HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND | ÀRAINNEACHD EACHDRAIDHEIL ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID:	PIC120
Designations:	Scheduled Monument (SM90107)
Taken into State care:	1909 (Ownership)
Last Reviewed:	2026

Statement of Significance

Dumbarton Castle



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Statement of Significance

Dumbarton Castle

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1. Summary

This document aims to present a holistic approach to support the definitions of cultural significance of Dumbarton Castle as a Property in Care (PIC). It highlights the key features that make Dumbarton Castle special by assessing it against six values that cover tangible as well as intangible heritage values. The most important aspects of significance for the site are summarised under *1.2 Statement of Significance* before each value is assessed individually under *2 Assessment of values.* The overall assessment is taking into account the ongoing development of our knowledge of the site. The Statement informs Historic Environment Scotland's conservation and management activity, provides the basis for interpreting the site and highlights areas where more research is needed.

As well as being a PIC, Dumbarton Castle is protected as a Scheduled Monument (SM 90107). The designation considers different, though overlapping, aspects of cultural significance and highlights the importance of the site.

1.1 Introduction

Dumbarton Castle[1] has a long history as a prehistoric fort, a medieval royal castle, as an 18th and 19th century garrisoned fort, and finally as a Second World War anti-aircraft battery. It is located within Dumbarton itself, about 0.5 miles from Dumbarton East train station, on the shore of the river Clyde, and situated on volcanic rock, known as Dumbarton Rock.

The character of the place is entirely evoked in the brute mass of the twin peaks of hard volcanic basalt, a long-extinct volcano, rising dramatically from the dark waters of the Clyde giving an extraordinary 360-degree view. The Rock itself is a highly

[1] Alternative names: Dumbarton Rock. The site was first known as *Alt Clut,* 'Rock of the Clyde'. Different spellings of the name are recorded, for example the Venerable Bede called it 'Al Cluith' in the early 700s. It is also often spelled *Al Clud* or *Alclud*. Sometime after 900 the place became known as Dùn Breatann, meaning 'Fort of the Britons' in Gaelic, although this was not documented until the 12th century. The modern placename 'Dumbarton' is derived from its Gaelic name.

visible landmark. The west peak, known as White Tower Crag, at 74m is the highest part of the Rock, while the twin peak to the east is the slightly lower Beak.

Dumbarton Castle today is outwardly a British Army fortress of the Georgian period, furnished with batteries of cannons, a barracks built for soldiers, which was later adapted to be used as a prison (referred to as the French Prison), and a mansion for the garrison's commander. While elements of the medieval buildings remain visible within the castle, these are not immediately obvious to the visitor.

Located in a flat alluvial tract at the mouth of the Vale of Leven, Dumbarton Rock rises to a height of 73 m above the reclaimed intertidal mudflats at the mouth of the River Leven. It is roughly oval in plan having an east–west elongation of 275 m and a north–south width of 200 m. A north-west-trending gully divides the summit area. Ringed by crags and surrounded by water, it presented a formidable character. There are sheer rocks on all sides except to the south, with the best useable ground between the two peaks. The pointed craggy nature of the west summit of White Tower Crag made this difficult to build on, compared to the lower Beak on the east with a fairly level summit of 30m by 20m. The boggy land on the north-west side was only drained around 1800, allowing for industrial use, now replaced by housing and the football stadium.

The site came into State Care through a transfer of ownership from the War Office to the Office of Works in 1909. It is also protected as a scheduled monument of national importance.[2]

The site has a small car park and is accessed on the eastern side of the rock, along a short, slightly sloping path with 40 steps leading up to the King George Battery. The overall castle site is very large, steep and rocky and the structures and points of interest are spread over the whole rock. Most areas are reached via narrow stairways and steep gravel paths. A shop and exhibition space are located in the Governor's House where visitors can also experience a virtual tour of the castle and another exhibition space is located in the Guard House. The French Prison interior is

[2] Scheduling information available from HES, Dumbarton Castle (SM90107) (portal.historicenvironment.scot) (accessed: 17 March 2026).

not open to the public. Information boards are spread over the site to give information on the history of the site, its surroundings and structures.[3]

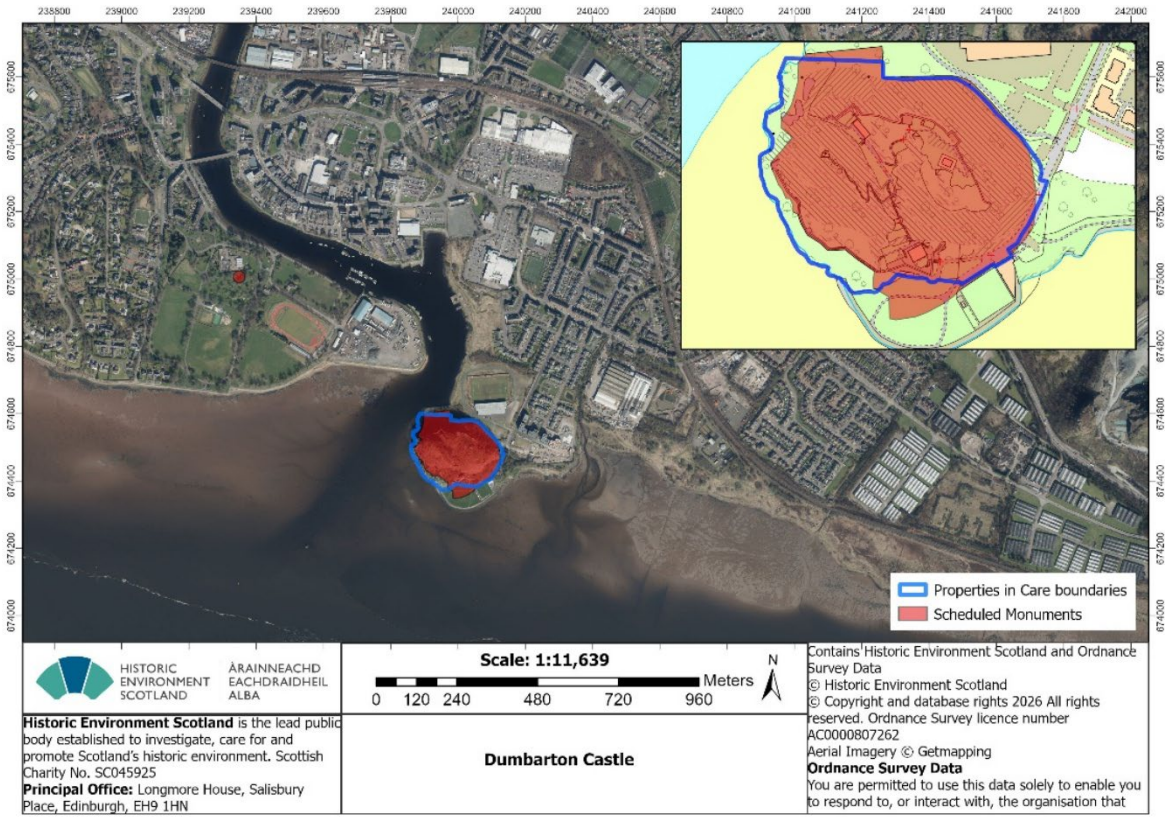


Figure 1: Dumbarton Castle Property in Care (PIC) boundary and scheduled area (SM90107). Image for illustrative purposes only.

1.2 Statement of Significance

- The character of the castle today is that of a British Army fortress of the Georgian period – musket-loops, sentinel turrets, a blast-walled gunpowder magazine, batteries of cannon, a barracks for soldiers, later adapted and used as a prison (referred to as French Prison) and a mansion for the military Governor. While elements of the earlier medieval buildings remain visible, these are less immediately obvious to the visitor.

[3] Prior to visiting, please check access information, available at: HES, Visit a place, Dumbarton Castle (historicenvironment.scot) (accessed: 26 February 2026).

- The castle we see today is largely the result of major improvements and refortification works led by Captain John Romer, a military officer and engineer to the Board of Ordnance who was also responsible for designing much of the northern artillery defence of **Edinburgh Castle**,[4] in the 1730s.
- The fort, royal castle and later military fortification existed here due to its vitally important strategic location. This enabled ship-borne transport and communications around Scotland, across to Ireland and connections to mainland Europe.
- The iconic view of the Rock from the south bank of the Clyde is one of the premier views in lowland Scotland.
- The discovery of imported exotic artefacts dating from the 5th to 8th centuries, together with evidence of precious metal working, identify Dumbarton as a royal seat of the kings of Alt Clut. The elite residents had access to long-distance trade, for the purposes of feasting at the site combined with networks of internal gifting and redistribution, as well as trade.
- Dumbarton is of significance in terms of its high archaeological potential, demonstrated by the limited excavations here in the 1970s. Investigations could considerably enhance our understanding of the lengthy development of the site, informing enhanced visitor interpretation and intellectual access.
- The Clyde-facing medieval Watergate and associated buildings was a complex of some grandeur, set against the backdrop of the impressive castle rock.
- The significance of the place is enhanced by its powerful associations with real and legendary individuals – St Patrick, Merlin, King Arthur, William

[4] Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at HES, Visit a Place (historicenvironment.scot) (accessed: 26 February 2026).

Wallace, Robert I ('the Bruce') and Mary Queen of Scots. The Wallace Tower here was associated with William Wallace as early as the 1400s.

- This was a royal castle which in theory gave it the same status as **Stirling** and **Edinburgh Castles**. However, Dumbarton received only a small fraction of the investment put into the other royal fortresses, and only very rarely accommodated royals within its walls.
- The castle was of great importance to King Robert I – after Sir John Menteith, the keeper of Dumbarton Castle who captured William Wallace in 1305, defected to King Robert I in 1308, he also brought Dumbarton back to Scottish control. The castle was one of the very few that escaped the new policy of slighting due to its strategic importance. The significance of the castle to King Robert I is underlined by the fact that he chose to site his retirement manorial residence at Cardross, a mile or so up the River Leven, affording easy access (possibly within a 15-minute fast ride) to the castle as a place of refuge in case of trouble.
- The castle was of importance as a secure place where high-value State prisoners could be lodged.
- The castle is an important example of the evolution of an ancient fort, into a medieval castle, then adapted for post-medieval military use, as a batteried gun-platform defending a key strategic location. From the 1600s on, the castle acted as an artillery fortification to guard the upper reaches of the River Clyde and Glasgow against an invasion fleet and attacks on shipping, as well as against domestic enemies.
- The gun batteries are a prominent feature of the castle today, some with fugitive evidence of earlier artillery structures. They have the potential to illustrate the development of gunpowder weaponry from late medieval times until the 19th century.
- The development of the castle illustrates how the place was shaped by major geo-political events. Firstly, following the Union of the Crowns in 1603; secondly in the 1730s as a consequence of the ongoing Jacobite threat;

thirdly, during the French wars around 1800, and finally during the First and Second World Wars and subsequent shift of function of the castle as an ancient monument.

- The castle is of significance as a focal point for the patrimony of the people of Dumbarton and the wider county, as a picturesque landscape feature in art, and as a focus for a renewed interest in Scottish heritage since the 19th century.
- There has long been a significant connection between the castle and the nearby burgh. This is underlined by the fact that the arrival of a new unit at the castle was announced at the burgh cross by a non-commissioned officer (NCO) with a drummer. In later times married soldiers lodged with their families in the town, and the garrison relied on the town for the usual recreations of soldiers.
- The castle has the potential to illustrate the development of military fortifications especially in the 1600s and 1700s, through the key works there by a number of leading military engineers of their day, including: Captain John Slezer in the 1670s and 80s; his successor Captain Theodore Dury (early 1700s); Captain John Romer (1720s and 30s); and General William Skinner Chief Royal Engineer of Great Britain from 1757 until his death in 1780.
- The castle's dramatic setting and its patina of age has stimulated the imaginations of artists, poets, composers and monarchs.
- As the town grew, the castle became a focus for training by local part-time volunteer artillery units, themselves an expression of popular patriotism and civic pride.
- The place is of significance in how it illustrates changing national attitudes to the heritage, seen in the shift of function in 1909 away from the castle's role as a military fortress to instead becoming an ancient monument. This philosophical shift was reinforced in the 1920s with the dramatic removal of military era buildings, seen at the time as modern incongruities, obscuring the history and character of the castle, and favouring one era over another.

- Dumbarton Rock is of importance to rock-climbers as the home of Scottish bouldering, as the lowlands training ground for generations of rock climbers.

2. Assessment of values

2.1 Background



Figure 2: Oblique aerial view of Dumbarton Castle. (DP 189860) © Crown Copyright: HES

The ancient fortress of Dumbarton Rock stands guard at the point where the River Leven flows into the mighty River Clyde. Its strategic importance was enhanced by its location on these two navigable rivers, the Leven with access to Loch Lomond and Stirling and overlooking the Clyde's major deep water anchorage. The strategic importance was enhanced by access to the road to Argyll and the West Highlands. Dumbarton had been the last stop for shipping before Glasgow, until the opening of the first parts of the Clyde channel (Lang Dyke) in 1773. The castle, therefore, protected one of the major trading and industrial arteries in the country. In part it owed its strategic significance to its proximity to the ford across the Clyde at

Dumbuck (2km to the east), which, until the channel was artificially deepened in recent times, was the lowest crossing point of the river. The rivers almost encircled the Rock at high tides into the 1600s.

The Rock is likely to have been a fort of the pre-Roman IA Dumnonnii tribe, and as such is amongst the few places with the longest recorded history of fortification in Britain.[5] Dumbarton enters history in the aftermath of the Roman era in Britain as the capital of a polity of the Britons. Their territory was bounded by the Gaelic Scots of Dalriada to the west, and by the Picts to the north and east. This iconic site unsurprisingly abounds with myths and legends, including as the birthplace of St Patrick, along with Arthurian associations.

The place is associated with events dating to as early as the early to mid-400s when St Patrick reproached King Coroticus for capturing and enslaving people from his fledgling Christian communities across the sea in Ireland. Though this is not specifically tied to Dumbarton until around AD 900 (see *Legendary association* under *2.3 Historical values*). The fort is recorded in the early 700s by the Venerable Bede, calling it *Al Cluith* - Clyde Rock – describing it as the capital, 'a strongly defended centre of the Britons'. The placename is also often referred to as *Alt Clut or Al Clud*. After the capture and destruction of Dumbarton by a Viking army from Dublin in 870, the centre seems to have moved east with the emergence of the kingdom of Strathclyde and *Alt Clut* was no longer mentioned. Small-scale excavations carried out by Professor Alcock in 1974–5 revealed the remains of an early medieval rampart on the Beak, as well as finds of imported Mediterranean

[5] There is possibly a very early reference to Dumbarton from the middle of the second century in Ptolemy's *Geography*, a world atlas incorporating information on northern Britain which is agreed to derive from information from campaigns conducted by the Roman legions around AD 85. On the north bank of the Clyde, Ptolemy places a location which he calls the *Lemannonios kolpos*, the Greek name for 'Lemannonic Gulf' (Ptolemy, *Geography* II.2). Although Ptolemy's Scottish coordinates are famously skewed, the name translates to 'the bay of the Leven' (*Leamhain* in Gaelic, earlier **Lemannon*) and could refer to the natural harbour at the river-mouth, guarded by Dumbarton Rock. Although four different Highland lochs have also been identified as possible locations by historians. If the reference is indeed of Dumbarton Rock, this would mean that the Romans would have known Dumbarton Rock at least as a landmark, if not as a place of military strength.

pottery and Merovingian glass. Level terraces on slopes could also have been used for occupation.

With the rising predominance of Gaelic culture, the place became known as *Dùn Breatann*, 'Fortress of the Britons', although this was not documented until the 12th century. The castle and town were still called 'Dumbritton' around 1700. Recumbent burial monuments found at the site help confirm its continuing status as an early historic elite site, as these are only found at high status sites in the kingdom.

It is not entirely clear when or how Strathclyde became part of what we now consider the Scottish kingdom. There are no more mentions of the kingdom of Strathclyde after circa 1050.[6] By around 1060 Malcolm III (1058 to 1093) seemed to have had control of at least the heartland of Strathclyde territory.[7]

Dùn Breatann became the focus of the earldom of Lennox, the successor in lordly and administrative terms to the old kingdom of Strathclyde.[8]

During Alexander II's reign (1214 to 1249), Dumbarton Castle had been firmly established as a royal castle.[9] The development of the castle can be unpicked from medieval records, while the post-medieval military development has been summarised in a number of reports commissioned by HES.[10] These are best read in

[6] Taylor 2006, 25. In 1054 a Mael Coluim *regis Cumbrorum filius* ('son of the king of the Cumbrians') is mentioned, believed to have been the son of Owain Foel of the dynasty of Strathclyde/Cumbria (Edmonds 2014). Strathclyde is often referred to as 'Cumbria', not to be confused with the later English county of Cumberland or the modern English local authority region of Cumbria as both only represent part of the land that at times comprised the kingdom (Oram 2011, 7). Some historians suggested that the terms are interchangeable as they refer to the same territory, others believed they applied to different territories. More recently it has been suggested that the terms evolved into the other through expansion of the kingdom of Strathclyde beyond Clydesdale, therefore necessitating a change in nomenclature (Edmonds 2014).

