

A Scottish Secret

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Once again, the controversial issue of self-rule for Scotland is being debated, leading to the threat of the break-up of the United Kingdom. It was in Dover that the secret of unification of the two nations was first revealed. The two, Scotland and England, have been one since the Acts of Union in 1707, although there had been the “union of crowns” since James VI of Scotland became king of England as James I in 1603.

Historic documents, secret at the time, reveal it was at Dover that the merger of the two countries was first suggested.

It was two years before the death in 1603 of Queen Elizabeth I, while in Dover, that she revealed her secret plan to name James of Scotland as her successor as monarch. The date was 1601, when Elizabeth was enjoying herself at Dover Castle and entertaining a French minister who was later to become the Duc de Sully.

Elizabeth had quietly travelled to Dover with the hope of persuading the French king, Henry IV, to cross the channel for top level talks. The two of them were on good terms, especially after Henry signed the Edict of Nantes giving more religious freedom to Protestants in a Catholic country.

But Henry refused to cross the channel and, in turn, invited Elizabeth to cross the Strait to Calais for talks. She, in her turn, refused. This resulted in an impasse until it was agreed that Henry should send his senior minister the Marquis de Rosny, to Dover.

Rosny, a Huguenot and a trusted minister of Henry, wrote about his Dover visit in his Memoires. These tell, that during gossiping, Elizabeth, realising she was reaching the end of her days, whispered to Rosny that she

intended to make King James of Scotland her heir. This way she hoped the two countries would be unified. It was the first time the idea had been mooted in official circles.

And what happened to Rosny after he returned to France to tell his king of Elizabeth's secret? His next mission for France was to negotiate the Peace of Savoy and two years later he was back in England to serve as France's ambassador to the new monarch's court. He later returned to France, where he contributed to the rehabilitation of his country and remained a constant friend of Henry IV until his king was assassinated in 1610 by a deranged Frenchman, Charles Ravaillac.

It was not Queen Elizabeth's first visit to Dover. That was during her procession around England when, it was reported at the time, there were 300 followers including knights and nobles, including the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. The procession topped the hill from Folkestone and entered Dover via Cowgate and then down the lane now known as Queen Street (hence the name). She remained at Dover Castle for two weeks, distributing honours to Kent's folk and while there asked about the neglected state of Dover harbour. Told of the issue of financing repairs, she promised to try to do something about that.



Queen Elizabeth I