

The Stag in the Window at Werribee Park: Species, Decoration and Britishness

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At the far end of the entrance hall of Werribee Park mansion, incorporated into the fabric of the building, is an elaborate series of etched glass panels created by Melbourne-based stained glass firm, Ferguson and Urie, between 1874 and 1876 (figure 1) (Sherry, 42; Lane and Serle, 156; Serle, 143).



Figure 1. Staircase Window, Werribee Park Mansion, 1874-6. Ferguson and Urie.

These panels collectively serve as the luminous spine of the architectural structure, originally built as the home of the Scottish immigrant brothers and colonial entrepreneurs, Thomas and Andrew Chirnside. Completed in 1877, the mansion at Werribee Park (figure 2) became widely known as a site of baronial activities in the colony, with Highland pipers, tartan, field sports, and red deer herds all characteristics of the lifestyle invented at Werribee by the Chirnside family (*Camperdown Chronicle*, 3; *Illustrated Australian News*, 154).



Figure 2. Werribee Park Mansion, 1874-6. Ferguson and Urie.

In a colonial report on the residence, which tells of a picnic to which upwards of 600 people were invited ('Picnic at Werribee Park' 3), details are given of the Scottish themed entertainment on offer in the mansion grounds:

About noon Mr. [Thomas] Chirnside arrived on the scene, when a Highland piper, whom he had brought out with him [from Scotland], dressed in full Highland garb of the Frazer tartan [*sic*], struck up the "Balmoral Highlander's March." When the first wild note of the pibroch struck upon the ear, a physiognomist had little difficulty in detecting the nationality of those who boasted of auld Scotland – the land of the brave and the free – as the place of their nativity.

Spanning the back wall of the hallway and linking the ground floor with the upper levels of the mansion, the Ferguson and Urie window series is alive with iconography, revealing a store of information related to the cultural identity of the original residents of the building, the Chirnsides. Moreover, the window series connects the outside landscape with the inside household through a set of orderly, emblematic depictions of nature etched into the glass. These semi-opaque illustrations act both to filter the exterior landscape for interior, domestic consumption and to allow the interior environment to adopt the 'wild' associations of nature (McNeil, 86; Basu, 69; Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 9), made popular through Sir Walter Scott's romantic 'Highlandism', examined below. The image of a male red deer, or stag is represented at the centre of this window series. This article focuses on the Werribee mansion stag window's representation of an animal species native to Scotland, in turn considering: how this image came to be in Australia; how it relates to the other window panels around it, including figural representations of St Andrew and St George; what it communicates about the Chirnside family at Werribee Park; and what it means in the context of colonial Victoria.

Reading Interior Design

In recent scholarship across the disciplines of architecture, cultural studies and art history, interior design has increasingly come to feature as a signifier of class, gender, and cultural identity—not only with regards to individuals and families, but also pertaining to communities,

societies and cultures (Briganti and Mezei; Aynsley and Grant; Borzello; Cohen; Taylor and Preston; McKellar and Sparke; Rice). In the *Handbook of Cultural Geography* (2003), the editors note the significance of individual instances of domestic interior decoration (comprising ‘cultural artefacts’) in revealing the collective identity of a society: ‘Studying the distribution of cultural artefacts involves asking *whose* artefacts, *how* did they get put in place, and *for what reasons*. For example, housing style and decor are among the most public forms of identity expression; they can reveal the economic class of the inhabitants, their ethnicity, perhaps their attitudes toward nature, their sense of belonging in a community’ (3).

Tracey Ann Avery posits a reading of interior design as an example of consumption and, by extension, a manifestation of Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘cultural capital’ (Avery, 2012). According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is a form of non-fiscal currency that a person can possess (through birth or environment), acquire (through a transfer of economic capital), and/or appropriate (through the acquisition of knowledge or the attainment of qualifications). These cultural assets then affect a person’s standing in society. In other words, while ‘economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital’, as Bourdieu notes in his 1986 article on this topic (Bourdieu, 47-53), the possession of cultural capital, in addition to the third form defined by Bourdieu as ‘social capital’, advances an individual’s social standing and allows them to mask perceived deficits in, for instance, wealth or lineage (as examples of economic and social capital, respectively).

