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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for February 12th, 2016

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

Thursday 4 February 2016

The leader of the Liberal Democrats at Westminster, Tim Farron, has attracted criticism for his remarks on the 'unthinking monoculture' of SNP MPs. He is reported as commenting: 'I've never heard or witnessed a single one of them utter an independent thought'. The Lib Dem coalition with the Conservatives in the last UK parliament means that Farron's views have been briskly dismissed by SNP supporters. However, they might have done well to give more thought to what he was saying. Many commentators, some of them not ill-disposed towards the nationalists, have detected a growing authoritarian trend in the party, a disinclination to pay heed to those who ask challenging questions, an intolerance towards anyone who does not sign up fully to the official agenda.

One of the most visible signs of this can be seen at question time in the Holyrood parliament. I have lost count of the number of occasions when the first minister has responded dismissively to perfectly valid points about finance, health, education, local government, or law and order. Her technique is to ignore the question and say rather stridently: 'I will not take any lessons from Labour/ the Tories/ the Lib Dems on this matter', and make some reference to the past failings of these parties. She has usually been supported by an array of nodding puppets in the seats behind her.

Ms Sturgeon's slapping down of the opposition worked well for a while, particularly in respect of Labour, whose record in Scotland is an embarrassment. But the SNP has been in power for nearly 10 years. Despite the sustained efforts of its press office and assorted enforcers, it cannot continue to deny that there are real problems on a number of policy fronts, not all of which can be blamed on the Westminster government.

What we are witnessing is the consequence of a lengthy period of power combined with weak opposition unable to hold government ministers to account. The SNP is in danger of becoming a party of cheerleaders and sycophants, with a cabinet that is unwilling to look hard at the evidence and listen to critics. Any organisation which relies on a default position of denial loses the ability to learn from experience. The biggest losers in all of this, however, are ordinary citizens who suffer the effects of a complacent government which ignores reality and hopes that PR spin will see it through.

Religion

I have added various religious texts last week and this. I note that churches are losing members on a steady basis and that on the whole people are no longer wanting to talk about religion within their family or with colleagues and friends.

I believe that this will be a major area for research in the years ahead. Certainly religion in Scotland was a major part of life for Scots over many centuries. Almost every home had a copy of the Bible. In fact many children learned to read and write by using the Bible and they were encouraged to memorise many parts of it. I think this is a large part of why Scots were so well educated and as a result were thought to be the ideal pioneers for the new world.

I will hold my hand up and say I was brought up in the Church of Scotland and with my parents attended church and Sunday School in Scotland, Malta and Kuwait. It has now been many years since I went to church services but I am still a Christian and basically follow the teachings of the Bible. I was always in favour of keeping the Sabbath and growing up in Scotland most shops were shut apart from some small grocers. Pubs were closed on Sunday but you could get a drink in hotels if you were having a meal.

Today everything is open and Sunday is not the day it used to be in the old days. I do believe that Sunday should be a rest day but that is no longer the case today in Scotland or around the world.

Do we have a better life today as most reject Christianity? I think this is a question for researchers in the future and is why I've made our Religious sector so large so that they can dip into it to find out how things have changed.

The magazines and newsletters available this week and last are not intended for you to read in depth but more to scan through to see if there might be individual articles you might find of interest.

You can get to our Religion section at <http://www.electricscotland.com/bible/index.htm>

Now onto what the Scottish Press is saying this week...

Edinburgh tourism chief warns against tourism tax plans

Robin Worsnop, chair of the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group, has expressed fears over a proposed tourism tax.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/travel/edinburgh-tourism-chief-warns-against-tourism-tax-plans-1-4022676>

Fewer than a quarter of Scot schools offering bagpipe lessons to pupils

Concerns have been raised that bagpipes are more of a priority in the private sector.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/fewer-than-a-quarter-of-scot-schools-offering-bagpipe-lessons-to-pupils-1-4022681>

Scotland Stronger in Europe names Mona Siddiqui as chairwoman

Scotland Stronger in Europe, which is the Scottish arm of Britain Stronger in Europe, will formally launch later this week.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-35504830>

