

Scotland's Independence from the United Kingdom: What Happens to England?

The September Referendum

By [Lesley Docksey](#)

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As if Prime Minister David Cameron hasn't got enough problems, the promised [referendum](#) allowing Scotland to vote on whether people want independence from the rest of the United Kingdom looms ever closer, and some polls show that the gap between the Yes and No camps is closing.

It will be a tight race come September. While staying within the UK still leads in the polls, over [50% of people](#) believe an independent Scotland could be successful.

One reason for the increasing number of once-independent areas seeking to regain that independence is that people also want to recover their character, their heritage, their sense of belonging to that particular patch of the earth which defines who they are.

While most of us are happy to trade, to buy products from other countries, to take part in what is now a "global community", we want to do it on our own terms. We do not want to be governed by global corporations which have far too much influence on our governments.

Globalisation is a process of homogenisation. We do not want to be mixed together until we are all the same tiny digits in the corporate balance sheet. We want to be different, and we want to market that difference. We want our contributions to the world to be recognised as *ours*, not swallowed up by some greater, faceless state.

Let me make it clear - I am English. I am British in the sense of belonging (as did my ancestors) to the British Isles, which is not a nation but a geographic location, a part of which is England. I come from a place, not a political entity. And I am definitely not United Kingdom-ish. I have huge loyalty to my land but little in the way of political "patriotism".

When I visit Wales or Scotland I am conscious of entering countries separate from mine, full of Welsh and Scots - not Brits. We define ourselves as Welsh, Scottish or English. We belong to countries with different accents, idioms and languages, different histories and cultures, legends and customs, and ways of thinking and perception. And I love it that way.

Therefore I respect the fact that many Scots want to return to being independent of the United Kingdom - not that *any* of our ancestors got to vote on the issue of being "United" back in the 17th century. I also respect the fact that the Scots are holding a referendum on whether to regain their independence from Westminster, and that it is their referendum, not mine.

There's another thing. Although it has not been openly said, is it really Westminster that

many Scots feel the need to separate themselves from? Because there are quite a lot of us English folk who feel the same!

But as an Englishwoman, I am ashamed of some of the arguments put forward by the “Better Together” camp. That title for a start. And the [launch](#) of Better Together was used by ex-Chancellor Alistair Darling, himself a Scotsman, to make much of the fact that an independent Scotland would “lose its standing in the world”.

Even worse, a diminished United Kingdom would lose its “clout”. Very important, clout is, to self-important politicians. They don’t get to interfere in other countries’ affairs, something that other countries might consider a good thing.

How tediously long is the list of what Scotland would lose if it cut its ties with England. Oh yes. It is *England* that is all-important. Little mention is made of Wales or Northern Ireland, but then they are not host to Westminster or the “financial capital of the world”.

Better Together said Scotland can’t be [part](#) of the EU. Why not? They can easily apply for membership or is Westminster going to have a hissy-fit and veto their entry? But the ex-head of the EU Commission Jose Manuel Barroso said “it would be extremely difficult”.

Ex-Prime Minister Gordon Brown threatens an independent Scotland with the [loss of the EU rebate](#) that we currently enjoy. Where EU membership is concerned, would Scots be worse or better off? How much do they really benefit from the UK’s rebate – compared to England? Better Together says they would be worse off. The Yes campaign says not, and points out that Gordon Brown, Scottish born and bred, didn’t negotiate a better deal for Scotland when he had the opportunity.

Up pops the Labour Party leader Ed Miliband [saying](#) that “Scotland may need border controls”. Surely not if Scotland stays within the EU, where there is free movement across borders. What next – a re-fortification of [Hadrian’s Wall](#)?

Scotland couldn’t possibly [share](#) our currency, although for many years Scottish banks have issued Scottish currency. And the [Committee of Scottish Bankers](#) has this to say: “... no banknote whatsoever (including Bank of England notes!) qualifies for the term ‘legal tender’ north of the border and the Scottish economy seems to manage without that legal protection.” So they could print their own, no problem. Or, perish the thought, they could adopt the Euro.

There might be a problem with the banks themselves – the main Scottish banks are not Scottish owned. How many UK financial institutions, utilities, insurance/pension funds and corporate businesses are solely UK-owned? Ah, but so many businesses operating in Scotland would have to [relocate](#). Why? Business locates at its convenience; where money is to be made or where there is a good labour force. Big business these days doesn’t do nationalism or patriotism (if it ever did), despite what [the CBI](#) tried to maintain.

