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## **Making Home in a Sojourner World: Organised Ethnicity and British Associationalism in Singapore, c1880s–1930s\***

Tanja Bueltmann and Lesley C. Robinson†

We cam' awa' frae Brig o' Doon,  
We cam' awa' frae Skye,  
We cam' awa' frae Glascae toon,  
An' ither pairts forbye.

We lep' frae crag to crag at hame,  
An' hoos'd in caves on hills.  
We left to exchange banks an' braes  
For Exchange Banks an' Bills.<sup>1</sup>

Published in the *Singapore Free Press*—a newspaper founded in 1835 by a quartet of British businessmen—on Christmas Eve in 1909, this spirited verse, an 'Echo of the St Andrew's Day Dinner', was submitted to the paper by a

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1 *Singapore Free Press*, 24 December 1909.

representative of a fledgling Singapore-based Scottish association.<sup>2</sup> Founded only one year previously, and thus at a late stage compared to developments in the Scottish community elsewhere in Asia,<sup>3</sup> the island's St Andrew's Society (StAS) offered the sizable number of Scots residing in Singapore a home from home, a space for coming together with their compatriots. The 1909 verse, thick with Scots tongue, poetically recalled the Scots' journey from the land of their birth, a place of 'caves on hills', to Singapore, a place of 'Exchange Banks'. The words spoke of the shared experience of relocation, but also the importance of unity and kinship in the new place of residence—the latter being critical components in the migration pathways of many migrants in diverse locations around the world. In fact, while sentimental attachments to the old world and the desire to invoke old homeland culture and customs through such gatherings and shared cultural markers such as traditional food or dress were critical motivations for migrant groups to come together collectively, there were also a plethora of more practical, circumstantial motivations to express a particular identity. Among migrants this usually related to the desire to generate social capital in the new environment,<sup>4</sup> and, therefore, gatherings organised by ethnic associations such as the St Andrew's Society we learned about at the beginning were often as much about building networks, nurturing business links and facilitating new connections than they were about expressing ethnic identity. Consequently, questions concerning the role of migrant networks, ethnic and kinship ties and wider issues regarding the assimilation and integration of migrants from different ethnic backgrounds, have been important foci in existing works.<sup>5</sup> Within the

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<sup>2</sup> The *Singapore Free Press* was founded by two Scotsmen, William Napier and Walter Scott Lorrain; Edward Boustead, a Yorkshireman; and George Drumgoole Coleman, from Drogheda, County Louth. For further details see for instance Arnold Wright, ed., *Twentieth Century Impressions of British Malaya: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries, and Resources* (London, 1908), p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> See Tanja Bueltmann, *Clubbing Together: Ethnicity, Civility and Formal Sociability in the Scottish Diaspora to 1930* (Edinburgh, 2014), chapter five.

<sup>4</sup> A. Portes, 'Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998): pp. 1–24; Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for Sociology of Education*, ed. J. G. Richardson (New York, 1985); for a detailed analysis of the connection between ethnic identity expression and social capital, see Tanja Bueltmann, *Scottish Ethnicity and the Making of New Zealand Society, 1850–1930* (Edinburgh, 2011), especially chapter four.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Richard D. Alba, 'Assimilation, Exclusion, or Neither? Models of the Incorporation of Immigrants in the United States', in *Paths to Inclusion: The Integration of Migrants in the United States and Germany*, eds. Peter Schuck and Rainer Münz (Providence and Oxford, 1998), pp. 1–31; Angela McCarthy, ed., *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2006); Enda Delaney and Donald M. MacRaild, eds., *Irish*

context of British migration, however, much of this work has concentrated on the traditional settler colonies. There is also a strong focus on the Scots—perhaps a result of them being the most visible ethnic group from the British Isles, and with easily identifiable ethnic markers such as kilts and bagpipes. The English on the other hand, and to some extent also the Welsh (though partly simply due to the small size of their migrant cohorts), have traditionally been cast, certainly in the North American context, as ‘invisible migrants’ lacking strong ethnic expression.<sup>6</sup> While new research has enhanced our understanding of the English, and how they fit into the matrix of ethnic networking and ethnic associations,<sup>7</sup> developments within the British community in Asia have been largely ignored for all groups. The exception are mercantile and trade networks which, since the first operations of the East India Company, have been critical in the development of the British connection with the Far East and have, therefore, been explored to some extent.<sup>8</sup>

Within this wider context this article seeks to address the existing void and geographical imbalance, exploring how the British ‘made home’ in Singapore—that is: how did they adjust to life in a foreign environment, and how did they maintain their ethnic identity there? In order to measure this we focus on exploring what we term organised ethnicity within Singapore’s British community. Organised ethnicity permits the capture of an ethnic identity that has been formalised by a group of people, and has been given a structure within which it is expressed—specifically in our case we concentrate on the structural framework offered by ethnic associations, though there are other structures migrants can use, for instance churches.

As a result of the process of formalisation in an association, organised ethnicity, first and foremost, is an ethnicity that is actively employed by a group of people. It is an identity which the group chooses to express in that way. This marks it off not only from individual ethnic expression, which might come in the

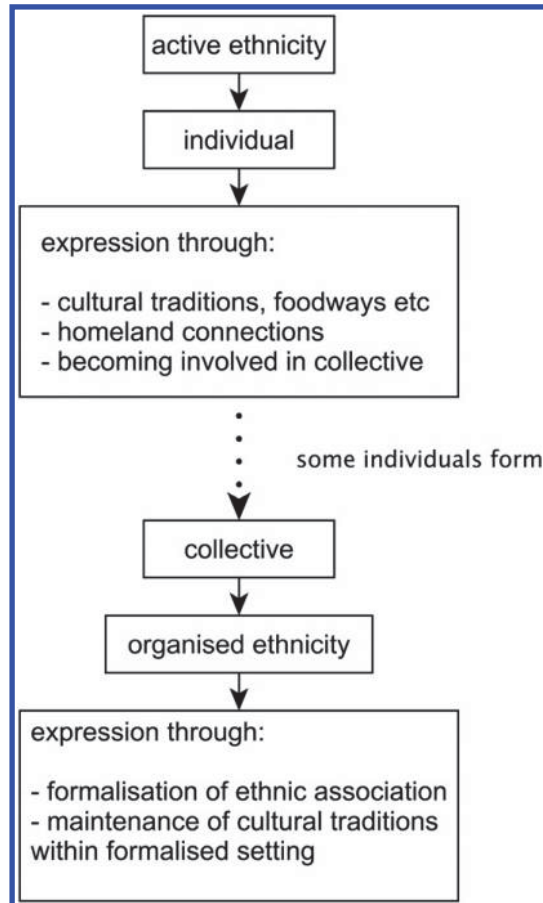
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*Migration, Networks and Ethnic Identities since 1750* (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 62–86; David Dickson, Jan Parmentier and Jane Ohlmeyer, eds., *Irish and Scottish Mercantile Networks in Europe and Overseas in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Gent, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Charlotte Erickson, *Invisible Immigrants: The Adaptation of English and Scottish Immigrants in Nineteenth-Century America* (Coral Gables, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> See for instance Tanja Bueltmann, David Gleeson, and Donald M. MacRaild, ‘Invisible Diaspora? English Ethnicity in the United States before 1920’, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 33, no. 4 (2014): pp. 5–30.

<sup>8</sup> For example H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge, 2006); George McGilvary, *East India Patronage and the British State: The Scottish Elite and Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2008).



**Figure 1:** Active and organised ethnicity.

form of maintaining cultural traditions or foodways, but also distinguishes it from an ethnicity ascribed to individuals or groups by others.<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 provides a schematised conceptualisation, making it clear that actively organised ethnicity, though established by a collective, ultimately draws on individuals to operate.

<sup>9</sup> An ascribed ethnic identity is passive in that the group or individual it is ascribed to is passive in the process, being simply a recipient of the ascription. This type of ethnic identity is often negative, see for instance the effect of negative ascriptions to the Irish as explored in Donald M. MacRaild, 'No Irish Need Apply': The Origins and Persistence of a Prejudice', *Labour History Review*, 78, no. 3 (2013): pp. 269–299.

They are the agents of organised ethnicity,<sup>10</sup> developing a formalised platform to facilitate engagement with their homeland identity and culture. They did so for a broad range of reasons and, as was highlighted above, these reasons could be circumstantial, and relate less to a person's desire to express a particular identity, but more practical considerations such as potential business opportunities. Our overarching aim, therefore, is to shed light on the motivations of the British in Singapore, exploring how, and for what purpose, they utilised their ethnicity through associations.

