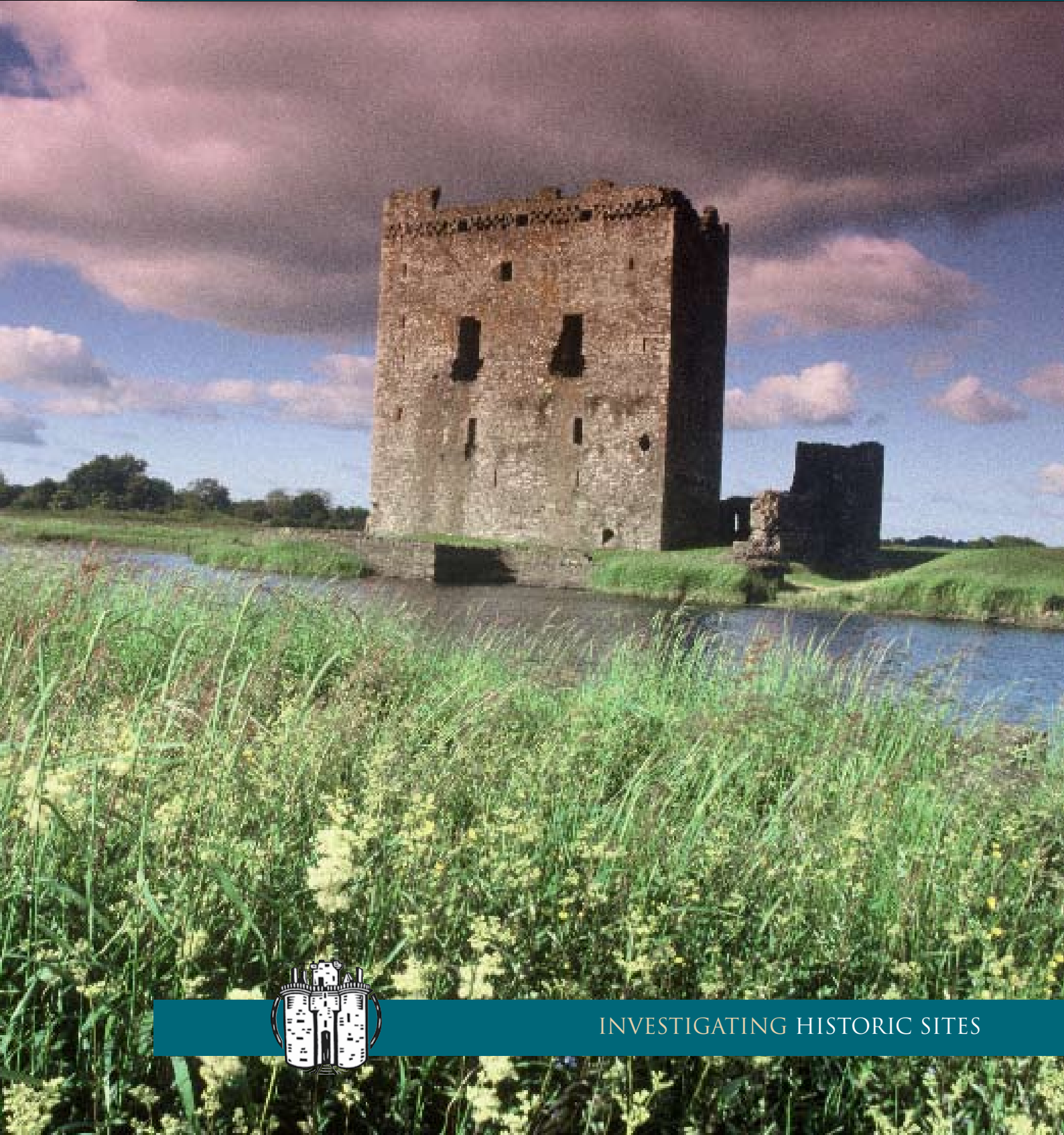




The mighty tower of Threave Castle lies on an island in the River Dee. Today it is a peaceful place, giving little hint of its turbulent past and key role in medieval Scotland.

