



Travelexonline The Abbey Tour

Melrose Abbey

The original site of the Abbey was 4 miles down the River Tweed, just below Scott's View. Founded by St Aidan in about A.D. 660, its first prior was St Boisil who was Succeeded by St Cuthbert, the apostle of the Borders, who dwelt there until 664 when he became prior of Lindesfarne. Later, when St Cuthbert died, it became one of his resting places before his body was taken to the place where Durham Cathedral was founded. Then in 1131, David I, King of Scots, encouraged the Cistercian monks who had been sent by Bernard of Clairvaux from France to found a new abbey on the present site below the Eildon Hills. It was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin on Sunday 28 July 1146. Richard II, in retaliation for a raid by the Scots in 1385, sent a force North of the border which "saved nothing and burnt down with fiery flames God's temples and holy places - to wit the monasteries of Melrose, Dryburgh and Newbattle"

Work started on the complete rebuilding of the abbey almost as soon as Richard's forces had left, and it is the remains of this new building which we see today. The delicacy of carved stone is remarkable. There is much interest in the abbey precinct including the Burial place of Robert the Bruce's heart (brought back from the crusades), and the Commendators House of 1590, now a museum. Visitor can spend hours finding carved images and decorative details, some of it high up and thus well preserved.

Dryburgh Abbey

Dryburgh Abbey lies a few hundred yards north of the village of St Boswells. Yet its location, surrounded on three sides by a loop in the River Tweed, means that by road the journey is one of several miles. The sense of seclusion this brings is one of the great joys of Dryburgh Abbey. You can begin to gain some sense of what a life of contemplation might have been like for the monks who lived and worshipped here. The second main attraction of Dryburgh is that so much of the domestic architecture remains visible. In a reversal of what has happened in other abbeys like nearby

Melrose and Jedburgh it is possible to gain a sense of the day to day lives of the monks, while the Abbey Church itself has largely disappeared The Chapter House, perhaps the second most important space in the abbey, is especially well preserved. Above it you can still see parts of the dormitory, some of which was later converted into a house. The cloister retains its surrounding wall on three sides, while lower down the east range you can see the walls of the Warming House and parts of the Novices' Day Room. Even the Gatehouse, bridging the water channel to the south of the abbey, is partly standing. Of the Abbey Church, only part of the North Transept gives any sense of the original structure. Here you find the chapels in which are entombed Sir Walter Scott and Field Marshal Earl Haig. For most of the rest of the church, you have to rely on foundations and imagination. The remains of the abbey was acquired by the Earl of Buchan in 1786. He worked to preserve what was left, and built within and around it a large formal garden. Like many early antiquarians, he couldn't resist the temptation to improve the ruins. An inscribed date of 1150 owes more to him than to the original builders.

Jedburgh Abbey

Jedburgh Abbey lies on south facing slopes on the north bank of the Jed Water, close to the centre of Jedburgh. King David I in 1138 founded it, initially as a priory. His intention was partly to demonstrate to the English that the Scots could build on a grand scale so close to the oft disputed border between the two countries. In doing so he was tempting fate and the English: and both failed to resist the temptation many times over the following four centuries David had another reason for founding Jedburgh Abbey here.

This site was probably the one used for a church by Bishop Ecgrid of Lindisfarne in 830, though a beautifully carved fragment of a shrine on display in the visitor centre dates back to the 700s and suggests that even Bishop Ecgrid was not breaking new ground. By 1080 the church at Jedburgh was well established. There is a story that the murderer of the Bishop of Durham, one Eadwulf Rus, fled to Jedburgh, only to be killed in revenge by a local woman. He was buried at Jedburgh, but his body was later exhumed and left to rot in a ditch. People have tried to link this story with the discovery of part of a body in a ditch near the later site of the Chapter House, complete with a fine ivory comb, also on display at the abbey. By 1154 the priory founded in 1138 had been elevated to an abbey populated by Augustinian or "black" canons. Building work would have been under way for the better part of a century. The abbey church at least would seem to have been complete by 1285, the year in which Alexander III of Scotland married Yolande de Dreux here.

Not long afterwards conflict overtook the abbey and it was used as lodgings for King Edward I of England in 1296 on one of his many trips north. In 1305 another English army stripped the lead from the abbey roofs to help in the construction of siege engines. By 1312 the abbey was seen as a supporter of the English cause when the Scots recaptured Roxburgh Castle and the abbot and 11 canons moved for safety to Yorkshire. By the end of the 1300s the abbey and the religious community it supported had been rebuilt. But the town and abbey were attacked again in 1409, 1410, 1416 and 1464.

More rebuilding followed, but in 1523 the Earl of Surrey arrived at the head of an English army and again badly damaged the abbey. This time the rebuilding was on a more limited scale than after earlier bouts of destruction, with parts of the accommodation remaining unusable and other parts only roughly repaired. It was placed in State care in 1913 and is now looked after by Historic Scotland.

Kelso Abbey

Built in 1128 and the years following, Kelso Abbey was one of the finest examples of Romanesque architecture. Finally finished, it was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and St John in 1243. It was soon one of the largest and richest in Scotland, having a superb library in medieval times. In the 12th and 13th centuries, the Abbot of Kelso was granted the right to wear a mitre, which gave him a precedence higher than any other Scottish abbot. The abbey's wealth came from its vast lands, its churches, schools, farms and its granges in the Cheviot Hills. Two kings, James III and James IV, were crowned in the Abbey and Prince Henry, son of David I, was buried there in 1152. With the Reformation, and Henry VIII's determination to wipe out the Border Abbeys, by 1550 Kelso Abbey along with those at Melrose, Dryburgh and Jedburgh had been reduced to rubble by the English forces under Hertford. Despite attempts at rebuilding, all the abbeys went into decline, and soon few, if any, monks remained. A Parish Church used part of the site about 1650 with a new school alongside. This seems to have continued in use until about 1770, with the abbey ruins being used as

a source of ready-hewn stone for buildings elsewhere in the town. In 1823, the remains of the Abbey were made safe, and in 1919 they passed into the care of the nation. The Abbey and grounds are open each day. There is no charge for entry.

The Abbey Tour is a full day tour consisting of approximately eight hours. The total Cost for this tour would be £280.00 excluding any entrance fees and up to eight persons.