

Beefeaters, British history and the Empire in Asia and Australasia since 1826

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Abstract

The Yeoman Warders at the Tower of London (colloquially known as 'Beefeaters') have been represented as a quintessential part of British history. Their distinctive Tudor costumes and their highly visible role at the Tower made them iconic symbols of Britishness. One would think that the Beefeater could only be seen in London yet the iconography of the Beefeater was widespread across the British Empire, including India, Hong Kong, Malaya, Australia and New Zealand. This essay explores the transmission of a symbol of Britishness, arguing that while the Beefeater was a global icon, it resonated most with those who desired a direct connection to Anglo-British history. The reception and consumption of the Beefeater differed substantially. In Australia and New Zealand, the Beefeater allowed 'distant Britons' to celebrate a nostalgic history shared with the old country, while elsewhere in the Empire and Commonwealth, the Beefeater was too historically obscure to hold resonance and often symbolised the commercialism associated with marketing alcohol. This essay explores the changing representations and meaning of the Beefeaters as an icon of Britishness across the rise and fall of the British Empire.

Keywords: Britishness; Beefeaters; British World; national identity; Tower of London; heritage.

In 1819, A.F. Huddleston wrote home to his mother about Tellicherry Fort in Kerala, India. He described Tellicherry as 'the most ancient settlement of the English at this coast, the Fort here was built [in 1708-9] by our countrymen with the assistance of the National Sovereign of that day.' Huddleston noted that 'the most curious feature about [the fort] is a gateway over which is the Royal Arms of England & on each side of which ... two Beefeaters habited as we now see them at the Tower.'¹ Huddleston

¹ Huddleston family of Hutton John Papers, letter 21 March 1819, Cumbria County Record Office, D/HUD/13/6/10. The project was funded by the University of Huddersfield. Versions of this essay were presented at the conference at Lingnan University, Hong Kong,

was almost certainly wrong about the fort and figures were not Beefeaters. This was a case of mistaken identity, but it is a case with some significance. It suggests that the Beefeater was emerging as a recognizable symbol of Britain and that a British visitor to empire, while surprised by his find, was prepared to consider the presence of the Beefeater in India. The distinctive Tudor costume of the Yeoman Warders and their highly visible role at the Tower of London made them iconic symbols of Britain and Britishness. Yet as Huddleston's sighting suggests, the Beefeater was not confined to the Tower alone. The iconography of the Beefeater was widespread across the British Empire, including India, Hong Kong, Malaya, Australia and New Zealand. Across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, like manufactured goods, the volume of British symbolic exports increased enormously. Beefeaters were exported too. In 1858, to give just one example, the *Launceston Examiner* in Tasmania advertised the sale of ten acres of land in Beefeater Street, Deloraine, a street running parallel to Tower Hill Street.² Across the British Empire, its subjects were reminded of the historic connection to metropolitan Britain and the heart of the Empire in London. This essay explores the transmission of a symbol of Britishness, hypothesising that while the Beefeater was a global icon, it resonated most with those who desired a direct connection to Anglo-British history and this meant that the reception and consumption of the Beefeater differed substantially. In Australia and New Zealand, the Beefeater allowed 'distant Britons' to celebrate a nostalgic history shared with the old country, while elsewhere in the Empire and Commonwealth, the Beefeater often symbolised the commercialism associated with marketing alcohol, and, with the end of Empire, an increasingly anachronistic and outdated, and yet not always unappealing, version of Britishness. This essay marks the first outing of a larger project that explores the changing representations and meaning of the Beefeaters as an icon of Britishness across the rise and fall of the British Empire.

The symbolic importance of the Tower and the Beefeaters rested on a narrative of their place in British history. As one of the numerous historians of the Tower explained (in the language of the early twentieth century):

To the English race the Tower of London will always be the most interesting of its Monuments; for it forms a group of buildings that, for eight centuries has been the very heart of the English capital, and, since the victor of Hastings raised the great Keep - or White Tower - through all the succeeding centuries, the Tower has been closely connected with the history of England.³

The Tower's importance resided in its longevity, which underpinned a sense of 'national' permanence. In disruptive and dynamic times the Tower acted as a symbolic place. The Yeoman Warders shared this narrative of the antiquity of their origins and trace their history back to the White Tower built on the banks of the

entitled *Empire State of Mind: Articulations of British Culture in the Empire, 1707-1997* in May 2011, the University of Northumbria at Newcastle in October 2011 and Sheffield Hallam University in March 2012.

² *Launceston Examiner* (Tas.), 17 April 1858. Most newspapers and many other sources used here have been consulted via digital collections.

³ Ronald Sutherland Gower, *The Tower of London*, Volume 1 (London, 1901), p. 1.

