

A clan divided between the Blacks and the Reds. Even though they were tied by blood, these two great branches of the Douglases finally fought each other to the death. When the might of the Black Douglases was shattered, their kin rose to become some of the most powerful men in the land.



# THE BLACK DOUGLASES

HELD ENORMOUS POWER  
IN MEDIEVAL SCOTLAND AND  
WERE FEARED BY THOSE  
LOYAL TO THE KING

Douglas Clan tartan

Aberdour Castle



Edinburgh Castle



## DOUGLAS SITES

The castles of Lochleven and Aberdour are pretty places, the one set on an island in a loch and the other amidst pleasant grounds.

Both were of great importance to one of the mightiest Red Douglases – James, Earl of Morton and Regent of Scotland from 1572 to 1578.

Regent Morton created lovely new terraced gardens at Aberdour, showing them off to the greatest men in the land when he hosted a meeting of the Privy Council there.

In an age when politics involved violence as well as guile, his career involved the shedding of blood.

He was found guilty of involvement in the murder of Lord Darnley, husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, and before his execution in 1580 was held at Lochleven Castle.

There he passed the time by planning layouts for gardens.

Edinburgh and Stirling castles also have their places in the history of the Black Douglases, the branch of the clan which held enormous power in medieval Scotland.

Their strength caused fear among loyalists to the royal family.

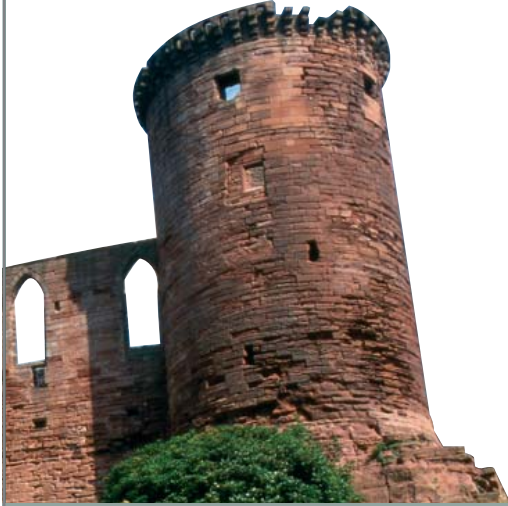
The young William, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Douglas, was executed at Edinburgh in 1440 after the Black Dinner – where the head of a black bull, a traditional symbol of death, was placed on the banqueting table.

A dozen years later King James II personally murdered the 8th earl at Stirling Castle and went on to destroy the power of the Black Douglases.

This involved a series of sieges and battles with the final showdown coming in 1455 at the island fortress of Threave.

Even though James II brought in his most powerful artillery the siege lasted for more than two months before the garrison finally surrendered.

The clan was far from finished and another branch, the Red Douglases continued to thrive, inheriting castles like Bothwell and Douglas from their Black kin.



Bothwell Castle

### THE BLACK AND RED DOUGLASES

The clan's senior line were the Black Douglases and the junior one, Red Douglases.

From their rise to power during the Wars of Independence until their fall 150 years later, the Black Douglases were embroiled in conflict.

The Red Douglases, who began as Earls of Angus, led James II's army against their Black Douglas kin at Arkinholm in 1455.

However, in 1491 Archibald, the 5<sup>th</sup> earl, entered a treasonable pact with Henry VII of England, and was besieged by James IV at Tantallon Castle.

The family was later important in the 1689 expulsion of the Stuart dynasty from Britain with James, Earl of Angus and Marquis of Douglas, supporting William of Orange.

### NOTABLE DOUGLASES

A giant, a great warrior, wise and generous to his friends – but illegitimate.

Archibald 'the Grim' Douglas overcame this huge obstacle to make his mark on history.

Born around 1320, he was effectively the founder of the Black Douglas line.

Archibald climbed to the pinnacle of Scottish nobility as Lord of Galloway and Earl of Douglas, controlling vast estates and with Bothwell Castle as his favourite residence. He also built Threave Castle as his chief stronghold in Galloway.