### **Ethnic Associations in a Sojourner World**

A site in Asia such as Singapore offers a particularly interesting case study for our examination. This is because locations in Asia to which British migrants relocated, often only temporarily, were never principal settlement destinations.<sup>11</sup> While a good number of Britons have made their way to Asia, from the earliest days of East India Company trading in the region to the present, at no point did the numbers come close to the stream of migrants that ventured to North America or the Antipodes.<sup>12</sup> The critical difference is that many arrivals in Asia were temporary sojourners rather than permanent migrants, and, critically, they saw themselves as such. Consequently, and somewhat ironically, it was often continued transience that was the principal constant in their lives: they did not leave the British Isles to relocate permanently overseas, but went for opportunities that were short-term and frequently involved moving to new locations. As a result, colonial Singapore, like other Asian sites, was characterised by a society in flux as many of the new arrivals followed in the tradition of European pioneers in India: they were sojourners keen to advance their economic position, intending to spend a specific time abroad to achieve that goal, before eventually returning home.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, a 20 or 30-year stay, interspersed with extended periods of leave spent in Britain, was not uncommon. The story of H.W. Raper, a committee

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10 For more on the role of agency, as well as actively employed ethnicity, see Bueltmann, *Clubbing Together*.

11 Several chapters in Robert Bickers, ed., *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford, 2014) problematise this difference.

12 See for example Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford, 2010).

13 They were people who Asians came to refer to as nabobs. The term first appears in the Singapore press in the mid-nineteenth century, for example, *The Straits Times*, 28 May 1850, p. 3. For more on the usage of the term see Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2010).

member of the Singapore St George's Society (StGS), is quite typical in that respect. He arrived in Singapore in 1908 to fill the role of Secretary for the Great Eastern Life Assurance Company. After 15 years in the colony, Raper succeeded A.H. Fair as Managing Director of the firm and continued in this role until his retirement in 1932 when, having maintained a strong relationship with his homeland, he returned to Britain, 24 years after his arrival.<sup>14</sup> Employment and opportunities to make money were critical, therefore, in the decision-making processes of sojourners, with the East India Company being the earliest example of an organisation that structurally enabled this type of financially-motivated temporary sojourn in Asia. As the British expanded further east, and as banks and trading houses grew in number, so did the tradition of the sojourn, with opportunities expanding significantly. Sir Charles Stewart Addis for example, who was to become the Director of the Bank of England, resided in a plethora of Asian locations as a result of his work for the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation.<sup>15</sup>

While the early sojourners have attracted some attention, within the pool of scholarly literature concerned with the British presence in Asia, little has been made of the specific context of sojourner life for the migration experience. Too often these sojourners—a group now often classed as expats—are an invisible demographic. In both cases it is the sojourners and expats' comparatively short-term residence in a particular location that provides a critical reason for this lacuna.<sup>16</sup> This is a direct result of the genuine problem of capturing them in data, particularly for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when detailed records relating to European residents in Asia are limited. Critically, this is one reason why a study of ethnic associations is so important: it provides one clear inroad into the sojourner world. Still we fully appreciate that an investigation of ethnic associations provides a prism not without its own issues, as any study focused on ethnic clubs and societies can only ever capture a specific cohort of a larger group of people—those who, as Figure 1 shows, actively employ their ethnicity in an organised way through a collective. This is, we recognise, problematic. However, and particularly in the absence of a discrete body of alternative records capturing the life experiences of sojourners, an assessment of how a significant number of people from a particular migrant group converge post-migration nonetheless

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<sup>14</sup> *Straits Times*, 13 December 1937.

<sup>15</sup> Bueltmann, *Clubbing Together*, p. 176.

<sup>16</sup> This is not the place for an extended discussion of the term 'expat' given that it is of more contemporary resonance than the timeframe of this study. However, it is worth noting that it is a loaded term with a range of possible definitions. A classic assessment is provided by Erik Cohen, 'Expatriate Communities', *Current Sociology*, 24, no. 3 (1977): pp. 5–90.



permits consideration of critical issues relating to their experience of relocation, their experience of ‘making home’ in a new world.

Recent scholarship has emphasised the importance of ethnic associations to British diasporic communities around the world. In fact, even much closer to home, in the near diaspora and within the constituent nations themselves, clubs and societies were founded to offer formalised platforms for ethnic expression and network-building from the 1600s. These early manifestations of ethnic association within the British Isles were, as in Singapore, also Scottish: the Scots were true pioneers of the ethnic associational scene. Their principal home at this early stage was London, where the Scots Hospital or Corporation was founded in the mid-seventeenth-century to aid distressed Scots residents in the city.<sup>17</sup> Later on, in the nineteenth century, Scottish club culture in London diversified, as new organisations moved away from providing charity for fellow Scots in need—their traditional focus—to more sociable pursuits, the city’s Caledonian Society setting the tone with its annual Caledonian Ball. From these origins in the British Isles the Scots took their associational culture with them when migrating overseas, spearheading developments, first, in the United States.<sup>18</sup> The English were hot on the Scots’ heels abroad, their ethnic associationalism flourishing overseas, being expressed in this way first in the diaspora rather than at home—much in the same way as has been shown for the Irish.<sup>19</sup> The position of the Welsh was more complicated, not least as a result of their comparatively small number. As a result of this, in North America at least, St George’s societies frequently embraced the Welsh, opening up membership for them—though never for the Scots.<sup>20</sup>

As migratory streams changed in terms of destination, bringing British migrants to an increasingly diverse range of places around the world, their ethnic associational culture similarly spread. This point is critical, confirming that ethnic associationalism was a common response to migration, designed to offset the

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17 For details see *An Account of the Institution, Progress, and Present State of the Scottish Corporation in London* (London, 1799).

18 The first Scottish ethnic association to be set up abroad was the Scots’ Charitable Society of Boston established in the mid-seventeenth century. For an extended assessment of developments is available in Bueltmann, *Clubbing Together*.

19 Tanja Bueltmann, David Gleeson and Donald M. MacRaild, ‘Invisible Diaspora? English Ethnicity in the United States before 1920’, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 33, no. 4 (2014): pp. 5–30; on the Irish see Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, MA, 1997).

20 Tanja Bueltmann and Donald M. MacRaild, ‘Globalising St George: English Associations in the Anglo-world to the 1930s’, *Journal of Global History*, 7, no. 1 (2012): p. 87.



effects of relocation and provide migrants with a means to actively shape their new environment by employing their ethnicity. This was the case not only because of the unifying effect associations could have on ethnic groups outside of the homeland, but also the associations' wider relevance for both immigrant and host community.<sup>21</sup> This relates to the fact that the motivation of ethnic associationalism, certainly on the part of an individual, could be circumstantial, being driven by new world needs that went beyond the mere desire to indulge in a little bit of homeland culture. At organisational level such a circumstantial take could also play a critical role, being the principal reason why many associations, and although they were clearly ethnic at the core, were driven by wider concerns that tied them directly into civic life.

### **Colonial Singapore**

In the course of the nineteenth century, Singapore emerged as 'the premier port in Southeast Asia',<sup>22</sup> and one of the most important in the British Empire. This was a remarkable development given the small scale of the settlement at the beginning of the century. When the island was identified by Englishman Stamford Raffles, the then Lieutenant Governor of the British colony at Bencoolen, as the ideal site for a new port in 1819, there were only a few hundred residents. As the new port developed, however, it soon attracted traders and migrants from across the globe.<sup>23</sup> As Newbold notes in his early account of the development of the island, by the mid-1830s the population had already risen to nearly 30,000, though the European element of that population still stood at less than 200.<sup>24</sup> This growth was a result too of the island's pivotal role in British enterprise in Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century:<sup>25</sup> not only did it provide a new port, its location also meant that it served as a critical stepping stone for further expansion east. And while, overall, Europeans remained a minority, Singapore did see the arrival of a growing number of them as the nineteenth century progressed. It was, after all,

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21 Graeme Morton, *Ourselves and Others: Scotland 1832–1914* (Edinburgh, 2012); Donald MacRaild, Tanja Bueltmann and David T. Gleeson, 'Invisible Diaspora? English Ethnicity in the United States before 1920', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 33, no. 4 (2014): pp. 5–30.

22 Wong Lin Ken, 'Singapore: Its Growth as an Entrepôt Port, 1819–1941', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 9, no. 1 (1978): pp. 50–84.

