

Letter from Scotland

It's been a chilly week, with snow in the North closing 100 schools and keeping daytime temperatures down to 3°C, or 4°C at best. There's also been a cauld blast on the political isobars.

Who would have thought that one of the biggest constitutional battles between Scotland and Westminster since devolution 20 years ago would turn out to be the Gender Recognition Reform Bill? It has triggered the use by the UK Government of the "nuclear option", Section 35 of the Scotland Act, blocking the Bill from becoming law, even though it was approved by the Scottish Parliament by 86 votes to 39.



Icy relations. Ross Fountain, Princes Street Gardens. You might have thought that the Scottish Secretary, Alister Jack, the UK Government's man in Scotland, would keep his big stick to beat back bigger Scottish government demands, like referenda, more tax and borrowing powers, control over North Sea oil and gas. But no. He says, without changes, the gender bill would undermine the UK wide Equality Act protecting women's rights and therefore he has a duty to prevent it going for the King's assent.

Nicola Sturgeon must regret having being persuaded by the trans-rights lobby to make gender reform such a high-profile issue. It only affects 0.5 per cent of the population but it has split her party and the nation, just when she needed them to unite under the banner of independence. But she has made it part of her progressive Scotland agenda and added it to world-leading climate change targets, school attainment targets, free university education, poverty reduction aims

etc.

So she is following the lead of nine other “modern” European countries and making it easier for people to change their gender. Under the Bill, anyone over 16 will be able to self-identify as a man or woman, without a medical diagnosis, and, after a six-month period of reflection, be granted a gender recognition certificate. The fear from many women’s groups is that this might allow a predatory man to class himself as a woman and gain entry to toilets, changing rooms, refuges, and other places reserved for women.

The UK government also argues it undermines important exceptions to the equality laws to protect women’s rights, in areas such as employment, board-room membership, and sport. The whole issue is expected to end up in the Supreme Court as both sides challenge each other to make concessions.



Protest outside Queen Elizabeth House against the UL Government’s proposal to block the Gender Recognition Reform legislation passed by The Scottish Government using S.35 ©2023

The Edinburgh Reporter

And this isn't the only complaint The Scottish Government had about "Westminster rule" this week. Nicola Sturgeon says the UK Government's new "minimum safety" law, limiting the right to strike, is "anti-worker" and will be opposed by the SNP. It's not exactly a peace move in the current wave of strikes in our schools and on the railways. Nurses too, in Scotland, may yet join their striking colleagues in England, if the latest round of talks fail.

Complaint number three is the UK government's attempt at "levelling-up" the north and south of Britain. This week it announced £170 million worth of UK projects in Scotland, which The Scottish Government says should be decided in Edinburgh not London. They include a new ferry boat for Fair Isle, a theatre restoration in Kilmarnock and a new library and museum in Peterhead. Here in Edinburgh we received £16 million plus in the last round for the [Granton Gasometer](#) but nothing in this latest funding announcement.

The winter flu is hitting us hard in Scotland. More than 120 people with flu died last week, the highest number for 20 years. And [Covid](#) has not gone away, with 101 deaths last week. All of this comes as the NHS says hospitals are nearly at full capacity and "delayed discharges" are still a major problem.

But, as usual, we are turning away from our problems with preparations for the Burns Supper season. We are drip-fed stories in the newspapers about new discoveries of Burns documents, a new Burns festival in Dumfries and debates over whether his views on slavery or women's rights are sufficiently correct.

And then of course there is the Celtic Connections folk festival in Glasgow, this year celebrating its 30th anniversary and its return to full programmes after the Covid shutdowns. Over 100,000 people are expected to attend the 150 shows at 30

different venues across the city between now and the 5th of February. Among the 1500 performers will be musicians from as far afield as the USA and Morocco. It couldn't be further from the "culture wars" between our two parliaments, Holyrood and Westminster.

Oh, and I mustn't finish without telling you about our sporting hero, Andy Murray. As I write, he has just won through to the fourth round of the Australian Open after a match lasting five hours 45minutes, ending at four o'clock in the morning local time. And this after being 2 sets down at the start. A fine demonstration of Scottish grit, at the age of 35 and with a metal hip.

