



Technical Appendix 11.3

Castle of Mey IGDL Description and
Designation Map

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Inventory Garden & Designated Landscape

CASTLE OF MEY (BARROGILL CASTLE) GDL00096

Date Added 01/07/1987

Local Authority Highland

Parish Canisbay

NGR ND 29127 73872

Coordinates 329127, 973872

Of outstanding historical value due to its association with the Royal Family and the Earls of Caithness, the designed landscape of Castle of Mey provides the setting for a category A listed castle and makes a major contribution to the surrounding scenery.

Type of Site

The designed landscape of parkland, woodland, formal gardens and walled gardens, probably established in the early 19th century and improved in the latter half of the 20th century, embellishes the magnificent setting of the Castle of Mey.

Main Phases of Landscape Development

Between 1750 - 1875, probably c.1820, with replanting and improvements in 1928 and post 1952.

Artistic Interest. Level of interest: Some

The designed landscape has some value as a Work of Art in its present form.

Historical. Level of interest: Outstanding

The Castle of Mey has outstanding Historical value due to its associations with the Earls of Caithness for four centuries and its present association with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother.

Horticultural. Level of interest: Some

The Castle of Mey has some Horticultural and also Arboricultural value due to the range of plants grown under the harsh climatic conditions in this area of the country.

Architectural. Level of interest: Outstanding

The designed landscape provides the setting for a category A listed building.

Archaeological. Level of interest: Not Assessed

Scenic. Level of interest: Outstanding

The designed landscape has outstanding Scenic value in the surrounding landscape.

Nature Conservation. Level of interest: Some

The woodlands provide some Nature Conservation value due to the lack of other woodland cover in the area.

Location and Setting

The Castle of Mey is situated on the north coast of Scotland approximately 5 miles (8km) west of John O'Groats, and 15 miles (24km) east of Thurso. The lands of Mey lie on the flat coastal plain of Caithness and are extremely exposed to the harsh climate and winds which blow off the Pentland Firth. The surrounding landscape is predominantly pasture land and there are few trees. Magnificent views can be gained west to Dunnet Head, the most northerly point of Scotland, and across the Pentland Firth to the Orkney islands. The Castle and its woodlands are significant from the A836 and other minor roads between it and the coast, particularly from the east. The flat nature of the surrounding landscape limits views of the policies which are enclosed within the woodlands to the south and the policy walls to the north.

The Castle of Mey commands a magnificent position some 500 yards from the shore of the Pentland Firth. The designed landscape extends south to the lodge, west to the edge of the walled garden and the woodlands flanking the west drive, and east to Barrogill Mains farm. To the north, a road links the Castle with a road running west to the pier at Harrow, approximately 1km to the west of the Castle. To the south, a road runs due south from the lodge flanked by a beech/hawthorn hedge and a stone dyke to the A836. A shelterbelt has been established along the northern edge of the A836, but this is not part of the Castle of Mey property.

The designed landscape includes some 100 acres (40.5ha) of parkland, 11.64 acres (4.7ha) of woodland, and 2.68 acres (1.08ha) of formal garden which includes 1.25 acres (.5ha) of walled gardens.

Site History

The present designed landscape was laid out between 1750 - 1875 but probably c.1820, after the Burn addition to the Castle. The layout from this period is shown on the 1st edition OS map of 1873. Comparison of this with the 2nd edition OS map of 1910 and the present design shows the landscape to have remained substantially the same since then.

Early records show that the lands of Mey originally belonged to the Bishops of Caithness. In 1567 George Sinclair the 4th Earl of Caithness, who 22 years earlier had resigned the Earldom in favour of his son, acquired the property and built the Z-plan tower calling it Barrogill Castle. His initials and those of his wife, Lady Elizabeth Graham, daughter of the 2nd Earl of Montrose, can be seen throughout the remaining part of the Castle. The 4th Earl's grandson, George, lost the fortunes of the estate which were regained by 1628 only to be lost once more in 1672 by the 6th Earl. This time the Castle was claimed by Campbell of Glenorchy in part payment of a debt. After the Earl's death, Campbell married the Countess and assumed the title of Earl of Caithness. In 1685, James II overruled Campbell's claim on the title and it was restored to the Sinclair family. The Earls of Caithness remained lairds of Barrogill until 1889 when the Castle was bequeathed by the last Earl of that line to someone outside the family.