23 Ibid.

24 T.J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca*, I (London, 1839), pp. 280; 283.

25 J.J. van Helten, and Geoffrey Jones, 'British business in Malaysia and Singapore since the 1870s' in R.P.T. Davenport-Hines, and Geoffrey Jones, eds., *British Business in Asia since 1860* (Cambridge and New York, 1989), p. 160.

the age of mass migration, the century throughout which millions of Europeans left their homes in search of new opportunities overseas. Britain alone bade farewell to vast numbers of people—an estimated 11.4 million men, women and children departed her shores during the period 1815 to 1930.<sup>26</sup> Even if not exuding quite the same pull as North America or Australia, Asia was still affected by the general growth in migration. Singapore certainly grew in importance—and this despite the considerably longer journey time of 45 days to Singapore as opposed to the 14 days required to travel from Liverpool to North America.<sup>27</sup> Merchants, bank clerks, engineers and telegraphists were drawn to her shores by its growing reputation as a land of opportunity.<sup>28</sup> On offer, and of similar social standing, were an abundance of senior management positions, a role common among the members of our ethnic associations. The Great Eastern Life Assurance Company, for example, provided employment to a number of Singapore StAS members in the 1930s,<sup>29</sup> while estates like Bukit Timah and the Seletar-based Trafalgar Estate, were routinely found to be headed by a Briton.<sup>30</sup> The East India Company, through the monopoly it held for a long time, was perceived by many as critical in facilitating access to Asia in the early days. However, once the Company's monopoly had gone, a growing number of possibilities opened up for individuals to go it alone. Among these intrepid persons in Singapore, the Scots emerged as a dominant force; of the first 17 trading partnerships set up in the city, for example, 12 were principally Scottish.<sup>31</sup>

One important factor in drawing even more Britons to Singapore was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869: this made travel to Singapore a considerably more attractive prospect, with the passage to Asia becoming far quicker as ships followed a new route connecting the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea. Writing in January 1870 of the Canal's successful opening, the editor of the *Straits Times* heralded this new era of trans-continental travel: 'It is to the Suez Canal we look as the agency that is to quicken our trade, and to increase the importance of Singapore as a commercial centre and port of call'.<sup>32</sup>

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26 Ian Whyte, 'Migration and Settlement' in Chris Williams, ed., *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), p. 281.

27 R. Kubicek, 'British Expansion, Empire and Technological Change' in A. Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Volume III, *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), p. 255.

28 Nick Aplin, 'The Slow Contagion of Scottish Example: Association Football in Nineteenth-century Colonial Singapore', *Soccer & Society*, 14, no. 5 (2013): p. 588.

29 *Singapore Free Press*, 21 April 1937; *Straits Times*, 13 December 1937.

30 *Singapore Free Press*, 10 November 1919.

31 T.M. Devine, *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora, 1750–2010* (London, 2011), p. 78.

32 *Straits Times*, 4 January 1870.

For one twentieth-century commentator, ‘it was easy to prophesy that the opening of the Canal heralded the dawn of a new era of prosperity’.<sup>33</sup> This optimistic mood transcended Singapore’s boundaries as news of a booming economy reached Britain. There, regional newspapers reported on the new route and began to run advertisements encouraging readers to ‘Steam via the Suez Canal’. An 1871 announcement marketing the route in the *Liverpool Mercury* advertised ‘good accommodation for cabin passengers’ and reassured prospective travellers that ‘all the steamers carry a surgeon and a stewardess’.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the Straits Steamship Company, formed on 20 January 1890, would further boost trade relations between Europe and Asia.<sup>35</sup> This growth was marked in 1897 in the jubilee address of the Municipal Commissioners which described Singapore as, ‘one of the largest sea ports in the world, visited in 1896 by ships whose combined tonnage exceeded 8½ million tons, and is the collecting and distributing centre for all the vast trade of Southern Asia and the Eastern Archipelago’.<sup>36</sup>

By the turn of the century, as a result of this rapid late-nineteenth-century growth and improvements in transport and trade, a large, modern city had developed.<sup>37</sup> As the Census of the British Empire of 1901 documents, the Straits Settlement then had a population of 228,555, including 2,659 British residents; 1,870 of them resided directly in Singapore. There were also a further 306 British recorded as ‘floating’ population, with 96 crew members of the *H.M.S. Algerine*, and 67 of the *Pigmy*, among them.<sup>38</sup> This points to a further important characteristic of the British presence in Asia: a significant number of British residents were naval and military personnel—a fact that underscores the extent to which the British world in Singapore was a world of temporary residence and transience. In this sojourner world, stable anchors for individuals as well as communities were critical, and ethnic associations were just such anchors.

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33 George Bogaars, ‘The Effect of the Opening of the Suez Canal on the Trade and Development of Singapore’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28, no. 1 (1955): p. 101.

34 *Liverpool Mercury*, 10 July 1871.

35 K.G. Tregonning, ‘The Origin of the Straits Steamship Company in 1890’, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 38, no. 2 (1965): pp. 274–89.

36 Cited in B.S.A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore, 2003), p. 35.

37 W.G. Huff, *The Economic Growth of Singapore: Trade and Development in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 1.

38 *Census of the British Empire: Report with Summary and Detailed Tables for the Several Colonies, &c., ...* (London, 1906), pp. 121; 126.

### **The Roots of Organised Ethnicity in Singapore's British Community**

When Florence Caddy, a London-born writer,<sup>39</sup> travelled to Singapore in 1889 as part of an extended journey to East Asia, she described the 'large town' as being 'so flourishing and enlightened, so advanced and well-governed' that, 'after seeing the quaint and crowded city of Bangkok, we feel as if we had come out of the theatre into the plain light of day'.<sup>40</sup> Many British migrants arriving at the same time held similar views: Singapore, with its British foundations, made sense; its streets bore an air of familiarity, were less alien than other Asian centres. This was expressed too, however, through maintaining shared customs and traditions from the homeland—a behaviour directly substantiated by the arrival of new migrants from Britain. The idea of the eventual return home that sojourning British migrants held, if anything, only fuelled the desire to keep alive markers of homeland culture and identity. For Margaret Shennan, the daughter of a colonial officer, it was critical to maintain these symbols. 'We could leave "home"', she recalled of her time in Southeast Asia, 'and find similar patterns of life and values in quite contrary places'.<sup>41</sup> One key means to maintain these 'similar patterns of life' was religious expression. In 1878, for example, a 'new Scotch kirk' was completed in Singapore, having been 'built through subscriptions of old Scotch residents'.<sup>42</sup> The place of worship, the present-day Orchard Road Presbyterian Church, remains standing to this day. Religious worship undoubtedly can be one element of associational activity that has ethnic underpinnings: as Hughes has rightly noted, the Presbyterian Church can be cast as 'the largest Scottish association of them all'.<sup>43</sup> However, ethnic associational culture amongst the British in Singapore was intrinsically secular.

The first organised expressions of ethnicity from British migrants in Singapore can be traced to the earliest days of settlement. As in so many other parts of the British World, the Scots were the first members of the British community to actively engage with their ethnicity, coming together in public celebration in 1835 to observe St Andrew's Day. But it was only a number of

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39 E. Baigent, 'Caddy, Florence (1836/7–1923)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/46552>, accessed 12 Oct 2014].

40 F. Caddy, *To Siam and Malaya in the Duke of Sutherland's Yacht 'Sans Peur'* (Singapore, 1889), p. 227.

41 Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880–1960* (London, 2000), p. 134.

42 *Dundee Courier*, 26 November 1878.

43 Kyle Hughes, 'The Scottish Migrant Community in Victorian and Edwardian Belfast', (PhD thesis, Northumbria University, 2010), p. 4.

Scottish men who had gathered: ethnic associationalism in the nineteenth century, and throughout the world, was clearly a male domain. This was less the result of a deliberate choice to exclude women, but rather a reflection of the spirit of the time—pre-suffragist and pre-voting rights, many organisations at the intersection of public and private spheres, and including ethnic associations, were male-only. The fact that meetings of such clubs and societies were often held late in the evenings, with meeting venues often located in the back room of pubs or, in Asia, elite colonial clubs, did not help broaden female participation.<sup>44</sup> In Asia another more local factor was significant, namely that gender ratios generally were unbalanced. Even by 1901, the European and American community in Singapore was comprised of 1,737 men, but only 1,124 women. The imbalance becomes all the more pronounced when considering age: while there were 1,289 men of European or American origin in Singapore, the number of women over 20 stood at only 676.<sup>45</sup>

The man who presided over Singapore's first recorded St Andrew's Day celebration was William Napier, one of the founders of the *Singapore Free Press* and the son of *Edinburgh Review* editor Macvey Napier.<sup>46</sup> A man of firsts, Napier was, in 1833, instilled as Singapore's first Law Agent; then, in 1845, he became the first Freemason to be initiated in Singapore at the Lodge Zetland; and, in 1868, he was inaugurated as the first Chairman of the London-based Straits Settlement Association.<sup>47</sup> Napier's commitment to associating—not only by choosing to actively express his ethnic identity, but also freemasonry—demonstrates that he was, like many migrants, a high-level 'joiner', keen to influence the environment he now inhabited through associationalism.<sup>48</sup>

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44 One notable exception is the comparatively early formalisation of a distinct associational base for women in the Orange Order, see for instance the work of Jim MacPherson, including 'Migration and the Female Orange Order: Irish Protestant Identity, Diaspora and Empire in Scotland, 1909–1940', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40, no. 4 (2012): pp. 619–42. See also M.A. Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, 1989).

