

Property in Care (PIC) ID: PIC240

Designations: Scheduled Monument (SM90105)

Taken into State care: 1925 (Guardianship)

Last reviewed: 2011

**HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT SCOTLAND
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

DUFFUS 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.

DUFFUS CASTLE

SYNOPSIS

Duffus Castle is the best-preserved motte-and-bailey castle in state care. It was built c.1150 by Freskin, a Fleming who founded the powerful Moray (Murray) dynasty. In the later 13th century the castle passed by marriage to the Cheynes of Inverugie, who rebuilt it in stone. Upon the death of the last Cheyne heir in the mid-14th century, the castle passed into the possession of the earls of Sutherland, with whom it remained until its abandonment in 1705. The earls of Sutherland further altered the castle.

For much of its history, Duffus Castle stood on the north bank of Spynie Loch, a sea loch. (**Spynie Palace**, residence of the bishops of Moray, lay on the opposite shore). The surviving remains comprise a high motte separated from a larger but lower bailey to its east by a broad, deep ditch. The ruined masonry keep atop the motte and the stone curtain wall skirting the edge of the bailey are most likely of early 14th century date. The partial collapse of the keep resulted in the focus of the later lordly residence moving to the bailey. The motte-and-bailey castle is surrounded by low-lying ground encircled by a water-filled moat that may date from the twilight days of the castle.

CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

Historical Overview:

- 1130 - Oengus, mormaer (Celtic earl) of Moray, revolts against David I but is defeated. King David begins to settle the province with men of his own choosing, aristocratic colonists whom he could trust. They include Freskin, a Fleming already holding the estate of Strathbrock (Uphall) in West Lothian. Freskin builds the motte-and-bailey castle. A later medieval source states that David I resided at Duffus in the summer of 1151, whilst inspecting construction work on his latest monastic foundation, Kinloss Abbey. Freskin's son, William, adopts the patronymic 'de Moravia' (of Moray), and by 1200 the Murray family is amongst the most influential dynasties in NE Scotland. They are also responsible for building **St Peter's Church**, in the kirktoon of Duffus, which also serves as the family mausoleum.
- c.1270 - the direct line of Freskin ends. The castle and lands of Duffus pass through marriage to the Cheynes of Inverugie.
- 1297 - the castle is burnt by Edward I of England's forces early on in the Wars of Independence.
- 1305 - Reginald Cheyne, a prominent supporter of Edward I, receives from Edward a grant of 200 oaks from the royal forests of Darnaway and Longmorn 'to build his manor of Dufhous'. Whilst this grant may have been for repairs to the timber castle, it possibly relates to the building of the present masonry castle, which incorporated large amounts of timber in its construction.
- 1308 - King Robert Bruce sweeps through NE Scotland en route to wiping out the pro-English Comyns. He besieges and takes Elgin Castle, but whether he attacks the Cheynes in Duffus is not known.

- 1320 - Reginald Cheyne (II) affixes his seal to the Declaration of Arbroath, signifying that he has entered King Robert Bruce's peace.
- 1350s - the castle again changes hands when the last Cheyne lord dies, leaving an heiress, who brings the barony to her husband, Nicholas, second son of the 4th earl of Sutherland.
- 1689 - John Graham, Viscount Dundee, and military leader of the first Jacobite Rising, is entertained at the castle by James, 2nd Lord Duffus, shortly before going on to defeat King William's government army at Killiecrankie (27 July).
- 1705 - Lord Duffus dies. The family moves to a new residence, Duffus House.
- 1793 - the *Statistical Account* states that 'within the ditch or fosse there is a fine orchard and garden, stocked with the best kind of fruit tree', hinting that the family are continuing to use the ancient castle site. Shortly after, the castle is sold to Sir Archibald Dunbar.
- 1925 – the castle is entrusted into state care.

Archaeological Overview:

- After coming into state care, the castle was subjected to a programme of clearance and masonry consolidation. This doubtless had an impact on the archaeological potential of certain areas. However, the clearance works appear to have been restricted in extent, concentrating on the motte, the motte ditch and hall range, leaving the greater part of the bailey untouched.
- Archaeological excavation in 1984/5, associated with stabilisation work to the leaning north curtain wall, were also very limited in extent, but confirmed through ceramic evidence the 12th-century origin of the castle. The bailey and surrounding ground must be considered archaeologically sensitive.
- In 2007 a watching brief on two areas of the outer moat, one to the south of the castle and the other to the north, showed that the moat's original profile was a steeper, more V-shaped cut. However, no further dating evidence for it was forthcoming.

Architectural/Artistic Overview:

Motte and Bailey

- The motte, a massive, man-made mound, is of classic truncated-cone form, with steep sides and a wide, deep ditch separating it from the bailey. It would have been crowned by a timber palisade within which stood the buildings that provided accommodation for the lord and his immediate household.
- Immediately to the east of the motte is the bailey, which exploits a natural rise in the ground. The bailey is now a broad expanse of grass, but would formerly have been crowded with buildings and yards necessary to maintain the wider household.
- Both the motte and its bailey subsequently had stone structures built on them.