Continental makeover planned for Edinburgh's George Street

NEW spaces for festivals, events and pavement cafes will be created as one of Edinburgh's flagship thoroughfares gets a radical overhaul.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/edinburgh/continental-makeover-planned-for-edinburgh-s-george-street-1-4023162>

New £3.5bn Shetland gas plant opens

Gas has begun coming ashore from a new £3.5bn plant in the Shetland Islands.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-35524260>

Build your own WikiHouse home in Scotland in just three days

A BRITISH designer has developed a concept that will allow people to download plans to print and build their own bespoke earth-friendly house over a few days.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/build-your-own-wikihouse-home-in-scotland-in-just-three-days-1-4023181>

Scottish economy shows worrying signs of distress

The claim was made by economist John McLaren after official figures showed that Scottish GDP per head of population is now 1 per cent lower than that of the UK.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scottish-economy-shows-worrying-signs-of-distress-1-4027181>

Scots Fiscal Commission lacking independence

Even Kim Jong-un couldn't have managed the Scottish Parliament's finance committee's display better, writes Bill Jamieson

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/bill-jamieson-scots-fiscal-commission-lacking-independence-1-4027034>

Barnett Fair?

The key question here is: how do we interpret the Smith Commission's no detriment clause?

Read more at:

<http://chokkablog.blogspot.ca/2016/02/barnett-fair.html>

Trade flows north, a lot less south

Scots sold goods and services worth £10.4bn in the third quarter to the people of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The flow coming the other way was rather larger: £15.2bn.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-35551543>

Trident: the British question

The debate is not simply about submarines and missiles. It touches almost every anxiety about the identity of the United Kingdom. The decision may tell us what kind of country or countries we will become

Read more at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/11/trident-the-british-question>

Goal difference

Why are the UK's hopes for Europe not the same as other countries', asks Allan Little

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-95a417ab-0982-4512-b550-20d68fd53f87>

Electric Canadian

A Pioneer of Imperial Federation in Canada

By Sir Frederick Young, K.C.M.G. (1902)

In the chapter of this volume which is headed "Imperial Federation—What is it?" I have described what are my own ideas on this great subject.

It may and probably will be the last time I shall raise my voice publicly on behalf of this vital national question. My life has already been prolonged far beyond the Psalmist's memorable limit. My sands are inevitably almost run out. I leave to the fair, candid, and serious consideration of the most intelligent and thoughtful of my countrymen the patriotic solution and ultimate adoption of this supreme problem.

More than thirty years ago I was led by an irresistible inspiration to take up the cause. I made it the object of close study, and as a result devoted myself enthusiastically to its advocacy. Under the title of "Imperial Federation" I published a book in 1876, which I dedicated to my countrymen, at home and beyond the seas.

As I have travelled on in the journey of life since the days of those years long gone by, I have never swerved from giving an active support to a question, on the principles of which, through good and evil report, I felt so deeply. I still hold boldly aloft the banner of Imperial Federation, under which I have earnestly fought so long, from a profound conviction of its importance to Great and Greater Britain.

I leave to my countrymen, as my latest political legacy, a heartfelt appeal to them, in the fulness of time, to resolve to bring about its accomplishment from their being as firmly convinced of its paramount benefit and its absolute necessity as myself, if they desire, as much as I do, to foster and preserve the permanent union of the British Empire.

FREDERICK YOUNG.

5 QUEENSBERRY PLACE.

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

Margaret Murray Robertson

ROBERTSON, MARGARET MURRAY, school-teacher and novelist; baptized 22 April 1823 in Stuartfield, Scotland, daughter of the Reverend James Robertson, Congregational minister, and Elizabeth Murray; d. unmarried 14 Feb. 1897 in Montreal.

You can read about her at: http://www.electriccanadian.com/lifestyle/margaret_robertson.htm

Electric Scotland

Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland A.D. 1803

By Dora Wordsworth

An account by the poet's sister on their trip through Scotland in 1803. You can read this at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/articles/tour1803.htm>

Clan Stewart of Appin and Clan MacLaren

Got in some interesting information in our community at:

<http://www.electricscotland.org/showthread.php/3198-Clan-Stewart-of-Appin-and-Clan-MacLaren>

Scottish Congregational Magazine

Found 4 volumes of this magazine which you can read at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/bible/scm.htm>

Letters from James, Earl of Perth, Lord Chancellor of Scotland, &c.

