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## HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# EDZELL 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.

# EDZELL CASTLE

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- Edzell Castle began as a towerhouse with a barmkin wall and associated buildings, which was to develop into an impressive courtyard castle during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The castle was built and altered by the Crawford Lindsays.
- To the South of the courtyard is a remarkable and unique Renaissance walled garden or pleasance with summer house and bath house built by 1604. The garden is as much an architectural as a horticultural feature, with an ornate heraldic and symbolic decorative treatment of the walls.
- Edzell Castle sits within a manorial landscape of some considerable time depth. To the South of the castle is a motte and bailey castle (Castle Hillock which is not yet in care), which preceded the courtyard castle as the original manorial centre, and the former site of the parish church. Within the graveyard is the Lindsay Aisle, the burial vault of the Lindsay family (in care). To the South East is the home farm of the manor, Mains of Edzell. Although replaced during successive agricultural improvements, the Mains retains an early 17<sup>th</sup> century doocot. Surrounding the castle are remnants of a deer park.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- About 1100 a Normanised native family, with the locative Glenesk, established a manorial centre, a motte and bailey castle, close to an existing ecclesiastical centre, which they may have had connections with as their surname was Abbe or Abbot.
- The Abbots were succeeded as lairds of Edzell by the Stirling family. About 1358, Catherine Stirling, heiress of Glenesk, married Sir Alexander, third son of Sir David Lindsay of Crawford. The barony and castle of Edzell was held by the junior branch of the Lindsay Crawford family, although for a brief period the Edzell branch held the earldom of Crawford in the person of David, the ninth earl.
- In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Lindsays appear to have moved from the motte and bailey to a wholly new site, 300m to the NE, where they constructed a towerhouse, known erroneously as the Stirling tower.
- Probably around 1553, and possibly by David 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Crawford, a two storey west range was built against the towerhouse. Centrally it contained the very impressive entry decorated with armorial panels, of which only the frames survive. The range would have created additional accommodation and a new kitchen on the ground floor.
- Queen Mary stayed at the castle on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> August 1562 during her royal progress north, to curb the power of the earl of Huntly. A Privy Council was held at the castle on the day of her departure, the 25<sup>th</sup>, and was attended by her closest advisors.
- Sir David Lindsay succeeded his father, the 9<sup>th</sup> Earl, in 1558 when still a child. He had plans to transform the castle into a sumptuous residence built

around the courtyard. He built a new lodging in the North East but it was never completed. The East and South ranges, today very ruinous, formerly contained service offices. His castle was visited on several occasions by James VI.

- Sir David's lasting achievement was the pleasance, bathhouse and summerhouse to the S of the castle, built in 1604. This is the finest Renaissance garden to have survived in Scotland (the planting dates to the 1930s) and no doubt was influenced by Sir David's European travels with his educator, James Lawson, a colleague of John Knox. Like many of his position, Sir David was an educated and cultured man, set on improving his estates. As well as being a significant builder, he carried out large-scale afforestation of his estates and initiated mining operations at the head of Glengask, employing German mining engineers to prospect for copper, lead and alabaster.
- Sir David died in 1610 without seeing his magnificent garden or his other building projects completed. He did, however, leave his family 'in extraordinary debt', although this was as much due to the activities of his notorious son David, who amongst other expensive misdemeanours, murdered Lord Spynie in a street brawl, as Sir David's lavish spending on his residence.
- In 1651 the castle was briefly garrisoned by Cromwellian troops.
- After the Presbyterian settlement of 1690, the people of Glenesk, including the laird and the minister, predominately supported Episcopacy. When the use of the parish church was denied to them, they held services with the castle's hall.
- David, the last Lindsay laird (a Jacobite sympathiser), was forced through debt to sell his estate to the Earl of Panmure in 1715. Almost immediately, the lands were forfeit owing to the Earl's involvement in the Jacobite rising of that year. The York Buildings Company obtained possession and began despoiling the mansion and its policies. The final ruin came in 1764 after the company was declared bankrupt. The beech avenue leading to the castle, was felled and the castle was gutted and sold on behalf of the creditors.
- In 1932 the garden was taken into care due to its extraordinary significance, followed in 1935 by the rest of the castle.
- In 1936 the castle garden was laid out with the current planting scheme.

