

## Maintaining a British way of life: English-speaking South Africa's Patriotic, Cultural and Charitable Associations

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This article examines the role played by patriotic, cultural and charitable associations in white English-speaking South African society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There were numerous such associations, drawing their membership from a relatively small constituency of predominantly middle and upper working-class South Africans of British stock. Most catered for "ethnic" allegiances. These included the English, Scottish and Irish Freemasons, the Irish Association, the Sons of England, the Cambrian and numerous Caledonian Societies. There were also small regional societies such as the Yorkshire and Lancashire Association. By the twentieth century, associations of war veterans, catering for all social classes, such as the British Empire Service League (BESL) and the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (MOTHs) joined their numbers.

As the article examines associations catering for English-speaking South Africans, it is not concerned with charitable and friendly societies that catered for the Afrikaner, Jewish, African or coloured groups. It is also not concerned with associations whose interests were purely political, such as the South African League, formed in the 1890s to further imperial interests in the subcontinent, the neo-fascist New Guard, founded in 1934, or the Society of United English-Speaking South Africans (UNESSA) who fought in the late 1950s to preserve English-speaking interests in the Union and to retain the monarchy.<sup>1</sup>

The article draws on the research undertaken by the author on the history of white English-speaking South Africans. In attempting to recreate the identity of South Africans of British origin or descent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the study centres on the extent to which they continued to define themselves as British, and South Africa as part of the British world. In a sub-continent in which they were outnumbered by both Afrikaners and Africans, they sought to maintain their position by emphasising their Britishness and by trying to preserve a British way of life. As Linda Colley has shown had been the case in the British Isles,<sup>2</sup> Britishness was constantly redefined and contested in southern Africa and South Africans of British origin and descent would have been hard-pressed to define precisely what the concept meant. They would have known, however, that it was closely associated with Protestantism and allegiance to the Crown, and that it involved the maintenance of the English language and of shared social and cultural values, as well as the acceptance of a common set of references, beliefs and attitudes. In this article it will become evident that the British who established these associations in southern Africa, sought

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1 *The UNESSA Manifesto*, included in personal correspondence, Peter Parnwell, Dorchester, 19 May 2004.

2 L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1830* (Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1992).

through them to maintain both the values, beliefs, attitudes and customs they had brought with them. In short, to maintain a British way of life.<sup>3</sup>

Many patriotic, cultural and charitable associations began as South African branches of British societies. Some settlers, perhaps many, would have belonged to the mother associations in Britain and slotted easily into the daughter lodges, while others would have been men who, in a strange land, welcomed the security found in mixing with those of a similar kind. They settled mainly in the new urban centres in South Africa, where they established social structures that reinforced the emergence of a mainly middle-class society in which associations found a fertile ground for growth.

The associations tended to attract a certain type of person. Although open to all British men, irrespective of age or social position, most members tended to come from the middle or upper working class. Their leadership structures, however, were often dominated by a fairly small colonial elite who provided the backbone of support for the associations and, by stressing civic duty and the fostering of an orderly society, espoused middle-class values.<sup>4</sup>

With Catholics and Jews being a small minority amongst British South Africans in the nineteenth century, most were Protestants, identified by Linda Colley as central to Britishness. Because of this, many of the associations had close links with Protestant churches. It was not uncommon for Protestant clergymen to be Freemasons or for them to establish links between their parishes and their local Masonic lodge. St Patrick's Church in Pietermaritzburg provides the example of its first vicar, the Reverend De Boinville, who belonged to the Irish Freemason constitution (see below). He established a strong Freemason presence in the church,

3 During recent years there has been a wide interest in Britishness throughout the English-speaking world, as is evident from a series of British World conferences that have been held this decade. For a discussion on Britishness in South Africa, see: S Dubow, "How British was the British World? The Case of South Africa", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, 1, 2009, pp 1-27; J Hyslop, "Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish: Military 'Scottishness' and Social Power in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa", unpublished paper, British World conference, University of Cape Town, 2002; J M Mackenzie with N R Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race, 1772-1914* (Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York, 2007); C Saunders, "Britishness in South Africa: Some Reflections", *Humanities Research*, 13, 1, 2006, pp 61-69; A S Thompson, "The Language of Loyalism in Southern Africa, circa 1870-1939", *English Historical Review*, 118, 477, 2003, pp 617-650. See also the following articles that I have written: "Britishness, South Africanness and the 1st World War", in P Buckner and R D Francis (eds), *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary University Press, Calgary, 2005); "An Identity Threatened: White English-Speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South Africanism, 1934-1939", *Kleio*, 37, 2005, pp 50-70; "'Munition Factories Turning Out a Constant Supply of Living Material': White South African Elite Boys' Schools and the 1st World War", *South African Historical Journal*, 51, 2004, pp 67-86; "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s", *South African Historical Journal*, 43, 2000, pp 197-222; "'The Thinking is Done in London': South Africa's English-language Press and Imperialism", in C Kaul (ed), *Media and the British Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2006); "'Their Finest Hour?' English-speaking South Africans and World War II", *South African Historical Journal*, 60, 1, 2008, pp 60-84.

