

Royal and Lordly Residence in Scotland c.1050 to c.1250: an Historiographical Review and Critical Revision¹

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Abstract

Academic study of eleventh to thirteenth century high status residence in Scotland has been largely bypassed by the English debates over origin, function and symbolism. Archaeologists have also been slow to engage with three decades of historical revision of traditional socio-economic, cultural and political models upon which their interpretations of royal and lordly residence have drawn. Scottish castle-studies of the pre-1250 era continue to be framed by a 'military architecture' historiographical tradition and a view of the castle as an alien artefact imposed on the land by foreign adventurers and a 'modernising' monarchy and native Gaelic nobility. Knowledge and understanding of pre-twelfth century native high status sites is rudimentary and derived primarily from often inappropriate analogy with English examples. Discussion of native responses to the imported castle-building culture is founded upon retrospective projection of inappropriate later medieval social and economic models and anachronistic perceptions of military colonialism. Cultural and socio-economic difference is rarely recognised in archaeological modelling and cultural determinism has distorted perceptions of structural form, social status and material values. A programme of interdisciplinary studies focused on specific sites is necessary to provide a corrective to this current situation.

One of the central themes in the traditional historiography of medieval Scotland is that in parallel with the emergence from the late 1000s of an identifiable noble stratum comparable to the aristocratic hierarchies of Norman England and Frankish Europe there was an attendant development of new forms in the physical expression of lordship. The exercise of lordly power was, it is argued, reinforced through the formalising of lord-dependent relations in a suitable 'arena where social relations are negotiated'.² What the formalising of lordship relations meant in physical terms, however, remains largely a matter of conjecture, for, powerfully presented though the argument has been, current knowledge of the character and composition of centres of secular power in ninth- to twelfth-century Scotland, when a novel expression of lordly power – the castle – was apparently imported as part of the cultural baggage of colonists from England and Frankish Europe, remains too fragmentary to provide substantive support to sustain it. For the period after c.1100, furthermore, the focus has fixed primarily upon the emergence of the castle as the principal architectural manifestation of lordly power to the neglect of possible continuity in indigenous traditions in some areas. In large part, this imbalance has resulted from the dearth of easily datable architectural remains from the period 1050-1150 from which to establish the character of native high status residences, and the paucity of archaeological excavation at all but some of the highest status Early Historic period sites. Castle studies in Scotland, moreover, despite a considerable output of publications which stress the longevity of timber and earthwork construction,³ has continued to be dominated by a methodology grounded in a chronologically ordered sequence of development from motte and bailey forms, through stone-built enclosures to tower-houses of increasingly complex design, a scheme originally devised for Scotland in the late nineteenth century founded on analogous comparison principally with England and northern France.⁴ It is the aim of this paper to review the evidence for centres of royal and lordly

¹ I am grateful to Dr Oliver Creighton, Dr Kieran O'Connor and Mr Geoffrey Stell for all their generous and invaluable advice and comments on earlier drafts of this article.

² Driscoll 1998, 34.

³ See, for example, Haggarty and Tabraham 1982; Oram 2000, 228-229.

⁴ This framework bears close comparison with that reviewed in Coulson 1996 for England, where a 'military architecture' paradigm which was founded principally upon inappropriate analogy with northern mainland European experience, retrospective projection of post-medieval military

power in Scotland from the mid-eleventh to mid-thirteenth century, identify the principal cultural traditions in building design, and to offer a critique of some of the traditional interpretative models.

It is important to stress at the outset how little work at any level, archaeological or historical, has been undertaken on Scottish tenth- and eleventh-century high status secular sites. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that most current interpretations of probable forms of Scottish high status residence are founded on hypothetical archaeological and social anthropological models constructed primarily by analogy from cultural studies elsewhere in Britain and northern Europe.⁵ While these constructs are plausible they remain, nevertheless, theoretical and caution must be exercised before indulging in the elaborate social reconstruction exercises that have characterised some discussions of socio-political development in the period of state-formation after c.800. Too often, historical and archaeological conjecture has assumed a mantle of fact which subsequently has been presented as the received 'truth' upon which further theorising has been constructed. In the confident language of some of these arguments it is easily forgotten how little field investigation has been undertaken to date at earlier medieval secular power-centres in mainland Scotland. The extensive programme of excavation and field survey around Birsay in Orkney constitutes the sole completed large-scale investigation of such a high status, multi-phase secular site, with the recently commenced investigation of Forteviot in Perthshire aiming to provide a similar level of data for a mainland site.⁶ Documentary research has identified a number of putative locations for lordly or thanage centres of eleventh-century date, but none of this work has stimulated archaeological investigation - invasive or non-invasive - as part of a wider study.⁷ It is a situation that barely improves in respect of the better-documented royal or lordly centres of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, where excavation has been limited and focused chiefly on outline investigation prior to consolidation work by State guardianship authorities rather than research-driven analysis.

With these caveats in mind, what can be said about the upper levels in the hierarchy of power centres? The principal observation is that between c.800 and c.1100, while there may have been continuity of occupation at many smaller fortified centres, especially in the western Highlands and Hebrides, most major locations associated with kingship or similar authority pre-800 were abandoned or declined in status and new centres developed which appear to have been quite different in character. Evidence for activity at Dunadd, one of the royal centres of Dál Riata, suggests rapid decline and possible abandonment before the end of the tenth century.⁸ Burghead in Moray experienced a similarly abrupt abandonment in the early 900s,⁹ while Dumbarton Rock was perhaps derelict from the time of its sack in 870 until its reoccupation in the twelfth or early thirteenth centuries.¹⁰ No one cause can be assigned for this wave of abandonment, although violence is apparently a common denominator at many

perspectives, and an absence of interdisciplinary study drawing on historical, architectural and art historical sources and methods, dominated the field of castle studies until the 1980s. Whilst Coulson warned of the risk of creating new bandwagons based on his revisionism, the result has been a growing body of published material which largely downplays or rejects outright the 'military architecture' model. A recent call for a corrective to this trend has been made by Colin Platt (Platt 2007 and Platt 2007-8), which may have opened up a new round in the debate.

⁵ See, for example, Driscoll 1991, Driscoll 1998, or Alcock 1988.

⁶ For Birsay, see Morris 1989; Morris 1996. For Forteviot, see <http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/serf/>.

⁷ For thanages and the locations of their probable administrative centres, see Barrow 2003, 7-67 and Grant 1993.

⁸ Lane and Campbell 2000, 93-5. Evidence was also found for what might have been a late phase of use involving feasting in the summit area of fort, dated tentatively to the 10th-12th centuries, *ibid.*, 95-6.

⁹ Oram 2007, 241-62.

¹⁰ Alcock and Alcock 1990, 117. The 10th-cent cross-slab fragments suggest that there may have been some ecclesiastical activity on the site in the 900s, but there is no evidence for its continued use as a high-status secular lordship centre.

sites. Dumbarton may have been discredited through its failure to withstand Viking attack,¹¹ and continued exposure to raiders possibly rendered it unattractive to a dynasty rocked by the consequences of the fall of its citadel. Dunnottar likewise disappears from the record following its 934 sack by a West Saxon army until its apparent reoccupation by the Keith family in the late fourteenth century.¹² [Fig.1] Dundurn¹³ and, possibly, Burghead, may have had too close associations with defeated or degraded segments of rival ruling houses, while Dunadd's *raison d'être* possibly disappeared as the core of the Scottish polity shifted eastwards. Only the castle rocks in Edinburgh and Stirling perhaps saw continuity of occupation through into the High Medieval period, possibly due to their strategic significance to kings who were extending their authority into Lothian and Strathclyde. Even here, however, firm evidence for high-status occupation c.900-c.1100 has proven elusive.¹⁴

One trend which Edinburgh and Stirling appear also to buck is a shift from elevated, strongly defensive and spatially quite restricted locations to lower-lying, less overtly defensive and more commodious sites. The most obvious examples are Scone and Forteviot, the latter of which served as a royal centre from the early 800s until the later 1100s, but Govan and Cadzow also stand in this category as potential successors to Dumbarton in the kingdom of Strathclyde, and perhaps Clunie in Stormont, which possibly replaced an earlier fortification at Dunkeld.¹⁵ Forteviot, however, is the site usually offered as a model for high-status administrative and residential centres of the period 800-1200.¹⁶ It has been suggested that the late Pictish monarchy developed a new style of power centre here to project its exalted kingship, consciously emulating Carolingian imperial palaces like Ingelheim.¹⁷ It is an attractive suggestion, but based on one sculpted stone arch-head and some other fragments from a site otherwise apparently obliterated by centuries of river erosion, discussion of its structural appearance and layout cannot be considered as anything other than speculation unless and until the current research project around the believed palace site provides more tangible evidence.¹⁸

Speculation, however, is unavoidable if we are to address the void in our knowledge of the nature of pre-twelfth-century estate centres in southern and eastern Scotland without a programme of research excavation. Unlike Ireland, where a wealth of record evidence permits the identification of the residences of Gaelic rulers with surviving structures and where it is possible to conjecture from these remains on the evolution of a pre-1169 native tradition of fortified centres of lordship,¹⁹ Scotland lacks any substantial pre-twelfth-century record evidence which would support such theorising. Apart from possible sculptural representations of probably high-status timber structures, like the hog-back gravestones from Luss or Govan which are carved in the form of shingle-roofed, bow-sided halls,²⁰ we are otherwise dependent on incidental references in narrative accounts for the layout of pre-

¹¹ Driscoll 1998, 40.

¹² Anderson 1922, 1, 426; Alcock and Alcock 1992, 267-9, but see also 276-282. McGurk (ed) 1976, 40.

¹³ Alcock, Alcock and Driscoll 1989, 193-6.

¹⁴ Driscoll and Yeoman 1997, 229; *Stirling Castle Archaeological Survey and Investigation: Excavations in Stirling Castle 1992-97* (unpublished report prepared for Historic Scotland by Headland Archaeology); Alcock 1981.

¹⁵ The royal residence on record at Cadzow in the reign of David I appears to have lain in the low-lying ground later occupied by Hamilton Palace rather than on the cliff-top site above the Avon gorge to which the name now applies.

¹⁶ Alcock and Alcock 1992, 236-241; Driscoll 1998, 42-3; Airlie 1997, 33-46; Aitchison 2006, 51-84.

¹⁷ Airlie 1997, 35-6.

¹⁸ It is possible that the traditional identification of Haly Hill as the site of the late Pictish to 12th-century Scottish royal centre is incorrect. An alternative location has been identified at Mailer, close to the site of the later medieval parish church, in the portion of Forteviot parish north of the River Earn. Personal communication A.Woolf.

¹⁹ O'Conor 2005; McNeill 1997, chapter 1.

²⁰ Lang 1972-74, 206-235; Crone and Watson 2003, 65-6.

twelfth century royal centres.²¹ The only surviving pre-1300 Scottish exchequer records, the rolls for 1264-5, reveal that the hall at the royal thanage of 'Rathenach', a now unidentified site between Elgin and the River Spey, was rebuilt that year using double boards in its roof and planks in its walls.²² We can perhaps assume that the building being replaced or repaired was of similar construction, but the nature of the record does not allow us to be categorical in that assumption. Perhaps this plank-and-board construction was that referred to in the later Middle Ages as a distinctly Highland building tradition, as for example in Alexander Myln's early sixteenth-century reference to the palace of the pre-1400 bishops of Dunkeld as being 'in highland style' and comprising of 'great houses built upon the ground'?²³ What that 'highland style' was, however, other than different from the dominant contemporary Lowland Scottish architectural fashion of stone-built tower and adjacent hall block, we do not know.²⁴ In the absence of clearer evidence we have sought models from elsewhere in the British Isles and northern Europe.

This resort to analogy has seen Scottish archaeologists generally look south, with excavated late Saxon manorial centres like Goltho in Lincolnshire being offered as type sites for the lordship centres postulated in Scotland. That site was suggested by its excavator, Guy Beresford, to have been the seat of a thegn. At its core he identified a substantial timber hall, which apparently formed one component in a courtyard-like arrangement of ceremonial, domestic and ancillary structures grouped within an embanked earthen enclosure, beside which was a church or chapel.²⁵ Goltho's tenth-century hall measured 25m by 7m, with its internal space divided into parallel aisles by timber uprights. Beresford interpreted these as open arcades rather than the bays being filled by partitions, and he proposed that it was a chamber reminiscent of a late Roman basilica. Of further interest was what Beresford interpreted as the post-1066 insertion into the enclosure of an earthen motte, obliterating the ancillary buildings but respecting the hall site. Here, it was argued, while new expressions of lordship – the motte – were being introduced to an ancient site after the Norman conquest of England, the complex was being adapted for continuing use rather than destroyed or abandoned. As a seat of lordship, Goltho offers a seductive image of the display and exercise of power, control of resources and administrative organisation, but caution must be exercised before embracing it enthusiastically as a model for tenth- and eleventh-century power-centres in England, let alone importing that model to Scotland: Goltho has been subject to major re-evaluation and re-dating which interprets the hall complex as continuing in use into the 1130s and the construction of the motte as a phenomenon of the 1135-54 civil wars.²⁶

While the details of Goltho and other late Saxon elite defended centres with adjacent churches, like Sulgrave in Northamptonshire or Portchester in Hampshire (which also seem to have continued as high status centres after 1066),²⁷ should perhaps be viewed circumspectly by Scottish archaeologists and historians, the generalities of the site may offer better prospects. A timber hall tradition in lightly-defended or open sites is known from northern Northumbria, characterised on a grand scale by the royal residence at Old Yeavinger in Northumberland and at a lower social level at Doon Hill near Dunbar.²⁸ What may be other complexes of timber hall and ancillary buildings have been identified as crop-mark sites at Sprouston near Kelso and Philiphaugh near Selkirk.²⁹ A similar complex may have existed at Eldbottle near Dirleton in East Lothian, whose name, meaning 'old dwelling-place', indicates possibly early seventh-century origins. Eldbottle became a royal estate, possibly during the

²¹ Such as the references in the *Life of St Margaret* to various chambers in the royal residence at Dunfermline. See Turgot, *Life of St Margaret*, in Anderson 1922, ii, 65, 68.

