



Case information

Case ID	300016768
File Reference	AMH/620/2/1
Name of Site	Bucholly Castle, Freswick

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 38200 65800
Designation No. (if any)	SM620
Case Type	Amendment

Received/Start Date	23/04/2015
Decision Date	16/06/2016

1. Decision

The monument was first scheduled in 1938 and the documentation does not conform to current standards. The assessment against the criteria demonstrates that the monument continues to be of national importance. The decision is to update the entry in the Schedule as **Bucholly Castle**.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument was first scheduled in 1938: no subsequent amendments.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

The site was considered for amendment as part of 2015 Highland project and visited on 23/04/2015

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment against the Scheduling criteria has been carried out (see Annex A). The monument was found to meet the criteria for scheduling.

The designation criteria are published in the Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/planning-and-guidance/legislation-and-guidance/historic-environment-scotland-policy-statement/>

3.3 Other considerations

N/A

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria

Bucholly Castle

1 Description

The monument is the remains of a castle dating to the 15th century. It is visible as a ruined gatehouse structure with associated ranges of buildings evident as turf-covered walling. The monument is located on a narrow rocky promontory that projects into the sea, accessed only by a narrow isthmus, rising around 10m above sea level.

The castle is almost completely surrounded by precipitous cliffs and is accessed across a narrow isthmus around two metres wide, cut by a ditch measuring about three metres in depth and two metres in width. The gatehouse structure, of which just the west wall and part of the south wall survives, rises from the east side of this ditch and survives to a height of around nine metres. It measures about six metres north-south by 4.3m transversely. The remains of corbelling above second floor level indicates that the gatehouse had a projecting battlement. A vaulted passageway about 1.4m wide passes through the gatehouse giving access to a narrow courtyard set at right angles to this passage. The courtyard is flanked by buildings, surviving as turf-covered walling measuring up to about 1.3m in height. Traces of an outside stair giving access to an upper floor are visible in this courtyard and an extensive kitchen midden is recorded as lying along the cliff-top on the seaward side.

The scheduled area is irregular in plan, to include the remains described above and an area around them within which evidence relating to the monument's construction, use and abandonment is expected to survive, as shown in red on the accompanying map. The monument was first scheduled in 1938 and the documentation does not conform to current standards; the present amendment rectifies this.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland policy statement June 2016, Annex 1, pp. 48-50.)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument is the remains of a castle, constructed in the 15th century. Although in a fragmentary condition, the overall plan of the castle and architectural features such as the gateway and the corbels of a projecting battlement are preserved. The recorded kitchen midden indicates that archaeological deposits, artefacts and ecofacts are likely to survive within, beneath and around the upstanding structures. Such buried archaeological deposits have the potential to provide information about the date and nature of the site, while any artefacts and ecofacts would enhance understanding of the economy, diet and social status of the occupants, as well as provide information about land use and environment. Study of the construction and

character of the surviving structures has the potential to add to our knowledge of castle architecture in the north of Scotland

The visible structures probably date to the 15th century; the architecture of the gatehouse and the arrangement of ranges along the promontory resembles that at Castle Girnigoe, Wick (scheduled monument reference SM622, Canmore ID 9144), which was built between 1475 and 1494. However, the erection of a castle on the promontory may predate the surviving visible remains as the site is recorded as being in the possession of the Mowat family from the 14th century. It has also been suggested that this is the site of the fortress of Lambaborg which is mentioned in the Orkneyinga Saga. Scientific study of the monument would allow us to develop a better understanding of the chronology of the site, including its date of origin and development sequence.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

Castles are a widespread class of monument across Scotland. The example at Bucholly is of significance because of its potentially early origins, surviving architectural features and location. It is positioned in a commanding location, on a high cliff-top promontory accessed only by a narrow neck of land. There are clear seaward views and the castle would have been well placed to control and exploit seaward routes. Bucholly is one of a number of castles along the coastline of Caithness, including others that were built on coastal promontories such as Castle Girnigoe around 11km south, the Castle of Old Wick (scheduled monument reference SM90065, Canmore ID 8956) around 17km south and the undesignated remains of Brough Castle (Canmore ID 8914) around 18km northwest. The locations of these sites, together with Bucholly, gives important insights into the medieval landscape and adds to our understanding of social organisation, settlement hierarchy, land-use and the importance of sea-travel. The monument has the potential to broaden our understanding of the nature and chronology of medieval castles and their place within the landscape of the north of Scotland.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

Bucholly Castle has been suggested as the site of the fortress of Lambaborg, built by Sweyn Asliefson and mentioned in the Orkneyinga Saga. It was in the possession of the Mowat family from the 14th century until it passed to the Sinclairs in 1661.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a reasonable stable condition though coastal erosion presents a threat to the site. Designation as a scheduled monument is therefore the most appropriate mechanism to secure the preservation of the monument, and ensure the recognition of its national importance.

4 Assessment of national importance

This monument is of national importance because it can make a significant addition to our understanding of the past, in particular of late medieval society in northern

Scotland and the date, construction, use and development of castles. This significance is enhanced by the similarities Bucholly has with a number of other castles located along the Caithness coast, including Castle Gornigoe built by the Sinclair earls of Caithness. Comparative analysis has the potential to add to our understanding of the spread of architectural ideas, the influence of specific families such as the Sinclairs and the importance of sea travel to the location choice for such residences. Although fragmentary, it is an impressive monument located on a coastal promontory which has been carefully exploited to accentuate the natural defences of the site. The loss or damage of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the character of late medieval fortifications, and the structure and organisation of society and economy during this period.

5 References

Historic Environment Scotland <http://www.canmore.org.uk> reference number CANMORE ID 9301 (accessed on 23/04/2015).

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record reference is MHG1664.

Batey, C E (1982) *Caithness coastal survey 1982: interim reports 1980-2*, typescript. Durham.

Lamb, R G (1980) *Iron Age promontory forts in the Northern Isles*, *Brit Archaeol Rep, BAR British*, vol. 79. Oxford.

MacGibbon and Ross, D and T (1887-92) *The castellated and domestic architecture of Scotland from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries*, 5v. Edinburgh.

Mowat, J (1931) *Place-names of Canisbay, Caithness*.

RCAHMS (1911) *The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland. Third report and inventory of monuments and constructions in the county of Caithness*. London.