4 Morrell has discussed the domination of Natal Freemasonry by the colonial elite. See R Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880-1920* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2001), p 118.

its foundation stone being laid in 1911 by the Provincial Grand Master of the Irish Constitution in South Africa, “with the mystic symbolism of their craft”.<sup>5</sup> The Masonic presence continued through the twentieth century. The parish also enjoyed close ties with the local Sons of England lodge.

Most Sons of England lodges had Anglican chaplains, although a few looked to the nonconformist churches for their chaplains. The Caledonian societies had close links with the Presbyterian Church. This identification of the associations with Protestantism meant that they held little attraction for non-Protestant English-speakers. The Catholic Church expressly forbade its members from belonging to the Freemasons and other Masonic associations, establishing guilds to serve similar purposes for Catholics. For their part, associations such as the Sons of England excluded Roman Catholics from membership.<sup>6</sup> Anti-Semitism was also widespread with many associations specifically prohibiting Jews from membership, although by the twentieth century, there was often cooperation between Jewish and British associations, particularly during the Second World War.<sup>7</sup>

Charitable associations originated in the Cape during the Dutch period, a Freemason lodge (*de Goede Hoop*) being founded by the Grand East Lodge of the Netherlands at the Cape in 1772. When the British established a permanent settlement in 1806, the British Commander-in-Chief, a mason, offered his protection to *de Goede Hoop* Lodge. With the establishment of a British mercantile community in Cape Town, individual merchants joined the lodge but, resulting from tensions between British and Dutch members, they broke away in 1811 to form *British Lodge*, the first English ethnic lodge at the Cape and a daughter member of the United Grand Lodge of England. During the following years, British lodges accompanied the advance of imperial rule in the subcontinent. By the 1850s, English lodges had spread to Natal, while in 1860 the first lodge of the Scottish constitution, *Lodge Southern Cross*, was founded in the Cape. In 1896 the first lodge of the Irish constitution, *Lodge Abercorn*, was established by Irish Protestants.<sup>8</sup>

The English, Scottish and Irish constitutions in South Africa retained close links with their mother Grand Lodges in the British Isles.<sup>9</sup> In the United Kingdom, Freemasonry had close links with the Protestant political, religious and military establishment and Grand Masters were often members of the Royal Family.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, English-speaking Freemasonry in South Africa was staunchly imperial and although relations with Afrikaner Freemasonry were generally cordial, attempts to form a closer relationship with the Netherlands constitution failed.<sup>11</sup>

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5 M Nuttall, *St Patrick's Church, Pietermaritzburg, 1904-2004* (No publisher, Pietermaritzburg, 2004), p 10, and generally pp 10-11

6 *Pretoria News*, 27 April 1912, “Who are the Sons of England?” This was a legacy of their Canadian origins

7 V Bickford-Smith (ed), *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1999), p 96

8 See <http://www.grandlodge.co.za/glsahist.html>; N Worden (ed), *Cape Town, the Making of a City: An Illustrated Social History* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1998), p 144; Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen*, p 117

9 A A Cooper, *The Freemasons of South Africa* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1986), p 158

10 Cooper, *The Freemasons of South Africa*, pp 152-158

11 See <http://www.grandlodge.co.za/glsahist.html>

In Britain, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, other associations based on Freemasonry had been established as part of the evangelical revival led by men like John Wesley and William Wilberforce. These evangelicals saw charity as a Christian duty and the charitable societies founded by their example were firmly placed in the Protestant and middle-class tradition.<sup>12</sup> Like the Freemasons, these associations founded daughter lodges and influenced the development of patriotic, cultural and charitable associations throughout what were to become the white Dominions. Prominent among these were the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, founded in London in 1822,<sup>13</sup> and the Independent Order of the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows, the largest affiliated Friendly Society in the British Isles.<sup>14</sup> These associations were particularly successful in replicating themselves in Canada, where the British community was faced with the presence of a large French minority in Canada and a powerful United States south of the border. Associations such as the Sons of England and the British Empire League which were to be transplanted to South Africa, originated in the North American Dominion.<sup>15</sup>

The growth of the British community in the Cape by the 1820s saw a need for poverty relief. As in Britain, there was inadequate official assistance and the response to social problems was left to the consciences and resources of individuals. The St Andrew's Friendly Society was founded in 1820 to offer relief and medical aid for Scots, while in 1829 the St Patrick's Society was set up to provide for the Irish.<sup>16</sup> The Freemasons were the main providers of charity until the second half of the century, when the rapidly expanding British population in southern Africa saw a need for founding new associations.

Among these were the Caledonian societies, which by the 1880s were to be found in the Cape and Natal. In addition to providing relief, they aimed to "keep alive among Scottish residents a love and reverence for Scotland, her history and traditions; to encourage the study of Scottish literature and music; and the practice of Highland games and pastimes; to promote social intercourse among local Scots ...".<sup>17</sup> By the end of the century, a large influx of Scottish immigrants to South Africa, particularly to the Transvaal, saw a great upsurge in founding Caledonian societies throughout the subcontinent. Regular social and cultural meetings were held and important Scottish occasions such as Burns Night, St Andrew's Night and Hogmanay were celebrated. By 1914, there were 40 societies in the Union, and in 1918 the societies joined to

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12 F Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006), p 7

13 See <http://www.raoagle.org.uk/order.htm>. W A C Hartmann, Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes Grand Lodge of England: Conceptions and Misconceptions. It was founded near the Drury Lane Theatre by stage hands and theatre technicians, receiving its name from the fact that meetings always concluded with the singing of the ballad, "We'll chase the buffalo" Despite its title, it never received a royal charter, but by the 1860s so many lodges had appeared, that the Grand Lodge of England was formed to govern the order and structures Ritual and regalia similar to all Masonic lodges were introduced

14 *Lochhead's Guide, Hand-book and Directory of Pretoria, 1913* (The State Library, Pretoria, 1980), p 225

15 One of the few non-British or non-Dominion Masonic associations to set up daughter lodges in South Africa, was the American International Order of Good Templars, a temperance movement that combined temperance with Masonic rituals and ceremonies. See Worden (ed), *Cape Town*, pp 232-233

16 Worden (ed), *Cape Town*, pp 121-122

17 *Lochhead's Guide*, p 225

form the Federated Caledonian Society of Southern Africa, making it the strongest and most active patriotic society in southern Africa.<sup>18</sup>

The most important association catering for South Africans of English descent was the Sons of England Patriotic and Benevolent Society. Founded in Toronto in 1874, the Canadian mother association founded its first Cape daughter lodge in Uitenhage in 1881.<sup>19</sup> Membership was restricted to males of British birth or descent, who were pledged to maintain imperial interests in the subcontinent. The association spread rapidly, benefiting from the upsurge in popular imperialism in the 1890s. Although they remained affiliated to the Canadian mother Supreme Grand Lodge, the various lodges were amalgamated under the Grand Lodge of South Africa (later renamed the Grand Lodge of Africa, reflecting the fact that there were daughter lodges in the Rhodesias and elsewhere in southern Africa) and in the early decades of the twentieth century, lodges could be found in the smallest dorps in South Africa.<sup>20</sup>

The smaller British ethnic communities also supported a number of associations. There were Irish and specifically Ulster associations, Cambrian and Cornish societies. There were specifically regional associations, such as the Cornwall and Devon Association, the Yorkshire and Lancashire Association, and the Lancashire, Yorkshire and Northern Counties Association. Pretoria, in the early twentieth century, even boasted a New Zealand Club, with its own social centre.<sup>21</sup>

By the early twentieth century, lodges and branches of the above associations were to be found throughout southern Africa, including Rhodesia. Names such as British, Queen Victoria, Lord Milner, Magna Charta, Union Jack, Victoria Cross and Lord Nelson Lodges proclaimed where their loyalties lay, to be joined later in the century by other British icons like Winston Churchill. In 1913, Pretoria's relatively small English-speaking society supported Sons of England lodges, two each of the Irish, Scottish and English Freemason lodges; six lodges of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes; an Oddfellows lodge; six civilian Good Templars lodges and two military lodges at Roberts Heights; as well as an Ancient Order of Druids Lodge.<sup>22</sup>

The various associations had many similarities. Most were based on the Freemason ideal of brotherhood and were organised into lodges incorporating at least some of the Masonic traditions of secrecy, particularly those surrounding admissions to lodges and ceremonies pertaining to the lodges. In 1912, Vere Stent, editor of the *Pretoria News*, described some in use by the Sons of England, which would have been typical of other Masonic lodges:

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18 J M Mackenzie with N R Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race, 1772-1914* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2007), pp 224-227

19 *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* X (Nassou, Cape Town, 1974), p 62 The reason for choosing Uitenhage as the founding centre of the association is unclear

20 *The Natal Mercury*, 19 April 1915, "Sons of England" As this article concentrates on the associations in what became the Union of South Africa, it does not pay attention to lodges and other branches established by amongst others the Freemasons, Sons of England and the Caledonians elsewhere in southern Africa It is to be hoped that research will be done on associations outside South Africa, particularly in Southern Rhodesia

