

PASSPORT TO KELSO: A (MICRO)NATION DECIDES

David Stenhouse

Micronations, the tiny statelets or state-like entities sometimes referred to as ‘new nation projects’ have been of occasional interest to academic researchers into nationalism, though they have never excited the same amount of critical or analytical attention given to larger nation states, nationalist secession movements or even widely recognised, *microstates* like San Marino, Monaco or the Vatican City. San Marino, Monaco and the others may be small, but they are also recognised by other countries and are part of the fabric of international law with the requisite rights, responsibilities and bilateral relations. By contrast Micronations tend to be unrecognised in international law, by states or international organisations, and tend to be dismissed as quixotic, frivolous or eccentric.

But even if states or academics aren’t interested in Micronations, they are of abiding interest to one section of the modern state. Perhaps because Micronations are often the brainchild of charismatic individuals and run as personal fiefdoms (and therefore make colourful copy), they can be guaranteed a disproportionate amount of attention from the media. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation gave the Hutt River Principality wide coverage when wheat farmer Leonard Casley ‘seceded’ from Australia in 1970 over what he saw as draconian wheat quotas. The offshore Principality of Sealand, for sale in early 2007 for offers over £65m, was picked up by news websites and media outlets around the world. And on the 22nd February 2007 BBC Radio Scotland persuaded Kelso High School to declare independence from the UK.

Free Kelso High School’s experiment with independence, and its subsequent referendum on whether it would rejoin the rest of the UK or remain separate, received wide coverage from the BBC and other national and local media

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outlets. A Radio Scotland programme 'Passport to Kelso' was broadcast on 25th March 2007, covering the result of the referendum, and looking back on the events of the previous month. This article explores the background to Free Kelso High's experiment in Independence, and explores the timeline from before the declaration of independence on the 22nd February to the referendum in which Free Kelso High's citizens voted on the 15th March 2007. Because much of the debate happened on-line, in various newspapers or in other media outlets, this article follows the time-line and draw extensively on contemporary coverage in the media.

HOW TO COVER THE UNION

Given that 2007 marked the 300th anniversary of the Act of Union between Scotland and England, and that the Union is still an issue of intense historical and political debate in Scotland, particularly in the year of a hotly fought Scottish Parliament election, it was inevitable and appropriate that BBC Scotland should cover the issue. But how?

The contemporary political issues surrounding the argument over Independence would be covered in day to day political coverage on Holyrood Live, Newsnight Scotland and to a lesser extent Reporting Scotland. But there was also a need for programmes which offered a historical or analytical perspective on the issue. The Features Department in Edinburgh produced a series of programmes for Radio 4 as part of a 'Union Season'. This comprised a number of programmes specially commissioned by Radio 4 and developed and produced in the Features Department in Edinburgh.

- The historical and political context of the Union in 1707 was outlined in '1707 the Birth of Britain' which was scripted by the journalist George Rosie, presented by Alan Little and explored the debates surrounding Union in 1707 and provided them with a contemporary political tone.
- The Scottish Economy was explored in 'Mony a Mickle: The Scots and Money' in which the BBC's Business Editor Robert

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Television output lead with Charles Kennedy's authored piece on The Union broadcast on BBC 1 network, and BBC Scotland broadcast the novelist and journalist Ruaridh Nicol's 'Patriot Games', a personal and historical take on the Union. These programmes took a broadly historical and analytical approach to the subject.

To complement these treatments I was keen to make a programme which addressed a central fact of the union- that it was a difficult choice between hotly contested political alternatives. Accordingly I wanted to find a format for a programme which allowed an electorate to choose between two opposing positions, and would give the audience a sense of participating in a debate. Each year through the Sound Town initiative BBC Radio Scotland forms a relationship with a Secondary School. In 2006/2007 our Sound School was Kelso High School. Could Kelso High School be involved in a project which foregrounded the issues of independence, interdependence and choosing between contested political futures?

HOW COULD KELSO HIGH SCHOOL BECOME A STATE?

