long-serving minstrel of that name, the archers by a man named in the source as Walter "Wygan", equipped as a light horseman in the Irish style, probably Walter Wogan, the younger son of the Justiciar of Ireland, who pursued a military career in the English campaigns in Scotland.

south to Berwick-upon-Tweed and executed in front of the prince of Wales. A contemporary report asserted that Sir Robert Boyd and Sir Alexander Lindsay, prominent Scottish partisans and ancestors of the earls of Kilmarnock and Crawford, were among the other prisoners. As they are both known to have been with King Robert again by 1308, perhaps they became captives of Aymer de Valence - contemporary sources note that the viceroy did not show the same brutality to his prisoners as the prince. The earl of Atholl, who was also captured and executed, is said in some sources to have been captured at Kildrummy. He had probably arrived there with the Bruce party, though a close reading of the evidence suggests that he had subsequently accompanied the royal women to Tain. One source, apparently attempting to correct a badly garbled account of the campaign, claims that the prisoners included Bruce's sister Christina, who would later take charge of the defence of the castle in the 1330s, and her first husband Sir Christopher Seton, who was subsequently executed at Dumfries.

Earl Donald was also taken prisoner, and initially assigned to be imprisoned in Bristol Castle, but given his high status and young age, he was treated rather indulgently. Although he was scheduled to return to Scotland in a prisoner exchange in 1314, he opted to remain in England. Although the English government refused to formally accord him the title of earl, he was rewarded with a revenue suitable for a great baron, and control of a collection of castles and manors extending from Llandovery to Lincolnshire. In return for this he served the English king in various military, administrative, law enforcement, and perhaps diplomatic capacities. We find him associating with other exiled Scots who refused to reconcile with Bruce, going on pilgrimage to Spain, accompanying the English royal family on a state visit to France, and making at least two extended visits to Scotland. It was widely assumed that he had become a loyal "favourite" of Edward II, but it is notable that his uncle King Robert did not have him officially disinherited as a traitor.

1308 - Full control of the area around Kildrummy was recovered by the Scots early in this year. By July 1308 the English presence in the north of Scotland was restricted to an isolated and irrelevant garrison at Banff. At some point the Scots decided to reoccupy and repair the castle at Kildrummy. It is not entirely clear when this took place. A date after the decisive defeat of the English at Bannockburn in 1314 is likely, and it was possibly only repaired after the Earl of Mar's return from exile in 1326, but it was certainly fully repaired by 1333. This made Kildrummy one of a very limited number of major strongholds which the Scots opted to retain. This contrasted with traditional royal centres such as Edinburgh, Roxburgh and Stirling, all of which were demolished and left in ruins until reoccupied by the English in 1335, and other local fortresses like the castles at Coull and Aberdeen, which were never rebuilt. The stretch of rebuilt wall south of the Snow Tower probably represents this phase of refurbishment.

1326 - Donald of Mar returned to Scotland from his self-imposed exile in England and was restored to his earldom by his uncle King Robert. This followed the overthrow of Edward II by his estranged wife Queen Isabella at the head of a French army, but Mar's role in the campaign is not always fully understood. Given an important military commission by the English king, he had responded by coming to terms with the queen, surrendering Bristol Castle, the scene of his childhood captivity, and handing over King Edward's chief advisor, Hugh Despenser -

previously one of the leaders of the siege of Kildrummy – who now suffered the same gruesome fate that had been imposed on the leaders of the garrison in 1306. Historians have followed contemporary English public opinion in supposing that after his return to Scotland Donald of Mar remained motivated by an attachment to Edward II. Certainly, many of the supporters of Edward II who had accompanied him to Scotland returned to England in mid-1327 in the context of a conspiracy which temporarily freed the imprisoned king from captivity; and Earl Donald was subsequently courted by high-ranking partisans of the deposed king such as the earl of Lincoln and archbishop of York. However, it is hard to know what the Earl of Mar's own opinion really was.[15]

In 1327 Earl Donald held an important command in the Scottish army which invaded England, and, in 1332, as the nearest adult heir to the throne (after the eight-year-old King David II and the sixteen-year-old John Stewart, the future Robert II), he was appointed Guardian of the Realm. Meanwhile, the Scots prepared to resist an invasion by Edward Balliol, heir of the rival family which had claimed the Scottish throne in the 1290s, but lost out to the Bruces. Concerns about his loyalty seem to have had less to do with his previous adherence to Edward II than to the fact that his wife was the heiress of the Cavers branch of the Balliol family, and he was believed to be sympathetic to Edward Balliol's claim to the throne.

1332 - Earl Donald, as Guardian of the Realm, commanded the Scottish army at the battle of Dupplin against the predominantly English army of the pretender to the throne, Edward Balliol, The earl responded to the criticism that he was sympathetic to his opponent by leading the Scottish army from the front, at the head of an infantry charge that initially drove the English men-at-arms back before the battle turned in Balliol's favour.[16] The defeat, combined with disagreements among the pro-Bruce leadership, prompted many Scottish nobles to defect to the Balliol cause, evidently including Earl Donald's widow with her children. However, Kildrummy remained loyal to David II under the command of his aunt Lady Christian or Christina Bruce, the sister of King Robert,[17] with a garrison said to number around 300 men. By mid-1333 Kildrummy was one of just five castles holding out in the name of David II, along with the near-impregnable citadel of Dumbarton rock, the remote Highland fastness of Urquhart, and the island redoubts of Loch Leven and Loch Doon.

1334 - Edward Balliol, the English-backed claimant to the Scottish throne, granted Kildrummy Castle and the title "lord of Mar" to Sir Richard Talbot, an English baron whose wife was the co-heiress of the Comys of Badenoch. The grant was made in Edinburgh, and it seems clear that Balliol and Talbot did not actually control Kildrummy.

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[15] The actions of Donald of Mar at Bristol the previous year are not those of an uncompromising loyalist to Edward II's regime - his surrender of Bristol and Despenser looks rather like a revenge twenty years in the waiting, and in the context of his willingness to surrender castle and chief minister to Queen Isabella, it may be relevant that she had previously lent him money to cover gaps in his royal salary.

[16] The reverse is variously attributed to the heavy volleys of arrows from the English archers on Balliol's flank, a mounted charge by Balliol's small mounted reserve of German mercenaries, or the over-eager way in which the main Scottish force piled into the rear of their own vanguard.

[17] Lady Christian held the neighbouring lordship of the Garioch; some historians have believed she was Earl Donald's mother, but current consensus identifies her as his aunt - it should be noted that David II was the son of King Robert's second marriage, and was thus not directly related to the earls of Mar.