21 *Pretoria News*, 4 March 1903, "New Zealand Club" Proof of how active the various associations were, is provided in the social and activities columns of all English-language newspapers from the late nineteenth century into the interwar years

22 *Lochhead's Guide*, pp 224-226

They go through certain ceremonies in the presence of members of the order only – and they have certain grips, passwords, and signs known only to members, by which members are known to each other ... because members of the Order, like Freemasons, are sworn to render certain brotherly assistance to each other in times of stress. They are also sworn to certain mutual obligations, tending towards the protection of their interests as a brotherhood<sup>23</sup>

Like the Masons, the Sons also had a private meeting room with ceremonial regalia and in which was displayed an open Bible, a Union Jack or St George's flag, and a rose.

The Sons of England and the other associations differed from the Freemasons, however, by being far less secretive. As Stent pointed out, the Sons "assemble yearly and oftener in public, they attend church in public, they dine in public, they picnic in public, and the names of their officers and members are practically public property".<sup>24</sup> There was also a marked degree of cooperation between the associations and it was not uncommon for a man to belong to more than one association. In the early twentieth century, Captain Benington of Pretoria, for example, was Master of the Transvaal Lodge of English Masons and also President of the Victoria Cross Lodge of the Sons of England.<sup>25</sup>

The general picture of the associations, whatever their origin, is of exclusively male societies in which masculine interests and male bonding were paramount. Although the article accordingly focuses on men's societies, a number of female societies are included as examples of women's associations that shared much the same goals as did those of the men. Two are singled out for attention: the Sons of England Women's Association – as its name indicates, a branch of the Sons of England, and the Guild of Loyal Women. The former, founded in 1919, singled out "the upholding of English honour, ideals and traditions"<sup>26</sup> as its overriding objective, while to the Guild of Loyal Women the mobilising of women to the imperial cause during the Anglo-Boer War was its *raison d'être* (see below). Where they differed from the male associations, was that they put much of their energy into endeavours they, and presumably men, regarded as more "feminine". They concentrated on charitable and social welfare works and were particularly involved with child-welfare and education for girls. The Sons of England Women's Association was also involved in organising and running branches for young budding "sons and daughters" which, while ensuring that there would always be recruits for the adult associations, do not seem to have captured the imagination of the young to the extent that the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides did.

The earliest example of a female society in South Africa was the Ladies' Benevolent Society, founded in Cape Town in the 1820s by Jane Philips to provide for the welfare of poor immigrants.<sup>27</sup> Societies such as this drew their members from the middle- and upper-class social strata of both anglicised Afrikaner, as well as British women, and enjoyed the support of colonial officials. The National Council of

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23 *Pretoria News*, 27 April 1912, "Who are the Sons of England?"

24 *Pretoria News*, 27 April 1912, "Who are the Sons of England?"

25 *Pretoria News*, 4 July 1914, Editorial

26 National Archives of South Africa, Transvaal Archives (hereafter NASA, TAB), Governor-General Papers (hereafter GG), 3/5306, Secretary, Sons of England Women's Association to HRH, the Duchess of Kent, 24 February 1936

27 Worden (ed), *Cape Town*, pp 121-122 Jane was the wife of the missionary, John Philips

Women was formed in 1909 as an umbrella organisation for women's associations. It was affiliated to the International Council of Women. Despite attempts to cooperate with Afrikaner associations such as the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Christelike Vrouwe Vereniging* (founded 1904) and the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Vrouwe Federatie* (1903), it remained a white, middle-class, essentially English-speaking association, which "had the ear of influential men" in Cape Town.<sup>28</sup>

A common theme of all of the men's associations was that of brotherhood. The rituals surrounding meetings and the process of initiation appealed to many men as it gave to them a sense of belonging, of being brothers. Associations were essentially, like gentlemen's or sporting clubs, congenial meeting places where men of a similar background, or with similar interests, could meet, socialise and make important business, as well as social contacts. The latter could be particularly valuable for immigrants. John Mackenzie shows how valuable contacts made at Caledonian society meetings in Johannesburg were to secure jobs or further business careers.<sup>29</sup>

In an age when people had to provide their own amusements, social activities such as dances, theatricals and banquets were undoubtedly important.<sup>30</sup> Sport was also a significant way of attracting young members and of strengthening male bonding within the associations. Caledonian sports meetings and pipe competitions aimed at maintaining Scottishness, while annual Highland gatherings brought together Scots from all over southern and central Africa.<sup>31</sup> Many associations had their own cricket and football teams, which competed in the various urban leagues. Even associations with very few members, such as Pretoria's Lancashire and Yorkshire Society, fielded cricket and football teams, while the city's New Zealand Club, which was committed to fostering "healthy athletics of all sorts", fielded a rugby team.<sup>32</sup>

