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WHATS NEW

Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for December 22nd, 2017

To see what we've added to the Electric Scotland site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/whatsnew.htm>

To see what we've added to the Electric Canadian site view our What's New page at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/whatsnew.htm>

For the latest news from Scotland see our ScotNews feed at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/>

Electric Scotland News

It's that time of year again when we generally over eat and have an enjoyable time.

I confess I also over eat at this time of year and as is my way I only eat Turkey at Christmas so it's a kind of treat for me.

On Christmas Day I usually have a full breakfast with bacon, sausage, eggs, hash browns and toast. Then later in the day I'll have my Christmas Dinner which is Turkey, Brussels Sprouts, wee sausages, roast potatoes and cranberry sauce. I'll have smoked salmon as a starter and plum pudding with brandy custard for dessert and a bottle of Matheus Rose to wash it all down.

I'll mostly repeat this on Boxing Day and that should be it and then back to my more normal diet. Last year Nola sent me over a Turkey so I ended up freezing it and had several Turkey meals during January.

As most of you will know Christmas is a relatively recent holiday in Scotland with it only being made an official holiday in the 1950's and so the New Year is really Scotland's most important holiday.

I'm always a touch concerned when Christmas comes around as I feel too many people are too generous with their Christmas presents and too many just don't have the money to spend on them. This means that credit card debt goes up and too many children get very little if anything and shows the divide between the have's and have not's.

Over the years I've posted up ways of making presents yourself at very small cost or indeed no cost. You might want to view the page at Krafts and Kooking for Kids Korner at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/kids/kkk/index.htm>

You can also make use of our Kids page to find all sorts of offline and online games as well as great stories which you can find at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/kids/index.htm> and mind that we do have tons of jigsaw puzzles for you to enjoy.

Our New Site Search Engine

We have now mostly completed the configuration of our new site search engine. You now have options like searching all our sites or just individual domains such as ElectricScotland.com, ElectricScotland.org, and ElectricCanadian.com but we've also given you the option to search the sites but exclude pdf files from the results. Part of the reason for this is that I have often added information about the pdf file on a page so by excluding the pdf files you'll find that text.

The other benefit of this new engine is that you will find all the results whereas with Google you'd only be offered the first 10 pages of links so a maximum of 100 links whereas on this site search you'll find all of them even if there are 600 or more.

I have arranged to do a re-index each Thursday so by the Friday you should have a complete update.

See our new site search at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/search.htm>

Scottish News from this weeks newspapers

Note that this is a selection and more can be read in our ScotNews feed on our index page where we list news from the past 1-2 weeks. I am partly doing this to build an archive of modern news from and about Scotland as all the newsletters are archived and also indexed on Google and other search engines. I might also add that in newspapers such as the Guardian, Scotsman, Courier, etc. you will find many comments which can be just as interesting as the news story itself and of course you can also add your own comments if you wish.

Woman's English too good for UK entry

A pregnant Indian woman has been refused entry to live in Scotland with her Fife husband because her language qualification for entry to the UK is too advanced.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-42358339>

60 million-year-old meteorite impact found on Skye

Geologists have found evidence of a 60 million-year-old meteorite impact on the Isle of Skye.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-42351959>

Whisky distillation resumes at Lindores Abbey

After 523-year break

Read more at:

<https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/local/fife/563686/whisky-distillation-resumes-lindores-abbey-523-year-break/>

In pictures: The Caledonian Forest

Cairngorms Connect is a new project in Scotland bringing together land-owning NGOs, public bodies and private landowners to work on nature conservation in one of the biggest schemes of its kind in the UK.

See these at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-42152572>

Hammond's Budget shows Scots Tory influence

By Murdo Fraser in Think Scotland

Read more at:

http://www.thinkscotland.org/todays-thinking/articles.html?read_full=13384

Quality of life survey rates Glasgow as miles worse

Glasgow was rated as having the worst quality of life in Scotland, according to a study published today.

Read more at:

<https://www.scotsman.com/business/quality-of-life-survey-rates-glasgow-as-miles-worse-1-4640813>

5 amazing archaeological finds made in Scotland in 2017

From a lost Dark Age kingdom to a big nosed Pictish warrior, its been a good year for those seeking to piece together information on Scotland's past.

Read more at:

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/5-amazing-archaeological-finds-made-in-scotland-in-2017-1-4640650>

Scotland's teacher crisis hits stunning new low

It is a disgrace that schools should be considering partial closures because of a lack of teaching staff

Read more at:

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/leader-comment-scotland-s-teacher-crisis-hits-stunning-new-low-1-4642587>

Designer on rejuvenating Scotland's kilt

On her design she said: The kilt shape is still made in the same traditional way, however, the front of the kilt is cut on the bias, on a diagonal angle.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-42430345>

Putting 2017 in perspective

ANOTHER YEAR has nearly finished. For the EU, the combined tensions of Brexit, Catalanian nationalism and a much-weakened Chancellor Merkel seem to be doing little to disrupt normal life.

Read more at:

http://www.thinkscotland.org/thinkbusiness/articles.html?read_full=13407

Baby boxes: a political case study

There's new financial information available for this policy which gives some insight into how the Scottish Government works, especially the power of political imperatives, and attitudes within government towards the Parliament.

Read more at:

<http://sceptical.scot/2017/12/baby-boxes-political-case-study/>

Social mobility and poverty in Scotland

At the beginning of December 2017, Alan Milburn's Commission on Social Mobility and Child Poverty resigned en masse in despair. Since Brexit, progress on tackling one of the biggest challenges of our time has ground to a halt.

Read more at:

<http://sceptical.scot/2017/12/social-mobility-poverty-scotland/>

Electric Canadian

Canada's Defence Policy 2017

Now Taking Off by Matthew Gaasenbeek III, Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel (past) which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/forces/cdp2017.pdf>

The Cree

Added a 1974 documentary of the Cree and a couple of other videos about this First Nations tribe at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/first/cree/index.htm>

Canadian History Readings

Edited and Published by George U. Hay (1900)

The history of Canada is full of incidents of romantic interest, of the details of personal bravery and heroic self-sacrifice, of the struggles of individuals to found for themselves homes amid the wilderness, and to obtain that measure of self-government which helps to establish character and independence. The records of these events, so stimulating and full of interest to the youthful imagination, have not been available to the extent that one might wish. The ordinary school text-book of Canadian history is shorn of much of that interest so attractive to the young. It is crowded with details of facts, that have to be condensed in order to provide a book of a certain number of pages of an unbroken uniformity. There are many books which present with more fullness the events of the story of Canada, but they do not come within the reach of the children in our schools. To make up for this want, a series of Leaflets will be published by the EDUCATIONAL REVIEW, which will present the leading events and persons in our history in such a graphic way as to secure interest and at the same time give instruction. It is hoped that the effort to provide, at a low price, supplementary reading in Canadian history for schools will meet with such encouragement at the outset that a series of Leaflets, covering all periods of our history, will be the result. Many leading writers of Canada have promised assistance, and the names of those who are contributing to the first number should be a guarantee of what may be expected in the future. The aim, first of all, will be to make history instructive. There is no need to sugar-coat such history as ours by trying to make it fascinating as a story. That is only an attempt to deceive children. Let them be presented with history as history. Let the events tell their own story. Let children, when possible, be brought into contact with original documents, with the historians of the past, and there will soon be a change from the passive hearer of a dull history recitation to the earnest, diligent enquirer after further light.

This Series will make it possible for schools with limited library privileges to do history work in the spirit and method of our best equipped institutions, by introducing them to the original sources of our history, and by awakening a spirit of thoughtful investigation, not only in this study, but in literature and science as well. The passages from original authorities will be so selected as to excite the interest and pique the curiosity of intelligent boys and girls, and stimulate them to further research in the sources of our surpassingly rich collection of historical material. Thus, an enthusiasm will be aroused, a love for Canada, for its history, for its institutions, and a keen sympathy with the perils and sufferings of those who have helped to make it.

History so studied will be a happy mean between the delightful amusement of a "fascinating story" and the dry husks of details to be memorized from text-books. If history has not suffered from the former, it has certainly suffered from the latter, in consisting too often of a dreary mass of facts, dates and events with no more coherence than beads upon a string. Another point that the Series has in view, aside from the value of the historical matter contained in it, is the advantage to students of coming in contact with the style of some of our best Canadian writers, and of historians like Champlain, Parkman and others, thus suggesting to them the true way of writing, as well as studying the events of history.

