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Campaign for an **E**nglish **P**arliament

Think of England Number 112: February 2021



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Number 112 February 2021

Contents:

Editorial

Campaigning for England : A message from the CEP Chairman

Current English Affairs: Police and Courts, Environment, Roads and Transport

English politics: Future of the Union

UK Government of English Affairs: Bills before parliament and Statutory Instruments

England's hero: Sir Thomas More

England's history: Capture of New Amsterdam

English culture: Candlemas

Promotion: Turbot

Recipe: Steamed Turbot with Lemongrass, Peas and Baby Spinach

RECOMMENDED READING: This Sporting Life: Sport and Liberty in England, 1760-1960 by Robert Colls



Campaign for an English Parliament Aims, Principles and Policies.

We campaign for an English Parliament, meaning a parliament for the people of England, for whom England is their chosen or inherited home and who are legally entitled to vote.

We campaign for an English Parliament with powers at least as great as those of Scotland's, i.e. a Parliament and Executive (Government) that can make Acts (primary legislation) on the same domestic issues (e.g. health, welfare & education) that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

The CEP works with academics, business groups, trades unions, think tanks and the media to create the conditions whereby UK MPs see that there is no alternative to the re-establishment of the English Parliament.

The CEP is a pressure group. It is not a political party. It does not contest elections.

The CEP is not and will not be affiliated to or formally linked with any political party

Editorial: "February fill dyke, be it black or be it white, fill-dike, fill-dyke" A photograph of our largest lake, Windermere, is our appropriate frontispiece.



The Covid crisis has shown up the cracks in the UK constitution. Having been sidelined for more than 20 years by the media and the UK government, the media at least, are allowing more commentators to draw from our research over those years to highlight England's problems inherent in our unbalanced constitution. Even so there are still those intent on destroying the ancient unity of England. They must be vigorously resisted. Vernon Bogdanor repeats his usual unhelpful mantra. Gordon Brown, infamous for never letting the word England pass his lips in favour of the insulting 'regions of the UK,' now has to recognise England's place in the union even though he would continue, as the government in which he served tried, to destroy England's unity with regions. That government did at least canvas the North East of England in a referendum unlike the Tories' imposition of their form of so-called regional devolution. That referendum and the massive indifference, shown by the figures reported by Patrick Flynn, to the election of city mayors clearly demonstrates that such impositions are not popular. Brown does now seem to accept that a federal solution may be the answer in a modern 21st century union. There have been no letters in the Daily Telegraph in response to 3 'relevant' articles, 2 by Nick Timothy and 1 by Vernon Bogdanor, it looks like an editorial policy to keep any comments online, perhaps to avoid exciting 'normal' readers.

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Campaigning for England: A New Year's message from our Chairman.



Hello everyone, I hope you have all had as pleasant a Christmas as was possible. 2020 as a year was quite disappointing for the campaign. Unfortunately 2020 was dominated by Brexit and Covid which marginalised all other issues.

Having sorted out the Brexit deal and got us over the line does not seem to have made our prime minister any more popular with the majority of people in the country. Certainly in Scotland his popularity is declining even further with opinion polls showing the Scots in favour of independence rising above 50%. Of course the Prime Minister has refused the Scots a second independence referendum, however this position might become untenable after the Holyrood elections this year. That of course depends on how well the SNP do in those elections, the present opinion polls show them doing very well. So we can expect a great deal of union flag and Saltire waving and chest thumping from Westminster in the run up to the Holyrood elections. We can also expect that more English jobs and money will go north in an attempt to stem the support for the SNP as it did in 2014. I often wonder how many of the naval dockyard workers in Portsmouth who's jobs were sacrificed for the good of the union have found work and how many are now among the permanently unemployed.

Because the thought of English unity is Westminster's worst nightmare they are pushing ahead with their English disunity campaign, code named, Devolution in England.

Devolution = Regionalisation = a cynical ploy. For when you destroy everything that creates unity in a nation the people are easily controlled. And it is not just our geographical communities that are in danger of being divided and ruled.

Our national day, for St George, has been totally ignored or discouraged in many local authorities and outright banned in others. All whilst openly celebrating the national days of other countries. And I think that once Covid is out of the way they will put more effort into operation 'devolution in England.'

So what are we planning to do to fight back.

Well we had been planning a series of talks throughout England in 2020. However with the coming of Covid we were unable to organise these events and hopefully 2021 will be more fruitful. The campaign kept the flag flying as much as possible and we have contributed to several newspapers and gave evidence to Parliamentary select committees' enquiries. Whilst this was valuable we would nevertheless have liked to have done more.

