1 1603: Union of the Crowns

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Chronology

1603	24 March	Death of Elizabeth I; James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England and Ireland
	30 March	Surrender of Tyrone ends Nine Years' War in Ireland
	April	Millenary Petition presented to James on his way south
	19 May	James proclaims uniting of England and Scotland
1604	14–18 January	Hampton Court Conference
	29 February	Death of Archbishop Whitgift
	19 March–7 July	First session of James's first Parliament: debates on union of the kingdoms; Buckinghamshire election dispute; *Form of Apology and Satisfaction*
	19 August	Treaty of London ends war with Spain
	September	New Canons issued defining the Church of England
	9 October	Richard Bancroft nominated as Archbishop of Canterbury
	20 October	James assumes title of 'King of Great Britain'
1605	February	Anglo-Scottish border commission established to pacify border regions
	5 November	Discovery of Gunpowder Plot

	5 November– 27 May 1606	Second session of James's first Parliament
1606	January	Two penal laws passed against recusants
	12 April	James proclaims a single 'Union Flag' for England and Scotland
	11 July	Scottish act restoring 'the Estate of Bishops'
	July	Visit by Christian IV of Denmark
	18 November– 4 July 1607	Third session of James's first Parliament: union of the kingdoms debated but not approved
	November	Judges find for James in Bate's Case, upholding the King's right to levy impositions
1607	2 May	Abolition of the 'hostile laws' limiting trade, aid and communication across the Anglo-Scottish border
	May	Midlands Rising against enclosure of common fields
	4 September	Flight of Tyrconnell and other leading Ulster lords to Continent
1608	January/ February	Court of King's Bench declares tanistry illegal
	4 May	Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, appointed Lord Treasurer
	June	Calvin's Case gives English legal rights to Scots born after the Union of the Crowns
	July	Salisbury introduces new Book of Rates
	July–October	Lord Ochiltree's expedition to Western Isles to bring certain chiefs to Edinburgh
	First Gaelic translation of Prayer Book published	
1609	30 March	Truce of Antwerp between Spain and the Dutch (until 1621)
	24 June	Establishment of Justices of the Peace in Scotland
	21 July	Appointment of commissioners to oversee plantation of Ulster
	August	Statutes of Iona: leading chiefs from Western Isles submit to royal authority

1610	9 February– 23 July	Fourth session of James's first Parliament: debates over Great Contract
	July	James agrees to levy no new impositions without Parliament's consent
	16 October– 6 December	Fifth session of James's first Parliament: discussions over Great Contract break down
	21 October	Three Scottish bishops consecrated at Westminster
	2 November	Death of Archbishop Bancroft
1611	4 March	George Abbot nominated as Archbishop of Canterbury
	May	Creation of order of baronets, for sale at £1,095 each
	Authorized Version of the Bible published	
1612	24 May	Death of Salisbury; beginning of ascendancy of Howards
	23 October	Scottish Parliament acknowledges James as Supreme Governor of the Scottish Church
	6 November	Death of Prince Henry; Prince Charles becomes heir to the throne
	Publication of Sir John Davies' *Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued*	
1613	14 February	Marriage of Princess Elizabeth and Frederick V, Elector Palatine
	15 September	Death in the Tower of Sir Thomas Overbury
	26 December	Marriage of Earl of Somerset and Countess of Essex
1614	5 April– 7 June	Addled Parliament: disputes over impositions
	11 July	Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, appointed Lord Treasurer
	December	Alderman Cockayne's Project: export of unfinished cloth prohibited; causes crisis in cloth industry for the next three years

1615	23 April	George Villiers appointed a gentleman of the bedchamber; beginning to emerge as new royal favourite
	April	Irish Convocation adopts new Articles of Faith
	18 October	Earl and Countess of Somerset arrested on charges of involvement in Overbury's murder
1616	May	Trial of Earl and Countess of Somerset for involvement in Overbury murder; death sentence commuted to imprisonment
	August–September	Weavers riot in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire due to depression in the cloth industry caused by Cockayne Project
	15 November	Sir Edward Coke dismissed as Lord Chief Justice of King's Bench
1617	5 January	George Villiers created Earl of Buckingham
	May–August	James visits Scotland
	28 September	James re-admits Sir Edward Coke to the Privy Council

1 James's Accession

Early in the morning of 24 March 1603, Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland, died peacefully at Richmond. Barely eight hours later, James VI of Scotland was proclaimed her successor in London. The proclamation asserted James's 'undoubted right' to 'the imperial crown of these realms' and rehearsed his descent from Margaret Tudor, the elder sister of Henry VIII. The fact that Henry VIII had excluded Margaret's descendants from the succession by act of Parliament in 1543 was completely ignored, and instead the principle of indefeasible hereditary right was resoundingly affirmed. This proclamation had been drafted in advance by Elizabeth's Secretary of State Robert Cecil and shown to James, who enthusiastically approved it. Cecil's secret contacts with James since the spring of 1601 prepared the way for a remarkably smooth accession which united the Scottish Crown with that of England and Ireland. There was, noted one observer, 'no tumult, no contradiction, no disorder'. The 'union of the crowns' was achieved with deceptive ease; yet over a century elapsed before it was followed by a full-scale 'union of the kingdoms'.

Within three days of Elizabeth's death a despatch rider, Sir Robert Carey, conveyed the news to Edinburgh. The King who greeted him was, at nearly thirty-seven, already a figure of impressive accomplishments. He had stamped his authority on the decentralized and sometimes turbulent Scottish polity with notable success. Through a combination of careful manipulation of faction and the development of a party of loyal officials, he had raised respect for the Crown to an unprecedented level. He had restrained the more radical leaders of the Presbyterian Kirk. An intellectual of European importance, he was the author of poetry and biblical commentary as well as two major works of political theory, *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) and the *Basilikon Doron* (1599). Shrewd, intelligent and determined, James also possessed considerable political skill. These qualities and achievements, together with the fact that he was a confirmed Protestant and already had two male heirs, ensured an enthusiastic reception from his new English subjects. He never forgot his first encounters with them as he journeyed south and saw 'their eyes flaming nothing but sparkles of affection'.

The multiple kingdoms over which James now ruled were far more diverse and contrasted than their relatively limited geographical area might suggest. In terms of political traditions, institutions of government, legal systems, and economic and social structures, the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland and the principality of Wales not only differed from each other but often displayed significant internal variations from region to region. But in the long term, the greatest source of instability was probably religion. The experience of multiple kingdoms on the Continent, especially the French and Spanish monarchies, suggested that for one monarch to rule over more than one religion was a recipe for trouble. In 1603, not only did James's three kingdoms each possess their own distinctive religions; they were themselves divided over religion. We must look more closely at each part of his inheritance in turn.

2 England: Politics and Government

As regards political and legal institutions, much the most centralized of these kingdoms was England. The Norman Conquest had allowed the machinery of government to be reshaped and moulded by successive medieval monarchs to a degree unparalleled elsewhere in Western Europe. During the course of the Middle Ages, a single common law had developed, a unique amalgam of ancient custom, Roman law and case-law dispensed by the judicial officers of the Crown. The thirteenth century saw the emergence of a bicameral Parliament comprising the Houses of Lords and Commons. Parliament combined the functions of a court of law and of the monarch's Great Council (as opposed to the Privy Council). Its central purposes were to advise the monarch of happenings in the localities, to collaborate with the Crown in the passing of acts of Parliament (statutes) and to vote taxes (the so-called 'extra-ordinary revenue' of the Crown). It was far more powerful than its Scottish and Irish counterparts, and increasingly perceived itself as the 'representative of the whole realm' of England.

These developments were consolidated and greatly extended under the Tudors, and in particular during the 1530s. That decade saw the emergence of a genuinely unitary State. The famous preamble to the Act of Appeals (1533) declared England to be 'an empire', free from the intrusions of any external authority. The Franchises Act of 1536 abolished those few remaining pockets of jurisdiction (such as the palatinate of Durham) where the monarch's writ did not run. The fact that these measures were enshrined in statute was itself highly significant. The period of the Reformation Parliament (1529–36) established the King-in-Parliament as the supreme legislative authority in England, jointly enacting statutes which were omnicompetent. There was no matter, no area of life, which statute could not regulate. This principle, clearly borne out through the remainder of the sixteenth century, gave reality to the view of the English polity as a 'dominium politicum et regale' (constitutional monarchy) which Sir John Fortescue had advanced in the fifteenth century.

