**Union**

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**1. Scotland at the Time of the Union, 1690-1707**

By 1690 the population of Scotland had grown to over a million. The majority of Scots lived in the countryside north of Perth, making a living as farmers. Most towns were in southern Scotland or around the coasts, where people could make a living from fishing or trade. The largest town was Edinburgh which had over 30,000 inhabitants. The Scottish population was generally well fed and well educated. Most Scots were literate and many had gone to university. The main languages were Scots and Gaelic though many people could understand English as well. The official Church of Scotland was Protestant although some Highland clans were still Catholic. There were few roads south to England across the Borders moorland. Instead, the Scots had links by sea to their allies in Holland and France.

**2. The Union of the Crowns**

Although Scotland and England were separate kingdoms in 1690, they were linked together by the monarch. In 1603 James VI of Scotland had become king of England as well. From then on the Stuart family ruled over both countries. This Union of the Crowns caused Scotland many problems.

After 1603 the Stuarts lived in London and neglected their northern kingdom. The old royal centres of power such as Edinburgh, Stirling, Linlithgow and Falkland went into decline. Royal visits to Scotland were very rare. Instead the country was run by Crown officials on the Privy Council who carried out the wishes of the king.

England's trading interests were very important to the Stuart kings because of the taxes they could raise there. As a result Scottish merchants were banned from trading in England's overseas colonies, even though they shared the same monarch. The Stuarts also tried to change the presbyterian Church of Scotland and make it more like the English Church, with bishops who obeyed the king's commands.

**3. The Scottish Parliament**

Since 1641 the Scottish Parliament had met in Parliament House in Edinburgh. Here sat the Three Estates; the clergy, the nobles, and the burgesses from the chartered royal burghs. Unlike the English Parliament in London, the Scottish Lords and Commoners sat and debated together in the same hall. The Scottish Parliament opened with impressive ceremonies such as the Riding and the Downsitting, but its powers were limited. It lacked the self-confidence and legal authority of its English counterpart. In part this was due to the absence from Scotland of the monarch after 1603. Since the Protestant Reformation in 1560, the Scottish Parliament had also existed in the shadow of a rival institution, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. In the eyes of the majority of Protestant Scots, the General Assembly was the more prestigious institution and the true defender of their liberties. By comparison, the Parliament was a talking shop for the nobility.

Until 1690, the work in Parliament was done by a forty-strong Committee of the Articles. The members of this committee were controlled by the Crown officials who ran Scotland. There was little debate in Parliament Hall. The Commissioners or members simply met to rubberstamp the wishes of the Crown. However, changes in 1690 gave the Parliament new powers. In the last 17 years of its existence, the Parliament began to develop into an effective institution: political parties flourished, and there was genuine debate in Parliament Hall. It was this new-found confidence of the Parliament in Edinburgh which worried the English government in London and ultimately brought about its demise.

**4. The Economic Crisis in Scotland, 1690-1707**

By 1690 it was clear that the Scottish economy was in trouble. The Scots pound had fallen in value against English Sterling to around one-twelfth of its former value. During the 1690s there was a run of poor harvests due to wet weather, the 'seven ill years', and the Scottish government found it difficult to buy in enough grain from Europe and England. As a result, there was famine and thousands of Scots were forced to emigrate to Ulster or to North America.

Many Scots blamed the Union of the Crowns for the decline in Scotland's overseas trade and prosperity. Scotland's industries had declined when the king and his noble courtiers took their custom from Edinburgh to London. In addition, English laws kept Scottish ships out of the wealthy trade in American tobacco, sugar and cotton that was enriching England. Much of Scotland's trade had been with France but the King of England (and of Scots) was often at war with the French, so the old trading routes were disrupted.

**5. The Darien Scheme**

The Scots tried to establish new trade routes and new markets for their goods. In 1695 the Company of Scotland set out to build a Scottish colony at Darien, in Panama (Central America). The Company hoped to control the trade in goods passing between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. In 1698 a fleet of five Scottish ships with 1200 settlers on board set off from Leith, bound for the New World. After arriving in Panama, they began to build the colony of New Caledonia with its capital at the fort of New Edinburgh.

