

A TALE OF TWO SCOTTISH CHURCHES

In the September magazine I wrote about a visit to Wales – this time I'm switching to Scotland! Whilst on holiday we visited Stirling and two very different places of worship.

The Chapel Royal at Stirling Castle is part of the royal complex at the centre of the castle. It was built in 1594 for the baptism of Prince Henry, the first son of James VI. It was the last royal building to be erected in the castle and also one of the first Protestant kirks to be built in Scotland. It is a large rectangular building and according to a contemporary historian the ceiling was decorated in gold and the walls were embellished with painted scenes and sculptures appropriate for a baptism.

Prince Henry's baptism was held in August 1594 and was marked by a celebration in the Great Hall of the castle. The climax of the event was the entrance of a ship (which held the fish course) complete with guns firing volleys and artificial sea for it to float on. Henry died aged 18 and never became king.

The chapel fell out of use in 1603 when the royal court moved to London after James VI succeeded to the English throne (as James I) but was redecorated in 1633 for Charles I's coronation visit to Scotland. Some of the painted friezes showing the Scottish royal regalia survive as does an impressive *trompe l'oeil* window on the west gable. It was later used by the military as a garrison chapel and storehouse but by 1900 was only used for non-ecclesiastical purposes.

The Church of the Holy Rude (Church of Scotland) sits in the shadow of Stirling Castle. Rude comes from the same derivation as rood screen and is a medieval term for the cross of crucifixion. It was one of the first churches in Scotland to experience the Reformation and in 1567 saw the coronation of the infant James VI whilst his mother, Mary Queen of Scots was in prison. The sermon was given by John Knox. Apart from Westminster Abbey, the church is the only active church in Britain where a coronation has taken place.

During the seventeenth century religious disputes led to the church being divided in two by a wall through which ministers could voice their disagreements! Memorials to ministers from the time refer to them as being of either the west or east kirk. A large gravestone in the churchyard was probably used for cover during the siege of Stirling Castle in 1651, when Oliver Cromwell seized the castle, as both sides are pitted with musket shots. As well as this rich history there is also some impressive modern stained glass including the Guildry Window which is full of symbols of Stirling's long association with the merchant trade.

It is fascinating to compare the history of the Scottish Reformation with that of the English Reformation. There isn't enough space to do it justice here but it was much faster and deeper than in England. After the death of the Catholic Mary I in 1558, John Knox, a prominent Protestant reformer, returned from exile. In just three weeks the Scottish Reformation parliament dismantled the whole pre-reformation church and a confession of faith was quickly produced which set out Protestant doctrine in a positive form (i.e. not in an anti-Catholic way) The reformers sought to establish what the Puritans wanted to achieve in England – a radical Protestant church – and established a Presbyterian system of church government. James VI favoured religious tolerance so he resisted demands from the new kirk that he act against Roman Catholics. He continued this approach when he became James I of England.

Pictures of the churches can be seen at www.stirlingcastle.scot and www.holyrude.org