

The King's Park at Stirling Castle

The King's Park History Group is a committee of academic experts working on the history of the King's Park and its continuing importance to Scotland. The historical background to that importance is described in the attached Annex. This statement was agreed at the Group's meeting in Stirling on 18th September 2012

The King's Park History Group is aware of the current debate about the future ownership and management of the King's Park. As Members of the Group for our personal expertise, we are deeply concerned that the future integrity and survival of the Park appears to be under imminent threat.

Our view is that the national importance of the King's Park makes it entirely inappropriate that the Crown Estate Commissioners (CEC) should be considering selling some or all of the land in the Park that is still held as an ancient possession of the Crown in Scotland.

If the CEC wish to relinquish their responsibilities for the management of the Park by disposing of the ownership of Scotland's oldest and only Royal Park, there should only be one destination. The ownership should be transferred to Scottish Ministers to re-unite the ownership of the Park and the Castle, as had been the case for last nine centuries other than since 1998.

The full importance of the King's Park as part of Stirling Castle has only started to be fully recognised in recent years, after many years in which its significance has been neglected. We urge those involved in the discussions over the future of the King's Park to recognise that importance and to help ensure that the ownership of the King's Park is re-united with that of the Castle.

We consider that this transfer will open up the opportunity for the management of the Park to deliver major benefits locally to Stirling, as well as valuable wider public benefits. We hope that the work of this Group will help contribute to that future by providing information and advice on the features of the Park, its rich history and continuing significance to Scotland.

Professor Chris Smout (Historiographer Royal)

Professor Richard Oram (University of Stirling)

John Harrison (Independent Historian)

Dr. Katie Stevenson (University of St. Andrew's)

Dr. Fiona Watson (Independent Historian)

Dr. Chris Dalglish (University of Glasgow)

STIRLING CASTLE

The Royal Palace and the King's Park

The National Importance of the King's Park

1. Stirling Castle is one of Scotland's most important national sites, an historic and iconic fortress with its restored Royal Palace and the King's Park still around the Castle, as Scotland's oldest, most historically important and only surviving royal park.
2. For at least 900 years, the Park has been an ancient possession of the Crown in Scotland and when Stirling Castle was one of the main royal residence of the Kings and Queens of Scots during the five centuries up to the Union of Crowns with England in 1603, the Park served a wide range of purposes as an integral part of the Castle.
3. The national significance to Scotland of Stirling Castle with its Royal Palace and the King's Park, had and still has only one equivalent in the rest of Britain, Windsor Castle and the Great Park there, which had a similar national status for the Kings and Queens of England.
4. The importance of the King's Park and of the Windsor Great Park to the monarchs of Scotland and England respectively, is reflected in the fact that they are the only two royal parks in the United Kingdom still managed directly on behalf of the Crown.
5. The survival at Stirling Castle since the Union of Crowns over 400 years ago, of both the now restored Royal Palace and other buildings within the Castle and the 350 acre (140 ha) King's Park around the Castle still defined by its medieval boundaries, is of exceptional historic significance not only to Scotland, but also at a wider European level.
6. The restored Palace and other buildings in the Castle show the splendour of the royal Stewart court at Stirling Castle from the 15th century to the start of the 17th century, and reflect its European standing at the time. The buildings are the finest complex of late medieval and renaissance royal buildings in Scotland and, with the Palace the best preserved 16th century royal residence in Britain and set amongst the cluster of renaissance architecture, of wider European importance.
7. The King's Park also reflects the same Stewart era. The Park's current boundary, while following the 12th century boundary in part, dates from the early 16th century. This was when the Gowane Hills were incorporated into the Park to maintain clear lines of sight from the Castle to Stirling Bridge, for artillery as part of the Castle's new defences. The Park was vital to the functioning of the Castle for many different uses, while the King's Park is now by far the most important late medieval royal landscape in Scotland and also ranks with the finest surviving examples elsewhere in Europe.
8. Recognition of the importance of the King's Park declined in the centuries following the end of the royal court at Stirling, as the Park and royal buildings were adapted to new purposes. However, the King's Park still survives today remarkably intact around the Castle, even if its full historical and national significance as an integral part of Stirling Castle, is yet to be widely recognised.
9. The restoration of the royal buildings at Stirling Castle over several decades, with the Palace completed in 2011, has led to greater appreciation of the Castle as first and foremost a royal residence and a new recognition of the King's Park as a key component of that. As a result, an expert group chaired by Scotland's Historiographer Royal has been set up to collate and develop the information available on the King's Park and its importance, while also identifying further research, surveys and other investigations required to safeguard and conserve the historic Park.