Material Memories of Darien: Letters, lieux de mémoire, and the Company of Scotland

By Leith Davis

In 2010, the records of the Company of Scotland held in the NLS and the archives of the Royal Bank of Scotland were digitized for the UK Memory of the World Register. The records consist of handwritten material regarding the Company of Scotland's inception in 1695, the establishment of a Scottish colony at Darien in present-day Panama, the failure of the colony in 1699, and the Company's metamorphosis in 1727 into the Royal Bank of Scotland within a newly unified nation of Great Britain. The language of the UK Memory of the World Register website suggests that the manuscript collection is a *lieu de mémoire* for the entire British nation, to invoke Pierre Nora's oft-cited term, as it asserts: 'This is Britain's collective memory.' The issue of how British 'collective memory' has been established, including whose memories have been remembered and whose have been forgotten or erased, is receiving much attention these days. The story of Darien offers a rich historical case study of the role that media and mediation play in the process of inscribing national memory.

The creation of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies took place not only at a significant moment in Britain's shifting position in the imperial global network, but also at an important juncture in the media shift that was occurring in Britain at the end of the seventeenth century. 1695, the year in which the Company received royal approval, was the same year in which the English Parliament failed to renew the Licensing Act, opening the way to a proliferation of printed works. While the process of authorising printed works was different in Scotland, as Karin Bowie and Alastair Mann have suggested, there was a parallel increase in print publication in Scotland at this time, a result of the growth of a parish education system and increased literacy, as well as expanding communication and transportation networks. The Company of Scotland was one of the first joint-stock colonial ventures to be 'born' into this brave new world of print culture in the British Isles (Brewer; my 'Publications About the Company of

Scotland and Darien' database).

But the establishment what is called the age of 'print saturation' (Multigraph Collective) took place only after a period of transition. During that time of media change, older media continued to play an important role. In 1695, the affordances of manuscript letters – including their symbolic communicative and connective functions in both informal and official situations – made them essential in the creation of the Company of Scotland. Moreover, letters in printed form also played a vital role in inscribing Darien at each stage, as they authorized the news of the Scottish global economic venture, circulated details about Darien to a wider public, and ultimately memorialized the failure of the company.

1. Letters and the Creation of the Company of Scotland

The Company of Scotland was the brainchild of William Paterson (see Figure 1) and fellow Anglo-Scottish merchants who were eager to capitalize on new business possibilities after the 1688 Revolution. On 26 June 1695, the Company was granted a patent which allowed it to trade as well as to make treaties and plant colonies 'by consent of the Natives or Inhabitants thereof, and not possest by any European Sovereign, Potentate, Prince or State' (*Act for a Company*, 5). The Company also received royal protection and a twenty-one-year exemption from paying taxes. The projectors were given until 1 August 1696 to find other investors who would constitute the Company, with half of the funds being reserved for '*Scottish* men within this Kingdom' (*Act of Parliament*, 2).

Figure 1: 'William Paterson, From a wash-drawing in the British Museum', J. H. Innes, New Amsterdam and its People. Wikimedia Commons.

Manuscript letters played an important role in the early history of the Company of Scotland, enabling the communication between projectors across the geographical distances between Edinburgh, London, Amsterdam and Hamburg, and linking them together in a network of anticipated global commerce in the new economic climate. The letter of 4 July 1695 from Patterson to Robert Chiesley, a Company director who was then Lord Provost of Edinburgh, for example, indicates how crucial letters were to the Company in order to establish what was 'necessary to be dispatched before the meeting of the Corporation'. Paterson writes with some impatience to Chiesley on 6 August 1695 regarding the importance of prompt response to letters in this business enterprise: 'The life of all Commerce depends upon a punctual Correspondence.' Letters also provided the secrecy necessary to keep the activities of the new Company off the radar of the rest of the London merchant community, particularly the East India Company.

