‘Kilts Versus Breeches’: The Royal Visit, Tourism and Scottish National Memory

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George IV’s visit to Scotland in 1822 not only involved the royal entourage but also attracted thousands of ordinary people to Edinburgh. These early tourists encountered a largely invented spectacle of Scottish history and traditions that was designed to create a unified memory of the national past, despite the reality of a sharp division between Highlands and Lowlands. This article examines how the tourist gaze helped shape a new Scottish national memory and identity.

Tourist, tourism, collective memory, national identity, tartanry, Scotland, consumption, guidebook.

Warm, sunny weather greeted the thousands of people who lined the road between Leith and Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh on 15 August 1822. A tremendous air of excitement hung over streets awash with animated chatter; a clamour all the more notable for its mixture of the broadest dialect of the Lowlands in discord with the twang of Gaelic, and the sharp and shrill pipe of Aberdeen. At 11:30 a.m., the sound of a distant bagpipe joined the buzz of the crowd. Then everything went strangely silent, the expectation of what was to happen next evidently taking hold. Just past noon, a cannon fired. King George IV had boarded his barge and was heading for shore. The royal visit was underway (Morning Chronicle, 19 August 1822).

The events that unfolded over the next two weeks are well known. King George IV, the first English monarch to visit Scotland since 1633, encountered a series of events that Sir Walter Scott, perhaps the most popular novelist in the world during the early nineteenth century, carefully
stage-managed. There were dress balls, royal levees, plays and a succession of other ‘traditional’ events designed almost entirely by Scott to present an image of Scotland as a Highland nation: what Scott believed the king ‘[would] like to see best’ (Grierson 1934: 213–214). It was a fair assumption. After all, the great author had been “selling” Scotland to the king for quite some time and he even managed to convince the monarch that not only was Scotland ‘a kingdom with its own customs and ancient traditions’ but that the king, despite his more immediately obvious German ancestry, ‘was not only a Stuart prince but also a Jacobite Highlander’ (Prebble 1988: 73). Scott reportedly had an easy sale. The king loved Glenlivet whisky (Smith 1999: 201–202) and liked Scott’s romantic vision of Scotland so much that he reportedly declared Scott to be his favorite poet (Oman 1973: 175; Smith 1999: 199–200). The king knew the author’s work so well that he successfully identified Scott as the author of Waverley, one of the most popular novels of the early nineteenth century, even before Scott publicly assumed credit for the work (Oman 1973: 191–92).

The major historians of the royal visit are united in their emphasis on the production of the affair and on painting Scott as ‘pageant-master’. They all assign tremendous significance to the events of those fourteen days (Skinner 1973; Trevor-Roper 1983; Prebble 1988; Withers 1992). For example, John Prebble goes as far as to argue: ‘If a single occasion can be said to have determined the kilt as the national dress of all Scotsmen … this may be the moment’ (1988: 103). Charles Withers, another important student of the evolution of Scottish identity, agrees (1992: 153). Before the royal visit, few Lowlanders would have contemplated wearing tartan clothing, a potent symbol of the stark division between Highland and Lowland culture. Scott’s festival, which invited Lowlanders to dress as Highlanders and Highlanders to dress as Scott believed Highlanders should, changed this. From August 1822 forward, Highland clothing – both tartan designs and the kilt itself – were intimately associated with memory of Highland heroics and Scottish national pride, even if the knee-length, skirt-like kilt and clan-specific tartans were a recent invention (Trevor-Roper 1983).2

The challenge is to explain precisely why the royal visit exerted such a powerful influence on Scottish national memory. After all, there was nothing new about royal travels and the political role of such trips is well known (Geertz 1985). Indeed, George IV travelled to Ireland in 1821 and was greeted warmly by the people, yet that royal visit plays virtually no role
in Irish memory (Prebble 1988: 44–48). Nor were royal festivals unique. The coronation of George IV in 1821, for example, cost an unprecedented £240,000 (Smith 1991: 14). Almost everybody involved wore specially designed Elizabethan clothing complete with ‘cloaks, ruffs, slashed-doublets, hose, and plumed caps of carefully contrasted colours’ while the king wore enormous robes and a black hat crowned with a ‘monstrous plume of ostrich feathers, out of the midst of which rose a black heron’s plume’ (Ibid.: 13–16). Despite the expense, there was no corresponding faux-Elizabethan fashion craze. In contrast, after George IV departed from Scotland, he left behind a country so steeped in tartan fabric that even today some scholars complain about the stifling prevalence of ‘the tartan monster’ in the make-up of Scottish identity (Nairn 1981: 165). Why was this the case? What happened in Scotland as a result of the royal visit that prompted this widespread adoption of tartanry and Highland culture?