45 *Census of the British Empire*, pp. 124–5.

46 *Caledonian Mercury*, 6 January 1848.

47 The setting up of that organisation in itself is revealing: it was designed to promote trade and other concerns relating to the Straits Settlement in Britain, thus providing another type of associational platform sojourners utilised—only in this case after their sojourn had concluded. There were several such associations, including, for instance, the China Association. See also Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, and Roland Braddell, eds., *One Hundred Years of Singapore being some account of the capital of the Straits Settlements from its foundation by Sir Stamford Raffles on the 6th February 1819 to the 6th February 1919* (London, 1921), pp. 172–6.

48 For further examples, see Bueltmann, *Scottish Ethnicity*, p. 123.

Many more engagements followed the inaugural St Andrew's Day celebration chaired by Napier, and the *Singapore Free Press* routinely kept the city's Scots abreast of the events held. In 1848, for example, the newspaper reported on the celebration of St Andrew's Day by 'the patriotic sons of Scotia' who commemorated the day with 'an enthusiasm and devotion which proved that they were scions of no degenerate race'.<sup>49</sup> Describing the evening, the *Free Press* told of the 'free vent' that was given by attendees 'to their feelings of nationality' as 'the song and pledge went round to a late hour'.<sup>50</sup> Scottish literature also connected the Singaporean Scots to their homeland—like many communities throughout the diaspora, recollections of Scotland were sustained by the words of the national figurehead, Robert Burns. In the late-nineteenth century Burns' global popularity soared, and so it comes as no surprise that the *Straits Times*, at the dawn of the twentieth century, reported on a celebration of 'Scotland's poet, Robert Burns' at the residence of 'Mr McMurray, the Superintendent of the Tanjong Pagar Police' and informed readers that 'it is on the boards to inaugurate a Robert Burns Club in Singapore'.<sup>51</sup> Burns Night dinners were still held in the early 1930s, and alongside the haggis and whisky, the 1931 dinner featured 'a sprinkling of knees and kilts and a generous display of plaid and tartan'.<sup>52</sup>

The English had similarly engaged with their ethnicity from the early days of British expansion in Singapore—and perhaps partly as a result of an element of competitive ethnicity with the Scots: this was an ethnicity that emerged as ethnic groups competed for space in new societies post-migration, seeking to claim their place on the economic, social and cultural ladder, and was a characteristic in locations across the globe.<sup>53</sup> In Singapore an 1836 communication sent to the editor of the *Singapore Chronicle* lays bare the sense of rivalry. Sent only a few months after the Scots' first celebration of their patron saint, the letter-writer asked upon what day St George's Day would fall that year. For, according to the correspondent, 'our countrymen from the South of the Tweed will not be "backward in coming forward" to treat the Sons of Caledonia to the roast beef and plumb [sic] pudding of old England on that occasion'.<sup>54</sup> Still the competitive spark was not quite enough for the letter does not appear to have incited a public celebration of St George's Day. In fact, available records suggest that it was not

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49 C.B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore* (Singapore, 1902), p. 494.

50 Ibid.

51 *Straits Times*, 26 January 1901.

52 Ibid., 26 January 1931.

53 Bueltmann and MacRaid, 'Globalising St George', pp. 102–3.

54 *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 9 April 1836.



until the 1880s that the English in Singapore were to celebrate their ethnicity in a formalised and public manner. For the Welsh, we find a similar story—organised celebrations of St David’s Day in Singapore commence long after the first Scottish celebrations. Indeed, in 1903, the *Straits Times* featured a message lamenting the lack of proper St David’s Day celebrations, the letter-writer pondering when St David’s Day would be made a bank holiday in Wales.<sup>55</sup>

The available evidence does not supply clear reasons as to the different temporal trajectories in the development of organised ethnicity among the Scots, English and Welsh. What is clear, however, is that other activities in Singapore—meetings and celebrations—took on a distinct British flavour from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. It is plausible to assume that this played at least some part in the delay among the English to establish an organisation for themselves. This is the case because there had long since been a drifting between the terms ‘English’ and ‘British’ in the UK and abroad. Sometimes deliberate, sometimes accidental, but as Krishan Kumar and Adrian Hastings have argued, with the clear effect that England remained a synonym for Britain.<sup>56</sup> This made it possible to cast customs and traditions as British rather than English specifically, even if origins clearly lay in England,<sup>57</sup> and facilitated the permeation of a sense of Britishness. While this was, ultimately, open to Scots and Welsh too, the English often championed it—particularly so because Britishness was directly tied up with wider notions of British imperialism and loyalty to the crown.<sup>58</sup> This sense of Britishness could be expressed on a small scale at dinners small celebrations, but was more often seen run through more public events, particularly in celebration of dignitaries.<sup>59</sup> This included, for instance, the visit of the Governor General of British India, but also a ball held in honour of the King of Siam in 1871. The latter had all the hallmarks of a traditional British celebration. Considered a ‘splendid affair’, the celebration, held at the Town Hall, was deemed ‘the largest that has ever been given in Singapore’. ‘Illuminated stars and other designs’ decked the entrance ‘making the place a perfect blaze of light’. Following a similar pattern to many ethnic celebrations, the evening entailed a lavish dinner and hours of dancing. After the toasts the band in attendance ‘struck up

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<sup>55</sup> *Straits Times*, 27 April 1903.

<sup>56</sup> Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (New York, 2003); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (New York, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> See also Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, (New Haven, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> See also Bueltmann and MacRaild, ‘Globalising St George’.

<sup>59</sup> For an insightful introduction to the influence of British culture overseas, see Mark Hampton and James R. Fichter, ‘The Cultural British World: Asia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, *Britain and the World*, 5, no. 2 (2012): p. 177.



“The British Grenadiers” and played God Save the Queen.<sup>60</sup> In the early twentieth century celebrations of Empire Day provided the key outlet for this type of Britishness.<sup>61</sup>

### **British Organised Ethnicity and Singapore’s Club Culture**

The British who were drawn to Singapore in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries brought with them not just capital and expertise, but also a distinct culture—one connected directly to their socio-economic standing. The city’s associational scene, of which ethnic associations were only one component, reflected this standing. Among the scores of associations catering to the British were the Singapore Yacht Club, the Billiards Club and the Singapore Turf Club.<sup>62</sup> The nature of these clubs exposes the type of lifestyle that many Britons enjoyed in Asia. Descriptions published in British regional newspapers evoked thoughts of a relaxed life in exotic climes. Readers of the *Sunderland Daily Echo* were informed of the everyday life of a Singapore Brit. In typically British fashion the report began with a nod to the weather. ‘It is always hot’, wrote the correspondent, ‘so that the best time of the day is when you sit under the big fans on the terrace of the Raffles Hotel with a Singapore gin sling in your hand’.<sup>63</sup> But the value of this social behaviour did not simply lie in the enjoyment of a drink. As Paul Ward has noted, not only was the drinking of gin ‘ubiquitous in the British Empire’, cocktails like the Singapore Sling provided the ‘social cement of Empire’.<sup>64</sup> This sense of the expatriates belonging to a higher class is similarly identified by Peter Horton, who, in his study of sporting clubs in Singapore, neatly elucidates the importance of club membership to expatriate groups. Writing with the Singapore Cricket Club in mind, Horton declares it ‘socially and professionally a salubrious environment for career-minded young middle class Europeans and they were attracted to it with advancement in mind in both domains’.<sup>65</sup> Drinking gin together on a veranda cooled by ceiling fans or playing

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60 *Straits Times and Overland Journal*, 29 March 1871.

