



VINTAGE

UNION JOCK
AIDAN SMITH

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It Is Now

Acknowledgements

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About the Book

July 30, 1966. Bobby Moore is lifting the Jules Rimet trophy, Denis Law is playing golf, and a young boy in Edinburgh is being taught the most important lesson of his life: no matter who England are playing, you support the other lot. If the opposition have a dodgy human rights record, or are cruel to wasps, or can't even be located on a large-format map - too bad. You support the other lot.

Forty years on, and Aidan Smith has done a pretty good job of supporting the other lot. But these days he should be old enough, and ugly enough, to be above petty, playground-formed sporting squabbles. Besides, the World Cup is coming, Scotland haven't made it, and he's about to marry an Englishwoman. Maybe it's a sign. But can a Scotsman ever cheer for 'Ingerland'?

In *Union Jock*, Aidan Smith investigates the age-old England-Scotland enmity, both on and off the football field. The Scots may have suffered at the hands of the Auld Enemy for centuries - Braveheart, Culloden, Jimmy Hill calling David Narey's goal a "toe-poke" (against Brazil in the 1982 World Cup, top right-hand corner) - but now they're a nation on the rise, with a spanking new parliament to prove it. But what do the fans, players, politicians, and Sassenach invaders really think about their English neighbours? Would supporting England be a denial of their Scottishness?

Join Aidan Smith on his quest to put an end to centuries of not-so-friendly rivalry. That's if the Scots don't get him first. Or the English.

About the Author

Aidan Smith has lived in Edinburgh all his life, and is currently Senior Feature Writer of *Scotland on Sunday*. He is the author of one previous book - *Heartfelt: Supping Bovril from the Devil's Cup* - which Irvine Welsh called 'the best book I've ever read about football'. It has been turned into an acclaimed play.

By the same author

Heartfelt: Supping Bovril from the Devil's Cup

For Lucy

Union Jock

Sleeping with the Auld Enemy

Aidan Smith



Yellow Jersey Press
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Maggie Thatcher! Butcher Cumberland! Rachael Heyhoe-Flint!

IT'S 31 DECEMBER, the most Scottish of nights. Along with penicillin, tarmacadam, the TV I'm watching, hollow-pipe drainage, deep-fried confectionery, the Ku Klux Klan, the Bank of *England* and - let's not forget - the *pre*-World Cup victory parade, Scotland can lay claim to having invented Hogmanay.

On the Mr Sheened surface, this looks like any other Hogmanay. My mother may not be around, but I've dusted the flat in her memory, in case of first-footers. My father may not be around, but I've bolted the door in his honour, in case of first-footers.

But it's not any other Hogmanay. On this night of nights, when you don't want to be alone but very often are, a woman has agreed to share my sofa, my bouncing-bomb consistency black bun (the local fruitcake) and my enjoyment of *Only An Excuse*, the Auld Year's Night television staple in Scotland - pungent football comedy reminding us of why we aren't invited to the 2006 World Cup in Germany and England are.

And - this is the really good bit - Lucy has agreed to share my life as well.

This summer I will utter two phrases that I never thought would pass my lips. The biggie, the one that matters, is 'I do.' The other one is 'Come on, England!'

A book about a Scot trying to support - or, at the very least, follow - England wasn't my idea. My friend David Begg suggested it as the obvious sequel to my previous book, *Heartfelt*, about a Hibs fan (me) cheering on Hearts,

the hated rival team in Edinburgh. That wasn't my idea either.

So, having swapped sides once before, this should be easy, yes?

Well, no. *Heartfelt* was supposed to be a journey into terror, the absolute Hearts of darkness. But now my secret can be revealed: I'd rooted for the Jam Tarts once before.

In 1971, Hearts competed in the Texaco Cup, a short-lived inter-British tournament for Sad Sack clubs who didn't qualify for Europe, and when they made it to the final I wanted them to beat Wolves. You see, in 1971 – a big year for Anglo-Scottish relations in our house – there would have been only one thing worse than supporting Hearts: supporting the team from *England*.

I am Scottish. I was born in Edinburgh and still live there. Once I ventured south, stayed for two years, but didn't like it so came back. South Edinburgh just wasn't me. Your roots are your roots.

