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**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC222

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90130) Conservation Area (CA19)

**Taken into State care:** 1906 (Ownership)

**Last reviewed:** 2012

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# EDINBURGH CASTLE – THE GATEHOUSE



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



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# EDINBURGH CASTLE – GATEHOUSE, INNER BARRIER AND OLD GUARDHOUSE

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The present Gatehouse, built in 1886–88, is the latest in a series of main entrances into the castle. Replacing a far simpler gate, the Victorian structure was seen as a bold intervention at the time. It is surrounded by a number of lesser constructions; the oldest, including the Inner Barrier, date from the later 17th century, and the latest, the ticket office, was constructed as recently as 2008. Archaeological investigations in the area in 1989, in advance of creating the vehicle tunnel through the castle rock, uncovered evidence for two massive Iron Age ditches in the area.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

**Late 1st millennium BC:** Two massive ditches are dug on the east side of the castle rock, presumably as part of a scheme to upgrade the defences of the prehistoric fort. The ditches are still serving a defensive function into the 14th century.

**1649/50:** The 'forte of the castell hill', or Spur, built in 1548 on the site of the present Esplanade, is dismantled and removed.

**1651:** Oliver Cromwell orders the building of a new defence, called in military parlance a hornwork. The present Dry Ditch may originate from this time.

**1660s on:** Following Charles II's return to the throne, work on the Cromwellian hornwork is continued, and largely completed by 1680. The most significant change to the castle is the relocation of the main entrance, previously at the north-east side of the castle rock, to the centre of the east side, through an imposing gateway. (The two carved artillery panels in the tranche of the present Gatehouse were taken from that gateway.) The works also include a new port guardhouse (subsequently demolished) and the Inner Barrier, a secondary line of defence fronted by a lifting bridge and defended by a gun flanker on its north side (the present souvenir shop), which also houses a sallyport .

**1708:** Work begins on a new, much larger, defensive outwork on the castle's east side, intended by its designer, the military engineer Theodore Dury (who also designs, and gives his name to, Dury's Battery), to replace the 17th-century hornwork and encompassing much of Castle Hill. 'Le Grand Secret', as it is called, is abandoned at an early stage due to major misgivings by the military authorities. (Short stretches of Dury's aborted scheme remain visible.)

**1714/15:** The north stretch of parapet on the inner side of the Dry Ditch is heightened by 2m, work that is still visible in the present fabric.

**1720s:** The northern part of the hornwork is reconfigured, as part of Captain John Romer's major realignment of the castle's northern and western defences. The

work includes a two-gun battery facing east in the north flanker (still visible in the present shop), the removal of the Inner Barrier's drawbridge and pit and its replacement by two casemates (still partly remaining beside the vehicle tunnel).

**1752–55:** William Skinner, the Board of Ordnance's chief engineer for North Britain, has the rough terrain of Castle Hill, immediately east of the hornwork, graded and landscaped to form a parade ground for the castle garrison.

**Early 19th century:** The 17th-century gateway is demolished and replaced with a much plainer, wider gate. Of the two carved artillery panels removed from the demolished gate, the one depicting Mons Meg is built into the ordnance office, then in the south wing of the Governor's House, whilst the other is presented to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

**1853:** A roof is built over the two-gun battery and the covered space converted into a new Guardhouse, designed by Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Moody. The port guardhouse is demolished around the same time.

**1866–67:** Prison cells for garrison soldiers are built against the west side of the new Guardhouse.

**1877–93:** The area to the west of the Guardhouse/cells is converted into stables for use by the castle's commanding officer.

**1886–88:** The present Gatehouse is built to house a new entrance gateway (fitted with a 'rolling-back' drawbridge, the last of its type erected in Scotland) and guardroom/cells at ground level with a two-room courts-martial suite on the upper floor. The two 17th-century carved artillery panels are incorporated into the new Gatehouse. At the same time a second entrance is constructed at the north end for lorries bringing coal, etc. from the Esplanade into the open yard (known as the Coal Yard), and the former Guardhouse is converted into quartermaster's stores. The architect for the entire scheme is R Lawson Scott, of the Royal Engineers.

**1914 (?):** A new single-storey structure is built facing the rear of the Gatehouse, to serve as a 'postcard kiosk'.

**Post-1923:** Following the departure of the garrison to Redford Barracks in the city's south-west suburbs, the Guardhouse/cells and stables are converted into storage accommodation. The 'rolling' drawbridge is replaced by a fixed bridge.

**1929:** Bronze statues of Robert Bruce (by Thomas Clapperton) and William Wallace (Alexander Carrick), within canopied niches (designed by Robert Lorimer), are built into the Gatehouse's front elevation to mark the 600th anniversary of Bruce's death.

