

IN BED WITH AN ELEPHANT: ALMOST THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF THE ANGLO-SCOTTISH UNION

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In an oft-quoted remark, the former Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, during a speech in Washington, DC in 1969, observed to his American audience that ‘living next to you is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant: no matter how friendly and even-tempered the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt’. Trudeau’s memorable simile could, of course, be applied to any relationship between a large, powerful country and a close neighbour, much weaker in political, economic and demographic terms. It certainly might refer to the Anglo-Scottish connection. In 1707 the English outnumbered the Scots by over 5:1. By 1901 that disparity had widened further to 10:1. England has always been the senior partner in the relationship with the sovereign Parliament meeting in London as the seat of government and the political, social and cultural ‘establishment’ of the United Kingdom also heavily concentrated in the south. Yet, despite the obvious possibilities for domination, assimilation or even exclusion by the senior partner, the Union of the two countries has survived for nearly three hundred years. May Day, 2007 will mark the tercentenary of the Treaty of 1707 being enacted in law. For the first half of the eighteenth century, the new connection remained fragile and could easily have fractured. Also, since the 1960s, the option of withdrawal from the Union has appealed to a substantial minority of Scots though, thus far,

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not a majority. However, since the later eighteenth century, until very recent times, the Anglo-Scottish connection has been remarkably stable and indeed rarely questioned, far less opposed, by political interests north of the Border.

In the 1840s, when nationalist insurrection rocked the capitals of Europe, Scotland was undisturbed. Between then and the Great War, any articulated concerns about the Union were concerned with its refinement and improvement not its repeal. The National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights, formed in 1853, voiced a number of grievances, which included the plea that Ireland received more generous treatment than Scotland, that the United Kingdom should always be designated 'Great Britain' and that the Scots merited an increase in the number of MPs at Westminster. These, however, were essentially cosmetic adjustments and none of them were of serious consequence. The Association itself did not last long (it was wound up in 1856) and attracted few figures of significant influence. It was resentment that the Irish were receiving a better deal than the Scots during the debates over Irish Home Rule that once more triggered interest in Scottish constitutional reform. In 1881, for example, the Earl of Rosebery memorably remarked that Scotland was 'mumbl[ing] the dry bones of political neglect and munch[ing] the remainder biscuit of Irish legislation' (quoted in Hutchison 2005, p.264). Soon a fully-fledged and politically significant Scottish Home Rule movement was under way. But this was no radical attempt at separation or even federalism. The aims of the Home Rulers were essentially both modest and moderate. They sought to devolve Scottish business to Edinburgh in order to make the sovereign Parliament in London more efficient. After all, at this time, most Scottish commentators believed that the Union was vital to the nation's progress, an enlightened act which had liberated the country from the anarchy, poverty and fanaticism which to them had scarred its pre-1707 past! To endanger such an invaluable relationship was simply unthinkable. The Union was an accepted and immovable part of life which now required no defence. It was a telling fact that when the Scottish Unionist Association emerged in 1912 out of a merger between the Scottish Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, the Union referred to in its title was not that of 1707 but the Irish Union of 1801. The Anglo-Scottish Union required no such vindication.

Yet to earlier generations of Scots and to later historians there was nothing inevitable about the survival of the Union. Mere geographical proximity between two different states does not, of course, guarantee the durability of any political association. Indeed, far from being typical, it may well be that the Anglo-Scottish Union was unusual in this respect when seen in the context of

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European history. Christopher Smout, for instance, argues that ‘unions between distinct and established medieval kingdoms of some reputation, like England and Scotland, to last for four hundred years (i.e. including the Regal Union of 1603) is a rare thing’ (Smout 2005, p.2). He then cites the example of two well-known failed unions in Western Europe, the ephemeral connections between Spain and Portugal and Norway and Sweden which both came to an end in acrimonious divorce.

Indeed, the more closely one examines 1707 and its aftermath, the more unlikely seems the remarkable longevity of the Anglo-Scottish political association. The omens at that time were far from auspicious. Scotland’s emergence as a nation out of miscellaneous tribal groupings in the medieval period was in large part the result of a centuries-old struggle to defend the kingdom from English aggression. Moreover, a mere fifty-odd years before the Treaty of Union, Scotland had been conquered and subjected to military dictatorship and annexation by the Cromwellian regime of the 1650s which left some bitter memories. The prelude to 1707 itself was the legislation of 1703 of the Scottish Parliament which in the key areas of foreign and dynastic policy suggested separation from England rather than union. The successful negotiations were then carried out by a tiny patrician élite resulting in a marriage of convenience passed through the Scottish parliament in the teeth of both internal opposition and considerable external popular hostility.

