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Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC005

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90007)

Taken into State care: 1915 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

AFFLECK CASTLE



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AFFLECK CASTLE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Occupying a commanding position on the south of the Sidlaw Hills, Affleck Castle originally overlooked the whole of the coastal plain from Dundee to Carnoustie and records show that before trees encircled the castle, mariners used it as a landmark for entering the Firth of Tay. Although unoccupied since 1760, the castle is in an excellent state of preservation and has suffered relatively little alteration during more than two and a half centuries of occupation, presenting an exceptional opportunity to view the household arrangements of a 15th-century laird.

Affleck Castle is a four-storey L-shaped tower house probably built in the late 15th century by the family of Auchinleck (or Affleck) of that ilk. It comprises a main block and a short wing housing the main stair to the second floor. The main block and wing are surmounted by a caphouse or garret, and a corbelled parapet with angle turrets and two bartizans, all of which probably date from repairs or alterations in the 16th century.

Internally, the arrangement is simple with a single apartment filling each floor, but it is the exceptional level of preservation and quality of masonry and carved stonework that distinguishes Affleck Castle from other tower houses. The accommodation includes cellars, a vaulted common hall, the lord's hall, an entresol or reception chamber with a small chapel adjacent.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

1296: Mathew Napier of Aghelek in the County of Forfar swears fealty to King Edward I of England

1471: James III confirms a deed subscribed in 1466 at Auchinleck by David earl of Crawford, detailing the bounds of the Barony of Auchinleck and stating that the lands were held in chief from the crown at an annual rent of one silver penny.

1501: first documentary record of Affleck Castle as a 'castell and fortalice'.

Early 18th century: Thomas Read purchases the castle and its lands from Gilbert Auchinleck and appears amongst a list of donors to the kirk session of Dundee in 1733, having gifted a silver communion cup.

Late 1740s: the Reads are declared forfeit for their part in the Jacobite rising, although there is a datestone built into the wall of the stables at the mansion that reads 'T.R.-1748'. The estate, still comprising a large part of the medieval barony of Auchinleck, is then purchased by James Yeaman, baillie and merchant in Dundee. The castle is believed to have been last occupied in the late 18th century, probably around the time the present mansion was built.

c.1850: the estate is purchased by Stirling Graham of Kincaldrum from the descendants of James Yeaman.

1913: Affleck Castle becomes a guardianship monument, with restricted opening hours due to the immediate proximity of the castle to the owner's residence and private land.

Archaeological Overview

No archaeological investigations are known to have taken place at Affleck Castle. The surrounding area is likely to have a high archaeological potential, representing outbuildings associated with the tower house. A late 16th century map by Timothy Pont shows the tower house with what appears to be outbuildings.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

Despite its occupation for over 260 years, Affleck Castle remains one of Scotland's finest examples of a late medieval tower house, its fabric having survived in near unaltered condition. The castle is a four storey, L-plan tower house built of local red sandstone rubble with ashlar at the quoins and openings. Affleck differs from other tower houses of this type since the wing or jamb is very small, being just one sixteenth of the size of the main block, the usual practice being to have a larger wing giving additional space. In the 16th century, the battlements were remodelled or renewed, the last significant works at the castle. The barmkin, the enclosure around the tower house, would have also included outbuildings such as another hall, stables, stores and possibly a kitchen, as there is no evidence for one within the castle itself.

Entry is via a plain arched doorway, which, like most tower houses, is sheltered in the angle between the wing and the main block, an arched entrance gives onto a spiral stair running from ground level to the lord's hall on the second floor. Above the entrance is an empty panel for the family's heraldic device, and a small niche probably designed to hold a statue of a patron saint. Prior to the addition of the parapet and battlements in the 16th century, it is likely that the entrance was protected by machicolation. The ground floor of the main block is occupied by a pair of cellars, equipped with 'key-hole' gunports to the N, W and S.

