

ICS BOOKS

# THE BEST OF 25 YEARS OF **THE SCOTTISH REVIEW ISSUE 5**



ISLAND AND RURAL LIFE  
INDEPENDENCE  
REFERENDUM 2014  
ERRORS AND  
CORRECTIONS



# The Best of 25 Years of the Scottish Review

Issue 5

Island and Rural Life  
Independence Referendum 2014  
Errors and Corrections

Edited by  
Islay McLeod

ICS Books

To

*Kenneth Roy, founder of the Scottish Review, mentor and friend,  
and to all the other contributors who are no longer with us.*

First published by  
ICS Books  
216 Liberator House  
Prestwick Airport  
Prestwick KA9 2PT

© Institute of Contemporary Scotland 2021

Cover design: James Hutcheson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means without the prior permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-8382831-4-8

# Contents

<b>Island and Rural Life</b>		<b>1</b>
Life on Coll	Martin Lunghi (1995)	2
A different way of seeing	Murdo Ewen Macdonald in conversation with Fiona MacDonald (1996)	7
Tales of the supernatural	James Shaw Grant (1998)	14
The giant MacAskill	Johan Roden (2003)	18
Island myths	Angus Peter Campbell (2006)	21
The gentry's cloth	Peter MacAulay (2009)	26
The pain of Raasay	Tessa Ransford (2009)	28
The World in the bay	George Gunn (2011)	31
The night I nearly drowned	Mike MacKenzie (2011)	34
Educating Lewis	Iain Smith (2013)	36
A state of tension on Shetland	Jordan Ogg (2013)	39
Three boys on a bucket list trip	Iain Smith (2013)	41
Finders keepers	Donald S Murray (2014)	46
A wind is howling in Scotland, but no-one's listening	Donald S Murray (2014)	49
Poor reception	Brian Wilson (2016)	52
Islay's amazing captain	George Robertson (2017)	55
<b>Independence Referendum 2014</b>		<b>67</b>
Why are we wasting valuable time?	George Robertson (2013)	68
What my grandparents taught me	Douglas Alexander (2013)	70
The missing vision	Alex Bell (2013)	72
The next question: why should I bother?	Alex Bell (2013)	74
We didn't need 170,000 words. We only needed 11	Katie Grant (2013)	76
Either way, Scotland lives on	Ian Hamilton (2013)	78

The scientific problem of dividing an island	John McGrath (2013)	80
Our 'friends in the north' may mobilise against us	Alasdair McKillop (2013)	84
Liz Lochhead and the luvvie consensus	Andrew Hook (2014)	87
Why would any intelligent Scot vote Yes?	David Donnison (2014)	89
My challenge to the No parties	Kenyon Wright (2014)	92
Scotophobia: how London hates us	Gerry Hassan (2014)	94
The Scotland of radical nostalgia	Gerry Hassan (2014)	97
I object to being called negative	George Robertson (2014)	100
A unionist makes the case for voting Yes	R D Kernohan (2014)	103
A people who need to be needed	Tom Gallagher (2014)	106
A people who need to be saved	David Black (2014)	108
The ludicrous idea of a Nordic dream	Dominic Hinde (2014)	112
Scotland at war with itself	Andrew Hook (2014)	114
I am more and more tempted to say Yes	Kenyon Wright (2014)	116
Why so many No voters are staying tight-lipped	Andrew Hook (2014)	118
Why a celebrity may sit on the fence	Bill Paterson (2014)	120
Will my relatives soon be foreigners?	Alex Bell (2014)	123
The myth of a divided Scotland	Gerry Hassan (2014)	125
The mock religious revival of the Yes campaign	Tom Gallagher (2014)	128
The SNP leaders should admit to their doubts	Gerry Hassan (2014)	132
What on earth is exceptional about us?	John Scott (2014)	135
The day of the torn souls may be approaching	Andrew Hook (2014)	137

Scottish artists and their cultural cringe	Gerry Hassan (2014)	141
Leadership has been assumed by the people	Alex Bell (2014)	144
Why this optimist is voting No	Carol Craig (2014)	147
Yes! Now is the time sing a better song	Ron Ferguson (2014)	156
No! I am voting to save my countries	R D Kernohan (2014)	159
The hubris of Alex Salmond	Kenneth Roy (2014)	162
Wha's like us?	Andrew Hook (2014)	165
The silent majority need to play a more active role	Walter Humes (2014)	168
Anatomy of a referendum - and its aftermath	Gerry Hassan (2014)	171
Next time, a supermajority will be needed	Nigel Smith (2014)	177
A Scotland of true believers	Jean Barr (2014)	179
<b>Errors and Corrections</b>		<b>197</b>
Diana's celestial boyfriend	Kenneth Roy (2009)	198
Rumours of her death	Kenneth Roy (2011)	200
<b>Contributors</b>		<b>202</b>

ISLAND AND RURAL  
LIFE

# Life on Coll

Martin Lunghi

1995

Considering its social and personal significance, the arrival of the sewage disposal tanker on Coll is never really afforded its due sense of occasion. Somehow, more should be made of the moment: a little festive bunting perhaps, children waving flags on street corners and, of course, a dance at night in the village hall. But there is none of this. The lorry quietly comes and quietly goes, but not to be seen again for another year or more. Even village gossip, which normally encompasses all life, leaves these visits unremarked.

Being low-lying and relatively flat, the island has evolved an erratic tracery of drainage ditches and, at one time, a mere generation or so back, it was customary for these ditches to receive the contents of household toilets and to convey this load, by degrees, to the sea. In these enlightened times, all homes outside the one village of Arinagour have their own septic tanks, the emptying of which awaits the coming of the sludge lorry. Somewhat unexpectedly, this event can often be experienced as spiritually uplifting, as though, with the scouring of each tank, there were some parallel cleansing of those responsible for its contents. Perhaps, as with confession, there is a sense of purging and of being able to start afresh. As with New Year celebrations, it may be that the ushering out of the old and in with the new is also a time of hope and bold resolve. At a stroke, all that is impure and uncivilised is sucked away and each tank owner quietly vows to sin no more.

Sadly, the tanker, once replete, makes its way to the end of the main pier and pumps the waste out – into the sea – and in so doing, serves as a mobile metaphor for one of the problems of island living, namely: how to get stuff away from the place. Nor is the problem inherent in the use of septic tanks as is evident from the fact that Arinagour itself has its own sewage system terminating in two outfall pipes which, naturally enough, lead away from the village – but also into the sea.

Another such symbol can be recognised in the tractor and trailer which, each Saturday, tours the entire island collecting household refuse, the final destination of which is a designated site among the island's abundant sand dunes. At one time, each dwelling would have had its own midden for normal household waste and more unyielding items would have been dragged into the nearest sea-riven gully, there to be progressively broken down by the action of sea and stone. Indeed, there are still parts of the island where the Atlantic swell continues with this task. More recently, the island's communal tip has served to distance each person from their waste and, for a while, it seemed to work. Over time, the wind blown sands would draw a shifting veil over the heaps of forsaken possessions and discarded food, to form a restless broken landscape of whining, dying metal and fluttering plastic sacks. Nowadays, however, the growing number of derelict vehicles in particular has

proved too much for the dunes so that a periodic cleansing of the island by the Territorial Army has become necessary.

The population of Coll is around 160, about 80% of whom own cars. There being no local garage to carry out MOT vehicle testing, these cars are exempt and may be driven on the island without an MOT certificate. In consequence, MOT failures from the mainland tend to gravitate to Coll, where they are often driven until they collapse so that it is not unusual to find them, at the end of their lives, ungratefully abandoned in the corner of some field. Those vehicles that do function constantly contest the tortured roads and the salt sea winds so that many come to display a certain world-weariness, somewhat reminiscent of 1940's post-war Britain. In part, this high rate of car ownership can be seen as inevitable since all the facilities are located in the one village and nearly 60% of island dwellings are widely dispersed away from that village. Indeed, some islanders regularly cover miles of trackless beach, through darkness, high tides and winter storms, to meet the ferry or to buy a tin of beans. It must also be said, however, that walking anywhere is increasingly viewed as an eccentric pastime and it is not uncommon, for instance, for children to be driven just a few hundred metres to school, in spite of the roads posing little danger.

The problem of exporting from the island is further evidenced when it comes to local trades and manufacturing and many an evening is spent, particularly with those newly arrived on the island, discussing and scheming over how to establish any sort of viable business. Clearly, any raw materials used must either be available locally, i.e. rock, sheep and heather, or must be light and small enough to avoid excessive incoming freight charges. This touches on the second major problem of island living, namely: how to get stuff into the place. The same constraints apply to the end product which should ideally be small and light i.e. not rock or sheep, otherwise it cannot compete with similar mainland products. To some extent, fishing for crab and lobster meets these conditions although few do this full-time and, even so, the waters are in danger of over-fishing. More promising is the tourism business, fickle though it is, and perhaps also the growing interest in art and craft work. Farm work continues but needs to be heavily subsidised and tends not, nowadays, to be sufficiently labour intensive to offer wide employment.

It seems little more than chance that the recent years of recession have passed almost unnoticed on Coll. This has been due to a period of intensive building and renovation work which has provided temporary employment for many islanders. Most notably, the local authority Housing Action scheme has transformed the face of the island by largely funding the upgrade of many of the houses, an undertaking which, due to the cost of importing raw materials, would otherwise have been impossible. A little later, the main pier was substantially rebuilt to cope with larger and more modern ferries. However, this bolstering of the island economy is ending and, as work from such undertakings diminishes, so anxiety over an uncertain future grows.

More typically then, there is a high proportion of casual and seasonal labour and a

tendency to earn income in a variety of ways, one person having perhaps five or more 'jobs'. In consequence, most islanders need to be opportunistic and be prepared to be generalists rather than specialists. A further consequence is that individuals are unlikely to see themselves predominantly in terms of what they do; their function doesn't clearly or uniquely define them, so that the familiar visitor's question, 'How do you spend your time?' or 'What do you do?' doesn't make much sense here. How nice it would be sometimes to reply 'I'm the baker, the plumber or the joiner,' but there again, what a relief not to be. Traditionally, each islander's identity has been more in terms of place than of work, even to the extent that surnames often become replaced by house names. Even today, this practice persists. Even today, the question, 'Who are you?' would prompt the answer, 'I'm Tom; I'm from Coll,' rather than, 'I'm Tom; I'm a baker'.

There are just two days to the island week. On one of them the ferry calls; on the other it doesn't. On a ferry day the island is alive, the village buzzes with good cheer and people drift with undaunted expectation to the pier – to see what the day will bring. Will the food arrive? What about that part for the washing machine? Will the 'club' parcels come today? Why not? What's the delay? Who has ordered all that furniture? What new faces will we see, who are they and where will they stay? Let's see who's going away.

Sometimes the aged leave, never to return. Sometimes the children go away; that taut time of ambivalent separation that stretches from the age of 12 years till the end of your days. That unimaginable time when the mainland high school eventually claims some small part of each island family. The ferry is both artery and vein to the island and from the shelter of the pier shed curious fingers probe the uncertain pulse of island life for, to some extent, each person's days are structured by this flow. Possibly, it is this same uncertainty that breeds a measure of patient fatalism in those who wait.

Along with the building materials and animal feed, the ferry brings food for the shops and it often comes as a surprise to the visitor that so much food is imported and so little is produced and sold locally. Surely, a population so small can barely sustain one such outlet, far less two? However, the presence of two shops does at least allow the harmless practice of partisan shopping as a mute and more or less dignified expression of the various factions which inevitably thrive in small communities. This, in turn, promotes the use of the shops as meeting places where those of like allegiance can exchange their various rituals of bonhomie with acceptable brevity and often messages are left in the shops for others who will come that way. Certainly, without such convenient segregation, interactions might well become uneasy, brittle and perfunctory.

In a way, such situations are symptomatic of the strains that attend a changing community, for the island has had to undergo not only a steady influx of incomers but a marked increase of seasonal tourist traffic. In consequence, a community that may well, at one time, have been strongly cohesive and cooperative, now increasingly shows signs of anomie, a loss of norms and mores, as disparate lifestyles and worldviews jostle for space. Some mourn and oppose the changes, as, of course, they must to the extent that identity is

rooted in place, for to change the place is akin to a change in one's own body. It is hardly surprising then, that at least one official concerned with local grants and development has commented on the seeming obdurate resistance to change shown in many small communities such as this. However, anomie communities are typically only unstructured and directionless for as long as it takes for new commonalities to replace the old. One of Coll's possible futures is that a growing spirit of vitality and enterprise will become apparent as concern for place breeds common purpose.

The regrettable absence of local produce results largely from the regulations relating to the sale of meat and dairy products, so that practically all provisions are imported by ferry. Retail pricing then becomes a function of freight charges and population size so that, in a twice yearly survey of cost of living throughout Scotland, Coll prices regularly feature in the top three, alongside remote Shetland communities. That so many islanders seem to absorb knowledge of this inequity with a degree of dour satisfaction may say much for the power of adversity to bond people and for the personalities that are drawn and bound to this peripheral place.

Unusually, this year young people returned to live on the island following their schooling. Several marriages took place and a modest baby boom has been noted but this is no way to increase population; it's far too slow. A working population needs to be attracted, large enough to sustain service industries and professions. For this to happen, however, both work premises and housing are required, neither of which currently meet with planning approval. The housing situation is further compounded by over 30% of housing stock on the island being held by absentee owners, either lying unoccupied or serving as holiday homes. Indeed, another possible future for the island is increasingly to become a site for second homes so that it serves as a sort of seasonal off-shore leisure centre. A further alternative is for the whole island to be designated for conservation and sites of special scientific interest.

Not surprisingly, vacant properties are more in evidence during the winter when the island is wrongly thought to be too hostile for comfortable habitation. Certainly, during these months, there can be times when arrogant displays of raw natural force play at will across the land so that the coastline cowers lower into the sea and work and leisure become subordinated to the elements. At such times, dwellings seem more remote and plans less certain. Mostly, however, the bite of winter here is rarely deep.

During the summer months, the island's population can be doubled, the visitors bringing colour and variety as well as profit. Some come with specific purpose, to visit the extensive RSPB reserve, to kill fish or to walk. Most, however, seem content to let time pass as they watch the changing sea and the stark, rock strewn landscape. In case entertainment is sought, there are various shows and competitions and the associated weekly dances provide a taste not so much of a social event as of a rumbustious ritual, dissolving the barriers of age and station. Sometimes, to make visitors feel at home, a traffic jam in the village is organised.

Interestingly, many visitors return again and again, sometimes over several decades, but when quizzed about this, usually fail to offer a convincing explanation. Certainly, many have family roots on the island and may find here a sense of home, whilst for others it is unashamedly an adopted home. Indeed, it may be that, with the modern divorce of work from home, with the dilution of family ties, with the increased mobility of populations, notions of 'home' and 'family' are becoming lost; fading vestiges from bygone times. Perhaps here then, where every face is known and one's own face is, in turn, familiar and accepted, it becomes possible briefly to recapture that secure sense of family and belonging. Perhaps here is a place to feed sweet illusions, to conjure dreams, and we are made the witting accomplices of myth, the artificers of soothing fantasy.

In this way, we may have become the victims of the romantic fallacy: the fallacy that the man of the soil is somehow more honest and more real, and that the simple natural solace of the land will bring us at last to vast untapped truths and inner peace. Our honeyed sentiment knows no bounds but all too often mirrors the candy box contrivance of the rustic poet and the tourist brochure. And yet the effect of the island is far from fanciful; it is real. In common with most wild and remote areas, it has the ability to unsettle minds shaped by the modern high-tech world; to challenge and to question; to heighten uncertainty and sometimes fear. Certainly, many who are by temperament islanders, display a robust individualism and self-sufficiency which finds ample expression here. Beyond this, however, such settings have the capacity to stimulate a peripheral awareness so that the imagination of each person can roam more wildly; so that the mystical becomes more possible. In a sense, where there is this interface between two worlds, the one can haunt the other, so that many people will feel touched by echoes from another place, by long shadows from a time outside the community, outside the common round of their day to day lives. For always, beyond and remote from the people, there is the harsh, timeless reality of the land.

The images that haunt us vary. Distantly, brown waters shimmer around the causeway that leads to a rocky island stronghold, a crannog, from which anxious eyes search for the flames of the invader. It is the time of the raised stone; there is blood on the rocks; the language is beyond time. Less dimly, a traveller shelters where a castle will one day stand, watching the sand dunes writhe and tumble before a winter storm. It is the time when a village is being buried; the language is early Irish; there is hunger and despair. Even now, today, a farm hand stops his tractor to watch strange cloud formations twist uneasy omens from sun, wind and rain across the vast sweep of island sky.

The scenes and the people change but the question stays the same: 'What will survive?' The same sentiment is commanded: one of subdued awe at the disproportionate presence of this small place.

# A different way of seeing

Murdo Ewen Macdonald in conversation with Fiona MacDonald  
1996

*Fiona MacDonald interviews Rev Professor Murdo Ewen Macdonald – Church of Scotland minister, theologian, and ex-commando. He was born in 1914 in Drinishader in the Bays area of Harris. The Presbyterian islands of the Outer Hebrides are renowned for their deeply fundamental religion, but Professor Macdonald admits happily to a radical theology at odds with such a faith. Heavens, he makes jokes in church. We talked about the influences on his life...*

It was a nice community to be brought up in. There was a strong community sense and though there wasn't much money, the importance attached to education by parents, who themselves were not highly educated, was immense.

There's still a strong sense of community in Lewis and Harris. It's demonstrated at weddings and funerals. At funerals, the whole community turns out. The same at weddings.

First there is a *rèiteach beag* when a wedding is to take place – the small gathering for the nephews and nieces and brothers and sisters, and others in the immediate family. Then there will be the *rèiteach mòr* – that's for a bigger group. It includes intimate relatives but the *rèiteach mòr* includes people who are not related to you at all but are friends and neighbours. Then [on the day of the marriage] there's the *banais* – that's for the whole community. And that still happens in Lewis and Harris. Oh, it's a very old tradition and it's very meaningful.

The community sense is not as strong as it used to be. The ceilidh has pretty well gone. It was very important when I was a boy. There were a number of homes where people would gather every night. Ours was one of them – my grandfather was a very amusing fellow. And the next croft – oh, it was a very popular ceilidh house. Christina Macdonald, a spinster, lived there. And there was another ceilidh house in the next village.

They were crowded every night.

Sometimes the talk would be about old songs and who composed them. Sometimes there were stories – maybe not all of them accurate but they were good stories about old characters.

I'll give you one example.

A fellow called Duncan Martin – he was a giant physically. And gentle. Absolutely gentle and good natured. And he held the floor this night.

In the village of Scadabay – the next village to ours – they had a schooner that took herring to Archangel in Russia, and they brought back wheat and something else. And even before communist days, the Russians were spy conscious. And they imprisoned the crew of this schooner. Duncan was only about 19 at the time and he was among them. The giant.

And the Russians started trying to get information from them, and they chose the most fragile of the crew. He was a young boy of 18 and he was slender and not very strong. A relative of Duncan's. Alasdair. Alasdair Martin. And they started pushing him around and knocking him about.

The rest of the crew turned round to Duncan and said, 'Duncan, you're the strongest man in the Outer Hebrides. Now, you take care of that thug the next time he comes in'.

Duncan was a gentle soul and said, 'Ah now, I've never raised my hand to man nor beast'. That was typical of him.

But next day the thug came in and he knocked young Alasdair unconscious. And that was enough for Duncan.

'So,' Duncan said in his gentle way as he told the story this night, 'I stood up. I walked over to the Russian. I took a hold of his two wrists and we swayed back and forth and I heard a *brag* [crack] and I knew I had broken his wrists. And he went out the door with his arms hanging limp by his sides'.

And that was the end of the story. Dramatic. He took his time telling it.

Oh, it could be very dramatic.

There'd be a core of people who would be in the same house every night. But new people would come in and it was very intriguing listening to the stories. Politics could be discussed too. Though they weren't highly educated, they were very interested in politics and they could discuss politics very intelligently. And then they might get somebody to sing a song. It varied.

But the media were taking over by the end of the 1930s and by the time I came back from the war in 1945, the ceilidh was on the way out. And that weakened the strong sense of community that existed traditionally. But oh, the sense of the community is still there. We have to visit everywhere when we go home. Every house. They're hurt if you don't. Really hurt. So when we go home we trot from house to house.

My basic discipline is philosophy. I don't claim to a Damascus road experience [in his faith] but the nearest I've ever come to it was in the philosophy class at St Andrews University. The lecturer was expounding the philosophy of John Stuart Mill and this sentence leapt up and it nearly knocked me out, and it was a tremendous influence on me. This is the sentence: I can only believe in a God who is better than myself.

It's a terrific sentence.

I began to question the fundamentalist God. I remember walking from the classroom to my digs and by the time I got inside, I'd got rid of the fundamentalist God.

I remember a television thing I was on, and it was on the question of AIDS. Cardinal Winning was the Roman Catholic representative. I was representing the Church of Scotland. Somebody else the Baptist church. Somebody the Episcopalian church. And there were a few fundamentalists there. It was a convention.

And the fundamentalists got up and this was their line: It's a judgement from God. He has lost his temper. He's put up with our sinfulness and now he's going to punish us...

So I got up and I said, 'I'm deeply shocked by what you are saying. Your God – the one you proclaim and profess to believe in – is a cosmic, mindless, immoral idiot. And as far as your bloody God is concerned I am an atheist and I'm proud of it!'

I was brought up in the United Free Church, which went out of existence in 1929 – it joined with the established church to become the Church of Scotland. My formative years were with the United Free Church; but it was an intelligent church. It produced what I would call intelligent evangelicals.

I am amazed at that God which is proclaimed from some pulpits. How they don't see through that... The people that are proclaiming Him are better than the one they are proclaiming.

I've been asked to write a book on fundamentalism, which I think is a great evil. I'm very tempted to do it, and my thesis would be: let's get rid of this mistake that fundamentalism is a purely religious phenomenon. It has a religious expression, but there are also political fundamentalists on the far right or the far left. There are philosophical fundamentalists. There are psychological fundamentalists – behaviourists, for example. There are atheistic fundamentalists – they are so sure that there is no God, they can't live with the question mark that there might be one, even in a universe as complex as ours.

Though! I've known evangelicals from all over the world – from Canada, Australia, English ones – and the Gaelic-speaking evangelicals are much more 'earthy' than the ones from elsewhere. My father was a good example of that. He was quite a pious man, and yet he was earthy in his stories and his sense of humour.

The Gaels are poetic. By that I do not mean they are poets, but there's a sensitivity to poetry. This business of disapproving of secular songs didn't exist before 1790. It was Hogg of Kiltarn, who was a powerful minister and had a lot of disciples, who introduced this bifurcation of sacred/secular. Now, this is very strongly rooted in the Hebridean culture. It's stupid. Who created the secular world? Was it Satan? Obviously, it was God.

There was this man Macleod – a disciple of Hogg of Kiltarn – and he appeared in Lewis. In Uig. It was a big parish – in fact it included the parish of Harris at the time – and Macleod imposed this sacred/secular bifurcation. You could sing hymns or psalms. No secular songs. The secular would rob you of your sanctity – this kind of thing. Now, that attitude is still there. Macleod was a powerful figure and he imposed his personality on the entire community. These narrow religious people have got strong convictions – to this day you find these attitudes.

And yet, somehow it didn't quite succeed. I notice Professor Donald Macleod had an article in the *West Highland Free Press*, and he admits in it that the effort didn't quite succeed. Professor Donald is right. There is still this curious humanity and earthiness which they failed to destroy.

*Rev Professor Murdo Ewen Macdonald is himself an example of a Gaelic amalgam of religious figure and earthy, Celtic humanity: a professor of practical theology who is a*

*socialist and enjoys a renowned sense of humour; a Church of Scotland minister who became a commando and paratrooper. Wounded and captured behind enemy lines, he spent the rest of the war as padre in a camp for US Air Force prisoners.*

*His autobiography, Padre Mac: The Man from Harris, reveals that when commissioned chaplain in the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, a senior officer compared his sartorial style to that of a Highland stick and told him in no uncertain terms what kind of deference he, as senior officer, expected in future. Rev Murdo Ewen promptly threatened to 'knock hell' out of him if he ever spoke to him like that again.*

*On another occasion, at the end of the war, he felt that if he followed orders to join a team evicting local German families from their homes, he would never again be able to preach the gospel of Christ. On being told this, the group captain called him an oatmeal savage, an ignoramus, and a coward – each insult delivered in a clipped accent and accompanied by an obscenity – and threatened to court martial him. Murdo Ewen turned the key in the door and promptly knocked the officer out cold. Bringing him round, he explained to him, 'Because you went to an expensive school you think you are educated... The trouble with you is that in your snobbish abysmal ignorance you equate education with intonation. Let me tell you that I went to inexpensive schools and I am cosmically better educated than you...'*

I was brought up under a terrific minister. He was a Lewisman, Duncan Macleod. He was a product of Aberdeen University and they bestowed a doctorate on him. Dr Macleod was a brilliant scholar. Crofters hadn't got much money and unless you won a bursary competition, they couldn't afford to send you through higher education. Those of us who made it were people who were good enough at exams to get bursaries and scholarships. He used to teach in his study – maths, English, Latin, Greek, and finally Hebrew. And the number of people he put through exams who then went on into the ministry... He was terrific. The roll of 240 members produced 30 ministers.

Another influence on me was a first cousin called Angus Campbell. I think he was the best all-round developed personality I ever met in my life. He was very strong physically. He was a terrific mariner – even the Lewis people admitted that he was the best mariner in the Minch. He was a brilliant mason, carpenter, boat builder, engineer, plumber. He was very intelligent. And he was human with it. He was pious – he was session clerk of the church – but he retained his humanity.

I must confess, I'm pessimistic about the future of the Gaelic language. The ground of my pessimism is media bombardment. It's there all the time in newspapers, radio, television. And I listen to the Gaelic news from this chair and I find it a bit artificial. I remember I was home on holiday once and the Gaelic news came on and my brother Angus got up out of his chair and switched it off.

'Why did you do that, Angus?'

'Because I understand the news better in English.'

That's an honest reply. There's a curious artificiality about the news in Gaelic.

A theologian, Paul Tillich, had a great influence on my thinking. He started off as a philosopher and then he became a theologian, and I got to know him. And he was an authority on symbols. He said that language is the most powerful of all symbols. He argued in a chapter of a book that when a language dies, it dies 'in the womb of the unconscious'. That's his great phrase. There is no conscious decision. No exact time. I understand what Tillich means. If this unconscious drive goes on, it will kill the language even although there are some who are striving to save it.

Take one example. When I was a boy at school, at the interval we always played in Gaelic. You never thought of playing in English. You go to the equivalent school today – the children are not playing in Gaelic now.

It's a beautiful language, but I'm a bit pessimistic...

In the lowlands and in other English-speaking countries, uneducated people make grammatical mistakes. The uneducated Gaelic-speaking person never does. My father left school at 12 and I never heard him make a grammatical mistake, and we listened to him conducting family worship morning and evening. Never once. And the same with my mother. Technically speaking, they were uneducated. But they came from a rich oral culture – that's why I would be very sad if Gaelic died out.

I remember Murdo, my brother, a week before he died, was driving me from Edinburgh to Glasgow and he suddenly said to me, 'Murdo Ewen, would you agree with me that mother is the most intelligent uneducated person you have ever met?'

So, I took my time in replying, and I said, 'Murdo, I agree with you that mother is very intelligent, but I don't agree with you that she is uneducated'.

'But she left school at 12.'

I said, 'Yes, but I'll give you two examples. One of the best hymns in the hymnary – in fact, in my opinion, it's the best Christmas hymn of all because some Christian hymns are sentimental and sloppy – is *Child in the Manger, Infant of Mary*. Composed by Mary Macdonald, Bunessan [Mull]. Now, she could neither read nor write. And that hymn is the most intellectual of the Christmas hymns. And Duncan Bàn Macintyre: a contemporary of Burns. He wasn't such a good lyrical poet as Burns, but he was a much better satirist than Burns. He could neither read nor write'.

That demonstrates the richness of the oral culture. So I would deplore the death of the language. It's a poetic language. It's pictorial. People who have listened to me preach have told me that they can see what I'm saying – that I project a picture. My reply is that if I do that, it's unconscious – it's a Gaelic legacy. Betty [his American wife] notices it too. She loves Harris and she says that people there project a picture when they're speaking. Most of them.

But English is so powerful and we're exposed to it all the time.

I forget which psychologist said a number of years ago that the proof of authentic bilingualism is: do you dream in the two languages? I do. When I dream about my brother Murdo, it's always in Gaelic.

*It is rare to meet an older Hebridean who does not have a story about second sight or similar phenomena. Professor Murdo Ewen is no exception. Indeed, he has a particular interest in the paranormal.*

I came to a belief in it in a peculiar manner. I was an undergraduate at university at the time and I used to go home for the summer and help my father on the croft. I was helping him to cut corn one day when a crofter by the name of Alasdair MacKinnon from the next village stopped to talk to us and he started teasing me, saying, 'Murdo Ewen, since you went to that posh university you don't come and ceilidh'.

I said, 'Alasdair, wait till I clean myself and change, and I'll go with you'.

We had to walk a mile to his house beside a beautiful loch – oh, it's gorgeous – and this thing happened.

About 50 yards from his house he stopped and began to shiver. His face went very white and he had a curious look in his eyes. And then the sweat came out on his brow – ever since then I've had this picture in my mind of the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was supposed to have huge globules of sweat on his brow – well, the sweat stood out like that and I got hold of his elbow and I steadied him. And he said in a strangled voice, 'Calum is dead'. And I knew he was referring to Calum his son who had emigrated to Canada about 10 years before.

So I helped him home and he lay on the bench and he kept looking at the ceiling. And his wife came over and said: 'He has seen something?'

I went home and I didn't say anything to my parents and next morning the postman passed our house because he had a letter for the next house, and on his way back he came in and said to my mother, 'Isn't it sad about Calum MacKinnon?'

She asked what had happened and he said that Calum had been killed in Montreal the day before.

I went up to the teacher who used to teach us navigation at school to find out the time difference between Montreal and Harris, and he had died at the same time as I'd been with his father.

So that was my conversion to the paranormal.

I have a friend, he's a retired professor of astronomy, Archie Roy. Archie is the number one expert in Scotland on the paranormal. Now, he is not a devout churchman but he is a passionate believer in the afterlife. And one of his theories which I can expound is that there is something belonging to the personality which is indestructible. Death cannot destroy it.

Now, Archie may not be an orthodox Christian, but he's an ally, and we should welcome all allies. None of them believe in the afterlife more passionately than Archie. We need our allies.

I think it's arrogant to be dogmatic about the nature of the afterlife. The truth is, we don't know. I don't believe in the old-fashioned hell because it comes back to this thing I tackled

at the AIDS convention. I'm better than a God who would consign people to that kind of hell. And I would say that without any trace of arrogance.

But I do think that if the afterlife is meaningful, in order to get to a higher level you have to work hard. As a child, I'm quite sure I had to try very hard before I could walk. This is my view, we're exposed to different environments and we have to learn, and sometimes the learning may not be easy.

But I don't believe in this savage God. Not only that, but I wouldn't respect him.

# Tales of the supernatural

James Shaw Grant

1998

As a journalist, I am a professional sceptic. As the son of a journalist, my scepticism began in infancy. I vividly remember, even before I went to school, being asked to convey home a boy, nearly twice my age, because there was an aurora and he thought it was the angels dancing. Displays of aurora were frequent in my childhood because the canny burghers of Stornoway switched off the street lights when there was a moon. My childhood was punctuated with showers of meteorites and vivid displays of the Northern Lights as I came home from my granny's house on the seafront, snuggling under my father's coat. I will come back to the aurora later. It lies at the core of what I want to say.

My disbelief has been assailed by several incidents I find it hard to understand. My maternal grandfather, a ship's mate, was firmly convinced that his brother-in-law spoke to him from beyond the grave as he crossed the Bay of Biscay. John Smith's ship was lost with all hands in that area. Years later, my grandfather dreamt that John Smith came to him as he slept and asked him to assure the owner of the boat, a Stornoway man, that he had not been at fault. It is easy enough to rationalise that incident. My grandfather would have a fair idea that he was near the place where John Smith's ship was lost. That fact itself may have inspired the dream.

An Australian cousin, of whom I was very fond, was firmly convinced that she had second sight. She gave me many instances. During the Second World War she was told officially that her uncle, an engineer in the Canadian navy, had been lost at sea. She refused to believe it, asserting he was alive and well in Nova Scotia. Her minister rebuked her for raising false hopes for her grieving mother. My cousin persisted in the story and in due course it proved to be correct. Her uncle's ship was torpedoed but he was picked up and landed in Nova Scotia.

Nothing as dramatic as that has ever happened to me but I had a strange experience in the middle of Princes Street. In the Overseas Club to be precise. My wife and I were going to our bedroom. The reception desk was then on the first floor and, as we passed it in the lift, we heard a man we could not see booking a room for the night. The voice was familiar and distinctive. I said, 'That's John Maclean'. 'That's John Maclean, undoubtedly!' said Cathie. In the morning, John Maclean, the Director of Education for Inverness and father of a much respected Scottish judge, was seated in the dining room before us. 'We heard you checking in last night,' I said to him as we paused at his table. He looked surprised. 'I wasn't here last night. I've just come off the sleeper. I haven't got access to my room yet.'

My mother had an even more disturbing experience. A fishing boat caught fire in Stornoway harbour. A group of youngsters, being taken for a sail, were trapped in the

engine room. One died. His brother was badly burned. When the fire occurred, the mothers of the boys were together at a tea party, to welcome a new matron who had come to Lews Hospital. In the course of the conversation they discovered she read cups. 'You don't know any of us. You must read ours!' Nurse Galbraith found a strange ship without a funnel in several of the cups. She found tears and fire and people who got money they did not want. She told my mother she saw her in a state of terror but, suddenly, anxiety gave way to joy.

While the cups were still being read, a messenger burst into the room with the news that one of the hostess's sons was dead and another badly injured. He had no idea where my brother was. He hadn't seen him since the blaze. My mother raced to the quay where she found my brother standing in the crowd. Even as a child he had an instinct for mechanical things and refused to go into the engine room because he did not think it was safe. He watched the attempt to start an old-fashioned engine with a blow-lamp, through a hatch, from the safety of the deck. Ironically, the fishing boat was called The Children's Trust.

Almost exactly 100 years ago, there was a drowning disaster in Brown Bay, then one of the most prolific fishing grounds for haddock in the kingdom. For weeks, the fishermen had been unable to go to sea because of gales. Money and food were getting scarce. Just before Christmas, there was a sudden calm. It was the middle of the night. The boats were launched from open beaches and had to go when the tide was right, or not at all. If they had access to a barometer they would have known they were sailing into the heart of a hurricane. Just as they reached the fishing grounds, the storm was renewed, with even greater violence, from a different direction. The darkness was complete. The thatched houses round the bay gave no glimmer of light. The lighthouse at Tiumpan Head had not then been built. The fishermen had no idea from which direction the wind was blowing or where their boats were being driven. Those who survived could not see the land even when they struggled through the breakers to the shore. By daybreak, men from all the villages around the bay were combing the beaches for wreckage and for bodies.

On the night of the disaster, a young divinity student from the area, temporarily teaching in North Uist, had a strange dream. He was walking to Stornoway from his home in Gress to begin the journey to the university to resume his studies. He met a group of fishermen. It was a sunny day and they had not yet been to the beach but their oilskins were dripping wet. They said their Gaelic goodbyes and wished him well. Next night, he had another dream. There was a wedding in the village but the wedding dance was not held in the bride's parents' barn, as the custom was. It was held in the local joiner's shop. The dreamer was distressed at the obvious disagreement between the families who were all close friends of his. As he entered the dance, he was astonished to find the same seven fishermen, still in their oilskins, still dripping wet. Their coffins were being made in the joiner's shop when he had his second dream.

The difficulty with a story like this for a sceptical journalist is that we seldom hear of the premonition until after the event. However, there are unusual circumstances relating to this

incident which, though they do not prove the timing of the dreams, give them credibility. The divinity student had two younger friends, still pupils in the Nicolson Institute, in whom he confided. One was Donald Maclean who went on to become headmaster of Boroughmuir School in Edinburgh and one of the leading educationalists of his generation. The other was Robert MacIver who almost completely cut himself off from Lewis when he set out on a career which earned him honorary degrees from eight universities, including Edinburgh and the big four in America: Columbia, Harvard, Princeton and Yale. A few years ago, Donald Maclean's daughter found among her father's papers an account of the dream as he recorded it soon after the event. When Robert MacIver sat down, in his 85th year, to write his reminiscences, he recalled the dream almost in identical terms, commenting: 'The story caught me. I could not doubt the divinity student's veracity. But I was not convinced'.

The Lewis ceilidh tradition claims that Coinneach Odhar (Grey Kenneth), the celebrated Brahan Seer, belonged to the island and got the famous stone, through which he saw the future, by blackmailing the ghost of a Norwegian princess whom he surprised as she was returning to her grave in Bailie na Cille, from a midnight excursion to see her friends in Norway. William Matheson, a lecturer in Celtic Studies at Edinburgh University, has shown fairly conclusively that this version of the Lewis seer is but the shade of a shade. This is the story of the Brahan Seer, carried across the Minch by the Mackenzies when they took possession of Lewis in the early 17th century and given a local habitation by the tale's bearers.

The real Brahan Seer is a tougher nut to crack. There is still a thriving industry in the Highlands inventing his prophecies to match events, but every time I look out my study window to Chanonry Point, where he was burnt in a barrel of tar, I am reminded that Sir Walter Scott and Sir Humphry Davy, inventor of the miners' safety lamp, are both on record as having heard his most famous prophecy, about the doom of the Seaforths, before it was fulfilled.

An incident of a different kind but raising somewhat similar questions occurred shortly after I took over the editorship of the *Stornoway Gazette* in the early 1930s. One Sunday morning, an elderly lady in the village of Tolsta Caolais, on the west coast of Lewis, was sitting with her granddaughter and grandson having a cup of tea. Suddenly the caorans – little bits of peat – began to jump from the side of the stove. One struck the old lady on the cheek. Another plopped into her cup of tea. Then there was a crash. The globe of a lamp, hanging from the ceiling, had broken in two and the fragments of one half were lying on the floor. The old lady was startled but kept her head. She told her granddaughter to take the dishes into the scullery and put them for safety into the cupboard.

As soon as the scullery door was opened, the teapot sailed from the sink into the bedroom where it struck the wall, coating the wallpaper in tea leaves. A jug of peasemeal landed on the bed with the contents intact. A jug of rice smashed in the middle of the floor. A row of cups, hanging from nails by their lugs, dropped to the floor, leaving their lugs on their nails. All the plates on the sink were broken clean across. A cake of Lifebuoy soap was

split in two as cleanly as if it had been done with a knife. Even the toothbrush was broken in three. When the granddaughter opened the cupboard door, all the dishes there disintegrated. In a few minutes, there was nothing left whole in the house but the dishes she was still clutching to her chest. While this was going on, the little grandson was sitting on the floor clapping his hands and shouting in Gaelic, 'Here's another, here's another'. The old lady's son, passing with the family to church, heard the commotion and came in just in time to see the end of the carnage.

I examined the old lady and the children very closely. The old lady was a remarkable woman. She said to me simply: 'There is an explanation although I don't know what it is'. Some of the villagers claimed greater enlightenment. They avoided the cottage after dark because it was haunted!

At first, I thought it was a classic case of poltergeist. The granddaughter, who seemed to be at the centre of the action, was just entering her teens and the events had all the appearance of being the work of an 'unruly spirit', although I could not see how the little lassie, who had all the dishes in her safe keeping, could be throwing teapots and jugs from a room she wasn't in. Then I came to the conclusion that it was a straightforward electrical phenomenon. That weekend, there was a remarkable display of aurora over the whole of northern Europe, accompanied by severe thunderstorms, one of them in Lewis.

The old lady's house was a large-scale model of the Leyden jar, beloved of school laboratories for building up high charges of static electricity. The wooden house on a concrete foundation was the non-conducting container. The iron stove, out of all proportion to the room, with an iron chimney through the roof, was the metal conducting rod through which the charge of electricity was fed in. The disturbance began with the caorans flying away from the stove which was the source of the electric charge. The second phase began when the insulating wooden door between living room and scullery was opened, the third phase when the insulating cupboard door was opened and the last dishes were exposed to the electric charge.

My explanation was met with a certain amount of derision. Electricity could not break dishes! Now, after more than 60 years, I have been vindicated. A few months ago, there was a programme describing how half of Canada was blacked out, in a matter of minutes, by a flare-up of the sun, producing brilliant displays of aurora and violent thunderstorms. More importantly, it played havoc with the delicate electronic equipment on which modern life depends. The US military were deeply concerned. They realised that a similar flare-up might dislocate their whole communications system for days or even weeks. They haven't long to take precautions – if precautions can be taken. The next flare-up of sunspots is due around 2000.

In the 1930s, sunspots could do nothing more serious than break the dishes in a Lewis croft-house. In the fragile, friable world of the internet and microchip, a similar flare-up might disable the economic, social and military life of a continent.

Are we worrying about the wrong millennium bug?

# The giant MacAskill

Johan Roden

2003

As far as I can remember, I always knew I was related to a giant. Older relatives in my family used to talk somewhat proudly of Angus MacAskill, who, standing at 7ft 9ins, weighing 33 stones and bearing a chest measurement of 80 inches, was the tallest Scotsman who ever lived, indeed the tallest natural giant as entered in the *Guinness Book of Records*.

Born on the island of Berneray, Angus spent most of his life in Cape Breton, where his family had emigrated while he was a child, and was remembered for his feats of strength, his kindness and his 'mild and gentle manner which endeared him to all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance,' as reported in the *Halifax Arcadian Recorder* after his death.

Exactly how I'm related to this man I must admit I'm unsure of. My mother's family, also MacAskills, had originally come from Berneray, and in such small communities ties either through blood or marriage are not uncommon, though I have a feeling such ancestral disclosures are imparted to each and every young MacAskill with even the faintest of island connections. And so, a week's camping holiday touring the Western Isles provided a more than agreeable opportunity to find out more about the Giant MacAskill and uncover the truths, half truths and blatant fibs surrounding him.

It was during that uncharacteristically hot spell at the end of April that my boyfriend and I set out from Inverness on our way to the Isle of Skye. Apparently the weather was beautiful everywhere, the north-west no exception. The landscape became impressively rougher and higher the further west we drove. We were heading towards the village of Dunvegan where I had heard there was a museum dedicated to Angus MacAskill.

Crossing the most expensive toll bridge in Europe and winding through the spectacular Cuillins, we reached Duvegan, locating the paradoxically small museum, set up by a more entrepreneurial distant relative of the giant's, Peter MacAskill.

The museum accommodates a life-size model of Angus with stories of his life displayed on the walls. Peter MacAskill struck me as a very likeable character and certainly told his stories well.

From Skye, we boarded the ferry to Lochmaddy on North Uist and made our way to Berneray, the two islands joined by a causeway. A breathtaking place with beautiful beaches, here Angus MacAskill was born into a family of 13 in 1825. Neither of his parents was particularly tall. Fisherman Norman was a stout 5ft 9ins and his mother Christina was described very tactfully as 'a good sized woman'. The family moved to the larger island of Harris while Angus was still a baby, his Heroch neighbours remarking that there was nothing special about him as a youngster except the size of his thumbs. However, the MacAskills did not remain long in Harris either. With the Highland Clearances in full flow

and the fishing trade unable to sustain the population of the islands, the entire family left for Canada in 1831 following many of their neighbours.

Quite what they made of leaving their beautiful part of the world, or how they fared on the long, hazardous journey is not documented, but they eventually settled in Englishtown in St Anns Harbour, Cape Breton.

In the small pioneer town, Angus's increasing size was useful. It was a time of much hard physical labour with trees to be felled, timber to be sawn and housed, farms to be constructed. After receiving a basic education, Angus became a successful fisherman, learning the trade from his father.

Hardship struck again in 1847, however, when the crops failed and Englishtown suffered near famine. It was around this time that Angus was approached by an American fish trader who suggested he should tour Canada exhibiting himself as the 'Cape Breton Giant'. Contrary to many accounts of his pairing up with a dwarf and joining a circus, the Cape Breton Giant Exhibition seems to have been a rather straightforward affair in which Angus stood still while people came and stared at him, as they would do many years later at his life-size model on Skye.

By 1852, Angus had travelled all over Canada and America and in 1853 was touring the West Indies. Comparable with the sailors who travel the world but 'see' little of it, Angus had to lie low during his tours: if he were spotted strolling down the street no-one would pay to see him.

I believe that, rather than subjecting himself to exploitation, Angus accepted his extraordinary height, the fact he was different, and patiently resigned himself to the tours, using his size to his own advantage. Certainly, in such hard times, he returned home from the West Indies with a small fortune and spent it discerningly, opening a shop and purchasing a mill. He also utilised his strength for the benefit of others: there is no shortage of stories describing his helpfulness towards neighbours and fellow fishermen. The sheer mass of such tales suggests some authenticity in their content.

In fact, it was one such display of strength that contributed to Angus's untimely demise. Lifting a 2,700 pound anchor was nothing out of the ordinary, but on one particular occasion one of the flukes caught into his shoulder – a wound from which he was never fully to recover. In 1863, Angus suddenly became seriously ill and died of a brain fever aged 38.

