# A History of Stirling

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Dedicated to James Lambert

Stirling in the Middle Ages

Stirling became an important settlement because it is the lowest crossing place over the River Forth. Furthermore, it has a rocky outcrop, which was a natural place to build a fort. (The name Stirling is derived from Striveling, meaning place of strife). By the 11th century, a royal castle was built on the crag. On its slopes was a village of wooden huts.

Sometime in the 1120's the king made Stirling into a town by granting the townspeople a charter. (A charter was a document, which gave them certain rights). Stirling became a royal burgh with a weekly market and its own local government. The merchants of Stirling elected a provost to run the town. Soon Stirling became a busy and important town. As well as a market it had an annual fair.

In the Middle Ages fairs were like markets but they were held only once a year. Buyers and sellers would come from all over central Scotland to attend a Stirling fair. After 1447 Stirling had 2 fairs. The main industry in Medieval Stirling was weaving wool. Stirling was also a small inland port. (The small ships of that era could sail up the Forth).

However, by modern standards, Stirling was tiny, with a population of only several hundred. Stirling was probably fortified by a ditch and earth rampart with a wooden palisade on top.

About 1145 Cambuskenneth Abbey, an Augustinian abbey, was founded on the other side of the River Forth from Stirling by King David I. Then in the 13th-century friars arrived in Stirling. Friars were like monks but instead of withdrawing from the world, they went out to preach. There were 2 orders of friars in Stirling. The Dominicans were called Blackfriars because of their black costumes. There were also Franciscan friars known

as grey friars in Stirling. Like many medieval towns Stirling also had a leper hostel outside the walls.

Stirling castle was originally built in wood but in the late 13th century it was rebuilt in stone. In 1174 it was handed over to the English in return for the release of William I who had been captured in battle. The English handed Stirling Castle back in 1189.

At the end of the 13th century, a long war began between the Scots and the English. During the war, Stirling castle changed hands several times. The English invaded in 1296 and captured Stirling Castle. However, they were severely defeated at the battle of Stirling bridge the same year. The Scots recaptured Stirling castle in 1297. Then in 1298, the Scots were defeated at the Battle of Falkirk. William Wallace retreated north. Stirling castle fell into English hands. Stirling castle changed hands once again in 1299 when the Scots recaptured it. Stirling castle fell to the English in 1304 but the Scots recaptured it in 1314 after the battle of Bannockburn.

At first, Stirling had a wooden bridge but in 1415 it was replaced by a stone one now known as The Auld Brig. Furthermore, the Church of The Holy Rude was built in the late 15th century.

Stirling in the 16th century and 17th century

In 1507 a man named John Damien tried to fly from the walls of Stirling Castle. Luckily for him, he landed in a dung pile and escaped with only a broken leg.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Stirling continued to grow in size and prosperity. By the middle of the century, it probably had a population of around 1,500. Although it would seem tiny to us by the standards of the time Stirling was a respectably sized market town. However, in the 17th century, Stirling declined in importance. That was partly because the king moved to England and Stirling castle gradually ceased to be a royal residence and became a barracks.

In 1530 Robert Spittal, a tailor, founded a hospice for poor people in Stirling. In 1547 after the Scots were routed at the battle of Pinkie a stone wall was erected around the town. When the Reformation swept Scotland the friaries were closed and in 1567 their property was given to the town council.

Mars Wark (work) was built in 1572 by the Early of Mar. Cowane's Hospital (almshouses) was built with money left by John Cowane, a merchant who died in 1633. (They were completed in 1649). The Argyll Lodging was built about 1630 by William Alexander Ist Earl of Stirling. Archibald Campbell Ist Marquis of Argyll purchased it in 1655 and gave it its name.

Like all towns in those days, Stirling was dirty and unsanitary. There were outbreaks of plague in 1606 and 1645. The 1606 outbreak killed over 600 people, which at the time, was a large part of the town's population. The 1645 visitation also left Stirling depopulated. But each time the town recovered.

Stirling in the 18th century

For most of the 18th century, Stirling was a fairly small market town with a population of around 4,000. It was still a minor inland port. Stirling Tolbooth was built in 1704 by Sir William Bruce.

Fortunately, Stirling escaped any damage in the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745.

At the end of the 18th century, the industrial revolution began to transform Scotland. However, it largely bypassed Stirling, which remained a quiet market town. However, the traditional wool weaving industry continued. There was also a carpet weaving industry. Some cotton was also woven in Stirling. The first bank in Stirling opened in 1777.

At the end of the 18th century, Stirling began to grow geographically. For centuries Stirling had been limited to the slope of the hill below the castle. In the late 18th century growth spread to the Port Street and Dumbarton Road area. Raploch also began to grow at the end of the 18th century. In 1799 10 new houses were built there. Soon more followed. Also in the late 18th century, Stirling gained a piped water supply (for those who could afford to be connected).

Stirling in the 19th century

In 1801, at the time of the first census, Stirling had a population of 5,271. By the standards of the time, it was a fair-sized market town. By 1821 the population of Stirling had grown to 7,333. In the early 19th century new streets were built north of the old town, Cowane Street, Irvine Place, and Queen Street. In 1826 Stirling gained gas street lighting and in 1833 a new bridge was built.

However, like all towns in the early 19th century, Stirling was dirty and unsanitary and there was a disastrous epidemic of cholera in 1832. Partly as result sewers were dug under the streets of Stirling in the 1850s. The old town jail was built in 1847 and in 1857 Stirling gained its first modern police force.

The Wallace Monument was built in 1869 and an infirmary was built in Stirling in 1874. Also in 1874 horse-drawn trams began running through the streets of Stirling. The Smith Art Gallery and Museum also opened in 1874. The Old Arcade was built in 1882. Furthermore, the Mercat Cross was restored in 1891. In the 19th century, Stirling remained a market town and it did not become an industrial center.

However, in 1848 the railway reached Stirling and the town began to grow more rapidly. This was partly because well-to-do people moved to the town and commuted to work in Glasgow. For the middle-class new houses were built west of the old town at Abercromby Place, Clarendon Place, Victoria Place, Victoria Square, and Queens Road. New streets

were also built north of the old town such as Wallace Street, Bruce Street, Douglas Street, and Union Street.

Because of its strategic position as the 'gateway to the Highlands' Stirling began to develop as a tourist centre. In 1871 Stirling had a population of 11,788. By 1881 that had risen to 14,000.

## Stirling in the 20th century

The first electricity was generated in Stirling in 1900 and by 1901 the population of Stirling was over 18,000. The first public library opened in 1902. The first cinema in Stirling opened in 1912 and the last horse-drawn trams ran in 1920 when they were replaced by buses. In 1922 a war memorial was erected in Stirling.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the council began slum clearance in Stirling and built council houses to replace the slums at Raploch and the Riverside. Many more council houses were built in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, in the 1950s many old buildings were demolished in the oldest part of the town.

Stirling University was founded in 1967. A swimming pool was built in 1974. The Thistle Centre opened in 1977. During the 20th century, Stirling was still a market town rather than an industrial centre but there were some industries such as financial services, food processing, and electronics. Castle Business Park opened in 1995.

Stirling in the 21st century



Stirling Castle

Stirling was made a city in 2002. Today the population of Stirling is 45,000.