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**HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

HAILES CASTLE



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.

HAILES CASTLE

SYNOPSIS

Hailes Castle is situated beside the River Tyne, 3km up-river (ie, SW) of East Linton. The oldest parts date from the first half of the 13th century. In the 14th century, following the turmoil of the Wars of Independence, the lordship came into the possession of the Hepburns, who transformed the castle into a formidable tower-house castle. Hailes figured frequently in the simmering Anglo-Scottish conflicts of the 15th and 16th centuries. It was also a residence of James Hepburn, 4th earl of Bothwell, Queen Mary's third husband, and for a short time it served as a prison for George Wishart, the Protestant preacher who inspired John Knox. Its days as a stronghold effectively ended with Cromwell's invasion in 1650.

The substantial upstanding ruins retain physical evidence for both noble families. The well-built red sandstone coursed ashlar work along the river's edge, forming the lower half of a rectangular tower and the basement of a well-tower a short distance to its east, date from the early 13th century. The formidable perimeter wall skirting the southern (landward) side, with its lofty tower house at the western edge of the site, both built mostly of grey, irregularly coursed sandstone, belong to later 14th / 15th centuries. The substantial structure between the 13th-century keep and the 15th-century tower house has been interpreted as a chapel, but is more likely to have begun as the great hall.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

- early 13th century - the first stone castle is built. By whom is not known but tradition holds that the estate was granted to the de Gourlays in the reign of William I 'the Lion' (1165-1214). The de Gourlays may be linked to the Balliols, who hailed from Picardy and had extensive lands in north-east England.
- 1242 - Bishop David de Bernham of St Andrews consecrates the parish church of Linton (now Prestonkirk), in which the estate of Hailes lies. The Lord of Hailes is likely to have been closely involved in providing the new chancel there, possibly employing the same stonemasons as at his castle.
- 1298 – Hailes may be one of the three castles in East Lothian Bishop Bek of Durham captures during Edward I of England's invasion. **Dirleton Castle** is the only one named, and Yester Castle may well be the third, as these three seem to be the only masonry castles existing in the county at this time.
- c.1350 - the estate of Hailes passes to the Hepburns, a family also with Northumbrian roots. Patrick, the first lord, marries Eleanor Douglas, sister of William, first earl of Douglas and builder of nearby **Tantallon Castle**.
- 1363 – Sir Patrick Hepburn of Hailes obtains a safe-conduct to visit the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket at Canterbury.
- 1401 (Feb) - Sir Patrick (II) Hepburn of Hailes holds the castle against an English siege led by Henry 'Hotspur' Percy, although the nearby towns of

Hailes, Traprain and Markle are devastated. The English are soon forced to return south after the battle of Prestonkirk.

- 1402 (22 June) - Sir Patrick is killed at the battle of Nisbet Muir, near Duns, along with 'the flower of the chivalry of a great part of Lothian' whilst returning from a raid into England.
- 1446 – Patrick's son and heir, Sir Adam Hepburn, surrenders Hailes Castle after a long siege by Archibald Dunbar; the latter's family had been deprived of the earldom of March in 1435 by the earls of Douglas after a tenure of 300 years. With English support, Dunbar slays 'all that he found therein', an exaggeration surely, but it makes the point well enough.
- 1452 – during the showdown between James II and the Black Douglas earls, Sir Patrick Hepburn deserts his Douglas master for the royalist cause and is rewarded with the title of Lord Hailes.
- 1481 – the castle is armed with heavy ordnance as part of a programme of defensive measures to secure southern Scotland from a possible English invasion.
- 1488 – Patrick Hepburn, 2nd Lord Hailes, is created earl of Bothwell by James IV. He acquires the estate of **Crichton** with its castle at the same time, and is also appointed Lord High Admiral of Scotland and keeper of **Edinburgh Castle**.
- 1507 – James IV visits Hailes Castle and orders drink-silver to be distributed to the stonemasons.
- 1546 (Jan) - George Wishart, the Lutheran preacher, is imprisoned in the castle immediately following his arrest in Haddington. Shortly thereafter he is taken to **St. Andrews Castle** and burned at the stake for heresy.
- 1548 – during the War of the Rough Wooing, Lord Grey of Wilton takes the castle for the English. He describes it as being 'fu of suche excellent bewtie within' as well being 'a house of verie grete strengthe'. The Scots soon recapture it and reportedly remove its great iron gates to **Edinburgh Castle**. Regent Arran instructs Lord Borthwick to 'keep the samyn surlie fra our auld ynemies of Ingland and all utharis' and not to deliver 'the said place and fortalice to Patrick Erle Bothwell [the 3rd earl was then collaborating with the English] nor nain uthairie of that name.' During the siege of English-held Haddington that follows, French troops, assisting the Scots, encamp near the castle.
- 1556 – James Hepburn succeeds as 4th earl of Bothwell. In 1562 he is briefly imprisoned in **Edinburgh Castle** but escapes and goes into voluntary exile abroad. He returns in September 1565.
- 1566 (24 Feb) – Bothwell weds Jean Gordon, daughter of the 4th Earl of Huntly, but they are divorced a year later. In October Queen Mary makes her famous journey on horse-back to visit the injured Bothwell at **Hermitage Castle** [Bothwell is also Lord of Liddesdale].
- 1567 – Bothwell is heavily implicated in the murder (10 Feb) of Henry Lord Darnley, Queen Mary's second husband. On 3 May Bothwell abducts Mary en route from Stirling to Edinburgh and takes her to another of his castles, Dunbar. The couple stay at Hailes Castle (5 May) en route from Dunbar to **Edinburgh Castle**, and marry at Holyrood Palace (15 May). Following Mary's surrender at Carberry Hill (15 June), Bothwell flees north to his uncle's palace at **Spynie**. Stripped of all his titles and estates, he escapes to Norway. He dies

