

“A Ceremony of National and Representative Character”: The Four-Nations Politics of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee

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Abstract In June 1887, Britons crowded the streets of London to celebrate Queen Victoria’s fiftieth year on the throne. It was an opportunity to publicly revel in the social, political, economic, and imperial progress Britain had made during her historic reign. The Lord Chamberlain was tasked with organizing a formal jubilee ceremony at Westminster Abbey representative of the queen’s diverse subjects. But this proved a difficult undertaking for a multinational kingdom with a vast overseas empire. Grievances over seating in Westminster Abbey, jubilee honors, and an absent royal family fostered varying degrees of solidarity and rivalry among the United Kingdom’s four constituent nations. The Irish Question and imperial expansion—matters in which Victoria was personally invested—heightened four-nations sensibilities and influenced participation in the festivities. The queen’s Golden Jubilee both reflected and inspired four-nations thinking, and it revealed public concerns that the British union might exist as a hierarchy of nations rather than as a collaborative venture among equal members. As the institutional embodiment of tiered society, the Crown became an outlet for subjects to explore questions and modes of belonging within the global British world. A four-nations analysis of Victoria’s 1887 jubilee shows that despite its unifying function, the modern British monarchy has struggled to harmonize the United Kingdom’s multinational perspectives.

On June 21, 1887, Queen Victoria paraded triumphantly through the sunny streets of London. The queen’s journal reveals her gratitude and surprise at seeing such an “extraordinary outburst of enthusiasm” from the “enormous” crowds gathered to celebrate her fiftieth year on the throne.¹ For months, Britons had talked and written about Victoria’s Golden Jubilee in biographical pamphlets, celebratory songbooks, sermons, and newspaper editorials. They ate on commemorative plates stenciled with the queen’s portrait, sent and received letters with limited-edition jubilee postage stamps, bought raffle tickets for lotteries with jubilee-themed prizes, and attended openings of hospital wards

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¹ Queen Victoria, Journal, 21 June 1887, VIC/MAIN/QVJ (W), The Royal Archives, London. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as RA.)

and orphanages funded in honor of the queen's historic achievement. The public fervor reflected what English journalist Walter Bagehot had called the "incalculable" value of the monarchy's dignified function.² The Crown, Bagehot argued, had the power to "combine the affection of conflicting parties," serve as "a visible symbol of unity" to undereducated British subjects, and capture public imagination through ceremonial splendor.³ Victoria's desire for her Golden Jubilee to be "of national and representative character" was evident in the gown she wore to her Jubilee banquet at Buckingham Palace: elegantly stitched with English roses, Scottish thistles, and Irish shamrocks.⁴ But the absence of the Welsh daffodil shows how Golden Jubilee celebrations designed to unify the United Kingdom's constituent parts could also exacerbate divisions and rivalries between them.

Champions of a four-nations approach to British history contend that London- and England-centric narratives obscure a fundamentally pluralist British past. Four-nations scholars trace their intellectual origin to J. G. A. Pocock's 1975 "plea" to de-parochialize the field of British history, which he believed was hampered by a pervasive tendency to conflate "British" with "English."⁵ "No true history of Britain has ever been composed," Pocock argued, because "British" histories were actually histories of England that only featured appearances by Welsh, Scottish, Irish, and colonial actors when their actions affected English political power. Pocock hoped to reinvest the term "Britain" with distinct meaning at a time when decolonization, Europeanization, and internal campaigns for devolution threatened its future.⁶ A framework that critically interrogated the experiences and histories of the diverse nationalities within the "Atlantic Archipelago" and across the settler empire would accentuate Britain's profoundly "contingent character"—something "always in the making, never made."⁷

In the five decades since Pocock's call, however, the four-nations subfield has struggled to provide a coherent metanarrative for British history and defend against charges of parochialism.⁸ Scholars have delved further into the individual histories of each of the Celtic nations, or drawn comparisons between two of them, while edited volumes have compiled Scottish, English, Welsh, and Irish stories with the implication that read alongside one another, they presented a broader "British" picture. I embrace Naomi Lloyd-Jones's and Margaret Scull's recent call for

2 Walter Bagehot, "The English Constitution," in *The English Constitution*, ed. Miles Taylor (Oxford, 2009), 36–235, at 38.

3 Bagehot, "The English Constitution," 45.

4 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Court Newsmen, 1 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 31, National Archives (hereafter this repository is abbreviated TNA); Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria: A Personal History* (New York: 2000), 380.

5 J. G. A. Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject," *Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 4 (1975): 601–21 at 603; Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret M. Scull, "A New Plea for an Old Subject? Four Nations History for the Modern Period," in *Four Nations Approaches to Modern "British" History*, ed. Naomi Lloyd-Jones and Margaret M. Scull (London, 2018), 3–31.

6 David Cannadine, "British History: Past, Present—and Future?," *Past and Present*, no. 116 (1987): 169–91.

7 Raphael Samuel, "British Dimensions: 'Four Nations History,'" *History Workshop Journal* 40, no. 1 (1995): iii–xxi, at iv; Hugh Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge: 1989).

8 Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992): 309–29.

"genuinely polycentric narratives" that deploy "four nations history" as a methodology.⁹ Narrow focus on a single event—Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee—reveals a dynamic four-nations ecosystem. The jubilee provoked distinctly Scottish, Welsh, and Irish reactions that confronted English hegemony and were continually shaped by impressions of one another, and of the wider global network that late nineteenth century British and Irish subjects conceived of themselves as belonging to. In elucidating these national perspectives, I do not purport to offer monolithic or static characterizations of English, Scottish, Welsh, or Irish identity.¹⁰ Rather, I examine the tendency for Victoria's subjects to frame their engagement with the jubilee along four-nations lines.

Although Bagehot referred parochially to "the English Monarchy," the nineteenth century saw the Crown increasingly come to symbolize the new multinational union. As Linda Colley has shown, "the monarchy was more genuinely and assertively British" at the start of Victoria's reign in 1838 than it had ever been before.¹¹ The Crown was instrumental in popularizing the new supra-national category of "Britain," with royal celebrations increasingly imbuing it with meaning; Duncan Bell has characterized Queen Victoria as "the linchpin for a sense of global national identity."¹² The Lord Chamberlain was tasked with cultivating this universal Britishness through Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebrations. His mandate was to create a ceremony "of national and representative character."¹³ But the difficulties in carrying out such a vision revealed the fervent four-nations cultural and political landscape of late Victorian Britain: subjects used the jubilee to contend with whether Britain's "global national identity," as Bell put it, was fundamentally pluralistic or Anglo-centric in character.

The jubilee festivities provoked myriad appeals to subjects' particular national sensibilities. Some of Victoria's Scottish, Welsh, and Irish subjects felt the celebrations took for granted or otherwise neglected the United Kingdom's multinationality. Although widely devoted to the monarch who had made the Highlands her second home, Scots voiced frustration with their unequal inclusion in the jubilee celebrations. Less enamored with the trappings of royalty, many Welsh subjects questioned why they should spend their hard-earned money on celebrating the jubilee at all. Meanwhile, the defeat of the politically fraught Irish Home Rule Bill only a year earlier loomed large over jubilee discourse across Britain and Ireland. As the public celebration of Victoria's historic reign inspired her subjects to reflect on the state of the British union, they often did so through a four-nations lens.

An integrated four-nations approach to British history reveals competing impulses fundamental to the United Kingdom's political project: to both validate the distinctiveness of the four constituent nations and build a supra-national sense of

9 Lloyd-Jones and Scull, "A New Plea for an Old Subject?," 6.

10 On the changeability of such ideas over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006).

11 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), 230–31.

12 Duncan Bell, "The Idea of a Patriot Queen? The Monarchy, the Constitution, and the Iconographic Order of Greater Britain, 1860–1900," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 3–22, at 5.

13 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Court Newsmen, 1 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 31, TNA.

“Britishness.” Local and regional press amplified four-nations perspectives, creating a public channel for cross-national engagement within the union. That this discourse frequently looked outward—to the other nations, and to the wider empire—shows that focus on the United Kingdom’s multinationality need not produce insular histories.¹⁴ A polycentric four-nations approach also offers one potential path out of the inconsistent and problematic “worlding of Britain.”¹⁵ Priya Satia has suggested that rather than accepting a “global” approach that flattens local particularities, a revamped Britain and the World framework could “strengthen our sense of the *ties* between the local and the global.”¹⁶ Institutions like the monarchy “created, sustained, and conditioned” the bonds between local and global.¹⁷ A polycentric four-nations approach demonstrates that this scalar thinking was deeply embedded in how these institutions developed and in modern British political culture more broadly.

The Crown’s public image as an apolitical, universal, and just institution made Victoria’s 1887 jubilee an ideal forum for airing national grievances. A string of perceived national slights in the event’s management aggravated tensions in and among the four nations, resulting in the occasion itself becoming a subject of contention for some. Jubilee discourse revealed many subjects’ worry that the union’s four constituent parts existed in a hierarchy rather than as an equal partnership. Hierarchy was a central feature of English, and subsequently British, society, and the Crown itself represented the pinnacle of a vast institutional system of ranks and titles. Nationalists and unionists alike grappled with the idea that this predilection for tiered systems might extend to the four nations themselves. Some saw the monarchy’s disparate engagement with each nation as a potential indicator of such a hierarchy. The jubilee became an outlet for complex expressions of nationhood, belonging, solidarity, and rivalry. Though often eclipsed by the imperial splendor of her Diamond Jubilee ten years later, Victoria’s Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1887 compelled English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh subjects to critically examine their respective positions not only within the United Kingdom but within the expanding British world.

THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN’S JUBILEE

By the spring of 1887, the Lord Chamberlain, Earl of Lathom, was hard at work on preparations for the queen’s jubilee service at Westminster Abbey. But there was no precedent for such an event. The last Golden Jubilee had occurred in 1809 for a monarch far less popular than Victoria—an effort to rehabilitate the Crown following a string of embarrassing behavior by the Royal Family.¹⁸ The lack of any substantial blueprint, combined with a particularly contentious political climate, left the

14 Colley, “Britishness and Otherness,” 328.

15 Tehila Sasson et al., “Britain and the World: A New Field?,” *Journal of British Studies* 57, no. 4 (2018): 677–708; Rachel K. Bright and Andrew R. Dilley, “After the British World,” *The Historical Journal* 60, no. 2 (2017): 547–68; Tamson Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” *Journal of British Studies* 52, no. 2 (2013): 441–63.

