

Scone Palace - The Heart of Scotland's History

The magnificent Palace is set in 100 acres of glorious Perthshire countryside. Poised above the River Tay, the Palace overlooks the routes north to the Highlands and east through Strathmore to the coast. The Grampian Mountains form a distant backdrop, and across the river stands the city of Perth. Two thousand years ago, the Romans camped here, at the very limit of their empire. They never defeated the warlike Picts, who later came to rule Scone, but the followers of St Columba had more success. By the early 7th century, a group of early Christians, the Culdees or servants of God, had established themselves here.

Scone Palace is a place that breathes history like nowhere else in Scotland. Present-day Scone Palace, although only 200 years old, stands on the site of the medieval abbey and palace where forty-two of Scotland's Kings were crowned for centuries when it was the home of the famous Stone of Scone, or as it is now referred to as the Stone of Destiny. This is where Macbeth, Robert the Bruce and Charles II were crowned. It was the capital of Pictavia in the 5th century onwards. Medieval Parliaments were held at Scone as it was immortalised in Shakespeare's Macbeth. You can wander down the Long Galley where King Charles II strode to his coronation in 1651. During the Jacobite rebellions, The Old Pretender spent 3 weeks at Scone and his son Bonnie Prince Charlie visited in 1745. Today, in the 21st century, it is the home of the Earls of Mansfield, and a major attraction to visitors from all over the world.

The current Scone Palace was built in the early 19th century in the years from 1803 by David Murray, the 3rd Earl of Mansfield. William Atkinson's Gothic Georgian style cost £60,000 and took nine years to complete. The building you see today has been largely unaltered since its completion. Today it is considered to be one of the most important Gothic houses to have survived from the Georgian era. The sumptuous interiors are full of treasures and history.

You can see the State Rooms where Queen Victoria was entertained on her way to the Highlands in 1842. The tour of the palace includes the Dining Room, in which Queen Victoria and Prince Albert dined in September 1842 and the opulent Drawing Room.

Later on in your tour you come to the Long Gallery, which at 150ft or 45 metres long is the longest room of any house in Scotland. Here Queen Victoria and Prince Albert witnessed a demonstration of the sport of curling, with the polished wooden floor standing in for ice. Following the demonstration, Prince Albert accepted an invitation to become the first President of the Royal Caledonian Curling Club. The far end of the gallery is home to an impressive organ, still used during the weddings performed here. Also included on the public tour of Scone is Queen Victoria's Suite, three rooms, on the ground floor at her request, prepared for Queen Victoria's stay at Scone.

Other highlights include the magnificent Library, whose shelves are now home to the family's collection of porcelain rather than books. You can admire the needlework skills of Mary Queen of Scots, bed hangings that she worked on while in prison on Loch Leven. Discover the desk at which Frances' tragic young Queen, Marie Antionette wrote her letters prior to the days when the guillotine beckoned. If you are a lover of fine things, Scone is a treasury of furniture and paintings, porcelain and other objects d'art.

The Chapel

Beyond the palace itself, the most obvious feature is the chapel. The building you see today largely dates back to 1807, when an earlier chapel built on the site in 1604 was remodelled. It serves as a mausoleum for the Murrays, the family of the Earls of Mansfield. The chapel stands on what is known as Moot Hill, and in front of it a stone block in which two rings are set rests on two uprights, forming a stone bench. The stone block is a replica of the Stone of Scone, one of the emblems of Scottish nationhood, and its presence here is the key to unlocking the story of Scone.

Scone Abbey flourished for over four hundred years. In 1559 it fell victim to a mob from Dundee during the early days of the Reformation and was largely destroyed. In 1580 the abbey estates were granted to Lord Ruthven, later the Earl of Gowrie, who held estates around what is now called Huntingtower Castle. The Ruthvens rebuilt the Abbot's Palace of the old abbey as a grand residence. In 1600, James VI charged the family with treason and their estates at Scone were passed to Sir David Murray of Gospetrie, one of James' loyal followers.

The Stone of Scone

The legend dates back to biblical times and states that it is the same stone which Jacob used as a pillow at Bethel. Later, according to Jewish legend, it became the pedestal of the ark in the Temple. The stone was brought from Syria to Egypt by King Gathelus, who then fled to Spain following the defeat of the Egyptian army. A descendant of Gathelus brought the stone to Ireland, and was crowned on it as King of Ireland. And from Ireland, the stone moved with the invading Scots to Dalriada, an area just north of Glasgow now called Argyll. Since then the Stone was always used as part of the crowning ceremonies of the Scots kings of Dalriada.

The Celtic name of the stone upon which the true kings of Scotland have traditionally been crowned is Lia Fail, "the speaking stone", or the stone which would proclaim the chosen king.

When Kenneth I, the 36th King of Dalriada united the Scots and Pictish kingdoms and moved his capital to Scone from western Scotland around 840AD, the Stone of Destiny was moved there too. All future Scottish kings would henceforth be enthroned on the Stone of Destiny atop Moot Hill at Scone Palace in Perthshire. Until it was forcibly removed by the English King Edward I ("Hammer of the Scots") after his Scottish victories in 1296, and taken to Westminster Abbey in London.

On St Andrews Day, 30th November 1996 10,000 people lined Edinburgh's Royal Mile to witness the Stone of Destiny return to Scotland for the first time in 700 years.

