

Not So Random Scottish History



by Gordon Craigie

ACCORDING to our First Minister, we are still (at the time of writing, but things move quickly these days!) on course for a second Scottish Independence Referendum at some point next year, via a Section 30 agreement with Westminster. Leaving aside any discussion or debate about the merits of this approach, or the legitimacy of any alternative approaches, how exactly have we arrived at this point in history? Well, one self-evident truth is that if Scotland hadn't entered, willingly or otherwise, into an incorporating union in 1707 then...

Eagle-eyed *iScot Magazine* readers may have noticed the wee mini-series that developed over issues 54, 55 and 56: *Myths and lies – what a surprise!* (issue 54) looked at the historical misrepresentation of the Darien scheme, *Rule Britannia, Britannia waives the rules...* (issue 55) highlighted the role of the Aliens Act in the run up to 1707, and *Prosperity to Scotland, and no Union!* (issue 56) completed the trilogy by exposing the treachery surrounding the signing of the Treaty of Union. *iScot* readers will not be surprised to learn that most of the research for these features was not undertaken in the kind of history books we were all subjected to at school, and that it takes a fair bit of digging to uncover sources that are not biased towards an 'accepted' British version of events. As the cliché goes, history is written by the victors.

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However, to coin another cliché, the truth is out there... it just sometimes takes a wee bit of finding!

Now, one of our recurring themes in this magazine is to champion and promote organisations and people who don't wait for permission to do things, they just get on with 'being the change'. Fortunately for us, one of those people is Jenny Eeles, founder of *RandomScottishHistory.com*. The website is dedicated to putting the truth out there about Scottish history, pre-20th century, through finding and making accessible information gathered from long-lost contemporaneous sources. Recently her research has been increasingly focussing on events surrounding, and in the aftermath of, the Treaty of Union. Let's be honest, if the Treaty had never happened, or if it had been a fair and democratically agreed process that ultimately benefited Scotland and the Scottish people, we almost certainly wouldn't be where we are now. The effect of the Treaty of Union provides the common thread running through why this magazine exists, why other pro-independence and pro-Scotland websites and publications exist, and why writers like myself and my colleagues constantly search for under-reported facts and details about all that is good in and about Scotland – past, present and future.

What prompted Jenny to develop *RandomScottishHistory.com*, and what she hopes to achieve through her work, is best told in her own words: "I'm pretty open about the fact I was brought up a No-voting Tory. I believed all the 'too wee, too poor' rhetoric about how Scotland could only ever stand a chance of failing should we choose the path of self-determination. The only papers I was exposed to growing up were the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Post*. Those kinds of papers present such a negative perspective, that you can't allow yourself to believe things could be any better for your country than the condition it's presently in. Due to that, I felt that I was under-prepared to vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, so I started seeking out Scotland's history and it was a pretty quick turn-around from that point."

Jenny recalls that she was always interested in history at school but never seriously considered following up on that interest. She left both school and home aged 16, living at Faslane Peace camp for 9 months, then bounced about between jobs in Glasgow for a while. She's now been married for 13 years to Alex, who is also her co-conspirator on *RandomScottishHistory.com*, and says that finally being settled allowed her to explore what it was that actually interested her. Initially that turned out to be Victorian London, and also ancient Classical Greco/Roman history, so she started an Open University course with a view to learning to read ancient Greek text as she wanted to read the original Homer rather than going through translators. But, when the Scottish Referendum was called to be held in 2014, she decided to turn her attention closer to home to see what, if anything, she could find of relevance or interest.

"Now here we are 5 years later and I'm still engrossed by the history of Scotland! I initially began to openly espouse my desire to see Scotland regain her right to self-determination on social media, losing friends and family members to the revelation. I was accused of being anti-English, but I couldn't find anything I'd said that would have given people that idea. Everything that I promote is positive and towards Scotland's cause, never negative and against England's. That would be an entirely destructive way of obtaining support for anything.

"I started acquiring random old books and was coming across information that I knew would appeal to others with any kind of interest in Scotland and its history. So I'd type up whatever passage I'd come across that interested me, take a screenshot, and post to my personal Facebook profile. Around the start of 2014 a friend suggested I collate this material in one place, and that's how the *Random Scottish History* project began, as a Facebook page. I made the conscious decision to deal only with publications that are pre-20th century as I wanted original information from Scots who had still seen their country as

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an independent nation within a union with their sister kingdom England, and that was best found in the era I picked for my project.

