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Selkirk, Scottish Borders

Selkirk is a town and historic *royal burgh* in the *Scottish Borders* Council district of southeastern Scotland. It lies on the *Ettrick Water*, a tributary of the *River Tweed*.

The people of the town are known as *Souters*, which means cobblers (shoe makers and menders). At the time of the 2011 *census*, Selkirk's population was 5,784.^{[3][2]}

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History

Selkirk was formerly the *county town* of *Selkirkshire*. Selkirk is one of the oldest *Royal Burghs* in Scotland and is the site of the earliest settlements in what is now the Scottish Borders. The town's name means "church in the forest" from the *Old English* *sele* ("hall" or "manor") and *cirice* ("church").^{[3][4]}

Selkirk was the site of the first Borders abbey, a community of *Tironensian* monks who moved to *Kelso Abbey* during the reign of *King David I*. In 1113, King David I granted Selkirk large amounts of land. *William Wallace* was declared guardian of Scotland in the town at the Kirk o' the Forest. *Bonnie Prince Charlie*, the *Marquess of Montrose* and the *Outlaw Murray* all had connections with the town.

Wool

Selkirk grew because of its *woollen* industry, although now that industry has ceased, leaving little in its wake. The town is best known for *bannocks*, a dry fruit cake. It has a museum and an art gallery.

The town has associations with *Mungo Park* (*explorer*); *James Hogg* ("The Ettrick Shepherd"), a local poet and writer; and *Sir Walter Scott*, a writer of romances in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It is also home to Scotland's oldest *horse racing* track, the *Gala Rig*, on the outskirts of the town.

William Wallace

It was supposedly in the church at Selkirk, supported by nobles and clergy, that *William Wallace* was declared Guardian of the *Kingdom of Scotland*. However this is disputed; the old lands of *Mauldslie* near *Rosebank* are also reputed to be where Wallace was declared Guardian. *Mauldslie Castle* was built on the lands of *Forest Kirk*.

O' Floddenfield!

Selkirk men fought with Wallace at *Stirling Bridge* and *Falkirk*, and also with *Robert the Bruce* at *Bannockburn*, but it is Selkirk's connection with the *Battle of Flodden* in 1513, her response to the call of the King, the brave bearing of her representatives on the fatal field, and the tragic return of the sole survivor, that provide the Royal Burgh with its proudest and most maudlin memories: the celebration of a five-hundred-year-old defeat. Only one man, "Fletcher", returned from the battle, bearing a blood-stained *English flag* belonging to the *Macclesfield* regiment. On his return he cast the captured English standard around his head before falling to his death.

Battle of Philiphaugh

Selkirk	
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<div>Location within the Scottish Borders</div>	
Population	5,784
OS grid reference	NT471288
• Edinburgh	31 mi (50 km)
• London	301 mi (484 km)
Council area	Scottish Borders
Lieutenancy area	Roxburgh, Ettrick and Lauderdale
Country	Scotland
Sovereign state	United Kingdom
Post town	SELKIRK
Postcode district	TD7
Dialling code	01750
Police	Scottish
Fire	Scottish
Ambulance	Scottish
EU Parliament	Scotland
UK Parliament	Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk
Scottish Parliament	Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire



Statue of Fletcher outside Victoria Halls, Selkirk

During the series of conflicts that would become known as the **Wars of the Three Kingdoms**, Selkirk played host the Royalist army of **James Graham, 1st Marquess of Montrose**, with his cavalry installed in the burgh, whilst the Royalist infantry were camped at the plain of Philiphaugh, below the town. On the morning of 13 September 1645, a **covenanting** army led by **Sir David Leslie** attacked the royalist forces camped at Philiphaugh, and a rout ensued. Montrose arrived to find his army in disarray and had to flee the field, eventually leading to his exile. The action at Philiphaugh is infamous for the massacre by the Covenanters of up to 500 surrendered Royalist troops and camp followers – including many women and children.

