



The Concise Dictionary of Scottish Words and Phrases

Betty Kirkpatrick

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Few people who are either native speakers of English or who have learnt English as a foreign or second language visit Scotland with any expectations of experiencing language difficulties. For the most part, their confidence is justified, provided at least they stick to the traditional tourist places and pursuits. The most difficulty they are likely to experience is with regional variations in accent and pronunciation, and that variation is true of many countries. Discerning tourists may have some awareness of the fact the Highlands of Scotland have a language of their own, Gaelic, that is completely different from English. However, if they think about the language of lowland Scotland at all, they probably assume that this is more or less English with, perhaps, a few dialectal differences. In this they are quite wrong. Historically, Scots is not just a dialect of English. It is a separate language, being rather a cousin of English rather than an offshoot, both languages having their roots in Anglo-Saxon. The Scots language became different in several ways from English, having, for example, noticeable vocabulary differences. For example, it was subject to linguistic influences from other languages, such as French, which did not affect English. Scots, however, gradually lost ground to the language of Scotland's more powerful neighbour. This gradual process of anglicization led to Scots being replaced by English as the official language of Scotland. The English language then represented, as it were, the public voice of Scotland, and, as such, also became the chief literary language of Scotland.

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