The scheme failed badly. Partly this was due to the poor climate in Panama and the hostile conditions there. The Scots were also inexperienced colonists and made many fatal mistakes. The settlers were weakened by disease and repeatedly attacked by troops of the Spanish Empire, which owned the land in Panama. However, the whole enterprise was also deliberately hampered by the London government, which did not want it to succeed. Although he was also King of Scotland, King William III of England ordered his English subjects to give no aid to the Scottish plans. They were not allowed to invest in the Company of Scotland nor to trade with its settlement in Panama. After enduring many hardships and disease, the isolated colonists of New Caledonia were forced to abandon Darien in 1700.

The failure of the Darien Scheme badly undermined the confidence of the Scots. The kingdom's leading families had put large sums of money into the Company of Scotland. Over £200,000 was lost in the venture and some investors were ruined.

**6. The Debate About the Union**

The disasters of the 1690s led to a great deal of discussion about the Union in Scotland. Most Scots were angered by the actions of their king, William II and III. They distrusted the government in London, which seemed to care little about Scottish aspirations. They argued that the Union of the Crowns had weakened Scotland badly and wanted to end it altogether. Others believed that Scotland had to make the Union work. If Scotland was more closely united with England, then it would share in English wealth and power. Some were even prepared to give up Scotland's independence in return for access to England's colonies and markets.

**7. The Protestant Succession**

Relations between Scotland and England were complicated by the death of William in 1702. He was succeeded by Anne Stuart, but she was past childbearing age and had no direct heirs. William and Anne were both Protestant monarchs and had been acceptable to the Protestant majority in England and Scotland. However, the lack of a Protestant heir led to fears that the Catholic branch of the Stuart family might return to power. They were living in exile in France but had many secret supporters, especially in Scotland. These were the Jacobites who believed that James Stuart was the 'true king' of Scotland and England.

In 1701 the London Parliament decided that Anne should be succeeded by the Protestant ruling family of Hanover in Germany. Although most Scots were Protestant, they were angered that the Scots were not consulted about who should succeed Queen Anne. This English Act of Settlement showed up the problem of having one monarch but two governments. There was no guarantee that the Scots would accept the princes of Hanover as their new ruling family. There was a real possibility that the Scots might go back to the Catholic Stuarts, leading to a war between the two kingdoms. The English government feared an invasion from the north and realised that they had to 'close the back door'.

**8. The Struggle Between the Parliaments**

The period 1701 to 1705 saw a struggle for authority between the English and Scottish Parliaments. By choosing the House of Hanover for the English throne, London was trying to extend its influence over Scotland by indirectly deciding who would be King of Scots. The Scottish Parliament reacted by passing laws which stressed the independence of Scotland. One such law said that the Scottish Parliament must be consulted by the king, before war could be declared. In another, the Scots laid out the tough conditions which had to be met before they would accept the Hanoverians. In reply, and to force the Scots into line, the English Parliament passed the Aliens Act in March 1705. This threatened to ban Scottish merchants and their goods from England, wrecking the Scottish economy, unless the Scottish Parliament accepted the House of Hanover.

**9. The '*Worcester'* Incident**

Scottish resentment against the English government eventually led to violence. In 1704, a Scottish merchant ship, *The Annandale,* was seized by the authorities in London. In revenge, the Scots seized the English crew of *The Worcester* accusing them of piracy. These unfortunates were probably innocent but had the bad luck to be tried while anti-English mobs rampaged through Edinburgh. In April 1705 the captain of *The Worcester* and two crewmen were executed on the shore at Leith Links. This incident demonstrated the level of feeling against the English government amongst most ordinary Scots. English garrisons at Berwick and Newcastle were strengthened and rumours of war between Scotland and England spread through both countries.

**10. The Union Commissioners**

In 1705 Anne ordered her ministers in England and Scotland to bring about a more complete union between the two kingdoms. Angered by the double threat of the Aliens Act and an English invasion, it was unlikely that the Scots would agree to this move. However, after much debate and scheming, 31 Commissioners from each nation met secretly in London in April 1706. They drew up a draft Treaty of Union, consisting of 25 separate articles. The Scottish Commissioners argued for a federal union with England which would have kept more power in Scotland. However, the English would only agree to 'an incorporating union' which would mean the end of Scotland's own Parliament.