1335 - Kildrummy was again besieged. A pro-English force of some three thousand soldiers, led by David de Strathbogie, earl of Atholl, faced a defending garrison estimated at just three hundred men, still led by Lady Christian Bruce, King Robert's sister. John of the Craig, who played a key role in subsequent events, is generally described as the garrison commander, but this relies on a sixteenth century source of uncertain value, and early sources show that he had been taken prisoner by Atholl and paroled to raise his ransom, so he was presumably unable to play a part in the later stages of the defence. Lady Christian "[m]ade stout and manly resistance". Her husband Sir Andrew Murray, who had been elected Guardian of the Realm, was leading peace negotiations with the English, and may have also been on parole while paying his ransom from a previous capture. He was allowed to break off the negotiations to rescue his wife, placing himself at the head of a force of eight hundred fighting men from the south of Scotland. Their arrival compelled Atholl to abandon his position and, once the siege was lifted, three hundred men from the Kildrummy garrison were able to reinforce Sir Andrew's men, and John of the Craig guided the Scots on a night march through deep forest to Atholl's encampment at Culblean about fifteen miles south of the castle. The resulting battle on the morning of 30 November saw the defeat of Atholl and was the turning point of the Second War of Independence.

1341 - After returning to Scotland after an upbringing in the safety of a château in France in June 1341, David II promptly visited Kildrummy Castle; he was there again in April and November 1342. The castle evidently remained in royal hands, perhaps still under the guardianship of the king's aunt Lady Christian, as the Dowager Countess Isabella and her son Earl Thomas remained loyal to Edward III, perhaps on her own lands around English-occupied Roxburgh and Cavers, or at her third husband's impressive seat of Careswell Castle in Staffordshire.

1351 - By this date, Earl Thomas, now aged about twenty, had returned to the Scottish side, and was acting as a diplomat in peace negotiations with England.

1358 - The lordship of the Garioch was added to the earldom of Mar by King David II. This elevated the earl's revenue to above £1,000, making him perhaps the richest nobleman in Scotland, but subsequent sources suggest that he was attempting to raise very large cash sums, hinting that he may have also been burdened by heavy debts (see **1362**).

c. 1360 - Earl Thomas granted the lordship of Brux near Kildrummy to his "dear and faithful" follower John Cameron, on the occasion of Cameron's marriage with the earl's kinswoman Helen Mowat. The date can be tightly defined from internal evidence in the charter text, as it occurred after Earl Thomas gained the lordship of Garioch in 1358, but probably before his disgrace in 1362. By 1409 Brux had passed - presumably by another marriage - to Alexander Forbes, and by the 1460s, two towers in Kildrummy Castle appear to have acquired the names of Brux and Mowat (although the name of the Mowat Tower has been interpreted as the "Maule Tower" since at least 1611 - see **Appendix 2**).

Local tradition remembered the arrival of the Cameron and Forbes families in the earldom in the following way. During a conflict with the Islesmen of the Hebrides, the

Earl of Mar's army had been scattered on the shores of Loch Eil on the west coast. Wandering home on foot through Lochaber, he came to a place called Bregauch, where a Highlander named Obierran Cameron gave him hospitality in his croft. When Cameron subsequently found himself threatened by the Islesmen for his help to their enemy, he took up the invitation of a return visit to Kildrummy, where he was generously received by the earl. Later a feud arose between Sir Hugh Cameron of Brux and a Mowat laird who controlled Braemar. The fact that the Camerons had gained Brux through marriage to a Mowat does not seem to have been remembered, but provides an explanation for the feud. At a meeting at Drumgaudrum near Kildrummy, which was designed to resolve their differences, Mowat brought twice the agreed number of men, killing Sir Hugh, after which his daughter and heiress, Katherine Cameron, vowed to only marry the man who avenged her family. In the words of a seventeenth century poet, identified as Arthur Forbes of Brux, her direct descendant and heir, "The virgin vow'd, none should possess her charms / But he who for her love in glittering arms, / Should own her quarrel in the dusty field, / And there revenge her cause with sword and shield." The four sons of the Forbes chief took up the challenge, and the Forbes and Mowat forces mustered at the head of Glenbuckett. To prevent slaughter the issue was decided in single combat, with Alastair Cam, the youngest of the Forbes brothers, killing Mowat with a dagger-thrust through his armour, and thus winning his bride. A less literary version of the legend concludes with Sir Hugh's gratified widow urging that her daughter's marriage should be carried through while Mowat's blood is still hot on Forbes' blade.

The effigy of a late medieval man-at-arms and his wife in the "Cameron Aisle" of Kilidrummy parish church, identified by an inscription as Alexander Forbes of Brux and his wife Mariota, may identify the resting place of this couple, although it seems to have traditionally been connected with their descendants.

1362 - King David II moved his court to the north of Scotland and visited Kildrummy in September and October 1362. Many historians have associated these visits with a falling out with the Earl of Mar recorded in chronicle sources, which led to a royal siege of Kildrummy, but Prof. A. A. M. Duncan has convincingly argued that the earl and the king remained on cordial terms at this point, that the king's trip north was perhaps simply to avoid the plague, and that the siege and capture of Kildrummy actually happened slightly later, around January 1363.

The context seems to have been particularly complicated. For unknown reasons the Earl of Mar had been challenged to trial by combat by Sir William Keith, the hereditary royal marischal or marshal, and during the resulting duel, he is reported to have felt slighted by the king's intervention in favour of his opponent. Meanwhile, local people in Aberdeenshire were complaining of "extortions" by the earl and his officials. In a separate development, the earl had also entered into a military contract to serve Edward III of England in his French wars with a company of a hundred mounted men, in exchange for an annual retainer of £400 and the possibility of an English bride. This may not have directly offended David II, but in conjunction with the complaints of extortion in Aberdeenshire, it certainly suggests that the earl was making aggressive moves to improve his cash revenues. Adding further to this impression, the earl had sold the barony of Foveran in 1357 for 1,000 Flemish écus (approximately £200), and there is evidence that in late 1362, the king had advanced the earl a large cash loan of 1,000 merks (a little over £650), to be repaid with 50%

interest after five years. At this point the earl decamped to England, after which the king returned to Kildrummy and besieged it, effectively taking control of the castle as security on the loan.

In an indication of a desire to avoid antagonising the local community, the king appointed two of the earl's leading supporters, Sir Walter Moigne of Park and Ingram Wyntoun, to command the castle for the crown. In exile Mar evidently retained authority over the rest of the earldom, as he was allowed to drive his cattle south from Mar to sell them at Newcastle. It is even possible that the whole dispute was a charade to allow the Earl of Mar to conduct secret negotiations with the English government, as David II was seeking to exclude the Stewarts from the royal succession and appoint an English prince as heir to the throne: presumably John of Gaunt, whose wife Blanche of Lancaster had a claim to the throne as the heiress of the Comyns.[18] Whatever the exact reasons, the surrender of Kildrummy to royal control, and the possibility that it might become a new northern capital for the kings of Scotland, are thought to have contributed to a revolt in March 1363 by the earl of Douglas, who stood to inherit the castle as the brother-in-law of the childless Earl of Mar. He was soon joined by the Stewarts, whose claim to the throne was threatened by the king's negotiations in England, but Moigne's garrison held Kildrummy for the crown throughout the crisis.

1365 - David II was again at Kildrummy in August and September of this year, when he confirmed a charter previously issued by the earl.

