

Letter from Scotland

Jack Frost, the Norse god, has visited Scotland this week.

The daytime temperature has barely risen above freezing point and at night it's been minus 4-6°C in most parts and minus 14°C in the coldest glens exposed to the strong north winds.

Shetland had 9 inches of snow, blowing into drifts in the blizzards.

Most of the snow has been in the North East and the islands, meaning some 300 schools had to close. Travel by road and rail was severely disrupted in the Highlands and Aberdeenshire. Even in the Central Belt trains were running slowly. Jack Frost has been amusing himself following [Traffic Scotland's "gritter tracker"](#) allowing him to see the progress of road clearing by such nick-named gritter lorries as Granite Gritter, Sir Snowington, Polar Patroller, Hansel and Gritt-all.

Here in Edinburgh, we've escaped the snow and instead we've had crisp sunny days with a sprinkling of Jack's frost on the rooftops, lawns and hedges.



It's been a cold week.

In Glasgow they are keeping warm with the traditional winter festival of Celtic music. Over the next two weeks there will be over 300 events, ranging from recitals in the Concert Hall to intimate gigs and workshops in cosy nooks and crannies all over the city. More than 1,200 musicians will be taking part, including home grown performers like Skerryvore and Skipinnish, Peat and Diesel, Julie Fowlis as well as bands from the USA, Australia and West Africa. All styles will be on show: traditional folk, jazz, blues, soul, rock, electronic and world music.

In Edinburgh, we have no time for such flipperly. Lady Hallett's UK Covid Inquiry has set up shop for three weeks to inquire into Scotland's handling of the pandemic. The cut glass accents of London lawyers has been replaced with the burr of Scottish advocates as the inquiry hears from victims' families, care-home operators, medical staff such as Jason

Leach (the authoritative voice of the pandemic) and politicians. I don't myself see the point of these inquiries, they seem to be all about blame – the lessons have been learned long ago.



Lord Advocate Dorothy Bain, KC, after leaving the chamber at Holyrood. Photo The Edinburgh Reporter

But if you wanted more blame, you could have tuned into the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday when the Lord Advocate Dorothy Bain was blaming The Post Office for failing to tell prosecutors that their computer system was at fault, leading to the wrongful conviction of 54 postmasters in Scotland over the last 20 years. Only four have since been cleared. I wonder how the courts allowed anyone to be convicted. Aren't court hearings supposed to unearth the truth? It can't be that hard to ask an accountant to work through a postmaster's books

manually and check the result against the computer's calculations.

As to clearing the postmaster's reputations and paying compensation, the First Minister Humza Yousaf has overruled the Lord Advocate's decision to plough on through the remaining cases one by one by saying he's going to fall in line with the UK government and grant a general amnesty.

He's also fallen in line with Westminster by agreeing to introduce severe restrictions on the ownership of American XL Bully dogs. The fear was that Scotland would be a dumping ground for these big and dangerous dogs by people getting rid of them in England.

But Mr Yousaf still has plenty of disagreements with Westminster. He doesn't think much of the scheme to send illegal migrants to Rwanda. He calls it "morally repugnant". He's also fallen out over his dealings with President Erdogan of Turkey. The UK foreign secretary David Cameron has objected to Mr Yousaf meeting the president at the climate change conference in December without a UK representative present. And this week it's emerged Mr Yousaf unilaterally invited Mr Erdogan to visit Scotland next time he's in Britain. Tut tut, Scotland is not supposed to have its own foreign policy.



Humza Yousaf approaches the Chamber for First Minister's Questions 11 January 2024 PHOTO ©2024 The Edinburgh Reporter
Finally, on Thursday there was a painful meeting between

politicians and trade union leaders and the owners of the Grangemouth oil refinery to plan its orderly shutdown and conversion into a simple oil import terminal. We are indeed witnessing the end of Scotland's oil industry. But, alas, the pain must be borne if we are to reach our climate change targets.

It's annoying ironic that while we're worrying about climate change, the weather plays tricks and throws a chilly week at us. It allows the heretical thought that perhaps the planet is not warming after all. A rare white whale, a beluga, certainly fell for the trick this week when he appeared off the coast of Shetland, thinking he was still in the Arctic.

We must not let Jack Frost put us off our struggle for survival.