

TOWNS AND TRADE

Medieval towns were called **burghs**. Burghs were centres with special privileges where merchants lived and people came to trade their goods. They are the Scots equivalent of the English 'borough'. Burghs were first introduced into Scotland by King David I (1124-1153) who wanted to encourage the development of towns and trade. They came to play a very important role in the development of Scotland, and most burghs survive today as Scotland's largest towns and cities.

Patrons

The person who created the burgh was the burgh's patron. A burgh could be **royal** (created by the king), **ecclesiastical** (created by a bishop or monastery) or **baronial** (created by a lord). Most of Scotland's burghs were royal, though Glasgow was ecclesiastical (created by the Bishop of Glasgow) and Renfrew was baronial (created by Walter, Steward of Scotland).

Markets

One of the privileges granted to a burgh was the right to hold a **weekly market** where people from the surrounding area would come to sell their goods and buy more. Having one market meant that prices could be regulated and the king could profit from the customs paid by people. Markets encouraged the use of **money** (silver coins) as before this the economy was based on people trading what they produced themselves.

Tolls and Customs

There was no such thing as free trade. Burghs raised money through taxes called **tolls** (money paid to the burgh) and **customs** (money paid on their merchandise). People had to pay these when they entered the boundaries of the burgh. This included ships when they docked in a Scottish port. Burgesses from royal burghs were exempt from paying these tolls throughout the kingdom.

Tofts

The land within the burgh itself was divided up into plots called **tofts**. People would receive a toft of land from the burgh's founder to use as they wished, in exchange for rent.

Burgesses

The burghs were run by **burgesses**, the wealthiest and most important of the merchants. Burgesses held land in the burgh (a toft). If they were from a royal burgh, they were given the privilege of being exempt from paying tolls throughout the kingdom. Burgesses of a particular craft formed **guilds** which eventually took over the government of the burgh from the sheriff. From the 14th century, burgesses had become so powerful and wealthy they had a hand in controlling the government of the kingdom itself as they became the 'Third Estate' in the Scottish Parliament.

Craftsmen

Under the burgesses were all the people of particular **crafts** who lived in the burgh such as carpenters, stonemasons, shoemakers, tailors and blacksmiths.

Law

The king would often grant his '**peace**' to the people travelling to and from the burgh to sell their goods. This was the king promising to protect those people and their goods against crimes (especially theft), and punish those that broke this peace. The king's peace was essential for the burgh market to flourish because traders were more likely to do business there if their safety was guaranteed.

Government

In the 12th century, the **sheriff** was the king's main officer in the burghs. The sheriff would be appointed by the king, and his role was to hold law courts and make sure burgh-taxes were collected and sent to the king. Officers called **grieves** and **mairs** were also appointed to help the sheriff.

In the 13th century, the burgesses became more powerful and started to run their burghs themselves. They collected money and sent it to the king. They elected their own leader called the **provost** to help them run the burgh. Below the provost were people called **aldermen** and **bailies** (Scots for the English 'bailiffs') who were also elected by the burgesses. By the time of the War of Independence, most burghs were **self-governing**.

Castles

The king sometimes established a burgh where he needed to increase his power. In these cases, the founding of a burgh would go hand-in-hand with the building of a **royal castle** and the appointment of a **sheriff**. Examples of this are the royal burghs in Moray (Elgin, Nairn, Inverness) and the South-West (Dumfries and Ayr).

Location

Burghs were mainly located on the coast or near rivers. The wealthiest and most important burghs in Scotland were on the east coast. This was because the most important trade was the export of wool and hides to Flanders in Europe.

Europe

As well as the Scots exporting their goods to Europe (such as wool and hides), people from Europe were also attracted to sell in Scottish burghs. By the time of the War of Independence, Scottish people were trading with people in northern- and western-Europe. Scottish coins from this period turned up as far away as northern Germany.

England

During the War of Independence, it was difficult for burgesses to trade with English towns. In fact, they had to receive a special letter from the King of England which gave them permission to trade in his kingdom. The English officials in these towns made it difficult for the burgesses to keep trading by arresting the Scottish burgesses' ships as they sailed past the English coast. When the burgesses were in trouble like this, they usually wrote to the king of England or Scotland to ask for help.

