6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Pre-castle activity

The exposure of deposits pre-dating the construction of the castle was limited. Fragments of charcoal and burnt bone were recovered from the soil below the castle wall in Trench 2, indicating some form of pre-castle occupation. A fragment of birch was dated to 677–877 calAD (BP 1246 ±24 95% probability SUERC-96577), which was obtained from a pre-castle soil lying under the Inner Bailey wall. Within Trench 1 an earlier pre-castle soil was also revealed, and this had evidence of burning in upper extent, although whether this related to pre-castle activity or to the construction of the castle itself remains unclear. The early historic date for the soil below the castle wall in Trench 2 is of course intriguing and raises the question as to whether this deposit relates to the two burnings of the putative fort mentioned in the Irish annals in 713 (*Combusti(o) Tairpirt Boitter)* and 731 (*Combustio Tairpirt Boittir apud Dunghal)*. It has been argued that many Scottish western seaboard castles were likely to have been built on earlier sites, such as prehistoric forts, duns, and brochs (Raven 2012). Raven suggested that there was a significant phase of occupation beginning in the thirteenth century, accelerating in the 15th and 16th centuries, but then declining although still occurring in the 17th century (Raven 2005). The work has thrown up a complicated picture of their use, from convenient places of refuge to communal meeting places, summer dwellings and even fishing lodges. There also appears to be a link between the re-use of sites with a desire to naturalise Gaelic familial lineages with a place, particularly after a period of Norse influence, these places seen as representing links to a pre-Norse past, with legitimacy of occupation perhaps stemming from such claims. While the majority of duns, forts, brochs, and crannogs in Argyll as yet show no evidence of having been reoccupied in the medieval period, a number of excavated sites have, including the sites at Kildonan (Canmore ID 38756; Fairhurst 1939), Ugadale (Canmore ID 38760; Fairhurst 1956), MacEwan's Castle (Canmore ID 39861; Marshall 1982), Dunollie, and Dun Mhuirich (Regan 2013b).

If the present Tarbert Castle is indeed the site of the *Tairpert Boiter* of the annals, then the question must be, where are the earlier remains? The other sites mentioned in the annals, Dunollie, Dunadd, and Dunaverty along with many other duns and forts in Argyll are built on prominent geological stacks. If an earlier structure existed at Tarbert, and these geological determinants were followed, then the place most likely for the position of an earlier fortification would be on the rise now occupied by the Inner Bailey, and if so, its construction may have eradicated most, if not all, of the evidence of any such building, although pockets of earlier occupation might survive.

While it may be attractive to conflate the carbon date to the events mentioned in the Irish Annals, without further substantial proof of a defensive structure occupying the ground below the present Inner Bailey the case for this site being *Tairpirt Boittir* is still unproven.

6.2 The Medieval Castle

It must be said at the start of the discussion on the medieval remains at Tarbert Castle that only a small percentage of potential medieval deposits were sampled during the excavation and any conclusions presented here must be treated with some degree of caution, given that so much remains unknown archaeologically. That said, the excavation work has shed light on several important aspects of the construction and layout of Tarbert Castle. The building analysis undertaken by Mark Thacker as part of the Scottish Medieval Castles and Chapels C-14 Project, has shown that the Inner Bailey was originally conceived as an integral part of the larger structure at Tarbert and has shown that the cross-wall of the Inner Bailey is a later insertion between the surrounding walls forming the circuit of the Outer Bailey. Two radiocarbon dates recovered from the mortar of the southwestern gate of the Outer Bailey and the cross-wall of the Inner Bailey provided similar dates, respectively 1210–1290 calAD (BP 788±31 95% probability SUERC-93141) and 1220–1290 calAD (BP 775 ± 31 95% probability SUERC-93140) (Thacker 2022). This appears to indicate that Tarbert Castle was constructed sometime in the later 13th century or early 14th century. Indeed, Thacker concludes that 'it remains possible that all surviving masonry structures on the site were built by the crown after 1315, as the earliest

documentary-led interpretations had previously suggested' (Thacker 2022: 196). This arrangement and chronology of the wall development *vis a vis* the Inner and Outer Bailey walls also appear to be historically documented within the 1325–26 exchequer rolls where in the final entry to John de Lany's account it states, 'In this statement are not included the iron, the houses within the inner court, the middle wall enclosing it, or the wine-house, for which the constable had not leisure to account' (*De ferro non vacat nunc computare, nec de domibus infra interiorem clausuram, nec de medio muro claudente, nec de domo vini computatur*) (Stuart & Burnett 1878: 58). This likely refers to the cross-wall which essentially completes the wall circuit forming the Inner Bailey and given that its cost had not been included in John de Lany's account suggests that it was one of the latest pieces of work completed at the castle. This of course has important implications for the overall understanding of the castle's development and is discussed more fully below.

The excavation within Trench 4 showed that no entrance to the Inner Bailey, as previously suggested, lies near the southwest tower of the castle although this trench did reveal the scale and preservation of the southwestern tower and exposed the remains of a doorway into the tower suite.

