

May in Scotland

Part 1: 10-17 May 2025
Edinburgh, The Borders, Perthshire



Abbotsford, the house of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) – View of the house from the kitchen garden

Saturday 10 May 2025

I arrived at Edinburgh airport in the afternoon. After an easy trip to the city centre with the tramway, I met Lynda, my American friend, at Parliament House Hotel, 15 Calton Hill, Edinburgh, EH1 3BJ (www.parliamenthouse-hotel.co.uk).



Entrance of the Parliament House hotel



Main hall of The Dome

In the evening, we went to George Street, in New Town where we had a drink at The Dome, (<https://www.thedomeedinburgh.com/>) and then a light dinner of tapas at Cafe Andaluz ([Spanish Tapas in Edinburgh George St — Cafe Andaluz](#)).

Sunday 11 May

From the hotel, we walked down Calton Road to go the Palace of Holyroodhouse, our first visit of that day. We could not take pictures inside the Palace, but the audio guides are very useful, and the visit circuit inside the house is well organized: [Palace of Holyroodhouse](#).

Under a bright sunshine, the promenade in the gardens and around the abbey was very pleasant, though we were not able to visit the ruins of the Abbey: access was denied for security reasons.



View of Holyrood Gardens and Arthur's Seat



Fountain at the entrance of the Palace

We then walked the Royal Mile, paying a visit to the Museum of Edinburgh (free entrance) where several items retained our attention: the National Covenant of 1638, and collections of Scottish decorative art (glass, silver, longcase clocks, along with pottery and porcelain dating from the 1760s). Here below is an example of Scottish craftsmanship, a huge epergne (almost one meter high) made in Edinburgh by Holyrood Flint Glassworks in 1840:

[Museum of Edinburgh | Museums and Galleries Edinburgh](https://www.edinburghmuseums.org.uk/museums-and-galleries/museums/museum-of-edinburgh/)



Epergne in the Museum of Edinburgh



Tron Kirk Market, Royal Mile

Tourist shops fill both sides of the Royal Mile, selling dubious “Scottish” souvenirs. The Tron Kirk Market, located in a deconsecrated church (see photo above), though, offers an interesting variety of Scottish craftsmanship: [Tron Kirk Market, Royal Mile – Scottish Design Exchange](#)

We also visited St Giles’ Cathedral: “founded in 1124 by King David I, it has been a working church for over 900 years. A backdrop to Scotland’s turbulent religious history, it has seen the seeds of civil war sown and been John Knox’s parish church during the Reformation”: [St Giles' Cathedral](#).

We went up to the Edinburgh Castle, and admired the view from there, but we did not visit it for lack of time: [Official Edinburgh Castle Website](#).

Instead, we walked down the Mound and through Princes Gardens to the Scottish National Gallery: [National | National Galleries of Scotland](#). Like many museums in Great Britain, the entrance to visit permanent collections is free. We particularly enjoyed the “Glasgow Boys” and the “Glasgow Girls” exhibitions, where the stunning work of Phoebe Anna Traquair, *The Progress of a Soul* developed in four embroideries, captured our imaginations.

I also liked the presentation of the various sources of inspiration, legends and histories, which fed the work of 19th-century artists, such as William Bell Scott’s screen *The King’s Quair*, or the arrangement of two different sculptures entitled *Ossian and Wordsworth: Inspiring Sculpture*.

And I could not resist photographing two of the greatest emblems of Scotland: the portrait of the poet and writer Walter Scott, and of *The Monarch of the Glen*.



Phoebe Anna Traquair, *The Progress of a Soul* (1902)



William Bell Scott, *The King's Quair* (1867-8)



George Anderson Lawson's *The Bard* (1867) and Alexander Munro's *Young Romilly* (c. 1863)



Henry Raeburn, *Portrait of Sir Walter Scott*



Edwin Landseer, *The Monarch of the Glen* (c. 1851)

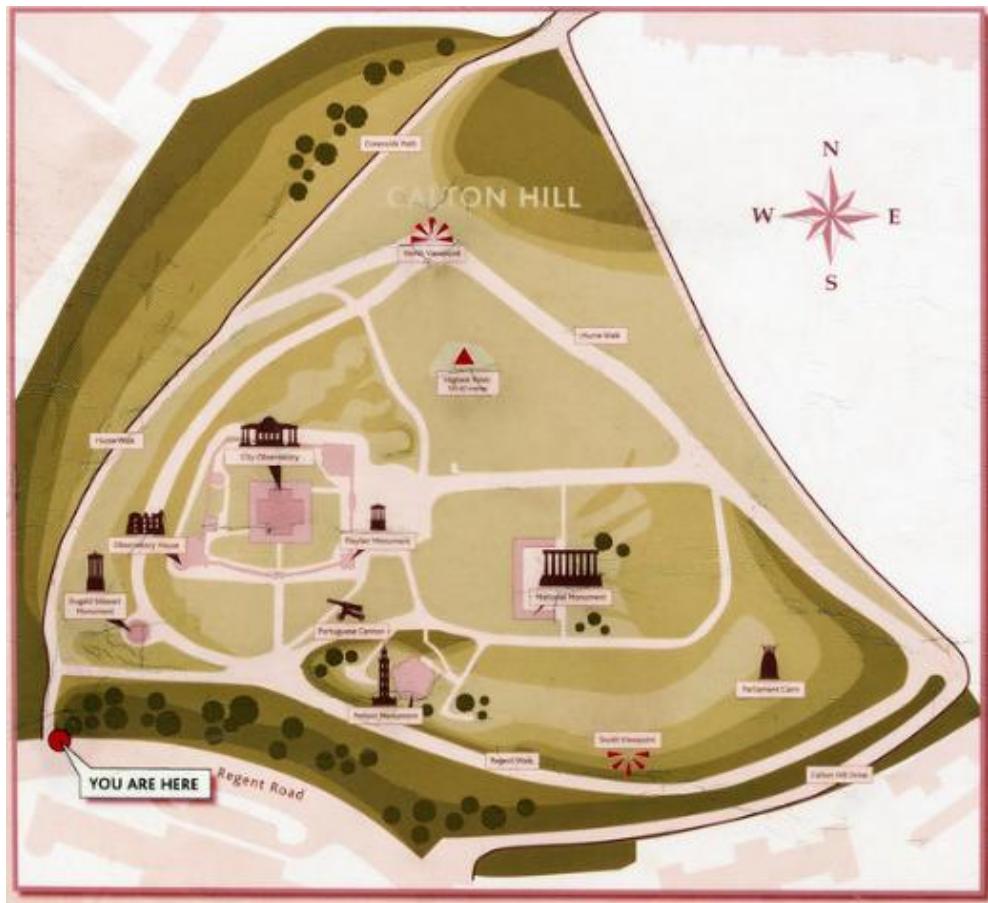
It was time to go to the Balmoral Hotel for our afternoon tea at Palm Court: I had booked it months in advance, and we did not regret this luxurious experience. Like most customers, though, we could not eat all the food provided, and left the hotel with boxes containing the precious, remaining cakes!
<https://www.roccofortehotels.com/hotels-and-resorts/the-balmoral-hotel/dining/palm-court/>



After such an indulgence, I could not go back and stay in the hotel room, so I put back my trainers and decided to explore Calton Hill in a glorious sunset. Its elevated position provides panoramic views of Edinburgh and on the hilltop are several monuments in a Greek revival style, which gave this city the name of the “Athens of the North”.



Calton Hill, seen from the Esplanade near Edinburgh Castle: the Nelson Monument, on the right, was behind scaffolding, the Dugald Stewart Monument is in the middle of the photo and St Andrew's House on the front.