After 1707 the threat of ‘the elephant’ loomed closer in the form of the English constitutional principle of the absolute sovereignty of ‘the Crown-in-Parliament’. Potentially this dictum was the most lethal threat to the new association. The old royal tradition of the Divine right of Kings to rule without constitutional limit was transferred in the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9 to the English Parliament and later the British Parliament after 1707. Given the dramatically different levels of parliamentary representation, whether based on population levels or property values of the two nations, this constitutional assumption could imply the imposition of unacceptable policies by Westminster on Scotland. That this was not simply a theoretical possibility became brutally clear very quickly. In London, the High Church Tories who replaced the Whigs in 1710 passed the Patronage Act of 1712, re-establishing the legal right of local patrons (usually landowners) to appoint to vacant church offices. This decision did not simply outrage pious Presbyterians. It also opened up a running sore which poisoned church and state relations until the final crisis of the Disruption of 1843 and beyond. In addition, the Act confirmed unambiguously that the Treaty of 1707 was not, as many Scots

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believed, an inviolate, fundamental and supreme law but rather one which could be altered by the whim of any electoral majority in Westminster. This interpretation was confirmed much later by the most influential constitutional expert of the Victorian era, Albert Venn Dicey (1835-1922). Manifestly, this was the scenario for potential turbulence which became even more likely as taxation on such basic necessities as salt, linen, beer, soap and malt rose inexorably from the 1710s and the anticipated post-union economic miracle failed to appear. The deep frustration was symbolised by the motion in the House of Lords of June, 1713 to repeal the Treaty of Union, an attempt at dissolution only narrowly defeated by a mere four proxy votes. Even more crucially, dissent and anger helped to fuel the Jacobite movement and was one reason why Scotland became the great hope of the exiled Stuarts in the early eighteenth century.

How the Union survived the Jacobite menace relates, of course, to the much broader question, which is mainly outside the scope of this article, of the reasons for Jacobite failure and disaster in 1746. There are several texts which deal with that fundamental issue which can only really be answered convincingly by taking a wider British and, indeed, European perspective. (The most recent study is Duffy (2003).) But the febrile nature of anti-unionism should not obscure the fact that even in that volatile period the Union was gathering vital support. It came from two sources. First, just as enthusiastic Jacobites regarded 1707 as an effective recruiting sergeant, presbyterian Scots (which meant the vast majority in the Lowlands) saw the Union increasingly as the best defence against the potential horrors of a Catholic Stuart restoration. The more menacing Jacobitism became, the more were these fears reinforced. It helped that anti-Jacobite feeling was often strongest in some of the most advanced areas of the economy. Glasgow's joyful relief when the news came of the happy deliverance at Culloden Moor was tangible. The town's newspaper, the *Glasgow Journal*, brought out a special large-print edition in celebration of Cumberland's victory to record 'the greatest rejoicings that have been at any time in the past' (**Glasgow Journal**, 28 April 1746).

A second factor was the effect which, in spite of public frustrations, the rewards of Union were already having before c1740 on the country's business and landed élites. The 'golden age' of the tobacco business, the huge prize of the Union settlement, is usually seen as a post-1740 phenomenon. In fact, recent evidence on the scale of smuggling and under-recording (an estimated average of 42 per cent of legal imports of tobacco leaf, 1715-31) in the trade suggests that the good times could be pushed much further back (Nash 1982).

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Even more crucially, the non-inheriting sons of the Scottish landed gentry, forced into other careers by primogeniture, were already moving in significant numbers into imperial and London jobs before mid-century (Devine 2003). The early emigration of these élites was noted everywhere from the frozen wastes of British North America (modern Canada) to the teeming cities of India. Later that link between élite careers, empire and union was to be strengthened even further. But it was already a remarkably potent force in the first three to four decades after 1707.