It remains to be seen how Covid will affect 2021, certainly we must look at the first half of the year to be the same as the year just gone. Be assured we will not abandon our campaign; England is too important to us to stop working for our own Parliament. We are in the process of organising a series of webinars throughout England for the spring and summer of this year. This kind of event is a new departure for us but I feel it will be an effective way of pushing the campaign forward. The exact details of these webinars have not been finalised yet but as soon as they are you will be informed. These webinars are not just a campaigning tool we will also be using them to gather information on the state of English identity, affinity and patriotism and the desire for England's self government. This data will not be gathered by us but by a team of intellectuals who will then present this in a paper. In this way our conclusions and evidence gathered will not be able to be dismissed by the politicians or the media, as they have in the past, who generally accuse us of bias in our work and unscientific in our approach.

This however is just the start. Once the restrictions are lifted we will be back out campaigning as usual. There is now in England a deep desire for a new approach to politics in this country. The old politics is so discredited and distrusted that no faith can be put in it to solve any of our problems or satisfy even our most basic aspirations. Labour and Conservatives, first past the post, the cronyism of the House of Lords, all have surely run their course. We need change, deep seated and fundamental. We need an English Parliament.

So let us do what Boris Jonson instructed us to do. We must take back control, but this time for England from the UK.

Wishing you all the best for the new year. Steve Davis, Chairman

Current English Affairs: Police and Courts, Environment, Roads and Transport,
Elected police and crime commissioners should lose their unilateral power to fire chief constables, according to a recently retired senior officer.

Fiona Hamilton, Crime Editor: Tuesday January 12 2021, 12.00am, The Times

Bill Skelly, who led Lincolnshire police, said that the ability of PCCs to get rid of chief constables without

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checks and balances potentially created a chilling effect. It made the chief the “most vulnerable” officer in the force and there was a risk they would not challenge their PCC if they feared losing their job and pension. He called on the government to introduce safeguards such as a requirement for dismissals to be ratified by the local police and crime panel.

Elected PCCs, who replaced police authorities when they were introduced in 2012 by Theresa May as home secretary, have the power to hire and fire chief constables and set budgets. But although they must go to the police and crime panel for approval to hire a chief constable, there is no obstacle if they wish to dismiss them if the relationship breaks down.

Mr Skelly said the police and crime panels, mostly made up of councillors, should be involved in any move to dismiss a chief constable to make the process fairer. “In the same way that the commissioner has to give a rationale for why they should appoint the chief, the commissioner would have to give a rationale as to why they wish to dismiss them or terminate a contract,” he said.

He also said there should be a requirement for steps such as mediation to take place before a chief constable could be fired.

The present situation made chief constables vulnerable because they were on fixed-term contracts from which they could be dismissed before reaching pensionable age. “You’re subject to essentially the views of a single individual who says, ‘I don’t see you as part of this organisation any more, I’m giving you notice I’m terminating your contract.’ I would welcome an additional safeguard.”

A Home Office source said that bringing crime panels into the dismissal process would erode the power of PCCs. However, they said that consideration was being given to a proper disciplinary process in which PCCs would have to give written warnings and use mediation before firing a chief constable.

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### **Green belt at risk from ‘wrong ideas about cities’**

Neil Johnston, Midlands Correspondent: January 18 2021, The Times

Coventry city council has planned for more than 40,000 new homes on green belt land. Thousands of acres of green space around towns and cities could be built on because of “implausible” population forecasts, campaigners claim.

The Office for National Statistics predicted that Coventry’s population would rise by 32 per cent between 2011 and 2031. That figure has led the city council to plan for more than 40,000 new homes on green belt land that once formed the Forest of Arden.

However, Keep Our Green Belt Green said that the city’s “vital signs” did not reflect the population growth projected. Its research, which four professors have reviewed, found that jobs had grown by 18 per cent in recent years but this was half that of some nearby towns. Births fell and car registrations and A&E attendances grew at a slower rate than in other cities.



The Office for Statistics Regulation, which is reviewing the statistics for Coventry after pressure by Andy Street, the mayor of the West Midlands, is now facing calls to broaden the investigation after it emerged that other areas had concerns about the use of population figures to justify building on the green belt.

Merle Gering, who chairs Keep Our Green Belt Green, said that estimates appeared to be wrong in Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Nottingham, where births were not rising as the ONS had predicted but deaths were rising faster than expected. He added that the problem was “particularly acute in university towns” eg Canterbury where the number of students who left after graduating was underestimated. Campaigners in Guildford and the Wirral have also carried out studies and believe that the projections used in local plans do not match real growth.

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Failure to regulate council audits properly risks being a costly error

Patrick Hosking: Financial Editor, Tuesday January 19 2021, 12.01am, The Times

The lesson we learn time and again is that bad audit can end up being horrendously expensive. It helps to conceal everything from management recklessness to out-and-out fraud. It enables one small mis-step to fester and grow into something that ultimately can kill the organisation.

