

**Appendix K – Statement of cultural significance**

This statement is based on a rapid survey of existing, accessible information. It is not intended to be a definitive assessment and should not be used as such.



## INTERIM STATEMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

**Property** Rowallan Castle  
**SAM Index No.** 90254 **Grid Ref** NS 434 424 to  
**Local Authority** East Ayrshire **PIC Region** South (Landward)  
**Collections** Stones  Archaeological Finds  Other   
Is there a separate statement for the collections?   
**Major Conservation works underway or planned?**

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Rowallan Castle is one of our finest Renaissance mansion houses. It sits on a knoll near the banks of the River Carmel, and was once surrounded by formal gardens and well stocked parkland. The site has seen funerary use dating back to the Bronze Age, and has attracted settlement at least since the Iron Age.

The monument comprises a medieval lairdly residence that was transformed into a Renaissance home - a 16<sup>th</sup> century courtyard house in the monumental style.

It is entered from a flight of steps between two conical-roofed round towers flanking the sculptured doorway. This miniaturised twin-tower gatehouse of 1562 fronts a small courtyard block.

The present buildings incorporate at least seven identifiable periods of change, illustrating changing styles of domestic and castellated architecture from the 13th to 18th century.

Rowallan Castle is both a scheduled ancient monument and a Category A listed building; the surrounding parkland features in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes.

### CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

#### Historical Overview

c1296 - the site enters history when Gilchrist Mure (Moir or Muir), is recorded in a charter as being in possession of Rowallan. The history of the Mures in Ayrshire can however, be dated back to at least 1260. He is presumed to have built a castle, the only real vestige of which is the tower at the NE corner.

14<sup>th</sup> century - the Comyns owned the estate for a short time, but from 1341 onwards its development is inextricably linked with the Mures. This period is rightly dominated by Elizabeth Mure, first wife of Robert II (1371-90) and mother of Robert III, whose marriage into the royal house elevated the family to become one of the most important in the W of Scotland, with Rowallan at the head of a wealthy barony.

1426 - Archibald Mure dies in battle at Berwick.

Early 16<sup>th</sup> century - John Mure had significantly advanced the rebuilding of Rowallan, before his death at Flodden in 1513.

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1513–47 - John's son, Mungo, continued his work, completing the hall and chamber in the S range, before his death at the Battle of Pinkie.

1562 - Mungo's son, John Mure (d1591) and his wife Marion Cunningham, added the magnificent twin-towered entry. This reflection of major royal work in miniature, such as the entrances to Stirling Castle and Linlithgow Palace, is an allusion to the Mure's connection with the Stewart dynasty.

17th century - saw the addition of a new external gate and the reworking of the interiors. Some music and poetry survives, written by the lords of Rowallan, both called Sir William (died 1615 and 1657). Both may have had a hand in writing a book of lute music, and in 1639 the younger William produced a transcription of the Psalms that was admired in London at the time. He supported the National Covenant. A third Sir William succeeded his father in 1657, and continued to allow Conventicles to be held on the estate, paying the price in prosecutions and fines.

1700 – the last Mure owner died, with the castle and estate being taken over by a Campbell of Loudoun.

18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries – no longer a premier residence, the castle fell to being used for accommodating estate staff.

1901 – Rowallan estate sold to Cameron Corbett MP, who decided against enlarging the old castle, and instead employed Robert Lorimer to build a magnificent new house, altering the designed landscape accordingly. Corbett was created Lord Rowallan in 1912.

1945 – the second lord became Chief Scout.

1950 – given over into guardianship by Lord Rowallan. Major programmes of conservation commenced thereafter, including the removal of the buttress supporting the E wall of the castle.

1989 – sold by John Corbett, lord Rowallan's grandson, along with the rest of the estate to Alexander George Ltd with intended to develop the estate for leisure use centred on the Lorimer House. Sold to the present owners Duffield Morgan Ltd in 1996.

To date – conservation works are continuing, and are detailed in the Condition Survey.

#### Archaeological Overview

1970's - limited clearance excavations were undertaken in advance of consolidation works.

