

Gordon Craigie



An independent mind...

This month, we're celebrating the achievement of our milestone 100th issue, and mourning the loss of our greatest political mind...

SO, HERE WE ARE then, the 100th issue of *iScot Magazine* – an incredible achievement for an independence-supporting, independently-produced, publication! That we should be celebrating this milestone in the immediate aftermath of the ten-year anniversary of the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, and while we're still mourning the sudden passing of the architect of that historic opportunity, Alex Salmond, leaves all of us in the *iScot* family with a range of mixed emotions.

First and foremost, I suppose, is pride, because the magazine continues to exist, and indeed thrive, against all the odds and continues to evolve in our pursuit of the goal of restoring our independence. Secondly, sadness, because despite our best efforts at promoting the best of Scotland's people, culture, and history, we still appear to be no nearer to achieving that goal. Thirdly, anger, at what appear to be the multiple missed opportunities to advance the

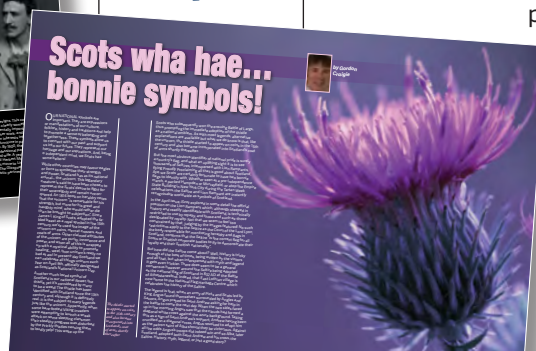
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cause of independence since 2014. And finally, grief, at the recent, still raw, loss of the finest politician Scotland has ever produced in Alex Salmond, but also at the loss of so many other doughty fighters who didn't live to see the nation restored to its rightful state. As we commented a couple of issues back, the period since 2014 will go down in history as Scotland's lost decade...

Other articles in this month's issue will explore various aspects of that sadness, anger, and grief, so I'd like to focus more on the pride that I personally feel in my own contributions to this wonderful magazine. When Ken invited me onboard in early 2018, he asked me to write a piece about Margaret Macdonald, *The Scottish world record holder nobody's heard of*, as part of that month's celebration of International Women's Day. Well, I'd never heard of her either, but I was astonished to discover that Margaret – the wife of Charles Rennie Mackintosh – had not only been a major influence on the work of her better-known husband but had also played a central role in *The Glasgow Girls* as well as having her own work internationally acclaimed in major cultural centres such as London, Paris, Turin, and Venice. You can read more in *iScot* issue 39 from March 2018.

I was equally astonished to discover that, since that introduction in 2018, I have contributed 75 feature articles (this one will make it 76!), around 60 sub-edits/ghostwrites/rewrites/*iScotifications* (Ken's description!), one poem (!), and one special edition magazine (in collaboration with *Random Scottish History*) – not too shabby a contribution, I think? Those feature articles have covered an incredibly wide range of topics, but always with the central theme of promoting Scottish history, culture, people, and connections. There are a few that I'm particularly proud of and/or attached to...

One of the earliest ones that I often think about is titled *Scots wha hae... bonnie symbols!* from *iScot* issue 42, celebrating our national



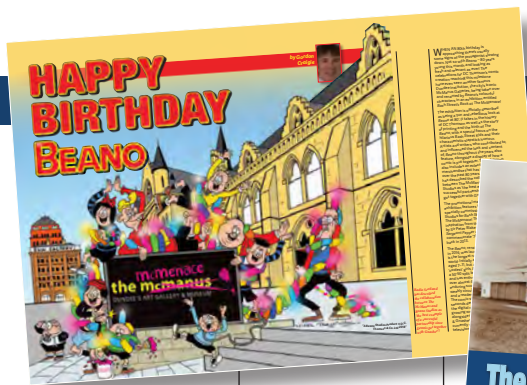
symbols which are just so appropriate for our “here’s tae us, wha’s like us?” culture. Our national flag is based on a vision that King Angus had before the Battle of Athelstaneford in AD832, our national animal is the unicorn, a mythical creature, and our national flower is the thistle, a plant that others may consider a weed. For me, this demonstrates the strengths of the Scottish nation in being prepared to think differently and to go our own way. As a people we are both dreamers and visionaries; think of our poets, writers, and inventors. And our characters can be prickly as well as beautiful, an important quality when up against bigger opponents and competitors. We are well served by the saltire, the unicorn, and the thistle, most definitely inspiring symbols for ‘those o independent mind’!

