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ÀRAINNEACHD
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Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC009

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Taken into State care: 1975 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2013

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

BALVAIRD 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.



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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

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BALVAIRD CASTLE

SYNOPSIS

Balvaird Castle is prominently set on a hill overlooking open undulating pasture, 2 miles ENE of Glenfarg. It is a late 15th-century tower-house castle associated with the Murrays, who married into the Barclay family of Balvaird and Arngask. Their descendants acquired the estate of Scone in 1604, which became their main house. In the 18th century they became earls of Mansfield. The family entrusted the castle into state care in 1975.

The tower house, built c.1495, was among the most sophisticated of its day. Designed on a variant of the L-plan, with the spiral stair carried upward in a turret projecting from within the re-entrant angle, it incorporates the main domestic and service accommodation, including a kitchen on the ground floor. The tower house was later surrounded by attractive courtyards and a spacious walled garden to its east. Whilst the ancillary ranges are now ruinous, the tower house is still roofed and retains internally timber partitions and wall plaster generally missing from many such towers.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

- **c.1495** - Sir Andrew Murray, son of Sir William Murray of Tullibardine, marries Margaret Barclay, daughter of James Barclay of Kippo, and heiress of Balvaird and Arngask. The tower house at Balvaird is built to celebrate the union. There is a strong possibility that a castle of some form already stood on the site, and the ditches below the summit may belong to this. A tradition that Balvaird was given to the Murrays by Robert II (1371-90) can be dismissed, but it remains possible that the Robert II connection relates to the Barclays and not the Murrays.
- **1498** - first mention of 'the place of Balward' in documents (*Register of the Great Seal*).
- **1567** - the present gatehouse is built for Sir Andrew Murray of Balvaird and his wife, Janet, daughter of the 2nd earl of Montrose, probably as part of a major upgrading of the accommodation.
- **1604** - Sir David Murray of Gospertie, laird of Balvaird, is granted Scone, forfeited by the earls of Gowrie, by a grateful James VI, who also creates him 1st Lord Scone and Viscount Stormont. He is probably the first to build a castle at Scone.
- **1631** - at Lord Scone's death, Rev Andrew Murray, minister of Abdie and second son of Sir David Murray of Letter Bannachty, inherits Balvaird, Arngask and Kippo.
- **1633** - Rev Andrew Murray is knighted during Charles I's coronation visit.
- **1641** - Charles I confers on Sir Andrew Murray the title Lord Balvaird, in recognition of his support during the Bishop's Wars (in 1638 Murray had been deprived of Abdie by the General Assembly for his moderate views).
- **1644** - Lord Balvaird dies and is succeeded by his eldest son, David.

- **1651** – David, 2nd Lord Balvaird, hosts the coronation of Charles II at Scone. In 1658 he becomes 4th Viscount Stormont and 4th Lord Scone. The title Lord Balvaird thereafter is merged with that of Viscount Stormont. Scone Palace is preferred as the prime residence, with Balvaird downgraded in status.
- **1776** - William Murray, younger brother of David, 6th Viscount Stormont, is created 1st earl of Mansfield. His chief residence is Kenwood House, London, designed by Robert Adam.
- **1803** - David, 3rd earl, embarks on building the present Scone Palace. In 1815 he carries out repairs to Balvaird but 30 years later the castle is described as ruinous. (This description may be exaggerated since the tower and west range clearly continue in some form of use.)
- **1887** – MacGibbon & Ross refer to a 'recumbent statue lying in the castle', thought to be that of Lady Margaret Barclay, the wife of the first Sir Andrew Murray, which was brought from the old Arngask Church when it was demolished in 1806. (The effigy is subsequently returned to Arngask Churchyard.)
- **1975** - the property is entrusted into state care by the 7th earl of Mansfield.

Archaeological Overview:

The courtyard buildings to the south of the main tower were excavated in the late 1980s, during masonry consolidation. This revealed that whilst the courtyard may have been laid out in 1567, it incorporated at least one earlier masonry structure, tentatively identified as a hall/accommodation range built to accompany the tower. Occupation of these buildings appeared to continue into the 19th century. The excavations were relatively small in scale and much archaeological potential remains within the tower house itself and the surrounding courtyard complex.

The ground around the castle, defined by the outer and inner courts and walled gardens, merits detailed survey and perhaps archaeology, especially in the former formal garden. There appears to be a ditch, or ditches, on the north-west side that may pertain to an earlier castle, and the ground to the south may contain traces of houses and yards associated with the estate.

