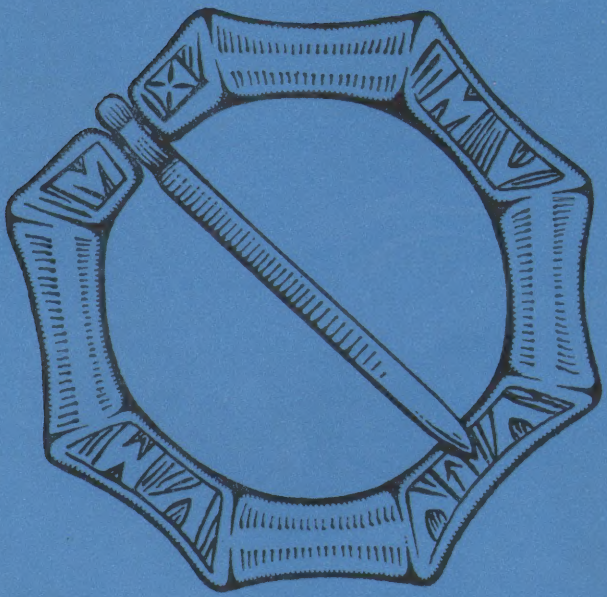
OFFICIAL GUIDE

Urquhart Castle



HMSO 30p net

THIS MONUMENT *is one of those held in trust for the nation by the Secretary of State for Scotland and cared for on his behalf by the Department of the Environment*

URQUHART CASTLE is situated approximately 26 kilometres south-west of Inverness, beside the main road [A82] to Fort Augustus

HOURS OF OPENING

	Weekdays	*Sundays*
APRIL TO SEPTEMBER	9.30 am—7 pm	2 pm—7 pm
OCTOBER TO MARCH	9.30 am—4 pm	2 pm—4 pm

ADMISSION CHARGES

Adults, 20p; children under 16 and pensioners on production of their pension books, 5p.

SEASON TICKETS, valid for 12 months from date of issue and admitting their holders free of charge to all ancient monuments and historic buildings in the care of the Department, may be obtained direct from the Department or at many monuments

COVER DESIGN

A sixteenth-century brooch found at Urquhart Castle and now in the National Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

Urquhart Castle

by the late W. Douglas Simpson
CBE, D LITT, LL D, FSA, FSA SCOT, HON FRIAS

EDINBURGH
HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

First published 1964
Fourth impression 1976

ISBN 0 11 490335 2

HISTORY

The mighty chasm of the Great Glen, known to the Gael as Glenmore, extends from Inverness to Oban and divides the Central from the Northern Highlands. Glenmore is a crack of long standing in the tough old hide of Caledonia. It dates back at least as far as Middle Old Red Sandstone times, as we may judge from the way in which the deposits of that period, which occupy the basin formed by the inner end of the Moray Firth, are prolonged down into the cleft of the Great Glen. It is a cleft of great depth for the deepest sounding in Loch Ness gives a measurement of 129 fathoms while the fine mountain of Mealfuarvonie, which is wholly composed of Old Red Conglomerate, rises above the loch to a height of 696 m—and who can say how much material has been stripped from its beetling crest by aeons of denudation? The Great Glen is one of the major faults in the geological structure of the British Isles. And though some three hundred million years, according to the latest computation, have elapsed since it was first formed it has not yet achieved stability. Frequent earth tremors at Inverness attest continued movement along the line of fracture and in an eloquent description of the 'Caledonian Valley' Hugh Miller has recalled how 'the profound depths of Loch Ness undulated in strange sympathy with the reeling towers and crashing walls of Lisbon during the great earthquake of 1775', and how 'the impulse, true to its ancient direction, sent the waves in huge furrows to the north-east and the south-west'.

From remote prehistoric times onwards there is ample evidence of the important influence that this great natural avenue has exerted upon Scotland's national development. In Neolithic days it was the route by which the chambered-cairn builders of Argyll reached the north-eastern and northern plains. In the sixth-century of our era it afforded an easy path for the two great saints of the west, Columba from Iona and Moluag from Lismore, to the Pictish capital at Inverness. And in the critical formative period of the twelfth and thirteenth-centuries the Great Glen acquired a special significance because it afforded a convenient lateral means of communication between the two provinces of Ergadia in the south-west and Moravia in the

north-east,[1] in both of which irreconcilable Celticism made its last, its longest and its sternest stand against the feudalising and unifying policy so resolutely enforced by the Normanised kings of the Canmore dynasty.

About 19 km above Inverness, the chasm of the Great Glen is interrupted on its western side by the embayment of Glen Urquhart. Its fertile soil, its sunward slopes with their good natural drainage, the abundant supply of fish in Loch Ness and game in the surrounding forests, and of fuel from the trees and the vast peat mosses on the bare uplands, all combined to make this an ideal locality for the settlement of early man. Small wonder, therefore, that these ancient folk established their strong point and place of refuge on the promontory, forming the southern horn of our alcove where now stands the medieval castle: ' a promontory run out into the lake like an arm, and the vast ruin of Castle Urquhart at the end of it like a clenched fist—menacing all and sundry'. Strewn about on the eastward slopes of the highest part of the castle area—the part which in Norman times became the *motte* or citadel of the fortress—quantities of vitrified stone were picked up in the course of the excavations carried out by the then Office of Works [now Department of the Environment]. These fragments show that in the prehistoric Iron Age, round about the beginning of the Christian era, this part of the site had been occupied by a fort built in the Gaulish manner, with dry-stone walls laced by bonding timbers so as to discipline the structure. When such a wall catches fire—perhaps through the combustion, accidental or by a hostile hand, of the wooden or wattle huts built against its interior—a high degree of heat, favoured by draught on such a windswept site, may be engendered and as a result the dry-stone walling, when the timber framework is consumed, collapses, and its materials become partly fused into a kind of slag. It is in this way that the so-called vitrified walls are produced. A famous example in the near neighbourhood is Craig Phadrig, first described by John Williams in his pioneer work on vitrified forts published in 1777.

In the Museum at Inverness is preserved the fragment of a penannular brooch of Celtic design, made of bronze coated with silver and retaining in its expanded terminal the socket for an enamel setting or a semi-precious stone. This was found at Castle Urquhart. It may be assigned to the ninth-century and affords a valuable hint of the continued occupation of the site during the early centuries of the Christian era. Perhaps therefore the old fort may still have been inhabited

[1]Ergadia is the ancient Latin term for the modern Argyll but the Celtic province so called included the entire western seaboard as far north as Loch Broom. In the same way the old Celtic province of Moravia included not only the modern shire of Moray but also Nairn [both now in Grampian Region] and the eastern portions of Inverness and Ross and Cromarty, thus extending as far north as the Dornoch Firth

when St Columba visited Glen Urquhart [Airchartdan], and there baptised an aged Pict, Emchath, his son Virolec, and his whole household. The text suggests a large establishment and one would like to imagine the Pictish chief 'who had preserved natural goodness through his whole life, into extreme old age', as dwelling in the Celtic fort where now stands the feudal castle. It is in St Columba's time, too, that we first hear of the 'Loch Ness Monster'—the *aquatilis bestia* from whose ravening jaws one of his monks had a narrow, and [as it was thought] a miraculous escape!