Another national symbol, sort of, is *The Beano* and I’m really proud of my *Happy Birthday Beano* piece, which celebrated that publication’s 80th birthday, in *iScot* issue 43. Staying in my home city, two issues later we featured the *Birth of the Design Museum of Scotland – V&A Dundee*, a great addition to our revamped waterfront and a building the whole of Scotland should be proud of. The following month, for issue 44, I researched a story that was taking Twitter by storm and, after an interview with the original author, Annie Harrower-Gray, was able to piece together *The Great Prestwick Airport Robbery?* – this feature turned out to be one of our most favourably commented on articles ever. I was clearly on a roll at this point because the next month my article focused on a scandal which continues to blight our society, *Foodbanks are not normal*, which featured specifically the challenges faced by the Dundee Foodbank but also looked at the national and international context. Written in 2018, the article quotes a UN Economic and Social Council report from 2016, which criticised the UK Government, stating bluntly their concerns “about the lack of adequate measures adopted by the [UK Government] to address the increasing levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, including obesity, and the lack of adequate measures to reduce the reliance on food banks”. Since that stark warning was issued, foodbank usage has continued to rise...

Things got personal in 2019, when my contribution to issue 51 was *Winston Churchill – My* part in His Downfall!* – the asterisk is there to give forewarning that “my” contribution was, in fact, courtesy of my great-grandfather, Patrick Crawford, who was “Neddie” Scrymgeour’s election agent when Churchill was finally, gleefully, booted out of his “safe seat” in Dundee in 1922... by the prohibitionist Scrymgeour! There was much more to Neddie though than simply his anti-alcohol stance – he was indeed a true socialist and perhaps a man ahead of his time as he refused to compromise his beliefs by joining the mainstream Labour movement.

My great-grandfather, Patrick, was a fervent trade unionist, attended the 1926 General and Municipal Workers Congress as a delegate, and stood as a socialist candidate for Dundee Parish Council. Through his political activities he became personally friendly with the then rising stars of the Labour Party – Nye Bevan, Jennie Lee, and Clement Attlee, all of whom visited him at his Lochee home on several occasions. A lifelong advocate of Home Rule for Scotland I have no doubt that Patrick would be similarly active in today’s independence movement, horrified at what has become of the Labour Party, and proud that his home city of Dundee has acquired the nickname of Yes City.

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Another story that really affected me personally was *He Never Spoke About It*, also from 2019, in issue 53. Having never met my uncle Henry, a Gordon Highlander who was killed in France in 1944, the story of another Gordon Highlander, Leslie Wilson and his capture at St Valéry-en-Caux in 1940 and subsequent multiple escapes – *the man no prison camp could hold!* – fascinated me. We usually rerun this story online each June, to commemorate the event, so please revisit it if you can – it gives me yet another reason to hold the aforementioned Churchill in such low regard!

Banking on an end to austerity

Myths and lies – what a surprise!

Rule Britannia, Britannia waives the rules...

Prosperity to Scotland and no Union!

I must've been cooking on gas in June 2019 because another of my favourite articles, *Banking on Austerity*, appears in the same issue! In it, I give Gordon Brown and Gideon Osborne a bit of a well-deserved kicking, have a meander through Scottish banking history, and a look at banking and currency in some other, comparable, countries before concluding, "Only in Scotland, apparently, is the decision about national currency deemed to be controversial, problematic or, in cases of extreme exceptionalism (aka, the Scottish cringe), impossible!" There are also some bonny pictures of concept designs for Scottish banknotes – braw!

