Getting to Know Each Other

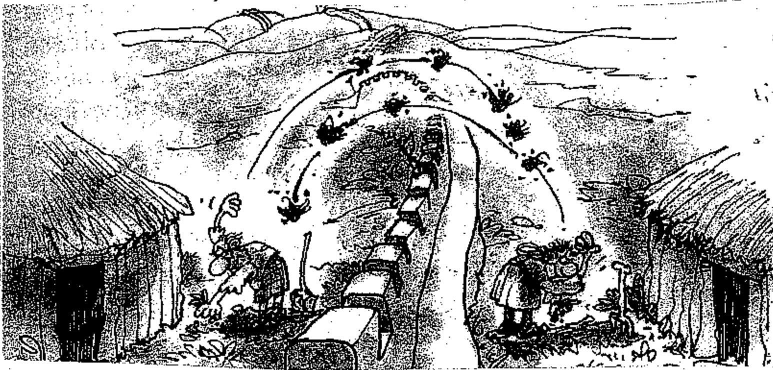
Scotland became a unified kingdom in 1034. England's identity stems from the Norman Conquest of 1066. At certain times before that, it had seemed possible that the Scottish realm would extend as far as the Humber, taking in all of Northumbria and Cumbria. Such a division of the island – Wales apart – would have created two states of comparable size, and led to a history that might have been very different. As it was, the fixing of a frontier from the Solway to the Tweed confirmed an unequal relationship. Scotland was going to have to live with the fact that England was bigger, more populous, and richer. England was also in the way. Sea-lanes to north, east and south-west were open to the Scots, but the land-route south towards the rest of Europe was blocked. The resulting rivalry was well-known on the continent, even rating a line in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In 'Paradiso' the poet comments: 'There shall be seen that pride that quickens thirst, that makes the Scot and the Englishman mad, so that neither can keep within his own bounds.'

For seven hundred years, successive English kings and governments would make use of their geographical position and their wealth to keep the northern kingdom isolated. As a result, Scotland was poorer than it might have been, but also more dangerous and violent as a neighbour. The English maintained the hope of absorbing Scotland into their own realm, or at least of reducing it to a form of tributary status, in which it could do no harm. For long periods of time, they were able to carry on a national life as if Scotland did not exist – something never possible in reverse. Scotland was a curiosity – a strange, somewhat archaic land known to have its own internal complexities of society, custom and language. A fellow-nation in western Christendom it might be, but to those who lived south of the Humber, Scotland was hardly better known than Lithuania – except for one thing. It alone could invade over land. The Scots had nuisance-value for government, and scare-value for individuals, especially those living north of the Humber.

While Scotland could not reasonably hope to overrun and conquer England, it certainly had the power to inflict heavy damage. Furthermore, from an early stage in national history, the Scots made a bond with England's other neighbours, the French. In official and unofficial concert with the Gaels of Ireland, the Scots also helped to delay the full English conquest of that country for centuries (though they had a go themselves in the 14th century). Never once until 1603 did the Scots form any sort of military alliance with the English. Indeed, when the young King James I, an involuntary guest of the English Henry V, was taken on campaign in France in the early 1400s, he found himself facing the army of his own countrymen. It had been sent, in his name, by the government of Scotland to help the French against the English. To England, the continuing independence of Scotland was a threat and a distraction.

Even in 1603, when James VI, great-great-grandson of Henry VII of England (and of fifteen other persons including French, Burgundians and a few Scots), achieved his long-awaited status as James I of England, his native country remained a poor relation. Ironically, having got the Scots' king, the English no longer wanted the Scots' territory. The sting had been drawn from the north, they believed, and they thought that Scotland would be a drain on England's wealth. Political union between the two countries was finally brought about, in controversial circumstances, in 1707. This did not mark the end of hostilities, either. Slightly less than forty years later, an army of Jacobite Highlanders invaded England and got to within 120 miles of London.

The battle of Culloden in 1746, fought not between Scots and English, but between Jacobites and Hanoverians (with many Scots among the latter), marks the end of large-scale armed conflict as a means of resolving political differences within the island of Great Britain. Since then, the inhabitants have increasingly followed a 'British' way of life, in their own Scottish, Welsh or English manner.



But because Britishness is still an outer layer of identity felt in the mind rather than in the heart, the old attitudes and rivalries, formed in a very different context, remain, although they are normally expressed in a very much tamer and more playful form nowadays. Even during the Second World War, local attitudes often prevailed. The story is told of a fishing boat from a Buchan port, which happened to be at Lowestoft in June 1940, when the call went out for all available vessels to help in bringing the retreating British army back across the Channel from Dunkirk. Taking his boat inshore through shot and shell, as close as he could get, and surveying the milling troops on the shore and in the water, the skipper bellowed: 'Onybody here fae Peterheid or the Broch?'

The mass of English people did not know the Scots very well until the mid-eighteenth century. They knew the Welsh better, and there are more jokes and rude stories in old English chap-books about Taffy than there are about Sawney. They knew the Irish better too, and once again Irish jokes precede and greatly outnumber jokes about Scots in the early eighteenth century. But by the end of that century a stereotyped English view of the Scots was firmly in place. However much of a distortion it was, an individual personality emerged cautious with money, curious of accent, logical-minded to the point of perversity. A favourite tale was of the Aberdonian who found a crutch lying in the street, took it home and broke his wife's leg. The Scots did not have a similar caricature of the English. This was partly because the English displayed such variety, from blunt-spoken northerners to their phlegmatic southern country-folk and effervescent Cockneys. As the Scottish writer and politician Christopher Harvie remarks '"Englishness" has always been notoriously hard to define - definitions, anyhow, are not the sort of thing chaps go in for' (from *Travelling Scot*). But there was another reason. The Scots saw the English less in individual terms than as a mass, a vast group, made up of disparate elements and united in only one thing – they were the other side, the opposition, the 'Auld Enemy'.

<u>Auld Enemies</u>, David Ross (2012