



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

# The Scottish Parliament Past and Present

Find out how the Scottish Parliament has evolved through the ages, from the assembly meetings of nobles and churchmen in 1235 to the modern Parliament that exists today.



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### 1235

#### THE FIRST MENTION OF A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

The use of the word ‘colloquium’ in this act, referring to a meeting at Kirkliston in 1235, marks the first surviving evidence of a parliamentary assembly in Scotland.

This is the earliest written mention of a Parliament; it refers to an assembly held at Kirkliston on the outskirts of Edinburgh. The Parliament developed from meetings of the “King’s great council”, which were gatherings of nobles and churchmen who advised the king on policy and justice issues.



### 1293

#### THE EARLIEST SURVIVING ROLL FROM PARLIAMENT

The official roll of John Balliol. This seal, showing the King on his throne, was attached to documents as a sign of royal approval.

The earliest official parliamentary roll dates from the first Parliament of John Balliol, who was King of Scots from 1292 to 1296. It records what happened at the parliamentary session of February 1293.

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**1309**

### DECLARATION OF THE CLERGY

**Bronze statue of King Robert Bruce, commemorating his victory at the 1314 battle of Bannockburn.**

The clergy (churchmen) declared their support for King Robert Bruce in Parliament. This was important as Scotland's continued independence was in doubt at the time.



**1357**

### THE FIRST MENTION OF THE THREE ESTATES

**Coin of David II (1324-71)**

The first surviving record in Scotland using the term "Three Estates", which referred to the three groups that made up the Parliament – the clergy (churchmen), nobility and the burgh (town) commissioners.

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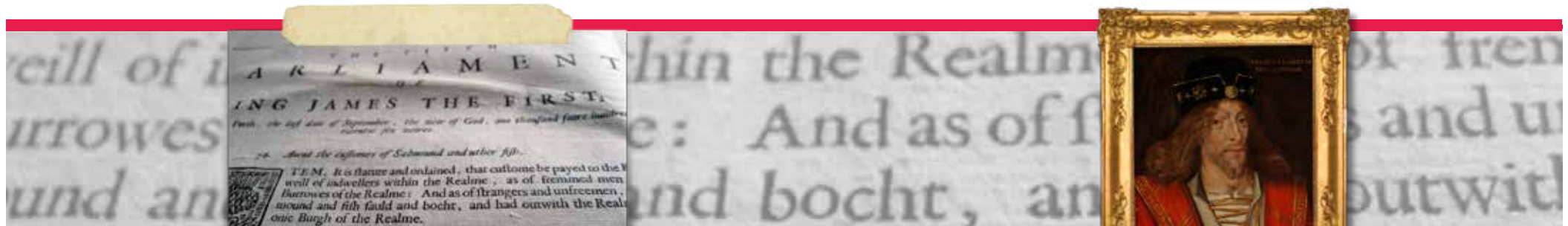
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**1424**

## ACTS OF PARLIAMENT BEGIN TO BE RECORDED IN SCOTS

**Acts of parliament from the reign of James I, written in Scots rather than Latin.**

Before this date, most of the surviving documents are written in Latin, which was the language of official documents at the time. King James I, however, began to keep his parliamentary records in Scots, a language that most people could understand. The 1424 Royal Mines Act is the oldest act still in force in Scotland today, which states that gold and silver mines belong to the monarch.

**1425-26**

## PARLIAMENT FLEXES ITS MUSCLE

**James I (1394-1437)**

King James made several attempts to make Parliament more obedient. These included suggesting changes that would have made Parliament more like the one in England. These changes failed, which helped Parliament to maintain a strong, and often independent, voice for the next two centuries.

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## 1436

### FAILED ATTEMPT TO CURB ROYAL POWER

Plate from the sixteenth-century “Forman Armorial”, showing James I and his wife Joan Beaufort wearing heraldic dresses.

Sir Robert Graham, speaker of the Estates, attempted to arrest James I ‘in the name of all the Three Estates of your realm’, but received no support from the Parliament. Graham was put in prison, but released and took part in the murder of the king at Perth on 21st February 1437.

## 1445

### A CONTRACTED KING

James II ruled from 1437 to 1460, an unstable period where various groups battled for power over Scotland.

King James II swore an oath not to alter legislation (laws) without Parliament’s consent.



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## 1455

### INSTITUTING A PROPER DRESS CODE

Detail from a 17th-century print showing the 1685 'Riding of Parliament', a colourful horseback procession which took place at the opening and closing of each session.

Parliament introduced a dress code for its members, specifying what kind of velvet cloak could be worn, its colour and what type of fur it should be lined with. Anyone who came to Parliament wrongly dressed was to be fined £10 Scots.

## 1458

### PARLIAMENT ORDERS THE SLAUGHTER OF WOLVES

Act of Parliament ordering landowners to seek out and destroy any wolves and their offspring within their area.

Parliament passed a number of acts in the fifteenth century making it not just legal but required to hunt and persecute wolves. Hunts were held four times a year and huntsmen were paid sixpence for each wolf's head brought to a sheriff. Such measures meant the wolf was extinct in Scotland by the eighteenth century.

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**1471**

## FOOTBALL AND GOLF BANNED

**A parliamentary act banning people from playing 'fute-ball and the golf'.**

Sport and similar leisure activities were strictly controlled by Parliament, since it was thought that these were distractions from everyday work. Football and golf were banned in the fifteenth century so that men of fighting-age would practice archery, a more useful skill to have for defending against any attackers.

**1496**

## FIRST EDUCATION ACT

**The 1496 Education Act ensured that schooling was more widespread, both geographically and socially, in Scotland than in most other European countries.**

Parliament passed an act making schooling compulsory from the age of eight for the sons of barons and wealthy landowners. The reasoning behind the act was to ensure that people who became sheriffs or judges would have a proper understanding of the law.

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## 1532

### FOUNDATION OF THE COURT OF SESSION

**The Great Window in Parliament House, Edinburgh, shows the founding of the court of session in 1532 by James V.**

Parliament passed an act setting up the Court of Session, the supreme civil court in Scotland, for the “universal well-being” of everyone. This was a major step forward towards a fully developed and modern legal system. The Court of Session still exists today as part of the College of Justice, a body bringing together all the supreme courts in Scotland.

## 1560

### THE REFORMATION PARLIAMENT

**John Knox, popular preacher and one of the religious leaders of the Protestant Reformation.**

Parliament set the seal on a religious revolution by breaking the connection with the Pope and the Catholic Church and establishing the Protestant religion.

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## 1563

### WITCHCRAFT ACT

An illustration depicting the Devil speaking to a group of witches at North Berwick in 1590-91.

Following lobbying from the Church, Parliament passed an act which meant that anyone practising witchcraft would be punished by death. Consequently hundreds of witches were tried and put to death, with the last execution taking place at Dornoch in 1722.



## 1579

### POOR LAW ENACTED

Detail from a printed copy of the 1579 Poor Law, which put in place severe punishments for 'vagabounds and idle beggars'.

A new, harsh law was passed by Parliament to control the administration of help to the growing numbers of poor people. This increase had been caused by a rising population and repeated food shortages. The act said that an able-bodied poor person who refused to work should be whipped and placed in the stocks.

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## 1587

### THREE BECOME FOUR

**Detail from a seventeenth-century sederunt, or attendance roll, noting the parliamentary representatives for the shires of Stirling, Linlithgow, Perth and Kincardine.**

Parliament passed an act regulating the attendance by commissioners from the shires (rural areas). Although they had attended Parliament in some numbers in the past, their presence was not made official until this act, which allowed each shire to elect two representatives.

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## 1604

### PARLIAMENTARY UNION WITH ENGLAND PROPOSED

**James VI (1566-1625) in 1604.**

In 1603, the Union of the Crowns took place when James VI became king of England as well as Scotland. He moved south to London and shortly after, he proposed the union of his English and Scottish parliaments, but neither side was enthusiastic and the project was abandoned.



## 1632

### THE BUILDING OF PARLIAMENT HOUSE IN EDINBURGH

**Parliament House, next to St.Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh.**

The building of Parliament House in Edinburgh began on a site just off the Royal Mile. This provided a permanent meeting place for the first time. The first meeting was held in the new building in 1639. Most of Parliament's meetings, until the Union of 1707, were held in this purpose-built home.

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**1633**

### CHARLES I's CORONATION PARLIAMENT

**King Charles I's conflicts with both his Scottish and English parliaments led to civil war across Britain and to his eventual execution in 1649.**

King Charles I intended his first meeting of the Scottish Parliament to be a showcase of royal power. But, in an effort to force through controversial laws, he disregarded parliamentary traditions and lost the support of many influential nobles.



**1638**

### THE SIGNING OF THE NATIONAL COVENANT

**This is a copy of the National Covenant of 1638 which called for all Scots to oppose Roman Catholicism and the policies of Charles I.**

First signed in 1638, the National Covenant demanded a parliament and a Church General Assembly that were free from influence by the King. It was copied for distribution to every burgh and parish. Supporters were called Covenanters. Widespread support for the Covenant led to Scottish opposition to Charles I and contributed to the outbreak of civil war throughout Britain and Ireland.

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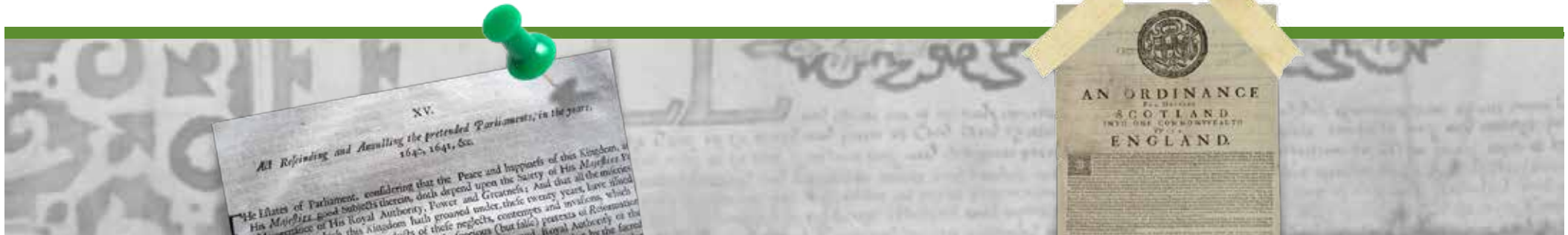
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## 1640

### PARLIAMENT REMODELED

**Detail from a printed copy of the 1661 act which withdrew all legislation passed by the “Covenanter parliaments” of 1640 to 1648.**

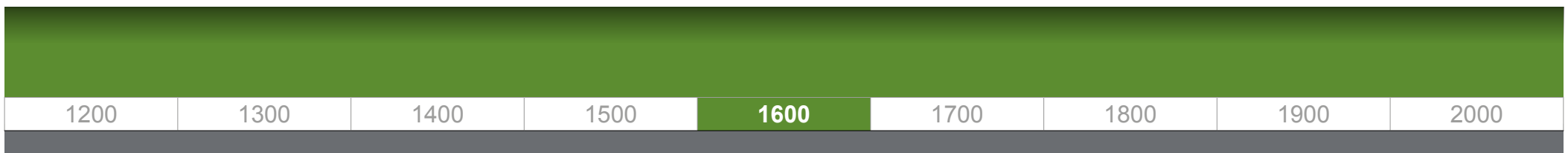
In June 1640, over the space of only ten days, the Estates passed some sixty acts which moved the balance of power away from the King in favour of Parliament. For example, a Triennial Act gave the Estates the power to hold a Parliament at least once every three years, removing the King’s right to summon and dissolve parliamentary sessions as he chose. These innovations were largely repealed in 1661.