Adjacent to the Nelson Monument, the National Monument was intended to commemorate the Scottish servicemen who died in the Napoleonic Wars, but was never completed, leaving just the twelve columns we see today:



The National Monument



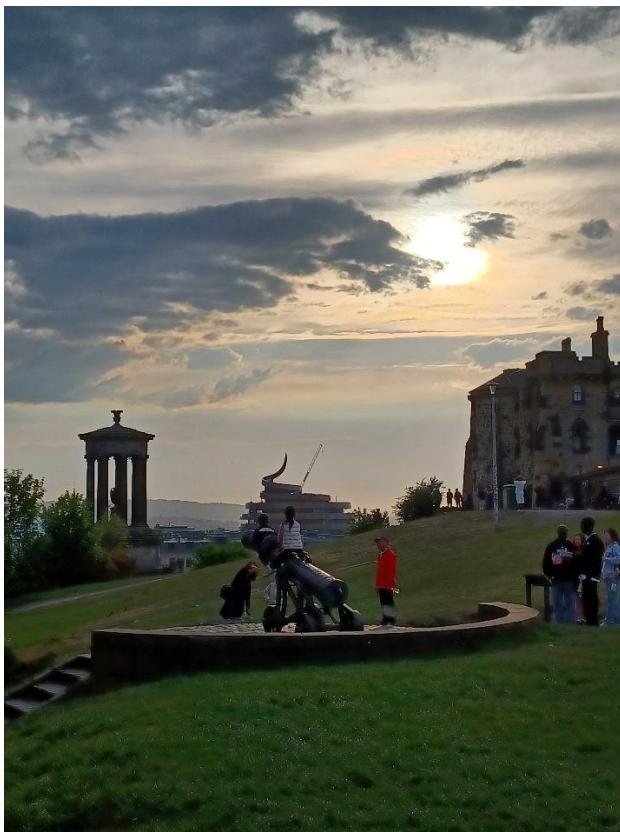
The Dugald Stewart Monument



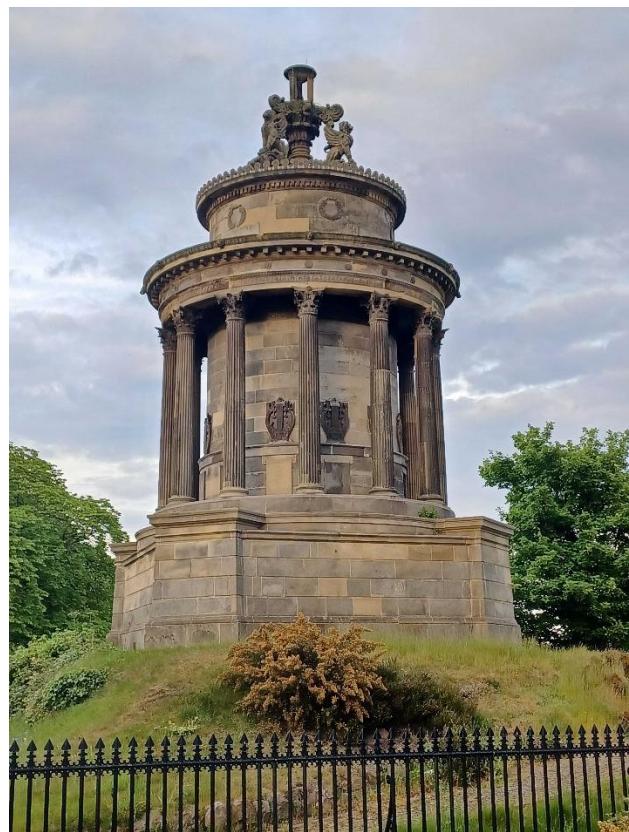
View of Arthur's Seat, Holyroodhouse and the Burns Monument on the front right.



Panoramic view down to Leith and across the Firth of Forth



The Cannon and Dugald Stewart Monument at dusk



The Burns Monument on Regent Road

The garden around the Burns Monument is planted with flowers mentioned by Robert Burns (1759-1796) in his poetry, which conveys his love of nature and life: “the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the foxglove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birk [birch] and the hoary hawthorn...”

Calton Hill is also the headquarters of the Scottish Government, which is based at St Andrew's House, on the steep southern slope of the hill. It opened on 4 September 1939, less than 24 hours after the outbreak of the Second World War and is still a centre of government:



Monday 12 May

From our hotel, we walked in New Town along Queen Street Gardens, then admired the Georgian buildings around Moray Place (still a private garden). From there we found our way towards the *Water of Leith Walkway* to walk through Dean Gardens to Dean Village.

This lush path along the river Leith offers a very agreeable walk, especially early in the morning. DCI Karen Pirie often takes this walkway in the crime novel *Past Lying*, by Van McDermid (2023)!



The Dean Industrial Village

The city's bakers were the mills' biggest customers. The Incorporation of Baxters' (the bakers' guild or union) owned five of the mills here: you can see their emblem, of bakers' shovels loaded with loaves, on several buildings around the village. Look out for this one on your right at the top of Miller Row: it is the date stone from Lindsay's Mill.

The three millstones behind you came from Lindsay's mill and are made from a hard stone, specially imported from France, so that they would last a long time. You can still feel grooves in the face of the stones: these guided the crushed grain out to the edge of the stones.

Above you soars Dean Bridge, built in 1832 and designed by Thomas Telford. It was paid for partly by John Scott, the 1st Duke of Buccleuch and Lord Provost, who wanted better access to extend the fashionable New Town to the north of the river.

Walk up Hawthornbank Lane to the footbridge to find the site of the ford: the original crossing point for the Water of Leith.

Edinburgh and the Dean in about 1693, by Slezer.

Edinburgh and the Dean in about 1693, by Slezer.

The Water of Leith Walkway follows the river from Balerno, at the foot of the Pentland Hills, to the sea of Leith. For more information on the Walkway and the river, contact:

The City of Edinburgh District Council, Department of Planning and Recreation, The Water of Leith Conservation Trust, 24 Lanark Road, Edinburgh, Tel: 0131 455 7387



Following the Dean Path we then arrived on Queensferry Road, then Queensferry Street, where we took a break in a *café*, then visited The Scotland Shop, where my American friend found the Fraser tartan worn by the Highlander Jamie Fraser in the TV series *Outlander*. As we wanted to have fresh fish for lunch, we took the tramway at Shandwick Place to go to 'The Shore' stop, in Leith.

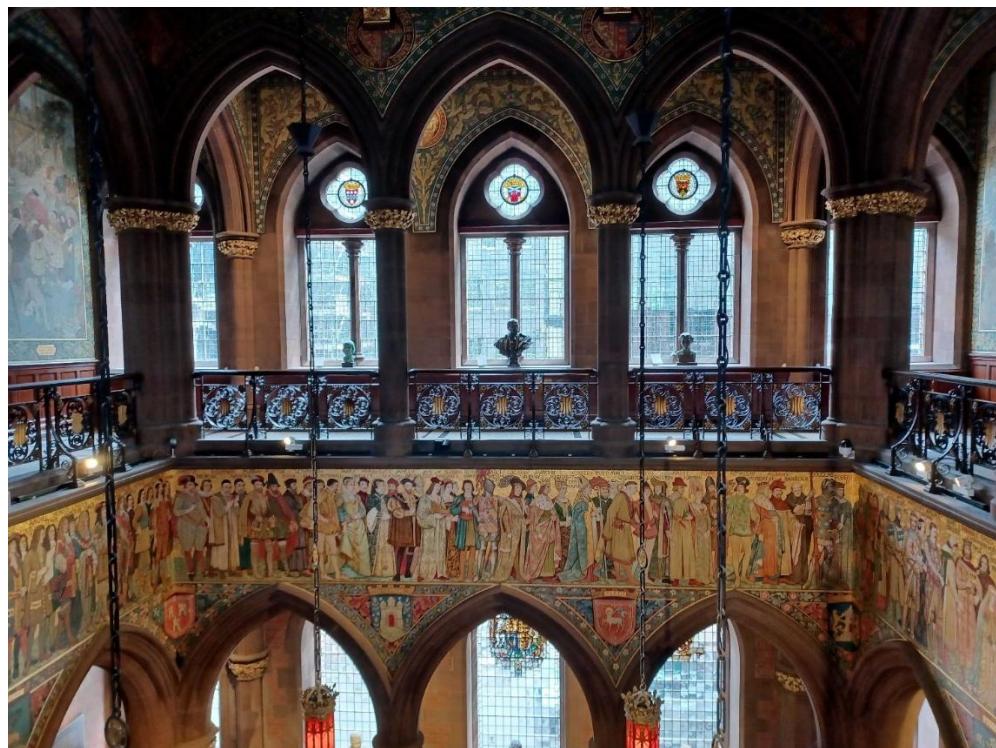
There we went to 'The Granary', a casual restaurant on the front of Leith Shore: [The Granary | Hearty Food & Great Pints on Leith Shore](#)



