



Report of an archaeological survey of the Policies of Castle Leod, Strathpeffer, Ross-shire

January to May 2013



With the kind permission of John Mackenzie, Earl of Cromartie

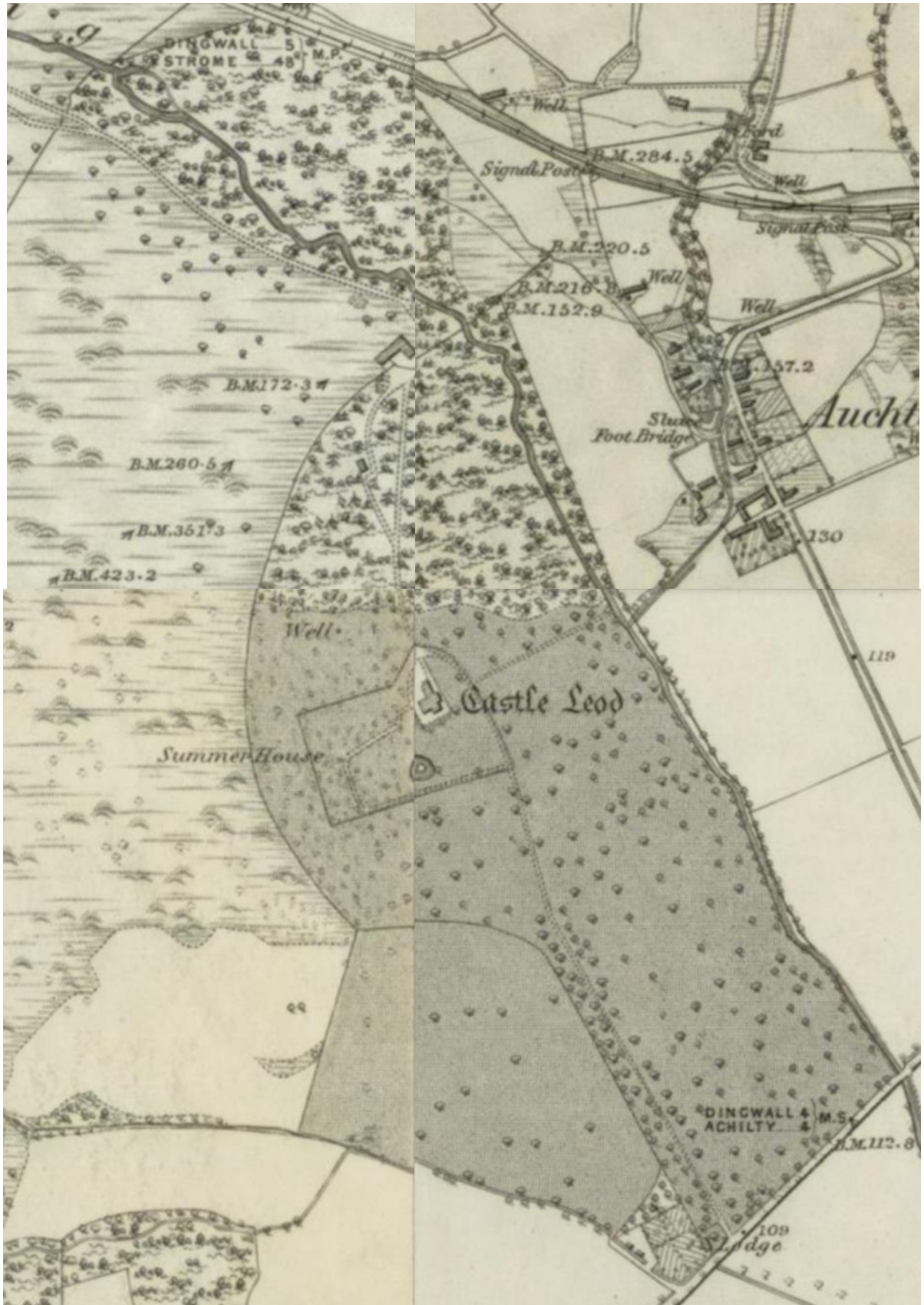
**Report of an archaeological survey of features within the policies
of Castle Leod, Strathpeffer, Ross-shire, carried out by members
of the North of Scotland Archaeological Society**

January – May 2013

Members of the team:

Anne Cockcroft, Anne Coombs, Bob and Rosemary Jones, Meryl Marshall, John and Trina Wombell

Front cover: Castle Leod with, in the foreground, one of the Spanish chestnut trees reputedly planted
c1553



Castle Leod and its Policies - First Edition Ordnance Survey map, 1872-76

Introduction and Objectives

A project of surveying and recording the archaeological sites within the grounds of Castle Leod was carried out by members of the North of Scotland Archaeological Society (NOSAS) in the winter of 2012-13. NOSAS is a group of amateur archaeologists who share an avid enthusiasm for the archaeology of the North of Scotland, furthering its study and promoting its interest to a wider audience. The project was undertaken by the small number of members who have volunteered for duty at the castle on the days that it is open to the public.

The aims of the project were:

1. To carry out a limited amount of documentary research and in particular to study the old maps, plans and aerial photographs (1946-47) of the Castle and its policies.
2. To walkover the policies prospecting for the remains of archaeological features.
3. To record the sites by taking a grid reference using a hand held GPS, writing a description and taking photographs. In addition a plan of the grounds with the sites plotted on it would be produced.
4. To try to determine a sequence of development of the grounds around the castle. And if possible to work out the relationship of the settlement of Achterneed to the castle. Achterneed is on the opposite side of the Peffery Burn and just 400m to the NE of the castle.
5. To produce a report at the end of the project and to enter our findings on the Highland Council Historic Environment Record (HER) and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments (RCHAMS) Canmore database

There were limits to the resources that were to be used; we did not have hi-tec equipment and we did not intend to consult the Cromartie archives for instance.

Three features had been recorded on the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monument's Scotland (RCAHMS) Canmore database prior to the date of the project. Details can be accessed at <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/12469/details/castle+leod>;

1. A tower house (the castle) – Canmore ID 12469, NMRS No NH45NE 09
2. The gate lodge, gate and piers – Canmore ID 142269, NMRS No NH45NE 09.01
3. A possible golf course – Canmore ID 111274, NMRS No NH45NE 09.02 centred on NH 4865 5900 and identified from aerial photographs of 1995

Eight features were recorded on the Highland Council Historic Environment Record available at <http://her.highland.gov.uk/> :

1. Castle Leod (MOTTE) – HER ID MHG6283
2. Castle Leod (CASTLE, TOWER HOUSE, TOWER HOUSE) - HER ID MHG45098
3. Gate Lodge, Castle Leod (LODGE) – HER ID MHG23647
4. Castle Leod, Gardens (GARDEN) – HER ID MHG23647
5. Burial ground, SW of Castle Leod (CEMETERY) – HER ID MHG32665
6. Castle Leod, Golf course – HER ID MHG34684
7. Castle Leod, Gardens (SUMMERHOUSE) – HER ID MHG42154
8. Possible standing stone, Castle Leod (STANDING STONE) – HER ID MHG54214

Castle Leod and its policies are entered on the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes <http://data.historic-scotland.gov.uk/pls/htmldb/f?p=2400:15:0:::GARDEN:GDL00094>

Maps consulted were:

Averys map of Moray Firth – 1727

William Roy Military Map – c1750

Barony of Castle Leod (HCA/D91716) – surveyed Peter May 1756 drawn John Leslie 1762

Plan of the barony of Castle Leod from an old plan of Peter May - 1796

Plan of Castle Leod showing gardens (NRAS4156/3/6) – surveyed by Capt N Maclean - Dec 1828

First Edition Ordnance Survey – surveyed 1872 – 76 and published in 1881

Second Edition Ordnance Survey – published 1904

Castle Leod and its policies - a Brief Historical Background

The castle sits on a man-made “motte” or mound which probably dates to the 13th or 14th century. Initially there would have been a timber fortification on the mound but this would have been later replaced by a stone built structure; evidence of 14th century stonework has been located within the basement of the castle.