Thames in 1078 as part of the Norman Conquest. Officially, they were formed in the late fifteenth century as a detachment of the Yeoman of the Guard, the body guards of the royal household. The Yeomen Warders' role was to guard the Tower of London, to act as warders to prisoners of the crown held there, and to protect the royal family when they were in residence. The role of the Tower changed considerably and it became little used as a royal residence after the mid-sixteenth century. Increasingly the Tower became a tourist attraction, housing a menagerie (until the 1830s), the royal armouries and the crown jewels (including the Koh-I-Noor diamond). The Yeomen Warders, who became known as Beefeaters, provided a ready and recognizable symbol of the Tower.⁴ They came to act as tour guides and to represent the developing power of the British state, history and later nostalgia for better times. Their red and gold Tudor uniforms confirmed their historic Britishness across the centuries.⁵

Manufacturing the Beefeater

In the eighteenth century, the Beefeaters had acquired a very poor reputation for swindling tourists and for other abuses of their position. By the early nineteenth century, they had become associated with 'old Corruption', the term used by radicals to describe aristocratic power built on greed, sinecure and nepotism. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British aristocracy sought to 'nationalise' itself, moving away from fashionable cosmopolitanism towards displays of patriotism, duty and association with national history.⁶ In 1826, the Duke of Wellington was appointed as Constable of the Tower and set out to professionalise the Yeomen Warders and to establish them as a respected body operating within a clear code of conduct. Whereas in the past Yeomen Warders had been able to 'sell' their offices, Wellington ensured that only soldiers with long

⁴ According to HRP, who employ the Beefeaters, 'It is thought their nickname is derived from their position in the Royal Bodyguard, which permitted them to eat as much beef as they wanted from the king's table.'

<http://www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon/stories/yeomanwarder>

⁵ While much of the history of the Beefeaters was 'English' history, there has been much celebration in Wales of the Welshness of the Tudors and their association with the *British Army* mediates their Englishness, so that I use the term 'Britishness' throughout this essay. Rebecca Langlands has argued that 'English ethnicity embodied in a number of customs, traditions, codes and styles has existed at least since the early modern period, and this provided the basis for the state-aided development of the British "nation" during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.' Such a statement helps to explain the relationship between the Englishness and Britishness of the Beefeater but this aspect will be explored further in subsequent research, to ascertain whether the symbol of the Beefeater is seen more often in English events such as St George's Day. Rebecca Langlands, 'Britishness or Englishness? The Historical Problem of National Identity in Britain,' *Nations and Nationalism* 5, 1 (1999): pp. 53-69.

⁶ See Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830*, revised edn (Basingstoke, 1993) and Peter Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven, 1993).

service and good conduct could take up the post. He also reduced the number of Beefeaters from around one hundred to thirty-three. The Beefeaters, therefore, were enabled to become symbolic of the British nation, alongside the transformation of the monarchy into a popular national institution as described by Cannadine, Prochaska and others.⁷

In 1840, Harrison Ainsworth published his (serialised) novel, *The Tower of London*, illustrated by George Cruikshank, which established a formula for the representation of the Beefeater as larger than life, affable, sociable and gregarious. He shared physical and personality characteristics with the fictional John Bull, yet was distinctive in the red and gilt Tudor uniform of 'olden times'.⁸ While the transmission of the image of the Beefeater relied on its representation in a variety of media, the core of the manufacture of the symbol remained real life people who were active in the development of their own symbolism. Fictional icons of the nation, such as John Bull and Britannia, were readily available to those seeking to glorify Britain.⁹ So too were living symbols of the nation such as the English bobby, the Chelsea Pensioner and the British soldier.¹⁰ Some soldiers were more symbolic than others, yet the London guardsman in his red tunic and Busby, for example, was a silent symbol, watched in the changing of the guard and, in the twentieth century, endlessly photographed, but he was required to stand unflinching and silent as tourists gazed.¹¹ However, the primary role of the police and army was not to be patriotic symbols but to act as the forces of the imperial state. The Beefeaters, on the other hand, were primarily employed as symbolic representatives of the nation, located within the walls of the Tower of London, the most visited tourist site in the capital and in Britain as a whole.

⁷ David Cannadine, 'The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the "Invention of Tradition", c.1820-1977', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, 1995); Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot, 1997); Alex Tyrrell and Yvonne Ward, "'God Bless Her Little Majesty.'" The Popularising of Monarchy in the 1840s,' *National Identities*, 2 no. 2 (2000): pp. 109-25.

⁸ Peter Mandler, 'In the Olden Time: Romantic History and English National Identity, 1820-1850', in Laurence W.B. Brockliss and David Eastwood, eds, *A Union of Multiple Identities: The British Isles, 1750-1850* (Manchester, 1997), pp. 78-92.

⁹ For the variety of uses to which John Bull was put, see Miles Taylor, 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England c. 1712-1929', *Past and Present*, 134 (1992): pp. 93-128. Taylor argues that within Britain, 'If John Bull symbolized anything in the early twentieth century it was the national economy, and not the British empire', but he was still used across the Empire as a symbol of Britishness.

¹⁰ See for example Clive Emsley, 'The English Bobby: An Indulgent Tradition', in Roy Porter, ed., *Myths of the English* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 114-35; Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: the Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* (Oxford, 2000); Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (Basingstoke, 2009).

¹¹ For an alternative view of guardsmen see Matt Houlbrook, 'Soldier Heroes and Rent Boys: Homosex, Masculinities, and Britishness in the Brigade of Guards, circa 1900-1960', *Journal of British Studies*, 42, No. 3 (2003): pp. 351-388.

