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**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90151)

**Taken into State care:** 1948 (Ownership)

**Last reviewed:** 2004

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# GLENBUCHAT CASTLE



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# GLENBUCHAT CASTLE

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- Glenbuchat Castle is a late medieval Z-planned towerhouse or fortified house built c. 1590 for John Gordon of Glenbuchat and his wife Helen Carnegie.
  - The castle is picturesquely situated on a small level platform on the crest of an abrupt rise overlooking the Bridge of Buchat, where the Water of Buchat joins the Don. The Water of Buchat flows past the castle to the N, and immediately to the south is Glenbuchat House, separated from the castle by a walled enclosure which may be contemporary with the castle.
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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- The first notice of the Glen is in 1438, when the lands were held by the Crown as part of the earldom of Mar. A reference in the Exchequer Rolls mentions 'Haltoun de Glenbuchat' which suggests that there was an early hall or manor house somewhere in the glen.
- The present castle was constructed by John Gordon of Glenbuchat, younger of Cairnburrow. The lands of Glenbuchat were acquired from Lord Elphinstone, who held large tracts of the earldom of Mar. John took possession before 1572 and had the towerhouse constructed around 1590 (it is dated by an inscription).
- John Gordon of Glenbuchat was involved in the conflict between the Gordons and their rivals including the Forbeses and the earls of Moray, which dominated the political life of north-east Scotland during the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He was alleged to have been involved in the burning of Donibristle and the murder of the Earl of Moray in 1592. As a consequence of the outcry following the murder, the Master of Elphinstone, superior to Glenbuchat, agreed to the castle being delivered to His Majesty upon demand, and that *'meanwhile none of the King's declared traitors shall be reset therein.'* The castle appears to have been garrisoned at this time
- When John died, there were immediately quarrels between his second son Adam, and his third son John over possession of the castle. John leased *'the tour and mannour plaice of Innerbuchett, with the yairdis, orchardies'* etc. from 1608 but this did not stop his brother seizing the castle with a band of armed followers in February 1623; he *'lochit the doors of the chalmeris and office houssis within the plaice'* and compelled his brother and his *'young bairnes and whole servandis to go to the yet, expoising thame to the violence and injurie of this tempestuous seasoun'*. Despite a court case, Adam held on to the castle.
- In 1701, the castle changed hands, when another branch of the Gordon family acquired the estate. John Gordon of Knockespock bought the lands of Glenbuchat for his son, another John, who was to gain the sobriquet 'Old Glenbucket'. A remarkable man, he followed the Earl of Mar, his feudal superior, when he raised the standard for the Stuart Cause on the Braes of Mar in 1715, and went on to lead a regiment at Sheriffmuir. John survived the battle and was to sell the estate to William Duff, Lord Braco in 1738. He again rose in support of the Jacobite Cause in 1745 at the age of 68, marching south with the Young Pretender and fighting at Culloden. After the

- battle, he fled into exile ending his days in Boulogne. The castle itself was garrisoned by government troops after the uprising.
- The castle gradually fell into ruin after the estate was bought by the Duff family. In 1795 it was reported that the castle was inhabited by the farmer of Glenbuchat Mains, but already one wing was unroofed. A drawing by Giles in 1840 shows the roof intact only on the main block, and in the same year the parish minister stated that '*the castle stands in a commanding and beautiful situation, totally neglected, and fast falling into complete ruin*'. Not long after that the roof must have been removed for in Billings' engravings (1845-52) the castle is drawn very much as it is today. It is reported that the rooms were panelled, and this and the timber of the roofs was used for firewood at the Mains.
  - In 1901 the castle was bought by James Barclay MP, and essential repairs were carried out shortly after. A survey of the building was also undertaken, as the first stage of a planned restoration which was never progressed.
  - In 1946, the castle was placed into state care, and two years later the Deeside field club gifted the Castle Park to the nation to ensure the castle retained its beautiful setting.

#### Archaeological Overview

- No archaeological work has taken place at Glenbuchat. As the castle continued in occupation up into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> C and then had its roof and internal fittings removed, it is likely that few archaeological deposits survive inside the castle itself.
- Documentary sources refer to offices and yards surrounding the castle (the enclosure to the south is probably the remains of a contemporary yard). Therefore the area immediately around the castle and in the general vicinity should be regarded as being archaeologically sensitive.

#### Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The castle is a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century tower house, on a Z-shaped plan. It comprises a main block with square wings projecting from the north-east and south-west angles and a square corbelled roofed turret on the south-east angle. The roof lines of the wings or jambs are elaborated by a number of round and square corbelled turrets. The entrance is in the east re-entrant of the south-west jamb which still retains a much repaired old oak board door. Above is a worn inscription which reads: JOHN · GORDON · HELEN · CARNEGIE · 1590/ NOTHING · ON · EARTH · REMANIS · BOT · FAIME – '*Nothing earthly can endure without good repute*'.
- The ground floor of the main block is divided into three vaulted chambers connected by a vaulted corridor running the length of the building. The east chamber is a well-equipped kitchen with a large fireplace and a slop drain. The other chambers, including those in the projecting towers, would have provided storage space.
- Originally the first floor of the main block would have functioned as a large hall, with the first floor of the north-east wing serving as a chamber. The hall was reached from a wide and rather unusual horseshoe-shaped staircase in the south-west tower. The stair leaves space for a small reception area at its head and an L-shaped vaulted chamber below which may have served as a prison. The upper floor of the main block rose into the roof space and was divided into two chambers each with a fireplace and provision for a dry stool

closet. The wings had two storeys of chambers above 1st floor level, and all could be accessed separately from the newel staircases.

- At some during its history, the castle was extensively remodelled. The hall was divided into two by a large masonry cross wall, probably to create a dining and a drawing room, and the ceiling was lowered for an additional floor, which was divided by wooden partitions into four bedrooms. A large four-light window was installed in the west gable, and was so contrived as to provide light for four rooms over two storeys. The remodelling created a large number of additional rooms but would have created much less impressive spaces. It is believed that the changes may have been made after John Gordon of Knockspock took possession in 1701, but it is possible that it took place when it was sold to the Duffs, when the castle ceased to be a lairdly house and became a farmhouse.
- An oddity of the castle is the arches which support the projecting spiral staircases in the return of the jambs. A French origin has been claimed for these features, particularly as Helen Carnegie's father served as an ambassador to France, but they are as likely to have been inspired by medieval Scottish squinch arches.
- The horizontal emphasis to the massing of the building is uncharacteristic of other Aberdonian tower houses which tend to emphasise verticality. The building gives the impression of being a fortified house rather than a towerhouse. It has been suggested that this indicates that a non-Aberdonian master mason was used, perhaps from Angus where Helen Carnegie was from. There are certainly similarities between Glenbuchat and Hatton Castle in Angus (built 1575).

#### Social Overview

Not assessed. The castle is used as a recreational attraction.

#### Spiritual Overview

None.

#### Aesthetic Overview

- The castle is situated within a particularly beautiful part of upland Aberdeenshire. The adjacent, later, farmhouse and yards adds to the visual interest of the castles setting.

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

- Was there an earlier manor house on this site, or one nearby?
- When did the secondary remodelling take place?

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### ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Key points

- Architecturally the castle is an impressive example of a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish towerhouse. It demonstrates the sophisticated nature that the form had reached by this time. It is possible for the visitor to appreciate how the sequence of internal spaces of the castle might have been used.
- The re-ordering of the internal spaces demonstrates how towerhouses might be altered to suit later social tastes and the needs of their owners.
- It belonged successively to two cadet branches of the Gordon family, the Gordons of Glenbuchat, and then the Gordons of Knockenspock. John

Gordon of Glenbuchat (Old Glenbuchat) the last Gordon laird of Glenbuchat is an intriguing character.

- Historic Scotland cares for a group of castles that belonged to various branches of the Gordon Family, which Glenbuchat is one. As a group they help demonstrate the dominance of the Gordons over the NE of Scotland.

#### Associated Properties

**Huntly, Knock, Auchindoun** – Gordon Castles.  
Glenbuchat Kirk.

Keywords Tower house, fortified house, Gordons, Jacobites, 1715, 1745.