All this meant that by 1603 English monarchs were far more powerful when they acted in collaboration with Parliament and the law, and when they governed with the consent of their subjects (or at least of the political elite) than if they tried to rule alone. Although the Crown possessed certain discretionary powers known generically as the 'royal prerogative', it was widely thought that such powers were granted and defined by the common law. The proclamations which the Crown could issue unilaterally were regarded as inferior to the common law and to the statutes passed by King-in-Parliament: proclamations could deal with administrative, economic and social matters, but they could not touch life, limb or common law rights of property. Moreover, the Crown had no police force to impose its will, and the total number of paid government officials was fewer than two thousand. As a result, the government was entirely dependent on the voluntary co-operation of local nobles and gentry for the collection of taxes, the training of the militia, the enforcement of all manner of laws, and the trial of most criminals. Such co-operation was essential to both

parties: the local elites held office (such as justice of the peace, deputy lieutenant, lord lieutenant) on royal commissions, and their status and influence depended upon the Crown's support; but equally without their loyalty and effectiveness throughout England the Crown's claims about the obedience and docility of its subjects would have been empty rhetoric. Government – at both national and local levels – rested upon the co-operation of the monarch with the leading subjects; and if this harmonious collaboration did not occur naturally the constitution possessed absolutely no formal mechanisms to bring it about.

In another sense too the English Crown was dependent on the support of the political elite. Historically, royal revenues had been divided into two categories, 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary'. The first came from Crown lands, customs duties, excise duties, feudal revenues, the profits of justice and (after 1534) from the Church. These sources were generating a total income of around £350,000 a year at the time of James's accession, a figure which, if maintained, would enable the Crown to finance its activities during peacetime. However, the effects of war and inflation were making the Crown more and more reliant on its 'extraordinary' revenue, and especially on the direct taxation which could only be levied with Parliament's consent. By the last decade of Elizabeth's reign, these direct taxes were becoming a regular part of royal income. Elizabeth requested such taxes in twelve of her thirteen parliamentary sessions. Although in the early seventeenth century barely 10 per cent of royal revenues came from direct taxation, the Crown was quite unable to wage war without it. That the Stuarts depended on Parliaments to balance their wartime budget in a period which saw Europe engulfed by successive conflicts was to have a major impact on the course of English politics during the seventeenth century.

This situation was complicated by the fact that the continental wars stemmed in large measure from profound religious divisions. Under the Tudors England had first repudiated papal jurisdiction and then embarked on a Protestant Reformation. After a brief attempt under Mary to reintroduce Catholicism, Elizabeth had established a Church of England which was reformed in doctrine but traditional in structure. The result was a Church that, in Conrad Russell's words, 'looked Catholic but sounded Protestant'. The Elizabethan Church was deliberately designed to appeal to as many different tastes as possible, but in the process it also incurred criticism from a number of quarters. The most vociferous and consistent attacks came from those 'hotter sort of Protestants' often loosely called 'Puritans'. Such people thought the Church 'but halfly reformed': they loathed the legacies of Catholicism in the form of bishops, vestments and a Prayer Book 'culled from that popish dunghill, the mass'. They sought 'further reformation' which would sweep away the remnants of popery and bring the structure of the Church into closer accord with its doctrine. For inspiration they looked to 'the example of the best reformed Churches', especially Geneva and the Presbyterian Kirk which had developed in Scotland since 1560.

Yet very few hated the Elizabethan Church enough to separate from it completely. The few sectarians who did, most notably the Brownists and the Barrowists, were largely rooted out by persecution during Elizabeth's later

years; and thereafter sects such as the Family of Love led a passive, underground existence which historians have only just begun to reconstruct.[1] These separatists cannot be classed as 'Puritans'. The term 'Puritan' should rather be applied to those who remained within the Church but wished to purify it of all remnants of the old religion. They felt that there was enough that was godly about the Church – that there was still 'much piety in Babylon' - to make it worth trying to reform it from within. They longed for a new Constantine, a godly Prince who would remodel the Church; we shall see that in 1603 they had high hopes that James, with his Presbyterian upbringing, would fulfil this ideal. In the meantime, they preferred to supplement the official worship according to the Prayer Book with additional services, sermons and prayer meetings of their own. Elizabeth was always happy to allow these distinctive practices as long as they did not promote debate over the nature of a Church which she wished to preserve unchanged. At the other end of the religious spectrum, the English Catholic community settled for loss of status and office as the price for minimal persecution. By the end of the sixteenth century the Church of England was firmly established, and it received systematic and eloquent justification in Richard Hooker's *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593–1600). Yet the long-term stability of the Church depended on the monarch's ability to balance the different strands of opinion within it, to make all shades of belief feel welcome and to avoid becoming identified with any one position. As Supreme Governor of the Church, the monarch played a vital part in maintaining its equilibrium and broad appeal.

3 England: Society and Economy

The monarch was thus the apex of both Church and State, or to use a common contemporary metaphor, the head of the 'body politic'. The Crown also stood at the summit of the social order, which was highly stratified and hierarchical. Inequality of wealth and status was everywhere apparent. Yet English society was certainly not ossified, and new wealth enabled individuals to gain social status just as poverty could bring social ruin. Since the mid-sixteenth century, there had been a growing redistribution of wealth towards the middle ranks of society; and those who prospered, especially from farming or trade or the law, were able to rise into the upper social echelons. It is probably fair to say that England offered greater scope for upward (and downward) social mobility than most of its continental neighbours.

Immediately below the Crown stood the peerage, a hereditary nobility which in 1603 comprised only fifty-five peers. They appear to have maintained their position among the Crown's wealthiest subjects, and recent research has cast doubt on the theory that the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries witnessed a financial 'crisis of the aristocracy'.[2] Their influence in local and national affairs originally derived from their role as the Crown's senior military leaders who raised and commanded troops in wartime. In their counties, peers continued to occupy military offices such as lord lieutenant. At the national level, they were automatically members of the House of Lords, which (as we

shall see) retained more political importance in this period than was once supposed. If English nobles lacked the legal and financial privileges of many of their continental counterparts, they often held senior offices at Court and usually dominated the King's Privy Council.

Below the peers stood the gentry, who made up no more than 5 per cent of heads of households but were increasing rapidly at the time of James's accession. It is likely that the total number of English gentry grew from around 5,000 in 1540 to about 15,000 by 1640. They were defined not by title but by lifestyle. According to Sir Thomas Smith, whoever 'can live idly and without manual labour, and will bear the port, charge, and countenance of a gentleman . . . shall be taken for a gentleman'. Gentry were those whose landed income freed them from labour or dependence on others and gave them the leisure to become involved in government. They served as deputy lieutenants, lords of manors and militia captains; above all, as justices of the peace they enforced the King's laws and dispensed justice at the quarter sessions. In addition, the gentry were expected to behave charitably and hospitably towards their tenants and neighbours. Whereas in France or Spain commercial activity precluded gentility, in England any successful merchant could buy land and adopt the lifestyle of a gentleman, prompting Sir Thomas Smith to conclude that 'gentlemen be made good cheap in England'.

Beneath the nobility and gentry were those who worked for a living and whose status was determined by their economic function. The minor gentry shaded into the yeomanry, who had a similar income, owned up to about a hundred acres, and discharged the lesser local offices such as constable, elder and juryman at the quarter sessions. The evidence of their homes and probate inventories suggests that yeomen were prospering and increasing at the end of the sixteenth century, and some of them ultimately entered the ranks of the gentry. Below them stood the husbandmen, who farmed less than fifty acres; and finally the cottagers and labourers. These last three groups formed the majority of the rural population, and at the time of Elizabeth's death they were becoming both poorer and more numerous.