The Mackenzie Clan moved east from Kintail in Wester Ross in the 15th Century and established a base at the crannog in Loch Kinellan which is located just to the west of Strathpeffer. In the 16th century John of Killin, 10th Chief of the Clan Mackenzie was granted the lands of Castle Leod and it is thought that much of the present castle dates to this time. John of Killin planted two (?three) Spanish chestnut trees in the grounds of the castle c1553. In 1608 Kenneth, 13th Chief of the Clan, granted the lands of “Cultelloud” to his brother Roderick Mackenzie. In 1605 Roderick (Rory) had married Margaret MacLeod, an heiress from Lewes; he marked the occasion by making significant alterations to the castle including an ornately carved stone over the doorway in 1616. He also added the lands of Tarbat in Easter Ross to his properties in 1623.

Few changes were made to the Castle and the formal landscape which surrounded it in the 17th century. A walled garden and orchard to the east of the castle probably date to this time and to the west was a park with a shelter belt of ash trees extending around the west and southwest of the castle. The principal landscape feature was a formal grass ride lined by a triple avenue of trees and aligned N-S in front of the castle, this is clearly depicted on the Avery map (right) of 1725. During this period the main drive approached from the east crossing the Peffery Burn which formed the eastern parkland boundary (HS 2003).



At the end of the 17th century New Tarbat House, at Kildary in Easter Ross was built and became the main residence for the family. But in 1717 the family was heavily in debt and:

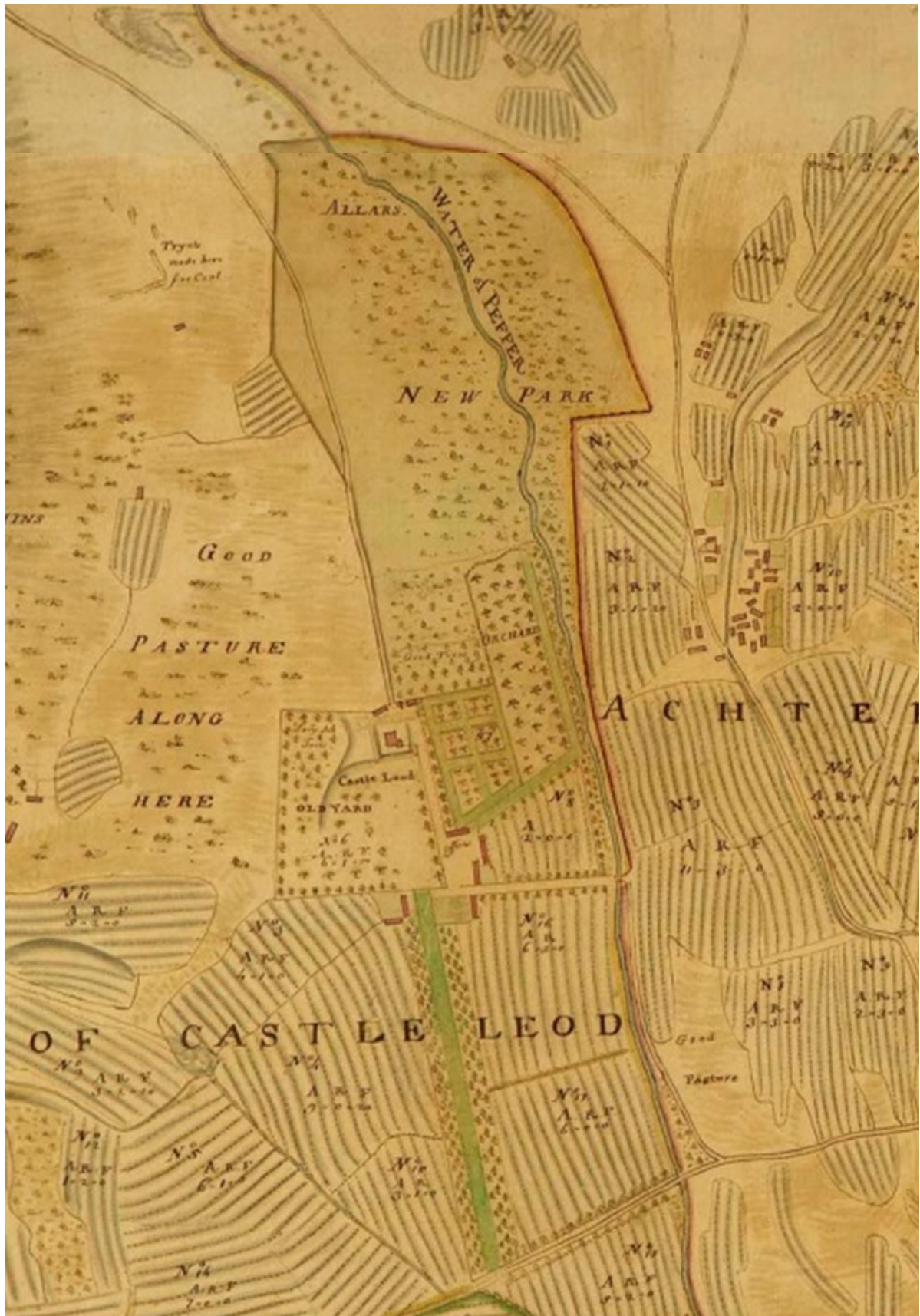
“there were reports that Castle Leod was in a ruinous state and the policies surrounding it in bad condition” (Richards and Clough p52).

George Mackenzie, 3rd Earl of Cromartie, inherited in 1731 and made efforts to develop agriculture introducing several new methods of “Improvement” to the estate and renovating the mansion houses of New Tarbat and Castle Leod. Richards and Clough tell us that:

“(George, the 3rd Earl) brought new crop rotations of barley, wheat, peas and beans to Strathpeffer. Much hedging and ditching was undertaken and he planted 100 acres of timber at Strathpeffer. He also embarked on schemes of consolidation including enclosures at the Castle Leod Mains”

George also introduced colliers to investigate the possibilities of an outcrop of coal near Castle Leod. The vein was only 12” thick and proved a disappointment, later being described as “not true coal but a slaggy mineral pitch” (New Statistical Account). But the Earls efforts at “Improvement” were only partially successful and when he entered into the disastrous events of the 1740s he was financially bankrupt. In the rebellion of 1745-46 George took the side of the Jacobites and after their defeat at Culloden he was imprisoned. He was spared the death sentence but was exiled to Devon where he died in 1766, his title attainted and his lands forfeited.

