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BRITISHNESS IN RECENT AUSTRALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT. *Australian public debate in the 1990s was dominated by issues surrounding the 'impending' republic. At the same time, Australian historiography experienced a return in the attention of historians to Australia's relations and ties with Great Britain, paralleling the increasing interest of Australians in severing the remaining constitutional links with the United Kingdom. Australian 'Britishness' has, unarguably, been a common theme in many contemporary histories. In subjects ranging from war, 'dedominionization', and republicanism, historians have noted with interest the challenges in history which have faced the imperial connection in Australia. This paper reviews the exploration of Britishness in recent historiography, and pays particular attention to a few key publications.*

Australian historiography in the 1980s was profoundly affected by the leviathan shadow of the national bicentenary. The fervour in which the Australian public was caught up in the flurry of historical commemoration and assessment of cultural identity was encouraged and sponsored by its Labor government. With such sudden mass attention on Australia's past and on its contemporary identity, historians were given unparalleled exposure in the media, and they responded with a plethora of cultural, social, and 'official' histories. Australian history became a school of 'people's history'. Political and other 'high' histories were no longer in demand, as Australians were challenged by interest groups demanding recognition of their place in the country's history. Women, Aborigines, and ethnic minorities received special attention in the 1980s revision of Australian history, encouraged by the policies of the government and dominant intellectuals of the day. The mammoth, co-operative historical project, *Australians: a historical library*,[1] tactfully covered all social and cultural domains. Bright, colourful pages paid special attention to the indigenous experience of Australian history, as well as to that of women and migrants. The more generic topics of Australian popular culture, such as sport, leisure, and family life, were also richly presented in this showcase of Australian history and historians.[2] There was an attempt made to redress the project's anticipated shortcomings by the quasi-Marxist series, *A people's history of Australia*,[3] as well as by John Rickard's widely read book, *Australia: a cultural history*.[4]

[1] *Australians: a historical library* (11 vols., Sydney, 1987).
[2] There were approximately four hundred contributors to the official history project, *Australians*.
[3] Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, eds., 4 volumes: *Constructing a culture*, *Staining the wattle*, *A most valuable acquisition*, and *Making a life* (Fitzroy, 1988).
[4] John Rickard, *Australia: a cultural history* (London and New York, 1988).

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Common to all, though, was a vigorous attention to cultural and people's history in Australia.[5]

By contrast, the 1990s came to be dominated in Australia by debate surrounding the 'impending' republic. At the same time, the focus of Australian historiography returned to Australia's relations with and ties to Great Britain. Arguably, this development was largely a product of the contemporary interest in severing the remaining constitutional ties with the United Kingdom, and was also encouraged by the reinterpretation of national identity provoked by the bicentenary and later championed by Paul Keating during his time as prime minister. Hence historians have revisited Australia's experience of empire with keen interest. Their histories have focused on a varying range of issues, although Australia at war, its 'dedominionization', and the republic are common themes. But they also share many characteristics. Regardless of which theme is under discussion, historians are almost universally touting their histories as a reassessment of previous interpretations of Australia and empire.

Historians of recent years have avoided tired and romantic perceptions of the British connection in Australia. Many, instead, are now challenging the previously supposed affinity between the United Kingdom and its Australian dominion. Some, such as Eric Andrews and Christopher Waters, are now probing deeper into historical relations between Australians and the British, assessing the tension between them which has periodically existed in the last century.[6] Many have placed particular attention on the process of Australia's separation from Britain. Australia's gradual relaxation of its close ties with the United Kingdom has occurred over the greater proportion of the twentieth century. Hence many rewrites of Australian history in recent years have looked at issues of identity, belonging, and the imperial relationship.

