STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

ST ANDREWS CASTLE

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

ST ANDREWS CASTLE

SYNOPSIS

St Andrews Castle was the chief residence of the bishops, and later the archbishops, of the medieval diocese of St Andrews. It served as episcopal palace, fortress and prison. It is perhaps most famous for events that took place there in 1546-7: the burning at the stake of George Wishart, Protestant reformer; the murder of the man responsible, Cardinal David Beaton; and the subsequent siege of the castle, during which John Knox joined the reformers inside the castle. Following the Reformation (1560), the castle was repaired and occupied by the Protestant bishops of St Andrews, until the final abolition of the post in 1689. Thereafter, the castle fell into disrepair.

The castle ruins are sited on a promontory on the NE side of the town, overlooking St Andrews Bay. The multi-period composite structure is of roughly pentagonal shape. The lowest courses of the Fore Tower appear to date from the later 12th/early 13th century. However, much of what remains dates from a wholesale rebuilding by Bishop Walter Traill (1385-1401), after substantial damage wrought during the Wars of Independence. Subsequent significant additions included two artillery blockhouses added by Archbishop James Beaton in the 1520s, and the new entrance front, added by Archbishop Hamilton (1546-71). Two notable surviving elements are the 'bottle dungeon' in the Sea Tower, and the mine and counter-mine, the latter legacies from the 1546-7 siege and among the most important medieval siege works surviving in Europe.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:
- 1123 - Alexander I promotes Robert, first head of Scone Priory, as his bishop of St Andrews, with the aim of bringing about reform at Scotland's leading church.
- c.1140 - David I grants Bishop Robert permission to found an ecclesiastical burgh, called St Andrews. Shortly after, Robert successfully establishes a convent of Augustinian canons at his cathedral.
- c.1160 - Bishop Arnold, Robert's successor, begins building a new cathedral on a huge scale.
- c.1190 - According to the 15th-century chronicler, Andrew Wyntoun, Bishop Roger (1189-1202), son of the earl of Leicester and cousin of William I (The Lion), builds the first castle. Architectural evidence in the Fore Tower supports this.
- 1290 - Bishop William Fraser invites Edward I of England to arbitrate between rival claimants to the Scottish throne on the sudden death of Margaret 'Maid of Norway'. Fraser is one of the 4 surviving guardians (of 6) appointed to govern after the death of Alexander III.
- 1296 - Edward I invades Scotland (start of the Wars of Independence) and makes his first visit to St Andrews before continuing north.

- 1304 - Edward I and his queen stay in the castle (Feb-March), whilst he holds a parliament in the cathedral-priory (at which Sir William Wallace and Sir Simon Fraser are declared outlaws).
- 1309 - the castle is back in Scottish hands, as Robert I (The Bruce) holds his first parliament in St Andrews (March). The castle is repaired by Bishop William Lamberton (1297-1328), a loyal supporter of Robert I.
- 1318 - Robert I returns to St Andrews for the consecration of the cathedral.
- 1336 – following the outbreak of a second phase in the Wars of Independence in 1332, the English once again take the castle and strengthen the defences.
- 1337 - Sir Andrew Murray, guardian, besieges the castle and takes it after a three-week siege, in which a siege machine, called 'the Bouster', is used. He then has the castle slighted to deny it to the English.
- c.1385 - the castle lies abandoned until Bishop Walter Traill becomes bishop. He rebuilds it to the form we largely now see and dies there in 1401.
- 1402 - David, duke of Rothesay and Robert III's heir, is imprisoned in the castle on the orders of his uncle, Robert, duke of Albany, on the grounds of poor governance by Rothesay. It was more likely a move by Albany to protect his own power.
- 1425 - Albany's own son, Duke Murdoch, is imprisoned in the castle prior to being executed at Stirling Castle. James I celebrates Yule at the castle that same year, staying until the Feast of Epiphany (6 January).
- 1452 - Mary of Gueldres gives birth to the future James III (1460-88) in the castle.
- 1472 - Bishop Patrick Graham of St Andrews becomes Scotland's first archbishop. In 1478 he is deemed insane and imprisoned in his own castle.
- 1513 - Archbishop Alexander Stewart is killed fighting the English at the Battle of Flodden (September). The untimely death of this illegitimate son of James IV (also killed at Flodden) leads to a power vacuum in the Scottish Church.
- 1521 - Archbishop James Beaton is appointed archbishop of St Andrews. A vigorous opponent of Protestantism, he sets about strengthening the castle. He builds two great circular gun towers (blockhouses), one at either end of the landward-facing wall. It may be he who repositions the castle's main entrance from the Fore Tower to midway along the SW curtain.
- 1538 - James Beaton dies and is succeeded by his nephew, David Beaton. David, appointed cardinal in the same year, is as fervently opposed to Protestantism as his uncle. His opposition to the marriage of the infant Queen Mary and Henry VIII of England's heir, Prince Edward, is a major factor leading to renewed warfare between the two countries - the 'Rough Wooing'. He appears to have continued strengthening the castle's defences, probably adding an outer skin to the SW curtain.
- 1546 - Cardinal Beaton presides over the heresy trial in St Andrews of George Wishart, a Fife laird and evangelical preacher; the latter is found guilty, strangled and burned at the stake immediately outside the castle in March. In May, a group of Fife lairds and evangelicals, led by Norman Leslie, master of Rothes, sneak into the castle disguised as masons and murder the cardinal. They hang his naked body in a pair of sheets from the castle walls, before throwing it into the castle's bottle dungeon.
- 1546/7 - Regent Arran lays siege to the castle. The besiegers soon begin to dig a mine under the castle walls. The defenders respond by digging a counter-