Contemporary anatomies of the social structure were couched in heavily masculine terms, and this reflected the fact that women could legally hold neither land nor title in their own right. The conventional (male) ideal of womanhood emphasized the qualities of submission, deference and obedience. In 1590 William Perkins defined a husband as 'he that hath authority over the wife': the latter, 'being subject to her husband, yieldeth obedience to him'. Yet, if women were the 'weaker vessel', in need of guidance from their husbands, men also had a duty to provide maintenance and protection. In reality, the relationships between wives and husbands varied greatly from marriage to marriage. Some outstanding women – such as Lady Joan Barrington, or Lady Anne Clifford, successively Countess of Dorset and of Pembroke – defied the stereotype of subservience and assumed a vitally important role in the running of large households and estates. Married couples often formed an economic partnership, especially among the small farmers and independent craftsmen or tradesmen. Plentiful evidence survives, particularly among diaries and wills, to suggest that genuinely affectionate marital relationships were far from

uncommon, and that 'companionate' marriage was certainly not a discovery of the later seventeenth century. On the other hand, male dominance was pervasive, and it was often only as widows that women could attain a significant measure of independence by gaining control over their husbands' property or trade. Mocking rituals such as 'charivaris' or 'skimmingtons' often derided households where the woman was thought to rule the roost, and served to reinforce a double standard that penalized female sexual misdemeanours far more severely than male. Such conventions and assumptions help to explain the shock and hostility that greeted the increased prominence and freedom that many women were able to achieve during the disruption of the 1640s.[3]

As the yeomanry and gentry expanded and prospered, so the divide between them and the lower orders of rural society widened. A number of recent local studies have shown that one of the most marked social trends of this period was a growing polarization of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. This gulf was very often reflected also in contrasting religious and cultural attitudes. Those who thrived commonly embraced an individualistic outlook which contrasted with the more traditional, paternal, cohesive view of the community held by their poorer neighbours. Nor was this process of polarization confined to the countryside. There is plentiful evidence that urban society was filling out at the bottom as people migrated from the countryside into the towns in search of work. During Elizabeth's reign the population of London increased from about 120,000 to nearly 200,000; and observers noted with alarm the proliferation of apprentices as well as of 'beggars and other loose persons, swarming about the City'. No other town expanded at anything like the rate of the capital. London was larger than the next fifty English towns put together, and even the biggest – such as York, Bristol, Exeter, Norwich and Newcastle – only had between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants each. Yet everywhere similar social patterns were replicated: while many merchants, lawyers, tradesmen and shopkeepers found new opportunities and wealth, artisans, apprentices and labourers often lived on or below the subsistence level.

These developments had their roots in demographic growth. England's population had risen from about 2.5 million in the 1520s to around 4.1 million by 1600. This trend would continue for another fifty years, reaching a peak of just over 5.2 million by 1650. Such steady growth was sustained despite the occasional setbacks of famine and disease (especially in 1594–7), and ensured that the population was growing faster than food resources. This produced long-term price inflation: food prices increased sevenfold between 1500 and 1640, whereas wages increased only threefold. The majority of the population who did not grow their own food therefore found that a growing proportion of their income went on food purchases, and this in turn meant that their living standards declined markedly. The first two decades of the seventeenth century saw periodical subsistence crises which caused hunger and even starvation. Thereafter, famine ceased to pose a serious threat, but the continued rise in the population led to growing pressure on land and jobs, and widespread hardship.

The English economy at the end of the sixteenth century remained predominantly agrarian. In an attempt to increase the food supply marginal lands were pressed into service and existing lands were cultivated more intensively.

More efficient production involved the enclosing of many arable, woodland and fenland areas, but often at the expense of the smaller landholders and labourers who lived there. Enclosure, together with the seasonal nature of much agricultural work, thus contributed to a dramatic increase in vagrancy and underemployment. The burgeoning poor either migrated to towns, or tried to eke out a living in the countryside from an 'economy of makeshifts'. They sought additional wages from non-agrarian sources. Such industry as existed in England at this time was mostly 'cottage industry': with a few important exceptions – notably coal-mining in the northeast – production of commodities such as textiles, leather goods, small iron articles, and pottery was 'put out' to workers in their cottages. This valuable income was supplemented by scavenging food and fuel from waste lands, and by recourse to local charities and to the national system of poor relief recently codified by statutes of 1597 and 1601.

These general trends should not obscure the fact that England's agrarian economy was both highly localized and very diverse. The harsher climate and poorer soils of the northeast and southwest encouraged the raising of sheep rather than the production of cereals, whereas the lighter soils of East Anglia lent themselves to the cultivation of fodder crops. By the end of the seventeenth century such regional specialization would become much more marked, yielding surplus crops and goods which could then be exchanged for other products from elsewhere. But in 1603 most localities still attempted to be self-sufficient and internal trade, although on the increase, was circumscribed by the relatively limited network of roads and navigable waterways. In the coming years the expansion of towns, and above all of London, greatly stimulated inland trade. The capital's insatiable demand for food, fuel and consumer products did much to encourage economic growth and specialization, such as coal shipments from Newcastle or the development of market gardening in Kent and the Thames Valley. London also enjoyed a virtual stranglehold on England's export trade. During the second half of the sixteenth century it handled over 90 per cent of England's total exports, of which cloth exports constituted no less than 80 per cent. As Antwerp declined due to famine and war, London gradually assumed its role as Europe's leading commercial entrepôt and money market. The seventeenth century was to see a dramatic increase in England's overseas trade which would ultimately place it at the centre of a world-wide market.

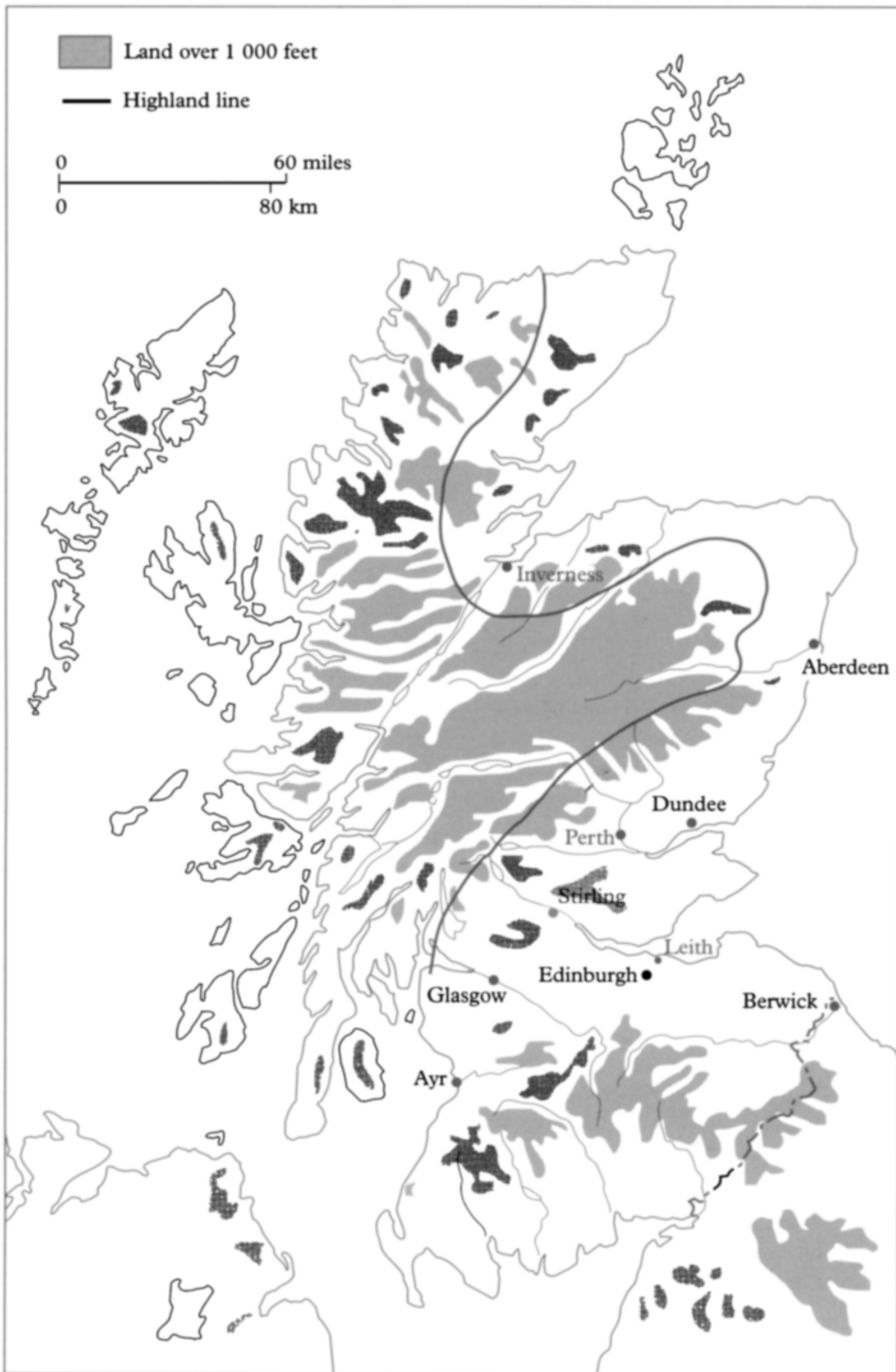
Taken as a whole, these economic trends enabled England to avoid major subsistence crises after the opening decades of the seventeenth century. The agrarian crises of the late 1590s, 1607 and 1629–31 caused unrest rather than actual rebellion. Food riots were very much a last resort, and recent research has shown that they were remarkably orderly and controlled. In Keith Wrightson's words, 'there was order in this disorder'. Such riots were designed to rectify specific grievances, most commonly the inequitable provisioning and distribution of foodstuffs, and presented no fundamental threat to the social order or the institutions of government. They were directed against particular individuals – aggressive landlords, hoarders, those who exported grain or sold it at inflated prices – and they attacked such people in order to defend

