

Excavations at Achanduin Castle, Lismore, Argyll, 1970–5: findings and commentary

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ABSTRACT

Excavations were undertaken at Achanduin Castle, Lismore, Argyll (NGR: NM 8043 3927), over six seasons from 1970 to 1975 under the direction of the late Dennis John Turner (1932–2013), henceforward referred to as DJT. Publication of a full report as a SAIR, assembled from the papers of DJT, has now been achieved by the other two authors of this paper, neither of whom were directly involved in the excavations. They have undertaken this task because of their friendship with DJT and their realisation of the importance of his work at Achanduin, the results of which are distilled and discussed here. Achanduin is a small rectangular enclosure castle, built about the very end of the 13th century or early in the 14th century. Although it was occupied intermittently by bishops of Argyll, perhaps as late as the 1680s, DJT has made a case for it being constructed for either Alexander MacDougall, lord of Argyll, or his son John.

EXCAVATIONS AND STRUCTURES

Achanduin Castle occupies the summit of a steep-sided, ridge-shaped limestone hill overlooking the Sound of Mull and Loch Linnhe (illus 1). Beneath it are Bernera and Achanduin Bays, two small but sheltered anchorages facing in opposite directions. Immediately outside the south-east and north-west walls of the castle, the ground falls precipitously: to the north-west there is a sheer cliff having a maximum height of some 20m (illus 2–3, 5–6), while the south-eastern flank, although less precipitous, is also extremely steep. The approach from the north-east, although steady, is also fairly steep, and only that from the south-west is easily negotiated. Access to Bernera Bay is provided by a route, partially via a gully to a low point in the sea-facing cliffs, and then by a rough, steep but well-worn stair down to the beach.

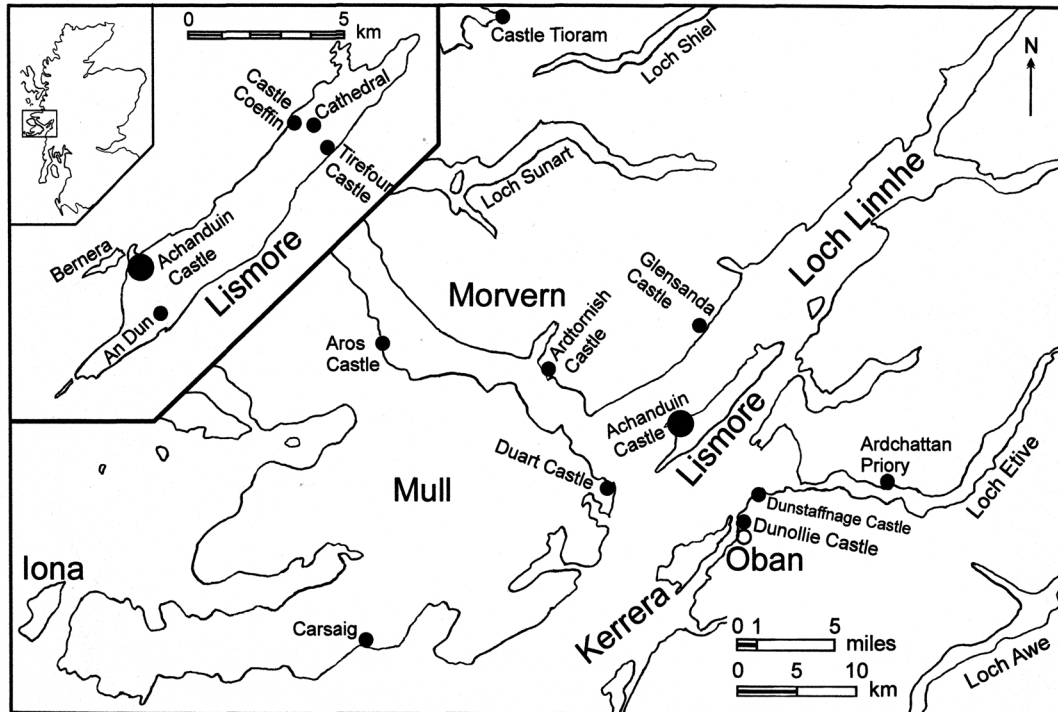
DJT and his team of volunteers excavated nine areas within the castle (Areas I–IX), and in addition dug trenches to elucidate a forebuilding associated with the gateway in the north-west

wall, a garderobe tower at the east corner and the entrance in the north-east wall. The extent of all these is shown in illustration 7. Although not recognised at the time, the excavations also revealed tenuous evidence for pre-castle occupation of the hill (illus 20). This consists of an occupation deposit adjacent to the interior face of the north-west enclosure wall, sealed by levelling for the construction of the castle, and the probable stub of a wall, on a different alignment from castle structures, within the north corner. The erection of a house (C) within the ruins of the castle sometime between the 18th and 19th centuries (illus 19) is evident from its substantially surviving walls. Otherwise, the evidence from the excavations relates to the construction, occupation and dereliction of the castle.

Today, the structure of Achanduin Castle is ruinous but its one-time rectangular layout can still be readily identified, comprising a single enclosure or courtyard approximately 22m square and oriented so that its corners are close to the cardinal compass points (illus 4). As a result

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ILLUS 1 The western seaboard showing the location of Achanduin Castle, Lismore

of the natural fall of the rock surface, the south-east part of the site is about 1.5m lower than the north-west side of the courtyard. The enclosure was surrounded by a curtain wall varying in thickness from 1.4 to 2.4m, surviving in 1975 only along five-sixths of the north-east side and along the northern two-thirds of the north-west side: the remainder of the walls had collapsed and were represented only by a few buried courses and tumbled masonry. The greater part of the collapsed curtain walling had fallen outwards.

The masonry consists mostly of small slabs of limestone rubble with prolific pinnings bonded in lime mortar. The stone used is mainly local limestone and granite boulders, possibly erratics and many of them split and set on edge. There are also cubical blocks of basalt, doubtless quarried locally from tertiary dykes. The basalt is occasionally disposed in courses in the curtain and appears in chequerboard fashion in the wall of the south-east range. Some, at least, of the limestone

used may have been quarried from the marine or glacial cliff immediately below the castle to the north-west, although it is difficult to distinguish quarrying from natural erosion because of the highly folded nature of the limestone. The walls, with the probable exception of the wall of the south-east range, had been harled internally and externally.

The best evidence for the date of construction of the castle came in the form of a coin identified by Nicholas Holmes as a halfpenny of King John Balliol (1292–6). Recovered from Area III, from beneath rubble make-up filling a crevice in the bedrock in the courtyard, it suggests a probable date for the construction of the castle about the very end of the 13th or early 14th century.

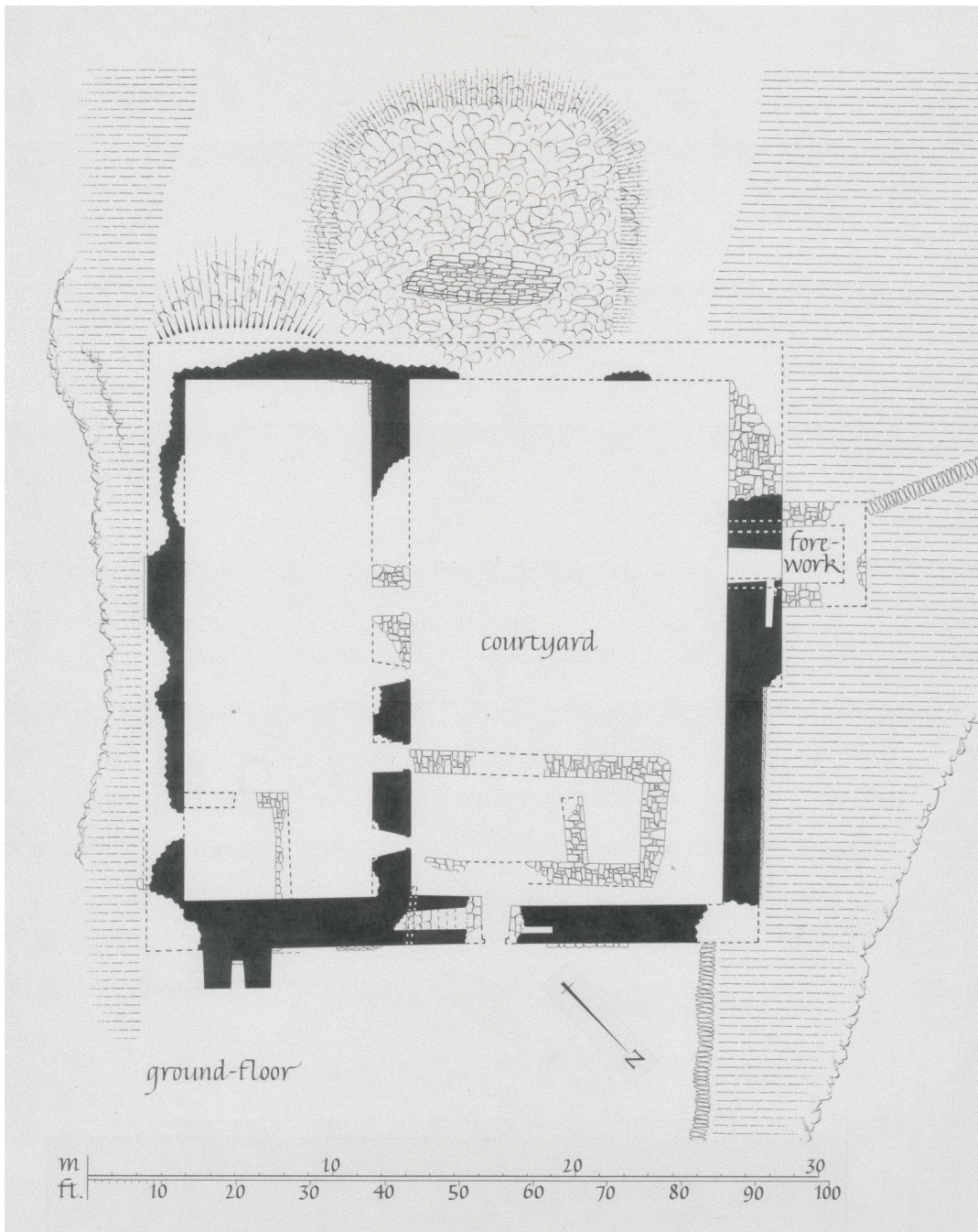
The castle had two entrances. The landward or north-east entrance (RCAHMS 1975: plate 37D) has an opening so damaged that its original form



ILLUS 2 General view from north, 1970 and published in 1975 in RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, 2, plate 37A (© RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk SC 715133)



ILLUS 3 Distant view from north-east, c 1970



ILLUS 4 Ground plan as surveyed in 1971 and published in 1975 in RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, 2, fig 159
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cannot be ascertained. During the excavations in 1973, two sandstone rybats, which probably formed part of this doorway, were found among rubble in the east angle of the courtyard. They are wrought with two chamfered orders, each of 0.13m, and appear to be of late 13th-century date. These dimensions are close to those of the surviving 0.88m-wide north doorway of the choir of the medieval cathedral on Lismore, 8km to the north (RCAHMS 1975: figs 149G and 152), where the orders are 0.13m and 0.17m. This suggests that the north-east entrance to the

enclosure at Achanduin had a two-centred arch of similar form to the door to the choir of the cathedral. The chamfered rybats were identified by the late Geoffrey Collins of the British Geological Survey as being of Carboniferous sandstone from Inninmore Bay, Morvern. The surviving lower rybats of the inner opening of the transe were found to be of plainly dressed freestone.

Within the entrance gateway, the lowest courses of the splayed north-west ingo and part of a drawbar socket survive, while on the



ILLUS 5 Aerial view from west, 1977 (© British Geological Survey/NERC. Licensor www.scran.ac.uk 000-000-147-870-R)



ILLUS 6 Cliffs on the north-western flank of the site, c 1970

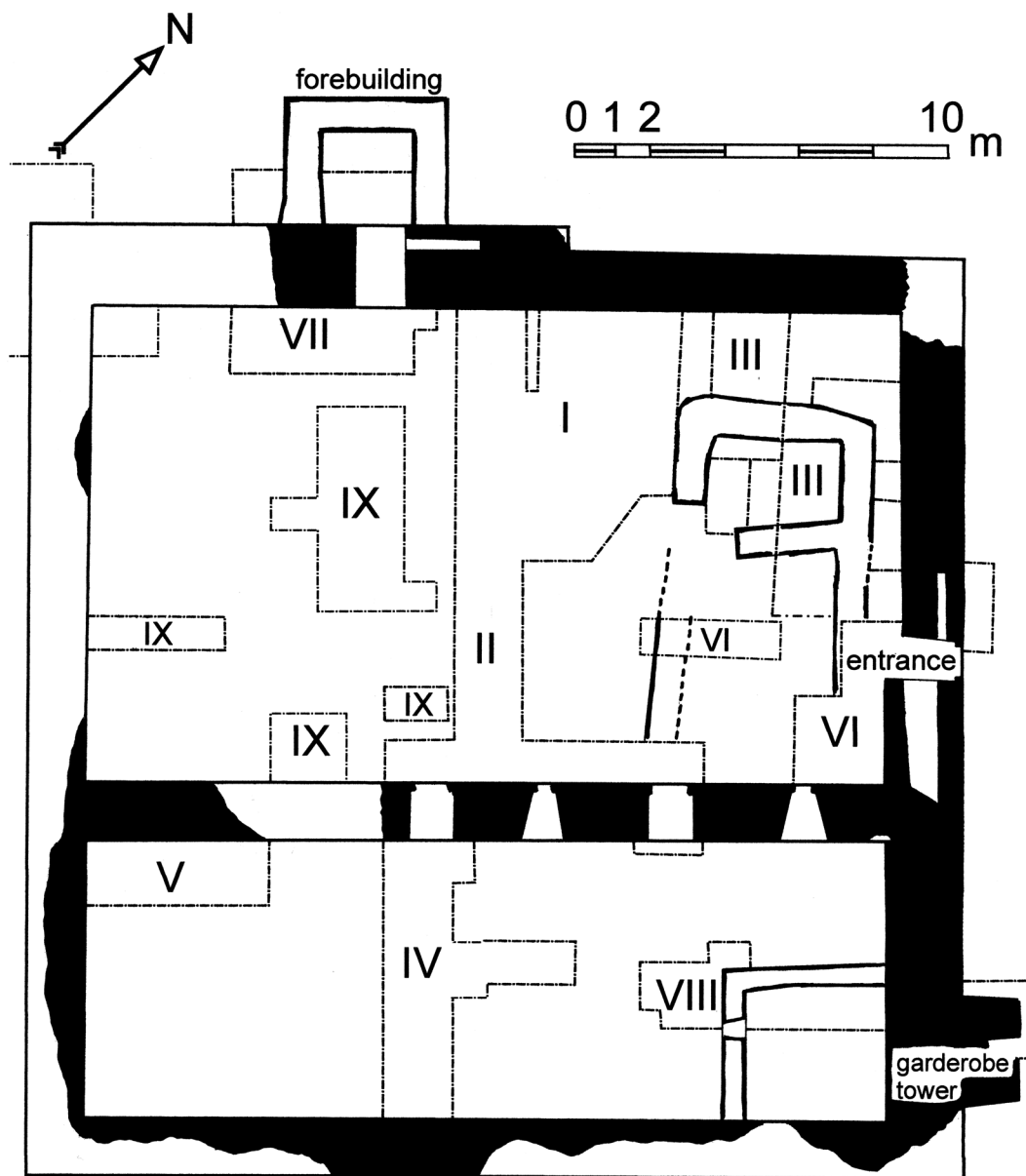
south-east, a straight stair (illus 10) rises in the thickness of the wall to give access to a parapet-walk. The curtain wall is thickened internally to accommodate this stair and a mural passage leading from the south-east range to a garderobe chamber contained in a small turret at the east corner. Nothing remains of the upper part of this turret, but excavation revealed it had quoins and dressed freestone margins of coarse yellow sandstone, reportedly matched by Collins with Ardtornish sandstone on the north side of the Sound of Mull, just east of Ardtornish Point, Morvern (cf RCAHMS 1975: 170 'probably from Carsaig [Mull]'). Two of its quoins bore an identical mason's mark, a mark that was also found on the door to the south-eastern range and could be matched at the former cathedral on Lismore (illus 9).¹

The castle also had an entrance in the north-west wall of the enclosure, equipped with a drawbar socket in the north-east ingo and having an internal width of 1.4m. Before excavation this appeared to give access to a bastion-like feature,

about 2.2m square. On excavation it was found to contain layers of midden and debris from the collapse of the castle, to a depth of over 1.5m. Among this was an English penny of King Edward II (1307–27), identified by Nicholas Holmes as a class 11a2, London mint. The exact context of this coin is uncertain, but its recovery does suggest that the forework was erected in the 14th century.

DJT believed this forework was intended to be an open pit, which was crossed by a bridge when access to the castle was permitted; when access was denied the bridge could be raised or removed. He considered that this forework replaced an original timber platform whose twin putlog holes passed completely through the curtain wall (illus 4) and are partially blocked by the masonry of the forework. The timber platform must have been approached by a stair or ladder.

The other two authors are not convinced about the forework having been a bridge-pit, especially given the lack of evidence for a path or stairs leading up to the putative bridge from outside. An alternative interpretation is that the



ILLUS 7 Ground plan showing layout of excavated areas

forework was a cistern. Notes in the Achanduin excavation archive (now lodged in RCAHMS) indicate that the base of its interior was covered with 'medium size flat stones (mortared)', presumably intended as a watertight seal. Water cisterns are normally below, or partially below,

ground, but at Achanduin it would have been easier to place a cistern where the ground falls away rather than dig one into the bedrock. That there might have been a natural spring here is also a possibility worthy of further exploration, especially since there appears to be no other



ILLUS 8 Interior of courtyard from south-west, 1972 and published in 1975 in RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, 2, plate 38A (© RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk SC 1445519)

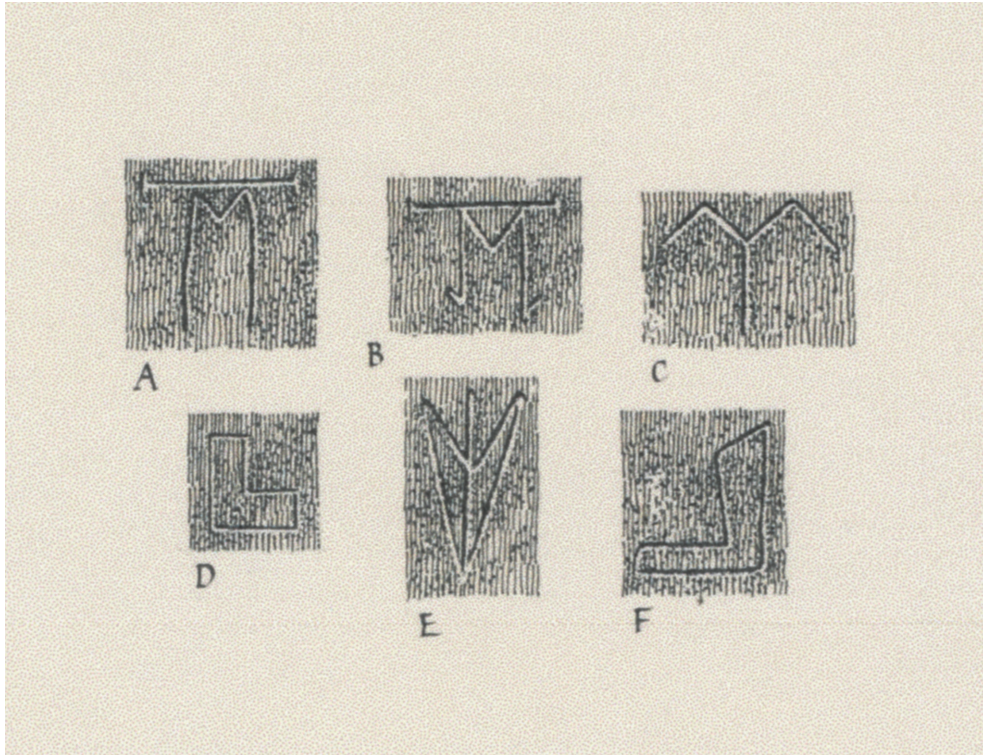
known source of water within the castle or very close to its walls.

The enclosed area was intended to contain at least two ranges of buildings flanking a small courtyard, but before excavation their extent was obscured by tumbled walling. A two-storeyed range along the south-east side of the courtyard was clear, while windows high in the north-east curtain and two large garderobes in the thickness of the north-west wall appeared to have served a substantial two-storeyed block in the north corner (RCAHMS 1975: 168–71, no 276; illus 8).

Excavation confirmed the presence of the south-east range, a substantial two-storeyed masonry building measuring 7.6m in internal width. Its north-west wall still stood as much as 2m in height and appeared to be integral with the construction of the curtain walls. It had been pierced by two doorways and at least two

windows in the lower storey. These were vertical slits with daylight openings of 0.32m, wrought externally with continuous 80mm chamfers and rebated and splayed internally. The undamaged chamfered rybats of the northernmost door were inscribed with masons' marks: one of these marks was also found on the dressed quoins of the garderobe turret. The dressed outer margins of the northernmost window also bore masons' marks, three of which were six-pointed crosses, a simple mark which was identical to one on the adjacent doorway and found on one stone at Inverlochy Castle (Ian Fisher to DJT, pers comm; illus 9).¹

Excavation in the east corner of this range revealed a secondary square chamber formed by a wall, which was noted by RCAHMS (1975: 170) as not bonded into the masonry of the north-eastern wall. The floor surface within it was



ILLUS 9 Cathedral of St Moluag and Parish Church, Lismore: masons' marks as published in 1975 in RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, 2, fig 151 (© RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk SC 196314)

covered with burnt clay, perhaps indicative of culinary activity.

The former existence of an upper storey was demonstrated by a high-level entrance at the north-east end, giving access by a dog-leg passage to the garderobe chamber described above. The ends of the joists of the first floor, which is likely to have contained the hall, were probably carried on scarcements, of which a fragment survives towards the north-east end of the north-west side wall. The span, at 7.6m, was such that, if the joists were not to be too unwieldy or the superimposed floor insufficiently rigid, it must have required intermediate support. DJT concluded that the joists were probably supported by Samson posts² and a central scarf-jointed lodging-beam, that is, a bressumer or girder. What may have been the socket for a timber post supporting the bressumer or girder was found just south-west of the inserted eastern

room. A second, but less certain, post setting was uncovered at a distance of about 16ft (4.88m) further to the south-west. The positions of these possible post settings corresponded to a division of the lower storey into four 'bays' by means of three posts. While Samson posts are widely found in southern Britain, their use in association with a longitudinal bressumer beam to carry the joists of an upper storey is known at only one other site in Scotland: the 13th-century hall-building on Fraoch Eilean on Loch Awe (RCAHMS 1975: 212–17 at 213, no 290).

The position of the first-floor doorway is uncertain. Access was probably obtained by a forestair from the courtyard, and one might have expected to find the foot of such a stair directly opposite the north-west entrance. Set into the existing fragment of the south-west gable wall there is a sandstone block which may mark the position of a former window

opening. At the centre of the north-eastern wall of this range, at a height of about 2.1m above first-floor level, there is an opening which appears to have been deliberately formed to contain a projecting beam or corbel, the purpose of which is unclear.

Excavation within the south-east range exposed a rough cobbled floor which had been



ILLUS 10 Intra-mural stair in north-east wall, 1970 and published in 1975 in RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, 2, plate 37B (© RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk SC 1445518)

badly disturbed and in several places was formed by patches of bedrock. This was partly overlaid by a dense layer of occupation material beneath the tumble. The occupation layer contained a number of objects of interest, including five coins dating through to the second half of the 14th century.

Two surviving window embrasures at first-floor level in the north-east curtain wall, north-west of the entrance doorway, suggest an intention to build a two-storeyed structure here (illus 11). These embrasures have straight ingoes for a distance of 0.8m and are then splayed, in the same fashion as the ground-floor windows in the south-east wall of nearby Castle Coeffin, Lismore (RCAHMS 1975: 184–7, no 282). Twin garderobes in the north-west wall at Achanduin also confirm the intention to build a two-storeyed block in the north corner of the courtyard. The twin garderobe chambers projecting from the north-west curtain wall are entered by two doorways whose thresholds are at a height of about 1.8m above the excavated medieval courtyard level, while the chambers themselves are reached by dog-leg passages.

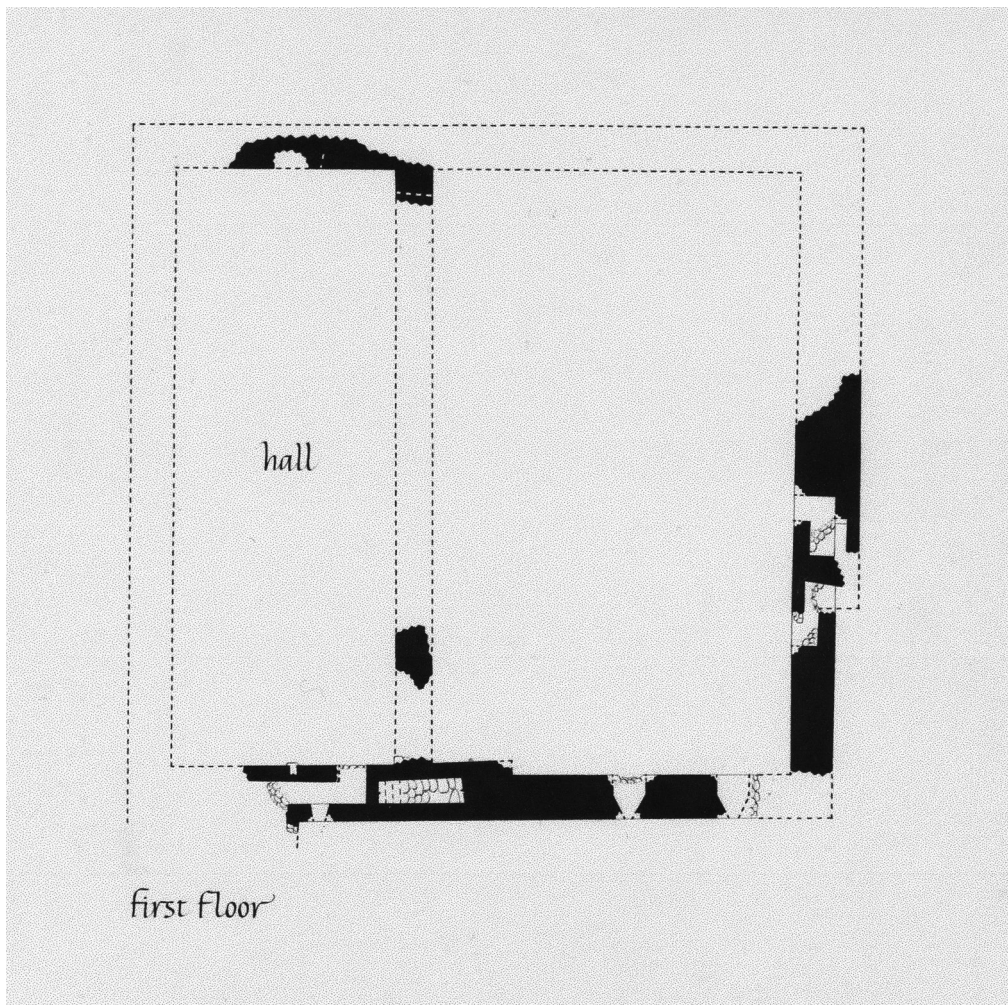
DJT's excavations, however, appear to show that a substantial stone range matching in character the one to the south-east was never built. Instead, there is evidence for a complex sequence of structures underlying and largely obscured by the presence of a secondary building (C) dating to the 18th or 19th century (illus 19).

In the view of Caldwell and Stell, the accumulated evidence from Areas III and VI of charcoal (from worked wood), nails and burnt daub points persuasively to substantial structures in the north corner of the courtyard, probably timber-framed and possibly burnt-out. It is noteworthy that the two samples of daub from this area are quite different in character, one with grass temper that might conceivably

have been walling material, the other possibly from an oven. DJT recognised a beam-slot for a medieval range along the inner face of the north-west curtain wall, set at right-angles to the wall. An excavation plan also identifies two stake-holes in the same area. The extent of the supposed medieval floor belonging to this range indicates a relatively narrow structure, perhaps designed as an adjunct to a more substantial, free-standing house, and to provide access from it to the garderobes in the curtain wall, possibly nothing more than a timber gallery containing a

flight of steps running along the courtyard wall.

The evidence for a free-standing medieval house in the north corner of the courtyard is derived from the presence or absence of occupation deposits and/or floor surfaces and a hearth, visible in photographs and recorded on plans and sections. To Caldwell and Stell, these features all add up to evidence for a house: it is labelled as 'A' on illustration 19, aligned with the curtain walls and with a large open hearth on its earthen floor, the existence of which surely indicated that there was no upper storey.



ILLUS 11 First-floor plan as surveyed in 1971 and published in 1975 in RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, 2, fig 160 (© RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk DP 196316)



ILLUS 12 Brooch no 1/lxxxiii, front (left) and back (right) (Stuart Campbell)



ILLUS 13 Brooch no 2/lvii (Stuart Campbell)



ILLUS 14 Brooch no 3/lvi (Stuart Campbell)

Its approximate extent could have been about 5m south-west/north-east by 9.5m north-west/south-east, but its occupation of approximately the same space as the later post-medieval house (C) probably explains why its walls were not identified by DJT. Because of the digging of a drain, it is unclear whether or not House A was actually built up against the wall of the hall-block,

but it was certainly close enough to have blocked one of its windows, perhaps indicating that the hall-block was already a ruin when House A was erected. House A would also have restricted easy access through the gate in the north-eastern curtain wall.

Again, evidence of observable floor and/or occupation deposits points to another



ILLUS 15 Brooch no 4/lxxxi (Stuart Campbell)



ILLUS 16 Brooch no 5/lxi (Stuart Campbell)



ILLUS 17 Brooch no 6/lx, front (left) and back (right) (Stuart Campbell)

free-standing house (B) in the courtyard, stratigraphically of later date, although its extent and shape are uncertain (illus 19). It was probably on the same alignment as House A, but smaller, not extending as far to the north-west. Between its floor and that of House A was a deposit of what was described as ‘brown,

containing bone’, up to 1m thick, apparently midden. Such deposits can be expected to have piled up outside rather than inside a building that was in use, but after the demise of House B a small kiln or oven, probably for food preparation, was positioned adjacent to the ruins of the hall range.

ARTEFACTS

The excavations led to the recovery of an assemblage of animal bones and a significant collection of artefacts, the value of which is unfortunately diminished by the lack of detailed information surviving on the contexts from which they were recovered.



ILLUS 18 Toilet set no 12/Ixxi (© Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)

The ceramics, reported on by Derek Hall and George Haggarty, include 75 sherds from local hand-made vessels. The fabrics are commonly micaceous and vary from those that have visible rock inclusions and are gritty through to a fabric that is heavily reduced. Only one bodysherd shows any traces of any organic elements in its fabric, in this case grass that has burnt out during the firing process. Two vessels were decorated with stabbed holes, both on the body and the top of the rim.

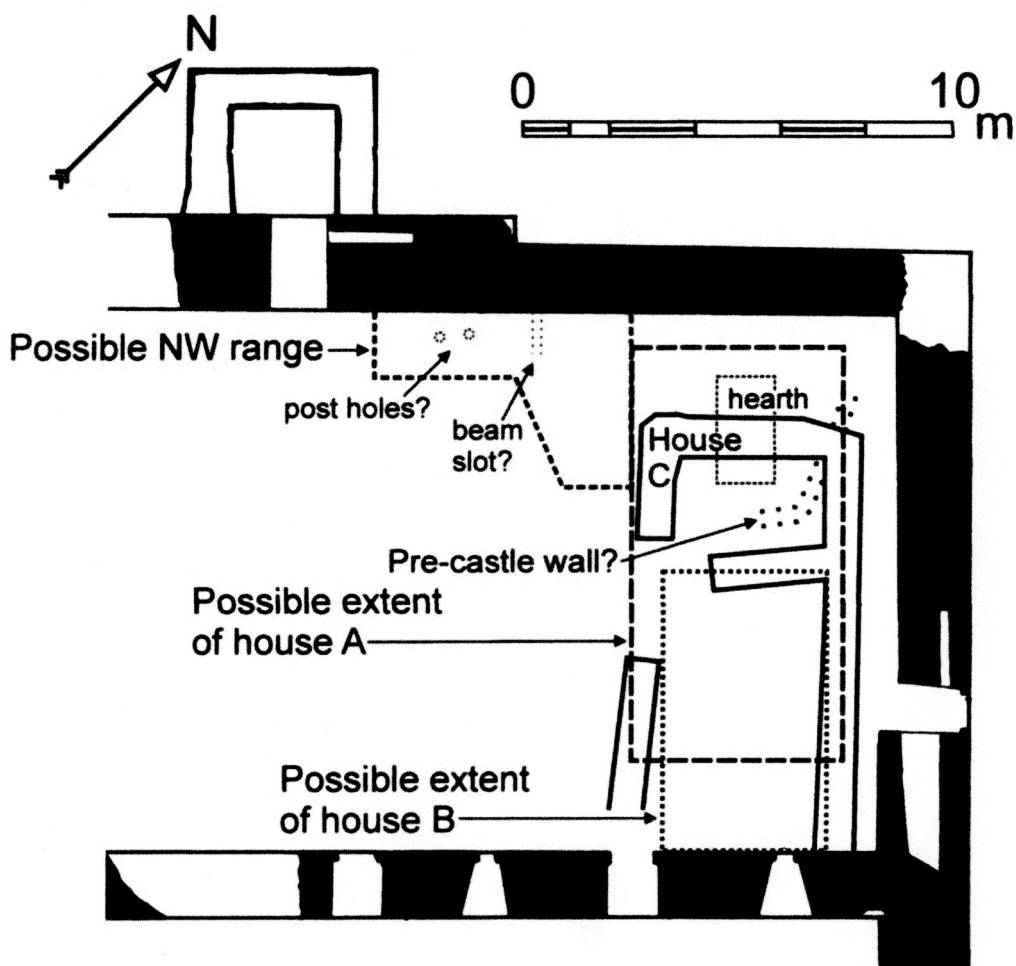
This assemblage also includes 67 sherds from splash-glazed wheel-made vessels in a range of fabrics, mostly of 15th-/16th-century date. Generally, these resemble fabrics that have been found on the Scottish mainland in places like Ayr and Dumbarton and would appear to be from jugs. There is a rim and handle junction which is from a splash-glazed jug decorated with incised lines around the vessel body. It is in Scottish post-medieval oxidised ware and must be of 16th-/17th-century date. There is a single sherd of a Saintonge-type bright green glazed jug which is of late 13th-/early 14th-century date.

The assemblage of 17 coins and one jeton, identified and described by Nicholas Holmes, is consistent with activity at the castle from the early to the later 14th century. It includes 12 pennies of Edward I and II, a halfpenny of John Balliol, a groat of David II (1329–71), and two groats and a half-groat of Robert II (1371–90). There are no coins earlier than those of Edward I's single cross type, first minted in 1279, and only two pre-date 1305. All the English pennies, as well as the halfpenny of John Balliol, are of types which would have circulated all over Scotland until well into the second half

of the 14th century. The coins of David II and Robert II date from the period 1358-90, a period during which the evidence of hoards suggests that English Edwardian pennies gradually fell out of circulation, to be replaced by pennies and larger denominations issued by Scottish kings. Hoards concluding with coins of David II normally also contain substantial numbers of Edwardian pennies, whereas those concluding with issues of Robert II rarely contain coins earlier than David II. Since this assemblage includes no examples of the relatively common early groats of Robert III (1390-1406), it is reasonable to conclude

that coin use on the site came to an end not long after 1390. The French jeton is of a type which fits happily into such a late 14th-century context, although it could also have been struck a little later.

The most remarkable finds were six copper alloy annular brooches (illus 12-17). The earliest and most accomplished, of 13th- or 14th-century date, is decorated with geometric patterns and inlaid niello (illus 17). Clearly a high-status piece, it was possibly manufactured in a large town somewhere in northern Europe. The other five brooches have broad flat hoops



ILLUS 19 Plan showing traces of medieval structures in the north corner of the courtyard and along the north-west curtain wall

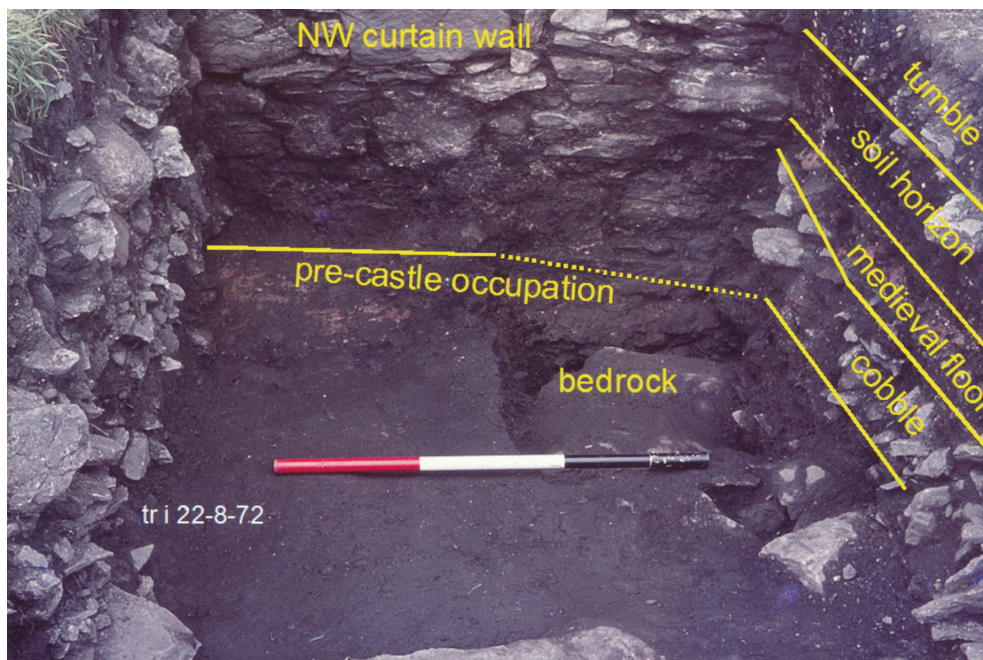
and were probably made locally – indeed one (illus 16) is unfinished – in the late 15th or 16th centuries. Two of them have repeating black letter inscriptions, on one (illus 14) ‘ihc’ (a Greek letter abbreviation for Jesus), and on the other (illus 15) ‘inrid’, for *Iesvs Nazarens Rex Iudeorum Dominvs* (Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Lord).

Another notable find was a portable toilet set of the 16th or 17th century including a nail cleaner, a tooth-pick, a fork and an ear scoop (illus 18). Amongst the ironwork were four arrowheads, apparently designed for warfare rather than hunting, and a Jew’s harp. Bone objects included three tuning pegs and a tableman, all from the trenches within the hall range and conjuring up an image of medieval entertainment.

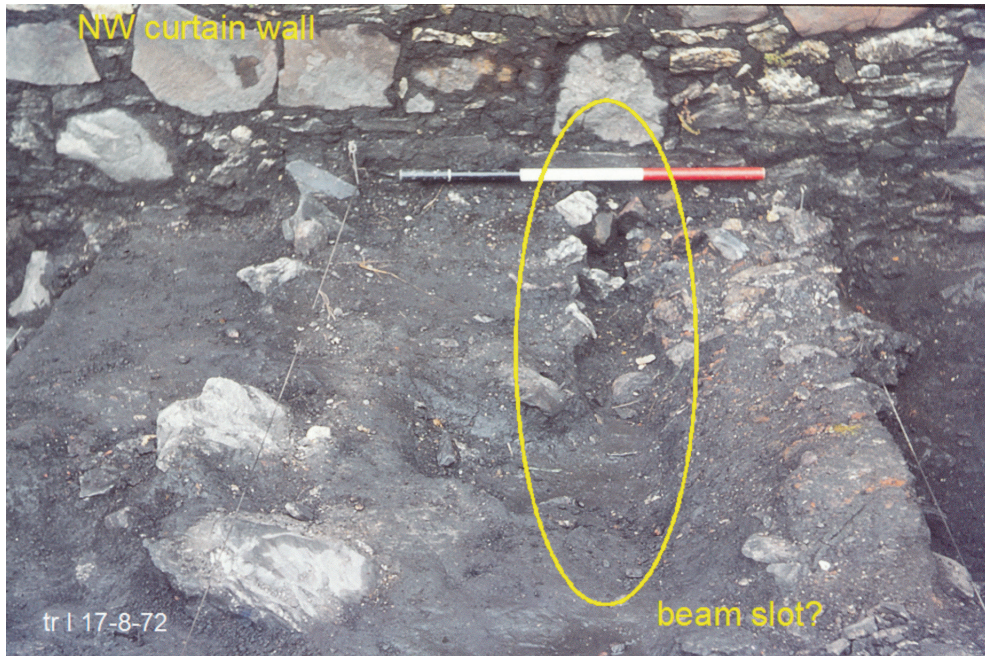
ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Carried out in support of the RCAHMS’s programme of survey in the Lorn district of

