

## Sign o' the Times

Scotrail will *no doubt be pleased* that the only thing that spoiled Eliot Wilson's recent trip to St Andrews was the Gaelic English dual language sign for Kirkcaldy (see *Comment Gaelic Signs Fri 5<sup>th</sup> May*). I apologise to delicate readers for repeating the C word, but here it is ~ *Cair Chaladain*. Apparently this sign signifies 'another wedge for nationalists to separate us'. Separate whom? English speakers of course. Do English speakers not feel at home in Scotland? *Really?*

The author clearly knows something of Scottish history but rather overstates his case. Yes, it may be inaccurate to describe Gaelic as Scotland's 'national language' and yes, *Angle-ish* has been here for a long time (after all, it's why our Capital is called *Edinburgh* and not *Dunedin*). But it's wrong to state with certainty, that English was – at least when Scotland emerged as a recognisable state – the majority language.

Gaelic once widely spoken has retreated and retreated and retreated: the Gàidhealtachd carved up at the end of a bayonet or cast to the four winds. And here we get to the heart of the issue. Those who dismiss Gaelic as 'fringe', a mere one percent of Scotland's linguistic lifeblood, should probably ask themselves *why?*

We only need go back to 1973 when the Gaels of Skye merely asked for their road signs to be in their own language and they were vigorously resisted by Baron Burton, the Grandson of the Duke of Devonshire. *Ironically*, I'm sure the people of Skye first resorted to using some *choice Anglo-Saxon* before muttering 'are we *still* having to do this? After all these centuries, are we *still having to do this?*'

But back to that sign. Let's talk *money*. Presumably critics of Gaelic/English signs see money (which they value) being spent on the Gaelic language (which they don't). But who's to blame for this *celtic frivolity*? Surely the SNP? Gaelic signs were first rolled out nationally by The Scottish Government in 2001. So that would be *Labour*, who have a long tradition of promoting diversity. Not nationalism.

What does the Sign *signify*? Let's talk *politics*. Critics may see that dual language sign as 'divisive'.

I see the sign as inclusive. As a Scots-English speaking lowlander, Gaelic doesn't 'divide' me from anything. Differences only divide if we're not allowed to be different, or are unwilling to celebrate diversity. In Scotland, English still gets top billing. Literally.

And the bugbear of Nationalism? If anything, this sign signifies the kind of nationalism espoused by the vast majority of those who support independence (SNP or Green). This sign respects the 'fringe' and celebrates it, nurtures it and seeks in some small way to redress the wrongs of our colonial past. An imperialist past we acknowledge but not celebrate. Let's move on and respect all of Scotland's cultures.

If that sign for *Cair Chaladain* makes a Gael feel a little more at home in their own country – a little more welcome *wherever* in that country – then that's *fine by me..*

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By the measured tone and good humour in this piece you can tell he's an irrational, vile and crazed cybernat.