

# SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE AND BRITISH IDENTITY: AN UNUSUAL LATE-MEDIEVAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract.** John Mair is regarded as the first unionist thinker because of his advocacy of dynastic union between Scotland and England in his ‘History of Greater Britain’ (1521). In this article his ‘History’ is reread in a new context as part of a late-medieval Scottish identification of Britain as Scottish. The idea of England as Britain is more than a millennium old; identifying Britain as an extension of the Scottish kingdom, and of Scottish independence as compatible with British identity, is much less familiar. It is traced in this article in John of Fordun’s work (written in the mid-1380s), Thomas Barry’s poem on the Battle of Otterburn (1388), and in an unpublished compendium of king-list, chronicle and origin-legend material in a recently discovered booklet from the early sixteenth century. It is proposed that, rather than ‘banal unionism’, there was ‘banal Britishness’ based ultimately on sharing the same island. Not only does this suggest that there was even less of an inherent contradiction between Scottish independence and being British than is apparent within the spectrum of unionism delineated by Colin Kidd; it also raises the question of whether there are only Scottish, English and Welsh British identities, each with their own spectrum which have only occasionally intersected as a common Britishness.

**Keywords.** British identity, unionism, Scottish independence, Colin Kidd, Mair, Fordun, St Andrews Libraries and Museums MS 39180

Although Scotland’s status in relation to Britain is contested, perceptions of the past have played a limited role in informing the debate. History as a discipline can offer something more useful than marshalling arguments for one side or the other by searching for a deeper understanding of Scottish independence and British identity. Colin Kidd’s *Union and Unionisms*, published in 2008, is

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an outstanding example of what can be achieved. At the book's core is a deft discussion of what Kidd described as the 'unionist spectrum', ranging from 'assimilation and anglicisation' at one extreme to 'a position which verges on nationalism' at the other. 'It is a category error, therefore, to think of unionism and nationalism as opposites'.<sup>1</sup> He emphasised, moreover, that 'unionism was inspired by Scottish—not English—concerns and took its rise in opposition to English desires to rule Britain as an empire'.<sup>2</sup> In this article these insights are developed by tracing a key dimension of Britishness found in works written when Scottish independence was a fact of life: John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* ('Chronicle of the Scottish People') of the mid-1380s, Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* (written in the 1440s) and John Mair's *Historia Maioris Britanniae, tam Angliae quam Scotiae* ('History of Greater Britain, both England and Scotland'), published in 1521; particular attention will also be given to an unpublished booklet datable to a few years before Mair's work.<sup>3</sup> This is not the first discussion of Scotland's British identity in the late Middle Ages. The groundbreaking work here is Steve Boardman's perceptive and wide-ranging study of a variety of ways that Scots between the mid-fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries saw themselves as part of Britain, often in relation to an imagined past.<sup>4</sup> What follows has a more limited focus on a specific dimension that has not been discussed before: the idea that the island of Britain was, in some sense, Scottish.

Colin Kidd identified Mair as the 'founding father of Scottish unionism';<sup>5</sup> the chronological endpoint of this article therefore dovetails nicely with Kidd's starting point. Mair, in his *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, advocated a marital union that would bring Scotland and England together under a single monarch, bringing centuries of enmity and warfare to an end. A vision of Scotland and England as a single British realm is apparent in late-medieval historiography, too, albeit in a

<sup>1</sup> Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms. Political Thought in Scotland 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 6; this insight is also expressed in more general terms in Willy Maley, 'Britannia Major: writing and Unionist identity', in Tracey Hill & William Hughes (eds), *Contemporary Writing and National Identity* (Bath, 1995), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Kidd, *Union and Unionisms*, p. 301.

<sup>3</sup> *Major* is Latin for Mair: Maley, 'Britannia Major', p. 47 and Alexander Broadie, 'Mair [Major], John', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17843>, have pointed out that this means that the book's title can be translated as *A History of Mair's Britain*. The booklet is University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums MS 39180, ff. 1–38. The manuscript was previously Spikkestad (nr Oslo), The Schøyen Collection MS 679, and was purchased by the University of St Andrews at auction in Christie's on 11 June 2024 with the generous support of Dr William Zachs and the Friends of the Nations' Libraries. It can now be consulted online: <https://collections.st-andrews.ac.uk/item/the-st-andrews-chronicles/882268> (accessed 24 December 2024), where it is given the title 'The St Andrews Chronicles'.

<sup>4</sup> S. Boardman, 'Late medieval Scotland and the Matter of Britain', in E. J. Cowan & R. J. Finlay (eds), *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 47–72.

<sup>5</sup> Kidd, *Union and Unionism*, p. 44.

less persistent way than expressed by Mair; some examples will be discussed in Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* and Bower's *Scotichronicon*. The final part of this article will be devoted to the manuscript booklet that came to light recently in a private collection; it has hitherto only been discussed in a very limited way in a pair of blogs (when the manuscript was part of the Schøyen Collection).<sup>6</sup> The booklet will allow us to glimpse historical texts circulating beyond the formal confines of a library. It will also bring us back unexpectedly to Mair's history.

At the end of the day this discussion will reinforce the insight that unionism and nationalism are not opposites. In the process, an attempt will be made to redefine the spectrum delineated by Kidd by giving more prominence to Britishness rather than unionism. It might be objected that these are synonymous: indeed, the distinction between them discussed in this article arises from a particularly Scottish way of identifying with the island of Britain that appears from a modern perspective to be baffling and perplexing. English identification with the island is, of course, commonplace: Britain and England are regularly conflated (however irritating and frustrating that is from a Scottish or Welsh perspective), and the island seen almost unconsciously as England writ large. This is perfectly understandable: not only does it chime with England's predominance in Britain in any period, given its relative wealth and population, but the identification of the island as the domain of English kings is as old as the kingdom of England itself more than a thousand years ago.<sup>7</sup> English predominance also came to embrace Ireland, too, making the entire archipelago appear as its natural point of reference. The identification of an independent Scottish realm with the island of Britain, by contrast, seems bizarre today. Although never as pervasive as the association of Britain with England in an English context, Scotland as Britain can be detected quite clearly in histories of the Scottish kingdom written in Latin and read by Scots between the 1380s and 1520s. This is not simply about Scots seeing themselves as part of Britain. It is, rather, a one-sided identification of Britain in exclusively Scottish terms. As such, it offers not only an uncomfortably unfamiliar perspective on Scottish identity, but raises fundamental questions about our understanding of the nature of British identity itself.

<sup>6</sup> D. Broun, 'A recently discovered Latin chronicle of the Wars of Independence' <https://breakingofbritain.ac.uk/blogs/feature-of-the-month/august-2011-a-recently-discovered-chronicle/> (2011, accessed 17 June 2024); D. Broun, 'New information on the Guardians' appointment in 1286 and Wallace's rising in 1297' <http://www.breakingofbritain.ac.uk/blogs/feature-of-the-month/september-2011-the-guardians-in-1286-and-wallaces-uprising-in-1297> (2011, accessed 17 June 2024).

<sup>7</sup> D. Broun, 'Rethinking Scottish origins', in Steve Boardman & Susan Foran (eds), *Barbour's Bruce and its Cultural Contexts. Politics, Chivalry and Literature in Late Medieval Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2015), p. 186; R. R. Davies, *The Matter of Britain and the Matter of England. An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 29 February 1996* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 15–25; R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 35–53; R. A. Mason, 'Scotland, England and the idea of Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 14 (2004), pp. 164–5.

## John Mair

Rather than first considering Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, the discussion will begin with the chronological pivot with Colin Kidd's *Union and Unionism*: John Mair's *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, 'the first printed work in which the case for Anglo-Scottish union was set out at any length'.<sup>8</sup> It was also the first attempt to write a history of Britain from a Scottish point of view, and therefore provides an important starting point for considering what British identity could mean towards the end of the Middle Ages in the context of a sustained presentation of the Scottish past. Before Mair turned his mind to history, he was already the author of at least forty-six books, chiefly on logic as well as theology, ethics and metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> In 1518 Mair moved from the Sorbonne to Glasgow University; by the end of this year he had already begun writing his *Historia Maioris Britanniae*.<sup>10</sup> It was soon eclipsed by Hector Boece's flamboyant history of Scotland, published in 1527.<sup>11</sup> In the modern era, however, Mair's work has been accorded special significance. A notable instance is how, at the Scottish History Society's very first AGM in 1887, a change in the society's rules – Rule 1, no less – was approved so that it could publish a translation of Mair's history: because the work had already been printed twice, it failed to satisfy the Society's main stated purpose to edit unpublished manuscripts relating to Scottish History.<sup>12</sup> The English translation by Archibald Constable duly appeared as the society's tenth volume in 1892. About a century later, in 1993, Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer made the striking statement that Geoffrey Barrow's *Feudal Britain*, published in 1956, 'provided a genuinely even handed study of medieval Britain' that had not been seen since John Mair's *Historia Maioris Britanniae*.<sup>13</sup> Mair's history was not only a milestone in writing medieval British history, of course: his canvas extended from British,

<sup>8</sup> Mason, 'Scotland, England and the idea of Britain', p. 283.

<sup>9</sup> Broadie, 'Mair [Major], John'.

<sup>10</sup> R. A. Mason, 'Kingship, nobility and Anglo-Scottish union: John Mair's *History of Greater Britain* (1521)', *Innes Review*, 41 (1990), p. 217 n.17 referring to a passage in book V; Mair says that 'in this year, 1518' James V was entering his 7<sup>th</sup> year (*Historia Maioris Britanniae tam Angliæ quam Scotiæ per Joannem Majorem*. [Paris], Iodocus Badius, f. ciii<sup>r</sup>; A. Constable (trans.), *A History of Greater Britain as well England as Scotland Compiled from Ancient Authorities by John Major*. Scottish History Society, 1st series, no.10 (Edinburgh, 1892), p. 309). This was therefore written sometime between 9 September and 31 December 1518.

