
FOUR NATIONS APPROACHES TO MODERN 'BRITISH' HISTORY
A (Dis)united Kingdom?
Edited by
NAOMI LLOYD-JONES
MARGARET M. SCULL

Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History

Naomi Lloyd-Jones · Margaret M. Scull
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Preface and Acknowledgements

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London, UK

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Editors and Contributors

About the Editors

Naomi Lloyd-Jones is Stipendiary Lecturer in History at Hertford College, University of Oxford. Naomi will submit her AHRC-funded Ph.D. for examination at King's College London in late 2017. Her research utilises a four nations framework and digital humanities techniques to explore public and party-political reactions to Irish Home Rule in England, Scotland and Wales. She is also interested in the emergence of a parallel Scottish Home Rule movement. Naomi's article, 'Liberalism, Scottish Nationalism and the Home Rule crisis, c.1886–93' (*English Historical Review*, 130, 539, August 2014, 862–887) won the Royal Historical Society's 2015 David Berry prize for Scottish history. 'Liberal Unionism and Political Representation in Wales, c.1886–93' appeared in *Historical Research* (88, 241, August 2015, 482–507), and her work has also featured in *History Today* magazine. Naomi is Assistant Editor at http://www.margaretthatcher.org, which digitises the papers of the former Prime Minister and her government, and is research assistant on an Open University project on British monetary policy, 1970–1990.

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2016 she published a year-long series with *The Irish Times* on the same subject. Her article 'The Catholic Church and the Hunger Strikes of Terence MacSwiney and Bobby Sands' appeared in *Irish Political Studies* (31, 2, 2016, 282–299).

The editors, Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret M. Scull, are co-founders and organisers of the Four Nations History Network, which aims to connect researchers using four nations methodologies and studying England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

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Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century (1998), both shortlisted for the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Literary Prize, and *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: The Isle of Slaves* (2009). His most recent publication is *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland* (2016), edited with Richard Bourke. He is currently completing work on *Irish Political Writings I*, a volume for the new Cambridge Edition of the works of Jonathan Swift.

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Martin Wright lectures in history at Cardiff University. Originally from the English Midlands, he was educated at the University of Wales and has lived in Wales for all of his adult life. During the 1990s and early 2000s he worked at Aberystwyth University's Centre for Continuing Education, teaching history in the communities of mid-Wales and serving as the centre's manager. He now lectures at Cardiff University, where he completed his Ph.D. in 2011. His main interests are the history of socialism and radicalism, and the history of Wales. He is the author of *Wales and Socialism: Political Culture and National Identity Before the Great War* (2016).

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PART I

Methodology

CHAPTER 1

A New Plea for an Old Subject? Four Nations History for the Modern Period

Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret M. Scull

J.G.A. Pocock's famed clarion call for the recovery of the concept of 'British history' and the inauguration of a 'new subject' is now more than forty years old. Pocock lamented a lack of 'histories of Britain' and the dominance of what grievously amounted to 'histories of England', in which the Welsh, Scottish and Irish appeared 'when, and only when, their doings assume[d] power to disturb the tenor of English politics.' This unevenness was compounded by the parallel writing of 'histories of Wales, Scotland [and] Ireland' as 'separate enterprises' within 'separate historiographical traditions', encountered by 'limited and fragmented

The authors are grateful to Joel Barnes, Matthew Glencross, Andrew Harrison and Paul Readman for reading drafts of this chapter.

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publics'.[1] He would later describe Anglocentric and Anglophobic historiographies as two sides of the same coin, which, if fused, would afford but a synthetic imitation of a true British history.[2] For Pocock, within its more immediate cartographical confines, 'British history' denoted 'the historiography of no single nation but of a problematic and uncompleted experiment in the creation and interaction of several nations.'[3] His challenge was most comprehensively taken up in the 1990s by early modernists who emphasised the need to place given points in history into their 'British' context, to tease out 'forgotten' dimensions and establish more complete narratives. The edited collections generated by a flurry of symposia led to the emergence of what David Cannadine has called a 'school of self-consciously "British" historians'.[4] The Pocockian inheritance was conspicuous in these historians' vocabulary: where Pocock's suggested prototype had been for a 'pluralist approach',[5] proponents of the 'New British History' strove to achieve 'a multiperspectival history' and 'an *holistic* or *organic* account' of events in the isles.[6] This was, at last, the '"Britishing" of British history', as Keith Robbins deftly described it.[7]

