

What makes Scotland a nation, an English viewpoint

Introduction:

A nation is a human cultural and social community. In as much as that none of its members have ever met each other, but they feel a common bond. They also share a common identity. That is, on a basic level what a nation is. Having lived in Scotland for a year, I feel that I can provide a fresh perspective on what makes Scotland a nation from an outsider's viewpoint. I will be covering the history, culture, arts and sports to find out how they have become the nation they are today. In writing this essay I hope I will be able to shrug off some of the misinformed myths and debunk the stereotypical image of a Scot.

Main:

Scotland as a nation first started 12,800 years ago. This was when the first hunter-gatherers crossed the glaciers and settled on the Orkney Isles. We can already see that the image of the hardy Scotsman is developing; surviving out on the cold, barren landscape of the Orkney Isles.

Later, the Roman Empire came. They built Hadrian's Wall so that they would be able to control the tribes North and South of the wall. In doing so they would put a stop to the Pictish tribes that had been raiding the roman settlements. Later on the Pictish tribes would be forgotten, but they would return as myths and legends. It can be seen that there is already an image of the Scottish being seen as wild and warlike. I would venture to say that most people do not have a clear understanding of what went on around these times: Such as the history, religion and art of the Picts; as record keeping was not a readily done thing. However, people will have painted a picture for themselves that the Scottish race was an unruly and barbaric race that cannot be negotiated with.

In 1286, King Alexander III of Scots died and 13 men made claim for the throne: Scotland was in peril of a civil war breaking out. The Scots accepted King Edward of England's offer to settle the dispute and eventually Edward took over as overlord. The Scots were not happy about this. Scottish resistance was led by William Wallace and then later by Robert Bruce. This was known as the Scottish Wars of Independence. Thus, we can see another part of the Scottish stereotype forming; that of the downtrodden hero. A prime example of this would be how William Wallace is portrayed in Braveheart. Braveheart, as a film is factually wrong on many accounts (but we aren't here to go over that). However, it does a good job of creating the stereotypical image of a medieval highlander; a man seen as strong, adaptable, intelligent and fighting for what he believes in. These are all positive and just characteristics which any culture would be happy to be linked with.

Scotland needed to recover from the Darien Scheme in which they lost a lot of money. So in 1707 the Acts of Union took place. This was when England and Scotland joined to become Great Britain. Not all Scots were in favour of the

joining of the two countries. It was said that for every Scot for it, there were 99 against. It could be argued that this shows that the Scottish do vehemently stand up for what they believe in. On the other hand, this joining was proposed to create a stable structural economy for Scotland to survive. This could be misconstrued as the tyrannical English getting what they want and oppressing the plucky underdog (Scottish Kingdom).

Scotland is not just a nation built on political history. Scotland, to this very day is seen and is promoted as a beautiful place to visit. The geography is diverse: the snow covered Nevis range; the blustery Shetland isles; the rolling hills of the Tweed valley; the quaint fishing villages dotted along the coastline. Each one of these areas has a deep history and are all suitable for their own individual essays. In spite of not having the time to provide a detailed observation on each of these areas, they do instil a sense of national pride in people: as they have the right to say "this is my country and a beautiful one it is"

In the Tweed Valley there is a deep rooted national spirit where traditions still hold sway. One of the traditions that the Borderers hold each year is a called common riding. A common riding is an ancient custom held in honour of the young men who used to ride around the town's boundaries, checking for encroachments from the neighbouring settlements, or on the look out from marauding bands of Reivers. This was a dangerous job that was fraught with the risk of kidnapping or murder. This shows that they keep alive the old rituals which have been passed down from generation to generation. There is no need now to actually defend the villages. So why do it? They do this to demonstrate who they are as a people and celebrate where they come from. It also keeps the historic identity intact and as a result encourages tourism. Furthermore, their history allows us to glimpse what it was like back when the Reiver clans were about; as they had to rely on their own skill and cunning to survive in those lawless and predatory times. It is evident that the Scottish always have been a strong, wilful and independent people; that fought for their own survival and for what they believe is a just cause.

There is also a strong social network in the Borders. In Peebles there is still a wide range of independent traders; many of which are family based and still selling homemade and traditional products. An example of which would be Forsyth's Butchers and Bakers, which has been open since 1938. A strong reason for the existence of independent family traders would be the growth of tourism in Scotland. Tourism has grown tremendously and the influx of tourists has led to an increase in the demand for more Scottish products. These products may actually be artificial in some capacity. Such as shortbread being mass made in a factory and delivered to various towns/cities. Even if this is true, it shows us how Scotland as a nation is perceived by an outsider, as we only have to visit Lidl, where we can each buy a kilt for £25.00. It could also be argued that there is a high demand for these products. However, the £25.00 kilt could be seen as cheapening the traditional Scottish clothing.