"What had started out as just the odd interesting quote from whatever book I was reading steadily evolved into entire chapters minus what I felt was especially uninteresting. Then I came across Sir James Balfour's *Historical Works* from 1824, and that seemed worth typing out in its entirety. I also created a companion copy, to make it an easier read for those not familiar or comfortable with old Scots, and after I'd added in any names, dates, or places in order to clarify the information given, I decided I wanted the information to be searchable. I needed a dedicated website to do that so, in February 2018, *RandomScottishHistory.com* went live. I then decided that I had no right to decide for folk what they might find interesting or not, so I went back to all of the books I'd already read and completed their write-ups; every preface, chapter, footnote, and appendix."

It's been a monumental task putting this website together, and Jenny's enthusiasm for, and dedication to, *RandomScottishHistory.com* seems limitless. She is the main researcher and transcriber, husband Alex's primary contribution is all the original artwork, and a close friend provides multi-media support. Twitter is the



Jenny and Alex relaxing at Random Scottish History HQ

site's main platform for publicising their work under the username @FlikeNoir. Recently, the website has seen an increasing focus on the Treaty of Union and, in particular, events afterwards: "I already had a pinned tweet of James Grant's *Old and New Edinburgh*, from 1880, detailing the manner in which the Treaty of Union had been signed, citing ordinary Scots' reaction to the signing of the Treaty, and listing those who had been bribed, with how much, for their signature to the document. Then I was contacted by an author, David Taylor, telling me he was interested in 'historic letters from Union supporters (to whomever) who write to explain things which could be done by Westminster to improve Scotland's place and treatment in the Union, or are complaining.' He wanted anything I could find from that era and I instantly responded that I could do that – nae bother! But once I got going with that it was other people's reactions, to the information I was finding and posting on social media, that convinced me that this was a worthwhile project in its own right.

"The aftermath of the Treaty tells us that nothing has changed. Scottish



Reports and statistics backing up the constant over-taxation and under-funding of Scotland is rife and frustrating to read

Members of Parliament in Westminster are still fighting the same fights and receiving the same responses, and often the same outright derision, from their English counterparts as they were back then. To have lived through it all would have tired anyone watching the repetitive actions of Westminster in regard to Scotland and her welfare. Reports and statistics backing up the constant over-taxation and under-funding of Scotland is rife and frustrating to read. It can make for strong emotions when you read a report stating the intent to apply for some rightful privilege that's still being denied to us 150 or 200 or 300 years later! It shows there's a sense, regardless of the deprivation of history, that these are fights that have gone on beyond their end date. I've only been working on this particular project for 3 months and I just want it all to end. I want us to stop wasting our time on this failed project of an Imperial Parliament which no longer has an Empire to speak of due to treating those in other places just as badly as we ourselves have experienced here on home ground. It's no wonder the colonies rebelled and sought liberation from this foreign power, the British Empire, that had usurped their laws and customs and sucked them dry of their revenue and resources at every given opportunity. It's about time we in Scotland learned a lesson from our brothers and sisters worldwide!"

Jenny's Treaty of Union project is reaching its end point, culminating in the planned November publication of 250+ pages of articles, documents, letters and newspaper reports relevant to the Treaty and its aftermath up to the end of the 19th century. The parallels with our situation today are uncanny, and all the more frightening when you see the same lies and misrepresentations being peddled. She concludes, "There is no Unionist argument that can't be countered by the original articles I'm posting and publishing, which is why I think they are so important. We can't trust Scottish history books written after 1918 because they don't recognise Scotland as an individual country or an individual entity, they don't see it for itself. They were written purely for a British audience and things kept getting stated from an English viewpoint. Because we've had this for so long, it's just so ingrained in the population.

"We Scots have been constantly lied to. I think many people feel betrayed by the education system for not being taught real Scottish history. Reading the truth makes the Yes voters more Yes than they were before, because it gives them more reasons to be disenchanted with Westminster and its deliberate centralisation of our culture, our heritage, and our history. It also has the potential to make British Nationalists and No voters think

twice too, because it's giving them more arguments that they can't argue against. We've set up a Crowdfunder to help us to publish the *Treaty of Union Articles*, mainly due to the sheer amount of interest being expressed on social media to what was being revealed. The purpose of it is to give folk a chance to contribute to the production of a hard-backed publication of the information and fund copies for the Scottish Government, libraries and any schools that are interested. We also intend to publish a cheaper paperback edition, for rallies and meetings, as well as a Kindle edition and audio book."