Over the summer and autumn of 2019, I was clearly on a mission of discovery with a series of articles – *Myths and lies, what a surprise!* (issue 54), *Rule Britannia, Britannia waives the rules...* (issue 55), and *Prosperity to Scotland, and no Union!* (issue 56) – which explored particular aspects of English subterfuge in the times leading up to the Union in 1707. Having dipped into this fascinating history – none of which any of us had ever been taught at school! – Ken gave me free rein to produce a special edition of the magazine, *Treaty of Union Articles*, in association with the redoubtable Jenny Eeles of *Random Scottish History*. This is still available as a free download at www.treatyofunion.com.

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tinyurl.com/iScot-Treaty. Reading and putting together this sample of contemporaneous articles certainly gave me a greater understanding of just exactly how duplicitous and self-serving the English establishment were, and how willing certain Scots were to sell out their country and their people for personal gain – can we honestly say that anything has changed in 300+ years?

In fact, it was that experience of discovering so many things that I'd certainly never heard of before that led to the five-part series, *Scotland in the Union*, which formed my contribution to issues 70–74 in the early part of 2021. Again, putting that series together was an eye-opener for me. It also made me angry that so many generations of Scots have been deprived of the opportunity to learn their own history which, in my opinion, has contributed massively to "the cringe" and this nonsensical narrative of Scotland being – uniquely in the world! – the only country incapable of running our own affairs or even having our own currency without the "broad shoulders" of the benevolent (!) United Kingdom. Aye, right!

Rewinding slightly, there's a couple of the articles from the dark days of Covid in 2020 that still stick in my mind. *The power of three* (issue 65) was, arguably, a wee bit self-indulgent but it did still have a serious point to it... honest! In celebrating the lives of Neil Paterson, Iain Macmillan, and Brian Connolly – hugely talented men in their respective fields – what I was getting at was that "they weren't successful because they were Scottish, but they were successful *and* Scottish – more evidence, as if it was needed, that our country and its people are big enough, smart enough, and rich enough!" And, as I said in concluding that story, "maybe the real magic of the 'power of three' is that I've managed to sneak in a column featuring three of my lifelong passions – Dundee United, The Beatles, and Sweet. Good effort Gordon!" Indeed...

The other one that I particularly remember is *The nichts'll sune be fair drawin in...* (issue 63) where I reflected on our collective Covid experiences in Scotland over the previous six months. One special memory of that time was of discovering many previously hidden – to me anyway – TV programmes being delivered from a Scottish perspective and by Scottish voices. "From documentaries like Ally Heather's *Rebel Tongue* and Cora Bissett's *Scotland – Contains Strong Language*, to comedies like *Scot Squad* and *Two Doors Down*, or more niche offerings like *Bad Influencer* and *Shelf Isolation*, there's a growing number of opportunities to hear our own accents and humour in a natural setting. We're all aware of the tokenism in most of the mainstream channel offerings, when the occasional Scot appears as the drunk/junkie/hard man, where our accents are offered up for ridicule, or subtitled, or both! We are so accustomed to having our everyday entertainment beamed into our homes from another country that for years we've just accepted that that's the way things are. Well, it doesn't have to be that way, and that simple commitment to watch, and support, Scottish programming will go a long way to boosting our collective morale and eliminating any lingering cringe. Same goes for music – the wonderful Amy Macdonald attracted a huge YouTube audience in early May (getting on for 100,000 views to date) when she livestreamed one of her concerts from last summer [2019], in Schaffhausen, and you could feel the love for Scotland from the Swiss crowd. And she didnae need subtitles!"