Tourists also come to Scotland for the taking part in the wholesome countryside pursuits: such as horse riding, salmon fishing and shooting. There is also a great demand for the burgeoning adventure sports such as mountain biking, quad biking and paintball. All of these pursuits are actively marketed on the [visitscotland](#) website. They are seen as Scottish and people wish to emulate what they believe to be the Scottish lifestyle. Even those seeking to partake in the new arrivals (mountain biking), Scotland is seen as the place to go if you truly want to have an adventure in the great outdoors.

Scotland is still at the forefront when it comes to being a place of Culture and a place where people wish to live. You only have to walk through Haymarket in Edinburgh to gain an insight into how multicultural a place it really is. There are Polish, Australian, Spanish and people from all over Europe and Asia that want to be part of this thriving city. The foreign population even have their own shops that sell their country's own unique foods. This shows that subcultures are forming within Scotland and broadening its identity. People not only choose Scotland as a place to work, but also as a place to learn. This diversity doesn't give us a strong inclination as to why they come here, yet it shows us that something draws them here: such as the nightlife, the history and the festivals.

There is a great deal more to Scotland, such as Edinburgh Castle. A place so steeped in rich history, that it deserves its own essay to discuss the romantic and magical air the place eludes when visited. The castle is actually the host to The Regimental Museum for the Royal Dragoon Guards; Scotland's only cavalry regiment. Their crest features an eagle; which represents the capture of the first French Imperial Eagle by a British regiment. This happened at the battle of Waterloo. Edinburgh castle is littered with all kinds of trophies won in Wars and famous battles. Consequently this is proof of a proud nation that has strong ties to its heritage and history.

Scotland also has its own language, Gaelic. Gaelic is not common throughout the mainland of Scotland, but is still common in the North of Scotland and the Western Isles. The Gaelic speaking areas are known as the Gàidhealtachd. The language is not taught in many schools. It is worth pointing out that since the majority of Scottish people don't speak Gaelic, that the use of it on road signs could be construed as more of a symbolic gesture rather than a practical necessity.

A lot of the Scottish towns and villages still use their original Gaelic name and that is why people (tourists) have difficulty pronouncing Penicuik or Auchendinny. While it may be seen as a symbolic gesture, it could also be seen that they feel that have to prove their independence from the English, so they stick to the old ways to show their identity.

Were as the Gaelic language has fallen into disuse, the Scottish brogue is one of the key identifiers of Scotland. This is often mimicked by people worldwide, they usually end up impersonating a stereotypical Scottish accent (hoots mon!). A prime example of this would be Mike Myers in *Austin Powers: Goldmember*. When in reality each area of Scotland has their own regional dialect and idioms. For instance the Scottish author Irvine Welsh is famed for

his phonetic use of Scottish language in his novels. His international novels actually contain a glossary at the end so people can understand the dialect and culture. To put it simply, this is showing off the part of the Scottish Culture and how different it is to everyone else's.

Robert Burns is widely regarded as Scotland's national poet. He is a cultural icon of Scotland. He used to write using the Scots language. It was his use of the common tongue that increased his popularity. This can be seen in *Auld Lang Syne*, which is sung on Hogmanay (the Scottish New Year) in Scotland and around the world. The Bard (Burns) also has a night / supper named after him (January 25th) in remembrance of his works. This tells us that the Scots take great pride in their history, but also want to congregate and celebrate the love they have for their icons. It also demonstrates that they are not as the stereotype lets on. They have love for all their history; good and bad.

Another key aspect of Scottish life is their keen interest in sport. The Highland Games are an iconic event which takes place each year to celebrate the Celtic history and heritage of Scotland. The Games began before the Wars of Independence. The English had occupied Scotland and refused the Scottish their right to train for war. So the Scottish used Subterfuge and created the Highland Games to keep themselves conditioned for war: Which shows how much they value their right to choose and not be governed. Additionally this also shows another aspect of the Scottish, in that they always like to get one over on the English!

