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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for September 6th, 2019

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

<https://electricscotland.com/scotnews.htm>

Electric Scotland News

Totally amazed at how many of our MP's are so stupid that they'd want the UK to be a rule taker in the EU without us even being able to veto anything. So stupid it's not funny. I hope we get an election and get rid of them for good. Too be frank... Either you have faith in your country or you don't and it seems the remainers simply don't have faith in the British people or British business.

You can view a video introduction to this newsletter at:

<https://youtu.be/Zl6f-8CzgEE>

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.

Costs soar at hotel of mum and dad

About a quarter of young adults in the UK aged 20-34 live at home, a figure which, according to the Office for National Statistics, has been growing steadily for 15 years.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-49508854>

Scotland's genetic landscape reflects Dark Age populations

The findings mean people still live in the same areas as their direct ancestors.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-49563887>

Grave with six skulls could be clan feud burial site

Historically, the area of Easter Ross was the scene of a feud between the clans Ross and Mackay.

Read more at:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-49581010>

Nicola Sturgeon accused of running out of ideas and time by MSPs

In a debate on the PfG in Holyrood today, MSPs from across the political spectrum accused the government of lacking in ambition and audacity and of a failure to tackle an index of incompetence in domestic policies.

Read more at:

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/nicola-sturgeon-accused-of-running-out-of-ideas-and-time-by-msps-1-4997678>

Beware the threat to our defence autonomy coming from the EU

The consequences for the UK if the defence and security sections of the current exit arrangements laid down in Theresa May's Withdrawal Agreement and the Political Declaration are approved.

Read more at:

<https://brexitcentral.com/beware-the-threat-to-our-defence-autonomy-coming-from-the-eu-and-not-just-in-the-draft-brexit-deal/>

You can forget having lunch in an independent Scotland

Scotland has been subsidised since 1983 by the UK and by April 2020 will have been 'subsidised' since 1980

Read more at:

http://www.thinkscotland.org/todays-thinking/articles.html?read_full=13996

Most valuable collection of whisky ever to be sold at auction could go for up to £4m

A spirits collection that's being described as the Holy Grail of Whisky which is estimated to be worth up to £4m is set to go up for auction in London this month

Read more at:

<https://foodanddrink.scotsman.com/drink/most-valuable-collection-of-whisky-ever-to-be-sold-at-auction-could-go-for-up-to-4m/>

Electric Canadian

The Soos of Today

American and Canadian. The Key to the Great Lakes, a Nation's Commerce Passes by its Doors—The Greatest Locks in the World Illustrated and Described—The Establishment of Great Industries and the Development of the rich Algoma Country is Building up Great Cities where once the Red Man held Undisputed Sway—The Romance and Legend of the Land of Hiawatha. (pdf)

You can read this at: <https://www.electriccanadian.com/history/ontario/soos.pdf>

A Summary, Historical and Political of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North America

By William Douglass, M.D. in two volumes (1760)

This can be read at: <https://www.electriccanadian.com/history/summary.htm>

Vulcan

A town in the Canadian Prairies of southern Alberta.

You can read about this town at: <https://www.electriccanadian.com/history/alberta/vulcan.htm>

Electric Scotland

Autobiography of Thomas Guthrie, D. D.

And Memoir by his sons, Rev. David K. Guthrie and Charles J. Guthrie, M.A. in two volumes (1874/5)

You can read this at: <https://electricscotland.com/bible/guthrie.htm>

The Home Preacher

Got up the service for Week 4 which is by Dr. Raleigh and can be read at:

<https://electricscotland.com/bible/homepreacher/week04.htm>

All I've Ever Known

Margaret Gallagher's Story - My Thatched Cottage without modern amenities. Documentary I produced for the BBC in 1992 now with over 1 million views.

This can be viewed at:

<http://www.electricscotland.org/showthread.php/5456-All-I-ve-Ever-Known-Margaret-Gallagher-s-Story-My-Thatched-Cottage-without-modern-amenities>

Homilies from Nola Crewe

The Creation story given on 1st September 2019 which can be viewed at:

<https://electricscotland.com/bible/nola/190901.htm>

Scotland's Work and Worth

An Epitome of Scotland's Story from Early Times to the Twentieth Century, with a Survey of the Contributions of Scotsmen in Peace and in War to the Growth of the British Empire and the Progress of the World by Charles W. Thomson in two volumes (1909)

You can read this at: <https://electricScotland.com/history/workworth.htm>

Clan Lachlan Association of Canada

Added their Fall 2019 newsletter which you can read at:

<https://electricScotland.com/familytree/newsletters/lachlan/index.htm>

Scottish Society of Indianapolis

Got in their August 2019 newsletter which can be read at:

<https://electricScotland.com/familytree/newsletters/indianapolis/august2019.pdf>

The Story

This week I'm taking this story from the Canadian History magazine. Canada's History asked several prominent historians and authors to weigh Macdonald's achievements against his failures and to explore the challenges that surround commemoration in general. Their essays offer unique and important perspectives. They don't all agree. But together their insights help us to develop a deeper understanding of the complex issues at hand.

We encourage you to read these essays and we hope that they will spark new conversations about the past. Learn more at: <https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/prime-ministers/the-trials-of-john-a>

We Need To Widen Our Views

Understanding Canadian History requires both context and a sense of proportion.

I'm glad we are having this debate. I'm happy that Canadians are being jolted out of historical amnesia. As we argue about what versions of the past we want to tell, we are being forced to recognize that today has been shaped by yesterday.

But I'm not happy that these discussions are drenched in moral judgments about our forebears, without any acknowledgement that our predecessors lived in a world radically different from ours — different in ideologies, challenges, constraints, and goals. Individuals are being ripped out of context, and their characters trashed, with no attempt to understand the past on its own terms.

I'm not advocating that every single historical figure should be revered as legendary. But surely we can have a sense of proportion about whose achievements still merit respect and whose legacy is too toxic to swallow.

Let's start with the recent shredding of Sir John A. Macdonald's reputation. There are proposals that his name should be removed from Ontario public schools. The Canadian Historical Association's prestigious Sir John A. Macdonald Prize has been rebranded as the CHA's Best Scholarly Book in Canadian History prize. Last summer, one statue of Macdonald was removed from outside Victoria's city hall while two more — one in Winnipeg, a second in Montreal — were defaced.

Macdonald's offence was his role in the residential school system — a system that had been established before he became prime minister, that peaked about forty years after his death, and that continued under eighteen more prime ministers before the last school finally closed in 1996.

As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reported, the system was a catastrophe for Indigenous peoples in Canada: Their children were horrifically abused, their cultures destroyed, their communities shattered.

Yet the issue, I would argue, is not who to blame but, rather, how did this happen? How can we understand the past, where people acted in ways that today we consider shocking? Instead of rushing to judgment in a triumphant display of wokeness, what about widening the perspective to see what was actually going on back then?

As I watched television clips from Victoria of Macdonald's statue being carted away, I noticed a ridiculous irony. Fixed to the wall on the other side of the doors was the city's coat of arms. It is laden with colonial symbols: Two blond angels represent colonization and civilization, with an all-seeing eye, the dove of peace, and a crusader helmet to represent Christianity.

As if the name of British Columbia's capital and the Union Jack embedded in the provincial flag weren't enough, this coat of arms hints that the British Empire lives on. The coat of arms reflects the beliefs with which Macdonald was raised — Britain was the motherland, Christian evangelism was used to justify oppression, and now-discredited theories of racial hierarchies held sway.

Sir John A. was a man of his time, but he was also a powerful leader. He moulded a handful of shabby British colonies into a new country and built a coast-to-coast railway to bind it together. He propelled the new Dominion towards autonomy. Without Macdonald, would there even have been a Canada?

