

Q is for Queens!

Scotland has a long list of royalty, dating back to Kenneth McAlpin, the first King of Alba, through to the Stuart Dynasty and union of the crowns in 1603. Of all of Scotland's monarchs, the most famous was Mary, Queen of Scots, daughter of James V, who famously came to her untimely death at the hands of her very own cousin, Elizabeth I. However, there were many more influential queens, royal consorts and princesses who have been largely bypassed by history and who deserve recognition for their contribution to our shared story.

Gruoch, wife of Macbeth

Gruoch is probably the first of the ancient Queens who we have any substantial information on.

Gruoch was born into royalty as she was a close relation to the reigning monarch Malcolm II (r. 1005 - 1034). Prior to her marriage with Macbeth, Gruoch was married to Gille Coemgain mac Mail Brigti, Mormaer of Moray, with whom she had a son, Lulach mac Gille Coemgain, the future King of Scots. Gruoch's first husband was brutally killed in 1032 when he and 50 of his men were burned to death in a hall. Luckily for Gruoch, this targeted attack failed to eliminate all of Gille's men, as his cousin, Macbeth, was available to step into Gille's shoes and not only marry his widow, but become the new Mormaer of Moray. In fact, Macbeth benefited so much from his cousin's demise, that fingers have naturally pointed towards him as the culprit.

In 1050, Macbeth killed King Duncan I, grandson of Malcolm II, and yet again succeeded his victim, becoming King of Alba and subsequently making Gruoch Queen. Macbeth has gone down in history as a usurper, however he was declared king by the people of Alba and Moray (which was an independent kingdom at that time), ruling both kingdoms alongside his loyal wife for seventeen prosperous and relatively peaceful years. So peaceful in fact, that the royals enjoyed a lengthy pilgrimage to Rome, safe in the knowledge that there would be no threat to their kingdom when they were absent. Gruoch was the inspiration behind Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's Macbeth, whether she was as ruthless as Shakespeare's portrayal is uncertain, what can be said is that she was a survivor, a loyal queen, a mother and a pilgrim, which were in those days, impressive accolades.

Matilda of Scotland, wife of King Henry I of England



Matilda of Scotland, also known as Good Queen Maud or Matilda of Blessed Memory, was the daughter of Malcolm III and Margaret of Wessex (Saint Margaret) and reigned as Queen of England from 1100 to 1118, as the wife of Henry I.

Much is unknown of Matilda's early life as she seems to have disappeared from the record after the death of her father and brother at the battle of Alnwick in 1093 and the death of her mother three days later. We know that when Henry I ascended to the throne in 1100 after the unexpected death of his brother, William II, he quickly proposed to Matilda, likely due to her descent from the Anglo Saxon House of Wessex, however chroniclers at the time claimed that the newly appointed King had 'long been attached' to her and even 'adored' her.

This adoration is easily understandable when we consider the many acts Matilda carried out as Queen of England. Like her mother, Matilda was pious and dedicated her life to helping others, founding leper hospitals and washing the feet of the poor.

She had a particular interest in architecture and invested a substantial amount of money in the construction of Norman-style buildings such as Waltham Abbey and Holy Trinity Aldgate and bridges such as Bow Bridge over the River Lea.

Marjorie Bruce, daughter of Robert the Bruce



Marjorie Bruce was the eldest daughter of King Robert I, from his first marriage with Isabella of Mar. Marjorie's mother died soon after giving birth to her, allegedly plunging Robert, who at the time was the Earl of Carrick, into years of mourning. Robert waited six years to remarry, wedding Elizabeth de Burgh in 1302 and at age ten Marjorie became Princess of Scotland when Robert was crowned King at Scone Palace in 1306. These were tumultuous times for the Bruces, with many in Scotland supporting the Balliol claim to the throne and were, understandably, upset with the way in which Robert secured the throne.

King Edward I was also furious with Robert's coronation and no expense was spared in teaching the Scots a lesson. Following defeat at the Battle of Methven, only three months after his coronation, Bruce sent Marjorie, his wife and other female supporters north with the hope that they could make their way to Norway to safety. Sadly, they were captured by the Earl of Ross, a Balliol supporter and handed over to the English. Longshanks refused to execute the women, however, he made sure to make an example out of them; several of the women were imprisoned in wooden cages exposed to the public outside of various castles in the north of England and Marjorie, who was only ten years old at the time, was sent to a convent and kept in solitary confinement for eight whole years. She was freed in 1314 in exchange for the Earl of Hereford who had been captured at the Battle of Bannockburn and was hastily married to Walter Stewart, 6th High Steward of Scotland.

Sadly, Marjorie's life was cut short when she died in a riding accident at the age of only 20, however she lived long enough to give the Bruce dynasty an heir, Robert II, who became King following the death of his childless uncle, David II, in 1371, beginning the infamous Stewart dynasty, who would dominate Scottish history for the next three centuries.

So there you have it, three Scottish Queens who you may not have known much about previously, but who undoubtedly made their mark in Scotland's story.