

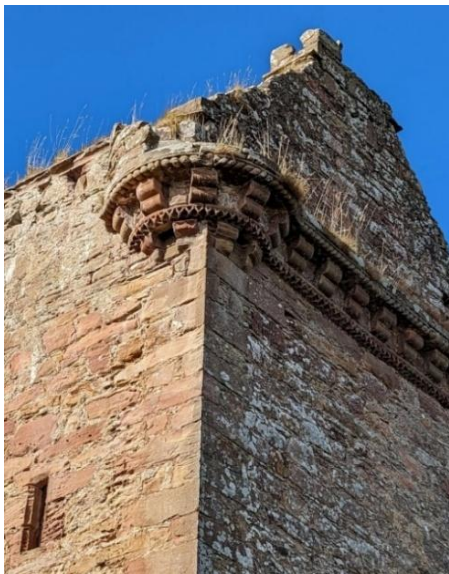
Castle Craig

by Barbara Abbot of Dingwall Museum

This late 16th century, four-storey, tower house sits on a sandstone crag on the north shore of the Black Isle near Cullicudden and commands stunning views across the Cromarty Firth.

It was built by the Urquharts, probably on the site of a previous residence of the Bishops of Ross, who were based at Fortrose Cathedral after the Reformation. Although little known, Castle Craig is still the traditional seat of Clan Urquhart, despite modern tourist focus on the more photogenic Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness.

In 1561 the Bishop of Ross granted the lands of Craig and its house to Thomas Urquhart, the second son of Alexander Urquhart of Cromarty. The Urquharts were the hereditary Sheriffs of Cromarty since 1358, and the nearby Cullicudden burial ground contains a burial enclosure for their family.



The remains of the Castle comprise a roofed north-east wing with barrel vaulted floors, a decorative corbelled parapet, a turreted wall head, and an oven. In the northwest wing, the great hall and stairway are now in ruins with timber supports to prevent further collapse.

The tower house is still intact on three sides, but lost its west wall to coastal erosion. The top has been fortified by a crenelated wall with round towers. Gun loops and a north enclosure may be from an earlier date. By the 19th century, the castle was a ruin, although local folklore has it that it housed an illicit still 200 years ago!

The building eventually became part of the Newhall Estate until it was gifted to a descendent of the Urquhart family in 1959. In July 2014, The Urquhart Foundation accepted ownership of the castle from Colonel Wilkins Fisk

Urquhart of Urquhart, the Clan Chief. In addition to preventing further structural deterioration they hope to preserve the castle and eventually open it to the public.

The Urquharts of Cromarty & Craigston

The Urquhart Clan is not so well known in Scottish history but are certainly of ancient heritage. William de Urchard is said to have defended the Moote of Cromarty against supporters of the English in the time of William Wallace. He also supported Robert the Bruce whose son, King David II of Scotland, made the Urquhart Chiefs hereditary Barons and Sheriffs of Cromarty around 1358.

Sir Thomas Urquhart epitomised the family's reputation for learning. A renowned writer in the 17th century, he was considered one of the most eccentric geniuses in Scottish history. While debts racked up at home, he travelled Europe collecting written works.