[7] Oram 2011, 7.

[8] Taylor 2006, 23.

[9] PoMS, 1/7/70 (RRS, iii, no. 70) and PoMS, H 1/7/274 (RRS, iii, no. 267).

[10] Unpublished reports 2020.

parallel with a series of drawings and plans from the 1670s by the military engineer and draughtsman John Slezer.[11]

In theory, as a royal castle Dumbarton stood alongside **Edinburgh** and **Stirling** in status. However, it was never developed to the same extent, although it would have contained some buildings worthy of its royal status, including a hall, chambers and kitchens. By the later 1300s these were mirrored between twin residences at the Wallace Tower by the north entry, and the gatehouse hall on the south riverside approach. Monarchs stayed here on very few occasions, and even when in the area often chose to live in more comfortable accommodation nearby or in the burgh.

The castle was held by Keepers for the Crown – responsible for upkeep, for maintaining a small permanent staff and garrison there, occasionally mustering a larger garrison, and making it ready for any royal visit. The keepership was a high-status role and so the incumbents were at least a senior knight, and sometimes nobles of higher rank. Dumbarton is located within the ancient lordship of Lennox, and so the earls of Lennox had a strong ancestral claim to this position from an early date. Often the keeper would not be present and so a Constable or assistant keeper would be in charge.[12] The Exchequer Rolls record income from lands and payments to support the keeper, and also to support the chaplain serving in the castle chapel of St Patrick.[13]

The castle also served as the seat of the sheriffdom, with the keeper responsible for local administration and justice over the burgh and local units of royal territory. The ancient province of Lennox, centred on the Vale of Leven, was restructured in the 19th century as the county of Dumbartonshire. The title of duke of Lennox exists to this day.

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[11] Some of his engravings can be viewed online: NLS, Slezer's Scotland (digital.nls.uk) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

[12] Details of the keepers are recorded by both Hodge (2019) and Pearce (2019) in their research reports for HES.

[13] HS 1994, 197.

The castle was divided into two main spaces, with the Nether Bailey fronted on the Clyde-side by the gatehouse hall, and the Over Bailey being the flat upper ground between and beneath the crags culminating at the Wallace Tower and the north entry. The dividing point between the two parts was the 14th century portcullis arch. Late medieval inventories and other records are difficult to unpick where these refer to halls and the various chambers within these. However there seems to have been three halls in the later medieval castle, one in the Nether Bailey Clyde-side gatehouse, another being the Windy Hall in the Over Bailey, along with a hall on the first floor of the Wallace Tower. The former was the domain of the keeper, while the latter is likely to have housed the military commander of the small garrison.

Dumbarton was one of the few castles not dismantled towards the end of Robert I's (1306 to 29) reign and was instead repaired and refortified. These works were continued under his son David II (1329 to 71).

The key surviving components of the medieval castle are the fragment of the base of the Wallace Tower at the north entry, the 14th century portcullis arch spanning the gap between the twin peaks, and the 16th century guardhouse below it, as seen in Slezer's engraving. Slezer also depicts the imposing lost medieval gatehouse hall, or watergate, on the south side standing forward of the curtain wall, with a large round-headed gateway, flanked to either side by the remnants of twin drum towers, reminiscent of James IV's forework at **Stirling Castle**. Based on historic plans, it is located beneath the Governor's House.[14]

As the significance of Dumbarton as a royal embarkation place and base for military use declined in the 1500s, its importance as a prison and fortress increased. Prisoners were mostly chiefs and aristocrats, though it also received 'common thieves and murderers'.[15] Following the Union of the Crowns in 1603 the castle lost its strategic value as a gateway to and from France, as well as its primary function as a bulwark against English raids up the west coast.

[14] Kirkdale 2013.

[15] Pearce 2019, 36.

A period of neglect followed, necessitating a major programme of repairs recorded in 1617–18 possibly prompted by the planned Jubilee visit to Edinburgh of James VI/I. Further repairs took place in 1629 in advance of Charles I's visit to Scotland in 1633, at which time the castle was reported as being in bad state, with a hall partly collapsed, and the brewhouse, bakehouse, barns and stables all ruinous.[16]

After the Restoration in 1660, the Scottish army was put on a regular footing, and Dumbarton took on a new role with its standing garrison policing highland glens and rounding up malefactors. The size of the garrison fluctuated depending on external circumstances such as financial retrenchment or threat of attack.

The Covenanters Uprising of 1679 prompted the building of new south gateway and defences, adapting the medieval arrangement which may have been recorded on the eve of destruction by Slezer. In 1681 the garrison stood at 35, while after the Glorious Revolution of 1689 the strength was increased to 60.

From the exile of the last Stuart James VII/II (1685–88) and the ensuing Jacobite risings, Dumbarton played a key role in the defence of the realm against this new threat, as the fortress closest to the South-West Highlands.[17] However, by the end of the 1600s buildings, contents, munitions and guns were all in a parlous state, showing that the castle was either of little military importance in the eyes of the government or (perhaps more likely) that the necessary resources were not available to rectify the situation. Even after the 1708 Rising the castle was considered to be in too ruinous a state to be an effective prison.

Following the 1715 Rising, General Wade produced plans for the refortification of the key Scottish castles, which were put into effect in the 1730s. The place we see today was largely created at this time. Captain John Romer took on the challenging task of adapting a difficult site to contemporary defensive needs, the main fortification being King George's Battery featuring Romer's signature component of domed sentinel boxes.

[16] MacPhail 1979, 109.

[17] Tabraham 2005, 41.

The last time the guns were fired in anger (before the Second World War) was in September 1715 when the Vale of Leven was threatened by a McGregor Jacobites raid. The Castle was warned and fired off a salvo which caused the raiders to retreat.

Becoming a Property in Care

Towards the end of the 19th and early 20th century, military presence receded at the castle, and the War Office was considering its options for Dumbarton Castle. This sparked multiple dismayed and impassioned newspaper articles which indicate that the desire was strong among the local community to keep military presence active.[18] The Town Council and County Council formed a committee in 1907 to explore possible future uses of the castle.[19]

Ownership was transferred from the War Office to the Office of Works two years later in 1909. It was briefly returned to military use during the First World War as a Head Quarters, and depot for 3/9 reserve battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The enthusiasm of military presence at the castle seemed to have waned somewhat at this stage. Letters from an officer stationed at Dumbarton in 1915 hint at a sense of indifference to their presence and possibly a growing fatigue with the war and its upheavals.[20] It was chosen as the location for a Fete in summer 1916 in support of wounded sailors and soldiers belonging to or connected with Dumbartonshire which was well received and raised a substantial sum of money. When the Fete was proposed in November 1915, it was also seen as a good opportunity to stimulate interest in the old historic castle.[21]

After the war, work began in 1923 to demolish the 'New' barrack block (the Master Gunner's Quarters had already been removed) – 'to create an ancient monument'.[22] The hospital was also demolished, and the war-time huts removed. The castle was

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[18] For example, The Lennox Herald, 08 June 1889, p. 4 *The Dismantling of Dumbarton Castle.*

[19] NAS GD260/6/14 and MW1/1229.

[20] Letters from Captain William Stavert Ferrie (1889-1958) in Carswell 2026.

[21] Kirkintilloch Herald, 03 November 1915, p. 4, *Town Talk.*

[22] *The Scotsman*, 2 March 1923 in NAS MW1/1229.

taken back into military control at the outbreak of the Second World War, with an anti-aircraft battery installed on the Beak in 1940-41 (now removed).

In 1971 Dumbarton Castle was listed at category A and scheduled in 1994. As part of the Dual Designation project, it was removed from the list as a listed building in 2018. It remains legally recognised as being of national importance through its designation as a scheduled monument. As such it is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. The Act seeks to protect scheduled monuments by making it an offence to carry out works[23] without gaining prior written permission, in the form of scheduled monument consent, obtained from Historic Environment Scotland.

Conservation work in the castle continued throughout this period. Since 2015 a major conservation project was completed on the external fabric of the Governor's House, conservation of the Grand Magazine, power supply and dehumidification work to the Guardhouse, and major geotechnical rock anchoring at the fracturing sections of the Rock's cliffs. Ongoing conservation projects include a masonry conservation project on the King George Battery, and future planned roof works to the French Prison. The latter project is the first phase of a multi-phase conservation project on the French Prison. Opportunities are being taken through signage to communicate positive message regarding best practice in conservation and management, and the fact that HES is investing in the future conservation of the castle. Extensive refurbishment and conservation work was carried out in the interior of the Governor's House in 2024/25 to allow for a refreshed exhibition on its ground floor. This included improving the environmental conditions of the exhibition room to allow for the safe display of associated artefacts. The exhibition *Rock of Ages* opened in July 2025.

[23] Works can include anything that would add to, flood, take away from or damage a monument. It is also illegal to carry out works which may detect metals including certain types of geophysical survey, without obtaining consent beforehand. For more information, visit HES, Scheduled monument consent (hisotricenvironment.scot) (accessed: 06 May 2026).

The main phases

Phase	Description
Phase 1	Likely prehistoric fort
Phase 2: circa 100-400	Iron Age Hillfort dated by finds of Romano-British pottery
Phase 3: 500s-800s	Early medieval citadel fort for the kings of *Alt Clut*, enclosed by timber-laced rampart, evidence of imported foreign ceramics, fine glassware, and evidence of high-status precious metal-working.
Phase 4: 870 and after	Destruction by the Viking army in 870, followed by likely reconstruction at an unknown date. By around 1000 an elite fort once again, with chapel and burial ground.
Phase 5: 1100s	Castle of the earls of Lennox.
Phase 6: by 1220s	Becomes a royal castle, followed by construction of new north and south gates, hall and chamber, and out-buildings.
Phase 7: later 1300s	Construction of Portcullis Gate and Wallace Tower. Possible construction of White Crag tower. Windy Hall in Over Bailey.
Phase 8: 1400s	Major rebuilding of south main gatehouse complex, possibly to be identified with 'Red Hall'.
Phase 9: mid 1400s	Major building works including 1456 rebuilding of chapel of St Patrick.
Phase 10: circa 1500	Construction of the upper guardhouse on the long stair up to the portcullis gate.
Phase 11: 1546-50	Large sums spent on works including floating timbers down from Loch Lomond side for buildings and gun carriages.

Phase 12: mid 1600s	Start of military garrison phase, existing medieval royal buildings initially converted for military use. North gate reconstructed
Phase 13: 1677-79	Construction of a 'Great Fort' and a rampart with gun batteries, replacing the south gateway and turf wall. This was around the time that Slezer recorded his views of the castle.[24]
Phase 14: 1688	Repair contract survives for works to the guardhouse and long stair in the Nether Bailey, 'little ammunition house' (magazine) by the White Tower, construction of the 'new house at the loch' that is the barracks/ensigns' quarters in Over Bailey, repairs to the Wallace Tower, and mend the 'high ammunition house' presumed to be the first large powder magazine (lost) on the Beak.[25] It is possible that the outer rampart which wrapped around the front of the gatehouse was added at this time, complete with a new outer gate, and a frontal polygonal turret.[26]
Phase 15: circa 1708	Second powder magazine (lost) ordered to be built on the Beak.
Phase 16: circa 1735	Demolition of much of the medieval castle, including the gatehouse to make way for major programmes of military fortifications. Construction of King George's, Spanish and Bower batteries. Construction of Governor's House. North gate blocked, but retaining some access function in the form of a small postern gate.

[24] NLS, Slezer's Scotland: Dumbarton - 'The Prospect of Ye Castle of Dumbritton from Ye East' (digital.nls.uk) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

[25] Tabraham 2005, 41.

[26] NLS MS.1647 Z.02/71a, A Draught of Dumbarton Castle Anno 1708 (maps.nls.uk) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

Phase 17: 1748	Surviving powder magazine built on the Beak.
Phase 18: 1760s	Old Barracks/French Prison built.
Phase 19: circa 1794-1800	The Duke of York's, Duke of Argyll's and Prince of Wales's batteries constructed. A large New Barracks constructed on site of the Wallace Tower in 1794, with cookhouse and ablutions. Master Gunner's quarters and conjoined armoury built in Over Bailey. Hospital built just west of Governor's House. Last vestiges of north gate blocked and demolished.
Phase 20: circa 1850	New outer perimeter wall and gate built.
Phase 21: 1914-18	Returned to military use, various temporary hutted buildings added.
Phase 22: 1920s	Demolition of First World War huts and many of the historic military buildings by Office of Works, including the main north barracks, to reveal ruins of Wallace Tower and the Old Entry, thus emphasising antiquity at the expense of the later military phase.
Phase 23: 1939-45	Renewed military occupation; anti-aircraft gun installed 1941.
Phase 24: 1946 onwards	Removal of Second World War structures and embedded into State care with ongoing conservation work.

2.2 Evidential values

The evidential value of the site is extremely high. The limited excavations done in 1974-5 and other small-scale archaeological works undertaken at the site, showcase the potential for archaeological evidence surviving at Dumbarton Castle. This can aid our understanding of the early use of Dumbarton Rock of which no or only little

structures survive above ground. It can also shine a light on the life-styles and influences of the people that lived on the Rock.

The surviving structures, together with the surviving documentations of plans and inventories, may also yield important clues as to the arrangements and uses they had over time.

Archaeological evidence

Limited excavations in 1974–75 revealed remains of a timber-laced stone and earth rampart on the lower edge of the east side of the rock, about 2m wide by 2m plus in height probably surmounted by a breastwork. 1st–4th century Romano-British fine ceramic tableware was found, along with fragments of B ware amphorae dating to around AD 500 imported from the east Mediterranean, which would have contained wine, olive oil or other goods. Tableware (E ware) imported from Gaul during the 6th to early 8th centuries was also found, along with fine imported glassware bowls, cups, beakers – all indicative of feasting. Small thin-walled crucibles were found, providing evidence for fine metalworking, all characteristic of high-status royal household.[27] Gold and silver has been identified in some of the crucibles – gold at this time being restricted to sites with royal connections.[28] This helps characterise the fortress as a royal trading emporia with access to Anglo-Saxon England, Ireland, Atlantic Europe and the Mediterranean, with an excellent anchorage in the bay. A place for feasting, redistribution and gift-giving.

Evidence for a partially vitrified timber-laced rampart was found in a small trench outside medieval and later wall at the north-east, possibly destroyed in the siege of AD 780 or after the Viking siege of 870. Finds from the destruction of the rampart include a Norse lead weight and an iron sword pommel.[29]

The excavator identified an inner oval citadel area, enclosed by a rampart, in the location of the later powder magazine. However, the excavations were too limited in

[27] Lowe 1999, 18.

[28] Ewan Campbell personal comments.

[29] All the archaeological finds are curated in The Hunterian Museum (accessed: 04 June 2026).

scale as to produce conclusive evidence. A lot of medieval artefacts were recovered which remain largely unpublished, including, for example, some chainmail which can be dated to the Wars of Independence.[30]



Figure 3: Fragment of a cross-slab at Dumbarton Castle dating to AD 900 – 1100. (HI00050633) © Crown Copyright HES.

Fragments of two recumbent cross-slabs grave covers associated with the Govan School of carving of around 1000, were found (date of discovery uncertain) in the garden area behind the Governor's House. These provide important evidence for an early medieval chapel and burial ground. This area therefore has the potential to contain important buried archaeology.

[30] Haughton 1981.

Further areas with high archaeological potential are: the north entrance area, the Over Bailey, and the area in front of the Governor's House which may contain parts of the lost medieval gatehouse hall and Watergate.

Upstanding remains and documentary evidence

There are quite a few plans and inventories surviving which can in conjunction with the surviving structures shed light on the history and uses of the castle throughout its different phases. Indeed, as so much of the medieval royal castle has been entirely lost, Slezer's drawings are key to achieving a glimpse of this before the demolition of the medieval buildings to make way for the new artillery defences.

Slezer's drawing of 1670s, for example, indicates a group of buildings behind the fortified Watergate south entrance. These could include the great hall recorded here in the 1460s when it was extensively restored by James III. This may be one and the same as the historical Red Hall with legendary Arthurian associations (for more detail on the association with King Arthur and Merlin see below under *2.3 Historical value*). An accommodation block or chamber would have been associated with this, along with necessary kitchens and other outbuildings. The historic chapel may also have stood in this area, now the site of the demolished later military hospital and terraced Governor's garden. This may have become the residence of the post-medieval garrison commander before the Governor's House was built.

Of considerable archaeological potential is the structure of the Wallace Tower. Detailed structural analysis of this may reveal further evidence of the dating and development of this building.

An intriguing possibility is the location of the camp from the Viking siege of 870, topography dictating that this might be to the north or in the area of the football stadium.

The surviving structures from the 18th century help us understand the developing needs of the military during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the continued role the castle played in protecting the Clyde estuary and later the local shipyards.

