



Timeline of the Scots Language AD 550-1700

The following list, though not exhaustive, is intended as a quick reference guide to the dates, various 'firsts', and developments in the Scots language, including reference to cultural and political developments.

ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD (PRE-SCOTS) AD 550-1100

547 Beginning of the kingship of Ida of Bamburgh whose Anglo-Saxon speaking followers spread into the Borders and Lothian. Their language, known as *englisc* (that is, 'Angle-ish') comes originally from Denmark and the Low Countries.

638-685 Greatest expansion of Anglo-Saxon speaking kings in Scotland reaches as far as modern day county of Angus.

c.750 Earliest Anglo-Saxon text attested in Scotland is the 'Dream of the Rood'. It is carved in runes on the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire.

867-883 The kingdom of Northumbria (modern Northumberland and south east Scotland) is conquered by the Danes. The Anglo-Saxon speakers in the Scottish portion remain as an enclave ruled by a high elderman. Their language is increasingly influenced by Danish.

c.900 Notes written on the Lindisfarne Gospels provide more evidence for the form of Anglo-Saxon spoken in northern England and southern Scotland.

1018 Battle of Carham. Anglo-Saxon speaking Borders and Lothian are confirmed under the rule of the king of Scots. The *Skot Watir* (Firth of Forth) is reckoned to be the frontier between 'Irish' (Gaelic) and Anglo-Saxon speakers.

OLDER SCOTS PERIOD 1100-1700 subdivided into:

Pre-Literary Scots AD 1100-1350

c.1100 The language, now known as *Inglis* to its speakers, begins to be increasingly influenced by French and Latin. Latin documents begin to provide vernacular words as glosses of Latin terms or cite personal and place-names.

c.1180 A school of monks with origins in Yorkshire establish the practices for writing in Scotland which Scots is later based upon. In this period the Scottish chancery stops addressing people according to ethnic background.

1237 Treaty of Newcastle finally establishes the modern Anglo-Scottish border.

c.1240 The English writer Bartholomew of Glanville alludes to the differences between Scots (non-Gaelic speakers) and Wild Scots (Gaels) long before the 'official' emergence of the Highland-Lowland distinction.

1286-1329 Succession crisis and reign of Robert I the Bruce (1306-1329) ensure survival of Scotland as an independent country. The political settlement allows conditions for the continued development of customs and languages peculiar to Scotland.

c.1300 A fragment of verse concerning the death of Alexander III (1286) is believed to be the earliest surviving text in Scots, preserved in later quotations.

c.1350 The Scone Charter (written in Latin 1312) has 50 vernacular glosses added. This is the earliest surviving original example of a substantial number of Scots words contained in a single document.

Early Scots AD 1350-1450

1362 The earliest known example of Lowland speech being described as 'Scottish' comes from the trial records of a court held in England (York) in which Scottish speech is distinguished from northern and southern English.

1364 Death of the English writer Ralph Higden whose *Polychronicon* refers to Scots speaking two languages of which one 'follows somewhat' the language of the Picts (then believed to be a Germanic tongue).

1365 The chronicler Jean de Froissart refers to the difference between 'Wild Scotland' (Gaelic) and the 'Flatlands of Scotland' or 'Mild Scotland' (Lowland).

1371-1390 King Robert II, first of the Stewart monarchs, is the first ruler closely associated with the Scots language.

1375 John Barbour's epic poem *The Brus* is the earliest surviving literary text in Scots (it survives in a 1487 copy).

c.1380 The chronicler John of Fordoun, writing in Latin, is the first Scot to describe the differences between Highlanders and Lowlanders. He refers to Lowlanders as speaking *Theutonica* ('German').

1380 A writ granted by Alexander Lindsay lord of Glenesk (in Angus) is the earliest surviving original prose document in Scots.

1386 The earliest known diplomatic act in Scots is the truce made between Scotland and England at Billymire in the Borders.

1387 Edinburgh council's earliest known document in Scots is a contract with masons to repair St Giles Church.

1390 The earliest document issued in Scots at Perth is a jury decree.

1392 An indenture by the earl of Lennox is the earliest document issued in Scots at Stirling.

1393 A plea by Thomas of Erskine is the earliest document in Scots to be enrolled in the records of parliament.

1394 A mortgage granted by Duncan Campbell of Edderling, at Innernodyn in Strachur, is the earliest document in Scots issued within Gaeldom.

1397 An act of Council at Stirling is the earliest official enactment in Scots while a contract in the name of King Robert III, that same year, is the first known document issued by a monarch in the language.

1399 Aberdeen council's first document in Scots is a contract with masons to repair the town.

1406 A charter by John of Crawford is the earliest known document in Scots issued at Ayr.

1418 Nichol Kynman's certificate is the first known document in Scots issued at Dundee.

c.1420 Andrew of Wynton's *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland* is the first history of Scotland written in Scots, in this case in rhyming metre.

1422 A mortgage granted by George Campbell is the earliest known document in Scots written at Glasgow.

c.1424 King James I's *Kingis Quair* is first literary work in Scots known to have been written by a member of the royal family of Scotland.

1424 Records of parliament begin to be kept regularly in Scots so that the king's subjects may be more clearly informed of the laws being made.

1433 A gift of a tenement by Duncan of Law to Donald Clerke is the first known document in Scots from Orkney.

1438 The *Buik of Alexander* is the oldest dateable Romance in Scots.

1439 The earliest writ in Scots issued by a lord of the isles was granted by Lord Alexander Macdonald at Inverness.

Early Middle Scots AD 1450-1550

1456 Gilbert Hay's *The Buke of the Law of Armys* is the earliest dated work in Scots to be translated from another vernacular language (in this case French).

c.1470 Blind Hary's *Schir William Wallace* is written down about this time. In this same period Scots speakers begin referring to the language of England as *Suddron* to better distinguish it from their own tongue.

c.1490 Death of the *makar* (master poet) Robert Henryson of Dunfermline whose *Morall Fabillis* was based on Aesop. In this same period the Paris theologian John Ireland writes the *Meroure of Wysdome* in Scots for James IV.