Cultural and educational activities were equally important. Eisteddfods, essay competitions, poetry readings and support for libraries and the theatre were all part of the associations' functions. The Guild of Loyal Women supported the schooling of indigent loyalists and founded the Milner Scholarship. Archie Dick has examined the important role that the Guild, and other women's associations played in inculcating a reading culture in South Africa.<sup>33</sup> At the Guild's initiative, the British National Home Reading Union opened branches in South Africa, sponsored school and children's libraries, offered prizes for essays and distributed books and pamphlets. It saw the primary function of education to be to "impress upon members of the rising

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28 Bickford-Smith (ed), *Cape Town*, p 32

29 Mackenzie with Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa*, pp 247-248 See also Morrell, *Boys to Gentlemen*, p 119; N Roos, *Ordinary Springboks: White Servicemen and Social Justice in South Africa, 1939-1961* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005), pp 183-186

30 Morrell provides important information on the social role of clubs and societies in Natal See Morrell, *Boys to Gentlemen*, and the social columns in English-language newspapers

31 See *Pretoria News*, 1 October 1938, "Gathering of the Clans"; Mackenzie with Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa*, p 244

32 *Pretoria News*, 11 March 1907, "L and Y Association"; *Pretoria News*, 4 March 1903, "New Zealand Club"

33 A L Dick, "Building a nation of readers? Women's organizations and the politics of reading in South Africa, 1900-1914", *Historia*, 49, 2, 2004, pp 23-44; *Pretoria News*, 19 February 1903, "Guild of Loyal Women"

generation a sense of their privileges and responsibilities as citizens of the British Empire, and to spread sound views upon imperial questions".<sup>34</sup>

Central to the lives of most of the associations, however, and certainly of all of the Masonic-type lodges, was that they were charitable concerns dedicated to visiting the elderly and sick, as well as providing relief both to the wider community and specifically to their own needy members.<sup>35</sup> Working voluntarily for churches and associations was the norm in South Africa as in Britain, particularly in the nineteenth century when there were inadequate government poverty relief systems.<sup>36</sup> The associations also fulfilled a very real need during the two World Wars and the Depression of the 1930s. The Sons of England paid out £250 000 in charitable and benevolent works in the 1920s and 1930s,<sup>37</sup> were active in child welfare and established an orphanage as a memorial to those brothers who died during the First World War.<sup>38</sup> The Guild of Loyal Women supported homes for the aged and the infirm,<sup>39</sup> while the Freemason constitutions stressed the importance of charity. It is likely that Freemasons played an important role in funding the St Andrew's and St Patrick's Societies in Cape Town in the 1820s, and in the early 1860s they were instrumental in the opening of a Sailors' Home in the city.<sup>40</sup> They also contributed grants and pensions annually to needy Masons. Despite the existence of the three separate English-speaking Freemason constitutions, they cooperated in the establishment and running of benevolent funds.<sup>41</sup>

The philosophy underpinning the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes gives an indication of how the Masonic associations saw their function. Members believed that the power and strength of the family should be available to needy Buffaloes and that all members should make voluntary contributions in accordance with their own circumstances. "Protection of the fatherless, the orphan child, the widow, the sick and the aged" was central to the Order and everything individual lodges did, was aimed at securing and maintaining "the homes and lives of our members and their families".<sup>42</sup> In fulfilment of this obligation, the Order ran convalescent homes and orphanages.<sup>43</sup>

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- 34 E van Heyningen and P Merrett, "The healing touch: the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa, 1900-1912", unpublished paper, British World conference, University of Cape Town, January 2002, p 16 See also M P Atteridge, *A Short History of the Guild of Loyal Women in South Africa* (Pretoria News, Pretoria, no date)
- 35 University of Cape Town Libraries, Manuscripts and Documents (hereafter UCTL, M and D), Sons of England Patriotic and Benevolent Society Collection (hereafter SoE Collection), BC 1035, A6, Grand Secretary to F A Davies, 4 March 1958
- 36 The importance of volunteering and charity in Britain has been examined by Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*, pp 8-12
- 37 *Pretoria News*, 25 May 1939, "SOE Meeting"
- 38 UCTL, M and D, SoE Collection, A1, Grand Lodge of Africa, Constitution, no date
- 39 Van Heyningen & Merrett, "The healing touch", p 17 Seeing its main function as the promotion of imperialism, it laid stress on the fact that the Guild was not a benevolent society as such, and had no intention of becoming a "flannel petticoat society" (*Pretoria News*, 19 February 1903, "Guild of Loyal Women")
- 40 Worden (ed), *Cape Town*, p 168
- 41 See <http://www.grandlodge.co.za/glsahist.html>
- 42 See [http://www.raob.org/about\\_the\\_raob.htm](http://www.raob.org/about_the_raob.htm), D Hardy, An Introduction to Buffaloesism as practiced by the RAOB
- 43 See [http://www.raob.org/about\\_the\\_raob.htm](http://www.raob.org/about_the_raob.htm), D Hardy, An Introduction to Buffaloesism; NASA, TAB, GG 1/268, 1925



