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SCOTLAND AND THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL REFORM MOVEMENT, 1830–1832*

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ABSTRACT. *The popular movement for parliamentary reform after 1830 managed to sustain its campaign for over eighteen months. The popular movement itself has largely been studied at a local level, and undoubtedly local contexts were influential in conditioning responses to reform. Reformers, however, predominantly represented themselves as patriots involved in a pan-British struggle, and this was a key factor in sustaining the mobilization. This article explores the reform movement on its own terms in one ‘national’ context, that of Scotland. If the immediate political context of reform was a spur to unity, the languages and strategies of reformers provided the real glue. Scottish reformers represented themselves as patriots involved in a ‘national movement’ and this article will analyse how the reform movement could act as a solvent for apparently conflicting aspects of Scottish and British national identities. It will argue that reformers deployed a language of ‘unionist-nationalism’ – which coupled demands for greater access to the British constitution with appeals to popular understandings of Scottish history – to call for reform, mobilize support, and maintain the unity of the movement.*

Historians are largely unanimous in seeing the granting of parliamentary reform in 1832 and the mass popular movement that supported it as the children of a unique constellation of circumstances. The fundamental changes made to Britain’s Protestant constitution in 1828 and 1829 gave civil rights to Protestant dissenters and Roman Catholics and split the Tory party that had held the reins of power, largely undisturbed, for forty years. A revolution in France, in 1830, avoided the excesses of the 1790s, and gave the lie to those who argued that political reform and bloody social revolution were but two sides of the same coin. As calls for reform quickened at the end of 1830, the embattled Tory prime minister, the duke of Wellington, stood up in the House of Lords and delivered an ill-advised eulogy on the British constitution, and denied that the people desired any reform.¹

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* I would like to thank Harry Dickinson and Alex Murdoch at the University of Edinburgh, and Miles Taylor at the University of York, for reading and commenting on drafts of this article.

¹ The best account is still Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act* (London, 1973). For a recent account, which is especially good on the parliamentary debates surrounding reform, see Edward Pearce, *Reform: the fight for the 1832 Reform Act* (London, 2003).

While lively debates continue to rage around the intentions of the Whig architects of reform, and the impact (or lack of impact) of the reform measures on the actual operation of the political system, popular politics during the reform crisis are less well served.² This dearth is even more pronounced in Scottish historiography, where work on the reform question has tended to focus on the technical aspects of parliamentary reform and its results.³ One recent exception to this hiatus was Nancy LoPatin's comprehensive study of political unions in England, which made a compelling case for the importance of pressure from without during the reform crisis. An intriguing issue that this work highlighted was the influence of Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic Association on the mass politics that developed in England, something that suggests the importance of adopting a 'four nations' approach to the reform crisis. LoPatin also demonstrated the enormous linguistic and visual appeal of 'union', which, rather than being a simple motif, was in fact a key aim of the popular reform movement.⁴

Perhaps the most powerful way that reformers could maintain this unity was by presenting themselves as a 'national movement', appealing to a language of patriotism that pitted their own actions against the machinations of a narrow faction. While popular politics during the reform crisis have tended to be investigated at a local level, with historians mindful of Asa Briggs's dictum that it was here that were to be found 'the mainsprings of national political action', the complexities of this national action have been left largely unexplored.⁵ While it is undoubtedly true that local conditions were crucial in determining aspects of the response to reform, Linda Colley's justly influential work has underlined that the reform movement was a pan-British one, which justified itself in appealing to the languages of patriotism.⁶ Of course, just as reform had different local contexts, it also had different national contexts, which affected the ways in which reformers made their demands and articulated their patriotism. Reformers made little attempt to address explicitly the ambiguities involved in describing themselves as a 'national' movement. What they said and did, however, suggests that the reform movement cannot be properly understood without investigation of the different national identities and conceptions of patriotism that were brought to bear by its members. By the same token, the very experience of political mobilization on a pan-British scale after 1830 can be seen as impacting on the manner in which national identities were articulated.

² The debate is ably surveyed in Philip Salmon, *Electoral reform at work: local politics and national parties, 1832–1841* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 1–11.

³ See for example William Ferguson, 'The Reform Act (Scotland) of 1832: intention and effect', *Scottish Historical Review*, 45 (1966), pp. 105–14; Michael Dyer, '"Mere detail and machinery": the Great Reform Act and the effects of redistribution on Scottish representation, 1832–1868', *Scottish Historical Review*, 62 (1983), pp. 17–34; idem, *Men of property and intelligence: the Scottish electoral system prior to 1884* (Aberdeen, 1996).

⁴ Nancy D. LoPatin, *Political unions, popular politics and the Great Reform Act of 1832* (London, 1999).

⁵ Asa Briggs, 'The background of the parliamentary reform movement in three English cities, 1830–1832', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 10 (1952), p. 293; F. A. Montgomery, 'Glasgow and the struggle for parliamentary reform', *Scottish Historical Review*, 61 (1982), pp. 154–70.

⁶ Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (London, 1992), pp. 335–6.

This article investigates this relationship between the reform movement and national identities in Scotland. First, it analyses the peculiar context in which a ‘national movement’ became the most promising platform on which to base reform claims and underlines the importance of adopting a ‘four nations’ approach to the reform crisis. Second, it argues that in Scotland reform claims could be couched in the language of ‘popular constitutionalism’, which offered reformers a largely English narrative of liberty. Scottish radicals and reformers embraced a language that conferred a powerful and legitimizing appeal to patriotism and was well suited to a context in which they demanded access to English liberties. Third, it demonstrates that this idiom was remarkably flexible and that episodes from Scottish history could be written into it to render it a more genuinely British discourse. Finally, it investigates how this constitutionalist language interacted with an indigenous tradition that viewed civil and religious liberty as the peculiar achievement of seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterians.

In thus paying close attention to the languages used by reformers and radicals it will argue that the movement in Scotland is best characterized, using Graeme Morton’s phrase, as a ‘unionist-nationalist’ one.⁷ This accurately describes a movement that was ‘unionist’ or ‘British’ in calling for greater access to English liberties in order to remedy the peculiar infirmities of the Scottish political system. At the same time, however, it was ‘nationalist’ or ‘Scottish’ in making this appeal and mobilizing its constituency by using national symbols and traditions. As Morton has demonstrated, by investigating civil society in Scotland we can identify a profound and coherent Scottishness that was used to demand more union, not less, but one that is apt to slip under the radar if we examine Westminster as the only possible locus of ‘successful’ nationalisms.⁸ By adopting this approach the article demonstrates that, while historiographies of reform and of national identities in Britain have developed separately, studying these two phenomena together can lead to fruitful conclusions about both.

I

If historians largely agree on the importance of the sequence of events that preceded parliamentary reform, there has been less engagement with how this ‘constitutional crisis’ was played out in different national contexts. In Scotland, for example, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 could be supported patriotically as a measure that strengthened the Union and ended the technical proscription of members of the Church of Scotland from certain English offices.⁹ More importantly, in Scotland there was a distinctive critique of the unreformed representative system and those indigenous elites who supported it.

⁷ Graeme Morton, *Unionist-nationalism: governing urban Scotland, 1830–1860* (East Linton, 1999).

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49–63, 189–200.

⁹ Gordon Pentland, ‘Radicalism and reform in Scotland, 1820–1833’ (Ph.D. thesis, Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 77–81.

Indeed, shortly after Wellington's famous declaration, William Dundas, MP for Edinburgh, managed to cement his own position and that of the family of which he was a scion, as the *bêtes noires* of Scottish reformers. Following the presentation of petitions calling for the alteration of Scotland's representation, Dundas rose and 'denied that any such feeling existed in Scotland in favour of the ballot. He denied, too, that the people wished the reform of which the honourable member had talked; he absolutely denied that they wanted reform in the Representation; at least that was not the general feeling in Scotland.'¹⁰ Odium was immediately heaped upon this 'inveterate corruptionist', the representative of a family that had been seen as the foremost collectors and distributors of patronage in Scotland since the success of William Pitt's ally, Henry Dundas.¹¹

The Scottish representation to which Dundas referred was a product both of the Union settlement of 1707 and of Scotland's pre-Union history. While the Union had set the number of Scotland's representatives at forty-five, it had left the franchise and other machinery largely intact. It was this pre-Union inheritance on which reformers focused, particularly highlighting two gross abuses. The first of these was the existence of increasing numbers of 'fictitious', 'faggot' or 'paper' voters who threatened to swamp the real owners of the land. These votes were created by legal chicanery, as canny lawyers created transferable qualifications on the strength of the feudal superiority over land rather than the actual ownership of it.¹² The second target of this critique was the election of Scotland's fifteen burgh MPs by delegates from the town councils. These councils themselves perpetuated municipal government in the hands of a narrow oligarchy by electing their own successors and had been the target of burgh reformers since the 1780s.¹³ In being based largely on statutes from 1681 and 1469 respectively, the county and burgh franchises could be denounced as feudal relics from Scotland's pre-Union past, which as all enlightened Scots knew was not distinguished by its surfeit of political liberty.¹⁴

It was these peculiar arrangements that allowed Scottish reformers to push claims based on the singularity of Scotland's position within the Union, and adopt an approach that was dismissive of Scottish politics. For reformers these feudal survivals explained why it was that the forty-five Scottish members were so frequently to be found on the treasury side of divisions, and why they proved so susceptible to crown influence and the lure of government and Indian patronage. While Scotland had gained access to expanded commercial horizons at the

¹⁰ T. C. Hansard, ed., *The parliamentary debates from the year 1803 to the present time* (London, 1812–), 3rd ser. I, 516.

