The Scottish medieval towerhouse as lordly residence in the light of recent excavation

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ABSTRACT
Excavations at Threave and Smailholm argue against the conventional model of the free-standing and self-contained towerhouse by demonstrating the presence alongside of additional residential and service buildings. Analysis of the floor areas of three Douglas towerhouses (Threave, Newark and Hermitage) shows the accommodation within the towerhouse to have been inadequate for the needs of the Douglas family.

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Despite recent dramatisations (ahem Blackadder) the hygiene of peasants was not as bad as is commonly supposed. In fact, there is considerable evidence that most medieval people tried to keep themselves clean. The evidence also suggests that most people washed and changed their clothes quite frequently. The strips in the first field would have been used to cultivate grains in order to pay their dues to the Lord of the Manor and the strips on the second field would have been used to grow barley and legumes for personal consumption. In addition to their strips, each villager would have had a small vegetable garden close to his house to grow vegetables for his family. The medieval tower was built as a private fortress by William Calder, 6th Thane of Cawdor (orig. Calder) in 1454. Although Shakespeare’s Macbeth is titled Thane of Cawdor, the current castle was built centuries after the life of the 11th century King Macbeth. Originally built as a tower house in the late 14th century by John de Crichton as his family residence, it later became home to the Earls of Bothwell who added the stunning 16th century courtyard facade. Restricted opening times and entrance charges apply. One of the oldest tower houses in Scotland, the castle and grounds were granted to William de Irwyn by Robert the Bruce in 1325. The original tower was transformed in 1619 when the then laird, Alexander Irvine added the Jacobean mansion. Hermitage was one of the main residences of one of the most powerful families in medieval Scotland, the Douglases; beyond its strategic significance it provided a large amount of residential accommodation, helping its owners’ to project and display their power across southern Scotland. Contextual Characteristics. Hermitage Castle is rare for its level of completeness and distinctive design and has been described as the ‘most perfect of the medieval castles on