

Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC118

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90083);

Taken into State care: 1949 (ownership)

Last reviewed: 2014

**HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

CRAIGNETHAN 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.

CRAIGNETHAN CASTLE

SYNOPSIS

Craignethan Castle is situated in a striking, and somewhat inaccessible, position, on a spur formed by the deeply eroded beds of the River Nethan and the Craignethan Burn, 1 mile from their confluence with the River Clyde and 5½ miles WNW of Lanark.

The castle comprises two courts. The inner court is defined by a rectangular stone perimeter wall with towers at the four corners and smaller towers in the middle of the north and south walls, the former a gatehouse tower. The court is dominated by a central tower house, or lodging, of a highly innovative form. The outer court, separated from the inner court by a deep, wide, stone-faced ditch, and likewise girdled by a stone perimeter wall, is now largely empty of structures, except for an L-shaped house and offices in the SW corner.

Everything apart from the L-shaped house, built for Andrew Hay in 1665 in the castle's twilight days, was built in the 1530s for James Hamilton of Finnart, illegitimate son of the 1st Earl of Arran. In addition to its highly innovative tower house it incorporates 'state-of-the-art' artillery fortifications, including an exceedingly rare caponier (gunners' hut) in the great ditch.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

- **c.1496** – Sir James Hamilton of Finnart is born. Although the eldest son of James Hamilton, 1st Earl of Arran, he is born illegitimate. Had he been legitimate he would have succeeded his father as Earl of Arran and heir to the throne.
- **1513** – after the death of James IV at the Battle of Flodden, Finnart joins the entourage of Regent Albany and travels to France. He returns in 1518, and gains the confidence of the new king, James V. By 1525 he is chief adviser to his father, the Earl.
- **1529** – at his father's death, Finnart becomes head of the House of Hamilton, and tutor (guardian) to the young 2nd Earl, also James. Almost immediately he begins building Craignethan (and quite possibly **Cadzow Castle** also). It is sufficiently complete by May 1536 for him to host his daughter's wedding here, with James V as guest of honour.
- **1539/40** – Finnart is rewarded with his most lucrative post yet - Master of Works Principal in charge of all His Majesty's building works, chiefly at this date the new Palace in **Stirling Castle**. He is also given full legitimacy. However, he falls out of favour with James V soon after, is arrested, tried on a charge of plotting against the king, found guilty and summarily executed in **1540**. On his demise Craignethan becomes a royal castle. The small garrison installed includes a captain and three gunners. The armament comprises at least two heavy cannon and five smaller pieces.
- **1542** – On James V's death, Finnart's half-brother, James, 2nd Earl of Arran, becomes regent. He takes back Craignethan for himself, though his main residence is **Kinneil House**. It is conceivable that it is he who completes the building of Craignethan, particularly the outer court. Arran remains regent for

12 years, during which time he is created Duke of Châtelh rault (**1549**) by Henri II of France, in recognition of his part in arranging the marriage of Queen Mary and the French Dauphin, Fran ois. A devout Catholic, Arran is at the centre of the growing religious and political troubles besetting Scotland in the build-up to the Protestant Reformation of **1560**.

