

The Landmark Trust

CASTLE OF PARK, GLENLUCE, DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

In 1991 the Castle of Park was leased by Historic Scotland to the Landmark Trust, as a charity which restores and cares for historic buildings throughout Great Britain. The future maintenance of these buildings is paid for by letting them for holidays. This allows many different people, from all walks of life, to enjoy them and learn from them. Parties of up to seven people can now stay here in this very fine tower house.

In 1992-93, the interior of the Castle was restored, to make it habitable again after standing empty for a hundred and fifty years. The architects in charge of the work were the Edinburgh firm of Stewart Tod and Partners; and the builders were Robison and Davidson of Dunragit.

The History of the Castle

The inscription over the door tells us that work began on the Castle of Park on the first day of March, 1590 (in time for a good long season's work before the next winter); and that Thomas Hay of Park and his wife Janet MacDowel were responsible for it. Thomas had been given the Park of Glenluce, land formerly belonging to Glenluce Abbey, by his father in 1572, and it is said that he took stone from the Abbey buildings for his own new house. This he built in the tall fashion of other laird's houses of the period, usually known as tower houses. Although very plain, it is on a grand scale, as is shown by the large rooms and the fine quality of the stonework.

The Hays of Park descended from the Earls of Errol. Their first connection with Glenluce was through Sir Thomas Hay, father of the castle's builder, who was Secretary to Mary, Queen of Scots and, from 1560, Abbot of Glenluce. Sir Thomas was also a protégé of the Earls of Cassilis, his wife being a daughter of David Kennedy of Culzean, younger son of the 2nd Earl. It was probably due to the Kennedys' influence that the Hays obtained Glenluce and Park.

Like many tower houses, the Castle of Park was greatly improved in the 18th century, when the windows were made larger and fitted with sashes, and the main rooms were panelled. Two small wings were added on the south and north-east corners at the same time, enclosing a courtyard and providing extra accommodation. Near the castle there were gardens, all long vanished.

In about 1830, the castle was abandoned by its owners, when the contents, and much of the panelling, were taken to Dunragit, the home of Sir James Dalrymple-Hay, who had inherited the Park estate through his mother. From that time, the upper floors of the tower house were left empty, or used for storage, but some panelling remained in the 1890s. The wings meanwhile, were lived in by a farmer, who probably used the old kitchen too. The wings were still in good condition in 1912, but derelict by 1950.

In 1949, the Castle of Park had been transferred to the Ministry of Works. A year or two later, the roof was renewed, but the floors were stripped out and the wings demolished. Then, in 1976-8, Historic Scotland carried out a full repair of the outside walls, and renewed the floors and windows. Inside, the Castle was left unfinished, with bare stone walls. The upper floors were undivided, and had no ceilings. For several years the Castle continued to stand empty, while a viable new use was sought for it. Such a use has now been found: the Landmark Trust's first visitors arrived on 24th April 1993.

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Restoration of Castle of Park

The main entrance to the castle is in the sheltered angle between the main wing and the tall stair tower. The door opens into a lobby at the foot of the stair, a common arrangement in tower houses. Turning to the right, you enter a passage which leads to all the rooms on the ground floor. These were service rooms, a scullery and larder (one now a bathroom), and at the north end, a kitchen with a huge fireplace on which the cooking was done. The stone vaults of these rooms are again a typical feature.

In 1976-8, the hatch between kitchen and passage was found, through which the cooks could hand food to the waiting servants. Beside the fire, there was evidence for a sway, a moveable bracket to hold cooking pots, and in the chimney itself there is a smoking board, for hams. The room in the corner was for the cook, and has a drain for waste-water. The newly restored stair to the first floor from the room at the south end of the passage was for the servants.

The main stair leads to all the upper floors of the castle. The whole of the first floor was occupied by the great hall, the main room in which the whole household dined once a day. Its importance is shown by the finely-moulded stone fireplace surround, placed in the side wall to heat as much of the room as possible. Draughts were reduced by a wooden screen across the "low" or entrance end, roughly on the line of the new kitchen counter. Another screen may have ran back from this to enclose a lobby at the head of the stair, and at the same time hide a servery at the top of the little back stair. Servants bringing food from the kitchen would have waited there, in what is now the kitchen, before entering in procession to serve the high table.

When the Castle was built, the windows would have been much smaller. They were enlarged in the 18th century, when the owners of many tower houses tried to make them more comfortable, without going to the expense of rebuilding. New pine panelling was fitted at the same time. Some of this was still there when drawings were made of the Castle in 1898, and was extremely fine, with rich mouldings, and pilasters, or flat columns, on either side of the windows. Originally, the walls would have been hung with woven cloths or tapestries.

In the north-west corner at the "high" end of the hall, a door leads to another stair, which has been completely rebuilt, having been removed long ago. This was for the private use of the laird and his family. It led only to the two floors above, on which were bedchambers and, no doubt, a private parlour. The partitions on both these floors disappeared long ago, so we don't know exactly how they were arranged. There must have been at least two rooms on each floor, because there are fireplaces at both ends, as well as two garderobes, or privies, in the thickness of the wall. These might have opened off closets, as they now open off the new bathrooms.

On the second floor, it was possible to put the new partition between the south bedroom and the passage exactly in the right place, because the drawings of 1898 show the end wall to have been panelled to that point. This panelling, while not as grand as that of the hall, was also of very good quality. It would have been too expensive to replace the panelling, but the sitting room has been decorated with hand-painted garlands by artist Jennifer Hacker, who also designed many of Landmark's curtain designs.

Under the steeply-pitched roof of the stair tower is a small chamber or caphouse, reached by its own turret stair. A door from this turret also leads into a large attic in the main part of the house, which was probably where the servants slept. This attic is now kept locked, to provide a safe roost for the three varieties of bat which in the past had the whole Castle as their home.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Castle of Park sleeps up to 7 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.