1494 Adam Loutfut is the earliest known writer to use the name Scots for the language when he '*translatit out of fraynche in Scottis*' a book of heraldry.

1498 Ambassador Pedro de Ayala described the Scots spoken by King James IV as having a similar relationship to English as that between Aragonese (close to Castilian but with Catalan influence) and Castilian ('Spanish') spoken in Spain.

1508 *The Complaint of the Black Knight* is the earliest dated work in Scots to be published by the printing press (Chepman and Myllar of Edinburgh).

c.1513 Death of the courtly *makar* William Dunbar.

1522 Death in London of the *makar* Gavin Douglas who translated Virgil's *Aeneid* into Scots and was a notable innovator in poetry.

1525 A deed of conveyance by Thomas Olason of Veester is the earliest known document issued in Scots in Shetland.

c.1530 Murdoch Nisbet makes the first complete Scots version of the New Testament having adapted it from the Wycliffe version in English.

1530's Aberdeen council register provides first instances of North East Scots.

1533 John Gau translates *The Richt Vay to the Kingdom of Heuine* into Scots from Danish '*that al quhilk onderstandis the scotis tung ma haiff with thayme*'.

1536 John Bellenden's *Chroniklis of Scotland* is the first prose history of Scotland to be published in Scots (translated from Hector Boece).

1542 The Scottish parliament authorises the use of the Old and New Testaments in '*Inglis or Scottis*'.

1545 Donald Macdonald of the isles issues the earliest known document in Scots in Ulster (at Carrickfergus).

Late Middle Scots AD 1550-1700

1552 First performance of Sir David Lindsay's *Ane Pleasant Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis* which is the earliest surviving text of a play in Scots.

1559 References to the *Elementar* and *Instructioun* by William Nudrye, both for instructing in reading and writing in Scots.

1560 Scotland breaks from Rome, parliament abolishes Catholic mass, and the kingdom becomes officially Reformed Calvinist. Because there is no approved Scottish text, preachers use an English translation of the Bible, paraphrasing from it so that congregations will understand.

1567 Earliest known edition of *The Gude and Godlie Ballatis* translated from German into Scots.

1579 Parliament requires property owners to own a vernacular Bible.

1584 King James VI (1566-1625) of Scotland publishes *Reulis and Cautelis* of writing poetry in Scots.

1586 Death of the poet Sir Richard Maitland (1496-1586).

1597 Death of Alexander Montgomerie master poet at the court of James VI.

1598 King James VI (1566-1625) writes *The Basilicon Doron* in Scots.

c.1600 *Diary* and other accounts by Reverend James Melville (1556-1613) written in Scots and describing personal, political and religious affairs.

1603 The earliest text of *Philotus* the oldest known comedy in Scots.

1603 James VI also becomes king of England and Ireland and moves his court to England where he begins to favour cultural assimilation based largely on English customs and language.

1604 The Englishman Henry Saville describes the English and Scots tongues as being as different as Portuguese and Spanish, while Sir Thomas Craig, who supports political union between England and Scotland, argues that both peoples 'use the same speech', though he adds that the English have corrupted their speech with many foreign words while the Scots have kept their language purer.

1609 Scottish planters offered land in Ulster. They come predominantly from the western Lowlands of Scotland.

1621 *The Morall Fabillis of Esope (in Scottish Verse)* by Robert Henrysoun published at Edinburgh.

1633 One of the complaints of Scottish church ministers against Charles I's new prayer book and psalms is the use of many English words and phrases unknown to Scots speakers.

1638 *The Pockmanty Sermon*, based on the preaching of the Reverend James Row, is published and becomes a best seller because it is in Scots.

1639 Jacob Gronnevold appointed at Helsingor, Denmark, to translate all letters in the English and Scots languages into Danish.

1640 Death of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross, one of the earliest women writers of poetry and song in Scots, noted for her *Ane Godlie Dreame* (1603).

1640-1700 Written records of the Scottish parliament, Privy Council and various burgh (town) councils gradually adopt a more 'English' style, adopting English spelling conventions and vocabulary. This is an uneven, drawn-out process varying from region to region, some towns remaining more Scots than others. Private writings generally remain Scots but are 'Englished' for publication. The publication of contemporary poetry and song in this period goes into decline, but will revive again from the early 18th century.

1639-1652 The Wars of the Covenant in Scotland and elsewhere.

1641 Publication of the earliest known collection of *Scottish Proverbs* (collected by David Fergusson who died in 1598).

1649 Death of King Charles I (1600-1649) who is technically the last monarch able to speak Scots.

1666-1689 Period of religious persecution against radical Presbyterians opposed to Episcopal church government imposed by the state.

1673 Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh (1636-1697) states that the 'Scottish idiom of the British tongue' is better suited to business and legal affairs in Scotland than English is, while English is a language 'invented by courtiers'.

1680 William Guthrie is appointed by the magistrates of Stockholm, Sweden, as interpreter for both the English and Scots languages.

1692 *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence*, a satire on Church of Scotland ministers (written by an Episcopal supporter) cites examples of the Scots language used in preaching. A reply to this - *An Answer* - defended Scots for preaching as the language better understood by the common people than the English text.

1690's Based on the evidence of hearth and poll tax returns, and discounting those for Gaelic areas, the number of Scots speakers in Scotland may be estimated at around 750,000 or about 70% of the Scottish population.