## 1652

### THE COMMONWEALTH

**This paper, dated 12th April 1654, states the terms and conditions of the union.**

After the execution of King Charles I and the exile of Charles II, Oliver Cromwell occupied most of Scotland. He brought Scotland into “a happy” union with England. The Scottish Parliament was abolished and Scotland was allowed to send representatives to the Parliament at Westminster in London for the first time.





## 1661

### PARLIAMENT RESTORED

**King Charles II being crowned at Scone in 1651, shortly before being forced into exile until 1660.**

After the defeat of the Commonwealth, King Charles II returned from exile and was restored to the throne. The first meeting of the Scottish Parliament for ten years was held in Edinburgh. It sat for over six months, passing a mass of legislation which reasserted the King's authority.

## 1669

### AN OPPOSITION 'PARTY' DEVELOPS IN PARLIAMENT

**William Douglas, 3rd duke of Hamilton, leader of the parliamentary opposition during the 1670s.**

Although individuals had shown opposition to the King's policy before, from 1669, a more organised opposition 'party' emerged under the leadership of William Douglas, 3rd duke of Hamilton.

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## 1689

### PARLIAMENT ADOPTS THE 'CLAIM OF RIGHT'

**The Proclamation declaring William and Mary as King and Queen of Scotland. Proclamations were read out at mercat crosses and churches throughout the country.**

After voting to remove King James VII, Parliament issued a declaration stating its right to remove any monarch who violated the law and threatened parliamentary liberties. The Crown was offered to King William and Queen Mary, who agreed to keep this agreement between the crown and the people.

## 1696

### EDUCATION ACT

**The 1696 Education Act for the "Settling of Schools".**

Legislation was passed that established the principle of a school for every parish. The schools were funded by voluntary contributions of landlords, who were pressured by the church and local government officials.

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## 1707

### THE TREATY OF UNION

#### Exemplification of the Treaty of Union, 1707.

The Scottish Parliament agreed the Treaty of Union with England on 16th January 1707. The Parliament adjourned on 25th March and was dissolved on 28th April. The Union of Scotland and England, as the United Kingdom of Great Britain, under one parliament sitting at Westminster, came into effect on 1st May.



## 1713

### THE UNION ALMOST FALLS

**John Campbell, 2nd Duke of Argyll (1678-1743), one of the great political figures of the 18th century. He was in favour of the union in 1707, but in 1713 he spoke out against it.**

Complaints by Scottish MPs and peers over a range of issues led to a debate in the House of Lords on 1st July 1713, suggesting the break up of the Union. It was defeated by only four votes.

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# 1762

## FIRST SCOTTISH PRIME MINISTER

**John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute (1713-92), served as British Prime Minister for only one year, before retiring to Scotland to pursue his interest in botany.**

John Stuart, Earl of Bute, was appointed by George III to lead the government, but his unpopularity contributed to anti-Scottish feelings in London and he resigned after only a year in office.

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### 1832

#### THE SCOTTISH REFORM ACT PASSED

A contemporary banner from the village of Lamington, near Biggar, in support of the Reform Bill, which became law in 1832.

Until this date, the number of people in Scotland who could vote was largely determined by an act of Parliament from 1681. Under the 1832 law, the number of Scottish seats at Westminster increased from 45 to 53, and those who could vote from 4,500 to 65,000, which was roughly one-eighth of the population. The principle of 'one person, one vote' was not introduced until 1928.



### 1867

#### FURTHER VOTING REFORMS

This act extended the vote to every man (with certain conditions) and also allowed universities to return two Members to serve in Parliament.

From 1867 Parliament extended voting to the working classes for the first time, with Scotland having its own Representation of the People (Scotland) Act which was passed in 1868. The Ballot Act of 1872 provided for a secret ballot to protect workers and tenants from unfair treatment.

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Democratic  
Government.



