

History Lesson: Scotland

The Roman invasion of Britain produced the first written records of what was to become Scotland. The Romans called it Caledonia and the inhabitants were called Picts. Because they were unable to conquer these wild inhabitants, the Romans built walls, like Hadrian's Wall, to keep them out of the Empire. After the Romans left Britain the Scots, a tribe based in Ireland, moved to the lands of the Picts. They lived side by side, sometimes in peace, sometimes not, together with the Northumbrians. When the notorious Vikings started their raids on Scottish and Pictish lands, the Scottish king Kenneth MacAlpine fought the Vikings and united the Scots and the Picts in his effort into what we now call Scotland.

After the Norman Conquest the kingdom of Scotland gradually lost influence to their southern neighbour England. But things got worse – by a stroke of bad luck Alexander III of Scotland fell off cliff riding his horse and not long after his only child heir died. The throne was up for grabs!

Unfortunately, the Scots let Edward I of England make the choice. Edward chose John Balliol. But when Balliol started making decisions that Edward didn't like, Edward marched to Scotland and to take the throne for himself. An Englishman on the throne of Scotland – that can't be good. The first rebellion rose in 1297, led by William Wallace, but was quickly defeated. Robert Bruce took over in 1306 and was victorious. In 1320 the Declaration of Arbroath was drawn up to recognise Scottish independence from England and the first Scottish Parliament met in 1326.

They don't have to wait long for the Second War of Scottish Independence. It started in 1332 by Edward Balliol (son of puppet king John) with the support of the losing side of the last war and the English (they happily supplied a fleet of 88 ships). The war was a struggle and their King David II was captured. The English only released him when the Scots agreed to pay an enormous

ransom. The first payment was on time, the second late, and the third payment was never made. David died childless and this period finally ended when Robert II of the House of Stewart took the throne in 1371.

James IV of Scotland married the sister of Henry VIII in 1503, a union that would unite the two kingdoms later on. After the death of Elizabeth I her cousin James VI took the throne and became James I of England.

Even though James VI and I tried to formally unite both kingdoms during his reign, he had to drop his plans because he lacked support.

Only in 1707 was the Act of Union passed and the Scottish Parliament is abolished.

The English then spent a good part of the eighteenth century banning the Scottish out of the Scots: laws were passed to root out the Gaelic language and to forbid clans, tartans and bagpipes. Wearing tartan was punishable by six months in jail and King George even instructed his soldiers in the Highlands to kill any man on the spot if he was wearing tartan.

But from the beginning of the nineteenth century when Sir Walter Scott started publishing his extremely popular historical novels on Scotland's past, the national identity of the Scots was revived. Many people were interested in that mysterious country and tourists started arriving. Tartan became the fashionable thing to wear and the Scots were now even selling tartans to the English. They never stopped doing that. Their tourist industry was born. Kilts, scarves, mugs, tablecloths – everything in the souvenir shops is tartan.

by Corianne Oosterbaan

