



HISTORIC  
ENVIRONMENT  
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD  
EACHDRAIDHEIL  
ALBA

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Last Reviewed:	2019

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# CUBBIE ROW'S CASTLE (CUBBIE ROO'S CASTLE)



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# HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

## CUBBIE ROW'S CASTLE (CUBBIE ROO'S CASTLE)

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# 1 Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

Cubbie Roo's Castle comprises the remains of a cluster of buildings from different phases, the earliest of which are probably medieval in origin. Though currently not independently verified, it is likely that the earliest phase of building at the site is the product of construction in the 12th century, ascribable to either Kolbein *hrúga* or one of his children, of which the likeliest candidate is Bjarni Kolbeinsson. It sits on a raised ridge of land on the small island of Wyre, which is between Rousay, Egilsay and Gairsay, to the north-east of Mainland in Orkney.

The castle comprises a roughly square block of good quality masonry c.8m<sup>2</sup>, with walls 1.75m thick from the base, becoming thinner above an internal ledge on the surviving higher north wall. Roughly mid-distance along the southern and western walls are plain slit windows with stepped sills and rebates slightly inside from the exterior face for wooden frames. In the floor of the enclosed space is a tank c.1.2m deep, currently retaining water, cut from the bedrock. Its chronological relationship to the masonry is unclear.

Perhaps contemporary with this construction, a roughly-built masonry wall was built around the site, fronted by a ditch which currently partly retains water. Beyond the ditch is another bank of uncertain fabric which may not be contemporary.

Soon after the completion of the first block of masonry, a small addition was created, butting against the north end of the eastern wall, on its exterior face. The presence of a chute tends to confirm its identification as a garderobe block, and was probably two storeys high.

In the third phase of building, a rectangular structure was built abutting the north wall of the exterior face of the primary masonry block. It contained a fireplace and window on its north interior wall face and a doorway at the south side of its eastern wall.

The fourth phase of building at Cubbie Roo's saw a significant increase in the number of buildings, though these may equally represent the stone replacements of an earlier earth- or timber-built construction, or of a thoroughly robbed stone predecessor. This phase saw the insertion of a corridor between the northern exterior building and the primary stone tower, linking two new wedge-shaped spaces to the north-west and north-east of the primary construction building. The north-east building, with its profusion of drains, may represent a kitchen. The northern building had an oven inserted by its north-facing window. Abutting the western side of the first phase masonry tower, a new building was constructed with a doorway on its south wall. It probably obscured the west window of the primary construction phase building. To the east of the primary tower, two smaller blocks were built: one enclosed the garderobe chute exit and also provided a new staircase to

access the upper storeys of the buildings, while a further extension was added south of the garderobe block with a doorway facing south.

The last phase of building is miscellaneous in focus, with smaller walls inserted in the north-west wedge chamber and the formalisation of a corridor or passage leading from the tower to the eastern entrance to the wider castle enclosure. The construction of a large building to the south of the first masonry phase at the site saw the destruction of the enclosing ditch and bank(s). The building has been identified as a hall. At the very least, it is an important building, demonstrated by the presence of both a fireplace and a sophisticated doorway along its north wall, facing the corridor linking tower to eastern exit.

Cubbie Roo's Castle was scheduled in 1929 (last amended in 1999) and taken into guardianship in 1932. It is an unstaffed site open to the public all year round. There is no visitor car-park, but it is accessible by foot (c. 15 minutes' walk) from the ferry terminal – the only public means by which to access Wyre. The site is not wheelchair-accessible. It is interpreted by panels at the site which provide visitors with background information.

## 1.2 Statement of significance

- Cubbie Roo's castle is a rare example of a castle in Orkney. If its early dating can be substantiated, it represents a truly exceptional example of a 12th-century castle of transnational significance in northern Europe. Rarely for early castle sites, the material evidence may be corroborated by a chronologically-secure documentary reference, from *Orkneyinga saga*.
- Outwith the castle, the proximity of the late 12th-century St Mary's Chapel and the high-status farm at The Bu mark the archetypal features of lordly landscapes in the European medieval period.
- The visual relationship the castle enjoys today with the neighbouring islands of Rousay and Egilsay are important. It is likely that the intervisibility of Cubbie Roo's castle with other non-castle sites in the medieval world (farms, churches and chapels) was part of the rationale for both its location atop a hill, and its form; probably a small stone tower.
- The secondary phases at Cubbie Roo's, though not often appreciated in the context of the site's 12th-century dating (accepted or otherwise) represent important and overlooked examples of the modifications and changes to castle-living in the later medieval period.
- Cubbie Roo's may represent the sole surviving exemplar of a larger group of castle sites in the Earldom of Orkney, built in the 12th century to reflect their patrons' significant power and familiarity with European forms of lordly architecture.



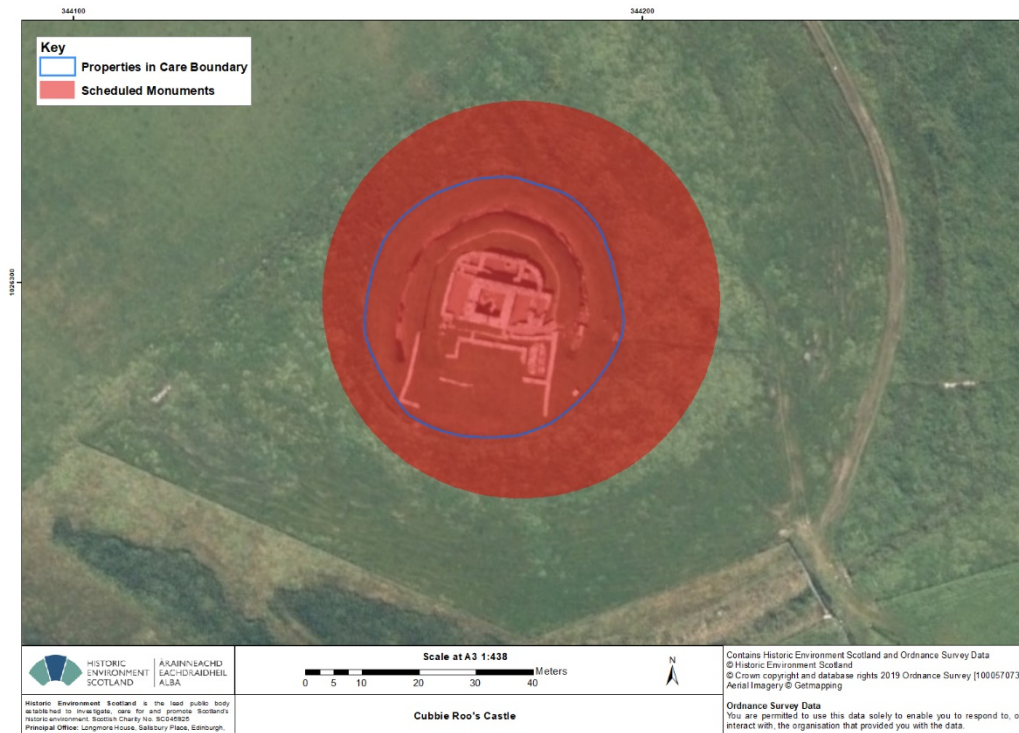


Figure 1: Cubbie Roo's Castle: Scheduled Area and Property in Care Boundary – for illustrative purposes only.