During the formative period of the Scottish kingdom, under the House of Canmore as indicated above, it is no matter of surprise that we should find either outlet of Glenmore strongly garrisoned by royal castles or by castles whose owners held them as trusted vassals of the Crown. At the lower outlet Ergadia was observed by the castles of Inverlochy and Dunstaffnage; at the upper outlet, those of Urquhart and Inverness occupied a commanding position in the very heart of Moravia. The early importance of the royal castle and burgh of Inverness depended entirely upon the nodality of their position. 'Situated near the mouth of the River Ness and almost surrounded by the fertile lands which lie along the Moray Firth, it was well adapted to be the centre of a not unimportant agricultural area, while it owed its political and strategic importance to the various routes which diverge from it, eastward along the coastal plain into Moray, westward by Glencarron to Skye and the Hebrides, south-westward by the Great Glen to Argyll, and southward by the Pass of Drumochter to the towns of the Central Lowlands'. The position of Castle Urquhart, on the other hand, is purely that of an observation post. It is of unrivalled aptitude for controlling the whole upper part of the Great Glen as the view from its promontory—its Gaelic *soubriquet* is *Caisteal-na-Stroine*, 'the castle of the nose'—extends nearly as far as Inverness to the north and almost to Fort Augustus in the south. In considerations such as these, combined with the no less tactical advantages of the peninsular site, are to be sought the *raison d'être* of Urquhart Castle and the explanation of the great role which it has played in Scottish history.

Just over a kilometre to the west of the Castle, round the head of Strone, is the large farm of Borlum, the name of which is a common corruption of Bordland or Borland, meaning the 'boardland' or tableland [*terra mensalis*], that is the home farm that supplied the household of the castle. The name is a significant one for even in cases where all other evidence of a medieval castle or manor house has vanished it affords reliable evidence that a structure of this kind has once existed in the neighbourhood. At an early manorial centre the remains of the castle are usually found side by side with the parochial church—the parish being in its origin just the manor ecclesiastically considered,

wherein the church began as the private chapel of the lord of the manor, and castle and church thus represent respectively the civil and ecclesiastical *nuclei* of the early manorial organisation. At Urquhart, though the castle is an early one, this typical juxtaposition is lacking. The parish church is situated just over three kilometres to the west, on the north bank of the river Coiltie. This appears to be a common occurrence in the Highlands and the inference must be that the parochial system was introduced here later than the earliest castles.

It is said that there was a royal castle at Urquhart in the reign of William the Lion [1165-1214] and the strategic importance of the site renders this altogether probable, although no contemporary record of such a fact appears to exist. After the suppression of the last rising in Moravia [1229] the lordship of Urquhart was granted to the very powerful family of the Durwards [de Lundin], the hereditary 'doorwards' or keepers of the palace of the Scottish kings. Thus the first recorded lord of Urquhart was Alan Durward, one of the leaders of the new Anglo-Norman aristocracy by whom the future of Scotland would in large measure be moulded. A friend of kings, mated with a king's daughter; lord of Atholl, as well as of vast domains in Angus, the Mearns and Mar; owning also the stately castle and broad acres of Bolsover in England, Alan Durward was for years the real power behind the throne of his brother-in-law, the young Alexander II. In whatever state he may have found it the castle of Urquhart, strategically so important to the whole Anglo-Norman position in the North, must surely have been refashioned by him in the most up-to-date manner of an age when military architecture was in a state of dynamic development.[1]

Upon the death of Alan Durward, in 1268 or 1275, the demesne of Urquhart seems to have passed into the hands of another great Anglo-Norman family, the Comyns, lords of Badenoch. Not, apparently, until the outbreak of the Wars of Independence at the end of this century do we meet with specific and contemporary records of the castle. In that great struggle it played a large and varied part. In 1296 Edward I penetrated as far north as Elgin, from which town he sent out flying columns to secure control of the chief strongholds in Moravia. Among the fortresses thus occupied is mentioned Castle Urquhart. Sir William Fitzwarine [who had married Mary of Argyll, Queen of Man and Countess of Strathearn] was appointed its Constable. A letter dated 25 July, 1297, is extant in which Fitzwarine, writing to his royal master, describes with picturesque detail how perilously precarious was his hold upon the castle and the surrounding country from the moment that the powerful restraining influence

[1]Alan Durward's seat at Coull in Mar was an elaborate example of the thirteenth-century courtyard castle, with a gatehouse and round flanking towers

of the great king's presence was removed. In the event the castle was besieged by the nationalists under Sir Andrew de Moray. We read that there was a night attack in which the garrison suffered some loss, the Constable's son being numbered among the fallen. Already on 11 June Edward had sent urgent orders to his representative at Aberdeen that the castle must be relieved as soon as possible and that thereafter it should be 'so strengthened and garrisoned that no damage or danger may in any way occur to it'. As a result of the king's vigorous intervention it would seem that the fall of the castle was respited; but not for long because in the next year it was being held in the national interest by Sir Alexander de Forbes. In 1303 Edward again marched north as far as Elgin and by a detachment of his army Urquhart Castle was reduced after an obstinate defence, the glory of which later legend has elaborated and enhanced. Sir Alexander Comyn of Badenoch, a Scottish baron in Edward's service was appointed Constable. In or after 1308 the castle was retaken by Bruce who in 1313 granted it to his devoted adherent, Sir Thomas Randolph, whom he had made Earl of Moray.

During the Second War of Independence, after the battle of Halidon [1333], and the flight of the young King David to France, Castle Urquhart formed one of five fortresses in the kingdom which continued proudly to fly the white St Andrews Cross: the other four were Dumbarton, Loch Leven, Kildrummy and Loch Doon. Our castle was successfully maintained against the English by its resolute Constable, Sir Robert Lauder. In 1346 the barony and castle reverted to the Crown. On 22 April, 1398, Parliament, with a view to providing that so important a place of strength should be in dependable custody, enacted that the castle should be taken into the hands of the king 'who shall entrust the keeping of it to good and sufficient captains until the kingdom be pacified, when it shall be restored to its owners'. In 1428–9 repairs on the fabric were effected at a cost of 40s; between 4 July, 1447 and 12 September, 1448 further expenses totalling £21-12s-4d were incurred, partly in payment to the garrisons and partly in meeting the cost of new buildings and repairing old ones, at the castles of Urquhart and Inverness. During the following years further such payments are entered in the Exchequer Rolls but no specific work upon the fabric is detailed nor in any of these entries have we a hint as to whether stone or wooden buildings were involved.