It's a tall story

Party residents on a high after mast ruling
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Everything she wants at Chinese buffet
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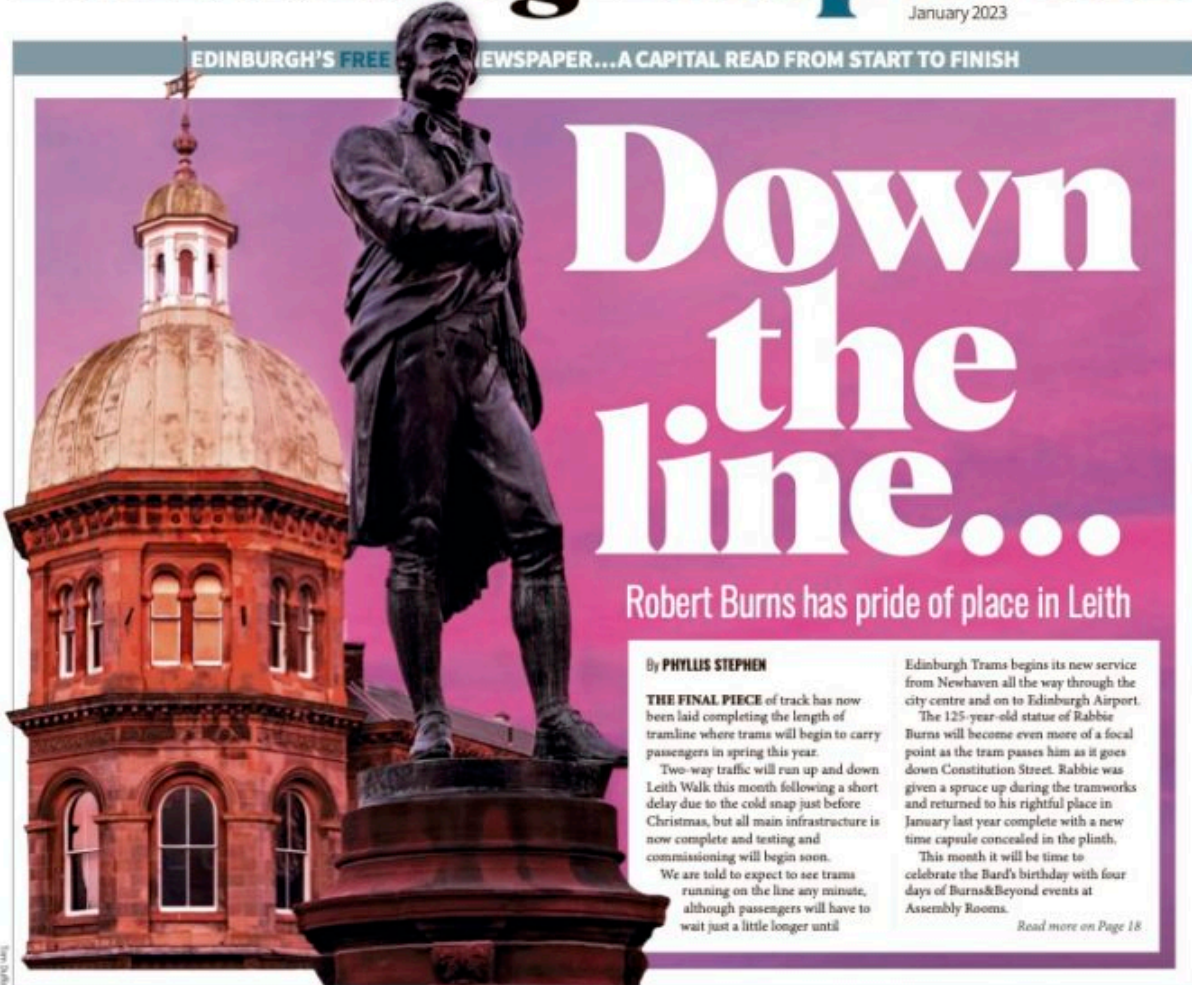
The finest ever

Turnbull's Tornados fifty years on
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the Edinburgh Reporter

January 2023

EDINBURGH'S FREE NEWSPAPER...A CAPITAL READ FROM START TO FINISH



Down the line...

Robert Burns has pride of place in Leith

By **PHYLLIS STEPHEN**

THE FINAL PIECE of track has now been laid completing the length of tramline where trams will begin to carry passengers in spring this year.

Two-way traffic will run up and down Leith Walk this month following a short delay due to the cold snap just before Christmas, but all main infrastructure is now complete and testing and commissioning will begin soon.

We are told to expect to see trams running on the line any minute, although passengers will have to wait just a little longer until

Edinburgh Trams begins its new service from Newhaven all the way through the city centre and on to Edinburgh Airport.

The 125-year-old statue of Rabbie Burns will become even more of a focal point as the tram passes him as it goes down Constitution Street. Rabbie was given a spruce up during the tramworks and returned to his rightful place in January last year complete with a new time capsule concealed in the plinth.

This month it will be time to celebrate the Bard's birthday with four days of Burns&Beyond events at Assembly Rooms.

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