EARLIEST BURGHS

Here is a list and map of the earliest burghs in Scotland:

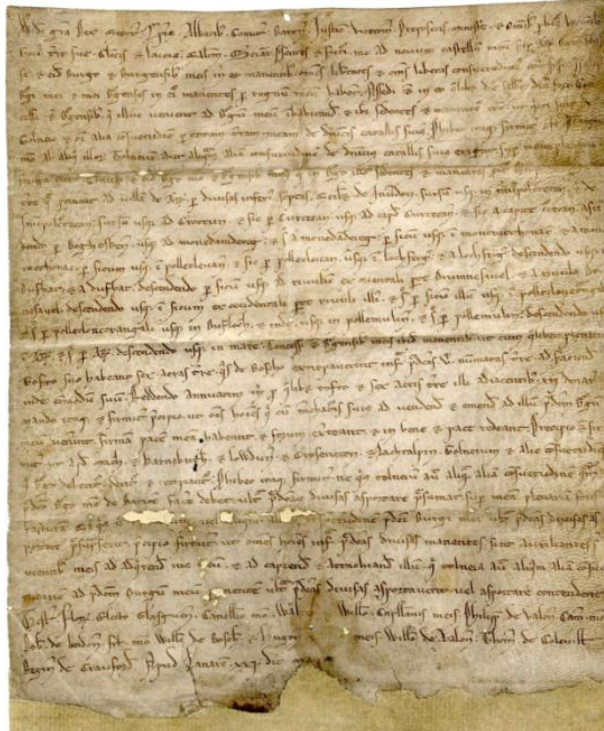
Aberdeen
Arbroath
Ayr
Berwick
Dundee
Dunfermline
Dumfries
Edinburgh
Elgin
Forres
Forfar
Glasgow
Inverness
Irvine
Lanark
Linlithgow
Montrose
Perth
Renfrew
Roxburgh
Stirling

Map of the earliest burghs



AYR: FOUNDATION CHARTER

This charter shows King William creating the burgh of Ayr in 1205, after he had built a castle there in 1197. It is the earliest burgh-foundation charter which survives as an 'original' document. The text of the charter has been translated below.



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Lanark: 21 May 1205

King William has made a burgh at his new castle built on the River Ayr. He grants to the burgh and burgesses the following special privileges:

- Free customs throughout his kingdom
- A market day every Saturday
- Exemption for the burgesses from paying tolls through his kingdom
- 5 'penny-lands' (an old system for working out the value of land)
- One toft to each burgess (i.e. 6 acres of land) in exchange for 12 pennies a year to the king
- Peace to all those coming to sell in the market
- The money owed to the burgh (tolls and customs) shall be paid at certain places on the boundary of the region where the burgh has a monopoly on trade, and anyone who does not pay the burgh will be arrested.

William by the grace of God king of Scots to the bishops, abbots, earls, barons, justices, sheriffs, provosts, officials, and all men of standing of his whole land, clerics and laity: greeting.

May those present, and those to come, know that I have made a burgh at my new castle on the River Ayr, and that I have granted to the same burgh and to the burgesses living there all the freedoms and free customs which my other burghs and

burghesses have throughout my kingdom.

I have also established a market day in it every Saturday.

Also, I have granted to the burghesses who shall come to live in my burgh freedom from paying tolls and all other customs throughout my land. I therefore absolutely forbid anyone in my kingdom from taking toll or any other custom from any one of them. Anyone who goes against my wishes will face a large fine.

Also, I have granted to my burgh and burghesses the five penny-lands which belong to the toun of Ayr, according to the boundaries written below: that is, on from Inuerdon [mouth of the River Doon] up all the way to Inuerpolcurtecan [mouth of the Slaphouse Burn] and on from Inuerpolcurtecan up all the way to Crottun [Corton], and so along the Curtecan [the Slaphouse Burn] as far as the head of the Curtecan, and so from the head of the Curtecan going up along Boghesken as far as Monedamdereg [i.e. 'Moss of red oxen'], and so from Monedamdereg along a sike all the way to Monemethonac [i.e. 'Middle moss'], and from Monemethonac along a sike all the way to Pollecleuan, and so along Pollecleuan all the way to Lochfergus [Fergus Loch] and from Lochfergus going down all the way to Dufhat, and from Dufhat going down along a sike as far as a burn on the eastern side of Drumnesauel [i.e. 'Ridge of the barns'], and from the burn of Drumnasauel going down all the way to a sike on the western side of that burn, and so along a sike all the way to Polleclonecrangali, and so along Polleclonecrangali all the way to Dufloch [i.e. 'Black loch'], and from there all the way to Pollemulin [i.e. 'Mill burn'], and so along Pollemulin going down all the way to the [River] Ayr, and so along the Ayr going down all the way to the sea.