Good audit, on the other hand, can expose financial risk-taking to sunlight, hold management to account and prevent fraud and corruption, or root it out early before it becomes an existential threat.

While the private sector is starting to learn this lesson and to support reform in the audit world, progress in the public sector is slower, if not imperceptible. Yet the scope for dodgy accounting in town halls seems, if anything, even greater than in FTSE 100 companies.

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First, there's the lack of accountability. Institutional shareholders have the time, clout, access and expertise to challenge the accounts of the companies they invest in. Council taxpayers and local media do not. Second, there's the complexity. Local authority accounts are "considered to be impenetrable to the public", according to Sir Tony Redmond in his recent report into council audit. Auditors need to be expert in the arcane rules and practices of local government.

Third, there's the lack of money. Fees paid for local authority audits have fallen by 40 per cent since 2015. Audit firms are decreasingly interested in the business and more likely to assign junior staff to the job.

Fourth, there's the lack of clear accountability. No fewer than six different organisations share responsibility for overseeing council audits, including the Financial Reporting Council, Public Sector Audit Appointments, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and the Comptroller and Auditor General. No one is unambiguously in charge, while liaison is poor. That's a recipe for fudge and failure. Fifth, councils are under extreme pressure to find income and that has led them to indulge in questionable leveraged speculation — borrowing to buy shopping centres, hotels, alternative energy projects and the like. Some are hamstrung by huge pension scheme deficits.

The chickens are coming home to roost. Croydon council in south London declared itself effectively bankrupt in November after borrowing £1.5 billion partly to invest in speculative investments.

We have been here before with councillors straying into speculation they don't understand. Some readers will remember the Hammersmith & Fulham affair. The west London council, along with other local authorities, piled into the derivatives market in the late 1980s and lost heavily after interest rates moved against them. They were fortunate: the courts ruled that their dealings were not lawful, so it was the counter-party banks that took the hit.

More recently, some councils were tripped up in the financial crisis, putting vast deposits with Icelandic banks that later failed. This was not an accounting issue, but demonstrated how town hall treasurers are as capable of making spectacular misjudgments as anyone else ignoring the warning signs to the bitter end. In the face of all this, it seems perverse for Robert Jenrick, the secretary of state responsible for local government, to reject a key proposal from Sir Tony and from Sir John Kingman, architect of the new audit regime. They both want a small but tough new watchdog to procure, manage, regulate and monitor council audit and so help to end the piecemeal, confusing and inadequate way in which council auditors are themselves held to account.

The government seems to have been put off by concern that any such watchdog could transmogrify over time into another Audit Commission. This was the quango with the commendable aim of preventing councils squandering public money, but which itself got too big and bureaucratic and ended up being guilty of the sin it was set up to prevent. It was abolished in 2015. Yet the proposed new body would cost only an additional £5 million, Sir Tony has calculated. That seems a small price to pay, given the escalating risks.

Safety technology covers only 37 miles of smart motorway

Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent: Wednesday January 20 2021, 12.01am, The Times

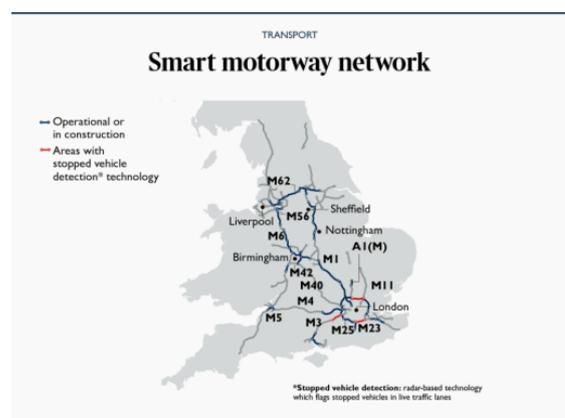
The radar system, which can spot stationary cars in 20 seconds, has been installed on four of the 24 sections of English motorway with no hard shoulder. Transport Focus, the roads watchdog, has said that drivers feel safer with a hard shoulder.

Grant Shapps, the transport secretary, demanded the rapid introduction of the technology in March last year as part of a sweeping review of smart motorways designed to improve safety.

All stretches where the hard shoulder has been stripped out are supposed to have the "stopped vehicle detection" system by March 2023. Highways England said that it would lead to a "significant reduction" in time spent stranded in live vehicle lanes.

However, figures seen by *The Times* show that only 13 miles of motorway, on the M3 in Surrey, have been newly covered in the past ten months. It has already been installed on 24 miles of the M25, and work on a section of the M20 in Kent is due to start this month.

Sir Mike Penning, the Conservative MP for Hemel Hempstead and a former roads minister, called for faster roll-out.



