

From Clan MacLeod Society South Australia, August 2008

Editorial August 2008 (*modern Scotland courting the Cavalry*)

Do you recall the saying..”If one keeps an ear to the ground you might hear the Cavalry arriving”.

For Robert the Bruce’s infantry that was a good thing, but if you were a Sioux Indian, that’s a bad thing; and in the case of Lord Cardigan’s Charge of the Light Brigade you’d prefer to be anything but in the Cavalry.

It all depends on your viewpoint or what side you are on.

Scotland’s identity seems to be an issue at the center of some social argument. “Well that’s not new.” say you, because it has been an issue since Robert The Bruce. What is your viewpoint and what side are you on ?

There appear to be some skirmishes in opinion as to whether Scotland wants a reputation and identity that is a rich, colourful mosaic of the past, or, an image on tack with the slick, minimalist, alloy styles of modern societies. (*Any bias expressed here is to be understood and forgiven*).

We citizens of Australia have a rather distant, fragmented and biased view of Scotland. The picture is an historical time capsule, or a parochial cultural attitude, learned from historians or passed from ancestral emigrants. Few of us have experienced more than a few footprints on Scottish soil, if at all, and while our sympathy may align with the Scots, we can rarely claim any empathy. We are remote from the emerging confidence and independence that is changing the social climate of Scotland.

Examples of the dynamics in the play for identity are the “**The Gathering**”, a celebration of the contribution made by the clans to the culture and history of Scotland. Another is found in expressions of modernism, published in media which use revered traditions to launch popularism (events), energetic progressiveness (generic tartans/vesture) and parcelled in terms of being economic assets for tourism and marketing.

To simplify the polarity:- I saw a Highland Piper playing traditional style at the Adelaide Festival’s “Northern Lights”, and a Punk Gladiatorial/Mad Max Piper busking at Fremantle Markets. It disturbs me that the crowds were more entertained and impressed by the punk piper. Such is one image being related to the modern world.

So, while Scotland struggles to define its relevance, modern expression, and identity, I am listening for the Cavalry, wondering who it will be and how it will influence the outcome.

Perhaps we, the scattered clans in the antipodes and in the Americas, might be the Cavalry and carry the day with traditions. On the other hand, we might ride for the modern Scotland, as acolytes of the colours and symbols, but allowing the new, young Scotland, to find its way after centuries of unwon causes and exploitation. (Ed.)