- **1566** – Arran is banished to France for opposing Queen Mary’s second marriage, to Henry, Lord Darnley (he rather hoped that Mary would marry his eldest son, James). Craignethan is occupied on behalf of the queen. No sooner does Arran return to Scotland (**1567**) than Mary is forced to abdicate in favour of her infant son James VI. Arran opts to support Mary. He colludes in her escape from **Lochleven Castle**, and entertains her at Craignethan for a short while. However, on leaving for **Dumbarton Castle**, Mary’s small army is intercepted at Langside (13 May **1568**). Mary flees to England. Craignethan, along with **Cadzow Castle**, is surrendered to the new regent, the Earl of Moray, who has all its guns removed. By **1570**, however, Craignethan is back in Hamilton hands. Arran’s third son, Claud, re-arms the place and prepares for a lengthy siege. The garrison comprises 80 horsemen and 50 musketeers. An uneasy ‘stand-off’ ensues. It is possible that the traverse wall in the great ditch is built at this time, to replace the caponier.
- **1572** – the Earl of Morton is appointed regent. An uneasy ‘stand-off’ between him and the Hamiltons ensues.
- **1575** – Arran dies at **Kinneil House**. His eldest son, James, nominally succeeds as 3rd Earl. However, having been declared insane since 1562, his two brothers, John and Claud, now effectively run the Hamilton family’s affairs and confine their eldest brother in Craignethan together with their widowed mother.
- **1579** – Regent Morton raises armed levies to take the Hamiltons’ Clydesdale strongholds of Hamilton, **Cadzow** and Craignethan. Craignethan is surrendered without resistance. Orders are issued for it to be ‘cast down to the ground, the inner barmkin ... and the tour upoun the south nuke of the samin, as alsau the tour upoun the north nuke at the entres [entrance], and the fosse [ditch] thair of fillit’. This was intended chiefly to demilitarise the stronghold; Finnart’s impressive and innovative tower house is left intact. The 3rd Earl is taken with his mother to **Linlithgow**. The Earl’s brothers flee the country.
- **1599** – John returns from exile and James VI makes him Marquis of Hamilton.
- **1659** – Anne, 3rd Duchess of Hamilton, sells the castle to Andrew Hay, a noted Covenanter, who builds a new residence and office range in the outer courtyard. The date **1665** is on the building.
- **c.1730** – Archibald Douglas, 1st Duke of Douglas, purchases the castle.
- **1799** – Walter Scott visits the castle in the company of Lord Douglas and is smitten with the place. He is offered the use of Andrew Hay’s house as a summer house but declines the offer. In **1816** Scott’s *Old Mortality* is published, and although Scott himself denies the association, many believe that the inspiration for his Tullietudlem Castle is Craignethan. It becomes a popular visitor attraction (J M W Turner visits in **1834**) and in **1876** a new railway station nearby is named Tullietudlem Castle in its honour.
- **c.1900** – Charles Douglas-Home, 12th Earl of Home, carries out repairs to the masonry fabric. These are perhaps most obvious in the entrance vestibule in the tower house.

- **1949** – Alexander Douglas-Home, 14th Earl of Home, entrusts the castle into State care. Throughout the 1950s and 60s major works of masonry conservation are carried out. Excavation of the great ditch in 1962 uncover the caponier.

Archaeological Overview:

A programme of clearance excavation and masonry consolidation took place between the site being taken into State care (1949) and the mid-1960s. The excavation work was directed by Iain MacIvor, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, and was largely carried out using local labour under a Government-funded 'winter relief' scheme.

The work concentrated on two areas – the great ditch and the outer court. The chief discovery in the great ditch was the well-nigh unique caponier (see Architectural/Artistic Overview). In the outer court was found the metalled road leading to the drawbridge crossing that ditch near its northern end. Also in the outer court were found the slots for timber sills forming the lean-to structures around the inside of the perimeter wall. Interestingly, there was no evidence for a roadway leading to a central gate through the main west wall of the inner court, as postulated by McKean.

In 1984, as part of the masonry consolidation programme, John Lewis directed excavations at the NE tower and its adjacent basement cellar in the east range. The former was found to have been a kitchen originally, and subsequently reformed as a brewhouse.

In 1995 excavation on the site of the east range showed that a building range had been planned here from the outset in the 1530s but was never completed.

The archaeological potential at the site remains considerable. The entire inner courtyard has scarcely been investigated, and the precise use and layout of the outer courtyard still remains something of a mystery, though this is likely to have been a formal garden. There is also a possibility that the kitchen garden may well be in evidence beneath the grass outside the south postern. It is also not beyond the bounds of possibility that evidence for siege works exists on the hill overlooking the site from the west (where the car-park is today).

Architectural/Artistic Overview:

There is nothing quite like Craignethan Castle anywhere else in Scotland, for its domestic architecture and its artillery fortification are without precedent. Indeed, its artillery works are unique in Britain. They combine to tell us much about its creator, Sir James Hamilton of Finnart.

