

REVIEW: ANGLO-SCOTTISH RELATIONS

Graham Walker

T.C. Smout (ed.), **Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1603 to 1900**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 281 pp., hb, £40, ISBN 0-19-726330-5.

W.L. Miller (ed.), **Anglo-Scottish Relations from 1900 to Devolution and Beyond**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 272 pp., hb, £35, ISBN 0-19-726331-3.

At the time of writing, with the World Cup still fresh in the memory, Anglo-Scottish relations seem strained. Standing jokes in Scotland about supporting whoever was playing England provoked this time an ill-tempered response south of the border; and for certain unfortunate Scottish-based England fans, victims of assaults during the tournament, humour did not come into it. The past months in any case have been as much about troublesome political relations between the two countries and peoples: the re-surfacing in a particularly ominous form of the West Lothian Question; the campaign to stop Gordon Brown becoming Prime Minister on account of his Scottishness; and hyped-up coverage of survey evidence pointing to a growing readiness on the part of the English to be done with the union.

These volumes, following recent important books by Murray Watson and Alan Massie, are thus well-timed. A growing literature such as this can help us put current tensions into historical perspective, and provide us with surer guides to the possible direction of future relations than the pot-stirring philippics of the moment. On the other hand, future studies may yet look back on this period of political and popular cultural turbulence with great interest. Anglo-Scottish relations may well have entered a transformative phase.

The books under review are the fruit of conferences held in 2003 to mark the fourth centenary of the union of the crowns. The first volume is the work of

Graham Walker is Professor of Political History at the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy, Queen's University of Belfast.

Scottish Affairs

historians of different specialisms, while the second features political scientists and sociologists as well as historians. Taken together they cover an impressive range of topics, from the established and the familiar to the relatively novel and previously unexplored. Moreover, as might be expected from such an august cast of contributors, they are marked by distinguished scholarship, helpful audits of research in respective areas, and genuinely new and exciting insights.

The first volume shows clearly how unsatisfactory both the Scots and the English found the new arrangements put in place in 1603. Contributions such as those by Wormald, Brown, Morrill and Whatley highlight the problems of governance, finance, trade and religion which bedevilled relations between the two places in the seventeenth century. Morrill also observes that Ireland was a further source of mistrust between Scotland and England in the 1640s, alerting us to the way that other relationships could crucially shape the Anglo-Scottish one. Indeed, this project in general might be criticised for being too narrowly focused and failing to build sufficiently on work which has elucidated the Irish dimension to Scottish and English – and jointly ‘British’ – affairs. Bob Harris, in his study of Anglo-Scottish radical connections in the late eighteenth century, is correct to say that these have been overshadowed by too exclusive a concern with Irish influences. Nevertheless, the missed opportunities to make comparative points involving the Irish experience rather detract from the value of the exercise overall. In an otherwise authoritative introduction, Smout dismisses the Irish dimension as colonial, whereas the interactions and connections between Ireland and Britain, explored luminously by Roy Foster and other historians, went well beyond ‘colonial’ stereotypes. For Thomas Carlyle’s impact on London society – discussed here by Rosemary Ashton – see Thomas Moore, Oscar Wilde and even Michael Collins.

Following the Act of Union of 1707, relations between Scotland and England improved economically and in some ways politically, though hardly socially or culturally. Colin Kidd contends that there was little nostalgia for the lost Scottish Parliament, and that Scottish intellectuals of the Enlightenment age concerned themselves with matters of civil liberty and equality rather than national identity. The promotion of the Union as a partnership between nations and the determination of Scottish elites not to be submerged by English laws and practices were largely phenomena of the nineteenth century. The Enlightenment intellectuals’ sense of disinterest gave way to a preoccupation with Scottish distinctiveness; an era of ‘Unionist Nationalism’ ensued. However, closer political union did not bring mutual appreciation of cultural differences; throughout the eighteenth century, and indeed during the

Review: Anglo-Scottish Relations

nineteenth, pejorative stereotypes about Scots were a staple of the London press, as Langford demonstrates. Indeed, his discussion of the Bute and Dundas political years invites comparisons with the current campaign against Brown and other highly-placed Scots being waged in sections of the English media.