**1950s:** Following the success of the first performance of the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, held on the Esplanade in 1950, the Guardhouse/cells/stables are converted into storage accommodation for the Tattoo company. During one Tattoo, an elephant is stabled there. A new ticket/postcard office is built over the site of the 17th-century port guardhouse.

**1989:** Archaeological excavations carried out in the Lower Ward during construction of the vehicle tunnel discover the later 17th-century Inner Barrier

drawbridge pit and sallyport access stair, and in the coal yard to its north a military cemetery and the two massive Iron Age ditches.

**1990:** The new vehicle tunnel is opened by Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, Minister of State in the Scottish Office. The tunnel enables the lower approach road to become largely a pedestrian walkway. Conversion of the Guardhouse/cells/stables to the castle's main souvenir shop, and the open area south-west of the Gatehouse to public toilets, follow soon after. The former courts-martial rooms on the upper floor of the Gatehouse are subsequently vacated by the Army and transformed by Historic Scotland into a hospitality venue known as the 'Gatehouse Suite'.

**2008:** A new ticket office is built on a concrete slab over the Coal Yard.

The 'footprint' occupied by the Gatehouse and Lower Ward clearly has considerable archaeological potential given the strategic importance of this most vulnerable side of the castle rock to assault. Since the late 1980s the area has seen a good deal of archaeological investigation which has revealed some fascinating, and totally unexpected, results. However, more archaeological potential surely remains to be investigated.

Excavations directed by Peter Yeoman in 1989, during the formation of the vehicle tunnel, found evidence *inter alia* for (a) the original later 17th-century defensive arrangements in front of the Inner Barrier; (b) the origins of the north side of the approach road as a later medieval entrance into the castle; (c) two massive ditches in the Coal Yard that had been created in the later Iron Age and were still in use in the 14th century; and (d) a military cemetery dating from the 1689–90 siege. Boreholes drilled during the works to create the present ticket office confirmed the findings. The 1989 results are published in Driscoll and Yeoman, and the report on subsequent works in Ewart and Gallagher.

#### Architectural/Artistic Overview:

### **Gatehouse**

*Foundation phase:* The Victorian Gatehouse (two storeys high above a series of low stone vaults) was built in the then-fashionable Scots Baronial style, replete with crenellated parapets, corner 'rounds' and crow-stepped gables. The structure housed guardrooms at ground level, to either side of the entrance pend, and a two-room courts-martial suite on the upper floor; the latter fully lined with panelling and fitted with elaborate stone fireplaces. Prison cells were housed in a lower south range with an exercise yard beyond.

The building was conceived by the then Inspector-General of Fortifications, Lieutenant-General Sir Andrew Clarke, and designed by R Lawson Scott of the Royal Engineers in some secrecy, apparently for fear of adverse public reaction. Soon after its completion, a correspondent to *The Scotsman* commented that the structure 'degraded the city's chief ornament ... to suit the convenience of the military authorities'.

The Gatehouse incorporates in its entrance pend two stone panels carved in high relief depicting artillery and other items of military equipment stored in the castle's royal gunhouse. They are a unique and invaluable source of information. Mons

Meg is depicted on a gun cart, with a coign (for elevating and depressing the gun) at the rear and a gunner's quadrant in the muzzle; Mons Meg's present gun carriage, made in 1935, is based on this carving. Numerous other guns and mortars are depicted, together with a fascinating assortment of ladles, sponges, rammers, barrels, buckets, etc. The panels were retrieved from the later 17th-century gateway, but could well be earlier in date and made to grace another structure, possibly James V's 16th-century Munion House (which occupied the site of the Scottish National War Memorial). All the guns and equipment shown could quite happily be dated to the earlier 16th century, though the single gunner depicted seems to be wearing 'Venetians' (knee-length breeches), which became fashionable in the 1570s (Caldwell).

*Development phase 1:* The two bronze sculptures within canopied niches, added to the Gatehouse's front elevation in 1929, were created by Alexander Carrick (Wallace) and Thomas J Clapperton (Bruce), two of Scotland's leading sculptors. Carrick's work is also prominent on the Scottish National War Memorial. (Incidentally, Carrick's daughter, Anne, was the artist who created the costumed figures on display in **Melrose Abbey** and **Smailholm Tower**.) Clapperton's other works include the bronze sculptures on the Mungo Park Monument, Selkirk, and the bronze statue of a mounted Border reiver outside the Burgh Chambers, Galashiels, arguably his finest work. The canopied niches were designed by Robert Lorimer, fresh from creating the Scottish National War Memorial in the castle, in which he, Alexander Carrick and others collaborated between 1924 and 1927.

