



Case information

Case ID	300016815
File Reference	AMJ/9321/1/1
Name of Site	Castletown Battery, battery 505m N of Tralorn

Local Authority	Highland Council
National Grid Reference	ND 18725 69051
Designation No. (if any)	SM13625
Case Type	Designation

Received/Start Date	23/04/2015
Decision Date	10/10/2016

1. Decision

The assessment against criteria demonstrates that the monument is of national importance. The decision is to add the monument to the schedule of nationally important monuments.

2. Designation Background and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The monument is currently undesignated.

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

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

3.2 Assessment against designation criteria

An assessment of the cultural significance of the site has been carried out following the criteria set out in the Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement June 2016 (Annex 1 paras 3-6). Having assessed cultural significance, the site was found to meet the criteria for national importance as set out in the Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement June 2016 (Annex 1 para 10). Having considered the purpose and implications of designating, it has been concluded that scheduling is the most appropriate mechanism to protect the site. Please see Annex A of this document for further information of this assessment.

3.3 Other considerations

N/A

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ANNEX A – Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria

Castletown Battery, battery 505m N of Tralorn

1 Description

The monument is the remains of a coastal artillery battery constructed around 1866. It is visible as a mortared stone wall and earth bank, with two cannon embrasures. A small sunken chamber lies at the east end of the battery and a rectangular building at the west. The battery is located on the coast overlooking Dunnet Bay, around 10m above sea level.

The monument was constructed in response to the perceived threat of a French invasion, and manned by a volunteer artillery battalion. The wall of the battery is constructed of Caithness slabs and stands 1.95m high, measuring 0.73m wide at the base, tapering to 0.48m at the top. It is protected on the seaward side by an earth bank measuring about 7m wide and 1.5m high. The two cannon embrasures are slightly splayed and faced with Caithness slabs bolted to timber beams running across the width of the bank. The small sunken chamber, likely the powder room, is set down three steps at the east end of the wall and bank, while the rectangular building, which measures 6.45m in length by 3.4m transversely, is at the west end of the battery.

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 scheduling extends up to but excludes the post and wire fence to the north and east.

2 Assessment Against the Scheduling Criteria (Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement June 2016 Annex 1, pages 48-50)

2.1 Intrinsic Characteristics

The monument is a coastal artillery battery surviving as a substantial structure of stone and earth. The site survives in good condition, and the plan of the battery is readily interpretable on the ground with no record of excavation or redevelopment on the site. The wall and bank surrounding the firing positions stand to full height, though there are signs of decay within the building at the western end of the battery. The battery was constructed in 1866 or soon after as a training battery, following the formation of a volunteer artillery company in Castletown. It likely remained in use until volunteer regiments were disbanded in 1908 in favour of the Territorial Army. The monument can help us understand more about late 19th-century volunteer

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regiments and the architecture, design and construction of artillery gun batteries. There is good potential for the survival of archaeological evidence within and around the battery which can increase our understanding of the construction and use of the battery and the lives of the men who built and served on it. The battery has the potential to add to our understanding of the design, layout and function of 19th-century artillery batteries and the role of volunteer regiments within Caithness society.

2.2 Contextual Characteristics

With its commanding coastal location overlooking Dunnet Bay and the waters of the Pentland Firth, the battery was constructed in response to the perceived threat of a French invasion in the late 19th century. Following the issue of an official circular in 1859 by the Secretary of State for war authorising the formation of local volunteer regiments, volunteer companies were formed across the country. Castletown battery formed one of at least six batteries constructed in Caithness, of which Mey Battery (SM13649) and some fragmentary remains at Sarclet Battery, Thrumster (Canmore ID 91677) also survive. Of these, Castletown survives in the best condition and is very similar in plan to Mey, which was built around the same date. Other related sites nearby include Castletown drill hall (Canmore ID 182416). More widely, artillery batteries were constructed across the country in the late 19th century as volunteer regiments were raised, though a limited number survive. One of the few surviving examples is that constructed at Point of Avelshay on Rousay (scheduled monument reference SM13421; Canmore ID 190739). The monument, therefore, represents a rare example of a late 19th-century artillery battery, which survives largely unaltered. It has the potential to broaden our understanding of the nature and chronology of late 19th century artillery batteries and the history of defense and volunteer forces in Caithness and more widely.

2.3 Associative Characteristics

The volunteer company at Castletown was raised in 1866 under the influence of the Earl of Caithness as the 5th company of Caithness artillery volunteers. Castletown battery was constructed soon after this date and is marked on Ordnance Survey 1st and 2nd edition maps as a rifle range. Although they were never called into active service, the volunteer force provided trained recruits for the regular army and were the forerunners of the Territorial Army. The monument therefore has the potential to add to our understanding of the development of the volunteer forces and their role in the defence of Britain.

3 Purpose and implications of scheduling

The field investigation concluded the site is in a stable condition and well preserved. There are few management issues, other than some slippage of stone slabs. 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

The monument is of national importance because it has an inherent potential to contribute to our understanding of the past, in particular of the construction and use of late 19th century artillery batteries. It is a good example of a coastal artillery battery that retains its field characteristics, and represents one of the best preserved examples of its class. The monument is an unusual survival of a formerly common defensive structure, and can significantly expand our understanding of the history of defence and volunteer forces in Caithness and Scotland in the late 19th century. The loss or damage of the monument would diminish our ability to appreciate and understand the nature and character of late 19th century artillery batteries and the role of volunteer regiments within Caithness society and more widely.

5 References

The Highland Council Historic Environment Record Reference is MHG52816.

Grierson, James Moncrieff, Lt Gen, 1909. *Records of the Scottish Volunteer Force*, William Blackwood and Sons.

Ordnance Survey, Name Book. *Object Name Books of the Ordnance Survey (6 inch and 1/2500 scale)*. Caithness Volume 7, 32.

Watson, G 1996. *The Artillery Batteries at Mey and Castletown (Caithness Field Club Bulletin Vol. 5 Number 8), Vol 5, Number 8.*