Trenches 1 and 2 demonstrated that well-preserved medieval occupation deposits survived within both the Inner and Outer Baileys. The medieval deposits in Trench 1 within the southeast corner of the Outer Bailey were suggestive of a series of floor and midden deposits, while one deposit contained evidence for the survival of organic material, in this case wood. While these deposits likely represent successive floor/make up and midden deposits no structural elements beyond the walls of the Inner and Outer Bailey were identified, although it seems likely that further excavation work would uncover evidence of such structures along the walls of the castle in this area of the site. Within Trench 2 inside the Inner Bailey similar well-preserved medieval occupation deposits were uncovered along with the remains of an upstanding clay and stone structure, or hearth used for heating. Beyond its heating function the true nature of this sub-circular feature remains elusive, although it is suggested here that it was used as a firebox that supported a pot or cauldron for heating liquids. If so, it could have been used for a number of functions such as cooking or brewing, both of these attested to within the surviving exchequer rolls, which mention both a kitchen (*coquine*) and brewhouse (*bracina*) being present within the walls of the castle. Evidence of food preparation was also recovered from this area including butchered bone and seashells (mainly edible periwinkles) recovered from a midden accumulation from which an iron fleshhook was also recovered. The pottery recovered from these same occupation deposits were almost entirely from jugs indicating their use as tableware in consumption and/or storing of wine and/or beer. However, without further evidence, attributing such specific functions to these spaces must be treated with caution, for example low quantities of slag fragments were also present within the general midden material, although perhaps not in such concentrations to suggest any metalworking took place in the immediate vicinity. The hearth feature also appeared to be the replacement for an earlier fire installation, possibly with a similar function, which, along with at least two superimposed floor surfaces, suggests some degree of longevity of use in this part of the castle. The pottery assemblage in this part of the castle was dominated by the sherds of several vessels that displayed very fresh breaks that often conjoined, perhaps suggesting a close correlation in time between their last use and being discarded into middens and/or on floors. The above-mentioned pottery group was recovered from above the earliest floor, which produced a date of 1299–1398 calAD (BP 622 ± 24 95% probability SUERC-96572). The radiocarbon date recovered from the charcoal from what was very likely the fuel from the last firing/use of the hearth in the Inner Bailey produced a similar date of 1282–1390 calAD (BP 622 ± 24 95% probability SUERC-96573). Both dates suggest occupation and use of the Inner Bailey in the 14th century. These dates are perhaps supported by the ceramic evidence, which is wholly dated between the 13th and 15th century, recovered from above the floor deposits within the Inner Bailey and that above the earliest floor, while admittedly only a handful of sherds were dated to the 13th–14th century, the overall assemblage suggests a 14th century date (Derek Hall pers comm.). These medieval occupation deposits were all sealed by an extensive deposit of rubble which appeared to have formed rapidly

and can perhaps best be explained as the deliberate demolition of the surrounding walls, rather than long-term degradation. Given these factors, it might suggest this part of the castle was redundant by the later 15th century, although the charcoal from what was possibly the last firing of the hearth feature might indicate an even earlier date for this demise (that is before the end of the 14th century). If this process was repeated elsewhere within the Inner Bailey, then it is highly likely that equally well-preserved medieval deposits survive elsewhere. Two other observations from the excavations are worth mentioning. Firstly, in all trenches where the castle walls were exposed there was evidence that the walls had been rendered in a light brown or cream coloured plaster, and it would appear that the majority if not all of the walls in the castle were originally rendered in a similar manner, with the exception of the carved red sandstone surrounds of entrances. The second observation was that there was no evidence of slate or stone being used as a roofing material, which indicates an organic roofing material was used. The 1326 Exchequer Roll does, however, mention the 'service of mowers of thatch for roofing the hall' (*servico messorum pro coopertura metanda pro aula*) and we can perhaps assume that other buildings were roofed with a similar material.

The confirmation of the positions of the gateways into the castle complex provides important new elements as to understanding of the castle's layout. The gates undoubtedly had several roles, defensive, controlling access to the castle, while they were also undoubtedly architectural projections of power and display. The southwestern gate into the Outer Bailey was positioned below the eastern wall of the Inner Bailey with the projecting tower in the Outer Bailey lying immediately to its west it would have presented an imposing approach and façade. The entrance on the opposite northeastern side of the castle was arguably even more impressive with the portcullis gate positioned between the two projecting drum towers. With its sloping access ramp, the southwestern entrance would have been the easier approach particularly for animal-drawn vehicles, while the northeastern gate is situated above what appears to be a very steep slope. As such it remains unclear as to how this gate was accessed from the sea (which now lies some 80–90m to the north). It is likely that much of the original topography is masked by the rubble collapse from the castle itself as well as being covered in extensive vegetation. Certainly, there appears to have been extensive reworking of the lower slopes below the gate with the creation of garden terracing at the rear of the Victorian houses that now line the south side of Pier Road (A8015). However, current topography suggests that the approach must have wound up from the sea to the castle from either the western or eastern side by passing below one or the other of the drum towers, as the ground immediately in front of the gate appears to be too steep to accommodate a direct approach to the gate from the north, unless of course steep steps were involved. The relatively inaccessible nature of this gate, as opposed to that on the southwest side of the castle, led Thacker to suggest that the former is a postern gate while the latter was the main entrance (Thacker 2022). Whatever the case, further topographic and survey work needs to be done on this side of the castle to shed more light on the access to the castle in this area.

