

Social Values Assessment Report: Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate

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Cover images

Left: Fyvie Castle and stalls during the 1644 Heritage Weekend (August 2024); Top Right: Fyvie Lake with boathouse on the far shore; Bottom Right: the walled gardens in bloom.

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Key Findings

The purpose of this social values assessment was **to understand the meanings, memories, stories, experiences, and feelings associated with Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate by people today**, and the ways in which these contribute to people's sense of identity, belonging, and place.

Key findings are:

- **The Castle** is a focal point within the estate and a local landmark. However, the building and its contents, while recognised as special and a key part of the attraction for visitors, are not necessarily the primary focus for local people's values or attachments. People are proud of the Castle, but the social values and relationships associated with the **natural environment** are more extensive than those related to the domestic interiors.
- The **outdoors (landscape and gardens)** is an important focus for community activities and values derived from **social, emotional and sensory experiences**. People connect with the property through observation and knowledge of the flora and fauna and its seasonal changes. The woods and trees structure the landscape, influencing people's sense of place and providing a focus for commemorations.
- The **domestic interiors** are the focus of social values relating to identity and belonging for a smaller range of people (notably those with familial or personal connections to the Castle).
- There is an **everyday** quality to many people's interactions with the property, which is valued for its associations with people's life stories – regular routines and familiar locations, experienced and remembered – whether directly or through inter-generational connections.
- Memories, feelings, and uses of place, including informal practices, are important in forming community connections and sustaining social values. Many of the **intangible** emotional attachments, sensory experiences, and memory-based meanings and practices are not readily apparent or evident in the tangible fabric and are therefore at risk of disruption/loss.
- The **communities** that consider Fyvie to be their "**local castle**" extend beyond Fyvie village, including residents in neighbouring areas/villages. Meanwhile, communities of attachment/interest, including those with family relationships and other connections, are even more dispersed, extending outwith Scotland. There are also important hierarchies within and between these communities and their respective attachments/claims. These factors affect when and how different groups engage with the property (or not).
- The varied social values and diverse communities identified highlight that changes in presentation, access or use bring the **potential for conflict**, due to the multiple forms of knowledge, claims to moral ownership, and ways of relating to the property.

Context

The property

Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate has been in the care of the Trust for 40 years (see [Annex I: Property Description](#)). It consists of multiple listed buildings, including the Castle (the origins of which date back over 700 years), a racquets court and bowling alley, a boathouse, and the Old Home Farm complex. These buildings are set within a designed landscape, with formal and walled gardens, woodland, and a lake. The whole property falls within an historic battlefield area. Fyvie Castle was acquired by the Trust together with its contents, which include a nationally significant collection of paintings. The Castle features in popular ballads and stories, being reportedly haunted by several ghosts, which have inspired novels and featured in television programmes.

The wider area

The property is situated about 1 mile (20 mins walk) from the village of Fyvie in rural Aberdeenshire (see [Annex II: Map](#)). Fyvie village has a primary school and several active community groups, such as Fyvie Heritage and Fyvie Choir. Census data (2011 figures) for the four Output Areas including Fyvie showed that over 80% of residents were born in Scotland, 60% can speak Scots and almost 100% identify as White Scottish or White British. According to the Scottish Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, the Data Zone containing Fyvie village is the lowest ranked of all the five areas that make up Fyvie-Rothie, with an overall ranking of 5, as opposed to 6, 7 or 8 for the other areas.

Management arrangements

The Castle, which also contains a café and shop, is open for ticketed guided tours April – October. People can access the gardens and grounds for free year-round. There is a holiday let in one of the Castle towers and the venue can be booked for weddings. Two or three large-scale public events take place each year, alongside smaller-scale group activities. The property team includes permanent visitor services and garden staff, supported by seasonal staff, indoor and outdoor volunteers, and regional teams. Several of the staff and volunteers live locally, supporting informal relationships with local community groups, some of which are involved in some of the public events. There is also an on-going relationship with the Forbes-Leith family, members of which own the surrounding estate.

Trust projects

The property was included in the Trust's *Facing Our Past* project and the *Histories of Witch Trials* property audit. There were two other on-going projects at the time of the assessment:

- The Engaging Communities project, which supported a full-time officer for 12 months to trial engagement activities for different groups at and outwith the property.¹
- A major conservation project to address structural concerns around the Castle and the restoration the Old Home Farm buildings (recently acquired by the Trust and which require stabilisation and conservation work before they can be put into use).

¹ Due to practical limitations and timing, it was not possible to undertake any joint activities. However, we worked closely with the officer to ensure co-ordination when approaching community groups and observation of a consultation meeting (off site, in May) and a health walk (on site, in December) helped to understand the Engaging Communities project approach and potential connections with the Social Values project.

Alongside the major conservation project, the racquets court and bowling alley were also undergoing conservation work (meaning they were closed to the public), following damage caused when a tree fell on the building during Storm Otto in spring 2023.

The existing range of activities and the on-going projects suggested that there was scope for a social values assessment to have a **direct application and operational impact**, informing management, conservation, and engagement – in terms of both what and how work is taken forward.

Assessment Process

Research approach

Prior to commencing assessment activities, a desk-based scoping was undertaken to obtain an initial orientation to the context, identify community groups and regular or upcoming activities, which might inform the planned assessment approach. The researchers also attended a one-day symposium at Fyvie in March 2024, where Trust staff, academics and sector partners discussed the three key themes identified in the property Research Strategy.²

This was a **rapid study**, with research activities taking **approximately 3 weeks** (over a period of 8 months), this included a three-day orientation trip in May 2024, two seven-day research visits, one in August and one in December 2024, and remote engagements online. Activities were scheduled to coincide with significant public events organised by the Trust (the 1644 Heritage Weekend in August and the Christmas Fair in December) and the international Clan Forbes visit (in August).

Recruitment and selection of participants

The research activities involved Trust staff and volunteers, local residents, and more dispersed communities of interest, attachment, and identity. As far as possible, contacts were established prior to on-site work but, in many cases, it was only through meeting people in person and being present at the property that it was possible to make arrangements. Initial contact was with groups who have a stated interest in the property. Participation was then extended through snowball referrals, an online appeal for participants (via NTS Facebook pages), and direct approaches to individuals both at the property and in the local area. Notices about the research were placed in the carpark for information and inviting participation, but did not result in any contacts.

Research methods

The assessment utilised the core methods of interviews, observation, and participant observation, combined with participatory methods, designed to take advantage of the public events at the property. The research methods were implemented as follows:

- semi-structured interviews (12 people, including 3 walking interviews).
- focus group (1 group, 4 people).
- short, structured interviews (16 in total, including 8 during the Clan Forbes visit).

² The three themes are: Lives (the people connected with Fyvie throughout its history and how they are also connected to other places); Stories (intangible cultural heritage associated with Fyvie as a place today); Climate (the impacts changing climate has on the buildings, landscape, and nature of Fyvie and how we prepare for the future).

- questionnaires - 5 by self-completion in the café following a walk in the grounds.
- observation – in the grounds (sometimes combined with structured interviews).
- participant observation – the Heritage Weekend (2 days), Christmas Fair in the Castle (3 days), tours of the Castle (2).
- participatory mapping – with the focus group and structured interview respondents in the grounds.
- what does Fyvie mean to you? – feedback during the Heritage Weekend (22 responses).
- create a postcard activity – during the Christmas Fair (60 responses).

It was planned to conduct the **participatory mapping** during the Heritage Weekend, but for practical reasons this activity was adjusted to obtain feedback on sticky notes in response to the question “what does Fyvie mean to you?”. The question still evoked responses relating to specific areas or features of the property, but people tended to speak about activities and uses rather than memories, feelings, and meanings.

Although it was not possible to arrange a creative activity with a youth/school or community group in the time available (as has been done in other studies), a **create a postcard activity** was run with a range of participants who attended the Christmas Fair. In this activity, participants chose from a variety of pre-selected images printed on A4, or proposed others that they would use, and then placed these on a magnetic whiteboard to build up a postcard. The images effectively prompted reflections on what was special or important about Fyvie.