¹¹ *Fife Herald*, 2 Dec. 1830; Michael Fry, *The Dundas despotism* (Edinburgh, 1992).

¹² William Ferguson, 'The electoral system in the Scottish counties before 1832', *Stair Society Miscellany*, 2 (1984), pp. 261–94.

¹³ D. W. Hayton, ed., *The history of parliament: the House of Commons, 1690–1715* (5 vols., Cambridge, 2002), II, pp. 115–42.

¹⁴ Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's past: Scottish Whig historians and the creation of an Anglo-British identity* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 268–80.

Union, her political system had been untouched by English freedoms and so remained essentially foreign and un-British. Indeed for some commentators, it was stricken with a kind of political syphilis ‘contracted by too intimate an intercourse with despotic France’.¹⁵

As such, the Scottish reform critique was markedly different from the calls for reform of the English representation, which could be premised on the notion that rights and representation needed to be *restored*, either in line with a revolution settlement which had become corrupted or had not gone far enough, or in line with an ancient constitution of longer pedigree. Scots were clamouring not for restoration of the rights of Britons, but for access to them, access that had been denied in 1707. In this sense the critique of the political system was comparable to other attempts to reform Scottish institutions such as the long campaign to introduce trial by jury into the ordinary forms of the Court of Session and the remodelling of Scottish universities in the nineteenth century. In both cases historians have demonstrated the contested nature of languages of ‘anglicization’ and ‘assimilation’ and investigated how appeals for English liberties could be reconciled with peculiarly Scottish traditions and demands.¹⁶ Similarly, the arguments pushed by parliamentary reformers were far more complicated than a simple call for assimilation, and reformers could prove very sensitive when they believed justice was not being done to Scotland or when they perceived threats to other Scottish institutions. Nevertheless, the peculiar nature of the Scottish representation bolstered unity among reformers, and radical claims that Whig reforms would disfranchise large numbers of the working classes would receive short shrift in Scotland, whose electorate in 1830 was below 5,000.¹⁷

This perception that Scotland’s representation was the most indefensible in the three kingdoms could even suggest to Sir James Graham, one of the future ‘committee of four’ who drafted the reform legislation, that Scottish parliamentary reform might be attempted first. He encouraged the MP for the Ayr burghs, Thomas Kennedy, in his plan to bring in a Scottish reform motion in October 1830, in the belief that English opposition to reform might be surmounted ‘if we could point to a successful experiment in Scotland, established and in full operation’.¹⁸ In the event, Grey’s ministry sought maximum support across Britain and prepared three separate reform bills for England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland, which it initially intended to pilot through parliament together. The parliamentary context remains crucial in any explanation of the unity of the reform movement. The Whig government’s reasonably prompt preparation of three significant measures of reform that might command broad support provided an

¹⁵ *Glasgow Chronicle*, 13 Sept. 1823.

¹⁶ Nicholas Phillipson, *The Scottish Whigs and the reform of the Court of Session, 1785–1830* (Edinburgh, 1990); R. D. Anderson, *Education and opportunity in Victorian Scotland* (Oxford, 1983).

¹⁷ Norman Gash, *Politics in the age of Peel: a study in the technique of parliamentary representation, 1830–1850* (London, 1953), p. 36.

¹⁸ Henry Cockburn, *Letters chiefly connected with the affairs of Scotland* (London, 1874), pp. 240–1, Sir James Graham to T. F. Kennedy, 26 Sept. 1830.

invaluable focus for reformers. While reformers wished to see parliament rendered a more effective body, they needed to appeal to a ministry and, after the election of 1831, a House of Commons that would sponsor such changes.

Even the petitions for reform that came into parliament before the bill had been introduced, and the sentiments expressed at meetings, often pointedly avoided suggesting any specific plan of reform. The opportunities for disagreement, however, were clearly there. The aims of petitions calling for 'radical reform', even if they avoided defining this objective, were clearly at odds with the aims of those that simply sought the representation of the 'property and intelligence' of Scotland.¹⁹ In the press and at meetings, however, reformers were often exhorted simply to support the bill. Those who would have a greater degree of reform were encouraged to follow the approach adopted by Robert Wallace of Kelly, who declared in May 1831: 'I can see no good reason why the elective franchise should not be extended further than is intended by the Bill, but in the mean time, as a Radical Reformer, I will declare for the whole and nothing but the Bill.'²⁰ Nor was this very practical approach restricted to an upper- and middle-class leadership. John Cant, one of the committee of operatives in Aberdeen, for example, demonstrated the primacy of expediency over justice in a defence of his actions at a reform meeting:

I certainly did vote against universal suffrage in St. George's Hall, but you should have stated also, that I expressed my opinion at the same time to be, that every free-born Briton should have a right to vote, although expediency rendered such a right unfit to be extended in the meantime.²¹

Once the bill had been announced, differences could be subsumed under a general support for 'the bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill'. There seems to have been little resistance to this approach in Scotland. Even the Paisley Reform Society, founded to press for universal suffrage and the secret ballot, saw motions that called for the reform bill to be declared inadequate heavily outvoted, as members 'begged of the meeting to be united'.²² Its president, Archibald Stewart, did write to the MP for the Glasgow burghs, Joseph Dixon, to push him to try to achieve a £5 urban franchise for Scotland on the eminently sensible grounds that the proposed measure would create very small constituencies in the less populous burghs. He did so, however, only because 'there is no risk of the popular measure brought forward by his Majesty's Ministers being defeated' and he told Dixon 'that this should not be done if there be any risk of losing the bill thereby'.²³ This

¹⁹ 'Reform petitions from Scotland', Durham University Library, Grey Papers, GRE/B46/1/71.

²⁰ *Glasgow Evening Post*, 14 May 1831.

²¹ John Cant, *Reform and Joseph Hume: a letter to the working classes of Aberdeen, containing strictures on the Aberdeen Observer, relative to the editor's extraordinary treatment of the author* (Aberdeen, 1831), pp. 17–18; *Aberdeen Chronicle*, 7 May 1831.

²² Archibald Leitch, 'Radicalism in Paisley, 1830–1848: and its economic, political and cultural background' (M.Litt. thesis, Glasgow, 1993), pp. 54–62.

²³ Archibald Stewart to Joseph Dixon MP [printed], National Archives of Scotland, Cunningham-Graham Muniments, GD22/158/160.

context was critical in rendering the reform movement one that primarily engaged in a struggle for the bill, and thus sidelined discussions about the more abstract issues concerned with political reform.

If the parliamentary context was auspicious, the creation of a national movement and the maintenance of unity was also helped by access to the press. Scotland's broad liberal press, through national publications such as *The Scotsman* and provincial papers such as the *Dundee Advertiser*, played a crucial role in sustaining the campaign and illustrating to reformers that they were engaged in a truly national struggle.²⁴ Newspapers encouraged this sense of collective endeavour by offering their readers reports of reform activity from around the country, frequently following *The Scotsman* and grouping such reports under the title 'The National Movement'.²⁵ This unity was further bolstered by the organizational methods adopted by reformers. Issues besides political reform had inspired extra-parliamentary mobilization in Scotland after 1815 and had contributed to the development of associational politics in which single claims were increasingly made at public meetings and processions and through named and frequently nation-wide associations.²⁶ Given the restrictions placed on extra-parliamentary politics after 1815, it would be hard not to agree with Charles Tilly's conclusion that it was not until the 1820s and particularly the reform movement that mass demonstrations were finally confirmed as legal.²⁷ Indeed, much of the repertoire of popular politics and the mass platform were definitively established only during this period. Even such well-established constitutional rights as petitioning underwent a change, with an increased emphasis on numbers as the practice became less restricted to incorporated bodies.²⁸

This process was given a huge boost by the success of national associational politics in the shape of the Catholic Association in Ireland, which had a direct influence on the development of political unions.²⁹ This model certainly had an impact on Scottish reformers, who consciously identified the benefits of Daniel O'Connell's approach to the expression of popular political demands, regardless of their opinions on the specific aims of the Irish Catholics. The Catholic Association had demonstrated just how effective a constitutional association, advocating one issue, and commanding enough support to claim to represent the nation, could be in achieving its goals.³⁰ *The Scotsman* was immediately impressed with the results of the movement for emancipation, and praised the 'wonderful

²⁴ R. M. W. Cowan, *The newspaper in Scotland: a study of its first expansion* (Glasgow, 1946), pp. 33–48.