in prison at Dragsholm Castle, Denmark in 1578 and is buried in nearby Faarevejle Church. Hailes Castle passes to Sir Francis Stewart, son of Bothwell's sister, Jean, and following his downfall in 1595, to Robert, 6th Lord Seton, the future 1st Earl of Winton.

- 1650 - the invasion of SE Scotland by Cromwell effectively ends Hailes Castle's days as a noble residence. The 4th Earl of Winton claims £4,700 in English money for quartering English troops and for the damage they caused.
- c.1700 - the 5th Earl of Winton sell Hailes to Sir David Dalrymple, son of 1st Viscount Stair. Created 1st Baronet of Hailes in 1701, Dalrymple purchases the house of Whitehill, near Musselburgh, in 1707, and renames it 'Newhailes'. The ancient castle beside the Tyne is occupied by local tenants for dwellings and storage.
- 1926 - Hailes Castle is taken into state care.

Archaeological Overview:

- No properly documented work has taken place here, only clearance work by the Ministry of Works after 1926. Even so, and given too that bedrock crops out across the site, there must be some archaeological potential within the curtain wall, particularly relating to the Gourlays' castle (later 12th/13th century).
- Beyond the curtain wall there is probably substantial archaeological potential. The ditch encircling the curtain wall, filled in at some date late in the castle's history, remains unexcavated, and the fields between the castle and the public road may well contain evidence for the castletown.
- In 1982, during consolidation work on the entrance gateway, part of a finger was found by stonemasons in the mortared joint between two of the jamb stones.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:

- The castle comprises significant masonry remains dating from the tenure of the two medieval families who held it – the Gourlays (13th/early 14th century) and the Hepburns (later 14th/15th century).

The Gourlay castle (13th century)

- The remains of the Gourlays' castle are important as being a very rare example of masonry castellated architecture surviving from early 13th-century Scotland. In East Lothian, only **Dirleton** and Yester have masonry of that date.
- The Gourlays' castle is characterised by well-built red sandstone, cubical (ashlar) blocks brought to regular course, and narrow pointed lancets. These are closely paralleled in the medieval chancel surviving at Prestonkirk (East Linton), the parish church for Hailes, dated to the early 13th century. It is possible that the same stonemasons worked on both buildings.
- The Gourlay-period remains have previously been interpreted as comprising a hall-castle, with a two-storey hall-block flanked to east and west by attached towers. However, there seems to be no clear evidence for this. All that can be said is that the western tower is obviously a rectangular keep of early date, at least in its lower storeys (the upper part is of rubble construction and clearly an addition or substantial rebuilding). Keeps of this date are exceedingly rare, and

include two others in state care (the Mortimers' keep at **Aberdour Castle** (Fife), and that at **Cubbie Roo's Castle** (Orkney)).

- The keep has a pit-prison in the basement, built of fine ashlar and roofed with a fine rib-vault. The east tower, of which only the ground-floor portion remains, has a well-chamber in its basement, built of fine red sandstone square blocks and with a fine cross-ribbed vault over the entrance stair. (The west tower was subsequently converted into a dovecot, and numerous stone nesting boxes remain.)
- Evidence for an enclosing (defensive) wall of early date may exist along the north-eastern edge of the site. The encircling ditch around the landward (south) side may also prove, on excavation, to date to the Gourlays' tenure.

