STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

MORTON CASTLE

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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

MORTON CASTLE

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

1.1   Introduction

Morton Castle stands overlooking Morton Loch, on the south-west slopes of the Lowther Hills, two miles north-north-east of Thornhill in Dumfries and Galloway. The ruined castle consists of a two-storeyed rectangular block with part of a twin-towered gatehouse attached to its west end: the rest of the gatehouse and another tower at the east of the hall block are extensively ruined. The site is a sharply defined triangular promontory which juts out into the loch.

Archaeological remains are evident immediately outwith the standing remains, and all is enclosed by a large ditch on the south side cutting off the promontory on which the castle stands.

Outwith the area in care, the remains of a large enclosure interpreted as a medieval deer park are visible, and this, together with Morton Loch (which may also have a medieval origin) provides a setting of some grandeur for the ruins.
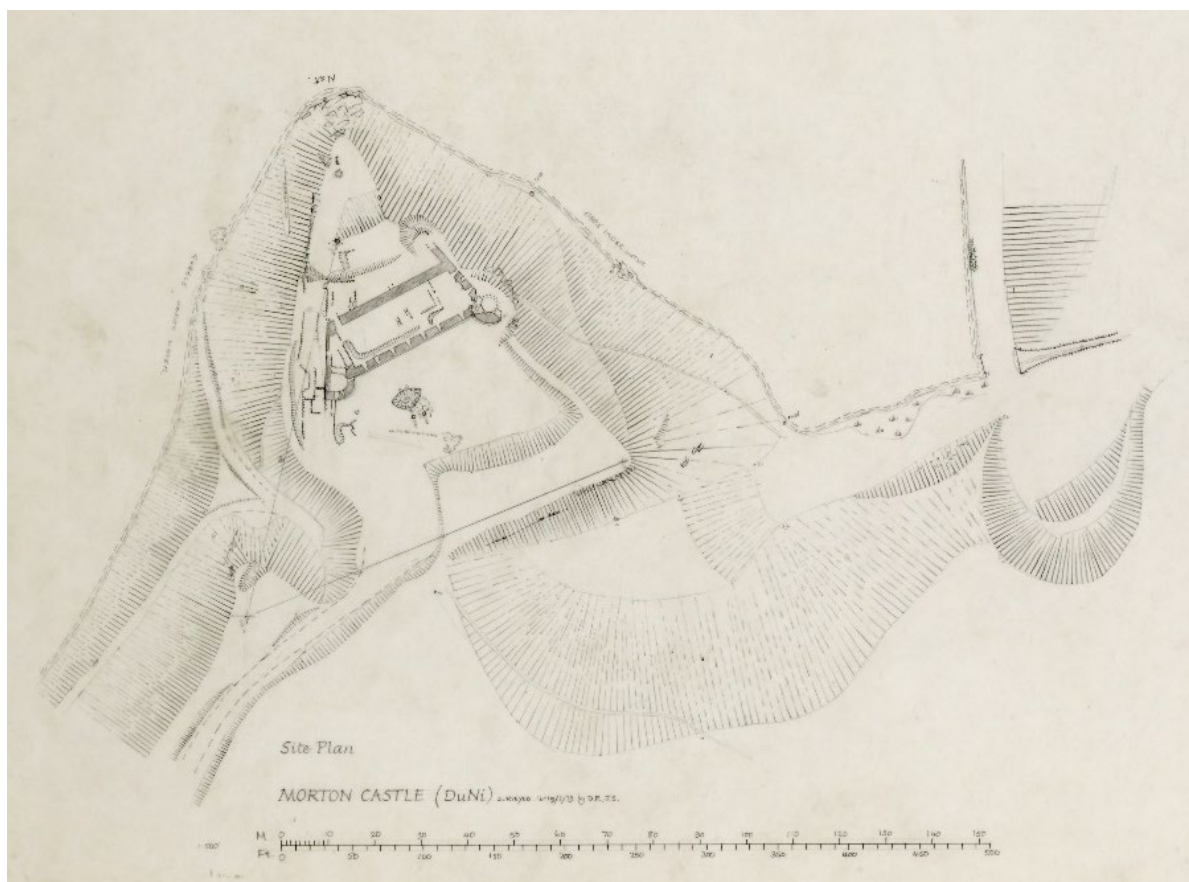
Figure 1: Morton Castle site plan. © Crown Copyright: HES.

The site entered State care in 1975 through a deed of Guardianship. The castle is accessible to view throughout the year[1]. As an unstaffed property, precise visitor figures are not known, however the annual number of visitors in 2018-2019 is estimated to be 6,720. There are currently no visitor facilities provided, beyond on-site interpretation panels. The nearest car parking provision is a layby situated c.200m from the castle; access between the two is via a footpath across agricultural land.

Figure 2: Morton Castle Scheduled Area and Property in Care Boundary. For illustrative purposes only.

1.2 Statement of Significance

Morton Castle is a remarkable building which has been '*as imperfectly understood as any castle can be…its position, purpose, style and its date are all open to question*'[2]. While it possesses features found at other castle sites, none seem directly comparable and ultimately it has its own unique character. It is this which has led to a century's worth of scholarly debate

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[1] For access information, see: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/morton-castle/
[2] Stell 1986, p.108

over how it should be categorised, its date, function and architectural significance. With this caveat, the following bullet points summarise the castle's key aspects of importance as currently viewed:

- Morton Castle is currently understood primarily as a residence, probably as a hunting seat. Its lack of military capacity is evidenced in its design and setting. It therefore provides some counterbalance to the traditional perception of castle sites as primarily military strongholds.

- Since the early 1960s it has been described as a hall-house, but this categorisation has subsequently been challenged. It therefore has an important place in the understanding of the evolution of the Scottish castle, particularly the changing nature of the castle in the late 14th and 15th centuries.

- The site displays significant chronological depth, with the possibility of recovering evidence of 12th century and earlier occupation, as well as possessing visible remains in the form of earthworks and standing structures spanning the 13th to 15th centuries and beyond that to the 18th century.

- Its setting within the Nithsdale landscape is noteworthy. Unlike some of its fellow castles in the valley, most notably Tibbers and Dalswinton, it is not strategically located. Instead, it is sited almost discreetly; a discretion which emphasises the lack of serious defensive capabilities displayed by the building in its final form.

- Its landscape setting includes the relatively uncommon survival in Scotland of an associated deer park, which had been created prior to c.1376. Whilst hunting parks were often associated with castles in Scotland, it is relatively uncommon for the complex to survive as a relatively easily distinguishable whole.

- Indeed the documentary evidence suggests a barony with two zones: an upland seigneurial zone with its park and the potential for further hunting in the hills, and a farming zone. The castle stands at the interface between the two, supporting the suggestion that it may have become a hunting lodge of the Douglas family[3].

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[3] Stell 1979
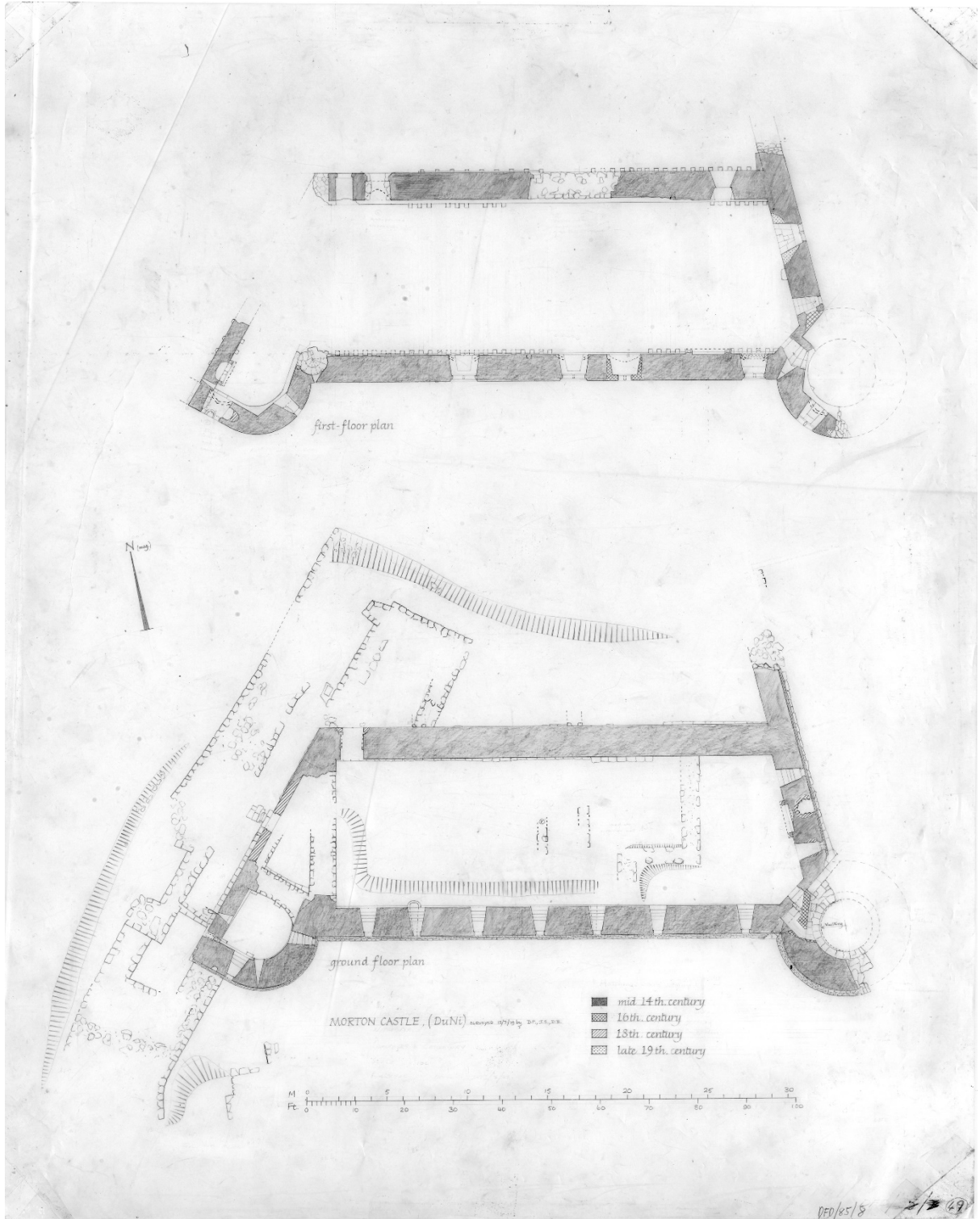
Figure 3: Plan of ground floor and first floor. © Crown Copyright: HES.