61 See for instance *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 17 May 1907 or *Straits Times*, 11 May 1912.

62 P. Horton, ‘Sports clubs in colonial Singapore: Insiders, outsiders, aspirants’, *International Sports Studies*, 35, no. 1 (2013): p. 38.

63 *Ibid.*

64 P. Ward, ‘Beefeaters, British History and the Empire in Asia and Australasia since 1826’, *Britain and the World*, 5, no. 2 (2012): p. 248.

65 Horton, ‘Sports clubs in colonial Singapore’, p. 40.

cricket in the humid air was also about the generation and accumulation of social, and often real monetary, capital.<sup>66</sup>

The types of ethnic associations we are concerned with here existed alongside these exclusive social and sporting clubs and it was common for members to be subscribed to multiple groups.<sup>67</sup> This emphasises the importance placed by many sojourners on maximising opportunities at all levels: clubs, regardless of what nature, were critical meeting places. What makes ethnic associations different from the social and sporting clubs listed above is that they had a ready-made anchor that connected members from the get-go: all were of a particular ethnicity, and that fact united them. In other associations the unifying connector had to be established first. While this does not automatically make ethnic societies more effective, it supplies one explanation why those new to Singapore often looked to them shortly after their arrival. So what else can we say about the development of British ethnic associations in Singapore?

The establishment of a Singapore StAS was first mooted at a meeting in the Exchange Room, in which a group of Scotsmen had come together to ‘consider the expediency of forming a St Andrew’s Society in Singapore’.<sup>68</sup> The evening’s Chair, Sir Arthur Henderson Young, opened proceedings by drawing attention to the fact that ‘there was no regular body of Scotsmen in Singapore to take the lead in arranging St Andrew’s Day celebrations or other events’ and declared the object of the meeting to be a decision on whether the Scots of Singapore should follow the ‘example of Hong Kong, Calcutta and other places in the East’ which already had St Andrew’s Societies.<sup>69</sup> Though there was some disagreement over the naming of the association, one attendee proposed what he perceived a more ‘comprehensive’ moniker—that of Caledonian rather than St Andrew—the motion that a Society be formed was carried unanimously. Records show that the Society was established in order that:

There might be in Singapore a regularly constituted body of Scotsmen under whose auspices and control the anniversary of St Andrew may be observed, and who may take cognisance of,

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<sup>66</sup> For the idea of social capital see A. Portes, ‘Social Capital: It’s Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24 (1998): pp. 1–24.

<sup>67</sup> In Singapore, the Festival Banquet of the local branch of the Royal Society of St George, traditionally held on St George’s Day, was in fact held in May. The reason for this was that ‘the Freemasons have their Annual Banquet on that day [23 April], and the Branch would, in consequence, suffer in attendance’. Source: *The English Race*, September 1937, p. 31.

<sup>68</sup> *Straits Times*, 28 November 1908.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

discuss, and take steps in regard to any matters which possess a national and local interest by donations from the Society's funds or otherwise.<sup>70</sup>

Although the assembled members were confident in the remit of their newly-formed association, on administrative affairs the party were less assured. Thus, they looked north to their countrymen in Hong Kong and modelled their association on the region's long-established organisation, so much so that the decision was made to 'adopt rules modelled on those of the Hong Kong Society'.<sup>71</sup> The transplanting of ideas between colonies was not unusual; from merchants and colonial administrators to sports and architectural styles,<sup>72</sup> many forms of capital and ideas were transferred throughout the British Empire, and the sharing of association rules happened often. Singapore's StAS set an entrance fee 'at five dollars', the annual subscription was two dollars, and the qualification for life membership was set at 50 dollars.<sup>73</sup> A number of esteemed guests were in attendance at this inaugural meeting, including Sir Arthur Henderson Young, Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements, who was elected President of the Singapore StAS;<sup>74</sup> John Anderson, then Governor of the Straits Settlements and 'doyen of the Singapore business community and pillar of Singapore society' who was elected Patron<sup>75</sup>; and committee member Dr Peter Fowlie, a Hebridean-born medical practitioner, champion golfer and elected Municipal Commissioner.<sup>76</sup> The background of these early lead figures in the StAS matches the overall socio-economic profile of British sojourners in Asia that we have already alluded to: unlike the majority of migrants who went to the settler dominions, those who went to Asia tended to be from a well-to-do background, had a relatively high standing on the social ladder.

Having established their own branch, Singapore Scots quickly immersed themselves in the world of associational culture: in the Society's first six months,

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70 Makepeace, Brooke, and Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, p. 303.

71 Ibid. For details on the Hong Kong St Andrew's Society, see Bueltmann, *Clubbing Together*, chapter five.

72 John Mark Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Lanham, 2007), p. 4.

73 *Straits Times*, 28 November 1908.

74 C.F. Yong, and R.B. McKenna, 'Sir Arthur Young and Political Control of the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore, 1911-1919', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 57, no. 2 (1984): pp. 1-2.

75 Cited in Horton, 'Sports clubs in colonial Singapore', p. 40.

76 Dr Peter Fowlie was a prominent member of early-twentieth century Singaporean society. Aside from his involvement with the StAS and his role as Municipal Commissioner, he was also the 1912 President of the Tanglin Club, one of the city's oldest and most prominent social clubs. In recognition of his esteem, his name was lent to Fowlie Road in Singapore.

over 100 members were secured.<sup>77</sup> The following year, the newly-formed StAS held a 'braw, bricht, nicht' when the 'inhabitants of Singapore were invited to plunge into the gay revels prepared for their edification and for a proper observance of Scotland's feast day'.<sup>78</sup> A report of the St Andrew's Day celebrations from the *Straits Times* sheds light on the festivities. 'Scotland has monopolised the Victoria Hall for practically a whole week in anticipation of and preparation for the national carnival', the report began, 'not only to the exclusion of ordinary Sassenach folk, but even to the exclusion of the new Bishop himself, who on Monday evening was obliged to receive his public welcome in the theatre'.<sup>79</sup> It was in the weeks following this jubilant celebration that the *Singapore Free Press* printed the short poem that opened this article. The following year, a correspondent of the *Singapore Free Press* recounted the worth of St Andrew's Day—an anniversary 'taken as the rallying point for the renewal of national associations and memories'. This was, for the report's author, particularly true for the Scots abroad for they took the day as an 'occasion for the summoning of friends of other less favoured nationalities to rejoice with them in their own rejoicing, to taste the haggis, pree the barley bree, and generally have a good time'.<sup>80</sup>

The year's celebration developed on a significant scale. On the occasion of the 1910 St Andrew's Ball, there were a reported 1,000 guests present, an assemblage so large that to 'accommodate that number with the comfort of elbow-room that a tropical climate makes a necessity, the capacity of the Memorial Hall was strained to the utmost'.<sup>81</sup> These balls in Singapore were part of a wider social scene in Asia that was framed, annually, by large-scale social events, mostly in the form of such balls. While this included gatherings organised outside ethnic associations, the ball scene was dominated by them, particularly those hosted by Scottish societies: on the basis of newspaper estimates, St Andrew's Day balls in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore, for instance, could easily attract a combined total of 3,000 to 4,000 guests in the early-twentieth century. Balls were elaborate and well-planned affairs, looked after by special committees. There was customarily a programme of dancing and music, combined with a dinner—usually in multiple sittings to accommodate all guests. The chosen venue's decoration was especially important, serving to effectively transmit memory and invoke the heritage of the group.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Straits Times*, 12 June 1909.

<sup>78</sup> *Straits Times*, 1 December 1909.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 1 December 1910.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> See for instance A. Radley, 'Artefacts, Memory and a Sense of the Past', in *Collective Remembering*, eds. D. Middleton and D. Edwards (London, 1990), p. 54.

