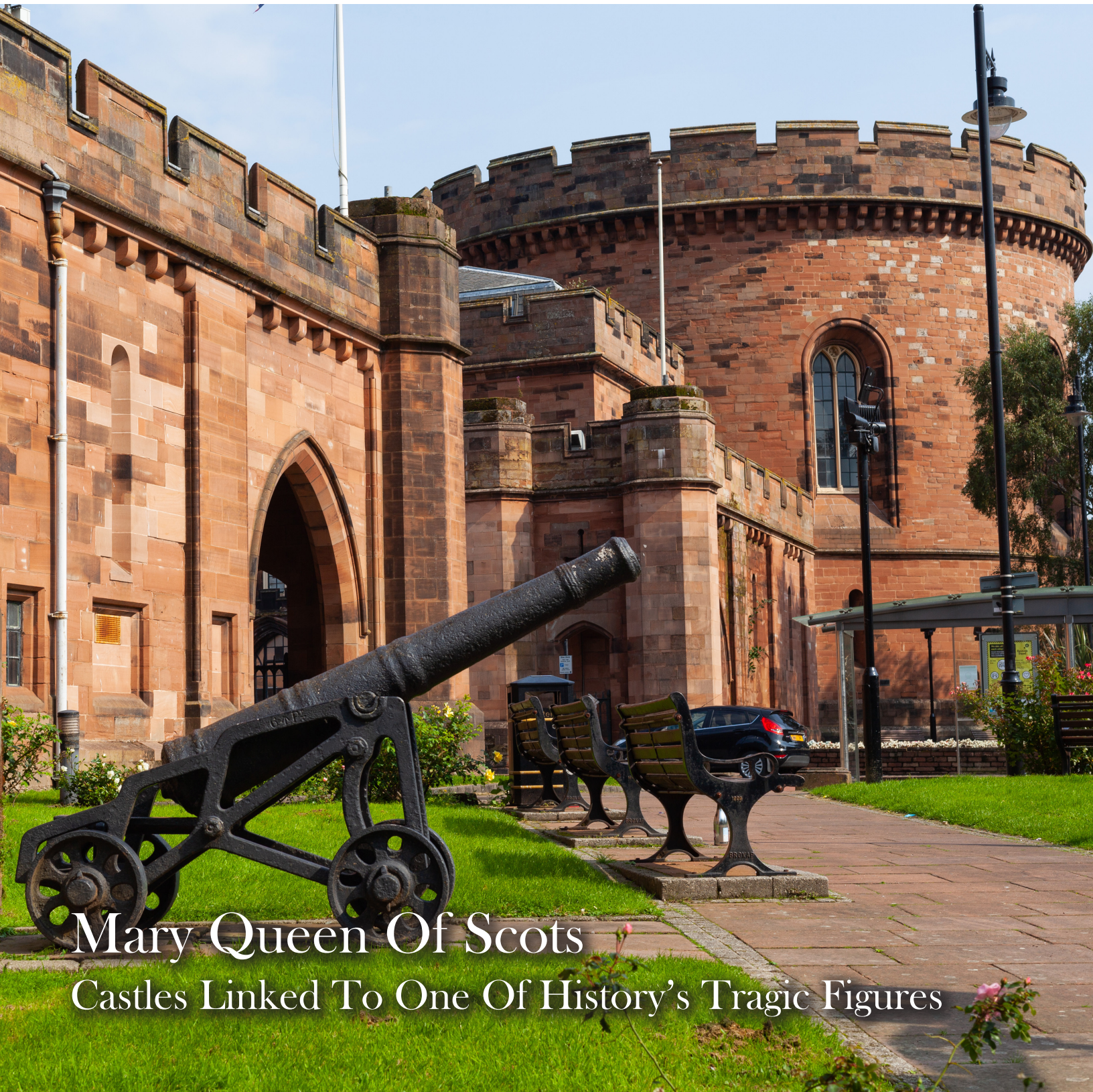


# British Castles

September 2025



## Mary Queen Of Scots

### Castles Linked To One Of History's Tragic Figures





# EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear all,

Welcome to this month's 'Castles Linked To Mary Queen of Scots' themed issue.