16 Sasson et al., “Britain and the World,” 696.

17 Pietsch, “Rethinking the British World,” 445.

18 Colley, *Britons*, 222–23.

government lukewarm about appropriating significant funds for a jubilee ceremony in 1887. Neither party wanted to bring the monarchy into the atmosphere of obstruction and political ill-will that had developed over a new Irish Crimes Bill.¹⁹ Moreover, some officials believed jubilee celebrations should be externally funded as proof of a more organic public sentiment. Thus, the government allocated only £17,000 for the event—the same amount provided for the Prince of Wales' thanksgiving service a decade earlier, but less than one-fifth of what was granted for Victoria's coronation in 1838. The queen, however, was determined to have an elaborate affair with receptions for the royal dignitaries of Europe, many of whom were relatives. She therefore contributed around £50,000 of her own money for jubilee festivities in London.²⁰ This, along with Parliament's skepticism about the event, no doubt intensified pressure on the Lord Chamberlain to produce a successful jubilee.

Keenly aware of the queen's desire for the ceremony to be "of a national and representative character," Lathom went about reserving seats for diverse groups, from "the members of both Houses of Parliament, to representatives of the Army, Navy, Civil Service, Church, Law, Colonies, India and numerous other Bodies and Persons selected to represent the Nation."²¹ He sent batches of tickets to the secretaries and administrators of each group to distribute internally. Meanwhile, Lathom politely turned down requests from non-British communities for tickets and dispensed with the twelve almsmen traditionally present in Abbey services to preserve more space for the queen's subjects.²² But he and the other organizers quickly encountered challenges in fulfilling Victoria's request for a "national and representative" ceremony.

The so-called Irish Question plagued the Lord Chamberlain's planning. Political tension over the 1886 Irish Home Rule Bill to grant Ireland a local parliament had not only deepened partisan divides but permanently fractured the Liberal Party. In a letter to the chief secretary for Ireland, A. J. Balfour, Lathom acknowledged the precedent set at the Prince of Wales' 1872 thanksgiving service to invite "the Mayors and Sheriffs of Counties of the United Kingdom and Ireland," isolating Ireland despite its membership in the United Kingdom since 1801. Given "the present state of affairs," Lathom wondered whether Balfour thought the Irish mayors should still be invited to the jubilee. Lathom's own inclination was to "show them civility, and it is for them to refuse if they choose to take the line of disloyalty."²³ His language was laced with condescension toward Victoria's Irish subjects, as charges of "uncivility" had long driven British violence in Ireland.²⁴ Lathom ultimately offered twelve tickets to the Lord Mayor of Dublin—the same number provided to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh—and to the mayors of other

19 William M. Kuhn, "Victoria's Jubilees and the Invention of Tradition," *Victorian Poetry* 25, nos. 3/4 (1987): 107–14, at 109.

20 Kuhn, "Victoria's Jubilees and the Invention of Tradition," 111.

21 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Court Newsman, 1 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 31, TNA.

22 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Greek Minister, 3 June 1887, LC 2/110 no. 139, TNA; Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Dean of Westminster, 30 May 1887, LC 2/110 no. 132, TNA.

23 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to AJ Balfour, 29 April 1887, LC 2/109 no. 25, TNA.

24 Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848* (Oxford, 1983).

major Irish cities.²⁵ Despite his diplomatic attempt to treat Irish and Scottish cities equally, Lathom clearly saw the jubilee tickets as a test of Irish loyalty during a politically fraught moment.

Less than two weeks later, the Lord Chamberlain confirmed to Balfour that “Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Limerick, and Kilkenny all refuse [attendance] with more or less offensive observations.”²⁶ Limerick mayor Francis O’Keefe, though “fully recognizing the honour of the invitation and the greatness of the historical event to be commemorated,” simply could not, “with my political desires and those of my fellow citizens and the national claims advanced by this country, join the proposed jubilee celebration.” He laid out the difficulty in candid terms:

Amidst the proud proclamation of triumph and progress this event will call forth in England, I must remember that above all the countries united under her Majesty’s Crown Ireland has not received the world developing benefit of the Jubilee Reign; that the undeniable expression of our people in favour of an Irish Parliament has been persistently ignored; that even today a measure is being passed abridging the liberty of speech, meeting and protection, asserted to be the acquired heritage of British fellowship; that periodically famine and continuous emigration is the record of every Irish decade, and that the Government, alien in sympathy and negative in action, is now the ruling power of Irish necessities. Fully impressed with the truth of these statements, and recognising the utter incongruity of my attendance at Westminster Abbey, I must respectfully decline to be present at the Jubilee Service.²⁷

To O’Keefe, attending Victoria’s jubilee would be to sanction her government’s policies that had brought devastating famine and violence to Ireland. Mayor of Cork John O’Brien labeled expectations that Irishmen participate in “celebrating the Jubilee of a reign which culminates in a system of government such as this ... an outrage upon [Irish] self-respect and an insult to their love of country.”²⁸ While both mayors cited the rejected Home Rule Bill in their reasoning for skipping the service, they framed it as evidence of Britain’s broad denigration of Irish national claims, rather than as the partisan issue Home Rule had become in England. In doing so, the Irish magistrates mobilized the jubilee’s distinctly apolitical nature to trouble what the Lord Chamberlain’s “national” jubilee ceremony meant for a multinational polity.

The Lord Chamberlain met the Irish mayors’ refusals “with dignified silence,” and sympathized when “loyal members” of the Dublin and Cork Corporations expressed the “very natural desire” to attend the jubilee service in place of their mayors. Though Lathom could not allow them to come as official representatives, he “gladly” offered them tickets to attend in a “private capacity.”²⁹ Whether his decision stemmed from genuine compassion for the position of Irish loyalists or a sense that even the

25 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Lord Mayor of Dublin, 11 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 51, TNA; Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, 11 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 52, TNA.

26 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to AJ Balfour, 23 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 105, TNA.

27 “The Mayor of Limerick and Jubilee Celebration,” *Cork Constitution*, 20 May 1887, 2.

28 “The Mayor of Cork and the Queen’s Jubilee Celebration,” *Freeman’s Journal*, 16 May 1887, 5.

29 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain’s Office to George Moyers, 26 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 110, TNA; Letter from the Lord Chamberlain’s Office to George Moyers, 26 May 1887, LC 2/109 no.

unofficial presence of Irish subjects would help boost the representative nature of the ceremony, the exchange reveals how jubilee organizers were forced to confront the distinct social and political circumstances in Ireland to carry out their duties. For Irish Unionists, filling seats at the service, even privately, helped prove that nationalist sentiments were not universally held across Ireland.³⁰

To accommodate the religious diversity within the United Kingdom, the Lord Chamberlain had to acknowledge another uncomfortable fact: that the Established Church of England, of which the queen was the head, was not the dominant church across the four nations. The Established Presbyterian Church of Scotland did not share communion with the Established Church of England and, after 1869, Ireland no longer had an Established Church at all.³¹ To address this, Lathom allocated seven hundred seats to the dean of Westminster "for Representatives of all branches of the Established Church in this Country, as well as the Episcopal Churches of Scotland and Ireland."³² He left it to the dean to divvy up the tickets fairly between the various branches. His office then solicited advice for how best to accommodate the United Kingdom's Nonconformists—English and Welsh Protestants who refused to conform to the authority and practices of the Established Church of England.³³ Nonconformity gained traction in the seventeenth century during the English Civil War and Interregnum, ultimately earning credence through several toleration acts. By the nineteenth century, Nonconformists had organized into multiple diverse bodies, buoyed by expanding middle-class populations.³⁴ In Wales especially, attendance at Nonconformist services vastly outnumbered Anglican ones. The Lord Chamberlain's effort to make space for the various church and Nonconformist bodies at the jubilee represents an implicit accounting of the four nations' particularities. He understood that even while Victoria was head of the Established Church of England, she was also queen to a religiously diverse British population. The "antithetical brands of Protestantism" prevalent in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland had become key markers of national distinctiveness by the mid-nineteenth century, making it imperative that each be included at the jubilee.³⁵

Lathom even attempted to include Catholics in the ceremony, further underscoring the administrative attention paid to four-nations contexts at the jubilee. He drafted a letter to the archbishop of Westminster, Henry Edward Manning, declaring "how gladly" he would reserve seats for Catholic representatives, given that the occasion was "of such National interest." But Lathom never sent that letter. The invitation had become unnecessary because the pope was sending a special envoy to personally congratulate the queen on her jubilee. "It is this alone," Lathom later assured the cardinal, "that has prevented me from writing," and

111, TNA; Letters from the Lord Chamberlain's Office to Sir John Arnott, James Lane, and JH Scott, 27 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 119–121, TNA.

30 James Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland, 1800 to Present* (Cambridge, 2007), 221–22.

31 Alan Megahey, "Gladstone, church and state," in *Gladstone and Ireland: Politics, Religion and Nationality in the Victorian Age*, ed. D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (New York, 2010), 41–64.

32 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Dean of Westminster, 16 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 61, TNA.

33 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain's Office to C. Shephard, 6 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 38, TNA.

34 Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: The Crisis and Conscience of Nonconformity* (Oxford, 2015), 103–6.

35 Lloyd-Jones and Scull, "A New Plea for an Old Subject?," 9.

underscored “the pleasure that it would have given me” to facilitate Catholic participation in the Westminster ceremony.³⁶ Although Protestantism remained fundamental to British identity, the Papacy’s extensive influence in Ireland saw British ministers spend much of the Victorian era cajoling diplomatic relations with the Holy See.³⁷ In 1887, the delicate relationship was commemorated by a mutual exchange of gifts as the Golden Jubilee of Pope Leo XIII’s ordination coincided with that of Victoria’s reign in Britain.³⁸

These political efforts paid dividends for Britain less than a year later. In 1886, Irish politicians had begun encouraging tenant farmers to withhold payments from landlords whose oppressive rents were propped up by British policies. Activists placed would-be rent money into a fund to protect tenants as they were evicted. Known as the Plan of Campaign, the tactic threatened to revive the Land War—agrarian agitation triggered by the 1879 famine in western Ireland and tentatively appeased through unofficial negotiations between Liberal prime minister William Gladstone and Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1882. Though Catholic clergy had actively supported the tenants’ cause during the Land War, the pope formally condemned the new Plan of Campaign in 1888 and forbade Catholic clergy from getting involved. The move came following a direct appeal by the chief secretary for Ireland, Lord Balfour, seeking support from the Vatican in suppressing Irish agitation. British officials believed improved diplomatic relations with the papacy could help contain the spread of Irish nationalism, and the Lord Chamberlain saw in the jubilee an opportunity to cultivate that partnership.