Gordon Brown feared Scotland would [lose](#) the BBC. But they do have Scottish TV and satellite TV, and if I can receive Al Jazeera and Russia Today in rural England I daresay they won’t feel too cut off, although they might miss BBC Alba. Even worse, Scotland wouldn’t be able to access any funding for local projects from our [lottery](#) money.

Some of these arguments are looking a little desperate, and the more ridiculous ones result

in a few more people saying they'll vote for independence - which must be why the big guns have been rolled out. It started in January with [Vladimir Putin](#) on the Andrew Marr Show, although Education Secretary Michael Gove has just [opined](#) that Putin would use Scottish independence as an excuse to "dictate to the world". Seriously. But if people like [Barack Obama](#), [Hillary Clinton](#), [Pope Francis](#) and [Chinese Premier Li](#) can now stick their oars into the referendum debate, then so can I. I am, after all, a rather nearer neighbour to the Scots than any of them.

This frothing and foaming at the mouth from Better Together always seems to boil down to one thing - money. Sir William Patey [claims](#) that only by remaining a part of the UK will Scotland have access to the IMF and the World Bank. Why would they want to since, should Scotland run into financial muddy waters, the IMF and the World Bank would be the first to come knocking at their door offering, as they have with other poor benighted countries, the kind of financial assistance that will pauper them for the foreseeable future.

Why not consider what we would lose if Scotland became independent, apart from what's left of North Sea oil? And [Faslane](#). With nowhere else to base them, the Trident missiles would have to go.

While relentlessly talking about what an independent Scotland would lose, how much poorer it might be in terms of money or power, Better Together has conveniently forgotten the impressive contribution Scotland has made, not just to the UK, but to the world. That such a small part of "Great" Britain should have contributed so much to the way we live now is astonishing. For instance:

James Watt, [inventor](#) and mechanical engineer, renowned for his improvements in steam engine technology. The unit of measurement of electrical power - the watt - is named in his honour. Another engineer, John Logie Baird, invented television, without which the world would be a very different place.

The [Scots](#) not only invented the telephone (Alexander Graham Bell) and logarithms (John Napier), developed radar (Robert Watson-Watt), penicillin (Alexander Fleming), and antiseptics (Joseph Lister). They also founded modern geology (James Hutton), invented the bicycle, the threshing machine, a reaping machine (forerunner of the combine harvester) the "Mac" raincoat (Charles Mackintosh), the vacuum flask (James Dewar) and our road surfacing (John McAdam).

They have produced great philosophers (David Hume), economists (Adam Smith), and chemists (Joseph Black), writers and poets (including the wonderful Hugh MacDiarmid and the hilarious William McGonagall), actors, sportsmen and women and artists/architects like Charles Rennie Mackintosh, recently in the news because of the [disastrous fire](#) at the Glasgow School of Art, one of the most inspiring buildings anywhere. And perhaps I should mention another of my heroes, photography pioneer David Octavius Hill.

Whether in politics, medicine, science, engineering or the arts, Scotland has not only greatly altered the way we live but added to the way we think. And some Scots have been very forward thinking:

In seeking to reform the Scottish Kirk, and backed by some lords who were in favour of reformation, John Knox wrote this wish list 450 years ago:

That all Church land should be used for three purposes, namely

1. for the upkeep of the kirk
2. for the support of the disabled and the aged poor and the provision of work for the unemployed
3. for a public elementary school education for every child

Unfortunately the lords being lords and fond of owning as much as they could, they ended up with the land and the Kirk got the kirks. But there, for some, is another reason for Scottish independence - the possibility that they will finally follow up on their [Land Reform Act](#).

Looking at that small snapshot of Scotland's richness of invention, capability and expertise, I think it sheer arrogance for Better Together to insist Scotland can't exist without the rest of us. The arguments for a No vote would be more impressive if they talked about how, in so many ways, the rest of us might be impoverished if Scotland chooses to leave us.

And whether Scotland becomes independent or remains within the UK, it will always be its unique Scottish self. The Scots will see to that.

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Articles by: [Lesley Docksey](#)

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