²² Stuart 1878, 14.

²³ Myln 1831, 16, 'alpinatum more' and 'ex domibus magnis super terram constructis'.

²⁴ Oram, 2005, 5-10.

²⁵ Beresford 1987, 34, 35.

²⁶ Creighton 2002, 21-3, 24.

²⁷ Creighton 2002, 70-1.

²⁸ Hope-Taylor 1977; Hope-Taylor 1980.

²⁹ Smith 1991, 261-94.

Scottish takeover of Lothian in the late tenth century, and was still visited by kings into the 1160s.³⁰ Such halls as may be represented by these south-east Scottish examples, it has been proposed, were the key structures to emerge as a symbolic projection of power relationships in the period 800-1100 as the locations for the feasting associated with hospitality rents, like *conveth* or *wayting*, public displays of material wealth, and gift-giving ceremonies. Eldbottle, however, is the only one of these sites where twelfth-century occupation is recorded. This situation perhaps owes much to the poor survival of documentary evidence and the rarity of excavation at documented pre-twelfth century sites, for work at Cruggleton Castle, a twelfth- and thirteenth-century seat of the lords of Galloway, has yielded possible evidence for apparently direct continuity in both occupation and basic structural forms from the late 700s down to the late 1100s. Excavation there revealed the rock-cut post-holes of a Dark Age 'hall' dating from the eighth century, a structure which its excavator has argued continued in use until c.1185-1200 when its still upstanding fabric was incorporated into a lengthened hall with an adjoining timber tower.³¹ This argument for continuity and eventual adaptation of a native lordly centre by insertion of structures associated with Frankish aristocratic culture, however, is heavily redolent of the scenario proposed by Beresford for Goltho and perhaps points more to the circulation of modern archaeological reports than to cross-cultural fertilisation in late twelfth-century Galloway.

Modern perceptions of the form and function of halls, generally considered as essentially rectangular in plan with symbolic internal zoning into high- and low-status ends, may be heavily distorted by the literary images produced by Sir Walter Scott in the early 1800s and the visual imagery created by Hollywood in the twentieth century. There seems also to be an element of cultural determinism shaped by deeply entrenched prejudices which present non-rectilinear structural forms as in some way primitive or used principally in the medieval period for non-standard or socially inferior buildings. This attitude can perhaps be glimpsed in analysis of the apparently twelfth-century timber structures occupying a central position in the courtyard of the royal castle at Peebles. The larger of the two was interpreted as a circular, timber-built, tower-like building c.12m in external diameter, with a roof structure supported on four major uprights. As an apparently round building in an age of squares and rectangles, it was argued that it perhaps represented the remains of a windmill rather than a higher-status component of the castle complex.³² In the 1980s, further large, timber-built sub-circular constructions were identified in excavations at Rattray in Aberdeenshire and Cullykhan in Banffshire, but questions remain over their function.³³ There is less debate, however, over the circular timber structure identified on the summit of the later thirteenth-century motte constructed by the Giffard family at Strachan in Kincardineshire, which may possibly have been of two storeys, c.11m in diameter and identified as a 'hall'.³⁴ Its excavator has compared it to an Iron Age roundhouse.³⁵ The importance of Strachan is that it demonstrates that circular or sub-circular structures continued to serve as a high-status building form in the architectural vocabulary of the Scottish political elite, both native and colonist, down to at least the mid-1200s. It also suggests that the round structure at Peebles Castle, the external diameter of which was 1m greater than at Strachan, should perhaps be re-evaluated. Questions of whether round structures could accommodate the same notional separation into high and low status 'ends' as is clearly visible in some rectilinear buildings are specious. Consideration of spatial hierarchies identifiable in circular structures in Prehistoric Britain, and still visible in a number of cultures elsewhere in the world, shows that notions of the form as in some way being less or non-hierarchical are unsustainable.

Documented evidence for the continuation through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of a tradition where halls formed the dominant component of lordship centres is slight, yet the

³⁰ Barrow 1999, nos 140, 141; *RRS*, i, no.194; Barrow 1981, Appendix A, no.1.

³¹ Ewart 1985, 15-22.

³² Murray and Ewart 1978-80, 522-4. See also Higham and Barker 1992, 315 and fig 8.70.

³³ Murray and Murray 1993, 120-122; Greig and Greig 1989; Tabraham 1997, 26.

³⁴ Yeoman 1984.

³⁵ Yeoman 1995, 91.

apparent development of stone-built 'hall castles' in the late thirteenth century suggests that the old tradition had endured.³⁶ There may have been a cultural and social dimension to this continuity of tradition, it being suggested for the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Lordship of the Isles that the prominence of large stone halls within enclosures at the principal centres of MacDonald power, e.g. Ardtornish, Aros or Finlaggan [Fig.2], while towers rose within the enclosure walls of their chief vassals, such as the MacLeans at Duart and Breachacha, reflected 'a society which measured the status of its chief men by their generosity in entertaining'.³⁷ Lavish feasting and large followings demanded suitably commodious accommodation. We can speculate that earlier, probably timber, versions of these late medieval halls perhaps formed the principal element in the chief centres of the later earldoms, such as the *rath* of Logie or Logierait in Atholl, or Aden and Kelly in Buchan, where no structural remains survive of the pre-1200 residences, and it is more than likely that similar halls stood at some older royal centres.

Another manifestation of the social symbolism of the hall form can be seen in its apparent association with activities whose pursuit was enjoyed by a privileged few. Halls of various scales appear to have had strong associations with hunting from at least the twelfth century. The late fifteenth-century timber-built hunt-halls of Robert II and James IV in Strathbraan and Glen Finglas are amongst the best-documented royal examples,³⁸ but the *Nigram Aulam* or Blackhall of the Stewarts, now surrounded by the suburbs of Paisley, appears to have been a hunting-lodge in their baronial forest, and the Giffards' hall at Strachan in Glen Feugh served their private forest on the northern slopes of the Mounth.³⁹ The Stewarts had possessed an *aula* close to Paisley Abbey before 1177, possibly identical with the later Blackhall. That 'message upon the rock where my hall had been founded' was amongst properties granted to the abbey by their ancestor, Walter I son of Alan.⁴⁰ Again, however, none of these hunt-hall sites has been excavated and the existing buildings at Blackhall are all of apparently sixteenth-century date, by which time the property had become the chief residence of a minor local noble family. What range of structures existed at these sites in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries remains a matter of conjecture. Given that hunting was such a significant component in the repertoire of aristocratic social activity, our poor understanding of the loci of formal and informal personal interaction associated with the field sport is a critical weakness. The hunt-hall, it can be argued, was as important as an arena for the negotiation of social relationships on an informal or private basis as the royal or lordly halls discussed above were on a public and formal level. While there were differences in scale and plan, it appears that halls – rectilinear and sub-circular - dominated the vocabulary of public and semi-public lordly architecture throughout the Middle Ages.