mine to forestall them. A truce (April 1547) allows John Knox, Wishart's former bodyguard, to join the rebels in the castle. Later that summer, a French fleet arrives to assist Regent Arran, and, together with cannons emplaced on towers at the cathedral and St Salvator's Chapel, begin pounding the castle, causing considerable damage. The beleaguered garrison eventually surrenders. Some, including John Knox, are condemned to be French galley slaves.

- c.1550 - Cardinal Beaton's successor, Archbishop John Hamilton, sets about repairing the castle. This includes a handsome new entrance front.
- 1559 (June) - John Knox preaches an inflammatory anti-Catholic sermon in St Andrews that is a prelude to the Protestant Reformation (1560). Archbishop Hamilton is subsequently imprisoned (1563). The post of archbishop is retained in the Reformed Church, but the castle falls into disrepair through lack of diocesan funding.
- 1606 - Parliament decrees that the castle should be separate from the bishopric, and grants it to the earl of Dunbar, constable (keeper) of the castle since 1603. However, in 1612 it is returned to Archbishop Gordon Gledstanes, who carries out some repairs.
- 1656 - stone from the castle is used in building the town's pier.
- 1689 - episcopacy is finally abolished in the Scottish Church. John Slezer's illustration of the castle, published 1693, depicts it as a roofless and rather desolate ruin.
- 1801 - Much of the great hall block along the courtyard's east side falls into the sea. Further losses continue until a seawall is built in 1886.
- 1871 - the castle is formally taken into state care.
- 1879 - the mine and counter-mine are rediscovered during digging for foundations of a house at the junction of North Castle Street and East Scores opposite the castle.
- 1991 – the castle visitor centre is opened.

Archaeological Overview:
- There has been little modern excavation within the curtain wall of the castle. Although early clearance work (mainly in the 1920s and 30s) may have removed much important archaeology, there is no doubt that the castle still has the potential to add to our understanding both of its architectural development and the lives of its occupants. Among the considerable number of quality artefacts from the clearance excavations are a fine pilgrim's badge and a large assemblage of medieval pottery.
- The castle covered an area larger than that defined by the present curtain wall. Between October 1988 and January 1990, excavations in advance of building the present visitor centre to the SW of the castle uncovered evidence for an outer, or service, court. Although the excavators found that construction of a 19th-century bowling green had severely truncated much of the archaeology in the area to the west, extensive archaeology remained largely undisturbed to the SW.
- The excavations uncovered complex remains, including deposits dating from the early Bronze Age. Much of the material spanned the period from c.1200 to the mid-1500s. This latter occupation seems not to have been continuous. The excavator assumed that much of it may not have been associated with the castle but with the town. However, Geddy's map of St Andrews, depicting the

