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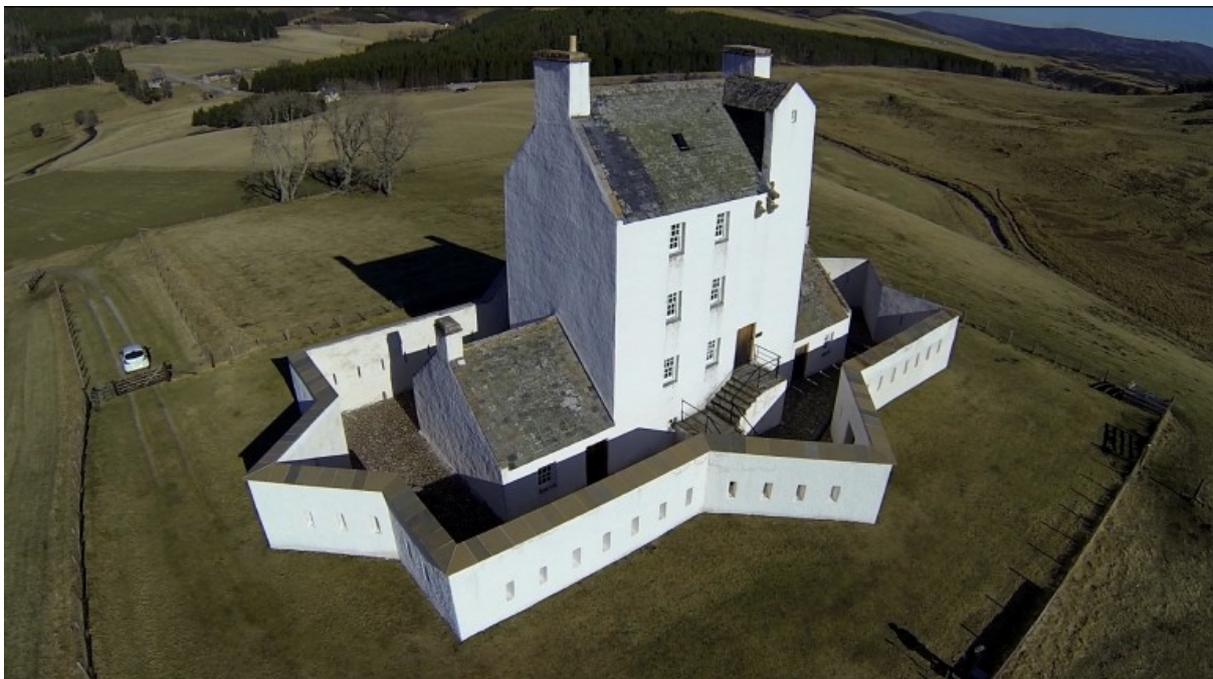
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

CORGARFF CASTLE



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CORGARFF CASTLE

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- Corgarff Castle is a mid-16th century tower house, extensively adapted as a garrison post after the 1745 Rising.
- It consists of a plain harled rubble-built tower standing four storeys high, entered at first floor level via a forestair. Attached at each end of the tower is a wing one storey high. Surrounding the castle is a rectangular curtain wall with a triangular salient on each face; the wall is looped for muskets. The curtain wall and the low wings were added to the castle in the mid-18th century, when government troops were stationed at the castle following the 1745 Rising.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- Mid-16th century - construction of castle, perhaps after Alexander, 2nd Lord Elphinstone, granted the lands of the Forest of Corgarff to his son on his marriage to Margaret Drummond of Innerpeffery, in 1546. Alternatively, the tower may have been built by Forbes of Towie who held the lands of Corgarff from the Elphinstones soon after the marriage in 1546.
- The suggestion that the castle was built on the site of an earlier hunting lodge of the earl of Mar after it was destroyed in 1571 (see below) appears to be without foundation. However, the tower itself may have been built to serve as a hunting seat, although since Strathdon was a wild and remote district it was constructed as a strong house.
- 1571 – the castle is a possible candidate for the location of the tragic events recounted in the ballad Edom o' Gordon, when during the Marian wars, a party of Gordons, supporters of Queen Mary, attempted to seize the castle from the Forbeses, who were allies to the cause of James VI. Margaret Forbes, the lady of the castle, and 24 members of her household were burnt to death when she refused the Gordons entry.
- 1607 – Alexander, Master of Elphinstone, made a complaint to the Privy Council concerning an attack of the tower led by Alexander Forbes of Towie and other members of the Forbes family. This would appear to be a typical dispute between the holder of the land and the tenant.
- 1645 – the castle was occupied by the Marquis of Montrose, campaigning for Charles I. It is recorded that the castle was derelict at this time.
- 1689-90 – the castle was burnt by Jacobite supporters of James VII to deny it to government forces. After the collapse of the Jacobite rising, the Earl of Mar, now holder of the castle, documented his losses *'In the next place was burnt to him his castle of Corgarff upon the water of Don, consisting of a tower house and jam, thrie stories high, which cannot be repaired in the same conditione under thrie hundred pounds sterline'*. This suggests that the tower had been repaired since 1645.
- 1715 – the beginning of the Jacobite rising saw the Earl of Mar marching from his ancestral seat at Kildrummy to Corgarff where his forces received

reinforcements and ammunition, confirming that the castle had been repaired once more. Mar then moved on to Braemar where the standard was raised.

