

Letter from Scotland

From time to time we all sympathise with Guy Fawkes. Blow up parliament and set the dark November skies alight with fireworks.

The poor man was cruelly treated. He was tortured till he confessed and then “fell” to his death from the scaffold before his could be respectably hanged.



Of bangs and bucks.
Guy Fawkes, by
George Cruikshank
1840

It sure is frustrating to see the mother of all parliaments getting into such a tangle over Brexit and, this week, over the budget. The chancellor Philip Hammond told us that “austerity is coming to an end.”

But then he told us his largesse may have to be rethought if there is a bad outcome to the Brexit negotiations.

He might also have warned us that it also depends on a prediction of good growth in the economy from the OBR, strangely named Office of Budget Responsibility, which has never got its predictions right.

Anyway, the upshot for Scotland is that the government here will have an extra £960m to spend. No doubt much of that will go to the NHS, as it will in England, though we will have to wait for the Scottish budget next month to find out exactly how much. There was also £150m for the Tayside cities deal, and a freeze on whisky tax and North Sea oil tax.

The chancellor's cuts to income tax however will only partially apply in Scotland. The lower threshold will be raised to £12,500 but the threshold for higher rate tax will not be raised in Scotland. The 41p rate will still be paid by workers earning over £44,300.

The Conservatives, of course, say this will lead to an exodus of top talent from Scotland – a prediction as accurate as any the OBR can produce – while the SNP say it's only fair that the wealthy should pay more in tax to support the public services.

On the subject of money, we had a reminder this week that even our hobbies – what I call our “new industries” – make a huge contribution to our economy. Football, for instance, is worth £1.2bn to Scotland, according to a study carried out for the Scottish and European football authorities. That's £200m directly from playing the game, £700m saved by the NHS because of better health, and another £300m in social benefits. It's estimated that 780,000 Scots play football, 147,555 of them for registered teams.

And here's another new industry coming on stream. The world's first tidal power station to provide energy to the national

grid has begun operating at Bluemull Sound in Shetland. Its three turbines produce a constant 300kW of electricity – thanks to a battery storage system. It may be a small start (only enough electricity for 200 homes) but there are great hopes that Scotland will eventually become a major producer of tidal power, or at least the technology for harnessing it.

There's no end to our inventiveness. In Glasgow, they've come up with a scheme to use the old Forth and Clyde canal as a reservoir for floodwater overflow. Electronic sensors will predict when an area of land is likely to be flooded after heavy rain, pumps will then divert water from the drainage system into the canal, allowing low lying land to be used for housing and businesses. The £17m scheme will free up 110 hectares of land. It's the first such scheme in Europe and again it's hoped the technology can be developed and sold elsewhere.

Finally, here's another business opportunity.....hard hats for golfers ! Apparently, golf is more dangerous than rugby, according to NHS statistics collected by Golf Monthly. It says at least 16 per cent of amateur golfers are injured each year. A health and safety expert, Chris Hall, has suggested that golfers should be forced to wear safety helmets. He says insurance companies may soon be insisting on it.



Photo shows Hamish Wilson Senior Valuer at Bonhams practising with hickory clubs at Musselburgh ©2018TheEdinburghReporter All Rights Reserved

Where will it all end, I wonder. We already have hard hats for builders, cyclists, politicians on photo-shoots. Soon we will all be required to wear one if we use the public pavement or go to a football match. We live in an over-protective society. But maybe I should get a hard hat for firework night.

And if Guy Fawkes had been wearing one, he might have lived to enjoy his public hanging.