

Cultural Memory and Nationalism at Scotland's International Exhibitions: 1886- 1938

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This paper explores the ways in which Scotland portrayed itself during the run of International Exhibitions in Edinburgh (1886, 1890, 1908) and Glasgow (1888, 1901, 1911, 1938). It will be shown that Scotland, as a fundamental component of the British Empire, served to increase visions of Britishness in these Exhibitions (or World's Fairs) by hosting a number of colonial exhibits and focussing, for the most part, on modern technological advances in machinery and engineering. While all of these Scottish exhibits did self-reflect on history and Scottish nationhood (via literature, art, and architecture), this paper will show that the novelty of doing this, in sharp contrast with the pomp and exuberance of the imperial display, reduced Scottishness to yet another exotic 'other'. Following the 'Old London' featured in 1884, Edinburgh and — later — Glasgow featured 'old towns' which offered visitors an impression of their lost cityscapes, dislocated from their original place and built among the many other temporary pavilions. In the twentieth century, both cities featured human displays: a nefarious turn in Exhibition culture across Europe which curated people from colonial lands on a level with their material culture. Scotland, as part of the British Empire, boasted Senegalese and West Africans as part of their popular attractions. Following this, Glasgow followed London in displaying the people of the Scottish Highlands as part of a pastiche village named 'An Clahan': a crystallising moment in Scotland's disorienting self-portrayal in these British imperial contexts. In working through these case studies, this paper will consider scholarship from the fields of history and memory studies.

Keywords: Scotland, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Memory, Empire, Exhibition

For centuries, national identity in Scotland has been a negotiation of the concept of Britain. The passing of the Acts of Union in 1707 ushered in a period of political and social unrest. The very real threat of the Jacobite risings to the new Hanoverian regime was extinguished at the Battle of Culloden (1746), only to be wrapped in the romance of Sir Walter Scott in *Waverley* (1814). By 1822, Scott himself helped stage-manage the state visit of George IV to Edinburgh; the first visit of a monarch to Scotland since the seventeenth century. By wearing tartan, George IV publicly compounded in 1822 what Scott's novel had achieved in 1814. As Pittock suggests: Jacobitism and its aesthetic was transformed into a 'romantic chimera', posing no real threat.¹ At the same time, recreational Highlandism was becoming popular in cities such as Dundee, where societies were formed to preserve the culture of Highland immigrants.² Just as emigration to North America increased, this movement of the population within Scotland was largely due to the forces of the British Empire. Throughout the nineteenth century, that great age of memory-making, Scotland's usefulness in the expansion of the Empire was exhibited to the world. Following the first International Exhibition in London (1851), other major cities held their own World's Fairs in which they organised and curated regional and national achievements. Between 1886 and 1938, Scotland's 'international' self-portraiture was confined to Edinburgh and Glasgow. In the first four exhibitions — Edinburgh 1886, Glasgow 1888, Edinburgh 1890, and Glasgow 1901 — Scotland's confidence of its central role in the British imperial machine was palpable. This is important because, as Storm and Leerssen succinctly put it in their recent edited collection (2022), these World's Fairs 'were the main platform for the global dissemination of nation-ness'.³ The next two major exhibitions had a different focus: the Scottish National Exhibition (Edinburgh 1908), the Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art and Industry (Glasgow 1911) are not strictly World's Fairs but they help us locate the pivot in Scottish national identity at the time.⁴ The 'Empire Exhibition (Scotland)' held in Glasgow in 1938 takes us to the end of the present study. And if we are to read into the use of parenthesis for the official title, we might perceive a

disconnect in the hitherto unbroken imperial story where Scotland is concerned.

Of course, Scotland is more than just these two cities, and the notion of Scottishness was staged in other important locations. The opening of the Wallace Monument in Stirling (1869) was the culmination of a campaign to commemorate Scotland's most iconic hero. During this time both Glasgow and Edinburgh were erecting statues to royals, statesmen, politicians, and literary heroes. The Wallace Monument in Stirling remains one of the landmarks of Scottish identity. All over Scotland, permanent statues to Wallace appeared during the nineteenth century.⁵ The presence of Wallace statues in the 1886 Edinburgh and 1938 Glasgow Exhibitions and the emphasis on manuscript material — including the Lübeck letter displayed in Glasgow in 1911 — confirm him as the chief figure in Scotland's *independent* national image, comfortably vying for space beside powerful imperial narratives. As Glasgow opened its first International Exhibition in 1888, London played host to the major Exhibition of the Royal House of Stuart, displaying over 1000 objects relating to the royal lineage from the fifteenth century up to Prince Charles Edward Stewart. The Highland and Jacobite Exhibition in Inverness (1903) marks yet another moment in the ongoing negotiation of Scottish identity within an ever-changing Britain. However, to properly investigate the state of Scotland's national identity through the major International Exhibitions, this article will focus solely on Glasgow and Edinburgh. The dichotomy of these major urban spaces has, after all, sparked some of the enduring popular images of Scotland. Take, for example, the Arbuckle Coffee Company's *Scotland* card (no. 86, produced in 1889). Their view of Glasgow and Edinburgh [Fig. 1] is a crucial moment in the bifurcated portraiture of Scotland.