Location

Topography is the key to understanding the *raison d'être* for Craignethan. It is a relatively rare example of a 'hidden castle', for it was not sited in a key strategic location, unlike another of Finnart's creations, Avendale (Strathaven), but tucked away out of sight and in dense woodland, in much the same way as another of his creations, **Cadzow Castle**, near Hamilton. Craignethan was a

place of last resort, providing Finnart with peace and tranquillity, within a secure shield; McKean describes it as his 'château'.

Layout

The castle consists of two rectangular courts, or wards, separated by a great ditch. The outer (west) court, defined by a token stone wall of single-storey height with equally token square towers at each corner, probably had a formal garden at its centre with service buildings around its edge in the form of lean-to structures against the perimeter wall; a dovecot was formed in the NW tower.

The inner court is defined by an altogether more formidable perimeter wall, rising much higher and with mid-towers to north and south, to complement those at the four corners. The north mid-tower incorporated the entrance gatehouse. There was a postern in the south wall, near the SE corner. The west (frontal) wall, adjacent to the great ditch, was extraordinarily thick.

This inner court was further divided into two halves. The front (west) half was an open courtyard paved with fine small square slabs (most of which survive beneath the grass). The rear half housed the principal residential and service buildings, in an impressive, double-piled tower house at the centre and in two corner towers at the NE and SE corners.

The tower house

Superficially the tower house has the appearance of a typical Scottish tower-house. But whereas contemporary tower houses had room piled upon room rising through four, even five, storeys, Craignethan's tower house was a brilliantly compact building of no more than three storeys. It also had a number of innovative features for its day, including:

1. It was double-piled, "a plan more closely resembling the rational planning of the 18th and 19th centuries" (McKean), with a cross-wall dividing the building into principal chambers to its south and service offices to its north;
2. The principal chamber, the hall, was at ground level and not on the first floor;
3. The building had a rigid symmetry and conscious use of proportions throughout.

Certainly the interior layout is like nothing existing in contemporary tower houses. The ground floor comprised Finnart's capacious hall to the south of the east/west dividing wall, and his private two-level suite (withdrawing chamber and bed-chamber) and court kitchen to its north. Above the kitchen was a roomy chamber that may well have been his steward's quarters. The top floor comprised additional suites of rooms.

The East Range

There was evidently a substantial residential block intended for the east range (ie, behind the main tower) but it seems never to have been completed. (Was there a change of plan perhaps, with the original intention being to house Finnart's suite in the NE tower with a great hall in the (never completed) east range, and a kitchen office in the SE tower?) The ground floor of the NE tower (now reduced to one storey) housed a kitchen, to complement the one in the tower house.

The SE tower survives to wall-head but its function is a mystery. Could this have been Finnart's lavish chapel, whose 'chapel-geir' was appropriated by James V in 1540? The tower now helpfully displays some of the fine-quality carved stonework that once adorned Finnart's tower house, including stone antelopes (the Hamilton's supporters) and wall-head water spouts carved in the form of ornate gun-barrels and animals (similar examples have also recently been found at **Cadzow Castle**).

The Artillery Fortification

The defensive fortification Finnart built around his residence was both impressive and innovative for its day. For this reason it has been described as 'the last private castle of high defensive quality built from new in Scotland' (MacIvor).

Here too the key to Craignethan as a fortress is its topography. Whilst the ground falls away steeply to ravines on three sides, to the west it rises sharply to overlook the site. This was not ideal, in an age of developing gun-powdered artillery. Whilst the three less vulnerable north, east and south sides were designed in the medieval tradition, by contrast the west front was given artillery fortifications of revolutionary plan and ostentatious strength.

The most important element of the entire fortification was the west rampart and great ditch. This consisted of a massively thick stone rampart rising vertically from a wide, deep, stone-faced ditch cutting right across the spur. It was largely demolished in 1579, as part of the castle's demilitarisation, but it was clearly formidably armed with heavy artillery at ground level and on its wall-head (gun-hole fragments, of innovative wide-mouthed form, were found in the ditch in the 1960s). The artillery mounted in and on the west rampart was supported by heavy guns emplaced on the wall-head of the tower house behind – defence in depth.