From my garden, my old secondary school can be reached with a hefty kick of a Mitre Mouldmaster. If I could produce Peter Lorimer – Leeds United and Scotland 'Hotshot' of legend – from behind a bush, in the way that Woody Allen produced Marshall McLuhan from behind a cinema hoarding in *Annie Hall*, just to prove a point, my old primary school would be within range as well.

Here's an example of how Scottish I am . . .

Me, to my brother, in the pub, watching an evening game on TV, as winter really starts to bite: 'Turned your central heating on yet?'

Him: 'No.' (Long pause . . .) 'You?'

Me: 'No.'

Scots are perverse, and the best example of just what big perverts we are is our attitude to the England football team. If Scotland aren't playing England, we do not transfer allegiance to the neighbours with whom we share a language, a currency, and three centuries of togetherness

as first-names-on-the-teamsheet constituent parts of the United Kingdom. No. We really, really, really want England to lose.

Scotland vs England is the world's oldest football rivalry, and the greatest. English people don't seem quite as passionate about it, but no matter: the Scots have passion to spare. For Scots, the rivalry defines them.

On the occasions when Scotland manage to defeat the Auld Enemy it's about more than just that ninety minutes. Like the procurator fiscal (prosecuting counsel in England) when a guilty verdict is returned, we ask for previous convictions to be taken into account: centuries of lording it, unfriendly acts with broadsword and bayonet, and the most heinous of unintentional slights.

Maggie Thatcher and the Duke of Cumberland! Enid Blyton and Jimmy Hill! Jimmy Greaves and Andrew Lloyd Webber! Samuel Johnson and Emlyn Hughes! Kevin Keegan and Frank 'Call My Bluff' Muir! Stephen Fry and Mick Channon! Virginia Wade and Walter de la Mare! Gerry Francis and Rachael Heyhoe-Flint! *Terry And June!* 'Your boys took a hell of a beating!'

But hang on, this is not only hysterical, it's historical. The Home International Championship ended in 1984 and the last of the annual Scotland-England matches took place five years later (2-0 to England).

It was a fantastic rivalry back in the day but it's over. We Scots have moved on, we've matured. We've got our own Parliament now, and our own cuddly little smoking ban, so we cannot blame England for all our ills.

Football - especially that match - can no longer be central to our lives. The Scottish team have gone into a sharp decline - the tanner ba' talent just isn't coming through anymore (though we can still just about manage the odd glorious failure). Our childhood obesity rates are higher than America's and it's computer games that are central to kids' lives now. Lucy is a teacher. Every weekend, she says, the

boys in her class are plugged in to their Xboxes instead of kicking a ball about. An eight-year-old revealed the appeal: 'Aye, and the best bit, Miss, was the end: I got raped by zombies.'

England, meanwhile, qualify for (almost) every major tournament and, if you believe the hype, are getting ever closer to winning one. We should be relaxed about this. Or, if we can't be relaxed, then we should just give one of those existentialist loner soulful stares, the sort much favoured by Steve McQueen (wasn't he Scottish?), and light up a cigarette and . . . well, smoking has been outlawed in public places, but you get my drift.

The great rivalry, especially for me, cannot be life or death any more. I'm marrying into the most non-football family on the planet.

My last days as a single man, therefore, will be my last days as a football fan, or at least the kind of fan I used to be: completely bloody obsessed. So maybe it's just as well I am to spend them supp— . . . following *Ingerland*. That way I can forget I'm even watching football, so when it's over I won't miss what I didn't have . . .

They Strut this Earth like Medieval Popes .

. .

'BLOODY BASTARDIN' SHITE!

You never forget the first time. Like the first time my father stretched to his full nineteen feet and plucked my football from a tree. The first time he picked up his four children like we were felt-covered dolls, and held us aloft to set a new Commonwealth all-comers dads' record.

The first time he ignited the gas burner under the fondue pan, probably the only one in our street. The first time he drove me to school in his orange Renault 4, definitely the only foreign car in our street.

The first time I noticed, at prizegiving, that everyone else's dad had a short back and sides, while his hair was long and wavy-grey and 'artistic'. The first time he read a chapter, yanked from the Olivetti, of his children's novel about pirates and whisky and a heroic cabin boy who saves the day (available in regular bedtime instalments). The first time I saw him on TV, hosting his own chat show.