## 2 Assessment of Values

### 2.1 Background

#### 2.1.1 Narrative Site History

Human history in the vicinity of Cubbie Roo's Castle predates the appearance of any late medieval building here. Much material evidence of earlier occupation is found in the area of the castle.

**Neolithic:** c.500m south-west of the site at Braes of Ha'Breck, significant evidence for an Early Neolithic settlement was recovered, comprising five structures and associated middens, and a stone quarry. Among the finds recovered from a series of walkover surveys, excavations and the analysis of stray finds, were traces of a possible cist, a flint scatter, Unstan Ware pottery and a substantial assemblage of charred grain; this last the evidence of a significant conflagration which destroyed part of the settlement<sup>1</sup>.

**Bronze Age:** Known evidence for Bronze Age settlement at Cubbie Roo's is absent, and indeed from most of Wyre, barring a possible burial mound at The Taing 1.5km to the west<sup>2</sup>. The series of drystone enclosures at Skirmie Clett 1,400m east of Cubbie Roo's is certainly prehistoric, but only tentatively dated to the Bronze Age (Figure 3)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/288385/wyre-hallbreck-farm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/182274/wyre-the-taing>

<sup>3</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/2618/wyre-skirmie-clett>; scheduling criteria documents: <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM3864>

*Prehistoric (undefined):* Several features around Cubbie Roo's testify to prehistoric occupation, though beyond this identification, a tighter chronology has not been suggested. An uncertain number of burial mounds c.700m south-west of the castle site were asserted in 2006 east of Testaquoy<sup>4</sup>. A further burial cairn was identified c.450m south-west of the castle, near Braes of Ha'Breck<sup>5</sup>. A probable Prehistoric stone setting s was recorded c.1000m east of the castle by Loch of Oorns, and an individual standing stone at Skirmie Clett nearby is also suggested.<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2: Aerial view with Cubbie Roo's Castle (in foreground), The Bu farm (centre), St Mary's Chapel (far right), with views to Rousay and Egilsay beyond. DP 255198 © Crown Copyright: HES.

*Medieval (other):* On architectural grounds alone the sole diagnostically medieval building on Wyre is the late 12th-century **St Mary's Chapel** c.100m east of Cubbie Roo's<sup>7</sup> (Figure 2). Comprising a simple plan of nave and chancel built of local whinstone rubble with lime mortar, the inventory makes clear that the chapel was heavily restored between Dryden's 1886 plan and that completed for publication by RCAHMS in 1946<sup>8</sup>. It was also apparent, according to a visit by Dr Raymond Lamb in 1982, that the building had been consolidated in the 19th century by General Burroughs, then major landowner

<sup>4</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/2651/wyre-testaquoy>

<sup>5</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/289898/wyre-testaquoy>

<sup>6</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/289900/wyre-loch-of-oorns>;  
<https://canmore.org.uk/site/289904/wyre-skirmie-clett>

<sup>7</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, pp 234-5 (no. 618)).

<sup>8</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.235).

in Rousay and Wyre<sup>9</sup>. Curiously, the 1946 inventory makes no mention of any phasing visible in the standing remains at the chapel, except to mention that external harling replaced an earlier plaster coat<sup>10</sup>. The photos of the chapel published by RCAHMS clearly show several phases of repair and alteration which may well not be the products of Burroughs's work at the site, but rather, post-primary changes to the building from the medieval and early modern periods. This neglect of the building's post-primary phases of construction is important in the context of the chapel, because it also applies to Cubbie Roo's Castle.

The Bu, a large farm c.180m north-east of the castle and c.150m north of the chapel, probably represents the site of an earlier settlement with medieval origins. It is sited on a large mound whose margins demonstrate evidence of middens<sup>11</sup>. Between The Bu and Cubbie Roo's Castle is a pond which may represent the remains of mill infrastructure of uncertain date.



Figure 3: General view of Skirmie Clett prehistoric enclosures, 1934. SC 1254117 © Crown Copyright: HES.

Cubbie Roo's Castle sits on one of the highest hills on the island. It comprises a ring ditch, lost to the south, with a sequence of walls within the enclosed area which represent the remains of the castle<sup>12</sup>. Both sets of features sit atop a mound on top of the hill, which may represent the collapsed remains of earlier remains. Characteristically in Orkney, such mounds represent collapsed Iron Age brochs, but there is no structural evidence that this is the case at Cubbie Roo's, and indeed patches of exposed bedrock at points across the site argue against this view. Both ring ditch and wall footings were also cleared by HM Office of Works in the 1930s (see Figure 4). It should be

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<sup>9</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/2656/wyre-st-marys-chapel>

<sup>10</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.235).

<sup>11</sup> (Thomas, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> The following description and measurements are drawn heavily from RCAHMS' inventory text on the castle, supplemented with observations on phasing.



noted from the beginning that Cubbie Roo's Castle bears no architectural features which are able to guide dating on the basis of similarity to chronologically diagnostic features. The ascription of dates to features is discussed later. More recently, research on the mortars of both buildings argues for the castle and chapel being constructed in a broadly coeval period<sup>13</sup>.



Figure 4: Photograph of Cubbie Roo's, possibly before clearing works. Undated SC 1168501 © Crown Copyright. Note the volume of slabs, of seemingly similar character to the fabric of the primary built phase, scattered around.

The ditch is 1.75m wide and 1.82m deep and survives largely intact at the north-west, north and north-east of the castle. The inner top of the ditch (scarp) is topped by a roughly-built stone wall, which is 2.2m thick at the eastern entrance. To the west, surviving fragments of the wall rise to 1.21m high from the interior floor surface, but allowances must be made for clearance works which may have altered surface heights. Though this wall bears no diagnostic features, in relative terms it must be early in the sequence of building at the castle, for both it and the ditch (considered coeval with each other) were later demolished and overlain with an extension to the building complex to the south (this extension is undated). In general terms, it is worth remarking that the primary building phase (discussed below) sits in the centre of the enclosing ditch, perhaps also suggesting a chronologically close relationship in phasing.

#### *Phase 1 (Inventory: 1st period)*

The primary phase of standing remains at the centre of the complex comprises massive square foundations (7.83m x 7.92m) with walls 1.75m thick at the base, decreasing to 1.53m above an internal ledge surviving only on the inner face of the north wall. This would have supported floor joists 1.98m above the ground floor of the tower, a floor presently composed of impacted gravel and fragments of cracked flags. Slightly to the west of centre an irregular rectangle-shaped tank 1.21m deep was carved into the bedrock.

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<sup>13</sup> (Thacker, 2016, I, p.90)

Its phasing is uncertain, but it still holds water. The walls rest on foundations exposed on the east side of the work comprising a scarcement of massive stone blocks projecting outwards<sup>14</sup>.

There are no traces of a doorway into this space, which suggests it was entered at first floor level and accessed via a hatch and ladder, though an internal staircase is also possible. There are two simple slit windows with internal stepped splays, located almost mid-length along the south and west walls. They are 0.22m and 0.24m wide externally but twice as wide internally. Both bear traces of rebates 0.30m from the exterior face of the wall for carrying wooden frames for shutters: these do not appear to be cut in later, but are coeval with the construction of the apertures.