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Debate over smart motorways was renewed on Monday when a coroner warned that the system presented an “ongoing risk of future deaths”. David Urpeth, the Sheffield coroner, said that the lack of a hard shoulder on the M1 in South Yorkshire had contributed to the deaths of two motorists who were stationary on the inside lane after a collision in June 2019 when they were hit and killed by a lorry.

On smart motorways the hard shoulder is replaced by an extra vehicle lane. Refuge areas are put in up to a mile and a half apart to allow vehicles to pull off the road in an emergency. Differential speed limits are used to keep traffic flowing, and red X signs are used on overhead gantries to close lanes in response to breakdowns and accidents.

Criticism has grown over the time CCTV operators take to spot broken-down vehicles. Figures published in 2019 showed that it took an average of 20 minutes for a lane to close. The new radar system is due to cover 350 miles in total over parts of the M1, M4, M5, M6, M23, M27, M56.

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### **£1 million wasted on cycle-friendly road zones that councils abandoned**

Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent: Wednesday January 27 2021, 12.01am, The Times

Research showed that almost one in ten “low-traffic neighbourhoods” has been abandoned as little as a month after being introduced after complaints from residents and businesses.

In one case, Westminster council spent almost £138,000 on design, engineering and consultation fees only to scrap a scheme before it was launched.

According to *Auto Express* magazine, councils have also had to make alterations to about one in six schemes after their introduction. In some cases changes have been implemented due to complaints from emergency services about access for ambulances, fire engines and police vehicles.

The Metropolitan Police wrote to Ealing council in west London to warn that a low-traffic neighbourhood would harm response times and could create a “crime hotspot” if criminals used closures to evade officers. The London Ambulance Service asked Ealing to remove barriers after paramedics were unable to park near an elderly patient’s home. The woman, 95, had to be taken “some distance” in the rain to reach the ambulance.

However, despite the expense, councils have collected a huge sum in fines issued to drivers for breaching new traffic rules. Ealing issued 7,125 penalty notices potentially worth up to £926,250 in fines in one month, the research showed. Drivers in Lewisham, south London, were charged £3 million in five months, and Enfield in the north of the city has collected £1.25 million since September.

The report comes a week after the High Court ruled that an expansion of the schemes in the capital was based on “unlawful” guidance because it failed to take account of the access needed by taxis.

Dozens of low-traffic neighbourhoods have been introduced during the pandemic to give people space to exercise, walk and commute while socially distancing. Schemes often involve the closure of roads to traffic, widening pavements or installing temporary bike lanes. Most have been generally well-received. However, some have prompted local opposition, mainly due to a lack of consultation, longer car journeys and the pushing of traffic on to other streets.

The research found that 138 schemes had been introduced by the councils that responded to the survey. Of those, 13 had subsequently been reversed at a collective cost of £974,483, although the true figure is likely to be well above £1 million as some authorities had yet to calculate spending.

Wiltshire council spent £412,000 to restrict traffic in Salisbury city centre only to suspend the scheme “indefinitely” after a month due to “impact on local businesses”. A further 25 schemes — one in six — across the country have been altered at a collective cost of £86,099, the report said.

Lambeth council in south London spent £90,390 on planters at four sites, including purchase, installation and maintenance. Greenwich in southeast London spent £31,740.

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Road bridges are falling to pieces as council budgets feel the strain

Graeme Paton, Transport Correspondent: Friday January 29 2021, 12.01am, The Times

Motorists face mounting disruption as traffic restrictions are imposed on a rising number of substandard bridges. Research published today showed that an increasing number of council-owned bridges were unable to carry the heaviest vehicles because of structural weaknesses.

Councils reported that one bridge in England had collapsed completely during the previous 12 months, with others suffering partial collapse. The findings come amid continued anger over Hammersmith Bridge, which has been closed to vehicles for almost two years with cracks in its cast iron structure.



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Further deterioration last summer led to the 133-year-old grade II* bridge being shut to cyclists and pedestrians, causing problems on both sides of the river. Plans have been drawn up to ferry more than 19,000 passengers a day across the Thames after its closure. An application has been submitted to transform a riverside wharf into a ferry terminal as a temporary replacement for the bridge, which could be out of action for up to six years. The scheme could cost up to £163 million.

Traffic chaos was caused last February when the A52 Clifton bridge over the Trent in Nottingham was part closed. Lane closures and speed restrictions were imposed for three years on the M5 Oldbury viaduct near Birmingham as part of the biggest repair scheme of its kind carried out in the UK.

It is feared, however, that cuts to council maintenance budgets could lead to a worsening of structural problems. The analysis showed an overall decline in the number of bridges being assessed for damage caused by river flow, despite recent damaging floods.

The RAC Foundation, which carried out the study, however, showed councils anticipated that only 392 affected bridges would have the necessary work carried out on them within the next five years because of budget problems. The survey was carried out with the help of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transportation (Adept).