### 1885

#### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

**The Duke of Richmond and Gordon, first Secretary  
for Scotland.**

The Scottish Office was established as a UK government department under the Secretary for Scotland. In 1926, the status was enhanced to Secretary of State.



### 1892

#### KEIR HARDIE ELECTED AS AN MP

**An election campaign poster for James Keir Hardie.**

James Keir Hardie emerged as a Scottish socialist and political activist. In 1892 he became the first Labour MP (for West Ham, London) and was increasingly a major figure in British politics.

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### 1918

#### WOMEN ACQUIRE THE VOTE

**A banner from 'St Andrews Women Citizens', part of the national suffrage movement which campaigned for women to be granted the right to vote.**

Women finally won the right to vote and stand in parliamentary elections, with the first woman MP being elected in 1919. The first Scottish woman to be elected as an MP was Katherine Murray, Duchess of Atholl, who won the seat of Kinross and Western Perthshire in 1923.



### 1939

#### THE TRANSFER OF THE SCOTTISH OFFICE TO EDINBURGH

**St Andrew's House under construction in 1938.**

St Andrew's House in Edinburgh became the headquarters of the Scottish Office and the functions of the government department were transferred from London to Edinburgh.

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## 1945

### SNP WINS ITS FIRST PARLIAMENTARY SEAT

**A cartoon from Punch, depicting the newly-elected SNP MP Robert McIntyre as a Highland Chief.**

Dr Robert McIntyre won the Motherwell constituency in a by-election, but lost it at the general election a few months later. The SNP won their next parliamentary seat in 1967, this time at Hamilton.

## 1979

### THE SCOTTISH ASSEMBLY REFERENDUM

**A supporter of the “Yes for Scotland” referendum campaign.**

Following a report on the Constitution, the UK Government brought forward proposals to create a Scottish Assembly. The UK Parliament passed a Bill on devolution for Scotland in 1978. This required a referendum to be held, which took place on 1st March 1979. The proposals failed to achieve the level of support required under the terms of the Act, which stated that 40% of the electorate had to vote in favour. Despite a majority in excess of 77,000, the “yes” vote represented only 32.9% of the electorate.

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## 1989

### THE SCOTTISH CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

**The Scottish Constitutional Convention meets in the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh.**

From the 1979 referendum onwards, there was a growth in the number of campaigns supporting some form of devolution for Scotland. The Scottish Constitutional Convention (SCC) was set up to prepare a scheme for a Scottish Assembly or Parliament. It held its first meeting on 30th March and adopted a declaration, "A Claim of Right for Scotland". The SCC published its final report in 1995.

## 1997

### "SCOTLAND'S PARLIAMENT" WHITE PAPER PUBLISHED

**Referendum campaign materials from the "Yes, Yes" and "No, No" campaigns.**

As part of its election manifesto, the Labour Party committed to consult people on proposals for devolution. As the UK Government, they published the White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament", setting out proposals for a new Scottish Parliament. On 11th September, the people of Scotland voted in a referendum. The result was in favour of a devolved Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers.

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## 1998

### THE SCOTLAND ACT IS PASSED

#### Launching the Scotland Bill.

The Scotland Bill establishing the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive (Scottish government) was passed by the UK Parliament and received royal assent on 19th November. The Consultative Steering Group on the Scottish Parliament presented its report, "Shaping Scotland's Parliament", in December. This proposed the key principles of the Parliament and suggested how it should work.

## 1999

### THE FIRST SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION

#### The opening of the Scottish Parliament.

The first elections to the Scottish Parliament were held on 6th May. The results led to the formation of a coalition government between Labour and Liberal Democrats. The first meeting of the Parliament took place on 12th May with Sir David Steel elected as the first Presiding Officer. The Parliament was opened by Her Majesty The Queen on 1st July. From that date, the Parliament assumed its power to legislate (make laws) for Scotland on devolved matters.

