



History of Scotland's Thistle

The prickly purple thistle is the national emblem of Scotland. Ever present in fields and pastures throughout Scotland, thistle has been Scotland's emblem for centuries. The first use as a royal symbol was on silver coins issued by James III in 1470. The plant, which grows to a height of five feet, has no enemies because of vicious spines that cover it like armor plating.

There are many different stories of how the Thistle became Scotland's symbol, but most point to the events surrounding the Battle of Largs in 1263. It is generally forgotten that for more than 600 years most of Scotland was part of the Kingdom of Norway. By 1263 Norway seemed to have little interest. King Alexander III proposed to buy back the Western Isles and Kintyre, still Norwegian territory. However this re-awoke Norse interest and King Haakon IV attacked with a large force, but was finally defeated at Largs. At some point during the campaign the Norsemen tried to surprise the Scots with a night attack. They removed their footwear for a silent approach but found themselves on ground covered with thistle.

It is said their leader stepped on thistle and cried out. His shout warned the Scots who then saw off the Norsemen, thus saving Scotland. The role of the thistle was then understood, and was chosen as Scotland's symbol, with the motto "Nemo me impune lacessit", "No-one harms me without punishment" but more commonly translated as "Wha daurs meddle wi me".