

Letter from Scotland

This has been the year of the three “Bs”, Boris, Brexit and Breakdown.

Breakdown of so many things – “united” Britain, parliamentary government, the public services, the climate. And in the decade now ending, there’s been a breakdown of trust in institutions, real communication between people (as opposed to social media nonsense) and a gradual breakdown in the world order in trade and security. But breakdowns can usually be fixed and there was also hope of rescue, in the form of public demonstrations and individual acts of kindness and defiance.



Christmas cheer in Princes Street Gardens Edinburgh
So Scotland is a different country from what it was a year ago and much of that has been caused by disillusion over Brexit.

It's something 62 per cent of us never wanted and the more we see of the chaos and uncertainty it brings, the less we like it.

The massive vote for the SNP at the general election, winning 48 of the 59 seats at Westminster, has prompted Nicola Sturgeon to make a formal demand of the UK government to grant Scotland the legal right to hold a second referendum on independence.



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Boris Johnson has made it plain that it will be refused, which will stoke up burning resentment against the "Union" and may well increase support for independence from around 50 per cent to the magic 60 per cent which Ms Sturgeon wants before she is confident enough to actually hold such a referendum.

Meanwhile, the Scottish

Conservatives and the Scottish Labour Party have a huge reconstruction job to do after their collapse in the election. Just how do they respond to the onward march of the SNP? The independence movement has not just seen electoral gains, it has mounted large-scale demonstrations which have brought tens of thousands out onto the streets in Glasgow in May and in Edinburgh in October.

In fact, street demonstrations have been a feature of this year throughout Britain. A "People's Vote" march in London in October attracted a million people. Another in Edinburgh in September brought many thousands to the Meadows for a mass rally, despite heavy rain.



Climate Strike March 20 September 2019 PHOTO © 2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

Climate change has also inspired huge public demonstrations and a new direct action movement, Extinction Rebellion. The Friday strikes by pupils and students have shamed us adults into action. The politicians responded with the declaration of a "Climate Emergency" and the promise of a carbon neutral economy by 2045 in Scotland and 2050 in the rest of the UK and across Europe.

Here in Scotland we are already feeling the effects of climate change. We had an unusually mild winter and a hot and wet summer. Edinburgh had its hottest day ever recorded, on 26th July, when the temperature

reached 31.6 C. Overall, Scotland had its 12th warmest summer since

1910 and its 7th wettest. All

this is nothing compared to the floods in England and the devastating storms

and floods in India, Mozambique, the Bahamas and Japan, not to mention the

forest fires in the Amazon, in California and Australia.

Scotland may have escaped the

worst of it, but the world around us has become a more dangerous place. The Caliphate may have been brought to a brutal end but Syria, and the Middle East generally, is still a powder

keg. We have a huge refugee and

migration problem, turning to horror this year when 39 Vietnamese migrants were

found dead in the back of a refrigerated lorry at Purfleet in Essex.

There have been terrorist

attacks in Sri Lanka and on London Bridge. We've had mass shootings by deranged

gunmen in New Zealand and Texas. Here at

home we've had two dangerous school fires, one in Dunfermline and the other in

Peebles, and in both cases a local boy was charged with fire-raising.

We've not had much to cheer us up this year. But Scotland's women's football team made it to the World Cup in France, only to throw away a 3-0 lead over Argentina and fail to qualify for the final stages. Celtic fans enjoyed their team winning the "Treble Treble", all three major competitions for the third time. Andy Murray made it back to singles tennis after his hip surgery and won the European Open. And singer-songwriter Lewis Capaldi took Scotland to No1 in both the

British and American pop charts.



Ruth Davidson Edinburgh 29 August 2019 announcing her resignation as Tory Leader PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter
In my list of predictions for 2019, written in early January, I didn't foresee all of these events, though I was right about Celtic. And right about climate change and plastic waste becoming more of an issue. I was right too about the Scottish Conservatives losing their leader Ruth Davidson. But totally wrong on the most important issue of the year, Brexit. I thought there would be a second referendum.

So I come to the end of the year, and the decade, chastened and a little downhearted. But Christmas is here to cheer us up. And if Boris was Father Christmas I would ask him to negotiate the softest Brexit possible and fulfil his promise to end the long winter of austerity.



Prime Minister Boris Johnson on his first visit to Edinburgh at Bute House being met by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon
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