The preoccupation, thus revealed in the Scottish government, with the need to control access through Glenmore from the Western Highlands and Islands to the eastern plains was rooted in an urgent political problem which became ever more menacing throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries. Historians have hardly grasped

the full import of the conflict between the Scottish Crown and the Macdonalds, Lords of the Isles, which bulks so large in Highland history during these turbulent centuries. In their aggressive policy towards the House of Stewart the Lords of the Isles drew upon all those proud memories of the once independent Celto-Norse kingdom of the Isles, the realm of Somerled and his masterful successors whose dominions had been forcibly incorporated in the kingdom of Scotland after the victory of Largs in 1263. As independent princes John of the Isles in the reign of Robert II and his descendants for a century thereafter comported themselves in their dealings with the Scottish Crown. With no consciousness of treason but rather as one sovereign negotiating with another they bargained with English kings and in the extraordinary Treaty of Ardtornish-Westminster [1461] actually concluded a pact with Edward IV for the dismembering of Scotland. It is idle to explain away such things as just irresponsible sedition. Rather should we understand it as a struggle between the Crown and an insular kingdom not yet organically embodied in the realm of Scotland.

Such great issues, and no more 'Highland reiving', lay behind the cruel Macdonald invasions of Glen Urquhart in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Lord of the Isles claimed the Earldom of Ross of which our district then formed a part. In the struggle that ensued he won the first round. Glen Urquhart was seized in 1395 and handed over to his brother, Alexander of Keppoch [Alastair Carrach], while a Maclean of Lochbuy was installed as keeper of the castle. The victory of Harlaw in 1411 for a time checked the Macdonald drive and the Earl of Mar, who had beaten back the Lord of the Isles on that crimson field, succeeded him as master of Glen Urquhart. But the murder of James I in 1437 brought about a *bouleversement* and once again the Lord of the Isles overran our glen, though royal governors continued to cling to the castle. In the crisis of the great Douglas rising in 1452 the Lord of the Isles seized the castle and the Crown was forced in 1456 formally to confirm him in possession. The Treaty of Ardtornish led to a 'show-down' between the insular potentate and the Scottish monarchy. His eastern conquests were stripped from him and the castle and lordship of Urquhart were handed over in 1476 to the Earl of Huntly, chief of the great family of Gordon who had now risen to a dominant position in north-east Scotland. So far, the struggle appeared to have gone decisively in favour of the Crown. But the devastation caused by the prolonged conflict had been grevious. In 1479 Glen Urquhart was reported wholly waste so that no rents were forthcoming. A strong local representative of the royal power was requisite to restore order and succour the afflicted tenantry. Hence the memorable charter by which, on

8 December, 1509, King James IV gifted the lordship of Urquhart to John Grant of Freuchie [Castle Grant]—'the Red Bard'—who among other conditions was held bound.

> 'to repair or build at the castle a tower, with an outwork or rampart of stone and lime, for protecting the lands and the people from the inroads of thieves and malefactors; to construct within the castle a hall, chamber, and kitchen, with all the requisite offices, such as a pantry, bakehouse, brewhouse, oxhouse, kiln, cot, dovegrove, and orchard, with the necessary wooden fences'.

But the Macdonalds were not yet subdued. Their next opportunity came with the death of James IV at Flodden in 1513. Forthwith a new Lord of the Isles was proclaimed—Sir Donald Macdonald of Lochalsh, who poured his clansmen into Glen Urquhart, harried it from top to bottom, and captured the castle. For three years he remained in possession during which time the wretched tenants were simply stripped of all they owned. An even more appalling visitation took place in 1545, when the Macdonalds, with their allies the Camerons of Lochiel, besieged and took the castle again, burned the humble homesteads up and down the glen and flayed their miserable inmates of all their livestock, goods and chattels. From the castle itself the plunderers removed.

> 'tuelf feddir beddis, with the bowstairs [bolsters] blancattis and schetis, price xl li.; five pottis, price of thame ten merkis; sax pannys, price ten merkis; ane bascyn, price xiiij s.; ane kyst, and within the samin thre hundreitht pundis of money; twa brew calderovnis, price fivetene pundis; sax speittis, price thre pundis; barrellis standis of attis [oats], pewder weschell, and vther insycht, to the valour of fourty pundis; twenty pece of artailzery, and ten stand of harnes [armour], price of thame ane hundreitht merkis; lokkis, durris, zettis [iron gates] stancheovnis, burdis, beddis, chearis, formes, and vther insycht, extending to the valour of twa hundreitht merkis; three grete boittis, price fourty merkis.[1]'

Amid such wild conditions it is not to be wondered at that the Red Bard and his successors should have been slow in carrying out the transformation of the castle to which they were pledged by their charter of 1509. Assuming that his information was up to date Hector Boece, the first Principal of Aberdeen University, in his famous *History of Scotland*, published in Latin in 1527, tells us that the castle was then in utter ruin. His Scotch translator, John Bellenden, renders the passage thus:—'In this countre [the old Earldom of Ross] was the famous castel of Urquhart: of quhilk the rewinous wallis remanis yet, in gret admiratioun of pepill'. Nevertheless, it seems

[1]These amounts are all in Scotch money, The £1 Scots was worth about 8p sterling

clear that in the course of the sixteenth-century, and in the seventeenth up to the outbreak of the great Civil War, the Grants did manage to carry out a major reconstruction of the castle which gave us the fabric as we know it in its stately ruins today.

In the development of the feudal castle four main elements may be discerned, each of which at different times has dominated the castle scheme. First there is the *motte*, the timbered mount of the early Norman castle. Then there is the *aula* or hall, at first of timber and later of stone, which formed the principal structure in the 'bailey' or base-court of the *motte*. Again, there is the great stone *donjon* or tower-house, usually found in those castles where there never was a *motte*. And lastly there is the gatehouse which seems to have conducted a kind of rivalry with the tower-house for the mastery of the castle scheme, from early stone castles like Ludlow until it finally ousted the tower-house altogether and became the dominating feature in the Edwardian castles. All four elements are finely displayed within the cincture of Castle Urquhart. The *motte* forms the highest part of the castle rock where once stood the Iron Age fort. In the bailey remains the wreck of a fine fourteenth-century hall and at its far end proudly rises one of the noblest of Scottish tower-houses. Fronting the mainland is a stately gatehouse which although it seems to date from the Grant reconstruction is perhaps as near an approach as native work in Scotland can show to the English 'keep-gatehouses' in which the defended entry is combined with the castellan's residence.

