Popular Imperialism, Scottish Identity, and William Wallace in an Australian Colonial City

L’impérialisme populaire et l’identité écossaise : William Wallace dans une ville coloniale d’Australie

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The relationship between Scotland and her nearest neighbour, England, has often been cast as one defined by rivalry, animosity, and opposition. In exploring this relationship, this paper will consider the events surrounding the unveiling of a statue of William Wallace at Ballarat, a provincial gold mining city in colonial Australia, during the year of 1889. The rituals attached to the unveiling of public monuments, and the dynamics of their reception, can assist us to identify their specific role and place in the public consciousness. Taken as a whole, statues themselves, the ceremonies surrounding them, and their public reception help us to investigate the symbolic, ritualistic, and performative dimensions of identity formulation. This article illuminates how settlers interpreted one Scottish national hero in such a way that demonstrated loyalty to the Union and Empire, and accommodated a convergence of English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh migrants in a British colonial city—Ballarat. Additionally, it considers how public monuments, providing a sense of authority to particular groups, can marginalise others by acting to settle cultural competition. Even so, monuments such as that of William Wallace in Ballarat are often subject to challenges and renegotiation. Therefore, this article also reflects on competing interpretations of the statue at its unveiling in the late nineteenth century from the likes of poet Francis Adams.

The most popular understanding of Wallace at the time, however, was that he was a hero of the Union. This, of course, contrasts with Wallace’s popular contemporary position in the conception of England as a negative referent of Scotland’s national identity—its binary “Other”, against which Wallace valiantly fought. Instead, this paper argues, the partnership with England and Scotland in the British Empire provided

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1. Ballarat is a provincial city in Australia located approximately 100 km from the capital city of the state of Victoria, Melbourne. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Ballarat was the location of a significant gold rush, which caused the substantial growth of Victoria and Australia’s economy and population in the second half of the nineteenth century.
a positive focal point for Scottish cultural identity in the diaspora. After
a discussion of the rise of “popular imperialism” in nineteenth-century
Scotland, the remainder of this paper will describe how this notion of
identity was played out, and perhaps exaggerated, in a British colonial
city that was home to both English and Scottish settlers.

Identity and popular imperialism in Scotland and abroad
from the 1850s

Scottish identity in the nineteenth century was largely expressed in rela-
tion to the British Empire, which, in the aftermath of the Act of Union with
England in 1707, the Scots helped to shape and which in turn helped to
shape Scotland. Yet, as Colin Kidd has noted, “Scotland’s Unionist cul-
ture has already become a world we have lost”, largely due to the influen-
tial modern notion that Scotland belonged and still belongs to a “Celtic
fringe” in the British Isles (2003, pp. 873–4). As Kidd observes (p. 874),
the Celtic labelling “is one which most nineteenth-century Lowland Scots
would have vociferously rejected”. Instead, Unionism and popular impe-
rialism were the core features of Scottish identity in the nineteenth cen-
tury era. The growth of Scottish imperial identity had its foundations
in the economic and social transformation of Scotland throughout the
late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in Scotland’s partnership
with England in the British Empire after the 1707 Union.

Three main institutions in Scotland survived the Union: the Scottish
Kirk and Presbyterianism, the Scottish educational system, and Scottish
legal traditions. Together, these institutions provided a focal point for
identity in Scotland throughout most of the eighteenth century. During
the 1700s, the church, law, and education in Scotland were dominated
and directed by the traditional professional middle class, which itself
was dependent on aristocratic patronage (Finlay, 1997, p. 14; Fry, 1987,
pp. 6–30). The impact of urbanisation and industrialisation in Scotland
during the early nineteenth century was such that these institutions began
to struggle to retain their traditional role in Scottish society and their
centrality as reference points for Scottish identity (Devine, 1998, pp. 1–9;