Word soon got out, however, and in the swirl of communication focused on the potential impact of the Company of Scotland on trade, letters continued to play an important role. This time, however, the letter forms taking centre stage were letter pamphlets, printed works referencing themselves as letters from 'gentleman' writing to fictional 'friends'. In *Writing to the World: Letters and the Origins of Modern Print Genres*, Rachael Scarborough King notes that the genre of the letter pamphlet served as an important 'bridge' genre at the end of the seventeenth century, offering familiar signposts that 'proved valuable to writers and readers' as they negotiated between the worlds of manuscript and print (26). The letter pamphlets written about the Company of Scotland debated the effects of the Company on English trade. The anonymous author of *Remarks upon the Scotch Act, in a Letter to a Friend*, for example, argues that the 'Scotch Company' will 'destroy the whole Trade and Navigation of *England*, and carry it to *Scotland*' (1). *A Letter from a Member of the Parliament of Scotland to his Friend in London*, written by the Company secretary Roderick MacKenzie using the pseudonym 'Philonax Verax', on the other hand, argued on behalf of the Company that the majority of the 'Sober and Tradeing People' of England, rather than being worried about the Company of Scotland, 'generally express an Inclination to be concerned in it' (2). MacKenzie intimates that any negative perspectives on the enterprise are the products of irrational thinking spread through rumour.

Despite the best efforts of writers such as MacKenzie, however, the nay-sayers won the debate regarding the Company of Scotland. On 14 December 1695, members of the House of Lords and the House of Commons jointly presented an Address to the King expressing their concerns regarding the impact of the Company of Scotland on 'the Trade of the [English] Nation.' The Address, which largely reiterated the points made by in *Remarks upon the Scotch Act*, was printed and circulated, further fueling the popular antagonism against the Company of Scotland. The Company projectors found themselves blocked by the Parliament and King at every turn. With English merchants forbidden by law from investing and further negative propaganda about the Company circulating in London, Paterson, along with several fellow projectors, removed to Scotland in February 1696, putting their resources into promoting the Company amongst Scottish investors.

Subscription books were set up in in Edinburgh on 26 February 1696, in Glasgow on 4 March 1699, and in Ayr on 2 April 1696 with a closing date of 6 August 1699.

Subscribers quickly signed up in astonishing numbers, including a number of women as well as individuals from the middling ranks. Advertising for the Company of Scotland was generated in multiple ways. Oral communication played an important role. As Douglas Watt observes, 'The promoters principally relied on word of mouth to sell shares in the Company, which was already the main subject of gossip in the coffee-houses of Edinburgh, indeed throughout the whole country, following the events in London' (49–50). But in addition, the Directors also relied on the affordances of the expanding print market to publish material aimed at generating interest in the Company. Lists of subscribers and the 'Terms' of subscription were published, as well as a multitude of other broadsides and pamphlets. And, as before, letter pamphlets were an important part of this printed campaign. The author of *A Letter from a Gentleman in the Country to His Friend at Edinburgh* asserts amongst his many points that Scotland is 'as much as any of her Neighbours, and more than many of them, fitted to be the Seat of such a Company, and a Mother to Plantations, especially in *America*' (3). The Company's efforts paid off, and when subscriptions closed in August, they had raised four hundred thousand pounds.

Having raised sufficient capital within Scotland, Paterson and several other directors went to Amsterdam and Hamburg to arrange ships and supplies and generate more 'noise' about the enterprise amongst foreign investors both through word of mouth and printed pamphlets. On 7 April 1697, however, William's ministers sent instructions to his Envoy at the Court of Lunenburg as well as to Paul Rycaut, the English Resident at Hamburg, to discourage investment in the Company. Over the next months, a series of official letters went back and forth between the Directors, the Secretaries of State and the King during which the Directors requested a declaration from the King of his support for the Company as well as reparations for the damages that had already been done to their finances and reputation as a result of the Memorial.

Interestingly, the letters from the Directors during this time period assume a new tenor as they rhetorically link the fortunes of the Company to those of the Scottish nation as a whole. In a letter sent 22 December 1697, 'To the "Right Honourable, The Lord High Chancellor, and remanent Lords of His Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council"', for example, the Council-General of the Company indicate: 'Your Lordships very well know of what Concern the Success of this Company is to the whole Kingdom, and that scarce a particular Society or Corporation within the

same can justly boast of so unanimous a Suffrage or Sanction, as the Acts of Parliament, by which this Company is established' (*A Full and Exact Collection*, 18). Parliament's Address to the King on 5 August 1698, too, indicated 'the whole Nation's Concern in this Matter' in asking the king to 'take such Measures as may effectually vindicate the undoubted Rights and Priviledges of the said Company, and support the Credit and Interest thereof' (*A Full and Exact Collection*, 26). In the formal letters and petitions complaining about English interference during this period, the Company of Scotland shifted from being a joint stock venture focused on profit to symbolizing the 'Honour and Independency of the Nation' (*A Full and Exact Collection*, 24). It was a shift that, repeated in subsequent manuscript and printed letters, would gain further amplification over the following years as the colony sought to establish itself.