At the 1910 Scottish ball in Singapore, shields of all principal Scottish towns ‘greeted the eye and, presumably, thrilled the responsive bosom of the patriotic Scot’, and ‘some never-to-be-sufficiently thanked person had inserted a few little blocks of peat that brought a whiff of Caithness bogland or Hebridean marsh’.<sup>83</sup> This sensory experience, apart from also serving to invoke particular memories, was a unifying force, an encounter which, for expatriates, could ‘indicate sameness and belonging’.<sup>84</sup> Newspapers vividly brought to life the balls to a wider audience, thereby enabling a wider reach beyond attendees. The significant scale of events goes some way to explaining their immense popularity and status throughout Asia. As Field has noted for Shanghai, though it could easily be applied to Singapore, ‘[p]rior to and up through the 1910s, the social life of the Shanghailanders revolved around national balls’.<sup>85</sup> At the 1906 St Andrew’s Day Ball the author of a report in the *Straits Times* observed the degree to which the festivities appealed not just to ‘the heart of the Scot’ but also to those ‘whose natal place was not “beyond the Border”’.<sup>86</sup> Still, the local population only featured in the margins of these events. While prominent locals could be seen, the balls were primarily the preserve of resident Westerners. United across borders, communication—through the dispensation of greetings—was a key means to establish a transnational connection. At our ball in Singapore, greetings came from Colombo, Tientsin, Batavia, Penang, Kobe, Hong Kong, Malacca, Shanghai, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Manila, Bangkok, and even from the cable steamer *Recorder* based on the Tonquin Gulf. Meanwhile, the Singapore Society sent the message ‘Singapore Brither Scots send greetings’ to Penang, Calcutta, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Yokohama, Batavia, Bangkok, Colombo, Manila, Rangoon, Weihaiwei and Tientsin. Critically, telegrams conveying these greetings did not only serve to re-affirm bonds between ‘brither Scots’, they also were one element that counteracted the transience common in the Asian sojourner world.

Yet, while Singapore Scots had well and truly entered the associational world in the early-twentieth century, the English and Welsh still remained surprisingly silent. The continuous impact of expressly British celebrations, particularly Empire Day, which was first conceived in the late nineteenth century,

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<sup>83</sup> *Straits Times*, 1 December 1910.

<sup>84</sup> Emily Walmsley, ‘Race, Place and Taste: Making Identities through Sensory Experience in Ecuador’, *Etnofoor*, 18, no. 1 (2005): p. 43.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew David Field, *Shanghai’s Dancing World: Cabaret Culture and Urban Politics, 1919–1954* (Hong Kong, 2010), p. 22.

<sup>86</sup> *Straits Times*, 1 December 1906.

plausibly supplies one reason for this. Framed as a global demonstration of union Empire Day was, for a writer in the *English Race*, the journal of the Royal Society of St George (RSSStG), a critical training for good, loyal, God-fearing citizens,<sup>87</sup> and thus an event the RSSStG promoted widely. In fact, the foundation of the RSSStG in 1894 was critical in the establishment of new St George's societies around the world, and also provided the necessary stimulus in Singapore, with the StGS there being established as an affiliate of the RSSStG. The London Society was delighted in spreading the seed, having been set up specifically to 'strengthen and encourage the instinctive patriotism of the English people, and to develop the race consciousness of all of English birth or origin throughout the world'.<sup>88</sup> With this focus, the RSSStG became the heart of a functioning, communicating, global movement of over 40 imperial centres. It had long expressed hope that Singapore's growing English community would join this expanding collective. A 1921 report in the *English Race*, described as 'a very valuable propaganda agent in favour of English patriotism', demonstrates this:

An extract from the *Singapore Free Press*, kindly sent to us by Lady Hyndman-Jones, informs us of the existence of a St George's Society in that quarter [Malacca], with which we hope presently to get into touch. Lady Hyndman-Jones, when resident in Singapore some years ago, endeavoured to establish a Branch there and, perhaps, some of the seed she sowed has now at last sprouted and borne fruit. In any case, we hope sincerely that this Malacca Branch will herald the spread of the Society among the many Englishmen in Singapore and the Straits Settlements.<sup>89</sup>

The growing popularity of the RSSStG in London in the 1920s, a decade which similarly produced flourishing branches in Swansea, Cardiff and Belfast, certainly played a part in the establishment of the Singapore StGS.<sup>90</sup> A 1926 report on the inaugural AGM of the Singapore association noted how, prior to its creation, Englishmen in Singapore had 'corresponded with the parent Society in England' at length.<sup>91</sup> In late 1925 the parent Society in London received word that there

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<sup>87</sup> *English Race*, April 1908, p. 23.

<sup>88</sup> Lesley Robinson, 'Englishness in England and the 'Near Diaspora': Organisation, Influence and Expression, 1880s–1970s', (PhD thesis, University of Ulster, 2014), p. 66.

<sup>89</sup> *English Race*, March 1923, p. 11; January 1921, p. 17.

<sup>90</sup> Robinson, 'Englishness in England and the 'Near Diaspora'', pp. 108–9; 164.

<sup>91</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 6 March 1926.



had been success in Singapore, and a branch of the RSSStG had been formed there on 12 October:

Mr D.W. Mortlock declares that all the 'spade work' in connection with the formation of the Branch has been done by Commander Vinden, and though frequently away at sea, he has promised to give every possible assistance when ashore. The Branch hopes that every member may become an Associate Member of the parent Society. In the meantime, our youngest Far Eastern Branch has been started under the best of auspices with an enthusiastic Secretary, who looks forward shortly to getting a membership of at least 200, and adds: 'With the growing importance of Singapore there is no telling to what extent our membership will go'.<sup>92</sup>

The Singapore Cricket Club, home to that most English of sports, was the backdrop to the inaugural meeting of the Singapore StGS. The evening's Chair began by lamenting his predecessor's lack of enthusiasm in bringing the English of Singapore together. 'He had been told that the idea of its formation was not a new one', wrote the *Singapore Free Press*, 'but, characteristic of Singapore, the idea entered the heads of several people, who having once thought about it had gone to sleep on it and had forgotten it'.<sup>93</sup> As with the formation of the StAS, the StGS sought assistance in establishing a set of rules—on this occasion looking to their countrymen in Penang, but also to the Singapore St Patrick Society. Membership was deemed open to 'all classes, the only qualification being that members must be English men and English women'.<sup>94</sup> The inclusion of women from the outset is clearly a reflection of wider social progress made for women: ethnic societies around the world, by the 1920s and 1930s, were considerably more open to accepting women, and there were also a growing number of women-only groups.<sup>95</sup> The extant records do not allow us to pinpoint the precise moment that membership of the StAS was opened to women, but the fact that women are seldom mentioned—and if they were mentioned then usually in the context of ball preparations, particularly for decorations, or in the 'toast to the lasses'—is instructive.

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<sup>92</sup> *The English Race*, December 1925, p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> *Singapore Free Press*, 6 March 1926.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> For an extended discussion on gender and ethnic associational culture, see Bueltmann, *Clubbing Together*, chapter six.



We cannot conclusively establish from the evidence that the Singapore StGS was generally more inclusive or progressive in its gender outlook, but its later establishment and under the umbrella of the RSSStG, did result in more open structures. Critically, what this highlights is an overall concern: one which we might aptly call the masculinity of ethnic associational life. We have already noted that ethnic clubs and societies had a significant male membership, but masculinity did not only simply stem from numbers. Ethnic associations of the British in Asia generally were more elite than those elsewhere—a simple result of the social standing of members. There were few working class migrants, and, consequently, the more working class associational forms that developed elsewhere in the world, particularly ethnic mutualism and a more down-to-earth ethnic sporting culture, did not show in Asia.<sup>96</sup> In this elite environment, the establishment and consolidation of hierarchies was a critical factor and the aim of many association members: in terms of the generation of social capital, many were keen to be at the front of the pack. With this comes the question of hierarchies: many of the men we have come across here were of a type Sinha has called the ‘manly Englishman’. What this conceptualisation seeks to address is that ‘colonial masculinity points towards the multiple axes along which power was exercised.’<sup>97</sup> Ethnic associations could be one such axis, offering a platform for the expression of colonial masculinity. From the ‘smoker’ at a ball to the tradition of late night drinking on the veranda of colonial clubs, much of the appeal of ethnic associations was overtly ‘manly’—and ultimately served to affirm and reproduce British masculinity in a new environment. Another factor was critical here: the strong presence of British military culture in Asia.<sup>98</sup> While military culture played a part in ethnic associational life in many locations—think for instance, of South Africa during the Boer War—the prominence of military men in the membership of British societies in Asia was important in visibly anchoring this culture. At a minimum, there was often a shared experience among many association members of military service, or even a current military connection. When St George’s Day was celebrated in Singapore in 1926, for instance, guests were met on arrival by ‘men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt., of the Duke of Wellington’s Regiment, in the uniforms of bygone times, creating at once an atmosphere so necessary for the full enjoyment

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<sup>96</sup> For a detailed assessment of the different aspects and roles of ethnic associationalism, see *ibid.* While the study focuses on the Scots only, new research on the English shows similar patterns.