The assessment activities were complemented by on-going reviews of documents and reports (including the independent Audience Development reports for the property) and monitoring of **online** platforms. The levels of activity on some of the community Facebook groups suggest that extending the assessment into these online spaces could have been productive, had capacity allowed.

In total, **118 people directly contributed to the research** (see [Annex III: Participants](#)). The figures for direct participation during the two public events (22 at the Heritage Weekend and 60 at the Christmas Fair) are slightly conservative, as the activities often involved talking to people in small groups. All direct participants have been anonymised in this report.

Indirect participants include the hundreds of people who visited the property on the Heritage Weekend and during the Christmas Fair, as well as those present on site at other times, when participant observation was taking place.

A **thematic analysis** was completed of the material resulting from all the activities and the emerging findings reflected on by the research team prior to discussion with Trust staff and participants. The time required for the analysis and discussion amounts to a further **approximately 2 weeks in total** (in addition to the research activities which took c. 3 weeks in total).

Ethical considerations

Participation in this assessment is voluntary and based on the principle of informed consent. People were advised before participating about the purpose of the research, what participation would involve (time and activities) and how any data they shared would be used, stored and disposed of. Participants involved in interviews and focus groups were given written information to keep and asked to sign a consent form confirming that they agreed to participate. Participants engaged during participant observation and at public events were given information and confirmed consent verbally.

Posters advising visitors about the research were also placed on notice boards around the property. Participants could withdraw at any stage from the process and consent was regularly reconfirmed with people involved in more than one activity.

Another key principle is that of protecting participants and causing no harm, both during the activities or in the sharing and handling of resulting material. This assessment does not directly address sensitive topics, but any subject matter introduced by participants that appeared to be emotionally charged or distressing was treated with sensitivity during activities. Participation was kept confidential and all participants have been given participant codes in this report. Careful consideration has been given to issues of identifiability and content when using direct quotes and to how potentially conflicting values and views are presented.

Personal and research data has been kept secure and not shared beyond the research team. The methods and approaches adopted in this assessment were reviewed and approved by the University of Stirling General University Ethics Panel prior to commencing activities.

Findings: Communities

The assessment identified a number of overlapping communities of groups for whom the site is of significance. These may be based on identity, attachment and/or interest, some of which include local residents, while others are more dispersed. They include:

- People who identify as being from ("*belonging to*") Fyvie.
- People who were born in the area or have lived there for many years.
- People originally from the area who are no longer living locally but may return to visit.
- Residents who have moved to Fyvie more recently.
- Residents of the wider area who consider Fyvie to be their "*local castle*", and in some cases, also visit regularly.
- People with family or inter-generational ties to the area, e.g. members of the Clan Forbes Society.
- Estate/Castle workers (and volunteers) and their descendants.
- Relations and friends of those commemorated in the grounds (formally or informally).
- School-age children (who visit on school trips, are members of a school house named after Fyvie, visit while staying at the Fyvie Guide House).
- People who use the property for leisure interests including: walking; running; horse riding; cycling; photography; birdwatching; spotting other wildlife.

It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list. The limitations of the assessment mean there are communities and groups who were not involved and whose views are therefore not necessarily represented in the current assessment (see [Gaps/Future Assessments](#)).

Individuals may also identify with more than one of these groups simultaneously or move between them depending on time and context. The ***distinctions and relationships between communities*** are defined by those belonging to them and may not be immediately apparent to others; for example, whether someone is considered to be a "*local-local*" or to "*belong to Fyvie*" is not just a question of where they currently live but also depends on their family relationships and other connections.

Furthermore, there are ***hierarchies of attachment and authority*** within and between communities, which are foregrounded in different contexts and can be competing. For instance, a few longstanding residents (members of multi-generational 'Fyvie families') are recognised by others as local

knowledge holders, familiar with the history of the area and its people over recent generations. At the same time, some more recent residents, those who have worked in the Castle, and members of Forbes-Leith family express values rooted in a deep familiarity with the building, its history, and its contents. In contrast, people who may have no firsthand experience of the property, such as members of the Clan Forbes Society, feel a more symbolic inter-generational connection, realised through exploring their Clan history and periodic visits.

While clear distinctions might be maintained as to where people are from (or belong to), the communities that consider Fyvie to be **their 'local castle'** extend beyond Fyvie village, including residents in neighbouring areas of Woodhead and Backhill, the larger village of Rothienorman, and beyond. This approach to what is local reflects the fact people living in this part of the country often need to travel comparatively far to access services (schools, medical centres, shops) and for personal and leisure reasons. As one young mother said, *"I grew up in Daviot [a village about 9 miles away], so Fyvie has always been there"*.

Findings: Social Values

What follows is a summary of the values identified and the activities and experiences that generate and sustain them (see [Annex IV: Statement of Social Values](#) for a more detailed discussion). The values relate variously to the property as a whole and to specific aspects of the Castle, gardens and estate (fields, lake, woodland). In addition to the property's formal heritage (the nationally significant architecture and interiors, artworks and collection, and designed landscape), social values are generated and maintained through informal, present-day uses and everyday engagements with place, as well as memories of what it once was or represents.

Fyvie is valued as **a familiar place**, with regular visitors (particularly those who also live locally or worked at the property) being intimately acquainted with it. Community membership and feelings of belonging are expressed through knowledge of the people/families, stories and folklore associated with Fyvie, the physical features of the Castle and grounds, the flora and fauna, and its seasonal changes. One example is the use and assertion of the name Fyvie Lake, in contrast to 'the lochside walk': *"It's always been the Lake"* (INT_005). Part of this knowledge is how Fyvie is **connected to the wider landscape** and other places of significance in the immediate and wider area (e.g. the road to Haddo called Castle Road, the Tiffany window in the Church, the King's Seat on the hillside), which were discussed in interviews as part of how the Castle functioned in the past and how the property is encountered and understood by some today.

This knowledge is foregrounded when expressing **concern and care** for the property, for example the view that the Trust should continue *"keeping things traditionally"* (INT_008) and should ask those with long-standing connections to the property before making changes. While some people expressed the view that more recent residents have no interest in the Castle – *"it doesn't mean anything to them"* (INT_012) – this is somewhat at odds with patterns of use. Instead, such statements speak to a concern that values relating to what is seen as traditional community knowledge are at risk of being lost and/or replaced by a different set of values.

There is an **everyday quality** to people's interactions with the property, which was characterised by those who have grown up knowing it as *"a bit matter of fact"* (INT_003) or *"taken for granted"* (INT_004). Nonetheless, local residents (both those of long-standing and more recent arrivals), express both a **pride** in, and **affection** for, the property. People expressed their attachments to and feeling for the property with words like *"love"* and *"fondness"*. For example, *"I love the castle, I've*

grown up with it, with country walks and bike rides, although it was owned by the Forbes-Leiths when we were growing up, they did have the odd open day, like fetes and stuff, mum used to always take us round here for picnics” (INT_004). The Castle is a local landmark and somewhere special that draws people to the area, e.g. *“think of Fyvie and you think of the Castle”* (SUR_001), and *“[it is] used by a lot of people and everyone is very proud of it”* (SUR_003). People visiting from the wider area also remarked on the Castle specifically as something **distinctive and unique**, *“the gardens, while lovely, could be any number of places but the Castle is unique”* (postcard activity).