The answer lies in the dialogue about the nature of Scottishness sparked by the mass of people from across Scotland and Northern England who travelled to Edinburgh to witness the visit. On their trip, these royal watchers discovered what, for many, was a jarring disconnection between long-held ideas concerning the difference between Highland and Lowland Scotland, now suddenly linked together with tartan cloth. Contemporary newspaper estimates suggest that as many as 300,000 people witnessed the king’s journey from the dock at Leith to the palace at Holyrood – just over 14 percent of the population of Scotland in 1822 (Morning Chronicle, 22 August 1822).\(^3\) Naturally, many who made the trip to Edinburgh were drawn from the social elite and the dress balls and formal levees were almost exclusively the domain of the wealthy. Those lining the streets, however, came from a much larger section of Scottish society. Without the benefit of railways, they travelled by ‘all manner of conveyances by land and by water; and Scotland from her shores and glens, and countless isles, came in coach, chariot, and cart, on horseback and on foot, and by wind and oars, and steam to the capital’ (Morning Chronicle, 19 August 1822). It must have been an extraordinary and eye-opening experience for these royal-watching tourists, who otherwise would have been unlikely to travel at all: an experience made all the more astonishing by the prevalence of the recently created ‘ancient costume of their country’ (An Old Citizen 1822: 16).\(^4\)

The experience of travel, writing about that travel and discussing the events at great length – not merely the fact that 300,000 people travelled to
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Edinburgh to consume views of a king and participate in newly invented traditions⁵ – helped transform the visit into not so much a lieu de mémoire (Nora 1989) as a lieu de discours, a ‘place of discussion’. The visit produced no single ‘collective memory’ of the visit, rather it generated ‘collected memories’ (Young 1993: xi): a hodgepodge of recollections and opinions that together prompted ongoing dialogue about the nature of Scottishness. Was Scotland a Lowland or a Highland nation? Was the kilt really a suitable national dress? What place did Scotland have in Great Britain? The royal visit transformed a previously limited discourse into a truly national one precisely because so many people participated in the event, giving them first-hand knowledge to be shared, whether in writing or conversation, with others.

This active discussion and questioning is exceptionally important because the nation is not simply an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1992). Instead, as Alan Williams recently pointed out, ‘Nationhood is not merely established, it must be maintained; its definition, therefore, will inevitably shift over time’ (Williams 2002: 3). Nations are not ‘imagined communities’; they are perpetually ‘re-imagined communities’ and that re-imagining happens as the result of a constant, ongoing process of debate and discussion about what it means to be part of the nation (Zuelow 2004: 15–21). The collective experience of consuming the royal visit spawned exactly this dialogue and thus helped shape modern Scottish identity.

This article examines the touristic experience of attending the royal visit to Scotland. It is divided into three parts. The first section provides a brief background for the royal visit. The second part describes the ‘lens’ through which royal-watching tourists viewed the event. The final section explores the impressions of those who travelled to Edinburgh and the dialogue inspired by their experiences. Ultimately, the analysis presented here illustrates how travel contributes to the creation of national memory and to the ongoing re-creation of the nation through a perpetual process of debating collected memories.

Part I: Background

When Scott began planning his royal spectacle he drew heavily upon a process of romanticising Highlanders that started soon after the Jacobite uprising of 1745/46. Construction of Highland roadways, Ossianic poems,
creation of Highland regiments in the British army (most notably the Black Watch), evolution of new pan-European attitudes toward mountains, Robert Burns’s poetry and Scott’s own romantic novels all served to convert Highlanders from barbaric brutes into clean-living strongmen (in the eyes of outsiders). Once seen as violent, now they were held to be romantic examples of the noble savage, something to be celebrated rather than reviled (Womack 1989; Withers 1992; Clyde 1995; Devine 1999). When Dorothy Wordsworth travelled to Scotland in 1803, her party felt that all the bother of travel was justified simply by the sight of a ‘Highlander upon the naked heath, in Highland dress, upon his careful-going horse’ (Wordsworth 1997: 233).

None of this meant that all Scots imagined themselves as Highlanders. Even Walter Scott himself understood the distinction between Lowlanders and Highlanders and, when he wrote to a Highland chieftain asking that ‘half-a-dozen or half-a-score of clansmen’ be sent to Edinburgh to take part in the royal festivities, he was careful to note that Lowlanders dressed in Highland garb ‘will not do without some of the real stuff to bear it out’ (Grierson 1934: 213–14). Simply put, there was widespread feeling that Highlanders and Lowlanders were quite different.