Of particular interest in this present discussion is the increasing awareness which historians have recently demonstrated of 'Britishness' in Australia. During most of Australia's experience of white settlement, the vast majority of the non-indigenous population firmly regarded themselves as British citizens. Australians' political activity in the nineteenth century, their federation in 1901, their participation in many international conflicts before and since, their immigration policies until the 1970s, and their general social and cultural identity has been for the most part associated and constructed by their sense of Britishness. Yet paralleling the Australian separation from the United Kingdom, this Britishness was gradually contested, questioned, challenged, and eroded, until by Gough Whitlam's term in office in the 1970s it was publicly denounced and dethroned. Remnants of Australian Britishness still exist, of course. The mere fact that many Australians are not prepared to discard an English monarch as their own testifies in part to this fact. But for the most part, Australians by the end of the twentieth century have embraced their unique identity and fostered their burgeoning sense of what it means to be Australian. This review will show how recent historians have analysed Australian Britishness and its demise in their histories of Australia in the twentieth century.

Australia at war is one subject which has regularly attracted the notice of historians

[5] Other examples of Australian histories at the time, providing special attention to cultural and social issues, are John Molony, *The Penguin bicentennial history of Australia: the story of 200 years* (Ringwood, 1987); and Geoffrey Bolton, gen. ed., *The Oxford history of Australia* (4 vols., Melbourne, 1986–90).

[6] E. M. Andrews, *The Anzac illusion: Anglo-Australian relations during World War I* (Cambridge, 1993).

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writing about Anglo-Australian relations. This is particularly so for Andrews, Joan Beaumont, and David Day. As well as providing a 'mandatory' account of Australian military involvement in conflicts such as the First and Second World Wars, these writers have also attempted a deeper analysis of the dynamics and interplay between Australia and Britain at the time. It is several years since Andrews launched his ground-breaking thesis on Anglo-Australian relations during the Great War. No longer a new publication, it remains of key interest to students of this area and is to be found on any relevant university reading list. Andrews develops three pivotal themes in *The Anzac illusion*. First, he writes that the significance and uniqueness traditionally attributed to the Anzacs by Australians and others has been an illusion. The valour and the bravery of Anzac soldiers is a familiar image to many. In 1916 John Masefield, later to be poet laureate, described the Anzacs at Gallipoli as 'the finest body of young men ever brought together in modern times. For physical beauty and nobility of bearing they surpassed any men I have ever seen.'[7] His sentiments were echoed and propagated by C. E. W. Bean, Australian war correspondent and later official war historian. Bean lauded the fighting capacities and qualities of the Australian troops, claiming excitedly of their campaign at Pozières: 'What is a barrage against such troops! They went through it as you would go through a summer shower.'[8] Richard White maintains that imperially minded Australians warmed to these dubious admirations by British and Australian observers overseas, and quickly absorbed them into their national image as being uniquely Australian in nature.[9] Andrews, though, disputes that there was anything uniquely Australian about the Anzacs' prowess, habits, or military capability. Rather, he contends that other dominions made an equally significant contribution to the imperial war effort – Canada and New Zealand two cases in point.[10] The bloody and horrendous nature of war was experienced by all countries involved, as were acts of heroism among men and women in battle. Nor were Australians innocent of occasional incompetence and poor leadership, Andrews notes.[11] Instead, he writes that the Australian experience and behaviour at war was representative of most:

> Indeed, many of the attributes which Bean assumes were characteristics of the Anzacs were in fact common to many soldiers. To give a minor example, their habit of stripping to the waist and wearing only shorts when working was commonly adopted by North Country and Scottish troops too. Most of all, however, he ignored the ugly face of battle, and the disillusionment and cynicism of the men.[12]

Along with contesting the traditional Anzac fighting image, Andrews also develops the theme that Anglo-Australian relations were so affected by the strain of the conflict that by the later years of the war, Australians were beginning to lose their faith in the capacity of the British authorities to lead the empire and the imperial war effort. Certainly, after the severe losses at the Western Front in 1918, 'Australians began to abandon their assumption that British leaders knew best', and began to demand a voice in imperial strategy formulation.[13] Andrews writes that in the Middle East, the Australian Light Horse grew increasingly 'disgusted' with the British command. So much so, in fact, that they 'failed to salute Chetwode and his orderlies as they rode through their ranks', and openly laughed at the pretentious bearing of the British

[7] John Masefield, cited in Richard White, *Inventing Australia: images and identity, 1688–1980* (North Sydney, 1981), p. 129. [8] C. E. W. Bean cited in Andrews, *Anzac illusion*, p. 62.
[9] White, *Inventing Australia*, p. 129; see also Rickard, *Australia*, p. 119.
[10] Andrews, *Anzac illusion*, p. 63. [11] Ibid., pp. 149, 150. [12] Ibid., p. 62.
[13] Ibid., p. 7.