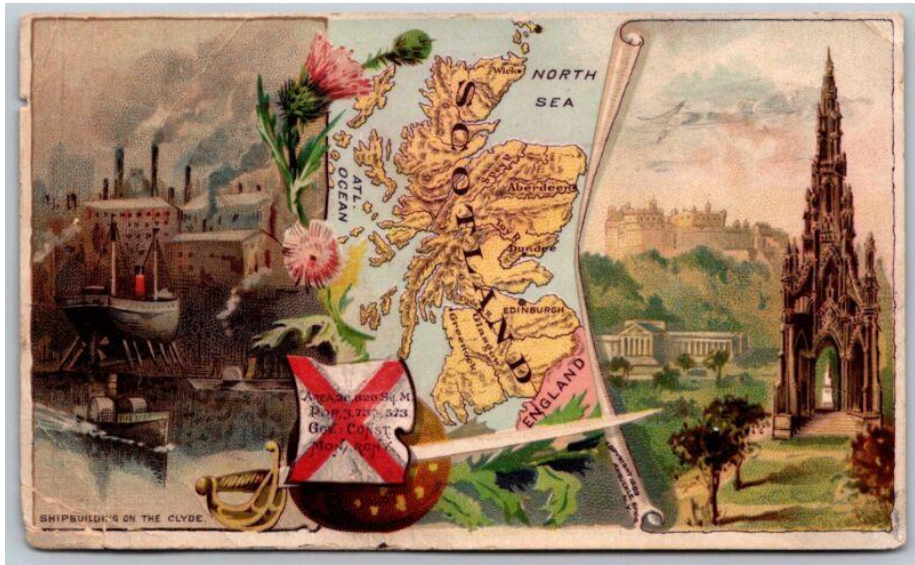


Fig. 1. Arbuckle Coffee Card showing Glasgow (left) and Edinburgh (right)

Shipbuilding on the Clyde gives Glasgow a smoggy, industrial appearance contrasting sharply with Edinburgh's scenic metropolis of grand monuments and buildings. Both views are of course highly contrived. The case of Glasgow is perhaps more easily made. The University had been rebuilt in the west end in 1870, making room for a new railway. Industrial innovation was becoming more present in the city itself, as is clear in the chimney-stacked background of paintings such as Houston's *View of Glasgow and the Cathedral* (c.1840). Robert Crawford makes a similar point in the example of the 1842 poem by John Mitchell, 'spoken in the voice of the city's newest chimney.'⁶ But as will be shown, Edinburgh also suffered badly from overcrowding and poor sanitation. Efforts were being made to rectify this with Improvement Acts and major rebuilding projects. But the tendency to compress Scotland's 'working' and 'historic' traits into these cities alone is an

elision not only of Scotland's other civic spaces, but the other spaces in Glasgow and Edinburgh. This compression becomes engrained as the International Exhibitions grow in popularity. From 1886 to 1938, both cities are used as suitable spaces in which aspects of Scottishness from the highlands to the hinterland of Britain's imperial reach can be gathered, forging an entirely novel sense of the nation.

In the oft-quoted excerpt from Alasdair Gray's masterpiece *Lanark* (1981), it is suggested that Glasgow, though 'a magnificent city', simply cannot compete with Florence, Paris, London, or New York — the types of city which people have 'already visited' in 'paintings, novels, history books and films.' Glasgow is reduced to 'a music-hall song and a few bad novels.'⁷ But unlike Glasgow, Edinburgh was already imbued with so many literary and historic tones that its locale was ready-made for exhibitions and tourists. And this endures today. As Richard Rodger put it (2001), 'most visitors to Edinburgh encounter [the photographer] Colin Baxter's atmospheric postcards of the city. The visual imprint has a number of strong images on which to draw, but commonly focuses on an instantly recognisable skyline of castle rock and church spires.'⁸ Looking specifically at Sir Walter Scott, that giant of cultural and symbolic nation-building, Robert Louis Stevenson remarked 'the character of a place is often most perfectly expressed in its associations.'⁹ What is more, Edinburgh had been modelling itself as the 'Athens of the North' since the early nineteenth century. As Iain Gordon Brown's recent book shows (2022), this fascination with ancient architecture allowed Edinburgh's citizens to reject modernity by assuming 'Athenian' aesthetics.¹⁰ And so we enter the realm of cultural memory, and its tendency to supersede history, and truth, with the power of story and myth.

Located at the eastern end of the park, Old Edinburgh was a mock street ‘composed of reconstructions’ of demolished buildings dating back to the fourteenth century. A companion publication, *The Book of Old Edinburgh*, was produced with the desire ‘to give each house its own place in Edinburgh history’.¹² [Fig. 2]. Visitors would enter via the reconstructed Netherbow Port, itself an imitation of Porte St Honore, in Paris. The Netherbow Port was built in 1606 and was demolished in 1764. During this time, it was one of the most distinguished landmarks in Edinburgh; separating the High Street from the Canongate. Other notable buildings included Symson the Printer’s House, Mary of Guise’s Oratory, Cardinal Beaton’s House, and the French Ambassador’s Chapel. Both inside and out, these sites were reconstructed according to the detail of their time and the — often pre-reformation-age — religious sentiments were noted well in *The Book of Old Edinburgh*. This is perhaps more obvious in Glasgow’s 1888 pastiche equivalent, which will be explored below. But this street, and its costume-era attendants, would have made for quite the sensational experience: compressing space and time for a foray into the past. As Storm points out, International Exhibitions had featured replicas of old buildings before, such as the ‘Old London’ feature at the International Health Exhibition in South Kensington (1884), complete with 25 ancient buildings. After Edinburgh, Old Towns and Cities were featured in Glasgow (1888), Vienna (1892), Antwerp (1895), Berlin (1896) and many more into the twentieth century.¹³ In Kate Hill’s study of these old towns she outlines the effect of Edinburgh’s example on the organisers of Old Manchester and Salford (1887), but, quoting Wilson Smith, draws the distinction between Manchester’s regional focus and the portrayal of Scottish nationalism in Edinburgh.¹⁴

