Scotland, England and the making of Great Britain

In the wake of the Scottish independence referendum, our visual overview explores two key episodes that brought Scotland and England together.

Timeline 1 The House of Stuart and the ‘Union of the Crowns’

1603 Death of Queen Elizabeth I. The Stuart dynasty takes the throne, and James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England
1604 James I appeals for a merger between the parliaments of England and Scotland to create a ‘Perfect Union’
1608 James’s union project defeated in the Westminster Parliament
1653 Oliver Cromwell creates a single parliament in Westminster, incorporating Scottish and Irish MPs
1660 Restoration of Charles II. Separate Scottish and Irish parliaments brought back
1669–70 Proposal for union by ministers under Charles II. Fails when English and Scottish commissioners are unable to agree terms
1671 Jacobite rebellion: pledge by Prince James Edward Stuart to restore the Scottish Parliament. Rebels defeated at battle of Sheriffmuir
1674 George, elector of Hanover, proclaimed George I of Great Britain. However, there are also Stuart (‘Jacobite’) claimants to the throne
1675 Riots against English taxation in Elgin, Stirling, Glasgow, Paisley and Dundee
1676–63 Seven Years’ War between England and France — Scottish soldiers instrumental in the capture of Quebec for the British empire
1680 1690 1700 1710 1720 1730 1740 1750 1760

Timeline 2 The Act of Union

A union of convenience

The Union of 1707 was shaped by political and economic self-interest. England needed Scottish assistance in fighting a major war against Louis XIV of France, and the English ministers needed the Scottish elites to agree to pass the throne to George, elector of Hanover, after Queen Anne had failed to produce a living heir. The Scots were offered access to the trade of the English colonies overseas — a lifeline for a nation nearly impoverished after the failure of its own colonial project at Darien in Central America.

The union of the parliaments came with many concessions. Scotland kept its independent church, and its separate systems of law and education. Eventually, in 1999, the terms of union were loosened further, with the devolution of powers in Scotland to a re-established Edinburgh Parliament. But the Act of 1707 aroused violent resentment in sections of Scottish opinion, stirred by allegations that it had been forced through parliament by English bribery and intimidation.

Timeline 3 Legacy of union

1600 1610 1620 1630 1640 1650 1660 1670 1680 1690 1700 1710 1720 1730 1740 1750 1760

James VI of Scotland became King James I of England in 1603. He established a single currency and a shared flag — the original Union Jack — and campaigned for a full parliamentary union. James believed that a common language and a common Protestant religion meant that England and Scotland were being willed by God to come together.

1659 Foundation of the Carron Company iron works, Falkirk. Beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Scotland
1674 Jacobite rebellion begins in the Scottish Highlands. Rebels enter England, but are forced to retreat and then crushed at battle of Culloden
1698–1701 Scotland is impoverished by the failure of its colony at Darien in Central America after English and Spanish opposition: 25% of all the money in Scotland is lost with the scheme
1701 Act of Settlement. English Parliament agrees that the crown will pass to the German royal house of Hanover in the absence of any British Protestant heir to the throne
1702 Outbreak of war between England and France
1706 English commissioners sent into Scotland to draw up terms for a union
16 January 1707 Passing of the Act of Union

Britain’s rise as a global industrial power widened the economic and political opportunities for Scots, and helped the Union to succeed.

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