Throughout his life he was described as gentle, mild-mannered, and rather shy. A moderate drinker, he seldom went to dances and parties, influenced by his community's exceptionally strict ministers denouncing such frivolities. Also, I imagine he had insight enough to realise all 7 feet and 9 inches of him doing a Gay Gordons would be unwise, if not potentially dangerous!

The Giant MacAskill is fondly remembered throughout the Western Isles, a cairn on Berneray commemorating him, while a small island off the coast of Harris is known as MacAskill's Rock – his father Norman having been stranded there as the result of a boating accident.

We were nearing the end of our week and were heading for Stornoway. Having become accustomed to the scattered crofts on Uist and the small villages on Harris and Lewis, Stornoway seemed big and bustling and noisy. We soon discovered we had completely run out of money and hadn't a bean between us.

Deciding that it could be worse and that we at least had enough petrol to get back to Inverness in the morning, we resigned ourselves to spending an uncomfortable night in the van, falling asleep to a thoroughly awful radio play. By 6.30 the following morning, thanks to the play, our battery was flat.

In my experience, being stranded somewhere is tolerable when you have enough to get something to eat, or sit in a pub and laugh at your misfortune, but when you're broke and tired and hungry it is miserable. Yet, now and then, I believe such minor disasters are almost worth happening if only to delight in the warmth and kindness of others. On this occasion, a farmer came to our rescue. Having spotted us wandering dejectedly round the town at such an early hour, he approached us with a good-natured mixture of nosiness and amusement, and was more than happy to help, providing a set of jump leads. After many heartfelt thank-yous and goodbyes, we boarded the ferry to Ullapool with five minutes to spare, expelling a huge sigh of relief.

Anyone I have met from the islands has been understandably proud of their origins. Crossing the Minch, I wondered how much, if anything, the Giant MacAskill remembered of his birthplace. He may well have relied upon the stories and songs which his elders passed down to the younger immigrants to illustrate vague memories of Berneray and Harris.

I would recommend a tour of the Western Isles to anyone, and would do it all again myself, notwithstanding the fighting over tents, the grubbiness, and the lack of money, simply because the islands truly are incredible – each individual and unique, with dramatic landscapes, immaculate beaches, and the sea never too far away.

Like the Giant MacAskill, they have to be seen to be believed.

# Island myths

Angus Peter Campbell

2006

The very fine Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie visited us here on Skye last summer and a passing comment she made to me about St Kilda has remained with me since and given me much pause for thought.

'St Kilda has now become the nearest thing we in Scotland have to a creation myth' were Kathleen's words, and the truth of these words stayed with me as I've recently re-read Martin Martin's marvellous account of his voyage to St Kilda (1698), and closely followed the debates which have been going on here locally in the islands where a conference to mark the 75th anniversary of the evacuation of St Kilda was recently held in Lewis.

Around the same time as that conference, I was struck by the fact that one recent weekend *The Scotsman* and *The Herald* and their sister Sunday papers were chock-full of property supplements (well, aren't they always?) and one headline, much like Kathleen's comment, has remained with me: 'Price of an Island Retreat Soars', it said.

Since then, these two perspectives have contested with me. Are they brother and sister? Are they mirror images of each other, or are they at different ends of the spectrum? What is St Kilda – a creation myth? An island retreat? And, of course, I don't just mean St Kilda – replace the name of that particular island with the name of any other island, and you'll get my drift.

What is – for example – Arran? Or Mull or Skye or Islay or Uist or Scotland, for that matter?

St Kilda, of course, has become *the* island, *par excellence*. It is remote, beautiful, and empty, and can therefore become whatever you wish it to become. You can populate it with sea-birds and military buildings. You can spend summer days there renewing the ancient buildings. You can inhabit it with any myth or history you want to imagine. You can fill its emptiness with any vision or dream or hope or pain you desire.

No-one will really argue with you. Not the people who are long gone certainly, though some of the historians and journalists who themselves created the mythological history in the first place, might.

To my delight, some of these very points were then beautifully made in a letter which appeared in our local paper, the excellent *West Highland Free Press*, from Fraser MacDonald, who is a lecturer in human geography at the School of Anthropology, Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Melbourne. I subsequently wrote to Dr MacDonald, and have his permission to quote his letter in full. He wrote:

Dear Sir,

*Torcuil Crichton (WHFP 19/8/05) reminds us that the popular history of St Kilda is engaging, charismatic and poignant. In this context, it seems churlish to point out that it is also significantly flawed. Does this matter? Well, yes: the story of this one archipelago has become the founding narrative for our contemporary culture and politics.*

*The popular history of St Kilda, presented to us by writers like Tom Steel and Charles MacLean, is almost entirely based on the diaries and journals of 19th-century travellers. And these accounts say a great deal more about the values and prejudices of the Victorian bourgeoisie than about the everyday life of the St Kildans.*

*The travellers may have arrived with patrician sympathy for the sublime savage, but they left sorely disappointed. They were affronted at the communal organisation of island society which they regarded as dangerous and backward. In 1887, the Glasgow Herald journalist Robert Connell, sounding a bit like contemporary proponents of free-market crofting, complained about 'nibbling at socialism' which was, he thought, 'responsible for a good deal of moral chaos'.*

*The travellers' sense of moral superiority was also profoundly challenged by the St Kildans. The islanders felt sorry for the aristocrats for being ignorant of important metaphysical truths. But for the educated elite to be so pitied by unwashed, shoeless, bird-eating Gaels reversed the entire logic of imperial travel.*

*A life of independent wealth and leisure meant that the travellers were used to getting their own way; not so on St Kilda, where local religious custom always took precedence over the recreation of the 'guests'. It is in this context that we have to understand the travellers' representations of islanders as religious maniacs and as the dupes of modernity: a simple people taken in by religion, corrupted by tourism and having acquired ideas well above their station.*

*The idea that the St Kildans were brainwashed by Christianity is almost as persistent as that of the St Kildan Parliament. Like the inhabitants of many Hedbridean communities, the St Kildans met regularly to discuss the social and economic life of the islands. That this informal meeting might be called a 'Parliament', however, was a 'joke' of another mainland journalist, John Sands, writing in 1876. Norman MacLeod's composition of the now iconic photograph for the George Washington Wilson studio in 1886 completed the myth.*

*In one sense, all history is a myth: a form of storytelling. But we need to rewrite a more radical St Kildan story, with the islanders as active agents, rather than as the passive, other-worldly characters that have been left to us by the historians. The evacuation is just one episode; the triumph of St Kilda is about self-determination and the enduring values of communal life.*

Fraser MacDonald

The letter just about says it all, and a few more things beside. Does it challenge all our preconceptions about other cultures? By what Western or bourgeois or capitalist or religious or cultural measures do we judge Islam, for example? And, of course, it also works the other way round – by what measures, mythological or otherwise, do fundamentalists, Islamic or otherwise, judge us? As in some kind of horribly distorted mirror, are all of us who live in the capitalist West to be tarred with the same false brush?

There is, of course, an alternative history – or histories – told from a different perspective and thereby telling a different tale. In the case of St Kilda, in Gaelic we have a very fine oral and written tradition which tells the tale from the inside, as it were. Lewisman Calum Ferguson, descended himself from St Kildan people, has written a marvellous book about the island, titled *Hiort – Far an laigh a' ghrian*, which I understand is currently being translated into English and will be published by Birlinn next year.

Along with that book there are more recent books which reverse the mythological tendencies of the 19th-century perspectives noted earlier – most notably a new book by Lewis-based writer Michael Robson, titled *St Kilda: Church, Visitors and 'Natives'* (Islands Book Trust, Ness, Isle of Lewis, 2005) and the 1997 book *An Island called Hirte – A history and culture of the St Kildans to 1930* by Mary Harman (published by MacLean Press, Isle of Skye).

What I find fascinating, of course, is that the vibrant St Kildan textology and the more recent newspaper headlines about property prices have coalesced (at least in my brain) to give us a powerful contemporary mythology which presents islands as 'retreats' from the mainstream of life. Retreats from what, you may well ask?

Are we island-dwellers not aware of Iraq and New Orleans and Bush and Blair and Putin and all the rest? Did South Uist not suffer its own terrible storm tragedies earlier this year? Were we not paying well over £1 for a litre of petrol long before the rest of Scotland imagined that was possible? Are we not in the very middle of the debate or argument over environmental damage and global warming and alternative energy with the on-going deliberations over wind-farms in Lewis and Skye and elsewhere? Do we not have the same transportation and educational and economic and social and political and linguistic and cultural and emotional and psychological and spiritual problems as the rest of mankind?

Or are we, by dint of some strange cartographic mystery, devoid of these tribulations? It may very well be that the majesty of the Cuillins, for instance, or the beauty of the strands on the western seaboard of Harris, or the glory of the cockle beaches in Barra puts it all into perspective, but there is still no escaping our global geography or responsibilities.

What has happened, of course, is that the islands – all islands – have been presented as as being somehow more 'natural', as being places (and communities and people) which have remained closer to the mythological conception of the 'noble savage', so that islands *per se* are invariably presented as 'purer' 'cleaner' 'safer' 'quieter' and – of course – 'cheaper'.

In very many cases – I would even go as far myself as to say invariably – all these things are true. In the vast majority of cases, the islands I know are safer and quieter etc than – let's say – Edinburgh or Glasgow, but that is not to say that it is then legitimate to treat

islands as exceptions, as rare places where exotic purity is preserved, as places where the soft Gaelic lilt is heard, as an escape, an alternative, a retreat, a place of retirement, a holiday home.

Where that path is followed – and there is a great deal of it about – it can lead to the very destruction of the very environment which the retreat-seeker has imagined. Instead, islands need to be imagined and presented as living, complex and often contradictory communities (just like Glasgow for example, ranging from Bearsden to Easterhouse, or Edinburgh from Muirhouse to Morningside). They need to be articulated not so much as remote, marginal, unusual places but as contemporary, central, normal places. To believe the first mythology is to emphasise the difference between islanders and the rest of humanity; to believe the latter is to emphasise our common humanity.

In the midst of all this, of course, lies the Gaelic language itself which for nigh on a thousand years now has been ghettoised as 'the rude speech of a barbarous people' as Samuel Johnson so famously put it in 1773. A beautiful but archaic language which time has passed by, when the reality is that Gaelic is as relevant to the 21st as it was to the 11th century.

What we have managed to achieve is a strange Scotland. Long in thrall to Westminster and London culture it is now, to one degree of the other, shaking off some of the mythological shackles of that long (forced?) marriage. We have a modern multicultural Scotland – or do we? A visit any Saturday – or now as well, sadly, Sunday – to Ibrox or Parkhead will challenge that definition as will any informed reading of our daily newspapers.

St Kilda – being empty and remote as well as beautiful – serves us well. It reminds us of many things – the fate that awaits us all, the evacuation of the senses, the remorse that it all happened, the dream that it could all still, somehow, be all different. In that sense, it serves really well as a creation myth, to use Kathleen's telling phrase. The distant but spectacular myth that St Kilda was somehow different, when it was very much part of us. And the reverse myth too, that St Kilda belonged and belongs to us, though it was, really, part of a very different world.

After Culloden, the government's Redcoats sailed all the way to St Kilda to check that Bonnie Prince Charlie wasn't hiding out on the island. The St Kildans had never even imagined, let alone seen, such a strange being: and were no doubt as startled by the arrival of the soldiers in the red coats as the poor people of Iraq were a couple of years ago when they began to be bombed to smithereens by similar men, looking for an equally mythological weapon of mass destruction. Here's a Gaelic poem I wrote about the Redcoats on St Kilda, with its English-language translation:

*Clann Dhè, a' sleamhnachadh sìos nan creag  
nan cànan fhèin. Nuair thachair  
Cùil Lodair, chaidh na saighdearan dearga  
an sin a choimhead airson prìonnsa  
air nach do smaoinich iad,*

*air nach cual iad, rimah. Choimhead  
na daoine beaga preasach, nam brògan fulmarach,  
air na saighdearan mar gun tàinig iad as a' ghealaich,  
's choimhead luchd-na-gealaich air ais  
le gràin, no nàir', air na creutairean.*

*Chunnaic mi an samhail air an sgrìon an-raoir,  
Bush is Bin-Laden air sgallan a' bhàis.*

*God's children abseiling down the crags  
in their own language. After Culloden,  
the red soldiers sailed there  
looking for a prince they'd never imagined,  
had never heard of. The small  
wrinkled people, in their fulmar shoes,  
stared at the soldiers as if they'd come  
from the moon, and the moonmen stared back  
with hatred, or shame, at the creatures.*

*I saw their parable on the screen last night,  
Bush and Bin-Laden on the crags of death.*

# The gentry's cloth

Peter MacAulay

2009

At the mention of tweed, my mind goes back 10 years or so to a Saturday morning in the hills of Wester Ross. It was towards the end of the stag-shooting season and I was only half a mile into a slog that would take at least eight hours.

Out of nowhere appeared a Land Rover and the driver, a man in tweeds, wound down the window and asked where I was going. I told him I intended to climb a couple of Munros a few miles further on. The man in tweeds was, I assumed, the estate gamekeeper and his job was to stalk deer so that his guests could shoot them, take the antlers home as trophies and make money for the landowner. It's a grisly business, but it's called sport.

Then I noticed two rifles behind the man in tweeds. Holding them were two youngish women, who looked as if they had just arrived from Sloane Square and had changed quickly into tweed jackets and trousers, without giving a second thought to whether or not they might look ridiculous. Make-up on their faces, highlights in their hair and going to shoot deer. The stags will run for their lives when they see this lot, I thought.

I knew what was coming as soon as I saw the combination of Land Rover, tweeds and guns. I offered to go in the opposite direction, ensuring there was always considerable distance, miles even, between us. 'No,' said the man in tweeds. 'You can't do that. We will be going all over the hills.'

A stand-off was inevitable. Since reason and the unreasonable don't go together, the discussion was brief and I climbed my couple of Munros. I never did see the Sloane Rangers again. They're probably long since comfortably retired, courtesy of Mr Brown's banking bonus culture. I wonder if they still wear their tweed suits.

The point of this tale is not to highlight the problem of access to the hills when toffs want to shoot stags, but to highlight the image of tweed. Tweed has a serious image problem. It is a fabric for toffs and their associates.

'Synonymous with sophistication and the choice of the British aristocracy, tweed is a classically glamorous fabric.' That is one description of tweed currently on a tweed website. No doubt the heir to the throne will pose in tweeds when next it's time for Balmoral. So probably will his mother, assuming she's obliged to pose at her age. The choice of tweed to attire Glasgow's new 5-star 'luxury spa hotel' sits well with this image. Not many of those who laboured in the tweed's production will ever be able to afford bed and breakfast there. Prices begin at £180, not for a week but for a night. Balmoral may well be cheaper.

The fact is that tweed costs far more than it's worth because of image, not because of substance. For tweed to be taken seriously, it must have a serious marketing strategy, not a love affair with catwalks, vanity and high society.

Tweed goes well enough with Chelsea gun cabinets in the glens, the owners of which can pay for tweed, for guns and for their cabinets with fistfuls of fivers. For all I know, they may pay cash down for the glens themselves too. But in the real world where tweed is woven, it hangs on the nail behind the kitchen door just like any other jacket, except far more expensively.

Assuming, of course, that it hangs there at all. In my experience very few of those who wove it actually wore it. It was known as *aodach nan daoine mora* (the gentry's cloth) and only the saddest amongst us aspired to the vacuous lifestyle of high society. Of course, people would weave it because they got paid for it, but that is a trait of human nature rather than a show of affinity towards tweed.

Scottish and Hebridean romanticism have great sales value nowadays, but there was nothing – absolutely nothing – romantic about the daily drudge of weaving tweed. People wove tweed when there was no other work to do. 'The last shift,' they called it. I never fathomed what that actually meant, but it was not meant to be a compliment.

Perhaps there was a natural reluctance to weave tweed, for there was an aura of exploitation about the industry. Weavers' pay was the proverbial pittance, and not enough to meet the demands of the average family growing up – demands that were very modest indeed. Meanwhile, those in charge of the industry lived in the most sought-after neighbourhoods with the best-manicured driveways. An enormous Bentley would sit in one of them. It's the lifestyle, stupid.

None of this should be very surprising, given the origins of Harris Tweed. It's said to have begun in a castle in Harris because the Earl of Dunmore wanted material for his army's kilts. That upper-crust tag has never left it throughout the century and a half since.

My day in the Wester Ross hills may not have had a good start, but it ended with a fine sense of achievement. Shortly after my encounter with the Land Rover, I met a young lad, still in his teens or not long out of them, heading back to his car. He'd also had an encounter with the Land Rover.

Although unnerved by the experience, he agreed to do an about-turn and we continued onwards and upwards until going our separate ways at over 2,000 feet, well clear of Land Rovers. He was thoroughly enjoying a day he was not meant to enjoy. Ten years on, what is he thinking when he sees tweed?

# The pain of Raasay

Tessa Ransford

2009

*The sound is blue in the sun  
and the sky naked above the wood  
of birch and hazel, rowan and alder.*

(inscribed on the glass frontage of Raasay's new community hall, from Sorley Maclean's poem *Screapadal*)

Raasay, a slim island, lying between Skye and Applecross, has many resources: a mild climate, housing, vegetation, harbours, history and culture, a primary school, an outdoor centre, two churches, a newly-built, architecturally-designed community hall, initiated and managed by voluntary effort, as was also the new playpark. Yet it is riven with discontent and disagreement.

This is a pattern familiar in many Hebridean island communities and has been interestingly discussed in Malcolm Gladwell's new book, *Outliers*, where he sees such patterns of dispute in areas where the Scots-Irish emigrated in America. He believes these patterns are repeated from generation to generation in small remote communities.

Summer tourists cycling or walking, geologists, botanists and others on field study expeditions, rich holiday home owners, young people on activities at the outdoor centre, would not be aware of the pain and disappointment that eats at the heart and enthusiasm of young people looking for a future on the island.

A certain sadness is almost palpable. Half the houses lie empty for large parts of the year and crofts lie neglected, or used very occasionally by descendants of crofters willing neither to work them nor give up their ownership. A handful of crofters hold sway over all the land. Young families are forced, meanwhile, into caravans and wherever these are placed is regarded as 'unsightly'. There is a hotel and a tiny youth hostel and there was Raasay House.

This is where the Macleod chief lived when Dr Johnson and James Boswell were given hospitality in 1773. The house has lawns leading down to the sea and a fertile walled garden, once managed by skilled gardeners with glasshouses and hotbeds, raising grapes, melons, summerfruit and all kinds of vegetables and fruit trees. The outdoor centre has rented the house in recent years from Highland and Islands Enterprise who awarded a generous grant for its refurbishment, added to by the lottery. On the night of 20 January 2009, when the refurbishment was almost completed, the centre of the house burnt down, leaving only the west wing and the façade.

Raasay's landlords were often oppressors of the population, using the island as a feasting

and pleasure ground. Poet, Sorley Maclean (1911–96) was born and brought up on Raasay, and his poem *Hallaig* is inspired by a clearance village of that name on the east side of the island. Roger Hutchinson's book *Calum's Road*, describes how in the rocky moorland of the north of the island, an area deliberately kept – indeed even walled off – as a hunting and shooting ground by the landlords, the lack of population was an excuse for not building a road. Even the dead had to be carried for several miles, or taken south by boat to the cemetery. No road led to lack of population in a vicious circle, ending in desertion of settlements from the north of the island.

During the First World War, some 200 German prisoners of war made the working of iron-mining feasible on Raasay, bringing in skilled joiners, masons, miners, electricians and engineers. Houses were built in the village and enclosed in fencing and barbed wire. There was one toilet for 40 men, one tap for 50, three sickbeds for every 100 and eight or nine men were allocated to each but-and-ben. Some 40 other British people also worked on the mines and 20 local people. The present village, with its two rows of whitewashed houses facing one another, with their garden strips behind and common ground between, stems from this time. The pier, built for the mining operation which ended in 1919, is now almost derelict. A new pier is being built in the bay in front of Raasay House to accommodate bigger Calmac ferries.

The island continues to offer itself as a pleasure ground. Ordinary daily human life has little support or encouragement. The primary school, the hotel, the shop and post-office (not accessible to the disabled), the new village hall and playpark are the only amenities for those who live permanently on the island.

Sorley Maclean wrote of the Clearances which left the island bereft of men, women and children, home only to the lovely birchwoods and waterfalls. Raasay has the most exquisite views: Dun Caan, the central chimney-like hill gives a panoramic view which includes the Cuillins; from Suisnish in the south there are serene views over to the red Cuillins and the mainland; from the north views of further islands. Raasay Sound and the Inner Sound must be among the most beautiful pieces of water in the world, and yachts float by in the shimmering ever-changing light.

Iain Crichton Smith (1928-98), a fellow Gaelic poet to Sorley, a Lewisman, wrote a book called *Towards the Human* in 1986. It includes a long essay entitled *Real People in Real Place*. Here he argues against the islands remaining as playgrounds for city-dwellers and landowners: 'There are many who wish to stay on the islands. But how is it possible for them to do so when unemployment is so high, when they who have so very little money have to spend more on their necessities than those who are closer to the heart of civilisation'.

He added: 'I recall with a sense of injustice my own fragmented life, the choices I had to make when I didn't realise that I was making them, the losses I endured before I knew that I was enduring them, the contradictions I was involved in before I knew they existed. And I know that my own life has been a snake pit of contradictions, because of an accident of geography and a hostile history'.

Surely now, in the 21st century, real people with families, who do not inherit crofts or land but who are prepared to give what it takes to live and work in the islands, should be invested in by Highland and Islands Enterprise and the Crofters Commission and treated as valuable, given help and encouragement, provided with housing, business facilities and some share of cultivatable land for trees, vegetables and livestock other than sheep. Tourism, in contrast, is a phoney part-time 'industry', into which huge amounts of money are poured and for little avail. Many who provide its working staff are summer-only immigrants and students. For much of the year the hotels, holiday homes, cafes and B&Bs lie empty or under-utilised, lost opportunities for those that remain.

That hostile history, mentioned by Iain Crichton Smith, still takes its revenge on modern inhabitants whose goodwill and desire for a genuine, ecologically-valid life in a real, living community, is denied them by the vicious in-fighting (when no-one can speak to anyone because everyone knows everyone) and the economics that drive away the young people and the young families, welcoming the sheep who range freely on common land, the many empty fields, and promoting the tourists.

Iain Crichton Smith again, on a pessimistic note: "To live is to be conscious of a history. No man can live if every action taken, no matter how enthusiastically, runs eventually into the sand. To give such a culture the possibility of a future means that the children must grow up in a world that they recognise as being as important as any other. If instead of consigning this culture to the oblivion of history people were to say "You are necessary", that would be sufficient encouragement for living'.

# The World in the bay

George Gunn

2011

At last the world has come to Wick. Or rather, a 644-foot, 43,524-tonne, 12-decked cruise liner called *The World* with 200 multi-millionaires and 290 of a crew on board, has anchored in Wick Bay for two days.

These passengers are only such in the literal sense and in fact are residents and co-owners in the actual sense. For *The World* is a floating commune of the super-rich who spend most of their time permanently at sea. For some, it might be as little as four months – it depends. But it is a life of constant travel. This year alone *The World* will visit 56 countries. She is currently en-route from Leith to Oslo. No cabins for these intrepid travellers; rather luxury apartments ranging from 'studios' to six bedroom penthouse suites. Last year, 18 apartments were sold for over \$41m.

Wick is a 'request stop' made by 'resident' Mike Clare, who founded the bed retailer Dreams and is worth a cool £200m. More importantly for Caithness, he is also owner of nearby Ackergill Tower, an exclusive hotel renowned for high-end business pow-wows and celebrity tourism. Because the 'residents' 'own' the ship, they also have a say in the destination itinerary.

'I thought that it would be really good if the guests could come and stay at Ackergill Tower,' he told the *John O Groat Journal*. Well, he would say that, wouldn't he? 'We would be passing the coast travelling to Norway anyway and I asked the captain if this would be possible. It was planned to go to the Shetland Islands but the guests voted to come to Wick. This is the first time the ship has come to the area. I hope they get the opportunity to experience a true taste of the Scottish Highlands.'

This 'true taste' will include a visit to the Castle of Mey, past residence of the Queen Mother, a tour of the Old Pulteney distillery, a Highland Games and something called an 'imperial dinner'. A 'true taste' of Wick these days would be a quick ceilidh dance around the job centre, for Wick has the highest unemployment rate in the Highlands at 6.5%. The average for Scotland is 4.3%. More specifically, 6.8% of men in the Pultenytown area of the town are long-term unemployed. Will a brief visit by 200 multi-millionaires to Pultenytown Distillery alleviate this? The answer, as you might expect, is 'No'.

So why do I find the visit of the rich-ship *The World* to Wick so ominous, surreal, depressing and paradoxical? The event itself held a kind of gallows fascination, and so it was I joined the not-so-serried ranks of fellow Wickers on the South Head – my mother's family were born and bred for generations back – to stare – no, we gaped! – at this huge square, angular toy-like hotel with a hull, as it sat in Wick Bay like some hi-tech seige engine, ours eyes silently scanning the scene with the grave compulsion of those who were

watching a public hanging. Launches ferried the 'residents' back and forth from the mother ship to the harbour quay where they were greeted by the exclusive yet dubious opulence of MacLeod's Luxury Coaches from Rogart.

What they thought, these visitors from another world, of the thunderous emptiness of Wick harbour which no amount of gala bunting and attempts at a yachting marina can quiet, I cannot imagine. Our digital cameras and mobile phones caught their indifference in a moment of sheer paradox as if the game were immortalising the safari hunters.

'Ay beegest boat ever til come til Week,' an informed soul who was sitting at The Fisherman's Rest told me. 'An d'ye ken iss, ay mannie makes beds!' I agreed that Mr Clare's retail dream had indeed come true.

'I'll mebbe get a shottie on her when I win ay EuroMillions ay morn's nicht,' his pal mused. 'But I willna be houldan my breath!'

The truth is that Wick has been holding its breath for years. Unlike Thurso, its more affluent sister town in the west, Wick has never benefited in the same way from the nuclear largesse of Dounreay. With the Euro-evaporation of the white fish fishing fleet Wick has been on her uppers for the past 25 years and each edition of *The Groat* seems to bring more bad news.

The day *The World* came to Wick, Haldane's supermarket in the town closed with the loss of 20 jobs. The strange floating republic of millionaires will fear nothing from the tax office in Wick because it has recently closed. Nor will the full force of the passport office be unleashed upon them either as it also has just closed. As I watched the on-goings, I could see no sign of the UK Border Agency or even a single bobby.

Up until the First World War, Wick was the biggest and busiest herring port in Europe. My grandmother gutted herring and my grandfather was a cooper. She filled the barrels he made. Such industrial symmetry fell apart after the Bolshevik revolution when the British government of the day slapped sanctions on the emerging Soviet Union. At a stroke, 80% of Wick's trade was lost. The herring fishing struggled on for a decade or two but by the time the Second World War came along, it was a thing of a past. As I made my way down from Pultenytown to the harbour, I looked on the derelict warehouses and tenements still much as they were when the Luftwaffe bombed them in 1940, leaving 15 people dead, eight of them children. Where else can you see war ruins suspended in time and in the frozen scream of death?

The cliché is that you could walk across the harbour at Wick on the herring boats, the Fyffies and Zulus, without getting your feet wet. Walking on water was never an occupation known in Wick. The town motto is 'Wark to God' and if the patron saint, St Fergus, paddled from Ireland to Caithness in his coracle, then miracles must have been manifest at some point in Wick's past.

What Wick needs now is an economic miracle. Even some joined-up civic planning would be gratefully received. The truth is that the 200 multi-millionaires aboard *The World* will spend little or nothing in Wick because there is little or nothing for them to buy. This is

the depressing part. Wick has little enough to offer its own inhabitants other than a hurl around the aisles of Tesco or a quick look at the semi-dereliction of what was Thomas Telford's industrial architectural masterpiece – the harbour area of Wick. The 'residents' of *The World* will instead be luxuriously transported to a theme park laid on for their pleasure by Mr Clare of Ackergill Tower, which will have more in common with *Brigadoon* than the Blackstairs of Lower Pulteneytown.

Everything which is wrong with Caithness, the Highlands, Scotland and *The World* sat for two days 1,000 yards from the harbour breakwater which broke the hearts of Robert Louis Stevenson's father and uncle as they tried and failed to hold back the North Sea. I will not allow the decadent world of nationless and disposable capital to break my heart.

It used to be said that the poor 'have no country'. For tax purposes, as the visit of *The World* to Wick proves, it is the rich who have no country. The world of *The World* is, thankfully, unsustainable. Is Wick sustainable?

All I can say is that Wick has been in existence since before the Norse similarly parked their Viking longboats at 'Vik' in the 10th-century. Wick is the real world and it, because of its people's genius for 'wark' and their ability to endure, will survive. This is based on belief not economics. I suspect there is little meaningful love for anything real onboard *The World*. My mother showed me that, in Wick, the opposite is the case.

# The night I nearly drowned

Mike MacKenzie

2011

One dark night towards the end of September 1977, along with two friends, I answered cries of distress coming from a yacht moored in Easdale Sound. We commandeered the only boat available in the harbour, the old ferry, an over-sized rowing boat with a Seagull outboard, and set out on the short distance to the yacht to render assistance. A blustering southerly wind had got up and the sea was choppy but we were unperturbed.

Dougie and I had worked every summer since we were 11 years old as salmon fishermen and were accomplished boatmen. Sandra, Dougie's fiancée, came with us, as unconcerned and confident in our abilities as we were. Such confidence is the preserve of 19 year olds.

Halfway to the yacht our engine cut out. The wind suddenly freshened and the waves rose but still we were unconcerned as we searched for the rowlocks in the dark. The boat drifted northwards. Realising that soon we would lose the comparative shelter of the Sound we gave up trying to find the rowlocks and began instead to lash the oars with rope as makeshift rowlocks. Before we could accomplish this, it became apparent that we were going to drift onto the rocks at the north end of the Sound. I unlashd my oar to fend the boat off, bracing the heavy oar against the rock, putting my weight into it. Just at that moment, a huge wave materialised out of the darkness and washed my two companions out of the boat.

The backwash from the wave pulled the boat off the rocks. I glimpsed two faces far below me in the gulf opening up between the sea and the base of the rocks as the wave sucked back. The boat was swamped and I could do nothing for them. Another large wave swept over the boat. I lost the oar and my balance and fell to my knees clutching a thwart. The gunwales of the boat were sunk to the waterline. Each successive wave washed over the boat and I was able to breathe only between waves. I had a dim awareness of the boat drifting further out to sea and of the waves getting bigger.

Time passed and I got cold and weak. At some point, I managed to grab a life hoop and pulled it over one shoulder like a bandolier. My fingers were laced together under the thwart. I breathed between enormous waves washing violently over me. Each one threatened to tear me out of the boat. At one point, I saw the lights of Oban far to the north and became aware that I was drifting on a north-westerly course. Consciousness began to fade and only a tiny voice from somewhere inside urged me to hang on.

Eventually, the dark bulk of the island of Insh loomed out of the darkness. Huge waves crashed ashore. The boat was caught up by one of these and rolled over. I half-swam and was half-washed ashore on a small rock just off the island. I scrambled up the rock finding a depression on top and fell into it. Looking back towards the boat, I saw it smashed to kindling in minutes before I lost consciousness.

When I regained consciousness, I saw parachute flares in the sky. I was sure my companions were lost and that no-one would yet have missed us. I imagined that some other poor soul had got into trouble. Later, I found out that against all odds my friends had got safely ashore and raised the alarm. The coastguard mobilised the Oban lifeboat and a local fishing boat, the *Bathsheba*. The lifeboat turned back in atrocious conditions just south of Kerrera. The crew were wise because the storm had veered into the west and conditions were impossible.

The brave little *Bathsheba* battled out to Insh. I watched their lights approach, sure they were going to founder in the enormous seas. The coastguard and the crew of the *Bathsheba*, with the benefit of local knowledge, calculated that I would have drifted towards Insh and restricted their search to this area. The fishing boat searched the coast of the two-mile-long island again and again, sweeping it with their searchlight. Eventually they saw me. The Sea-King from RAF Leuchars couldn't launch for several hours because the winds were too high. They winched me off my rock at 9am the next morning.

I was cold but unharmed and in no doubt that I owed my life to the courage of the crew of the fishing boat, to their local knowledge and that of Oban coastguard. I became firm friends with Michael Caine, the skipper of the fishing boat. Sadly, he and his crewman died a few years later when his boat sank a few miles west of Easdale. A pall hung over our community for many weeks afterwards.

On the banks of the Thames, there seems to be little appreciation of the work done by our coastguard and search and rescue services. Local knowledge and the connection with the seagoing community are vital if lives are to be saved. No amount of computers or clever technology can replace this. Some years ago we lost the Oban coastguard station and are dependent now on Clyde coastguard. In a vicious cost-cutting exercise, several coastguard stations are proposed for closure along with cuts to RAF search and rescue services. We who live on Scotland's coastline will count the cost of this in lives lost at sea.

# Educating Lewis

Iain Smith

2013

Let me begin with the foundation of Lews Castle College in Stornoway. Four people met in a room in Stornoway in 1950. They had a dilemma that most of us will never face.

They were part-owners, amidst thousands of others, of a castle – i.e. a castle which had been bequeathed by Lord Leverhulme in the 1920s to a local community trust; and they were unsure in 1950 what to do with their castle. It was a castle with a controversial past: having been built by Sir James Matheson in the 19th century. He is currently described on a poster outside the castle itself as 'an astute trader'. That, I suppose, is indeed one way of describing the biggest and most notorious drug-dealer of the 19th century: for he was responsible for importing vast quantities of opium from India into China. This was a man who, with his business partner Jardine, induced the British Government to declare war on China to keep his trade going.

These four people in 1950 eventually reached a conclusion: 'Let us make this castle a place of learning'. And that is how Lews Castle College UHI (now part of the University of the Highlands and Islands) began. Wise people these four were; and their advice was significant in persuading the Stornoway Trust and Ross and Cromarty education authority to establish a college. Out of a building financed from the fruits of infamy, they created an institution for good.

The island of Lewis already had the Nicolson Institute, a school which in 1898 had for the first time acquired the power to send students directly into university. Two students went to university that year, the first two out of many thousands to follow. One of these two, Robert M Maciver, records in his autobiography how he departed from Stornoway on the midnight steamer, knowing that he would never return to live again in Stornoway. (That was one of the side effects of much advanced education in rural Scotland: it created a good to be exported, not a good for local communities or even for Scotland as a whole.)

Maciver indeed did not return to Stornoway, except on holidays (during one of which he and his father, in 1913, drove the first Ford Model T in Lewis on what is now Stornoway Airport): he had gone to study in Edinburgh and in Oxford; and then in 1913 was already into an illustrious academic career in Aberdeen, then Toronto and then New York.

His story was replicated across much of rural Scotland about the same time i.e. roughly 100 years ago. What the Nicolson Institute had begun to do in 1898 began at approximately the same time (1905 or so) in Portree High School, in Kirkwall Grammar School and in many Scottish rural communities of significant size. (However, it took many more decades before school students in Harris, in the southern isles of the Outer Hebrides and in other small rural communities acquired similar access.)

But, if direct access to universities from a reasonably local school became moderately common from 1900 onwards (and accelerated with the foundation of the Carnegie Trust in 1901 and its ever-expanding provision of university bursaries in the decades of the early 20th century), the story of further education (or for that matter, higher education) provision is much more uneven across Scotland. For the most part, it is a story of the years after 1945; and the growth of further education colleges in Scotland's major cities was rapid, even dramatic – but only in cities. The development of further education in rural Scotland was uneven and generally slow. Skye did not acquire a college offering further education qualifications until Sabhal Mor Ostaig started such provision in 1983; Argyllshire had very meagre provision indeed until the establishment of Argyll College in 1997; and the story in Orkney and Shetland was very similar.

So the decision to create a Lews Castle College in 1953 (with its nine staff and its 83 students) was for its time indeed a far-sighted and unusual one. But, whether we are talking about school education or about further education, there was and is a dilemma in at least some areas of the Highlands and Islands.

I went to school in Ness on Lewis in 1952. Fourteen of us started: I was monolingual in English. The others were monolingual in Gaelic. The first language of our teacher was also Gaelic. So our teacher taught us in the sensible language: English.

I well remember our first lesson. 'A' is for apple. 'N' is for needle. That was, more or less, fine by us. And then: 'C' is for camel. That concept caused some difficulty, especially for my Gaelic-speaking fellow classmates: at the time, camels were in short supply on the Isle of Lewis even on the sandy machair land. That struck me as strange then; and, 60 years on, it still seems strange – and wrong. So I am glad that the training of Gaelic-medium teachers has been brought into the curriculum of UHI and of Lews Castle College.

When I left education in the Nicolson Institute, I wanted to be good at chemistry. And from university, I went back to teach chemistry in the Nicolson Institute for a bit more than two years. But I had also done something else with my university years: I had studied public speaking, debating and related things. And the Nicolson Institute allowed me one period every Friday afternoon to teach students something of what I thought I knew about public speaking. One 16-year-old student, Maggie, stayed behind one day and said to me: 'Mr Smith, I come from a very small Hebridean island. I think that is why I lack confidence. I wondered what to do about it. So I thought I would enrol in your class. Not to become a public speaker but to add to my confidence. And what has gone on in this class has made me more confident. I will never ever be a public performer of any kind. But thank you for what has happened to me'.

I left chemistry, the Nicolson Institute and Lewis; and then I left Scotland entirely. Sixteen years later, I returned to Scotland. As I drove across the border, I switched my car radio to Radio Scotland. And heard a voice I recognised (that of Maggie, then well into her very distinguished career with BBC Scotland). That was the same person who had sworn to me never to speak in public.

The Hebrides have many more Maggies today than they had when I was a little child in Ness. And that is a change for the good. Both the schools of the Western Isles and its further education provision have contributed to that. There is a confidence in the Western Isles now that was not present in my generation or in the generations before mine. That is good. And the growth of education in the Western Isles both in quantity and in quality has done much for that.

So, what has changed in education in Lewis over the last 50 or even 100 years? Perhaps at least three major things. Firstly, we observe that 100 years ago, as the story of Robert M Maciver (and of many others) shows, secondary education was to a large extent an export industry rather than in any way being about local civic and community development. Fifty years ago, this was also true of much of the further education at the then new Lews Castle College. This is now much less true. Much of the curriculum of Lews Castle College and of the University of the Highlands and Islands is not a pre-career prelude to migration but early and mid-career capacity-building for those already in local employment.

Secondly, 100 years ago, and even 50 years ago, teachers in Lewis and further afield largely believed that bilingualism and Gaelic-medium education were handicaps to educational progress. That certainly is what was believed by my own parents, both teachers, and by most of their colleagues. That belief is now largely, although not wholly, gone and practice – especially in much of the primary school sector – reflects that. It is now thought that the bilingual student is advantaged, not disadvantaged. Indeed, that is the belief throughout much of Europe. Gaelic-medium education improves literacy in Gaelic – and in English.

Thirdly, and finally, primary, secondary and further education in Lewis has a greater emphasis today not just on academic knowledge and skills but on higher-order capacities: working in teams, making public presentations, engaging in problem solving, being active rather than passive students. And so we have a local Hebridean (and indeed Highland) generation which is more confident, more outspoken and more engaged in civic society than were either my generation or the generation of my parents.

There is a refrain that is often thought to have been used constantly across the world for at least 2,000 years: 'The children and students of today are not what they used to be'. Indeed: and for me at least that is a matter for celebration.

# A state of tension on Shetland

Jordan Ogg

2013

We craned our necks towards the crackling sound of our master's voice. The pilot was describing the weather in near quantum detail, and while neither of us could decipher what was being said, we understood the implication of his message well enough: it's thick with mist in Sumburgh and we might not get landed.

Our friends had braved the same flight the previous morning, only to get as far as Kirkwall, where they spent a few hours enjoying the liquid pleasures of the cathedral town before being corralled into one of the gargantuan floating bathtubs commonly known as the North Isles ferries.

Never particularly comfortable in my experience – and I've been traversing the route for some 30 years – the vessels have apparently become downright barbarous since Serco was awarded the contract to run them by the current Scottish Government. The company was quick to get to grips with its new charge by ditching local suppliers, threatening to axe 36 jobs and refitting the ships by installing barriers between seats to prevent passengers from lying down when sleepy, thus forcing them to pay for funky new features like 'sleep pods'. Probably not the best way to introduce yourself to the communities that are relying on you to run a lifeline service, but what else can you expect from a company more used to running prisons.

When a visit home approaches, I look forward to re-exploring the closes and trances that ripple across the broad side of Lerwick's old town. We have a small Victorian house in one of the lanes and it's a fine place to take in the sights and sounds of the harbour beyond. Usually very little has changed, save for a new seagull's nest here, an unusual looking boat there. This time, however, things are very different.

Shetland is currently host to a rush of activity focused on the development of oil and gas fields to the west of the islands. The French multinational company TOTAL is spending £3bn on the construction of a huge gas plant in the north of the islands, for which 2,000 incoming workers need to be accommodated. The company has already built a hotel to house some of them, and in recent weeks two massive accommodation barges – former prison ships converted into 'floatels' – have docked at Lerwick harbour.

Monolithic monuments of pure grey formica, they look like the kind of thing the GDR would have rejected for being too ugly. Each barge sleeps 200 men and a third is expected shortly. Yet they're still not nearly enough, and so more terrestrial means of accommodation is being snapped up. As a result, tourists are struggling to find beds in the hotels and B&Bs, and the private rental market has gone through the roof. *The Shetland Times* reported last week on how even decently paid locals are struggling to afford the exorbitant rise in rental charges.

As with the discovery of North Sea oil in the late 1970s, which saw over 7,000 incoming workers arrive to construct Europe's biggest oil terminal at Sullom Voe, noises are being made about the potential of current developments to harm the isles' social fabric. It hasn't quite reached a state of cultural panic yet but you can feel the tension. In the bars, local men complain about the incomers stealing their women and those unable to afford their own place to stay can be heard cursing the enterprising attitude of landlords who are making the most of the rising rents.

As I write, Alex Salmond and his team have arrived in Shetland for a special Scottish Cabinet meeting. The fog delayed his flight by a few hours but he made up time by announcing the 'Lerwick Declaration', a promise to establish a committee to look at devolving powers to Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles under an independent Scotland. It's the result of a joint push by the three island councils for greater autonomy over issues such as control of the seabed, fisheries and renewable energy developments.

Their timing is canny. Many Shetlanders don't feel confident that Edinburgh rule would be better than that offered by London. They've already been let down with the north isles ferry service, as many more will be again when a judicial review into deeply divisive plans for a large windfarm on Shetland's mainland reports later this year. Furthermore, many Shetlanders question the 'It's Scotland's oil' argument when it was their islands that provided the means for the oil to come on stream, as is again the case with current developments to the west.

'Apo da amp' is a Shetland dialect saying for being in a state of watchfulness. As I head back to Edinburgh, I suspect that those at St Andrew's House will be keeping a closer eye on the isles. It's starting to get very interesting up north.

# Three boys on a bucket list trip

Iain Smith

2013

I

I check my list, as I have done in the past for dangerous places (Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, etc.) They generally do not help me that much; but tend to reassure the dear loved ones left behind.

## **Checklist for Barra: November 2013**

Reluctantly leave one credit card with my wife Joan. (Done.)

Check status on Barra boat and buy tickets. (To do.)

Intro letter to impress the locals. (Received from Anne McGuire MP.)

Check medical status and requirements for Barra with GP. (Did this in 1958 with my BCG.)

Take some spare passport photos. (On computer.)

Leave some signed cheques for Joan. (Done with bad grace.)

Squito burner (Skipped that one.)

Trinkets for the natives (Skipped that one also.)

## **8 November**

Guys assemble in Balshagray Avenue from 8.30 onwards. We (Sam, Robert and I) set out on our great expedition. A 'bucket list' trip to Barra (i.e. one thing to do before one dies). We drive to Oban, entirely without incident. Out on the *Clansman* for five hours to Castlebay. There are three very naughty children on the voyage. I dissuade Sam from drowning them. The journey past Mull is hopelessly calm. A more satisfying swell as we head out of the shelter of Coll into more open seas.

We have a bowl of soup on CalMac. Where are the linen tablecloths of yesteryear? One of my staunchly Conservative aunts said that she began to hate the Labour Party seriously in 1926 when she (having had six hours of sea-sickness en route from Stornoway to Mallaig on an overnight steamer) went at 5am to a David MacBrayne dining room for a cup of tea and had to endure the (famously emaciated and sickly) Jimmy Maxton tucking into porridge and bacon, sausages and eggs: all served by stewards to a table immaculate in its Irish linen.

There is a watery crescent moon peering out of black clouds as we head into Castlebay at 7pm. We check into the Castlebay Hotel and have a very good dinner (oysters and cockles and fish pie for me). We three wee boys chat over wee drams about boyish things for a wee time, as wee boys often do. I tell stories.

## 9 November

We are up for a (full and excellent) 8.30am breakfast; the only other residents at breakfast are a wind turbine construction team. They remind me of the elderly Hebridean lady who said 'Wind farm? Why do we need a wind farm? We have plenty of wind up here already'.