Yet, Culloden and its brutal aftermath did not entirely end the tensions within the Union. True, the gravest threat to the relationship had been finally eliminated but, on the other hand, English suspicions of crypto-Jacobitism as a peculiarly Scottish disease lived on for some time. Scottish pride was offended by the Militia Act of 1757 which created a volunteer force for defence of the realm against foreign attack in England and Wales but not in Scotland. The conclusion drawn north of the Border was that the treacherous Scots could not yet be trusted with the bearing of arms (Robertson 1985). Scottophobia then reared its ugly head in the early 1760s, during the office of John, Earl of Bute, the first Scottish-born Prime Minister after the Union. His tenure in this exalted position was brief – ending in 1763 – but his influence endured through interest, networks and clientages. So too did the relentless attacks on him personally – his family name, Stuart, did not help – and Scots in general. During the 1760s the number of Scots holding state office rose dramatically and it was easy to suspect that Lord Bute was favouring his own kind. Paul Langford has noted recently that ‘With the sole exception of the French, no other nationality [other than the Scots] was so despised and derided in the vast array of caricatures turned out by the London press (Langford 2005, p.148). These cartoons were savagely racist in tone, portraying Scots as greedy mendicants growing rich on England’s rich pastures. Bute himself was satirised in one ribald print after another as the well-endowed seducer of the mother of George III, which was explicit sexual symbolism for the intolerable penetration of England and the Empire by ragged swarms of Scots crossing the Border in search of places and pensions:

Friend and favourite of France-a,
Ev’ry day may you advance-a,
And when dead by tomb be writon,
‘Here lies one whom all must sh-t-on,
Oh, the Great, the Great North Briton’

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(quoted in Hamilton 1999, p.208)

Probably the turning point in these strained relations came to an extent during the American War of Independence and then, finally and emphatically, during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. The vital contrast here was with Ireland, the more awkward neighbour. Between 1776 and 1783 the Scots were enthusiastically loyal to the British crown. Even in the colonies more loyalists were apparently born in Scotland than in any other country. They became the hated enemies of the Patriot Party, denounced as natural supporters of tyranny because of Scottish support for the exiled Stuarts in 1745, a dynasty which was viewed as the very incarnation of absolute monarchy and Catholic autocracy by respectable Protestant colonists. At the same time, Irish politicians were seen to be behaving badly and attempting to extract advantage from England's travails.

That contrast between the two nations became even more glaring during the Napoleonic Wars, a conflict which ended the epic 'second Hundred Years War' with France for global imperial hegemony. Britain was comprehensively victorious and the foundation of *Pax Britannica* across the oceans of the world was well and truly established. But at the time it was a close run thing: from 1798 to 1805, Napoleon's all-conquering armies were encamped a few miles across the Channel. It was at this time that the Irish committed the ultimate betrayal as the rebellion of 1798 gave the French the real chance of an effective flank attack at the hour of England's greatest peril. The contrast with the Scots could not have been more dramatic. Already over-represented among the officer class in the field armies, 52,000 Scots also joined the ranks of the volunteers. With around 15 per cent of the British population, this amounted to 36 per cent of all the volunteer soldiery in 1797, 22 per cent in 1801 and 17 per cent in 1804 (Cookson 1997, p.128). Scottish loyalty and the Scottish contribution in blood to final victory had cemented the Union by 1815. If contemporary caricatures and cartoons are any guide, the 'venomous contempt' of the mid-eighteenth century became the 'innocent humour' of the Victorian era (Langford 2005).

Linda Colley makes great play of the shared Protestantism of the two nations as the ideological cement of the Union (Colley 1992). But there may have been just too many differences in church governance for this factor to be truly decisive (Finlay 1999, pp.122-144). Religious 'nationalism' was a basic factor in Scotland throughout this period. Presbyterians in the main were deeply critical of the subordination of the Christian churches to the British state. They adhered in very large numbers to the 'Two Kingdoms' theory that Christ was

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supreme over the spiritual realm. Over a third of the members of the Church of Scotland had seceded over this issue by the 1830s and the related problem of patronage. The Disruption of 1843, when nearly 40 per cent of the ministers and a third of the congregations left the established Church, was the supreme assertion of spiritual independence from secular authority. It is arguable, then, that religion may have been more of a destabilising force within the Union than a foundation of ultimate stability.