For three decades after “the 45” the estate was in the hands of the Commissioners for Forfeited Estates. Castle Leod was used initially as a garrison with 100 troops quartered there, but it was later let to Mackenzie of Avoch on a 19 year lease. Annexation entailed “the attempted alleviation of social and economic ills and modernisation of the estate with the help of the state”. One of the Commissioners first acts was to request a thorough survey and report of the territory from the



Extract from the “Barony of Castle Leod” (HCA/D91716) – surveyed Peter May 1756, drawn John Leslie 1762 – reproduced by permission of John Mackenzie, Earl of Cromartie

mapmaker Peter May (*this resulted in the 1762 map, a “snapshot” of the times and an extremely valuable resource today*). Peter May remarked on the heavy erosion of the soil caused by the direction of the rigs which ran down rather than across the hillsides and also that:

“The Tenantry on this Estate are for the most part very poor, & live in a wretched beggarly way, the Cattle and they generally Sleep under the same Roof” (1762 map)

Agricultural improvement under Annexation, despite the efforts of the agents and their relatively moderate renting policy, was slow. To a large extent it appears to have been frustrated by the entrenched character of Highland practice. Small improvements were accomplished and 300 acres of forest was planted at Strathpeffer, but at the end of the era little advance seems to have been achieved and in its final years the Board seems to have lost some of its sense of purpose.

George’s son John, Lord MacLeod, aged 18 at the time of Culloden, was also charged with treason after the events of 1745-46 but he was pardoned in 1748. He gave up his rights to the estate and settled in Sweden where he joined the army rising to the highest rank and being given the name “Count Cromartie” by the Swedish king. In 1777 he returned to Scotland and petitioned George III for restoration of his estates in return for raising a Highland Regiment for the Government. This offer was accepted and in 1784 the estate was returned to him for the sum of £19,000.

John built a new mansion at Tarbat on the site of the previous Tarbat House and once again it became the base for the family. The project strained the family’s finances and burdened the estate with debt yet again. John died in 1789 and in the next decades the estate descended through a series of distantly related people none of whom were particularly endowed with capital. The family finances continued to decline and by the mid-19th century were in a poor state



Extract from
a plan of
Castle Leod
(NRAS4156/
3/6) –
surveyed by
Capt N
Maclean -
Dec 1828

The first half of the 19th century saw a series of tenants at Castle Leod as the sport of shooting became popular. Shooting rents were to become an important part of estate revenue as the demand for shooting leases grew. The census of 1841 has just a gardener and a game keeper with their families resident at Castle Leod and the NSA (1838) reports:

“(The castle) is surrounded with large parks and tall ancestral trees, among them are oak, ash,

sycamore or plane-tree, elm, lime, arbor vitae, laburnum and chestnut. One of the last kind is a splendid tree measuring in circumference at the ground 24 feet and breast height 18 feet. Its branches spread to the extent of about 90 feet in diameter

In 1849 Anne Hay-Mackenzie revived the family fortunes by marrying George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, Marquis of Sutherland. Anne and her husband were instrumental in developing the spa of Strathpeffer, which had initially been established in 1819, the beneficial effects of the spa waters having been recognized in the 18th century. The Strathpeffer Spa was to become an important asset to the Cromartie Estates. Anne was a close friend of Queen Victoria, becoming Mistress of the Robes, and as a personal gift to her, Queen Victoria recreated the family title. Anne became the 1st Countess of Cromartie. Castle Leod had a rear wing in the baronial style added in 1854 and became a "shooting lodge" for Lord Stafford, much to the displeasure of his advisers who felt it should be leased to bring in revenue for the estate. The mid to late 19th century was a significant period of landscape development as resources were channeled into the estate making it a fitting base for the revived earldom. The entry on the "Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes" reports that:

"It was probably during this time that the walled garden, orchard and buildings (*marked as "Offices" and Mains of Castle Leod on the 1762 map*), east of the Castle, were cleared in order to create an informal and picturesque setting for the Castle. Extensive parkland was established and woodlands throughout the policies included many exotic trees. The Main Drive which had been routed along the earlier formal ride south of the Castle in the early 1800s was altered to lead in a wide sweep up to the Castle. Early 19th century topographical illustrations indicate that during this period the Castle mound was modified to create the existing irregular terrace below the Castle".

Over the next 4 decades the Cromartie Estate benefitted from the financial support of the Sutherland family and when Anne died in 1888, the estate passed to her 2nd son, Francis. The long association with the Sutherlands ended and the Cromartie Estate was expected to stand on its own feet.

Francis died in 1893 and his eldest daughter Sybil (1872-1962) although only 15 at the time, inherited. She married Colonel Blunt Mackenzie (1860-1949) in 1899. Blunt brought new energy and ideas to the estate and quickly assumed control on behalf of his wife. He had visions of economic development on several fronts including the provision of hydro-electricity to Strathpeffer and Dingwall. But finances were still in a poor state and the solution to the problems lay in a series of asset sales. Strathpeffer Spa was sold in 1907 and following the First World War repeated land sales in both the east and the west continued until 1949.

An extension to the north wing of Castle Leod had been added in 1911 when the family had intended to switch residence from Tarbat House to the castle. Sybil's son, Rorie, 4th Earl of Cromartie (b1904) lived for all of his life at the Castle, but Sybil herself resided at Tarbat House until her death in 1962.

More recent developments to the designed landscape have been the introduction of sports grounds; a games field for the Strathpeffer Highland Gathering, which has been held since 1882, and which is also used as a shinty pitch by Caberfeidh Shinty Club, founded in 1886, and a cricket ground for Ross County Cricket Club established in 1902. It is also reported that horse racing took place too.

Bibliography

Castle Leod – Guidebook to the Castle

Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes – Historic Scotland, 2003 (inclusion of Castle Leod)