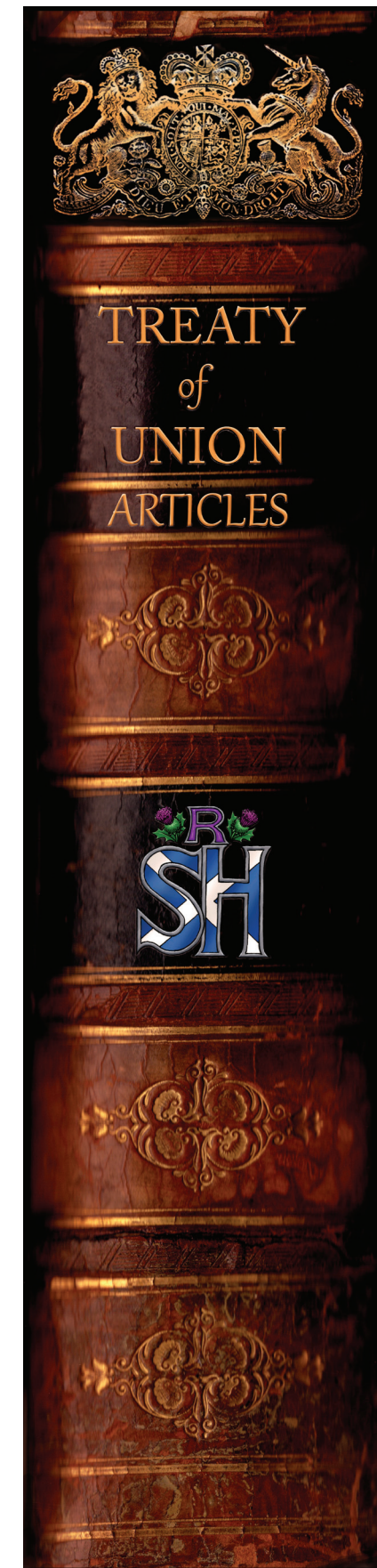
So, once the book is published, what's next on the horizon for Jenny and *RandomScottishHistory.com*? "I'll just keep on keeping on! I feel that I'm making information available to people that can help them make positive, informed decisions regarding their country's future. Regardless of impending political decisions taken by our governments, people will always require access to their country's heritage. I've received lots of glowing commendations, each of which never fails to surprise me, and I haven't experienced any negativity. I think it's because I don't post opinion pieces, I just record history for the sake of history and try not to let modern politics creep onto the site. So, it's all been super positive and that's the reason I'm not thinking of giving it up any time soon.

"Twitter is the platform that's surprised me more than any other. People give instant reactions and comments to content and I can see from those that it's valuable information people have a desire to know. We didn't get it at school, after all, and that's something I hear more than anything from fellow Scots – you'd have to find your way into some specialised history course to learn this stuff in Scotland. For me that's an inevitable consequence of the centralisation of education within Britain from an almost entirely English perspective. I like to put forward three examples that we routinely get taught about: Henry VIII and his six wives, but not who was on the Scottish throne at the time of his reign; Queen Elizabeth's defeating the Spanish Armada but not that Spain proposed an alliance with Scotland against her, and that we were considering it; The Great Fire of London in 1666, but not the Great Fire of Edinburgh in 1824, which is far more contemporary and closer to home. They've tried to muddy the waters through centralisation, and that's what we've got to defeat. If people were to read only one thing on my website, I would point them to the *Financial Cost to Scotland of the Union* – it's a chapter copied from *The Scots Magazine* in 1891, written by Harry Gow. The moment you find out more about your country you feel more attached to it because you can't help but feel empathy – the more you read about Scotland the more you're going to be on Scotland's side and want the best for it."

Work as if you live in the early days of a better nation is one of the inspirational inscriptions on the Scottish Parliament's Canongate Wall and is a motto that *iScot Magazine* aspires to live up to every month. We also proudly promote those individuals and organisations who actively work to *be the change*. Jenny Eeles, through her work at *RandomScottishHistory.com*, is clearly achieving both by highlighting the long-forgotten truths from much earlier days in our proud nation's history and bringing them to a wider audience. Scotland's desire to be a modern, democratic, welcoming, free-thinking, socially-just nation taking its rightful place on the international stage can only be enhanced by remembering past achievements and mistakes, and being guided by lessons learned from our true history.

You can find Jenny's collection of historical documents at: RandomScottishHistory.com or RSH.scot and follow her on Twitter @FlikeNoir

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