

The Landmark Trust

CUL NA SHEE, SADDELL BAY

The Landmark Trust's involvement with the estate and buildings at Saddell Bay on Kintyre dates back to 1975 when part of the estate including the Castle, Shore Cottage (built in the 19th century) and Cul na Shee were purchased from Colonel and Mrs Moreton. Mrs Moreton was given a life tenancy of Saddell House, which came to an end in 1998. In 1984 the Trust bought the remainder of the estate including Saddell Lodge, and in 1990 Ferryman's Cottage.

Cul-na-Shee

Cul-na-Shee was built in the 1920s by a teacher for her retirement. It take its name from the little bay on whose shore it is built, Cul-na-Shee, or Cul-na-Sithe in the Gaelic spelling, meaning 'quiet corner.'

Since the mid 1960s it was lived in by Graham McKinley (1895-1980) and his wife Mary (1890-1982) when they retired from farming Whitestone, a farm on the Saddell estate. By the time the Landmark Trust bought Cul-na-Shee the Graham Mckinleys had moved to Saddell Lodge.

The Landmark Trust's Repairs

When Landmark bought Cul-na-Shee it had no bathroom, just a WC by the front door, whose waste went straight into the sea; the roof and the corrugated iron walls were in a poor state, and the rooms, particularly the kitchen were dark.

A new bathroom was added to the back of the house and a septic tank was installed.

The front lobby which had been added when the WC was installed probably in the 1950s and which took the light away from the kitchen, was removed. The kitchen window was then enlarged and another window looking west, away from the sea, was opened up.

The corrugated iron cladding was renewed at the back and at the front where the lobby had been. The house was re-roofed.

It was decided to line the rooms with pitch pine boarding, a common feature in Scotland, although the rooms at Cul-na-Shee were not originally finished in that way, it allowed for mineral fibre insulation to be inserted behind the boarding.

Brief history of Saddell Castle and Saddell House

In 1508 James IV, King of Scotland, granted the lands of Saddell Abbey to David Hamilton, Bishop of Argyll, with licence to "build castles ... and fortify them with stone walls". Saddell Castle was the result, a tower-house typical of the period. It was probably completed by 1512, and used by the Bishop as an occasional residence.

Of this 16th-century building there remain only the outer walls, including the entrance doorway, the great fireplace on the first floor and a small fireplace on the second floor

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(where there is also a garderobe closet), together with a short stretch of the original barmkin wall to the south of the tower, and some carved stone panels. In 1556 Saddell had been transferred to James Macdonald, who was busy annoying the English army in Ireland. In retaliation the Earl of Sussex mounted a raid on Kintyre in 1558, during which he burned and sacked the Castle, which he described as "a fayre pyle and a stronge".

The Castle seems to have been left as a ruin for the next hundred years, even after it was granted to Archibald Campbell, Earl of Argyll, in 1607. Then in 1650 the Earl, in turn, granted Saddell to William Ralston of that Ilk, a fugitive from religious persecution in the Lowlands, on condition that he made it habitable within two years. The Castle was given a new roof, and floors, and the walls and parapet were extensively repaired. The arrangement of the rooms is mostly of that same date.

William Ralston soon moved elsewhere, and by the end of the 17th century the estate had been granted to a junior branch of the Campbell family, who became known as the Campbells of Glensaddell. During the 18th century they tried to make the Castle more comfortable, by lining the bedroom walls with panelling for example; and they smartened up the sitting room with a new fireplace, alcoves and a moulded plaster ceiling.

They must have felt they were fighting a losing battle, however, because in about 1774 the Campbells built themselves a new and more convenient home, which they called Saddell House. The castle became a farm, and was lived in by estate employees. Stone from the Abbey was used for the farm buildings that cluster around the foot of the tower.

In 1890 the Castle once again became, for a few years, the chief residence of the estate, after Saddell House was damaged by fire. At that time it belonged to Colonel Macleod, who clearly had great fun restoring the castle. It was he who put up the heraldic shields in the dining room, which contain heraldic jokes and puns; and he made several other minor alterations, such as the ceiling in the top bathroom, and fireplaces in several of the bedrooms.

Once Saddell House was repaired the castle went back to being an estate farmhouse. In the 1930s it was given another new roof. In 1937 the Saddell Estate was bought by Colonel and Mrs Moreton. During the war, when (the then) Captain Moreton was recalled to active service, Saddell House became home to children evacuated from Glasgow as well as to the Moreton's own children. When Landmark bought Saddell Castle in 1975, the walls were in surprisingly good condition, only needing minor repairs to the stonework. A crack in the south east corner had to be tied together, and some trees had to be removed from the parapet. The walls were then harled with a thin coat of lime plaster. The roof was reslated. The roofs of some of the outbuildings were unsafe, and these were taken off; some of the walls, including the entrance archway and cupola, were rebuilt. Inside, almost total repair was needed - to floors, walls, doors and windows.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays to pay for their future maintenance. Cul Na Shee sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk.