

Interview about the Scottish independence referendum with Ian Green of Greentrax Recordings, near Edinburgh, conducted by John C. Falstaff in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, over telephone, on Friday 29th September 2014.

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Podcast: <http://thecelticshow.org/wrfgpodcasts.html>

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PART 1

JcF: Ian is at the forefront of the promotion of Scottish music, having masterminded Greentrax Records from its infancy 30 years ago, into the bastion of Scottish culture it is today. Before his 30 year career in music, he had a 30 year career in the police force. So he's a man who's been around the block, literally, and has seen a lot in his lifetime, and we are at a very interesting juncture in Scottish history now, with a referendum coming up in just a few weeks on the possibility of Scottish independence. It's not getting as much press in the US as one would have hoped, so I want people to know that there's a very good Wikipedia page on the Scottish independence referendum, where you can get *some* information. Another interesting website with a perhaps different perspective is the website WingsOverScotland.com.

So Ian, for the benefit of the US audience, can you please give our listeners a brief account of the current status, politically, of Scotland in the United Kingdom, and how that came about over the centuries.

IG: Well, I mean, the union with England, and the United Kingdom as it's now known, occurred some 300 years ago, with the Act of Union, which was *completely* against the wishes of most of the people in Scotland. It was all done by bribery, by England, to the lairds and these people in Scotland were promised money and land if they signed over the rights to Scotland. This was after we had won the Wars of Independence, what we call the Battles of Robert the Bruce and so on, and the English had at that time said no longer will England attempt to control Scotland, and Scotland will forever be a free country. But of course, once again, England did [LAUGHS] did the dirty on us, and eventually we were forced into something that really most people didn't want.

So for the last 300 years we've been part of the United Kingdom and [??] I suppose quite happy. There have never been any further wars or anything like that, but there's been a lot of discontent, and a lot of unhappiness with the way we are controlled by a government which operates out of London and it too blind to see very much more north of say, half way up to here.

It all started, I suppose, again with the SNP [Scottish National Party] way back, some years ago. Another thing which brought it to attention was when a group of students stole the Stone of Destiny, from London, where it had been filched away after the Act of Union, and they brought it back to Scotland. And this kind of started a kind of nationalism, which [??] and eventually, in the 70s, we had a referendum to see if we could get devolution, and part control of our own destiny, in Scotland. It failed on that occasion *very narrowly*, but there was a lot of people in Scotland, by now, were determined that we would seek our own national identity and our own independence. And a further referendum was held, and on this occasion we won the right to have a devolved parliament in Scotland. Now that was fine, but we don't have the powers that we feel are necessary and we're still controlled, to a great extent, by Westminster, London. And we have governments [??] again in Westminster, which we haven't voted for, and I'll give you an example of that. We're currently governed by the Conservatives, who have also used the Liberal Democrats to have, plan a coalition, but there's practically no one in Scotland voted for the Conservatives, so here we are, with a government in London which we didn't vote for. And we just feel, these are some of the things which we consider to be quite unfair.

We are considered to be one of the richest countries, amongst the ten richest countries in the world, and we can see no reason why we can't govern ourselves, and look after our own affairs. Additionally, we are quite different from [??], we have totally different culture, music culture and so on, and we really, really, deserve to be independent, of some kind of [??]. So that's a kind of resume, John!

JcF: Now the devolution vote back '97 did give rise to a new Scottish Parliament in 1999. That's obviously given Scottish voters a *certain* voice in their own destiny. But, obviously, for some people that's still not enough?

IG: No, we just feel it's not enough. There's still a lot of stuff controlled by England. For example, when we had the oil boom in the North Sea, [??] they were sensible enough to put away lots of money in the sand, for rainy days. The United Kingdom government just spent all the money, willy-nilly, and there was no benefit from that at all, apart from the taxes that have been coming in each year. But there was no sensible stashing away some of it for a rainy day, like Norway and so on. So we've suffered from things like that. And there's still lots of oil riches in the North Sea, which could benefit the people of Scotland. We've got a huge tourist industry here of course, as you probably know. We've got a strong, strong manufacturing base, things like whisky, engineering, and so on. So we feel there isn't any reason why we shouldn't run our own affairs.

JcF: So the Referendum Bill was put forward in March of last year, passed by the new Scottish Parliament in November, and received royal ascent in December. So now, on Thursday 18th the September, around 4 million voters in Scotland are going to be asked the following, very simple question: "Should Scotland be an independent country"? My understanding is that there's a promise that if the Yes side wins, moves towards a significant state of independence would take place soon thereafter. The No campaign, which I guess goes by the name Better Together, so it's the Yes versus the Better Togethers. Did you ever foresee the possibility of a referendum like this, as a younger man growing up in Scotland?

