



Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC260

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90238)

Taken into State care: 1956 (Ownership)

Last reviewed: 2004

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

PEEL RING OF LUMPHANAN



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.



© Historic Environment Scotland 2019

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated.

To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

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

PEEL RING OF LUMHPANAN

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The monument consists of a flat-topped earthen mound 55m by 36m across the summit and rising to a height of about 5m. The mound is natural in origin – a glacial drumlin that has been modified to create the earthworks for a timber castle. It is surrounded by a wet (now boggy) moat, up to 15m wide, itself enclosed by a bank. On top of the mound, the footings of a later rectangular building can be identified. The summit of the mound is reached by a cobbled causeway which approaches from the north-east.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview

- The timber castle was built in the mid-thirteenth century by the de Lundins or Durward family, the hereditary door-wards or ushers to the king, who rose to power in the 1250s, and whose chief seat lay at Coull around 10km to the west where there are the remains of a masonry castle. It has been suggested that the Peel Ring was a hunting seat, explaining the apparent late construction of an earth and timber castle. However, such an interpretation perhaps over emphasises the distinction between timber and masonry castles, and ignores the fact that timber remained a high status building material over a long period.
- The castle was the scene of the submission of Sir John de Melville, of Raith in Fife, to Edward I of England on the 21 July 1296.
- After a period of abandonment, the castle mound was reoccupied in 1487 when Thomas Charteris of Kinfauns, Perthshire, built the residence known as Ha'ton House on it.
- In the early 1780s Ha'ton House was demolished.
- In the 1920s a curling pond, the rectangular outline of which is still visible today, was constructed in the south-west sector of the moat.
- The monument was taken in state care in 1957, the 900th anniversary of the death of Macbeth who was slain near by in 1057. At the time the Peel Ring was believed to be a seat of Macbeth but later excavation demonstrated that it was constructed some 200 years after his death. However, it remains associated in the popular imagination with Macbeth.

Archaeological Overview

- The excavations in the late 1970s were limited in extent. The early phase of the occupation of the castle is still poorly understood. This is partly as a result of indifferent survival due to the later agricultural use of the site and partly since the main aim of the excavation on summit of the mound was to investigate to the level of the foundations of Ha'ton House. Excavation has, however, shown that the whole site is archaeologically sensitive and that there is still considerable potential to explore the earlier phases of occupation, despite the disturbance caused by later agricultural use and several undocumented archaeological investigations (The mound was investigated during the mid-19th century and in 1907. Little is known of the

extent of these excavations, but the 1907 investigations did uncover the foundations of Ha'ton House).

- Excavations between 1975-9 clarified the development of the site, particularly the significance of the drystone wall which had girdled the mound. This significantly altered the interpretation of the early phase of the castle, firmly debunking the idea that it was a shell keep (a masonry curtain wall built around an existing motte), a form of castle not otherwise known in Scotland. Loch Doon Castle (Ayrshire) can perhaps be interpreted as such, although it is more usually described as a curtain wall castle.
- Excavation has shown that the mound was initially constructed around the mid 13th century. A natural mound was heightened with carefully laid turves, perhaps creating a defensive bank. The outer ditch was probably contemporary with the occupation of the mound, however later tree planting may have heightened the bank. The cobbled causeway may relate to this phase of construction, but alternatively the lack of any defensive provision along its length, such as a gateway, may suggest that it dates to a later phase.
- Although a timber castle, Lumphanan is hardly typical of the motte and bailey castle. The summit of the mound is very large for a motte and would have been able to accommodate many of the buildings, which in other earth and timber castles would have stood in subsidiary enclosures or baileys. In this respect it is rather similar to David's Forth, near Conon, and perhaps the Doune of Invernochty.
- The mound was reoccupied in the late 15th century, when a rectangular masonry structure, known as Ha'ton House, 16m by 5m was constructed. The dimensions of the structure suggest that this was a hall or hall-house, with a hall above a storage undercroft or accommodation of a lesser significance. It is unclear when this structure was abandoned.
- In the early 1780s Ha'ton House was demolished by a neighbouring tenant. The rubble masonry was used to construct a drystone wall enclosing the summit of the mound. Before the site was excavated this wall had been interpreted as the remains of an encircling wall of a shell keep. However, excavation demonstrated that the wall was wholly an 18th century feature and may have functioned as a revetment for imported soil which was built up to some considerable depth, perhaps for cultivation on top of the mound.

Artistic/Architectural Overview

There is no standing architecture.

Social Overview

Not assessed.

Spiritual Overview

None – although some visitors may seek to sense a connection with MacBeth.

Aesthetic Overview

- The Peel Ring is situated on a relatively flat piece of land in an otherwise hilly part of Aberdeenshire. Views are restricted due to a nearby disused railway embankment. This is exacerbated by the trees that have been planted on the outer bank. Judicious thinning and not replanting trees that die off would open up the views to the castle.
- It is difficult to get a true sense of the scale of the monument.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- What was the disposition of buildings on the summit?
 - When was the castle abandoned, and in what circumstances? What were the circumstances of its re-occupation and later abandonment?
 - What was the function of this castle?
-

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key points

- The Peel Ring is a well preserved example of the earthwork for a timber castle. It demonstrates one of the range of forms such castles could take. It is one of the few examples that would have had a water-filled moat, with mechanism to control the flow.
- It is one of the relatively few earth and timber castles to have been excavated in Scotland. Unfortunately, the excavations did not reveal much evidence for the initial occupation of the castle.
- The Peel Ring is associated with the powerful Durward family, who held the reigns of government during the final years of Alex II reign and the minority of Alexander III. They also had a castle at Coull, which was destroyed during the Wars of Independence.
- Its reoccupation in the 15th century, with the construction of Ha'ton demonstrates that such sites continued to have significance even after they had been abandoned, and could be re-occupied for residential use.

Associated Properties

Coull Castle, Doune of Invernochty.

Keywords Earthwork, Peel Ring, Timber Castle, Durwards.