first-floor plan

ground floor plan

MORTON CASTLE. (DuNi)

	mid 14th. century
	16th. century
	18th. century
	late 19th. century

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2   ASSESSMENT OF VALUES

2.1   Site description

The following paragraphs give a summarised description of the site. A more detailed description is given in Appendix 2.

2.11   Location and setting

The castle is situated in the middle reaches of the Nith Valley some 26km (16 miles) north-north-west of Dumfries, at a height of 183m (600 feet) on the first slight swelling towards the high hills that enclose the valley on the east. It stands upon a triangular promontory of high ground flanked on the north-west and north-east by the waters of Morton Loch and is only easily approachable from the south. The present loch was created in the 1850s, but there is strong evidence to suggest that there was an artificially created loch here in the medieval or immediately post-medieval period. Whilst locally prominent, the castle is screened by topography from the rest of the valley to the west, and though the standing remains capture the attention they are just one element of a more extensive site occupying the whole of the promontory (Figures 1 and 2).

Approaching from the south along a well-formed track, it has been suggested that a defensive ditch might have been drawn across the neck of the promontory. Natural gullies on both the east-south-east and the west, which may have been artificially enhanced, mean that only a narrow 20m section of ground would have been required for the digging of a ditch.

Immediately within the boundary of the east-south-east gully, a rectangular enclosure roughly 50m square fronts the castle and is defined on the east and south by artificial scarps which incorporate stretches of walling. Whilst its purpose and relationship to the main body of the castle cannot be demonstrated, its appearance on aerial photographs suggests that it is probably contemporary with some phase of its occupation. There are also traces of masonry on the steep, sculpted sides of the promontory beyond the standing building, suggesting that the initial form of the castle was a triangular enceinte measuring about 45m from north to south by 38m transversely.

2.12   The castle

Traditionally a fortress of the native lords of Nithsdale in the early 12th century and possibly the caput of a small Anglo-Norman lordship in the late 12th century, Morton is a castle with a complex history and at least two major periods or phases of construction and use can be identified.

The remains of the first recognisable phase (as noted at 2.1.2 above) are the steep slopes of the promontory upon which the castle stands, and which may have been artificially cut. They bear traces of stone walling and are suggestive of a triangular enceinte[4]; its apex on the north.

The remains of the second phase lie on the south side of the encient and dominate the site. They comprise a well-built two-storey rectangular block with a twin-towered gatehouse at the south-west angle and a circular tower at the south-east angle, the whole set across the neck of the promontory. All three towers once comprised a basement and four storeys, presumably with well-lit and heated accommodation on the upper floors. Only the west half of the south-east angle tower remains, and only the east tower of the gatehouse is still standing. The central block was of two storeys and, though roofless, stands almost to its full height and probably contained a first-floor hall with a service floor beneath.

The functional relationship, if any, between the two phases is unclear. Whilst the date of the first phase is not known, the architectural and documentary evidence clearly points to a date in the second half of the 14th century or perhaps even the early 15th century for the second phase works, i.e. the standing building.

Earlier interpretations of the site link the damaged towers to a treaty requirement of 1357 to demolish Morton and other Nithsdale castles. However, a more likely explanation is the original decision to place the towers on the very edge of the steep slopes of the promontory with consequent structural risks and failures. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the imposing façade, so dramatically positioned, was designed to impress rather than defend

The castle is said to have been abandoned as a residence by 1714, but there is documentary evidence for agricultural settlement activity on the site until the end of the 18th century.

An estate plan[5] of 1742[6]depicts the buildings of a farmstead immediately in front of the castle. Though they do not appear on an estate plan of 1772[7], an engraving of 1789[8] (Figure 4) shows three single-storey thatched buildings here, one of which appears to be a dwelling, the others ancillary buildings. The walls of these buildings are depicted in the same way as those of the castle, suggesting that they were constructed of stone robbed from the castle.

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[4] i.e. the castle was in the form of a walled enclosure
[5] Many of the Drumlanrig Estate plans have been digitised by the DAMP (Dumfries Archive Map Project) and are published on the National Library of Scotland website: https://maps.nls.uk/estates/#dumfries-shire
[6] Vernon 1742 https://maps.nls.uk/estates/rec/4102
[7] Leslie
[8] Grose, 1789-91

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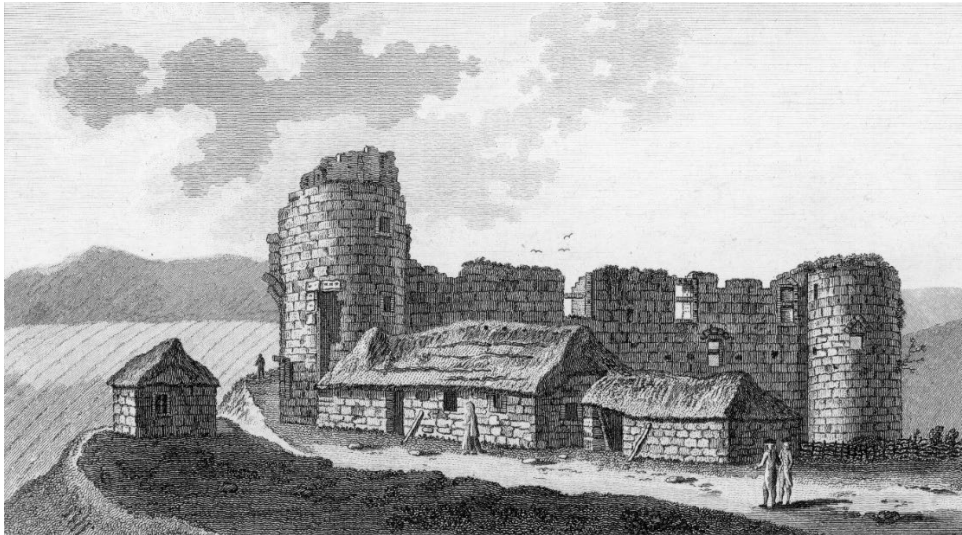
Figure 4: 1789 engraving of Morton Castle. © Courtesy of HES.

The buildings had apparently been abandoned before the mid-19th century, as they are not shown on an estate plan of 1851[9] or the first edition of the 6-inch Ordnance Survey map[10].

Evident throughout are the tiles inserted to indicate repairs carried out in the late 19th century by the Duke of Queensberry (Figure 5).
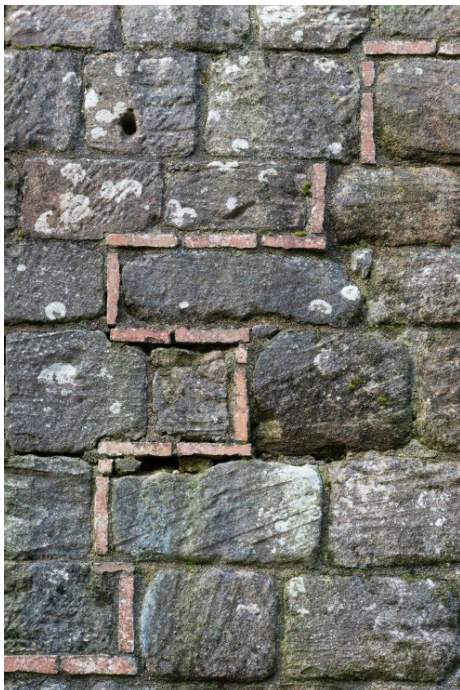
Figure 5: Clay tiles demarcating area of repair.