Kevin Dentith, chairman of the Adept national bridges group and chief engineer at Devon county council, said it was not the case that substandard bridges were unsafe. They were usually managed with the imposition of a weight limit. He said, however, that it would only be possible to carry out the necessary repairs with "more investment" from the government.

English politics:

Boris must be bold or go down in history as the PM who lost the Union

Daily telegraph NICK TIMOTHY 3 January 2021

Devolution is a disaster But what can be done? First, the Government must break the cycle of devolving in a panic. Ministers must be clear that they want to reform the constitution because they understand the urgent need to do so, not because they are appeasing nationalists out of fear.

Secondly, their approach must be guided by principle: decentralisation, not devolution, equality, not disparity, between the four nations.

This means moving quickly to a fully-fledged federal model, with a government and parliament for each of the four nations, and a federal government and parliament residing in Westminster. Core functions – foreign policy, defence, international trade and aid, national security, immigration and border control, citizenship, extradition, monetary policy, the constitution and the maintenance of the UK single market – would rest with the federal government. Everything else, including almost all tax policies, would be the responsibility of the four national governments and parliaments.

Constitutional reform is always treated as an inconvenient distraction, but as Brexit shows, where power resides matters. Some worry that England is too big for a federal structure, but if that logic were true, it would be too big for the Union itself. A federal system could anyway still weight constituencies to give a stronger voice to the smaller nations, and would make it more likely than now that a Scottish politician can become Prime Minister.

Nobody should be under any illusions of the radicalism of this kind of change. It would require new constitutional laws, and a new role for the Supreme Court. It would almost certainly herald further constitutional change, with the House of Lords replaced at last. But it would bring power closer to the people. It would put right the dangerous imbalances in the way we are governed. It would avoid the kind of constitutional crises that are heading our way. And instead of yet more piecemeal and self-defeating devolution, it would be a self-confident and comprehensive offer to the people of Scotland.



If Scottish MPs lose leverage at Westminster, the SNP will push harder for independence

Telegraph: Vernon Bogdanor, professor of government at King's College, London 6 January 2021 •

One response would be to offer more powers to Scotland together perhaps with a "federal" constitution for the UK. But one wonders whether its advocates know what "federalism" entails. Do they mean an English Parliament, in Sunderland or Liverpool, with concomitant officials and politicians? That would hardly bring decision-making closer to the people. Indeed, John Major once said that if the answer is more politicians we are asking the wrong question!

No democratic federation in the world has a system in which one of the units contains 85 per cent of the population. Such a federation would inevitably be dominated by England, and prove a recipe for collapsing

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rather than strengthening the Union.

A federation based on the English regions would be equally misguided, foisting on England a constitution which she does not want. In 2004, the North East, thought to be the region most sympathetic to devolution, rejected it by 75%; and it would be absurd to have different laws in Newcastle and Bristol. In England, the regions are ghosts. No one living in Bristol or Canterbury believes that they belong to a region.

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**Letters the Times 10Jan21:** from one of our members.

**English voice must be heard:** Alex Massie says nationalist revivals in the UK are a response to “English assertiveness” (News, last week). Yet, as things stand, England is constitutionally invisible: no parliament or first minister. Any prime minister serious about healing rifts in the UK, particularly the growing ambivalence in England towards the Union, should put addressing this imbalance at the top of their agenda.

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The UK must rediscover what holds it together and sort out what is driving us apart.

Gordon Brown: Telegraph 25 Jan 2021

The status quo is not working and the world’s most successful experiment in multinational living is under greater threat than at any time in 300 years.

Months of Covid-19 – and bitter disputes between No 10 and the regions and nations over lockdowns, furloughs and business and employment support – have brought to the surface tensions and grievances that have been simmering for years.

The complaint is that Whitehall does not fully understand the country it is supposed to govern. Elected leaders in our nations and regions protest that their local knowledge has been ignored and only rarely are they ever consulted.

While the crisis is deepest in Scotland, it is far from alone. Regional metropolitan mayors – from Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, to Sheffield, Bristol and London – are demanding more powers from what they see as an insensitive, out of touch and over-centralised centre.

No country can have national integration without political inclusion, and the commission might start by learning from the experience of countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany and America where, partly because of British influence in times past, second chambers are senates of their regions, and minorities who can easily be outvoted are guaranteed a stronger voice.

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**Letters Telegraph**

**An English parliament:** Gordon Brown’s article on constitutional reform is to be welcomed. I hope, however, that the Prime Minister goes further.