1370 - The earl was once again in trouble with the royal authorities. In February he refused to attend parliament and, perhaps as a result, he was imprisoned in the castle on the Bass Rock. He was released in time to do homage to the new Stewart king, Robert II, in March 1371.

c. 1374-77 - At some point in these years the direct male line of the earls came to an end. The heir was the earl's sister Countess Margaret, whose husband, William, 1st Earl of Douglas, promptly adopted the title "Earl of Douglas and Mar", and may have been granted a new charter of the northern earldom. Unconventionally, he was involved in a *ménage à trois* with his wife's sister-in-law, the late earl's widow, another great heiress named Margaret, who was countess of Angus and lady of Abernethy in her own right. Earl William died in 1384, succeeded by his son Earl James, but Countess Margaret may have retained some level of control of the earldom. She re-married to Sir John Swinton of that Ilk, an internationally renowned knight who commanded the private army of the duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt.

1382 - Countess Margaret issued a charter (using the royal "we") providing a particularly well-documented example of a public ceremony at Kildrummy Castle. The countess was endowing an additional chaplain in the chapel of Garioch, a church founded by Lady Christian Bruce, and the act was witnessed by her son Earl James, the bishop of Aberdeen, her nephew Sir James Sandilands, the knights William Lindsay, Patrick Sandilands, William Borthwick, William Preston and Thomas

[18] Jean Froissart's romance *Meliador* was evidently inspired by these events with its story of a heroic English prince competing for the Scottish throne against a scheming rival who spends his spare time brooding in a thinly-disguised version of the Stewarts' marsh-girt tower at Dundonald.

Colville, plus Adam Glendinning, John Mortimer, and Stephen Clerk, “and many others”. Most of these men were barons of national stature allied to the Douglases: the bishop, Adam of Tyninghame, had originally been her late husband’s secretary. Mortimer and Clerk were local lairds, and may have stood at the head of a body of unnamed local men. The lands from which the endowment was to be drawn had previously been resigned to the countess at Kildrummy by members of the Barclay family “in the presence of Sir William Lindsay, Walter Lichton and John Wishart”.

1388 - James, 2nd Earl of Douglas and Mar, was killed leading a Scottish army to victory at Otterburn in England. This prompted a division of the vast agglomeration of lordships he had controlled. The core Douglas lands, the baronies of Cavers and Drumlanrig, and the great castle of Tantallon, went to four different members of the Douglas family. The heir to Kildrummy Castle and the earldom of Mar was the late earl’s sister Isabella, along with her husband Sir Malcolm Drummond, “a manful knight both wise and ware”. His sister Annabella was in turn married to the heir to the throne, the earl of Carrick, who subsequently succeeded as King Robert III in 1390. By 1393, Sir Malcolm was calling himself lord of Mar, though as he had no children by Countess Isabella, he seems to have tried to sell the earldom to his wife’s stepfather Sir John Swinton. This alarmed the Erskine family, cousins of Countess Isabella and rightful heirs to the earldom, who began court proceedings to protect their rights - the start of a protracted legal struggle which eventually ran until 1626.

1402 - Sir Malcolm Drummond, lord of Mar and husband of Isobel, countess of Mar and Garioch, was kidnapped and imprisoned “until he died in hard penance”. The contemporary source which records this is silent about the motive or the identity of his attackers, and historians disagree on the context. It has conventionally been assumed that he was effectively assassinated on the orders of King Robert III’s powerful brother the duke of Albany in order to bring the earldom, the countess, and Kildrummy castle under the control of his nephew Alexander Stewart. However, recent scholarship has queried this interpretation, emphasising that Albany supported the claims of the Erskine family as rightful heirs to the earldom, and was neither politically close to his nephew nor motivated to antagonise his brother King Robert by kidnapping and murdering Queen Annabella’s brother. Instead, recent studies have suggested that the lord of Mar was simply caught up in an obscure local feud.

1404 - In this year, Isobel, countess of Mar married Alexander Stewart, a nephew of King Robert III, who by virtue of the marriage came to be recognised as Earl of Mar and Garioch and Lord of Kildrummy Castle. The couple were engaged by August, when Countess Isobel granted the earldom to Alexander in anticipation of their marriage, and this was followed by a curious stage-managed ceremony acted out before the gates of Kildrummy on 9 December 1404. The countess held a “colloquium” accompanied by the bishop of Ross, the prior of the Franciscan friary at Aberdeen, and the barons and lairds of her earldom, at which Alexander appeared and handed her the keys to Kildrummy, formally giving back to her the castle, title deeds, family silver, and everything else she had bestowed on him in August. Still holding the keys, she responded by publicly choosing him as husband and giving him the lands of the earldom in free marriage. As the contemporary verse chronicler Andrew Wyntoun wrote, “So was this Stewart for his bounties / Belted earl of two counties”.

At first sight, this was a surprising match. Although "the young Stewart" was a member of the royal family, his father, the earl of Buchan, was a notorious and largely disgraced figure whose activities at the head of a private army of "wild, wicked Highlanders" had earned him the nickname of the 'Wolf of Badenoch', and whose essentially bigamous private life had led to his wife divorcing him for desertion. Like his father, the son is described by one contemporary as "leader of a band of caterans" (Highland robbers), and due to his father's irregular family life, he was regarded as illegitimate. It also seems likely that the new earl was some years younger than his countess.[19]

Alexander Stewart's acquisition of the earldom of Mar has been traditionally interpreted by historians as an audacious coup, in which the countess and her castle were seized by a man who was little better than a bandit leader, with the tacit support of a royal administration whose standards were hardly any higher than his own. However, in a recent re-evaluation, Alexander Grant has argued that it was a natural alliance between two leaders of the local community, a leader of men in search of legitimacy, and a noblewoman seeking strong support to defend her rights, conducted with wide local support which enabled it to overcome the opposition of a central government equally hostile to both parties. Moreover, notwithstanding his parentage and early career, contemporary chroniclers agree that Earl Alexander became an exemplary nobleman. In Wyntoun's words, "He was all virtuous in his deed / And well ruled that he had to lead", while Walter Bower, abbot of Inchcolm, explicitly notes the change in his behaviour in his *Scotichronicon*: "in his youth he was completely ungovernable, and a captain of Highland robbers; but afterwards, he turned himself around and became a different sort of man, ruling almost all the north beyond the mountains in peace". The author of the Pluscarden chronicle, although remarking that the sons of the Wolf of Badenoch "are all said to have been wicked by nature", concedes that Earl Alexander was "the wisest of them". Recently, Alexander Grant has argued that he was "given his European reputation, probably the greatest medieval Scottish bastard of them all".

1405 - Earl Alexander commanded a Scottish fleet sailing off the English coast, successfully blockading seaborne trade between Berwick and Newcastle.