Moreover, the property is also valued as a form of “everyday heritage” (Ireland et al. 2024) associated with the familiar and familial aspects of **people’s life stories**, whether directly experienced (as a work or meeting place, somewhere enjoyed with family and friends) or through inter-generational connections. For those familiar with the property, it is associated with memories of childhood and time spent with family, as one young mother commented, *“Fyvie is part of daily life, and memories of family”*. Other people reflected the familiar routines and regular activities: *“everyone in Fyvie walks round the grounds and the lake on the fine days”* (INT_002), and *“I have walked round it so often with grandchildren as they have grown up - it holds loads of happy memories”* (SUR_011). People also recalled special experiences (such as weddings) or events during which they got to explore another side to the property, e.g. *“The caretaker showed us round once on a private tour”* (postcard activity). For those with a broader, often symbolic connection, such as the Clan Forbes members, their emotional response and sense of attachment is nonetheless still often rooted in memories of immediate family. For instance, one woman was moved to tears describing how her mother, who never knew her Forbes heritage, would have loved the piano recital in the Gallery.

Various claims to **ownership** (in a moral rather than legal sense) are expressed by communities on the basis of these different types of connection – deep knowledge, proximity/personal experience, and inter-generational/family relationships. For example, *“[it is] nice to go somewhere you feel is yours”* (Clan Forbes member), and *“I love coming out of season, then it is like it’s our castle”* (Heritage Weekend visitor). The history of public use and community access to the grounds as a type of public space (including when privately owned) reinforce this sense of communal ownership. For some people this is also an aspect of the Trust’s custodianship: *“my friend [NAME] says, ‘now it’s our castle’ [...] even if you’re not a Trust member it belongs to everyone now”* (INT_006).

The feeling of **homeliness** and the lived-in quality of the Castle rooms are central to many people’s attachments. This is particularly the case for those who remember it as a working household, but visitors also describe the Castle as having a *“warm and inviting”* feel (member of the Clan Forbes group). For a whole range of communities, social values are derived from the ways in which the property is enlivened by social connections and complex networks of relationships between people and place. These relationships and the values associated with them are sustained through activities in the present, whether through public/communal events, everyday activities and interactions with family, friends, staff, and colleagues, or often routinised individual practices and private contemplation.

As a place of memories, relationships and shared experiences, Fyvie is also a place for **commemoration** of loved ones. There are several formal memorials (benches, stones, and trees with plaques) on the property, but commemorative activities also extend to informal personal practices. As one person explained: *“I have got a tree planted for the family [...] There’s no plaque, it’s just for me”* (INT_001) and another person reflected, *“My partner came here when his mother died, quiet place to sit, was great solace”* (postcard activity).

The **natural environment** is central to how people view the Castle and experience the property. During the create a postcard activity, one person selected a picture of the castle frontage, but described it as *“a bit stark, I would choose something which shows the trees around it”*, reflecting how the woods and trees structure the landscape and influence people’s sense of place. Even though the grounds around the Castle are gardens and designed landscapes, Fyvie is valued as a *“natural haven”* (SUR_010) and for *“its wildlife, in particular birds”* (SUR_012): *“I love all the nature, birds, wildlife, and squirrels”* (SUR_004). There are occasionally rare animals or birds seen at Fyvie but, for the most part, people are interested in the local flora and fauna, which is *“special because it’s here”*. Attending to and caring for the wildlife includes informal activities, such as setting up feeding stations for the squirrels, foraging, and feeding the birds. The changes each season brings are anticipated by regular visitors and seasonal activities and natural phenomena are a feature of people’s experiences and memories across the generations.

The **outdoors/landscape** is an important focus for community activities and values, more so for most people than the interiors of the Castle. A lot of people come to Fyvie to walk in the grounds, both local residents and those drawn from the wider area who have other options but prefer to come to the property. However, people are not engaging with the landscape simply as a convenient place to exercise or walk the dog. Their activities are also associated with deeper **emotional and sensory** experiences. Fyvie was described by one woman as *“a delight for the senses”* (SUR_010) and many other people connected their enjoyment of the seasons with sensory experiences, for example: *“The smell of the wild garlic, you think winter has gone”* (INT_004), while for another young woman the feeling of the place was connected with *“the leaves turning in the autumn, feels like a cozy place because of that I suppose”* (SUR_004). For a small group of people, the sensory experience extends to feelings connected to the supernatural, with personal experiences of unexplained events or unsettling feelings in various rooms of the Castle. Many more people know the stories associated with Fyvie’s reputation as a haunted castle.

For people who remember the property as a private residence and the members of the Forbes-Leith family who lived there, the **relationship between the Castle and the local community** is an important aspect of how it is valued. For example, people who had worked or grown up on the estate remembered attending parties or fetes, e.g. *“At Xmas, Sir Andrew Forbes wife, who sadly died, she always had a Xmas party for the estate children, so spent every Xmas Day in the castle, which was lovely and everyone was made very welcome”* (SUR_013). Some local residents said they now feel a **disconnection** or *“a divide between the Castle and the village”*, related to how the property is managed and what it is for (its social purpose). This is perhaps also reflected in fact only around half of respondents (7/13) selected the option “It is part of the community” when asked in the survey: “From your perspective, do Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate have any special significance?” (for the full list of questions and options see [Annex V: Structured Interview](#)).³

Implications

It is clear from the assessment findings that Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate is valued by multiple communities. However, the ways in which it contributes to people’s sense of identity, belonging, and place varies. The people identifying as *“belonging to Fyvie”* express a range of values connected to the property derived from a **deep familiarity and knowledge, personal connections, and, in many cases, regular use of the grounds**. This is also true of an extended community of location for whom

³ The options selected most frequently were: It is place that people use for everyday activities (13); I think it is a beautiful/evocative place (12); It allows me to connect with nature (12); It is a landmark and/or part of what makes this area special (11); It is a place for learning (10); It is associated with memories (9).

Fyvie is considered “local”, some of whom will have known it all their lives and who may be regular or more occasional visitors. However, **attachment is not limited to proximity or presence**, as the feelings expressed by the members of Clan Forbes from the USA and Canada show. There are also people who grew up locally but who no longer regularly visit (because they have moved away or for other reasons, including accessibility), but who nonetheless retain a strong connection and are recognised as knowledge holders within their communities. **A diverse set of approaches are needed to include this range of communities in engagement and/or participatory processes.**

Social **relationships and personal connections** are key to many of the values identified. These are dynamic and plural – the people directly involved in this research expressed multiple identities. For example, they might “*belong to Fyvie*” and also have worked or volunteered at the property, have moved to the area more recently and be active within communities of interest, or have an older family connection to the area and have got married at the Castle. Personal relationships also shape the production and negotiation of values, as inevitably the property is understood in part through the network of staff and volunteers, their connections to the place, and roles within their communities. Where local community members become formal custodians, how they present the property to others and talk about its significance is informed by their experiences and also their training. This formal heritage orientation (which is largely directed outwards towards visitors) is sometimes at odds with their personal memories and community knowledge (which is retained but not always considered appropriate to share, such as memories of the Forbes-Leith family).

The competing claims of ownership, different roles and functions ascribed to the property (including how it operates as a public space), and the range of informal activities and attachments result in **differing expectations and views** regarding what is important about the property and appropriate for its management and conservation. Such differences can result in **conflict**, between groups and/or with the Trust. For example, the hurt that longstanding local residents’ felt about the redesign of the walled gardens, which was not based on community knowledge and conflicted with their desire to see what they and previous generations had cared for being conserved rather than changed for changes sake, as it was sometimes seen.

The potential for changes to cause conflict not only relate to physical alterations but also the **feelings and uses of place**, including the continuity of informal practices (like picnics, commemorations, and setting up squirrel feeding points) that are important to community connections and sustaining values. While some of these informal practices leave observable traces, many of the emotional, sensory, and memory-based meanings attached to the property will not be immediately apparent and are therefore at greater risk of incidental or unknowing disruption.

The role of the Castle and its owners in the wider area would undoubtedly have changed through the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, even if it had not been sold to the Trust. However, in some instances, the change in ownership has been conflated with other social, economic, and physical changes, including changes in employment patterns (this is still a rural farming area, but fewer people are engaged in agriculture and people are commuting to Aberdeen rather than working locally) and resulting shifts in demographics and a perceived decline in participation in community groups and events. Whether or not these are within the Trust’s control, it is seen as implicated in (and will be impacted by) the future of the village and wider area.