Not only were Highlanders and Lowlanders dissimilar, but ‘Highland culture’ itself was dying out, so much so that a small group of social elites, including Walter Scott, formed the Celtic Society in 1820. This body was part heritage society, part elite dining club, and part quasi-military organization ‘in the popular tradition of volunteer soldiering of the time’ (Skinner 1973: 229). The society sought “to promote the general use of the ancient Highland Dress in the Highlands of Scotland” for which purpose at the annual general meetings “all members shall be dressed in the ancient costume of the Highlanders of Scotland, each member if of any clan, in its particular tartan” (ibid: 229). The memory of Scotland as a Highland nation was unusual enough that it required dedicated cultural nationalists to publicise it; it was not a ubiquitous discourse.

More than a romantic desire to recapture a largely imagined past motivated Scott; he anxiously pursued the visit’s smooth progress in order to reverse trends he felt were pulling Scotland, and Britain, apart. Between 1817 and 1820, labour turmoil along the Clyde in and around Glasgow sparked protests, marches and violence during a period often called the ‘Radical War’ by historians. Scott’s letters to his son William, a soldier
stationed in Cork, Ireland, reveal the degree of his concern. On 16 November 1819, for example, he wrote that ‘Times look still dark[en]ing about us and I fear we shall want some of you gentlemen (soldiers) in blue or red or whatever the colour of your jackets may be. Every body [sic] however is arming in the disturbd [sic] districts’ (Grierson 1932: 17). One month later, on 17 December, he described ‘the fearful and unsettled state of the country’ and he portrayed Scotland as a divided land, with ‘our corner high and low’ ‘loyal’ while Glasgow and Paisley were in chaos. The state of affairs bothered him to such a degree that he planned ‘to raise a corps calld [sic] the Loyal Foresters to act any where [sic] South of [the] Forth’ (Ibid.: 53–54). A few days later Scott requested that his son return a sword that he had loaned to him, stating ‘I little thought to need my sword again but the peasantry are clamorous to have me as a leader so I shall look out for a steady horse that will stand fire and sword’ (Ibid.: 78). In Scott’s view, the radicals were disloyal villains and their unrest, combined with a Britain-wide economic depression, threatened to undermine both Scottish society and the 1707 Treaty of Union. The royal visit represented a way to repair the country by reaffirming not only Scottish loyalty to the crown, but also the nation’s unity between east and west, Highland and Lowland (Prebble 1988: 1).

Meanwhile, George IV also had reasons for visiting Scotland. The king faced open hostility in London for divorcing Caroline of Brunswick so that he might marry a Catholic (Johnston 1885: 233). Most depictions of the king included images of a lecherous man engaged in unseemly activities with young women. He lacked, furthermore, the necessary funds for a planned continental tour, requiring him to settle on a destination closer to home (Prebble 1988: 46–49). Under the circumstances, Scotland seemed just the thing.

The royal household only began publicising the decision to visit Scotland on 24 July, thus leaving Scottish authorities roughly three weeks to make arrangements for a royal trip. The Edinburgh City Council immediately passed the job on to Scott and his associates in the Celtic Society who had obvious ideas about how to proceed. Scott relished his role as pageant-master. By the king’s arrival he created a dramatic event (Skinner 1973). Hundreds of Highlanders and Lowlanders dressed in tartan paraded through the streets, virtually indistinguishable from one another as a result of their suddenly Scottishized clothing. Candles and bonfires illuminated the town at night, and thousands upon thousands of tartan-clad Scots lined the roads.
and attended royal functions. The king appeared in the ubiquitous highland garb on at least one occasion. Only the collapse of a flimsy spectator-scaffold prior to the king’s landing and criticism from those who believed that the Highland focus of the pageantry was unjustified marred Scott’s carefully planned visit (see below).

**Part II: Guide to the Jaunt**

To mend the rift he perceived during the Radical War and attain a more unified sense of both Scottishness and Britishness, Scott had to offer visitors a lens through which to read the nationalist content of the visit. No manner of planning would assure a successful event if the Scottish people did not attend in droves, dressed in their finest clothing, and behave in a suitable manner. Scott needed to publicise the visit and, perhaps more importantly, he needed to present royal-watching tourists with a means to interpret, to consume, what they saw (Bourdieu 1984: 2). He needed to show them ‘what ought to be seen’, creating in the process an ‘optics of tourism’ that would allow these visitors to make sense of the events unfolding before them (Koshar 1998: 325).