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## 1999

### FIRST BILL PASSED BY THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

**The Debating Chamber of the Parliament at the General Assembly buildings in Edinburgh.**

On the 8th September 1999, the Mental Health (Public Safety and Appeals) (Scotland) Bill was passed. The bill was introduced by the Scottish Executive.

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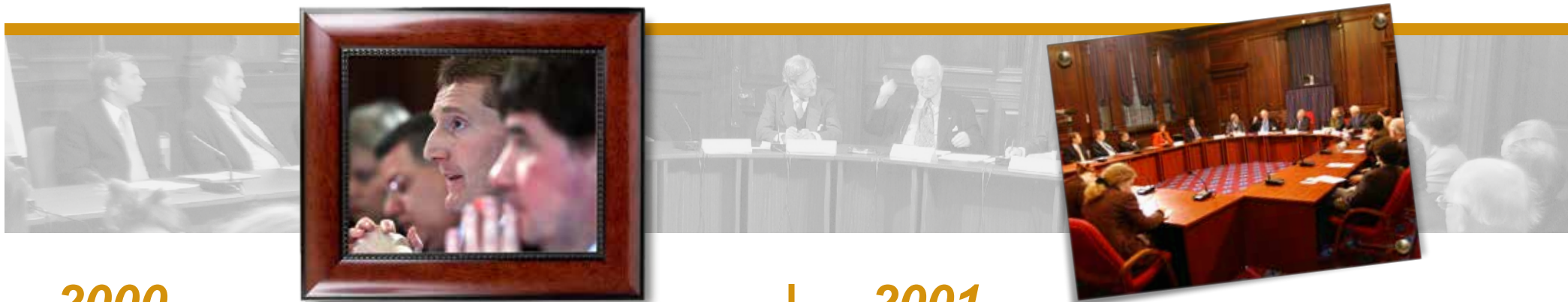
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## 2000

### FIRST MEMBER'S BILL PASSED

**Tavish Scott, MSP for Shetland.**

On the 28th September, the first member's bill was passed: The Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Amendment (Scotland) Bill was introduced by Tavish Scott MSP.

## 2001

### FIRST COMMITTEE BILL PASSED

**One of the Committee Rooms in Committee Chambers in Edinburgh, used by the Parliament as a temporary home until 2004.**

On the 4th October, the first committee bill was passed: The Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Bill. The bill was introduced by the Justice I Committee.

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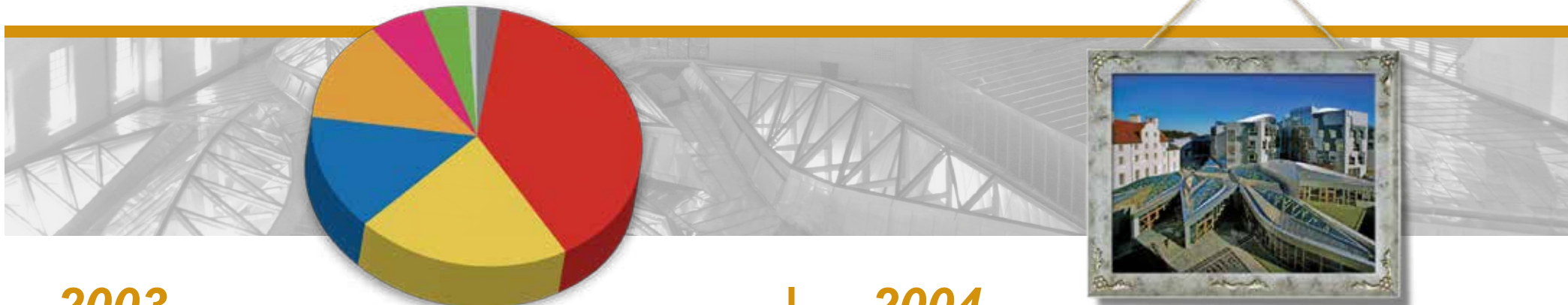
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## 2003

### SECOND SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION – 1ST OF MAY

**Pie chart showing the results of the election in 2003 :  
Labour 50, SNP 27, Conservatives 18, Liberal Democrats 17,  
Green 7, SSP 6, SSCUP 1, Independents 3.**

The second Scottish Parliament election was held: more MSPs were elected from smaller parties and as independent MSPs. A second coalition was agreed between Labour and the Liberal Democrats to form the government.