There are several large conservation projects in the pipeline, which are likely to alter the physical appearance and access to the property (in the short term, if not permanently). During interviews, surveys and at the Heritage Weekend, people were interested in the possible future changes and

responded positively to opportunities to find out about the conservation work. The Trust has proposed a co-design approach for determining the future development of the Old Home Farm buildings, once the structures are stabilised and safe to open to the public, which is in keeping with the Trust's overall strategy and expressed aims to work more closely with community groups. This research suggests that going forward, **not only what is done, but how, and who is involved**, will be important in generating and sustaining the social values associated with the property. Considering the range of communities and values identified, this is likely to require going beyond formally-constituted groups and those who are regularly present at the property to consider informal connections to place and those whose relationships are sustained from a distance.

Fyvie has a range of connections to legacies of empire/the slave trade, with the interiors reflecting a way of life built on the profits of enslavement and colonial enterprises (Melville 2022). There are also associations with historic gender-based violence, through traditional stories and other forms of intangible cultural heritage, such as the ballad of The Mill O Tifty's Annie and the story of Lillias Drummond (now known as the Green Lady ghost), as well as the violence of armed conflict at the battle of Fyvie. While some of these associations are widely known, reflections on these **darker aspects and more difficult histories** and their present-day implications do not feature significantly in people's current values or experiences of place. For example, the property's connection to histories of enslavement was only mentioned once during the assessment. It is nonetheless worth noting that these aspects have the potential to disrupt some of the homeliness and sense of cosy, bucolic comfort associated with historic houses and designed landscapes. In keeping with the Fyvie research strategy of revealing previously hidden lives and stories, it may be that these aspects will become a more specific focus for various kinds of interpretive work. In which case, an approach that acknowledges and directly engages with potential value conflicts is likely to be the most productive.

Gaps/Future Assessments

This was a rapid study undertaken over a fixed period and the scale and range of participation reflects this. In terms of addressing recognised limitations in representation and scope, complementary research could be conducted with:

- **The Scottish Traveller community:** Aberdeenshire Council estimates there are between 100 and 200 Gypsy/Travellers living in Aberdeenshire at any one time. The area of Fyvie is roughly equidistant from the two official stopping places in the council area, Aikey Brae to the East and Banff to the North. There may well be objects in the collection that attest to the interactions between settled and Traveller communities (see e.g. Ramsey 2019) and Traveller histories connected to the estate. Consideration would need to be given as to how any engagement would benefit the Traveller community and any research activities co-designed with them.
- **Young people** (teens and young adults in particular): assessment activities could be done in connection with local high schools, youth groups (guides, scouts, young farmers), or as part of activities for families with children of different ages at the property.
- **Past residents in the Preston Tower and people who regularly visited the Castle for shoots or events:** the apartment has previously been used for long-term lets and for many years the Castle hosted lunches for groups shooting on the wider estate. Some of these regular visitors or residents may have developed attachments and values.
- **Online communities:** online spaces are accessed by communities to varying degrees, but other research has shown that they are also spaces in which values are generated and expressed (Bonacchi et al 2023). Given the demographic changes in the village described

by some respondents and the past activities mentioned above, online research could help understand the values of people familiar with Fyvie but no longer regularly present.

As noted in Implications, the major conservation project and other activities planned at Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate over the coming years are likely to impact on a range of communities and their social values. A ***periodic review*** of these findings would therefore be advisable, taking into account the evolving context and the opportunities this offers.

Annex I: Property Description

Location:

Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate are situated about 1 mile (20 mins walk) from the village of Fyvie in rural Aberdeenshire. Fyvie is a 20-30 minute drive from two larger towns of Turriff and Inverurie, and a 45 minute drive from Aberdeen. It is served by one bus per hour (#35 Elgin to Aberdeen route) that stops on the main road in the village. The property is surrounded by agricultural land, the remainder of the original estate, which is still owned and worked by the Forbes-Leith family. The River Ythan flows around the property and feeds the lake.

Other sites of historic interest in the area include the remains of a priory (founded in the 13th century) on the other side of the village (Canmore ID 19069) and the village Church (Canmore ID 19032), which has Pictish carved stones set into the exterior walls and features a large Tiffany glass window in commemoration of Percy Forbes-Leith (d. 31 Dec 1900 in South Africa while on active military service).

Socio-economic profile of surrounding areas:

According to the Scottish Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, Fyvie village is in Data Zone S01006991, one of five that make up Fyvie-Rothie (S01006991/2/3/4/5).⁴ This is the lowest ranked of all the five zones, with an overall ranking of 5, as opposed to 6, 7 or 8 for surrounding areas. While some of the other data zones are ranked even lower on geographic access (with limited public transport links), they are ranked higher on other domains, such as crime, income, and housing.

Census data (2011 figures) for the Output Areas including Fyvie (S00091828; S00091829; S00092819; S00092820)⁵ showed that over 80% of those living in the four Output Areas were born in Scotland, and 14% elsewhere in the UK. Of those aged over 3 years, 60% can speak Scots (this would include Doric), although 90% only used English in the home. Almost 100% of people identify as White Scottish or British; with 4 people identifying as White Gypsy/Traveller.

Property (including formal heritage designations):

There has been a building on the site for at least 700 years, although its form and functions have evolved over time. Today, the property includes several A, B and C listed buildings, including the Castle, a playhouse containing a racquets court and bowling alley (undergoing restoration at the time of this study), a boathouse by the lake, and the Old Home Farm complex (recently acquired by the Trust and on the Buildings at Risk Register). The Castle is located within a designed landscape, with formal and walled gardens (the Garden of Scottish Fruits) and woodland, and the whole property falls within an historic battlefield area (Battle of Fyvie, 1644).

Within the Castle is a nationally significant collection of paintings, together with furnishings and other objects acquired by the Forbes-Leith family in the 19th and 20th centuries and sold with the property (note: the family retained their archive of personal papers, which include alternative designs drawn up when refurbishing the interiors of the Castle). The Facing Our Past project identified connections between the property and ownership of enslaved people through 1) the American members of the

⁴ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a relative measure across 6,976 small areas (called Data Zones). It ranks all the Data Zones and divides them into ten equally sized segments: the first decile (ranked 1) are the 10% most deprived areas, and the tenth decile (ranked 10) are the 10% least deprived areas.

⁵ Output Areas are the smallest geographical unit for which Census data is released. They are designed to have relatively small numbers of households (in the range of 25 to 89) and population (>=60), while being large enough for Census statistics to be released without infringing confidentiality.

Forbes-Leith family, whose wealth first accrued on their Kentucky plantations, 2) earlier members of the Leith family, 3) those featured in portraits, showcasing a way of life built on the profits of enslavement and colonial enterprises (Melville 2022: 21-24).