In Edinburgh, this period of reimagining the old and very old coincided with the civic renewal of the city, and the effort to retain the historic aesthetic with heraldry and shields grafted onto new facades. This was in part due to the impact of Ruskin’s lecture on architecture and painting in the city in 1853, and the beginning of a new civic aesthetic that led to the 1891 Heraldic Exhibition in the National Portrait Gallery.¹⁵ During this time Edinburgh passed a second Improvement Act (1867) to cope

with the overcrowding and dilapidation of the Old Town. The crude death rate around this time in Edinburgh was the highest in Scotland.¹⁶ Demolitions had claimed two-thirds of the ancient buildings in Edinburgh, many of which were reconstructed under the temporary guise of the Exhibition.¹⁷

The Glasgow International Exhibition opened in the spring of 1888, featuring a vast temporary structure 'in the Moorish style' along the River Kelvin in Kelvingrove Park.¹⁸ The exhibition map reveals many similarities with the layout of exhibits in the 1886 Edinburgh event, with machinery and artisanal products on show. Similarly, there were picture galleries, cafes and other amusements. The importance of Glasgow's contribution to global progress in the form of industries and technical innovation were visible, but the exhibition did much to promote Scotland's collective achievements in industry, commerce and culture. There had been industrial exhibitions in the city from 1847 to 1886, which, as MacKenzie points out, improved and educated the working classes by 'setting the industries and manufacturers of the city in their wider global and imperial context while also displaying the products of other cultures'.¹⁹ But having these connections in an International exhibition would connect these ideas more widely and more obviously, reinscribing the city's 'image' to Glaswegians and tourists alike.

In the colonial exhibits, the India section was given the most space. As the exhibition publication states: 'Three large courts are required, with a sort of annexe for the native artisans in addition, to accommodate the immense number of exhibits in this section'.²⁰ The various manufactures from different parts of British India are then covered, showcasing a proud exchange of goods across these two zones of empire. John Lavery's *Potter at Work* [Fig. 3] shows us a scene from one of these exhibits.



Fig. 3. John Lavery, *Potter at Work* (1888). Glasgow Life Museums

As Rosie Spooner has said, the novelty of the temporary structures which housed these exhibits was designed as an escape from Glasgow's emerging architectural style: 'Spectators may have come away from a visit feeling as though they had had an authentic experience of another world; of having been immersed in an exotic Orient replete with golden domes, towering minarets and entrancing arabesques'.²¹ In this sense, Glasgow's cityscape was effectively disrupted by temporary novelties, a

diversion from Glasgow in the name of Empire rather than a celebration of it. And while the exhibition did not follow Edinburgh in featuring a conceptual Old Town which might have reprised an old civic layout — though it would do so in 1911 — one lost Glasgow building was brought back to life.

The Castle and Palace of the Glasgow Bishops was built to the west of the Cathedral prior to 1258. Extensions were made in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but while the destructive forces of the Reformation spared the Cathedral, the Bishops' stronghold fell into ruin, and by the eighteenth century it was a public eyesore. It was eventually removed in 1789 and the Royal Infirmary was built in its place. A local poet, William Campbell, marked the occasion of laying the foundation stone of the infirmary with these lines:

No more th' impending wall offends our eyes
A nobler happier dome is seen to rise
Whose milder aspect bids contention cease
And soothes the mind to harmony and peace
The hostile banner shall approach no more
Nor shall the cannon with tremendous roar
From this now peaceful fabric e'er be found
To deal destruction on its foes around...²²

The offence caused by this site of Popish oppression to Protestant eyes is cleansed in the mind of the writer by this monument to public health in the form of a new hospital. It is here where Lister worked as a surgeon in the 1860s, and there is a plaque dedicated to his name on the site today. And yet less than 100 years since its demolition, the Bishop's Palace was reconstructed with wood and canvas, and placed across town near the new University campus. As the official account worded it: 'the imitation of antiquity has been very successfully carried out [...] wood and paint and canvas have been so put together as quite to cheat the eye into a belief that it is a genuine old building'.²³ There are also reports that

it ‘suffered badly’ from exhibition-goers ‘poking at it with their umbrellas, wondering what it was made of.’²⁴ The dark, atmospheric interior of the Palace proved incredibly popular, with crowds crushing in to see historic artefacts of local and national importance, such as spoons and cups belonging to Mary, Queen of Scots, and a two-handed sword from Bannockburn. The exuberant language in the catalogue is indicative of how quickly the memories of religious persecution and suspicion have faded, at least while the tourists are in town:

What visions of brave men and fair women we can conjure up as we wander through the Bishop’s Castle! What memorials do we see on every side of knaves and heroes! What suggestions of romance and chivalry! What records of the country’s glory, and of its weaknesses as well!²⁵

But of course, this conjuring soon vanished along with all the fleeting scenes of empire at home. The chief remnant from this showcase was the 46 feet high Doltoun Fountain. Gifted to the City, the impressive terracotta structure depicts figures from colonial lands in India, Canada, South Africa, and Australia, with Queen Victoria at the top. This expression of ‘the untroubled imperial attitudes seen elsewhere in the exhibition’²⁶ survives today in Glasgow Green, on the grounds of the People’s Palace. Just as the Bishop’s Palace had been rendered in a new location, overlooked by the new University, so too has this landmark of the 1888 event been dislocated to Glasgow’s east end. It is now simply one of a large number of outdated and poorly preserved imperial expressions. And while its survival does perpetuate visual ideas about former colonies, the effect is decreased with the absence of the contextual framework of the exhibition itself. In terms of Glasgow’s topography, then, it seems out of place mostly because it is.