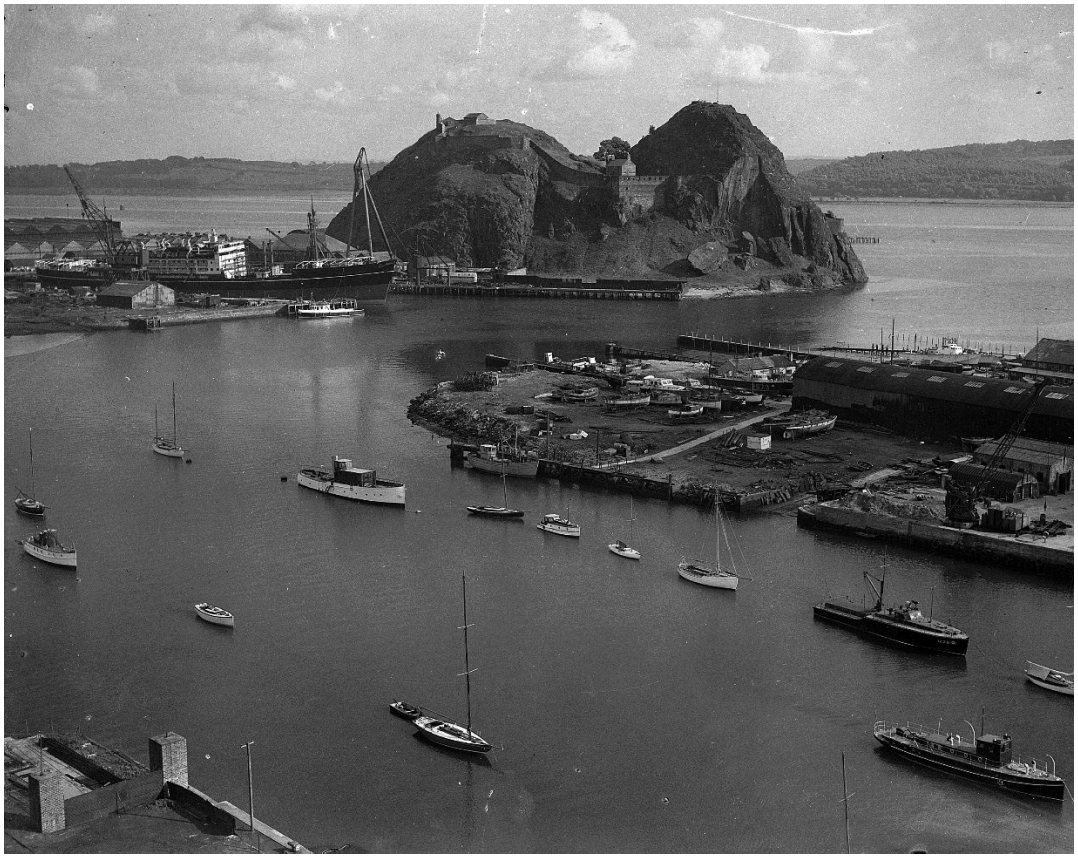


Figure 4: Dumbarton Castle and the shipyard to its north. Photograph from around 1950. (DP 609795) © Licensed by The Scotsman Publications Ltd (Records of the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN), Edinburgh, Scotland).

2.3 Historical values

Dumbarton Castle has significant historic value, especially as precious little physical evidence survives of the prehistoric, early medieval and medieval history, adding greater weight to the historical understanding of the place in its wider context.

- One of the most significant events in Dumbarton's early history is the well-documented Viking siege of 870. The length of the siege (four months) suggests how well defended the site was and how big a prize it was deemed to make such a long siege worthwhile.
- The site is associated with several famous historic and legendary figures, for example, William Wallace, King Robert I (the Bruce), King James IV, Mary Queen of Scots, St Patrick, King Arthur and Merlin to name but a few.

- It is situated at a uniquely strategic location. It served as an access point for Scottish kings to the Highland and Islands of Scotland that evaded the rule of the Scottish crown for a long while. It also served as an anchorage for key diplomatic and military contact with Ireland and France.
- It is one of the few sites that has records of women working which are rare to find in Scottish royal building accounts.
- It was regarded as a secure location where high-value State prisoners could be lodged
- Dumbarton Castle was a garrison fortress throughout most of its existence, and it saw military action as recently as the Second World War. It has a longer documented history as a stronghold than any other place in Scotland.

Prehistoric and early medieval

Fraser proposes that into the 500s Clyde Rock was a royal fortress within the successor kingdom to what had been the territory of the Roman-era Dumnonnii tribe, whose territory once stretched from the Clyde to Strathearn.[31] In post-Roman times this was associated with the Maiatai people, not to be confused with the later kingdom of Strathclyde. A fort must have existed here which was recorded as being besieged by king Áedán of Dalriada when Riderch (sometimes Rhydderch) ruled at Dumbarton around 600.[32] By the time of king Riderch, referred to as king of Alt Clut, much of this territory had been taken by Bernicia and/or the Picts, with just a rump surviving around Dumbarton.

The Annals of Ulster record the destruction of the fort in a siege of 780. It was rebuilt, and there are good contemporary records of it being besieged by a Viking force in 870. The siege lasted for four months, indicative of what a major prize this was. The Vikings completely sacked and destroyed it, taking with them a host of captives.

[31] Fraser 2009, 136.

[32] Fraser 2009, 133.

There are no more references to the kings of Alt Clut after 870, and around this time we see a shift in power east into Clydesdale and south into Cumbria with the emergence of the kingdom of Strathclyde. Dumbarton is no longer the chief place, and never was the capital of the kingdom of Strathclyde as is oft repeated. In the 10th century the transition to Gaelic language and culture begins in this area which became known as Lennox, moving towards incorporation into the expanding kingdom of Alba. The name of the Rock became *Dùn Breatann* in Gaelic. However, the continuity of defended settlement on the Rock is shown by the presence of carved stone grave covers dated to around 1000, believed to have been found in the garden behind the Governor's House, the possible location for a chapel dedicated to St Patrick. These are parts of two recumbent cross-slabs carved in relief on one broad face, with a cross and panels of interlace relief decoration. These are identified as products of the so-called Govan School and confirm its continuing status as an early historic elite site, as these are only found at high status sites in the kingdom.[33]

Legendary associations

St Patrick

The area around Dumbarton has strong connections to St Patrick. When he was a bishop in Ireland, St Patrick famously wrote a letter to a ruler in western Britain named Coroticus or Ceretic who had kidnapped Irish converts to Christianity. From AD 900 and possibly earlier, Irish historians identified Coroticus as an early king of Dumbarton and by assertion that St Patrick himself came from the Dumbarton area. Nearby Kilpatrick was identified as his birthplace. This is not supported by current scholarship. However, this gave rise to an origin legend for the Rock itself - the story goes that the Devil was so incensed at Patrick's sanctity and success in preaching the gospel that he sent witches against him. In order to escape, St Patrick quickly set

[33] See Trove, 353219, Dumbarton Castle, Dumbarton Castle 2 (trove.scot) (accessed: 26 August 2025).

sail for Ireland in a boat. The witches hurled a giant boulder to sink him but missed and this boulder became Dumbarton Rock.[34]

Joscelin of Furness who wrote a hagiography of St Patrick, visited Dumbarton in the twelfth century to collect stories from locals about the saint. Though it is unclear if he really did come from the area, it clearly shows that the fortress and the area around it were a setting for stories that were told and believed among the local people. Numerous church dedications to the saint also confirms a close association of the saint to the area.

King Arthur and Merlin

Similarly, there is an association with the legendary figures of King Arthur and Merlin from the Celtic version of a wider international body of tales and literature. Merlin, also known as Myrddin Wyllt, was said to have lived at Dumbarton Castle for a while under King Riderch before he went to live in the wild as a prophet and recluse.[35]

The association with King Arthur varies between identifying it as a location for battle[36] and stories evolving around *An Talla Dearg* 'the Red Hall'.[37] According to some traditions this Red Hall was located at Dumbarton Castle, most explicitly by a seventeenth century genealogy of the Clan Campbell chiefs who claim descent from 'King Arthur of the round table' through his son, Smerevie Mor. According to the source it was said that Smerevie Mor 'was born in Dumbarton on the south syde thereof, in a place called the redd hall or in Irish Tour in Talla Dherig that is the Tower of the redd hall or redd house'.[38] The Gaelic reference to *Tùr an Talla Dheirg* seems to suggest a connection between this legendary hall to the 'Red Tower'

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[34] Eydmann 2019.

[35] Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example, has him closely associated with King Riderch in his *Vita Merlini* in which Merlin's sister is married to the King.

[36] Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae,* for example, has Arthur fight against the Scots and Picts to help his besieged nephew in '*Alclud*' and pursue them with no mercy (Geoffrey and Thorpe 1968, 218-219).

[37] MacPhail 1979, 3-4.

[38] Duncanson quoted in Sellar 1973, 113.

documented in 1451,[39] and was supposedly roughly where the modern Governor's House is located.[40] Whether or not the stories of the Red Hall owe anything to earlier traditions of Arthur, they came to define the identity of the fortress as seen by the people of the medieval Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* – at least as far as the storytellers and their audiences were concerned. It is generally accepted by modern historians that Dumbarton Castle was linked to King Arthur in Highland tradition.

Later medieval: A royal castle and safe anchorage

The need for a strong fortress at Dumbarton arose from the geopolitics around 1100, as it stood close to the new border between Scotland and the Norwegian hegemony of Argyll and the Isles. Dumbarton Castle was therefore confirmed as a royal castle in 1238 when King Alexander II excluded Dumbarton Castle from the earldom of Lennox when he granted it to Maldoven, son of Alwin, earl of Lennox.[41] After the Norse defeat at the Battle of Largs in 1263, the area west of Dumbarton was effectively under the control of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles, outwith the control of the Scottish Crown. Consequently, the castle became of increased strategic importance as a key border post for the Highlands, and as a postern backdoor into the realm.

From 1488, King James IV used Dumbarton Castle and its safe anchorage as a springboard from which to launch several expeditions against the rebellious Lords of the Isles. The town of Dumbarton became a bustling naval base, with naval vessels being repaired and provisioned, and with James overseeing ship-building works on the Leven. James was a regular visitor, leading naval campaigns from here against the Isles. In 1495 he sailed to Argyll from here to finally resolve the problem of the rebellious MacDonalds lords. It is interesting to note that he was almost always accommodated elsewhere in the burgh or else in nearby lordly houses and only a visitor to the castle; this may indicate a lack of appropriate, comfortable royal accommodation.

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[39] Exchequer Rolls, vol. v, 422.

[40] MacPhail 1979, 3.

[41] PoMS, H 1/7/274 (RRS, iii, no. 267).

In general, Dumbarton was a vital anchorage at the centre not only of foreign trade but also key to diplomatic and military contact with France. In 1436 Princess Margaret famously set sail from Dumbarton to France after James I, her father, held a race on the Clyde to determine the fastest vessel to take her on her journey to marry the Dauphin of France Louis, son of King Charles VII. Similarly, this was the go-to place of departure for stealthy exits by high-ranking personalities heading to safety in France, to evade capture by the English – most famously the five-year old Mary, Queen of Scots in 1548. There was two-way traffic: John Stewart, duke of Albany and Regent during James V's minority came and went from the castle on his French trips. In May 1545 a French army sailed in via Dumbarton with money and provisions to fight the English.

Wars of Independence

The castle held out for two months against the English in 1296, when all other castles had surrendered underlining its strength, though it ultimately also fell under English control. William Wallace was captured by the keeper Sir John Menteith, who had been appointed by King Edward I of England, in 1305 and may have been imprisoned here overnight before being sent south, however, this is unclear. The speed of his arrival in London for trial after his capture, would only allow time for a very brief spell (if at all) in Dumbarton. The epic poem *The Wallace,* composed in the late 15th century, also connects William Wallace to Dumbarton, this time as a builder of a house of stone:

> *Twa monethis still he duelt in Dunbertane;*
> *A hous he foundyt apon the Roch of stayne.*
> *Men left he thar till byg it to the hycht,*
> *Syn to the March agayn he rydis rycht.*
>
> (Two months more he dwelt in Dumbarton,
> And on the Rock he built a house of stone
> He left men there to finish it to the top
> And then he rode again to the Border)[42]

[42] Quote and translation in Hodge 2019.

Both traditions confirm that the association with Wallace is strong at Dumbarton with the 'Wallace Tower' a lasting reminder of it. The so-called Wallace sword which is now displayed at the Wallace Monument in Stirling, had been kept and displayed at Dumbarton Castle prior to its relocation in 1888.

Robert I, another famous historic figure of the first War of Independence, also had strong connections to the area. He reclaimed the castle in 1308 and unlike other castles, it was not slighted, possibly because of its strategic location which allowed communication with Ireland and the western isles of Scotland.[43] He was known to have been in residence there.[44] The ruined medieval Cardross Old parish church in Levengrove Park 750m to the north-west, across the mouth of the Leven,[45] was close to the site of Bruce's lost manor house where he died, and his body was eviscerated and embalmed there prior to transport to Dunfermline Abbey. There are hints in documentation that his entrails were buried in the church in sight of his royal castle, a place of refuge in case of trouble.

The great strength of the castle offered again a safe refuge in the 1330s for young David II and the court, when faced with an English invasion during the Second War of Scottish Independence (1332 to 1357). Dumbarton was also named as one of a handful of strongholds which remained in the control of Scottish garrisons loyal to him in 1333.

Mary Queen of Scots

The infant Mary Queen of Scots and her mother, Mary of Guise, fled to the castle in 1548 during the so-called Rough Wooing, started by Henry VIII in 1544, after the English army got within a few miles of **Stirling Castle**. De Guise spent six months at Dumbarton with her daughter awaiting French ships, feeling safe and at home thanks to a French guard in the castle. They were spied on, and their enemies may have considered capturing the child Queen, but the strength of the castle made this

[43] Cornell 2008, 239.

[44] Dennison and Coleman 1999.

[45] Trove, 42348, Cardross, Old Parish Church (trove.scot) (accessed: 26 August 2025).

impossible.[46] Eventually four galleys arrived and took Mary to France. When Mary returned in 1561, however, she sailed into Leith, Dumbarton's days as a royal 'gateway' into Scotland were over. She visited in 1563 during a royal progress through Lennox and Argyll, and dined on salmon, eggs and white wine.[47]

During the civil war that followed Queen Mary's flight to England in 1568, the castle was held by the 'Queen's Party', including John Hamilton Archbishop of St Andrews. The castle was retaken for the infant James VI (the 'King's Party') in the early morning of 1 April 1571, in a bold feat of arms involving Captain Thomas Crawford of Jordanhill and 100 men, making a daring ascent of the precipitous north-east side. The Archbishop was among those captured and later executed.

Women workers[48]

Women were employed to carry sand and lime from the boats to the places on the site where male builders mixed mortar. This is unusual and was probably due to the difficulties of the terrain. Perhaps the work involved carrying sand and lime on steep and narrow paths where wheelbarrows could not access.

The women were from Dumbarton, as their surnames show. They may have been young women, the husband of one woman died in 1679 nearly fifty years after her work is recorded, although she had died in 1651. The women were paid less than men on the site, but the work may have paid better than agricultural labour or textile work.

Throughout different periods of building activities there are women recorded in the *Accounts of the Masters of Work* showing that this was not an isolated event. Eight women were recorded in 1617 and their leader and spokeswoman was Christene Buchanan. Fourteen were listed in 1629 and eighteen in 1633.[49]

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[46] Pearce 2019, 35.

[47] Small 1927.

[48] The following paragraphs are part of Pearce 2019.

[49] Full list of names can be found in Pearce 2019, 27-28. A little more detail is available for Janet Thome, Margaret Robisone and Margaret Paul, all three women working at the castle in 1629 and Margaret Paul also in 1633.

Other records of women working are rare in Scottish royal building accounts. A gang of women carried small stones in baskets and buckets on Inchkeith Island in 1555. This was another fortress built on a steep rocky outcrop.[50] Shortage of labour was probably not the reason women were employed at Dumbarton. In England, women and girls were employed at contemporary works at Bolsover Castle carrying sand and lime.[51] Medieval English records only occasionally include women, mixing mortar or carrying water at Woodstock Palace in 1271, and tasks like carrying straw for thatching, or moss for bedding tiles.[52]

Post-1660: Permanent garrisoned artillery fort

After the Restoration of 1660, the castle took on a new role within a national network of permanently garrisoned artillery forts at strategically important locations for a standing army in Scotland.[53] However, the castle was not sufficiently funded and maintaining it was problematic.

During the Jacobite Risings, particularly in 1715 and 1719, the castle was deemed 'a place of supreme importance' and consequently money was spent to refortify it. Lt-Gen. George Wade visited in 1724 and recommended major upgrading of the buildings and defences. The north defensive circuit was rebuilt in the late 1720s while the south and west defences were done in the 1730s. These included the arched main entrance, King George's Battery and the Spanish and Bower batteries which were built under the direction of Captain John Romer who was also responsible for designing much of the artillery defence along the north side of **Edinburgh Castle**.

The number of soldiers living or stationed at the castle fluctuated throughout the years, and put pressure on accommodation especially as the main barracks accommodation was still in poorly adapted medieval buildings – the gatehouse and

[50] Inchkeith, French Accounts, NRS E34/21 (3).