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[9] McCallum and Dundas
[10] Sheet xxii, 1861. Accessible at:
https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/#zoom=16&lat=55.2756&lon=-3.7467&layers=5&b=1

2.2   Evidential values

The evidential values of Morton Castle relate primarily to the physical evidence of the structure itself and its below ground remains. This extends to the wider area around the castle where substantial traces of an enclosure indicate the perimeter of a hunting park[11]. This can be linked to written descriptions of the 17th century. The completeness and relative undisturbedness of this surviving combination of medieval and post medieval elements is important, though is not regarded as unique.

Because of the differing interpretations of the site, and the relative lack of comprehensive archaeological study (including detailed standing building analysis), there is a high potential for more evidence to be discovered which would help improve understanding of the monument and its setting. The conservation work carried out by the 8th Duke of Queensberry in the later 1800s did involve clearance work but this is likely to have been superficial.

The archaeological potential therefore remains exceedingly high and could potentially resolve the continuing uncertainty surrounding the castle's date of construction (small-scale excavations uncovered floor tiles of late 13thcentury date; these are now in Dumfries Museum) and establish whether there was an earlier castle at the site. It could determine the nature and extent of the medieval castle, and cast light on its post-medieval, post-lordly use as a residence.

The castle also merits a full standing building survey, to inform our understanding of (1) how the castle functioned as a lordly residence when first built, (2) how it functioned following its partial destruction, and (3) the extent of the conservation works carried out by the 8th duke of Queensberry.

2.3   Historical values

As already noted, there are many gaps in our understanding of Morton Castle, the chronology and development of the place is only generally established with various phases attributed to *likely* builders rather than securely dated and identified. This is the case for many castles, it is particularly so for Morton.

The historical values of Morton revolve around its long history; its association with powerful families (particularly in the medieval period); the

[11] Gilbert lists 50 baronial parks (Gilbert 1979, 357-9) and 25 royal parks (Gilbert 1979, 356).

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demonstration of elite leisure pursuits; and the context it shares with other Nithsdale and Annandale castles. Other key points of interest lie in the architectural form and details (discussed more fully at 2.4 Architecture) and its surrounding landscape, in particular the still-visible medieval deer park (discussed more fully at 2.5 Landscape) and lake.

The following paragraphs set out a very brief historical overview with a more detailed narrative at Appendix 1: Historical narrative.

There is no direct physical or documentary evidence of an early (pre 12th century) centre of lordship at Morton. However, the site is traditionally associated with the native lord Dunegal of Strathnith, who is mentioned in DavidI's grant of Annandale to Robert de Brus in 1124. Later the land was held by Hugh Sansmanche who seems to have acquired the land before 1173 and is documented granting the church of Morton to Kelso Abbey. It is entirely possible that at this point there was a castle on the site though there is no firm evidence.

During the 13th century possession passed to the Randolph family but was forfeit in 1306 as they supported the Bruce cause. Thomas Randolph was a key supporter of Bruce and perhaps the most powerful figure in a national context associated with Morton. Again, the nature of the association is not known, but it is certainly possible that the Randolphs undertook some construction work.

The first mention of a castle at Morton comes in 1357 when the demolition of the castles of Morton, Dalswinton, Durrisdeer, Dumfries and nine other Nithsdale castles was demanded by the treaty of Berwick (for the release of David II from English custody). This implies a significant structure already in place, but the extent of any slighting undertaken remains to be proved.

After 1372 Morton Castle passed by marriage into the Dalkeith branch of the Douglas family, later created Earls of Morton,[12] remaining with them up to 1680, though it does not appear that it was central to their interests. In fact, it was leased to the Drumlanrig Douglasses for much of the 16th century, though it seems not to have been a primary residence for that family either. By 1714 it was reported as abandoned as a residence.

By the 19th century the castle was firmly understood as a "monument" and was in part repaired by William 9th Duke of Queensberry. It was passed into State care under a Guardianship agreement in 1975.

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[12] Though the title refers to the estate of Morton in Midlothian, rather than the Nithsdale estate.

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2.4   Architectural and artistic values

2.41   Architectural values

The architectural values of Morton arise from its plan, form and details. As noted below, there is still some debate over the classification of the castle (see 2.4.2 below) and thus of the interpretation of its features and their relationship to other sites.

A fuller architectural description is given at Appendix 2, however, in summary the key architectural features[13] of Morton Castle are

- its siting towards the sharp end of a promontory, accompanied by a deer park and set above a small valley which was potentially a lake in medieval times as it is today: features which indicate a landscape of leisure and status
- the ashlar facades: while there is evidence of some earlier masonry (and some later alterations) the majority of the upstanding structure appears of one build
- the twin-towered gatehouse (with portcullis and drawbridge), placed dramatically to the west extremity of the long hall block
- a balancing single tower at the east extremity of the central hall block
- the ground floor area lit by small, fairly regularly placed windows,
- the first-floor hall, accessed through a pointed arch doorway to the north (possibly reached via timber steps/gallery) and lit by generously proportioned mullioned and transomed windows.
- the absence of vaulting and consequent use of large quantities of timber in construction

2.42   Interpretations

The interpretation of Morton Castle remains an ongoing subject of expert debate, with repercussions for the classification and understanding of related sites: this section summarises the arguments and interpretations to date.

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[13] This assumes the architectural features of its completed form, rather than its current partly ruined state.

Morton Castle has received the attention of castellologists from the late 19th century to the present day and been the subject of different opinions as to the nature and date of its component parts, and this is summarised in Appendix 1. Most interest and speculation have been focussed upon the currently standing structure, with views falling broadly into two camps, each drawing upon different parallels. MacGibbon and Ross[14], Douglas Simpson[15], and Cruden[16] focussed primarily upon the upstanding remains, perceiving the building as a unitary structure. Through the considerations of Douglas Simpson and Cruden this led ultimately to the term 'hall-house' being attached to the building and very clear parallels being drawn with other structures, most notably Rait Castle (Nairn), and from this comparison to a date in the earlier 14th century.

A different view was taken by MacKay MacKenzie[17] and Geoffrey Stell[18]. MacKay MacKenzie included Morton in his discussion of the evolution of the Scottish castle in the early 15th century in which he saw a move away from the earlier enclosure plan with its random disposition of buildings within the enclosure, towards a more symmetrical arrangement of hall and tower together forming the front of the construction and with the service buildings to the rear. He cites **Doune**[19] in Perthshire as an early example, **Ravenscraig** in Fife, and draws Morton into the comparison.

The concept of the hall-house is not raised by MacKay MacKenzie, and the usefulness of the term is strongly questioned by Geoffrey Stell. Accepting the arguments of MacKay MacKenzie there is no requirement for Morton Castle to be categorised as a hall-house. As Stell points out, in a Scottish context the layout of gatehouse, hall-block and tower at Morton is unique and that 'it shares only a limited number of characteristics with other anomalous hall-like structures.'

However it is characterised, there can be little doubt that in its final form its function was predominantly residential and probably also recreational[20]. Its military weakness was noted by Cruden[21], though admittedly there may have been wall-head defences of which nothing remains. It was apparently defensible rather than defensive. This might seem to be belied by what must have been a very imposing gatehouse, though the only defensive features it possesses (again no wall-head defences survive) are its drawbridge and pit, portcullis and gates. The gatehouse was perhaps built

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[14] MacGibbon and Ross, 1887
[15] Simpson, 1961
[16] Cruden,1981
[17] MacKenzie, 1927
[18] Stell, 1979
[19] Throughout the text, site names in **bold** are managed by Historic Environment Scotland and are publicly accessible. Access information can be found at: www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/
[20] Stell, 1979
[21] Cruden, 1981, 96

for show rather than defence. It may have served as a solar tower with well-appointed chambers on the upper floors (we assume that the missing tower was a mirror image of that still partly standing). MacGibbon and Ross envisaged a small courtyard behind the standing block, but the plan they created did not take into account the lean-to buildings adjoining the main block. I It is therefore conceivable that what they interpreted as the north wall of the courtyard was in fact the north wall of the lean-to buildings.

Without further investigation the relationship of the standing structure to the fragmentary remains of the enceinte remains enigmatic, though there is one important piece of architectural stratigraphy. At the external north-east angle of the main block, where a ruinous fragment of curtain wall projects, it is clear that this represents two different building phases. The material of the upper part of this wall is different to that of the lower, being thicker and corbelled out on a slightly different alignment. This change corresponds with the position of the corbels that would have carried the timbers of the first floor of the lean-to. It is perhaps a hint, (though probably not sufficient evidence to conclusively suggest) that the current block incorporates sections of earlier curtain wall.

2.5   Landscape and aesthetic values

2.51   The prehistoric landscape

The possibility of a pre-12th century site at Morton, created by Dunegal, the native lord of Nithsdale, has been discussed above, and could possibly be demonstrated by archaeological research. There is, however, prehistoric activity in the wider area of the castle and whilst no attempt is made here to assess it, attention might be drawn to the remains of a 'complex timber-built fortification' situated within a discontinuous earthwork enclosing the summit of Morton Mains Hill. An oval enclosure defined by a single palisade trench and measuring 118m by 70m surrounds a smaller enclosure defined by twin palisade trenches and measuring 86m by 59m. A stony mound on the summit of the hill may be an earlier burial cairn, and cord rig on the north-west flank of the hill attests prehistoric cultivation[22]. These remains lie within the medieval deer park.