Management arrangements:

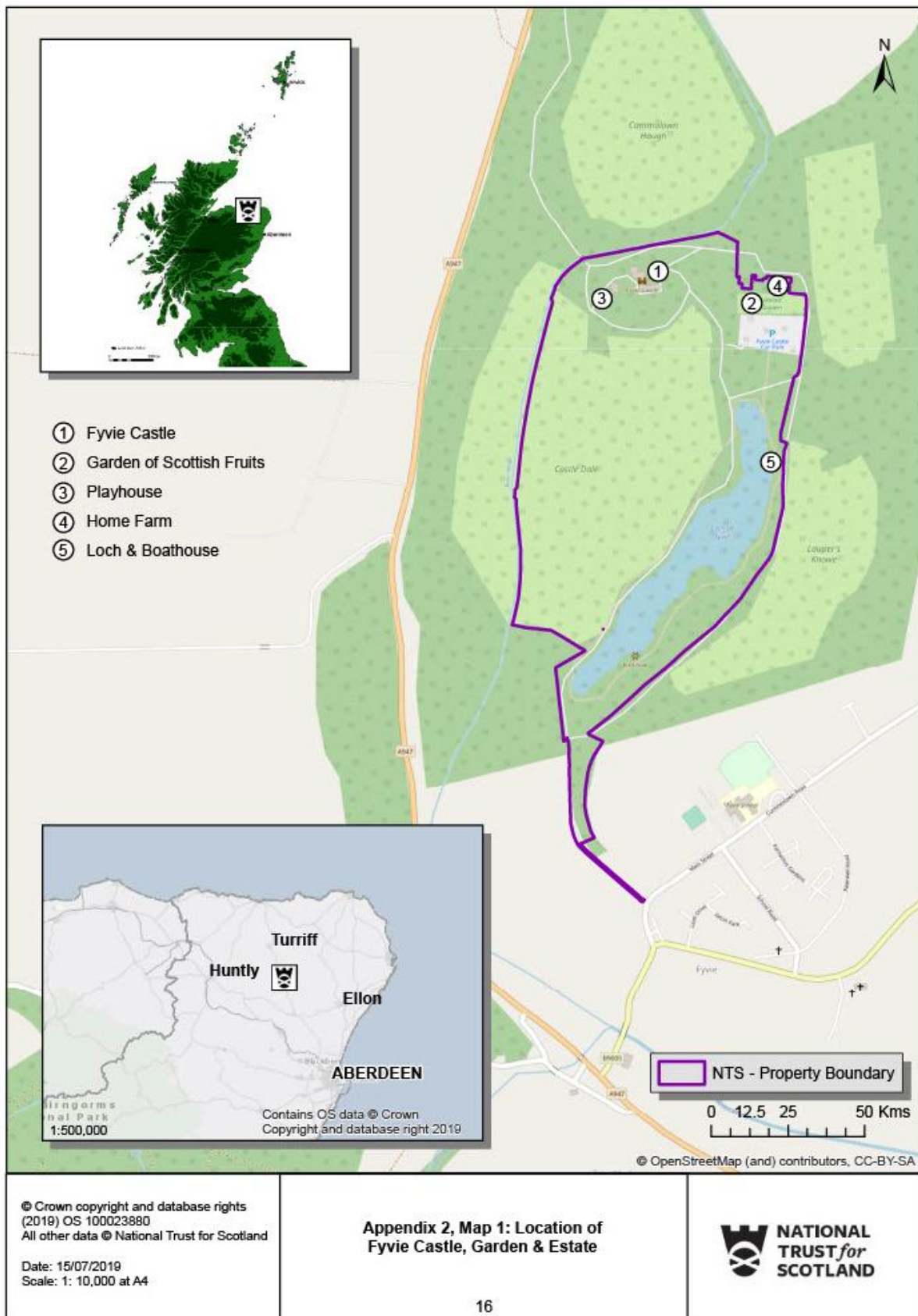
The property has been in the care of the Trust for 40 years, since it was sold by the Forbes-Leith family with contents in 1984 (opened to the public in 1986). It is managed and staffed directly by the Trust. The grounds and garden are open year-round 09:00 until dusk with free entry. The Castle, café and shop are open April - October. Access to the Castle is normally on a ticketed guided tour only. There is an apartment available to rent in the Castle's Preston Tower (sleeps 16) and the venue can be booked for weddings. There are annual public events in the Castle and grounds, including an Easter egg trail and Christmas fair, alongside smaller-scale group activities.

Popular culture:

The Castle was apparently cursed by Thomas the Rhymer and is said to be haunted by the ghost of Lillias Drummond (the Green Lady), leading to it being featured in the TV series 'Most Haunted' (June 2005) and 'Castle Secrets' (July 2023). The life of Lillias Drummond, her husband, and his aunt are the basis for an historical novel 'The Green Lady' by Sue Lawrence. Lillias' story also inspired the traditional Scottish fiddler James Scott Skinner to compose 'Fyvie Castle' (sheet music published 1888). The song 'The Bonnie Lass o' Fyvie' is about the thwarted romance between a soldier and a local girl (possibly referencing the Battle of Fyvie). The ballad 'The Mill O Tifty's Annie' is about the ill-fated love between Andrew Lammie (the Lord of Fyvie's trumpeter) and Annie (Agnes Smith) from Tifty (about 2 miles from Fyvie), who is killed by her disapproving family. The memorial of Agnes Smith in Fyvie kirkyard is widely known as Annie's grave.

Annex II: Maps

Location and key structures (NTS *Fyvie Castle, Garden & Estate Forward Plan 2019 – 2024*). Based on an Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright, licence no. 100023880. All other data © National Trust for Scotland. Not to be reproduced without permission.



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Date: 15/07/2019
Scale: 1: 10,000 at A4

Appendix 2, Map 1: Location of Fyvie Castle, Garden & Estate



Annex III: Participants

Date	Method	Primary affiliation/reason contacted
23/05	Walking interview	NTS staff member
23/05	Semi-structured interview	NTS staff member
20/08	Semi-structured interview	NTS staff member
20/08	Focus Group	Community group member (Fyvie)
20/08	Focus Group	Community group member (Fyvie)
20/08	Focus Group	Community group member (Fyvie)
20 & 21/08	Focus Group & Semi-structured interview	Community group member (Fyvie)
22/08	Walking interview	Local resident (Rothienorman)
23/08	Walking interview	Local resident (Fyvie)
05/12	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Fyvie)
05/12	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Turriff)
09/12	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Fyvie)
09/12	Semi-structured interview	NTS staff member
10/12	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Fyvie)
11/12	Semi-structured interview	Local resident (Rothienorman)

Structured Interviews and Questionnaires

The August interviews were completed in person/verbally. Everyone encountered was asked to participate in the order that they were encountered, unless another interview was already in progress. There was 100% positive response to requests. The December participants (5) completed a questionnaire in writing. For questions and response options see Annex V.

Date	Location	Age	Gender identity	Postcode	NTS member
20/08 am	Main car park	18-30	woman	AB51	no
20/08 am	Lochside path	18-30	woman	AB54	yes
20/08 am	Lochside path	60+	man	AB53	no
20/08 am	Lochside path	18-30	woman	AB53	no
20/08 am	Main car park	18-30	woman	AB51	no
21/08 am	Walled garden	31-40	woman	AB51	no
21/08 am	Walled garden	51-60	woman	AB41	no
22/08 pm	Fyvie village	60+	man	AB53	no
22/08 am	Castle and drive	8 x people visiting with the Clan Forbes Society (USA)			
11/12 am	Castle cafe	60+	man	AB53	no
11/12 am	Castle cafe	30-40	woman	---	no
11/12 am	Castle cafe	60+	woman	AB53	no
11/12 am	Castle cafe	60+	woman	AB53	no
11/12 am	Castle cafe	60+	woman	AB53	no

Participatory activities at public events (Heritage Weekend and Christmas Fair)

These involved a mixture of people, some of whom had visited before, others for whom it was their first time, drawn from an area of up to a 45-minute drive away (including Aberdeen, Mintlaw, Ellon, Turriff, Old Meldrum, and Inverurie).

Annex IV: Statement of Social Values

This Statement is an attempt to illustrate the range of values associated with the property. It is based on a limited number of inputs from individuals who do not claim to speak for or represent the views of their entire community. Multiple values may be present concurrently and competing or seemingly contradictory values can co-exist between and within communities. Values are also not static and are liable to change over time. This Statement should therefore be considered as indicative of the diversity of values for communities with interests in the site, rather than comprehensive or definitive.

This assessment encompassed all aspects of the property - the Castle and other structures (e.g. racquets court and recently acquired Old Home Farm buildings), Gardens (the walled garden and American garden), and the surrounding woods, lake and grounds owned by the Trust. It was noted that people can pass seamlessly off the Trust's land and into the surrounding Fyvie Estate (still privately owned) and the wider landscape forms part of their experience of the property. Alongside values associated with the property as a whole, some values and activities are associated with particular locations or features, and this is highlighted within the descriptions below.