The 1946 county survey noted a marked difference in quality between the masonry of the central square block and that of the rough scarp wall<sup>15</sup>. Fine lime harling apparently also survived in the exterior face of the east wall<sup>16</sup>. Given that the two larger features share a mutual spatial intelligibility (they respect each other and the central block sits in the middle of the enclosed space), it is unlikely that the variance in masonry represents a significant difference in phasing, but rather a selective investment in the location of good quality stonework. The inventory also recognised that the quality of the masonry of the central square block was comparable but superior to that of **St Mary's Chapel**, and furthermore that it was superior even to the earliest phases of work at the Cathedral of St Magnus in Kirkwall. The earliest phases of the cathedral date to its traditional foundation date of 1137, stretching into the middle of the 12th century. It should be remarked at this point that architecturally the style of St Magnus is English, from the Durham school, and owes nothing to a distinctly Scandinavian context<sup>17</sup>. Recently, Thacker has argued that the mortars of the earliest phases of both **St Mary's Chapel** and Cubbie Roo's Castle are coeval<sup>18</sup>. Although there remains no independent diagnostic dating for the castle itself, the chapel is more readily datable to the 12th century. A clear conclusion from this new interpretation of the mortar evidence is that the castle is by extension also 12th century in its primary phase.

#### *Phase 2 (Inventory: 1st addition)*

Soon after the completion of the primary construction above, a rectangular extension or wing (north-south, c.4.45m x east-west, c.3.84m) was added to the east side of the central block, extending the face of the north wall eastwards. Its walls were c.1m thick. From its respect of the existing central feature it is apparent that this is a development of the site rather than rehabilitation. The presence of a garderobe chute in the east wall of this extension confirms that the building was inhabited at first floor level<sup>19</sup>. The

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<sup>14</sup> (Marwick, 1927-8, p.10).

<sup>15</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.236).

<sup>16</sup> (NMRS, MS/36/107, p.74).

<sup>17</sup> (Thurlby 1997, pp 884-5).

<sup>18</sup> (Thacker, 2016, I, p.90).

<sup>19</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.238).

orientation of a garderobe flue facing the entrance to a site is not unusual. The masonry of this extension is not dissimilar to that from Phase 1, and is laid in mortar. From its wall thickness, it is doubtful if this wing was taller than two levels; that is, ground and first full-height floor.



**Figure 5:** Photo of fragments of harling on wall of building at castle, location unknown SC 1247583 © Courtesy of HES.

### *Phase 3 (Inventory: 2nd addition)*

As with the earlier phase of building at Cubbie Roo's, the third period of construction evidenced a development of the site, with the internal mutual communication of the buildings themselves suggesting that the earlier two phases were still in use. It comprised a rectangular extension appended to the central block to the north, matching the width of the Phase 1 building and extending northwards c.4.5m. On the south face of the north wall, that is, in the interior of the extension, was a fireplace on the west end and a window with broad internal splay, mid-length along the wall. The entrance to this space was on the east wall, along the south end, by the Phase 1 building. It is not clear if there was a second entrance or window in this phase on the south end of the west wall (there is presently a gap in the wall there). On account of the fireplace, this extension can be understood as a domestic space – confirmed somewhat by traces of internal plastering – but it is not obvious that it communicated with its neighbouring buildings. The Inventory identified the window and fireplace as “not early”, but did not ascribe any date<sup>20</sup>. A staircase and landing built on the exterior face of the east wall, north of the entrance to the extension, suggests this was a two-storey building<sup>21</sup>, but on account of the meagre thickness of its walls (c.0.76m) it may be imagined that

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<sup>20</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.238).

<sup>21</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.238).

the stairs gave access to a loft rather than a full-height second storey. The fabric of this Phase 3 construction comprises small stones set in clay, deemed inferior in quality to that of the earlier two<sup>22</sup>.

#### *Phase 4 (Inventory: 3rd addition)*

The next phase of construction at Cubbie Roo's saw a significant increase in building work, though this was seemingly confined to the exterior of the Phase 1 building, its interior remaining apparently untouched. The new buildings again seem to respect the earlier phases and are extensions, rather than undoing or replacing them, although the character of use of the Phase 3 building and its vicinity, certainly changed. To the east of the Phase 3 building, the re-entrant angle between it and the Phase 2 wing on the east side of the tower was 'filled in' with a curving masonry, mortar-bonded wall with three drains (formed of low-level holes in the wall). These may be tentatively connected to food preparation or cleaning. A new east-west wall was inserted in the south portion of the Phase 3 domestic extension, creating a corridor between it and the Phase 1 building and accessed by a doorway at the east end of the new south wall. This new corridor linked the new space with three drains to the rest of the site, for the latter communicated with no other spaces. Inside the Phase 2 building, an oven was constructed against the north wall at its east end, probably evidencing a change in the use of the space from domestic towards production or preparation.

To the west of the Phase 1 construction, another rectangular block was added, c.4.11m wide and matching the length of the earlier building to the east. It was entered on its south wall by a doorway with fragmentary checks surviving. The surviving masonry suggests it did not feature a north wall, but rather its west wall curved at its north end to meet the north-west corner of the Phase 2 building, abutting against it. It is possible that there was originally a returning northern wall for this rectangular building, but any evidence of it has been lost beneath a lateral wall of later date. It is also unclear, from the evidence, how this western extension communicated with the new corridor mentioned above. The corridor opens at its western end into the curved corner room, but the surviving material in this space is confused in its stratigraphy and its original configuration is at present difficult to reconstruct. What is certain is that this west extension blocked out any natural light and air from the west window of the Phase 1 building; this may or may not represent a change in how this earliest of buildings was used.

If the change in use of the Phase 2 building and new north-east corner space with three drains is accepted as representing a new suite of food preparation facilities, it follows that these spaces must have had easy access to the main area of dining. Where exactly this was located is unclear at present, but it must have been near to the only means by which to access these new spaces, the south doorway of the west extension in this phase. It may even be represented by the west extension itself.

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<sup>22</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.238).



*Phase 4a (Inventory: 3rd addition)*<sup>23</sup>

The last significant changes to the site in Phase 4 concerned the east portion of the existing complex, around the Phase 2 wing. The re-entrant angle between the Phase 1 central block and Phase 2 wing was filled in, not by a curved wall but by a north-south wall extending southwards on the line of the east wall of the wing. How far southwards this extended is unclear, for its southern terminal is obscured by masonry of a later phase. Its southern extent may very well be marked by a further block of masonry appended to the exterior face of the south-east corner of the Phase 1 building. The Inventory plan suggests it represents the west jamb of a doorway with draw-bar hole<sup>24</sup>, marking a doorway set of a roughly east-west alignment giving access from the exterior (south) to the interior (north), within the re-entrant angle of Phases 1 and 2.

It should be noted that the Inventory presents a different interpretation which also evidences a contradiction in phasing between the plan and the narrative. The narrative suggests that the 'filling in' of the south-east re-entrant angle between phases 1 and 2 saw an east-west wall abut the southern end, external face of the east wall of Phase 1. A doorway is suggested adjacent to the Phase 1 building. It also suggests that between this doorway and that with the draw-bar to the south was a passageway leading from the east entrance to the enclosure. The plan, however, accords better with what is proposed above, namely that the draw-bar doorway was part of the same 'filling in' as the wall running south from the Phase 2 east wall.