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officers.[14] In France, too, Australians were said to find the behaviour of the British higher command 'depressing' and 'disgusting'.[15]

Bean thought very highly of the British officer, and extolled such a figure as: '[a] product, perhaps, of a culture which one would not desire to see established without modification in this country; but to me, and to some other Australians who met him over there, the finest thing on earth'.[16] Andrews, though, writes that 'Bean is not to be trusted on the attitudes of the Australian Imperial Force to officers.'[17] Instead, he argues that the Australian military mostly disliked and criticized the British leaders, and that such dissatisfaction was evident among all levels of the Australian troops. General Sir John Monash described junior British officers as 'young men from the professions and from office stools in the English cities, who have had no experience whatever of independent responsibility and leadership [and are too] comfort orientated and aloof'.[18] Similar views were held by the Australian soldiers. One returned serviceman had several derogatory tales to tell of British officers during the war: 'one sexually harassing a French girl; and two others refusing to accompany him into no man's land. Anzacs were sometimes horrified by the way British officers treated their men; and petty disputes with British officers were not uncommon.'[19]

Such images were fast gathering momentum among Australian service personnel, and, combined with widely circulated tales of British military incompetence, encouraged a new distrust in the leadership capacity of the British high command. This conveniently provided an alternative place to lay blame for Australian losses. Events such as Gallipoli, according to Rickard, were interpreted with a subtle anti-British perspective, and defeat could be blamed on British command: 'The defeat could not be laid at the feet of the heroic Anzacs: the failure of Gallipoli was a failure of British strategy.'[20]

Such widespread contact with the British social elite, as well as the ordinary 'Tommy', created a situation which Andrews develops as his third, major theme. Disappointed and disillusioned with the English they met and the England they visited, many Australians during the war began to reassess their identification or affiliation with their British 'cousins'. Here, we witness the first major challenge to the Australian sense of Britishness.

'In 1914,' Andrews notes, 'Australians *were* British. They were simply members of the British race in the antipodes, and entitled to carry British passports.'[21] It is a supposition supported by Geoffrey Partington in *The Australian nation: its British and Irish roots*.[22] Partington, in fact, suggests that Australians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries possibly identified with a British identity more so than the British themselves: 'A shared sense of Britishness was often achieved more readily in the Australian colonies than back home, partly because of the sharp contrast with the Aborigines, partly because the different populations of the British Isles were mixed together as they had never been before even in Britain's American colonies.'[23] Certainly most white Australians regarded Britain as 'Home'. Furthermore, the society in which they lived and the political system under which they operated were both modelled closely on those of the British. Hence Neville Meaney recognized that 'Australians were British and happily

[14] Ibid., p. 165. [15] Ibid., p. 166. [16] C. E. W. Bean, cited in ibid., p. 167.
[17] Ibid., p. 167. [18] Ibid., p. 168. [19] Ibid., p. 168.
[20] Rickard, *Australia*, p. 119. [21] Andrews, *Anzac illusion*, p. xiv.
[22] Geoffrey Partington, *The Australian nation: its British and Irish roots* (2nd edn, New Brunswick, 1997). [23] Ibid., p. xvii.

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counted themselves as members of the British community of nations.' He added that 'even those who urged a more self-respecting nationality did so within the assumptions of a British culture'.[24] Partington contends that it was due to this shared sense of Britishness that Australian colonists in 1901 consented to the limited union of Federation. He suggests that it was, in fact, the continued links between the individual Australian colonies and Britain that fostered the unity of their cultures as much as the 'frequent intercourse between the colonies themselves'.[25]