The final stage in the long-continued Grant reconstruction seems to be fixed by a document, dated 26 March, 1623, in which the laird of Grant entered into a contract with James Moray, master-mason, for repairing the castle.[1] During the Civil War its history seems on the whole to have been uneventful except that at Christmastide, 1644, it was thoroughly plundered by a Covenanting detachment so that in a report of 27 June, 1647, the 'mansione and maner place of Wrquhart' is described as 'being alluterlie spoilziet, plunderit, and abvsed of the whole pleneisching, goodis and geir and insicht was thairintill and within the samene'. In a letter to her son, written on 2 April, 1645, the Lady of Urquhart complains that she was left 'without a serviette to eat my meal on'! Unbroken in spirit and busy with thoughts of vengeance she concludes with the robust avowal 'I believe in God that the Christmas pie which we have unwillingly swallowed shall be paid home at Easter'.

Cromwell built a citadel at Inverness and placed a galley on the Loch. In the words of a contemporary observer, the Roundheads

> 'carried a bark, driven uppon rollers of wood to the Lochend of Ness, and there enlarged it to a statly friggott, to sail with provision

[1]His gravestone still remains at Kilmore, the parish church of Glen Urquhart

from one end of the Loch to the other; one Mr. Church governnour, and Lieutenant Orton captain of this friggott, and 60 men aboord of her to land upon expeditions when they pleased'.

It is impossible to think that this amphibious force failed to make sure of Castle Urquhart, though there appears to be no record of a Cromwellian occupation of the fortalice. Richard Franck, then serving as a trooper in Cromwell's army, has left us an amusing description, in his own bombastic style, of the way in which the frigate was hauled upon timber rollers from the citadel at Inverness to the Loch, so that 'she relinquished the brinish ocean to float in the slippery arms of Ness'!

In 1676 the castle was repaired again at a cost of 200 merks. At the Revolution of 1689 it received a Whig garrison consisting of three companies of Highlanders, poorly armed, under Captain James Grant. Almost at once it was blockaded by a Jacobite force, estimated at 600 strong. Although the garrison were thought to have 'a fortnight's or three weeks' provisions' it was decided to send ten bolls of meal, a supply of ammunition and 26 men by boat from Inverness. Unfortunately in 'forcing her out of the river into the loch' the boat sprang a leak so all the men save a dozen privates and a sergeant were sent back. The remainder, with their cargo, succeeded in disembarking from their leaky craft 'verry safe' at the water-gate of the castle. No serious attempt seems to have been made by the Jacobites against so formidable a stronghold and on the collapse of the legitimist rising the castle was permanently occupied by a detachment of regular troops who held it for two years. On evacuating it they are said to have blown up some of the buildings so that the castle should no longer serve as a Jacobite base. On 10 July, 1695, an Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament recommending to the King that compensation should be paid to the Laird of Grant for damage done to his property and tenants during the late troubles. A sum of £44,355–5s–2d Scots was proposed to cover losses in respect of the barony of Urquhart 'whereof there is two thousand pounds for damnifying of the house of Urquhart and low buildings by several Souldiers of his Majesty's regular forces when they lay in Garison there'.

In 1708 the castle was being despoiled by the country folk against whom the laid intervened by process of law. In an action raised before the Sheriff-Principal of Inverness, he asserted that

'there was a way taken out of one of the vaults of the Castle of Urquhart, belonging to the said pursuer, ten ton cake lead at two thousand pound weight each ton, which ten ton lead was a pairt of the lead with the said Castle of Urquhart, belonging also to

the pursuer, was covered; as also, about the time before mentioned, there was away taken furth of the said Castle, some deals or parts of the partitions of the chambers in the said Castle'.

But the law courts could not avert the gradual decay of the structure. On 19 February, 1715, it was reported that 'the Castell of Urquhart is blowen down with the last storme of wind, the south-west side thereoff to the laich woult'. Though the orientation is not quite correct the statement evidently refers to the keep, the whole of the south side of which, above the vaulted basement, has in fact disappeared. Thereafter the castle remained a roofless shell upon which time and weather wrought with slow but cumulative effect—although it must be remembered to the credit of the owners that all further spoliation was latterly forbidden and that intermittent repairs were effected wherever urgent need for such made itself manifest. In 1912, however, the ruins were handed over by the Seafield Trustees to the custody of the Ancient Monuments Department of H.M. Office of Works [now the Department of the Environment] by which the complete excavation and repair of the vast ruin was immediately set in hand. Interrupted by the First World War these extensive operations were resumed in 1919 and completed in 1922.

