

DAIRSIE CASTLE

Ruin to be resto

RUINOUS Dairsie Castle is to rise again.

Taiwan-based businessman, Chris Ruffle, who bought the ruin in June, is to embark on a major reconstruction of the 16th century ruin to create a unique family home.

Work is due to start in Spring, once necessary planning permission has been obtained, and is expected to take up to two years to complete.

The end result will see the castle returned as close as possible to its original external state, with the main tower finished in pink-white harling and the two "drum towers" in dressed stone.

Scottish grey slate will be used to roof the main building and also the "cap houses" which are to be reconstructed on top of each of the towers.

Walkways at each gable end will be another interesting feature of the castle which will be three-storeys high above the cellar area.

The former barmkin enclosure, a courtyard area which would have been immediately around the castle, is to be uncovered and the boundary wall rebuilt on the original foundations.

The castle is a scheduled ancient monument and classed as an Archeological Site of Regional Importance, and the building work will be preceded by a two-month archeological dig, due to start a week on Monday, for which Historic Scotland have granted scheduled monument consent.

ARTIFACTS

As well as any artifacts, the team will be hoping to uncover fragments of mouldings, pottery, slate tiles and other materials used by the original builders back in the early 1500s.

Tim Heale, in charge of the project and based on the site, said this week that a lack of detailed drawings of the castle, of which little more than the north wall and south facing wall and tower

remains, had caused the architects to use a certain amount of conjecture in coming up with plans for the external reconstruction.

He added: "Our plans are subject to any alterations which may be required in the interests of architectural accuracy.

"We may uncover sections of the original window surrounds or doorways, for instance, and if they differ from our drawings then we will be able to make the appropriate adjustments. The aim is to create as near as possible a replica of the original structure.

"I would be interested also in any other snippets of information which people may have on the castle or its occupants, and can be contacted by telephone on 03377 430."

Tim brings a wealth of experience to the job, having led the recent restoration of Forter Castle, in Glen Isla, which was transformed from a shell to a private home within two years.

On Wednesday, Fife Regional Council's Planning and Environment Committee recommended a financial contribution of £3500 towards the costs of the total archeological project, estimated to cost between £25,000 and £30,000. The funds would be divided, with £1000 directed to the excavation phase and £2500 to the full post-excavation phase.

Funding was agreed subject to several conditions, however, which

include provision of public access to the grounds and limited seasonal access to the public rooms of the castle.

Other conditions include a requirement that the full post-excavation project be completed to publication standard in a form acceptable to Historic Scotland and the Regional Council by the end of June 1994, that copies of all reports be submitted promptly to the Fife Sites and Monuments Record, and that the council be kept informed of all signifi-

ored to its former glory

cant discoveries.

The rebirth of Dairsie Castle has been welcomed by the Trust formed in 1987 to consolidate the ruins, which have lain abandoned since the 18th century.

Secretary, David Scott, said that Trust members were "over the moon" at the latest developments, adding: "Re-building the castle was way beyond our wildest dreams, yet it is now going to happen."

"The castle occupies a commanding position on high ground, with fine views all round. Once rebuilt, it will be easily seen and, superimposed

on the surrounding countryside, should look superb."

The castle has an interesting history, having been occupied by the Learmonth family and, later, the Spottiswoodes, both prominent in Scottish affairs during the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1583, King James VI (later James I of

England), assisted by Sir Patrick Learmonth, escaped the clutches of the Earl of Gowrie and made his way from Falkland to Dairsie Castle where he spent his time hunting and feeling "free, like a bird flown out of a cage."

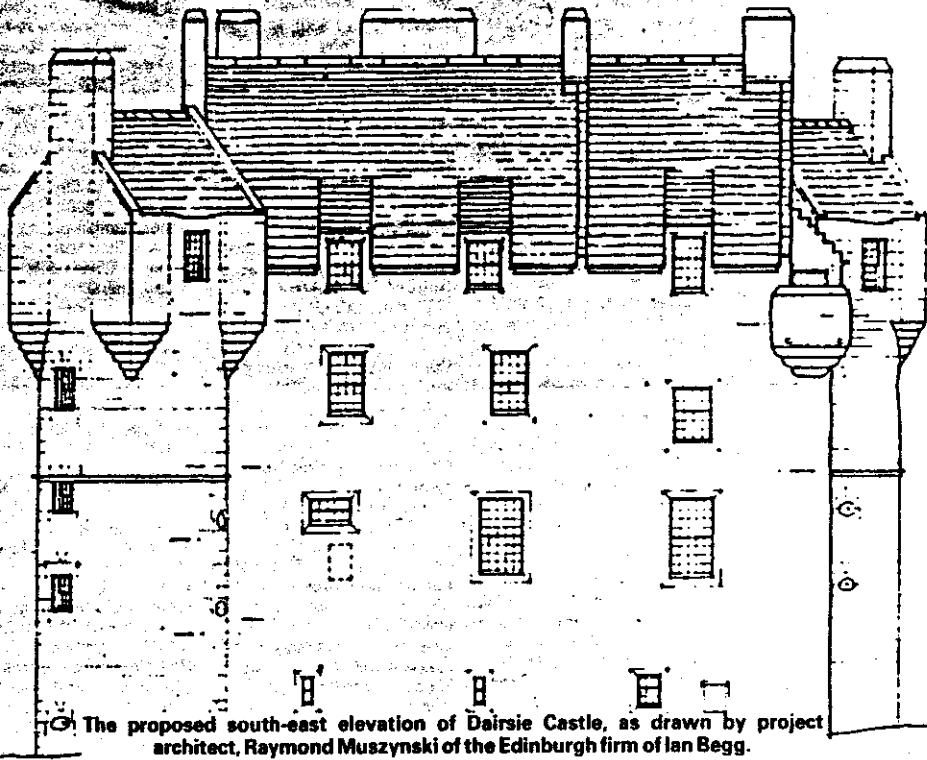
Sir Patrick was a hero in 1575 when he successfully defended the castle against a marauding

band of the Douglas family, who had chased their sworn enemy, Lord John Hamilton, from Pit-scottie to Dairsie.

A Russian connection exists through the Association of the Learmonth and Lermontovs, based in Moscow and with members scattered around the world.

Mr Scott took up an

invitation from the Association to visit Russia in September and spent almost four weeks visiting places and sites relative to Mikhail Lermontov, a descendant of the Learmonth's. The sometime soldier, poet and artist died in a duel in the Caucasus in 1841, and has since become a national hero to many Russians.



The proposed south-east elevation of Dairsie Castle, as drawn by project architect, Raymond Muszynski of the Edinburgh firm of Ian Begg.