

# Chapter 1

## Welcome to Scotland

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Getting acquainted with the people who make up the land we call Scotland
  - ▶ Seeing how Scotland was formed
  - ▶ Examining how Scotland gained, lost and regained its independence
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**W**hen you think about Scottish history, maybe it takes you back to the classroom, where you heard stories from teachers about great heroes and villains. You may have stamped on your brain tales about great men like Robert the Bruce or William Wallace; or women like St Margaret or Mary, Queen of Scots; or maybe the great explorers like David Livingstone or Mungo Park. You would have also heard of villains like Macbeth, or failures such as Bonnie Prince Charlie. These are all wonderful stories in their own right, and they receive their due in this book. But there is more to Scottish history than simply the doings of great men and women, and in these pages you find out more about this nation than a history of the usual suspects can tell you.

### *The Peoples of Scotland*

The history of Scotland is a truly remarkable one. As a nation, Scotland has probably contributed more to world civilisation than any other country of a comparable size. In fact, you could argue that the Scots – through their historians, philosophers, engineers and scientists – invented the modern world. But how did that come to pass? What was it about the people and their history that allowed them to make such a significant contribution to the modern world?

You couldn't put your finger on anything in the Scottish past to answer that question. For many centuries, nothing in particular distinguished the Scots from people from other parts of the globe. Indeed, you could argue that for most of Scotland's history, it has lagged behind other societies, including – wait for it – England!

There aren't any genetic clues either: ancient Scotland was made of at least five different peoples who spoke different languages. At first, they were simply members of tribes searching for food, but later they became farmers and members of small kingdoms. Of course, Scotland didn't exist in their minds: borders and things like national identity were pretty meaningless.

Since ancient times, other people have settled in Scotland. The Romans came, saw and tried to conquer but left empty-handed. Much more successful were the Vikings, who arrived at the start of the ninth century. The Vikings not only raped and pillaged but, in time, also settled on the islands and on the northern coast and became Christians. They were followed by the Anglo-Normans, who arrived in the reign of David I. They were given lands and eventually became successful and powerful members of the Scottish aristocracy. The Bruce and the Stewart families, who were rulers of Scotland at various times, were from this stock.

From the 12th century, we had to wait until the 19th century for the next major influx of people into Scotland. This time it was the Irish, and this influx proved a bit more problematic! The Irish arrived by the thousands in the west of Scotland in the 1840s, fleeing the famine. Their religion made it difficult for them to integrate into Scottish society, which was staunchly Presbyterian. However, they eventually succeeded, only to be replaced by other immigrants from the British Commonwealth in the late 20th century. This last movement of people into Scotland has been on a scale much smaller than experienced in England, but still, one in five children in Glasgow schools is from an Asian background.

So, we are, in a famous Scottish saying, 'aw Jock Tamson's bairns'. There is no such thing as a genetically pure native Scots: we are a hybrid people, and the better for it.

## *The Formation of Scotland*

When it comes to the formation of Scotland, we can start with the Romans. They did little for Scotland except unite the various tribes of the north against them. In fighting the Romans, the tribes realised that bigger was better. When the Romans arrived at the tail end of the third century, there were 17 different tribes; when they left, there were only 4 (Angles, Britons, Gaels and Picts).

In the middle of the ninth century, Kenneth MacAlpin united the Picts and the Gaels, and the new territory was named Alba or Scotland. But he didn't control the whole of Scotland – that was not achieved until 1460, when the Norwegians ceded Orkney and Shetland as part of payment of a dowry. So, what we now recognise as the boundaries of Scotland took a long time to be fixed.

Of course, the sovereignty of the kingdom was always contested by our friends in the south. Successive English kings tried to incorporate Scotland into their realm, without much success. The most determined attempt was by Edward I toward the end of the 13th century; that led to a national struggle for independence and made heroes of Robert the Bruce and William Wallace. The result was English recognition of the Scots' claim to be an independent nation. But it didn't end there. The Scots battled the English right up until the Union of Crowns in 1603 when a Scottish king, James VI, became the first king of England and Scotland.

The crowns were united but the nations were not. After about half a century of religious strife and battling the Stewart kings, the parliaments of the two countries were united in 1707 by the Treaty of Union. The Scottish Parliament voted itself out of existence. Why it did so is a matter of debate – people are still arguing over it. However, it meant that a new country called Great Britain was born, and the Scots had to learn to accept that they were British first and Scottish second, which they gladly did.

Scots were happy to accept what is known as a 'dual identity' because they were incorporated into the British Empire. They were quick to recognise a good thing when they saw it. So extensive was Scottish involvement with the empire, as administrators, traders and soldiers, that people have spoken about the 'Scottish Empire'.

Access to new markets and sources of raw materials saw the Scottish economy begin to take off. On the backs of native genius inventors, like James Watt, who invented the steam engine, Scotland became an industrial powerhouse. Scotland led the way in engineering, iron, steel and shipbuilding. Although Scotland beat the world in technology, it was also breaking records for the wrong reasons: the highest rates of squalor, poverty and disease in western Europe.

The late 20th century saw Scotland lose its lead in industry to other countries, like Japan and Korea, and as a result Scotland transformed itself from a maker of ships to a maker of chips (electronic ones, but Scots like the potato ones too!). All the old skills and occupations have gone, and in their place have come new ones associated with what's euphemistically called the 'knowledge economy'. In the past, Scots went down pits; today, they work in brightly lit offices and shops, but in many cases for much less money.