We wander around Castlebay (not a challenging task). A plaque to Alexander Mackendrick (of *Whisky Galore* directing fame) is interesting: what a talented man. Kisimul Castle I had always thought to be a large castle way out in the bay: but my brain has been remiss in interpreting the photographs – in reality it is a wee castle close to the pier. We identify the rather quaint Kisimul Café, where we are booked to eat in the evening.

Then the 10.30 bus, free for me (thanks to young taxpayers), out of Barra across the causeway and into Vatersay. The weather is calm but threatens rain: out at sea one can indeed see sharp showers. We get off the bus at Vatersay village, not a major centre of population – but blessed with shell sand beaches and machair land. We make our way back north along the east-facing beach, with some animated oyster catcher birds as companions. Rejoining the road, we head towards the causeway, stopping to inspect the metallic corpse of a wartime Catalina which had crashed by the shore. A plaque remembers the 10 dead crew.

At the causeway, there are breakers crashing on rocks on the Atlantic side of the Sound of Vatersay, and a wee seal bobs up and down watching us; but, on the quieter other side, there are signs of considerable fishing activity.

The road takes us up the steep south edge of Barra, with spectacular views out east towards Coll. Just after the highest point, there is an elegant memorial (of 1993 vintage) remembering the dead of two wars: the vast majority of the names are merchant navy personnel.

We get to Castlebay at 2pm, having covered some six miles in dry sunshine – a big walk for me; and reward ourselves with sandwiches, beer and a hotel view over the bay – we look out rather smugly at the first shower of the day. The sun at 3pm is already beginning to die in the western sky; Sam says, 'Just like me'. At 6pm the three musketeers regroup. A few swift drinks and off to the Café Kisimul.

We have probably the best Indo-Pak meal I have ever eaten (scallop pakora and then curried organic Barra lamb). We head home (pausing only briefly to take in some of the *X-Factor*, or some such nonsense, in the Castlebay Bar). Over the bay, there is the crescent of a waning (says Sam) moon. Actually, the moon was waxing. The three of us talk about education for two hours. I tell stories. I always tell stories.

## 10 November

Last night, we discussed weather prospects with our genial host John. Winds of 35mph (perhaps with higher gusts) are forecast. 'When does the ferry stop sailing, i.e. at what wind speed?' asks Sam. 'It depends on the skipper,' says our host.

This morning dawns bright and still. We are up for 9am breakfast; at 10.30 we want a

taxi to go to the north side of Barra. There is no taxi available. So John volunteers to take us and to ensure a taxi collects us later in the day. We therefore enjoy a conducted tour up the west coast route with a running commentary all the way.

Compton Mackenzie's house is pointed out to us, still owned and (sometimes) used by a descendant: so here was where Mackenzie wrote and philandered. Our host talks about his own sons, one a master on the Lochmaddy-Uig-Tarbert CalMac boat, the other an engineer in Singapore with a subsidiary of Cathay Pacific: in all a typical Hebridean family story.

At the extreme north tip we start to walk south, mainly by road but with one or two diversions, the first of them down to an Atlantic coastline of spectacular energy. Back on the road, we go into the cemetery and locate (we think, because the headstone is badly eroded) Compton Mackenzie's grave. Here also is buried Compton Mackenzie's friend and piper Calum, who played at the Mackenzie funeral, promptly died and was buried here two days after his pal. There is also a headstone (in Italian) to an Italian who died in Barra in 1941: intriguing, might he have been a POW sent to work in Barra as an agricultural labourer?

## II

Three days later I find the answer, from John in the Castlebay Hotel: 'Hi Iain, we are so pleased you all enjoyed your trip to Barra. The gravestone you looked at in Cille Bharraidh was Enrico Muzio an opera singer from Napoli who lived in London. He was an internee aboard the *Arandora Star* heading for Canada on July 1940 when she was torpedoed off the west coast of the Hebrides. There was also another Italian washed ashore on Barra and he is interred at Borge graveyard – Oreste Fisanoti; and more were washed up on the other islands'.

Inspired by John, I check the story: a somewhat gung-ho German U-boat captain in essence killed hundreds of his alleged 'allies', mostly Italians but including some German POWs; the death toll was added to by UK guards on the *Arandora Star* riddling the ship's lifeboats with rifle fire to prevent their human cargo from 'escaping'. Most of the bodies recovered in the Hebrides from that sad affair ended up on Colonsay, I discover.

The issue of 'Italian' internment in the Second World War was controversial at the time and subsequently. Scotland had about 5,500 'Italians', many of them actually native-born Scots (who escaped internment). But the male Italian-born 'Italians', many of whom who had come from Barga or Lazio 20 or more years earlier, were interned.

Scotland's eminent historian Tom Devine has written: 'The most tragic incident in the entire history of the Italians in Scotland came about because of this policy. On 2 July 1940 the *Arandora Star* carrying 712 Italian "enemy aliens" to Canada was torpedoed in the Atlantic by a U-boat. Altogether 450 internees drowned. The dead from Scotland were mainly harmless cafe owners, small shopkeepers and young shop workers'.

Out to the north is the legendary Eriskay. Hugh Robertson of the Glasgow Orpheus Choir

famously said (on a vinyl record that still exists): 'It is a little island but, long after we are all dead and forgotten, it will be remembered'. And, of course, the great Paul Robeson picked up a song sheet on Bond Street in London and added to the immortality of Eriskay.

Here also is where *SS Politician of Whisky Galore* fame came to grief: confusing the Sound of Barra with the Sound of Eriskay was not good news.

### III

Then the coastline of South Uist. Much further away and to the east are the shapes of Eigg and Rum, and the very distant (but distinctively snow-capped) peaks of the Cuillins. There is bright sunshine, the merest zephyr of a wind and an extraordinarily good quality of light. We reach the famous Cockle Ebb with the world's most exotic airport, and walk on the beach/airport.

The sand is indeed rich with cockleshells, possibly the reason why the surface is amazingly hard and compact and therefore so suited to its aeronautical duties. With some time to spare, we walk to Traigh Eais. A notice says 'No kite flying while the airport is open i.e. windsock visible'. It is a very long and beautiful beach, but with menacing Atlantic breakers and surf; and indeed there are notices warning about its undercurrents.

Our taxi dutifully turns up at 1pm and proceeds down the east side i.e. the Minch route to Castlebay, the driver helpfully informative. And insightful: 'You guys on a bucket list trip?'

Lunch at the bar; our host and I have a largely Gaelic conversation on the merits of eating 'sgadan' and 'guga', i.e. herring and gannet, and indeed cormorants. And we talk about the extinction of the herring industry (dead by the 1950s, with trawlers much to blame). I have spoken more Gaelic in Barra in two days than on my last few trips to Stornoway: and remember enough of my pitiful Gaelic consistently to use the polite vocative plural to address our host. (My father in the 1950s – otherwise discouraging of my attempts to learn Gaelic – gave me a half-crown, a fortune then, for mastering that aspect of Gaelic etiquette.)

And then we have an hour's walk to the end of Ledaig and back. Ledaig I can only describe as a suburban part of Castlebay: but given that Castlebay is not urban by any definition, 'suburban' may not be the best word.

Now, at 3.30, the wind has picked up to the level of a rather stiff breeze and a black-clouded front is moving in from the Atlantic.

By mid-evening, the wind is indeed rather high. CalMac warns that the Sunday sailing from Oban may well be disrupted by winds of 45mph. But, as we watch from the hotel, at 8.50 (10 minutes early) the *Lord of the Isles* sails serenely into Castlebay (admittedly with the side-thrusters clearly in overdrive).

Good dinner: I have sea trout (if only because there are no farmed sea trout). It is okay. A tad cold, but good. We tell stories, i.e. I tell stories. Again.

At almost midnight, the wind is still whistling around parts of the hotel. But that is what I loved about living at the Butt of Lewis when I was eight years old: the wind whistled but one had the security of a warm bed and some secure parental figures. Six decades later, I have a warm bed; and Robert and Sam as my secure surrogate parents.

### **11 November**

At 5.50am there is still something of a gale; but when I get up an hour later it has abated. Sam, Robert and I head down to the Barra Pier at 7.30 or so; as the *Lord of the Isles* slides regally into Castlebay from Lochboisdale. All the chat from the locals on the pier is in Gaelic: so unlike Stornoway.

Off at 7.50 and we tuck into a hearty CalMac breakfast; there is nothing better to deter the effects of a heavy swell of the Southern Minch or Sea of the Hebrides (or of an incipient hangover) than a good fry-up. We are tossed around a little for a couple of hours. As Barra recedes, we see Rum and Eigg to the north-east; and Coll looms up ahead.

Calm appears, and indeed stunning sunshine, as we sail past the top of Mull; the high slopes and houses of Tobermory; then Fishnish; and Craignure; the lighthouse at the tip of Lismore; and, at 1pm, into Oban. Three hours later, we are back in Glasgow. It has been good to be away for a little time. It was a great adventure to a great place. I enjoyed it all so much.

# Finders keepers

Donald S Murray

2014

Once upon a time, there was one item lying around the barn of almost every croft in the islands that did not appear to have been honestly obtained...

And that was the fish-box; the instruction on its side asking people to return it to, say, Lochinver, Mallaig or even Stornoway ignored as a matter of course. Instead, it would be kept by the crofter who had – somehow – managed to obtain and use it in a thousand different ways. These ranged from a container for tools to a way of sprouting seed potatoes. They might be transformed by a coat of varnish into book-shelves or a coffee table.

Young lads had their own ways to employ it. They might attach both rope and wheels and – abracadabra! – it was a go-cart, fit for the dips and dives of the village road. Others used a number to help shore the walls of a 'bothag' or 'turf-hut' built on the edge of the moor. Or a few might be brought together to form a makeshift stage. You could then stand on it for a few precarious hours, your pelvis pulsating as you pretended to be Elvis; the song *Return To Sender* mocking the message the owners printed on the box.

Yet the fish-box served as more than a utility tool for crofters and their kids. The boxes – with their owners' names or ports of origin inscribed on their sides – acted as a reminder of both the surges and dips in the fortunes of the fishing industry. They chronicled the titles of both the boats and firms involved in that trade, providing a record of the growth and dwindling of harbours at the nation's edge. If they were dated and placed side by side, they could show the time when ports like Wick gave way to, for instance, Fraserburgh, when areas once famed far and wide for their herring – such as Tarbert, Loch Fyne, Campbelltown or Stornoway – rose and ebbed in importance.

It provides, too, a way of illustrating the changes in the technology and approach of the fishing industry over the last hundred years or so. Until the late 19th century, it is likely that the fish-box did not exist. Its place both below deck and on the country's quaysides was occupied by its larger, tubbier 'cousin' – the fish-barrel. At this time, most fish was either dried or salted, stored within these barrels and shipped to the mainland's towns and cities at a later date. These objects too generated their own stories.

A friend of mine, the aptly named Ryno Morrison, had a grandfather nicknamed 'Gladstone' who had 17 children in total – and two wives called Christina (not, it should be noted, simultaneously.) One day he was lifting his youngest child up and down, pretending to let him fall into the fish-barrel brimming over with water at the end of the house but catching him an instant later. A stern Free Presbyterian elder passed by. 'I see you've got so many these days that you're beginning to have to salt them,' he declared.

It was the railway that was responsible for the invention of the fishing box. In the

beginning, its original model – the shipping box – was larger than those seen around crofthouses today. They had rope handles and lids. When the latter was nailed down, a card bearing the despatcher and buyer's name and the route it had to take was tacked to its top. It was a way of delivering fish copied by a number of fishing boats, using them – and vast quantities of ice – to send their catch as quickly as possible to market.

Later, in the early years of the 20th century, the form of wooden fishing box, familiar to most of us today, was introduced. They were open-topped, possessed hand-holds at their ends and wooden bars along the top edges of each side. Thousands were made between, say, the 20s and 70s; each one bearing the names of their firms and fishing ports.

The way these wooden boxes could be stacked gave them an important advantage over what many saw as their modern replacement – the tin box. Made, oddly enough, from aluminium, they were not quite the success their makers had clearly imagined. Unable to lock together in the same way as their predecessors, they slid off one another when they were stacked upright. They were easily bashed; their sides bent and battered when they were thrown noisily to shore. Unlike the names stencilled on to old wooden boxes, it was also hard to make out the words etched into their sides. As a result, boat-crews and quayside workers used paint to try and claim and keep them for their own.

And so to plastic fishing boxes – ones that, like their predecessors, are beginning to gather in the barns and garages of island crofthouses. Doubtless, both crofters and their children are discovering a thousand uses for their dubiously acquired possessions, casting them off into the waves, failing to return them to their owners in much the same way as their ancestors once did.

*Wide stern, wide bow,  
it churned its way through water,*

*each hole and gap  
bunged with dulse and bladder wrack,*

*and its frail mast,  
a pole cut and split in half*

*with the ragged remnant of a towel  
serving as a sail;*

*we watched it leave our beach,  
wading alongside till its reach*

*defied us, heading – we were sure –  
across Atlantic, to shores*

*far off from Dun Arnaistean, bays  
stretching beyond dreams that stirred our days,*

*where fishermen off Connecticut or Maine  
would wonder at the strange craft their nets and catch contained.*

*This article owes much of its information and inspiration to Spotter's Guide To Fishboxes by  
Ian Tait in the New Shetlander.*

# A wind is howling in Scotland, but no-one's listening

Donald S Murray

2014

Like many throughout the north of Scotland, I grew up looking out at a moor. It stretched out before me, dread and drear as I stood at our sitting room window for much of the year. Often it was veiled by rain or mist, cloaking life there with either the lash of rain or the grey obscurity of fog.

At times like these, it was difficult to believe that any existence could be sustained there; the choking hold of bog or peat so unrelenting that one could only imagine the ground swallowing your feet as you walked upon it. Or worse – being swallowed by its depths until the earth itself sucked the breath from your lungs, covering you with its blackness.

Yet there were occasions when it seemed these empty acres were rich with life, one that occupied a separate existence to our own. Lapwings pirouetted above its surface; rabbits burrowed beneath. One could walk out through peatland and see a swan or a clutch of ducks swimming on the stillness of a loch. On its banks, there might be sudden flares of colour. Purple heather bloomed. White flags of bog-cotton flapped. Wild iris sparkled with their unexpected orange flowers.

Peculiarly, though it is only 6% of their landscape, it is largely English writers who have done most to celebrate that landscape. It is its emptiness which provides the stage for Heathcliff's wanderings in *Wuthering Heights*, no doubt accompanied these days by Kate Bush's haunting cry of 'Cathie'. Both Auden and Hughes celebrate it with one poem after another inspired by its desolation. It is present, too, in some of the novels encountered either on the page or TV screen, from *Lorna Doone* to *Jamaica Inn*, and the works of Thomas Hardy.

Their nightmare vision of that landscape seems to go right back to Shakespeare with the broken figure of *King Lear* stumbling across the 'blasted heath'. Or even *Macbeth* where the man from Stratford-upon-Avon seems to have produced an early version of an islands council, standing in the murk while stirring a cauldron, asking when the next transportation committee meeting will be held:

*When will we three meet again  
In thunder, lightning or in rain...*

The accuracy of this picture is all the more remarkable because Shakespeare never stepped over the Scottish border. His imagination was no doubt stirred by some landscape he encountered while making his way south through the wilds of Luton or Croydon, some community untouched by civilisation either then or now.

One can only speculate why the moor has played such a part in the English imagination. Perhaps there is the memory of dark crimes and deeds through the ages, even, maybe, stretching to our own times. Which one of us of a certain age is not haunted by the word 'Saddleshoe'? The ghosts of Brady, Hindley and their victims will forever haunt its vacancies, the emptiness of that domain.

In the main, the moor does not appear to have the same power over Scottish writers, though there are exceptions to this. It looms up in the work of those who were acquainted with it from an early age, novelists like Stevenson in *Kidnapped*, Gunn and Buchan, or the magnificent verse of Sorley Maclean or Norman MacCaig. Yet even there, it often lacks the brooding intensity of how English writers viewed the moor.

The one exception to this is Edinburgh native, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. His *Hound of the Baskervilles* howls and prowls, however, round a southern stretch of bog and heather, leaving paw-prints around the wild wasteland of Dartmoor. Considering there was so much moorland not far from the Scottish capital, one might need Sherlock Holmes to puzzle out the reasons for his choice of setting.

There is, of course, another vast volume, compiled by a group of – what is surely – largely lowland Scots. Despite the fact that something approaching a third of the country's landmass, far more than our southern neighbour, is moorland, there is little reference to this environment among the 200,000 words that weigh down the pages of the Scottish Government white paper, *Scotland's Future*.

There is even less mention of the way much of this is 'kept' wilderness, retained that way deliberately by the tiny percentage of Scotland's population who possess it. Quite remarkably, for a movement whom many of its members consider to be left-wing, there seems to be only blank white space in the white paper dealing with the question of who owns Scotland's land.

And then, too, there are the lines that criss-cross much of that emptiness, the ferry, flight and other paths that link together the scattered communities of the north. Again, if we flick through the bulk of that glossy document, there is little notice taken of measures that could be taken to improving these, especially in terms of the cost of the journeys we are compelled to take.

Why, instead of its current centralising agenda, are these not some of the major priorities of any Scottish Government? In my view, the answer to that question lies in the way Scotland perceives itself, one that is revealed even in its literature. It contains one of the most cramped and confined populations in the Western world; the bulk of its people living jowl by grizzled jowl beside one another in the narrow corridor of the nation's central belt.

They rarely raise their sight to look at the moorland and mountains that sometimes lies only a short distance from their homes. It is as if it has nothing to do with them, their myopia such that the issues and concerns of those who live on the country's periphery can be all too easily overlooked even in the most bloated document ever heaved and hauled out by any government to give its people to read.

Yet there is a great deal of self-deception in all this. The price of Scotland's empty acres, filled only by grouse moors and hunting estates, is not simply paid by those who live in their vicinity, unable to provide jobs for and retain their young. It is paid, too, by those who live out their cramped and close existence – in tenement and high-rise flat, Castlemilk and Easterhouse, our post-war housing estates.

The issue should not have been left unmentioned in *Scotland's Future*. It is a betrayal both of those who live in Sutherland and Sighthill. Instead, the issue should have been howled about as loudly as Heathcliff called out Cathie's name on the desolation of the moor.

# Poor reception

Brian Wilson

2016

When you live on the edge of Europe, communications are everything. I was due to take part in a radio discussion from my home in Lewis on Sunday morning. The internet connection was down so no Skype; there is no mobile signal and the BT landline was so awful that the nation was deprived of my wisdom after 10 seconds.

I had recently stumbled upon an article from *The Spectator* archive published 70 years ago and written by Malcolm K Macmillan, Labour MP for the Western Isles. It was an overview of the post-war state of his constituency and the priorities to be addressed in order to stem the flow of emigration as an escape from unemployment.

The word 'communications' had then a more basic meaning but was still top of Macmillan's list. 'While sea transport is poor and expensive,' he wrote, 'the islands will remain poor, and economic development will be expensive and discouraged. And because of lack of work and wages and modern social amenities, disenchanting youth is attracted to the mainland towns and to the Dominions. Thus depopulation goes on... and those who emigrate are the most virile, adventurous, reproductive stock'.

Macmillan went on to list a whole series of possibilities for improving the economic life of the islands and thus stemming emigration. Over the intervening decades, many of them have come to pass – but never at a rate which negated the basic problem which is that if people do not have work in peripheral places, then many of them will leave. Communications, of all sorts, can either exacerbate or redress the challenges of peripherality.

By far, the most important initiative since Macmillan offered his prescriptions was the establishment of the Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) by the Labour Government in 1965. It was an act of radical interventionism which certainly dwarves any legislative minnow to have emerged from Holyrood over the past 16 years. In a more generous society, it would be held up to every student of Scottish politics as the kind of thing governments can do for good where the will exists.

Willie Ross, the Secretary of State for Scotland, spoke of the Highlander as the 'man on Scotland's conscience' and gave the new HIDB exceptional powers – not replicated when the Scottish Development Agency was brought into existence a decade later – to address the social needs of the region as well economic ones. From the outset, however, there was a conflict inherent in the approach which the board adopted.

Its first chairman, Sir Robert Grieve, was a distinguished planner who firmly believed, as a 1960s planner would, in a growth point strategy. In other words, the plan was to create industrial centres around Inverness and the Cromarty Firth, as well as Lochaber with its

pre-existing aluminium works, as the hubs of Highland regeneration. The problem in this was obvious. Far from halting the migration which appalled Macmillan and troubled Ross's conscience, it hastened it since the primary source of labour was those parts of the Highlands and Islands which were already economically weakest.

The 'growth centre' rhetoric abated but the conflict has never gone away. The peripheral places which were losing population in the 1940s and 1960s are, on the whole, still losing them today. The pace has slowed because there are not many left and even fewer who have their roots in them. Of course, there are far more people coming in and without them many communities, such as the one I live in, would be dead or dying.

But it could all have been approached (and still could be) so much more creatively, to the benefit not only of these communities but also the cultural diversity they represented. For all its successes, a failure of the HIDB (and its successor, HIE) has been the absence of any coherent solution to the most challenging part of its remit: sustaining a healthy periphery where populations are counted in hundreds rather than thousands. To be fair, the lead has to come from government, rather than any agency.

Social planners should pay attention because what is currently affecting small numbers of people will soon spread to larger ones. It is easy to close a school and bus the handful of kids to another one five or 10 miles away. But what happens when age imbalance reaches the point where there are no longer enough of the economically active to look after the ageing population? What meaning do childcare guarantees have when there is nobody to provide it? How vast do medical practice areas have to become, to maintain at least the theory of adequate cover?

My own longstanding view is that Scotland's economic development map should be redrawn. It's a long time since anyone could say with a straight face that the Invernessian is the 'man on Scotland's conscience' yet vast quantities of public money continue to flow into that city and its environs as a result of 'Highland' status. Are its 21st-century needs really greater than those of other Scottish towns and cities? And how much does it have in common with the true periphery, from which it continues to suck resources and people?

The other elephant in the room is the centralising mentality of the Scottish Government. Until 2010, there was a good organisation called the Highlands and Islands Partnership Programme which managed European Structural Funds. It had clear priorities and a well-developed understanding of relative needs, with a strong bias towards peripheral infrastructure. That is how the great programme of bridges, causeways and ferries linking the Western Isles in the preceding two decades was funded.

There is now absolutely no transparency about how structural funds are allocated because it is all done in Edinburgh and branded as Scottish Government largesse. As part of the Brexit discussions, they will presumably shout loud and long for Scotland to retain some equivalent to EU structural funding. However, the quid pro quo must be that the money goes to the places for which it is intended and that there is complete transparency about how it is allocated.

To get back to my lost broadcast, there is a serious point. A couple of years back, the UK Government allocated a large chunk of money to upgrade the broadband network in the Highlands and Islands. Predictably, the places already most vulnerable to depopulation were put to the back of the queue. The headlines boasted of 80% coverage while the other 20% were, by implication, deemed statistically insignificant.

No communications-dependent business is going to set up in these places which are excluded, while families might be deterred from moving into them. So the process continues and once again, remoteness is a barrier to be punished rather than compensated for through improved communications.

This is one area of policy in which we could learn a lot from Norway, where the maintenance of population in the most peripheral places has long been integral to their whole philosophy of government. Instead of selectively using (non-EU) Norway as a shining example when it suits, it would be more useful to actually learn something from them about matters which are wholly within Holyrood's remit. But that would involve effort and imagination.

Where are such issues even discussed? For example, the crofting system is integral to any forensic approach to the challenges faced by the Highlands and Islands periphery. Westminster legislated on it rather a lot, from the 1880s onwards. One of Malcolm K Macmillan's claims to fame was that, until quite recently, he held the record for the longest House of Commons speech – and it was on the subject of crofting.

At present, the Crofting Commission quango is in a state of meltdown, held in universal contempt throughout the areas it is supposed to regulate. In a leaked letter, its minister, Fergus Ewing, stated that its interpretation of crofting law is 'diametrically opposed' to the Scottish Government's own legal advice. Yet he has done nothing publicly. Holyrood will certainly not debate the subject and even if it did, speeches would be limited to five minutes. Macmillan would hardly have got into his stride.

Like many complex matters which are of importance to significant minorities within Scotland, the well-being of crofting communities goes virtually undiscussed – and certainly less so than when it was the preserve of a parliament which had responsibility for 12 times as many people. How can this be so? As far as influencing policy is concerned, Edinburgh seems just as remote from Scotland's periphery – and certainly less interested – than London or Brussels ever was.

# Islay's amazing captain

George Robertson

2017

'The Captain' they called him. He built eight shipyards, four dry docks and 200 ships. He designed ocean-going canal boats, an ore washing device, a hydraulic transporting system, designed and operated Mississippi river barges, created a torpedo-proof military vessel and held 49 patents for his inventions.

The Captain was Alexander McDougall and he was born in Port Ellen, a small village on the Isle of Islay in the Inner Hebrides, on 16 March 1845. His working life stretched from the American Civil War to the First World War but he never forgot the village of his birth and the shop (now the old post office building) where his father operated a village store.

The Captain was a remarkable man whose achievements on the American Great Lakes are still spoken of with awe – even if he is unknown in his native land. As an inventor, designer, pioneer, major employer and in many ways a visionary in shipping, he was a polymath of substance and lasting success.

McDougall's father, Dugald, shopkeeper in Port Ellen and then a Glasgow policeman, left for Canada like so many of his countryman when Alexander was seven. They landed up in Nottawa, a village near Collingwood, Ontario, from where at the age of 16 the young Alexander ran away to sea on the mighty Great Lakes. By the age of 26 he was captaining a major cargo ship. An amazing career was about to take off.

His first ship in command was the *SS Japan* of the Anchor Line. It was a cargo ship which carried 1,200 tons of cargo with 150 passengers. He then built a home in Duluth (pronounced Dulooth) near Minesotta and got involved in the trade arising from the proposed Mississippi and Lake Superior railroad. Burgeoning iron ore mining and the transportation of grain were driving economic activity.

In 1875, he was sent to Russia at the request of Grand Duke Alexis to examine the feasibility of building a canal linking the Volga and Don rivers. He was told to examine the possibilities of trade and to get a franchise for a grain elevator. En route he visited his native Islay, then Paris and Berlin (celebrating the defeat of the French). In St Petersburg, he saw the Tsar Alexander riding in the streets unremarked in a horse and sleigh. He left Russia with hidden maps stitched specially in the linings of his coat.

In 1886, he tried his hand at fishing in Lake Superior catching quantities of herring and trout. He and his compatriots froze fish in blocks of ice and sold them with the slogan: 'Frozen with a wiggle in their tails'. Abandoning that project he then returned to shipping, captaining the *SS City of Duluth*, sailing from Chicago to the ports on Lake Superior. That same year he married Emiline Ross, whose grandfather had come from Tain in Rosshire.

They were to have five children with one daughter called Islay but only two were to survive to adulthood.

This was when his exceptional ship-building career started, as he helped to build the SS *Hiawatha* and started a successful stevedoring business employing nearly 1,000 men. But it was in 1888, in the newly created American Steel Barge Company, he built his first 'whaleback', the signature ship which was to revolutionise shipping in the Lakes. An ugly ship shaped like a cigar with ends turned-up, it was decried as a 'pig' and 'McDougall's Nightmare'.

But McDougall had seen the necessity for a ship designed for the locks and stormy waters of the Great Lakes. He defied the critics. The initial whaleback barges were a success and the project was backed by John D Rockefeller, the Standard Oil mogul.

In 1890 and 1891 he built a dry dock, and in 1893 he built 10 ships. He 'launched a ship every Saturday for eight Saturdays and on the ninth launched two ships and a tug'. He then built his most prestigious ship for the Chicago world's fair, the SS *Christopher Columbus*. It was started on 7 September 1892 and launched on 3 December the same year. On its trial run it carried 7,500 passengers, and in its lifetime (it was still sailing in 1930) carried more Lake passengers than any other ship. Small wonder this whaleback was nicknamed *Queen of the Lakes*.

At the time, the *Chicago Tribune* said: 'The whaleback is an American invention and belongs particularly to the West and the Great Lakes district. It was planned by a Lake navigator out of the necessities of Lake transportation and was built in a Lake shipyard'.

A similar ship was built the next year in Everett, Washington State, where McDougall had constructed a shipyard and dry dock. The *Spirit of Everett* was to be the first American steamship through the Suez Canal and the first American steamer to go round the world. Another McDougall whaleback, the *Charles W Whitmore*, captained by McDougall himself, was the first vessel to leave the Great Lakes, sailing to Liverpool in the course of which journey it extraordinarily ran the rapids on the St Lawrence River.

In 1889, McDougall was enticed to build ships for the Mississippi River trading traffic and his tugboat plied as far down the river as the Gulf of Mexico. In 1912, he returned to Collingwood where the family had landed 58 years before, and built there a shipyard and dry dock. He also helped his son Miller to found a cold storage company in Chicago.

Later that busy year, the Captain came back to the UK to visit Liverpool where they were contemplating building whalebacks. He took the opportunity to visit Islay and see his cousins and the 'old farm where my father's people had lived'. It was only a ruin but he speaks in his autobiography of a ride in a buggy on the Big Strand, and the surprising lack of drunkenness among so much 'whiskey'.

The Captain then started to wind down, spending time in the basement of his home in Duluth, continuing his inventing and experimenting. The end of the First World War brought depression to the huge Duluth shipyard and it was reluctantly closed. At its height, the yard had employed thousands of workers and dominated the whole town.

In May 1923, the Captain died reportedly just after a whaleback waiting in the bay outside his home blew two solemn blasts on its horn. It was 77 eventful years after his birth in the village of Port Ellen, Isle of Islay.

The reference book *Who Was Who in America 1897-1942* described Alexander McDougall as 'Inventor of the only method devised for making merchantable the vast deposits of sand iron ores in Minnesota. Inventor of "whaleback" ships'.

Only one whaleback survives. After a working life of a remarkable 73 years, the *Meteor* is now a maritime museum on Barker's Island, Superior. Every year in Duluth they still mark the life of this significant and trailblazing shipping pioneer. His achievements stand as a memorial to this unique son of Islay.

INDEPENDENCE  
REFERENDUM  
2014

# Why are we wasting valuable time?

George Robertson

2013

I spoke last Saturday in St Andrews University, where I once studied, at the celebrations to mark its remarkable six centuries of education and thinking. We were looking at the future of nations in the 21st century.

In the light of the heavyweight contributions to that subject it seemed incredible that, given all that has happened in Scotland in the university's history, we are now about to start a year of navel gazing. Spending a year contemplating the merits of destroying the three-century-old union of nations we live in, and which has served us so well, seems a monumental waste of time.

With the perspective of history and looking back at the coming year, will not future students look at this debate with wonder and incredulity? They will consider the great problems facing the world and the people of Scotland: climate change, religious and nationalist extremism, pandemics, organised crime, proliferation of the likes of chemical weapons, economic migration flows, financial meltdowns and the effect of fragile and failed states. Not one of these real urgent global challenges has a single nation solution. All, if they are to be managed, need multinational, collective action.

And those future students will also ponder that Scotland is not a colony, we are not oppressed, we are not discriminated against in the UK construct, and we are not disadvantaged – indeed, recent studies show that Scotland is the most prosperous part of the UK outside of the south-east.

One of the participants at the celebrations said to me: 'As a Scot living south of the border, I wake to the voice of Jim Naughtie, I go to sleep watching Kirsty Wark, and on Sunday I start my day with Andrew Marr. I am a proud Scot and I am surrounded at all levels down there by Scots in England who play a major part in the life of the United Kingdom'. What he deeply resented was that he would have no vote next September when the decision might make him a foreigner.

In the UK, there is no linguistic differentiation and no defining cultural division the like of which motivates and energises so many other separatist movements waiting and watching our referendum campaign. Not only that but we have for ourselves here in Scotland a legislature with serious and growing powers to make and amend laws across the whole range of domestic life. Lord Ashcroft's huge opinion poll two weeks ago found that most Scots do not fully appreciate just how much power, and over just how many areas, the Scottish Parliament can make and change the laws of the land.

Housing (so why is there a housing crisis?). Education (and where is the genuine experimentation and thinking in this area so vital to Scotland's future?). Health (can we be

so complacent that the existing model is so good when last week it was recorded that this was the biggest year for complaints?). Transport, tourism, agriculture, local government (squeezed by the council tax freeze which benefits mainly the wealthy), universities and colleges, fishing – and more too.

And next year the parliament will get even more powers under the Calman reforms, including major powers to alter income tax (not that the existing power to lower or increase income tax by 3p in the £ has ever been contemplated). Amid the moans about Westminster contained in last week's Swinney Budget, did anyone hear that Scotland had received from the George Osborne spending review an additional £296m plus another £100m from the Barnett formula?

The real tragedy of the Yes campaign is its relentless negativity about the present UK setup and its obsession with blaming every ill, real and imagined, on Westminster and the coalition. As if creating a separate state was the simplest, cost- and risk-free way of replacing the current people in charge.

In our United Kingdom we have evolved a template for common action in a single geographic space and our single market, our joint institutions and seamless way of living has inspired many others in the world.

So what conceivably is the dynamic for separatist change which will divert us and divide us for the next 12 months? In the context of the long history of these islands, the atomisation of Britain will deliver no solutions whatsoever for that catalogue of global threats and challenges which face us all and which must be urgently addressed.

# What my grandparents taught me

Douglas Alexander

2013

Isobel Garven, my grandmother, was born in Glasgow in 1901. Her mother, my great grandmother, died when she was just a child, and so she was brought up by her father. He was a general practitioner in the St George's Cross area of the city and, as what today we would call a single parent, he would take her on his visits to treat his patients.

I remember her telling me that in those years, long before Aneurin Bevan established our National Health Service, he would never take a payment if the children in the home had no shoes. There were a lot of children without shoes around St George's Cross.

No doubt those house calls with her father had an effect on my grandmother as, remarkably for her time, she decided herself to become a doctor. And that is exactly what she did – graduating as one of the earliest female graduates of medicine from Glasgow University in 1925. After graduating, she met and married my grandfather who was also a recent medical graduate of Glasgow University. Both had been involved in the Student Christian Movement and together they decided to go to China as medical missionaries of the Church of Scotland.

In Manchuria, she and my grandfather immersed themselves in the local culture – learning to write and speak fluent Chinese, living the adventure of difference, bringing up their son and three daughters amidst some very hazardous periods of conflict, and over many years building the academic status and medical services of the Moukden Medical College. As if these challenges were not sufficient, during those years my grandmother also helped my grandfather to write and publish, in Chinese, books on both the ornithology and the flora of north China.

They lived a deeply different life. They were shaped by many new and at times challenging things. Yet they never stopped being Scottish. They brought that self-understanding to this new place; shared it and received what this new place brought to them.

Recently, I travelled to China. I left Inverness on the Saturday evening, had two days of meetings with Chinese Government officials in Shanghai, and was back in the House of Commons by the Wednesday evening. In this era of air travel and instant electronic communication – of Skype and email – it is hard now to comprehend the isolation – the sheer sense of distance and 'apartness' from Scotland – that my grandmother accepted as the price of her endeavours to train Chinese doctors.

She told me years ago of her fear on arriving in so foreign a land and went on to explain to me that urgent family news – such as bereavement – took seven weeks to reach Manchuria from Scotland. The emails I sent from Shanghai were being read here in Scotland in less than seven breaths.

Yet I believe my grandparents had something much more important than communication. They had communion. I do not mean this in the religious sense, although it is true that they were committed Christians. I mean it in the sense that they were deeply and meaningfully engaged in relationships: with their family, with their students, and with the environment and culture around them. In drinking deep of the lives of their very different neighbours they were better able to fully be who they could be: international Scots, celebrating diversity, serving others.

Decades on, that truth endures: we become fully ourselves only through the deepening of our relationships, especially with those who are not who we are. Making a contribution through establishing deeper and more complete connections makes each of us who we are. Of course, we can still develop in isolation, but I suggest it is through connection and contribution with and to others that allows us to fully become ourselves. We become who we are in conjunction with those around us becoming who they are. I believe that. And so too, I sense, did my grandmother and my grandfather.

Writing in an article for *The Scotsman* on what would have been the jubilee year of the Moukden Medical College in 1962, my grandfather – by then back in Scotland – began the piece by quoting a Chinese proverb which in English goes: 'If you are planting for 10 years, plant trees. If you are planting for a hundred years, plant men'. He understood that it is by becoming entangled in the web of human relationships – with neighbours, friends, and family – that we experience the essence of human flourishing.

And why do I share that family story? Because it has indelibly shaped my sense of who I am, and who, as Scots, we are. It reminds me that it is our connectedness, in our relationships – our interdependence – with our neighbours close by and with distant strangers who are the neighbours we have yet to meet, that we can both make a contribution and best discover who we are, and what we can be.

Here in Scotland and further afield, I have spent a lifetime grappling to engage with the adventure of difference, so I am distrustful of a politics that draws its energy from a default belief that the assertion of difference in all circumstances is a universal panacea for all ills – including, often, where there are none. Indeed, for me, basing your politics around a starting point of difference all too easily becomes a denigration of others. That is why I reject a cultural conceit that implies not only that as Scots we are committed to social justice, but that our friends, family and colleagues across the UK somehow are not.

Ahead of next year's referendum, there are those who think that Scotland needs to walk away from our neighbours to fully become who we are. They see difference requiring not celebration but separation. But this approach, to my mind, misses the very point of who we are.

For Scotland to be that better nation does not demand that we become a separate nation. Scotland is not diminished by being part of the family of nations within the United Kingdom, just as we are not diminished as individuals by our relationships. Indeed, it is through our relationships that we discover who we really are.

# The missing vision

Alex Bell

2013

The white paper tries to answer the exam question from hell – what's the future going to be like? The Scottish Government's document attempts both to be smart while showing off all its revision. There's plenty for those who crave detail, but perhaps not enough to convince sceptics that this is the right question to be asking at this time.

We have a long time to judge the paper, and the snap views of now are jumbled with prejudice and baggage. The best thing we can do as a nation is treat this like a book club – read it and gather again in a few weeks with our notes. In effect, that is what the referendum campaign has become – a 10-month critique of 650 pages.

The government had to offer a prospectus but has dreaded the moment for two years, knowing fine well that to capture the state of a nation and its future is like trying to pin a live butterfly to a board. To succeed, you must kill the beauty of the idea. The dynamism of a people and the variables of fate, the most crucial elements that make a state rise or fall, are absent.

What we do have is a map of the visible moon – the dark side owned by Whitehall remains out of sight. There can be no costs, or practical sense of what will be negotiated, while London refuses to reveal its hand and that will always mean the white paper is incomplete.

The commitment to early years is on the money – it's the only way we can tackle our chronic inequality in a sustainable way. What is strange is that the pledge for more child care isn't accompanied by changes to tax and welfare which would present a 'whole state' solution to the problem. It's as if the range of state levers has overwhelmed the authors.

This applies to other pledges on offer – they are stand-alone vote winners, but not integrated into an over-arching vision. The advantages of an intimate state aren't exploited here – but that may yet come. We expect next Easter for the unionists parties to show their positions on devo-plus, and that may present an opportunity for the Scottish Government to develop these ideas.

Will it all work? Of course – it's all a matter of confidence. As the UK repeatedly demonstrates, you can run a State with corrupt banks, unfit-for-purpose departments and rampant tax evasion and not lose much sleep. Indeed, you can argue that with quantitative easing the UK is verging on a confidence trick, printing money to prop up historic debt. It's not the coherence of detail or vision that matters, it's conviction. That's the one thing the white paper wants to inspire.

Back in the 1970s, Jim Fairlie described independence as a 'revolution by coffee mornings', meaning radicalism was disguised by bourgeois concerns. This offer suggests

the bourgeois has trumped the revolutionary – independence is not a moment to begin again but a chance to modify the existing society over time. As the Yes campaign wins supporters one by one, at the modern equivalent of coffee mornings, it may yet be enough – more 'mild disruption in a cappuccino'.

The launch day has also teased out London's strategy to attack the currency union, seen as the SNP's weak spot. For what it's worth, I don't buy this threat. The UK can't afford a second of doubt on its national debt. After a Yes vote, deals will be done in the blink of an eye to keep the markets from ravaging through the future of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and an independent Scotland. This appears like a popular referendum, but global capitalism will have more sway than any politician.

# The next question: why should I bother?

Alex Bell

2013

The team who produced the white paper are taking a week off – well, a few days of reduced mania and maybe a couple of seconds to look out of the window. This slight break is more than deserved. Unfortunately, they can't take too long as it is vital that the debate moves on.

They should do so with good cheer, aware that we already live in a nation transformed. The debate we are having just isn't the same as the one in 2011. The idea of independence is accepted – we can discuss it in public without ironic caveats or eye-rolling. This doesn't make the idea more agreeable, but does at least mean we don't have to treat our future like a Christmas cracker joke.

Details of the currency and EU membership are still disputed, but no longer dismissed – there is substance and the growing realisation of real-politik. What Scotland does will have repercussions and it's how the rUK will deal with the situation, or the rEU, that is just as important as what is said in Edinburgh. We desperately needed that wider context as a means of giving sense to the debate.

Details that were old-hat in SNP circles are now in the public domain – it is easy to mock points such as Scotland still competing for the Eurovision song title, but equally it's a mark of our political elite's detachment that this is parodied. The sense of normality and continuity is huge for most voters, and since when were elections decided on fancy theory rather than basic needs?

This is the latest step forward in a fast-changing Scotland. When I was growing up, *The Sunday Post* was the biggest selling paper in the world, we had two celebrities in Sean Connery and Lena Zavaroni, and most people voted Tory. There was an oppressive sense, like a cultural haar, which sat over the country. An economy and way of life was dying around us.

Now, nobody would doubt our cultural strength or our creative abilities, as they wouldn't question the ability of Scotland to compete in the world or manage its own affairs. We have come a long way. The white paper in that sense has a thousand authors and a lead time of 30 years – it is simply unimaginable that it could have been written sooner.

But no sooner is it out than it becomes a thing of the past – another milestone on the way, but behind us as we look to the horizon. The next priority is to read the unwritten counterargument. Flawed as the Scottish Government's proposition may be, at least it exists. Voters have no way of knowing what the future will be like within the UK, and that is both arrogant and stupid of the unionists. They will not be able to hold that silence for 10 months till the vote.

We are told that in the spring the union parties will reveal their case for more powers.

Not a response to the white paper, but a welcome admission of guilt. We can all agree that the UK is dysfunctional. They tried this once before with the Calman Commission and the second Scotland Act. A grubby piece of politics that should shame all involved. Now we have the white paper, the unionists can't get away with reheating that gruel – the Scottish Government, in making the case for independence, has also set the mark on what is credible for devo-max.

But this is not enough. Once breath has been drawn, there must be more – a document of more thought (and less length) which takes the debate into the possible country we could be. The procedural and technical side of the debate remains alive, but richer for all is the debate over the people we could be. The Scottish Government needs to spell this out.

You can't read the white paper without risking diabetic disorder from all the sweet sentiments. They are wonderful aspirations but there's only so much meringue anyone can eat. If this stays as it is, then No will find it easy to be just as sweet, but at less apparent risk. Yes need to make the link between control of state levers and social outcomes much clearer.

This is the UK's vulnerable spot. So far, we have been given no clear reason why Britain is intrinsically better. The white paper shows you can have 'good' things without being in the current constitution. This needs to be expanded. The Scottish Government can't just dip its toes in the waters of a post-national world, but must champion the benefits of a new way of ordering human affairs.

In so doing, it emphasises a growing truth of the debate, that it is the UK which is defending 19th-century nationalism while Scotland is struggling to articulate a new relationship between citizen and state suited to the realities of now. The Scottish Government must explore further what new things could be done. Its static attitude to welfare, and the statist policies of Common Weal contributions, are appeals to the past. We are not going forward only to arrive behind other nations.

Much as we have moved on, we are stuck on a different question to the one on the ballot paper. The voters will be asked 'Should Scotland become an independent country?' but they will be thinking 'why should I bother?' – that's the next body of work. You can't transform Scotland without some pretty radical shifts, and those are impossible within the UK. We are building the future, not defending the past.

# We didn't need 170,000 words. We only needed 11

Katie Grant

2013

It's irritating but true that since nobody taking part in the referendum debate is impartial, debate serves only to confuse matters. The white paper, by intertwining Scottish sovereignty – keeping the Queen (I wonder what she makes of being a 'kept' woman), with SNP policy – free childcare – confuses matters further.

Childcare belongs in an election manifesto, not in a constitutional white paper. After 'independence day' there would have to be a Scottish election. Scotland might go berserk and elect a government run by a modern King Herod. This would place childcare in a rather different category.

Then there's the length of the paper. 170,000 words take a while to download and as anybody who marks student work knows, length is no guarantee of anything. On page xviii, we find this sentence: '[Part 4] describes the transition that will take place and the negotiations that will be required on assets and liabilities, and to ensure continued delivery of public services'. What a mouthful. '[Part 4] describes the transition and negotiations required over assets, liabilities and continued delivery of public services' is 11 words shorter and would do as well.