<sup>11</sup> It became the basis of the first book-length history of Scotland in the Scots language: see D. Broun, 'Scotland's first "national" history? Fordun's principal source revisited', *Scottish Historical Review*, 103 (2024), pp. 399–400 and N. Royan, 'The relationship between *Scotorum Historia* of Hector Boece and John Bellenden's *Chronicles of Scotland*', in Sally Mapstone and Juliette Wood (eds), *The Rose and the Thistle. Essays on the Culture of Late Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (East Linton, 1998), pp. 136–7.

<sup>12</sup> Report of the First Annual Meeting of the Scottish History Society, p. 3 (published at end of A. D. Murdoch (ed.), *The Grameid. An Heroic Poem Descriptive of the Campaign of Viscount Dundee in 1689*, Scottish History Society, 1st series, no.3 (Edinburgh, 1888)); the two printed editions were Major, *Historia Maioris Britanniae* in 1521 and R. Fribarnius [Freebairn] (ed.), *Historia Maioris Britanniae tam Angliæ quam Scotiæ per Joannem Majorem . . . Editio Nova* (Edinburgh, 1740).

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Grant and Keith Stringer, 'Foreword', in Alexander Grant & Keith J. Stringer (eds), *Medieval Scotland. Crown, Lordship and Community. Essays Presented to G. W. S. Barrow* (Edinburgh,

Scottish and English origins (disposing of cherished legends), and reached his own time of writing.<sup>14</sup>

The most even-handed part of Mair's work is not his treatment of the Middle Ages, but his approach to the early settlement of Britain. He outlined how, to begin with, there was a single kingdom of Britons; after the Picts arrived there were two kingdoms (Britons and Picts), and then three when the 'Irish Scots' arrived. In due course the English arrived and formed seven kingdoms, bringing the total in Britain to ten; eventually this was reduced to two kingdoms: England and Scotland. 'Yet', he said, 'all the inhabitants are Britons' – English, Scots and Picts as well as the ancient Britons – because 'all men born in Britain are Britons'.<sup>15</sup> He explained, though, that he would follow general usage by referring to Picts and Scots (and so on), although keeping in mind (if only subliminally) that all were Britons, too.

When it came to writing about more historical times, however, Mair made no attempt to integrate Scottish and English events into a single narrative. Instead, as Roger Mason has observed, 'he simply compiled two chronicles in harness, alternating frequently between the two countries, though with a pronounced leaning in favour of his native land'.<sup>16</sup> The title of Mair's work – a 'History of Greater Britain, both England and Scotland' – encapsulates this sense of Britain as two kingdoms with their own histories. Mair's treatment of them is not entirely 'even handed', however, because – to pick up on Roger Mason's observation – much more space is given to Scottish than English history. Most chapters are predominantly concerned with either Scotland or England, with a few in Books I and II that are either about Britain as a whole (for example, describing the island), or about early British figures (such as Merlin and Arthur). A crude sense of quite how far Mair favoured his own country is that, in total, twice as many chapters are devoted to Scotland than England: 67 to 33.<sup>17</sup> A fairly even division is only found in Book III, which runs from the expulsion of the Picts and the Danish invasion of England through to the martyrdom of Thomas Becket.

The most striking way in which the Scottish dimension of Mair's work is apparent is in the running header in both the original 1521 edition and the new edition in 1740: the shorthand way to refer to Mair's history was not *Historia*

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1993), p. xiv. The treatment of Scotland and Wales is arguably not so different from that in R. L. Mackie, *A Short Social and Political History of Britain* (London, 1921).

<sup>14</sup> On Mair's approach to the legendary ancient histories of Scottish and British kingdoms, see Mason, 'Kingship, nobility and Anglo-Scottish Union', pp. 188–90.

<sup>15</sup> *Et tamen hi sunt omnes Britanni . . . omnes in Britannia natos Britannos*: Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae*, f. vi'; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Mason, 'Kingship, nobility and Anglo-Scottish Union', p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> The breakdown is Book I (15 chapters), 7 on Scotland, 3 on England, 5 on Britain (as a whole); Book II (14 chapters), 6 on Scotland, 4 on England, 4 on the Britons / Britain; Book III (15 chapters), 7 on Scotland, 8 on England; Book IV (21 chapters), 15 on Scotland, 6 on England; Book V (24 chapters), 18 on Scotland, 6 on England; and Book VI (20 chapters), 14 on Scotland, 6 on England.

*Maiores Britanniae* ('History of Greater Britain'), but *De Gestis Scotorum*, 'The Deeds of the Scots'. In the first AGM of the Scottish History Society in 1887, indeed, it was referred to in the minutes simply as 'the *De Gestis Scotorum*, or the History of the Scottish Nation, by John Major or Mair'.<sup>18</sup> It was only when Archibald Constable's translation came to be published that we find 'History of Greater Britain' as the work's running header. Constable's choice seems very natural and obvious to us now. It is important to remember, however, that the work was originally presented as essentially Scottish history, and could still be read as such in 1887. There is no indication that John Mair conceived of it fundamentally differently. His history belonged to the king of Scots: in his dedication to King James V, he referred to James's 'most lofty descent in the line of both kingdoms of Greater Britain', and beseeched him to accept the work and 'read with good fortune this history of your ancestors'.<sup>19</sup> James V's mother was Margaret Tudor, daughter of Henry VII of England. Although it seems strange to say this, Mair's history begins to look less like an attempt to combine Scottish and English history into a pioneering unionist narrative, albeit favouring the Scots, and more like a treatment of Britain as an extension of Scotland.<sup>20</sup>

If Mair's history is known for anything today, however, it is for his repeated advocacy of a dynastic union between Scotland and England. He turned to this first in Book I when discussing the mutual hostility between Scots and English, and saw marital union as the only hope of establishing peaceful relations.<sup>21</sup> He returned to the topic in a little more detail in Book IV, when he deplored the missed opportunity for union on Alexander III's death because Alexander III's daughter had married the king of Norway rather than the king of England.<sup>22</sup> (It is curious that Mair overlooked the proposed betrothal of Alexander III's granddaughter, Margaret, and the future Edward II.<sup>23</sup>) Later in Book IV, during a display of rigorous reasoning to show that Robert Bruce and his descendants were rightfully kings of Scots, he digressed to dilate on the virtue of a dynastic union between Scotland and England, in contrast to a union by conquest, as

<sup>18</sup> See n.12, above.

<sup>19</sup> *summis vtriusque Maioris Britanniae Regni natalibus; historiam tuorum . . . feliciter perlege*: Major, *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, Prefatio; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, pp. cxxxiii, cxxxv (translation adapted).

<sup>20</sup> Note also the comment in Mason, 'Scotland, England and the idea of Britain', at p. 282, on how a possible dynastic union resulting from James IV's marriage to Margaret Tudor in 1504 would have been perceived by James IV 'as an extension of the Stewart not the Tudor imperium'.

<sup>21</sup> Major, *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, f. xlii<sup>v</sup>; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, pp. 41–2.

<sup>22</sup> Major, *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, f. lxxvii<sup>v</sup>; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, pp. 189–90.

<sup>23</sup> It is mentioned in Bower's *Scotichronicon*, book XI chapter 1 (repeated in the Book of Pluscarden, book VIII chapter 1) as Edward I's initiative as an attempt to annex Scotland to England; N. H. Shead, W. H. Stevenson & D. E. R. Watt (eds), with A. Borthwick, R. E. Latham, J. R. S. Phillips & M. S. Smith, *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, vol. vi (Aberdeen, 1991), pp. 2–3; F. J. H. Skene (ed.), *Liber Pluscardensis*, *Historians of Scotland*, no. 7 (Edinburgh, 1877), pp. 118–19. Mair mistakenly regarded Alexander's daughter, also Margaret, as Alexander III's heir on his death in 1286, rather than Margaret's daughter, Margaret.

experienced by Wales.<sup>24</sup> Finally, in Book V, at the end of his reflection on the recognition of Scottish independence in the Treaty of Edinburgh in 1328, he returned briefly to the theme of marital union as the only long term solution to the wars between the two countries.<sup>25</sup> Although Mair was firmly committed to the idea of a marital union between the two remaining kingdoms on the island of Britain, it is notable that these passages form part of a general pattern of providing a commentary on events. The idea of marital union is expressed in a fairly repetitive way, with variations that reflect the textual context that triggered it – mutual hostility between Scots and English, a missed opportunity for marital union on Alexander III's death, Edward I's conquests, and the inherent resilience of the Scots that culminated in the Treaty of Edinburgh.

Not only is Mair's advocacy of union an intermittent – if repeated – feature, but his idea of the union is more theoretical than practical. Colin Kidd has emphasised that, for Mair, 'Union did not entail capitulation so much as a common acknowledgement of partnership and shared interests'.<sup>26</sup> Roger Mason has also noted that, in Mair's view, 'any union between them [Scotland and England] must be based on parity of status and esteem'.<sup>27</sup> These are important observations. It is notable, however, that Mair is rather diffident about how parity and partnership would be maintained after the union had happened. He proposed that the 'name and kingdom' of the Scots and English would disappear and be replaced by a 'king of Britain'.<sup>28</sup> Although the island would thus become a single kingdom, Mair supposed that the Scots need not worry about an English king (of Britain) imposing taxes, because 'he would have respected our ancient liberties, just as the king of Castile at the present day permits to the men of Aragon the full enjoyment of their rights'.<sup>29</sup> Mair goes on to say, however, that if taxes are for the common good, they should be paid to the king anyway. This does not amount to a clear and consistent view of how the union would work in practice. Although the logic of the island of Britain as a single kingdom seemed self-evident to him, and he lost no opportunity to urge the necessity of a marital union in order to establish peace, Mair avoided the pressing constitutional implications of Britain as a single realm with Scots and English having equal status. There is a strong suspicion that his only clear goal was a union of the crowns, with the detail to be worked out afterwards (as indeed occurred after 1603).

How far, then, should this be regarded as one of the work's governing ideas? It would have been natural for Mair to respond to James V as offspring of Stewart

<sup>24</sup> Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae*, f. lxxviii<sup>r</sup>–v; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, pp. 217–19.

<sup>25</sup> Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae*, f. cvi<sup>r</sup>; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, p. 289.