As Rudy Koshar points out, ‘both tourism and nationalism are grounded in the idea of opposition to the everyday and the desire for authenticity’ (1998: 326). The royal visit was certainly out of the ordinary. For visitors to understand the nationalist content, it had to be translated into a language they could easily comprehend. Scott needed to offer a ‘cultural translator’ that would both allow visitors to convert the spectacle before them into a nationalist vernacular that was relevant to their daily lives and teach them how to behave in unfamiliar circumstances (Cronin 2000: 2, 36). In other words, he needed to create a kind of tourist guidebook. Just as the Murray guidebooks did from their first publication in 1836, Scott needed to present ‘what ought to be seen’, as opposed to ‘what could be seen’ (Koshar 1998: 326, emphasis in original).

Scott, under the pseudonym ‘An Old Citizen’, wrote the guidebook *Hints Addressed to the Inhabitants of Edinburgh, and Others, In Prospect of His Majesty’s Visit*. First published as a pamphlet and later reproduced in Scotland’s major newspapers, it served as a guide to the royal events and provided Scots with a primer describing suitable behaviour on such an
occasion. It essentially served as an ‘intersemiotic translator’, providing translation ‘into or from something other than language’ through ‘the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs belonging to non-verbal sign systems’ such as dress or physical behaviours (Cronin 2000: 2).

Scott’s Hints had three main goals, each designed to assure that Scots would both attend the event and behave in a particular manner. Scott devoted no less than six pages of his 32–page pamphlet to the primary objective of placing the royal visit into historical context. Not only had no monarch visited Scotland since the seventeenth century, this monarch ‘comes hither as the descendant of a long line of Scottish Kings. The blood of the heroic Robert Bruce – the blood of the noble, the enlightened, the generous James I is in his veins’. In Scott’s version, the king was closely related to all of the great Scottish families, including the Douglases, Stewarts, Hamiltons and Bruces; ‘we are the CLAN and our King is THE CHIEF’ (An Old Citizen 1822: 6–7, emphasis in original). In short, the royal visit represented a timeless link between the modern Scottish nation and a glorious, heroic past, just as rapid industrialization, the collapse of the clan system and significant economic growth sent Scotland toward an uncertain future. But Scott, moreover, also viewed the event as an opportunity to recapture the imagined unity of the past. Toward this end, the pageant-master alluded to the recent ‘Radical War’ and expressed his ‘most deep and sincere desire, that the presence of our King may be the signal for burying in oblivion that which is past [the Radical War], and the pledge of better things in the time to come’ (Ibid.: 8).

Scott intended the royal visit to be a truly historic event that not only demanded that people take part, but that they participate in a particular way. Scott’s Hints, therefore, not only offered historical context, but provided royal-watching tourists with a detailed discussion of how precisely to behave in the presence of royalty (something that they had practised little since 1633). Scott placed a premium on good behaviour because the visit was ‘not an ordinary show – it is not all on one side. It is not enough that we should see the King; but the King must also see us’ (An Old Citizen 1822: 22). Thus, he instructed readers as to how to introduce themselves at levees, what to wear to specific events (‘the ancient costume of their country [Highland dress] is always sufficient dress’ (Ibid.: 16)), how to behave when viewing royal processions and, for women, how to correctly leave the royal presence without becoming entangled in their dresses.
Finally, *Hints* also provided potential royal-watchers an itinerary for the visit – telling them ‘what ought to be seen’ – an experience which differed little from the growing movement toward consuming romantic views. Romantic memories of an ancient past defined Scott’s choice of venues, and the events that should fill the visitors’ itineraries. For example, he explained that the royal yacht might land at two possible docks: Newhaven or Leith. Of these, the most likely was Leith because it ‘is the ancient sea-port of the Scottish metropolis, and there, in former times, the Scottish Monarchs were uniformly accustomed to land’. It followed logically that the king ‘would himself prefer landing on the same place where so many of his ancestors did land in former days’. Even if visitors took little interest in the history, Scott also placed venues into a comparative context, noting, for example, that the king would travel to Holyrood Palace along Leith Walk because ‘No city in Europe can boast a nobler avenue. It gives the idea of grandeur and massiveness’ (An Old Citizen 1822: 10–11). Viewing the royal visit, then, constituted a way to consume views of a truly European city without any need to cross the English Channel.