Portcullis entrances are relatively rare features amongst west coast castles, although they exist at nearby Skipness Castle and at Rothesay Castle both considered works of the Stewart/Mentieth family. While containing later additions and repairs, the original elements of the gate at Skipness have strong similarities to the surviving structural features of both Outer Bailey gates at Tarbert using similar red sandstone for the architectural mouldings and detail. The gate at Skipness is slightly narrower being 2.70m wide as opposed to the 3.0m at Tarbert. Both have door checks set internally to the portcullis slots, the examples at Skipness being 12.5cm (or 5 inches wide) while those at Tarbert were 19cm (or 8 inches wide). At Tarbert red sandstone is also used within the surrounds of the gate into the Inner Bailey and within the surrounds of the entrance to the southwest tower of the Outer Bailey. Again, a comparison with Skipness can be made where doorway surrounds within the enclosure walls are rendered in moulded red sandstone blocks. The similarity in date and the similar use of red sandstone raises the question, previously postulated by Simpson, as to whether the same masons were involved in the construction of both edifices, although without closer dating evidence or comparative masons' marks this has to remain speculation (Simpson 1966).

Examination of the masonry at base of the Tower House at Tarbert appears to show that it is tied into the masonry of the Outer Bailey wall while the northeast corner of the projecting tower base is constructed with different masonry (using squared quoins) from the upper build of the Tower House. This suggests that this lower section of the tower is contemporary with the construction of the Outer Bailey wall and may represent the remains of projecting tower on this side of the castle prior to the construction of the Tower House in the late 15th century. However, closer and more specialist examination needs to be undertaken to confirm or contradict this observation.

Other castle sites in Argyll have produced excavated evidence for occupation in the late 13th and early 14th centuries including Achadun, the Lismore seat of the Bishop of the Isles built sometime between *c* 1295 and 1310 (Turner 1975; Caldwell & Stell 2017), Dunstaffnage (Canmore ID 23036), a MacDougall stronghold probably constructed in the mid-13th century (Lewis 1996; Radley 2000; Stewart 2004; Breen et al 2010), and Castle Sween (Phases 2 and 3) constructed by the MacSweens in the late 12th or early 13th century (Ewart & Triscott 1996; Thacker 2020). However, within the published reports few of these artefact groupings are firmly dated to the 14th/15th centuries or are in significant enough quantities to conduct anything more than broad comparative analysis, such as the similar preference for the eating of beef in other medieval lordly residences, such as Castle Sween (McCormick 1996).

6.3 The Medieval Burgh

The area to the southwest of the castle within the scheduled area occupies a ridge of undulating ground that slopes off to the east and west. The results of the excavation suggest that medieval topography may be partially masked by what appears to be the accumulations of later soils likely caused by the movement or weathering of worked soils into lower areas across the site. This process was observed within Trenches 5–7. In Trench 5, any plough/horticultural soils were very shallow, but downslope within Trench 6 there was a depth of up to 1.0m of soil covering the underlying archaeology, this was likely an accumulation of hill wash/colluvial forming within existing natural hollows and it is highly likely that this process was repeated across the whole area of the ridge to the south of the castle. The recovery of dumped medieval pottery and slag along with evidence of burning within Trench 6 as well as the presence of what is likely a medieval building in Trench 7, indicates that medieval activity and occupation was present within the area to the south of the castle. The exact nature of this activity was harder to glean from the limited exposure within the excavated trenches, however, the presence of large fragments of slag in both Trenches 6 and 7 indicates possible metalworking activity in the vicinity. Part of one building does not of course make a burgh, but does suggest that other buildings may lie along this same ridge to the south of the castle, this perhaps underlined by the recovery of medieval pottery from a small community excavation on Bruce Hill, further south along the same ridge (Regan 2018a). Sherds of 15th–16th century pottery along with one 17th–18th century sherd were recovered from the ploughsoil deposits within Trenches 6 and 7, this perhaps indicating a decline in any burgh activity after the 16th century. This may reflect the increased importance of Inveraray (created a burgh of barony in 1472) or that any burgh activity within Tarbert had moved closer to the sea around any harbour area.

6.4 Post medieval evidence

Within the Inner Bailey and constructed directly over the rubble collapse sealing the medieval sequence was Structure 1, the walls of which were apparent as earthworks prior to excavation and appear in the Royal Commission's published plan of the castle (RCAHMS 1971: no. 316, 179–84). This building is also depicted on the First Edition Ordnance Survey, although, prior to the excavation it was unclear whether these were a depiction of the walls of the castle or a later building (OS 1870). The building is probably 17th century in date given the evidence from the coins recovered from the floor of the building. While Structure 1 utilised the walls of the castle on its western and northern sides, the 'new built' walls of this structure are poorly constructed when compared to the castle walls and do not show any sign of mortar use in their construction. The floor in the eastern room was very uneven although

it did contain a clay spread with signs of burning which was likely a hearth or perhaps a work area. The western room also contained a hearth area with signs of burning on the floor in the centre of the room and lying nearby on the floor was the upper stone of a large rotary quern. The quern might suggest a domestic use for the building, however, the presence of several 17th century coins from the building's floors might reflect the garrisoning of the castle during this turbulent century whether during the Civil War period or its occupation by Cromwellian troops in 1652. This building appears to be one of a series of earthworks that suggest other structures of a similar late date occupy the internal space of the Inner Bailey.

The excavation has also shown that the area immediately to the north of the Inner Bailey had been used as a field, this area demarcated by a sinuous wall running from the entrance of the Inner Bailey to the Tower House. Indeed, this wall is shown, in a much better-preserved state, in a 19th century postcard of the castle. Similarly, the area to the south of the castle appears to have been extensively cultivated, given the evidence of plough soil within all the excavated trenches. The depths of the plough soil in each trench varied, perhaps indicating that there may have been a problem with the movement of soils from the upper sloping ground to lower ground and it is possible one function of the revetment wall examined in Trench 6 was to counter this erosion. It also seems likely that the earthworks which can still be seen lying to the south of the southern berm of the inner enclosure are of late date, these representing drainage and lazy bed or narrow strip cultivation. The relatively large number of artefacts recovered from the plough soil can perhaps only be explained by these being introduced onto field areas as midden material for soil enhancement. This process perhaps underlined by the generally small size of the artefacts, the presence of burnt/melted material, and some sea-worn artefacts, the latter possibly indicating the use of seaweed introduced to the soil as a fertiliser.

6.5 Re-thinking Tarbert Castle

As mentioned above the suggestion that the castle at Tarbert dates to the 13th century was initially made by MacGibbon and Ross who suggested that Tarbert Castle was one of the royal fortresses handed over to Edward I by John Balliol, after Edward placed him on the throne in 1292 (MacGibbon & Ross 1887: 136). They also pointed out the similarities of ground plan and size of the inner enclosure at Tarbert to Kinclaven Castle in Perthshire. The comparison to Kinclaven was later expanded upon by Dunbar and Duncan who compared the Inner Bailey at Tarbert with both Kinclaven and Kincardine Castles, the later probably dating to before 1249 and speculating that Tarbert might also date to before that time and may have been constructed by Alexander II (1214–1249) as part of his successful campaign in 1221 and 1222 against Ruaidhri mac Raonaill to subdue the west and attempting to regain the Western Isles from the Norwegian crown (Dunbar & Duncan 1971:13). This has been accepted and expanded on by other scholars while some have argued that it was Alexander III (1249–1286) who, after gaining his majority in 1261 and continuing his father's policy of regaining the Western Isles from the Norwegian crown, built Tarbert as part of crowns consolidation in the west, possibly after the Treaty of Perth in 1266 when the Western Isles were ceded to the Scots. Dunbar and Duncan's (1971) argument that Tarbert may have been built by Alexander II is based on their understanding, like MacGibbon and Ross, that the Inner Bailey of the castle is earlier than the walls of the Outer Bailey, which appeared to have been recently confirmed by the RCAHMS Inventory survey undertaken in 1966. The comparison of Tarbert Castle with both Kinclaven and Kincardine only holds if the Inner Bailey at Tarbert is seen as a stand-alone '*simple rectangular castle of enclosure*' and perhaps more importantly a structure that can be shown to be earlier than the walls of the Outer Bailey.

The present work along with that undertaken by Mark Thacker has shown that the cross-wall that effectively creates the Inner Bailey is secondary to the surrounding curtain walls of the Outer Bailey, their construction likely being of a late 13th to the early 14th century date. A 14th century occupation date is suggested by the carbon dates and the ceramic evidence for the initial occupation of the Inner Bailey at Tarbert Castle. This dating evidence would appear to eliminate the possibility that Alexander II constructed the castle and perhaps make it unlikely that it could have been built by

Alexander III who was dead by 1286. However, this does not necessarily preclude the construction of Tarbert Castle by a local magnate in the later 13th or early 14th century period. As mentioned above it is likely that the Stewart/Menteith family held the lordship of Knapdale from at least the 1260s and the Stewarts of course had a long tradition of building or improving castles.

Alexander Stewart the brother of Walter Stewart may have been responsible for the construction of Rothesay Castle and also for the rebuilding of Dundonald Castle (Canmore ID 41970) and it may have been Walter himself who oversaw the construction of Dunoon Castle (Canmore ID 40729) following his grant of lands in Cowal, although this is less than clear, while Ewart and Baker postulate that the structure below the present tower and enclosure at Carrick equates to a hunting lodge constructed by the Stewart family (Simpson 1939; Ewart & Baker 1998: 999; Ewart et al 2004;). Caldwell has argued that Stewart influence in the west also extended to the construction of Brodick Castle (Canmore ID 40145) on Arran (Caldwell 2022). It appears likely that after the Menteith Stewarts obtained possession of Skipness Castle they may have been responsible for rebuilding the castle compound, this work attributed to the late 13th or early 14th century and may have also displaced Clann Suibhne from Castle Sween, as they took control of Knapdale (Simpson 1966). Thacker has pointed to the *c* 1300 construction for the northwest tower at Castle Sween as likely being the work of the Menteith Stewarts which contains cross-slit openings similar features in the nearby castles of Skipness and Brodick which also had an entrance flanked by a large drum tower (Thacker 2020: 238; Caldwell 2022: 7). As such the Menteith Stewarts, as lords of Knapdale undoubtedly had the resources and the power base within southern Argyll to construct a castle at Tarbert and the dates retrieved from the walls of the mortar of the walls of the Inner and Outer Baileys make this a possibility. However, and surely important, is why would they build another even larger castle in Knapdale given that they already had control of Skipness Castle and possibly Castle Sween by the late 13th–early 14th century?

The first documented reference to Tarbert Castle is in the above-mentioned exchequer rolls entries of 1325–1326 outlining building work undertaken by Robert I and it has been maintained for some time that these referred to major additions to a previously established royal castle. Prior to this there is no mention in extant historical documents of a castle existing at Tarbert. Thacker has previously pointed out that the castle is not mentioned in the catalogue of 23 royal castles handed over to Edward I in 1292 (Thacker 2022: 180). The castle of course may have been held by the English or their allies at this time but the fact that Tarbert Castle escapes notice in any historical source prior to its mention in the 1325–26 exchequer account is surely problematic, particularly given that other Argyll castles including Rothesay, Brodick, Dunaverty, Dunstaffnage, Skipness, Sween, Cairn na burgh, and Fraoch Eilean are all documented in some form before this time. The documentary evidence, scant though it may be, combined with the archaeological evidence tends to suggest that the remains we see at Tarbert Castle, apart from the later Tower House, are from the time of Robert I and as such represent the only major new castle constructed during his reign.