<sup>26</sup> Kidd, *Union and Unionism*, p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> Mason, 'Scotland, England and the idea of Britain', p. 283.

<sup>28</sup> Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae*, f. lxxvii<sup>v</sup>; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, p. 189.

<sup>29</sup> *quod eos in libertatibus antiquis vivere permisisset sicut Aragonenses Castellæ Rex hodierno die sinit*: Major, *Historia Majoris Britanniae*, f. lxxvii<sup>v</sup>; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, p. 190. The kingdoms of Castile and Aragon were ruled together from 1479 by Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon (who married in 1469) when Ferdinand succeeded his father, John II.

and Tudor parents (the first marriage between Scottish and English royal families since 1328 and the first to bear a son since 1264): a potential future union of the crowns was in the air. Alexander Broadie, however, has pointed out that, in the preface of his history, Mair explained to James V that the book was written so that ‘you may learn not only the thing that was done but also how it ought to have been done’, adding that it is ‘of more moment to understand aright, and clearly to lay down the truth on any matter’.<sup>30</sup> Mair often remarked at some length in his history on what should have been done: he explained in the preface that, as a theologian, he was particularly qualified to do so. His views on union are undoubtedly the most eye-catching of his moral injunctions for a modern reader, but they should be read chiefly as a consequence of Mair’s promotion of peace rather than lying at the heart of the work itself. British history was, in his eyes, and the eyes of his readers, essentially a version of Scottish history writ large, reflecting both James V’s parentage and the natural appeal of the island of Britain as a salient point of reference.

Seen in this light, Mair’s *Historia Maioris Britanniae* offers a rather ambiguous—even contradictory—view of Scotland as part of the island of Britain. On the one hand he looked forward to a king of Britain ruling over a realm which erased the former Scottish and English kingdoms. At the same time he looked back at Scotland’s independence with pride, and vigorously repudiated claims of English overlordship. His enthusiasm for a single British kingdom in the future, however, resonated in his own present day with the ancestry of the reigning king of Scots as grandson of kings of Scotland and England—something which he clearly relished. He assumed that James V or one of his descendants would, as monarch of Scotland, become ruler of Britain. Mair himself, moreover, was clear about his own identity. At the very beginning of his history he advertised himself as a ‘Scot by nation, theologian of the university of Paris by profession . . . [who] offers the deference due to his king’.<sup>31</sup> Scot, theologian, and a loyal subject of James V: these three elements can be recognised as the ideas that suffuse the work. Although he earnestly hoped that the island of Britain would become one realm, and regarded all its inhabitants ultimately as Britons of one kind or another, he spoke routinely of Scots and English as separate peoples. His originality was to articulate a way of being Scottish that rejected the mutual antipathy between Scots and English. He did not, however, create a clear vision of what it might mean to be British in a new united island kingdom. That was not his purpose.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Broadie, ‘Mair [Major], John’; *vt . . . non solum quid gestum sit, sed etiam quomodo gerendum sit perspicias; potius recte sapere & rem acriter discernere*: Major, *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, Præfatio; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, pp. cxxxiv–v.

<sup>31</sup> *natione Scotus & professione Theologus academie Parisiensis . . . Rege dignam obseruantiam*: Major *Historia Maioris Britanniae*, Præfatio; Constable, *A History of Greater Britain*, p. xxxiii, adapted.

<sup>32</sup> A notable contrast is with Sir Thomas Craig’s *De Unione Regnorum Britanniae Tractatus*, written mainly in 1605 after Craig had served as a commissioner in 1604 to discuss a closer union between the kingdoms following James VI’s accession as king of England in 1603. It was first published over three centuries later in C. S. Terry, (ed.), *De Unione Regnorum Britanniae Tractatus by Sir Thomas Craig*,



### John of Fordun and Thomas Barry

The novelty of John Mair's approach is immediately apparent on reading any codex of the Scottish kingdom's history in Latin that existed at the time he was writing his work.<sup>33</sup> These all have the first five books of Fordun's history as their initial core, running from Scottish origins to the death of David I in 1153.<sup>34</sup> Over twenty manuscripts survive that were produced before circa 1520; in all but one of them various ways had been found of extending Fordun's narrative beyond 1153 to at least 1363;<sup>35</sup> most of them continued to James I's assassination in 1437.<sup>36</sup> The principal concern of books I to V of Fordun's history was the freedom of the Scots under their own kings from ancient times. When Fordun's history was enlarged and continued by Walter Bower, abbot of Inchcolm, in the 1440s, a more pronounced anti-English element was included.<sup>37</sup> If we look carefully at these works, however, an occasional identification with Britain can be found.<sup>38</sup> In Bower's case this British element is in a poem on the Battle of Otterburn in 1388 which he incorporated into his history specifically so that it would be preserved for posterity.<sup>39</sup> He included it not only in his *Scotichronicon*, but in his parallel version of Scottish history in 40 books which survives most fully in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 35.1.7 (the Book of Coupar Angus).<sup>40</sup> It can hardly be said that Bower was particularly interested in the poem's British frame of reference; it presumably spoke to him as a vivid account of Scottish

Scottish History Society, 1st series, no.60 (Edinburgh, 1909); its genesis is discussed at pp. v–vi. For discussion of Craig's ideas, which are broadly similar to Mair's, see Kidd, *Union and Unionism*, pp. 56–9.

<sup>33</sup> D. Broun, 'Rethinking medieval Scottish regnal historiography in the light of new approaches to texts as manuscripts', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, 83 (2022), pp. 23–31 discusses what survives.

<sup>34</sup> The earliest manuscript (Dublin, Trinity College MS 498: second element (pp. 223–398), datable most likely to the 1430s) did not originally include Books I to IV, but its exemplar did, and Books I to IV were added later: D. Broun, 'A new perspective on John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* as a medieval 'national history' in S. J. Reid (ed.), *Rethinking the Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland. Essays in Honour of Roger A. Mason* (Woodbridge, 2024), pp. 54, 57–9.

<sup>35</sup> Broun, 'A new perspective on John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*', p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> Broun, 'Rethinking medieval Scottish regnal historiography', pp. 27–8 for a diagram of their complex interactions (based on current knowledge).

<sup>37</sup> D. E. R. Watt (ed.), *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, vol. ix (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 352–3.

<sup>38</sup> These were identified for the first time in Boardman, 'Late medieval Scotland', pp. 62–3, reaching different conclusions.

<sup>39</sup> A. B. Scott & D. E. R. Watt (eds), with U. Morét & N. F. Shead, *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, vol. vii (Edinburgh, 1996), pp. 420–43; see pp. 418–19 for Bower's explanation for including the poem.

<sup>40</sup> The poem is *Scotichronicon*, Book XIV chapter 52: it was also included by Bower in the 40-book version of his history of Scotland (known from the name of its principal manuscript as the Book of Coupar Angus), Book XXXIV, chapter 15: Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS 35.1.7, pp. 392b–395b (<https://digital.nls.uk/early-manuscripts/browse/archive/217342500#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=422&xywh=-1%2C-2491%2C9434%2C11428>, accessed 24 December 2024).

valour as well as a virtuoso verse composition.<sup>41</sup> With John of Fordun, however, the British dimension is more fundamental. Its importance for Fordun is apparent *not* because Scotland's British identity is featured throughout the work bearing his name; it is only revealed once it is realised that books I to V is a revision of an earlier work.<sup>42</sup> Very little can be read with any confidence as Fordun's own fresh prose: an exception is the preface of his incomplete book VI.

Fordun's book VI provides an account of English kings from Alfred the Great to the Norman Conquest: as it stands it finishes mid-sentence, so we cannot say what he intended for the book as a whole, or the rest of his work. Books V to VII of Fordun's principal source survives largely in what was known until recently to scholars as *Gesta Annalia* I, which begins with an account of English kings from Alfred to the Norman Conquest.<sup>43</sup> Fordun has evidently used this to create his book VI, and reconfigured his source's book V by incorporating the eulogy for David I by Ailred of Rievaulx.<sup>44</sup> He also included a genealogy of David I which he says he was given by Cardinal Walter Wardlaw, bishop of Glasgow: this enables Fordun's work to be dated to sometime between December 1383 and August 1387.<sup>45</sup> The preface to Book VI has no parallel in *Gesta Annalia* I; given how Fordun went out of his way to create book VI, there is little doubt that the preface is Fordun's own prose: indeed, this is the only chapter where we are likely to be consistently hearing Fordun's own voice free from any pre-existing text. In it he addresses kings of Scots, celebrating their descent from English as well as Scottish kings, and declaring that 'these two royal lines, for whom the size of the island was formerly insufficient for living in peace and harmony, now repose, joined as one, in the person of one prince'.<sup>46</sup> On the face of it this looks like a union of the crowns: certainly the idea of a single British kingdom as a way to

<sup>41</sup> On Barry's poem as 'a metrical tour de force', see Scott and Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, pp. 527–8.

<sup>42</sup> D. Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain from the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 215–68; Broun, 'Scotland's first "national" history?', where 'proto-Fordun' is redated from 1285 to the late 1320s or 1330s.

<sup>43</sup> D. Broun, 'A new look at *Gesta Annalia* attributed to John of Fordun', in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Church, Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 9–30; F. Young, '"A Nation Nobler in Blood and in Antiquity": Scottish National Identity in *Gesta Annalia* I and *Gesta Annalia* II', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2018, pp. 17–32; in Broun, 'Scotland's first "national" history?', pp. 52–4. *Gesta Annalia* is abandoned as a confusing title (*Gesta Annalia* I becomes the '107 chapters before 1285'). Its only edition is W. F. Skene (ed.), *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*. *Historians of Scotland*, no.1 (Edinburgh, 1871), pp. 406–37.

<sup>44</sup> The close relationship between this material and Fordun's book V and incomplete book VI is apparent in the apparatus of W. F. Skene's edition (Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, pp. 406–37). Ailred's eulogy of David I had been added to the end of Fordun's principal source: Broun, 'A new look at *Gesta Annalia*', p. 16; Broun, 'Scotland's first "national" history?'.

<sup>45</sup> Broun, 'A new perspective on John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*', p. 47 n.15.