Also, I have granted to my burghesses that for every full toft they shall have six acres of land for their own use from the woodland within the said five penny-lands. They should give to me twelve pennies a year for each toft and the six acres of land adjoining it.

Therefore, I order and absolutely command that all men who shall come with their merchandise to my burgh so they can buy and sell shall have my absolute peace, and shall use the market and return well and in peace.

Also, I command absolutely that tolls and other customs which are due to the burgh shall be given and received at Mach [Maich], and Karnebuth, and Lowdun [Loudon], and Crosenecon [Corsencon] and Lachtalpin [Laicht]. I absolutely command, therefore, that no-one may carry off the tolls or any other custom beyond these bounds which he ought to pay to my burgh. If, indeed, anyone has carried off the tolls or custom, I command that all men living within these bounds be of assistance to my serjeants in obtaining my right and in arresting the person who shall have carried off, or shall have attempted to carry off, the tolls or customs burgh.

As witnesses: Floris bishop-elect of Glasgow, my chancellor; Walter and William, my chaplains; Philip de Valognes, my chamberlain; Robert of London, my son; William Wood and Hugh, my clerks; William de Valognes; Thomas de Coleville; Reginald Crawford.

At Lanark, on the 21st day of May.

BURGH OF ABERDEEN

November 1306

Receipt of payment to a blacksmith from Aberdeen.

From the account book of the king's personal spending:

Payment to William Fichet of Aberdeen for 40 pieces of iron bought from him: 10s. 3d. [about £265 today].

Between July and October 1306

Record of malt given to the beer-brewers of Aberdeen in order to make beer for the Prince of Wales.

From the accounts of the clerk of the pantry and buttery of the Prince of Wales:

John of Bromsgrove [the keeper of Aberdeen Castle] paid the brewers of Aberdeen 26 quarts of malt from the king's store to brew 40 flagons of beer from each quart.

Dundee: 21 October 1313

Charter of Robert the Bruce giving the burgesses of Aberdeen the rights to a forest near the burgh. However, Robert keeps the rights to hunt in the forest for himself.

I, Robert King of Scots, have given the burgesses and corporation of my burgh of Aberdeen the care and custody of my whole forest of the Stocket in Aberdeenshire. It is to be held by the burgesses and corporation and their heirs by its correct boundaries, with all the liberties of the forest. However, I reserve the greenwood and hunting to myself.

I forbid that anyone in my kingdom should go into the forest, lest he cause the burgesses or the corporation any trouble. Evil-doers will face a large fine.

BURGH OF DUNFERMLINE

Westminster: 28 March 1305

Charter of Edward I granting Dunfermline Abbey a weekly market and an annual fair.

I, Edward, king of England, grant to the abbot and monks of Dunfermline a weekly market on Thursday at their manor of Kirkcaldy in Fife, and a yearly fair there on Saturday in Easter week and the two days following.

BURGH OF EDINBURGH

Stirling: 7 October 1301

Receipt of a payment to a stonemason from Edinburgh who worked in Edward I's army.

From the account book of the king's personal spending:

Payment to Ralph, a stonemason of Edinburgh, staying in the army for the king's building works: 2s. [about £50 today].

Dunipace (near Falkirk): 30 September 1301

Receipt of a payment to a carpenter from Edinburgh who worked in Edward I's army.

From the account book of the king's personal spending accounts:

Payment to Brother Herbert of Edinburgh, carpenter, for wages in the king's army: 4s. [about £100 today].

BURGH OF PERTH

York: 22 February 1312

Edward II writes to the tax collectors in Perth telling them to pay money to their castle keeper.

I, Edward II, command the collectors of customs of wool and hides in Perth to pay all of these taxes to William Oliphant, my keeper of the town, for the debt I owe him.

BURGESSES

Berwick: 10 July 1292

A burgess from Berwick has letters from the king of England which allow him to trade in England until 29 September 1293.

I, Ralph of Whitby, burgess of Berwick-upon-Tweed, have royal letters which say that I have the special licence of the king to carry out trade with my goods and merchandise in different parts of the kingdom of England until the feast of St Michael [29 September] nearest in the future, and from the same feast until the completion of one year.

Berwick: June 1294

The people of the burgh of Berwick tell Edward I of their troubles. Because there is so little grain in Scotland, they had sent ships to buy grain from abroad. However, English officials (called bailiffs) arrested these ships and goods when they were near to the English coast.

The mayor, officials and community of Berwick to the king [Edward] who rules the three realms of England, Scotland and Ireland: greeting.