The recently retired editor of historical documents at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, W. J. Hudson, also notes the Britishness of Australians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: 'Migrating colonists, bond or free, were British citizens, traveling on British ships to British territory where they spoke the old language, worshipped in the old churches, lived under a version of the old law.'[26] If colonial loyalties began to develop on arrival, argues Hudson, the new Australians remained British just as a proud Yorkshireman was also English and a Scot part of the United Kingdom. Indeed 'colonists continued to think of themselves as British, and the home government in London continued to think of them as British'.[27] Non-British migration to Australia did not occur in sufficient numbers to challenge Australian Britishness until well into the twentieth century. In fact, there remained a considerable emphasis on continued British immigration to Australia after the war, assisted by the Empire Settlement Scheme and other similar incentives. Nor did the Home government act in such a manner as to incite Australian colonists to active rebellion as had been experienced in the American colonies.[28] It was in a real sense, then, that Australians saw themselves as British when their prime minister announced in 1914 that Australia would defend Britain 'to our last man and our last shilling'.[29]

Andrew Fisher's promise certainly reflected a widespread feeling within the Australian population, although Andrews shows that by the advent of the Great War, Australian empathy with Britain as 'Home' was waning in some quarters.[30] It was certainly apparent enough for a 1911 contributor to the *Round Table* to write that Britain was a 'foreign land' while Australia was 'the real "Home"' to most native-born Australians.[31] Andrews also contends that the reaction of Australians to the announcement of war was far more divided than originally accepted. To the surprise of recruiting campaigners, Australians were less committed to the war than originally anticipated. Nor were enlistment numbers particularly high — only 6.4 per cent of eligible Australian men had enlisted by the end of 1914. Andrews writes: 'Historians who make much of the "rush to enlist" might therefore do better to ask why *93.6 per cent of eligibles did not enlist* … Most men did *not* volunteer, and they did not "keep on coming".'[32]

None the less, the Great War gave the thousands of Australian men who did serve in Europe their first opportunity to come face to face with the English. Here, according to Andrews, the first challenge to Australian Britishness began. Australians meeting English soldiers for the first time were increasingly disappointed in their capabilities. It

[24] Neville Meaney, 'Introduction: "sidere mens eadem mutato"?', in Neville Meaney, ed., *Under new heavens: cultural transmission and the making of Australia* (Port Melbourne, 1989), p. 3.
[25] Partington, *Australian nation*, p. xx.
[26] W. J. Hudson, 'Strategy for survival', in M. McKernan and M. Browne, eds., *Australia: two centuries of war and peace* (Canberra, 1988), p. 32. [27] Ibid., p. 32. [28] Ibid., p. 32.
[29] Andrew Fisher, cited in Rickard, *Australia*, p. 119.
[30] Andrews, *The Anzac illusion*, pp. 36–9. [31] Ibid., p. 38. [32] Ibid., p. 45.

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was not only the British high command who were despised by the Australian troops, as has already been noted. Ordinary British soldiers also dismayed the Australians on their first acquaintance and their military competence did little to earn the respect of the Anzacs. Australian troops soon developed a firm belief, after several fiascos such as at Cape Helles and Suvla Bay, that they were far better than their English counterparts. On these occasions the Anzacs accused the British of losing trenches which the Australians had managed to capture.[33] Hence a subtle irony started to develop which enabled one Australian at Gallipoli to display 'typical loyalty to the Empire' while complaining of the 'fool English'.[34] Gallipoli was an eye-opening encounter for the inexperienced Australians: 'Australian illusions about British military competence were shattered … Gallipoli … began the long road of Australian loss of innocence. Faith in the might and wisdom of the British Empire and the idea of war as a glamorous adventure could not survive Gallipoli.'[35]

Nor was this emerging image tempered by the realities of the Western Front campaign. On 21 March 1918, faced with the German hurricane gas shell bombardment in France, many young British troops fled from the front, earning the disapproval of the Australians also present. One soldier from the 4th Australian Division wrote: 'The road is a continuous stream of … detached parties of 'Tommies' who have become 'lost, stolen, or strayed'. … Seems to me that the whole damn lot are more intent on getting back than getting up. They'll make a good advance guard – for the civilians' retreat.'[36] To be fair, Andrews notes, many other British troops fought long and hard, and Australians were also capable of leaving the front line under pressure. But the important issue in this case is that however warranted or unwarranted such an impression of the British may have been, it was a strong image developed by the Australian troops at the time, and one which has persisted to this day.