With each successive stage in the country's development, Scotland's sense of identity has undergone change. From a land of a myriad different voices and cultures, it became fiercely nationalistic as a result of the struggles with the English. Then it learned to embrace a new dual identity, which from the 1970s onward became more nationalistic. Unlike the old forms of Nationalism, which were exclusive and masculine, the new identity is inclusive of all Scots, regardless of gender, ethnicity or race.



Identity is never fixed; it's fluid and always in a state of forming and reforming itself. In that respect, Scotland is no different to any other country.

## *The Union with England and Its Uncertain Future*

Scotland and England formed a union in 1707, but because no one was certain it was going to last, it was half-hearted and left the way open for a divorce. The English were in a hurry to get an agreement, so the Scots were able to negotiate a deal that allowed them to retain a separate legal and educational system and secure guarantees regarding the independence of the Church of Scotland – no Anglicanism here, thank you!

So, in spite of it being the beginning of a new country, each of the partners of the union had the building blocks of a nation-state intact in case they wanted to go their different ways in the future. Scotland had become a nation within a nation. The survival of these institutions was of no great importance at the time, but their very existence kept alive the memory of an independent Scotland.

No one doubts the Scottish commitment to Britain and its empire, but even at the high point of imperial pomp and circumstance, there were complaints about the way England had begun to stand for Britain. Instead of the 'British Empire', it was commonplace throughout the world to talk of the 'English Empire'. As a result, people in Scotland started to demand some form of 'home rule', where the Scots controlled their own affairs but matters of national defence and foreign policy were still the responsibility of the Westminster Parliament.

However, as long as the British Empire stuffed the mouths of the middle class in Scotland with gold, the moaning was confined to a minority. Along came war in 1914, and the moaning became even quieter as the Scots responded more enthusiastically than any other part of Britain to fight for king and country. They also took the biggest hit!

The cause of Nationalism didn't really get going again until the late 1960s, in spite of the formation of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in 1934. Scots were content with their dual identity – after all, they had fought another world war to defend it! But things started to go wrong in the 1970s, and by the end of 1974, the SNP found itself the second largest party in Scotland, with one-third of the vote in the second general election of that year and ten members of Parliament (MPs).

Both the Labour and Tory parties were worried, so they agreed to hold a referendum on devolution in 1978. But they rigged it in such a way that at least 40 per cent of voters would have to be in favour (many general elections have been won with less than that). The Scots were to have their own assembly, but at the last minute, they got cold feet and the dream was over. Things went back to the political status quo – it was once more a two-horse race, Labour versus Tory.

But the genie was out of the bottle. The support for Nationalism declined, but it didn't disappear. All it needed was another spark to ignite it. Step forward the best recruiting sergeant Nationalism ever had – Prime Minister Margaret Hilda Thatcher!

At first, Thatcher's election and the determination to roll back the frontiers of the state (hey, we're subsidy junkies!) saw a massive increase in the Labour vote north of the border. Yes, while England voted for the Tories – even trade unionists – in Scotland it was Labour. It seemed as if the Scots were being governed by an alien government – there was a democratic deficit of enormous proportions. We didn't want the Poll Tax; we didn't want to chant the 'greed is good' mantra; and we didn't want to fight the Argies (Argentinians)!

After a visit by the grey suits, Thatcher was gone by the end of 1990, and the Tories were out on their ear in 1997. By that general election, they had no MPs left in Scotland – it was a Tory-free zone! Teflon Tony Blair became prime minister in 1997 and promised a referendum on a Scottish Parliament. The Scots, in a historic vote, opted to restore their Parliament, which had been in abeyance for more than 300 years, and it sat for the first time in 1999.

The Parliament was set up in such a way that it encouraged power sharing. The first government was a coalition of Labour and Liberal Democrats. However, the tide of opinion in Scotland was flowing toward the SNP and its leader, Alex Salmond. Salmond did the unthinkable at the last general election and won a majority. Immediately, another referendum was on the cards. This time, the stakes were higher – independence would mean the breakup of Britain and an end to a union that had stood the test of time for 300 years.

Whether it will come to pass, who knows? It's still not clear whether the vote for the SNP is a protest vote against the failings of New Labour and the present coalition government, or whether it's representative of a genuine wish of the Scottish people to regain their independence. Only time will tell.

## What kind of history?

History depends on documents or texts, which creates a bit of a problem, because for most of human history, people have been illiterate. The creators of documents tended to be the educated elite, and if you go back even further, only clerics. Kings needed clerics and clerics needed kings, so most of the documents that survived from the medieval period concern the church and kingship. The ordinary Scot was more or less invisible – a mere footnote in celebrations of great deeds and daring do.

Following the spread of literacy from the late 16th century onward, other voices began to be

heard, although the history of great men still dominated. It was really only from the end of the Second World War that these other voices began to be taken seriously by historians. The Second World War was a people's war, and that led to a people's history. The working class began to appear in history books! From the 1970s on, so did women! History had ceased to be only a story about the rich and powerful. It had become more inclusive, telling the stories of previously marginalised groups and peoples: homosexuals, gypsies, unusual religious sects and many more.