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**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90062)

**Taken into State care:** 1913 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2013

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# CARSLUITH CASTLE



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# CARSLUITH CASTLE

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## SYNOPSIS

Carsluith Castle is situated on the south side of the A75, 3 miles south-south-east of Creetown. It comprises a four storey, L-plan tower house with vestigial remains of a barmkin (courtyard) wall. The worn stone armorial panel above the entrance doorway displays the arms of Broun (Brown) and the date 1568. However, there is evidence to suggest that the existing tower house may possibly be a remodelling of an older rectangular building.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview:

- **1422** – Alexander de Cairns, provost of **Lincluden**, grants the estate of Carsluith to his nephew, John Cairns of **Orchardton**.
- **1460** – Carsluith passes to James Lindsay, chamberlain of Galloway.
- **1506** – Margaret Cairns marries Lindsay of Fairgirth, and Carsluith is given in dowry.
- **c. 1536** – Margaret's daughter, Elizabeth Lindsay, marries Richard Broun, of New Abbey, and the Brouns assume ownership of Carsluith. Their son, Gilbert, is most probably born here; he subsequently becomes commendator of **Sweetheart Abbey**.
- **1568** – Carsluith Castle undergoes some modifications, according to the stone plaque above the entrance doorway. The builder is possibly John Broun of Carsluith.
- **1579** – John Broun of Carsluith is called to account for the murder of McCulloch of Barholm.
- **1748** – James Broun of Carsluith, then resident in London, sells Carsluith to Alexander Johnston prior to sailing for India. The estate thereafter passes through several hands.
- **c.1800** – Two wings are added to either side of the tower house, to serve as farmhouse offices.
- **1913** – Carsluith Tower is taken into state care.

### Archaeological Overview:

Carsluith Castle comprises a four-storey L-plan tower house (see [Architectural/Artistic overview](#) below). Given that the tower house never had a kitchen inside (either in its original phase or following its remodelling in the 1560s), it is almost certain that such a facility existed close to the tower, probably close to its entrance doorway on the north side. This and other ancillary structures (eg, bakehouse and stables) in the barmkin, or courtyard, may survive as archaeological features below the existing ground surface, together with the enclosing barmkin (perimeter) wall.

The tower house and barmkin would have been complemented by other extra mural elements (eg, gardens, an orchard, ponds, a 'pond' is said to have existed

on the landward side until it was filled in), and these too may yet survive as archaeological features at some distance from the tower itself, particularly on its southern side.

The existence of two late Georgian wings to either side of the tower house on its north side suggests that there may also be archaeological features remaining below ground relating to this latest phase of occupation of the tower house.

#### Architectural/Artistic Overview:

All that remains of the castle at Carsluith is the tower house itself, which would have served as the residence of the laird of Carsluith estate. The tower house survives remarkably intact to its wall-head, though minus its roof. It consists of a four-storey structure built on the L-plan, with the stair tower in the jamb, or wing, at the north-west corner. The layout conforms to the usual pattern for post-Reformation tower houses; entrance doorway and cellars at ground level, hall on the first floor and private chambers on the two upper floors. One significant omission is the lack of a kitchen within the building.

The entrance doorway has a stone armorial panel above it, now badly weathered but still displaying the arms of Broun (a chevron between three fleurs-de-lis) and the letter 'B' together with a date, now illegible but recorded by MacGibbon & Ross as reading 1568.

However, Carsluith's architecture has evidence demonstrating that, in its present form, the building may possibly be a remodelling of an older structure. Both MacGibbon & Ross and RCAHMS suggest that the stair tower is an addition, based chiefly on the fact that (a) its east wall runs into one of the second-floor windows, and (b) the curved north end of the wall closet in the north-west angle of the tower's first floor indicates the position of the original staircase. This evidence is far from convincing. There is no sign of a construction break on the tower's north wall, and the so-called second-floor window was actually a door giving access to a projecting timber balcony (see below).