Many Australians also had their first opportunity to see England while serving overseas. As Michael McKernan reminds us, Australian soldiers still had periods away from the conflict while on leave or in training. Most Australians, he writes, spent several months in England for one or both of these reasons.[37] At school in Australia, children had for decades been taught the importance of the British Empire and came to acknowledge Britain as 'Home' both through these teachings and those of their parents.[38] Andrews and McKenna agree that the first arrivals in England fulfilled all of the soldiers' imaginings of what the metropolis of Empire would be like.[39] Andrews includes contemporary photographs of Anzacs touring Trafalgar Square and another of Australian soldiers and nurses setting out to see the sights of London.[40] Soon, though, their growing experience of England and the English left the Australians heartily disaffected. The climate was atrocious, London was dirty, and the British class system and snobbery quickly grated on the Australian tourists.

> There was, then, a 'growing mood of disillusion and disenchantment'. One letter-writer wrote that he hated England, and that 'they ought to give England to Germany and apologize for the state it is in' … So they turned their eyes back to Australia as a source of sustenance, creating 'a highly idealized picture of their homeland', which they saw with new eyes.[41]

[33] Ibid., p. 55. [34] Oliver Hogue, cited in ibid., p. 48. [35] Ibid., pp. 53, 54.
[36] Unnamed soldier cited in ibid., p. 175.
[37] M. McKernan, *The Australian people in the Great War* (West Melbourne, 1980), p. 116.
[38] Ibid., p. 116; see also Andrews, *Anzac illusion*, p. 181.
[39] McKernan, *Australian people*, pp. 116–18; and Andrews, *Anzac illusion*, pp. 179–81.
[40] Andrews, *Anzac illusion*, pp. 180, 181. [41] Ibid., p. 185.

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Gradually Australians began to recognize the real and significant differences between Britain and Australia, and grew 'increasingly uncomfortable'.[42] For perhaps the first time, some Australians began to prize their 'Australianness' over their Britishness.

Australian dissatisfaction with Britain is a theme also developed in many recent analyses of the Second World War. Historiographical interest has focused particularly on the fall of Singapore during the crisis of 1941–2, that event which Prime Minister John Curtin called 'Australia's Dunkirk'.[43] David Day has fostered discussion of this subject since the mid-1980s with his publications *Menzies and Churchill at war*, *The great betrayal*, and *Reluctant nation*.[44] His thesis has by now become well known and has been echoed by public figures such as former Prime Minister Paul Keating and his speech writer, historian Don Watson.[45] According to Day in *The Great betrayal*,

> in 1939 Australia lay wide open to attack, her defences practically non-existent, and she was reluctant to commit her meagre forces overseas. Her objections were overcome, however, by an unequivocal British promise to protect her from a Japanese attack ... [but] the oft-repeated promise to defend the Dominion came to nought. And, at the most crucial time in Australia's history, Churchill tried to prevent substantial American forces from being sent to the Pacific, and even attempted to delay the repatriation of Australian troops for defence. Thus Britain deliberately left Australia at the mercy of Japan.[46]

Day's fundamental thesis is that Churchill and the British war cabinet failed to acknowledge the real Japanese threat to Australia during the war and that, despite constant demands from the Australian government, they refused to supply sufficient defence means to ensure the region's protection. Australians, Day argues, came to a horrified realization that Australia was 'seen in London as an expendable outpost of Empire'. He adds, 'the blinkers were off as far as Australia was concerned. As Evatt realized to his horror, the Mother Country had abandoned her dutiful daughter in the south seas.'[47] Day considers the moment a considerable turning point in Anglo-Australian relations. Australia, he argues, could no longer retain any faith in Britain's promises to offer the kinds of sacrifices Australians were already doing to ensure Britain's own defence. 'The rhetoric of Empire,' he adds, 'and the system of Imperial defence by which Australia had set so much store, had failed its ultimate test'.[48]

Joan Beaumont offers an alternative interpretation of this controversial event in the relations of Australia and Britain. She writes that the fall of Singapore has predictably generated 'bitter controversy and a search for scapegoats',[49] a tendency which has not diminished to this day. Like Andrews, Beaumont attributes responsibility to both the British and Australians for the debacle of Singapore. The case against Britain is well known – the passage from Day, quoted above, demonstrates that clearly. On the other hand, Beaumont and others argue that the Australian government was insufficiently critical of the assurances of the United Kingdom leaders, and 'too ready to accept

[42] McKernan, *Australian people*, p. 117.

