

# Prosperity to Scotland

# and no Union!



by Gordon  
Craigie

Dissolve the Union (Credit: Original artist unknown, sourced via Twitter)

“MAY YOU LIVE in interesting times” may or may not be an old Chinese curse, but the fact that we are currently living through the curse of interesting constitutional times is fairly self-evident. We can surely apply the ironic sense of *interesting* to the two major constitutional issues of today – the UK leaving the EU (or not?) and Scotland regaining its political independence after 300+ years of subjugation. It is certainly *interesting* that Scotland should be denied its democratic choice to remain in the EU because the UK Government has decided that England’s vote to leave takes priority. It is definitely *interesting* that an advisory referendum can be retrospectively interpreted to be both binding and a clear statement of the ‘will of the people’. And it is bafflingly

*The democratic will of the Scottish electorate counts for absolutely hee-haw with our Westminster masters!*

*interesting* that, despite that advisory referendum being deemed to have been influenced illegally, the result can’t be nullified because the referendum wasn’t binding, even though the UK Government has subsequently, and unilaterally, decided to interpret it as such. Whit? So, just to be clear, if it had been declared ahead of time as binding then we would not currently be on the brink of economic and social catastrophe because it was illegal. But because it was advisory it can’t be challenged legally, and therefore it apparently doesn’t matter that the ‘victors’ cheated, we all just have to live with the consequences? Apparently so, and the entire 3-year (and counting!) farce demonstrates unequivocally that the democratic will of the Scottish electorate counts for absolutely hee-haw with our Westminster masters!

But there’s very little that’s new in this world. Our ancestors, particularly those living in the 1600s and 1700s, must have experienced very similar emotions watching their politicians, and monarchy, committing national suicide. In the previous two issues of *iScot Magazine* we’ve attempted to dispel some of the myths around the

lead-up to the 1707 Treaty of Union following the 1603 Union of the Crowns. In Issue 54 we showed that while the whole Darien adventure may have been ill-conceived, it was ultimately English subterfuge that ensured its failure, aided and encouraged by the ‘Scottish’ king favouring his ‘English’ subjects. Notwithstanding that failure, it is entirely untrue to assert that Scotland, as a country, was bankrupt as a result and that Union was England’s way of charitably saving us from our fate – indeed, even the BBC (I know, me too!) acknowledges in the history section of its website that, “The Treaty of Union was not a magnanimous, indeed unprecedented, act of altruism in which England rescued an impoverished Scotland – as it has sometimes been portrayed”. And, in Issue 55, we showed how the English Parliament viewed Scotland as a ‘rogue nation’ and threatened us with the Aliens Act if we didn’t agree to the Union.

The Treaty of Union solved a few problems for England at a stroke. For example, it:

- Achieved England’s goal of never again having a Catholic

monarch and established the right of Hanoverian succession to both crowns

- Removed, or at least greatly reduced (they thought!), the threat of invasion from their pesky neighbours in the North while they continued to fight the French, Spanish and anyone else who got in their way
- Reduced England’s national debt by obliging Scotland to assume a share (at a time when Scotland had **zero** debt!)
- Increased their tax-base by introducing new taxes to Scotland at the same level as England
- Provided England with a ready supply of cannon fodder for all of those aforementioned wars

*The English Parliament viewed Scotland as a ‘rogue nation’ and threatened us with the Aliens Act if we didn’t agree to the Union*



Daniel Defoe - We thought spies were supposed to be incognito?

Again, even the BBC website recognises all of this – how they must regret allowing a Scottish academic, Professor Allan MacInnes, to write it!

During the course of his extensive genealogical research, historian Gordon MacGregor has uncovered many letters and official documents that reflect general dissatisfaction with the Treaty, even during its discussion phase. "For example, on 11 May 1706, James Hamilton of Pencaitland wrote to the Duke of Hamilton: 'It is said that the Treaty of Union is far advanced, and that we are to have one incorporating union which is not well liked here by many, both lay and clergymen.' In a letter of 1 June the following year, he goes on to say: 'The Treaty of Union is now far advanced, but I do not find many of our Presbyterians very inclinable to go into one incorporating union, and Belhaven [John Hamilton, 2nd Lord Belhaven] is altogether against it.' Also, the Duke of Atholl continually protested against the Union, as did many of the other commissioners to parliament. How it was received by the average person is proven by the riots that ensued."