[51] Worsley 2000, 32; Worsley 2007, 34-5; Knoop 1936, 24-37.

[52] Salzman 1952, 78, 153.

[53] A more detailed summary on the post 1660 military history based on the Carswell reports is available in Appendix 4.

Wallace Tower. This was not improved until around 1760 when the Old Barracks (now known as the French Prison) was built. The Wallace Tower was only replaced as barrack accommodation around 1795 when it was demolished to make way for the New Barracks after the outbreak of war with Revolutionary France.

Similar to **Edinburgh** and **Stirling Castle**, which also turned from medieval power centres to British army barracks, Dumbarton Castle was also used as a base to recruit soldiers during the period of the British Empire.[54] Dumbarton Castle has one of the earlier examples when in 1747 Jacobite prisoners were held at the castle and recruited for deployment to South India.[55] Another example is the heavily understrength 74th Highlanders, who returned from seventeen years' service in India to recruit and were based at Dumbarton.[56]

Dumbarton Castle as a prison

Throughout the years Dumbarton Castle had housed many prisoners, however, after it had lost much of its strategic importance as the gateway to and from France or Spain towards the end of the sixteenth century, its value as a prison fortress rose. In the early years of the seventeenth century, it housed a considerable amount of notable prisoners, including Patrick Stewart, Earl of Orkney, who has been described as 'proud, avaricious, cruel and dissipated'. Patrick was arrested in 1609 and transferred to Dumbarton Castle from Edinburgh in 1612 where he remained for the most part and lived in relative comfort until 1614 when he was brought to Edinburgh to be tried and finally executed for high treason in February 1615.[57]

The castle was also used to imprison notable Jacobite leaders including local lairds with Jacobite sympathies and several senior Jacobite figures captured while on the

[54] This has been identified as a 'production' connection to the British Empire, which means a site where commercial, manufactured or human resources, derived from either empire imports or empire exports, are created, concentrated, organised and distributed. In the case of the major castles, production took the form of regimental manpower. See Mullen *et al* 2024, 32 for a full definition of typology of the connections between the British Empire and HES Properties in Care.

[55] Mullen *et al* 2024, 25 and 83.

[56] Carswell 2020b, 8, it is not entirely clear if they were based at the castle or in the town.

[57] MacPhail 1979, 96-100.

run after the defeat at Culloden. The most senior was William Murray, marquess of Tullibardine. Overall, 53 were held of which 12 escaped. Two gentleman Jacobite prisoners escaped in May 1746, the rope ladder apparently smuggled in under the skirts of a visiting sister. Low-ranking prisoners were likely to have been kept in the lower vaults of the Wallace Tower, while those of higher social status would have been kept in the upper rooms.

The prisoners included Aeneas MacDonald, one of the 'seven men of Moidart' who had accompanied Prince Charles Edward to Scotland in 1745, and Sir James Campbell of Auchinbreck, who maintained that 'the air of the place agreed with him and he much preferred it to any other'. He had lived comfortably at the castle, enjoying the company of his wife and three sons and at times by friends and neighbours, with his own cook and four servants in attendance.[58] Not all the prisoners were so fortunate, with some kept in the basement of the Wallace tower with no air and little food.[59]



Figure 5: View of the French Prison in 2021. (HI00135684) © Historic Environment Scotland.

[58] MacPhail 1979, 150.

[59] MacPheil 1979, 161.

A later famous prisoner was General Edouard Simon who was a French general. He was captured at the battle of Buçaco, Portugal in 1810, after being severely wounded. He was paroled in Hampshire but conspired with other officers to escape back over the channel with help from English people-smugglers. His conspiracy also involved providing intelligence for a French raid on the south coast. Simon escaped to London in early 1812 but was soon caught by Bow Street officers. Various Prisoner of War prisons had been opened in Scotland, but Simon was classed as a special case, a flight risk, so somewhere extremely secure was needed – Dumbarton Castle. The garrison was significantly enlarged for Simon's arrival in March 1812; he and his servant were confined in the two-storey building we now know as the French Prison, next to the barracks, in 'a suite of rooms with iron-stanchioned windows' and was 'vigilantly guarded by two soldiers with loaded arms and fixed bayonets'. He was allowed to exercise twice a day, from 10am to 12 noon and from 4 to 6pm, by walking to the top of the castle rock and back again.[60] He was released and returned to France under the terms of the Treaty of Paris May 1814.[61]

Dumbarton was even considered as a prison for Napoleon after his capture in 1815, but this was thought to be too contentious by the government of the time.

Following the Radical Rising of 1820, Dumbarton Castle was used to imprison suspected radicals. Eight suspected radical leaders were taken during raids in nearby Duntocher where local radicals were said to be planning an attack on the castle as part of a general uprising. Other prisoners came from Greenock after a crowd had attacked volunteers escorting prisoners who were freed in the process. All the prisoners held at the castle were eventually acquitted through lack of evidence. Nine such prisoners co-signed letters of appreciation to the Lieutenant

[60] The Napoleon Series, *A Traitorous Correspondence: General Edouard Simon and the Conspirators of Odiham* (napoleon-series.org) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

[61] Carswell provides full details of the contemporary orders issued concerning the guarding and imprisonment of the General (Carswell 2020d, 2).

Governor, Major General Ilay Ferrier, in recognition of the good treatment they had received during their confinement in the castle prior to their trial.[62]

Early tourism and transition to the Office of Works

From an early date, soldiers in the garrison could earn a few pence by showing visitors around the castle for a small fee. It was a popular destination for poets and artists (see *2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values* for more detail) who were inspired by its picturesque aesthetic. Many more visitors from Glasgow on steamers would have experienced the castle after the construction of Dumbarton Pier, completed in May 1875. The pier was located on the south side of the Rock and extended out '765 feet from the base of the Castle Rock'. Remains of that pier are still seen in Second World War air photos. The grassy space on that side of the Rock came to be known as the Pier Park.



Figure 6: Dumbarton Castle in 1941. The remains of the pier on the south side can be seen. © National Collection of Aerial Photography, [000-000-266-058]. All rights reserved.

[62] Ellis and Mac A'Ghobhainn 2016, 194-195 and 205-219; WDCA Ferrier Papers D21 *Petition to Lord Justice Clerk and Lords Commissioners of Justiciary*, 14 April 1820 and D22 and D23 *Letters of Thanks from Prisoners*, June 1820.

By the early 1900s the military function of the castle had been reduced to almost nothing, and with considerable local support the property was transferred to the Office of Works in 1909 'for the purpose of maintaining the ancient fortress as a place of historic interest'.[63] The Office changed the structural landscape significantly with the intention of highlighting the medieval aspects of its past. The New Barracks was removed in the 1920s to reveal the Wallace Tower, overlooking the old principal gateway to the castle. The Gunner's Quarters was also taken down the same year. Under the same series of changes made by the Office other structures were removed, including: the Hospital, the Armoury, the New Barracks, second Magazine and Gunner's Quarters.

First and Second World Wars

The castle quickly reverted to its primary role as a military base on the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Work then began to provide accommodation for 500 troops of the 9th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. 17 temporary wooden huts were erected in and around the castle, including a sergeant's mess, sleeping huts, ablution sheds, cook houses and latrines. An acetylene gas lighting plant was installed, in addition to existing buildings being repurposed to hold the troops. The Governor's House became the officer's accommodation, the hospital was converted to battalion offices, while the armoury, married quarters (New Barracks) and French Prison were all gutted and converted to sleeping accommodation.[64] An old Magazine (now demolished) became a detention room, and the old wash house first became the officer's cook house.

The 9th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the local part-time unit of the Territorial Army, gained occupancy of parts of the Governor's House in 1925 for use as an Officers Mess and Headquarters.

An anti-aircraft gun position was built in 1940-1 to protect local industrial sites from air attack – at least one 'duty' hut was built near the gun position on the Beak, with the French Prison used for sleeping accommodation. In May 1941 the castle was hit

[63] MacPhail 1979, 161.

[64] Carswell 2019b, 11.

by German bombs aimed at the nearby Blackburn aircraft factory. Some damage was inflicted on the Governor's House and a 70ft (21m) length of wall on the eastern side of the castle was completely destroyed.[65] The gun-site was removed in 1945 and the Territorial Army Unit took over the Governor's House at a similar time.

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

The long history of the site with changing functions from royal medieval castle to military garrisoned fort to ancient monument attraction, coupled with the challenging landscape setting, has inevitably resulted in a lack of architectural harmony of the buildings across the site.

Only a few structures remain of the medieval royal castle and none from its earlier prehistoric or early medieval iterations. Most other surviving buildings are from the 17th and 18th centuries which illustrate the struggle by military engineers to adapt this challenging site to contemporary defensive needs.[66]

Key medieval buildings

The key surviving components of the medieval castle are the lower levels (although incomplete) of the Wallace Tower at the north entry, the 14th century portcullis arch spanning the gap between the twin peaks, and the 16th century guardhouse below it. The long stair located behind the Governor's House and leading up through a spectacular rock cleft to the guardhouse is medieval in origin but now consisting of modern stairs.

The portcullis gate is a tall medieval archway which spans the gap between the cliffs. It has a pointed narrow archway with a portcullis slot, which controlled access between the Nether and Over Baileys and was probably built around the 14th century. The upper part also provided a bridge between the two peaks. Though the current crossing is now separate from the building, it is still roughly in the same

[65] Carswell 2019b, 11.

[66] Piggot and Simpson 1970, 66.

location. Originally there would have been an upper chamber above the gate, with the winding mechanism for the portcullis and some accommodation.



Figure 7: General view of the portcullis arch. (HI00113455) © Historic Environment Scotland

The upper Guardhouse is 16th century in origin with two upper floors, now reduced to one. The upper floor was provided with a pair of oval gun ports for small swivel-guns defending the long stair. The south facing façade features two 18th century windows, and a carved mask stone at the wall-head traditionally identified with 'the False Menteith', keeper of the castle who captured William Wallace.

Only the ruined lower parts remain of the Wallace Tower which formerly guarded the north entrance and associated inner barbican. It possibly was an early tower house on a similar pattern to David's Tower in **Edinburgh Castle** which was completed around 1370. There is a reference to the 'house of the gate' (*domus porte*) included in construction work at the castle in 1329-1330, which was overseen by Robert Wallace, the constable of the castle. Based on its location, this could

potentially refer to the Wallace Tower.[67] The Wallace Tower was much rebuilt and changed right into the 1610s, but it is possible that the lower parts contain the base of a much older tower, which could have been the prison for William Wallace though it is not known if he was ever imprisoned in Dumbarton Castle. As the name suggests, the Wallace legend was firmly linked to the building and was even mentioned during its reconstruction in the 1610s. The final form of the Wallace Tower is clearly seen in a set of architectural plans of 1719,[68] and a pen-and-ink drawing by the military surveyor and landscape artist Paul Sandby dating from around 1750.[69] A full description of the tower at the time is given in Appendix 5. The Wallace Tower was largely removed around 1794 when the north entry was also blocked, and a three-storey barrack block (known as the New Barrack) was built as well as the five-gun Duke of York's battery to the north. This means that only the ruined lower parts of the tower survive, including the prison sometimes identified as Wallace's prison, along with the blocked gateway and barbican.

Key Georgian military buildings

Initially the site presents a strong first impression in the fine composition of the entrance gate, King George's Battery and the Governor's House, of 1735 designed by John Romer with the noted architect William Adam as builder.[70]

Romer, a military officer and Engineer to the Board of Ordnance had already perfected schemes at a number of forts elsewhere in Scotland to help counter the continuing Jacobite threat. He was responsible for applying a scheme to regularise the defensive battery ramparts throughout the castle with strong, angled and battered walls, to create a defence capable of withstanding a limited, but not full-on, artillery siege.[71]

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[67] Exchequer Rolls, vol. i, 250, 257, 259-60, 268-269.

[68] NLS, MS.1647 Z.02/73, Dunbarton Anno 1719, Military Maps of Scotland (maps.nls.uk) (accessed: 29 August 2025). Note that the Tower is captioned as 'Wall House Tower' in the drawing.

[69] Available online at National Galleries of Scotland, P. Sandby, North View of Dumbarton (P 2150) (nationalgalleries.org) (accessed: 29 August 2025).

[70] Grove and Tabraham 1995, 85.

[71] Grove and Tabraham 1995, 85.

The inner gate from around 1735 is a classical, round-arched gate of fine ashlar with a projecting central quoin and corbelled horizontal pediment, complete with a pair of inner bar holes which housed great timber beams. The arch is mirrored by the doorway to the Governor's House of the same date.

The Governor's House is a simple but imposing classical 3-storey and attic, 3-bay house. The raised margins around the openings indicate that it would have been harled. By the late 1800s this was being used as a barracks. The otherwise plain façade is alleviated by a triangular corbelled pediment at attic level.



Figure 8: Aerial view of the Governor's House and the top half of the King George's battery with Romer's signature circular sentinel box. (HI00223617) © Historic Environment Scotland.

The King George's battery was named in honour of George II and is triangular or V-shaped in plan. It is enclosing and protecting the Governor's House. The point of the V features one of Romer's signature circular sentinel box corbelled over the southern angle. Another one of his sentinel boxes is located on the east curtain wall. This style of Romer's sentinel boxes can also be seen at **Edinburgh Castle**.

Aside from these, only the French Prison (sometimes referred to as the Old Barracks) and the Powder Magazine present strong architectural qualities. Both were designed by William Skinner, chief engineer of North Britain who also worked at **Edinburgh Castle** (the Ordnance Storehouses), but who is most famous for designing **Fort George**. The powder magazine was erected around 1748 on the eastern summit known as the Beak. It is the sole extant building on the Beak and is a detached skew-gabled rectangular set within a plain perimeter blast-wall. It was purpose built and features double doors and indirect ventilation openings to give protection against gunfire and arson. It held 150 barrels of powder and was designed to protect against both solid shot and artillery bombs.[72]

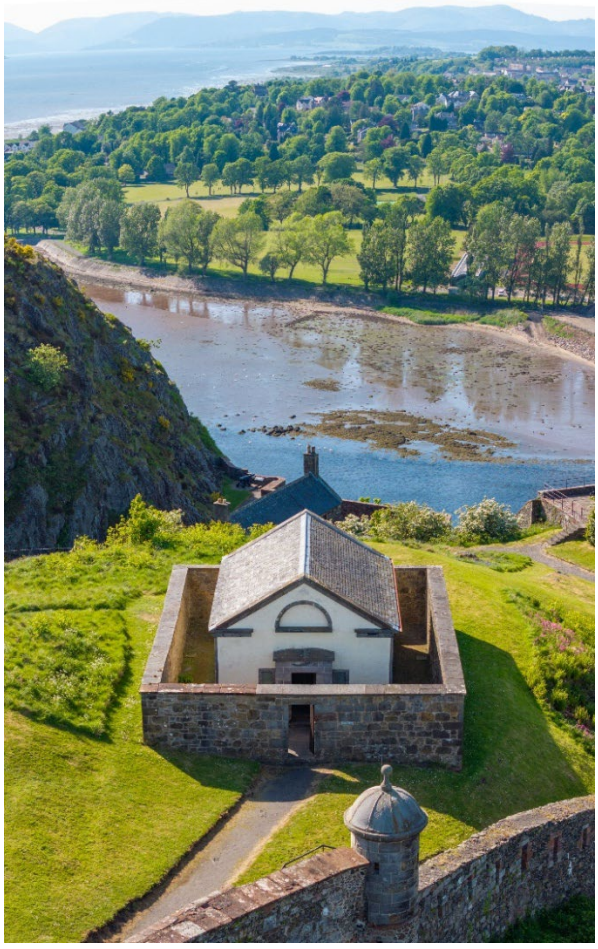


Figure 9: Aerial view of the Powder Magazine (HI00223628) © Historic Environment Scotland

[72] MacIvor 1958, 14.

The French Prison was initially built as a barracks around the 1760s as a 2-storey, 5-bay building at the head of the cleft. It features a distinctive round window which is reminiscent of Skinner's Ordnance Stores at **Fort George**. The upper floor was subsequently altered by the addition of bars to the windows, extra door bolts and, apparently, a specially designed iron-bound floor to prevent the lifting of the boards, all to make the space especially secure. It is likely that this is where General Edouard Simon, the French general, and his servant were held from 1812 to 1814 (see *2.3 Historic value* for more information), and where the Radicals arrested for civil unrest of 1819–20 were also kept.[73] Carswell notes that there is no evidence of other French prisoners being kept in the castle. By the mid-1850s this had offices, ablutions and a cookhouse on the ground floor, with barracks accommodation including for sergeants on the first floor. The room capacity numbers still visible on the doors probably date from the First World War.

All the buildings are rubble-built throughout, with ashlar dressings.

Other surviving structures

Reservoir or well

A covered reservoir, also known as the well, stands close to the spot of a now gone open pool (called the loch in the 1688 repairs contract) with ancient origins underneath the White Crag to the north of the Master Gunner's House, shown on the 1708 drawing. This could potentially be the only legacy above-ground physical evidence of Dumbarton's earliest history.

