INVESTIGATING
CORGARFF CASTLE
Information for Teachers

A well-preserved tower house with recreated redcoat barracks, Corgarff Castle is an ideal place to explore the government’s response to the Jacobite threat.
Corgarff Castle stands alone and distinct on a wild stretch of moorland at the head of Strathdon. Its history and recreated displays make it an excellent and evocative place to explore the events and aftermath of the Jacobite rising of 1745.

Historical background

Corgarff Castle was originally built as the fortified home of the notable local Forbes family in the mid-16th century. Since then it has been much altered, but enough remains of the original structure for us to glimpse something of the castle in its heyday. Surrounded by outbuildings, the castle was originally a lordly residence on three floors, with cellars, a kitchen, a hall and private chambers.

In 1571 the castle was the scene of a brutal massacre. Margaret Forbes and 23 other members of her household perished in a fire at Corgarff, after she refused to allow the Gordons of Auchindoun entry while her husband was away. This was part of a long-standing feud between the two families.

In 1689 the castle was set alight once more, this time by Jacobite sympathisers to prevent its use as a garrison post for the new monarchs, William and Mary. The isolation of the castle made it an ideal place for plotting, and in 1715 the 6th Earl of Mar came to Corgarff to recruit and arm his Jacobite troops before launching the Jacobite Rising of 1715 at Braemar.

Corgarff was to play a role in the final Jacobite Rising of 1745-6 as well. In February 1746 a group of Jacobite troops from Prince Charles’ army had occupied the castle and were using it as an arms depot for a consignment of gunpowder and muskets, recently arrived from the Continent. The Government ‘redcoat’ army, based in Aberdeen, got wind of this and around 400 soldiers trekked through deep snow to surprise the castle. News of their advance had already reached the Jacobites, and the government troops arrived at Corgarff to find it abandoned by all but a cat, still sleeping by the fireside. The departing Jacobites had attempted to destroy the gunpowder in the river and hid the weapons – but the redcoats found these. They returned to Aberdeen with over 100 muskets and destroyed hundreds more they could not carry.

After the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden, the military authorities were keen to maintain a presence in the Highlands to suppress any further rebellious activity. Corgarff was substantially remodelled and fitted out as a barracks for a garrison of infantrymen. This was when the distinctive star-shaped outer wall was built. The soldiers based here patrolled the region around the castle and rounded up Jacobite sympathisers. A new military road was constructed which ran close by the castle, linking Blairgowrie with Fort George on the Moray Firth.
By the mid-1750s the tension had subsided and by the end of the 18th century, Corgarff’s military importance had faded. It was rented out privately for a while, but saw brief military reoccupation in the 1820s to stamp out illicit whisky production in the area. After 1831 the castle fell into neglect and its last residents were the two Ross sisters who rented the castle until 1912. Finally it was taken into state care in 1961. Today the castle has been restored and visitors can enjoy the recreated barracks rooms from the 1750s.
Before the visit

- Look at photographs of Corgarff in advance – see www.scran.ac.uk or www.historicscotlandimages.gov.uk or www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk Help pupils to formulate their own research questions to investigate on site so that they arrive with a clear sense of mission. If possible involve them in the booking procedure.
- Help pupils gain a clearer grasp of the time scale by making a time line with them, counting back the centuries and then marking on key events in the history of the castle and the surrounding area. This could be added to after the visit.
- Make sure that pupils have a grasp of the key elements of the Jacobite Rising of 1745 before they come: who the Jacobites were, what they wanted; the story of their advance into and retreat from England; the story of the response of the British army to this advance and retreat; how the Highlanders lived at the time; the outcome of Culloden and its aftermath.
- Help pupils begin to form research questions about army life in the 18th century. Help them to shape questions to which they can seek answers on their site visit (e.g. what kind of person joined the British army, how did they live, what did they do, what did they wear etc). Try and counter the prevailing impression that the British army was entirely formed of English toffs; many of the redcoat soldiers during and after the Jacobite rising were Scottish.
- Help pupils locate Corgarff Castle on a modern map. Help them find and mark Fort George, Inverness, Fort Augustus, Braemar, Ruthven Barracks near Kingussie, and Blairgowrie. Look at the roads which connect these places – all important military centres in the 18th century. Compare this with contemporary maps of the area which show the network of military roads constructed in the wake of Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745. Help pupils to see that our modern day road network is closely based on these roads – though the overland route from Corgarff to the Dee is not likely to be undertaken by today’s drivers. The SCRAP database is a good source of maps – www.scran.ac.uk. The famous ‘Roy’ map of 1747-55 clearly shows Corgarff Barracks, and can be viewed on www.nls.uk/maps/roy/.
- One way to animate a historic site for pupils is for them to research and prepare short drama sketches to perform (and perhaps video?) on site. A good incident for pupils to find out about would be the surprise redcoat raid on Corgarff in 1746. There is a fairly detailed account of this in Christopher Duffy’s excellent book The ‘45. In school, pupils could identify roles, draft a story, write script, prepare simple costumes. This could then be re-enacted on site.
Working on site

