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**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC109

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90289) Conservation Area (CA218)

**Taken into State care:** 1907 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2012

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# MAR'S WARK, STIRLING



We continually revise our Statements of Significance, so they may vary in length, format and level of detail. While every effort is made to keep them up to date, they should not be considered a definitive or final assessment of our properties.



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# MAR'S WARK

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## SYNOPSIS

The property comprises the ruins of a once-splendid Renaissance town house, begun in 1570 by John Erskine, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Mar (c.1510-72), hereditary keeper of **Stirling Castle** and regent of Scotland. Whether the mansion was ever entirely finished is open to doubt. It fell into neglect following the flight into exile of the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl in 1716, following the disastrous '15 Jacobite Rising which he led.

Mar's Wark is distinguished by its impressive two-storey façade facing onto Broad Street. Evidently inspired by James V's palace in the nearby castle, it has a great arched pend flanked by octagonal turrets, aptly described by Charles II's physician, Sir Robert Sibbald, as 'like to a port entering to the city'. The whole elevation is ornamented with a wealth of carvings, armorial panels and gargoyles. The overall plan of the building is unclear, but it may have been designed to extend around three or four sides of a central courtyard.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview:

- 1567 - James Erskine, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Mar, is removed from his position as keeper of **Edinburgh Castle** but is compensated with the hereditary keepership of **Stirling Castle** (a post which many Erskines had held on a non-hereditary basis since the 14<sup>th</sup> century). Mar probably begins planning his new Stirling town house, then known as 'Mar's Lodging', soon after his appointment.
- 1571 - 'Mar's Lodging' is evidently nearing completion, according to an account by George Buchanan, James VI's tutor, of the assassination of the then regent, Matthew Stewart, Earl of Lennox. In attempting to clear the streets of looting soldiers, Mar positions musketeers in 'his own new house, which was then building and not quite finished'. The Earl of Mar replaces Lennox as regent.
- 1572 - Regent Mar dies in **Stirling Castle**. His widow, the dowager countess, takes up residence in 'Mar's Lodging'.
- 1593 - James VI and Queen Anna briefly occupy 'Mar's Lodging' whilst preparations are underway for their reception in the castle.
- 1603 - John, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl, a close friend of James VI, moves to London with his sovereign at the Union of the Crowns. Thereafter, 'Mar's Lodging' is only intermittently occupied by the family.
- 1634 - the mansion is being occupied by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl and Countess.
- 1715 - the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl fits the house out for use as barracks during the 1715/16 Jacobite rising, which he leads. Following the stalemate at the battle of Sheriffmuir (13 November 1715), the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl goes into permanent exile, following which his estates, including 'Mar's Lodging', are declared forfeit. Subsequently, Lord Grange, the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl's brother, buys back the estates, including 'Mar's Lodging', for his nephew.
- 1733 - Stirling Town Council, concerned about growing vagrancy, secures a 57-year lease of the mansion as a workhouse. They change the name from

'Mar's Lodging' to 'Mar's Wark'. The lease refers to a close (courtyard), well, yard and gardener's house.

- 1745 - during the '45 Jacobite Rising, Mar's Wark, occupied by Jacobite troops, is damaged by cannon fire from the government garrison in the castle. Thereafter, the town council relocates the workhouse elsewhere and abandons the building.
- late 18<sup>th</sup> century - some stonework is removed to build a new churchyard wall at St Ninian's, south of the town.
- 1857 - Stirling Town Council purchases the ruins of Mar's Wark.
- 1907 - Stirling Town Council entrusts Mar's Wark into state care.

#### Archaeological Overview:

- The entire area occupied by Mar's Wark and beyond, particularly to the west in the adjacent graveyard, has the potential to provide good archaeological evidence for the use of the site. Although Mar's Wark is the first house we know of at this location, its position overlooking the town's main market-place strongly hints that there must have been something on the site previously.
- The full extent of Mar's Wark is not obvious. The nature of the north and south ranges, as well as the putative existence of a west range, can now only be discovered by archaeological excavation. In 1858, whilst extending the Church of the Holy Rude's graveyard, a stone-lined well, oven, passage-way and cellar were uncovered, along with pottery and bones.
- There is a significant resource in the archaeology of the shop interiors that occupied the ground floor of the frontal (east) range. Although the rooms continued in use after the mansion's abandonment as an aristocratic town house, it is unlikely that any of the later uses were thorough enough to remove earlier evidence of use entirely.
- The subsequent utilitarian uses of Mar's Wark - as barrack and workhouse - seem not to have resulted in any alteration to the upstanding buildings, but they may have left significant archaeological deposits.

#### Architectural/Artistic Overview:

- Mar's Wark comprises the ruins of a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century town house, prominently positioned at the top end of Broad Street. The whole street frontage is elaborately decorated, and is focused on a central arched entrance pend set between twin projecting polygonal towers, 'like a port entering to a city'. The range must have been longer than the existing 35m, given the evidence of tussing at the north end and the fragmentary evidence belonging to cellars in the south range. The vaulted pend gave access to a courtyard behind, which had enclosing ranges along the south and north sides at least, and possibly along the west side also, though the evidence is ambiguous.
- The ground floor of the east (front) range was divided into a series of vaulted spaces. Those with street frontages seem to have been used mostly as booths (shops), entered through a separate door with a window alongside. The arrangement is not exactly mirrored on either side of the gatehouse; the south projecting tower provides a street front door to a turnpike stair leading to the

range's upper floors (of which there appear to have been two), and the bottom treads of a further stair can be seen at the inner angle where the south and east ranges meet. The surviving upper floor of the east range consists of a high and spacious hall (now roofless), with a small retiring room to the north, evidently originally part of the earl of Mar's residence; it was altered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Sibbald, in 1707, mentions 'large rooms and commanding views'.