Mary is one of the most tragic figures of British history. As a cousin of Elizabeth I, with a strong claim to the throne, she was seen as a constant threat by Elizabeth's court. This led to her exile, imprisonment and ultimately her execution.

Her life can be told via the many castles she lived in (either voluntarily or as a prisoner) – and this is the subject of our first article: the castles of Mary Queen of Scots.


Our second takes a deeper look at Mary and her life. Our 'Lesser Known British Castle' is Carlisle Castle, the first place Mary was imprisoned on her exile in England.

Our quiz and gallery have, as you'd expect, a 'castles linked to Mary' theme.

Anyway I hope you enjoy the issue

Chris





# CASTLES LINKED TO MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS

Spend much time in the UK visiting castles and you'll be struck by just how many of them claim a link to Mary, Queen of Scots.

That's understandable as she was born in a castle, lived in several, was imprisoned in even more and then was executed in yet another. Here then is a list of the main castles, with the greatest claim...

## LINLITHGOW PALACE

**Birthplace and royal nursery (1542)**

Mary was born at Linlithgow Palace on 8 December 1542, only six days after her father James V died. The grand late-medieval/early Renaissance palace, set beside Linlithgow Loch, was one of the Stewart royal residences and symbolised her dynastic claim from infancy.

Although she spent much of her childhood abroad, Linlithgow's association with her birth made it a potent site of memory and legitimacy for her supporters in Scotland. The palace later fell into ruin, but its link to Mary's origin remains central to her story.



# STIRLING CASTLE

## Childhood education and upbringing (1543–1548)

Stirling was one of the main royal strongholds where Mary spent parts of her early years.

As a Scottish royal residence, Stirling Castle served both as a defensive fortress and a centre for court life; noble guardians and regents used it to supervise the young queen's upbringing after James V's death.

The castle's royal apartments and chapel are where Scottish monarchs prepared for rule, and Mary's time there placed her within the traditional training and ceremonial life of the Scottish crown.

Stirling helped shape her identity as Scotland's sovereign given its long Scottish history (it had strong links to William Wallace of Braveheart fame for example)..

# EDINBURGH CASTLE

## Coronation (1543)

Mary's coronation was held Queen of the Scots in Edinburgh Castle . The castle dominated the capital, as it does today, and held the Honours of Scotland (crown, sceptre, sword).

She was crowned with this Scottish regalia, making Edinburgh Castle central to the legitimacy of the monarchy she inherited as an infant. The fortress's political and military importance made it a focal point during factional struggles in Mary's time.

While she did not live there continuously, the castle and its royal regalia symbolised the authority she claimed and the contested nature of power in Scotland during her reign.

Stirling Castle





# PALACE OF HOLYROODHOUSE

## **Queen in residence (1561–1567)**

After returning from France in 1561, Mary made Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh her principal Scottish court. Between 1561 and 1567 she lived, held council, entertained diplomats, and staged courtly life there. Holyrood's private chambers, state rooms and chapel were settings for key events: her marriages, political manoeuvres, and the pageantry of her reign.

The palace is also where tensions with Protestant nobles and court intrigues played out. Mary's household at Holyrood shaped many of the political relationships that later led to her downfall.

# LOCHLEVEN CASTLE

## **Imprisonment, forced abdication, and dramatic escape (1567–1568)**

After her defeat at Carberry Hill in June 1567 Mary was taken to Lochleven Castle and held captive. While imprisoned there she was compelled to sign abdication papers in favour of her infant son James VI.

In May 1568 she made a famous escape from Lochleven (helped by allies and a sympathetic jailer), a dramatic turning point that ended her active rule in Scotland and precipitated her flight to England. Lochleven is therefore the site of both her political humiliation and one of the most dramatic episodes of her life.

# CARLISLE CASTLE

## **Mary's first English prison (May–July 1568)**

When Mary fled to England in 1568 she was escorted to Carlisle Castle, where she was held initially while English ministers considered her fate.

Carlisle's role was pivotal: what was to be a brief refuge quickly became the start of nearly two decades of detention.

The castle's wards hosted the early interrogations and the political decisions that transformed Mary from a fleeing monarch into a pawn and prisoner of Elizabethan policy.

Carlisle thus marks Mary's transition from sovereign to captive.