INVESTIGATING THREAVE CASTLE

Information for Teachers





Timeline

1000s Island the residence of Fergus, lord of Galloway

1308 Residence burned by Robert the Bruce's brother

1369 Threave built for Archibald 'the Grim' Douglas, lord of Galloway

1400 'The Grim' dies

1447 New fortifications built

1452 James II murders 8th earl of Douglas at Stirling

1455 James II besieges Threave for two months; garrison bribed to surrender; Threave annexed to Crown

1460 James II killed at siege of Roxburgh Castle

1473 James III presents castle to his wife, Queen Margaret

1502 James IV visits

1526 Lord Maxwell becomes keeper of Threave

1640 Threave besieged by Covenanters; surrendered after 13 weeks

1913 Threave taken into state care

The mighty tower of Threave Castle lies on an island in the River Dee. Today it is a peaceful place, giving little hint of its turbulent past and key role in medieval Scotland. Pupils will enjoy the walk through farmland, the boat trip across the river and the chance to explore the castle tower.

Historical background

The defensive advantages of an island are obvious and it is likely that Threave island was inhabited from early times. The name Threave comes from an Old Welsh word meaning homestead, perhaps dating habitation here to the 6th century, when Welsh was the language spoken locally.

Traditionally this is where Fergus, lord of Galloway had his residence in the 11th century. This building was destroyed by the brother of Robert the Bruce in 1308 after he defeated one of Fergus' descendants in battle nearby.

In 1369 Archibald 'the Grim', lord of Galloway and later 3rd earl of Douglas built Threave Castle as his strong and defensive headquarters. However, he spent little time here, much of his time taken up with attendance at court and parliament.

The 'Black' Douglas family, powerful and ambitious, came into conflict with the monarchs of the time. After James II murdered the 8th earl at Stirling, the 9th earl vowed to seek revenge. In 1447 the defences at Threave had been fortified with a new artillery house, one of the first purpose-built gun defences in the British Isles. In 1455 their strength was tested.

After attacking all other major Douglas strongholds, in June 1455, James II and his army besieged Threave, his final target. The siege lasted for over two months until the garrison was finally bribed to surrender. After this the castle became Crown property.

In the 16th century the Maxwell family was made keeper of the castle. Their staunch Catholicism was seen as suspicious in the post-Reformation years and in 1639 the castle was once again besieged by forces of Covenanters, after Maxwell declared his support for Charles I. Threave held out for 13 weeks, until Charles I himself authorised the surrender.

Since that time the castle has not been inhabited. It was taken into state care in 1913.



Supporting learning and teaching

A visit to **Threave Castle** is particularly appropriate for teachers working on class study topics such as:

- **The Middle Ages**
- **Castles**

The **Curriculum for Excellence** aspires to motivate and challenge pupils through a wide range of varied learning experiences. Site visits have a particular role to play in joining up learning outcomes across the curriculum. A visit, and use of the supporting materials, will help to:

- **develop successful learners** by challenging pupils to consider how life has changed for people. It will help them to think critically about evidence and arrive at their own conclusions.
- **develop confident individuals.** Pupils will learn about aspects of their community's past, develop an understanding of social changes, establish some of their own values and communicate their views on different historical and social issues.
- **develop responsible citizens.** It will help to increase pupils' social and historical knowledge and understanding and encourage greater respect for their own historic and built environment.
- **develop effective contributors** by broadening pupils' knowledge and understanding through investigative, creative and critical thinking.

