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**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90085);

**Taken into State care:** 1966 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2004

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# CROOKSTON CASTLE



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# CROOKSTON CASTLE

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument comprises an upstanding stone towerhouse built by the Stewarts of Darnley about 1400. It is enclosed by the earthworks of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century original castle, built for Sir Robert Croc, a vassal of the High Steward.

The castle occupies the western part of a hilltop, dominating the confluence of the Levern Water and the White Cart, at between 20-30m OD.

Situated off Brockburn Road, Pollock, about 2km W of Junction 2 of the M74.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

Mid-12<sup>th</sup> century - the castle may have originated as one of a string of ringworks created by Walter fitzAlan along the White Cart. Robert Croc probably arrived here from England in the 1160s, as a vassal of Walter the High Steward. Croc was granted an estate (Croc's toun), with the Crookston ringwork serving as one of his chief places of local administration.

1180 - Robert Croc granted permission from Paisley Abbey to build a private chapel at his castle "as a special friend of the house".

Later 13<sup>th</sup> century - another Robert Croc sold the tenancy of Crucsfeu to the Glassfords of Lanarkshire. Following the Wars of Independence they sold the lands on to a branch of the Stewarts.

c1400 – towerhouse likely to have been built by Sir Alexander Stewart, lord of Crookston 1374-1406. His son John inherited the Darnley estate, now part of. He spent little time in Scotland, having become constable of the Scots fighting in France, and died at Orleans in 1429. The title *Sieur d' Aubigny* stayed with the Stewarts of Darnley.

1489 – the Stewarts had become the earls of Lennox through marriage, and in this year became part of an uprising against the young James IV. The royal gun train was brought from Edinburgh to Crookston, Duchal and Dumbarton, including the mighty Mons Meg. However Meg was not necessarily at Crookston, as the train split with part going to Dumbarton. The loss of the W towers might be attributed to this siege.

1544 – the castle was captured by Regent Arran, the fourth earl of Lennox having sided with Henry VIII.

Crookston was patched up and used as a residence until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

1758 – the Maxwells of Pollock acquired the estate.

1817 – Sir Walter Scott published *The Abbot*, erroneously placing Mary, Queen of Scots' courtship with Lord Darnley at Crookston, increasing its fame as a romantic icon.

c1900 – the Stirling Maxwell family of Pollock House conserved the castle, and opened it to day-trippers from the grime of industrial Glasgow seeking the pure air of the countryside. An army pensioner was installed in the lodge house as a custodian, welcoming 6,500 paying visitors in 1910.

1920 - the monument was first scheduled.

1931 – Sir John Stirling Maxwell, owner of Pollok House and a leading figure in the conservation movement, gifted the castle to the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) as its first property.

1939-45 – the NE tower was used by the Home Guard as an aircraft observation post during the Clydeside blitz. Concrete floors were inserted into NE tower. An army camp existed in the parkland around the castle.

1963 – NTS transferred the castle into State care.

1973-75 – archaeological excavations by Eric Talbot of Glasgow University.

#### Archaeological Overview

A geophysical survey in 1998 revealed a circular feature, 20m in diameter, to the E of the present limits of the castle. It may be that the 12<sup>th</sup> century builders incorporated part of an existing prehistoric defensive circuit into their ringwork.

The primary work comprises the massive encircling bank and ditch of Robert Croc's earth-and-timber castle, built around 1180, with an entrance over the ditch on the W side. The secondary work comprises the impressive stone castle probably built by Sir John Stewart of Darnley at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Fairly large-scale excavations took place at the castle from 1973-75. Ancillary ranges outwith the main tower to E and W were investigated, along with the two demolished W corner towers. Significant discoveries were made, highlighting the good archaeological potential of the site.

A building about 15m x 8m was investigated against the E side of the enclosure. An area of the counterscarp bank top was excavated and found to have been cobbled, as was an area lower down towards the ditch, to create a stepped arrangement. An area was also investigated to the N side of the entrance. A stone building was uncovered here, set over the slighted bank of the 12<sup>th</sup> cent ringwork. A silver groat of Robert III, minted 1403-06, was found in the foundations of the SW tower, providing a *terminus post quem* for its construction.

#### Artistic/Architectural Overview

The arrangement of this castle is well-nigh unique in Scotland (cf Borthwick and Hermitage). It comprises a high central oblong block (measuring c.19m E-W by 12m N-S) with four square corner towers. The two W towers and much of the W

part of the main block have now gone, and the NE tower alone survives intact. This tower exhibits careful unitary planning. The public rooms were located within the central block, while the projecting corner towers contained the other accommodation expected in a conventional towerhouse: stores, kitchen, prison, bed-chambers, and servants quarters.

#### Social Overview

The community now play a major part in the management of the castle, under the auspices of the Crookston Castle Working Group. A storyteller-in-residence has been created, and a number of community events now take place. Numerous local school groups are led on visits with a storytelling theme.

#### Spiritual Overview

None known.

#### Aesthetic Overview

18<sup>th</sup> century – the castle became ‘romantic’ in its decline, and became noted as a picturesque ruin with superb woodland prospects, *pleasantly situate in a pretty rising ground*.

Its fame increased when Thomas Pennant described its ruins as *delicious*.

The top of the NE tower provides spectacular views in all directions.

#### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

Was there an Iron Age fort on the hilltop?

Was the ringwork built by Walter fitzAlan or by Robert Croc?

What was the form of the ringwork, and was this built to an Anglo-Norman design?

Were there any gaps in its occupation between the late 13<sup>th</sup> cent and the construction of the stone towerhouse in c1400?

What was the arrangement of buildings and defences in the towerhouse barmkin?

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

- Crookston was a strategic stronghold and manorial residence throughout its long history, originally held by vassals as part of the Stewart fiefdom.
- Evidence of the early castle is chiefly represented by the massive outer earthworks, and by the buried archaeology.
- Crookston is an unconventional towerhouse, one of a small, important group that exhibits an unusually well-integrated plan.
- The castle serves as a poignant and highly visible reminder of the lost pre-20<sup>th</sup> century rural landscape of this area, now intensely urban. The character of the area has changed fundamentally within living memory.

- Now the only medieval castle to survive in the City of Glasgow.
- Crookston has played an important role in the Romantic and conservation movements.

Associated Properties

Borthwick, **Hermitage, Edinburgh Castle (Mons Meg)**, Duchal Castle, **Dumbarton Castle**.

Keywords Walter fitzAlan; the Stewarts; Robert Croc, the Stewarts of Darnley; Sir John Stirling Maxwell; ringwork; earthwork castle; towerhouse; Mons Meg; Romantic movement.