Four-nations politics and symbolism loomed over virtually every facet of planning for the jubilee service—even the chair on which the queen would sit. The coronation chair featured in royal ceremonies was built in the early fourteenth century for King Edward I of England to display the Scottish Stone of Scone, or Stone of Destiny. The investiture of medieval Scottish kings “was not complete until they had been seated upon this emblem of their power.”³⁹ During his invasion of Scotland, Edward removed the stone “as proof of the complete annihilation of the Scottish monarchy.”⁴⁰ It was relocated to Westminster Abbey and incorporated into the seat of the chair upon which all future English, and subsequently British, monarchs would be crowned. In 1884, only three years before it was displayed at Victoria’s jubilee service, the stone was the subject of an attempted heist—not by Scottish nationalists, but Irish. Popular legend claimed the ancient stone had originally come from Ireland before making its way to Scotland and then to London.⁴¹ The conspirators hoped the stone’s “restoration to the land of its original and only lawful owners ... would inspire confidence” in the Irish nationalist cause.⁴²

36 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, 6 May 1887, LC 2/110 no. 156, TNA.

37 James P. Flint, *Great Britain and the Holy See: The Diplomatic Relations Question, 1846–1852* (Washington, DC, 2003); Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland*, 222.

38 “Queen Victoria to Pope Leo XIII,” *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 364–67.

39 “The Stone of Destiny,” *Mid-Lothian Journal*, 6 October 1893, 2.

40 “The Stone of Destiny,” *Mid-Lothian Journal*, 6 October 1893, 2.

41 Warwick Rodwell, *The Coronation Chair and Stone of Scone: History, Archaeology and Conservation* (Oxford, 2013); “The Stone of Destiny,” *Mid-Lothian Journal*, 6 October 1893, 2.

42 “Plot to Steal ‘The Stone of Destiny,’” *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 19 October 1892, 2.

Though police were alerted in time to prevent the theft, the plot shows how contentious the stone's multinational mythology was by the jubilee year.

According to Lathom, the queen wanted the stone "to be seen" and asked the royal undertaker whether "a more open pattern [could] be devised in character with the chair" to better accentuate it.⁴³ What did Victoria intend to convey by ensuring the stone's visibility during her jubilee service? To some, it may have solidified her authority over a great multinational union. Others may have interpreted it as a powerful reminder of an oppressive colonial past and the appropriation of Celtic heritage into an Anglo-British tradition. Perhaps the queen and her jubilee organizers overlooked the ambiguity of the chair's message, or perhaps the ambiguity was purposefully intended. Indeed, they were so invested in foregrounding the stone during the jubilee service that it led to the chair being "smeared with brown stain and varnish" and riddled with tacks to uphold new upholsteries in a rushed and sloppy restoration attempt.⁴⁴ To many outside London, the commitment to four-nations imagery during the jubilee service appeared as carelessly tacked together as the fabric on the coronation chair.

THE FOUR NATIONS REACT TO LONDON'S JUBILEE

Victoria's subjects paid close attention to the jubilee celebrations, and even minor administrative missteps in the event's planning and execution revealed what Jan Rüger has called the "unresolvedness" of national identity in a kingdom "increasingly struggling to accommodate its four nations."⁴⁵ Objections to "manifestations of Anglocentrism" in the late nineteenth century led some "to rethink what 'national' meant and how this should be reflected in its public representation."⁴⁶ This dynamic played out during Victoria's Golden Jubilee. For despite the Lord Chamberlain's stated intentions to make the occasion "national and representative" in character, people in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland challenged what they saw as displays of English hegemony in the festivities.

Frustration over Church of Scotland officials' seating arrangements in Westminster Abbey, for example, provoked Scottish appeals to a brand of unionism that prioritized mutual respect and partnership. A week before the ceremony, Balfour, who had been secretary for Scotland before becoming chief secretary for Ireland in March 1887, brought the developing issue to the Lord Chamberlain's attention. Lathom had given a batch allotment to the dean of Westminster to accommodate the various "classes of the Church." But representatives of the Established Church of Scotland, Balfour explained, believed they were being inadequately accommodated. Though Lathom agreed to provide additional tickets to the Church of Scotland, he warned that "numerical representation would be impossible" and

43 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain's Office to William Banting & Sons, 14 April 1887, LC 2/109, TNA.

44 Somers Clark, "Westminster Abbey and the Coronation," *Nineteenth Century and After* 50, no. 295 (1901): 387–401, at 399.

45 Jan Rüger, "Nation, Empire and Navy: Identity Politics in the United Kingdom, 1887–1914," *Past and Present*, no. 185 (2004): 159–87, at 167.

46 Rüger, "Nation, Empire and Navy," 163.

implored Balfour for help in “appeasing the discontent which you tell me has arisen” in Scotland.⁴⁷

But problems with the Church of Scotland representatives only worsened for Lathom as Scottish frustrations played out in the press following the service. A bolded headline in the *Edinburgh Evening News* announced: “The Jubilee Insult to the Church of Scotland.”⁴⁸ It described a “miscarriage in the arrangements ... which occasioned the representatives of the Church of Scotland the loss of their proper seats.” With the Church of Scotland having endured several internal schisms and a reduction in communicants over the last several decades, advocates might have been especially sensitive to perceived slights. Some interpreted the mishap as a deliberate affront against the Scottish nation. In attributing blame, however, news outlets carefully distinguished between incompetent royal administrators and the queen herself. The *Edinburgh Evening News* commentary, brief and polite, absolved Victoria of her administrators’ transgressions. A Dundee report went further, describing the queen as being “angry and indignant ... about the blunder which took place” and assuring Scottish readers “both the Lord Chamberlain and the dean of Westminster have had their knuckles sharply rapped.”⁴⁹ Their portrayal of Victoria taking offense on behalf of the aggrieved Scottish clergymen likely drew on perceptions that the queen had developed a personal affinity for Scotland during her decades spent summering at Balmoral Castle. If the queen was angry about the seating arrangements, however, she did not mention it in her diary.⁵⁰

Differentiating culpability between the queen and her administrators likely also reflected the distinct brand of unionism that permeated modern Scottish political thought, what political scientist Graeme Morton has called “Unionist-nationalism.”⁵¹ Unlike the nationalist movement in Ireland, separatism was not a foundational principle in Scottish national politics. Nineteenth-century Scottish nationalism emphasized that the 1707 Act of Union was an equal partnership of distinct nations, and demanded that this be reflected in British political, economic, and social spheres.⁵² Indeed, it was Scottish Conservatives, rather than radicals, who most fiercely championed this nationalist sentiment. As the Marquis of Lothian put it in 1884: “they wanted *more* union, [but] they objected to anything in the shape of absorption.”⁵³ Even over something as fleeting and seemingly minor as seating arrangements, Scots deployed this Unionist-Nationalist perspective, protesting jubilee organizers’ apparently dismissive treatment of a Scottish national institution while reasserting Scottish loyalty to the Crown.

Indeed, the jubilee became an outlet for Unionist-Nationalism, a way to bind Scottish national sentiment to the monarchy. Rev. George Hutchison of Aberdeen

47 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to AJ Balfour, 13 June 1887, LC 2/110 no. 174, TNA.

48 “The Jubilee Insult to the Church of Scotland,” *Edinburgh Evening News*, 8 July 1887, 2.

49 “The Church of Scotland and the Jubilee Service,” *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 13 July 1887, 2.

50 Queen Victoria, Journal, 21 June–10 July 1887.

51 Graeme Morton, *Unionist-Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland, 1830–1860* (East Linton, 1999). David Torrence has inverted the term to “nationalist unionism” in “*Standing Up for Scotland*”: *Nationalist Unionism and Scottish Party Politics, 1884–2014* (Edinburgh, 2020).

52 Colin Kidd, *Union and Unionisms: Political Thought in Scotland, 1500–2000*, (Cambridge, 2008); Naomi Lloyd-Jones, “Liberalism, Scottish Nationalism, and the Home Rule Crisis, c. 1886–93,” *English Historical Review* 129, no. 539 (2014): 862–87.

53 Torrance, *Standing Up for Scotland*, 1.

professed pride in Victoria having "the Stuart blood in her veins" and encouraged Scots to relish "having given a sovereign [of her caliber] to our greater neighbor in the South."⁵⁴ Communicants at Edinburgh's ancient St. Giles Cathedral were told that celebrating the jubilee would "deepen the root of our national life in everlasting righteousness."⁵⁵ Scottish pride became wrapped up in an embrace of the British union that Victoria personified. So when news of an English campaign to light bonfires across the country on Jubilee Day evening reached Scotland, one editorialist incredulously asked: "Are there to be no fireworks or illuminations in the ancient capital of Scotland while there is to be a blaze of light from end to end in England?"⁵⁶ Newspapers soon filled with updates about which towns would light bonfires and how gaps in the chain might be addressed.⁵⁷ Like the Scottish jubilee sermons, these efforts demonstrated the blending of local, national, and supra-national pride that royal celebrations endeavored to harness. But they also reveal the sense of national rivalry undergirding Scottish appeals to "Britishness" not always apparent in discussions of Scottish nationalism. Loyalist Scots wanted due credit for Victoria's Scottish lineage and refused to be outshone—literally—by their southern neighbors.

Instead, they continually felt marginalized by the jubilee festivities. Days after the Abbey seating fiasco, Scottish tempers flared again, this time over the inadequate distribution of jubilee titles and honors. One editorialist complained that "Scotland has been treated very shabbily indeed." Their assessment that "second and third rate towns in England" received honors while "vastly more important towns in Scotland" were left off the list completely implied it was strictly the Scottishness of these towns that caused their omission.⁵⁸ "Scotchmen are not in any way likely to make themselves disagreeable over such a matter," the letter-writer promised, "but there appears to be a strong feeling of dissatisfaction, not to say indignation, springing up throughout the country at the mean treatment of Scotland." His keen assurances that Scots, though righteously indignant, would never become "disagreeable" over the issue was likely an attempt to distinguish Scottish national pride from the Irish brand of nationalism wreaking political havoc across Britain. The tacit comparison only further bolstered the Scottish Unionist-Nationalist view that multinational harmony depended on equal representation within the union even in something as frivolous as royal honors.

In Wales, dissatisfaction over jubilee honors fostered national unity across partisan divides. The Liberal *South Wales Daily News* anticipated that "strongly-worded resolutions will be passed by the Conservative as well as Liberal associations" over "the almost entire ignoring of the Principality" in the distribution of jubilee honors.⁵⁹ The Conservative *Western Mail* likewise rebuked "the abominable snub administered

54 Hutchison, "God Save the Queen, a Jubilee Sermon," 6.

55 Rev. Donald MacLeod, "Order of Service to be used in St. Giles' Cathedral in Celebration of the Jubilee," 21 June, 1887, 11–12.