To his Sister, The Countess of Erroll, and other Members of his Family, edited by William Jerdanm, M.R.S.L. (1845)

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/webclans/dtog/drummon.html>

Life and Letters of John Paterson Struther

Late Minister of Greenock Reformed Presbyterian Church edited and illustrated by A. L. Struthers, Third Edition (pdf)

You can read this at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/bible/struthers.pdf>

John Struthers

Added his two volume history of Scotland and his Poor Man's Sabbath.

STRUTHERS, JOHN.—"It is said that the solitary and meditative generation of cobblers have produced a larger list of murders and other domestic crimes than any other mechanical trade except the butchers; but the sons of Crispin have, to balance their account, a not less disproportionate catalogue of poets; and foremost among these stands the pious author of the '[Poor Man's Sabbath](#),' one of the very few that have had sense and fortitude to resist the innumerable temptations to which any measure of celebrity exposes persons of their class." This honourable attestation from the pen of the distinguished editor of the "Quarterly Review," in his Life of Sir Walter Scott, when speaking of John Struthers, entitles this lowly bard to not a little consideration.

You can read about him at:

http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/struthers_john.htm

Songs by John Henderson

John sent in 4 new songs, "Sam And Sue", "Saint Valentine", "Signs of Spring And Summer" and "Trad Jazz And Swing".

You can read these at the foot of the page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/poetry/doggerels.htm>

General History of the Murray Royal Institution for the Insane, Perth

From its establishment in 1827 to the end of the first Half-century of its existence in 1877 by Lauder Lindsay, M.D., F.R.S.E. (1878)

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

How We Lived Then

A sketch of Social and Domestic Life 1914-1918 by Mrs C. S. Peel, O.B.E.

You can read this book through the link at the foot of this page at:

<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/articles/livedthen.htm>

THE STORY

I thought this story might be of interest in part due to the growth of food banks.

The time when the government tried to feed everybody

Public canteens were set up to feed people during World War One - and they proved hugely popular. Could today's food banks learn from them, asks Adam Forrest.

A bowl of soup, a joint of meat and a portion of side vegetables cost 6d - just over £1 in today's money. Puddings, scones and cakes could be bought for as little as 1d (about 18p).

These self-service restaurants, run by local workers and partly funded by government grants, offered simple meals at subsidised prices.

In 1917, ministers in Lloyd George's government had agonised over the best way of combating hunger while Germany's U-boats disrupted Britain's food supply.

The government was keen to avoid the stigma of poverty associated with soup kitchen hand-outs, but also wanted to utilise the volunteer-run community kitchens springing up in working class communities to help deal with food shortages.

A popular fix was found - a network of public cafeteria known as "national kitchens".

The Ministry of Food instructed that the kitchens "must not resemble a soup kitchen for poorest section of society". They should feel like places "ordinary people in ordinary circumstances" could sit down together at long canteen tables for a cheap meal.

Now there are efforts to bring them back. Bryce Evans, a senior lecturer at Liverpool Hope University, has researched the WW1 kitchens and believes there are parallels with today's food banks.

"Some of the bigger kitchens were feeding up to 2,000 people a day, and the efficiency really helped cut down on waste," he says.

"Great efforts were made to make sure they were attractive places run along business lines and avoided the taint of charity. It encouraged middle-class professionals like clerks and office workers to come in and sit alongside working class families."

It was an egalitarian approach to meeting people's needs, which I think we can learn from today."

Bryce Evans, Liverpool Hope University

Evans's new research, funded by the Wellcome Trust, shows how the government's national kitchen programme grew out of grassroots community kitchens run by charities and trade unionists.

The Ministry of Food seized on their potential for efficiency. Wholesale purchasing and the collective preparation of food, they reasoned, would help cut out waste.

So local authorities were urged to open up public cafeterias wherever possible. If an outlet followed Ministry of Food guidelines, the local authority received a Whitehall grant covering half the costs.

In May 1917, Queen Mary opened the first government-backed national kitchen on Westminster Bridge Road in London. By the end of 1917, national kitchens were popping up in almost every British town and city.