- 1746 – the castle once again served as an ammunition store for Jacobite forces. However, it was quickly seized by government forces who *'found it abandoned by the Garrison, but so lately that the fire was burning'*.
- 1748 – work began to convert the castle into a garrison post. The work was designed by William Skinner, architect behind Fort George, and later to become a Major-General and chief engineer of Great Britain.
- 1750 – a detachment of 45 men, under the command of Ensign Rutherford, from Pulteney's 13th Foot were based at the outpost.
- 1795 – Cordiner sketched and described the castle. From this description it is clear that the garrison no longer served its policing role and instead the castle had become the occasional quarters of gentlemen huntsmen.
- 1802 – the castle returned to private hands and it became a farmhouse.
- 1826 – James MacHardy, the farmer, held a licence to distil whisky on the premises.
- 1827-1831 – the castle was once again occupied by the army who were supporting the Excise in stamping out the illegal production of whisky.
- 1831-1961 – the decline of the castle. The castle served as a lodging for farm labourers. In 1911 it was still inhabited by the Ross sisters. After the first world war the castle became derelict.
- 1961 – the castle was given into State care by Sir Edmund and Lady Stockdale. First-aid repairs were carried out in advance of State care and major consolidation works were undertaken in the 1960s. In the late 1980s a presentation scheme was implemented reconstructing aspects of military occupation of the castle.

Archaeological Overview

- There have not been any formal archaeological investigations at Corgarff. The interior of the castle, within the curtain wall, was cleared during consolidation work during the 1960s. The clearance work uncovered areas of cobbling and a stone lined drain.
- Although the castle has been cleared, due to the lack of records the sub-surface archaeological potential is essentially unknown, with the possibility that the clearance work was limited in its extent and depth.
- The area immediately surrounding the house may have the potential for associated archaeology, such as gardens and outer courtyards.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The layout of the tower before it was reconstructed by the Hanoverian military authorities in 1748 is known through surveys carried out as part of those works. For a small tower house its interior planning demonstrates considerable sophistication.
- The castle was one of a number of small garrison outposts established after the '45 Rising throughout the Highlands. For several of these outposts, existing castles such as at Corgarff and Braemar (both highland Aberdeenshire), Duart (Mull) and Mingary (northern Argyll) were pressed into

service. Corgarff is typical of these outposts and is the best preserved and least altered of all.

- The conversion of the tower to a garrison post saw considerable alterations to the interior arrangements of the tower, which was essentially gutted to provide the accommodation required. In doing so the hall vault was removed and an extra floor was fitted into the existing walls. In addition, the outer defences were strengthened by the construction of a star shaped wall with loop-holes for musketry, while extra accommodation was created by constructing two low pavilions attached to the tower.

Social Overview

- No formal assessment exists.
- As an outpost of what was essentially an army of occupation in Highland Scotland, attitudes to Corgarff can be ambivalent. However, perhaps due to its earlier and later history, and its small scale compared to the vastness of Fort George, it does not arouse hostility to the same degree as other monuments to the 'pacification' of the Highlands.

Spiritual Overview

- None

Aesthetic Overview

- The castle is spectacularly situated in high moorland at the head of Strathdon, overlooking the Lecht Road to Tomintoul. The castle and its setting, whether glimpsed travelling N or the S along the Lecht Road, offers one of the finest views in Aberdeenshire, if not Scotland.
- The castle within its landscape gives a sense of the isolation and remoteness that the troops garrisoning the outpost must have felt when they were faced not only by a unforgiving landscape and climate, but also by a hostile populace. For the local populace, the transformation of the familiar old tower house into a government outpost surrounded by its star-shaped perimeter wall high on the hill must have been an oppressive sight.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- The early history of the castle, particularly the questions of when it was built and for whom, remains unclear.

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- It is the best preserved and least altered (although in a restored condition) of all the post-1745 military outposts established by the Hanoverian government to pacify the Highlands, and best demonstrates how existing places of strength were pressed into service.
- The castle played a role in Montrose's 'year of miracles' in 1645, the 1689-90 Rising, and the Risings of 1715 and 1745. Though fortified, Corgarff was no major place of strength; but its secluded location made it an ideal base for fomenting disaffection, which the government found difficult to counter, until the tower was transformed into an outpost.
- The experienced army engineer, William Skinner, who used his knowledge of fortifications from across Europe to make Fort George 'state of the art',

worked at a very different scale at Corgarff, to produce an effective military outpost.

- In its landscape setting, Corgarff is one of the most visually striking monuments that is held in care. The sight of it is appreciated not only by visitors to the monument, but all those that travel the lonely Lecht road.

Associated Properties

Fort Augustus (and the earlier barracks), **Fort George**, **Fort Charlotte** Fort William, Braemar Castle, Berwick, Ruthven, Bernera and Inversnaid Barracks.

Keywords Tower house, Jacobite, 1715, 1745, William Skinner, Lecht Road, Outpost.