



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

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ALBA

Property in Care (PIC) ID:
Designations:
Taken into State care:
Last Reviewed:

PIC190
Scheduled Monument (SM90099)
1888 (Guardianship)
2013 (2025 update to include Empire
connections)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DRUCHTAG MOTTE



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DRUCHTAG MOTTE

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SYNOPSIS

Druchtag Motte is situated on the North-East edge of the village of Mochrum, 2 miles North-North-East of Port William. It comprises a steep-sided, flat-topped grassy mound, 22m in diameter and 6.5m high, encircled by a ditch 10m wide and now 2m deep. A number of small depressions on its summit suggest antiquarian excavations, but no records exist to indicate when or by whom these might have been carried out. In the absence of excavation it is difficult to be precise about the date of the earthwork but it was probably constructed in the later 1100s.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical overview

- **Early 1100s** – The first motte-castles are constructed in Scotland, by King David I (for example, Peebles and Roxburgh) and some of his leading nobles, including Robert de Bruce, lord of Annandale (at Annan, Lochmaben and Moffat).
- **1161** – Fergus, lord of Galloway, dies and is succeeded by his two sons, Gilbert and Uhtred, who divide Galloway between them. King David's grandsons, Malcolm IV (1153-65) and William I (1165-1214), embark on a policy of bringing the semi-autonomous principality more fully into the realm of Scotland. This includes introducing Anglo-Norman settlers into Galloway, among them the powerful Walter de Berkeley, lord of Lauderdale, to Urr, who builds the mighty Motte of Urr, now the best-preserved motte in Scotland.
- **1174** – Gilbert and Uhtred rise up against these incomers and, according to an English chronicler Roger of Howden, expel 'all the bailiffs and guards whom the king of Scotland had set over them and [capture and destroy] all the defences and castles.'
- **1185** – Another upheaval, this time led by Uhtred's son Roland, sees him seize the whole of Galloway and build 'castles and very many fortresses.' It is possible that Druchtag Motte dates from this period, though who builds it is not known.
- **c. 1300** – Most motte-castles are abandoned by or during the Wars of Independence with England (1296-1356). However, some new motte-castles are hurriedly built *de novo* during this conflict.
- **1882** – The first Ancient Monuments Act is passed into law. Shortly after, Lieutenant-General Pitt Rivers, a leading figure in the movement to protect Britain's archaeological heritage, is appointed the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments. Pitt-Rivers was also heavily

involved in the British Empire, including in the Grenadier Guards (1845). A family inheritance allowed him to pursue his archaeological interests.

- **1887** - Pitt Rivers visits Druchtag Motte, whilst staying with Sir Herbert Maxwell, MP, at nearby Monreith House, and sketches it. He adds it to his 'schedule' of Ancient Monuments. Recent research into the relationships between the Properties in Care of Scottish Ministers and the British Empire¹ has highlighted that Druchtag Motte has a 'property' empire connection² as it was owned by the Maxwells of Monreith. Sir Herbert E. Maxwell Bart. (1845–1937) was a major landowner in late Victorian Scotland. His commitment to and pursuit of antiquarianism led to the preservation of this and other sites across the region. The family had major imperial connections, and through Herbert E. Maxwell's maternal line, the Shaw-Stewart family, connections to Caribbean slavery. It is not clear how much of that family's fortunes made it into the Maxwell family, but there was undoubtedly some transfer of wealth, which may have played a role in the preservation of sites on Maxwell's lands.³
- **1888** - Druchtag Motte is taken into state care, along with other nearby ancient monuments (**Drumtroddan Cup-and Ring Marks**, **Drumtroddan Standing Stones** and **St Ninian's Chapel**).

Archaeological overview

Druchtag Motte has never been archaeologically investigated, though minor depressions on its summit suggest that it might have been dug into in antiquity. However, the well-preserved earthwork, evidently abandoned and never subsequently built upon, has the potential to inform a comprehensive understanding of the chronological development of the site, and the nature and function of the buildings, structures and yards used by its lords and retainers. The ditch, by analogy with excavated motte ditches elsewhere in Scotland (for example, Robertson (Lanarks) and Barton Hill (Angus)), will undoubtedly have been considerably deeper originally, and should contain silted deposits rich in material waste, including possibly the remains of the access bridge.

The area in state care includes only the mound itself and the surrounding ditch. However, there is the possibility that the mound was augmented by a

¹ Full report can be downloaded from HES website: [Surveying and Analysing Connections between Properties in Care and the British Empire, c. 1600-1997](https://www.hes.scot.nhs.uk/research-and-projects/surveying-and-analysing-connections-between-properties-in-care-and-the-british-empire-c-1600-1997) ([historicenvironment.scot](https://www.hes.scot.nhs.uk/research-and-projects/surveying-and-analysing-connections-between-properties-in-care-and-the-british-empire-c-1600-1997))

² 'Property' connection describes land or buildings owned by either an established propertied family which participated in the Empire, or a recently enriched family which, through involvement in colonial activities, acquired the means to secure property. See Mullen *et al* 2024, 30-31 for a full definition of typology.

³ Mullen *et al* 2024, 60-62.

bailey, or outer service court, housing ancillary structures. A castleton, or village, obviously existed close by, which contained a 12th-century church.

Architectural/artistic overview

There is nothing discernible in the way of stone structures.

Social overview

Other than being a minor visitor attraction, Druchtag Motte currently has no social role.

Spiritual overview

Druchtag Motte, as the residence of a medieval lord, would probably have had at the least a private oratory, perhaps even a small chapel. Today, the site plays no obvious spiritual role.

Aesthetic overview

The castle mound presents a somewhat striking and pleasing feature within the relatively flat and featureless landscape of the south Machars.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Who built the motte-castle, and when? Was it a local Gallovidian lord or an Anglo-Norman incomer in the twelfth century, or could it possibly date from the Wars of Independence in the early 14th century? Archaeological excavation might well answer the date issue, but discovering the identity of the builder presents a more challenging problem.
- What was the full extent of the castle? The probability exists that the complex included a bailey, or outer court, and was larger than that represented by the present area in state care.
- When was the motte-castle abandoned, and in what circumstances? Most Scottish mottes seem to have been abandoned (for example, **Carnwath Motte**), or replaced by newer structures (for example, **Huntly Castle**), by or during the Wars of Independence.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- Druchtag Motte is of national importance for being a well-preserved example of an early medieval motte-castle.
- It has the potential to inform an understanding of the nature of the first castles to appear in Scotland, as well as casting material light on the transition of the ancient 'kingdom' of Galloway into an integral part of the medieval kingdom of Scotland.
- Druchtag Motte may be a relatively minor Scottish castle, but it has played its part in the development of 'ancient monumentry', courtesy of its association with Lt-Gen Pitt Rivers, a key figure in the post-Darwinian interest in the origins of human development.

ASSOCIATED PROPERTIES

- *Some other well-preserved Gallovidian motte-castles:* Ardwell; Balmaclellan; Boreland of Anwoth; Boreland of Borgue; Boreland of Parton; Dalry; Lochrinnie; Mote of Urr; Skaith
- *Some other sites associated with the ancient lords of Galloway:* Castle Fergus; Cruggleton Castle; **Dundrennan Abbey; Glenluce Abbey; Threave Castle**
- *Other motte-castles in Historic Environment Scotland's care:* **Duffus Castle; Greenknowe Tower; Huntly Castle; Lincluden Collegiate Church; Peel Ring of Lumphanan**

KEY WORDS

medieval; Lords of Galloway; motte; earthwork and timber castle; ditch, bailey; Pitt Rivers

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