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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DUNSTAFFNAGE CASTLE AND CHAPEL



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HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DUNSTAFFNAGE CASTLE AND CHAPEL

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1 Summary

1.1 Introduction

Dunstaffnage Castle and Chapel are situated about 3.5 miles (5.6km) northeast of Oban and just north of the village of Dunbeg on the coast of Argyll & Bute. Both are ruins of the Medieval Period with substantial portions of upstanding walling. The castle's position on a raised rock outcrop, at the mouth of Loch Etive, gives it commanding views across the Firth of Lorn, the Sound of Mull and the approach to the Great Glen next to a secure anchorage in Dunstaffnage Bay to the southeast. It was this strategic location, on one of the key routes from the Argyll coast into the heart of Scotland, that led to the castle's construction by the MacDougalls, probably in the early 13th century, and its important role in struggles with Norway later in that century, the War of Independence (1296-1328), and policing the Islesmen in later medieval times. In 1746 Flora MacDonald was imprisoned here, for helping Prince Charles Edward Stuart escape after the 1745 Rising.

The castle makes an irregular quadrangle, measuring approximately 35m by 30m, with towers at its west, north and southeast angles linked by a massive curtain wall, which still stands to parapet level along most of its length, some 6.1m to 8.2m above the level of the courtyard`.

The chapel, at a distance of about 150m WSW of the castle, is a rectangular structure of about 8m by 22m overall, dating to the early 13th century, with a burial aisle of 1740 at its east end.

Dunstaffnage is about 3.5 miles, 10 minutes, from Oban along the A85. There are regular buses from Oban that stop by the turn-off for Dunbeg, leaving the visitor to walk the final mile.

The castle had about 19,500 visits in 2016. Separate figures are not maintained for the chapel but it can be assumed that many visitors viewed both monuments.

1.2 Statement of significance

- Dunstaffnage has been a strategic focus in the area since at least the early 13th century.
- The castle was an important administrative centre and residence for the MacDougalls, the most powerful family in Argyll and the Hebrides for much of the 13th century. The chapel was their private place of worship.
- The castle, and the role of the MacDougalls, were central to the struggle that saw the Kingdom of the Isles, including the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, pass in 1266 from control of local kings, owing allegiance to the king of Norway, to incorporation in the kingdom of the Scots.

- Dunstaffnage continued to have an important role as an administrative centre throughout the Medieval Period for the Lordship of Lorn and the wider area dominated by the Campbells.
- The architecture of the castle fully reflects its history and importance over the centuries.
- The chapel is an outstanding example of a minor church of the early 13th century.
- Dunstaffnage retained its military importance for a much longer period than most castles, continuing as a key garrison until after the battle of Culloden in 1746. Design changes reflect that long military history.
- Dunstaffnage features as a major royal centre in a widely believed pseudo-history of how the Scots came to Scotland and established their kingdom.

2 Assessment of Values

2.1 Background

Dunstaffnage Castle is generally believed by architectural historians to date to the 13th century, more probably the earlier part of that century. That would place its erection about the same time as Dunstaffnage Chapel. Both belonged to the powerful MacDougall family.

The castle was originally a quadrangular structure with thick high walls, probably with few openings apart from a simple entrance. It was altered, perhaps when still incomplete, by the addition of round towers at three of its corners and the incorporation of embrasures with arrow-slits in its curtain walls. This 13th-century remodelling probably went much further, to affect not only the defensive appearance and capabilities of the structure but also to allow the creation of a unified, stone walled suite of rooms round two sides of the courtyard, including a first floor hall, kitchens and private rooms.

In the late 15th or early 16th century access to the castle was modified by the erection of a Gatehouse. In the later 16th century it was provided with two upper stories and a garret, providing private accommodation for the Captain and his family. Windows and arrow-slits were altered for use with guns and in 1725 part of the north-west range was rebuilt as a dwelling-house.

In 1810, the gatehouse, the principal residence of the Captain, was gutted by fire but the other buildings in the courtyard remained in use until the end of the 19th century. As early as 1835 plans were drawn up for the repair and partial restoration of the castle, and though the restoration was shelved, repairs appear to have been carried out on the walls. The gatehouse was restored on the initiative of the 9th Duke of Argyll in 1903-4, and repaired by the Captain in 1912.

The chapel, a rectangular structure consisting of a nave and chancel, originally separated by a wooden screen, is dated to the second quarter of the 13th century on the basis of its architectural detailing.

The castle and chapel came into state care in 1962, with restrictions on access to the castle gatehouse.

2.2 Evidential values

Medieval and earlier occupation and use of Dunstaffnage

There is considerable potential for archaeological work at Dunstaffnage specifically to search for evidence of occupation and use prior to the early 13th century. Previous excavations (Lewis 1996; Breen 2010) have demonstrated that there is a considerable potential for good pockets of medieval archaeology to survive within and around the castle. The Dunstaffnage promontory has considerable potential to provide archaeological evidence for a castle-toun, boat noosts/houses and harbour structures. The castle itself could clearly not provide accommodation for all the retainers, warriors and others that came on occasion, or for their horses and other supplies.

A charter of 1572 refers to a place at Dunstaffnage called 'sen down', apparently an attempt at the Gaelic *Sean Dùn* ('old fort'). This has been identified as Chapel Hill, a rocky ridge about 160m southwest of the castle, which may plausibly have been the site of an iron age dun (RCAHMS 1974: no 182).