IG: No, I must admit, not as a younger man. I'd no interest in politics as a young man, and once I began to get a passing interest I just never thought it was possible. But then, all things are possible, really, and as it progresses, devolution and so on, I now see it at a real possibility. And personally, it looks at the moment as if the Yes vote will just be slightly below the required figures to get the Yes, but I'm hopeful that by the day we go to the polls, there'll be a few people who've changed their minds, and we may well have a majority vote. I certainly hope so, I think we deserve it.

PART 2

JcF: The last polls that I saw suggested 43% decisively Yes, and the remaining 57% a combination of Nos and Don't Knows. So, with the Don't Knows, we just don't know...

IG: [LAUGHS] They say it's mostly women, they say women and very astute, maybe they're thinking about it a little bit more than males are. No, but I'm a Yes man, and I have been. I have to say I'm getting pretty of all the stuff we get here, on television and radio, and so on, and so forth. We've just been absolutely with it, bombarded, from both sides, and one of the things that so disgusted me is that the vote No people have been just scaremongering, and throwing lots of things onto the bonfire, they've been setting it alight even more. I think a lot of it is alarmist and should really be ignored, but lots of people, of course, are kind of alarmed by it and are having doubts.

JcF: Right, well I guess scaremongering always happens to cases like this. At the same time, the No people play up the implications of issues such as defense, currency, energy, and allegiance to the monarchy. But isn't just the price that both sides play in a peaceful exercise of democracy?

IG: Absolutely, and I mean there's absolutely no reason why, [], if the Scottish people vote Yes, there's absolutely no reason why the Queen can't be retained as the Monarch. [] To me that isn't even worth considering. As far as defense is concerned, I think we have a serious point here. We are lumbered in Scotland with, there's a nuclear submarine base, and most people in Scotland are entirely against the nuclear warheads. One of the things that the Scottish government would do, if we got a Yes, would be insist that the nuclear submarine base in Scotland [] would immediately—well not immediately, they'd be given four years, if we get a Yes—to move it down to somewhere in England. I mean it's an absolutely ridiculous waste of money, millions and millions of pounds, are going to be spent on new warheads, money that could be spent on national health service and so on and so forth. And what is it for?

What can we do with a nuclear deterrent? If we use it then the world is going to be finished, and everybody knows that, so nobody's going to use it. It's just a piece of absolute and utter nonsense, as far as I'm concerned.

JcF: Compromises would certainly be made, both in London and in Edinburgh, if the Yes side prevails. But again, England and Scotland have had a long time to plan for this.

IG: Yes, and of course, as has been discussed all the time, there's not an awful lot of actual planning and agreements can be made, because I know people are saying, no we're not going to sit down and discuss anything until the referendum. So, nothing can really be done until a vote for Yes, or No. if it's a vote for Yes, then there's obviously going to be a lot of discussion as to who gets what. It's going to be a bit like a divorce [LAUGHS], we'll be sorted through the collection of CDs and so on. I think common sense will prevail in that situation, and some sort of deal will be worked out. If it's No, what worries me is the No campaign have come to be saying that if everybody votes No, Scotland will be given lots of additional powers, taxes and powers and so on and do forth. But we've heard all that before from Westminster, and it's just as likely as not, if it's a No, nothing will happen, there'll be no change. I hope there will, but I'm cynical on that issue, promises made by Westminster.

PART 3

JcF: Obviously you spend a lot of your time involved in the music business, and there are certainly some prominent musicians who are taking the Yes side, including Aly Bain, Dick Gaughan, Alasdair Fraser, Dougie MacLean and Eddi Reader.

IG: Yeah, now you see, that's an interesting point you've made there, because almost everyone that I know from the traditional music scene is going to vote Yes, and that tells you something. The traditional music scene is of course one of the most important parts of our culture, and I think that the people that are really interested in their culture want a better say and want more freedom. For years and years, you know, the whole thing was controlled, and all funding for any kind of cultural thing was handed out by Westminster. It's improved under devolution, but there's still a long way to go, and I think our culture has got a *lot* to benefit by independence. And that's why I think most traditional musicians, involved in one of the most important cultural aspects of Scotland, are voting Yes.

JcF: The Big Question: what happens if the Yes campaign does not prevail, and the referendum fails? What do you see as a Plan B, coming from a Yes man?

IG: [LAUGHS] Well of course at the moment, the Tories and the Liberal Democrats, who are our joint government at the moment, they're all promising all sorts of things, [] cynical [] as I said earlier, I think that all of these promises may well be forgotten. Some people are suggesting that we might even *suffer* at the hands of Westminster, if it's a No, trying to teach us a lesson. I honestly don't think it'll be as bad as that. But there are going to be a lot of very disappointed people up here, and I can't see another referendum, certainly not in my lifetime, and how many more years it might be, I'm not sure. There'll still be a lot of people in Scotland who feel as I do that we should have independence, and that's not going to go away readily.

[Interview continues re: loss of Buddy MacMaster and Jean Redpath, it's all on the podcast linked from <http://thecelticshow.org/wrfgpodcasts.html>]