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Six Castles and a Bastle in Upper Clydesdale.

by Tam Ward 2018.

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Abstract

A localised grouping of castle sites and a bastle house (Pl 1) are given as a guide to defensive sites dating from the 12th to the 17th centuries in Upper Clydesdale, South Lanarkshire.

Introduction

The upper reaches of the River Clyde have been the route in and out of south central Scotland since pre-historic times (e.g. Ward 1992 & 2010). The medieval period begins in the 12th century under the reigns of David I and his grandson Malcolm IV when they brought in second and third generation Flemish and possibly Norman descendants of those who fought for William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Under these kings Scotland's management came more into line with that in England, and the newcomers probably had to build themselves castles as their presence was likely to have been an unwelcome one by the indigenous populations.

Most of the historical evidence in this report has been gleaned from Irving & Murrays 'The Upper Ward of Lanarkshire' published in 1864 (I & M 1864), while any archaeological information is the authors own work at Windgate House (Ward 2018) and that of Chris Tabraham (Tabraham 1977-78) at Robertson motte.

The Castles

No 1. Crawford Castle – *dangerous building and should be viewed only from the roadside.*

Crawford castle (Pl 1, Fig 1 & 2) certainly began as a 12th century motte, whether it had a bailey is uncertain but the moat around the base of the motte can still be seen. Mentioned in records as early as 1175, the castle then would have been a timber one. The Lindsay family were early superiors to the barony, followed by Douglas's, and Hamilton's, who were probably responsible for building the first stone castle on the site. The scant remains seen today date to the 16th and 17th centuries.

Various inscribed stones from the castle are built into the walls of the nearby farmhouse.

The castle is most famous for having been attacked by William Wallace and described as "ane great bastille" (a defensive place). It was also visited by King James V when he entertained French ambassadors after a poor days hunting. For dessert at the dinner table he allegedly served them with bowls of gold nuggets, describing them as "the fruit of the country". James also seduced Elizabeth Carmichael, the daughter of the Castilian, he had several children by her, and maintained her in a castle (Boghouse) built for the purpose at Crawfordjohn (now gone), she was later married off to the laird of Cambusnethan.

As usual, many of our historic buildings have not succumbed to warfare, but to wanton vandalism of owners with little respect for history or the past. Crawford Castle was more or less rebuilt at the beginning of the 17th century by the Marquis of Douglas, and what is seen

today mostly belongs to that period. Of particular interest and seen in Pl 2 and Fig 1 is the unsupported window lintel on the north side, showing how, if left alone, ancient buildings can survive very well.