## **Guardhouse**

The origin of this building is complex and imperfectly understood. The following is a concise educated guess.

*Original foundation phase:* The Guardhouse building originated in the later 17th century as a flanking defence to help cover the main castle entrance, and specifically the late 17th-century Inner Barrier immediately to its south. The original 17th-century stone access stair and sallyport leading to the pit beneath the drawbridge that originally fronted the Inner Barrier were rediscovered in the south-east corner during the archaeological excavations in 1989.

*Development phase 1:* The flanker was remodelled in the 1720s to form a two-gun battery facing east (the two embrasures are still visible in the present shop). The Inner Barrier's drawbridge was removed and its pit filled in and replaced by two casemates (still partly remaining beside the vehicle tunnel).

*Development phase 2:* The 1853 Guardhouse was formed in the shell of the flanker by Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Moody of the Royal Engineers. Moody embellished the flanker's rubble mass in a revived ancient Scottish style, including a wide-mouthed gunhole of 16th-century form. In 1866–67 prison cells were added to the rear (west), and a little later stables formed in the yard beyond, for the Commanding Officer's use.

*Period in State care:* During its conversion into a souvenir shop in 1990 the Guardhouse was gutted and the cells removed, though the stables were retained.

The Guardhouse's fine curved iron-truss roof was removed because it was declared unsafe – which it wasn't!

### Social Overview

The Gatehouse has commanded the principal (east) front of the castle for over 130 years, and although the medieval castle would never have had such an architectural confection, the Victorian structure, although deemed controversial at the time, is seen today as an integral part of the castle's iconic image. Despite incorporating guardrooms, the Gatehouse effectively marked the demise of the castle's role as a 'defender of the realm'.

Today, the Gatehouse not only marks the physical entrance into one of the world's most famous visitor attractions, but internally it provides a comfortable, intimate facility for use by the 'castle family' (Crown, Scottish Ministers, Historic Scotland, Army, National Museums Scotland), and as a reception facility available for hire (including weddings).

The Lower Ward generally provides ticketing, orientation, toilets and shop space for visitors to the castle. During the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo each August and the concerts that immediately follow it, the Lower Ward provides valuable 'back stage' space.

The 1990 vehicle tunnel, entered from the Coal Yard beneath the 2008 ticket office, is of inestimable value for the castle, providing as it does an alternative vehicular route, thereby allowing the lower approach road through the Lower Ward to function as a pedestrian precinct during visiting hours.

### Spiritual Overview

The Gatehouse and associated buildings in the Lower Ward have no observable spiritual associations, although the former courts-martial rooms on the upper floor of the Gatehouse are occasionally used for wedding ceremonies.

### Aesthetic Overview

The Gatehouse is a major component in the frontal elevation of the castle. Although evidently seen by its creators as potentially controversial, and despite the fact that nothing quite like it would have stood at the main entrance into the castle during its 1,000-year history, the Gatehouse has become universally accepted as an integral part of the castle's built fabric. The early 20th-century statues of Bruce and Wallace (although neither is recorded as ever having visited the castle) enhance the historicity of the Victorian structure.

The lofty Gatehouse helps provide a feeling of enclosure within the Lower Ward behind. The brooding mass of the Half-Moon Battery to its west and the 1853 Guardhouse to its north complete the sense of enclosure.

The views from the Gatehouse's upper terrace eastward out over the Esplanade to the Old Town and the countryside beyond, particularly Holyrood Park and Arthur's Seat, are breathtaking.

## What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

What else remains to be discovered beneath and around the Gatehouse? Further light on the Iron Age/medieval ditches would be of particular value.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key Points

Even though the Gatehouse and Guardhouse date only from the Victorian age, they have a suitably martial air about them that helps create the impression in visitors' minds that the castle is of great age.

The carved artillery panels in the Gatehouse pediment are unique documents illustrating the contents of the royal gunhouse in the later Middle Ages.

The statues of Bruce and Wallace within their canopied niches are valuable artworks from the early 20th century associated with three of Scotland's most noted artists.

## ADDENDA

### Associated Properties

Some other post-medieval guardhouses: **Fort George; Stirling Castle**

Other famous statues of Robert Bruce: Bannockburn Visitor Centre (NTS); **Stirling Castle**

Other famous statues of William Wallace: Aberdeen; Ayr; Dryburgh; Lanark; Wallace Monument (Stirling)

### Keywords

guardhouse; cells; stables; drawbridge

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