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BRITISHNESS & OTHERNESS

TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF WHITE IDENTITIES IN THE EMPIRE

ROBYN WESTCOTT AND CHRISTINA PAROLIN

This issue of Humanities Research presents a selection of papers offered to the ‘Britishness & Otherness: Locating Marginal White Identities in the Empire’ symposium, convened at the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University in July 2004. The symposium was designed to provoke a more sustained and nuanced contemplation of the mechanisms by which a plethora of British identities circulated within the Empire. Moreover, participants were encouraged to question the assumption that ‘Britishness’ was a static cultural identity accessed easily and equally by all phenotypically similar (i.e. white skinned) subjects of the British Empire.

In the main, the academic consideration of Otherness in the Imperial context has focused on the dynamics of the colonial ‘encounter’ — the profound cultural, economic and psychic dislocation produced by territorial expansion and racial violence. Whereas a significant proportion of this work has been motivated by literal and definitive differences predicated on skin colour, the papers in this collection explore marginal, nominally British identities rendered outside of the absolute collision of the ‘white presence’ with the ‘black semblance’.

In pursuing the emergence of differing constructions of white Britishness, it has not been our purpose to collate a series of ‘cardboard caricatures of British omnipotence and Imperial wickedness’. Nor do we intend to invoke a scale of competing oppressions, a proof positive of white victimisation that would somehow assuage or balance the accumulating testimony to non-white dispossession. Rather, the writers represented in this collection reflect on the peculiar and Gordian complexities of white British becoming and white British belonging at the zenith of Imperial power. These identities arose not only in the negation of a stereotypically limited and inexorably objectified Other, but as a function of a system of power/knowledge in which white subjects had never possessed equal access to narratives of hegemonic Britishness.

It is simplistic to assert that white experience within the Empire can be collapsed under the homogenising signifier ‘British’. Such a conclusion, arrived at consciously or not, reiterates the ultimately reductive presumption that the history of Imperial Britain is writ only and inevitably in the vast and global opposition of a mythic conquistadorial ‘whiteness’ and an equally mythic subaltern
‘blackness’. Ruminating on the involute quality of white histories, Alistair Bonnett observes that race work focusing on the United Kingdom has ‘remained imprisoned within a dualistic vision of White agency and Black resistance’. The effect of this has been to minimise the ‘inconsistencies and contradictions’ that subtend divergent experiences of white Britishness. Bonnett locates his analysis in two registers: firstly, and primarily amongst the ‘fluctuating boundaries’ of white ethnic difference internal to Britain as a geographic entity; and secondly between a collective white order who could be described as Britons and those putatively non-white subjects who are either denied, or refuse to be reconciled to, this interpellation. Bonnett’s contention that any interrogation of white Britishness must adjudicate both intra- and inter-racial contingencies forms the point of departure for the considerations of marginal white identities presented here. The essays that follow seek to complicate this framework via two specific interventions: (i) by tracing those same intra- and inter-racial differences at the colonial periphery to consider the (re)creation of Britishness in settler societies; and (ii) by disturbing the easy assumption that all members within Britain’s four significant white ethnic groups experienced whiteness equally.

The papers in this collection represent a sample of those delivered in the workshop and explore ‘white’ or ‘British’ identities both within the Imperial centre and in the colonised settler outposts of the Empire. Taken together, the papers offer a variety of responses to the symposium’s three broad themes of Ethnicity, Diaspora and Metropole.

Robyn Westcott reads Linda Colley’s historical speculations of Britishness and Otherness through the lens of Cultural Studies and Whiteness Studies. By engaging with the critical strategies and theoretical frameworks advanced in these disciplines, Westcott argues for the disruption of the binary implicit in the dichotomy of ‘Britishness’ and ‘Otherness’ and for the need for a more subtle and nuanced mode of analysis of national belonging.

Alex Tyrrell explores Scottish nationalism at both the centre and periphery of the British world through a consideration of the hitherto unrecognised role of conservatives in the invention of ‘Scottishness’. In the process, he offers an insight into Scottish national identity as it was understood both in the homeland and by Scottish emigrants to the Australian colonies during the nineteenth century.

The re(creation) of national identity far from the metropole also forms the focus of Malcolm Campbell’s paper which questions the canonical accounts of New Zealand historiography with its homogenisation of nineteenth century newcomers from the United Kingdom. Campbell discusses the complex position of Irish immigrants in New Zealand and argues for recognition of national distinctiveness in New Zealand historical writing.

Two other papers in the collection also explore the British diaspora at the colonial periphery. Sarah Carter acknowledges that Canadian historiography has resisted the presentation of a singular narrative of white experience in Western Canada, but argues that little attention has been paid to issues of gender, and in particular to the history of women. Her paper explores the distinctions cultivated within the British and British-Ontarian fragment of
Western Canada through a comparison of the celebrated ‘Pilgrim Mothers’ of the West, and of white women on the margins.

The wide variety of meanings of ‘Britishness’ in the South African context is illustrated by Christopher Saunders, who considers how white South Africans, both of British descent and non-British nationalities, identified with the Empire both before and after independence was granted to the white minority. Saunders traces the complexity of the relationship between the difference races, classes and identities of South Africa, particularly the competing ‘white identities’ of English and Afrikaners.

Christina Parolin’s paper looks to the ‘centre’ of the British world in the early nineteenth century. Far from the collision with an ‘alien other’, Parolin’s paper explores the othering of white ‘home grown’ British subjects on the basis of gender, politics and class. In the face of political and religious persecution, the radical language of historical and natural rights informed an internal struggle over what it meant to be British.

Our collective purpose in both the workshop and in this volume is to give voice to those narratives of white Britishness occluded in the inference that a ‘lack of fixed boundaries [and] clear racial markers’ within a phenotypically similar national majority guaranteed a shared understanding and experience of colonial exceptionalism. As Julian Wolfreys declares, ‘narratives of identity have to be read for contradiction, and with respect for difference’. In looking to the interstices — the gaps, breaks and boundaries within sameness — we hope to contribute a series of subtle and carefully situated readings to the ongoing understanding of Britishness as a narrative of both inclusion and exclusion.

A final word of gratitude must go to Dr Paul A. Pickering of the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University for his patience and dedication during the planning process and his skillful and good-humoured chairing of the symposium itself. His afterword in this volume stands as a testament to his considerable skills as a transnational historian and to his insight into the complexity of the networks which existed, and continue to resonate, throughout the British world.

ENDNOTES

1 Bhabha, Homi, 1994, The Location of Culture, Routledge, London, p. 7
4 Bonnett, 1996, ”‘White Studies ‘ p. 152
The question that animates this paper is deceptively simple: what is brought into ‘play’ in the conjunction of the signifiers ‘Britishness’ and ‘Otherness’? Is the coupling of these two terms merely a taxonomic convenience, a way of marking out apparently fixed, mostly immutable categories such as ‘nation’, ‘cultural practice’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘Empire’? Or, conversely, is the opposition of ‘Britain-as-subject’ and its panoply of archipelagic and colonial ‘objects’ essentially a tactical manoeuvre driven by ongoing investments in a particular kind of narrative economy? Does the narration of nationhood, in spite of the multiplicity of standpoints or cunning segues in time and location the historian evokes, always and inevitably depend on the persistence of specific rhetorical structures? To wit, a teleological orientation, the working out of time via the trope of linearity and, most significantly, an abiding motif of the nation as a ‘sovereign ontological subject’.1 As Edward Said notes in the introduction to Culture and Imperialism, ‘the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism and one of the main connections between them’.2

If we were to trace this distinction between Britishness and Otherness inward from where we imagine the boundary of its ‘outside’ to be, an alternate series of questions would be provoked. How does the figure of the Other function to authorise specific conceptions of Britishness? Through what discursive techniques is the Other inaugurated and sustained? Is the Other only ever rendered strategically, as a cipher in a great cryptogram of imperial nationhood, or does it endure as a definitive (and therefore representative) presence? How can political and epistemic power be seen to operate in the critical separation of Britishness from its absolute exterior, the tyranny of its vast ‘not-self’?

The conundrum of Britishness and Otherness is always and already a problem of the line and the boundary. That which presents itself as denotatively simple and grammatically efficient — the apparently modest copula ‘and’ — drives the terms Britishness/Otherness both together as an
‘irreducible conceptual pair’\(^3\) and apart in their ‘seemingly clear-cut opposition’\(^2\). Drawing the two signifiers toward one another, the ‘and’ occupies a (non) space that is both constitutive of the opposition, but also absolutely outside of it. Considering the function of the frame (or boundary) in painting, Jacques Derrida observes that it is neither in, nor of, the work itself. Where the frame, or parergon, delineates the boundary of the work (ergon), it is already a ‘hybrid of outside and inside’\(^4\) that ‘disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate’.\(^5\) This dynamic repeats itself ceaselessly in discourses of power and privilege, its light throbbing pulse a reminder that the two halves of any opposition cannot be knifed apart arbitrarily, as much as it may appear far easier, in a conceptual sense, to do so. The border (or ‘frame’, or the ‘and’ or the ‘outside’) cannot be peeled away and discarded. Derrida’s theory of framing serves as a reminder that meaning is already deeply implicated in inside/outside relations, and, as such, defies a finite point or limit.

Where does Britishness start (if it is not already impossible to proffer the question)? Is it an identity, a mode of being in the world, confined solely to ‘a group of cultures situated along an Anglo-Celtic frontier and marked by an increasing English political and cultural domination’?\(^6\) Can such an ‘archetypal’ conception of Britishness, based on geo-political boundaries and cultural hegemony, be read productively against a narrative of Britishness as an unstable amalgam of (post)colonial difference? When the internal boundaries of Britishness (between the four significant white-skinned ethnic groups — the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish — and ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ racial groups in the contemporary multi-culture) are juxtaposed with those ‘quasi’-British identities that proliferated on the ‘external frontiers’\(^7\) of the Empire (‘non-white’ colonised citizens and ‘white’ settler classes), a plethora of edges, axes and borderlines is generated. As these lines intersect, fuse and fracture, each boundary becomes progressively ‘fuzzier’.\(^8\)

My explorations in this paper respond to the difficulties inherent in working productively with binary forms of identity. Who is ‘British’? Who is ‘Other’? Is it possible to delimit both the inside and outside of this opposition accurately? In putting Britishness and Otherness back ‘in play’, I also mean to consider whether the invocation of the Other in this context is merely an opportune appropriation of post-structuralist idiom, or, potentially, a way into a methodology useful for thinking through what was at stake in the prohibition of particular identities within the Empire. As a way into the Britishness/Otherness dyad, I will consider the account of the emergence of British identity offered by Linda Colley in her essay *Britishness and Otherness: An Argument*.\(^9\) My aim is to engage Colley’s historical speculations in conversation with critical strategies and theoretical frameworks advanced in disciplines such as Cultural Studies and Whiteness Studies. I contend that such a dialogue will disrupt the opposition of the ‘concrete’ with the ‘abstract’ implicit in the dichotomy of Britishness and Otherness and allow for the exploration of minority white identities that are often under-explored in existing histories of the period.

I come to the disciplinary concerns of ‘History’ as cultural theorist in pursuit of
the perversely obvious — that is, white people. The relation of ‘History’ to ‘Theory’ (also capitalised and rigorously disciplinary) could be described politely as fractious. History, as broadly artifactual and focused on the production of truthfulness, is apparently antithetical to the entirely more sceptical, more contestatory style of theoretical conjecture. Where theory looks for ‘histories’, entertaining partiality and a certain ‘epistemic insecurity’, history perceives relativism, and an ‘atmosphere of permissiveness toward questioning the meaning of historical events’. While I am guilty here of exaggerating the dialectical relation of history and theory, there are certain central difficulties that must be admitted when attempting to put history and theory in conversation. ‘The writing of history’, asserts Prasenjit Duara ‘is antitheoretical, first, because it is the principal means of naturalising the nation-state as the container of, or the skin that contains, the experiences of the past.’ How would the writing of history, the knitting and stretching of the nation’s ‘skin’ with all the stark, primordial connotations that this image evokes, operate differently, extraordinarily?

Curiously, there seems to be an emerging consensus that theoretical imperatives do not change the work of history — the immersion in archives, the close reading of primary source material, the ethical imperative to account for the past and the dead — but alter the relationship of the historian with the act of narrating. ‘To conceive of difference in the past’, write Ann Curthoys and John Docker, quoting Foucault, ‘is to conceive of the Other in the time of our own thought. And that means we must recognise that the historian too is not unified within himself, he is not a sovereign subject whose consciousness is fully knowable to himself.’ The subject who doesn’t experience her capacity to know as concretising, as a measure of full and complete presence, may perhaps persist more readily with the differences and contradictions that haunt all ideologically encoded attempts to explain human experience. To turn to Duara again briefly: ‘Theory is useful to me not because it illuminates a hidden truth freed by the death of the past. Theory illuminates the object because it provokes the historian as subject.’

The search for specific ethnic identities at work in Imperial Britain, albeit as part of a broader enquiry into whiteness and racial superiority more generally, has prompted me to ponder who, or what, was authorised at the time under the sign of Britishness. At the zenith of the Empire, in the heart of its metropole, could a subject possess white skin, but still not be British? The study of white racial and ethnic identities has gained steady currency in the academy over the last 20 years, but it has only been in the past decade that such work has precipitated the naming of a specific field of enquiry with a discernable critical mandate. These investigations are now generally referred to, with or without an ironic inflection, as whiteness studies. Whiteness Studies responds to the surge in anti-racist scholarship that followed social and political fluctuations across the globe post-World War II. Most directly and significantly, it references the civil rights movement in America in the 1960s. As such, this work addresses three core considerations. Firstly, it contends that a significant number of white-skinned people do not
accept that they are raced. Furthermore, whiteness is seen to persist as a position of socio-cultural and political invisibility or neutrality, despite the fact that it enables some subjects to achieve highly visible and discernable levels of privilege. Finally, whiteness studies recognises that subjects who are interpellated as white exercise significantly greater discursive and material power than those who are not.

Whiteness is frequently equated with a sense of everydayness. The white subject, in terms of both corporeality and cultural efficacy, becomes hypernormalised and is rendered invisible against an expansive landscape of visible fetishes — subjects who do not sign, and are not signed back, as white. Thus it has been the project of whiteness studies to address the problem of whiteness as invisibility, its condition, described by Toni Morrison as ‘mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless and implacable’, by making visible its effects; to counterbalance the omnipresent ‘nowheres’ that whiteness seems to emanate from by recovering the ‘somewheres’ in which it can be seen to be operating.

There has been a torrent of work that considers the formation of white identities in the United States. Studies such as David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness*, which assesses how the American working classes progressively ‘whitened’ in response to the entry of African-Americans and successive waves of immigrants into the free labour market, and Noel Ignatiev’s work, *How the Irish Became White*, which charts the progression of Irishness from a marginal non-white identity to its interpellation in the normative white centre, have established the conditions for a thoroughgoing analysis of occluded racial identities. However, the paradigm of American racial analysis does not translate easily or necessarily effectively between continents or histories. Issues of race, as framed in the American context of slavery and the civil rights movement, stand more clearly delineated — the problem of whiteness is heightened, energised even, through its proximity to the ‘absoluteness’ signified by black skin. Such circumstances are not mirrored as acutely in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Absolute racial difference is an experience confined largely to the colonial periphery. Instead, there are four main ethnic groupings — the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish who apparently do not differ phenotypically, that is at the level of biological body, but who experience the non-biological or inscriptive body differently. This intersection of the biological with the inscriptive is interesting and relevant because it disrupts and complicates three significant analytical assumptions currently inherent in whiteness studies. The first of these is that the possession of white skin in and of itself equates to privilege. The second is that all subjects coded and interpellated as white enjoy equal access to specific practices of behaviour, gesture and signification that produce cultural and material power. Finally, Whiteness Studies often presumes that a practice of whiteness must be ascribed limits by a co-existing practice of ‘blackness’ or ‘non-whiteness’ (i.e. a literal and symbolic difference based on skin).

As someone who is interested in the production of what is broadly, and sometimes glibly, termed ‘identity’, I am acutely aware of the tension in play
between my own post-structuralist inclinations (the drive toward ways of reading and questioning that are ‘polytopic and supple’\textsuperscript{19} and the simultaneous desire for a ‘thick’ historical understanding grounded in evidence. In seeking to think through the implications of Britishness as an identity, or set of complementary identities, governed by specific set of prohibitions and interdictions, I don’t assume that identity is merely a synonym for culture, or that all inquiries into identity are primarily cultural. Identity is, to steal a phrase from Foucault, the ‘strategic elaboration’ over time of the interplay between the cultural, social and political. Thus, the examination of identity should be able to support the analysis of vectors such as class, race or gender without requiring that one necessarily be subordinated to any other.

* * * * *

Linda Colley’s article, ‘Britishness and Otherness: An Argument’ appeared in the Journal of British Studies in 1992, shortly after the publication of her monograph Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837.\textsuperscript{20} I am interested in Colley’s work not only because of the status that the book has amongst work which assesses the emergence of Britishness as a national identity, but because her article ‘Britishness and Otherness’ is one of the very few that directly couples these terms together and presents them as mutually constitutive.

Colley’s article opens on Viscount McCartney of Dervock, emissary of George III to the Chinese Emperor Ch’ien–lung, shivering in the dark, blank hours of a freezing autumn night. McCartney’s mission to China was predominantly an economic one. As the first representative of the British government in China, his mission was threefold. Firstly, he was to persuade the Emperor to accept a permanent British embassy. Secondly, he was to negotiate expanded strategic and trade opportunities for the East India Company by attaining permission to establish trading posts at strategic points on the Chinese coast. Lastly, it fell to him to convince the Emperor that the quality and ingenuity of British manufacturing was such that mass importation should be permitted.\textsuperscript{21} However, despite a reciprocal giving of gifts and a lavish state reception, Chi’en-lung was impervious to the British proposals and assurances of mutual benefit. Colley records that McCartney, an Ulster Scot, and his retinue (comprised variously of two Scotsmen, a protestant Irishman, a Welshman and a Kentish artist amongst others whose ethnicities are not specified), were, despite their differences in country of origin and background, ‘united by anger and by something more. In the presence of an alien and contemptuous culture, they felt all of a sudden intensely British, brought together, almost despite themselves by confrontation with the Other.’\textsuperscript{22}

This diplomatically unproductive encounter between Orient and Occident functions as a primal scene in the concretisation of Britishness. The implicit menace of the foreigner operates to erase any prevailing differences between the Britons themselves — ethnicity, provincialism, and even distinctions related to class are annihilated in the refusal of the non-self to return the gaze and appropriately interpel late the white presence. Britishness, according to Colley, is thus inaugurated and sustained by the presence of threat. As a supranational identity, Britishness is applied, template-like, across regional
differences and affiliations, effacing the anomalous experiences of Highlander and Lowlander, northerner and southerner, the rural and the metropolitan. Although Colley stresses the necessarily artificial and contingent nature of British identity — her term for it is ‘forged’ with its curious double association of shaping/hammering and duplicity and trickery — it enables suspiciously organic political manoeuvrings against the potentially hostile stranger. Such manoeuvrings are not, she asserts, ‘imposed from the centre and not an anglicisation of the Celtic fringe’, nor are they consequent on the integration or homogenisation of the internal cultures of the United Kingdom. Thus, what Colley’s analysis requires is a metanarrative point of identification which can accommodate the vicissitudes of the three nations she considers generative to Britishness, namely England, Scotland and Wales. That point of reconciliation is Protestantism.

In Colley’s schema, Protestantism sutures the potentially fractious English, Scots and Welsh together as a representative British presence against the menace of Continental Catholicism. She argues that it was the continuing threat of French invasion throughout the 100 Years War, combined with the lesser, but still conceivable, possibility of a Jacobite incursion through Scotland that transcended national and ethnic boundaries within Britain. The French Catholic threat required that Britain adopt a war footing; Colley notes that at the War of Spanish Succession, which culminated in 1713, the British army constituted some 130,000 men. By 1815, in the aftermath of Waterloo, the national army plus the militia and East India Company numbered one million men, or one in five of the adult male population. This war machine was nourished by state propaganda that both reiterated the inside/outside opposition and simultaneously supported the contradistinction of Protestantism and Catholicism. With an emphasis on both the circulation of familiar stereotypes and the clear delineation of good and evil, this inculcation acted to quicken the national narrative.

The national narrative is seen to be strengthened again, recast or forged anew, in the pursuit of Empire. Colley is careful to distinguish between the 13 American colonies, which she designates as the ‘English’ empire, and the later ‘British Empire’. The British Empire is characterised not only by its sheer territorial reach, but also by the participation of Scots, Scots-Irish and Anglo-Irish in its administrative ranks in rates disproportionate to the percentage of population they represented within Britain itself. Inevitably, the Empire is invoked as a differential space against which Britishness could cohere. ‘Britains could join together vis-à-vis the Empire’, writes Colley, ‘and act out the flattering parts of heroic conqueror, humane judge and civilising agent.’