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[22] Canmore ID 46376

2.52   Medieval park and settlement

The deer park associated with the castle is on record in *c.*1376[23]. It was described graphically in the later 17th century:

> 'Near to this castle there was a Park built by Sir Thomas Randulph on the face of a very great and high Hill so artificially, that by the advantage of the Hill, all wild Beasts, such as Deer, Harts and Roes and Hares, did easily leap in, but could not get out again; and if any other Cattle, such as Cows Sheep or Goats, did voluntarily leap in, or were forced to it, it is doubtful if their Owners were permitted to get them out again.'[24].

The park lies immediately north of the castle, which probably stood upon its southern edge. It took in the west slopes of Bellybought Hill and Par Hill, and most of Morton Mains Hill; an area measuring about 2km by 2km, or 400 hectares. The park pale survives for a very considerable portion of its original extent. It cannot be convincingly detected in the fields immediately east of the castle, but it can be picked up 1.7km further east of the castle at NX9074 9903. It climbs steeply up the south spur of Bellybought Hill before contouring north to Par Hill from where it descends north-west to the Kettleton Burn. It crossed the burn, at this point, now part of a small reservoir, and travelled west across the saddle between Morton Mains Hill and East Morton Hill and towards the unnamed burn which runs south towards the castle. It may be that this burn marks the west boundary of the park, though in itself it seems inadequate for the purpose of containing game. On its ascents and descents, the pale takes the form of an earthen bank, but where it contours Bellybought Hill it appears as a terrace with a drystone revetted scarp on its uphill side.

If, as claimed above, the park was the work of Sir Thomas Randolph, then Graham and Feacham suggest that construction would probably have occurred between 1329 and 1332[25]. This might fit well with Thomas Randolph constructing or reconstructing the castle at that time. However, the only certainty we have is that the park was there before c.1376, when it is mentioned in a rental of the barony of Morton[26]. At that point it was leased to Gilbert son of Duncan for one year for the sum of £6-13s-4d. This suggests that the park was perhaps not fulfilling its primary function. The date of the rental is relatively close to 1357, when the castle was ordered to be destroyed, and it may be that if slighting did occur in or shortly after 1357, the castle went into a period of decline as a centre of lordly indulgence, before its later resurrection.

The park, with its stock of deer, was a display of conspicuous wealth and its existence a statement of the high status of the castle. It is a landscape mirror of the high quality of the castle's architecture. It also helps to explain

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[23] Graham and Feacham, 1956, p. 152
[24] Macfarlane's Geographical Collections, 1906, vol iii, p. 208
[25] Graham and Feacham, 1956, p.152
[26] *Morton Registrum,* vol. 1, lvi

the castle's position in its local landscape. The c.1376 rental shows the barony falling into two distinct zones. The north-east zone, the upland area, can be viewed as a *'seigneurial zone'* given over to the castle, the park and quite likely hunting in the hills – though the latter is nowhere specified. But scope for hunting in a relatively small park was limited, and its main purpose, other than as a display of wealth, was probably as a live larder: a ready supply of venison for the lord's table.

Agricultural settlement in c.1376 was to be found in the lower lying ground of the Nith Valley where the parish church, probably founded by Hugh Sansmanche in the 1170s, was sited. Here the rental[27] lists the settlements of Thornhill, set to ten tenants for a rent of £9-6s-8d; Dobtoun (modern Dabton), set to nine tenants, also for a rent of £9-6s-8d; Erismortoun (modern East Morton) set to two tenants for a rent of £6-13s-4d; Drumcorke, set to four tenants for a rent of £7-6s-8d; Laucht (modern Laught), set to one tenant for a rent of 50s-50d. All the leases were for one year although at Drumcorke provision was made for a second year. All exist as modern places. The mill too was mentioned in the rental and probably stood on, or close to, its modern site on the east bank of the Carron Water just above its confluence with the Nith. It occupied this site in the mid-18th century[28], and at the end of the 16th century. Pont's map of c.1600[29], whilst a little misoriented, provides a good snapshot of the barony and its relationship to Drumlanrig and Tibbers across the Nith. Settlement had increased by 1608 when the barony included the lands of 'Eris-Morton, Whitefauld, Gallow-Flat, Hall-Gill, Dabton, Carronhill, Drumcork, Broom-rig, Thornhill, Upper and Nether Laught, Gallow Bridge (Gately Brig), upper Kirkland and Langmyre'[30].

2.53 Relationship with Tibbers and Drumlanrig

The relationship of Morton with its two near neighbours across the Nith is interesting and informative. The Roman road north up Nithsdale splits at Drumlanrig, one branch continuing north to Sanquhar and beyond, the other heads north-east towards Clydesdale. The significance of the location is attested by the cluster of Roman camps and forts on either side of the Nith. Tibbers sits on the west bank of the river beside this cluster on a terrace overlooking a ford. Morton, in contrast, is discreetly sited, and appears to have no strategic significance. It apparently contributes little or nothing to the control of routes up the main Nith valley, and the only case to be argued would be that it monitored the route to Clydesdale, though this was better done by the castle at Durisdeer. MacGibbon and Ross have

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[27] Ibid. lvi, lvii
[28] Roy, 1747-55
[29] Accessible at:
https://maps.nls.uk/pont/view/?id=pont35#zoom=5&lat=3387&lon=2474&layers=BT
[30] Ramage, 1876, p. 308.

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an apt description of its siting as possibly 'selected by some early chieftain for his stronghold, partly on account of its secluded situation, which would afford a well-concealed retreat in case of pursuit'[31]. It might also be pointed out that the other major castle in the valley, Dalswinton, 22km to the south, occupies a commanding position overlooking the main route up the valley, with a clutch of Roman works not too far away. This point is amplified by Stell who notes that Morton 'occupies what might be regarded as almost a recessive or concealed position when viewed from the main S approach. Its towers and walls, admittedly ruinous but perhaps not far short of their full height, do not rise much above the crest of the hill to the S'[32].

Recent survey work at Tibbers[33] has demonstrated it to be one of the largest timber castles in Scotland, a motte with two baileys and locally on a par with the first castle of Lochmaben and the castle of Torthorwald, both possessing very large baileys, the former the caput of the Brus lordship of Annandale. Though no early records for Tibbers are evident, the scale of the works is clearly indicative of its importance. This importance is emphasised by the construction by Richard Siward, sheriff of Dumfries, of a major stone castle on the motte in 1298, a classic rectangular castle of enclosure with circular corner towers. Unlike Tibbers, held variously by the English and the Scots, Morton has little documented involvement in the Wars of Independence.

By the 16th century Drumlanrig had become the principal Nithsdale seat of the Douglases and in 1544 Sir James Douglas of Dalkeith gave a younger son, Patrick, a tack of Morton Mains and a lease for the castle as part of a marriage contract. It is clear that the castle of Morton was very much of secondary importance. This position is well seen by the depiction of the two sites on Roy's Map[34] in the middle of the 18th century. New gardens had been laid out around the newly completed mansion of Drumlanrig at the end of the 17th century and these are recorded on a plan attributed to John Rocque in the 1730s. The 1730s plan shows only the gardens, but Roys map shows both Drumlanrig with its gardens and the abandoned Morton in splendid, but unadorned isolation. But was it a perceived part of the Drumlanrig narrative, a romantic ruin to be distantly viewed and perhaps occasionally visited, or had it simply descended to little more than agricultural status and out of mind?

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[31] MacGibbon and Ross, 1887, p. 545
[32] Stell, 1979
[33] Dixon and Anderson, 2015
[34] Accessible at: https://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/#zoom=14&lat=55.2800&lon=-3.7859&layers=roy-lowlands

2.54 Post-medieval landscape

The siting of Morton Castle is one of great natural and human-made beauty. It lies in the first fold of hills rising to define the east side of Nithsdale, about 112m above the valley floor. To the east the Lowther Hills rise to heights of over 610m (2000 feet). At this point the valley is heavily planted with mixed woodland, much of it associated with Drumlanrig Castle, contrasting with the bare slopes of the hills where green pasture soon gives way to darker heather. Morton Castle sits at the interface of these very different landscapes. The distinctions are encapsulated in the description of the area by Daniel Defoe in the 1720s. Whilst visiting Dumfries, Defoe travelled up Nithsdale to see Drumlanrig Castle 'the fine palace of the Duke of Queensberry.' Whilst impressed with the castle and gardens, 'so fine, and every thing so truly magnificent,' he does not seem to have been charmed by its surrounding landscape. He compares its situation with that of Chatsworth House in the Derbyshire Peak District, 'like a fine picture in a dirty grotto, or like an equestrian statue set up in a barn; 'tis environ'd with mountains, and that of the wildest and most hideous aspect in the south of Scotland'[35].

Modern sensibilities, however, take a different view and the siting of Morton Castle is generally considered to be one of great beauty, to which the castle is a major contributor. Seen from the surrounding ground it appears to occupy a commanding position on a promontory, though the approach from the south is distinctly unchallenging. It is toward this approach that the castle's façade is presented, and revealed in full only after a slight rise has been crossed; perhaps a deliberate affectation by the builders.

