

EXTRACTS FROM NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND PROJECT OUTLINE FOR FALKLAND PALACE HISTORIC BUILDING SURVEY

Background

As the only Scottish, historic royal palace still in Crown possession which is not managed by the state, but by the Trust as Deputy Keeper, the Palace of Falkland has a unique status in the Trust portfolio. As a favoured residence of many of the Stewart kings, and jointure house of influential queens, Falkland ranks alongside royal seats such as the Palaces of Stirling and Linlithgow. Yet despite the fact that buildings such as these are recognized as major cultural, architectural and historic national assets, our understanding of the nature and significance of the constituent elements of Falkland Palace remains very broad-brush, as no detailed, modern examination of the historic fabric or documentary archive has ever been undertaken.

The 19th-century 're-imagining' of Falkland Palace, with the substantial structural, functional and decorative changes that entailed, now dominates the histories we share with the public, as does an over-strong focus on the relationship with Mary Queen of Scots. Our lack of detailed architectural, cultural and historical knowledge of the whole life-span of the palace complex impoverishes our communication of the significance of Falkland's role in Scottish history to the public.

Recommendation

It is recommended that a full Historic Building Survey (HBS) is undertaken, comprising building recording and analysis, tree-ring dating of historic timber, and documentary research. Full funding will be required for this and with the availability of current funding it is proposed that the dendrochronological analyses and documentary research be carried out now.

The property and its significance

The palace complex sits at the heart of the Royal Burgh of Falkland. In royal hands since 1425, the property includes the ruins of 14th-century Falkland Castle, two remaining ranges of Falkland Palace, with possible mid 15th-century origins, the Royal Tennis Court (16th-century) and King's Stables (a multi-phase building of uncertain date) and the archaeological sites of demolished Palace ranges and gardens and the 17th-century Nether Palace of Falkland. The Palace is perhaps best known for James V's spectacular reworking in the French Renaissance style, heavily influenced by his experience of the architecture of the great seats of royalty and the high aristocracy during a sojourn with the French royal court in the Loire valley and Paris Basin. Designed as a clear statement of his status as a cultured European prince, the Renaissance courtyard facades of Falkland Palace are considered to be the most sophisticated of all the royal residences and the most advanced example of Renaissance architectural design in the British Isles at this date. Their significance is thus of European level, comparing well with their early 16th-century French and Italian counterparts.

The Palace, King's Stables and Royal Tennis Court are all Category A Listed Buildings, while the garden walls are Category B. With the exception of the S range and gatehouse of the Palace, all of these are also designated as a Scheduled Ancient

Monument of national importance. The gardens form part of the Scheduled Monument and are also recognized as of national importance in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland.

The Trust's Portfolio Review identified Falkland Palace as of exceptional heritage significance, with the highest possible score within that class. It is therefore one of the five most important historic buildings in the Trust estate.

Anticipated Outcomes

The results of the project will provide the first part of a key tool for effective and efficient conservation management of Falkland Palace and its associated buildings, and for facilitating potential enhancement and development of the property in the future. A greatly enhanced understanding of their nature and significance of the Palace, will provide a resource of great benefit not just to Trust conservation staff but to a wide range of external communities of interest, long into the future. In addition, the vast body of new knowledge emerging from the project will contribute towards considerable enhancement of visitor understanding and enjoyment, as it can be drawn into a wide range of communicative media at many different levels.

Justification

Recent and current state-funded research projects at Stirling and Linlithgow are demonstrating the depth, quality and value of information that may be drawn out from modern analytical techniques, and provide an active professional context in which to address the issues at Falkland. Being able to benefit from this current focus on comparable buildings from the same cultural/historical context is important, before specialists move on to other projects and the focus moves on to other topics. The project is therefore timeous.

Organisational Impact

The results of the Phase 1 HBS will provide a key tool for effective and efficient conservation management of Falkland Palace and its associated buildings, and for facilitating potential enhancement and development of the property in the future. The HBS will support and inform the preparation of a Development Plan for the property, which is one of the key initiatives in the 2015 Property Operational Plan.

The results of the dendrochronological dating and historical research will feed into any future project to undertake detailed building plans, elevations and sections. Our record of the existing fabric will be far more comprehensive, so that in the event of potential loss in the future, whether that be, for example, through natural processes of erosion or a catastrophic event such as the Glasgow Art School fire, Falkland's cultural assets will have been preserved for posterity in a virtual sense.

The results of the project will undoubtedly enhance visitor understanding and enjoyment of the property well into the future, as our ability to share the stories of Falkland will be greatly advanced.

Project Description

The HBS of Falkland Palace and associated buildings is one of the key initiatives identified in the 2015 Property Operational Plan. Phase 1 will consist of detailed a tree-ring dating programme for the S range and Stables roofs, chapel doors and screen; and a complementary programme of documentary research.

As a small-scale, pilot exercise, archaeological recording and analysis was built into a repointing project on the courtyard façade of the E range in 2013. Given the high profile Falkland Palace has in traditional accounts of the architectural history of Scotland, the amount of new information that emerged from that study was not only surprising, but of a fundamental nature, highlighting the fact that much received wisdom about the various contributions made to the fabric by Kings James II to V and by Queen Marie de Gueldres deserves to be re-evaluated. Not only was evidence for previously unknown, long-demolished features of the E range identified, and for complex restructuring of the rooms within it over time, but the possibility that much surviving fabric is rather older than previously suspected also became evident.

Assessment of the potential for sampling and analysis of surviving historic doors and the baluster screen in the chapel, and roof timbers in the King's Stables, S range and gatehouse, has demonstrated that all but the last have very strong potential to clarify the chronological phasing of the structural development of the buildings. In addition, a sampling programme would cast light on the specific nature of royal procurement of timber in the medieval period, which will complement the recent research on the timber elements of Stirling Palace.

Preliminary assessment of the historic archive relating to Falkland Palace, which is spread across various collections, has been undertaken. Indications are that a great deal of documentary material of potential relevance to building campaigns, functional layout and cultural context survives. Significantly, much of this material has remained unexplored until now – for example, previously unknown references to use of the King's Stables in the 17th century and images of the Palace in the 18th century were revealed even in this very rapid, preliminary overview. Although not every source can be followed up during the project due to financial constraints, it will certainly be possible to examine those collections identified as having the strongest potential to reveal new information.

Project Scope and Exclusions

The Phase 1 HBS will involve dendrochronological sampling and analysis of the standing buildings of Falkland Palace, the Royal Tennis Court and King's Stables. Documentary research will focus on the standing buildings, but in order to enhance understanding of how these buildings functioned it will also pull out higher-level information connected to the now-demolished N and potential W ranges, the Nether Palace of Falkland and the Castle (both situated between the Palace and the Royal Tennis Court), as appropriate.

Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the Phase 1 Historic Building Survey investigations (dendrochronology and documentary history) will provide a solid grounding for the proposed Phase 2

recording works and will provide information on which an appeal for raising the required funds could be based. Undertaking the project now will also benefit from the current research focus on the Palaces of Stirling and Linlithgow, with the availability of advice and support from a body of specialists working on very similar buildings from the same historical and cultural context. Undertaking such a project will demonstrate the Trust's commitment to best practice in conservation management, which will undoubtedly benefit and uphold the organization's professional reputation. In addition, the project will provide excellent public relations opportunities, which will enhance the Trust's profile with a broad audience.