Perhaps more significant were two major influences on the Scottish governing classes: the first was material; the second more related to the world of ideas. Until well into the nineteenth century, Scotland was ruled by a tiny élite of landowners and their kindred in the law and commerce. Before the first Reform Act of 1832 there were 45 parliamentary seats in counties and 15 in the burghs, each with a mere 2,600 and 1,500 voters respectively. In all, only 0.2 per cent of the population of the country had the franchise, an extraordinary small number even by the pre-democratic standards of the eighteenth century. Some among them were already gaining from rising rentals and mineral royalties from their estates as the Industrial Revolution in Scotland gathered pace. Even more critical for many others, however, were the vast increases in employment opportunities in the Empire through soldiering, trade, administration and the professions for the non-inheriting male offspring of this élite. This was an age of significant population increase and there were simply many more younger sons for whom careers had to be found commensurate with inherited social status. In that sense the Empire came as a godsend for the genteel but often impoverished landed gentry of Scotland. There was no barrier on entry placed on these Scots, even at the highest levels of colonial administration. By the end of the eighteenth century, not surprisingly, they were over-represented in almost every area of élite imperial employment. How important this was to the long-term stability of the Union is confirmed by comparison with Ireland in the 1790s and the provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the nineteenth century. Louis Cullen and others have shown that deep frustrations among the Irish Catholic gentry in the eighteenth century at the limited imperial prospects for their families helped to fuel Irish instability from the 1780s and was a significant influence helping to trigger the rebellion of 1798 (Cullen 1989). Similarly, ethnic discrimination against provincial élites in Austria-Hungary fed disaffection in central and eastern Europe. The Scottish gentry may have encountered prejudice and suspicion but this presented little practical obstacle to their widespread imperial success. The terms of the treaty of 1707 had ensured that Scottish presbyterians did not encounter any legal penalties or

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formal discrimination either in the domestic union state or its overseas territories.

Growing awareness of the material benefits of Union were paralleled by a developing consensus among the nation's intellectual leaders that progress and unionism were closely associated. In theory, of course, the stunning achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment could have built a new national confidence and even a platform for nationalist assertion. But almost to a man, the *literati* were wedded to the idea that the Union was the prime source of liberation from Scotland's dark past of religious obscurantism and feudal inertia. The rubbishing of Scotland's pre-Union history in the eighteenth century also fashioned a unionist intellectual agenda for the Victorian era. As Colin Kidd has shown, standard nineteenth century histories of the nation by authors such as John Hill Burton and P. F. Tytler embedded a tradition of portraying pre-1707 Scotland in a negative light (Kidd 1993, p.274). Significantly, when the Royal Commission of 1876 suggested that chairs of history should be set up in the universities, they were filled by English-trained scholars who virtually ignored the Scottish past in their teaching and writings and focused on the glories of English constitutional history. Not until 1901 was the first professorship in Scottish history established when the Fraser Chair was endowed at Edinburgh.

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All this raised the possibility that even if the Union had promoted material progress, the 'elephant' still posed a mortal threat to the distinctive identity of the Scottish nation. Certainly, some leading thinkers of the early nineteenth century regarded this not simply as probable but inevitable. Sir John Sinclair, Henry Cockburn and Sir Walter Scott, among others, feared that assimilation with England was a real possibility and that Scotland faced the future as 'North Britain', a mere regional appendage of the British state. The Union had brought remarkable benefits but at the accelerating cost of anglicisation. As Scott put it, 'what makes Scotland Scotland is fast disappearing'. The Scots in this view were steadily becoming invisible as a people as their ancient traditions, identities and institutions were diluted by the corrosive effect of close association with the world's most powerful state. (See Devine 2001 for more detailed discussion of this issue.)

England was not the only threat to Scottishness. Between the 1760s and the 1850s Scotland experienced unprecedented economic growth and the fastest

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rate of urbanisation in Western Europe. The argument made by several commentators at the time that this material revolution had severed the cultural and social links with an older Scotland seemed plausible and convincing. Economic modernity was creating a new order. In addition, the Enlightenment *literati* who subjected the ancient history of Scotland to rational enquiry and dismissed much of it as mythical, fanciful and beyond belief went with the grain of the times. As a result the nation was in danger of losing the connection with its past. Even the three key national institutions of church, law and education which survived the Union and which have been hailed ever since as the transmitters of Scottish national identity from generation to generation were under acute pressure in the early Victorian era. The presbyterian church of Scotland played a pivotal role in Scottish society, watching over morality, administering much of the nation's schooling and its systems of welfare. Through the General Assembly it provided a surrogate parliament for a stateless nation. Now this great institution was fracturing rapidly as dissenting congregations multiplied in the first few decades of the nineteenth century until the old Church finally split in two in the Disruption. Education too was felt to be in a sorry state. George Lewis's devastating polemic, **Scotland: A half-educated nation** of 1836, caught the mood of the times as he argued that the country's former eminence in learning was being destroyed by urban growth, irreligion and Irish immigration. Many members of the Scottish legal establishment also lost confidence. Some, such as Henry Cockburn and Francis Jeffrey, denounced Scots law as backward in comparison with that of England while the cream of the Glasgow merchant aristocracy asserted that further legal assimilation was a necessary step in order to reap all the economic benefits that the Union could provide.