Crane bastion

This is located at the south-east corner of the Beak and survives in its 18th century form, although it could be medieval in origin. This was essential for lifting stores and munition to the Beak. The crane itself is no longer in place.

[73] Carswell 2020a, 3.

Batteries

Dumbarton Castle boasts several defensive batteries of which King George's battery with its dramatic V-shaped feature is the most distinctive looking. The batteries defended key strategic locations and were capable to guard the upper reaches of the River Clyde and Glasgow against an invasion fleet, as well as against domestic enemies. Some hold evidence of earlier artillery structures and have the potential to illustrate the development of gunpowder weaponry from late medieval times until the nineteenth century.

The oldest battery is the One-gun battery which was built around 1550 to protect the then north entry and is now overshadowed by the Duke of York battery. The Spur battery was built around 1680 and located west of the Governor's House, close to the latrine block which projects over the wall.

The Spanish Battery and the Bower Battery were built in 1735 and replaced an older battery, covering west approaches up the Clyde. It was reconstructed around 1802 to accommodate larger calibre guns.



Figure 10: General view of the Duke of Argyll's Battery (HI00205134) © Crown Copyright HES.

The Duke of York's battery was built in 1795 over the blocked north entry. Around the same time, the Duke of Argyll's battery was built on the north-east defences of the Beak, which replaced an older battery on the site and also the Prince of Wales battery close to the 1748 powder magazine. It was previously known as the Prince Regent's battery.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

The Clyde gave easy maritime access to much of west central Scotland, as the equal to the Forth in the east. To the west this gave access to the Irish Sea and ultimately to the Atlantic coast of Europe. There are good views of the Rhins of Cowal in Argyll, north to Ben Lomond, east to Glasgow, to the Campsie Fells to the north-east, and even a glimpse of the spire of Paisley Abbey on a clear day. The castle presents a visually impressive complex with grand buildings on an ancient iconic site dominating the Clyde.



Figure 11: Aerial view of Dumbarton Castle and Dumbarton Rock (HI00223626) © Historic Environment Scotland

The immediate setting on the south side is now less impressive due to the large amount of reclaimed land in front of the castle today, including the parkland and the bowling club. Even more drastic, however, is the impact of modern development on the landscape setting on the north side, which was for millennia marsh and tidal land drained in the 19th century and developed for shipbuilding. In the post-war period this went through another great change with the infilling of the Denny shipyard basin, removing any sense that the Rock was once almost engulfed by water. The football stadium and housing developments are now filling this reclaimed land close to the base of the Rock.

Until the 1600s, the south entrance could only have been accessed by water, by which time it could be approached by road around the base of the Rock. However, the approach from this side was very difficult due to boggy land here between the castle and burgh. The 1708 plan shows the water mark at 35m out from the south curtain wall. As part of the pier construction in the 1870s to the south of the castle, additional land was reclaimed, creating the Pier Park and widening the distance to the water mark. Into the 1800s the castle stood in isolation, separate from the burgh 1km to north-west. Glimpses of the castle from the town can still be had, but these are incidental due to large-scale urban development which now acts as a barrier. In this way the town has been disconnected from the castle, with the loss of appreciation of why the town came to exist.

Artistic inspiration

Paul Sandby, who was chief draughtsman to the Military Survey in Scotland, made a fine drawing of the north side of the castle around 1750 from the burgh looking across the River Leven, which he published in a print edition.[74] Sandby also produced an oil painting of the same view with a wider perspective.

Literary tourists appreciated the patina of age, and the awe-inspiring picturesque image. A visit to the castle by James Boswell, a Scottish lawyer and writer, and Samuel Johnson, a famous writer who wrote what is now widely believed to be the

[74] National Galleries Scotland, Paul Sandby: North View of Dumbarton Castle (nationalgalleries.org) (accessed: 09 March 2026).

first modern English dictionary, as part of their travels were written up by Johnson in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775). Poets William and Dorothy Wordsworth, accompanied by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, visited in 1803. Dorothy published an account of their travels soon after, having been shown around the castle by a member of the garrison: 'We came to the barracks; soldiers' wives were hanging out linen upon the rails, while the wind beat about them furiously.' She made a negative comment on the Governor's House – 'a modern house, which is white-washed, and consequently jars, wherever it is seen, with the natural character of the place'.



Figure 12: Oil on canvas - View of Clyde and Dumbarton Rock by Horatio McCulloch (1805-1867). (HI00050612) © Crown Copyright HES.

J.M.W. Turner produced an engraving of a distant view of the castle around 1818 intended for issue in his *Liber Studiorum* series. Turner came again in the 1830s sketching the castle when he was preparing illustrations for an edition of Sir Walter Scott's poetry. The composer Felix Mendelssohn visited and sketched in 1829. It was

a popular subject for many landscape artists, especially the iconic view of the Rock from the south bank of the Clyde. This view was photographed by George Washington Wilson as early as the 1850s and featured in an album compiled by Prince Albert. Queen Victoria made two sketches of the Rock in 1847.[75] On 17 August that year, Queen Victoria and her young family went on a day trip on board *The Fairy*, a Royal steam-boat. In her journal entry of that day, Queen Victoria describes how they sailed down the River Clyde and saw 'Dumbarton Castle, the situation of which is very fine, the rock rising straight out of the river, with mountains all round, & the town of Dumbarton behind it. It is very picturesque'. The landing of the royal party at the north side of the castle was recorded in a fine painting by Hope James Stewart. The Queen owned a watercolour of Dumbarton Castle by Edouard Hildebrandt made in 1848.[76]

2.6 Natural heritage values

The Rock is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its Geology.[77] It is also designated as a Geological Conservation Review Site, which emphasises that Dumbarton Rock 'combines historical significance as a fortified site with geological importance as the remnant of a mass of lava that solidified in the crater of an Early Carboniferous volcano.'[78]

The Rock features a mixture of amenity grassland and unimproved neutral grassland throughout rocky outcrops, of note is the presence of mossy saxifrage (*Saxifraga hynoides*) a Scottish Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Specis. Bats (European Protected Species) are known to roost in the buildings, including the portcullis.

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[75] Royal Collection Trust, Queen Victoria: Dumbarton Castle (17 Aug 1847) (rct.uk) (accessed: 09 March 2026).

[76] Royal Collection Trust, Edouard Hildebrandt: Dumbarton Castle (1848) (rct.uk) (accessed: 13 April 2026).

[77] NatureScot, Dumbarton Rock SSSI (551) (sitelink.nature.scot)

[78] MacDonald 2003, 94.



Figure 13: General oblique aerial view of the River Clyde with Strathclyde Homes Stadium and Dumbarton castle in the front. (DP 191107) © Crown Copyright: HES.

The adjacent foreshore areas of the rivers Leven and Clyde are designated as part of the Inner Clyde Site of Special Scientific Interest,[79] as the most northerly of Britain's large west coast estuaries used by migrating birds. It is of national importance for its population of wintering wildfowls and waders. The area is designated as a Special Protection Area of European importance (Special Protection Area)[80] for its wintering population of redshank (*Tringa totanus)*. It is known as supporting one of the highest densities of wintering populations of redshank in Britain.[81]

The variety of typical estuarine plant communities provide an important habitat and food source for the wildfowl and waders that visit the area.

[79] NatureScot, Inner Clyde SSSI (1701) (sitelink.nature.scot) (accessed: 18 February 2026).

[80] NatureScot, Inner Clyde SPA (8514) (sitelink.nature.scot) (accessed: 18 February 2026).

[81] NatureScot, Inner Clyde SPA Citation (PDF, 98.8KB) (accessed: 18 February 2026).

Geology

The Rock is a basalt volcanic plug of Lower Carboniferous age from approximately 340 million years ago. It is composed of fine-grained basalt with numerous small grains of magnetite and crystals of felspar. Basalt columns of cooled lava solidifying over eons can be seen leaning from west to east.

The present shape of the gulley between the two prominent peaks of the castle rock was primarily formed by glacial action, which over-deepened a weak area of natural joints and fractures formed during the post-intrusion phase of the Lower Carboniferous volcanic plug.[82] Evidence of glacial activity are very distinctly seen in the gap between the two summits. The ice passing over it, with a general direction from the north-west, appears to have got partly wedged into this narrow opening, probably an old fissure in the rock, and worn it very powerfully on the west side, as it curved round and swept out again to the east, where just at the widening of the gap its markings are also very distinctly seen.[83] The ice carved away and removed the once-surrounding softer geological strata.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Community values

There was always a close connection between the historic town and the castle. It is unclear how the construction of new housing developments on what was reclaimed and brownfield sites has affected this connection. It may have eroded due to the loss of visibility, though it also could have strengthened as new parts of the town are in closer proximity to the castle. Further research is needed to determine this.

This connection between town and castle was of such significance in the past that the arrival of a new unit at the castle was announced at the burgh cross by an NCO with a drummer. In later times married soldiers lodged with their families in the town, and the garrison relied on the town for the usual recreations of soldiers. This close connection with the military presence seems to have been highly valued by

[82] N Ruckley personal comments.

[83] Bell 1881, footnote 1, 79.

the local community as the multiple impassioned newspaper articles in response to the possible leaving of the military in the late 19th century suggest.[84] The subsequent indifference to the soldiers felt and reported in letters of the First World War, however, shows that this sentiment was not necessarily continuous or universal.[85]

The castle is a prominent landmark in the townscape of Dumbarton and has long been seen as an important symbol of civic pride. It has thus figured in important civic occasions (for example, royal visits in 1847, 1937 and 1953) and a tangible manifestation of its civic role is the bronze direction finder on the White Tower Crag, donated by the London Dumbartonshire Association. The plate was to 'add to the interest of one of the most expansive and beautiful views in Scotland'.[86]



Figure 14: Viewing point with the direction finder with views over the Clyde to the west. (HI00146754) © Historic Environment Scotland.

[84] For example, The Lennox Herald, 08 June 1889, p. 4 *The Dismantling of Dumbarton Castle.*

[85] Letters from Captain William Stavert Ferrie (1889-1958) in Carswell 2026.

[86] Daily Record (22 March 1933), p. 3.

The Pier Park immediately in front of the castle is of importance to the community as a popular location for various events run by local groups, as well as for events and re-enactments by Historic Environment Scotland. The popular 'Rock of Ages' events held here and in the castle involving re-enactors, have attracted 2 to 3,000 visitors. Now, re-enactors themed events are smaller in scale.

Social values

HES is working in partnership with Scottish Maritime Museum, West Dunbartonshire Council, and Dumbarton Football Club, to integrate the planning of local heritage initiatives for the benefit of local communities, and to encourage economic development through tourism. This also aims to encourage sustainable access and travel arrangements, and generally to improve the physical and intangible links between the town and the castle.

Pre-2020, the 1st floor of the Governor's House was occasionally used for events and weddings.

HES also maintains contact with the Dumbarton Castle Society, the aim of which is to promote the castle at home and abroad.

Dumbarton Rock is held dear by a major community of rock-climbers and is known affectionately as 'Dumby', the home of Scottish bouldering. Since the 1960s the west side of the Rock has been the lowlands training ground for generations of the best Scottish rock climbers (see Appendix 2 for further information on the significance of Dumbarton Rock to the climbing community). A popular guide to the challenging climbs is regularly updated.[87]

Overview of Intangible Cultural Heritage[88]

Dumbarton Castle is remarkable in that while there is not a great deal of 'historical/traditional' intangible heritage associated with the site, it is held in such great regard by the local community in the present day that there are currently

[87] UKC, *Dumbarton Rock* (ukclimbing.com) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

[88] For further detail see HES *Intangible Cultural Heritage Dumbarton Castle* report. Available on request, please email CRTenquiries@hes.scot

many intangible associations from different community groups. The rock and castle are the main focus of any intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in the area due to their prominence in the landscape.

The historical or older ICH associations tend to be focussed on the military associations of the castle or the striking aesthetics of the rock, which has been the inspiration for many artists and photographers over the centuries. Hector Boece's description of Lennox from 1527 is particularly interesting as he mentions the place being referred to as 'Alcleuch'.

The origin myth of the Rock describes the devil sending witches to counter the work of St Patrick, one of whom tried to hurl a 'large rock' at him but missed and formed Dumbarton Rock instead. This tale has definite similarities to other stories in Scotland about the famed 'Cailleach Bheurra' but no references could be found so far which suggest that any firm or reliable link has been made by folklorists to date.

There have also been a significant number of instrumental tunes composed about the site, which again is likely to be largely due to the military associations.[89]

The modern or contemporary associations with the site include Dumbarton FC fans, rock climbers around the world, graffiti enthusiasts and more.

Finally, the site is extremely well-reviewed on popular reviewing platforms, which gives a rough indication of the value that modern day visitors hold of the castle as a visitor attraction.

Spiritual values

A lasting result of the area's association to St Patrick, is a number of local church dedications to the saint, including that of the ancient chapel on the Rock itself which is now lost. This association would have been wholeheartedly promoted by the medieval Church, raising the importance of the place.[90]

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[89] Examples include 'Dumbarton Castle' by James Scott Skinner and 'The Rock on the Clyde' by Mull accordionist Bobby MacLeod.

[90] Taylor 2006, 35.

While spiritual importance can be communicated to visitors through interpretation resources, there is nothing currently of spiritual value in the castle today.

Use values

Visitor numbers

The castle is usually open year-round, but in recent years annual visitor numbers have fluctuated greatly due to closures first during Covid and again due to conservation works and bad weather. In a usual year the site welcomes over 25,000 visitors.[91]

Data from a 2023 visitors' survey show that the majority of visitors come to the area specifically to visit the castle.[92] Respondents indicate a high level of satisfaction, featuring the essential contribution of stewarding staff, and the value of the fixed interpretation panels. The views were also highly appreciated. Some dissatisfaction was reported on the number of buildings closed due to conservation works at the time, plus the difficulties of access for some visitors due to the steepness and numbers of steps.

First impressions of the castle have been impacted on by the proliferation of scaffold rock-fall protection by the entrance. The geography of the site is challenging for many visitors, and a visit can be described as 'a climb through time'.

This survey data is reflected in reviews left on popular reviewing websites where most visitors leave positive reviews.[93] People who leave a review often mention the view as a highlight, the rich history which most people say is communicated well through interpretation panels and site staff and the relative quietness of the site. Most reviews mention the number of stairs throughout the site, often noting that it

[91] Based on the pre-Covid year 2019 to 20 (27,914 visitors) and 2023 to 24, the first continuous open year after Covid (26,119 visitors). Visitor numbers courtesy of HES.

[92] Survey of 68 people, 56% of which came specifically to visit only the Castle, 28% to do several things in the area including visiting the Castle, 12% visited spontaneously and 4% did not answer the question.

[93] This paragraph is based on a random selection of Tripadvisor reviews and Google reviews.

makes the site inaccessible for people with restricted mobility. Negative reviews tend to be around the lack of access to interior buildings or when the site is closed unexpectedly.

Access and education

The castle offers an excellent setting for cross curricular learning and discovering more about local heritage, landscape and environment. Its long history covers key learning topics with links to events and characters from Scotland's past including Vikings, castle life, the Wars of Independence, Mary Queen of Scots and the World Wars. The summit offers sweeping views making it an excellent setting to investigate the adjacent coastline, landscape and urban environment and the sites topography and natural environment make it an excellent setting for inspiring outdoor and play based learning.

Learning access is supported through the HES Free Learning Visits Schemes and support with travel costs is available for schools. As such Dumbarton Castle is regularly visited by local schools and each year in spring HES contribute staff and activities to a local history themed event for them. Dumbarton Castle also hosts a 'Visiting Viking' weekend each summer. The site has also been used as the focus for targeted learning projects including the youth engagement programme 'Heritage Remixed' which from 2018-2023 used the castle to support local employability and life skills programmes for young people through co-designing creative work inspired by their learning.

Due to the topography of the site, many areas are reached by narrow stairways or steep inclines and access to the site may be restricted in adverse weather conditions. To make more of the site accessible, HES has introduced a virtual tour of the castle within its new exhibition *Rock of Ages.* This enables visitors to experience key locations of the site including the top of Dumbarton Rock and its famous views of the River Clyde.

3. Major gaps in understanding

- We have only a limited understanding of the appearance and development of the rock as a prehistoric and early medieval site
- We have only a limited understanding of the construction, appearance and development of the buildings within the medieval royal castle, as so few of these have survived.
- We have only a partial understanding of the 18th century military buildings purposefully destroyed in the 1920s, giving the Over Bailey a rather bleak and empty appearance.
- The buried archaeology throughout the castle has the potential to fill in some of these gaps. The limited trial excavations of the 1970s were successful in producing evidence of the early medieval defences and produced a surprising quantity of exotic high-status imported artefacts. The site therefore would seem to retain pockets of archaeological deposits despite the heavy disturbance caused by various different occupation phases. These have the potential of revealing far more of this vitally important phase of the development of the site and inform a better understanding of the role of the place in the early medieval kingdoms. The buried archaeology may also have considerable potential in revealing lost elements of the later medieval royal castle, on the White Tower crag, within the area of the Wallace Tower, in the Over Bailey, as well as in the Governor's Garden where vestiges of the chapel and cemetery may be found.
- A full assessment of the social values of the property is necessary to better understand its connection within its communities of interest. This could also potentially clarify if the building developments on what was reclaimed and brownfield sites has altered the connection between the town and the castle.
- There may be an argument for further research on the origin story involving St Patrick, as the 'Cailleach' or hag/witch is a much discussed topic in Scottish folklore but little is actually known about her.