A senate should replace the House of Lords but a fundamental part of any long-lasting reform was missing from Mr Brown’s piece. An English parliament needs to be established so that all four nations achieve primary representation through their own parliament. The stumbling block then is English representation in that senate. As I’ve argued previously, this requires a generosity by English voters. Otherwise, they will dominate the new senate so that the three other countries see the reform as another, ‘English stitch-up, Lord Field of Birkenhead,



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Patrick O’Flynn: Spectator online, Coffee House, 26 Jan 2021

Back in 2006, when he was close to executing his masterplan to chase Tony Blair out of Downing Street, Gordon Brown sought to address something that worried many voters: his Scottishness. ‘My wife is from Middle England, so I can relate to it,’ he pronounced, as if Middle England were a town somewhere off the M40.

In fact, though Sarah Brown was born in Buckinghamshire, she spent most of her early childhood in Tanzania and her family moved to North London when she was seven. By mistaking a term denoting the provincial English psyche for a geographical area, Brown merely demonstrated that he was indeed all at sea.

He has never let that stop him from drawing up governmental systems that will allegedly solve the tensions inherent within the United Kingdom, a union of one highly populated country with three sparsely populated others. And now he is back at it, having been invited by Keir Starmer to spearhead Labour’s attempted fight back against Nicola Sturgeon.

The trigger for Brown’s intervention is, as always, his perfectly understandable wish to thwart Scottish separatism. He cites worrying polling about the number of Scots believing the Union undermines their distinctive identity and advises Boris Johnson about how to tackle that (basically, yet more devolution of power away from Westminster).

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Brown was also a key champion of the idea of elected English regional assemblies as a counter-balance to Celtic devolution. But that idea was rejected by a majority of almost four to one in a referendum in the North East in 2004 and Labour's plans for further regional referendums in the North West and Yorkshire were quietly shelved.

In his *Telegraph* article, Brown latches on to the fact that regional metro-mayors want more powers. But is there really a credible case for believing that transferring more decision-making authority to one-party states in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and South Yorkshire will help promote the sense of Britishness upon which the UK depends?

Andy Burnham was elected on a turnout of 28.9 per cent in Greater Manchester, Steve Rotherham on a turnout of 26.1 per cent on Merseyside and Dan Jarvis on a turnout of 25.8 per cent in the Sheffield City Region. This hardly indicates a fervour for regional government among English voters.

The dog which is never allowed to bark in Gordon Brown's schemes for constitutional reform is, of course, English nationalism. However coherent it may be as a collective identity in the eyes of tens of millions, Englishness is the one national feeling that Brown is always determined to suppress.

Yet England – too big and too powerful to sit comfortably amid an ultra-devolved UK – is inescapably what one is left with if one keeps undermining Britishness by conceding further ground to Celtic nationalists. Containing the English within 'regions' of roughly similar populations to those of the other UK nations is a bodge job – an obvious retro-fit necessitated only by imbalances created elsewhere. My time as an MEP for the East of England underlined to me just how weak regional identity is in this country. Would a Norfolk farmer feel any special sense of East Anglian kinship with a Bedford estate agent? Hardly. But at World Cup time both might hang out a Cross of St George.

His plan for a 'Forum of the Nations and Regions' – their nations, our regions from an English perspective – just won't wash. But if Scots do vote to go their own way when a referendum is next held, they should know that their southern neighbour will not be broken into manageable, bite-size 'regions' called things like East or North West. It will be a country called England.

UK Government of English Affairs

Committee to question Health and Safety Investigation Branch for inquiry into safety of maternity services in England: 18 January 2021: MPs will question the Health and Safety Investigation Branch on their role in investigating maternity safety incidents such as stillbirths, neonatal deaths or suspected brain injuries and pregnancy-related maternal deaths.

The fourth session of the inquiry into the safety of maternity services in England will also hear directly from maternity care providers as well as regulators of the nursing, midwifery and obstetrics professions – the GMC and NMC – and charity Baby Lifeline, which supports frontline NHS staff to prevent injuries and deaths in and around childbirth. The session will cover a wide range of issues relating to maternity safety including training, safety culture and workforce.



Bills before parliament

Environment Bill: A Bill to make provision about targets, plans and policies for improving the natural environment; for statements and reports about environmental protection; for the Office for Environmental Protection; about waste and resource efficiency; about air quality; for the recall of products that fail to meet environmental standards; about water; about nature and biodiversity; for conservation covenants; about the regulation of chemicals; and for connected purposes.

88 Valuation of other land in drainage district: England

80 Water and sewerage undertakers in England: modifying appointments

97 Local nature recovery strategies for England

105 Controlling the felling of trees in England

106 Local highway authorities in England to consult before felling street trees

Schedule 12 — Smoke control in England and Wales Part 1 — Principal amendments to the Clean Air Act 1993: England

Schedule 15 — Controlling the felling of trees in England

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Summary of the Speed Limits (England) Bill 2019-21: A Bill to prohibit permanent derogations from a 30 mile per hour speed limit in built-up areas in England; to make provision for the circumstances in which speed limits below 30 miles per hour may be introduced; and for connected purposes.