1406 - Earl Alexander travelled to London with a large retinue for a jousting match against the earl of Kent. His safe-conduct specified a retinue of forty men, while according to the chronicler Andrew Wyntoun he had at least sixty mounted followers, including at least ten knights, at least five of whom participated in the tournament - Sir Walter Lindsay against the Lord Beaumont, plus Sir Walter Bickerton of Luffness,

[19] Isabella is usually assumed to have been the daughter of the 1st Earl of Douglas who the chronicler Jean Froissart met as a young girl in 1365, but he calls that girl Blanche. It is not impossible that Isabella was a younger daughter born after that date, though given that her maternal grandfather died in 1332, she is unlikely to have been born much later than 1375 at the very latest. As to Earl Alexander, very contrasting dates of birth have been proposed. Alexander Grant believes that he had younger brothers of fighting age by 1392 and was thus born no later than 1375, but this hinges on the argument that a reference to him as the earl of Buchan's *primogenitus* in 1404 identifies him as the "first-born" rather than "eldest-surviving" son. David Ditchburn, in contrast, suggested he may have been born as late as 1390, though a date this late is highly unlikely, as he seems to have been drinking in the taverns of Aberdeen at the head of a band of soldiers as early as 1398, and he had a son who was knighted by 1420. A date of birth around 1380 seems plausible.

Sir William Cockburn, Sir William Cranston, and Sir Alexander Forbes. After the match, Earl Alexander and an escort of twelve men-at-arms returned by sea to Newcastle aboard the *Saint-Ésprit* of London, where he intended to take another ship north to Scotland.

1408 - Earl Alexander and Countess Isabella travelled to France accompanied by a large retinue. The safe-conduct for the earl's overland journey through England specified forty individuals, while the chronicler Andrew Wyntoun once again enumerated the party at sixty. They formed part of a Scottish embassy in Paris, where they stayed for twelve weeks and were accorded a very favourable reception by the French court, overshadowing the simultaneous English embassy of the earl of Warwick. They also visited Saint-Saëns in Normandy, where the countess was selling an estate she had inherited and dedicating a stained glass window she had donated to the abbey. At Bruges on the return journey, Earl Alexander was recruited by John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy, whose acquaintance he had made in Paris, to assist him in his campaign against the city state of Liège. Two years earlier, Liège had expelled its unpopular prince-bishop - the duke's brother-in-law - and since then, with a local nobleman named Hendrik van Horne, lord of Perwez as their military leader, and his son or nephew as bishop, the rebels had driven pro-Burgundian forces out of the principality. In the background of the dispute was the Great Schism between two rival claimants to the papacy, and in this context it is somewhat surprising to realise that the Liege rebels had the support of Benedict XII, the claimant recognised in Scotland. However, it is perhaps more significant that they had also gained English aid in the form of a company of two hundred archers added to their army.

According to the chronicler Andrew Wyntoun, whose detailed narrative is explicitly based on eyewitness accounts, Earl Alexander rapidly recruited a company of a hundred Scotsmen to aid the duke of Burgundy, including four knights - Sir James Scrimgeour of Dundee, Sir Elias Kinninmonth of that Ilk, Sir William Hay of Naughton, and Sir John Bothwell - and twenty-four other men-at-arms. The remaining seventy-two were "Good yeomen for archery / Right well equipped and honestly". On 23 September 1408 they formed the vanguard of the duke of Burgundy's army at the Battle of Othée, where the earl knighted five more men-at-arms before the start of the battle - the Master of Sutherland, Alexander Keith, Alexander Irvine of Drum, his own brother Andrew Stewart, and his standard-bearer John Menzies - while the laird of Naughton knighted Sir Gilbert Hay. According to Bower, the earl was responsible for the well-documented flanking manoeuvre which routed the Liégois forces. Wyntoun provided a dramatic narrative in which the earl, spotting the Van Hornes - two well-armoured noblemen with battle-axes standing apart from the Liégeois forces - bid his standard-bearer to hold his position, and charged them accompanied by a single man-at-arms named John Ceres. The rest of the Scottish company followed, and with the earl at their head they cut a swathe thirty feet wide through the opposing formation, which broke into a fatal rout. The battle ended on a comic note when Earl Alexander asked a man-at-arms named Alexander Lyell, of the Murthill family, to bring his standard to him, and found that Menzies had stubbornly remained where he was ordered to stay at the start of the battle.

The dramatic victory was somewhat marred by the death of Countess Isabella, probably in the weeks before the battle. This was followed by Earl Alexander's hasty second marriage to Marie van Horne, teenage niece of the man he had just killed at Othée, and ruler of the weaving town of Duffel in Brabant. Only a few days after the marriage, however, Earl Alexander returned to Scotland while Marie remained on the continent, and by 1415 the marriage was effectively over.

1410 - Earl Alexander entertained a large and distinguished company at Kildrummy during the Christmas season. This may have been a meeting to prepare for the threatened onslaught of Donald, lord of the Isles, the claimant of the earldom of Ross, who was reported to have aspirations to march by Aberdeen to Perth and conquer all of northern Scotland. The invasion by the lord of the Isles in 1411 reached as far as Earl Alexander's territory, where it ended with the bloody Battle of the Harlaw, known as the Red Harlaw. The army of Islesmen retreated, but the battle came at a heavy cost in casualties in the royal army, including Earl Alexander's close associate, "Robert Davidson, the warlike provost of Aberdeen".

1412 - A ship from Danzig (modern Gdansk), sailing from Rostock to Scotland, was seized by an Aberdeen ship off Cape Lindesnaes in Norway. The crew were reportedly put to work by Earl Alexander carrying stone for building work on one of his castles - plausibly Kildrummy. Earl Alexander had been a fleet commander since at least 1405, and is documented as Admiral of Scotland by 1414.

1420 - Earl Alexander made an agreement with the regent of Scotland, his cousin Murdoch Stewart, 2nd Duke of Albany, which contained three important provisions: it furthered the earl's attempts to pass Kildrummy and the earldom of Mar on to his son Sir Thomas Stewart; it attempted to block a proposed marriage alliance between the duke's family and the Erskines of that Ilk, dynastic heirs of Countess Isabella and rival claimants to the earldom; and it extended Earl Alexander's authority across much of northern Scotland in exchange for a division of the resulting revenues between himself and the duke.

1424 - After the return of King James I from captivity in England, Earl Alexander was a member of the jury of peers which condemned Duke Murdoch to death for treason.

1426 - Earl Alexander obtained a charter from King James which secured the succession to the earldom to his son Sir Thomas, to the total exclusion of the Erskine claimants. Sir Thomas, henceforth known as the Earl of Garioch, married the widowed countess of Buchan. He is known to have donated a tapestry to Aberdeen Cathedral, a hint of the high level of luxury available to the family.

1427 - Earl Alexander gained full control of the vast Highland lordship of Badenoch and Lochaber on the proviso that it should revert to the king rather than pass to his heirs.

1431 - Earl Alexander participated in the Battle of Inverlochy against another army of Islesmen led by Donald Balloch, a cousin of the imprisoned lord of the Isles. The battle was a heavy defeat for the royal forces, but a prompt retreat by Earl Alexander prevented his division suffering the sort of casualties sustained at Harlaw in 1411.

1432 - Earl Alexander, whose second marriage had been officially annulled for some years, gained a dispensation to marry the widowed countess of Moray. There is no evidence to show whether this marriage actually took place: she subsequently married Sir Walter Ogilvy, seeing her son by this marriage elevated to the peerage, and survived into the 1470s.

