



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC337

Designations: Scheduled Monuments (SM2540) (SM90291 – Part)
Conservation Area (CA218 – Part)

Taken into State care: 2013 (Ownership)

Last reviewed: 2017

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KING'S PARK, STIRLING



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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1.1 Introduction

The King's Park at Stirling Castle is Scotland's oldest Royal Park, and survived in possession of the Crown for over 900 years before ownership was transferred to Historic Scotland, predecessor body of Historic Environment Scotland in 2013. It covers an area of over 350 acres, and was an integral part of the life and workings of the castle. As well as providing the setting for events such as royal baptisms, it has a long history of leisure activities such as jousting tournaments in medieval times. The park survives relatively intact and is still defined by its medieval boundaries, along with extensive documentation on how it was used.

Ownership of the part of the park called the King's Knot (see separate Statement of Significance) was transferred to the predecessor of Historic Environment Scotland in 1866. Another part of the park (The Haining) was purchased by Stirling Council. Historic Environment Scotland currently lease the King's Park to Stirling Council who manage it entirely, including sub-letting a large part of it to a private Golf Club.

The park today is one of Stirling's best used recreation areas, with a network of paths, playparks and sports facilities available for public use.

1.2 Statement of Significance

- King's Park, Stirling is Scotland's oldest, most historically important royal park, which was in the possession of the Crown for at least 900 years
- While Stirling Castle was one of the main royal residences of the kings and queens of Scotland, the park was an integral part of castle life
- The extent of survival of the King's Park (350 acres), along with the castle, the Royal Palace and other buildings, is of significance not only to Scotland but on a European level. The only equivalent royal residence and associated landscape in Britain is Windsor Castle and the Great Park.

2 Assessment of values

2.1 Background

Timeline:

Early 12th c – first records of lands associated with the castle appear

1165 – parts of the park are enclosed for the first time

1260 – New Park created – this possibly played role in Scots Strategy at Bannockburn

1398 – references to tournaments

1488 – James IV initiates series of radical changes

1506 – Justinflat (Jousting grounds) given up in exchange for Gowane Hills. This meant the castle had a clear view to Stirling Bridge, as artillery capabilities had advanced sufficiently to keep the area between the castle and the bridge protected.

1513 – Stirling Castle and grounds assigned to James IV widow

1525 – Walter Cunningham was made gardener and forester, a role which continued in his family into 17th century

1529 – first reference to the new jousting ground at Butt Park

1530 – lands in Raploch still let to tenants and servants of queen

1566 – John Erskine (later Earl of Mar) granted captaincy of castle with park and gardens including Raploch and Gowane Hill

1617 – Royal visit led to extensive work to castle and gardens

1620-1633 – further work carried out, and the King's Knot first laid out

1671 – Warrant issued to master of works to repair park for king – probably mainly repairs to the dykes

1715 – Earl of Mar forfeit & exiled, for his leadership of the Jacobite Rising that year

1790s/1800 – public paths laid out round castle and Gowane Hill

1850 – boundary wall rebuilt apart from one section east of St Thomas Well which probably dates from 1671

1851 – all other historic crown lands disposed of except Windsor Castle and Stirling

1860 – Decision made that the racecourse in main body of park was to be used only for horseracing henceforth (to stop people playing other games such as quoits)

1866 – Ownership of King's Knot transferred to predecessor of Historic Environment Scotland

19thc – golf played in park

20thc– Stirling Council buy The Haining

2013 – Ownership of King's Park transferred to predecessor of Historic Environment Scotland

2.2 Evidential values

Very little archaeological work has been carried out in the area of the King's Park covered here, but the potential for archaeological remains is high, even with the developments such as the golf course below the castle. Stephen Digney's [report](#) which combined Historic Land Use Assessment with LiDAR results in parts of the

park has illustrated the potential for new discoveries. In particular it enhanced our understanding of the position of the racetracks, as well as showing the position of the military camps at the Haining. It also helped identify where the loch was and discovered the position of a medieval dam. Further application of this model could enhance our knowledge of other parts of the King's Park. The following values are excerpts from this report.

2.3 Historical values

The King's Park has been extremely well-documented as one of the most important royal landscapes in Scotland.

The King's Park was founded by William I, c1165-75 (RRS II: 206-207) and is the oldest royal park in Scotland. It performed multiple social and economic functions for the royal court at Stirling (Gilbert 1979). These included activities such as deer hunting, hawking, archery, and tournaments with associated pageantry (Edington 1998: 53-61). The park was also cultivated, used for hay production, pasturage, and the stocking of deer, cattle and sheep. It was used in tandem with Alexander III's larger 'New Park' of c1264, a short distance to the south (Miller 1922). Both sat within a wider landscape of royal forest and hunting reserves which stretched between the rivers Forth and Carron (Cook 1907: 121; Harrison 2012: 27). Lands of the New Park were gradually granted out to others by the Crown in the 14th and 15th centuries (Cook 1907: 122-6). However, the Old Park, which was revitalised by James IV and his reorganisation in the 1490s and early 1500s, included the creation of a great garden, orchards, fish ponds, and a new park dyke (Ronald 1899: 99-100; Harrison 2012: 31-33).