We inform you that no tongue can tell our anxieties. By reason of the dearth of all kinds of grain in Scotland some of our fellow burgesses had shipped grain from abroad. And while off the English coasts and ports, your bailiffs have arrested our ships and cargos to our heavy loss and damage. The bailiffs are William of Orford and others whom the bearer of this letter will tell you. Our goods and vessels have been arrested at Yarmouth, Erewell, Blakeney, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and elsewhere.

We send our fellow burgess, Nicholas of Pampesworde, as our messenger with special authority to lay these matters before you and find a remedy.

Newark (England): 2 July 1294

King John writes to Edward I telling him that the burgesses of Berwick have complained to him about their goods being arrested in England and asking Edward to sort out the problem.

John, king of Scotland, to my lord, Edward, king of England, lord of Ireland and duke of Aquitaine: greeting.

I understand by letters from my burgesses of Berwick that they and their fellow burgesses are going overseas searching for grain and sending this grain back to Scotland. They have also been transporting their goods (that is wool, leather and sheep hides) from Berwick to places overseas.

However, when they come to the shores of England with their goods and land in the ports, it is said that your bailiffs arrest them wherever they find their goods, including ships carrying the said goods. And those on the ships are detained against surety and pledge [unlawfully], to the great injury of our realm.

I thus ask that this problem be remedied, if it pleases you, so that the said burgesses may have full compensation.

Between 1296 and 1297

King Edward makes a rule that nothing can enter or leave Scotland without a stamp which shows that customs have been paid on the goods. In particular, no one is allowed to bring letters from elsewhere which may harm the king or his kingdom.

I, King Edward, along with my council, announce that no wool, hides, messengers or merchants are allowed to enter the realm of Scotland except in places where there are cocket-seals [a stamp to show that customs have been paid on imports and exports] or at Kirkcudbright. Before they leave Kirkcudbright, a cocket-seal must be sent there by the earl of Warenne and by my council in Scotland.

In each place, two of my most honest and loyal men must be appointed to keep the port so closely that no messenger carrying letters from abroad can pass through without a special warrant from me myself. Any person carrying closed letters or other suspicious things may be taken and kept in prison.

All the sailors who shall pass though must be examined. Merchants shall be free from examination because of their oath that they will carry no letters which might bring mischief to me or to my realm and that they will bring nothing from abroad by deed or word which may be hurtful to me.

Furthermore no merchant of Lombardy shall pass anywhere in the realm.

This order is to be announced and published throughout the kingdom in the chief places and towns so that no man may excuse himself by ignorance. In the same manner to John, earl of Warenne, guardian of the realm and land of Scotland, must make sure this order is kept and firmly observed.

October 1297

The burgesses of Roxburgh ask Edward I to help them resolve their troubles. After being attacked by the Scots, they had to flee and take refuge in Berwick and Newcastle. However, the officials (bailiffs) in these burghs are preventing them from baking or making goods to sell, treating them as strangers.

We, the king's burgesses of Roxburgh, who were surprised by the enemy [the Scots], losing our goods and only saving our lives, have taken refuge at Berwick and Newcastle-on-Tyne.

We complain that the bailiffs of these places are preventing us from baking or making merchandise for our sustenance, but are treating us as strangers. We pray that you redress our grievances.

26 May 1310

Edward II promises protection to a burgess from Perth coming to England, as long as he does not give the Scots any supplies on their journey.

I, King Edward, give protection to William Cockin, burgess and merchant of Perth, his men and goods, coming to England on behalf of John fitz Marmaduke, warden of Perth, to trade and make purchases for the warden and garrison, provided they take no supplies for the Scots on their return.

FOREIGN TRADE

Haddington: 11 October 1297

Andrew Murray and William Wallace write to the mayors and people of Lübeck and Hamburg (Northern Germany) to thank them for helping the Scots and their merchants. They also tell them that their merchants will be able to trade safely with Scotland because the Scottish army has defeated the English.

Andrew Murray and William Wallace, leaders of the army of the kingdom of Scotland and the community of the kingdom, to their friends the mayors and citizens of Lübeck and Hamburg: greeting.

We have been told by trustworthy merchants of the kingdom of Scotland that you are giving advice, help and favour in all causes and business concerning us and our merchants, for which we thank you. We ask that you tell your merchants that they can have safe access to all the ports in the kingdom of Scotland, since Scotland (thanks be to God) has been rescued from the power of the English by force of arms.

Farewell.