There may be diamonds amongst the 170,000 words, but what are we to make of things as they stand? I'm not pretending to be impartial myself: I favour the union. We live in a world which should be bringing borders down, not raising them up. The soft border between Scotland and England, with Scotland keeping its own particular characteristics and England keeping hers, works well. Hard borders create tensions, a truth universally acknowledged since the first man (I expect it was a man) put up a garden fence. To deny this is silly.

I'm also concerned that Scotland is not looking itself squarely in the face. In the preface to the white paper, Alex Salmond states that 'our national story has been shaped down the generations by values of compassion, equality, an unrivalled commitment to the empowerment of education, and a passion and curiosity for invention that has helped to shape the world around us'. I agree with the last two, even though commitment to the 'empowerment of education' isn't quite the same as delivering good education, as pupils from Scotland's worst performing schools might agree.

But are we going to airbrush out of our national consciousness all the Scot on Scot violence of the past? That a Scot, James Adair, a former procurator fiscal of Glasgow, was the only Wolfenden Committee voice raised against the humane recommendation that 'homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private should no longer be a criminal offence?' That in Scotland, government figures show that incidents of domestic abuse,

usually perpetrated by men against women, rose by 7% between 2011 and 2012? That a 2009 *Herald* investigation into care for our elderly uncovered not compassion but 'record levels of neglect and abuse'?

My point is not to say that Scots are worse than other people: not at all. But it's just not good enough to imply that if we do bad things, it's somehow because we're not 'free' to be ourselves. We're already ourselves. Sometimes we're not very nice, and being independent isn't going to make us nicer.

Another truth needing acknowledgement is that however the referendum goes, it won't be the end of the matter. As we saw in Ireland over the Lisbon Treaty, referenda are a snapshot of opinion on a particular day, not a full stop. If next September we vote to stay in the union, the SNP aren't going to give up: there'll be another referendum round the corner, then another.

It's a curious irony that amongst all the uncertainties inherent in a divorce from the rest of the UK, a Yes vote would actually contain the most certainty. Certainty is a powerful attraction, and one that unionists have not so far addressed. Alistair Darling, if you're reading this, could you please give us clearer, more certain pictures of what will happen if Scotland chooses to remain in the UK. In broad terms, we know what independence means. We also need to know where the union is. Speaking of Alistair Darling, do you know whom I blame for this whole referendum/independence business? Not the SNP, but the Labour Party.

Perhaps they started out with 'liberty, fraternity, equality' ideals, but their post-war stamp on Scotland is dismal. Look at the condition of the housing schemes. Look at the councils. Look at Falkirk. Small wonder that, as James Mitchell reminds us in [totalpolitics.com](http://totalpolitics.com), despite being the architect of devolution 'Scottish Labour has lost support at every Holyrood election since 1999'. The SNP's success at Holyrood is not a positive endorsement of independence: it's the punishment Labour voters are dishing out to a party that has taken them for granted, and often for a ride as well. Whither Labour is riding now is anybody's guess. Johann Lamont, its Scottish high heid yin, is all but invisible. Labour has failed Scotland, and we're living with nationalist consequences.

Over the next 10 months, the waters will muddy further. Wild promises will be issued by the Yes camp; wild threats by Better Together. Since we've no idea which promises will be delivered and which threats will materialise, perhaps we should ignore both. Here's the thing which nobody in debate ever wants to say: independence will bring unintended consequences; remaining in the union, unintended frustrations. Eleven words, not 170,000, but they're probably near as dammit to the truth.

# Either way, Scotland lives on

Ian Hamilton

2013

Sixty-five years ago, John MacCormick put forward the National Covenant. It began: 'We the people of Scotland'. It called for a measure of self government. It was signed by two million Scots. Then it vanished into the walled city of London and was heard of no more.

Yet not quite. John MacCormick had influence even although he never had power. This is the view stated by Kenneth Roy in his great book *The Invisible Spirit*. I knew John well. He was less concerned with government than with the very existence of our country.

In the 1940s it was touch and go. Scotland nearly became a hinterland of England. We needed magic. Sometimes words have magic. 'We the people of Scotland' had magic. Suddenly we were a nation again. Two million of us spoke, even if politically it was only a whisper. Now look at us. By the Scotland Act, creating the Holyrood parliament, England recognised Scotland as a nation with separate needs. Where do we go from here?

Let us get some rubbish out of the way. The SNP doesn't embrace all Scots. You don't need to belong to a political party to love your country. For that matter, the SNP will fly apart as soon as its aim of independence is achieved. That said, sooner or later there will be a revival of party politics in Scotland. We must face that as a nation we have the responsibility of nationhood. We cannot hide a handful of MPs among the crowds at Westminster and kid ourselves that it gives us influence. It doesn't. We have 4% of the legislators. We have no voice to speak to other nations. Independence means that we pick and choose our friends. I'm not sure where England stands in the pantheon of our friends.

England changes. The England of the shires and the village green has gone. England is now the walled city of London. The torrent of Better Together that daily disfigures our papers shows a frightened London. The real fight of the 21st century is not between Britain and the Common Market. It is between Scotland and London.

London has sucked the wealth of these islands into its walls. It manages things. It doesn't create them and for this reason it fears a rival who does. We are the only country with the wealth and vigour to rival them. If that were not so they would patronise us, not shout at us. If we are poor, why are they so keen to keep us? They have been asked what makes us better together. Like Goliath on the heights of Garth they stand, red-faced, and go on shouting. But answer they nothing. Will he who shouts the loudest win the vote?

When we vote I shall be into my 90th year. I'm not afraid for the future of my country. No-one can ride two bicycles. No government can rule two countries. Many who vote No will hope to get greater powers for Holyrood. Some hope! Which bike will they ride when nothing comes?

I remember the lonely years with John MacCormick. John has won. In the long vista of

history, influence is more important than power. Power passes. Influence changes things. Scotland's future is secure. We are an uneasy country. We are not at home in a walled city. Yes or No, Scotland lives on.

# The scientific problem of dividing an island

John McGrath

2013

I always felt uncomfortable taking an attendance register – like I was checking that none of the prisoners had escaped – so at the beginning of a lecture I would hand a sheet of paper to the nearest student to be signed and passed around.

In a class of engineers, the returned list would typically contain a few more names than the number of bodies actually present – names like 'Ben Dover', 'Phil McCrackin' or 'Mustapha Fag'. The handwriting told me a lot. The most illegible signature often belonged to the student most talented in physics and maths.

After some years, I developed the prejudiced view that anyone who could write neatly and spell well probably could not wire a plug and would struggle to understand Newton's laws of motion. That people understood the world in one of two ways. Those weak in logical powers with no idea how anything worked got on by learning things off by heart – they were good at spelling, history and literature while others with strong logical powers understood very well how things worked but could not remember names or how to spell 'accommodation' – as if a genetic predisposition was at work. I still kind of believe this.

Politics is dominated by the first type of thinker – a recent *Times Higher Education* article reported that, of the current 650 MPs, only 71 have a science background down from a previous 86 – and this is probably not an atypical ratio for elected representatives. There could be many reasons for this – one perhaps being that logical thinkers are often poor communicators, much easier to knock down in debate when they are unable to repeat what said verbatim – though they may well have understood better than the 'others' the practical implications.

Logical types are also, I'm sure, inclined to be introverts – a characteristic more or less prohibited in modern politics. Whatever the cause, their absence may be one reason why there has been very little debate among politicians of any persuasion of thinking very simply about the idea – scientifically – entirely in abstract – of dividing an island.

As a scientist, the problem of dividing an island so that one part is governed by one group while the other by another, is a practical problem. Nationality – not just nationalism, as we are seeking universal principles – party politics and promises must be entirely disregarded – replaced with a consideration only of these universal principles – whatever they are. Can dividing an island possibly be a good idea?

Disregarding promises, politics and nationality, consider this on the mathematics of division. Jock, Bertie, Pat and Dafydd work on a building site moving sand in a huge 2 x 2 x 2 canvas bag, sharing the weight by hanging it on a pair of big poles. After a few days Jock becomes convinced that at least one of the other three is not actually pulling his weight and

suggests that each side of the bag be cut into four and stitched back together to make four 1 x 1 x 1 bags so they can all carry their loads independently. Pat agrees and to keep the peace the deed is done. They are now free to move the sand as and when they like with only one problem.

It is perhaps counter-intuitive to those who can spell but the four new bags made from exactly the same area of canvas when filled together will now carry only half the sand the original bag could – only four units cubed instead of eight – and as a consequence Jock, Bertie, Pat and Dafydd will have to make twice as many journeys to get the job done.

They may all be happier not having to work together, and happiness is an important thing, but this simple illustration of the economy of scale points to a pattern which is found over and over again in maths and physics and economics. In general, one large system is more efficient, often much more efficient than many small systems when doing the same work.

This is why modern long-haul airliners are becoming terrifyingly huge; why we get our electricity from large power stations rather than small personal generators; and why it is not the bank manager who makes it difficult for the corner shop to compete with Tesco, but the unalterable maths of scale. This is perhaps one universal principle to think about when dividing an island and its work into smaller parts.

I have heard some people say that dividing an island is like dividing a ship so that it has two captains, two crews and two rudders. Students do work on a similar idea in physics when learning about vectors. With a protractor and a ruler they figure out which way a ship will go when two tug boats pull it in different directions as you see with the cruise liners squeezing in or out of Leith docks. The cruise liner does not go in the direction either tug is pulling – it goes in a third direction – the resultant of the vector sum of the two.

There is one big difference between an island and a ship of course – an island does not move – but there may be something in the thought that, if the two captains and two crews of a divided island economy are working in different directions, the island economy as a whole may go in a direction that neither had planned.

Scientists often look for patterns when trying to form a hypothesis. A Google of 'divided islands' brings up a Wikipedia entry on that very subject and it is worth a read. In order of land mass they are: New Guinea, Borneo, Ireland, Hispaniola, Tierra del Fuego, Timor, Cyprus, Sebatik Island, Usedom, Saint Martin, Kataja, Embankment No. 4 King Fahd Causeway, Märket and Koiluoto.

The pattern at a glance – at least for the larger islands – seems to be that the majority of them are dysfunctional in some way with a history of war or conflict being common. Are they dysfunctional because they are divided or divided because they are dysfunctional? Whichever, they give the impression that there will always be some tension in a divided island for it to become united and that a state of unity if it can be achieved is probably a more stable state to be in.

The decision to divide or share may have less to do with evidence or hard science and

more to do with human behaviour or psychology. There have been many studies in animal behaviour on the subject of the sharing or dividing of territory and resources. Jane Goodall's famous study of our chimpanzee cousins surprised the world when it showed them to be infant-killing cannibals – though it was later argued by some academics that this was not normal and that much of the killing was the result of a territorial battle over the place Jane was leaving food.

Consider, then, animals undisturbed in their natural habitat. The seagulls wheeling up and down Portobello high street outside Greggs during the school lunch break are one lesson. They appear on the face of it to have little interest in sharing, descending on whatever the children drop on the pavement to take what they can for themselves but they do one thing to show some thought to other gulls – they squawk at the sight of food and thereby at least invite others to join them.

Contrast this with the crows at Meadowbank Kentucky Fried Chicken. I have watched them silently enter the bins to pull a bag out and set about the contents without uttering a single caw to their hungry fellows.

Where are people on this scale?

I have only occasionally come close to killing over some division – most often at this time of goodwill to all – that moment at the end of a 'work night out' when the waiter brings the bill, which is easily divisible by the number sitting at the table, until one raises their hand and says in a little voice: 'I did not have a pudding'. If the person is poorly paid it is understandable but as often as not the little voice comes from someone well enough paid who owns their own home and for whom the sum is a pittance.

I sometimes think that they are somehow misunderstanding what is going on – that they think they are paying for a pudding that they did not get – of course, they are not – they are paying a contribution towards all the puddings eaten by their comrades – no bad thing at Christmas you would think. Whatever the reason, a great competitive show of arithmetic talent is usually used to cover the group embarrassment while the notes and coins are collected.

Why do they do it? Where does this desire to divide so exactly come from? Can't they help it? Possibly not. Perhaps just the thought that others have eaten a greater share than ourselves is enough to trigger in the subconscious mind some deep sense of revulsion – something we are genetically programmed to feel – an instinct.

As a practising scientist, I still have to make an effort to remember that by far the vast majority of my ancestors were animals – that some millions of years ago a chimpanzee-like creature with a face perhaps a little like mine did well enough with its wit to father or mother one generation closer to becoming me and had it not I would not be here. A distasteful thought is that there are aspects of my behaviour now influenced by the character of that ape – that the inclination to share or divide is so fundamental to survival that I, that is we all, may be genetically predisposed one way or another – maybe, just maybe, there is something instinctive going on – that, when faced with the choice to divide

an island, those of us with certain genes will always be inclined to want to have their bit while others will be inclined to share.

I am disappointed that I have not so far read anywhere a serious scientific analysis of the general universal issues involved in dividing an island – possibly because there are too many overlapping branches of science to consider and, in this age of specialists, we have no modern day Diogenes Teufelsdröckh – Professor of Things in General of Weissnichtwo University – to write it. I suspect that, if we did have, and it was written, and we all read it, it would make no difference – that all arguments rational or irrational do little to alter the inherited view.

# Our 'friends in the north' may mobilise against us

Alasdair McKillop

2013

BBC Scotland recently broadcast a documentary by Alan Little called *Our Friends in the North*. The concept of his programme, in which Scotland was compared with Norway, Finland and Sweden, was not novel.

It is now commonplace to look to our Nordic neighbours for lessons in matters as diverse as welfare, education, childcare and shipbuilding. Such comparisons have become so fashionable that they surely qualify for a little gentle, or not so gentle, satire.

But there is no harm in looking for best practice in countries that bear a resemblance to our own in terms of population size and natural assets. Such exercises can be of use so long as we don't fall into the trap of believing in the panacea of wholesale policy transplantation.

The current issue of the *New Statesman* has a series of articles dedicated to a different 'North': in this instance it is the north of England. That this particular north is to the south of us will no doubt be seized upon as compelling evidence of the irredeemably and fatally muddled nature of the United Kingdom. Regardless, it is another area with which Scotland shares close bonds and many similarities, arguably more so than with our Nordic dancing partners.

Reading the articles, it was impossible not to be struck by the Scottish resemblances: a fondness for comforting, collective myths which turn into unacceptable stereotypes in the hands of others; a continuing struggle to come to terms with industrial decline and a political culture characterised by deep antipathy towards the Conservative Party.

It is useful to be reminded of Scotland's part in the alternative and enduring networks within the UK itself. Glasgow, for example, was once remarked to have formed part of an industrial triangle with Belfast and Liverpool, and Christopher Harvie has written about the west of Scotland forming a floating commonwealth with other Atlantic-orientated parts of mainland Britain and Ireland.

A recent article for the Red Paper Collective titled *We're different up here... How different are we?* compared social attitudes in Scotland and northern England, using data from British Social Attitudes Surveys, from 1986 until 2012. Some geographical discipline was imposed for the purpose of the study with the 'north' being taken to consist of Yorkshire and Humberside, north-east and north-west England.

The study found little difference in attitudes on a range of issues including welfare, taxation, the role of government and abortion. Stephen Low, the author of the study, argued that similar problems with similar causes were framed as national in Scotland but economic in the north of England. He said: 'Insisting that progress for Scotland depends on

independence is saying that those with similar problems and outlooks to our own must be written off as partners in building something better'.

Referring to the 'independence as lifeboat' scenario, he criticised this as an 'inadequate response' for anyone who subscribes to leftist politics. He then challenged nationalists to 'show, rather than simply assert, how independence would improve, or at least do no harm, to our capacity to jointly confront our common problems'.

There are those who would argue that Scotland's departure from the union would deliver a fatal blow to the overbearing powers-that-be in London/ Westminster/the south-east with positive outcomes for the rest of the country. This argument was most recently glimpsed in a piece by Neal Ascherson for *Comment is Free*. He described Scottish independence whipping away the British comfort blanket to reveal an England distorted by the 'monstrous north-south imbalance' which would become obvious and intolerable.

This suggests that the divide has somehow been concealed or remains concealed when it is keenly felt. It might be suggested that this argument is a comfort blanket of a different sort entirely: one that aims to soothe the guilt of leaving those in the north of England to a deeply uncertain future. There is a fine line between being a pioneer and a runaway.

There is another, less optimistic prognosis that should be considered. This would see the north of England economically sandwiched between greater London and Scotland while being subjected to perpetual Tory Government. It would be disadvantaged in competition with the country to its north by cuts in air passenger duty, corporation tax and an inability to offer a wider range of goodies to potential investors.

A regional legislature or legislatures would probably be proposed as the correct solution but the north-east voted against such an idea in 2004, and last year, some northern English cities failed to be enticed by the idea of directly elected mayors. For whatever reason, there seems to be an unwillingness to create political institutions that might better fight the north's corner. In the dire scenario outlined above, regional parliaments might be born out of mobilised resentment towards Scotland as much as towards London and the south-east. The possible consequences of Scottish independence for our nearest neighbours deserve more careful consideration.

A proposed 3% cut in corporation tax, for example, would potentially entice companies to relocate north of the border, thereby depriving the north of England of much needed jobs. Unemployment stands at 10.2% in the north-east and 8.9% in Yorkshire and the Humber and, according to the *New Statesman*, 96% of all employment growth in England in the past year has taken place outside the region.

One need only ask politicians in Northern Ireland (we have 'friends in the north' all over the place) about the difficulty of competing with a very near neighbour who is willing and able to dangle a lower rate of corporation tax in front of businesses. The difference in the rate that exists between it and the Republic – admittedly more significant than would prevail between Scotland and the north of England should we vote for independence – has resulted in repeated calls for the devolution of corporation tax to Stormont. Interestingly,

the outcome of the independence referendum could have some bearing on this decision because some experts predict that this power will be devolved to the province should Scotland vote against independence.

As with most things referendum-related, reality will probably sit meekly in the middle. Another recent report – *Borderlands: Can the north-east and Cumbria benefit from greater Scottish autonomy?*, which was produced on behalf of the Association of North East Councils – found such a middle ground. The executive summary read: 'Stakeholders in the north-east and Cumbria did not underestimate the competition likely to be provided by a stronger Scotland. Indeed, many felt that Scotland already had major advantages in relation to institutional capacity, resources for economic development and the ability to attract inward investment'.

But it was also optimistic about the chances for more collaboration with Scotland and it was reported back in August that a deal had been signed with the intention of realising these opportunities. This might give some practical expression to the social union – but the implications of independence for cross-border relations require more sober study and a bit less wishful thinking.

# Liz Lochhead and the luvvie consensus

Andrew Hook

2014

Invited to write a Burns Night column in *The Guardian*, Liz Lochhead, (Scotland's makar), found it impossible not to speculate on how Burns, were he around, would vote in the referendum.

Accepting that Burns did 'with great conviction' 'inhabit many apparently contradictory personae', she appears to have decided that what was good enough for her predecessor was also good enough for her. Thus she begins by insisting she is 'heartily sick of the ubiquitous, daft if Burns was alive today how would he vote? question', but then discovers she cannot resist asking it. What a mistake.

She was right first time round. It is a daft question. Burns died in 1796, almost 90 years after the Treaty of Union. In those 90 years, his native land had been transformed. At the opening of the 18th century, Scotland was a peripheral country on the northern edge of Europe known – if known at all – only for its poverty, violence, backwardness and religious intolerance (remember Thomas Aikenhead, a young Edinburgh University student was hanged for blasphemy in 1697, and a so-called 'witch' executed in Sutherland in 1722).

By the time of Burns's death, however, post-Union Scotland had a lofty international reputation as a land of both learning and increasingly – thanks to the work of Burns and other literary figures – of romance. Scotland, a centre of progress and improvement, had never stood higher in terms of economic, intellectual and cultural achievement. It is hardly a surprise then that, in Burns's lifetime, there was no movement he could have joined, campaigning for a return to the old days of an 'independent' Scotland.

Certain that Burns would share her position and vote Yes in the referendum, Liz Lochhead's comments in the closing paragraphs of her article tell us much about the current position of the Yes campaign. Burns would vote Yes, she suggests, because he is a poet and 'just about every contemporary writer or artist, young and old, that I know has declared they'll be saying a big yes to "Should Scotland be an independent country?"' This may well come as news to English readers of *The Guardian* but it is already an old story here in Scotland.

Only a few days ago, Facebook listed '100 Artists and Creatives' (whatever they are) who say they are supporting Scottish independence, and it has long been clear that writers, artists, actors, and academics make up a settled body of opinion in support of the Yes campaign. Perhaps this apparent degree of unanimity among artists should be a cause for concern. Artists are not normally seen as even coming close to agreeing over any issue. So why the unanimity over a Yes vote? Supporters of the Yes campaign often seem happy with the unpleasant suggestion that opponents of independence are unpatriotic or anti-Scottish.

There is a strong suggestion that it's impossible to be committed to Scotland and Scottish culture and also a supporter of the United Kingdom.

In the coming eight months this view may well be articulated ever more strongly. In such a climate, why should an artist or writer – or indeed anyone else – make a point of declaring their intention to vote No?

In any event, English readers of *The Guardian* should be reminded that there are plenty of 'anyone elses' in Scotland who do not appear to share the artistic community's enthusiasm for independence. No-one would suggest that, say, the Scottish business world, or the legal or medical establishment, is committed to voting Yes. In the circles Liz Lochhead moves in, she may well sense 'a very powerful drive towards cultural and political autonomy. A desire to grow up and take responsibility for ourselves'. But the artistic circle is a strictly limited one. And there are a great many people now – as there have been for the last 300 years – who may well feel perfectly responsible as it is, and even that they are not the ones who need to grow up.

However it is Scotland's makar's final point that gives the referendum game away. She feels that the outcome she desires is on its way: 'You can feel it in the air. It's coming yet for aw that... If not this time, then, nevertheless, it feels like an inexorable process has begun'. With that phrase – 'if not this time' – we are being offered a vision of future referendums until at last the 'right' result is achieved.

In January 2012, I wrote here arguing that a one-off referendum was not the way to resolve the constitutional issue. Why not? Because of the huge disparity between the consequences of a Yes or No vote. A Yes vote 'produces change on a monumental scale', whereas a No outcome means only a temporary setback for the SNP, 'a loss of momentum', 'that is all'. This is still the case, as Liz Lochhead's reference to 'if not this time' makes clear.

At this point, there is no sign that the result in September will be so clear-cut as to represent the 'settled will' of the entire Scottish people. There is every chance that the referendum will settle nothing. What we can look forward to is only eight more months of increasingly intense, ill-tempered and destructive bickering, entrenching division rather than reducing it.

Whatever the final outcome, the referendum's legacy will be long years of anger, bitterness, and resentment. This superficially democratic referendum is a major political blunder. I may be wrong, but I suspect little good will come of it.

# Why would any intelligent Scot vote Yes?

David Donnison

2014

Recently I found myself in a seminar with old friends and colleagues at the London School of Economics. They are one of the best teams of economists and social scientists you can find working on problems of social policy anywhere in the world, most of them with experience of advising governments and senior politicians – usually Labour Governments and politicians.

As our discussion finally dissolved into informal chat, I found myself surrounded by professors asking me how the Scots will vote in their referendum on independence, and how I shall vote. It was an expert interrogation conducted by people well aware that their chances of getting a Westminster Government that is concerned about the kinds of questions they care about depend heavily on Scottish votes.

They asked me about many of the dilemmas we have been pondering in Scotland in the aftermath of our white paper – and most of them could not understand why any intelligent Scot would be voting for independence. It was an afternoon that compelled me to clarify my own thinking.

What matters most, I said, is not how an independent Scotland will fare. Independence will, of course, bring teething troubles of many kinds; but the Scots, if they choose to break away, will make their way in the world pretty successfully. What matters most, I said, is what you are doing in England; what kind of country you want to make of the UK; and whether we in Scotland want to be part of it.

The most important question facing Scotland – independent or not – is whether we can enable people living in the Central Belt and around the Clyde, where the UK's greatest concentrations of poverty are to be found, to enter our society's mainstream and gain the opportunities every human being should have. 'Is Glasgow to belong to Scotland or not?' is a crude way of posing this question. I used to think we'd stand a better chance of getting the right answer to it if we remain in the UK with the resources of the whole island to help us. Now I am not sure that the rest of the UK – even the relics of its Labour movement – have much interest in that question.

Take a look at the last issue of the left-leaning *Fabian Review*, journal of the UK's most venerable political think-tank. It offers a sophisticated analysis of the votes Labour will have to attract if they are to win a majority in the Westminster Parliament. How many of them will be new voters? Former abstainers? Ex-Lib-Dems? Ex-Conservatives? In which marginal constituencies are these potential swing voters to be found? (Mainly in the south of England and a few Midlands seats.)

This analysis is followed by chapters written by leading politicians and commentators of

the left laying out the policy proposals that polls and focus groups suggest will win these votes for Labour. Policies for the economy, immigration, education, housing and the NHS, for example. But not much about poverty, social security, inequality or social justice – the traditional concerns of radicals – and nothing about Scotland. Most of us could give examples of policy statements by leading Labour politicians that tell the same story.

Professor John Curtice of Strathclyde University – the UK's principal analyst of political polls – tells us that average Scottish voters are no more egalitarian or progressive than their English counterparts. But a political culture runs deeper than average voters' responses to the simple questions posed in a mass survey. If you listen to politicians, their civil service advisors and political journalists in the two countries, or just to their more serious radio programmes, different political cultures emerge.

The Scottish 'political class' assume that proposals for new policies should help to create a fairer and more equal society where there will be greater social justice. They assume that proposals for solving social problems should be prepared in active consultation with the kinds of people who experience these problems. Of course, they do not always live up to these aspirations; but our political class assume that they will be generally accepted by Scottish governments, whoever wins our next elections. They are not contentious. None of that can be said of England.

I could give various examples of the impact of these divergent cultures, but one will have to do. When our First Minister was taking questions at the press conference launching the independence white paper, a correspondent from the *Daily Telegraph* said (roughly speaking – I took no note): 'Your plans for Scotland's future are splendid. But in a country with high rates of unemployment and high proportions of pensioners, how can you pay for all this?' To which Salmond replied: 'That would indeed be difficult if nothing changes. But an independent Scotland will attract more young workers'. To which the *Telegraph* man – thinking he had a killer question – said: 'You mean more immigrants?' 'Yes,' said Salmond. 'They make an important and creative contribution to our society and we need more of them.' Could any serious English politician have said this? And if it had been said, would it have passed unnoticed, as it did in Scotland?

We shall all have to make our best guesses at England's political trends when the referendum comes – eight months before the next Westminster election which may give us a few pointers. But if staying in the UK seems likely to mean living in a country that leaves the European Union (Miliband, if he wins the election, has not yet promised a referendum on that, but neither has he refused one); if it is to be a country that continues to impose increasingly punitive and humiliating sanctions on its poorest citizens who live on social security benefits (Labour spokespersons on this subject seem determined to show they will match the Tories' brutalities); if the Human Rights Act is to be repealed (as our present Home Secretary promises); if the UK continues to have the most centralised government in the Western world (strangling local governments and killing off civic leadership); if 'green' policies are to have low priority; and if our armed forces are to remain mercenary outriders

to American foreign policy; then I would rather get out, whatever the hazards of independence.

It's a white paper, agreed by the main political parties, on the future plans and priorities, not of Scotland but of the rest of the UK, that I need. I guess I'll have to place my bet without waiting for that.

Looking further ahead, we have to recognise that a vote for independence – or even a narrow rejection of it – will pose difficult questions for people living in Northern Ireland, Wales, and even the north of England. If the Scots negotiate the reasonably generous settlement that Salmond expects to achieve, there will be others hoping to follow in our footsteps. The referendum is unlikely to be the end of this story. It may lead us into the endgame of the United Kingdom.

# My challenge to the No parties

Kenyon Wright

2014

I have at last been able to get to grips with the 670 pages of the white paper *Scotland's Future*. It deserves a serious and positive response, not just a torrent of criticism and negativity. I seemed to hear the faint echoes of a voice from the past, Michael Forsyth, chanting ad nauseam 'Tartan Tax; Tartan Tax', and peddling the myth that 'Scotland will be the highest taxed part of the UK'.

In the referendum of 1997, the people decisively rejected the politics of fear, for that of hope. They understood, I believe, the difference between policies and powers. The actual use of the limited powers of taxation, for which Scots voted explicitly, was not the policy of any party – and in 14 years has never been used.

At a time when many are crying out for more and clearer information, perhaps we are in danger of repeating this mistake – of appealing to fear and insecurity, and failing to distinguish between the nature of the powers we want Scotland to have, and the way in which these powers would be used to implement the policies of any party.

The proper response by the No camp is to spell out clearly and in comparable detail their vision and proposals for Scotland's future.

The ideas in *Scotland's Future* fall into three categories, each of which implies a challenge to both sides in this debate. First, there is on offer a whole range of fairly detailed policies in which the SNP seems to be saying 'If there is a Yes vote, and if we remain in power after the elections of 2016, here are the ways in which we would actually use the greater powers given by independence'. Much of the fevered debate going on is centred on these – policies such as the bedroom tax, pension safeguards, Trident removal, and many others. They need to make a clearer distinction between their party policies, and the projected powers that would make these possible.

But here is my direct challenge to all the parties in the No camp. Go on attacking the SNP policy ideas. We don't expect politics to be sweetness and light, but at least do one thing to balance the debate. The SNP, rightly or wrongly, has been confident enough to set out its stall. Where is yours? Please don't just tell us how mistaken and impossible you think their proposals are – tell us, and tell us now, what would be your positive policies for an independent Scotland if the vote is Yes? How would you use the enhanced powers of independence for the good of the people of Scotland?

Of course, if the vote is No, you will have to produce some radical ideas on Scotland's constitutional future – but more of that later. If it is Yes, we need to see your policies. If the people of Scotland are to see clearly what you stand for, not just against, you cannot wait for an election in 2015 to tell us what you would do – we need to hear it now, because

it forms part of the information on which people will make up their minds how to vote.

Alongside the policy debate, a second category includes all the questions raised by the transitional arrangements. If Scotland votes to end the political union, how can all the other unions – the EU, defence, currency, the monarchy, and our close social union – be remodelled and renewed? I don't know, but both sides must recognise, in the spirit of the Edinburgh Agreement, that Scotland needs to express in new ways her interdependence. Yes or No, we will not be separated. Yes or No, we must redefine our togetherness, if we are to be together – but come of age.

These are major questions to be negotiated, but their importance might be illustrated by one issue. If Scotland remains in the UK, could a future referendum on the EU drag Scotland against her will out of Europe? Again, it is a question the No parties need to answer. In any form of autonomy or federalism within a reformed UK, is there any way Scotland could retain her close links with Europe, if England effectively takes the UK out? Scotland cannot afford to leave that power in the hands of an unreformed UK.

This leads us neatly to the third area, which the referendum is really about – the constitutional, which is about the use and limitations of power. If it is Yes, a constitutional framework is promised, leading to a broadly based convention to create Scotland's written constitution, based on the sovereignty of the people as affirmed in the 'Claim of Right for Scotland'.

If it is No, the experience of the 1979 referendum warns us against vague promises of further devolution, even of the max or plus brand. 'Power devolved is power retained.' That was clear when Westminster simply vetoed even consideration of a second question in the referendum, but a No vote will raise that again. Is the UK capable of the kind of reform that would give Scotland secure constitutionally-defined power, as the basis for better governance, and a remodelling of our democracy?

So my last challenge to the No parties is this. Give us an alternative constitutional vision and framework to that proposed in *Scotland's Future* which recognises the sovereignty of the people of Scotland in how they will be governed; gives Scotland autonomy which is constitutionally secure; and provides the foundation for a remodelled democracy at a time when the present political system is failing and produces in more and more people either apathy or contempt.

Be it Yes or No, Scotland deserves better.

# Scotophobia: how London hates us

Gerry Hassan

2014

It has become part of the common sense account of the independence campaign that there is a problem with some of the more vociferous, partisan supporters.

In one perspective, frequently spun in the mainstream media, this problem is predominantly, if not exclusively, about the 'cybernat' phenomenon. Numerous examples are brought out, from comedian Susan Calman facing invective for comments on independence, to incidents with Chris Hoy and Susan Boyle being verbally abused online.

Yet to pose the 'cybernats' as the sole problem, as Labour bigwigs such as George Robertson and George Foulkes do, is fundamentally disingenuous. Another serious issue is the way that mostly Labour figures describe independence and the SNP. Alistair Darling talked of independence as a 'road to serfdom', Gordon Brown of it leading to Scotland becoming the equivalent of a 'British colony', while Ian Davidson stated with confidence that the vote had already been won and all that was left was the simple act of 'bayoneting the wounded'.

We can argue, as I would, that there is an imbalance in this. The 'cybernats' are mostly, if not exclusively, lone operatives typing away furiously into the night in their bedsits, whereas Darling, Brown and Davidson are elected public figures with the first two having global stature. They should know better, yet their comments above represent how a whole host of Labour politicians describe the independence cause, which tells something about their Manichean and deeply insecure view of the world.

The more important point than who is more responsible than the other is to reflect on the empathy deficit prevalent in large parts of Scotland. Too many people are happy to berate others for the simple reason that they disagree with them, and are prepared to use vile, aggressive, threatening language.

This isn't, of course, unique to the independence referendum and should not be talked about in isolation, as it often is. Instead, we need to take a good look at our society and the wee hard men and women who feel it appropriate to abuse others, insult and threaten anyone they dislike or feel threatened by.

If we look across society, we can note the levels of male violence and abuse of others, ubiquitous sexism, racism and prejudice, and the attitudes revealed by the fall of Rangers on both sides of that bitter divide.

But we have another serious challenge and set of prejudices to deal with in present-day Scotland. That is the barefaced cheek and arrogance of an increasingly self-satisfied, insular, and out of touch with the rest of Britain London-based political class and how they feel they can describe and comment on Scotland.

There has always been an element of Scotophobia in the London political classes and elites, but now it has gone virulent and it isn't just about us, but about the nature of London and the rightward drift of British politics. Basically, the London elites now see themselves as presiding over the economic powerhouse of UK plc, the global city of the global kingdom which is how they imagine London and the UK. This nexus of power, wealth and privilege increasingly has less time and patience for the rest of the UK, let alone a troublesome, 'restless nation' province still attached to the idea of a welfare state and public services.

The rise of this new intolerant version of the UK is a fundamental break with all we have known with post-war Britain and even modern Conservatism. Instead, an emerging, dystopian vision of a 'fantasyland Britain' is being articulated, shaped by the idea of a transatlantic and far east-facing UK, shorn of the shackles of the statist, moribund European Union.

A few examples show the scale of prejudice. Take the episode of *The Wright Show* of November last year which, in a 19-minute studio discussion of four people, did not feel it had to be hindered by the inconvenience of one solitary fact on the subject. Presenter Richard Madeley made repeated statements about the entire debate being driven by anti-Englishness, asking one caller: 'Are you a bit or a lot anti-English? Do you not like us very much?' The entire item saw the Scots referred to something external and other: as 'them', denoting some kind of cultural divorce on the part of this bit of England.

None of his three guests challenged any of this, instead happily agreeing and going further. We are talking, in case anyone hasn't watched it, about Katie Hopkins – she of 'I won't let my kids speak to kids who have names which means they might be poor' and 'Let's cut off all foodbanks' fame. There is an even wider issue in this about what passes for commentary in the media and about the level of expertise (meaning in some cases neanderthal ignorance) which passes for getting on in the public gaze these days.

Then there was *The Spectator's* Charles Moore, whose touch of class and certainty about his place in society does not allow his ignorance of Scotland (apart from the odd country estate) to prevent him from wading in. A couple of weeks ago, he compared Alex Salmond to Robert Mugabe, feeling it somehow appropriate, just because some of his pals and his own pastimes might be inconvenienced.

This example is worth mentioning because prejudice and ignorance once articulated gives others licence. Following Moore's musings, along came the reflections of Damian Thompson in the *Daily Telegraph* a week and a half ago. Thompson cited Moore on land reform and then mentioned land confiscation, the obligatory Mugabe reference, and comparison of the SNP and Salmond to Mussolini. There were lots of other gratuitous references, but these were at least historical about Hitler, the Nazis and fascism; all of the other ones were about present-day Scotland.

Twice I politely asked Thompson on Twitter to explain his apocalyptic language about modern Scotland; all I got was silence. Even more interestingly, Iain Martin, former *Scotsman* editor, stated to me that he was 'amused by your utter bafflement when you

encounter views you don't agree with'. When I responded, pointing out that I read *The Spectator* and *Economist* every week, asking why he thought such language permissible, he fell suddenly reticent and quiet.

This is serious stuff and will get worse before the independence vote in September. What we are facing is a London political and media class who increasingly present an intolerant, narrow, nasty version of the UK, in tune with the prejudices and self-interests of the global class and winners who inhabit and shape the corridors of power in Westminster, the City and the cheerleaders of right-wing opinion in the media, lobbying and think tanks.

They profess that the union they talk about in such terms is one that they wish to maintain and cherish, as in the self-trumpeting hyperbole of the UK being 'the greatest nation state and partnership humanity has ever produced'. Well, maybe for them it seems self-evident that this is true, but for the rest of us this is a sectional, incestuous, elite-driven view of the UK and far from reality.

Scotland can do something about this. It can say that this is not our country and future. What would be helpful for all of us north of the border, and a majority south as well, is if the political forces on either side of the independence question could join the rest of us in common cause, and say enough is enough. We don't want your virulent, asocial, poor-hating, welfare-destroying and stigmatising vision of the world, with its *Back to the Future* mentality pulling us back to Dickensian Britain.

We have a serious empathy deficit in places in Scotland, but let's have the insight to understand that the more threatening empathy gap is to found in what passes for mainstream opinion in Westminster, Whitehall and the City. It is an ideologically blinkered dogma out to destroy and denigrate everything which once made people feel proud to be British. Recognition of this should be centre stage in all of our deliberations in Scotland over the next year. We have to counter it, challenge it and ultimately defeat it, for the sake of all Scottish, English, Welsh and Northern Irish citizens – all of which has huge consequences beyond constitutional issues.

# The Scotland of radical nostalgia

Gerry Hassan

2014

Scotland's current debate on independence comprises many conversations. They centre on what we were, are, and could be, and who did what to whom in the past, and what it means about where we are now, and what we could become in the future.

Many of these aspects were brought to the fore last week at a Jim Sillars-Alex Neil event to launch Jim's new book, *In Place of Fear II*, under the auspices of 'Yes Airdrie'. On a cold Thursday night, nearly 300 people attended, a five-member men-only panel (with David Hayman, Pat Kane and the chair), and for two hours of discussion in which every question from the floor was asked by a man. Pat understandably balked at this, apologised, and after his contribution, gave his place to a woman in the audience (who got to make a one-minute intervention over the course of the whole evening).

Mr Sillars' book is fascinating. It is a real curate's egg, buzzing with ideas, eclecticism and frustration (both about Scotland and personally). Many of the suggestions are a bit dotty (the Robert Burns hospital ship), but many are interesting, and some even heretical (such as self-governing state schools). It is in a deeper sense a sign of the Scottish times: of a culture which has awoken to the power of the pamphleteer, both old and new, and the floating of numerous vessels and platforms.

Yet this was a revivalist meeting of the left of a certain age, wanting to believe in a pre-Thatcher Scotland and have it re-affirmed who the villains were, and that despite everything, it was all going to be all right in the end.

How this was going to happen was through that magical formula: left leadership and 'men of steel' and 'men of iron' (with the occasional woman, perhaps). In Mr Sillars' speech and exchanges, it seemed that no problem was too difficult to be surmounted. There is something inspiring in that, as he talked of the philosophy of *In Place of Fear II* – the importance of confidence and how 'Project Fear' invited us to be feart of ourselves.

Yet, the cumulative effect was the opposite, as problem after problem could be solved by human will and diktat: the crises of housing, easy; of the construction industry, no bother; of young people, unemployment and alienation, he had a handy scheme based on an American-style Scots environmental corps; even the issues of state investment could just be solved by borrowing ideas from Islamic finance.

There was, for all the references to change and a different Scotland, the constant invoking of the 1970s, and a feeling that the whole evening was living in the past, and happier there than in the present day. Jim Sillars and Alex Neil batted away points about 1974 and 1979, and cited research called *Born to Fail*, which was published in 1973.

The prism through which social change was understood matched this. 'Thatcher' carried

out this and that evil to Scotland, killed industries and communities, only matched, Mr Sillars said, by Tony Blair who 'killed the Labour Party'. Missing from all of this were the failures of the world pre-Thatcher, and the Attlee, Wilson and Callaghan governments. 'The socialist movement has stopped retreating,' said Mr Sillars, and 'the long retreat of socialism reversed'.

Alex Neil's comments over the course of the evening were populist and playing to the audience's comfort zones. He recited numerous facts, nearly every one incorrectly, for example claiming twice that London has a population of 15 million (it is actually just over eight million). He even got wrong things he was involved in, bizarrely claiming that Labour didn't win an overall majority in the October 1974 election (it did; narrowly).

Worryingly, Mr Neil – who is Health Minister and responsible for the NHS in Scotland – got nearly every health fact he cited wrong. The most alarming of these was when he completely misunderstood and misrepresented 'the Glasgow effect': a phrase used to denote how worsening health inequalities developed post-1979, claiming it showed that our deteriorating health record was all down to Thatcher and unemployment (which the research does not show). He also said that the research was undertaken by Harry Burns, Chief Medical Officer until recently, when it was actually done by researchers at Glasgow Centre for Population Health.

*The Sunday Post* had a field day when it found this out, declaring in a headline that Mr Neil had said that 'Thatcher Drove Scots to Drink'. But he also misrepresented lots of other things in his brief: claiming that the health divide in Glasgow life expectancy is 20 years, when it is 28; claiming that Scotland had gone from having the lowest rates of cirrhosis of the liver in the world (not even the developed world) in 1986 to now having the highest (when it isn't even true of the developed world). It was a worrying insight into Mr Neil's grasp of his multi-billion pound brief.

Jim Sillars and Alex Neil pinned their hopes of change in the future on a revitalised and radicalised Labour Party. This was continually stated to the point of becoming a mantra, with Mr Sillars observing that Labour would have to change post-independence when all its Westminster MPs have to come home 'and live with us'. That seemed a bit simplistic, and led one member of the sympathetic audience to ask where the new leaders of this bold new Labour would come from.

This outlook seems to view independence not as an end in itself, or even a way of changing Scotland, but first and foremost as the best way to resuscitate the Labour Party and its wider movement. It does seem a bit of a long shot and diversion of energies, to put it mildly.

All evening we had talk of the need to appeal to the 'organised working class', a 'well-educated political community' and 'political education,' and it seemed the two men were still living and evoking the South Ayrshire of their younger days. It made me realise that we have been here before, with the Sillars-led Scottish Labour Party of the 1970s.

In his pre-1979 study of the Sillars party, Henry Drucker observed of Sillars and Neil that

'They mistook South Ayrshire for Scotland' and their biggest 'failure [was] to realise that Scotland was changing rapidly'. The old mining communities of Scotland of the 1960s and 1970s were fast disappearing then; they have vanished completely in 2014.

This then is the Scotland of easy answers; of being stuck in a timewarp – of a land pre-Thatcher anchored in the thinking of the 1960s and 1970s. In its culture, politics and perhaps as much its attitudes and lifestyles, it is a Scottish version of *Life on Mars* (the TV drama not the song) – of no women in authority, everybody knowing each other, of rundown social clubs, lots of voluble men and copious amounts of drink.

I wondered with my equally bemused friends what to make of all this and what a similarly male-only aged Better Together left-wing meeting would look and sound like, and whether, for all the differences on 'the big question', it might be rather the same. Would it evoke the same yearnings for a golden age of the past, and the certainties which people now evoke of it: a sort of radical nostalgia which tells more about where we are today?

I think we would find huge commonalities. A book by anti-independence left-wingers from last year identifies the main way to advance political struggle as going back to the inspiration of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders of the 1970s (when this was a time of majority trade union membership and left-wing optimism).

Do some people want our debate to be competing visions of the 1970s? Not even an attractive, stylish one either, bereft of Bowie, Marc Bolan, glam and more, but instead a grubby, miserablist, male world. A different Scotland is possible, some younger left-wingers say today. Maybe a different left Scotland would be a start.

# I object to being called negative

George Robertson

2014

I am genuinely sympathetic to the Scottish public's desire in the referendum debate for objective information on what creating a separate Scottish State would involve. It is, however, the inevitable nature of a single issue referendum that opinion becomes polarised. Since many of the issues in separation are complex and are dependent on judgement and guesswork there can be no definitive 'bible' to guide the indecisive voter.

People properly have the right to know the facts – and the unknowns and unknowables. They deserve from the separatists knowledge of the costs which will be incurred and the disruption which might ensue and what is to happen if the admitted multiplicity of negotiations does not fit the promises made. So far they have silence.

As a patriotic Scot, who passionately believes in the best of both worlds formula, having a strong, vibrant Scottish Parliament inside a 300-year old successful union of nations, I increasingly resent the accusation that I am being 'negative'. I see those in favour of breaking up Britain persistently and aggressively attacking London, Westminster and the UK parties yet simultaneously maintaining a pretence of being 'positive'.

I view with increasing anger the relentless cartoon-type, unsupported assertions being made by those who promote secession and the bitter ending of what the late John Smith called the 'settled will of the Scottish people'.

