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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 GOVERNOR’S HOUSE



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EDINBURGH CASTLE – THE GOVERNOR’S HOUSE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The Governor’s House was built in 1740–42 to provide residences for the Governor of the castle and his two most senior staff officers, the Master Gunner and Storekeeper. Designed by Dugal Campbell, Board of Ordnance engineer, it is easily the most distinguished of the castle’s Georgian military buildings.

The post of Governor fell into abeyance in 1860, but was reinstated in 1935, though with purely honorary duties. The building, however, has remained in continuous Army use, and today houses an apartment for the Governor and Officers’ Mess for the Scottish Command.

The Governor’s House may well have been where William Roy, Paul Sandby and their colleagues were based between 1748 and 1755, whilst producing the Military Survey of Scotland (‘the Great Map’), ordered by the duke of Cumberland in the aftermath of the battle of Culloden.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

1735: A Board of Ordnance plan shows the site occupied by the Deputy Storekeeper’s House, and what appears to be a garden to its rear.

1740–42: The Governor’s House is built on the site of the former Deputy Storekeeper’s House, to a design by Dugal Campbell, Board of Ordnance engineer. Latrines and gardens are provided to the rear and south side.

1747–53: The basement rooms may well be used by William Roy, Paul Sandby and their team of surveyors and cartographers, producing the Military Survey of Scotland for the duke of Cumberland.

Later 18th century: The two wings are raised in height by an additional storey.

1811: The south wing is in use as the Ordnance Office.

1860: Following Viscount Melville’s retiral as Governor, the post falls into abeyance. The building is then used by the nursing sisters of the military hospital.

1935: The post of Governor is re-instated, though for purely honorary duties, with General Sir Archibald Cameron, KCB, CMG, the first appointee. The north wing is subsequently remodelled to provide a residence for the Governor. The central block and south wing become the Officers’ Mess for Scottish Command.

Archaeological Overview

Little archaeological work has been undertaken in or immediately adjacent to the Governor’s House. In the mid-1980s, a small excavation at the rear revealed the stone footings of the latrines built in the 1740s to serve the Governor’s House.

Architectural/Artistic Overview

The Governor's House is essentially a single-phase building of 1740–42. The only significant alteration externally was the raising of the two wings to their present height at some stage during the reign of George III (1760–1820). The interior has, however, been substantially altered.

The Governor's House has been described as 'an outstanding example of Board of Ordnance design' (Maclvor). Two storeys and attic high above a two-storey basement, it was in fact three houses, for the Governor, Master Gunner and Storekeeper.

The Governor was housed in the five-bay central block, suitably dignified with massive stepped gables rising from heavy channelled pilasters and a deep parapet. The front door porch with its triangular pediment, and the windows with their raised key-blocks, further enhanced that particular house's superior status.

The wings to north (Master Gunner) and south (Storekeeper) are slightly lower in height and lack the detailing of the central block; Gifford *et al.* describe them as 'decently utilitarian'. That the wings were originally only one storey high above the double basement is evident both from the different coloured stone of the heightened structures and the fact that their lead rainwater hoppers bear the cipher of George III.

Social Overview

The Governor's House, being in Army use, has restricted access to members of the general public.

Much of the building is used as an Officers' Mess, and as such is highly valued by those privileged to be members of the institution or their guests.

Spiritual Overview

The Governor's House has no observable spiritual associations.

Aesthetic Overview

The Governor's House is the most distinguished of the several Georgian military buildings in the castle, and an outstanding example of 18th-century Board of Ordnance design.

The building's front elevation, facing east towards the principal approach road between the Portcullis Gate and Foog's Gate, is by far the most impressive. Indeed, it would not be out of place in Edinburgh's Georgian New Town.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

How were the three houses laid out internally when first built, and how did they change when the wings were heightened?

Is there proof to confirm the supposition that the basements were used by the Military Survey team between 1747 and 1755?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- The Governor's House is the most distinguished of the castle's numerous Georgian military structures, and an outstanding example of Board of Ordnance design.
- The Governor's House continues to play an important role in the life of the Army in the castle.

ADDENDA

Associated Properties

Other governor's houses: **Dumbarton Castle** (1735), **Fort George** (1750s)

Keywords

cellar; latrine; Master Gunner; storekeeper; Georgian

Selected Bibliography

Gifford, J, C McWilliam, and D Walker, *The Buildings of Scotland: Edinburgh* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984)