**11. The Passing of the Treaty**

The Scottish Parliament read, debated and voted on the Treaty articles between October 1706 and January 1707. There was great opposition to the Treaty both inside and outside Parliament. There were riots in several burghs, and petitions and letters of protest flooded into Edinburgh from across the country. Several Scottish patriots, notably Lord Belhaven and Fletcher of Saltoun, made powerful speeches against the Union. However, the government skilfully managed to get the Treaty through the Edinburgh Parliament. The time available for debate was strictly limited. Supporters of the Union were promised pensions and payments of back salary and possible honours. Presbyterians who wanted to keep their independence were bought off by a separate Bill, protecting the Church of Scotland. The Court Party, who were for the Union, were well led and well organised whereas the opposition to the Union was divided and poorly led. In his diary, the pro-unionist writer Sir John Clerk of Penicuik admitted that the Treaty was opposed by three-quarters of the Scottish population. Nevertheless, the unpopular Treaty was ratified in Edinburgh on 16 January 1707 and became law two months later.

**12. The Bribery Question**

Most Scots could not understand why their leaders had given up Scotland's independence against the wishes of the majority. The Jacobite George Lockhart of Carnwath published a list of 32 Scottish Parliament Commissioners who had taken money from the English Treasury. This came to over £20,000. Others hoped for a share of the Equivalent, a cash payment of almost £390,000, which was to be paid to the Scots if they accepted the Treaty. Some of the Scottish nobles clearly hoped for new honours from the English Crown. The Duke of Argyll was rewarded for his help by becoming the Duke of Greenwich. The Duke of Queensberry was made Duke of Dover. The Duke of Hamilton, who was supposed to be against the Union, made several key 'mistakes' in the Scottish Parliament which helped the Union come to pass. These 'mistakes' were probably inspired by English offers of reward.

Historians have long debated the issue of corruption but there now seems little doubt that bribery and 'sweeteners' were used to get the Scots, and especially the Scottish nobles, to accept the Treaty.

**13. The Articles of Union**

The Treaty brought a new United Kingdom into being on 1 May 1707. It was to be ruled by the Protestant Hanoverian family after Anne's death. Catholics were excluded from the UK throne. There was to be only one Parliament sitting in London and the Edinburgh Parliament was abolished. After much argument, the Scots received 16 seats in the Westminster House of Lords and 45 seats in the House of Commons. This compared with 196 English lords and 513 English MPs.

English and Scottish merchants were now equal before the law and able to trade freely. Scottish merchants had access to England's prosperous American colonies. However, the Scots pound and Scotland's distinct weights and measures were abolished. The Scots had to take a share in paying off England's massive national debt and had to pay new, higher taxes to the London Treasury. To help meet this burden, the Scots received a one-off payment called the Equivalent and were given some temporary tax concessions on commodities such as salt and the malt used in brewing beer. Scotland was allowed to keep its own legal system and its own form of church government.

**14. The Consequences**

Within months, even some of the nobles who had voted for the Union began to regret it. The Scottish Privy Council was abolished by London in October 1707. The nobles suddenly realised that they had lost an important source of jobs and influence. New laws such as the Treason Act of 1708 were based on English law and therefore a breach of the Treaty. That very year, the Court of Session in Edinburgh was overruled by the House of Lords in Westminster, technically another breach of the Treaty. Scottish nobles were also barred from the Lords if they tried to use their Scottish titles to gain a seat there.

Several other new laws outraged the Presbyterians in the official Church of Scotland. People were now allowed to worship in the English Episcopalian way. Local landowners were given the power to choose parish ministers. This went against the Presbyterian tradition of congregations selecting their own minister.

The Scots were also disappointed by the financial side of the Union. The Equivalent was mostly paid in paper money, not in the gold coin which the Scots expected. Scotland's east coast burghs could no longer trade with France and suffered terribly. English customs officials arrived in Scotland to collect the new higher taxes and customs. Then in 1713 the London government put taxes on goods which were exempt according to the Union and which were crucial to the Scottish economy. That year the Scottish nobles tried to repeal the Union. They only failed by four votes.

Even supporters of the Union such as the influential Earl of Mar, felt that it had failed. The deep resentment at the Union led many Scots, especially Highlanders, to support the Jacobite cause of the Catholic Stuarts. Jacobite armies tried to invade Britain in 1708 and 1719. There were serious Jacobite rebellions in 1715 and 1745. Eventually these were suppressed by the British Army and the Highlands of Scotland were pacified.

In time Scotland began to adjust to its position in the United Kingdom. After 1750 changes in farming and industry brought increased prosperity. Towns like Glasgow began to benefit from the trade with America. People in Scotland began to feel more British and many Scots played a part in building up the British Empire around the world. Prosperity was slow in returning, but in time more Scots began to feel that Scotland had gained from the sacrifice of its independence in 1707.