The MacDougall owners of Dunstaffnage Castle and Chapel were descended from a local 12th-century prince, Somerled. According to the *Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles*, dating to about 1260, some Isles' chiefs about 1155, dissatisfied with their king, Godred, sought to have Somerled's son, Dugald, established as king in his place. Somerled defeated King Godred in a sea battle in 1156 and the two divided the kingdom between them. Two years later Somerled forced Godred to flee from the Isle of Man and as a result usurped the kingship of all the Isles for himself, not Dugald (Broderick 1996: f.37). After Somerled's death in 1164 Godred reclaimed his kingship and he and his descendants ruled in the Isles until 1265. Several of Somerled's descendants also claimed kingship in the same period but it is not always clear from our meagre sources which territories were claimed at any one time by any of these kings of either line. These descendants of Somerled, or MacSorleys as they are known collectively, owed allegiance to both the king of Norway and the king of Scots. This was the cause of much strife, only resolved by the Treaty of Perth in 1266 by which King Magnus of Norway gave the Isles to Alexander III of Scotland.

On Somerled's death in 1164 his lands in the Isles and Argyll were divided between his sons. It can be deduced that Dugald, normally presumed to be the eldest, was given Lorn and island possessions including Mull (Duncan and Brown 1959: 198, 204, 205). Dugald was the eponym of the MacDougalls. Either Dugald, or else his son Duncan, or his grandson Ewen, might reasonably be considered the builder of the castle and chapel. Early documentary sources fail to locate a centre of lordship for Dugald's father, Somerled. Although there is nothing visible at Dunstaffnage which can be dated prior to his death in 1164 it would not be unreasonable to suppose that

the senior lineage descended from him demonstrated their pre-eminence by literally building upon his achievement.

Excavations in 2008 (Breen 2010) identified features associated with construction of the castle in the 13th century. It also found evidence of subsequent changes over the following centuries. Two lime kilns probably of medieval date were located outside the castle walls. In the 18th century extensive landscaping took place in the immediate environs of the castle as part of the 'improvement' and redevelopment of the site.

The role of the Chapel

There are no indications that the chapel is anything but a new foundation of the 13th century. The suggestion (MacPhail 1920: 270) that it may have been dedicated to St Moluag is not firmly based and would not, in any case, be evidence of a Christian presence dating back to that saint's time. It is probably significant that there is no evidence for burials at the chapel prior to the 17th century, a matter that it would be relatively easy to check archaeologically. The chapel never served as a parish church, the normal place of sepulchre. Dunstaffnage was in the parish of Kilbride with its church about 5km to the south of Oban.

Future research on the chapel might focus on its function and relationship to Ardchattan Priory and the establishment of a diocese of Argyll. When Dugald visited Durham Cathedral with his chaplain in 1175 (Anderson 1908: 264) he may have been looking for advice on how to administer his lands, what amounted to a separate kingdom, ecclesiastically. The creation of the diocese of Argyll sometime about 1183 x 89 (Cowan and Easson 1976: 210-11) may be one of the results. The foundation in 1230 or 1231 by Dugald's son, Duncan, of a priory of Valliscaulian monks at Ardchattan on the shore of Loch Etive (Cowan and Easson 1976: 83-84) would have provided prayers for the MacDougalls and their ancestors and probably a family burial place.

The chapel obviously provided a convenient place for family worship, in easy reach of the castle. Its presence, however, may have more to do with the kingly status of the Macdougalls, their need to maintain clerks to write documents and have a place where important business could be overseen and approved by God.

The Castle as part of a network of Campbell strongholds

Dunstaffnage was the chief messuage and caput of the Lordship of Lorn. After its acquisition by the 1st Earl of Argyll in 1470 it does not appear ever to have been a usual place of residence by him or his successors. Instead, the castle was given into the hands of a hereditary family of captains. A charter of 1502 (*Dunstaffnage Case*: 81-83) by Archibald 2nd Earl of Argyll to Alexander Campbell Kere provides the earliest detailed evidence for this arrangement, detailing the lands given to support the captain and his duties, including keeping a garrison of six armed and armoured men along with two others in time of peace.

The earls of Argyll had a network of strongholds similarly given into the care of hereditary captains or keepers, also including Innis Chonnell, Carrick, Dunoon and Craignish (*Dunstaffnage Case*: 335, 338, 342, 351). More research on this network and how it functioned would be desirable.

The Castle as royal or national garrison

It was a place of significance in the civil wars of the 17th century, from 1644 to 1647 the main arsenal and supply base for military operations and other garrisons in Argyll (Simpson 1958: 40). It had a Cromwellian garrison from 1652 to 1660 (Simpson 1958: 42-47), and it was garrisoned on behalf of the Crown during the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745. These activities should be researched within the framework of a wider study of campaigning and government policy at the periods in question.

Whether in time of peace or on occasions when a larger or government sponsored garrison was installed in the castle there is much still to understand about what arrangements were in place for guarding the castle and interrelationships with the Captain, his family and servants. It is possible that the West Tower and the adjacent portion of the Northwest Range were reserved for garrison use.

Inventory of Household Furniture in the Castle in 1767

Surprisingly little use has as yet been made of this document in interpreting the castle. It was drawn up on the death of Neill Campbell the Captain on behalf of his widow and it has been printed in full in *Dunstaffnage Case*: 225-27. It contains few room identifications but it does appear that there is some logical order to the way the items are listed. There is scope to assess whether any of the material from the excavations in the castle by Lewis (2010) might be recognisable in this inventory.

Visitors to Dunstaffnage

More research on visitors to the castle and any impressions they recorded would be worthwhile. Douglas Simpson has drawn attention to an important example hidden in Tobias Smollet's novel *Humphrey Clinker*, first published in 1771. The Campbell castle in which his Jeremiah Melford was a guest is clearly based on Dunstaffnage (Simpson 1958: 57-60). Some caution, however, would be wise in considering how close to its model it really is.

