James Russell Thompson was a successful businessman from Airdrie in Scotland. He arrived in the Victorian gold-mining town of Ballarat in 1853, having previously struck gold on the Ovens goldfields. Deafness caused by his earlier 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 sprawling botanic gardens. A fellow Scot, Thomas Stoddart, was executor of Thompson’s estate, and was able to procure for the gardens numerous monuments and statues made of Italian Carrara marble. The most notable of Stoddart’s procurements was the statue of the Scottish hero William Wallace. The Ballarat Star noted that “the statue of Wallace was decided on as a compliment to Mr Thompson’s love for the country he came from—an effigy of the greatest character … in Scottish history or legend”. The statue of Wallace in Ballarat’s botanic gardens was unveiled and bequeathed to the city on May 24, 1889. It is one of very few outside Scotland.

Sculpted by Melbourne sculptor Percival Ball, the statue is made of marble and rests on a granite base. 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. The Ballarat Star describes the Wallace statue 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 closefitting 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 in Ballarat was a festive occasion. Approximately one hundred members of the Caledonian Society in Melbourne came to Ballarat by rail. Many were in full Highland regalia, and the party was led by four pipers as it progressed to the botanic gardens. They were joined by members of the local St Andrew’s Society, also in Highland dress, and various other Ballarat dignitaries. Newspapers estimated that around three thousand people attended the event.

The socialist writer and polemicist Francis Adams wrote a poem at the time of the statue’s unveiling and had it published alongside a series of anti-English, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist poems in the volume Songs of the Army of the Night. The poem, which is dedicated to the Ballarat statue, represents a familiar, Braveheart-esque, understanding 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!
Though it seems familiar to us, Adams’s interpretation of the monument was not representative of how most Scots, at home and in the colonies, would have understood the tradition of William Wallace in the nineteenth century. As Scotland’s referendum on national independence approaches in 2014, it is worth considering that, once upon a time, the Union and Empire were the pride of Scots, and that their combined Scottish and British loyalties echoed as far as the Antipodes.

*The Victorian Minister for Public Works, John Nimmo, was called upon to present the Wallace monument to the public of Ballarat in 1889. Nimmo was a surveyor by trade, a businessman and a parliamentarian. He 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, he was at various times a local government councillor, a mayor, from 1877 a Member of the Lower House, and later a staunch protectionist. As he unveiled Wallace, “in all its beauty”, the militia band played the tune of “Scots Wha Hae Wi’ Wallace Bled”. Nimmo began his speech to the gathered crowd with a brief history of Wallace and his life. He observed:

The freedom enjoyed by Scotland at the present hour is directly traceable to the patriotic efforts of Sir William Wallace 600 years ago; and his name shrouded in a halo of honour and glory, has come down through that long vista of years, until here this day in the noble city of Ballarat I see before me thousands of her 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 …

Of course, his audience was not exclusively Scottish. There were English, Welsh and Irish spectators, as well as members of other national groups who had settled at Ballarat in search of gold in the 1850s. Wallace’s narrative is often understood as one of unambiguous political and cultural antagonism between England—the so-called “Auld Enemy”—and Scotland. Indeed, the tradition required some adjustment in order for it to become palatable to the public audience in Ballarat, and, more importantly, appropriate to the pro-Union nationalism that began to define Scottish identity in the nineteenth century.

“Unionist nationalism”, as historians call the movement, was at once grandiose in its “Balmorality” and its romanticisation of Scotland’s past, but also exhibited unabashed British patriotism and confidence in the Union. The key assertion was that the Scots were the supreme component of the British Empire; it was a form of cultural nationalism without political antagonism. Indeed, the Scots’ contribution to the British Empire was disproportionate, and they were the first nation in the British Isles to take on an imperial mentality. Scots earned a strong reputation for empire building through their contributions to the spheres of education, engineering, exploration, medicine, commerce and shipping. These imperial achievements were recognised in dual loyalties to Britain and to Scottish cultural nationalism.

William Wallace thus became not only a patriot of Scotland, but also a Unionist hero. The narrative, of course, required some adjustments. Of Edward Longshanks, or the “Hammer of the Scots” who features so prominently as the antagonist in the familiar 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.