Before the visit

- It is helpful if pupils have some of the architectural terminology of castles as this makes discussion on site easier. Words particularly relevant to Threave might include: **battlement, spiral stair, latrine closet, gun loops, arrow slits.** Other useful words are: **artillery, ammunition, garrison, siege.** Pupils could produce an illustrated class dictionary to explain these and other terms.
- Without going into too much detail, it is worth discussing the Douglas family and how they provided a threat to the king.
- Help pupils gain a clearer grasp of the time scale by making a time line with them, counting back the centuries and then marking on key events in the history of the castle. This could be added to after the visit.
- Discuss the organisation of life in a castle. Pupils could investigate the roles of the key castle 'managers': **steward, constable or keeper, marshal and chaplain.** Further details of this can be found in the Historic Scotland publication *Investigating Medieval Castles in Scotland.*
- There is plenty of good evidence on site relating to defending and attacking castles. Discuss with pupils the range of ways that castles could be attacked and defended.
- Some children find it hard to grasp that a castle was ever anything other than a ruin. Discuss how wind and weather can affect the look of a building as well as the many deliberate changes that people choose to make to buildings as their use evolves.

Working on site

When exploring the castle, in addition to our suggestions for discussion, pupils should be encouraged to look critically at what they see and to make and test theories based on physical evidence. Some general starting points could include:

- What materials were used to build the castle? Why were these materials chosen? Are there any materials which might have rotted away or been stolen since then?
- Do you think this room has always looked like this? Can you see anywhere it has been altered? Why might it have been changed?
- What evidence is there for everyday life?

Pupils can record evidence by taking notes, sketching, taking photographs, recording impressions into a tape recorder.

On the Historic Scotland website: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/education_unit teachers can find additional resources to help with work on site. These include compiling an Evidence Record and a My Impressions Record.

Suggestions for follow-up work

Following the visit pupils can pool their findings in groups to create a fuller record of the castle. This could form the basis for a range of presentation activities, for example:

- A guide book or leaflet for future visitors.
- A slide show with commentary.
- Imaginative writing based on the lives of the people who lived or worked at the castle – even a prisoner.
- A series of drama sketches showing snapshots of life in the castle through the ages.



On the trail of the Black Douglases

Our suggested tour route guides you and your pupils around the site at Threave. After the introduction, it doesn't really matter on the order in which you visit the locations, so you may prefer to split your class into groups and start at different points.

After crossing the river and checking in with the steward, we suggest you visit these locations, marked on the plan to the right:

1. Introduction: Outside the Castle
2. Outside the Tower
3. The Tower Entrance
4. The Kitchen and Cellar
5. The Hall
6. The Artillery Tower
7. The Harbour

Background information is given in the pack for each location. It is written in simple language so that it can be read aloud to pupils if desired. Also included are suggested questions for discussion.

Allow about an hour for the tour.

Plan of Threave Castle



Based on drawing on pp4/5 of plan, but with my numbers rather than theirs, plus ferry route and kiosk marked.

Reconstruction drawing of tower house

Cut-away reconstruction drawing of tower house, as on pp8-9 of guidebook, with labels



Did you know...

The Douglas family were close allies of Robert the Bruce. After he died, Archibald the Grim's father, the 'Good Sir James' Douglas was given the task of taking Robert's heart on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. That's why they have a heart on their shield.



Threave from the ticket kiosk



Arms of Archibald the Grim

Tour notes: On the trail of the Black Douglases

Leave the coach in the carpark. Walk along a well-surfaced path for about half a mile until it comes out at the River Dee. Ring a brass bell hanging by the river, which will summon a small boat from the island. After everyone has crossed, check in with the site steward at the ticket kiosk.

Stand beside the information board closest to the kiosk.