Masonry structures

- The stone keep, a two-storey rectangular tower, was built on the motte summit as the main residence. It was not vaulted in stone but floored with huge timber joists with 12m spans. Insufficient survives to show precisely how the building was laid out internally. The ground floor was probably for service offices and

storage. The upper floor very likely comprised a large hall, with chambers and latrines in the thickness of the walls.

- The keep was defensive in character, with small slit windows. The main entrance, at ground level overlooking the bailey to its east, was protected by a portcullis. The upper floor had two doors giving access onto the wall-walks of the curtain wall. The nature of the defences at the wall-head is not known.
- The keep is a structure with few parallels and thus not easily dated. Architectural details, including the shouldered lintels, the broad chamfered triple base course, and the heavily-chamfered narrow lancets, are found in a number of masonry castles of c.1300, including **Morton** (Dumfriesshire), Rait (Nairnshire) and Tulliallan (Fife). All were held by supporters of Edward I, and all exhibit English architectural characteristics. Two dates are possible from the historical context – after the 1297 burning (ie, c.1305), or later in Robert I's reign (ie, c.1320).
- The difficulties associated with building a substantial masonry structure on top of a man-made earthwork appear to have become quickly apparent. Quite when the walls started to slip down the motte's steep slope is uncertain, but repairs were carried out on certain subsidence fractures, and on the rear-arches of the windows, before the north wall went.

Bailey

- The bailey was enclosed by a stone curtain wall, which was probably built contemporary with the keep. It had a main entrance at the NE corner and at least three postern gates. Put-log holes at various places indicate the former existence of buildings.
- Apart from a kiln along the east range, to the right of the main entrance, the only surviving structures lie along the bailey's north side. Although foundations only, they included a kitchen and cellars, hall and chamber. The fact that its western portion was built into the motte ditch suggests that the range was built late in the castle's history, perhaps even as late as the 17th century. It was probably in this range that Viscount Dundee was entertained in 1689.

Moat

- The whole site, covering around eight acres, is enclosed by a water-filled moat. This should perhaps be seen more as a defining boundary than as a serious defensive measure. Its date of construction is unclear, but it has been suggested that it relates to gentrified landscaping during the 16th or 17th century, when the grounds are described as being laid out as gardens and orchards. The pretty, humped stone bridge carrying the access road to the castle over the moat at the NE corner of the site, seems to confirm this.

Social Overview:

- Duffus Castle is popular with locals and visitors, though its actual meanings and associations require further exploration. Local families still use the grassy slopes at Easter for egg-rolling.

Spiritual Overview:

- The castle has to be understood in conjunction with **St Peter's, Duffus**, the parish church, of which the lords of Duffus were patrons and chief heritors. In medieval times, the castle and the church would have been the twin foci of the parish, demonstrating the inter-relationship between the institutions of secular lordship and the Church.
- In medieval times, the castle probably also had a chapel, for daily use of the lord and household. Where that chapel was is not known.
- Today, the castle has occasionally been used for wedding ceremonies, and its connection to Easter egg-rolling can be viewed as a quasi-spiritual practice.

Aesthetic Overview:

- The prominent grassy motte, topped by its ruined red sandstone keep, and the lower-lying bailey with its fragmentary curtain wall, combine to present an impressive spectacle in an otherwise flat landscape.
- The subsidence of the masonry buildings on the motte has created collapses and slumps which are visually quite spectacular.
- The encircling wet moat with its humped stone access bridge adds to the drama of visiting the castle.

What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Was there anything at the site prior to the 12th century?
- What did the motte-and-bailey castle look like?
- When precisely was the masonry keep built and what form did it take?
- What is the date of the wet moat?

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Key Points

- Duffus Castle is the best preserved motte-and-bailey castle in state care, and second only to the Mote of Urr, in Galloway, as the best in Scotland.
- Duffus was the ancestral home of the powerful House of Moray (Murray), who in the 13th century became lords of Bothwell, on the Clyde, and built there Scotland's best surviving castle of enceinte, **Bothwell Castle**.
- The keep is an unusual example of this type of early masonry castle structure.

Associated Properties:

(other related sites locally) - **St Peter's, Duffus; Spynie Palace.**

(*other significant motte-and-bailey castles*) – Bass of Inverurie; **Coulter Motte; Druchtage Motte; Huntly Castle;** Mote of Urr.

(*other similar castles*) - **Morton Castle;** Rait Castle; Tulliallan Castle.

(*some other Murray castles*) – **Balvaird Castle; Bothwell Castle,** Darnaway Castle; Petty Castle.

Keywords:

motte, bailey, keep, curtain wall, moat, Moray (Murray), Cheyne, Sutherland

Selected Bibliography:

Cannel, J. & Tabraham, C., 'Excavations at Duffus Castle, Moray', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.124 (1994)

Cruden, S., *The Scottish Castle* (Edinburgh, 1960)

Shaw, L. & Gordon, J., *The History of the Province of Moray*, vol.2 (Edinburgh,1882)

Simpson,G. G. & Webster, B., 'Charter evidence and the distribution of mottes in Scotland, *Chateau Gaillard*, vol.5 (1972)

Simpson, W.D., 'The castles of Duffus, Rait and Morton reconsidered', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, vol.92 (1958-9)