²⁵ *The Scotsman*, 24 Sept. 1831; *Aberdeen Chronicle*, 22 Oct. 1831; *Fife Herald*, 27 Oct. 1831; Colley, *Britons*, p. 343.

²⁶ Pentland, 'Radicalism and reform', pp. 30–59.

²⁷ Charles Tilly, *Popular contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), p. 61; see also Joseph Hamburger, *James Mill and the art of revolution* (New Haven, 1963), ch. 1.

²⁸ Colin Leys, 'Petitioning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *Political Studies*, 3 (1955), pp. 45–64.

²⁹ LoPatin, *Political unions*, pp. 7, 22; Carlos Flick, *The Birmingham political union and the movements for reform in Britain, 1830–1839* (Hamden, 1978), pp. 17–18.

³⁰ Fergus O'Ferrall, *Catholic emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the birth of Irish democracy* (Dublin, 1985), pp. 270–3; Tilly, *Popular contention*, pp. 321–3.

organization' of the Catholics, which had helped form a perfect union that could place ministers under the 'moral necessity' of conceding its claims. The newspaper went on to suggest that those who sought reform of any description should 'treasure up the lesson for their future guidance'.³¹ The lesson, it seems, had been swiftly assimilated by some and, immediately following O'Connell's election victory in County Clare in 1828, a regular correspondent had suggested that prominent reformers like Lord John Russell ought to institute a 'Protestant National Rent' to return pro-reform MPs to parliament and 'paralyze [sic] the *Dukery*'.³² Reformers, who in any case had been stressing the absolute necessity of union, frequently referred after 1830 to the Catholic Association as a demonstration of this principle. The one reservation that some reformers did have, and which perhaps prevented reference being made to the precedent more often, was that the ideal union would be one of educated men. The *Herald to the Trades' Advocate* in a series of articles entitled 'On the best mode of bettering the condition of the working classes' pointedly highlighted both the benefits and the dangers of the Irish model:

Innumerable instances could be advanced to prove the power of Union, even where knowledge was but scantily distributed among the mass. Witness that of the Catholic Association, which acted more from the impulse of feeling than reason; but it is evident that the leaders, who concentrated this union of unintelligent matter, could have rendered its members the instruments of effecting a less honourable design; and, therefore, knowledge among the great body, is essential to conserve, and perpetuate a beneficial union.³³

In spite of such scepticism, the influence of events in Ireland quickly became physically apparent in places. For example, in July 1829 the Paisley Reformers' Society was established and followed the Irish model. Focused on the single issue of parliamentary reform, it resolved to correspond with reformers throughout Britain for the purpose of advancing a 'general union' and declared that each member ought to pay a contribution of at least one penny at every meeting.³⁴ It was this repertoire of mass public meetings and processions, named associations, and petitions that was to characterize the reform movement in Scotland.

The very nature of this mode of mobilization bolstered the unity of the movement. Instead of functioning as fora for debate and discussion, mass meetings, petitions, processions, and political unions were more often carefully choreographed displays of patriotism and unity. When meetings were announced, they were frequently restricted to a very specific aim, usually to express support for ministers, the bill, and the king, or to petition the Commons or the Lords. They were thus susceptible to a reasonably large degree of control, and vaguely worded petitions and addresses could be carried by acclamation rather than by a debate followed by a formal vote. One such display was the Grand Procession of the Trades on the occasion of the king's coronation, organized by Glasgow

³¹ *The Scotsman*, 4 Feb. 1829.

³² *Ibid.*, 30 July 1828.

³³ *Herald to the Trades' Advocate*, 1 Jan. 1831.

³⁴ *The Scotsman*, 29 July 1829; Leitch, 'Radicalism in Paisley', pp. 51-3.

operatives in September 1831. The coronation provided an ideal opportunity for operatives to display their loyalty and flaunt their patriotism. The address to the king in favour of reform was to be held up on the hustings as a signal that the leaders of the various trades and districts should hold up theirs. Next, according to the organizers, ‘a sky-rocket will follow, and the address will pass with a universal shout, three times repeated, which will astonish the soul of every contemptible boroughmonger and foe to reform, and wither their hearts within them’. Having passed the petitions in a similar manner, the regimented trades, all carrying their banners, would march off behind the committee of arrangements, who would bear aloft the ‘fasces’, a bound bundle of rods originally symbolic of Roman republican unity, with the pendant motto ‘Union is Strength’.³⁵ Much of the effect of the reform movement was intended to be visual, and the fasces were only one among a number of symbols employed by reformers to underline their unity. Indeed, perhaps the most frequently used symbol, intertwined roses, shamrock and thistles, was a revealing articulation of the self-consciously British nature of the reform movement. Reformers could also express their unity by wearing cockades or ribbons and, indeed, the committee of the Glasgow trades advised everyone to wear a scarf that had been manufactured bearing the word ‘reform’ at processions.³⁶ Such expressions underlined the purpose of meetings and processions, which were not deliberative assemblies but rather public displays of united will.³⁷

II

If the context for a patriotic and ‘national’ reform movement was auspicious, the peculiarities of the Scottish political system might suggest that finding a suitable language with which to mobilize reformers throughout Britain would be problematic. As will be demonstrated below, however, this very distinctiveness actually encouraged Scottish reformers to appeal to a language that focused on the history of the struggle for English liberty. Indeed, even the constitutional tactics of petitioning and meeting can be seen as an integral part of the essentially English idiom in which reformers and radicals demanded political reform.

Historians of English politics have become increasingly interested in the idea of a paradigmatic political language centred on contesting the ‘real meaning’ of the constitution. This language, which appealed for political reform on the basis of historical precedents enshrined in a narrative of English liberty, appeared in Thompson but remained in the background as an essentially pre-industrial political language, which was necessarily usurped by the universalist ideology bequeathed to the world by the American and French revolutions and eventually a critique based on class rather than historical precedent.³⁸ More recent approaches have put popular constitutionalism back at the centre of considerations

³⁵ *Design and order of the grand procession* (Glasgow, 1831), pp. 8–9.

³⁶ *Herald to the Trades’ Advocate*, 30 Apr. 1831.

³⁷ Tilly, *Popular contention*, p. 7.

³⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (London, 1963), ch. 4.

of nineteenth-century politics, one influential interpretation identifying it as the 'master narrative' of English politics until at least 1867.³⁹ In the work of John Belchem and James Epstein this language is closely related to strategies of political action, and Epstein suggests that the constitutionalist idiom was powerful not only because it prescribed what might be said by radicals but also what might be done by them.⁴⁰ According to Belchem, popular constitutionalism, which was 'excitingly presented' and 'readily understood', was thus the only language capable of achieving mass mobilization, and radicals sought to legitimize their aims and their activities in 'popular concepts of the constitution and of the historical struggle for its implementation'.⁴¹ This language's continuity into the age of Chartism was further bolstered by its remarkable flexibility, which allowed it to incorporate and be re-enforced by new ideologies and aims, rather than being superseded by them.⁴² The appeal to the constitution was not only a flexible way in which to articulate political demands but also provided radicals with a powerful appeal to patriotism, an appeal not offered by a Paineite approach to reform.⁴³

Most of the work on popular constitutionalism has remained largely focused on English popular politics, without investigating how narratives of the constitution and the contest over it might have differed in other contexts.⁴⁴ Popular constitutionalism, at least as it was used by John Wilkes and his followers in the 1760s, was not just English but was positively anti-Scottish, and so we might expect it to have played very differently with radicals north of the border.⁴⁵ Given the British nature of the reform movement of 1830 to 1832 and its preoccupation with the language and symbolism of national unity, such issues can fruitfully be explored in the peculiar Scottish context. Historians of Scottish popular politics have implicitly recognized the importance of constitutionalist arguments, but few have investigated how this language was used in the Scottish context to create a mass movement and to demand political reform.⁴⁶

³⁹ James Vernon, *Politics and the people: a study in English political culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 6-10.

⁴⁰ James A. Epstein, 'The constitutional idiom: radical reasoning, rhetoric and action in early nineteenth-century England', *Journal of Social History*, 23 (1990), pp. 558-63.

⁴¹ John Belchem, 'Republicanism, popular constitutionalism and the radical platform in early nineteenth-century England', *Social History*, 6 (1981), p. 6.

⁴² John Belchem, 'Orator' Hunt: *Henry Hunt and English working class radicalism* (Oxford, 1985); Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Rethinking Chartism', in his *Languages of class: studies in English working class history, 1832-1982* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 90-178. ⁴³ Epstein, 'Constitutional idiom', pp. 566-7.

⁴⁴ Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian nation: class, race, gender and the reform act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 37-49.