These institutions and the old ruling class that controlled them increas-
ingly found their authority challenged by demands for greater social
and political prominence among the emerging commercial bourgeoisie,
whose receipt of the vote in 1832 displaced the dominant Conservative
Party, and whose challenges to aristocratic privileges in the Church cul-
minated in the Disruption of 1843 (Hutchison, 1987, pp. 33–59; Brown
The Presbyterian Church, which had once occupied the space of a Scottish national parliament in the minds of many, could no longer provide the foundations and focal point of a unified national identity (Bebbington, 1982, pp. 469–503; Brown, 1987, pp. 58–65). Much like other European nations during the early nineteenth century, a romantic, anti-modern sentiment arose in some sectors of the Scottish population in response to the urbanisation and industrialisation that had swept the nation and transformed its society and economy. Anglicisation, modernisation, and commercialisation—the results of Scotland’s new urban society—seemed to contemporaries to be undermining Scottish national distinctiveness and identity, especially in relation to England. Voices for national grievances came together in the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights in 1853, and attempted to gain recognition at Westminster for Scotland’s national distinctiveness in the Union, but ultimately failed to build a sustainable or effective political movement. It was also largely unable to foster a national political sentiment in Scotland (Hanham, 1967, pp. 143–79). Finlay (1997, p. 15) described the “radicals and romantics” of the Association and other anti-modern proponents as lacking a “coherent ideological underpinning other than the general notion that something was undermining Scottish nationality”.

In the nineteenth century, therefore, Scottish nationalism failed to manifest itself into a major political force. Tom Nairn and other historians have argued that this was largely because the bourgeoisie rejected Scottish nationalism in an attempt to secure and build upon the material benefits bestowed on their class by the British Empire (Nairn, 1983, pp. 138–64; Dickson, 1980, pp. 230–4). Nationalism in Scotland was “stunted and ill-formed”, and the country became saddled with a “Tartan Monster” (Nairn, 1983, p. 162). The assumption that Scottish nationalism must be inherently defensive and hostile to the British state to be a legitimate nationalism has been demonstrated to be a flawed argument. Throughout the nineteenth century in Scotland there was no real sense in which being Scottish and British were mutually exclusive. They were, to the contrary, highly compatible positions, and the Scots mostly felt no need to construct a defensive identity in opposition to Britain or England (Finlay, 1997, p. 15; Finlay, 1994, pp. 127–43).

Instead of a defensive political nationalism, there emerged an identity centred upon popular imperialism. Militarism, race, religion, economic expansionism, and monarchism were all core ideological clusters around which popular British imperialism was constructed (MacKenzie, 1984, pp. 1–10). Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Scotland’s imperial identity did not focus upon a national “Scottish” contribution.
to the Empire—tellingly, Britain was still often referred to as “England” in Scotland, although the contributions of individual Scots were widely recognised. In the 1880s, largely due to the reformulation of Unionism in the wake of the Irish Home Rule movement and the recognisance of Irish nationality within the British state, Scotland quickly adopted its own language of nationhood and began to articulate a distinctive national role within the British Empire (Finlay, 2011, pp. 280–301).

Towards the later nineteenth century, popular imperialism in Scotland took on its own distinctive national characteristics (Finlay, 1997, p. 15). In particular, “empire” and “imperialism” became ubiquitous in the language describing Scotland and its people. The Union with England was an imperial partnership; Glasgow was the second city of the Empire, and Scotland’s economy was the workshop of the Empire; Scottish parliamentarians in Westminster were taking part in an imperial parliament; and, the Scots themselves were a race of Empire-builders (MacKenzie, 1993, pp. 714–39; Finlay, 2011; Finlay, 1997, p. 16). The ideal of the imperial partnership with England was vindicated and given credibility with the spread of distinctly Scottish imperial activities. These notably included the role of Scottish regiments, and the notion of Scots as a martial race, throughout the Empire; Queen Victoria in particular was taken by the Highland romanticism that these regiments embodied (Duff, 1980, pp. 34–5; p. 220–5). Scottish religious identity found expression in the missionary movement and the spread of Presbyterianism throughout the colonies (MacKenzie, 1990, pp. 24–33; Calder, 1996, pp. 79–108). The expansion of Scottish business and trade was central to the idea of a Scottish imperial mission (Lenman, 1977, pp. 167–93; Finlay, 1994, pp. 127–43). The cult of Balmoralism, linked intrinsically with the Queen’s romantic obsession with the Scottish Highlands, formed a distinct form of monarchism, while notions of imperial racial identity were also given expression; indeed, Lowland Scots considered themselves superior to and ultimately more “Anglo” than the English themselves (Devine, 2012, pp. 293–4; Kidd, 2003, pp. 874–5).