Although the prime concerns of the associations were social and charitable, the patriotic aspect was always important and was to become central during the years in which the majority of English-speaking South Africans identified themselves with imperialist and loyalist interests in the sub-continent. Like their members, from the late nineteenth century, the associations became committed to maintaining imperial supremacy in southern Africa.<sup>44</sup> They were described by Vere Stent as an important link in the “Brotherhood of the British people”.<sup>45</sup> Cecil Rhodes, in his Confession of Faith of 1877, drew on his Freemason membership in his dream of a secret society in southern Africa “with but one object, the furtherance of the British Empire, and the bringing of the whole uncivilized world under British rule ... which should have its members in every part of the British Empire working with one object and one idea”.<sup>46</sup> Although the associations claimed to be non-political, with attitudes such as these, their members were seldom to be found in political parties which were perceived to be anti-imperial. It is little wonder that they were regarded with considerable suspicion by most Afrikaners and particularly by the Nationalists in the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup>

The Sons of England were far more overtly political in outlook and aggressively patriotic than were the other associations, and vigorously campaigned to further imperial interests in the subcontinent. Not surprisingly, more than the other associations, it attracted the bitter hostility of Afrikaner nationalists. It is interesting that it took root in Canada and South Africa, where French Canadians and Afrikaners respectively were perceived to pose a threat to British paramountcy, and never established itself in Australia or New Zealand, where the British settlers were not confronted by rival white identities.

The associations embodied the imperial civic culture of South Africa. Their symbols, ceremonies and rituals were British and imperial. As was the case with brother and sister associations elsewhere in the Empire, they were at the forefront of loyalist celebrations and commemorations of British and imperial anniversaries such as those of the patron saints, Trafalgar Day and Queen Victoria’s birthday (later Empire Day). Colonial Governors and Union Governors-General gave the associations the official seal of approval by providing patronage for their charitable endeavours and attending their celebrations.<sup>48</sup>

That these associations were racist in that Africans, Asians and coloureds were barred from membership, is undeniable,<sup>49</sup> but the fact that few of them catered for Afrikaners, Jews or Catholics, either because of their ethnic nature or by specifically excluding them, also contributed to the divisions that marked white South Africa. Certainly until the beginning of the twentieth century, the only “outsiders” who felt welcome in British associations were Anglicized Afrikaners or prominent Jewish

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44 Andrew Thompson has discussed this loyalist tradition in “The language of loyalism in southern Africa, circa 1870-1939”, *English Historical Review*, 118, 477, 2003, pp 617-650

45 *Pretoria News*, 24 May 1917, Editorial

46 G Wheatcroft, *The Randlords* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1985), p 141

47 Cooper, *The Freemasons*, p 153; *Pretoria News*, 2 October 1944, Editorial

48 NASA, TAB, GG – The collection has numerous files dealing with the patronage dispensed by successive Governors-General to association charities

49 The Sons of England even barred membership to men married to “non-white” women See NASA, TAB, Prime Minister (hereafter PM) 1/4/412, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Secret Organisations*, RP 20/1965, p 3

Randlords like the Oppenheims, who converted to Anglicanism.<sup>50</sup> Ethnic exclusiveness appears to have been far more pronounced in the English than the Celtic societies. The Freemasons' Scottish and Irish constitutions, for example, found it easier cooperating with the Afrikaner constitution than did the English. The establishment of a number of Afrikaans-language Scottish and Irish lodges facilitated such cooperation. The Caledonians, too, despite their stress on Scottish ethnicity, generally enjoyed good relations with Afrikaners. In the nineteenth century, there would also have been closer ties between British and Afrikaans associations in the old established British communities in the Transvaal and Orange Free State republics who were far more socially and commercially interconnected with their Afrikaner neighbours.<sup>51</sup>

The events during the years leading to the South African War (Anglo-Boer War), and the war itself, were a major catalyst in the growth of the associations and stimulated the founding of one of the most important women's associations, the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa (Daughters of the Empire). The war mobilised British women in southern Africa to support philanthropic works aimed at providing relief for refugees or comforts to soldiers and the wounded. The Guild was founded in Cape Town in March 1900 at the instigation of Lady Edward Cecil who was concerned that British interests in the subcontinent were being undermined by disloyal elements in the Cape. Its members were drawn from middle and upper-class women and it enjoyed the support of the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner (who Cecil later married), and of Cape Town's British male elite. Unlike many of its male counterparts, it did not bar Jewish or Catholic members.<sup>52</sup>