2. Writing Home: Letters Between the Directors and the Colonists

When the five Company of Scotland ships left Leith harbor in July 1698, they carried with them twelve hundred individuals who, it was later claimed, had no idea where they were going. They arrived in Darien in November of that year. Even before they knew where they were heading, however, the colonists knew that they were required to write about it. The list of 'Instructions to the Council of the Colony' from the Directors specified as its third item that, following landing and taking possession, the colonial Council 'shall with all possible speed dispatch home to us an exact journal of your voyage, Landing, proceedings and condition of the place' (Burton, 54). In addition, item number ten of the Instructions required the Council to send back to Scotland both true copies and duplicates of all 'Proceedings, Books, and Registers' (Burton, 53–55). The Directors envisioned a stream of 'punctual correspondence' that would keep the Company connected with its new colony.

Figure 2: Map of the Isthmus of Map of the Isthmus of Darien and Panama by Herman Moll. From William Dampier, A New Voyage Round the World (London, 1697). Wikimedia Commons.

Letters were intended to provide a networked connection between the colonists and the Company Directors as well as friends and family back home. Over the course of the next year and a half, letters between the Directors and the colonists did indeed criss-cross the Atlantic Ocean. Abiding by the instructions they themselves had sent to the colonists, the Directors kept both a signed copy and an unsigned copy of every letter they sent out, and the colonists also dutifully wrote back home giving details of their experiences. But, although both sides kept up their share of writing, the actual process of communication between Scotland and its new colony differed drastically from the flow of 'punctual correspondence' that the Company Directors had imagined.

One of the biggest problems impacting communication was the time that it took for letters to travel back and forth between Scotland and the Scottish expedition, time that was also a function of unorganized space as, unlike letters that travelled within the postal systems within Britain and Europe, the letters between the colonists and the Directors were not conveyed at regular intervals using pre-existing routes. Once the colonists had sailed out of Leith, successful correspondence depended not on the punctuality of the writers but on the fate of ships that they encountered and used to relay their letters. Letter-writing between the Company and the colony involved an elaborate process of writing and re-writing to create not just copies and true copies, but also multiple 'original' versions to send. Details of the enterprise had to be kept hidden from

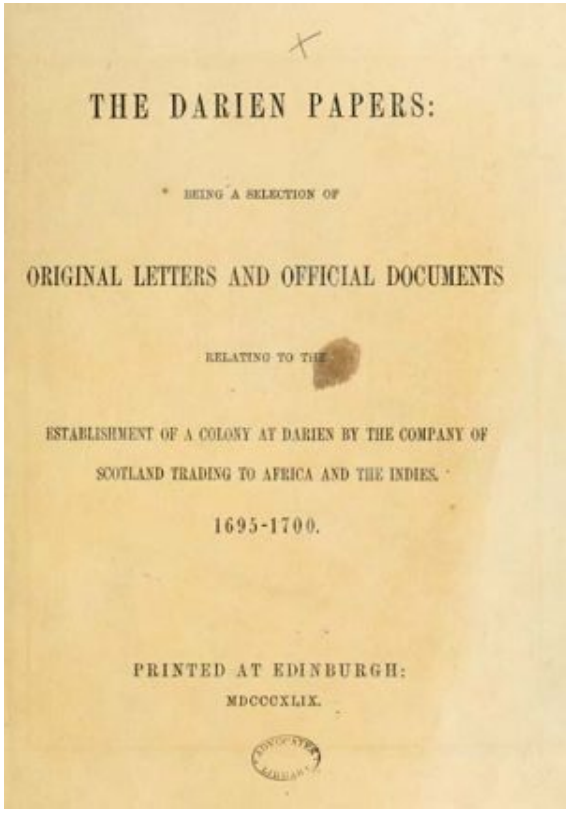
spies and ill-wishers, moreover, so letters needed to be sent only through trusted agents.