As west coast magnates, the Bruce family and the future Robert I himself, were, as previously outlined by Seán Duffy, firmly entangled in Gaelic west coast and Irish geopolitical culture (Duffy 2002: 46–70). The future Robert I inherited the Gaelic earldom of Carrick through his mother, while in 1282, the Bruces were granted a licence by Edward I so that his men could travel to Ireland to buy and export goods receiving a similar permission in 1291 (Sweetman 1877: 1928; 1881: 945; Bain 1884: 211, 535). After succeeding to the earldom, in 1294, the future Robert I obtained a safe conduct lasting a year and a half in which he was given permission to travel and stay in Ireland which has led Duffy to suggest that he had landed interests in Ulster (Sweetman 1881: 136; Duffy 2013: 135). Robert's second wife Elizabeth, whom he married in 1302, was the daughter of Richard de Burgh, the Earl of Ulster, additionally some have suggested, on admittedly speculative evidence, that his brother Edward may have been fostered in Ireland amongst the Ó Néills (Philips 1979: 269–70; Duffy 2013: 60). The Bruces were then fully aware of the strategic importance of controlling Scotland's western seaboard, particularly the approaches to the Clyde Estuary from Ireland and Inner Hebrides giving access to the Scottish

Lowlands, the route known in Ireland as *Sruth na Maoile* (the North Channel). During one of his earliest campaigns in 1306, Robert Bruce provisioned Dunaverty Castle in Kintyre and Loch Doon in Carrick (Canmore ID 63601). It has been argued that this along with his failed attempt to secure Dumbarton Castle (Canmore ID 43376) from John of Menteith, was an attempt by the new Scottish king to secure the seaway of the Firth of Clyde allowing communication with Ireland and the Western Isles of Scotland and which was a potential source of Irish and/or Hebridean troops (Stones 1970: 260–1; Cornell 2008). Through Christiana MacRuairi and Angus Òg MacDonald the Western Isles did provide Robert I with a supply of men and resources in the early days of his kingship, while men from the Isles took part in the Bruce invasion of Galloway in 1308. Duffy has also argued that Bruce's famous letter to 'all the kings of Ireland, to the prelates and clergy, and to the inhabitants of all Ireland' (*Rex omnibus et singulis regibus Ybernie prelatis quque et clerico euisdem ac incolis tocius Ybernie nostras*) dates to the winter of 1306–07, indicating Bruce's intention to create a pan-Gaelic anti-English alliance (Duncan 1988: no. 564, 695; Duffy 2002: 46–70). By 1309, Robert I's forces had seen off many of the west coast magnates who had remained allies of the Balliol and English factions, particularly Alexander MacDougall of Argyll and his son John. Here again, like his provision of castles in 1306, the MacDougall strongholds such as Dunstaffnage were garrisoned by Robert I's forces rather than destroyed, no doubt with the aim of controlling his former enemy's heartlands and their adjacent seaways of the Sound of Mull. Other former MacDougall strongholds may have come into Robert I's or his allies' hands, such as Cairn na Burgh (Canmore ID 21822 and 21823), which has been identified with the '*castri de Scraburgh*' whose constable was Neil MacLean (*Nigello McGillon)* in 1329 (Stuart & Burnett 1878: 238). Others such as Duart (Canmore ID 22662) and Aros Castles may have gone the same way, but without documentary evidence this must remain speculation. The displaced MacDougalls however sought refuge in Ireland and along with other dispossessed Scottish magnates continued to pose a threat along Bruce's western seaboard, particularly after John of Argyll had been appointed admiral of his western fleet by Edward II in 1311. Ireland of course could also be used by the English king to raise troops and to provide a supply base in support of any future campaign against the Scots. This threat appeared to be particularly acute in early 1315 after John of Argyll had recaptured the Isle of Man from pro-Bruce forces, while Edward II had ordered his officials, including the Irish Justiciar to raise troops and supply ships to John's fleet for a renewed campaign against the Scots. Securing the Scots western seaboard was no doubt an important consideration when in May 1315 Edward Bruce and his fleet sailed from Ayr launching his seaborne invasion of Ireland, supported by his brother King Robert, who joined him in Ireland, in July. Prior to Robert I sailing to Ireland the king, according to John Barbour, mustered his forces at Tarbert. The Bruce invasion of Ireland is narrated in Barbour's '*The Bruce*' Book XIV while Robert's crossing with his fleet at Tarbert to daunt the Isles appears in the following Book XV (Duncan 2007: 563–7). King Robert now repeated the symbolic annexation of Kintyre and the Isles undertaken by Magnús Óláfsson, hauling his ships across the Tarbert isthmus '*Out-our Betwix the Tarbertis twa*'. Whether, like the story of Magnús, Barbour's poem is apocryphal is still debated but it does appear that King Robert was at Tarbert in March–April 1315, where he received the resignation of a charter by John of Glassary at Tarbert (*apud Tarbart' iuxta Louchfyne*) and he may have returned there to prepare for the pacification of the isles after his brother's departure (Duncan 1988: 69).

