

Letter from Scotland

Scotland is not getting much of a say in who will be the next British Prime Minister. Unusually, there were no Scots among the 11 contenders, never mind in the final two.

And when it comes to the vote by Conservative Party members, there are only around 10,000 of them in Scotland.

All the candidates are Brexiteer, low-tax, austerity Tories which hardly reflects public opinion in Scotland. And all of them appear to be ignoring Scotland in their pitch for the leadership, except to say "No" to a second independence referendum any time soon.



Partner or Imperial Power – the UK government building in Edinburgh

I guess most Scots are watching the scramble to succeed Boris Johnson with incredulity. How can these “ministers” be so out of touch with reality? How exactly will low tax stimulate the economy? Most economists say it would only have a marginal effect on growth and certainly not repay the revenue lost in tax revenues. How will it repay the government debt, rung up during the pandemic? Why is growth so necessary in order to end the poverty suffered by a fifth of the population? Can't we just transfer some wealth from the top to the bottom?

Quite apart from the credibility of the arguments coming out of the Westminster bubble, there are the black holes in the universe of their vision. What about climate change? Or Britain's role in the world? Or the future of our health and education systems? Or the problems of old age? Or the housing shortage? Or the quality of our jobs?

All of the above failures and blunderings give the SNP the opportunity to spell out their case for independence. And Nicola Sturgeon this week [published the latest in her series](#) of epistles on the future of Scotland. In it she describes a “democratic deficit” in which Scotland is out-voted every time in Westminster elections and powers which ought to rest with the Scottish parliament are being taken away. The examples she gives are post-Brexit trade rules, UK government grants and refugee policy. And of course, the right to hold a second referendum. She’s even taken the referendum issue to the UK Court of Appeal.

So the political temperature is getting hotter in Scotland. As is the weather. The dry hot summer is turning our lawns to straw, the trees a deeper shade of green and it’s emptying our rivers and reservoirs. There are warnings of water scarcity in the North East and in the Forth and Tay areas. Temperatures have reached the high 20s most days. Compared to the rest of over-baked Britain and Europe, this is delightful holiday weather and it makes me wonder why so many Scots are travelling abroad.

Let’s hope they don’t bring back another strain of the Covid virus. Because it looks like the latest variant, which led to a surge of cases in Scotland, is passing over. There’s not much sign of the pandemic in everyday life. Case numbers are coming down (1 in 18 people are now thought to have the virus) but there are still 140 people every day admitted to hospital with Covid (not necessarily because of Covid) and there are still 10 deaths a day.

Scotland’s “super-sponsorship” scheme to admit refugees from the war in Ukraine has been [suspended](#) due to pressure of numbers. In March, the Scottish Government agreed to accept 3,000 refugees who had no private sponsors. The idea was that they would be found homes in council or social housing across many parts of the country.



In fact 7,000 have arrived in Scotland, two-thirds of them under the government's sponsorship scheme and councils have struggled to cope. One council, North Lanarkshire, is re-commissioning two tower blocks due for demolition to house 200 refugees. And a cruise ship in Leith harbour is to be used to accommodate over 700. Scotland now accounts for 20 per cent of the 21,000 Ukrainian refugees who have arrived in Britain, more than its fair share, largely because of a shortage of sponsors in England where only private sponsorship is allowed.



Old Tom Morris (1821-1908) golfer, course designer, groundsman, golf club maker and founder of the modern game
Finally, old Tom Morris would be astounded to see what a carnival of sport, business and big money he has created in St

Andrews. The 150th Open Golf championship has come to his home town this week. 156 world class players are competing for the \$2.5m first prize and the famous claret jug, watched by a record crowd of nearly 300,000 in golfing t-shirts and sun-hats.

We are back in a world of semi-reality, a bubble of privilege, where poverty, wars and climate change are a long way away. But the golf fans will go home to the real world while the Tory contenders will go back into government in wonderland.

A painting of the golfer and course designer was up for sale at [Bonhams](#) this week in an online auction with an upset price of £350,000.



Henry Jamyn Brooks
(British, 1839-1925)
Portrait of Tom Morris Senior
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