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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

KINNAIRD HEAD CASTLE AND LIGHTHOUSE, AND KINNAIRD HEAD WINE TOWER



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Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Historic Environment Scotland

Longmore House

Salisbury Place

Edinburgh

EH9 1SH

+44 (0) 131 668 8600

www.historicenvironment.scot

You can download this publication from our website at www.historicenvironment.scot

KINNAIRD HEAD CASTLE AND LIGHTHOUSE, AND KINNAIRD HEAD WINE TOWER

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- The monument comprises Kinnaird Head Lighthouse Station, the first lighthouse to be constructed on behalf of Northern Lighthouse Trustees, in 1787.
- The lighthouse, standing atop Kinnaird Head, which remains an important navigational point for shipping heading E around the top of Scotland, was adapted from an existing late 16th century towerhouse complex.
- The only other surviving remnant of the castle is the so-called Wine Tower, which lies some distance from the lighthouse station.
- The lighthouse station is complete as it was left when it was decommissioned in 1991. It includes the light tower, an engine room, keepers accommodation and a foghorn.
- The monument is managed as part of the nearby Lighthouse Museum, which has many exhibits related to life in Lighthouse service.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- **1570** - The castle is commonly believed to have been constructed by Alexander Fraser, 8th Laird of Philorth. However, the form of the tower suggests that it is earlier, perhaps dating from the early 16th century.
- The tower was originally surrounded by other domestic buildings, as shown on a plan produced by William Urquhart in 1786. All the ancillary buildings, apart from the Wine Tower, were demolished as part of the conversion of the site to a lighthouse station.
- **1786** – The newly-created Board of the Northern Lighthouse Trust (which was to become the Northern Lighthouse Board, with commissioners), was authorised to build four lighthouses (Kinnaird Head, North Ronaldsay, Eilean Glas and the Mull of Kintyre). That year the Trust purchased Kinnaird Head, the first of its lighthouses.
- **1787** – Thomas Smith, the newly appointed engineer to the Trust, designed the light and the alterations to the tower necessary for supporting the lantern. The light, using recent developments in technology including Aime Argand's cylindrical wick and Quiquet's glass chimney, was constructed in Edinburgh, shipped to Fraserburgh, and installed by November.
- The first light keeper, and indeed the first employed by the Northern Lighthouse board, was James Park, a 70-year-old retired sea captain. Soon after leaving the service, aged 80, he was captured by the French on a sea journey and imprisoned in a Dutch gaol. On his release, the Northern Lighthouse Trustees arranged a small pension and allowed him and his wife to lodge in the castle.
- **1824** – The lighthouse was thoroughly redesigned by Robert Stevenson, who produced a permanent solution to the problem of mounting a lantern on top of the castle. Originally, Stevenson planned to demolish the entire castle including the tower and to build a more conventional lighthouse tower 100 yards to the E. He may have been dissuaded from doing so by the influence of his friend, Sir Walter Scott. Scott had already persuaded him not to knock down the 17th century fire-tower on the Isle of May but to turn it into a ruin instead.

- Stevenson retained the old tower but altered it by the construction of a lighthouse tower through the towerhouse. The tower supported a new lantern and contained a wide circular stair, improving access to the lantern. The lantern was also redesigned at this time, with silvered copper parabolic bowls burning spermaceti oil (oil from the head of a sperm whale).
- Although the tower survived, the ancillary buildings were cleared away to make way for new accommodation for the principal and assistant lightkeepers and their families.
- **1851** – The light was replaced by Alan Stevenson with a Dioptric light (one that uses a system of lenses rather than reflectors). The new light also necessitated a new lantern using diagonal glazing bars, which was the standard pattern adopted by the Northern Lighthouse Board in 1849.
- **1902** – The light, which had been a fixed one, was replaced by a more powerful flashing one. This new light, which is still in place, was a hyper-radial lens and was one of the largest in service. A new lantern had to be constructed to fit the lens, and a clockwork mechanism was installed to power the revolving machinery.
- As well as replacing the light and lantern in 1902, David Stevenson installed a foghorn and engine house. A second assistant keeper was required to for foghorn duty, so a new cottage for the principal keeper was constructed. At the same time, stores and a workshop were constructed.
- **1929** – The first permanent radio beacon in Northern Lighthouse Board service was installed to improve of the warning capabilities of the lighthouse in fog.
- **19 February 1941** – Kinnaird Head suffered a near miss from an enemy bomber. During the war, the lantern was also strafed by an enemy plane, chipping some of the glass prisms which can still be seen in the lens today. Lighthouses were often targeted by the Luftwaffe.
- **1991** – The light went out of service on the 20 June, to be replaced by a new automatic light on the site of the old radio beacon mast.
- **1994-1995** – On the decommissioning of the lighthouse, a major scheme of repair and presentation was undertaken by Historic Scotland, funded by the National Heritage Memorial Fund, before the lighthouse was reopened as part of Scotland's Lighthouse Museum.