Without doubt, there was an element of top down construction of this national icon and much can be gained by application of methodologies associated with the 'invention of tradition' to the Beefeaters, yet there was always a populist imperative inherent in their symbolism. Appointed from among private and non-commissioned servicemen, the Beefeaters' social origins were from the labouring classes, and while the reputation of soldiers in the early nineteenth century was poor, it was improving. By being of 'good conduct', the reputation of the Beefeaters was higher than that of other soldiers.¹² The aristocracy had successfully nationalised itself, but the Beefeaters allowed the 'lower' social orders access to national history without disrupting the national hierarchy. As David Cannadine has argued:

Britons generally conceived of themselves as belonging to an unequal society characterized by a seamless web of layered gradations, which were hallowed by time and precedent, which were sanctioned by tradition and religion, and which extended in a great chain of being from the monarch at the top to the humblest subject at the bottom.¹³

The Beefeaters were respectable at a time when the respectable working class were mounting a campaign for access to Britain's national monuments. As Billie Melman and Philip Hammond have shown, across the mid-nineteenth century there were attempts to restrict entry to the Tower, yet by the 1870s radical campaigns for access had led to free entry days.¹⁴ Numbers of visitors to the Tower steadily rose, and while some of these were foreign tourists they were vastly outnumbered by British visitors, keen to engage with British history, which as John Baxendale argues, they considered belonged to them.¹⁵ This version of history emphasized progression towards liberty via Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement. The Beefeaters enhanced the belief in a constitutional monarchy developing towards liberty, democracy and self-representation.

The Beefeater and the British World

This 'democratisation' of British history paralleled the renewed expansion of the British Empire.¹⁶ As John Darwin has recently argued, 'by the 1840s at latest, the British system was becoming global ... it exerted its presence, commercial or

¹² John MacKenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992).

¹³ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London, 2001), p. 4.

¹⁴ Billie Melman, *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past, 1800-1953* (Oxford, 2006); Philip Hammond, "'Epitome of England's History": The Transformation of the Tower of London as a Visitor Attraction in the 19th Century', *Royal Armouries Yearbook* (1999): pp. 144-74.

¹⁵ John Baxendale, 'Royalty, Romance and Recreation: The Construction of the Past and the Origins of Royal Tourism in Nineteenth-Century Britain,' *Cultural and Social History* 4, no. 3 (2007): pp. 317-39.

¹⁶ For discussion of 'democratisation' and imperialism in the nineteenth century see Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000).

military, in every world region ... the point of the system was to promote the integration of these widely separated places: commercially, strategically, politically and – by diffusing British beliefs and ideas – culturally as well.¹⁷ This was an expansion of the ‘British World’, a theme around which historiography has sought to connect British metropolitan and imperial history to produce a more holistic understanding of ‘the British world-system.’¹⁸

This focus on the imbrication of the British Isles with the British World reminds us that, by the end of the nineteenth century, London, the home of the Beefeaters had become an imperial city.¹⁹ On the one hand, London exported goods, services and culture, but on the other it ‘welcomed’ visitors from Empire, many of whom visited the Tower of London encouraged by reading about it in advance in tourist guides and coming across various representations of Beefeaters.²⁰ This connection was further enhanced because, after the Wellington reforms, the Beefeaters were recruited only from those who had served at least 22 years in the British armed forces. The expansion of the British Empire meant that long service became synonymous with imperial service and biographies of Beefeaters resound with imperial battles – between three random yeomen warders, Gibraltar, China, South Africa, Afghanistan, India, Turkey and the Crimea appear in their service records. The medals displayed on their chests record these imperial adventures reminding Tower visitors of the extensive reach of British military power. A newspaper account of a visit in 1884 identified the military symbolism of the Tower and its guardians: ‘We now cross the court-yard, where are several very splendid cannons, captured by our soldiers in foreign countries ... we asked [our handsome old guide] about his six medals worn so proudly on his breast. Each seemed to have the tale of a battle connected with it, and twenty years of his life had been spent in India.’²¹

The Beefeaters had therefore become simulacral ‘living history’ exhibits – representations of themselves – but, despite their confinement within the precincts of the Tower, they were associated with an imperial role. The image of the Beefeater was portable and exportable. Angelia Poon has argued that ‘The operational logic of colonial discourse depended on a map of England as the imperial centre of the world with the colonies cast on the margins or periphery.’²² Britons in the Empire however did not want to consider themselves as marginal or peripheral and the Beefeater provided a link back to identity firmly located in the fixed territory of the Tower of

¹⁷ John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970*, Cambridge, 2009), p. 2

¹⁸ See especially Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds, *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London, 2003) and Philip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds, *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, 2005).

¹⁹ Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (London, 2001).

²⁰ David Gilbert, ‘“London in all its Glory – or How to Enjoy London”: Guidebook Representations of Imperial London,’ *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25, no. 3 (1999): pp. 279-97.

²¹ ‘The Children’s Column: A Visit to the Tower,’ *Leeds Mercury*, 6 December 1884.

²² Angelia Poon, *Enacting Englishness in the Victorian Period: Colonialism and the Politics of Performance* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 10.