The first time he told me that the peel in marmalade was the toenail clippings of the workers at the jam factory. The first time he told me that the hole in his neck was a sword wound from the war - the Second World War, which was not a big swordfest. The first time he battered me for coming home drunk (and me too paralytic to feel a thing). The first time he read something I'd had published. The first time I realised he was going to die. And I'll never, *ever* forget the first time I heard my father swear.

'Bloody bastardin' shite!'

It was after *The Goal That Never Was*, after *The Goal That Shouldn't Have Counted Because There Were Some People On The Pitch And They Thought It Was All Over*, and around the time that Alan Ball slumped to his knees and Bobby Charlton burst into tears and Nobby Stiles danced a daft jig of joy and Bobby Moore stood removed from the hullabaloo, all serene, the boy with the golden hair.

Actually, Moore didn't have golden hair, not that day, because that day was pre-colour TV in our part of Scotland (pre the fabulous revelation that Blue's eyes in *The High Chaparral* were indeed blue, and so was Emma Peel's catsuit in *The Avengers* - not the leather one, her weekend wear - and so was *Top Cat's* sidekick Benny the Ball). The golden hair came slightly later, after I was replayed *The Goal That Wasn't A Goal* etc. at the cinema in a newsreel filler before the main feature (*Shalako*, or somesuch horse opera). I must have taken Moore's gilded barnet, along with the orange of the ball, the turquoise of Sir Alf Ramsey's tracksuit, the red of the shirts I assumed were grey - and coloured in the flickering cathode-ray image supplied by Rediffusion that momentous afternoon.

'Bloody bastardin' shite!'

Denis Law lost himself on the golf course rather than watch England win the World Cup but my father didn't have that refuge. He hated the infernal dimpled-pebble game though I'll never forget the first and only time I persuaded him to have a thwack with a four iron: he cleared the entire pitch 'n' putt course, the pond beyond it, almost the Edinburgh Academicals rugby ground as well. I assume he didn't want to watch the final but, with a nine-year-old son to entertain that afternoon, perhaps he felt obliged to educate this latecomer to football in the game's basics.

'Bloody bastardin' shite!'

That was when I realised that England, the country, was a different place. School did not teach me about the long, crabbit and often bloody history between Scotland and

England. Well, it may have done but I didn't take in the lessons, or differentiate between that conflict and any other. No, I learned all about the special non-relationship from my father.

Dad loathed the Londoncentric BBC's mispronunciation of Scottish place names. 'It's COCK-bridge-to-Tomintoul-pronounced-TOOL!' he'd roar at the radio at breakfast time, spluttering marmalade-maker's toenails everywhere. This happened at the onset of every winter, the Highlands route ritualistically the first to be closed by snow.

Then he'd scold my mother for reading the *Daily Express*, a 'Tory rag' that in his view did not have Scotland's best interests at heart. (He read the *Scotsman*.) Then he'd revive some grumble from the night before, possibly concerning southern, bourgeois attitudinising in the *Play For Today*. Then . . . one last blast at the radio . . . a hoot of derision at someone of privilege ('Fortesque-Robinson-Smythe!') or a retired colonel from the shires ('Double-Back-Action-Breech-Loading-Gore!'). And he'd go to work, get down to the real business of being monumentally indifferent towards England.

Dad wasn't one of those tartan terrorists who blew the queen's head off postboxes and other official ironmongery; his methods were slightly more subtle. He was a journalist, critic, author, photographer, playwright and television producer - yer actual polymath, Renaissance Faither. His work may not have been anti-English as such but it was definitely pro-Scottish; comment on the English was unavoidable and indeed essential. He made programmes about Scottish cultural life because the BBC - the London-run network, at any rate - ignored it. He wrote a book exalting his home city, Edinburgh. He wrote another called *This Is My Country* (of course the country exalted in it was Scotland). He wrote plays about iconic Scots, such as Mary Queen of Scots and John Knox, and also ordinary ones, like the funeral director, the toilet attendant and a soldier by the

name of Jock. By himself, the squaddie told the entire history of the Scottish nation in just over two hours, stopping only for essential-to-the-plot fish and chips, purchased by me.

Written in 1971, *Jock* was a great success. Before its final run at the Edinburgh Festival, it had been seen by more people than any other piece of theatre by a living Scottish writer. Many viewed it as nationalistic, a rallying cry for independence. I have often wondered about this. My father isn't around for a chat about the play's politics and, it would follow, his own politics. But even if he was, I probably wouldn't ask. He was of a generation for whom politics were a private affair. Asking a man how he voted was the height of impudence, like quizzing him on whether he had false teeth.