When exploring the castle, in addition to our suggestions for discussion, pupils should be encouraged to look critically at what they see and to make and test theories based on physical evidence. Some general starting points could include:

- Corgarff Castle is interesting in that its use has changed entirely from when it was first built – from a lordly residence to a basic barracks. Help pupils to look out for what features have been retained and what have been added since then. Discuss how wind and weather can affect the look of a building as well as the deliberate changes that people choose to make to buildings.

- What materials were used to build the castle? Why were these materials chosen? Are they any materials which might have rotted away or been stolen since then?

- Do you think the rooms have always looked like this? Can you see anywhere they have been altered? Why might they have been changed?

- What evidence is there for everyday life?

Pupils can record evidence by taking notes, sketching, taking photographs, recording impressions into a tape recorder.

On the Historic Scotland website teachers can find additional resources to help with work on site. These include compiling an Evidence Record. See www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Suggestions for follow-up work

Following the visit pupils can pool their findings in groups to create a fuller record of the castle and the lives of the people who lived and worked there. This could form the basis for a range of presentation activities, for example:

- A guide book or promotional leaflet for future visitors
- A slide show with commentary of their visit
- Imaginative writing based on the lives of the inhabitants of the castle
- A series of drama sketches showing different snapshots of life in the castle through the ages

Recreated barracks at Corgarff
On the trail of the redcoats at Corgarff

Our suggested tour route focuses on everyday life in Corgarff in the 1750s, when it was used as a barracks by the British ‘redcoat’ army. It takes in six key locations:

1. Outside the castle
2. An officer’s apartment
3. The soldiers’ barracks
4. Redcoat displays
5. The cellars
6. In the courtyard

After the first point, it is not essential to view these locations in this order. Ideally, split your class into groups of 8-10, to allow maximum participation.

Background information is given in the pack for each location. It is written in simple language so that it can be read aloud to pupils if desired. Also included are suggested questions for discussion.

Because the castle is so well preserved, it lends itself easily to role play, particularly for younger groups. Suggestions for role play have been included in a Join the Redcoats! section for each location, featured in red.

One way to manage this type of activity is to give out the roles, allow a few minutes for practising and then on a given signal allow the action to take place for a minute or two, until you give the signal to stop.
Tour Notes: On the trail of the redcoats of Corgarff

Location 1: Outside the castle

Stop after passing through the gate on the path up from the carpark, just before you first reach the white wall outside the castle.

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.
- We’re just about to go inside Corgarff Castle. But before we do, let’s see what we can work out about the castle just from looking at it on the outside.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher prompts</th>
<th>Desired pupil response here</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Let’s think about the height of the castle first of all. Can you work out how many floors there are on the castle?</td>
<td>Look at windows – can work out there are probably three floors plus an attic floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s quite tall for an old building. Why do you think it was built so high?</td>
<td>So that the people inside could have a good view of anyone coming from miles around. Also to show off – built by important people who wanted to impress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you notice about the windows?</td>
<td>They are really tiny and hardly any of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think they are so tiny and there are so few of them?</td>
<td>Windows make a wall weaker – so the castle wall was built to be very strong and difficult to attack. Also for warmth – windows let the cold and draughts in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you see any clues which tell us how they kept warm inside Corgarff castle?</td>
<td>Two big chimneys and two smaller ones. Open fires to keep rooms warm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at the strangely shaped wall around the castle. What do you think the holes in the wall are for?</td>
<td>Musket holes for firing through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that this is a friendly place as you come near to it?</td>
<td>Unlikely - feels threatening; says ‘keep out!’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So: what have we worked out about the castle already?</td>
<td>Probably built by someone important who wanted to show off, and who maybe had enemies. Castle was designed to keep people out. Inside it would be quite dark – but it might have been warm.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• There are really two stories about Corgarff Castle. It was built about 450 years ago, around 1550 by a local family called the Forbeses. It was their home and was probably quite grand for its time. They built the main tower we can see now.