London and England. There were numerous propagandist organisations associated with imperialism that encouraged emigrants to retain a sense of their own national history. The Victoria League, for example, aimed to promote 'knowledge of English history and life' and 'the English language and literature'.²³ Such organisations, and events such as Empire Day and St George's Day, provide opportunities for seeking use of the symbol of the Beefeater in the British Empire. It is certainly the case that some distant Britons reflected deeply on their connection with 'home', such as the daughter of a colonial officer living in Malaya during the 1930s:

I would gaze at the globe ... and wonder at all the blobs of pink, all originating from the tiny dot of England. That's how I began to grasp my inheritance. The globe had so much pink on it. We could leave "home" and find similar patterns of life and values in quite contrary paces. I felt paternal towards our subjects – it wasn't a feeling of superiority, it was just that we were innocently and benevolently in charge. It gave me a feeling of really belonging to the world, to the veil of pinkness spread across it. Instead of having a bus pass I had a world pass – a right of passage because I was British.²⁴

In the Empire, culture and commerce went hand in hand. Britain stood at the centre of a network of increasingly competitive global trade and it was essential for companies to mark out the distinctiveness of their products. As Anne McClintock has explained,

Economic competition with the United States and Germany created the need for a more aggressive promotion of British products and led to the first real innovations in advertising. In 1884, the year of the Berlin conference, the first wrapped soap was sold under a brand name. This small event signified a major transformation in capitalism, as imperial competition gave rise to the creation of monopolies.²⁵

The Beefeater, as a highly distinctive symbol representing tradition, quality and character, was a popular choice in marketing and it was indeed used to advertise soap, as well as a wide range of other products including tobacco, herbal drinks, beef extract and, most visibly and extensively, James Burrough's gin.²⁶ As with imperial

²³ Victoria League Annual Report, 1901-1903, quoted in Eliza Riedi, *Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-14*, *Historical Journal* 45, no. 3 (2002): pp. 569-599.

²⁴ Quoted in Margaret Shennan, *Out in the Midday Sun: The British in Malaya 1880-1960* (London, 2000), p. 134.

²⁵ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995), p. 210. See also Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (London, 1991).

²⁶ For the symbol of the Beefeater advertising Lifebuoy soap in 1916 and herb extract in 1892, see John Johnson collection: An archive of printed ephemera, Bodleian Library, Oxford. See <http://johnjohnson.chadwyck.co.uk>.

cinema in the 1930s, representations of the Tower and the Beefeaters have always involved an element of 'patriotism with profit'.²⁷

Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of the developments of imperial and international networks of trade in the British World and the story of Beefeater gin confirms that commodities are cultural as well as economic.²⁸ While Beefeater gin bottles claim origins back to 1820, in fact James Burrough was not born until 1835. He sought his fortune in North America and in 1855 went into partnership with a Toronto chemist. Returning to the United Kingdom, he bought John Taylor distillers, which *had* been founded in 1820. Importing exotic ingredients from the Empire and overseas, James Burrough manufactured fruit gins and punches for domestic consumption.²⁹ In the 1870s, as consumer capitalism and the market for spirits became more competitive, distillers began to brand their products to make them distinctive.³⁰ James Burrough began to use the Beefeater for the first time in the Edwardian period, registering the trademark in 1908, attaching the company's gin to the long period of English history associated with the Yeomen Warders. From the start, the export market was crucial for James Burrough. Their gin won three medals in the 1873 Festival of Empire exhibition, for example. Marketing itself globally, the label on the new bottle suggested that 'Like the Beefeater of tradition, Burrough's Beefeater Gin is of unique character - the best quality and of distinctive style.' To ensure the validity of their marketing the company formed a personal relationship with the Yeomen Warders, emphasising the importance of the 'living' nature of the Beefeaters, 'entertaining them every year with a Christmas lunch at the Distillery and, in return, being invited to the Tower to watch the Ceremony of the Keys [discussed below]. In addition all Beefeaters receive a very welcome bottle of Beefeater Gin on their birthdays.'³¹

Drinking gin was ubiquitous in the British Empire. Some cocktails, such as the Singapore Sling, provided the social cement of Empire, while medicinal reasons also encouraged its consumption. Quinine was administered in order to combat malaria, but was added to Indian Tonic Water to make it more palatable, and in turn, gin was added to make it more sociable.³² In such a way, the Beefeater entered into the banal alcoholism of the British Empire.³³ As a character in George Orwell's *Burmese Days*

²⁷ Jeffrey Richards, 'Patriotism with Profit: British Imperial Cinema in the 1930s', in James Curran and Vincent Porter, eds, *British Cinema History* (London, 1983), pp. 245-56.

²⁸ See Gary Magee and Andrew Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2010) and James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world, 1783-1939* (Oxford, 2009).

²⁹ Geraldine Coates, *Beefeater: The Story of London's Gin* (Edinburgh, 2007), p. 22. This is the official 'popular' history of Beefeater gin.

³⁰ John Hughes, *Still Going Strong: A History Of Scotch Whisky Advertising* (London, 2005).

³¹ Coates, p. 22.

³² 'Medicine: Overcoming natural barriers to colonisation', <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/science/medicine/medicine.htm>.

³³ It should be noted that London gin was not the only alcoholic drink with an imperial history. See for example Dmitri van den Bersselaar, *The King of Drinks: Schnapps Gin from Modernity to Tradition* (Leiden, 2007); Simon Heap, "'A Bottle of Gin is Dangled before the

quips: 'Reminds me of the old colonel who used to sleep without a mosquito net. They asked his servant why and the servant said: "At night, master too drunk to notice mosquitoes; in the morning mosquitoes too drunk to notice master."' ³⁴ Gin's role in the social affairs of Empire brought it into the complex domain of racial relations, which Orwell's novel explores. The Beefeaters' association with gin did not necessarily make its symbolism more attractive to those outside and excluded from European circles.

The Capacious Beefeater?