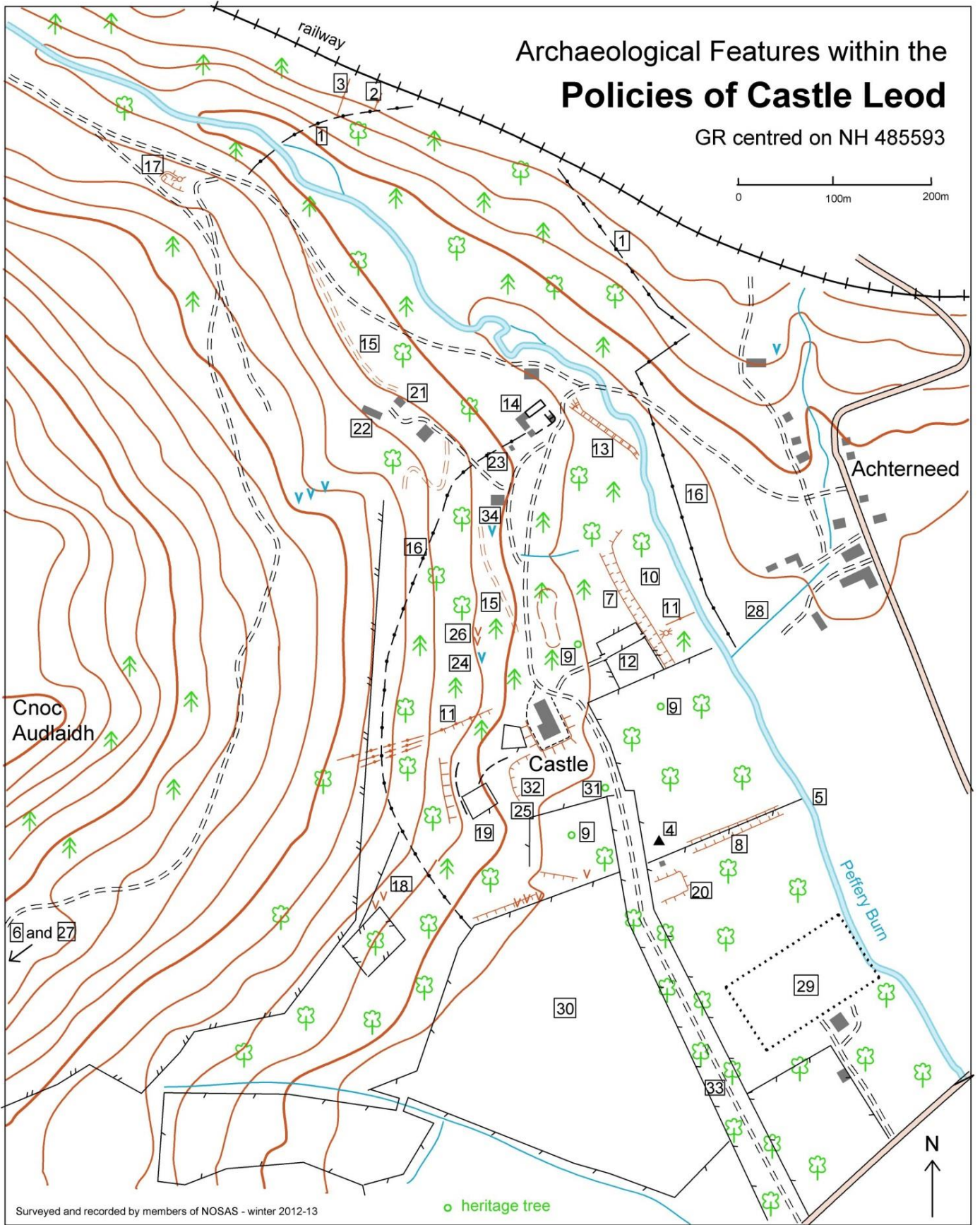
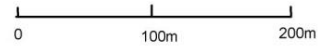
New Statistical Account for the Parish of Fodderty (1838)

Old Statistical Account for the Parish of Fodderty (1791-99)

Richards, E and Clough, M (1989) - Cromartie: Highland Life 1650-1914

Archaeological Features within the Policies of Castle Leod

GR centred on NH 485593



Results

Thirty sites were located and details were taken of each, they are described in the gazetteer which follows; where relevant, reference to the old maps is made in each record. From the history it would seem that there were three phases of landscaping to the policies; a tentative suggestion as to which sites relates to which phase is made here. The phases are:

1. The early period of the 17th and early 18th century when the extent of the policies is as outlined on the Avery map of 1725. The three ancient trees (sites 9), the avenue of trees to the south of the castle (site 33), the enclosure (site 25) with its bounding north wall (site 11) and the orchard (site 10) relate to this period also possibly the old track (site 15) and the access road (site 8) with its bridge (site 5). The walled garden mentioned in the "Inventory of Designed Landscapes" may be the "garden" marked on the 1828 plan which on the 1762 map had been designated "orchard".
2. The period from the 1730s to the mid-19th century, the early part of which was when the 3rd Earl had introduced "Improvements". Sites relating to this period are the scant remains of the Mains of Castle Leod Home Farm marked as "offices" on the 1762 map (site 20), the explorations for coal and shale (sites 17, 18 and 26) and the walls enclosing the wooded area to the north of the Castle (sites 16 and 1). No evidence of the formal garden layout marked to the east of the castle on the 1762 map was found, although by the time of the 1828 plan the orchard has become a garden which is bounded on its west side by a ditch (channel 7).
3. The 1850s was another time of great change when the old gardens and buildings were swept away and much of the designed landscape with its trees was established. At this time the castle was let as a shooting lodge. The well (sites 24), the kennels (site 22), the game larder (site 23), the building (site 14), and the Games field (site 29) are relevant to this period, and possibly the standing stone (site 4).

Gazetteer of Sites

1. Boundary wall

This wall forms the north boundary of an area on both side of the Peffery Burn in the north part of the policies. The area is marked as "New Park" on the 1762 map and the wall is depicted as the march of Mains of Castle Leod farm. It appears on 1st Edition OS survey but is truncated by the railway. It is described in two sections.

A. The east part - NH 48760 59777 (SE end) to NH 48610 59913 (NE end/truncated by railway)

It is located in the upper part of the wood to the north of the Peffery Burn. Aligned NW-SE it is substantial but grossly ruined having a spread of between 1 and 2m.

B. The west part - NH 48466 59979 (ENE end) to NH 48265 59887 (WSW end /truncated by a track). Descends the slope obliquely on the north side of the Peffery Burn, crosses the Peffery Burn at NH 48313 59939 and a short stretch continues to the south of the burn before it meets the track. The wall is generally substantial, with moss covered stones but tumbled in places. From the current OS map it appears that the wall ascends the hill to the SW but no evidence of it was seen because of the rough nature of the terrain which has seen extensive forest operations.

2. Wall –NH 48446 59990 (N end) – NH 48438 59980 (S end). The eastern of two short walls which abut wall 1 to its north. Wall 2 is grossly wasted and ascends the hill and has been truncated by the railway; it continues on the north side as part of the croftlands.

3. Wall –NH48403 60004 (N end) to NH 48394 59969 (S end). The western of the two grossly wasted walls which abut wall 1 and continue on the north side of the railway as the boundaries of croftlands.

4. Standing stone (HER ID MHG 54214) NH 48724 59178. A standing stone, 0.8m in height x 0.5m thick x 0.8 width, has no carvings. Considering that this site was occupied by "Offices" (marked

on the 1762 map), this stone is probably not in its original position. It does not appear on the 1st Edition OS map.

5. Bridge abutment – NH 48892 59239. The remains of a faced stone bridge abutment is seen on the west bank of the Peffery Burn. The abutment is 1m high and c6m in length but grossly wasted in places. A bridge is marked in this position on the 1762 map and also on the 1828 plan. The bridge is on the main access road (see site 8) to the castle

6. Meallers Houses – centred on NH 47811 59006. Several stone edges with distinct corners at this location indicate small buildings, but their size and form could not be determined in the dense bracken. To the west there is an area of fertile ground, now wooded, at an easy angle. This small settlement is marked on the 1762 map as “Meallers houses”. No traces of the other buildings and small patches of improved ground marked on the map to the NE were found.