If secrecy in transit of letters was of paramount importance to the success of the Darien venture, disseminating the news of success that those letters conveyed was also crucial, as the Company Directors used the information in the letters sent back from the colonists to advance their cause with the King and the English Parliament. Crucially, the letters from the colonists sent upon their arrival were used as evidence to prove that the area surrounding Darien belonged to the Indigenous peoples and was not part of the Spanish settlements of Carthagena, Panama and Portobello and that it had been freely given up by the Indigenous owners to the Scottish colonizers.

At the same time, printed letter pamphlets purporting to be written by the colonists themselves were a vital component of the shaping of the meaning of the colony during this time. Letter pamphlets helped affirm the points that the Directors were trying to make through diplomatic channels. They also offered a positive perspective on future Scottish colonial prospects at Darien, amplifying the celebratory printed discourse circulating at the time (see Sandrock 2021). *A Letter, Giving a Description of the Isthmus of Darian,* for example, represents itself as sent '*from a Gentleman who lives there at present*', and describes the abundance of flora and fauna in the new location. Signalling again the national importance of the venture, the author of *A Short Account from, and Description of the Isthmus of Darien* suggests that such accounts from Darien appeal to all 'True *Scots* Men' and notes that he himself has included 'the Contents of some Letters writ from the Place where they are Settled' because 'the Honour and Happiness of the Nation, does in a great Measure depend' on the 'Success' of the colony at Darien (n.p.). Through their employment of what Gary Schneider calls a 'rhetoric of epistolarity' designed to 'verify reliability, authenticity, and intimacy' (55), the letters purporting to be from the Darien colonists did not just satisfy curiosity; they also forged an affective connection between readers in Scotland and the colonists. In their printed form, then, letter pamphlets encouraged the imagination of a new kind of Scottish identity, one that was both national and imperial.

Such optimism was short-lived, however. On May 3 1699, the Spanish ambassador presented a memorial to the King objecting to the Scots settling in territory that they considered their own. In response, William sent instructions to

Richard, Earl of Bellomont, Captain General and Governor in Chief of Massachusetts Bay, New York and the West Indian colonies to terminate communication with and assistance for the Scots colony. Cut off from supplies and decimated by illness, the remaining Scots at Darien abandoned the colony on 21 June 1699. Those who managed to survive made their way to Jamaica, or in the case of Paterson and some others, to New York. Accordingly, the two relief ships that arrived in August found no one at New Edinburgh. A second group of colonists, consisting of four ships, had already set out, however, and they arrived in Darien in November 1699. Lacking sufficient resources, refused aid by the Governors of the West Indian settlements, and attacked by the Spanish, the second colony surrendered to the Spanish on 31 March 1700, ending the Scottish colonial venture at New Caledonia in less than two years (Orr, 32).


THE DARIEN PAPERS:

BEING A SELECTION OF

ORIGINAL LETTERS AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

RELATING TO THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF A COLONY AT DARIEN BY THE COMPANY OF SCOTLAND TRADING TO AFRICA AND THE INDIES.

1695-1700.

PRINTED AT EDINBURGH:
MDCCCXLIX.

Figure 3: J. H. Burton, The Darien Papers: Being a Selection of Original Letters and Official Documents (Edinburgh, 1849). Courtesy National Library of Scotland.

3. Inscribing Darien in the Aftermath of the Disaster

Douglas Watt suggests that 'two parallel views' emerged from the 'voluminous' pamphlet war in the aftermath of Darien: 'one in which a well managed Company was undermined by English opposition and another in which the directors squandered the Company's capital' (168). He comments on the unprecedented support that the Company enjoyed as a result of the 'relentless and vigorous' propaganda campaign on the part of the Directors who embarked on a strategic campaign to exonerate themselves, helped by the emerging Country party who were also intent on generating opposition to the government-supported Court party (166). Ultimately, it was the narrative that blamed the disaster on English hostility that was more widely reprinted. Letters played an important role in establishing this narrative. Edited collections of letters and documents such as *The Original Papers and Letters Relating to the Scots Company Trading to Africa and the Indies*, for example, curated an anti-English cultural memory of Darien. Letter pamphlets also contributed to the discourse. In *A Short and Impartial View of the Manner and Occasion of the Scots Colony*'s *Coming Away from Darien*, for example, Andrew Fletcher adopted the form of a letter pamphlet to relate the history of Darien, observing that 'the Affections, as well as the Interests of many People seem to be wrapt up in its Fate' (38). Fletcher's words and comments, as well as those George Ridpath and James Hodges subsequently played an important part in the framing of the debate about the Union in 1707, arguing against an incorporating union.