Scottish identity in the nineteenth century, therefore, was constructed around the ideological clusters of popular British imperialism: militarism, race, religion, economic expansionism, and monarchism. The re-invention of Scottish identity in this period also precipitated the rise of a sense of Scotland as embodied in three core elements, the first of which was the romantic Highland symbolism exemplified in the works of Robert Burns and Walter Scott. Also widespread across Scotland in the nineteenth century was the notion that all Scots shared a set of intrinsically Scottish characteristics (such as thrift, respectability, independence, temperance, the work ethic, and meritocracy). Finally, there was an under-
standing that the British Empire was a stage upon which the credibility and authenticity of these symbols and values could be asserted. Thus, a distinct Scottish identity was capable of accommodating concurrent identification with the British Empire (Finlay, 1997, p. 16; Fry, 1987, pp. 88–119).

At the same time as popular imperialism was developing and finding cultural expression in Scotland, high levels of emigration were being recorded. When these migrants settled in their new homelands, they brought their social and political systems, as well as cultural practices and national identities, with them (Hartz, 1955; Hartz, 1964; Dixson, 1999, pp. 22–6). Scotland’s popular imperialism, therefore, was transmitted to Australia by Scottish migrants. Divorced from the cultural-nationalist framework of Scotland, expressions of popular imperialism in Australia became “symbolic” of Scottish identity, and represented a nostalgic commitment to the culture of first generation immigrants, or to that of their homeland. Migrants or their children often harboured a genuine desire to return to these imagined pasts, which, writes sociologist Herbert J. Gans (1979, p. 9), were “conveniently cleansed of the complexities that accompanied them in the real past […] while [migrants] may soon realize that they cannot go back, they may not surrender the wish”. Subsequently, internal concepts of ethnicity and identity were externalised and displaced in the creation of symbolic traditions through churches, schools, monuments, and organisations. Such monuments as those examined in this article are, in Pierre Nora’s words, lieux de mémoire, or sites of memory where “memory crystallises and secretes itself” because there are no longer milieu de mémoire, or real environments of memory (1989, p. 7). Removed from the real environments of their own personal or national histories, migrants externalised and projected their identities onto lieux de mémoire—sites of memory.

Statues are particularly relevant to this kind of symbolic identity construction as lieux de mémoire. As Kirk Savage (1996, p. 143) has observed, monuments are integral to understanding the creation and negotiation of cultural identity because they “impose a permanent memory on the very landscape within which we order our lives”. While monuments provide public and enduring credibility and legitimacy to particular collectivities they must necessarily marginalise others, or at worst remove the potential for rivals. Additionally, monuments can operate to settle cultural competition—and although they act as a homogenising force, they are often later subject to renegotiation and challenges. Public monuments and statues remembering figures from Scotland’s past are therefore representative of the process whereby migrants create or recreate symbolic traditions of identity in their adopted countries.
Additionally, monuments are especially useful entry-points into the nature of group identity because the process of their creation is a democratic and often collective process. Public statues are highly representative of the public sphere; we can recognise them as both products of, and stimulus for the public imagination (Johnson, 2009, p. 478). In the monuments erected across the world to remember figures from Scotland’s past, historians have found very specific constructions of Scottish identity. Across the global Scottish diaspora, Marinell Ash (1989, pp. 10–1) argues, “monuments were raised to meaningless or highly selective images of Scotland’s past; images which did not endanger the new-found freedom from the past of which many imperial Scots were proud”. Of Burns statues, Christopher Whatley (2011, pp. 222–3) notes that

[…] for large numbers of those who […] clamoured to attend unveiling ceremonies, Burns represented something more: a lost Scottish past with which they could identify; a present of which they felt part, and proud—as individuals, as members of trade and other mutual aid societies, and as Scots; and a future in which they might find themselves in an even better world.

