

The Political Parties: Commentators

Alexander Forbes of Pitsligo, philosopher and Jacobite officer (1678–1762)

Alexander Forbes travelled in France as a young man and returned to Scotland in 1700. Forbes believed in an independent Scotland and opposed a parliamentary union with England. He refused to get involved in the debate and withdrew to his home at Pitsligo Castle. He did not take part in the vote.

In 1715, Forbes supported the Jacobites, survived the battle of Sheriffmuir and fled to France. He returned to Scotland in 1720 where he lived quietly, studied philosophy and published several essays. He joined the Jacobite rising of 1745, survived the battle of Culloden but was forced into hiding for the rest of his life. He died aged 84.

Daniel Defoe, writer and businessman (c.1660–1731)

Daniel Defoe was born in London. He went into business but went bankrupt in 1692 and was committed to prison for debt. He took on different jobs to reduce his debts and began to write for money. A supporter of freedom of religion and the press, he published pamphlets, poetry and political essays. He earned the reputation as a political agitator and spent time in Newgate Prison for libel.

In 1703, Robert Harley, a senior English government official, employed Defoe as a spy. He was sent to Scotland in 1706 to work in support of the union. He infiltrated Edinburgh society, sent regular reports to London and produced his own impassioned propaganda.

Defoe returned to London in 1708 and continued occasional work for Harley until 1714. In 1719 he turned to writing fiction. On his death, he was buried in London.

Robert Wodrow, minister and ecclesiastical historian (1679–1734)

Robert Wodrow was born in the Trongate in Glasgow. He became minister in the parish of Eastwood in Glasgow in 1703. He sat on the commission of the General Assembly in 1706 and was very active in his opposition to the treaty of union. He believed it offered insufficient security for the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. He expressed his strong views in letters and articles sent to public and private figures. Wodrow remained in Eastwood for the rest of his life. He died there and was buried in the parish churchyard.