1435 - Alexander Stewart, Earl of Mar, died “in Mar” on 7 August 1435. In a testimony to the wide reach of his authority as viceroy in the north, he was buried in the Franciscan church at Inverness, while an annual requiem mass for the repose of his soul was instituted in Aberdeen Cathedral. Immediately afterwards King James I annexed the earldom and took Kildrummy Castle into his own possession, overriding the rights of the Erskine heirs. Although often used as an example of James I’s policy of keeping his nobility weak, James’s seizure of the earldom was probably as much motivated by a desire on the part of the heavily indebted king to acquire the earldom’s considerable revenues.

1436 - King James I, having taken Kildrummy under his control, visited the castle. Grain worth £23 6s. 8d. (35 merks) was bought from the Knights Hospitaller to meet the needs of the royal household during the stay. Among relatively modest but informative refurbishment works documented between 1436 and 1438 were the repair of a stone chimney (costing 12s.), a refurbishment of the chapel roof with new wooden “shingles”, newly-made nails to hammer them in place (costing 12s. and 10s. respectively), and four new locks set into the gates (8s.). In addition, substantial stone-cutting work took place in the quarry in the Black Den, where the wage bill was well above £10. Activity in the smithy and orchard, and other works that may have been less directly connected with the castle complex, such as the repair of a water-mill. This was perhaps located at the modern Milltown of Kildrummy, a mile east of the castle at the southern end of the medieval burgh. Around the start of 1438, Lord Gordon was appointed keeper on a generous annual salary of £200.

Most modern sources follow Douglas Simpson’s suggestion that the stone quarried in the 1430s was used to construct the barbican in front of the gatehouse, but the most recent survey has argued convincingly that the barbican in fact dates from c. 1300 (**Appendix 2**). It is likely that the Kildrummy quarry was run on a commercial basis, providing stone for many other castles and churches throughout Aberdeenshire from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. Only the purchase of four stone of iron “for making iron tools for the structure of Kildrummy Castle” (at a price of 13s. in Aberdeen) hints directly at substantial masonry work at this date.

Similarly, it is unclear how much trust can be put in the conventional argument that after 1435 the crown continually kept the earldom and the castle within its own hands or those of its immediate adherents, and that the vacuum left by the effectively moribund earldom in part allowed the NE of Scotland to be dominated by the Gordons and their rivals the Forbeses. As the entries below show, the castle actually changed hands repeatedly for much of the period, alternating between various competitors for royal favour and the heirs of the old earls. Moreover, rather than emerging due to the disappearance of old factions, the new leaders perpetuated old rivalries. The Forbes family were tied to the earldom of Mar through the younger brother of the 1st Lord Forbes, who became the laird of Brux around 1400, and after 1435 they allied themselves with the Erskine heirs. Meanwhile the Gordons were

descended from the Comyns, established regional rivals of the earls of Mar, and through whom they inherited ancestral links to the central Highlands which also put them at odds with the Wolf of Badenoch and Earl Alexander. In the years around 1450, a third element was provided when Kildrummy was caught up in the rivalry between the earl of Douglas and Chancellor Crichton, each of whom temporarily placed one of their supporters in command of the garrison. In the end, a close reading of the documents shows that it was the Gordons, rather than the crown directly, who gained the largest degree of control over Kildrummy in the second half of the fifteenth century.

1442 - Lord Erskine, dynastic heir to the earldom of Mar, took control of Kidrummy Castle. This was the culmination of several years of lobbying, alliance building, and legal proceedings prompted by the royal appropriation of the earldom. Already in 1435 Sir Robert Erskine, as he then was, had forged an alliance with the powerful Forbes family. In 1438 he had secured legal recognition as heir of Countess Isabella, and by 1439 he was styling himself Earl of Mar and apparently in control of much of the earldom. In 1440 he reached an agreement with the regents ruling Scotland on behalf of the infant King James II by which he was to surrender his captaincy of Dumbarton Castle, and in exchange be given possession Kildrummy Castle and half the revenues of the earldom until the king reached adulthood. At this point the Scottish parliament was to rule on the dispute, and although the government largely refused to recognise his title as Earl of Mar, they did accord him a new peerage title as 1st Lord Erskine. When royal officials failed to honour the 1440 agreement, Lord Erskine declared that he was free to act as he wished within his own earldom and appears to have taken the castle by force. In retaliation the government seized Erskine's castle and estates in Alloa. The Erskines retained control of Kildrummy for at least six years.

1448 - James II visited the north and gained control of Kildrummy, appointing Archibald Dundas, an ally of the earl of Douglas, as "keeper and captain" under the terms of an agreement concluded with the Erskines the previous year. However, there is some reason to suspect that the Erskines subsequently took the castle back again. In April 1449 the Erskines were accused of violating the 1447 agreement, i.e., going back on their pledge to let the crown have control of the fortress, to which they responded that they would do so if the royal government returned earldom revenues appropriated in 1448 by its personnel, meaning presumably the ejected garrison.

1450 - After fifteen years of dispute Kildrummy passed from the Erskines (though they recovered it 176 years later). Sir James Crichton of Frendraught was appointed by the royal government as keeper. Crichton was the son and heir of Chancellor Crichton, a powerful crown official who seems to have been hostile to the Erskine claim to the earldom of Mar, and was also the main political rival of the earl of Douglas, whose ally Archibald Dundas had been the previous royal keeper in 1448. As the factional dispute degenerated into a civil war between King James II and the earl of Douglas, Crichton was replaced as keeper by the earl of Huntly, probably in mid-1451.

1451 - Alexander Crichton, "constable and master of works of Kildrummy Castle", is paid £13 6s. 8d. (20 merks) by the king, "for the fabric of the said castle". In Scottish usage, the constable was second-in-command of the garrison, deputy to the keeper

(at this point, Sir James Crichton). This reference also suggests that a relatively significant project of construction or maintenance work was undertaken at this time.

1456 - The earl of Huntly, who had controlled Kildrummy for King James II during the civil war against the earl of Douglas, surrendered command of the castle. King James II also granted the earl of Huntly and his son a pardon for incursions they had made into the earldom of Mar against the Erskines, possibly indicating that the conflict over the earldom had continued during the war between the king and the earl of Douglas. The keepership of Kildrummy, along with control of the castles at Braemar and Balvenie, passed to Lord Glamis, a loyal courtier and official, until his death in 1460.

1457 - King James II, having strengthened his authority by defeating the earl of Douglas during the civil war, and in the process gaining effective control of Kildrummy, initiated a new round of legal proceedings over the earldom of Mar, which rejected the claim of Lord Erskine to the earldom. The king promptly bestowed the title of Earl of Mar on his youngest son John. The boy was raised in Stirling, Falkland and Doune, however, and the royal accounts make clear that Kildrummy remained under the control of royal officials.