The 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States declares that 'The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states. There are also of course major issues around legitimacy, the self identification of nationals and their buy in to the idea of being a micro-nation. All these would become important in the Free Kelso High School narrative.

The idea of approaching Kelso High School and asking them if they would consider declaring themselves independent appealed for a number of reasons, namely:

- The pre-existing relationship between BBC Radio Scotland and the school.
- The fact that Kelso High School sits on a geographically contained site on Bowmont Street in Kelso – and so could be identified as a discreet geographical entity (Section 1 (b) in the Montevideo Convention).

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- The fact that the project could appeal to the school as fitting in with their curricular interests in history, geography, tourism and modern studies (that it would have educational benefits).

It was also attractive that the school was reasonably easily accessed from Edinburgh, Glasgow – and, as it turned out, London.

There were also other reasons why the school made an appealing site to run the project. It was a school and therefore full of young people who might be expected to engage with the possibilities of such a bold proposal. I was also interested in whether, sited so close to the Border with England, and with a number of pupils who commuted across the border to attend each day, attitudes to national identity might be more fluid than elsewhere in Scotland (or, indeed, the opposite).

FREE KELSO HIGH AS MICRONATION

Passports

Kelso High had a discrete geographical identity but it is a day school, not a boarding school. This meant that its citizens went home for the night, and ‘home’ was outside the territory of the state. Whilst this experience was comparable in some ways to people who, say, live in Belgium and commute across the border into France to work, it did create some interesting anomalies. The local media (see below) were excited by the idea of the citizens showing their passports in order to get into the school in the morning and staged a photo op of the ‘border control’. In practice, the citizens of Free Kelso High used their school identification cards to go about the school, but the fact that these were checked more regularly than in the pre-independence days made them increasingly aware that there had been a change.

Currency

The Kelso Bawbee was adopted as the national currency. The bureau de change was also a popular site for photographs. Many of the pupils found using the bawbee confusing (particularly after a visit from a European economist persuaded them that the Bawbee/Sterling exchange rate should float against a variety of other European currencies). The Tuck shop across the road (i.e. outside the territory of Free Kelso High) was reluctant to re-price its goods in Bawbees so in practice the Bawbee was only used for transactions within the state (to buy school lunches). Since it was felt that school lunches should not

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be withheld from anyone who did not have any bawbees on them, this meant in practical terms that the Bawbee was run alongside Sterling (as, say, in practice the Jamaican Dollar is run alongside the US Dollar) and used essentially as a symbolic token of independence.

Stamps and medals

During the course of Free Kelso High's Independence it did not issue stamps or medals but it did make increased use of what had previously been the symbols of the school: the 'Doe or Die' crest, on cups and lapel badges.

Flag

The red black and white flag of Free Kelso High fluttered over the school for the duration of Independence. The flag was designed by the art department and raising it was the symbolic centrepiece of the Declaration of Independence.

Language

The new state prioritised the use of the local dialect of 'Kelsae' in discussions and appointed a poet laureate from within the school who used 'Kelsae' in a series of patriotic poems.

A FREE KELSO HIGH INDEPENDENCE TIMELINE

December 2006

I approached Mr Charlie Robertson, the Rector of the Kelso High School, in early December 2006 and suggested that I come down to Kelso to meet with him and other members of staff. That meeting took place in Kelso High School on the 11th December. Additional meetings to discuss the logistics took place in January 2007. The 22nd February 2007 was agreed as a date for 'Independence Day.'

22nd February 2007 – Independence Day

The print and broadcast media were invited for a press call to cover a 'special event' at Kelso High School at 9.30 on the 22nd February 2007. The event, led by Mr Robertson and attended by all the pupils and teachers at the school, began with a Free Kelso High National Dance, and went on to the reading of the following Declaration of Independence. The Declaration had been the work of various history classes, and had involved input from a number of different

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year groups. It was read by Saskia Peace and Sebastian Murray, two pupils who would play a significant role in the Independence process. The Declaration itself drew on the American Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of Arbroath, and several other documentary sources.