In Edinburgh two years later, another exhibition was held. The 1890 International Exhibition of Electricity, Engineering, General Inventions and Industries does not feature in Findling’s *Historic Dictionary of World’s Fairs and Expositions*, though it did host many international

exhibitors and attractions. Of all the Scottish exhibitions, it has been so poorly remembered that it rarely appears in discourse or scholarship. The focus on modern inventions, and electrical engineering in particular, was perhaps too narrow to compete with the nation-building exercises in 1886 and 1888. The exhibition officially marked the opening of the Forth Bridge, one of Scotland's most iconic landmarks and, in the words of the exhibitors, 'the greatest engineering work in the world'.²⁷ There are tokens and souvenirs from this costly and well-attended (if relatively underperforming) exhibition, but it does not survive well in cultural memory. It would be Glasgow once again, at the turn of the century, to mark Scotland's central role in the British Empire.

1901-1911

The 1901 International Exhibition in Glasgow is the high point in Scotland's imperial self-fashioning. The year lined up with the fiftieth anniversary of the first such World's Fair in London 1851, and, in staging an even larger display than in 1888, Glasgow 'extolled Britain's world supremacy, a claim substantiated by technological virtuosity and colonial domination'.²⁸ Including attendants, the 1901 Glasgow Exhibition drew 11,497,220 attendants, more than double the 1888 total.²⁹ The site of Kelvingrove was chosen again, but on this occasion the temporary halls and domes were complemented by a new permanent structure, the ever-popular Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

Unlike the previous Glasgow event, British colonialism found greater expression with pavilions for Canada, captured Boer guns, and sections dedicated to Australia and South Africa. Rhodesia, named after British colonial agent Cecil Rhodes, was also given space, with indigenous peoples organised among 'natural history'. This is an early tangible expression of the white supremacist mode of British imperialism showcased at a major Scottish exhibition. India retained its extensive share of space, with additional performative aspects to add

entertainment to the already-popular Indian artisan exhibits. As Paul Greenhalgh has shown, British imperialism ‘was most clearly demonstrated’ through representations of India in several locations, not just in London or Glasgow but in Paris (1867) and Vienna (1873). Into the nineteenth century, ‘British organisers continued to expand the scope of Indian displays’ even while under attack for starving India with one hand and celebrating it with the other.³⁰ And of course, any effort to exhibit the talents, customs and people of a land under imperial rule is bound to be refracted by the desires of the ruler. Christina Baird has shown how ‘the nature’ of Indian collections on show in the late nineteenth century changed, ‘becoming at every succeeding exhibition, more and more overcrowded with mongrel articles, the result of the influences on Indian art of English society’.³¹ These important distinctions reveal that Scotland, as a component of Britain, was subverting historical Indian and (*in that key phrase ‘English society’*) Scottish aesthetics in the name of a hybrid, modern image.

The largest foreign exhibit in 1901 was the Russian Village, with two nearby thatched Irish cottages promoting the skills of Ireland’s weavers. All of this makes for an altogether more disorienting affair than previous efforts. Crucially, there was no attempt to recreate an old Glasgow Town — not yet — and none of Glasgow’s much-lamented lost buildings were brought back to rekindle memories of the erstwhile city. This was a thoroughly modern and confidently British show. The official guide literature sought to define Glasgow from three distinct perspectives, all of which capture this high-point of civic confidence. Firstly, ‘Glasgow of the Imagination’ deploys the topographical and industrial landmarks of the city and its fame as being the ‘Heart of Scotland.’ Second, ‘Glasgow of Fact — the Place,’ is a sort of history of Glasgow preceding the Union of 1707. Thirdly, ‘Glasgow of Fiction — the man and his haunts,’ looks at the typical Glasgow character and industrial scenes, mostly skewed towards shipbuilding.³² The importance of this moment cannot be underestimated. Together with the third portion of the triptych mural in the city chambers banquet hall (1901), it marks the early consecration of Glasgow’s chief shibboleth. Indeed, John Lavery’s

portrayal of *Modern Glasgow* was represented through shipbuilding is the 'next' moment after St. Mungo's founding miracles and the twelfth century Glasgow Fair. Later, George Blake's *The Shipbuilders* (1935) ensured the importance of the trade in Glasgow's cultural memory, where it has remained despite several generations-worth of decline in shipping activity. The Finnieston Crane, one of only a few surviving giant cantilever cranes, dominates part of the skyline and serves now only as a reminder of Glasgow's industrial past. This emphasis on industry and commerce on the Clyde are of course synonymous with Glasgow's cultural memory, and beneath this layer we can perceive the Atlantic world, and the global shipping hub which Glasgow went on to become. In other words: Empire, whether or not in name, was crucial to Glasgow's unique identity as the largest representative of Scotland.

Edinburgh stood for something different. Throughout the nineteenth century the success of 'Romantic historical treatment' had been achieved, as Wilson Smith points out, through the landmark "boulders": Palace, Kirk, and Castle.³³ As the seat of Scotland's royal heritage and its national religious body, Edinburgh's cityscape — unfurling down the spine of the High Street into the Canongate — made for a fine mnemonic model on which images of Scotland's past could be projected. In Edinburgh in 1908, Saughton Park was the location of the new Scottish National Exhibition. The ground plan shows typically large temporary machinery and industrial halls, concert halls and sports grounds. Absent from Findling's *Dictionary*, the exhibition still offered a plethora of imperial displays, such as a Canadian Pavilion and the popular Senegalese Village. In May of 1908 the birth and naming ritual of a Senegalese baby at the Exhibition was reported in the press:

The Maroba [priest], a man of serious mien, read or rather chanted, in a pleasantly modulated voice a passage from the Koran, to which fervid responses were made by the surrounding natives [...] he named the child Oumar Reekie Scotia in compliment to the city and land of his birth.³⁴

A more explicit sign of imperial exchange than the naming of a child can hardly be imagined. The Senegalese were popular, of course, for their 'otherness': a natural spectacle for all visitors to cast their eyes on.³⁵ Greenhalgh has traced the beginning of people being curated as part of exhibitions to the Paris Exposition Universelle, 'when various North African exhibits were presented as tableaux-variants'.³⁶ Rarely, there is an almost-innocuous legacy to these sorts of exchanges, such as the note found on a surviving postcard depicting a blacksmith from the Senegalese Village [Fig. 4] which reads: 'This man has arranged to put Bobbies shoes on some day next week'. The post card was sent to a Willie Bone in Girvan, on Scotland's Ayrshire coast and is signed 'Uncle'.



Fig. 4. Postcard of a Senegalese blacksmith held at the Yale Center for British Art (public domain)

Banal as this message is, we can only assume the true opinions of the visitors to these exhibitions where written testimony does not exist, and so material like this is important. Others made their opinions known in the press, with one J. Stiggins writing in to say that, though he has not yet visited the exhibition, he had ‘heard about the Senegalese village there’ and found the presence of ‘heathen’ customs in Christian Scotland most troublesome. To save them from hell, Mr. Stiggins suggested converting them while they were ‘within our gates,’ partly out of Christian virtue, partly because it would be cheaper than sending missionaries to Africa.³⁷ Looking inward at Scotland, a Scottish National Pageant of Allegory, Myth and History was performed during the exhibition. According to local press coverage, the committee wanted to ‘give a full representation of Scotland from prehistoric times down to shortly after the “45”’.³⁸ Arthurian figures, courtly ladies, sword-bearers and Princes Charles Edward Stuart [Fig. 5] made an appearance among 1000 performers.



Fig. 5. Scottish National Exhibition. (1908). Image Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums, ID: JV-Exhib-ScoNat-Un-19.

Scottishness here is something of an emanation of Scott's safe reclaiming of the Jacobite romance, and the coexistence of history and myth that we find in the carved likenesses on the Scott Monument. Fiction and fact blend together, it seems, in literature, in stone, and in performance. Against the backdrop of British imperialism which none of these exhibitions can hope to avoid, Scotland is shown to be something almost mystic, something entertaining. The exhibition was otherwise comprised of the standard local and national industries, none of which could compete imaginatively with the exotic designs of the temporary structures, and the parading of historical pageants and peoples from colonial lands.

In Glasgow in 1911 another Scottish Exhibition was held. It drew around 9.5m visitors where Edinburgh in 1908 had attracted only 3.5m. Once again, the Kelvingrove was the site of choice and the ground plan on this occasion shows a more dispersed effort than in 1901: less emphasis on large temporary structures and an increase of smaller pavilions, courts and mock-villages. North-west of the bandstand, the fee-bearing amusement section contained West Africans, Laplanders and even Scottish Highlanders. The West Africans comprised about one hundred people from different regions including the French Congo and Sudan, and were described by their appearance, customs and behaviour in a souvenir pamphlet. The Laplanders were also paraded as primitives, positioned — in a rather disorienting irony of climate — beside the Africans. Before exploring the Scottish village, it is important to acknowledge the double refraction at work. 'Old Scotland' — that is, the then-popular notion of ancient and romantic Scotland set up by writers like Scott — was essentially assumed alongside other 'aboriginal' peoples. As Kinchin and Kinchin put it, the Scots from 'An Clachan' were 'displayed as an endangered species in their primitive cottages, in picturesque costume, speaking and singing in their strange tongue, and practising their native crafts'.³⁹ This reduction of Scotland in geographical and cultural terms to something primitive is the first refraction. It is as though parts of Scotland have not evolved with the imperial machine and can be curated along with other subjects. The

second refraction is the official celebration of the ancient Kingdom of Scotland. Indeed, the committees in charge of this exhibition had sought to exceed all previous efforts to display notable archaeological and historical relics pertaining to Scotland. A collection of thousands of items were put on show, with the purpose to 'keep alive, in the breasts of all who reverently look upon them, the love of their native land'.⁴⁰ The landmarks of Scottish history and literature — Wallace, Bruce, Mary, Stuart, Burns, Scott — were celebrated in display cases of the Palace of History while the indigenous customs of the highlands were subject to the zone of imperial amusements. Irish villages had begun to appear in British imperial exhibitions since 1908, with Scotland being featured since the London Imperial International in 1909. In London this seemed like a typical, even expected attempt to lift the 'Highland idyll' and make it 'stand as the essence of Scottish culture'⁴¹ but to encounter this in Scotland is another matter altogether. Before 1911, Glasgow had exhibited a clachan and contextual highland landscape panoramas at the 1907 Highland Association Bazaar. The committee, which included the historian George Eyre Todd, wrote of their collective hope that the 'Highland race' would prosper and 'remain upon the land of their forefathers'.⁴² This language likely invokes the Highland clearances, but when the clachan appears in the larger, 1911 exhibition, the otherness of the Highlanders becomes more stark, more Scottish, less British. It epitomizes the self-erasure of nationhood, and the annihilation of cultural tradition and development in the name of novelty.

Not only this, but in 1911 Glasgow also featured, for the first time, an 'Auld Toon'. Unlike the Old Edinburgh Street in 1886, this was a vaguely reconstructed town centre, with a generic Old Castle Keep, a non-specific town hall which might have been modelled on Dunbar, and some historic Glasgow landmarks such as the Old Gorbels tower.⁴³ In other words, there was an effort to showcase the 'typical' examples of burghal society as it was in Scotland before the Union.⁴⁴ In this case we have the *effet de typique*, as described by Leerssen: a confusion of a "nation's" core features with that which makes it unique. This conflation of a nation's 'most unusual features' as 'the most characteristically representative'⁴⁵

is also what we have in the case of An Clachan. A simple memorial stone for this moment of imperial self-portraiture remains [Fig. 6].



Fig. 6. Memorial stone for An Clachan in Kelvingrove Park. © Copyright Eileen Littler (Creative Commons).

