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Electric Scotland's Weekly Newsletter for March 18th, 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

No progress on the move to SFU sad to say but now SFU are sending a USB hard drive to Steve which should arrive at his place on Friday. He should then let me know when he takes a new image of our server and gets it sent back to them. This all seems to be very easy to do but seems Steve is having some kind of brain meltdown sad to say.

Scottish Studies in Toronto

Please note the following events that I thought might be of interest to you. Details can be found on their website:

www.scottishstudies.com

March 22: The University of Guelph's Centre for Scottish Studies is pleased to announce its first installment of the 2016 Scottish Studies Roundtable series: "The Reformation of Time in Early Modern Scotland," presented by Dr. Daniel MacLeod, St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba. It will be held from 2pm to 3:30pm in MacKinnon Room 132.

April 1: Join us at the Oor Club when Jo Ann Munro Tuskin will give a talk entitled: "The United Empire Loyalists: Pioneers of Ontario."

April 5: "Why History Matters: An Evening with Margaret MacMillan" @ 6:30 pm – 9:30 pm, Bloor Street United Church, 300 Bloor St W., Toronto.

April 9: The Gaelic Society of Toronto and the University of Toronto Celtic Studies Program will be holding a day of Gaelic language and song for learners of Scottish Gaelic.

April 16: This year's Spring Colloquium will showcase current research on Scottish history underway in the Guelph Centre for Scottish Studies. Saturday, April 16th, Knox College, University of Toronto.

News from the Scottish Press this week...

Note that there is more news on our ScotNews feed so this is just some highlights from them.

Holyrood gives approval to devolved powers Scotland Bill

Holyrood has unanimously given consent to legislation devolving new powers to the Scottish Parliament.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-35815426>

SNP's free childcare plan is unworkable

Nurseries in Scotland have the biggest funding shortfall in the UK and will struggle to offer more free childcare

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/snp-s-free-childcare-plan-is-unworkable-1-4072319>

Jackie Kay named as new Scottish makar

National poet says she hopes to open up the blethers, the arguments and celebrations that Scotland has with itself

Read more at:

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/15/jackie-kay-becomes-the-new-makar-scotlands-national-poet>

Leith's transformation is fascinating

CREATIVE buzz is bringing a new lease of life to Leith, writes Brian Ferguson

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/brian-ferguson-leith-s-transformation-is-fascinating-1-4067833>

On the Trump trail with America's Scots

THE most well-known Scottish American of the moment is the surprise front runner to become the Republican candidate in November's Presidential election.

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/the-quiet-americans-on-the-trump-trail-with-america-s-scots-1-4069063>

Clan tourism generated £390,000 for Scotland in 2015

More than 7,000 visitors attended events such as battle re-enactments.

Read more at:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-35795287>

Brian Wilson: Thank God we didn't believe facts

THE BOGUS figures that informed the SNP's pre-indyref White Paper have been exposed, writes Brian Wilson

Read more at:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/brian-wilson-thank-god-we-didn-t-believe-facts-1-4063624>

Why we should be glad we voted No

The figures show Scotland ran a deficit of £14.9bn in 2014-15. This means that the taxes we raised in Scotland fell £14.9bn short of covering the public spending we received.

Read more at:

<http://chokkablog.blogspot.ca/2016/03/why-we-should-be-glad-we-voted-no.html>

Electric Canadian

Farming, Ranching and Social Conditions in Western Canada

You can download this book at:

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

The Canadian Red Book

A Handbook of the Dominion of Canada which you can download at:

<http://www.electriccanadian.com/history/canadianredbook.pdf>

Electric Scotland

Robert Burns Lives!

Supper was at my own Burns Club of Atlanta in the cottage built by its members in 1910. I have experienced a lot of "firsts" since becoming a member of that historic club quite a few years ago and find it hard to recall all the dinners at which I was honored to deliver the Immortal Memory. Clubs in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia have been the main areas where I enjoyed sharing the words of Burns. There is one additional Burns Dinner or Supper, however, where I can't begin to imagine the magic felt by those in attendance, and that is a Burns night in the auld cleg biggin, as the poet himself described his Alloway birthplace.

Yes, like many of you, I have strolled through the original birthplace of Robert Burns and tried to imagine what it was like to be born and reared there. I have also wondered how exciting it would be to attend a dinner there on January 25 of any year. Stop and think

about it! Can you imagine? A dinner in the auld cleg biggin! That opportunity will probably never come my way, but I can still dream and wish for those who do attend only the best for an incredible night!