Historians of the British World have emphasised 'the capacious nature of Britishness, a resource open to men and women, metropolitan and colonial, black and white, Anglophone and non-Anglophone, Christian and non-Christian.'³⁵ As Bridge and Fedorowich argue: 'Beyond the core of the ethnic British diaspora there was the possibility of adopted Britishness. For instance, aboriginal peoples, Afrikaners, French Canadians, Jews, Cape Coloureds, Hong Kong and Singapore Chinese, and West Indians all laid claim to British values and institutions.'³⁶ Lynn Hollen Lees has described how for Lim Boon Keng, a Straits-born, ethnically Chinese medical doctor, 'Pride in his British ties combined easily with his affection for Malaya. He told his students stories of Dick Whittington and his cat and praised the naming of streets for British worthies.'³⁷ In contrast, others have suggested that Britishness was exclusive and exclusionary. Magee and Thompson, for example, have suggested that 'what it meant to be British became increasingly racially circumscribed' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁸

Discussion of the symbol of the Beefeater throws some light on this debate and allows some clarification of the various ways in which Britishness could be used

Nose of the Natives": The Economic Uses of Imported Liquor in Southern Nigeria, 1860-1920', *African Economic History*, 33 (2005): pp. 69-85 and Alex Tyrrell, Patricia Hill and Diane Kirkby, 'Feasting on National Identity: Whisky, Haggis and the Celebration of Scottishness in the Nineteenth Century', in Diane Kirkby and Tanja Luckins, eds, *Dining on Turtles: Food Feasts and Drinking in History* (Basingstoke, 2007).

³⁴ George Orwell, *Burmese Days* (1934) is available online at

<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200051.txt> The anti-imperialist novel contains numerous references to drinking gin before breakfast.

³⁵ Bill Schwarz, "'Shivering in the Noonday Sun": The British World and the dynamics of "Nativisation"', in Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre, eds, *Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures* (Melbourne, 2007), p. 20.

³⁶ Bridge and Fedorowich, p. 6.

³⁷ Lynn Hollen Lees, 'Being British in Malaya, 1890-1940', *Journal of British Studies*, 48, no. 1 (2009), p. 77.

³⁸ Magee and Thompson, p. 57. For further discussion of the nature of Britishness in the Empire, see Adele Perry, 'Whose world was British? Rethinking the "British World from an edge of Empire,' in Darian-Smith, Grimshaw and Macintyre, *Britishness Abroad*, pp. 133-52 and Saul Dubow, 'How British was the British World? The Case of South Africa, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, no. 1, (2009), pp. 1-27.

instrumentally to construct identities. It is certainly the case that Britishness could be deployed to assert the exclusive nature of British identity, so that some saw 'British race patriotism' as key to understanding the operation of culture within the Empire. At the Imperial Assemblage of 1877 in India all sorts of 'British' symbols were used to assert British authority. The dais for the Viceroy was decorated with obvious (Western) symbols of imperial rule such as laurel wreaths, imperial crowns, eagles, and the Union Jack, but also included the cross of St George roses, shamrocks and thistles, shields with the Irish harp, the Lion Rampant of Scotland and the three lions of England.³⁹ The Beefeaters can be seen as an icon in the style of these symbols. One had to know what they were to understand their meaning. To the ethnically British, Beefeaters were instantly recognizable for their distinctive style of *historical* uniform. Its shape and colour identified it as Tudor and of the olden times, such that A.F. Hudleston 'recognized' it in the 'out of place' circumstances of India. The Beefeaters represented the longevity of British history and embodied the development of constitutional monarchy and liberty, which emphasized the progressive nature of the British Empire as opposed to others, but they appealed mainly to those with a claim to British history. Liberty emanating from Britain could be exclusive, allowing 'Anglophone settlers [to retain] their metropolitan-ness, their full citizenship, their first-world standing.'⁴⁰

To others not versed in the meaning of one red-coated British soldier over another, information passed on to generations of schoolboys, tea drinkers and cigarette smokers in Britain, they were British but one knew not why.⁴¹ Unversed in the history of England, others looked to alternative parallels to describe the dress of the Yeoman Warders. A Japanese visitor to the Tower of London in the Edwardian period described how:

While I am gazing in wonder at this suit of armour, there is the click of footsteps as someone walks towards me. I turn around and see a Beefeater. When I say Beefeater, you might think that this is someone who is always eating beef, but he is not like that. He is a watchman of the Tower of London. Wearing something that looks like a squashed silk hat, his clothes are similar to those worn by pupils of the Art School. His wide sleeves are gathered at the end and a belt is tied around his *waist*. His clothing is also patterned. The pattern is the kind of thing found on the short coats worn by the Ainu people and is nothing more than an array of extremely simple straight lines arranged into square shapes. He even sometimes carries a spear. On the end of the short-

³⁹ Bernard S. Cohen, 'Representing authority in India', in Hobsbawm and Ranger, p. 200.

⁴⁰ See the essays in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Exclusionary Empire. English Liberty Overseas, 1600–1900* (Cambridge, 2010). The quotation is from James Belich's contribution to the book, 'How Much Did Institutions Matter? Cloning Britain in New Zealand', p. 268

⁴¹ I am grateful to David Benson for sight of his collection of cigarette cards, which differentiate between various ceremonial military uniforms.

headed shaft he has a spear with feathers hanging down like something out of *The Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms*.⁴²

Awareness and ready recognition of the Beefeater gave young ethnic Britons a sense of ownership of the (English-dominated) British past. The *historical* nature of the Beefeater was crucial to his meaning. Yet, this acted to narrow interest in them and non-Britons often needed their own cultural references to make sense of the appearance of the Beefeaters.