[43] Cited in Joan Beaumont, 'Australia's war: Asia and the Pacific', in Joan Beaumont, ed., *Australia's war, 1939–1945* (St Leonards, 1996), p. 30.

[44] David Day, *Menzies and Churchill at war: a controversial new account of the 1941 struggle for power* (North Ryde, 1986); David Day, *The great betrayal: Britain, Australia and the onset of the Pacific war, 1939–1942* (North Ryde, 1988); David Day, *Reluctant nation: Australia and the allied defeat of Japan, 1942–1945* (Melbourne, 1992).

[45] *Daily Telegraph Mirror*, 28 Feb. 1992, p. 11.

[46] Day, *Great betrayal*, dustjacket.

[47] David Day, 'Loosening the bonds: Britain, Australia and the Second World War', *History Today*, 38(1988), p. 17.

[48] Ibid., p. 17.

[49] Beaumont, 'Asia and the Pacific', p. 29.

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London's advice'. In fact, Australia had ample warning, if it had but recognized it, that the United Kingdom would not be able to fulfil its promised protection, and should have known to seek other means of self-defence.[50]

Geoffrey Blainey, in his 1994 *Shorter history of Australia*, also criticized Australian preparation for its self-defence. Contrary to his former pupil, Day, Blainey defended Britain's role in Australia's losses at Singapore, claiming that 'thousands of Australian soldiers were captured in Singapore by the Japanese partly because they had been inadequately equipped for war by their own nation'. Blainey adds that Britain actually contributed 'far more than Australia to the defence of the shared bases and strategic posts in south-east Asia'.[51] In the end, of course, Australia turned to the United States for an alliance necessary to secure Australian and regional security. Regardless of who was to blame for the fall of Singapore and Australia's insufficient defence measures, Anglo-Australian relations were permanently scarred by the experience.

By the end of the Second World War, the Anglo-Australian relationship had changed irrevocably. The following decades witnessed the gradual withdrawal of Australia from empire, and its separation from Britain.[52] An important part of this separation was the growing identification on Australia's part of diverging interests, and the Anglo-Australian conflict which arose as a result. Christopher Waters considers this conflict to be the 'most striking feature of Anglo-Australian relations in the immediate post-war years',[53] and calls it the 'fracturing of the imperial state in Australia'.[54] It can also be identified as another challenge to Australian Britishness.

Waters argues that prior to the election of a Labor government in 1941, Australia was ruled by an Anglo-Australian elite whose policies kept Australia as firmly in the empire as a more dependent colony such as Nigeria.[55] Partington's description of Australian Britishness in the nineteenth century appears to complement Waters's of the twentieth. Waters writes:

> The Anglo-Australian elite (and large sections of Australian society) viewed the world through an imperial imagination, it reacted to the world with an imperial instinct, and the bounds of its policy choices were set by imperial imperatives … The imperial imagination dominated Australia's institutional memory, its sporting memory, its religious memory, its military memory and its ceremonial memory … Being British was central to their identity and from that flowed their understanding of the world and the policy to be followed.[56]

Waters identifies the primary source of conflict between Australia and Britain in the immediate post-war years as stemming from the confusion and disorder that arose when the two countries began to pursue differing foreign policies – a subject also discussed by David Lowe at some length.[57] Unfortunately, both Lowe and Waters missed the opportunity to discuss the impact of the ratification of the Statute of Westminster in the Australian parliament in 1942 – an event which certainly reflected a change in Australia's attitudes to its relations with the British government. Waters and Lowe,