In these monuments, notes John Rodgers (2009, p. 66), we see Scottish history embodied in a “selective series of emotional and sectarian heroes”, represented by figures such as Robert the Bruce, Mary Queen of Scots, William Wallace, Charles Edward Stuart, Walter Scott, and Robert Burns. These national heroes were recast within the framework of Scotland and the British Empire. Yet the accommodation of different identities is not to say that Scots were or became “invisible ethnics”, as scholars such as David Armitage (2007, p. 297) have argued, describing Scots in North America as “stalwart supporters of Empire, predominantly Protestant and eager to assimilate”. Eric Richards (1988, pp. 11–2) adopts this position for Australia, and argues Scots quickly disregarded their ethnic origins after settlement as the forces of integration and assimilation intensified. On the other hand, historians such as John MacKenzie (2007) and Thomas Devine (2012b) have broadly rejected these views. Devine (2012b, pp. 167–8) notes that one striking feature of Scots in the diaspora is that they were often identified by others as a specific ethnic group and were not merely described as members of a generalised British diaspora, “moulded into uniformity”, he writes, “by the experience of settlement in distant lands”. He argues that the maintenance of Scottish identity was, in fact, complementary to British loyalty: “the British empire did not so much dilute the sense of Scottishness but strengthened it”. The remainder of this article explores how settlers interpreted one Scottish national hero—William Wallace—in such a way that demonstrated loy-
alty to the Union and Empire, and accommodated a convergence of English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh migrants in a British colonial city.

**William Wallace in Ballarat, 1889**

The cult of Wallace in the nineteenth century had little resemblance to the Wallace legend of the late-twentieth century as represented in popular films such as Mel Gibson’s *Braveheart*. Devine (2012a, pp. 294–5) notes that Wallace was “one of the supreme Victorian icons”, and that the Wallace cult in the nineteenth century was “not designed to threaten the union or inspire political nationalism”. Instead, the story of Wallace was seized upon to remind Scots of how the Union of 1707 had been achieved precisely because of his struggles for freedom and liberty; because Scotland remained unconquered, it could form a beneficial and equal union with England in the eighteenth century. Devine observes that the devotion in Scotland to Wallace was evidence that “pride in Scottish nationhood and loyalty to Union and Empire could be reconciled”. This munificent cultural nationalism was reflected in Australia in the late-nineteenth century. Additionally, the Australian context complicates what we know about Scottish identity because, as we shall see, popular imperialism survived longer in the diaspora than in Scotland itself, where Whatley (2012) notes, “service to unionist-nationalism was less obvious by the 1860s, and coincides with the demise of unionist-nationalism itself”.

The evolution of the British element of Scottish identity and culture is evident in Australia from at least the late 1840s, when annual Scottish festivals were held in Melbourne to celebrate both Robert Burns and William Wallace. The occasions were at first explicitly political and assertive, and anti-English sentiment was especially rife (in 1847 the organisers even refused to invite Melbourne’s mayor because he was English). These festivals were exemplary of the broader evolution of Scottish culture and identity in Australia during the nineteenth century (Tyrrell, 2011, pp. 175–86).

Gradually, the exclusivity of the events was replaced by the adoption of the hybrid form of British loyalty and Scottish nationalism—Scottish popular imperialism—that began to colour Scotland’s identity in the later-nineteenth century. This was a form of identity that accommodated both cultural nationalism and a munificent political loyalty to the Union and the Empire. By 1850, non-Scots were allowed to attend the celebrations in Melbourne, representing a growing confidence among Scots of their (real or imagined) proliferation into the social élite and a growing sense that Scots were the key factor in the success of the Empire and
its colonies. As the 1850s drew out, the celebrations, though becoming more ostentatious in their “Balmorality” and romanticisation of Scotland’s past, began to exhibit an unabashed sense of British patriotism and made assertions that the Scots were the supreme component of the British Empire. Throughout that decade, numerous Caledonian societies and St Andrew’s associations were founded where there had been none before—a development assisted in part by the immigration of thousands of Scots to the colonies in the 1850s. Their activities, too, were tinged with a unique combination of romanticised Scottish culture and British loyalty (Tyrrell, 2011, pp. 172–5). In the middle of the nineteenth century, therefore, an imperial culture emerged among Scots in Victoria and Australia that harmonised with the numerous connections they had forged throughout the Empire. As we shall see, this imperial culture was pervasive well into the late-nineteenth century among the Scottish residents of one of Victoria’s largest provincial cities, Ballarat.