1998 - 2000 - excavations were carried out within the ruined NE tower in advance of a programme of consolidation. The remnants of at least one, and possibly two, successive Iron Age timber buildings lie beneath that earliest stone building. This is not the first use of the mound on which the castle sits, since late Bronze Age burials were also uncovered.

The ruined tower was found to be filled with rubble from the collapse of the side walls, which survive to a maximum of two storeys. Five main periods of development of the tower were identified from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. This is likely to have

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originated as a hall house, later transformed into a towerhouse in the later 14<sup>th</sup> century, with the addition of an intra-mural stair and passage. The undercroft was enlarged by the insertion of a barrel vault in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

A buildings archaeology survey and analysis was carried out throughout the castle, at the same time as the excavations in the NE tower. This has revealed that all the ranges incorporate earlier work, and have the potential to provide information on the development of the castle from the earliest times.

The fine 16th century house is likely to have been surrounded by elegant formal gardens, and the evidence for these gardens might survive as buried archaeology. Documentary evidence for work in the gardens, including planting schemes, also survives from the sixteenth century. The walled garden is believed to date back to the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### Artistic/Architectural Overview

The form of the present castle is a slightly irregular square set around an open courtyard. The castle has three main ranges, the E, S and N. The regular alteration and rebuilding of Rowallan Castle culminated in the elegant 16<sup>th</sup> century reworking.

**The first stone castle** - the earliest identifiable part is the NE tower, which originated in the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is likely to have been surrounded by a curtain or barmkin wall, or at the very least a stout palisade. Other ranges are likely to have existed within the enclosure, including a separate hall and kitchen, but these can only be postulated.

**The N range** consists of two buildings, the earliest and the latest on the site. Both are now consolidated ruins, but in part still stand to first floor height. Both structures consist of a single chamber on each floor. The towerhouse has a straight intramural stair inserted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century when a vault was introduced on the ground floor: it is accessed from a small lobby inside the main entrance in the S wall. It is of massive construction and has been at least three stories in height. The kitchen range to the W consists of a ground floor vaulted kitchen with a banqueting house over, reached from a newel stair in the jamb.

**The E range** was probably started in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century as a gatehouse range adjacent to the tower. It now has accommodation over four floors. The range is constructed on a flat platform formed by inserting a vaulted basement in the S end, where the mound slopes away. The ground floor has two major chambers, one at either end, and between them, flanking the entry trance, are two guardrooms. It is entered from a flight of steps between two conical-roofed round towers flanking the sculptured doorway, all created by John Mure and his wife Marion Cunningham. This miniature twin-tower entrance of 1562 clearly mimics, on a domestic scale, the palace layout and double-towered frontispiece of major royal works such as Stirling Castle. The first floor echoes the ground floor plan, with major flanking chamber to either side of a central hall. This was later divided by the insertion of a small room, with surviving cob partition walls. The S flanking room was a bed chamber, and features the remarkable survival of a timber bed frame and alcove. The floor above contains a single long gallery space.

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**The S range** had been built by Mungo Mure in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He downgraded the less fashionable towerhouse and replaced this with a superb hall and chamber. The hall utilises the topography of the site in much the same way as did the E range. It sits on two further vaults, and has a subterranean entrance with a shallow vaulted roof. A fourth vault existed at the W end, but was replaced when the present kitchen was constructed.

**The 'woman house'** – the coherent planning of the Renaissance house was completed by John Mure and his wife Marion Cunningham after 1562, with the addition of this block at the SW corner of the courtyard, with a new basement kitchen. The final flowering of building work at the castle is also seen here with the addition of buckle quoins dated to the 1630s.

**The interiors** of the S and E ranges have some unique surviving furnishings and fittings, dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As well as those already mentioned above, these include wall panelling and magnificent door-cases (one of the 16<sup>th</sup> and one of the 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> centuries) in the dining room on the ground floor, along with an oak door and wall cupboard opening, leading from the hall to the main stair, with balusters at the stair head. A finely detailed panelled vestibule and cupboard existed in the solar, and although this is now broken up, was recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This room is partly plastered and painted. The two panelled rooms of the 'woman house' give an impression of the quality of finishes likely throughout the castle in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### Social Overview

In the recent past, Rowallan has held an prominent place within the Scouting movement.