Palace Of Holyroodhouse





Tutbury Castle

## TUTBURY CASTLE

**Early English captivity  
(1569 onwards)**

Soon after Carlisle, Mary was taken to Tutbury Castle (Staffordshire), one of the first English great houses used to hold her.

Tutbury was an early place of confinement where she first realised she was now a royal exile and prisoner rather than a guest.

She lived there under the watch of English officials; the castle's halls witnessed the initial phase of Mary's lengthy English captivity and the beginning of her downward political slide.

## SHEFFIELD CASTLE & MANOR HOUSE

**Long-term custody (1570s–1584)**

From the 1570s Mary spent many years under the custody of George Talbot, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, often based at Sheffield Castle and Manor Lodge.

These sites were adapted to hold a royal prisoner with household trappings yet under strict surveillance. Sheffield became a sort of “base camp” for Mary's captivity: she entertained a constrained retinue, corresponded with allies, and was moved regionally as political threats rose and fell. Sheffield embodies much of Mary's middle years in England — dignity under constraint.

## FOTHERINGHAY CASTLE

**Trial and execution (1587)**

Fotheringhay Castle in Northamptonshire was where Mary was tried, condemned, and executed on 8 February 1587 after years of captivity in England. Held as a prisoner by Elizabeth I's government,

Mary was implicated in plots against Elizabeth and tried for treason. Fotheringhay's scaffold is the place where her life ended; the site therefore marks the legal and fatal conclusion to her long struggle for safety, legitimacy and, for many English Catholics, the throne of England.



# QUIZ: CASTLES LINKED TO MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS

See if you can match the castle connected with Mary Queen of Scots with its photo. Answers on page 24.