Existing in an ‘objectified’ state, cultural capital can be manifested in the interior design of a person’s home, serving to advertise the cultural currency and social standing of its occupants. In the example of domestic interior design analysed in this article, the display of the resident’s cultural and social statuses can be interpreted as pertaining to two interrelated strands of identity: social standing and cultural heritage. The decorative imagery built into the fabric of the structure displays a bourgeois social identity (Rice 276-8), as well as hybridised Scottish, British and settler cultural identities.

The Rise of Highlandism

The popularity of stag imagery and the culture of deerstalking examined in this article can be accounted for in the ascription of romantic value to the natural landscape of the Scottish Highlands in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British literature (Rigney; Shields), as in the poems of Ossian by James Macpherson (1761) and the myriad writings and broader cultural influence of Sir Walter Scott (1802-32). Following the dispersal of the aesthetic ideals of romanticism through popular literature, the Highlands of Scotland became widely known as a site of uncultivated beauty, quaint mores, and heroic endeavours. This led to a widespread phenomenon known today as ‘Highlandism’—which saw the repackaging of industrial, urbanised Scotland as a grand wilderness inhabited by proud clansmen in tartan kilts (‘Highlandism and Scottish Identity’, 97-111; McNeil; Devine, 231-248; Pittock; Trevor-Roper). With the rise of Highlandism, Scotland came to be viewed as mountainous, rugged, simplistic, and definitely rural. Yet it is a widely neglected fact that Victorian Scotland was second only to England in its standing as the most industrialised nation in the world (‘Highlandism and Scottish Identity’, 98).

The writer Sir Walter Scott is recognised as the chief architect of Highlandism. Following the union between England and Scotland in 1707, which saw the establishment of the state’s capital at Westminster, there was a growing concern in Scotland that the nation’s cultural distinctiveness would be extinguished in a gradually encroaching wave of Anglicisation. As such, Scotland needed a way of preserving its historic individuality, while participating in the

joint political and cultural enterprises of Britain. Highlandism provided an enduring solution. Drawing on the aesthetic principles romanticism, Walter Scott wrote stories of heroic adventures set in sweeping Highland landscapes and cast the local people as noble, yet ultimately innocuous natives. Examples of such narratives can be found in his enormously popular novels *Waverley* (1814) and *Rob Roy* (1817) and his epic poem *The Lady of the Lake* (1810). Through Scott's writing, therefore, Highlandism proved itself to be inoffensive to the structures of the British union; indeed, advocates of Highlandism respected the British union, deferred to British rule and were fiercely loyal to the British crown. They were, as Graeme Morton has termed it, 'unionist-nationalist' (Morton). This approach to Scottish nationality avoided provoking a negative response from Westminster and even went as far as to actively champion the British alliance (*Painting the Nation*, 225). In this way, Scotland acquired a unique identity without jeopardising its economically advantageous union with England, which provided access to the joint ventures of empire.

Subsequently, in Australia, an appreciation for the Scottish Highlands was inspired by the existing allegiance to British cultural identity, which sought to mirror the presiding fashions of the imperial metropole (Fraser). Serving as depictions of a Scottish national landscape, moreover, representations of the Highlands in art and literature also fulfilled a function in Australia as a remembrance of the motherland for British immigrants and their descendants. Additionally, the Highland landscape, and the 'inventions' of Highlandism more broadly (Hobsbawm and Ranger; Trevor-Roper), held a distinctive significance as a wellspring of social status, indicative of the aspirational impact of baronial culture in the burgeoning middle-classes of both Britain and Australia. This association came about, in part, through royal endorsement of the Highland lifestyle created by Queen Victoria at Balmoral.