The tower house in its existing ruined state is somewhat plain, but features remain to show that it was once of some quality. At the top of the main block's north-east, south-east and south-west corners are round turrets projecting from a course of continuous corbelling surmounted by widely spaced rounded corbels, whilst the stone outlet spout at the south-west corner, once serving the wash-hand basin in the first-floor hall, terminates in a charmingly carved human head. (The chimney cope atop the stair tower's north elevation was also formerly graced by a grotesque figure.) However, the most eye-catching feature would have been the timber gallery, or balcony, along the tower's north wall at second-floor level, of which the supporting corbels and roof raggie alone remain. Evidence for similar features can be seen at, for example, **Craigmillar Castle** and **Crichton Castle**, also of later 16<sup>th</sup>-century date.

Nothing else of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century castle survives above ground. However, the adjacent two-storey wings situated to either side of the tower house on its north

side (not in state care) were probably added to the tower house in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, to complement the residential accommodation in the tower house itself. (A similar provision once existed at **Castle of Park**.) These Georgian wings are a valuable addition to the monument, helping to show how Jacobean tower houses were able to provide useful accommodation for their gentrified owners well into the Georgian period.

Incorporated into a courtyard wall to the east of the tower house is a fragment of late-medieval grave slab, provenance unknown.

#### Social Overview:

Other than being a prominent visitor attraction beside the main A75 trunk road, Carsluith Castle currently plays little social role. However, the adjacent 18<sup>th</sup>-century wings continue to give the tower house a new life. The western wing has long served as a family home, whilst the eastern wing has recently been converted into another visitor attraction (the Marrbury Smokehouse).

#### Spiritual Overview:

Carsluith Castle was perhaps the childhood home of Gilbert Broun, commendator of **Sweetheart Abbey**, who earned enduring fame as a devout Catholic stolidly refusing to conform to the Protestant faith in the aftermath of the Reformation and who finally fled to Paris. However, there is no evidence to indicate that this holds any significance for visitors to the castle today.

The castle seems to serve no other spiritual role.

#### Aesthetic Overview:

The tower house occupies a prominent location on a raised beach overlooking Wigtown Bay to its south. Across the A75, to the north, the prospect is very different, one of dense woodland covering the southern slopes of the Kirkmabreck Hills.

The views south and west from the upper storeys of the tower house are excellent, looking as they do across Wigtown Bay (a Local Nature Reserve) to the Machars of Galloway, and if one is lucky enough, the Isle of Man in the distance. When the sun is setting on the shimmering waters of the bay, it feels magical. The presence of swallows darting in and around the tower house in the summer add to the charm.

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

- Was the tower house originally a simple rectangular building, and if so what was its precise form and when was it built? A full standing building survey and further documentary research might enable a fuller picture to emerge. As to dating it, the lack of worked timber suggests that dendrochronological dating is not an option.
- What was the nature and extent of the castle? Only archaeological survey and excavation can now provide answers as to what originally accompanied the tower house itself.

- Who built the wings to the north of the tower house, and what were they originally used for? Here too, documentary research coupled with archaeological excavation would be beneficial.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key Points

- Carsluith is a fine example of a Jacobean tower house, containing all the principal elements (except the kitchen) one would expect to find in a later 16<sup>th</sup>-century residence of gentry.
- Carsluith's tower house has evidence to suggest that it may not have been newly built in the 1560s, but a remodelling of an older structure. If so, Carsluith is one of a growing number of examples being discovered across Scotland where this is demonstrably the case.

### Associated Properties:

(some other 16<sup>th</sup>-century tower houses in western Galloway) – Barholm Castle; **Castle of Park**; Castle of St John, Stranraer; **Drumcoltran Tower**; Dunskey Castle; Old Place of Mochrum; Rusko Tower; Sorbie Tower  
 (some other 16<sup>th</sup>-century tower houses in HES's care) – **Carnasserie Castle**; **Claypotts**; **Corgarff Castle**; **Craignethan Castle**; **Elcho Castle**; **Glenbuchat Castle**; **Greenknowe Tower**; **MacLellan's Castle**

### Keywords:

tower house; barmkin; armorial plaque; post-Reformation; Jacobean; Cairns;  
 Broun (Brown)

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