Back to the city centre with the tramway, we stopped at the National Portrait Gallery, where a temporary exhibition was taking place, of great interest to my present research studies: *The World of King James VI & I* : [The World of King James VI & I | National Galleries of Scotland](#). I took many photos and bought the exhibition book: [Art & Court of James VI & I](#).

Admiring—among many other superb decorations—the golden frieze in the great hall, which celebrates “the history of Scotland and the Scots who have inspired and changed the world”, I couldn’t help taking the following photo from the gallery.

See: [The Great Hall in the Portrait | National Galleries of Scotland](#)



Once back at our hotel, Kirsty, a Scottish friend of Lynda’s, came to fetch us and drove us to her house in Kirk Yetholm, near Kelso. Yetholm is a picturesque settlement, straddling the Bowmont River on the edge of the Cheviot Hills, close to the English Border. It consists of two small villages (Town Yetholm and Kirk Yetholm) and is famed for being the home to the kings and queens of the Scottish gypsies from the 16th century.



Extract from a map of the Scottish Borders, Google maps, 2025



The Gypsy Tribe Memorial (2003) on the village green



The 'Gypsy Palace' in Kirk Yetholm

The former 'Gypsy Palace' can be seen just off Kirk Yetholm Green: it is now a private house. The village is a lively place with its pub on the edge of the green.



A view of the village green and its magnificent tree. The pub is in the background.

Kirk Yetholm is well known among walkers: the Pennine Way National Trail (268 miles) ends up in this village, and it is also a stop on St Cuthbert's Way. See [The Pennine Way - Yorkshire Dales National Park : Yorkshire Dales National Park](#) and <https://www.stcuthbertsway.info/#163-slide-1>

Kirk Yetholm: [Kirk Yetholm Visitor Guide - Accommodation, Things To Do & More | VisitScotland](#) and [Town Yetholm & Kirk Yetholm Feature Page on Undiscovered Scotland](#)

Tuesday 13 May 2025

That day, we wanted to explore the Tweed Valley, and our hosts drove us to Abbotsford, the house of the writer, poet and antiquarian Walter Scott (1771 – 1832): see his portrait p. 6.

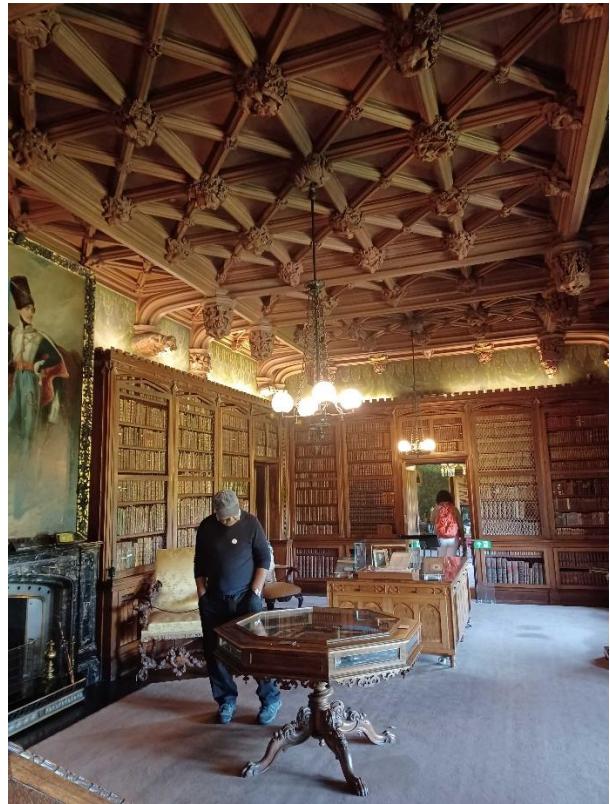
Link: [Abbotsford - The Home of Sir Walter Scott](#)

It was again a beautiful day, perfect to visit the gardens and the surroundings of the house.