It didn't really matter; it wasn't essential to the plot of my young life that I 'got' *Jock*. I loved every second of the drama, and especially the big speeches packed with honest, decent and true appraisals of our southern cousins: 'The English! My God they ruffle my feathers. They strut this earth like medieval popes.'

As assistant to the assistant stage manager's assistant, I had to bang a bass drum to signify the horse's charge as Robert the Bruce's second in command at Bannockburn - en route to the Holy Land with his king's heart encased in silver - thundered towards the infidels then hurled the casket into a ring of enemy spears and died over it. And to set the scene for the murder of James I of Scotland, I was the royal court minstrel on classical guitar (fifteenth-century lute not available).

Culloden and Flodden, Calvinism and hair shirts, oppression and just being ignored. Treachery and variety theatre, cesspit squalor and the *Sunday Post*, public hangings (and drawings and quarterings) and a basic lack of guts, cometh the hour. My father painted a bloody grim picture of life in Scotland down the centuries. For light relief

he turned, as Scots often do, to England for a spot of gentle character assassination: 'They behave as if God had granted them the divine right to be smug. As if a' their eggs had two yolks . . .'

As I reported for duty behind the drum every night and on the matinee afternoons, *Jock* was like a gold-star student's exam crammer or, more accurately in my case, a thicko's primer: it was the history lesson I skived at school. The birth of a nation and its subsequent befuddlement, told in the time it took a football match to unfold, if you added on extra time and the referee's toss of a coin (penalty shoot-outs had not yet been introduced). Mind you, there were occasions when I skived *Jock* too . . .

The makeshift theatre was tucked into the roof above the Playhouse, one of Edinburgh's biggest and grandest cinemas, whose own closing credits were fast approaching. It had decided to go out with a bang, screening some of the most provocative films of the early 1970s, and during the interval of the play, but also at moments when my services weren't required, I would sneak downstairs and watch a few minutes, always the same minutes, of the movies.

Six nights running, I thrilled to the scene in *Klute* when Jane Fonda declares herself 'the greatest fuck in the world'. Even now when I think of James II, which isn't often, for he was the king who banned 'the futeball' in Scotland for more than a century, I can't get out of my head a brazen, bra-misplacing, unknownbut-not-for-long Melanie Griffith driving Gene Hackman to distraction in *Night Moves*. And there is a two-minute sequence of *Last Tango In Paris* (not *that* sequence) which I know better than just about anything, save for great Scotland goals.

(Scotland's goals against England in the 1970s were rarely great. Dalglish dunted one through Ray Clemence's legs in 1976 and Lou Macari's the following year was decidedly unsilky. But both goals were competition winners in the Home International Championship and my father and I willed them

over the line. Indeed Macari's involved such a stramash in the six-yard box that Dad puffed up his cheeks and, with cartoon exaggeration, tried to blow the ball into the net, only succeeding in firing his falsers across the room.)

My father also wrote songs. One of them, 'Come By The Hills', was even proposed as a new national anthem for Scotland. But its composer would freely admit that he never penned a couple of lines which summed a nation's character as perfectly as:

What d'you do with the bracelet
What d'you do with the bracelet
What d'you do with the bracelet Bobby Moore?

Put it in your handbag
Put it in your handbag
Put it in your handbag Bobby Moore

It seems faintly ludicrous that the wisest man I knew got such a kick out of this juvenile piece of abuse. I can still see him dancing round his armchair to that terrace taunt, bashed out by the Hampden hit factory after the England captain was arrested in Colombia for 'The Great Chain Robbery' - the alleged theft of a £600 emerald and diamond bracelet when the England team were en route to the Mexico World Cup in 1970.

Other wise Scots of the time thought the same way. In Dad's book, *This Is My Country*, an anthology of musings on the Scottish condition, the novelist and screenwriter Gordon Williams confesses: 'The greatest moment of my life was this year [1974] on the rain-soaked terraces of Hampden when the second goal went in and we'd beaten the whiteshirted swines.'

And if we couldn't beat them, we wanted everyone else to beat them. The other lot could have an appalling human

rights record, or be impossible to locate on a jumbo-sized map, or be a nowhere kind of place, hicks-in-sticks . . . it didn't matter. We *always* wanted England's opponents to win.