That event took place this past January 25 that event took place when a group gathered to do what I have always dreamed about - meet in the Burns old clay biggin to honor Burns on his night. Read and enjoy the following experience with thanks to David Hopes and Chris Waddell for sharing that special night with our readers. (FRS: 3-9-16)

Read this article, A Unique Burns Supper By Chris Waddell, at:
http://www.electricscotland.com/familytree/frank/burns_lives232.htm

James Cuthbert Hadden
Added this person to our Significant Scots page.

While browsing www.archive.org I came across James (Cuthbert) Hadden and was surprised at the amount of books he had written on great musicians - books for boys - short stories for the English Illustrated Magazine in the 1890s, and also about 100 articles on famous people to the Dictionary of National Biography. His book on Chopin of course involves Miss Stirling of Keir in Scotland, so I downloaded the whole book, but then extracted the Scottish visit pages as jpgs (then converted them the slow way via Word to a pdf) . I also downloaded all available books by Hadden from [archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

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

Rugby
Got in a wee introduction to Scottish Rugby from 1871 to 1881 which you can read at:
<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/snippets/football/1871Intro.htm>

Two Great Scotsmen, The Brothers William & John Hunter
By George Mather MD (1893)

In those charming days of student life, when first I wandered round the classic building which jutted into the old College Green, I had a desire to become familiar with the end and aim of that Grecian temple, for as such it then appealed to me. I anxiously inquired its purpose and had not long to wait for an answer. On matriculating, a card was presented, permitting me to enter with a friend the temple of science containing the Hunterian Museum. This noble building then was the stately storehouse of anatomical specimens and other treasures collected by one man, which for variety of riches has had no parallel in the annals of medicine. It was founded by the elder of two brothers, who had astonished the world by their scientific labours. Glasgow can justly claim those brothers as her sons, because they were born within sound of her Cathedral bell. William spent five years at her ancient University; John spent three years in a workshop of the city. They left their native country for London, and made their mark so indelibly on the time in which they lived, that that period has been spoken of by Englishmen as 'the age of the Hunters.'

The vast intellectual labours of those great men have not attracted the interest they ought to have done in their native place, possibly because they are not fully known; should the present sketch of their lives, issued in commemoration of the centenary of the younger brother, lead to a keener appreciation of their public services, I shall be abundantly satisfied.

I have to express the great pleasure I have had in communing with the illustrious band of writers and orators who have done so much to extend the name and fame of the brothers Hunter. To Professor Gairdner I acknowledge my obligations for the privilege of extracting from Dr. Reynolds' "System of Medicine," his lucid and masterly description of the case of John Hunter. I would also express my thanks to Mr. D. Y. Cameron for the interest he has taken in the work, and my admiration of the glamour he has thrown around the scenes he has so finely etched. To Mr. Annan I owe thanks for the artistic manner in which the photogravures have been executed; and to Mr. Tweed for his medallion of John Hunter reproduced in the volume.

GEORGE R. MATHER.

You can read this book at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/medical/hunter.htm>

Isabella Baillie
Famous Scottish Soprano which I've added to our Baillie page in the Scottish Nation.

You can read about her at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/nation/baillie.htm>

Norman MacPhail Blair
Added 5 of his songs to the foot of his page which you can listen to at:
http://www.electricscotland.com/history/other/blair_norman.htm

Beth's Newfangled Family Tree

Got in the April edition section 2 which you can read at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/bnft/index.htm>

The Life of John Stuart Blackie

Edited by the Rev. John G. Duncan which I've added to the foot of his page at:

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

William Boyd

Added this person to our Significant Scots page.

Dr William Boyd was the head of the Education Department at Glasgow University for most of the first half of the twentieth century and was a noted educational historian. He was educated at Kilmarnock Academy and gave a comprehensive account of the school and its rector in his time, Dr Hugh Dickie, in his *Education in Ayrshire through Seven Centuries* (1961). He wrote of Dickie:

As rector of the Academy he became responsible for a school of mixed character; required to devote itself to elementary work if it was to enjoy government grants but expected by School Board [sic] to reach a high academic level. Like the rectors of the other Academies he was a full-time teacher; as at the outset he was the only graduate he had the whole burden of the upper school on his shoulders. He had to teach all the higher subjects. This he did so effectively that in a year or two Kilmarnock Academy was sending a succession of well-trained pupils to Glasgow University and year by year two or three of them were making their appearance on the Bursary list. So far as scholarship was concerned he had made his 'elementary' school a real Academy.

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

When you read about him you can't but be a bit ashamed about how Scotland is doing on Education today in Scotland from the story below.

THE STORY

Silence of the Sheep

By Jean Barr from the Scottish Review

Why has civic Scotland nothing to say about educational disadvantage and so much else?