In 1851, Victoria and Albert purchased the Balmoral estate in Deeside. This signalled the beginning of 'Balmoralism' (Devine, 293; Ormond, 13), an offshoot of Highlandism which represented the Scottish Highlands as a playground in which aristocrats and social elites, primarily from London, could find recreation in a wilderness setting and participate in blood sports, such as deerstalking and grouse shooting. Both of these evocations—the romantic naïve and the privileged urbane—spoke to the emerging cultural identity of colonial Victoria, where British taste was the order of the day. It is conceivable that the grand historicism of Highlandism also offered a validating buttress for the early settler societies in Australia. In this way, the romantic ideals of ancient history, heritage and ancestry, characteristic of Highlandism, counteracted the comparative newness and unfamiliarity of Australian settler society. Through the 'moral' value of culture more generally, moreover, Highlandism served to disguise the initial and underlying violence of the settler project, especially with regards to Scottish participation (Rowley, 112-3; Watson; Prentis, 90-1).

The Stag in Scotland

Before beginning an analysis of the Werribee stag window, it is constructive to first move away from the outskirts of Melbourne and relocate the etched glass representation to its conceptual origins in nineteenth-century Britain, and consider the nativeness of the stag in that domain. There are four species of wild deer in Scotland: the red deer and the roe deer, both of which are recognised as indigenous, the former having been continuously present in Scotland since the end of the last ice age; and the fallow deer and silka deer, which were introduced in the twelfth and nineteenth centuries, respectively (Edwards and Kenyon, 3, 6). Today the largest population of red deer in Europe is found in the Scottish Highlands. As Silvia Pérez-Espona has noted, while red deer were originally numerous across the country, they were 'gradually displaced northwards' due to deforestation and hunting practices over the last 500 years (199).

During the nineteenth century, the quantity and range of red deer in the Highlands rose dramatically with the popularity and subsequent cultivation of the hunting lifestyle, a development that led to the introduction of foreign stock and more precise management of the population (Pérez-Espona et al; Lorimer). The Victorian fashion for hunting and shooting can be traced to the baronial lifestyle made famous by the royal family at Balmoral in the Highlands. Thus, with an increase in the hunting of this species (also termed ‘deerstalking’), came an increase in the species population. This irony of blood sports is one of many such complexities that characterise the presence and cultural relevance of red deer in Scotland. Here we find an indication of Hayden Lorimer’s assessment of the multiple, overlapping and oftentimes contrasting ‘cultures of nature’, which exist at any given time in a particular spatial context (Lorimer, 405; Macnaghton and Urry).

The popularity of deerstalking in the nineteenth century led to a decrease in the human population of the Highlands, as inhabited areas of the land were converted to deer pasture by landlords, often acting *in absentia*. This also led to restrictions on the hunting of native deer by local residents; as John Morrison notes, ‘By the 1860s deer were no longer a potential food source for crofters. They were a threat to their livelihood’ (‘Highlandism and Scottish Identity’, 105). In one of several commentaries published in the *Scotsman* in 1883, later reprinted for Australian readers in the *Shoalhaven Telegraph*, the chief grievance of Highland crofters at the time is described as ‘their deprivation of grazing grounds’, through an increase in ‘sheep runs and deer forests’ (*Shoalhaven Telegraph*, 4). In an impassioned conclusion to this assessment, which discloses an intimate perspective on the late nineteenth-century land struggle in Scotland, these deer forests are described as ‘[T]he scandal of our generation...where a few empty-headed, wealthy fools may enjoy the glory of shooting with arms of precision some silly, half-tamed stags; and who, like the big sheep farmers, pay high rents to absentee owners’. Such commentaries, censuring to varying degrees the displacement of Highland crofters, continued to be published in Britain, and reprinted in Australia, across the final decades of the nineteenth century.