traditional rights and customs. Rioters did not run out of control or abandon all respect for authority; and by the same token the authorities usually treated them leniently and actively tried to redress the grievances which provoked them.

The restrained nature of riots was symptomatic of a nation which appeared in 1603 to be moving steadily away from the danger of civil war or revolution. Lawlessness, violence and disorder were decreasing, and the pervasive assumption was that most problems could be remedied through existing channels and institutions. The fact that the business of the law courts had expanded throughout the Tudor period reflected less an increase in criminality than a litigiousness born of the conviction that the arbitration of the courts offered more authoritative and enforceable solutions than could be achieved by taking the law into one's own hands. By 1603 the English were one of the most litigious peoples of Europe. The same belief in the power of established institutions to reflect diverse opinions and to solve all manner of problems explains why so few decided to opt out of the Church of England, and also why most Parliaments were widely welcomed as opportunities to remedy the ills of the commonwealth. As long as Court, Privy Council and Parliament continued to operate effectively as 'points of contact' between monarchs and their subjects, the underlying stability of the polity would be preserved. The smoothness of James's accession both demonstrated the essential soundness of England's government and further reinforced it by establishing what had never existed under Elizabeth: a well-nigh unchallengeable title and an indisputable line of succession.

4 Scotland

The northern kingdom which James left early in April 1603 presented a striking contrast with its southern neighbour. At the close of the sixteenth century Scotland's population was steadily expanding but remained well below one million. The impact of inflation was felt later than in England but no less severely: prices increased at least fourfold between 1550 and 1625. This, together with the Crown's relentless depreciation of the coinage, meant that the pound Scots was worth only one twelfth of the pound sterling by 1603. Scotland was still, as Bruce Galloway has written, 'a poor and in some ways primitive society', with a much smaller economic base than England. Scotland remained overwhelmingly agrarian: four in every five people continued to make their living from the land. The most characteristic form of settlement was the hamlet built around a notional 'farm', and such communities often achieved a high level of self-sufficiency. Even more than in England, there was no single national economy but rather a series of local economies. Large areas remained barren and grain yields were comparatively low. James had tried to encourage native industry and manufactures, but these were limited by lack of natural resources and by vested interests such as the craft guilds. He did succeed in reducing the autonomy of the burghs and casting the tax net more widely over their inhabitants, but Scottish burghs remained mostly small and medieval in



Map 1 Scotland.

character. In 1603 the vast majority of burghs had well under 3,000 inhabitants, and only Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth, Aberdeen and Dundee had more than 5,000.

These economic facts were in turn reflected in Scotland's social structure. At the apex of rural society stood the nobility and leading Highland chieftains, comprising fewer than a hundred great families. Beneath them, the remaining landholders were classed together as 'lairds'. This was a large and diverse group that embraced as many as 10,000 heads of households, but only around 1,500 of these possessed really extensive estates. The rest, sometimes called 'bonnet lairds', were relatively small landowners who were generally less substantial than English gentry. Many of them were more akin to the yeomen who were prospering all over England, but Scotland had no exact equivalent to that category. Beneath the lairds, almost immediately, came the tenants. These were far more subservient to the landlord than their English counterparts, and in return the landlord offered protection, jurisdiction and military leadership. The relationship was seen in terms of paternalism and kinship, and many 'bonds of manrent' survive whereby lords and their men bound themselves to serve and protect each other. Nevertheless, during the later sixteenth century, the lot of the rural peasantry steadily deteriorated as many landlords aggravated the effects of population growth by ruthless rack-renting. The same polarization was evident in the burghs. The merchants and craftsmen who together formed the burgesses accounted for a tiny proportion of the urban population: in Glasgow in 1604 the fourteen craft guilds contained 361 members and the merchant guild only 213 out of a total population of 7–8,000. Beneath them, journeymen, domestic servants, hawkers, labourers, vagrants, thieves and many others formed a growing proletariat which often lived close to destitution. As in England, urban society was rapidly filling out at the bottom.

Scotland's narrow economic base also meant that its overseas commerce was small in volume and perhaps 4 per cent of England's in value. It was conducted mainly with the Baltic, the Low Countries, France and Spain, whereas England ranked only fourth among Scotland's trading partners. Exactly the same pattern was evident in the spheres of culture and politics. During the sixteenth century, the art and literature of the Scottish Court established it as a major cultural centre influenced more by continental than English trends. The characteristic architectural style of this era, often known as 'Scottish baronial', was essentially a native achievement which drew eclectically on Dutch and French models, but owed virtually nothing to buildings in England. Similarly, Scotland's 'auld alliance' with France retained its importance and continued to pose a standing threat to English security. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's reign did see a gradual improvement in Anglo-Scottish relations. Unlike her father, the Queen did not assert any claim to suzerainty over the Scottish Crown and instead adopted a largely non-interventionist approach. This allowed an Anglophile party to grow up in Scotland free from the stigma of abetting an intrusive foreign power. By 1603 it seemed that the long period of wars between the two kingdoms was finally over.

The Union of the Crowns, and subsequently of the kingdoms, has often led

English historians to underestimate the distinctive and highly successful nature of the Scottish polity. Certainly the machinery of government and the law was much more diffuse and less centralized than in England. But when the Scottish monarchy is judged on its own terms rather than condemned for failing to emulate English models, the scale of its achievements becomes clear. Scotland's often difficult terrain and poor communications ensured that local government remained very much in the hands of individual chieftains. The Crown was therefore even more dependent on magnates than in England, but precisely because it posed less of a threat to regional power it was more likely to obtain their co-operation. During the later Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, the Stuarts developed a remarkably stable and resilient relationship with their leading subjects. The strength of this rapport was most clearly revealed by the monarchy's ability to survive an extraordinary sequence of dynastic disasters: between 1406 and 1625 only two of the seven monarchs died in their beds, and for no fewer than seventy-seven of these years Scotland was ruled by a minor. Yet as successive monarchs attained the age of majority they found that their powers remained largely intact and that Crown lands alienated to the nobility during their minority could be easily 'revoked'. Through it all, the monarchy was able to portray itself as the embodiment of Scottish identity and a focal point for a highly localized nation.

The stability of such a polity clearly rested to a large extent on personal contact between the monarch and the leading subjects. The monarch's personality was crucial, particularly because the institutional 'points of contact' were much less formally defined than in England. The Privy Council was a large body, comprising many of the leading nobility, but with a regular attendance which often barely reached double figures. Under James it became increasingly dominated by professional administrators, lawyers and churchmen. Some councillors were also nominated by the Scottish Parliament, which was strikingly different from its English equivalent. It consisted of a single chamber containing the most important landowners, clergy and burgesses. The Crown managed Parliament through an inner committee of trusted advisers known as the Lords of the Articles, and was able to exercise rather firmer control than in England. But whereas English statutes once passed could be easily enforced through very tight legal and administrative structures, in Scotland chieftains could render them a dead letter in the localities. Government was highly informal, and its effectiveness ultimately depended on the personal relationship which individual monarchs forged with their 'natural counsellors'. Political relations could display a roughness unknown in England: in 1582 the sixteen-year-old James had been kidnapped by a group of Protestant nobles and held in Ruthven Castle for over a year to ensure that their counsels held sway. For a band of nobles to seize the monarch's person was far from unprecedented in Scottish history, and was accepted as a legitimate, if extreme, political tactic. But, like other forms of personal contact, it was impossible to achieve with an absentee monarch, a fact which was to have profound implications once James moved to London.