In 1928, it was purchased by Captain Imbert-Terry who was responsible for the replanting of the shelter woodlands and for some improvements to the gardens. During World War II, the Castle was occupied as an officers' rest home and the grounds suffered some neglect. In 1950, the estate farms and crofts were sold to tenants. The Castle and policies were for sale when the Queen Mother first saw them during her visit to Caithness in 1952. Her Majesty purchased the Castle and revived its original name of the Castle of Mey. When Her Majesty bought the Castle it was in a dilapidated condition and threatened with demolition. Her Majesty has initiated many improvements to the Castle and gardens, which are designed to be at their best for the Queen Mother's visits in August and October.

Landscape Components

Architectural Features

The Castle of Mey and flanking Garden Walls are listed category A. The Castle was built c.1576 and has experienced additions and alterations in each subsequent century. In 1819 William Burn designed the entrance porch and hall. The fenestration of the dining-room wing was altered by Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, and Her Majesty's cypher above the new sash window was carved by Hew Lorimer. The stone was obtained from a local quarry which was specially reopened for the purpose. The Gate Lodge and Gatepiers, listed category B, are early 19th century, possibly by William Burn. The stable/garage block, unlisted, lies to the north-east of the Castle. Crenellated walls flank the entrance to the courtyard on the south front of the Castle, and cannons stand on the adjacent lawns, relics of the Napoleonic wars. They were originally part of the armament of the fort on the cliff to the north-west.

Parkland

The Parkland is situated to the south of the Castle, flanked by the woodlands and enclosed on the southern boundary by a road linking the lodge with Barrogill Mains Farm. This boundary also encloses the parkland to the south of the east drive. In the park directly south of house, two round clumps of trees, mainly sycamore and ash, are enclosed by fencing. There are many trees in the park next to the east drive. Both areas are grazed by the Queen Mother's renowned breeding herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle.

Between the Castle and the stable-block to the north is an area of grassland which is important to the setting of the Castle from the Harbour approach. The mill-lade runs through this area, past the Home Farm and the stables, to flow into the sea due north of the Castle. It has been dammed in two places since 1952 and the two resulting ponds are separated by a race.

Woodland

The woodlands lie to the south of the Castle. They are indicated on the 1st edition OS map of 1875 but it is difficult to tell the age of the existing trees as windblow has greatly stunted their growth. The shelterbelt along the edge of the A836 was replanted in 1939. Sycamore and ash are the dominant species but horse chestnut, copper beech and gean are being introduced into the more sheltered areas.

The west drive approaches the Castle through the woodland. Reference to the 1st & 2nd edition OS maps indicates pathways through the woodlands. In spring, the floors of these woods are carpeted by daffodils, primroses, aconites and celandines.

The Gardens

Formal lawns lead up to the south front of the Castle. Crenellated walls, in a similar style to the Castle additions of the 1950s, flank the entrance to this area from the main drive. Cannons stand on the lawns.

Walled Gardens

There are two walled gardens adjacent to the Castle of Mey. The east walled garden is enclosed on the north and east sides. The 14th Earl of Caithness is thought to have been instrumental in its development. It contained as a central feature a reproduction of the Glasshouse of the 1851 Empire Exhibition. An article written in the early 1850s describes the glasshouse as being well stocked with purple cinerarias and red & white Camellias, with a vine growing over the inner walls. It was derelict by the 1950s and consequently removed. In its place now is a bed of Primulas. A herbaceous border runs along the south face of the wall next to the Castle and is separated from the former glasshouse site by a Fuchsia hedge.

The west walled garden is thought to be the older of the two. It is enclosed on all four sides by walls. It is thought that this was the area which William Lithgow described in 1628 as 'greenfaced gardens'. Another account of 1762 describes 'plenty of apples, strawberries and cherries prospering within its bounds despite the harsh climate'. Thus a garden has existed there for some time although the exact date of the walls is uncertain. The present garden is laid out in a series of eight compartments, as shown on the 2nd edition OS map of c.1910. The compartments are separated by hedges of Berberis, elder, privet and hawthorn. Within the compartments, thus divided for shelter, are grown vegetables, herbs, soft fruit and flowers. At the north end is a rose garden. Two small modern greenhouses are used for propagation and pot plants.