In the bottom of the great ditch is arguably Craignethan's most remarkable feature – the caponier, a vaulted, stone-roofed gallery with gun-holes scouring the ditch. The caponier was invented in Italy in the late 1400s and in the early 1530s was a complete innovation in Britain. (Interestingly, there is a similar caponier in **Blackness Castle**, also Finnart's handiwork, and there may be two more in the great outer ditch at **Tantallon Castle**, which Finnart may also have had a hand in creating.) McKean makes an attractive, and plausible, suggestion why the caponier was built – as a show-piece to impress James V, when he visited Craignethan for Finnart's daughter's wedding in 1536. (Caponiers had a short life in the 16th century. They reappeared again in the 18th century – there is one in the outer ditch at **Stirling Castle** – and in the later 19th century – there is one on Inchkeith Island.)

Two artillery features may have been added after Finnart's time – the stone traverse wall in the bottom of the great ditch near its north end, and the two traverse walls (demolished in 1579) in the inner court, to either side of the great tower. The former perhaps replaced the caponier as the main ditch

defence, whilst the others were intended to stop cannonballs oversailing the west rampart from continuing on their murderous course eastward.

Andrew Hay's House

The L-planned two-storey and attic house in the SW corner of the outer court is a fine example of a typical laird's house of the 17th century – robustly built and with some fine features but not in the least defensive (other than the fact it sat within the outer precinct wall).

The adjacent service offices are of interest as unusual preservations of features that have normally disappeared elsewhere, albeit much altered internally. They also incorporate rare stone decorative features recycled from Finnart's tower house, including another stone antelope.

Social Overview:

Craignethan Castle was largely forgotten about until the publication of Scott's *Old Mortality* in 1816, when readers began to associate Scott's fictional Tillietudlem Castle with Craignethan. Although Scott denied the link, the belief persisted and Craignethan came to a wider audience. A new railway station nearby was even named Tillietudlem. That station has long closed, and very few people today will have heard of *Old Mortality* let alone read it.

Craignethan is set in attractive countryside. This has been designated as the Nethan Gorge SSSI, which forms part of the Clyde Valley Woodlands National Nature Reserve. A walking route passes by the castle, and this brings in visitors with interests in the natural heritage who might not otherwise know about the castle.

The castle is home to an interesting variety of wildlife, including most notably bats in the tower house's basement vaults.

Spiritual Overview:

The castle clearly had a chapel of some significance in Finnart's day, for its 'chapel-geir' was appropriated by James V after Finnart's downfall. The precise location of that chapel is not known today, although the SE tower is regarded as the most likely.

Today the castle fulfils no observable role. Until recently it was used for wedding ceremonies, but this has now ceased.

The castle is supposedly haunted, and the most popular apparition is Mary Queen of Scots (headless naturally). Stewards residing in Andrew Hay's house in the outer court have been bothered by a poltergeist hurling things about, and the writer knows of at least one recent exorcism.

Aesthetic Overview

The castle is remarkably well hidden. It is visible from a distance only from the south, from the mill in the Nethan Valley way below, where it takes on the appearance of a ruined towered citadel dominating the skyline. This must always have been the principal approach.

The castle is only truly appreciated by the visitor on arrival at the car-park, on the hill overlooking the complex from its western side. That knoll provides the perfect viewpoint, with the castle's impressive form and monumental scale laid out below. Finnart's great tower house takes centre-stage, and the whole stage-set is fringed by dense and attractive woodland, with the deep rocky Nethan Gorge lurking way below.

The outer court would originally have been an eye-catching formal garden. The timber bridge across the centre of the great ditch is somewhat misleading, given that the great ditch was originally crossed via a drawbridge at the ditch's northern end.

The inner court is likewise largely grass; would that its attractive stone-flagged surface could be uncovered again, for this must have been a stunning feature in the castle's hey-day.

The tower house's frontal façade remains impressive, despite the passing of the centuries, particularly its wall-head battlement rising from a double row of corbels arranged in a chequer pattern, with turrets at each corner and in the middle.