By 1603, the nature of Scottish government was beginning to change. From 1587, when James attained his majority and assumed personal control of

affairs, he steadily created a much closer relationship between the centre and the localities. Increasingly, the Crown intervened directly to resolve blood-feuds, with the result that these ceased to be widespread. New officials were sent to the localities, making government more visible and less dependent on the caprices of individual magnates. Parliamentary commissioners were appointed to enforce all manner of statutes, to regulate poor relief and to secure payment of more and more regular taxation. Yet James consistently avoided offending the greater nobility: with political agility and a shrewd awareness of personalities, he won their co-operation by giving them offices and responsibilities. Highland chieftains who had hitherto shunned the Court were attracted by the lure of patronage and found they could work with the easy-going King. Without seriously disrupting the polity, James managed to strike a balance between noble factions and to raise the effective authority of the Crown to new heights.

The same increased centralization was also evident in Scotland's legal system. Here again the contrast with England was very marked. There was no single body of law but rather a complex blend of Roman law, feudal bonds and customary law partly derived from English models. Records were few and there was little reliance on precedent. The Highlands in particular were a patchwork of different jurisdictions and legal codes; while in the Northern Isles justice even showed traces of Nordic influence. In much of Scotland, local baron's courts operated with little interference from royal justice. From the early 1580s, however, local autonomy was gradually curtailed by the extension of judicial eyres and the introduction of royal commissions to deal with petty crimes and social abuses. One of James's most striking successes was to insist that the Highlands paid the same respect to the law as other parts of Scotland. In 1597, all Highland landowners were ordered to produce titles for their land and to provide sureties for good behaviour. The last quarter of the sixteenth century also saw a considerable expansion in the business of the central courts – especially the Court of Session – and a growing readiness to submit to their jurisdiction. But, for all these moves towards regulation and standardization, the law remained one of the most important structural differences between England and Scotland.

Another, scarcely less dramatic, lay in religion. Assisted by very limited English military expeditions in 1560 and 1573, the Scottish Reformation took root astonishingly quickly. The two particular characteristics of the reformed Kirk, established by Parliament in 1560, were its emphatically Calvinist doctrine and its aggressive assertion of autonomy from the State. Both traits stemmed from the fact that the Kirk grew up under a Catholic, Mary Queen of Scots, who yet did virtually nothing to stifle Protestantism. The Kirk therefore repudiated any notion of royal supremacy, abolished episcopacy and developed instead a classically Calvinist structure of regional assemblies (presbyteries) run by ministers and lay elders. James VI thought that the Kirk's doctrine of the 'two kingdoms' (religious and secular) posed a threat to royal authority: he regarded bishops as the Crown's natural supporters and had their existence confirmed by the 'Black Acts' of 1584. Eight years later, however, he was forced to accept the 'Golden Acts' which deprived bishops of effective

power. But thereafter James continued to search for ways to enhance episcopal authority and restrain militant presbyterianism. He was supported by a minority of episcopalian clerics, led by Archbishop Patrick Adamson of St Andrews, who looked to the Church of England as a model. Throughout the 1590s, James exploited his right to summon General Assemblies of the Kirk by calling them infrequently, at short notice, and away from the Presbyterian strongholds of Lothian and Fife. Hostility between Kirk and State led to some fiery debates, as in 1596 when Scotland's most famous Presbyterian reformer Andrew Melville tugged the King's sleeve and called him 'God's silly [= weak] vassal'. Yet, characteristically, James always tried to preserve good personal relations even with his strongest opponents. It was a technique which would stand him in very good stead when he found himself Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

As with so many other aspects of Scottish life, the social impact of the Kirk varied considerably from region to region. It enjoyed its greatest success in the Lowlands, where godly discipline and regular Church attendance became the norm. Elsewhere, adherence was more patchy. Despite its proscription, significant pockets of Catholicism survived, especially in the Highlands, although these soon ceased to pose a major threat to the Kirk. A more serious and widespread problem was friction with local magnates. Many nobles resented the Kirk's demands for the restitution of ecclesiastical lands alienated prior to the Reformation, and also saw the Church courts, known as kirk-sessions, as an encroachment on their own baron's courts. By the end of the sixteenth century, antagonism between Kirk and nobility had become an established feature of the Scottish scene. It would take a singularly inept monarch to reunite them against himself.

All of this meant that, while they were both Protestant in doctrine, the Scottish and English Churches displayed fundamental structural differences. Exactly the same was true of the institutions of law and government. For most Scots, their distinctive polity and Kirk were sources of considerable pride and important ingredients of national consciousness. An even more potent symbol of Scottish identity was the monarchy itself. The English had always had to treat their northern neighbour rather differently from other parts of what John Pocock has called the 'Atlantic archipelago' because the kingdom of Scotland possessed its own ruling dynasty. Throughout the centuries of conflict, English monarchs had sought overlordship or suzerainty over the Scots rather than sovereignty and annexation. But such claims were successfully resisted. The House of Stuart provided a rallying point for the entire nation; and whatever Scotland's comparative poverty in 1603, it could savour the irony that its own King now wore the crown of England.

5 Wales

The absence of a native dynasty helps to explain why another Celtic nation, the principality of Wales, developed in very different ways from Scotland. England had conquered Wales in the later thirteenth century, but did not actually annex

it until the so-called 'Acts of Union' of 1536 and 1543. Then, the lack of a Welsh monarchy allowed its easy absorption into the unitary State envisaged by Thomas Cromwell. This was moreover accomplished with the active co-operation of the Welsh elite. England never had either need or desire to uproot the natural leaders of Welsh society or to suppress their language. The Acts of Union consolidated effective central control over Wales and remodelled the old Council of the Marches as a delegative body of the English Privy Council with wide-ranging judicial and administrative responsibilities throughout the region. Wales's 'sinister usages and customs' were replaced by the common law of England. Welsh gave way to English as the language of law and administration, and Wales was to send twenty-four members to Westminster. English patterns of local government and justice were introduced: Wales was divided into shires, administered by justices of the peace, sheriffs and (from the 1580s) by lords lieutenant and deputy lieutenants. All this was successfully accomplished largely because the Welsh gentry secured many of these offices and welcomed the status and power gained by working with the English authorities. The Tudors' Welsh origins no doubt smoothed their feelings: one Welsh poet, Lodowicke Lloyd, praised Elizabeth I as a ruler sprung from 'Cambria's soil'. Overwhelmingly, the new style of government remained in the hands of gentry families with a tradition of local responsibility, and this combination proved highly stable and effective. One of those who gained office, the author George Owen who became vice-admiral of Pembroke and Cardigan and sheriff of Cardigan, described Wales in 1594 as 'a perfect well-governed commonwealth'. Certainly vagabonds, 'masterless men' and even pirates continued to defy the law, especially in South Wales. But the rule of law steadily became established, particularly through the Courts of Great Sessions which sat twice a year in each shire. Feuds still occurred but were more and more likely to be resolved by law suits. During the course of the sixteenth century, the Welsh increasingly looked to Westminster as the ultimate seat of legal and political authority.

Another institution which served as a bulwark of order, unity and good government was the Church. Henry VIII's break with Rome had encountered virtually no serious resistance in Wales: the old Church inspired little loyalty and the dissolution of the monasteries had only minimal impact on religious and economic life. Protestantism made very rapid headway under Edward VI, and Mary failed to re-establish Catholicism as signally in Wales as she did in England. The 1559 Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity applied also to Wales and during the course of Elizabeth's reign at least formal adherence to the established Church became general. Pockets of Catholicism survived, especially in the northeast and southeast, but never posed any serious threat; Puritanism was much weaker than in England and John Penry was almost alone in separating from the Church completely. Yet, as in England, it proved more difficult to instil really enthusiastic commitment to the Church. In general, Elizabethan Wales found bishops of unusually high calibre, but they faced an uphill struggle against the ignorance and superstition of the peasantry, the lack of effective preaching, and the twin evils of clerical pluralism and absenteeism caused by the poverty of the Church. Ironically, the translation of the Bible and

Prayer Book into Welsh in the 1580s, designed to foster religious devotion and uniformity of practice, actually encouraged the Welsh language and sparked something of a renaissance in Welsh poetry and prose during Elizabeth's final years.