1. The Castle in the landscape

The property is often referred to as *"the Castle"* and the Castle itself is seen as something distinctive, a focal point within the estate and wider area. However, the building and its contents are not necessarily the primary focus for people's values or attachments. While the Castle is key to drawing visitors, with people describing it as their *"favourite castle"*, most local people are not frequently going on tours. In contrast, they are visiting the grounds on a regular basis, daily in some cases. This distinction between access and use of the Castle/gardens and the wider grounds is a continuation from before the property was in Trust care, with people recalling passing through the grounds to get to school or for days out, while the main driveway and gardens immediately surrounding the Castle remained private spaces.

- The Castle is seen as part of the area's distinctiveness – *"think of Fyvie and you think of the Castle"* (SUR_001); *"I never say I come from Aberdeen I say I come from a little village called Fyvie in Aberdeenshire and the number of people who know about the Fyvie Castle"* (INT_005); and *"the gardens, while lovely, could be any number of places but the Castle is unique"* (postcard activity).
- One local man said: *"The castle we miss out, as live in the village. Do walk around the lake 5 times a week, that's our interest"* (SUR_003). In common with other participants, he had visited the Castle but was unlikely to go again unless for a particular occasion, such as event or if family and friends are visiting.
- As one woman reflected, *"everyone in Fyvie walks round the grounds and the lake on the fine days"* (INT_002) and there is a community of *"familiar faces"*, people who regularly see each other at the property at a similar time or day of the week (even though they may be involved in different activities while on-site – walking, spotting wildlife, running etc.).
- A woman born in Fyvie and bought up near Tifty said, *"I love the castle, I've grown up with it, with country walks and bike rides, although it was owned by the Forbes-Leiths when we were growing up they did have the odd open day, like fetes and stuff, mum used to always take us round here for picnics. You could access the downs and what we used to call the policies"* (INT_004).

2. Pride and affection

There is pride in the Castle as an attraction that draws people to the area and (as in the last quote above) people spoke about Fyvie in terms such as “*fondness*” and “*love*”, as somewhere that is part of their lives. The connection to, and pride in, local heritage was also apparent in comments about how the property supports (or could support) the learning and sharing of the Doric dialect, local folklore and ballads, and Scottish music. There was also a corresponding feeling of surprise or regret that many local people do not visit the Castle and that, particularly children, do not know the history of the local area.

- Pride was directly expressed, in comments such as “*[it] is used by a lot of people and everyone is very proud of it*” (SUR_003), or “*the village of Fyvie is very lucky to be on its doorstep*” (SUR_013).
- Also, when people reflected on the presence of the property, one young woman remarked that, “*People come from everywhere, [it] brings wider community here*” and several other people said they were “*very proud folk come to Fyvie*”.
- Pride and affection were apparent in the desire to share the property with visitors, being “*happy to see people enjoy it*” (SUR_003); and “*We bring foreign visitors who don’t have places like this near them. We’re so blessed*” (postcard activity).
- Some people found the environment, and in one instance the craftsmanship of the interiors, “*inspiring*”.
- Those living locally who were familiar with the property also reflected: “*I would say they [school children] almost didn’t know it was here. [...] I think they are or may be interested but they just never bothered, if you know what I mean [...] but sometimes they come here and they absolutely love it*” (INT_007), and “*there shouldn’t be a price for local schools to know about their local history*” (INT_002).

3. Belonging

Knowledge of the property and connections to it were expressed as part of people’s sense of belonging, to their communities and to the area. People were familiar with the stories/history of the property and how it has changed, describing and/or questioning physical changes (e.g. when statues have moved). Many people mentioned having images of the Castle or photos of friends and family members taken at the property in their homes, including pictures taken to mark significant events, such as an engagement or wedding. The Castle is associated with multiple ghost stories and unexplained/supernatural occurrences. While some of these associations might be construed as negative, they are considered part of the Fyvie folklore and, for many people, knowing or being part of such stories is a way of asserting belonging and a connection with the Castle.

- This local knowledge is asserted, for example in the continued use of ‘Fyvie Lake’ rather than loch (as discussed in the focus group): “*Well, growing up in Fyvie it was not the loch of Fyvie it was Fyvie Lake and it really bugs me. If you look in at the Fyvie Castle book by A W Stirling it is Fyvie Lake, and someone put up a sign Fyvie Loch and it just grrr [annoyed sound]*” (INT_002), others present agreed “*No, it’s never known as the Loch of Fyvie*” (INT_005) and “*It’s always been the Lake*” (INT_004), which is how it was referred to by most participants throughout the research.
- For some people whose personal and professional lives have been intimately connected to the property there is an especially strong sense of it being part of their identity, e.g. “*I volunteer in the gardens and it just becomes part of your life*” (postcard activity).
- During the Heritage Weekend someone said that “*everyone has a picture of Fyvie in their homes*” and this was also observed when visiting people’s homes.

- The supernatural is a particular attraction or interest for some people – one young girl’s favourite memory was going around the Castle with an EMI detector (postcard activity). Other people described finding some rooms “spooky” (the Library), that *“this room [the charter room] gives me the creeps, I don’t know why”* (INT_007), and one person entered the dining room during the Christmas Fair and immediately said she had an awful feeling and had to leave.

4. Ownership and responsibility/care

There is a sense that the grounds have been and remain community spaces (irrespective of legal ownership) and that there is a corresponding collective responsibility and desire to see the property taken care of – this was not only expressed by people who identified as Trust members or long-standing residents, although some people did feel that membership was principally for those wanting to access the Castle, rather than a contribution to caring for the property as a whole (also see Shared history of the village). There are still people living locally who grew up on the estate, who worked at the property, and remember how things were done before Trust ownership and this was often shared during interviews. People are also involved in informal caring practices - putting up feeders for the squirrels and leaving seed for the birds - and formally contributing, for example, the Fyvie Youth Club were involved in building the birdhide.

- The sense of ownership in a moral rather than proprietorial sense was apparent in statements such as, *“I normally come when the castle opens, first day, and when it closes, last day, and one in between. I say hello to my castle and goodbye to my castle.”* (INT_005) and *“I love coming out of season, then it is like it’s our castle”* (Heritage Weekend). While a member of the Clan Forbes group said it is *“nice to go somewhere you feel is yours”*, with reference to her ancestral connection.
- The fact the property is owned by the Trust is also seen as significant by some people: *“[It] needs something bigger than an individual or even a family, as a generation might not want to mind it, so for the Trust, well my friend [NAME] says ‘now it’s our castle’ [...] even if you’re not a Trust member it belongs to everyone now”* (INT_006).
- Various people expressed the desire to see the property “protected”, that it was important the collection (which was brought together by the previous owners) be kept together in place, and that the Trust continue *“keeping things traditionally”* (INT_008).
- More broadly there was a feeling that *“[people] want to be informed about what is happening and have [their] views taken into account”* (INT_013). One participant described *“a divide between the Castle and the village”*, and that it would be good to *“encourage support from local people”* and see it brought more *“alive”* (INT_010). Where local people have been involved in events and reciprocal partnerships, this enhances their connection: *“we felt, coming here it was a quid pro quo, the Castle benefits and we benefit from the location [...] it’s an event I wouldn’t miss now because of where it is. Reciprocal thing is what made it really fab”* (INT_006).

5. Homeliness

This feeling seems to derive in part from the scale and style of the property and in part from the experiences, people, and activities that are associated with it (also see Familiarity). Among visitors to the Castle, there is interest in the human stories of what life was like (not just for the owners) and the lives of the people in the portraits (perhaps more so than who they were painted by). The importance of capturing how the Castle was lived in as a home was mentioned by several people with connections to the previous owners, while the continued use of the Castle and it being a busy,

active place (not just as a museum) was viewed positively. However, concern was expressed over the balance between sharing the history of the Castle and prying into the personal lives of the Forbes-Leiths. This interest in people of the past is more directly expressed in the Castle than in the grounds, where people tended to reflect more on nature or the efforts of the present-day staff and volunteers in shaping the formal gardens.