What the colonised, particularly the Irish, might have felt of their part in the shoring up of an enduring British national sentiment is apparently in excess of the argument’s scope and capacities.

Thus far Colley has presented Britishness as one element in a dichotomous relation. As a category, it inherees only in the presence of that which is outside, and in surplus, of it. The binary is a treacherous, if compelling, form of thought. Not only is it governed by the logic of the excluded middle, whereby something is or isn’t, but it can never simultaneously be and not-be.
That is, you could be British, or you could be Other, but never both British and Other. The binary is ultimately hierarchical, privileging one element over and above its pair, most usually the term cited first. This inversion reveals the Other as only ever supplementary, as constantly and inevitably exchangeable. As Michel De Certeau observes of modern Western historiography, ‘intelligibility is established through a relation with the other; it moves (or “progresses”) by changing what it makes of its “other” — the Indian, the past, the people, the mad, the child, the Third World’. In the context of Colley’s narration of Britishness, the chain of substitutions reveals itself: China is erased by Catholics who are in turn supplanted by the indigenous populations of the Empire. The Other, therefore, cannot have the quality of a thing-in-itself. It can only suggest the proliferation of a boundary, the uncertainty within a liminal space. The Other is only ever figurative and thus partial. Where the centre (the British) is possessed of a metaphysics, the periphery is construed as entirely metonymic and so depredated of representative presence.

The effects of binary thinking cannot be circumvented by inversion. Privileging the secondary term does not, by default, dissolve the first. Thinking through the deployment of terms such as ‘Self and Other’, or the corollary opposition of ‘centre and margin’, is neither a comforting or necessarily successful enterprise. Methodologically, the ‘other’ is an unstable category. It cannot be seen merely as the neutral indicator of a space ‘beyond’ — be that semantic, geographic, political or otherwise. The term ‘Other’, when employed in twenty-first century critical endeavours, is always already embedded in a network of trace and association from which it cannot be recovered, pristine and ready, for whatever work we desire it to do. Thus, the Other is already and immutably tied to the discourse of psychoanalysis, as that which Jacques Lacan postulates as the unattainable object of desire. In this arguably unhappy scenario, subjectivity plays itself out in a frantic striving to attain that from which the self is ultimately alienated (the Other) without succumbing to aphanisis, the loss of the signifier that the self invokes to sustain the phantasy of wholeness. Or, to cite Julia Kristeva, the Other is the abject. The abject is that category of phenomena that the self must expel, be it either as ‘defilement, sewage and muck’ or the fear of the outsider in the form of the stranger, in order to live. Similarly, the generic Other already references the ‘Other’ of linguistic poststructuralism — the elusive semiotic element that is endlessly deferred ensuring that the sign remains persistently incomplete. Poststructuralism has also underwritten the discursive and political restitution of subaltern subjectivities — those othered subjects in excess of Enlightenment rationality, masculinity, heterosexuality and whiteness. Lastly, albeit inexhaustively, these projections intermingle with the Other of the anthropological ‘interview’, the judicial Other of Althusser’s interpellative encounter and, perhaps a little unfashionably now, Satre’s existential Other. The Other, as such, is a dirty word, perhaps beyond a productive rehabilitation.

The dependence on the Other to concretise Britishness also has the consequence of demanding that the primary term remain internally consistent. Colley acknowledges the conceptual and political implausibility of this arrangement in an...
unexpected and somewhat strident paragraph toward the essay’s conclusion, where she writes that:

I am not, for one moment, suggesting that their shared imperial obsession, and shared access to imperial booty, invariably concealed from Britons their own internal divisions – the cultural splits among Englishness, Irishness, Scottishness and Welshness, the gaps in experience and sympathy among different regions, social classes and religious groupings and between the sexes. But Empire did serve as a powerful distraction and cause in common.\textsuperscript{30}

While this complication is certainly challenging, I am yet to realise a way in which the model of Britishness that Colley has outlined could accommodate such variables whilst resisting collapse. Certainly Colley herself provides no example as to how a model of Britishness so deeply reliant on internal consistency could integrate a minority or contestatory position. Her treatment of Ireland demonstrates, to a certain extent, the limitations of this paradigm for working through gradations or liminalities of Britishness. Ireland, despite its long established economic and governmental ties to England and its cultural relation to Gaelic regions through Scotland, is positioned as outside the ‘national’ narrative of Britishness by virtue of what Colley posits as its ‘strictly limited response to the Protestant reformation’,\textsuperscript{31} i.e. its continuing status as a Catholic nation. If Britishness rests at some deep structural level on the unifying capacity of shared Protestant beliefs then, by this definition, the Irish cannot be British despite their location in Pocock’s ‘Atlantic archipelago’ and their historical interaction with the mainland nations. Eventually, Colley does elaborate a little as to her reasons for excluding Ireland from the framework of British becoming that she has carefully advanced. Her explanation is tripartite: the \textit{Act of Union} that married Ireland to the United Kingdom survived only 120 years; Ireland was sympathetic to France and might have aided a French invasion of the mainland; and, finally, that Ireland’s status as a quasi-colony fatally complicated its interpolation into a hegemonic narrative of British nationhood. Again, how the presence of Irish Catholic soldiers or administrators in the Empire can be encompassed or explained by this model of national emergence is uncertain.

Although I find Colley’s speculations problematic, there is much in her analysis that is admirable: an unwillingness to allow Britishness to be synonymous with Englishness; a sensitivity to local and regional experience; and a distrust of easy nationalisms. She is committed to demonstrating that Britishness was both an imaginative fiction and an energetic political identity, aware to a certain degree of its own artifice. Yet at the argument’s conclusion we are reminded again of what has to be effaced (or at the very least obscured, if not suppressed) in order that her thesis appear coherent and successful. Referring to the emergence of a new British elite, Colley acknowledges the ‘Rich, landed, and talented males from Wales, Scotland, England, and to a lesser extent Ireland [who] became welded after the 1770s into a single ruling class that intermarried, shared the same outlook and took to the business of governing, fighting for, and
profiting from greater Britain’. Is there room in this schema for Britains who were neither wealthy, propertied nor educated? In short, where is the working class? Could the working class, along with the Irish, represent the dilemma of the phenotypically similar non-white? The non-British in white skin? A degree of support for this view can be found in Alistair Bonnett’s study of the Victorian working class, ‘How The British Working Class Became White: The Symbolic (Re)formation of Racialized Capitalism’. In a cogent and provocative argument to which I cannot entirely do justice to in this context, Bonnett contends that ‘metaphorical and literal depictions of racial whiteness were employed as a new paradigm of class hierarchy’ and that such depictions were formulated in colonial and settler societies and exported back to the metropole. Initially, this mythical sense of whiteness was a bourgeois preserve, and the denial of ‘authentic racial whiteness’ to the lower classes could be seen to be achieved through the employment of two specific strategies of deferral: (i) through the ‘imaginative alignment’ of the worker with the non-white; and (ii) via the assertion that biological differences produced a ‘literal racial distinction’ between the lower, middle and upper classes. However, as the imperial project advanced and the welfare state consolidated, white identity became progressively more accessible to the working class. Bonnett observes however, that this whiteness was not the whiteness of Bourgeois English exceptionalism, but a ‘popularist identity connoting superiority, but also ordinariness, nation and community’.

Throughout this paper, it has been my intention to question the easy invocation of the Other in the construction of racial identities. In conclusion, I would posit that simply calling attention to existence of the binary itself or extrapolating its parameters is an inadequate response to the complications of binary thought. Writing of the tensions inherent in distinguishing a British history from the hegemonic narrative of English nationhood, Pocock advocates that the dyad England/Britain can be countenanced only through the cultivation of what he describes as a ‘two-fold consciousness’ that can accommodate the ‘recognition that things happen in different places at the same time’. Interestingly, however, Pocock’s dilemma cannot be satisfactorily resolved via the conjuring of yet another dualism, ‘the two-fold consciousness’. The way out of the England/Britain impasse is through the summoning of a third term, to ‘complicate[e] the original load-bearing structure [of the hierarchical binary] beyond recognition’. That term, almost inevitably, is Ireland. The binary cannot be undone by inversion, or even by butterflying it — that is juxtaposing its terms horizontally rather than vertically. Pocock’s two-fold consciousness must of necessity become trifold at the very least. Effectively, this is what Colley’s analysis of Britishness and Otherness also demonstrates. Britishness relates to a mythical outside through, and on the condition of, the simultaneous presence of Protestantism. Without Protestantism, there is no Britishness. In this schema, Protestantism is the mechanism via which ethnic, linguistic, regional and political differences are sutured. Thus, when Britishness is set against Otherness, a third term is always already invoked, whether it is spoken or not.
In an essay entitled ‘Who needs the nation? Interrogating “British History”’, Antoinette Burton argues that the time of boundaries and Otherness has past and that:

What we need is conceptual work that ‘turns on a pivot’ rather than on the axis of inside/outside — an image which suggests not just a balancing act, but the kind of counter-clockwise historicising manoeuvre such subjects require in an era when national histories, unlike the pivot, seem unwilling or unable to budge.  

Perhaps what is needed is a new venture in thought — a less anticipated, less wearied, conceptual nomenclature that will generate questions as yet unarticulated, or even entirely un-thought. The binary is a clumsy rhetorical and metaphysical device that overdraws distinctions and occludes the fuzzy logic of the borderline. It tempts us to repeat the exclusion of the ‘middle’, and to collude in the silencing of the ‘third term’ that animates the duality whilst contradicting the very terms of the logic it imposes. Perhaps the figure of the pivot, with its connotations of mobility and contingency, could frame a subtler mode of analysis. A ‘counter-clockwise historicising manoeuvre’ would not resolve the dilemma of the boundary, or provide a ‘right’ methodology for either the writing of history or the encounter of history and theory. It could, however, encourage us to reconsider and evaluate the rhetorical and taxonomical choices we make in the narration of both national and ethnico-racial belonging.

ENDNOTES

5 Ibid, p. 9.
8 Ibid, p.35.
The Uses of (An)other History


22. Ibid, p. 311.


27. Ibid, p. 324.


31. Ibid, p. 314

32. Ibid, p. 325.


34. Ibid, p. 322.

35. Ibid, p. 322.

36. Ibid, p. 322.


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.¹

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 privileges 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 ‘other’. 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 Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland could be pushed off to the periphery of awareness. It would be less easy to create a similar image in our own day when Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are assertively distinct polities — less easy, but, of course not impossible.

The task I have been given is to discuss Britishness with reference to the history of Scottish national identity in Scotland and the Scottish community in Victoria. 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 another English province, obliterated by the billowing flag of centralisation that was being hoisted above the Home Counties. 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. 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, 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 subject 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 newspapers voiced the resentment felt in Edinburgh 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.

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. 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’. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.30 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.31 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.32

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.33 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’.34 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.35 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.36

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 —
Scottishness and Britishness

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 Crofters’ 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.
MARGINAL MICKS OR MAINSTREAM MEN AND WOMEN?

IRISHNESS AND BRITISHNESS IN NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURY NEW ZEALAND

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Not long ago my family and I attended ‘live day’ at the Howick Historical Village in Auckland’s eastern suburbs. These occur once a month, when local enthusiasts dress in nineteenth century costume to enliven visitors’ experiences of the village (which, incidentally, is very good). We attended a church service, sat through a hilarious Victorian pantomime and saw the village blacksmith at work. The high point for me was the visit to the village school where an elderly school ma’am gruffly inspected our fingernails, endeavoured unsuccessfully to teach us to add and subtract pounds, shillings and pence, and instructed us in the history of the local community. Nineteenth century Howick possessed a large population of Irish Fencibles, we were told, ex-British army men and their families who were encouraged to settle on the land to provide a bulwark against troublesome Maori tribes and secure the Crown interest in the colony. Enlistment in the British Army went against the grain for these Fencibles, our teacher continued, because the Irish disliked the English. Unfortunately for them, the harsh economic conditions in nineteenth century Ireland left people with little choice but to take what employment they could get.

This was a familiar narrative to me, one that will be recognisable to historians of the Irish in many other parts of the former British Empire. At its heart is the late-twentieth century observer’s conundrum of Ireland’s relationship with its neighbouring island: how and why was it that the peoples of a nation whose relationship with England was so tumultuous appear so often to be key collaborators in the establishment and perpetuation of the British Empire? It is a question that has received close scrutiny from historians of Ireland lately; as Nicholas Canny pointed out, ‘the question of whether Irish people who participated in many of Britain’s imperial projects were truly committed to the cause or were some type of fifth column is one that — like the ‘gendering of Empire’ — has been brought to the fore’. While increasing attention has fo-
discussed on the Irish role in extending and maintaining empire in the Americas and Asia, the issues of Irish collaboration or resistance in the antipodean settler colonies, and whether the Irish can actually be considered in any sense ‘British’ in those contexts, have been less well scrutinised.

These lacunae have arisen for several reasons. One is the particular standpoint of Irish historians when examining Ireland’s relationship with the British World. Their task, Kevin Kenny has written recently, ‘is to make sense of this activity [by which he means Irish engagement within the empire] and what it means for Irish history’. 2 In addressing the imperial relationship, these historians have tended to grant utmost attention to developments in the Atlantic World for the evaluation of Ireland’s engagement with the processes of empire. More globalising approaches have been rare. As Stephen Howe has written:

Thinking about Irish history in relation to the global reach of the British Empire, and indeed to other imperial systems in world history, evidently requires both a comparative and, more challengingly, an integrative historical awareness. As is often lamented, neither British … nor Irish history-writing has in the past been strong in these qualities. 3

But neither have historians in New Zealand (or Australia or Canada for that matter) afforded particularly high priority to understanding the local nuances of the Irish–imperial connection or the complexity of the Irish position in the founding of new societies. In each setting, attention has focussed more on Irish contributions to colonial development and the national ethos than interrogating the complex interplay amongst European newcomers. Imperial connections and Britishness have (at least until the last five years or so) been seen as passé.

New Zealand’s historiography in particular has been deficient in this respect. Notoriously complicit in the task of trying to establish the distinctiveness of the national identity, it has until very recently been remarkable for its homogenisation of nineteenth century newcomers from the United Kingdom. Nineteenth century immigrants to New Zealand, the canonical accounts seem uniformly to iterate, entered their new society as ready-made Britons — and ‘Better Britons’ at that — who passed on quickly and seamlessly to become Pakeha New Zealanders.

This tendency to write out the Irish, Scots, or even English in favour of an all-embracing ‘Britishness’ has been commented upon unfavourably by historians approaching New Zealand’s past from the standpoint of Ireland and the Irish diaspora. In his path-breaking 1990 study of the Irish in New Zealand, Half the World From Home, the eminent Canadian historian Donald Akenson criticised harshly historians’ homogenisation of New Zealand’s nineteenth century European population into the singular group ‘British’. The nation’s historians were guilty, Akenson contended, of ignoring the diversity of their society’s newcomers, and inventing instead an homogeneous proto-nationalist group that passed quickly and inexplicably from being Britons (and as many New Zealanders might still want to insist, ‘Better Britons’) to become Pakeha and New Zealanders. He expressed frustration that:
neither contemporary nineteenth and twentieth sources, nor the modern historical literature of New Zealand, has developed a vocabulary that facilitates one’s thinking clearly about, and researching accurately into, the Irish. Or the Scots. Or the Welsh. Or, even, the English … The Maori-Pakeha distinction that runs through most New Zealand historical writing indicates an admirable awareness of the integrity and perdurance of the aboriginal culture, but it leads to a lumping of all white settlers into a spurious unity.4

Akenson’s book, the first significant monograph of the Irish in New Zealand for a generation, was received by the nation’s history establishment with a deafening silence. It was not reviewed in the country’s premier historical journal, so far as I am aware, and its appeal for a dismantling of the homogenising edifice of New Zealand’s European origins received little attention for the better part of the 1990s. Indeed, as recently as 1997, Tony Simpson’s *The Immigrants: The Great Migration from Britain to New Zealand 1830–1890* — a serious study, if not by an academic — managed to steer clear of any significant discussion of the Irish or Scots, reducing the great era of assisted migration in the 1870s (the Vogel Era) to little more than a story of the uniform flow of English rural labourers.5

However, promising signs exist of a new and more complex reading of New Zealand’s colonial past, one that breaks free from an older nationalist imperative and explores more frankly the diversity of the nation’s nineteenth century immigrants. Central to this revision has been new exploration of the Irish presence in New Zealand. As part of the consideration of the meaning of Britishness, this article explores the complex position of the Irish in New Zealand and in New Zealand historical writing in order to address two specific lines of inquiry: the validity of singular narratives of Britishness within the empire and whether or not (and if so, when) phenotypically-similar groups such as the Irish accessed the privileges of Britishness.

Who were the Irish in New Zealand? Until recently, this question would not likely have been asked by historians, not because of the sparseness of Irish numbers, or the insignificance of their presence, but because the nation’s historiography, rooted in a near-obsessive concern with an homogeneous (and homogenising) Britishness. James Belich has argued that in the period 1880–1920 New Zealand experienced a process that he terms ‘recolonisation’, where the colony’s impetus towards independence was curtailed and a renewed sense of economic and cultural reliance on Britain developed. According to Belich, this process:

reshuffled and tightened links with Britain between the 1880s and the 1900s. It welded selected shards of the old regime together with fresh developments to form a new system in this period … It transformed New Zealand’s economy, technology, politics, conceptual geography, history and ideology, and penetrated directly or indirectly into almost every other sphere.6
The unusual strength of this era’s connection to Britain profoundly influenced the next century of New Zealand historical writing. In the late-nineteenth century, ‘recolonising’ New Zealand — like other settler societies — was vigorously engaged in a process of making, remaking and understanding its colonial beginnings. Most celebrated was the legend of the heroic British pioneer. However, as Fiona Hamilton has written recently, the privileging of the pioneer in foundational narratives ‘foreclosed other memories, such as disruption, loss and displacement of Maori’. To this list might also be added memories of New Zealand’s Irish antecedents and the strong connections New Zealand maintained with Ireland. For the process Hamilton describes, occurring against the backdrop of recolonisation, bode poorly for any memory of such connections. It was homogeneous Britishness rather than United Kingdom regional identity(ies) that was to the fore. As Belich explained, ‘The collective identity asserted New Zealandness and Britishness, with an assumption of compatibility so strong that it required no stating.’ In this environment there was little impetus to recognise or celebrate the diversity of New Zealand’s United Kingdom newcomers, nor for those of Irish origins to emphasise distinctiveness. Invisibility, New Zealand’s assimilatory pulse, was a virtue.

Nor did the Irish see much light when, shortly after the Second World War, a staunchly-nationalist historiography emerged to free the shackles of Britain’s hold. Seminal studies, including Sir Keith Sinclair’s *History of New Zealand*, emphasised the commonality of the nation’s Pakeha peoples, their shared ethnic inheritance, and the distinctiveness of their new national ethos. Irish and Scots migrants are noted briefly, but their post-arrival behaviour as Irish or Scots was not explored. Writing on the emergence of New Zealand language, for example, Sinclair stressed the importance of the rapid merging of regional dialects in a colonial melting pot: ‘New Zealand was settled from every part of Great Britain, and all of the regional and class dialects were mixed up as they never had been in their homeland.’ To be fair, Sinclair identified particular echoes of Essex phraseology and Australian twang in the local dialect, but the singular new product was the principal focus of his attention. Aggregation, not disaggregation, continued to dominate studies of national life in New Zealand, even as its distinctiveness from Britain was vigorously asserted.

However, from the 1980s disaggregation and diversity did begin to impact more significantly on the nation’s historical writing. One impetus to this new inclusiveness was the diversification of New Zealand’s immigrant intake, resulting in louder calls for the recognition of the nation’s cultural diversity. Another, ironically, was the British decision to enter the European Common Market (ECM), a turn away from traditional relations with the settler dominions that deeply disturbed some New Zealanders. In a famous lecture at the University of Canterbury in 1973, delivered shortly before Britain’s entry to the ECM, J.G.A. Pocock outlined a vision for a ‘new subject’, ‘British history’, independent of English history, which acknowledged the diversity and creativity of the peoples of what he termed the ‘Atlantic archipelago’. Pocock’s proposed subject had clear implications for the practice of
History at home in the archipelago — and, despite a time-lag of more than a decade in its gaining traction, it is now alive and well there — but also explicitly for settler societies, including New Zealand. As Pocock stressed, his proposed new history was ‘not a task for those concerned to continue the main traditions of English or Irish historiography, but the rest of us — and I am thinking from the banks of the Mississippi as well as those of the Waimakariri’.