#### Archaeological Overview

- Although limited excavations took place in advance of laying out the gardens in 1930s, they revealed little except a central garden feature (now represented by the yew tree.) Several clearance excavations have revealed the footings of the courtyard buildings, but it is likely that these were restricted to removal of rubble and overburden. As a result the site must be regarded as archaeologically very sensitive.
- Beyond the walls of the castle the location of the castle town is not clear, but it is likely that any settlement will have been between the castle, the old castle and the parish church. An archaeological assessment of a site between Edzell kirkyard and the motte did not reveal any medieval features.

#### Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The walled garden at Edzell is a unique survival and is of wider European importance showing the transmission of Renaissance ideas and classical motifs throughout Europe. The walls served as an architectural frame work for the planting and provided a canvas for an extraordinary heraldic and iconographic design, which would have worked with the original planting scheme. It would have been a purposeful demonstration of Sir David's knowledge of classical forms and learning, and an artful display of his family armorial symbols.
- The walls are divided into compartments by a series of pilasters, now reduced to their bases, caps and bands. Above, the wall is finished with a heavy cope. A series of rounded niches was doubtless intended to display busts (the West side has a simple cope suggesting it was never completed as intended). The wall with the compartments are dealt with in two alternative ways: in the first three rows of recesses, dished to hold flower boxes are arranged chequer-wise, representing the 'fess chequy', the armorial device of the Lindsays. Above this is seven ray stars, another armorial device of the Lindsays. In the alternative bays there is a low oblong recess, again dished for planting, above which is a sculpted panel. The sculptures display the Planetary Deities on the East, the Liberal Arts on the South and the Cardinal Virtues on the West. At least some of these sculptures (the planets) have been copied from a series of engravings made in 1528-9 by the Nuremburg engraver *Meister I B*, identified as Georg Pencz. Each wall of sculptures was carved by a single craftsman, with the Cardinal Virtues being the least accomplished.
- The individual elements of the garden are to be found elsewhere; formal gardens were a common feature of late medieval Scottish castles, and the treatment of the walls with the division into pilasters and the use of sculptured panels can be found in other architectural contexts, notably at the South courtyard front of Falkland palace (1540). However, Edzell is unique, not only as a survivor, but in the way the various elements have been drawn together into a walled garden. The summer house and the bath house demonstrate how many aspects of private social life would have gravitated to the garden in clement weather, allowing dining and entertaining.
- The oldest standing part of the castle, the so-called 'Stirling Tower', is very prominent on the entrance front, and this is balanced on the other side by the gable of the North range and the projecting round tower, built in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century as part of Sir David Lindsay's new North range. A similar combination of elements is to be found at Tolquhon Castle. At both, the incorporation of the older tower in such a prominent location could be seen as attempt to demonstrate the noble lineage of the owners, through the retention of identifiably older elements in their new residences.
- The 'Stirling Tower' is an L-plan towerhouse, which from details such as the parapet corbelling appears to date to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is far more massively constructed than the latter phases of work. It was entered through a ground entrance with provision for a door and yett, and was covered by an inverted keyhole type gunloop (quite a late example). The entrance leads to a short corridor with doors off to two vaulted cellars and the staircase, which takes up the wing. The stair leads to a first floor hall, which would have been divided by a screen at the East end. This area would have functioned as a servery with a small fireplace to warm food, and with a gallery above. Each of

- the upper floors was divided by partitions into two rooms, each with a fireplace and a latrine. The windows of the tower were later enlarged and those in the entrance façade were given decorative gunloops beneath their cills. The tower would have originally been surrounded by a substantial barmkin wall.
- The quadrangular layout found in the final phase at Edzell can be identified in several other houses of the period in the NE. Both Tolquhon and Pitsligo Castle developed into a roughly quadrangular house around an earlier tower house.
  - The magnificent entrance front of the castle is impressive piece of late medieval architecture, particularly the juxtaposition of the round tower with the older tower house, and the impressive entrance portal with heraldic devices above. The entrance façade was built in three distinct phases yet the individual elements work together to create an accomplished whole.
  - There was a certain vogue in mid to late 16<sup>th</sup> century Scotland for adding round towers to existing ranges of high status buildings, found notably at Huntly Castle, Balvenie Castle and the Bishop's Palace, Kirkwall. While it is inappropriate to ascribe inspiration for these towers to a specific building or collection of buildings, they do appear to reveal awareness of French prototypes. This may reflect the influence of the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise, at this time. In France, there was evidently a developing fashion for lodging blocks with attached single round towers from the early 15<sup>th</sup> C.
  - The addition of the gatehouse range, then the N lodging, brought successive improvements in the standards of accommodation within the castle. The gatehouse range was integrated into the tower house with access at ground and first floor level, and was provided with a kitchen on the ground floor, which would have served both the gatehouse and the tower. The first floor would have provided a more extensive hall and chamber. The N range was supplied with another, larger, kitchen, on the ground floor and had a large hall on the upper floor, from which the private rooms in the round tower could be accessed. The upper floors were reached from a polygonal stair turret accessed directly from the courtyard. Direct access to lodgings by an externally expressed stair may be a further reflect French influence. The surviving detailing of the doorway suggest that it had an impressive surround, perhaps with heraldic panels above, not unlike the early 17<sup>th</sup> century stair tower at the palace at Huntly Castle.