This paradox was typical of the way in which Tudor Wales was 'Englished' in structure and institutions without the complete destruction of her own identity or culture. The social order adapted very easily to the new demands placed upon it. Traditional ideas of hierarchy and gentility survived and were reworked. The Welsh concept of a gentleman (*uchelwyr*), with its emphasis on status conferred by ancestry, gradually blended with the English idea of gentility determined by lifestyle. The poetic tributes paid to Welsh gentry throughout the sixteenth century revealed the continued vitality of bardic culture. Many Welsh gentlemen continued to act as patrons to writers, topographers and antiquaries, and stoutly defended the reputation of the medieval Welsh chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth.[4] This distinctive identity survived despite the growing numbers of Welsh gentry educated in England, especially at Oxford, and the increasing English influence on their way of life. For many of the disadvantaged in Wales – such as younger sons or those of humble birth – the Union greatly extended the opportunities to migrate to England and pursue careers in government, commerce or the professions. While the Welsh remained proud of their national identity, the elites of the two countries became gradually assimilated.

Wales was thus much more firmly bound to England in 1603 than was Scotland. Wales's trade was predominantly with England, and its terrain in many ways resembled the less hospitable parts of the English landscape. The two economies were becoming ever more closely aligned. As Wales's population grew – from less than 200,000 in 1536 to perhaps 290,000 in 1603 – inflation reached a similar rate to England, social mobility in both directions increased, and the gulf between rich and poor widened. Although there was as yet no real breakthrough in agricultural production, as in England a prosperous yeomanry began to emerge. English visitors to Wales in the opening years of the seventeenth century were far less struck by unfamiliarity and 'otherness' than they were in Scotland or Ireland. As Glanmor Williams has written, in the decades following the Union the English came to regard the Welsh as 'the closest and most familiar of foreigners, and also the most distant and outlandish of provincials'.

6 Ireland

A peaceful union founded on co-operation with the native elite and respect for their property, language and culture: all this offers a profound contrast with the experience of the final component of the 'Atlantic archipelago', Ireland. During the sixteenth century, English policy in Ireland moved decisively away from delegating authority to the Anglo-Irish nobility towards conquest and colonization. Medieval English monarchs claimed overlordship or suzerainty over the whole of Ireland, but in practice their control was restricted to the 'Pale',

a small area abutting the coast between Dundalk and Dublin and extending about twenty to forty miles inland. The English Crown's hold on the country beyond remained much more tenuous, and power was in practice wielded either by Gaelic lords, or by Anglo-Irish nobles such as the Fitzgerald Earls of Kildare or the Butler Earls of Ormond. These Anglo-Irish, or 'Old English', were descended from the first wave of English colonists who had migrated to Ireland in the wake of the conquests of the later twelfth century. Outside the Pale, most of these Old English families had to a large extent become Gaelicized by the early sixteenth century. Although the King's writ technically ran throughout the country, beyond the Pale its impact was quite limited, and the primary loyalty of most people was to their lord rather than to the Crown.

Indeed, it was only in the wake of the Kildare Rebellion of 1534 that a serious attempt was made to settle the whole of the country. The first stage in this process was an Act passed by the Irish Parliament in 1541 creating the kingdom of Ireland. English monarchs henceforth held the title of King or Queen of Ireland rather than being overlords: Ireland thus became a dependent kingdom, 'united and knit to the imperial crown of the realm of England'. Yet its constitutional relationship with England remained complex and ambiguous. Instead of delegating authority to an Old English noble such as Kildare, Henry VIII and his successors entrusted the government of Ireland to an English-born Lord Deputy (sometimes a Lord Lieutenant) who ruled on the monarch's behalf. The Lord Deputy's powers were comparable to those of the monarch on the mainland, except that executive and judicial appointments were reserved to the Crown, as was the power to summon and dissolve Parliament. There continued to be a separate Irish Council, whose members, like the principal officers of state, were English-born Protestants. However, the English Council was entitled to hear petitions or disputes directed to it from Ireland without reference to the Council in Dublin.

From time to time, English Parliaments still passed legislation that was applicable to Ireland as well. Nevertheless, Ireland retained its own Parliament, modelled on that of England and traditionally dominated by the Old English lords and gentry. Its relationship with England was defined in 1494 by Poynings' Law, which stipulated that no Irish Parliament could legally meet without a licence from the monarch, and that all measures submitted to the Irish Parliament had first to be approved by the King and Council in England. Although Poynings' Law curtailed Ireland's constitutional autonomy, the Old English generally valued it as a safeguard against Lord Deputies who tried to introduce legislation hostile to their interests. If necessary, they could appeal over the head of a Lord Deputy directly to the Crown. A similar ambivalence characterized the judicial system. Within the Pale, Anglo-Norman institutions had taken fairly deep root, and the central law courts of King's Bench, Common Pleas, Chancery and Exchequer were very similar to those in England. Like the Irish Council and Parliament, the judiciary was semi-independent in that the English courts asserted their right to hear appeals against judgements made in Ireland.

Outside the Pale, Anglo-Norman institutions had only been very partially superimposed upon Gaelic customs and structures during the Middle Ages,

and the Gaels' way of life, sustained by their own distinctive form of law and bardic culture, proved remarkably resilient. The English system of shiring was no more than loosely operational, and the Gaelic and Old English lords retained considerable control over the administration of justice within their lordships. Gaelic *brehon* law, a highly fluid and pragmatic system practised by a hereditary caste of jurists, remained widespread and presented a powerful obstacle to the spread of English law. Gaelic society was based on a unit called the *tuath*, an area of land belonging to a tribal or kinship group that could encompass as much as 300 or 400 square miles. Within the *tuath* patterns of landholding varied considerably, and there was no uniform law of inheritance. Unlike English law, where the principle of primogeniture was well established, Gaeldom operated a system known as 'tanistry', whereby the dead lord's land was conferred by election upon the 'eldest and worthiest' of his surviving kinsmen. In practice, this tended to assume diverse forms in different lordships: frequently it led to partible inheritance or collective landholding. There were few fixed tenancies, and only gradually did the common law system based on legally recognized titles to land begin to gain ground. To many English observers 'tanistry' looked utterly anarchic, and it was finally declared illegal in 1608, yet it was well suited to the mobile methods of pasture-farming and strong sense of family characteristic of Gaeldom.

The creation of the kingdom of Ireland in 1541 was accompanied by the concerted attempts of a new Lord Deputy, Sir Anthony St Leger, to transform Gaelic lords into Anglicized nobles by the policy of 'surrender and regrant'. A lord would surrender his lands to the Crown; then, in return for his swearing allegiance to the English monarch, they would be regranted to him with a recognized title in English common law. At the same time, the lord would agree to renounce his Gaelic title in return for an English one, and to accept primogeniture as the principle of inheritance rather than tanistry. Unfortunately, this policy, which offered a chance of absorbing the natural leaders of Gaelic society into a power structure controlled from London, was not given sufficient time and was pursued less systematically after 1543. A great opportunity was missed, and instead after Henry VIII's death renewed waves of colonization brought further English settlers (the 'New English'), who steadily displaced Gaelic and Old English and established major new plantations in Munster, Leix, Offaly and later Ulster. In 1603 these Protestant colonists probably comprised about 2 per cent of a total population that has been estimated at approximately 1.4 million. But their impact was disproportionate to their numbers, and this colonialism provoked a series of Gaelic revolts culminating in the Nine Years' War (1594–1603), which was finally resolved by a decisive English conquest. The rebel leader Tyrone surrendered shortly after Elizabeth died, leaving to her successor the task of achieving a settlement.

