

Blair Castle, Blair Estate, Ayrshire



ONE OF SCOTLAND'S GREAT HISTORIC COUNTRY HOUSES

- 'A' listed castle (18 beds)
- 5 star private/corporate venue
- Formal gardens
- Heated outdoor swimming pool
- 250 acres parkland & woodland

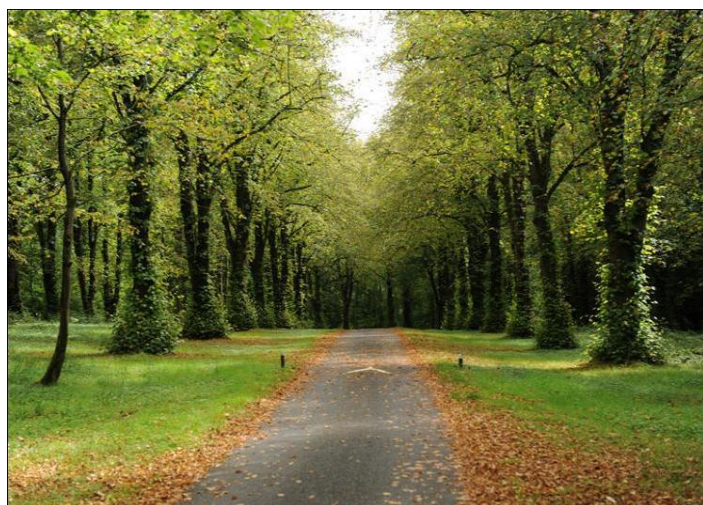
Excess of £2,500,000
Freehold

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Mileage

Prestwick Airport 17 miles, Glasgow Airport 18 miles, Glasgow City Centre 25 miles, Edinburgh 72 miles

Situation

Blair Estate lies only a short distance from the Ayrshire coast, in south west Scotland. Glasgow City Centre is only 25 miles. The estate is almost equidistant between Prestwick and Glasgow Airports. Prestwick International Airport has services to London Stansted, a number of European destinations, and facilities for private aircraft. Glasgow International Airport provides a wide range of domestic, European and international flights. Dalry has a railway station with direct services to Glasgow Central Station (about 30 minutes).

Ayrshire has a very successful and extensive farming community. It is primarily a dairy, beef and sheep area producing high quality local produce. The Ayrshire coast is famous throughout the world for some of the finest fish in Scotland. Local shopping and business services are available at Dalry and Irvine. Wellington School in Ayr (20 miles) and St Columba's in Kilmacolm both offer excellent private co-education.

The city of Glasgow can be accessed easily by both rail and road, and is now widely regarded as one of Europe's most fashionable cities, with some of the UK's best shopping facilities. As a cultural city it

is held in high regard internationally. Edinburgh, Scotland's famous capital city, lies just over 70 miles to the east. The Ayrshire coast is famous throughout the world for its wide variety of golf courses, including the championship courses at Prestwick, Royal Troon and Turnberry, all of which have hosted the Open Championship. A wide variety of other activities are also on offer in the county including shooting, fishing, riding, walking and bird watching. There is excellent sailing on the Firth of Clyde, with yachting marinas at Troon, Largs, Fairlie and Inverkip, and there are many beaches up the Ayrshire coast. The Isle of Arran, Scotland in miniature, is easily accessed from Ardrossan Harbour (9 miles). Ayr Racecourse has regular race meetings and hosts the Scottish Grand National in April and the Ayr Gold Cup in September. The area has a number of exceptional equestrian venues including Rowallan Activity Centre (about 15 miles) and Ingliston Equestrian Centre (about 25 miles).

Description

The 1,265 acre estate is centred on Blair Castle and its surrounding designed landscape. Within the stone park wall are about 260 acres of 'Policies', where, in addition to the Castle and the Carriage House, there are two gate lodges (North and South), and five further estate houses and cottages. The properties are strategically placed around the grounds within the Blair Policy walls without compromising the privacy and seclusion of either of the two principal dwellings, the Castle and the Carriage House. Adjacent to the Policies, across a minor public road, lie four farms, Lambridden, Glencart, Cleeves and Templandmuir. Each one has a farmhouse and a range of farm buildings. The land is best suited to sheep, beef or dairy, comprising a variety of productive silage ground and pasture.

The woodlands within the Policy walls and outside provide shelter for stock and amenity. They are also an integral part of the

pheasant shoot which has been run at Blair Estate for many years.

The agricultural and residential properties in total generate a current income of over £170,000 per annum. Most of the agricultural land on the estate is let on a seasonal basis and could be available with vacant possession after 31st October 2011.