The Text of the Declaration of Independence

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one school to dissolve the bands which have connected it with others and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature's God entitles it, a decent respect to the opinions of man and womankind requires that those involved should declare the causes which impel them to that separation.

Most esteemed listeners we know, and from the chronicles and books of the ancients we find, that among other famous schools our own, Kelsae, has been graced with widespread reknown.

The appointed day has come – the day appointed by destiny – and Kelsae stands forth again, after long slumber and struggle, awake, vital, free and independent. The turning-point is past, and history begins anew for us, the history which we shall live and act, and others will write about.

It is a fateful moment for us in Kelsae, for all of Scotland and the world. On this day our thoughts are synchronised with those of our great leader, the architect of this freedom, the Father of our Nation, Mr Charles Robertson, who, embodying the old 'Doe or Die' spirit of Kelsae, has held aloft the torch of freedom and lightened up the darkness that has surrounded us. Let us hope that these thoughts never go astray. We have often been unworthy followers of his and have strayed from his message and bear the imprint in their hearts of this great son of Kelsae, magnificent in his fatherhood and strength and courage and humility. We shall never allow that torch of freedom to be blown out, how ever high the wind or stormy the weather.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all students are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are a Multi-Use Games Area, a Plasma Screen at the front door, a Computer in every room and the pursuit of Healthy Eating.

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The future beckons to us. Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour? To bring freedom and opportunity to the students, to the teachers, to the janitors and office staff, the canteen staff and all the workers of Kelsae; to fight to end ignorance and sloth; to build up a prosperous, democratic and progressive school, and to create an institution which will ensure justice and a fullness of life to every boy, girl, man and woman.

For, as long as but a hundred of us remain alive, we will never consent to subject ourselves to the dominion of any other. It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours, nor even our Multi-Use Games are that we are fighting, but for freedom – for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with his life.

They may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom!

The subjects of Free Kelso High went on to swear a Pledge of Allegiance.

WE, the citizens of Free Kelso High, do humbly promise to be loyal to the state, to uphold its aims and laws and to support its heroic leader.

The event ended with a performance of a specially commissioned pipe anthem ‘Free Kelso High School’ performed by local piper Chris Waite and the Flag being raised by Megan Quashie and Craig Logan, the youngest pupils at the school.

After the ceremony the pupils were interviewed by Angela Soave of BBC Radio Scotland in the Borders, and photographed for the BBC website. The photographer took images of the flag being put up the flagpole, and of pupils running the bureau de change. Borders Television, which had not attended the 9.30am press call, arrived later. Key events from the Independence Ceremony were restaged for the cameras that afternoon, and it appeared on that night’s Border TV news bulletin.

The same day the following news story appeared on the BBC Scotland website.¹

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/south_of_scotland/6386751.stm

Pupils' Republic of Kelso created

Kelso High School has declared its 'independence' from Britain

Pupils read out a special declaration, raised their own flag and have even adopted a new currency to mark the historic occasion.

The school is carrying out the experiment as a way of studying the 300th anniversary of the Act of Union.

It will remain as a 'breakaway' state until a referendum in March when pupils will decide whether to stay independent or rejoin the UK.

Pupils Sebastian Murray, 15, and Saskia Peace, 16, read a declaration of independence which the pupils had written for the event.

'Inalienable rights'

It contained the pledge: 'We hold these truths to be self evident, that all pupils are created equal.

'That they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights.

'That amongst these are the multi-use of the games area, a plasma screen at the front door, a computer in every room and the pursuit of healthy eating.'

Over the next few weeks the new 'country' will be visited by representatives from the EU, the UN and others who will advise them on how to make the most of their independent status.

'As it is the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of the Union, we thought we would undertake this experiment and we are expecting to learn a lot but also to have a lot of fun in the process,' explained rector Charlie Robertson.

As part of their independence, the citizens of Kelso High School have adopted a new currency – Kelso Bawbees – a new flag and national anthem.

The school is also issuing its own passports.