7. Channel – this channel is 120m in length 2m deep and 15m width, it is probably a soak away for a stream which descends the slope to the northeast and was probably created when the “orchard”(on the 1762 map), site 10 to its east, became a “garden” (marked on the 1828 plan).

8. Track/Avenue of trees –NH 48860 59219 (E end) to NH 48722 59170 (W end). Aligned ENE – WSW, this track is roughly 150m in length and runs from the ticket office of the castle car park to the site of an old bridge over the Peffery Burn (site 5). Several trees line the track which for much of its length is sunken and c0.5m deep. The main access road to the castle is marked as taking this route on the 1762 map.

9. Spanish Chestnut trees – three trees which are reputed to date to c1550

A. NH 48649 59202 south of the castle this tree is dead but still standing

B. NH 48733 59340 situated east of the castle, this is the only tree of the three that is still alive. It has a plaque with the words:

Planted c1550 by John Mackenzie, 1Xth Chief of Kintail, 1480 – 1556, Privy Councillor to King James V and Queen Mary, Great Grandfather of Sir Roderick Mackenzie of Castle Leod, Coigach and Tarbat, ancestor of the Earls of Cromartie, 1574 – 1626”.

The plaque, which appears to have been placed in 1938, gives the measurements of two of the trees and the location of tree C to the NW, but it does not mention the tree to the south of the castle, tree A.

C. NH 48652 59400 the remains of this tree are located NE of the castle

10. Orchard/Garden - NH 48677 59527 (N end) to NH 48766 59388 (S end). A rectangular area on the west side of the Peffery Burn below the castle may have been surrounded by a wall. It is aligned ENE – WSW and measures roughly 170m x60m. It is bounded on the east side by the burn and a line of lime trees and on the W side by a wide channel, Site 7. At the north end its limit is less clear. This area may have been an early walled garden but on the 1762 map the north part of the “Orchard” is marked in this position and by the time of the 1828 plan it has become a “garden” again.

11. Wall/bank – NH48764 59425 (E end) to NH 48414 59300 (W end). This feature is aligned ENE-WSW and probably formed the boundary of the old policies around the castle ie predating the 1762 map, it may mark the extent of the policies as shown on the Avery map of 1725. The remains of the wall are variable where extant and have not survived in the immediate vicinity of the castle and the garden. The wall can be divided into sections:

A. East section – NH 48764 59425 (E end) Roughly 30m in length the barely discernible footings of a stone wall are 0.2m height x 2m spread. At the W end it is truncated by the channel (site 7) and a prominent knoll, 3m high, c15m in diameter, at NH 48740 59420 may be clearance removed from the wall during excavation of the channel. This wall would have formed the south boundary of the garden marked on the 1828 plan

B. West section – NH 48545 59326 (E end) to NH 48467 59314 (W end). To the west of the castle the wasted wall climbs steeply and is a barely discernible bank with a steep slope (as much as 2m in places) to the S. It is overgrown with rhododendrons for some of its length



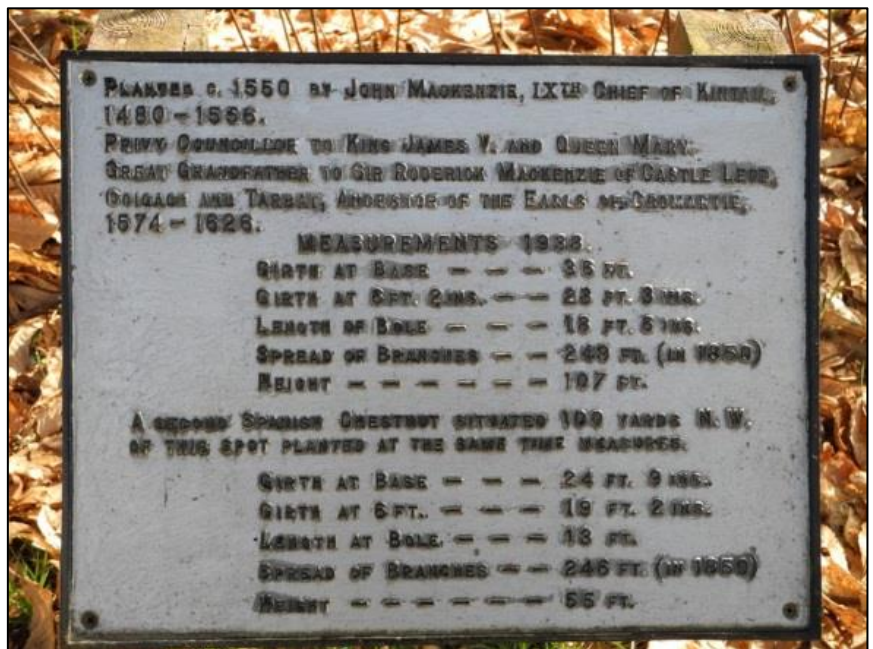
Site 4, the standing stone



Site 5, the site of the bridge over the Peffery Burn with the remains of the abutment on the west bank



Site 9B, the Spanish chestnut tree to the east of the castle with the plaque below



Site 9C, the remains of the Spanish chestnut tree amongst the snowdrops to the NE of the castle



C. West upper part – emerges from rhododendrons at NH 48467 59314 as three banks which diverge. It was not possible to detect the line of the banks higher up as forest operations had rendered the terrain extremely rough, but the banks may have been associated with a group of deciduous trees which is marked on the 2nd edition OS map of 1904; some of the trees are still standing. This part of the wall may not be contemporary with the lower part.

12. Garden – centred on NH 48696 59386 and measuring 60m x 50m this is a relatively modern kitchen garden surrounded by a fence. It has a cultivated vegetable plot at its centre, an orchard in the SE part and a pet's graveyard with several headstones in the NE corner. The garden is not marked on the 2nd Edition OS map of 1904.

13. Tail race –NH 48637 59654 (NW end) to NH 48694 59628 (SE end) Aligned WNW-ESE this channel is roughly 70m in length and generally 3m in width and up to 0.8m in depth. At its NW end it bifurcates and both channels are then truncated by the road. This tail race probably emerged from a mill which was on the site of the present saw mill. Mills are not depicted on any of the maps.

14. Building – NH 48598 59662 (north corner) a substantial L-shaped building which is rapidly falling into ruin. The main part to the west is roofless and has mortared stone walls to 2.5m height and a chimney still standing to 5m height. The eastern “leg” of the building has been levelled to the ground in its middle section and an outshot with curving corner has been added. The building is marked on the 1st Edition OS survey of 1873 and on the 2nd Edition OS survey of 1904. A small cottage has been constructed more recently at the south end of the building.

15. Old road –The line of an old road can be detected to the north of the castle. It exists in two sections, the middle part being obliterated by more recent buildings and their gardens:

S section – NH 48566 59449 to NH 48534 59526. Aligned SSE-NNW this part of the track exists as a grassy terrace 4m in width and c80m in length. It is truncated at its north end by the garden of a house

N section – NH 48446 59667 to NH 48358 59793. Aligned SE-NW and c120m in length this section is less distinct than the south section and is now a path.