Lastly, the final change in this phase saw the closing up of the garderobe pit of the Phase 2 wing, with the northern wall of this segment of masonry containing a drain emptying northwards.

*Phase 5 (Inventory: 4th addition)*

The Inventory suggests the enclosing of the garderobe pit was short-lived, for soon after a staircase was inserted into the south side of this block leading northwards, presumably granting access to the Phase 2 wing from the east at first floor<sup>25</sup>. How short-lived is not stated, but when the phase plan was created for the site it was deemed sufficiently distinct to merit a different constructional phase entirely (Phase 5). Such an arrangement is at odds with the newly proposed means of access above, but accords with the phase plan published in 1946. The difference may represent a finer resolution of phasing for the building works in Phase 4/4a than can presently be resolved by the Inventory's understanding of the site.

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<sup>23</sup> This phase is differentiated from the other works in Phase 4 because, as the Inventory states, its masonry was bonded with clay (akin to Phase 3) rather than mortar (as with the other Phase 4 buildings). Since the walls of phases 4 and 4a do not meet anywhere on site to confirm or reject a common phasing, the Inventory identification is retained but distinguished.

<sup>24</sup> A review of imagery for this feature cannot confirm this identification.

<sup>25</sup> (RCAHMS, 1946, p.238).

Apart from the creation of new access to the upper level of phases 1-2, Phase 5 saw the creation of a passage running from the present east entry into the enclosure of the castle to the south-east corner of the Phase 1 building. The irregular coursing and wall thickness of this phase of construction raises doubts over the certainty that the Inventory correctly identified a single, coherent scheme of construction in this phase.

*Unknown phasing (Inventory: Indeterminate and later)*

Several discrete areas of (in phasing terms) later work at Cubbie Roo's survives at the site.

The smallest area is the north-west segment of the site, west of the Phase 3 rectangular domestic building. In this wedge-shaped space several radial walls appear, some earlier than others but with no clear relation to the better-understood features around them. It should be remarked, however, that all seem to respect the existing features around them, and that therefore they likely represent modifications of the interior arrangement, rather than later building remains.

The second area comprises the two sets of piers crossing the ditch at the east of the castle enclosure. Of roughly comparable design, the southern of the two clearly respects the corridor of Phase 4a south of the Phase 2 building and enclosing feature of the garderobe in Phase 4. The piers north of this set, however, must be earlier, for they face no gap in the enclosing bank around the site but are on an alignment with the Phase 2 wing. Both sets of piers are demonstrably earlier than the outer bank, for their eastern terminals underlay the upcast of the bank. It is possible this outer ring of earth represents the clearing remains of the ditch. It is apparent, too, from the relationship between the northernmost piers' western terminal and the inner bank that the inner bank here, too, is of suspect antiquity, at least in its present form. It may be remarked that, except for the Inventory's identification of the rough-built wall atop this inner bank (as the present view has it), there is no reason to think that the ditches enclosing Cubbie Roo's are coeval with the earliest phases (1-3) at the site.



Figure 6: Photograph of both pairs of piers in the ditch on the E side of enclosure. SC 1247581 © Courtesy of HES.

The final area of features of uncertain phasing is a series of walls and corners south of the Phase 1 building, and indeed south of all of the earlier phases at the site. The Inventory identified the presence of a hall with large, shallow fireplace and centrally-framed doorway on an east-west wall c.3.04m south of the Phase 1 building. What is certain is that in contrast to the earlier phase built around the Phase 1 work, this building shows a less tangible relationship with the other buildings on site. It lies at the northern end of a flattened area of land whose construction necessitated the demolition of the ditch and banks enclosing the castle's southern third. Its construction was not the sole direct cause of this demolition, however. The 'hall' is in phasing terms coeval with two large tanks east of it, whose location lies in the path of a conjectural reconstruction of the inner bank<sup>26</sup>. Therefore the tanks, and the hall, must have necessitated the destruction of the bank.

The fireplace in the 'hall' suggests a domestic space, but beyond this no definite role can be ascribed to this building. At a later date still, a small L-shaped block of walling was constructed in the 'hall', its longer section abutting the building's north wall just west of the fireplace. Its presence neither confirms nor denies the continued use of this space.

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<sup>26</sup> It may be remarked that the proximity of these tanks to the garderobe pit c.4.5m to the north could suggest that the liquid stored there was not for human consumption, given the risks of contamination from the latrine waste. If this was not the case, it is plausible the garderobes were no longer in use, though perhaps the coeval storage of materials was better managed than presently imagined.

## 2.12 Artefacts from Cubbie Roo's Castle (see also attached object list, Appendix 2)

Over the course of several excavations at Cubbie Roo's Castle a number of artefacts were recovered which are now dispersed between the National Museum of Scotland and the Orkney museum. There does not seem to have been a concerted effort to ascribe a date to these finds beyond the initial assessments made in the 1920s-1930s. The sole diagnostic item from the collection currently dated is the brass jetton ascribed to the reign of King Magnús Eriksson of Norway and Sweden, and dating to c.1320-1340<sup>27</sup>. At the time of the jetton's creation Orkney and Shetland were part of the Kingdom of Norway.

The fragments of bronze mail often ascribed to the castle originate, in fact, from **St Mary's Chapel**; these are dated to between the 12th-15th centuries<sup>28</sup>. Presently there are two sets of bronze mail: a corroded lump (presumably from the chapel), and a second set comprising triangles of mail rings and a small volume of individual mail rings and pairs<sup>29</sup>. The material of these could not be determined, though some are identified as brass. The collection of pottery fragments from the site are small but seem to be varied, and are presently undated. Handmade pottery, of which there are three groups from Cubbie Roo's, can in dating terms range from the prehistoric to the modern period.

Several items strongly hint at metalworking at the site – crucibles, moulds, scraps of bronze or copper. The annular brooch with simple decorative scheme, and the fragment of a small (crotal?) bell, may be products of this metalworking scheme.

## 2.13 Clearing and Excavations in the 1920s-1930s

The site was subject to several different episodes of clearing works in the 1920s-30s. Dr Hugh Marwick's 1927-8 article, discussing the castle, remarks that in the Phase 2 building "[...] some excavations were made a few years ago (on the outside) in order to construct a henhouse." This was subsequently wholly cleared out and roofed<sup>30</sup>. This was evidently not an investigation into the castle but a redeployment of its use. He also noted the presence, on the north side of the exterior face of the enclosure, a raised area of turf which is not now obvious.

W.F. Cormack's investigation into the provenance of the mail fragments from the St Mary's Chapel's also revealed details of the early 1930s works at the castle. In 1933 the Office of Works undertook clearance and consolidation at

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<sup>27</sup> (Wyeth, 2018, p.139, citing Stuart Campbell, National Museum of Scotland, pers. comm. (6/4/16)).