A planned royal hunting trip to the castle by James II in 1460 was cancelled. The king decided to besiege English occupied Roxburgh Castle instead, and the beer prepared for the occasion was given away “to friars and paupers”. It was probably in anticipation of this visit that the re-roofing of the bastions now known as the Brux and Maule towers took place. This is often said to have occurred in 1464, the year in which the outlay was belatedly reimbursed by the exchequer, but was grouped between expenses for the cancelled hunting trip and the siege of Roxburgh, indicating a date in 1460 (see **Appendix 2**). The keepership reverted from Lord Glamis to the Gordons in 1460, an event which also coincided with the accession of the infant James III. It then passed in 1468 to Sir Henry Kinghorn, the former steward of the household to the queen dowager, Mary of Guelders. The only keeper who was a straightforward royal official, he may in fact have been a priest rather than a knight. Further work was carried out between these years, including a payment in 1465 to a carpenter named Patrick Black for new joists for the chapel roof, indicating a more substantial renewal than in the 1430s. During Kinghorn’s tenure there was a substantial outlay of at least £280 for “repairs and construction” in 1468-71. This may have involved a strengthening of the gatehouse to defend it against artillery, and a substantial refurbishment of the great hall (see **Appendix 2**).

It was only in 1471, at the age of about fourteen, that Earl John travelled north to take control of his earldom. He seems to have lived mostly in Aberdeen and he died in mysterious circumstances in 1479, at which point the earldom reverted to the crown.

c. 1470 - James III apparently visits Kildrummy. Little is known about this royal occasion, which is only recorded by a legal document in favour of the royal squire James Innes of that Ilk.

1482 - Thomas Cochrane is recorded to have been constable of Kildrummy Castle. A rather shadowy figure, he was remembered in later tradition as a favourite of

James III, promoted by the king to become “Earl of Mar” and even “prime minister” of Scotland. If there is any truth to these tales, he may have been one of the courtiers hung from the parapet of Lauder Bridge during a coup a few months later. The main beneficiary of the coup was the king’s brother, the duke of Albany, who made himself regent. He promptly attempted to gain control of Kildrummy and the earldom of Mar, officially described as a reward from the king for his “faith, loyalty, love, goodwill, fraternal love, piety, plus cordial service and virtuous homage”. It is unclear if Albany ever actually gained control of Kildrummy: he was rapidly ousted in 1483 and the earl of Huntly regained formal control of the castle soon afterwards.

1487 - James III granted Kildrummy Castle and the earldom of Mar to his third son, John, a boy of eight, although in practice the control of Kildrummy and much of the authority in the earldom evidently remained with the Gordons until 1505, outlasting Earl John, d. 1503.

1507 - Alexander Elphinstone of that Ilk, a prominent member of King James IV’s royal household and council, married Elizabeth Barlow or Barlees, maid of honour to Queen Margaret Tudor. In lieu of a dowry for Mistress Barlees, and in compensation for the loss of the principal Elphinstone inheritance, which had been diverted away from the male line when Alexander’s great-uncle fell in battle 1435, they received grants of large parts of the earldom. This included in 1508 the keepership of Kildrummy Castle “with its towers, fortress and garden”. After various additional augmentations, including Alexander’s elevation to the peerage as 1st Lord Elphinstone, their new lordship was erected in 1513 into a free barony of Kildrummy by James IV, with Kildrummy Castle as the chief messuage. In return Alexander was to provide “a hundred mounted men with lances for service in the king’s wars and military operations against his enemies, if any such should arise”. Alexander was to die with his king on Flodden Field, whereupon his son succeeded as 2nd lord Elphinstone and baron of the "tower and fortress" of Kildrummy. The Elphinstones remained as lords of Kildrummy until the 1620s. They are generally thought to have been responsible for rebuilding the lord’s chamber attached to the hall into a more complex tower house residence, although it is possible that they actually built a substantial new mansion, now almost completely disappeared, against the curtain wall to the west of the Gatehouse (see **Appendix 2**).

1531 - A series of royal pardons were issued, showing that the castle had recently been besieged by a local faction including John, 6th Lord Forbes, his sons John, master of Forbes and William Forbes, their prominent local kinsman Alexander Forbes of Brux, and a local laird’s son, John Strachan younger of Lenturk. Most historians, unaware of the Forbes involvement (documented in National Records of Scotland, GD52/121) have only named young Lenturk. Nor does there seem to be any evidence in the documents to support assertions that the castle itself was damaged. The siege was evidently connected with a wider pattern of factional violence involving the Forbes family and their local rivals, which culminated when young Lenturk betrayed an alleged pro-English conspiracy, leading to the master of Forbes’ execution on what is generally thought to have been a trumped up charge.

1562 - Mary Queen of Scots bestowed the title of Earl of Mar on her half-brother the Lord James Stewart, along with those parts of the old earldom lands remaining in royal hands. This did not affect Kildrummy, and soon afterwards Lord James gained

the earldom of Moray. In 1565 he resigned his rights in Mar out of deference to his uncle the 6th Lord Erskine, the rightful heir to the old earldom.

1565 - The claim to the earldom by the Erskines was finally recognised by the crown and the 6th Lord Erskine was acknowledged as 18th Earl of Mar, although Kildrummy Castle and the barony of Kildrummy remained in the hands of the Elphinstones.

1587 - The 19th earl was recognised by act of parliament as rightful heir to Countess Isabella and the lands of the earldom, and resumed legal proceedings to regain them. The Elphinstones and other beneficiaries of the crown's claim lodged protests. The Elphinstones clearly valued their possession of Kildrummy, using the parish church as a family mausoleum, where many carved monuments remain. Around 1607, when the master of Elphinstone was appointed a senator of the College of Justice (judge of the Court of Session), he took the title of lord Kildrummy.

1611 - Robert Maule, commissary of St Andrews, an early antiquarian, recorded his impressions of Kildrummy in his history of his family. This was part of a comparative survey of Scottish castle design aimed at understanding the architecture of his brother's seat at Panmure. He named the Snow Tower, and noted the well in the basement, which he inferred was designed to provide an independent water supply if the rest of the castle was overrun, thus enabling him to correctly identify the tower as the donjon. He also noted that the masonry of the "south quarter" of the curtain wall was similar to the "great square stone" which characterised the curtain at Panmure, and that the medieval mortar was showing early signs of the decay which was causing elements of Panmure to collapse. In another passage he recorded the names of two of Kildrummy's other towers, the Burnt Larder, now the Warden's Tower, and the Maule Tower (see **Appendix 2**).

1618 - The English poet and traveller John Taylor joined the Earl of Mar's annual hunting party in Braemar: a major event on the Scottish social calendar. Although the earl had not yet formally recovered Kildrummy, this tartan-bedecked extravaganza was a bold statement of his Highland identity.

1626 - After prolonged litigation the 19th Earl of Mar at last recovered the castle. The arbitration settlement ruled that Mar should pay 48,000 merks for the ancient baronial rights in the lordship of Kildrummy, and an additional 22,000 merks for additional lordship rights acquired by the Elphinstones since 1507. The total was over £45,000 Scots, or almost £3,900 sterling. In 1628 similar cases were launched against around a hundred and fifty lesser lairds in Mar. The earl was able to comfortably settle the obligation, and may have also initiated an ambitious architectural updating of the castle which masked the courtyard fronts of the great hall and chapel with a new baroque façade (see **Appendix 2**). However, the Erskines' interests remained concentrated in the south with their main residence at Alloa Tower, and remained hereditary keepers of Stirling Castle, which entitled them to reside in the royal palace there.