A plain barrel-vaulted hall occupies the floor above, its wooden floor forming the ceiling of the cellars below. Interpreted as the common hall, the chamber is sparsely appointed and lacks features such as a fireplace or a garderobe. The hall's three windows, facing E, W and S, each have stone seats in their bays. The spiral stair, set within the wing, continues upward to the second floor.

On the second floor, the lord's hall is a finely appointed chamber, overlooked by a raised dais for the lord's table at its N end. Behind the dais is a large and finely built fireplace. As in the common hall, the windows, set in the E, W and S walls,

each have stone seats in their bays. Additionally, the room has a latrine, situated in the SW corner, near the entrance from the main stair, and a large press in the W wall. As the stair from the ground floor ends here, a second stair continues to the parapet on the opposite side of the hall, giving access to the private apartments above. The upper part of the wing is occupied by small chambers.

The hall's S wall contains a straight stair leading to a small mezzanine floor housed within the wing. It comprises a small chamber lit by a pair of loop-holed windows, with a small gap in the wall providing space for a lamp. The adjacent latrine is furnished with a peephole, evidently intended to allow someone to watch the hall below. Anyone intending on entering the upper floors of the castle would have to pass under the peephole.

Situated on the third floor is the lord's principal chamber, the solar or withdrawing room. As befits its status, the room is richly appointed, and has large windows, each with side benches, while the large fireplace in the E wall is finely made and has carved pillars. Two large mural closets in the N wall are sufficiently spacious to have possibly held beds.

In the SW wall of the solar, a small arch gives access to the castle's small chapel that possesses a wealth of fine and well-preserved carved details, such as a holy water stoup, a piscina and aumbry, as well as a pair of decorative corbels for holding candles flanking the altar. The piscina is exceptionally fine, richly moulded and springing from a corbel in the form of a human mask with an arched recess to hold containers of wine and water above. The decorative features of the chapel are particularly appealing, and many of the furnishings required for the rituals of the mass remain intact.

From the lord's solar, the spiral stair runs to the battlements, where there are corbelled angle turrets at the NE and SE corners of the wing and the SE and SW corners of the main block, and bartizans in the E and W walls, one of which is directly above the entrance. It is likely that prior to 16th-century alterations to the battlements, the parapets and both bartizans included machicolations. The larger of the two cap-houses, which contains the stair and an attic space, has crowstepped gables. The smaller cap-house, built on top of the wing, has a small chamber entered from the parapet walk.

Social Overview

The castle's social value was not assessed as part of this report.

Spiritual Overview

The castle's spiritual significance was not assessed as part of this report.

Aesthetic Overview

The exceptional level of preservation at Affleck Castle has immense potential to present a late medieval tower house in near original condition.

The castle stands near the small village of Monikie, which also has a fine churchyard containing many interesting and well-preserved post-Reformation gravestones.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

It is unknown where the Auchinleck family resided prior to the construction of Affleck Castle. The extent of the associated barmkin is unknown.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

Affleck is one of Scotland's best preserved late medieval tower houses, almost entirely unaltered in 260 years of occupation, and has real potential to allow visitors to experience a tower house in near-perfect condition.

The chapel is rightly acknowledged as one of the finest in Scotland, having retained almost all of its original fittings.

Associated Properties

Monikie Castle (now destroyed, a stronghold of the Lindsay earls of Crawford); Finavon Castle (a ruinous 16th century L-plan tower house erected by the earl of Crawford); Kellie Castle (late 15th or 16th century tower house, restored by Lorimer in 1878); Guthrie Castle (a restored 15th century tower house incorporated within a modern mansion); **Drumcoltran Castle** (16th century L-plan tower house among farm buildings, reflecting the later medieval arrangement of ancillary buildings within an associated barmkin).

Keywords

Auchinleck; earls of Crawford; tower-house; machicolation; corbelling; hall; press; peephole; entresol; chapel; bartizan; cap-house; parapet