2.3 Historical values

There is a wealth of episodes and prominent people associated with Dunstaffnage, including:

Dunstaffnage and the Stone of Scone

The Scots, like other nations in the medieval period, developed legends about their origins and status. For the Scots, this came to be very important to counter English claims to over-lordship of Scotland, often projected by means of their own origin myths. As fully developed in the 14th century, the Scottish origin myths claimed ancestry for their kings from a marriage between Gaythelos (the eponym of the Gaels), a son of the king of Athens, and Scota,

a daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt, after whom the kingdom came to be named. Scota, with a large force, is said to have landed in Ireland, taken on board some Irish, and then sailed to Scotland. Either Scota herself, or a descendant, Fergus son of Feradach, said to be the first king of Scots in Scotland, brought the Stone of Scone here, and Fergus was crowned upon it. He had created a kingdom for himself in the west of Scotland (Caldwell forthcoming).

We are dependent on the early-16th-century history of Scotland by Hector Boece for providing information on the early history of the Stone in Scotland. It remained in Argyll, even though the Scots there were driven into exile by the Romans for a period of over 40 years. Prior to being removed to Scone in the mid 9th century by King Kenneth MacAlpin the Stone was located at Eudonium or Evonium, which was identified by other 16th-century historians as Dunstaffnage Castle (Simpson 1958: 105-08).

Interest in the Stone of Scone's alleged sojourn at Dunstaffnage was encouraged in later times by Thomas Pennant's account of his visit there in 1772 and the identification of a chess king found in the ruins as a representation of the coronation of an early king of Scots (Pennant 1774: 355). Writing in 1900 to the Captain of Dunstaffnage about improving the castle as a visitor attraction he Duke of Argyll mentioned 'the supposed old receptical in the wall' for housing the Stone (Dunstaffnage Case: 291). He may have meant the aumbry in the vaulted opening under the stair in the East Range.

The Early MacDougalls

Dugald son of Somerled, the eponym of the MacDougall family, was still active in 1175, in which year he made offerings to Durham Cathedral (Anderson 1908: 264). His son and successor, Duncan, was active by about 1224 when he witnessed a charter to Paisley Abbey (Innes 1832: 217) and his name appears on a document of 1244 issued by King Alexander II along with those of other leading Scottish barons (Anderson 1908: 356). He was the first of the family to adopt the style 'of Argyll' and is also described as a king (Sellar 2000: 201-02)

His son and successor, Ewen (also known as John), was clearly head of his kin by 1247 when he sailed to Bergen to seek kingship from King Hakon of Norway (Anderson 1990, 2: 548). This brought down on him the wrath of King Alexander II of Scotland, his overlord for his mainland territories. He lost whatever kingship he held in the isles to his distant relative, Dugald son of Ruairi, and appears only to have recovered his Scottish territories in 1255 through the support and intervention of King Henry III of England (Duncan and Brown 1959: 211-12). He appears to have died sometime between about 1268 and 1275 (McDonald 1997: 128-29).

During the Wars of Independence the MacDougalls were leading supporters of England, implacably opposed to the cause of King Robert Bruce. As the culmination of a campaign against them in Argyll in the summer and autumn

of 1308 (Duncan 1997: 362, 364, 366; Barrow 2005: 233), in which the king won a victory beneath Ben Cruachan, he besieged and captured Dunstaffnage Castle. Sometime after 1318 he created a Sherrifdom of Argyll with its caput at Tarbert and dependent constabularies at Dunoon and Dunstaffnage Castle. The latter was granted to Arthur Campbell about 1321-22 (Thomson 1882: 534 (no 353), 535 (no 368); Duncan 1988: 242; Boardman 2006: 45). The Campbells were key Bruce supporters and Arthur was not the only family member who now gained position and lands in Argyll. It is not clear what happened to the constabulary of Dunstaffnage, but in 1358 the then head of the MacDougalls, John (Gallda) of Lorn, was granted by King David II all the lands which had previously belonged to (his great grandfather) Alexander of Lorn (Webster 1982: 202-03).

The Stewarts of Lorn

At his death c 1376-77 John left two daughters and his lordship of Lorn passed through them to a branch of the Stewarts. John also left a son, Allan of Dunollie, who although he had to accept Stewart overlords of Lorn, still retained considerable lands and power there (Boardman 2000: 232-33). The Stewart hold on Lorn continued a matter of great concern throughout the late 14th and much of the 15th century with other major local families, including the MacDonalds and Campbells, taking an interest. In 1463, according to Stewart family tradition, John Stewart of Lorn was murdered by one Allan MacCoule (MacDougall) on his way from Dunstaffnage Castle to the Chapel (Stewart and Stewart 1880: 78). This assassin was probably Allan 'of the wood', grandson of Allan MacDougall of Dunollie (Boardman 2000: 239).

The Campbell Lordship of Lorn

The ultimate winner, however, of the Lordship of Lorn, including Dunstaffnage, was to be Colin, 1st Earl of Argyll, married to John of Lorn's daughter (Boardman 2000: 238-46). In April 1470 he secured a grant of Lorn under the Great Seal (*Dunstaffnage Case*: 68-70, = Paul 1882: no 989). Lorn, created with other Campbell possessions, a Lordship and free barony by a grant by King James V in 1540 (*Dunstaffnage Case*: 70-72, = Paul and Thomson 1883: no 2305), was to be an important part of the vast Campbell empire, mostly in the west. By 1490 a cadet family of Campbells had been appointed hereditary captains of the castle (*Dunstaffnage Case*: 81, no 23), and the castle and other lands to support their position, remained with this family until recent times.

Siege and capture of Dunstaffnage Castle, 1309

Early documentary sources provide little detail about Bruce's successful capture of the castle. The results of the excavations conducted by John Lewis (1996) in the North Tower might, however, be re-examined to see if they might relate to this event, particularly the enamelled mounts associated with the Earl of Moray, Bruce's companion and leading general, and the evidence for the destruction and rebuilding of the North Tower.

