While I was preparing for this paper I received my copy of History Australia. There on the front cover is Britannia embattled against Hitler’s Europe in October 1940. Her feet are placed firmly on the map of her native soil, and a Union Flag billows around her. This is a rousing evocation of national defiance, but a closer look shows us that the imagery is very strange. The map only shows England and Wales. Ironically, given its historical and constitutional symbolism, the Union Flag emphasises unity by obliterating Scotland. Even more remarkably Northern Ireland seems to have sunk beneath the Atlantic waves. The image with its feminine icon of national identity also raises themes of gender as does its provenance, a women’s periodical publication. Finally, it is noteworthy that the periodical’s title brings in sentiments of unity from beyond the map. It proclaims itself as Australian, although nothing in the image evokes a distinctive sense of Australianness. Britannia’s helmet, trident and the aircraft she is launching merge easily into the title — The Australian Women’s Weekly. 

This is very rich imagery, and I cannot hope to do more than touch on some of its themes, but two of the questions it raises are those that have been set before us by the workshop organisers: when we look at an image such as this are we examining the expression of ‘a singular narrative … that can be collapsed into the homogenising signifier, “British”‘; and are all ‘the subjects who were phenotypically similar’
in the British world accessing ‘the priv-
ileges of “Britishness”’ equally? For the
designer of the image the answer in that
grim year of 1940 was evidently ‘yes’; this
is an image of unity against the alien ‘oth-
er’. Placed in a more recent perspective,
however, the imagery provides an equally
emphatic ‘no’ as the answer. The designer
has subscribed, however unthinkingly, to
the careless assumption that ‘Britain’ could
be conflated with ‘England’ while Scot-
land, Wales and Northern Ireland could
be pushed off to the periphery of aware-
ness. It would be less easy to create a sim-
ilar image in our own day when Scotland,
Wales and Northern Ireland are assertively
distinct polities — less easy, but, of course
not impossible.3

The task I have been given is to dis-
cuss Britishness with reference to the his-
tory of Scottish national identity in Scot-
land and the Scottish community in Victor-
ia. I shall be concerned principally with
the nineteenth century, which was an era
of anxiety, when spokesmen of various
political persuasions openly admitted their
fears that Scotland would become just an-
other English province, obliterated by the
bellowing flag of centralisation that was
being hoisted above the Home Counties.4

This has been a recurrent fear. It was
voiced in 1961, when I was still living in
Scotland, by a well-known writer, Maurice
Lindsay, in a chapter entitled ‘The Death
of Scotland?’ where he expressed the fear
that ‘Scotland the Nation’ would cease to
exist within fifty years.5 The outcome has
been very different, and there have been
immense changes since then. Tom Nairn
and others have spoken openly of the
break-up of the United Kingdom,6 and for
us as historians it has become common-
place to write three — or is it four? —
nation approaches to British history.

Scottish history is now a vibrant sub-
ject of research and debate — one to
which I have been increasingly attracted
in recent years, despite, not because of,
the fact that I was born and educated in
Scotland in an earlier era. For, like many
of my generation of Scots, I received an
education that contained very little by
way of Scottishness. We were well and
truly hidden behind Britannia’s flag. So,
what I have to say today goes beyond a
mere historical research project; it is to
some extent a voyage of self-discovery,
one that seeks to answer the question that
presented itself to Scots of my generation
during our younger days: What did it
mean for us and for those generations who
had gone before us when we repudiated
the term ‘English’ and called ourselves
Scots and British? I am also concerned
with the Australian version of this story
as it presented itself to the Scots who
settled in Victoria during the first quarter
century of the colony’s existence. What
was their expression of Scottishness and
Britishness?

If we go back to 1842 we can see the
problem of Scottishness and Britishness
posed in all its clarity by an exchange of
insults between Scottish newspapers and
the London Times. The Scottish news-
papers voiced the resentment felt in Edin-
burgh about the arrangements that Sir
Robert Peel’s government had made for
Queen Victoria’s first visit to Scotland, and
they took particular exception to Peel’s
decision that she should worship on
Sunday, not according to the Presbyterian
rites of the established Church of Scotland,
but according to those of the Scottish
Episcopal Church, the sister church of the
Church of England which had no official status north of the border. The controversy went to the heart of the relationship between Scottishness and Britishness. Blithely ignoring the constitutional history of the matter, The Times could not contain its contempt for what it saw as a stubbornly stupid disinclination by Scots to give up their distinctive institutions and expectations. Admittedly some Scots were prepared to follow the path of assimilation indicated by The Times, but the Scottish newspapers I consulted saw things very differently. For them the Treaty of Union had created a polity in which the Scots had accepted the status of Britishness in some matters — those affecting the economy, parliament, defence, foreign affairs and the British Empire — but had retained autonomy in others — the law, the church, education and local government. These institutions were important in their own right; they were also the symbols of what some historians have called a status of Scottish semi-independence. Linda Colley has summed up the resultant attitude well. If you were a Scot you learned how to wear more than one hat of national identity at a time — a Scottish one and a British one.