Since the early days of settlement in south-east of Australia, Scots had been successful settlers, and Ballarat, a goldmining city in the west of the state of Victoria (then a colony), was no exception. In the 1857 Census of Victoria, there were 5,735 Scottish-born living in Ballarat, and around 3,800 were men—the capital, Melbourne, was the only place in the colony with more Scottish residents, although parts of the Western District of Victoria were still, proportionally, overwhelmingly Scottish. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, the Scottish-born dwindled, but their settlement patterns showed a shift from Ballarat East to Ballarat West, towards the more prosperous and stable part of the growing city. In the 1871 census, there were 4,296 Scots living in Ballarat and the ratio of men to women had become more even—3,123 of these Scots lived in the West, while 1,173 lived in the East. In 1881, the East-West division is clear again, with 1,339 in Ballarat West and 654 in the East. By 1891, the numbers had dropped but there were around 1,300 in the West and 426 in the East.

Jan Croggon (2002, p. 257) has argued that the Scots’ tendency towards residing in the West over the second half of the nineteenth century, which was a more pronounced shift than other migrant groups, reflected their “pattern of quiet achievement”. She observes that the Scots were “builders—men who left their mark” (p. 274). Weston Bate (1978) contends that the overall division of Ballarat between East and West was also evident in the demographics of each area. The low-lying flats of the East were prone to floods and fire, and thus affluent residents moved towards the more physically stable West; the East’s geography was unsuited to the needs of a growing metropolis, while the West offered more appropriate sites for Ballarat’s public buildings and institutions. Moreover, the
West was closer to rich, gold-bearing quartz deposits deep in the earth, and was also oriented towards the fertile pastoral lands of the Western District of Victoria. The West’s residents were often affluent merchants, bankers, retailers, investors, and architects.

Scots were therefore well placed to make their mark on the built environment of Ballarat and, while the city was home to Australia’s only statue of William Wallace (indeed, one of few outside of Australia), it was also home to one of eight statues of Robert Burns in Australia (Wilkie, 2013, p. 280). The creation and reception of the Burns statue, erected in 1887, reflected many of the themes evident at the unveiling of Wallace; indeed, “Britishness” was a common image circulated at the unveiling of other Burns statues around Australia (Wilkie and Prentis, 2012). As this article finds, Wallace took his place alongside Burns in a pantheon of statues across Australia embodying what Ken Inglis (2008, pp. 25–7) has described as a “colonial culture”, and he noted “in provenance as well as subject many of the statues were imperial artefacts”.

It was James Russell Thompson who, in 1889, bequeathed the statue of William Wallace in Ballarat’s botanic gardens to the city. Thompson was a successful businessperson from Airdrie in Scotland, who had arrived in Ballarat in 1853 after finding gold on the nearby Ovens goldfields. Deafness caused by an early career in mining prevented Thompson from becoming involved in public life in Ballarat but, dying a wealthy man in May 1886, he was able to leave significant bequests to relatives and requested that his remaining estate be put towards the purchase of statues for Ballarat’s botanic gardens. Fellow Scot, Thomas Stoddart—who had also been involved in the funding and creation of Ballarat’s statue of Robert Burns—was executor of Thompson’s estate, and was able to procure for the gardens numerous monuments and statues made of Italian Carrara marble (Kimberly, 1894, pp. 166–7). The most notable of Stoddart’s procurements was the statue of Scottish hero William Wallace. The local newspaper, the *Ballarat Star*, noted on 25 May 1889, that “the statue of Wallace was decided on as a compliment to Mr Thompson’s love for the country he came from—an efigy of the greatest character treated in Scottish history or legend”.