Morton Loch, an artificial creation that folds around the base of the promontory on three sides, adds greatly to the beauty of the scene. The present loch must have been created between 1851, when an estate plan depicts it with the label 'PROPOSED LAKE,'[36] and 1856, when it was depicted on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6-inch map. Earlier estate plans of 1742[37] and 1772[38] do not depict a lake here, but the *Old Statistical Account* of 1794[39] notes that 'this castle is surrounded (except upon the W. side) by a deep natural hollow, in which the water had been dammed up by an artificial mound at each end'. A similar description, also using the past tense for the feature, occurs in the *New Statistical Account* in 1845[40]. This suggests that at some time during the occupation of the castle. an artificially created, or enhanced, lake existed at the base of the promontory but was subsequently drained. The discovery of a logboat at 'the bottom of a moss not far from the old castle' in the early 18th century adds to the

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[35] Defoe 1724-27, letter 12, part 1
[36] McCallum and Dundas, 1851
[37] Vernon, 1742
[38] Leslie, 1772
[39] Stat. Acct. 1794, x. p. 151
[40] NSA, 1845, iv. p. 96

likelihood of a nearby expanse of water, and Ramage suggests that the boat was actually found in the moss on the site of the former lake[41]. Most logboats are dated to the medieval period[42]. Within the period of the castle's occupation the lake would have provided additional security, and fish for the table, as well as enhancing the scene.

The seeming re-creation of a previous lake raises the question of the relationship between Drumlanrig and the abandoned and subsequently ruined Morton. I.e. was it, along with the backdrop of the Lowther Hills, a part of the borrowed landscape when the gardens of Drumlanrig were laid out in the late 17th and early 18th centuries? Unfortunately no research has yet produced evidence to show how it was perceived by the Drumlanrig residents at that time. John Rocque's plan of the Drumlanrig gardens in 1732 shows an east drive - the direction of Morton - but does not list it as a 'visto'. Roy's Map (1747-55)[43] continues the line of the east drive across the Nith as far as the Carron Water, but is slightly off target for Morton. It is also unlikely that even before the planting of Morton Wood, which hems the castle in on the west, that the actual castle of Morton would have been visible from the house at Drumlanrig, though it may have been visible from the hills above.

2.6   Natural heritage values

The bedrock geology of the castle belongs to the Carron Basalt Formation, with superficial deposits of Devensian Till[44].

The area encompassed by the Property in Care (PIC) boundary (see Figure 2) is a mixture of amenity grassland, isolated meadows of un-improved acidic grassland, and acidic marshy grassland. These grassland areas contain plant species associated with species rich grasslands, including pignut, eyebright, bedstraws, ragged robin, tormentil, yellow rattle, scabious, wild thyme and sedges.

At the time of writing (February 2020) the site was not protected by any special natural heritage designations. However, in recent years, otters (*lutra lutra*) have been recorded within c.500m of the PIC, as have frogs and toads. The castle and neighbouring trees also have many features suitable for roosting bats.

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[41] Ramage, 1876, p. 312
[42] Mowat, Cowie, Crone and Cavers 2015, pp. 313 and 322-3
[43] Accessible at: https://maps.nls.uk/geo/roy/#zoom=14&lat=55.2800&lon=-3.7859&layers=roy-lowlands
[44] British Geological Survey *GeoIndex*, accessible at: http://mapapps2.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/home.html

The loch adjacent to the castle is managed for fishing by Drumlanrig Estate with a boat available for hire. The loch contains wild brown trout and is stocked with rainbow trout.

2.7   Contemporary/use values

2.71   Visitors
The scenic nature of the castle's setting has made it a focal point for 'nature' walks, to which it is generally seen as an added point of interest. This is encouraged by Drumlanrig Estate, and the site also features on numerous online walking itineraries. One such site publishes glowing reviews, such as: 'there are castles you visit on a formal basis and then there's Morton Castle. There's no turnstile, no admission charge, no gift shop, nothing at all like that. Just a castle ruin across a field, with a commanding view over a small loch and the surrounding countryside. It's a peaceful spot where you can enjoy the scenery and your imaginings about life there a few hundred years ago.' Or: 'a bit off the beaten track, Morton castle is one of my favourite places ever. The landscape is stunning and the castle itself, whilst smaller than others, is still an interesting place to look around. There is plenty of wildlife to see as well. Perfect for picnics and casual walks'[45]. Other descriptions employ phrases such as 'atmospheric ruins,' 'best kept secret' and 'hidden gem.'

Another describes it as 'one of the most breath-taking settings of any castle in Scotland' and whilst, disappointingly, it did not find the castle itself impressive suggested that it was "Undiscovered Scotland"' and you should come simply to enjoy the location and listen to the wind'[46].

2.72   Cultural

In August 2015 the Environment Art Festival Scotland was held at Morton Castle and included over thirty local and international artists:

'actively making work in the landscape around the festival "*village*." Following specially made maps people were invited to venture into the landscape to encounter the artists and the land. Also art actions, guided walks and hosted conversations took place around the village where people lived without money eating food brought by visitors and cooked on a 90ft communal barbeque. Each evening people gathered around five

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[45] Trip Advisor: www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186513-d2640797-Reviews-Morton_Castle-Dumfries_Dumfries_and_Galloway_Scotland.html
[46] Undiscovered Scotland

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different campfires to take part in themed conversations hosted by artists and thinkers'[47].

The castle was the setting for a two-minute scene in the 1978 film version of the novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* by John Buchan.

2.73   Social values

Whilst the castle is not widely known as a tourist attraction, and access via narrow roads can be challenging, it clearly has a place in local knowledge that crosses generations. Its steady trickle of weekend visitors are mostly local people out for a walk, often with children and dogs, drawn by the compelling mix of ruined castle, gleaming loch, woods, hills and wildlife.

3.   MAJOR GAPS IN UNDERSTANDING

The gaps in our understanding of the site, or rather the questions for which answers need to be sought, relate to three principal areas: i) the physical nature of the remains, ii) the position of the standing building in the development of the Scottish castle, and iii) the place of the castle in the wider landscape setting of Drumlanrig Castle from the later 17th century onwards. Answers to the first question might be obtained through archaeological research, for instance geophysical survey or detailed ground survey of the remains, or combinations thereof. Answers to the second question will be obtained through the examination of the corpus of similar buildings. Study of archival material at Drumlanrig Castle may provide answers to the third question.

Questions relating to the physical nature of the remains are:

- Was there a pre-12th century or an earlier or later 12th century settlement or fortification on the site?

- Was there a ditch protecting the south approach to the castle?

- What was the nature and date of the triangular enceinte?

- What is the date span of the standing remains?

- What is the relationship between the standing remains and the triangular enceinte?

- Are there traces of earlier masonry in the present standing remains?

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[47] For more information, see: https://thestove.org/portfolio/eafs-august-2015/

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- Was the destruction of the south-west gatehouse tower and the east half of the south-west tower the result of natural causes, i.e. inherent instability because of their siting on the very edges of the promontory, or the result of deliberate slighting?

- Was the triangular enceinte ordered to be slighted in 1357?

- What is the nature of the rectilinear enclosure that fronts the castle on the south?

- What was the nature of the post-abandonment activity on the site? In this context there is the opportunity to investigate an 18th century farmstead depicted on contemporary estate plans and featured in an 18th century illustration of the castle.

4. ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

Caerlaverock Castle (Dumfries and Galloway); **Dirleton Castle** (East Lothian); **Doune Castle** (Stirling); **Duffus Castle** (Moray); **Hermitage Castle** (Scottish Borders); **Lincluden Collegiate Church** (Dumfries and Galloway); Rait Castle (Highland); **Ravenscraig Castle** (Fife); **Threave Castle** (Dumfries and Galloway); Tulliallan Castle (Fife); Sanquhar Castle (Dumfries and Galloway); Kincardine Castle (Aberdeenshire) for hunting park.

5. KEYWORDS

Morton; Castle; Hall-house; Deer Park; Dunegal; Duvenald; Anglo-Norman; Randolph; Douglas; Hunting.

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Further Resources

Canmore ID: 65143

Site Number: NX89NE 10
NGR: NX 8908 9920

Scheduling description for Morton Castle:
http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90221

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Early History to Early 12th Century

The placename Morton is suggested in the mid-19th century Ordinance Survey Namebooks as being Anglo-Saxon for "the Stronghold or dwelling on the Moor" [48] It has been suggested that there was a stronghold on the site from an early date. The *Old Statistical Account,*[49] for instance, states that *'In former times a great chieftain had made his residence here.'* The claim subsequently becomes embodied in the person of the native lord Dunegal of Strathnith. Dunegal is mentioned in the charter by which Robert de Brus, Lord of Cleveland, was installed as lord of Annandale in 1124, the first known act of David I's reign and the first major recorded act of military feudalism in Scotland[50]. Dunegal was Brus' immediate neighbour on the west and it is probable that the creation of the Brus lordship, in effect a military colony, was to contain the Galwegians of Nithsdale and those beyond them to the west. Dunegal would thus have found Brus to the east, the English military lordship of Carlisle - created after the English recapture of the city in 1092 - to the south, and Fergus of Galloway to the west. Whilst it is possible that Dunegal, or perhaps one of his sons, established a fortress at Morton there is no visible evidence to demonstrate this, and the location of the caput of the early medieval lordship of Nithsdale is unknown.