Execution and burial of Coll Ciotach, 1647

Coll Ciotach, the father of Alasdair MacColla, was taken prisoner at the siege of Dunyvaig Castle in Islay when he attempted to speak directly to his friend, the Captain of Dunstaffnage. He was ordered to be hung at Dunstaffnage, and requested that he should be buried there so that he would in due course be able to share snuff in the grave with the Captain. He is said to lie under the second step at the door of the burying place (Simpson 1958: 41-42).

Imprisonment of Flora MacDonald, 1746

Dunstaffnage Castle served as a prison from time to time, including for political prisoners, most famously Flora MacDonald, the Jacobite heroine (1722-90). In 1746 when government forces were closing in on the fugitive Prince Charles Edward Stuart she allowed him to be disguised as her maid, Betty Burke, and on the night of 28-29 June they escaped by boat from Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides over to Skye (hence the *Skye Boat Song*). She was arrested, and sent off to London for questioning, but was not charged (Douglas 2004). On her way there she was detained in the castle for a few days – ‘a very pretty young Rebel’ (*Dunstaffnage Case*: 122-25).

2.4 Architectural and artistic values

The Castle, Phase 1

Dunstaffnage Castle as originally built was a quadrilateral structure with thick high walls, probably with few openings apart from a simple entrance. It occupies all of the summit of a rock outcrop and can be compared with other early stone castles in the west, most obviously Mingary and Tioram ([Canmore Database](#), sites 22355, 22511), all belonging to descendants of Somerled.

The dating of this earliest phase at Dunstaffnage and the other two castles is contentious. Simple castles of enclosure like these three were probably built in the West Highlands over a long period of time. In the case of Dunstaffnage, if the double lancet window with dog-tooth decoration in the east curtain wall is part of the original work, it invites comparison with work at the chapel and indicates a date of about 1225 to 1250. It would have provided light to the ‘upper end’ of a great hall at first floor level.

The Chapel

The chapel is of one build, with a relatively rich scheme of architectural decoration, including edge roll mouldings on its external corners and a principal entrance doorway of three orders. The chancel has had three double lancet window openings which include dog-tooth in their ornamentation. In the context of medieval Argyll and the Isles it is clearly a building of some prestige. The date assigned to it, c 1225 – 1250, on the basis of architectural comparisons, seems to be non-controversial.

Comparisons have been made in terms of its size and decoration with parish churches at Killean in Kintyre and Inchcailleach, Loch Lomond ([Canmore Database](#), sites 38555, 43477), and in terms of architectural decoration with Iona Nunnery and the south transept of Ardchattan Priory ([Canmore](#)

Database, sites 21621, 23259). Influences have also been identified from Irish churches (RCAHMS 1974: 124-25; Dunbar 1981: 41; Fawcett 2011: 157).

The Castle, Phase 2

Round towers were added to three of the castle's corners. Archaeological evidence that this was the case with the North Tower has been provided by the excavations of Lewis (2010) and a visual examination of the external elevations of the castle walls backs this up. These towers are positioned awkwardly, hardly flanking the exterior walls, and the north and west towers projecting considerably into the interior.

The west tower, and no doubt originally the other two, has arrow-slits, and there are a further six, four of them in the southwest curtain wall and two in the southeast curtain wall. It is probable that these arrow-slits in the curtain walls are also not part of the original plan. It should be noted that they and their embrasures are positioned above the level at which the curtain walls are drawn in in thickness, creating a scarcement in the internal wall faces. This may actually represent the point at which a new plan was devised for the castle. If so, the castle must still have been incomplete when the changes were introduced.

A major challenge for appreciating and enjoying the castle is gaining an understanding of when and by whom these considerable changes to the castle's defences were made. The castle was probably held by the Crown from 1249 to 1255 and the instigation of changes at that time must be considered a possibility. More likely is that the changes were undertaken by Alexander MacDougall, Lord of Argyll, about the same time as his father-in-law, John Comyn, was building Inverlochy Castle ([Canmore Database](#), site 23701), perhaps about 1260-80 (Anderson & Dixon 2011). The latter was very probably the inspiration for the former.

This remodelling probably went much further, to affect not only the defensive appearance and capabilities of the structure but also to allow the creation of a unified, stone walled suite of rooms round two sides of the courtyard, including a first floor hall, kitchens and private rooms. This appears to be a concept coming in from mainland Scotland. More locally and in the Isles, and for long afterwards, great men were content to have stand-alone halls and separate ancillary structures, often largely of wood.

Dunstaffnage, was an important, probably the main residence of the MacDougalls. Alexander MacDougall's father, [King] Ewen, had in 1263 refused to serve King Hakon of Norway and requested him to dispose of the dominion he had granted to him (Anderson 1990, 2: 617). It is possible that at the time Dunstaffnage was remodelled it was looking out on islands that no longer belonged to Alexander MacDougall.

Also of relevance to an understanding of the remodelled Dunstaffnage Castle is the castle of Rothesay in Bute ([Canmore Database](#), site 40395). It was strengthened by the addition of four round towers with arrow-slits. This was

probably work undertaken for Alexander [Stewart] of Dundonald (died 1282). Apart from the obvious, its circular rather than rectangular plan, it is similar to Inverlochy. The owners of Inverlochy, Dunstaffnage and Rothesay were all at the heart of Scottish efforts to eliminate the Norwegian threat in the 1260s and take control of the Isles. Alexander Stewart commanded the Scottish forces in 1263 that saw off the Norwegian invasion at Largs on the coast of Ayrshire and John Comyn and Alexander MacDougall were amongst the leaders of the army sent to the Isle of Man in 1275 to suppress an uprising led by an illegitimate son of the last king of the Isles (Anderson 1908: 382-83).

