

History of Inverurie

Inverurie is a prosperous Aberdeenshire town whose history stretches back well over a thousand years. Unusually for a Scottish settlement of any size it offers no history of battles, of sieges, of invading armies. Instead it offers a story of quiet steady commerce and growth, apparently unaffected by the turbulence that swept across Scotland time and again over the centuries.

This is doubly odd given Inverurie's strategically important location. It lies on the north bank of the River Don, opposite Port Elphinstone, and on the west bank of the River Urie. The two rivers meet at the south east corner of the town, this is where you find the "The Bass", the Earl of Garioch's motte and bailey built in the 1100s. This was used as a base by Robert the Bruce before his defeat of the Earl of Buchan in early 1308 .

A monastery had been established nearby by about the year 1000, and Inverurie received its charter as a burgh in 1195. Steady growth continued and a grammar school appeared in 1606. The River Don was bridged in 1797, and in 1805 the Aberdeen Canal linked Port Elphinstone to Aberdeen.

The canal was put out of business by the Great North of Scotland Railway which reached Inverurie in 1854, before completing the link from Aberdeen to Inverness in 1858. Many railways replaced the canal system of transport around this time.

What was unusual here was that the railway company actually brought the canal, filled it in, and then built its tracks along the line of the filled-in canal.

With the railway came a more important role for Inverurie. It became a significant junction, with branch lines heading off in various directions, and it also acquired major railway workshops and a large area of new railway housing. The branch lines closed one by one through the mid 1900s, with the last going in the Beeching cuts of 1966. The wagon works followed in 1969. But the main line station remains and easy commuting to Aberdeen by rail has been a major factor in the recent wealth of Inverurie.

Close to the railway station is the focal point of Inverurie, marked by the High Street broadening out into the Market Place. This has in its centre the small wooded park surrounding the war memorial. At the head of the Market Place is the large grey stone Town Hall, built in 1863 and the Carnegie library which was donated by Andrew Carnegie.

Today Inverurie is a peaceful town, with surrounding countryside displaying beautiful contrasts of river valley, green or golden fields, thick forests and rough heather clad slopes. Bennachie is Inverurie's local hill at a height of 528 meters at the top of Oxen-Craig.

Historic sites and Monuments

The Bass

Situated at the south end of the town within the cemetery, it is a fine defensive site between the rivers Don and Urie. Although probably fortified earlier, it became the first Norman motte and bailey castle in the north east of Scotland, when David, youngest brother of King Malcolm IV, was made Lord of the Garioch and built a timber fort upon it. (He was the ancestor of Robert the Bruce, also Lord of the Garioch). Steps lead to the top.

Kinkell Church

This church was built in 1528 but is now in a ruinous state. It contains the impressive grave slab of Gilbert de Greenlaw, who was killed at the Battle of Harlaw. The church is off the B993, one mile south following the river.

Battle of Barra

Fought on the fields north of the castle on 22 May 1308, when Robert the Bruce defeated his great rival Comyn, Earl of Buchan, during the Wars of Independence. Bruce's forces then waged a punitive campaign of destruction throughout Buchan.

Battle of Harlaw

A monument, two miles north west of the B9001, was erected in 1911 on the scene of the battle fought in 1411. The advance of Donald, Lord of the Isles, and his clansmen was checked by the forces of the Earl of Mar and the Provost and citizens of Aberdeen, and with great bloodshed, "Red Harlaw" ensured that Gaeldom would never regain control of Scotland.

Kinmuck

Three miles east of Inverurie off the B993, this was the scene of an earlier battle between Norsemen and Picts. In 1682 a Quaker settlement was established here to the indignation of the Bishop of Aberdeen and Earl of Haddo. The Quaker Meeting House of Kinmuck became the leading Quaker meeting place in the north east, and the community survived and flourished until this century. The meeting house remains, (not open to the public) together with the graveyard where the identical gravestones reflect a belief in the equality of all people.