• About 250 years ago, in the 1740s and 50s, it was a base for the British army, known as the redcoats because they wore red tunics. They converted the castle into a garrison, a kind of mini-fort for a group of soldiers. The soldiers had the job of patrolling the area to capture any Jacobites and to put people off ever becoming Jacobites again.

• Today we’re going to find out what it was like to be a redcoat soldier stationed here.

**Join the redcoats!**

Let’s imagine that we are a group of redcoat soldiers marching up to the castle for the first time. We’ve never been here before. What are your first impressions of the castle? We’re going to march closer and then I’m going to ask some of you what you are thinking. Are you ready? Quick, march!

*Head into the castle, through the courtyard, up the steps and check in with the steward in the office/shop in the first door on the left. Then move into the small room next to the shop.*

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*The castle as it would have looked around 1750*
Did you know…

In 1746 the Jacobites were using the castle as their base. The British redcoats attacked the castle but by the time they arrived, the Jacobites had escaped. There was still a fire burning in this room and a cat asleep beside it!

Location 2: An officer’s apartment

**Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.**

- This used to be the kitchen for the castle. For a while it was used as the kitchen for the army too. Later on it became an office for the soldiers who were in charge of Corgarff.

- In 1750 the person in command here was called Ensign Robert Rutherford. He was in charge of all the soldiers here. Around 50 soldiers were based at Corgarff at one time. They marched over from their main base at Fort George. Some of them would stay at the castle, and others went out and patrolled the surrounding area. This room was Rutherford’s office, bedroom, sitting room and dining room.

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<tr>
<td>Can you find any clues which tell us about the old kitchen?</td>
<td>Traces of much bigger old fireplace visible above existing fireplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would these things have been used for?</td>
<td>Fire was used for cooking, and heating water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What might you have heard or smelt?</td>
<td>Dirty water was ‘slopped’ out of the drain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heard fire crackling, sounds of cook giving orders; smell of fire and things cooking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Can you find a clue on the fireplace which tells us what king was ruling some of the time the army were here? | Look for crown, letters GR and numbers III. GR stands for ‘Georgius Rex’ – Latin for King George III. |
| Look in the baskets by the fire. What fuel can you see in the baskets as well as wood?               | Peat in the baskets – dug from the ground. |
| Why do you think this was sometimes used instead of wood?                                           | Few trees in the area. |

| In the corner of the room there is a little separate cupboard – but with a window. | It was the toilet – or latrine. |
| What do you think this was for?                                                            | |
| Do you think it had a door?                                                                | Yes – signs of where a door was. |

*Leave this room and go upstairs to the next floor.*
**Location 3: The soldiers’ barracks**

*Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.*

- In the 1600s, this room didn’t exist! This room was the top half of the great hall in the Forbeses castle. When the army redesigned it in 1748, they needed more rooms, so they added this floor.

- This is where the ordinary soldiers lived and slept. There were about 50 men based at Corgarff at once. Half of them would have lived here, and the other half would have stayed in the houses of local people. The furniture is modern, but it’s like the furniture that was here in 1750.

- The soldiers were given a ration of food everyday – about half a loaf of bread, a pound of meat (that’s about six sausages – but this often included lumps of bone or fat) and two pints of beer. If they wanted any more food, they had to buy it themselves, but they didn’t have much money going spare. They had to cook their food themselves over the fire here.