Take the 12-page 'newspaper' called *Yes!* which appeared in my post last week. The headline, in common with other junk-mail flyers was succinct, '£600 INDY BONUS'. And that was to be just the first in a whole catalogue of offers and promises and commitments to delight only those who love pretend newspapers. In addition, permeating all 12 pages was the usual thread of attacks on the Tory/Liberal Coalition suggesting that changing the present government justified ripping the UK apart forever.

But just like the 670 pages of the white paper we are expected to take all these unqualified offers, assertions and the attacks on Westminster at face value. No downsides at all. No risk analysis or uncertainties. No possibilities of alternative scenarios. No doubts or imponderables. It will all be a piece of cake. Dream on.

Let's examine some themes in *Yes!*

If you vote Yes, it says, 'We will always get the government we vote for'. Ah, well, will we? In the SNP's so-called landslide they got 45% of those voting. That means that 55% of those voting in that election did not want an SNP Government but they got it, divisive referendum and all. Since only a whisker more than half the electorate voted (50.1%) it means that only 22% of those eligible to vote actually chose the SNP. Okay, I know I had a hand in crafting the electoral system but our reasonable objective – frustrated in practice –

was to try to ensure that an overall majority in the Scottish Parliament could only come from a majority of votes.

Then they claim: 'There's no need to increase taxation with independence'. Really? But the readers can surely count. 'Extra child care.' 'Pensions protected with increases guaranteed.' 'A fair welfare system.' 'An oil fund.' 'About £70 off household energy bills.' Then you can add the renationalisation of Royal Mail and corporation tax 3% below whatever applies south of the border.

And there are even more expensive promises in the 670 dense pages of the white paper. Do they actually think Scottish people are arithmetically illiterate?

My copy of *Yes!* says this: 'Nuclear weapons removed from the Clyde' and 'We'd also be a non-nuclear member of NATO – just like 25 of its existing 28 members'. Now here's real economy with the truth. Three NATO nations have their own nuclear forces, a further number host tactical nuclear weapons and all 28 fully subscribe to the strategic concept which says: 'As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance'. Indeed, all 28 nations went further in the 2012 Chicago NATO summit statement, stating that 'nuclear weapons are a core component of NATO's overall capabilities for deterrence and defence alongside conventional and missile defence forces'.

This is what Patrick Harvie of the Scottish Greens (important part of the *Yes!* campaign, remember) said about the SNP position. 'The idea that we sign up to a nuclear alliance, the implications of which is to ask other countries to deploy nuclear weapons on our behalf, and then have a debate about whether they should be moved from the Clyde, is a nonsense'.

Then *Yes!* has its word on pensions and currency. 'After independence, private and public pensions will continue to be paid just as they are now. And another advantage is that we'll be keeping sterling as Scotland's currency.' There seems to be a blind spot here about the EU rules on funding pension schemes on both sides of a national border. Slip of the pen? And the 'advantage' of 'keeping' sterling looks a little less than belt and braces a week on. After separation, the SNP will not own the pound so this incredible pledge looks more like a three-card-trick.

Even for those who believe Westminster will negotiate sensibly after a Yes vote, I suggest that agreeing favourable outcomes with people in London who have been hectored and abused by the Scottish separatist movement for decades is not going to be a walk in the park.

Then we get to the EU. My *Yes!* newspaper tells me 'Scotland has been a member of the European Union for the past 41 years and will remain so after independence'. Just like that, as Tommy Cooper would have said, and I can see his comic influence in other parts of the paper.

Unlike the scribblers who write this superficial drivel, I have actually been in charge of an accession negotiation – for the six new countries who joined NATO 10 years ago. I can vouch for the fact that any accession process, for the EU just as much as for NATO, involves negotiations that are complex, rigorous and very, very political. In the case of a Yes

victory, the negotiations will have to be conducted by the existing UK, the SNP will be demanding changes in existing deals (like fisheries and Schengen and the rebate) and any outcome requires unanimous 28-nation agreement. Not straightforward by any means.

Consequently, the electors should listen more to the warnings of hard-headed and experienced European politicians than to some retired EU bureaucrats who are usually wheeled out. Rest assured, EU membership will not be easy or quick and recent comparisons of Scotland's position with that of communist East Germany are, frankly, bizarre and unworthy.

As we get nearer the decision day, there will be a lot more heat and noise. The stakes are naturally very high; there will be no going back if we go for a break-up. Looking for hard facts will be a major task but a legitimate mission.

We can only hope that crass simplicities, and the clear deception of some of this kind of propaganda will get the ridicule it deserves. As someone wisely said: 'Some issues are of such monumental importance, future generations should have a vote'. Let's remember them when we make our eventual judgement.

# A unionist makes the case for voting Yes

R D Kernohan

2014

Once upon a time, when we had a dull two-party system in Scotland, the Glasgow University Union tried to liven things up with a debate led by Dick Mabon, the Labour Club chairman (later a minister under Wilson and Callaghan) and myself. The livening-up was to come from making him plead the Tory case and sentencing me, a natural right-winger, to play for socialism. We both struggled, but my labour was not in vain. It was worthwhile stating the arguments, even the inconvenient half-truths, which challenged my actual (and unshakeable) convictions.

It's in that spirit that I face up to the real case for a Yes vote in this year's referendum. It has nothing to do with the wishful thinking and best-case hypotheses of the white paper, still less with the mixture of plausibility and populism with which Alex Salmond coaxed the SNP into power at Holyrood and has used (and sometimes misused) the machinery of Scottish government to grind out a case for independence.

Neither is it a case which demands either brushing aside or hushing up, as the SNP is inclined to do, the complications the European Union has created by its unique blend of bureaucracy, legalism, arrogance, and federalist ideology or the practical difficulties of currency union so dispassionately set out by the governor of the Bank of England and more emphatically stated by George Osborne, the Treasury, and even Ed Balls.

If I were Mr Salmond's consultant on these matters, with virtue as its own and only reward, I would urge him to admit and even emphasise all the difficulties but to brim over with enthusiasm for the Anglo-Scottish unity and co-operation which could overcome them.

We should not mock Mr Salmond's attempts, as some London-based journalists are inclined to do, 'to dissolve one union and replace it with another', and we should ascribe to political tactics rather than intellectual laziness or duplicity his apparently deliberate attempt verbally to confuse the different concepts of the union of the crowns and a united kingdom. We should credit him with sincerity both about the 'social union' of our intermingled peoples and in the loyal monarchical convictions which are all too evidently not shared by all his party.

The real case for a Yes vote is that legal sovereignty, notwithstanding all the limitations imposed on it by general inter-dependence in the modern world and particular conditions in the British Isles, offers the best purgative for the poisons which have weakened Anglo-Scottish relations since the end of empire, though Scotland's condition is not a post-colonial but a post-imperial one.

Separate but linked sovereignties could even, given goodwill and sensible leadership on

both sides, shrink to its irreducible minimum that streak of anglophobia in Scottish life which owes less to 1314 and All That than to ever-present tensions when a small country shares an island with a much larger and closely-related one, sometimes inclined to treat it as a poor relation.

The problem for the Better Together coalition is that any but the most crushing victory (by at least two to one) will neither prevent the SNP from seeking a replay whenever conditions permit nor altogether soothe these tensions. They were still present but of little importance when, in the great age of the British Empire, Scotland gave and took a contribution quite out of proportion to its size and previous wealth. They were bound to matter more when we 'lost an empire and had not yet found a role'. The notorious epigram of Dean Acheson, a very anglophile American, was intended for Britain as a whole but it applies even more to our Scottish condition.

The problem for the SNP legions and their auxiliary units of Greens and leftist class-warriors, whose hope can only be for the narrowest of victories, would be to switch from the campaigning rhetoric and their long-standing culture of chronic grievance and complaint (symptoms of which flared up so evidently in the SNP response to George Osborne) to the amicable co-operation which would be an imperative need for both London and Edinburgh governments.

Whatever is said now – and rightly said by George Osborne – it would be in the interest of the British Treasury as well as of the whole British people to overcome the risks inherent in the SNP's unworkable plans to combine a common currency with wide divergences in economic and social policy.

It's not the duty of the British Government to offer any co-operation now which might increase the risk of what it regards as a disastrous hypothesis. This is not bullying but political common sense of a kind lacking when Cameron allowed Salmond to delay the referendum to a time of his choosing. But were the SNP to contrive a Yes vote it would also become the duty of the Foreign Office to urge the Scottish case for an immediate and painless adjustment of the necessary but minimal political and legal changes in the European Union. We should not be dictated to by other people's anxieties about Catalans or Corsicans, and lawyers who have given one opinion can always be invited to come up with another and more expedient one.

But common interest would extend far beyond these immediate needs. The 'social union' which Salmond accepts as a fact of British life presumes free movement of people and their chattels cross the border and implies a common immigration policy, preferably one welcoming those with most to contribute and readiest to be assimilated. Such a social union should also ensure that both sovereignties in Britain maintain close harmonisation, if not unison, not only on currency and monetary policy but on pensions, welfare, and health.

An independent Scotland within NATO (assuming that the SNP has genuinely changed its flexible mind in favour of membership) would also find that its interest, like that of the London Government, drew it towards close co-operation in defence policy. Our

cohabitation in Britain makes it unthinkable that intimacy should not take place. Even the future of Faslane would in practice have to be a matter for very extended negotiation. The alternative to this intimacy would be an expensive and chaotic attempt to create Scottish armed forces as tokens of sovereignty but with limited support services and wholly inadequate opportunities for training or range of professional experience.

The Scottish Government would also have to take account of the interests of Scots whose inclinations or specialisations ensured that they continued to serve in the British forces, and of young Scots who would follow them. But it would be a common interest for both London and Edinburgh governments to ensure practical co-operation and in some matters to find a face-saving formula.

Of course co-operation and compromise are not the readiest rallying cries for any campaign, least of all an emotional referendum one in which one side has to quicken right and proper fears of the unknown and the other to exacerbate a sense of grievance and exaggerate the contemporary importance of the variety in the cultural and political traditions within the British Isles.

But, in the aftermath of a referendum victory, economic and social realities would dictate a reappraisal of old nationalist attitudes. Political expediency would also demand the conciliation not only of those of us who have been forthright in our unionism but of those unco-timid parts of the Scottish business, professional, media, and even ecclesiastical establishments who have no taste for separatism but no inclination to offend the powers that currently be at Holyrood.

Whatever one thinks of Alex Salmond (and some of us have been reproved by our own side for not recognising how fanatical he is), he is a very fine professor of political expediency. He would also, were the referendum to go his way, be regarded in its immediate and vital aftermath as infallible when speaking ex-cathedra, and would be powerful enough to carry all but the wildest nationalist and leftist supporters of independence with him should he replace the Treaty of Union with a new Treaty of Unity. That hope is the real case for voting Yes and extricating Scotland from a slough of debilitating grievance and despond and from an anglophobia which only too often reveals our own lack of self-esteem.

I am, of course, as unconvinced by my own advocacy as I was in those distant days when Dick Mabon and I briefly changed sides and I kept the red flag drooping high. Perhaps I argue that real case for Yes partly to reassure myself that something could be saved from the wreckage if the referendum goes wrong.

But I shall not complain if I tempt some of the more temperate and rational supporters of Scottish independence, especially those complaining that the No campaign is too negative, to argue as a political, intellectual and moral exercise a 'real case' for the United Kingdom as the best framework for the defence of particular Scottish interests and the recognition of shared British ones. They too should be looking for something to save and be positive about if, as I fervently hope, it all goes wrong for them in September.

# A people who need to be needed

Tom Gallagher

2014

It was the Cossacks who mounted guard at Sochi over Vladimir Putin's prestigious Winter Olympics. But it has taken nearly 250 years for this individualistic and prickly ethnic group to find a settled place in Mother Russia. In 1773, they were rebelling against Catherine the Great because they were unhappy about the meagre place that they were offered in her emerging empire.

Today, another outspoken ethnic group find themselves spurned by an empire they are keen to serve. Jose Manuel Barroso, the grand vizier of the emerging European super-state, declared bluntly on 16 February that the road towards Scotland ever becoming a member of the European Union was bound to be long and difficult.

Barroso's refusal to say 'Open Sesame' to the Scots and tell them that the road to membership lay wide open if the people vote for independence on 18 September is bound to vex many of them. This gifted people are essentially a nation of subalterns (read Private Frazer in *Dad's Army*). They wish to transfer their loyalty from the British cause which they served with utter dedication, especially during the high noon of empire, to a new multi-national destiny.

Anyone who has sat through debates on Europe in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh will marvel at the stoical attitude of the Scottish nationalists towards the European Union. Its difficulties are lightly skated over and Labour and the Tories are blasted for any trace of hesitation about whether Scotland's destiny lies within a future grand European confederation.

The Scots will be the most loyal Europeans of the lot, quite possibly ready to sponsor a kind of European Scottish Guard ready to snuff out insubordination and rebellion wherever they raise their heads. Such unionist ardour was already displayed only 30 years after the defeat of Bonnie Prince Charlie's 1745 rebellion. It was the Scots who provided the military manpower and declarations of loyalty for George III in his bid to keep the 13 North American colonies forever within the British realm.

Britain therefore found a place for a martial people whom it had previously distrusted. Some of its most illustrious rulers, Queen Victoria first among them, even saw the Scots as the most loyal and accomplished people in the entire far-flung British realm. Yet the tin-pot Portuguese ex-Maoist senhor Barroso, who runs the European Union, and runs it badly, fails to see what a transfusion of energy the Scots could bring by their swift admission to the wider European entity.

No wonder Alex Salmond dubbed his parochial stance as 'preposterous' and one can only marvel at the restraint of a Scottish leader in the face of such knavery. The Scots are a

people desperate to play a meaningful role in a cause greater than themselves. They did so during Europe's tumultuous Protestant Reformation. They served the British Empire with undimmed valour for 200 years. This rugged picturesque country is simply too small and cramped to confine a people of such energy and indomitability.

That perfect embodiment of the English ruling-class villain, George Osborne, knew that Europe was the only open road for the Scots once he publicly slammed the guillotine down on the currency union. But can he or anyone have expected that, within 72 hours, a Brussels commissar would so crudely deny the Scots their European birthright with a few dismissive words on a BBC political chat-show? If Europe has a collective beating heart, surely it must be touched by the loyalty a plucky nation displays to the European cause despite every impediment placed in its way.

It is surely only a matter of time before the decision-makers forging the European nation state realise who their true friends are. The project is currently mocked by that dangerous felon Nigel Farage, by an insurrectionist like Beppe Grillo in Italy, and even the Germans are now getting in on the act thanks to the Alternative für Deutschland demanding the return of the Deutschmark.

Scots are unstinting champions of orthodoxy and the Scottish National Party only got going thanks to the craven English themselves walking away from a British Empire which in truth was really a Scottish operation given the soldiers, merchants and missionaries from Caledonia who were at its heart. The Scots want only to be needed and will persevere with the new European cause even if it means years of form-filling and throwing the country's markets and fisheries completely open to the continentals.

If forcibly excluded from their own European house, Scots are capable of making no end of trouble. Some functionary should point out to Barroso that the Cossacks are like pussy-cats compared to the Scots when traduced. Brussels will yet learn to listen when Alex Salmond speaks.

# A people who need to be saved

David Black

2014

When Kate Moss stepped up to the Brit Awards mic to make a speech on behalf of David Bowie, who was obviously far too important to be bothered travelling from New York to collect his luvvie bauble for himself, we were in for something of a surprise. 'Scotland, don't leave us' mimed the bonny wee blonde clothes horse on Ziggy the pensioner's behalf. David Cameron, allegedly sitting at home with his eyes fixed on the screen, is said to have let out a whoop. Alex Salmond, had he been watching, would no doubt have burst into tears. Or would he?

Celebrity endorsements are the 'bitcoin' of modern political process. They have a way of going wrong, and most people don't care a damn about them in any case. The punters may even feel as though they're being patronised, and react in a manner consistent with the law of unintended consequences. The London thinking at the time was probably that the crucial young people's vote in the forthcoming independence referendum would be nudged towards the 'better together' option by Mr Bowie's punchline, thereby redressing a worrying celebrity endorsement imbalance. Even the young are capable of feeling patronised, however.

David Bowie, admittedly, does have an Edinburgh connection. He lived in the city half a century ago, when he was part of Lindsay Kemp's troupe of mime artistes and dancers. Indeed, he made a film with a friend of mine, the musician and composer Michael Garrett – I had the pleasure of viewing it when I last visited Michael, who has since worked for Ken Russell, amongst others. Watching the scratchy black and white footage, there is little doubt that David, in the role of Pierrot le Fou, had a heavenly voice. He was also perfectly likeable, as I recall – at least he was then. I wouldn't know about now – Ziggy has long since stopped replying to Michael's letters.

Certainly, the Better Together campaign has a problem. It's partly self-induced; the official website is about as interesting as a moth-eaten copy of *The Hotspur* unearthed from a dusty attic, while the Yes website sparkles with verve and energy. Scottish celebrities, on the whole, would seem to favour independence. Annie Lennox, who spends time in the place, and has actively campaigned to save Aberdeen's Union Terrace Gardens from crass redevelopment, has no problem supporting Yes. The actor Alan Cumming, the toast of Broadway for his *Macbeth*, has bought a flat in Edinburgh so that he can cast a Yes vote. The actress Elaine C Smith is a tireless campaigner. Even London-based Will Self has voiced his support.

Others are more circumspect. Ian Rankin was asked about his views on the forthcoming referendum at a recent event in New York. He chose to cite his fictional creations: 'Well, if I

was Inspector John Rebus I would definitely be voting no, but if I was his younger sidekick, Siobhan, I would definitely be voting yes'. Andy Murray has studiously avoided giving an opinion, despite which the *New York Times* placed him in the No camp. Lorraine Kelly reacted furiously when she was falsely identified as a No supporter. Billy Connolly is so fed up being asked for his opinion on the matter that he's decided not to vote at all.

Some endorsements can be the psephological equivalent of a cyanide capsule. I doubt if David Cameron gave a whoop when Sarah Palin tweeted on a far-right website: 'Lets face facts. Secession is wrong for Scotland. All Americans want to see a @UK\_Together for the sake of our children's future'. I must admit, I can think of a number of reasons for voting no – the SNP's abolition of the corroboration principle in law, the sinister creation of a single all-Scotland police authority, not wanting to hurt the feelings of my English friends – but Sarah Palin's tweet on a right-wing website will never be one of them. In fact, it's a sure-fire way of driving me into the Yes camp.

It's not that Sarah Palin shouldn't have views on independence. After all, her husband Todd, a one-time production supervisor with BP, was for many years a registered supporter of the Alaska Independence Party, which is described not so much as conservative, as paleo-conservative, rather suggesting a species of fur-clad cave dwellers with a limited vocabulary. The AIP's founder, Joe Vogler, famously declared: 'I'm an Alaskan, not an American. I've got no time for America and her damned institutions'. How do we reconcile that with the Patriot Act, I wonder? One has to laugh.

The poisonous website flagging up the crazy lady's views is firmly in the not-so-funny league, however – in fact it's so extreme and downright hair-brained that most rational people in Britain would probably think it was a raucously entertaining satire, which I'm assured it isn't. HardDawn.com is headed up by a garrulous flakey fellow whose vocabulary isn't in the least limited – in fact, it's out of control.

Derby Mack describes himself as an American patriot who has dedicated his life to loving his country and preparing his family for the national apocalypse. His cod-anthropological views on the Scots – whom he initially concedes are an admirable people with a rich history – is that if they embrace independence, and if 'the powers that be in London will allow this to happen without a fight' then given the precedence of 'Russia's Chechnya', the whole affair 'may end in complete societal collapse'. He goes on to reveal that 'a closer look at the specific parties agitating for this upheaval shows that socialism is crucial element of this agenda'. [sic]

Mack then tells us that the Scots 'speak with a thick, guttural brogue that sounds more like German than contemporary English', while 'their love of soccer is only eclipsed by their love of whiskey [sic]' and that 'when the two are combined, we have a dangerous trend known as hooliganism in which people riot in the streets and burn automobiles'.

Some visual evidence is offered in the form of a picture, except that the bullet-headed hooligans illustrated are tattooed England supporters with a cross of St George laying into an equally thuggish looking bunch of Germans at a soccer international, though certainly

all the individuals involved would appear to be white, and at least the German belligerents will presumably speak in a 'thick, guttural brogue'.

We are further enlightened with the information that 'many of the most dangerous hooligans tend to be unemployed and dependent on the dole' while 'huge sections of Scottish villages and cities are composed of council estates and here, heroin addiction is common'. The result, obviously, can only be an epsilonic degeneration of the race. 'Because of these problems, the Scottish people are not known to be particularly warm or friendly. Their boys are not meek, but because they lack a normal family structure, they're often morally undeveloped. The love of God and faith found in America is unheard of Scotland'.

Derby's in his element now – nothing can stop him. 'Without morality, many Scots tend to lack vision, and this can also be traced back to the widespread use of government handouts. This dilemma is manifested in a physicality that is often flabby and slow. They do not prize a healthy and muscled physique as boys do in the United States. A weakness of body and spirit may explain their low birth rates. Scottish women take little care with their personal appearance, and the men are not endowed with any propensity for lovemaking'.

Let's pause for breath here, as I recall all those unfortunate grossly obese American people in various less-privileged areas I've seen waddling from their cars to the pizza shop, or wheezing their way around Walmart.

Another problem is that the old blunderbuss isn't too scrupulous with his facts. For example, he seems blind to the standard OECD statistics which indicate that the US birth rate trails some way behind Britain as a whole, Scotland included.

More amusingly, Derby pompously informs us that Scots 'lack the maternal obsessiveness of the Spanish and Romans', without seemingly being aware of the collapse in the birth rates of both the latter named, which are well below Scotland in the league tables. He also whips up fear and alarm with the suggestion that Scottish 'radical groups' with 'socialist goals, such as minimum wage schemes and nationalised childcare – are also demanding control of any nuclear weapons on Scottish soil'. The reality is, of course, that the pro-independence parties want to eliminate Scottish-based nuclear weapons.

He gets particularly worked up when he states that 'most offensive of all, they are attempting to seize North Sea oil reserves by bypassing American approval'. I bet you never knew we'd need a note from the White House to assume control of our own resources, as agreed under international law.

Then comes the mission statement. 'Scotland clearly falls within the American sphere of protection and has benefited greatly as a province of our favorite European ally. We, as Americans, have a responsibility to stop the rise of socialism all over the world, and that includes in anarchy-prone provinces like Scotland.' Well, we all make mistakes – even the *Washington Post* tried telling its readers that an independent Scotland would quit NATO, when the opposite is the case. But Derby isn't just making mistakes. He's on the warpath.

In essence, Derby Mack is a fulminating one-man poison machine. He probably doesn't realise that it was two Scottish-American lawyers – David Jamieson in the 17th century,

and Andrew Hamilton in the 18th – who established the principle of free speech which would eventually be enshrined in the constitution, thanks to which people like himself are permitted to spout vitriolic rubbish.

I would so, so, like to see the man squirming coast to coast on *The Late Late Show*. Craig Ferguson would mollicate him for sure, as they say in his native Glasgow. On the other hand, we could just walk past Derby's cave and ignore him. That would really piss off the old fool.

The breakaway province of Chechnya was devastated by its socialist independence movement – or could it be Marchmont Road, Edinburgh, the day after the Scottish Deatherendum?

# The ludicrous idea of a Nordic dream

Dominic Hinde

2014

Recently I presented a paper at Yale University on Scotland's changing identity and the independence referendum. It was written because of the changing state of Scotland's political aesthetic, and how this could possibly work in the context of a new and dynamic northern European country as many seem to desire.

Of particular interest is Scotland's Nordic aspirations and how these contrast with reality, but also how these aspirations can be a good thing in articulating what kind of country Scotland might become. Nordic lifestylism is a rocky path, but in Scotland the fascination with its neighbours to the north and east is far more prevalent and substantial than it is in English politics and public life. For many in Scottish politics they offer a way of articulating values not seen in Westminster-centric conversations and create a chance to reposition the country at a crossroads between Nordic and British culture.

The problem with such a view is that the two biggest parties in Holyrood, Labour and the SNP, are equally unambitious in their vision. Where references to the Nordic countries do occur they seem to trade as much on the positive connotations of Scandinavia as they do on meaningful understanding of how Scandinavian society works.

The SNP's white paper on independence contains as many references to Norway, Sweden and Denmark each as Britain merits as a concept by itself. The United Kingdom is portrayed as a state and nothing else, whilst Scandinavia appears as a constellation of small, naturally virtuous nations.

Scotland has huge problems with governance – not just in the way that its councils and parliament work but in the very fabric of democracy itself. How Scotland conceives of democracy in comparison with its neighbours to the north and east is radically different. This was typified by the refusal of the BBC and STV in the last Scottish General Election to give equal weight to all parties in the media. Such a limited approach would be unthinkable in the pluralistic liberal democracies of mainland Scandinavia.

Walking around any Scottish city it is clear just how far Scotland is from Scandinavia at present. From air pollution to poor public spaces and increasingly homogenous or dead high streets, the physical space is firmly British. This is not so much the Nordic dream as the last hiding place of a model of governance suffering from a redundancy of ideas. It is not something that oil money will solve any better than targeted regeneration did previously. Whether Labour or SNP, Liberal or Conservative, Scotland's political culture is dominated by a sameness that will be hard to break, and sameness is a very different thing from Nordic consensus politics.

There is though some light in the dark. As well as campaigning for a Yes in the

independence referendum, the National Collective arts movement has tried to engineer a new idea about what Scotland is, looking to place Scotland back into a family of dynamic northern states that value both youth and creativity over identity for its own sake. Similarly, the Lateral North architecture collective in Glasgow has tried to re-assert Scotland's northern and Nordic aesthetics, arguing for a new idea of where the nation sits on the European map and setting out a new urban and artistic message that firmly rejects British narratives on the nation without resorting to Celtic drum-beating.

In a different way, the journalist and broadcaster Lesley Riddoch has almost single-handedly raised the idea of an alternative Scottish model quite independently of the SNP. Seeing the North Sea and North Atlantic as no less a barrier than the Southern Uplands, this is not the Scotland of the north-south class divide or the Scottish essentialism that still lingers around some in the SNP. It is a genuinely inspiring vision for radical change, albeit one outside of the reality of most voters.

If people are not enthused about the referendum, it is because there is little to believe in beyond the like or dislike of a political party with a firm and antiquated view of the potential of the country for whom they claim to be the flag bearers. Scotland may not have to deal with as much of the commodification of culture currently laying waste to England, but it struggles with the ghosts of a national identity that has been assigned to it by unionists and nationalists alike.

Any vote for independence, or even a vote for a reformed union settlement that is not forthcoming at this moment, should be based on the vitality and confidence glimpsed in the early days of the Scottish Parliament and a genuine desire to wipe the British slate clean and create a new kind of democracy. The big question is whether the Nordic fans in the independence movement really understand the scale of what they are promising.

# Scotland at war with itself

Andrew Hook

2014

A few weeks back, I was suggesting that the long-drawn-out referendum campaign we are experiencing is doing more harm than good. My point was that the effect of the increasingly bitter exchanges and accusations between the two sides is the entrenching of division, the driving of the two sides further and further apart, and that it is difficult to see how after 18 September, whatever the result, Scottish society can return to any kind of working togetherness. In recent days, a similar view has been expressed by other observers.

A few nights ago, I heard a supporter of the Yes campaign arguing in a television interview that the growing bitterness was all the fault of the destructive negativity that characterised the No campaign. Supporters of the union were constantly implying that Scotland was too weak to stand on its own feet – this was the source of the bitterness problem. The speaker may have a point, but it is clearly one a long way short of the whole story.

A voice that cannot be accused of bias of any kind is surely that of the Rev Sally Foster-Fulton, head of the Church of Scotland's church and society committee. Concerned over the tone of the referendum debate and its consequences, she recently suggested that 'regardless of whether it's Yes or No, there are going to be some elated people and some devastated people'.

What needs to happen, she believes, is that even before the referendum result is known, efforts should be made to rebuild some sense of national unity. Invited to comment, spokesmen for the two sides in the campaign were characteristically bland. Better Together said that 'our job is to persuade people and not berate those who don't' [agree with us]. The Yes response was that 'debate should be free from hostility and negativity'.

The trouble with these platitudinous responses is that they do not address the problem. The campaign so far has been full of 'berating' and not short of either hostility or negativity. The evidence is so blatant that it does not need repeating. Suffice it to say that we are already in a situation where individuals – particularly individuals with any kind of public profile – are unwilling to express a view on the referendum because they know all too well what kind of reaction their opinion, whatever it is, is likely to provoke.

The Scottish Government makes much of how the Scottish referendum campaign – apparently like most things Scottish – is in a class of its own, showing the rest of the world just how large issues of constitutional change can be handled by a mature democracy. Unfortunately, so far it has had little to say about how freedom of expression in that same campaign is seen by many voters to be under serious threat.

Of course, it's possible that those of us concerned about the long-term consequences of

the polarising of public opinion over the future of the United Kingdom have got it wrong. Gerry Hassan, in his *Sceptical Scotland* article (SR, 9 April), clearly thinks so. He does not deny there is a problem, and reminds us of the various kinds of division which seem always to have characterised Scottish society. But he thinks we exaggerate: 'the vociferous, combative, almost quasi-militaristic Scotland is a tiny minority. Most of our nation is not currently divided into two warring camps, and nor will it be post-18 September'.

The point is a fair one, but I would be a lot less confident about the post-referendum situation – particularly if the result is a close one. Gerry himself, in the conclusion to his article, does not play down the scale of the possible problem: '... bringing about change,' he writes, 'requires building alliances, listening and empathising with people we disagree with. Never have such qualities been more required than in the Scotland of 2014'. The problem surely is that in the current situation such qualities seem to be in very short supply.

Perhaps the great majority of voters will wake up on 19 September and think, win or lose, thank goodness that's all over, now let's get back to normal. But Alistair Carmichael, Secretary of State for Scotland, is the latest big name to express concerns over the lasting damage to Scotland's sense of shared, communal identity which this referendum campaign may be causing. But he too seems simply to be hoping for the best: 'One thing must be the same the day after the referendum,' he says. 'We must all still be friends and family.' The question is, will willing it – however strongly – actually make it happen?

At the time of the Treaty of Union of 1707, easily the most popular way of describing the new relationship between Scotland and England involved the metaphor of marriage. In the pamphlet wars of the period, both those in favour and those against the union reverted again and again to the marital analogy. In terms of gender, it was universally agreed that a feminised Scotland was the bride, England the suitor. For those in favour of the union, the marriage was a happy one based on shared affection and companionship; for opponents the marriage meant a patriarchal loss of Scotland's freedom and power.

Given the long history of the marriage metaphor, it is not surprising to find 'divorce' deployed to describe what the Yes campaign really means. The First Minister and his party are reluctant to accept the relevance of the term. (Even 'separation' is not their vocabulary choice.) Mr Salmond insists it is only the political union that will go – the social union, and more or less everything else, will remain just as before. Perhaps it will, but my inclination is to side with the 18th-century pamphleteers in this context: marriage or divorce is what is on offer on 18 September.

A divorce can be amicable. But with so much at stake, it often turns out to be very much the reverse. I am fearful that the combative, aggressive tone of the referendum campaign is making reconciliation in any future situation increasingly difficult to achieve.

# I am more and more tempted to say Yes

Kenyon Wright

2014

The struggle to give Britain – and Scotland – a democracy fit for the 21st century has been long and hard. The Maria Miller affair reminds us forcibly yet again that any changes so far have been cosmetic, and have left the basic problem of a system alienated from the people it is supposed to serve, unsolved and unchanged.

From 2004 to 2006, the centenary project of the Rowntree Foundation set up an intensive 'Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy' called *POWER*. Chaired by Helena Kennedy, this took evidence from thousands throughout the UK, and produced a report of over 300 pages, with radical proposals, none of which have been implemented. However, its serious analysis might be summed up in three points from the report, all of which have resonance for Scotland's choice in September.

1.

'The current way of doing politics is killing politics. The level of alienation felt towards politicians, the main political parties and the key institutions of the political system is extremely high and widespread.' There is no doubt that since then, this contempt has deepened, and, in the absence of any serious reform, is one of reasons for the emergence of UKIP.

2.

'The response to this problem should be about a rethinking of the way we do politics in Britain so that citizens and their concerns are at the heart of government. A new politics will only be born once the structural problems within the current system are addressed. When politicians were asked for ideas on re-engagement, the suggested solutions were almost all about tweaking the existing system, with a bit of new technology here and a consultation there.' The report identifies that the problem is systemic, the result of a system of government that is past its sell-by-date and unfit for purpose, while the current solutions are cosmetic.

3.

'We should be creating a culture of political engagement in which it becomes the norm for policy and decision-making to occur with direct input from citizens. Only a sustained campaign for change from outside the democratic assemblies and parliaments of the UK will ensure that meaningful reform occurs.' The Constitutional Convention proposed, and the new Scottish Parliament adopted, four principles about the sharing and accountability

of power. The third of these echoes the *POWER* report – we called for 'a participative approach to the development and scrutiny of policy and legislation'. That remains one part of the unfinished business of the convention.

With the expenses scandal in 2009, we hoped that the time had come when the whole system would at long last be put under intense scrutiny. David Cameron seemed to encourage these hopes when he said: 'I believe there is only one way out of this national crisis we face: we need a massive, sweeping, radical redistribution of power. Through decentralisation, transparency and accountability we must take power away from the political elite and hand it to the man and woman in the street'.

Well, the mood changed. David came into power, and promptly forgot. The system prevailed, but the current debate in Scotland gives us a real chance to renew our democracy. I am more and more tempted to say Yes, for two reasons – a fear and a hope.

My fear is that if Scotland says No, we will sink back into the discredited UK system, probably tarted up by a few cosmetic changes.

My hope is that Scotland could build what the convention called 'a new community and political culture', the constitutional foundation for better governance, a remodelled democracy, real participation by the people in structured ways in the political process, and the limits and accountability of power.

Both that hope and that fear remind us to be vigilant if the result is Yes. We do not simply adopt the patterns and systems of Westminster for a new Scotland. If we can do these things, Scotland could be an example of better government to a Europe we believe in – and possibly even the threat of a good example to the continuing UK.

# Why so many No voters are staying tight-lipped

Andrew Hook

2014

A recent edition of Radio 4's *The Week in Westminster* ended with an item on the Scottish referendum. For once the contributors were not politicians rehearsing predictable party lines. Rather they were by definition 'neutrals' – men working for major polling organisations, one in Edinburgh, one in London. On the present position, they were broadly in agreement: the most recent polling evidence puts the Yes campaign closing to within only four points of the Nos.

With five months to go, if the present pattern of steady progress by the Yes campaign were maintained, they agreed a victory for the pro-independence side was entirely possible. But it was here that one of the pollsters expressed a note of caution: there might be a degree of unreliability in the polling on the No side because of a reluctance by some voters to admit that they were intending to vote No. Despite this concession having been made, the closing moments of the programme ended on a surprising note. Pressed by the presenter to forecast the result of the referendum, both professional pollsters finally came down in favour of a victory for the No campaign.

Given the polling evidence they themselves had produced and discussed, I'm wondering why they think that at the end of the day the Yes campaign will lose. The only explanation that comes to mind is the above-mentioned possible unreliability of the figure for those voting No. Are there really a substantial number of Scottish voters reluctant to admit that they intend to vote No? History suggests it's at least a possibility. In the 1980s and 1990s, during the heyday of Thatcherism, pollsters did come to the conclusion that there was a category of voters in the UK who would not admit that they intended to vote Tory, but who in fact did so in large numbers.

The question then is this. What possible reason could anyone have for not being prepared to say they intended to vote No in the referendum? I suspect the answer lies in what may be seen as the success of the Yes campaign. Every observer and commentator agrees that the Yes campaigners have monopolised almost all the energy, enthusiasm, excitement and commitment that the independence referendum has created. So far at least it has proved difficult to make people feel passionate about the reasonable idea of Better Together. More importantly still, the Yes campaign has successfully created an atmosphere in which a largely unspoken assumption has emerged that an intention to vote No may be seen as somehow anti-Scottish or unpatriotic.

In *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Scott famously asked: 'Breathes there the man, with soul so dead/ Who never to himself hath said/ This is my own, my native land!' If there is, the poet tells us, such a man 'shall go down/ To the vile dust from whence he sprung,/ Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung'.

It would be absurd to suggest that intending No voters consign themselves to the poet's second category, but there is no denying that the Yes campaign has been very successful in implying that anyone who is really positive about Scotland's future, who thinks progressively, and who rejects Thatcherism and its legacy, is bound to favour independence.

It is that last word, however, that in my view takes us to the nub of the matter. If on 18 September the Yes vote prevails, a major reason – perhaps the major reason – will be what Mr Salmond proudly calls the Edinburgh Agreement. Committing itself to that agreement is emerging more and more clearly as an act of hubristic folly by the Westminster Government – one based no doubt on the presumption that a voting outcome in favour of Scottish independence was inconceivable. In that agreement, Westminster, for whatever strange reason, gave in to the SNP's demand that the franchise on this one occasion should be extended to 16 and 17-year-olds. (As far as forthcoming local, European and Westminster elections are concerned, it is as though that concession had never been made.)

Much more important was London's supine acceptance of the Electoral Commission's recommended wording of the referendum question: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?' Mr Salmond and the SNP must have found it hard to believe their luck. Vote Yes for independence – with all the positive gloss and power and appeal that word enjoys. How many countries are there that are not independent? And in any event, with its guaranteed independent religious, legal and educational systems, plus a parliament in Edinburgh, isn't Scotland already more or less an independent country?

Vote No for what? Nothing positive. No hint of preserving a 300-year union. Just Yes for, or No against, independence. And rejecting independence, isn't one apparently in favour of its opposite? What is that? Subordination? Subservience? Dependency? Even subjugation and enslavement? Is it really so surprising that No voters may prefer to remain tight-lipped about how they intend to mark their ballot?

# Why a celebrity may sit on the fence

Bill Paterson

2014

Imagine, heaven forbid, that you're a celebrity. You would probably prefer to be someone who is famous for doing something helpful or useful but in today's parlance once you've raised your head above the show business parapet, you're a celebrity. You endorse charities and causes, and you're happy, and indeed obliged, to add your name and support to such things.

Then imagine being a Scottish celebrity as the independence referendum grinds towards its long drawn out climax, which means that you're regularly asked to nail your colours to the campaign masts of Yes or No. No matter that you left the Scottish electoral roll in the 1980s and will have no vote in the referendum. Your views and voting intention, even without a vote, are apparently of interest. You work in what's loosely called 'the arts' and will be very aware of the seemingly overwhelming support for the Yes campaign among that community.

Famous names abound, including some who, like yourself, will have no vote in September. That doesn't seem to trouble them and why should it? They can take comfort in knowing that many illustrious Scots on the iconic 'Wha's Like Us' tea towel would not have a referendum vote either.

Did John Logie Baird carry on paying his rates in Helensburgh while he was working on his Televisor in Soho? What about Alexander Fleming in Paddington or Alexander Graham Bell in Canada? They might be proud Scots on the tea towel but they too would be disenfranchised by the rules of the 2014 referendum.

A positive clamjamfrey of writers, artists, actors and musicians are actively supporting the Yes campaign, and who can blame them. To paraphrase the poet, 'Yes is a great wee word'. It sounds kinder. It's just nicer to say. It's progressive. It's the very definition of positive. It makes you feel that you have the reins in your hand to change society, and that's the way people in the arts want to feel.

You will have swept away any lingering 1970s memories of the SNP as 'tartan Tories' with a faint whiff of xenophobia about them. After all, you've been assured that you will be backing Scotland, not Alex Salmond. You may have doubts about the economic or political risks but the change feels exhilarating and it's a risk you're prepared to take.

The negative and Calvinist No, on the other hand, can bring a sense of despair and hopelessness to the question of what's best for the country you love. To deny it the chance of the most profound change in three centuries seems so, well, negative. There's no other word for it. Even more so when you yourself have no vote. To add that 'no vote' to the No vote seems a particularly dreich option.

On top of that, Scots have a particular aversion to being told what to do by people furth o' the Tweed, and although that seems to apply less to Yes campaigners, it's already taken its toll on the No campaign.

Once again, the positive seems to have an emotional and psychological advantage over the negative. In fact, you don't have to be deep into conspiracy theories to feel that whoever was able to frame that referendum question loaded the dice right from the start. However, what's done is done, so let's move on to your possible support for the campaigns.

As a celebrity supporter of the Yes campaign you will be in convivial and supportive company. You will be welcomed as a progressive, as a freedom fighter, as someone who has confidence and pride in Scotland. Someone who is willing to repay to Scotland all the advantages our great wee country gave them. There are many bars where you will be welcomed with open arms and tumblers of your favourite tipple will be thrust into your hand.

Better still, should the vote in September go against the Yes campaign, you will remain a freedom fighter and you will find support and comfort as you continue the struggle.

It's unlikely that a victorious No campaign will exact any revenge. They will be anxious to prove magnanimous in victory as they share out the tokens of the further devolution which will surely come. The status quo will not return and the non-domiciled Yes supporter can quietly withdraw knowing he's made many new friends north of the border. Perhaps even to fight another day. For the celebrity Yes supporter it's a win-win situation.

Now put yourself in the brogues of this summer's celebrity No supporter. As a frequent visitor, you will have seen how much Scotland has changed since devolution. Much of it for the better. You might not like the rewriting of history that is going on regarding Scotland's complex relationship with Great Britain, but you have to admit that a new relationship has to forged within that union. The deadly status quo is not an option.

You will almost certainly have as much concern for Scotland as any Yes man but there will be few convivial corners in which to share a dram with like-minded souls. Although amazed that you won't have a vote, your celebrity chums will plead with you not to leave the union, but they will all be in London. Your fellow campaigners will be scattered across all the colours of the political spectrum from the far-left international socialists who see nationalism as a ploy to destroy working-class solidarity, to the dyed in the wool red, white and blue unionists. Even the Orange Order will be your allies. Business leaders and bankers will welcome you into the fold but it's unlikely you'll see much of them in your favourite watering holes.

In Scotland you will be isolated, yet conspicuous, in your support of the No campaign. The polls may be on your side but it won't feel like that in the Traverse bar. And if the No campaign triumphs or even just limps to victory you will remain conspicuous for quite some time. The anonymous voter who has cast their secret ballot will get on with their life while you will continue to be a No sort of person. Worse still, you'll be a No person living in Islington.

Your friends in the Yes campaign may forgive you. They may not. So if you're wondering why the Scottish celebrity support for the No campaign seems muted it might be because of this fear, which may give pause for thought about the present mood in Scotland.

If you feel it's absolutely essential to take part, you'll already be on board the campaigns. If you don't, it might be good manners to sit on the fence and let history take its course. Perhaps heeding the words of one genuine Scottish A-lister who said that, even without his help, 'Scotland will get the result it deserves'. In the nicest possible way.

# Will my relatives soon be foreigners?

Alex Bell

2014

Concerned that family and friends will soon become 'foreigners' and a border wall will be erected like Israel's, as we are told by unionists, I spent the summer in England.

In Yorkshire, huge St George's Cross flags hung across facades next to French flags, all part of the Tour de France. A beautiful county, villages built in stone the colour of digestive biscuits while earnest bodies cycled through, folded into pain over their gears and wheels, lycra'd muscles straining at the chain.

To Bath, which also enjoys an ochre hue to its stone, making it prettier than Edinburgh, and has the air of warm civility. The Roman baths 'experience' has been refreshed making it a top afternoon of hydro-engineering and west country actors pretending to be ancient romans. A merry hoot of the old, new and chaotic.

More dishevelled but equally lovely was Lewes in Sussex where they take great pride in anti-Catholic rituals carried on from the Glorious Revolution. Glasgow's heid-bangers should be sent to the small town outside Brighton to see how sectarianism can become a community pastime as innocuous as Halloween.

London, of course, remains the joyful sweatbox of people. Quite how anyone under £500k pa can afford to live there is a mystery, and why anyone with over £500k pa stays is also something of a puzzle, but great cities needn't make sense. Outside the metropolis, people I spoke to are all in favour of erecting a border around the place and letting the rest of the country get on with things. The Yes campaign's targeting of the south-east has been correct, but only in so far as making an argument for a revised UK, which has supporters across the 'great' island.

The story of the UK I heard in England was of people clinging on – to jobs, to mortgage payments, to marriages and dreams. It's a journalist's trick to find a theme but here it felt valid, a tale of a lovely country and hopeful people finding daily life really hard. Perhaps it is a cyclical thing, but it has the feel of something deeper, of the 1980-2008 party leaving a serious hangover for the middle classes. All that said, sun and gin did much to lift spirits.

In England during the cabinet reshuffle, it was noticeable that Scotland was not mentioned once. It simply didn't matter. Yet in the reshuffle, so much of what concerns Scotland was on display. Not the martyrdom of Micheal Gove, but the reveal on how directionless and incapable this coalition government is.

Iain Duncan Smith is still in place, yet his reforms of social security are like the vomit on a Sunday morning pavement, a mess of indulgence and regret. That whole block of policy, fundamental to the Westminster elite's view of reforming Britain, is in bits. It is disappointing that the Scottish Government's critique of welfare is so scant, but given the

performance of IDS and Whitehall, who can blame them for standing back in amazement.

