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Our Museum Future

[Danny Dorling](#) 27 April 2018

Tags: [brexit](#) | [royal family](#) | [tourism](#)

I used to be a republican, but that was before Brexit. What does Britain have that the other countries of Europe will still want access to after we leave the EU? Banking will be safer away from ‘offshore London’. There are other places in the world besides Sellafield that can store spent nuclear fuel. The most expensive higher education in the world is unlikely to attract so many overseas students, its lure and decline mirroring that of Swiss finishing schools after their 1980s heyday.

Despite the entrepreneurial myths we tell ourselves, innovation isn’t a British forte. A vacuum cleaner once constructed in Malmesbury is a fitting emblem for the land of hope and glory, if not for the reasons its inventor would have us believe. When Dyson moved production to Malaysia, few British jobs were lost, because so few had been created in the first place.

As the pound drops and the world's middle class grows in size, tourism is our best bet to tide us over until we learn to do something useful. And the royal family is by far our most potentially profitable export earner. The town of Windsor is already booked out for the summer through Airbnb. American TV companies have reportedly paid six figure sums to book prime sites from which to film the royal wedding on 19 May. The birth of Prince Louis on St George's Day conveniently supplanted less happy news in the headlines.

The great skills of the British, historically, haven't been engineering and industry but exploitation and imperialism. We built our tourist attractions up around ancient stone circles, small monastic universities, old London streets and the birthplace of a playwright, but without the British Empire they wouldn't draw such vast crowds from around the world.

The golden square of English tourism has its corners in London, [Stonehenge](#), [Stratford-upon-Avon](#) and Cambridge; at its heart is Oxford (a.k.a. [Bicester Village](#)), a short train ride from both Windsor and Buckingham Palace. Everyone in the world with money has to travel here once in their lifetime. They are the Meccas and Medinas for unbelievers – the places to go to give thanks for the fact that you own a plastics factory in Changchun or a software firm in Bangalore.

Some 2640 'commoners' are to be invited to the royal wedding with surprise golden tickets being awarded to schoolchildren at the nomination of regional lord lieutenants. Unlike Charlie in Roald Dahl's novel, however, none of them will be given a chocolate factory at the end of their day's holiday from poverty. In 2018, for the first time in many decades, there are entire local authority districts where a majority of children are growing up in poverty.

It is time to forget any selfish republican fantasies. Forget climate change and pollution: our desperate economic plight means that we have to build that third runway at Heathrow for more tourists to land. We need to embrace our museum future. We are very good at selling the myth that all industry was invented in Britain, that England is the mother of parliaments, that we invented the modern university. We have fooled ourselves into believing it all, so it should be easy to sell to tourists.

Time to widen the pavements and get out the bunting. Build the hotels and face down the nimbys. Bring back red telephone boxes: they don't need phones in them, just tourist information screens pointing the customer in the right direction.

If we work hard enough, we will win the global race to become the central tourist destination on planet earth. We are in the right time zone; we speak the right language, and no other languages; we have a captive, cheap, docile, servile labour force. We have a quaint currency with a picture of a member of the royal family on it, a souvenir in itself. And every year tourists will get more and more pounds for their dollar, euro, renminbi or rupee.

No one can take our history away from us. Just as millions flock to Rome to see the Colosseum, that site of mass murder, so we could rebuild the East India Company headquarters on Leadenhall Street. Lloyds will have abandoned the premises by then, and moved to Amsterdam. Parliament will have to vacate the palace of Westminster for good. We already have a new site for it: where [HS2](#) will divide, just east of Birmingham.

All empires crumble and an afterlife as a tourist attraction is far better than what befell the [Ottomans](#) in the 1920s. The worst casualties may be the youngest members of the British royal family, born into a form of slavery from which they can never escape. But perhaps, in many decades to come, when we have finally learnt to do something useful, their children or grandchildren will not face a future of forever having to smile and wave – simply because of an accident of birth or marriage, and because they are the best that we have to sell to the world.



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