In 1885, for instance, an extract from an article originally published in the British literary journal *Nineteenth Century* was reproduced in South Australia’s *Kapunda Herald*, in which the writer, J A Cameron, decries the appropriation and mistreatment of the Scottish land and traditional Highland communities by wealthy ‘Englishmen’ (Cameron 3), a process that might now be termed ‘internal colonisation’ (Hechter). For Cameron, this situation is defined by the uneven distribution of power and money between the founding nations of the British state. As he notes:

How long the craze for deer forests may last is problematical; but it is not likely that individuals will continue in the future to pay one thousand pounds for the privilege of killing a score of stags per annum; and when the fashion comes to an end retribution for the evictions of the past will at last have overtaken the Highland landlord. But in the meantime the fashion is at its height, and threatens the Highlands in its progress with a new evil not less in degree than the one from which they have already suffered. Throughout Scotland, among all classes, a strong feeling against deer forests prevails. Why should our country be turned into a hunting ground for the Southerner? (Cameron, 3)

The role of the absentee landlord in facilitating the spread of the Highland deer forests is an ongoing source of concern in newspaper reports from the nineteenth century. A brief article

published in the *Western Australian Sunday Times* in December, 1899, admonishes of the actions of landowners for neglecting the welfare of local crofting communities. Lamponing the British national anthem in the title of the piece, ‘God Bless the Duke of Argyll’, this article goes on to state:

The Duke of Argyle [*sic*] is converting another extensive farm into, a deer forest. The new deer forest will stretch across the whole breadth of the mountain range from Loch Sgridan on the one side to Loch-na-Keal on the other. A few more landlords like His Grace, and certainly there would still be Scotland and Scottish deer, but the land without the Scotch. A short time ago when a military officer went to round to recruit in the part of Scotland, which has turned out so many brave soldiers, they said to him, ‘Enlist the black cattle, there is nothing else left.’ Yet we still go on making our own big landlords. Will past history never teach us anything? (‘God Bless the Duke of Argyll’, 6)

Within this contentious climate—marked by conflicting perspectives on the practice of deer hunting in the Highlands, ranging from romantic ideals to pragmatic criticisms, and privileged participants to disadvantaged ones—the etched glass panels at Werribee Park were first conceived. While the terms ‘stag’ and ‘red deer’ have thus far been conflated in this analysis, it is important to note that *stag* can be used to designate the adult male of several deer species. Yet the red deer stag has a particular relevance in the current study. As the largest species of deer in Scotland and the largest land mammal in Britain—not to mention the most ‘native’ (Pérez-Espona et al, 14) of the country’s deer species—the red deer has, on account of its biological presence alone, assumed an elevated status in the Scottish natural environment. Moreover, as a direct consequence of the physical grandeur and indigeneity of this species, writers, artists and other influential figures of the nineteenth century—acting on the advice of the earlier developments in romanticism—established a new cultural status for the red deer in Scotland, one irrevocably connected to Scottish national identity. To this day, the red deer is celebrated, and expended through hunting, as an icon of Scottishness.

The Window at Werribee Park: Demarcating Britishness in Victoria

It was in the immediate wake of these social developments in Scotland that the Chirnside family appointed the Scottish-trained, Melbourne-based company Ferguson and Urie to construct the etched window series examined in this article. The middle panel of the Werribee window series is a representation of a well-known painting by Sir Edwin Landseer entitled *Red Deer of Chillingham* from 1869 (figure 3), first exhibited at the Royal Academy in London five years prior to the image being used in the interior decoration of Werribee mansion.