The aim of this collection is not to reinvent the wheel that Pocock crafted and the New British historians spun. The 'British' 'turn' has already taken place. Crucially, it problematised a field of enquiry. It confronted our taxonomical presuppositions and encouraged us to think critically about the criteria with which we establish the geographical breadth and margins of our studies, prompting both the decentring of historical accounts and the refashioning of a 'British' metanarrative. 'British history' was to an extent a subject interposed between the discrete histories of England, Ireland, Scotland and (to a far lesser degree) Wales, designed primarily to interrogate the dynamics of their coming together. It was at the same time an endeavour to establish an overarching frame of reference with which to describe a shared existence. The New British History replaced neither the practices of 'Scottish', 'Welsh' and 'Irish' histories nor Anglocentric readings of critical episodes and phenomena in which the non-English parts of the United Kingdom are unhelpfully, and often inaccurately, partitioned into a 'Celtic fringe'.[8] It has indeed been accused of discounting their dissimilarities and of sustaining a focus on a suspiciously 'English'-looking core. It took nearly twenty years for Pocock's historiographical and semantic experiment to be embraced with any urgency or consistency, and a further two decades for a collection such as this, with an explicit emphasis on the modern period, to emerge. The stop–start nature of this field of historical enquiry can in part be attributed to fatigue: by the early twenty-first century, the debate over the New

British History and its nomenclatures had in one sense come full circle, culminating as it had begun, in a dispute over how *not* to write history.

Does this collection therefore represent a new plea for an old subject? In a sense, yes: fundamentally, its intention is not to totalise the histories of these islands, but to explore how polycentric narratives can be achieved. However, it also embodies a desire for a new 'new' subject: a practicable, sustainable 'four nations history' for the modern period. The disjuncture between modern 'British' and 'national' narratives is alive and well, with too few bodies of work concerned with both their multifaceted interplays and distinctive experiences. With the exception of an underutilised collection edited by Sean Connolly,[9] the application of Pocock's entreaty has been directed principally at understanding the mechanics of early modern state construction. If it is to be successful, 'British' history must be occupied by more than the making of Britain. Nor should four nations history by extension concentrate on how, once made, the state was maintained and administered. This collection is less a study of integration and more one of interactions, across and within national boundaries. It does not discount the importance of state formation but rather proposes fresh angles from which this process can be considered. The shift in periodisation makes new themes available, necessitates the asking of different questions, and presents distinct problems for the conceptualisation and analysis of that period's history. This collection encompasses the cultural, social, economic, intellectual and (low) political history of the United Kingdom in the period between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among other aims, we aspire to rebalance what Colin Kidd has called the 'lopsidedness' of the New British History,[10] in which Wales occupied but a tangential position. That said, we do not seek to impose a symmetry upon the United Kingdom. Although it has its shortcomings, by its very terminology, 'four nations' is less 'wholeistic'[11] and perceptibly more pluralistic than 'British history'.

If we are to construct genuinely polycentric narratives, there is not, and cannot be, a one-size-fits-all model. It is for this reason that we encounter a semantic minefield when attempting to define our subject. It is ironic that the absence of a categorical label—and indeed category of study—is indicative of precisely why we need multidimensional histories. The Union project, as Robert Colls has put it, resulted in 'a set of British peoples with a sense of their own nationality but never quite sure of how to talk about themselves as a collective of nations',[12] an awkwardness that somehow feels familiarly 'British'. As editors, we use the umbrella term 'four nations'—popularised by Hugh Kearney—as a heuristic device, in

recognition of the separate national histories and in acknowledgement of the complications arising from the fact of their forming a larger polity, represented in and governed by a united parliament, for the majority of the period covered by this collection. If Pocock envisaged 'British history' as archipelagic and diasporic in scope,[13] 'four nations' more firmly situates the parameters of study within the United Kingdom.