<sup>28</sup> (Caldwell, D., Cormack, W.F., Gavra-Sanders, T., 2005)

<sup>29</sup> (Caldwell, D., Cormack, W.F., Gavra-Sanders, T., 2005)

<sup>30</sup> (Marwick, 1927-8, p.10).



both the chapel and castle; under the paramount supervision of James S. Richardson (Inspector of Ancient Monuments), the work was contracted to John Firth of Kirkwall, who in turn appointed Thomas Drever as foreman to manage the Wyre men who were employed for the labour<sup>31</sup>. Also present was a mason from Arbroath, A.P. Baird. In this year, the collapsing inner face of the wall ringing the site was consolidated, and gaps left within it to show its location<sup>32</sup>.

On 12th September 1934 Marwick reported in the *Orkney Herald* that in the early summer of the same year, works at Cubbie Roo's had "just commenced"<sup>33</sup>. From a series of letters and documents beginning in early June 1935 it is apparent that Marwick returned to Wyre to be instructed in the completion of, and then supervise, the clearing works at the castle in advance of the Royal Commission's plan of the site. Thomas Yeoman's letter to J.S. Richardson notes that Marwick believed that securing the services of "labourers" would be difficult on account of their preoccupation with farm work<sup>34</sup>. A letter four days later reveals that Marwick was given instructions on how to undertake the clearing works<sup>35</sup>. Three weeks later, in a letter dated 26th June 1935 to Richardson, E. Craigie Brown reported that Marwick was nearing the end of his written instructions in managing the site clearance (with survey and consolidation?), but that he was confident in carrying on after he had enacted the written guidance<sup>36</sup>.

There appears to have been apprehension at the conduct of the excavation at Cubbie Roo's in the 1930s. Cormack hints at this in letters, and a more recent written account by a relation of a Wyre farmer gives this some credence<sup>37</sup>. It notes that:

"I was told – again maybe 'fake news' – that the men were given a certain amount of work to be completed in a month but left to do it more or less on their own. They did the work in a week and spent the next three weeks in the tent playing cards and probably drinking home brew. There was a certain lack of supervision but I can't believe it was that bad. None of the men are still alive so no verification I'm afraid. [...]. Looking at the finds now in the Tankerness House Museum I feel that the supervision must have improved because they are tiny things."

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<sup>31</sup> (Orkney Library and Archive, 1989, p.1, citing S.R.O. files MW/1/723, 725 and 726).

<sup>32</sup> (Orkney Library and Archive, 1989, p.4.)

<sup>33</sup> (NMRS, MS/268/14 (p.2)).

<sup>34</sup> (NMRS, MS/268/15, (p.3)).

<sup>35</sup> (NMRS, MS/268/5 (p.2)).

<sup>36</sup> (NMRS, MS/268/17 (p.2)).

<sup>37</sup> Deduced from email correspondence with Margaret Flaws, 21<sup>st</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> February 2019. Mrs Flaws has graciously agreed to her writing being included in this report. The father of Mrs Flaws' husband Ian worked on the clearance works at Cubbie Roo's.

### 20th and 21st centuries

The nearby heritage centre (c.280m south-east of the castle), occupying a modern single-storey building, contains a war memorial which formerly hung in Wyre School<sup>38</sup>.

It is intended to record the entire structure via terrestrial laser scanning as part of the Rae Project. This objective digital record will underpin future site management and conservation works, as required.

## 2.2 Evidential Values

Cubbie Roo's is regarded as one of Scotland's earliest stone castles. This claim rests on the connection made between the site and a reference in the early 13th-century Icelandic narrative source commonly identified as *Orkneyinga saga* (discussed in 2.3 *Historical values*). On this basis alone, whether accepted or not, Cubbie Roo's is a uniquely important site in Scotland.

The primary evidential values for Cubbie Roo's are:

- Its physical fabric: the castle, although diminished in height, retains a strong corpus of wall evidence with relative phasing to underpin scientific dating methods.
  - *Condition*: The castle is in a good condition, its remains are straightforward to interpret and it is not at any immediate risk.
  - *Completeness*: The castle is complete at foundation level and to wall height survives to roughly ground-floor level, preserving certain doorway jambs, windows and thresholds.
  - *Extent*: It is likely that the greatest historic extent of the castle is already recognised in the remains. Depending on the extent to which the excavations of the 1930s were destructive, there may remain features of major significance below the surface of the site. Outside of the castle itself, it is likely that there remains significant archaeological potential for a greater understanding of medieval Wyre at both the high-status farm mound and, if genuine, the pond between the castle and farm. Although not part of the PIC, these and the chapel represent part of the same unit of medieval lordship.
  - *Disturbance*: There does not appear to have been significant disturbance at the site following the clearing and consolidating works there in the 1930s. However these, and both the known and unknown modification of the site for agricultural purposes before the 1930s are likely to have damaged and removed evidence. The extent of this damage is not known.
- Its landscape context: the survival of a clear relationship between castle, coeval and largely unaltered chapel, and high-status farm is uncommon for secular centres of lordship in Orkney for the 12th century. A preserved visual relationship between castle, surrounding islands, farms and church or chapel sites, also makes Cubbie Roo's rare.

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<sup>38</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/339104/wyre-heritage-centre>

- New research undertaken on Cubbie Roo's has the potential to strengthen or undermine the argument of the earliest phase's origins.
- Cubbie Roo's may represent an early typology or form of castle site with few comparators in Scotland.
- The collections from Cubbie Roo's, though not extensive and presently poorly understood, represents a body of evidence with the greatest immediate potential to enhance an understanding of the site.

### 2.3 Historical Values

*Close association with people or events; Demonstrating past ways of life:*

Cubbie Roo's may represent the site constructed by Kolbein *hrúga* in 1145 as told in *Orkneyinga saga*. The extract from the widely-available modern English edition is as follows: "At that time there was a very able man called Kolbein Heap [Old Norse: *hrúga*] farming on Wyre in Orkney. He had a fine stone fort [ON: *steinkastala*] built there, a really solid stronghold [ON: *öruggt víg*]." <sup>39</sup> It is equally possible that it represents the works of one of his children, of which Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson, noted poet and builder, is a likely candidate <sup>40</sup>.

Separately, Cubbie Roo's Castle may also represent part or all of the site of a siege mentioned in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* ('The saga of Hákon Hákonarson') in 1231. "After that, Hánef and his companions went out to the Orkneys. They went to Viera [Wyre], and placed themselves in a castle [*kastalann*] which Kolbein Hrugá had caused to be built; they drew to themselves sufficient stores [into the out-castle, *út-kastalanum*]. But when this was known in the Orkneys, the earl's relatives and friends collected together, and went out to Viera, and besieged the castle [*kastalann*]." <sup>41</sup> On both counts, although the references are incidental, Cubbie Roo's is an important historical artefact to corroborate and elucidate those references. Both references make clear that the castle was a well-known and familiar element of the Orcadian landscape, and perhaps further afield.

These represent the only known mentions to a castle on Wyre in medieval sources.

The connection of castle to chapel and farm site is also central to understanding the site's historical importance, and to reaching deeper than the historical records allow to reconstruct the lives of 12th-13th-century Orcadian aristocrats. Both references are also direct surviving connections to important historical figures: Kolbein *hrúga* and one of his children, Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson.

Not a great deal is known about Kolbein. He is known to have been in Norway in 1142, three years before the appearance of a castle on Wyre based on the *Orkneyinga saga* reference. Kolbein is recorded bringing Eysteinn (II)

<sup>39</sup> (Pálsson, Edwards, 1981, chapter 84. Old Norse: Jónsson, Jónsson Thorkelín, 1780, p.258; Vigfússon, 1887, I, p.147).

