

Background

JAMES V AND STIRLING – A Favoured Residence

Stirling Castle one of James V's favourite residence – far more popular than his other mighty cliff-top fortress at Edinburgh.

It had everything the king needed.

There was the Great Hall for national festivities and a Chapel Royal, for important royal religious ceremonies.

There were fine gardens and excellent hunting nearby.

All this made it an ideal place to hold court and indulge the young king's love of display, pageantry and bloodsports.

James often spent Lent at Stirling, culminating in a great Easter feast.

During his 20s, and with the hope of a long and successful reign ahead, he decided to carry out a major upgrade at Stirling – creating a new palace that would impress Scots and foreign emissaries alike.

James was aware of how challenging a task this was, having spent time in France where royalty and aristocracy had far greater resources and ready access to the best and most fashionable architecture, art and crafts.

The project began in 1538, but he did not live long enough to see its completion.

The life of James

Prince James was born at Linlithgow Palace in 1512, the son of King James IV and Margaret Tudor – sister to King Henry VIII of England.

It was an auspicious start.

His father, born in 1473, was a vigorous ruler who had extended royal power, built great warships, and undertaken ambitious building projects to modernise Linlithgow Palace, Stirling Castle and Edinburgh Castle.

But disaster struck when he, along with much of Scotland's ruling elite, were wiped out at the Battle of Flodden in 1513.

As was so often the case in Scottish history the country was left with an infant sovereign and a government run by uneasy and shifting alliances of nobles.

At the age of 15 James V shook himself free of the powerful Douglas family, who tried to direct his decisions, and began to assert his own will.

As the head of a small and poor country he worked hard to increase his revenues and the political stature of Scotland.

Marrying a rich wife, Madeleine daughter of King Francis I of France in 1537, was a help. She died soon after and he was free to wed a second rich bride, Mary, daughter of the Duke of Guise.

At the same time he increased his authority by enhancing the Auld Alliance, and

supporting the French against an English monarchy that had often been ambitious to completely swallow Scotland.

Mary and James had two sons, but both died, yet the king was young and seemingly had plenty of time to produce a male heir.

In 1542 Mary fell pregnant again and hopes were high that the king, aged 30, would soon have a healthy prince at his side.

That year the English and Scots were involved in raids and then outright war.

There was fighting on either side of the border with the Scots victorious at Hadden Rigg, near Kelso, but the English winning at Solway Moss on 24 November.

The battle might have ended up being regarded as a relatively minor episode had it not been for the events which came in its wake.

James, who was not at Solway Moss, remained busy for the next few days but by 6 December had fallen sick and was confined to bed.

Two days later, Mary de Guise gave birth to a girl, rather than the hoped-for boy.

On the night of 14, December, the monarch died and once again there was an infant on the throne of Scotland.

Stirling – fit for a king

Castles weren't all about defence – but they were about showing who was boss.

High on its rock and dominating the plains for miles around, Stirling Castle really looked the part.

The site had been in royal hands since at least 1110 and had undergone a series of expansions and improvements over the centuries. Gardens and royal lodgings are known to have existed in the days of James II (1437-60).

Just as important was that many of the lands nearby were under royal control – giving direct access to the wealth and resources needed to run the court.

Many local Crown properties were in the hands of James' mother, but came to him when she died in 1541, further increasing his interests in the region.

Estimates suggest that Margaret's lands in the Stirling area yielded £370 in money plus valuable commodities like roughly 17 tonnes of barley, nine tonnes of wheat, 17 tonnes of malt, four tonnes of oats, 30 salmon and 90 capons.

Mary de Guise kept poultry at Stirling, then there was venison from the royal park, a doocot for pigeon meat, herbs and fruit from the gardens and ponds for fresh fish.

The town's merchants could be relied on for other goods, such as wine.

All this helped confirm Stirling's standing a perfect place for a king with a love of lavish entertainment and display.

While James had over 30 residences to choose from it appears that he spent around 70% of his time at just four of them - Stirling, Linlithgow, Holyrood and Falkland.

This was in era when monarch's moved from one location to another throughout the year – often with huge baggage trains moving ahead of them and large numbers of nobles, officials, servants and their families in tow.

Stirling, and its palace, also need to be seen within the context of James' efforts to professionalise the government.

Instead of simply drawing all his officials from the most powerful families in the land, he employed men from lesser backgrounds who would work hard because they needed his money and favour.

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