Despite its importance in the debates on Union, however, the memory of Darien was effectively sidelined even in Scotland for over a century, taking a back seat to discussions of the Union. Then, in 1848, while conducting research for 'a History of Scotland', John Hill Burton discovered a 'curious collection' of documents 'in an old oak press in one of the under rooms of the Advocates Library': the papers 'connected with the Proceedings of the Company of Scotland trading to Africa and the Indies, commonly known as THE DARIEN COMPANY.' In the process of publishing *The Darien Papers* (in a printed book which also featured the new technique of anastatic printing to reproduce the original handwriting of the papers), Burton re-animated the memory of Darien. He also altered the narrative to fit a nationalist-unionist agenda, as he suggested that English neglect was only partially responsible for the disaster. The greatest blame, he suggested, lay on the

Scots for not being good colonial administrators in the seventeenth century. As Burton observes:

> *In every thing they did, the Company at home and the colonists abroad went from one blunder to another. The central and supreme authority, so absolutely necessary for a body of men pursuing a purpose at a distance from their parent state, appears to have been totally wanting. (xx–xxi)*

Given a new lease on life within a re-activated collective memory, the letters were used to write a narrative not of English political betrayal, but of Scottish colonial ineptitude. Clearly, the Darien letters currently featured on the UK Memory of the World Register tell as much a tale of the interruptions, erasures and re-alignments involved in the making of Britain's collective memory as of its consolidation.

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William Paterson to Robert Chiesley, 4 July 1695. NLS, Adv.MS.83.7.4 f.3.

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whole Kingdom, and that scarce a particular Society or Corporation within the same can justly boast of so unanimous a Suffrage or Sanction, as the Acts of Parliament, by which this Company is established' (*A Full and Exact Collection*, 18). Parliament's Address to the King on 5 August 1698, too, indicated 'the whole Nation's Concern in this Matter' in asking the king to 'take such Measures as may effectually vindicate the undoubted Rights and Priviledges of the said Company, and support the Credit and Interest thereof' (*A Full and Exact Collection*, 26). In the formal letters and petitions complaining about English interference during this period, the Company of Scotland shifted from being a joint stock venture focused on profit to symbolizing the 'Honour and Independency of the Nation' (*A Full and Exact Collection*, 24). It was a shift that, repeated in subsequent manuscript and printed letters, would gain further amplification over the following years as the colony sought to establish itself.

2. Writing Home: Letters Between the Directors and the Colonists

When the five Company of Scotland ships left Leith harbor in July 1698, they carried with them twelve hundred individuals who, it was later claimed, had no idea where they were going. They arrived in Darien in November of that year. Even before they knew where they were heading, however, the colonists knew that they were required to write about it. The list of 'Instructions to the Council of the Colony' from the Directors specified as its third item that, following landing and taking possession, the colonial Council 'shall with all possible speed dispatch home to us an exact journal of your voyage, Landing, proceedings and condition of the place' (Burton, 54). In addition, item number ten of the Instructions required the Council to send back to Scotland both true copies and duplicates of all 'Proceedings, Books, and Registers' (Burton, 53–55). The Directors envisioned a stream of 'punctual correspondence' that would keep the Company connected with its new colony.

Figure 2: Map of the Isthmus of Map of the Isthmus of Darien and Panama by Herman Moll. From William Dampier, A New Voyage Round the World (London, 1697). Wikimedia Commons.

Letters were intended to provide a networked connection between the colonists and the Company Directors as well as friends and family back home. Over the course of the next year and a half, letters between the Directors and the colonists did indeed criss-cross the Atlantic Ocean. Abiding by the instructions they themselves had sent to the colonists, the Directors kept both a signed copy and an unsigned copy of every letter they sent out, and the colonists also dutifully wrote back home giving details of their experiences. But, although both sides kept up their share of writing, the actual process of communication between Scotland and its new colony differed drastically from the flow of 'punctual correspondence' that the Company Directors had imagined.

