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Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC202

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90203)

Taken into State care: 1937 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

LOCH DOON CASTLE



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LOCH DOON CASTLE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument consists of the rebuilt remains of Loch Doon Castle, surviving as a substantial stone structure. The castle is located on the west side of Loch Doon, 4km south of Dalmellington in East Ayrshire. It formerly stood on Castle Island 400m to the south until it was moved in 1935. When the level of the loch is low it is possible to see the top of Castle Island, along with some of the remaining stones of Loch Doon Castle.

The castle dates from the late 13th-century castle and has an extremely unusual eleven-sided curtain wall constructed of high quality ashlar masonry, with a simple entrance in the north through the curtain. The entrance comprises a large pointed arch, with evidence of double doors and a portcullis.

In the first half of the 16th-century a tower was added to the inside of the west wall. The re-erected remains does not include this later work.

All the dressed stonework was carefully dismantled in 1935, numbered and accurately re-erected by the Ministry of Works AM Dept, while the wall core material from the curtain wall was left on Castle Island.

The monument came into state care in 1937.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

The castle was built by the Bruce Earls of Carrick at the end of the 13th century.

The castle is first mentioned in 1306 when it fell to the English, marking the elimination of the last Bruce stronghold in the south-west. Having reverted to the Scots, it was seized again by the English, but retaken in 1314.

This was one of David II's six strongholds which held out against Edward Balliol in 1333.

History later records that the castle was owned by the Kennedy family and was taken from them by William Crauford of Lefnoris in 1511. The castle was supposedly badly damaged by fire during the reign of James V (1513-42), and finally abandoned in the 17th century.

Archaeological Overview

There is no below-ground archaeology associated with the rebuilt castle.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

It has a unique, polygonal plan, which is now difficult to understand divorced, as it is from its original location. It was, of course, the configuration of its original island site which determined the plan.

The quality of the ashlar of the exterior facework of the curtain is extremely high, with frequent use of rebated joints. The form of the main entrance is remarkably complete – a simple but imposing pointed arch of two chamfered orders.

The re-erected later remains within the enclosure are difficult to comprehend.

Social Overview

Not assessed

Spiritual Overview

Not assessed

Aesthetic Overview

The castle is bounded on the east by a massive wall of hills, the northern end of the Kells Range. To the south lies the wild scenery of the Ayrshire Highlands. The area is now depopulated.

The monument appears to sit uncomfortably in its modern location, separated from the lochside by the modern road.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Any understanding of the associated archaeology would have to be derived from an investigation of Castle Island.
- The planning of the original courtyard ranges.
- The re-erected later remains within the enclosure are difficult to comprehend.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

The monument is of national importance as an unusual example of a polygonal castle of enclosure, with a remarkably complete circuit, excellent ashlar work, and well-preserved doorway openings.

This castle played an important strategic role in the Wars of Independence.

The surviving architecture, albeit reconstructed, has the potential to inform an understanding of high-quality castellated architecture and planning of the late 13th century. This importance is further reinforced by the fact that this form of castle plan is out of place in lowland Scotland, and is more usually associated with the Gaelic west.

The story of its re-erection could be of interest to many. This is a rare example of an early 20th century large-scale conservation project, which indicates the considerable importance attached to the fabric of the monument at that time.

Associated Properties

Castle Sween; Lochmaben Castle; Kildrummy Castle; Bothwell Castle.

Keywords Castle of enclosure; island site; Wars of Independence; re-erection.