When the royal court moved to England in 1603 interest in the park waned. However, a major investment in the great garden in the 1620s appears to have funded the construction of the King's Knot (RCAHMS 1963: 219). These geometric earthworks, the foundations of a monumental garden, would have been in place for the Scottish Coronation of Charles I and his visit to Stirling in 1633. The death of Charles II (1685) brought an end to royal usage of the King's Park and it became primarily an economic asset of the Crown Estate. It was leased to tenant farmers, but with some restrictions on agriculture as it was also to be made available for military use when required (Harrison 2012: 38).

The 18th and 19th centuries brought several new developments in connection with public sport and recreation. Antiquarian interest in the King's Knot led to its restoration in 1867 and current protection, as a scheduled monument and Property in Care. The construction of the Back Walk (recreational pathways below the town wall) began in the 1720s and was later extended round to Gowanhill. The Back Walk became increasingly wooded in the later 20th century. From 1805 to 1854 horse racing was a regular feature of the park and contributed to the 'high park' being turned over to pasture. This pasture proved attractive for golf and in 1869 the Stirling

Golf Club was formed. The golf course was expanded to 18 holes in 1912 and is now the dominant land use within the park. A thin tree belt is all that divides the golf course from the public playing fields in the south-east. Since the late 19th century this public space has been important to Stirling life not only for recreation, but also for major gatherings of various kinds (social, military, political and cultural).

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

The park is defined to the north and south-west by a stone dyke. This contains lengths of 17th-19th century builds and repairs, but arguably maintains the footprint of the original park (Harrison 2008: 46-48; 2012: 26, 37). The dyke terminates at King's Park Road in the south, where 19th century railings begin. These railings define the current park boundary in the south and east.

This part of the boundary broadly reflects the shape of the park in 1506 following an exchange of parkland with the burgh for Gowanhill, and earlier 14th century alienations (Ronald 1899: 96-101; Harrison 2012: 28, 31). Prior to these alienations the south-eastern boundary followed the length of King's Park Road (the old Cambusbarron road) towards the site of the former Burgh Gate (Cook 1907: 126). From the Burgh Gate to the north end of the castle, the high ground of the Stirling Sill, occupied by the town wall, completed the park limits. Overall c164ha may have been originally enclosed, reducing to c. 133ha by 1506. On historical grounds it is acceptable to redraw the south-eastern boundary along King's Park Road to the Burgh Gate as a relict footprint.

James IV's reorganisation in the early 1500s resulted in a designed landscape focused around the great garden, orchards, and loch. Beyond this immediate area the park continued as before with a mixture of animal husbandry, agriculture, hunting and sports. Although the royal park continued in use as a park into the 17th century the designed elements of that period have since been lost. The exception is the earthworks of the King's Knot (see separate Statement of Significance).

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

The King's Park has huge aesthetic value, being beautiful both when walking in it with views of the surrounding area and the castle high above; as well as when viewing the park from the castle battlements where it sprawls out below with the distant backdrop of mountain peaks of the Southern Highlands. The vast landscape invokes a sense of how impressive it must have been when in use as a royal park. It is all well-maintained with the golf course being a central feature as well as several pathways, playparks and sports facilities for the public.

2.6 Natural heritage values

These values are likely to be high due to the large area, and the possible antiquity of some of the woodlands, however they have not yet been formally assessed.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

The park is a central part of Stirling community life, with well-used walkways, playparks, sports facilities and a golf course within it. It is thus valued within the community, who have set a group called Friends of King's Park Stirling. Amongst other groups, the Friends are working towards making King's Park one of the first Dementia Friendly Parks in the UK.

The golf course is run by a private golf club which (it is presumed) is of economic value to the local area, but the extent of this has not been assessed at present.

3 Major gaps in understanding

To be assessed

4 Associated properties

King's Knot, Stirling Castle, Mar's Wark, Holyrood Park

5 Keywords

Royal park, designed landscape

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ERS The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland vol IV, Burnett, G. (ed) 1880, H. M. General Register House, Edinburgh.

RRS Regesta Regum Scotorum, II, The Acts of William I King of Scots 1165-1214, Barrow, G. W. S. and Scott, W. W. (eds) 1971, at the University Press, Edinburgh.

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