We now know with the historian's supreme advantage of hindsight that all of this pessimism proved to be groundless. Indeed, what is most remarkable is that so much of what we now regard as integral and accepted features of modern Scottish identity were created, invented, renewed or strengthened in the very period when the death of Scotland was widely predicted by many thinking Scots. The very threat of the annihilation of the historic identity triggered a reaction. Sir Walter Scott himself, who feared that Scotland might become invisible, helped to pioneer major collections of Scottish ballads and folk tales. Scottish history loomed large in the most popular working-class paper of the later nineteenth century, **The People's Journal**, which by 1875 had a circulation of 130,000 a week and a quarter of a million on the eve of the First World War. It contained frequent series on the Scottish past and also had a pioneering interest in folklore and social history that went far beyond the

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orthodoxy of kings, queens and national heroes. Presbyterian religious history attracted wide interest. Thomas McCrie's biographies of John Knox (1811) and Andrew Melville (1819) were best-sellers. The Reformation, the Covenanters and presbyterian heroes were commemorated in the paintings of Sir George Harvey and immortalised in numerous monuments in stone erected in several Scottish towns.

But even more potent were the mythical and semi-mythical stories and personalities, set in the times before industrialisation. Here again Scott had led the way followed closely by Jane Porter's enormously influential **The Scottish Chiefs** (1810) and the continuing massive popularity of the medieval accounts of Blind Harry and Barbour's **Bruce**. Through his Waverley novels and **Tales of a Grandfather**, Scott invested the Scottish past with a magical appeal and satisfied the powerful emotional needs for nostalgia in a society experiencing unprecedented change. He was a brilliant pioneer in the invention of tradition, a process which helped to develop a new set of national symbols and icons while at the same time renewing others of venerable antiquity in the contemporary image of Victorian Scotland. The tartan and kilt of the Highlands had been appropriated even before 1830 by some as national dress. But its adoption was given further impetus by the well-publicised deeds of the kilted regiments in the Empire, the growing number of Caledonian Societies in the emigrant communities abroad with their pipe bands and tartan dress and, not least, by Queen Victoria's love affair with the Highlands. The best-loved monarch of modern times built a residence at Balmoral on Deeside and, after 1848, spent the autumn of each year on holiday there. By comparison she visited Ireland only four times in her entire reign. The fact that Victoria showed such fascination with the Highlands and was sometimes even heard to proclaim herself a Jacobite at heart was found to have a major effect (Finlay 2005, pp.17-34) Highlandism had now been given wholehearted royal approval and tartan recognised as the sartorial badge of Scottish identity. It was no surprise that when a company of radical volunteers was established to fight for Garibaldi in Italy, they were dressed in tartan shirts and bonnets topped with the Scottish thistle. At the same time, Scottish landscape painting developed a fascination with 'the land of the mountain and the flood' in the work of such artists as Horatio McCulloch (1805-67), with his pictures of lochs, corries and waterfalls, notably the archetypal and hugely popular **My Heart's in the Highlands** (1860).

The adoption of romantic Highland symbolism, paradoxically at the very time when crofting society itself was experiencing the terrible agony of clearance

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and dispossession, was only one element in the reinvention of Scotland. The historic building tradition of castles, keeps, towers and fortifications which had died out in the later seventeenth century was rehabilitated in the Victorian period in the architectural style which became known as Scotch Baronial. A key influence here was Robert Billings (1813-74) whose multi-volume, **Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland**, published between 1848 and 1852, was the primary source for the movement. Soon turrets, battlements and towers were appearing everywhere in rich profusion, first in country houses (Queen Victoria led the way with Balmoral Castle), and then on urban sheriff courts, municipal offices and infirmaries.

Above all, the cult of national heroes became one of the most popular ways of linking urban Scotland with its history. Pre-eminent in this respect were Robert Burns and William Wallace. The modern Burns cult was born in this period. In one Burns festival in 1844 an estimated 80,000 were in attendance, and of this multitude 2,000 sat down to eat lunch, accompanied by numerous toasts to the bard. Burns' standing was reflected in the countless attempts at imitations of his verse which dominated the 'poetry corners' of local newspapers throughout Scotland. But the historic Burns and his remarkable literary achievement were also moulded to suit the political tastes of a Victorian middle-class readership. He was depicted as anti-aristocratic and as a man who had succeeded by his own individual talent rather than through inherited privilege or noble birth. Burns became the apotheosis of 'the lad o' pairts', a key element in the most influential Victorian Scottish myths, that personal ability alone was enough to achieve success in life. But he was also praised because he linked the Scots with their rural past – it was often said that the blood of the Ayrshire Covenanters flowed in his veins – and preserved the ancient vernacular language by his genius.