This was also the case in Scotland itself. In 1869, the National Wallace Monument on the Abbey Craig, near Stirling, was originally intended to stress a peaceful union with England and was broadly accepted as such at the time; some have described the monument at Stirling as “unionist-nationalism in stone”. In Ballarat, Nimmo made sure to remove any sense of national enmity that the monument may have embodied:

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.
Nimmo thus adopted a style of pragmatism suitable to an environment in which Scots had to live amicably alongside English, Welsh and Irish.

After the unveiling of Ballarat’s Wallace statue, tributes were paid to the sculptor, Percival Ball, and to 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 with a verse of “Auld Lang Syne”. After the 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. The *Ballarat Star* 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 honour 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.

Much as Nimmo had attempted to defuse national antagonisms in the narrative, Lambie proclaimed Wallace a universal hero, appropriate to a diverse 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 larger 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 traditional folk song which fittingly ends with these 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.

While the Wallace tradition was made relevant to British, Scottish and colonial contexts, such negotiations were seemingly unnecessary in other parts of the world. In nineteenth-century America, speechmakers did not have to negotiate their way around British loyalty at such opening ceremonies. Set high on the stone plinth of the Wallace statue at 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 align Wallace with the British Empire. At the unveiling of the Wallace statue in Baltimore, 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 Scottish nationalism. Instead, Wallace was a Unionist hero, appropriate to a people that had faith in the Union and took great pride in their achievement throughout the Empire.

In September, the Scottish people will be asked to pass judgment on England—is their southern neighbour the Auld Enemy, or the old ally? People all over the world will be watching with keen interest, for Scotland’s greatest global export in the last two centuries has been its people. Thanks to the vast number of migrants from Scotland and their descendants, the Scottish heritage industry is flourishing in Australasia and North America. The number of people identifying as “Scottish” in Australia has increased exponentially since the early 2000s, and all manner of cultural activities are flourishing here.

Support for Scottish independence, it seems, is strong in the global diaspora, and has been ever since Mel Gibson’s blockbuster movie *Braveheart* reminded Scots across the world of how much they should hate the English. Trivial historical inaccuracies aside, the movie reflects the kind of Wallace that Francis Adams described in 1889—one who fought back against the “English tyrant Nobles”. The anti-English rhetoric has been, and will continue to be in the lead-up to the referendum, symptomatic of a passive acceptance of Scottish history as presented in all manner of novels,
plays, television series, paintings, history books, and, of course, blockbuster movies. Authors and readers tend to go into auto-pilot when it comes to Scotland’s history; rather than inventing new stories or constructing new interpretations, they submit to a range of pre-existing narratives about Scotland and its relationship with England.

Much of what is said about Wallace today, in Scotland but especially abroad (including here in Australia), skips over the nineteenth century—when he was a Unionist hero—and latches onto the antagonistic, nationalist narrative that is now so familiar thanks to movies like *Braveheart*.

The truth or otherwise of various understandings of the Wallace tradition is not the issue here. Rather, the point is that Scotland has not always been as fiercely anti-English and pro-independence as some would like us to believe. Such was the power of the Union in the nineteenth century that Scots living as far away as Australia praised Wallace as a patriot fit enough to represent their proud partnership in the British Empire. My, how the times have changed.

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**Sweets and Things**

You mention sherbet lemons, and we’re time-shaken back to their sugary tart acidy smell, fountain-fizzes and swizzlers ghastly-blackened blackjack teeth.

You get on to your churchyard tale—firemen twice to the fire-crackered tree—so I lob in my dodgy dens dances plays rafts songs—pride in a hand-made pirate flag. Marbles, we agree! Real ones—glass—

and skived-off games first fag puffs, abandoned organ failed piano—the gut-thrill of bikes, ingenious uses for pocket knives—

the dark hovers around still but with shifty eyes.

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**Gybe-point**

When I hear he’s dying—
I ignore all strictures and race to reach him.

On the ward
I worry he might heave up from his death toils just to dispense one last shattering curse, and my sea-legs stumble—

but I face down the door and there he is—basilisk eyes thick white hair, pain—the ancient size the sheer scale of him!

I edge slowly over for a closer look as though I haven’t encountered his like before—stay a minute,

an hour, the last ebbing days—and when his beast-breath slows and stops, I rise, steady the altered weight of him—and leave.

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**Olivia Byard**