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A referendum of the 651 pupils will take place in March to decide the fate of the 'nation'.

Experts Visit

On the 28th February Free Kelso High School was visited by John Edward, the head of the European Parliament Office in Edinburgh, and by Professor Andrew Scott of the Europa Institute at Edinburgh University. Their brief was to discuss the issues surrounding the economy of the independent state and whether it could qualify for membership of the European Union. The tone and content of that discussion is perhaps best expressed in this transcription of one exchange. The audience was a combined fourth and first year class studying modern studies.

Membership of the European Union

EDWARDS: As far as the EU is concerned, we'd be more than happy to have you. You have to be a state first, so assuming that the referendum is in favour of independence you need to have a visit from the UN, and get [Secretary General] Mr Ban Ki-moon to accept you in as the latest member of the United Nations. Then you need to get your flag up in New York, open your embassy in Edinburgh, your embassy in London and let everyone recognise you.

[If you want to join the EU] Like any club we have a set of conditions you would need to meet. These are mostly economic conditions – does your economy work, do you have a bank that functions properly? The other more important ones, especially at the beginning, are political. As a country which wants to function on its own do you have the political institutions which make you a democratic country. Have you a freely elected parliament? Have you a freely elected president or prime minister? Who is the head of state? Are you going to set up a passport and immigration office here? If you do that and you meet all these criteria you make an application to the EU. All the other 27 countries – Bulgaria and Romania being the two most recent until you make your application – will then decide upon your application on the advice of the European Commission and finally you will have to sign a treaty with the rest of the European Union countries to join.

Question: Have you got any other High Schools as members of the EU?

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EDWARDS: So far no. You would be the first.

Legitimacy

As the exchange above indicates, one early issue surrounding Free Kelso High was legitimacy. Though the Independence Day events had been widely supported (perhaps because it marked a change from the normal routine of the school day) many citizens/pupils seemed bemused by the constitutional change which had occurred. This may in part be due to the important respect in which Free Kelso High differed from other Micronations. If Micronations often arise out of a sense of grievance (cf Leonard Casley's objection to the wheat quotas imposed on him by the Australian Government which spurred him to create the Hutt River Province) Free Kelso High was in one sense a 'top down' creation imposed by an 'elite' (the teaching staff) on the citizens (pupils). Many of the citizens clearly found the process disorientating: 'is this for real?' was a frequent question.

Subsequent events changed views dramatically.

Political intervention

It had been decided that for the duration of Free Kelso High's existence it should be a 'politician free zone'. On Thursday 1st March **The Southern Reporter** carried a story which questioned whether this would be possible.

MSP accused of hijacking school project in political point-scoring

MARK ENTWISTLE

The Scottish Nationalists have been accused of hijacking a school learning exercise for party political purposes. Last week we reported how, as a three-week-long academic exercise, a group of senior pupils at Kelso High School were going to examine the topic of independence for small countries, using themselves as the example. To do this, the pupils declared the school 'independent', and are meeting representatives from the European Union and United Nations. After the three-week period, the school will hold a referendum and vote on whether they should continue as an 'independent' state.

Project co-ordinator and modern studies teacher, Alison McWilliam, told **The Southern** last week the reasons behind the experiment. 'The

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timing is right with the build-up to the Scottish Parliament elections, as well as the whole concept of independence, and for pupils to see if it is a feasible option – and also for pupils to have a bit of fun with it ... How would we survive? Would we send a representative to the European parliament? Would we be taken seriously? Are we going to be a republic? It's for them to look at the whole concept of independence. It's about thinking outside the box.'

After news of the school's project was reported within our pages last week, the SNP issued a press statement saying it had now invited a 'Ministerial' delegation from the newly-formed 'Independent Republic of Kelso High School' to visit the Scottish Parliament to begin negotiations to 'aid and assist' the restoration of Scotland's status as a fully sovereign independent country. SNP MSP Christine Grahame has now written to the Kelso High School government inviting them to talks in Edinburgh to discuss areas of 'mutual benefit'.