The Traffic Signs (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2021: The amendments made by these Regulations are to further refine the traffic sign and marking requirements for roads in local areas hosting electric scooter trials, to assist the smooth running of trials of electric scooters and therefore to inform assessment of their suitability for use on roads in the future.

The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2021: provide instruction on how local authorities are to set their education budgets in the 2020-21 financial year.

The Countryside Stewardship (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021: These Regulations, which apply to England only, are made pursuant to section 98 of the Environment Act 1995. Regulation 2 makes amendments to the Countryside Stewardship (England) Regulations 2020. Paragraph (2) prohibits the transfer of capital-only countryside stewardship agreements. Paragraphs (3) and (4) omit regulations that grant the Secretary of State powers to charge interest on recoveries and a fee for appeals. Paragraph (5) adds new activities that are eligible for funding. An impact assessment has not been produced for this instrument as no, or no significant, impact on the private or voluntary sector is foreseen.

The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021: Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires each billing authority in England to make a scheme specifying the reductions which are to apply to amounts of council tax payable by persons, or classes of person, whom the billing authority considers are in financial need. The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012 ("the 2012 Regulations") prescribe matters which must be included in such a scheme in addition to those matters which must be included in such a scheme by virtue of paragraph 2 of Schedule 1A to the 1992 Act.

The Spring Traps Approval (Variation) (England) Order 2021: This Order varies the Spring Traps Approval (England) Order 2018 (S.I. 2018/1190). Under section 8 of the Pests Act 1954 (c. 68), it is an offence to use or knowingly permit the use of any spring trap, other than a trap that has been approved by order, for animals or in circumstances for which it is not approved.



Sir Thomas More (1527)
by Hans Holbein the Younger

England's hero: Sir Thomas More (7 February 1478 – 6 July 1535), was an English lawyer, social philosopher, author, statesman, and noted Renaissance humanist. He also served Henry VIII as Lord High Chancellor of England from October 1529 to May 1532. He wrote *Utopia*, published in 1516, which describes the political system of an imaginary island state.

More opposed the Protestant Reformation, directing polemics against the theology of Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin and William Tyndale. More also opposed Henry VIII's separation from the Catholic Church, refusing to acknowledge Henry as supreme head of the Church of England and the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. After refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy, he was convicted of treason and executed. On his execution, he was reported to have said: "I die the King's good servant, and God's first".

England's history: 2 Feb 1665 British forces capture New Amsterdam, the centre of the Dutch colony in North America. The settlement on the island of Manhattan was renamed New York in honour of the Duke of York, its new governor later James II of the UK.

New Amsterdam was a 17th-century Dutch settlement established at the southern tip of Manhattan Island that served as the seat of the colonial government in New Netherland. The initial trading post gave rise to the settlement around Fort Amsterdam. The fort was situated on the strategic south-



The Castello Plan, a 1660 map of New

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ern tip of the island of Manhattan and was meant to defend the fur trade operations of the Dutch West India Company in the North River (Hudson River). In 1624, it became a provincial extension of the Dutch Republic and was designated as the capital of the province in 1625.

After the Second Anglo-Dutch War of 1665–67, England and the United Provinces of the Netherlands agreed to the status quo in the Treaty of Breda. The English kept the island of Manhattan, the Dutch giving up their claim to the town and the rest of the colony, while the English formally abandoned Surinam in South America, and the island of Run in the East Indies to the Dutch, confirming their control of the valuable Spice Islands.

English culture: Candlemas, which occurs 40 days after Christmas.

The Presentation of Jesus of Nazareth at (or in) the Temple is an early episode in the life of Jesus, describing his presentation at the Temple in Jerusalem in order to officially induct him into Judaism. The Feast of the Presentation is among the most ancient feasts of the Christian Church. Celebration dates from the fourth century in Jerusalem and sermons given at the feast survive from that time.

The earliest reference to specific liturgical rites surrounding the feast are by the intrepid Egeria, during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land (381–384). She reported that 14 February was a day solemnly kept in Jerusalem with a procession to Constantine I's Basilica of the Resurrection, with a homily preached on Luke 2:22 (which makes the occasion perfectly clear), and a Divine Liturgy.

About AD 450 in Jerusalem, people began the custom of holding lighted candles during the Divine Liturgy of this feast day. Originally, the feast was a minor celebration. But then in 541, a terrible plague broke out in Constantinople, killing thousands. The Emperor Justinian I, in consultation with the Patriarch of Constantinople, ordered a period of fasting and prayer throughout the entire Empire. On the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord he arranged great processions throughout the towns and villages and a solemn prayer service (*Litia*) to ask for deliverance from evils, and the plague ceased.