[50] Ibid., p. 33.
[51] Geoffrey Blainey, *A shorter history of Australia* (Port Melbourne, 1994), p. 183.
[52] Notwithstanding the contentions of some that this process is yet to end without the constitutional removal of the monarchy.
[53] Christopher Waters, 'Conflict with Britain in the 1940s', in David Lowe, ed., *Australia and the end of empires: the impact of decolonisation in Australia's near north, 1945–1965* (Geelong, 1996), p. 69.
[54] Christopher Waters, *The empire fractures: Anglo-Australian conflict in the 1940s* (Melbourne, 1995), p. 10. [55] Ibid., p. 5. [56] Ibid., p. 6.
[57] See David Lowe, 'Australia in the world', in Beaumont, ed., *Australia's war*, pp. 162–86.

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though, suggest that Anglo-Australian conflict in the 1940s developed out of differences in the imperial expectations of the post-war Australian and British Labour governments. The war had changed the political, social, and economic landscapes in these countries. Waters suggests that while Australia was beginning to identify its new, independent interests in the global arena, the United Kingdom returned to an imperial mindset and expectation of unconditional dominion support in its post-war reconstruction strategy.[58] 'Accordingly the ruling elites in Australia and the United Kingdom despite both being based in labour movements, no longer shared a common understanding of the world. The hold of the imperial imagination was broken in Australia, just as the imperial imagination was renewed and modernized in the United Kingdom.'[59]

Prominent British (and a few Australian) leaders of the day who were disconcerted at the increasing conflict between themselves and their Australian counterparts, blamed the caustic personality of the Australian external affairs minister, H. V. Evatt, for the discordant relations.[60] This, apparently, has also been the tendency of historians commenting on the same conflict since. Waters suggests that Coral Bell, Glen Barclay, and Kenneth Morgan are among those who have taken this approach.[61] He, on the other hand, contends that the conflict was a result primarily of the defeat of the Anglo-Australian elite in Australia, the subsequent fracturing of the British state in Australia, and the succeeding loss of identification in Australia with British interests. It was, of course, not a complete severance of the British connection – Waters, like others, insists that the separation was gradual.[62] But the process had started, and the changes were irrevocable.

The concluding episodes in the demise of Australian Britishness are provided by the historian of Australian republicanism, Mark McKenna. The issue of Australians' complete affinity with Britain is of powerful significance in his book, *The captive republic*.[63] In this case, little systematic conflict with Britain is explored and he therefore departs from a common theme discussed by historians assessed so far. Rather, McKenna provides an exhaustive analysis of Australian Britishness over the two centuries of white settlement and how it particularly affected the various republican movements during that time.

It is perhaps a surprise to many that the republican debate of the 1990s is not the first time Australia has heard volubly from proponents of 'people's rule'. Yet according to McKenna, republicanism has a wealthy heritage in Australian history.[64] Perhaps most surprising is the remarkable thesis which he has developed regarding republican causes in the nineteenth century. Contemporary observers of the republican debate in Australia take for granted that a monarch would be dismissed at the attainment of a republic, and that all remaining constitutional ties with the United Kingdom would be terminated. On the other hand, McKenna suggests that there was no such intention on the part of nineteenth-century Australian republicans. Rather, he writes that Australians proposing or threatening separation from the United Kingdom were merely

[58] Waters, *Empire fractures*, pp. 18, 15. [59] Ibid., p. 3. [60] Ibid., p. 194.
[61] Ibid., pp. 193–4.
[62] Waters, '1940s conflict', p. 77. For gradual Australian separation from Britain see also Geoffrey Bolton, *The Oxford history of Australia, volume 5, 1942–1988, the middle way* (Melbourne, 1990).
[63] Mark McKenna, *The captive republic : a history of Australian republicanism, 1788–1996* (Melbourne, 1996).
[64] See also Rickard, *Australia*, p. 115, for discussion of nineteenth-century republicanism.