It has served an important role as a publicly accessible ancient monument. From 1992 public access was restricted to enable the completion of the conservation programme.

#### Spiritual Overview

Not assessed

#### Aesthetic Overview

This is one of the most picturesque buildings in Scotland. It is approached along a tree-lined drive through rolling Ayrshire countryside. The very epitome of a 'rural idyll' - it is first glimpsed through trees by the winding banks of the Carmel, and accessed through an imposing rusticated gate into the outer court in front of the imposing entry stair.

This frontispiece is enlivened by rope mouldings, the central armorial, along with other finely carved detailing, all set off by finials above. The visitor is drawn up through the grand drum towers into a surprisingly intimate inner court. The patina of antiquity is impressive, along with the obvious palimpsest of building phases, starting with the block-like towerhouse, and ending with the delightful detailing of the external kitchen range.

The detailing of the facades has a charm and quality far beyond the ordinary.

The evocation of antiquity is reinforced in the internal spaces by the surviving detailing in stone and timber, and especially by the tranquil atmosphere especially felt in the upper floor of the 'woman house'. The interior is a warren of domestic scale rooms above large and plain masonry vaults. However, the continuity of use coupled with some of the recent

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interventions, has resulted in a mish-mash of periods and finishes, not all of which are aesthetically pleasing.

The castle stood at the centre of a great estate and was surrounded by gardens and pleasure grounds. This setting, sensitive to change, although greatly altered in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, adds immeasurably to the aesthetic appeal. There are fine views out from the castle, especially from the E front, to the designed landscape and the countryside beyond.

#### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- What was the nature and extent of the prehistoric land-use?
- Was the first stone castle preceded by an earthwork castle?
- How was the early castle affected by the Wars of Independence?
- What was the precise developmental sequence of construction?
- What was the arrangement of the early ground floor kitchen and well chamber in the S range, in relation to Mungo Mure's hall?
- How did the furnishings and decoration change through each developmental phase of the castle's life?

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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

- This is one of the most complete castle complexes to survive down to the present day. Rowallan perfectly illustrates the development of castellated and high status domestic architecture, and helps to inform our knowledge of the structure of life in late medieval Scotland.
- Rowallan's importance is not as a 'castle' as such, but as an ancient lairdly residence that was transformed into a Renaissance home, with echoes of royal and noble 'palace' architecture. This is likely to have been influential on the development of architecture elsewhere in Scotland.
- The castle has been inextricably linked with one family, the Mures, from the 13<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Mures were deeply embedded in the political, social, and economic life of the area throughout this time. The buildings chart the changes in their fortunes over this lengthy period. Uniquely, the builder of each range is known, thanks to a number of autobiographical family histories written in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Rowallan is a perfect symbol of the period of cultural flowering in Renaissance Scotland during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, reflecting the remarkable tastes and talents of the Mures, epitomising the polymath culture of their time. Their artistic skills and intellect were broadcast to the wider world through the media of their architecture. Few houses in Scotland demonstrate that link more clearly or more intimately.

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- The completeness of the later form of the castle contributes to its significance, where suites of rooms can be observed in their proper relationships, interconnected by the original doors and stairs.
- The known use of an area of the house as a 'woman house' is quite rare, evoking a lost age of gender separation, defined by their specialist work with clothes and linen. It has the potential to inform an understanding of the role of women here and in wider society.
- The interior fittings, including the bed screen and the cob partitioning on the first floor, are extraordinary survivals of what must have been a common features of buildings of the period, but are now among the very few known examples.
- The grounds around the castle have the potential to inform an understanding of the land-use history of the site, dating back to prehistory.
- Unlike many castles, it continued to be occupied until relatively recent times into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Associated Properties

**Newark Castle; Stirling Castle; Argyll's Lodging; Linlithgow Palace; Skelmorlie Aisle; Dundonald Castle; Edzell Castle; Monimail; Crichton; Tolquhon; Fyvie.**

Keywords Renaissance country house; Mure family; prehistoric land-use; palace architecture; panelling; door frames; cob; bed alcove; 'woman house'.

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