Then, in the summer of 2021, *iScot Magazine's* lead feature

writer, Robbie Dinwoodie, decided to hang up his notebook. I was extremely honoured when Ken asked me to take over his slot and, while Robbie had concentrated solely on interviews, Ken and I agreed that we should take the opportunity to shake things up a wee bit and take more of a columnist approach to the lead article, with the occasional interview when the opportunity arose. After kicking off by interviewing the legend himself, Robbie, a series of interviews followed before the already complex Scottish political scene started to become even more complicated. After a few twists and turns, we were soon headed towards the “no ifs, no buts, no maybes” certainty (?) of the promised 19 October 2023 second independence referendum and this necessitated, in our view, a bit more analysis and commentary. Our mission, if that’s not too grand a description, at *iScot Magazine* is to entertain, educate, and inform, but always from a pro-Scotland perspective. We all know what happened next – Nicola Sturgeon’s ill-fated decision to ask a British court to decide if she had the power to disrupt the British state never made sense to me, or many like me, and the independence movement is still suffering the consequences of the inevitable negative judgement.

Her unexpected resignation a few months afterwards was only the beginning of an horrendous time for the SNP and the Scottish Government and, well, it’s still going on – there’s a lot required to change before the next Holyrood election to ensure we still have a pro-independence government in Scotland. Yet all the while this particular binfire was going on, one man was steadily rebuilding his reputation and charting a credible course forward towards the restoration of Scotland’s independence – Alex Salmond. The outstanding politician of his – and of any previous or subsequent – generation, and the finest political mind Scotland has ever produced, was working tirelessly to promote the idea of “Scotland United” to ensure that we maximise the pro-independence vote in 2026 and to use that democratic event, specifically the list vote, as the mandate to begin negotiations on the terms of independence with Westminster with the backing of the international community. He had the gravitas, and the chutzpah, to succeed too, even if the current generation of SNP politicians had yet to realise it.

Sometime last year, Ken told me that Alex had agreed to be interviewed by me for *iScot Magazine*. At that point, as we had already started to look ahead to our milestone 100th issue, we felt that there would be no better way to celebrate the occasion than to open the magazine with that interview. To say I was excited would be a serious understatement, but equally honoured and proud to be given the opportunity of a one-to-one conversation with my only political hero. It seemed there was little point in scheduling our meeting too far ahead of publication as we really wanted to include Alex’s up-to-the-minute thoughts on what the road ahead was for Scotland. In aiming to have this issue out so that our celebrations could also sit alongside St Andrew’s Day, we thought that early November would be a fine time to arrange our meeting, but, as Robert Burns memorably warned us, *the best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley*, and as John Lennon also reminded us, *life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans...*

The journalist, Martin Hannan, a good friend of Alex Salmond, tells this story of Alex: “He once told me that if the people of Scotland really knew their history, they would have no qualms about voting for the regaining of our independence – he was always precise about



that, regaining rather than winning independence for the first time.” I try to stick with that in my writing too, the notion of regaining or restoring, as opposed to *gaining*, our independence, mainly as a result of having researched so much of Scotland’s history for articles like the ones referred to earlier. I completely agree with Alex’s view that if more Scots knew our history, our *real* history, then we would probably have restored our independence years ago. But, going back to the English/British subterfuge thing, I’m reminded of the story of the Labour education minister whose response to being asked why more is not done to promote Scottish studies in our school curriculum was, “I do not see my role as educating a generation of young nationalists”! Like Alex, *they* all know that if we all knew the truth about our history and culture then our independence would have been re-established a long, long time ago.

We all still have work to do on that front and, as we head into our second century of issues (!), *iScot Magazine* will continue to promote everything that is good about Scotland – while not being shy about criticism where it’s needed – until we reach our goal. Alex Salmond’s final public pronouncement, on social media, was a reminder to the Scottish Government, and to the First Minister in particular, that “Scotland is a country, not a county”. We wholeheartedly endorse that fact, and we should all be emphasising that to anyone and everyone who diminishes our movement, our ambitions, and our country. As the American writer John Steinbeck once pointed out, Scotland is not a lost cause, it is an unwon cause. It’s up to us to win it, so let’s keep fighting – the dream shall never die.

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