This failure is very important. It suggests that the UK cannot, as it is currently constituted, be reformed. Further, it highlights the abject lack of moral purpose to the Coalition Government – the one area where it hoped to make a difference has become a midden but Downing Street doesn't seem to care.

This impression is underlined by the abandonment of plans to sell the English student debt loan book. You may think this a dull matter (true) and of little consequence (false) when it offers so much about how the UK Government works.

£12bn is owed by students who took out loans to pay for university courses from 1998 to the present day. The debt is carried by all of us. The plan was to sell the debt book onto the private sector – much as the mortgage loans of failed banks were sold on in recent years. The trouble was that no private concern would take the debt without guarantees so great it would no longer count as a 'sale'.

What this tells us is that the method of paying for third level education south of the border doesn't work – nothing is being paid as the public sector ends up with a debt. The model is ineptly constructed, such that no outside investor wants the risk of taking it on. The cost of the debt and the consequence of any cancellation will be felt by taxpayers across the UK. The much derided Scottish system is not a 'freebie' as unionists will insist, but a model that works.

Whether it's welfare reform, the lost money of student fees or countless other items, to this observer the UK repeatedly sends out the message that it doesn't work and can't be changed. While this remains hidden by the barley-coloured stone of the past and the just-managing habits of today, one feels it can't go on for much longer.

In contrast, Scotland is one of the most interesting places on the planet right now for ideas and arguments. Sure, the various strands have yet to coalesce and much of the mainstream debate has been flat, but the emergence of an articulate online community makes here a much more animated place than down there.

While south, *The Guardian* ran a piece on Douglas Alexander which included the stand-out quote of 'I don't get up every morning thinking how I will break-up Britain but how I will help the poor'. The accompanying photo made him look like an aggrieved philatelist. Perhaps he really believes such slogans, but it felt like the bid of man who realises a Scot will never lead UK Labour again.

Perhaps Westminster really thinks this is about 'breaking up Britain' – if so, they have not been paying attention. Coming home feels like returning to a place that is searching for its moral purpose while England, lovely England, feels like it has lost its way. Despite these things, the idea that my relatives down south will ever be 'foreigners' remains risible – whether they'll ever be sober is another matter.

# The myth of a divided Scotland

Gerry Hassan

2014

One of the most oft-repeated descriptions of Scotland at the moment in the heat of the independence referendum is the problem of 'divided Scotland'.

A Yes victory will leave a 'deeply divided Scotland' claimed Better Together chief Blair McDougall, while a pro-independence website declared in response: 'A deeply divided Scotland will be the result of a No vote'.

Much cited recent polling shows that 38% of Scots believe divisions will remain whatever the referendum outcome, while 36% disagreed. In the same poll, 21% of people have had a row with family or friends about the vote. This latter finding led *The Independent* to declare: 'The Scottish independence debate has become venomous and fraught... pulling some families apart'.

No evidence was provided by the paper beyond the above poll, apart from the online abuse given to the writer J K Rowling, which then allowed Blair McDougall again to warn of such behaviour and its wider implications, stating: 'It's little surprise that Scots fear a divided nation'.

'Divided Scotland' – the independence referendum version draws on a rich strand of metaphors and fears – of the vote as 'civil war without the guns', of 'two tribes' in conflict, 'the fog of war' of Labour versus SNP, and the many 'stairheid rammy' debates which have been inflicted upon by the public by broadcasters.

All of the above have roots in a deeper set of historical narratives which are embedded in the Scottish imagination. It goes along the lines: Scotland is too divided to stand on its own feet, govern itself, or even have a mature, sensible debate about its future.

'Divided Scotland' has a number of tropes: Highland/Lowland, Catholic/ Protestant, urban/rural, unionist/nationalist, head and heart, thought and feeling, the list could go on. This is either/or Scotland presenting an often sick, pathologised and divided character seen in the Caledonian Antisyzygy (meaning dueling polarities) and Jekyll and Hyde dual identity, and with it overtones of schizophrenia and inner torment.

Tom Nairn, unarguably the most original and penetrating writer and thinker on Scottish politics and society in the last 40 years or more, has given weight to this, invoking a 'Jekyll and Hyde physiognomy of modern Scottishness'. In similar tones, commentator Iain Macwhirter described the early years of devolution as having a 'Jekyll and Hyde Parliament'.

What this pathologising does is infantilise, diminish and demean how Scottish identity is seen and portrayed. There is a potent sense of backwardness, of being trapped by our history, tradition and myths, along with the whiff of inferiorism. This is a kind of negative

Scots collective dream found in the phrase, 'Wha's like us, damn few and they're a' deid'.

This week has seen the publication of Eleanor Yule and David Manderson's *The Glass Half-Full: Moving Beyond Scottish Miserablism* in the *Open Scotland* series of books (which I have commissioned). Yule and Manderson identify and critique the mindset of miserablism in our culture, and in particular explore its rise as a genre in the worlds of film and literature.

They contend that this portrayal of Scotland rose to prominence due to the economic and social dislocations which began in the 1970s and reached a crescendo under Thatcherism. They describe the 1970s as 'the heartland of miserablism', and then chart its morphing in the 1980s into what can only be described today as an orthodoxy and defining single story.

Yule and Manderson believe this diminishes us collectively, reinforces caricature and stereotype, and demonises people who lost out in these periods of intense change. It tells a profoundly partial story of Scotland: urban, about losers, damaged men and the women around them, and with a particular focus on Glasgow and the west of Scotland. This is a set of stories stuck in a timewarp, unable or unwilling to move on.

There is a cathartic power in Yule and Manderson's analysis. Firstly, it recognises that what began as a culture of giving voice to dislocation, hurt and loss has become an industry, genre and 'official story'. Second, it raises much wider questions about cultural power and creative imagination, and in areas such as film and TV where commissioning budgets and decisions are what matters, who are the arbiters and gatekeepers, and whose interests are they serving? What are the consequences of such a narrow, inaccurate version of Scotland being cumulatively played back to us in some miserablist virtual loop? Why are other stories – of redemption, change, winning against the odds, hope, and even comedy and camp – less inclined to emerge?

Third, the act of naming is an act of understanding and then challenging it. By identifying cultural miserablism as a genre and form, this makes it much more likely and possible that it can be critiqued and different stories and genres emerge which are less partial and problematic.

The miserablist myth has been one of the most powerful accounts of Scotland in recent years. From Peter Mullan's *NEDS* to *Trainspotting* and Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*, a problematic account has played into pathologising Scotland, and telling and retelling like a stuck record the same partial story: of problem men and the women who are attracted to them and think they can 'change' or 'reform' them. It is a Scotland of the imagination without escape, presented as omnipotent and overwhelming.

Such an account is directly related to and feeds into the myths of 'Divided Scotland'. Scotland is no more divided or ill-at-ease with itself than any other comparable, stable and wealthy society; yet that is not the impression that is given by such perspectives: instead we are presented as unique in a negative, debilitating way, not able to overcome divisions, inner demons and our past.

Scotland needs a different way of portraying itself than the old cliché of 'Divided Scotland'. We are meant to believe that no-one any more believes in the mantra that 'Scotland is too wee, weak and poor' to govern itself, but the trope of 'Divided Scotland' shows that this element of doubt and anxiety is still present in parts of our debate.

'Divided Scotland' needs to be put into the dustbin of our history. It has outlived its welcome and held us back for too long. Whatever the result of the referendum, one signal of change would be if politicians, public figures and media (and that means you, Blair McDougall, along with countless others) need to stop going on about our 'bitter divisions'.

It is time to stop giving succour to accounts of ourselves which contribute to problematising Scotland, citing 'Jekyll and Hyde' characteristics, or treating our nation as a sick character in need of medical treatment (see as an example Henry McLeish, *Scotland: A Suitable Case for Treatment*).

Let's use this debate to define ways which bring us together, identifying what we share and have in common, and also look at acknowledging the liberating power of appropriate division, debate and disagreement. In this, Scotland needs to find a new language which draws from the likes of poet Douglas Dunn when he described Scottishness as 'a kaleidoscope' – that is a much more rich, rewarding and pluralist interpretation of who we are and who we might become in an age of change and flux, than the voices who forever want to hark back to a dark, imagined past and the dangers of a divided land.

A different Scotland is out there; to aid it we have to challenge the increasingly threadbare caricatures which have had such power, and nurture a more humane and humble way of describing ourselves and our many cultures.

# The mock religious revival of the Yes campaign

Tom Gallagher

2014

I'm not an elemental unionist and am still emotionally disposed to favourably assess bold new political departures for Scotland. But they have to be driven by practical considerations which ensure that Scots, especially those without position and means, don't succumb to adversity. I don't think the planners of the voyage for which Yes Scotland is selling tickets are concerned about the impact of the adverse weather this journey is bound to encounter.

Yet ordinary folk with few means have jumped aboard the independence bandwagon, making common cause with liberal professionals in Edinburgh and Glasgow in a popular front for change. Many of these people are seeking a new direction that will offer them selfrealisation and wider collective fulfilment through a new national project.

The great experiment that has emerged from this 30-month referendum has only been made possible by the decay of an older Scottish order. Privatised lives based around capitalist consumption have overtaken community endeavours. Family life has been hollowed out as indeed has religion: they used to provide meaning and a sense of direction in a self-effacing land with low expectations. In an edgy and experimental Scotland, where people let their emotions hang out, they no longer do.

People are looking for empathy and fellowship. Unexpectedly, in a Western world wary of political commitments thanks to the collapse of big projects and established narratives, Scotland is taking the lead. Online communities have sprung up where people can reinforce their emotional fervour behind a common cause and allay doubts about the journey they're on.

The rise of a highly evangelical nationalist media effort has managed to bury doubts about the economic rationale for independence. The SNP declines to say what the start-up costs for independence will be, it is unclear what kind of currency a post-British Scotland will have, and it leaves numerous economists unconvinced about its public sector-friendly vision for Scotland in the light of plunging oil revenues.

But as many as 30% of Scots don't consider economic adversity as a disqualification for independence. This is a tribute to the ability of the Yes campaign to move the fight for statehood beyond mere material issues. Nightly fervent meetings suggest a mock religious revival is taking place in this largely post-Christian land. Quasi-mystical events are occurring with a 'Margo-mobile' about to tour Scotland presumably to enable devotees of one of the few truly loved Scottish public figures, the late Margo MacDonald, to commune with her political spirit.

This is a new touchy-feeling Scotland. The country appears to be full of relentless optimists. They see the human story as one of accelerating progress.

I've been sceptical of visionaries who see humankind in the abstract ever since my

student days in the afterglow of the 1968 rebellions. I never dabbled with the far-left. Perhaps deep down I was satisfied with an order which enabled someone from a big Catholic Irish family, brought up in the south side of Glasgow, to get on. Moreover, being in such a bustling family offers you some insights about the strengths and real limits of human solidarity from an early age.

Never a Marxist, I had a weakness for nationalism, first Irish and then Scottish. But by the 1980s, I was teaching university courses on how to manage conflicts over territory and identity. The fall of Yugoslavia in the late 1980s had a big impact; I remember taking issue with Neal Ascherson, one of the many high-profile media figures now on the Yes side, when he argued frequently in the London media that such a collapse said more about the Balkans than about the hazards of placing too much faith in political nationalism in sturdier places like Scotland.

Virtue and vice run through most human beings. English-speaking countries have recognised that the separation of powers is vital in order to restrain humankind's most destructive political instincts. But I am alarmed that building sound architecture for the new independent state that will shield people from bad leadership or calamitous events, is simply not a priority in the plans of Yes.

Instead, there is a palpable desire to exalt humanity by offering bulky white papers and constitutional blueprints which read like a radical wish-list of entitlements. These inalienable rights have no secure home. A stormy European past has shown that the more radical the prescription, the more short-lived its span of existence.

People collectively need to be responsible and alert for democracy to work over the long-term. I believe that a people with a moral perspective shaped by the Christian religion are better at this than those with a firmly secular mind-set who believe they are the centre of everything.

Modern ideologies which worship the people have on too many occasions produced terrible leadership and low-grade political outcomes. But the passage in St Paul's letter to the Corinthians, 'Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom,' remains highly relevant for our own times.

In the SNP's world, there is spirituality but it is bound up with territory and a stereotypical view of the people who inhabit it.

Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon endlessly flatter the Scots. They are a special people who belong to an exceptional country with its own 'soft power' that can put England's in the shade. Arguably, this form of identity politics dumbs down politics at a time when citizens need to be exceptionally alert that the choices they make are for the best.

Is the First Minister spoiling the people so as to disarm them and ensure they will have little real influence when tough decisions are made? Much of politics is about power and its distribution. His emotional appeals over the fulfilment of the people through territorial liberation are meant to make them grateful and thus dependent on his leadership.

This marathon campaign has increased my own doubts that it is possible to devise a

collective Scottish identity that will support the vaulting ambitions of those in the Yes camp. It is hard to project a potent macro-identity perhaps because of the way that geography has made a sometimes very fractured nation in social, religious economic and territorial terms. Niche identities instead have been mobilised. The SNP has long flattered minorities whom some of its excitable spirits view as fellow victims of 'imperialism'. But Scotland has never felt ground down in this way for centuries. It wasn't even the case in the Thatcher era – otherwise backing for independence would have been far higher than it was in the 1980s.

Britain has been written off by Yes advocates as almost a failed state. But their inability to cost and imagine a better Scottish alternative has led to an unexpected happening. In Scotland, there is now far less reticence about publicly affirming a satisfaction and even pride in being British than I recall for a long time.

The emotional and practical effects of the threat to the unity of this small but symbolically important island has led a lot of people to express feelings of Britishness hitherto dormant within them. For many young people, with education and self-improvement on their minds, Britain rather than Scotland offers a passport to the future. Many women don't see independence as risk-averse however plausible SNP ministers aim to be about making the sums add up. The key demographic on the Yes side are men, particularly men in west-central Scotland. Many are angry and alienated because of long-term problems in finding meaningful work; but many are this way because of cultural changes that extol risk-taking. These make Glasgow and some of its satellite towns some of the most volatile places socially anywhere in the Western world.

I think the result will show huge variations in terms of age, gender and region. The referendum has replaced antipathy between Scots and English with sharp intra-Scottish tensions that cut across class, occupation, region and even family. But many in the Yes camp see the tumult as good clean fun which will have no lasting after-effects.

Much of the radical left is banking on a Yes vote as the best chance it will ever have of defining a Scottish future. I'm far from sure of this: plenty of cases exist where the left has been overwhelmed by nationalism and there are few outside the communist world where the left has managed to bend nationalism to its own purposes. The radical left figures who sit in the higher counsels of Yes for Scotland have been noticeably silent about the SNP's erratic currency plans or indeed about its intention to lower corporation tax which is bound to adversely affect wages. Wherever the left has been silent about such key issues at this stage of an independence campaign, it has usually been sidelined afterwards.

History, right down to the present, has shown that a lot of people embrace the nationalist cause because it offers private advantage like few other things in politics. This is due to the potential for manipulating the emotions of so many people and shutting down their critical faculties. Too many figures are attracted by a bold new departure because they see a 'Wild West' type of situation: it is one where they don't need to give a normal account of themselves and one where, if they behave badly, harm is unlikely to occur to them.

With two months to go, Scots have been sizing each other up as never before. Clichés and sentiments have gradually been laid aside. A lot of people are asking: are we sufficiently cohesive as a people to embark on this journey together?

I think the result will be closer than certain polls suggest but that it will be a No vote. There is insufficient mutual trust and mutual regard among Scots for the leap of faith towards independence to be taken. Many people are afraid to express their feelings in pubs and other social settings, or even to put posters in their windows. Very revealing is the reticence felt by satirists and comedians about sending up independence at the Edinburgh Festival.

Many earnest and excitable people have flocked to the party in charge of the state in the hope that by altering borders a new superior age can be ushered in for Scotland. The belief that politics can improve the condition of the country is touching, especially when considering the quality of elected representatives which Scotland currently enjoys.

The belief that the route to the promised land lies through inspirational white papers and mock constitutions at least shows one thing. God may be dead in the minds and hearts of a great many Scots. But they still hunger for terrestrial idols to fulfil their dreams. Perhaps the Good Shepherd will ensure that on 18 September they are spared their heart's desire out of unquenchable affection for his lost Scottish flock.

# The SNP leaders should admit to their doubts

Gerry Hassan

2014

It has not been a great week for the independence cause and the SNP. This has been made worse by the self-denial and delusion expressed by a host of independence supporters including parts of the commentariat, the SNP and online opinion.

The SNP's position on currency union, along with EU membership, has for ages been the weak flank of their entire proposition. Thus, it should have been no surprise to anyone when Alistair Darling basically mugged Salmond on the former in last week's TV debate. These problems touch on the dominant voice of the independence debate and cause. It is one of certainty, not showing doubt or acknowledging risk, and instead presenting an air of effortless confidence.

This approach does not address many of the realities of independence and much of the modern world: the realities of risk, uncertainty and the virtues of ambiguity and doubt.

In so doing, this presents a Panglossian idea of independence which does not correspond to how most voters see their lives and world, and does not connect to the lived experiences of most Scottish people. Taken over a long campaign, this has had the effect for all the engagement, emergence of new voices, and sound and fury, of producing a problematic credibility and connection gap in the SNP's independence prospectus.

Any successful political strategy has at times to address its weaknesses, and attempt to understand and diminish them. It should get inside the head and heart of its opponent's arguments and understand their emotions, rationale and logic. What it shouldn't do is what a major part of our debate has done: demonise and stigmatise the other side, whether it be Yes thinking the existence of 'Project Fear' is enough to show that all right-minded people should be on their side, to Better Together's inability to understand the legitimacy and appeal of independence (hence bogey words like 'separatism' and 'narrow nationalism').

Imagine if the independence cause were to offer in these last few weeks a different kind of tone and content. Picture Nicola Sturgeon before 18 September having the courage and conviction to stand up and talk about her own doubts and risks on independence. Think of the effect of Sturgeon saying that at times she too has had doubts and has felt uncertain about the project and idea of independence. This would entail her saying that she has at times had anxieties about the risks inherent in independence.

She would understand and put herself in the shoes of those who have fears and concerns about the whole idea of independence. In so doing, she would show a different kind of political intelligence to that on show so far from both camps, and would not dismiss her opponents as just being about 'Project Fear'.

This would be generous, human and speaking to the majority of Scotland in a style and

language people can understand and see themselves in. It would go beyond the stale Yes/No certainties which have stifled much of the official debate. Such an approach would be mature, aid better debate and how voters weigh up and decide where to cast their votes. Evidence points to how this could resonate and speak to people.

Scottish Labour Party focus group findings demonstrate that one of the biggest public fear factors is a view that the SNP's refusal to acknowledge and address the existence of risks in independence makes them feel that these must be huge. The logic runs that: these unstated risks are so big and gargantuan that this is the reason SNP leadership will not address them, knowing that they are so large, and having decided to keep silent about them in public for the course of the campaign.

Voters understand the limitations in both the SNP version of independence and Better Together's defence of the union. They can implicitly see through both, but for the SNP the problem is that they need to make the case for change, convince and reassure.

The SNP's political strategy owes its origins in a number of factors. There was the embracing of Martin Seligman's 'positive psychology', which Salmond has previously cited as having played a role in changing his mindset. There was the work of RED consultancy in aiding the party at senior levels to think and talk differently.

This contributed to the SNP transforming its message in both 2007 and 2011 to become hugely successful: shifting from the previous politics of griping and grievance to emphasising the positive potential of self-government. Such a shift on both occasions took the SNP's opponents by surprise, Labour in particular, aided by it being in hock to a set of outdated stereotypes about the nationalists.

This backstory and set of insights has been brought to the SNP offer of independence. There is the constant assertion that Yes Scotland is offering a politics of optimism, and that hope will always trump fear in a democratic political contest anywhere in the world (palpably untrue as the Tory victory in the 1992 UK election shows).

This mindset on independence has presented what, at times, has come across as a one-dimensional offer: of believing in your own enlightened, slightly messianic language that Scotland is or can be this land of near limitless opportunity, and that all that is holding us back is the wicked union (the same union the SNP are keeping half the institutions of).

Does it really mean anything to most Scots voters that an independent Scotland would be the 14th richest country in the world in GDP per head? I doubt it, but even more serious is the sharp shift in the SNP presentation of Scotland pre-2007 to date, from basket case to a mix of Celtic Tiger, California and Nordic dreams.

If the SNP could adopt a different tone it would speak to the Scotland which is unsure, nervous and waiting to be won over. These include younger voters, female working-class voters, and the 'missing Scotland' who haven't voted in a generation and more.

One of the most interesting revelations of this long campaign has been how voters see independence. It has come from the margins of politics to being normalised. With it huge numbers of Scots including lots of No voters say, 'I would like us to be independent,' or 'I

would like to think we could do it,' and then a 'but' comes. This widespread goodwill is a significant, indeed historic shift, compared to where this debate began.

If, as is likely the SNP do not change tone and adjust content, irrespective of a Yes/No vote, they are going to have to consider embracing such an agenda post-vote. Here then is a suggestion to the SNP and independence cause. Have courage and believe in your convictions. Embrace the ideas of doubt, uncertainty and talk about the risks. That's what strong, courageous leadership and vision involves.

Talk to your fellow Scots in a language human and humble that contains personal stories about how you made the journey to independence. Tell us how you deal with your emotions, doubts and fears. And drop at least for a time the technocratic, accountancy sell which has so far dominated the independence offer.

Doing so now would be good for democracy, politics and the independence case. It would also be conducive to the worries people have about a 'divided Scotland' and the need for reconciliation after the vote, irrespective of the result. Better for all to start such a dialogue now. As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said, 'Nothing will bring us back to the path of justice so readily as the mental picture of the trouble, grief and lamentation of the loser'.

The 'idea' of independence has already won the campaign. This is a very different entity from the SNP's vision of independence. But it is time to talk and speak in a very different language – to not treat independence as a company flotation or consultancy prospectus, and connect with Scots across the full range of emotions, hopes, dreams, fears and anxieties. The question is: do Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond have the motivation, wisdom and political insight to do so?

# What on earth is exceptional about us?

John Scott

2014

Gerry Hassan recently took issue with some of the most prominent Yes supporters. He correctly identified a nostalgia for the post-1945 period but failed to see that their view is also part of a new understanding of what it means to be Scottish.

What Tom Devine, Iain Macwhirter and Joyce McMillan believe in and preach might be called the New Scottish Exceptionalism. Middle-aged and elderly Scots will have been brought to believe in a different – now vanished – version of Scottish Exceptionalism.

The Old Exceptionalism was a story of individuals. They were role models before the phrase had been coined. They represented the best of ourselves and it was our mission in life to aspire to the heights they achieved. Mostly their success was not material – it was moral. Their story was essentially religious and many of the individuals viewed themselves first and foremost as Christian missionaries. The less overtly Christian ones, James Watt and Alexander Fleming, were clearly working not for money or fame but for the betterment of mankind. Although this exceptionalism was rooted in Protestantism, its key teachings could win the approval of immigrants: Jews and Catholic Irish.

The most materially successful of these individuals, Carnegie, redeemed himself by giving away his money and endowing Scottish towns with libraries where poor Scots would have the opportunity to recreate his success.

It was understood that most of us would never achieve the importance of those whose lives we were encouraged to emulate. That was secondary. It was more important for us to understand the moral lesson these heroic Scots taught by the way they lived their life. Exceptionalism, by its nature, was an attribute most could not share.

In the late 20th century, things changed. Scotland became a country of 'precious few heroes'. The phrase gained wide currency as the title of Christopher Harvie's history of Scotland, first published in 1981 at the depth of the economic depression which completed the destruction of the country's old economic order.

This pessimistic outlook lasted for most of the rest of the 20th century. Slowly, a new economy arose, though one which in many areas failed to replace the employment opportunities of the old. From the late 80s on, though many are reluctant to acknowledge it, it was a time of considerable material progress. Confidence began to replace the demoralisation of the 1980s. Christianity's influence was being replaced by secularism.

Almost unnoticed, confidence – for some – gave way to something more strident: the idea that Scotland might be the 'best small country in the world'. This was a long way removed from being inspired by the example of David Livingstone.

Moving forward to today, according to many commentators, it is the Scots as a group

who display the virtues once clear in particular individuals. For Tom Devine we are 'social democrats'. No attempt is made to define social democracy in relation to other political viewpoints with which it has competed – and often failed.

Conservatism, Christian Democracy and Socialism spring to mind. In Scotland, depressingly, social democracy has become shorthand for virtuous. This would have earned the scorn of Leszek Kolakowski, the great theorist of social democracy, who defined it in terms of endless drudgery to alleviate the misfortune of others.

Interestingly, those named by Gerry Hassan – and others who spring to mind – share a common attribute; they have not put themselves forward for the approval, or otherwise, of Scotland's voters. You might have expected politicians, eager to win votes, to flatter the electorate with a positive view of themselves. Instead, it is the new commentariat which is providing voters with a distorting mirror. In part, this is because politicians know that they will be subject to harsh scrutiny; not least from other politicians. Commentators have it easier.

The New Scottish Exceptionalism was carried to new heights on 22 August in *The Guardian*. In an article favouring independence, novelist Val McDermid described Scots thus: 'We run towards, not away from, terrorists'. This is clearly a reference to the terrorist attack on Glasgow Airport in 2007, when a handful of workers risked their life tackling the would-be bombers. From the bravery of these individuals, Val McDermid constructs a narrative about all 5.3 million Scots, including herself.

Would all Scots have behaved equally bravely? Common sense tells us not. Would I? Thankfully I, like almost every Scot, have not been put to the test. I would consider it arrogant to assume I would act heroically.

I am out of sympathy with the New Scottish Exceptionalism. I am certain a large proportion of the population agrees with me.

It is just one of a number of 'different Scotlands' now sharing the same space. In the long run, having 'lots of different Scotlands' will create more problems than it solves.

# The day of the torn souls may be approaching

Andrew Hook

2014

In these closing weeks I've come increasingly to feel that the Yes campaign is being led, not by politicians, but by Scottish writers, artists and actors. Joyce McMillan, a theatre critic, Elaine C Smith, a comic actor, and Val McDermid, a crime fiction writer, seem to be pontificating on our TV screens more often than Nicola Sturgeon or Alex Salmond.

Back in the days when we were waiting for the Scottish Government's defining white paper on independence, there was much eager talk about how a major Scottish novelist – William McIlvanney was the name most frequently mentioned – would write an introduction to the forthcoming document that would 'capture the imagination' of the Scottish people. Statistical facts and figures would be bolstered by this creative vision of the future. Well it didn't happen then – but perhaps for understandable reasons it's happening now.

The mainstream politicians involved in the campaign have largely failed to excite, impress or seduce the voting public. The main arguments – say about taking control of the 'levers of economic power' – have become boringly predictable. Only the radical veterans – Jim Sillars and George Galloway – appear to have been able to contribute to the debate the fire and spirit that the party spokespeople have so conspicuously lacked.

Some no doubt will argue that I'm being too dismissive of our party politicians and that Mr Salmond, for example, is an inspirational leader of the Yes campaign. I'm not inclined to agree. The First Minister is a very effective political debater and point-scorer. But the vision thing is not something he can successfully articulate – as the first TV debate on 5 August suggested, and the second on 25 August confirmed. In the splendid setting of Kelvingrove art gallery and museum, the leaders of both the Yes and No campaigns had a wonderful opportunity to come up with a closing statement of truly memorable and inspirational quality. Neither managed to do so.

In this situation, space has opened up for those whose trade is words. Thus perhaps it's not surprising that the media – particularly the media outside of Scotland – have turned to non-politicians to find ways of interesting their audiences in the independence issue. On Saturday 19 July, having invited contributions from 10 Scottish writers, *The Guardian* devoted several pages to the topic of Scottish independence. Inevitably the most striking thing about this exercise was that only one of the 10 – Allan Massie – seemed at all likely to vote No. Concerned about balance and fair-mindedness, the paper's editors will surely have tried to come up with a more even line-up. But they were never in with a chance.

As historian Colin Kidd, writing on Scottish literature and nationalism in the same feature, puts it: Scottish writers 'have come out en masse for a yes vote... and [have]

participated in pro-independence rallies'. (One such rally took place in the Oran Mor in Glasgow's West End on Sunday 6 July, the day after the conclusion of Glasgow University's World Congress of Scottish Literatures. About a dozen novelists and poets participated.)

Friends at home and abroad often ask me to explain this degree of unanimity among the Scottish literati. From now on I shall point them to the article by Bill Paterson in the *Scottish Review* (23 July). Republished in *The Guardian* on 28 July, the actor's incisive piece reveals brilliantly all the pressures that make it so difficult for a Scottish artist/celebrity to come out in favour of the No side in the campaign. In the future, when the dust has settled and the referendum has become the subject of scholarly analysis, this article I'm sure will gain classic status in this particular context.

As one would expect, the reasons given for their decision to vote Yes by the participants in *The Guardian* feature vary from the idiosyncratic – poet John Burnside for example says he favours independence 'not just for Scots, but for all citizens, which is why I reject the SNP's phoney independence referendum in September' – to the widely-shared.

Most of them, for example, agree that Westminster and UK politics in general are in free fall. 'With its morally bankrupt party system... the UK is now perceived as a failed state by many of its citizens,' Irvine Welsh tell us. 'The British political system is broken,' says Richard Holloway. 'The moribund, corrupt, militaristic lump that is Westminster today,' thunders Alan Warner. A L Kennedy is excited by divergence from 'the tottering Westminster model'. So it goes, as Kurt Vonnegut has it.

The suggestion is that the parliament in an independent Scotland would be something completely different. But is that quite certain? After all, we've been here before. The devolved Edinburgh Parliament rejected the Westminster electoral model. The 'list' system was meant to ensure that the members of the Scottish Parliament would not be limited to the party faithful. But in no time at all, the list system was being manipulated in such a way as to ensure only that familiar faces in the traditional parties were guaranteed a seat. So the truth is that in this, as in so many other areas, we have to take it on trust that, post-independence, a failed Westminster democracy will somehow be replaced by a successfully transformative Scottish one.

By chance, at almost exactly the same time as readers in the UK were hearing why Scottish writers were supporting independence, their counterparts in the US could learn why 'Scottish Independence is Inevitable' by reading Neal Ascherson's article of that title in the *New York Times*, datelined London, 18 July. Now among the Scottish intelligentsia at home and abroad, Neal Ascherson has attained almost saintly status. That he was already writing for the weighty *New York Times* must surely be the reason he did not feature in *The Guardian* article.

The news from London may have come as a surprise to American readers but there was in fact nothing new about the arguments advanced here in favour of Scottish independence. Rather Mr Ascherson trotted out the reasons that have largely become the bedrock of the Yes campaign. The Edinburgh Parliament should have full tax-raising powers. Scotland is

an anti-Tory fortress, consistently rejecting the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by Mrs Thatcher. The British Labour Party, under Tony Blair and his successors, has gone along with the same free-market economic philosophy. And the British government has constantly displayed 'matchless ignorance and clumsiness' in Scottish matters.

However, it is not these familiar arguments – coming from such a respected source as Neal Ascherson – that are disturbing. What is disturbing is the premise of his article: that Scottish independence is inevitable. Independence is inevitable, he suggests, because it has been on the march since (Step one) the first and unsuccessful devolution campaign of 1979. Step two was the successful campaign of 1997. Step three is the current referendum. But don't worry, even if No prevails in 2014, 'the campaign has already taught me that if we don't make it with the third referendum, there will be a fourth'. So, unequivocally, Neal Ascherson's view – like that of many other Yes voters – is that Scotland's future will permanently be driven by the politics of the 'neverendum'.

I continue to believe that a one-off referendum is not the way to determine Scotland's political future. Referendums never settle anything, precisely because there is always a next time. Two years of bickering may well end with nothing more than ever greater division. I recognise that there are those who believe that after the result is declared, we'll all shake hands and celebrate the 'democratic' outcome whatever it may be. But if, for example, No is the result, and the Ascherson formula for the future prevails, we shall be back where we started, with recrimination and estrangement becoming the new norm.

Am I scaremongering? Not if you believe Alan Warner who, in his contribution to *The Guardian* feature, envisages a much darker future for post-referendum Scotland. 'If the vote is very close,' he writes, 'some might find room for optimism. I won't. Scotland will have become a mere global brand, its reality officially cancelled by its own people'. In a word, 'Scotland will have voted Tory'.

In Warner's view, Scottish writers have always favoured independence. Hence 'a No vote will create a profound and strange schism between the voters of Scotland and its literature...'. No voters will join the ranks of the 'parcel of rogues' in Burns's poem who sold out their country in 1707. Let's hope that such views are not those of most Yes voters.

Finally, let me share with you views of a very different kind from a man who has been both a prominent political figure and a distinguished scholar of the Scottish Enlightenment. Michael Ignatieff contributed an article to the *Financial Times* on 27 June in which he commented on the Scottish independence issue from the perspective of one who had wrestled with the idea of independence for Quebec over many years.

Despite the strength of his own attachment to Quebec, he had opposed the secession of the state from the rest of Canada. He explains that he admires countries like the UK, Canada, and Spain where 'people who speak different languages, worship in different faiths, and are heir to painfully different histories can share institutions and defend democratic freedoms together'. Secession in these countries would represent 'the breaking apart of political systems that, without violence, have enabled peoples to live together'. Ending

political union 'forces apart the shared identities that people like us carry in their souls'.

Ignatieff concludes that if Scotland should decide to secede from the UK, 'there will be many torn souls the day after'. As one who has never found the slightest difficulty in being both Scottish and British, I find Ignatieff's rhetoric quite compelling. If the Yes vote prevails by a single vote – no matter how small the turnout on the day – apparently in due course I, like the rest of the Scottish people, will lose my British identity. How 'democratic' would such an outcome actually be?

# Scottish artists and their cultural cringe

Gerry Hassan

2014

The independence referendum is remaking Scotland. History is being made which scholars will look back on and study years from now: the very idea that Scotland is on the move and changing, as is what we think of as politics and even the notion of what is public.

One of the constant refrains, both in the independence debate, and over the last 30 years, has been the importance, role, and critically, the fragility of Scottish culture. Whether it has been the existence (or not) of a 'cultural renaissance' in the 1980s, the supposed influence of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, or artistic and cultural figures becoming politically engaged, first in the 1980s, and now in the referendum, the politics of culture have influenced both cultural politics and politics per se.

At the same time, a counter-strand has worried about Scottish culture, that its very existence might be under threat and that somehow it might be assimilated or excised. In certain circles, this anxiety has reached a crescendo in the independence debate which has been revealing, but which has deeper roots in history and the Scottish psyche.

There have been hosts of cultural interventions and musings about the state of Scotland in the independence debate. One illuminating example was provided by *The Guardian* when bringing together a collection of Scots-based writers under the heading 'Scottish writers on the referendum' (19 July).

There was nuance from the likes of Janice Galloway, Val McDermid and Alison Kennedy. There was contingency, doubt and movement in their accounts, with Galloway writing: 'How to deal with London's already independent city-states and unconnectedness to the rest of the UK concerns me'. And then reflecting that: 'I want my vote to mean something. But the No campaign seems not to notice that people like me (or my thoroughly English, thoroughly yes-inclined husband) exist'.

There was also bluster and assertion, particularly from Alan Warner, commenting that: 'a Yes vote would free us as Scottish writers from a hidden war that rages inside our minds'. However, the prospect of a No vote would signal something calamitous: 'It will be the death knell for the whole Scottish literature "project" – a crushing denial of an identity...'. Not content with the desolation of this he went even further, declaring that a No vote meant 'Scotland will have become a mere global brand, its reality officially cancelled by its own people,' and then signed off: 'Ultimately, Scotland will have voted Tory'.

The above are not isolated over-statements. Alan Riach, professor of Scottish literature, wrote in his *Herald Manifesto*: 'There is only one argument for Scottish independence: the cultural argument' (20 February 2013). So, instead of 'It's the economy, stupid,' we have 'It's culture, stupid'. Similar sentiments could also be seen in Ian Macwhirter's recent *Sunday*

*Herald* column where he posed that over the last 40 years Scots voters had consistently rejected the allure of 'self-interest' and 'materialism', instead being more motivated by the values of 'New Testament morality' (31 August 2014).

Riach's 'manifesto' led to and is reproduced in his and Sandy Moffat's book *Arts of Independence: The cultural argument and why it matters most*, which expounds this case at length. There is, in any exchange between two figures of the insight and knowledge of Riach and Moffat, richness, wonder and fascinating reflections shared between them, but also over-assertion.

Thus, after listing a whole range of wonderful art, they conclude that without it, 'Scotland would be no more than a geographical region to be exploited. There would be no argument for Scotland at all'. Then there is the inaccurate reading of history, our past and present stating, 'We have been ruled by authorities in London who care little or know nothing for Scotland and the people of Scotland'. This is to put it mildly a gross simplification of the history of the last 300 years; the 'idea' of the union and Scotland's place in it has been deeply ingrained in British elites for centuries, whatever one's opinion of the union today.

Another example was provided recently at the Edinburgh International Book Festival when Sandy Moffat implied that Scottish culture was under threat from the nation remaining in the union, and when asked for an example, cited the lack of retrospectives on the painters Allan Ramsay and Henry Raeburn (due to Scottish funding bodies). It did seem to be stretching the point a bit.

Then there was Alan Bissett's play, *The Pure, the Dead and the Brilliant*, just on at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. This was political pantomime – fun, camp and cheesy, all positive and joyful qualities. Maybe given this, the underlying messages of the play shouldn't be taken too seriously, but in all its irreverence, it was asking Scots to think about the future consequences of voting Yes or No.

To do this it took us into the future landscape, years after a No vote, and posed that this would result in Scotland, as a name, nation and community, ceasing to exist. The result was that the naysayers and doubters were horrified at the result of their own actions and headed back to 2014 to resoundingly vote Yes. The problem is Scotland's existence isn't under threat from anyone; in fact as a nation and 'idea' we are in rather robust health.

There are a number of factors which are often unexplored in the cultural accounts of modern Scotland. For one, there is a significant gender dimension. Is it an accident in *The Guardian* that the thoughtful, nuanced voices of hope and doubt came mostly from women writers? And that most of the more one-dimensional, simplistic interpretations have been from men, seeing the world in much more emphatic and black and white terms?

Another influence is what motivates Scottish cultural figures, what they define themselves in relation to, and even rebel against. The current state of Britain, politically, culturally and in terms of power, provides a set of elites and ideas to challenge and reject. David Torrance in a perceptive observation at the 'If Scotland' conference at Stirling

University posed that the present state of the UK and power nexus of London, provided a 'creative spark' for cultural imaginations to engage with, seek platforms and oppose. There is something in this remark which deserves consideration: the cultural opportunities and crises of the union are a rich tapestry for artistic endeavour.

Some date a lot of this back to the Scots *annus horribilis* of 1979 and the twin peaks of the devolution debacle and arrival of Thatcher, but this touches on a much deeper stream.

A longer view is evident in the cultural lack of confidence which has gone with Scotland sitting next door to England, the tensions of the union, and the role of Scottish identity in the British imperial state both at its apex and now twilight years. There was the notion of Scotland as being distorted and disfigured by the 'Divided Scotland' set of historical stories – one articulated in an alternative version by radicals such as R D Laing and Tom Nairn.

There is the problem of the singularity account of Scotland with all its essentialism and self-reverentialness – of seeing the nationalist interpretation with a small 'n' as the defining story of past, present and future and then explaining everything through this – more reification of 'Blackwatch' than 'Braveheart'.

These anxieties have long made up part of the fabric of Scotland, but isn't the society and nation before us – one on the brink of a historic and seismic independence vote – the appropriate time and place to let go of such nerves?

Living in complex times of uncertainty and fluidity, no one story can shape and define individuals and the society we live in. Instead, with a nod to the modernist pasts Scotland has come from, there is a need to embrace multiple Scotlands – or what we could call multi-story Scotland. This would recognise the claim of not just nationalism, but its limits, and the value of other isms: from post-nationalism to unionism, unionism-nationalism and all sorts of other isms, and a world beyond 'them' and 'us'.

It is fascinating that outsiders can notice how much Scotland has changed. Thus, Paul Mason of *Channel 4 News* said this week that what defines Scotland is that 'a significant number of Scottish people have a dream: where statehood, social justice and cultural self-confidence fit together'. That's a rather powerful way of describing the best of this debate at the moment.

So isn't it time to throw off the cultural doubts, anxieties and cringes, and just accept that modern life isn't rubbish (as some left-wingers claim), but filled with a mosaic of contradictions and paradoxes which make our lives richer and more rewarding?

What would a Scotland which relaxed a bit and felt more comfortable in its skin look and feel like? Might it take the edge off some of our artistic and cultural imaginations? Could it ignite or douse the 'creative spark' which has burned bright these last few decades? Or might it allow a wider palette and range of voices and forms to emerge, less insular, and more outward focused? We could even invent a stirring clarion call for such an adventure: 'Artists of Scotland, Unite! You have nothing to lose but your cultural cringe!'

# Leadership has been assumed by the people

Alex Bell

2014

With 10% of the economy, 30% of the landmass, 70% of the coastal shelf and 100% of international status at stake, of course the UK want to keep Scotland. There isn't a scintilla of sympathy to the idea in Whitehall and Westminster that Scotland leaving would be a good idea. Yet still the Prime Minister doesn't want to lead the case for No.

As I write, 10 days out from the vote, the talk is of two things. A poll which has put Yes ahead, but within the margin of error, and the UK's hurried talk of new or more powers. The YouGov finding of 51% for and 49% against independence is I think the first time it can be said with any credible evidence that a majority of Scots don't want the union in 300 years. The response was for George Osborne to tell Andrew Marr on Sunday morning that new powers would be announced within days by the No camp.

Actually, this may not be the first poll of its kind. I recall a rogue one in the 1990s indicating a majority for independence – a point for nerds and psephologists alone perhaps. Those same anoraks will also point out that a poll isn't the result, and could even have a negative affect by making switherers suddenly unsure of the reality of independence.

Let's take it as an historic milestone, and look to see who led this popular upsurge. The UK media are working to default and personalising it around canny Alex Salmond. For all the distrust of the London hacks, many in the SNP team will happily pin the rise on the ability of the First Minister. That would forget that Salmond spent much of this campaign sceptical of a victory and out of the limelight, preferring Nicola Sturgeon to be the face of the referendum.

There are partisan websites that'll take the credit, claiming the injection of radicalism was wot won it, but I'm not sure. Certainly the way many in Yes were able to make Salmond's scripted claim of being a 'beacon of progressiveness' sound legitimate helped. And the Yes campaign's astonishing organisation on the ground helped by a super-do social media ability was also instrumental. However, the mantle of leadership is carried by many, the joyfully excited people across the land who turned this from being an ugly technical spat between middle-aged professional politicians and into a genuine people's moment.

Leadership is key because of two other important trends. The first is the good luck that Yes was on the up just as the old order was on the down. It has been much easier to make the case for a 'better society' when politicians in London and Brussels are so lacking in purpose. Contrary to popular opinion, had Cameron shown genuine commitment to a purposeful Britain and articulated that case repeatedly in Scotland, then I think the No side would be comfortably ahead. Initially there would have been the insults about dreaded

Tories north of the border, but this would have given way to the sincerity and passion of his vision – if he had one.

With the UK looking aimless, it has been much easier to suggest that independence is about a new purpose. There is no rival vision on offer. The same applies to Europe. Of course in the broad sweep of history, this should be the moment when Europeans become more integrated and committed to the purpose of global relevance. That is not happening because of the ennui in the EU. A wounded beast from the Euro crisis, it's unable to offer a strong case for anything much. Yes has been campaigning as the UK and the EU have been napping.

The other important factor is that in the absence of personal or political leadership, the void has been filled with technicalities. Thus much of the No campaign's case has come down to how things will 'break rules' or 'won't be allowed'. Better Together has often sounded like the priggish bureaucrat, citing regulations as the reason why people can't have fun.

We are told the currency union won't be allowed, that EU membership has a formal process which can't be changed. This is the voice of a system which has lost its leadership and relies for legitimacy on sub-clauses. If it's not the rules of government which are insulted, then it is the even higher and more sacred rules of finance which must be obeyed.

Astonishingly the No camp allowed the main story the day after the YouGov poll to be how the pound has dipped to a 10-month low on fears of Scottish independence. Not, you note, that Westminster loved us and the Prime Minister would do anything in his reach to keep the great union alive, but a slight dip in the value of the currency. Who cares?

Variations in the value of the pound will be hugely important in the period between a Yes vote and actual independence, but I can't see anyone rushing to save the union because they are worried about the day rate of Sterling. This is the echo of so much of the No campaign – the assumption that we'd all be obedient to the wishes of the markets. As with the stuff about bureaucratic rules, it supposed that all people cared about was keeping financiers happy.

In place of leadership, we had institutions, structures, rules. Thuddingly inane details from an establishment that evidently had no idea how much it was loathed or mistrusted. The degree of how detached this establishment is comes in the promise of 'more powers'.

Like those razors that, with the addition of yet another blade, promise to shave 'closer still' there is something meaningless in the offer of more powers. Didn't the old model offer us more powers? Didn't the last big announcement talk about more powers? Won't the next offer be about more powers? It's become a pointless slogan marketing an unnecessary item.

Scots don't want 'more powers', they want actual detail on real things which can be shown to have a meaningful outcome. The crisis of leadership in the UK is exposed on this point alone. Unable to hear the British people's dissatisfaction with how things are, the political class invent technocrat solutions to academic problems.