Argyll, the main purpose of the excavations at Achanduin was quite simply to examine and date an apparently little-altered but much-ruined example of a small rectangular enclosure castle (RCAHMS 1975: 168–71, no 276; illus 2–5). Castles of this type had previously been discussed by Dunbar and Duncan (1971: 7–13) and had been considered by them to fall into two typological groups. Achanduin is one of the group characterised by an enclosure 19–25m square: others in this group included Castle Sween, Innis Chonnell, Duart (all Argyll) and Castle Roy (Inverness-shire). The second group comprised larger enclosures – around 36m square – such as Tarbert (Argyll), Kincardine and Kinclaven (Perthshire). The authors had suggested (Dunbar & Duncan 1971: 8) that both classes of rectangular courtyard castles ‘typologically ... precede the developed enclosure castles of the later 13th century, such as Inverlochy and Lochindorb, with their salient angle towers of circular plan and ... they may tentatively be ascribed to the 12th or early 13th century’.



ILLUS 20 Evidence of pre-castle occupation in Area I



ILLUS 21 Evidence of a north-west range in Area I

Dunbar and Duncan provided historical arguments to support this dating in respect of Tarbert, Kincardine and Kinclaven, while Castle Sween and Innis Chonnell could also be accepted as relatively early. Ardrossan Castle, Ayrshire (Caldwell 1971–2: 208), might be seen as a development of the smaller type, while some hall-and-enclosure castles in Argyll, such as Aros on Mull (MacGibbon & Ross 1889: 125; RCAHMS 1980: 173–7, no 333) and the second phase of Skipness (RCAHMS 1971: 165–78, no 314), have many points in common with the type. Castle Sween and Innis Chonnell have been dated to *c* 1200 and the first half of the 13th century respectively (RCAHMS 1992: 245–59, no 119; RCAHMS 1975: 223–31, no 292), while the second phase of Skipness probably dates from the end of the 13th or early 14th century.

As we have seen, the evidence from DJT's excavations at Achanduin pointed in the direction of a construction date at the very end of the 13th century, or early in the 14th century, confirming the longevity of the basic rectangular enclosure

design. The Achanduin excavations also showed what the enclosure walls of such a castle were required to shelter, a large hall and private accommodation, the former appearing to be the more important.

To DJT, however, some central historical questions remained: who built, owned and occupied Achanduin Castle, the local, powerful MacDougall family or the bishops of Argyll, whose cathedral was on Lismore? Setting out some of his arguments in an earlier paper (Turner 1998), he believed that the impecunious bishops of Argyll, to whom the castle is usually attributed, were unlikely builders of Achanduin, and that the castle was more likely to have been constructed for the MacDougalls, presumably either Alexander, lord of Argyll, or else his son John. The 2½ pennylands of 'Achacendun', part of 14 pennylands in 'Lesmore' granted by Alexander's father, Ewen MacDougall, in 1240 (or more probably 1251 (Paul 1882: 670–1, no 3136)) did not necessarily include the site of the castle itself. It is first mentioned in 1304 as John's castle or manor of 'Achychendone' when

he granted a charter there of other nearby lands to Bishop Andrew of Argyll (Turner 1998: 649–50).

In 1307, the political situation was transformed by the death of Edward I, King of England. From the very beginning of his reign, Edward II, the new English king, seems to have been able to call on John MacDougall as his lieutenant, appointing him on 2 October 1307 as ‘Sheriff of Argyll and Inchevall [the Hebrides] and guardian of these parts against the enemy’. However, as Edward was to find, MacDougall territorial strength was soon to be overwhelmed by the military campaigns of Robert Bruce. In October 1307, Bruce captured the Comyn stronghold at Inverlochy, and in 1308 he carried the attack to the MacDougalls in their own heartlands in Lorn, John MacDougall writing to Edward apprising him of the situation (Bain 1887: 16; Barrow 1988: 179; Barrow 1999). The Battle of Ben Cruachan, formerly known as the Battle of the Pass of Brander (Duncan 1997: 362–7; Duncan 1999) in 1308 and the fall of Dunstaffnage in 1308 or 1309 led to the forfeiture of both John and his father, Alexander.

DJT considered that it was possible that Achanduin Castle may have been granted to the bishop in 1334, but, failing this, such a gift may have taken place when the MacDougalls returned to mainland Lorn more than a century later. Their return and their building of Dunollie Castle on the site of an ancient Dalriadic stronghold followed the grant in 1451 by John Stewart, Lord of Lorn, of ‘Dunolly’ and other lands to *John Alani de Lorn nominato Mak Dowil* (John Maol) and his son, John Maol, being recognised as chief of the MacDougalls (Sellar 1986: 8; RCAHMS 1975: 194–8, no 286). The MacDougalls had apparently abandoned Achanduin some time before this, but George Lauder, Bishop of Argyll, certainly seems to have had possession of Achanduin Castle in 1452 and for a short time to have taken up occupation (Thomson 1819: 14–15; Thomson 1877: 50–1). DJT deduced that the castle had probably been given to the bishopric at an earlier date but that the bishops had not found much use for it, given that the archaeological evidence had suggested to him that there was little occupation of the castle

from c1400 through to comparatively modern times. To DJT, the events of 1452 seemed to imply that the bishop was an infrequent visitor to Lismore.³

DJT also considered it notable that in all the lists of redistributed lands of the MacDougall lordship Lismore alone was never once mentioned. He concluded that it was possible that, while most of the property was stripped from the family, they may have been allowed to retain Lismore. He could envisage Achanduin being occupied by MacDougalls throughout the 14th century and possibly into the 15th, whilst acknowledging that not much is heard about the MacDougalls or of the bishop at that time.