One assumes that the Scottish king and his entourage were adequately accommodated when staying at Tarbert, while Thacker has pointed out the issuing of charters in 1315 from Tarbert might imply that some kind of administrative structure was located here at this time (Thacker 2022: 180). However, there is still no mention of a castle at Tarbert, either by Barbour or in the above resignation by John of Glassary. It is not clear what role if any Tarbert played in supplying Edward Bruce in his Irish campaign or if it was used during the transit of magnates between Scotland and Ireland including Robert and Edward Bruce at various times between 1316 and the defeat of the Scots at Faughart in 1318. The invasion of Ireland by the Scots might be seen as the most dynamic expression of King Robert's attempt to control his western seaboard but

before 1315 his administration had already begun the process of consolidating its position in the west through a series of land grants given to loyal west coast-based adherents, particularly the lands of the defeated and banished MacDougall kindred. Prior to Faughart, the beneficiaries Robert I's network of military patronage included the MacDonald and MacRuairi kin groups (Thomson 1912: App. 1, no. 9; App. 2, no. 56, 57, 58). However, after 1318 the Bruce regime appeared to specifically exclude the same MacSorley kindreds from further patronage. The reason for this is unclear but the Irish Annals tell us that two Hebridean lords died alongside Edward Bruce at Faughart '*Mac Ruaidhri tigerna Innsi Gall, Mac Domhnaill tigearna Airir Gaoidel*' while the Annals of Inisfallen names the fallen MacDonald leader as '*Alexander*' (*FM*: M1318.5; *AI*:1318.4). It has been postulated by Boardman that these individuals were the heads of MacDonald and MacRuairi families and if so, this may have caused instability within the families possibly leaving minors as heirs leading to factional competition between elder family members seeking to control the respective chieftainships. Any new emergent leaders may not have automatically followed the cause of Robert I and any growing animosity of some of the MacSorley kindred is no doubt reflected in the forfeiture of Roderick of the Isles (*Forisfactura Roderici de Ylay*) in 1325 for unspecified offences. However, this break could not have been complete as John MacDonald is named as bailie of Islay (*Johanne McDonnyle Ballio de Ile*) between 1326 and 1329 (*RPS:* A1325/2; Stuart and Burnett 1878: 52, 196–8; Boardman 2006: 37–55; Penman 2014: 62–76).

The Scottish king continued to increase the presence along his western seaboard of men who he regarded as trustworthy, these including members of the Campbell and Stewart/Menteith families who continued to be rewarded for faithful service receiving further land grants, these often held in return for ship or other military service (Stuart & Burnett 1878: 52; Thomson 1912: App. 2 nos. 352, 353, 363, 364, 368, 372, 374, 661 and 695; MacPhail 1916: 132–4; Duncan 1988: nos. 27, 239, 366, 374; Boardman 2006: 41–6). Other west coast families also benefited from crown patronage such as the MacKays in Kintyre, while Alexander MacNaughton, Ewan McIver, and two MacLean brothers appear as witnesses amongst other Bruce loyalists in a grant of Christina MacRuairi to Arthur Campbell, while, as mentioned above, one of the MacLean brothers, Neil, is named as constable of 'Scraburgh' possibly Cairn na Burgh (Thomson 1912: App. 1, no. 99; Duncan 1988; Boardman 2006: 47–8). These west coast magnates and local families controlled an impressive series of strongholds along the firths of Clyde, Mull, and Lorne that included Dunoon (Canmore ID 40729), Rothesay, Brodick, Dunaverty, Lochranza (Canmore ID 39807), Skipness, Castle Sween, Dunstaffnage, and possibly Cairn na Burgh More/Beg.

Robert I's construction work at Tarbert could have started any time after 1315 but he may have had to wait until the Treaty of Bishopsthorpe in May 1323 before he was able to fully resource such a project. The treaty provided for relative peace on his English border and specifically prevented the Scottish king from building new castles along the same border which in turn may have allowed the crowns finances to be directed towards castle building in the west (Duncan 1988: no. 232). Only two years after the Treaty of Bishopsthorpe, Tarbert Castle appears on record for the first time within the above-mentioned exchequer roll of 1325–1326 submitted by John de Lany (Stuart & Burnett 1878: 52–8). By this time the works at the castle appear to be well underway when King Robert visits Tarbert accompanied by William Lamberton, the bishop of St Andrews and Sir James Douglas (Stuart & Burnett 1878: 58). Although the date of the visit is not specifically mentioned in de Lany's account it appears likely it occurred July 1325 when the King along with Sir James were at Cardross, after which they possibly sailed by galley to Tarbert (Duncan 1988: no. 277, no. 279; Penman 2018: 260).

The accounts also give a detailed glimpse into the building work involved at Tarbert Castle and its provisioning. If we examine the account and give some allowance for the transcription of the original Latin, we can perhaps differentiate between new building works and repairs to existing structures. The new work involved the building of a peel tower at West Loch Tarbert, which still has not been definitively located, and the construction of a new road between the two Tarberts. Within the castle itself a new kitchen was built along with a house, presumably a workshop, for the goldsmith.

A '*fabrilis*' for the 'plummer' was also built, and if this is taken as a literal translation meaning 'carpentry' then it likely indicates the building was a timber construction, perhaps a workshop or shelter. A house was also built for the '*pistrius*', likely a bakery (*pistrinus*). New works also involved the excavation of a mill pond and lade as well as a ditch, presumably defensive, below the castle along with a ditch around the brewhouse, was likely a drain. A number of buildings which appear to have already been in existence were also repaired or upgraded.