I can mark out my life in international tournaments, and defeats and disasters for the Auld Enemy. And I assumed every Scottish family was like ours, and behaved in the same way.

Of that 1970 World Cup, another screenwriter, *Night Moves*' Alan Sharp, declares in *This Is My Country*: 'When I was in Mexico I thought England played very well against Brazil, but it would have been impossible for me to identify with them and support them.'

You just couldn't. England was a different country, and still, to these teenage eyes, a faraway country. Our family knew no English people. My father had a good friend called Fred England but, unhelpfully, he wasn't English. From Nos. 1 to 11, my team Hibs were entirely Scottish, and every week they played other all-Scots sides, give or take the odd Scandinavian called Noggin the Nog and the like who'd been lured to Scotland by our sultry temperatures. And I still hadn't crossed the border by the time I was eligible to place a cross on a voting form.

The 1970s were stirring times for Scotland. In the two general elections of 1974, the Scottish National Party stormed Westminster, winning first six then eleven seats. That year's World Cup also produced a double whammy: Scotland qualified, England didn't. Oh how Dad and I laughed.

The SNP campaigned on the slogan 'It's Scotland's oil' after the discovery of so much black gold underneath the North Sea. Scotland was rich; wealthy enough to split from the rest of the United Kingdom and go it alone.

George Rosie, the journalist and author, recalls the optimism of the times: 'Wild schemes were floated for huge petrochemical works, international airports, whole new

towns. Fortunes were made and fingers burnt. It was the apocalyptic hour of the Dreamer and the Artful Dodger. But it was also a massive injection of optimism, energy and hard cash the like of which Scotland had never seen before and will probably never see again.'

'When will we see your likes again?' That's a line from 'Flower Of Scotland', the song eventually chosen to be Scotland's modern anthem. It was written by Roy Williamson of The Corries, who were given their TV break by my father. By the time Dad and I started going to Scotland games at Hampden - we're still in those tumultuous 1970s here - the booing of 'God Save The Queen' was thunderous. My father loved this, almost as much as the chant which invariably followed:

Bobby Moore, superstar
Walks like a woman and he wears a bra

(Who was the true bard of the old Mount Florida slopes - up to his Stead & Simpson stack heels in red mud as another dolly bird beer can full of piss is emptied onto the crumbling steps - and where *did* these fabulous chants come from? My father always wanted to find out. Sometimes we'd play a game, scan the faces in the packed crowd and pick out possible candidates for lyricist-in-residence.)

Whatever your political persuasion, if you were a Scot Nat or a Scot Not, there could be no denying that Scotland in the 1970s had a swagger in its step and demanded to be heard. My 1970s - half spent at school, the other half cub-reporting - were about trying to find my voice. As a confused teenager with a head full of the usual obsessions and also a sizable self-obsession, I didn't fully appreciate that my country was undergoing a life change of its own, shedding its plooks and attempting to grow up. Lashing out at everything, the way bumfluffed, bumptious teens do, I

probably couldn't wait to leave Scotland. Of course, I've ended up staying.

In their book *Modern British History*, Mark Garnett and Richard Weight write: 'In this period a more distinct Scottish popular culture also emerged, centred on vociferous support for Scotland's football team, while the Bay City Rollers, a tartanclad pop group, took Britain by storm.'

The Bay City Drongos? The Rollers and their 'Shang-A-Lang' sound were Scotland's national embarrassment. I may have been politically naive, but aged seventeen I knew my pop music. If I was patriotic about pop in the 1970s it was for the Average White Band who, remarkably, sold soul music back to America and topped the US charts.

The swagger was even more pronounced in the theatre. John McGrath's *The Cheviot, The Stag And The Black, Black Oil* was an angry polemic about the exploitation of Scotland, from the eighteenth century Highland Clearances to the battle over the bounty found at the bottom of the North Sea. *The Great Northern Welly Boot Show* was a musical about the threatened closure and subsequent work-in at the Upper Clyde shipyard and starred a promising young comedian called Billy Connolly. Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough* was also shipyard-set, as was, on TV, Peter McDougall's *Just A Boys' Game*, although in that fantastic film the central characters were never in their crane cockpits. They were always bunking off to drink and fight and drink and screw and drink and ponder the state of cross-generational male relationships.

