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Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC254

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM8480)

Taken into State care: 1951 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KNOCK CASTLE



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KNOCK CASTLE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- Knock Castle consists of a ruined, late 16thC tower house standing within a roughly circular enclosure. The enclosure is considerably later than the castle, but within it are the traces of other buildings, ancillary to the tower.
 - The castle is picturesquely situated on a rocky knoll at the mouth of Glen Muick, near the junction of Muick Water and the Dee.
 - The castle was held by a cadet branch of the Gordon Family, the Gordons of Knock, and then by the Gordons of Abergeldie.
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CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- The date of construction is unknown, although there are historical references to the existence of a castle at Knock in the early 16th century when the 3rd Earl of Huntly gave command of the castle to one of his sons. The 4th Earl granted the castle to a brother of the Gordon Laird of Abergeldie.
- The Gordons of Knock and Knock Castle were involved in the conflict between the Gordons and their rivals including the Forbeses and the Earls of Moray, which dominated the political life of north-east Scotland during the latter half of the 16th century. In 1592, Clan Chattan (Mackintoshes) raided into Mar, despoiling Gordon lands in Abergeldie, Glenmuick and Strathdee, and killing four Gordon lairds including Henry Gordon of Knock. It has been suggested that the original castle was destroyed at this time.
- Henry's brother, Alexander, succeeded him and may have rebuilt the tower. Tradition states that he fell to his death down the staircase at Knock after being overcome with grief when his servant reported that a party of Forbeses had killed his seven sons while they were out cutting peat and impaled their heads on their spades. The lands and castle of Knock then passed to the Gordons of Abergeldie.
- Little is known of the castle's later history. A painting by Giles shows that it was ruinous by the 1840s.
- The castle and the area within the circular enclosure was taken into state care in 1951.

Archaeological Overview

- The ground floor of the tower was excavated in 1987. About 1m of rubble overburden from the collapsed vault was removed. This revealed a mortar floor surface but located no finds apart for some roof tiles, suggesting that the building was cleared and abandoned before the vault collapsed.
- The area around the building is enclosed by a low circular dry stone wall, which is probably rather later than the construction of the tower. Within the area, particularly to the NW and S, there are traces of ancillary buildings and the whole area should be regarded as highly sensitive.
- It has been suggested that the site may have contained a prehistoric stone circle. There is no evidence for this.

- The whole site including a possible castletoun should be viewed as very sensitive archaeologically given the apparent lack of prior disturbance it has received.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The tower is a good example of a minor laird's towerhouse. The building is very simple; the tower is accessed from the ground floor, with a small entrance lobby in the thickness of the wall, leading to the main stair and a vaulted cellar. The cellar has a small private service stair to the 1st floor. Above the cellar, accommodation is over three storeys, with a first floor 'hall' and chambers above, the top floor supplied with corner turrets or studies at the NE and NW angles. The SE angle is carried up as a corbelled out gabled tower or cap house higher than the roof of the main building. Under the cills of the major windows of the tower are three, quite crude, shot holes.
- The upper works of the tower, with the corbelled out caphouse, key-pattern corbelling to the roofed corner studies and the flat skew on the gables, all suggest a fairly late 16th C date, perhaps stretching into the early 17th C. It is possible that after the Clan Chattan raid, the opportunity was taken to update the existing tower.
- As one would expect, the tower house did not stand in isolation, and it is surrounded by traces of ancillary buildings. The yards and gardens would have been even more extensive than can be seen on the ground today.

Social Overview

Not assessed.

Spiritual Overview

None.

Aesthetic Overview

- The castle stands on a rocky knoll within open fields. It is a prominent feature yet does not dominate the landscape as it sits in a saddle between two heavily forested hills.
- The castle itself has a distinct charm. Its verticality is emphasised by the treatment of its upper storey, which also gives some relief from the simple rectangular massing of the building as a whole. Features such as the gunloops and the corbelling relieve the severity of its granite rubble walls.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- There are very few historical references to the castle, and after it was acquired by the Gordons of Abergeldie it appears to have had a very uneventful history.
- The development of the castle is uncertain; was the early 16th C castle completely rebuilt in the late 16th C or, as seems more likely, was it extensively refurbished, modernising the upper works.
- Very little is known about the nature and structural development of the wider castle complex that existed – outbuildings, yards etc.
- The purpose of the circular enclosure is not known, although it is likely to have been built after the tower's abandonment to keep out cattle.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- The tower is a good example of a minor laird's tower built in the early 16th C and altered in the late 16th/early 17th C.
- The castle is attractively sited at the mouth of Glen Muick.
- It belonged to a cadet branch of the Gordon family, the Gordons of Knock.

Associated Properties

Huntly, Glenbuchat, Auchindoun – Gordon Castles.

Keywords Gordon, tower house, Clan Chattan