One of the biggest problems impacting communication was the time that it took for letters to travel back and forth between Scotland and the Scottish expedition, time that was also a function of unorganized space as, unlike letters that travelled within the postal systems within Britain and Europe, the letters between the colonists and the Directors were not conveyed at regular intervals using pre-existing routes. Once the colonists had sailed out of Leith, successful correspondence depended not on the punctuality of the writers but on the fate of ships that they encountered and used to relay their letters. Letter-writing between the Company and the colony involved an elaborate process of writing and re-writing to create not just copies and true copies, but also multiple 'original' versions to send. Details of the enterprise had to be kept hidden from

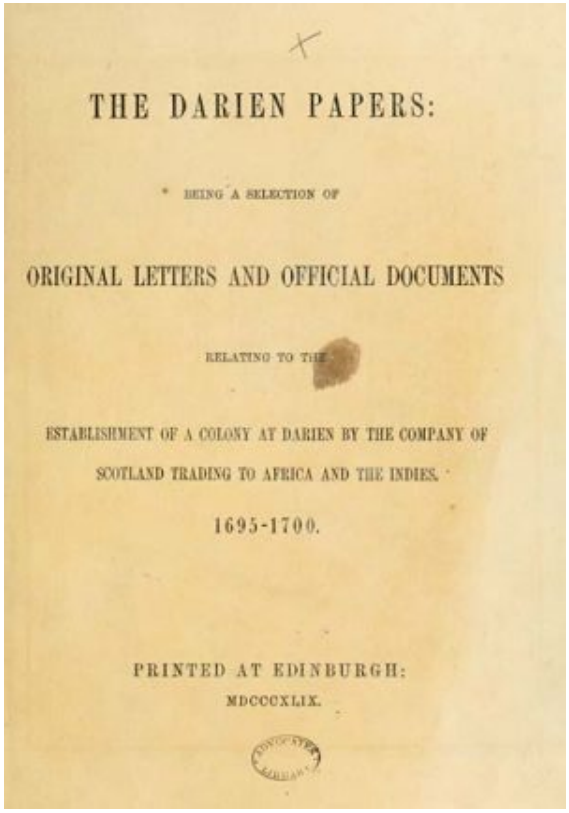
spies and ill-wishers, moreover, so letters needed to be sent only through trusted agents.

If secrecy in transit of letters was of paramount importance to the success of the Darien venture, disseminating the news of success that those letters conveyed was also crucial, as the Company Directors used the information in the letters sent back from the colonists to advance their cause with the King and the English Parliament. Crucially, the letters from the colonists sent upon their arrival were used as evidence to prove that the area surrounding Darien belonged to the Indigenous peoples and was not part of the Spanish settlements of Carthagena, Panama and Portobello and that it had been freely given up by the Indigenous owners to the Scottish colonizers.

At the same time, printed letter pamphlets purporting to be written by the colonists themselves were a vital component of the shaping of the meaning of the colony during this time. Letter pamphlets helped affirm the points that the Directors were trying to make through diplomatic channels. They also offered a positive perspective on future Scottish colonial prospects at Darien, amplifying the celebratory printed discourse circulating at the time (see Sandrock 2021). *A Letter, Giving a Description of the Isthmus of Darian,* for example, represents itself as sent '*from a Gentleman who lives there at present*', and describes the abundance of flora and fauna in the new location. Signalling again the national importance of the venture, the author of *A Short Account from, and Description of the Isthmus of Darien* suggests that such accounts from Darien appeal to all 'True *Scots* Men' and notes that he himself has included 'the Contents of some Letters writ from the Place where they are Settled' because 'the Honour and Happiness of the Nation, does in a great Measure depend' on the 'Success' of the colony at Darien (n.p.). Through their employment of what Gary Schneider calls a 'rhetoric of epistolarity' designed to 'verify reliability, authenticity, and intimacy' (55), the letters purporting to be from the Darien colonists did not just satisfy curiosity; they also forged an affective connection between readers in Scotland and the colonists. In their printed form, then, letter pamphlets encouraged the imagination of a new kind of Scottish identity, one that was both national and imperial.