Ms Grahame, who lodged a parliamentary motion recognising the newly formed republic, said: 'The newly-formed 'Republic of Kelso High School' has shown a lead to the rest of Scotland which I am certain Scots will want to emulate come the third of May when the Scottish parliamentary elections take place. This is a great way to learn about how Scotland lost its independence in 1707 when a cabal of corrupt politicians allowed themselves to be bought out before sailing our nation's sovereignty and future prosperity down the Tweed.

'After 300 years the Scottish people have yet to ratify that treaty through popular vote and those who support union now are too frightened to ask the people of Scotland to endorse it in a referendum.

'The declaration by the Kelsonian republican pupils lights a torch over the rest of the country and I am very impressed by the enthusiasm of the pupils who have embraced the idea of freedom, liberty and independence.'

However, Roxburgh and Berwickshire MSP Euan Robson, is unhappy about what he sees as political opportunism by the nationalists. 'I don't think it appropriate that a learning experience be turned into a political opportunity,' he told **The Southern** this week. 'Such things

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are better left a matter for the headteacher and local education authority. I don't think it's right to bring a party political aspect into this sort of episode.'

The Visit from the UN and the Lonely Planet

The second of the expert visits to Free Kelso High occurred on the 6th March 2007. The experts this time were Frances Mildmay of the UN Association and Tom Hall of the Lonely Planet Travel Guides who took the train up from London. Frances Mildmay addressed the issue of what Free Kelso High would have to do to qualify as a member of the United Nations. Tom Hall was invited for a number of reasons. One of the classes at Kelso High was studying tourism; several were studying the environment. The Lonely Planet had also recently published a guide to the world's Micronations.

In his presentation Tom Hall suggested that to maximise its tourism footfall Free Kelso High should consider becoming the first carbon neutral country in Europe. This provoked a detailed discussion. Hall was also able to speak about other Micronations, including the Hutt River Province. This exchange was identified by Charlie Robertson as a key turning point in the independence process. 'People started to think "we could really do this".'

The Lonely Planet plans to incorporate Free Kelso High in the second edition of its guide to Micronations.

On his return to London, Tom Hall wrote about FKH in his blog.²

Doe or Die – Free Kelso High is born

Posted Tuesday, March 13, 2007, 4:28 PM by Lonely Planet

It's been 85 years since the British Isles produced a new nation, so when I was asked to represent Lonely Planet and address a gathering of a freshly-declared independent state in the small rural town of Kelso, I hot-footed it to London's Kings Cross station, the gateway to the north and east of England, and distant Scotland beyond.

² http://www.lonelyplanet.com/blogs/travel_blog/2007/03/doe-or-die-free-kelso-high-is-born.html

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My destination was Free Kelso High, a school and now a country in the Borders. This region, unsurprisingly, straddles England and Scotland and for centuries was squabbled over in a manner not unlike the more gory bits in Braveheart. Though little-visited, the Borders are home to lovely market towns, gently rolling hills and the broad, fast-flowing river Tweed – a natural border that even today separates



attitudes and dialects. Doe or Die, Kelso's motto, comes from medieval Scots King Robert the Bruce and reflects the area's distinct accent and slang. The Borders is perfect for a cycling or walking trip away from the crowds, who rarely give the region a second thought as they hot-foot to Edinburgh and the

Highlands beyond. Even the recent hooah cause by nearby Rosslyn Chapel being named as the resting place for the Holy Grail in the Da Vinci code seems to have barely impacted on the tranquil pace of life round here.

Perhaps irritated by this oversight, Kelso High School has decided to leave behind the petty squabbles of England and Scotland and go it alone as Free Kelso High. This year marks the 300th anniversary of the Act of Union between the two countries, and to mark the event two students read out a Declaration of Independence. Free Kelso now has its own flag, fluttering in the stiff early Spring breeze, and currency (bawbees) and is flirting with the trappings of nationhood. The school is issuing its own passports, but failed to check mine on entry, raising questions about the porous nature of FKH's borders.