Even the UK Parliament website acknowledges these riots: "As negotiations progressed, the public mood became increasingly volatile, and during 1706 there was frequent civil unrest and disorder in Scottish towns" and "In October 1706 the Scottish Parliament met to consider and ratify the Articles of Union. Publication of the Articles triggered widespread unrest. Violent demonstrations took place outside Parliament House and inside there were fears that the building would be invaded by protestors". Troops were apparently deployed with orders to shoot if necessary, but



The Articles of Union

the disturbances eventually settled down. However, the website goes on to note that "a total of 96 petitions were presented against the union ... designed to show to undecided MPs the widespread unpopularity of the proposed terms ... but the Duke of Argyll, one of the leaders of the Scottish Court party, said that petitions were little more than 'paper kites' – a revealing insight into how governments of the day regarded public opinion". Governments of today too, it would seem! There were no petitions received in favour of any incorporating union, and the English spy, Daniel Defoe, reported back to his masters in London that "for every Scot in favour there are 99 against"! And yet, the Treaty was ratified by 106 to 69 on 16 January 1707 despite that clear and obvious opposition. Perhaps the financial inducements on offer to MPs (detailed on page XX) arguing for the Union may have influenced the vote? (Surely not!)

Incidentally, one little known detail of the lead-up to the Union is revealed in an entry from the Parliamentary register, 25 March 1707 session:

*And for the better settling the method and way of paying these public debts her majesty, with advice and consent foresaid, statutes, ordains and declares that after allowance of the sum for repairing the losses which private persons shall sustain by reducing the coin of this kingdom to the standard and value of the coin of England.*

As Gordon MacGregor explains, "The comparison of value of currency at the time is interesting. The implication is that the Scottish pound was stronger than the English pound. England was labouring under massive debts at that time, which is no doubt why their currency was so devalued. As Scotland was having to reduce the value of its coin to bring it into line with that in England, so losses incurred on account of that exchange were to be made up. Annexing Scotland, which is what really happened, opened the door to the pillaging of both wealth and men. This enabled England to continue to fight their wars and also to replicate the model elsewhere, such as in India. It

**"For every Scot in favour there are 99 against!"**

also meant they could prevent the Scots from siding with their continental enemies, such as France, against them." Very interesting indeed!

Given the way the Treaty was ratified it could hardly be described as 'the will of the people' and it certainly wasn't the case that the question of Scotland's independence was settled for all time, or even for the mythically fluid present-day British Nationalist definition of a 'generation'! Dr Robin Eagles, on the *History of Parliament* website, records how, when English parliamentarians forced through a bill extending their English malt tax to Scotland in 1713, a mere 6 years after the Union, Scottish MPs argued that this was an infringement of the terms of the Treaty, specifically Article 14. The denouement of that particular battle was enacted in the House of Lords when "the Earl of Seafield rose to his feet to move that a bill be brought in for terminating the Union. He outlined a series of slights that the Scots had endured since 1707, of which the malt tax was the final indignity". After the English peers managed to obfuscate the debate by stressing the Union's importance in ensuring Hanoverian succession, and suggesting separate legislation to protect 'the nation', "the bill for dissolving the Union was lost by just four votes, and even then only because of the employment of proxies". Four. Proxy. Votes. It all sounds eerily like the present-day antics of the Eton toffs in their absolute disregard for our country, and what was actually agreed in the Treaty.