town as it probably looked in the mid-1500s, clearly shows the castle's outer court located in the area where the excavations took place, albeit devoid of buildings. The archaeological remains included a 14th-century tannery, possibly operating whilst the castle lay abandoned, and a large assemblage of pottery and bone.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:
- St Andrews is one of a number of curtain-walled castles (eg, **Bothwell**, **Caerlaverock** and **Dirleton**) reoccupied and substantially rebuilt at the end of the 14th century, in the aftermath of the Wars of Independence. The rebuilding at St Andrews appears to have been very extensive, judging by the paucity of masonry dating from the late 12th and 13th centuries. It is likely that the original 12th-century castle was at least partly of earthwork and timber.
- The castle was rebuilt by Bishop Traill (1185-1402), and the present pentagonal plan probably dates from his time. Whether the arrangement of residential towers at each angle of the curtain wall dates from then is questionable, as earlier masonry exists in both the Fore Tower and the Sea Tower.
- The castle was further upgraded in the first half of the 16th century by the two Beaton archbishops, James and David. Their contribution was mostly to improve the defensive capability of the landward side of the castle against gun-powdered artillery. In this it failed, as the events of the 1546/7 siege show.
- The final alterations were carried out by Archbishop John Hamilton in the 1550s, who took advantage of siege damage to build an almost entirely new residence along the landward side.
- The castle is now entered midway along the SW curtain. (Note, there was a postern, or service gate, at the north end of the west curtain, now blocked.) The present entrance front dates from the 1500s, but the location of the entrance was moved there from the Fore Tower by Bishop Traill. Although the Fore Tower as we see it today dates from Traill's time, it still retains in its lower courses earlier masonry work. This includes well-dressed cubed ashlar of 12th-century form in the north half, closest to the courtyard, and a crosslet-arrowslit of c.1300 deep down in the SW corner. It also underwent alteration during the English occupation of 1336-7. The upper levels of the Fore Tower were also substantially altered by Traill.
- The remainder of the castle is now so ruinous that there are many uncertainties concerning its original planning. The Sea Tower at the NW corner seems also to retain high-quality masonry in its sea-facing elevation that may well date from before Traill's time, including a shouldered fireplace of 13th-century form, indicating the former existence of a fine residential chamber on its first floor. The Sea Tower also houses the castle's infamous 'bottle dungeon', a dank and airless pit cut out of the solid rock, which must rank as one of Scotland's most gruesome castle prisons. The Kitchen Tower at the NE angle had a first-floor kitchen above storage vaults that served the great hall in the adjacent east range (which unfortunately fell into the sea in 1801).
- The re-ordering of the castle's defences in the early 1500s transformed the castle into a major artillery place of strength. This work resulted in the building of two great gun towers (John Knox refers to them as blockhouses), one at each end of the landward front. These replaced two of Traill's rectangular

towers. The building of a second wall immediately outside the SW curtain dates also from this time.

- The 1546/7 siege has left important physical evidence in the mine and counter-mine, which are extremely rare surviving examples of this form of siege engineering. The contrast between the spacious mine and the cramped counter-mine illustrates the defenders' desperate attempt to forestall the besiegers' efforts to bring down the Fore Tower.
- The rebuilding of the damaged castle by Archbishop Hamilton in the 1550s seems to have been concentrated on the main landward front. The entrance facade as we see it today is largely his – described by Gifford as 'a major piece of prototype Scottish classicism'. Although now somewhat fragmentary, it has clearly been symmetrical, with flanking ranges, topped by a corbelled parapet interspersed with aediculed dormers, to either side of a dramatic entrance centrepiece that may be an attempt at a triumphal arch. Above the round-arched gateway is a projecting armorial panel surmounted by a frieze liberally embellished with Hamilton's badge, the cinquefoil, the whole doubtless brightly painted in heraldic colours. The scheme is reminiscent of French architecture (eg, Chambord).
- Behind Hamilton's entrance front was his rebuilt lodging, on the two upper floors. The top floor, lit by dormers, may have been a gallery.
- Slezer's engraving of 1693 shows the fine traceried windows of the fore tower above a ground floor that contained a north-facing loggia. Loggias, rare in Scotland, also survive at **Castle Campbell**, **Crichton** and **Huntly**, all built in the later 1500s.