The building of a new kitchen, of course indicates a previous one, while making the mill 'anew' and 'making good its walls' also suggests this building was already in existence. Also suggestive of extant buildings were roofing for the chapel. There are also repairs to the brewhouse, which was fitted out with a lead sink/tub, and the making of a '*ruderis*' (rubble) of stone and clay in the middle of the brewhouse, which may mean a cobbled surface or hard standing. A kiln was also made 'anew' although what type is not stated. The hall also seems to have been extensively refurbished at this time. That it was already in existence is indicated by the underpinning of timber supports of the hall by stone. Carpenters were also involved in 'raising the hall' with 'mowers' presumably providing thatch for roofing it. Clay and sand were used for the walls ('*parietibus*') and birch branches collected to repair the hall and rooms, which suggest the use of wattle and daub type construction. The park was also repaired or expanded at this time. Several trades are named in the construction and repair of the castle, these including, mason, smith, plumber, carpenter, plasterer, roofer, thatcher, and sawyer. The smith was also paid for working 78 stones of iron, possibly indicating the production of construction materials, for example nails, door fittings, yetts, portcullis, etc.

While some of the buildings may indeed have been new, we have no way of knowing how old the extant buildings were at the time of any repair, or whether these were just upgrades to buildings that may not have been very old at the time of John de Lany's account.

Being one design from the start and at almost 2 acres in extent as Dunbar and Duncan noted Tarbert 'must have ranked as one of the largest and most strongly fortified castles in Scotland' (Dunbar & Duncan 1971: 14). While correct, this calculation is based on the total area encompassed within the walls of the Inner and Outer Baileys, however, given the steep rocky nature of much of the rest of the internal area within, the extent of its usable space is considerably lower (see Illus. 4). It is then within either the Inner Bailey or within the more level ground of the Outer Bailey that the location of the buildings mentioned in the exchequer roll, including the hall, chapel, kitchen, brewhouse, granary, and smith's workshops for example might be identified. The confirmed presence of an entrance gate on this northeast side of the castle might justifiably focus more attention on this area of the Outer Bailey particularly the area lying immediately to the southwest of this gate where there is a strip of relatively level ground some of which is currently occupied by the linear remains of 19th century outbuildings and as such this is an area worthy of closer examination by geophysical survey.

It is also perhaps not too much of a stretch of the imagination to equate the entry 'making a house anew in the island' in the exchequer roll with a building identified on Eilean Da Ghallagain at the head of West Loch Tarbert (Canmore ID 39336). In May 1455, John, lord of the Isles is found on '*Cleandaghallagan in Knapadal*' granting a charter to Paisley Abbey (Munro & Munro 1986: 86). The signing of the charter presumably took place within some form of building on the island and the RCAHMS has recorded a building with 'unexpectedly substantial' footings not typical of later agricultural buildings and has suggested the building may have been used in connection with the nearby anchorages (RCAHMS 1992: no. 141, 303). If the structure on Eilean Da Ghallagain can be identified with the 'house anew in the island' then this and the peel along with the castle might be an overall scheme for the control and protection for an anchorage and the road, or route over the isthmus.

As mentioned above, when Tarbert actually became a Royal Burgh is open to question but it is referred to as such in an exchequer roll of 1328 where a charge of seven shillings and eight pence is recorded for '*Et pro factura unius cokete at un Burgum de Tarbard*', the making of a coket (a customs seal) for the Burgh of Tarbert, to have the right to custom a levy on goods imported and exported through the port of Tarbert. Expectation

of the expansion of trade within the new burgh can perhaps also be seen the following year when the purchase of two more customs seals is recorded in the exchequer roll (Stuart & Burnett 1875: 118, 175). Whether Robert I ever intended Tarbert Castle to be the base for a new sheriffdom of Argyll is open to question. Dunbar and Duncan have argued that a new sheriffdom of Argyll, possibly recreating the 1293 administrative ordinances of John Balliol, was established sometime between 1318, before which time Argyll was in the sheriffdom of Perth and 1325–26 when Dougall Campbell is named in the exchequer rolls as sheriff of Argyll (*vicecomitatus Ergadie*) (Stuart & Burnett 1875: 52; Dunbar & Duncan 1971: 14). They also argue that the sheriff was possibly based at Dunoon with Tarbert and Dunstaffnage as dependent constabularies. Others have suggested that Tarbert was the base of the new sheriff, however, again this must remain speculation without firm documentary evidence as to where any sheriff was based during this time (Boardman 2006: 45).

The King's concern establishing a strong crown presence on the west coast and influencing affairs in the Islands and in Ireland are underlined, by his interventions in Ireland in 1327 and 1328 when he used his new castle as a base (Nicholson 2002: 145–61; Barrow 2013: 408; Penman 2018: 217). Robert I's continued concern for the stability of the west is underlined by the specific clause in the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton which was concluded by May 1328, which stated that the Scots would not support England's enemies in Ireland while in return the English would not aid the enemies of the Scots in the Isle of Man and the other Isles of Scotland (…*Auxint est il tretee et acordee qe si nul leue de guerre contre lauandit Roi Descoce ses heirs ou ses successors en lisle de Manne ou es autres illes Descoce*…) (Stones 1970: 334–5; *Duncan 1988:* nos. 342, 593). In the second half of November 1328, King Robert was again at Tarbert Castle and likely stayed there for up to a month during which time he received the resignation of Argyll lands in the presence of the Barons of Argyll (*Duncan 1988:* nos. 156, 366, 617). The exchequer rolls of 1328–1329 list various revenues and expenses relating to Tarbert Castle and its constable, John de Lany, and the new Burgh such as bringing Patrick the fool from England to Tarbert, no doubt to entertain King Robert and his noble entourage. The King's ship also had to be brought back from Tarbert by John, son of Gun. The castle was also supplied with provisions of grain some of which were stored in a granary (*granario*), while William Scot receives a payment for finishing the Park (*parci del Tarbard*) (Stuart & Burnett 1878: 127, 153, 175, 184, 187, 188, 193, 201, 207, 213, 223, 237, 239, 287).