The Castle, Phase 3

In the late 15th or early 16th century a new entrance, a gatehouse, was created for the castle, replacing the 13th-century South Tower. It had broad arched entrances both externally and internally towards the courtyard, and a small guard chamber.

The Castle, Phase 4

In the late 16th century the gatehouse, which had possibly remained an unfinished project, was modified into a tower-house with two upper stories and a garret to serve as a dwelling for the Captain and his family. It is apparently 'The Tower' of the 1767 inventory. The main accommodation on the upper floors is entered from a stair between the tower and the hall range. At the top, it led into the tower on the right or into the hall on the left – creating a direct internal link between the two buildings. Access to the North Tower (since blocked) was provided by a door at the north end of the hall and there may have been access through the North Tower (Lewis 2010: 568) to the north-west range with its kitchen facilities. A mural stair in the North Tower gave access upwards, at least to a second floor.

Overall this suite of accommodation with private accommodation in the tower-house and, probably, refurbished medieval great hall and kitchen facilities, would have created a reasonably prestigious and sizeable laird's dwelling, given extra character and status by the massive curtain walls and round towers to west and north.

Probably also in the late 16th century earlier arrow-slits and windows in the castle were modified to create gunloops.

The Burial Aisle

The unroofed Burial Aisle was added to the chapel ruins in 1740, as a place of sepulture for the family of the Captains of Dunstaffnage. The earliest monument in it dates to the 1680s. Because there is a strong local tradition of medieval commemorative sculpture in the West Highlands – not represented at Dunstaffnage – later work like this aisle has not received the attention it deserves.

The Castle, Phase 5

In 1725 a two-storey dwelling-house, apparently the 'New House' of the 1767 inventory, superseded much of the medieval northwest range of the castle,

which was probably by then ruinous. The east wing with hall at first floor level still remained in use but the North Tower may have been given up by this time. Access to it was totally or largely blocked by the insertion of a fireplace in the north gable of the east wing.

The Castle, Phase 6

The castle may well have been well on the way to being transformed into a romantic ruin when the tower-house was destroyed by fire 1810, resulting in the Captain and his family moving out. The New House of 1725 remained in use by tenants and latterly as a tea-house for visitors (Simpson 1958: 61). It has since fallen into ruin while the Tower-house has been restored using three dormer gablets from the 1725 house.

2.5 Landscape and aesthetic values

The approach to the castle and some of the distant views are now disturbed by modern building, firstly a housing estate at the landward end of the peninsular, and compounded by a marine laboratory and university buildings on the immediate approach to the castle.

The area immediately around the castle is well kept parkland, but some of the important views out to sea are hidden by trees.

For the wider setting, the backdrop of the hills rolling down to Loch Etive remain as impressive today as they were to Dugald in the early 13th century. An appreciation of this wider setting is key for a deeper understanding of Dunstaffnage and its historical role. Dunstaffnage was the chief messuage, the caput of the extensive and important Lordship of Lorn. Much of that land is and was moorland, suitable, among other things, for the raising of sheep. The importance of sheep and the production of textiles is suggested by the annual *reddendo* (render) by the Crown from the Lords of Lorn – *unius rubei clamidis* [a red chlamys or mantle – translated in later documents as a plaid]. This is first recorded in 1470 (Burnett 1885: 20, 35) but probably dates back to much earlier times.

Even more significant than the surrounding hills and moorland in understanding Dunstaffnage's place and importance are the surrounding open sea and sheltered lochs. Dunstaffnage provides a secure, safe harbour at the junction of the vast territories held by the MacDougalls in the Kingdom of the Isles and in Scotland. Their power and status were based on the control of waterways and the use of ships. These ships, the descendants of Viking long ships, were probably taken out the water in the winter months, and the area around Dunstaffnage Bay protected by the castle was ideal for that. The name itself is intriguing. '-staffnage' appears to be Norse for staff-headland (cf Stavanger in Norway = staff- inlet) to which has been prefixed the Gaelic for a fort. Was the staff in question originally a navigational feature or sign of lordship? Dunstaffnage controlled sea access to Loch Etive, on the shores of which was the MacDougall foundation, Ardchattan Priory, c 1230. From Loch Etive access could be gained to Loch Awe, lying in the heart of Lorn with some of the region's best lands round its shores. Loch Awe is connected to

Loch Etive by the River Awe, the regime of which has been much changed by the Power Station in recent times. It is probable that it would have been possible in medieval times to go by boat between the two lochs. In 1309 John [MacDougall] of Argyll, reading himself to fend off an invasion by Robert Bruce, reported to King Edward II of England that he had properly manned ships on a lake 24 leagues long (Bain 1887: no 80). It is probable that he meant Loch Awe rather than Etive.

Other MacDougall lands and castles in Lismore, Mull and elsewhere were within easy reach of Dunstaffnage. It is difficult to give a definitive list of these MacDougall castles for any one time, but all relevant castles, including Aros and Duart in Mull, Achanduin in Lismore, Dun Chonnuill in the Garvellachs and Cairnburgh in the Treshnish Islands, were accessible by sea, and in some cases have impressive shelter for ships. In the time of the MacDougalls Dunstaffnage's harbour must often have been the base for sizeable fleets. John served as an English admiral in the second decade of the 14th century (Sellar 2000: 216). When his grandson, John Gallda, went about restoring MacDougall fortunes in Scotland in the 1350s he entered into an agreement with John [MacDonald] Lord of the Isles in 1354 that allowed him to build eight ships of 16 or 12 oars each (Munro and Munro 1986, no 5).