## 2004

### THE OPENING OF NEW SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT BUILDING

#### The new building at Holyrood

Designed by Barcelona architects EMBT and their partners RMJM Scotland, the new Scottish Parliament building was officially opened on 9th October 2004 in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen.

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### 2006

#### 1000TH PUBLIC PETITION LODGED

**Pupils from All Saints Secondary School hand over their petition to the Public Petitions Committee Convener Michael McMahon MSP.**

This Petition, presented by All Saints Secondary School on 3rd October, called for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Executive to investigate the public health implications of cheaply available alcohol.



### 2007

#### THIRD SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION – 3RD OF MAY

**MSPs elected at the 2007 election.**

The third Scottish Parliament election was held on 3rd May. It led to the first minority government being formed by the SNP. They decided to adopt the title “Scottish Government” in place of the term Scottish Executive.

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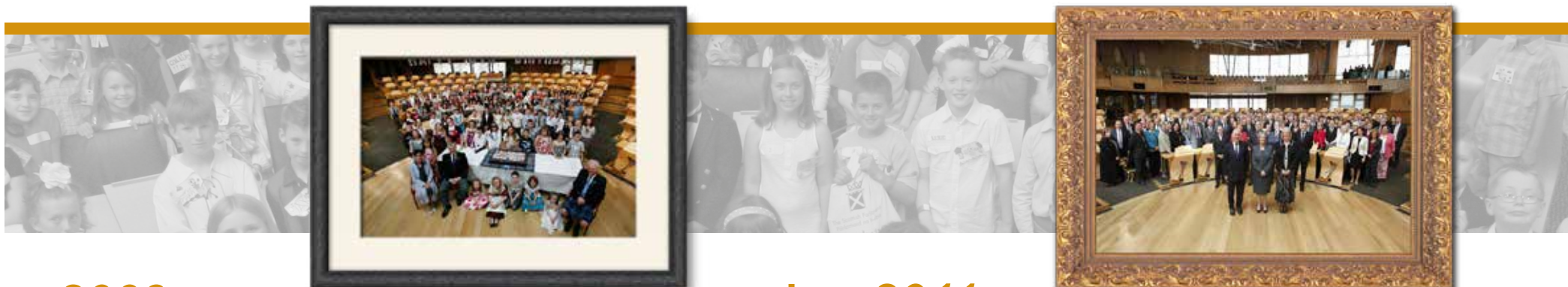
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## 2009

### 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPENING OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

**143 of the children who were born in Scotland on July 1st 1999 joined the Presiding Officer at Holyrood to celebrate.**

On 1st July, the 10th anniversary of the official opening of the Scottish Parliament was marked by a visit from Her Majesty The Queen and a birthday party for 10 years olds born in Scotland on 1st July 1999.

## 2011

### FOURTH SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION – 5TH OF MAY

**Photo of the Members of the Scottish Parliament elected at the 2011 election.**

The fourth Scottish Parliament election was held on 5th May. It led to the Scottish National Party forming the government after winning a majority of seats.

