

= Urquhart Castle =

Urquhart Castle (listen ; Scottish Gaelic : Caisteal na Sròine) sits beside Loch Ness in the Highlands of Scotland . The castle is on the A82 road , 21 kilometres (13 mi) south @-@ west of Inverness and 2 kilometres (1 @.@ 2 mi) east of the village of Drumnadrochit .

The present ruins date from the 13th to the 16th centuries , though built on the site of an early medieval fortification . Founded in the 13th century , Urquhart played a role in the Wars of Scottish Independence in the 14th century . It was subsequently held as a royal castle , and was raided on several occasions by the MacDonald Earls of Ross . The castle was granted to the Clan Grant in 1509 , though conflict with the MacDonalds continued . Despite a series of further raids the castle was strengthened , only to be largely abandoned by the middle of the 17th century . Urquhart was partially destroyed in 1692 to prevent its use by Jacobite forces , and subsequently decayed . In the 20th century it was placed in state care and opened to the public : it is now one of the most @-@ visited castles in Scotland .

The castle , situated on a headland overlooking Loch Ness , is one of the largest in Scotland in area . It was approached from the west and defended by a ditch and drawbridge . The buildings of the castle were laid out around two main enclosures on the shore . The northern enclosure or Nether Bailey includes most of the more intact structures , including the gatehouse , and the five @-@ storey Grant Tower at the north end of the castle . The southern enclosure or Upper Bailey , sited on higher ground , comprises the scant remains of earlier buildings .

= = History = =

= = = Early Middle Ages = = =

The name Urquhart derives from the 7th @-@ century form Airdchartdan , itself a mix of Gaelic air (by) and Old Welsh cardden (thicket or wood) . Pieces of vitrified stone , subjected to intense heat and characteristic of early medieval fortification , had been discovered at Urquhart from the early 20th century . Speculation that Urquhart may have been the fortress of Bridei son of Maelchon , king of the northern Picts , led Professor Leslie Alcock to undertake excavations in 1983 . Adomnán 's Life of Columba records that St. Columba visited Bridei some time between 562 and 586 , though little geographical detail is given . Adomnán also relates that during the visit , Columba converted a Pictish nobleman named Emchath , who was on his deathbed , his son Virolec , and their household , at a place called Airdchartdan . The excavations , supported by radiocarbon dating , indicated that the rocky knoll at the south @-@ west corner of the castle had been the site of an extensive fort between the 5th and 11th centuries . The findings led Professor Alcock to conclude that Urquhart is most likely to have been the site of Emchath 's residence , rather than that of Bridei who is more likely to have been based at Inverness , either at the site of the castle or at Craig Phadrig to the west .

= = = The early castle = = =

Some sources state that William the Lion had a royal castle at Urquhart in the 12th century , though Professor Alcock finds no evidence for this . In the 12th and 13th centuries , the Meic Uilleim (MacWilliams) , descendents of Malcolm III , staged a series of rebellions against David I and his successors . The last of these rebellions was put down in 1229 , and to maintain order Alexander II granted Urquhart to his Hostarius (usher or door @-@ ward) , Thomas de Lundin . On de Lundin 's death a few years later it passed to his son Alan Durward . It is considered likely that the original castle was built soon after this time , centred on the motte at the south @-@ west of the site . In 1275 , after Alan 's death , the king granted Urquhart to John II Comyn , Lord of Badenoch .

The first documentary record of Urquhart Castle occurs in 1296 , when it was captured by Edward I of England . Edward 's invasion marked the beginning of the Wars of Scottish Independence , which

would go on intermittently until 1357 . Edward appointed Sir William fitz Warin as constable to hold the castle for the English . In 1297 he was ambushed by Sir Andrew de Moray while returning from Inverness , and Moray subsequently laid siege to the castle , launching an unsuccessful night attack . The English must have been dislodged soon after , since in 1298 Urquhart was again controlled by the Scots . In 1303 Sir Alexander de Forbes failed to hold off another English assault . This time Edward installed as governor Alexander Comyn , brother of John , as the family had sided with the English against Robert Bruce . Following his murder of the Red Comyn in 1306 , Bruce completed his defeat of the Comyns when he marched through the Great Glen in 1307 , taking the castles of Inverlochy , Urquhart and Inverness . After this time Urquhart became a royal castle , held for the crown by a series of constables .

Sir Robert Lauder of Quarrelwood was constable of Urquhart Castle in 1329 . After fighting at the Battle of Halidon Hill in 1333 , where the Scots were defeated , Lauder returned to hold Urquhart against another threatened English invasion . It is recorded as being one of only five castles in Scotland held by the Scots at this time . In 1342 , David II spent the summer hunting at Urquhart , the only king to have stayed here .