We view 'four nations history' as a methodology—a perspective with which our contributors agree to varying extents. From Kearney's point of view, 'The label "Four Nations" history is a reminder that the United Kingdom is a union of peoples'.[14] To this we may add that it is a prompt that we should recognise heterogeneities within the composite state. While its history is more than the sum of its parts, they should be considered in conjunction. The term's (un)satisfactory tidiness invites us to question how we ought to conceptualise the relationships between the nations and their peoples, which were in turns linear, binary and parallel. This is not to suggest that the study of one, two or even three nations affords but an abridged history; it is instead an attempt to offer inclusive narratives of coexisting nationalities and ethnicities. Their histories shaped and informed one another's—the extent to which they shared a 'British' history is interrogated, rather than assumed, throughout the pages of this collection. A 'four nations' history can be comparative, employed to study points of convergence, interaction and conflict, but it should also be capable of acknowledging that developments in the one were not always present in the other(s), and of asking why. In Raphael Samuel's words, such history 'widens the scope of scholarly enquiry', 'puts in question some of our more cocksure generalisations' and 'encourages us to think more geographically'.[15]

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Pocock used the term 'British history' to 'denote the plural history of a group of cultures situated along an Anglo-Celtic frontier and marked by an increasing English political and cultural domination', while emphasising that the 'fact of a hegemony does not alter the fact of a plurality.'[16] If English history was the 'old subject', the new was sensibly presumed to consist of, and be familiar with (but not to synthesise), 'three modes of historical consciousness': English, Scottish and Irish.[17] And yet, in acknowledging that such history was 'remarkably difficult to write in other than English terms',[18] Pocock's examples of how a 'British history'

might be realised certainly revolved around how the English polity infiltrated neighbouring societies and how the political and socio-cultural entities within its orbit responded to successive attempts at integration. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the New British History comprised two main thrusts: comparative and supra-narrative. For Joanna Innes, the benefits of comparison were threefold: it presented the opportunity to highlight 'broader patterns of similarity and difference in the governance societies of the four nations'; it could enhance 'our knowledge of the form and character of intellectual and cultural exchange'; and, finally, it provided us 'with a richer context in which to assess and interpret the choices made in each.'[19] Moreover, as Rees Davies surmised, 'developments which are taken for granted in one country might appear much more surprising—and therefore demanding of an explanation—if we are forced to contrast them with what happened (or did not happen) elsewhere'.[20] This should in turn facilitate something of a 'supra-national perspective',[21] wherein we are confronted almost with a fifth nation: 'Britain'. If successful, this history would serve as a superstructure for understanding how these collectivities operated as a whole; the process of contextualisation is inadequate if conceived of as centralistic with the introduction of peripheral 'add-ons' [22] when convenient.

Perhaps the most powerful critique of the New British History is the allegation that it amounted to little more than an Anglocentric narrative redux. It could be suggested that the field was ultimately tracing the origins of institutions, structures and concepts that would come to be understood as 'English', such as the state, parliament and constitution. Keith M. Brown, for instance, has warned that this 'risks taking us back to a more sophisticated version of old-fashioned anglocentric constitutional history.'[23] Nicholas Canny, one of its foremost critics, has remarked that 'much of what appears as "new British history" is nothing but "old English history" in "Three-Kingdoms" clothing.'[24] Ironically, with state formation its 'unifying problematic',[25] the New British History could thereby stand accused of perpetuating the very practice Pocock denounced. If Ian McBride's chapter in this collection is correct and Pocock's project comprised 'a more subversive agenda' that entailed 'provincialising England', then the New British History could be said to have done the opposite: recentralising England and further peripheralising its neighbours.