1630 - Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun, younger son of the 12th Earl of Sutherland, asserted in a history of his family that St Gilbert, bishop of Caithness,

was the architect of Kildrummy/Kildrume, and mentioned the “seven towers within the precinct”[20] (see **1239**).

1644 - During the Scottish phase of the Civil War, the castle at Kildrummy played a small role in the conflict between the royalist forces led by the marquis of Montrose and their opponents the covenanters, allies of the English roundheads. In early April, with Montrose and his army entering the area, the covenanter leader Lord Forbes and his associates took shelter in the castle. At the end of August, Lord Gordon, eldest son of the Earl of Huntly, was appointed commander of the local covenanter forces, and set a rendezvous at Kildrummy on 2nd September. He mustered a force of about 3,000 but the Forbes, Fraser, and Crichton families, rivals of the Gordons, refused to join him. As the Gordons and their allies were at base opposed to the covenanter cause, the mustered force disbanded, “not liking well the cause”. Only around four hundred men remained with Lord Gordon, and he eventually defected to the royalists in February 1645.

1654 - In the final phase of the Civil War which had been fought across the British Isles since 1638, royalist forces supporting the exiled King Charles II staged an uprising in the Highlands against the roundhead regime of Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. Viscount Kenmure, one of the royalist leaders, installed a garrison of around thirty cavalry and forty infantry at Kildrummy, apparently hoping the castle would act as an obstacle to tie down the roundheads in a siege. Instead, the roundhead force led by Colonel Thomas Morgan defeated Kenmore and the earl of Glencairn at Cromar, then turned back to besiege Kildrummy, where they arrived on 10 February. Three days later the garrison agreed to hand over the castle in exchange for being allowed to depart with their arms and equipment. This was somewhat to Morgan’s relief as he had no artillery and the problems of encamping his army would have compelled him to lift the siege the next day. The roundhead force consisted of at least five hundred redcoat infantry, several hundred “ironside” heavy cavalry, a smaller number of dragoons, and a force of Scottish mounted volunteers. Regarding Kildrummy as “a very strong considerable place”, Morgan installed a roundhead garrison of infantry and cavalry. Later in 1654 “some companies of foot” from the garrison were dispatched in conjunction with a force of dragoons, in an unsuccessful attempt to capture the royalist partisan leader Sir Ewan Cameron of Locheil in the Highlands.

1655 - “The Don Poem”, an epic poem on the area around Kildrummy, was published in this year. It is said to have been written by a local laird, Arthur Forbes of Brux, and contains a description of the castle before its fall into ruin: “Cross o'er the flood, Kildrummy view again, / Whose turrets stand the glory of our plain. / As Rome on seven hills triumphing stood, Kildrummy's seven towers command the flood. / No building in our land, our annals name, / Of such extent, or such stupendous frame; / So strongly built, so high its turrets rise, / They strike with wonder the beholder's eyes.” It is unclear whether the analogy between Rome’s seven hills and the seven towers of Kildrummy was intended here as more than a literary device, but by 1744, when an annotated edition of the poem was published, the idea of a Roman origin for Kildrummy was said to be widely believed.

[20] Gordon, 1630 (published 1813), 32

1662 - Kildrummy was described in the second edition of Joan Blaeu's great geographical compendium *Atlas Novus*, in a Latin essay on Aberdeenshire by Robert Gordon of Straloch, though the text was possibly written in the 1640s: "Kildrummy Castle, an ancient structure and, it is thought, a royal one…. Indeed, with its firm wall, crowded too with mighty towers, mutually accessible from each other, it was then judged safe from hostile force; now, rendered more commodious and amenable by new buildings, the Earl of Mar has his principal seat in this place".

1689 – A civil war broke out between factions supporting two rival claimants to the kingship, William III and James VII - the first Jacobite Rising. The 21st Earl of Mar supported the Williamites, but their Jacobite opponents captured Kildrummy Castle and installed a garrison. This probably happened after the Battle of Killiecrankie on 27 June 1689, at which the Jacobite leader Viscount Dundee died leading his army to victory. The new Jacobite commander General Cannon then led his army north to Kildrummy, where they were joined by around three hundred local cavalry before returning south. In 1690 Cannon's successor, General Buchan, dispatched a column to reinforce the garrison. However, the castle was eventually abandoned and then put to the flame by Jacobite troops, perhaps when the stalemated conflict ended in an armistice the end of 1691. In a memorandum of his losses, submitted to the government, the earl of Mar asserted that Kildrummy was "for the most part totally burned and destroyed", and put the cost of repairing the castle at £900. A source of the 1720s, however, associated the damage more specifically with a set of lodgings conventionally identified as the Elphinstone Tower, but possibly a house built against the inner face of the curtain wall to the west of the Gatehouse (see **Appendix 2**). Meanwhile, other subsequent sources suggest that it remained habitable as a residence of the family.

1696 - A tax assessment recorded that Lady Jean Erskine, dowager countess of Mar, was resident in the parish of Kildrummy with a household of two female and four male servants. It is likely that they were resident in the castle and that any serious damage caused by the Jacobite garrison in the 1689-1691 civil war had either been localised or promptly repaired.

1715 – John Erskine, 22nd Earl of Mar, arrived secretly in Scotland to plot a rising in support of the exiled Jacobite claimant to the throne, the "Old Pretender". Arriving at Kildrummy on 19 August with a troop of cavalry, he sent out letters inviting the principal Jacobite leaders to a hunting party at Braemar a week later, which served as the occasion to declare the revolt. Some sources suggest that many of the leading Jacobite nobles and lairds had already gathered at Kildrummy before the hunt. Defeated at Sheriffmuir in 1716, the earl fled to France and Kildrummy's days as a noble residence were at an end. Sources from the late eighteenth century claim that the castle was burned again by soldiers of the opposing Hanoverian government forces. It was certainly seized by the London government and sold to the York Buildings Company. Although the exiled earl recovered ownership through proxies in 1724, he promptly sold the castle and barony again to raise capital for the recovery of his lowland seat in Alloa, with the proviso that subsequent owners should preserve at least the foundations of Kildrummy Castle, "on account of the antiquity". It is likely that the castle was largely abandoned from this point, although it is possible that some form of occupation may have continued up until around the 1750s (see **1733** and **Appendix 2**).

1724 - The Highland chief and antiquarian Walter Macfarlane of Arrochar compiled a collection of geographical information, including an anonymous survey of Mar which described the castle in detail, in particular providing a very useful description of the Snow Tower. A 1724 description of the Garioch within the same survey of Aberdeenshire referred to the castle twice as “old but now ruinous". This was written by Mr James Gordon, Presbyterian minister of Alford, and a Mr William Robertson, presumably the clergyman father of the Enlightenment historian Principal Robertson. They may also have been the authors of the detailed description.