Location 1: Outside the Castle

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- This castle was built more than 600 ago for a man called Archibald Douglas. He was the lord of Galloway but was known to his enemies as Archibald the Grim and to his friends as Lord Douglas.
- When the castle was first built, several things would have looked a bit different. The river was much higher then, so the island would have been smaller.
- There used to be lots of other buildings as well as the stone tower house. These were where all the servants lived and worked, and where guests stayed. There was probably a big hall here too, used for formal events. We know about these buildings because archaeologists did a lot of work here, and found lots of objects and the foundations of buildings.
- These buildings were pulled down in the 1440s when the castle was in danger of being attacked, so that the defenders could have a clear view of the enemy. They used the stone from these buildings to build the extra walls to defend the castle.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Why do you think Archibald the Grim thought that this was a good place for a castle?	Easy to get to – river used as transport. Easy to defend – on island, harder for people to attack. Flat all around – easy to see if enemy is heading your way.
Look at the picture on the left of the panel. This is what historians think the castle looked like in 1400. Compare it with what you can see today. What is the same? What has changed?	There is still an island, a tower house, a river. Tower has no roof. Other buildings no longer there. River level is lower so island is bigger. A stone wall has been built around the tower, which is still there.
Can you see any signs today of the other buildings?	Some uneven humps and bumps where buildings used to be.

Go and stand closer to the tower, just to the right of the round defensive wall tower, close to another big information panel showing a cross-section



Did you know...

One method of attacking castles was to climb the walls with huge portable ladders. At Threave the defenders would have used the wooden platform at the top to drop things on to anyone who tried to climb up.



The tower house and artillery tower



Top of tower showing holes for timber platform

Location 2: Outside the Tower

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- This is where Archibald the Grim and his close family lived for some of the time. He was an important politician, so he was often away at Parliament or dealing with business friends or fighting the English.
- The wall around the tower was added about 50 years after Archibald the Grim died, in the 1450s. The earl of Douglas wanted to defend the castle even more strongly against his enemy, James II, King of Scotland. We'll look more closely at this wall later.
- At the top of the tower house there used to be a special wooden fighting platform. The defenders would stand on it to attack the enemies who were trying to climb the walls.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
The tower is as tall as a 10-storey block of flats today. Can you work out how many floors it had?	5
Why do you think there are so few windows this side?	Windows make a wall weaker.
Look at the top of the tower. Can you see any signs of where the wooden fighting platform used to be?	You can see three rows of square holes at the top of the east face of the tower, which is where supporting poles used to be.
Look at the drawing on the picture to see what we think it used to look like.	
Look at the top of the tower. At one of the corners, you can see the shape of a door. Why did they need a doorway so high up?	Probably used for hauling heavy guns up to the fighting platform.
How many ways can you see that this castle was defended?	On an island – hard to get to. Tower strongly built out of stone – difficult to knock down or burn. Tall tower – can see enemy coming. Wooden fighting platform – can attack invaders. Wall around it with gunholes and arrowslits – can fight off enemy from a distance.
How would you have attacked this castle?	Pupils' own ideas.

Go and stand on the wooden bridge to go into the castle.



Did you know...

Archibald the Grim had four key servants. The Steward was in charge of all the servants, the Constable was in charge of security, the Marshal was in charge of all transport and communication and the Chaplain dealt with religious matters and also wrote any letters. Each of these people had their own team of workers. In some castles there were as many as 150 servants!



Outer entrance and drawbridge



View to defensive wall from entrance

Location 3: The Entrance

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- The Douglas family had lots of enemies. Even when there wasn't a battle going on, the castle was very closely guarded. Security was very tight.
- If you were allowed on to the island, you still had to go through more checks before you were allowed into the castle. The drawbridge would be kept raised until you were checked out. Then it would be lowered and you could cross a ditch and go through behind the wall.
- Then you'd be checked again before you were allowed into the tower house itself.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
What do you think would have been in the ditch?	Water, sludge, muck from the toilets.
The bridge that you are crossing is a modern one. Can you see where the old drawbridge would have been pulled up tightly?	You can see the inset shape in the wall showing where the bridge would have slotted in.
Above the doorway there is a small window. What do you think this was for?	Guards would attack you from here with guns or arrows, if they thought you were dangerous.