Continuity of a hall-building and using tradition does not mean that it was the only architectural expression of social elevation employed by Scotland's medieval rulers, but the political, cultural and socio-economic revolution underway in the kingdom by the late eleventh century has left no as yet recognised physical structural manifestation. There is little evidence for radical innovation in the architectural settings employed by the early twelfth-century Scottish monarchy. Apart from mention of Edgar's death at Edinburgh, there is no contemporary record of his preferred residences, but we should probably assume that he followed the itinerant tradition characteristic of early medieval kingship throughout northern Europe, and which was maintained by Scottish kings into the fifteenth century. It is likely that Edinburgh, Stirling, Dunfermline, Forteviot and Scone defined a core territory in his itinerary, but it is possible that the thanages which have been traced as far north as Easter Ross mark routes along which he and his retinue could have progressed, consuming the food renders accumulated at these places as they passed. References to Edgar's actual building operations, however, survive only in unreliable late sources. Of his successor Alexander I's

³⁶ Tabraham 1997, 37-8, 51-2, 55.

³⁷ Caldwell and Ruckley 2005, 119.

³⁸ Dunbar 1999, 202; Gilbert 1979, 80-82.

³⁹ For Blackhall, see Innes 1832, 96; for Strachan, see Yeoman 1984.

⁴⁰ Innes 1832, 5.

work we have only marginally more evidence; fragments uncovered in excavation may be from a chapel built for him at Stirling Castle.⁴¹ While it is likely that this chapel formed only one component in a complex of high status buildings close to the highest point of the site, no substantial or coherent structural evidence for them has been identified. It is only in the succeeding reign that the first evidence survives for major building programmes at the main royal residential and administrative centres.

Given his reputation as a state-builder, it is fitting that perhaps the most significant piece of secular building work in twelfth-century Scotland was the 'tower' built by David I at Roxburgh Castle. This structure, probably a stone donjon of the type that was emerging in the Anglo-Norman realm at this time, was in existence by 1134 when Malcolm, son of Alexander I, was imprisoned within it. The donjon was surrounded by a complex of buildings which included the church of St John, already in existence by 1127.⁴² If the description of the Lady Galiene's castle, which appears to be based on Roxburgh, given in the *Roman de Fergus* is accurate, the donjon and church still dominated this important royal residence in the early 1200s, and John Barbour's late fourteenth-century verse accounts of Sir James Douglas's capture of the castle still refers to the 'gret toure'.⁴³ This 'great tower', it is probably safe to assume, was a stone keep of the form which had developed in northern France before 1000, introduced to Britain by the Normans. David, with his up-bringing at the English royal court, would have been personally familiar with such towers at London and Winchester, and his building of such a highly symbolic residence is another indication of the continental style of lordship which he introduced into his realm. Nothing identifiable of this structure appears to survive in the remaining fragments at Roxburgh, but an impression of its scale may be gained from the existing twelfth-century keep at Carlisle which was possibly begun by Henry I in 1123 or built by David after 1136. It has been suggested that a third such stone donjon may have been erected at Edinburgh by David, and that the building referred to as St Margaret's Chapel perhaps occupied a similar relationship to it as the chapels in the surviving twelfth-century donjons at Rochester in Kent and Bamburgh in Northumberland [Fig.3].⁴⁴ The major expenditure which the construction of such donjons represented, however, probably meant that the towers of Roxburgh, Carlisle and, possibly, Edinburgh were not replicated in less frequented residences around the kingdom. At these places there is an implication of lighter construction, perhaps using impermanent materials, as perhaps indicated by the timber structures excavated at Peebles.

Impermanence is often (mis-)associated with earth-and-timber construction and the motte-and-bailey castle, but this class of monument does not appear to be well represented at royal sites. Perth's twelfth-century royal castle has been identified as a motte but this labelling arises from a fifteenth-century reference to the sweeping away of 'a certain eminence' (*mons*) in a flood in 1209.⁴⁵ This *mons* has been assumed to have been the castle mound,⁴⁶ but the absence of a more specific description, e.g. *mons castris*, makes this identification less certain. Recent discussion has been more cautious and refers to the castle simply as being of earth and timber.⁴⁷ The earlier assumption of motte format was based largely on the experience of the Bruce family at Annan, whose motte was abandoned following major erosion episodes by the adjacent river.⁴⁸ At Cupar, Dundee, Forfar and Elgin, the royal castles crowned rocky outcrops which had little or no need of artificial heightening, while at Berwick, Peebles, Linlithgow, Crail, Aberdeen, Banff, Forres and Inverness, the sites selected were headlands or promontories which already possessed natural defensive characteristics and where again

⁴¹ *Excavations in Stirling Castle*, 11-12.

⁴² See Anderson 1936, s.a. 1156; for church of St John in the castle, see Barrow 1999, nos 30, 42.

⁴³ Barbour 1997, 385.

⁴⁴ Fernie 1986, 401-3.

⁴⁵ Bower 1994, 457.

⁴⁶ Duncan 1975, 469.

⁴⁷ Bowler and Perry 2004, 25.

⁴⁸ Corser 2005, 48-9; RCAHMS 1920, no.3.

construction of a motte may have been redundant.⁴⁹ The character of the royal castles at Haddington, Rutherglen, Dumfries and Ayr is uncertain. Only four twelfth-century royal castles in burghs appear to have been primarily built earthworks: Selkirk, Kintore, Cullen and Auldearn. Even here, however, there is variety of form, with Selkirk being apparently a motte and bailey, while Cullen and Auldearn are small ringworks crowning low knolls.⁵⁰ Nothing survives of Kintore, which was levelled in the eighteenth century.⁵¹