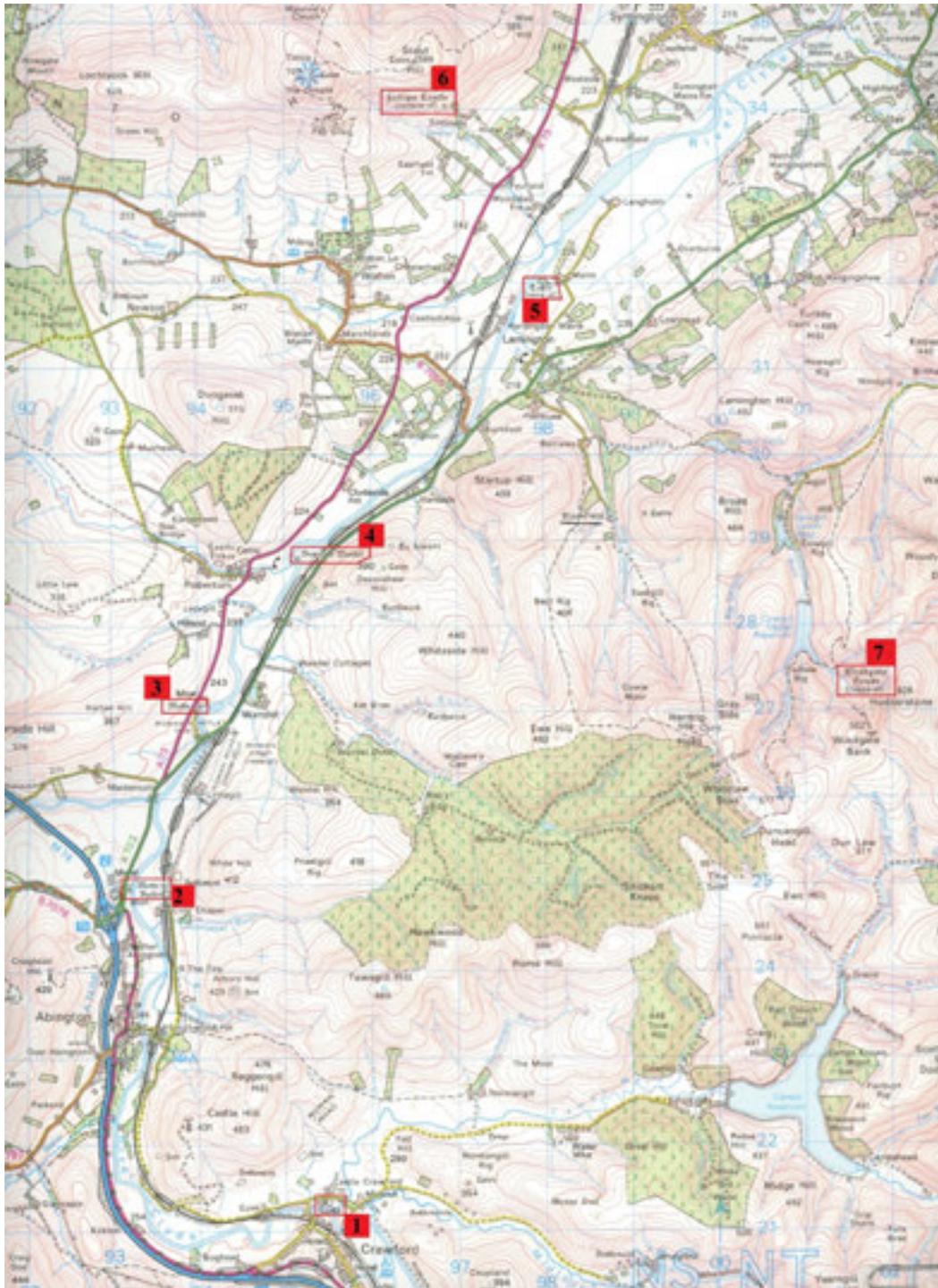


Plate 1. Showing locations of sites given in the text.



Plate 2. Crawford castle (16th-17th C) built upon a 12th century motte.



Fig 1. Crawford Castle, MacGibbon & Ross 1889. Note the window lintel in each image.

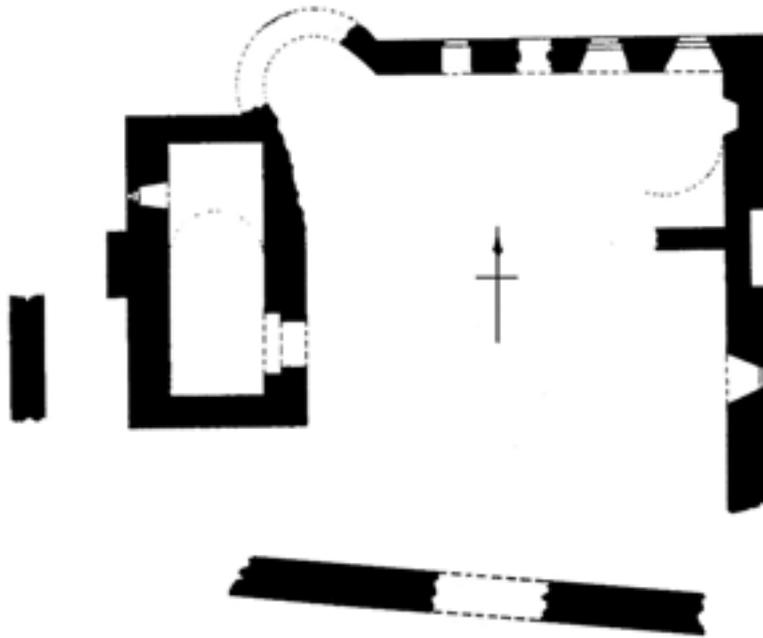


Fig 2. Crawford Castle, MacGibbon & Ross 1889.

No 2. Abington. Plates 3 & 4.

Abington motte and bailey castle site is the only example of its type in South Lanarkshire. It is a classic 12th century fortification and is in magnificent preservation having all its earthworks intact. A mystery surrounds the founder of this castle (and indeed the settlement of Abington), which would have a timber tower on the top of the motte, the bailey would be surmounted by a timber palisade and no doubt some timber buildings were within. One could assume Abington was the town or villa of ‘Albin’ as so many other Clydesdale villages take their name from founders; such as Robertson and Lamington (town of Lambin), but there are no medieval records to sustain that theory. However, Abington appears to have been part of Crawfordjohn parish, the village of that name and probably the caput of John, where no 12th century castle is known. Could it be that the motte and bailey here was the castle of John?