It is upon these lines, then, that the present Series is to be issued, not to take the place of any text-book, but for subsidiary use in our schools, and to aid teachers and students who have limited access to books and documents relating to the history of Canada.

G. U. HAY.

You can read this book at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/CanadianHistoryReadings.pdf>

Here I Stand - The Chris Hadfield Story

Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield took command of the International Space Station (ISS) on March 13. Watch TVCogeco's exclusive documentary "Here I Stand - The Chris Hadfield Story" about how a Sarnia farm boy grew up to become a Canadian hero - who knew being weightless would come with such heavy responsibility?

You can get a link to this video at the foot of his page at:

http://www.electriccanadian.com/makers/chris_hadfield.htm

We are the best

Never knew just how good we are in the Food and Drink industry. This is a collection of some 49 short videos which will amaze you and make you proud to be a Canadian. You can watch these at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moVrHjHi-5A&list=PLJyG4btas2dmlsH2tpouOuyVUgJ8R2omE>

150th Anniversary Videos.

Added new videos to our Index page to celebrate our 150th year as a country. You can watch these at

<http://www.electriccanadian.com>

A Short Account of the Emigration from the Highlands of Scotland

To North America: and the Establishment of the Catholic Diocese of Upper Canada with an Appendix (1839)

You can read this at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/pioneering/shortaccountofemigration.pdf>

Wheat Growing in Canada

Also The United States and Argentina by W.P. Rutter (1911) which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/agriculture/wheat.pdf>

The Mission of the Scot in Canada

By Alexander Fraser (1903)

You can read this at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/Scotland/missionofscotincanada.pdf>

First Nations, Metis and Inuit Education Policy Framework

By Alberta Learning, Edmonton (2002)

You can read this at: <http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/first/metiseducation.pdf>

Industrial Canada

Added volume 12 which you can read at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/transport/industrial/index.htm>

Conrad Black

I've always had a lot of time for Conrad Black and so as he writes from Canada on a number of issues of interest from around the world I'm intending to include links to his writings for you to view.

Media's Unhinged Attacks on Trump Recall the Treatment of Nixon

<http://www.conradblack.com/1356/media-unhinged-attacks-on-trump-recall>

Trump's Success a Wake-up Call for Trudeau

<http://www.conradblack.com/1357/trump-success-a-wake-up-call-for-trudeau>

Trump's Whirlwind Year

<http://www.conradblack.com/1358/trump-whirlwind-year>

Electric Scotland

Sir Fitzroy MacLean

An obituary which you can read at: http://www.electricscotland.com/webclans/m/maclean_fitzroy.html

Clan MacLean

Noting that a YouTube video about the clan MacLean no longer worked I replaced it and added another about Duart Castle with a link to another history video.

You can view this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/webclans/m/maclean2.html>

George Jamesone

The Scottish Vandyck by John Bulloch (1885)

You can read about him at: http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/jamesone_george.htm

A Companion and Useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland

To the Lakes of Westmorland, Cumberland and Lancashire; and the Curiosities in the District of Craven in the West Riding of Yorkshire to which is added, a more particular Description of Scotland, especially that part of it called The Highlands by The Hon. Mrs Murray of Kensington (1799)

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/travel/tours/BeautiesofScotland.pdf>

The Men of the Moss-Hags

Being a History of Adventure taken from the Papers of William Gordon of Earlstoun in Galloway and old over again by S. R. Crockett (1895)

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/raiderland/MenofMossHags.pdf>

A Critical Examination of Dr. MacCulloch's Work on the Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland

By James Browne (1825)

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/books/pdf/DrMacCulloch.pdf>

Tour through some of the Islands of Orkney and Shetland

With a view chiefly to objects of natural history, but including also occasional remarks on the state of the Inhabitants, their Husbandry and Fisheries by Patrick Neill, A.M. With an Appendix containing observations, political and Economic on the Shetland Islands; a Sketch of their mineralogy, &c. (1806)

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/orkney/tourthroughsome.pdf>

The Story

A few square feet of Scotland

A Story by Kenneth Steven

It was bordered on two sides by high walls, and on the third by tall trees and the grounds of a cathedral. Beyond the open side was the river.