The cult of William Wallace in the nineteenth century was equally complex and bears little relation to the raw nationalism of Hollywood's **Braveheart** of the 1990s. There can be little doubt that Wallace was one of the supreme Victorian icons. Magnificent statues to the hero of the Wars of Independence were erected overlooking the Tweed in Lanark, but these paled before the grandest of such projects, the 220-foot high tower of the National Wallace Monument, built near Stirling between 1859 and 1869. This colossal edifice overlooked the country where the Scots at Stirling Bridge and Bannockburn had fought their most decisive battles against the English in the fourteenth century. Wallace was not only remembered in statuary and monuments. Blind Harry's fifteenth-century epic, **The Wallace**, which was vehemently anti-

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English in language and tone, maintained its popularity, while tales of Bruce and Wallace was always familiar features in the local press. But the Wallace cult of that period was not designed to threaten the Union or inspire political nationalism, though the membership of the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights were among the most enthusiastic supporters of the proposal for a national monument. Rather, the cult reminded the Scots of their own history in which the Union had been achieved *because* of Wallace's struggle for freedom. Wallace had ensured that the Scottish people had never been conquered. As a result of their own courageous fight for independence in medieval times, a fruitful union between equal partners had become possible in 1707. In addition, Wallace could appeal to a Victorian Scotland profoundly divided across class lines. To middle-class Liberals, he had saved the nation when it had been betrayed by the aristocracy which still held power in the nineteenth century and which remained the reactionary enemy of many of the urban bourgeoisie throughout the Victorian era. For working-class Chartists, who often passionately sang **Scots wha hae** at their meetings, he represented the spirit of the common man striving for freedom against oppression. The national devotion to Wallace demonstrated that pride in Scottish nationhood and loyalty to union and empire could be reconciled.

A set of influences peculiar to the nineteenth century helped to fashion all these symbols of Scottish identity. But to a greater or lesser extent many of them harked back to an older Scotland. The pessimistic commentators of the early Victorian era underestimated the power of the past over a rapidly changing present. The inventors of tradition, the novelists, poets, song-writers, painters and architects, were not working in a vacuum. They were addressing an audience with a social memory moulded by inherited myth and story. Between the thirteenth century and 1707 Scotland had been a sovereign state with its own administrative, legal and ecclesiastical apparatus. There was also, unlike Wales, a clearly territorial Scotland which had been preserved during the medieval Wars of Independence. The nation was unified with the kingdom of England in 1603 and with the English state in 1707 but the distinctiveness of Scotland endured because the crucial forms of institutional and social identity proved much more robust than the pessimists predicted.

The English factor was also relevant. With security on the northern border firmly established and underpinned by the proven loyalty of the Scots, Westminster could virtually afford to let Scotland go its own way within the parameters of the Union. Unlike English policy in Ireland, there was no army of occupation or extensive colonial bureaucracy. Instead, the 'elephant'

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reverted to a posture of benign neglect. Only in the Disruption crisis of 1843 did it stir. Indeed, from 1827 until 1885, there was no minister or department with defined responsibility for Scotland. Contrary to the assimilationist interpretation most of the actual day-to-day business of governing Scotland remained in Scottish hands for much of the nineteenth century (Hutchison 2005). Not until the passing of the Education Act of 1872, the extension of the franchise to the working class on a larger scale and the creation of the Scottish Office in 1885 was there a decisive movement towards a more centralised state. Before then the United Kingdom was probably more decentralised than any other country in Europe. As in the eighteenth century, parliament in London rarely intervened on Scottish issues unless invited to do so, and the Lord Advocate in Edinburgh continued to control such key areas as law enforcement and policing. In the second half of the twentieth century the enormous influence of the state in education, health, welfare and economic management is taken for granted. In the nineteenth century government intervention was, however, limited in the extreme.