Scott presented various events not only for their physical or historical significance but also in terms of social standing and gender. In other words, not all Scots were welcome at all times. He directed upper-class Scottish ladies to go to a special ‘drawing room’ with attendant social behaviours. Male members of the elite could go to a royal levee. The wealthy also had the opportunity to be present at a specially planned Highland Ball – assuming that they owned the requisite Highland outfit, a requirement that sent people scurrying to woollen mills to purchase clothing they would otherwise never have imagined wearing (Prebble 1988: 103). Meanwhile, everybody else could see the king as he travelled from venue to venue – a reality that placed tremendous responsibility onto the shoulders of those in attendance because ‘The very character of the nation is concerned here’. Not only should the people observe the king, but ‘Scotland and Scotchmen are altogether a new subject for his observation’. Being seen, and being seen behaving properly, was ‘our duty, and [it] should be our pride to display’ truly noble behaviour (An Old Citizen 1822: 21) – behaviour defined as much by appropriate Scottish dress as by suitable actions.
Part III: Consuming Royalty

Despite all Scott’s best efforts, creating a unified Scottish identity and resolidifying British ties required more than event planning or careful instruction about what to see and how to see it. In the final analysis, it was up to those who travelled to Edinburgh to ‘read’ the event and to make sense of it. Scott provided a cultural translator and tried to assign the visit a political, historical and cultural significance, but the people themselves ultimately supplied the meanings.

The people assigned importance to the visit and transformed it into an influential ‘place of discussion’. They accomplished this in two ways, both deserving treatment here. First, participation in the visit created a common experience among many Scots, a corporeal memory of the event and its attendant ‘traditions’ (Connerton 1989), and, secondly, this experience sparked widespread discussion and debate about what had been seen while in Edinburgh – a dialogue that played out both in private discussions and in the pages of Scottish magazines and newspapers. More often than not, conversation focused on the relevance of Highland culture (tartanry) for Scotland as a whole.

The Experience of Travel

For most of those 300,000 who lined the streets of Edinburgh in 1822, travel for pleasure was a rare novelty. Prerailway travel was both difficult and expensive. Generally speaking, Scots were ‘marginally’ poorer than their English neighbours (Fraser and Morris 1989: 111) and some 70 percent of the Scottish population earned less than £30 per year. Moving up the social ladder, the next 20 percent of the population earned only slightly more than £47 per year (Smout 1986: 110). While few of the bottom 70 percent are likely to have made the trip, a substantial number of those in the next income bracket must have done so given the total number present in Edinburgh – an impressive fact when considering that the most affordable trip, if one stayed with relatives, cost between £3 and £10 (Prebble 1988: 101), while a less restrained adventure cost upwards of £40 (Ibid.: 187, 366–67).

Given the expense, the trip to Edinburgh was an occurrence worthy of note. Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine evidently believed the experience important enough to document it in an article describing the adventures
of several parties including a ship’s captain, his wife and their neighbours, the Goroghans, from Greenock. Though the specific characters may well be fictional, the hopes, dreams and challenges described in the piece were not. The captain’s wife, Mrs M’Auslan, for example, faced a challenge simply convincing her husband that the trip was worth the expense. She tirelessly cajoled him into going to ‘Embro’ because he ‘hae been lang promis’t me a jaunt and everybodie’s gaun intil Edinburgh’. It did not matter to her that the family’s business had recently suffered (Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, September 1822: 306–07). Mrs M’Auslan then had to purchase suitable clothing and contact a friend in Edinburgh regarding a place to stay in order to minimize costs and take advantage of having ‘a friend acquainted with the localities’ (Ibid.: 316). Once underway, M’Auslan and her husband faced new challenges. Scots packed steam and canal boats and the Blackwood’s author noted that ‘besides the canal, all the roads from Glasgow to Edinburgh were like so many webs of printed calico, stamped with the figures of coaches and carriages, horses and noddies, men, women, and children’ (Ibid.: 315–17).

From the moment the travellers left their homes, the experience of travel generated new friendships and animated discussions. In the Blackwood’s story, Mrs. M’Auslan met ‘Miss Nanny Eydent, the Irvine seamstress’ while waiting to board a track-boat. The two soon talked excitedly about their plans for Edinburgh; to M’Auslan’s delight Eydent held letters of introduction to several of the more distinguished events so that she might survey the latest fashions. M’Auslan hoped to capitalize on her new friend’s good fortune (Ibid.: 316).