Sir Walter Scott

Sir Walter Scott was appointed **Sheriff-Depute** of the County of Selkirk in 1799, and was based in the Royal Burgh's courthouse in the town square. The **Sir Walter Scott Way** from **Moffat** to **Cockburnspath** passes through Selkirk.

Traditions

Selkirk Common Riding

The **Selkirk Common Riding** is a celebration of the history and traditions of the Royal and Ancient Burgh. Held on the second Friday after the first Monday in June, the ceremony is one of the oldest in the area, with 300-400 riders, Selkirk boasts one of the largest cavalcades of horses and riders in Europe. Selkirk still owns common land to the north and south of the town, but only the northern boundary of Linglie is ridden on the day. The Riding commemorates how, from the eighty men that left the town to fight in the **Battle of Flodden**, only one – Fletcher - returned, bearing a captured English flag. Legend has it that he cast the flag about his head to indicate that all the other men of Selkirk had been cut down. At the climax of the day the Royal Burgh Standard Bearer and Crafts and Associations Standard Bearers cast their colours in Selkirk's ancient market place.

Standard Bearer

The Standard Bearer is chosen from the eligible unmarried young men of the town who have applied for the post by the trustees of the Common Riding Trust, successors to the old Selkirk Town Council which disappeared in the local government reorganisation in 1975. He will normally have served his time as an Attendant to previous Standard Bearers. He is introduced on Appointment Night, the last Friday in April. He is carried shoulder high round the town, accompanied by bands and the crowds of locals. There follow many civic duties in preparation for the main event, and participation in other town common ridings and festivities, including **Spurs Night** when the Standard Bearer and attendants meet the principals of **Galashiels** at **Galafoot** and receive a pair of spurs at a dinner in Galashiels.

Common Riding Week

The Saturday before Common Riding Day is marked with the annual Children's Picnic, where primary schoolchildren have races. Sunday sees the inspection of The Rig, the town racecourse and Show Sunday, recently moved to the grounds of **The Haining**. Traditionally Souters would meet up in their new finery bought for the festivities and sing songs to the town bands. Other events include the Ex-Standard Bearers Dinner on Monday, and Ladies Night on Wednesday when the female population take over the bars and clubs for the evening and only the bravest males venture out. Various bussing concerts and dinners are held for the Crafts and Associations.

Night afore the Morn

On Thursday evening the Senior Burgh Officer takes to the streets to "Cry the Burley", giving notice that the marches are to be ridden the following day, naming the Burleymen (four ex standard bearers), the Burgh Standard Bearer and his attendants. His trek, accompanied by the bands, starts in the West Port, stopping in the Market Place, High Street, Back Row and South Port to read the proclamation, ending with the time honoured phrase "There will be all these, and a great many more, and all be ready to start at the sound of the Second Drum." There follows the Bussing concert for the Incorporations of the Weavers and the Hammermen, in the Victoria Hall. This is followed by an act of remembrance when all available ex-Standard Bearers march to the statue of Fletcher outside the Victoria Hall. A wreath is placed on the statue by the chairman of the ex-Standard Bearers Association, and each ex-Standard bearer walks round the statue in order of the year they represented the town, earliest first. Then many hit the pubs and clubs to renew old friendships, for others it is off to bed in preparation for a full day ahead.

Common Riding Day

Before dawn, at 4.00 a.m., the Selkirk Flute Band begins the march around town, wakening in turn the Standard Bearer and Provost. There follows an Act of Remembrance by the Ex-Soldiers at the War Memorial at 5.30. The "First Drum" is struck at 6.00, the Silver Band play round the town and lead the singing of "Hail Smiling Morn", alternating with the first verse of the hymn "Lead, Kindly Light". The band stops off outside the County Hotel for a rendition of Exiles' Song "Her Bright Smile" before continuing to the Victoria Halls for 06.30. Meanwhile, the riders assemble in the Back Row. At 06.45 there is the Installation of Standard Bearer and Bussin' of Royal Burgh Flag on balcony of Victoria Hall. At this point, The procession forms and marches to Market Place awaiting the "Second Drum" at 07.00. The procession moves off 'down the Green' behind the Silver band playing "O' a' the airts" and the pipe band, along with the flags of the Incorporations and Guilds on foot. Then follows the Standard Bearer and his attendants and the mounted cavalcade behind. The traditional wish for all horseman is "Safe oot, Safe in", wishing that all ride, and return safely.