Social Overview:
- The castle plays an important part in St Andrews' worldwide attraction as a tourist destination, alongside the cathedral, golf and the university.
- The castle is more than simply a tourist destination, though that is its primary interest. The castle grounds are used by university and town groups for events.
- Castle Sands, directly below the castle, although not in state care, has been a popular spot, particularly with students, since late Victorian times (the concrete bathing pond still survives) and thus enhances the castle's social importance.

Spiritual Overview:
- Throughout the later Middle Ages the castle was the residence of the head of the Scottish Church. Its history and surviving architecture aid our understanding of the functioning of the medieval church at its highest level, and how it responded to change over that time.
- The castle would have had its own chapel from the outset, for use by the bishop, his household and guests. Fragments of a chapel remain.
- The castle was the location for some of the most dramatic events in the run-up to the Protestant Reformation, including the martyrdom of George Wishart, the murder of Cardinal Beaton, the 1546/47 siege and the presence of the young John Knox among the garrison.
- Today, the castle has little or no spiritual association.

Aesthetic Overview:

- St Andrews Castle, although substantially ruined, is still impressive, particularly its imposing landward-facing facade with its architecturally impressive entrance and lofty Fore Tower. Behind it, the remainder of the complex seems more domestic and dispersed, but still most pleasant. Trees fringe the outer side of the west curtain wall, and these add a pastoral aspect to the castle grounds. The grim 'bottle dungeon' in the Sea Tower, and the dark, tortuous passages of the mine and counter-mine are, by contrast, claustrophobic.
- The castle sits on a rocky promontory jutting north and east into St Andrews Bay and with steep drops to the rocks below. This powerful setting adds drama to the visit, but is best appreciated either from the sea or from the cliff edge along the East Scores, to the SE of the castle.
- The view to the castle from the town, down the narrow North Castle Street, offers a very different setting - that of a solitary and somewhat forbidding ruined tower, the Fore Tower, framed by more domestically scaled 'medieval' buildings that line the lane. Only as one steps into The Scores, the street that marches with the castle along its southern side, does the castle's appearance become more expansive. The Scores is full of character, mostly composed of grand villas now largely part of the university. The castle, being close to the university schools and halls, now feels very much a part of the unique aesthetic of this university town.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?
- When was the first castle built, and how did it develop up to the time of its wholesale destruction towards the close of the Wars of Independence?
- What was the nature and form of the castle's outer court(s)?
- What did the two artillery blockhouses look like when complete?
- What was the form and extent of the residence built for Archbishop Hamilton in the 1550s?
- An exhaustive trawl of all available documentation pertaining to the castle and its ecclesiastical owners would be very useful.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points
- The castle was the main residence of Scotland's leading clergyman. The scale of the castle is a material demonstration of the power and wealth of medieval prelates. Such men had an importance over and above their religious responsibilities, and were great magnates fully conversant with the symbols of power used by their secular counterparts.
- The alterations to the castle, both its defences and accommodation, chart the changing requirements and fashions of its owners.
- The mine and counter-mine are unique surviving examples of medieval siege techniques. The underground passages also give a palpable sense of the grim nature of medieval warfare.
- The castle is intimately associated with some of the most significant events and personalities leading up to the Protestant Reformation in 1560.

Associated Properties:

(other linked sites locally) - **St Andrews Cathedral;** St Salvator's College.
(other extant episcopal residences in Scotland) - **Spynie Palace**, **Bishop's Palace**, **Kirkwall**, Dornoch Castle.
(other castles with significant artillery works) - Dunbar Castle's blockhouse; **Craignethan Castle; Blackness Castle; Tantallon Castle**; **Threave Castle**.

Keywords:

bishop/archbishop, tower, blockhouse, chapel, mine/counter-mine, dungeon/prison, Reformation.

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