This special status seemed to be slipping away in the early nineteenth century, especially during the years after 1832. In an age of improvement, the process of reforming old institutions in Scotland often amounted to substituting newer ones based on English models. Modernisation and Anglicisation seemed to go hand in hand, sweeping the older symbols and institutions of Scottish national identity aside at a time when easier communications were bringing people into closer contact throughout the United Kingdom and beyond. Yet it was during this very era that Scots reinvented themselves as bearers of a new form of national identity — one that is often taken for granted as timeless. As Thomas Devine has pointed out, Scotland was defined by the symbols of ‘(mostly) imagined and false Highland “traditions”’. This was a story that could be traced back to the eighteenth century when Scotland was adopted as one of the favoured lands of the Romantic Movement. In the epic poetry of Ossian, it even seemed to have produced the classic statement of the values of romantic primitivism. Ossian was a fake, but for a time it offered a potent image of Celtic warrior society, and in the nineteenth century the writings of Sir Walter Scott offered a more durable contribution to this definition of Scottishness. This should not have happened. Scott was one of those who envisaged, however reluctantly, that Scotland’s sense of distinctiveness was coming to an end. We can see this in his Tales of a Grandfather, a book where he summarised his narrative of Scottish history. The book ends with the Jacobite Rebellion, after which ‘the two sister nations … [were] blended together in manners as well as by political ties’, becoming ‘gradually approximated to each other, until the last shades of national difference may be almost said to have disappeared’.

Paradoxically, however, Scott’s influence helped to reinvent Scotland’s sense of distinctiveness. His novels provided a compellingly attractive summary of Scottish history to the extent that we read of people traversing Scotland to seek out the scenes of a heroic past as they were described in his writings. In 1822, with Scott playing the part of unofficial choreographer royal, George IV’s visit to Edinburgh
reinforced this reinvention. Dressed in a Stuart tartan kilt and pink tights, the King spoke of his Scottish subjects as the chiefs and clans of Scotland. At a crucial moment Scott and the British monarchy were consolidating the development of Scottishness in the form described by Scottish historians as ‘Highlandism’. Two decades later the young Queen Victoria would renew and strengthen this love affair between the monarchy and the Highlands. The form of Scottish national identity that goes under the name of ‘Balmorality’ was born, and a tartan-wrapped version of Scottishness became a feature of the British Establishment.13

My recent research has focused on these invented traditions. As the term I have just used indicates, I have followed the path marked out by Hobsbawm and Ranger in their collection of essays, and I have tried to extend the interpretation given by the late Hugh Trevor Roper in the essay he contributed to that collection. Using a methodology that explicates the dramaturgy of collective rituals, I have examined the ways in which the new form of Scottishness was consolidated in the early Victorian era.14 My conclusions differ in some respects from those that were previously offered: I have emphasised the importance of the part played by the Scottish aristocracy and Scottish Tories in the definition and assertion of Scottishness during this era.

This has helped me to solve a puzzle about Scottish identity that had intrigued me since my schooldays. Scotland was and is a left-wing place, but many of its symbols are conservative and backward looking. The sort of question that was rising in my mind from schooldays has been summed up by a Scottish historian, Michael Fry, when he summarises the great change that took place in the Scottish mentality during the nineteenth-century. The great thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, he writes, had:

invented new sciences, revealing to the world the secrets of political economy and pioneering the study of man as a social animal. [In the nineteenth-century there was a decline into philistinism]. Locked into backward-looking forms extracted by the popular mind from Burns and Scott, it [Scotland] was no more than depressingly provincial under the influence of lesser imaginations and talents, drawing sustenance from regiments and tartans, from a tawdry-heroic view of history, from ben-and-glen paintings and from kailyard literature.