Both the novelty and the merit of Pocock’s vision for a new historiography have been subject to debate, though the details of those disputes need not detain us here. What is critical to note at this point is that the agenda he outlined in 1973 necessarily implied a more rigorous interrogation of the origins and composition of New Zealand’s non-Maori population than had been commonplace to that time. As he explained more recently, ‘If the British were going to redefine themselves as European, which we neo-Britons were not, we needed a way — historically valid — of redefining British history as our own … a merely Anglocentric history calling itself that of “Britain” was satisfactory neither in archipelagic nor in oceanic terms’. In this new century, Pocock’s call for broadening and the recognition of diversity has been embraced locally, at least implicitly. One consequence of its adoption has been to displace to a considerable degree the narrow purview of Britishness that so dominated the writing of New Zealand history.

As a result of this paradigm shift, it is now possible to assert with greater confidence just who the Irish in New Zealand were and to assess what their impact on colonial society was. Irish connections and Irish influence are readily identifiable in the historical record, prominent from the outset as the European presence took root. When Queen Victoria signed the royal charter to create the colony of New Zealand in November 1840, liberating the newest crown acquisition from New South Wales, it was a Waterford-born naval officer, William Hobson, who was appointed the first governor. Hobson’s instructions were issued by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Normanby (Constantine Henry Phipps) who had returned only recently to London from his previous posting as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. As Lord Lieutenant, Normanby had won the warm praise of the leading political figure in Ireland at the time, Daniel O’Connell, as ‘an excellent man … I tell you there cannot be a better’. It seems likely Normanby played a significant role in drafting the royal charter, which decreed that the infant colony should be divided into three provinces: New Ulster (the North Island), New Munster (the South Island), and New Leinster (Stewart Island).

Though these ‘Irish’ provinces did not long endure, they provided a foretaste of Irish-New Zealand connections that intensified in the second half of the nineteenth century as the pace of immigration to the colony quickened. The high point for the Irish inflow was the Vogel Era of the 1870s when, attracted by the colonial government’s offer of assisted passages to recruit much-needed labour, more than 100,000 newcomers from the United Kingdom arrived to contribute to a wave of rapid economic expansion. The Irish-born constituted 22.4 per cent of the intake in the decade 1871–1880, and 27.5 per cent of those who received government assistance. By 1878, when the colony had a
non-Maori population of 414,000, some 43,758 of the population was Irish-born, nearly 11 per cent of the total.\textsuperscript{17} Thereafter the overall level of immigration to the colony declined. By the beginning of the twentieth century the Irish-born constituted only 5.6 per cent of the non-Maori population.

The Irish intake bore a distinctive imprint. David Fitzpatrick suggested more than twenty years ago that New Zealand’s immigrant stream represented a hybrid of the larger Australian and Canadian intakes, one that drew extensively on Munster as well as the southern parts of Ulster.\textsuperscript{18} More recently, Terry Hearn’s statistical analyses have confirmed the importance of these two provinces and Ulster in particular in New Zealand’s Irish immigrant stream between 1853 and 1915. From the 1850s until the First World War, Ulster consistently outstripped each of the other Irish provinces in its supply of colonists to New Zealand, with its preponderance increasing towards century’s end. This Ulster connection was strongly in evidence in Auckland Province, the top-half of the North Island, where the Irish-born constituted some 27.2 per cent of the UK born population in 1871. The concentration of Irish-born settlers there was surpassed only by the South Island’s West Coast.\textsuperscript{19}

* * * * *

In light of the diverse backgrounds of New Zealand’s nineteenth century immigrants — English, Scots, Irish, and others — can any singular narrative of Britishness hold true? The short answer is no. In fact, no singular narrative of one of these groups, the Irish, can be considered adequate, given the diversity within the stream of Irish-born newcomers who entered New Zealand. The experience of the mid-nineteenth century Auckland businessman and philanthropist James Dilworth helps to exemplify this point. Born in Dunseark, County Tyrone in 1815, Dilworth was fostered out to a well-to-do cousin, Anne Dilworth, at the age of eight. Dilworth’s biographer, Russell Stone, has demonstrated the consequences of Anne Dilworth’s decision to adopt James as her heir. The youth was enrolled at the Royal School of Dungannon and subsequently found employment in the town’s bank. However, as was the case for so many nineteenth century emigrants, James’s future was determined within a wider familial context and in 1838, at the age of 23, he was sent to the antipodes ‘to look about and ascertain where his capital could most profitably put into land’.\textsuperscript{20} Travelling a path familiar to many of his compatriots who settled finally in New Zealand, James went first to Sydney but did not remain there long. He journeyed on to New Zealand in 1841, arriving in Auckland in the midst of a frenzy of land speculation. Dilworth initially took a post as a clerk to his recently-appointed compatriot, Governor William Hobson, before taking a position with the fledgling New Zealand Banking Company. However, James Dilworth’s enterprise demanded wider challenges, and a collapse in property prices heralded his energetic entry into the Auckland property market. By 1844 James had spent over £200 purchasing land on the Auckland isthmus.\textsuperscript{21}

James Dilworth prospered in Auckland, partly by virtue of his early arrival in the city. Shrewd seizure of opportunities built an estate that by the time of his death in 1894 was valued at £150,000. He was also a prominent figure in public af-
fairs, a member of the Auckland Provincial Council for eight years, a member of the Auckland University College Council for four years, a long-time trustee of the Auckland Savings Bank, and a supporter of numerous other community organisations. A large portion of his estate was directed to the Dilworth Ulster Institute Trust to facilitate the education of less-privileged boys, and the Dilworth School continues to bear his name and commemorate his achievements. Throughout James Dilworth’s life his Ulster heritage was never far from the surface: he married an Ulster-born woman in New Zealand, Isabella Hall, and Ulstermen were prominent among his business associates. Russell Stone’s excellent biography emphasises the centrality of Dilworth’s Ulster origins to an understanding of the life of the historical actor:

In my quest for James Dilworth, I became more and more convinced that he had been misunderstood by past commentators because of a failure to put his life in the setting of his family background, and of his Irish experience. The most significant episodes in his life, the decision to leave Ireland and the extraordinary singleness of purpose with which he acquired and developed his landed estate shortly after he came to New Zealand can be understood only in the light of the changing circumstances of the Dilworth family back in County Tyrone during James’s formative years before the age of twenty-four.

As Stone’s book shows so compellingly, Dilworth’s origins and experiences circumscribed his associational life, setting it apart quite fundamentally from that of his non-Ulster compatriots in the colony.

In a fashion similar to James Dilworth, Irish Catholics in the colony developed their own networks and bonds of association that demarcated daily life within the colonial context. Hugh Coolahan, also a native of County Tyrone, was born in Strabane in 1800. He arrived in Auckland the same year as Dilworth, having traversed a similar path, travelling first to Sydney before crossing the Tasman Sea to Auckland. However, Coolahan’s religious and cultural affiliations ensured that in New Zealand he moved in different — if sometimes overlapping — circles to his fellow Ulsterman. Coolahan established and maintained a bakery business in Auckland while gradually diversifying with investments in mining, finance, and railway construction. He was also energetically involved in wider community affairs, and like Dilworth, served on the Auckland Provincial Council. But with his different Ulster tradition, Coolahan was intensely active in the Roman Catholic Church in Auckland, serving as a financial advisor to Bishop Pompallier, and deeply enmeshed in the devotional life of its lay community.

These individual experiences are matched by examples on a wider group scale. Well-known is the case of George Vesey Stewart, born in 1832 in Brighton, Sussex to a County Tyrone family. Stewart commenced training as a civil engineer, and studied languages at Trinity College Dublin, before embarking on a career as a farmer and estate agent. Conscious of New Zealand’s desire to recruit immigrants and the opportunities this presented, Stewart initiated a scheme to promote the settle-
ment of Ulster Protestant families in New Zealand and secure his financial future in the process. He entered into complex negotiations with the New Zealand authorities to establish this settlement. A member of the Loyal Orange Order, Stewart found his fraternal ties invaluable and his scheme won the backing of the influential colonial politician J.M. Dargaville, Grand Master of the Lodge in Auckland. Eventually, on 24 June 1874 Stewart entered into an agreement with the New Zealand Government, whereby the Crown set aside 10,000 acres of land for occupation by Stewart’s recruits. Stewart’s settlers arrived in Auckland in September 1875. The migrants soon moved on to Katikati, in the Bay of Plenty, and quickly won praise for their industriousness. However, Stewart’s ambitions as a land dealer and emigration sponsor were not fulfilled, and he was soon planning a second group settlement from Ulster.

Irish Catholic associational life was also a feature of colonial life, attested to most fully in Lyndon Fraser’s comprehensive study of Christchurch’s Irish population. Utilising a rich variety of sources including electoral rolls and probate records, Fraser shows how the newcomers to the city ‘effected a transition to colonial life by creating and sustaining durable social networks based on ethnic ties which transcended pre-existing affiliations and represented a powerful means to domesticate a new environment’. These networks were reliant on kinsfolk and community, and, he maintains, fostered an increasing level of institutional completeness centred on the activities of the parish church’. However, Christchurch was but part of a broader colonial canvas, and the strong nexus between one tradition of colonial Irishness and Catholicism was resonant across large parts of rural and small-town New Zealand too.

In New Zealand, as elsewhere in the Irish Diaspora, religious affiliation was therefore one significant factor (but by no means the only one) in defining immigrants’ social networks and life experiences. It also affected attitudes to political developments in Ireland, the empire, and their new society, if not universally or consistently so. This was well demonstrated in 1867, as the influence of Fenianism escalated in North America and Ireland. That year a new arrival on the South Island’s West Coast, John Manning, founded a newspaper, the New Zealand Celt. Manning’s journal was provocative and uncompromising in its demand for Ireland’s political independence, and soon found a strong following among the large number of Catholic Irish immigrants on the region’s goldfields. The substantial population of single Irish men present on the West Coast proved especially receptive to the Celt’s enthusiastic promotion of Irish national consciousness. In line with the affirmation of that new and assertive Irish identity, on 8 March 1868 a group of Irish in Hokitika staged a mock funeral for the recently-executed Manchester martyrs. Led by a Roman Catholic priest, Father William Larkin, a funeral procession wound its way to the local cemetery where a Celtic cross was erected. This overt display by Irish gold miners caused consternation among local loyalists, and when news of the attempted assassination of Prince Alfred in Sydney by an alleged Fenian reached New Zealand soon after, hostility was further aroused. When Father Larkin inflamed passions with a provocative speech in which he expressed sympathy
with Fenianism, local authorities reacted. Manning and five others were arrested. The colony’s Governor, Sir George Bowen, an Anglo-Irishman, product of a very different Irish tradition, felt little compunction in immediately dispatching troops to reinforce local volunteers in dealing with the local Irish menace.27

Other examples of Irish Catholics’ antagonism towards the British government, imperial policy, and New Zealand opponents can readily be identified in nineteenth and early-twentieth century New Zealand. For example, while numerous Irish soldiers served in army regiments to enforce colonial authority during the Maori wars, a small number of Irish deserters, overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, chose consciously to fight alongside Maori resisters during those wars.28 Working class Irish rallied strongly in the face of opposition to support Irish nationalist delegates in the 1880s despite strident press criticism and apprehension from Unionist supporters about the prospect of Irish Home Rule.29 Later still, the First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish War of Independence provided moments of intense anxiety that not only encouraged divisions between the Irish-born and those of Irish descent and their fellow New Zealanders, but even among the Irish themselves.30 Given these divisions, the utility of any singular narrative of British-ness is difficult to acknowledge.

* * * * *

I have argued that the reduction of New Zealand’s colonial population to a generic group ‘British’ does a grave disservice to the historical record. Individuals’ lives in the colony were certainly shaped by a series of common denominators that transcended national origin, including time of arrival, class, and level of education. But regions of origin, cultural traditions and religious beliefs were also significant determinants of individuals’ lives, patterns of association, and wider public attitudes. Aggregation into an homogeneous settler population elides these important distinctions. But what were the material consequences of different national or ethnic origins? Did such variation lead to groups we consider phenotypically-similar experiencing differential treatment in New Zealand?

A long tradition of historical writing on the Irish diaspora asserts that the Irish-born and those of Irish descent experienced grave disadvantage after their arrival in New World societies. In the United States, Oscar Handlin laid the foundation for this scholarly tradition in his celebrated book Boston's Immigrants, published in 1941. Handlin recognized that conditions in the new society were influential in shaping immigrant lives, but emphasized that the Irish were ‘shabbily equipped to meet the multifarious problems imposed upon them by urban life’. In both Ireland and America, he believed, the Irish were ‘victims of incalculable influences beyond their control’, a people whose ‘utter helplessness before the most elemental forces fostered an immense sadness, a deep-rooted pessimism about the world and man’s role in it’.31 Subsequent writers magnified the impact of characteristics assumed to be peculiar to the immigrants to explain both Irish urbanization in the United States and the newcomers’ subordination in American cities.

However, the last two decades have witnessed the emergence of a large body of new scholarship, much of it on Irish
immigrants in Australia, Canada, and South Africa, that contests the traditional American interpretation. This revisionist scholarship emphasizes not maladjustment or paralysis on the part of Irish immigrants in the face of modernization but their abundant adaptability and capability in both rural and urban landscapes. Recent studies on the Irish in New Zealand have tended similarly to emphasize a more fluid and less alienating pattern of adjustment to the new society than influential American accounts allowed. As Donald Akenson contended, ‘Irish immigrants and their descendants dispersed throughout New Zealand society and were to be found at every occupational level and in virtually every community’.

Akenson’s study of New Zealand census data in the early-twentieth century firmly suggests that, across a range of measures, the Irish-born were mainstream players rather than marginal men or women. By the early-twentieth century, as most of the nineteenth century’s first generation Irish passed through middle-age, the distribution of Irish-born across New Zealand’s provinces was scarcely distinguishable from the pattern of the entire population. Likewise, in 1921 the Irish urban/rural split (55/45) mirrored extremely closely that of the nation as a whole (56/44).

Within the multi-generational Irish population some variations are discernable, particularly in the experiences of Roman Catholics. In 1916 Catholics were slightly overrepresented in major North Island regions of Auckland (29.0 per cent) and Wellington (20.7 per cent) when compared with those areas’ share of the entire population (28.1 per cent and 20.4 per cent respectively).

Table 1: Occupational categories, males, 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Catholics (%)</th>
<th>Entire male population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Service</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>9.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Communions</td>
<td>9.97</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>14.38</td>
<td>15.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Producers</td>
<td>22.01</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent on others for livelihood (mostly children)</td>
<td>35.46</td>
<td>33.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Akenson (1990:77).

Table 2: Occupational categories, females, 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Group</th>
<th>Catholics (%)</th>
<th>Entire male population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Service</td>
<td>7.08</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Communions</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Producers</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents (housewives and children)</td>
<td>75.65</td>
<td>78.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Akenson (1990:77).

In contrast, Catholics were underrepresented in Canterbury, Otago and Nelson. The differences were never so stark as to be indicative of American-style ghettos, nor are they reliable markers of Irish or Catholic marginalisation. Rather, the variations are most reflective of specific employment
patterns, visible in the occupational data for 1921.

As these tables demonstrate, Roman Catholics males — a cohort closely synonymous with the multi-generational Irish group — were slightly more likely than the entire male population to work in service or transport industries, and less likely to work in commercial occupations. Catholic women were a little more heavily concentrated in the professions and domestic service than women in general and less likely to be dependants. What is striking are not these differences, however, but the remarkable similarity of the Catholic profile to the nation-wide distribution. In residential and occupational terms, Irish immigrants by the end of the nineteenth century were by no means ‘marginal micks’. Yet distinctions did exist. The Irish born did display a significantly higher level of illiteracy than other groups, a characteristic Akenson interprets principally as the result of educational disadvantage prior to emigration from Ireland. That interpretation is supported by the data on Irish performance in other new world settings. In eastern Australia, for example, at century’s end the Irish occupational profile closely mirrored that of the colonial born at the same time as the group exhibited a higher level of illiteracy than other immigrants. In 1901, nearly 10 per cent of the Irish born in the state of New South Wales aged five years and over were reported to be unable to read, compared with 7 per cent of the Australian-born, 4.5 per cent of Germans, 3.6 per cent of the English-born and less than 2 per cent of Scots. 36

Statistical evidence is one measure of marginality or exclusion, but it is not the only one. Bigotry and discrimination operate at other levels, restricting access to political rights and economic opportunities. Irish Catholics entering colonial New Zealand did so as members of a group that historically had experienced differential treatment on account of their beliefs. Conquest and land confiscations, the lasting effects of the Penal Laws, and George III’s refusal in 1801 to match the Act of Union with Catholic Emancipation contributed to the majority of Ireland’s population experiencing discrimination on the grounds of religion, exclusion from public office, and economic subordination as Ireland was incorporated in the United Kingdom. The consequences of those policies were felt in Ireland and across the British empire for most of the nineteenth century. Even decades after Daniel O’Connell’s campaign for Catholic emancipation brought about the lifting of civil restrictions, the legacy of the long period of anti-Catholic discrimination remained evident. The Irish — and Irish Catholics in particular — were seen by many in Britain, the United States, and the settler colonies as undesirable, in large part because of religion, but also because religion became inextricably linked with pejorative ideas about the group’s intelligence, economic incapacity, civil behaviour, ability to exercise appropriately political rights and responsibilities, and an array of other insidious stereotypes.

In New Zealand the consequences were clear when, in the 1870s, New Zealand embarked on a major programme of economic expansion. As the colonial government commenced large-scale assisted immigration, Ireland was not the preferred source for newcomers. Prevailing stereotypes, some drawn from Britain (particularly rooted in the repeal campaign of the
1840s), others originating in the mid-century experience of Nativism in the United States, circulated throughout the Australasian colonies at the time. Irish immigrants were suspect on account of their alleged intellectual inferiority, impudence, and indolence. Adherence to the Roman Catholic Church was also a central factor.\(^{37}\)

In a sign of this antipathy to the Irish, in 1872, when the New Zealand Agent-General in London, Dr Isaac Featherston, placed recruitment advertisements in newspapers in the United Kingdom, only 15 of 124 were situated in the Irish press.\(^{38}\)

Given that religious bigotry was an underlying feature of nineteenth century New Zealand life it was not surprising that, whenever Ireland was discussed as a potential source of immigrants, Ulster was singled out as the most suitable site for any recruitment to occur. Sympathetic politicians, businessmen, and Presbyterian Church leaders were but some of the advocates for an increase in the numbers of immigrants coming from Ireland’s north.\(^{39}\)

These calls apparently influenced New Zealand’s attempts to recruit immigrants, as all Featherston’s advertisements in Ireland were placed in newspapers in Ulster. This focus on Ulster and disregard for potential applicants in other Irish provinces eventually provoked a backlash in New Zealand, where the Minister for Immigration, George Morris O’Rorke, demanded action to provide fair access for Irish Catholic applicants. However, that favourable sentiment was not long maintained, and in 1879 the new Minister for Immigration, Robert Stout, chastised Featherston for the ‘large number of applicants you are receiving from the south of Ireland’.\(^{40}\)

That sense that the Irish were undesirable immigrants, a threat to social cohesion, was maintained in all of the Australasian colonies to at least the end of the nineteenth century. In 1881, the essayist A. M. Topp argued in the *Melbourne Review* that Ireland’s Roman Catholic population was fundamentally different from that of other regions in the British Isles. Whereas the Welsh and Scots merged naturally with the English, he believed, the Irish were irreconcilably set apart: ‘It is only with regard to them that the question of race becomes important. Only as to them can any doubt arise concerning the loyalty and benefit to the empire of any of the races that have acquired the English tongue.’\(^{41}\)

Anti-Catholic, anti-Irish sentiments such as this survived well into the twentieth century. They soured relations between Catholics and non-Catholics, at least sporadically. However, despite sectarian divisions, the Irish were for the most part very successful in accessing the privileges of Britishness and marking out positions as insiders in New Zealand life. In occupying positions of power in parliament and within the colonial bureaucracy to defend Irish and/or Catholic rights, through their enterprise and labour, and by their daily engagement within New Zealand life, the Irish proved adept at carving a niche in their new society. There were, indeed, ‘marginal micks’, just as there were marginal men and women of other ethnic backgrounds. But there were also a great many Irish men and women on the make, enterprising and resourceful, who excelled in making themselves mainstream. In replacing the homogenising signifier British we need to be careful to not too rigidly classify those who operated their own myriad agendas within the so-called British world.
Where then for Britishness? Does it have a future applied to the settler societies? I would argue that it does, not as a replacement for Irish, English, or Scots identity, but as a complementary identity, a simultaneous identity. The case has been made persuasively by scholars including Benedict Anderson that exile (absence from homeland) acts as a well-spring for an awareness of and identification with nationalism. In other words, existence outside Ireland produced a heightened sense of Irish nationality — indeed, in some Irish-American communities it seems the crucible of the New World environment instilled a sense of being ‘Irish’ where no pronounced mind-set had existed before. However, colonial life — at some points in time, at least — provided a strong counterpoint, stripping away narrower identification with the homeland in favour of something new. A New Zealand poet published this verse in 1900:

Jack came from Cornwall, and Pat from Donegal
'arry came from London, the first place of all,
Sandy came from Aberdeen, and Tom’s native-born,
But they’re all mates together in the land of the morn.
Pulling, pulling on the rope together,
Bringing up the future with a golden tether,
Cousin Jack and Cockney,
Irishman and Scot,
And the native is a brother to the whole blooming lot.