12th Century

Rather than Dunegal or his son Duvenald, Hugh Sansmanche (*Sine Manicis*) is a more plausible candidate to be the builder of an early castle at Morton is. Hugh seems to have acquired Morton before 1173 by means unknown, but possibly by marriage to a daughter of Radulph son of Dunegal. Hugh was apparently a tenant on the Honour of Richmond in Yorkshire, and must have been taken prisoner while fighting for the King of Scots in the war of 1173-4, as in 1175 the land in the Honour paid £5 towards his ransom, and £5

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[48] https://scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/digital-volumes/ordnance-survey-name-books/dumfriesshire-os-name-books-1848-1858/dumfriesshire-volume-40/1
[49] Stat. Acct. X, 1794, p151
[50] Lawrie 1905, pp. 48-9, liv

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was also paid for his forfeited chattels. In 1173 x 1177 William I confirmed to Kelso Abbey the church of Morton in Nithsdale, together with one ploughgate of land, granted, 'in the king's presence' by the aforementioned Hugh[51].

That the church, which lies a little over 2km south of the castle (NX89022 96968), was a foundation of Hugh is indicated by a charter issued in 1195 by Jocelin, Bishop of Glasgow. The charter stated that although they lay in the diocese of Glasgow, Morton and other churches are 'by the reasonable grant of their patrons' confirmed to Kelso abbey 'with their rectorial rights for the monks' own use and for their support'[52]. The grant was confirmed in c.1200 by Duvenald of Strathnith and in 1232 by Walter, bishop of Glasgow. After this the church remained annexed, but its revenues were given to the priory of Lesmahagow in Lanarkshire, a dependency of Kelso[53]. The ploughgate that came with the church in 1173 x 1177 may well be represented by the modern farm of Kirkland, close by the church.

Hugh's acquisition of Morton fits the pattern of what has been termed 'Anglo-Norman' settlement in Scotland, which was particularly encouraged in the reigns of David I (1124-1153), Malcolm IV (1153-1165) and William I (1165-1214). This is in part characterised by the import of often younger sons with limited expectations on English, Norman, Breton or Flemish estates. Indeed, Hugh may well have had links with Brittany. The first lord of the Honour of Richmond was Alan Rufus, Count of Brittany and the Breton link with Richmond was continuous throughout the 12th century. It is possible, therefore, that Hugh could have been the son or grandson of a settler from Brittany. The presence of other Anglo-Norman settlers in Nithsdale is attested by the scatter of timber castles, now represented only by their earthwork components.

There is no identifiable timber castle in the barony of Morton. However, it should be noted that in Nithsdale's eastern neighbour, the Brus Lordship of Annandale, there were significantly more possible baronies than there are surviving timber castles[54]. Therefore, the existence of a 12th century barony cannot be taken to imply the existence, or former existence, of a timber castle. Nor can we assume that 12th century estate centres always involved the construction of defensive earthworks.

It is often the case, though by no means the rule, that timber castle and parish church sit side by side. This would not have been the case in Morton as the church is about 2km to the south of the castle. This raises the possibility of an earlier estate centre, close by the church, all visible remains of which have vanished. A moated site, for example, is more likely

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[51] Barrow 1971, p. 241, no. 183
[52] Ibid, p. 373, no. 379
[53] Cowan 1967, p. 152
[54] RCAHMS, 1997, pp. 207-8; Corser 2005

to be eradicated by later farming activities and there are moated sites close by at Durisdeer and at Eccles, beside the village of Penpont. Alternatively, assuming Hugh was indeed established on the site of the present castle, he may have placed the church for the convenience of his tenants, and for whatever reason preferred a different location for himself. But, in short, there is no firm evidence to support or deny the presence of a 12th century structure on the present site, though the possible ditch and the scarping of the sides of the promontory could be of that date.

13th and 14th Centuries

The Randolphs are subsequent potential builders who came into possession of the lordship at some point in the 13th century. It is possible, though there is confusion with the names Radulf and Ranulph, that the Randolph family may have descended from Radulph, son of Dunegal of Strathnith, and one Thomas Randolph was sheriff of Dumfries in 1237. But the Randolphs' Nithsdale lands were forfeit when, in 1306, Thomas Randolph the younger joined Robert Bruce against Edward I and was captured at the battle of Methven. After briefly supporting the English crown he returned to the Bruce cause and at the first parliament of Bruce's reign in 1309 he appears as *'lord of Nithsdale'*, though the lands were still technically in English hands. However, he was probably in possession of Nithsdale by 1313, following Bruce's successful campaigns against the English. Other substantial rewards accrued and in 1310 Randolph was appointed as the king's lieutenant north of the Forth, and in 1312 was granted the earldom of Moray.

Amongst his many achievements in the service of Robert Bruce were the recapture of Edinburgh Castle 1314, the taking of the Isle of Man for which he was rewarded with the lordship of Man in 1317, and command of a brigade at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. He also led punitive raids into northern England and retook Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1318. In 1323 he successfully petitioned the Pope to recognise Bruce's right to the throne, and became Guardian of Scotland following Bruce's death in 1329.

Thomas Randolph died in 1332, and his son John was killed at the battle of Neville's Cross in 1346, after which event the Randolph inheritance broke up, passing through two heiresses into the Dunbar family. The barony of Morton eventually came into the possession of George Dunbar, 10th Earl of March.

The earliest reference to a castle at Morton occurs in the 1357 Treaty of Berwick. The treaty secured the release of David II from English custody but demanded the demolition of the castles of Morton, Dalswinton, Durisdeer, Dumfries and nine other Nithsdale castles. That the castle was functioning before 1357 points to its construction in the period of the Randolphs, but leaves us far short of anything like a precise date.

Agnes Dunbar, the earl's sister, married Sir James Douglas of Dalkeith in 1372, taking the barony of Morton with her as a dowry, although March remained the feudal superior. In 1382 the barony, together with Mordington and Whittinghame, passed to Agnes and James's son, also James.

15th Century

In 1420 James the younger inherited Dalkeith and Aberdour and in c.1430 became a 'Lord of Parliament', taking the title Lord Dalkeith.

The Earl of March was declared forfeit in 1433, and shortly thereafter Lord Dalkeith obtained a new enfeoffment of Morton, to be held in regality directly from the Crown. The grant by James II, dated 1440, referred to '*the barony of Morton with the castles thereof*.'

The castle was once again specifically documented in 1456 when Robert Dalziel of that Ilk was recorded presenting himself at the outer gates of Morton Castle to seek enfeoffment for a portion of land.

In 1458 James, Lord Morton, married Joan, James II's sister, and was created Earl of Morton. The earldom was not, however, received for the barony in Nithsdale, but for the estate of Morton in Midlothian, which had been held by the Dalkeith branch of the Douglases since the 13th century. Despite a few breaks, the barony of Morton remained with the earls of Morton until 1680, but they appear to have taken little interest in it as it was far removed from their core estates and residences, at Dalkeith and Aberdour.

16th Century

In the early 16th century the whole barony was leased to the Douglases of Drumlanrig, a powerful local branch of the extended Douglas family. However, Morton appears not to have served as their primary residence.

In 1544, Patrick Douglas, a younger son of Sir James Douglas of Drumlanrig, received a tack for the Mains of Morton, and a lease for the castle, as part of a marriage contract.

James Douglas, 4th Earl of Morton, who had been a powerful figure in the minority of James VI, becoming regent between 1571 and 1578, was executed in 1581 for his part in the murder of Lord Darnley, James VI's father. His title and estates, including Morton, passed to his nephew, John, 8th Lord Maxwell, of Caerlaverock. His ownership, however, was brief, his staunch Catholicism bringing him into conflict with James VI. Morton Castle was attacked and 'burned' by royal forces in 1588, and returned to the Douglases.

17th and 18th centuries

The castle was sold in 1608 to Sir William Douglas of Coshogle, which lies about 6.5km north-north-west of Morton, and in 1618 to Sir William Douglas of Drumlanrig, later 1st Earl of Queensberry.

In 1653 William Douglas of Morton was enfeoffed 'as heir to his said father in the £5 land commonly called the mains of Morton, comprehending the castle, tower, fortalice, manor place, house, yards and pertinents.'

The castle is said to have been abandoned as a residence by 1714.

An estate plan of 1742 depicts three rectangular buildings immediately in front of the castle and an accompanying enclosure is named 'Castle Yord.' The plan legend records '*Morton-Castle, Mealing, in Possession of James Haffleup*,' and '*Moreton Castle, the Green, or Yord. Belonging to the Earl of Morton*'[55]. The buildings do not appear on an estate plan of 1772[56].

A 1789 engraving by Grose shows a farmstead comprising a dwelling and two ancillary buildings, in front of the castle. These may have been those depicted on the 1742 estate plan.