The absence of surviving royal financial records from earlier than 1264 prevents us from firmly identifying major episodes of new building or repair at royal residences. The first significant new building work may only have commenced late in the reign of William I (1165-1214) and been completed in the first half of the reign of Alexander II (1214-49) at Kinclaven in Perthshire.⁵² Although only unexcavated fragments survive there, it apparently encapsulated many of the developments in design of high status residence and military architecture of the early 1200s. There was, for example, no donjon, the principal defences being a strong circuit of walls whose head was reached via flights of straight stairs from the courtyard. Although there were small, projecting towers at the angles of the enclosure, there was no elaborate gatehouse like those built by the contemporary bishops of Glasgow and St Andrews at their castles.⁵³ It was also not a building distinguished by scale, its 40m-square enclosure being matched or exceeded in area by many noblemen's castles of the second quarter of the thirteenth century.⁵⁴ The main accommodation was presumably built against the inner faces of the curtain wall, or free-standing within the courtyard. Circumstantial references in documentary sources to structural components of other Scottish royal residences suggest that it probably comprised of at least a hall and chamber block, kitchen and a chapel. Comparison with the slightly earlier non-royal enclosure at Castle Sween in Knapdale and the later thirteenth-century Inverlochy Castle in Lochaber **[Fig.4]** suggests that the original courtyard ranges at Kinclaven were largely timber-built, with some elements subsequently replaced in stone.⁵⁵ Additional accommodation may have been provided in the angle towers, but these were relatively small, possibly little bigger than the surviving latrine tower at the north-east angle of Balvenie castle in Moray.⁵⁶ As the one substantial early thirteenth-century royal castle which fulfilled a primarily residential function and which survives unencumbered by post-1300 alteration or post-medieval reuse it is a site which begs intensive examination and where even geophysical investigation may yield significant results.

Two royal castles of similar plan to Kinclaven were built around the same date, at Tarbert in Kintyre and Kincardine in the Mearns.⁵⁷ Like Kinclaven, neither castle has been excavated. Work at Tarbert probably commenced shortly after Alexander II's 1222 campaign in Argyll, and the castle probably symbolised an assertion of royal power in territory where previously it had been weak. The most substantial presently visible remains belong to building work of the 1320s and c.1500. Of Alexander II's castle, only the grass-grown rubble of a quadrangular enclosure survives today. There are no angle or gate towers evident, but there are traces of buildings ranged around this courtyard. As at Kinclaven, these ranges may represent secondary phases of development replacing a primary largely timber-built arrangement. Kincardine is significantly smaller in scale than either Kinclaven or Tarbert, but again takes the form of a rectangular enclosure, apparently without projecting angle or gate

⁴⁹ RCAHMS 1933, 90-1, No. 173 (Cupar castle); Lamb 1895, 7-10 (Dundee castle); Dennison *et al* 2000, 13-14, 62-5 (Forfar castle); Hall *et al* 1998; RCAHMS 1967, ii, 263, no.523 (Peebles castle); Pringle 1989 (Linlithgow); Sibbald 1803, 345 (Crail castle); Yeoman 1988, 130, no. 1 (Aberdeen castle); McKean 1990, 25 (Banff castle); Yeoman 1988, 131, 132, no.71 (Forres castle); Gifford 1992, 182 (Inverness castle).

⁵⁰ RCAHMS 1957, 47-9; Yeoman 1988, 131, 132, no.72 (Auldearn).

⁵¹ Yeoman 1988, 131, no.22 (Kintore).

⁵² MacGibbon and Ross 1887, 67-70; Tabraham 1997, 40.

⁵³ Oram 2005, 4-5.

⁵⁴ For comparative plans to the same scale, see Tabraham 1997, 34.

⁵⁵ Ewart and Triscott 1996; Lewis (Inverlochy).

⁵⁶ Richardson 1980, 5.

⁵⁷ Duncan and Dunbar 1971.

towers, with a single gateway in its west wall and, possibly, a compact, stone-built, hall and chamber arrangement against the east curtain. Here, too, it is unclear if the stone-built courtyard buildings represent primary or secondary phases of work. It is generally assumed that it was here that Alexander II received the heads of defeated rebels in early 1215, but it is possible that the stone castle is a replacement of the 1220s for an earthwork enclosure at Greencastle, 1.5km to the north.⁵⁸ Kincardine had an administrative and strategic significance as the focus of the sheriffdom of the Mearns and as the control point at the southern end of an ancient route between Strathmore and Deeside, but it seems to have served primarily as a residence associated with a royal deer-park, the remains of which are visible as earthworks in the hills to the north of the castle.⁵⁹

These three castles may have been new-builds of the 1214-30 period. While none is particularly sophisticated in design or quality of construction, they do indicate that the crown was expending resources on constructing impressive visual expressions of its authority. We can only wonder how Alexander may have made his mark at his favoured residences at Forfar, Stirling and Edinburgh. What is most striking in the thirteenth-century work at Scottish royal castles is that there is no evidence for the adoption of architectural forms that were developing in northern France and England. There is no apparent debt to Chateau Gaillard or any other exemplar of these new forms. Instead, the simple plans of Kinclaven or Tarbert apparently derive from an indigenous style evident at, for example, Castle Roy on Speyside or Balvenie in Glenfiddich.⁶⁰ Again, the poor level of survival of pre-fourteenth-century secular buildings or of documentary records for building work may have skewed our perspective, but it is also possible that there was no significant investment in large-scale or sophisticated projects. We do not know the wider economic ramifications of the drain on capital in Scotland caused by payment of the Quitclaim of Canterbury's ten thousand merks of silver to King Richard I in 1189, or the fifteen thousand merks paid to King John and £4000 to the bishop of Durham in 1209, while King William's personal debts at the English exchequer in the early 1200s, which arose from the English crown's assumption of money owed to Jewish moneylenders, stood at nearly £3000. When to this sum is added the unknown but evidently substantial amounts spent by William on building-work at Arbroath Abbey, it appears unlikely that he had much left to lavish on the architectural elaboration of even his main residences.

The evidence for twelfth-century non-royal castle-building in stone in eastern and southern Scotland has been hotly debated for many years but the issue remains unproven on either side.⁶¹ While stone building was perhaps undertaken at some lordly sites, however, the physical evidence appears to show that earthwork and timber remained the principal materials used at most high-status residences into the 1200s. Traditionally, it has been argued that the most common form of earth-and-timber construction was the motte, with or without an associated bailey containing the main domestic and service buildings, although there is an increasing body of evidence to suggest that other forms of earthen defence, especially 'ringwork' enclosures, were also common.⁶² The paradigm which drew a fundamental link between the appearance of mottes and the importation of knight-service tenures in twelfth-century Scotland, moreover, a view based almost wholly upon the traditional model offered for the experience of post-1066 England, has, like that English model, come under increasing challenge over the last thirty years.⁶³ Traditionally, a link has been drawn between the appearance of mottes and related earthworks and the settlement in Scotland of colonists of

⁵⁸ RCAHMS 1982, no.226.

⁵⁹ Gilbert 1979, 82, 85.

⁶⁰ Dunbar 1981, 45, 65.

⁶¹ Bogdan 1979.

⁶² For ringworks, see Talbot 1974, 48-57; Talbot 1976-7, 378-9; Talbot 1981, 1-9; Tabraham 1997, 22-3.