<sup>46</sup> *Iste uero due regales linie quibus inhabitandum olim insule latitudine pace concordii non suffecerat unius nunc persona principis . . . requiescunt*: J. MacQueen, W. MacQueen & D. E. R. Watt (eds), *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, vol.iii (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 306, 307 (translation adapted); Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, p. 387.

bring peace resonates with John Mair's history. Fordun also exclaims that it is the duty of kings of Scots 'to maintain the traditions of the brilliant fighting force of the victorious fighting island, that is of the Scots and the English'.<sup>47</sup> Why this should be a particular concern of Scottish kings is, presumably, because (to repeat) 'these two royal lines . . . now repose, joined as one, in the person of one prince': that 'one prince' (or 'ruler': *princeps*) is apparently the king of Scots. Unlike Mair, who looked to the future, Fordun seems to be referring to the present.

But this is impossible: how could this 'one prince' who brings together the two royal lines relate to any reality in the 1380s?<sup>48</sup> The answer lies at the beginning of Fordun's account of St Margaret's Anglo-Saxon royal ancestors, which comes immediately after the preface to book VI. There Fordun declares not only that Alfred the Great and his pre-Conquest descendants were paragons of kingship, but that 'readers may plainly observe the treasonable ejection of their lineage [the kings of Scots] from their royal dignity'.<sup>49</sup> When Fordun says that 'these two royal lines . . . now repose, joined as one, in the person of one prince', he is evidently referring to kings of Scots descended from St Margaret, culminating in the reigning monarch, Robert II. Seen in this light, Fordun's British identity seems to be no less than a partisan claim that the king of Scots should be king of England, too.<sup>50</sup> It is tempting to see this as a brazen riposte to the claim of English kings to be overlords of Scotland, just as Robert I's representatives had done when negotiating with the English in 1321.<sup>51</sup> But that is not how it is couched. There is a striking identification with Britain as a 'victorious fighting island', and a sense of the benefits of a single kingdom for maintaining 'peace and harmony'. This amounts to something more interesting than a counterclaim to English overlordship. It offers instead a specifically Scottish version of being British, claiming pre-Conquest English kings as their own, and the island as the proper realm of the king of Scots. Britain is embraced as an entity that

<sup>47</sup> *victoriose pugnatrix insule Scotorum videlicet et Anglorum rutilantis militie prosequi vestigia studeatis*: MacQueen, MacQueen & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. iii, pp. 306, 307 (translation slightly adapted); Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, p. 387.

<sup>48</sup> Boardman, 'Late medieval Scotland', p. 62 referred to this as 'an enigmatic elaboration' of the theme of an 'amicable settlement between the two kingdoms and peoples'.

<sup>49</sup> *sue propaginis a regia maiestate prodiciosa deieccio palam a legentibus speculetur*: MacQueen, MacQueen & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. iii, pp. 308, 309 (adapted), with Fordun's *sue* for Bower's *sui* (Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, p. 388).

<sup>50</sup> On statements of this claim in the twelfth century, as well as in Robert I's negotiations with Edward II in 1321, see Boardman, 'Late medieval Scotland', p. 62 and n.47.

<sup>51</sup> P. A. Linehan, 'A fourteenth-century history of Anglo-Scottish relations in a Spanish manuscript', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Studies*, 48 (1975), p. 116; '... the hereditary right of the kingdom of England descends to the previously mentioned Margaret. Seven kings had proceeded in turn by birth as far as the time of the lord Robert, now king of Scotland; to these, as it is written, is transmitted from the branch of the blessed Margaret their mother the right to rule in the kingdom of England . . .' (*... ius hereditatis regni Anglie descendit ad Margaretam ipsam predictam. Procreati processerunt successive usque ad tempus domini Roberti nunc regis Scocie septem reges ad quos, ut scriptum est, ex parte Margarete beate matris eorumdem deuoluitur ius regnandi in regno Anglie . . .*). The seven kings are from Edgar (1097–1107) to Alexander III (1249–1286).

could—indeed, should—be a kingdom, but on Scottish terms, ruled by kings of Scots. In effect, Fordun's vision was of the Scottish kingdom on a British scale.

A sense of personal attachment to the island of Britain is even more apparent in the poem on the Scottish victory at Otterburn, on 5 August 1388, composed by Thomas Barry probably not long after the event, and preserved by Bower.<sup>52</sup> For Barry this was a battle of Scots versus English, in which the earl of Douglas 'suffers martyrdom to protect freedom'.<sup>53</sup> One of the bravest Scots is a knight from Moray who blocked the path of the English, despite wearing no headgear or armour, outdoing the exploits of Achilles: the battle is portrayed as a national struggle.<sup>54</sup> The earl of Douglas, killed leading the Scottish force, was Barry's patron, so it is understandable that the poem is emotional. After their triumph, the Scots 'return home with tears mixed in with their rejoicing, as they recall the earl's tragic end, mourning sadly. Therefore I pour out these mixed metres weeping'.<sup>55</sup> The poem finishes by imploring God to 'put an end to savage war', and 'cause the wars between the two kingdoms to die down, put down all evil, put an end to wars, end all quarrels, let peace reign'.<sup>56</sup> The tone is set from the outset, expressed vividly in British terms. 'But I weep as I make my new song . . . mourning the lamentable quarrels of two warlike kingdoms, I sing songs mingled with grief. The island home of the British contains two most excellent kingdoms, from which is banished every benefit of peace by the craft of the Devil. Their bodies are riven by war on every side'.<sup>57</sup> There is nothing here explicitly about a kingdom of Britain, so we cannot say how far, if at all, Barry would have shared Fordun's vision. What we are left with—in the absence of royal lineages—is a powerful identification with Britain linked with a yearning for peace, in contrast to the weary inevitability of Scots and English at war. This resonates strongly with Mair's Britishness, without the aspiration for a dynastic union. At the same time there is no doubt about Barry's commitment to Scotland, just as with Mair. For

<sup>52</sup> Scott and Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, pp. 420–43; for Thomas Barry (d.1404/5), see p. 526, note on line 27.

<sup>53</sup> *martyrium patitur pro libertate tuenda*: Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, p. 436–7, line 275.

<sup>54</sup> Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, pp. 432–3, lines 202–3; I am very grateful to Steve Boardman for pointing out to me that the knight was probably Thomas Dunbar, earl of Moray, who is mentioned earlier (Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, pp. 422–3, line 50). S. I. Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings: Robert II and Robert III 1371–1406*, The Stewart Dynasty in Scotland (East Linton, 1998), pp. 142–9 highlights how there were sharply divergent accounts of the significance of the Battle Otterburn written shortly afterwards, and how this reflected Scottish political divisions which were exacerbated by the question of who should succeed the fallen earl.

<sup>55</sup> *Ad proprias partes redeunt per gaudia flentes / et comitis recolendo ruinam, tristeque gementes. / Hec ideo metra mixta fleo*: Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, pp. 440–1, lines 328–30.

<sup>56</sup> *bellum pessundato sevum*: Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, pp. 442–3, line 342; *prelia regnorum fac pacificare duorum, / et mala comprime, bellaque destrue, iurgia dirime, pax dominetur*: Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, pp. 440–1, lines 337–8.

<sup>57</sup> Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, p. 421; *Sed lacrimor . . . nova . . . carmina . . . / scismata regnorum lacriminalia belligerorum / deflens binorum, cano carmina mixta dolorum. / Insula iam Britonum duo continent optima regna, / pacis quodque bonum quibus exulat arte maligna. / Ex omni parte sunt corpora diruta marte*: Scott & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. vii, p. 420, lines 5, 7–11.

Barry the cause of Scottish freedom and the identification with Britain are both fundamental, without any sense of being contradictory.<sup>58</sup>

Putting all this together, it is striking to see how assertions of Scotland's independence from English overlordship can be found alongside a strong identification with Britain as an island, not only in Mair's history, but also in Fordun and Barry writing towards the end of the fourteenth century. Both Fordun and Mair in very different ways saw Britain as a kingdom created by a union of Scottish and English royal lines. In both cases, however, this was imagined as an extension of Scottish kingship. Although not exactly a mirror image of England as Britain – not least because there was no equivalent to English claims to overlordship – a distinctly Scottish notion of Britain is apparent in which the island of Britain is an aspirational or imaginary dimension of the Scottish kingship. There was certainly no sense here that Scottish independence was incompatible with being British or with a kingdom of Britain. This was not, however, articulated as Scotland and England living in parity and harmony as neighbouring independent realms. It involved equating the Scottish kingdom with the island of Britain itself. Appropriating Britain as an extension of your country was not, therefore, unique to England: the Scots did it, too. In a Scottish context, moreover, this was associated with an end to war, even though Fordun was simultaneously pressing a claim to the English throne or Barry celebrating feats in battle.

### Unpublished Booklet

Up to this point the Scottish kingdom's British identity has been revealed only by authors of works that we can read today. Is it possible to look beyond these few remarkable individuals and discern if this notion of Britain as Scottish, combined with a vision of peace, had a wider appeal and significance, particularly in writing about the kingdom's past? An obvious place to look is among the many anonymous highly abbreviated histories written by Scots or about Scotland datable to the late Middle Ages. A number of these have been published, most recently by Kathleen Daly, Dan Embree and Edward Donald Kennedy in their collection of what they refer to as 'short prose chronicles'. These can be dated to the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and are written in Scots or Latin; one is in French. One of these is given the intriguing title: 'The Ynglis Chronicle'.<sup>59</sup> Its contemporary title, however, shows its true colours: *Heir followis ane tractact of a part of þe Ynglis cronikle schawand of þar kingis part of þar ewill & cursit governance*, which can be rendered as: 'here follows a treatise drawn from the English chronicle

<sup>58</sup> Boardman, 'Late Medieval Scotland', p. 63 perceptively notes the poem's 'bellicose subtext'. There is, indeed, a tension between the glorying in martial prowess (for Scottish freedom) and the yearning for peace (thinking of Britain); for Barry these exist together as perspectives on the Battle of Otterburn, the former in the lead up to the battle and the conflict itself, and the latter in reflecting afterwards on its fatal outcome.