HISTORICAL NOTES

Blair Castle lays claim to being the oldest continually inhabited mansion house or small Castle in Scotland, lived in by the same family and never rebuilt or sold. The family traces its ancestry back to the time of William the Lion, who reigned from 1165 to 1214. The king awarded the Barony of Blair to Jean Francois in 1165, for services rendered, and his son took the name de Blare, later adapted to Blair.

The first tower was established by a Norman knight, probably near the site of an ancient Celtic village. It is reputed to date back to 1105 and is built on the living rock, which can still be seen to the right of the tower door and inside the Guard Room. The first structure was a castellated building of rudimentary stone work. The lack of keystones in the base of the tower in the Guard Room indicate the early date of the building, which was on three levels.

The original masonry is well preserved, being protected and surrounded by later subsequent additions to the house. A second tower, probably also on three levels but taller, was added to the back of the 1105 tower in 1203. These early Norman towers form the base of the present day Castle.

The elegant 1668 Wing was added by William Blair (c1640 - 1689) and his wife Lady Margaret Hamilton, fifth daughter of the second Duke of Hamilton, who he married in March 1666. The initials of LMH & WB are carved above the windows to celebrate their conversion of this complex of towers into an elegant, grand and comfortable country house.

It is thanks to Captain William Fordyce Blair (1805 - 1884) that the extensive additions and adaptations, undertaken in the 19th century, are so sympathetic to the original tower structures and the expanded 17th century mansion house.

The architecture, environment and contents of Blair reflect Scotland's history and evolving development through the ages. The superb collection of furniture, china, ironwork and interesting artefacts is largely attributable to Captain William Fordyce Blair, Colonel Frederick and his wife Mary Blair. The swords used by the Blairs at Culloden, and at Bannockburn whilst supporting Robert the Bruce and William Wallace are amongst the historic family collection, many items of which will be available by separate negotiation. William Fordyce Blair's granddaughter Cecily Blair was the last of the direct Blair line. The current owner, Luke Borwick, is grandson of Cecily Blair's first cousin, Violet Borwick. Luke and his wife Caroline have renovated the Castle, Policies and gardens over the last decade, bringing Blair back to life, both as a family home and as a Five Star Exclusive Use Venue for private and corporate guests.

FARMING

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The land is designated as lying within a Less Favoured Area (LFA) for the benefit of grants and subsidies. All the grazing land is let to neighbouring farmers under annual seasonal grazing licences and Short Limited Duration Tenancies. The grazing fields are fenced for sheep and cattle. Quiet public roads and estate tracks facilitate easy access to all parts of the property.

The low ground pheasant shoot has five small fenced off areas for game crop. These are replanted as required with rotational game cover, and have been extracted from the grazing areas.

WOODLANDS

The woodlands within the Policy walls have been designed and planted to enhance the value of the Designed Landscape and to provide shelter, privacy and amenity for Blair Castle. In addition to the Policy woodland, there are about 278 acres of woodland interspersed with the farmland which provide shelter for stock and have been managed and maintained with both landscape and commercial values in mind.

SPORTINGS

The Blair Estate shoot is currently run by a local private syndicate on an annual basis, with the help of a part-time gamekeeper. From 1986 - 2005, the shoot was run commercially with 3,000 birds released for eight days shooting, under a full time gamekeeper. Woodland rides provide easy access for guns and beaters. There are a considerable number of roe deer on the estate. Typically approximately 10-20 are taken annually.

Accommodation

BLAIR CASTLE

Surrounded by its own 248 acres of gardens, policies and parkland, the Castle provides rare privacy, tranquillity and seclusion. There are two main entrances to the estate. The north drive is the principal route to the Castle, starting from the gates at the North Lodge. This first part of the drive is planted with horse chestnuts and sycamores, leading into a remarkable double lime avenue.

The drive crosses the Bombo Burn by a small single-arch bridge, before entering the gently undulating parkland and then ascending to the Castle, fronted by its sweeping lawns. The south drive passes through a mixture of rhododendrons, sycamore, ash, oak, beech and conifers, before passing the Carriage House and dropping through a cutting in an outcrop of rock. It terminates at the front of the Castle in an imposing red gravel sweep.

The ancient exterior belies a truly intimate interior, which skilfully manages to maintain a subtle and tasteful balance between modernity and its historic integrity. In 2001, Caroline and Luke Borwick embarked on redecorating and repairing Blair. The Castle has been beautifully restored and is now warm and welcoming. It is the perfect location for private hospitality, whether for the family or for clients.