From the late 15th century Dunstaffnage was used by the Crown and the Earls of Argyll as a base for naval campaigns in the West. King James IV visited it in 1493 immediately after the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles in order to meet up with local lords and chiefs (MacDougall 1998: 102-03), and in 1531 it was to be a muster point for a royal expedition that was cancelled (Cameron 1998: 231). It was the relative ease by which the castle could be accessed by sea and its sheltered harbour that made it an obvious place to install garrisons in support of the government, during the civil wars of the mid 17th century and at the time of the Jacobite uprisings of 1715 and 1745.

2.6 Natural heritage values

The grassland to the east of the castle is unimproved neutral grassland, an uncommon habitat in Scotland. The rest of the grassland is species poor improved-neutral grassland of limited value to wildlife. Continued management by infrequent cutting and allowing plants to flower seems to be improving the species mix. There is a bat roost in the castle roofspace.

2.7 Contemporary/use values

Social Values

Community values: For the local population, the legends associated with the castle and chapel and their history retain some significance. Their association with the MacDougall family is important in attracting attention from MacDougalls all round the world, many of whom return to the country of their origin for International Clan Gatherings with their chief, currently Madam Morag MacDougall (31st chief). There is a strong Clan MacDougall Society of North America. The main focus of MacDougall activity is now at nearby Dunollie, the base for a preservation trust for that castle, and an important

collection of family relics including the Brooch of Lorn. It is important that Dunstaffnage should be seen as part of a MacDougall heritage package.

Use Values

Economic: Dunstaffnage Castle and Chapel have the potential to draw significant numbers of the visitors who come to Oban and be economic generators for their locality. Dunstaffnage Castle is the quintessential Scottish romantic clan castle. Oban is a significant transport hub for bus and road services. It is a rail-head and one of the main ports for ferry traffic to the Western Isles. It has significant facilities, including shops, restaurants, hotels and B&Bs to deal with tourism.

3 Major gaps in understanding

The archives of the Dukes of Argyll at Inverary have not been thoroughly searched in recent times, and it is possible that other material may be found there that will throw further light on the castle and chapel and their history.

That apart, the main avenues for advancing knowledge are archaeological. The following major gaps in our understanding could readily be addressed:

- The summit of Chapel Hill, a steep-sided rocky ridge near the Castle (NGR 880 343) has been identified as a place documented in 1572 as Sen Down, that is Gaelic, Seann Dùn, 'the old fort' (RCAHMS 1974: no 182). Excavation might hope to provide information on Dunstaffnage prior to the 13th century.
- More precise dating of the chapel and the major medieval phases of work in the castle would add significantly to our understanding of both. A programme of radiocarbon dating of carefully selected mortar samples should provide answers.
- The entrance arrangements for the medieval castle are not well understood. The prevailing view that the original entrance in the 13th century was alongside a South Tower, the precursor of the present Gatehouse, is difficult to reconcile with the available space and alignments of the southwest and southeast curtain walls. An entrance through the South Tower is possible, as proposed by Millar (1963: Fig 1), but not easy to parallel elsewhere. Millar's solution does not seem to square with the evidence from a small excavation within the guard-chamber by RCAHMS in 1970 (RCAHMS 1974: 199). Also the approach to the present entrance, supposed to date to the late 15th or early 16th century, must surely have originally been more direct and have allowed access by horses and/or wheeled vehicles. Perhaps an access ramp and large wooden bridge, like that reconstructed at Dirleton Castle in East Lothian (Canmore ID 56735), might have been in place. Geophysics and excavation should be able to provide more information on these matters.

4 **Associated properties**

- Ardchattan Priory: compared with Dunstaffnage Chapel (Canmore database no 21621)
- Carrick Castle: Campbell stronghold held by a family of keepers (Canmore database no 40804)
- Craignish Castle: Campbell stronghold held by a family of keepers (Canmore database no 22560)
- Dunoon Castle: Campbell stronghold held by a family of keepers (Canmore database no 40729)
- Inchcailleach Church: compared with Dunstaffnage Chapel (Canmore database no 43477)
- Innis Connel Castle: Campbell stronghold held by a family of keepers (Canmore database no 23162)
- Inverlochy Castle: compared with Dunstaffnage Castle (Canmore database no 23701)
- Iona Nunnery: compared with Dunstaffnage Chapel (Canmore database no 23259)
- Killean Church: compared with Dunstaffnage Chapel (Canmore database no 38555)
- Mingary Castle: early castle compared with Dunstaffnage (Canmore database no 22355)
- Rothesay Castle: compared with Dunstaffnage Castle (Canmore database no 40395)
- Tioram Castle: early castle compared with Dunstaffnage (Canmore database no 22511)

5 **Keywords**

Castle, Chapel, MacDougalls, Campbells

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Timeline

Early 10th century: emergence of the kingdom of the Isles.

1156: King Godred defeated in battle by Somerled who usurps the kingship of the Isles.

1164: Somerled killed in battle near Renfrew and his lands divided between his sons, including Dugald, given lands both in the kingdom of the Isles and in Scotland.

1175: Dugald visited Durham Cathedral, offered two gold rings and an annual grant of a mark.

1183 x 89: Diocese of Argyll carved out of the bishopric of Dunkeld. By 1225, if not from the beginning, the cathedral was on the island of Lismore.

Early to mid-13th century: Dunstaffnage Castle and Chapel built by Dugald or one of his (MacDougall) descendants.

1230 x 31: Ardchattan Priory on the shore of Loch Etive, a house of Valliscaulian monks, founded by Dugald's son Duncan.

1248: Ewen [MacDougall] of Argyll made king of (some of) the Isles by King Hakon of Norway.

1249: King Alexander II of Scotland invades Argyll in order to force Ewen to relinquish his kingship but dies of an illness on Kerrara.

