

## Hook Norton and Scottish Independence

**August 2014: *A concerned resident writes . . .***

**Question:** What effect would an independent Scotland have on Hook Norton?

None, I hear you say. But if a group based north of the border called Friends of Alba has its way, then you could be in for a shock. As the date of the Referendum draws nearer, the gap between those who want independence and those who wish to remain part of the union is narrowing. In the event of Scotland gaining independence this group, made up of a cross section of mainly retirees from all over Scotland, have decided to move to England.

Fergus Mackinnon is the spokesperson for the group and I travelled north to meet him. We met in his comfortable bungalow in the Fife town of Auchtermuchty. Up until now this town on the road to St Andrews has been famous as the home town of Jimmy Shand, the accordionist who, in his day, made more recordings than Elvis and the Beatles combined.

If the vote goes against Mackinnon's wishes, then he will be thrust into the limelight. Tall with grey hair, he is in his early seventies. As he ushers me into his sitting room, his bearing is still very much that of the soldier he once was. "Golf is the reason", he says. "I play three times a week at Ladybank". This is a local course not too far away. Not St Andrews, I venture. "Too many foreigners play there", he says. Perhaps if this venture takes off, he will be the foreigner settling in England. He says that this might not be the case as he explains the Friends of Alba's plan.

"Our aim is to relocate to parts of England which have Scotland in their names", he tells me. "We have identified several places which meet the criteria and are making plans to buy land." He is coy about numbers but estimates that in total there are only a few thousand. Several developers have been approached as potential builders for the communities they wish to establish.

Where are they looking? A few places are under consideration. Scotland Gate in Northumberland is one potential choice. While Little Scotland near Bolton is

a definite no – too remote. Scotland Corner near Bucklebury in Berkshire looked promising until they realised that it is in the middle of “Middleton” country and as such would be too much in the public eye.

Hook Norton is mentioned as a strong possibility for reasons that become clearer as I listen intently to Mackinnon. “Up and down the country (in England) local councils seem to get overruled when it comes to granting planning permission. The councils turn applications down only for developers to appeal and subsequently get permission”, he tells me. As the reader knows too well, here in Hook Norton the failure of the district council to have an adequate supply of housing land has led to some controversial developments in the village being given the go-ahead. This is what Friends of Alba have latched on to.

They have identified Scotland End as a potential site for their development. In a way the village is to blame. Scotland End got its name after some Scots camped in the western part of the village close to where the brewery stands today, following the Royalist defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. Mackinnon has clearly been researching this part of Hooky's local history, as he tells me that the locals had welcomed the soldiers with open arms. In their honour they named this part of the village in memory of those Scots who lost their lives here. (*See the next item*). He hopes that the villagers of twenty-first century Hook Norton will do the same. He tells me that there are residents in the village who are sympathetic to their situation. They are fellow Scots who wish to remain in the Union but who do not get a vote because of their domicile.

The actual campsite has long since been built on, so it is difficult to establish exactly where it was, but it is believed to be close to the present-day brewery. However, as Scotland End stretches from the brewery as far east as Hook Norton Manor on Netting Street and takes in land to the north, several potential sites for this community have been identified. The field in Round Close Road has been dismissed as, over the centuries, it has been regarded as an unofficial memorial to those Scots killed there in the aftermath of the Battle of Worcester. However, the field beside the doctor's surgery is the favourite. As the majority of the Friends of Alba are pensioners, each development they wish to create will in effect be a retirement village. They won't be a real burden on the current community as each of their “villages” will have suitable medical facilities, including a doctor and dentist. There

will also be social facilities, so in effect they will be “independent” of the rest of the village. Naturally they will have no need for schools but the potential for increased traffic in the vicinity is a worry.

If the vote on 18 September does go in favour of the pro-independence lobby, it will be a few years before everything is implemented. As I take my leave of Mackinnon, I get the feeling that this is a very determined man who has been used to getting what he wants.

So do we really want another development in Hooky, despite it being self-contained, to add to those already granted and another potential one in the pipeline?

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*Readers will be disappointed (or relieved) to learn that they will search the web in vain to find either Fergus Mackinnon of Auchtermuchty or a Scottish Friends of Alba. And see the next item on how Scotland End got its name. (Eds.)*