The Fathers of Confederation developed a radical new idea on which to establish this country — a compromise between English-speaking and French-speaking settlers. In keeping with attitudes of the time, they failed to include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in this bargain, and Canadians as well as Indigenous communities have been the poorer for that omission ever since.

Yet the idea of a nation based on political rather than ethnic links would, in the future, allow Canada to become the beacon of pluralism that our current prime minister loves to celebrate.

I can't help wondering why our first prime minister had to be banished from Victoria's city hall while the province continues to embrace peachy-cheeked angels and crusader armour.

The crucial role that the resourceful, risk-taking, pragmatic Macdonald played in shaping this country cannot be expunged from our history as briskly as his statue. Meanwhile, in a province with some of the largest non-settler, outdated symbols are still allowed to tell a story of white supremacy and racial bigotry.

Sir John A. Macdonald is far from the only national leader under attack these days. Statues and busts in public places explicitly celebrate their subjects. The debate about which historical figures should be toppled from their plinths is happening in several countries that are reframing their national narratives.

Sometimes the purges are easy to justify. Depictions of brutal dictators rarely survive the tyrants' deaths; you won't find monuments to Adolf Hitler anywhere in Germany, and Antonio de Oliveira Salazar is invisible in Portugal. There are apparently remote Russian fields crammed with banished statues of Stalin. (However, on a recent trip to St. Petersburg, I noticed a monumental statue of Lenin, who, despite unleashing violence and purges, has escaped obliteration because he overthrew Tsarist oppression.)

Equally easy to understand are the re-evaluations of the contributions made by some men who were eulogized for decades after their deaths, such as Cecil Rhodes in Britain and some leaders in the southern United States.

The most compelling argument to remove their statues is that the subjects' whole careers were dedicated to upholding white supremacy, as imperialists (in the case of Rhodes) or defenders of the institution of slavery (in the case of Confederate heroes).

I am happy to see their lumps of masonry sent into exile. It is also instructive to see how, in some instances, history spoke to the present loudly and clearly. In Charlottesville, Virginia, the removal of an equestrian monument to Confederate leader and Civil War hero Robert E. Lee sparked an ugly outburst from alt-right protesters shouting racist slogans.

But other, more surprising figures have been caught up in these debates. Mohandas K. Gandhi seems an unlikely symbol of racial arrogance — Nelson Mandela once described the Indian leader as “the best hope for future race relations.”

Yet in 2016 the University of Ghana removed a statue of Gandhi from its campus after an online campaign (#Gandhimustfall) charged him with racism against black Africans. His extraordinary achievement in campaigning for the British departure from India with non-violent protest was not enough to save him.

At this point, I ask myself, can anybody survive scrutiny? Which historical figure is completely free of flaws? Some of the most celebrated heroes of progressive causes, among them Canadian suffragist Nellie McClung and British author George Bernard Shaw, endorsed eugenics. How do we balance our admiration for some of our predecessors' ideas against our abhorrence of others among their beliefs?

I suggest that the only way is to widen the lens when reviewing historical figures. Don't banish Sir John A. Macdonald in an Orwellian attempt to clean up the past. Instead, present him in all his complexity, as both a nineteenth-century patriarch and, to quote the title of Richard Gwyn's biography, “the man who made us.”

Don't eliminate him from view. Instead, amplify the information provided on the plaques and inscriptions that accompany his monuments. Yes, Macdonald was implicated in the cruel treatment of Indigenous peoples, and it is important to recognize that. But that's only one aspect of a substantial legacy.

We need to be more tolerant of the moral failings of our predecessors — not as an act of charity to them but as an act of charity to ourselves. Our own unconscious assumptions and cultural habits are doubtless just as impregnated with biases as theirs were. The next generation is already berating mine for our wanton destruction of the environment, for our needless cruelty to factory-farmed animals, for our blind embrace of consumerism.

If we want the future to respect our moment in history, perhaps we should expand our knowledge of the past before we launch into spasms of outrage.

And that's it for this week and hope you all have a great weekend.

Alastair