16. Wall – a substantial wall which encircles the castles and immediate ground. Described in two sections which may or may not be contemporary with each other, only the east section appears on the 1762 map, although the west section may be marked on the Roy map of 1750:

A. W part - NH 48578 59632 (N end) to NH 48533 59094 (S end) Takes a curving line from building 14 at the north end to the corner of a field SW of the castle. It is circa 700m in length and much of it has the characteristics of a “ha ha” with the faced stone wall generally up to 1m in height

B. E part – follows the line of the Peffery Burn on its east side and is up to 1m in height and encloses the fields to the west of Achterneed.

17. Workings (north) – centred on NH 48206 59884. A scooped area of 20m x 20m, with extension to east, is recessed into the slope and has upcast material on its N and W side. It may be a stone quarry or it may be the “trial made for coal” marked on 1762 map

18. Workings (south) – centred on NH 48433 57117 – an area of disturbed ground with humps, hollows and shaley bedrock in places. This feature is probably excavations for coal and shale.

19. Burial ground – centred on NH 48563 59236. (HER ID MHG32665) A fenced enclosure with four headstones is roughly 50 x 50m and on a moderately steep slope facing the castle. At the NE corner there is an ornamental gate between two stone pillars; a pathway leads towards the castle.

20. Building and platform – centred on NH 48740 59130. This raised platform to the SE of the ticket office and forming part of the car park is rectangular and on a NNW-SSE alignment. The east part is roughly 20m x 8m and has a tree at its centre. Adjacent to the west is a possible yard of firm ground with a stone edge at the S end and a slight bank at the N end. A group of 6 buildings and an

enclosure are marked as "Offices" on 1762 map and on the 1828 plan the eastern four buildings are still standing. Building 20 and its platform are in the position of the SE building and enclosure of this group. No evidence of the other buildings could be detected although there were some amorphous humps and bumps on the west side of the access road to the castle.

21. Building – centred on NH 48448 59657. A small building on a NW-SE alignment is now used as a shed with a corrugated iron roof. The building appears to have been truncated at its SE end as it is open at this end and only 5m x 3m. The three upstanding stone walls which are mortared are up to 1m height.

22. Kennels – This site comprises two rectangular buildings on a platform. The platform is recessed into the slope and has a concrete retaining wall to the rear. The buildings are on an E-W alignment, they are disused and overgrown with vegetation and young trees but are generally in good order:

East building at NH 48419 59650 is of stone construction and has a slate roof, abutting to the south there are three "runs" surrounded by high metal fences. This building is marked on 2nd edition OS map of 1904

West building at NH 48403 59653 is constructed of corrugated iron and has two "runs"; it is not marked on the 2nd edition OS map of 1904

23. Game Larder at NH 48560 59612 a small wooden building measuring 4m x 3m on a concrete platform. It has slatted walls, is 2.5m in height and has a corrugated iron roof. The windows are not glazed but are covered with mesh although one is slatted.

24. Well (also known as the Countesses Well) – NH 48538 59376. This well is situated within a small stone lined structure which is roughly circular, 0.7m in diameter and 0.7m in height. The structure is covered by a stone slab, on top of which there is a small stone ornament c0.7m high; it comprises a conical shaped stone with at least 8 vertical grooves carved on it and a stone ball mounted on top.

25. Enclosure (Recorded as Garden HER ID MHG23647). NH48533 59094 (SW corner) – NH48472 59312 (NW corner). This enclosure defines the immediate area around the castle and is marked quite clearly on the 1762 map. The east boundary is the road and fence to the east of the castle and the west boundary which is indistinct for much of its length but can be detected as an abrupt change of slope, overgrown with rhododendrons, above and to the west of the castle. Site 11, the wall or bank to the north of the castle, forms the northern boundary of the enclosure and the south side is bounded for part of its length by a steep bank with a line of trees (and a fence); this line continues eastwards as the track 8. The enclosure is marked on FE OS map of 1872 and on the 1762 map it is annotated "Old Yard". Within the enclosure are:

The burial ground (HER ID MHG32665) – see site 19 above

An ancient Spanish chestnut tree – see site 9 above

The site of the Hanging tree – see site 31 below

The site of the drowning pond – see site 32 below

And also

25.1 A garden – centred on NH 48590 59283. An enclosure to the immediate west of the castle,

surrounded by a fence and roughly 40m x 30m. It has an overhanging crag/grotto with rockery and steps, and a formal area with a sundial at its centre.

25.2 A terraced footpath – NH 48543 59200 (S end) marked on FES. Appears as a grassy terrace 2m in width; it can be followed northwards for 50m but then disappears under dense undergrowth. No evidence of the Summerhouse (HER ID MHG42154) marked on the FES was seen, it is possibly hidden in the undergrowth.

25.3 A depression – NH 48664 59152. Along the line of the south boundary of the enclosure this large oval man-made depression of unknown purpose is 1m in depth x 11m x 6.5m.

25.4 Pits – centred on NH 48617 59125. Three pits in a line along the south boundary are c10m apart. They measure 0.8m deep x 3m x 2m and are of unknown purpose



Site 8, the “sunken” track with several trees along its length, formerly the main access road to the castle



Site 19, the ornamental gate to the burial ground



Site 16, the curving wall to the west of the castle, much of which has the features of a “ha ha”

Site 22, the game larder



Site 24, the Countesses well

Site 22, the kennels



26 Pits – two pits just to the north of the Countesses Well, feature 24, have been excavated into the slope. They may be exploratory diggings for coal/shale
Southmost - centred on NH 48517 59387 is 1m deep and c3m diameter
Northmost – centred on NH 48516 59401 is 0.7m deep and c2.5m diameter

27. Boundary Wall – NH 47889 58935 (junction with track) 1 km to the west of the castle, on steep ground and on FC land, this is a substantial stone wall in reasonable order. It is marked on 1st edition OS map of 1872 and on the 1762 map it forms the march of the Mains of Castle Leod

28. Old Track and possible ford at NH 48805 59388. (the line of the track is now used by the diverted Achterneed Burn) What appears to be a track from the settlement of Achterneed to the “Offices” south of Castle Leod is depicted on the 1762 map. On the FE OS map of 1872 the line is used by the Achterneed Burn which on the 1762 map runs down the side of the present road south of Achterneed

29. Games Field – A large area of parkland to the SE of the castle which has several ancient trees has a shinty pitch which doubles up as the field for the Strathpeffer Highland Gathering. Oral evidence and aerial photographs of 1946 show a horse racing course at this site. To the south of the shinty pitch there is a cricket pitch and a modern pavilion is seen at the centre of the field.

30. Possible Golf Course (Canmore ID 111274, NMRS No NH45NE 09.02 - HER ID MHG34684) – centred on NH 4865 5900, previously recorded from APs of 1995. No evidence of a golf course was seen in the field to the west of the avenue of trees south of Castle Leod and no knowledge of a golf course is known by local people

31. Site of the Hanging tree – centred on NH 48668 49252. This site, reputedly that of a “Hanging tree”, comprises a small mound with a rotting tree trunk and two old trees growing from it.