Once in Edinburgh, the M’Auslans and the Goroghans pursued views of the king like deer-stalkers pursing game, an apt depiction of what must have taken place and one in keeping with recent developments in tourism aesthetics. In many ways, the act of pursuing the romantic notion of a monarch, complete with ties to a romanticised past, differed little from searching out views of romantic ruins, windswept beaches and sublime mountains – then the major objective for most tourists (Corbin 1994; Löfgren 1999: 16–19; Macfarlane 2004). In both cases, the object was to capture a view rather than to acquire knowledge, wealth or divine favour as was true for previous generations of travellers. This new generation of tourist hoped to escape from the everyday and to become part of a special, timeless reality of the imagination.
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Following the visit, those interested in commemorating their trip could purchase one of several commemorative books or magazines as souvenirs. The special Blackwood’s issue contained 150 pages of stories, letters and recollections. Beyond this, special commemorative books were published that included: The Royal Scottish Minstrelsy: Being a Collection of Loyal Effusions Occasioned by the Visit of His Most Gracious Majesty George IV to Scotland, August 15, 1822 (n.a. 1824), Letters to Sir Walter Scott, Bart., on the Moral and Political Character and Effects of the Visit to Scotland of His Majesty King George IV (n.a. 1822) and Historical Account of His Majesty’s Visit to Scotland (Mudie 1822). While the significance of these tokens should not be discounted, the dialogue and the memory of the visit ultimately assured its long-term impact.

Debating Tartan
That many of the poems included in Royal Scottish Minstrelsy contained tartan-clad memories is no surprise. Such images dominated both contemporary dialogue about the visit and subsequent memory of it. Indeed, the prevalence of tartan created a sharp divide between those for and against the use of Highland garb as a symbol of Scottishness. The resulting debate played a significant role in newspaper coverage, especially prevalent throughout the special issue of Blackwood’s, and it constituted one of the only aspects of the visit mentioned in memoirs.

The controversy first reached the newspapers when Glengarry, a Highlander who narrowly escaped a murder conviction after killing his opponent in a duel (Prebble 1988: 113), lashed out at the Celtic Society in an angry letter to the editor of the Observer. He thundered:

I never saw so much tartan before, in my life, with so little Highland material. There are some very good and respectable men amongst them [the Celtic Society], but their general appearance is assumed and fictitious, and they have no right to burlesque the national character or dress of Highlanders ... I for one formally protest (Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, September 1822).

Fundamentally, Glengarry was upset that he and his clansmen were given secondary billing to a much larger contingent of Celtic Society men from the Lowlands. Others, however, felt less motivated by anger and
jealousy; these people saw the issue as one of Highland versus Lowland cultures. One essayist summarized:

The opinion is not uncommon that the Highlanders, being a small part of the Scottish population in number and a smaller still in wealth and social importance had more than their share of the royal notice; that the whole land was *tartanized* in the royal eye from Pentland to Solway. ...

This particular author was willing to accept the Highland content and had to admit ‘they [Highlanders] formed a highly romantic and interesting addition to the general picture on the late occasion’ (*Letters to Sir Walter Scott, Bart*. 1822: 74–76). But others pointed out that such a display was anything but accurate – either for the Highlands or the Lowlands. ‘A Goth’, for example, wrote that no other Scottish prince had worn tartan in Holyrood, except Bonnie Prince Charlie, because (anticipating Hugh Trevor-Roper’s famous article [Trevor-Roper 1983]) tartan was ‘nothing but a fanciful and a very modern invention’. Worse, the kilt ‘was invented by an English officer not quite seventy years ago’. Yet the invention of tradition was not the only problem: Highlanders and Lowlanders were simply not the same. Highlanders were ‘not’ the Scottish nation, but even their own chiefs are in very few instances of the same blood with themselves’. The most famous chiefs were ‘no more a Gael than George IV himself. His family are a Gothic family from Berwickshire; and whom did they succeed in the Highlands?’ None of this implied that Glengarry’s assault on the *Celtic Society* was acceptable (it was not), but neither should Lowland Scots foolishly ‘strut in kilts’ (*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, September 1822: 354–59).

Many commentators agreed. A *Blackwood’s* editorial, for example, argued that the growing debate over the merits of tartanry represented a battle over who would wear the pants in Scotland: it was a fight over ‘kilts versus breeches’. *Blackwood’s* guessed that breeches would ultimately win out and suggested that it was not necessary to form ‘a society for the encouragement of breeches in the Highlands of Scotland’ because ‘pants’ (trousers) were ultimately superior clothing. As for the Lowlands, breeches were the ‘national dress’ and any Lowlander who attempted to wear a kilt in cold weather would inevitably be ‘killed by the kilt’ because they would
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be unable to withstand the Scottish wind. The magazine concluded that if ‘the kilt is to be encouraged in the Highlands, we seriously think, and shall say so on a jury, that the Celtic Society must be answerable for the death of many worthy members of society at large’ (Ibid.: 359–68).