Tom Brooking, a leading historian of the Scots in New Zealand, identifies the verse as capturing ‘the tension between clinging to older British associations [interestingly, all are local or regional] and the relentless drive to become homogenised New Zealanders’. However, I am not as confident as Brooking in identifying this process as ‘relentless’. It was uneven, halting, and sporadic. It was interrupted by individual groups’ assertions of distinct identity (local, regional, and national); by intermittent reinventions of ethnicity; and by colonial neighbours’ reactions to what were deemed unduly militant displays of difference. Britishness could and did stand as a convenient milestone along the road from Old World national or regional identities to New World nationalism. It warrants continuing investigation because of the position it occupies in this process. The challenge for us as historians is to historicise Britishness effectively, to recognise and interrogate Britishness in its colonial manifestations, and not afford it the standing of some irresistible, non-contingent identity that swept away all that had come before.

ENDNOTES

Fern: Scottish Migration and New Zealand Settlement, Dunedin, p. 68.


Belich, James, 2001, Paradise Reforged, p. 78.


Ibid. p. 208.


Ibid. p. 21.


Ibid. pp. 27–33.

Ibid.

Ibid. p. 6.


Fraser, Lyndon, 1997, To Tara via Holyhead: Irish Catholic Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century Christchurch, Auckland, p. 158.


Marginal micks or mainstream men and women?


39 Ibid., pp. 50–5.


In 1913 a petition bearing over 11,000 signatures was presented to the Parliament of Canada asking that homestead rights in Western Canada be granted to ‘all women of British birth who have resided in Canada for one year’. This was the unsuccessful culmination of a campaign to allow unmarried women of British citizenry the ‘free’ homestead grant that was offered to male immigrants (regardless of marital status or citizenship) from Europe, the United States and other regions of Canada. The strategists behind this campaign (white, British-Canadian or British-women) were specifically asking that the privilege not be granted to ‘foreign born’ women. They keenly felt it to be an injustice that ‘our own Canadian men — our fathers and our brothers — deliberately set us aside as undeserving of a share in our country’ while permitting ‘ignorant, uncouth, lawless foreigners to occupy lands that we desire, and that we have laboured for, yet cannot have’. They wished to offer ‘inducements to better class Canadians and Britishers to settle here’. The unsuccessful ‘homesteads-for-Canadian-women’ movement indicates that white women in Western Canada did not share in all of the privileges often associated with whiteness. They do not easily fit into what David Roediger has described as ‘the central overarching theme in scholarship on whiteness [which] is the argument that white identity is decisively shaped by the exercise of power and the expectation of advantages in acquiring property’. Women of British ancestry in Canada had the expectation of privilege and advantages in acquiring property, and were frustrated that they had no such advantage, and exercised little power. Single women of all backgrounds were denied the right to homestead, and married women had no legal right to the homesteads they helped to acquire and maintain as dower rights were abolished in Western Canada in 1886. There was no white race privilege for the white women (and men) who were described and derided as ‘foreigners’. ‘Foreign’ women were denigrated and maligned in much the same ways as Aboriginal women. To elevate their own
status and to bolster arguments for their entitlement, British-Canadian women (although not all) contributed to the denouncement of ‘foreign’ women. Because of the diversity of white people in Western Canada, whiteness alone did not mean power and privilege; the situation required different strategies of authority. The mainly British-Canadian elite that dominated business, politics, education, women’s organizations and other realms worked to ensure that a sense of Britishness, combined with whiteness, became equated with Canadianness.

To consolidate their Empire, and legitimise the dispossession of Indigenous people, Britons of the late-nineteenth century constructed ‘grammars of difference’ that distinguished the elites who would rule in the colonies, from those who would be subject to this rule. As Catherine Hall has observed: ‘One of the critical carriers of that difference became their white skin. As brown and black skin, particular hair types and bone structures, came to signify inferiority, so whiteness became a signifier of power.’ But whiteness meant privilege and power for some and not others. The question ‘who was white?’ was seldom straightforward in any of the colonies. There were many people who fell short of standards and were, in Hall’s words ‘in danger of not being quite white enough’, because of their class, ethnicity, occupation, lifestyle, accent, religion, table manners or ‘suspect’ ancestry. Gender further complicates any simplistic link between whiteness, power and privilege. White women did not enjoy the same advantages as their male counterparts, although they shared components of elite status. They also had reasons of their own to help construct and maintain ‘grammars of difference’. There were gender-specific ways of marking difference, of elevating some femininities and masculinities, while denouncing others. Whiteness had its own hierarchies. It was an unstable, moving category; its meanings and boundaries continually changing.

Equating whiteness with power and privilege is particularly problematic in any examination of Western Canada, particularly after 1896 when the Wilfrid Laurier liberal government adopted a new policy of recruiting immigrants from eastern and central Europe, many from impoverished backgrounds. They were welcomed ‘as long as they had white skins’. (‘Visible’ minority immigrants were not permitted to enter Canada in any significant numbers until the 1960s.) My previous work, which has centred on encounters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Western Canada in the late nineteenth century, with particular focus on women, stops at about 1900, before this diverse population took root. In Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West, I analysed the category of ‘white woman’ in the Canadian West of the 1880s and 1890s and found that during that time it was reasonably clear what it meant — women who were not Aboriginal. The white women of Western Canada at that time were overwhelmingly British-Canadian and the ‘other’ women were Aboriginal. White women were cast as the pure, virtuous guardians of the ‘race’, symbols of the future health and wealth of this new corner of Canada and of the British Empire. Aboriginal women were their sinister and dangerous opposite, posing a threat to morality and prosperity. What it meant to be a white woman at that time took shape through a series of negat-
ive assumptions about the malign influence of Aboriginal women. These representations came sharply to light in 1885 during the Metis resistance that was defeated through an overwhelming military response. Negative representations of Aboriginal women, concerns about racial mixing, and intolerant attitudes were extraordinarily resilient and pervasive. Even Metis women who might, to all appearances, seem ‘white’ in their dress, deportment, and education risked detection and dismissal as ‘half breeds’ and impostors.13 But with the arrival of diverse white women, and as Aboriginal people became a minority isolated on reserves, white femininity no longer depended for its articulation on a sense of difference from Aboriginal women, rather a British-Canadian femininity was contrasted with negative assumptions about ‘foreign’ women.

That there is no singular narrative of white experience in Western Canada has long been acknowledged in Canadian historiography. These studies begin with the first presence of Europeans in the fur trade era from 1670, as historians have examined the differential treatment of, and discord among, the Orkney labourers and the English or Highland Scot elites in the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company.14 Studies in the fields of immigration and labour or working-class history have, from the 1970s, examined the discrimination and prejudice faced by phenotypically similar but diverse immigrants because of their nationality, religion, or other factors.15 These included Mormons, Germans, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Jews, Doukhobors, and Hutterites. Historian Howard Palmer, drawing on the work of U.S. historian John Higham, employed the concept of ‘nativism’ to describe the ‘op-
most powerful group were generally not directly from the ‘Mother Country’, but rather were what is often described as a Protestant British-Ontarian or an English Canadian elite. From the time of the Conquest of New France, this group fashioned an identity that was distinct from Franco Canada, the Americans and the British; ambiguous and even negative attitudes were directed toward each of these ‘others’. This elite was predominantly Scots or Irish in ancestry, rather than English. The term ‘English Canada’ is often used to refer to the largest ethnic group at the time of Confederation, but in the 1871 census the English were only half the size of the combined Scottish and Irish groups. As the authors of *Colonies: Canada to 1867* argue:

The conventional picture is that a ‘British’ or ‘English’ culture, inherited from the homeland, was modified by the Canadian environment and catalysed by the War of 1812-14 and by Canada’s western expansion and became thereby the English-speaking identity. The study of the process of cultural transfer in general and of ethnicity in particular indicates that the process was much more complex than that. There was no ‘British’ or ‘English’ culture to draw on, but, instead, several vigorous, distinct, and, in many of their details, incompatible Anglo-Celtic cultures found in the homeland. Therefore, an integral and absolutely necessary aspect of the development of an English-speaking sense of identity was the creation of a ‘British’ or ‘English’ culture in the new homeland, one that did not in fact exist in the old. The melding of the several Anglo-Celtic cultures to establish a new and synthetic ‘British’ or ‘English’ culture was part of the creation of the English-speaking Canadian identity. \(^{20}\)

Religion played an important role in the formation of an English-Canadian identity that was distinct from the Americans — it was a society that reflected the conservative and pro-imperial view of the Anglican church. \(^{21}\) The Canadian brand of ‘Britishness’ was given further definition through a group of intellectuals who called themselves ‘Canada First’, and who sought to promote a national sentiment worthy of a great transcontinental nation, one that was independent of both Britain and the US. They were initially anti-American and were also wary of the British after the 1871 *Washington Treaty* that sacrificed Canada’s interests in the cause of better British-American relations. At the same time however, they celebrated and promoted the great achievements of the Anglo-Saxon races and the British Empire. They believed, with other Canadian nationalists who were also imperialists, that Canada could achieve a ‘sense of power’ and fulfil its destiny as a great nation through the connection with Britain and the Anglo-Saxon race. \(^{22}\) Canada First presented Canada as a country made up of robust ‘northern races’, and expressed bigoted attitudes toward the people of ‘southern’ nations, French Canadians and Aboriginal Canadians. Poet Charles Mair declared that Canada was being held back by the inferiority of the North American Indian and the medievalism of the French Canadians whom he described as the principal ‘bar to progress, and to the ex-
tension of the great Anglo-Saxon Dominion across the continent.\textsuperscript{23}

These attitudes were at the foundation of the suppression of the first or Red River Metis resistance and the subsequent erosion of the French language, and Catholic education rights promised in the 1870 \textit{Manitoba Act}. As J.E. Rea has argued, Manitoba served as the prototype for similar action further west.\textsuperscript{24} These attitudes were also at the foundation of the immigration policy pursued by Canada until 1896 that was highly selective and confined to Great Britain and to northwestern Europe, or those supposedly vigorous northern races cherished by Canada First. As Prime Minister Macdonald stated in 1890, deploiring the influx of millions of Slavic and northern Europeans to the U.S.: ‘It is a great country, but it will have its vicissitudes and revolutions. Look at that mass of foreign ignorance and vice which has flooded that country with socialism, atheism and all other isms.’\textsuperscript{25} These same concerns were expressed about Western Canada not many years later. As J.W. Sparling wrote in the introduction to J.S. Woodsworth’s 1909 \textit{Strangers Within Our Gates: Coming Canadians}: ‘Either we must educate and elevate the incoming multitudes or they will drag us and our children down to a lower level. We must see to it that the civilization and ideals of Southeastern Europe are not transplanted to and perpetuated on our virgin soil.’\textsuperscript{26} As diverse white immigrants made Western Canada home, the term ‘white’ was used less often to denote the privileged group. In \textit{Strangers within Our Gates} for example, Woodsworth used the term right at the beginning of the book: ‘What does the ordinary Canadian know about our immigrants? He classifies all men as white men and foreigners. The foreigners he thinks of as men who dig the sewers and get into trouble at the police court.’ But the term ‘white’ was not used again until the chapters on ‘The Orientals’ and ‘The Negro and the Indian’. The latter chapter began for example with the sentence: ‘Neither the Negro nor the Indian are immigrants, and yet they are so entirely different from the ordinary white population that some mention of them is necessary.’\textsuperscript{27} ‘English’ or ‘English-speaking’, ‘British’, ‘Canadian’ or ‘pioneer’ were used instead of ‘white’ to mark the distinction from the ‘foreigner’ or ‘stranger’.

Women’s organizations, made up predominantly of Protestant British-Canadians of the middle or upper classes, shared concerns about the health and vitality of the imperial ‘race’ in the face of the influx of new immigrants, and fears that the ‘race’ was in imminent peril of ‘degeneration’.\textsuperscript{28} The white ribbon worn by members of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was ‘a symbol not only of the healthy pure milk they would substitute for alcohol but also of the kind of racial composition they favoured for Canada’.\textsuperscript{29} Prominent Western Canadian feminist Emily Murphy believed, along with Canada Firsters, that the Nordic races were inherently superior: ‘The best peoples of the world have come out of the north, and the longer they are away from the boreal regions in such proportion do they degenerate.’\textsuperscript{30} Many British-Canadian women were staunch imperialists. The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), popular in Western Canada, was dedicated to implanting ‘in every Canadian, man, woman and child the grandeur of our heritage as a British people … [who are] bound by tradition, loyalty and gratitude
to the Motherland’. The assimilation of ‘foreign’ immigrants was a top priority of the organization, although these immigrants were not permitted to join. The IODE also denied membership to women of British birth who married ‘foreigners’. Members handed out ‘Be British’ pins at local fairs, and they also promoted the history of the British Empire in the schools. Prominent women activists promoted the idea that women of the Anglo-Saxon race were treated well and held in high esteem compared to their ‘foreign’ counterparts. As Nellie McClung wrote to solicit support for Methodist missionary work:

Take the treatment of women! Even the most rabid suffragist who ever scorned our man-made laws will agree that women are treated with greater respect in Christian and Anglo-Saxon countries than in any other … Child marriages, the burning of widows, the throwing out of girl babies … are all, I believe, reasons for our effort to extend Christianity and its humanities.  

But being white and British did not guarantee privilege, power or even acceptance in Western Canada. Just as whiteness had its own hierarchies so too did Britishness. There was no unified British community whose superiority was unquestioned. Class distinctions remained sharp, and there was pervasive anxiety about degeneration from less desirable and poor British immigrants. There clearly was a variant of what Ann Laura Stoler has described as the ‘sustained presence of a subterranean colonial discourse that anxiously debated who was truly European and whether those who were poor and white should be included among them’. Not preferred were the urban working classes, those unaccustomed to working on the land. The English were particularly discriminated against. In Strangers within Our Gates, J.S. Woodsworth wrote: ‘Generally speaking, the Scotch, Irish and Welsh have done well. The greater number of failures has been among the English. This is due partly to a national characteristic which is at once a strength and a weakness — lack of adaptability.’ He continued that the trouble was largely with the ‘class’ of immigrants from England who were the ‘failures of the cities’. Woodsworth described a common lament of the English labourer that ‘On many western farms, certain Englishmen have proved so useless that when help is needed “no Englishman need apply”’. By the time of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, there was also grave concern in elite circles about the preponderance of British immigrants who were schooled in trade unions, socialism and militancy in their struggles with both the business community and the state. At the other end of the spectrum, and equally unwelcome, was the English upper class remittance man. Newspaper cartoons and articles, plays and books satirized the English gentleman, always comparing them unfavourably to the shrewd, capable and egalitarian Canadians. The Englishman in Canada, by an unidentified writer, was a satire of travel literature about a bumbling young English bachelor who was ‘oblivious to his own boorish manners and inability to comprehend that the self-confident, capable Canadian men and women he encounters have no need of his British ways or civilization’. Sell-out crowds at
music halls laughed uproariously at the ‘antics of English characters who strode about wearing monocles and outlandish tweed costumes, stammering and ranting such lines as … “Oh I say! How deucedly unsporting”’. The remittance man was lampooned in Western Canada’s entertaining and wildly popular paper, Bob Edwards’ *Eye Opener*, published in High River and then Calgary. In 1903-4 a series of (fictitious) letters appeared from Albert ‘Bertie’ Buzzard-Cholomondeley, originally of Skookingham, Leicestershire, England to his father from whom he was always trying to solicit more money. Scotsman Bob Edwards made merciless fun of the fox-hunting and pheasant-shooting society, class distinctions, privilege and aristocracy through Bertie’s letters.  

Class distinctions, as well as shifting hierarchies of Irish, English and Scottish identities, remained sharp among British women as well. There is a popular myth of the West as a place where class distinctions disappeared. This is, in part, promoted by the letters, diaries and memoirs of well-to-do British women who described the difficulties they had keeping servants. If they brought maids with them, or succeeded in hiring in the West, the servants never stayed long as they married hastily, often to neighbours, rising (in the view of the former servants) to a position of social equality with their former employers. While there is evidence for this, the situation was much more complex. Class distinctions remained, although they might be contested by those who wanted to rise in status. An example of this is provided in a letter written in 1878 by Colonel James F. Macleod of the North West Mounted Police. While visiting at Fort Walsh, he met the wife of the fort’s tailor, Mrs Stuttaford, an Irish woman, and thought she would make a ‘capital servant’ for his wife Mary. Macleod asked Mrs Stuttaford if she would like to ‘stay with Mrs Macleod’ and she said she would be ‘delighted’, but when he added that, ‘Mrs Macleod would be glad to get you as a housemaid and I suppose you can cook also’, her attitude changed. Macleod wrote:

Lord bless us — if you had seen her nose go in the air and sweep a curve half way across the room. ‘Ah no’ says she ‘my people are quite above that, they would never hear of me going as a servant.’ I very nearly told her that my wife could hardly think of meeting a tailor’s wife on terms of equality and that she would not find such society very congenial to her tastes … but I simply said I never had the least thought Mrs. S of receiving you in my house except as a servant … The whole thing was so rich that when I returned to the Fort I had all the fellows in fits over it.

The issue of which classes of English women ought to be encouraged to emigrate as domestic servants (virtually the only opportunity for single women) was hotly debated. While the work might not appeal to ‘gently-reared’ women, these women were, it was thought, better reproducers of the ‘race’ than lower-class women. In *A Woman in Canada*, Mrs George Cran argued that middle-class women were essential to ‘race making’, warning that if ‘ignorant women of our lower orders go out and marry — as they will — farmers, who are often of decent breeding, their
children will go down, not up, in the scale of progress; a woman of refinement and culture, of endurance, of healthy reasoning courage, is infinitely better equipped for the work of homemaking and race-making than the ignorant, often lazy, often slovenly lower-class woman’. There were fears that working-class British women might have ‘serious mental and moral disabilities’ and were more likely to be ‘diseased prostitutes than healthy “mothers of the race”’. Others argued that the ‘degeneration’ of the urban poor could be reversed after immigration to Canada, as ‘they belong to a race which is the first among the strong ones of the earth … Blood will tell. The race will assert itself and reproduce in the children of these people the old English character and the old English strength’. English women, too, were viewed as poor workers. ‘We don’t want any English here’ was the rude remark of a Canadian woman who ran a hostel to one young English woman applicant. English farmer Georgina Binnie-Clark discovered that the English were not popular among her neighbours in the Fort Qu’Appelle district of Saskatchewan. One explained that, ‘You know the English ain’t much considered out here. The Scotch is highly respected, and the Irish is well liked. But there is too much affectation and nonsense and lazinessness of the Englishmen.’ Binnie-Clark wrote in her 1914 book Wheat and Woman:

Canadian opinion divides the English into two groups, the ignorant English who can work, or the English wasters, who, having been dowered with every advantage which wealth can procure in a highly civilised country, won’t work … We are dumped together as the helpless English, affected or ignorant, helpless or hopeless, snobs or slaves, and every one of us has to make his or her way through that barrier of prejudice.

But it was ‘foreign’ women who were subjected to the most pejorative descriptions. These negative representations, which were very similar to the descriptions of Aboriginal women, pervaded newspaper accounts, missionary publications and popular literature. Like Aboriginal women, they were compared unfavourably with the supposedly elevated position of the British or British-Canadian woman. Derogatory representations included Mormon women, who were from the U.S., spoke English and many of whom had British backgrounds. They were depicted as enslaved, servile women. The Doukhobors were criticized for allegedly making draught animals of their wives and daughters, in much the same way as Aboriginal women were depicted as drudges and beasts of burden. Newspapers such as the Edmonton Bulletin, in an area where many Ukrainians settled, regularly ran stories of ‘diabolical’ crimes among the ‘Galicians’, where the alleged perpetrators were women. Sometimes crimes were petty but were minutely described such as the activities of a Russian woman and her four sons who were an ‘industrious gang of sneak thieves’. She did washing and scrubbing in Edmonton homes and allegedly stole a huge variety of personal possessions that were itemized in great detail, emphasizing how she had invaded and violated the privacy of her decent employers: ‘The list is varied ran-
ging from babies’ slippers to the old Saskatchewan district court seal, used here in 1880. A few of the stolen goods are: Jewelry [sic], including a number of wedding rings … babies shoes … silver spoons with monogram … childrens [sic] dresses … photographs.\textsuperscript{50}

‘Foreign’ women were depicted as abused and ill-treated by their own men, as in the report in 1899 of a ‘Galician woman, half starved and thoroughly exhausted, with three small children’, who was deserted by her husband, who walked 20 miles hauling a ‘primitive home-made cart, and applied to the North-West Mounted Police for relief’.\textsuperscript{51} Often they were cast as poor mothers, again in much the same way as Aboriginal women. The \textit{Edmonton Bulletin} reported on July 20 1899, for example, that a ‘Galician’ woman had left her four-month-old baby under a wagon while she ran after a cow that broke free during a storm. ‘The baby remained under the wagon during the terrible wind, dust and rain and when found by a man who was passing after the storm subsided had been badly buffeted by the elements and completely exhausted, besides being almost smothered by the dust.’ They were also, and again in virtually the same way as Aboriginal women, castigated as poor housekeepers. As reported in the \textit{Bulletin} of February 23 1899, the ‘Galicians’ ‘are, from the point of view of civilization, ten times lower than the Indians. They have not the least idea of sanitation. In many cases they have been content with building themselves holes in the ground, where the family consorts with the animals — all in one common apartment.’