The stone is no ornately carved megalith, just a simple oblong block of red sandstone, measuring some 650mm in length by 400mm wide, and 27mm deep: with chisel marks apparent on its flat top.

The stone block is a replica of the Stone of Scone, one of the emblems of Scottish nationhood, and its presence here is the key to unlocking the story of Scone and explaining why this place is so important to the story of Scotland.

The Moot Hill

The Moot Hill was the Ancient Crowning Place of the Kings of Scots. It is located immediately in front of the Palace and is crowned by a tiny Presbyterian Chapel, which, like the Palace, was gothicized around 1804. A replica of the Stone of Scone sits in front of the Chapel. The Hill was created by sand taken here in the boots of those lord-vassals who had sworn allegiance to the Scottish king. Here, Scottish kings were crowned, coinciding with regal processions. Thus, the land was symbolised by the combined earth, making the Moot Hill into a primordial hill.

The mound has been known by many names: Moot Hill, Omnis Terra (every man's land) and Boot Hill. Another name is the Hill of Credulity (or Hill of Belief), which dates from AD 710 when the Pictish King Nectan came to Scone to embrace the customs of the Church of Rome. And as mentioned, the name by which it is best known today is the Moot Hill.

From the time of Kenneth MacAlpin, who created the Kingdom of Scone in the 9th century, all the Kings of Scots were crowned upon the Moot Hill, seated upon the Stone of Scone. Even after the Stone's removal by King Edward I in 1296, the Moot Hill continued to be the crowning place of the Scottish Kings. Probably the greatest historic event to take place at Scone was the coronation of Robert the Bruce, who declared himself King of Scots upon the Moot Hill on March 25, 1306. That the "official" Stone of Destiny was already south of the Border, may have made the coronation all the more emotional – if we believe Braveheart. The last coronation held at Scone was that of King Charles II as King of Scots on 1 January 1651, some nine years before he was restored to the English throne.

Outdoor Fun The Lawns and Formal Gardens

But it's not only history at Scone. A visit to Scone Palace is incomplete without spending some time in the Palace grounds. They are as splendid as the Palace itself.

The Palace is surrounded by beautiful gardens and peaceful woodland, perfect for a gentle stroll or even a picnic - all under the watchful eye of the ever curious peacocks. There's a great adventure playground providing more energetic diversions for the children to burn excess energy.

The lawns lie generally in the open space between the Palace and the Wild Garden and Pinetum, separated by the ancient Gateway of Scone. They are home to free-roaming peacocks. There are also donkeys, sheep and Highland Cattle in adjacent fields.

The Game Conservancy Fair takes place every year in early July. Throughout the summer, events including falconry demonstrations and living history performances may be seen at various times. There is a National Hunt Racecourse where you can spend a pleasant time 'at the races'.

The Murray Star Maze

The unique Murray Star Maze was designed by an international maze designer, Adrian Fisher. The unique 'tartan' maze consists of 2000 beech trees half green, half copper. The maze was planted in the shape of the heraldic Murray Star. There is a fountain in the centre of it.

Pinetum

The Pinetum originated with the planting of exotic coniferous trees in 1848, with further additions over the years. Overlooking the stones is a very special Douglas Fir. This was raised from the original seed sent home by David Douglas from America in 1826. David Douglas was born at Scone and worked as an under-gardener here before gaining fame as a plant explorer and collector for the Royal Horticultural Society.

Not far away is what is described as the archway to the City of Scone, beyond which stands the mercat cross of Old Scone. Nearby is Scone's ancient burial ground. The family graveyard provides further historical interest. The archway and the mercat cross are all that survive of the village of Old Scone.

New Scone

The old Scone is not the Scone you see today.

In 1803 the 3rd Earl of Mansfield commissioned the architect William Atkinson to rebuild the 1580s Abbot's Palace, and what emerged was Scone Palace. In 1805, as part of the landscaping of the grounds of the new Scone Palace, the residents of what was later known as Old Scone were resettled in a new village over a mile to the east. This was originally known as New Scone to distinguish it from its predecessor, though it has since simply become known as Scone.

Scone is a busy village that stands astride the A94 Forfar road as it climbs a gentle hill that rises to the north of the Annaty Burn some two miles north east of Perth. Half a mile of open countryside separates it from the north eastern edge of Perth, but in many ways it comes over as a detached suburb of its larger neighbour.

The core of today's Scone is bracketed between the Old Parish Church near the river and the redder stone New Parish Church near the top of the hill. The churchyard of the former is home to a striking memorial to the botanist David Douglas. Also near the foot of the hill and a little off the main road is New Scone's mercat cross. Old Scone's mercat cross, apparently replicated by its 1805 replacement, still stands in its original location near Scone Palace.

A mile and a half north east of Scone is Perth Airport, a busy general aviation and training airfield. This was established in 1936 as Scone Aerodrome and has had a training role throughout much of its life. It is also home in June each year to the Heart of Scotland Airshow.

Resources:

<http://www.scone-palace.net>
<http://images.yandex.ru>
<http://www.scone-palace.co.uk>
<http://www.expedia.com>
<http://wikimapia.org>
<http://www.insiders-scotland-guide.com>
<http://www.perthshire.co.uk>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk>
<http://britishcastle.co.uk>
<http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk>
<http://www.gateway-to-the-scottish-highlands.com>
<http://www.theheritagetrail.co.uk>