<sup>59</sup> K. Daly, D. Embree & E. D. Kennedy (eds), with Latin translations by S. Edgington, *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, Medieval Chronicles no.5 (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 145–54.

showing their kings' evil and accursed government'.<sup>60</sup> Two of the texts edited by Daly, Embree and Kennedy refer to the king of Scots as rightfully king of England due to their descent from St Margaret, but without an explicit evocation of Britain itself: one is a summary of Scottish history in French from their origins to 1463 (*La Vraie Cronique d'Escoce*), and the other is a brief summary of Scottish origins and early history (known as *The Scottis Originale* or *The Cronycle of Scotland in a Part*), which survives in three versions (in Scots).<sup>61</sup> In one of these versions Britain itself is mentioned, but only in passing. In the Asloan MS of *The Scottis Originale* it is explained that William the Conqueror 'put the Danes and many of the Saxons out of Britain, and still holds that land whose right of possession should be the king of Scotland's'.<sup>62</sup> The other two versions lack 'out of Britain'; this suggests that 'that land' originally referred to England rather than the island as a whole.

If this was all that was available to us, then it would be difficult to deny that the identification of Britain with the Scottish kingdom in the late Middle Ages may have gone no further than some choice moments by a few writers. This is changed by the booklet that has recently come to light.<sup>63</sup> It survives only because approximately fifteen or twenty years after it was produced it was used as the beginning of a copy of a book-length historical work which will be discussed in due course.<sup>64</sup> The booklet's paper has been dated by its watermarks to about 1511;<sup>65</sup> the text is written by a single scribe. Although the names of six owners appear on the flyleaves and a blank space (all probably in the sixteenth century),

<sup>60</sup> Daly, Embree & Kennedy, *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, p. 145.

<sup>61</sup> Daly, Embree & Kennedy, *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, pp. 81–109 (*La Vraie Cronique d'Escoce*), pp. 111–33 (*The Scottis Originale*), at pp. 88–91, 127.

<sup>62</sup> Daly, Embree & Kennedy, *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, p. 127, bottom text, *put þe Danis & mony of þe Saxonis out of Brettane, and haldis þat land as ȝit, quhilk of ground-rycht suld be King of Scotlandis*. The Asloan MS (Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland MS 16500) is datable to between 1513 and about 1533 (Daly, Embree & Kennedy, *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, p. 76).

<sup>63</sup> University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums MS 39180 (previously Spikkestad (nr Oslo), The Schøyen Collection MS 679; see n.3, above). The booklet (ff. 1–38) is recognisable as originally a separate codicological entity because it is the work of a scribe not found later in the manuscript, its contents are distinct, and the paper is different from the rest of the manuscript (see below). For booklets, the standard work is P. Robinson, 'The "booklet": a self-contained unit in composite manuscripts', *Codicologica*, 3 (1980), pp. 46–69. My approach—particularly in relation to the importance of binding history and (initially) unbound manuscripts—is informed by Joanna Tucker, *Reading and Shaping Medieval Cartularies. Multi-Scribe Manuscripts and their Patterns of Growth. A Study of the Earliest Cartularies of Glasgow Cathedral and Lindores Abbey* (Woodbridge, 2020), pp. 38–50, 192–4.

<sup>64</sup> See below, pp. 21–2. The dating depends on watermarks: see next note.

<sup>65</sup> The date is given in the online catalogue of the Schøyen Collection (where MS 679 is referred to as the 'Lindesiana Scotichronicon': <https://www.schoyencollection.com/history-collection-introduction/medieval-history-collection/lindesiana-scotichronicon-ms-679> (accessed on 24 December 2024)); it is based on the watermarks which were inspected by Elspeth Yeo of the National Library of Scotland when Martin Schøyen lent the manuscript there, shortly after purchasing it at Sotheby's on 19 June 1990. This gives a rough indication of the booklet's date. The manuscript had previously been kept in Bangor, Co. Down; nothing is known of its whereabouts between the sixteenth century and 1990.

**Table 1.** Physical collation of the booklet: University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums MS 39180 (previously Spikkestad (nr Oslo), The Schøyen Collection MS 679: see n.3, above) ff. 1–38.

Size of folios:	20×14 cm
Gathering I:	ff. 1–16 (sewing between ff. 8 and 9; note the catchword <i>sponsa</i> in the bottom margin of f. 16v).
Gathering II:	ff. 17–32, with sewing between ff. 22 and 23 and ff. 26 and 27: it appears, therefore, that there are two sub-gatherings (ff. 21–24 and ff. 25–28) within an otherwise eight folio gathering: ff. 17–20 + ff. 29–32).
Gathering III:	ff. 33–38 + stub (sewing between ff. 36 and 37).

this is likely to relate to the whole volume, not the earlier booklet.<sup>66</sup> The bound volume was owned at an early stage by Robert Robertoun, who refers to himself as a priest (*sacellanus*) of Edinburgh. This is the only clue we have about the booklet's origins. Its contents give no reason to doubt that it is Scottish—for example, the only document that is included is the Quitclaim of Canterbury of 1189 where Richard I freed the Scottish kingdom from the subjection it had suffered since 1175, when all freeholders had sworn fealty to the king of England in fulfilment of the terms of the Treaty of Falaise.<sup>67</sup>

Before looking at the booklet's contents, we can begin to understand it better by first considering it as an object (see Table 1). It is smaller than any extant manuscript of Fordun's history or Bower's *Scotichronicon*: at 20cm × 14cm, its closest comparator among versions of Bower's work is the radical abridgement produced in 1501 by John Gibson, canon of Glasgow and rector of Renfrew, for his own use.<sup>68</sup> The booklet has 38 folios in three gatherings: the first two

<sup>66</sup> In the online catalogue of the Schøyen Collection (see previous note) these are listed as Robert Robertoun, George Kemp, David Kemp, Henderic Kemp, Walter Buchanan, and John Lindsay of Balcarres (1552–1598). *Liber domini Roberti robertoun Sacellani Edynburgi* is on the recto of the flyleaf, and *Liber hendericis(?) kemp* and *Liber Gorgi kemp* are on the verso; *liber Johannis Lyndesay* is twice on f. 1r (the text begins on f. 1v). David Kemp's *ex libris* and Walter Buchanan's are on the originally blank bottom part of f. 32v. In the middle of the flyleaf the title *Chronica Scottorum* has been written in a hand of the same era as Robert Robertoun's. More information on these individuals is provided in the archival history of the MS at <https://collections.st-andrews.ac.uk/item/the-st-andrews-chronicles/882268> (accessed 24 December 2024), thanks to the research of Dr Elizabeth Henderson, Rare Books Librarian, University of St Andrews.

<sup>67</sup> See Table 3, below: the Quitclaim is on ff. 15r–16r. For all freeholders swearing fealty see D. Broun, 'Britain and the beginning of Scotland', *Journal of the British Academy* 3 (2015), p. 116.

<sup>68</sup> Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Adv. 35.6.8 (20.5 × 14cm, originally 288 folios): at the end (f. 287v) there is a colophon by John Gibson 'junior' saying he finished the manuscript on 4 March 1501; on f. 288r Master John Gibson *Venerabilis et Circumspectus vir* ('a respectable and prudent man') Canon of Glasgow and Rector of Renfrew, is given as the owner of the volume. This is presumably John Gibson junior identifying himself more formally (as assumed in Marjorie Drexler, 'The extant abridgements of Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*', *Scottish Historical Review*, 61 (1982), p. 64): the handwriting here is attempting a higher register than the informal cursive in the manuscript itself. For the sizes of manuscripts of Bower and Fordun see Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. ix,

**Table 2.** Summary of contents of the booklet

1. ff. 1v–24r	Compendium of origins, king-list, genealogy and chronicle.
2. ff. 25r–29v	Dynastic history and chronicle ‘1066’–1390.
3. ff. 30r–32v	Kings of Britain/England to Edward the Martyr (d.978).
4. ff. 33r–38v	21 ‘notes’ (closely related to Book V of <i>Scotichronicon</i> ).

gatherings are 16 folios each and the third one was originally 8 folios (the eighth folio has been removed). The second gathering is unusually complex, embracing two smaller gatherings within it: it consists of 8 folios with, additionally, two four-folio gatherings in the middle. This irregularity makes the booklet seem homemade. The fact that it soon became part of a bound volume reinforces the likelihood that the booklet was not itself originally created with a regular binding, or any kind of binding at all. It was probably either kept in a wrapper or held together with tacks.<sup>69</sup> All in all, the booklet was not apparently produced to grace a bookshelf. It seems instead to be a more ephemeral, personal object that the scribe either created for their own use or for their employer.

This is consistent with its contents (see Table 2): a collection of historical texts with little or no narrative substance. It is, essentially, a compendium of information, including summaries or brief accounts of origins, lists of kings, dynastic history and also brief year-by-year chronicles. The Quitclaim of Canterbury stands out as the only document: it was incorporated into the first item (see Table 3 below). Given the nature of the booklet the scribe would have been free to do whatever they liked with this material. It seems, however, that they have copied pre-existing texts rather than composing or revising anything afresh. One indication of this is that gaps have been left where a name or word was illegible in the exemplar.<sup>70</sup> Most remarkable of all is how the first item begins

pp. 149, 186–92, 196–202; manuscripts of the more substantial abbreviations are described in Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. ix, pp. 193–8, but this does not include the more radical versions like Gibson’s. Gibson identified his exemplar as the ‘Black Book of Paisley’ (London, British Library, MS Royal 13 E.x). On a general relationship between the size and appearance of codices, and ‘textual flexibility’, see Broun, ‘Rethinking medieval Scottish regnal historiography’, p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums MS 39180 (previously Spikkestad (nr Oslo), The Schøyen Collection MS 679; see n.3, above) survives in its original binding, so it cannot be disbound to see if there are any earlier holes (or not) in the gutters. On unbound manuscripts see Tucker, *Reading and Shaping Medieval Cartularies*, pp. 44–50.