One of the most popular authors in Western Canada was Presbyterian minister and Winnipeger (originally Ontarian) Charles W. Gordon, who published numerous novels under the pseudonym Ralph Connor. A central character in his novel \textit{The Foreigner} is Paulina Koval, a Hungarian woman who is ‘slow-witted’, ‘undoubtedly slovenly’, ‘dull’ and ‘apathetic’.\textsuperscript{52} Her son Kalman, however, becomes ambitious, hardworking, devoutly Presbyterian and Canadianized. The hope of the future is symbolized through Kalman’s marriage in the last chapter to Marjorie, a Scottish-Canadian, who represents all of the virtues of the Canadian nation. Marjorie had once declared that ‘never could she love one of those foreigners’, but in the last line of the book Kalman has become, she says ‘my foreigner, my Canadian foreigner’.\textsuperscript{53} This was the ‘making of a nation’, Gordon explained in his preface. ‘Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech and in manner of life, Saxon and Slav, Teuton, Celt and Gaul, one people is being made. The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all’. Ralph Connor’s solution however, would not have been palatable to the social reformers of the day who were concerned with ‘race’ regeneration.

The targets and nature of the condemnations of ‘foreign’ women varied according to the needs of the hour. In his 1920 book \textit{Breaking Prairie Sod: The Story of a Pioneer Preacher in the Eighties} with the subtitle ‘With a Discussion of the Burning Question of To-Day: “Shall the Alien Go?”’, Wellington Bridgman provided a detailed description of ‘alien’ women, interchanging the term with the ‘Hun’. They appear as poor housekeepers, who were ‘not used to a floor in the house, or a stove, or a broom, or a churn’.\textsuperscript{54} None had ever had a bath. They were physically
strong, being used to outdoor work but ‘No care is ever taken with the shape or form of the body, so she just grows and develops. In domestic life she thinks of nothing, and is trained to nothing but subserviency.’ They could often be found in court, having assaulted their neighbours or family members. He described at great length a fight between two women in the north end of Winnipeg:

One who felt the spirit of her throbbing strength claimed to hold the ‘belt’ for a considerable district in the north end. Another woman of the same nationality ‘doubted if she could do her’. Gossips carried the doubtful challenge. The burly defender of the belt went down. The backyard formed the arena, and there, without rules and with only females present, they contended to a finish.56

None of this, Bridgman wrote, contributed to ‘good motherhood’, and the children of these women fell even lower into ‘vice and looseness of morals’. He concluded his section of women by asking why people of ‘such low character and breeding should have been inflicted on this fair Dominion? … There is not a cog of their primeval being that fits into the machinery of Canadian civilization.’ Bridgman argued that the ‘aliens’ should all be sent home and urged that British war widows and their families be placed across the prairies.

Americans were welcomed as hard working farmers but at the same time they were cast as a danger to the purity of Canadian women. The Canadian West was frequently depicted as a young white woman, a ‘beautiful, wholesome, hopeful maiden’, the offspring of Mother Britannia. She was pure, pristine, virginal, naive and vulnerable. The masculine U.S. was base, rapacious, debauched and menacing. There were fears and anxieties in Western Canada about young girls and women being enticed into ‘white slavery’ by unscrupulous Americans.57 British traveller Bessie Pullen-Burry’s 1912 book of her trip across Canada was full of warnings about the danger from undesirable Americans. Americans lurking about Winnipeg were connected to a ‘hideous traffic south of the line, the result … of an insufficient supply to meet the demands of the immoral men of cities like Chicago, which send well-dressed emissaries into Canada to entrap the unwary and ignorant into life-long bondage’. Pullen-Burry also described the experiences of an English girl, a doctor’s daughter, who had shared a room at a YWCA in Vancouver with a young woman from Seattle: ‘in a day or two the American girl’s condition, aptly described as a “menace to the town”, was such that she was sent to the hospital: the matron of which whom I afterwards met, confirmed in every detail the account I had previously heard, which is absolutely unfit to be recorded.’58

‘White’ slavery was one example of the continued use of the term ‘white’ into the twentieth century. Another was a feature apparently unique to Canada, the ‘white women’s labour laws’ that were enacted in the western provinces and Ontario beginning with Saskatchewan in 1912.59 These prohibited Asian owners of restaurants, laundries or other businesses, from hiring white women. The legislation was the result of lobbying by labour and business interests concerned about ‘unfair competition’ from Asians, as
well as moral reformers and middle-class white women’s groups. Hysteria about the dangers to white women from Asians were kept alive in the press through ‘sordid and revolting’ stories of women being lured away and tragically transformed into drug fiends. But authorities had difficulty deciding just who was a ‘white woman’ as the statutes provided no definition. In 1912, a Saskatoon police magistrate adjourned a trial professing great confusion over the question of the ‘whiteness’ of the female employees involved who were described as Russian and German. The Crown attempted to provide a definition, arguing that the court should ‘give these words the meaning which is commonly applied to them; that is to say the females of any of the civilized European nations’. The adjournment, and the judge’s confusion, indicates that in his mind these women were not quite ‘white’, although he eventually decided that Germans and Russians were indeed members of the ‘Caucasian race’.

Similar legislation was proposed in Western Canada that would prohibit ‘white’ girls from working in Greek restaurants. Lobbying for such legislation in the town of Lethbridge provoked this letter to the Lethbridge Daily Herald of January 7 1913, from Miss Bessie Carter under the headline ‘White Girls in Greek Restaurants’, which indicates the confusion over just who was considered part of the ‘white race’:

Dear Sir,

In regard to the local council of women of Lethbridge, on the proposition of girls help in Greek Restaurants, who do you refer to in the original Greeks in such cases? Do they not belong to the white race? The difference is, we came east generations ago and are somewhat more advanced. Because they came from a foreign country, they are not of the dark race. History and geography of the US will give evidence to that effect. If they are respectful enough to join the allies and fight for your country, surely they are good enough for the employment of our girls. What are we girls going to do? Quit working nine hours a day, wages $60 a month, and do housework and slave for $15 a month and work 15 hours a day, no! We will go where we can get wages. Who will take the place of the girls when all the men are called to the front?

The issue was still being debated in Lethbridge in 1918 when the local Council of Women urged the city police to exercise more power over the employment of ‘white girl help’ in restaurants owned by Chinese and Greeks.

The participation of British-Canadian women in the promotion of negative representations of the ‘foreigner’ is illustrated in the campaign for homestead rights. In Western Canada persons who were heads of families or males over 18 could make an entry for a homestead of 160 acres upon payment of an entry fee of $10. After fulfilling certain duties of residence and cultivation during a three-year ‘proving up’ period, the entrant could receive patent to this land (or ownership in fee simple). Unmarried women could not apply for homestead land, nor could married women. The only women who qualified were those who were heads of families — widows and in some cases divorced or separ-
ated women — but in all cases they had to have a minor child or children. Women such as Georgina Binnie-Clark had to purchase land, as they were not eligible for ‘free’ homesteads. A woman wanting to farm was denied a ‘fair start’, Binnie-Clark argued, as she ‘has the killing weight of extra payments thrust on her at the very outset. She may be the best farmer in Canada, she may buy land, work it, take prizes for seed and stock, but she is denied the right to claim from the Government the 160 acres of land held out as a bait to every man’.62

A homesteads-for-women campaign gained momentum in the years leading to the First World War and was an important component of the feminist movement in Western Canada. The injustice of the situation was heightened by the fact that just across the 49th parallel in the U.S. West, single women could homestead and did so in the thousands.63 Many women moved from Canada to the U.S. in order to homestead.64 The campaign was centred in the Western Canadian press, particularly farmers’ journals such as the Grain Growers’ Guide. Supporters of homesteads-for-women drew on a number of arguments. The opportunity to farm would help the weak and weary office worker. Sanatoriums would be emptied. Families with daughters could not expand their holdings in the way that families with sons could by occupying adjoining sections. Greater gentility would be introduced to the homosocial frontier. As one supporter wrote in 1911 to the Grain Growers’ Guide, there were hundreds of ‘bright, intelligent girls and women’ in Canadian cities who would be ‘more valuable citizens than the drinking, swearing, carousing, cigarette-smoking young fellows who loaf about bar-rooms, and yet the latter have votes and homesteads, and the former have neither’.65 The resultant influx of women would also solve the ‘bachelor’ problem that was much lamented in the Canadian press. As another supporter wrote: ‘It would make the country very much more sociable and perhaps prevent a lot of the bachelors from going to the insane asylum for want of sociability.’66

But increasingly the most forcible argument made was that homestead rights should not be given to ‘foreign’ men when British-Canadian and British women were denied that right. ‘We women of the west feel that our rightful inheritance is wrested away from us and given to strangers and all because we have committed the sin of belonging to the “female species”’, wrote a supporter of the cause in a 1913 letter to officials in Ottawa.67 Isobel Graham, women’s editor of the Grain Growers’ Guide, was the most prominent and dedicated activist for this cause. She wrote in a 1913 letter to the President of the National Council of Women Mrs F.H. Torrington:

Are we Western farmers so cultured, so steadfast, so loyal, so philanthropic that we can bear dilution by the ignorance, low idealism, and religious perversity of the average foreigner? … Keep back the foreigner. Give us good, sound British stock — women already British, already civilized, already subjected to both earth and heaven for conduct.68

This line of argument reached a new level in 1911 when African-Americans from Oklahoma expressed an interest in homesteading in Western Canada. Graham stressed the threat to ‘white’ women on
isolated homesteads, writing about ‘the atrocities committed by these terrible communities the only corresponding punishment for which is the lawless lynching, and even burning at the stake. Already it is reported that three white women in the Edmonton and Peace River districts have been victims of these outrages accomplished in peculiarly fiendish abandon.’ These and other allegations proved to be fabricated, but they successfully built up pressure to halt most of this immigration.

One of Graham’s proposals was to discriminate against ‘foreign’ women wishing to homestead by requiring them to make a deposit of not less that $500 to hinder them from the start. She wrote: ‘It is not desirable to grant homesteads wholesale to foreign women who know nothing of the rigors of the country and who are bound to fail through the discouragements of unexpected hardships.’ Graham claimed sole responsibility for the clause in the petition asking that homestead rights be reserved to women of British birth, arguing that Canada ‘would really suffer from any other course’. There were thousands of women and men who agreed with Graham as they signed the petition, which was not circulated in any of the areas settled by the ‘foreigners’ or ‘new’ Canadians. One supporter declared that he signed only because the petition stated ‘women of British birth’, as he did ‘not believe in giving the same rights to foreigners or Americans as I do to our “women of British and Canadian birth”’. But there were many who disagreed, arguing that changes to the homestead laws should benefit all women, and they expressed concern that this narrowness might diminish their own quest for equity and justice. H.G. Ahern wrote from Claresholm, Alberta in July, 1911 to object to the wording of the petition:

The women of British birth should not be so selfish and short-sighted as to try to put through a law of this kind with the words ‘of British birth’ therein, for if they succeed it will be a blot on the degree of their intelligence, and a factor of their lack of Christianity as practised by them, which our historians will be sorry to relate. It will also retard the development of Canada.

Mrs L. Doran wrote to the Grain Growers’ Guide in 1912 to say that she would agree to circulate the petition:

If the words ‘of British birth’ be eliminated … I can only explain that clause as being the result of prejudice … The Canadian government could not make a greater mistake than to grant the petition as originally worded for what have women of British birth done that entitles them to the land more than the thousands of women of other nationalities … Let us be consistent and not let the men have a chance to accuse us of being narrow-minded.

In a 1913 letter to the Minister of the Interior, V.C. Bedier of Chauvin, Alberta wrote that the right to homestead should be open to all women, and expressed the opinion that ‘foreign’ women would likely do better than English women, reflecting the widely held view that the English were poor workers: ‘It certainly would be hard to find women less suitable to help build
a country than some of these very ones she [Isobel Graham] so very narrowly tries to favor [sic].' Americans and ‘ex-Americans’ were disappointed that they were excluded along with ‘foreign’ women. One reader wrote to Graham that when she read the petition ‘all my fondest hopes were crushed for the petition reads that women of British and Canadian birth be allowed the privilege of homesteading and I first beheld the light of day under the Stars and Stripes. But, pray tell me, would you not vouchsafe for American girls to homestead as well?’

The ‘homesteads-for-women’ campaign was unsuccessful. The petition was shelved away and forgotten. The First World War interrupted the momentum of the campaign, and after that the response of the federal government was that any remaining homestead land should be occupied by returned soldiers. It is difficult to say whether the strategy to campaign on behalf of British women only damaged the cause but it would certainly have been a nightmare to administer a system that welcomed all white males, but denied all but British women. It would also have seemed very unfair in the U.S. where British, Canadian and other women were permitted to homestead. The narrowness of the campaign clearly alienated potential supporters. But the response of the federal government, who had control over dominion lands, never wavered both before and after this strategy of exclusion was adopted. Politicians and government officials did not want women to deviate from ideals of proper femininity. When Georgina Binnie-Clark brought the issue before the deputy-minister of the Department of the Interior, the reply was that women ‘are already averse to marriage, and he considered that to admit them to the opportunities of the land-grant would be to make them more independent of marriage than ever’. A similar response was given in the House of Commons in 1910 when Minister of the Interior Frank Oliver stated that in order to make a homestead productive there should be ‘not a single woman upon it, nor even a single man, but there should be both the man and the woman in order that the homestead may be made fully advantageous to the country’. It was the job of the single man ‘to get the woman, and for the woman who wants to settle on land in the Northwest to get the man, rather than that she shall have land of her own’. White women of British ancestry were viewed as the key to order and civilization, but only if they were firmly tied to the home and the domestic sphere. Land, and the potential wealth and independence this could mean for women, was a male preserve.

Linda Colley has explained ‘Britishness’ as being forged between 1707 and 1837 in a series of conflicts with an external other (Catholic France). This sense of a shared identity permitted diverse inhabitants to focus on what they had in common, rather than what divided them. In the case of Australia, Marilyn Lake has argued that by the late-nineteenth century the ‘emergent identity of the ‘white man’ began to complement, and then displace, the figure of the Britisher in Australian cultural and political discourse’. In Western Canada, however, Britishness supplanted whiteness by the early-twentieth century. This was a unique brand of Canadian Britishness that took shape first in opposition to French Canada and the U.S.; in the West it was shaped in opposition to Aboriginal people and the ‘foreign-
ers’. It was a strategy of authority that divided the residents of the West into the deserving and the less deserving in a place where white skin could not be a critical carrier of difference. But the British community too was divided by class, gender and ethnicity. British-Canadian women enjoyed a much more privileged position than Aboriginal and other immigrant women, but they too were subject to complex gender and racial ideologies.

In Capturing Women, I wrote about an Aboriginal woman known as ‘Liza’ who lived on the outskirts of the Manitoba town of Virden. I saw much of her symbolic importance in the fact that she was an Aboriginal woman, writing that her presence continued to feed the community’s stereotypic view of the deficiencies of Aboriginal femininity, while bolstering the ideal of white femininity. Liza served to sharpen the boundaries of community membership, to articulate what was and what was not considered respectable and acceptable. But this is not the complete story. At the turn of the century Caroline ‘Mother’ Fulham was the young city of Calgary’s ‘Liza’, but she was Irish. She was white, but not properly white, and not properly British. She had fallen from grace. Fulham kept pigs in her back yard, and collected garbage from Calgary’s hotels and restaurants. She was called the ‘Queen of Garbage Row’, and she was frequently prosecuted for her disorderly conduct. She visited the bars of the hotels and was often the objects of pranks when she unsteadily emerged. ‘Mother’ Fulham celebrated St. Patrick’s days in outlandish green clothing and on that day she sang Irish songs while intoxicated from her ‘throne’ on top of her democrat. Lawyer and senator James Lougheed, in one courtroom exchange in 1891, called Mrs Fulham a ‘moral leper’, and he regretted ‘the liberty or rather the licenses granted to such a woman who made herself a notorious nuisance’.

Although white and British, Caroline Fulham was an outcast, a blight and ‘moral leper’ to the emerging community of Calgary, founded on a strong British-Ontarian foundation. But like Liza, she performed a valuable function. Her behaviour, which was in contrast to and in conflict with norms of respectable white, British femininity, functioned to confirm these norms, attesting to the value and sanctity of traditional domestic arrangements that implied little freedom or independence for women. Fulham’s independent living as a pig farmer, her drinking, and transgressions of the law were all powerful explorations of an alternative femininity, helping to maintain the overall equilibrium within the community by mapping out what was permitted, and what had to be repressed. Caroline Fulham points to the complexities of the ‘grammars of difference’ that were established in Western Canada. Clearly we need to look beyond the collision of the white presence with the Aboriginal semblance in understanding marginal identities in this corner of the British Empire.

ENDNOTES

2 Canadian citizenship was not legally recognized until 1947 with the passage of the Canadian Citizenship Act. Until that time Canadian nationals had been legally defined as British subjects.
3 LAC, RG 15, vol. 1062, file 2029532, ’Homesteads for Women: A Western Woman’s View of Man’s


7 Aboriginal is the term selected for use in Canada’s Constitution Act 1882, and encompasses the Metis, those defined as ‘Indian’ under the Indian Act, and those not legally defined as ‘Indians’ (formerly known as ‘non-status Indians’). The term ‘Aboriginal’ is now widely used in Canada as a replacement for the term ‘Indian.’


10 Ibid.


18 Ibid., pp. 11-12.


20 Ibid., pp. 505-6.


25 Quoted in Avery, Donald, 1995, Reluctant Host, p. 61.


27 Ibid., p. 190. The section of the chapter entitled ‘The Indians’ began with ‘One of the most pathetic sights is that of an Indian stepping off a sidewalk to let a white man pass, or turning out of prairie trail to give a white man the right of way. Once the Indians were proud autochthones; now they are despised natives; aborigines, yet outcasts …’ Ibid., p. 192.


30 Quoted in Ibid., p. 15.


32 Quoted in Valverde, Mariana, 1991, ‘Age of Light, Soap and Water,’ p. 120.
Britishness, ‘Foreignness’, Women and Land in Western Canada


35 Ibid., p. 52.


40 Pullen-Burry, Bessie, 1912, From Halifax to Vancouver, Mills and Boon Ltd., London, pp. 218-9, 340.


44 Ibid., p. 201.


48 LAC, RG 15, D-II-1, vol. 1105, file 2876596, J.H. Perra to Hon T.M. Crother or Dr. Roche, 29 April, 1913.

49 Ibid., vol. 3, no. 52, 26 July, 1911, p. 17.

50 Ibid., vol. 4, no. 4, 23 Aug., 1911, p. 20.

51 Ibid., vol. 3, no. 52, 26 July, 1911, p. 17.

52 Ibid., vol. 4, no. 23, 3 January, 1912, p. 23.

83 Ibid., pp. 201-3.
85 Many thanks to Donald B. Smith, University of Calgary, for sharing his research on Caroline Fulham.
Britishness is a relatively newly coined term. When running a spell-check after drafting this paper, my word-processing programme did not know the word and wanted me to substitute ‘Brutishness’ instead. Though that would have produced interesting results, I continue to use the term Britishness in this paper, meaning by it a sense of being British, an identification with Britain. Not surprisingly, given the enormity of the topic, and the difficulties of giving it a precise definition, no one has to date attempted an overview of Britishness across the whole of South African history. Here I can do little more than suggest some themes that need to be explored in greater depth.