In the faither-laddie relationship of which I was part, I believed in my dad implicitly (apart from the stories about the toenails in the marmalade and that sword wound; I was *haein' ma doots* about them). Everything I knew about the shaky concept of the 'United Kingdom' I learned from him (and everything I knew about local difficulties in the rest of Europe I learned from Katie Boyle in a shimmering gown during voting for *The Eurovision Song Contest*).

When Dad stomped off to his study in 1966, so missing the World Cup presentation, I stomped off to my bedroom. It was only afterwards that I saw Bobby Moore wipe his muddy hands on the velvet drape of the Royal Box before he accepted the trophy from the queen.

And when in later years, in their attempt to repeat that triumph, England failed to score against Polish clown-goalies (Jan Tomaszewski), or conceded goals to Germans who looked old enough to be my grandfather (Uwe Seeler), or expected the hirpling veterans, Kevin Keegan and Trevor Brooking, to save the day while wearing ridiculously skimpy shorts (1982 World Cup), I believed a loud guffaw was the only permissible reaction. I couldn't wait for my voice to drop so it would have even more impact.

And I believed every word of *Jock*. Year after year at the Edinburgh Festival, this one-man tattoo played to sell-out crowds. The rousing finale always got them, with the old soldier unleashing one more verbal volley at his English oppressors:

We've seen too much and heard too much to be taken in by any of the old queen and country crap. The ba's up on the slates . . .

Then the bagpipes start up. It's 'Scotland The Brave'. Jock snorts:

They'll have to do more than skirl a tune at us, won't they? We're our own masters now. We've bowed the knee and touched the forelock once too often.

But as the music builds, his shoulders start to twitch - a 'gallus wee swagger' is how my father recommends it in the script. Jock picks up the Saltire and marches out of the theatre. Every summer, Dad predicted this would be the year when the audience would jump to their feet and fall in behind the 'auld bastard', follow him all the way along Princes Street to their destiny, or the pub, whatever was closest.

It never happened. And Scotland never got Home Rule, at least not then. In 1978 Scotland qualified for the Argentina World Cup, England didn't, and Dad and I laughed even louder. But Scotland performed abysmally under the tragically deluded Ally MacLeod. That swagger of ours took a kicking in Córdoba and the following year's referendum on devolution was a vote too far for many Scots.

In my polling station, I stood tall because I was in my old primary school for the first time since I'd left the place. But hunched over the desk in the booth, I felt pathetically small. Voting for the very first time, on anything, I placed my cross in the 'No' box. Too scared by the alternative, I chose that Scotland should remain attached to a country that all through the 1970s I thought I despised.

How did my father vote? What would he think about Scotland finally getting a Parliament? What would he think about the Scottish team qualifying for five World Cups in a row, then looking like they might never reach the finals again? What would he think about the current generation of 'whiteshirted swines', their six-figure salaries and their hairstyles and their super-celebrity, and the upsurge in patriotism - *English* patriotism - they inspire? I don't know because he's not here to ask.

But we will always have 1966. When Dad was alive, the rest of the family knew better than to bring up a year destined to go down in infamy. And today he would not believe the extent to which that triumph is still banged on about.

The English gave Dad what he called 'the dry boak'. None more so than when they provoked this rant, my favourite from *Jock*:

And in Whitehall and Westminster and all along their corridors of power they treat us as if we were still savages, painted in woad. A subject race of congenital idiots, a nation of Harry Lauders with curly sticks and wee daft dugs and stags at bay and flyin' haggises and tartan dollies and

Annie Lauries and hoots mon Jock McKay ye'll be a' richt the nicht if you can houghmagandie backwards.

Jock dates from a time when Scotland, a large chunk of it, felt driven down by England. Some would say Scots are at their best in such situations. A few would contend Scots need these situations simply to function. And now? Whitehall and Westminster no longer deny us a say in our own affairs. But while we have a Parliament, this has not made us more remote from England. Ideologically, and in every way when I was growing up, I used to think England and Scotland were a million miles apart. I cannot say that today.

There are 400,000 English people who now call Scotland home; many of them live in my Edinburgh. The BBC, where my father worked for twenty-five years, is no longer powered by the insistent thrum of plummy accents.

Three decades ago, the only Scots of influence making their living in England seemed to be footballers. Every club had at least one wild-haired, wide-lapelled, desperado-moustached card shark in the dressing room, and if the Sassenachs were familiar with the vernacular which *Trainspotting* author Irvine Welsh would later take into the mainstream, they might have referred to this fellow as 'the Scottish radge'.