56 "Letters to the Editor: The Royal Jubilee in Edinburgh," *The Scotsman*, 10 June 1887, 7.

57 "Jubilee Bonfires," *The Scotsman*, 10 June 1887, 7; "Letters to the Editor: Jubilee Bonfires," *The Scotsman*, 15 June 1887, 10; "Jubilee Beacon Bonfires," *The Scotsman*, 16 June 1887, 7.

58 "Letters to Editor: Jubilee Honour Distribution," *Dundee Courier*, 23 June 1887, 2.

59 "Wales and the Jubilee Honours," *South Wales Daily News*, 23 June 1887, 4.

to Wales.”⁶⁰ Liberal M.P. for Cardiff Sir Edward Reed wrote to the *Western Mail* lamenting the “grave mistake,” demonstrating that the issue had transcended party politics.⁶¹ Reed detailed his earnest attempts to promote Welsh inclusion in the jubilee honors and noted his strong desire for the mayor of Cardiff, a member of an opposing party, to be recognized.

Like that of its Scottish neighbors, the Welsh press interpreted the exclusion of Welsh officials as a slight on the Welsh nation itself. But rather than seek solidarity on the issue, editors maligned Scottish claims. Wales, they argued, had a more defined national identity, a more distinct national border, and a thriving national language. “Wales must,” therefore, “insist that she shall not be passed over in the fashion which has been only too common with England in the past.”⁶² Resentment that Scotland seemed to consistently rank second in the hierarchy of an Anglocentric union supports Ian B. Stewart’s argument that homogenizing “non-Englishness” into a monolithic “Celtic Fringe” misses the pluralistic and contested idea of “the Celt.”⁶³ The dynamic rivalries between Scottish, Welsh, and Irish subjects were clearly on display during Victoria’s Golden Jubilee.

Welsh and Scottish grievances over the distribution of jubilee titles reveals how an honors system designed to unite diverse British subjects also served to divide them. David Cannadine has detailed how the vast system of titles and orders that emanated from British royal culture bolstered imperial subjectivity in the modern era.⁶⁴ The letters and editorials published in Scotland and Wales during the Golden Jubilee seem to support the significance Cannadine ascribed to the British honors system, yet they also reveal its ability to animate four-nations rivalries. For this system was predicated on a culture of hierarchy and exclusion. As Tobias Harper has shown, “a variety of groups within Britain and the British Empire used honours and public controversies about honours to define themselves in relation to existing hierarchies” during the twentieth century.⁶⁵ That process likewise played out in 1887, as Britons used the distribution of jubilee honors to gauge potential hierarchies among the four nations. Outside London, many British and Irish subjects bristled at the uneven allocation of jubilee seating and honors, anxious that these snubs reflected broader national inequities within the union.

ASSESSING THE CROWN’S PRESENCE IN THE FOUR NATIONS

Royal tours to the empire became widely popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, offering colonial subjects an opportunity to tangibly engage with Britishness as an inclusive, supra-national category. Imperialists used these tours to cast Victoria as a loving imperial matriarch and imbue her with both political and emotional

60 “Some Jubilee Truths About Wales,” *Western Mail*, 23 June 1887, 2.

61 “Wales and the Jubilee Honours,” *Western Mail*, 27 June 1887, 3.

62 “Some Jubilee Truths about Wales,” *Western Mail*, 23 June 1887, 2.

63 Ian B. Stewart, “Celticism and the Four Nations in the Long Nineteenth Century,” in Lloyd-Jones and Scull, *Four Nations Approaches to Modern “British” History*, 135–59, at 138.

64 David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford, 2001), 174.

65 Tobias Harper, *From Servants of the Empire to Everyday Heroes: The British Honours System in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2020), 3.

authority.⁶⁶ Historians have shown how such practices underscored the powerful symbolic function of the Crown, inventing and personifying imperial connectivity as part of a broader effort to revitalize the monarchy, the imperial mission, and indeed the British public in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁷ Colonial subjects frequently met these royal trips with expressions of loyalty and love for Victoria. But rather than an indication of passive submission or naivety, recent scholarship has emphasized that these "affective" modes of speaking "to and about the Royal Family were 'a medium for hardnosed and clear-eyed political agendas.'"⁶⁸ Not only was it part of a centuries-old culture of colonial subjects petitioning the Crown for various rights or privileges, such rhetoric provided pivotal space for the development of anticolonial thought.⁶⁹ Royal engagement with overseas subjects, and especially the proliferation of royal tours, became essential in managing Britain's empire and continues to be a central feature in maintaining the Commonwealth of Nations today.

Extending this mode of analysis to the four nations reveals a populace eager to find meaning in royal visits, or lack thereof. British and Irish subjects paid close attention to how often the royal family left England for other parts of the kingdom and made clear inferences from it. As Victoria's reign lengthened into the second half of the century, royal presence across the four nations became an easily measurable way for subjects to claim either preference or neglect, particularly in comparison to one another. Her Golden Jubilee offered an ideal opportunity to assess the Crown's engagement with the four nations throughout the queen's fifty-year reign.

Many Scots, and Highlanders especially, developed a special bond with Victoria following her 1852 purchase of Balmoral Castle, a sprawling property nestled in the hills of Aberdeenshire. The queen looked forward to her regular trips to Balmoral and lamented departures from its peaceful seclusion.⁷⁰ New railway routes allowed the royal family to make short stops on the way to their Highland refuge, further ingratiating themselves to the Scottish public.⁷¹ Published selections of Victoria's personal journal covering *Our Life in the Highlands* were so popular in Scotland that they were translated into Gaelic to satisfy Highland demand.⁷²

Scots relished Victoria's public appreciation for the region and used the 1887 jubilee to highlight her frequent presence there. In his Edinburgh jubilee sermon, Rev. Donald MacLeod connected Scotland's "great enthusiasm" for the occasion with the fact that "the Queen has made her home among us, and we know her

66 Charles Reed, *Royal Tourists, Colonial Subjects and the Making of a British World, 1860–1911* (Manchester, 2016).

67 David Cannadine, "The British Monarchy, c. 1820–1977" in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, (Cambridge, 1983), 101–64; John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984).

68 Sarah Carter and Maria Nugent, *Mistress of Everything: Queen Victoria in Indigenous Worlds* (Manchester, 2016); Miles Taylor, *Empress: Queen Victoria and India* (New Haven, 2018).

69 Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham, 2010); Miles Taylor, "The British Royal Family and the Colonial Empire from the Georgians to Prince George," in *Crowns and Colonies: European Monarchies and Overseas Empires*, ed. Robert Aldrich and Cindy McCreery, (Manchester, 2016), 27–50.

70 Christopher Hibbert, *Queen Victoria in Her Letters and Journals* (London, 2000), 175–82.

71 Richard J. Finlay, "Queen Victoria and the Cult of Scottish Monarchy," in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, ed. Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh, 2002), 209–24, at 216.

72 Victoria, *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands, 1848 to 1861*, ed. Sir Arthur Helps (London, 1868).

attachment to our people and to our land.”⁷³ MacLeod declared Victoria “genuine and true, the same in the house of the Highland cottager as she is in the palace of empire.”⁷⁴ Indeed, scholars have attributed the mid-nineteenth-century “explosion of Highlandism” and the invention of Scottish national identity to a “cult of Scottish monarchy” that developed in response to Victoria’s regular presence there.⁷⁵

But the queen’s affinity for Balmoral also shed light on the stark social, cultural, and economic differences separating the Scottish Highlands and Lowlands. The failed Jacobite Rising in 1745 ostracized the traditional clan system and triggered a century-long ban on many Highland cultural forms. The systematic eviction of Highland tenant farmers from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, known as the Highland Clearances, devastated the region’s population. Those that remained were often portrayed as backward. Scottish Lowlanders, meanwhile, frequently had more in common with their English neighbors to the south than their Highland brethren. The growing preoccupation with racial identity in the nineteenth century worked to solidify this perspective, as Saxon Scots of the Lowlands actively distinguished their Teutonic heritage from Highlanders’ Celtic origins.⁷⁶

Highlanders accentuated this regional divide in their jubilee discourse. The song “Ban-righ Bhictoria” or “Queen Victoria,” emphasized the differences between Highlanders and Lowlanders alongside a broader Four-Nations framework. Printed in both English and Gaelic for the jubilee, the first two stanzas are as follows:

The Saxon land, with lavish hand
Has shown her liberality;
Ev’n Erin’s Isle resumes her smile
Of the sweetest, rarest quality;
On Lowland dales and hills of Wales,
That ancient Principality,
This Jubilee they keep with glee,
And free cordiality.

But we the Gaels, in lonely vales
Beyond the frowning Grampians,
Though clansmen true, are poor and few,
Bereft of chiefs and champions.
Though we’ve been proud and never bowed
With praises loud to royalty,
Our Queen and land shall aye command
Our hand, heart and loyalty.⁷⁷

References to England’s “Saxon land,” the “hills of Wales,” and “Erin’s Isle” invoked a four-nations lens to convey collective loyalty to the queen. Even the kingdom’s most troubled nation, racked by the divisive politics of Home Rule, could be coaxed into a “smile” for Victoria’s jubilee. When it came to Scotland, however, the song opted for a regional framework. Lowlanders were grouped with the

73 MacLeod, “Order of Service,” 21.

74 MacLeod, “Order of Service,” 19.

75 Finlay, “Queen Victoria and the Cult of Scottish Monarchy.”

76 Colin Kidd, “Race, Empire, and the Limits of Nineteenth-Century Scottish Nationhood,” *Historical Journal* 46, no. 4 (2003): 873–92.

77 “Ban-righ Bhictoria—Queen Victoria,” *Songs and Hymns of Scotland*, no. 32 (Inverness, 1888).

other three nations in the first stanza, distinguished from the first-person perspective of the Highlander—"we the Gaels"—in the second stanza. So even as Rev. MacLeod used the jubilee to cultivate a broad Scottish identity in Edinburgh, Highlanders used the occasion to disaggregate it.