The Guild mobilised women for the imperial cause without challenging the existing social order or advocating feminist or suffrage interests. Support for it grew rapidly and by the end of the war, it had branches throughout southern Africa. It had close links with the Canadian Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire, also formed during the war.<sup>53</sup> At the Canadian Order's request, the Guild became involved in locating and caring for graves of British and imperial soldiers, acting as proxies for "those mothers, wives, sisters or sweethearts, who from distance were unable ever to perform this act for themselves", and in so doing, helping them to find closure.<sup>54</sup> As the number of graves grew, so it became beyond the Guild's abilities to maintain them alone and, at its request, the Victoria League was formed in London in 1901 to raise money for maintenance.<sup>55</sup>

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50 Ernest Oppenheimer was master of Richard Giddy Lodge, Kimberley in 1912, while his son, Harry, became a member in 1943 See Cooper, *The Freemasons*, p 127

51 See <http://www.grandlodge.co.za/glsahist.html> The fact that the Scots and many of the Irish settlers were Calvinist Protestants, could have been a factor in encouraging cooperation between their lodges and those of the Afrikaner constitution

52 NASA, TAB, GG 27/124, Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa, *The Federal Leaflet, Special Number*, July 1911; Van Heyningen & Merrett, "The healing touch"; *Pretoria News*, 21 April 1911, "Loyal Women"

53 See K Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002)

54 *Pretoria News*, 13 November 1905, "Loyal Women and Soldiers' Graves" After Union this work was transferred to the South African Soldiers' Graves Association See NASA, TAB, GG 27/239, South African Soldiers' Graves Association, 2 January 1936 The Association also cared for Boer graves

55 Van Heyningen & Merrett, "The healing touch"

After the South African War, the emergence in southern Africa of a nascent South Africanist sentiment that sought to unite British and Afrikaner in a common white South Africanism,<sup>56</sup> saw a greater willingness by members of the various associations to cooperate with Afrikaners. This could prove divisive. While many members of the Guild of Loyal Women accepted the need to move away from their staunchly imperialist outlook; other members did not, and by 1910, the Guild was splitting into two camps, one group continuing to advocate staunchly imperialist values, while the other favoured a more South Africanist approach of encouraging reconciliation between English-speaking and Afrikaans women. The latter believed that by accepting change, the Guild would be better able to fulfil its role in the new South Africa, although even these continued to see the Union in a British context.<sup>57</sup> It was never in doubt that imperial and patriotic principles should remain central to any new association and when, on 24 March 1911, the new association was born, it was named the Victoria League of South Africa. While it was stressed that it would not be a branch of the British Victoria League, its objectives were similar, “to unite its members, without distinction of party in a sense of comradeship, as fellow citizens of the British Empire” and “to promote such a sense of comradeship amongst their fellow subjects in South Africa”. Among its activities were the celebration of Empire and Union Days, the teaching of Empire history, and the distribution of pamphlets and newspapers, particularly in country districts.<sup>58</sup>

The attempts to encourage reconciliation between Afrikaner and English-speaker after the war were also reflected in Freemason circles in a movement to bring about a single Masonic grand lodge, yet ethnic differences remained sufficiently strong to prevent this from happening and the English, Scottish and Irish constitutions continued to remain districts of their ethnic Grand Lodges in the British Isles, while the Afrikaner constitution remained under the Netherlands Grand Lodge.<sup>59</sup>

Attempts to bring about reconciliation between English-speakers and Afrikaners were undermined by the establishment of the Afrikaner National Party in 1914 and the strengthening of Afrikaner nationalism during the First World War. Like English-speaking South Africans generally, the patriotic, cultural and charitable societies threw their weight behind the war effort.<sup>60</sup> Caledonian, Cambrian and Irish societies were as enthusiastic as were the Sons of England and other English societies, while the Freemasons of all three constitutions closely identified themselves with the war effort, arguing that the British cause was synonymous with the principles of Freemasonry: “Patriotism is one of the duties of Freemasonry and the sons of Freemasons have nobly shown that they are ever ready to take up arms to fight for our King and our Country.”<sup>61</sup>

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56 For a discussion of South Africanism, see J Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s”, *South African Historical Journal*, 43, 2000, pp 197-222

57 NASA, TAB, GG 27/239, South African Soldiers’ Graves Association, 2 January 1936, Appendix C, p 24

58 NASA, TAB, GG 27/239, South African Soldiers’ Graves Association, 2 January 1936, Appendix C, p 25; *Pretoria News*, 22 January 1915, “The Victoria League” For information on the British Victoria League, see E Riedi, “Women, Gender and the Promotion of Empire: The Victoria League, 1901-1914”, *The Historical Journal*, 45, 3, pp 569-599