Anglo-Scottish relations were also profoundly shaped by shared Imperial concerns. Empire was central to the development of the 'Unionist Nationalism' of the nineteenth century. However, as Tom Devine shows, Scots had been adept at exploiting the opportunity structure of Empire since the mid eighteenth century, particularly in relation to the East India Company. He explains clearly how the sons of the small landed families took advantage of the patronage of key government figures such as the Earl of Islay and later Warren Hastings. As Devine argues, access to such imperial openings helped forge a stronger union. Given this, and the acknowledged importance of Empire to the shaping of Scottish national identity in its modern form, it is surprising that this theme does not receive more discussion and exploration. Further attention to Empire would have done no more than reflect the topic's recent impact on Scottish historiography.

The second volume bears something of a misleading title. The contents practically involve a temporal leap from Queen Victoria and Dicey to consideration of the impact of devolution on the Union in the contemporary context. There is some discussion by McLean of the financial arrangements put in place by the Goschen formula of the 1880s and those of Barnett in the 1970s, and some insight into how the more astute holders of the office of Secretary of State for Scotland played the 'administrative devolution' system during the twentieth century. However, the development of the political relationship through the years is not accorded the kind of appraisal that Hutchison supplies for the nineteenth century in the first volume. Neither are the social and cultural themes of the greater part of the century given enough attention. A topic such as the Welfare State and its possible role as an adhesive for the Union in the context of a dying Empire demands much more analysis than is available here.

That said, there is much in the contents to think about. The chapters by McLean and Heald and McLeod offer sharply contrasting perspectives on the finances of devolution: McLean assumes that this issue will be the undoing of the devolution settlement unless an alternative is found to Barnett, while Heald and McLeod take the view that funding conundrums will be resolved if there is a political will to do so. John Curtice also stands apart from McLean, arguing

Scottish Affairs

that devolution has not resulted in Scotland and England drifting apart. Nevertheless, the question of the role of the UK as a whole in the new devolutionary age is problematic. Charlie Jeffery considers the impact of devolution on UK citizenship and notes that the Barnett formula is not designed to maintain UK wide equality in public services. He indicates that the commonalities across the UK need to be worked on and that the centre has to co-ordinate matters more purposefully. Indeed, it might be observed that the area of inter-governmental relations is one of the weakest aspects of the Blair government's constitutional reform programme; the hastily thrown together 'Joint Ministerial Committees' appear to have been allowed to wither. An effective system of inter-governmental relations would seem to be a necessity to avoid debilitating tensions ensuing in the event of governments of different ideological complexions taking office in London and Edinburgh in the near future.

The volume breaks new ground in Angela McCarthy's study of Scottish migrants in England which involves the use of some illuminating interview material, and Hussain and Miller's study of the English in Scotland provides a helpful counterpoint. Interestingly, the English respondents considered tensions between Scots over religion to be more significant than those between Scots and English.

The future of the Union is a subject addressed by several contributors to the second volume, and McCrone's chapter is particularly thought-provoking in its assessment of possible scenarios. Is British identity strong enough to sustain the Union? Does the Union need a strong sense of Britishness to survive? The pertinence and disputability of both questions at one and the same time is a good measure of the complexity of the issue. As Miller points out in his introduction, the reverse situation to the beginning of the twentieth century has now taken place: Scotland and England are merging culturally yet diverging in relation to identity. Perhaps the trump card of the Union will be its proven flexibility and adaptability, its capacity to be as tight or loose as the times prescribe.

Meanwhile, I am moved to draft an exam question for possible future use: 'That the World Cup Finals take place only every four years is a blessing for the Union'. Discuss.'

July 2006