Tutbury Castle

Inverary Castle

Burleigh Castle

Carlisle Castle

Craigmillar Castle

Fotheringhay Castle

Holyrood Palace

Edinburgh Castle

Stirling Castle

Borthwick Castle

Dumbarton Castle

Lochleven Castle

Falkland Palace

Linlithgow Palace

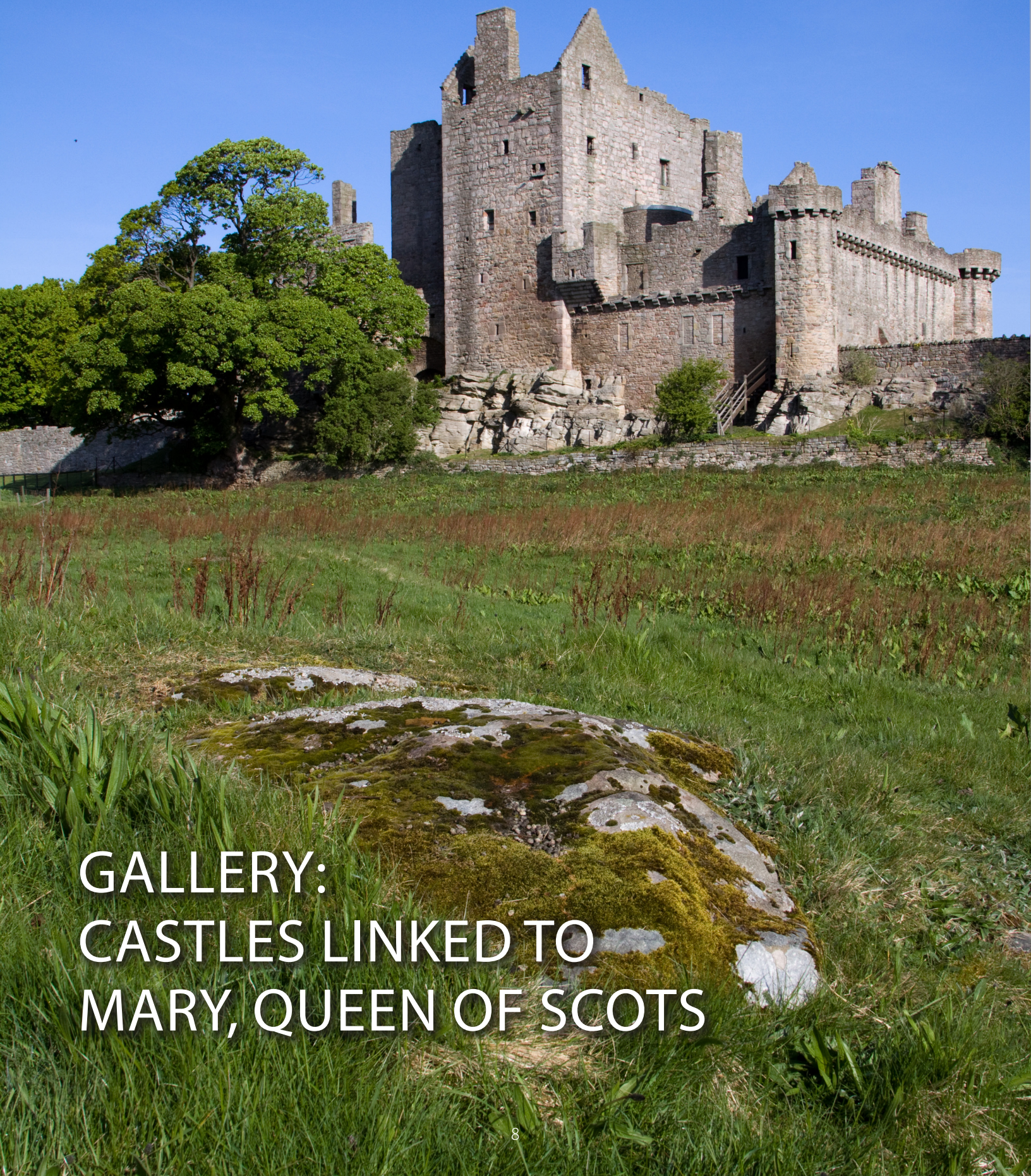








# Craigmillar Castle



GALLERY:  
CASTLES LINKED TO  
MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS





Inverary Castle



# Edinburgh Castle







Sunset At Stirling Castle





Falkland Palace





Cannon, Edinburgh Castle





Dumbarton Castle



# MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS

## HER BIRTH, LIFE & EARLY DEATH

Here's more on the subject of this month's issue - Mary Queen of Scots - from her birth to her downfall and execution.

### BIRTH & CHILDHOOD

Mary Stuart was born in Linlithgow Palace in December 1542 to King James V of Scotland and his French wife, Mary of Guise. Her father died just days after her birth, so she became queen when she was still a baby; Scotland was governed by regents until she grew up.

Her mother, Mary of Guise, was French, and that connection shaped Mary's early life. To protect her from the instability in Scotland, she was sent to France as a child where she was raised at the glittering court, becoming close to the French royal family, especially Catherine de' Medici, the formidable queen mother of France.

Mary's education was thorough, and she became fluent in French, Latin, Spanish, and a bit of Scots. She learned music, poetry, and dancing, growing into a lively and intelligent young woman.





A Young Mary



## MARRIAGE & TRAGEDY

At fifteen, she married Francis, heir to the French throne, and soon after, he became King Francis II.

It was a promising match. Mary was queen of two countries for a brief moment, linking Scotland and France against the constant threat from England.

Unfortunately her happiness didn't last as Francis died unexpectedly at the age of sixteen, leaving Mary a widow at just eighteen. With little choice, she returned to her native Scotland in 1561.

## RETURN & IMPRISONMENT

Britain, though, was no refuge. Queen Elizabeth I saw Mary as a threat and kept her under house arrest for nearly twenty years.



Mary's Coat of Arms

During this period, Mary wrote numerous letters and maintained a network of supporters. Plots to free her and place her on the English throne, or at least to restore her to Scotland, persisted.

Whether she encouraged these plans is still debated, but their existence was enough to keep Elizabeth wary.

Scotland wasn't the same as the elegant French court. It was experiencing deep religious changes—Protestantism had taken hold, and Mary, a devout Catholic, was suddenly the focal point of suspicion and discontent. She tried to be diplomatic, but tensions simmered.

Her cousin, Elizabeth I of England, was another central figure. Elizabeth was wary of Mary's claim to the English throne—Mary was, after all, a legitimate granddaughter of Henry VII and, to some, the rightful Queen of England.



## PERSONAL LIFE

Mary's personal life became as complicated as her political one. After years of pressure to remarry, she chose Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, another claimant to the English throne. Their union wasn't happy. Darnley was charming but unreliable and prone to violence. Their marriage deteriorated quickly.