- Visitors described the Castle has *“somewhere you want to stay”* and *“warm and inviting”* (members of the Clan Forbes group). With participants in other activities commenting that *“it is not overly grand like some other places”* and *“you can imagine people living here”* (postcard activity).
- The intimacy of a family home was tempered by respect for the owners when the Castle was in private hands: *“it was private, we would have been very much in awe of the family at that time, it’s different today, at that time the laird was the laird”* (INT_009).
- People mostly associated a sense of homeliness with the Castle, but this sentiment was also extended in some cases to the grounds, with one young woman saying the property *“feels like a cozy place”* (SUR_004) due to having spent time here in her childhood and the autumn season.

6. Social connections and memories

A lot of the values and experiences that people expressed were related to the property as a meeting place, somewhere enjoyed with family and friends, and the associated memories. The grounds are places of fun and family, with people growing up coming to Fyvie and it being rich with personal memories. Those with multi-generational connections to Fyvie also reflected on how their family history/personal stories connected to the history of the Castle and its owners. Similarly, although the Clan Forbes members have an ancestral connection to the Forbes family, their experience of visiting Fyvie Castle was principally expressed in terms of their relationships to close family. While most had no prior connection to Fyvie, the visit was nonetheless a meaningful, and for some people quite emotional, experience. One woman was moved to tears describing how her mother, who never knew her Forbes heritage, would have loved the piano recital in the Gallery. Other people shared occasions when they were made to feel special or felt they had privileged access to the property, including being invited in while it was still privately owned but extending to experiences arranged by the Trust, such as members being invited into the Castle when it was first acquired before it closed for restorations. This sense of personal connection is also reflected in the property acting as a focus for personal/community histories and as a place of memorialising/commemorating loved ones.

- Comments included: *“The grounds, they keep drawing you back, lots and lots of happy memories”* (postcard activity); and *“I have walked round it so often with grandchildren as they have grown up - it holds loads of happy memories”* (SUR_011). Also, during the create a postcard activity, an older woman picked a picture of the boathouse and said to her adult daughter *“that is our memory”*, coming here for picnics, sandwiches and lemonade. Her daughter adds that she used to come here to play and her father knew the laird.
- People remembered parties and open days during the Forbes-Leith’s ownership: *“I came to a party here once, the gamekeeper invited me”* (postcard activity) and *“At Xmas, Sir Andrew Forbes wife, who sadly died, she always had a Xmas party for the estate children, so spent every Xmas Day in the castle”* (SUR_013). Someone else mentioned that *“The caretaker showed us round once on a private tour”* (postcard activity).
- Other people had memories of working at the Castle/on the Estate, or stories related to previous generations of their family: *“My grandma worked in the kitchens and my grandpa was in the gardens in 1920s”* (INT_002); *“it was my father who raised the alarm the night the*

Castle was on fire" (INT_010); *"the laird, Cosmo Gordon [b.1810, d.1879], he took ill and my great grandfather supposedly took him into the hospital in Aberdeen"* (INT_009).

- A lot of people mentioned having attended weddings or events and the Christmas Fair was described as something special and different, allowing more intimate access to the spaces, with people saying, *"it is amazing that we are allowed to walk around with all these things and the [dining room] table being laid is just perfect"* (postcard activity).
- Staff and volunteers, more familiar with the property, also recall special moments of discovery, like accessing the Old Home Farm buildings from the walled gardens for the first time: *"We've all been dying to get behind the blue door and [...] it was amazing, just as it was. Hope they can keep some of that feel"* (postcard activity).
- Aside from a direct connection to the formal history and heritage, the property is also used to tell personal/family histories by association, such as one woman taking her young son around the walled gardens to show him what *"my granny and grandad's garden was like"* and explain how things grow (SUR_006).
- Following on from this strong association with memory, the grounds are a focus for formal memorials (with several benches, stones, and trees with plaques) and informal personal memory practices. As one person explained: *"I have got a tree planted for the family, so you always remember people. There's no plaque, it's just for me, but you know. And that happens for a lot of people, they ask for benches and there are some with trees"* (INT_001).

7. Everyday and familiar

The property is, as has already been discussed, a focus for everyday activities (such as walking) and forms part of the wider backdrop to people's lives. It was described in interviews and other interactions as an unquestioned aspect of the landscape: *"It's a bit matter of fact"* (INT_003) or *"taken for granted"* (INT_004). Similarly, some people mentioned having items related to the workings of the Castle from before the Trust took over (such as milk bottles from the dairy). These once commonplace things were not necessarily seen as special or of importance. However, with further reflection, this lack of importance was described as an expression of familiarity (connected with the memories described above and feelings of belonging and ownership).

- A young mother participating in the create a postcard activity said: *"I grew up in Daviot, so Fyvie has always been there, so it doesn't seem special. I don't mean that to sound dismissive or negative, there is a familiarity to it"*. She goes on to say that for her *"Fyvie is part of daily life, and memories of family"*, she remembers coming to feed the ducks here herself and reflects that soon she'll be bringing her little boy. By the end of our brief discussion, she seems surprised that actually she does feel a connection to Fyvie, ending by saying *"I have always known it"*. During the same activity, another little boy points out the swans, the boathouse and the castle in a 1830s engraving. His mother says, *"even at three he recognises Fyvie"*, implying that is how familiar and recognisable it is to local people.
- Familiarity was reflected in the details people shared in interviews of, for example, how rooms and buildings were used and stories of how Fyvie functioned in the past. Several people expressed a concern that this knowledge is gradually being lost: *"One regret is that mothers and fathers told me these things but wasn't written down [...] we're no better"* (INT_009).
- One circumstance that had brought the importance of the everyday into people's awareness were the restrictions imposed during COVID-19. As one regular visitor recalled, *"I remember turning up and being like 'noooo please don't close, we've nowhere else to go', well, we did, but when it reopened it was like 'yay'. A little avenue of regularity [...] Afterwards really appreciated being able to come"* (INT_006).

8. Connection to 'nature'

For a lot of people, the outdoor spaces at Fyvie are the primary focus of their activities, memories, and what draws them to Fyvie as opposed to going elsewhere. Although it is a designed landscape, the opportunity to connect with the natural environment (flora and fauna) are significant in how the property is experienced and valued. These values are mostly associated with the outside spaces, although species such as bats and swifts are also using the Castle and other buildings. In interviews, people discussed the various birds that can be seen and unusual incidents, like a greylag goose staying all year and rearing goslings on the field, a great white egret, or seeing an otter in the lake. For people visiting regularly, the changing seasons and what each season brings was part of their connection to Fyvie as a familiar place. The seasonal activities organised by the Trust (Easter egg hunts, wreath making, a pumpkin growing competition, the Christmas Fair) reinforce this connection to the changing character of the property throughout the year. The presence of the woods and of mature trees also influences people's experience (structuring the landscape) and sense of place. People referred to the "*majesty*" of the tall trees, had memories associated with specific trees (children climbing them, collecting conkers, and getting engaged under them) and, as previously mentioned, trees are also a focus for memorialising activities and multi-generational connections to place. The impact of storms, recently and the January 1953 Gale, was spoken of with sadness, as events that had radically changed how people saw and moved about the landscape.