Go through the gateway and stand looking at the tower.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Look at where the doorway is into the tower. The steps we can see are modern. How do you think Archibald the Grim would have climbed up there?	Probably a moveable staircase, like a very big ladder was brought for him to climb up. got up there?
The doorway we can see wasn't always this shape and size. It used to be bigger. Can you see any signs of where the original doorway was?	Semicircular archway further up is where top of door used to be.
How many different entrances did you have to get through if you wanted to visit Archibald the Grim?	On to bridge, through stone archway, through door, on to stair, through doorway into castle.

Go through the archways into the castle. Go down some steps so that you are standing on the ground floor.



Did you know...

Some fireplaces at this time were so big that they had a special space for a boy to stand. His job was to turn the spit that roasted meat over the fire. He was known as the **turnbrochie**. Would you have liked this job?



Kitchen area showing fireplace and well



Alcove with drain

Location 5: The Kitchen and Cellar

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- We're now standing on the ground floor of the castle. This used to be the cellars. The kitchen used to be on the next floor, but the floor has rotted away now.
- Look for the well. This was the supply of fresh water for the castle.
- The cellars were used to keep the food cool and dark, so that it lasted longer.
- You can also see a model of a siege at Threave, which happened in 1455. **Can you see the tent belonging to James II?** The siege lasted two months.

Teacher prompts

Desired pupil responses

Why was it handy to have the well right inside the castle?

If the castle was under siege you could still get water.

What was the water used for?

Same uses as today – washing, cooking

Can you find where they would have poured the dirty water away?

Arched stone alcove with drain on wall to right of well.

The cellars were used to keep supplies of food. Where would Archibald the Grim and his family get food from?

Fish from river or sea.
Deer, birds and rabbits from woods.
Sheep and cattle; pigs from tenants.
Vegetables, herbs and fruit from gardens.
Wheat and oats for flour from farms.
Milk and dairy produce from farms.

What foods do we have today that they would not have been able to have?

Not available – tropical fruit and vegetables such as bananas, pineapples, mango, avocado, tomatoes; potatoes not yet brought over to Europe (so no crisps, chips)
Pizza, chocolate, limited access to sugar.

Why did they not have them?

Some of these items originally came from the Americas; no regular trade with the Americas yet.

Continued on the next page...



Did you know...

The richer you were, the better your prison! Very rich criminals were often kept in very comfortable surroundings.

Can you see where the ceiling of the cellar area used to be?

It was the floor for the kitchen.

Look up to where the old kitchen used to be.

Can you see anything which shows us how the cook would cook the food?

How could food be cooked over the fire?

Can you see a kitchen cupboard anywhere?

Big solid squarish holes in walls all around where beams used to slot into.

Huge fireplace and chimney very obvious.

Boiled in a cauldron over the fire. Roasted on a spit over the fire. Perhaps baked in an oven next to the fire.

Square alcove in the wall above the steps.



Wall showing cupboard

Turn to go up the steps to the next floor. As you go, you'll pass the entrance to the pit prison.

- This was where local criminals or enemies of the Douglas family would be locked up. Check to see if there are any prisoners still there today...[there is a model of a prisoner, which you can just see if you look carefully].



Prisoner in the cell



The hall, with fireplace



Window in hall

Location 5: The Hall

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- There used to be two halls at Threave. There used to be a much bigger hall in one of the buildings that was pulled down before the siege. It was used for really grand feasts and entertainment. This was the Lord's hall, where the Douglas family would have had private feasts and parties. You will have to try and rebuild it in your imaginations.
- In the old days the walls would have been covered in plaster, like walls at home today. The plaster walls would have been decorated with coloured wallhangings, which also helped keep the hall warm. The ceiling would have been brightly painted. There would have been rushes or mats on the floor. Silver dishes on display would sparkle in the light of the candles and the room would have been warmed by an enormous fire.
- In the day time the hall would be lit by sunshine streaming in through the glass in the windows. At night time there would have been oil lamps attached to the walls and flaming candles held by servants.
- Sometimes there would be feasts here. The servants would carry in long tables. Lord Douglas would sit at the head table, and his guests would sit on benches at other tables. The meal would have lots of courses and there would be music and entertainers performing as the guests ate. Lord Douglas would eat off silver plates but his guests would use wooden platters or even slabs of bread as plates. Dogs would lurk under the tables, hoping to be thrown scraps.
- There used to be two more floors above this one. The one above was where the Douglas family had their private rooms. **Can you see fireplaces and window seats on that floor?** The floor above that was probably where the servants slept in peacetime, and where soldiers would stay during battles.