19th and 20th Centuries

An estate plan of 1851[57] and the slightly later 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map[58] do not depict any buildings in the vicinity of the castle. William, 8th Duke of Queensberry, carried out repairs at the Castle in the 1870s. The repairs are clearly visible as tile-demarked areas of rebuilding and patching.

Morton Castle was Scheduled in 1937, and entrusted into State care under a Guardianship agreement by Walter, 11th Earl of Queensberry, in 1975.

21st Century

The castle has recently been laser scanned as part of the Rae Project, providing an objective digital record which will underpin the future management of the site.

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[55] Vernon, 1742
[56] Leslie, 1772
[57] McCallum and Dundas
[58] sheet xxii, 1861

APPENDIX 2: DETAILED ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The principal surviving remains of the castle comprise an oblong block of two storeys lying east-west across the neck of the promontory. There is a circular tower at the south-east angle of the block and a twin-towered gatehouse at the south-west angle. The whole is faced with grey sandstone ashlar and the lower walls have a shallow external batter.

A study of the Morton masonry, identified as Carboniferous sandstones, was carried out in 2003. It noted the consistency of the dressed stone blocks and suggested that this was a deliberate show of wealth and status. It is usual to place stone with the natural beds in the same way as deposited, as blocks set at right angles to this tend to flake when water penetrates the stone, but at Morton a few blocks were placed this way as it was considered more important to maintain the symmetry of the long courses of stone and keep the height of each course regular. The study also identified Kings Quarry, 1.7km west-south-west, as the largest Carboniferous sandstone quarry close to the castle[59].

The gatehouse formerly comprised two D-shaped towers set back-to-back at an angle of about 160 degrees to the main block. Unfortunately, the west tower has been reduced to its footings, and entrance arrangements have to be deduced from the jamb of the surviving tower. Entry was through an arched gateway protected in turn by a drawbridge, possibly a gateway opening outwards, a portcullis and an inner gate. When lowered, the drawbridge spanned an ashlar-lined pit. The corbels in the wall of the entrance passage probably served to take timbers rather than vaulting ribs. Corbels occur throughout the castle and evidence the amount of timber used in its construction[60]. An estimate has been made of the quantity of timber used in the floors and roof of the main block and puts the total at 69.85 cubic metres or 140 appropriately sized trees, presumably oak, which was readily available in Nithsdale[61].

The surviving east tower of the gatehouse (Figure 6) comprised a basement plus four storeys. Entry to the ground floor of the tower was from the ground floor of the main block and access to the basement was probably by means of a trap door. The only opening in the basement is a ventilation flue in the south wall, whilst the ground floor is lit by small square windows in the south and east walls and there are two squints into the entrance passage in the west wall. The embrasure of the south window has a shouldered lintel and stepped sill. Both basement and ground floor chambers retain the D-shaped plan of the tower, but the arc of the 'D' in

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[59] Ruckley, 2003
[60] Stell 1979
[61] McConnel, Pers. Com

the internal wall-faces of the chambers above has been facetted. The first floor is lit by a large square window in the south wall and a smaller square window in the east wall. The embrasure of the south window has a shallow arch-pointed opening and is provided with stone seats. In the west wall there is a fireplace with projecting jambs. The second floor is lit by a window in the east wall similar to that in the south wall of the first floor. Little remains of the third floor. Access to the upper floors of the tower was by a spiral stair entered from the first floor of the main block.

Figure 6: Interior of east tower of gatehouse

The plan of the main block (Figure 3), which measures 30m by 9m internally, takes the form of an extended trapezium, the shorter east and west walls inclining inwards to the north. The shape may have been conditioned by the alignment of the curtain walls of the earlier castle.

Figure 7: Interior of main block

Figure 8: Interior of south-east corner tower

The location of the original ground floor entrance is unclear, the current entrances being relatively modern. The whole is lit by nine small rectangular windows placed high in the walls, seven in the south wall and two in the east. Internally the windows have long, stepped embrasures with corbelled lintels. The south window in the east wall and one towards the west end of the south wall both have slop sinks, and a third slop sink in the south wall appears to have been cut off. The two windows in the east wall flank a fireplace with projecting hood and jambs. In the south-east angle of the block is a latrine set above a drain with internal and external outlets and which could also be accessed from the south-east tower. There is no evidence for internal access to the first-floor, though there was access to the lower floors of the east gatehouse and south-east angle towers. (Figures 6 & 8)

The hall above is entered at first floor level at the west end of the north wall by an arch-pointed doorway (Fig. 9), though there is nothing to indicate how it was reached externally. The door has arch-and-hood mouldings with three contiguous rounds on the jambs descending to continuous splayed bases. Immediately beside it to the west is another, smaller, doorway with a corbelled lintel, and immediately beside this are the partial remains of a window. Around the mid-point of the north wall there has been another window of which only part of the moulded west jamb remains, whilst a further window lies close to the east end of the wall. It is rectangular with corbelled internal and external lintels, and internal and external splays.

Figure 9: First floor entrance

In the south wall of the hall there are three large rectangular windows with mullions and transoms, they have been heavily barred (windows throughout the castle are barred) and there have been seats in the ingoes. A fourth, slightly lower, window to the east of centre of the wall is a later insertion. Towards the east end of the wall there is a fireplace with projecting hood and jambs. The positioning of the fireplace at the dais end of the hall suggests that additional heating may have been required for much of the rest, perhaps a brazier. The east wall contains two windows; that ton the north is comparable to the three large windows in the south wall, while that to the south is smaller and narrower. In the south-east angle of the hall a door gives access to the south-east tower.

The interpretation of the block as a first-floor hall with service floor beneath, may well be essentially correct, but the absence of evidence for subdivisions on either floor renders absolute interpretations of function impossible, and there may have been some flexibility or change of use. This is further suggested by the positioning of the hall fireplace, the domestic appearance of the ground floor fireplace and the siting of an additional door beside the main door of the first floor.

Within the shell of the main block there are the stone footings of possibly two rectangular structures, presumably constructed after the abandonment of the castle. That on the east is the clearest and it abuts the north wall of the hall upon which there are traces of a corresponding roof raggle.

The south-east tower (Figure 8) is much ruined, with only part of the west half remaining. Like the south-east gate tower, it formerly comprised a basement with four storeys above, the upper floors providing accommodation, and in the south-west wall of the first-floor chamber there is a rectangular window. Its embrasure has a shallow arch-pointed opening with stone seats.

The tower shows evidence of major work carried out, presumably to make the main block habitable after the collapse of the tower. The principal work is a short length of obliquely angled wall connecting the east wall of the main block to the remains of the tower, and a wall across the latrine-passage at ground floor level supporting the masonry above. The first-floor chamber was entered from the south-east angle of the main hall.

Little remains of two adjoining structures which formerly stood against the outer face of the north wall of the main block. That on the west, as evidenced by its weather-table and the hooked corbels for its roof-plate, was of a single storey with a lean-to roof. That on the east was probably of two storeys, and its first floor may have been accessible from the main hall by a window. The robbed north wall of the buildings is reduced to no more than a stony scarp and a narrow terrace. Abutting the west end of the main

block at an acute angle are the stone footings of a third building, which, like the structures in the main block, was probably associated with post-abandonment use of the site. To the north of these ancillary buildings a natural scarp descends to the lower levels of the promontory.

APPENDIX 3: PREVIOUS DESCRIPTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

When Stell[62] described Morton as *'imperfectly understood as any castle can be'* he pointed out that its *'position, purpose, style, and its date are all open to question.'* This section, therefore, looks at the major studies and interpretations of the castle, spanning the period from 1887 to 2015.

Macgibbon and Ross (1887)[63]

- Repeated the traditional view that the site 'is said to have been occupied by a castle from an early period' and that Dunegal, Lord of Nithsdale was supposed to have had a stronghold here in the 12th century.
- Noted the natural strength of the site and suggested that the weaker south approach was probably defended by a ditch.
- Did not consider the full extent of the site, concentrating only on the standing remains. To the rear of the main block they proposed a small courtyard, though the evidence for this presently appears weak and they seem not to have taken account of the lean-to buildings.
- They place the castle in their 'Third Period' (1400-1542) in a section described as 'exceptional modifications of the keep plan' and drew parallels with Tulliallan in Fife and Rait in Nairn, suggesting that all three belong to the first half of the 15th century.

RCAHMS (1920)[64]

- Considered the full extent of the site and suggested the form of the castle to be a triangular enceinte with a gatehouse at the south-west angle, a circular tower at the south-east angle and possibly another tower at the apex of the enceinte on the north.

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[62] Stell, 1986, p.108
[63] Macgibbon and Ross (vol. 1, 1887, pp. 545-50)
[64] RCAHMS (1920, pp. 176-8, no. 510)

- The main block contained the principal living apartments, occupies the south side of the enceinte and, together with the gatehouse and south-east tower, incorporates the curtain walls in its construction.
- Drew no parallels, but stated that the castle is a 15th-century structure, its erection following the acquisition of the barony of Morton by James Douglas of Dalkeith in 1440.