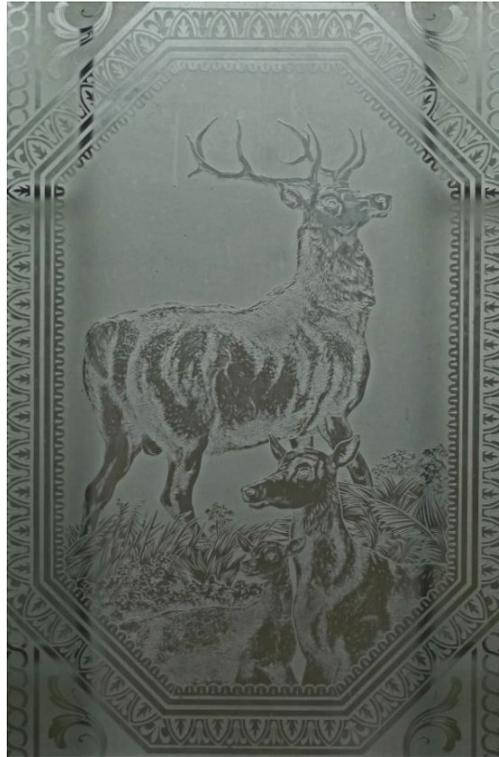


Figure 3. *Red Deer of Chillingham, Werribee Park Mansion, 1874-6.* Ferguson and Urie.

This work was made famous through an internationally distributed print by the artist's brother Thomas Landseer; indeed, records show that the Chirnsides themselves owned a copy of this print (figure 4). In this work, Landseer painted a stag, distinguishable by its antlers, standing in profile, elevated by the incline of the hillside from an accompanying hind and calf, which also stand in profile although facing in the opposite direction. A coarse layer of vegetation covers the ground beneath the feet of the stag, intruding upon the length of its legs, as it strides across the uncultivated plain.

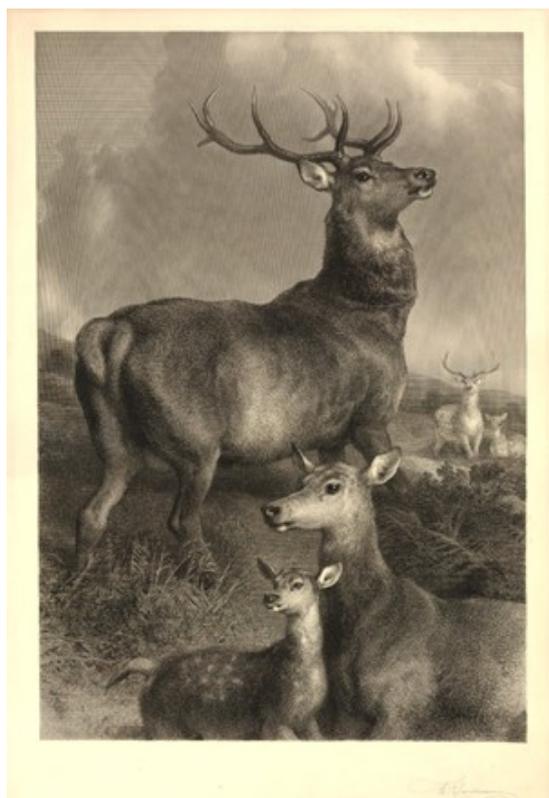


Figure 4. *Red Deer of Chillingham*. The British Museum.

The choice of a stag as the subject matter, first by Landseer and later by colonial craftsmen Ferguson and Urie in Melbourne, was not pioneering, although the quality of the rendering in each case demonstrates a measure of ingenuity. But just as the red deer gained a newfound relevance in the everyday activities of nineteenth-century Scotland, so too did the stag—with its larger stature than the hind, its combative mating rituals and its many-pointed antlers—assume a new degree of significance in the Scottish cultural landscape. The stag became a symbol of wildness and masculinity and a facilitator of human dominance over nature (Lorimer, 410; Martin, 39-80). In the context of the British state, the Scottish Highlands, through the fashion for deerstalking, was transformed into the playground of the southern gentry and growing *nouveau riche*.

Sir Edwin Landseer is not generally featured in Scottish art history on account of his birth or training; he was an English painter, born and trained in London, who made his name through portrayals of mountainous, romantic and largely de-peopled Highland landscapes, painted from the 1840s to the 1870s. When humans feature in Landseer's Highland scenes, it is generally in sporting pictures showing the royal family at Balmoral or members of the British aristocracy (figure 5), or else in melancholy or mischievous scenes of poor, yet decorative locals.



Figure 5. *Queen Victoria landing at Loch Muick*, 1850. Royal Collection Trust.