It now has an incongruous monument surmounting the motte, this is to Mathew McKendrick, one-time Abington Post master and keen angler. Part of the inscription reads: A worthy man and fine fisher” and “Fish fair and free - and spare the wee anes”. Interestingly when the monument foundations were dug, large quantities of charcoal were observed on the summit of the motte, this may be important evidence of what happened to the wooden tower.



Plate 3. Abington Motte & Bailey.



Plate 4. Model in Biggar Museum showing how Abington Motte & Bailey may have looked.

No 3. Roberton. Plate 5.

The tiny motte at Moat Farm near Roberton could be assumed to be the 12th century site of the founder of Roberton, whose name was – hardly surprising – Robert. Robert is on record as being the brother of Lambin who left his name to nearby Lamington; the town of Lambin. However, the motte has been modified into a silage pit on the farm and when this happened the opportunity was taken to carry out some archaeology on what was left, not a lot as it happened. Nevertheless, the scant finds showed that the motte was more likely to date to the early 14th century, on pottery evidence (Trabraham, *ibid*). It may be that sites such as Roberton and the similar sized motte at Wolfclyde near Biggar were used as lookout posts along the Clyde, during the Wars of Independence, much the same as Roman watch towers functioned, that is however speculative.

In Roberton village there is a flat-topped knoll with traces of what may be ramparts, called ‘Castle Dykes’ and which is given as an antiquity on OS maps (Canmore ID No 47364, NS92NW/1). No other evidence apart from visual remains is recorded, only archaeological work could determine the true nature of the site.



Plate 5. Roberton motte/silage pit!



Plate 6. Wandel Tower and possible siege work.



Plate 7. Wandel Tower, northerly defence.



Plate 8. Lamington Tower.

No 4. Wandel. Plates 6 & 7.

Often described as ‘The Bower of Wandel’ and the haunt of King James V, this 15th century tower was the home of the Jardine family. The site was chosen as an excellent one to defend before the advent of reliance on guns, although they were probably in use at the time of original building. The River Clyde sweeps around the castle on three sides while the spit of open ground to the north appears to have been defended by a rampart and probably a ditch. The walls of the once vaulted basement are about 3m thick and some windows can still be traced. A large mass of mortared masonry lies at one side.

The principal historical tale does not concern the castle directly, but the inhabitant’s behaviour in the late 16th century. James Johnstone and Alexander Jardine were accused of murdering Alexander Baillie and his daughter Raechel by burning down their house at nearby Littlegill, they got off with it on the grounds it had been their servants without their permission! Such were the times with kin feud between neighbours and which led directly to the building of bastle houses in Upper Clydesdale, where people could at least defend themselves against such attacks.

A feature not previously recorded at Wandel is an earthwork which may be a siege work. A bank has been artificially thrown up to overlook the castle from the east side. It would have been an admirable place from which to bombard the castle by gun fire, although there is no historical record that such an event took place, it is nevertheless clear the tower has been demolished.

No 5. Lamington. Plate 8 and Fig’s 3 – 6.

As stated above the original settlement of Lamington was founded by Lambin, the brother of Robert in the 12th century. There is no account of warfare about this site, and Lamington is the *traditional* home of Marion Bradfute, the wife of William Wallace, who undoubtedly started the Scottish Wars of Independence in Lanark.

However, Lamington Tower appears as a typical 16th century castle which was defended by guns used in gun ports. The massively thick walls, about 2m, suggest it was built earlier in

the 16th C rather than later, it had a vaulted basement which was usual, and the great hall would have been above that. We get a few details of the appearance of the building from 19th century illustrations; one from *The Upper Ward of Lanarkshire* (1864) and the other from *MacGibbon & Ross* (1889).