Britishness *was* frequently used instrumentally. Hollen Lees has argued that in Malaya:

Despite their dislike of colonialism, in their memories British rule was linked to social benefits as well as political constraints. For Asians, Britishness could mean the assertion of social and political equality with their colonial masters. People born within the empire, whatever their skin color or status, were on an equal legal footing in relation to Queen Victoria and her successors: subjects of the monarch owing loyalty to the crown. Ethnicity and religion were technically irrelevant.⁴³

This was a 'democratic' and modern imperative in taking up Britishness. Bill Schwarz has argued that 'To become modern, for the colonised in the British World, was to become British.'⁴⁴ The length of British history gave authority to its imperial rule, but the distant past offered little to those seeking to use British ideas against the British Empire.⁴⁵ The same Japanese visitor commented upon the anachronism of the Beefeaters: 'It doesn't feel like I am talking to an Englishman of the present age. It feels as if he has just put in an appearance from some bygone era of three or four hundred years ago.'⁴⁶ It was this sense of continuity and longevity that appealed in the 'neo-Britains' being established overseas. Many settlers considered their new homes as being without history, and the Beefeaters, in part through their association with the monarchy, could provide access to a sense of rootedness among those who had uprooted themselves.⁴⁷ Just as the Beefeaters were an embodiment of metropolitan democratic ownership of the past, so too were they co-opted as providing distant Britons with sense of historic identities in their new homes. The Beefeaters, alongside many other reminders of home and history, provided a network of heritage for a network of ethnic Britons across the globe. Descended, as they were, from ancestors who left Britain, association with history ensured that

⁴² Sōseki Natsume, *The Tower of London: Tales of Victorian London* (London, 2005), first published 1905, p. 101.

⁴³ Lees, 'Being British in Malaya,' p. 77.

⁴⁴ Schwarz, p. 23.

⁴⁵ See for example Laura Tabili, *'We Ask for British Justice': Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, 1994).

⁴⁶ Natsume, p. 101.

⁴⁷ See Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford, 2010) and Robert Bickers, ed., *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford, 2010) for the diversity and complexity of settlers' identities.

these expatriate Britons did not become 'foreign'.⁴⁸ They remained kith and kin with those still in the home country, part of an invisible network in which the Beefeaters formed one of the many threads of cultural connection.⁴⁹

The Ceremony of the Keys stood at the centre of this sense of historical continuity. The ceremony, it was claimed, has been conducted every night since the eleventh century, only to be interrupted by the Blitz in the Second World War. *Chums*, a boy's magazine, described the ceremony in 1898:

One could go on writing about the Tower for years, but a few words more must suffice. One of the quaintest customs observed is the locking of the gates. Every evening the Chief Warder, with an escort, goes to the Major's house to fetch the keys, after which there is a solemn procession to the outer gates, which are duly made fast and locked. Then the procession returns, and when it arrives at the guardroom the guard, officers and all, turn out to salute the Queen's keys. The century challenges, and says:

'Who goes there?'

The Chief Warder, with his head uncovered, answers:

'The keys.'

'Whose keys?' asks the sentry.

'Queen Victoria's keys,' is the reply.

Upon which the guard presents arms, and the Yeoman Porter exclaims:

'God save Queen Victoria.'

And the whole guard answers.

This ceremony has gone through every night for the past eight hundred years and more.⁵⁰

This tradition, described in every Tower guidebook, was also reported repeatedly in the national and imperial press in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵¹ The Ceremony of the Keys is simple and fixed in its form; performed daily it emphasizes history, tradition and continuity, despite the changing historical context.⁵² The ceremony was visual and oral in its power. The uniforms of the Beefeaters and guardsmen, the shouting of monosyllabic words and the crashing of hob-nailed

⁴⁸ I am paraphrasing Joseph Chamberlain, via Schwarz, p. 30.

⁴⁹ See Alan Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,' *History Compass*, 4 no. 1 (2006): pp. 124-141, for a summary of the literature on imperial networks.

⁵⁰ 'A Jaunt to the Tower of London', *Chums*, 9 February 1898, p. 396. Guidebooks continue to emphasise the longevity of the ceremonies e.g. 'The ceremonies of the Tower that are still performed encompass centuries of history. The installation of a new Constable, for example, continues the almost unbroken succession that began in the reign of William the Conqueror'. Peter Hammond, *Royal Fortress: The Tower of London through Nine Centuries* (London, 1978), p. 12.

⁵¹ See Simon Potter, 'Communication and integration: The British and dominions press and the British world, c.1876-1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31 no. 2, (2003): pp. 190-206.