When I moved into the tiny house at the end of the street it was late autumn. There was almost no light in my rooms, that was shut out by the high walls and the trees – what little of it there was to begin with. The days were wild with wind; rain blattered against the windows and the trees roared like the masts of ships. At night it was eerie; I felt far out at sea in some great galleon.

Then one day when I was outside in that tiny piece of ground that was mine I saw the moment the rain turned to snow. I had never thought of it before and I saw it now, and a great silence fell as those ballerinas of snowflakes twirled from the grey sky.

All I possessed were some 10 square feet of ground, the first I had owned in all my life. There was nothing special about them. A lawn with a narrow flower bed along one edge. I stood at the back door and watched as the grass flickered and turned grey with the first snow of winter. In the middle of my lawn were two stout metal poles, carrying a curve of washing line. The spring would be a new beginning. I had no idea what I would do, but I knew I wanted to do something.

I was on the flight path for the geese returning from Iceland. The great trails of skeins passed right over my tiny garden, and I felt proud, as though they had chosen that path themselves. I went out every morning now with bread for the birds. There wasn't so much as a bird table, but I cut a plank of wood into a simple oblong and set it down on the lawn, above the first thumb-deep settling of snow. Now my few square feet of ground was graced by the flights of blackbirds and chaffinches. I watched them from the little square of my kitchen window. Often they landed first on the washing line, waited, and swung there until the plank of wood had been left free once more. There was almost always a robin that waited patiently, watching me from a far post until I had gone inside. Then he was down in a moment, the game won, tapping away.

But new snow kept falling. It came and came out of grey skies until the silence in the morning seemed bigger than silence itself. It felt like long ago; the main road on the other side of the river had closed and there was no traffic. The world felt smaller and it filled me with a strange gladness that somehow we had gone backwards, into an older time. When I met my neighbours we spoke more; we exchanged news of how things were in the south of England, of how long the snow might stay, of when it had happened last. I went inside and built a fire in the grate; all evening I sat in the shadows of the living room, my eyes dreaming in the flames.

And every morning there was the same ritual with the robin. Until one particular day when, without thinking, I did something differently.

For days the snow had lain
Deep as a boot. Mouths of ice
Hung from roofs and windows,
The river slid by like a wolf.

At noon I went out with crumbs
Cupped in one hand. As I crouched,
A robin fluttered from nowhere,
Grasped the landfall of my palm.

A rowan eye inspected me
Side on. The blood-red throat
Swelled and sank, breathing quickly,
Till quickly, the beak stabbed fast.

The robin finished, turned,
Let out one jewel of sound
Then ruffled up into the sky –
A skate on the frosty air.

Only once it happened, as though all the conditions had been met that one morning and never again. Then one day I woke to a singing: droplets from roofs and trees and drainpipes, the river riding downstream with branches and whole trunks of trees – a mud-coloured Zambezi. Like that it was spring, and a muffled sun behind the lifting skies; birdsong and the softness of breeze. When the snow had gone and my little patch of lawn was restored, I looked at it and thought. I wanted it to be alive and it was useless.

The first thing I did was to have the metal posts that carried the washing line removed. A man came with a kind of saw and hot sparks flew from the poles as he cut them; they screamed before falling at last. He worked away then at their roots and by evening all trace of them had gone; the two piles of earth that remained like molehills. I squatted beside them and gently put my hand through the soil. Glass and nails and ancient edges of metal. My patch of ground was made of builders' rubble: I had never seen anything like it before. Perhaps keeping it as a lawn was the only thing for it, yet that felt like an acceptance of defeat – worse than nothing.

Perhaps it came to me through the night, this vision of water. The boy in me rejoiced: the boy that had run to play Pooh Sticks at bridges, who had exulted at the building of dams and the finding of fish. I had never made a pond in my life, nor had I known one in any of my childhood gardens – yet now the thought of it hummed through me like a strange electricity.