One of the important legacies of this exhibition is not an object or site, but the establishment of a Chair in Scottish History and Literature at the University of Glasgow, funded by the exhibition proceeds. Various professors tried to teach both disciplines as they grew exponentially in the twentieth century, as outlined in detail by Bruce Lenman (1973). Lenman points to the historical ‘incoherence’ of the exhibition — ‘from the rattlesnake pit to the bogus Highland village’ — as a reflection of the dilemma in funding such a chair.⁴⁶ But the coexistence of Scottish History and Scottish Literature in the University of Glasgow today is a fitting memorial in itself to the 1911 Exhibition.

Glasgow 1938 and beyond

The 'Empire Exhibition (Scotland)' was held in Glasgow in 1938. Around 12.5m people visited Bellahouston Park on this occasion, enjoying 175 acres of exhibition ground. For all the imperial trumpeting, the purpose of the exhibition was interwoven with unprecedented aims, such as 'stimulating work and production', 'fostering Empire trade and a closer friendship among the peoples of the British Commonwealth of Nations', and 'to emphasise to the world the peaceful aspirations of the peoples of the British Empire'.⁴⁷ Of course, Britain was still recovering from the financial ramifications of the first World War, and within a year the world would be plunged into another. Indeed, the chief physical landmark of the 1938 exhibition, Thomas S. Tait's Tower of Empire [Fig. 7], was ordered to be demolished only months before Britain declared war on Nazi Germany.⁴⁸ In its year of existence, the 300ft tower included two 18-passenger lifts, observation decks and a restaurant at the base.⁴⁹



Fig. 7. View of the Exhibition Site with the Tower of Empire in the background

The tower was undoubtedly designed to install new ideas. ‘Ever since primitive man placed one stone upon another to form the first crude temple,’ the *Official Guide* says, ‘columns and towers have played a prominent part in the architectural visions of mankind’. The Tower of Babel, the sky-scrapers of Manhattan, and other renowned structures are cited, and the Tower is said to be ‘symbolic of all that is enterprising, and is the crowning achievement of the imagination which envisaged the Empire city of Bellahouston rising from the wooded slopes and spacious lawns of a beautiful public park’.⁵⁰ The power of colonialism in utopian terms is clear to see here, and somewhat undermines the peaceful and benevolent, even modern step this exhibition is supposedly making.⁵¹

In 2023 a Scottish Labour MSP, Paul Sweeney, ‘issued a call for the tower to be rebuilt in time for the exhibition’s centenary [in 2038]’, but was met with lukewarm response given contemporary attitudes to imperial nostalgia (to borrow the title of Peter Mitchell’s 2021 book). The tower had been digitally reconstructed in the Glasgow School of Art (GSA), and visually unveiled at the House for an Art Lover in Glasgow in 2007. The deputy director of the Digital Design Studio responsible for this reconstruction said: ‘People talk about how the good old days never lived up to the hype. In the case of the Empire Exhibition the exact opposite is the case [...] we feel we have been able to revive that memory in a positive way’.⁵² The modern aesthetic of the exhibition was a departure from the ‘pastiche, eclectic, or antique styles’, and revellers clearly remembered the bright, smooth, distinctively thirties designs.⁵³ Speaking in 2007 on the occasion of the GSA unveiling, Kit Ritchie recalled her fond memories of visiting the site in 1938: ‘It was just so different. Glasgow was a dirty, sooty, black place and it was like going from the darkness to this amazing light. The atmosphere was beautiful and everything was so brightly-coloured. We were awestruck by it’.⁵⁴ With this we return to the Arbuckle Coffee card depicting Glasgow as a smoky, industrial hub, and how — perhaps for the first time — Glasgow’s cityscape resembled a possible future rather than a reinscribed past.

But this was an Empire Exhibition after all. There were the usual colossal palaces for industry and engineering, and the imperial regions — Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Burma, Southern Rhodesia and East Africa — were given their own spaces. Ireland was also given its place, curated by the Irish Government, but the language in the *Official Guide* outlines ‘recent progress’ in Ireland as if the nation were inherently primitive without Britain’s magisterial support. The Ireland pavilion was located on the so-called ‘Colonial Avenue’, featuring an Ulster stand.⁵⁵ As well as the artisanal industries of Ireland there were statues by Oliver Sheppard, including one depicting Cú Chulainn, the mythical warrior hero. In *The Scotsman* it was reported that an exhibition official declared the warrior to be ‘a greater hero than any Scotland has produced’, only to be shushed by the Queen.⁵⁶ The presence of Ulster and Dublin in this pavilion, and the coexistence of Scotland and Great Britain in their distinct pavilions, is a model of ‘international neighbourliness’ — to borrow Peat’s words — which the designers sought to promote in their portrayal of the British empire.⁵⁷

Several Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church, were featured as pavilions throughout. As stated, there were distinct pavilions for Scotland and the United Kingdom. For the latter, there were displays relating to ‘Fitter Britain’, advertising health initiatives for future generations, and exhibits on Coal, Iron, Steel, and Shipbuilding. These great national industries, the *Official Guide* states, ‘are also Scottish Industries’.⁵⁸ This effectively allows more space to be allotted to history and literature in the Scotland pavilions, of which there were two. In the North Pavilion, decorated with the figures of Burns, Scott, Livingstone and Watt, Scottish domestic life and education from ancient times to the modern day were exhibited. In the South Pavilion was the Hall of History, entailing the same type of material culture relating to the Wars of Independence, the Covenanters, and the Jacobites that dominated previous exhibitions. To complete this view of Scotland, the Clachan (Highland village) re-appeared, with the intended purpose of raising memories ‘in the minds of returned exiles’, or giving ‘some expression of the real old Scotland, the Land of the Gael’.⁵⁹ This reinscribes the

sentimental disorientation found in the 1911 Exhibition in Kelvingrove, and in fact only serves to promote Scotland's modern, British traits by contrast as being superior and more advanced. The imaginary 'Empire City of Bellahouston', above, can be seen rising from the woods of this same, invented Clachan in a postcard view [Fig. 8].