⁶³ Barrow 1960, 12-13; Barrow 1971, 7-8, 13-14; Barrow 1981b, 47-9; Duncan 1975, 181-5; Simpson and Webster 1985, 9-10; Driscoll 1998, 44-6; Oram 2000, 218-31. For England see Coulson 1979, Coulson 1996 and Platt 2007.

knightly class but, while it can be accepted that such earthen defences were imported into Scotland as part of the cultural repertoire of the incomers, the distribution of mottes does not tally closely with the areas of their main settlement. For example, while Annandale is densely populated by such earthwork fortifications, most of which can be linked to members of the knightly subtenant class planted in the lordship by its Bruce lords, in Teviotdale, Tweeddale, Lauderdale and the Merse, the zone within which David settled the majority of his colonists, there is a striking dearth of such sites.⁶⁴ This dichotomy cannot be explained simply in terms of chance survival and might rather be linked to social or cultural differences within the colonist group or to the particular circumstances of a specific colonial episode. The markedly defensive aspect of the Annandale group, for example, might reflect its marcher character as opposed to the situation further to the east, which was the heartland of David I's domain from c.1113.

A mindset amongst earlier twentieth-century archaeologists and historians shaped by the British imperial military experience and heavily influenced by Classically educated scholars, who looked to the Romans' use of fortification to penetrate, contain and assimilate hostile territories, helped to form a view of mottes in Scotland as mapping the aggressive penetration of the Gaelic territories by an unpopular, alien elite.⁶⁵ Where such sites were clustered thickest, it was argued, like in Galloway or along the Moray coast, there the Scottish crown encountered the most dogged resistance to its attempts to impose its authority and intrude dependent settlers.⁶⁶ Mottes, it was argued, represented the 'spread of the feudal system' and were the highly visible symbols of an 'enforced infeudation', constructed by the crown's new agents in direct confrontation with the native population and forces of traditional lordship.⁶⁷ The language in which this notion of a planned system of strongholds from which the new regime could impose its lordship over the native population is almost identical in tone and view to that which reigned unchallenged in England down to the 1980s, perhaps articulated most clearly in R Allen Brown's work.⁶⁸ In some areas of Scotland, the direct link between these new forms of lordly residence and a colonial settlement appears to be incontrovertible. In upper Clydesdale, for example, the cluster of mottes extending south-west from Carnwath and Biggar can be linked to a colony of Flemings planted in this district during the reign of Malcolm IV.⁶⁹ In Moray, too, the mottes in the Laich can be linked to David I's military conquest and resettlement of the region between c.1135 and c.1150.⁷⁰ Closer examination of the evidence, however, has also revealed that the motte was quickly adopted by some Gaels as part of their wider reception of Frankish cultural norms and that it should not be regarded as a unique signature revealing the presence of a colonial lord.⁷¹ Before the end of the twelfth century, in territories as dispersed as Galloway, Mar or Badenoch,⁷² the motte had been accepted into the vocabulary of lordship employed by both native and newcomer.

This acceptance of the new form was neither simultaneous nor uniform everywhere. In respect of Strathearn but with general application to the other Gaelic earldoms, for example, the absence of mottes has been commented upon: 'Scotland's ancient earldoms [...] were not places in which to find the up-to-date apparatus of a 'Norman' or 'feudal' lord'.⁷³ Given that the 'native' earls did not lose their socio-political leadership role in the core of the kingdom in

⁶⁴ Corser 2005, 45-60; Simpson and Webster 1985, 2-7.

⁶⁵ For example, Simpson 1924. Simpson, it should be added, developed a style which attempted to place his objects of study into their wider socio-economic and cultural contexts, but at the same time it remained rooted in a vision of castles as the agents of conquest. For a wider contextual setting for this tradition, see Coulson 1996.

⁶⁶ Coles 1890-91; Coles 1891-92; Coles 1892-93; Oram 2000, 218-221; Oram 2005, 91-2, 93, 102-105.

⁶⁷ Cruden 1981, 10; Tabraham 1984, 122.

⁶⁸ Brown 1954; Brown 1976.

⁶⁹ Tabraham 1977-78; Toorians 1996.

⁷⁰ Oram 2006.

⁷¹ Oram 2000 chapter 8.

⁷² Oram 2003.

⁷³ Watson 2005, 27.

the face of the colonists, Fiona Watson concluded that the failure to adopt these new expressions was a statement of cultural self-confidence on the part of a traditional nobility, who did not lack ‘the *ability*, in terms of status and landed resources, to “modernise” their residences [but] had no *inclination* to do so’.⁷⁴ This attitude may be true of the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, once the earls had accrued the landed resources and revenue which secured them a permanent position at the head of noble society in the kingdom, but earlier it is quite likely that they indeed lacked the ability to fund construction of such buildings, even if they had possessed the inclination. A similar situation has been posited for Gaelic Ireland where, with a few significant exceptions that bear close comparison with the thirteenth-century enclosure castles of the Scottish western Highlands and Hebrides, the indigenous royal and lordly families continued to build and occupy traditional power-centres, such as crannogs.⁷⁵ Here, too, it is suggested that native legal practices governing possession and control of land and the transmission of coercive, lordly authority militated against the adoption of the castle as an expression of status, at least until the development of the economic resources controlled by Gaelic Irish lineages in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁷⁶ In Strathearn, however, even once the earls had gained heritable possession of sufficient land, rents and jurisdictional rights to secure their social status and attendant economic dominance, they, their kinsmen and tenants appear to have adhered to traditional expressions of lordly power, as in their residence on the crannog of ‘leyle de Kenmer’ (Island of Kenmore), probably to be identified with Neish’s Island at St Fillans at the east end of Loch Earn rather than Eilean Craggan at its western end [Fig.5].⁷⁷ What needs to be considered, however, is that the vision of sites like the Loch Earn crannog functioning in essentially the same manner as a castle represents in itself the projection backwards of a dimension of a style of lordship that only emerged in Gaelic Scotland as the twelfth century progressed. In most of the other Gaelic earldoms there was likewise either a lack of inclination or financial ability to build new residences in motte, ringwork or early stone form before the middle decades of the thirteenth century. Even in Fife, whose line of earls has for long been regarded as the most enthusiastic supporters of ‘Anglo-Norman’ culture amongst the Gaelic nobility, that enthusiasm apparently did not extend to castle-building, with the architectural details of the scanty remains of their castle at Falkland indicating construction only in the second half of the thirteenth century. Only in Mar, whose rulers were linked by marriage to the royal family’s de Warenne kin, were the motte and early stone enclosure castle perhaps adopted before the end of the twelfth century as visual expressions of lordly power in a Gaelic earldom. The Mars’ great platform motte of the Doune of Invernochty, crowned by an oval shell-keep-like enclosure, is otherwise paralleled at ‘native’ lordship centres only by the Mars’ Durward kinsmen’s early thirteenth-century shell-keep at Urquhart by Loch Ness.⁷⁸ It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the absence of the adoption of a style of building which signalled the social separation of the earls from the wider Gaelic ministerial class and their elevation to form a top stratum in a socio-political hierarchy was a consequence of the originally limited economic standing of such men and the primarily administrative function which they performed.