Religious divisions added to James's difficulties. By the end of the sixteenth century it was clear that the overwhelming majority of the Old English would join the Gaelic population in adhering to Catholicism. They insisted that this was compatible with loyalty to the Crown and the adoption of English legal and political institutions. The Old English were increasingly drawn to the continental Counter-Reformation, and many of them preferred to send their

sons to European seminaries rather than to English universities. When they returned to Ireland, these Old English priests were crucial in propagating Catholic doctrine as redefined by the Council of Trent. Yet the impact of the Counter-Reformation on the Gaelic Irish was much more limited. The Jesuits did not begin to arrive until the latter stages of the Nine Years' War, and they found it difficult to reform many aspects of Gaelic Catholicism. Gaeldom lacked the parish structure that played so central a role in the Counter-Reformation, and many Gaelic attitudes and social customs, especially regarding the conduct of baptisms, marriages and funerals, diverged considerably from the decrees of the Council of Trent. Within Gaeldom the priesthood tended to be hereditary within certain families, and priests, bishops and abbots were usually clients or kinsmen of local lords. There was thus a marked contrast between Gaelic Catholicism and the Counter-Reformation Catholicism embraced by most of the Old English, and serious rifts also opened up between the secular and regular clergy. Nevertheless, the fact that the vast majority of the population adhered to Catholicism was of immense significance for Ireland's subsequent history, for it ensured that Catholicism gradually superseded Gaelic language and law as the crucial hallmark of Irish identity.

By contrast, English attempts to establish a Protestant Reformation in Ireland proved a spectacular failure. Beset by problems of poverty, insufficient numbers of able Protestant clergy, and the ineffectiveness of attempts to enforce conformity, the Church of Ireland made little headway against the entrenched Catholicism of the majority. The spread of Protestantism was further stymied by the fact that the 1559 Irish Act of Uniformity stipulated that the services of the English Prayer Book should be provided in English or, in Gaelic areas, in Latin, but not in Gaelic. In 1596, William Lyon, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross lamented the 'miserable state' of the Church of Ireland and concluded that 'a great part of the people of this kingdom are no better than mere infidels, having but a bare name of Christians'. Eight years later, he complained that his dioceses were 'overwhelmed with the palpable darkness of idolatry', and claimed that no Protestant christenings, marriages or funerals had taken place within them for the previous eleven years. In 1603 the proportion of families in Ireland that had adopted Protestantism was less (probably much less) than one in ten.

Officially a kingdom but in reality more and more like a colony, Ireland presented a fascinating and distinctive landscape utterly unlike that of the mainland. In 1603 woodland still covered over an eighth of the land. The vast majority of people lived directly off the land and there was virtually no industry except that associated with woollen goods. Towns were sparse and small. The capital, Dublin, had a population of barely 5,000 at the end of the sixteenth century, and there were only eighteen other towns with more than 2,000 inhabitants in the whole of Ireland. The limited nature of communications, together with the territoriality of many Gaelic lords, hampered internal trade, and the towns – many of which were controlled by Old English oligarchies – were largely self-contained. Such overseas trade as there was involved the exchange of hides, tallow and above all wool and cloth in return for wine, salt and manufactured goods, and trading links existed with the Continent as well

as the mainland. For most people, dairy products and grain (especially oats) were the staple diet: relatively little meat was eaten, and the large herds of sheep and cattle were valued more for their milk, skins and wool than for their meat. In most of the country housing was fairly primitive and transitory, and clothing, consisting mainly of linen and woollens, was practical and basic.

Such a way of life was quite alien to English experience, and the deep-rooted Catholicism of the majority of the population reinforced the widespread English perception of the Irish as savages and pagans. Ireland was viewed as a truly foreign country, as barbarous as the Dark Ages and as unfamiliar as the Orient. It was, in English eyes, a land of meagre diet and squalid living conditions where uncivilized practices such as tying a plough to the tail of an ox still survived. This perception was nowhere more compellingly expressed than in Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, written in 1596 but not published until 1633. Spenser advocated a war of conquest as the necessary precondition for a general reformation. Without use of the sword, he argued, the Irish would remain ungovernable and the benefits of the English polity could not be extended to them. Other English writers echoed Spenser's view of Ireland and her people: to Fynes Moryson the Irish were a 'rude and barbarous people', while John Derricke complained of their 'wild shamrock manners'. Such attitudes lay behind generations of English colonial activity in Ireland. The profound differences between Ireland and the rest of the archipelago meant that James in effect ruled two kingdoms and a colony.

7 Union of the Kingdoms Defeated

The British monarchies in 1603 thus contained an extraordinary variety of political, religious, economic and social structures. Yet they all displayed two common characteristics which will emerge as fundamental themes throughout this book. First, England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland were all part of a composite monarchy, and their own individual histories can only be fully understood within the context of the larger entity which they collectively formed. Historians are only just beginning to explore the challenges and implications of a genuinely 'British' history. What is clear is that, although the nature and extent of the interaction between the kingdoms varied through time, the historical experience of the Stuarts and their subjects during the seventeenth century was profoundly affected by the fact that multiple kingdoms were ruled by a single monarch. That the Stuarts ruled rather than merely reigned brings us to the second common characteristic. Notwithstanding the very different institutions and political traditions of each kingdom, throughout the archipelago the personalities and priorities of individual monarchs had a crucial impact on the style of government and the formulation of policy. The monarch remained the ultimate source of patronage and all public offices were held on commissions from the Crown. Personal access to the monarch still conferred immense influence, and for this reason the Court remained a vital centre of political discussion and decision. Time and again, the nature of political life

and the course of events were shaped by particular royal attitudes and characteristics.

The intertwining of these two themes was strikingly illustrated soon after James's accession. Now that he held the titles to the kingdoms of England and Ireland as well as Scotland, James attempted to secure the full-scale union of his kingdoms. He determined to use all his influence as a personal monarch to adapt the multiple kingdoms of Scotland and England into a united kingdom. Yet his hopes that the union of the crowns of England and Scotland would lead naturally to a union of the two nations were quickly dashed.

The general direction of James's thinking was immediately clear from his farewell speech as he left Edinburgh early in April 1603: 'think not of me as of a king going from one part to another, but of a king lawfully called going from one part of the isle to another that so your comfort be the greater'. On his arrival in London, James issued a 'proclamation for the uniting of England and Scotland' (19 May 1603) which declared that 'all the best disposed subjects of both the realms' felt 'a most earnest desire that the said happy Union should be perfected . . . and the inhabitants of both the realms to be the subjects of one kingdom'. James promised that he would 'with all convenient diligence with the advice of the Estates and Parliament of both the kingdoms make the same to be perfected'. In the meantime, all his subjects were to regard 'the two realms as presently united, and as one realm and kingdom, and the subjects of both the realms as one people'.

This last phrase helps to illuminate what James meant by a 'perfect union'. He wanted a 'union of hearts and minds' which would merge his peoples into one and pave the way for a full institutional union. As James told his first English Parliament on 19 March 1604, any other course seemed utterly unnatural:

> I am the husband, and the whole isle is my lawful wife; I am the head and it is my body; I am the shepherd and it is my flock: I hope therefore no man will be so unreasonable as to think that I, that am a Christian King under the Gospel, should be a polygamist and husband to two wives; that I, being the head, should have a divided and monstrous body; or that being the shepherd to so fair a flock . . . should have my flock parted in two.

Parliament's cool response should have warned James of the entrenched resistance his ideas would face. At first the Houses stalled for time by appointing commissioners to meet with Scottish counterparts to investigate the issue. Four weeks later, when a full-scale debate took place, English hostility instantly became clear. When James requested a statute declaring him King of Great Britain, Sir Edwin Sandys, perhaps the most vociferous opponent of union, retorted that 'by this name' of Britain 'the kingdom of England is dissolved'. James's hopes suffered a further blow when the judges insisted that such a change of title would involve 'the utter extinction of all the laws now in force'. By the time Parliament was prorogued on 7 July, it was obvious that a union of the kingdoms could not be straightforwardly achieved.

James nevertheless pressed ahead without Parliament, and on 20 October

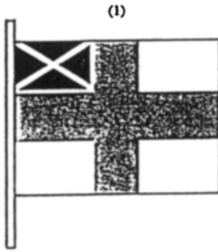
issued a proclamation assuming the 'name and style of King of Great Britain'.[5] He argued that in view of 'the blessed union, or rather reuniting of these two mighty, famous and ancient kingdoms of England and Scotland under one imperial crown', and 'seeing there is undoubtedly but one head to both peoples', he had therefore 'thought good to discontinue the divided names of England and Scotland out of our regal style'. Beyond this, however, James was not very precise about exactly what sort of union he wanted. It is possible, as Jenny Wormald has argued, that his vagueness was a conscious ploy designed to allow him greater room for manoeuvre than a more detailed and fully developed programme would have done.[6] Certainly there is evidence that in private, as James began to recognize the level of parliamentary hostility towards a 'perfect union', his thoughts turned towards a more gradualist strategy. In a letter to Cecil in November 1604 he wrote that 'the full accomplishment of the Union ... should be left to the maturity of time, which must piece and piece take away the distinction of nations as it hath already done here between England and Wales'. His wish to emulate the Tudor union led him to adopt the motto *Henricus rosas regna Jacobus* ('Henry [VII] united the roses, but James united the kingdoms'). He embarked on a series of largely symbolic reforms, including the introduction of a common coinage and the design of a new British flag, the Union Jack (see plate 1). His ultimate goal remained 'the uniting of both laws and parliaments of both the nations' (but it is interesting that he omitted the Churches from this list). In the shorter term, however, a more piecemeal approach seemed to offer the most appropriate way forward.

