



Letters Patent appointing John, Duke of Newcastle, Robert Harley and others as commissioners to treat for union with Scotland; 23 Jan. 1703. Among the symbols included in the decorative details are an English rose, Scottish thistle and Irish harp. Portland (London) Collection PI F1/1/18.

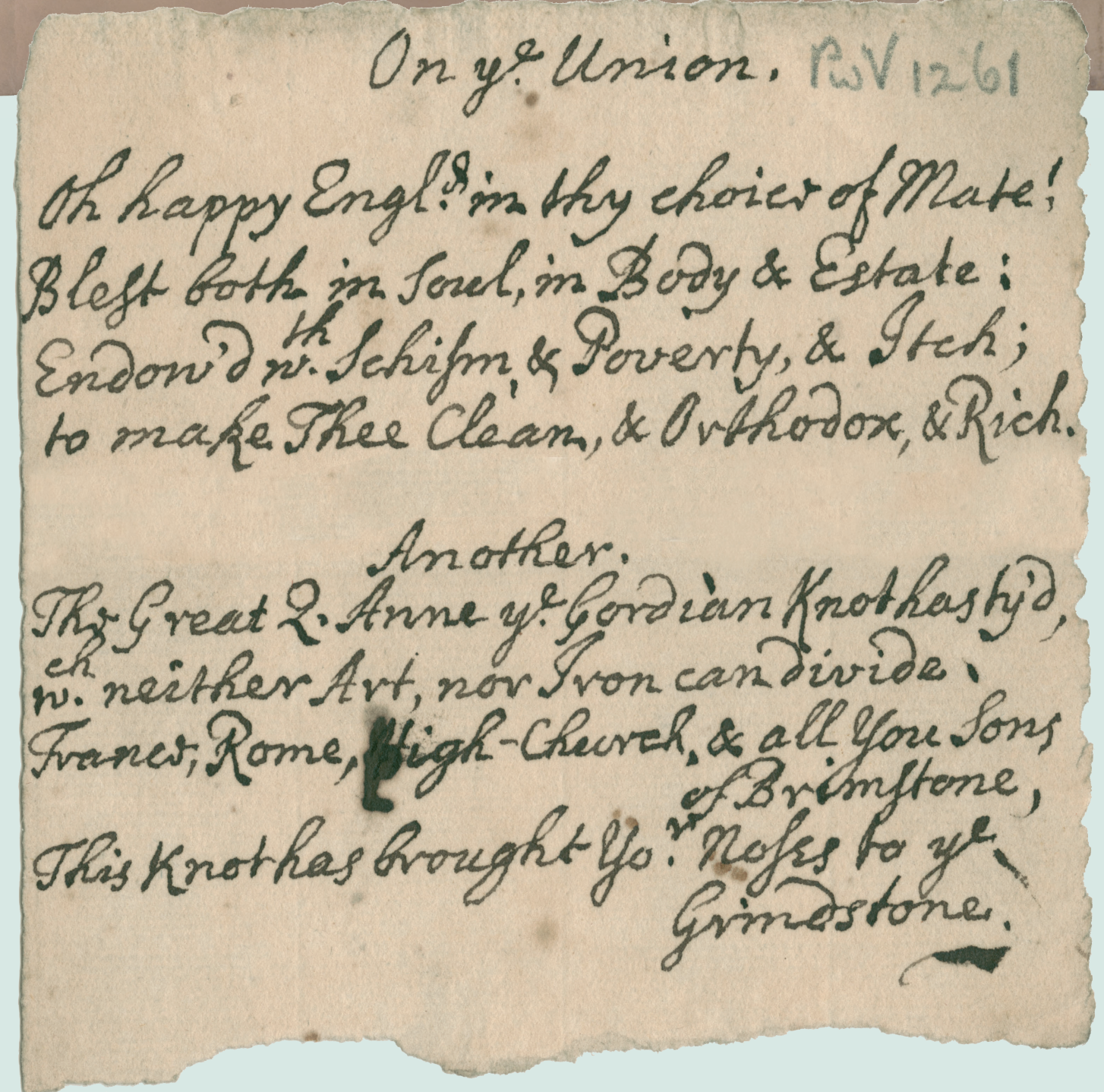
England and Scotland united!

In recent years the constitutional status of England and Scotland has often been in the news. A key event in the long history of the two countries occurred in 1707, when – to ensure the Protestant succession – the crowns of England and Scotland were united to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain, with Wales already an integral part of the English administration. Another century passed before the Irish Act of Union created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801.

