

Letter from Scotland

2020, the year of reckoning.

Is this going to be the year when all our misdeeds catch up with us? Brexit, climate change, social media, they have all brought a plague of problems which will torment us more and more this year and for the next decade.



Sparks of light in a dark world. Edinburgh's Hogmanay fireworks.

The first date on this calendar of woe is 31 January, the day we are supposed to "get Brexit done." It will, of course, be just the beginning of a tangled series of talks with the European Union on a new trade agreement and a re-negotiation of our links on migration, security, environmental protection, scientific research, travel arrangements etc. The British

government will be in such a rush to have these completed by the end of the transition period in December that everything will either be a crumpled compromise or remain much it is at the moment.

Scottish fishermen, for instance, will be sadly disillusioned if they think Boris Johnson will insist on “control” over Scottish waters, if the EU demands access to our fishing grounds as part of an overall trade deal. And the same goes for any other “regional” issue. Remember how quickly he caved in over the Northern Irish border.

Which brings us to Scotland's place in this Brexit bourach. Nicola Sturgeon is hoping that Scots will be so appalled by what's going on that they will rise up and demand a referendum on independence either this year or when the SNP win yet another election victory in 2021.



Nicola Sturgeon speaking outside Bute House two days after the EU Referendum in 2016

Scotland too has a special place in the climate “emergency”. We are to host the next UN conference on the issue in Glasgow in November which really will be the moment of reckoning. We will finally see if the governments of the world are prepared to take serious action to cut carbon emissions. The Scottish Government has set a target of us becoming a carbon neutral country by 2045, five years ahead of everyone else. But targets are only targets.

As to the social media revolution, Scotland has been swept along like everyone else and we are only now realising its downside...increasing individualism, a harsher public and private dialogue, loss of concentration, instant gratification, screen addiction. We are already seeing the breakdown of institutions, from family meals, to café culture, to political parties and parliament itself. It's frightening to contemplate what will come of it all.

But such talk of disaster shows my age. I'm now in my 70th year, my year of reckoning. And perhaps I should look for sparks of light in the year ahead. Afterall, New Year's Day on Wednesday was supposed to be a day of mad optimism. I went to South Queensferry to watch the “Loony Dook”, a thousand brave but shivering people in fancy dress plunge into the chilly waters of the Firth of Forth to raise funds for charity.



Loony Dook 1 January 2020 PHOTO Live Edinburgh News

I suppose it was the first event in Scotland's "year of coasts and waters." It will be followed later this month by a parade from the banks of the Clyde in Glasgow to the Royal Concert Hall at the start of Celtic Connections, the traditional folk festival. But there will be events throughout the year, from Wick to Dunbar and from Stornoway to Arran, all celebrating Scotland's coasts and waterways.



The marvellous Kelpies PHOTO ©2020 The Edinburgh Reporter

Finally, I'm going to be optimistic in my predictions for the year ahead (I got 7 out of 10 right last year).

Agreement will be reached at the UN Climate Change conference in Glasgow on a global target of net zero carbon by 2050.

Boris Johnson will agree to the softest of soft Brexits and hail it as a triumph.

Sir Keir Starmer will be elected leader of a new centrist Labour Party.

Christine Jardine will be elected leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Donald Trump will lose the American presidential election in November.

Russia will broker a peace agreement to end the civil war in Syria.

President Xi Jinping will lose power in China in a reformist coup.

The Tokyo Olympics will be a rip roaring success for Japan.

There will be a breakthrough in battery power.

Andy Murray will compete again at Wimbledon.



21st November 2019 – Former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, spoke at a Labour gathering in Edinburgh along with Ian Murray and Sir Keir Starmer. The trio spoke at the meeting in Morningside Parish Church. Is this a photo of the former and future leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party?