Internally, the great tower has an interesting array of spaces, some dark and mysterious (particularly the basement vaults), others marginally more welcoming. Finnart's main chamber, his hall, is somewhat sterile and dank, lacking that 'wow' factor it undoubtedly had in its hey-day. The tower's highlight today is the stair up to the top and the views out therefrom, though visitors are not permitted to ascend the frontal wall-head and look back across the great ditch to the outer court.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Was there an earlier castle on the site prior to Finnart's arrival in the late 1520s, and if so of what date and form? The entire complex is in need of a comprehensive standing building survey. This may identify areas of masonry that might suggest the existence of an earlier work. It could also potentially identify areas of masonry post-dating Finnart's time (eg the outer courtyard wall is thought perhaps to have been completed in the 2nd Earl's time).
- Did Finnart plan his great tower from the outset, or was his original intention that his lodging be in the NE tower, engaged with an adjacent east range housing his great hall and a kitchen tower at the south end? Perhaps we will never know, but here too standing building survey may help.
- What was the layout of the formal garden and associated ranges within the outer court? An archaeological excavation should answer this query.
- How much of the castle's design was Finnart's doing, and to what extent was Finnart Scotland's first architect, in the modern sense of the word, as McKean proposes?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

Craignethan Castle is one of the most important sites in Britain for appreciating the development of early artillery fortification. Although experimental - and it has to be said ultimately unsuccessful - it nevertheless exhibits innovation both in its planning and detailed form. Its west-facing artillery works in particular show an appreciation of the need for 'defence in depth', and have, in the caponier, the earliest extant example in Britain of this innovative Italianate gun defence.

- The castle's great tower house is one of the most extraordinary and innovative structures to have been built in late medieval Scotland. It exhibits a strong symmetry and a conscious use of proportions, and in its internal planning – most importantly its double-pile arrangement and the placing of the principal chamber, the hall, on the ground floor - is way ahead of its time. The castle is intimately associated with Sir James Hamilton of Finnart, one of the most extraordinary characters of his time, who, despite his illegitimacy, contrived to become one of James V's closest confidantes. His role as courtier is well-known; less so is his possible role as architect, though it is hard not to see his hand behind some of the country's most extraordinary royal building works. The castle is closely associated with the powerful Hamilton dynasty – the Scottish royal dynasty that never was. Craignethan, together with its 'twin' - **Cadzow** – is a key site for charting the rise and fall of the Hamiltons as the once great noble house in Scotland, just a heartbeat away from the throne itself until their loyalty to Queen Mary after her escape in 1567 brought about their downfall.
- The castle is attractively set within dense, and naturally important, woodland. Its secluded position seems from the outset to have been of particular importance to Finnart, who sought to build a residence unlike most of its contemporaries (again excepting **Cadzow**) to which he could repair from time to time, to escape the limelight and relax.

Associated Properties

(*Other extant castles of Hamilton of Finnart*) – Avendale (Strathaven); **Cadzow**; **Kinneil House**

(*royal castles Finnart is associated with, design-wise*) – **Blackness**; Dunbar; **Linlithgow Palace**; **Stirling**; **Tantallon** (?)

(*other 16th-century caponiers*) – **Blackness**; **Tantallon** (?)

Keywords:

tower house; lodging; ditch; artillery work; caponier; gun-hole; siege; Hamilton dynasty; Hamilton of Finnart; Earls of Arran; Mary Queen of Scots; Covenanter; Walter Scott; Tillietudlem

Selected Bibliography:

Donaldson, G., *All The Queen's Men* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1983)

Lewis, J, Cox, E & Smith, H., 'Excavations at Craignethan Castle, 1984 and 1985',
Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol 128 (1998)

MacGibbon, D & Ross, T., *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*
vol 1 (Edinburgh, 1887)

Maclvor, I., 'Craignethan Castle, Lanarkshire: an Experiment in Artillery
Fortification', in Apted, M R, Gilyard-Beer, R & Saunders, A D (eds).,
Ancient Monuments and their Interpretation: Essays presented to A J Taylor
(Phillimore, London & Chichester, 1977)

McKean, C., 'Craignethan: the castle of the Bastard of Arran', *Proceedings of the
Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol 125 (1995)