<sup>40</sup> Kolbein's other children were Kolbeinn *karl*, Sumarliði, Aslákr and Fríða.

<sup>41</sup> (Anderson, 1922, II, p.482; Vigfússon, 1887, II, p.150).

Haraldsson, a third son of King Harald Gille (r. 1130-1136), to Norway as a rival claimant for the throne. Kolbein was joined by two otherwise unknown individuals, Arne Sturla and Torleiv Brynjulvson<sup>42</sup>. The kingdom was subsequently co-ruled by Eysteinn and his two half-brothers, Ingi (I) Haraldsson and Sigurðr (II). It is likely that from this enterprise, Kolbein gained material and political benefit, but to what extent is not known. It has been argued that one consequence may have been the elevation of Kolbein within Orcadian politics, facilitating and reflected by the construction of the castle on Wyre<sup>43</sup>.

Bjarni Kolbeinsson is a better-understood figure. Connected by kin and by friendship to the comital family in Orkney, he also communicated with the powerful individuals in Iceland and Norway, as well as the papacy. As Bishop of Orkney from 1188 to his death (1223), he was a prominent political leader in the earldom and an advocate for its leaders in the wider North Atlantic world. His byname in *Orkneyinga saga* was *skald* (ON: poet), reflecting a literary reputation<sup>44</sup>. His only surviving output, *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, recalls the defeat of an heroic band of pagan mercenary Vikings<sup>45</sup>. Bjarni oversaw the translation of Rognvald Kali Kolsson's relics in 1192, and a major phase of construction at the Cathedral of St Magnus in Kirkwall. He was once thought to be the author of *Orkneyinga saga*, but this is not now generally accepted<sup>46</sup>.

No other figures are known to be connected to the castle site on Wyre. It is possible, though unverifiable, that the tacksman for Wyre in 1504, Sir John Sinclair<sup>47</sup>, retained a residence on the island. In 1529 Jo Ben described the remains of the structure on Wyre: "*Hic olim gigas habitatet procerus, ubi effigies domus adhuc manet [...]*"<sup>48</sup> In 1693, James Wallace also noted the remains of buildings at the site of Cubbie Roo's Castle. "It is trenched about, of it nothing now remains, but the first house hight; It is a perfect square: the Wall being eight Foot thick, strongly Built and cemented with Lime. The breadth or length within walls not being above ten Foot, having a large door and a small slit for the Window. Of this *Cubbirow*, the common people report many idle fables, not fit to be inserted here."<sup>49</sup> It is apparent from this description that the tower was indeed entered at first floor, but beyond this the early accounts offer limited further information.

There is a traditional association between Kolbein *hrúga* and the legendary giant of Orcadian folklore, Cubbie Roo (variously rendered)<sup>50</sup>. Certainly,

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<sup>42</sup> (Monsen, Smith, 1932, ch. 13, p.675. Arne Sturla is mentioned again in *Heimskringla* in 1157, shortly before King Eystein's death at the hands of King Ingi's supporters. There, Sturla was acting as messenger from Eystein to Ingi, and is identified as "a song of Snæbjorn".)

<sup>43</sup> (Wyeth, 2018, PhD, pp 125-40).

<sup>44</sup> (Pálsson, Edwards, 1981, chapter 84.

<sup>45</sup> (Crawford, 1996, pp 12-3).

<sup>46</sup> (Crawford, 1996, p.13; Thurlby, 1997, p.866).

<sup>47</sup> (Clouston, 1914, p.409).

<sup>48</sup> (Clark, Mitchell, 1908, III, p.306. In translation: 'Here once lived a tall giant, where the impression [Latin: *effigies*] of his house [*domus*] yet stands.')

<sup>49</sup> (Small, 1883, pp 31-2).

<sup>50</sup> Among renderings: Cobbie, Coppie; Cobbe; Row, Roo; Coppierow; Coppirow; Cubberow; Cubbarow.



Kolbein's byname implies he was a person of substantial physical presence, which could explain how an historic figure came to be understood in more recent folklore as a giant<sup>51</sup>. There are several prehistoric monuments and natural features in Orkney bearing the name Cubbie Roo which have no known historic association with Kolbein<sup>52</sup>. It may also be remarked that there are several monuments called 'castle' in Orkney which are almost certainly prehistoric monuments<sup>53</sup>. The association between a giant and the site of Cubbie Roo's Castle may also explain why workers clearing **St Mary's Chapel** in the 1930s found what they believed to be the bones of a giant beneath the floor of the building.

## 2.4 Architectural and Artistic Values

### *Historic significance*

Cubbie Roo's may represent a rare survival in Scottish castles: the massive sub-square foundations at its centre, if dated to the 12th century, are evidence of a larger lost tradition of stone castle buildings from the beginning of the castle-building age. Prominent among the features of European castle culture, to which Cubbie Roo's may belong, are an elevated entrance and the centrality of position within a complex and a landscape.

### *Contextual characteristics*

It is difficult to be sure of the exact dating of Cubbie Roo's earliest phases, and so a chronological framework is problematic to establish. On the basis of the physical properties of its remains, Cubbie Roo's sits in two traditions. The first looks towards Orkney and Caithness, and the other towards Norway and Sweden. Both feature a stone tower at the centre of the castle complex. It is reasonable to assume that Cubbie Roo's Castle had a similar feature in its earliest surviving building phase, given that it was entered at least at first floor. It should be noted that independent diagnostic dating evidence for these groups is meagre. The Orkney-Caithness tradition comprises castle sites usually on promontories and with no clear relationship to chapels or churches.

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<sup>51</sup> (Lee, 2015, p.147, n.9).

<sup>52</sup> (Wyeth, 2018, p.127).

<sup>53</sup> (Wyeth, 2018, p.129).

Promontory sites with tower(s) as central feature		Sites close to church/chapel [documentary evidence only]		Sites outside tower typology or later	
Site	Date	Site	Date	Site	Date
Berriedale C	?C14	Braal C	C14	Brims C	C16
Brough C	N.D.	Castle Holm	?C12	Caisteal Morar na Shein	N.D.
Bucholly C	?C15	Castle Howe	N.D.	Castle of Mey	C16
Castle of Old Wick	?C14	Cubbie Roo's C	?C12	Dounreay C	C16
Clyth C	N.D.	[Damsay]	[C12]	Langwell C	N.D.
Dunbeath C	C15	Dirlot C	?C15	Muness C	C16
Forse C	C14x15	[ <i>Knarrarstaðir</i> ] <sup>54</sup>	C12	Scalloway C	C17
Halberry C	N.D.	Manse Tower <sup>55</sup>	?C12	Scrabster C	?C12
Keiss C	C16	The Wirk	C16		
Knockinnan C	C16	[Thurso]	[C12]		
Latheron C	N.D.				
Sinclair Girnigoe C	C15				

From this table it is apparent that there is not a closely similar comparator for Cubbie Roo's in the region. The later medieval promontory sites with central towers all date to at least two centuries later than conventional thinking ascribes the first phase at Cubbie Roo's. Sites with a similar landscape relationship to medieval monuments like Braal Castle are also later in origin<sup>56</sup>. The only excavated, documented and independently dated castle in the region from the same period (on documentary grounds) at Cubbie Roo's, is Scrabster Castle, which is typologically different.

