



ST ANDREWS & THE FISHING VILLAGES OF FIFE

Our tour begins very close to the famous Edinburgh Castle and we drive down a very short part of the 'Royal Mile', the main street of Edinburgh's Old Town. Everyone used to live on this street and the ones leading off it until the building of the 'New Town' began in 1770. The Royal Mile goes downhill past many interesting & impressive sights before ending at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, home to the kings & queens of Scotland, and now the United Kingdom, for 500 years : opposite it is the Scottish Parliament, opened in 2004.

After leaving the Royal Mile we soon pass a cemetery on the right: there is a round guard-house there dating back to an infamous period of grave-robbing in the early 19thc. when men would dig up dead bodies and get well paid for them by the professor of anatomy at the university who used them in large public dissection demonstrations. A little further on we pass Murrayfield Stadium where Scotland play their international rugby matches. If the weather is reasonable you may be able to see in the distance, on the left, the Pentland Hills which mark the southern boundary of Edinburgh.

Soon after leaving the city we come to the Firth of Forth, an inlet of the North Sea which is the sea that separates the UK from mainland Europe. We cross over by the Forth Road Bridge which is an impressive suspension bridge, opened in 1964, though it is no longer coping with today's volume of traffic and a second road bridge is now being constructed, a short distance to the west (the left of our bridge).

However over to the right is the famous & magnificent Forth Rail Bridge which was opened in 1890 and still carries over 100 trains a day. It is a cantilever bridge, built entirely from steel girders and it has to have a coating of a special paint to protect the steel from rusting in sea water. When it opened the bridge was described as "the eighth wonder of the world" and without doubt it is one of the most impressive sights in Scotland.

We are now in the Kingdom of Fife. Back in the first millennium, before Scotland was one nation, the Pictish kingdom ruled in what is now east & north Scotland. It was divided into sub-kingdoms, Fife being one of them (it was originally called Fib) and the people here still call themselves Fifers and are proud to say they live in the "Kingdom".

We will be driving along the north side of the Firth of Forth, but with a photo-stop at the little town of Aberdour. We continue through the town of Burrtisland, once important for trading & ship-building and home to Rossend Castle where Mary Queen of Scots, our most famous queen, was staying in 1563 when a French poet, who was enamoured of her, was found hiding in her bedroom – he was quickly taken away and executed !

Next comes Kinghorn near where King Alexander III fell to his death over a cliff in a storm in 1286. His untimely death led to a very unsettled period in Scottish history and the Wars of Independence when fortunately we had two great leaders in William Wallace ("Braveheart") & King Robert the Bruce.

On through Kirkaldy, one of the larger towns in Fife, and famous in the past for the production of linoleum, a floor-covering, and linen. It is known as the "lang toon" because its main street is 6½ km long and Europe's longest street fair is held on it every Easter.

After another two or three small towns we reach the part of the coast called the East Neuk (a neuk is a corner) where there are some attractive fishing villages. You will visit some of the following, probably with a coffee stop in one of them :-

After eventually leaving the motorway we will pass Balgonie Castle on the right. It was built in the 14thc. and was captured by a famous Scottish character, Rob Roy MacGregor, in 1716. It is said to be haunted by several ghosts. In recent times part of the castle has been restored and is lived in.

We are driving across Fife but soon we reach the part of the coast called the East Neuk (a neuk is a corner) where there are a number of attractive small fishing villages, some still active today. You will visit some of the following, probably with a coffee stop in one of them:-

Elie A popular holiday resort with a good golf course and a large beach on which cricket matches are occasionally played in the summer.

St Monans On the approach to St Monans there is the ruined 15thc. Newark Castle off to the right, then a church with an interesting history : in 1346 King David II had been seriously injured in a battle but his wounds were cured when he visited the shrine of St Monan, buried here in the 9thc. To give thanks the king had the church built on the site of the shrine. St Monans is a fishing village but in the past also had a tradition of ship-building.

Pittenweem Another attractive village with a busy fishing harbour, narrow streets and popular with artists. It was first recorded as a port in 1228 and its name means "*place of the cave*" - back in the 7thc. a holy man called St Fillan lived in a cave near the harbour and it is said that he wrote sermons in the dark cave by means of his luminous arm which gave out light.

Anstruther The largest of the villages along the East Neuk although nowadays the fishing fleet is greatly outnumbered by yachts and other pleasure craft. Out to sea you can see an island, the Isle of May, on which there are the remains of Scotland's first lighthouse, built in 1636 : the island is a bird reserve, reached from Anstruther, and home to huge colonies of sea-birds.

Crail A very pretty village with a lovely small harbour. Crail dates back to at least the 9thc. and it was an important and thriving town in the 12thc., and a trading port with Europe.

After Crail we leave the East Neuk and drive north-west along the coast towards the famous town of St Andrews. It was here in the 4thc. that some of the bones of St Andrew,



one of Christ's disciples, were brought by St Regulus "to the ends of the earth" for safe-keeping. His ship was shipwrecked at a place that was then called Kilrymont, the name later changed to St Andrews. The town is dominated by its large cathedral, founded in 1160, now ruined but once the largest & most important cathedral in Scotland. Over the centuries thousands of pilgrims journeyed here.

Close to the cathedral is St Andrews Castle which stands on the edge of a cliff. It was built in the late 12thc. and has a long & bloody history, especially around the time of the Reformation when the dominant religion in Scotland changed from the Catholic to the Protestant faith. There is an interesting exhibition centre, a 'bottle' dungeon and you can also explore tunnels that were dug during a siege in 1546.

St Andrews University is the oldest in Scotland, founded in 1413. It has two colleges (St Salvator's and St Mary's) and has always been a very popular seat of learning with students from all over the world. Two of its recent graduates were the Duke & Duchess of Cambridge (Prince William & Kate) who met while both were students here.

However to many, St Andrews is best known as the home of golf, the game having been played here for 600 years. There are 11 courses within the town or a short distance outside, including the most famous course in the world, the Old Course, where the Open Championship is played every few years. The administration of golf throughout the world, except for the USA, is carried out from the Royal & Ancient Clubhouse beside the Old Course.

Once we leave St Andrews we drive inland through farming countryside and close to the Lomond hills which rise above what is otherwise quite a flat landscape.

Eventually we will come to Loch Leven, the largest loch in the Lowlands of Scotland (a loch is the Scottish term for a lake). There are seven islands and on the second largest is a ruined castle : it was built in 1257 and in 1567 Mary Queen of Scots, was imprisoned here for 11 months after many of the nobles had risen up against her. She eventually escaped but her army was heavily defeated near Glasgow. She fled to England where



her cousin, Queen Elizabeth, was on the throne but, far from giving her support, Elizabeth had Mary imprisoned for 19 years before having her executed in 1587.

From Loch Leven we drive southwards, back across the Forth Road Bridge and into Edinburgh to complete our tour.