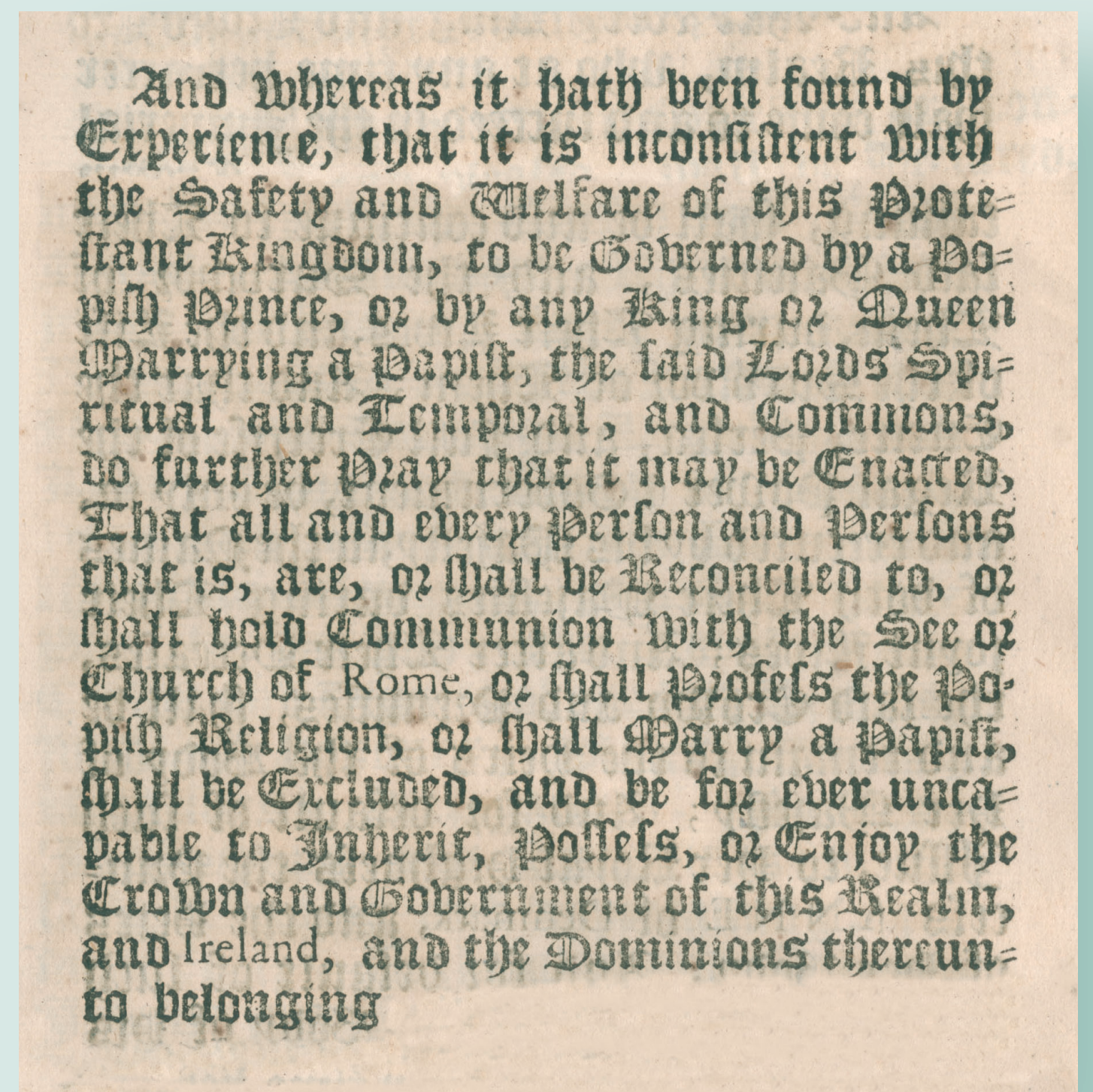
Although one monarch had reigned over the two countries since James VI of Scotland succeeded to the English crown in 1603, the Act of Union in 1707 fundamentally changed the political landscape, introducing a single parliament and a single market.

The 1689 Bill of Rights, after the Glorious Revolution, aimed to remove any possibility of a future legitimate claim to the crown by a Catholic. But the childless state of William and Mary had created uncertainty which increased under Mary's sister Anne, whose only heir died in 1700. English politicians, fearful of a Catholic Stuart return, passed the Act of Settlement in 1701. The next legitimate claimant, who must be Protestant, was identified as Sophia of Hanover, grand-daughter of James I.

Although the Scottish parliament had welcomed William and Mary in 1689, the separate status of the kingdoms allowed independent constitutional decisions. To ensure the succession of the House of Hanover, English politicians began to press for parliamentary union. Commissioners were appointed to negotiate terms and a Treaty in 1706, after earlier attempts at forging union were made in 1703. It became effective in 1707, when the Act of Union was passed. Scotland retained its distinctive legal system and a Presbyterian church, but Westminster became the place where its political concerns were determined.



Anonymous verses, 'On the Union'. These lines present ambiguous views of Union. Anne is credited with tying a Gordian knot, setting an intractable problem for the future. Portland Literary Collection Pw V 1261.



Extract from the Bill of Rights, An Act declaring the rights and liberties of the subject and settling the succession of the crown (1689). Special Collection Oversize JN205.S8

Far left: Seal of Queen Anne from Letters Patent. The wax seal shows Anne sitting in state. On the reverse is an image of Britannia.