The sites from Scandinavia represent a different corpus of evidence, on the whole earlier than the Scottish typologies above. The table below illustrates elements of their typology<sup>57</sup>. Two sites in particular, Brunflo and Sunne, are closer exemplars in terms of their form, relationship with landscape features (both are by church or chapel) and a 12th-century date. They are situated in a district of Sweden which, just prior to their construction, was conquered by the Norwegian king Sverrir Sigurðarson (r. 1184-1202). Both towers have been understood as symbols of Sverrir's defeat of the Jamtlandic aristocracy and also as centres of royal and episcopal administration in the region<sup>58</sup>. This parallel is a move away from the influences suggested by Storer Clouston, the pioneer of the study of early castles in Orkney. He suggested a connection to the European tradition of castle building through the crusading activities of the Earldom's magnates<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> The precise location of *Knarrarstaðir* is not known. Presently the traditional identification of the site with the (certainly pre-modern) remains at Bu of Cairston, Stromness, Mainland, is not accepted as coeval with the *saga* reference, and may date to the 16th century: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/1482/bu-of-cairston>

<sup>55</sup> (Dating of Manse Tower at Earl's Palace, Kirkwall, is not certain.)

<sup>56</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/8546/braal-castle>

<sup>57</sup> (Drawn from Wyeth, 2018, p.98, figure 16, modified).

<sup>58</sup> (Wyeth, 2018, pp 94-5).

<sup>59</sup> (Clouston, 1925-6, p.294).

Site, locus	Length (m)	Width (m)	Wall thickness (m)	Date ascribed
'Building 50' (Berg.) NOR	(9.80)	(8.20)	1.50	1198
Archbishop's palace (Trond.) (encl.) NOR	(98.00)	(94.00)	1.00	1152/3
Brunflo kastali SWE	9.00	9.00	2.00	1150s-1200s
Cubbie Roo's ORK	8.00	8.00	1.70	-
Ragnildsholm ('donjon') NOR	15.00	11.00	-	(1200s-1250s)
Sunne kastali SWE	9.00	9.00	2.00	1178
Sverresborg (Trond.) (encl.) NOR	80.00	50.00	-	1182-3
Valdisholm ('donjon') SWE	11.00	11.00	-	(1200s-1250s)

Brackets indicate approximate dimensions; dashes represent unknown/uncertain.  
NOR = Norway; SWE = Sweden; ORK = Orkney.

It should be stressed that a typology-centric investigation of these sites will only bear limited results, as their dating is fraught with difficulties which undermine any chronologies. It is anticipated that new dating evidence will alter or refine the present understanding of both typological groups in which Cubbie Roo's Castle is located.

Certain other sites within Scotland have been favourably or unfavourably compared to the remains at Cubbie Roo's. The impetus for these comparisons emerged from the early work on castles by Storer Clouston, who stressed that certain words in Old Norse sources implied specific typologies in the archaeology. This theory has been rightly critiqued by S.J. Grieve's study, which stressed the flexibility and broad meaning of terminology in saga sources, although noting that terms were not universally interchangeable<sup>60</sup>.

Turning to the typology question, the foundations of what has been interpreted as a tower were revealed in the early 20th century at The Wirk, Westness on Rousay. Analogy with Cubbie Roo's has led to it being dated to the 12th century<sup>61</sup>. More recent examination has suggested a date for this building in the 16th century<sup>62</sup>. The structure revealed at Tuquoy on Westray, though no longer compared to Cubbie Roo's, reflects the great influence of the Wyre site on analogous dating from building typology. It should also be remarked that Tuquoy has demonstrated independent dating evidence for occupation at the site from the 11th-mid-12th centuries, in the form of a diagnostic pin in a stratigraphic phase below that of a rune-inscribed stone<sup>63</sup>. The large square foundations of Cubbie Roo's were favourably compared to second-phase wall foundations in the shore-side mound of Castlehowe in Holm, Mainland<sup>64</sup>. Its dimensions, c.9.75m x c.7.92m, are comparable, as is the wall thickness. However, the building is roughly built and features a rough

<sup>60</sup> (Grieve, 1999, p.30).

<sup>61</sup> (Lamb, 1982, p.27).

<sup>62</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/2282/rousay-westside-the-wirk>

<sup>63</sup> (Owen, 1993, pp 327-8).

<sup>64</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/3044/castle-howe>

ground-floor entrance, contrasting to the well-built masonry and distinct apertures at Cubbie Roo's. This secondary building at Castlehowe remains to be independently or scientifically dated. Castle of Old Wick, near Wick in Caithness, has also frequently been compared to Cubbie Roo's castle. For reasons alluded to above, namely the quite distinct tradition in Caithness of later medieval stone towers of simple detailing, it is likely that it post-dates the Wyre site<sup>65</sup>.

#### *Intrinsic characteristics*

Cubbie Roo's Castle allows the detailed investigation of the forms and manifestations of lordly architecture and identity in Orkney in the broader late medieval period (up to the 16th century). It represents a truly unusual monument in its survival, form and development, and can be understood as a type-site against which less intact comparators may be judged.

## 2.5 Landscape and Aesthetic Values

### *Setting*

The situation of Cubbie Roo's in its landscape is central to interpreting its history. Not only does the site share a symbiotic relationship with **St Mary's Chapel** and with the high-status farm site of The Bu, but its more distant view sheds are significant. To the north-east, the striking profile of the round tower of **St Magnus Church**, Egilsay (12th century) is visible on the horizon. To the north, Cubbie Roo's in its original form was visible to high-status farm sites on southern Rousay and south-western Egilsay<sup>66</sup>.

### *Aesthetic value*

In aesthetic terms, Cubbie Roo's Castle is set on a high point on Wyre, and enjoys wide-ranging views across Wyre and to the west, north and east. Being at the site and looking out towards the more distant island gives a tangible sense of the situation of the island within Orkney. The essential importance of waterways and channels to interpreting a regional character of castles in the archipelago is also easily understood.

## 2.6 Natural Heritage Values

Defined as a 'Whaleback Island' landscape in the SNH National Landscape Character Assessment, Wyre has a low, domed profile with landcover of improved pastures, mixed with arable, rough grass, heather and bog<sup>67</sup>. At the time of assessment (March 2019), the site had no special natural heritage designations.

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<sup>65</sup> <https://canmore.org.uk/site/8956/castle-of-old-wick>

<sup>66</sup> (Wyeth, 2018, p.134).

<sup>67</sup> (SNH, N.D.)



## 2.7 Contemporary/use values

### *Social values*

Cubbie Roo's Castle has an important place in contemporary Orcadian identity, and indeed an importance to those other areas of Scotland where a Norse past is celebrated (especially Shetland and Caithness). The importance of this site to Norse heritage more generally is also valued by contemporary Norwegians sharing an interest in the medieval past of Scotland. However the earliest phase of the castle is ultimately dated, Wyre and both Kolbein *hrúga* and Bishop Bjarni remain significant. In the first two decades following the second millennium, there has been a broader public interest in the Norse past, encouraged by the popularity in film and television of historic and mythological figures of Norse origin. While Orkney's present emphasis in its heritage tourism rests largely on the prehistoric side, Cubbie Roo's and the sites at **Brough of Birsay** and the **Earl's Palace, St Magnus Egilsay, St Magnus Cathedral, Earl's Bu** and Church, Orphir, **Bishop's Palace** and the **Earl's Palace in Kirkwall**, as well as the later **Noltland Castle** represent a body of sites well suited to fostering an interest in the medieval past.