Archaeological Overview

- The monument has only seen limited excavation restricted to the basement of the tower itself. The floor of the towerhouse cellar/kitchen (which had been used as a coal store) was excavated in advance of consolidation work to allow safe public access. The archaeological investigation took the floor level down to the original 16th century level and has assisted in unravelling the building history of this part of the building.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The lighthouse tower is an early 16th century tower house, with some architectural embellishment at wallhead level in the form of a projecting corbel course with corner rounds.
- The lantern on top of the old towerhouse has a slightly incongruous appearance, making the building look rather top heavy. However, the white tower and its surrounding neat little buildings form a pleasing ensemble.

- The most significant feature of the Wine Tower is a series of seven very fine sculpted bosses carved with heraldic emblems inserted into the upper vault. One pendent has the *Arma Christi*, the coat of arms of Christ depicted on it, which has led to a suggestion that this room was built as a private chapel for Magdalen Ogilvie, the Roman Catholic wife of Alexander Fraser. While this pendant may point to the religious sympathies of the Frasers and Ogilvies, the identification of the room as a chapel is probably erroneous. The other pendants simply commemorate the political and dynastic affiliations of the Frasers, while the room is orientated N-S and has a fireplace. The pendants also have been clearly inserted into the vault and probably have come from another building.

Social Overview

- When the lighthouse was decommissioned, it was left as if the lighthouse keepers had just gone. As a result, the monument provides a unique opportunity for visitors to see and understand the workings of a manned lighthouse station (all working lighthouses are now automatic and many have been thoroughly modernised).
- The lighthouse has strong associations for those who worked for or who are related to those who worked for the lighthouse service. It demonstrates a way of life that has disappeared in living memory due to changing technology. The adjacent Lighthouse Museum further informs visitors about this lost way of life.

Spiritual Overview

- No known spiritual associations apart from the belief, probably erroneously, that the Wine Tower was a chapel.

Aesthetic Overview

- The lighthouse tower has been an important aid to navigation, visible from miles out to sea.
- The white tower, surrounded by a cluster of tidy white buildings, is a startling sight amid the grey backstreets of Fraserburgh.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- The origins and form of the 16th-century castle, and its relationship to the foundation of Fraserburgh and the ambitions of the Fraser family.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- As the first of the Northern Lighthouse Board's lights to be commissioned, Kinnaird Head has a unique place in the history of sea-marking around the coast of Scotland.
- The monument is the best preserved of Scotland's early lighthouse stations.
- Kinnaird Head is the only lighthouse built by the Northern Lighthouse Board to have used an existing building.
- The lighthouse has strong links to the famous Stevenson family.
- Kinnaird Head encompasses all of the technological advances that have helped make the waters around the coast of Scotland a safer environment for mariners.

- All the major elements of the station survive: the light, the keepers' cottages, the foghorn, engine room and other ancillary buildings such as garages and stores.
- When decommissioned, Kinnaird Head was immediately identified for preservation. Uniquely, this has resulted in the retention of the artefacts and ephemera of the life within a lighthouse station in their original context. It is this combination of a significant collection of artefacts together with the structure that they are associated with, that provides a unique opportunity to see a lighthouse and appreciate, what life was like for the keepers and their families.

Associated Properties

- **Trinity House** – The only other HS property with close associations to the history of seafaring, seamarking and the welfare of mariners.
- North Ronaldsay, Eilean Glas and the Mull of Kintyre – the three other lights built under the 1786 Act 'for erecting certain lighthouse in the Northern Parts of Great Britain.
- Scottish Lighthouse Museum.
- Ardnamurchan Lighthouse Visitor Centre.
- Cairnbulg Castle – original the House of Philorth, the main seat of the Frasers of Philorth. Now restored.

Keywords Northern Lighthouse Board, Thomas Smith, Robert Stevenson, Stevenson Family.