Teacher prompts

Where do you think Lord Douglas would sit at feasts?

Do you think the cooks would use this fireplace for cooking?

Look at the windows. Can you see holes either side of the windows?

What do you think they were for?

The Douglases were quite modern and had toilets on every floor. The toilets were called latrines. Can you find the latrine in the hall?

Where do you think they would have emptied?

Desired pupil responses

At the end of the hall closest to fire.

No, this fire was for warmth and light.

Smaller ones for bars across windows.

Larger ones for wooden shutters.

Through narrow doorway in far south-west corner.

Emptied down chute into moat at bottom of castle.

Go back down the stairs and out of the tower house. Be careful – these stairs will feel much darker than on the way up, because your eyes will not be used to the dim light.

Don't cross the drawbridge - turn right along the inside of the wall and stand beside the round artillery tower.



Did you know...

James II ordered his men to bring huge cannons from one of his palaces to attack Threave. Unfortunately one of them was so heavy that it sank into a bog on the way!



The artillery tower and defensive wall



Inside the artillery tower

Location 5: The Artillery Tower

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- In Scotland in the 1400s people started using guns as well as bows and arrows to fight with. This changed how battles were organised. Bows and arrows were still used to try and kill people as well as smaller guns, but cannons with huge cannon balls were used to try and knock down buildings. The king of Scotland, James II, and Lord Douglas were both very interested in experimenting with guns – against each other.
- This tower was one of the very first towers built to defend a castle against a gun attack in the whole of Britain. It's called an artillery tower. The English king, Henry VI helped Lord Douglas pay for it, because he hoped it might be used against the Scottish king.
- There used to be three of these towers. As you go around the outside of the castle, try and spot the other two. They were damaged in another siege in the 1600s.
- The artillery tower was successful in helping the Douglasses fight off the attack from James II. But in the end James had to pay the Douglas soldiers to surrender – he bribed them and they gave in. After this the castle became a Crown property, owned by the king or queen of Scotland.

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
Look along the wall. Can you see where the archers with their bows and arrows would stand?	Tall vertical slits in wall.
There used to be a wooden walkway which the archers would stand on. Can you see any signs of this?	To the right of the tower you can see the course of the walkway along the wall.
How many floors did the artillery tower have?	3.
How do you think the defenders got up to the next levels?	Probably via the walkway – you can see a door at first floor level.
How many gun holes can you see?	6 gun holes.
How many different types of hole can you find?	Slits for arrows, keyhole shapes
Why were they different shapes?	for one type of gun, another shape for a second type of gun. Different shapes tell us that different types of weapon were all being used at the same time.
Imagine that a battle is taking place. Where would the soldiers in the castle be firing from?	From the three towers, along the wall, from the top of the tower house along the artillery platform.
Where do you think James II and his army would have been?	The other side of the river, perhaps on the small hill.

Follow the wall round till you come to the site of the harbour.



The harbour today



Remains of gun tower protecting harbour



Latrine outlet

Location 6: The Harbour

Background information for teachers. This can be read to pupils.

- This was the harbour where boats were kept. It used to have a guarded gateway across the entrance.
- Archaeologists have found a lot of objects in the mud at the bottom of the harbour. They found the remains of leather shoes, buckles, beads, pieces from games and a barrel full of gun stones. You can see some of these objects in the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, and there are pictures of them on a website. (see www.scran.ac.uk)

Teacher prompts	Desired pupil responses
What would the Douglases use the harbour for?	To bring supplies of food and ammunition to the island.
Can you see how the harbour was protected?	Remains of another circular guntower to the south of the harbour.
Look at the wall of the castle here. Can you find a chute [labelled Garderobe outlet] coming down to the ground? What do you think this was?	Latrine chute, carrying waste from latrines out to the river.
Look up at the castle wall from here. These windows are much bigger. Why do you think this is?	Castle unlikely to be attacked from this side because of the river.