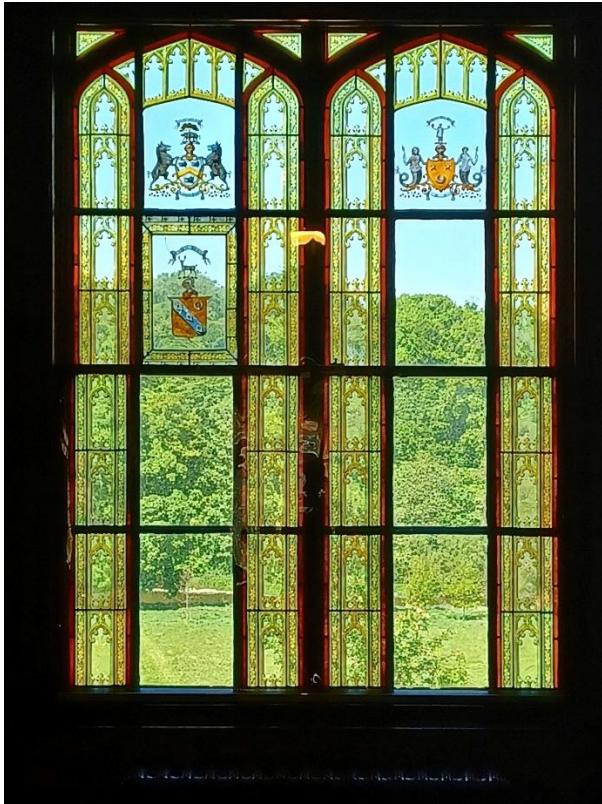




Walter Scott's office



The library



Two examples of stained glass windows in the house

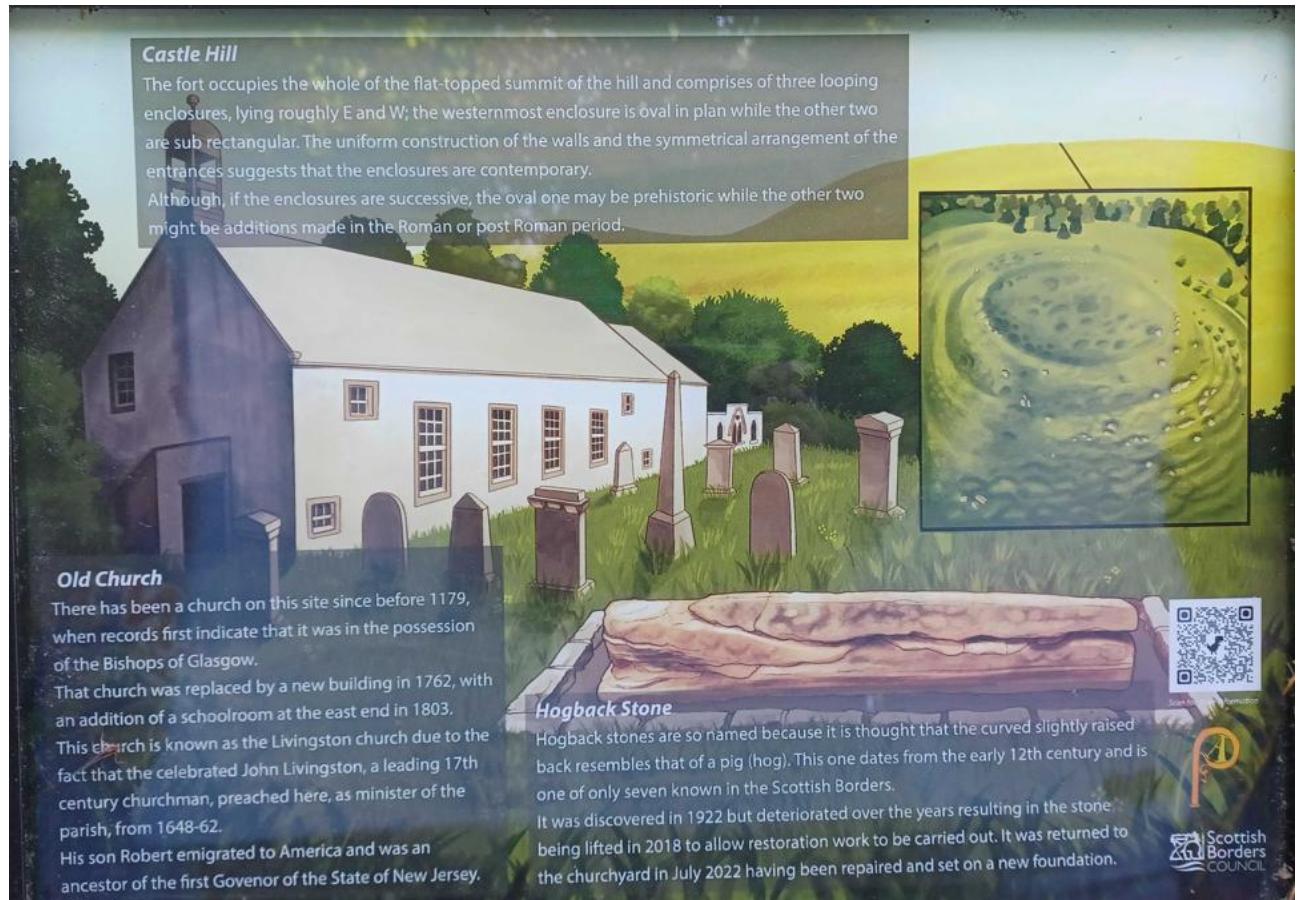
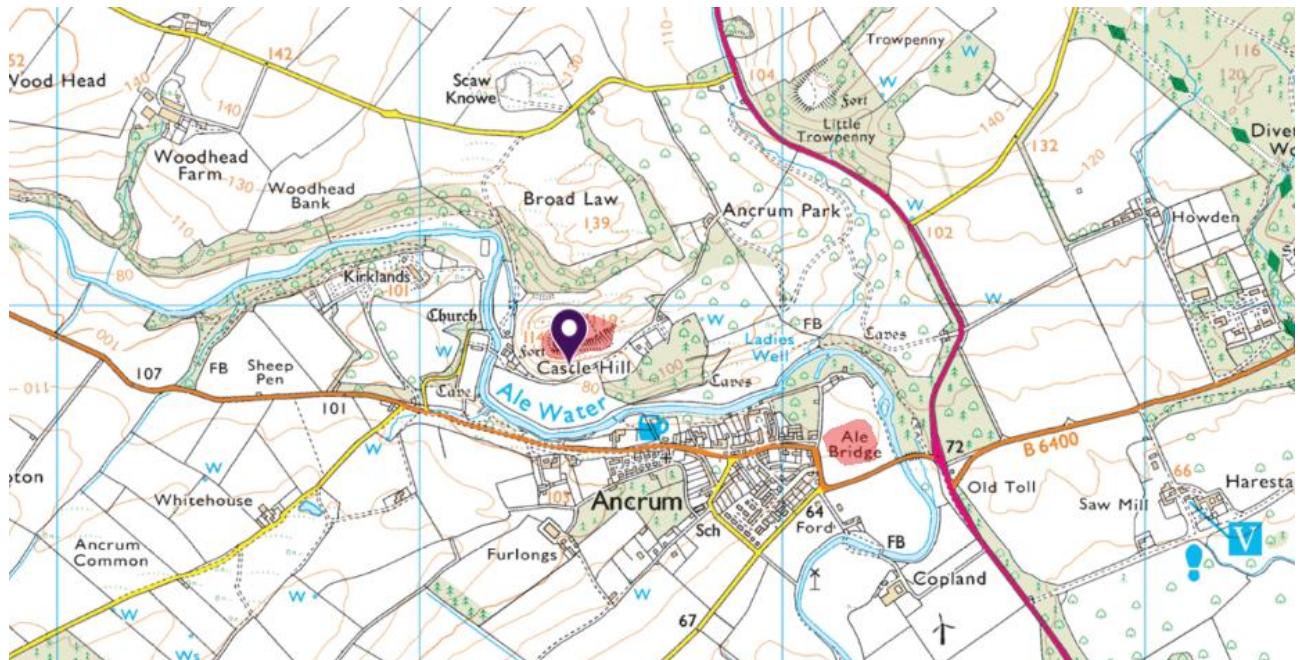


"Standing on the banks of the River Tweed, Abbotsford was Sir Walter Scott's creation and, after his death in 1832, somewhere visited by millions. Its architecture and interior design made it an iconic building of the 19th century Scottish Baronial style, and it remains a key site in the history of European Romanticism". (see [Abbotsford - The Home of Sir Walter Scott](#)).

After a quick lunch in a *café*, we decided to go and visit Bowhill House, the Buccleuch family's country home, but unfortunately, it was closed to the public.

Link: [One Of Scotland's Finest Country Estates | Bowhill House](#)

So, on our way back, we drove through the little village of Ancrum, where we visited the churchyard and the hogback stone.





In the evening, we drove to Kelso for having a drink and a very nice dinner at *The Contented Vine* with our hosts. See <https://www.thecontentedvine.com/>

Wednesday 14 May 2025

After a late breakfast, Kirsty drove us to Hawick (see map on page 14), where we wanted to visit one of the last factories of cashmere knitting in the UK and visit some shops. Indeed, the town grew significantly during the Industrial Revolution and Victorian era as a centre for the manufacture of textiles and knitwear, but textile production has declined since the late 20th century.

We enjoyed a guided tour of the Johnstons of Elgin's knitting mill, then had a light lunch at their coffee shop: [Johnstons of Elgin | Welcome to the World of Johnstons of Elgin](https://www.johnstons-of-elgin.com/). As this mill works for many luxury brands all over the world, their products are quite expensive.

However, when we visited Hawico's Factory Shop, in Arthur Street, we found some high-quality items at an affordable price, produced in their nearby workshop during the previous seasons.

[Hawico | Scotland - Home of Luxury Scottish Cashmere](https://www.hawico.com/)

We also visited the Borders Distillery: if we appreciated how a former Edwardian electrical works was converted into the distillery building, our guide, though very knowledgeable, spoke so fast that even my American friend found it difficult to understand him. The tasting at the end of the tour was quite poor, considering the price paid for the visit ticket (£ 20), even if it included a whisky tasting glass as a gift. [Distillery Tours | The Borders Distillery](https://www.bordersdistillery.com/tours)

Thursday 15 May 2025

That day, Kirsty drove us to Rosslyn Chapel, located only seven miles from Edinburgh. "Founded in 1446, the beauty of its setting in rural Midlothian and the mysterious symbolism of its ornate stonework have inspired, attracted and intrigued writers, artists and visitors ever since."