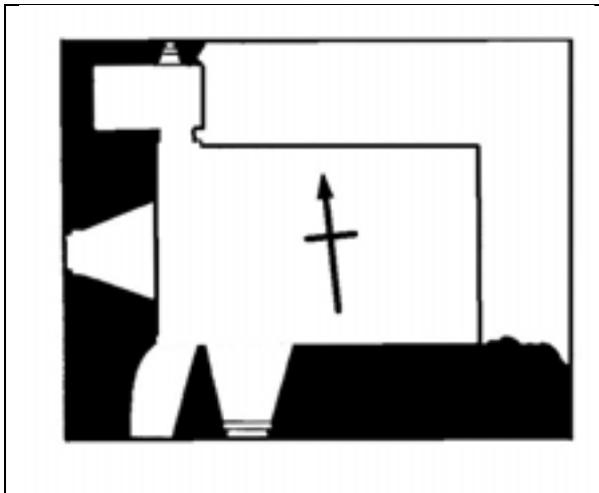


Fig 3. Lamington Tower plan.

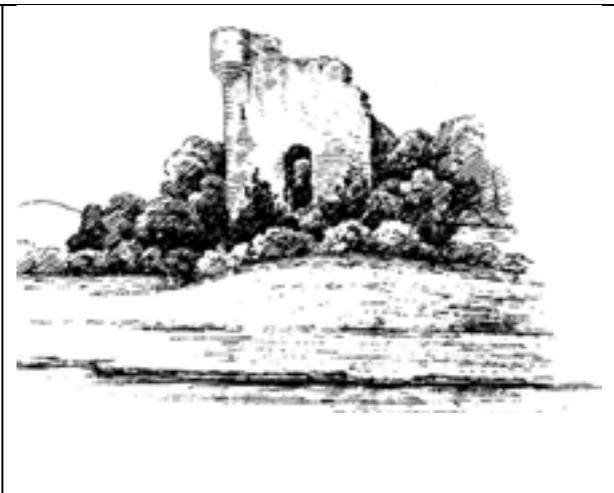


Fig 4. MacGibbon & Ross 1889.



Fig 5. Irving & Murray 1864.



Fig 6. Stone built into chapel wall.

Unfortunately, around 1780 the local factor, without permission, decided to blow the building asunder with gun powder, for stone to be used elsewhere. The horrified owner, Lady Ross Baillie, residing at Lanark stopped any further demolition. It has nevertheless been much reduced since the time of the two drawings as Plate 8 shows.

The builders were the Baillie family who chose a naturally defended knoll above the haugh land to build their castle, a simple keep which no doubt had four corner towers as is suggested by the two illustrations.

The existing external features; two windows, a gun hole and a date stone are all later incorporations in an attempt to consolidate the castle remains, while a shield with the Baillie arms of nine stars is built in to the gable wall of Trinity Chapel in Lamington Village, having been removed from the castle. The stone above the blocked window as seen today appears to

have the initials ‘EIB’ and the date 1589, presumably the date of some improvements or modifications.

The only other notable story is the one which links Lamington, with Fatlips Tower and Windgate House (below).

The story goes that Fatlips who is described as the laird of Symington, sent a taunting message to Lamington Tower and the laird there, which he overlooked from his own abode on Tinto Hill to the effect “that the lady of Lamington could not go outdoors without being observed by Fatlips”. Even though Fatlips would have required a pair of binoculars to accomplish the observation effectively, the offended laird vowed that within twelve months he would have a house where Fatlips could not continue his obnoxious behaviour. The tradition continues that Windgate House was the result, a bastle house built at the end of a remote glen and clearly not visible from Fatlips tower. What grain of truth there is in any of this is not known.

No 6. Fatlips Castle. Plate 9.

The fortification built on the steep and high flank of Tinto Hill and facing east over the Clyde valley, and towards Lamington Tower, has only a legend (above) attached to it concerning the Laird of Symington, whom we must assume was known as ‘Fatlips’, and from his ‘Eagles Eyrie’, antagonised his neighbour across the Clyde.

The site as seen today is a double vaulted basement with slit windows. Interestingly but hardly surprisingly it is built using Tinto felsite, the distinctive orange stone which once graced the famous ‘red roads’ of Lanarkshire. Very few buildings in the area around Tinto *were* built with this stone.



Plate 9. Fatlips Castle.