With all of this attention focused on the bare knees of Highlander and Lowlander alike, it is little wonder that memoirs recalling those two weeks in August 1822 tend to describe the preponderance of tartan – and specifically the Highland outfits worn by George IV and his friend Sir William Curtis. Curtis, ill suited to the outfit, received considerable ridicule from spectators. In his memoirs, published some sixty-three years after the king’s visit, David Johnston, a Scot who found his fortune in Chicago, described the scene with disgust:

The king in his caprice had taken into his social councils a rich, ignorant baker of the name Sir William Curtis. He was dressed in a grotesque Highland costume, and for a sporran, hanging from the lower part of his huge body, an immense turtle. The king had the bad taste to carry this voluptuous ignoramus with him to the north, creating thereby a good deal of gossiping scandal from his coarseness (1885: 223).

Johnston clearly had little positive to say about the king, but even those more favourably disposed to George IV commented on the tartan theme. Elizabeth Grant, a Scottish noblewoman, recalled:

A great mistake was made by the stage managers – one that offended all the southron [sic] Scots; the king wore at the levee the Highland dress. I daresay he thought the country all Highland, expected no fertile plains, did not know the difference between Saxon and Celt. However all else went off well, this little slur on the Saxon was overlooked, and it gave occasion for a laugh at one of Lady Saltoun’s witty speeches. Some one objecting to the dress, particularly on so large a man, ‘Nay,’ said she, ‘we should take it very kind of him; since his stay will be so short, the more we see of him the better.’ Sir William Curtis was kilted too (1942: 505–06).

Scots found something jarring about the sudden proliferation of tartan cloth and Highland clothing in Edinburgh. It challenged much older
perceptions of separation between Highland and Lowland Scotland, notions at this point not yet erased by the ongoing romanticisation and improvement processes nor by the efforts of the Celtic Society. Blackwood’s was not far off when they characterized the conflict as ‘kilts versus breeches’. The fight reflected a struggle over how to define Scottish identity and was made truly national by the fact that so many took part in the visit. Some, like those above, objected fiercely to the new tartanized Scotland, but others simply accepted Scott’s directions and adopted the new symbolism.

Conclusion

Twenty years after George IV visited Edinburgh, Queen Victoria and her beloved Prince Albert travelled to Scotland. Memories of the first royal visit soon surfaced in print. The Perthshire Advertiser and Strathmore Journal, for example, remembered the first visit as full of ‘senseless pageantry by which it was sought to do honour to the visit of George IV to Scotland’ (Kerr 1992: 14). Yet the negative tone of this article did not correspond to a lack of pageantry on this royal occasion. Highlanders danced reels, bonfires illuminated the Taymouth Castle, pipers played bagpipes and everybody wore tartan. Though the festivities did not reenact the exact movements of 1822, they bore more than a passing resemblance to Scott’s grand party and the reflection on ‘senseless pageantry’, furthermore, indicated the continued vitality of the debate over how best to represent Scottishness.

Like her uncle, Victoria was impressed by the display. She and Albert fell in love with the Highland scenery and traditions – so much so that Prince Albert purchased Balmoral Castle in 1848 so the royal couple might regularly summer in Scotland. This royal patronage helped raise the region’s popularity among other tourists. Between 1846 and 1862, Thomas Cook took over 50,000 tourists to visit Scotland as part of his ‘Tartan tours’ and he managed to make ‘Scotland the chief tourist goal of mid-Victorians’ (Brendon 1991: 38–56). Adopting the name ‘Tartan tour’, of course, helped perpetuate Scott’s vision of Scotland as Highland.

While most of Cook’s tourists were English, Scots travelled ever more widely as well. From 1838 to 1868, for example, Scots constituted the vast
majority of visitors to Scott’s Abbotsford home. In 1858 alone nearly 60 percent of visitors to the mansion were Scots (Durie 1992: 49). While Abbotsford and other Lowland sites such as the monasteries at Melrose and Jedburgh attracted considerable tourist traffic throughout the nineteenth century, the Highlands truly captured the imagination, especially as a destination for sportsmen (Durie 2003: 109; Smout 1983). Unsurprisingly given the 1822 precedent, many wore tartan on their travels.

As Highland holidays became a greater part of the cultural lexicon, tartanry became increasingly associated with Scottishness. The great satirical journal *Punch* relished poking fun at the fad. In one cartoon, a group of bemused Victorians clad in breeches gawk at a heavy-set man, not unlike George IV himself, who is dressed in full Highland garb as he waits for the train to Scotland for ‘a few days shooting’ (*Punch*, 11 September 1875). In another cartoon, two men sit atop an urban rooftop wearing kilts, the wind obviously blowing vigorously, and the caption reads:

> Now we dare say you wonder what the deuce this means. The fact is that Smith and Tomkins have got a place in Scotland this year, and they are doing all they possibly can to accustom themselves to dizzy mountain heights and to get their faces and legs the proper tone for the North (*Punch*, 10 August 1861) [Figure 1].