By 07.30 the riders begin to ford the River Ettrick and continue to Linglie Glen. The cavalcade reaches the summit of the Three Brethren cairns, the highest point of the ride; here they rest and the Standard Bearer and Attendants sing "Hail Smilin' Morn" before remounting and continuing the ride.

Back in Selkirk, the foot procession re-forms in Market Place and leaves for Shawburn Toll for community singing led by bands until the riders return at the gallop. The procession re-forms again and returns to Market Place via Bleachfield Road and High Street to the Market Square for the ceremony of the Casting of the Colours; In turn the Royal Burgh Standard Bearer followed by those of the Weavers, Merchants, Fleshers, Colonials, and ex soldiers cast their flags to the tune "Up wi' the Souters". The ex soldiers standard is dipped at the end of his performance, there follows a Two Minutes Silence to honour the towns War Dead, broken by the Silver band playing the haunting ballad "The Liltin".

The ceremonial ends with the Return of the Burgh Flag "unsullied and untarnished" by the Standard Bearer to the Provost. After lunch there is horse racing at the Rig, and the ball is held in the Victoria Halls. Saturday ends with "The Games" – gymkhana and professional foot racing at the towns Cricket Club.

Landmarks



Sir Walter Scott's Courthouse in Selkirk Market Place

The remains of the "forest kirk", referred to in ancient times as the church of St Mary of the Forest, still stand in the old churchyard. William Wallace may have become Guardian of Scotland here, and it is also the final resting place of several relatives of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the 32nd President of the USA. Roosevelt, whose ancestors came from the area, named his famous dog *Fala*, after *Fala* and the nearby village of Falahill.

Just to the south of the town is The Haining, the late 18th-century residence of the Pringle family. In 2009 the last owner died, and left the house and grounds "for the benefit of the community of Selkirkshire and the wider public."^[s] A charitable trust is now planning to restore the building as an art gallery.^[6]

The Selkirk Grace

The Selkirk Grace has no connection with the town of Selkirk, beyond its name; it originated in the west of Scotland. Although attributed to Robert Burns, the Selkirk Grace was already known in the 17th century, as the "Galloway Grace" or the "Covenanters' Grace". It came to be called the Selkirk Grace because Burns was said to have delivered it at a dinner given by the Earl of Selkirk at St Mary's Isle Priory, in Kirkcudbright in Galloway.

In Scots

Some hae meat and canna eat,
And some wad eat that want it,
But we hae meat and we can eat,
Sae let the Lord be thankit.

In English

Some have food and cannot eat,
And some would eat that lack it,
But we have food and we can eat,
So let God be thanked.

Sport

Rugby union plays its role in Selkirk culture and society. Selkirk RFC play in their home games at Philiphaugh, competing in Scottish National League Division One and the Border League (the oldest established rugby union league in the world).

The town cricket club was formed in 1851 and still plays in the Border League. The cricket ground at Philiphaugh is the site of the Battle of Philiphaugh. Selkirk Cricket Club have won the Border League on 23 occasions and the club has produced a dozen Scottish internationalists.

The town also has a footballing tradition, having produced some players of note in the Scottish game including Bobby Johnstone of Hibernian, Bob Mercer of Heart of Midlothian, Sandy McMahon of Celtic. Selkirk Football Club were members of the Lowland Football League. Nicknamed The Souters (Cobblers) the club was founded in 1880 and is the oldest club in the Borders, however the team liquidated in 2018 due to financial mismanagement, later in the year the team tried to re enter the SFA but were not accepted.

Football in the town now consists of Selkirk Victoria (The Vics) and Selkirk Junior FC,(age group teams).

