

By Pax Brittanica, Our Imperial (and Chelsea Dinner Party) Correspondent



Glorious stuff (though we are surprised that this historian doesn't remember that Ireland decided to leave the UK, or thinks our American friends were pleased to have the Union Jack fluttering above the white House in 1814).

We are delighted to reprint this stirring call to remain part of the London upper middle class from our friends at the Daily Mail. To quell any doubts from those who imagine that we indulge in satire (Heaven forbid!) not a single word in Andrew Roberts article has been changed.

Imagine yourself at a very smart dinner party and the conversation gets round to the issue of Scottish independence. Suppose people whose intelligence and thoughtfulness you've long respected, such as Sir David Attenborough and historians Simon Schama and Professor Mary Beard, said they thought that it was in the best interests of Scotland to remain within the United Kingdom rather than going it alone in the world.

Then people who were at the top of their professions, such as the former chiefs of the Defence

Staff, Marshal of the Air Force 'Jock' Stirrup, Lord Stirrup, and Field Marshal Charles Guthrie, Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank, agreed with them, as did the former head of the Royal Navy, Admiral Sir Alan West.

At the other end of the table, some of the brainiest people in Europe, including Stephen Hawking and the former Astronomer Royal, Martin Rees, Baron Rees of Ludlow, wholeheartedly agree. Wouldn't you listen very carefully to what they have to say? Especially if historians of the calibre of Margaret MacMillan and Tom Holland, intellectuals of the experience of Melvyn Bragg and Joan Bakewell, actors of the quality of Sir Patrick Stewart and Dame Judi Dench also weighed in, saying exactly the same thing?

Wouldn't these views be at least worth considering very profoundly? Not if you're someone of the vanity and self-regard – or perhaps by now the sheer desperation – of Alex Salmond.

The Yes campaign has sneered at the opinions of some of the most profound thinkers and intellectuals of our day who have just written a joint letter opposing Scottish independence, simply because they were joined on the page by a number of TV celebrities, comedians and social gadflies who were asked to join the 200-strong list.

The people I mentioned above have been demonised as 'posh, rich, publicly educated English celebrities', even though most of them were not – and by the way still deserve a voice in our democracy even if all of them were. The response of the Yes vote has been woeful, yet wholly representative of the arrogant way they have conducted this whole campaign.

'It's Scotland's pound,' the impossibly conceited Mr Salmond has said. 'It doesn't belong to George Osborne. It doesn't belong to Ed Balls. It's Scotland's pound and we are keeping it.'

For all that the Yes campaign has tried to discount all non-Scots' views on independence, there is nothing wrong with the rest of the United Kingdom reminding the Scots they are admired, valued and respected co-creators of the United Kingdom, indeed central to the whole fabulously successful project.

The rest of the country regards them with an affection bound over three centuries of a joint endeavour, a unity which it would be tragic to throw away.

After more than 300 battles between the Scots and English, the 1st Article of the 1707 Act of Union stated: 'The two kingdoms of England & Scotland shall forever be united into one kingdom by the name of Great Britain.'

Scotland kept her excellent legal and educational systems, of course, but the new entity adopted a common flag, monarchy, coinage and Great Seal.

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That Act of Parliament provided for the 'same allowances, encouragements and drawbacks, and [for Scotland to] be under the same prohibitions and regulations'.

A vast free trade area was created, with access to both countries' trading outlets, so the Industrial Revolution would benefit Clydeside as much as Lancashire. In 1707, Glasgow's 12,000 inhabitants barely numbered half of Bristol's, but by 1800 its 77,000 people made it the third city in the nation. Scotland exploded onto the world: From Nova Scotia in Canada, Perth in Australia, Dunedin in New Zealand and elsewhere, the nodal points of our imperial expansion had Scottish names.

Yet instead of playing a global role, Scotland could have been an obscure backwater, had it not added hugely to the critical mass necessary to propel the United Kingdom into the forefront of nations, where she has remained ever since. At least up until this vote on September 18.

The Battle of Waterloo, whose bicentenary we celebrate next year, might possibly have been won without the Prussians, but it could not have been won without the valiant Scots.

I have no Scottish blood, but as an historian it's impossible not to salute the magnificent contribution at Waterloo made in the vital closing of the gates of the strategic Hougoumont farmhouse by Colonel James MacDonnell and Sergeant James Graham. The performances of the Black Watch, Gordon and Cameron Highlanders and Scots Greys, among several other Scottish regiments, were heroic.

The Union has been at the root of the success of both Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Together we make up only 0.9 per cent of the world's population, yet we have the sixth largest economy, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, founder member status at Nato, leadership roles in the Commonwealth and – for better or worse – the EU, and perhaps man-for-man the best Armed Forces in the world.

The glorious contribution made by Scotland has always been absolutely key to this success, and should be receiving full-throated thanks from the rest of the United Kingdom.

In a sense of course, the Union was always what is called in business a 'reverse takeover'.

Even though at 5.3 million the Scots make up only 8.4 per cent of the population of the UK, eight of our 52 prime ministers have been Scots, and several others grew up in Scotland, or were educated there.

For all that Alex Salmond portrays Scotland as having got the worst deal out of the Union, in fact Scotland has quite rightly benefitted easily as much as England and Wales.

Too often this debate has been fought, on both sides, in terms of mere cash; yet it is the visceral facts of enemy blood spilt, history made, mutual dangers overcome and triumphs that should be dominating the discussion.

For can we really be contemplating the end of the Union Jack? (The term itself may be derived from King James VI of Scotland signing his name 'Jacques'.) The splendid flag that was the first to fly over Mount Everest, the flag that swept the oceans clear of slavery, that fluttered over the White House in 1814, the Heights of Abraham in Quebec in 1759, the Indian sub-continent for

more than a century, over Paris in 1815 and El Alamein in 1942, and in the British zone of Berlin after 1945.

For three centuries, our joint flag – which has as its base the Scottish saltire – has meant liberty and justice and often life itself. Yet today its existence is threatened by this referendum.

The people of Scotland, England, Wales and Ulster together didn't allow the murderous, 30-year-long Irish republican campaign break up our United Kingdom. Scots must not allow Alex Salmond's pompous bluster to succeed where even three decades of IRA bombs failed.

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