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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# LOCHLEVEN CASTLE



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# LOCHLEVEN CASTLE

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Lochleven Castle probably originated on its island site during the Wars of Independence in the early fourteenth century. It developed as a royal castle with a special function of state prison. Given to the Douglas family in 1390, it was again used as a prison for Mary, Queen of Scots and is the site of her abdication. The main tower and curtain wall stand largely complete to wallheads.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- The earliest record of a fortification on this island in Loch Leven is an English fort which was taken by William Wallace in the first years of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. It had a garrison of 30 men and 5 women. The earliest parts of the curtain wall may date from the English occupation or not long after it.
- By 1313 when Robert the Bruce stayed on the island, Lochleven was in Scottish hands and had become a royal castle.
- The security of the island site made Lochleven a useful prison for key individuals such as John MacDougall, Lord of Lorn in 1316 as well as providing safekeeping for part of the Royal Exchequer in 1329. It was presumably for the housing of high-status prisoners such as John of Lorn that the fine tower house was added about this time.
- In 1334 Lochleven was one of five Scottish castles not to fall to Edward II. It was besieged in 1335 and the English tried to dam the River Leven in order to raise the water level to flood the castle. The dam was burst by the men of the constable, Adam Vipont, men before it could take effect.
- David II visited Lochleven in 1361 and 1362 and paid for building repairs between 1359 and 1368. Like his father, he used Lochleven as a prison holding his nephew, the future Robert II, in 1368-9 along with Robert's son Alexander.
- In 1390 Robert II granted Lochleven to Sir Henry Douglas, ending its role as a royal castle. Under the Douglas family the ancillary buildings in the courtyard were redeveloped and the Glassin Tower added to provide additional accommodation.
- The castle has particularly strong associations with Mary, Queen of Scots. She visited as a guest in 1561, 1563, when she debated with John Knox in the great hall, and with her second husband Henry, Lord Darnley, in 1565. However, it is her incarceration in Lochleven which still captures the imagination. Two days after her surrender at Carberry on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1567 she was taken to Lochleven where she fell ill and, shortly after, suffered a miscarriage. In this weakened state, pressure continued to be exerted until, at the end of July, she unwillingly signed a letter of abdication in favour of her infant son, James VI. However, she remained a prisoner until 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1568 when she escaped with the assistance of the sons of William Douglas of Lochleven, her gaoler.
- William Douglas later inherited the earldom of Morton but his cousin, James, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Morton, made use of Lochleven in the years between his loss of the regency in 1578 and his execution in 1581. He is said to have spent his time pursuing his interest in gardening.

- With the inheritance of the other Morton properties of Aberdour and Dalkeith, Lochleven was no longer the prime residence of the family.
- In 1672 it was sold to William Bruce of Balcaskie, the architect of Holyroodhouse who built nearby Kinross House for himself (1686-1693). Kinross is a boldly symmetrical design with its axis lined up on the tower of Lochleven Castle.

#### Archaeological Overview

- The loch level was lowered approximately 4½ feet in 1830 when sluices were fitted to the outflow into the River Leven. The natural extent of the island was far smaller than the current extent being largely restricted to the area of the castle's enclosure and the level terrace to its north.
- Only selective archaeological work has been carried out in recent times. The factor for the Lochleven Estate in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, R. Burns-Begg FSA Scot, conducted excavations revealing the footings in the courtyard but only publishing his interpretation, not his findings.
- While the archaeological potential of the site will have been diminished by this work, Burns-Begg's activities are not thought to have involved a comprehensive clearance of the site but rather to have been largely restricted to revealing masonry structures.

#### Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The tower-house, built in the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century, is the most architecturally distinguished part of the complex. Constructed of squared rubble approaching the quality of ashlar, architectural details such as the string course which wraps round the arch-head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor entrance mark the building out as more than a simple stronghold.
- The curtain wall follows the topography of the site, a feature which is characteristic of several castles built of islands or isolated bluffs around this time such as Loch Doon Castle.
- With the construction of Kinross House at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Lochleven took on a new guise – that of a picturesque ruin. It therefore holds an important place in the history of such appreciation and the changes in aesthetic attitudes.

#### Social Overview

- No formal assessment of this has been carried out.
- The castle is a prominent landmark from the M90 but its natural isolation divorces it from much social activity.

#### Spiritual Overview

- Although a single window embrasure in the tower is thought to have been designed as a private oratory, the castle cannot be said to have any great spiritual value.

#### Aesthetic Overview

- The castle sits on the heavily wooded island which provides a striking backdrop when viewed across the loch from the west.
- Once on the island the quietness, combined with the woodland setting, lends the ruins a peaceful air.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- We do not understand the detail of the building function and phasing of the more fragmentary buildings identified in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

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ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- Lochleven Castle is a well preserved castle, which has played a key part in the history of medieval and early modern Scotland.
- It is particularly prized as the place of incarceration of Mary, Queen of Scots, a figure with world-wide renown.
- Lochleven's role as a prison is an important element in understanding the exercise of royal control at the time.
- The exploitation of Lochleven in the design of Kinross House marks a key point in the development of the "romantic" aesthetic in Scottish architecture and landscape design.
- The archaeology of the site retains the potential to add greatly to our understanding of this and similar sites.
- The island in Lochleven is a particularly attractive site, with a wooded and tranquil setting.

Associated Properties

**Blackness Castle**, Bass Rock (state prisons), **Aberdour Castle**, Dalkeith House, (Earl of Morton), Threave Castle, Bothwell Castle, Tantallon Castle (Douglas family) **St. Serf's Priory**, **Loch Doon Castle**, Kinross House,

Keywords Mary, Queen of Scots, loch, island, prison, Douglas, Morton, tower-house, Robert the Bruce, Wars of Independence