This Highland theme sits in the artist's oeuvre alongside paintings of anthropomorphised dogs. One of Landseer's most famous paintings, however, is *Monarch of the Glen* (1851) (figure 6), currently on loan to National Museum of Scotland. Originally painted to hang in the Houses of Parliament at Westminster, Landseer's *tour de force* romantic stag painting moved to private sale when a suitable price could not be settled on.



Figure 6. *Monarch of the Glen*, 1851. National Museums of Scotland.

As disclosed in the title of the painting, the stag in Landseer's *Red Deer at Chillingham*, draws inspiration from a north English red deer herd, formerly held in the park of Chillingham Castle in Northumberland (Coult). While red deer are native to pockets of south England, in addition to the Scottish Highlands, the Chillingham herd is known to have been imported to the area. Consequently, both Landseer's painting and the Werribee etched window symbolise the embrace of the Highlandist associations of red deer across nineteenth-century Britain and its empire, representing a suitable addition to rural estates and the baronial lifestyles of their residents. A herd of red deer was also acquired by the Chirnsides at Werribee Park.

As with many motifs of national identity ascribed to Scotland in the modern era, the stag became a dynamic player in the nation's consciousness, in part, through the writings of Sir Walter Scott. In line with his efforts to preserve a distinguishable Scottish identity in the face of the hegemonic encroachments from London following the formation of Britain in 1707, Scott repackaged the ecological, cultural and historic characteristics of Scotland. In the opening canto of his popular epic poem, *The Lady of the Lake*, from 1810, Scott provides one of the earliest and most stirring representations of a stag hunt in nineteenth-century British literature. Entitled 'The Chase', this canto sees the author introduce an anthropomorphised image of the Highland stag:

As Chief, who hears his warder call,
 'To arms! The foeman storm the wall,'
 The antlered monarch of the waste
 Sprung from his heathery couch in haste.
 But ere his fleet career he took,
 The dew-drops from his flanks he shook;
 Like crested leader proud and high
 Tossed his beamed frontlet to the sky;
 A moment gazed adown the dale,
 A moment snuffed the tainted gale,
 A moment listened to the cry,
 That thickened as the chase drew nigh;
 Then, as the headmost foes appeared,
 With one brave bound the copse he cleared,
 And, stretching forward free and far,
 Sought the wild heaths of Uam-Var.
 (II. 11-26)

Such literary evocations inspired a new category of visual art, one in which both the stag and the cultural activities of deerstalking featured prominently, as can be seen in the works of Horatio McCulloch, Sir Edwin Landseer and, as featured in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Thomas Miles Richardson (figure 7).



Figure 7. Corie Echen, *Highlands of Scotland*, 1880. National Gallery of Victoria.

Art historian John Morrison juxtaposes the presence of deer in McCulloch's well-known painting, *Glencoe* (1864), with the absence of a human presence in the work, interpreting McCulloch's representation of deer as a means by which the artist could actively celebrate the mythologies of the Highland environment as wild, uncultivated, and a 'retreat from human activity' ('Highlandism and Scottish Identity', 106). In Clare Brennan's doctoral thesis examining the introduction of recreational hunting practices in New Zealand and colonial Victoria in the second half of the nineteenth century, entitled *Imperial Game* (2004), Landseer's *Monarch of the Glen* (1851) is used to introduce the premise of her project; she notes that this painting encapsulates the Victorian taste for wilderness and the romantic ideals of hunting that subsequently became popular across the empire. Although Brennan erroneously labels this fashion as 'English' instead of 'British', she certainly affirms the role played by imported deer in refashioning the newly-settled natural environments of the colonies, in an attempt to make them palatable, familiar and culturally acceptable spheres of living for wealthy colonial residents. As she states: '... sport hunting and its symbolic animals were used by Antipodean settlers to possess the unfamiliar environments of New Zealand and Victoria – fleshy Monarchs of the Glen were used by settlers to imaginatively recreate wild Antipodean environments as culturally familiar hunting grounds' (Brennan, 1). This is supported in the present examination of domestic interior decoration in colonial Victoria. The interior scheme conceived and commissioned for the Werribee estate reflected the Scottish heritage the pastoralist brothers brought with them when they emigrated from lowland Scotland in 1839. Settling in the soon-to-be independent colony of Victoria and proceeding to make their fortune through fortuitous trading in stations and land, these working class Scots came to construct a baronial lifestyle for themselves in Australia, akin to that of the landed gentry in Britain, a lifestyle made popular by Victoria and Albert at Balmoral. Thus, through the 'benevolence of distance', the Chirnsides were able to reinvent themselves using a constructed cultural identity that drew upon the Highlandist trappings fabricated decades earlier by Sir Walter Scott. The Chirnsides were thus able to exercise a 'lairdly ambition' (Brown, 11), in spite of their lowland,