Fig. 8. Postcard for The Clachan Exhibit (1938). Image Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Library, ID 2000-1-237-A-7

Fifty years later Glasgow held the Garden Festival, described in Findling's *Dictionary* as something of a misnomer: 'There were gardens aplenty, but the 1988 show was a true exhibition with a significant international component [...] concerned with urban renewal, generated by sophisticated industries', service, and tourism.⁶⁰ In the 1980s, Glasgow

was in the throes of deindustrialisation and was badly in need of rejuvenation. The Glasgow's Miles Better campaign saw billboard advertising featuring Mr Happy launched in 1983 and helped promote the city as an alternative tourist destination. The same Michael Kelly who produced Glasgow's slogan soon introduced 'Edinburgh: Count Me In' along similar lines. Car stickers also appeared with the slogan 'Edinburgh is Slightly Superior', and so the two cities remained locked in a cultural feud.⁶¹ In 1990 Glasgow was designated as the UNESCO City of Culture, and celebrations ensued. As important as 1990 was to Glasgow's modern rebirth, the Garden Festival of 1988 was essentially the forerunner for this.⁶² Though the grip of the Empire had weakened in the preceding fifty years, the 1988 Exhibition paid due respect to Scotland's historic global achievements. Displays from nations including China, Mexico, Israel, and Pakistan upheld the international component so crucial to these cultural exchanges. On this occasion, the event was held in the Prince's Dock, a space only made available because of Glasgow's declining shipping and building activity. And while there are many alive today with fond memories of visiting the Festival, the topography of the site has changed so completely that a team of archaeologists led by Kenny Brophy at Glasgow are looking to uncover lost structures and other material. Applying these expertise to a site within generational memory speaks volumes of the temporality of exhibitions and festivals.

In his book on Prague (2010), Alfred Thomas describes how the 'apparent immutability' of that city 'camouflages a complex history of discontinuity and disruption'.⁶³ Thomas shows how cities can skew history towards a certain aesthetic, in this case strength and defiance. But as with all city spaces there are religious and political disputes responsible for the destruction of this church and the toppling of that statue. In specific studies like these it would be easy to find comparisons between Prague, Glasgow and Edinburgh. But in the direct oppositional points drawn between Scotland's two chief cities, this nation has, for most of its time as part of the United Kingdom, skewed the image of its own history. Scotland's relationship with Europe in its towns, and its complex rural development beyond the towns, have barely featured in

the major International Exhibitions. Instead, Scotland's stake in the British Empire was put front and centre, with Glasgow leading the way on industry, engineering, and imperial (often Indian) aesthetics. Edinburgh on the other hand retained the 'apparent immutability' of an ancient Scotland, first by resurrecting its lost architecture in a temporary street comprised of historic buildings, later with lively pageants and relics. Another 'Scotland' eventually appeared, like an apparition of its former self, as an invented Highland village: a pivotal moment in Scotland becoming a British nation-state first, and a culturally independent nation second. Indeed, these mythical landscapes — transposed onto whichever city happened to be playing host — anticipated *Brigadoon*, the famous 1947 musical and 1954 film about the magical Scottish village which appears out of the mist every century for only a day. For sure, the exhibitions of 1886–1938 were open for months, but the disorienting effect on Scotland's sense of nationhood is still being felt today.

Endnotes

¹ Murray Pittock, *Scottish Nationality* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 78.

² Pittock, *Scottish Nationality*, 86.

³ Eric Storm and Joep Leerssen, 'Introduction', in *World Fairs and the Global Moulding of National Identities*, ed. by Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2022), 4.

⁴ The classification of World's Fairs – set out in the *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988* (1990) – mostly depends on International components, though there is no definitive set of rules.

⁵ Graeme Morton, 'The Most Efficacious Patriot: The Heritage of William Wallace in Nineteenth-Century Scotland,' *The Scottish Historical Review*, 77: 204 (1998), 224–251.

⁶ Robert Crawford, *On Glasgow and Edinburgh* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 73.

⁷ Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: a Life in 4 Books* (2007 [1981]), 243.

⁸ Richard Rodger, *The Transformation of Edinburgh: Land, Property and Trust in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), 459.

⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1879), 14.

¹⁰ Iain Gordon Brown, *Auld Greekie: Edinburgh as the Athens of the North* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Fonthill, 2022).

¹¹ *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988* ed. by John E. Findling (Greenwood, CT/ London: Greenwood Press, 1990), 93.

¹² John Charles Dunlop, *The Book of Old Edinburgh and Hand-book to the Old Edinburgh Street [...] with historical accounts of the buildings therein reproduced and anecdotes of Edinburgh life in the olden time* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1886), vii.

¹³ Eric Storm, 'The Transnational Construction of National Identities: A Classification of National Pavilions at World Fairs', in *World Fairs*, ed. by Leerssen and Storm, 71.

¹⁴ Kate Hill, "'Olde worlde" urban? Reconstructing historic urban environments at exhibitions, 1884–1908', *Urban History* 45, 2 (2018), 306–330 (312 n14); Wilson Smith, 'Old London, Old Edinburgh: Constructing Historic Cities', in *Cultures of International Exhibitions 1840–1940: Great Exhibitions in the Margins* ed. by Marta Filipová (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 203–227.

¹⁵ Craig Lamont, 'Allan Ramsay and Edinburgh: Commemoration in the City of Forgetting', *Scottish Literary Review* 10:1 (2018), 117–137 (131).

