

Grim realities

Archibald Douglas

c.1320-1400

Illegitimate children often got a raw deal in Medieval Scotland, even sons of noblemen.

Accident of birth meant Archibald Douglas was destined not to inherit any of the lands of his father Sir James, Lord of Douglas.

Yet opportunities did exist for young men of his status who proved themselves in other ways.

Despite once being captured by the English, Archibald became an exceptional warrior who was highly favoured by King David II.

Known as Archibald 'the Grim', he was a giant of a man.

The monarch even helped him win a bride, Joanna Murray, who brought with her huge tracts of land that transformed him into a major magnate.

Such was his reputation that France paid him a war pension and he led French troops in a successful raid on Carlisle.

Among his military achievements was the recapture of Lochmaben Castle which meant the English lost their final bastion in the south west.

As lord of Galloway, Archibald stamped his authority across a large region and was rich enough to buy the earldom of Wigton. He also became earl of Douglas.

And unlike many nobles, his influence endured beyond his lifetime.

The castles Archibald built at Threave set the fashion for generations of wealthy landowners.

As effective founder of the Black Douglas side of the family, he fathered a kindred which wielded great power across the kingdom.

- Read the Oxford DNB biography here: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/7861.html>.