

# The Landmark Trust

## **SADDELL CASTLE, KINTYRE, ARGYLL AND BUTE**

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 (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, but after the War there were no longer the funds to repair it. In 1939 the Saddell estate had been bought by Lt Col and Mrs Moreton, and it was they who in 1975 sold the Castle, with Shore Cottage (built in the 19th century) and Cul na Shee (built in the 1920s), to the Landmark Trust. In 1984 the Trust bought the remainder of the estate, and in 1990 Ferryman's Cottage.

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## RESTORATION OF SADDELL CASTLE

The walls of the Castle were in surprisingly good condition, only needing minor repairs to the stonework. There was one crack, in the south east corner, which had to be tied together, and some trees had to be removed from the parapet. The walls were then harled in the traditional way, which consists of applying 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 the Castle, almost total repair was needed - to floors, walls, doors and windows. These last were copied from some casements that survived, which were probably 18th-century. Where possible existing materials were retained, and there were no structural alterations; only a few later partitions were moved or removed, and two bathrooms and a new kitchen were inserted.

On the ground floor a floor was inserted over the original well chamber, to fit in the bathroom.

On the stairs, the original arrow slits were discovered, but they were too fragile to reopen. The inner reveals were opened up, however, and now serve as niches for the electric lights. The larger windows were inserted in 1890. The original stone steps had been replaced in concrete at the same time.

The dining room had a floor of concrete and cobbles, and this was replaced by old stone paving. The shields on the ceiling had been removed for safekeeping to Campbeltown Museum some years before, and these were reinstated.

In the sitting room the 18th-century moulded plaster ceiling was collapsing; in 1975 a new plain ceiling was inserted, but in 1986 this was replaced with a copy of the original. One of the alcoves also had to be renewed. The pitch pine floorboards, like the other wooden floors in the castle, came from the Scotia Distillery in Campbeltown, which was being altered at the time the restoration work was being carried out. By the window on the left as you come into the sitting room there is a carving by Maxwell Allen of Edinburgh. It contains the numbers of the three architects who were involved in the restoration: David Carr, A.V.J. Tod and Stewart Tod.

One wall of the big second floor bedroom had to be rebuilt, and while work was going on the garderobe closet was discovered. In the smaller bedroom the 16th-century fireplace was found behind a Victorian one. The tartan is Argyll Campbell.

On the third floor the 18th-century Scots fir panelling of the bigger bedroom was mostly rotten, but enough was saved to cover one wall, behind the bed heads. The rest of the room was panelled in new Douglas fir. The top floor had some attic bedrooms, but it was decided to remove these, to make somewhere to run about in wet weather. On the roof the wall walk was reinstated, but bars were placed over the openings of the machicolation for safety.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Saddell Castle sleeps up to 8 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.*