

Cardoness Castle

www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/gatehouseoffleet/cardonesscastle/index.html

For a castle designed primarily to house the family of the local laird, Cardoness enjoys a remarkably strong defensive position, on a rocky bluff overlooking the northern end of Fleet Bay. It was even more daunting when built, with the base of the rock lapped by the sea until the surrounding land was reclaimed for agriculture in 1824.



Cardoness Castle

Cardoness Castle was built by the McCulloch family, probably some time in the 1470s. They had acquired the estate when one of the family married the youngest daughter of the previous landowner. Legend has it that she was the sole survivor of a tragedy in which her eight elder sisters, her father and her newborn brother drowned in a frozen lake during a celebration of the birth of the infant.



View of the castle from the Visitors Center

The McCullochs' approach to life meant that strong defenses against their neighbours could sometimes come in handy. James McCulloch, who died in 1500, was involved in litigation over land five times, and got embroiled in another dispute when he married his daughter to a man regarded as a "natural idiot" to gain control of additional lands.



West side view of the castle.



The main door of the castle

James' son Ninian was tried for theft of property from his widowed mother, while Sir Alexander McCulloch, who met his end at Flodden in 1513, was convicted twice for violence against neighbours.

The laird from 1516 was another Alexander McCulloch. He is remembered as the "Cutlar McCulloch" who in 1530 led a raid on the Isle of Man in revenge for an attack by the Manx on Galloway. This proved highly lucrative and McCulloch returned to plunder the Isle of Man several more times.



The interior of the castle

But the local disputes continued to drain family resources and in the early 1600s the estate was mortgaged, eventually being lost completely to John Gordon in 1628, head of a family the McCullochs had long feuded with. But the McCullochs didn't give up easily. In 1668 Alexander McCulloch dragged John Gordon's

ailing widow out of her house and threw her onto a dung heap. And in 1690 Sir Godfrey McCulloch shot dead William Gordon, John's son. Sir Godfrey escaped to France, but was spotted in [Edinburgh](#) in 1697 and beheaded on the Maiden, the Scottish equivalent of the guillotine.



Main hall of the castle

Cardoness Castle was abandoned after Sir Godfrey's death. It passed through the hands of a number of owners before being placed in State care in 1927. Today it is cared for by Historic Scotland.

Visitors to Cardoness Castle today approach via the Visitor Centre in a converted cottage at the roadside. While there it is worth looking at the model on show to get a clear idea of how the castle originally looked. From the Visitor Centre you climb the path up the hill to the castle itself.



Cellar of the castle

The main structure of the castle is a four-storey tower house standing on a flat platform. It is approached by an ivy-covered ramp leading up from the top of the outcrop. Underneath other parts of the platform are cellars, representing those of the original buildings that would have formed a courtyard with the castle, including an outer hall and various service buildings such as stables. What you see today are 1920s reconstructions on foundations discovered during excavation: not original, but they do give a strong sense of what may once have been here.



Gable of the castle

The ground floor of the tower house forms a large stone-vaulted cellar. This would originally have been subdivided both by a wall within the lower cellar and by a floor, creating two different levels of storage. At upper cellar level is the access to the murder hole over the main door, designed to provide an added deterrent to unwanted callers. Nearby is the entrance to the upper level of the prison. This is a pretty grim space, though it is provided with



Shadow of the castle

a latrine and a small window, making it vastly more comfortable than the horrible pit prison below it into which those who had really offended the McCullochs were thrown to rot.

The first floor of the castle is entirely given over to the main hall used for more private functions than the larger outer hall in the courtyard. The floors above the hall provided accommodation for the laird and his family. Today you can access the stone floored hall and part of the top level of the castle: Historic Scotland intend to fit more floors to give an even better idea of life here 500 years ago.



Model of castle's original setting



The Visitor Center



Gift Shop in the Visitor Center



Map of the area