When one considers Britishness in South Africa, or elsewhere, two major questions loom — these are the ones I wish to address here briefly. First: what forms did it take? In other words, what did it mean to different people? I will attempt to illustrate some of the immense variety of forms it took in the South African case for three main groups of people. One should break these groups down, and discuss sub-groups, but here I will mainly discuss Britishness in terms of, firstly, those I call the English, people of British ancestry or descent who settled in South Africa and spoke English as their first language. Secondly, I consider the Afrikanders, who, except in Natal, have always been a majority of whites. Descendants of the Dutch at the Cape before the British arrived at the end of the eighteenth century, they can in some ways be compared to the French Canadians, though the latter lost their majority position among whites as Canada united. Thirdly, I discuss black people of various kinds. The San hunter-gatherers and the Khoi pastoralists were the South African equivalent of the Aborigines of Australia or Canada’s First Nations. It is the descendants of the mixed farmers, who arrived later and whom the Dutch and then the British encountered as they penetrated the interior of the sub-continent, who today are usually known as black Africans. Many people of mixed descent, today known as Coloureds, and of Indian origin were also oppressed under apartheid and also came to call themselves black. In South Africa, of course, unlike other British settler colonies, the indigen-
ous population did not die out in the face of colonial penetration but remained a majority in the population as a whole.

Having illustrated through a few examples some of the vast array of different forms of Britishness, I conclude with some reflections on why people identified with Britain, especially those not from Britain. Why did particular kinds of Britishness emerge?

* * * * *

I shall not discuss here say, Jewish people who immigrated from Lithuania or Portuguese-speakers who moved to South Africa in large numbers from the Portuguese colonies in southern Africa, or Greek or Italian immigrants, though how and to what extent such people became anglicised is an important question. Those who came, or whose ancestors came, from Great Britain were mostly from England; relatively few identified primarily as Welsh or Irish and even a separate Scottish identity tended to merge into a broader British identity.\(^1\) Unlike the immigrants from elsewhere in Europe, the Afrikaners and blacks, these English did not have to be anglicised; they were British because their roots were in Britain, but their identification with Britain and the Empire took varied forms at different times and in different situations. Some identified politically with Britain, which represented for them order, progress, civilisation, modernisation, philanthropy. For others, Britain meant aggressive imperialism based on self-interest or meddling interference. Yet even those English-speakers who were very critical of the British government and its agents in South Africa usually retained their cultural ties with Britain. So cultural and political Britishness did not always go together.

Britishness was most intense in Natal, sometimes called `the last outpost of the British Empire',\(^2\) where the English were, after the Afrikaner trekkers left in the 1840s, the majority of whites. There in the 1920s, 90 per cent of children who were asked to write on `winter' wrote of an English winter of ice and snow, and a General Knowledge examination in 1935 asked such questions as what was the Flying Scotsman, and what was meant by the King’s Silver Jubilee. Royal occasions were celebrated all over South Africa, but with special and exaggerated fervour in Natal.\(^3\) The English in Natal voted in 1909 against entering the Union of South Africa, and in 1960 almost all of them rejected the idea of a republic. However, along with other English people, their identifications with Britain and the Empire/Commonwealth seemed to them to go into decline and when Britain reacted with hostility to Rhodesia’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965.

According to the Mayor of Port Elizabeth, in 1923 most English in South Africa were `born and bred in feelings of fealty and loyalty to the Crown, and though sundered by distance, those feelings were even stronger than in the land of their birth'.\(^4\) `God Save the Queen’ continued as one of the two national anthems, and the Union Jack remained in the national flag until 1957. The King’s Birthday and Empire Day were public holidays. Leading newspapers and schools promoted Britishness, which often went with an attitude to superiority that others bitterly resented.\(^5\) Afrikaners spoke of `sout (for salt) pnie’, a scornful reference to men (women seemed not to count) who had one foot in
South Africa, the other in Britain, with the result that their penises dangled in the salt water of the ocean between.\(^6\)

Britishness changed over time. Vivian Bickford-Smith has shown in detail how the English bourgeoisie who controlled local affairs in Cape Town in the late-nineteenth century became more aggressive and overt in their identification with Britain towards the end of the century.\(^7\)

I turn to why this was in a moment. After Union was created in 1910, many British South Africans were able to combine their loyalty to the Crown and Empire, their pride in British achievements and the Imperial connection — the latter suggesting, in John Darwin’s term, a ‘Britannic’ rather than British nationalism\(^8\) — with a broad South Africanism, meaning an identification with the country in which they lived. They hoped that Dutch/Afrikaners would join them in devotion to the Empire, and the pro-Britishness of the ex-Anglo-Boer War generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts after Britain agreed to grant self-government to the former republics seemed to show that this was possible. Sir Keith Hancock wrote at length about how the Cambridge-educated Smuts, a member of the Imperial War Cabinet in the First World War, came to support the civilising mission of the British Empire.\(^9\)

Loyalties to South Africa and to Britain and the Empire could be combined in a host of different ways, depending on the individual concerned and the time. Even those of jingoistic tendencies, who were active in the Sons of England Patriotic and Benevolent Society and continued to call Britain home, could at the same time identify as South Africans.

In his recently published memoir, entitled *A Patriot in Search of a Country*, the historian Arthur Keppel-Jones describes how, growing up in Cape Town in the early years of Union of parents who had come from Wales and Ireland, he had two primary identifications: to South Africa, ‘based on a bond with the land, the only land I knew’, and to Britain. ‘A photograph’, he writes, ‘shows me as a small boy holding a flagpole from which hung a Union Jack about as large as myself. My books about trains, ships and soldiers were mostly about British trains, ships and soldiers’. He played a card game based on the 10 counties of England, and as a boy he knew from which stations in London the trains ran:

> Not only was the whole weight of family tradition thrown behind a British, even an English, patriotism, but the society around me added another kind of weight. Great prestige was attached to having ‘been to England’, so that I always felt jealous of people who had done that, until I had done it myself. There was even more prestige in being ‘home born’, rather than a mere ‘Colonial’.

Keppel-Jones’s two identities were linked in the British Empire. Through his favourite book as a child, *The Wonder Book of the Empire*, the Taj Mahal, the Kicking Horse Pass, the hot springs of Rotorua and the clove trees of Zanzibar seemed almost as much parts of my own country as Knysna and the Karoo. ‘We could never forget the Empire’, he writes:

> Pride in it was not a mere sentiment, and *civis Britannicus sum* was not an empty boast. Wherever we might go in the world, we would be protected by a real
power, which from time to time showed its teeth. The King’s head was on coins and stamps, his monogram on mailboxes, and we regularly sang the national anthem … At the end of every cinema show in Cape Town in the 1920s at least a few bars of God Save the King were played, while his portrait appeared on the screen.

When he went to Oxford in 1929, Keppel-Jones describes the thrill of coming in sight of England and realising that ‘the people there were real Englishmen [sic]’. ‘Anyone of my background’, he continues:

though he had never seen England before, had been absorbing its influences all his life. They came from family talk, a father’s and a grandmother’s memories of the old country, from literature and history. Every rural scene, every flower and bird, had been celebrated by poets that one had read at school. Still more important was the relationship to the people: their kind of thinking and feeling, and mine, came from the same source.

The English (not British) history he studied at Oxford was ‘my own history’ and when he left England in 1931, ‘I thought of it as home’. He nevertheless returned to South Africa, where he had been offered a teaching post, and was to remain in academic life in that country for another 27 years. And in one of the books he wrote in those years, he has a chapter entitled ‘Divided Loyalties’ in which he writes:

No one [he meant, of course, no whites] in Australia or Rhodesia is worried by ‘divided loyalties’. The people of those countries are as deeply attached to Australia or Rhodesia as any other patriots. But they remain British, proud of their national origins and eager to share with other British countries the defence and the development of the common heritage.

As a British South African, Keppel said, he resented being told by Afrikaner nationalists that he should not identify with Britain. Their appeal to him to give undivided loyalty to South Africa was ‘a confidence trick’. He would not sacrifice himself for Table Mountain, in whose shadow he had grown up, but, he wrote, ‘an Englishmen dies for the freedom of parliament and the press, Habeas Corpus and the right to go to perdition or salvation in whatever way he pleases … Loyalty to … our kind of South Africa involves allegiance to principles of which Great Britain happens to be the principal exponent in the world.’

The First World War had contradictory results: it strengthened both Britishness, in that those who went to serve saw themselves as British soldiers fighting for the Empire, and South Africanism, for the terrible slaughter in the battle of Delville Wood in France in 1916, the South African equivalent of Gallipoli, helped to strengthen ideas of white South African nationalism. While for most British South Africans there was no conflict of interest between Britishness and South Africanism, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism seemed to threaten both. Given that, it is not surprising that the year after J.B.M. Hertzog defeated Smuts and came to power in 1924,
with republican ambitions, the visit to South Africa by the Prince of Wales should have occasioned a vast outpouring of pro-royal sentiment. But while some English became more jingoistic in the face of the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, most, while retaining a sense of loyalty to the Crown, accepted that South Africa was no longer a British colony, and that Afrikaners would not become British. So long as Smuts and his party seemed to protect the position of the Crown and South Africa in the Empire/Commonwealth, however, they continued to support him, despite the ‘growing tensions between Britishness and South Africanism during the 1930s’. When Smuts returned to office at the outbreak of the Second World War it was possible for English-speakers to think that ‘Britishness and Dominion South Africanism’ could again co-exist harmoniously.

One other individual example: mine. Born in England of English parents who wished to escape Britain after the war, I was taken to South Africa at the age of four, and brought up in a home in which England was the main point of reference, though my father had arrived as a supporter of Smuts, to whom I was introduced in 1950 just before he died. Smuts’s photograph long continued to adorn my father’s study. When I first went to England, to visit grandparents, everything seemed as familiar as it had been to Keppel-Jones. As apartheid intensified, Britain seemed to represent the opposite of South Africa: a free, tolerant society based on the rule of law, justice and equality (it was not until I lived in England as a student in the late 1960s that I began to realise the extent of class inequality there). Growing up alienated by Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid, I did not develop a deep attachment to South Africa, and in a vague way expected that at some time in the future I would probably return to England to settle. When I went to Oxford to study, I felt at once at home in Britain, and when I returned to South Africa to teach in the 1970s I was more deeply alienated from the country in which I lived because of the now more oppressive racial politics and the seeming inevitability of a bloody conflict as the Afrikaner government held onto apartheid in the face of growing resistance. To my surprise, along with that of others, those in power decided to abandon apartheid and seek a negotiated settlement. Only in the democratic South Africa since 1994 have I felt able to identify positively with the politics and therefore with the country itself.

Secondly, let us consider more briefly the Britishness of some Afrikaners. While those who hated British rule moved into the interior in the 1830s and 1840s, where they retained their anti-Britishness, many of those who remained at the Cape were anglicised to some degree. Some, like Henry de Villiers, who ended his days as the first Baron de Villiers of Wynberg, became as British as those who had come from Britain itself. Living under British rule, these Afrikaners were subject to British cultural practices and laws and as a result of a long process of socialisation, especially in school, they came to accept these as natural, and to accept that British rule was benevolent and positive. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, a majority of Afrikaners at the Cape were loyal to the British Crown and Empire, and greatly devoted to Cecil John Rhodes, with whom they saw themselves as involved.
on a joint colonial sub-imperial project, which often clashed with the desires of the British government and its officials in South Africa. Mottie Tamarkin, who has done the best work on these loyal Afrikaners, argues that even after their affection for Rhodes was shattered by the Jameson Raid, many remained loyal to the British connection. Only some became, like those in the interior, Anglophobic and anti-British. Tamarkin quotes the chairman of the Afrikaner Bond in a speech in 1898 saying, ‘I thank the Lord that I am a British subject’; under no one else, he said, would the Afrikaners have enjoyed such freedom.17 Smuts, author of the most fiercely anti-British tract, entitled A Century of Wrong, published on the eve of the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War (1899), became, not two decades later, as we have seen, a member of the Imperial War Cabinet, despite the horrific new suffering the Afrikaners had experienced during the war at the hands of the British.

Many Afrikaners fought on the British side in the Second World War — 50 per cent of all those in the army at that time were Afrikaners — though whether they joined up because of an attachment to the monarchy, as the title of Albert Grundlingh’s article on this topic with its reference to ‘the King’s Afrikaners’, suggests, is open to doubt.18 After the Second World War, with the rise of a more overt Afrikaner nationalism, identification with Britain among Cape Afrikaners faded away, though an intense interest in the Royal family survived even among those who were hostile to Britain.

It is at first sight surprising that indigenous people should have become pro-British, given the record of the British government and army in conquering and destroying African societies. The ‘century of wrong’ done to black Africans from the time of the British arrival at the beginning of the nineteenth century far outweighed that done by the British to the Afrikaners. Yet towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the early-twentieth century, the main discourse among educated black Africans was pro-British. At the Cape members of the small new educated elite took on board British cultures and way of life, and identified closely with the political system, in particular because of the qualified but non-racial Cape franchise, the origins of which they traced to Britain. Some who visited Britain rejected British ways on their return, but most continued to be staunchly pro-British. This could, as Andre Odendaal has shown,19 go along with a retention of adherence to traditional culture, but what is striking is the excessive loyalty to Britain the elite displayed, whether in collecting money for a memorial to Queen Victoria, who was seen as the epitome of justice and impartiality, or in the numerous petitions they addressed to the British government expressing their loyalty in obsequious terms.20

Why Britishness? Some explanations apply to all three groups, while others are specific to those not of British descent. Some of the Britishness of the English who settled in the nineteenth century Cape derived from the fact that they arrived in a colony in which the Dutch were the majority of colonists; they therefore had to assert their own identity vis-a-vis the Dutch.21 Some of their Britishness was in reaction to the imperial government,
whose policies they disliked and whom they regarded as interfering and meddling. The colonists saw themselves as the true representatives of Britain, an attitude taken to an extreme by Ian Smith and his Rhodesian Front when on 11 November 1965 they signed their Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain under a portrait of the Queen.\textsuperscript{22}

Vivian Bickford-Smith argues that Britishness became more aggressive in Cape Town in the late-nineteenth century because English dominance in the city was beginning to be challenged by the rising Afrikaner elite, and by new entrants to the city, black Africans from the east.\textsuperscript{23} Britishness was most intense in Natal because in the nineteenth century, though the English formed three quarters of the whites there, whites formed only 10 per cent of the total population; aware of the precariousness of their position, they looked to Britain to support them in such a situation.\textsuperscript{24} In the new Union of South Africa from 1910, the English in Natal found themselves dominated politically by the Afrikaners, and they asserted their Britishness for that reason: as a minority among whites in a Union dominated by Afrikaners, they clung to notions of British cultural superiority and of being connected to the power, might and prestige of Britain. As they were not a majority among whites in South Africa — that the English should be such a majority in South Africa had been Milner’s goal in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War — they could see themselves as part of a broader community, through their links to the many British people in Britain itself and elsewhere in the Empire. I suggest, therefore, that where the English were most vulnerable their Britishness was most intense and overt; they sought security from the threats of black or Afrikaner domination in the imperial connection.

Afrikaners became anglicised at the Cape in part because they were forced to live in a British-run system. They wanted to fit in, and that meant identification with the Empire. Advancement depended on becoming anglicised; British culture and practices ‘determined what was right and acceptable in the political life of the Cape Colony’.\textsuperscript{25} And this helps explain too why blacks identified with Britain, despite all that Britain had done to them in the nineteenth century. Britain was dominant in the region and the world, and was perceived to be the custodian of civilised values. When Britain did not live up to what it seemed to promise, there was a deep sense of betrayal. Pro-Britishness could also be a form of anti-colonialism: blacks appealed to Britain against the white colonists who were increasingly taking power into their hands. Britishness, then, seemed to offer potential rewards, even though the early twentieth century idea of a white South Africanism linked to the Crown and Empire had no place for blacks.

* * * * *

Britishness took so many and different forms in South Africa that it is impossible here to illustrate the full range of the spectrum involved. Some Afrikaners and blacks chose to take over aspects of British culture, and associated Britain with values they ascribed to. Race and Britishness were probably more closely connected in South Africa than in other British colonies. If those who identified with Britain had combined across the colour line, who knows how South Africa’s history might
have developed? Racial prejudice was too strong to permit that. There can be little doubt that the antipathy of some British people to the racial policies of Afrikaners intensified their Britishness.²⁶ Though most British were happy to accept racial segregation, and then apartheid, they saw such racial policies as being of Afrikaner origin, and could continue to uphold British values as superior. As apartheid intensified under an overtly anti-British government, this link between opposition to racial policy and Britishness might have been expected to grow closer, but by the 1950s Britain and the Commonwealth no longer seemed to hold much resonance, even for recent immigrants from Britain.

A full study will ask how Britishness compares to and interrelates with the growing Americanisation of South Africa in the twentieth century, so well sketched by James Campbell, who argues that some people came to identify with the United States in reaction to an identification with Britain.²⁷ United States culture became increasingly important, which helped undermine Britishness. Among the many questions to be asked in further research is this: to what extent did whites come to identify with ‘the West’ rather than with Britain, especially in the Cold War years?

Let me end with Nelson Mandela and the ‘new South Africa’. In his wonderful autobiography Long Walk to Freedom Mandela confesses to being ‘something of an Anglophile’:

When I thought of Western democracy and freedom, I thought of the British parliamentary system. In so many ways, the very model of the gentleman for me was an Englishman … While I abhorred the notion of British imperialism, I never rejected the trappings of British style and manners.²⁸

That Mandela and others in the leadership of the African National Congress had such respect for British parliamentary institutions and values was not unimportant in shaping the transition to a liberal democratic order in South Africa in the early 1990s.

ENDNOTES

1 The term those not from England used for themselves was English rather than British because the language they spoke was English. On the Irish, see esp. McCracken, Donal (ed), 1992, The Irish in Southern Africa, 1795-1910, Ireland and Southern Africa Project, Durban; on Scottish settlers, some of whom identified with Afrikaners, see the forthcoming book by John M. Mackenzie.


7 Bickford-Smith, V., 1995, Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town (Cambridge). See also Bickford-Smith, V., 2003, ‘Revisiting Anglicisation in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony’, Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, vol. 31, no. 2. While originally ‘Anglicisation’ was seen as the process of making people British, and related to the imposition of British ways by the Cape Governor Lord Charles Somerset in the early-nineteenth century and by the High Commissioner Alfred Milner at the beginning of the twentieth century, the meaning has been broadened to include what was


15 Ibid, p. 69.

16 Walker, E., 1928, *Lord de Villiers and his Times*, London. Other Afrikaner families who became anglicised included the Cloetes and the Van der Byls.


22 Smith dismissed the significance of this when asked about it by David Dimbleby of the BBC: ‘Smith, Mugabe and the Union Jack’, broadcast on BBC2 on 25 June 2000.


24 Thompson, P., 2001, p. 223.

25 Ross, R., 1999, p. 43.

26 This is seen in, say, the eminent historian William Macmillan: Macmillan, W.M., 1995, *My South African Years*, Cape Town.


In November 1822, London’s New Times newspaper related the trial of a ‘wretched’, ‘shameless’ and ‘abandoned’ woman who appeared before the court of the King’s Bench. Susannah Wright was facing charges of blasphemy for the sale of two pamphlets from the notorious Fleet Street bookshop of imprisoned radicals Jane and Richard Carlile. A young Nottingham lace-worker, Susannah answered the Carlile’s calls for volunteers to keep the bookshop open and, assured of the support of her ‘atheistical friends’, vowed to ‘attend to the business at all risk’. Like the Carliles before her, and the legion of volunteers who followed, Susannah was soon prosecuted; in her case, for the sale of two tracts penned by Richard Carlile from his Dorchester prison cell. During her first trial in July 1822 she conducted her own defence, which lasted a formidable four hours. Retiring from the court to attend her to her baby, Wright returned to conclude her case, advising the Jury to ‘be firm and do your duty’ and insisting that she both scorned ‘mercy and demand[ed] justice’. The jury obliged, swiftly returning a guilty verdict. It would be four months before Wright again returned to court for sentencing. This time, her notoriety attracted more of the public gaze in both crowd numbers and press interest. When offered the opportunity to address the court in ‘plea of mitigation of punishment’ Wright instead challenged the validity of her guilty verdict, arguing that Christianity had no place in the law. The Chief Justice issued repeated warnings to her to desist from profaning the law and the church in his court. To the amusement of the crowded courtroom she retorted, ‘You, Sir, are paid to hear me’. Infuriated by her obstinacy the Judge sentenced Wright (and by default her infant) to be confined for 10 weeks in the loathed Newgate prison to deliberate on her plea.

Susannah Wright, the Carliles, and the other radicals who appear fleetingly in this essay, constitute a fragment of those prosecuted throughout the 1820s for political and religious heterodoxy. These prosecutions occurred at precisely the time when, Linda Colley contends, Britain began to unify as a nation. Colley’s seminal ac-
count of the forging of a British identity argues that unity was an expression of difference from an alien ‘other’; from France, from Catholicism and later from races encountered in the Empire. While Colley’s primary focus is on the forging of a national sense of identity from a collision with an ‘other’ located outside Britain’s immediate borders, she does concede both that Britishness was never all embracing and that internal schisms also had a role to play in the formation of a national identity in the period after Waterloo.