If inclination rather than ability was the principal determinant in the adoption of alien cultural expressions, then the lordship of Galloway appears to have been one territory whose rulers were enthusiastic converts to the new models. Mottes, associated particularly with a small group of colonists related to Uhtred, son of Fergus, had been constructed in eastern Galloway in the 1160s, but it was in the last quarter of the twelfth century that they became common throughout the lordship. Linked traditionally to Uhtred’s son Roland’s imposition of his rule after 1185, the Galloway mottes have long been presented as symbols of conquest and colonisation *par excellence*, but the earthworks appear to have been constructed by Roland

⁷⁴ Watson 2005, 27. The italics are in Watson’s original article.

⁷⁵ O’Conor 2005, 214-5.

⁷⁶ O’Conor 2005, 216-9.

⁷⁷ Watson 2005, 32.

⁷⁸ Oram 2003, 58-60; Bridgland 2005, 10, 12-13.

and his supporters, both native and colonist.⁷⁹ Roland personified the hybridity of the ‘native’ nobility in the later twelfth century. His parentage was more Anglian or Anglo-Scandinavian than Gaelic, but he was ruler of a territory that was pronouncedly Gaelic in its base culture. Apparently originally named Lachlan, he seems to have adopted the Norman-French Roland as a young man, a move which indicates an extreme personal enthusiasm for the continental culture that was seeping into Scotland from the south. His close association with the court of William I and marriage into the de Morville family, moreover, appear to show personal identification with Norman-French culture as much as recognition on the young man’s part of his political dependence on the Scottish ruling elite.⁸⁰ Like King William, whom the Barnwell Chronicler described as preferring ‘French’ culture over his Gaelic inheritance,⁸¹ Roland represented a transitional stage where the division between the two cultural traditions was bridged. This was the man who probably oversaw the redevelopment of Cruggleton in the later twelfth century, where it has been suggested that a motte was added to an already ancient seat of lordship and the existing hall was incorporated into an expanded complex. The possible over-interpretation of this site based on analogy with Beresford’s work at Goltho has already been suggested, but it is possible that Cruggleton does represent accommodation of the old into the structural language of the new. In many ways, the apparently odd structure which Roland may have built, with its suggested juxtaposition of elements of ancient native lordship and the structural projection of new, continental forms, reflected his own historically recognised cultural ambivalence, and foreshadowed the ‘Janus-like’ personality of his son, Alan, who moved comfortably between the Gaelic and Hiberno-Norse culture of Galloway, the Irish Sea and the Isles, and the English- and French-influenced political society of eastern and southern mainland Britain.⁸²

Even while Roland was perhaps reshaping his ancestral seat at Cruggleton, new forms and expressions of lordship were emerging elsewhere in Scotland. It is probably significant that the builders of these structures were men who held their estates by ‘feudal’ tenures and commanded the economic and jurisdictional power to provide themselves with an unmistakable symbol of their enhanced lordship. By *c.*1200, stone-built castles or stone components added to earlier earthworks had been included in the repertoire of architectural forms employed by the new noble classes. At Glasgow and St Andrews, the bishops had incorporated stone halls and gatehouses into the earthen ringworks and enclosures of their predecessors’ residences,⁸³ but elsewhere wholly stone-built structures were perhaps also being erected. At Aberdour in Fife, for example, it has been suggested that William de Mortimer constructed a free-standing stone keep of at least two storeys as the centrepiece of his residence by *c.*1200, while at Panmure in Angus the de Valognes family has also been suggested to have possessed a large stone-built enclosure castle by a similar date.⁸⁴ In neither case has the dating been tested by excavation, the earliest phases evident at both having been interpreted principally through the subjective dating of architectural features such as clasping buttresses or masonry styles. While these possibly early examples of stonework perhaps drew their main influences directly from England, a free-standing stone tower tradition which emerged in Caithness and Orkney in the early thirteenth century may have drawn its inspiration from Scandinavian contacts with the European mainland rather than from southern Britain. The dating of the simple stone towers which survive at Castle of Old Wick and Braal in Caithness is fraught with difficulties, but the stylistically identical structure at Cubbie Roo’s Castle on the Orkney Island of Wyre appears to represent the remains of the ‘fine stone castle’ built there in the second half of the twelfth century by Kolbein Hruga.⁸⁵ Scandinavian-filtered European influence, too, may lie behind the stone-and-mortar building tradition which

⁷⁹ Oram 2000, 219-221.

⁸⁰ Oram 2000, 97-9.

⁸¹ Anderson 1908, 330 n.6.

⁸² Stringer 1993, 82; Stringer 2000; Oram 2000, 97-9, 100-108, 112-40.

⁸³ Oram 2005, 4-5.

⁸⁴ Tabraham 1997, 24; Angus Council Sites and Monuments Record, NO53NW0010.

⁸⁵ Pálsson and Edwards 1978, 155; Tabraham 1997, 28-30.

developed in the western mainland and Hebrides, represented by castles like Sween in Knapdale, whose quadrangular enclosure has been dated to *c.*1200, or Urquhart, where the Durwards' shell keep has been described as a hybrid sharing features in common with the indigenous tradition of stone circuits on rock outcrops,⁸⁶ like Tioram in Moidart, where the irregular stone enclosure is regarded traditionally as the work of Somerled's MacRuarie descendents.⁸⁷ Here, the relationship between these buildings and the ancient indigenous tradition of drystone fortification represented by the dun is a subject crying out for detailed research.

At several locations in the western mainland and Hebrides it is apparent that there is either continuity of occupation from the Early Historic period into the later Middle Ages and beyond, or medieval re-occupation of abandoned late Prehistoric structures.⁸⁸ At Dun Ringill [Fig.6] and Rubha an Dunan in Skye, Iron Age duns on coastal promontories were re-used as fortified residences by the chiefs of the MacKinnons and MacAskills respectively. Both sites saw the refurbishment of the old defensive circuits and insertion of new buildings within the enclosures.⁸⁹ These structures, however, represent continuity of an indigenous tradition in high status residence rather than adoption of the cultural icons of continental lordship that were being imported into southern and eastern Scotland. Elsewhere, however, there is evidence for the construction of fortifications of the new type at older defensive sites. At Dun Lagaidh in Wester Ross, for example, a small mortared stone keep and enclosure was inserted into the remains of a late Iron Age dun and hillfort in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.⁹⁰ The process of transformation from Early Historic Gaelic dun into medieval castle, however, is not well understood and there has been no other modern excavation of post-twelfth-century structures which occupy earlier sites to determine whether these represent the remodelling of traditional fortifications by resident lords or the re-occupation of derelict sites by a new elite.