To walk through Blair is to experience Scotland's evolving history. The 12th century Guard Room, with its original stone work, immense fireplace, thick walls and slit windows takes one back to the Norman origins of the original Castle.

Captain Blair's Study was formerly the kitchen, from 1668. When Captain William Fordyce Blair added the West Wing he converted this substantial barrel vaulted room into his study. It has a magnificent limestone Victorian fireplace and oak panelling. The elegant oval staircase was adapted in 1668 to lead up to the family quarters of the grand home. Lady Margaret Hamilton and William Blair created it, employing the most skilled craftsmen of the time. The Upper Hall features some beautiful Adam style plasterwork.

The 1668 Drawing Room combines sophistication, space and intimacy, with eight windows and two open fires. Formerly two rooms, William Fordyce Blair had this superb double cube room created with restrained Doric columns and a concealed beam to support the ceiling. The fine Scottish ceiling plasterwork was created in the mid 1880s using the heraldic motifs of the Hamilton and Blair crests. The Blair coat of arms represents the union of Lady Margaret Hamilton and William Blair. The symbols of the English rose, the Scottish thistle, the French fleur-de-lys and the crescent moons relate to the historic roots of the family. The struts incorporate the fruits often used in the popular Arts and Crafts period.

The stately Victorian Dining Room incorporates the original chapel of Lady Margaret Hamilton. In the mid 1800s the house was widened, the ceilings heightened and this room expanded to create a large light impressive dining room panelled in oak. A magnificently worked fireplace celebrates William Fordyce Blair whose impressive portrait (available in addition) surveys his guests. The Dining Room will seat up to 60 in comfort, whilst it is also intimate enough for small numbers. The cosy Sitting Room, originally the second level of the 1105 tower, with its open fire and access to the Dining Room and Cecily Blair Bedroom, reflects the history of the different periods of the house in varied door heights. The secret door to the Dining Room bores through the retaining walls of the two earliest towers.

There are two kitchens, a catering kitchen on the ground floor and the family Galley Kitchen on the first floor.

Blair currently has 14 bedrooms: five doubles and six twins, each with its own dedicated bath or shower room (six en suite). There are three single rooms that share two bathrooms. There are two principal bedroom corridors.

The 1668 Victoria Corridor, named after the remarkable collection of lithographs honouring Queen Victoria (available in addition), and the Brittany Passage, in the 19th century West Wing. Each room tells a story and reflects the history and sense of style of the ladies of Blair. The Cecily Blair Bedroom was originally the Day Nursery for the children's (East) wing. The room was adapted into a bedroom for the late Miss Cecily Blair when she moved into the East Wing in her 80's. It has an en suite bathroom and links to the rest of the accommodation in the East Wing.

The intimate Blue Tower Room is the highest room of the original castellated tower.

The Brittany Bedroom is a light and elegant room that has its own separate and unique Victorian bathroom at the end of the corridor. The Bombo Room with en suite bathroom was created as a separate bedroom having formerly been the original dressing

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room to the Brittany Bedroom to which it still has an adjoining door.

The Yellow Bedroom has full length windows looking out over the Bombo Burn and the rhododendron and azalea gardens. The Yellow Dressing Room (bedroom) would have originally been the gentleman's bedroom for the Yellow Bedroom. The Edinburgh plasterwork on the fireplace is interesting, as is the fire surround, made of Cambuslang marble.

The Empire Room has a Napoleonic theme. The marble fireplace reflects Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. There is an en suite shower and a superbly masculine Victorian hand basin.

Lady Margaret's Room is a beautiful elegant light room with windows on three sides giving magnificent views of the gardens, the park and the hills to the West. It has an en suite bathroom. The Mary Queen of Scots room is one of the highest rooms in the house and is over the 1105 tower. It is likely that this higher level was added in the 14th or 15th century. The twin Galley Bedroom with adjoining bathroom is situated on the first floor. The West Wing third floor could potentially form a private flat. The sewing room could be a sitting room/kitchen. It has three bedrooms (Blue, Pink and Green), one with an en suite shower room. There are also a second shower room and a bathroom.

HOUSEKEEPER'S FLAT AND EAST WING

The Housekeeper's Flat has separate access from the back of the Castle, and overlooks the garden. It has a kitchen, sitting room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. From a passageway by the flat, steps lead down to the boiler room and four store rooms. The East Wing is currently accessed from outside, on the north side of the Castle. Three internal connecting doors remain. There is a delightful drawing room and dining room on the first floor. The kitchen and utility room are on the ground floor. It currently has three bedrooms, though there is a fourth bedroom which is being used as an office, and three bathrooms.

