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### Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Parliament is a unicameral legislature comprising 129 Members, 73 of whom represent individual constituencies and are elected on a first past the post system; 56 are elected in eight different electoral regions by the additional member system, serving for a four year period. The Queen appoints one Member of the Scottish Parliament, on the nomination of the Parliament, to be First Minister with the convention being that the leader of the party with the largest number of seats is appointed First Minister although any member who can command the confidence of the chamber could conceivably be appointed First Minister. All other Ministers are appointed and dismissed by the First Minister and together they make up the Scottish Government, the executive arm of government.

Since September 2004, the official home of the Scottish Parliament has been a new Scottish Parliament Building (shown in the banner above), in the Holyrood area of Edinburgh. Designed by Catalan architect Enric Miralles, some of the principal features of the complex include leaf-shaped buildings, a grass-roofed branch merging into adjacent parkland and gabion walls formed from the stones of previous buildings. Crow-stepped gables and the upturned boat skylights of the Garden Lobby, complete the unique architecture. Queen Elizabeth II opened the new building on 9 October 2004.



## Scottish Independence

Scotland was an independent country from its foundation in the Early Middle Ages (traditionally 843) until 1707 with the Act of Union. The Acts of Union were two Acts of Parliament: the Union with Scotland Act 1706 passed by the Parliament of England and the Union with England Act passed in 1707 by the Parliament of Scotland. They were put into effect the terms of the Treaty of Union that had been agreed on 22 July 1706, following negotiation between commissioners representing the parliaments of the two countries. The Acts joined the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of Scotland (previously separate states, with separate legislatures but with the same monarch) into a single, united kingdom named "Great Britain"



King James VI and I

The two countries had shared a monarch since the Union of the Crowns in 1603, when King James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne from his double first cousin twice removed, Queen Elizabeth I. Although described as a Union of Crowns, until 1707 there were in fact two separate Crowns resting on the same head (as opposed to the implied creation of a single Crown and a single Kingdom, exemplified by the later Kingdom of Great Britain). There had been three attempts in 1606, 1667, and 1689 to unite the two countries by Acts of Parliament, but it was not until the early 18th century that both political establishments came to support the idea, albeit for different reasons.

The Acts took effect on 1 May 1707. On this date, the Scottish Parliament and the English Parliament united to form the Parliament of Great Britain, based in the Palace of Westminster in London, the home of the English Parliament. Hence, the Acts are referred to as the Union of the Parliaments. On the Union, historian Simon Schama said "What began as a hostile

merger, would end in a full partnership in the most powerful going concern in the world ... it was one of the most astonishing transformations in European history."

The Visit of King George IV to Scotland in 1822 and the subsequent rise in tartanry did much to reinvigorate a sense of a specifically Scottish national identity, which had been split between the Episcopalian and Roman Catholic-dominated Highlands and the Presbyterian-dominated Lowlands since the Glorious Revolution in 1688, and continued during the 18th century through the Jacobite risings, the Act of Proscription and subsequent process of Highland Clearances by landlords.

From the mid-19th century, calls for the devolution of control over Scottish affairs began to be raised, but support for full independence remained limited. The "home rule" movement for a Scottish Assembly was first taken up in 1853 by a body close to the Conservative Party, complaining about the fact that Ireland received more support from the British Government than Scotland and soon began to receive Liberal Party backing.

In 1921, the Scots National League formed as a body primarily based in London seeking Scottish independence, largely influenced by Sinn Féin. They established the *Scots Independent* newspaper in 1926 and in 1928 they helped the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association form the National Party of Scotland, aiming for a separate Scottish state. One of the founders was Hugh MacDiarmid, a poet who had begun promoting a Scottish literature, while others had Labour Party links. It cooperated with the Scottish Party, a home rule organisation formed in 1932 by former members of the Conservative Party, and merged in 1934 to form the Scottish National Party (SNP), which at first supported only home rule but later changed to supporting independence.

Supporters of Scottish independence continued to hold mixed views on the Home Rule movement which included many supporters of union who wanted devolution within the framework of the United Kingdom. Some saw it as a stepping stone to independence, while others wanted to go straight for independence.

Following the SNP's victory in the 2011 election, which gave the party an overall majority in the Scottish Parliament, First Minister Alex Salmond stated his desire to hold a referendum for independence "in the second half of the parliament" which would place it in 2014 or 2015.

Until next month...

## Sláinte