⁴⁵ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 105-17; idem, 'Radical patriotism in eighteenth-century England', in Raphael Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: the making and unmaking of British national identity* (3 vols., London, 1989), 1, pp. 171-7.

⁴⁶ J. D. Brims, 'The Scottish "Jacobins", Scottish nationalism and the British union', in R. A. Mason, ed., *Scotland and England, 1286-1815* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 247-65; Catriona M. M. Macdonald, '"Their laurels wither'd, and their name forgot": women and the Scottish radical tradition', in Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay, eds., *Scottish history: the power of the past* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 225-52.

The popular constitutionalist demand for political reform remained largely based on an essentially English eighteenth-century critique of the state. Its origins lay in the sustained ‘patriot Whig’ and ‘Country’ opposition to the Whig supremacy up to 1760. This opposition concentrated on representing Walpole and his supporters as traitors to ‘Revolution principles’. The ministers’ use of royal patronage, or, as it was more generally demonized, the spectre of ‘old corruption’, threatened the maintenance of a crucial constitutional maxim, the balanced constitution of king, Lords and Commons.⁴⁷ The fear of arbitrary rule, and especially rule without parliament, which had been pervasive under the Stuarts, was thus replaced in the half century after 1688 by anxiety about the methods and influence being used by the king and his ministers to rule through parliament. Crown patronage and executive corruption, it was argued, rendered parliament inadequate as the guardian of public liberties. This critique encouraged reforming initiatives from the opposition aimed at eliminating corruption but not at broadening the basis of political participation. Place and pension bills sought to remove royal and ministerial dependants from the Commons, while demands for shorter parliaments aimed to secure its independence by ensuring a frequency of elections that not even the deep pockets of old corruption could afford. Central to the debate was the contest over the ‘real’ meaning of the constitution, and particularly over interpretations of what had been achieved in 1688–9. The opposition to Walpole, by contesting ‘revolution principles’ and calling for reform, provided radicals and reformers after 1760 with a critique which might be used out-of-doors to push for parliamentary reform that might secure the independence of the Commons, not only through the elimination of corruption, but eventually by the broadening of political participation.⁴⁸

As Kathleen Wilson has argued, this development took place in a period when elite sponsorship of politics was decreasing and new forms of political organization that would characterize the reform movement were being developed. This not only encouraged more radical interpretations of the achievements of the Glorious Revolution, but also helped to render the critique an essentially anti-aristocratic one.⁴⁹ The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars gave sustenance to this ideology. A rapidly expanding national debt and the perceived assault on long-cherished English liberties ensured that the notion of a corrupt oligarchy of aristocrats, boroughmongers, placemen, pensioners, and fundholders, plundering the nation by levying extortionate taxation made possible by its stranglehold on political power, became the language used to demand reform by the mass movement that developed after 1815.⁵⁰ Although new idioms and critiques were developed during and after the 1790s, extra-parliamentary politics

⁴⁷ H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and property: political ideology in eighteenth-century Britain* (London, 1977), ch. 4.

⁴⁸ H. T. Dickinson, ‘The eighteenth-century debate on the “Glorious Revolution”’, *History*, 61 (1976), pp. 28–45.

⁴⁹ Kathleen Wilson, ‘Inventing revolution: 1688 and eighteenth-century popular politics’, *Journal of British Studies*, 28 (1989), pp. 349–86.

⁵⁰ Belchem, ‘*Orator*’ *Hunt*, ch. 2.

in England remained dominated by the appeal to precedents contained in an essentially English narrative of liberty. This provided radicals and reformers with an incredible range of precedents to which to appeal, although it was the constitutional wrangling of the seventeenth century and particularly the Glorious Revolution that continued to dominate.

First and foremost, such an approach involved an appeal to history, and to the history of England's constitution in particular. As J. A. Murray instructed those at a huge reform meeting in Edinburgh's King's Park in May 1832: 'Look back at past times, and they will enable you to look forward to the future.'⁵¹ Scottish radicals were no strangers to this language and, indeed, it had been prominent in the agitations of the 1790s and again after 1815.⁵² In the context of 1830 to 1832 it provided radicals and reformers with a shared language that allowed for mass mobilization and the expression of patriotism. Interpretations of the Glorious Revolution remained the central plank of the popular constitutionalist approach. In evoking it as a justification for political reform there was little consistency. To more conservative reformers, reform should aim at no more than restoring the constitution to its original purity, that is, as it was established in 1688–9. A speaker at an Edinburgh county meeting in April 1831 could thus claim 1688 as 'the creed by which we try the orthodoxy of reform'.⁵³ So too could the *Loyal Reformers' Gazette* base a call for reform on the principle that 'all must admit that there has been a change from what was the constitution, that is, the right of voting is not now in those to whom it was originally designed to be given'.⁵⁴ The Glorious Revolution also featured among those banners carried by reformers and could be a powerful symbol of the continuity of political traditions. James Paterson noted, among 120 flags in a procession at Kilmarnock in May 1831, one belonging to the old Lords of Kilmarnock, which 'had been unfurled at the Revolution, and bore the date 1689'.⁵⁵

A more radical interpretation of history was a prominent feature of reform arguments. This held that the settlement of 1688–9 had not, in fact, gone far enough in giving 'the people' control of the House of Commons. Of course, exactly who 'the people' that ought to be directly represented were remained a hotly contested issue. By this more radical narrative the Glorious Revolution had not established a perfect and immutable constitution but rather principles, in particular those of popular sovereignty and the ultimate right to resist tyranny. In making this claim radicals could appeal to the English narrative of liberty, and point to an indigenous tradition that might justify resistance in the present.⁵⁶ By this reading, the Revolution was simply, according to Robert Jamieson, the

⁵¹ *The Scotsman*, 16 May 1832.

⁵² Gordon Pentland, 'Patriotism, universalism and the Scottish conventions, 1792–1794', *History*, 89 (2004), pp. 347–51; William M. Roach, 'Radical reform movements in Scotland from 1815 to 1822 with particular reference to events in the west of Scotland' (Ph.D. thesis, Glasgow, 1970), pp. 37–44.

⁵³ *The Scotsman*, 4 May 1831.

⁵⁴ *Loyal Reformers' Gazette*, 14 May 1831.

⁵⁵ James Paterson, *Autobiographical reminiscences* (Glasgow, 1871), p. 103.

⁵⁶ Wilson, 'Inventing revolution', p. 380.

Edinburgh advocate and political unionist, ‘the first edition’ of the reform bill.⁵⁷ Professor Bell was of the same mind, rejecting the notion of 1688–9 as a ‘final settlement of government by code’ and attributing to it the establishment of ‘one great principle – that no sovereign power was paramount to the rights of the people’.⁵⁸ Following the rejection of the reform bill the idea that the Glorious Revolution had established the right of the people to resist tyranny was frequently expressed, as it was by John Stoddart at another meeting of the Edinburgh Political Union in October 1831. He reminded the peers that they, in conjunction with the people, had deprived James II of his crown and had placed the present royal family on the throne, thus confirming that ‘the principle of resistance is a part of our constitution’.⁵⁹

By making claims on behalf of ‘the people’, Scottish radicals and reformers were also attempting to capture the high ground of patriotism. Hugh Cunningham has explored the links between politics and patriotism during this period. He suggested that the radical language of patriotism that had developed in the second half of the eighteenth century was challenged by governments, which ‘unambiguously reclaimed much of the vocabulary of patriotism and freedom during the war years’.⁶⁰ It was through the language of popular constitutionalism that reformers managed to recapture it, after 1815, through episodes like the Queen Caroline affair and particularly during the reform bill crisis.⁶¹ This was certainly bolstered by the perceived support of the king for the reform measures of his ministers. Until May 1832 William IV was seen as on the side of ‘the people’. He gained great popularity with the reform movement for his dissolution of parliament following the passing of General Gascoyne’s motion, which had effectively stymied the ministry’s first reform schemes, at the end of April 1831. The Renfrewshire Political Union, for example, met ‘to address their most gracious and patriotic King, with the most fervent loyalty and deep gratitude for an act of extraordinary patriotism – in dissolving a Parliament which had shown itself hostile to the liberties of the people’.⁶² Notions of the ‘just king’ were a prominent trope in popular constitutionalist language, allowing for the conflation of loyalist, patriotic, and radical sentiment, and so his support for, or at least acquiescence in, reform was a major boon to the movement.⁶³ As Linda Colley has pointed out, the ability to portray the people as being supported by a ‘patriotic’ king and his ‘patriotic’ ministers ensured that reformers could ultimately represent themselves successfully as the ‘nation’ and thus reduce their enemies, rhetorically, to a faction.⁶⁴ This was the purport of the cartouche banner of the *Loyal Reformers’ Gazette*, the most widely circulated of the Scottish unstamped

⁵⁷ *The Scotsman*, 24 Dec. 1831.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 24 Sept. 1831.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 Oct. 1831.

⁶⁰ Hugh Cunningham, ‘The language of patriotism’, in Samuel, ed., *Patriotism*, 1, p. 65.