<sup>70</sup> There are numerous examples, including where the missing word(s) would not have been difficult to guess, for example f. 3v: *venerunt Scoti de Ybernia in Britanniam cum duce Reuda* blank in *Pictorum parte* (‘The Scots came from Ireland into Britain with their leader Reuda, blank in the region of the Picts’); the text is verbatim from Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* (and ultimately Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*), which has *qui* (‘who’) in the blank; and f. 18r: *apud Sconam vbi congregati sunt tam maiores quam minores* blank *eiusdem vii custodes* (‘at Scone where greater and lesser were gathered together [blank] seven guardians of the same’), where something like *electi sunt regni* has been omitted (‘at Scone where greater and lesser were gathered together seven guardians of the same [kingdom were elected]’). Proper nouns would have been more challenging, e.g., f. 20r: *Et interfecti sunt Johannes Senescallus et Loh*, where the rest of the name of the person killed at the Battle of Falkirk with James Stewart has been omitted and a gap left. There are also occasions, however, where there is



**Table 3.** Summary of contents of the older compilation (item 1 in the booklet)

<b>ff. 1v–4r</b>	Material on Britain taken verbatim from Henry of Huntingdon, <i>Historia Anglorum</i> , bk.I, with a section on Brutus and his sons summarised from Geoffrey of Monmouth, <i>Historia Regum Britannie</i> .
<b>ff. 4r–7v</b>	An account of Scottish origins taken from a Life of St Brendan and a Life of St Congal, followed by a list of Dalriadic kings, then Pictish kings, and then kings from Cináed mac Ailpín (d. 858) to Lulach (d.1058).
<b>ff. 7v–9v</b>	A history of the English royal family from Edmund Ironside to the arrival of Margaret in Scotland.
<b>ff. 9v–16r</b>	A history of descendants of Mael Coluim III and Margaret as far as the Quitclaim of Canterbury (1189).
<b>f. 16r–v</b>	Brief account of the Scottish royal dynasty from William the Lion to Alexander III.
<b>ff. 16v–17r</b>	The descendants of Ada daughter of David earl of Huntingdon (as far as Robert II).
<b>f. 17r–v</b>	English royal descendants of Matilda daughter of Mael Coluim III and Margaret (as far as Edward III).
<b>ff. 17v–24r</b>	Annalistic chronicle 1285–1327.

in mid-sentence. In short, it appears that the scribe has sought to create a copy of the texts as they found them rather than editing them into something coherent and intelligible. There is also a significant degree of overlap not only in historical coverage but also, in one instance, by repeating text that had already appeared verbatim in an earlier item in the collection.<sup>71</sup>

The only text that might be an original piece of work is the final item relating to Máel Coluim III and St Margaret and their children. It begins, ‘The fifth book’ (*Quintus liber*), and is probably based on book V of *Scotichronicon* (or a later version of *Scotichronicon*), summarised as 21 ‘notes’, with a paragraph for each *nota*.<sup>72</sup> This

no intentional gap for an omitted word, for example f. 22r: *arripiens iter suum de Anglia versus Berwik de Berwik versus et venit*, (‘setting off on his way from England to Berwick, from Berwick to, and came’), where a place-name is missing between *versus* and *et venit*.

<sup>71</sup> The first 17 lines of the item on kings of Britain/England to Edward the Martyr (d.978) (ff. 30r–32v) is the same as in f. 2r, describing the Trojan origins of Brutus, how he came to Britain and took it, and how it was named after him.

<sup>72</sup> The ‘18th note’ (f. 37v), on Alexander I, refers to Alexander’s uncle, the ‘earl of Gowrie’, giving him Liff and Invergowrie on his baptism: this is in *Scotichronicon*, book V, chapter 36 (MacQueen, MacQueen & Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. iii, p. 104), but not in Fordun’s account of Alexander I (book V, chapter 28: Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, pp. 227–8). Wyntoun’s account of Alexander I refers to Invergowrie, but only as a residence of Alexander I’s (F. J. Amours (ed.), *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. iv. Scottish Texts Society (Edinburgh, 1906), pp. 370–3). In the 18th note, it is said that when Alexander I founded Scone he gave it Invergowrie; this is not stated by Fordun, Bower or Wyntoun, and suggests that the composer of the ‘21 notes’ could perhaps have been linked to Scone Abbey. For Invergowrie (‘Inuergoueren’) as part of Alexander I’s original endowment when founding Scone see Cosmo Innes (ed.), *Liber Ecclesie de Scon*, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1843), p. 2; G. W. S. Barrow (ed.), *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, vol. I, *The Acts of Malcolm*

was the sole text in the booklet's third gathering and could therefore have been written separately; because the booklet was almost certainly unbound, or in a loose binding that could easily be undone, this text could have been removed for reading on its own. Although it cannot be shown to have been the scribe's own creation from *Scotichronicon* book V (or not), it was evidently regarded by the scribe as distinct in nature, in some way, from the rest of the booklet.

All in all, this booklet has been produced as a store of detailed information about the kingdom's past, almost certainly for someone's personal use in a way that could be kept readily to hand. Rather than creating lists, summaries and notes of their own, however, the scribe has brought together a compendium of texts which each, in different and sometimes overlapping ways, provide information on different aspects of the kingdom's history. It is impossible to say, of course, whether the scribe has copied everything they could get their hands on, or only those items that interested them most. Be that as it may, the booklet can be recognised as a rare example of an eco-system of ephemeral manuscripts that satisfied a need to have the kingdom's history in a quick and direct way rather than in more leisurely extensive narratives. As such, it provides an exceptional opportunity to glimpse what was available relating to the kingdom's history for Scots to copy for themselves. It allows us to look beyond the polish and sophistication of John Mair and Thomas Barry, or the scholarly enterprise of Fordun and Bower, and see how the kingdom's history was regarded by at least some of the middling sorts, such as clergymen, for their personal use in a form that was relatively quick and easy to read and reproduce for their own convenience.

Let us look, then, in more detail at what the booklet contains (Table 2). There are four items which are treated as separate entities, beginning each time on a fresh folio. The final one we have already met: the 21 'notes' on Máel Coluim III and St Margaret and their children. This is preceded by a brief account of Britain's origins and its kings from Brutus to Edward the Martyr (d. 978)—in effect, a mini-*Brut* chronicle truncated by not continuing to Richard I or a later king of England.<sup>73</sup> The second item is a quick summary of Máel Coluim and Margaret's descendants up to Alexander III, when it then becomes a succinct chronicle of Scottish events up to 1390. (Two other copies of this text are known.<sup>74</sup>) By far

*IV King of Scots 1153–1165 together with Scottish Royal Acts prior to 1153 not included in Sir Archibald Laurie's 'Early Scottish Charters' (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 263.*

<sup>73</sup> The many Middle English prose versions of the *Brut* are studied in L. M. Matheson, *Prose Brut: The Development of a Middle English Chronicle*, Medieval Renaissance Texts and Studies (Tempe, AZ, 1998). There are also versions in French: see in particular J. Marvin (ed.) *The Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose Brut Chronicle. An Edition and Translation*, Medieval Chronicles no.4 (Woodbridge, 2006) and H. Pagan (ed.), *Prose Brut to 1332*, Anglo-Norman Text Society (Manchester, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Edinburgh, University Library MS 27 (where it has been added into blank spaces in a breviary), and Oxford, Bodleian MS Fairfax 23 ff. 110r–116r. I am very grateful to Steve Boardman for alerting me to the latter and providing me with scans of his photocopy of it. The text in MS Fairfax 23 finishes with the killing of the prior of St Andrews by one of his canons on 24 March 1393; University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums MS 39180 (previously Spikkestad (nr Oslo), The Schøyen Collection MS 679: see n.3, above), ff. 26r–29v, includes almost all the items in MS Fairfax 23 but stops with the coronation of Robert III and his wife Anabella in 1390. The text inserted into

the largest item is the first, which is itself a compendium of different texts: these are presented continuously, without a break, rather than as separate items (see Table 3). It appears that the scribe of the booklet has begun their work by copying what may well have been an earlier booklet in which short texts were combined to provide information on the kingdom's history. It may be suspected that this putative earlier booklet was itself an expansion of an earlier compendium.<sup>75</sup> It is possible therefore to imagine the extant booklet as a kind of Russian doll of similar textual compilations of information on the kingdom's history, with each adding new material to an earlier compendium. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine exactly how far an earlier compilation was reproduced in a later one, so the Russian-doll analogy can be taken too far. The main point to emphasise is that the first item in the extant booklet was itself an earlier similar compendium.

The inclusion and arrangement of these four items in the extant booklet are the only clues about what its scribe had in mind when making this collection. The first item (potentially copied from an earlier booklet) begins with a description of Britain and the peoples who settled there; the fourth item is an extended discussion of Máel Coluim III and Margaret and their children. The overall combination of accounts of the Scottish royal dynasty and Scottish events on the one hand, with an outline of Britain as a kingdom from ancient times, can be compared with Mair's treatment of British history, with his greater detail on Scotland and greater emphasis on Britain in the earlier period. On the other hand, the focus on Máel Coluim III and St Margaret as a fundamental point of reference (not just once, but twice, as the fourth item and as part of the first item), and the inclusion as the third item of an account of British rulers finishing with Anglo-Saxon kings, resonates with the pointedly Scoto-centric view of British history articulated by John of Fordun in particular.

### **An Older Compendium on the Kingdom's History**

The booklet was probably produced a few years before Mair began to write his history. It is not, however, the earliest example of presenting the kingdom's past with a prominent British dimension by using similar texts that are heavy with information and light on narrative. This earlier example is none other than the first item in the booklet—a compendium which, it will be recalled, could itself have originally been written as a booklet. It includes origin legends, king-lists, genealogy, dynastic history and also the Quitclaim of Canterbury (see Table 3).

EUL MS 27 (onto the front two flyleaves and in gaps in ff. 231v–233v) is more selective, and continued originally to 1385 (later continued to 1401); its items are consistently found in the other witnesses until at least the burning of Arbroath Abbey in 1379, but not generally thereafter (except for important events that could have been included independently).

<sup>75</sup> For example, the origin-legend and lists of kings that are part of the compendium (ff. 4r–7v) were already combined by the end of the thirteenth century (Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Studies in Celtic History, 18 (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 109, summarising pp. 83–108).