Such optimism was short-lived, however. On May 3 1699, the Spanish ambassador presented a memorial to the King objecting to the Scots settling in territory that they considered their own. In response, William sent instructions to

Richard, Earl of Bellomont, Captain General and Governor in Chief of Massachusetts Bay, New York and the West Indian colonies to terminate communication with and assistance for the Scots colony. Cut off from supplies and decimated by illness, the remaining Scots at Darien abandoned the colony on 21 June 1699. Those who managed to survive made their way to Jamaica, or in the case of Paterson and some others, to New York. Accordingly, the two relief ships that arrived in August found no one at New Edinburgh. A second group of colonists, consisting of four ships, had already set out, however, and they arrived in Darien in November 1699. Lacking sufficient resources, refused aid by the Governors of the West Indian settlements, and attacked by the Spanish, the second colony surrendered to the Spanish on 31 March 1700, ending the Scottish colonial venture at New Caledonia in less than two years (Orr, 32).


THE DARIEN PAPERS:

BEING A SELECTION OF

ORIGINAL LETTERS AND OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

RELATING TO THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF A COLONY AT DARIEN BY THE COMPANY OF SCOTLAND TRADING TO AFRICA AND THE INDIES.

1695-1700.

PRINTED AT EDINBURGH:
MDCCCXLIX.

Figure 3: J. H. Burton, The Darien Papers: Being a Selection of Original Letters and Official Documents (Edinburgh, 1849). Courtesy National Library of Scotland.

3. Inscribing Darien in the Aftermath of the Disaster

Douglas Watt suggests that 'two parallel views' emerged from the 'voluminous' pamphlet war in the aftermath of Darien: 'one in which a well managed Company was undermined by English opposition and another in which the directors squandered the Company's capital' (168). He comments on the unprecedented support that the Company enjoyed as a result of the 'relentless and vigorous' propaganda campaign on the part of the Directors who embarked on a strategic campaign to exonerate themselves, helped by the emerging Country party who were also intent on generating opposition to the government-supported Court party (166). Ultimately, it was the narrative that blamed the disaster on English hostility that was more widely reprinted. Letters played an important role in establishing this narrative. Edited collections of letters and documents such as *The Original Papers and Letters Relating to the Scots Company Trading to Africa and the Indies*, for example, curated an anti-English cultural memory of Darien. Letter pamphlets also contributed to the discourse. In *A Short and Impartial View of the Manner and Occasion of the Scots Colony*'s *Coming Away from Darien*, for example, Andrew Fletcher adopted the form of a letter pamphlet to relate the history of Darien, observing that 'the Affections, as well as the Interests of many People seem to be wrapt up in its Fate' (38). Fletcher's words and comments, as well as those George Ridpath and James Hodges subsequently played an important part in the framing of the debate about the Union in 1707, arguing against an incorporating union.

Despite its importance in the debates on Union, however, the memory of Darien was effectively sidelined even in Scotland for over a century, taking a back seat to discussions of the Union. Then, in 1848, while conducting research for 'a History of Scotland', John Hill Burton discovered a 'curious collection' of documents 'in an old oak press in one of the under rooms of the Advocates Library': the papers 'connected with the Proceedings of the Company of Scotland trading to Africa and the Indies, commonly known as THE DARIEN COMPANY.' In the process of publishing *The Darien Papers* (in a printed book which also featured the new technique of anastatic printing to reproduce the original handwriting of the papers), Burton re-animated the memory of Darien. He also altered the narrative to fit a nationalist-unionist agenda, as he suggested that English neglect was only partially responsible for the disaster. The greatest blame, he suggested, lay on the

Scots for not being good colonial administrators in the seventeenth century. As Burton observes:

> *In every thing they did, the Company at home and the colonists abroad went from one blunder to another. The central and supreme authority, so absolutely necessary for a body of men pursuing a purpose at a distance from their parent state, appears to have been totally wanting. (xx–xxi)*

Given a new lease on life within a re-activated collective memory, the letters were used to write a narrative not of English political betrayal, but of Scottish colonial ineptitude. Clearly, the Darien letters currently featured on the UK Memory of the World Register tell as much a tale of the interruptions, erasures and re-alignments involved in the making of Britain's collective memory as of its consolidation.

(c) The Bottle Imp