¹⁶ Johnston P. Smith, 'Slum clearance as an instrument of sanitary reform: the flawed vision of Edinburgh's first slum clearance scheme,' *Planning Perspectives* 9:1 (1994), 1–27 (2).

¹⁷ Bruce J. Home, 'Provisional List of Old Houses Remaining in High Street and Canongate of Edinburgh,' in *The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* v. 1 (Edinburgh: T&A Constable, 1908), 1–30 (1).

¹⁸ *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs*, 103.

¹⁹ John M. MacKenzie, "'The Second City of the Empire": Glasgow – imperial municipality,' in *Imperial Cities: Landscape, Display and Identity* ed. by Felix Driver & David Gilbert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 215–237 (226).

²⁰ Thomas Raffles Davison, *Pen-and-Ink Notes at the Glasgow Exhibition* (London: J. S. Virtue & Co., 1888), 74.

²¹ Rosemary Gall Spooner, *Close encounters: international exhibitions and the material culture of the British Empire, c.1880–1940* (2016), 101–102; PhD thesis: <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/7386/> (accessed 14 September 2023).

²² Mitchell Library, Glasgow MS. 73: Unpublished collection of poems by William Campbell.

²³ Davison, *Pen-and-Ink*, 103.

²⁴ Perilla Kinchin & Juliet Kinchin, *Glasgow's Great Exhibitions: 1888, 1901, 1911, 1938, 1988* (Oxon: White Cockade, 1988), 45.

²⁵ Davison, *Pen-and-Ink*, 106.

²⁶ Kinchin & Kinchin, *Glasgow's Great Exhibitions*, 34.

²⁷ 'International Exhibition, Edinburgh, 1890', *British Architect*, 8 November 1889, 338.; cf. Sarah Kirby, 'Prisms of the musical past: British international exhibitions and 'ancient instruments', 1885–1890', *Early Music* 47:3, (2019), 393–407.

²⁸ *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs*, 172.

²⁹ Kinchin & Kinchin, *Glasgow's Great Exhibitions*, 15.

³⁰ Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas : the Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester: MUP, 1991), 59–60.

³¹ Christina Baird, *Showcase Britain: Britain at the Vienna World Exhibition 1873* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 110.

³² Derived from table of contents of James Hamilton Muir, *Glasgow in 1901* (Glasgow/ Edinburgh: William Hodge & Company, 1901). cf. Craig Lamont, *Georgian Glasgow: the city remembered through literature, objects, and cultural memory theory* (2015): PhD thesis: <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/7041/> (accessed 14 September 2023).

³³ Smith, 'Slum clearance', 215.

³⁴ *The Scotsman*, 19 May 1908, 6.

³⁵ There is surviving footage of the 1908 exhibition, including the parading of the Senegalese, at the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive: Reference 1699.

³⁶ Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 85.

³⁷ *The Scotsman*, 23 May 1908, 14.

³⁸ *The Sphere*, 20 June 1908, i.

³⁹ Kinchin and Kinchin, *Glasgow's Great Exhibitions*, 121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 100.

⁴¹ Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, 107.

⁴² *Souvenir and handbook of Feill a' Chomuinn Ghaidhealach (The Highland Association Bazaar) 1907* (Glasgow: J. M. Munro, 1907), 71.

⁴³ Kinchin and Kinchin, *Glasgow's Great Exhibitions*, 102.

⁴⁴ Nigel G. W. Curtis, 'The place of history, literature and politics in the 1911 Scottish Exhibition', *Scottish Literary Review* 7:1 (2015), 43–74 (55).

⁴⁵ Joep Leerssen, 'Trademarking the Nation: World Fairs, Spectacles, and the Banalization of Nationalism', in *World Fairs*, ed. by Leerssen and Storm, 43.

⁴⁶ Bruce P. Lenman, 'The Teaching of Scottish History in the Scottish Universities', in *The Scottish Historical Review* 52:154 (Edinburgh: EUP, 1973), 165–190 (177).

⁴⁷ These 'Objects of the Exhibition' were printed in a list in the *Official Guide* (1938), 66.

⁴⁸ Kinchin and Kinchin, *Glasgow's Great Exhibitions*, 167.

⁴⁹ Canmore record: <http://canmore.org.uk/site/180625> (accessed 14 September 2023).

⁵⁰ *Official Guide*, 107.

⁵¹ For an expansion of this, cf. Lamont, *Georgian Glasgow*, 182.

⁵² 'Empire's Glory Days Back in 3D', *Glasgow Times* 6 December 2007: <https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/12853953.empires-glory-days-back-in-3d/> (accessed 14 September 2023).

⁵³ *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs*, 291.

⁵⁴ 'Empire's Glory Days Back in 3D'.

⁵⁵ Entry for the Ireland pavilion, *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe*: <https://ernie.uva.nl/viewer.p/21/66/object/372-523307> (accessed 20 December 2023).

⁵⁶ *The Scotsman* 4 May 1938, 12.

⁵⁷ Alexandra Peat, 'Scottish Internationalisms at the 1938 Empire Exhibition: Between Britain, Europe, and Empire', *Open Library of Humanities* 6:1 (2020), 1–30 (18).

⁵⁸ *Official Guide*, 111.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 121.

⁶⁰ *Historical Dictionary of World's Fairs*, 369.

⁶¹ Cliff Hague and Huw Thomas, 'Planning Capital Cities: Edinburgh and Cardiff Compared', in *Nationality and Planning in Scotland and Wales* ed. by Roderick Macdonald and Huw Thomas (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 133–158 (142).

⁶² See for instance John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Cities of Culture: Staging International Festivals and the Urban Agenda, 1851–2000* (Aldershot, UK/ Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2005), 225.

⁶³ Alfred Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest: writing, memory, and the city* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1.