<sup>97</sup> Sinha examines this within the context of India, but similar patterns are evident in Singapore. Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali’* (Manchester, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester, 2004).

of the event'.<sup>99</sup> English clubs in Singapore, as well as those of Scots and Welsh, were the 'preserve of elite administrators and military personnel rather than a popular movement'.<sup>100</sup>

The story of the Welsh is always complicated by the small number of Welsh arrivals: it is clear that sustained ethnic associational structures only work when they are continuously maintained by members, and the Welsh simply lacked strength in number for this. Undoubtedly this is one critical factor in the relative weakness of Welsh ethnic associationalism. Among the Welsh too there were, however, more informal gatherings and activities. Only three years after the establishment of the StAS, patriotism certainly had begun to stir Singapore's Welsh community. Though it was only a 'little band of Welshmen' who came together to commemorate St David's Day 1912 at the Grand Hotel de l'Europe, thoughts swiftly turned to something more concrete. The evening's Chair, D.Y. Perkins, 'hoped that the reproach that there was no St David's Society would cease to exist, and that after that dinner steps would be taken to form such a society in Singapore'.<sup>101</sup> Aware that 'their community was small in Singapore', Perkins believed that the Welsh 'had one great attribute and that was a great love for their country to which they were most loyal'.<sup>102</sup> Responding to Perkin's address, Colonel George Alexander Derrick, founder of Derrick & Co., demonstrated the way in which the British expatriates were aware of each other's activities. Indeed, 'he did not think the Chairman need reproach himself on there being no St David's Society, for the English had no society and in thirty years he could only remember St George being twice celebrated'.<sup>103</sup> In 1914, the Cardiff-based *Western Mail* reported on the activities of the 'small Welsh community in Singapore' who appeared to have 'made up for lack of numbers by enthusiasm on the occasion of their St David's Day fête'.<sup>104</sup> A later report in the *Straits Times* would make reference to a 'flourishing' Singapore St David's Society that fell into 'desuetude' after the outbreak of conflict in 1914.<sup>105</sup> Yet, no records exist to this effect and it is possible that this referred to the small group of Welshmen noted above.

For the Welsh too it took until the mid-1920s until a St David's Society was formed. The formation of the two Societies was met with great enthusiasm, and not just from the English and Welsh communities. The *Straits Times* heralded the

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99 Ibid.

100 Bueltmann and MacRailld, 'Globalising St George', p. 93.

101 *Straits Times*, 2 March 1912.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid.

104 *Western Mail*, 13 April 1914.

105 *Straits Times*, 24 April 1926.

establishment of the associations, and waxed lyrical about their importance: 'If the spirit they [English and Welsh associations] breathe and inhale can only be caught and fostered then Singapore will be a happier place in which to live and enjoy life.'<sup>106</sup> The formation of the Singapore St David's Society was commended several times, with the *Straits Times* leading with the headline 'Cambria, Free and Bold'.<sup>107</sup> Established only months after the StGS, the Welsh appear to have been motivated by a sense of competitive ethnicity, as observed in the local press: 'Welshmen and ladies of Singapore have followed the example of the followers of St George, St Andrew and St Patrick in forming a society of their own'.<sup>108</sup>

As the English and Welsh entered the associational scene, the Scots too, eager not to be forgotten, continued to commemorate their homeland through now well-established methods. Indeed, the 1925 St Andrew's Day Ball was attended by over 450 guests. As the evening's celebrations progressed, punctuated by the provision of dinner and the reading of greetings by kindred societies, the Scots 'as usual, demonstrated that they are "no that dour" even when the "drap in their eé" is quite of the weeist'.<sup>109</sup>

### **Philanthropic Ideals, War and Transnationalism**

Philanthropy, namely the provision of charitable aid to distressed countrymen, was a central tenet of British ethnic associations.<sup>110</sup> In Asia it was, however, generally carried out on a much smaller scale than elsewhere, contrasting in particular with developments in the United States, where benevolence was the very foundation on which both the English and the Scots' ethnic associational culture rested.<sup>111</sup> Both in Singapore and Asia as a whole, the benevolent trait was most obvious during the First World War, when patriotic sentiment prompted an outpouring of charitable aid from British expatriates and was channelled, in part, through ethnic associations. Most active in Singapore during the war were the Scots with their St Andrew's Society—no surprise in light of the fact that other groups had not formalised associations yet. On 1 October 1918, a short notice printed in the *Straits Times* detailed the recent charitable efforts of the StAS. The Society's Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, A.M. McNeil, had written to

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<sup>106</sup> *Straits Times*, 24 April 1926.

<sup>107</sup> *Straits Times*, 2 March 1926.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 June 1926.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 December 1925.

<sup>110</sup> Bueltmann and MacRaid, 'Globalising St George', p. 87.

<sup>111</sup> For details see Bueltmann, Gleeson and MacRaid, 'Invisible Diaspora?', pp. 5–30; Bueltmann, *Clubbing Together*, chapter two.

the publication to inform readers that recent donations from Society members to the Scottish Soldiers Comfort Fund had amassed a total of \$5,540—a sum which was to be sent directly to the StAS in Edinburgh.<sup>112</sup> A subsequent article about the charitable activities of the Scots in Singapore, printed the following year in the *Singapore Free Press*, indicated that the money raised by Scottish expatriates had been ‘expended in providing “Comforts” for Scottish troops on active service and, also, for Scottish Prisoners of War’.<sup>113</sup> The funds that were sent back home to Scotland—‘proof of the affectionate regard and vigorous loyalty which characterises Scotsmen in far distant lands’—were gratefully received: acknowledgements were sent directly from the front and from Regimental Societies. One particular expression of thanks came from the War Work Party in Callander, a small town known as the ‘Gateway to the Highlands’, which was given £25, money that had been ‘entrusted to the Edinburgh Society by its namesake, the St Andrew Society of Singapore’. For the recipients of this financial aid, which would be spent on ‘comforts for local men on active service’, the creation of the Scottish Soldiers Comfort Fund was ‘a striking testimony to the close bond of fellowship which unites Scotsmen all the world over, and which finds expression in so practical a form of sympathy with the men “at the front”’.<sup>114</sup>

But it was not only the Scots that were involved in benevolent activities during wartime; indeed, many expatriate residents of Singapore actively engaged in charitable endeavours. Yet at this point, and still without the formalised setting of an English or Welsh ethnic association akin to the StAS, the charitable efforts of the English and Welsh were largely concealed. However, a report sent from the High Commissioners Office in March 1918 listed the ‘various private subscriptions raised in the Colony and Malay States for purposes connected to the War’.<sup>115</sup> Alongside the \$8,143.77 raised for the Scottish Soldiers Comfort Fund were sums of \$2,723.02 for the Prisoners of War Royal Muster Fusiliers, \$2,147.82 for the Queen’s Work for Women and, collected in Penang, \$1,807.81 for Pineapples for Troops.<sup>116</sup>

Singapore and its immediate environs were not the only sources of practical philanthropy as the First World War facilitated the invocation of pan-Asian networks and transnational charity. Critically, these pan-Asian networks and war relief efforts more broadly, provided a more ready outlet for women to become

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112 *Straits Times*, 1 October 1918.

113 *Singapore Free Press*, 21 May 1919.

114 *Callander Advertiser*, 8 March 1919.

115 *Singapore Free Press*, 13 June 1918.

116 *Ibid.*

engaged through ethnic societies—a development evident in Britain itself too.<sup>117</sup> In the early months of the conflict, for instance, nine ‘Welsh ladies of Shanghai’ including the wife of William Hopkyn Rees, President of the Shanghai St David’s Society, organised for men of the South Wales Borderers and ‘any Welsh sailors there may be at Tsingtau and Weihaiwei a present of 4,500 cigarettes, 200 tins of smoking mixture, forty hard plugs of tobacco and sixty-one pipes’.<sup>118</sup> Charity roles for women were often indicative of the primary position of female expatriates: that of support for their husband’s endeavours—a fact that supplies another reason why women generally were rather invisible in British ethnic associations. In the same way that modern demographic studies have demonstrated that, as a general rule, women’s employment status declines when a couple migrates,<sup>119</sup> twentieth-century female expatriates found themselves assuming the role of the ‘trailing spouse’.<sup>120</sup> In that position they tended to be confined to more domestic roles,<sup>121</sup> and these did not translate well into the world of ethnic associations—at least not into its visible side. The importance of this supporting role should not, however, be underestimated.