working-class background. As Kerry Lea Jordan has noted of the role of domestic space in establishing social standing in colonial Victoria:

Few of those building grand houses in Victoria in the nineteenth century would have been accepted as gentry in Britain. Many came from humble backgrounds, but had made their fortune in the colony, and were ultimately accepted in Victoria as gentlemen. In the attempts of these new rich to establish and maintain their social position, the houses they built were essential. (Jordan, 9)

The first published report of the etched glass series at Werribee Park was printed in a column in the *Bacchus Marsh Express* in July, 1875, which noted that Mr W J Clarke of Sunbury had commissioned a set of painted windows from Melbourne-based company Ferguson and Urie and that a similar stained glass series would also be made for the Messrs Chirnsides: ‘if the design submitted be approved of [by the Chirnsides], they will have “The four seasons” well limned; and “The twelve months of the year”, each representing the class of game obtainable here and in the old country’ (*Bacchus Marsh Express*, 4). In the end, the Werribee window series was not executed in colour, but in acid etched glass; otherwise, this contemporary report provides an accurate description of several of the panels commissioned by the Chirnsides.

Around the glass panel image showing the stag are personified representations of Britannia and Victoria, as well as images of St George of England and St Andrew of Scotland (figure 8).



Figure 8. *St George and St Andrew*, Werribee Park Mansion, 1874-6. Ferguson and Urie.

The latter two figures serve as a symbolic representation of the British union and, in turn, a figural adaptation of the British flag. Neither St George nor St Andrew is given prominence in this window series, standing precisely level and having exact proportions. This reflects the proposal on the development of a British Union flag stated in the Acts of Union from 1707: ‘The two Kingdoms of England and Scotland shall ... for ever after be united into one Kingdom

by the name of Great Britain ... and the Crosses of St. George and St. Andrew be conjoined' (*Union with Scotland Act 1706*, Article I; *Union with England Act 1707*, Article I). The Werribee window series thus communicates a sense of united directorship over the founding of Great Britain and the expansion of its empire. Underscoring this impression of state and empire, under each of the saints in the Werribee decoration is a Latin phrase, representative of the highest chivalric orders in England and Scotland: the Order of the Garter, whose motto is 'Honi soit qui mal y pense', which is written under the image of St George, and the Order of the Thistle, whose motto is 'Nemo me impune lacessit', written under the image of St Andrew.

Also visible in the window series, around the central image of the Landseer's *Red Deer of Chillingham*, is shown a selection of game animals from Britain and Australia (figure 9), animals that symbolise the practice of hunting, in keeping with the baronial lifestyle created at Werribee Park.



Figure 9. Examples of game species, Werribee Park Mansion, 1874-6. Ferguson and Urie.