In the Highland capital of Inverness, locals commemorated the jubilee by singing a Gaelic version of the national anthem "with great power and admirable effect." But *Celtic Magazine* lamented that there was not "a native *national* song" to better capture the particular loyalties of Gaelic-speaking Scots.⁷⁸ And despite the massive spectacle that took place in London in June, local Balmoral residents held their own "pretty little ceremony" on the last day of Victoria's jubilee year.⁷⁹ Victoria's consistent presence in the region became a validating force that emboldened Highlanders to express not only their Scottish identity, but their regional one as well. It served as cover against charges of disunity or separatism that such pronouncements might rouse elsewhere in the kingdom—Ireland in particular.

Some officials thought a royal visit to Ireland during the jubilee year might defuse the fraught political sentiments of the failed Home Rule Bill. The Marquess of Londonderry, Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, hoped an appearance by the Prince of Wales to celebrate Victoria's jubilee would ingratiate Irish subjects to British governance.⁸⁰ Using royals as public relations envoys became a tactical staple in managing political discontent, and not only for the colonies. As Miles Taylor has suggested: "there is nothing like a visiting royal to quell republicanism or at least to confuse the issues."⁸¹ Victoria, however, was a "reluctant participant" in these royal tours. According to Charles Reed, they became a critical instrument of both monarchy and empire "*in spite* of her rather than *because* of her."⁸²

In 1887, the queen was especially unenthusiastic about a royal visit to Ireland. She told Londonderry that while she was gratified by the warm support he described among the Irish upper classes, she feared "the spirit of the greater part of the people is very bad." After all, the newly appointed chief secretary and permanent under-secretary for Ireland had been fatally stabbed at a Dublin park only five years earlier. The men were among the British government's most senior representatives in Ireland, and the event no doubt fueled Victoria's apprehension that her family could not be protected there. Citing Lord Salisbury's support, she suggested any royal trip should wait until the new Irish Crimes Bill was passed.⁸³

The Criminal Law and Procedure (Ireland) Act—sardonically referred to as the Jubilee Coercion Act—granted law enforcement in Ireland additional authority to combat the Plan of Campaign and the threat of a renewed Land War. That Victoria would not sanction a royal visit to Ireland without such a bill in place demonstrated her understanding that the monarchy's ability to excite certain parts of her kingdom was limited. She had not traveled to Ireland since 1861 and would not visit the island again until 1900, less than a year before her death. That trip was meant to boost support for the Boer War, but it, along with King Edward VII's subsequent visit

78 Alexander MacBain, "News and Notes," *The Celtic Magazine*, no. 12 (1887), 432.

79 Queen Victoria, Journal, 31 December 1887.

80 James Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland*, 223–24.

81 Taylor, "The British Royal Family and the Colonial Empire," in *Crowns and Colonies*, 27.

82 Reed, *Royal Tourists*, xxvii–xxviii.

83 "Queen Victoria to the Marquis of Londonderry," *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 2.

in 1903, had the unintended effect of helping inspire a new Irish national party: Sinn Féin.⁸⁴

Pressured to make some jubilee gesture to Ireland following the new Crimes Act, Victoria ultimately allowed the Prince of Wales's two sons, rather than the prince himself, to visit Dublin a week after her Westminster service. While there, the young princes dutifully carried out the philanthropic "social policy" that had "delighted civil society" in England and invested the modern monarchy with new authority.⁸⁵ They met with various groups and public officials, toured the children's ward of the Royal Hospital, and laid the foundation stone for a new wing funded in honor of Victoria's jubilee. But tensions flared outside an evening concert the princes attended at Trinity College. An impromptu face-off broke out between a crowd of students singing "God Save the Queen" and a group of "roughs" countering with refrains of "God Save Ireland." The conflict peaked when the princes left the concert around 11:00 PM. They were met with passionate cheers from the students while "the roughs groaned and hissed."⁸⁶ The skirmish resembled similar jubilee-related demonstrations in Cork, Mallow, and Belfast.⁸⁷ Such incidents reflected the extent to which the queen's jubilee—and the physical presence of her grandsons specifically—transformed political tensions into real conflict.

For news outlets across the four nations, the royal visit to Dublin became an opportunity to assess Irish loyalty. The *Times* reported that the princes received "the enthusiasm and hospitality which Irish loyalists, Protestant and Catholic, Saxon and Celt, have always been eager to place at the service of the Crown."⁸⁸ Of course, commending Irish loyalists implied the prevalence of disloyal Irish subjects. Another English outlet estimated that about forty percent of the Irish population were loyal to the queen, with a majority of the remainder likely indifferent, and only a small portion "distinctly hostile to the Crown and Empire." But although hostile subjects represented a minority of the Irish population overall, editors reminded readers that it was far more than the proportion of such sentiments among Britons.⁸⁹ A Dundee paper expected "nothing from Ireland except such loyalty as we find in England and Scotland, and we have little doubt that when the free heart of the people is got at loyalty will be found there, active and sound."⁹⁰ Ignoring any unique historical or contemporary challenges facing Ireland, their outlook reflected the Scottish Unionist-Nationalist ideal that all parts of the union be held to similar standards and command equal respect. The *Times*, however, embraced hierarchical rhetoric in its assurance that "among the civilized part of the population of the sister island—England's earliest and noblest colony ... the sentiments awakened by the Queen's Jubilee are as universally diffused as they are in England or Scotland."⁹¹ The article undercut any niceties with a reminder of the

84 Senia Pašeta, "Nationalist Responses to Two Royal Visits to Ireland, 1900 and 1903," *Irish Historical Studies* 31, no. 124 (1999): 488–504.

85 Frank Prochaska, *Royal Bounty: The Making of a Welfare Monarchy* (New Haven, 1995), 100.

86 "A Noisy Scene in the College Green," *The Scotsman*, 30 June 1887, 5.

87 "The Queen's Jubilee," *Daily Express*, 23 June 1887, 5–6.

88 "The Royal Visit to Ireland: Reception in Dublin," *Times*, 28 June 1887, 9.

89 "The Royal Visit to Ireland: Reception in Dublin," *Times*, 28 June 1887, 9.

90 "The Vatican and Ireland," *Dundee Courier*, 23 June 1887, 2.

91 "Royalty in Ireland," *The Scotsman*, 28 June 1887, 3.

"sister" island's long history of colonial subjugation by England. This, coupled with the trope of Irish uncivility that the Lord Chamberlain had privately marshaled weeks earlier, worked to distance Irish subjects from Britons.

But rather than use the royal visit to Dublin to criticize Irish loyalism, one regional English newspaper laid the blame for Irish disaffection at the feet of the monarchy:

What blockhead, we wonder, devised the sapient scheme of sending the Prince of Wales's sons across the Channel to lead the dance at Dublin? Was it intended as a courteous reminder to Ireland of her inferior importance to England and Scotland, or a snub for political misconduct in the Jubilee year? It can scarcely be imagined that the Irish consider the flying visit to Dublin of two youths who have barely reached man's estate, much of a compliment. They remember naturally enough that in the reign of fifty years the Queen has spent just fourteen days in the country ... [And] until some such step is taken, there will be little personal loyalty among the Irish, nor indeed, is it to be understood how such a feeling can be expected to exist.⁹²

These editors applauded any level of Irish participation in the jubilee given how poorly the Crown had treated Ireland. Their rebuke was not directed at "disloyal" Irishmen, but at institutions and prejudices closer to home: the queen and her government. Though Victoria had privately cited anti-British violence as justification for her historic absence from the island, her prolonged absence became fodder for explaining disaffection in Ireland.

In Wales, too, people used the conspicuous lack of royal presence to defend their indifference to the jubilee. One Cardiff man described the Welsh as "disinterested, and to a large extent, opposed to the celebration."⁹³ Without making a direct causal argument, he noted that "the Queen never visits the principality and the Prince of Wales practically ignores the land of his title." The Welsh press used the jubilee to excoriate the one-sided relationship between Wales and the monarchy. Editors of the liberal *South Wales Daily News* were insulted by the expectation that gifts "be poured out" in the queen's honor by "poor, hard-working, struggling people" who had never received anything from her. In response to a barrage of English critiques about Wales' "absolute failure" to commemorate the jubilee, another Welsh paper pointed to Victoria's own apparent disinterest in the festivities. After all, the queen had "not even proposed to take part in the [jubilee] movement beyond going to Westminster Abbey."⁹⁴ Such sentiments proved largely accurate, as Victoria complained several times in her personal journal about the "endless, distracting bothers and questions about the jubilee."⁹⁵ Her personal and financial investments were aimed at impressing European royalties, not engaging her subjects.⁹⁶ Welsh editors, therefore, saw "no reason" for taking on the costs of local jubilee celebrations and warned that the more the English tried to bully Welsh people into participating in the event, "the more promptly do they turn away in disgust."⁹⁷

92 "After the Jubilee," *Carlisle Express and Examiner*, 9 July 1887, 4.

93 "Wales and the Jubilee: To the Editor," *South Wales Daily News*, 22 February 1887, 4.

94 "Wales and the Jubilee: Antagonistic Demonstrations," *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 15 March 1887, 4.

95 Queen Victoria, Journal, 30 May 1887.

96 Kuhn, "Victoria's Jubilees and the Invention of Tradition."

97 "The Failure of the Jubilee in Wales," *South Wales Daily News*, 16 March 1887, 2.

When Frank Ash Yeo, Liberal MP for Gower and former mayor of Swansea, tried to assure *London Daily News* readers in March 1887 that their Welsh compatriots were as excited as Londoners about the upcoming jubilee, he received a swift rebuke in Wales. Yeo described “a very strong and practically unanimous desire that it should be celebrated in a manner worthy of the occasion” and promised “the rejoicing will be as spontaneous and as heartfelt in the towns of Wales” as anywhere else.⁹⁸ But his appeals to unity and loyalism, no doubt welcomed by English readers, fell flat back home. The *South Wales Daily News* published a scathing reply: “Mr. Yeo has evidently been attending very closely to his Parliamentary duties, or else he would hardly have delivered himself of the above opinion. His absence from home must account for his ignorance of the apathy which prevails. Wales neither cares about the jubilee nor its celebration. She is content to regard the last fifty years of reform with satisfaction, and is convinced that she does not owe her progress to Royalty, but rather to loyalty to principles.”⁹⁹ Despite Yeo’s Liberal party membership, the editors implied that Yeo’s time in London had compromised his ability to gauge the mood of his countrymen. In selling out to London values, they suggested, he had conceded his Welshness. The editors reiterated Welsh disinterest in the queen’s jubilee and attributed fifty years of prosperity in the principality to their devotion to Nonconformist principles, not an absent monarch. Nonconformists, who represented Welsh national and political identity by the late nineteenth century, spurned the political control of landed or clerical elites. They considered Establishment figures—whether Anglican ministers or the head of the church herself—to be at odds with Welsh political and cultural interests.¹⁰⁰ That the mayor of Swansea would ingratiate himself to the Crown and readers in cosmopolitan London, therefore, seemed profoundly anti-Welsh.