Above providing practical manifestations of support, support activities during the First World War brought to life a global network of ethnic associations and connected those in distant lands with those at home. Some of the networks thus established continued to operate after the War had ended. A 1922 report from the Shanghai branch of the RSSStG shows, for instance, that communities, keen to unburden themselves of destitute countrymen, did not necessarily pay passage home, but to other English expatriate communities. In 1922, in addition to ‘school fees for three children, and also assistance for two other families with school fees’ and ‘temporary assistance to a number of Englishmen out of work and passing through Shanghai’, passage was paid from Shanghai to Singapore for a single Englishman and ‘an Englishman, his wife and his family’.<sup>122</sup> Requests of this kind formed the greater part of the financial aid distributed by each of the

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117 See for instance Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity* (Abingdon and New York, 2014).

118 *Singapore Free Press*, 13 November 1914.

119 Katie Willis and Brenda Yeoh, ‘Gender, Marriage and Skilled Migration: The Case of Singaporeans in China’ in Nicola Piper and Mina Roces, eds., *Wife or Worker? Asian Women and Migration* (Lanham, 2003), p. 101.

120 Marjolijn van der Klis and Clara H. Mulder, ‘Beyond the trailing spouse: the commuter partnership as an alternative to family migration’, *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 23 (2008): p. 2.

121 Willis and Yeoh, ‘Gender, Marriage and Skilled Migration’, p. 102.

122 *The English Race*, March 1924, p. 43.

ethnic associations. However, in 1927, the StAS were faced with a particularly difficult case.

December 1927 brought with it an unusual request for the StAS, an appeal documented by the *Singapore Free Press*. A former member of the StAS had, for reasons unrecorded in available accounts, made an unsuccessful suicide attempt. In the months that followed the gentleman in question had been arrested, called before a magistrate, and ordered to give an undertaking that he would not repeat the offence. During the court proceedings, the individual, Mr Begg, informed the magistrate that, on account of his circumstances, he wished to return home to Scotland and was 'hoping to get the money for his passage from the St Andrew's Society'. Responding, the Inspector informed the court that while the StAS was 'willing to pay Begg's passage' they would not pay that of his wife's to which Begg declared that his wife had 'stuck by him for seven years and he was not going to desert her now'. Upset, he added that 'in his successful days', he had been a subscribing member of the StAS and had himself 'always assisted "broken Scotsmen"'.<sup>123</sup> Weeks later the honorary secretary of the StAS responded to this report, stating that they had not in fact agreed to pay Mr Begg's passage home, and refuted his allegation that he had assisted those in need, stating, 'at no time has a general call ever been made to members of the Society to assist either the funds or "distressed Scotsmen"'.<sup>124</sup> Extant records do not provide a conclusion to this case, however, the circumstances show that the association's remit extended far beyond providing a forum for social intercourse.

The types of transnational connections evidenced for the period of the First World War had their foundation in profound communication networks that had, for some time, connected ethnic associations around the globe. Transnational messages, received by, and sent out from associations representing members of the British diaspora strengthened ethnic ties throughout the English-speaking world and gave rise to a wider national consciousness.<sup>125</sup> Greetings reached Singapore from England, Scotland and Wales: 'Britherly greetings' came for the Scots from Kuching, Tientsin, Penang, Zanzibar, and Medan; telegrams arrived for the English from London, Malacca, Ipoh and Negri Sembilan 'conveying fraternal greetings'; while the Welsh received congratulations from the 'Archbishop of Wales and the societies of Shanghai and Hong Kong'.<sup>126</sup>

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123 *Singapore Free Press*, 12 December 1927.

124 *Ibid.*, 23 December 1927.

125 Gary B. Magee, and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c.1850–1914* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 16.

126 *Singapore Free Press*, 1 December 1928; *Straits Times*, 24 April 1926; 2 March 1927.



Just as advancements in transportation had brought a growing number of British migrants to Singapore, technological advancements brought news from home to Southeast Asia. The Empire Service, ‘a connecting and coordinating link between the scattered parts of the British Empire’,<sup>127</sup> was seen as a key tool in helping to bolster an imperial identity.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, this connection to the homeland was truly a modern manifestation of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community’, sustained by print culture.<sup>129</sup> Transmissions on the wireless similarly brought together expatriates in the same locale. On St George’s Day 1937, listeners could tune in to their radios to hear H.S. Godwin, the vice-president of the Singapore RSSStG, deliver a talk on England’s patron saint.<sup>130</sup>

As travel around the British Empire became easier, physical encounters bolstered these aural or textual interactions. In 1922, Howard Ruff, President of the London-based RSSStG personally visited Singapore, an event recorded in *The English Race*:

[Howard Ruff’s] tour of the Eastern Empire of England was very complete, for he visited Burma, Ceylon, the Federated Malay States, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Thence he went on to Japan, returning the visit paid to this country by the Imperial Crown Prince of that country last year, and received a welcome worthy of the friendship and alliance that has for many years bound the two Island Empires together.<sup>131</sup>

This event instigated a long-term relationship between the Singapore branch and the London headquarters and in 1934, Mr Harry Bowrey, President of the Singapore RSSStG, travelled to London to attend the prestigious annual banquet of the parent Society.<sup>132</sup> Whereas ties with the global St George’s network were maintained primarily through the customary exchange of telegrams and newsletters, visits such as this, to the RSSStG’s metropolitan headquarters, brought to life these interactions. Singapore’s British communities had undeniably found their associational place not only in Singapore itself, but also the wider British World and the old homeland.

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127 ‘Opening of the Empire Service’, John Reith, 19 December 1932.

128 C. Ai Lin, ‘“The Modern Magic Carpet”: Wireless radio in interwar colonial Singapore’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 46, no. 1 (2012): p. 171.

129 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

130 *Singapore Free Press*, 23 April 1937.

131 *The English Race*, November 1922, p. 73.

132 *Ibid.*, August 1934, p. 18.



## Conclusion

Ethnic associations set up by British migrants in Singapore joined an increasingly active culture of associationalism in Southeast Asia. While membership changed often due to the high transience in the British community, ethnic associational culture continued to expand. So much so, in fact, that, in June 1934, a Bangkok-based correspondent for the *Singapore Free Press* penned an article entitled 'A Society Craze', bemoaning that '[t]he history of the foreigner in Siam or rather Bangkok, is strewn with the wreckage of societies of one kind or another'. The city 'has had rowing, sailing, gymnastic, debating and gun clubs and musical societies which have all flourished and then died after a few years'. Yet, within this 'wreckage', success could be found among ethnic associations. Indeed, it was the 'foreign societies' that were helping to provide for a more 'clubbable generation'. As the correspondent neatly summed up, '[t]hese have long since cut their wisdom teeth, and as one generation says good bye to the East, successors rise up to carry on the objects for which they were founded'.<sup>133</sup> Surprisingly, therefore, only three years later, in August 1937, a correspondent for the *Singapore Free Press* despondently reported that in Bangkok, 'Scotia's sons appear to be a dying race'.<sup>134</sup> Membership to the city's StAS had seemingly fallen and the Pipe Band, 'once the pride of the Far East' lay dormant—silencing a 'wonderful tradition'.<sup>135</sup> We may look to the Sino-Japanese War for explanation. As the effects of the conflict began to be felt in Bangkok, 'practically everything here which the ordinary Siamese house requires every day, now costs more',<sup>136</sup> funds for civic pursuits may have been limited. Indeed, for other societies, the onset of the inter-war economic downturn and the global impact of the depression stripped away members who were unable to fund their membership dues—a trend identified in the United States by Robert Putnam who found a sharp fall in civic involvement in communities devastated by the Great Depression.<sup>137</sup> Yet, southward, at the foot of the shallow arm of the Gulf of Thailand, Singaporean Scots, along with their English and Welsh counterparts, were flourishing, highlighting the importance of pacing the evolution of ethnic associations clearly within their respective local context.

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133 This and previous quotations taken from *Singapore Free Press*, 27 June 1934.

134 *Singapore Free Press*, 6 August 1937.

135 *Ibid.*

136 *Straits Times*, 30 August 1937.

137 R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000), p. 54.

What we have seen for Singapore is that organised ethnic associational culture offered sojourners a mechanism through which to remain connected to their homeland while in Singapore. While sociability was certainly the driving force behind the establishment of each of the associations explored here, their purpose transcended the desire to be convivial. Associations provided support to expatriates, and provided a potent platform for the establishment and honing of connections that for more instrumental purposes, such as the generation of social capital or the making of new business connections. Moreover, groups showed their support for the homeland—whether their individual nations, or to Britain—during times of conflict. Ultimately, through organised ethnicity, British expatriates succeeded in making home in a sojourner world, establishing formalised structures that permitted them not only to maintain their ethnic identity, but also to link it directly, and in a way that transcended the immediate ethnic purpose, to both local society and the old world.