- The east range is a parallelogram, aligned north/south and with walls varying in thickness. The stonework is faced with ashlar. Some of the building stone is clearly re-used (including a consecration cross) and may have come from one of the local religious houses abandoned at the Reformation (1560); tradition holds that it came from **Cambuskenneth Abbey**, which had passed to the Earl of Mar by 1562.
- The façade along the street shows a rectangular and well-balanced arrangement. It is embellished with nook-shafts at all the angles and corners, as well as with carved ornamentation comprising heraldic and inscribed panels, initial letters, statuettes, masks, and dummy gargoyles fashioned to resemble cannon. Doors and windows have straight lintels and all the openings are moulded. The basement window-sills were once carved but have lost virtually all their ornamentation. Those on the first floor appear to have formed part of a continuous string-course, but the mouldings of those to north and south of the gate-towers have been cut away. All the windows were half glazed, shuttered and protected by iron grilles. The richly carved frontage displays the royal arms above the archway, and the arms of Regent Mar and his countess on the towers.
- The entrance pend is now closed off by an elegant 'Arts and Crafts' wrought-iron gate.

#### Social Overview:

- Mar's Wark is prominently situated at the head of the town centre, on the main approach to **Stirling Castle**. As such, it is seen by all who approach the castle, whether on foot or in a vehicle. Its enigmatic appearance, aided by its state of ruination, probably results in many viewers assuming it was not an aristocratic town house but a structure associated with the adjacent Church of the Holy Rude.
- Mar's Wark seems not to have any specific social use, other than being a visible landmark on the approach to Stirling Castle, and thus a low-level tourist landmark.

#### Spiritual Overview:

- Tradition has it that Mar's Wark was built partly of stone recycled from **Cambuskenneth Abbey**. The 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Mar was given the estates of the former Augustinian monastery immediately after the Protestant Reformation (1560).
- Today, Mar's Wark serves as a frontispiece to the Old Kirkyard of the Church of the Holy Rude. In fact, access to Mar's Wark is now from that graveyard. It thus provides a fitting ruinous, if somewhat 'spooky', accompaniment to the adjacent cemetery with its many fascinating memorials to the departed.

- One of the most bizarre pieces of sculpture on the main façade is a statue of a woman in a winding sheet. The figure is traditionally known as 'Jeannie Dark', probably a local corruption of Jean D'Arc (Joan of Arc).
- Mar's Wark seems not to have any current spiritual use.

### Aesthetic Overview

- From the exterior, Mar's Wark is enigmatic. Despite its ruined state, it remains a splendid building, one of the finest examples of Renaissance building in Scotland, modelled on James V's palace in the nearby castle. The exterior is liberally adorned with decorative gargoyles, including figures in contemporary dress playing musical instruments, and the royal arms of James VI flanked by those of the earl and countess of Mar. Behind this impressive façade, however, all is dark and mysterious.
- The setting of Mar's Wark affects it in two ways, depending on whether one views it from the exterior or the interior.
- From the outside, Mar's Wark has an urban grandeur. Imposingly set at the upper end of Broad Street, it is not dwarfed by the adjacent buildings because the approach up Broad Street masks the lofty presbytery of the Church of the Holy Rude to its left, and the more restrained domestic structures to its right. Rather, the visual effect telescopes the Renaissance grandeur of the building, and exaggerates its majestic frontage.
- Close to, the context of the church and graveyard are interesting, creating an ambiguity and moodiness appropriate to a graveyard relic. It is fitting that the ruin of a building is the frontispiece to the graveyard, full of its own monoliths to human ego and earthly status.

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

- What structure(s) occupied the site prior to the building of Mar's Wark?
- Who was the architect of Mar's Wark, how did he envisage it being used by his patron, and was it ever completed? Does an inventory of the house's contents survive, such as those for **Argyll's Lodging**, across the street, that provide such valuable insights into the house as a home?
- Who occupied the ground-floor booths after 1572, and how was the building later fitted out for use as barracks and workhouse? Further documentary and archaeological research may shed more light on this fascinating aspect of the building's history.

## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key Points

- Mar's Wark is one of the best examples of an aristocratic town house surviving from late-medieval Scotland, renowned for the sumptuous quality of its street façade. As Gifford & Walker put it, Mar's Wark 'stands still a testament to courtly aspiration and the cosmopolitan culture of its age.'
- Mar's Wark is intimately associated with one of Scotland's most powerful aristocratic families, the Erskines. Linked to **Stirling Castle** for most of the later Middle Ages, the family rose to pre-eminence in the time of John, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Mar, the man who put the 'Mar' into Mar's Wark, and who served his country at the topmost level, as regent. His most famous descendant was John, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl, who led the ill-fated 1715 Jacobite Rising and subsequently fled to France.
- In addition to its primary use as an aristocratic town house, Mar's Wark's use also as booths (shops) for the townspeople gives it added interest, particularly given the rarity of such structures in Scotland. So too does its later use as barracks and workhouse.

### Associated Properties:

(*other related sites locally*) – **Stirling Castle** ; **Argyll's Lodging, Stirling**; Church of the Holy Rude, Stirling; **Cambuskenneth Abbey**

(*other properties closely associated with the Erskine earls of Mar*) – Alloa Tower; **Kildrummy Castle**.

(*some other late-medieval aristocratic town houses in Scotland*) – **Argyll's Lodging, Stirling**; **Croft-an-Righ House, Edinburgh**; Glencairn Greit House, Dumbarton; Maybole Castle; Moray House & Tweeddale House, both Edinburgh.

### Keywords:

town house; gate; gargoyle; pend; Erskine; earl of Mar; Stirling Castle; Renaissance.

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