Mackay MacKenzie (1927)

- Suggested a construction date soon after 1440[65].
- Asserted that the masonry at Morton, 'block-in-course' or 'large squared rubble', can be accepted as a 15th century characteristic[66].
- Placed Morton in the category of Pallatial Castles (Hall Castles). He argued that from the early 15th century in those parts of the country responsive to new influences, the hall, not the great tower, becomes the pivot of the structure: 'Hall and tower or towers are combined, and this unified structure occupies the front of the construction as a whole.' The close with its ancillary buildings is to the rear and the principal entrance 'generally passes in an arched pend under the great frontal block and the entrance can be reached without crossing the court'[67]. Suggests **Doune Castle** in Perthshire and **Ravenscraig Castle** in Fife as partial exemplars,
- Accepting differences of detail, such as the entrance being in the centre of the main block, suggested that Ravenscraig and Morton are 'substantially similar'[68]. Ravenscraig is situated upon a triangular promontory and it comprises a main block flanked by drum towers at each end, the whole fronting the approach to the promontory; ancillary buildings lie to the rear. The martial appearance of Ravenscraig is the result of later work and when begun in 1460 it was intended as a jointure or dower house for Mary of Gueldres, queen to James II.
- At Doune, as at Morton, the main façade is the hall block with a gatehouse at one end providing private accommodation.
- Tulliallan in Fife is also cited as 'another structure of the same general class and about the same age'[69].

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[65] Mackay MacKenzie, 1927, p.147
[66] Ibid. p.134
[67] Ibid. p.142
[68] Ibid. p.147
[69] Ibid. p.147

W. Douglas Simpson (1939)

- Accepted the existence of an early castle on the site, but didn't attempt to identify it amongst the present remains.
- 'The end' of the early castle was probably 1357, when Morton was amongst a group of castles whose demolition was required as one of the terms of the Treaty of Berwick.
- The present building is clearly a structure of the fifteenth century, its architectural detail and the quality of the ashlar masonry suggesting a date early in the century[70].
- The high-quality ashlar masonry also suggests an early 15th century date. Points to the similarities between the Morton masonry and that at contemporary parts of nearby Sanquhar Castle and the lower portions of the choir and presbytery of the collegiate church at Lincluden, built between 1409 and 1424.
- Suggests that the same master mason was responsible for Morton Castle and extensive 15th century building work at Sanquhar castle.
- Some architectural details, notably the jambs of the hooded fireplace in the first floor chamber of the south-east tower appeared to be 'of so pronounced Edwardian type as to raise the suspicion that they have been re-used from an older building'[71]. The corbelled lintels used at Morton also recalled 'Edwardian' work and could have been inspired by the earlier castle[72].
- Argues that the gatehouse formed 'a self contained residence for the lord of the castle, having the entrance under his own control, and cut off completely from the rest of the building'[73], though the visible evidence contradicts this.

W. Douglas Simpson (1961)

- Douglas Simpson subsequently revised his view on the dating of Morton Castle following a re-examination of Rait castle with Stewart Cruden in 1957. Their conclusions were that Rait is 'an excellent and (in Scotland) exceedingly rare example of a small medieval stone hall-house, and that its date must be placed quite early in the fourteenth century, during the Plantagenet occupation'[74]. Douglas Simpson pointed out that the fireplaces in the remaining gate tower and the hall are 'of decidedly Edwardian character'[75] and that the shoulder-

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[70] W Douglas Simpson, 1939, p.29).
[71] Ibid. p.31
[72] Ibid. p.32
[73] Ibid. p.32
[74] Douglas Simpson, 1961, p.28
[75] Ibid. p.14

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headed lintel, used throughout the building, is an Edwardian characteristic, though he accepted that it can be earlier or later.

- Emphasising the 'obviously close architectural connections' between Morton and Rait observed by MacGibbon and Ross[76] he notes the major features common to both castles as:
    - A long hall resting upon un-vaulted storage.
    - The large 'architecturally conspicuous' doorway giving entry to the lower end of the hall and the small window adjoining it.
    - The fireplace at the dais end of the hall.
    - The lord's chambers in a circular tower opening off the dais.
    - The use of continuous corbelled lintel construction.
    - The presence of small oblong windows.

Cruden (1981)

- Dealt only with the standing remains, viewing them unequivocally as those of a hall-house.
- The internal appearance of the windows on the south wall of the undercroft, their long, stepped sills, and door-like embrasures and shouldered lintels indicate a late 13th-century date, as do the hooded fireplaces with pronounced jambs bearing moulded capitals. Other minor details, such as corbels, confirm this[77].
- Drew the parallels with Rait, which he placed in the late 13th or the first quarter of the 14th century, 'say 1290 to 1320'[78].

Stell (1979)[79]

Carried out a full site survey with detailed plans of the standing elements and concluded that:

- The castle is almost certainly not a homogenous structure of one medieval build. There may be elements of the remains which predate the upstanding structures which themselves have been modified, for example, the alterations of the south-east tower which were probably made when the east half of the tower collapsed or was taken down.
- In a Scottish context it can be argued that Morton is unique and shares only a limited number of characteristics with other hall-like structures.
- Rejects the usefulness of the term 'hall-house' arguing that it has no particular validity as a description of a period-type, and can cover

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[76] Ibid. p.14
[77] Cruden, 1981, p.96
[78] Ibid. p.82
[79] Stell, 1979, DFR/14/1

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structures dating from the 13th to the 16th centuries; the diagnostic features of their dating are also of uncertain reliability.

- Comparisons, and possible models, for the layout and detailing of Morton can more fruitfully be sought within a more regional and social context. 'Different aspects of its construction such as the gatehouse, the shouldered door- and window-heads, the canopied fireplaces, the mullioned and transomed windows and so forth, can also be seen in varying combinations among other large castles of the Western March, such as **Caerlaverock**, **Hermitage** and **Threave**, and one of the closest parallels for the main doorway–surround is the 15th-century north window in the hall range at **Dirleton Castle.**'

- Rejects the dates, ranging between the late-13th century and the mid-15th century, based on analogies with 'so-called hall-houses' elsewhere in the country.

- Provisional conclusions in 1979 were that 'the existing castle is of post-1350 date and overlies the ruins of an earlier structure with what appears to have been a triangular enceinte,' and that 'the upstanding structure almost certainly belongs to the Douglas period of ownership, probably serving as a country retreat or hunting lodge'[80].

Stell (2015)

- Names Cruden (1960) as the first castle scholar to treat hall-houses as a discrete archaeological entity, followed by John Dunbar and the RCAHMS in their volumes on Argyll[81].

- Cites Professor Tadhg O'Keeffe (2014) in identifying a serious problem described as 'hall-house syndrome' which 'distorts the ways in which medieval society is viewed and reflected through the medium of surviving buildings'[82].

- Observes that in the 1960s and 1970s Scottish hall-houses became accepted as a 13th-century period-type, their minimally defensive character invoking the notion of peace and domesticity[83]. In this context he quotes the example of the late Professor A. A. M. Duncan who wrote 'Lest it be urged that the assumption of a peaceful society is invalid, the small number of recognised hall-houses of late 13th century date is worth mention'[84].

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[80] Ibid
[81] Stell, 2015, p. 134

[82] Ibid. p. 134
[83] Ibid. p.136
[84] Duncan, 1975, p.441

- Concludes that Scottish archaeological records and classifications 'continue to leave themselves open to, indeed implicitly encourage, such historical misuse of the physical evidence and will continue to do so as long as "hall-houses" remain an unchallenged dogma'[85].

APPENDIX 4:   STATISTICAL ACCOUNT

Old Stat. Acct., vol x, 1794, p. 151[86]

'In former times, a great chieftain had made his residence here; and to him, no doubt, a large district of country around this had belonged. Of his castle, called Morton Castle, there is still a large ruin remaining. It stands upon pretty high ground near the foot of the hills, on the E. side of the parish. The present remains measure about 100 feet in length, by 27 in width. But, from the traces of the foundation, it has evidently been, when entire, about double its present wideness, and considerably longer. A great deal of the stones have been carried away at different times, to build houses and dykes in the neighbourhood. The wall of the S. front is still quite entire; it is between 30 and 40 feet in height, and has a large rounded tower at each end, of about 12 feet diameter. In this front, at the height of about 12 feet, is a row of small windows, about 16 inches square, to each of which are a few steps leading up, in the inside of the wall. In the higher parts of the building, the windows are much larger. This castle is surrounded (except upon the W. side) by a deep natural hollow, in which the water had been dammed up by an artificial mound at each end. Considering the advantages of its situation, and the strength of its walls, which are about 8 feet thick at the foundation, this strong hold must have been almost impregnable by the ancient modes of attack. According to Pennant, this castle "was originally the seat of Dunenald, predecessor of Thomas Randolph, afterwards created Earl of Murray by Robert Bruce; when this castle, with that of Auchincass, near Moffat, was disposed of to Douglas of Morton, predecessor of the Earls of Morton.'

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[85] Stell, 2015, p.136
[86] Accessible at: https://stataccscot.edina.ac.uk/static/statacc/dist/viewer/osa-vol10-Parish_record_for_Morton_in_the_county_of_Dumfries_in_volume_10_of_account_1/osa-vol10-p151-parish-dumfries-morton