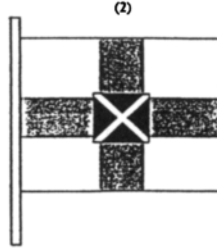
The full extent of English hostility to the union became apparent during the parliamentary session of November 1606–July 1607. When the commissioners of both nations recommended the abolition of mutually hostile laws and the freeing of trade between the two kingdoms, prolonged and bitter debate ensued. The reasons for English hostility can be divided into three categories. First, there was a widespread fear that James's aim of 'community of commerce' would in practice mean that Scottish poverty undermined English prosperity. Perhaps the most eloquent expression of such anxieties was voiced by Nicholas Fuller:

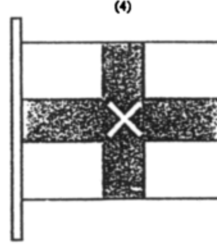
> One man is owner of two pastures, with one hedge to divide them; the one pasture bare, the other fertile and good. A wise owner will not pull down the hedge quite, but make gates, and let them in and out etc. If he do, the cattle will rush in in multitudes, and much against their will return.

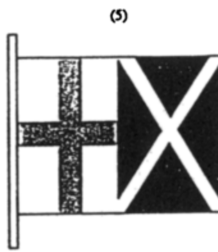
These economic concerns were closely linked to the second issue, naturalization.

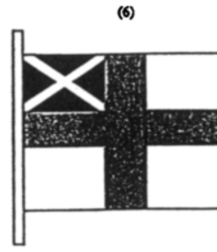
James not only wanted those born in either England or Scotland after his accession to the English throne (the so-called *post-nati*) to be granted legal rights in both kingdoms; he also wished those born before March 1603 (the *ante-nati*) to be naturalized by statute. Again, many feared that these measures would encourage an influx of Scots into England. This was already a very sensitive issue because of the large number of Scots who had received offices at











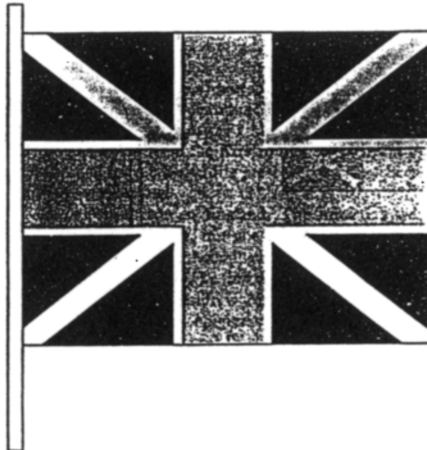


Plate 1 Designs for the Union Jack, 1606. As part of his gradualist approach to securing a union of hearts and minds between the peoples of England and Scotland, James issued a proclamation on 12 April 1606 establishing a single 'Union Flag'. But it proved extraordinarily difficult to design a flag that combined England's (vertical) St George's cross with Scotland's (diagonal) St Andrew's cross in a way that gave them complete equality. These were some of the designs that were considered before, after prolonged wrangling, the first Union Jack was finally agreed on. This flag remained in use until 1801 when, following the union with Ireland, it was adapted into its present form.
Source: Courtesy of the National Library of Scotland

Court when James came south. Sir John Holles complained that 'the Scottish monopolise his princely person, standing like mountains betwixt the beams of his grace and us'. To naturalize the Scots – whom Sandys thought 'better than aliens, but not equal with natural subjects' – promised only to intensify the competition for offices and honours.

The question of legal rights in turn brings us to the third sticking-point, which concerned the integrity of England's constitution and common law. To many English these were as distinctive a national blessing as was their Kirk to many Scots. The common lawyers in particular believed their law to be an immutable part of England's 'ancient constitution'. They were alarmed to hear James's call for 'such a general union of laws as may reduce the whole island, that as they live already under one monarch, so they may all be governed by one law'. The majority in Parliament were only willing to contemplate such a 'perfect union' of the legal systems if this meant the subordination of Scottish laws to English: those, such as Francis Bacon, who advocated an assimilation of the two bodies of law were massively outnumbered. James lamented that these three considerations persuaded Parliament to move 'with leaden feet', adding 'delay unto delay, searching out as it were the very bowels of curiosity', and he admitted ruefully that he knew his 'own end but not others' fears'.

Accounts of the resistance to James's proposals have generally stressed the concerted opposition of the English Parliament, but it is worth noting that there was also much scepticism north of the border. The Scots, too, wished to protect the integrity of their own institutions. Furthermore, the contemptuous language used at Westminster only served to fuel centuries of resentment against the English. They viewed their southern neighbours rather as the Catalans or Aragonese viewed the Castilians within the Spanish composite kingdom. Scottish opposition focused particularly on any suggestion of an 'incorporative union': this was the one type of union which commanded some measure of support in England, but it would have been tantamount to annexation. The Scots were however happy to call James King of Great Britain because they thought this title would help them to resist dominance by England. Indeed, in so far as there was any support for further union north of the border it was as a means to safeguard Scotland's position within a composite monarchy and to offset the problems created by absentee kingship.

What finally wrecked the union proposals in the parliamentary session of 1606–7 was Sandys' alternative scheme for a 'perfect union'. By this phrase he meant not what James meant but rather an incorporative union in which 'the Scottish nation [should] be ruled by our laws'. James saw this for the wrecking tactic it almost certainly was. In despair, he fell back on the idea that a full union might be achieved gradually, and told Parliament on 2 May 1607:

> [The Union] is no more unperfect, as now it is projected, than a child, that is born without a beard . . . The Union is perfect in me; that is, it is a Union in my blood and title; yet but *in embrione* perfect. Upon the late Queen's death, the child was first brought to light; but to make it a perfect man, to bring it to an accomplished Union, it must have time and means; and if it be not at the first, blame not me; blame time; blame the order of nature.

In the end, James realized that there was no way round an English Parliament which he regarded as 'barren by preconceived opinions'. When he prorogued the session two months later, the only one of his proposals to have been enacted by statute was the repeal of all laws in each kingdom hostile to the other. Plans for free trade were rejected. Although in June 1608 a test case, known as 'Calvin's Case', established the legal rights of the *post-nati* in both England and Scotland, the naturalization of the *ante-nati* was quietly forgotten. Serious proposals for union in effect came to an end with the parliamentary session in July 1607. When one member, Sir William Morris, tried to re-open the question in the Parliament of 1610, he met with howls of derision. James very sensibly decided to cut his losses and drop the matter. Indeed, the fact that his original proposals had been couched in fairly vague terms probably enabled him to do this with less difficulty than if he had committed himself to a clearer, more detailed programme. Thereafter, as we shall see, he continued to pursue changes 'piece and piece' which pointed towards a 'gradual union', but he never raised the wider issue in Parliament again. His failure to achieve his ideal of 'one king, one people, one law' signalled the beginning of over a century in which England and Scotland remained separate kingdoms while living under a 'double crown'.

James's surrender over the union undoubtedly showed political sense. If he had badly misjudged the outlook of the English Parliament, he was at least able to recognize when to make a tactical retreat and to adopt a more gradual, long-term strategy. Contemporaries were beginning to acknowledge James's political instincts. In the autumn of 1604, just after the proclamation declaring James King of Great Britain, John Gordon, recently appointed Dean of Salisbury, preached a florid sermon in which he thanked God for the union of the realms and likened the King to Great Britain's Solomon. This identification with Solomon was to enjoy wide currency in sermons, prayers and visual representations of James, and it reflected a contemporary perception of his wisdom and political skill. Such qualities were to become more and more evident during the fifteen years following the Union of the Crowns, years which saw the heyday of James's kingship.