- A soldier’s life was probably quite dull. They would spend their days here drilling - practising using their muskets and marching. Sometimes they would go out to look for Jacobites and to put people off being Jacobites again. At this time it was also a crime to wear tartan or speak Gaelic! They would spend time looking after their equipment and doing their cooking and washing. Their families were not allowed.

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<td>How many beds are there?</td>
<td>Six big beds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think they are so big?</td>
<td>The men shared beds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The man in charge would have had his own bed. So how many men could have slept in this room?</td>
<td>11 men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try sitting on the bed. Would you like sleeping here?</td>
<td>Probably not – very hard and the blankets look thin!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you notice about the windows on the wall where the door is?</td>
<td>Much bigger than other windows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think this is?</td>
<td>This is the sunny side of the castle – maybe it was to let in more warmth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Find:
- where the soldiers kept their muskets (guns)
- how this room was lit
- the names of some of the soldiers
- what they carried their equipment in
- a secret compartment for hiding things

- rack to the right of the fire.
- replica candle shown in cubby hole.
- names written on slates above the beds.
- knapsacks hanging above beds.
- in the base of the cupboard to the left of the fire.
Look at any the coat hanging up. Do you think it was suitable for life here?

Probably quite warm but would be very heavy if it got wet. Not waterproof at all.

How is it different from modern soldiers’ uniform?

Biggest difference is the colour – today’s soldiers are usually camouflaged rather than dressed in bright colours.

Look at the ceiling. How do you think these marks were made?

With a candle.

Why do you think the soldiers made these marks here?

Probably bored.

All the bags have the number 13 on them. What do you think this means?

It was the name of the soldiers’ regiment – Pulteney’s 13th regiment.

Would you have liked to be a soldier here? Why/why not?

Pupils’ own responses.

**Join the redcoats!**

Imagine you are a redcoat soldier. You’ve been out all day patrolling the hills and villages. Now you’re back in the barracks. Some of you are cooking, others are eating, some are stoking the fire. Some people are repairing their uniforms and equipment. Maybe some of you had action-packed days – others didn’t do much. Are you missing your families here?
Continue up the stairs to the next floor. This room is largely empty now but would also have been another barracks room, identical to the one below. There is a model on display here showing what the castle originally looked like when it was first built.

You could look at it with pupils and discuss the following:

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<tr>
<td>Can you work out where we came in?</td>
<td>Now in room where 4-poster bed is in the model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you work out where we are now?</td>
<td>Can see it off the hall on the first floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you see the old kitchen we were in at first?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for the big fireplace which has gone now.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What changes did the army make?</td>
<td>There used to be a big hall which has gone now. The army added another floor to make the barracks room we were just in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used to be a big grand bed in this room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The spiral staircase has gone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think they changed the castle?</td>
<td>Wanted to make it suitable for about 50 men to live and work here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What parts are still the same?</td>
<td>Basic shape is still the same. Small kitchen next to hall on first floor quite similar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continue up to the top floor.
Did you know…

Soldiers were not encouraged to bring their wives and children with them. If they did, they had to share the soldier's bed!

Location 4: Redcoat displays

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- This floor was probably used for storing kit and military equipment, but if there were a lot of soldiers in the area, they might have slept here.
- Today there are some displays which tell you about the life of a soldier. Look at them and find one interesting fact to remember and tell the class when you are back at school.

Climb the steep little flight of steps up to the ‘cap house’ to look out of the window. Pupils may need to do this in small groups.

- Look out of the small window. Can you see the track? This used to be the old road over the hills.

Return downstairs to the first floor. Then carry on down a very steep, dark stair to reach the cellars. Warn pupils to go carefully. Go into the first cellar room and continue into the second.

An actor dressed in the uniform worn by 18th Century government ‘redcoats’
Location 5: The cellars

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- This is the very oldest part of the castle. It has hardly changed at all since the castle was built more than 450 years ago. In those days, coming in here would be like stepping into a giant fridge.