Worse still, despite nobody showing any interest in these irrelevant details, they are

presented repeatedly in the most egregious example of sophistry – which those of us in the cheap seats call bullshit. Last week, Gordon Brown talked of something close to devo-max. This is the man who skewered Labour's proposals for Scotland such that they were dubbed devo-nano (he also then wrote a book promoting federalism – go figure).

This promise of something big and better was repeated over the weekend, with George Osborne promising 'new powers'. It seemed like the No side's response to the surge in support for Yes was to offer something new. For sake of clarity, new would mean something that hadn't already been offered before. New, as in not old. Yet, by Monday morning, Alistair Darling and Nick Clegg were telling the BBC that the announcement wouldn't be new, but rather a timetable on the delivery of old promises.

Who in the No camp, whether Darling, Brown, Cameron or Clegg, thinks it's a good way to lead by trailing 'new powers' and then revealing the same old rags from the past? This is catastrophically bad politics. You don't win trust or new support by demonstrating that you are happy both to mislead the people and remain deaf to their demands.

Leadership, which is about trust, purpose and fairness, has been assumed by the people in Scotland, and abandoned by the establishment. Ultimately, No built their gallows high and will hang on their own rope.

# Why this optimist is voting No

Carol Craig

2014

## Part I

The referendum campaign, we're told, is an intoxicating revival of our battered democracy. However, for me, deciding how to cast my vote has proved the most agonising decision of my life.

Daily, people are framing the referendum campaign and voters' decisions as essentially about confidence. The Yes side are filled with confidence and optimism in themselves and their country. The Nos are a bunch of under-confident fearties.

And here's the source of my agony: I share the values of much of the Yes side but I'm minded to vote No. Given the salience of confidence and optimism to the Yes campaign that might strike you as a preposterous position for the author of *The Scots' Crisis of Confidence* to adopt.

I've known for some time that simply by saying I would vote against independence would put me in grave danger of being denounced as a fool, a hypocrite, or a wimp. Over the course of the campaign, my fears of this reaction has led to my own personal Scots' crisis of confidence. I've kept my head down. Not blogged, tweeted or spoken publicly on the topic basically for fear of the reaction I would get. However, I can hold my tongue no longer.

### The confidence myth

On Twitter in the last few weeks, various people have posted the Turnbull cartoon from the 1979 devolution referendum depicting a lion rampant sucking its thumb. 'I'm feart' the caption read. Lack of confidence and the Scottish cringe did play a part in that referendum campaign. Even though there was actually little at stake, there was palpable fear that the Scots 'would make a right arse of it' as my own uncle put it.

But these views on Scotland have largely been expunged as a result of the Scottish Parliament – particularly the two SNP administrations. These governments have appeared professional and competent, the senior ministers highly articulate and presentable. When we add to this the huge success of Glasgow's Commonwealth Games it's easy to see that the vast majority of Scots no longer doubt their nation's ability to run its own affairs.

What's interesting is that the notion that 'Scotland is too wee, too poor and too stupid' to become independent has mainly featured in this campaign via the Yes side. It's the likes of Nicola Sturgeon who frequently set this idea up as a straw man to be knocked down.

Nonetheless, the objections the No campaign raises to independence are interpreted as a

slight on Scotland and the Scots and generally seen as scaremongering. So, for example, when currency problems are raised by the No side, Yes counter with disbelief: look round the world at all these countries with their own currency they'll say. They've all managed it, so you are being needlessly pessimistic and denigrating us as Scots. You are telling us we are too wee etc.

What I've found frustrating over the past few months is that the No side is hopeless at providing a context for the problems they're raising. But this context is vital as it debunks the idea that this vote is a confidence test.

### **The context**

The Scottish independence movement is trying to do something that hasn't been done in Western Europe since 1944 and no country with a modern welfare state has separated and established its own independent country. Norway became independent in 1905, Finland in 1917.

The problem isn't just that life and institutions (e.g. membership of the EU) make independence more difficult to achieve but that we are now living in a fairly hostile, economically globalised world. The crash taught us just how vulnerable national economies can be. Indeed the economies of Ireland, Iceland, Spain and Greece almost toppled under the weight of debt and seemed little more than the playthings of international markets.

As I write, there are stories in the press that a recent surge for Yes in the polls has led to a concomitant drop in the pound. Goldman Sachs has predicted a euro-style currency crisis within Britain, with the threat of independence providing investors with 'a strong incentive to sell Scottish-based assets and households with a strong incentive to withdraw deposits from Scottish-based banks'. For Scots to think we're not going to be severely effected by the vicissitudes of the market is, to use James Stafford's words, 'a dangerous combination of chauvinism with naivety'.

What's more, Scotland has been part of the UK for over 300 years and the economies of its constituent parts have become increasingly intertwined. Separating them inevitably carries risks: finance is our biggest sector yet it is hugely threatened by various currency options. Billions of pension funds have been transferred from Scotland to England in the last few weeks. Oil is 15% of the Scottish economy and it's widely known to be volatile in volume and price as well as being a finite resource. Scotland currently has healthy levels of trade but 70% of this is with rUK and economists talk about a 'border effect' whereby trade between two geographical units is reduced if they become separate countries even if there is not a physical border as such.

Yesterday the Nobel prize-winning economist Paul Krugman devoted his *New York Times* column to Scottish independence. He noted that independence campaigners had 'managed to reduce the fear factor' regarding the economics of going it alone but went on to say: 'Well, I have a message for the Scots: Be afraid, be very afraid. The risks of going it alone are huge... [Scotland] would end up becoming Spain without the sunshine'.

He then explains that a separate currency would have its own difficulties but that using

the pound in a currency union or through Sterlingisation would be 'very dangerous' adding: 'I find it mind-boggling that Scotland would consider going down this path after all that has happened in the last few years. If Scottish voters really believe that it's safe to become a country without a currency, they have been badly misled'.

Quite frankly, they are being misled because the leadership of the SNP and the Yes campaign want independence at any price. Secondly they have created an atmosphere where any facts or viewpoints which are 'negative' are being ridiculed. But how did a country once respected for its emphasis on reason, common sense, and principles get to the position where healthy scepticism or inconvenient truths are demonised as scaremongering lies? I believe the answer is to be found in the weight the Yes campaign places on optimism.

### **Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative**

The SNP prides itself on the positivity of their election strategies but this only started before the 2007 election following a workshop with the Really Effective Development Company where, amongst other things, they learned about Martin Seligman's research on how it's the most optimistic candidate in American presidential elections who usually wins. According to Paul Hutcheon, the late SNP MSP Brian Adam revealed a bizarre strategy for ensuring candidates remained upbeat: 'We were all presented with a bag of pennies. Every time we said anything negative we had to put a penny in the middle of the table. This was to stop us saying negative things. It was a major change in approach'.

The SNP also ran an optimistic upbeat campaign in 2011 and yet again this appears to have contributed to their electoral success, particularly when their main opponent, the Labour Party, went in the opposite direction. The SNP has continued with this type of training in the referendum campaign with Alex Salmond receiving performance coaching by Clare Howell REDCO's CEO. Stephen Noon, chief strategist for the Yes campaign, loves the idea of a 100% positive, optimistic campaign. In his blogs he is particularly fond of turning any problem people might raise into an insult to the Scottish people:

'The No campaign spend much of their time telling us that Scotland would fail or struggle. That doesn't show much respect for, or confidence in, the people who live here. Much better the Yes approach, which is based on an absolute belief in the people of Scotland.

We will face ups and downs in the future (that's life) but, at Yes, we have total confidence that the people of Scotland have got what it takes to overcome the challenges and, most importantly, make more of the many opportunities and advantages we enjoy as a nation. This isn't a blind optimism, but a realistic assessment of our collective capabilities and capacities.'

Some of this upbeat appraisal of Scotland's capacities fits perfectly with George Orwell's acerbic views on nationalism – a philosophy which is always on the look out for slights and

driven by 'blind zeal and indifference to reality'. Look at Noon's quote and ask yourself what's so special about the Scots that every single one of us will be impervious to the financial havoc easily wreaked by the international markets or the restructuring of our economy which will follow independence?

Noon's approach is nationalism laced with a heavy dose of what looks like whacky personal development philosophy. One of REDCO's 'Red Tens' is 'Invent your own virtual reality'. I have no problem with these mind games when it comes to sports or other performances but how appropriate are they for political leaders? Indeed I suspect that the use of these 'power of the mind' approaches helps explain why senior Yes people set out their agenda for Scotland and then simply expect the rest of the world to comply. Indeed, they don't even acknowledge that others (e.g. rUk or EU member states) may have their own agendas or interests as they are only focused on their own.

Some of these approaches claim an academic pedigree, notably the work of Professor Martin Seligman. But there is little in Seligman's core work on optimism that supports their strategy. Indeed, his key ideas reinforce profound questions about the SNP's use of optimism, questions that should ring an alarm bell for all of us with a vote on the 18th.

### **When the cost of failure is high**

Seligman's definition of optimism is not whether we see the glass half-full or half-empty but how we think about the future – our 'explanatory style'. Do we see bad events as 'permanent, pervasive and personal'? Optimists don't tend to whereas pessimists do. In his book *Learned Optimism*, Seligman is quite clear that while optimism has considerable benefits (for example, for health and sporting success as it helps prevent us from giving up) pessimism is also important. It keeps us alive. If we didn't think the worst might happen and take evasive action, we might take unacceptable risks that damage ourselves or our prospects.

Seligman argues that there are times when it makes sense to be optimistic (or use optimism building techniques if you are prone to pessimism) and times when it is better to be pessimistic. He writes: 'The fundamental guideline for not deploying optimism is to ask what the cost of failure is in the particular situation. If the cost of failure is high, optimism is the wrong strategy'.

The examples Seligman gives of appropriate uses of optimism are things like a salesman making another phone call. In short, they are trivial. Elsewhere he says: 'If your goal is to plan for a risky and uncertain future, do not use optimism'. And that includes taking on debt. When it comes to finance we should err on the side of 'worst case' not 'best case' scenarios.

In the chapter on optimism at work Seligman is clear that there are some roles that are most suited to optimists or an optimistic style and others which aren't:

"Think about a successful large business. It has a diverse set of personalities serving

different roles. First, there are the optimists. The researchers and developers, the planners, the marketers – all these need to be visionaries. They have to dream things that don't exist, to explore boundaries beyond the company's present reach. If they don't, the competition will. But imagine a company that consisted only of optimists, all of them fixed upon the exciting possibilities ahead. It would be a disaster.

The company also needs its pessimists, the people who have an accurate knowledge of present realities. They must make sure grim reality continually intrudes upon the optimists. The treasurer, the CPAs, the financial vice-president, the business administrators, the safety engineers – all these need an accurate sense of how much the company can afford, and of danger. Their role is to caution, their banner is the yellow flag.'

This is no abstract warning from the world authority on optimism and pessimism. It has a huge significance for all our lives as it was exactly this lethal cocktail of unbridled optimism, and disconnection from reality, which brought down the banks and led to austerity across the Western world. At RBS, for example, CEO Fred Goodwin never wanted to hear about problems until it ran out of money as a result of its aggressive acquisition strategy. And let's be clear, we're all still paying the price for bankers' reckless optimism and for governments worldwide, as regulators, not being pessimistic and fearful enough to restrain them.

The Yes side aren't just using optimism in their campaign. They're also using it in their data on Scotland's finances. The SNP Scottish Government present the best, most optimistic, figures for potential growth and oil revenues, for example, and berate anyone who doesn't follow suit. Indeed, there was some embarrassment for them in recent weeks as a result.

Sir Ian Wood, one of Scotland's most respected businessmen who made his family fortune in the North Sea, warned that the SNP are inflating oil reserves by 45-60%. The tax take from oil last year was £4.4bn less than the Scottish Government's forecasts. If we had been independent that would have been a significant hole in Scotland's budget. Others have come into the debate with higher estimates than Sir Ian Wood's but the central point remains – with such important issues at stake it is best to err on the side of caution and be pessimistic, not optimistic.

### **The campaigns**

The Yes side are selectively optimistic. They are pessimistic when it comes to anything to do with the UK – Labour's prospects for regaining power, the rise of UKIP, exit from the EU, Boris Johnson ousting David Cameron, and the credibility of any Westminster pledge for further leadership devolution of power.

In August, with Yes stalled in the polls, the campaign clearly veered off in a decidedly pessimistic direction. Relentless positivity was replaced by their own version of Project

Fear. 'Only a Yes vote can protect the NHS in Scotland from privatisation and cuts.' But this turn does not negate the central point I'm making here – blind optimism is at the heart of the Yes campaign and centre stage at this critical time in Scottish politics. If the No side is Project Fear then, for the most part, Yes is Project Pollyanna. Indeed, as I've written about the relentless emphasis on positivity in this campaign a line from George Orwell's *Animal Farm* kept ringing in my ears: 'Four legs good, two legs bad'.

There's little doubt that the Yes campaign have been particularly good at communicating to their supporters the importance of vision, optimism, hope, confidence, and can do. Lots of people are using this language. All this has put the Better Together side on the back foot. They have often been stupidly and needlessly pessimistic – jumping the gun on pronouncements which later prove to be false or focusing on trivia such as we'll not be able to watch *Dr Who*. But they are in a difficult position since they're an amalgam of three different political parties and it's impossible for them to outline a shared vision even if they wanted to. What's more, they can't help but be negative. They are asking us to vote No after all.

The Yes campaign has also been tremendously successful thus far in using all the optimism stuff to neutralise the effects of the copious amounts of research and opinion which indicate that serious problems lie ahead. According to Yes all these people are just naysayers and pessimists who are trying to obstruct the Scottish people's forward march to a great future. Indeed, their campaign is doing so well that at the time of writing Yes are now forging ahead in the polls. The Yes side may have run an astonishingly successful campaign but to vote for them simply on that basis would be the triumph of style over substance.

## **Part II**

### **'A leaner, meaner Scotland'?**

As George Orwell points out, nationalists typically believe their country will be stronger because of the superiority of their people. What's more, they're so convinced of the importance of self-determination that nothing will persuade them otherwise. Even if they have to admit that things might actually be worse, they would still think these sacrifices worthwhile. But that's not how the non-nationalist Yes voters see the world and they might be in for a shock as the prosperity and fairness promised by the SNP fails to materialise. I have little doubt that some would people would be better off – more of this later – but there will be inevitable casualties from the economic uncertainty and restructuring.

What particularly bothers me is how this could affect young people. They are facing a hard time anyway in the current world – zero-hours contracts, low wages and much more restricted opportunities to lead a life independently of their parents. But let's not kid ourselves – this could be much worse than it is now.

The 2014 UK youth unemployment figure is 18%, the EU average 22%, Spain 54% and Greece 57%. If the economy of a newly independent Scotland goes through a serious shock our youth could suffer hugely. I'm sure it's because they intuitively know that their generation could be heavily disadvantaged by independence that a higher proportion of the newly enfranchised 16- and 17-year-olds, than the general population, are minded to vote No.

I identify with the left. I am quite aware of the attractions of voting Yes. At first glance it looks as if we could get rid of the Tories permanently, distance ourselves from UKIP and all that nasty immigration stuff and have a more socially just Scotland. The left-wing independence vision which more people are adopting is of a Scotland which is similar to what we have now only much nicer.

Much of the debate on whether this is likely has focused on the myth of left-leaning Scotland and whether the SNP has either the track record, analysis or strategy to tackle structural inequality. My own view is that no matter who governs Scotland post-independence the country will become harsher and more right-wing – or 'leaner and meaner' in Simon Jenkins's words. Scotland has a large public sector which is likely to face significant cuts whatever currency option we pursue.

If you are sceptical of my claim that Scotland is more likely to become a vehicle for the right's policy rather than the left's, just look at some of the most ardent supporters of independence. Some of the big hitters of the SNP's independence campaign are among Scotland's most ruthless, money-oriented business people: Monaco-domiciled tax exile Jim McColl is a key player and economic adviser; Brian Souter, of Stagecoach fame is well-known for his illiberal views and cut-throat business practices; and George Mathewson, former CEO of RBS, laid the foundation for Fred Goodwin's leadership of the bank.

Rupert Murdoch, an old pal of Alex Salmond's, is also a supporter of independence, sending out a series of positive tweets as Yes gained ground in the polls. One of them read: 'Scottish independence means huge black eye for whole political establishment,' and he evidently wasn't including himself. He also tweeted 'everything [is] up for grabs'. Could this mean Scotland's economy and media? An Scottish offshoot of Fox Media perhaps?

Only a couple of weeks ago, the ultra right-wing think tank, the Adam Smith Institute, published a paper extolling the virtues of Alex Salmond's plan B – Sterlingisation. Google [wealthynation.org](http://wealthynation.org) and you'll see that right-wing thinkers and investors support independence and are already getting organised. They want Scotland to become a free market country, with more liberty and self-reliance, and much smaller government and public sector. Hong Kong is their model, not Scandinavia. Their founder, the journalist Michael Fry, published a piece in *The Scotsman* recently extolling the virtues of zero-hours contracts.

If Scotland is financially challenged in the first years of independence, and this looks inevitable, then these are the people who will be influential in the new Scotland. It is a hard fact of life that it's right-wing money men rather than folk involved in dreaming and visioning at Yestival who are most likely to create the nation in their image.

## **The limitations of hope**

Lest you think I have found deciding to vote No easy, I haven't. I'm feeling uncomfortable about it. When I hear many Yes folk speak they are talking my language: extremely critical of the Westminster regime and the politics currently on offer. My values chime with theirs. What's more there's a tremendous creativity in their campaign. They seem to have all the best tunes. Of course, I'd rather be on the same side as radicals like Andy Wightman, young activists like Zara Kitson and cultural figures like Janice Galloway and David Greig whose work I admire hugely. Instead, I'm on the same side as the bowling clubs, old footballers and the British Legion. Though it is also true to say that the majority of women of my age I know – including lots of former left-wing activists and feminists – are also voting No, so I'm definitely not alone.

But this doesn't make my No vote easy. I looked at the Twitter feed of one young man who is currently working full-time for a Yes campaign. As I read his idealistic tweets, I found myself bursting into tears. Like countless others, he simply wanted hope – hope that a better world is possible. I was a child of the 60s and we had hope that politics could lead to a better future. How can I vote No and deprive others of this, I sometimes ask myself?

But hope and vision are not on their own enough to deliver good results for people and they can end up, not just disappointed, but disadvantaged. (Remember that old adage 'be careful what you wish for'.) Hope needs to be accompanied by analysis, foresight and scepticism. In recent times, people's hopes that politicians will deliver good results have not been warranted. Remember the wave of optimism and hope which brought New Labour to power or Barack Obama and his 'yes we can' mantra? With the independence referendum, the risks are much greater as we're not talking about voting for a four- or five-year term of office.

## **A new politics**

One of the tragic ironies is that if we vote for independence the new Scotland will be born into a world where national governments are increasingly unable to protect their citizens' interests from global corporate power. Ordinary people everywhere are losing out. We are living through what the academic Wolfgang Streeck calls 'the crisis of democratic capitalism'. Across Europe, governments' failure to address the issues confronting people is leading to the politics of disunity and division.

If Scotland gains independence then for decades most of its political and intellectual resources will be channelled into becoming another, largely inadequate, European state. As Manfredi La Manna pointed out in *Scottish Review* last week what the SNP is offering is 'a managerialist alternative' to Whitehall. It's standard issue with tartan packaging. Creating all that new machinery of state could even get in the way of vital changes that are urgently needed – altering the structure of local government to make it more democratic and involving, reforming land ownership and establishing proper control of an overbearing police authority.

Paradoxically, a No vote might lead to more radical politics. After all, the economic restructuring and instability which would follow independence is likely to lead to divisive rather than progressive politics. When people's security is threatened they become more materialistic, not less. Since concerted action is required to deal with global forces, the less we are caught up in our own affairs, the more keen we may be to join up with progressives in the rest of the UK (and other countries) and to support initiatives to devolve power throughout the land. What's more, if we can't count on politicians to deliver hoped-for change then we have no choice but to start doing it for ourselves – grassroots activity, citizens' movements and consumers holding companies to account.

One undoubted positive of the whole campaign is that it has encouraged political discussion. If there is a No vote, there's still hope that all that energy can be used to help create the better world that many of us – Yes and No voters – long for.

# Yes! Now is the time sing a better song

Ron Ferguson

2014

*There is a storm coming that shall try your foundation. Scotland must be rid of Scotland before the delivery come.* – Robert Renwick, on the scaffold, 1668

*We are acutely conscious that much of the world is watching us and wishing us well. We must not waste this opportunity.* – People and Parliament report, 1999

Some years ago, goes the tale, a trainload of Scottish football supporters was heading for England. Wembley. The bagpipes wailed familiar laments about Scotland's historic woundings. The noise got louder and louder; one piercing cry, though, penetrated the wall of sound with insistent plaintiveness. 'Penicillin!' was the bewildering shout. Gradually, the compartment became quieter as people turned and looked at the source of the cry – an archetypal wee man in a bunnet, staring crazily into space. 'Penicillin!' he cried again. 'Penicillin! Tarmacadam! Television! The greatest wee fuck'n country that God has made!' Having delivered himself of this eulogy to his native land, God's messenger then sank into a drunken collapse.

Another story. A woman went to see her psychiatrist in Edinburgh. 'I feel that everybody's talking about me,' she complained. The counsellor looked at her straight in the eye, then said deliberately: 'Listen. Here is the truth. 99.99% of the population couldn't give a toss about you one way or another'.

It's all there, isn't it? The megalomania and the drunken collapse, the grandeur and the inadequacy, the paranoia and the bleak truth. Wha's like us?/We're useless. The greatest wee country that God has made/the chip-on-the-shoulder land fit for failures. We hope people are laughing along with us but we're afraid they're secretly laughing at us. (Are you looking at me, Jimmy?) We strut the stage, presenting ourselves as a lovable model of how human life should be, while fearing deep down that 99.99% of the world's population really couldn't give a toss about us one way or another.

The split runs right through the country, from north to south, from east to west. There are other divisions – rich/poor, Protestant/ Roman Catholic, rural/urban, public school/state school – but the confidence/inadequacy split is the fundamental psychological fault line that has affected everything else in Scotland for generations.

Scotland is changing, though. The steady determination shown in the long march to our own parliament points to a growing confidence that is not of the drink-fuelled, inferiority-driven, swaggering 'Wha's like us?' variety. The quest for a Scottish Parliament was marked by a long-term resolve that declined to be deflected by dispiriting blows along the route.

The Scottish cringe is on its way out. The old deference on the basis of class, income, breeding and schooling is thankfully dying on its knees.

The process is far from complete, though. The old demons assail us from time to time: especially at the point at which we are presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take full responsibility for our national life. No-one knows this better than the leadership of the Better Together campaign. The unspoken – and sometimes spoken – fear is that we're not good enough, can't run our own affairs, will become the laughing stock of the world. (I remember a Scot earnestly talking that way to me at a time when our political masters were such political giants in the land as Nicholas Ridley, John Redwood, and John Selwyn Gummer. God have mercy.)

Whatever the outcome of the referendum, the Yes campaign has brought a new energy into the Scottish political scene. Many young Scots have engaged with politics for the first time. Alongside sometimes toxic stuff from both sides on the internet, we have witnessed the resurrection of the town meeting; halls have been filled with people debating the future of Scotland with passion and civility.

What I have disliked most about the campaign is the phoney certainties served up by both sides. (I'm reminded of the story of the church beadle who went up into the pulpit after the service to gather the minister's sermon notes and saw in big letters 'shout louder here, argument weak'.)

Whatever we think of Alex Salmond and the SNP, due acknowledgement has to be made – without their drive, there would not be discussions up and down the land about what kind of country we want Scotland to be. It is not about the SNP or Alex Salmond but about priorities. In the words of Neil Gunn: 'At the end of the day, what's all the bother about? Simply about how we are to live one with another on this old earth'.

I dislike and distrust utopian politics, and the rhetorical nonsense about Scotland being a morally superior country. There is too much Calvinism in my bloodstream to listen to Panglossian political idiocies without crying for mercy. But when I watch with dismay what is happening in Westminster in relation to immigration, the health service, attacks on the poor, education, the failure to put pin-stripe fraudsters in the dock, and nuclear weapons, I can take no more. Surely we can make a better fist of producing a more just society than that?

Some years ago, when I was a regular columnist with *The Herald*, I was asked to write a piece about the union. I was broadly in favour. What changed my mind? The answer is simple: a Tory UK Government that brought us Margaret Thatcher and the poll tax and a Labour UK Government that brought us an unrestrained narcissistic leader and the war in Iraq. Not in Scotland's name. With a week to go, we have the possibility of a political change that can have a major effect on that Scottish confidence/inadequacy split. Scotland must be rid of Scotland before the delivery comes.

What the Better Together campaign has signally failed to do is to deliver an inspiring vision of what a No vote will bring. Here is an unpalatable truth: by 2018 we could be out of

Europe, and under the jurisdiction of a Conservative-UKIP coalition led by Boris Johnson (who is on record as saying he doesn't want to give Scotland any more powers). We would have more of the baleful Iain Duncan Smith, and more portentous lectures to other countries about weapons of mass destruction, while spending even more billions on Trident ourselves.

Without being grandiose, we could surely do better than that. In Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, R and G are in a boat heading across the English Channel. They don't realise that the letter of safe conduct they are carrying is their own death warrant. When they discover the betrayal, Rosencrantz says to Guildenstern, 'There must have been a time, somewhere near the beginning, when we could have said No'.

When Rita, in Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*, goes back from university to visit her old stamping ground, she becomes depressed as the jukebox transmits the same old tunes. She bursts out: 'There must be better songs to sing than this'.

There remains a shortening time when we can say Yes. And maybe even sing a better – though far from perfect – song.

# No! I am voting to save my countries

R D Kernohan

2014

After I came back from posting my No vote, I did my customary check on the internet's menu of referendum arguments and opinions. Much of it was cauld kail rehashed. What was more striking was not just that even now there seemed to be professedly undecided voters but that some were still crying out for 'more information'.

Such is the confusion of thought which this extended campaign, a tedious affair enlivened in its last phase by hysteria and demeaned by sporadic nastiness, has forced upon a people once proud of its high purpose, clarity of thought, and 'democratic intellect.'

For the decision forced upon us by the separatist tendencies in modern Scotland and the shameless manipulation of devolved powers is one that depends not on information – of that we have more than enough and much misinformation besides – but on our sense of identity and reality.

That is why it is unfortunate that in the last throes of the campaign much of the chattering has wandered away from the ballot-paper question towards policy matters which any sovereign government and parliament, whether at Westminster or Edinburgh, would have to decide and review according to circumstances and unforeseen events: welfare spending, soaring health service costs, defence and alliances, oil revenue projections, tightness or lightness of monetary policy.

Having discovered that most of the Scottish people do not share their own fervent national separatism, the Yes campaign – with the SNP in the leading role but working with admirably organised front-organisations and fellow-travellers – now hopes that Toryphobia will carry the day. It solicits a vote for independence as a demonstration against Margaret Thatcher and David Cameron.

This approach has certain advantages. It not only exploits the unpopularity of the Tory Party in Scotland, the result of some past mistakes and many contemporary myths, but exasperates and disconcerts the thinner-skinned among Labour people and those Liberals with a bad conscience about doing the right things in (for them) the wrong coalition.

It has the minor advantage that the Tories will not hit back hard, since they are voting No anyway but also know that success depends on Labour convincing and carrying its own people. It has the rather greater advantage, since the Tories are strong in England, of providing a respectable cover for an unacknowledged and maybe in some cases unconscious appeal to anglophobia – in the same way as 'anti-Zionism' can be a cover for something much uglier. But it is an approach which quite improperly confuses the hypothetical Queen's speech (or whatever Holyrood would call it) of a sovereign Scottish

Government, in conditions still as unpredictable as they are hypothetical, with the questions of identity, reality, and principle which the referendum should decide.

All the 'information' already available, or likely to be offered to those sad souls still seeking it before 18 September, cannot predict how that speech, or the emergency financial statements which might follow in due course, would have to be shaped. Given the uncertainty over currency, revenue, debt, and unavoidable expenditure, the best guess is that they would avoid the agony of Greece but settle for something akin to the chastened sobriety of Portugal, Spain, and the Irish Republic – perhaps something better if a cordial relationship and coordinated approach were agreed with Westminster.

An independent Scotland might even really thrive if it were prepared for ultra-liberal economic policies and welfare-benefit restraints that out-Thatchered Thatcher. But I would still be against it, for Britain has been shaped by its democratic patriotic Left as much as by the Tory tradition: Orwell as well as Churchill; Burns as well as Scott.

The worst prospect, occasionally threatened by Salmond's rhetorical speeches and Swinney's reckless ones, is of a cold civil war in Britain and a mood certain to aggravate the authoritarian streak in the SNP's sense of mission. How I wish they might sometimes betray signs of those doubts which occasionally afflict those of us committed to more empirical political traditions and patriotisms.

They do have rational moments. Salmond is all for 'social union,' by which he surely means, even if he does not admit it, the network of personal and cultural as well as historical links which make Britain much more than a geographical expression. (Some of us call it nationality and tremble when UKIP try to distort it into a cruder populist nationalism.) He and Swinney profess shock at the notion that Britain might not have a currency union. His party claim to be the purest devotees of the National Health Service, now both the sacred cow and the golden calf of British politics. Even their platitudes on immigration policy reflect the political correctness and liberal cultural consensus imposed on Britain in the age of Blair.

But it is these concessions, sometimes grudging, which the nationalists make to the affinity of the Scots with the rest of the British people that expose the most fundamental flaw in their thinking. Mature societies should beware of enthusiasts for constitutional destruction and reconstruction, and still more of zealots whose politics reflect emotions more appropriate in the 80 or 90-minute nationalism of international matches. Free societies are always open to reform (as the government of Scotland has been for at least 150 years) but are best served by political institutions which emerge from such realities as 'social union' and meet such practical needs as currency union, coherent foreign policy, common citizenship, and a single market.

Institutions and constitutions should express and reflect identity, not try to create it. The travails of the European Union, and especially of the euro, display the difficulty of applying abstract principles without sufficient 'social union' or effective and acceptable institutions to determine common policies. For all their faults and failures, British institutions do this.

Were Scotland to opt out of them, a new Treaty of Unity would eventually have to create something less satisfactory to meet the same needs and express the ineradicable affinities.

What worries me about the referendum campaign is how remote such rational but non-party unionist reflections seem from the mindset and emotional disturbance of so many independence campaigners, not least those fellow-travellers who have either just dropped the mask or become very late converts. There are the churchmen who are sulking for independence either because they hope SNP spells CND or because even the Labour Party has developed scruples about high taxation and welfare dependency. There are the columnists who thirst for independence, perhaps because they see its turbulence as a wonderful refreshment facility for tired type-thumpers.

There are others carried away with pomposity as much as verbosity when, for example, Iain Macwhirter exhumes an old totalitarian idiom to tell unionists that 'they are the wrong side of history'. There may even – though I hope not – be editors and newspaper proprietors who wonder if that turbulence might make it easier to check the terrible decline in print circulation. There may even be broadcasters who wonder what it would be like to be much bigger fish in a rather smaller pond.

All revolutions are made when a core of zealots mobilise the confused and the discontented, exploit any loss of confidence among the powers that be, and enlist those who think they can read some Sat Nav of history. As revolutions go, of course, the break-up of Britain would be a fairly modest affair. But it would upset necessary arrangements that could not easily be replaced without wrangling, trial, and error. Like most revolutions, it would probably also bring disillusionment and eventually recrimination among the victors. But I still hope that our minority of zealots is not quite big enough, our discontented not quite gullible enough, and our realists more numerous than our columnists. Anyway, I have voted to save my countries.

# The hubris of Alex Salmond

Kenneth Roy

2014

I

After many years of service, my mobile phone finally gave out on Sunday afternoon. I boarded a bus owned by that rich benefactor of the governing party, Souter of Section 28 notoriety, and travelled the short distance to the near-derelict high street of Ayr.

At my shop of choice, I asked if they had any unsmart phones for sale. 'Naw,' he replied. 'The system's doon. It's been doon a' day.'

He showed me a phone, unsmart enough for my purposes, that he would have been prepared to part with for 30 quid if only the system hadn't been doon. When I suggested returning in half an hour to see if the system was up again, he nodded. But it was not the nod of hope. It looked suspiciously like a No voter, that nod.

I retreated into nearby and once-prosperous Newmarket Street, where even the charity shops have pulled down the shutters. But there's this one coffee shop left, with a single fly buzzing lethargically around, a don't know by the sound of it, and there I remembered the East European.

A retailer of few words, he runs a make do and mend mobile phone shop in the Lorne arcade. Within minutes I was walking out of his unit with a Samsung, simcard transferred, tearing off the plastic and marvelling at its Yes sheen. In the spirit of devo-max, he'd also succeeded in reviving the dodgy old phone and given me a charger for it, a useful back-up in case glossy Yes, for all its superficial allure, is ever found wanting.

Back in the High Street, a couple advanced towards me. Their boulevard stride suggested Paris or Milan. She was in her early 30s, blonde and slim, he too rather presentable, gymfit, sporting a big Yes t-shirt, both smiling confidently, with such a jaunty air about them.

But there was something else. That smile of theirs: it seemed to be the product of a wonderful secret denied to the rest of the human race. Maybe there had been a private poll of all the glam couples in Scotland and they were all voting Yes and they had all been instructed by the SNP's optimism guru how to walk down the sad high streets of Scotland looking invulnerable.

I have begun to see these deceptively sunny people as part of a new national brand. Their organiser, Blair Jenkins, has the biggest smile of all; well taught, perhaps. The smile will either take off big-time this weekend or Duncan Bannatyne will be declaring it uninvestable. I wouldn't care to place a bet either way.

Later on Sunday afternoon (I'd got home by that stage and was wondering how to unlock the keypad), Shona from Glasgow posted on the BBC that she would be voting Yes because, according to her, Scotland will soon be 'raining money'.

Could she be the same blonde I'd spotted in Ayr High Street? Or are they all like that? Do the young lovers of Scotland go to bed with the *Sunday Herald*, utter an orgasmic cry of 'Yes!' when they've finally got to the climax of the Macwhirter column, and then talk long into the night about the oil wealth? It's worryingly possible.

## II

And so to this: the bizarre concord between that arch-unionist Allan Massie and the First Minister Alex Salmond. The old bruisers don't agree about much, but they agree about this: they are struck by the cheerful mood of pre-referendum Scotland, the jolly banter in the streets, the inspiring evidence of what Massie calls 'civic engagement', the subversive hint in our hitherto monosyllabic pubs of stuff-the-bastards (that would be the English, Tory toffs, bankers, supermarket bosses, the British Biased Corporation and people like Allan Massie who write for the *Daily Telegraph*). Massie seriously thinks all this has been 'good for Scotland'. He must tell me the make of the bag he puts over his head in order to keep reality out.

P G Wodehouse found that it was never difficult to distinguish between a Scotsman with a grievance and a ray of sunshine. But there has been a remarkable transformation of the national character in recent weeks, which I date back to the Greater Glasgow Egg and Spoon Race (a highly political event, as I wrote at the time). The grievance is still there, indeed it multiplies by the hour, but it is currently being worn with a patriotic and revengeful swagger.

Forgive me. I'm about to be unpatriotic.

It is true that there has been 'civic engagement' of a sort. But mostly it has been a bit Free Kirk, preaching to the converted and with a messianic quality. I'm assured that the number of such engagements which bore a passing resemblance to the Nuremberg rallies was comparatively small. Still, even that great democrat and friend of the First Minister, Rupert Murdoch, has expressed concern about some of the company – 'the rabble' – the Yes side has been keeping. Bit rich, that.

Furthermore – it is never too late for a furthermore – the project may yet go horribly wrong. Unlikely as it seems, that fine woman Mary Pitcaithly, having counted all the votes, may be obliged to declare early on Friday morning that the dark, invisible forces of No have somehow squeaked home by 43 votes with no possibility of a recount.

What then?

We have seen in the history of the modern world how smiles can abruptly turn to snarls and jeers. In our own small country, we saw it during the televised debates. We saw it in a Kirkcaldy street. We saw it several times outside the BBC in Glasgow, where the intimidation of journalists was excused by Jenkins, a journalist himself, and endorsed by Salmond. This bullying bodes ill for the future of the press in an independent Scotland, whatever Jenkins and Salmond say in defence of the mob.

And in the last 24 hours we saw it in the roughing-up of Ed Miliband – the hurling of the

word 'murderer' at a transparently decent politician; and we saw it in the disclosure of Salmond's unsuccessful attempt to coerce the principal of St Andrews University – a direct threat to the integrity of the Scottish institutions.

### III

But not everyone is smiling. Half of Scotland is smiling – the half that chooses to turn a blind eye. The other half looks as if its system is doon. It is odd that neither Massie nor Salmond has observed the unsmiling faces in the streets. They may be the faces of the many people who have already paid a high price for this campaign in broken friendships and damaged relationships.

Or worse. The inexcusable failure of the First Minister, and his henchman Jenkins, to control or condemn the excesses of their supporters has created an atmosphere in which hatred thrives out of sight.

I'll give one example which I know to be true. I have no doubt there are many others. In a small town in central Scotland – for the protection of the people involved I do not intend to name it – a couple put a No sticker in the window of their house. A neighbour – a woman they 'knew' – came over and said: 'Oh, I didn't realise you were moving home'.

'We're not,' said the man, surprised. 'Well, you will be after we win,' she told him. 'You won't be welcome in this street.'

I hold the First Minister personally responsible for such intolerance. Had he chosen to utter a few statesmanlike words months ago, the nastiness of the present mood could and probably would have been avoided. He chose not to utter them.

When the First Minister talks of social union, he is referring to Scotland's relationship with England after independence. But there is another social union – that of Scotland itself. Whatever the result, it will require to be rebuilt somehow.

Will Alex Salmond have any interest in doing so? Would he have the least idea how to go about it? I doubt it.

I won't be staying up for the triumphalist denouement of his romantic adventure with half the people of Scotland. By 7am on Friday, we should know whether it's raining money or raining cats and dogs. Who cares? The country I've lived in all my life has been broken by the hubris of Alex Salmond.

# Wha' like us?

Andrew Hook

2014

*If countries have their ages with respect to improvement, North Britain may be considered as in a state of early youth, guided and supported by the more mature strength of her kindred country.*

This sentence appears in the preface to the first issue of the short-lived *Edinburgh Review* of 1755, the contributors to which included Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, and William Robertson – figures who would play major roles in the success of the Scottish Enlightenment. What is striking about the passage is not only its choice of 'North Britain' for Scotland, but more importantly, its ready acceptance of the comparative cultural superiority of England over its very junior partner, Scotland.

The passage came to mind because in the referendum campaign the idea has recently re-emerged that Scotland within the union has always suffered from a kind of cultural cringe when faced by the overwhelming cultural power of its sister country. A few days ago, BBC2's *Scotland 2014* tried – unsuccessfully – to address this issue of the cultural cringe.

The problem was that the two invited contributors – Stuart Cosgrove and Alan Bisset – while certainly rejecting it – were less than clear in answering Sarah Smith's questions about what exactly it was. So what we got were not very relevant clips of Andy Stewart and the *White Heather Club*.

The 1755 passage from the *Edinburgh Review*, on the other hand, offers a perfect definition and indeed illustration of the cultural cringe and its roots. Acknowledging 'the more mature strength' of English culture, the passage happily recognises that Scotland in the 18th century is in no position to challenge or rival the range and scale of England's achievements in the world of culture.

Admittedly, barely two generations later, when Francis Jeffrey had made the second *Edinburgh Review* into the most powerful cultural arbitrator across the entire United Kingdom, and *Blackwood's Magazine*, also in Edinburgh, could twit those they called 'our enlightened neighbours, the Transtweeddalecarlians', the cultural cringe appears to have been replaced for a time by an unequivocal sense of Scottish intellectual self-confidence.

Nonetheless, from the earliest days of the emergence of Scottish nationalism in the 1930s, the notion that Scottish culture was damaged, not only by creeping anglicisation, but by a pusillanimous submissiveness to English cultural values and norms, became one of the nationalist movement's most touted themes.

In a recent contribution to *SR* (3 September), Gerry Hassan appears to suggest that over the last 30 years, despite an increased degree of political engagement, Scottish culture has

felt itself under threat of assimilation or excision. 'In certain circles,' he writes, 'this anxiety has reached a crescendo in the independence debate'. In his article's conclusion, however, he says it is time 'to throw off the cultural doubts, anxieties and cringes'.

I am not sure I agree that over recent years Scottish culture has been under any kind of increased threat, while to my mind it is all too evident that in the independence debate the cultural cringe has disappeared from sight. In fact what has happened is that the old cringe has been replaced by a very different phenomenon – yet one which has always lurked away within the Scottish psyche. What that is, is perfectly illustrated by the familiar toast: 'Here's tae us, Wha's like us, Damn few, And they're a' deid'.

In the Yes campaign, Scottish triumphalism is never far from its surface. Scottish values, Scottish norms, Scottish practices are as good – if not better – than those of any country anywhere. The whole world, we gather, will be better off with the existence of an independent Scotland.

Triumphalism surrounds even the referendum campaign itself. Journalists and commentators across the political spectrum are constantly assuring us that our referendum is the best; they have never seen anything like it. The leaders of the Yes campaign are of course delighted to agree.

Scotland, we are assured, is an amazing model of political engagement. From Wigtown to Wick, apparently all of us are caught up in excited debate about the pros and cons of independence. Streets and squares, pubs and clubs, houses and homes are the setting for ongoing, informed discussion of all the crucial issues. Husbands and wives, parents and children, young and old – all are involved – even disagreeing over the central issues.

Those who have never voted in their life, believing that politics has nothing to do with them, are queuing up to get their names on the voting roll. Turnout on the great day will soar as high as 85% – or so we are told. By 18 September, if all this is so, Scotland, intoxicated by the debate, will surely have come to a complete standstill. The referendum rules.

Well I'm not a commentator touring the country's towns and cities, Highlands and Lowlands. My experience is limited to Glasgow and its West End in particular. So I don't know. And yet, when the Glasgow lawyer Derek Ogg, appearing recently on *Scotland 2014*, dissented from the view that the referendum was quite as all-consuming as the media is constantly telling us it is, I found myself nodding in agreement.

A few days ago, I was present at a well-attended book launch in the University of Strathclyde. At the reception no-one mentioned the referendum. If the political temper of all of us is at the fever pitch we are assured it is, why are so few of us willing to declare publicly where we stand?

In the Glasgow streets I see every day, window posters are few and far between. How many of us are choosing to display our allegiance by wearing a badge of some kind? Or is even asking that question taking us in a direction that those who insist that the referendum campaign has been nothing but a wonderful exhibition of Scottish political maturity do not wish to go?

All those observers, both within and outside Scotland, who are enthusiastic about the scale of our embrace of the referendum campaign, are also anxious to tell the world how polite, grown-up, and respectful of each other's views, we all are. In this sense too, Scotland is lauded as a model democracy. England can only look on admiringly.

Once again one can only hope that this indeed the whole story. And yet I wonder. Why is a complete stranger in my local bank the first of several people to shake my hand and say I'm brave to be wearing a badge? Why do others tell me that putting a poster in their window could be dangerous? Why are so many of the postings I read on Facebook angry, illiberal and intolerant? But perhaps even asking such questions, and expressing a tad of scepticism over the wonders of Scottish democracy, is simply the current version of that derided old cultural cringe.

On Thursday 18 September 2014, Scotland voted in a referendum on the question: 'Should Scotland be an independent country?'. The result was No, 2,001,926 (55.3%); Yes 1,617,989 (44.7%).

## The silent majority need to play a more active role

Walter Humes

2014

I wonder how many SR readers belonged to the 'silent majority' described by Gordon Brown in his barnstorming speech in defence of the union – a speech some commentators feel played an important part in determining the final outcome.

The silent majority included those who may have been engaged with the issues in the referendum debate, but did not write letters to the newspapers, or put up posters in their windows, or take part in rallies or televised debates. They remained below the radar and so they did not feature sufficiently in the calculations of the pollsters who predicted a much closer result than the one that finally emerged.

Ian Jack, in an article in *The Guardian*, suggested some of the reasons for the invisibility of many of those who helped to secure a victory for the Better Together side. A few may have been afraid of a hostile reaction from the more strident voices in the Yes camp. Others may have been anxious not to appear 'old, dull, unadventurous and unfashionable'.

A further possibility is that they viewed the showmanship of the campaign – the parading of celebrity supporters, the carefully staged PR events – with distaste. They regarded the decision as too serious to be overshadowed by techniques more suited to the world of entertainment than to an issue affecting the nation's future. They preferred substance to slogans, private reflection to public display.

Whatever their individual motivations, they certainly helped to shape the picture that emerged last Friday morning. By contributing to the 10% difference between the Yes and No votes, they may also have been a factor in Alex Salmond's decision to step down. One of the memorable pictures of the night was of a tired and dejected First Minister sitting in the back of a car as he started the journey home. A much tighter result may have encouraged him to stay on as leader for longer.

What will the silent majority do now? Will they be content to remain in obscurity having helped to achieve the outcome they hoped for? Will they simply let the traditional political classes carry on as before? I would hope not. A vote for remaining part of the UK should not be assumed to be an endorsement of the status quo: many voters unconvinced by the

nationalist case are far from complacent about the adequacy of existing political structures and processes.

