Forum for British and Irish Political Thought

Mission Statement:

The British state in its current form is unravelling. Scottish politics now diverge dramatically from English patterns. Scottish independence would not only transform the nature of the British state, but it would also have significant effects on Wales, and, particularly, on Northern Ireland, with further consequences in turn for the politics of the Republic of Ireland. The Forum for British and Irish Political Thought aims to bring clarity and informed expertise to current debates about political relationships among the constituent nations of these islands, whether within or outside the United Kingdom itself.

The current crisis of the British state is, in part, of course, a symptom of immediate discontents. However, it also derives from deeper-seated issues in Anglo-Scottish-Welsh-Irish relations going back to the middle ages. It was no accident that the Referendum on Scottish independence was held in the year of the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn. Medieval themes still have rhetorical purchase on the politics of the 21st century present.

The Forum for British and Irish Political Thought brings together those interested in the British and Irish Questions from across these islands, from academia and politics, and from across a range of disciplines. By political thought the Forum means much more than political philosophy; rather, it examines thinking about politics across a range of genres and idioms. Political thought, it is now recognised, is a subject which is intrinsically multi-disciplinary, a concern not only of political scientists and public lawyers, but also of historians and even literary critics, for the imagination too has a large part to play in the construction of national identities. Fiscal issues constitute another major theme in territorial politics, which will also be addressed.

The Forum seeks both to inform public debate and to provide expert analysis to policy makers who are faced in the case of the British and Irish Questions with issues deep-rooted in the historical past, well beyond the normal expertise of the political classes, whose horizons are inevitably present- and future-oriented. The Forum seeks to facilitate engagement between academics and other interested parties, including politicians, civil servants, and think tanks. A key feature of the Forum will be the aim to provide a relaxed and unthreatening setting for constructive discussion, in which politicians from across the major divides on constitutional issues, both nationalists and unionists of different sorts, can feel comfortable exchanging ideas and, perhaps, finding some common ground.

The Forum is non-partisan. Its membership includes unionists and nationalists, from inside and outside the United Kingdom, and does not pursue any party line.

Participants:

Organisers:

The steering group of the FBIPT comprises Prof. Colin Kidd (St Andrews), Prof. Gerry Carruthers (Glasgow – Centre for Robert Burns Studies), Prof. Aileen McHarg (Strathclyde and Scottish Constitutional Futures Forum), Prof. Jane Ohlmeyer (Trinity College Dublin), Dr Macolm Petrie (St Andrews) and Prof. Chris Williams (Cardiff)

The venture has attracted expressions of interest from a range of academics across several disciplines, and from various institutions, including not only the host institutions, St Andrews, Glasgow, TCD and Cardiff, but also at Oxford, King’s College London, University College London, Edinburgh, University of Ulster, Queen’s University Belfast, University of Strathclyde.

Associated Organisations:

The Forum has close links with the Scottish Constitutional Futures Forum and aims to collaborate with the SCFF on joint events and initiatives.

The Forum also has particular affiliations with the Institute for Intellectual History, the Institute for Legal and Constitutional Research (both St Andrews), the Centre for Robert Burns Studies (Glasgow) and the Trinity Long Room Hub (Trinity College Dublin).

Advisory Board:

Neal Ascherson

Lord Bew

Sir Kenneth Calman

Prof. Linda Colley

Sir David Edward

Tom Holland

Prof. Caroline Humfress

Tim King

Gregg McClymont

Lord McFall

David Melding A.M.

Lord Norton of Louth

Neil Oliver

John Redwood MP

Prof. Louise Richardson

Prof. Emma Rothschild

Activities:

The activities of the Forum will include:

Lectures and Seminars

Panels

Website (with reviews, blogs, podcasts)

Policy Advice

Inaugural Event:

On 1 March 2016 the Byre Theatre at St Andrews and Cardiff University hosted a joint livestreamed debate as part of the celebrations of the Tenth Anniversary of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The event was held on the eve of STANZA, the St Andrews poetry festival, and featured as part of its ‘fringe’ programme. The theme of the debate, chosen by the AHRC, was ‘Is British culture a myth?’ Speakers included Robert Crawford, Murray Pittock, Alison Lumsden and Ali Ansari:

<https://vimeo.com/158355452>

<https://vimeo.com/158601647>

<http://stanzapoetry.org/festival/events/british-culture-myth>

Next Event:

‘The Present Crisis: Origins and Outcomes’, St Andrews, September 17, 2016

Speakers include Lord Norton of Louth, Lord McFall, David Melding AM, Mike Russell MSP, David Torrance, Katie Stevenson, Dauvit Broun, Aileen McHarg, Graham Walker, Malcolm Petrie

Future Events:

‘Federalism and the British Constitution: Past, Present and Future’

‘Republicanism, the Monarchy and the Four Nations’