In the 1380s he helped recapture Lochmaben Castle from the English.

The chronicler Walter Bower claimed Archibald 'surpassed almost all other Scots ... in worldly wisdom, resolution and daring'.



Threave Castle



Tantallon Castle

## MUCH OF HIS LATER LIFE WAS INVOLVED IN POLITICAL INTRIGUES

### THE GREAT POET

Tantallon Castle was the likely birthplace of the great medieval poet Gavin Douglas (c.1476–1522).

As a younger son of Archibald 'Bell-the-Cat' Douglas, he was unlikely to inherit his father's earldom of Angus so entered the church, becoming bishop of Dunkeld.

Gavin's surviving poetry is from his younger days and includes "*The Palice of Honour*."

Douglas's greatest work was the "*Eneados*," a careful translation of Virgil's Aeneid, completed in 1513 shortly before the king and many nobles and clerics were killed at the calamitous Battle of Flodden.

Much of his later life was involved in political intrigues and advancing his career, at a time when bishoprics could be vigorously contested.

On arriving at Dunkeld, after Bishop Brown died in 1515, a rival's supporters began shooting from the cathedral steeple and the episcopal palace. Nonetheless Gavin was unscathed and went on to enjoy being in charge of "*a rycht gust Byschopry of rent and they thyrd Seyt of realm*"



# DOUGLAS SITES

## 1 **Aberdour Castle:**

Aberdour passed to Sir William Douglas, 'the flower of Chivalry', in 1342. James Douglas, earl of Morton, became Regent, ruler of Scotland in 1572, and built the terrace garden and part of the castle.

## 2 **Balvenie Castle:**

Parts were built by the Douglases between c1400 and 1455.

## 3 **Bannockburn:**

Sir James Douglas pursued the English from the battlefield as far as Dunbar.

## 4 **Bishop's & Earl's Palaces, Kirkwall:**

William 7th earl of Morton was given a mortgage of the islands by Charles I in 1643.

## 5 **Bothwell Castle:**

The favourite residence of Archibald the Grim 3rd Earl of Douglas who acquired the castle in 1362.

## 6 **Claypotts Castle:**

Claypotts was given to the 2nd Marquess of Douglas in 1694.

## 7 **Drumlanrig Castle:**

Built in the 17th century by William Douglas, the 1st Duke of Buccleuch, on the site of an ancient stronghold of the Douglases.

## 8 **Edinburgh Castle:**

King James II had William Douglas, 6th earl of Douglas, murdered at the castle in 1440.

## 9 **Falls of Glomach:**

Donor of land.

## 10 **Hermitage Castle:**

Owned by the Black and Red Douglases, until James IV swapped it for Bothwell Castle near Lanarkshire.

## 11 **Lincluden Collegiate Church:**

Founded by Archibald the Grim in 1389.

## 12 **Lochleven Castle:**

Lochleven was granted to Sir Henry Douglas in 1390.

## 13 **Lochmaben Castle:**

Besieged by Archibald earl of Douglas in 1385.

## 14 **Melrose Abbey:**

The heart of Robert the Bruce was carried to Spain by Sir James Douglas but later buried at Melrose.

## 15 **Morton Castle:**

Given by James II to James Douglas earl of Morton.

## 16 **Spynie Palace:**

An early Bishop of Moray Bricius de Douglas was the first to move to Spynie in 1206.

## 17 **St Brides Church:**

The church holds Douglas memorials including the tomb of Good Sir James Douglas who died in 1330.

## 18 **Stirling Castle:**

William 8th earl of Douglas was murdered here in 1452 and his body thrown out of the window.

## 19 **Sweetheart Abbey:**

The abbey came under the protection of Lord Maxwell after the Battle of Flodden in 1513. The family saved the buildings from destruction at the Protestant Reformation in 1560.

