

## **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.

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, 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 rest of the estate including Saddell House, and in 1990 Ferryman's Cottage. The Antony Gormley sculpture GRIP IV which stands on the rocks between the Castle and Shore Castle, was erected in 2015, part of a national year-long installation called LAND in celebration of Landmark's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW  
*Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205*

*Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website*  
[www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk)

## RESTORATION OF SADDELL CASTLE IN 1976-8

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 render. 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 [now kitchen] 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 [now dining 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 [dining] room there is a carving by Maxwell Allen of Edinburgh., which references the three architects who were involved in the restoration: David Carr, A.V.J. Tod and Stewart Tod.

On the wall of the big second floor bedroom [now sitting room] had to be rebuilt, and the garderobe closet was discovered in the process. In the smaller bedroom the 16th-century fireplace was found behind a Victorian one.

On the third floor the 18th-century Scots pine 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.

## MAJOR UPGRADE & REFURBISHMENT IN 2024-5

Almost 50 years after its initial restoration, the fabric of Saddell Castle was again in need of significant attention and compliance works to meet present standards of fire safety and thermal performance. We also felt it could be made a more comfortable place to stay by altering the room layout somewhat. Conservation practice had also moved on over the years: the thin 1970s harling had not only been patched over the years but was cementitious, meaning that it did not breath and was prone to cracking so that the Castle suffered from dampness.

In 2024, it was cleared of furniture, and scaffolding was again erected to enclose the whole right up to chimney height. The harling was first examined and proved to need replacing entirely, after which it was stripped and the external walls raked out and steam cleaned before deep void packing, pinning and re-pointing with gauged hot lime mortars, pressed back to replicate the historic finish. Lime harling was then applied, carefully feathered in on the gable to integrate the crow steps, and six coats of limewash, the top four coats being coloured in a careful match of the tones of the local sand. The opportunity was also taken to improve drainage around the castle as flood alleviation. The whole Castle was re-wired, re-plumbed, redecorated and give a new heating system.

The roof slates were stripped, roof timbers repaired and insulation introduced. The wallheads were consolidated, new sandstone copings installed and the crenelations repaired. The south chimney had to be taken down and rebuilt to correct its lean and a new stack was (re)built to take the flues from new stoves brought back into use in the sitting room and dining room. 50% of the roof slates could be re-used, the replacements all being reused Scots slates.

Internally, the basement, previously unused, has a new heated floor and is now the table tennis room. On the first floor, the former dining room was made the main kitchen with a new prepping island. The wooden shields were taken down from the ceiling and cleaned and consolidated before being returned. The adjacent room (the 1970s sitting room) has become a grander dining room, as befits a former bishop and laird's residence.

On the second floor, the largest room that had been in use as a master bedroom now became the sitting room, offering more space and better views for everyone all day long. A new bathroom was created in a former single bedroom off the stairs, the former single room on the second floor becoming a twin.

The third floor remained largely as it had been, other than enlarging a closet in the twin room as somewhere to sit and look along the bay. The fourth floor, previously unused, was made into a double bedroom and bathroom.

Saddell Castle is now warm, snug, even more inviting as a place to stay, and most importantly of all, resiliently ready for the next fifty years – or more.

*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 visit [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk).*