Loss of faith in the London establishment extends to unionists as well as nationalists (including unionists in other parts of the UK). People across the political spectrum recognise that there is a desperate need for new ideas combined with a keen awareness of the economic, professional and bureaucratic obstacles to effective reform – obstacles often sustained by powerful vested interests.

What would be encouraging would be evidence that at least some sections of the silent majority might be prepared to take a more active part in political processes, helping to address the many problems that Scotland still faces. There are no grounds for feeling satisfied with the current state of the country, as a visit to most town centres would swiftly demonstrate. The social class division exemplified by those areas which had a majority in favour of the Yes option on the ballot paper – areas all containing deprived communities with people who were attracted by the hope that independence offered a better future, if not for themselves, at least for their children and grandchildren – remains a huge challenge that none of the existing parties has shown much imagination in tackling.

There are also important lessons for supporters of the Yes campaign. Some of the activists were so caught up in their enthusiasm for the cause that they failed to pick up the signs that many people were not persuaded by their arguments, even if they did not declare themselves as committed supporters of Better Together.

One of the saddest sights of election night was the dejected, and in some cases tearful, expression on the faces of young people in George Square in Glasgow: they had worked hard for their cause, convinced that they would wake up to a new dawn. But despite having won a majority in that city – showing how disenchanted traditional Labour supporters had become with the leadership of the party – the trend across the country favoured the No camp.

Just as it is important that unionists should not revert to 'business as usual,' so nationalists need to face the reality of the situation in which they now find themselves. There is much work to be done. The immediate task is to ensure that the UK party leaders live up to their assurance that increased powers will be devolved to Holyrood on the time-scale promised. Beyond that, there is a deeper and more difficult task to reflect on the reasons for the nationalist defeat. Some of the reasons might be understood by paying heed to those who were initially attracted to the possibilities of independence but who became increasingly concerned about the tactics of the Yes campaign.

The writer Ewan Morrison, at one time an SNP member, found that unquestioning conformity to vague, upbeat messages was what was expected from supporters. Anyone who asked hard questions about the details of post-independence policies was criticised for negativity and accused of not belonging to the faith.

The movement became cult-like, with zealots employing the repeated mantra of Yes as a quasi-religious chant. There was a crude conflation of the personal and the political so that

an individual's desire for personal freedom was mobilised as part of the national aspiration for independence. Anyone who dissented found themselves subject to the attentions of the 'Yes Thought Police'. Even so-called intellectuals happily colluded in the 'conformist dumbing down'. An unspecified promise of a better society in an independent Scotland encouraged adherents to imagine their own utopia without having to face the fact that other 'true believers' might have very different priorities.

Morrison's account is particularly interesting because he was for a time an active supporter of the Yes campaign. He found determined resistance to any attempt to raise awareness of the complexity and difficulty of the political process in an advanced democracy – the need to make hard choices, to reach compromises, to determine financial priorities. As he put it himself: 'Democracy is a daily struggle, an ongoing fight to reconcile differing opinions and ideologies, of contesting facts and plans and shouldering the burdens we inherit from history'. On this analysis, the nationalist dream would quickly turn out to be an illusion.

If the disappointed young people in George Square are to remain engaged with politics – and I sincerely hope they will – they need to confront the questions raised by Ewan Morrison and make a stronger and more persuasive case for the cause they espouse. And if they are joined by some of those on the other side who are prepared to move beyond silence to articulate their case, we may make some progress in the drive to improve the quality of life in Scotland, particularly for those who feel alienated and marginalised.

# Anatomy of a referendum - and its aftermath

Gerry Hassan

2014

The Scottish independence referendum was a momentous moment in Scottish and British history. It dominated Scottish and British airwaves in the last couple of weeks, and became a huge international story.

Nearly every single cliché has been dug up, used and then over-used to exhaustion. What then as the excitement, claim and counter-claim quieten down, is there left to say and do? Actually, there is quite a lot.

Let's talk about the immediate reactions post-vote from the Scottish and British political classes. They both have, so far, let us down, speaking for their narrow interests and party advantage, with no-one addressing wider concerns.

Take the SNP leadership. Five days after the vote neither Alex Salmond or Nicola Sturgeon has reached out to the 55% or offered any words of congratulation, recognition or understanding. Both were conspicuous by their absence from the Church of Scotland service of reconciliation on Sunday. The three pro-union parties were all represented by their leaders; the SNP by John Swinney.

Then there is the Westminster political classes. From David Cameron's first announcement on Friday morning at 7am, they have been out on political manoeuvres, advancing and promoting narrow self-interests. Cameron in that morning address was conciliatory in tone and style, but in content, was ruthlessly and nakedly calculating, linking Scottish devo-max to the idea of English votes for English laws.

By the afternoon, Ed Miliband disagreed with Cameron, refusing to agree with him on the Scottish-English linkage, resulting in the fracturing of the three pro-union party agreement and front only hours after polls shut. The solemn pledge that had been presented as 'the Vow' of what Westminster would deliver to Scotland lasted even less than the Lib Dem promise of 'no tuition fees'. Better Together no more.

## **The limits of #the45**

Now is a time for national political leadership, for people talking not just from their base. Instead, so far Scotland and the UK has had to endure partisan politicians speaking to and reinforcing the prejudices of their own moral tribes and echo chambers.

There was the understandable social media outcry of #the45 (reflecting the 45% Yes 55% No result) as people wanted to find voice, come together, find strength in numbers, and show their anger and defiance. However, #the45 does not reach out to #the55, and attempt to understand and connect with them on any level – politically or emotionally. It was a natural reaction in the immediate aftermath, but it doesn't offer any political route for the

future, instead having an element of bitterness, self-denial and labelling people who have different views.

Part of the immediate aftermath of the vote was framed by a kind of misguided collective rage against the machine. Thus, the referendum, according to some, was 'stolen' or 'rigged' (a petition claiming this having over 87,000 signatures by Monday afternoon) – all comments which were given permission by Salmond's unhelpful, ungracious comments that No voters were 'tricked'.

None of this is helpful or mature. It also on the Yes side doesn't come from the best of the independence movement which has shown generosity, dynamism, enthusiasm and positivity, and which has reshaped politics and energised democracy.

### **Anatomy of the vote**

Political contests, victory and defeat, offer a time for reflection, renewal and learning how to do things differently. In the last 30 years plus, British Labour's humiliating defeat in 1983 was a cathartic release and liberation for the party; the same was true to a lesser extent of the Conservative third successive defeat in 2005.

The Tory pollster Lord Ashcroft conducted a super poll post-vote and reflected on the blame and denial prevalent in sections of the Yes side: 'A political movement never flourishes by blaming its defeats on the media, or by deploring the motives or gullibility of the electorate'. He went on to say: 'Tories have generally been guilty of these things in the past, and I found the attitude was prevalent in the Labour movement in my post-election research in 2010'.

There are also perils and dangers in English responses. Matthew Parris has pointed out that such initiatives as *The Spectator's* 'Scotland, please stay' front cover one week before the vote, had a hint of desperation and self-abasement.

Parris observed that in all these initiatives (clearly thinking of the Dan Snow-Tom Holland 'Let's Stay Together' intervention) almost all the English No voices 'have come either from the kind of Englishman who hunts, sails or skis in the Highlands and Islands, or from talented Scots who have migrated south in search of a larger arena for their talents'. He concluded with a hint of irony: 'This is a group well-represented among the commanding heights of British journalism and politics, and a distinctive and distinguished demographic. But it is not, I'm afraid, a representative one'.

What do the results and reactions to Thursday tell us about Scotland and the union? The vote showed on the surface a distinctly united nation: the yellow wave of the SNP's 2011 national landslide, replaced by an emphatic No vote which ran from north to south, west to east. Yet, underneath this there were lots of fascinating patterns. For example, the long hailed 'gender gap' was present, but not very strong: men voted 47% Yes, women 44% Yes; 16-17 year olds were 71% Yes, while 18-24 year olds only 48% Yes.

The biggest issues given for voting Yes were dissatisfaction with Westminster (74%) and the NHS (54%); in relation to No it was the currency (57%) and pensions (37%). When

asked to choose between three reasons for voting Yes voters split: Scottish decisions should be made in Scotland (70%), Scotland's future brighter independent (20%), and no more Tory Governments (10%); with No voters split: the risks of independence were too great (47%), attachment to the UK (27%), and a No vote means more powers (25%). Just over half the Yes vote was made up of SNP voters (53%), while the No vote tally (2,001,926) was higher than the number of people who voted in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections.

### **Insider/outsider Scotland**

Two frequently cited tropes about the vote were first, it was all about class, and second, Labour heartlands voted Yes. These need some qualification. Take the different layers of insider/outsider Scotland. In terms of social class this produced some evidence of insiders, those who were financially better off, and felt they had more to lose, voting No, while outsiders, who were less well off and assessed they had less to lose, voting Yes. Yet this wasn't clear-cut, and in terms of geography and place, there was another divide of insider/outsider with the biggest Yes votes in the central belt (Dundee aside), and the outsiders of Dumfries and Galloway, Borders, Shetland and Orkney, decisively voting No.

The politics of social class were a bit more complex than presented. It wasn't completely the case that the middle classes voted No and the working classes voted Yes. The AB professional class voted Yes 40% No 60%, and the CI intermediate class Yes 49%, No 51%. But there were significant divisions in the working classes: the C2 skilled manual group voting 52% Yes, 48% No, and the DE semi and unskilled manual working classes Yes 45%, No 55% (leaving aside for the purpose of this essay, academic debate on the use and limits of these particular terms). And most Labour areas voted No, some quite decisively.

Another dimension was that the higher the Yes vote the more an area was deprived and poor: hence Dundee, Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire voted Yes, and Inverclyde just missed by a whisker. These are all areas with lower economic growth and prosperity, and significant social problems. All of the major growth centres and hubs in the country voted No: Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness and Shetland, for example.

This is a telling picture of now and future patterns. The Yes side positioned itself as being optimistic and visionary, and that anything was possible in an independent Scotland. The No case had little positive to say over the long campaign; instead they went on about the past, risks and problems and were relentlessly negative. It worked for the moment.

Despite this, Yes won areas that have traditionally been wary of economic and social change, having seen it for the last 30 years as a threat. The No side carried prosperous, middle class Scotland in part because of fear and anxiety of losing the security, position and even place they had in society.

This illustrates that the future shape of politics in Scotland has to be built on addressing the increasing parts of the electorate. It cannot be focused primarily on the most deprived, excluded parts of the country.

A traditional left approach of embracing 'the ghetto' or minority 'rainbow coalition' will

not deliver a majority to Yes. This is something many on the left and left nationalists have not understood over the last three or four decades: namely, that a political contest carried out by constant retreat and conducted defensively, only results in defeat and demoralisation.

The politics of Scotland's future has to entail getting into the heads and hearts of the middle classes with all their varieties and different sub-parts, from the well-heeled and affluent, to the doing comfortably, and struggling to keep up appearances. It cannot be about such mindsets, as some have said about older voters, 'waiting for the old to die'. Nor can it be about the self-limiting mentality of the politics of #the45.

It has to embrace being outward-looking, embracing and understanding economic and social change, and having a grasp of how society and the economy are changing. An illuminating perspective in all this has been Guy Standing's work on the emergence and rise of the precariat and with it increasing inequality, insecurity and the retreat of status, security and the notion of a career. Standing has observed that the logic of contemporary capitalist exploitation is towards not just zero-hour contracts, but use of crowd labour contracts. Such is the brutal leviathan of Anglo-American crony capitalism.

This can only be overcome by creating majority alliances which address large parts of the middle classes and recognise their concerns and anxieties. It entails reframing the debate from the traditional leftist welfarist concerns, to talking of a citizen's income, and a different vision of political economy.

### **The Scottish debate in an uncertain world**

Large parts of the Scottish debate took place as if none of this was going on, not just in the world around us, but at home, in Scotland and the UK. There was a prevailing assumption, not just in Yes and No, but across society which went unchallenged which stated that 'this was as bad as it could get' and that 'things couldn't get any worse', particularly under independence. These assumptions need to be taken on and shaken to the core, because out there the world is a very shaky, scary place.

That doesn't necessarily mean Syria, Iraq, Ukraine and other war zones, but the economic instability of the global economic order, the perilous position of the West, and the possibility of a second banking crash. A telling piece of Madrid graffiti says: 'The worst thing would be to return to the old normal'.

Scotland is a conservative country. Its opposition to Thatcherism was in many respects a yearning for safety and security, as well as being influenced by progressive values. One potent element of our debate has been pitched around a contest for Scotland's political soul centred on a battle for the Scotland of the 1945-75 era.

In this there have been two distinctly different visions, the first, the British variant which stresses the triumphs of 'the common people' and Liberal and Labour parties historically; the second is a Scottish expression of this which has an attachment to the post-war period as some kind of 'golden era'. Both miss the inadequacies of that period, that the economic

and social settlement was only possible because of the managed capitalist order, and do not recognise that such certainty and order are no longer possible in today's world.

A politics of the past cannot be what defines the future. This is a central mistake the left and social democrats have made over the last 40 years. In the referendum campaign and since, senior Labour figures such as Brian Wilson say that the case for progressive Britishness has at its centre, the NHS, BBC and welfare state. All of these are institutions founded quite a while ago, and not one of them is exactly in a good state today. Why should Scots feel the establishment of the NHS in 1948 is pivotal to remaining in the union, particularly when the Tories are outsourcing it and handing it over to private contractors in England?

There is also the changing nature of the union. Jack Straw proposed passing parliamentary legislation making a further Scottish independence referendum 'illegal', an act which itself would have no constitutional standing. Jim Murphy, who unlike most Scottish Labour MPs had a good campaign, cannot answer as the English votes for English laws question comes to the fore, the basic question of what gave him the right, along with 37 other Scots Labour MPs, to impose tuition fees on England and Wales.

There are significant challenges to Yes. The SNP and Yes have to reach out and empathise with the non-Yes majority in Scotland. Scottish Labour as a tribe never grasped or cared to understand the hopes and fears of non-Labour Scotland; it didn't feel it had to, being the biggest party in the country for decades. From this there originated a politics ill-at-ease about pluralism, reaching out to others, which was arrogant and insular. Scotland cannot jump from one version of triumphant tribalism straight into another. And to win any future referendum, such a pluralism is absolutely essential for Yes.

Politics involves controlling your zealots and true believers. The referendum saw the rise of vex nats, meaning vexillology, the study of flags. This broke out in the most unlikely places, including 10 Downing Street as Cameron panicked when the first poll put Yes ahead, with Ed Miliband joining him, encouraging local authorities and public buildings up and down the land to fly the Union Jack.

The most overt expression of vex nats came from the Yes movement and in particular the explosion of flash mob rallies in the latter half of the campaign. These obviously made people feel good, raised morale, and gave them a sense of being part of something bigger. Yet they also gave over the impression to the innocent bystander of looking like urban Bannockburn rallies (the SNP, when they were a smaller party, having as one of its key events the annual Bannockburn rally, attending which was the mark of the true believer!). These made the mistake of getting activists to talk to themselves, and were not the right messages in the closing weeks to win over passing floating voters.

This touches on the problem of what SNP activist Kate Higgins said her father called the 'shouty socialists' who dominated many of these rallies, and for instance, the two Edinburgh rallies of 2012 and 2013. It isn't enough in the early days of the 21st century to just recite a pile of predictable left slogans and mantras; it is actually counter-productive because it can kid some people that this is enough to bring about change.

That isn't the only issue. There was a genuine explosion of activism, engagement and radicalism in the referendum, but there was also the phenomenon of astroturf organisations. On the No side, there was the infamous example of 'No Borders' set up by Tory supporter Malcolm Gifford. In the Yes camp, there were much less clear examples such as Business for Scotland and Academics for Yes set up with the support of Yes Scotland and which carried with them the air of officialness and had a sort of rigid managerial consultancy orthodoxy which wasn't very persuasive for many who encountered them.

Despite all the above, the biggest air of decay has come from the British establishment. In the last few weeks they have panicked, love bombed and patronised Scotland. Now they think it is back to 'business as usual'. Therefore, English votes for English laws is all the rage as it looks democratic, but punishes the Scots, undermines Labour, and is a sop to UKIP. The problem it has is that Westminster is broken and the solution cannot come from inside what is a discredited clubland.

Take the BBC. They had a terrible referendum. BBC Scotland didn't know what way to turn, facing rival Scottish and London pressures, and being run by incompetent management. The actions of BBC London (and Salford) personnel was extraordinary in its arrogance and lack of knowledge. Many of the Radio Four *Today* staff who took over large parts of BBC Scotland could not believe there was such a thing as BBC Scotland, one saying: 'You mean you make your own programmes here?'

In another discussion, a group of BBC London staff threw scorn and disdain on the whole debate they were being paid from the public purse to cover. One said, 'why do any Scots want independence?', bringing another to answer with condescension, 'who would want to be like Denmark?', while yet another commented, 'this has just been a divisive, horrible referendum. I will be glad when it is over'.

Think of those words, 'who would want to be like Denmark?' Who wouldn't? It is one of the most successful, prosperous and egalitarian countries in the world. Who would want that, when the argument goes, you could be part of the great project that is the United Kingdom with its UN Security Council and G8 membership? This world view has to be understood, named and challenged: it is nothing less than 'Great British Powerism', the 'status syndrome' of the imperial home country, and it hasn't served the people of these four nations well for decades.

The independence referendum was but one stage in the struggle of people up and down these isles to challenge that self-centred, self-congratulatory view of the world. This outlook has taken hold of the UK's political, corporate and media elites, and in so doing it has brought the UK to this sorry state, one where, despite last week's vote, break-up looks more likely by the day.

We are one Scotland. Not 45%, or 55%, or even 99%. We need to speak up and find voice and demand the same from our so-called leaders.

# Next time, a supermajority will be needed

Nigel Smith

2014

On the whole, a simple majority (50% + one vote) works for democracy including referendums. It has the great merit that all voters understand and usually accept the result. One exception is the constitutional referendum where some countries and states require a supermajority sometimes as low as 55% more often 60% or even 67% before the result is valid and the change adopted.

The supermajority is designed to protect the constitution from sudden popular whims and scheming leaders and to demonstrate the proposed reform has achieved some degree of consensus before adoption. (Unlike the UK, these countries have codified constitutions which make obvious what counts as constitutional. But even in the UK, recognising the constitutional nature of Scottish independence is not difficult when compared with the proposed EU referendum.)

A supermajority would have prevented the creation of the Welsh Assembly in 1997 when only 50.3% voted for it. It was not challenged because even that low figure represented a sea change in opinion from the big No vote in the earlier devolution referendum in 1979.

In contrast, the referendum in 2011 gave the same assembly direct legislative power with a consensus of 64%. If independence had scraped home with a narrow win, say 52%, the Scottish Government would have opened negotiations with HMG on the basis of the Edinburgh Agreement without the consensus that backed the referendums on the Scottish Parliament in 1997 (75%) or the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (73%) or routinely supports independence in the referendums held around the world since 1945 (usually well upwards of 70%).

By these standards, independence failed dismally. Their campaign was designed to win a simple majority referendum not build a consensus for independence. Despite two years and all the resources of the Scottish Government to help produce the white paper, its 680 pages lacked answers in key areas.

In what was the world's longest referendum campaign, independence gained a tranche of new enthusiastic support but no great new consensus. A supermajority would have forced a different approach to the electorate dealing with arguments not avoiding them.

The 'hope v fear' strategy with its emphasis on emotion took them in substantially the wrong direction for consensus building. It suited the temperament of Alex Salmond whose hallmark is gliding brilliantly over detail and induced in some supporters a revivalist fervour that swept all risks aside but it intimidated others and failed to engage let alone convince many of the practical utility of independence.

The patent lack of consensus would have given the Scottish Government a weak hand in

negotiations despite the offer to involve others in the negotiations. As these progressed, it is possible that as more and more difficulties became apparent, public opinion would have started to regret its narrow decision in favour and the demand for another referendum ratifying the deal would have arisen. The Scottish Government would have quickly found that a nation lacking consensus does not easily make a new state. A supermajority is intended to forestall these kinds of difficulties.

A supermajority is transparent to every voter. With a 55% supermajority, the 1979 Scottish devolution referendum would have failed as only 51.6% voted in favour but all voters would have known why it failed.

Instead, it failed in the most secretive way possible. A deliberately un-transparent rule required 40% of registered voters to vote in favour. In effect, it rigged the result by making all non-voters into No voters without their knowledge. It left a legacy of distrust in Scotland of anything but a simple majority – but is it wise to persist with that legacy when the issue is so important?

In the search for constitutional stability supermajority thresholds can go too high (67% or higher) making all but the most high profile reforms impossible to achieve and so disengages the voter as in Italy, in the opposite experience of Scotland's referendum.

A more practical supermajority of 60% was used in the referendum on electoral reform held in British Columbia in 2005. The result 57.7% approval fell just short of the 60% supermajority so the reform was not adopted.

On the one hand, at 60% the winning side achieves half as many votes again as the defeated side. It seems too big a democratic hurdle put that way. But looked at another way, it means three out of five voters have supported the change showing a consensus emerging. Perhaps Canada has it right at a 60% supermajority.

And it finds supportive echoes in the prominent independence campaigner, Pat Kane's recent call for a '60+' campaign and the Yes campaign's target of 65% supporting independence.

While a low supermajority of 55% provides only a glimmer of consensus, it moves the result out of debatable territory as to the intention of the electorate.

The supermajority would help dismiss the 'neverendum' talk by prioritising consensus building over more of the same. And it can hardly be resisted by those seeking the change. After this result, wiser heads now see the need for consensus and reaching out to those who voted No.

There is one last argument that will prove decisive. The rest of Britain could not vote in this referendum yet watched Britain taken to the brink of break-up. They will rightly insist next time that there should be a consensus among Scots for such radical change. Such a request will be politically hard to resist from those who have no vote but do have an interest. For this reason alone, I believe we have seen the first and last referendum on independence decided by a simple majority. Only the size of the supermajority is yet to be decided.

# A Scotland of true believers

Jean Barr

2014

The signs are not good. In post-referendum Scotland, as the *New Statesman* puts it, nationalism reigns. The left in Scotland is uniting with the SNP to pursue an agenda for change that hinges on securing independence as soon as possible.

For one whose political formation was in the heady days of international socialism and feminism of the 1970s, it feels surreal to witness the left's increasing championing of Scottish nationalism. This frames the debate for change and social justice in terms of liberating Scottish nationhood: supposedly, since we Scots are more progressive and socially democratic than the English, independence is necessary to guarantee the democratic will of the Scottish people.

It is conveniently forgotten that in 1983, 25% of Scots voted for Margaret Thatcher, a percentage of the population roughly equivalent to the proportion of people who voted for the SNP in the 2011 Scottish parliamentary election, and not that much lower than the overall percentage in the UK. Democracy cuts both ways.

In the run-up to the referendum and in its aftermath, the leftist case for Scottish independence reveals a dogged reluctance – even refusal – to engage in robust democratic dialogue with critics, especially those who also identify with the left. Dialogue means people together examining their thoughts and assumptions. It demands effort as well as empathy and imagination.

It has been suggested that some independence leftists seem to yearn to be part of a community in which theirs is the majority opinion. If true, this is a bizarre take on the value Scots traditionally place on community and belonging. It resonates with one eminent Scottish novelist's remark that a people so committed to the idea of belonging must live in fear of strangers, especially the stranger in themselves.

Adam Smith believed that democracy thrives on conflict and disagreement rather than homogeneity and agreement. He and his friend and fellow Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, David Hume, believed in people's capacity to feel an increase in fellow feeling simply from the habit of conversing together. For Smith, sympathy, the ability to put oneself in the other's shoes rather than standing in judgement of them, requires continuously challenging one's own assumptions: too much emphasis on belonging and on being the same limits and stultifies, leaving those outside the clan 'in a limbo of coldness and indifference'.

There was precious little fellow feeling across the Yes/No divide in the run-up to the referendum. Instead, on the Yes side there was incredulity and disbelief that one could be 'against Scotland' and huge pressure to join the club as well as a fair dose of moral

superiority. When did a questioning approach to a fundamental constitutional change (that few had sought) become beyond the pale, simply outside the frame, unthinkable? History shows that social movements wither and die when 'true believers' break off debate and form sects.

I recall that one of the cardinal dividing lines between different sections of the left during the 1970s rested on such burning issues as whether or not Russia should be described as a 'communist' or 'state capitalist' society. On such distinctions friendships turned. A resurgence of such sectarianism now endangers the wider movement for social change and justice in Scotland for reasons built into the history and process of the referendum campaign, with potentially far-reaching consequences both within and beyond Scotland.

The Scottish referendum was anything but a response to an overwhelming demand from the Scottish people. It arose because the SNP won an election in 2011 with a slim majority of barely half of the Scottish population who bothered to vote, roughly a quarter of the Scottish population. A now deeply divided and polarised Scotland is the result, an indirect consequence too of Scots' loss of faith in the Scottish Labour Party, a body which subsequent to the referendum has been described as being as near to a political corpse as it is possible to be.

Such visceral disaffection has combined with the general decline of class politics fuelling the rise of nationalism in Scotland as a kind of anti-establishment proxy, to use Seumas Milne's phrase.

Much of the extraordinarily high Yes vote was a protest against austerity, inequality and the obscene growth in wealth for the few, coupled with the wholesale selling off of the public utilities and railways, the insidious privatisation of the NHS and the shift from an enabling to a punitive welfare state. Some Labour supporters voted for independence to get shot of the Tories. Many saw independence as offering at least a chance of something better in the absence of anything else on the horizon. 'You have to start somewhere,' commented one Yes voter to me recently.

Yet a majority of Scots remained sceptical about the only published prospectus on offer, the SNP white paper. Yes is a nice wee word but so too is 'why'. Insulting caricatures of No voters as self-deluding, self-harming dupes of the ruling class – particularly the over 65 'fearties' – were far off the mark, as was the mantra coined by Tommy Sheridan in his bid for discursive space: 'Hope over Fear'.

No voters were unconvinced of the merits of the independence case. Older voters, especially those politically on the left, could remember the mass campaigns mobilised by the labour and trade union movement of the 1970s and 1980s, from which standpoint any kind of nationalism was anathema.

The Canadian social theorist and philosopher Michael Ignatieff believes that the referendum result would have been closer if fear had been the only factor holding the union together. More deeply, he thinks, the No campaign prevailed because it tapped into an implicit recognition about the symbiotic interdependence of Scottish and British identity:

the understanding that each nation in the union defined itself in relation to each other and that to lose the union would have been to 'lose the mirror in which Scottishness acquires its defining contrast'. The Scottish Enlightenment was itself a project to demonstrate and claim Scotland's distinctive worth in relation to its newish big brother/sister.

A major problem with the referendum, which contributed to its divisive consequences, was the extended nature of the campaign, increasingly saturating political space and dominating the attention span over a period of almost two years, its terms set from the outset by the binary Yes/No question on the ballot paper.

Early on, some excellent community meetings with outside speakers fostered informed debate and tended to be sceptical of both sides. A few public courses, run by the WEA and by university adult education departments, created some space for open debate. But on the whole the reportedly wonderful civic debate that took place did not address the big issues that needed tackling, such as: What difference will one more state make in an era of global capitalism? Is it better to bring government closer to the people it is meant to serve? Which policies for social justice require independence for their practical implementation?

Many Yes and No voters voted with a heavy heart, pushed into a binary choice that very few wanted and torn between calls for greater Scottish self-government and a wider social solidarity. The binary nature of the referendum question prevailed with the result that the opportunity for a richer discussion was missed, especially as the campaign intensified. This is confirmed by a research report sponsored by the organisation Collaborative Scotland that explores the nature and quality of debate during the extended period of the campaign.

The report shows that by the spring of 2014, interest-based organisations had coalesced on both sides, and national-level efforts to deliberate on a range of views were rare or had stalled. For example, The Future of Scotland, a broad-based partnership of civic organisations, with no specific political agenda, had no further events planned and its website was inactive. This filtering process was reinforced by the binary way the media reported the referendum. Thus the STUC and its affiliates, by adopting a neutral stance, received very marginal coverage.

Despite the flowering of new pro-independence online sites like Bella Caledonia, few long-standing organisations took part, perhaps because of the increasingly heated and assertive spirit of the debate. Several interviewees in the Collaborative Scotland research remarked on this. One said: 'I'm relaxed about independence. It's the debate I'm worried about,' adding: 'This has a potential to mark and damage Scottish society, it's such a brutal distinction between people. I'm afraid that people will be tagged and not forgiven afterwards.' Everything is seen through the lens of if it is for yes or for no,' said another, whilst one person spoke of 'muzzled moderates' and of 'a lot of incentives to keep out. A whole set of organisations who should be mediating are staying out'.

Until the final two weeks, like many others, I was fairly confident in a No vote despite the deficiencies of the No campaign and because there were so many holes in the independence case. It was at that point that the grassroots Yes campaign became what one

commentator describes as a 'material force' that bore no relation to the white paper, marrying the spirit of the 1968 student and worker revolt in France with the insurgent qualities of Obama's first presidential campaign. A message of hope and conviction that everything bad would turn good but only with a vote for independence was wrapped in a message of despair about anything good coming out of Britain. Had the referendum been held a week or two later, that momentum might well have swept Yes to victory.

The Yes campaign demonstrated the potential of grassroots mobilisation in a context of supposed political apathy. The Better Together campaign was insulting and inept. In contrast, the Red Paper Collective, which describes itself as a group of labour movement activists drawn from trade unions, politics and academia, was valiant in arguing a case for a class-based alternative to independence, its stated purpose being to provide a labour movement alternative to what it sees as a sterile nationalist versus unionist debate around the referendum. However, I doubt that many people either accessed their material or had heard of them or their latest publication, *The Red Paper on Scotland: Class, Nation and Socialism*.

One author, arguing for a form of enhanced devolution, pointed out that more powers to the Scottish Parliament would allow it to borrow and take land, property and enterprises into public ownership, and re-build Scotland's industrial base on green technology, renewables and high-value manufacturing. A central part of this argument is that it is only by remaining part of Britain that wealth can be redistributed across Britain from London and the south-east to Scotland and the poorer regions of England and Wales. And a labour movement united at British level is better able to challenge the concentration of power and wealth at that level and bring the economy under more democratic control.

Dealing with the limitations of nationalism will challenge the new left formation that is emerging in the wake of the referendum, in light of its apparent abandonment of class-based politics. It now looks as if the majority of the Scottish left will go on fighting for independence despite a majority of Scottish people rejecting it.

Bella Caledonia, online magazine and a voice for the Yes campaign, is emblematic. Announcing a new team for the magazine, the editor comments with rhetorical flourish: 'The referendum saw a noble steed dragged down into the mire by a gilded carriage... I will work to persuade those who voted No to rethink their moral position. This requires a free media... rooted in our democratic intellect... not subaltern [sic] to the forces of our internal... colonisation where money and fear trump justice and hope'.

This Scottish brand of nationalism shows little interest in confronting the structural inequality occurring across the neo-liberal globalised world. If it were even serious about addressing inequalities at home the Scottish Government would ban private education (or at least end its charitable status) and invest in further education (starved of resources in favour of free higher education). Such progressive rather than regressive policies would address educational attainment inequalities linked to class. As such, they would alienate sections of the Scottish middle class and political elite.

Short of the revolution, is there a future for a democratic Scotland that does not require independence? The political scientist Michael Keating believes there may just be enough remaining space in Scottish politics for a party that could win elections and govern at Holyrood by backing both advanced devolution and the politics of social justice. Scottish Labour could be that party, but only with a radical overhaul, including an injection of imagination and skill to transform itself from a 20th-century party into a modern democratic movement for radical change. Encouragingly, Kezia Dugdale's recent announcement to put her hat into the ring for the deputy leadership of the Scottish Labour Party was couched in such terms.

The recent Ipsos Mori poll anticipating an almost total wipe-out of Scottish Labour by the SNP at the 2015 General Election indicates how high the stakes are. Less drastic estimates of a loss of between 10 and 20 Labour seats in Scotland could still be decisive in a close-run UK election. Those on the Scottish left who resist the siren call of independence understand that a General Election represents a choice between a Labour-led and Conservative-led government, as Owen Jones reminds us in an article on the Green Party. The role of the Scottish pro-independence left, as with the Greens, could be to split the progressive vote and deliver election victory to the Tories/coalition parties. In the absence of proportional representation, a Borgen-style government is a fantasy.

The Labour Party in Scotland and at UK level must speak of inequality and poverty as obscene; advocate redistribution and progressive taxation, including council tax reform; pursue public ownership, social housing and employment rights; and reverse the creeping privatisation of the NHS. At least this would show that a vote for No in the Scottish referendum was for progressive change for all working people across the UK. If the Labour Party cannot recover momentum in Scotland, a Tory majority in the 2015 General Election is on the cards.

Construed more positively, this indicates just how important the Scottish vote is going to be in the general election. Without its core vote at the heart of an alliance of working-class and middle-class voters, Labour cannot win in 2015.

Having been so shamefully taken for granted for so long, Labour's core voters in Scotland have a place to go – the SNP. Any simple clarion call for a move to the left will not do. But the Scottish electorate has the chance to seize a moment of major political influence. Those who voted Yes in the referendum as a blow to Westminster's Tory (Coalition) Government should vote Labour in the General Election for the very same reason.

# ERRORS AND CORRECTIONS

# Diana's celestial boyfriend

Kenneth Roy

2009

Although others will have noticed, two vigilant readers took the trouble to point out that, in last Thursday's column awarding two stars to the Scottish Parliament, I prolonged the life of Diana, Princess of Wales, by almost two years, claiming that, at the time of the election of May 1999, she had just acquired a new boyfriend. My ever-watchful ex-colleague Marian Pallister and Professor John Izod tactfully pointed out that poor Diana was killed in August 1997, John putting it in these terms: 'Which [boyfriend] was that, Ken? I suspect in one of the few realms that escape the red tops'. Quite.

Three questions present themselves.

First, is it possible that, at the time of the devolution vote, Diana had indeed acquired a new boyfriend, albeit a celestial one? I have no knowledge of the theological position on relationships in the afterlife; presumably no hanky-panky permitted, the afterlife being a place of unimpeachable virtue, but it would be interesting to have an official view of friendships in heaven – whether they are allowed and, if so, on what terms.

By posing that first question, I think I was trying to dig myself out of a hole. I agree that it hasn't worked.

On quickly, then, to question two. By dying in August 1997 rather than at some point in 1999 after the devolution vote, what did she miss? The devolution vote, for one thing, followed by Donald Dewar's marvellous speech. Anything else? The year before – 1998, unless I'm much mistaken, which of course I could be – she missed the Good Friday Agreement, the passing of the Human Rights Act giving 'a legal right to life' (coming too late for her), and the sending-off of David Beckham in the World Cup. The boy done bad, but it is remarkable looking back at the incident how Dave was blamed for just about everything wrong with England. Oh, and she missed the 43rd Eurovision Song Contest. It was held in Birmingham, England, that year and was won by a male-to-female transsexual called Dana. Not the sweet little thing from Ireland, the other Dana, who won it years before and who wasn't a male-to-female transsexual. No, no. From Israel, this one. Britain's Imaani was second. Whatever happened to Imaani? Where is she now? I would not care to speculate and, if I did, I'd probably get it wrong.

Looking back over the records of 1998 it occurs to me that, although we must have been quite excited about 1998 at the time, I mean as we lived through it, oohing and aahing at every new occurrence, in retrospect it is scarcely worth a row of beans, simply a succession of passing events. The truth is that Diana, Princess of Wales, did not miss very much, apart from her own life, of course. What was I myself doing in 1998? I have no specific memory of the year. It must have passed – like everything else.

I said there was a third question. There usually is. Oh, yes, I've remembered. How the hell could I have got that wrong? Tony Blair had only just been elected Prime Minister. We all loved him in those early days. He was so young and tall and, well, a little bit charismatic. We took his dramatic pauses seriously then. He had a gift for the gab. Then, shockingly, Diana died. Tony, with the help of Alastair Campbell, was the master of the moment, conjuring up the greatest soundbite in modern history, 'the People's Princess', out of the loose emotion lying around that Sunday morning. Later in the week, when the Queen was all over the place, or rather not all over the place but clinging on at Balmoral, and the public mood turned nasty, Tony sorted that too. Unlike David a year later, Tony done good. It made his premiership.

How could I have got it wrong? I was not in Scotland when I gave the Scottish Parliament two cheers and prolonged the life of Diana, Princess of Wales. I was in a place called England, chairing a three-day conference, and maybe not thinking all that straight about dates and stuff, concerned as I was about the strange, closed world of the conference. The wind howled and the rain pattered down and there I sat, in front of a laptop early one morning, giving Diana another two precious years. How generous of me.

I believe, however, that this is only the second worst inaccuracy of the year so far. A venerable columnist on *The Spectator* – I shall not name him because this man has said kind things about me in print more than once and you should never shop people who have been kind to you – claimed in January that the world was commemorating the 200th anniversary of the death of Robert Burns. That means, does it not (you'll correct me if I've got this wrong too) that Robert died in 1809, so his life was prolonged by 13 years whereas I prolonged Diana, Princess of Wales's, by only two. I haven't bothered checking what, if anything, Robert missed in those 13 years, quite a lot of interest in France no doubt, but at least he was spared the Eurovision Song Contest and the World Cup.

Yet, as the perpetrator of the second worst inaccuracy of the year so far, I am worried – obviously. I find myself in the embarrassing position of one of those MPs who, having claimed quite properly for only £230,363 in second home allowances, inadvertently applied to the fees office for the cost of a Kit-Kat. How could they have got it so wrong? How could I? I may have to stick to duff predictions in future.

# Rumours of her death

Kenneth Roy

2011

I should make it clear (for the avoidance of doubt, as our learned friends insist on adding) that, when it was announced here on Monday that Miss Shirley Temple, the film actress, was no longer a threat to the existence of small magazines because she had been dead for some time, readers were not necessarily expected to accept this statement as literally true. It was intended to have the quality of biblical metaphor.

Or, to put this another way: she's no' deid yet.

Within half an hour of her demise being casually mentioned in parenthesis, a vigilant reader emailed with the shocking intelligence that, not only is the lady still alive at the age of 83, she sits on the boards of such charming companies as the Walt Disney Corporation and the Bank of America.

Good heavens, she is very much in a position to threaten the existence of small magazines should it come up her still functioning back to do so. The disturbing possibility arises that, on top of our other worries, she might be able to sue us on the grounds that the accusation that she is dead is damaging to her reputation for being – well – alive.

In such a potentially litigious week, this would be too much. If a writ arrived from California, possibly off the Cargolux flight due to arrive outside this window later today, we would probably just lie down in Liberator House and die ourselves.

Alternatively, we could attempt to mount a defence. We could say – it would have the small merit of truth – that when news of Miss Temple's current robust state of health hit us, the deputy editor gasped audibly. She then swiftly removed the offending reference to Miss Temple's demise and a more accurate version of Monday's editorial was substituted.

But would this do any good? It could be argued that significant damage had already been done. Readers of the *Scottish Review* in many parts of the world, across several time zones, had come to terms (as people do) with the sad realisation that they had somehow failed to notice that Shirley Temple had popped her clogs yonks ago; the truth being that she is alive and well and running the Bank of America, a source of great comfort to investors everywhere.

The next pressing question: what is my excuse? I might well plead (m'Lud) that I was distracted by the soft purring of the Scottish literary community and so hypnotised by its use of big words that I quite forgot which film actresses were still alive and which had passed to that Universal studio in the sky.

Or I could fess up and acknowledge that, since Shirley Temple had raised her action against the magazine *Night and Day* as long ago as 1936, I lazily assumed that, 75 years later, she would be 'no longer with us'. What I failed to remember – it was my fatal mistake

– was that Miss Temple came to the suing business earlier than most. She was only eight years old at the time, which surely makes her the youngest libel claimant in the history of motion pictures. It might even qualify for a retrospective Oscar as Most Promising Litigant.

I do not propose to repeat here what Graham Greene, the reviewer of the film *Wee Willie Winkie*, in which the child star played a leading role, said about Miss Temple. Many years later, Greene's notice appeared in an anthology but with a health warning attached: 'In reprinting this article, the editor and publishers wish to make it clear that they are doing so only for reasons of historical interest and without any intention of further maligning the good name of Mrs Shirley Temple Black'. I am unaware of what Mrs Black did next, if anything, but I ain't taking the risk.

The raising of the action had a terrible effect on the magazine. Overnight it became more timid. That is what the threat of libel often does.

A semi-jocular example of the new caution was when one of the staff sent a proof to the writer Stevie Smith and drew her 'attention to the fact that we have discovered that there is a Mr Montague Cohen living in Golders Green. This unfortunate coincidence would make it highly dangerous to publish the poem as it stands'. To which Stevie Smith replied: 'I'm sorry about Mr Montague Cohen and agree, from a quick glance at the telephone directory, that what you say is probably an understatement. I have therefore altered the suburb to Bottle Green'.

*Night and Day* had already folded when the case was finally settled in 1938. Shirley Temple and Twentieth Century Fox were awarded damages of £3,500.

That sounds like a helluva lot for 1938. Would it be worth in today's money more or less than the golden hiya of half a million for the new chief executive of the *Galloway Gazette*, Ashley Highfield? I am grateful, incidentally, to the reader who suggested that *Ashley Highfield* should be the title of a new novel by Jane Austen, sitting alongside the lately discovered masterpiece of Charles Dickens, *Adam Werrity*.

Where was I? Oh, yes. I offer an unreserved apology to the unlame, great Shirley Temple for my dubious innuendo that she had turned up her toes. Whether the *Scottish Review* will ever recover from the blows of this week, or whether it will fade into a *People's Friend* cosiness, including a weekly knitting pattern and improving stories of love among the over-90s, only time will tell.

# Contributors

**Douglas Alexander** is a former Labour MP. He was Secretary of State for International Development from 2007 to 2010

**Jean Barr** is Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Glasgow

**Alex Bell** is a columnist and journalist. He was formerly head of policy and speechwriter to Alex Salmond

**David Black** is an author, playwright, and journalist who lives in Edinburgh

**Angus Peter Campbell** is a poet, novelist, journalist, broadcaster and actor. He was born in South Uist and lives in Skye

**Carol Craig** is an author and chief executive of the Centre for Confidence and Well-being

**David Donnison** was an academic and social scientist. He died in 2018

**Ron Ferguson** is a journalist and author. He is a former Leader of the Iona Community

**Tom Gallagher** is an author and Emeritus Professor of Politics at University of Bradford

**Katie Grant** is a Glasgow-based novelist. She is author of both books for children and for adults

**George Gunn** is a journalist, playwright and poet. He was born in Thurso, where he still lives

**Ian Hamilton** is a QC. In 1950, along with three others, he removed the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey and returned it to Scotland

**Gerry Hassan** is a writer and commentator

**Dominic Hinde** is a lecturer in Digital Media and Communications at Queen Margaret University

**Andrew Hook** is an Emeritus Professor of English Literature at University of Glasgow

**Walter Humes** is an Honorary Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Stirling University

**R D Kernohan** is a writer, broadcaster and Conservative thinker

**Martin Lunghi** is originally from South London. He gave up academic life in Edinburgh to move to the island of Coll in 1985

**Peter MacAulay** is a journalist based in the Highlands

**Fiona MacDonald** is a former deputy editor of the *Scottish Review* and currently runs the Young Programme charity

**Murdo Ewen Macdonald** (1914–2004) was a Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Practical Theology, University of Glasgow

**John McGrath** is a retired teacher of physics and maths who lives with his partner and daughter in Portobello

**Mike MacKenzie** is a former SNP MSP for Highlands and Islands region

**Alasdair McKillop** is a writer based in Edinburgh

**Donald S Murray** is from Ness on the island of Lewis. He is an author, poet, journalist, playwright and teacher

**Jordan Ogg** was a delegate on the first Young Scotland Programme in 2002. He is originally from Shetland and lives now in Edinburgh

**Bill Paterson** is a distinguished Scottish actor and commentator. He has appeared in many films and television programmes and lives in London

**Tessa Ransford** (1938 – 2015) was a poet, activist and the founding director of the Scottish Poetry Library

**George Robertson** (Lord Robertson of Port Ellen) is a Labour Party politician. He was Secretary General of Nato from 1999 to 2004

**Johan Roden** was a delegate on the first Young Scotland Programme in 2002

**Kenneth Roy** was a distinguished Scottish journalist and founding editor of the *Scottish Review*. He died in 2018

**John Scott** is a retired teacher

**Iain Smith** is originally from Lewis. He trained as a secondary school teacher, but spent most of his career, in a variety of countries, working in the training of teachers

**Nigel Smith** was a businessman and political campaigner

**James Shaw Grant** (1910 – 1999) was a writer and journalist from the Isle of Lewis. He was editor of the *Stornoway Gazette* from 1932 to 1963

**Brian Wilson** was a Labour MP from 1987 to 2005, and was a Minister of State from 1997 to 2003. He was founding editor of the *West Highland Free Press*

**Kenyon Wright** (1932 – 2017) was a priest of the Scottish Episcopal Church and political campaigner. He chaired the Scottish Constitutional Convention (which laid the groundwork for the creation of the devolved Scottish Parliament)