4. Associated properties

Royal castles - **Edinburgh**, **Stirling**, **Blackness**, **Linlithgow**, Roxburgh, Jedburgh, Dunbar, and Lanark.

Georgian military forts - **Fort George**, Fort William, Fort Augustus.

Early medieval sites with foreign imports – **Dunadd**, **Whithorn**, Mote of Mark, Rhynie.

5. Keywords

Early medieval fort; Alt Clut; Dùn Breatann, royal castle; tower house; gateway hall; William Wallace; Mary Queen of Scots; artillery fortifications; gun batteries; Jacobites; barracks; garrison; state prison; military engineers.

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Further resources

Trove ID: 43376
Trove Site Number: NS47SW 5
NGR: NS 39988 74485
Trove entry: Trove ID: 43376, Dumbarton Castle (trove.scot)

Scheduling description: Scheduled Monument (SM90107), Dumbarton Castle (portal.historicenvironment.scot)

3D models of some of the object related to Dumbarton Castle are available on Sketchfab: Sketchfab, Historic Environment Scotland, Dumbarton Castle 3D Objects (sketchfab.com)

A number of artefacts from the archaeological dig in the 1970s are held within the Hunterian Museum collections. Their collections database can be searched via: University of Glasgow, Explore the Collection (gla.ac.uk)

Rock climbing: UKC, *Dumbarton Rock* (ukclimbing.com)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Timeline

- **340 million years ago** – Dumbarton Rock, a twin-peaked outcrop of basalt, is formed during a period of intense volcanic activity in the Earth's crust.
- **15,000 years ago** – ice starts to melt, and glaciers create the gully.
- **Iron Age?** – Dumbarton Rock likely to have been a hill-fort of the *Damnonii* tribe
- **Around 150 –** Ptolemy in his atlas records *Lemannonius sinus* (translates to 'the bay of the Leven'), five miles from west end of Antonine Wall constructed around this time.
- **Around 450 AD** – St Patrick writes to Christian King Coroticus of Strathclyde and his warriors reprimanding them for attacking Irish converts to Christianity. Coroticus rules from *Alt Clut* 'Rock of the Clyde'.
- **Late-500s** –King Riderch recorded as ruler of *Alt Clut*.
- **657** – first contemporary reference to a king of Clyde Rock, Guret who died that year.
- **late-600s on** – Adomnan of Iona and Irish annalists record the presence of British kings at *Alt Clut*.
- **731** – one of only two major secular places in Scotland mentioned by the Venerable Bede, who describes *Alt Clut* as a 'strongly fortified British capital'.
- **756** – annals record the capture of *Alt Clut* by an army led by the Pictish king Oengus allied with a force from Northumbria.
- **780** – the Annals of Ulster record the burning of *Alt Clut*.
- **870** – Vikings, led by Olaf 'the White', king of Dublin, and Ivar Beinlaus 'the Crippled', besiege the Rock for four months, wasting 'the people who were in

it by hunger and thirst', before carrying off 'all the riches that were within it and afterwards a great host of prisoners'. This is the last we read of *Alt Clut*.

- **871** – Olaf and Ivar travel from Scotland to Dublin with 200 ships and a great booty of British, English and Pictish slaves (Annals of Ulster).
- **Around 10th century** –cross slabs found on the Rock indicate presence of a chapel and cemetery.
- **1098** – King Edgar formally concedes Argyll and the Hebrides to the king of Norway. The border with Norway now lies within 10 miles of Dumbarton Rock.
- **1222** – Alexander II (1214–49) founds a new burgh beside his 'new castle' of Dumbarton.
- **By 1238** - royal castle firmly established. By now Scoto-Norwegian relations are becoming increasingly strained as the Scots attempt to wrest back the Hebrides. Alexander's new royal castle is doubtless part of that strategy.
- **1263** – Haakon IV of Norway leads an armada into the Firth of Clyde, which ends in stalemate at Largs, on the opposite side of the estuary. Haakon dies at **Kirkwall Palace** on his way back to Norway, and his son and successor, King Magnus, subsequently (1266) agrees a peace treaty with Alexander III (1249-86) that returns the Hebrides to Scotland.
- **1291** – All royal castles are surrendered to King Edward I of England as part of his arbitration between the fourteen rival claimants for the Scottish crown. All fourteen nobles made formal protest before submitting to the demands with the understanding that the castles would be handed back in due course to the rightful king of Scotland. Edward appoints Sir Nicholas de Segrave, an English nobleman, to the keepership of Dumbarton Castle.[94]

[94] MacPhail 1979, 12-13.

- **1292** – Edward I gives Dumbarton and the other royal castles of Scotland over to King John Balliol. The new custodian of Dumbarton Castle is Sir Ingram de Umfraville.[95]
- **1296 –** Outbreak of war with England, later to be known as the First War of Scottish Independence.
- **1296** – Edward I of England captures the castle and puts his knight, Sir Alexander of Leeds, in charge. However, after Sir William Wallace's victory over the English at **Stirling Bridge** (1297), the Scots wrest the castle back and use it to imprison three English knights – William FitzWarin, William de Ros and Marmaduke Tweng.
- **1305** – Wallace is captured near Glasgow by Sir John Menteith, 'the fause [false] Menteith', keeper of Dumbarton. Tradition holds that he is briefly imprisoned in the castle prior to being sent south to London and execution.
- **25 March 1306** – Robert I ('the Bruce') is crowned King of Scots at Scone, near Perth.
- **Before spring 1309** – King Robert I takes back Dumbarton Castle and does not destroy it as he did with other castles.
- **1 May 1328** – The First War of Scottish Independence ends when the English King Edward III is forced to sign the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton which recognised the independence of Scotland and Robert I as King of Scotland.
- **1329** – Robert I dies peacefully at his manor of Cardross, directly across the River Leven from the castle. The entrails from his embalmed body are said to have been buried at the chapel there.
- **1332** – outbreak of the Second War of Scottish Independence.
- **1333–4** – following the Scots' defeat at Halidon Hill (July 1333), young David II and Queen Joan are brought to Dumbarton, then one of only five castles

[95] MacPhail 1979, 13.

holding out against the English (the others are **Kildrummy**, **Loch Doon**, **Lochleven** and **Urquhart**). They are taken to France in the following spring.

- **1357** – the Second War of Scottish Independence ends with the signing of the Treaty of Berwick.
- **later-14th century** – following David II's return to Scotland from lengthy captivity in England (1346–57), he sets about rebuilding his royal castles, probably including Dumbarton. The lofty, four-storey Wallace Tower, located beside the North Entry (then the main access into the castle) probably dates from this time. The Portcullis Arch, securing the passage up from the Nether Bailey, is probably also of this date.
- **Around 1399** – Master Walter Dennistoun seizes control of Dumbarton Castle when the previous keeper, his brother, Sir Robert Dennistoun, died. He was a churchman and lawyer, but under his leadership his garrison performed many 'wicked deeds'. He negotiated his command of the castle for the position of Bishop of St Andrews in 1402.
- **1420s** – the castle is described by an agent of Henry V of England as 'a castell stronge and harde for to obteine'.[96]
- **1440s** – during the minority of King James II, the castle's control is handed between the different rival government factions.
- **1454-1479** – Sir John Colquhoun of Luss is governor of Dumbarton Castle.
- **mid-15th century** – major rebuilding and repair works are recorded at the castle, including the purchase of 13,000 'stone roofing-slabs' in 1445 which is unusual for the time period in Scotland[97] and the rebuilding of the chapel of St Patrick (1456), long demolished but believed to have been close to the later Governor's House.

[96] The Chronicle of John Hardyng quoted in Brown 1891, 21.

[97] Exchequer Rolls, vol v, 210.

- **1489** – James IV twice lays siege to the castle, then held by its rebellious keeper, John Stewart, earl of Lennox. The first attempt fails but the second succeeds, largely due to the arrival of the royal gun train from **Edinburgh Castle**, including the mighty bombard **Mons Meg**.
- **1494 and 1495** – James IV leads naval campaigns from Dumbarton against the lords of the Isles.
- **1504** – James IV stays/is? at Dumbarton en route to campaign against the Macleans of Mull.
- **1505** – Treasurer's Accounts record expenditure on a new scabbard and belt for 'Wallace's sword' (a two-handed sword probably of 15th century date). Although there is some doubt if this sword is the same 'Wallace Sword' currently on display in the Wallace Monument in Stirling.[98]
- **1515** – in the aftermath of James IV's death at Flodden (1513), his cousin, Regent Albany, wrests the castle from the earl of Lennox and installs a French garrison. Albany's subsequent journeys to and from France are usually via Dumbarton.
- **1531** – James V uses Dumbarton as his naval base for his expedition against the MacDonalds, deposed Lords of the Isles.
- **1545** – France military supplies, money and soldiers arrive at the castle.
- **1548** – Queen Mary is brought to the castle by her mother Mary of Guise for her safety following the Scottish defeat at Pinkie. Whilst there Mary contracts smallpox and almost dies. After six months four French galleys arrive and take Mary and her four young attendants (known as the 'Four Marys') to France. (When Mary returns in 1561, she sails into Leith; Dumbarton's days as a royal 'gateway' into Scotland are over.)
- **1563 –** Queen Mary visits Dumbarton during a royal progress through Lennox and Argyll.

[98] See Caldwell 2007, 172.

- **1568–71** – during the civil war that follows Queen Mary's flight to England, the castle is held by the 'Queen's Party', including John Hamilton Archbishop of **St Andrews**. The castle is retaken for James VI (the 'King's Party) in a dramatic siege of April 1571.
- **1612–14** - Patrick Stewart, treasonous 2nd earl of Orkney, is imprisoned here.
- **1640s** – held by Royalist forces before being captured by Covenanters led by the earl of Argyle.
- **1652** - the castle falls without resistance to Oliver Cromwell.
- **1654** - the royalist earl of Glencairn attacks English dragoons in Dumbarton; thirty are killed and twenty made prisoner, other retreat into the castle.
- **Later 17th century** – the castle continues to serve as a garrison fortress as well as a Covenanter prison – but only just. Buildings and defences are repaired, but only after much prevarication and cost-cutting - the Spur Battery is part of this work. The main entrance into the castle is by now from the south. The castle's role as a state prison also continues.
- **1677–79** - Construction of a 'Great Fort' and a rampart with gun batteries, replacing the south hall-gatehouse and turf wall.
- **Around 1688** - major repairs and new building works, including a new barracks in the Over Bailey, and construction of new outer defences and gate fronting the south gatehouse.
- **1708** - threat of French invasion – Duke of Argyll raises additional troops, 200 of which are sent to Dumbarton Castle. Board of Ordnance survey with recommendation for improvements, not carried out.
- **1720s and 30s** – the continuing unrest in the West Highlands caused by the Jacobite Risings, particularly those in 1715 and 1719, forces the Government of George II to refortify the castle.
- **1735** - Romer designs the Governor's House.
- **1746** – important Jacobites are imprisoned at Dumbarton Castle.

- **1748** - a new powder magazine, designed by William Skinner, the Board of Ordnance's chief engineer, is built on the Beak.
- **late-18th / early-19th century** – during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars further defensive measures are taken.
- **1812–14** - at the height of the Napoleonic Wars, General Edouard François Simon, is imprisoned in the castle.
- **1820** – following the Radical Rising in April, suspected radical leaders are held at the castle on suspicion of high treason. All prisoners held at the castle were eventually acquitted through lack of evidence.
- **1843** – Lord Lynedoch, Castle Governor, dies aged 95. He is not replaced.
- **1847** – Queen Victoria visits the castle during her first visit to Scotland. She arrives on the royal yacht *Fairy* at a specially constructed pier on the north side of the castle.
- **1850s/60s** – the River Leven is deepened to enable shipbuilding to develop. In the 1860s the firm of William Denny and Brothers (builders of the *Cutty Sark*) relocate from the west bank to larger premises to the north of the castle.
- **1874** – building of the castle pier where pleasure steamers could stop.
- **1884** – Dumbarton Bowling Club opens on reclaimed land (Castle Green) just outside the entrance into the castle.
- **1909** – responsibility for Dumbarton Castle is transferred from the War Office to the Office of Works.
- **1914–18** – returned to military use as a Head Quarters, and depot for 3/9th reserve battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, with repairs to the main buildings including the barracks.
- **1916** – A fete is held at the Castle on 2nd – 3rd June to raise money for wounded soldiers which included an exhibition of historical items including the Wallace Sword on loan from Stirling.

- **1921** – military use returns to the castle for a 90-day period by a new Defence Force in response to a national coal and rail strike.
- **1925** – Part of the Governor's House is given over to be the Headquarters and Officers' mess of the local 9th (Territorial) Bn Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.
- **1927** – Post of Keeper of the Castle is revived.
- **1932** – a bronze direction indicator is erected on White Tower Crag by the London Dunbartonshire Association.
- **1937** – H M King George VI visits Dumbarton Castle during his coronation visit to Scotland.
- **1938** – the Blackburn Aircraft factory, producing Sunderland Flying Boats, opens on land immediately east of Dumbarton Rock.
- **1939-45** – during the Second World War Dumbarton Rock is used as an anti-aircraft battery. On the night of 5th to 6th May 1941 four high explosive bombs land on the Rock, the first enemy attack on the stronghold for nearly 300 years. The Magazine was damaged but not in use at the time.
- **1948** – a triangulation station was added on the west mound as part of the retriangulation of Great Britain.
- **1953** – H M Queen Elizabeth visits Dumbarton Castle during her coronation visit to Scotland and plants a Japanese Cherry behind the Governor's House. The Queen names the new royal yacht, 'Britannia' on the same day of her visit.
- **early 1960s** – the Denny Shipyard and Blackburn Aircraft Factory close, leaving the area north and east of the Rock to become derelict.
- **1974–5** – Professor Leslie Alcock, Glasgow University, directs archaeological excavations at the castle. Valuable evidence for Dumbarton Rock's role as early medieval *Alt Clut/Dùn Breatann* is discovered.

- **1995** – Watching brief is maintained of a power cable trench in an area immediately east of the Governor's House, latterly a garden. Masonry dating from the earlier Gatehouse (demolished in advance of the 18th century artillery fortification) is revealed running east to west close to the east wall of the Governor's House. A clay cross pendant is discovered in the garden soils of the main East - West line of the service trench. Whilst not directly dateable, reassessment in 2024 has suggested that it is early medieval in date and adds to the evidence for an early medieval burial ground and possible medieval chapel.
- **1996** - A watching brief and small excavation are conducted at Dumbarton Castle by Kirkdale Archaeology in December 1996. The works involve the clearance of 300mm of floor deposits in the 18th-century powder magazine, in advance of the installation of a new floor and the opening of the magazine exhibition to the public. In addition, a small trench is excavated to the West of the Governor's House, in advance of the installation of a moveable gate-post.
- **2000** - Dumbarton Football Club (also known as 'Sons of the Rock'), founded 1872, moves from Boghead Park to new premises, the Bet Butler Stadium, on the site of the former Denny Shipyard close by Dumbarton Rock, helping to regenerate the area.
- **2000** - Archaeological monitoring is undertaken at Dumbarton Castle on the 19th and the 23rd of October while Historic Scotland MCU undertake minor excavations at the Powder Magazine.
- **March 2001** – Trial pits are excavated in and around the French prison to investigate the subsidence afflicting the west wall of the building. The long east wall of the building is built directly on bedrock while west frontage sits on and within a soft fairly wet sludgy silt.
- **May 2001** – Trial trenching between the Wallace Tower and the Argyll Battery show remains of unmortared paving at the west end of the north curtain wall which may have been part of an 18th-century sentry path. Various 17th to 20th-century midden deposits are found accumulated against

the inner face of the curtain wall, while the wall itself is seen to sit on top of a lower wall, potentially an earlier perimeter.

- **February 2002** – Excavation of a small cable trench adjacent to the west wall of the steps leading from the Governor's House to the Guardhouse. A small stump of an earlier wall is found protruding from under the present wall on the garden terrace below the Guardhouse. This was possibly the remains of an earlier approach to the entrance to the upper castle, leading from the probable site of the medieval Hall, to the west of the Governor's House, thus adding weight to the theory of this being the original location of the Hall.
- **February 2003** – Three small pits are excavated to erect a gate in the gap between the Governor's House and the parapet wall of the King George Battery. Levelling layers are found, including building debris from various periods of construction, possibly relating to the laying of the path or the building of the King George Battery.
- **October 2004** – Watching brief is undertaken during the clearing and removal of vegetation and soil in an area near the portcullis on the east side of the main stairway through the castle complex. This area consisted of a purpose-built platform just south of the east side of the portcullis. The platform measured circa 5m by 2m, with a roughly metalled or cobbled surface, and no clear structural function beyond the reinforcement of the rock face.
- **January 2005** – A short programme of clearance and evaluation is undertaken at the site of the walled-off area below King George's Battery on the south side of Dumbarton Castle rock, an irregular-shaped courtyard containing two adjoining buildings. This area appears to have been a Victorian addition, set against the old sea wall of a Georgian gun battery. All structures and features seen during these works therefore date from the mid-and late 19th century to the late 20th century. The basic structure is mostly intact, comprising the new sea wall, the two store sheds and general levelling deposits. An original gateway positioned halfway down the compound had been demolished, probably to improve access to the end of

the site. The cobbling at the west end of the site seemed to respect the line of the gateway and consequently was probably in place while the gateway was in use.

