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It's time for Scotland to reclaim Winston Churchill

A lack of education about his connections north of the border has let grievance politics fill the gap

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Scots have not been short of controversial statues to protest against of late, but there was one glaring omission. Despite serving as MP for Dundee for 14 years and giving leadership during our darkest hour, Winston Churchill has been forsaken by Scotland. There is a smattering of busts and plaques but nothing more, which is ironic for a man born on Saint Andrew's Day who fought with a Scottish regiment in the First World War. While most countries are proud and make a tourist trade out of major historical figures, one Dundee historian said of his city: "A statue of Winston Churchill here would be as welcome for many as a swim through vomit."

Last year an elected member of the Scottish parliament tweeted that Churchill was a "white supremacist" and a "mass murderer". The shock value aside, the post confirmed the pantomime view of Churchill. The absence of a single resource

about Churchill and Scotland has turned prevailing myths into fact and social media the de facto reference book.

Churchill, long taken for granted alongside Unionism for decades, has fallen out of favour and is cast as the villain, much like the United Kingdom. [Scottish independence](#) is argued in reaction to the British state, Brexit and British history. [The SNP](#) argues that an independent Scotland will be a “good global citizen”. The moral rigidity that goes with this makes even passing support for the British Empire or Churchill taboo and implicitly racist. Much like the extraordinary influence of Scots at nearly all levels of the empire, there is a case of cultural amnesia. Modern Scottish education perpetuates this as it generally dismisses British history in favour of Scottish vignettes such as the Wars of Independence and the Highland Clearances.

Meanwhile, the prevalence of social media has allowed grievance politics and victimhood to fill the gap. Tall tales abound instead that Churchill abandoned the 51st Highland Division in 1940, sent soldiers of the Black Watch on his Dundee constituency in 1911, ordered tanks into Glasgow in 1919 and would have abandoned Scotland if the Nazi invasion had come in 1940.

That he was calling for Scottish home rule from 1912 is lost, as is his warning to Ibrox stadium in 1949, that Labour’s nationalisation programme threatened Scots’ autonomy. He’s perceived to have subdued Scottish strikes and therefore was an extension of an aristocratic suppression of the Scottish working class. The same people do not know that as a young MP, he was considered a traitor to his class for helping to found the welfare state. Of course, Churchill said things that are distasteful to modern sensibilities, but the idea that he was “chased out” of Dundee for incompetence is wrong.

True, his views didn’t always coincide with the predominantly working-class sentiments of Dundee, but he was hardly

different to other MPs of the day who found the responsibilities of the high ministerial office in London and the distance to Scotland's constituencies a challenge. Others say he was a warmonger and murderer, perhaps unaware that he also led the 6th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers on the Western Front. This experience led to his opposition to a premature cross-Channel invasion during the Second World War, which would have resulted in mass slaughter.

The real connections between Churchill and Scotland are plethoric. Andrew Dewar Gibb, his adjutant and future SNP leader, recorded Churchill saying to his troops that: "Although an Englishman, it was in Scotland that I found the three best things in my life: my wife, my constituency and my regiment." There's even a picture of Churchill sitting in a Glengarry bonnet.

Clementine, his wife, was of Scottish descent and briefly educated in Edinburgh. His son, Randolph, took part in the highly charged by-election for Ross & Cromarty in 1936 (losing to Malcolm MacDonald, son of the former prime minister Ramsay). Churchill served as rector of the University of Aberdeen in 1914 and the University of Edinburgh in 1929; he formed the Commandos in Scotland in 1940 and ordered the creation of the Scapa Flow barriers on Orkney that same year. Losing his Scottish seat in 1922 to a prohibitionist candidate is the grandest of punchlines.

During the Second World War, Churchill proposed a meeting with Roosevelt and Stalin and suggested Invergordon as a venue. His relationships with his secretaries of state for Scotland, particularly Tom Johnston, transformed the country. Last year the BBC reported that Churchill purportedly held a secret meeting in Scotland with General Eisenhower in 1944 to discuss the D-Day landings.

Modern politics has removed a stalwart champion from Scotland's history. Scots need to put a kilt on Churchill and reclaim him as one of our own. His daughter, Mary Soames, surmised it best in a letter to her father in his final years: "I owe

you what every English man, woman and child does – Liberty itself.” The same is true of Scotland.

There is more to this country and this great man than people know. Churchill happily borrowed from Charles Murray when, accepting the freedom of the city of Edinburgh in 1942, he said: “Auld Scotland counts for something still.” And he was right.

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