



HISTORIC
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SCOTLAND

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Property in Care (PIC) ID:

PIC119

Designations:

Scheduled Monument (SM90085)

Taken into State care:

1966 (Guardianship)

Last Reviewed:

2004 (2025 update to include Empire connections)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CROOKSTON CASTLE



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CROOKSTON CASTLE

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument comprises an upstanding stone tower house built by the Stewarts of Darnley about 1400. It is enclosed by the earthworks of the late 12th century original castle, built for Sir Robert Croc, a vassal of the High Steward.

The castle occupies the western part of a hilltop, dominating the confluence of the Levern Water and the White Cart, at between 20-30m OD.

Situated off Brockburn Road, Pollock, about 2km west of Junction 2 of the M74.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical overview

- Mid-12th century - The castle may have originated as one of a string of ringworks created by Walter fitzAlan along the White Cart. Robert Croc probably arrived here from England in the 1160s, as a vassal of Walter the High Steward. Croc was granted an estate (Croc's toun), with the Crookston ringwork serving as one of his chief places of local administration.
- 1180 - Robert Croc granted permission from Paisley Abbey to build a private chapel at his castle "as a special friend of the house".
- Later 13th century - Another Robert Croc sold the tenancy of Crucsfeu to the Glassfords of Lanarkshire. Following the Wars of Independence they sold the lands on to a branch of the Stewarts.
- Circa 1400 - The tower house was likely to have been built by Sir Alexander Stewart, lord of Crookston 1374-1406. His son John inherited the Darnley estate, now part of. He spent little time in Scotland, having become constable of the Scots fighting in France, and died at Orleans in 1429. The title *Sieur d' Aubigny* stayed with the Stewarts of Darnley.
- 1489 - The Stewarts had become the earls of Lennox through marriage, and in this year became part of an uprising against the young James IV. The royal gun train was brought from Edinburgh to Crookston, Duchal and Dumbarton, including the mighty Mons Meg. However, Meg was not necessarily at Crookston, as the train split with part going to Dumbarton. The loss of the west towers might be attributed to this siege.

- 1544 – The castle was captured by Regent Arran, the fourth earl of Lennox having sided with Henry VIII.
- Crookston was patched up and used as a residence until the end of the 16th century.
- 1758 – The Maxwells of Pollock acquired the estate. The family undertook restoration and improvement works throughout the 1800s, funded primarily by their extensive landholdings and industry interests in Scotland. However, the family had accrued some wealth related to slavery economies in the 1700s.¹
- 1817 – Sir Walter Scott published *The Abbot*, erroneously placing Mary, Queen of Scots' courtship with Lord Darnley at Crookston, increasing its fame as a romantic icon.
- Circa 1900 – The Stirling Maxwell family of Pollock House conserved the castle and opened it to day-trippers from the grime of industrial Glasgow seeking the pure air of the countryside. An army pensioner was installed in the lodge house as a custodian, welcoming 6,500 paying visitors in 1910.
- 1920 – The monument was first scheduled.
- 1931 – Sir John Stirling Maxwell, owner of Pollok House and a leading figure in the conservation movement, gifted the castle to the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) as its first property.
- 1939-45 – The north-east tower was used by the Home Guard as an aircraft observation post during the Clydeside blitz. Concrete floors were inserted into the north-east tower. An army camp existed in the parkland around the castle.
- 1963 – NTS transferred the castle into State care.
- 1973-75 – Archaeological excavations by Eric Talbot of Glasgow University.

Archaeological overview

A geophysical survey in 1998 revealed a circular feature, 20m in diameter, to the east of the present limits of the castle. It may be that the 12th century builders incorporated part of an existing prehistoric defensive circuit into their ringwork.

The primary work comprises the massive encircling bank and ditch of Robert Crook's earth-and-timber castle, built around 1180, with an entrance

¹ For more on this topic see [Surveying and Analysing Connections between Properties in Care and the British Empire, c.1600-1997 \(historicenvironment.scot\)](#) (accessed: 04 February 2025).

over the ditch on the west side. The secondary work comprises the impressive stone castle probably built by Sir John Stewart of Darnley at the beginning of the 15th century.

Fairly large-scale excavations took place at the castle from 1973-75. Ancillary ranges outwith the main tower to the east and west were investigated, along with the two demolished west corner towers. Significant discoveries were made, highlighting the good archaeological potential of the site.

A building about 15m x 8m was investigated against the east side of the enclosure. An area of the counterscarp bank top was excavated and found to have been cobbled, as was an area lower down towards the ditch, to create a stepped arrangement. An area was also investigated to the north side of the entrance. A stone building was uncovered here, set over the slighted bank of the 12th century ringwork. A silver groat of Robert III, minted 1403-06, was found in the foundations of the south-west tower, providing a *terminus post quem* for its construction.

Artistic/architectural overview

The arrangement of this castle is well-nigh unique in Scotland (cf. Borthwick and Hermitage). It comprises a high central oblong block (measuring c.19m east-west by 12m north-south) with four square corner towers. The two west towers and much of the west part of the main block have now gone, and the north-east tower alone survives intact. This tower exhibits careful unitary planning. The public rooms were located within the central block, while the projecting corner towers contained the other accommodation expected in a conventional tower house: stores, kitchen, prison, bedchambers, and servants' quarters.

Social overview

The community now play a major part in the management of the castle, under the auspices of the Crookston Castle Working Group. A storyteller-in-residence was in place as part of a project, and a number of community events took place. Numerous local school groups were led on visits with a storytelling theme.

Spiritual overview

None known.

Aesthetic overview

18th century – The castle became ‘romantic’ in its decline and became noted as a picturesque ruin with superb woodland prospects, *pleasantly situate in a pretty rising ground*.

Its fame increased when Thomas Pennant described its ruins as *delicious*.

The top of the north-east tower provides spectacular views in all directions.

Natural heritage overview

Birds spotted around the castle include blackbirds, jackdaws, robins, owls, starlings and buzzards. Foxes and squirrels have been seen and there are bats roosting within the castle. There is a wildflower meadow adjacent to the property.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROPERTY?

- Was there an Iron Age fort on the hilltop?
- Was the ringwork built by Walter fitzAlan or by Robert Croc?
- What was the form of the ringwork, and was this built to an Anglo-Norman design?
- Were there any gaps in its occupation between the late 13th century and the construction of the stone tower house in c1400?
- What was the arrangement of buildings and defences in the tower house barmkin?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- Crookston was a strategic stronghold and manorial residence throughout its long history, originally held by vassals as part of the Stewart fiefdom.
- Evidence of the early castle is chiefly represented by the massive outer earthworks, and by the buried archaeology.
- Crookston is an unconventional tower house, one of a small, important group that exhibits an unusually well-integrated plan.

- The castle serves as a poignant and highly visible reminder of the lost pre-20th century rural landscape of this area, now intensely urban. The character of the area has changed fundamentally within living memory.
- Now the only medieval castle to survive in the City of Glasgow.
- Crookston has played an important role in the Romantic and conservation movements.

ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

Borthwick, Hermitage, Edinburgh Castle (Mons Meg), Duchal Castle, Dumbarton Castle.

KEYWORDS

Walter fitzAlan; the Stewarts; Robert Croc; the Stewarts of Darnley; Sir John Stirling Maxwell; ringwork; earthwork castle; tower house; Mons Meg; Romantic movement.

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