The SNP's policy of free university tuition has so powerfully framed the debate on education in Scotland that it has effectively screened out other concerns, such as the impact on schools, on lifelong and further education and on poor students. The better-off are the unacknowledged beneficiaries of the way student support policy has been debated, described and formulated. Scottish education policy now seems to operate within an affirmative culture that places itself beyond criticism and other options beyond debate.

In 2001 the Labour-led government in Edinburgh removed upfront fees for Scottish university students, replacing them with a one-off graduate endowment of £2,000 (£2,700 at today's prices) to be paid after graduation. The Graduate Endowment and Student Support (Scotland) Act of 2001 defines the graduate endowment as 'a fixed amount that some graduates will be liable to pay, after they have completed their degree', adding that the funds raised are to be used to 'provide student support, including bursaries, for future generations of disadvantaged students'.

The expectation was that as many as 50% of graduates, including mature students and some disabled students, could be exempt from paying the endowment. It is worth pausing here to underline the fact that it was not the SNP who abolished upfront tuition fees but the first Scottish Executive, a coalition between Labour and Liberal Democrats. What the minority SNP administration abolished in 2008 was the graduate endowment scheme.

The SNP has been in power now for nearly a decade – since 2007 as a minority government and since 2011 as a majority government. In 2013, as a result of the rising costs of its university fees policy, it cut maintenance grants for the poorest by 40%, without any parliamentary scrutiny. Grants had already been cut in real terms since 2007 when the SNP came to power. They have now been cut in half. Young students from families earning less than around £30,000 have lost out because grant cuts have more than outweighed any benefit to them from the abolition of the graduate endowment scheme.

Lucy Hunter Blackburn, the former civil servant responsible for implementing the graduate endowment scheme, points to mounting evidence that free university tuition represents a middle class hand-out by stealth: 'It's superficially universal, but in fact it benefits the better-off most and is funded by pushing the poorest students further and further into debt'. Some of this evidence can be found in 'Higher Education in Scotland and the UK' (2015), a study of higher education policy across the UK. In the final chapter of the book, Professor Sheila Riddell of the University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education concludes that free university tuition in Scotland hasn't produced the egalitarian, progressive outcomes claimed for it.

A recent critical analysis in the New Statesman is blunt in spelling out the implications of such research. As a result of prioritising universal free university tuition over targeted grants, says Tim Wigmore, the worst place for poor students in the UK is Scotland. Students here now leave university with an average debt of £21,000, more than in Wales and Northern Ireland, which have tuition fees. When less generous spending on bursaries by Scottish universities is taken into account (English institutions spend more than three times as much on bursaries, because of their student fee income), many disadvantaged Scottish students will graduate with higher debt than equivalent students in England.

Scotland now has the lowest number of school leavers from the poorest fifth going to university in the UK. In England the figure is 17%, in Wales 15.5%, in Scotland, just 9.7%. Free university tuition seems to have blinded government and wider public to the broader picture. Working-class students traditionally use Further Education (FE) colleges, sometimes as a route via HNC and HND to university. Cuts to the FE sector have undermined what was already a poor cousin in our education system. The number of FE colleges in Scotland has almost halved, from 37 in 2011-12 to 20 in 2014-15, partly because of Michael Russell's enthusiasm for amalgamations.

More importantly, between 2007 and 2014-5 the number of college places fell by 156,000, from 379,233 to 222,919. Worryingly, 35% of FE students from the most deprived backgrounds don't complete their courses. Retention rates on longer courses have worsened and female enrolments have fallen. In 2014-5 colleges received £114m for student bursaries. That budget goes down to £107m this year, forcing students into yet more debt. Patrick Harvie, leader of the Scottish Green Party, voices regret about this in his blog but believes that once Scotland can set its own welfare policies, a longer-term option would be a citizen's income. Well, perhaps, but the maintenance grant system is the only welfare policy that the Scottish Government directly controls now and so is a reasonable indicator of where its political priorities lie.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) says the decline in numbers is a result of colleges being asked to prioritise more 'substantive courses' by the Scottish Government and to reduce the number of learners enrolled on leisure programmes and short courses. The EIS says that the decision to prioritise full-time courses for younger learners, coupled with the change in government priorities, has a knock-on effect on part-time courses that often attract adults, carers, disabled learners and others. It has weakened the lifelong learning elements that have been a long-standing, if small, aspect of Scottish FE provision.

A 'substantive course' is geared towards accredited qualifications and requires a significant amount of study time. A major chunk of lifelong learning used to be called 'second chance education', that is, adult education designed specifically for those who didn't do well at school. They may be daunted by formal education and need step-by-step commitments or have little time because of caring or other work commitments. Many participants are women who weren't served well by school in the past. The kind of flexible learning opportunities that are likely to suit them are now regarded as 'not substantive': the fall in female enrolments is evidence of that.