That said, the roots of this historiographical axis cannot be said to be uniquely English. As Kidd has observed, the '*de facto* continuity of the

historic English parliament validated the ethnocentric notion that Britain's political heritage resided in the history of English institutions.'[26] However, in tracing the strange death of Scotland's whig historical ideology, Kidd has illustrated how intellectual and literary elites reconciled themselves to Union and its attendant identity by essentially de-historicising Scotland's own past.[27] This did not involve the wholesale eradication of a 'Scottish national consciousness' but rather the creation of 'a national historical consensus' along what Kidd elegantly describes as 'Anglo-British contours'.[28] In turn, it can be argued that the nineteenth-century phenomenon of 'Unionist-nationalism' involved less a repositioning of this consciousness along Scoto-British lines and more the logical maturation of 'the Anglo-British suggestion that post-1707 Scots participated in the freedoms won in the long course of English history.'[29] Unionist-nationalism was thus a means of articulating Scotland's contribution to a partnership-based relationship, without recourse to the resistance-based, defensive nationalism practiced by the Irish.[30] Claydon has claimed that 'the persistent failure of the English to think in "British" terms' could serve to demonstrate that "'British history" is non-existent'.[31] If the English were indeed myopic in this respect, the Scottish dimension is nonetheless evidence that 'British' history, however Anglo-oriented, need not begin with or be thought up by the English in isolation.

A related, but parallel, concern is that such approaches, in imposing a metahistory upon the isles, presuppose 'a denial of those separate histories and separate identities of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales'.[32] According to Linda Colley, if 'pushed too hard or too exclusively', the methodology threatens to conceal 'the fact that the four parts of the United Kingdom have been connected in markedly different ways and with sharply varying degrees of success.'[33] Canny in particular has warned against assuming a comparability that simply did not exist and of 'emphasis[ing] similarity at the expense of difference'.[34] The implication here is that the teleological tendency of the New British History—however inadvertent—shores up rather than dismantles the edifice of homogeneity. The histories and historiographies of the four should not be subsumed under the monolith of the one whole. Glenn Burgess, who edited what was by far the most searching and self-critical of the New British collections, suggested how the discipline might correct itself. He asserted that if British history is to offer more than just explanations for 'the inexorable growth of English dominance', the individual histories of the four nations must 'constitute the necessary basis for constructing a

British history that pays attention to difference and mutuality as much as to English preponderance.'[35] There is a compelling case to be made for viewing this kind of history as most fruitful when conducted as a bottom-up rather than a top-down enterprise. When understood in this vein, it should be perceived less as a palimpsest—it is not advantageous to superimpose 'British' history atop layers of English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh histories—and more as the fusing together of multiform narratives.

The consequences of England's historical, political and territorial dominance are, however, evident in the scant treatment afforded to Wales by the New British school. Wales has been the least well incorporated into the field, essentially because it was the best incorporated into England. As Neil Evans has pointed out, the war of the three kingdoms narrative 'left little room for Wales'.[36] Indeed, in editing *Three Nations—A Common History?*, Ronald Asch justified Wales' omission on the grounds that it 'had no constitutional status of her own after the 1536 Act of Union'.[37] If Ireland and Scotland are more readily comparable examples of the limits of integration, neither constitutional continuity nor the apparent quietude of Welsh patriotism can paper over the singularities of the Welsh experience, least of all for the period covered by this collection. Pocock rather indelicately admonished 'the authors of histories of Scotland and Ireland' for writing 'as if they were addressing themselves to different reading publics'.[38] For him, it seems, recognition of plurality could not be permitted to descend into parochialism; these histories must be written and read together, not independently.

Yet if 'British' history precludes discussion of Wales on the proviso that it was constitutionally indistinguishable from England, it falls at the first hurdle. To invert Pocock, it appears that, in the case of Wales, the fact of a hegemony has to an extent denoted a homogeneity. We must turn to historians of Wales, writing for a Welsh audience, to fill in the gaps. For instance, if Colley is correct and 'it was their common investment in Protestantism that first allowed the English, the Welsh and the Scots to become fused together',[39] it was their antithetical brands of Protestantism that, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century, enabled expressions of national distinctiveness. Where Colley's 'Britons' regarded Catholics as the principal 'other', historians of Wales have illustrated that the Welsh nonconformist identity became increasingly exclusionist, juxtaposed against an 'alien' Anglican aristocracy.[40] How far we view the use of the Welsh language as a diacritical feature in the history of 'British' movements is also a subject ripe for exploration through the

four nations frameworks. Here, Martin Wright's chapter traces the formation of a 'Welsh-medium socialist discourse' by activists for whom, 'in a very real sense, their medium was their message'. It also raises questions as to the mapping of Welsh culture and the competing national (more so than regional) visions presented by north and south Walians.