How had this come to be? Fry blames what he calls ‘the popular mind’ for the collapse into the ‘tawdry-heroic’.15 My suggestion is that ‘the popular mind’ was given a lot of help from Scottish Tories.
and landlords who lived in a higher social sphere.

For the question of Scottish identity was very much a party matter during the first 60 or so years of the nineteenth century. Scottish Whigs were in the forefront of the sort of modernisation that accepted English models, and radicals in Scotland often acted in concert with English radicals to alter the British polity, not to create a Scottish one. It may seem surprising in the light of their late-twentieth century opposition to devolution, but it was within the ranks of the Scottish Tories of the mid-nineteenth century that something like a Scottish national party emerged. These Tories were opposed to the sort of reforms that Whigs, radicals and their own leader, Sir Robert Peel, espoused — reforms that were inspired by an unholy alliance of Anglicisation with policies of centralisation that undermined the traditional hierarchy and resulted in social dissidence. To uphold the older Scottish institutions and cultural practices against the Whigs, radicals and Peelites was to protect what these Scottish Tories saw as the older and stronger social values of an organic hierarchy. This had many of the characteristics of what we in our day would call a culture war or a history war; by extolling a vision of the past in which their ancestors had held a place of prominence they were creating a political weapon in the present. The outcome was a division of the spoils. By the end of the 1850s it was evident that the Whigs and liberals dominated Scottish politics, but the Tories retained many of the best known trophies of the culture war, and it was their image of Scottishness as ‘Highlandism’ that was the preferred version during the twentieth century.

The conservative definition of Scotland’s national identity did not escape hostile comment. Looking over the history of the previous 100 years, George Blake commented during the 1930s on the way Scotland:

has come to be regarded more as a picturesque playground than as an economic and social reality. The same sort of misapprehension — one had almost said sentimentality — attributes an infinitely greater importance than they possess to Highland Games, with esoteric pursuits like tossing the caber, putting the weight, and dancing the Highland Fling as high-lights of the ‘quaint’ and semi-barbaric performance.

Highland Games are largely a Victorian and English invention. They are an emanation of that spirit so admirably nicknamed ‘Balmorality’ by Mr George Scott-Moncrieff … What Scottish reality could there possibly be in a highly organised affair, staged almost entirely for the benefit of alien
landowners, who ... are in Scotland only to have so many acres of it all to themselves?

Blake was pointing to what I think is the answer to my childhood question about a left-wing country adorned with national symbols that proclaim the values of social and political conservatism.

As a corollary it followed that the form of Scottish national identity I have been describing in no way constituted a threat to the Act of Union. Many of the Scottish Tories were monarchs of the glen — men who were well integrated into the British establishment, Westminster politics and the London social scene. One of their best-known leaders during the early Victorian era, Lord Eglinton, was appointed as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.\textsuperscript{20} Blackwood’s Magazine, in which they published many of their ideas, circulated widely outside Scotland. The point I am making about them is similar in some respects to the analysis that Graeme Morton has offered for the liberal middle class in Victorian Scotland. He describes a people who were on the whole well content with a system that by and large left them to govern the Scottish cities as they saw fit. Morton calls these middle class people ‘Unionist Nationalists’ — men who were proud of their Scottishness as well as their Britishness. They celebrated their Scottishness in the dramaturgical demonstrations that were associated with the erection of great monuments that commemorated Scotland’s national heroes. Performing impressive feats of mental gymnastics, they described William Wallace, Robert the Bruce and John Knox, not only as Scottish heroes but also as the champions of a sense of national, civil and religious liberty that fitted their descendants to take a proud place in the British Empire.\textsuperscript{21}

This Unionist Nationalism was the dominant expression of Scottishness in the nineteenth century. In the course of the late-nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century ideas of Home Rule and even of independent nationalism were expressed in some circles, and left wing ideas bit hard into the Scottish consciousness, but Unionist Nationalism evolved too. It was a creed that the Westminster political establishment could accommodate, and its triumphs included not only the creation of a special Scottish Office to attend to Scottish affairs, but also the admission of a Scottish Secretary of State to membership of the British Cabinet.\textsuperscript{22} In the meanwhile, the backward-looking cultural expressions of national identity held their ground and in many ways still do so. Balmorality and Highlandism were not exorcised from the land. There was a distinctive sense of Scottishness that was fully compatible with a loyalty to the British state. This helps us to understand the image of Britannia and her billowing flag with which I opened my paper. I very much doubt if any Scots objected in 1940 to that image in the terms that I used. 1940 was a year for wearing the British hat of national identity and paying the price of junior partnership with the English. The two world wars were accentuating a sense of Britishness much as the wars against the French had done in the eighteenth century.