A 1918 Scarborough Post story about a national kitchen in Hull emphasised the ambition of the typical urban outlet: "The place has the appearance of being a prosperous confectionery and cafe business. The business done is enormous."

The Ministry of Food handbook criticised the "appalling ignorance" of British people when it came to preparing food, advising that more vegetables should be introduced to the diet through national kitchen menus.

The handbook also advised that each kitchen "bow to prejudice" by offering meat dishes. Gravy was to be made the "British way", by using juices and fat from the meat. The ministry also recommended any kitchens in rural settings like village halls should have food which could be "taken into the field", like Cornish pasties.

At the height of their popularity in 1918, 363 national kitchens were doing business across the country. Wartime civil servants at the Ministry of Food eagerly discussed whether national kitchens might become a "permanent national institution".

Yet the bold experiment was not to last.

The restaurant trade was not happy at the threat to private enterprise. The introduction of full rationing toward the end of the war apportioned food to each individual, damping demand for communal eating. And after the war ended, local authorities were reluctant to help fund kitchens any longer.

Within six months of Armistice Day, 120 of the kitchens had closed.

Evans believes the national kitchen movement has been too easily dismissed as merely an emergency expansion of dingy soup kitchens.

"The national kitchens were a great example of government supporting and building upon good work going on at the grassroots," he reflects.

"They were also an admirable attempt to bring people together. It wasn't a service only for the very poorest - it was an egalitarian approach to meeting people's needs, which I think we can learn from today."

Inspired by the past, the historian has now set up his own project in Liverpool called Manna Community Kitchen. Manna volunteers visit housing associations and other community spaces in the city to create a pop-up lunchtime cafe.

Meals at Manna are made using surplus food. Soups and "scouses" (a local lamb or beef stew) are sold for 50p, and people from all walks of life are encouraged to take recipes home, or even help with the cooking.

Turning back to communal kitchens, it would be extremely difficult to avoid the stigma of it feeling like a service for the poor.

Evans thinks community kitchens like Manna might act as an alternative to food bank hand-outs, which are used by a rising number of people.

The Trussell Trust network has grown to 445 food banks, and the charity's most recent annual figures also show a 19% year-on-year increase in food bank use. Around 500,000 different people are thought to have received help over a 12-month period.

According to the charity, the most common reason for food bank use has been benefit payment delays and sanctions. But more than a fifth of food bank users - 22% - were referred because of low incomes, including people in low-paid, zero-hours or part-time work.

Most of the food banks run by the Trussell Trust charity only have the storage facilities to hand out non-perishable items like pasta, cereal and cans, though a small number do offer fresh fruit and vegetables too.

Evans hopes community cafes might inspire food banks to rethink how they currently operate.

"There are some wonderful people who give up their time to volunteer at food banks," he says. "But I think simply handing over plastic bags of tinned and dried goods is a very limited approach. It's a wasted opportunity to do more with the huge amount of fresh food being wasted."

"I think food banks need to evolve into places with kitchens for people to cook fresh food and social spaces for people to eat together. We can do better."

Yet not everyone agrees the seeds of a new communal dining movement lie in the home front hardship of the WW1.

"Turning back to communal kitchens, it would be extremely difficult to avoid the stigma of it feeling like a service for the poor," says Martin Caraher, professor of food and health policy at Centre for Food Policy at City University.

"If they build up quite organically from a community choosing to set it up, perhaps the stigma can be overcome. But if it feels anything remotely like charity or state provision, people will feel like they're going cap in hand."

Evans argues community kitchens could also help address the nation's poor diet. At a time of rising obesity rates, he thinks it would be useful to have local authorities helping subsidise cheap cafes which only have healthy food on the menu.

"I'd like to see supermarkets get involved too by donating fresh produce," he explains.

"Community kitchens, by providing cheap and healthy meals, could really help improve nutrition."

"I would love to see community kitchens blossom," adds the historian. "We have a history of egalitarian eating. Why couldn't we do it again?"

I added a link to the book "How we lived then" A sketch of Social and Domestic Life 1914-1918 by Mrs C. S. Peel, O.B.E. at <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/articles/livedthen.htm>

And that's it for this week and hope you all enjoy your weekend.

Alastair