

Drum Castle

Statement of Significance

(2004)

Introduction

Drum Castle, Garden and Estate is the last remnant of the once extensive estate of the Irvines of Drum. It is situated on a ridge above open country, 10 miles from the centre of Aberdeen. The Estate extends to 163.9 hectares. The Castle, a composite structure, is set around a courtyard and comprises a 13th century Tower with later additions, a Jacobean mansion and Victorian additions, remnants of parkland, a walled garden with later ornamental planting, an arboretum and lawns.

The wider estate consists of the Old Wood of Drum – the last vestige of the oak woods of Lower Deeside, a farm and other estate buildings, and commercial conifer plantations. The property was bequeathed to the National Trust for Scotland (the Trust) in 1975 on the death of the 24th Laird and now provides employment and economic stimulus at a local and wider level.

Statement of Significance

The key physical components of the property - the Tower and the Old Wood of Drum - are bound together in their medieval origins as a royal deer forest with enclosed park and one of the hunting seats of Robert the Bruce. Subsequently granted to the Irvine family by Bruce in 1323, Drum remained in their possession over the next 653 years. It is this very tangible and easily appreciated antiquity, most dramatically expressed in the Tower, which marks Drum out as special and different in an Aberdeenshire castle context. There are of course many other significant aspects to the property, which reflect its development under the Irvines and a fuller evaluation of the place is given below.

Cultural Heritage

The Old Wood of Drum, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), is one of the last remnants of the once extensive oak-woods of lower Deeside. It is significant in terms of natural heritage for the habitats it provides as well as in terms of cultural heritage for its historic associations as a hunting forest. These cultural aspects also have intangible form: the Old Wood is a classic example of relict wood pasture typical of the deer park/forest, with a number of veteran trees. As such it is a nationally rare example of an ancient woodland in which oak has been present from at least the late 13th century until the present day. Furthermore its timber is a tangible link to the foundation of ship building in Aberdeen in the 17th century. The wood provides a habitat for a wide range of species, including the increasingly threatened red squirrel, and contains one of the largest rookeries in the North East. Elsewhere on the property, in the castle and estate buildings, are roosts for colonies of nationally significant and legally protected pipistrelle and long-eared bats. There are, outwith the Old Wood, a number of conifer plantations which, when harvested, offer the opportunity for the regeneration of native species such as pine and birch, which would increase their nature conservation value.

Natural Heritage

Drum Castle is a Category A Listed Building, a designation indicating high national importance. The most significant component of the property is the Tower: it is one of the three oldest towers in Scotland and, of these, the most intact. Its early date (probably pre-1286), lack of later alterations and associations with Robert the Bruce make it of outstanding national importance. This, and its ownership by one family over 21 generations, together with the survival of the family archive, including the original Bruce Charters, makes the property unique in Trust terms and an important resource both nationally and regionally. The ability to understand and interpret the Tower and its inhabitants is further enhanced by the archaeology of its fabric and the proven existence of substantial buried deposits in the immediate environs of the castle.

Buildings

Archaeology

As most investigations have tended to concentrate on the medieval aspects of the building, the Trust's understanding of the full significance of its later phases is less certain. However the later development of the building, particularly the Jacobean mansion of 1619 and the suite of Victorian interiors are also of considerable national significance. Built in 1619 during the more settled period between the Reformation and the Covenanting Wars, the mansion reflects a development in Scottish architecture from vertical to horizontal building and expresses the wealth and taste of the family. The mansion has been extensively altered and represents an amalgam of architectural styles rather than a complete unified 17th century composition.

Architecture

The alterations undertaken by David and John Bryce in 1876, included a very thorough refit of the interiors of the mansion, intended to harmonise with the old whilst giving an air of antiquity. The creation of the Library in the Tower is of particular historical note as a pioneering piece of Scotch Baronial Antiquarianism, and its origins may lie in the taste of the patron rather than the advice of the architect.

The collections are an important relic of the Irvine's occupancy of the castle for, despite some dispersal in

the 18th century, they still include much which came from the family, particularly paintings. These paintings, under the influence of Hugh Irvine and Anna Forbes Irvine, are, as a collection, of local historical and, potentially, national significance. The furniture, little of which pre-dates the mid- 18th century, is strongly antiquarian and requires research before a full evaluation is possible.

Collections

The landscape, as an example of a late 18th century parkland, provides a significant setting for the castle and is an important feature in its own right. However, farming, later plantings and visitor management have largely diluted its value. The South Lawn may cover the remains of a 17th century formal garden believed to have been destroyed by Covenanters in 1644: if this is the case it would be of national importance, there being few known original examples in Scotland. The walled garden, Category C-Listed, has been converted by the Trust to a Garden of Historic Roses and, as a collection and as a focal point for visitor interest, is of regional importance: as it develops it has the potential, as a collection of historic roses, to be of national importance. In the early 20th century, the Irvine family established an arboretum, which has been developed by the Trust and, as a collection of exotic conifers, is of local importance. The family also developed an existing pond into the Pond Garden, which has been further developed by the Trust as an additional focal point to the wider gardens and has local importance.

Landscape

Gardens

Adjacent to the castle is a medieval family Chapel, last renovated in the middle of the 19th century, and which, as a Category B Listed Building, is of regional importance. The estate buildings include an entrance lodge (detached from the remainder of the estate,) the Home Farm, an 18th century laundry building and a stable complex, which are, in combination, of local architectural significance. There are a number of buildings in a less than complete state of repair such as the Laundry, Drumhill Cottage and the Walled Garden Boiler House which are worthy of further attention. Extensive traces of the medieval agricultural landscape

Wider Estate

Archaeology

survive in the form of sizeable cultivation rigs, which have the potential to make an important contribution to our understanding of the nature and extent of the deer park. A series of crop-mark sites on the estate are of potential importance, given their proximity and thus possible relationship with an important complex of prehistoric sites on neighbouring land. There is evidence of archaeological sites on the estate, which are potentially significant but are as yet not sufficiently understood to fully evaluate.

The diversity of the property in its parkland, woods, gardens and buildings hints to the visitor of the specific qualities to be found in an Aberdeenshire baronial estate. The castle offers visitors a compelling and satisfying experience, particularly through the lightness of its interior, whilst its easily recognisable phased construction ensures that it is a regionally important educational and interpretive resource. The Walled Garden, through its collection of historic roses, is a focal point for visitor interest in the region.

The Old Wood and Estate, through diversity of habitat, the presence of waymarked trails and proximity to the major population centre of Aberdeen, is a locally important destination and educational resource. It is a spiritual home to those from around the world who bear the name Irvine. As an entity, the property contributes, through its status as an historic building, a tourist destination and a community resource, to Deeside's sense of cultural identity. It is a source of employment in the local communities. The castle is, by virtue of its proximity to Europe's Oil Capital, Aberdeen, of regional importance in the commercial hire of historic properties.

*Visitor
Education*

Social and Economic