The Hepburn castle (later 14th/15th century)

- The castle as remodelled for the Hepburns took the form of a more conventional (for Scotland) tower-house castle, where a single, tall, multi-storey tower dominates a surrounding courtyard filled with ancillary structures, and enclosed within a strong defensive wall.
- The Hepburn-period masonry is distinguishable from the Gourlays' castle by its use (mostly) of grey, coarsely-built rubble walls with dressed margins hewn from light-coloured sandstone.
- The formidable perimeter wall drawn around the landward side of the castle is over 2m thick and entered through a round-arched doorway. The encircling ditch (which may have originated in the Gourlays' time) was subsequently filled in. Two posterns, or back gates, also survive – one leading out through the north wall to the river, and the other through the wall along the east side of the complex, leading in the direction of Hailes Mill (though this may well be much later).
- The main element of the remodelled castle was a lofty five-storey tower house placed at the far west end of the newly-defined enclosure. This replaced the 13th-century keep as the lordly lodging. It was conventionally arranged, with a storage basement, including a second pit-prison, at ground level, a hall on the first floor, and private chambers above. The wall-head presumably had defensive elements (eg, wall-walk and parapets). It too shows signs of having been later altered (eg, a narrowing of the hall fireplace and partial use as a dovecot).
- Beside the new tower house, between it and the older keep, is a most enigmatic structure. Its masonry provides clear evidence for a complicated building history. In its final form it was three storey and an attic high, though the top floor and attic were added later. Whilst the basement was clearly a service office throughout (the ovens and stone trough suggest a use for brewing/malting), the use to which the first floor was put is puzzling. It has been variously interpreted as a great hall and as a chapel (the latter on account of what appear to have been a piscina and sacrament house in the north and south walls at its east end). The floor was originally entered through a doorway centrally placed in the south (courtyard) wall, reached by a timber gallery supported on stone corbels. The present entrance, towards the east end of that same wall, was originally a fine window, which can be interpreted as having lit either a dais (a fine dais window survives in the great hall at **Bothwell Castle**, dating from the early 15th century) or an altar.

- Along the far east side of the complex has been a range of buildings of some quality, judging by the dressed stonework found there during the Ministry of Works' clearance post-1923; they date from the 16th century.

Social Overview:

- Hailes Castle is a well-known and well-used local 'beauty spot', the more so since the resident custodian post was removed in the 1980s and the property became free of charge! The castle is on a well-signed walking route along the River Tyne between Haddington and East Linton. An interesting (also signed) detour to the nearby impressive prehistoric hill-fort at Traprain Law passes the castle.
- The two pit-prisons used to be one of the castle's main highlights for visitors, but these have been closed to public access since the property became free to access.
- The castle figured prominently in local author Ross Laidlaw's 1980s historical novel *The Linton Porcupine*, set in the time of the 'Rough Wooing' of the 1540s.
- The castle is somewhat tucked out of the way. Although just visible from the A199 (formerly the A1), the castle is reached by car along a narrow, twisting side road. It is used as a tourist attraction, and popular picnic spot, but being remote from modern population centres, it features little in organised activities.

Spiritual Overview:

- Historically, the castle would have had a chapel where the family and household worshipped daily, attending the parish church at Linton (now Prestonkirk) only for 'high days and holy days'.
- Today, the site has the capacity to encourage spiritual activity, but there are no known uses of the site for such ends. There are reports of ghostly apparitions - the last custodian in the 1980s told of fireballs plunging into the 13th-century pit-prison - but otherwise there are no known 'spiritual' associations and meanings.

Aesthetic Overview

- Hailes Castle appears disappointingly small upon approach. However, on entering, it assumes a more impressive presence, with interesting spatial dynamics. The fragmented architecture is highly attractive. The red sandstone masonry of the Gourlays' keep and the Hepburns' perimeter wall are most fetching against the green grass.
- The castle's location has to be among the prettiest in Historic Scotland's estate, and an undoubted 'draw' for visitors (the more so as the property is now free of charge). After touring the ruins, visitors can relax on the green grass and gaze at the slow-moving waters of the River Tyne, and if they are lucky spot the occasional kingfisher, dipper or heron.
- The best view of Hailes is from the north bank of the river, and almost all paintings, etchings, photos etc, show it from this side. A walking route between Haddington and East Linton has recently been installed along that far side.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- When was the first castle built, and what did it consist of?
- What was the extent of the 13th-century castle? A full standing building survey, coupled with a trawl through historic survey material, is required to aid interpretation of the existing fragmentary remains.
- What is the building history of the range between the Gourlays' keep and the Hepburns' tower house? Here again a standing building survey is needed.
- What, if anything, lay in the fields to the south of the castle ditch?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- The Gourlays' keep is an exceedingly rare example of early 13th-century castellated architecture in Scotland.
- The castle as rebuilt for the Hepburns contains important elements to inform our understanding of how later medieval tower-house castles were intended to be used by their owners.
- The castle is intimately associated with James Hepburn, 4th Earl of Bothwell, one of the major political figures in Mary Queen of Scots' reign.
- Hailes Castle is among the most picturesque properties in Historic Scotland's care, its situation beside the River Tyne adding a wonderful sensory dimension to the visit.

Associated Properties

(other related sites locally) – Prestonkirk parish church; Traprain Law.

(other Hepburn castles) - **Crichton**; Dunbar; **Hermitage**; Waughton.

(other important castles locally) – **Dirleton**; **Tantallon**; Yester

Keywords:

keep; tower house; enclosure wall; ditch; Gourlay; Hepburn; Bothwell; Queen Mary

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