

Renfrewshire

Scotland



(Larger map available at: <http://www.mearnsraft.co.uk/renfrewpic.htm>)

Renfrewshire is situated on the Firth of Clyde, just to the west of Glasgow. Like much of Scotland it has a turbulent history. In 1164, for example, Somerled, the Celtic/Norse Lord of the Isles, brought his fleet up the Clyde to Renfrew to confront the Scottish king, Malcolm IV. During the negotiations that followed, Somerled was treacherously murdered, probably in his sleep. Somerled's grandson was called Donald and it was from him that the immensely powerful Clan Donald took its name.

In 1270 William Wallace, perhaps Scotland's greatest patriot, was born in the Renfrewshire village of Elderslie, and it can fairly be said that it was his initial resistance to the English King Edward I that grew into the Scottish Wars of Independence. Paisley Abbey gave its support to Wallace and as a result it was sacked by the English in 1307, two years after Wallace's brutal execution in London.

The county has strong connections with the royal house of Stewart. In 1316 Marjorie, daughter of Robert the Bruce and wife of Walter the 6th High Steward, gave birth to a son in Paisley Abbey. The boy eventually became Robert II, first of the Stewart monarchs. Robert III, that weak but kindly monarch who described himself as "the worst of kings and the most miserable of men", is buried in the Abbey, as are all six High Stewards of the realm.

In the 19th century Renfrewshire was overtaken by the industrial revolution. The Clyde became popular with Glaswegians wanting to holiday "Doon the Watter" and many would take the train to the Renfrewshire ports of Wemyss Bay, Greenock and Gourock, there to embark on paddle steamers for a variety of destinations. The magnificent railway station at Wemyss Bay was built specifically for this holiday traffic and is pictured on our map along with Paisley Abbey, Renfrew Town Hall, Newark Castle, and many other buildings of interest.

Family names associated with Renfrewshire include Stewart, Erskine, Cuningham, Hamilton, Maxwell, Shaw, Sempill (Semple) and Houston.