⁶¹ Macdonald, ‘“Their laurels wither’d”’, pp. 234–44.

⁶² *Glasgow Evening Post*, 7 May 1831.

⁶³ Vernon, *Politics and the people*, pp. 319–20; Christopher A. Whatley, ‘Royal day, people’s day: the monarch’s birthday in Scotland, c. 1660–1860’, in Roger Mason and Norman Macdougall, eds., *People and power in Scotland: essays in honour of T. C. Smout* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 183.

⁶⁴ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 339–40.

papers, which read 'The King and the People'. Above this was a crown and beneath it a wreath of roses, thistles, and shamrocks. Similarly, the Glasgow Trades' political dinner in January 1831 delivered the traditional radical toast to 'the people, the only legitimate source of power' and immediately followed it by a rendering of 'Rule Britannia' and a toast to 'The King, the centre of the people's power'.⁶⁵

The king was thus afforded a pivotal role in the narrative of British liberty. The inevitable parallels were drawn, even by Scottish reformers, with King Alfred and one speaker at a meeting of the Dundee Political Union claimed: 'The King himself is a Reformer, and no such title could perhaps be assigned to any preceding king since the days of Alfred.'⁶⁶ *The Scotsman* informed its readers in October 1831 that *Alfred*, the work of the popular Irish playwright, James Sheridan Knowles, which had premiered at Drury Lane in April 1831, was taking to the stage in Scotland 'for our appreciation of a patriotic kingly character'.⁶⁷ Knowles's *Alfred*, who 'lives only for his people' and addressed them as 'the drops of blood that make your King', was explicitly linked to William IV by the radical Thomas Atkinson, when he wrote a verse prologue to the edition published in Glasgow.⁶⁸ Whereas the previous work of Knowles had offered the spectacle of liberty won through tyrannicide, this present work:

Doth picture forth a still more noble thing
Than patriot only – even a PATRIOT KING! –
Such as we now in living lustre see,
As WILLIAM wills each subject shall be free.⁶⁹

More pointedly, the parallels with William's Dutch namesake, who had granted Britain her last great charter of liberty, were exploited. In Robert Jamieson's speech at a meeting of the Edinburgh Political Union in December 1831, William III appeared as the 'sleeping hero', returned from the grave to observe the people in their attempts to regain lost rights:

What, have these lazy Britons been 130 years idly content with that portion of their rights which we were able to procure for them, or rather have they not slovenly let much of them slip away; for many boroughs which I left flourishing communities are now dwindled into mere manufactures of unrepresenting M.P.'s [sic]. They are surely unworthy of all that has been done for them, but I see how it is, (he would add) they can do nothing without William, they must even trust to William again, and well for them that my mantle is descended on my namesake and successor.⁷⁰

These rhetorical attempts to appropriate the king for the cause of the people could be carried even further. At a public reform meeting on Glasgow Green, in

⁶⁵ *Herald to the Trades' Advocate*, 8 Jan. 1831.

⁶⁶ *The Scotsman*, 13 Aug. 1831.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1831.

⁶⁸ J. S. Knowles, *Alfred the Great; or, the patriot king: a drama, in five acts* (Glasgow, 1831), p. 83.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷⁰ *The Scotsman*, 24 Dec. 1831; Christopher Hill, 'The Norman yoke', in John Saville, ed., *Democracy and the labour movement: essays in honour of Dona Torr* (London, 1954), pp. 11–14.

October 1830, John McArthur moved that the operatives petition the ‘patriot King’ who would certainly hear their pleas because ‘he was almost an operative like themselves (applause), who had risen from a midshipman through all the gradations of rank, in the navy, to be an admiral; and through progressions till he had arrived to be their King’.⁷¹

In relying on episodes from the English narrative of liberty from the Anglo-Saxons, through Magna Carta, to the Civil War and Revolution, the discourse of popular constitutionalism comes across as an essentially English ideology offering the appeal to an English patriotism. Scottish radicals and reformers, however, were comfortable in appealing to this language. As has been suggested, the Scottish approach to reform was often couched in terms of gaining access to English liberties that had been denied. Thus, Scottish reformers consistently represented the bill as ‘the MAGNA CHARTA of the People of Scotland’, and as a measure that finally secured them access to the much-vaunted benefits of the British constitution.⁷² The notion that Scotland had never had a constitution was a common theme in the Scottish movement for reform. Reform would allow her access to English liberty and thus the bill was of far more value to Scotland than to England, or as J. M. Bell put it at a meeting of the Renfrewshire Political Union: ‘if it was a boon to England it would be a thousand times more so to Scotland. (Cheers.) She had no free institutions to renovate; but Reform would create liberty where it found only bondage.’⁷³

Indeed, reformers frequently espoused the interpretation pushed by some Whigs in parliament that any liberty Scotland did have at present was an indirect result of her union with England. This view was expressed at an Edinburgh reform meeting: ‘she [Scotland] had nothing free but her admirable church, and the practical liberty which she did enjoy was maintained only by the reflected operation of the free institutions of England’.⁷⁴ The operatives of Glasgow were even more explicit in their appeal to the electors and elected of England and Ireland, which appeared in the *Herald to the Trades’ Advocate*. It began by questioning:

Are you aware that there is such a country as Scotland? that it forms a considerable portion of the British Empire? that her people have an equal claim to all the political rights which you now possess, and those which you are about to wrest from the death-grasp of a fallen faction?

With no MPs who actually represented the people of Scotland, while they might offer help especially ‘were physical force necessary’, they looked to England and Ireland and ‘by your efforts alone hope to be rescued from their moral and political bondage’.⁷⁵ In appealing for what was perceived as English constitutional liberty, Scottish reformers were provided with a ready language in which

⁷¹ *Herald to the Trades’ Advocate*, 9 Oct. 1830.

⁷³ *Glasgow Evening Post*, 7 May 1831.

⁷⁵ *Herald to the Trades’ Advocate*, 26 May 1831.

⁷² *Reformers’ Gazette*, 21 July 1832.

⁷⁴ *The Scotsman*, 4 May 1831.

to make their political demands. As well as highlighting Magna Charta, they made frequent references to those heroes of the English struggle for liberty in the seventeenth century, identified in the usual manner by Daniel McAulay, at a meeting of the inhabitants of Johnstone, as Hampden who 'fought on the field' and Sidney who 'died on the scaffold'.⁷⁶

III

If Scots could readily embrace this essentially English narrative of the constitution, it is difficult to discern how it could have produced a sufficiently immediate and melodramatic appeal in the Scottish context. Seldom, however, did Scottish radicals and reformers deploy this English narrative alone. More often aspects of the Scottish past were written into the English narrative to lend it a broader appeal. The ambiguities and flexibility of English constitutionalism meant it could interact with Scottish notions of popular sovereignty, which could themselves be rewritten to support constitutionalist claims.⁷⁷

This was, of course, very effective when Scottish reformers referred to the history of liberty over the preceding forty years, a shared British experience of popular politics. The notion of a continuity of reforming endeavour from the 1790s was prominent and, on the passing of the first reading of the bill, *The Scotsman* announced the 'END OF THE FORTY YEARS WAR!' between the House of Commons and the people, and chronologically listed the significant points of this struggle throughout Great Britain. This included the trials of Thomas Muir and Thomas Fyshe Palmer in 1793, the Irish insurrection of 1798, the Peterloo massacre of 1819 and the Scottish burgh reform movement of 1819 to 1822.⁷⁸ The essential continuity of this struggle was also highlighted by the veteran reformer John Pattison who adorned his house during the illumination of March 1831 with a banner reading:

After wandering forty years,
Mid persecution, taunts and jeers,
The promised land at length appears
To bless our weary eyes.⁷⁹

The continuity of Scottish radicalism was physically manifested by these veterans of reform, who were particularly fêted at public meetings. When the trades of Alloa gathered to celebrate the passing of reform, for example, it was Mr Kidd 'an old reformer of 1793' who was chosen to receive a silk banner from Colonel Abercromby.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid., 19 Feb. 1831.

⁷⁷ Colin Kidd, 'North Britishness and the nature of eighteenth-century British patriotisms', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), pp. 361–82; Macdonald, "'Their laurels wither'd'", pp. 229–30.

⁷⁸ *The Scotsman*, 27 Apr. 1831.

⁷⁹ Peter Mackenzie, *Reminiscences of Glasgow and the west of Scotland* (2 vols., Glasgow, 1875), I, p. 250.

⁸⁰ *Alloa reform jubilee: extracted from the Stirling Journal of 23 Aug. 1832*, p. 1.