Tragedy followed: Darnley was murdered in suspicious circumstances in 1567, and many suspected Mary had a hand in it. Whether or not she was involved, her reputation suffered.

Soon after, Mary married James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell—the very man many believed was behind Darnley's murder. This marriage scandalized the Scottish nobility, and Mary's enemies seized the opportunity to act.

She was forced to abdicate the throne in favour of her infant son, James VI, and she was imprisoned in Loch Leven Castle. After a daring escape, she tried to regain her throne but was defeated and fled to England, hoping for support from Elizabeth.

## ENGLAND

Mary's arrival in England in 1568 marked the beginning of the final, most tragic chapter of her life. Rather than offering the sanctuary and assistance she desperately hoped for, Queen Elizabeth I greeted Mary with suspicion and caution. The political danger Mary represented—a Catholic queen with a strong claim to the English throne—was too great for Elizabeth to ignore.

Instead of freedom, Mary found herself a captive. She was kept under strict surveillance, first at Carlisle Castle, then at Castle Bolton, and finally at a succession of country houses and fortresses across England. Her household was reduced, her movements monitored, and her correspondence intercepted.



Castle Bolton





Sir Francis Walsingham

## PLOTS

Mary's presence in England quickly became a focal point for Catholic plots and conspiracies.

Her supporters, both within England and abroad, saw her as a rallying figure against Protestant rule. Rebellions, such as the Northern Rising of 1569, broke out in her name, but were swiftly crushed.

The English government, alarmed by the continued threats, responded with ever tighter restrictions, moving Mary frequently to prevent rescue attempts and further isolating her from the outside world.

Despite the risks, Mary never ceased to communicate with her network of supporters.

She sent coded letters, negotiated with European monarchs, and remained at the centre of intrigue.

It was this continued involvement—or at least her perceived involvement—in plots against Elizabeth that ultimately sealed her fate. The most notorious of these was the Babington Plot of 1586, a conspiracy to assassinate Elizabeth and place Mary on the English throne.

Unbeknownst to Mary, Elizabeth's spymaster, Sir Francis Walsingham, had intercepted her secret correspondence, laying a trap that implicated her in the plot. The evidence was damning.

Elizabeth, reluctant to execute a fellow queen and cousin, agonized over the decision. But pressure from her ministers and parliament grew relentless. The threat Mary represented could no longer be contained by imprisonment alone.



## THE END

In October 1586, Mary was brought to trial at Fotheringhay Castle. She defended herself with eloquence and composure, denying any intent to harm Elizabeth, but the verdict was a foregone conclusion. She was found guilty of treason.

On February 8th, 1587, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, met her end in the great hall of Fotheringhay. Dressed in crimson—a Catholic symbol of martyrdom—she faced her executioners with courage and grace.

Her death was both an ending and a beginning: the passing of a queen whose life had been shaped by dynastic struggle, religious conflict, and unyielding ambition; and the final act in a drama that would echo through British history.

She was buried at Peterborough Cathedral on 1 August 1587 with a heraldic funeral. In 1612, her son James VI and I ordered her reburial at Westminster Abbey in London.



Casting Of Mary's Tomb In Westminster Abbey





# LESSER KNOWN BRITISH CASTLES

## CARLISLE CASTLE

Carlisle Castle stands in the centre of the city of the same name, close to the border between England and Scotland, a location which has ensured that it has been of strategic importance for nearly a millennium.

As well as its connection to Mary Queen of Scots, it has a long history with bit parts in many of the significant events of both English and Scottish history. Here is our guide to this history, and information if you're lucky enough to visit



## 11<sup>TH</sup> TO 16<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

The castle's origins lie in the late eleventh century, when William II, the son of William the Conqueror, ordered the construction of a timber fortification around 1092, shortly after reclaiming the area from Scottish control.

Over the following decades, this wooden structure was replaced with stone, and by the early twelfth century the castle began to resemble a more permanent fortress, marking Carlisle as a key military outpost on a frontier that was, for centuries, a point of contention between the English and Scottish crowns.

The castle's design reflects repeated efforts to fortify it against sieges. It was besieged several times, most notably in 1173 and again in 1315 by Robert the Bruce during his campaigns in northern England.