‘With little left to fear from without, and lacking now such an obviously hostile other across the Channel’, Colley argues:

it was scarcely surprising that different groups of Britons should have looked for new ways to establish who they were and what, if anything, made them special and bound them together. Nor was it surprising that this process of adaptation proved divisive and painfully disruptive … What was involved … was nothing less than a redefinition of the nation.  

Where criticism has been directed at Colley’s exceptionally well-received work, it has been for her neglect of the Irish question, her reliance on an uncontested notion of Protestantism, and for underplaying the internal struggle for an inclusive political nation. Colley sidesteps the ‘othering’ which continued at the veritable centre of the British world and overlooks the way in which internal contests contributed to the formation of a sense of Britishness.

The scope of this article allows only for a brief exploration of the type of ‘othering’ which occurred within the metro-pole far from the collision with an ‘alien other’. My focus is on the threat posed to Colley’s internal cohesion by the first vigorous wave of popular political dissent in the early decades of the nineteenth century and how the British elite responded to marginal political and freethinking groups. By prosecuting radicals under repressive new legislation, the authorities inscribed political heterodoxy with criminality — the radical was located both physically and morally with the much maligned and feared criminal ‘other’. Both the response by the authorities and the resistance of radicals reveals the faultlines in the forging of the nation where white ‘home grown’ British subjects were being ‘othered’ on the basis of gender, of politics and of class. It reveals an internal struggle over what it meant to be British.

Ostensibly, Susannah Wright represented ‘the other’ in numerous respects. She was provincial in the metropolitan epicentre of the British world; she was a radical, beyond the pale of respectable politics; and she was a woman at a time when the public face of politics was dominated by men. To this the State sought to add a further label of otherness: she was a criminal. The attempts by radicals to resist the imposition of a criminal identity were couched in the language of both historic and natural rights. They saw the privileges of the freeborn English as the heritage of all. Here was the vision of an inclusive Britishness that is worth recording.  

Despite the often deep ideological and organisational divisions in the nascent popular radical movement, radicals of all persuasions sought to reform the old order based on Church and King. Colley con-
tends that most retained ‘a gut belief in the fundamental worth of the institution even as they called for its thoroughgoing reform’; their dissent was ‘expressed as much if not more in support for the nation state, as it was in opposition to the men who governed it’. Colley’s contention that radicals simply wanted ‘in’ to the existing political system has a strong foundation. But it perhaps undervalues the fact that in getting ‘in’ radicals were envisioning a new social and political order — whether (or not) it was from within existing political frameworks. The call for universal manhood suffrage was perhaps the most public and overt threat posed by radicals to Britain’s ruling elite, but radicalism also menaced much more. Elijah Riding, an energetic Lancashire radical, enthused that ‘Reform, revolution, improvement, innovation and regeneration are the talismatic words of the present time’. Radicalism offered the disenchanted, the uneducated, the hungry, the poor and the powerless access to the privileges of ‘Britishness’.

Radical groups employed the discourse of ‘rights’ to both define these privileges and to argue an end to the status as the ‘other’ for a large majority of the populace. They championed the natural, intrinsic rights of man through the social and political frameworks set down by Thomas Paine. The dissemination of knowledge and instruction based on rational thought and reason was vital to achieve a more inclusive political nation. Although Paine rejected the British Constitution as ‘Political Popery’ for favouring the elite ‘parasites’ and for disentitling ‘at least ninety-nine parts of the nation out of a hundred’, many radical groups saw no incongruity in also appealing to the historic rights of Britons which they maintained had been guaranteed by the ancient Constitution but from which they had been dispossessed by the ‘Banditti’ — the ‘robbers’ of the ‘so-called higher classes’. The spread of radicalism caused genuine fear among the British authorities. The ‘Nobility, Gentry, Clergy and Freeholders of the County of Durham’ might have spoken for many in the British elite when they lamented that ‘we cannot view without apprehension, the rapid strides which sedition and blasphemy are everywhere making’. They invoked their own claim as constitutional defenders when they argued that ‘publications of the most dangerous tendency are circulated in all parts of the empire, urging the people to disregard their duty to their God, to throw off their allegiance to the King, and to trample under foot our glorious constitution’. Their concerns were well founded. Between 1819 and 1821 the British government witnessed overt public discontent on an unprecedented scale and it responded with a raft of repressive legislation which criminalised all forms of heterodox political and religious expression. The Six Acts were passed in 1819 following the mass demonstration at Peterloo, aiming to cripple the burgeoning radical movement and all its outlets by placing severe restrictions on the numbers allowed at political meetings (only 50); by increasing newspaper duties to push even the cheaper radical publications outside the reach of the vast majority of people; and through the introduction of new banishment laws which meant that a radical charged with a repeat offence for blasphemy or sedition could now face transportation. They enshrined the centrality of the Church within British society by linking seditious and blasphem-
ous libels as equally heinous and punishable by law. Moreover, the suspension of habeas corpus two years earlier allowed for the most ruthless form of containment; with the empowerment of local magistrates to prosecute for sedition, treason and blasphemy, the country’s gaols swelled with political prisoners.

Through the criminalising of political and religious heterodoxy and the confinement of radicals in prison, the authorities attempted to add another layer of social ‘otherness’ to those already considered outside the political nation. Both social commentators and the popular literature of the period depicted criminals as members of an underclass – operating outside the social and moral codes of British society. By transgressing the laws which reflected the accepted mores of society, criminals could be classified as non-subjects, forfeiting the rights and privileges of ‘Britishness’. Radicals generally shared the prevailing attitude towards the criminal other. Veteran radical Francis Place excluded ‘that class of wretched beings who seldom or never labour, but live or linger on in existence by the habitual practice of vice, and the perpetuation of crime’ from his vision of a new ‘inclusive’ political nation. Similarly, Richard Carlile had no objection to the law being upheld for ‘real’ crime against person or property and for transgressors of those laws to be treated with force. He reflected in his Journal in 1830 that ‘laws can never be too severe, nor too severely administered, where they deal with nothing but real crimes’.

Place was keen to distance the sober, industrious working class from the taint of the criminal poor. Historians of crime in this period differ on the extent to which the general attitude to criminals and to crime resulted from class fear. Despite public exposure of upper class crime, criminality was generally associated with the poorer classes. As Clive Emsley argues, ‘since the great majority of offenders came from one social class it was logical to locate the causes of crime within what were generally perceived as vices of this class.’ Further, he contends that crime was seen as just one of the ways that the moral deficiency and profligacy of sections of the poorer classes manifested itself.

Female criminality contained yet another layer of ‘otherness’. Lucia Zedner, who has to date produced the most comprehensive survey of women and crime in Victorian England, suggests that since women were generally considered more pure and moral by nature than men, the women who fell from this elevated pedestal through criminality were considered the very ‘negation of femininity’, and, as such, could be dehumanised and demonised as ‘monsters’. Female criminality was firmly conflated with prostitution and when the ultra-conservative New Times labelled Wright a ‘wretched and shameless woman’ and an ‘abandoned creature’ they immured her (and her blasphemy) with the most liminal of the criminal underworld — the women considered as whores and outcasts and among the most irreclaimable of the prison population. Similarly, Richard Carlile’s sister, Mary-Ann Carlile (who also endured a prison sentence in the Dorchester family cell for her work in the bookshop), was subjected to public depreciation from the centre of political power when Evangelical Christian and Tory MP, William Wilberforce, referred to her during a parliamentary debate as ‘wretched’ and ‘fallen’. Such high profile castiga-
tion acted to contain women’s public political involvement at a time when moral virtue was beginning to define the feminine ideal.

The approach to crime and criminality after the turn of the nineteenth century, suggests Victor Bailey, was to protect the ‘honest and independent poor’ from the ‘moral infection’ of marginal groups such as vagrants, prostitutes and thieves. To Bailey’s list we might add radicals and freethinkers. Reports such as those from John Stoddart’s New Times reflect the concern for the protection of younger minds from the corrupting influence of radicalism. They portrayed Wright as the harbinger of moral turpitude and the ‘monsters in female form’ who openly supported her as ignorant and repugnant vassals: ‘her horrid example has deprived the minds of others, who are perhaps already mothers of families, or to whom the temporal and eternal happiness of a future offspring may be committed’. By 1821, almost half the English population was under 20 years of age and the young, particularly from the poorer classes, were increasingly perceived as posing a new problem to the moral and social order. So when radicals began to talk publicly in pamphlets and in trials denying the divinity of Jesus and speaking of Christ as an imposter and a murderer, they were identified as a threat to the very moral fibre of the under-aged country. In the trial of William Tunbridge, another of the Carlile shop volunteers, the Lord Chief Justice forewarned that:

If you unsettle the opinions of the young and unwaried … if you take from their minds the sentiments which religions had inspired you might be the author of all their future crimes… If [this publication] has the effect of unsettling the minds of the young — of removing from their minds that belief which the Christian Religion inculcates — that there is another world, and that all must answer for their actions … they do not advance morality or the good of society, but they strike at the best roots of society.

London’s more mainstream and better known Times newspaper also conceded that it ‘would be a most extraordinary state of society in which the privilege of defaming that religion on which all its institutions were built should be conceded’. Trial reports suggest that the Judges saw it both as their legal and moral duty to prosecute radicals as not simply a matter of law, but of upholding the moral character and well-being of the nation by protecting the sanctity of its very basis, that of the Church.

By the early-nineteenth century Judges could choose from two types of prisons in which to confine and punish those threatening the prevailing British way of life. By the 1820s the concepts of crime and punishment had undergone vigorous debate and change and were reflected in new prison architecture and new attitudes towards criminals. Prisons built after the mid 1790s realised the reform vision of separate and solitary confinement, mandatory religious instruction, hard labour, and sometimes brutal hygiene measures, to effect moral reform and spiritual redemption. These new prisons, such as Coldbath Fields and Dorchester, operated alongside the (sometimes) ancient, unreformed and hitherto unregulated prisons such as Newgate.
the epithet the ‘mansion of misery’ by radicals in the 1790s, by 1820 the architectural plans of Newgate prison still allowed for the separate confinement of political prisoners in the State side of the prison, revealing a spacial hierarchy of criminal ‘otherness’.\textsuperscript{31} Radicals in this period entered prisons under conditions quite unlike their 1790s counterparts. The newly regulated prison system dispensed with the old prison economies which allowed wealthier or well supported prisoners to purchase comforts and separate accommodation to cushion the harsher effects of prison life.

During the 1820s radicals were dispersed among both old and new prisons. Radical literature of this period is rich in episodes in which political prisoners not only defied the identity of the criminal other — but also contested the authority, purpose and legitimacy of the prison and the authorities, regardless of the type of prison a Judge chose. Radicals at several different prisons reported being banned from the otherwise mandatory chapel services for proving so fractious and irreverent. Indeed, they regularly taunted the prison chaplains to engage in debates over the validity of the Christian religion. Nor did they acquiesce quietly in their confinement; many petitions were organised from prison complaining of their treatment, and many fierce letters were penned to those they held responsible for their incarceration.

Foremost in their defiance of the ‘othering’ imposed by their criminal status was the demand for the right to be separated from the ‘common’ criminal, both in terms of physical location and the conditions under which they were held. The radical Whig MP Henry Grey Bennet noted in his 1818 report into conditions at Newgate prison that little attempt had been made to classify prisoners so that the ‘political libeller was confined with the perjured, fraudulent and persons convicted for attempts to commit abominable crimes’.\textsuperscript{32} William Linton, writing the biography of radical stalwart James Watson, protested with indignance that during his second term in Clerkenwell prison Watson had been forced to petition parliament after being ‘subjected to the companionship of the vilest and most brutal criminals, a compelled listener to the most horrid swearing and the grossest licentiousness, refused even occasional withdrawal to the retirement of a solitary cell.’\textsuperscript{33} Of all the complaints reported by imprisoned radicals in the entire period they found their treatment under the same rules and conditions as felons the most galling. Thomas Riley Perry’s 1825 petition from Newgate objected that ‘the regulations of the prison place your Petitioner under the treatment of a convicted felon; all which annoyances, and degrading regulations amount to a total exclusion of all your Petitioners friends’.\textsuperscript{34} They particularly sought ‘the removal of those grievances which place the moral Philosopher, on the same footing with convicted felons.’\textsuperscript{35}

Fortuitously for the radicals, the spread of popular radicalism in the early decades of the nineteenth century gave them a crucial advantage in effecting their physical separation from other classes of prisoners. The authorities were now even more alert to the dangers of exposing the ‘morally-wanting’ to the apostasy of radical views and publications. Mary-Ann Carlile complained that the Carliles’ access to the prison yards for fresh air and exercise was severely restricted because of the
fears of the magistrates that they would ‘corrupt their Christian felons with a glimpse of Reason and Truth’.

Yet in spite of the forced separation between radicals and the ‘common criminals’, radicals often scoffed at the fears of the prison authorities, believing that most prisoners were incapable of understanding the most basic tenets of Richard Carlile’s radical texts; ‘the men who are generally the inmates of such places will not take the trouble to examine either Christianity or atheism’.

Prominent radical prisoners did make some use of their access to public forums to expose more general prison abuses. Henry Hunt, confined in Ilchester Gaol in 1820, claimed to have assisted fellow inmates with letter writing and petitioning before composing his pamphlet *A Peep into Prison* to document the widespread abuses within the gaol. He also used the example of his own intervention in general prison affairs at his ‘own personal risk, and by my own exertions’ to aid the wider prison community to accuse Richard Carlile of self-interest in focusing only on his own prison hardships during a fierce public brawl between the rival radical spokesmen conducted from their prison cells. Carlile’s retort was to claim that he had been subjected to harsher conditions than Hunt; he had been forced to endure the tyranny of ‘solitary’ confinement because of the threat posed by his exposure to the other prisoners. Hunt’s pamphlet and the magistrates inquiry which followed did lead to changes in the management and conditions at the prison (albeit temporarily) both for Hunt and the other prisoners.

Where radicals did intervene to expose the abuses of the prison regimes, they generally appear to have done so to highlight their own grievances. The general tone of radical prison writing suggests a disdain for other prisoners. Richard Hassell, another of the Carlile shopmen, coolly remarked in 1826, ‘I never felt the least interest in the fate of any one who was executed [in Newgate]’.

Yet the fears of prison authorities and magistrates for the potential for contagion from political prisoners to the wider prison community were not entirely unfounded. The case of Edward Cockerill, a young forger awaiting execution in Newgate, caused radicals to momentarily rethink their view of the general prison population. In an effort to alleviate overcrowding in the gaol, the Keeper moved Cockerill to the State side of the prison for the six weeks prior to his execution. There he shared a ward with imprisoned Carlile shopmen William Campion, John Clarke and Richard Hassell. The radicals reported that Cockerill ‘had the free use of our library, and the benefit of some philosophical and blasphemous conversations’ and, despite being a ‘stranger to infidelism’, he read with ‘avidity’ during the six weeks. By the time of his execution, they claimed, he had ‘imbibed our principles’.

To the disgust and despair of the prison chaplain, the Keeper, and the conservative press, Cockerill refused religious consolation and shunned God during the entire proceedings at the gallows. His radical roommates instead had prepared him with the ‘consolation of philosophy’ to see his fate as the ‘inevitable result of life’ as ‘merely the termination of sensation, a perfection of that state of unconsciousness which he nightly experiences in an inferior degree’. The conservative press reported his long and painful death...
on the gallows as a consequence of his impiety, juxtaposing it against the instant death of a fellow condemned prisoner who had allowed the presence of God during his final days. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the radicals instead related a different version of events, where the two men suffered equally at the gallows.

Such a public conversion to the infidel cause from one facing imminent death was abhorrent to the Christian community in early-nineteenth century Britain. It was also a direct affront to the central tenet of prison reform, which now aimed to redeem the fallen criminal through mandatory religious instruction. Campion reported that the incident ‘occasioned the consultation of a coterie of Alderman’ who determined that ‘no more prisoners were to be mixed with us, and that all communication between us and any other prisoners should, as far as possible, be prevented’. The risk posed by the seepage of such heretical views through the wider prison population created a spacial conundrum for the prison authorities. The four rooms that housed the remaining three radical prisoners in Newgate in 1826 would have otherwise accommodated between 40 and 50 prisoners in other parts of the prison. As Campion quipped, the prison authorities had only three choices: send in more prisoners to share the space and risk their ‘souls be[ing] lost to Jehovah — or keep the yard solely for us — or send us to another prison.’ Indeed, the men claimed a significant victory, reporting triumphantly that their endeavours had resulted in a permanent change to prison rules. Special legislation was enacted to effect their removal from Newgate to the Giltspur Street Compter which decreed that ‘no prisoners convicted on charges of misdemeanour should from that time be kept in the gaol of Newgate’.

It was not only in their agitation for separate accommodation that radicals were able to defy their containment in the prison space. By continuing to disseminate their trenchant political and social messages through prison publications, the imprisoned shopmen who formed the editorial collective of Newgate Monthly Magazine in 1824 were drawing on a long tradition of literary pursuit from within prisons walls. As Kevin Gilmartin has observed, the ‘ability to work through repression, and especially imprisonment, became a litmus test for the viability of radical protest in print.’ It was; but prison publications also suggest much more. They were a manifest form of prisoner resistance and an outlet for the expression of political identity. As radical poet Elijah Ridings wrote to the editors:

> Your thoughts are not confined either in your own cranium or within the walls of your prison, but are wandering around the Island of Albion … almost persuading me that you are at large, once in each month at least, perambulating and disputing, confabulating and philosophising.

The use of ‘Newgate’ in the title of the magazine announced clearly to the wider public that the walls of the prison would not serve to silence them, nor suppress the right to a free press. For radical supporters, Carlile’s own prison publications and the shopmen’s Newgate Monthly Magazine, provided a legitimising intellectual activity for what James Epstein has termed Britain’s ‘other’ political nation. The Newgate Monthly Magazine was heralded
‘Let us have truth and liberty’

as a publication of ‘the greatest utility’, and as a ‘medium for the interchange of sentiments uncorrupted by the prejudices of the times, and untainted by servility’. 53

Perhaps the greatest irony of this period of radicalism was that the confined space of the prison allowed for a freer expression of radical principles than was possible outside the prison walls. In the tradition of radicals imprisoned at the beginning of the ‘reign of terror’ in the 1790s, Richard Carlile successfully continued his publishing business from his cell in Dorchester prison; and like his earlier counterparts his cell afforded him a measure of protection from further prosecution. As the New Times remonstrated, imprisonment did not ‘in the slightest degree check the publication of fresh blasphemies on [Carlile’s] part’. 54

Carlile’s freedom to publish his trenchant political journal, the Republican, was also noted in parliamentary debates. Sir Thomas Dyke Acland, Tory MP and confessed member of the prosecuting loyalist group, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, 55 noted indignantly yet with reluctant acceptance:

The security enjoyed by him in thus continuing to offend, arose from that very circumstance of his suffering under the laws which he had transgressed; for were he liberated and should be guilty of such publication, a sentence of banishment from the country might follow. So long as he is unable to pay the fines imposed upon him so long would he remain in prison, and consequently safe from that extreme sentence to which he [Acland] had alluded. 56

The leniency with which the authorities approached the prison publications (choosing instead to prosecute those responsible for selling the literature) suggests that attempts to silence radicals in prison might have been regarded as contrary to a fundamental British right. During Susannah Wright’s trial for the sale of tract penned by Carlile from his prison cell, she maintained that it would be ‘scandalous indeed to shut the mouth of a man in prison’. 57 Radical complaints of being denied the use of pens, books and paper drew much public sympathy. Even conservative commentators, such as those from the Courier newspaper, observed that such deprivations acted to magnify their punishment in comparison to felons who were unaccustomed to such necessities.

For rules, wise and humane in relation to an ignorant, depraved felon, become unjust and cruel to a man of education, accustomed to the comforts and ‘endearing charities’ of polished life. 58

Through their publications radicals argued forcefully against attempts to strip them of their rights. They vehemently denied the criminality of their actions, maintaining their right to publish and promote what they considered amounted to mere opinions. Crucially, not only were radicals being deprived their liberty as freeborn Britons, but also their natural rights of humanity, of inquiry, of reason and of truth.

In this way, radicals used the treatment meted out by the authorities to question which side of the political divide had the ‘truer’, more authentic vision for Britain. Because they spoke for the whole nation (albeit with the exception of the
criminal other) radicals both believed and promoted the fact that theirs was a purer patriotism, a more legitimate claim to ‘Britishness’. It was the State that was behaving like the oppressive regimes on the continent in ‘un-British’ ways. As the editor of the \textit{Black Dwarf} scolded in the wake of Susannah Wright’s trial (in characteristically gendered terms):

\begin{quote}
No man has any right to ask of another to conform to opinions which he does not entertain, nor to suppress those which he does. To do this is to establish the basis on which all bastilles, and all inquisitions have been erected.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

This is Colley’s Britishness with a twist.