## 20 **Tantallon Castle:**

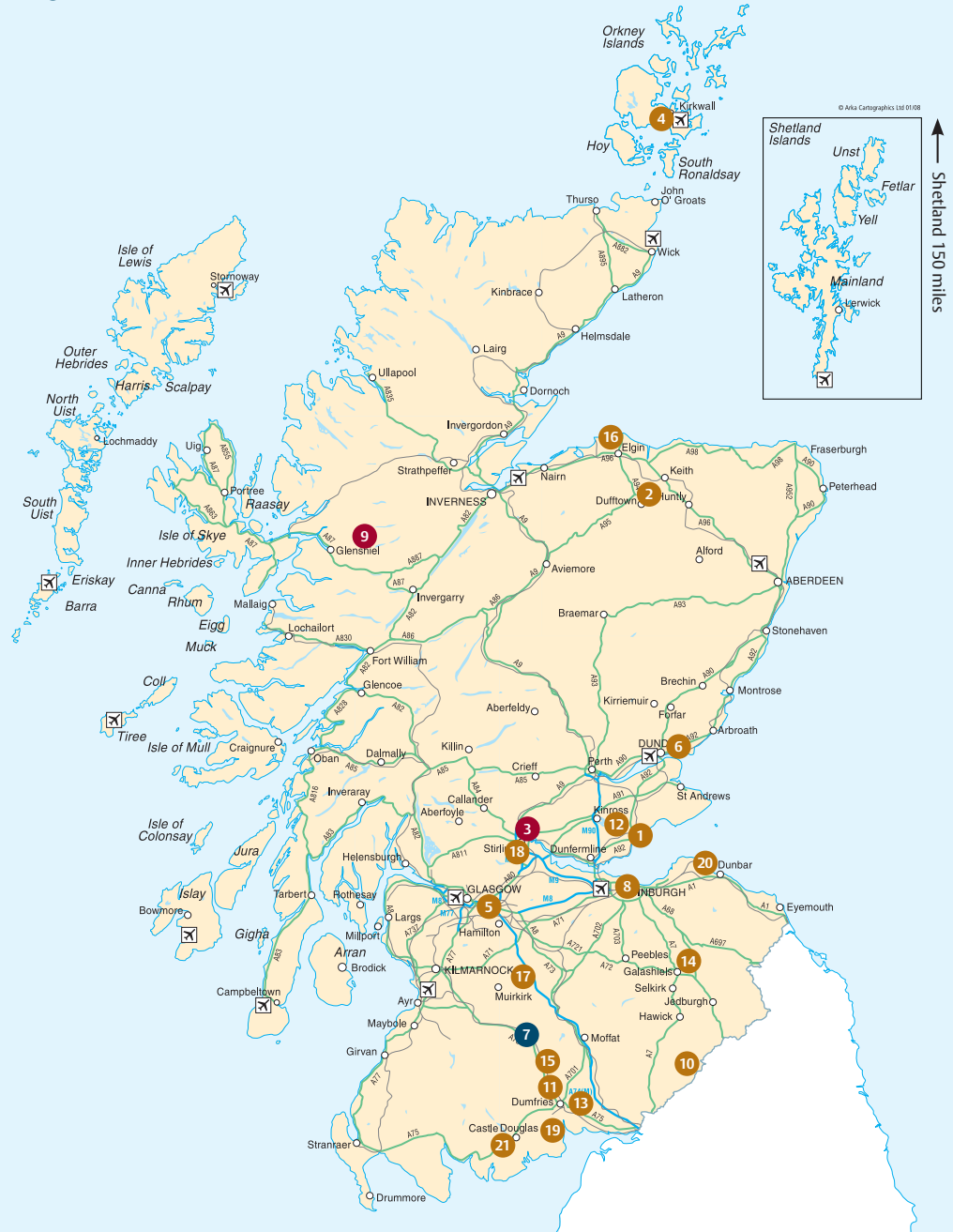
The Red Douglas earl of Angus defeated a siege by king's forces in 1528.

## 21 **Threave Castle:**

The last stronghold of the Black Douglases, it fell to royal forces in 1455.

### Key to sites

- Historic Scotland
- National Trust Scotland
- Historic Houses Association



Bothwell Castle

Bannockburn

Sweetheart Abbey