Sculpted by Melbourne sculptor Percival Ball, the statue is made of marble and rests on a granite base. It was unveiled on the day of both Queen Victoria and Thompson’s birthday. The monument represents Wallace standing on Abbey Craig, waiting to give the signal for his army to descend upon the English forces crossing Stirling Bridge. At the time, the *Ballarat Star* described Wallace as being of

[...] heroic size, standing, as the great patriot is said by legend to have stood, over eight feet in height. His powerful figure is clad in a close-fitting suit of
chain armor, which well displays the muscular development of the stalwart frame. The arms are bare to just above the elbow, and the large muscles stand out in cords through the armor. Both hands are grasping a representation of the immense sword that in Wallace’s hands wrought such havoc amongst his foes. Over the figure is a light surcoat, with [the] lion of Scotland emblazoned on the breast, and on the head is a simple morion, so that the features are not hidden by a vizor. These are most expressive, representing a stern resolve to do or die, not unmixed with anxiety, and full of vigilance and observation. The pose is natural and effective, and the *tout ensemble* is pleasing to the eye.

The unveiling of Wallace was a festive occasion. Approximately one hundred members of the Melbourne Caledonian Society travelled to Ballarat by rail. It was reported that at least twenty of them were in full Highland regalia, and four pipers led the party. Members of the local St Andrew’s Society, also in Highland dress, and various other Ballarat dignitaries, joined them. Overall, around three thousand people attended the event. John Nimmo the state Minister of Public Works, was called upon to present the monument to the public. A surveyor by trade, a businessperson, and a parliamentarian, Nimmo was born in 1819 at Catrine, Ayrshire, the son of a mason, and trained in Glasgow. He arrived in Australia in 1853. In business, he was a produce merchant specialising in coffee and spices. As a politician, Nimmo was at various times a local government councillor, a mayor, from 1877 a Member of the Lower House and later a staunch protectionist (Mitchell, 2012). As he unveiled Wallace, “in all its beauty”, said the *Ballarat Star*, the militia band played *Scots wha hae wi’ Wallace bled*.

Nimmo gave a brief history of Wallace, and noted that in Ballarat he could observe thousands of “public-spirited and high-minded citizens met to do honour to the memory of that brave man who struggled, fought, suffered, and died as a patriot martyr in the cause of national liberty”. Implicitly acknowledging the difficulties involved in reconciling Wallace with British loyalty in a mixed Anglo-Celtic community, Nimmo attempted to remove any sense of national enmity that the monument may have embodied, taking particular care to appease the English in the audience:

> I am proud to see amongst the audience Englishmen and Irishmen mingling with Scotchmen. [...] I thank God that England and Scotland have shaken hands, and for many years have united in fighting for that tight little island side by side. I pray that this state of things may long continue, and that the noble and glorious Queen who now reigns over us may long continue to do so. [...] The Irish, too, I am pleased to see here. They are a brave and noble
race—a little impulsive, perhaps, but amongst them I have found as much genuine manliness and real good feeling as I have amongst the Scotch.

What was most striking about Nimmo’s speech on this occasion was the extent to which he defused the national and political antagonisms that exist within the Wallace tradition. William Wallace had become not only a patriot of Scotland, but also Unionist hero. The narrative, of course, required some adjustments to fit. Of Edward Longshanks, or the “Hammer of the Scots” who features so prominently as the antagonist in the familiar modern Wallace tradition, Nimmo pronounced:

I have long been of the opinion that Edward I was not a true Englishman, and I am sure he did not represent the English character truly. I have always found in my dealings with the English that they are, as a body, high-souled and honourable men. I am sure they were misled by Edward […] I have found the English one of the first nations in the world as regards fair and honourable dealings between man and man, and for bravery and generosity.

For Nimmo, the Wallace tradition required contortion in order for it to become palatable to the public audience in Ballarat, and, indeed, appropriate to the popular imperialism that began to define Scottish identity in the nineteenth century. Additionally, his mention of the “impulsive” Irish is noteworthy. It has been argued elsewhere that the Irish in Ballarat maintained a “vehemently Irish voice”, which was more firmly established and was maintained for longer than Scottish, Welsh, and, indeed, Cornish, identities. Ultimately, it has been argued, by the Federation of the Australian colonies in 1901, the Irish became part of “a larger and distinctively Australian citizenry”, despite distancing themselves, and being distanced from, the British mainstream (Croggon, 2002, p. 299).