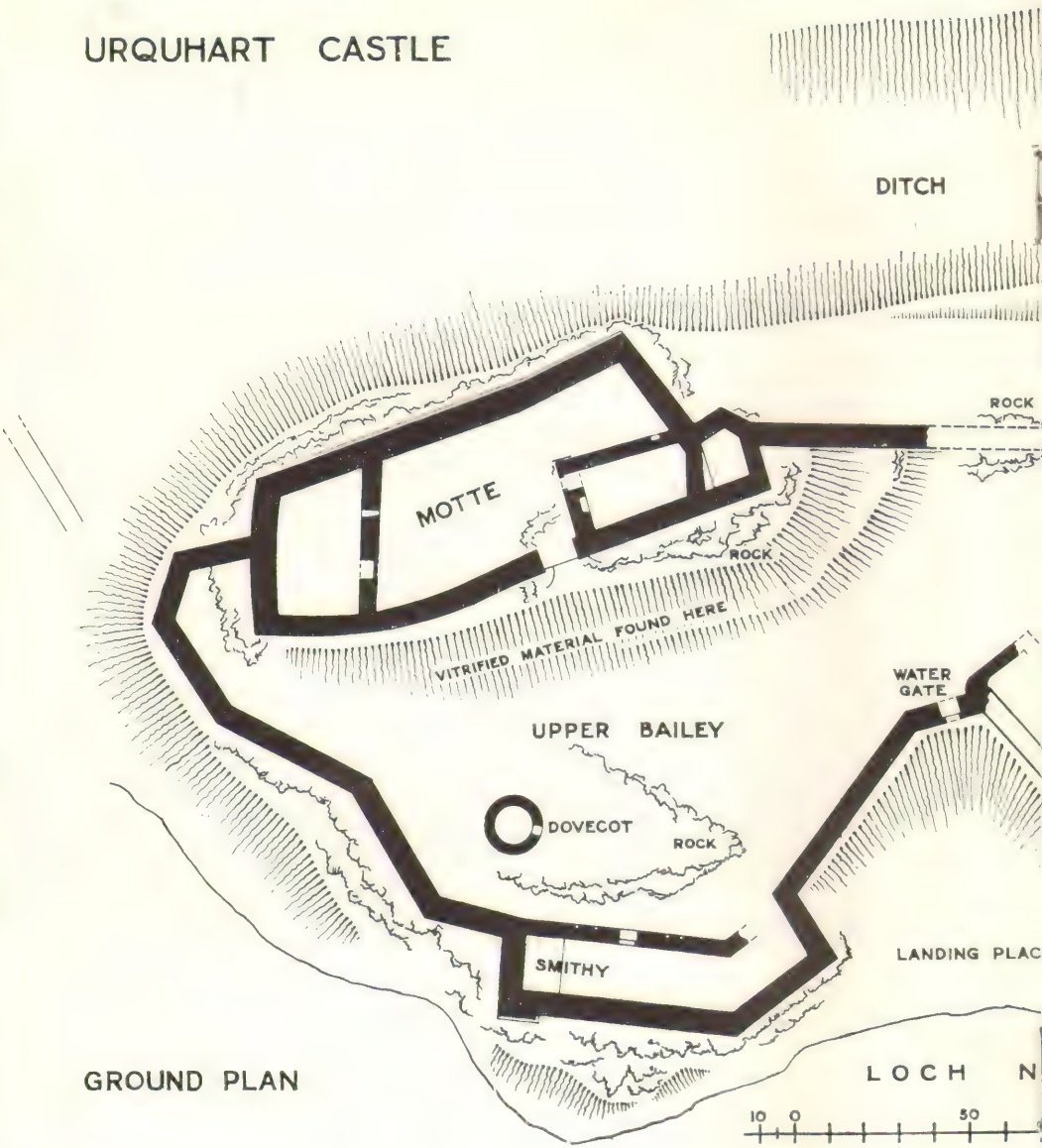
1 The sixteenth-century Tower

2 Urquhart Castle

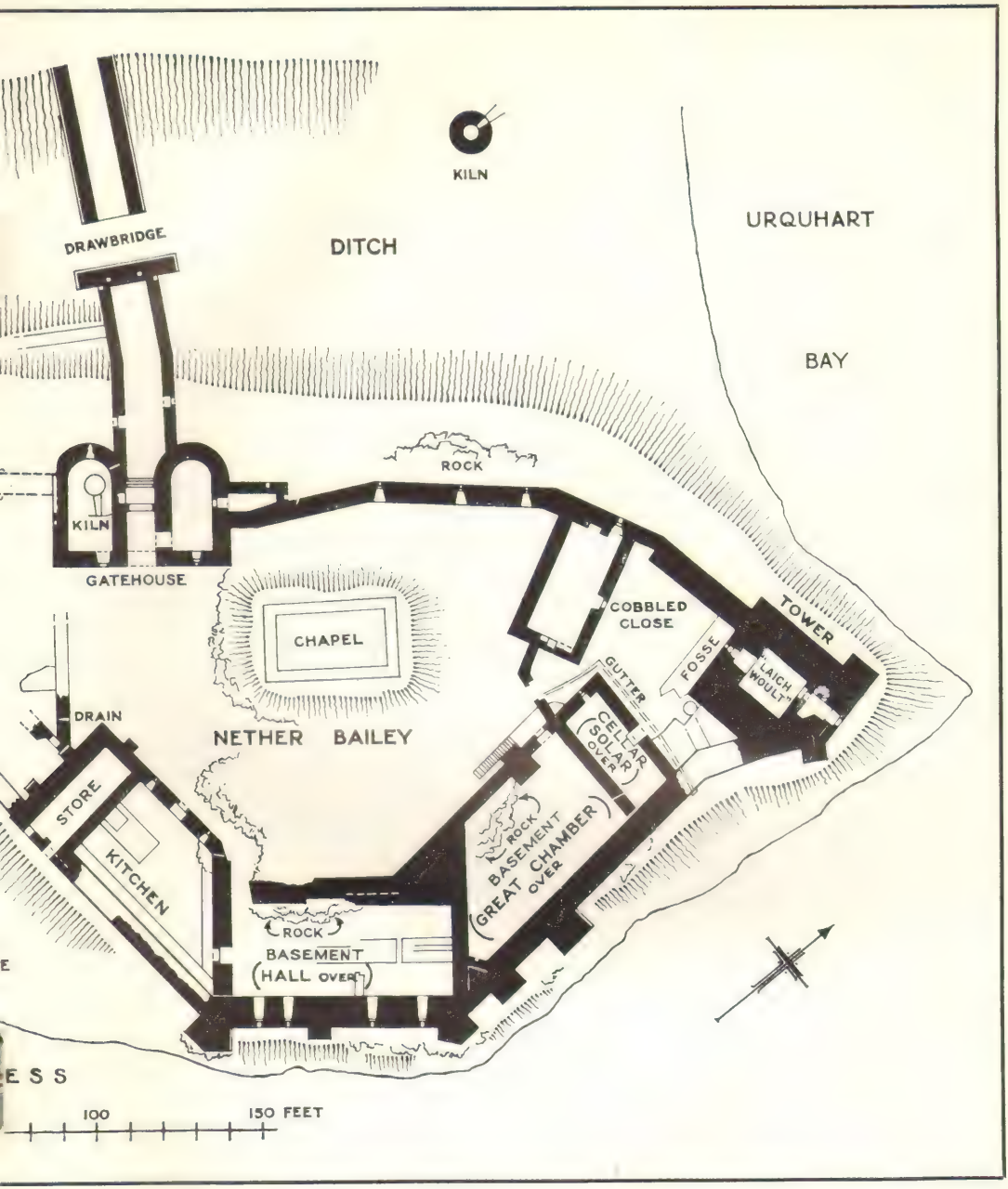
3 Urquhart Castle as it might have been at the end of the seventeenth century

From the drawing by David Walker (1961)

URQUHART CASTLE



GROUND PLAN


KILN
DRAWBRIDGE
DITCH
URQUHART
BAY
ROCK
KILN
GATEHOUSE
CHAPEL
COBBLED CLOSE
TOWER
GUTTER
FOSSE
"LAICH VAULT"
DRAIN
NETHER BAILEY
STORE
KITCHEN
CELLAR (SOLAR OVER)
ROCK
BASEMENT (GREAT CHAMBER OVER)
ROCK
BASEMENT (HALL OVER)
E S S
100
150 FEET

4 Ditch and ruined Gatehouse

5 The Nether Bailey

6 Aerial View

Reproduced by courtesy of Airviews Ltd., Manchester

DESCRIPTION

The Castle stands on a bold sandstone promontory, rugged and irregular, which projects into Loch Ness from its steep north-western bank and is additionally emphasised by the deep indent of Urquhart Bay on its northern side. Across the landward face of this promontory, isolating it from the higher ground of Strone beyond, a deep and wide ditch is drawn, measuring about 30 m in greatest breadth and some 5 m in average depth. The promontory itself is of an hour-glass shape, being narrowest and lowest at the waist. In its southern expansion it rises on the landward side to a bold craggy mount, reaching a height 26 m above the surface of the loch, or about 15 m above the present bottom of the ditch. The northern expansion is much lower and more level and is completely commanded by the mount to the southward: it also, however, rises centrally into a rocky knoll 15 m in height above the water level. With regard to all these figures of altitude it must be remembered that the present level of Loch Ness has been raised about 2 m by the construction of the Caledonian Canal. Along the waterward side the cliffs average about 9 m in height. The total length of the castle, over the walls, may be computed at 158·5 m; its greatest breadth, in the southern expansion, at 58 m.