Significantly the history provided by *The Scotsman* pointedly omitted the so-called ‘Radical War’ of 1820, when thousands of workers in the west of Scotland struck work in obedience to a proclamation purporting to be the production of a provisional government. The minority of radicals who took up arms were decisively beaten and either executed or transported. The one thorough investigation of the events of 1820 by Ellis and Mac A’Ghobhainn portrayed an insurrection nourished by bitter class conflict and vigorous Scottish nationalism, though more convincing assessments avoid nationalist bias and view the rising as futile and prosecuted by a tiny minority.⁸¹ That the ‘Radical War’ was omitted from *The Scotsman*’s narrative is something that would support W. Hamish Fraser’s assertion that the reformers of the 1830s sought to sanitize the history of Scottish radicalism, using the events of 1816 to 1820 ‘not to paint parallels but contrasts’.⁸²

There was, however, a more positive goal to this attempt to re-write the history of Scottish radicalism and integrate it into the history of liberty. Peter Mackenzie, the editor of the *Loyal Reformers’ Gazette*, was at the forefront of this, and published editions dealing with the trials of Thomas Muir and others transported in the 1790s and the martyrs of 1820, Andrew Hardie and John Baird.⁸³ He was also the driving force behind the monument erected to Baird and Hardie at Thrushgrove in 1832, and at the same time he consulted Joseph Hume about erecting a monument to the martyrs of the 1790s.⁸⁴ Certainly, through his publications, Mackenzie sought to convey an interpretation of the post-war radicals as having been seduced into violence by spies and *agents-provocateurs*. In so doing, however, he emphasized the precedent provided by the Glasgow reform meeting at Thrushgrove in 1816, which was one of constitutional protest and co-operation. At a dinner commemorating this event, held in October 1831, Robert Wallace of Kelly also chose to emphasize the continuity of the Scottish reform movement since Thrushgrove: ‘At that meeting the good seed had been sown, which had produced such good effects, as even exceeded the wonderful produce of the present harvest.’⁸⁵ Indeed, even in 1838, with the beginning of a new period of radical agitation, James Turner, the tobacconist on whose fields the meeting had been held, reminded an audience of Glasgow radicals, met to greet the Birmingham political unionist Thomas Attwood, that the 1816 meeting had dictated ‘the correct mode of behaviour to all reform meetings since then’.⁸⁶ The Scottish experience of reform did contain valuable precedents for the reformers

⁸¹ P. B. Ellis and S. Mac A’Ghobhainn, *The Scottish insurrection of 1820* (London, 1970); Malcolm I. Thomis and Peter Holt, *Threats of revolution in Britain, 1789–1848* (London, 1977), pp. 65–84; F. K. Donnelly, ‘The Scottish rising of 1820: a re-interpretation’, *Scottish Tradition*, 6 (1976), pp. 27–37.

⁸² W. Hamish Fraser, *Conflict and class: Scottish workers, 1700–1838* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 139.

⁸³ Peter Mackenzie, *The life of Thomas Muir, esq., advocate, younger of Huntershill, near Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1831); idem, *An exposure of the spy system pursued in Glasgow during the years 1816–20* (Glasgow, 1832); idem, *The trial of James Wilson for high treason, with an account of his execution at Glasgow, September, 1820* (Glasgow, 1832).

⁸⁴ Joseph Hume to Peter Mackenzie, 24 Oct. 1832, William Patrick Library, Kirkintilloch, Peter Mackenzie papers, GD185/4/10.

⁸⁵ *Loyal Reformers’ Gazette*, 3 Nov. 1831.

⁸⁶ Cited in Alexander Wilson, *The chartist movement in Scotland* (Manchester, 1970), p. 50.

of 1830 to 1832, but these were to be found in the manly constitutionalism of mass meetings rather than in the rash physical actions of deluded individuals.

The appeal to history was by no means restricted to those events still within living memory. Scottish history provided reformers with libertarian episodes and ideas that could be written into the English narrative in order to make their claims more genuinely British. When Scots cited Hampden and Sidney as the libertarians *par excellence* of English history, these figures were frequently accompanied by Bruce and Wallace, not as anti-English heroes, but as Scottish figures who had bravely resisted tyranny and thus contributed to the cause of British liberty. McAulay's speech at Johnstone, for example, saw his reference to Hampden and Sidney sandwiched between evocations of Bannockburn and the 'great and glorious Wallace'.⁸⁷ Indeed, more than one historian has pointed out that the song 'Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled' had become something of a radical anthem on both sides of the border.⁸⁸ In Glasgow, radicals called for the plan to erect a monument to Wallace, which had apparently fallen into abeyance after 1819, to be renewed now 'that his name is in every one's mouth ... to show that we are indeed the friends to that liberty we so much covet at the present moment'.⁸⁹ Radicals on the west coast of Scotland never tired of praising the reforming efforts of Robert Wallace of Kelly, and his name provided them with a ready means of expressing both their support and their patriotism. One fictional letter in the *Herald to the Trades' Advocate*, for example, from 'Ebenezer Clyde' to his son 'Simeon', requested:

tell him that an old man, a native of that land which his illustrious ancestor redeemed with his blood, looks proudly on the political struggle of the present day, in the fond anticipation that in the many attempts that may be made to repair the broken constitution of our native country, the helping hand of another Wallace will not be wanting.⁹⁰

Robert Bruce could provide a fitting and indigenous parallel for a movement which set great store by the support of the monarch, and notions of the just king were celebrated in a play about Bruce, which saw him comparing his situation to that of King Alfred.⁹¹ It also provided an opportunity to celebrate the reforming credentials of another namesake and supposed ancestor, and the play was dedicated to Sir Michael Bruce, an Aberdeenshire reform leader, in view of 'his patriotic zeal, and indefatigable exertion, in promoting a great national measure, which hath conferred on the people their just rights'.⁹² Bruce's victory at Bannockburn was frequently mentioned and at every reform meeting in Jedburgh a flag that was said to have been captured from the English during the battle was displayed.⁹³ In mobilizing their history in this fashion, Scots could conceive of Bruce and Wallace as having defended liberty, and in doing so making

⁸⁷ *Herald to the Trades' Advocate*, 19 Feb. 1831.

⁸⁸ Colley, *Britons*, p. 338; T. C. Smout, *A century of the Scottish people, 1830-1950* (London, 1987), p. 237.

⁸⁹ *Reformers' Gazette*, 2 June 1832.

⁹⁰ *Herald to the Trades' Advocate*, 22 Jan. 1831.

⁹¹ David Anderson, *King Robert Bruce, or the battle of Bannockburn: an historical play in five acts* (Aberdeen, 1833), p. 23.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹³ *The Scotsman*, 19 Sept. 1964.

possible Scotland's free entry into the Union, the full benefits of which they now claimed.⁹⁴

The flexibility of the constitutionalist language allowed it to interact with a whole range of traditions. Even the Jacobite legacy could be written into this history of liberty and, at political demonstrations between 1832 and 1873, the Edinburgh joiners carried a banner depicting a fully armed Highlander with the inscription 'TURN THE BLUE BONNETS WHA CAN'.⁹⁵ No longer a threat to liberty or the Union, the Jacobites could be used as a symbol of steadfastness and possible physical resistance and, in the anonymous radical poem *Remarks on reform*, the Jacobite host at Culloden are cast from the same libertarian mould as Wallace and 'fought like bold heroes their rights to maintain'.⁹⁶ Peter Mackenzie later recalled how at dinners held in memory of Charles James Fox: 'No music was so much relished on these occasions as the fine old Jacobite tunes of by-gone days, and they had of course a *political* signification or stamina about them.'⁹⁷ In this context Mackenzie certainly meant that such songs provided an idiom in which to criticize the Hanoverian state. Rivalling 'Scots wha hae' for prominence during the reform crisis, however, were songs based on the old Jacobite ballad 'Up and waur them a', Willie', which was appropriated as peculiarly suitable to a loyal reform movement which claimed William IV as its leader.⁹⁸

The predominant language of the Scottish reform movement was this popular constitutionalist approach whereby reformers utilized episodes from both English and Scottish history in order to place themselves within the narrative of British liberty. Such an approach offered a strong appeal to patriotism and the reform movement could claim 'WE ARE THE NATION, and the nation's might is ours.'⁹⁹ This allowed reformers to represent their enemies as an essentially foreign faction, hostile to the liberties of the British people. On his perceived abandonment of reform, the king's German wife was immediately vilified by the popular movement as a powerful and conspiratorial woman, who had been plotting to achieve this end. As well as exploiting the common trope of the hen-pecked husband ruled by the will of a woman, opposition to the queen also highlighted her foreignness, as did the Rev. Andrew Marshall when he highlighted 'those un-English and unpatriotic counsels which swayed the royal mind'.¹⁰⁰ It was certainly the kind of theme beloved by squib writers, one of whom penned 'The king wants no tyrants', which dwelt on Wellington's plotting with 'foreign powers', and offered a typical image of a domineering, trouser-wearing, foreign queen:

She is a tyrant in her place,
She wears the breeks sae braw, Willie;

⁹⁴ Graeme Morton, *William Wallace man and myth* (Stroud, 2001), chs. 6–7; idem, *Unionist-nationalism*, pp. 176–84.