In any case, though the Victorian cult of Wallace was arguably the dominant understanding, this was not the only way in which Wallace was interpreted at the time. When the statue was unveiled the socialist writer and polemicist Francis Lauderdale Adams wrote a poem dedicated to Wallace, and had it published in 1910 alongside a series of anti-English, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist poems in the volume Songs of the Army of the Night (Murray-Smith, 2013). The poem, dedicated specifically to the statue in Ballarat, represents a more familiar, post-Braveheart, reading of Wallace’s position in Scottish history:

This is Scotch William Wallace. It was He
Who in dark hours first raised his face to see:
Who watched the English tyrant Nobles spurn,
Steel-clad, with iron hoofs the Scottish Free:
Who armed and drilled the simple footman Kern,
Yea, bade in blood and rout the proud Knight learn
His Feudalism was dead, and Scotland stand
Dauntless to wait the day of Bannockburn!

O Wallace, peerless lover of thy land,
We need thee still, thy moulding brain and hand!
For us, thy poor, again proud tyrants spurn,
The robber Rich, a yet more hateful band!

In 1969, British historian H. J. Hanham (1968, p. 79) associated the Wallace statue with the poem written by Adams, suggesting his was the representative interpretation. Echoing Hanham’s understanding of the statue’s significance for Ballarat, historian Edward Cowan (2007, p. 20) has linked the Wallace statue with the Eureka Stockade, a small but symbolic political uprising of Chartists and miners against colonial authorities, at Ballarat in 1854. Although the linkage of the two rests on the incorrect placing of the Adams poem on the statue itself, it is easy to see how Adams’ interpretation of Wallace could resonate in a city so strongly linked with the rise of democratic institutions in Australia. The actual inscription is from Robert Burns’ *The Cotter’s Saturday Night*. Adams’ sentiments were not echoed in Nimmo’s speech, although it is important to recognise that interpretations of Wallace were not homogenous.

While Nimmo retained some assertiveness in his imagining of Scottishness, he adopted a kind of pragmatism suitable to an environment in which Scots had to live alongside the Welsh, Irish, and—particularly—the English. Furthermore, Nimmo and Adams’ contesting interpretations of Wallace were reflective of similar trends elsewhere. For example, the National Wallace Monument on the Abbey Craig near Stirling, Scotland was subject to similarly competing interpretations at the end of the nineteenth century—unionist nationalism on the one hand, and a more radically political and nationalistic reading on the other. Ultimately, the monument at Stirling was intended to stress a peaceful union with England and was broadly accepted as such at the time—historian James Coleman (2007, p. 151) describes the Wallace monument at Stirling as “unionist-nationalism in stone”.

While the Wallace tradition was made relevant to British, Scottish and colonial contexts, such negotiations were unnecessary in other parts of

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2. In Australian national mythology, the violent clashes between protesting miners, including a number of Chartists, and the colonial authorities at the Eureka Stockade represents “the birth of democracy”, for it is linked (in sometimes tenuous ways) to the establishment of a number of democratic institutions in Australia, including universal male suffrage and the secret ballot.
the world, and especially where identities had emerged in opposition to, or at least apart from, Britishness. In the nineteenth century North American context, speechmakers did not have to negotiate their way around British loyalty at opening ceremonies. Set high on the stone plinth of the Wallace statue in Druid Hill Park in Baltimore are the unambiguous words: “Wallace, patriot and martyr for Scottish liberty, 1305”. The core values of liberty and individualism were retained without the need to explicitly realign Wallace with the British Empire, which was a sometimes-awkward task as Nimmo’s speech evinced. David R. Ross (1999, p. 137) observes that, at the unveiling of the Wallace statue at Baltimore in 1893, the principal benefactor, William Wallace Spence, said

It was this man who, by his precept and example, implanted in Scotland that indomitable and inextinguishable love of freedom which has been a distinguishing characteristic of Scotchmen in every quarter of the globe. This was abundantly manifested by them in this, their adopted country, for which they so freely shed their blood in the trying days of the American Revolution.