### Teacher prompts

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does it feel down in these cellars?</td>
<td>Cold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think the first owners of the castle kept in here?</td>
<td>Supplies of food – sacks of grain, dried or smoked meat, bottles of wine etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why was this a good place to keep food?</td>
<td>Like a fridge – it would stop the food from rotting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think the redcoat soldiers kept in here?</td>
<td>Probably kept food too – but also kept equipment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you guess what they might have kept in the big barrels?</td>
<td>Gunpowder!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a look at the doors. Do you think they are really old, or are they modern copies, like the furniture upstairs?</td>
<td>They are really old, not copies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think it was important to have strong doors on the cellars?</td>
<td>To stop people creeping in and stealing the food – or the gunpowder!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Join the redcoats!

In 1746, the Jacobites were using Corgarff to store weapons and gunpowder. The redcoat army made a surprise attack, mostly marching on foot in the middle of winter – but the Jacobites had already left.

Imagine you are the redcoat soldiers who have just come down to the cellar and find gunpowder and weapons left by the Jacobites. What do you decide to do? Discuss and then act out your decision!

Think about:

- How useful the weapons might be to you – and to the Jacobites.
- How tired you and the horses are after all the marching through snow to get here.
- Do you know where the Jacobites have gone to? Perhaps they might come back any minute!
- What might happen if you leave the weapons.
- How you could destroy gunpowder.

In fact the redcoats destroyed many of the weapons and ammunition as they could not carry them all away. Then they returned to Aberdeen with over 100 muskets.

Carefully climb the stairs again and then go out the front door and down the steps to stand in the courtyard.
**Location 6: In the courtyard**

*Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.*

- There was always a courtyard around the castle. There used to be all kinds of workshops, stables and store rooms. When the army took over the castle, they made some changes.
- They demolished all the outbuildings which used to be around the castle. Then they built a wall all round the castle. Inside the wall they built a bakery, a place to brew beer and a prison.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think the entrance to the castle is not on the ground floor?</td>
<td>Easier to defend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When it was first built, the castle probably had moveable wooden steps.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The wall is built an unusual shape. Walk around it on the inside and see if you can work out what shape it is. How many points (sticking out corners) does it have?</td>
<td>It’s star shaped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think it was built in this shape?</td>
<td>8 points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think the holes in the wall are for?</td>
<td>Musket holes – to shoot through.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think there are so many – more than the number of soldiers in the castle?</td>
<td>So that they could shoot at the enemy whatever direction they came from.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Join the redcoats!**

Imagine that you have heard rumours that the castle is about to be attacked. It’s important that you all know what to do. Organise lookouts and people to patrol the walls, and practise getting into position quickly.

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What would be the bad things about being a redcoat soldier here?</td>
<td>Away from family, hunger, boredom, local people hostile, no private space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think that people chose to join the redcoats?</td>
<td>Some security, adventure, small amount of money.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our tour of Corgarff is now over.

You may wish to look into the former bakehouse and brewhouse, where the soldiers baked their bread and where beer was brewed every week.
Visiting Corgarff Castle

Pre visits: We strongly recommend that teachers make a free visit to the castle to familiarise themselves with the site and to make a risk assessment before bringing school parties.

Booking a visit: Phone 01975 651460 to book a visit, discuss your needs and confirm opening times with the Steward. The castle is open in the summer months only.

Cost: Admission is free to a range of educational groups including school parties. More information about who qualifies for free visits can be found on the Historic Scotland Education Unit website (see below).

Location: 8m west of Strathdon on the A939

Parking: There is a car park at the bottom of the hill below the castle. There is a short walk up a rough track to reach the castle.

Health and safety: Please note the following:

- Pupils should be supervised at all times. Some of the internal steps are very steep.
- As part of our commitment to Green Tourism, we ask that all litter be disposed of back at school.

Historic Scotland Education Unit: For further information about school visits, activities and resources for teachers linked to Corgarff Castle, visit: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

Additional resources

For teachers

Chris Tabraham, Corgarff Castle, Historic Scotland 2008. The official guidebook, giving further details on the architecture and history of the site. Order online from www.historic-scotland.gov.uk


Christopher Duffy, The ’45, Phoenix 2007. An outstanding and very readable account of the events of 1745 and 1746. A good couple of pages about the redcoat raid on Corgarff.

For pupils

Terry Deary, Horrible Histories: Bloody Scotland, Scholastic 1998; Scoular Anderson 1745 and all that, Birlinn 2001. Both of these are popular with pupils, provocative and surprisingly informative.


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