Its thick stone curtain walls, imposing keep, and defensive towers were repeatedly adapted over time to accommodate new forms of warfare.

In the sixteenth century, under the reign of Henry VIII, the castle was further strengthened as part of the king's wider programme of modernising England's defences, a sign that Carlisle remained a place of high military importance well after the medieval era.

## IMPRISONMENT OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS

Carlisle Castle also became a temporary place of confinement for Mary, Queen of Scots, after she fled Scotland in 1568 following her defeat at the Battle of Langside. She sought refuge in England, expecting support from her cousin Elizabeth I, but instead she was placed under guard and held in the castle for several weeks.

She was moved south and eventually entered longer-term captivity. The rooms she occupied in the Warden's Tower are still pointed out to visitors today, offering a rare physical connection to this dramatic episode in British history, and serving as an early indication of Mary's long imprisonment and eventual execution.



Warden's Tower



## 17<sup>TH</sup> TO 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

The castle also played a role in the turbulent political events of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the English Civil War, it was held by Royalist forces, who surrendered it to the Parliamentarians in 1645 after a prolonged siege.

A century later, in 1745, it became embroiled in the Jacobite Rising, when the supporters of Charles Edward Stuart briefly captured Carlisle, only for the castle to be retaken by government forces shortly afterwards. This was one of the last times it would see active military conflict, though it remained a garrison and administrative centre well into the nineteenth century.

## THE CASTLE TODAY

Today, the structure offers a clear visual record of its layered history, as many of the changes it underwent over time remain evident in its architecture. The central keep, largely dating from the twelfth century, is surrounded by outer walls and gatehouses that reflect successive periods of modification, while the interiors have been adapted over the centuries for various purposes, including storage, barracks, and even a prison.

Notably, visitors can still see prisoner carvings made by Jacobite captives following the 1745 uprising, a small but striking reminder of the castle's human history. The complex also houses the Cumbria Museum of Military Life, which focuses on the history of the King's Own Royal Border Regiment and provides context for the castle's military significance.

## VISITING THE CASTLE

For a visit, we would recommend setting aside at least two to three hours, as the site is more extensive than it might initially appear.

The keep, though relatively compact, contains multiple rooms and exhibitions that are worth exploring slowly, and climbing the stairs to its upper levels offers a good vantage point over the city and surrounding countryside, illustrating why this location was chosen for a fortress in the first place.

The outer walls and towers are accessible via a circuit walk, which helps in understanding the castle's defensive layout, and the museum warrants time if you are interested in nineteenth- and twentieth-century military history in addition to medieval topics.



Entry To Castle





The castle is managed by English Heritage, so it is well maintained, with information panels throughout that provide historical context without overwhelming visitors. Audio guides are available and are useful for those who prefer a more structured visit, though the site is also easy to navigate independently.

Entry is straightforward, with tickets available online or at the gate, and opening hours are generally consistent year-round, though it is worth checking in advance if you are visiting during winter months when shorter daylight hours can affect access. Visiting earlier in the day may make for a quieter experience, as afternoons tend to draw more tour groups, especially in the summer.

While there are limited facilities within the castle itself, its location within Carlisle makes it convenient to combine with other attractions or a meal in the city centre, which is only a short walk away. Comfortable walking shoes are advisable, as the cobbled surfaces and steep staircases can be uneven, and, given the open courtyards, weatherproof clothing is helpful in case of rain, which is common in this part of Cumbria.

Overall, Carlisle Castle offers an opportunity to trace nearly a thousand years of border history in one site, and while it is smaller than some other English castles, its location, its well-preserved medieval keep, and its layered story make it a worthwhile stop for anyone interested in British history, particularly the complex relationship between England and Scotland.

**Quiz Answers;** 1. Edinburgh Castle; 2. Inverary Castle; 3. Holyrood Palace; 4. Stirling Castle; 5. Falkland Palace; 6. Craigmillar Castle; 7. Lochleven Castle; 8. Dumbarton Castle; 9. Tutbury Castle; 10. Burleigh Castle; 11. Borthwick Castle; 12. Linlithgow Palace; 13. Fotheringhay Castle; 14. Carlisle Castle.





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