As has been argued previously, Robert I's construction of Tarbert Castle can be seen as a major part of consolidating and improving his western defences which created a bulwark of crown influence along his western seaboard, whether against new threats from Edward III, influencing events in Ulster/Ireland while also countering the growing MacDonald/ MacRuairi animosity towards the crown. While King Robert's building work at Tarbert may have started by 1315 it seems more likely any construction began when the political and perhaps financial situation allowed, perhaps after the Treaty of Bishopsthorpe in 1323.

Apart from the 8th century date retrieved from soil under the present walls of the castle, there is presently no firm evidence for occupation or indeed structures dating to before Robert I's time, and the construction of Tarbert Castle should be framed within the political reality of his time as suggested by the surviving historical sources. It is argued here that until any evidence to the contrary is forthcoming, it is unnecessary to insert a castle at Tarbert Castle into an earlier historical narrative. Indeed, historical works earlier than either the MacGibbon and Ross description of Tarbert Castle or Dunbar and Duncan's essay had no issue with stating that the castle was a creation of Robert I (Innes 1854: 32; Stuart & Burnett 1880: lxxi).

While Dunbar and Duncan's historiography of Tarbert Castle has been re-examined and questioned there appears no reason to dispute their concluding paragraph:

> 'When King Robert in something like a decade created so flourishing a community at Tarbert, he had in mind the need to bind the whole western seaboard to the rest of the kingdom by ties of trade, by shared prosperity, as well as by a strong fortress and by the sherriff's wand and summons' (Dunbar & Duncan 1971: 16).

Over 350 years later, in 1685 during the rebellion of Archibald Campbell, Earl of Argyll, he ordered his troops to gather at Tarbert, which Robert Wodrow narrating these events described as a 'very centrical place' a description that would have been familiar to Robert I who understood its strategic position as being an integral part of the crown's political and military settlement securing the western flank of his kingdom (Burns 1832: 290). Both the 16th century *Holinshed Chronicle* and *Buchanan's History* narrate similar accounts of the death of Robert I, who aware his life was ending, advised the councillors of his young son and heir to make sure that the Western Isles be kept under royal control and make sure they did not unite under one leader, the islanders being numerous, hardy, ferocious, and easily moved to rebellion and could cause 'very extensive mischief' (Ellis et al 1808: 361; Aikman 1827: 444–5). In this respect Robert I was right as his successors failed to prevent the rise to the MacDonald lordship of the Isles which was to remain a thorn in the crown's side until its ultimate demise in the late 15th century when Tarbert Castle was once again utilised as a royal base in the crown's campaign against that turbulent lordship.

The evidence from the excavations within the Inner Bailey and Outer Bailey of Tarbert Castle show that the medieval occupation deposits were sealed by an extensive deposit of rubble, which likely formed rapidly sometime before the late 15th century. In 1494, as mentioned above, James IV personally led a military campaign to the Western Isles and appears to have visited Tarbert Castle twice, whereupon he ordered the repair or the '*biggin*' the castle. Essentially James IV's settlement in Knapdale and Kintyre reflected that of Robert Bruce, whereby various strongholds were utilised against a western threat, in this case that posed by Clan Donald South, with royal garrisons installed at Skipness and Dunaverty while Tarbert was repaired, and a new castle built at Kilkerran (Boardman 2006: 268). By this time, it may be that the Inner Bailey was extensively abandoned, and its walls may have provided some of the material for the building of the Tower House. The *Origines parochiales* states that the castle may never have been completed after Bruce's reign. Presumably this statement is based on the repeated phrase used in crown charters (from 1505) giving the custody of the Tarbert Castle to the Campbell family 'when it shall be built' *(custodia castri de Tarbart cum edificatum foret* or *cum custodia castri de Terbert cum edificari contingeret*) (Innes 1854: 35; *RCHM 1874*: 239, 485; Paul 1883: 348, 78–9 and 2306, 527; Thomson 1886: 2017, 525; 1888: 25, 9; 1890: 265, 97). This may just be a repeated legal convention used across charters although there may be some validity in that argument, particularly when looking at the rather incongruous rock outcrop that still dominates the central area of the Inner Bailey and which surely would not have been beyond the ability of medieval or later quarriers or masons to have either removed or flattened. After the construction of the Tower House this edifice became the centre for any resident constable and their garrison, with later outworks perhaps added in the 17th century. As mentioned above some post medieval structures were also constructed within the Inner Bailey reflecting this later use of the castle, although whether they were garrison related is open to question. The excavation results indicate that the medieval occupation deposits within the castle remain largely unaffected by this later activity and extensive wall robbing, protected it seems by deposits of rubble collapse. If such well-preserved medieval deposits survive within the other parts of the site, then Tarbert Castle provides a unique opportunity for further excavation to gain a fuller understanding of the construction, function, and material culture of a major Scottish royal fortress of the 14th century.