Through the prison publications, the radical community found a collective voice with which to object to the un-British nature of the treatment of radicals in prison. Supporters rallied across the country to protest the actions of the government and to raise subscription funds for imprisoned radicals and their families. Even though radicals maintained that special juries were employed to secure convictions against them, trial by jury was still seen by radicals as the ‘bulwark of our liberties’.\textsuperscript{60} As W.A. Johnson’s impassioned letter to the radical weekly the \textit{Black Dwarf} in 1822 asserted:

\begin{quote}
let us have \textit{truth} and \textit{liberty} … nothing short of the voice of the people being fully, fairly, and justly heard … let me recommend a steady and hearty perseverance to obtain that object which alone can save this fine, noble, abused and cheated country.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

Clearly radicals saw that their sense of Britishness involved defending both the natural right of ‘truth’ and the historic right of ‘liberty’.

Susannah Wright’s trial defence also shows that the two rights discourses were not incompatible for radical ends, even for a staunch disciple of Thomas Paine. She provided the historical example of the futility of such prosecutions against reason and truth; ‘As the blood of the Christian martyrs became the seed of the Christian Church, so shall our sufferings become the seed of free discussion’. James Epstein argues that in the radical trial of Joseph Gerrald in 1794, Gerrald — a Godwinit and believer in natural rights — was forced by the court room environment to couch his defence in terms of ‘our ancient constitution’.\textsuperscript{62} Wright’s defence invoked the language of historic rights, but without any overt appeal to the constitution. Rather her appeal to the freedom of expression and opinion rang with overtones of the rights of the freeborn English. That Carlile could not respond to his detractors in the clergy ‘without dooming some member of his family to a dungeon’ left Wright to question, ‘Is this a land of liberty?’\textsuperscript{63} She appealed to the Jury to ‘discountenance’ the persecutions led by the ‘bigoted, tyrannical and the dishonest’ to ‘stay the disgrace which it leaves on our Courts of Law and on the country at large’. Yet the defence was performed in the language of natural rights as well: ‘Is it become a blasphemy and profaneness to wish for universal and constant peace among the human race, or to point out the means of attaining it? Is it blasphemy … to recommend the best of all charities, a mutual toleration of opinions?’ The nature of the 1820s prosecutions for blasphemy necessit-
ated an engagement with the discourses of natural rights; radicals argued that their vision of Britain allowed for the right to use reason, logic and inquiry to base one’s own opinions on truth alongside the rights enshrined by notion of the freeborn English.

The episodes discussed here suggest that the prison experiences of the early-nineteenth century radical have much to reveal about the development of a sense of Britishness and the rights and privileges it secured for ‘home grown’ British subjects. The prison language of radicalism in this period was the language of liberty, of reason, of truth and of humanity. Despite some fierce opposition to the use of constitutionalism by some quarters of the radical movement, clearly most did not consider that invoking the natural rights of man and those enshrined by the ‘ancient constitution’ as incompatible. The ‘moral torture’ of being immured with the criminal other gained the radical movement significant public attention and sympathy for the plight and status of political prisoners, allowing radicals to question the authorities’ vision of Britishness. As E. P. Thompson argued in his epochal *Making of the English Working Class*, it was the radical movement — the artisans and workers — who between the 1790s and 1836 made the notion of British rights — ‘of the rights of the press, of speech, of meeting and of personal liberty’ — their own.64

That the authorities recognised the extent of this threat posed by Britain’s ‘other’ political nation is evident in the harsh repression of radical activity throughout these decades. By appealing to the ‘moral torture’ of co-habiting with criminals, radicals could amplify the injustice in trampling on their rights by treating them as felons. Despite the very real hardships suffered by radicals during this period, prison practices reveal concessions that were unavailable to other classifications of prisoners. Radicals believed that they had to fight hard to secure these concessions as part of their rights as freeborn Britons, but the authorities were just as keen to isolate them from the general prison population; the threat of contagion of their ideas to the wider prison population was simply too great. Both the physical separation from the general prison population, and the public sympathy aroused by the encroachment on their rights — both natural and historical — allowed radicals to resist the attempts by the authorities to stigmatize them as the criminal ‘other’. As for Susannah Wright, it is clear that prison inspired neither reform nor redemption. Following almost two years of imprisonment she returned to Nottingham to open a radical bookshop — continuing to champion the natural rights of all Britons and to resist all the layers of ‘otherness’ ascribed to her.

ENDNOTES

1 *New Times*, 22 November 1822.


3 *The Times*, 9 July 1822.

4 *The Times*, 22 November 1822.
8 This is a subject and a period that has been intimately examined by scholars since E.P Thompson (and why Colley contends that she refocused her lens away from the centre).
9 While this process had its origins in the 1790s 'reign of terror', for the purposes of this paper I will focus on the flux of prosecutions in the 1820s. For a more detailed account of the prison experiences of radicals see my forthcoming PhD thesis, Radical Spaces: architecture, identity and popular politics 1800-1840, which explores the prison experience of radicals in Coldbath Fields Prison and Newgate Gaol in the early decades of the nineteenth century.
11 Newgate Monthly Magazine, 1 April 1826.
12 The 'instruction' of the 'useful classes' became a major focus of radical journals, tracts and pamphlets which began to flourish in these years; and in the lectures and 'entertainments' of other radical spaces such as taverns, meeting halls and theatres.
13 Quoted in Thompson, E.P., 1968, The Making of the English Working Class, p. 101. See chapters 'The Free-Born Englishman' and 'Planting the Liberty Tree' for discussion of the various ideological and historical influences on the radical movement. Recent scholarship has questioned the 'traditional dichotomy between constitutionalist and Paineite idioms as based respectively on historical or natural rights' and has found powerful continuities in rights discourses from 1790 through to the end of the nineteenth century. See, for example, the introduction and essays in Vernon, James [ed], 1996, Re-reading the constitution Cambridge University Press; and Harling, Philip, 1996, 'Leigh Hunt's Examiner and the Language of Patriotism', English Historical Review, vol. 111, no. 444, pp.1159-81.
14 There are many examples of this rhetoric — see, for instance, 'A letter from a poor man' in Poor Man's Guardian, 30 July 1831, p.27, and Richard Carlile quoted in Aldred, Guy, 1923, Richard Carlile, agitator; his life and times, Pioneer Press, p. 124.
15 The Times, 23 October 1819.
16 The Times, 23 October 1819.
17 Bailey, Victor 1993, 'The Fabrication of Deviance', in Rule J and Malcolmson R (eds), Protest and Surviv-
‘Let us have truth and liberty’

34 Republican, 3 June 1825.
35 Ibid.
36 Republican, 21 June 1822.
37 Letter from Humphrey Boyle in Newgate reproduced in the *Republican*, 11 October 1822. Some radicals promised Keepers that they would not disseminate radical principles in the prison in return for other concessions. See letter from Susannah Wright to Jane Carlile, Republican, 13 December 1822.
39 See the Republican, 1 March 1822.
40 Newgate Monthly Magazine, 1 March 1826.
41 Within Newgate, the new system of classifying prisoners according to the nature of their crime meant prisoners who were convicted of sedition or libel could still be housed in the separate accommodation on the State side, which was now reserved for ‘misdemeanours’.
42 Newgate Monthly Magazine, 1 March 1826.
43 Report from an unattributed morning paper reproduced in the *Republican* 24 February 1826. Carlile delighted in the news, sharing with his readers both the radical version of events, and reproducing copies of the reports from the morning papers.
44 Newgate Monthly Magazine, 1 March 1826.
45 The Times, 22 February 1826.
46 Newgate Monthly Magazine, 1 July 1826.
47 Ibid.
48 Newgate Monthly Magazine, 1 August 1826.
51 Newgate Monthly Magazine, 1 April 1826.
53 Republican, 15 April 1825.
54 Reproduced in the Republican 14 January 1825.
55 The Society for the Suppression of Vice was a well-funded private organisation that initiated many of the prosecutions against Carlile and his shop men and women.
56 House of Commons debates reprinted in New Times, 27 March 1823.
58 See Courier, 7 March 1811. Also quoted in *The Abuse of Prisons; An Interesting and Impartial Account of The House of Correction in Cold-Bath-Fields London*, 1811. See also Manchester Guardian, 26 June 1824 for an editorial discussion on why the treatment political offenders should differ from other criminals.
59 Black Dwarf, 20 November 1822.
60 The Times, 21 May 1810.
61 Black Dwarf, 30 October 1822.
62 Epstein, James, 2003 ‘‘Our Real Constitution’: Trial Defense and Radical Memory in the Age of Revolution’ *In Practice*, pp. 59-82.
63 The Trial of Mrs Wright, pp. 13, 22.
AN AFTERTHOUGHT

WHY WE SHOULD TELL STORIES OF THE BRITISH WORLD

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According to the Royal Mail, Britons post approximately 10 million Christmas cards to Australia every year.1 This extraordinary volume of seasonal felicitations is a reminder that at its core the British world is a corporeal system. It is easy to forget the magnitude of the British Diaspora over the past 400 years. Between 1600 and 1800 more than one million people emigrated from England, Scotland and Wales, mainly across the Atlantic to North America.2 In the 60 years between 1853 and 1913 just under 13 million British citizens left the United Kingdom as migrants headed for extra-European ports; a further 7.3 million migrated in the period 1951 to 1998.3 Britons at home and abroad have long understood that the British world was a thing of flesh and blood. ‘Thousands of us, home-staying people in England’, wrote Richard Acton in 1881, ‘have been called by family duties or friendships, perhaps more than once in our lives, to come down to Gravesend, to bid farewell to those whom we love.’ ‘There are so many people’, he continued, ‘who have a son or a brother in our colonies.’4 The ties of kinship have persisted despite the fact that Britain has long since turned its gaze to Europe and, in turn, the ‘better Britains’ of the southern seas look increasingly to Asia and the Pacific. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, for example, nearly 1.2 million Australians reported to the census collectors that they had been born in the United Kingdom; many more could point to one of their parents or grandparents who had been born in ‘old Blighty’.5

Over the past two decades the related ideas of ‘Britishness’ and ‘the British world’ have undoubtedly breathed new life into the study of Anglophone societies. Thankfully now fewer historians refer to Britain when they mean England, or worse, write of England when they mean Britain.6 Moreover, those who study ‘other’ Britons — people that were on or outside the political and cultural margins due to their gender, race, income or religion, that lived far from the imperial capital in the provinces or in the colonies of settlement — have, in particular, benefited from (and contributed to) what is often called the ‘new British history’. There is a greater understanding of the way in
which ideas and individuals moved around the British world, not simply from centre to periphery.

The study of ‘other’ Britons raises definitional issues. According to the OED the earliest use of the word ‘Britishness’ equated it with Britishness. ‘Primitive Britishness’, one observer noted in 1682, ‘was never acquainted with the habiliment of a Shirt.’ Since then there have been many attempts to define it: from Walter Murdoch’s suggestion that above all other associations (race, language, tradition, custom and ideas) the link between those who lived in the empire on which the sun never set was that they were ‘subjects of the same sovereign’, to T.S. Eliot’s glib index of British culture: ‘Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar’; from Linda Colley’s emphasis on Protestantism and enmity to France, to Gordon Brown’s assertion that the ‘golden thread’ that runs through British history is ‘a passion for liberty anchored in a sense of duty and an intrinsic commitment to tolerance and fair play’.

By examining its many variations the essays in this volume — a selection of those presented at the symposium in 2004 — all contribute to the expanding definition of Britishness as a political, social, cultural and racial category. The presentations were all concerned with people whose claim to Britishness was marginal and contested. What did it mean to be ‘British’ in Cape Town, Aberdeen, Calgary or Dunedin? What did it mean to be ‘British’ if you were poor, an Irish Catholic, a radical reformer, a Jew or a woman? The ensuing discussion which is, in turn, reflected in the essays in this volume, made it clear that further study will question, challenge and perhaps even destabilise the notion of Britishness. Indeed there is a danger that the concept will fracture under the weight of additional research. Unfortunately, this would encourage many to retreat behind the more familiar and secure palisades of national, regional and local history. It is, nevertheless, worth the risk. Moreover it was apparent from the symposium, at least to this observer, that a productive way to explore the myriad varieties of Britishness without undermining the ‘new British history’ is to use biography as a lens; to tell stories of the British world. By way of illustration and conclusion here are three.

At the York Assizes of 1830 a 26-year-old linen weaver from Barnsley named William Ashton was tried for riot and sedition and sentenced to 14 years’ transportation. He spent five years of his sentence in Van Diemen’s Land where he was appointed to the relatively privileged position of ‘Convict Constable’ but was later suspended, fined and briefly imprisoned for a succession of misdemeanours. The bonds of kinship and community were not easily broken. After seven years, a petition from his friends and neighbours in Yorkshire secured his release and a subscription paid his passage home. Following his return, Ashton was unable to pursue his former trade — radicals and trade unionists often could not find employment — and he began a career as a political lecturer-cum-activist. His favourite subject was the brutality of convict life — ‘I have seen … the blood laying in pools between the stones, and the flesh flying from the
end of the lashes’, he reported — the salacious details of which added to his celebrity. Ashton’s newfound avocation ensured that he would play a prominent part in the Chartist campaign for democratic reform of the British political system that was rapidly gathering pace during the winter of 1838-9. His comments in support of the use of violence to promote the Chartist cause soon brought him to the notice of the authorities and fearing incarceration he fled to France. For reasons that are unclear, Ashton returned to England after a short time on the continent and was arrested. At his trial in March 1840 he was sentenced to two year’s imprisonment for sedition at Wakefield Prison. By this stage he was married with one child.

Upon his release in March 1842 Ashton was defiant: ‘my long confinement has not in any measure altered my former principles, or made me less anxious for, or willing to assist in, destroying the accursed system under which we live in wretchedness and degradation.’ Soon, however, he became embroiled in a bitter public quarrel with other Chartist leaders and by the end of the year he and his family had decided to emigrate to America, settling in New York. They regretted it almost immediately. ‘The people of America, so far as I have had an opportunity of judging’, he wrote, ‘are an ignorant, selfish and overbearing class of beings.’

After 10 short months in the great republic the Ashtons again crossed the Atlantic to return to Barnsley where William managed to recommence his trade as a weaver. He remained politically active during the 1840s but in the early 1850s migrated with his son and daughter to Australia, settling in McCullum’s Creek, half way between Ballarat and Maryborough on the Victorian goldfields, where they ran a store. Still the ties of kinship and community could not be broken. From his new home Ashton intermittently sent letters back to Yorkshire to be published in the local liberal newspaper, the *Barnsley Chronicle*. He wrote firstly to encourage his former townsfolk to emigrate, not to Victoria, where he argued that the squatter and the capitalist had a vice-like grip on access to the land, but to Queensland, New Zealand or (oddly, given his own experience) America. He also wrote to educate and to attempt to influence debate in Britain. One of his letters outlined the success of the ballot; another the virtues of protection. He met with very limited success. His panegyrical protection, for example, met with polite indifference. ‘Controversy on protection has here so long been held to be dead and buried,’ commented the editor, ‘that its return to existence in a newspaper column is felt like the ghostly visit of a deceased friend to a family circle who had long forgotten him.’ The point is, however, not the reception but the attempt. For Ashton, McMullan’s Creek and Barnsley were not separated by a tyranny of distance.

In February 1855 Henry Samuel Chapman was elected to the Victorian Legislative Council. At the time he had only been in the colony for a few months. Prior to that he had served a turbulent term as Colonial Secretary of Van Diemen’s Land, a position from which he was ultimately dismissed following a dispute with Governor Denison over the latter’s support for convict transportation. Turning down an offer of the governorship of the West Indies, Chapman chose instead to establish a law practice in Melbourne. Before his clash with Denison, Chapman had spent
nearly a decade as a judge in Wellington on the north island of New Zealand where he had helped to establish the colony’s Supreme Court. Although he had been born in London in 1803 it was the formative years that he spent in Quebec, where he worked as a clerk and agent representing English manufacturers during the 1820s, that shaped his future career. Whilst in Canada he began to dabble in economic theory and the fashionable ideas of the British philosophical radicals, as well as reading law, eventually being admitted to the Canadian Bar. During a visit to England in 1833 Chapman had his first taste of electoral politics involving himself in the campaign of a leading radical of the day, J.A. Roebuck. Back in Canada he commenced a radical newspaper, the Montreal Daily Advertiser, which was committed to representative and responsible government, allied causes that would resonate around the British world over the next twenty years. Chapman returned to England in 1835 as an agent of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada, seeking to cultivate support for their demands in the House of Commons.

Over the next few years Chapman became a familiar face at meetings of London’s philosophical radicals. In addition to working on the Canadian cause with Roebuck — which culminated in the failed rebellion of 1837 — he also assisted John Stuart Mill to produce the London Review and John Bowring to edit the works of the pre-eminent English philosopher and leading philosophical radical, Jeremy Bentham. By the end of the decade Chapman had established himself as a political agent and publicist in London. In 1840 he became involved in the campaign against the Corn Laws, a protective tariff that butressed the power of the landowning aristocracy, becoming a founding member of the Metropolitan Anti-Corn Law Association and one its most successful publicists in the capital. At this time he also accepted government service as secretary to a parliamentary enquiry and he published extensively on New Zealand and systematic colonization. It was this latter interest that led to his appointment to the New Zealand bench in 1843. As a member of the Victorian parliament in 1856 Chapman drafted the legislation that incorporated the secret ballot into the Electoral Act of the self-governing colony. Many years previously Chapman had penned, with Roebuck, a pamphlet on the virtues of the ballot which had been a staple of the radical program for a generation. It is ironic that Chapman’s bill gave rise to what has become known amongst psephologists and political scientists as the ‘Victorian (and later Australian) ballot’ when its author, recently arrived in the colony, was truly a citizen of the British world.

In different ways both Ashton and Chapman were outsiders, committed to fundamental reform, who seized the opportunities presented by the wider British world as a platform for personal advancement. For all that the British aristocracy looked down their collective noses at their colonial cousins, the Imperial elite too was often integrated across the empire. Take Peter Alexander Rupert Carington, Sixth Lord Carrington, as an example. Carington is the archetypal British aristocrat: from Eton to Sandhurst to the House of Lords and high office (including the post of British High Commissioner to Australia and a place in every Conservative government from 1951 to 1979). Within the relatively recent past the story is much more
interesting and diverse. In the middle of the eighteenth century Thomas Smith, a humble draper of ‘good Yeoman stock’ in Nottingham, extended his business from providing credit into banking. Thomas’ business grew in the hands of his son who moved it to London and acquired a famous customer, William Pitt. Service to the Prime Minister led to ennoblement; first an Irish barony (the King demurred at easy promotion for those ‘in trade’) that was later converted to an English peerage. In 1839 the Smiths adopted the name Carington to match their title (although confusingly spelt with one ‘r’). The editor of The Complete Peerage was in no doubt that they had done so in order to associate themselves with an ancient noble family of Smiths who had held the peerage of Carrington in the 1640s. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the family was facing financial difficulty and Peter’s grandfather, Rupert, went to New South Wales in the ‘hope of relief from creditors’ (his elder brother was already in residence as Governor of New South Wales). In Sydney Rupert Carington found financial salvation by marrying the daughter of John Horsfall, one of the leading sheep farmers in the colony. Rupert went on to be a Major in the New South Wales Mounted Rifles in 1901 and during the South African war commanded a regiment of the ‘Imperial Bushman’ before returning to England where he inherited the peerage from his elder brother in 1915.

The smell of sheep manure has long since dissipated but the Carington tale is still a story of the British world. These examples are a reminder that lives are complex, varied and surprising. There are many other stories of imperial, transnational and international lives to be told and retold. Although the days when an Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, could insist that the ‘boundaries of Great Britain are not on the Kentish coast but at Cape York [in Australia] and Invercargill [in New Zealand] have passed, the legacy of the British world is instantiated 10 million times every Christmas. The same is true of the British world writ large.

ENDNOTES

1 I am grateful to Carl Bridge, Director of the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, for this information. The estimate dates from the 1980s. Australia Post is unable to provide a comparable statistic.
5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1301.0 County of Birth 2004.
7 The etymology of the term was noted by Ian Donaldson at the ‘Britishness and Otherness’ symposium held at the Humanities Research Centre, The Australian National University, July 2004.
Ashton, W., 1838, *A lecture on the evils of emigration and transportation*, Sheffield, p. 15.


Cited in *Barnsley Chronicle*, 1 September 1877.

*British Statesman*, 10 December 1842.

See inter alia *Barnsley Chronicle*, 29 October 1864; 29 July 1865.

*Barnsley Chronicle*, 29 July 1865.