The expectation that subjects across the kingdom celebrate Victoria during her Golden Jubilee led many to reflect on how much time she and her family had spent in its constituent parts. Regular royal presence in Scotland emboldened Highlanders to assert their particular regional identity, while a reluctant visit to Dublin by the queen’s underage grandsons triggered skirmishes across Ireland. In Wales, the virtual absence of the monarchy throughout her reign stoked a sense of apathy toward the jubilee and royal ceremonial culture more broadly.¹⁰¹ The Crown’s physical presence throughout the four nations shaped public attitudes toward the jubilee, demonstrating the merits of expanding analyses of royal tours beyond the colonies. Doing so not only reveals acute tensions embedded in the Golden Jubilee celebrations, but highlights the extent to which nineteenth-century British subjects perceived and expressed themselves through a four-nations lens.

98 “Wales and the Jubilee—To the Editor,” *London Daily News*, 24 March 1887, 6.

99 “Wales and the Jubilee—To the Editor,” *London Daily News*, 24 March 1887, 6.

100 Naomi Lloyd-Jones, “Liberal Unionism and Political Representation in Wales, c. 1886–1893,” *Historical Research* 88, no. 241 (2015): 482–507, at 497.

101 Antony Taylor, *Down with the Crown?: British Anti-monarchism and Debates about Royalty since 1790* (London, 1999), 140.

THE GOLDEN JUBILEE'S IRISH QUESTION

Though constitutional constraints prevented the Crown from intervening in parliamentary politics, the two institutions were nevertheless associated with one another throughout Victoria's reign. This was especially true after the queen reemerged from a decade of reclusion following the untimely death of her husband, Prince Albert, in 1861. Scholars have shown that by the late 1870s, "much of the enhanced presentation of monarchy was itself political, designed to strengthen particular government objectives."¹⁰² Upon her return to the public eye, Victoria became devoted to her regular Privy Council meetings and actively employed the royal prerogative to participate in the political sphere, whether through her speeches at Parliament or in her capacity to appoint and veto Anglican bishops as head of the Church of England.¹⁰³ Her private journals reveal not only how closely the queen kept up with the political debates of the day but that she often harbored strong, partisan views about them. She notoriously loathed Liberal leader William Gladstone, for example, and one nationalist paper in Ireland argued: "loyalty to her sacred person can be best testified by the unquestioning support of a Tory Government."¹⁰⁴ The queen's jubilee brought increased public focus to the question of royal partisanship.

This became particularly apparent as the "Irish Question" permeated jubilee discourse. Many in Ireland had long suspected Victoria of having anti-Irish prejudices and by the 1880s nationalists mobilized these concerns.¹⁰⁵ They dubbed Victoria the "Famine Queen," tying British political culpability for the Great Famine forty years earlier to her apparent indifference to Ireland. She had failed to visit the country until 1849—when almost a third of the population had already died—and was rumored to have donated only £5 of her personal money to relief efforts.¹⁰⁶ Nationalists regularly deployed the Famine Queen characterization, which remains pervasive even today, in their responses to Victoria's Golden Jubilee. Irish republican leader Michael Davitt condemned rather than celebrated the queen on Jubilee Day. Linking the Crown with government policies that sanctioned mass eviction of Irish tenant farmers, Davitt defiantly flew a black flag outside his cottage emblazoned with the word "EVICTORIA."¹⁰⁷

The Jubilee Day issue of the nationalist *Freeman's Journal*, meanwhile, compared population changes in Ireland during the queen's fifty-year reign with those in England, Scotland, and Wales. As the leading newspaper in Ireland in the late nineteenth century, it was often read aloud to illiterate Irishmen to expand the reach of the Home Rule movement. According to the *Journal*, Great Britain had enjoyed steady

102 Andrzej Olechnowicz, *The Monarchy and the British Nation, 1780 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2007), 69; Arianne Chernock, *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women: Queen Victoria and the Women's Movement* (Cambridge, 2019).

103 Miles Taylor, "The Bicentenary of Queen Victoria," *Journal of British Studies* 59, no. 1 (2020): 121–35 at 131–34; Chernock, *The Right to Rule and the Rights of Women*.

104 Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland*, 223.

105 Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland*, 171, 190.

106 Victoria donated £2000 to Irish famine relief, making her the largest individual contributor. *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness, 1837–1901*, ed. Peter Gray (Dublin, 2004), 24.

107 Loughlin, *The British Monarchy and Ireland*, 223; Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *The Land War in Ireland* (London, 1912), 277–78.

population growth since Victoria's coronation, while Ireland's had dropped by almost 40 percent.¹⁰⁸ "England failed absolutely to impress her character or her most dearly cherished institutions upon the country," editors declared, including the monarchy. This failure demonstrated "the strength of the Irish national character" and proved "that Irish nationality is indestructible, save by the destruction of the Irish people."¹⁰⁹ Another nationalist outlet—Charles Parnell's *United Ireland*—juxtaposed England's and Ireland's experience of Victoria's fifty-year reign, pronouncing that "by England's joy, Ireland's sorrow is justified."¹¹⁰ Over and over, Irish nationalists seized on Victoria's jubilee to underscore the historical and contemporary plight of a nation devastated by British rule, marshalling the trope of the Famine Queen to debunk welfare monarchism.

This discourse was not limited to Ireland. Throughout the United Kingdom, people considered Victoria's jubilee through the politically pressing Irish Question. The Cardiff man who had defended Welsh indifference to the jubilee also argued that Victoria should use her jubilee to broker political negotiations and "seek some method of doing justice to Ireland."¹¹¹ His insistence shows how similarities between Irish and Welsh tenant-farming fostered a transnational political and economic solidarity.¹¹² Both systems were instituted by the English and designed to augment the power of absentee landowners. Established in 1879, the Irish National Land League helped negotiate fair rents and tenure packages and by 1886 efforts were underway to organize a Welsh equivalent.¹¹³ Tom Ellis, leader of the Welsh national group *Cymru Fydd*, emphasized the Celtic nations' shared interests in their pursuit for land reform, even if the particular modes of tenant oppression varied in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.¹¹⁴ The Welsh tenant farmer could "sympathize very fully with his brother farmers in Ireland who are still worse off than himself."¹¹⁵ Welsh editorialists therefore urged the government to capitalize on the "golden opportunity" to extend "a friendly hand to the wretched peasantry of Ireland during this Jubilee year."¹¹⁶ These Welshmen marshaled Irish politics to cast the Crown as a symbol of inequality and complicity in the suffering of non-English farmers, rather than one of multinational unity and prosperity.

In the English press, discussion about Ireland and Victoria's jubilee fell along partisan lines. In the radical *Reynolds Newspaper*, which focused on class interests and critiqued elite privilege and corruption, a Northumbrian juxtaposed the royal festivities with descriptions of poor Irish families being violently evicted from their homes.¹¹⁷ He lamented that the "Jubilee-eve in Ireland seems to be signalized by a brutality

108 "The Jubilee Record in Ireland," *Freeman's Journal*, 21 June 1887, 5.

109 "The Jubilee Record in Ireland," *Freeman's Journal*, 21 June 1887, 5.

110 "'United Ireland' and the Jubilee," *St. James Gazette*, 23 June 1887, 8.

111 "Wales and the Jubilee: To the Editor," *South Wales Daily News*, 22 February 1887, 4.

112 Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007); Caoimhín De Barra, *The Coming of the Celts, AD 1860: Celtic Nationalism in Ireland and Wales* (Notre Dame, 2018), 78.

113 "A Welsh Land League," *The Argus*, 19 January 1886, 5.

114 David W. Howell, "The Land Question in Nineteenth-Century Wales, Ireland, and Scotland: A Comparative study," *The Agricultural History Review* 61, no. 1 (2013): 83–110.

115 "Wales and the Jubilee: To the Editor," *South Wales Daily News*, 22 February 1887, 4.

116 "Is Ireland to Have No Jubilee?" *South Wales Daily News*, 22 January 1887, 2.

117 "Jubilee-Eve Rejoicings in Ireland," *Reynolds Newspaper*, 19 June 1887, 2.

which is a disgrace to the nineteenth century." Representing the other side of the ideological spectrum, the Conservative *Hull Daily Mail* complained that Liberals and nationalists were politicizing the jubilee in Ireland. The editors claimed that anyone in Ireland "who is friendly ... to the Crown and Government ... [is] subjected to all manner of pains and penalties" and chastised other newspapers "still harping on the old string" that the Crimes Bill was the only gesture made to Ireland at the jubilee.¹¹⁸ This was "certainly not the fault of the English," they argued. The chief secretary for Ireland, A. J. Balfour, had attempted to resolve the newest agrarian uprising through a new Irish Land Bill that would make the purchase of land in Ireland more accessible through government loans. Conservatives hoped it would help placate unruly Irish farmers and reduce the demand for Home Rule, but Gladstone's fierce advocacy for Irish Home Rule led him to deploy "extreme obstructive tactics" to stymie the legislation. Frustrated by the political attention paid to Ireland, the *Hull Daily Mail* declared that at some point "the English and the Scotch, to say nothing of the Welsh taxpayer, will expect some legislation in their sole interest" as well. The argument deftly inverted traditional charges of Anglocentrism in Whitehall. Irish issues had dominated Parliament's attention, they claimed, to the detriment of the United Kingdom's three other constituent nations. Exacerbated by the tense Home Rule debate in 1886, the Irish Question continually spilled into jubilee discourse as people across the four nations considered the monarchy's role in either solving or perpetuating it.

THE FOUR NATIONS AND IMPERIAL RIVALRIES

That the British Crown and state shared a preoccupation with empire only furthered subjects' conflation of the two institutions. Both Victoria and her government were captivated by the imperial expansion that had fueled Britain's transformation into a global superpower. Indeed, Conservative prime minister Benjamin Disraeli was only able to coax Victoria out of her prolonged seclusion and back into the public sphere because of his willingness to push the Royal Titles Act through parliament in 1876.¹¹⁹ She became Empress of India, formally bestowing the imperial title Victoria had been employing herself since the Crown assumed control of India two decades earlier.¹²⁰ The new title tied the monarchy to a Conservative political agenda that viewed imperial expansion abroad as a way to build national sentiment at home.¹²¹ Contemporaries and scholars alike have emphasized how this manifested in Victoria's 1897 Diamond Jubilee. Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain called the 1897 jubilee a "Festival of the British Empire" while historian Jan Morris referred to it as a "kind of family reunion" brought together by the imperial Crown.¹²² The empire-laden Diamond Jubilee often overshadows the Golden Jubilee celebrated ten

118 "Ireland and the Jubilee," *Hull Daily Mail*, 22 June 1887, 2.

