

Edinburgh Castle



Edinburgh Castle is a historic castle in Edinburgh, Scotland. It stands on Castle Rock, which has been occupied by humans since at least the Iron Age. There has been a royal castle on the rock since at least the reign of Malcolm III in the 11th century, and the castle continued to be a royal residence until 1633. From the 15th century, the castle's residential role declined, and by the 17th century it was principally used as a military garrison. Its importance as a part of Scotland's national heritage was recognised increasingly from the early 19th century onwards, and various restoration programmes have been carried out over the past century and a half.

Edinburgh Castle has played a prominent role in Scottish history, and has served variously as a royal residence, an arsenal, a treasury, a national archive, a mint, a prison, a military fortress, and the home of the Honours of Scotland - the Scottish regalia. As one of the most important strongholds in the Kingdom of Scotland, the castle was involved in many historical conflicts from the Wars of Scottish Independence in the 14th century to the Jacobite rising of 1745. Research undertaken in 2014 identified 26 sieges in its 1,100-year history, giving it a claim to having been "the most besieged place in Great Britain and one of the most attacked in the world"

PRE-HISTORY OF THE CASTLE ROCK

History

The castle stands upon the plug of an extinct volcano, which is estimated to have risen about 350 million years ago during the lower Carboniferous period. The Castle Rock is the remains of

a volcanic pipe, which cut through the surrounding sedimentary rock before cooling to form very hard dolerite, a type of basalt. Subsequent glacial erosion was resisted by the dolerite, which protected the softer rock to the east, leaving a crag and tail formation.[8]

The summit of the Castle Rock is 130 metres (430 ft) above sea level, with rocky cliffs to the south, west, and north, rising to a height of 80 metres (260 ft) above the surrounding landscape.[9] This means that the only readily accessible route to the castle lies to the east, where the ridge slopes more gently. The defensive advantage of such a site is self-evident, but the geology of the rock also presents difficulties, since basalt is extremely impermeable. Providing water to the Upper Ward of the castle was problematic, and despite the sinking of a 34-metre (112 ft) deep well, the water supply often ran out during drought or siege,[10] including during the Lang Siege in 1573.[11]

Early Middle Ages

The castle does not re-appear in contemporary historical records from the time of Ptolemy until around AD 600. Then, in the epic Welsh poem *Y Gododdin* there is a reference to *Din Eidyn*, "the stronghold of Eidyn". This has been generally assumed to refer to the Castle Rock.[31] The poem tells of the Gododdin King *Mynyddog Mwynfawr*,[32] and his band of warriors, who, after a year of feasting in their fortress, set out to do battle with the Angles at "Catreath" (possibly Catterick) in Yorkshire. Despite performing glorious deeds of valour and bravery, the poem relates that the Gododdin were massacred.[33]

The Irish annals record that in 638, after the events related in *Y Gododdin*, "Eidin" was besieged by the Angles under Oswald of Northumbria, and the Gododdin were defeated.[34] The territory around Edinburgh then became part of the Kingdom of Northumbria, which was itself absorbed by England in the 10th century. Lothian became part of Scotland, during the reign of Indulf (r.954–962).[35]

The archaeological evidence for the period in question is based entirely on the analysis of middens (domestic refuse heaps), with no evidence of structures. Few conclusions can therefore be derived about the status of the settlement during this period, although the midden deposits show no clear break since Roman times.[36]

WARS OF SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

Wars

A century later, in 1286, on the death of King Alexander III, the throne of Scotland became vacant. Edward I of England was appointed to adjudicate the competing claims for the Scottish crown, but used the opportunity to attempt to establish himself as the feudal overlord of

Scotland. During the negotiations, Edward stayed briefly at Edinburgh Castle and may have received homage there from the Scottish nobles.[46]

In March 1296, Edward I launched an invasion of Scotland, unleashing the First War of Scottish Independence. Edinburgh Castle soon came under English control, surrendering after a three days long bombardment.[47] Following the siege, Edward had many of the Scottish legal records and royal treasures moved from the castle to England.[46] A large garrison numbering 325 men was installed in 1300.[48] Edward also brought to Scotland his master builders of the Welsh castles, including Thomas de Houghton and Master Walter of Hereford, both of whom travelled from Wales to Edinburgh.[49] After the death of Edward I in 1307, however, England's control over Scotland weakened. On 14 March 1314, a surprise night attack by Thomas Randolph, 1st Earl of Moray recaptured the castle. John Barbour's narrative poem *The Brus* relates how a party of thirty hand-picked men was guided by one William Francis, a member of the garrison who knew of a route along the north face of the Castle Rock and a place where the wall might be scaled. Making the difficult ascent, Randolph's men scaled the wall, surprised the garrison and took control.[50] Robert the Bruce immediately ordered the slighting of the castle to prevent its re-occupation by the English.[51] Four months later, his army secured victory at the Battle of Bannockburn.[52][53]

DESCRIPTION

Description

Edinburgh Castle is located at the top of the Royal Mile, at the west end of Edinburgh's Old Town. The volcanic Castle Rock offers a naturally defended position, with sheer cliffs to north and south, and a steep ascent from the west. The only easy approach is from the town to the east, and the castle's defences are situated accordingly, with a series of gates protecting the route to the summit of the Castle Rock.[118] In front of the castle is a long sloping forecourt known as the Esplanade. Originally the Spur, a 16th-century hornwork, was located here. The present Esplanade was laid out as a parade ground in 1753, and extended in 1845.[56] It is upon this Esplanade that the Edinburgh Military Tattoo takes place annually. From the Esplanade the Half Moon Battery is prominent, with the Royal Palace to its left.[119]