When we think of the Highland Games, we automatically think of the caber toss. It is rightly seen as the cornerstone of the games. The games are not just about feats of strength: they also contain traditional Scottish dancing such as the Highland fling and the sword dance. Each contestant is usually kitted out in the traditional clothing of the Highlands, the kilt. The kilt is now synonymous with Scotland in general. The Games start and finish with as much as 20 pipe bands. They play popular renditions of Scottish songs; such as *Scotland the Brave*. This is just another aspect of how dense Scottish History is. We already know that they celebrate the common ridings in the Borders (South) and we can now see that they keep to the old traditions in the Highlands (North) too. This allows us to group Scotland as a collective. A people who believe in where they come from and proud of what they are.

Football and Rugby may seem old, but they are relatively new to Scotland (only developed in the last 100 years). Scotland has some of the oldest surviving leagues in the world. The traditions may not be as old and historic as the Highland Games, yet the same sense of passion and pride takes place, possibly more so. The Scottish national football supporters go by the name of the 'Tartan Army'. Now there is no need to fear at the thought of a Neo-Reiver clan causing havoc around the world: as the Tartan Army is known for its non violent attitude at matches. They even wear the 'jimmy hat' (a tartan hat with sewn in ginger hair). This shows us that the Scottish are playful with their stereotype and like to have fun. It is also evident that it is not just the older traditions that the Scottish People believe in. They also have a fierce, zealous love for their country in sporting events. However, I would deem it more likely

Rob Kane

that they feel a common bond with their fellow Tartan army fans: as it is the taking part, not the winning that counts. In view of this we can see that solidarity is strong as well. Alternatively, they do like to beat the English at sporting events, as they are seen as their main rival, known as the 'auld enemy'. This shows that however diluted their history is, they still remember the English as being the enemy.

Conclusion

Scotland as a nation, like any nation, is built on its history. The events that lead up to the current time play a pivotal part on how a country perceives itself and is perceived by others. I believe that after researching Scotland that the majority of Scottish people are happy with their social identity. Yes, they may be part of Great Britain and we have people for and against the notion of Scotland gaining independence. Yet I would still conclude that those for and against hold similar opinions of Scotland: that of a fierce and proud nation that will stand up and fight for what it believes in.

They also have an oppressive history: which only strengthens their resolve to set themselves apart from the English. By keeping traditions and customs at the forefront, they have marked themselves out as a nation whom has great passion from whence they come from.

It is also a welcoming nation: they are quick to poke fun at themselves and stand with welcoming arms when people from other nations wish to join them. This foundation of sport, art and culture has broken the stereotypical mould of a Scottish man wearing his tartan kilt, playing his pipes and being partial to a wee dram every so often. That is not to say that the stereotype is a bad one. As each stereotype is usually linked to some important part of the country's history and these key elements have helped build the nation of Scotland as we see it today.

Rob Kane

Bibliography

- Smout, C. (1993) 'Scotland Since Prehistory: Natural Change and Human Impact'.
- 'About Hadrian's Wall'. <http://www.aboutscotland.co.uk/hadrian/index.html> (accessed 29th September).
- 'Wallace, Bruce and the Wars of Independence Int1/Int2'. (Handbook from College).
- 'Scottish Tourist Board'. <http://www.visitscotland.com> (accessed 29th September).
- 'In Search of the Border Reivers'. <http://www.reivers.com/> (accessed 29th September).
- 'Langholm Common Riding'. <http://homepages.enterprise.net/iainlogan/langholm/lang3.html> (accessed 29th September).
- 'Hawick Common Riding'. <http://www.hawickcallantsclub.co.uk/commonriding.htm> (accessed 29th September).
- 'The Royal Scots Regiment museum'.
<http://www.edinburghcastle.gov.uk/tour/highlights/highlights-royal-scots-regimental-museum.htm> (accessed 29th September).
- 'The Gaelic Language'. <http://www.geo.ed.ac.uk/home/scotland/gaelic.html> (accessed 30th September).
- Gaelic and Scots Language <http://www.rampantscotland.com/gaelic.htm> (accessed 30th September).
- Ross, J. (7th march 2008) 'War of Words over Gaelic Road Signs' <http://www.thescotsman.com> (accessed 30th September).
- 'Scots Tongue'. <http://www.cs.stir.ac.uk/~kjt/general/scots.html> (accessed 30th September)
- 'Scottish Dialect and Language'. http://www.talentscotland.com/jobs.aspx?item_id=2322 (accessed 30th September)
- 'Robert Burns'. <http://www.robertburns.org/> (accessed 30th September)
- (29-11-2001) 'Tartan Army Wins Fair play award'
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/scotland/1682841.stm> (accessed 30th September)