119 Cannadine, "The British Monarchy," 119–20; Walter L. Arnstein, "Queen Victoria Opens Parliament: The Disinvention of Tradition," *Historical Research* 63, no. 151 (1990): 178–94, at 185–87.

120 Miles Taylor, "Queen Victoria and India, 1837–61," *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2004), 264–74, at 264.

121 Richard Williams, *The Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the British Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria*, (Aldershot, 1997), 170; Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 101.

122 Jan Morris, *Pax Britannica: The Climax of Empire* (London, 1968), 30.

years earlier, but the colonies loomed large over the 1887 festivities as well. Across the four nations, people wondered how Victoria's increasingly apparent interest in empire influenced their standing within the widening British world.

The Golden Jubilee became the impetus for convening the First Colonial Conference. Delegates from most of Britain's white settler colonies met in London to debate the merits of forming an imperial federation, an idea that had garnered increasing attention in the decade leading up to the jubilee. A federative scheme would create a more republican system of governance between the colonies and the United Kingdom, empowering local representative bodies to manage local affairs while deferring to the Imperial Parliament in London for other matters. Many Unionists believed such a system would ensure the future of an integrative Anglo-world, though Duncan Bell has shown that it was merely "one of a large number of competing and intersecting movements aiming to challenge and transform the way in which the British empire (and state) was understood."¹²³ Still, using Victoria's jubilee as an occasion to tackle these high-stakes and potentially transformative ideas underscores the monarchy's significance to contemporary understandings of empire.

The jubilee-inspired Colonial Conference also became an outlet for representatives from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa to advocate for "further extension of the Royal titles as may place other portions of the Empire on an equality in this respect with Great Britain, Ireland, and India."¹²⁴ Their request was no doubt a response to the queen's assumption of the title Empress of India ten years earlier. With Great Britain, Ireland, and now India each receiving formal mention in the style of the sovereign, these men sought similar acknowledgement of the Dominions. The demand reflected a long tradition of colonial subjects using the language of imperial loyalty to petition the Crown for special rights or privileges that serve their own political ends.¹²⁵ In this case, however, the queen and her titles became the subject—rather than the arbiter—of these political petitions.

But while Victoria was a formal host of the conference, she showed little involvement or interest in its activities. Her personal journals give no indication of the fervor with which she had craved the formalized India title a decade earlier. Prime Minister Lord Salisbury advised that she respectfully decline any proposals to "more distinctly include the Colonies" in the royal titles.¹²⁶ But British settlers' desire to validate their belonging to the expansive British world in this symbolic way indicates their sense that a national and cultural hierarchy existed within it. It likewise shows not only the disconnect between Victoria's interests and those of these colonial delegates, but the queen's role in producing that disconnect. After all, Victoria's personal interest in India was well-known and no doubt contributed to settler jealousies over the queen's titles. Though sometimes obscured by constitutional constraints, Victoria's influence on the politics and culture of the day demonstrates that the Crown was

123 Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, 2011), 7.

124 Howard Vincent, House of Commons Sitting, 19 May 1887, 315, *Parl Deb HC* (3rd ser.) (1887), cols. 520–21.

125 Taylor, "The British Royal Family and the Colonial Empire."

126 "The Marquis of Salisbury to Queen Victoria," *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 338.

far more than a passive prop for others to maneuver.¹²⁷ She had pushed hard for the title Empress of India, in turn alienating subjects in the Dominions and at home.

India continued to command the queen's attention during the 1887 jubilee. She admired the "gratifying" and "quite marvelous" jubilee celebrations in India, which had taken place in February, and was keen for the colony to have a prominent place in her London Jubilee Day program.¹²⁸ At Victoria's behest, the Lord Chamberlain allocated two "of the best Galleries in the Abbey" for colonial subjects so that these "strangers should have the advantage of seeing the Queen."¹²⁹ Each seating about 150 people, one gallery was reserved exclusively "for any distinguished Indians who may be in this country" while the other was for representatives of the rest of the colonies combined.¹³⁰ The queen prioritized meetings with visiting Indian princes at Buckingham Palace and made arrangements to bring over a dozen cavalry from the Indian Army to lead her carriage in the procession to Westminster Abbey.¹³¹ As impatient as she was by the "constant questions" surrounding the jubilee arrangements, Victoria was enthralled by the prospect of Indian participation.¹³² She even acquired two servants from India, sent to assist her during the jubilee. The queen took a particular interest in one of them, Abdul Karim, and requested that he teach her Hindustani. She became so fond of him that she famously—and controversially—promoted him from a servant to her personal secretary the following year, declaring him to be her *Munshi*, or "teacher."¹³³

The sense that the four nations had become part of this wider British imperial world was evident in jubilee discourse. Rev. MacLeod's Edinburgh sermon asked God to "unite the different parts of our Empire together as one family."¹³⁴ The service in Aberdeen declared that, "every one, in his own place, can make some contribution to the prosperity and the stability of the empire... And is it not something to be able to feel that we are not without some part in so great a cause?"¹³⁵ Meanwhile, the mayor of Swansea's assurances that the Welsh would fully participate in the jubilee promised celebrations "as heartfelt in the towns of Wales ... as in any part of the Empire," bypassing the category of the United Kingdom altogether.¹³⁶ In each case, imperial rhetoric was grounded in a specifically Four-Nations framework.

Subjects across the United Kingdom also became acutely aware of how the empire was commandeering financial resources during the Golden Jubilee. From the early nineteenth century, engagement with royal celebrations frequently took the form of local community-oriented building projects, from new bridges to orphanages. It

127 On the need for historians to reassert Victoria's agency, see Taylor, *Empress*, 7.

128 Queen Victoria, Journal, 19 February 1887; Queen Victoria, Journal, 13 March 1887.

129 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain's Office to Robert Meade, 1 June 1887, LC 2/110 no. 138, TNA.

130 Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to the Secretary of State for India, 16 May 1887, LC 2/109 no. 64, TNA.

131 "The Earl of Dufferin to Queen Victoria," *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, 295–97; Letter from the Lord Chamberlain to FitzGerald, 2 June 1887, LC 2/110 no. 149, TNA; Queen Victoria, Journal, 29 June 1887.

132 Queen Victoria, Journal, March 1887.

133 Taylor, *Empress*, 251–54.

134 MacLeod, "Order of Service," 11–2.

135 Hutchison, "God Save the Queen, a Jubilee Sermon," 22.

136 "Wales and the Jubilee—To the Editor of the Daily News," *London Daily News*, 24 March 1887, 6.

was a tangible way to demonstrate local loyalty and forge a connection between the longevity of the monarchy and the prosperity of the broader British nation.¹³⁷ Even without direct involvement from the monarchy, these local projects helped the Crown develop a humanitarian image when its political power was increasingly constrained.¹³⁸ And by highlighting the “decentralized nature of the [British] polity” and the importance of voluntary participation, the practice also seemed to carve out space for Four-Nations thinking.¹³⁹ In 1887, cities and towns across the United Kingdom organized campaigns for local betterment projects in honor of the queen. The Jubilee Entertainment Committee in Dundee delivered “jubilee treats” to the poor and proposed establishing “a Home to house and educate in perpetuity fifty destitute children, one for each year of the Majesty’s reign.”¹⁴⁰ Kirkcaldy and Coatbridge erected jubilee drinking fountains; Somerset established the Victoria Jubilee Nursing Institute; Hull put on a children’s festival; and Sheffield opened a new park.¹⁴¹ Even in the monarchy-wary nations, a Jubilee Scholarship Fund was launched at the new University College of North Wales while Cork and Belfast residents started a jubilee education collection for the children of Church of Ireland clergymen.¹⁴²

But the largest fund-raising project associated with Victoria’s Golden Jubilee was for an “Imperial Institute.” Led by the Prince of Wales, the organizing committee saw the permanent “emblem of the unity of the Empire” as a fitting tribute to Victoria’s jubilee. An Imperial Institute, the Prince argued, would allow “everyone” to “become acquainted with the marvellous growth of the possessions during her reign.” He launched a massive public subscription campaign to fund his vision, with local newspapers frequently publishing lists of public donors.¹⁴³ Historian John Mackenzie has depicted the Institute as part of an imperial propaganda machine “set up in a mood of self-congratulation,” one which counted on “a dramatic financial expression of the imperial sentiment” among the British public.¹⁴⁴ It looked to marshal the culture of community-funded building projects that had developed around royal events to showcase British imperial expansion.

But the Prince of Wales received little support for the Imperial Institute from his titular homeland. With enthusiasm for the jubilee already low in Wales, asking working-class Welshmen to contribute toward an Imperial Institute proved exceedingly difficult.¹⁴⁵ For unlike other subscription campaigns predicated on celebrating the Crown by improving local public life, many in Wales saw the Imperial Institute as

137 Colley, *Britons*, 222–23.

138 Prochaska, *Royal Bounty*, 132–33.

139 Olechnowicz, *The Monarchy and the British Nation*, 71.

140 “The Jubilee Treats to the Dundee Poor,” *Dundee Courier*, 21 May 1887; “A Sensible Jubilee Proposal,” *Dundee Courier*, 1 January 1887, 2.

141 “Opening of the Victoria Jubilee Nursing Institute,” *Somerset County Gazette*, 27 October 1888, 10; “Children’s Jubilee Festival at St. John’s Church,” *Hull Daily Mail*, 27 June 1887, 4; “The Jubilee Fund,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 11 March 1887, 7.

142 “The North Wales College on the Jubilee,” *Western Mail*, 11 March 1887, 2; “Victoria Jubilee Fund Meeting in Cork,” *Irish Times*, 27 May 1887, 6; “Church of Ireland and the Queen’s Jubilee,” *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 June 1887, 6.

143 Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 124.

144 Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 123, 143.

145 “The Failure of the Jubilee in Wales,” *South Wales Daily News*, 16 March 1887, 2.

a royal vanity project that prioritized caring for the wonders of the empire over the welfare of British subjects. Their reaction shows how jubilee efforts to unite diverse subjects under a single British banner—particularly one that seemed to prioritize the empire—prompted a doubling down on Four-Nations identities.