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British (and monarchical) loyalists, demanding their rights as enshrined in the English constitution.[65]

A common attribute of nineteenth-century champions of republicanism, according to McKenna, was their loyalty to the British monarch. Colonists advocating republicanism were actually struggling for reform in colonial issues of the day, such as the cessation of convict transportation and the right to self-government. Other reasons for discontent and tension among the Australian colonists which McKenna recognizes were the 'draconian regulations' on the goldfields and dissatisfaction with British interference in colonial affairs.[66] Hence republicanism played a pivotal role in the struggle for Australian political liberty. Colonists ready for self-government and anxious to exercise their constitutional rights threatened independence despite their loyalty to the crown: 'Their threat of a republic was made to protect their right to be afforded the privileges of the British Constitution. The republic which beckoned was a direct result of their allegiance to the Constitution and Crown of England. They were loyalists first, and republicans second, a gathering of extremely reluctant rebels.'[67]

Consequently, Australian republicanism of this period had not the anti-British flavour of its 1990s proponents. 'Rather, it was motivated by a desire to protect their British heritage, a desire to be more British than the British authorities would allow them to become.'[68] Yet on all occasions, discontent with the colonial administration was deliberately separated from sentiment to the crown. McKenna quotes from an 1840s edition of the Melbourne *Argus*: 'We owe loyalty to one person – the Queen … We are bound … to distinguish between [the Queen and the Governor]. Every mark of respect … shown to the governor [is] an insult to the Queen … Be careful on all occasions to distinguish between respect to local functionaries and loyalty to the British Crown.'[69]

By contrast, McKenna recognizes the republicanism of the late twentieth century as a deliberate rejection of Britishness and dissatisfaction with remnants of Australian colonialism. When Prime Minister Robert Menzies bid farewell to Queen Elizabeth and the duke of Edinburgh on their royal tour in 1963, McKenna suggests that it represented the end to 'an affair between Australia and Britain which had lasted for almost two centuries'. Australia, he claims, had reached the end of its colonial relationship, and with the vast swell of non-British immigration which was to take place over the succeeding decades, so too had the trappings and conditions of British Australia. Instead of the nineteenth-century fight for British rights, modern Australian republicanism had turned into a campaign for a unique national identity. Hence, to many, the queen is no longer suitable as Australia's head of state, because she is not Australian.[70]

A republic as recognition of 'Australianness' is a concept which has been advocated by several Australian public figures in the last few decades. Les Murray, the well-known Australian poet, announced in 1977:

> The prospect of living one's whole life in a timid late colonial society is a mediocre and galling one and Australians don't have to endure such a prospect. If the republic is about anything, it is about the dignity and potential of human beings in this country … it is about confirming and strengthening the confidence of every Australian.[71]

[65] McKenna, *Captive republic*, p. 8. [66] Ibid., p. 40. [67] Ibid., p. 58.
[68] Ibid., p. 58. [69] Ibid., p. 32. [70] Ibid., pp. 219, 221.
[71] Les Murray cited in ibid., p. 236. See also Keating, cited in ibid., p. 262.

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McKenna himself argues that without the traditional monocultural stereotypes and Britishness in Australian society, the task for Australians now is to define their own identity. A century ago Australian republicans (apart from the poet, Henry Lawson) were still loyal, British citizens, campaigning to receive their full constitutional rights as such and dedicated to the service of the crown. In the 1990s, McKenna concludes, the republic is about 'how we wish to be Australian'.[72]

There is yet to be a conclusion to the episode of British Australia. The British monarch is retained as the Australian head of state, and the nation remains firmly entrenched as part of the British Commonwealth. National identity is of concern to all Australians, for it both determines and reflects the way in which they perceive themselves. In 1999 the prospect of an Australian republic was heatedly debated at all levels of Australian society, prior to the defeat of the proposed republican model at a national referendum. Now, remnants of the Anglo-Australian elite continue to fight to retain the old constitutional and ceremonial symbols by which they characterize Australian identity, while most Australian-born citizens and non-British immigrants struggle to accept the significance of such symbols at all. While the imperial legacy of Britain in Australia remains a matter for public concern and interest, it is pertinent that historians contribute to the debate with research on such issues as Australian Britishness and the Australian experience of empire. When the 'trumpets of empire' are finally stilled, and when Britishness in Australia is finally put to rest, it will remain only to determine what social memory will inform Australian historical writing, and whether the empire will be framed within it.

[72] Ibid., pp. 259, 260.

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