Yet by setting the red deer apart from the other prey of blood sports portrayed in the window series, the colonial designers Ferguson and Urie, and in turn the house's residents, the Chirnsides, were paying tribute to the unique status of the stag, ascribed to the animal through the rise of Highlandism earlier in the nineteenth century. Indeed, as noted above, red deer were not simply represented in the mansion's window decorations and in the display of antlers hanging in the hallway; Thomas Chirside also kept a red deer herd at Werribee Park (Bentley; Brennan, 148-75), recreating, in Australia, the hunting lifestyle only recently made popular among the *nouveau riche* of Britain. The herd itself was originally donated by Prince Albert from his own red deer herd at Windsor Great Park (Bentley, 48). A contemporary report and depiction of the Werribee deer is given in the *Illustrated Australian News* from October, 1877, in which a day's sport is narrated. The day, it is announced, 'terminated in great slaughter':

For years past the Messrs. Chirside have taken a keen interest in the acclimatisation and preservation of every description of gam», and they are accredited with being the first importers of deer and foxes into Victoria...the deer,

of which there are various kinds, have thriven famously since their first introduction, and so numerous have they become that it has been deemed necessary to make periodical raids against them in order to limit the amount of damage done to the neighbouring crops of the cockatoo farmers. Apart from the more dignified monarchs of the glen, who are comfortably ‘parked’ near the home mansion, there are estimated to be about 700 fallow deer roaming at large in the vicinity of a certain section of the estate. (*Illustrated Australian News* 154)

Arthur Bentley’s survey of deer in Australia begins by aligning wealth and social status with the introduction of certain species to the colonies, stating, ‘Sportsmen among the well-to-do settlers supported or made direct efforts to introduce deer, the fox, hare, rabbit, pheasant, partridge, trout and salmon’ (Bentley, 2). These species were introduced to Australia as necessary components in the enacting of blood sports culture, which was increasingly linked to elevated social status in Victorian society. Bentley also notes that ‘Thomas Chirnside’s Werribee Park herd of red deer was the most important herd ever established in Australia’ (48). Throughout the colonies, acclimatisation societies were formed to facilitate the introduction of European species to the Australian environment, apparently distributing ‘useful species’ across the world (3). In nineteenth-century Britain, the usefulness of deer—and, especially, the red deer stag—was centred on the associations with aristocracy and romantic literature.

Conclusion

Given this cultural and environmental context, the Werribee mansion stag window might then be read in a number of ways: firstly, as a celebration of British union and empire, expressed through imagery associated primarily with the Scottish Highlands and the indigeneity of red deer in that region; secondly, as a means of legitimising the presence of the Chirnsides in both the moneyed strata of colonial society and the land claimed through empire, by offering an array of historic and baronial associations to their domestic space; and, lastly, when interpreted alongside the imported stag herd at Werribee Park, as a familiar and romantic filter through which the settler residents could experience an unfamiliar Australian environment (Brennan, 1-2).

This visual artefact, furthermore, illustrates the centrality of animal species such as the red deer stag in demarcating British imperial territory and, by extension, the involvement of Scottish colonials, alongside other settler participants, in facilitating the displacement of Indigenous custodianship in Australia. Brennan notes how the ritual of the ‘Hunt’ in the colonies served to express the authority of white possession, as settler participants cast Indigenous people in subordinate roles, such as beaters and bearers, and, more generally, used the culture of blood sports to lay claim over Australian nature (Brennan, 213). The taste for wilderness environments, as projected on the Scottish Highlands, which were depeopled through the rise of hunting forests, also has parallels in the fashion for blood sports in colonial Australia; in reference to the emergence of wilderness space as identified through the perspective of ‘settler colonial imaginings’, Australian historians Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds have recently noted: ‘wilderness, as it was imagined in the late nineteenth century, could only exist because it had been, or would be, emptied of human habitation’ (Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 9).

At the Chirnside’s home in rural Victoria, hunting and Highlandism were employed as a means by which this working-class family could reinvent itself as noble and powerful, qualities they shared with the stag that looked down on them in their hallway. In the context of Victoria, even more so than in Scotland, the image of the stag demonstrates a collaboration between

Scottishness and the British state. Indeed, as willing participants in the colonial project, the Chirnsides celebrated Britishness, both union and empire, in their employment of Highlandist motifs and displays of Scottish species at Werribee Park.

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