

KINGS OF SCOTS

The Scottish Kingdom

The kings of Scots did not always rule the whole area we call 'Scotland' today. From around the middle of the 9th century they ruled a smaller area within modern-day Scotland north of the River Forth. Everywhere else in Scotland was ruled by different lords and kings.

In the period between the 9th and 13th centuries, kings of Scots began to expand their kingdom by taking over control of other areas. By the middle of the 13th century, the kingdom had expanded to include all of the land we would call 'Scotland' today, with two exceptions:

1. Southern border with England: the town of Berwick was then in Scotland, but after swapping between the two countries eventually became part of England for good in 1482.
2. Northern isles: Orkney and Shetland were part of Norway at the time but were given to Scotland as part of a marriage agreement, Orkney in 1468 and Shetland in 1469.

Scotland in the mid-9th century



Scotland by the mid-13th century



Succession

Before the 13th century, there was no simple rule for deciding who would be the next king once the current king had died. However, during the 12th century a new idea took hold. This idea was called **primogeniture**.

Primogeniture was the rule that your title would be passed down to your eldest son when you died. So instead of passing sideways in a family (e.g. to uncles or cousins) the title would pass downwards through the family to children, or grandchildren if the children had died. It also went down through the male line, which meant that sons would be chosen over daughters even if the daughter was older.

Primogeniture was a **hereditary** system – it was based on the idea that titles should pass downwards through families. In theory, this meant there should be less competition for the title: at any one time there should only be one heir. Therefore primogeniture brought stability. On the other hand, if a king died young and his heir was still an infant, the kingdom would have to be governed by a group of the leading nobles and churchmen from the kingdom who would form a temporary government (called a 'minority government') to rule in the name of the king until he was old enough to do so himself (reaching his 'majority'). Primogeniture could therefore also bring instability: without a single ruler during the king's minority, the kingdom was weaker and vulnerable to threats from inside and outside.

Primogeniture has continued to be the system of succession for the monarchy until today.

Becoming King

When the current king died, there would be a ceremony to make the next king. This was called the **inauguration**. Kings had to undergo this ceremony in order to be the ruler legally. The ceremony in Scotland before the War of Independence was unusual. It was not, strictly speaking, a coronation. The Scottish royal inauguration ceremony was a simple enthronement (presumably on the Stone of Scone). As a result, Scottish kings from Alexander I (1107–1124) to Alexander II (1214–1249) were pictured *without* a crown on their heads on their wax seal. (The seal was the most important statement of who you were.) This did not mean that Scottish kings were not allowed to wear a crown at all. On coins, they were always portrayed with a crown. When Robert Bruce was inaugurated at Scone the Stone of Destiny was no longer available because Edward I had taken it to Westminster Abbey. It is likely that an alternative ceremony was devised that involved a crown.

By the 13th century it was expected that a king would become king by being **crowned and anointed**. As well as being placed on a throne, he would also be anointed with holy oil by an archbishop and have a crown placed on his head. The holy oil was believed to make the king sacred by making him into a new person through the grace of God. The kings of England and France had used this ceremony for centuries. By the 13th century, however, if a kingdom did not already use coronation and anointment, it had to ask the pope to allow its kings to be crowned and anointed. The king of Norway was given permission in 1247. Requests to the pope for Scottish kings to be crowned and anointed were made in 1221, 1233 and 1251, but were rejected due to English protests that this would go against the king of England's claim to be overlord. The pope finally gave permission for coronation and anointment in 1329. The letter was addressed to Robert the Bruce, but he had died a

couple of weeks earlier. The first Scottish king to be crowned and anointed was Robert the Bruce's young son, David II, in 1331. He was seven years old.

The oldest description of the inauguration of a king of Scots

An account of Alexander III's inauguration (1249) has survived and gives us a sense of how grand an occasion it would be. Alexander III was only seven years old. The ceremony involved the bishops and nobles of Scotland, and a man who read out a list of Alexander's ancestors. The 'royal seat' was the Stone of Scone. The central act was enthroning Alexander on the Stone. The ceremony, however, had some new features. Instead of enthroning the king on the Moot Hill, this happened at a prominent cross in the cemetery. The theatrical display of placing garments at the feet of the new king was taken from a description in the Bible of the inauguration of a king of Israel as God's anointed. Both these new features were invented to make the ceremony as close to coronation and anointment as possible. They wanted to show that Alexander III was as sacred as any other king. On his wax seal he is pictured wearing a crown. Reading out the king's ancestors, however, was an ancient part of the ceremony. Although they wanted Alexander III to be as important as any other king, they also wanted to celebrate the fact that he was king of the Scots.

ACCOUNT OF ALEXANDER III'S INAUGURATION

This account was written near the time of Alexander III's inauguration, which took place on **13 July 1249** at **Scone**, near Perth.

The earls Malcolm, earl of Fife, and Mael Ísu, earl of Strathearn, and many other nobles led Alexander, soon to be king, to a cross standing in the cemetery at the east part of the church. They placed Alexander in the royal seat which was adorned with silk cloths woven in gold.

The bishop of St Andrews and other assistants with him consecrated Alexander as king, as was proper.

Also, while the king was sitting upon the royal seat, earls and other nobles on bended knee spread their garments under his feet. And behold, after they had done this one by one, a certain highland Scot kneeling suddenly before the throne greeted the king in the mother tongue [Gaelic], bowing his head and saying: "Bennachd Dé, rí Albanach, Alexanndar mac Alexanndair meic Uilleim meic Énri meic Daid". ('The blessing of God, king of Scots, Alexander son of Alexander [II] son of William son of Henry son of David [I]'). And in this way he read the genealogy of the kings of Scots to the end.

SEAL OF SCONE ABBEY

The picture shows the scene of Alexander III's inauguration. It was chosen by the Abbey of Scone to be the picture on their seal not long after the ceremony.



Kings of Scots in the 12th and 13th centuries

Here is a list of the kings of Scots in this period and the dates they reigned. Below are some images of each king: their own personal wax seals, coins with their faces imprinted on them, and drawings.

Edgar	1097 – 1107
Alexander I	1107 – 1124
David I	1124 – 1153
Malcolm IV	1153 – 1165
William 'the Lion'	1165 – 1214
Alexander II	1214 – 1249
Alexander III	1249 – 1286
John Balliol	1292 – 1304*
Robert 'the Bruce'	1306 – 1329

*King John left Scotland a prisoner in 1296, never to return. However people governed Scotland in his name from after the battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297 until 9 February 1304. Therefore the end-date of his personal rule is 1296, but the end of his actual reign is 1304.

This picture shows David I (left) and his grandson Malcolm IV (right). The image appears on Kelso Abbey's most important charter from Malcolm IV, produced in 1159.