On the other hand, we must acknowledge Robbins' very real concern that 'history's "English dimension" … is sometimes marginalised.'[41] Here, it would seem, there is a fine line between Anglocentric history and the explicit study of England. The slipperiness of English national identity conceivably reinforces this trend: if English history is not British history, then what is it? Determining how far we can disentangle the 'national' contributions to 'Britishness' perhaps affords a window into what was English about being British. For example, Paul Ward's chapter examines the transmission of 'British' identity through the Beefeaters, located in and deeply connected with the imperial capital. He shows that while their 'origins were associated with English history'—thus affording the imposition of 'an English historical narrative on the rest of the United Kingdom'—they were in fact 'ciphers for the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century'. We may then ask whether England had any icons or traditions, 'invented' or otherwise, that were uniquely its own. Likewise, what was 'English' about the experiences of people in England?

In reasserting the 'ultimate autonomy of English history when it comes to explaining events in England', Tim Harris has argued that 'we need to recognise that even when political actors in England appear to have been reacting to developments in Scotland and Ireland, they were reacting in ways that were structured by the context of their own historical experience and the distinctive character of English political culture'.[42] And yet the same rationale must assuredly be extended to dramatis personae in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and to their respective socio-economic circumstances. Indeed, it has traditionally been easier to pinpoint the character of Irish, Scottish and Welsh political culture than it has the English.[43] The need for what Harris has dubbed 'internalist explanation[s]'[44] is not exclusive to the history of England. For instance, Patrick Walsh investigates the extent to which the institutions of the fiscal-military state, transposed from an English model, took on characteristics in Ireland and Scotland coloured by their underlying economic, administrative and military infrastructures. On the other hand, Oliver Betts' chapter highlights the juxtaposition between an increasingly 'English', 'administrative' understanding of poverty and the actuality of

how poverty was experienced at a local level. Thus, both the 'national' and the 'British' contexts must be established.

Even where the full aspect of the 'British' dimension was not always present, the politics and cultures of the four nations did not develop or operate in a vacuum; events and ideas reverberated out from multiple centres and multiple peripheries. For instance, James Stafford's chapter shows that English advocates of Union with Ireland were happy to borrow from the political economy of the Scottish Enlightenment to suit their ends. Melanie Bassett considers how working-class migrants, in seeking to legitimise their presence and ingratiate themselves in a corner of southern England, sought out those with whom they had a geographically specific kinship. She demonstrates, in particular, the portability of their local, regional and national identities. This is a clear example of what Ward's chapter terms 'the fluidities of national cultural boundaries in the British Isles'. Four nations history thereby affords a nuanced framework with which to reveal multilayered patterns of internal and intra-national hybridity.

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The terminology used in this collection is intended neither to atomise nor to totalise the history of the United Kingdom. Apportioning the United Kingdom into suitable units for historical enquiry has long been a task fraught with semantic complications; this collection does not pretend to tender a definitive solution to this difficulty. What it does offer, however, are analytical tools for interrogating the methodological perspectives from which we enter upon our chosen subject. A newish 'new' subject, 'four nations history' is not an adjunct to 'British history', nor is it intended to serve as its replacement. It instead affords a different kind of territorial, and thus narrative, stratification: 'four nations' is in one very crucial respect a statement of intent as to the structure of the enquiry.

That 'four nations history' emerged as a descriptive and a problematic is emblematic of perceived shortcomings in the parameters of 'British' history. If Britain technically refers to England, Scotland and Wales, as Kearney has pointed out, the history of the 'larger island' was not 'self-contained'.[45] And yet, the juxtaposition of 'British history' and 'Irish history' implies both a homogeneity to the experience of the former and its separateness from the latter. As Pocock has noted, '"Irish history" is not "British history", for the very good reason that it is very largely

the history of a largely successful resistance to being included in it; yet it is part of "British history", for exactly the same reason.'[46] The two are entwined, with the points at which they interweave and detach dependent upon the nature of our inquiry, where we locate our 'core' and our 'periphery', and the 'cause' and 'effect' of our subject. Furthermore, as McBride elaborates, the undesirability of a Pocockian framework to certain Irish historians, who reject a reading which places Ireland too firmly in Britain's historical trajectory, poses the question as to whether there are '*any* logical divisions of mankind'.[47] Ultimately, like the United Kingdom, 'four nations' is a construct, the label in many respects a convenience. No one talks of practising 'United Kingdom history' or 'United Kingdomish history'.

