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## The quiet American who handed National Trust a staggering £1.4m



Crowning glory: Culzean Castle, with its 600 acres of grounds, is the trust's flagship property Picture: Robert Perry



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By Tim Cornwell

Arts Correspondent

A MYSTERY American recluse who chose to put his cash into Scottish castles rather than US banks has handed over a gift of £1.4 million for the National Trust for Scotland, The Scotsman has learned.

The anonymous donor, who has no known Scottish connections, told NTS staff he was making the gift because he "had lost all trust in bankers and the US government", they said.

He felt his money would be better going to a charity, or something he cared about – like Scottish castles.

Little is known about the donor, who has demanded anonymity from the trust, though he is a reclusive, childless retired man, who has clearly saved millions but is probably not super-rich.

He has asked for half of his £1.4 million gift to be spent on castles run by the trust, and the rest to be allocated to the Burns Birthplace Museum – a £21 million project to convert the poet's former home in Alloway, Ayrshire, which is due for completion next year.

Curt diCamillo, an architectural historian who heads the trust's US fund-raising arm, the National Trust for

Scotland Foundation USA, said it was an extraordinarily generous gift.

"It's astounding. It overnight doubled the amount of money we had sent to Scotland from here over the past ten years," he said.

"I don't think he's ever been to Scotland. He likes castles. A lot of Americans do – crenellated battlements, flags and knights. He's very, very reclusive."

The \$2 million gift was worth just over £1 million when it was transferred last year – it would have been worth closer to £1.4 million now. Nonetheless, the donation is a welcome shot in the arm for the trust.

The organisation has an annual income of about £44 million, but has looked at closing some properties and selling its headquarters in Edinburgh's New Town amid falling visitor numbers and a funds shortfall.

Lorna Stoddart, the trust's former director of development, and Johanna Gurland, a US fundraising consultant, worked closely with the donor. He plans to leave his Los Angeles home and its contents to the trust as well.

Many Scottish charities, universities and cultural organisations target wealthy American individuals and trusts, but not always with such success.

The National Trust for Scotland Foundation USA, has a staff of two, including Mr diCamillo, but has built strong US connections, fund-raising experts say.

Christopher "Kip" Forbes, of the Forbes publishing dynasty, hosts parties for US donors on the family yacht, the Highlander, in New York harbour.

Every April the US foundation hosts a ball in New York, at the Metropolitan Club, and this year it will honour the leading Scottish actor Alan Cumming as its "Great Scot". On St Andrew's Day it hosts another ball in Palm Beach, Florida.

This year, the publicity for the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns and the Year of Homecoming is already paying dividends for the trust, Mr diCamillo said.

About 90 million Americans – from a population of about 300 million – claim some Scottish ancestry.

### **King of the castles, but not all its properties are money-spinners**

IF THE romance of Scottish castles helped to drive a mystery American donor to give \$2 million to the National Trust for Scotland, the trust has plenty on offer.

Culzean Castle, on the Ayrshire coast, is its flagship property. It draws 200,000 visitors a year, with high-class accommodation on offer. Falkland Palace, a Renaissance hunting lodge in Fife, has a 16th-century real tennis court, the oldest in Britain.

Other castles are not faring so well. Brodick Castle, on Arran, is failing to draw enough visitors to cover costs and is said to be among a dozen of the trust's 128 properties facing closure as it struggles to bridge a multi-million-pound funding gap. Crathes Castle, in Aberdeenshire, famous for its fairytale turrets and painted ceilings, has also seen a slump in visitors.

The trust, which last week appointed a new chief executive, Kate Mavor, has an annual income of £44 million. But it has endured a £3 million deficit, redundancies and the sudden departure of Ms Mavor's predecessor, with visitor numbers falling and the credit crunch hitting investments.

Scotland's most imposing castles – Edinburgh and Stirling – are run by Historic Scotland.

The US benefactor could have bought his own castle, the ruined 16th-century Baltersan Castle in South Ayrshire, for just £195,000.

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