The survival of so much internal timberwork in the tower house represents a rare opportunity for dendro-chronological analysis. This would best be carried out alongside a standing building survey of the building.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:

The tower house is a sophisticated building for its date (1490s). It is built on a variant of the L-plan, with the main spiral stair carried up through the full height of the building in a turret projecting from within the re-entrant angle rather than within the thickness of the wall which was then the norm. The stair turret is crowned by a tall battlemented cap-house. The plumbing arrangements are also ahead of their time. The privies are cleverly positioned one above the other so that all the soil collected in one cess-pit, the chutes flushed by rainwater, ingeniously channelled from stone spouts on the roof. Even the waste water from the numerous wash-sinks in the chambers was channelled into the adjacent chutes. The inclusion of a kitchen at this date is also unusual. In most other respects the planning of the tower house is relatively standard –

a vaulted basement containing an entresol, a hall on the first floor, with an adjacent chamber in the wing (for the steward perhaps?), and two upper floors, including an attic.

The quality of Balvaird's stonework is exceptionally fine. Externally, these include the corbelled parapets and ornamented chimney copes, and internally the hall fireplace and adjacent aumbry with its ornate lintel; the latter was probably brought from a nearby monastery (perhaps Elcho Nunnery or Lindores Abbey, even Scone Abbey given the family link), as seems to be the case also with the aumbry in **Orchardton Tower**. The elaborate armorial panels above the entrance doorway, though badly weathered, are believed to include the arms of Margaret Barclay and her husband, Sir Andrew Murray, who married c.1495. The early date for so sophisticated a tower house is confirmed by the presence of inverted keyhole gun-holes, which date to the later 1400s (as at **Broughty Castle**, also of the 1490s).

The tower house preserves rare features associated with its subsequent upgrading. These include fragments of ornate moulded plaster work, including a section of elaborate cornice (late 16th / early 17th century), timber partitions above the hall, and reformed fireplaces. Such survivals are rare today, and Balvaird rightfully takes its place alongside other notable later medieval castles with preserved interiors (eg, Neidpath, **Newark** and **Rowallan**). The late use of the tower house is also evidenced by the slapped doorway through the west wall at ground level, and the structural repairs in the south-east corner that resulted in the abandonment of the pit-prison.

Of the remainder of the castle complex little can usefully be written given its ruined state. The excavations hinted that the tower house was augmented by an outer, more public, hall in the west range. The presence of walled gardens/orchards to south and east further highlights the castle's sophisticated nature.

Social Overview:

Though the castle has long been associated with the Murray family (later earls of Mansfield), there seems no longer to be any close association between the two, or between Balvaird and Scone.

The castle stands isolated in open countryside, out of sight of modern settlement. As such, it has little known social use, other than as an eye-catching ruin in the landscape. It is open to visitors only on rare occasions (eg, 'Doors Open Days').

Spiritual Overview:

Historically, the castle would have housed a place of worship. The room above the gatehouse has been identified as its location (cf. MacGibbon & Ross), but as this post-dates the Protestant Reformation (1560), this seems unlikely. A chamber in the tower house, as at **Affleck** for example, seems more likely.

Today, the castle doesn't appear to have any spiritual association or use, though the occasional wedding has been held here recently.

Aesthetic Overview

Balvaird Castle is surrounded by undulating hill-pasture, in a setting which is remarkably open and largely devoid of modern settlements or structures. It is a conspicuous landmark, partly masked by just a few trees.

The tower house is a handsome building, whose massing is solid without appearing stern. This is largely a result of the quality and elaborate nature of the wall-head, including the fine cap-house over the stair turret.

As a group, the tower house and adjacent ruined ranges forms an attractive cluster, the latter creating a gentle transition between the lofty tower and the open pastures around.

Within the roofed tower house, the ghostly nature of the empty interior is unsuspected and particularly enticing, helping to give cues to the imagination as to how it was inhabited in olden times.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Was there an earlier castle at the site, and if so what form did it take? The 1980s archaeological excavations were limited in scope and further delving may well reveal a more comprehensive picture of the origin of the site.
- How did the castle complex (tower house, courtyards, garden, etc) function in its heyday of the 16th century, and where was the well? Here too further archaeological excavation should clarify the position.
- What was the history of the Murray family at Balvaird before it transferred to Scone? A more detailed investigation of the available documentation would hopefully illuminate the history of the site to a greater degree.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- Balvaird is a fine example of a tower-house castle, replete with surrounding courtyards and gardens such as one doesn't normally find surviving today.
- The tower house itself is a notably sophisticated building for its time. Its original architectural features and subsequent alterations are exceptionally rare.
- Excavations on the site have shown the site to have considerable archaeological potential which has been only partly exploited.

Associated Properties

(other related sites) - Arngask Churchyard (Margaret Barclay's effigy); Kenwood House, London; Scone Palace

(some other 15th-century tower-houses regionally) – **Affleck**; Alloa; **Castle Campbell**; Castle Huntly; **Clackmannan**; Drummond; **Elcho**; Kinnaird; Sauchie
(other tower houses retaining significant timber fittings) – Neidpath (Peebles); **Newark**; **Rowallan**

Keywords:

tower house; ambry; garden; timberwork; plasterwork; Murray; Barclay

Selected Bibliography:

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