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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# LOCHRANZA CASTLE



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# LOCHRANZA CASTLE

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Lochranza Castle occupies a low, gravelly peninsula projecting into Loch Ranza on the north coast of Arran and was constructed during the late 13th or early 14th centuries as a two-storey hall house. The building's present appearance is the result of the hall-house being remodelled as an L-plan tower-house.

Lochranza lies on a NW-SE axis with a projecting square tower at the south corner. The original entrance to the lower storey lay in the south-east wall, with a mural stair connecting this and a second entrance in the north-east wall on the first floor. Both entrances became windows in the subsequent remodelling of the hall-house. The ground floor entrance has a heavily-ribbed barrel vault, traces of two doors and either a "murder hole" or hatch going up to the first floor, where was situated the hall, with the lord's solar or private chamber in the tower. There are traces of two windows in the south-west wall of the hall and one in the south-east.

At a later date, probably during the 16th century, the hall-house was significantly redeveloped by the Montgomery family who owned Lochranza at the time. New windows, a cross-wall and spiral stair were inserted, a new ground-floor entrance formed in the south-west wall, and the walls partly heightened so that the building took the form of a conventional L-plan tower house. All of this work was carried out in similar rubble masonry to the earlier work, using plum-coloured sandstone for dressings rather than the earlier red. Defence remained a priority, as evidenced by the box machicolation placed above the entrance door and there is a bartizan at the west corner.

In both phases, the main building would have been accompanied by a defended courtyard enclosing a variety of dispersed outbuildings.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- No historical sources document the construction of the hall-house. The MacSween family held Arran in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, until the 1260s, and built a similar hall-house at Skipness.
- Alexander III granted Arran to Walter Stewart, Earl of Menteith in 1262. At the failure of the male line, Lochranza passed to a kinsman, Robert the High Steward, who became Robert II, King of Scots in 1371.
- Around 1400, Fordun describes Lochranza as one of two royal castles on Arran.
- In 1433, records show that John de Monteith, Lord of Arran, granted ownership of Lochranza and surrounding lands to Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochaw. The Campbell occupation of Lochranza appears to have been brief as James II granted it to Alexander, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Montgomerie around 1450. Alexander was succeeded by his grandson Hugh, keeper of Brodick and Rothesay Castles, who later became 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Eglinton in the reign of James IV. James made

use of Lochranza as a base from which to launch offensives against the MacDonalds.

- Lochranza remained a Montgomery possession until 1705 and they probably rebuilt the existing hall-house as a tower-house in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- In 1614, Lochranza served as a base for an assault on the MacDonalds of the Isles by James VI's forces.
- During the Civil War, the castle was garrisoned by Cromwell's troops in the 1650s.
- In 1705, Anne, Duchess of Hamilton, purchased the building from the Montgomery family for the sum of £43,200 Scots and built a chapel near the castle although no trace now survives.
- According to Thomas Pennant, visiting Arran some seventy years later, Lochranza was abandoned as a residence, being used as a shelter by 'poor people who occasionally take refuge here'.
- Fullarton's Gazetteer, published in 1843, describes Lochranza as 'a roofless ruin'.
- In 1892 the north-eastern part of the building collapsed.
- The monument came into Guardianship in 1952, being gifted to the State by the Duke of Montrose. A programme of consolidation and repair quickly began, continuing through the 1950s.
- In 1997, an archaeological investigation was carried out on the headland connecting the castle to the southern shore of the loch.

#### Archaeological Overview

- Relatively little archaeological investigation has been carried out at Lochranza. In 1997, Kirkdale Archaeology conducted a watching brief on works carried out on the strip of land connecting Lochranza Castle to the southern shore of the loch. The only structural remains uncovered were two areas of flat schist slabs whose purpose could not be ascertained.

#### Artistic/Architectural Overview

- Until the 1950s, Lochranza Castle was considered a 16<sup>th</sup> century tower-house of L-shaped plan, but detailed analysis of the building by Stuart Cruden in the 1950s suggested that an earlier building was incorporated within a later work. Subsequent restoration work demonstrated the validity of Cruden's interpretation, demonstrating that Lochranza began life as a hall house of late-13<sup>th</sup> to mid-14<sup>th</sup> century date.
- The hall-house comprised an L-shaped two-storeyed fortified residence. The lord's hall and chamber, his apartment or lodging, occupied the first floor while an undercroft occupied the main part of the ground floor. A dark, stone-vaulted chamber in the wing served as a prison, and was wholly devoid of light, air and sanitation. The building was furnished with two entrances, the first being on the south wall at ground level, while a second was in the east wall at a higher level, presumably being reached by a wooden forestair or ladder. The ground floor entrance, later converted to a window, was heavily protected, and a 'murder hole' remains visible, where defenders could fire upon intruders.

- Conversion to tower-house in the 16<sup>th</sup> century resulted in significant alterations, adding an additional storey which was likely used as additional living space by the lord and his family. Most of the surviving architectural features were added at this time. Although relatively little of the 16<sup>th</sup> century roofscape survives, Francis Grose made a detailed drawing of the roofless castle in 1772. This shows a bartizan or turret at the north-west corner of the main block, supported by continuous corbelling, while a square bartizan projected from the north-eastern corner, destroyed in the 1890s. The upper floor of the wing, which still shows traces of corbelling, was equipped overhanging battlements. The new landward-facing entrance, set in the west wall, was protected by a box machicolation above while the bartizan was equipped with an array of gunloops, evidence that defence remained a consideration to the occupants.

### Social Overview

- Lochranza Castle would have had a significant social status in the medieval period, being the estate centre and the lord's residence.
- Anecdotal evidence indicates a strong sense of local sentiment for the building in the years before the castle became a Guardianship monument.

### Spiritual Overview

- The building has no known spiritual significance.

### Aesthetic Overview

- Sited on a small headland jutting into Loch Ranza, the castle occupies a particularly picturesque position at the foot of the hills. Built of greyish stone, the ruined castle is an imposing sight at the head of the loch.
- The nearby village of Lochranza is one of the most scenically attractive of Arran's villages.

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

- No clear record exists of when the first hall-house was built and by whom.

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

Medieval hall-houses are rare survivors in Scotland as many were demolished to make way for larger residences or incorporated into another structure, as was the case at Lochranza and **Skipness**. Most of the surviving masonry belongs to the hall-house phase of construction at Lochranza.

### Keywords

Tower; tower-house; machicolation; 'murder hole'; Arran, Lochranza Castle.