Four-Nations jealousies toward the empire similarly emerged after 25,000 Indian prisoners were released in honor of the jubilee. An English newspaper lauded the queen's act of clemency and goodwill in India "by which ... she endears herself more than ever to her loyal subjects."¹⁴⁶ But the *Dundee Courier* in Scotland was less impressed. Although they commended the "Oriental magnificence" and "heartly loyalty" of India's jubilee festivities, editors highlighted how impractical such a measure would be in Britain: "It may do in India ... but in our country we could not give liberty to a twentieth part of the number without letting loose some considerable scoundrels on society, which would be a rather unsatisfactory method of celebrating the Jubilee of the Queen."¹⁴⁷ The *Courier's* efforts to distinguish between British and Indian civility indicates concern that India may be encroaching on the privileged status of the four nations within the British world order. The undeniable enthusiasm the queen-empress herself had for the subcontinent no doubt fueled this anxiety in a country already suspicious that Englishmen neglected Scotland's position within the UK partnership.

Irish politicians, meanwhile, seized on the precedent set in India to advocate for similar clemency in Ireland. In the House of Commons, Patrick O'Brien of Monaghan asked the First Lord of the Treasury how many of the Indian prisoners were jailed for political offences, and enquired "whether it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to advise Her Majesty to further manifest the Royal clemency during the Jubilee Year by granting an amnesty to prisoners confined in Ireland for political and agrarian offences?"¹⁴⁸ Victoria had become a powerful symbol of justice—or injustice—by the second half of the century. As chair of the judicial committee of the Privy Council, only the queen had the power to commute sentences and grant mercy to condemned subjects. Her active use of this authority made her a point of appeal for subjects across the British realms, and an ideal political tool for O'Brien's Irish cause.¹⁴⁹ In response to his enquiry, the First Lord claimed it was "a general Oriental custom to celebrate occasions of public rejoicing by the release of prisoners," but that the government had no plans to "recommend the Queen to extend this ancient Oriental custom to the United Kingdom."¹⁵⁰ His answer echoed the *Courier's* efforts to distinguish between policies appropriate for the empire versus the United Kingdom. By culturally distancing the colonies from the United Kingdom, the First Lord deftly validated the supremacy of the metropole while simultaneously rebuffing Irish efforts to free political agitators during a tense moment in Anglo-Irish relations.

146 "Jubilee, Jubilee, Jubilee," *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 5 March 1887, 1.

147 "The Jubilee in India," *Dundee Courier*, 17 February 1887, 2.

148 Patrick O'Brien, House of Commons Sitting, 18 February 1887, 311, Parl Deb HC (3rd ser.) (1887), cols. 45–46.

149 Taylor, "The Bicentenary of Queen Victoria," 133.

150 Edward Norris, House of Commons Sitting, 13 May 1887, 314, Parl Deb HC (3rd ser.) (1887), col. 1816.

The Irish nationalist press pushed the issue further. Journalists decried the hypocrisy of jubilee celebrations taking place in parts of the empire “where England gave the right of self-government,” while Ireland was subject to “the most infamous and tyrannical Coercion Bill that ever was proposed in a civilised country.”¹⁵¹ For them, the empire was simply another vehicle for demonstrating Ireland’s unequal treatment during the jubilee. Liberal leader and Irish sympathizer William Gladstone agreed, calling the bill “poison ... aimed at a nation.”¹⁵² “Our blood and brain have helped to build up the vast empire that rejoiced at the Jubilee,” *United Ireland* reminded readers, but “poverty, misery, slavery, and famine have been our reward.”¹⁵³ Victoria’s Golden Jubilee made too clear the extent to which the Irish were ostracized and excluded from precedents set both in Britain and the empire. Westminster forced Coercion Bills on them that were not enacted in Britain because of Ireland’s apparent colonial status but denied them opportunities and goodwill enjoyed by the queen’s colonial subjects abroad. *United Ireland* ominously declared in their jubilee issue that “Ireland is to-day the one weak point near [England’s] heart, the one danger to her empire.”¹⁵⁴ Indeed, it would be the 1921 Anglo-Irish treaty granting political independence to the Irish Free State that would trigger the decades-long process of British decolonization in the twentieth century.¹⁵⁵

Victoria’s 1887 jubilee highlighted tensions both between and within the United Kingdom’s four nations and its empire, evident even in her title, Queen-Empress. Upon conferring the imperial crown in 1876, Conservatives and Liberals alike had insisted that the British throne take precedent in the formal styling to show that it was the grander investiture.¹⁵⁶ It is no surprise, then, that the various imperial elements of Victoria’s jubilee celebrations prompted many British and Irish subjects to reassert the primacy of the four nations within the broader British system. Scottish Rev. MacLeod, for instance, “happily” praised the “living and powerful” bond that “makes us parts of Great Britain, and of the Greater Britain beyond the seas” in his jubilee sermon.¹⁵⁷ But “loyalty to the Empire,” he maintained, “does not supersede loyalty to our own” Scottish sensibilities. Even as subjects across the United Kingdom embraced and appreciated a shared imperial identity in the late nineteenth century, they held fast to the “magnificent ... possession of national life,” especially in the Celtic nations. Many subjects in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales worried that Britain’s fixation on empire, showcased during the Golden Jubilee, worsened already competing appeals for attention within the United Kingdom’s multinational system.

151 “The Anti-coercion Campaign,” *Weekly Freeman and Irish Agriculturalist*, 16 April 1887, 1.

152 John Boyle O’Reilly, “The Coercion Bill,” *North American Review* 144, no. 366 (1887): 528–39, at 537.

153 “‘United Ireland’ and the Jubilee,” *St. James Gazette*, 23 June 1887, 8.

154 “‘United Ireland’ and the Jubilee,” 8.

155 John MacKenzie, “Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire,” *History Compass* 6, no. 5 (2008): 1244–63, at 1245.

156 “The Royal Titles Bill,” *Dundee Courier*, 21 March 1876, 4.

157 MacLeod, “Order of Service,” 13.

CONCLUSION

Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887 offered subjects a once-in-a-generation occasion to commemorate five decades of progress and prosperity in the United Kingdom and revel in its near limitless global power. It "called for the most remarkable, unanimous, and gracious expression of loyalty to her Majesty the Queen."¹⁵⁸ The monarchy's ability to transcend partisan squabbles of the day to unify diverse peoples was a crucial tool in a multinational political enterprise that had only begun at the start of the century. Unionists across Britain and Ireland looked to Victoria and her Golden Jubilee to bolster the Union and paper over the cracks wrought by acute nationalist sentiments. But the problem posed by celebrating a queen who represented a global British identity was in defining which nation—or nations—that identity belonged to. While the event undoubtedly did have a unifying effect for many, for others Victoria's 1887 jubilee only threw divisions among the four nations into sharper relief. Even as organizers took steps to accommodate the union's multinational framework, they were confronted by the unresolved tensions hardwired into it. Suspicion that their efforts were half-hearted stoked anxiety, disaffection, and even resentment among a range of subjects who insinuated that the United Kingdom was not the equal partnership it purported to be.

Much of the jubilee discourse reflected the profoundly British preoccupation with status and hierarchy. Scholars have enumerated the hierarchical systems and cultures that have governed modern British society and were based in various contexts on race, class, gender, or colonial status.¹⁵⁹ Celebrations of monarchy represent a tacit endorsement of tiered society, and many British and Irish subjects saw the Golden Jubilee as an opportunity to gauge the four nations' political and cultural standing relative to one another, and to the wider empire. In doing so, they demonstrated their implicit concern that even the union's constituent nations were embedded in a culture of hierarchy. The jubilee became an outlet for subjects to reckon with this prospect, while also providing fodder for fresh grievances. Some used the occasion to criticize the monarchy, the state, or both, whether in an attempt to improve the union or to highlight its hypocrisies. Others hoped that public demonstrations of loyalty would garner their nation better political standing. Still others resolved to ignore the jubilee entirely, unwilling to participate in such a duplicitous system. In almost all of these cases, however, people articulated their engagement with the jubilee—or lack thereof—through a four-nations lens. Tensions surrounding the 1887 jubilee festivities demonstrate the pervasiveness of four-nations thinking even at the height of Britain's imperial power.

Four-nations analysis offers a new approach to the history of British monarchy. The Crown is often portrayed as a national symbol actively shaped by governments and publics alike, especially after World War I. Its rise in popularity during the twentieth century has been attributed to unprecedented access brought by radio and television, as well as a possessive nationalist reaction to the decline of global British power.¹⁶⁰ Scottish political scientist Tom Nairn described the palpable "*Geist*" of

158 "Victoria Jubilee Fund Meeting in Cork," *Irish Times*, 27 May 1887, 6.

159 Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000); Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*.

160 David Cannadine, "The British Monarchy and the 'Invention of Tradition,'" 157.

Royal identity” and “Crown-mystique” that developed in the postwar period. It enabled the monarchy “to constitute one kind of English-British nation” and effectively fulfill its symbolic function outlined by Walter Bagehot.¹⁶¹ A non-Anglocentric account of Victoria’s Golden Jubilee, however, reveals the tensions among the four nations embedded in Britain’s ostensibly unifying royal tradition—tensions that continue today. In the months before Queen Elizabeth II’s historic 2022 Platinum Jubilee, unionists in Northern Ireland fumed over nationalist party Sinn Féin’s reluctance to allocate funds for local celebrations, labeling it a “dismissal of British identity in Northern Ireland.”¹⁶² That identity was further affronted during the globally televised Platinum Party at the Palace when the BBC “inadvertently” displayed the Republic of Ireland’s flag instead of the Northern Irish one. Meanwhile, despite senior members of the Royal Family traveling to Edinburgh, Belfast, and Cardiff to celebrate Elizabeth’s Platinum Jubilee Day, one *Sunday Times* columnist reported that readers “would be hard pressed to find a string of bunting or a platinum pudding” in Scotland.¹⁶³ Only months later, controversy erupted in Wales over King Charles III’s decision to pass the Prince of Wales title onto his son.¹⁶⁴ Analyzing the monarchy’s engagement with the United Kingdom’s multinationality can further our understanding of the institution’s contested role in modern British society and offers a lens into four-nations politics more broadly.

161 Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy* (London, 1988), 235–36.

162 “Anger as Councillors Block Queen’s Platinum Jubilee but Fund Irish Unity Talks,” *Belfast News Letter*, 31 January 2022.

163 Gillian Bowditch, “Platinum Jubilee: Scots Partied Less, but We Respect the Queen,” *Sunday Times*, 5 June 2022.

164 Andrew Forgrave, “Prince of Wales Title ‘Should Have Been Ditched’ Says Petition but Warning It’s Now Too Late,” *Daily Post*, 10 September 2022.