1250: Ewen attempts to be recognised as king by the Manxmen but is driven off. His kingship appears to be taken up by Dugald MacRuairi.

1255: Ewen regains his Scottish lands (lost since 1249) through support from King Henry III of England.

1263: King Hakon arrives off the west of Scotland with a large invasion fleet. Ewen refuses to serve Hakon and resigns his island possessions (including Mull), to that king.

1266: by the Treaty of Perth overlordship of the Isles is passed from Norway to Scotland.

1275: Alexander of Argyll (who had succeeded his father Ewen about 1268) was one of the commanders of a Scottish force sent to suppress an uprising in the Isle of Man.

1293: when King John (Balliol) established three new sheriffdoms in the west, Alexander of Argyll was appointed sheriff of one of them, probably including the Mull and Islay groups of islands.

1296-1328: War of Independence with England. From 1306 the MacDougalls pursue an anti-Bruce, pro-English policy.

1296, 10 Sept: Alexander Earl of Menteith given a commission by King Edward I of England to deliver to him the castles, islands and lands of Alexander of Argyll and his eldest son John.

1306: Robert Bruce is defeated at Dail Righ in Argyll by the MacDougalls.

1308: Bruce defeats the MacDougalls beneath Ben Cruachan, besieges and captures Dunstaffnage Castle. John of Argyll had reported to King Edward II that, with no support from the other barons of Argyll, he only had a force of 800 men, 500 of whom were being paid by him to keep his borders. He had three castles to guard and a lake 24 leagues long [loch Awe] on which he had properly manned ships.

c 1321-22: King Robert Bruce creates a constabulary based at Dunstaffnage Castle for Arthur Campbell.

1358: John (Gallda) MacDougall regains his ancestral Scottish lands from King David II, probably including Dunstaffnage Castle.

c 1377: Lordship of Lorn, including Dunstaffnage Castle, acquired through marriage by a branch of the Stewarts.

1431: according to a late 17th-century clan history of the MacKenzies King James I used Dunstaffnage Castle as a base when he mounted an expedition against the MacDonalds (MacPhail 1916: 19-20).

1463: John Stewart, Lord of Lorn, assassinated at Dunstaffnage by a MacDougall claimant [Alan MacCoule/Alan of the Wood].

1464: Parliament proposes that, once the weather allows, the king should lead an expedition to besiege Dunstaffnage Castle (rps.ac.uk 1464/1/9 accessed 31 Jan 2018).

1470: Lordship of Lorn acquired by Colin Campbell, 1st Earl of Argyll.

1470 x 1490: a cadet family of Campbells appointed hereditary captains of Dunstaffnage Castle.

1493: King James IV meets with local leaders at Dunstaffnage Castle immediately after the forfeiture of the Lord of the Isles.

1554: Dunstaffnage used as a base by Archibald Earl of Argyll for a government commissioned expedition against the MacLeods of Lewis (Simpson 1958: 32-34).

1585: John Cameron of Kinlocheil [a leading figure in internal struggles at that time within Clan Cameron] apprehended by Earl of Argyll and executed at Dunstaffnage Castle (Gregory 1936: 229).

1625: Dunstaffnage used by Lord Lorn as the muster point and base for an expedition against the pirates of Clan Ian. Orders given by Lorn to the captain of the castle for its repair (Simpson 1958: 34-36).

1636: further order by Lord Lorn for the repair of the castle.

1647: Coll Ciotach executed and buried at Dunstaffnage.

1652-60: the castle garrisoned by Cromwellian troops. The castle was besieged by 'Highlanders' in 1652.

1667: the Earl of Argyll and Captain of Dunstaffnage agree on a programme of building and repair work at the castle. The work was still not complete in 1681.

1685: 9th Earl of Argyll launches his uprising against King James VII/II, disembarking with his forces from the Continent at Dunstaffnage. His uprising fails and Dunstaffnage Castle is taken and burnt by the Marquis of Atholl.

1715: the castle garrisoned at time of Jacobite Uprising.

1725: The 'New House' is built as a two-storey residence, on the site of a kitchen in the northwest range.

1745: the castle again garrisoned against the Jacobites.

1746: Flora MacDonald imprisoned briefly in the castle.

1810: the gatehouse tower accidentally destroyed by fire. It was partially restored in 1903.

Appendix 2 – Summary of archaeological investigations

1970: Trial excavation by RCAHMS within the guard-chamber of the Gatehouse revealed what appeared to be the external scarcement of a continuation of the east curtain wall (RCAHMS 1974: 199).

1987-94: Excavations by John Lewis (1996) within the North Tower and the East Range. Lewis distinguished four principal periods of construction or occupation within the area of excavation:

Period 1 The Early Bronze Age (on the basis of a sherd of pottery)

Period 2 The construction of the first castle enclosure (perhaps early 13th century). Evidence was uncovered within the North Tower for the curtain wall carrying around the north angle of the castle rock prior to the erection of a tower.

Period 3 The main phase of building and remodelling, including the construction of the north tower and the east range (probably mid- to late 13th century). At ground level the tower had two window embrasures and a doorway providing access to the east range. At some stage the tower was demolished to the level of the first floor or lower, and the ground floor was infilled with rubble and midden material. The tower was then rebuilt but the ground floor remained filled in and out of use. Lewis was unsure whether the construction of the East Range was contemporary with the original construction or rebuilding of the North Tower.

Period 4 The East Range was remodelled in the late 17th or early 18th century. A fireplace was inserted in the doorway that originally gave access to the ground floor of the North Tower. The North Tower was abandoned and partially filled with debris, much of it dating to the 19th century.