32. Site of the “drowning pond” – NH 48599 59246. This feature is marked on the First Edition OS survey as a pond but it is now filled in, levelled and used as a football pitch. The feature is also annotated as “pond” on the 1828 plan

33. Avenue of trees – N end NH 48720 59120, S end NH 48850 58770

Aligned N-S in front of the castle and approximately 400m in length this avenue of trees is currently the main approach to the castle. The avenue is lined by two rows of trees on each side which are almost certainly not the original trees marked on the Avery map of 1727 and on the 1762 map. In this earlier period the avenue was a formal grass ride and not the main approach to the castle; this was from the east over a bridge, site 8.

34. Well – GR NH 48545 59525 This stone lined well (right) is in the garden of “Gunroom cottage” and covered by corrugated iron sheets and stones. It is usually dry in the summer months. It is c1.2m in diameter and c1.5m deep and the east part of the upper lip of the well is formed by a large flat slab 1.3m x 0.6m which may have a single cup mark on its east edge.



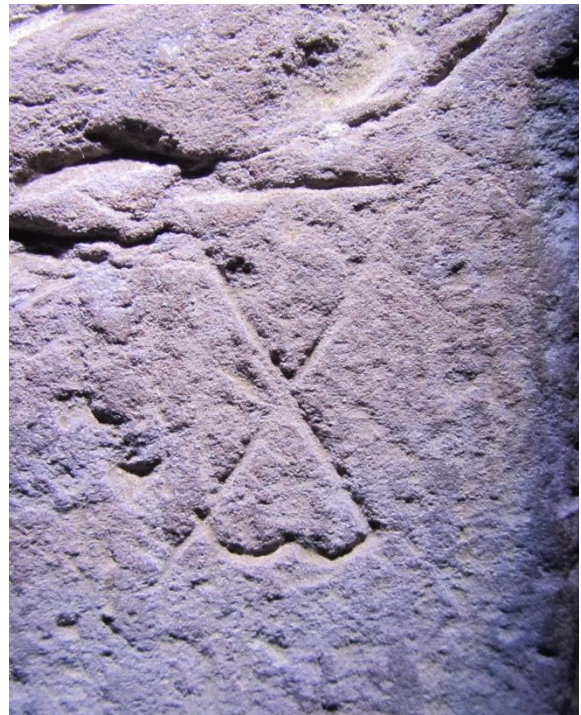
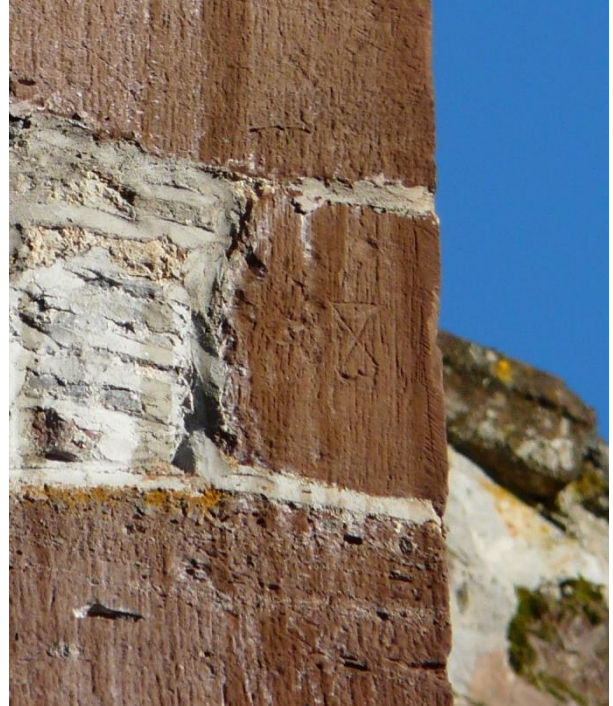
Appendix 1

Masons Marks at Castle Leod

Castle Leod displays numerous masons (or 'apotropaic') marks of varying design carved into the dressed stones. They are usually 50mm to 60mm in length and 25mm – 30mm in width and found equally on the inside and the outside of the castle. Whilst many marks remain clearly visible many more have been eroded by the weather on the outside of the building; some are simply built in where we shall never see them, or are covered inside by panelling.

The marks were carved as a sign of ownership or responsibility for work executed and the practice is thought to have originated in the Early Medieval period. A good place to look for them is inside the front door lobby and on the walls of the grand staircase. Others can be seen in the small lobby between the drawing room and the dining room. Outside the best sequence can be found on the quoin stones of the south west corner of the castle. With binoculars we have identified masons marks right to the top of the castle.

Most of the marks here seem to be unique to Castle Leod. The heart shape attached to a triangle is the most common mark both inside and outside the castle and can be found 'heart up' or 'heart down', and sometimes sideways on. Some marks are deeply cut and others are more lightly incised or scratched using a straight edge and a sharp pointed tool. One mark occurs on an inside face of a narrow gun loop, proof that the mark was made before the stone was set in place.



On major building projects like Castle Leod the project would have been led by a master mason and it

is understood that the masons belonged to a guild and they stayed in a lodge on site. Most carving was done at the quarry but we do not know for sure where the stone for Castle Leod was quarried, possibly on the other side of the valley.

There are other small marks just 20mm long in the drawing room lobby that may be something much more sinister. Some marks on the stones of medieval buildings are thought to have been made to ward off witches. Castle Leod was built at a time when witches were much feared and were horribly persecuted. It may be that some came to grief in the drowning pond at the bottom of the castle front lawn – this site is now filled in and levelled off.

In time we hope to record every mason's and other marks on the castle both inside and out which we hope will give insights into its building sequences.



One of the "other" marks

Appendix 2

Transcription of Text from 1762 map "Map of Barony of Castle Leod" – Peter May (bottom righthand corner)

Some General Observations

This Barony of Castle Leod lys on that part of the Shire of Rojs, commonly called Wester Rojs, two Miles West from Dingwall, which is a Small Town & of little Trade, alltho it be ye Metropolis of the County. The Valley it lys in is called Strathpeffer and is Justly Esteemed a pretty Small place in which Castle Leod lys at the West End, & has a fine prospect East toward ye Cromarty Firth, with a Range of Hills on each Side, and a Sweet Valley between them. It is also Twelve Miles from Invernejs, but has bad Accejs, both on account of the Roads and Ferrys

This Estate in Generall is the Reverse of New Tarbet, here most of the Arable Land lys on Brea Sides Slopping pretty Steep, & the Soyl has a mixture of Clay in most of it, which with ye natural Declivity makes their way of Labouring tedious & uneasie, But what is Still worse, it is much Exposed to Land Floods in Winter, or Wet Seasons, which hurts it more than if the Grounds were Levell for in time of Rain or storm, every hollow or ploughfur becomes a gutter, and Runs with Such Rapidity as to hole &

carry away the Ground, which is fast the Case with Sundry of the Farms here, as may be seen from the Plan where the Banks and Breaches are shaded Black.

Beginning at East End of the Road Mark't A and then going Westward by the Towns of Inchbory, Keppoch, Inchveany & Auchterneed, all the lands lying on the North side of that Direction hang Steep to the South and is a good lot intermixed with Wood & Brush, which interrupts the Tillage greatly, in they go on of Ploughing it Constantly up & down hill & that without either a Ridge or any Gutter a Crofs to Stop or Carry to a Side the Long Course of Water, & this Inconvenency they give as the Reason why they do not Plough up their Lands in ye Autumn & Winter as they doe in other places.

