

This may not be a super Saturday, but let's face it, things could be a lot worse



Rab McNeil's WEEK

WE stand on the cusp, laddies and gentlewomen. Yes, it's Super Saturday as you read this. Doon yonder, where our rulers reside, they're thrashing out the ins and outs of being out, after years of being in.

At the outset, I'd planned to provide you with a full guide to the new deal and the implications for the economy in both Britannia Major and Britannia Minor (Scotia), but then I thought that you might spot a fundamental flaw in my analysis: to wit, that I don't know anything about it.

Accordingly, I've decided to focus instead on Super 1880. Yes, that was the year that was, like, the best ever, according to a bewilderment (I think that's the collective noun) of researchers. The boffins, from [Warwick University](#), [Glasgow University Adam Smith Business School](#), and the Alan Turing Institute in that London, analysed emotional content detectable in books and articles over the last 200 years.

The reason why 1880 appears to have come out top is because the British Empire was at its peak. More people were getting rich and educated and, while poverty was rife, it was good, British poverty, which is and always will be the best poverty. No snowflakes back then. Folk were proud of their squalor.

They didn't complain or, if they did, they were imprisoned.

Apart from that, in the course of researching this article or piece, I've been unable to find evidence of much happening in 1880. The only highlight anyone mentions was the first successful shipment of frozen mutton from Australia.

As for the Empire, well, there was trouble in Basuto – home, as you will recall, of the Basotho people – and the year ended with the outbreak of the Boer War and, shortly afterwards, the massacre of British soldiers at the Battle of Bronkhorstspuit. I can't think that being bayoneted in the Spruit would make anyone happy.

On the political front, the Tory Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, retired. Not only was his gout getting him down but he remained distraught after the massacre of British soldiers at the Battle of Isandlwana the previous year (and, in the happiness stakes, you didn't want a spear up your jacksie either).

While British troops were happily being massacred abroad,

William Gladstone became Prime Minister at home, after his Edinburghshire (as Midlothian was properly known) Campaign, which involved speaking to mass crowds in what passed as entertainment in pre-Downton days.

Perhaps it's a hangover from my

school days that the name William Gladstone makes me come over all sleepy. You too? Well, wake up, readers, as I whisk us all forward to the year 1978, which the same researchers say was, like, the worst year ever. This has caused a storm or mild breeze of protest from those who were there and loved it.

There was the so-called Winter of Discontent, of course, industrial strife, rubbish piling up in the streets, yada and an additional helping of yada. On the plus side, a pint of beer cost less than 30p, England failed to qualify for the World Cup, and you could buy a hoose for, on average, £17,000.

Unfortunately, the following year saw the election of Margaret

Thatcher and the ongoing triumph of the free market, with the result that the average cost of a house is now £240,000. Mrs Thatcher's election lifted the national mood, it says here, and matters progressed merrily until, in the 1980s, Britons were happily rioting in many towns and cities of Englandshire.

I suspect that the trouble with a lot of such research is that the indices they analyse don't stack up to a hill of beans – or reality, as I have also heard it described.

One wonders what future researchers will make of 2019, a year of fury and intolerance, caused by having no foreign wars to fight, a year in which the nation



stood on the brink of enormous economic success after Brexit.

Perhaps schoolchildren will start dozing over their books when the name Boris Johnson comes up. They brighten on seeing the term Super Saturday but, finding it's not about football, back to sleep they go.