- People feel a sense of peace in the grounds and valued being able to "*connect to the present moment through natural beauty*" (SUR_010). As one young woman said, "*I really like walking here, it is peaceful and calming. I love all the nature, birds, wildlife, and squirrels*" (SUR_004). People also mentioned coming at quieter times of day and being able to have the place to yourself (in contrast to busier places like Haddo), the grounds providing the space to reflect: "*My partner came here when his mother died, quiet place to sit, was great solace*" (postcard activity); "*in the gardens there are new seats and benches, so I go in there sometimes and just sit*" (INT_005).
- A lot of people said autumn was a favourite season with the changing colour of the leaves and foraging for mushrooms, although the spring flowers (daffodils, bluebells and wild garlic) were also mentioned: "*Daffys are just fantastic when you're coming in, in spring*" (INT_002). In December, people mentioned looking for the hair ice (apparently often found here), silhouettes of the trees against the sky, and shared memories of the lake freezing and curling or playing football on it.
- Fyvie was described by one woman as "*a delight for the senses*" (SUR_010) and many other people connected their enjoyment of the seasons with sensory experiences, including tasting the produce from the walled garden (berries and peas) and the smells of the plants: "*Being in the garden April-May it is all about smell, there is a honeysuckle, in a birch tree I think, and a rhododendron or azalea that smells tropical on a warm morning. Before that it's the wild garlic and the place is carpeted, and then the lime trees open and that is amazing too*" (INT_006). "*The smell of the wild garlic, you think winter has gone*" (INT_004).
- Although most of the flora and fauna found at Fyvie are not rare, visitors and staff shared a feeling "*they are special because they are here*" (INT_011). People valued opportunities to see, photograph, and experience these local species, as reflected in comments such as, "*the ranger was here and showed me a picture on her phone of a little grebe, which is quite rare and hard to see, and then I walked around to the jetty and there was one there!*" (SUR_003); and "*The birds that come to eat out of your hand, that's special. The lakeside walk is nice, but the birds are the most special*" (postcard activity).

- During the create a postcard activity one person describes the picture of the castle frontage as *“a bit stark, I would choose something which shows the trees around it”*, reflecting how people see the Castle within the wider wooded landscape.

9. Connection to Fyvie village

While the Castle is a familiar place, it remains separate from the everyday spaces of the village, just as when it was privately owned. Nonetheless, the way the estate influenced the history of the village and the connections between the Castle and the wider community are known and spoken about (also see ownership and social connections). In the village there are buildings funded by the lairds (such as the Vale Hotel) and roads or other places that are named after the families. At a more personal level, as already mentioned, people’s family histories and memories connect with the property. For example, people remember attending the wedding reception of Miranda Forbes-Leith, which was open to all the tenants and game keepers, with the party held in the Old Home Farm buildings because the marquee blew down. Some of the people who have arrived in the village more recently have also established connections to the history and present-day life of the Castle, through activities and/or acting as custodians of this knowledge.

- Although connected with the village, one man recalls, *“[the Castle] was a community in itself”* (INT_008). He estimates that in the 1960s there would have been about 30-40 people working on Fyvie Estate – foresters, gamekeepers, joiners, masons, farm workers, and in the dairy, but now there are maybe 5. Farming tenancies were passed down through the generations and family members got jobs on the estate, holding people in the area.
- Another participant reflected that the relationships with local trades people *“stopped with the National Trust [...] they just stopped using local folk, it went from Forbes-Leiths to National Trust and it did nea just have the same connection”* (INT_002).
- While some people expressed the view that people who have moved into the village more recently and work in Aberdeen have no interest in the Castle – *“it doesn’t mean anything to them”* (INT_012) – this is somewhat at odds with patterns of use and volunteering and is perhaps more a reflection of changing patterns of community involvement and the formal and informal knowledge associated with the property.
- Several people expressed a desire *“that the Castle recognises, and that people recognise, there is a community outside and that can help with bringing the castle to life”* (INT_006).

10. Continuity and change

Fyvie has been in Trust care for the last 40 years and in that time changes have been made to the property and the operations. There have also been changes in the village and to Fyvie Estate, reflecting wider societal shifts. Although the Trust has employed local people, the relationship is different to when the Castle was owner-occupied and integrated with the wider estate. There is a generational aspect to these reflections, with people who remember the Castle before the Trust took over most explicit about how things have changed. However, often the same people, also stressed the continuity of the Castle’s presence, presentation, and their connections to it as a place that is locally important. Meanwhile, for visitors to the Castle, how the structure had evolved and the changes made by successive owners were points of interest rather than tensions, with comments on what it would have cost to live in this manner,* and some surprised that it was a private home as recently as the 1980s.

- Several people commented how the Castle *“speaks through time”* (Clan Forbes visit), with other people describing visiting as a form of *“time travel”* (SUR_010).

- There was appreciation for the work the Trust has done to conserve the Castle. With comments such as: *“The best thing that happened was that the Trust did take it over”* (INT_008); *“things were beginning to deteriorate”* (INT_009); and *“the castle needed a lot of work doing to it”* [at the time it was sold] (INT_007).
- However, some of the changes were questioned and (connecting back to earlier points) it was a source of hurt to some people that those with longstanding connections to and knowledge of the property hadn’t been asked or listened to by the Trust in the past: *“if they had asked me about the garden I could have told them, because there isn’t an inch of that place that I have not walked over”* (INT_010); and *“the Trust [...] went a bit off the rails when they started moving stuff about but that was I think [...] they had to make changes to be seen to be doing something”* (INT_007).

*The only mention of the property’s connection to the profits of empire and slavery was during one of the participatory activities, when a woman commented that she had a Jamaican/Canadian friend who was named Forbes because the Forbes family had owned plantations in Jamaica where his ancestors were enslaved. She explained that when he had come to visit her, he’d said *“we have to go to Fyvie Castle because of the Forbes connection”* and during their visit had told his daughter, *“you will get married here”*. The emotion behind his statements was slightly unclear, but it was taken to be either pride and/or a form of symbolic reparation.

Annex V: Structured Interviews & Offline Questionnaire

Question 1: How would you describe Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate? What are your impressions of it? What words come to mind?

Question 2: From your perspective, do Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate have any special significance - to you, your family, your wider community? Please tick all that apply and rank the aspects selected, with 1 being the most important.

[Note: the ranking element of this question was not consistently completed by respondents]

	Applies	Rank
It is associated with memories (personal/communal)		
It is associated with stories (community/family)		
I have family connections to it		
It is place that people use for everyday activities		
It is a place for community activities / events / festivities		
It is somewhere I go for religious or spiritual activities		
I think it is a beautiful/evocative place		
It allows me to connect with nature		
It is part of the community		
It is a landmark and/or part of what makes this area special		
It is a meeting place		
It is a place for learning		
It is connected to my livelihood		
It has no special significance		
Other [please state]		

Question 3: What does Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate mean to you? Meanings may be positive and/or negative.

Question 4: Do you feel a sense of attachment to Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate or sense of ownership (overall or to particular parts of it)? If yes, please describe.

Question 5: Do you use Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate (or places within it) regularly? If yes, please describe.

Question 6: In your view, what role does Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate play in the area and does it have communal importance?

Question 7: What would you like to see happen in future with Fyvie Castle, Gardens and Estate? This might be in terms of conservation, management, uses, developments/changes, or any other aspects.

Basic demographic information was also requested. All questions were optional with a prefer not to say option, including for age and gender identity (where the other options were: man; woman; non-binary/gender fluid; in another way). All participants were advised about the purpose of the research project before participating and given an information sheet including contact details to keep.

Annex VI: References and Comparators

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Background to the methods and approach:

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- Jones, S. 2017. 'Wrestling with the Social Value of Heritage: Problems, Dilemmas and Opportunities', *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage*, 4:1, 21-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20518196.2016.1193996>
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- Robson, E. 2021. Social Value Toolkit. <https://socialvalue.stir.ac.uk/>
- Robson, E. 2025. *Assessing the Social Values of Heritage: Methods in Theory and Practice*. Routledge. www.routledge.com/9781032805269

Comparator Trust properties with social values assessments:

Newhailes House and Gardens (report produced by Elizabeth Robson, 2022): An historic building that many people experience most frequently from the outside within a designed landscape, which is the location for the majority of people's activities. Similarly to in this case, people valued the natural environment at the property and the routes through it to surrounding areas. Given the discussions around Old Home Farm at Fyvie, it is perhaps also worth reflecting on how development of the Stables at Newhailes impacted on people's behaviours and feelings towards the House.