



First edition, single sheet broadside, lower inner margin cut away, text amended in a contemporary hand.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE DARIEN COMPANY

Constitution agreed upon by the Committee of the Company of Scotland trading to Africa and the Indies.

Author

[DARIEN COMPANY]

Publication date

13th April, 1696

Publisher

Publication place

Edinburgh,

Physical description

First edition, single sheet broadside, lower inner margin cut away, text amended in a contemporary hand.

Dimensions

Notes

The foundation of the Darien Company with manuscript alterations as adopted.

This first edition has manuscript alterations reflecting its adoption at a meeting four days later: the printed dateline is followed by the note 'agreed as amendit Apr. 17', which refers to two crossings-

out in the printed text of the articles.

This is one of the foundation documents for the ill-fated Company of Scotland, otherwise known as the Darien Company, created to challenge the London-based Royal African and East Indian Companies. Patented by Scottish Act on 26th June 1695 (the date of assent by William III), but subject to English Parliamentary and civil protests over the next eight months, its subscription book opened in Edinburgh on 26th February 1696 and closed on 1st August; in between, as these 'Constitutions' detail the precise terms of investment and responsibility were hammered out.

As John Pebble recounts, the act itself was "one of the most noble, vainglorious Acts ever passed by the Parliament of Scotland" and "as defined by [its] clauses... there had never been anything like this Company, nor would there ever be anything like it again... for the next 31 years it had the monopoly of Scottish trade with Asia, Africa, and America, and for 21 of these all goods imported by it, with the exception of sugar and tabacco, would be free of duty" (The Darien Disaster (1968), pp.21, 27). For ten years the Company was free to conduct its own hired ships "in warlike or other manner, to any lands, islands, countries or places" outside Europe, and "there to plant colonies, build cities, towns and forts", and to make its own treaties with native rulers, providing no European sovereign or state had established prior claims: "thus was the Company a nation in itself, with the right to make governments and wage war, to grant freedoms [to Scottish citizens] and impose punishments, to trade where, and with whom it wished... to the King alone did the Company owe allegiance, and in a token of this, and in gratitude, it promised him and his successors one hogshead of tabacco every year" (pp27-28).

Of course the Company is now best remembered for its main project, the doomed Central American plantation Caledonia, which collapsed in 1700 with great loss of fortune and life. The worst of all American colonial failures, as much a victim of bad planning as of English or European hostility. Never able to recover its capital or prestige, the Company itself was dissolved in 1707 as part of the Treaty of Union between Scotland and England.

This is the very rare first printing (13th April) of the Darien Company Constitutions: Wing, records four copies, just one of these in Great Britain (NLS). With its revised text it was printed in two forms, a two page version, only one copy of which exists (BL), and a three page version - both dated 17th April as our corrector indicates.

Bibliography

Wing, C5993A; Sabin, 18547.

Provenance

Price:

Inventory reference: 1295