Below the parliamentary level the routine of government and administration was devolved to town councils and supervisory boards which grew up from the 1840s. The Scottish Board of Supervision ran the Poor Law from 1845, and the Prisons Board was set up in 1838. These two were followed in due course by others for public health, lunatic asylums (1857) and education (1872). Scots lawyers staffed this new bureaucracy and its inspectors were Scots doctors, surveyors and architects. Along with these, the Scottish Burgh Reform Act of 1833 created a new and powerful *local state*, run by the Scottish middle classes and reflecting their political and religious values. It was this, rather than a distant and usually indifferent Westminster authority, that in effect routinely governed Scotland. The middle classes had therefore no reason to seek parliamentary independence or to adopt a nationalism which was hostile to the British state. They enthusiastically supported Kossuth in Hungary and Garibaldi in Italy in their struggles for national unity, but they did not feel similarly oppressed or need a national parliament to achieve what the middle classes in Scotland already possessed, namely liberty, economic prosperity and cultural integrity, the very advantages for which European nationalists had yearned for so long (Morton 1999)

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On the eve of the Great War, the Anglo-Scottish Union must have seemed a rock of stability in an uncertain world. It was such a fact of life that no one of any influence questioned its future. If truth be told, the Scots had been remarkably fortunate. Rightly or wrongly, they assumed that their global economic eminence was rooted in the Union. But that wealth had not come at the expense of either cultural dependency or loss of identity. The old saying, having one's cake and eating it at the same time, does come to mind!

But between 1914 and the 1950s, this almost smug relationship was assailed to an extent unknown since the eighteenth century. Despite final victory, World War I was a human catastrophe on an enormous scale for Scotland. At the start of the conflict national euphoria was the mood. By 1918 this had degenerated into dark pessimism. One historian has suggested that the Scots regiments, on a *per capita* basis, suffered most from the carnage on the Western Front. The Serbs and the Turks did have higher *per capita* mortality rates but this was mainly a result of disease rather than losses in battle (Ferguson 1999, p.298). That slaughter of the nation's young men of all social classes was then followed by the collapse of the markets for Scottish heavy industry in the late 1920s and thereafter, together with a remarkably and high level of emigration which, for the first time since census records began, caused an actual fall in Scottish population. Edwin Muir eloquently captured the crisis of national confidence in his **Scottish Journey** of 1935: 'Scotland is gradually being emptied of its population, its spirit, its wealth, industry, art, intellect and innate character' while George Malcolm Thomson was even gloomier: 'The first fact about the Scot is that he is a man eclipsed. The Scots are a dying race' (Thomson 1927, pp.18-19).

But despite all this, the Union remained impregnable. The Conservative and Unionist party in Scotland was hugely popular between the wars, winning five of the seven General Elections over that period. During the long drawn-out economic crisis of these years, Scottish voters preferred the secure umbrella of the British state to any nationalist adventure. The foundation of the SNP in 1934 showed that not all Scots were in the unionist camp but its successive failures at the polls demonstrated conclusively that the vast majority were. Indeed the emergence of the SNP came about in large part because of the growing indifference to Home Rule on the part of the more established Liberal and Labour parties. The outbreak of the Second World War further strengthened British identity. For a time plucky Britain stood alone against an

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evil foe. Every nook and cranny of life was affected as the nation geared up for total war. The age-old distinction between combatants and non-combatants faded as the civilian population on the home front struggled against enemy bombers, food shortages and, until the end of 1941, the fear of invasion. The legacy of Britain united in a good cause endured in the folk memory of the post-1945 generation through the extraordinary popularity (and longevity) of war comics, books and films.

This was not the only vital factor buttressing Britishness. The foundation of the Welfare State, promising cradle to grave security and the commitment to full employment in the post-war world, had enormous appeal for Scots who had suffered the full impact of market failure in the 1930s, as evidenced by serious unemployment levels and appalling housing conditions. With free trade, the actual economic impact of the Union in the nineteenth century was probably broadly neutral. Only from the 1950s with welfarism and nationalisation of industry did it once again have a marked effect on Scotland. Even the beginnings of the end of Empire with the independence of India and Pakistan did not disturb the union connection. A new bond had been formed. As living standards finally started to improve in the 1950s and the years of austerity faded into the past, unionism in Scotland seemed unchallenged. Indeed, in 1950 Labour dropped its long-standing manifesto commitment to Scottish self-government and the SNP continued to stagnate in political irrelevance. 1955 saw the Unionists achieve just over half of the popular vote, a unique and remarkable achievement in Scottish electoral history.