The image with which I started came from Australia, and it takes me into the second part of my paper, for the Scots are well known as an imperial people.\textsuperscript{23} One of my projects is concerned with traditions of Scottishness in Australia, and my em-
phasis in this paper now shifts to Victoria at a time when it was a very new colony called the Port Phillip District or Australia Felix. Scots were prominent among the early colonists, and a recognisable Scottish community soon emerged. A contemporary described ‘the new colony of Australia Felix’ in 1839 as ‘a Scotch Colony’ characterised by ‘industry and perseverance’. The ‘town of Melbourne [was filled] with Scotch faces, Scotch dresses, and the sound of Scotch idioms; it argues well for the prosperity of the country’. As his words indicate, there is no basis for the belief, so often voiced nowadays, that the early Scottish settlers in Victoria were desperate paupers evicted by the Highland Clearances. Most of them were literate Lowlanders with skills; in other words, they were high quality immigrants, well able to make a mark in the business, politics and culture of the new colony.

These Scottish settlers quickly devised a social culture that celebrated their national distinctiveness; they devised societies, forms of commensality and ritualised gatherings. Their first feast, a St Andrew’s Dinner, took place as early as 1840, eliciting ‘feelings of unity and patriotism’. When news reached Melbourne that a move was afoot in Scotland to raise funds for a monument to William Wallace, the Victorian Scots quickly held a public meeting to show that ‘they were not dead to the doings of their mother country’. A few years later they celebrated the centenary of the birth of Robert Burns in the Melbourne Exhibition building under the patronage of the Governor, Sir Henry Barkly.

It is tempting to see this sort of thing as cultural baggage directly imported from Scotland and nostalgically displayed in a time-warped colonial setting, but the temptation must be set aside. As James Hedderwick, the editor of the Glasgow Citizen, pointed out, Scottishness in the colonies was not the same as Scottishness in Scotland. He detected a greater intensity in the expression of Scottishness in the colonies when he reflected on the great celebrations that had occurred throughout the Scottish world in 1859, the birth centenary of Robert Burns. ‘The effect’, he wrote, ‘has been to … make the Scotch abroad more intensely Scotch than even their countrymen at home’. Highland Games in the Port Phillip District exemplified his point. They came to Victoria in the 1850s in the cultural baggage of the large numbers of Scottish immigrants who were drawn there by the gold rushes, and they soon became major parts of the colony’s social calendar. In 1859 when the Caledonian Society of Ballarat held its Highland Games an Argus reporter was amazed to see the streets, theatres and other public venues promenaded by ‘kilted warriors’ who turned out to be some of the city’s best known citizens. Some of the shop windows were given over to Highland clothing including medals, clasps, tartans and caps ‘with plumes of the eagle (or in default, of some less noble fowl)’. Obviously there is no doubting the sense of Scottishness that pervaded occasions such as these, but the celebrations were no mere replica or intensification of what had happened at home. There was a significant change. Highland Games in Scotland, according to their recent historian were dominated by ‘sporting landlords’ who saw the Highlands as their ‘leisure playground’ and constituted themselves as ‘the new cultural gatekeep-
ers of Highland culture’. Dressed up as Highland chiefs, from time to time they presided over colourful cultural exercises performed by the surviving population. Highland Games and other demonstrations of Scottishness in nineteenth century Australia developed very different characteristics. There was a different cultural context in Victoria where a spirit of inclusiveness and lack of hierarchy characterised the Scottish immigrants’ celebrations to such an extent that they may even be seen as contributors to an early form of multiculturalism.