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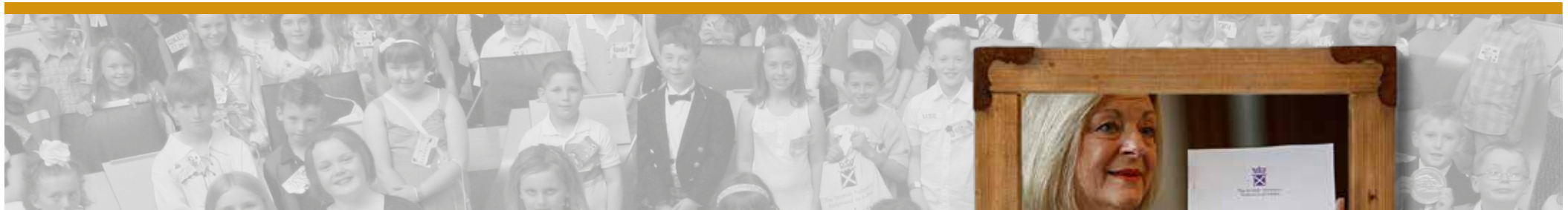
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## 2012

### UK PARLIAMENT PASSES SCOTLAND ACT 2012

**Linda Fabiani MSP, Convener of the Scotland Bill Committee with a copy of the Committee's report.**

On 1st May, the Scotland Act 2012 received Royal Assent after being passed by the UK Parliament. It gave the Scottish Parliament additional powers. For example, the Scottish Parliament can now make laws about the drink drive limit and the national speed limit on roads. There are new powers to raise landfill and stamp duty land taxes and to set a Scottish rate of income tax and these will come into effect over the next few years. The Scottish Parliament looked at the proposals in the bill and gave legislative consent to the UK Parliament in April 2012.



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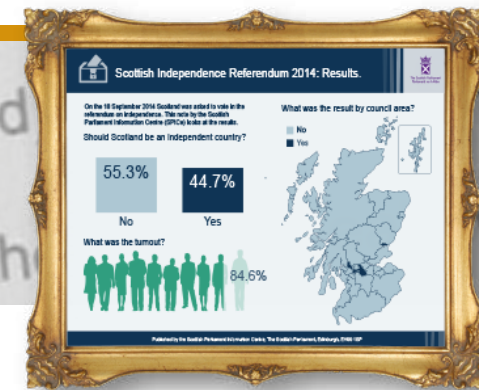
## 2013

### THE 200TH ACT OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT IS PASSED

**The Royal Warrant and the Great Seal on the 200th Act of the Scottish Parliament.**

On 28th June, The Forth Road Bridge Bill became the 200th Act of the Scottish Parliament to receive Royal Assent.

Following approval of the Bill by Her Majesty the Queen, the Great Seal of Scotland, also known as the Scottish Seal, is attached to the Royal Warrant.



## 2014

### REFERENDUM ON SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

**On September 18th, a referendum was held to ask the Scottish People “Should Scotland be an independent country?”**

The terms of the referendum and the question to be asked were agreed by the First Minister and the Prime Minister in the Edinburgh Agreement in 2012. The result of the referendum was 55.3% No, 44.7% Yes. The turnout was 84.6%.

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### 2015

## 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS GET THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN ALL SCOTTISH ELECTIONS

### Young people meeting at the Scottish Parliament

The Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill was passed on the 18th June. All 16 and 17 year olds meeting the criteria for the electoral register are now eligible to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections.



### 2016

## UK PARLIAMENT PASSES SCOTLAND ACT 2016

### Scotland Act 2016

The Scotland Act received Royal Assent on 23rd March. The Act delivers the Smith Commission Agreement and transfers a range of powers to the Scottish Parliament and/or Scottish Ministers including areas of taxation and welfare.

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## 2016

### FIFTH SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT ELECTION 5TH MAY

**Photo of the Members of the Scottish Parliament elected at the 2016 election.**

The fifth Scottish Parliament election was held on 5th May. It led to the Scottish National Party forming a minority government.

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# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the project team of the Records of the Parliaments of Scotland for their help with the timeline. The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707 (RPS) is a fully searchable database containing the proceedings of the Scottish parliament from the first surviving act of 1235 to the union of 1707. The culmination of over ten years work by researchers from the Scottish Parliament Project based in the School of History at the University of St Andrews, the online edition seeks to make this key historical resource freely available to all in a technologically advanced and user-friendly format.

For further information, please see [www.rps.ac.uk](http://www.rps.ac.uk)

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