But this political consensus did not mean that ‘Scottishness’ had in any sense evaporated. On the contrary, the mass interest in the Scottish Covenant of 1949, advocating a Parliament in Edinburgh within the Union and attracting nearly 2 million signatures, suggested that Scotland’s sense of itself remained robust. Moreover, by the later 1950s all was not well with the Scottish economy. The long period of Britain’s post-war relative decline against international competitors, which lasted from the 1960s to the 1990s, had begun. The balance between ‘Scottishness’ and ‘Britishness’ now shifted. The rise of the SNP, the new and pragmatic interest in devolution by Westminster and a fresh vitality in Scottish culture were all signs of the times. A key decade was the 1980s when the English ‘elephant’, for the first time since the eighteenth century, moved to the Scottish side of the ‘bed’, with the imposition of hugely unpopular social and economic policies by the Thatcher governments. The Scots had not voted for Tory radicalism and many began to feel that they were now suffering from an electoral dictatorship. That

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experience put more steel into the Scottish electorate and their politicians. Any ambiguity about the relevance of a Scottish Parliament to the future of the nation quickly receded.

More than half a century on from the high noon of unionism in the 1950s the issue now is whether the time-honoured connection between Scotland and England will survive for much longer in the new millennium. Scottish identity has now become stronger and more confident. In 2004, around three-quarters of Scots felt 'exclusively' or 'mainly' Scottish, a significantly higher proportion than the equivalent measures in England and Wales. These 'Scottish' loyalties are especially common among the younger generation. But that need not mean that political independence is inevitable. It may be yet another manifestation of the Union's historic capacity not only for flexibility but for giving full and easy scope for the Welsh, English and Scots to express their cultural and ethnic identities within a UK framework. Perhaps inevitably, however, most recent comment both in the media and among academic analysts has been about the reasons for the decline of 'Britishness' over the last half century. The obvious check list might include the waning of Protestantism (for some writers a key ideological British resource for earlier generations), the end of Empire and Britain's subsequent fall for a time to the status of a second-rate power, the huge and increasing importance of Europe and the parallel decline in the authority of the British state and the ebbing of respect for the institution of monarchy. Again, since the end of World War II and the collapse of the Soviet threat, there is the loss of a clear 'Other' which can help to sustain British national solidarity against a common foe.

However, whether all this means that a political divorce is likely in the short-term is less certain. Three hundred years of Union have resulted in multiple familial, personal, economic and cultural connections between the two nations. Many hundreds of thousands of Scots have long migrated to England. Less well known is the continuous movement in modern times from England to Scotland. Between 1841 and 1911 a quarter of a million English and Welsh men, women and children came north. At the last census (2001) over 400,000 English-born were resident in Scotland, by far the nation's largest immigrant group. Not so long ago, it was possible to speak with concern about the 'Englishing' of Scotland. More common nowadays is the reference to the 'Scottish Raj' in English politics, media and London's financial institutions. The story about the Midlands MP who asked, why should the Scots need a parliament when 'they are running ours', may be apocryphal but still strikes a chord. The Scots have felt themselves to be provincials from time to time and

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have also often been the target of some English humour but such minor irritations have never really prevented them achieving access to the highest positions in politics, business or academe south of the Border. Devolution has also undeniably drawn the teeth of much of the discontent of the 1980s, even if a majority in Scotland still think that the Parliament could do much better.

In addition, the economic crises of the 1970s through to the 1980s, which undermined confidence in the British state, have at present disappeared. Balance of payments problems, hyperinflation and trade union militancy have, for the last decade or so, gone from the UK. Since emerging from the recession of the early 1990s, Britain has thrived and most Scots have shared in the benefits. According to the International Monetary Fund, the growth of GDP per person in the UK was both stronger and less variable than that of other rich nations in the G7 over that period. All this has helped to fuel both electoral apathy and suspicion of dramatic political adventures (**The Economist**, 25 April 2006)

But to conclude that the Union is now secure and that the devolved parliament as presently constituted is the 'settled will' of the Scottish people would be to go too far. In recent surveys, nearly half of respondents have wanted more powers for Holyrood, especially in the areas of taxation, the economy and immigration (McCrone 2005). This suggests that the agenda in the medium term might not be the stark choice between unionism or independence but when, how far and how fast the pragmatic transfer of powers from London to Edinburgh will progress. Nonetheless, even in the event of full independence, the 'elephant' will still be there. After all, Trudeau's original simile referred to two separate nation states, the USA and Canada. Geographical proximity, coupled with relative size and power may, in the final analysis, be more influential than formal constitutional status.

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June 2006