Outside of parliament there were other examples of constitutional unrest. There were Jacobite risings in 1708, 1715 and 1719 as well as the more widely recognised 1745, each fuelled by dissatisfaction with the Union as well as a desire to reinstate the Stuart monarchy to the throne of Scotland. That the Jacobite cause gets confused – often deliberately – by Catholic/Protestant, Highland/Lowland, Stuart/Hanover, Scotland/England arguments does nothing to help us understand the precise details of what exactly was the will of the Scottish people, but we do know that a Jacobite motto was *Prosperity to Scotland, and no Union*. After what can only be reasonably described as an English occupation of Scotland after Culloden in 1746 – how else are we supposed to interpret the number of *British* army outposts across Scotland? – along with the brutality of the Clearances, the outlawing of traditional highland clothing and the Gaelic language and the deliberate diminution of the Scots language... well, according to the *British* history we were all taught in school, everything was fine! But then that would be to ignore the radical rising of 1820, the 1918 Battle of George Square or the slow and steady reinvigoration of our Scottish identity which finally passed its tipping point in 2014.

Gordon MacGregor's conclusion is, "In the early years after the Treaty's ratification and going forward from then the general understanding was that all that was required for Scotland to withdraw was a majority vote of its own MPs to that effect, which was also Margaret Thatcher's own position in the 1980s. I also seem to recall several of her Tory cronies, such as Michael Forsyth, saying precisely the same thing. Only recently has there been an apparent realignment within the SNP hierarchy in favour of referenda, and we now appear to be at a point in time when that is somehow considered to be the only method. Bearing in mind that the Treaty was enacted by a majority vote, the return of a majority of Scottish MPs on a manifesto which specifically states the intention to withdraw has been, and remains, a legitimate means to end that same union." It is formally recorded that the Scottish Parliament was merely adjourned in 1707, not

Jacobite broadsword with inscription



**Well, according to the British history we were all taught in school, everything was fine!**



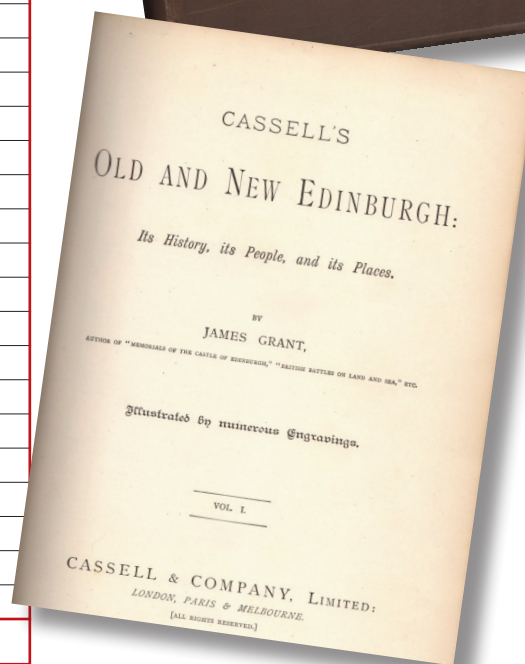
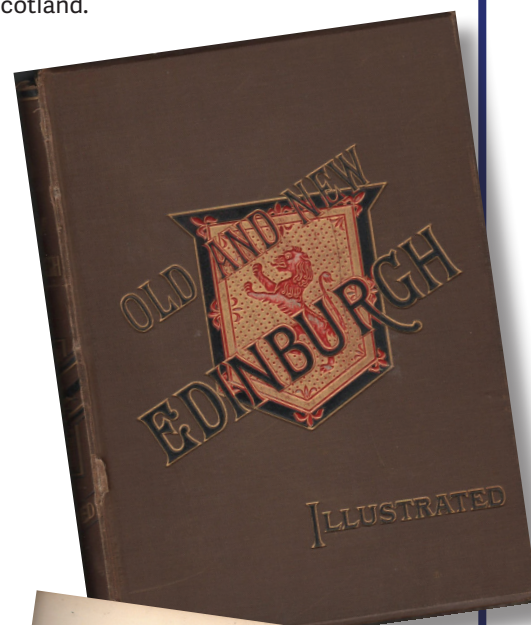
abolished – a fact reflected in Winnie Ewing's historic words in 1999 at the opening of the devolved parliament – "The Scottish Parliament, adjourned on the twenty-fifth day of March in the year seventeen hundred and seven, is hereby reconvened". Whether Scotland's full independence is to be regained via referendum, election or some other methodology not yet thought of, remains to be seen. We do indeed live in interesting times as we consider Scotland's next constitutional move and, taking our cue from history, perhaps we should be guided by that Jacobite motto of the 1700s – **Prosperity to Scotland, and no Union!**