PRIVATE USE/WEDDINGS

The main house at Blair has been rated a Five Star Exclusive Use Venue by VisitScotland annually since 2005. It has played host to a wide variety of functions from private parties, corporate meetings, golfing parties, historical and architectural tours, weddings and special occasions. This family business has specialised in tailoring each visit to the client's particular requirements and has excellent relationships with a wide range of specialist suppliers in the area. Guests are expertly served by local staff and the chefs use the superb local foods readily available in Ayrshire. Caroline Borwick has cultivated world wide connections and the intimacy, history and service offered at Blair has resulted in the business being largely referral based. Captain Blair's Study and the private gardens are licensed for civil wedding ceremonies. For religious or humanist ceremonies, up to 120 may be seated in the Drawing Room. Further information on all the facilities and booking arrangements may be found at www.blairestate.com or on Facebook.

GARDEN

The gardens and policies are maintained in excellent condition by

the owners and the estate creator, and have been adapted well to a less intensive labour regime than in the past. Whilst the current layout mostly dates from the mid 19th and early 20th century, the site itself is much older, with gardens recorded in the early 17th century.

The lawns on the south side of the Castle were laid out in the 1890s. The Rose Garden on the west side of the Castle was re-configured in the late 20th century. The heated outdoor swimming pool was installed in 1970. Below the lawns and across the Bombo Burn in the peninsula of the flower garden, an extensive herbaceous border has been created in the last ten years. The rest of the flower garden contains a very special collection of trees and shrubs. The magnificent *Gunnera Manicata*, the superb tulip trees and the rare *Metasequoia Glyptostroboides* are amongst the significant plants in this lovely peaceful garden. A Japanese maple walk leads from the Castle down through the gardens and policies. There are a number of other paths that meander through all parts of the garden.

A wide range of species of rhododendrons, azaleas and special shrubs have been planted in all the areas around the Castle. In the early spring there are spectacular displays of snowdrops, daffodils and bluebells, followed by abundant flowering shrubs.

At one stage the Castle was surrounded by a moat, but this was believed to have been filled in when one young Blair heir fell into it and nearly drowned. As a result of his naval role, Captain William Fordyce Blair was very well travelled, and was a great collector of antiquities. Some special artefacts remain in the private gardens, notably the 18th century Italian gates leading into the walled garden situated to the west of the house across the Bombo Burn. The north-west wall has two elaborate entrances, and the south-east wall contains the ironwork so-called Paradise Gates. Although the walled garden is now planted with trees, the 18th century stone walls are largely intact and the garden has been the subject of plans to restore it to its former glory. It may have some potential for development subject to obtaining the necessary planning consents, being accessible from a back drive which also serves the Garden House.

DESIGNED LANDSCAPE

Flanked by many hardwood trees, the agricultural land is integrated into the Designed Landscape within the Policies and extends to about 109 acres in all. The majority of this land is good quality stock grazing, is gently undulating and lies at about 80m above sea level. The land to the southwest of the Policies was a deer park in the 17th century. The main area of parkland lies to the north and east of the Castle, and is planted with mature and young species hardwoods. One of the oldest trees is the ancient yew by the Bombo Burn beneath Court Hill. There has been extensive re-planting of trees throughout the Policies since 2005.

The majority of the Policies are wooded, particularly the north-west and the edges. The plantings mostly date from the mid 19th century. The area to the east of the North Lodge is mainly deciduous, whilst the area to the south towards the walled garden is mostly conifers with intervening pathways and tracks, many of which have been re-established in recent years. The park walls date from the 1840s and have been well maintained. At a height of about two metres, they provide a high degree of privacy to the

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Castle and houses within the Policies and parklands.

ESTATE BUILDINGS AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of potential development opportunities which have been discussed informally with the planning department of North Ayrshire Council. The former sawmill lies near Park Cottage

and is of brick construction with a slate roof. Adjoining the rear of the building is a series of small timber framed extensions with corrugated roofs. There is a nearby implement shed of timber frame

construction with a corrugated roof and partially enclosed sides. Situated off the back drive to Garden Cottage on the western side of the estate, the Old Laundry remains as a ruin. Whilst no planning permission has been applied for, this quiet site may have potential for a residential or commercial building subject to obtaining the necessary planning consents.

Tenure: Freehold

Energy Performance: A copy of the full Energy Performance Certificate is available on request.

Directions

Property postcode KA24 4ER.

Viewing: Strictly by appointment with Savills

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