Over the next two hundred years , the Great Glen was raided frequently by the MacDonald Lords of the Isles , powerful rulers of a semi @-@ independent kingdom in western Scotland , with a claim to the earldom of Ross . In 1395 , Domhnall of Islay seized Urquhart Castle from the crown , and managed to retain it for more than 15 years . In 1411 , he marched through the glen to take on the king 's supporters at the Battle of Harlaw . Although an indecisive battle , Domhnall subsequently lost the initiative and the crown was soon back in control of Urquhart . In 1437 Domhnall 's son Alexander , now Earl of Ross , raided around Glen Urquhart but could not take the castle . Royal funds were granted to shore up the castle 's defences . Alexander 's son John succeeded his father in 1449 , aged 16 . In 1452 he too led a raid up the Great Glen , seizing Urquhart , and subsequently obtained a grant of the lands and castle of Urquhart for life . However , in 1462 John made an agreement with Edward IV of England against the Scottish King James III . When this became known to James in 1476 , John was stripped of his titles , and Urquhart was turned over to an ally , the Earl of Huntly .

= = = The Grants = = =

Huntly brought in Sir Duncan Grant of Freuchie to restore order to the area around Urquhart Castle . His son John Grant of Freuchie (d.1538) was given a five @-@ year lease of the Glen Urquhart estate in 1502 . In 1509 , Urquhart Castle , along with the estates of Glen Urquhart and Glenmoriston , was granted by James IV to John Grant in perpetuity , on condition that he repair and rebuild the castle . The Grants maintained their ownership of the castle until 1912 , although the raids from the west continued . In 1513 , following the disaster of Flodden , Sir Donald MacDonald of Lochalsh attempted to gain from the disarray in Scotland by claiming the Lordship of the Isles and occupying Urquhart Castle . Grant regained the castle before 1517 , but not before the MacDonalds had driven off 300 cattle and 1 @,@ 000 sheep , as well as looting the castle of provisions . Grant unsuccessfully attempted to claim damages from MacDonald . James Grant of Freuchie (d.1553) succeeded his father , and in 1544 became involved with Huntly and Clan Fraser in a feud with the Macdonalds of Clanranald , which culminated in the Battle of the Shirts . In retaliation , the MacDonalds and their allies the Camerons attacked and captured Urquhart in 1545 . Known as the " Great Raid " , this time the MacDonalds succeeded in taking 2 @,@ 000 cattle , as well as hundreds of other animals , and stripped the castle of its furniture , cannon , and even the gates . Grant regained the castle , and was also awarded Cameron lands as recompense .

The Great Raid proved to be the last raid . In 1527 , the historian Hector Boece wrote of the " rewinous wallis " of Urquhart , but by the close of the 16th century Urquhart had been rebuilt by the Grants , now a powerful force in the Highlands . Repairs and remodelling continued as late as 1623 , although the castle was no longer a favoured residence . In 1644 a mob of Covenanters (Presbyterian agitators) broke into the castle when Lady Mary Grant was staying , robbing her and turning her out for her adherence to Episcopalianism . An inventory taken in 1647 shows the castle

virtually empty . When Oliver Cromwell invaded Scotland in 1650 , he disregarded Urquhart in favour of building forts at either end of the Great Glen .

When James VII was deposed in the Revolution of 1688 , Ludovic Grant of Freuchie sided with William of Orange and garrisoned the castle with 200 of his own soldiers . Though lacking weapons they were well @-@ provisioned and , when a force of 500 Jacobites (supporters of the exiled James) laid siege , the garrison were able to hold out until after the defeat of the main Jacobite force at Cromdale in May 1690 . When the soldiers finally left they blew up the gatehouse to prevent reoccupation of the castle by the Jacobites . Large blocks of collapsed masonry are still visible beside the remains of the gatehouse . Parliament ordered £ 2 @,@ 000 compensation to be paid to Grant , but no repairs were undertaken . Subsequent plundering of the stonework and other materials for re @-@ use by locals further reduced the ruins , and the Grant Tower partially collapsed following a storm in 1715 .

= = = Later history = = =

By the 1770s the castle was roofless , and was regarded as a romantic ruin by 19th @-@ century painters and visitors to the Highlands . In 1884 the castle came under the control of Caroline , Dowager Countess of Seafield , widow of the 7th Earl of Seafield , on the death of her son the 8th Earl . On Lady Seafield 's death in 1911 her will instructed that Urquhart Castle be entrusted into state care , and in October 1913 responsibility for the castle 's upkeep was transferred to the Commissioners of His Majesty 's Works and Public Buildings . Historic Scotland , the successor to the Office of Works , continues to maintain the castle , which is a category A listed building and a scheduled monument in recognition of its national significance .