He further considered that the MacDougalls may not have been formally exiled, but sought asylum at their own discretion at the English court, along with their ‘personal’ bishop. On 1 April 1310, Edward II ordered money for the payment of the men of Alexander and John ‘serving in Ireland’ (Bain 1887: 26ff), and similar payments of 50 marks each were made to Alexander and John ‘for their sustenance’. On 16 June 1310, both John and his father appeared at Westminster for a Council meeting with Edward. On 20 July 1310, Edward arranged for money and victuals for Alexander and his two sons, John and Duncan. Alexander of Lorn died around December 1310 and John in September 1316.⁴

Nothing could disguise the fact that between 1309 and 1316 John MacDougall was a beaten man, conducting a forlorn campaign to recover his position in Argyll. He lived in exile, his family and some of his friends and retainers with him until his death in September 1316. He had one or two boats of his own but not enough, even with English and Irish reinforcements, to stop either Edward Bruce’s invasion of Ireland or to carry the war to the enemy. His power base had been mainland Argyll, and for Edward II he had proved to be a broken reed. Either Edward totally misjudged the political balance of power in the Hebrides or had mistakenly hoped to turn the MacDonalds to his cause. The island-based Macdonalds of Islay remained attached to the Bruce faction, and, in the long term, this was to consolidate the political primacy of the Lordship of the Isles for the next two centuries.⁵

DJT's 1998 paper took the history of the Argyll see to the documented visit by the bishop to Lismore and to the castle of Achanduin in 1452. From that time onward, if not before, the bishops of Argyll seem to have preferred to reside occasionally at Dunoon (Dowden 1912: 386; RCAHMS 1992: 273–6 at 274, no 127), while the construction between 1508 and 1512 by Bishop David Hamilton of a castle at Saddell in Kintyre (RCAHMS 1971: 161–5, no 313) may be seen as ending any residual interests the bishops may have had in the castle on Lismore.

As first pointed out by Carmichael (Carmichael 1948: 122; see also Hay 2009: 104–5), in the 1630s, Sir James Livingston of Skirling, Keeper of the Privy Seal, received a lease of the temporalities of the bishopric of Argyll from Charles I and was said to have resided at Achanduin at that period. Although RCAHMS (RCAHMS 1975: 171, no 276) could find no documented authority for this tradition, an entry under the great seal ratified such grants made in favour of Livingston in 1641 and 1642 and his assignation of the spiritualities and temporalities to the Marquess of Argyll in 1648 (Thomson 1897: 708–9, no 1903). Indeed, in 1666 the farm of Achanduin was in the possession of the 9th Earl of Argyll, who wadset it to Colin Campbell of Loch Nell, but there is no mention of the castle in the transaction (Campbell 1933–4: 2, no 1321). There is a local tradition that Hector Maclaine of the Lochbuie family (*c* 1605–87), who was appointed bishop of Argyll in about 1680 and was the last incumbent before the Revolution of 1688–9, unlike his predecessors maintained his seat on Lismore and occupied what is referred to in a secondary source (Carmichael 1948: 132) as the bishop's palace at Achanduin. DJT was unable to identify a primary authority for this tradition, but it is possible that the toilet set (illus 18) relates to this episode.

Finally, in terms of structural evidence, DJT also pointed to the absence of any part of Achanduin Castle being identifiable as a chapel, a somewhat surprising omission from an episcopal residence. The closest ecclesiastical site to the castle is the slight and ambiguous remains of an alleged chapel and burial-ground on nearby Bernera Island (RCAHMS 1975: 117, no 224).

He also felt that the substantial physical character of Achanduin was out of line with what was known of other early bishops' residences. The subsequent excavation between 1986 and 1994 of the bishops of Moray's palace at Spynie (Lewis & Pringle 2002), for example, demonstrated to DJT the comparatively modest nature of 13th- or 14th-century Scottish bishops' castles or palaces, even when the bishops, as in the case of Moray, were relatively prosperous.⁶

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In their analysis of DJT's site archives, Caldwell and Stell have attempted to report faithfully and accurately the work that was carried out and to reflect DJT's interpretations and opinions. Inevitably, they have formed their own views of the evidence that was uncovered and have put forward a different understanding of some aspects of Achanduin in ways which they hope would have been approved by DJT, if there had been the opportunity to discuss them with him. For a fuller account of how they have dealt with the Achanduin archives and a more detailed analysis of the excavations, see their forthcoming SAIR, 'Achanduin Castle, Lismore, Argyll: an account of the excavations by Dennis Turner, 1970–5'.

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NOTES

- 1 The widely held assumption, tacitly accepted here by DJT, that marks were personal and held for life has been challenged by Butler (Butler 1998: 23–6) who has argued, on the basis of evidence from North Wales and Yorkshire, that marks were issued by the master mason at each castle or church.
- 2 A term derived from wooden ship construction, meaning a strong upright post resting on the keelson and supporting the deck beam, in general architectural parlance, Samson post has also come to be applied to the carpentry of undercrofts supporting wooden floors.
- 3 The events of 1452, which DJT did not go into in detail, are described by Carmichael (Carmichael 1948: 94–5). His account of an assault on Bishop Lauder and his party on their way to a meeting, which he had convened at the cathedral on Lismore in order to settle a disputed parsonage, is supported by an entry in the Auchinleck Chronicle (Craigie 1923: 222), which records that, when assaulted on 29 August 1452, Lauder was indeed coming from his castle of Achanduin where he had been staying for 30 days or more. However, Carmichael's further assertion that Donald Balloch, 'Donald of the Isles', appeared in Lismore and attacked the bishop's residence where he killed many of his servants cannot be so securely authenticated. It was probably derived from a MacDonald clan history that was based on an elaboration of a passage in Lindsay of Pitscottie's *Historie and Chronicles*. What Pitscottie actually recorded (Mackay 1899–1911, i: 124) was an episode that was undated but which could have been in 1452 when 'Donald of the Isles' did indeed chase Bishop Lauder and killed sundry of his friends and servants, but he stated that the bishop escaped by fleeing to 'a strength' which he did not name. The immediately preceding text described Donald's attack on a castle in Arran, which may be reasonably identified as Brodick.
- 4 Judging from DJT's notes, he does not appear to have consulted the biographies of Alexander and John MacDougall, lords of Argyll, published in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: see Sellar 2004A and Sellar 2004B.
- 5 For the important role of Clann Alexandair in the MacDonald–MacDougall conflict and in the establishment of MacDonald ascendancy, see Murray 2002, an essay of which DJT was evidently unaware.
- 6 A defensive earthwork at Spynie became the 'palace' of Bishop Brice of Douglas when he made the nearby church of Holy Trinity his cathedral. In 1224, the cathedral was fixed at Elgin, but Spynie remained the principal residence and a lay community grew up in its shadow. In the mid-13th century, the earthwork castle was partly transformed with the addition of at least two stone buildings – revealed by the excavations – one of which was probably a kitchen. The site at Spynie was abandoned for about 50 years before being rebuilt entirely in stone, commencing in the early decades of the 14th century. Other literature on early episcopal residences which DJT had evidently not consulted included Dransart and Trigg 2008, Dransart 2012, RCAHMS 2007: 161–3, and Thompson 1998.

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