Rather than presenting each element separately, however, the ingredients have been merged to form a continuous text.

It begins with an account of Britain which has been taken verbatim mainly from Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, continuing with material from Geoffrey of Monmouth on Brutus's ancestry and the division of Britain between his sons. This is followed by an account of Scottish origins spliced with a king-list beginning with Fergus and his successors (i.e., kings of Dál Riata), followed by Pictish kings, and kings from Cináed mac Ailpín to Lulach (who was killed by Máel Coluim III in 1058). Before continuing with Máel Coluim III, however, there is an account of the English royal family from Edmund Ironside to Margaret's arrival in Scotland after the Norman Conquest of England. When the text resumes with Máel Coluim and Margaret, it becomes more of a narrative than a list or summary of events, until it reaches the Quitclaim of Canterbury in 1189. It then returns to a more succinct style with a brief account of the Scottish royal dynasty from William the Lion to the death of Alexander III in 1286. After this it moves into genealogy with the descendants of Ada daughter of David earl of Huntingdon as far as Robert II, and the English royal descendants of Matilda, daughter of Máel Coluim III and Margaret, as far as Edward III.<sup>76</sup> The final ingredient is a year-by-year chronicle from Alexander III's second marriage in October 1285 to the encounter between the Scottish army and Edward III in Weardale in early August 1327.<sup>77</sup>

Nearly all this material in the extant booklet's first item—potentially the contents of an earlier booklet—can be found in some form elsewhere, except the year-by-year chronicle. Again, as with the extant booklet itself, the kingdom's history is presented with a particular focus on St Margaret's English ancestors and Scottish descendants. The commitment to Scottish independence is made plain by including the Quitclaim of Canterbury, and the basis of the claim of Scottish kings to England as heirs of St Margaret is laid out in detail, although not stated explicitly. There is also, however, an identification with Britain at the outset which is fashioned from English texts. Mair and Fordun (or his principal source) were less dependent on, and more critical of, the standard English view of Britain's ancient history, fashioned originally by Geoffrey of Monmouth.<sup>78</sup> Here,

<sup>76</sup> This is closely related to, but independent of, the genealogies published in Skene's edition as *Gesta Annalia* chapters 75–80 (Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, pp. 316–19). For example, it gives (f. 17r) each generation of the descendants of Earl David's youngest daughter, Ada, which *Gesta Annalia* chapter 79 does not (Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, p. 318).

<sup>77</sup> University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums MS 39180 (previously Spikkestad (nr Oslo), The Schøyen Collection MS 679; see n.3, above) ff. 18r–24r is the only known copy of this text: see D. Broun, 'A recently discovered Latin chronicle of the Wars of Independence' <https://breakingofbritain.ac.uk/blogs/feature-of-the-month/august-2011-a-recently-discovered-chronicle/> (accessed 17 June 2024).

<sup>78</sup> For example, the criticism of Geoffrey of Monmouth's account (referred to as *fabulosa*, 'imaginary') of how Ireland was granted by the king of Britain to Pertholomus to settle, in Fordun, book I, chapters 22 and 23 (Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, pp. 20–1). Mair was consistently hostile to English accounts of Britain's early history: as Roger Mason has observed, he

by contrast, we seem to have a Scottish version of Britishness that would have been equally acceptable to English readers as well – but that is only true if the material from Henry of Huntingdon and Geoffrey of Monmouth is taken in isolation. The prominence given to St Margaret's ancestry and descendants, the comprehensive succession of Scottish kings from ancient times, and above all the Quitclaim of Canterbury, makes this a particularly Scottish version of British history.

It is difficult to say when this compendium (see Table 3) was created: it was certainly no earlier than the 1370s.<sup>79</sup> It begins mid-sentence, which suggests that the scribe of the surviving booklet copied it after its first folio had been lost.<sup>80</sup> The booklet scribe's difficulty in reading some words and names, which have been left blank, suggests that the handwriting was unfamiliar, which reinforces the suspicion that the exemplar – itself potentially a booklet – was an old manuscript.<sup>81</sup> In any case, the way of presenting the kingdom's history in this source appealed to the scribe of the surviving booklet, who not only copied it (despite the difficulty in reading it), but followed it with three other texts which magnified the older compendium's emphasis on St Margaret's English ancestors and Scottish descendants, Scottish events, and Britain itself. This is important for how we understand the currency of these ideas. If the surviving booklet (datable probably to the 1510s) had not included the older compendium as its first item – potentially copied from an old booklet – then it would be tempting to see its presentation of Scottish history with such a strong British dimension as only a recent development in response to the marriage of James IV and Margaret Tudor, and birth of James V in 1512. James, indeed, had an older brother called Arthur who died in infancy.<sup>82</sup> Mair's enthusiasm for union was no doubt a response to this heightened British profile of Scottish kingship, and the booklet could have been too – but not the older compendium which was copied as the booklet's first item. Although it cannot be dated with any precision, all the indications are that it was created significantly earlier than the 1510s.

If the booklet appears to foreshadow Mair's approach to Scottish history, this can be corroborated by how it survives as part of a much larger volume

'repeatedly (and somewhat indiscriminately) heaped abuse on their publisher, William Caxton, for lending the authority of the printed word to the scurrilous belief in Scotland's historic and continuing feudal dependency on England' (Mason, 'Kingship, nobility and Anglo-Scottish union', p. 188; see also pp. 188–191, and R. A. Mason, 'The Scottish Reformation and the origins of Anglo-British imperialism', in R. A. Mason (ed.), *Scots and Britons. Scottish Political Thought and the Union of 1603* (Cambridge, 1994) p. 163.

<sup>79</sup> The text of the genealogies (see p. 20 and n.76, above) is no later than Robert II and Edward III (i.e., 1371 × 1377), but this does not necessarily indicate when the compendium itself was originally put together: the text could readily be copied without being updated.

<sup>80</sup> The sentence (from Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, book I chapter 4) begins <Quinque autem plagas ab exordio> vsque ad presens misit . . . : the booklet lacks the words in angled brackets, and begins (on f. 1v) with vsque ad presens misit . . . .

<sup>81</sup> See above, n.70.

<sup>82</sup> I am grateful to Willy Maley for pointing this out to me. Arthur was born in 1509, and was just over nine months old when he died.

in an enduring binding. The remainder of the volume is, in fact, a copy of Mair's history, beginning at book II chapter 4 (on Merlin); it was written as a continuation of the extant booklet, perhaps less than a decade after Mair's work was published.<sup>83</sup> The booklet and Mair's history were seen as compatible. There was one obvious difference between them, however, which was their treatment of early Scottish and British history. The booklet included king-lists and origin-legends at greater length than Mair (who was, of course, unsympathetic to aspects of this material).<sup>84</sup> It appears that the volume's owner was keen to have Mair's history to hand, but wanted the early detail, too. The booklet therefore replaced the first part of Mair's work – a striking example of the reception of Mair's history in Scotland.

### Britain as Scottish

Looking back over the history writing discussed in this article, it is not difficult to see how the radical identification of Britain with the Scottish kingdom that has been identified here has not been highlighted before. Individual instances can readily be overlooked as an oddity when reading Fordun's history and Bower's *Scotichronicon* as a whole, and they have only been detected in other, less ambitious historiographical contexts through an unpublished booklet that only recently came to light. There is also a broader backdrop of expressions of Scotland's British identity that lack an explicit sense of Britain as Scottish.<sup>85</sup> A general sense of being part of Britain was deployed in political discourse, as well as in historiography. For example, Archibald Whitelaw, leading an embassy in Nottingham in 1484 to negotiate a lasting peace, referred to both kingdoms as 'bound together within a small island in the western sea'; he explained that 'it would be an unnatural thing that war should be fought between us'.<sup>86</sup> It is rare, however, to find the more radical identification of Britain as Scottish – even in literature, where there would be more freedom to have done so. An example is in Richard Holland's *The Buke of the Howlat*, a highly accomplished poem of 1001 lines in Scots written in the

<sup>83</sup> The date 1526 (based on Elspeth Yeo's study of the watermarks: see n.65, above) is given in the online catalogue entry: <https://www.schoyencollection.com/history-collection-introduction/medieval-history-collection/lindesiana-scotichronicon-ms-679> (accessed on 9 February 2025).

<sup>84</sup> Mason, 'Kingship, nobility and Anglo-Scottish Union', pp. 188–90.

<sup>85</sup> See, in particular, Boardman, 'Late medieval Scotland'.

<sup>86</sup> D. Shotton (trans.), 'Archibald Whitelaw's address to King Richard III, advocating the strengthening of peaceful ties between the English and the Scots, 12 September 1484', in A. J. Pollard (ed.), *The North of England in the Age of Richard III*, The Fifteenth Century Series, no.3 (Stroud, 1996), p. 198. *Innaturale enim est, inter nos bellum geri quos brevis occidui maris insula nectit* . . . ([Laing], D. (ed.), 'Oratio Scotorum ad Regem Ricardum Tertium pro pace firmanda inter Anglos et Scotos, XII Sept. M.CCCC.LXXXIV', *Bannatyne Miscellany*, vol. ii, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1836) p. 46). Alexander Grant has explained the Scots' principal goal was the return of Dunbar and Berwick: a marital union of the kingdoms was not on the cards. See Alexander Grant, 'Richard III and Scotland', in Pollard (ed.), *The North of England in the Age of Richard III*, p. 140, and pp. 137–40 for discussion of Whitelaw's oration.

late 1440s for Elizabeth, countess of Moray, wife of Holland's patron, Archibald Douglas earl of Moray.<sup>87</sup> There we are told that the king of Scotland 'shall be lord and leader / everywhere over broad Britain / as St Margaret's heir'.<sup>88</sup> This resonates with Fordun's vision of the king of Scots ruling over the whole island. It appears, however, in a hierarchical sequence of heraldic arms that can be read as a stage-setting for Douglas fame, beginning with the anti-pope Felix V followed by Frederick III king of the Romans, the king of France and the king of Scots, before arriving at 'the arms of the Douglas, altogether doughty, known by an appropriate coat-of-arms throughout Christendom; the bulwark of Scotland'.<sup>89</sup> This leads to a vision not of peace but of war in an extended account of Sir James Douglas fighting for Robert Bruce and ultimately Latin Christendom itself, killed carrying Bruce's heart against the Saracens.<sup>90</sup> Seen in this context, the idea of Britain as a single kingdom under the king of Scots is mentioned, but only in passing: it lacks the force of Fordun's 'victorious fighting island' united in 'peace and harmony' under St Margaret's true heir.