All the Lands lying South from the Towns last Mentioned to ye Road mark't B at the East End and keeping the Course of Said Road Westward, untill it comes opposite to ye Milndam of (?Miln Nain) and then along by the Course of the Intake to ye Parks of Castle Leod, & then so many of that Parks & Land that lye on each Side of the Avinew lye Levell in the Bottom of the Valley on ye West End whereof is a Barren Muir with Short Heath, but could be Easily laid under Water as ye Situation is low & Levell & is under the Command of the Burn and Sundry Springs that comes from ye Rising Ground, which if properly diverted would be of great Service here, as may be Seen by ye places where the Burn breaks out in Speats, & where the Sward is thereby changed into Grafs, which they plough up in Scattered Ridges here & there as the Same is marked on the Plan.

All the Lands lying South from the Road & Burn as last Described hang Steep to ye North and much Skreened from the Sun. Especially the Farm of Ballmullach at the East End, which has but little Sun Shine for some months in Winter. The other Arable Lands lying South West from Castle Leod viz The Farms of Ardivall & Park, are also North lying Farms and much exposed as the Situation is high, but (?Kinnitta), Ardguise and Castle Leod itself have a very fine Exposure to ye South & ly warm under ye Cover of the hills, for more particulars See ye Discriptions.

The Tennantry on this Estate are for the most part very poor, & live in a wretched beggarly way, the Cattle and they generally Sleep under the same Roof, and have but little odds Between their Lodgings, from all the Informations I could get, there is not Four of Fourty Seven that is worth Thirty pound or could take more Land than they presently Occupie without bringing themselves in Debt, nor can it well be otherwise from Such Small Poje'sions held at a Dear Rent and formerly oppre'sed with Servitudes, which with their own Indolent practices may help to account for their bad Circumstances & which likewise has a bad consequence upon ye Ground for we seldom or ever find an Estate Occupied by Bankrupt Tennants but looses its Character through their bad Management.

In the Table of Contents I have Cla'sed the Ground of each farm in their proper Order & Divided the Arable Land under the Characters of Good, Indifferent & Bad & all the Barren Ground under the Name of Improvable, or Notimprovable and to make the Plan the more Intelligible I have Shaded the Arable Fields & described the Shape and Course of the Ridges re prickt Lines whereby one Sees of ye very first glance all the Arable Lands with ye Course of ye Ridges & Number of Stores in each field & also its No. which Numbers refer to a Book of Observations where the Names Situation & Characters of each is Mark't & Described Distinctly.

The Boundings of the Different Farms, which for Distinctions Sake is Shaded on the plan at Different Collours, will appear very irregular & at the same time very Inconvenient to the Tacksmen themselves, as some of them have Lands lying at their Neighbours door & that perhaps half a Mile from their own houses, which Land lying at Such a Distance, cannot be so Valuable to the Poje'sor as it would be to them who live just beside it, not only because it is out under his Eye, but the Odds of Dinging, Ploughing and every other part of the Labour is very considerable. These irregularitys may be Easily mended in the Event of new Leases by annexing Some of the Small Farms together, or by (?orciting) Tenements more centrally to the other Farms, all which I have taken particular Notice of in my Observations upon the Separat Farms to which I have refer.

As the Act prohibits the principal Tacksmen from having any Subtenants or Meallers under them, of which last there is One Hundred and Sixty Familys upon this Estate, (as may be Seen by the Table) that must flit or live in Some Village by themselves for which purposes I know no better place than Achterneed for their Accomodation, a great part of the Arable Lands upon this Farm lys Levell near the Town & Contiguous of it Self so that it Could be Easilly parcilled out in Acres, & would Serve a Number of this poor bodies that are Scattered through the Estate. This Town is likewise near the Mo's which is of great Weight to a design or purpose of this kind, & a number of hands could be Employed here if they inclined to work, this is a large subject for them, which would Sufficiently pay

any frugal Expenche they could be at.

The Boundings of this Estate, at least that part of it put upon this Plan, is very Distinct except on the West Side where it Marches with Sir Alexr McKenzie of Coull, who claims all this Baron Ground and Moyses on the West Side of the Black Ink lines beginning at Craigyriach & from it Southward by the Said Line untill it comes to the Letter B. And then by a Gutter ljsuing out of a worn out Moys to another Moys mark't A which he Says are his Exprejs Boundings as they are Mentioned in his Instruments to be By the Farms & Lands of Kinnahaird & Kindlan, & from that to Craigicouach, But the Tenants of Castle Leod who went a long to Capt Forbes & me when we were Reconsidering the Marches Say that the Boundings of this Barony begining at the South end of foresaid little Mojs mark't A and goeing Northwestward along by a Road defined upon this plan untill it comes to a little Rock Mark't Craiganalabaan or the Craig of the White Cow which they condescend upon as a Certain & fixt Bounding to the Estate, & from that Craig or Rock keeping pretty much the same direction Northwestward untill it goes to the Bounding of Glenskaigh which is not put upon this plan but Runs in a Line and is a Grajsing belonging to this Estate& lys just on the North West Sides of ye foresaid Craigyriach as may be seen by a separate Plan of that & the other Baron Grounds of this Barony.

There is a (?.....) Plan of ye Baron Grounds of Castle Leod which is done to a Small scale as it Contains only Hills, Moyses, & Some Glens which they use for Grajsing. It Joyns to ye North End of this plan at the line E.F. to G.H. which Line is also put upon the South End of the other plan to show that they unite there. I would have made them all to the same scale but that would have either Reduced this to a narrow Compajs (...) the Arable Lands would have been confused or Enlarged the other to Such a Size as would have made ye whole very unwieldy.

Upon this Barony of Castle Leod, there has been some tryals made for Coals & any Mains they found there on a Brae Side as mark't on the plan, but these pitts are now filled up so that one cannot know what kind they have been. The people who Saw the Tryals made Says these Stratas of Coal were so thin as not to be thought worth digging after. If they were there is plenty of Levell to carry off the Water.

Appendix 3

References to the placenames “Castle Leod” and “Achterneed”

(From Place names of Ross and Cromarty – WJ Watson 1904)

Contaneloid 1507,
Kandinloid, 1534,
Cultenloid 1547,
Cwltelloid and Cultaloid 1556,
Cultalode 1575,
Cultelloud 1609
Culterloud 1618,

From these old forms it appears that Castle Leod is a corruption facilitated doubtless by the presence of the “castle” which bears date of 1616. Contaneloid and Kandin loid represent “Caenn an leothaid” – head of the sloping hill-side; other forms point to “Cul da leothad” – at the back of two slopes, to wit, the slope of Achterneed and that immediately to the west of the castle

References to the placename “Achterneed”

Wethirnyde 1476,
Ouctirneide 1479,

(G) Uachdar-niad, the high ground rising up from the plain of Fodderty, Uachdar means “upland”, niad can hardly be explained from any Gaelic or Irish source, but it would very well represent Welsh “nant”, valley; cf. Welsh cant, Gael. Ceud, W. dant, G. deud. Achterneed would thus mean “the land above the valley”. Above Achterneed is a cup marked stone called “a' chlach phollach” the stone full of holes