The site has lent itself readily to the lay-out of a large *motte*-and-bailey castle with two baileys. An early Norman castle, consisted of two parts, the *motte* or citadel, a mount natural or artifical, crowned with walls of timber, wattle-and-daub, or stones mingled with earth, and usually containing a wooden tower, sometimes raised above the surface on stilts, and the bailey, an entrenched basecourt sheltering wooden domestic buildings. At Duffas Castle, in the Laich of Moray, another large *motte*-and-bailey castle may be seen [1] but here the earth-works both of the mount and of the bailey are artificial whereas on the rocky site of Castle Urquhart they have been scarped out of the living stone. The *motte* is formed by the dominant mount in the southern expansion—occupied long ages before by the prehistoric fort. Its skirts, along the waterward side, comprise the Upper Bailey

[1] Likewise *in the care of* the Department of the Environment. See the *Official Guide*

while the northward expansion is the Nether Bailey. At the waist of the hour-glass are two entrances, a land-gate and a water-gate. The former is a well-developed gatehouse, the latter simply a portal in the curtain wall opening on to a small indented strip of sheltered pebbly beach which forms an ideal landing place. The *motte*, the Upper Bailey and the Nether Bailey are all separately walled in. In the Nether Bailey, grouped along its eastern curtain where the greatest area of more or less level ground is available, are found the principal residential buildings; at its northern apex a strong square donjon tower or keep commands a superb view both up and down Loch Ness.

The approach from the high road affords a fine prospect of the vast spread of the castle, fronted by its great ditch. The latter is traversed by a stone causeway, interrupted midway by a gap, now spanned by a modern timber gangway. Originally there was a drawbridge here, worked from a wooden tower, the post holes of which may still be seen, as well as a pair of massive lateral buttresses to counteract the stress of the timbers and the lifting mechanism. The causeway is placed obliquely to the portal so as to check a direct rush; from the drawbridge it rises to the gatehouse with a gentle ascent of 1·8 m. Side gates lead out from the causeway to the space between the curtain walls[1] and the lip of the ditch which on the southern side was crested with low wall.

Only the lower storeys of the Gatehouse now remain more or less intact. It has clearly been blown up as may be seen from the tumbled fragments which cumber the causeway. Among these will be noticed a portion of the circular wall of the south drum tower with a chimney flue attached. The Gatehouse is a rectangular block 15·7 m broad passing out frontally into two half-engaged drum towers of 6·4 m in diameter between which lies the barrel-vaulted entrance passage 2·9 m wide—a standard width, providing space for entry by carts, or for three men abreast. Its outer portal is a plain semi-circular arch, carefully wrought in unmoulded freestone. It has been defended by a portcullis, the slot of which remains. About 1·5 m further on there was an outer folding gate of two leaves, opening outwards, and immediately behind it a second gate opened inwards. Between the portcullis and the outer gate the passage was unvaulted and had a timber ceiling in which were doubtless 'murder holes'. It is said that the passage formerly had 'stone arch ribs, at intervals, of carefully dressed freestone'. Just inside the portcullis, on the south side, is a tall recess, now built up: this was probably a refuge for the porter when wheeled traffic, or mounted men, entered the castle. At the inner end a rear-gate formerly existed.

[1]The term '*curtain*' is applied to the great screen walls enclosing the courtyard of a castle

On either side of the entrance passage are barrel-vaulted lodges with semicircular bows in the drum towers. The north lodge is entered from the passage, the south lodge from the courtyard. In the south lodge a kiln or oven, or possibly a brewing vat, has later been inserted, doubtless at the same time a ventilation shaft was formed in the outer wall of the tower. To the north of the Gatehouse and occupying the angle between it and the west curtain of the Nether Bailey is a rectangular construction containing a vaulted prison cell, entered through a door, or rather manhole, in the north lodge. A similar cell adjoins the gatehouse tower of Balgonie Castle in Fife. Above this prison the rectangular projection contained at least two storeys of privies.

Little remains of the first floor of the Gatehouse. It contained two main rooms in the towers with two small rooms over the entrance passage, the outer one forming the portcullis chamber. The south room retains part of its vault.

It has sometimes been thought that this Gatehouse is part of the works assumed to have been built pursuant to Edward I's order for the strengthening of Urquhart Castle in 1297. It has, however, nothing in common with the great Edwardian keep-gatehouses which are on a much larger scale and always carried out in a high Gothic style. Our gatehouse rather finds its place alongside such structures as the gatehouse of Falkland Palace or the forework of Stirling Castle. Probably it is part of the rebuilding carried out by the Grants after 1509.

On the right within the Gatehouse is the Upper Bailey, overhung by the craggy eminence on which stood the prehistoric fort and where later was the Norman *motte*. The latter was surrounded by very thick walls now reduced to mere foundations except on the landward side where the wall is still about 4·3–4·6 m high. The interior contained at least two living rooms. A modern wooden stair leads up to the ancient gate. Where it survives the external facing of the western wall, which is 2·6 m thick, shows a peculiar striated texture of small, long, close-set stones. This masonry is of early character and may well date from the thirteenth century. When the summit of a Norman *motte* was walled round in stone and lime, replacing the earlier defences of whatever nature, we have what is known as a 'shell-keep'. Such remodellings can often be assigned to the twelfth or thirteenth-centuries and having regard to the ascertained history of the castle a date in the Durward period is in no way unlikely for our shell-keep at Castle Urquhart. The shell-wall round the *motte* is certainly earlier than the curtains that run up to it at either end. The curtain wall on the north side, descending the steep rocky slope to join the Gatehouse, has been built in two thicknesses. It is later than the walling round the *motte* and also later than the

Gatehouse. On the south side of the *motte* the curtain wall sweeps irregularly round the outer margin of the site to beyond the water-gate. This curtain is later than the shell-wall of the *motte* and also later than the kitchen block against which it butts at its other end. The only buildings now visible in the Upper Bailey are the circular dovecot, of which the stump alone remains, showing four of the nesting boxes, and a smithy with a hearth platform and traces of a large chimney. Post-holes in the west or courtyard wall of the smithy show that there was a pentice roof on this side where the shoeing of horses doubtless took place. Externally the south gable of the chimney forms a shoulder in the curtain wall. It exhibits two levels of masonry, the lower composed of random rubble low in the course and forming part of the early curtain, while the upper, doubtless added when the smithy was built inside, has a very conspicuous admixture of massive water-worn boulders. The putlog holes[1] used in construction are left open.

