

The Landmark Trust

SADDELL HOUSE & SADDELL BAY, 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.

In 1556 Saddell was transferred to James Macdonald, who had been 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, which he did. 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 the Campbells tried to make the Castle more comfortable, but must have felt they were fighting a losing battle, because in about 1774 Colonel Donald Campbell (1726-84) decided to build a new and more convenient home, which he called Saddell House. Colonel Campbell had served in India with distinction but was wounded in 1771 and it seems likely that a reward from the Nawab of Arcot provided the funds to build Saddell House. The Colonel's new house was Classical in style and is typical of the country seats built by the merchants and military men returning after a successful career overseas during this time of prosperity in Scotland.

With three storeys, generously proportioned rooms across four floors and large windows, Saddell House was in marked contrast to the castle, with its small, defensive windows and turnpike stairs. The house commands perhaps the best position right at the centre of the bay and was carefully aligned to look out both across the Kilbrannan Sound onto the Ailsa Craig and back up Saddell Glen. A natural change in level allowed the house to be entered at *piano nobile* level on the landward side, while originally also affording the basement rooms views across the beach. The house was always approached along a carriageway over the bridge across the burn, but its original front entrance was centrally positioned through a portico beneath the pediment. An early drawing shows two small pavilions flanking the house but we have found no physical evidence of these. Sometime in the first half of the 19th century, the sunken area was created all around the house, and then in the later Victorian period, the Classical symmetry of a central entrance was sacrificed for a roomy, two storey porch block, added to the western end.

In 1899, however, there was a disastrous fire. This was during the tenure of Colonel Macleod, great-great-nephew of the builder of Saddell House and who had also just refurbished Saddell Castle. The house was let at the time to an English shooting party and while they were out a fire in the kitchen chimney is thought to have spread to joists in a lumber room. The house was gutted, only walls and porch block remaining. This led to extensive refurbishment, so that internally today the house presents more of a late Victorian than Georgian appearance. A complete set of servants' rooms remains on the basement floor, including a game room and kitchen with range - this floor was left relatively undamaged by the fire.

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On the ground floor, the butler's pantry on the ground floor has survived with all its Edwardian fittings, and on each landing is a maid's cupboard with sturdy shelves for bedlinen and a sink, all providing a fascinating record of existence in such country seats. The reception rooms and bedrooms are all large, some with bay windows looking out across the shore.

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. The boys slept in the attic and the girls on the first floor and though these were tense days, it seems many happy memories were generated.

The Landmark Trust's involvement with the estate and buildings at Saddell Bay on Kintyre dates back to 1975. The estate and its buildings were purchased from Colonel and Mrs Moreton to enable them to survive and Mrs Moreton was given a life tenancy of Saddell House, which came to an end in 1998.

Landmark refurbished Saddell House in 2004, with the help of two very generous private donors. Externally, the windows were repaired and overhauled. The present harling is cemetitious and was probably applied after the fire in 1899. It has been left for now and repainted to match traces found of the original 18th-century colour. In time, we will hope to replace it with a more traditional lime harling. The stone dressings have also been repainted, as have the window dressings and portico in a darker grey as is traditional in Scotland, specially mixed by our decorator. The railings around the area (or basement well) have been extensively repaired and overhauled. Electrical cables were buried and new drainage installed. There is no doubt that Colonel Donald Campbell originally intended the view towards Arran to be enjoyed and so we also felled some of the conifers to the front of the house, planted by the Moretons in the 1930s but grown so tall that they were hemming the house in.

Internally, the work done was almost entirely ordinary maintenance, repair and redecoration, carried out mostly by Landmark's own small internal team of craftsmen, together with local contractor Roly Mauchline and electrical contractor Jim Martin. The original dining room and Colonel Moreton's Rod Room on the ground floor were made into bedrooms (as indeed the former may originally have been) and the 18th-century entrance hall or Trophy Room became the dining room. The house was completely rewired and a new central heating system installed. A shower was added to the porch, to aid recovery for those brave enough to bathe in the Kilbrannan Sound and also to provide ground floor bathroom facilities. Much of the panelling and joinery was re-grained and a replacement sink put in the butler's pantry.

We altered the location of the bathroom on the attic floor to provide better views. Otherwise, the attic floor was made weathertight but is not furnished. The basement, which was largely untouched by the fire and so retains much of its 18th-century form, has been left unfurnished for Landmarkers to explore the large kitchen, game room and laundry room.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Saddell House sleeps up to 13 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.