

NONESUCH

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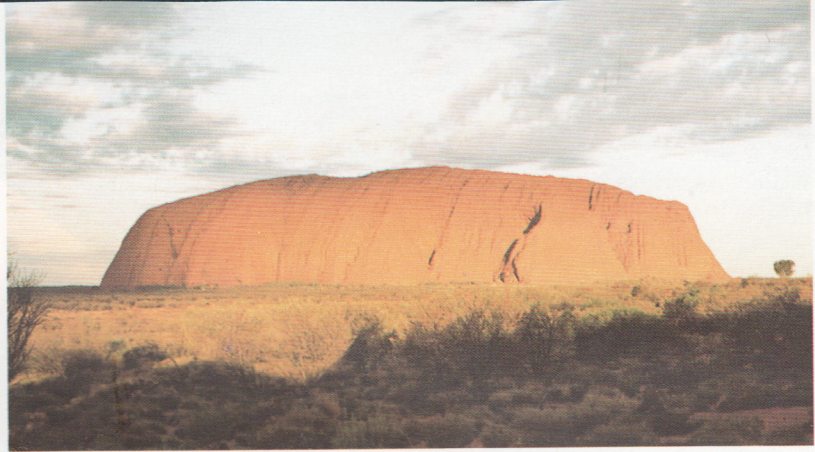
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The Scots, typically, took a little longer to dissolve and were highly prominent, especially in business and the professions. Many Roman Catholic Irish retained an identity as Irish-Australians. The Irish had a distinctive programme but their ideas gained more impetus from events in Ireland than they did from experiences in Australia. Although the sectarian conflict (about such issues as the funding of schools) between Irish-Australian Roman Catholics and other migrants from the British Isles was an important ingredient in creating the Australian Nation, the many values the Irish held in common with other migrants were even more important. Irish migrants no less than other Australians became beneficiaries of the world-wide expansion of the British Empire.

The extent to which Australianness was bound up with Britishness was illustrated in the two World Wars. In 1914 Australia's Liberal Prime Minister Joseph Cook declared 'All our resources in Australia are . . . for the preservation and security of the Empire.' Cook was backed by Andrew Fisher, leader of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), who stated, 'Australia will stand beside our own to help defend her to our last man and our last shilling'.

In 1939 Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies told the people, 'Great Britain has declared war and, as a result, Australia is also at war.' John Curtin, the ALP war-time Prime Minister, told the nation two days after the Japanese capture of Singapore, 'Australians, you are the sons and daughters of Britishers.' Even after the war Australians still wanted infusions of Britishness. In November 1946 Arthur Calwell, Minister for Immigration in the ALP Government, said 'It is my hope that for every foreign migrant there will be ten people from the United Kingdom.'

Today, however, that has all changed. Australians are now beginning to define themselves not in terms of their Britishness but almost in terms of the ways in which



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*Above: Ayer's Rock, sacred to the Aborigines and symbol of an Australia rooted in the landscape
Right: 'The millennia of Aboriginal experience'? A contemporary interpretation: Papunya Tula painting, Tingari Dreaming, by Anaatjarri Tjakhmarra. Courtesy of the Rebecca Hossack Gallery*

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they can distinguish themselves from Britishness. Australia's current Prime Minister, Paul Keating, represents Britain as a foreign country with no special ties with Australia, and the Queen as a foreign ruler. That ties between Britain and Australia have become weaker over the last quarter of a century is by no means all the fault of the Australians. Britain has turned increasingly to Europe and the United States of America for meaningful political as well as military ties.

But changes in immigration policy in Australia have significantly reduced the proportion of people of British origin in its population. Post-1980 multi-culturalist policies have tried to convince non-British immigrants that they should not celebrate the pre-1950 'British' past, which is dismissed as irrelevant to the new national identity of Australia and Australianness. A new orthodoxy has emerged in which all 'ethnic' traditions are to be valued and prized, except the old British-Australian tradition.



In many schools and universities now 'Australian Studies' courses reject 'myths of national progress and unity' and maintain that, 'held up against the millennia of Aboriginal experience, the last 200 years seem a brief, nasty interlude'. Recommended books and video-material now portray the British-

Australian past as an obnoxious mixture of racism, patriarchal oppression of women, and capitalist exploitation. Britain features only as a land of poverty and injustice which sent innocent victims as convicts to Australia and later lured Australia into unnecessary wars.

Paul Keating has accused his Liberal opponents of 'cultural cringe to a country which decided not to defend the Malay Peninsula, not to worry about Singapore, and not to give us our troops back to keep ourselves free from Japanese

ties with Asian nations, including Japan. He denounces past and present Australian links with Britain the betrayer.

There may of course be a good case for ending the legal role of the Crown in Australia, since it has long since ceased to exert any influence on Australian political life and can no longer act as a unifying centre of loyalty for all Australians. But there is also a case for retaining a British-derived democratic system which has served Australia remarkably well. There certainly is no case for

Aborigines so that the land could be used for stock raising. In other myths Ned Kelly (born about 101 years after Cook's death) was the friend of the Aborigines and gave them horses and bullocks. He was then killed by Cook who despoiled the Aborigines.

The fact is that Aboriginality was defined by contact with the first settlers. Aborigines themselves seem to have been separate peoples although joined by a common culture. Their interaction with the new invading culture was certainly unfortunate. Many of the settlers with whom they came in contact were murderers or other criminals. Others were missionaries who sought to catch the Aborigines young and place them in schools so that their pagan culture could be abandoned.

It was the British Earl Grey, as Colonial Secretary, who urged Australian governors to protect traditional Aboriginal land usage and therefore their culture.

Australianness today must define its sense in terms of its own history, *all* of its own history. It should also try properly to understand that history. It should know where Captain Cook landed and did not land. It should recognise the strenuous efforts and indeed sacrifices (such as the sending of the battleships *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales*, which were subsequently sunk) Britain made to try to save Singapore and to protect Australia. It should cherish the art, music, literature and sport (much of it British in origin) that draws together Australian cultures and tradition. Only then will a true Australianness arise. ■

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REBECCA HOSSACK GALLERY

domination'. Mr Keating went on to express the hope that 'the change and the composition of our migration programme [that is, towards Asianisation] is well appreciated in Asia'. He believes that Asian nations want to see Australia as part of Asia 'for real'. His programme is to strengthen

denigrating Great Britain and all that it has stood for in the Australian past. There is certainly little excuse, in the forming of a mature Australianness, for the myths that have been created around figures such as Captain Cook.

According to these myths, Cook was a murderer who shot