References

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Listings

NMRS, Photographs

Castle of Mey (Barrogill Castle)

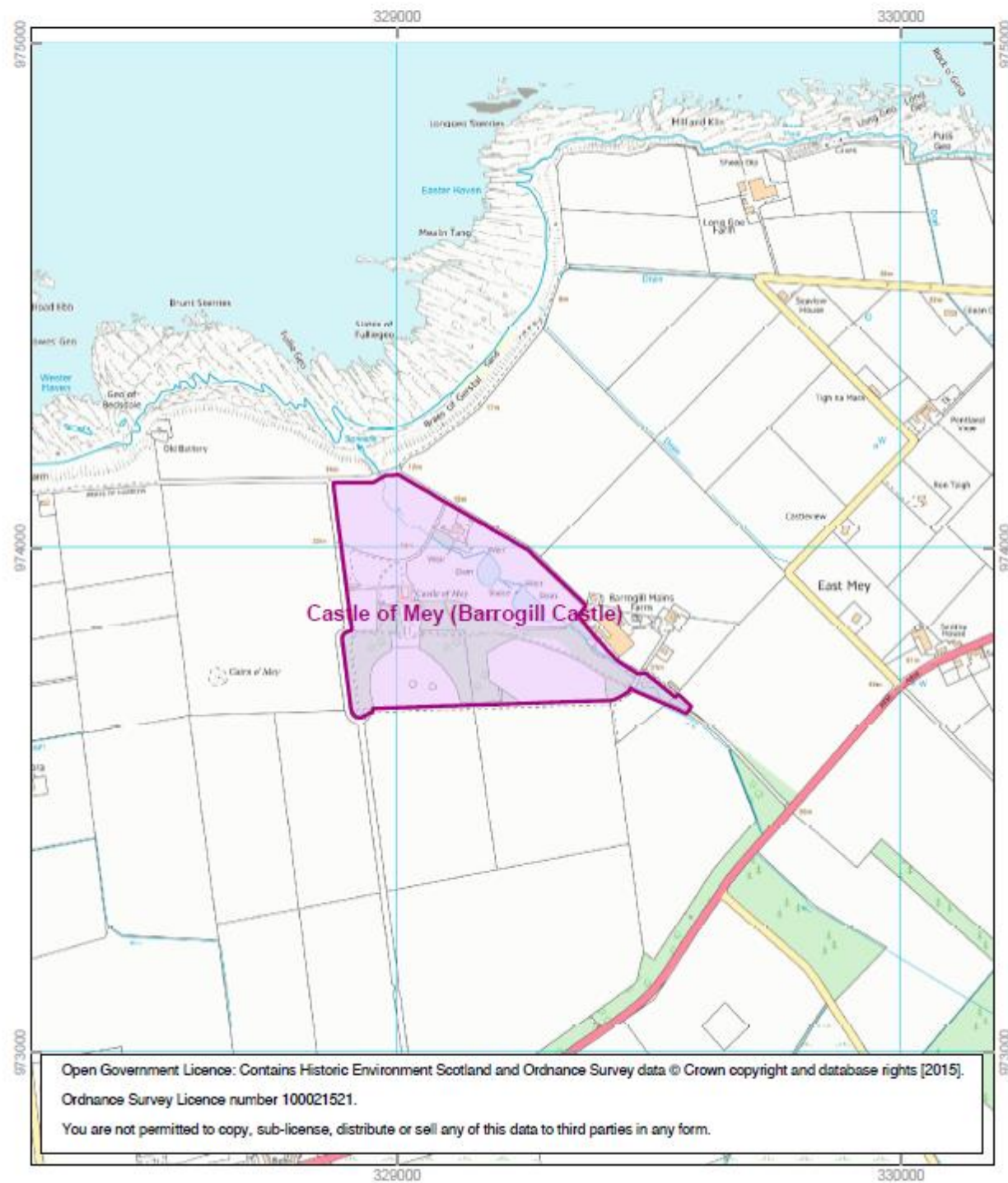
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Council: Highland

Map Scale: 1:10,000

 Garden and Designed Landscape Boundary



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