⁹⁵ Helen Clark, *Raise the banners high: the city of Edinburgh's banner collection* (Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 56–7.

⁹⁶ *Remarks on reform* (n.p., n.d.).

⁹⁷ Mackenzie, *Reminiscences*, I, p. 186.

⁹⁸ *The Scotsman*, 8 Jan. 1831.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 Sept. 1831.

¹⁰⁰ A. Marshall, *Meditations for the reform jubilee* (Glasgow, 1832), p. 11.

She's surely of some foreign race –
We'll banish her awa', Willie.¹⁰¹

IV

Patriotism was not, of course, an entirely secular phenomenon.¹⁰² As James Vernon has pointed out, the success of any political language which could not utilize the tropes of popular Christianity was likely to be limited.¹⁰³ Indeed, we might suggest that the religious aspect of patriotism provided the most immediate and exciting narrative to which reformers might appeal. During the reform agitation this was most apparent in the numerous references made to the Covenanters and the other shared heritage of most of Scotland's Protestant churches in the seventeenth century. This idiom was, potentially, an impediment to the kind of unity reformers sought to achieve and had provoked disputes within the Scottish radical movement of the 1790s.¹⁰⁴ The prevalence of references to covenanting history during the reform agitation, however, suggests that we ought to analyse precisely how this language was used and how it related to popular constitutionalist demands for reform.

Institutionally, covenanting survived in those churches that had been formed from the secession of 1733, and most prominently in the small Reformed Presbyterian Church, which had immediately rejected the Revolution settlement.¹⁰⁵ While few reformers advanced explicitly religious justifications for political reform, it is apparent that radical Scottish Presbyterianism, with its political theology of justified resistance, provided an alternative idiom to constitutionalism, and one that was an important element in the Scottish national identity.¹⁰⁶ This critique was fundamental and radical in utterly rejecting the compromises inherent in the settlement of the Scottish church and state in 1689–90 and particularly the subsequent imposition of lay patronage on the Church of Scotland in 1712.¹⁰⁷ Such views had been aired frequently in the early nineteenth century, as clergymen, partly in response to what they perceived of as Sir Walter Scott's disparaging published views of the seventeenth-century martyrs, engaged in

¹⁰¹ Peter B. Freshwater, *Sons of Scotia, raise your voice: early nineteenth-century Scottish broadsides from a collection in Edinburgh University library* (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 43.

¹⁰² John Wolfe, *God and greater Britain: religion and national life in Britain and Ireland, 1843–1945* (London, 1994), pp. 1–19.

¹⁰³ Vernon, *Politics and the people*, pp. 317–19.

¹⁰⁴ J. D. Brims, 'The covenanting tradition and Scottish radicalism in the 1790s', in Terry Brotherstone, ed., *Covenant, charter, and party: traditions of revolt and protest in modern Scottish history* (Aberdeen, 1989), pp. 50–62.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Scottish Church, 1688–1843: the age of the moderates* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 38–44; Matthew Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: its origin and history, 1680–1876* (Paisley, 1893), pp. 81–106, 159–72.

¹⁰⁶ Richard J. Finlay, 'Keeping the Covenant: Scottish national identity', in T. M. Devine and J. R. Young, eds., *Eighteenth-century Scotland: new perspectives* (East Linton, 1999), pp. 121–33.

¹⁰⁷ Colin Kidd, 'Conditional Britons: the Scots covenanting tradition and the eighteenth-century British state', *English Historical Review*, 117 (2002), pp. 1147–76.

debate to defend and extol the virtues of the Covenanters.¹⁰⁸ The enduring appeal of the seventeenth-century Presbyterians was particularly apparent in the vogue for erecting monuments to persecuted Covenanters and renewing those monuments and gravestones that already existed.¹⁰⁹ A sermon for a collection for one such monument in Dumfries was delivered by William Symington in June 1831, and attracted a congregation of between 3,000 and 4,000.¹¹⁰ Symington concerned himself with defending the principles for which the martyrs had died, which he interpreted as ‘*the sole headship of Christ over the church ... and its consequent independence of all political control*’ and ‘*the right of resisting such civil rulers as usurp the prerogatives of Christ, oppress the church, tyrannise the people, and lend the weight of their authority and example to the subversion of equity*’.¹¹¹ In protecting these principles, the martyrs deserved the respect of posterity, but Symington was also quite clear that they could provide lessons: ‘We are not, it is true, placed in precisely the same circumstances as they: but still the resemblance is sufficiently strong to enable us to profit by the pattern they have set before us.’ While, at present, they were not actively persecuted by tyrannous rulers, they were certainly threatened by ‘the monstrous absurdities of passive obedience and non-resistance’ being taught by the clergy. Much of Symington’s concern, however, was for ‘the countenance extended to Popery by men of all ranks – from the late strange enactments, by which there has been given to the abettors of that bloody and intriguing system control over the interests of this reformed, covenanted, protestant land’.¹¹²

This fundamental critique of the British state and its institutions, however, could not find favour in a broad movement that ostentatiously proclaimed its attachment to the constitution, and it did not form the basis for the public pronouncements of reformers. Religion was potentially divisive, and reform was prosecuted not only by numerous Protestants who would not agree with Symington’s stance on church establishments, but also by Roman Catholics.¹¹³ Aspects of this idiom, however, could inform radical languages while remaining consistent with professions of constitutionalism. Symington had also celebrated the less controversial qualities of those martyrs who, he claimed, had acted to

¹⁰⁸ Thomas McCrie, *A vindication of the Scottish Covenanters: consisting of a review of the first series of the ‘Tales of my landlord’, extracted from the Christian Instructor for 1817* (Glasgow, 1824); Peter Macindoe, *A vindication of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, from various charges preferred against her on the subject of civil government* (Edinburgh, 1830); Douglas M. Murray, ‘Martyrs or madmen? The Covenanters, Sir Walter Scott and Dr Thomas McCrie’, *Innes Review*, 43 (1992), pp. 166–75.

¹⁰⁹ J. H. Thomson, *The martyr graves of Scotland* (Edinburgh, n.d.); A. B. Todd, *Covenanting pilgrimages and studies* (Edinburgh, n.d.); Thorbjörn Campbell, *Standing witnesses: a guide to the Scottish Covenanters and their memorials* (Edinburgh, 1996).

¹¹⁰ [William Symington], ‘To the editor of the Christian Instructor’, *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, 2nd ser., 1 (1832), p. 514.

¹¹¹ William Symington, *The character and claims of the Scottish martyrs: a discourse, delivered in St Michael’s church-yard, Dumfries, Thursday, June 16th, 1831* (Dumfries, 1831), pp. 25–7 (italics in the original).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 34–9.

¹¹³ John F. McCaffrey, ‘Irish immigrants and radical movements in the west of Scotland in the early nineteenth century’, *Innes Review*, 39 (1988), pp. 46–7.

protect not only a covenanted nation and religious liberty, 'but in defence of our civil liberties and possessions'. Moreover, they had not been 'visionary fanatics', but men of varying descriptions who opposed 'a corrupt hierarchy' and in so doing they had demonstrated 'a patriotic attachment to the good of their country'.¹¹⁴ And it was in this way, as defenders of religious and civil liberty and exemplary contributors to British freedom, that Covenanters were used most frequently by the reform movement. Indeed, this interpretation of the Covenanters was paralleled in nineteenth-century Presbyterian historiography, which consistently linked them to the long struggle for civil and religious liberty. Significantly, as recent work has suggested, this historiography was also very explicit that 'the Presbyterians were fighting for what became *British* liberties, not just Scottish ones'.¹¹⁵

This representation of the Covenanters during the reform agitation could be effected very simply by placing them alongside other key figures in the narrative of British liberty. For example, the Reformed preacher, the Rev. William Anderson, used his coronation sermon, a symbolically significant occasion, to denounce the principles of passive obedience and non-resistance. He used Romans 13.1, a common scriptural justification for submission to the state and civil authority, as his text: 'Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God.'¹¹⁶ Anderson lambasted the absurdity of the principles derived from this text with reference not only to Knox and the Covenanters, but also to 'patriotic' English figures, whose deeds were inconsistent with notions of passive obedience and non-resistance: 'a dogma which would pronounce the damnation of Wallace and Knox, of Hampden and Milton, of Russell and Sydney, of all the Covenanters who fought and bled for our liberties, yea, almost of every patriot whose name blazons the page of history'.¹¹⁷ In thus presenting Scottish Presbyterian history as part of the long struggle for civil and religious liberty reformers had a rich tradition with which they could identify their own campaign. Covenanters and the 'killing time' were an integral part of local tradition and folk history in many places in lowland Scotland and these traditions could be used to provide analogues for the reform agitation. In 1832, when a monument to two martyrs shot in 1685 was renewed in Strathaven, an inscription was added to the pedestal highlighting the link: 'Renewed by the Reformers of Avondale at the passing of the Reform Bill – ANNO DOMINI. 1832.'¹¹⁸ These kinds of associations provided an immediate and emotive rather than a remote narrative of liberty and helped to render covenanting an effective means of mass mobilization. Local traditions

¹¹⁴ Symington, *Character and claims of the Scottish martyrs*, pp. 8, 19.