Climate

Like the rest of the British Isles, Selkirk has a maritime climate with cool summers and mild winters. However the area appears to have one of the widest absolute temperature ranges in the United Kingdom. The absolute minimum temperature of −26.6 °C (−15.9 °F) at the nearest weather station is both a daily record,^[7] and the record lowest temperature for the UK outside of the Highlands. Conversely, Scotland's highest temperature of 32.9 °C (91.2 °F) was recorded at Greycook, St. Boswells^[8] just 8 miles (13 km) to the east.

Climate data for Bowhill, 168 m above sea level, 1971–2000, Extremes 1960- (Weather station 2.3 miles (4 km) to the West of Selkirk)													
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Record high °C (°F)	12.6 (54.7)	13.9 (57.0)	17.8 (64.0)	25.7 (78.3)	27.5 (81.5)	30.3 (86.5)	31.3 (88.3)	30.1 (86.2)	25.8 (78.4)	22.2 (72.0)	16.0 (60.8)	14.1 (57.4)	31.3 (88.3)
Average high °C (°F)	5.3 (41.5)	5.9 (42.6)	8.3 (46.9)	11.0 (51.8)	14.7 (58.5)	17.1 (62.8)	19.2 (66.6)	18.7 (65.7)	15.4 (59.7)	11.7 (53.1)	7.8 (46.0)	5.9 (42.6)	11.8 (53.2)
Average low °C (°F)	−0.4 (31.3)	−0.2 (31.6)	1.1 (34.0)	2.4 (36.3)	4.7 (40.5)	7.8 (46.0)	9.8 (49.6)	9.5 (49.1)	7.5 (45.5)	4.8 (40.6)	2.4 (36.3)	0.1 (32.2)	4.1 (39.4)
Record low °C (°F)	−26.6 (−15.9)	−17.2 (1.0)	−15 (5)	−6.1 (21.0)	−4.4 (24.1)	−1.7 (28.9)	1.1 (34.0)	−0.5 (31.1)	−2.3 (27.9)	−6.1 (21.0)	−11.1 (12.0)	−16.4 (2.5)	−26.6 (−15.9)
Average precipitation mm (inches)	95.16 (3.75)	66.33 (2.61)	74.61 (2.94)	55.76 (2.20)	65.4 (2.57)	59.74 (2.35)	58.49 (2.30)	72.11 (2.84)	72.75 (2.86)	86.35 (3.40)	86.11 (3.39)	102.48 (4.03)	895.29 (35.24)
Source: Royal Dutch Meteorological Institute^[9]													

Twinning

- Plattling, Bavaria.

Notable people

- Mungo Park (1771–1806), explorer of the African continent
- James Hogg (1770–1835), poet and author
- John Roberts (1845–1934), wool merchant
- Gideon Lang, Australian pastoralist and parliamentarian
- Bobby Johnstone (1921–2001), Scotland international footballer and a member of the Hibernian Famous Five forward line
- Sandy McMahon (1871–1916), Scotland international footballer and Celtic's eighth highest all-time top goal scorer
- Andrew Lang (1844–1912), poet, novelist, literary critic and contributor to anthropology

- **James Marr Brydone** (1779–1866), surgeon who sighted the **French** fleet, signalling the beginning of the **Battle of Trafalgar**
- **James Brown** (J.B. Selkirk) (1832–1904), poet and essayist
- **Peter Blake** (1951-2018), film and television actor
- **Rae Hendrie** (b. 1977), television actress
- **Tom Scott** (1854–1927), artist
- **John Rutherford** (b. 1955), Scotland international rugby player and British and Irish Lion, won 42 caps at fly-half for his country, at the time a record in that position
- **Tibbie Tamson**, alleged to be either a victim of the Scottish witch trials, a suicide victim, a plague victim or a murder victim
- **Scott, Grant Hutchison**, and **David (Billy) Kennedy**, members of the indie rock band **Frightened Rabbit**
- **James Sorley FFA FRSE** (1853-1923) joint founder of Scottish Life Assurance Company

See also

- **Selkirkshire**
- **Selkirk Rugby Club**
- **Selkirk Football Club**
- **List of places in the Scottish Borders**

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External links

- **Selkirk online website** (<https://exploreselkirk.co.uk/>)

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