Traditionally, the Western term "Candlemas" (or Candle Mass) referred to the practice whereby a priest blessed beeswax candles on 2 February for use throughout the year, some of which were distributed to the faithful for use in the home.

Many motets and anthems have been composed to celebrate this feast and are performed as part of the liturgy, among them Johann Sebastian Bach who composed several cantatas to be performed in the church service of the day, related to Simeon's canticle *Nunc dimittis* as part of the prescribed readings.

The eve of Candlemas was the day on which Christmas decorations of greenery were removed from people's homes; for traces of berries, holly and so forth will bring death among the congregation before another year is out as the poem by Robert Herrick (1591–1633), *Ceremony upon Candlemas Eve* records

"Down with the rosemary, and so
Down with the bays and mistletoe;
Down with the holly, ivy, all,
Wherewith ye dress'd the Christmas Hall"

In England, good weather at Candlemas is taken to indicate severe winter weather later:

If Candlemas Day is clear and bright, / winter will have another bite. / If Candlemas Day brings cloud and rain, / winter is gone and will not come again."

Candlemas was one of the traditional quarter days when quarterly rents were due for payment, as well as the day or term for various other business transactions, including the hiring of servants.

English produce: Turbot Scientific name: *Scophthalmus maximus*

The turbot is a large Left eyed flatfish which is almost circular in shape. The skin is scaleless and the colour varies greatly but is usually a shade of brown with black speckles and a white underside. Eyes are small and the mouth is relatively large. It is prized for its firm white flesh and subtle, refined flavour.

Turbot has been held in high regard in Europe for at least two thousand years. By the eighteenth century they were being sold in Billingsgate Market, London. During much of the nineteenth century, the price they fetched at market could vary weekly by a factor of a hundred due to the large variability in the quantity landed



Blessing of the Candles at Candlemas



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by fisherman.

Seen as more common in the south but actually found throughout the UK on sandy, muddy and light broken ground. Turbot come into shallower water in the spring and early summer. It is widespread around English waters but more common on the south and west coasts. However it is possible to catch this species from the north east and Yorkshire coastlines

Recipe: Steamed Turbot with Lemongrass, Peas and Baby Spinach

<https://www.expressnews.com/food/recipes-cooking/article/Recipe-Steamed-Turbot-with-Lemongrass-Peas-and-10954153.php> Feb. 23, 2017

This recipe demonstrates the proper technique of steaming.

Makes 6 servings

- 1 tablespoon coarse sea salt
- 2 cups fresh or frozen shelled peas
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 shallots, peeled and finely chopped
- 1/8 teaspoon fine sea salt, or to taste
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh lemongrass (from 4 to 8 stalks), tender pale parts only
- 3 cups fish stock, shellfish stock or clam broth
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 6 4-ounce boneless, skinless turbot fillets (see Note)
- 4 cups fresh baby spinach leaves
- Grated lime zest or fresh mint leaves, for garnish (optional)

Instructions: Prepare a bowl of ice water.

In a 2-quart saucepan, bring 1 quart water to a boil over high heat. Add the coarse sea salt and the peas and blanch, uncovered, for 2 minutes, counting from when the water comes back to a boil. Taste for the desired doneness; the peas should still have a touch of crunch. Drain well. Plunge into the bowl of ice water to halt the cooking and help preserve their bright green color.

In a medium saucepan, combine the butter, shallots, sea salt and lemongrass and sweat (cook, covered, over low heat) until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the stock and cook until it has reduced to 1/2 cup, 10 to 12 minutes. Add the cream and cook until slightly thickened, 2 to 3 minutes more. Strain the sauce through the fine-mesh sieve into another medium saucepan, pressing hard on the solids to extract maximum flavor. Discard the solids. Taste for seasoning. (The sauce can be made up to 1 day in advance. Refrigerate in a covered container.)

Bring 1 quart water to a simmer in the bottom of a medium saucepan. Arrange the fish fillets in the bamboo steamer. Place the steamer over the simmering water, cover, and steam just until the fish is cooked to the desired doneness and flakes easily with a fork, 2 to 3 minutes.

Place the spinach leaves and several tablespoons water in a large skillet. Cover and wilt the spinach over medium-high heat. Once wilted, add the blanched peas to warm them. Transfer the spinach and peas to the fine-mesh sieve to drain.

To serve, gently reheat the sauce if necessary. Divide the vegetables among the six warmed, shallow bowls and set a fish fillet on top of each. Spoon the sauce over all. Garnish with lime zest or mint leaves. Serve immediately.

Note: Any firm, white-fleshed fish fillets, such as halibut, flounder, trout or perch, can be used here.



Photo: David Japy / HarperCollins Publishers

OUR PRECIOUS UNION! Theresa May June 2017

(Sucking England dry)

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