1999: Excavation by Alan Radley of two trenches within the cellar of the Gatehouse, prior to the lowering of the ground surface for visitor management purposes. A deposit containing building debris and 19th/20th century material was encountered (*Discovery & Excavation* 2000: 16-17).

2004: Monitoring by David Stewart of the excavation for a new soakaway of a septic tank 32m south of the Visitor Centre. Levelling materials, including ashlar blocks, apparently from the castle walls, were revealed (*Discovery & Excavation* 2004: 31).

2008: Excavations by Colin Breen (2010) identified evidence for a broad shallow ditch round the castle associated with construction activity in the 13th century. There was also evidence for further refurbishment activity at the castle in the early 14th century and two lime kilns of probably medieval date.

Appendix 3 – Significance of associated collections and objects

The following select list of objects and monuments associated with the castle and found in archaeological work there particularly throws light on its history. There are other finds of domestic metalwork, sherds of pottery, etc, in NMS.

- Lead seal matrix found on the shore beside the castle in 1991 with a design of a West Highland galley, probably belonging to a leading MacSorley, 13th-14th century [NMS].
- 7 copper alloy mounts with enamelled decoration, including arms associated with the Randolph Earls of Moray; most probably Scottish work of the early 14th century made for Thomas Randolph, 1st Earl of Moray. They may either be from horse harness or have decorated the armour of the earl himself. Found in excavations in the North Tower [NMS]. It is possible that their presence in the castle relates in some way to its capture by Robert I.
- A ring brooch, 14th century. Found in excavations in the North Tower [NMS]. Brooches like this were a typical costume accessory in the Highlands in medieval times, perhaps mostly for women.
- A ring brooch, 14th century, from the 2008 excavations (Breen 2010: 173-74, illus 7).
- The fragmentary remains of a decorated, octagonal stone font, probably local work of the 14th or 15th century.
- Effigies in Culross Abbey Church, Fife, of John Stewart, Lord of Lorn, and his wife, Isobel MacDougall.
- Chessman, carved from the tooth of a sperm whale. It is a crowned, enthroned king, in the same tradition as the famous ivory chessmen of c 1300 found in Lewis, but of 15th- or 16th-century date. The travel-writer, Thomas Pennant, was told in 1772 that it had been found in a ruinous part of the castle, and believed that it was a representation of a king seated on the Stone of Scone (Pennant 1774: 355; Laing 1857). Its present whereabouts are unknown. The only other early chessman of comparable type and quality from Britain is associated with the MacDonalds and may have come from a residence in Skye of the Kings of the Isles (Smith 1862; cf Glen 2003: 178-81).
- The Brooch of Lorn, a silver reliquary brooch set with a crystal and pearls, said to have been ripped from Robert Bruce by a MacDougall in battle in 1306 [MacDougall of Dunollie]. It is West Highland work of the 15th century and may have served as a badge of office.
- Large cast bronze gun with a bore of 3.75 inches (95mm), Dutch Amsterdam), inscribed: ASSVERVS KOSTER ME FECIT. AMSTELRED AMIE/700 A. A gun of this size would have been known in Scotland as a culverin Bastard. It is said to be one of the guns from the Spanish Armada wreck in Tobermory Bay, Mull, raised for the 9th Earl of Argyll in 1666 (Hist. MSS. Comm., Appendix to 6th report (1877), 627, no 176), but other guns by this founder bear dates from 1624 to 1643 (Peterson [2018]). The gun may relate to the garrisoning and defence of the castle in the mid or late 17th century.

- Finds, fittings and structural remains from the supposed wreck of the Swan off Duart, Mull, in 1653 [NMS]. She may have been the barge or galley, kept at Dunstaffnage, from which Argyll witnessed the defeat of his forces by Montrose at Inverlochy in 1644 (Simpson 1958: 40; Martin 2017: 14).
- 31 pieces of clay tobacco pipes, mostly from clearance work. Some, especially those identified as having been manufactured in Chester, may relate to the Cromwellian troops who garrisoned the castle between 1652 and 1660 [NMS].

Appendix 4 – Documentary sources

The earliest specific mention of Dunstaffnage in reliable historic sources is in 1308 when the castle was besieged and captured by Robert Bruce. The castle is, however, relative to other major Scottish castles well documented, with much of the material, including some which no longer survives in the original, available in a printed compilation put together in 1911 for a court case.

In 1910 the Duke of Argyll took Angus John Campbell of Dunstaffnage to court over ownership of the castle. Although Angus John's ancestors had held it since the 15th century the Duke claimed that they were merely providing a service and the ownership belonged to him. The judgement initially went in favour of the Captain, it being noted that there was then no castle in any proper sense of the word, but only a considerable extent of ruined masonry. The judgment, however, was overturned on appeal in 1912 (MacPhail 1920: 271; Simpson 1958: 61-66). The joint compilation of documents printed for the case by the Pursuer and Defender, here cited as *Dunstaffnage Case*, is an important source of information for the castle. There is a copy in HES's library and another in Aberdeen University Library (Law 3472 Arg j). Material of importance includes:

- Deeds recording how the Lordship of Lorn passed from Walter Stewart Lord of Lorn to Colin Campbell 1st Earl of Argyll, 1469-70.
- Crown charters of lands including Lordship of Lorn to the 1st Earl of Argyll and his descendants, and relevant instruments of sasine.
- Charters and other documents relating to the possession of the castle and other lands by the Captain of Dunstaffnage and his ancestors.
- Information on the garrisoning of the castle, especially in 1644, 1715 and 1745.
- Documents relating to building work and repairs at various times from 1625 to the early 20th century.
- An inventory of household furniture in the castle at the time of the death of Neill Campbell, Captain of Dunstaffnage, in 1767.
- Many documents in *Dunstaffnage Case* of relevance to the history of the castle have been reprinted by Simpson (1958).