In 1994 Historic Scotland proposed construction of a new visitor centre and car park to alleviate the problems of parking on the main A82 road . Strong local opposition led to a public inquiry , which approved the proposals in 1998 . The new building is sunk into the embankment below the road , with provision for parking on the roof of the structure . The visitor centre includes a display on the history of the site , including a series of replicas from the medieval period ; a cinema ; a restaurant ; and shop . The castle is open all year , and can also host wedding ceremonies . In 2011 more than 315 @,@ 000 people visited Urquhart Castle , making it Historic Scotland 's third most visited site after the castles of Edinburgh and Stirling .

= = Description = =

Urquhart Castle is sited on Strone Point , a triangular promontory on the north @-@ western shore of Loch Ness , and commands the route along this side of the Great Glen as well as the entrance to Glen Urquhart . The castle is quite close to water level , though there are low cliffs along the north @-@ east sides of the promontory . There is considerable room for muster on the inland side , where a " castle @-@ town " of service buildings would originally have stood , as well as gardens and orchards in the 17th century . Beyond this area the ground rises steeply to the north @-@ west , up to the visitor centre and the A82 . A dry moat , 30 metres (98 ft) across at its widest , defends the landward approach , possibly excavated in the early Middle Ages . A stone @-@ built causeway provides access , with a drawbridge formerly crossing the gap at the centre . The castle side of the causeway was formerly walled @-@ in , forming an enclosed space similar to a barbican .

Urquhart is one of the largest castles in Scotland in area . The walled portion of the castle is shaped roughly like a figure @-@ 8 aligned northeast @-@ southwest along the bank of the loch , around 150 by 46 metres (492 by 151 ft) , forming two baileys (enclosures) : the Nether Bailey to the north , and the Upper Bailey to the south . The curtain walls of both enclosures date largely to the 14th century , though much augmented by later building , particularly to the north where most of the remaining structures are located .

= = = Nether Bailey = = =

The 16th @-@ century gatehouse is on the inland side of the Nether Bailey , and comprises twin D @-@ plan towers flanking an arched entrance passage . Formerly the passage was defended by a portcullis and a double set of doors , with guard rooms either side . Over the entrance are a series of rooms which may have served as accommodation for the castle 's keeper . Collapsed masonry surrounds the gatehouse , dating from its destruction after 1690 .

The Nether Bailey , the main focus of activity in the castle since around 1400 , is anchored at its northern tip by the Grant Tower , the main tower house or keep . The tower measures 12 by 11 metres (39 by 36 ft) , and has walls up to 3 metres (9 @. @ 8 ft) thick . The tower rests on 14th @-@ century foundations , but is largely the result of 16th @-@ century rebuilding . Originally of five storeys , it remains the tallest portion of the castle despite the southern wall collapsing in a storm in the early 18th century . The standing parts of the parapet , remodelled in the 1620s , show that the corners of the tower were topped by corbelled bartizans (turrets) . Above the main door on the west , and the postern to the east , are machicolations , narrow slots through which objects could be dropped on attackers . The western door is also protected by its own ditch and drawbridge , accessed from a cobbled " Inner Close " separated from the main bailey by a gate . The surviving interior sections can still be accessed via the circular staircase built into the east wall of the tower . The interior would have comprised a hall on the first floor , with rooms on another two floors above , and attic chambers in the turrets . Rooms on the main floors have large 16th @-@ century windows , though with small pistol @-@ holes below to allow for defence .

To the south of the tower is a range of buildings built against the thick , buttressed , 14th @-@ century curtain wall . The great hall occupied the central part of this range , with the lord 's private apartments of great chamber and solar in the block to the north , and kitchens to the south . The foundations of a rectangular building stand on a rocky mound within the Nether Bailey , tentatively identified as a chapel .

= = = Upper Bailey = = =

The Upper Bailey is focused on the rocky mound at the south @-@ west corner of the castle . The highest part of the headland , this mound is the site of the earliest defences at Urquhart . Vitrified material , characteristic of early medieval fortification , was discovered on the slopes of the mound , indicating the site of the early medieval fortification identified by Professor Alcock . In the 13th century , the mound became the motte of the original castle built by the Durwards , and the surviving walls represent a " shell keep " (a hollow enclosure) of this date . These ruins are fragmentary , but indicate that there were towers to the north and south of the shell keep .

A 16th @-@ century water gate in the eastern wall of the Upper Bailey gives access to the shore of the loch . The adjacent buildings may have housed the stables . To the south of this , opposite the motte , is the base of a doocot (pigeon house) and the scant remains of 13th @-@ century buildings , possibly once a great hall but more recently re @-@ used as a smithy .