Rector and Head of State Charles Robertson, a man of passion and vision, invited Lonely Planet to add our thoughts to those of the UN and European Union. They had provided an insight into what it means to be a working country. I had a slightly different message: that you could make pots of money by behaving eccentrically. Citing the examples of self-proclaimed success stories like Hutt River Valley Province, Sealand and the Copeman Empire, I suggested how Free Kelso could not only survive, but thrive. Tourists and souvenirs can bring in revenue. Very new and very old things can be tourist highlights. Kelso, I learnt, is know for its onions. If all else fails,

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students can get out the papier mache and make an Aussie-style _Big allium cepa.

The flag of Free Kelso will flutter over the school until next Thursday until a referendum – covered live by BBC Scotland, who are keenly following events – will decide whether the school goes it alone or comes back into the British fold. The students have an interesting choice – the school is at the heart of the debate raging about whether Caledonians are Scots, Brits, Europeans or something else altogether. I'll let you know what they decide

The Referendum Special

The BBC Scotland 'referendum special' was recorded on the 15th March, the same day as the citizens of Free Kelso High School went to the polls. The polling had been previewed on that day's Good Morning Scotland, the flagship daily Radio news programme which is broadcast from Glasgow, and several of the pupils had been interviewed. The school voted class by class, and the voting was immediately preceded by a hustings which reiterated the main arguments for and against Independence. Iain MacWhirter of the **Sunday Herald** presented the programme and Professor John Curtice of Strathclyde University analysed the opinion polls. (See Tables 1 and 2.³)

In addition to the two opinion polls which had been commissioned during the course of Free Kelso High's Independence, Curtice was also faced with an exit poll conducted on the day; the results of the exit poll showed that 38% wanted to remain independent and 32% wanted to rejoin the United Kingdom. This meant that 3 in 10 still hadn't made their minds up. Curtice's comment at the beginning of the referendum special was 'The girls are consistently more in favour of the independence than the boys – but the don't knows are leading amongst the girls.'

³ *The question the pupils were asked for the opinion poll was 'Based on what you know already, when you come to place your vote on 15th March will you vote*
1/ For The Free State of Kelso High to remain independent
2/ For the Free State of Kelso High to rejoin the United Kingdom
3/ I haven't made my mind up how I am going to vote yet/ don't know.'

Table 1
Opinion Poll 9th March 2007

Year	Independence			Rejoin UK			Don't know		
	Boy	Girl	Total	Boy	Girl	Total	Boy	Girl	Total
1	19	18	37	2	0	2	10	20	30
2	6	12	18	8	9	17	13	20	33
3	22	24	46	23	5	28	17	27	44
4	12	3	15	7	6	13	12	26	38
5	14	3	17	11	4	15	5	13	18
6	2	9	11	2	15	17	1	2	3
Staff			1			6			4
			145			98			170

Table 2
Opinion Poll 13th March 2007

Year	Independence			Rejoin UK			Don't know		
	Boy	Girl	Total	Boy	Girl	Total	Boy	Girl	Total
1	15	38	53	19	5	24	14	35	49
2	18	30	48	16	22	38	9	18	27
3	3	10	13	23	26	49	22	17	39
4	21	17	38	13	9	22	2	10	12
5	8	2	10	15	7	22	12	23	35
6	5	6	11	3	7	10			0
Staff			5			9			12
			178			174			184

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In the studio MacWhirter interviewed Charlie Robertson, heard extracts from the previous visits by the various experts and interviewed four pupils. Sebastian Murray and Adam Stevenson were in favour of Free Kelso High remaining independent and Rachel Walters and Fiona Hunter were in favour of rejoining the United Kingdom.

In discussion a number of themes emerged. Murray and Stevenson leaned heavily on the argument that a decision in favour of Independence would 'put Kelso on the map' – increasing recognition of the school. Walters and Hunter argued that the Independence experiment was just that, it would be impractical in the long term and that it would diminish the school. (There was also a brief discussion of whether some of the female voters had been swayed 'because they have a crush on Adam.' This was felt to be inconclusive.)