As editors, we use the term 'four nations history' in full knowledge that it is not uncontroversial. Particularly when engaged as a 'disaggregating' technique,[48] it raises questions as to the divisibility of the United Kingdom, and as to the (in)appropriate lines of division. As Paul O'Leary explains in his chapter, the United Kingdom is, and has been, a state of multiple unions and multiple kingdoms. Its composition has shifted: the centralisation required at its inception in 1801, the partition of Ireland in 1922, the instability of successive Stormont administrations, and the asymmetry of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Scottish and Welsh devolution settlements have all resulted in imbalances of power. These transformations have implications for how one might arrive at a four nations approach. In 1989, Robbins observed that 'the history of the whole of Britain is so difficult to write precisely because there is no ideal vantage point from which to survey it'.[49] Indeed, our preferred observation deck arguably depends upon the type of history we intend to write and on what we hope to discover. For instance, are we searching for interactions or dissonance—and between or among whom?—or looking down upon a superstructure? The preoccupations of English historians are neither analogous to nor interchangeable with those of Irish, Scottish or Welsh historians (and vice versa)—their core and peripheral visions are undoubtedly shaped by where they write their history from.

A quarter of a century later, the 'paradox' identified by Robbins—that 'the "centre" of Britain is located in the South of England'[50]—has been supplanted by the normality of multiple, alternative and often rival centres. This is evidenced not only in the establishment and enhancement of devolved administrations but also in the backlash against the perceived ineptitude of an out-of-touch Westminster elite that contributed to the

June 2016 decision to leave the European Union (EU). This surely throws into relief Brown's objections to a 'core–periphery' model—that there existed more than one core, each with 'very different peripheries', 'sliding in and out of one another's vision depending on circumstances.'[51] Ian B. Stewart's chapter, on the dynamics of 'Celticism' in the long nineteenth century, contends that the notion of a 'Celtic fringe' is unsatisfactory and demonstrates that 'Celts' competed as much among one another as against the 'Saxon' English. If we are to move away from anachronistic dichotomies we must not only rethink our own taxonomy but also be aware of its etymology and past usages.

In dealing with boundaries of nationhood, we must ask what defines a nation or a national grouping. What are our categories for exploring and explaining space and place? Identities, ethnicities, cultures, relationships and ideas overlap, transcend, supersede and undermine borders. Nations are more than their governing bodies (or lack thereof); Acts of parliament are amended and repealed. The three kingdoms united in 1801 were arguably not coterminous with the nations contained therein. 'Three kingdoms history' must of necessity operate within different constraints—and chronologies—than four nations history. In its historical and historiographical senses, 'four nations' implies, and is usually taken to mean, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. In this respect, it is at least more satisfactory than 'British' history, which has more universalising connotations. However, what room does this nomenclature leave for pre-1922 Ulster and modern Northern Ireland,[52] or for the claims of, say, Cornwall[53] to nationhood? Although beyond the scope of this collection, more must be done to address where Northern Ireland fits into these complex and often territorialised understandings of national narratives. Should it be conceived of as a fifth nation? If so, from what date? Can a history come under the 'four nations' banner if it does not deal with each of the four or if each does not receive proportional treatment (and how ought we to determine these proportions)? By this logic, there are contributions to this collection for which the moniker 'four nations' may not be strictly accurate. Patrick Walsh acknowledges a deficiency of data concerning the impact on and involvement of Wales in the fiscal-military state, and James Stafford notes the virtual absence of Wales from the late eighteenth-century debate on union with Ireland. They come under the aegis of this collection because one of its core aims is to test the plasticity of four nations history as a conceptual framework.

