

The Act of Union



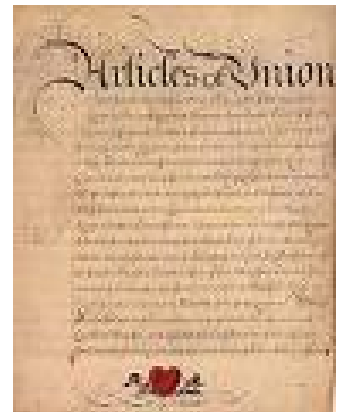
The Duke of Queensberry and Dover presenting the Act of Union to Queen Anne

What was the Act of Union?

The political unification of Scotland and England was sealed in 1707 with the creation of one parliament for both countries, based at Westminster.

Union would only happen if a treaty could be agreed by both the English and Scottish governments.

Each country sent commissioners who worked in separate groups. When the Treaty was drawn up in October 1706, it began its progress through the parliaments in Scotland and England.



The Treaty consisted of 25 articles, 15 of which were economic in nature.

When was the Treaty of Union made?

There had been three previous attempts to create a union between Scotland and England, one in 1606, then in 1667 and again in 1689. The successful Treaty was finally ratified on 16 January, 1707 by the Scottish Parliament, and in March 1707 by the English Parliament. It came into effect on 1 May, 1707.

What did it mean?

The Scottish and English parliaments were dissolved and replaced with a new Parliament of Great Britain which would be based at Westminster.

What was England's motivation for agreeing to the union?

Although the two countries had shared a king for much of the previous century, the English were increasingly concerned that an independent Scotland with a different king would line up against England.

What was Scotland's motivation for agreeing to the union?

It enabled Scotland to recover from the financial disaster of the Darien scheme. The scheme created a Scottish trading colony in the New World and brought Scotland into competition with the East India Company, supported by the English government.

The East India Company refused to sell supplies to the second Darien expedition in 1700, helping towards its failure and the subsequent loss of up to one quarter of Scotland's liquid assets.

However, union would create the largest free trade area in 18th Century Europe.

What changed and what did not change?

- Some clauses permitted the continuation of Scottish institutions, such as the burgh and legal systems.
- It also guaranteed that the Church of Scotland would remain the established church in Scotland.
- Other provisions included the restatement of the Act of Settlement 1701 and the ban on Roman Catholics from taking the throne.
- Most clauses stated that union was to be obtained by Scotland adopting the English way regarding such things as customs and excise duties, weights and measures and coinage.