### Social Overview

- The castle is currently used as a recreational attraction.
- In previous years the castle was used as a wedding location. This is no longer possible, though people can and do use it as a location for wedding photographs to be taken.
- According to tradition in Angus and the Mearns, the famed 'Leezie Lindsay' in the song 'Will ye Gang tae the Highlands Leezie Lindsay' was a daughter of Lindsay of Edzell, though to date no genealogical evidence has been found for this. This ballad (Child Ballad #226) first appeared in print in 1803. A version was recorded from Robert Burns, with whom it is often associated and erroneously attributed to, but there were many other folk versions collected of the songs. In the ballad a Highland laird comes down disguised

as a shepherd to find a wife, courts and wins Leezie Lindsay, and returns to the Highlands surprising her with the fact she had married a laird.

### Spiritual Overview

- Sir David would have no doubt retained the medieval concept of the garden as the earthly paradise. However, the panels of the Liberal Arts, the Planetary Deities and the Cardinal Virtues demonstrate that Sir David had been influenced by Renaissance thought and to him the garden had become much more, perhaps the location for solitary thought, philosophical discussion and a source of moral instruction.
- As mentioned above the Castle hall was used for worship by the Episcopalians following the Presbyterian settlement in 1690.

### Aesthetic Overview

- Edzell is one of the most picturesque castles in Scotland, situated within the green and pleasant remnants of its pleasance and policies and surrounded by unspoiled countryside.
- The garden is an extraordinarily beautiful and peaceful location, which still conveys the desire for tranquillity and distance from the world and things worldly that would have been a motivation behind its construction.
- The original approach to the castle, up to the gatehouse range, is an impressive and extremely pleasing composition with the entrance portal flanked by the two towers. The sense of discovery is increased when one enters the courtyard and the heart of castle and then beyond to the magical and private space of the garden (the present approach is incorrect and reduces the impact of the entrance façade and the succession of spaces).

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

- Much of the later 16<sup>th</sup> century work at Edzell has survived in a fragmentary state, and yet more was never completed as intended. The final design of the castle is therefore open to some conjecture.
- We know very little of the first castle at Edzell which sat on Castle Hillock. The stylistic details of the towerhouse suggest that it was not constructed until the late 15<sup>th</sup>/early 16<sup>th</sup> century, which implies that the Stirlings and then the Lindsays occupied the site of the motte until then, which is a very late date for the occupation of such a site.
- Although the inspiration/pattern for the carvings for the planetary deities has been identified as a group of engravings by *Meister I B* of Nurenberg, the models used for the other sets of carving have not been found.

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

- The pleasance at Edzell is a unique example of a walled garden in Scotland; nothing quite like it survives in Europe. It is one of the most important Renaissance constructions in Scotland, and shows the variety of methods by which artistic ideas were transmitted. Sir David travelled in Europe, and appears to have had access to copies of engravings. There may have also been influences from other buildings within Scotland that used classical motifs.

- The contrast between the earlier tower house and the later mansion house demonstrates the gradual move away from fortified residences to more palatial houses which nonetheless retained an outward militaristic appearance, through the use of round towers, impressive gate ways and details such as gunloops.
- The frontage to the castle is a fine example of late medieval architecture, particularly in the manner in which the different elements inter-relate. The design of the later work, with its French influence, demonstrates the manner in which Scottish patrons gained inspiration from the Continent, as well as from existing buildings within Scotland.
- The castle sits within a manorial landscape of considerable time depth.

Associated Properties

Castle Hillock Edzell, **Lindsay Aisle**, **Tolquhon Castle** (quadrangular layout, pleasance), **Huntly Castle**,

Keywords Fortified mansion, tower house, gardens, Renaissance gatehouse, Sir David Lindsay, York Buildings Company