It is a commonly held view that a switch to construction in stone as the favoured building material in lordly residences in southern and eastern mainland Scotland in the thirteenth century is a sign of increasing sophistication and was principally the work of members of the colonial nobility. Certainly, some of the greatest of the stone castles to survive from the pre-Wars of Independence era, *e.g.* Bothwell or Dirleton, were the later thirteenth-century products of families who settled in Scotland in the course of the twelfth century, but the greater number of the buildings are the work of Gaelic and Scandinavian lords operating in regions that have traditionally been perceived as marginal to the zone of greatest 'Anglo-Norman' cultural influence. Whilst much has been made of the evidence for an embracing of alien culture by families like the MacDougalls in the thirteenth century,⁹¹ their residences at Dunstaffnage, Mingary or Tioram do not derive from a mainstream European tradition. In the northern and western Highlands and Islands, a stone building tradition was already deeply entrenched in prehistory, and the development of castle-building, although shaped by influences from elsewhere in mainland Britain, may have been a phenomenon driven as much by ancestral traditions and factors such as availability of materials as by fashion. The superiority of stone over timber as the material for lordly buildings is, moreover, largely a post-medieval perception influenced by the poor survival of medieval timberwork in Scotland. Excavations at Castle Sween in Knapdale, believed to be the oldest stone-built castle in mainland Scotland, revealed that there were no 'permanent' buildings within the stone-built enclosure before the late 1200s.⁹² The excavators' suggestion that this situation

⁸⁶ Bridgland 2005, 12.

⁸⁷ Fisher 2005, 88, 91-2; Tabraham 1997, 33-6; Ewart and Triscott 1996, 517-558. Castle Tioram's architectural and cultural significance has recently been the subject of a major reassessment undertaken on behalf of Historic Scotland by Geoffrey Stell. See Stell 2006.

⁸⁸ Morrison 1974.

⁸⁹ Miket and Roberts 2007, x-xii, 38-43.

⁹⁰ Dunbar 1981, 51.

⁹¹ McDonald 1997, chapter 5.

⁹² Ewart and Triscott 1996, 521-522, 556.

was the result of an unfinished or interrupted building programme indicates how pernicious a hold the view of timber's replacement by stone as the material of choice for lordly architecture perhaps has in Scottish archaeology. That the first phase 'permanent' internal structures at Castle Sween were timber-built by choice seems never to have been considered, yet at a number of other major Scottish stone enclosure castles of the mid and later thirteenth century the evidence points strongly towards that arrangement. At Rothesay in Bute, the majority of the structures arranged round the inner face of the sub-circular stone enclosure appear to have remained timber-built throughout the Middle Ages, and excavations at the castles of Dunstaffnage in Lorn and Inverlochy in Lochaber suggest that timber was probably the principal material used at both in the construction of the buildings originally ranged round the courtyard faces of the stone enclosures.⁹³ But entirely timber-built high status residences also remained present in Scotland long after the date when stone had supposedly displaced it as the building-material of choice for the higher nobility. For the Giffards at Strachan in the thirteenth century or the Gordons at Huntly as late as the 1450s, wood was an entirely acceptable material expression of their aristocratic status. We should surely be unsurprised, therefore, by such use of stone and timber together in castles being constructed by some of the greatest noble families of later medieval Scotland, for, as the work of Higham and Barker has highlighted, even the kings of England were content to employ timber for some of the principal apartments at their castles into at least the later fourteenth century.⁹⁴

Modern perceptions of the nature of power and its visible expression are, as explored above, amongst the principal factors that have shaped interpretation of the residences of Scotland's medieval ruling families. Assumptions about the antiquity and authority of Gaelic social elites in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have been projected back into earlier centuries by political, social and economic historians, and their theorising has then been taken as a factual foundation from which to construct social models by archaeologists who have then looked for analogous social settings to populate with their wealth-empowered and sophisticated aristocracies. Theoretical constructs and social anthropological models founded on inappropriate comparisons, however, are no substitute for empirical research. What limited archaeological investigation there has been, coupled with surviving documentary evidence, points to a series of discontinuities in what might be classed as the 'native' traditions, and also highlights disturbing inconsistencies and conflicts within the current dominant models for the formalising of royal or lordly power in the Early Historic and High Medieval periods. The absence of recognisable, large-scale non-royal power centres dating from before c.1200 has perturbed archaeologists and historians alike for decades and resulted in various hypotheses to suggest what we should be looking for. Almost all, however, have been predicated upon the existence of a ruling elite whose status, wealth and authority shared equivalence with that exercised and enjoyed by their later medieval descendants. Changing perceptions of the nature of the Gaelic governing class and their socio-economic position are bringing these traditional interpretative models into question and are requiring a reappraisal of the physical landscape of secular power in medieval Scotland. The removal of notions of a native hierarchy holding a social status similar to, and an economic standing the equal of, the later twelfth- and thirteenth-century nobility, also removes the need for the hierarchy of power-centres postulated by generations of scholars. That situation, however, merely replaces one void in our knowledge with another and underscores the continuing dearth of focused field-work and targeted research excavation which could be linked to the revisionist prescriptions offered by the new generation of documentary historians. At present, medieval historical research and medieval archaeology in Scotland are moving on divergent trajectories, or rather, the former is moving whilst the latter is largely mired in models formulated in the mid-twentieth century. It is easy to advocate subject convergence, scholarly collaboration and interdisciplinarity, the challenge is to give reality to the calls and move the debate on in a practical and substantive manner.

⁹³ Dunbar 1981, 39; Lewis 1996, 599; Lewis and Smith 1998, 639-640.

⁹⁴ Higham and Barker 2004, 173-177.

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Website

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/departments/archaeology/research/projects/serf/> [Strathearn Environs and Royal Forteviot]

Captions

Fig.1 Dunnottar Castle: the late 14th-century to 17th-century stronghold of the Keith family probably occupies the site of the pre-10th-century late Pictish fortress (R.Oram).

Fig.2 Finlaggan, Islay: the principal centre of the MacDonald lords of Islay from the later 12th century occupies two islands in the Loch of Finlaggan.

Fig.3 Edinburgh Castle, St Margaret's Chapel: it has been suggested that the now free-standing early 12th-century chapel is the only surviving portion of a donjon similar to those at Rochester or Bamburgh (R.Oram).

Fig.4 Inverlochy castle: beam sockets on the inner face of the west curtain mark the position of the two-storey ranges of timber buildings which formerly lined the courtyard (R.Oram).

Fig.5 Neish's Island, Loch Earn: this at least partially artificial island, which was still in occupation in the late 15th century, may be 'Leyle de Kenmer' named as one of the chief seats of the earls of Strathearn in the 13th century (R.Oram).

Fig.6 Dun Ringill, Skye: the late Iron Age headland dun was reoccupied and adapted by the chiefs of the MacKinnons in the Middle Ages (R.Oram).

Map 1 Early Historic power centres and 12th-century royal centres in Scotland.

Map 2 Twelfth- and thirteenth-century lordly residences mentioned in the text.