But before I did anything I bought gloves, the toughest and the thickest I could find, for I knew now what was in that soil. Then I got out the old spade from the little shed where I stored my wood. I brought it out with trembling hands, all ready to begin doing something I knew almost nothing about. Perhaps my very naivety excited me the more: there was no handbook in front of me with detailed plans. This was a dream; it lay in the depths of my head, and though I had no real knowledge of how it would be fulfilled I was determined it would be just the same.

The cold still held the ground like an iron fist. My spade dented the lawn and sent a judder through fingers and wrists and arms. I had to wait, until at last the year opened to the sun once more, until that dark piece of ground under the shadow of the walls and the trees had been lit at last.

Even when finally the spade did break easily into the turf and all that lay beneath, it was painfully slow work. I was the wrong man for the job. I was born to books and the digging of words; my parents had chased me out into the garden over the years where I pretended to do half an hour of weeding or snipped rather forlornly at privet hedges. I thought gardening a penance. Yet now, at last, I had a purpose. I had ground that was my own and I had the dream of creating something for myself. I was a kind of Adam, and even though my Eden was the oddest knuckle-end of forgotten ground, it was mine. That gave me the strength my arms didn't possess, and I dug furiously, until half the lawn and more was gone.

I remember now that it took far longer than I ever imagined. Digging out a hole in the garden, something that wasn't more than three feet deep – it sounded easily and speedily enough done. I crawled in the back door under cover of darkness over several evenings as though my life was over. Despite the gloves my hands had been scratched by edges of glass and metal. Perhaps then there was part of me that wondered what on earth I thought I was doing, yet the dream wasn't about to be quashed. I had started and I would finish.

The plastic lining stretched beyond the edges of the hole on every side. I filled it with water and slowly, inexorably, the level rose and the lining held. The edges were weighed down with boulders; from the very first evening I set about making the pond real. I wanted to forget it was lined with plastic, that the water inside was from a tap and full of half a hundred chemicals. I planted things at the edges with fronds and flowers, things that would hide the rims and hang over the water. I brought back great mats of moss from the riverside and pinned them with tiny twigs around the sides; I made sure they were kept moist until they took hold. Then, finally, I could do little more than wait.

At the beginning of the summer I got married and everything else was forgotten; life was composed of the measuring of clothes, the arranging of flowers and bookings, the planning of a honeymoon. I hadn't been nervous before and suddenly I was; I looked at my little house at the end of the street in a new way and I wondered what everything would be like. The geese flew back over the house from Iceland and I remembered what the travellers said – that when you see them above you it means you are going on a journey. I thought about that and knew it was true.

When finally we came back to the house summer was all but over. I had been away for weeks. I looked out of the kitchen window and saw the pond: the blue eye of water held like a stone in a brooch. I went out the back door and stood, feeling the thud of my heart in my chest. It had happened; it had become real. The moss and the plants had taken, had grown; every part of the plastic was buried. In the water beetles zigzagged from one side to the other.

My heart thrilled because I had given something back. I thought how we take from nature, rape and pillage the wild places again and again, never learning from the sins of our fathers. Yet it is possible to give back too, to take the desert and allow it to bloom once more. All that is necessary is to set something in motion, to push out the boat and then watch it find its own course. It was but a tiny thing I had done, yet it felt a metaphor, a symbol.

My wife had brought with her from Germany a water lily, and now it found a place in the pond. We set it down carefully on a ledge and waited. And the lily's story is as true as the pond's and the garden's itself. Each of them small miracles, little beginnings. They changed us too, for ever.

Last year I dug the pond –
Heaved up roots, old wire and pots,
Smoothed the deep ground, lined it,
Let water flood its hold like liquid glass.
Your family gave you the lily for Christmas;
All winter it slept in the water,
Through the fierce blue days of January,
When ice grew thick as a doorstep there
And it seemed it would be winter for eternity.
But the year flowed slowly back in time,
Melted into the first blossom of spring.
We had forgotten all about the lily until,
One day it opened its heart in the middle of the sun
Like a princess, and we marvelled, laughed, came close
In wonderment as if some baby star
Had crashed into our grass and stayed alight.

For four whole days we were like our own children
And the lily was the centre of the world.

And that's it for this week and I hope you all have a Very Merry Christmas.

Alastair