These days, the radge plays a different game. Over the last few years, most of the great offices of state have been held by Scots. Tony Blair was born in Edinburgh. More obviously, Gordon Brown is Scottish. There are many others. To the exasperation of the English, this coterie of 'Jocks' controlling the government, the media and much else besides is the 'Scottish Raj'.

With so many English people living in Scotland, the Parliament perfectly understandably talks a lot about its vision of a 'modern, inclusive Scotland'. Any mention of the great rivalry would doubtless be deemed 'reductive'. So

maybe it's just as well that Scotland and England no longer play each other at football.

But the word 'reductive' didn't exist in my father's day and neither did the view that the great rivalry was in any way a bad thing. And if you grew up believing that it was the most important thing, you cannot simply switch off. Whether I like it or not, the great rivalry is part of me. It sits in me like a vaguely benign lump.

My father wasn't a New Dad (thank goodness). For Auld Dad and I, football was our currency, the means by which we communicated with each other, and what we talked about most was Scotland and 'the other lot'. And even though he's dead I cannot break the link. I am his self-appointed representative on earth, checking the classified football results for mispronunciations, such as 'Brechin City' being rhymed with 'wretchin' '. It is while saddled with this long-standing, possibly incurable condition, then, that I take on the challenge of supporting - come, on get it right: *following* - England at Germany 2006.

2006. Thirty, no, hang on . . . *forty* years of hurt. It is four long decades since that glistening afternoon when England won the World Cup. They love their anniversaries, the English, but so do Scots.

It is thirty-five years since *Jock*. Thirty years since *This Is My Country*, and I'm the same age now as my father was when he wrote that book. It's also ten years since Dad died after hanging on long enough to see England fail to win Euro '96.

And for all that England believed 2006 to be their destiny, that this was when they would once again win football's greatest prize, I'm afraid that in my mind the fortieth anniversary demands a whole different reaction to flags, rattles, street parties, a joyful unbuttoning of decent, proper English reserve and a spontaneous chorus of 'For he's a jolly good fellow' when Bobby Moore, the boy with the golden hair, hoists aloft the golden trophy.

'Bloody bastardin' shite!

Gordon Brown, Texture like Sun

I COULD USE some help. More than that, I need a Scot – a pre-eminent one, an example to us all – to show me how to ‘do’ England.

Gordon Brown is a key member of the ‘Scottish Raj’. He is Chancellor of the Exchequer but, bored of being assistant manager to the country, wants a shot at the top job. He will get it eventually, but his leadership bid really kicks in at the beginning of this World Cup year with an appeal for team unity. This is United Kingdom FC and Brown, unmistakably Scottish, has a bit to go to win over Middle England, Little Englanders and Ingerlanders and convince them he’s prime-minister material. He wants to reclaim the Union Jack from far-right nutters. He wants it planted in gardens up and down this decking-clad septic isle. And he proposes a national holiday, a British Day.

There is much scepticism about his wizard wheeze. In Scotland the SNP insist that Britishness is so last century, if not the two centuries before that, and point to opinion polls showing that Scots feel emphatically more Scottish than British. Down south, the paper of record for Unmerrie Englande, the *Daily Mail*, contends: ‘Gordon Brown has a problem – he is Scottish.’

Brown exudes ‘Presbyterian rectitude and a kind of northern bleakness,’ says Stephen Glover, which is a bit rich, considering Glover is among the most joyless of the *Mail’s* grey-sky thinkers. ‘His particular difficulty as a would-be prime minister arises because the Scots are less loved in England than at any time since the mid-eighteenth century.’

Is this true? I don't know because, for me, the process of integration has yet to begin. There's a World Cup warm-up in Liverpool in February and I think I should be there.

How British do I feel? Not very. But in 2006, Scots and our English cousins will want to ponder the question, what with the 300th anniversary of the Union looming.

If Brown is looking for an instinctive Scottish response to his big idea, then it's this: I approve of a national holiday and reckon I deserve it. After all, I'm giving up a year for this cross-border cultural exchange to follow the English team, and it's twelve months I can ill afford.

The life expectancy of the average Scot is 73.8 years, about three years less than the average Englishman. So the English - and Gordon 'Play up, Britain, play up!' Brown - had better appreciate the huge personal sacrifice I'm making here.