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National Identity and Local Culture

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For my parents

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is intended as a short and accessible introduction to a complex subject. The idea of attempting it first came to me as long ago as 1974, when I read Professor John Pocock's now famous essay, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject', in the Periodicals Room of the University of Edinburgh Library. It helped me place my efforts as an American student with a Scottish name, who found it difficult to understand why Scottish history was not considered relevant to the British history taught at American universities, and indeed at universities in Scotland or England. My ferociously sectarian paternal grandparents, emigrants to America from the West of Scotland, had passed down to their family a view of Britishness much at variance with this. The idea occurred to me again in 1979 while reading Professor J. C. Beckett's *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603–1923* on the train from Dublin to Galway to be interviewed for a lectureship in 'eighteenth-century history' at University College Galway, where it was clear that American and Irish history were taught in an emphatically Atlantic rather than a British context, in the assumption that each was mutually exclusive. Thus, in 1992, having moved from Edinburgh to the East Midlands of England, the invitation from (then) Dr Jeremy Black to write on the theme of 'centres and localities' in Britain and Ireland during the eighteenth century was most welcome.

I would like to acknowledge Professor Black's help and support in this project, particularly in what proved to be a successful application for a British Academy Research Leave Award held while I was an employee in Northampton of Nene College of Higher Education Corporation. I am grate-

ful to those at Nene College who endeavoured to ensure that I benefited from this award, particularly its Director, Dr S. Martin Gaskell. Peter King, Professor of Social History at Nene College, always encouraged and supported me in this project, and shared with me unreservedly his love for the work and vision of Edward Thompson as an historian of eighteenth-century England. Richard Moss, former Head of History at Nene College, set an example of quiet academic integrity in changing times which I will remember for the rest of my career.

I must also record a particular debt to Professor Linda Colley, who has corresponded with me on aspects of this subject, not uncritically, and has been generous in her encouragement. I must also acknowledge my debt to two former employers. The late Ian R. Grant trained me as an antiquarian bookseller and employed me as his assistant and cataloguer from 1978 to 1986. Few people realise his role as a publisher in producing the four-volume *Edinburgh History of Scotland* with Professor Gordon Donaldson from 1965 to 1975, and as co-editor with Donald Withrington of the new edition of the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, in twenty volumes, from 1973 to 1983. Dr Robert J. Cain employed me from 1986 to 1990 as researcher for the Scottish Records Program of the North Carolina Colonial Records Project, administered by the Historical Publications Section of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, and always treated me as a friend and a colleague rather than an agent. He made it possible for me to take up academic employment when the opportunity arose late in 1990.

Since the autumn of 1995 I have been privileged to be a member of the Department of Scottish History at the University of Edinburgh, and the completion of this book owes everything to the support I have received from Professor Michael Lynch as Head of Department. My colleagues Dr John Bannerman and Dr Ewen Cameron have taught me much about the Scottish Highland perspective on the idea of Britain, and the Honorary Fellows of the department (Professor Geoffrey Barrow, Dr Pat Dennison, Dr William

Ferguson and John M. Simpson) have always been willing to discuss aspects of this subject with me. It has been a pleasure to return to the university and encounter as colleagues my former supervisors in the Department of History, Professor H. T. Dickinson and Dr N. T. Phillipson. I owe a particular debt to Dr Phillipson for his support and encouragement over many years. Ronald Black and Dr Robert Mullally of the Department of Celtic Studies at Edinburgh have helped by gently reminding me that the perspective of a monoglot anglophone is not the only one relevant to the study of the idea of Britain.

There are many other scholars I would wish to thank, but there are limits to how long a list once can include in a short book! I would be remiss, however, in not mentioning how much I have gained in the past from collaborating with Dr John Dwyer, Dr Roger Mason of the University of St Andrews and Professor Richard Sher of the New Jersey Institute of Technology, Newark, New Jersey. Other scholars I would like to mention include Dr John D. Brims, Dr David J. Brown, Professor J. Stewart Brown, Dr Alan Day, Dr Hugh Dunthorne, Owen Dudley Edwards, Dr Martin Fitzpatrick, Professor Tim Harris, Dr Colin Kidd, Dr Murdo Macdonald, Professor Rosalind Mitchison, Professor Aubrey Newman, Professor Frank O'Gorman, Dr John Robertson, Dr Stuart Wallace and Professor T. C. Smout. Any errors or omissions in this little book, however, are my responsibility alone.

I am grateful to the Research Centre in Scottish History at the University of Strathclyde for inviting me to discuss aspects of this subject with them and to acknowledge how much I learned from three important conferences relating to this subject: that on 'The Formation of the United Kingdom' held at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, in July 1994; that on 'National Identities in Eighteenth-Century Britain' held at Manchester Metropolitan University by the North-West [England] Branch of the British Association for Eighteenth-Century Studies in September 1994 and that on 'Conflict and Change in English Communities and Regions' held at the University of Liverpool in March 1995. All of these

conferences were attended with the help of financial support from the School of Social Sciences, Nene College, Northampton.

While receipt of a British Academy award added to the excitement of pursuing this project, the arrival of my daughter Lydia during the period of that award, and the opportunity to move to Edinburgh which arose just before her birth, made the period during which this project has been completed almost, I can truthfully state, unbearably exciting. I owe much to the love and support of my partner Catherine Rylance, our daughter Anna and our son Jos for negotiating the many changes we have had to face together. I owe a particular debt to Catherine, who was determined to drag me from the library and seminar room to encounter her native England in places like 'the Bush' near Upper Lydbrook in the Forest of Dean, or the public bar of the Jolly Potters at Hartshill in the Potteries, or the village fêtes of Northamptonshire or the footpaths of the North Norfolk coast. In return I have tried to persuade her, in consideration of her mother from Renfrewshire and her paternal grandmother from County Cork, that no matter how English the rose, a little bit of the idea of Britain can be found to have affected us all.

Edinburgh
August 1997