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**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC335

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90255)

**Taken into State care:** 1968 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2004

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# RUTHVEN BARRACKS



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# RUTHVEN BARRACKS

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Ruthven Barracks, near Kingussie, comprises the ruins of a small 18th-century garrison. It was constructed between 1719 and 1721 on the site of a medieval castle, of which only the well is now visible. The whole site was constructed on a prominent, fluvioglacial terrace (OD 236 m), overlooking the wide alluvial plain of the River Spey.

The fort comprises two opposed single-pile barrack blocks, each aligned NW-SE and containing three storeys and garret above a semi-basement. A central stairwell separates the two rooms on each floor, each measuring 5.5m x 5.2m. Loop-holed enclosure walls join the outer angles of the barrack blocks, enclosing them and other structures (eg latrines) within an approximately square courtyard. The north-west and south-east ramparts of the enclosure are formed of a series of open-ended vaults forming musket embrasures. Above these ran wall-walks, from which access was gained to the upper storey of each of the angle-towers projecting from the east and west corners. These were house officers' accommodation. The ground storey of the west tower contains a bread-oven and remains of a brewing vat, and that in the east tower formed a guardhouse, possibly with a cell in the basement below. The courtyard measures 28.35m NW-SE by 25.6m NE-SW externally, excluding the projecting towers. The barrack blocks were constructed with gun-loops in the rear walls, but those in the basement were soon blocked up. The medieval well was reused.

To the north-west of the main barracks a stable-block for 28 horses was built in 1734, as recommended by General Wade, and the remains of this survive. A postern was formed in the north-west enclosure wall of the barracks to allow access, removing the latrines as a result. Horses were used by dragoons acting as messengers on the military road network.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- The prominent mound at Ruthven, on which the medieval castles and Hanoverian garrison were constructed, is strategically sited in the valley of the Spey, at a crossing point of routes north, south, east and west. This strategic significance is reflected in the military use that was made of this site and the part that the site and its inhabitants played in the military and political history of the troubled Highlands over at least half a millennia.
- In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the site was chosen as the caput, or chief seat, of the Comyns in their Badenoch lordship. At this time the castle may have been of earth and timber construction.
- In the later 14<sup>th</sup> century the castle was in the possession of Alexander Stewart ('Wolf of Badenoch') before reverting to the Crown.
- 1451 reduced to a partial ruin
- Towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Huntly erected a replacement stone castle.

- 1649 castle was garrisoned by the English under Cromwell.
- 1689 castle ruined again.
- In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the barracks were built by the Hanoverian government to garrison infantry whose task was to police the locality in the wake of the Jacobite Rising of 1715. The well from the medieval period was retained.
- The garrison was besieged (by MacPherson) and surrendered in 1745-6, the fifth Jacobite uprising. Thereafter, the barracks temporarily served as a rallying-point for the Jacobites following Culloden, but were allowed to fall into ruin, despite being re-acquired by the Duke of Gordon in 1792. There appears to have some subsequent landscaping of the parade ground, but no domestic reuse.
- The barracks are therefore a forceful visible reminder of the Hanoverian government's efforts to quash the Jacobites and disaffected Highlanders.
- 1929 Offer of guardianship declined.
- 1958 scheduled; concern expressed about condition or ruins in late 1950s, so site added to the Surveillance List (monuments which were regularly monitored and where, with the owner's permission, the State undertook urgent repair works at its own hand and expense). Works took place from 1961 onwards.
- 1968 Guardianship.

#### Archaeological Overview

- Large parts of the interior of the barracks and stable block have been excavated in advance of presentation; the well was only partially excavated (see summary plan in Cox 1998, illus 4). This work clarified aspects of the building's phasing.
- Although the hill is a likely place for prehistoric settlement, there is no evidence of occupation on the terrace prior to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The hill appears to be artificially contoured and the possibility of a ditch at the hill base cannot be ruled out. The earlier castle may have been of earth and timber construction. With the exception of the well, there are no visible remains of the earlier castles, although some remains of earlier work were excavated beneath the north-west part of the courtyard in 1983, and it is possible that some stonework around the edge of the mound may also be a survival.

#### Artistic/Architectural Overview

- Ruthven Barracks is the best surviving example of four new Highland garrisons built by the Hanoverian government in the wake of the Jacobite Rising of 1715.
- An early 18<sup>th</sup>-century Board of Ordnance Plan details the proposed fortification and barrack facilities and compares favourably with the extant structure, although there are a few exceptions (minor discrepancies in the arrangement and number of gun-loops within the casemates; some differences in vaults within each corner of the compound; repositioning of well (reusing medieval supply); later additions and removals). Such plans are a tangible reminder of the military organisation and considerable expenditure that the government invested in this campaign, itself a reflection of the seriousness of the Jacobite threat.

- This scheduled ancient monument is also Category A listed.

#### Social Overview

- Not formally assessed.
- However, the site is known to be of particular interest to Clan MacPherson (whose ancestors attacked it in 1745), and in general the legacy of the Hanoverians in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Highlands can still be an emotive subject.

#### Spiritual Overview

- Not formally assessed, but see above.

#### Aesthetic Overview

- This site is visually stunning. The massive, regular mound on which the barracks stand is visible for miles. The wall-heads have survived to a great height and their outline enhances the dramatic visual qualities of the site, not least at night when the monument is floodlit.
- The barracks master the great valley of the Spey, still the main route of communication north-south (the A9). The valley is a beautiful landscape feature in its own right, and the barracks have a very special physical and visual relationship with this.
- The monument is not far from the River Spey - Insh Marshes SSSI. This flat, marshy ground physically and visually enhances the strategic qualities of the site.

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

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- The physical form of the earlier castles on the site is virtually unknown.
- It could be useful to draw together all the documentary and archive sources for the medieval and later site, particularly the earlier history (Stell (1983) provides an invaluable summary account of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century phase).

#### ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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##### Key points

- Nothing is visible of the very important medieval castles that once stood here, other than the well, though the strategic significance of this spot is obvious to any visitor.
- After Bernera in Glenelg, Ruthven Barracks is the next best surviving example of four new Highland garrisons built by the Hanoverian government in the wake of the Jacobite Rising of 1715.
- The barracks are therefore a forceful visible reminder of the Hanoverian government's efforts to quash the Jacobites and disaffected Highlanders: the site might well be described as iconic in this respect.
- The strategic and visual qualities of this site and its wider landscape setting are exceedingly high.

### Associated Properties

For the medieval phase, **Inverlochy Castle** (Comyn), **Urquhart Castle**, **Balvenie (Comyn)**, Lochindorb (Comyn).

For the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Bernera, the biggest and best (well-preserved but not publicly accessible), Kilcumein (little survives (as part of Lovat Arms Hotel), superceded by Fort Augustus) and Inversnaid Barracks (not publicly accessible). **Kilchurn Castle** (earlier, late 17<sup>th</sup>-century barracks) **Fort George**, **Corgarff Castle** (later phase of Hanoverian military activity, ie post-1745 rising).

Keywords medieval, castle, Comyns, Lords of Badenoch, Hanoverians, Major-General Wade, Jacobites, Bonny Prince Charlie, Clan MacPherson, barracks, Spey Valley