As you leave by the drawbridge, look left to see the remnants of the third artillery tower.

This is the end of our suggested tour.



FAQ

Q What is the minimum number of adults required for supervision?

A 1 adult to 10 pupils

Q Is it possible to have a guided tour?

A Ask about this when booking.

Q Is there disabled access?

A Access to the castle involves a twenty minute walk along an accessible path through farmland. Wheelchairs can be carried on the boat across to the island. Sadly there is no wheelchair access to the internal parts of the castle.

Q Are there lunch facilities?

A Pupils can picnic outside or in poor weather can shelter in the castle.

Q Where are the toilets?

A There are toilets at the start of the walk to the castle; there are none on the island itself.

Q Do you carry out risk assessments on behalf of schools?

A Risk assessment of the site is the responsibility of the teacher in charge of the group. Hazard information sheets available on the Historic Scotland website provide information that can help teachers prepare their risk assessments.

Q Is there a shop?

A There is a small kiosk on the island that sells postcards, guidebooks and souvenirs.

Visiting Threave Castle

Pre visits: We strongly recommend that teachers make a free visit to the castle to familiarise themselves with the site and to make a risk assessment before bringing school parties.

Booking a visit: Phone **07711 223101** to book a visit, discuss your needs and confirm opening times with the Steward. The castle is open April-October.

Cost: Admission is free to a range of educational groups including school parties. More information about who qualifies for free visits can be found on the Historic Scotland Education Unit website (see below).

Location: On an island in the River Dee, 1 mile west of Castle Douglas. The island is reached by a short ferry ride after a twenty minute walk along a path through farmland from the car park.

Parking: There is a reasonable sized car park at Kelton Mains farm, 500m from the A75.

Health and safety: Please note the following:

- Pupils should be supervised at all times, particularly while on the ferry and when investigating the harbour close to the river.
- The land surrounding the castle is not only used for farming but is also a wildfowl reserve. Pupils should be encouraged to respect this.
- Pupils should not climb on the walls.
- As part of our commitment to Green Tourism, we ask that all litter be disposed of back at school.

Historic Scotland Education Unit:

For further information about school visits, activities and resources for teachers linked to **Threave Castle**, visit: www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

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Additional resources

For teachers:

Chris Tabraham *Threave Castle Historic Scotland 2005* The official guidebook and a particularly good one, giving further details on the architecture and history of the site.

Historic Scotland Education *Investigating Medieval Castles in Scotland* Historic Scotland 2005. An excellent booklet designed for teachers, with lots of background on castle life and suggestions for class activities.

Chris Tabraham *Scottish Castles and Fortifications* Historic Scotland 2000.

www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/castledouglas/threavecastle/index.html This site has some lovely photographs and a good historical overview.

A large number of objects have been found at the Threave site – buckles, beads, gaming pieces, gunstones, keys, spindle whorls etc. Many of these are on display in the **Museum of Scotland** in Edinburgh. If you are not able to visit the Museum, then many of them are shown on www.scran.co.uk. A chair associated with Threave can be seen at the Stewartry Museum in Kirkcudbright.

For pupils:

Deary, *Horrible Histories: Bloody Scotland*, Scholastic 1998.

Phil Roxbee Cox *What were Castles For?* Usborne Publishing Ltd 2002.

www.nationalgeographic.com/castles/enter.html Explore a virtual castle.

<http://home.freeuk.net/elloughton13/castle1.htm> A good source of pictures of castle life which can be downloaded.

http://kotn.ntu.ac.uk/castle/castl_fm.html Online activities based on Nottingham Castle.

www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/education/as/burghlife/ Explore 16th century burgh life in Scotland.