As it was forbidden to take photos inside the Chapel, here is the link to the official website presenting its main highlights: [Highlights of Rosslyn Chapel - The Official Rosslyn Chapel Website.](https://www.rosslynchapel.com/)



The Master Mason Pillar¹



The Apprentice Pillar²

The view on the Chapel's surroundings is beautiful from the *café*, where we enjoyed a coffee break in the sunshine. Then we went to Dobbies Garden Centre near Edinburgh, a convenient place to say goodbye to Kirsty and meet my Scottish friends, who live near Perth and would host Lynda and I for the next few days.

After having lunch in the restaurant at Dobbies', we thus embarked on a new leg of our trip. On the way to Perthshire, our hosts stopped at Falkirk, to visit the Kelpies first, then the Falkirk Wheel.



¹ Photo from Rosslyn Chapel official website: [Master Mason's Pillar - The Official Rosslyn Chapel Website](http://www.rosslynchapel.com/master-masons-pillar)

² Photo from Rosslyn Chapel official website: [The Apprentice Pillar - The Official Rosslyn Chapel Website](http://www.rosslynchapel.com/apprentice-pillar)

The Kelpies are a pair of monumental steel horseheads (30 metres high), standing in an area of parkland known as *The Helix*. Designed by sculptor Andy Scott and completed in October 2013, *The Kelpies* “reflect the mythological transforming beasts possessing the strength and endurance of ten horses. They represent the lineage of the heavy horse of Scottish industry and economy, pulling the wagons, ploughs, barges, and coal ships that shaped the geographical layout of the Falkirk area.”



See: [The Kelpies - Wikipedia](#) and [The Helix: Home of The Kelpies, Falkirk – Parks | VisitScotland](#)

The Falkirk Wheel is a rotating boat lift connecting the Forth and Clyde Canal with the Union Canal. It opened in 2002 as part of the Millennium Link project, reconnecting the two canals for the first time since the 1930s. The world's one and only rotating boat lift, it is a marvel of engineering. See: [Falkirk Wheel - Wikipedia](#) and [Scottish Canals | The Falkirk Wheel Forth & Clyde](#).



After these interesting stops, we arrived at West Redstone, near Perth, where my Scottish friend live. We had planned to explore the beautiful countryside in Perthshire the following days through the visit of local historical places. See: [Perth - Holidays & Weekend Breaks | VisitScotland](#)

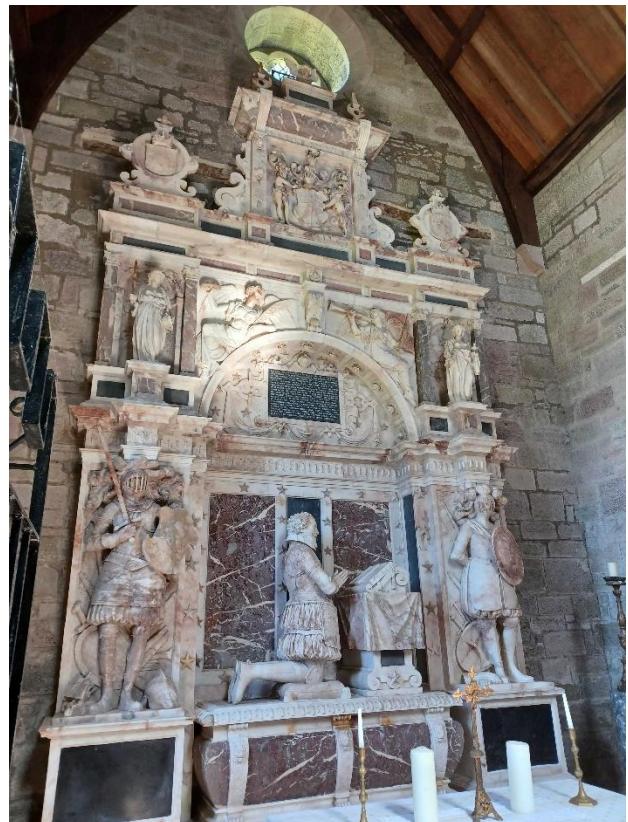
Friday 16 May 2025

That day we started our travel back into centuries of Scotland's history with the visit of Scone Palace, the crowning place of Scottish Kings, set in beautiful gardens.

See more on: [Scone Palace | Iconic Crowning Place of Scottish Kings](#)

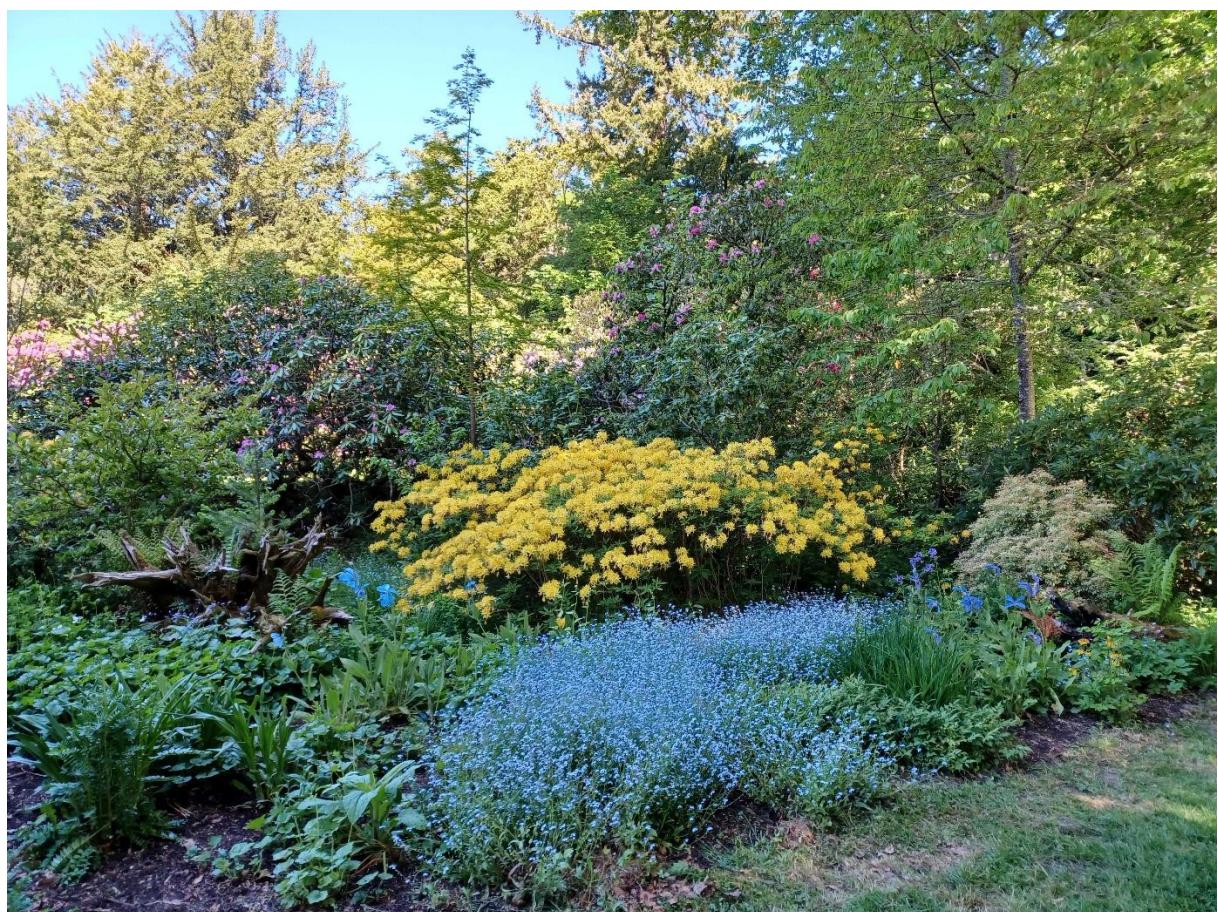


A replica of the Stone of Scone and the Chapel behind



Inside the Chapel

I sat on a replica of the Stone of Scone: the original is now the crown jewel of the new Perth Museum (see page 27). We then strolled into the beautiful gardens of the palace:



We even met a peacock in the wooden parts of the park!