### *Use values*

Cubbie Roo's Castle and **St Mary's Chapel** are unstaffed sites, available to visit throughout the year free of charge. As such, exact visitor numbers are hard to quantify, however the annual figure is estimated to be 700 visitors in 2018. Both sites represent attractions for visitors to Wyre, though the lack of further visitor amenities on the island does hinder a development of its tourist potential. The Wyre Heritage Centre, in a small 20th-century single-storey house by the road on Wyre, is currently closed but, as of 2017, in the care of the Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre Heritage Trust<sup>68</sup>.

### *Access and education*

Although access to Wyre is limited and determined by ferry timetable, Cubbie Roo's represents a good example of easily understood phasing of buildings. More importantly, it remains an outstanding survival of a wider lordship unit of castle, chapel and high-status farm, with historically significant views around the islands.

## 3 Major Gaps in Understanding

- *An independent date or dates for the constructional phases of the site.* No scientific dates have been published which give a clear chronology upon which to frame the phasing applied to Cubbie Roo's in the 1930s. Any new information will greatly enhance the understanding of the site, and indeed elevate its public and academic profile. It is anticipated that the work undertaken by Mark Thacker on Wyre, within a larger re-examination of medieval buildings in the North Atlantic, will provide fresh data to this effect<sup>69</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> <http://rewdt.org/index.php?link=heritage&name=heritage>

<sup>69</sup> (Thacker, 2016).

- *A full assessment of the finds recovered from the castle and chapel during clearing works in the 1930s.* It is likely that advances in typologies will make new efforts to date the artefacts more straightforward. This has resultant potential to elucidate the site's history, role and identity.
- *An investigation of castle, chapel, farm mound and fossilised landscape features.* Though castle and chapel have been surveyed for the RCAHMS inventory, it is suggested that a new survey of the buildings may yield new understanding in their phasing and histories. A test-pit examination of the farm mound could also provide new material to understand the wider lordly complex, but non-destructive investigations can yield new insight too. A closer examination of landscape features – the pond between castle and farm, and any other watery features – in concert with a renewed investigation of castle and chapel, will likely greatly enhance an understanding of the site.
- *A review of documents and oral history relating to the excavation of the castle.* The work of Cormack to shed light on the controversy of the excavation, and the confusion over the provenance of finds, has demonstrated that there remains much potential to revise current understanding of how the site was developed in advance of entering State care. Archives in Edinburgh (NMRS, SRO) and Orkney probably represent the best avenues for inquiry.

#### 4 Associated Properties

**St Mary's Chapel, Wyre** is the most important nearby site with regards to understanding the castle. Its relationship with **St Magnus Church, Egilsay** is also significant. The **Brough of Birsay** is a substantial, potentially near-contemporary lordly centre (for the Earls of Orkney), as is **Earl's Bu and Church, Orphir**. **Castle of Old Wick**, though believed to be later than Cubbie Roo's, has historically been likened to it. **Westside Church, Tuquoy** (Orkney) and **St Mary's Chapel, Crosskirk** (Caithness) represent two regional comparators to the St Mary's Chapel which also contribute to the context of the castle site on Wyre.

#### 5 Keywords

Castle; Cubbie Roo's; Kolbein Hruga; Late Norse; Lordship; Medieval; Orkney; Viera; Wyre

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## Other resources

**Canmore ID** 2665

**Site Number** HY42NW 5

**NGR** HY 44179 26296

Scheduled Monument Description:

<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/SM90079>

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Timeline (italic words in primary source language).

c.1145	Around this time Kolbein <i>hrúga</i> built a <i>steinkastala</i> on Wyre.
1231	The <i>kastalann</i> and <i>út-kastalann</i> which Kolbein <i>hrúga</i> built were besieged.
1529	Jo Ben describes the ruins at Cubbie Roo's Castle as <i>effigies</i> of the <i>domus</i> .
1693	James Wallace notes the first detailed information about the ruins on Wyre. His description suggests the ruins survived to first-floor level, now lost.
1927-8	Hugh Marwick notes some clearing works at the castle in advance of the construction of a chicken coop.
1929	Site first scheduled.
1932	Site placed into guardianship.
1933-6	Office of Works undertook clearing and consolidation works at the castle site.



## Appendix 2: Object list

<b>Object</b>	<b>Provenance</b>	<b>Find spot</b>	<b>Periodisation</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Annular brooch	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 242
Brass jetton [King Magnús Eriksson, c.1320-40]	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	1320-40 <sup>70</sup>	
Triangular bronze tag w/ scalloped edge	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 244
Trowell-shaped bronze fragment	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	? H/HX 245
Fragment of ball of bronze (=bell)	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 246
Fragments of bronze	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	
Flagstone fragment w/ shallow moulding	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 248
Fragment of clay mould	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 249
Micaceous claystone w/ grooves	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 251
Fragment of fired clay w/ two depressions	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 250
Fragment of small crucible	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 252
Two fragments of large crucible	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 253
Pottery fragments	<i>PSAS</i> , 17 (1940), p.148	'Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	
Bronze mail	MS D1/849/7, W. Cormack, 'The iron mail from Wyre, Orkney'. Notes for private circulation, Tankerness House. Orkney Library and Archive, Miscellaneous small gifts and deposits, Kirkwall. <sup>71</sup>  Presently at Tankerness House. <sup>72</sup>	St Mary's Chapel, Wyre?	1100s-1400s	
Cetacean bone handle	<i>PSAS</i> , 65 (1930-31), p.11	Near Cubbie Roo's Castle	none	
Rim sherd of a jug of grey stone ware with a brown salt glaze		'From Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 254

<sup>70</sup> (Wyeth, 2018,p.137, fn 556: Stuart Campbell, NMS, pers.comm.)

<sup>71</sup> (Caldwell, D., Cormack, W.F., Gavra-Sanders, T, 2005, suggests there is a lesser piece of mail in Tankerness House).

<sup>72</sup> (Orkney Library and Archive, 1989, p.4).

Sherd of grey stone ware with a darker glaze		'From Cubbie Roo's castle'	none	H.HX 256
Sherd of thin, hard, pale grey stone ware			none	H.HX 257
Rim sherd of brown-black handmade pottery			none	H.HX 258
Part of a base made of dark grass-tempered handmade pottery			none	H.HX 260
Part of a base made of dark handmade pottery			none	H.HX 261
Ten pieces of chain-mail, together with several detached brass rings and groups of rings	TDGNHAS, 79 (2005), p.100 reveals conservation work on these pieces which represents the disentanglement of the corroded mail pieces above.	[From the original find?]	[1100s-1400s]	H.HX 852
Piece of mail with buckle	TDGNHAS, 79 (2005), p.100, suggests it is located at Tankerness House.	[From the original find?]	[1100s-1400s]	N/A