

Britain: a country of counties post-Brexit



By Gerard Dugdill

BREXIT provides an unusual opportunity in the history of our nation. It is an opportunity to recharge, reflect, rethink.

What Brexit is not is an opportunity to restart the country again from scratch. That would be too radical. We must, after all, bear in mind the narrowness of the victory for the “leave” side in the referendum.

However, it is an opportunity for a soft reset: just to remind ourselves of where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are going.

Two examples spring to mind.

“Take back control”

The first, controversially, but perhaps in chime with the aims of the Campaign for an Independent Britain, is to reshape our political landscape, so that we do have full power again over our own destiny.

“Take back control” is the perhaps now tired but still in essence true mantra of the leave EU movement.

We must become responsible for our actions in a way that perhaps we have not been since the end of empire. We must forge new alliances, regain true international, independent competitiveness, and – perhaps – be a beacon for the world, combining our democratic vision with economic and industrial inventiveness and our sense of fair play. Lawmakers and

judges, take note. Note to mention satirists...

Can we achieve this?

Britain is too precious to be left to our own devices if we cannot hack it ourselves. Game on.

Beautiful Britain

The second area is our soft culture, our history – second to none, surely – and community.

We must remind ourselves and restate what it means to be British: that relates to the sort of people we are, what we do, and where we live.

On that last point, let me introduce myself.

I am campaign manager for British Counties Campaign (BCC), a lobby group seeking to legislate formal recognition of the 86 traditional counties of England, Scotland and Wales. NB, for what it's worth here, the six Northern Ireland counties remain intact in the public consciousness as real entities.

Conspiracy theorists – don't you just love 'em? – will say that our entry into the EU coincided with the destruction of ancient county identity in this country for a reason: all part of a masterplan, concocted in and around the 1970s to stop us feeling British – and independent – in any number of ways, including through our loyalty to local identities that existed since the dawn of our time: Kent, Sussex, Lancashire, Glamorgan, Cromartyshire. Were MPs and ministers also manipulated?

Whether the theorists are right or wrong, one thing is certain: these things happened at the same time and, as a happy result of Brexit, they can be put right at the same time.

We can ditch EU-imposed so called regions – at least where

they mangle county identity – and reset our cultural landscape so we can identify with our counties as the Irish do, or the Americans (with their states), or the blessed Swiss with their fierce, independent and integrated Cantons.

Don't mangle administration, or services areas, or media areas, with counties. Give us back what we had before. Stop treating people as worse than idiots – as non-existent in their feelings and sensitivities – and give them back what they had before. Local, county identity. It won't cost anything. It will remind us of what we are.

As campaign founder Pam Moorhouse says, stop bullying people into accepting forced change against their will. You don't know better. You charm people. You build on the past.



Slaidburn, still got its white roses despite being run by Lancashire. Can we keep it?

Link

It is dangerous for BCC to link with any other movement, because the point of the campaign can easily become obscured. By extension, it is dangerous for other movements to link with us.

However, common sense suggests a tiny, tiny overlap between those wanting – rightly so – to see Brexit now fully implemented and those wanting to see our historic nationhood restored in just a few soft, important ways.

For example, county ways. To celebrate the beauty of and pride in their country at this slightly wacko level: the level of cheeses, cricket, Pevsner references, roses, horses, foxes, bears, leg-pulling (Yorkshire!); a sign on a stretch of road, a line on a map, a bleep on the Satnav, just to keep the kids entranced a bit longer – sometimes.

Don't mess with identity. War with local government? War with civil service. Who knows? Sounds familiar? Game on again. God bless.

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