- **2005** – A small excavation is undertaken around the French Prison to assess the nature of the underlying material. Stone-lined drains and other features are exposed and recorded, which appear to pre-date the French Prison.
- **February 2006** – A watching brief is undertaken around the Governor's House during the excavation of service tracks for CCTV cables. The depth of the trenches excavated was relatively shallow but revealed the mortared surface adjacent to the Battery wall. This feature is likely to be contemporary with the construction of the wall.
- **November 2006** – A small excavation and assessment take place at the French Prison. The excavation revealed an earlier floor level, probably dating to the first half of the 20th century, and also deposits associated with levelling for, and the construction of, the French Prisons (1795).
- **February and March 2007** – Trenches are excavated along the length of the south wall and west wall of the French Prison. The former is dug to a depth of 0.8m and revealed evidence of medieval industrial activity. The other trench is dug to a depth of 0.7m and revealed traces of a toilet block apparently demolished before 1928, on the basis of photographic evidence. Drawings from circa 1940 show the toilet blocks were designed and built for the Anti-aircraft Batteries.[99]
- **2009-2011** – Several watching briefs are maintained during the years for various work. Mostly these did not uncover any significant finds or features.
- **2012** – A ground penetrating radar survey is undertaken in the French Prison as part of investigations to inform possible building stabilisation works and underpinning of the foundations. The radar data provides approximate

[99] HES drawing ref 193-107-055.

indications of the depth to bedrock around the south-west and north-west walls, and has indicated the possible location of archaeological deposits.

- **2013** – A project to characterise the quantity and quality of the Scottish resource of known surviving remains of the First World War. Carried out in partnership between Historic Scotland and RCAHMS.
- **2013** – A watching brief is undertaken within the forework forming part of King George's Battery. Excavation revealed a wall face with associated wall core. Although only revealed in a small trench, it appears to show the upper limits of a wall on a different alignment from the 18th Century layout. The masonry, in turn, lies beyond the assumed limits of the 17th Century plan, and as such is most likely part of the medieval defences associated with other known residual elements such as the medieval gatehouse
- **February 2014** – A watching brief is maintained during excavations for the installation of a septic tank on the shore, and excavation of a sewage pipe trench within the Mason's Yard. The results of the excavations confirm that the original (19th-century) level of the Mason's Yard was created by simply backfilling the space between the 18th-century rampart to the north and the later enclosure to the south. There was some evidence that the upper circa 1.5m of the Mason's Yard boundary wall was narrower than the lower (majority) section of the wall. This may reflect a parapet level, associated with the cobbled surface.
- **2013-15** – Project ACCORD, an AHRC-funded project, led by Glasgow School of Art, Digital Design Studio, with contributions from RCAHMS, Archaeology Scotland and the University of Manchester, undertake research with climbers to record aspects of the climbing heritage at Dumbarton Rock, usually referred to by the climbers as 'Dumby'. The project included recording the entire crag and some of the boulders with a laser scanner and applying 3D recording techniques to survey specific aspects of the boulders.
- **2016** – a lightning strike badly damages a sentinel box in the curtain wall, which is rebuilt the following year.

- **November 2017 – March 2018** – A watching brief is undertaken during the installation of a new waste water drainage system in the grounds of the castle. The main trench excavation, which ran along the western side of Governor's House, contained the only significant archaeological remains. These included various culverts, surfaces and walls, all of which had been truncated by previous drainage works. These are thought to relate to the construction of the Governor's House, but this could not be confirmed due to the limited nature of the trenches.
- **July 2018** - A watching brief is carried out at Dumbarton Castle to monitor ground breaking works for the earth terminals of a new lightning conductor to be placed on the exterior of the curtain wall adjacent to the 'Pepper Pot'. Two holes are excavated, both to a depth of 0.4m, and only topsoil is encountered. No archaeological features are uncovered.
- **2021** - An archaeological watching brief is conducted during the excavation of a trench for a new electrical supply cable for the Guard House. The majority of the trench did not extend through the depth of the topsoil and no archaeological deposits or features were impacted upon. At the base of the steps leading up to the Guard House, immediately to the north of the Governor's House, the remains of a possible stone-built structure were identified and recorded in plan. The trench was widened slightly here to allow the ducting to pass safely over the feature without disturbing any of the stones. This feature may be the remains of a wall or the top of a feature such as a stone-built drain, but it was not excavated.
- **2023** - The floor structures have been partially exposed in all rooms throughout the Governors House and the exposed joists are assessed for their dendrochronological potential. The joists are all pine (Pinus sp) but they are all fully squared so dendrochronology is not recommended. The construction of the floor was unusual with every joint identified with a carpenters mark.
- **2024** – Four test pits are excavated beneath the floor of the exhibition room of the Governor's House. They reveal consistent deposits of rubble infill

which was redeposited in this part of the site, likely to level the area prior to modern developments. The deposition of these rubble layers is likely related to a substantial phase of demolition, construction and landscaping in the 18th century. No evidence of the medieval gatehouse is identified confirming it was either not surviving in this location or at a much greater depth than the test pits.

- **July 2025** – *Rock of Ages* exhibition opens in the Governor's House after extensive refurbishment and conservation work.
- **early 2026** – Mitigation works are completed to clear the rock face from vegetation at the outer court along Castle Road. This has cleared the view of a ramp which may have been the location of a possible loading platform for the crane bastion which was used to raise stores and munitions to the summit from the ground. It also uncovered wall fragments of unknown date.

Appendix 2: Dumby: A contribution provided by Dumbarton Rock Climbers

Dumbarton Rock's north-west sector is exceptionally popular with climbers, especially boulderers. This is not a recent phenomenon. 'Dumby', as The Rock is known to climbers, has from the 1960s been at the forefront of Scottish rock climbing and has in the last two decades commanded much attention from the world climbing media. It has played a large part in the history and development of the sport in and beyond Scotland and thus has great cultural and heritage significance to the climbing community and to the growing 'sport heritage' of Scotland.[100] The seven main boulders are known as Eagle, Home Rule, Pongo, Suckers, B.N.I., Sea and Warm Up. There are also sport and traditional climbing routes up the cliffs surrounding the impressive overhanging wall of the North West

[100] Hutchinson 2020.

Face.[101] These boulders and cliffs are often patterned with chalk marks left by climbers indicating the various routes or 'problems'.

The values surrounding climbing at 'Dumby' are linked to the volcanic geology and the styles of climbing it necessitates. In particular, the way it fractures requires the use of lots of pressure holds and an athletic and technical approach. It offers many difficult and challenging routes and climbers regard it as a 'yardstick', or 'a place to push your limits'. These 'use values' contribute to its social significance amongst the climbing fraternity.[102] It has an intimidating reputation and a mystique surrounding it. However, its significance is also rooted in the unique character and atmosphere that define its sense of place. It is seen as having a gritty character linked to the industrial heritage of Dumbarton, particularly as this recent (but now largely disappeared) industrial infrastructure provided the striking photographic backdrop to many iconic images of significant 'first ascents' in the 1980s. The social history of industry offers an analogy for climbing which also 'requires a graft and an industry'. The graffiti that marks the rocks and the detritus left by local revellers add to this 'edgeland' feel. At the same time, Dumby is seen as a valuable place of natural beauty and scenery informed by the changing of the weather and tides.

There is a strong sense of community amongst the climbers who frequent Dumbarton Rock. This is founded on shared practice and appreciation of place rather than residence. Various forms of social media have created more cohesion amongst those who climb there in recent years.[103] Social memory also plays a role in defining a sense of community. Guidebooks, published periodically since the 70s, highlight its significance and there is a strong sense of generations of climbers adding to layers of meaning and sense-of-place, including leading figures in Scottish

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[101] For details on all the climbing routes, see UKC, *Dumbarton Rock* (ukclimbing.com) (accessed: 29 June 2026).

[102] This statement is informed by two focus groups carried out as part of the ACCORD project. For further information on the project see: Archaeology Data Service, ACCORD with Rock-Climbers at Dumbarton Rock (archaeologydataservice.ac.uk) (accessed 20 March 2026).

[103] For example, Dumby.info. Available at: Facebook, Dumby.info (facebook.com) (accessed 29 June 2026).

and world climbing. In 2020, a comprehensive and bespoke guidebook for Dumbarton (*The Climber's Complete Guide to Dumbarton Rock)* was published, illustrating hundreds of routes and problems, including a dedicated history of the climbing at Dumby.[104]

There is also a rich tradition of oral history associated with climbing at Dumby and the graffiti adds a further dimension to the continuity of place. Ranging in date from at least the nineteenth century to the present day, it intersects with climbing routes becoming part of their characterisation and even naming (as in the case of the Eagle Boulder). The nationalist graffiti is singled out by some as part of the counter-culture of Dumby, with 'Saor Alba' ('Free Scotland') inscriptions appearing at different times, the latest undoubtedly linked to the 2014 Referendum on Independence. Strong expressions of attachment, loyalty and ownership are also evident amongst the Dumbarton Rock climbing community. These are linked to the sense of community, memory and place described above. However, they were also reinforced by the removal of some of the graffiti in 2012. Some of the climbers voiced concerns over the impact of these actions on the character of the place, and ultimately Scotland's climbing heritage.[105] At the same time some of the recent 'tagging' of the rocks by graffiti artists is also seen by some of the climbers as invasive.

The symbolic importance of the site for Scotland's climbing heritage was recognised in 2015 by the creation of a consultative group (the Dumbarton Rock Liaison Group), also through a 2016 Archaeology project,[106] and by continuing print and online archiving of the climbing heritage at Dumbarton. It is evident that there is still an ongoing desire to assert the rights of climbers' marginalised heritage in addition to the 'official' heritage of the castle.

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[104] Watson and Hutchinson 2020.

[105] BBC, *Dumbarton Rock graffiti clean-up concern raised by climbers*, 16th July 2012 (bbc.co.uk) (accessed: 29 June 2026).

[106] ACCORD project focus group, as summarized in the statement of social value archives at: Archaeology Data Service, ACCORD with Rock-Climbers at Dumbarton Rock (archaeologydataservice.ac.uk) (accessed 20 March 2026).

Selected Climbing Bibliography:

Hutchinson, J, 2020, *The Rock and The Map: two tales of contemporary heritage landscaping in Scotland*. Available at https://theses.gla.ac.uk/79003/ (accessed 29 June 2026).

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Dagg, T (ed.), 2023, *The Lowland Outcrops,* Scottish Mountaineering Club guides.

Appendix 3: Dumbarton Castle collection

HES Collections team have a catalogue of the substantial collection associated with the castle.[107] This includes pole arms and other militaria provided for display purposes on the 1st floor of the Governor's House by the Royal Armouries (currently not on display). There are also munitions and other paraphernalia related to the 19th century cast iron guns mounted on the batteries. There are fittings removed from individual buildings for safe-keeping, such as a door with a grille possibly from the French Prisons (DUM 113). Another possibly related object in the collection is an attractive wooden jewellery box decorated with coloured foils and paper, with a later inscription dated 1815 stating that the box was made by French prisoners (DUM 146). Another interesting object is the original copper (no sparks) lock and key possibly from the 1748 magazine (DUM 368). Both items are on display in the current exhibition.

[107] Some of the collection can be viewed online on Trove, Dumbarton Castle, Related Objects (trove.scot) (accessed: 20 March 2026). For any enquiries relating to the collection held by HES, please contact collections@hes.scot



Figure 15 and 16: Wooden jewellery box. Twists of paper and metallic threads were used to make the pattern on the lids and sides. Writing on the bottom of the lid tells us that the box was made by French prisoners taken during the Napoleonic Wars and held at Dumbarton in 1815. (HI00077648 and HI00077641) both © Historic Environment Scotland.

Medieval artefacts are rare from the site – a fine wrought iron yett of likely medieval date is displayed in the ground floor corridor of the Governor's House. The original location of this is uncertain, however, it is possible that this came from the north 'Old Entry' gate, blocked in the 1730s (DUM 112). A small medieval silver pendant cross was found in the 1970s excavations,[108] while a ceramic pendant cross, believed to be of a similar age, was found in monitoring works in the 1990s. Both these objects and other finds from the archaeology excavations are part of the collection of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow and are currently displayed in the *Rock of Ages* exhibition in the Governor's House.

[108] Caldwell 1992.

The collection also features early medieval carved grave slab fragments which were found in the garden terrace behind the Governor's House, the exact location is not known. Two of these are currently displayed in the Governor's House one of which dates to the 10th century and the other from the 12th-14th century. Two further carved stones are currently in storage, one dating to the 10th century and while the other is undated, it is possibly from around the same time.

One large object displayed in the Governor's House illustrates the history of the castle as a prison. This is an ex-situ inscription on a chimney stone from the Wallace Tower where one John Harlaw was being held in the castle in 1704, having been there since 24 March 1694. It is not recorded what his crime was, but the line from the inscription which reads '*persecuted for Christ and mistaken'*, together with the date, suggests he was a Roman Catholic.

Other than the carved stones, there is little in HES collection which has a direct relevance to the history of the castle before 1925 – the year when the 9th Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders gained occupancy of parts of the Governor's House for use as an Officers Mess and Headquarters.

It is clear that the battalion officers then deliberately set about creating an interior, chiefly on the first floor put over to their use, which befitted (as they saw it) the history of the castle and their battalion's service. Suitable pictures, books and objects were then acquired, by purchase or gift, to achieve the desired effect. The result was, no doubt, satisfactory to the officers and their frequent guests but it has resulted in a disjointed collection.[109]

The military collection features the uniform and medals of Admiral Sir A E M B Cunninghame-Graham, Keeper of the castle from 1955 to 1981. A large part of it relates to the history of the Dumbartonshire Rifle Volunteers (from 1887, the 9th Bn Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders) prior to their formal association with the castle. This includes material from their creation in 1860 relating to rifle target shooting – a silver prize medal, portrait of Sgt A Lawrance, winner of the highly prestigious

[109] Carswell 2020c.

Queen's Prize and a prize rifle. There are also some items of insignia. In addition, there are some good images, cuttings and general historical information contained in the various scrap books. This makes a coherent narrative linking the Battalion's use of the castle in the First World War with their subsequent occupancy from 1925. However, it is more representative of the military history of the town and county rather than the castle.[110]

The small collection of First World War material previously stored on the 1st floor of the Governor's House – British and captured German arms and equipment (including a number of grenades) - appears largely unprovenanced but may have been connected to the service of the frontline element of the 9th Argylls. It was probably collected in an attempt to establish a small 'regimental museum' type collection for the Battalion when former members retained a strong bond born of their war service.[111]

Much of the other material, as outlined above, beyond illustrative items, has no direct relevance to the castle's history. One exception to this is the small statuette of the figure from the 51st Highland Division Memorial at Beaumont Hamel in France. This was presented to the Battalion by the Chairman of the Regimental Association in July 1925 on the day they officially took up residence in the castle.[112]

Appendix 4: Post 1660: Military history

With the development of a standing army in Scotland after the Restoration of 1660, the castle took on a new role within a national network of permanently garrisoned artillery forts at strategically important locations.[113] But a chronic lack of investment presented problems in maintaining the castle in a suitable state of readiness. For

[110] Carswell 2020c.

[111] Carswell 2020c.

[112] Carswell 2020c.

[113] The military history reports commissioned by HES from A. Carswell contain a wealth of information on individuals serving at Dumbarton from Governors to private soldiers, and the circumstances of being billeted there. The following is informed by this research (Carswell 2020 reports).

example, in a report to Government in 1708, just as a French invasion fleet set out for Scotland in support of a planned Jacobite Rising:

> Dumbarton Castle – There are several breaches in the wall: there are 12 brass-guns, none of them mounted, all of them want carriages: there is no powder in the garrison, and but few flints; all the lodging in a ruinous condition; no coals in the garrison, not any other provision; the firelocks, being long since they were gotten, are very ill fixed. Edinburgh, March 9, 1707-8.[114]

The continuing unrest in the West Highlands caused by the Jacobite Risings, particularly those in 1715 and 1719, forced the Government of George II to refortify the castle, deemed 'a place of supreme importance'. Lt-Gen. George Wade visited in 1724 and recommended major upgrading of the buildings and defences. The north defensive circuit was rebuilt in the late 1720s. While the south and west defences, the arched main entrance, King George's Battery and the Spanish and Bower batteries, were the subject of major works in the 1730s, all under the direction of Captain John Romer (also responsible for designing much of the artillery defence along the north side of **Edinburgh Castle**).