While these cartoons parodied English travellers donning Celtic dress, the subtext differed little from the tartan debate in 1822 – who could and should wear the kilt? What, if anything, did Highland clothing mean? What did it mean to be Scottish? Each new cartoon raised the question of who should wear Highland costume and rekindled the debate inaugurated in 1822. Many still objected to the dress, but others, smitten by the romance of Highland symbolism, cheerfully adopted the optics of tourism created by Walter Scott and ‘went native’.

Indeed, the tartan question continued into at least the late twentieth century. According to Tom Nairn:

> Most intellectuals – and nationalists chief amongst them – have flinched away from him (‘the tartan monster’), dismissing the beat over-easy as mere proof of the debased condition of a nation without a State of its own. It is far more important, surely, to study this insanely
Figure 1: Cartoon by John Leech, Punch, 10 Aug. 1861. (Courtesy University of Wisconsin – Madison, Memorial Library). Cartoons such as this one rekindled the debate inaugurated in 1822.
sturdy sub-culture. Tartanry will not wither away, if only because it possesses the force of its own vulgarity – immunity from doubt and higher culture (Nairn 1981: 165).

Yet it is not so much the continued existence of tartanry itself that matters, as the continued debate about its existence. It is not a debate about aesthetics, but a debate about the fundamental definition of an identity – a debate that has been perpetually recycled since 1822.

James Young, a leading scholar of Holocaust memory, makes a particularly salient point when he notes that ‘the best German memorial to the Fascist era and its victims may not be any single memorial at all, but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve’ (Young 1997: 879). Indeed, this statement is relevant for far more than German memory; it is at the very core of national identity more generally. Within any nation, there are a wealth of different definitions of what national membership means and what symbols best represent the nation. Yet at the same time there is a common assumption that the nation does, in fact, exist. Nations only persist because different views of the nation perpetuate dialogue about what the nation means, which, in turn, allows nations to adapt to new demands and to remain pertinent.

Tourism is only one nexus for discussion concerning the definition of national identity, but it is a very important one that deserves much further scholarly attention. Modern tourism is about nothing less than selling national distinctiveness. Tourists seek difference; they travel in order to enter into ‘contact with other ways of life. The most prestigious experiences are the ones which take people the furthest away from their everyday world. And the distance from home is not only measured in miles, but in cultural terms’ (Peillon 1984: 165–68). Tourists are anxious to find the ‘other’ – authentic representations of distinctive cultures (Selwyn 1996: 23). Tourism developers must satisfy this taste for the unique, while at the same time pleasing domestic constituents at both a local and national level (Zuelow 2004 and 2005). Regional and national tourism development bodies, central governments, environmental groups, historians and antiquarians, citizens groups, and others all must converse about ‘what ought to be seen’ and in so doing they perpetuate precisely the dialogue sparked by Walter Scott’s great Scottish production in 1822.
Notes

1. I would like to thank both the anonymous reviewer and Catherine M. Burns for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2. The word ‘kilt’ first appeared circa 1727 but it initially referred to the *breacan*, or ‘belted plaid’, rather than to the modern short kilt. A *breacan* was a large piece of tartan cloth that was worn over the shoulder to cover the upper body and was then wrapped around the waist, below the belt, to form ‘a kind of skirt’. After 1746, an English Quaker from Lancashire, Thomas Rawlinson, sought to create a more appropriate article of clothing for factory workers. Rawlinson developed the *felie beg*, or ‘small kilt’, ‘which was achieved by separating the skirt from the plaid and converting it into a distinct garment, with pleats already sewn’ (Trevor-Roper 1983: 20–22).

3. The population of Scotland in 1821 was 2,091,521 (Donnachie and Hewitt 1989: 228).

4. A ‘tourist’ is most often defined as a person travelling for leisure purposes and spending at least one night away from home (Hall and Page 2000: 59). The term ‘tourist’ originates from the ‘Grand Tour’ists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (for more on the Grand Tour, see Black 1992).

5. Use of the word ‘consume’ is meant to invoke Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of consumption: ‘a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense one can say that the capacity to see (*voir*) is a function of the knowledge (*savoir*), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception. A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded’ (Bourdieu 1984: 2).

6. Rudy Koshar draws an important distinction between John Urry’s ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990), which is ‘uncritical and undifferentiated’, and the notion of ‘the optics of tourism’, which ‘connotes an active search for knowledge because optics refers to the scientific study of light and its effects’ (Koshar 1998: 325).

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