⁵² Cannadine, 'The British monarchy and the invention of tradition.'

boots on stone created its own dramatic atmosphere. The ceremony was exported to Empire in its oral form when broadcast for the first time on the BBC Empire Service in 1934 in a programme which described it as 'one of the most interesting as well as one of the most ancient ceremonies' and subsequently in newsreels and tourist marketing films.⁵³

If the Beefeaters performed many ceremonies at the Tower of London, it was also possible for Britons to perform *as* Beefeaters across the world. Cannadine has explored the way in which Gilbert and Sullivan, through their satirical light operas about British institutions became a British institution in themselves.⁵⁴ One of their most widely performed operettas was *The Yeomen of the Guard*, which opened in 1888 at the Savoy Theatre, London.⁵⁵ Only a year later, it was performed in Australia and regularly thereafter throughout the dominions. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported when the operetta was performed at the Sydney Theatre Royal in 1933, W.S Gilbert had been inspired to write the operetta when he noticed an advert for the Tower Furnishing Company at Uxbridge station, which featured a Beefeater.⁵⁶ The *Yeoman of the Guard* also became a staple for amateur dramatic groups.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the Beefeater also featured extensively in fancy dress parties and historical pageants across the Empire. In 1881, a fair in aid of the building fund for the Anglican Holy Trinity Church at Balaclava in Melbourne saw the hall fitted out as a street in old England, complete with Beefeaters.⁵⁸ Other examples include 'Henry the Eighth, his wives, a courtier and three Beefeaters' at Sydney Town Hall in the 1930s.⁵⁹ Twenty years later still, a newly arrived immigrant dressed as a Beefeater on a carnival float in Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre, Australia, to celebrate Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne.⁶⁰

Such fancy dress balls, pageants and carnivals were a common feature of life in British communities across Asia. Robert Bickers has shown how Shanghailanders combined British history with the history of their settlement in Shanghai, asserting independence, self-reliance and community spirit through their efforts in creating

⁵³ It was an Empire Programme Talk broadcast on Sunday, 29 July 1934. I am grateful to Eleanor Fleetham of the BBC Written Archives Centre for this information. See also <http://www.britishpathe.com/>.

⁵⁴ David Cannadine, 'Gilbert and Sullivan: The Making and Un-Making of a British Tradition,' in Porter, pp. 12-32.

⁵⁵ The opening night was reported in the Australian press – see review from London correspondent in *South Australian Advertiser*, 12 November 1888, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 1933, p. 8.

⁵⁷ See for example *The Mercury* (Hobart, Tas.), Wednesday 26 October 1904, p. 7 and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 December 1930.

⁵⁸ *The Australasian Sketcher*, 31 December 1881.

⁵⁹ Sam Hood collection, 'Henry the Eighth, his wives, a courtier and three beefeaters, State Library of New South Wales, <http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemDetailPaged.aspx?itemID=9877#>

⁶⁰ State Library of Victoria, Australia. <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/immigvic/gid/slv-pic-aaa87896>. See also S. Wills and K. Darian-Smith, 'Beefeaters, Bobbies, and a New Varangian Guard? Negotiating Forms of "Britishness" in Suburban Australia,' *History of Intellectual Culture*, 4, no. 1 (2004): pp. 1-18.

the wealth of mercantile gold on the mud-flats of the Huangppu river at the same time as having their children study the British school curriculum and celebrating Empire Day and royal events.⁶¹ In Hong Kong in 1978, the *Hong Kong Tatler* recorded that Swire Loxley, sole agents for Beefeater gin, 'hosted an evening of nostalgic revelry at the Bull and Bear' pub, at which 'the waitresses wore the uniforms of the Beefeaters themselves.'⁶²

However, such dressing up emphasises the limitations of the Beefeater as an imperial icon of Britishness. The Beefeater was but one among many different representations of Britain to those who had left its shores and combined with many other cultural forces and memories. For example, at a juvenile fancy dress ball at Freemantle in 1890, J.B. Johnston went as a Beefeater, but among the 200 others in attendance, there were also a 'flower girl', Robin Hood, King Henry V, and a Shakespearean Lady. Indeed there were always numerous non-British costumes as well at such events, including an incredible array of peasant costumes from all parts of the world.⁶³ In 1926 Gordon Stredwick received only second prize for his Beefeater costume in a children's carnival in Malaya.⁶⁴

Also, outside of the informal British heritage network, there was less engagement with the specific aspects of British history. Certainly, as Hollen Lees explains about Malaya:

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the multiethnic, multicultural town populations of Malaya gradually learned the forms and language of British identity, which spread well beyond the small, British-born population. Conferences, holidays, and state ceremonies exposed residents to the symbolism of the British Empire.⁶⁵

But she does provide significant evidence of a failure by local people to engage fully. In 1887, William Evans, the collector of land revenue in Malacca was appalled when local people refused to sign a congratulatory address to Queen Victoria on the occasion of her golden jubilee and elsewhere, in Perak, participation in the jubilee events linked residents more to their Malay or Chinese roots.⁶⁶ Some features of Britishness were available to all inhabitants of the Empire but it can be considered that there was a 'British race history' that underpinned 'British race patriotism'. The Beefeaters were an assertion of white British (and often English) ethnic identity.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Robert Bickers, 'Shanghaianders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai, 1843-1937,' *Past and Present*, No. 159 (1998): pp. 161-211.

⁶² *Hong Kong Tatler*, I, no. 11, January 1978, p. 13. I am grateful to Mark Hampton for providing me with this example.

⁶³ *The West Australian* (Perth), 26 July 1890.

⁶⁴ *Straits Times*, 7 August 1926.

⁶⁵ Lees, 'Being British in Malaya,' p. 86.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 87.

