

Five things you need to know today



Independence Referendum Date announced

High Speed Rail

Romanov to sell St Andrew Square property

National Museum of Scotland announces 2012 programme

Professor Peter Higgs to be awarded the Edinburgh Medal

Following many years of campaigning the SNP Government yesterday announced that the Referendum on Independence will be held 700 years after Bannockburn, shortly after the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, the football World Cup and the Ryder Cup at Gleneagles in Autumn 2014. Continuing their embrace of new media, the announcement was made first by the [Deputy First Minister on Twitter](#) from the Cabinet meeting at Bute House. The First Minister continued to speak to media all day from Bute House with the fire crackling in the hearth behind him.

Mr Salmond said:

“The date for the referendum has to be the autumn of 2014. That’s because this is the biggest decision that Scotland has made for 300 years. If you are going to do things properly and have the debate in the way it must be had then that is the date that we are going to move towards.”

The Scottish Government will launch a consultation on the referendum later this month.

[The papers](#) today are full of political comment, all the

[political programmes](#) yesterday evening focussed on the matter and the announcement of a consultation by Secretary of State for Scotland, Michael Moore, in Westminster was carried live on TV. The Secretary of State for Scotland explained that the UK Government were prepared to allow Holyrood to hold a legal, fair and decisive referendum on the matter of independence from the rest of the UK. The UK Government do not think that Holyrood has the power on its own to do this as it relates to a reserved matter as set out in the Scotland Act 1998. Speaking for the UK Government, Moore declined the demand from Menzies Campbell to publicise the Government's own legal advice to help clarify the constitutional position. Whatever your political stance if you are Scottish then perhaps you owe it to yourself to read as much as you can about this, but you would do little better than start off with [The Spectator](#) which explains the real reason behind all the recent posturing by Salmond and McAskill about the UK Supreme Court. And of course have a look at the Blipfoto account of Cabinet Secretary for Education, Mike Russell, who posted his ['historic photograph' there](#) – of John Swinney with a Saltire...on his phone....

High Speed Rail was on the rather packed agenda at Westminster yesterday, but there was no assurance that the investment will be extended to bring the 200 mph trains north of the border. You can read [the details here](#), and you will be hard pushed to find anything to do with Edinburgh, except that it mentions a couple of times that the existing East Coast service will connect seamlessly with the new speedy service. Given that HS2 will not be operational for about 14 years The Reporter really hopes that someone, somewhere (Michael O'Leary perhaps?) has by that time taken East Coast and given it a good shake. The trains are tired, the catering practically non-existent (particularly if you are travelling north to south) and the wifi almost inexcusably bad.

Local MP, Sheila Gilmore, has asked for the Government to extend new high speed rail beyond Leeds and Manchester to Edinburgh and Glasgow in the second phase.

Questioning Transport Secretary Justine Greening in the House of Commons, Sheila Gilmore said:

'Despite the warm words from the Secretary of State about Scotland, I'm unclear as to whether she is prepared to extend the remit of the HS2 company for detailed route planning to Scotland, and if so when?

Justine Greening replied:

'I would say to her give me a chance to actually get up to Scotland to meet with the Scottish Government. I would be very happy to meet with her and other MPs from Scottish constituencies to talk about the broader benefits of a high speed network. As she's demonstrated so clearly, in countries that do high speed rail, once you've built one bit of the line, there's pressure to do more. Why? Because people can see the benefits of the line and it's incredibly successful.

Speaking afterwards, Sheila Gilmore said:

'I welcome the UK Government's decision to press ahead with Labour's high speed rail project. Passengers in Scotland will benefit from reduced journey times immediately as the new line will be linked to the West Coast Main Line, meaning trains can make the last part of the journey south at speeds of up to 225mph.

'I argued for the line to be extended beyond Leeds and Manchester to Edinburgh and Glasgow in the second phase when I responded to last year's consultation. The absence of any such commitment in today's announcement is disappointing.

'Building the line to Scotland would bring London within 3 hours of Edinburgh. We could benefit from the economic

strength of the South-East, and as more people switched from plane to train, high speed rail could play a role in reducing our carbon emissions.'

'Last month business leaders and councils published their Fast Track Scotland report, which argued that while the case for investment in high speed rail is already strong, that case is even stronger when Scotland is included. I will continue to press the UK Government to take this on board and build to Edinburgh and Glasgow in the second phase. '

[The BBC](#) report that Vladimir Romanov is set to make a loss on his £20m investment in the former Royal Bank building in West Register Street when it is sold. It is understood to be under offer at the moment.

The first major exhibition in the National Museum of Scotland's new purpose-built exhibition space will be Fascinating Mummies, featuring treasures from two of the world's great ancient Egyptian collections. Objects dating back as far as 4000BC will guide visitors through the complex rituals surrounding death and afterlife in ancient Egypt, including mummification and burial.

The National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, the Netherlands, has one of the world's leading ancient Egyptian collections, with an extraordinary range of material including human and animal mummies. This material will be complemented by a small selection from National Museums Scotland's own collections. These feature thousands of objects from ancient Egypt, including mummies and coffins collected in the mid-19th century by Scottish archaeologist Alexander Henry Rhind.

For many, this will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see these internationally significant exhibits as the [National Museum of Scotland](#) will be the only UK venue for Fascinating Mummies.

The City of Edinburgh Council announced in December that Emeritus Professor Peter Higgs is to be the next recipient of the Edinburgh Medal. His name may not be immediately known to you except if it is linked with the other part of a well known scientific term 'Higgs Boson'.

Professor Higgs will be presented with an engraved Loving Cup at a ceremony in early 2012 where previous award winners and young achievers from across the city will be invited to attend.

He will have a mould of his handprints taken, which will be engraved – and immortalised – on a flagstone in the City Chambers quadrangle.

Lord Provost George Grubb said: "The [Edinburgh Award](#) enables the people of Edinburgh to pay a lasting tribute to someone who has made an outstanding contribution to the city through their work or achievements in recent years. I am delighted to present this year's award to Professor Peter Higgs whose proposal of the Higgs boson has not only made him an international success, but has also significantly advanced the study of particle physics.

"His work with the University of Edinburgh has put this city on an international stage and as such he has undoubtedly proven to be a most deserved winner of one of Edinburgh's most prestigious civic awards."

[Professor Higgs's theory](#) about the existence of the elusive particle – or boson – came in 1964, in a moment of inspiration while walking in the Cairngorms.

The particle is purported to be the means by which everything in the Universe obtains its mass.

His work directly influenced the production of the Large Hadron Collider which was switched on three years ago at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva.

Professor Higgs was chosen as the winner of the 2011 Edinburgh Award by a judging panel chaired by the Lord Provost, with representatives from all political groups on the City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations Council and Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce.

And here he is talking about his theory on YouTube:-