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With the 'New British History' no longer new, this collection admittedly prompts the question: why now? The conference from which these chapters are drawn was announced prior to the Scottish independence referendum of September 2014 and long before the Conservative Party promised to hold a vote on the United Kingdom's membership of the EU. It was borne out of frustration at what we saw as stagnancy in the debate over how we research and write the history of these islands, and out of a desire to bring together historians of England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. However, the collection has since developed against a backdrop of heightened intra-United Kingdom tensions, radically altered patterns of socio-political allegiance and a reorientation of the country's international position. In the febrile atmosphere of 2017, the need for pluralistic histories seems more pressing than ever. It also reinforces the advantages of 'four nations' over 'British' history as a descriptive.

The historiographical interpretations of the New British History were unmistakably a product of its historical moment, the consequences of which Paul O'Leary teases out in greater detail in Chapter 3. The Victorian self-assuredness that had sustained whiggish visions of English progress and inevitability had dissipated in a post-war era defined by the loss of an empire, the decline of a once highly prized world standing, and the arrival of migrants from former colonies and Europe. In 1995, Cannadine could juxtapose an 'unprecedented break-up of nation-states' against 'the seemingly inexorable shift of power to the Strasbourg parliament and the Brussels bureaucrats'.[54] For Pocock—a New Zealander disquieted by the impact upon colonial 'neo-Britons' of what he identified as the 'Europeanization of Great Britain'—the 'double defeat' represented by the fading of imperial power and the 'perceived failure of the social democratic [experiment] Britain attempted in and after 1945', was key to understanding why the United Kingdom had from the 1960s decided 'to become European'.[55] This realignment, in turn, was crucial to problematising *where* British history should be positioned, geopolitically.

At a pre-election rally in 1992 (the same year as Pocock's article on Europeanisation was published), John Major, speaking 'as a Briton', denounced Scottish nationalism as a threat to the British constitution. He counselled against 'The exchange of Great Britain for a little Scotland and a lesser union' and maintained that were a Scottish parliament

established, 'We could be no longer a United, but a Disunited, Kingdom'. He concurrently branded the 'move towards a federal Europe, towards a United States of Europe', as a menace. Major's Britain, it seemed, would only be Europeanised in so far as it was possible to 'build a Europe of nation states'.[56] The message was unambiguous: sovereignty would neither be devolved from Westminster nor be ceded to Brussels. At the same time, the 1993 Downing Street Declaration placed the search for a peaceful solution to the situation in Northern Ireland front and centre of the political agendas of both the United Kingdom and Ireland. It was the Troubles and the resurgence of ballot box nationalism in Scotland and Wales that, according to Cannadine, 'helped to make us more aware of the "British" problem'.[57]

Writing in 2017, it is abundantly clear that the United Kingdom continues to possess both a 'British' problem and a European problem. The United Kingdom may include four nations but in this it is becoming ever more exclusivist; we see the othering of Scottish nationalists, and of European migrants, bureaucrats and institutions. We are conceivably witnessing the reversal of the trend detected by Pocock, although the de-Europeanisation of the United Kingdom as a polity appears increasingly incompatible with Scotland's attachment to and investment in its Europeanness, above and beyond its Britishness. Both the Scottish and the EU referendums have given politicians recourse to a four nations rhetoric—the main variation being that in contemporary political parlance Northern Ireland has replaced Ireland as one of the four. In the immediate aftermath of the Scottish vote in September 2014, David Cameron simultaneously christened himself 'Prime Minister of four nations in one United Kingdom' and vowed to transfer additional powers to the devolved administrations as a means of securing 'a united future'.[58] When in January 2017 Cameron's replacement, Theresa May, came to set out her Brexit objectives, she pledged her government to 'put the preservation of our precious union at the heart of everything we do.' Her vision for an ostensibly archipelagic 'Global Britain' rested on the hypothesis that 'A stronger Britain demands that we … strengthen the precious union between the four nations of the United Kingdom.'[59] There are obvious similarities in these speeches: they recognise a diversity of opinion and attempt to portray the United Kingdom as both drawing strength from, and greater than, these differences, the seeming contradictions reflecting the complexities of numerous Union settlements and resettlements.