⁶⁷ For the problematic nature of whiteness see Satoshi Mizutani, 'Contested boundaries of Whiteness: Public Service Recruitment and the Eurasian and Anglo-Indian Association,

There were diverse responses to the Beefeater by those who visited London and got the chance to see and listen to the real Beefeaters at the Tower. Such visits were often recorded in the Dominion press. A New Zealand newspaper in 1908, for example, praised the Beefeaters as genial guardians eminently capable of looking after the crown jewels yet kind and helpful to tourists. The Australian *Longreach Leader* in 1935 described the Beefeaters as 'those impressive fellows who take the eye of all Dominion visitors to the Tower of London.'⁶⁸ An India soldier in London to receive a medal in 1915 wrote to his superior officer that, 'Subedar Sahib, you should know that I have been to London. There are four things worth seeing - one is the Tower, another is St Paul's, and a third is the Houses of Parliament, and the fourth is the market.'⁶⁹ Such visits strengthened the iconic position of the Beefeater as returning tourists gave verbal accounts of their trips and sent postcards depicting the Tower and its warders back overseas. As the cost of photography fell during the twentieth century Beefeaters were regularly photographed alongside Tower visitors - such snapshots popularised the distinctive Tower warder and it became part of tourist itinerary to be photographed next to a Beefeater, but these were often tourist encounters rather than an assertion of ethnic affiliation.⁷⁰ The meaning attached to such encounters varied greatly. Antoinette Burton explains that

Visits to the Tower ... prompted several Indian travellers to recite the list of royal heads lost in that historic place. Syed A.M. Shah took the opportunity presented by an afternoon's visit to the Tower in the spring of 1893 to express his appreciation for being British in the age of Queen Victoria rather than the time of Henry VIII - a comment that resonated with Victorian notions of imperial progress *and* enabled Shah to announce his claim to be a British subject like every other Londoner.⁷¹

On the other hand, Jhinda Ram recounting his visit to the Tower noted that Rome, the empire to which the English compared themselves, was in 'ruin, ruin, ruin' and Britain was no longer the 'Mistress of the World'. He also considered that the Indian arms in the Tower's armoury were the most popular, 'putting to shame the arms and armours of England.'⁷²

1876-1901', in Harald Fischer-Tinè and Susanne Gehrman, eds. *Empires and Boundaries: Rethinking Race, Class, and Gender in Colonial Settings*, (London, 2008), pp. 86-106.

⁶⁸ *Longreach Leader*, 1 June 1935.

⁶⁹ Quoted in David Omissi, 'Europe Through Indian Eyes,' *English Historical Review*, CXII (2007), p. 382.

⁷⁰ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity*. (New York, 2001) explores the complexities of meaning for women from Australia returning 'home'.

⁷¹ Antoinette Burton, 'Making a Spectacle: Indian travellers in *Fin-de-Siècle* London,' *History Workshop*, 42 (1996): p. 133. See also Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, 1998).

⁷² Jhinda Ram, *My Trip to Europe* (Lahore, 1893), pp. 123, 73, quoted in Julie F. Codell, 'Reversing the Grand Tour: Guest Discourse in Indian Travel Narratives,' *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 70, no. 1 (2007): pp. 173-89.

Conclusion

The Beefeaters, real and symbolic, represented the historical longevity of a form of Britishness firmly located in 'the bounded territory' of the Tower of London.⁷³ For those who left the metropole's shores to build new Britains in the four corners of the world, the Beefeater was one symbol among many reminding them that they had a ready-made history. As Poon argues, 'Nations are commonly imagined as *original* communities. The ghost of a purer past frequently haunts the performance of Englishness, which in order to succeed as "authentic", must provide a clear sense of temporal succession and continuity.'⁷⁴ The Beefeaters emphasised that the authentic and national core of the Empire was located in place and history. Across the Empire the symbol was being reproduced in sketch form as a ripple of the centre, in pageants, fancy dress and dramatic performance, reminding distant Britons of the long run of British history.

This happened in parallel with the development of 'the new commodity culture' in which 'the fundamental imperatives of the capitalist system became tangled up with certain kinds of cultural forms, which after a time became indistinguishable from economic forms.'⁷⁵ The Beefeater and other British images were so commonly used in advertising that it can be considered that most people became familiar with the red and gilt dress uniform of the Yeomen Warders from the label of the bottle of a brand of gin.⁷⁶

Beefeaters symbolised the historical power and authority of the British across the world. They were available across the Empire, and indeed to Anglophiles elsewhere. They were available to visitors to London who could meet the personification of the national heritage. But their 'authenticity', while asserting the British national story, meant that they were only available to most people as spectacle, to be gazed upon but not owned. They represented Britishness but only those with a 'patrial' connection to Britain, by birth or heritage, could feel that they belonged to their 'ethnic' history. The Beefeaters were highly distinctive symbols of British history, but in their distinction they emphasised the commonality of those of British heritage in the far flung reaches of the Empire. For those without, they were picturesque and British and often appealing, but they were also other.

⁷³ I have borrowed the term 'bounded territory' from Poon, p.154. It is particularly apt since one ceremony at the Tower of London, conducted every three years, is called 'Beating the Bounds' in which Yeomen Warders and children mark out the boundaries of the Tower of London Liberties.

⁷⁴ Poon, p. 154.

⁷⁵ Richards, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Robert Opie, *Rule Britannia: Trading on the British Image* (London, 1985).