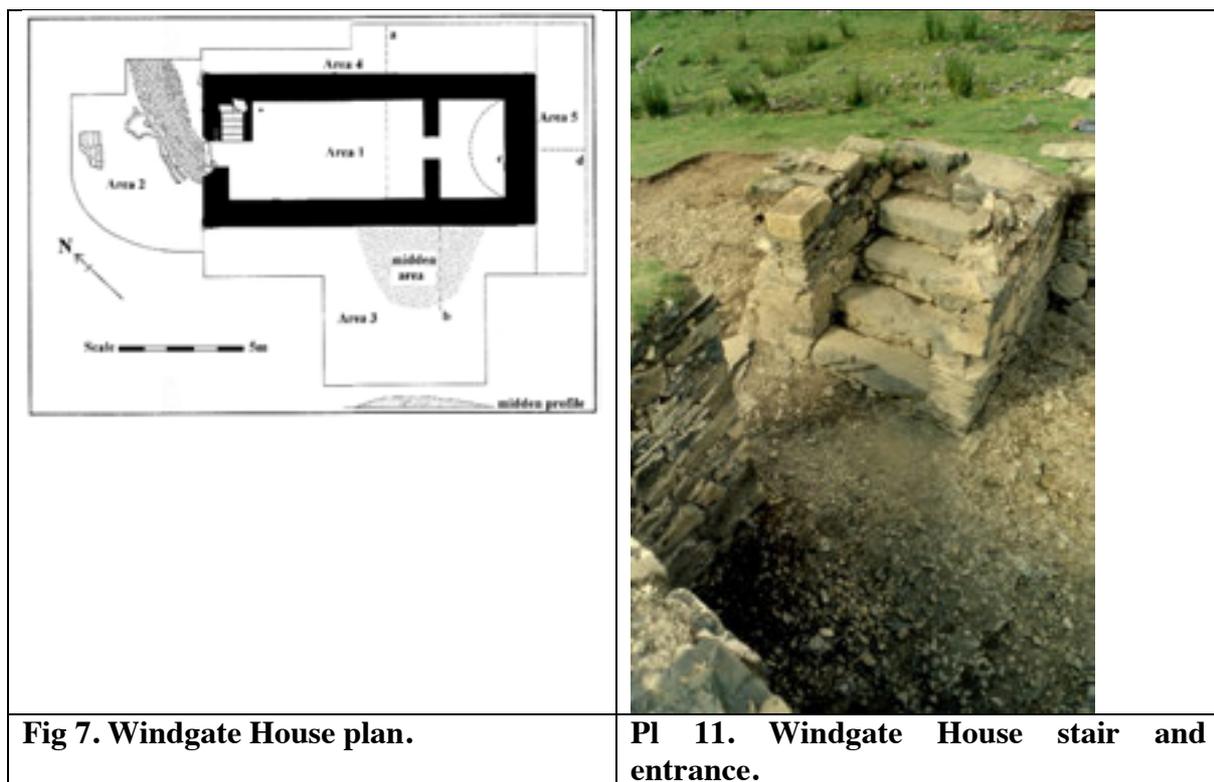


Plate 10. Windgate House – a bastle.

No 7. Windgate House – the bastle. Plates 10 & 11 and Fig 7.

Windgate house was the first of several bastle houses to be discovered and excavated in Upper Clydesdale by Biggar Archaeology Group (BAG) (Gillanders et al 1986, Ward 2018). The series as a grouping remain unique in Scotland and are the only examples to have been systematically excavated and published. The unexpected discovery regarding Windgate House prompted the successful search for other examples and was developed into the Bastle Project by BAG.

The site is alluded to with reference to Lamington Tower (above) but what truth can be deduced from that is uncertain. It is nevertheless a classic example of a bastle house being long in plan, having been barrel vaulted, a defended single entrance on the ground floor and an internal or mural stair, of a type known as ‘scale and platt’ in Scottish parlance (rise and platform). The finds from the site showed it had been built around 1600 and was used for only about a century before abandonment and demolition. It certainly would have belonged to the Baillie family of Lamington, and if the legend above may be ignored, the bastle was definitely built with seclusion in mind, there is no farming opportunities in the area apart from grazing sheep, all other bastle houses are known have been working farm houses. Another unsubstantiated theory is that it was built to carry out clandestine reiving by the Baillie family themselves.



Discussion

The seven sites are interesting for their known periods of occupation derived from architectural and archaeological evidence. Travelling from No 1 to No 7 in that order brings the visitor through a journey beginning in the 12th century when the first castles were built in Scotland, to the 17th century when the last defended houses in Britain were built. Stone built castles and bastles in Upper Clydesdale have suffered badly at the hands of later owners who appear to have quarried the structures for building stones to be used elsewhere. Archaeological investigation would probably garner a few more facts regarding the occupation of the castle sites and possibly their demise, however, this is unlikely to happen.

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