¹¹⁵ Neil Forsyth, 'Presbyterian historians and the Scottish invention of British liberty', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 34 (2004), p. 96.

¹¹⁶ Romans 13.1; Donald C. Smith, *Passive obedience and prophetic protest: social criticism in the Scottish church, 1830–1945* (New York, 1987), pp. 63–5.

¹¹⁷ *Loyal Reformers' Gazette*, 7 Jan. 1832.

¹¹⁸ Thomson, *Martyr graves*, pp. 249–50.

could, for example, help families with a covenanting heritage to legitimize their leadership and, at the first election after the Reform Act, the reform candidate for the Kilmarnock burghs, Captain John Dunlop, carried the old well-worn flag reputed to have been with the laird of Dunlop at the battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Brig. James Paterson, the editor of the *Kilmarnock Chronicle*, identified the political potential that lay in deploying such symbols: ‘The effect produced on the people of Kilmarnock – who still remembered the covenanting times of their ancestors – as the procession passed along the main streets, was exciting in the extreme.’¹¹⁹ Wherever the material culture of covenanting survived, it seems to have been similarly utilized in the cause of political reform. For example, at a procession in Bathgate, in May 1831, a blood-stained flag and three swords from the battles of Bothwell Brig and Drumclog in 1679 were carried and, when the resolution of the crisis of May 1832 was celebrated in Renfrewshire ‘the victorious flag of Drumclog was proudly displayed’.¹²⁰

Scotland’s seventeenth-century religious history could also provide more pointed lessons with which Scots might compare and contrast their own actions. The radical who designed the grand coronation procession of the Glasgow trades, that conscious display of unity discussed above, penned an aside when he had written that the band for the occasion was to come from Bothwell. Inspired by his forefathers’ experiences he drew a salutary lesson from the battle, which underlined the principal aim of the reform movement:

Bothwell! what heart stirring associations in the sound! carrying us back to a period when our stern forefathers were struggling for religious and civil liberty ... May we, while revering the motives that led our sturdy sires to the field of strife, avoid falling into those petty jars and heartburning disputes that lost them the ‘Battle of BOTHWELL BRIG’.¹²¹

Similarly, in September 1831, *The Scotsman* encouraged people to sign the Edinburgh petition with the same single-minded determination that had seen ‘men travelling fifty miles on foot, in the depth of winter, to sign the Solemn League and Covenant’.¹²²

Covenanting remained a controversial basis for a mass movement, and it was more readily appealed to when the rejection of the reform bill saw a radicalization of the language used to demand reform. In providing a tradition of justified resistance to tyranny and support for a libertarian struggle, it proved immediately relevant in this more fraught context. The sheriff-substitute of Lanarkshire, William Aiton, had recognized the mobilizing potential of covenanting in 1820 when he wrote an account of a radical meeting that had been held in 1815 at the site of the Covenanters’ victory at Drumclog. Aiton roundly accused Whigs and political demagogues of using the Covenanters in ‘calling out the simple peasantry, and illiterate mechanics, to join them in their political

¹¹⁹ Paterson, *Autobiographical reminiscences*, p. 111.

¹²⁰ *The Scotsman*, 25 May 1831; *Reformers’ Gazette*, 19 May 1832.

¹²¹ *Design and order of the grand procession*, p. 14.

¹²² *The Scotsman*, 25 May and 24 Sept. 1831.

manoeuvres'.¹²³ In this scathing attack, Aiton recognized the emotive and instructive appeal of the Covenanters, which lay in the fact that 'they set themselves up against the Government and constituted authorities of their time, and were sometimes successful in their opposition'.¹²⁴ The exploitation of such traditions was indeed crucial to a mode of politics where 'the intimation of impending violence, reinforced by the evocation of the deeds of the glorious ancestors' formed a large part of the appeal, particularly at moments of perceived crisis.¹²⁵ It was only after the rejection of the reform bill that John Maxwell addressed the Lanarkshire county meeting in trenchant terms: 'The people of Scotland, more than any other in the Three Kingdoms, were interested in the Bill; and they would stand for it in the spirit of the old Covenanters, who were not afraid to speak their sentiments, whether they were in fetters, or sword in hand.'¹²⁶ Indeed, the fact that the bishops had been instrumental in seeing the bill defeated in the House of Lords made the evocation of Scotland's covenanting heritage peculiarly relevant. A Glaswegian radical, David Walker, having asserted the people's right to abolish the House of Lords at a meeting on Glasgow Green in October, was outspoken in his comment:

The Bishops had nothing to do with Scotland. Their forefathers had fought to get rid of them; and would they, their descendants, allow them to rule over them – (No) – the same glens which their forefathers frequented still existed, and they could go to these glens too, and oppose the Bishops as they had done. Then lift up your covenant, and swear with me, that the Bishops shall have nothing to do with us or our bill.¹²⁷

At this moment of crisis, Walker demonstrated just how explicitly understandings of the Scottish past could inform the words and deeds of reformers after 1830. To him, reform of parliament and covenanting were part of the same struggle against the same enemies.

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Scottish reformers had thus succeeded in creating a patriotic consensus, which was flexible enough to allow for considerable diversity. If this appeal to the nation had received vital succour from a reform ministry and a monarch perceived to be in favour of reform, it was the common resort to a language that made of politics a means of contesting the past, present, and future of the British constitution that largely facilitated the creation of such a broad coalition. There were numerous other idioms in which Scots might demand reform, but the appeal to the past was the best means not only of mobilizing large numbers of Scots to participate in an exciting mode of politics but also of maintaining the unity of reformers. The

¹²³ William Aiton, *A history of the reencounter at Drumclog, and battle at Bothwell Bridge, in the month of June 1679, with an account of what is correct and what is fictitious in the 'Tales of my landlord', respecting these engagements, and reflections on political subjects* (Hamilton, 1821), p. 123.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹²⁵ Belchem, 'Republicanism', p. 11.

¹²⁶ *Loyal Reformers' Gazette*, 19 Nov. 1831.

¹²⁷ *The Scotsman*, 26 Oct. 1831.

appeal to a history of British liberty complemented and reinforced those organizational strategies that had developed after 1815 and aimed at mass mobilization. The appeal to history also offered ample scope for radicalization. Depending on what historic episode was chosen and how it was interpreted, radicals could make claims for popular resistance to tyranny or the right to arm in defence of liberty. To do so on the basis of a reading of British history was a far less controversial approach than to claim these rights in the abstract as ones bequeathed by nature alone and belonging to all men at all times.

By investigating the reform movement on its own terms, as ‘national’, we can ask new questions of what remains a fundamental episode in British politics. If the nature of their representation saw Scots claiming access to essentially English liberties and using an English history of liberty to do so, they were not content with this appeal alone. Instead Scottish reformers and radicals wrote aspects of Scottish history and native ideas of popular sovereignty into the story of the British constitution. The use of Scottish history, and Presbyterian history in particular, had disintegrative potential, but was deployed by reformers to place themselves in a narrative of liberty that was more genuinely British. Such episodes were not only used symbolically but had practical political content in terms of what they allowed reformers to *do*. Popular traditions about Bruce, Wallace, and the Covenanters were closely related to the strategies of radicals and reformers, and particularly when the king was perceived to have abandoned reform indigenous narratives of resistance and struggle helped to sustain mobilization. Indeed, in appealing for political reform as a means of obtaining access to the constitution and completing the Union of 1707, reformers’ language typifies that ‘unionist-nationalism’ which Graeme Morton has identified in Scottish civil society after 1830.¹²⁸ In the heated political context of 1830 to 1832 it provided the reform movement with an ideal language with which to oppose anti-reformers, who sought to claim a Scottish patriotism based on the success and consequent immutability of the Union settlement.¹²⁹ And so, if Scottish national identity was being ‘remade’ in the early nineteenth century – into one that called for closer union and used traditional national symbols to do so – then there is good reason to assign the parliamentary reform movement a prominent place in the process. The agitation for political reform represented Scotland’s first mass unionist-nationalist movement, and involved large numbers of people in appealing for the ‘rights of Britons’ and mobilizing and reinterpreting their own history to underline their patriotism and legitimize their actions. The novelty and success of what reformers had achieved was well summed up in *The Scotsman*: ‘We call it a National movement, for it is more truly universal and national than any one which has ever been witnessed in the kingdom.’¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Morton, *Unionist-nationalism*, pp. 20–1, 189–200.

¹²⁹ Gordon Pentland, ‘The debate on Scottish parliamentary reform, 1830–1832’, *Scottish Historical Review* (forthcoming).

¹³⁰ *The Scotsman*, 24 Sept. 1831.