On entering the Nether Bailey from the Gatehouse there is on the right a prominent rocky knoll which seems to have been artificially flattened and carries the foundations of a rectangular building, probably the castle chapel. Along the waterward curtain are the remains of the principal domestic buildings of the castle. In order from the south-west they are the kitchen, the hall, the 'great chamber' or parlour, and the 'solar' or lord's private room. Only the basements beneath these apartments now remain. The outer or curtain wall here is about 2·7 m thick, and survives to a height of as much as 6·1 m. It is strengthened by massive pilaster buttresses and two pairs of small square windows light the cellarage under the hall. This very substantial buttressed curtain is older than the apartments behind it and the four windows do not seem to refer to the existing internal dispositions. These small oblong windows are of an early type which can be paralleled in other buildings assignable to the thirteenth or early fourteenth-century such as Rait Castle, Duffus Castle*, Lochindorb Castle, Morton Castle* and the oldest portion of the Bishop's Palace at Kirkwall.* Moreover, the internal bays of these windows are furnished with 'shouldered' lintels, a mannerism characteristic of the time of Edward I. Again, the deep pilaster buttresses recall the Norman method of castellar construction as seen, for instance, in an early Scottish example at Castle Sween* in Knapdale. Upon all counts this eastern curtain at Castle Urquhart, although its exact date might be hazardous to guess, is likely to be one of the most ancient surviving portions of the fabric.

[1]Putlogs are the short horizontal cross-pieces used in timber scaffolding

*Ancient monuments

During the excavation of the kitchen part of an exceedingly fine enriched cap, with vigorous fourteenth-century scroll and filleted mouldings, was discovered. At the south or lower end of the kitchen is a transverse room with a door opening towards the loch. The waterward wall, containing this door, and two rows of joist holes inside, are clearly secondary and the whole space would appear, so far as the evidence goes, to have been originally open to the loch. It is too high above the ancient water-level to have served as a boat-house and was probably a store into which goods could readily be brought from the landing place.

The great hall was, as usual, on the first floor. Towards the loch it appears to have been lit by four windows, some traces of which remain. On the outer angle between the hall and the great chamber is an open semi-circular masonry platform, probably a derrick-stance for hoisting supplies out of a boat.

The west or landward curtain of the Nether Bailey is pierced by various loopholes. This curtain is of one build with the gatehouse but later than the Keep against which it butts. Near its north end is a transverse building forming one side of a small close in front of the Keep. Entry to this close was barred by a gate and the Keep itself is isolated by a deep stone-lined fosse. The close is cobbled and is drained by a carefully constructed gutter, descending in stages along the north end of the solar and venting through the curtain into the loch.

The Keep has been a fine tower and is almost the only part of the castle in which distinctive architectural detail is preserved. Unfortunately nearly the whole of the south wall above the ground floor has fallen. The tower measures 12·2 m by 11 m and is 15·2 m in height to the battlement. The south-east angle is canted in obedience to the site and to the east and north angles raked buttresses are applied, reaching as high as the ground floor. The tower contains a basement, ground floor, and two complete storeys and a garret above. In the basement the walls vary between 2·7–3·7 m thick. This contains a single vaulted chamber lit by a small window on the west side, opening into the fosse, and is entered by a spiral stair, roughly constructed without a proper newel[1], leading down from the ground floor above. This stair communicates with a postern opening towards the loch, about 7·6 m above the present water-level, and defended by outer and inner gates, the former secured with a draw-bar. The architectural detail of this basement resembles work of the later fourteenth-century at David's Tower in Edinburgh Castle, at Tantallon Castle and at Craigmillar

[1]*Newel*, the post round which a spiral stair winds. If the stair is of stone, the newel is fashioned out of the narrow ends of the steps

Castle. The vault, however, is an insertion, or at all events a reconstruction.

The ground floor of the Keep is at courtyard level—12 m above the present surface of Loch Ness. It is entered by a door on the west side which must have been reached by a drawbridge across the fosse. The walls of the tower here are reduced to 2·4 m thick and from various considerations it is evident that the whole building above the basement is of more recent date. The room on this floor formed the hall of the Keep. It is lit by two good windows and has a moulded fireplace. The old spiral stair from the basement enters the hall at its north-east corner and beside it another spiral stair conducts to the upper storeys and the wall-walk. This stair is well finished, with a proper newel. Considerable fragments of the ancient plaster remain on the walls of the hall.

The first floor has a single window in each of the three sides but has not possessed a fireplace.

On the second floor is likewise a single window in the two surviving walls as well as a handsome moulded fireplace and two large vaulted mural closets: the room itself has also been cleverly vaulted in two sections, the main vault spanning the tower, with a side vault or groin, to take in the fireplace and window in the north wall. Under this window is a gunloop of a sixteenth-century pattern, with two divergent openings. The floor above this formed the garret of the tower and only its north wall remains. At either end of this are very comely square-gabled turrets; there has been a third at the south-east corner. Each turret contains a chamber, with a fireplace, a window having a gunloop below, and a privy. Older mural chambers at a lower level now form pits, entered through the floors of these turrets. The visitor will notice deep cavities provided in the masonry for the massive principals of the roof. Part of the wall-walk and embrasured parapet[1] of the north wall remains, with the usual large dished runnels.

In an inventory made in 1647, after the castle had been plundered by the Covenanters, the various rooms in the Keep are specified and their contents, or what was left of these, listed. The vaulted basement is described as the 'seller' and contained 'ane old kist'; the floor above is the 'hall' in which were 'ane boorde, ane furme, ane tafill, ane chaire'; above this is the 'chalmer abone [above] the hall' with 'ane bed of tymber, ane furme', while the vaulted topmost room is called the 'wolt-chalmer' and contained 'ane bed of tymber, ane tafill'.

Externally, the rubble-built Keep has well-wrought freestone dressings and quoins.[2] At the base of its canted angle is a latrine vent and

[1]Embrasures are the voids, merlons the solid portions, in an embattled parapet

[2]*Quoins*, the angles or corner stones of a building

beside it a slop drain—both evidently relics of the original arrangements before the tower was reconstructed. The walls show the usual graceful entasis,[1] accentuated on the upper third of their height. Due relief is thus afforded to the parapet which is carried out on a continuous single corbel[2] course while the angle turrets rest upon an upper level of small separate corbels. Over the main door there has been a machicolated[3] platform resting on four great corbels and the postern on the other side is defended by a similar contrivance served from the stairhead. On this short front the corbel table of the turrets is carried continuously across the tower and the three machicolations are formed by holes between the separate corbels of the upper level, no larger corbels being inserted here. All these parapet arrangements form an architectural composition of much beauty and indeed the whole tower is marked by refinement and a sense of style.