Admittedly, this concept had yet to be developed, and there was evidently some resistance to its emergence. One of the speakers at a meeting that was held to support the Wallace Monument project felt obliged to rebut the accusation that the Scots were being exclusive, narrow and illiberal by keeping up national distinctions that would be better forgotten. In the very early days of Scottish settlement there was weight in the charge; the Robert Burns Festival in 1846 was one of several gatherings that were open only to those who were Scots or of Scottish extraction. Subsequently the response of the Victorian-Scottish societies to the accusation of exclusiveness was multi-layered. When the Caledonian Society of Victoria was founded in 1858 a speaker pointed out that it was the English who were causing problems of nationality because of the way they used the word ‘English’ for everything that was really British. More positively, at the Melbourne Robert Burns centenary dinner in 1859 all were welcomed regardless of nationality. A similar spirit could be seen in the games organised by the Caledonian Society in Bendigo. In 1863 the fourth of these games included English, Irish and Cornish sports. The Comun Na Feinne society in Geelong was a notable trailblazer in this respect at its sporting gatherings in the 1850s. It was not only that an American called ‘the Yankee pirate’ was allowed to win the prize for the foot race in January 1858; Aborigines attended as honorary Scots. The men were dressed in plaid short drawers, and the women were given what was described as a ‘flaming shawl’. In 1859 the Aborigines were invited again. Described as ‘kilted and turbaned’, they took part in foot races, and some of their skills were exhibited including boomerang throwing and spear throwing at a target painted as a kangaroo. The report referred to them as ‘one of the most picturesque groups of the day’, and there was evidently a patronising element in this contrived display of exoticism, but within the mentality of their times these early Scottish settlers were showing that the term ‘cultural baggage’ is not necessarily a collection of inert ideas preserved in a time-warp; it can evolve to meet the new circumstances of immigrants.

What we have to bear in mind is that the emigrants who went to Port Phillip left a Scotland where Highlandism, Balmorality and Unionist Nationalism were recently invented traditions. There was considerable scope for variants when Scots celebrated their sense of nationality overseas. More research has to be done, but the hypothesis to be pursued is clear: just as Scots in Scotland were experiencing their Britishness as a form of Unionist nationalism that distinguished them amicably from other peoples of the British Isles, so were the Scottish immigrants in Victoria developing their Unionist Nationalism in a different way from their kinsfolk at home —
a way that inserted their cultural practices into the colony’s social calendar and opened them up to those who came from different traditions. In the process these Scottish settlers were exhibiting their cultural baggage as a celebration of Scottishness appropriate to people who were Britons, empire builders and pioneers of an inclusive new colony of settlement.

ENDNOTES

2 Quotations taken from introductory conference materials.
3 Since this paper was delivered, Prince Charles’s complaint about the personal discomfort he experienced as a consequence of representing Britain in Hong Kong in 1997 has provided an example of conflation: ‘The things one thinks one is doing for England’. See Stephen Bates, ‘Prince’s candid thoughts revealed to a larger than intended audience’, Guardian, 23 February 2006. More recently, Professor Niall Ferguson has called on Scotland to relinquish its claim to distinctiveness and accept its fate as a ‘small, sparsely-populated appendage of England’, Scotsman, 2 January 2006.
4 See, for example, Cockburn, Henry, 1854, Journal of Henry Cockburn, Being a Continuation of Memorials of his Time, 1831-1854, Edinburgh, vol. 2, 294; and Gordon, Mary, 1862, ‘Christopher North’: A Memoir of John Wilson, Late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, vol. 2, pp. 41-3.
5 Lindsay, Maurice, 1961, By Yon Bonnie Banks, London, p. 213.
9 Devine, Thomas, 1994, Clanship to Crofter’s War. The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands, Manchester, pp. 84-6.
17 I have discussed this at greater length in Tyrrell, Alex, 2005.
24 Port Phillip Gazette, 21 September 1839.
25 Scottish commensality in Scotland and Victoria is discussed in Tyrrell, Alex, ‘Feasting on National
Identity: Whisky, Haggis and the Celebration of Scottishness in the Nineteenth Century’ (forthcoming).

26 Argus, 13 November 1856.

27 Age, 26 January 1859. This was the William Street, Exhibition Building, which preceded the present one in the Carlton Gardens.

28 Scotsman, 26 January 1859

29 Argus, 1 January 1859.


31 Argus, 13 November 1856

32 Argus, 7 April 1858.

33 History of Bendigo Caledonian Societies Since 1859, n.d., p. 1, typescript made available by Mr Jim Miller of Bendigo.

34 Ibid. 5 January 1858.

35 Ibid. 4 January 1859.

36 There is a contrast here with the more usual depiction of the Scottish settlers in Victoria as described by Fry, Michael, 2001, The Scottish Empire, pp. 108-09 where he refers to ‘a holocaust’ of the Gippsland Aborigines.