The programme was interrupted by the announcement of the results. Results were that 437 to 113 voted in favour of remaining independent. Voter turnout at the elections was affected by a hockey tournament and a class trip, which resulted in 557 pupils voting.

Charlie Robertson said 'we didn't expect nearly such a decisive result, but I welcome the fact that it was so overwhelming, because there is now no argument that the vote had no legitimacy. Many challenges for the future. The one that told most for me is that this gave us the opportunity to put Kelso on the map – the debate we had over the last 3 weeks or so was about whether we as citizens of the world have the right to run our own lives.' When asked by MacWhirter what the way forward was, Robertson replied 'forward. It is the only way.'

The BBC website duly reported the extraordinary result on line:

Students vote for 'independence'

The 'nation' of Kelso High School has voted to remain independent

Last month the Scottish Borders school declared 'independence' as its own way of studying the 300th anniversary of the Act of Union.

After a trial three-week period it held a referendum to decide whether or not to rejoin the United Kingdom.

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The vote – which was monitored by John Curtice, Professor in Politics at Strathclyde University – was almost four to one in favour of independence.

During the trial period pupils created their own flag, currency and constitution.

The referendum attracted a strong turnout of the 651 pupils.

They voted by 437 to 113 in favour of remaining an independent nation state.

The result followed the shock find earlier this week of gas supplies in the Republic of Kelso High.

Workmen in the multi-use games area uncovered an old sealed-off pipe, which still had gas inside.

Rector Charlie Robertson said the discovery had not swayed the vote.

‘The gas find doesn’t quite put us in the superpower league, but we now view ourselves as an energy rich state,’ he said.

‘This may help bring in a few Bawbees, which isn’t just a turn of phrase, but is our national currency.

‘It wasn’t a major factor in the presentations being put forward by those advocating the school stays an independent nation.’

Professor Curtice, who kept a close eye on proceedings, said the result was something of a surprise.

‘This clearly is a stupendous result for the pro-independence campaigners,’ he said. ‘A four to one majority in this election wasn’t what the opinion polls had been predicting. Evidently there was a dramatic swing in favour of independence in the final hours of the vote.’

POST SCRIPT: DID THE FREE KELSO VOTE AFFECT THE HOLYROOD ELECTION OF 2007?

On the 18th March Iain MacWhirter, the presenter of the programme, devoted his 'Holyrood Commentary' in the **Sunday Herald** to the Kelso programme. Though the issue of Scottish Independence per se had not featured in the Kelso discussions, MacWhirter chose to see the Kelso result as a sign of generational changes in attitudes towards independence with an inevitable moral for the Scottish Parliament elections which were to follow on 3rd May 2007:

I was witness to history last week as the 650 pupils of Kelso High School voted by a majority of nearly four to one in a referendum to remain an independent state. The events will be broadcast next Sunday on BBC Radio Scotland's Passport To Kelso. Prominent figures from the UN and the European parliament had been to Kelso to advise the students on arcane issues such as how to rejoin the European Union and whether or not to have a separate currency. Far from turning the students against separatism, it made them keener to embrace it.

Now, I'm not suggesting for one moment that this tells us anything about the results of the May election, still less the outcome of any independence referendum. Schools have always held mock elections. But what was impossible to ignore was the enthusiasm for autonomy and the absence of fear among the pupils here.

These increasingly confident and outward-looking young people seem to have no concept of 'the dark side of nationalism'. People of my generation watched the former Yugoslavia fracture into a multiplicity of poisonous ethnic nationalisms and wondered if Balkanisation could happen here. Socialists said that nationalism divided the working class. And didn't nationalism help cause a century of war?

Such ideas are ancient history in classless Kelso. Independence doesn't make them think of separation, of dividing people against themselves, but rather of joining a wider community of nations.

At time of writing it is unclear how Free Kelso High will decide to develop their independent status, though the country will feature in the next edition of the Lonely Planet Guide to Micronations.

June 2007