Although the external coursed rubble of the Keep is of very similar texture at all levels and the quoin stones pretty uniform throughout its height, it is clear that the basement is considerably older than the upper storeys and that the parapet in its present form is later still. Probably the basement should be assigned to about the end of the fourteenth-century; the tower above was no doubt rebuilt after 1509 and the parapet and turrets may well be part of the repairs executed by the mason James Moray pursuant to his contract in 1623.

A writer in 1798, describing Castle Urquhart, says that 'its walls are still decorated with a considerable quantity of cut freestone of a coarse texture and hard quality'. Unfortunately today this statement remains true only of the Keep. The rest of the vast pile of buildings have been almost completely robbed of their dressed stone work and architectural detail such as might help to determine dates. Throughout the ruins the rubble masonry is of a fairly uniform character, which makes it hard to detect alterations or additions except where walls come into contact in a way manifestly revealing that one is later than the other. Nevertheless, it will have become apparent to the reader of this guide that in spite of all rebuilding and final destruction a considerable portion of the ruins, notably the shell keep round the *Motte* and the middle sector of the waterward curtain, still survive from the earliest castle which played so notable a part in the Wars of Scottish Independence.

At the south-west corner of the ditch, where it sweeps round the *motte* towards the loch, it has been barred by a cross-wall which

[1] *Entasis*, the swelling and gradual intaking in the upper part of the profile of a column or building

[2] *Corbels*, stone brackets projecting from the wall face to carry an oversailing parapet

[3] *Machicolations* are voids left between large projecting corbels. Through these, offensive material, solid or liquid, could be cast down upon assailants

would prevent landing parties making their way round on this side. At the opposite end of the ditch, to the north-west of the castle, a roughly fashioned oast, or kiln, for drying grain, is niched into the counterscrap. It would perhaps be too much to claim that this is the kiln ordered to be constructed in the charter of 1509. Below the *motte* the present base of the ditch is 10·7 m above Loch Ness; opposite the Nether Bailey it sinks to 3·4 m.

RELICS

During the excavations conducted by the former Office of Works an exceptionally large and varied collection of relics was found which cast a flood of light upon the internal economy and material equipment of the castle in the heyday of its pride. The most important objects found were a fine bronze ewer, dating from the fifteenth-century; an ornamental strap and mounting of silvered bronze, probably of the fourteenth-century; a bronze cross with trefoiled terminals; a bronze finger ring with a bezel for a circular setting, and three brooches, two of medieval date in brass, one bearing the initials of the Virgin Mary[1], and one of tinned metal dating from the seventeenth-century. The coins recovered dated from the reign of Edward I to that of Charles II. The other objects included—various buckles and hasps in bronze; pins in bronze and bone; a cross-bow ratchet in bone; a tableman or playing counter in bone; pieces of lead piping; masses of arrowheads corroded together [evidently these had been preserved in bags]; single arrowheads, both of the long bow and the cross-bow [quarrels]; stone cannon balls of various sizes; a much decayed dirk; knives of sundry patterns; gouges; ox-goads; a sword-guard; two fourteenth-century rowel-spurs; swivels of various types; horse-shoes; netting instruments; hooks; door-latches; door studs; a key; two pruning tools; quantities of nails; whorls in stone, earthenware, and bone; several rotary querns, and portions of two stone cressets. Considerable quantities of domestic pottery were recovered, ranging from the fourteenth to the seventeenth-centuries and including foreign wares. Numerous animal bones, including deer-horn, were found, also two fragments of a child's skull and jaw, found outside the Water Gate.

Most of these relics are now preserved in the National Museum of Antiquities but the pottery and bones are at the Castle.

Some years before 1825 a large hoard of 'silver pennies, of the Alexanders, Davids, Edwards and Roberts' was dug up in the Castle but unfortunately they were dispersed or melted down and no proper record of the coins was kept. No doubt they were buried, probably in a pitcher, during the troubles of the fourteenth-century.

[1]A similar brooch found at the Castle, and bearing the names of Jesus and Mary, is illustrated by W. Mackay, *Urquhart and Glenmoriston*, ed. 1914, p. 212

LITERATURE

W. MACKAY, *Urquhart and Glenmoriston*, 2nd ed. [1914].

D. MACGIBBON and T. ROSS, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, vol. III [1889], pp. 90–6.

G. T. CLARK, *Medieval Military Architecture* [1884], vol. II, pp. 509–12.

W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, 'Urquhart Castle'. *Trans. Inverness Gaelic Soc.*, vol. XXXV [1929], pp. 51–82.

W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, 'Glen Urquhart and its Castle', in *Aspects of Antiquity* [Essays presented to O. G. S. Crawford, 1951], pp. 316–31.

STEWART H. CRUDEN, *The Scottish Castle*, 1960 [especially Chap. II].

Printed in Scotland for Her Majesty's Stationery Office
by McCorquodale (Scotland) Ltd. Glasgow. Dd. 401482 K400 8/76

Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings

Many ancient sites and buildings are maintained as national monuments by the Department of the Environment.

Guide-books, pamphlets and postcards are on sale at many monuments and are also obtainable from the bookshops of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, or from the Ancient Monuments Publication Section, Department of the Environment, Argyle House, Lady Lawson Street, Edinburgh EH3 9SD, (Chief Information Officer, Department of the Environment, 2 Marsham Street, London, SW1, for English and Welsh monuments).

Photographs of most monuments may be obtained in large prints at commercial rates, plus postage, from the Photographic Librarian, Department of the Environment, Argyle House, Lady Lawson Street, Edinburgh EH3 9SD, (Photographic Librarian, Department of the Environment, Hannibal House, London, SE1, for English and Welsh monuments).

Season tickets, valid for 12 months from date of issue and admitting their holders free of charge to all ancient monuments and historic buildings in the care of the Department of the Environment in Scotland, England and Wales, may be obtained from the Department or at many monuments.

Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Government Bookshops

13a Castle Street, Edinburgh EH2 3AR
49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6HB
41 The Hayes, Cardiff CF1 1JW
Brazennose Street, Manchester M60 8AS
Southey House, Wine Street, Bristol BS1 2BQ
258 Broad Street, Birmingham B1 2HE
80 Chichester Street, Belfast BT1 4JY

Government publications are also available through booksellers

ISBN 0 11 490335 2