1732 - The Episcopalian clergyman Alexander Keith completed his “View of the Diocese of Aberdeen”. There were two local presbyters of this name: internal evidence points to the incumbent at Cruden rather than his namesake in Aberdeen. He described Kildrummy as “the greatest castle in all this diocese”, and noted that while it was said to have seven towers, “the remains” of only six could then be identified, with the Snow Tower being the highest, plus the chapel. He concluded that the castle “is reckoned, at least, to be eight hundred years old; and though now in ruins, looks still noble and grand”.

1733 - According to a source of **1819**, the chapel continued to be used as a place of worship until this date. The source associates this with the residence at the castle of the Lady Jean Mackenzie, dowager countess of Mar, the grandmother of the 22nd earl, who had married the 20th earl as early as 1647, but certainly survived into the early eighteenth century (see **1696**). Nonetheless, the date is perhaps an error for 1713. A source written towards the end of the eighteenth century claimed that occupation continued until a date of approximately c.1750, yet has it simultaneously “allowed to fall into ruin” since 1715 (see **1791**).

1746 - James Johnstone, a Jacobite officer in hiding after the Battle of Culloden, arrived at Kildrummy. It is unclear if he visited the castle itself, but he found himself inspired by the story of the Battle of Culblean and the subsequent ejection of the English, although in recalling the event in his memoirs he misattributed the victory to Robert Bruce rather than his sister. “The view of this celebrated spot operated as a relief to me”, he wrote. Johnstone’s memoirs also recorded the state of what had once been the burgh. It had ”only a few cottages… one which went by the name of a public house”. To his surprise this "contained no liquor of any description” and offered him an “uncomfortable” straw bed, but to compensate the landlady supplied "an excellent young fowl for supper", and asked the very reasonable rate of threepence for bed and meal. Asking for a second bird to pocket for his journey, he paid sixpence in total, leaving both himself and the landlady very satisfied. His conclusion offers a striking contrast to conventional descriptions of eighteenth century peasants: "These good people have very little money among them, and indeed, they have little want of it, as they possess the necessaries of life in great abundance”. The author is generally known as the Chevalier de Johnstone, but this title probably commemorates the award of the Order of St Louis for his subsequent service in the French army in Canada.

1776 - Charles Cordiner, an episcopalian clergyman, wrote a letter to the antiquarian and travel writer Thomas Pennant, containing a description and history of Kildrummy accompanied by a sketch. These were subsequently printed in 1780. Cordiner noted

of the castle that, "Its strength seems superior to what could have been thought necessary before the use of cannon; and its grandeur corresponds with the idea of its having been intended for a royal palace". He described the Snow Tower as "still nearly fifty yards in height" and mentioned "a peculiar kind of columns, and vast length of windows" in the chapel. He also wrote of "a lady in the neighbourhood" who had dined in the castle with the earl's family before "the Fifteen", and that the earl of Fife, who had acquired the lordship in 1724, was trying to preserve a chamber for his officials to do business in the Snow Tower, but was defeated by the overhanging weight of the ruined upper section. A second publication by Cordiner, with a more literary text and a different illustration of the castle, followed in 1788.

1789 - The antiquarian Richard Gough included a description of Kildrummy in his expanded edition of the seventeenth century antiquarian compendium *Britannia*. Based primarily on the text used by Macfarlane in 1724, which was not at that date published, this added additional details not found in Macfarlane's text, describing the Snow Tower as "near fifty yards high" and identifying the chamber described in most detail as the "Court House" on the "middle story".

1791 - An essay on Kildrummy accompanied by an engraved illustration was published by the *Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer*, an Edinburgh magazine aimed at a wide audience beyond the conventional literary circles, in its number for 30 November 1791. The article stated that the castle was "inhabited about forty years ago" and described it as "a striking monument of the taste of our forefathers and their style of architecture" before its partial demolition for stone and lime. Reflecting the political views of its editor James Anderson, who stressed the improvement of the ordinary man with the support of a protectionist state (he was respected by contacts ranging from George Washington to Jeremy Bentham and was later much admired by Marx), the narrative presented the past largely in terms of the struggles of government against a domineering aristocracy.

1795 - A detailed description of Kildrummy castle was provided in the description of the parish submitted by the minister to the *Statistical Account of Scotland*. It is an accurate and intelligent description of the ruins, much as they exist today. In addition, it was recorded that the castle had been ruined through being used a source of good building stone after "the Fifteen", and, like the earlier description by Cordiner (see **1780**), mention was made of unsuccessful attempts by the earls of Fife to use the ruinous Snow Tower in its traditional role as a place of administration for the surrounding lordship. The minister regarded the "splendor and magnificence" of the castle as little more than an illusion, depicting it as a mere fortress in which a tyrannical elite had lived "in fear, and comfortless insecurity", exercising arbitrary persecution of a population who were further oppressed by the "priestcraft and gloomiest superstition" of the pre-Reformation church. He went on to imagine that souterrains were the houses of prehistoric people so tyrannised that they had to live in underground concealment.

1797 - An annotated edition of the "Don poem" was published (see **1655**). This included a long note on Kildrummy, combining a comprehensive knowledge of earlier sources with some personal knowledge. This seems to have been the earliest written source for the widely repeated statement that Osbourne, the traitor in the siege of **1306**, was a local blacksmith. However, several passages closely parallel the earlier

writings of Cordiner (see **1780**), including assertions that the Snow Tower was "still 50 yards high", a reference to "a particular kind of columns" indicating the chapel, and an account of the troubles that the earl of Fife was having in attempting to retain a chamber in the Snow Tower for the use of his officials.

1805 – It is believed that the ruinous Snow Tower collapsed at this time.

1808 – It is believed that the plundering of the castle for stone ceased from this time.

1819 - Alexander Laing's *Caledonian Itinerary* was published: a poem describing the history and landscape of Deeside. A long descriptive footnote on Kildrummy preserved information not found in any other source, including the fullest list of the traditional names of the castle's towers.

1852 - The architectural historian Robert Billings published the third volume of his *Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities*. He was very impressed with Kildrummy, emphasising its contrast with the conventional baronial tower house and its resemblance to classic English castle architecture "in its best developed shape". He asserted that its comparatively early date meant that its history had largely been forgotten in the area: "tradition can lay no palpable hold of its days of strength and glory, and unlike the other baronial remains of antiquity, it seems to the peasants of the district as Niniveh to the Persians or Paestum to the Italians", in support of which he quoted the old story that its "seven round towers" were indications of a Roman date, though in his subsequent historical survey, he wrongly associated it with the lordship of Garioch).

1898 - The Kildrummy estate was bought by Colonel James Ogston, who systematically consolidated the castle. The consolidation was extensive, with much of the exterior of the stump of the Snow Tower and the back curtain wall refaced in stugged ashlar. The rear arches over what had been corbelled lintels to the window embrasures in the Warden's Tower, and some of the odd features in the Elphinstone Tower, where vast gaps in the masonry which had stood open for over a century, were walled up. All of this dates to this early phase of consolidation.

20th century – The site was first scheduled in 1921 before entering State care in 1951. The site was rescheduled in 1999 in order to clarify the extent of the protected area[21].

Appendix 2: Available as a separate document on request from Historic Environment Scotland Cultural Resources Team, please contact crtenquiries@hes.scot

[21] Scheduled Monument Description accessible at: http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90181