**iScot Magazine is grateful to Jenny Eeles of RandomHistoryScotland.com (Twitter: @FlikeNoir) for allowing us to reproduce an extract from James Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh*, published in 1880:**

It is, of course, a matter of common history, that the legislative union between Scotland and England was carried by the grossest bribery and corruption; but the sums actually paid to members who sat in that last Parliament are not perhaps so well known, and may be curious to the reader.

During some financial investigations which were in progress in 1711 Lockhart [Sir George Lockhart of Carnwath, MP for Midlothian 1708–1715] discovered and made public that the sum of £20,540 17s. 7d. had been secretly distributed by Lord Godolphin, the Treasurer of England, among the baser members of the Scottish Parliament, for the purpose of inducing them to vote for the extinction of their country, and in his *Memoirs of Scotland from the Accession of Queen Anne*, he gives the following list of the receivers, with the actual sum which was paid to each, and this list was confirmed on oath by David Earl of Glasgow, the Treasurer Deputy of Scotland.

| To the                                  | £              | s.        | d.       |
|---|----------------|-----------|----------|
| Earl of Marchmont                       | 1104           | 15        | 7        |
| Earl of Cromarty                        | 300            | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Prestonhall                        | 200            | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Ormiston, Lord Justice Clerk       | 200            | 0         | 0        |
| Duke of Montrose                        | 200            | 0         | 0        |
| Duke of Athole [Atholl]                 | 1000           | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Balcarris                       | 500            | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Dunmore                         | 200            | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Anstruther                         | 300            | 0         | 0        |
| Stewart of Castle Stewart               | 300            | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Eglinton                        | 200            | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Fraser                             | 100            | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Cessnock (afterwards Polworth)     | 50             | 0         | 0        |
| Mr. John Campbell                       | 200            | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Forfar                          | 100            | 0         | 0        |
| Sir Kenneth Mackenzie                   | 100            | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Glencairn                       | 100            | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Kintore                         | 200            | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Findlater                       | 100            | 0         | 0        |
| John Muir, Provost of Ayr               | 100            | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Forbes                             | 50             | 0         | 0        |
| Earl of Seafield (afterwards Findlater) | 490            | 0         | 0        |
| Marquis of Tweeddale                    | 1000           | 0         | 0        |
| Duke of Roxburghe                       | 500            | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Elibank                            | 50             | 0         | 0        |
| Lord Banff                              | 11             | 2         | 0        |
| Major Cunninghame of Eckatt             | 100            | 0         | 0        |
| Bearer of the Treaty of Union           | 60             | 0         | 0        |
| Sir William Sharp                       | 300            | 0         | 0        |
| Coultrain, Provost of Wigton            | 25             | 0         | 0        |
| Mr. Alexander Wedderburn                | 75             | 0         | 0        |
| High Commissioner (Queensberry)         | 12,325         | 0         | 0        |
|   | <b>£20,540</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>7</b> |



Ere the consummation, James Duke of Hamilton and James Earl of Bute quitted "the house in disgust and despair, to return to it no more".

Under terror of the Edinburgh mobs, who nearly tore the Chancellor and others limb from limb in the streets, one half of the signatures were appended to the treaty in a cellar of a house, No 177, High Street, opposite the Tron Church, named "the Union Cellar", the rest were appended in an arbour which then adorned the Garden of Moray House in the Canongate; and the moment this was accomplished, Queensberry and the conspirators – for such they really seem to have been – fled to England before daybreak, with the duplicate of the treaty...

**iScot Magazine footnote:**

To put that level of bribery and corruption into context, that **£20,540 17s. 7d.** from 1707 would today be worth around... **£3,500,000** – yes, you read that correctly, **£3.5 million!**

**"We're bought and sold for English gold, sic a parcel o rogues in a nation"!**