In a climate where local authority funding for adult and community education has all but dried up and key adult education providers such as the Workers Educational Association (WEA) and university continuing education departments struggle to stay afloat, the Scottish Government has received surprisingly little flack for this casual dismissal. Yet cuts in student grants and reducing FE student places are not the unavoidable results of budget cuts in the form of the Scottish block grant from Westminster. The Scottish Government has choices. The most significant choice so far has been the decision to fund a freeze in council tax at a cost of £560m this year and £630m next. This is a lot of money not available for FE colleges or student grants (or schools or hospitals) and again it is a freeze that benefits the better off most. This is a political choice, concerning what to prioritise.

An option that was not available in 2013, when maintenance grants were so drastically cut, will become available in 2016-7, namely to use the new income tax raising powers long sought by the SNP. The Scottish Rate of Income Tax (SRIT) is a progressive tax that hits harder as income rises because there is a tax-free personal allowance. However, everyone earning above the personal allowance would still have to pay more tax. This is ostensibly why the SNP rejects it because they argue against any tax increase for workers who are relatively low paid. The Scottish Labour Party's election manifesto's proposal to increase SRIT by 1p and to make a £100 payment to any taxpayer earning less than £20,000 is an attempt to compensate households at the bottom and mitigate the effects of the tax increase for a large number of households in the middle and upper-middle income range.

The Scottish Government has had almost a decade in power with no change. The new Scotland Bill will give it nearly full control over income tax bands and rates. It will also devolve a £2.5b welfare budget to Holyrood. At such a pivotal moment there is an urgent need for a wider debate about priorities.

In the lead up to the election in May, and as local councils face cuts of £350m this year and £500m next year, Nicola Sturgeon has just announced a 'radical reform' of local government finance. Besides a 'more progressive council tax' (a tiny adjustment to the top bands) there is the proposal that if councils boost economic growth and income tax receipts, they'll share in the benefit. It is clear that any such plan will take several years to implement – too late to protect local services from the savage cuts to council budgets this year. The tweak in council tax bands E-H will raise just £100m in 2017-8, when it comes into force.

Why hasn't there been deeper questioning of the SNP's policy record? The Scottish Government portrays opposition as being 'against

Scotland' because the SNP claims to speak for Scotland. Opposition is weak, not just in the Labour Party but in the wider polis. Few thinktanks are providing sources of criticism and new policy ideas, and the institutions that make up the weft of Scottish civil society such as trade unions, churches, professional associations, educational bodies, voluntary organisations and businesses, with few exceptions, seem lacking in the will to speak up.

The institutions of Scottish civil society were once pivotal in preserving the Scottish nation within the union. They now fail to hold their government to account. Close-knit institutional connections and strong social, cultural and intellectual cohesiveness distinguished the 18th-century Scottish Enlightenment from the Enlightenment in England, which was a looser, more demotic, affair. The Scottish men of letters were involved in a project to improve the Scottish nation within the new union and to demonstrate its distinctive worth in relation to its newish, bigger sibling.

This close-knit nature of civil society may now be acting as a brake on innovative thinking, the disputatious civility of social life giving way to near silence. Size matters. Scotland is tiny. Typically, everyone involved in any policy area knows everybody else. Are people scared of the consequences of criticising the SNP? Are they worried about deepening the divide that exists in Scotland since the referendum, despite talk of the 'festival of democracy' that is supposed to have taken place during the summer and autumn of 2014?

Recent research on medical students in the UK should give everyone pause for thought. A study of 33,000 applications to 22 medical schools across the UK found that a disproportionate number of medical students come from the most affluent homes. So far, so unsurprising. The sting in the tail is in the differences between the nations of the UK. In England, 8.7% of medical students were from the poorest 20% of the population by postcode, against 4.3% in Scotland. In Scotland, where private schooling is far more prevalent in some areas, particularly Edinburgh, 35% of medical students came from fee-paying schools, as against a UK average of 27%. This is an uncomfortable finding for anyone who believes in Scotland's special concern for social justice, particularly in education.

A recent survey indicates that there will be a landslide victory for the SNP in May this year despite only modest satisfaction with its performance in government. Only a third of voters believe that they have done well in four key policy areas. It seems that no matter what they do in the time left between now and May, the SNP is 100% sure to win. Scotland will soon be the most powerful devolved country in the world. There is now a need for a creatively critical and open discussion that can hold government to account.

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

Alastair