Although the emphasis on freedom and liberty is recognisable, Spence’s interpretation is in contrast to those offered in the colonies and Britain that purposefully avoided placing stress on Wallace’s political Scottish nationalism. The cultural identity reflected in Nimmo’s interpretation of Wallace suggests the popularity of unionist nationalism and the compatibility Scottish identity with British loyalty in the nineteenth century, and reflects the broader state of the Wallace cult in the nineteenth century. Yet, as competing interpretations from the likes of poet Francis Adams attest to, the realigning of Wallace with British patriotism was not always simple a task.

After the unveiling of Ballarat’s Wallace statue, tributes were paid to the sculptor, Percival Ball, and the artistic merits of the monument. Three cheers were called for the Mayor, the trustees, and the artist. The militia band played God Save The Queen, and the gathering followed this with a verse of Auld Lang Syne. After the unveiling ceremony, visitors were invited to a banquet at the City Hall, at which more speeches were given. One James Lambie spoke of his pride in Ballarat being linked with his native country. On 25 May 1889, the Ballarat Courier reported Lambie saying that

Some people wondered why they should bother about heroes of the past, but even if the tales of the heroes were not true they were of extreme value if they gave inspiration to the young. They should cherish the heroes of the past, and all people who enjoyed English liberty should honor the Scottish hero and join in his praise. He was just as ready to bow down before a hero of
Southern England as a Scottish hero. It was Wallace who first discovered the value of the masses of the people, and the best blood of the Scottish people came from the lonely farmers in the distant moors and the small villages outside the towns.

Here, we see a clear exposition of symbolic ethnicity and the nostalgic connections made by diasporic Scots to the traditions and myths of Scotland. We also see the ways in which identity is transformed in response to the immediate social environment. Much as Nimmo had attempted to defuse national antagonisms between Scotland and England inherent in the narrative, Lambie is pragmatically reimagining Wallace as a universal hero, appropriate to a group of migrants living in a British colonial world. In essence, it is a call for sectarian Scottish and English heroes to be incorporated (but not assimilated) into a broader middle class British cultural and political identity that pronounced individualism and liberty as its core values. Finally, as if to extend the inclusiveness of the event to all, the final song sung at the banquet was *Steer my bark to Erin’s Isle*, a popular Irish folk song that fittingly ended with the lines

*If England was my place of birth, I’d love her tranquil shore;
If bonny Scotland was my home, her mountains I’d adore.
But pleasant days in both I’ve passed, I’d dreams of days to come;
Oh! steer my bark to Erin’s Isle, for Erin is my home.*

**Conclusion**

The imperial nature of Scottish national identity in the nineteenth century precluded, somewhat, aggressive anti-English sentiment. This is despite the relationship between Scotland and her nearest neighbour, England, being frequently represented as one defined by rivalry, animosity, and opposition. Popular imperialism, and its impact on relations between England and Scotland, was evident both at home and abroad, and had an identifiable role to play in the formation of migrant identities in Australia. The events surrounding the unveiling of a statue of William Wallace at Ballarat in 1889 assist us to examine the public role of monuments and their relationship to identity formation and maintenance. Such an exploration can provide insights into the symbolic, ritualistic, and performative dimensions of migrant identities. The ways in which colonial settlers interpreted and presented William Wallace incorporated elements of popular imperialism, and seemingly attempted to accommodate diverse English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh migrants living together in a British colonial city.
Furthermore, public monuments provide credibility and a sense legitimacy to particular groups, but as such can marginalise others by acting to settle cultural competition. Nevertheless, monuments such as those of Scottish heroes erected in many areas of Scottish settlement around the world are often subject to challenges and renegotiation. Indeed, while Francis Adams’ understanding of Wallace was not popular in the late-nineteenth century, it represented a strand of nationalist, anti-English opinion that would surface in the second half of the twentieth century. The current popular positioning of England as Scotland’s binary “Other” —the nation and culture Wallace famously resisted—has overshadowed the nineteenth century Victorian cult of William Wallace. As we have seen, however, Scotland’s partnership with England in the British Empire offered a positive and crucial reference point of cultural identity for the Scottish diaspora in Australia.

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