Pressure on accommodation was compounded by the over-wintering of one or more companies of regular marching regiments and militia, a practice which occurred at intervals during Wade's campaign to disarm and patrol the Highlands from 1725 onwards, and in the pacification of the region during and after the 1745 Rebellion.[115] At this time, the castle was recognised as a place of '*the utmost importance*' by General John Campbell of Mamore, the officer tasked with securing Argyll and the West Highlands against the Jacobites. The garrison was augmented by companies of the Argyll Militia and the Royal Scots Fusiliers, although finding them accommodation in the castle was problematic.[116] The main barracks accommodation was still in poorly adapted medieval buildings – the gatehouse and

[114] Carswell 2020a, 4.

[115] Carswell 2020a, 8.

[116] Carswell 2020d, 4.

Wallace Tower, both being unsuitable and uncomfortable. Some troops must therefore have lived in tented camps or were billeted in the town. The situation was not improved until around 1760 when the Old Barracks, now known as the French Prison, was built, with the garrison company largely made up of veterans of regular service housed between this and the adjacent Wallace Tower. The latter was then demolished around 1795 to make way for the New Barracks, required shortly after the outbreak of war with Revolutionary France.

Up to 1802, the garrison was provided by an Independent Garrison Company (of which there were four in Scotland – one for each of the old royal castles: Dumbarton, **Edinburgh**, **Stirling** and **Blackness**) whose duties were light. It was permanently based at the castle and would have included men with local connections. Married soldiers were allowed to live in the town while single soldiers were accommodated in the castle. The size of the company varied considerably depending on circumstance – anything from 15 men up to 100. This independent company was nominally commanded by the Governor who had responsibility for paying, clothing, equipping and sustaining the personnel. He would then reclaim money from the War Office, likely making some small profit in the process. Increasingly, the Scottish Independent Garrison Companies were made up of older, partially unfit soldiers. However, these were distinct from the formal 'Invalid Companies' used to garrison forts in England and the more recent installations in Scotland. In 1802, all such independent garrison companies were grouped together into new Garrison Battalions and the Governor would have lost this role. These battalions were disbanded in 1816.

In 1806 the heavily understrength 74th Highlanders returned from seventeen years' service in India to recruit, based at Dumbarton.[117] The capacity of all barracks in the castle is recorded at this time as being one captain, two subalterns or staff and 162 other ranks. In 1846 the barracks accommodation (presumably the main barrack block) described as being made up of six rooms with a capacity of ten men in each, normally occupied by 42 men, women and children, plus two 'garrets' formerly used

[117] It is uncertain if they were based at the castle or in the town.

for an additional 14 men in an emergency. There was no separate accommodation for washing or cooking.[118]

From 1816 until 1865, the garrison was provided by detachments from other regular or militia regiments. These would have been younger men than the members of the previous static garrison companies. They would have served at the castle for short periods, around six months, and would then return to their parent units. For regular soldiers, these detachments generally came from the barracks at Paisley or Glasgow. Locally recruited auxiliary volunteers or militia were never part of the garrison as such.[119]

In 1855 the barrack accommodation underwent expansion and reorganisation. The Governor's house was gutted, and the ground floor turned into barrack rooms, with officers now accommodated only in the upper floors. The former officer's quarters west of the Governor's House was transformed into a hospital.

Around this time the War Department erected nine marker stones along the north side of the Castle Rock.[120] These indicated their ownership boundary, possibly in response to the development of the shipbuilding industry to the north. Six of the marker stones are still in their original location.

Appendix 5: Principal buildings of the castle which are now lost

Historic records, military plans and artists views informed the below description of some of the principal buildings that were once part of the castle but were subsequently demolished and no longer exist with the exception of the ruined Wallace Tower.

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[118] Carswell 2020b, 8.

[119] Carswell 2019a, 2.

[120] NLS, Ordnance Survey (1897), *Renfrewshire*, Sheet III.11, 25 inch 2nd edition, Southampton: Ordnance Survey Office (accessed: 03 June 2026).

Description of the Wallace Tower before its demolition

The final form of the Wallace Tower is clearly seen in a set of architectural plans of 1719,[121] and a pen-and-ink drawing by the military surveyor and landscape artist Paul Sandby dating from around 1750.[122]

This was a classic Scottish tower-house, a tall rectangular building standing six storeys high including the small basement prison. The first floor was a plain guardroom or storeroom, entered from the raised platform inside the Old Entry, with a single window at the north end (which still survives), and a floor hatch below this leading to the vaulted prison below. The next two levels, which may possibly have been the two upper storeys of the pre-1510 tower, appear to have been two superimposed halls, very similar in plan – each with an entrance at one end, leading through a relatively gloomy main space to a dais area lit by two windows, and furnished with a fireplace and an adjacent mural chamber. These were entered separately – the lower hall from ground level just inside the entrance, the upper floor apparently by a higher door, which would have required a timber fore-stair, or a bridge from the adjacent higher ground. As only the upper doorway has a guard chamber, this may have been the original entrance, with the floor below being accessed by an internal stair.

The floor plan of the tower was enlarged in 1618 requiring major works, supposedly the down-taking of the south gable and rebuilding. The remodeled tower was then harled with lime by workers in a cradle.[123]

From the entrance lobby of the upper hall, a staircase concealed within the thickness of the wall led to the two uppermost floors, each with a suite of two

[121] NLS, MS.1647 Z.02/73, Dunbarton Anno 1719, Military Maps of Scotland (maps.nls.uk) (accessed: 29 August 2025).

[122] Available online at National Galleries of Scotland, P. Sandby, North View of Dumbarton (P 2150) (nationalgalleries.org) (accessed: 29 August 2025).

[123] Pearce 2019, 2.

rooms. From their layout, these floors are likely to have been intended as accommodation suites for one or more relatively high-ranking individuals.[124]

White Tower

16th century references exist to a tower on the west summit which in 1580 (it probably dates from long before then) seems to have comprised a structure on at least two floors including a bedchamber for a watchman. The same inventory notes that the basement was used for storing munitions including 500 cannonballs in 1580. There was an early artillery position here, exploiting the highest point and most effective arc of fire, on which was mounted a 'moyan' a bronze gun of around 9ft in length. A 1639 description mentions a 'lofty watch tower' on White Tower crag, but by Slezer's time around 1680 this had been reduced to a stump. A ruined circular stone base of unknown function stands there now, with a modern view indicator.

Medieval watergate/gatehouse hall, main inner entrance

This inner entrance with an arched gateway and pend which housed a stair up giving access into the Nether Bailey. This was L plan in shape, with the frontage we see in the Slezer view, with a shorter west chamber block at 90 degrees going north up the slope towards the Guardhouse. In front of the gatehouse was a later small artillery bastion and an outer simple gate in a wall on the bastion's north flank, forming a kind of barbican. The sea shoreline probably came into the area roughly half-way between the 18th century Sentinel Wall and the King George Battery salient. The site of this may be under the garden in front of the present Governor's House.

The gatehouse hall may be the 'Red Hall' referred to in medieval documents. It is possible that the name may derive from the colour of the stone and/or harling, maybe with a red sandstone base. There are fragments of red sandstone re-used in later buildings, for example in the French Prison. Monies were spent on repairing/rebuilding this in 1460s, hall with basements. The Great Hall here served as

[124] Hodge 2019.

a dining space, attested by the benches and long tables mentioned in fifteenth-century inventories. A single space on the first floor 25m in length by 7.5m in width, with windows overlooking the Clyde to the south, and a great fireplace at the west dais end. This was associated with an external kitchen, brewhouse and bakehouse, possibly located under the rock at the north-east corner of the hall.

The Slezer plan shows an external stair to the first floor against the north-east façade. The hall over the entrance was used by the Constable and household and was where local law-courts were held. Chambers and servants' quarters were in the 2nd floor attic above, shown with five attic dormers in Slezer's drawing of the late 1600s, matched in the 1719 military plan.

The Slezer print shows the gatehouse façade flanked by drum towers (upper parts truncated by this time) reminiscent of James IV's forework at **Stirling** of around 1505, also seen at Rowallan, Holyroodhouse, and James V's outer gate at **Linlithgow**. These towers were entirely removed by the time of Slezer's 1690s plan.

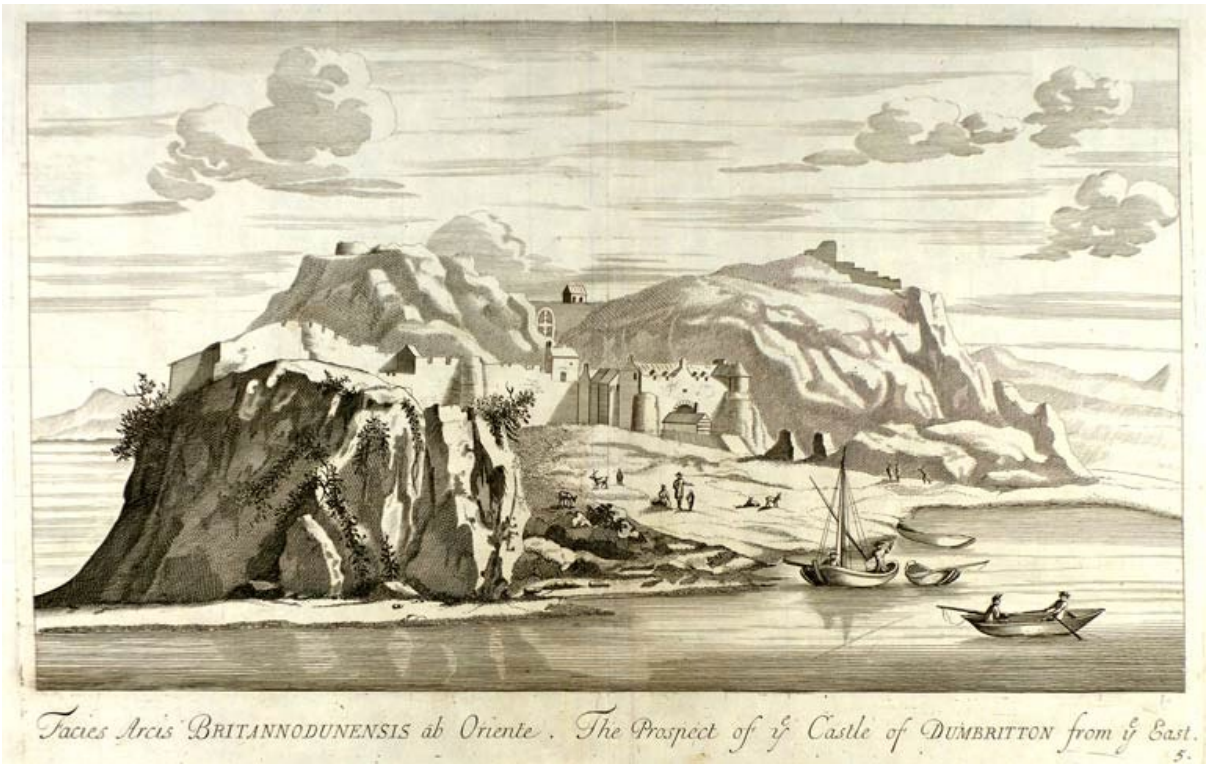


Figure 17: Slezer's view (possibly late 1670s) of the south gateway, published in Slezer's Theatrum Scotiae of 1693. (DP 537023) © Licesned by National Library of Scotland (Records of the Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN) Edinburgh, Scotland.

Gatehouse halls existed in many other medieval castles including **Bothwell**, **Caerlaverock**, **Rothesay**, and the Constables Tower in **Edinburgh Castle**. The 1719 plan shows the 1st floor as a large single space subdivided by a later partition.[125] This had been converted to be the military Governors' and officers' quarters around 1650 and then demolished to make way for the new Governor's House.

Chamber block

The Chamber block adjoined the north-west inner corner of the gatehouse. A 1510 inventory mentions a withdrawing room which could have been accessed from the west 'high' or dais end of the hall. By 1700 this was officers' quarters. The early plans show an external stair to a platform giving access to the upper floor of the gatehouse and chamber block.

Medieval chapel and cemetery of St Patrick

The chapel and cemetery could have originated in the early medieval period, and likely to have stood behind the gatehouse. Associated with the around 1000 recumbent cross slabs recorded as having been found in the area of the existing terraced Governor's gardens. Payments for repairs and for a chaplain are recorded at various times from 1300s to 1500s in the Exchequer Rolls. The chapel appears in the inventory of 1510 with a list of ecclesiastical vestments and other textiles.[126]

Payments to a chaplain continue after 1560 until about 1600, and so the chapel may have carried on in use for an unknown period of time after the reformation. The cemetery seems to have continued in use through the later medieval period, as there are references to gravestones being plundered and reused as building stone in the post-medieval period.[127]

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[125] NLS, MS.1647 Z.02/73, Dunbarton Anno 1719, Military Maps of Scotland (maps.nls.uk) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

[126] Pearce 2019, 5.

[127] Mair 1916, 64.

New Barracks of 1794

The New Barracks are shown on a 1920s Office of Works pre-demolition plan[128] on five floors including a garret floor. The south part of the Wallace Tower was demolished to make way for this barracks, while allowing space for the five-gun Duke of York's battery to the north. The New Barracks conjoined with the Old Barracks/French prison to the south. An 1895 plan shows the functions of spaces and barrack room capacities across the floors.[129]

Military hospital

The military hospital was located in the Nether Bailey on the terrace west of the Governor's House. A substantial two storey and attic building, with five south-facing windows on the first floor.

Chaplains house

The plan of a two-storey Chaplain's House with an external access stair is included in the 1719 Board of Ordnance survey of individual buildings in the castle.[130] However, it is not known where the precise location of the building was.

Lower guardhouse

The lower guardhouse stood at the end of the terrace to the west of the Governor's House, near the Hospital. It later served as a fuel store before its demolition in the 1920s.

Windy Hall/Master Gunner's House

A contemporary account from the time of the 1571 siege describes 'sundrie houses of the place' including the Windy Hall as a 'chamber between the crags'.[131] This was

[128] HES ref 193-107-16.

[129] 1741 plan HES ref 193-107-033.

[130] NLS, MS.1647 Z.02/73, Dunbarton Anno 1719, Military Maps of Scotland (maps.nls.uk) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

[131] Bannatyne 1836, 107.

probably located in the Over Bailey flat area between the two crags and was rebuilt as the barracks/ensigns' quarters in the 17th century.

This was enlarged and reconstructed around 1800 as the Master Gunner's House at the south end with the armoury and ordnance store to the north.

Magazines

A 17th century powder magazine stood on the Beak, shown on Slezer's 1690s plan. It was in ruins by the early 1700s.

In 1708 a second powder magazine was built. It was smaller and on a new site against the rampart below the Beak to the east (shown on 1725 plan).

A 1800s low magazine stood outside and to the south of the inner gate until it was demolished in the 1920s. By this time, it served as a Detention Room.

North gate

The North gate was also known as the Old Entry. It was accessed via a steep curving path leading up from the burgh side. There must have been a big difference in height between the outer and inner parts, and therefore likely that a steep stair was required through the entrance passage, giving access to an inner barbican. This would have been unsuitable for moving carts or guns. This area was reconstructed in the 17th century possibly in the form which Slezer depicts in the late 1670s, comprising a round-headed outer arch with rusticated quoins, beneath machicolated battlements. Part of the north defences collapsed from neglect in 1726 and were rebuilt in the following years as part of General Wade's wider programme.

This appears blocked in the Paul Sandby print of 1750 but retaining some access function in the form of a small postern gate. This entrance was clearly of greater importance in medieval times, hence the siting of the Wallace Tower adjacent to it. The last vestiges of this entry were blocked and demolished in 1794, having become superfluous.



Figure 18: North entry possibly 1670s by Slezer, published in Slezer's Theatrum Scotiae of 1693 (DP 101334) © Courtesy of HES (Illustration from Theatrum Scotiae by J Sleezer).

Governor's House kitchen

Adjoining the north-west corner of the house tucked-in against the rampart beneath the Rock, with brewhouse and bakehouse, shown on the 1719 detailed drawing of military buildings. It was on site of the medieval kitchens.[132]

First and Second World War structures

When the castle was returned to military use during the First and Second World Wars, there were a lot of temporary structures erected to accommodate troops and weaponry.

[132] NLS, MS.1647 Z.02/73, Dunbarton Anno 1719, Military Maps of Scotland (maps.nls.uk) (accessed: 20 March 2026).

During the First World War, 17 temporary wooden huts were erected in and around the castle, including a sergeant's mess, sleeping huts, ablution sheds, cook houses and latrines. An acetylene gas lighting plant was installed, in addition to existing buildings being repurposed to hold the troops.

During the Second World War, a 40mm anti-aircraft gun was installed on the Prince of Wales Battery covering the River Leven and Denny's Shipyard, with an accommodation block nearby.[133] An ablutions block for the garrison was built on the north gable of the French Prison, and the ground floor north half was converted into kitchens.

[133] Shown on 1940 plan HESref 193-107-055.