

For Teachers

You can ask for the primary school pack on the castle history. It contains interesting activities relating to castles.

If you want to study some more aspects of the history of the castle, see our website for detailed documents at www.portencrosscastle.org.uk.

MYTH BUSTING

It is said that Portencross Castle was the last resting place of the great kings of Scotland. Legend has it that they were transported via the castle (at the Port of the Crossing) on their way to Iona, for burial. They lay in state at Portencross Castle for a short time.

Do any local museums or libraries have records of Portencross Castle? Examine records about the Scottish medieval kings and the link to Iona. Can you find evidence on the internet? How do you know if you can trust the evidence you find?

Find out as much as you can about the techniques that archaeologists and historians used to get evidence to write their reports on the Iron Age settlement on Audlhill, the castle there and the different phases of Portencross Castle.



1859 steel engravings and enhancements of the Great Seal of Robert II, King of Alba.

Curriculum for Excellence Links

Literacy

- LIT 2-05a
- LIT 2-08a
- LIT 2-10a /LIT 3-10a
- LIT 3-13a
- LIT 2-15a
- LIT 2-18a
- LIT 2-25a

Social Studies

- SOC 1-01a
- SOC 2-01a
- SOC 3-01a
- SOC 1-02a
- SOC 2-02a
- SOC 1-03a
- SOC 2-03a

Friends of Portencross Castle

This leaflet was produced by Friends of Portencross Castle (FOPC).

FOPC is a recognised Scottish Charity (No. SC028181) dedicated to conserving the castle and providing access to the building.

In 2007 FOPC was awarded grant support from The Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland and the Architectural Heritage Fund. With additional support from local charities, North Ayrshire Council and many individuals, FOPC was able to raise just over £1 million pounds for the costs of the project.

Grant support does not include maintenance. As a result FOPC has to raise costs for staff, maintenance, education materials, website and overheads. We will remain open with the help of donations and by having events and functions at the castle.

Please donate if you can. You can become a Guardian of Portencross Castle. Find out more from our website www.portencrosscastle.org.uk or pick up details at the castle during opening hours.



THE HISTORY OF PORTENCROSS CASTLE



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www.portencrosscastle.org.uk

Portencross Castle is a scheduled ancient monument, a recognition of its national importance.

Why is there a castle at Portencross?

The dun at Auldhame (Auldhill) occupies high ground to the east of Portencross. It dates from the iron age, the period from around 800BC to 1000BC.

The site is strategic. It dominates the sea approaches to the upper Clyde and has been important for centuries because of this. Materials from earlier buildings were reused to build a medieval castle on Auldhill in the 1100s and 1200s. This castle had a protective ditch, an enclosure and a secure house on a mound. Such structures were called 'motte and bailey' castles. This medieval castle overlooked the surrounding land and the islands to the west that were held by the Vikings until their defeat in a battle near Largs in 1263.

After this time, the castle at Auldhill and the surrounding lands of Arnele were in possession of the de Ross family, who were probably of Norman descent.



The 1300s: the period that earned the castle its national importance

In 1315, a year after Bannockburn, de Ross lost control of the lands of Arnele. Robert the Bruce gave the lands to Sir Robert Boyd of Kilmarnock as a reward for his loyal support. Auldhill Fort went out of use in the mid 1300s. Around 1360, Portencross Castle replaced it on the site where we see it in the village today. It was on part of the estate not leased to anyone else and used personally by the laird of Arnele. We call this part of an estate the 'caput of the barony'. It was the grandson of Sir Robert Boyd who fought at Bannockburn, also called Robert Boyd, who possessed the Arnele estate when the current harbour-side castle was built.

Robert Stewart, later to become Robert II, the first of the Stewart kings, grew up in the Stewart lands in Renfrew, and Ayrshire and Bute. As a young man he was part of the struggle in the mid 1300s to overthrow the repeated occupations of Scotland by Balliol and Edward III of England. The Boyds and the Stewarts were allies in this cause. When the Scots overcame the threat of occupation, Arnele and its castle became the convenient port of access from the Stewart base in Dundonald Castle to the Clyde and the castle at Rothesay.

The importance of Portencross castle increased when Robert Stewart became king. The 15 Acts or Charters of Robert II dated at Arnele between 1371 and 1390, were probably signed at Portencross Castle. The prominent place of Portencross and Arnele estate is shown by how frequently these royal charters were signed there during the reign of Robert II. One of the Charters secured the inheritance of much of the northwest of Scotland and the Western Isles to descendants of the first Lord of the Isles who had links to the Stewarts through marriage.

The 1400s and 1500s

Robert III also signed charters at Arnele. However, royal use of the castle grew less frequent by the 1400s. The castle reverted to its role as a local Boyd stronghold. The first written reference to Portencross Castle is in 1572 when it is named in a contract between Robert Lord Boyd of Kilmarnock and Robert Boyd of Portencross. This document refers to 'the ten merk land of Portincroce'.

The Boyds of Portencross were well connected with local aristocratic families. The fourth Robert Boyd of Portencross married the daughter of John Mure of Rowallan, the family of Robert II's first queen. Later generations of Boyds married locally. In 1550 a bride was the daughter of David Fairlie of that ilk. The seventh laird married a daughter of Sir Robert Montgomerie of Skelmorlie. A list of the contents of the castle made in 1621 has been preserved and includes items such as 'sax feddir bedis with their furnitour'.



The 1600s to 1800s

The castle remained the seat of the Boyds until the restoration of Charles II (1660) after which the family moved to a mansion house in Portencross. Local fishermen then occupied the castle. The roof of the castle blew off in a violent storm in the winter of 1739. The Boyds still had possession of the surrounding estate until 1737.

The 1900s

William Adams acquired the castle and estate in 1900. A concrete roof was constructed over the east wing of the castle in 1910. Responsibility for the building passed to Adams' son, also William, in 1940. The South of Scotland Electricity Board (SSEB) later took possession of much of the Hunterston peninsula, including Portencross Castle. British Nuclear Fuels Ltd (BNFL), the successor to SSEB, inserted a timber stair and several door and window lintels. The company also repaired masonry in the 1980s as part of consolidation work.

In 1998, a local charity, Friends of Portencross Castle (FOPC) recognised that the castle was in serious danger of collapse and began its efforts to preserve the building for future generations. With the support of BNFL, ownership of the castle passed to FOPC on 22nd December 2005. Conservation work on the building started in February 2009.