The more radical form of Scotland's British identity in late-medieval historiography is, by comparison, much clearer, even if it can only be found occasionally. It offers a fresh perspective on John Mair's celebrated history that invites us to see it not only as a precursor to unionism but also as an expression of a long established – if infrequently articulated – form of Scottish identification with Britain. This helps us to understand how Mair's *Historia Maioris Britanniae* could be seen at the time (and long afterwards) as essentially a work of Scottish history. What emerges from all this is a phenomenon which seems puzzling and unexpected: namely, that Britain could be regarded as in some sense a particularly Scottish concern, and specifically as an extension of the Scottish kingdom. At one level this can be interpreted as a response to English claims to overlordship, but there is more to it than that. At a deeper level it is also a Scottish reflex of the gravitational force of geography – particularly Britain as an island – on the way kingdoms were imagined, comparable to the way that Britain was (and is) seen from an English perspective as an extension of England. Both were expressed using historiographical claims that matched their perspective: the English through overlordship, the Scottish via St Margaret. This can be thought of as deeper not only because it is more basic and elemental, but also because the equation of realm

<sup>87</sup> See P. Bawcutt & F. Riddy, *Longer Scottish Poems*, vol. i (Edinburgh, 1987), p. 43 and Michael Brown, *The Black Douglasses. War and Lordship in Late Medieval Scotland 1300–1455* (East Linton, 1998), pp. 10–12 for its author, dating and background.

<sup>88</sup> *shall be lord and ledar / Our braid Brettane all guhar / As Sanct Margaretis air* (Bawcutt & Riddy, *Longer Scottish Poems*, p. 60, lines 374–6); see Boardman, 'Late medieval Scotland', p. 64, referring to this as 'a bald threat to the English crown'. The translation here and below is based on the glossary in Bawcutt & Riddy's edition.

<sup>89</sup> See Bawcutt & Riddy, *Longer Scottish Poems*, pp. 328–9 for Felix V and Frederick III; *The armes of the Douglas, doughty bedene, / Knawin throw all Cristindome be conysance able, / Of Scotland the wervall* (Bawcutt & Riddy, *Longer Scottish Poems*, p. 60, lines 380–2).

<sup>90</sup> Bawcutt & Riddy, *Longer Scottish Poems*, pp. 61–6.

and island has a longer history reaching back to the early Middle Ages.<sup>91</sup> It can also be recognised in the silent work of the scribe of the booklet, contributing no prose of their own as they copied their simple texts (with the possible exception of ff. 33–38, the 21 notes closely related to *Scotichronicon* book V), and also in the editorial energy of whoever created the earlier compendium preserved as the booklet's first item. In both cases Scottish Britishness was expressed not as explicit statements, but implicitly in the design and substance of what these scribes reproduced.

Can this late-medieval Scottish identification of Britain as Scottish be regarded as a form of 'unionism'? If unionism and Britishness are regarded as identical then this question is redundant. A medieval Scottish perspective, however, suggests that a distinction can, indeed, be drawn between British identity and unionism. Colin Kidd refers helpfully to unionism as 'some form of association with England'.<sup>92</sup> The late-medieval Scottish identification with Britain highlighted in this article, however, is uncompromisingly one-sided. In its most brazen form, expressed by Fordun, the association is with an England of the past, whose heir is the king of Scots; the English of Fordun's day are denied any validity. Seen in this light, Fordun's reference to 'living in peace and harmony' rings hollow. The quest for peace between the two realms is heartfelt in Barry's poem, but not at the expense of his commitment to his kingdom's freedom, for which, seen through his adoring eyes, his lord, James Douglas, gave his life. In John Mair's history, by contrast, there is the first trace of at least an openness to engage with the English themselves – but this, essentially, is postponed to the future when the marital union finally happens. Mair treats the past and present in decidedly Scottish terms, woven through with a consistent commitment to peace. It is only with the advent of Protestantism that an engagement with the English of the present day begins to be articulated. Roger Mason has shown how this was first expressed in the 1540s in a stark vision of Scotland's incorporation into an English Protestant island-empire. After the Scottish Reformation in 1560, however, for Presbyterians their aspiration for a British realm was conditional on the Church's jurisdictional independence, a possibility denied by the ecclesiastical settlement of Elizabeth I in England.<sup>93</sup> There was still, however, a sense of sharing a common cause as a 'beleaguered isle' in the face of Catholic might.<sup>94</sup> In comparison to this, Mair's unionism, although detectable, seems vague and limited.

<sup>91</sup> D. Broun, 'Rethinking Scottish origins', in Steve Boardman & Susan Foran (eds), *Barbour's Bruce and its Cultural Contexts. Politics, Chivalry and Literature in Late Medieval Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2015), pp. 182, 186–7.

<sup>92</sup> Kidd, *Union and Unionism*, p. 300.

<sup>93</sup> Mason, 'The Scottish Reformation', pp. 170–84.

<sup>94</sup> Mason, 'Imagining Scotland', p. 8; C.Z. Wiener, 'The Beleaguered Isle: A study of Elizabethan and early Jacobean anti-Catholicism', *Past and Present*, 51 (May, 1971), pp. 27–62 (I am grateful to Willy Maley for this reference).



### British Identity

Re-reading Colin Kidd's *Union and Unionisms* from a medieval perspective, it is possible to discern not only a 'unionist spectrum', but a range of forms of Britishness which would embrace unionism. A key insight of Colin Kidd's is that the unionisms he delineated so richly were animated by Scottish concerns, even when what was proposed was complete incorporation with England. What may be recognised overall, therefore, is a spectrum of particularly Scottish identifications with Britain which includes, but extends beyond, varieties of unionism, and has at one of its extremes an absence of any meaningful intention to associate with England in the here and now. And what is present throughout this spectrum might not be so much a 'banal unionism' (to quote Colin Kidd's astute phrase), but a banal Britishness based on the unquestionable facts of geography, as part of the same island.<sup>95</sup>

Seen in this light, there is even less of an inherent contradiction between Scottish independence and being British than is apparent within the spectrum of unionism. It might be asked, however (not for the first time) if there is such a thing as a shared Britishness beyond the mere fact of inhabiting the same island:<sup>96</sup> are there only Scottish, English and Welsh British identities, each with their own spectrum which have only occasionally intersected to become a common Britishness? This is not to deny that, in certain contexts, it was possible to develop a compelling vision of a shared Britishness, not least in the hands of historians. When Chairs of History were first established in Scotland in the 1890s, they taught that Britain was the result of a gradual fusion of its constituent nations around an English constitutional core—an inexorable progression which, it was imagined, would in time include the Irish.<sup>97</sup> This vision has long ago retreated from lecture halls. A different approach to British history was developed by Rees Davies (1938–2005) in a series of studies of English dominance in the central Middle Ages. Through understanding the historical contingency and dynamics of English power, he created an intellectual space for conceptualising alternative forms of Britishness with England first among equals.<sup>98</sup> His most explicit statement of this, however, was delivered in Welsh, which suggests that

<sup>95</sup> Although the facts of geography also extended to the archipelago as a whole, British identity in an Irish context could be regarded as innately contested because of Ireland's obvious position as a separate island, and therefore inherently less susceptible to the banal Britishness of Britain as an island.

<sup>96</sup> Note, for example, M. G. H. Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685–1789* (Basingstoke, 1997), p. 174: '... British identity and history, whether portrayed in history, journalism, cultural studies, social sciences or now through the electronic media, has historically tended to present a view both of its past and present which minimalises internal differences to an absurd degree ...'.

<sup>97</sup> R. Anderson, 'University History teaching, national identity and Unionism in Scotland, 1862–1914', *Scottish Historical Review*, 91 (2012), pp. 25–8.

<sup>98</sup> R. R. Davies, *Domination and Conquest. The Experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales 1100–1300* (Cambridge, 1990); R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000); D. Broun, 'A second England? Scotland and the monarchy of Britain in

he regarded this as especially relevant for a Welsh-speaking audience. This was in his Sir Thomas Parry-Williams memorial lecture delivered in 1998.<sup>99</sup> Its title, *Beth yw'r ots gennyf i am – Brydain* ('What do I care about – Britain'), echoes one of Parry-Williams' most famous poems, which opens by asking: *Beth yw'r ots gennyf i am Gymru?* ('What do I care about Wales?'). Parry-Williams' answer in the end is that he cannot escape from being Welsh because 'I feel the claws of Wales are torturing my breast' (*mi glywaf grafangau Cymru'n dirdynnu fy mron*).<sup>100</sup> English and Scots, and Welsh, cannot escape from being British: is Britishness only keenly felt, however, when it is a version of being English, Scottish or Welsh?

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*The first English empire*, in Seán Duffy (ed.), *The English Isles: Cultural Transmission and Political Conflict in Britain and Ireland, 1100–1500* (Dublin, 2013), pp. 84–6.

<sup>99</sup> R. R. Davies, *Beth yw'r ots gennyf i am – Brydain?* Darlith Goffa Syr Thomas Parry-Williams 1998 (Aberystwyth, 1999); Broun, 'A second England?', p. 86.

<sup>100</sup> T. H. Parry-Williams, 'Hon', in T. Parry (ed.), *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse. Blodeugerdd Rhydychen o Farddoniaeth Gymraeg* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 455–6, originally delivered in the radio programme, *Molawd Cymru* ('In Praise of Wales') on St David's Day 1949, and published in T. H. Parry-Williams, *Ugain o Gerddi* (Aberystwyth, 1949); see R. G. Jones, *T. H. Parry-Williams*, Dawn Dweud (Caerdydd [Cardiff], 1999), pp. 228–9.