We then drove to Perth Museum, in the centre of Perth, to attend a presentation of the Stone of Destiny, also known as the Stone of Scone, back to Perthshire for the first time in 700 years. "A powerful symbol of Scotland, it is wreathed in myths linking Bible heroes, Ancient Egyptian royalty, and Irish High Kings to the Scottish throne. This iconic artefact is still used to crown kings and queens of the United Kingdom today, including the coronation of King Charles III in May 2023".

See more on: [Perth Museum - The new home of the Stone of Destiny](#) (Free entry).



Photo: see [The Stone Of Destiny - Perth Museum](#)

We then had lunch at Effie's, a traditional tearoom and restaurant in the city centre of Perth: [Afternoon Tea in Perth | Traditional Tea Room Perth | Effie](#).

We can also recommend another good restaurant in which we had dinner the following day: Deans, 77-79 Kinnoull Street, Perth. See: [Deans Restaurant in Perth, Scotland](#)

In Perth we also visited Riverside Park, a beautiful public park alongside the River Tay, in which volunteers undertake planting, weeding, tidying and general maintenance across the gardens.

See: [Volunteers | Gardening work | Horticulture | Beautiful Perth](#)



View of Perth from Riverside Park

Volunteers have created and maintain a unique and extensive Heather Collection:

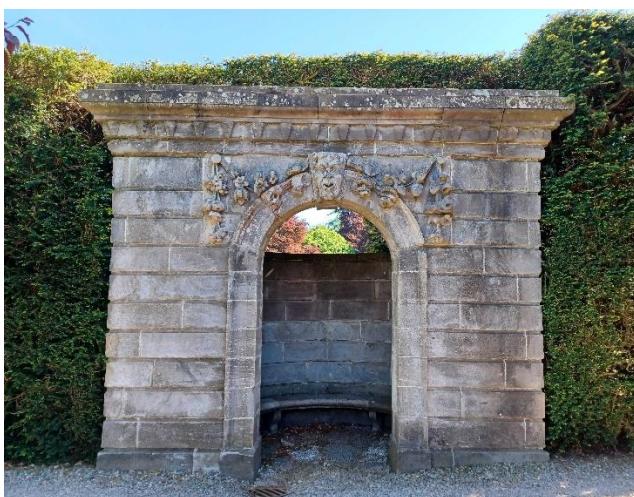
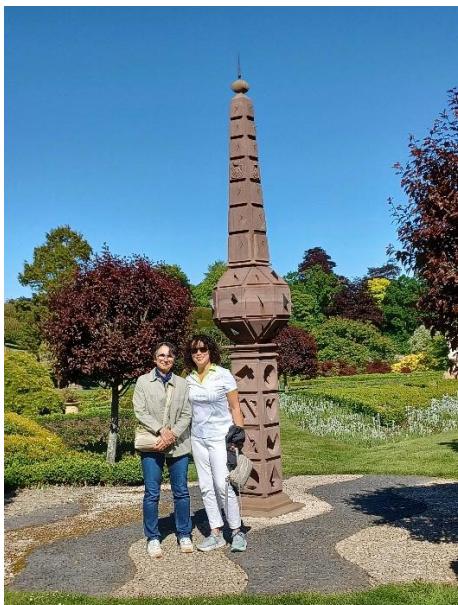


Compassionate Friends Garden – This is a contemplative garden created in partnership with Compassionate Friends, a charitable organisation of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents

In the afternoon, we went to visit the impressive formal garden at Drummond Castle.

See: [Drummond Gardens | Drummond Castle Gardens. Enjoy one of Europe's finest formal gardens](#)





Saturday 17 May 2025

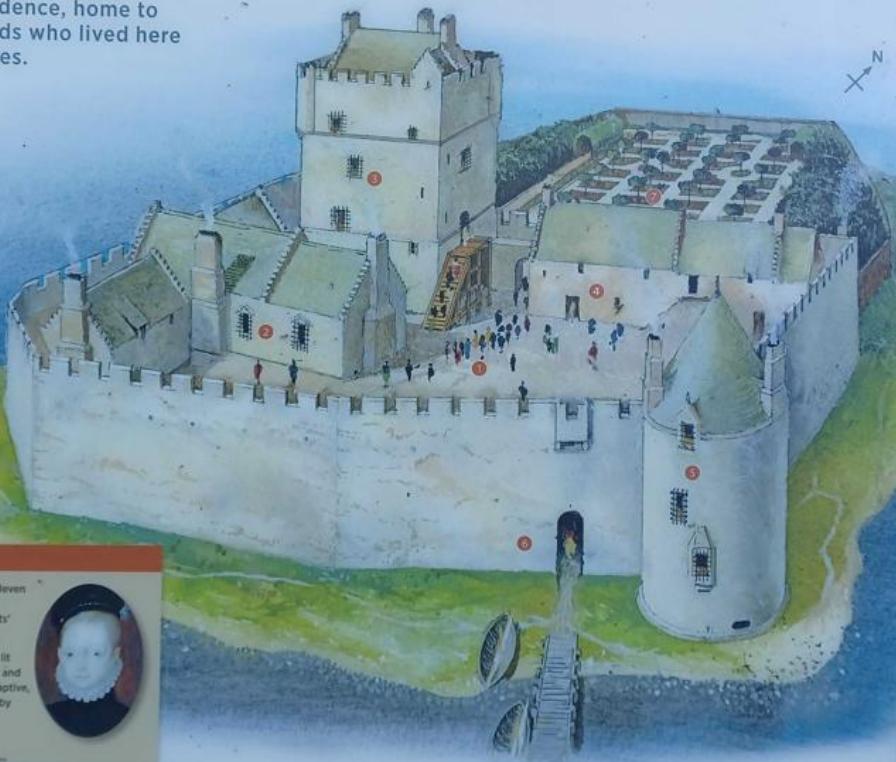
That morning, we went to Loch Leven (see map p. 34), to take the first boat to Lochleven Castle where Mary, Queen of Scots, was imprisoned between June 1567 and May 1568.



LIFE ON THE LOCH

Although strong and defensible, Lochleven Castle was also a functioning residence, home to the Douglas lairds who lived here with their families.

Below:
An artist's impression of how the castle may have looked during the 1560s, with the great hall and kitchen to the south of the tower house. The loch level was much higher than it is today.

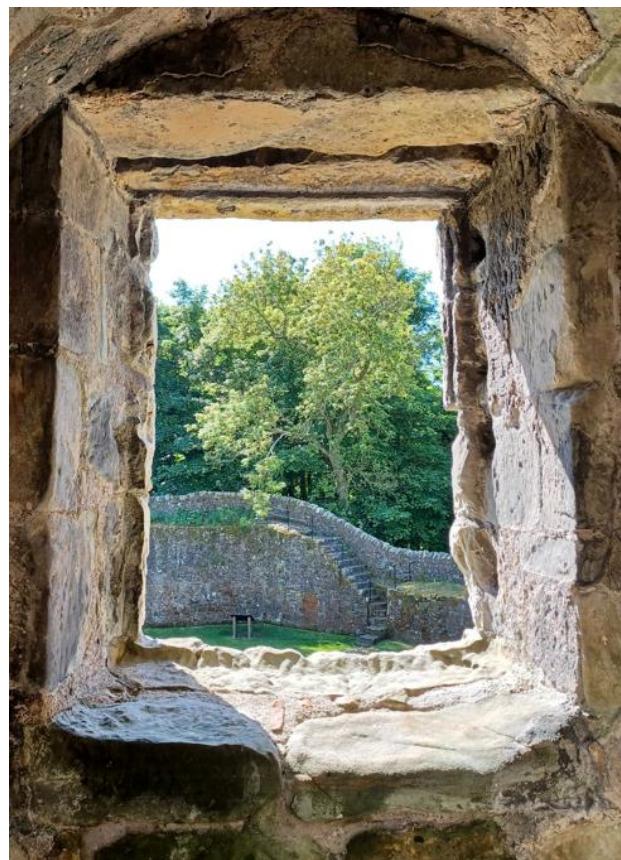


The courtyard contained several buildings of which only fragments remain:

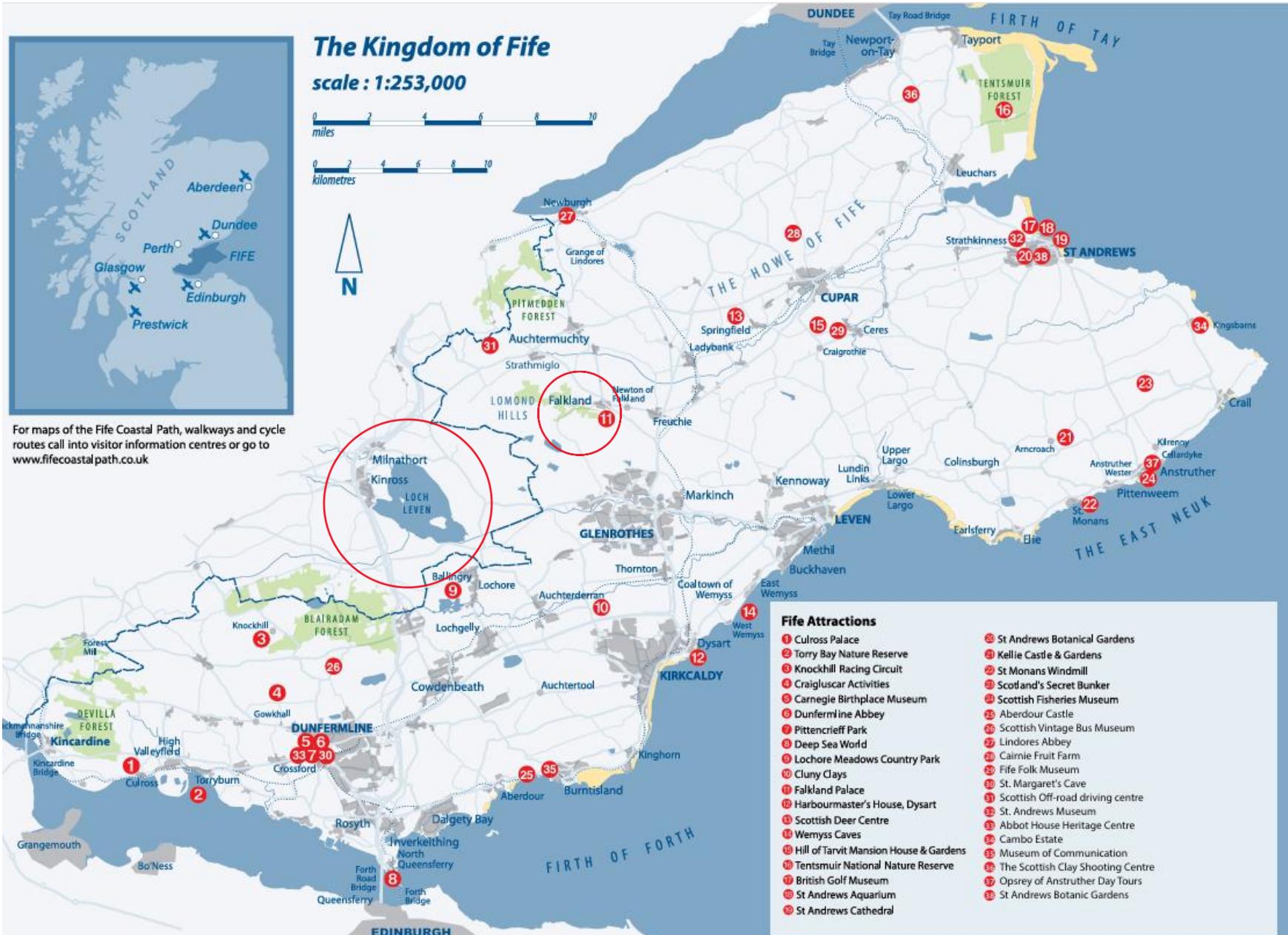




The Tower



Views from two of the tower "windows"



See map on: fifecottages.co.uk/local-information/map-fife-tourist-attractions/

From Lochleven Castle, we have a beautiful view on Kinross House, on the other bank of the lake. Designed by Sir William Bruce and dating back to 1685, the house is the first neoclassical Palladian mansion built in Scotland: see [Kinross House Estate & Coach House Spa](#).



View on Kinross House from the Castle

After this visit, we drove to Falkland, in the county of Fife (map p. 34). We first had lunch in the vegetarian *cafe* at Pillars of Hercules, [Pillars of Hercules - Organic Food, Wholefood](#), then visited Falkland Palace, a royal palace of the Scottish kings: [Falkland Palace | National Trust for Scotland](#).

A fine Renaissance palace with an extensive formal garden and one of Britain's oldest tennis courts, Falkland Palace was one of the favourite places of Mary, Queen of Scots.

The Falkland Bed in the Keeper's Bedroom was originally made by Aberdeen craftsmen in 1618, supposedly for King James VI:

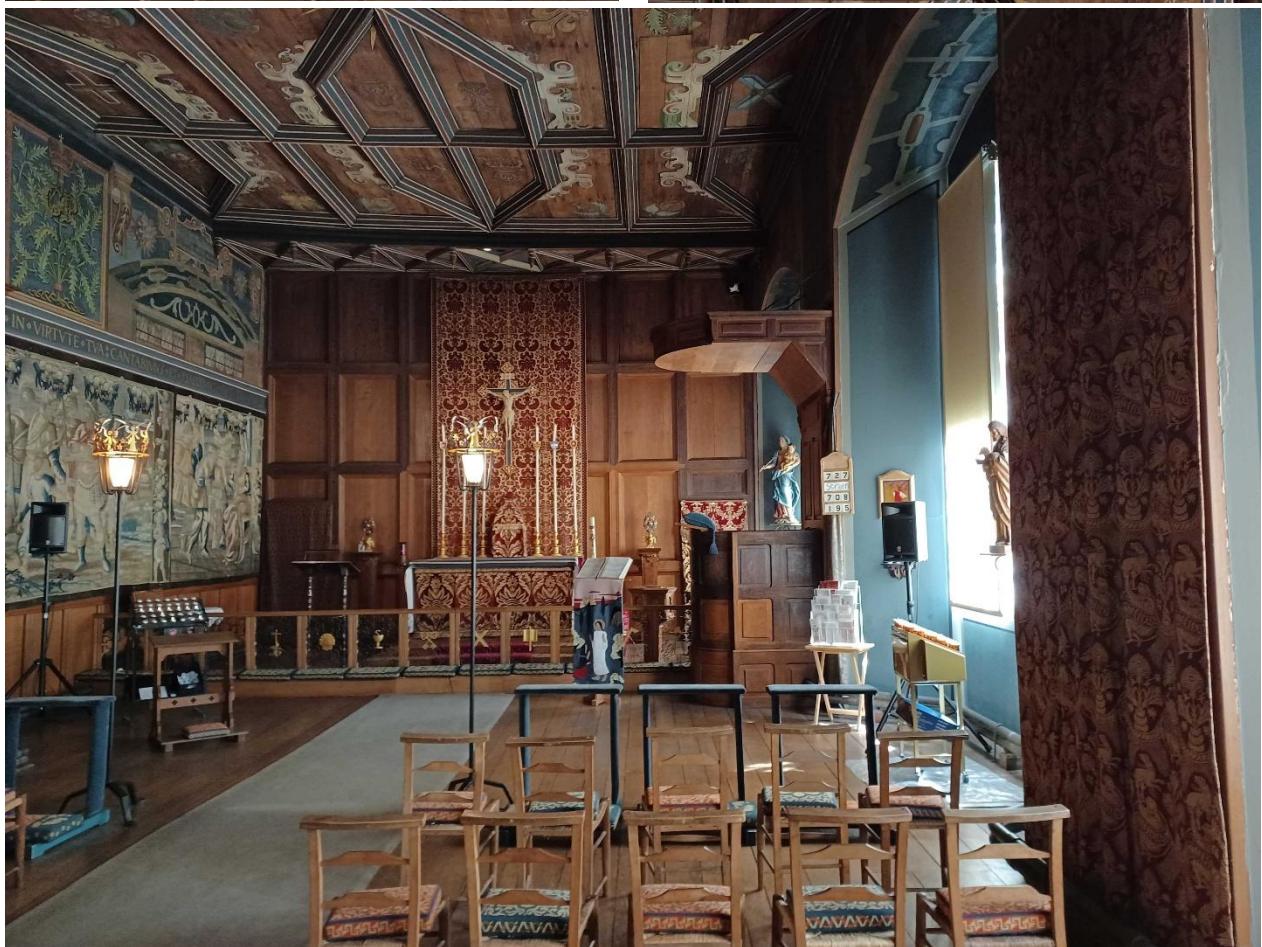
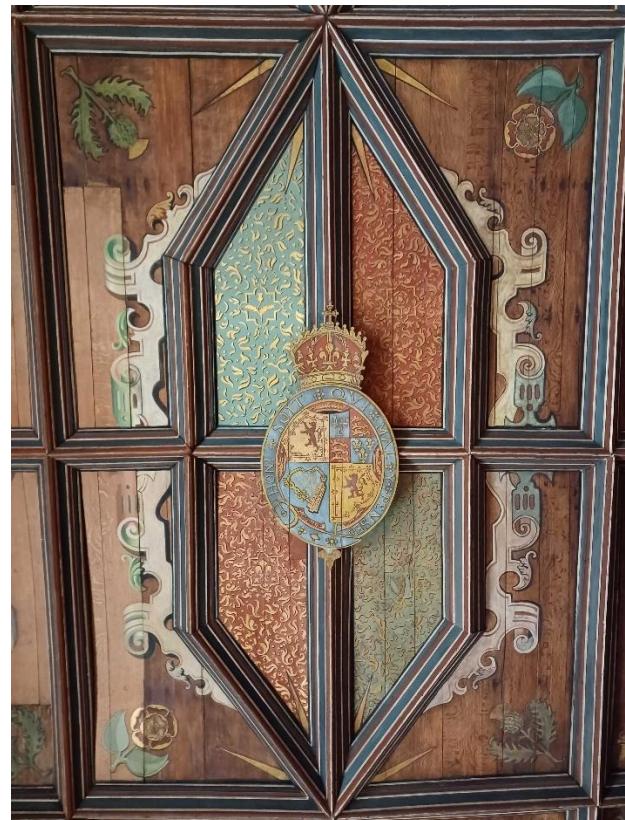
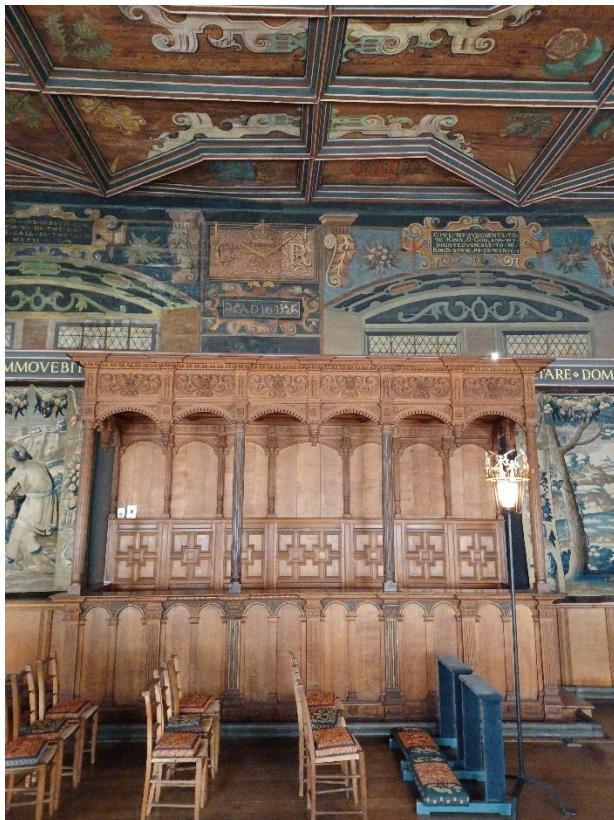


The Falkland Bed



Detail of ceiling decorations

The magnificent tapestries usually displayed in a corridor had been removed after a water damage, but I particularly admired the Chapel, its tapestries and stunning Renaissance painted decorations:

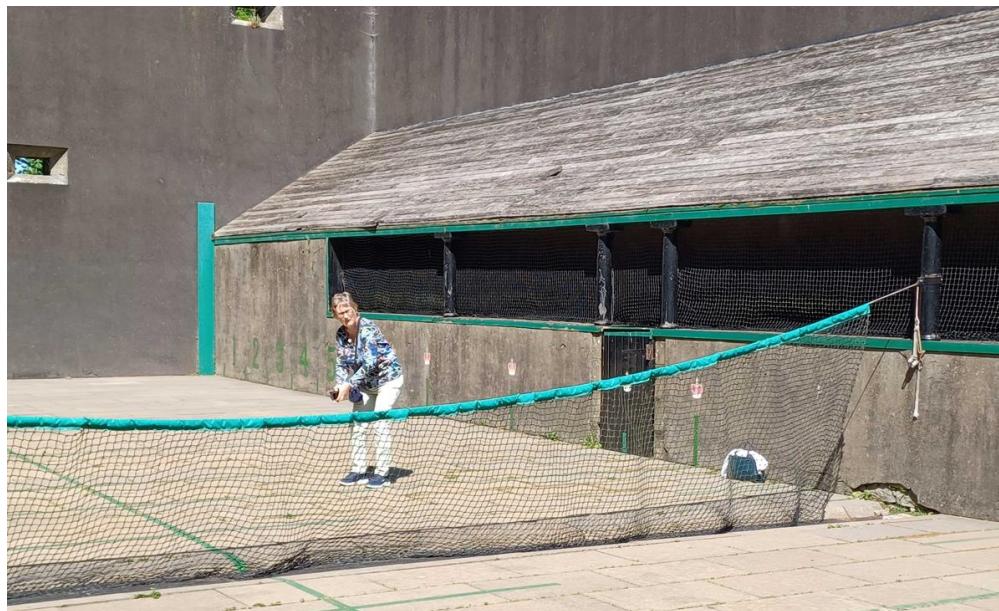


The Percy Cane Garden displays a range of remarkable trees, including a fern-leaved beech tree, and a tormented tree which reminded me of the Whomping Willow in the *Harry Potter* movies!



Falkland Palace also has the oldest royal tennis court in Britain. King James V of Scotland ordered it built in late 1538. James was young and was making a mark to establish himself as a respected European leader. He had married the King of France's daughter and spent time at the French Court, where he would have played on the tennis court (built in 1530 but now gone).

See: [Tennis court | National Trust for Scotland](#)



Then from the tennis court we strolled into the orchard wildflower meadow, where we met a strange creature, the Willow Queen!



The towers of the Palace Gatehouse from the meadows



Falkland is also a delightful village, where 17th century buildings have been preserved or transformed into more modern houses. The village centre played the part of Inverness in the TV series *Outlander*.