59 See <http://www.grandlodge.co.za/glsahist.html>

60 *Pretoria News*, 22 September 1914, “The War”

61 Natal District (English) Grand Master, D Sanders, in Cooper, *The Freemasons*, pp 126, 130

The various patriotic societies encouraged enlisting and their members served in all theatres of war.<sup>62</sup> In Durban, a Sons of England Defence Rifle Association was formed,<sup>63</sup> while 53 members of the Sons of England were in South West Africa in April 1915 where they opened an Expeditionary Lodge. So great were the numbers of society members who enlisted, that many lodges and branches almost ceased operating. By July 1918, 208 members of the Sons of England had enlisted from Pretoria alone, of whom 13 had been killed.<sup>64</sup> As elsewhere in the Empire, the Scots enlisted in large numbers and the various Caledonian societies set up volunteering stations throughout the Union.<sup>65</sup> The Scots had a traditional involvement with the army in South Africa, Caledonian societies had been instrumental in founding both the Cape Town Highlanders in 1885 and the Transvaal Scottish in 1902.<sup>66</sup> In 1915, when the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade was formed for service on the western front, the companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Regiment were drawn not only from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Transvaal Scottish and the Cape Town Highlanders, but also from Caledonian societies.<sup>67</sup> Scottish Freemason losses were particularly high – of the 39 Scottish lodges in southern Africa, 646 Masons fought, with 61 members of the Transvaal division being killed. For their part, 241 Freemasons from the English Transvaal Division served, of whom 33 lost their lives.<sup>68</sup> Freemason deaths were recorded in all the main campaigns in which South Africans fought. As the Natal District (English) Grand Master, D. Sanders, recorded: “We are heart-stricken at our losses but at the same time we are proud our loved ones died in the Great Cause, that we may continue to enjoy the privilege of our Race to live free and unfettered.”<sup>69</sup> For their part, women’s organisations and women’s branches of men’s associations were involved with fund-raising for charities associated with the war and for the South African and British armed forces.<sup>70</sup>

As was the case elsewhere in the Empire,<sup>71</sup> the associations benefited from the war and their membership surged. Membership of the Sons of England grew from 5 000 in 1914 to 8 000 by 1918.<sup>72</sup> The years after the war also gave a new impetus to the associations, namely to assist maimed members, war widows and orphans. However, they also saw the appearance of a new kind of association, which was

62. *Cape Times*, 13 August 1914, “Ready to serve the empire”; *Pretoria News*, 31 August 1914, Editorial; *Pretoria News*, 22 September 1914, “The war”

63. *Natal Mercury*, 24 November 1914

64. *Pretoria News*, 4 May 1915, “SOE”; *Pretoria News*, 1 July 1918, “Sons of England active service list”

65. *Pretoria News*, 5 August 1915, “South African Scottish”

66. J Hyslop, “Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish: Military ‘Scottishness’ and Social Power in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa”, unpublished paper, British World conference, University of Cape Town, 2002

67. P K A Digby, *Pyramids and poppies: the 1st SA Infantry Brigade in Lybia, France and Flanders, 1915-1919* (Ashanti, Rivonia, 1993), p 19; N Orpen, *The Cape Town Highlanders, 1885-1970* (Cape Town Highlanders, Cape Town, 1970), p 81

68. Cooper, *The Freemasons*, p 127

69. Cooper, *The Freemasons*, p 126

70. See <http://www.raobgle.org.uk/history/ambulances.htm>; *Pretoria News*, 8 November 1915, Editorial

71. For Canada, see P Buckner, “The Long Goodbye: English Canadians and the British World”, in P Buckner and R D Francis, *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary University Press, Calgary, 2005), pp 196-197

72. NASA, TAB, GG 9/41/121, Loyal message from the Grand Lodge of the Sons of England, 1918; The Overseas Club saw a similar increase, see *Pretoria News*, 24 May 1916, “The Overseas Club”

ultimately to attract members from the old-established associations. These were the societies of war veterans, equally committed to assisting the victims of the war, but also dedicated to keeping alive the memory of those who had died during the conflict and to maintaining the camaraderie of the war years.<sup>73</sup> Of these, the two most important were the British Empire Service League (BESL) and the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (the MOTHS).

Founded in 1921 by Smuts and Field-Marshal Haig, the BESL was an imperial, non-sectarian and non-party political association. As elsewhere in the Empire, its purpose in the Union was to make representations to Parliament concerning the welfare and pensions of ex-servicemen and women, to find employment and provide relief for them, and to help secure education for children. Members of its women's auxiliary visited the sick and disabled, and laid wreaths on the graves and memorials of those who had fallen in the war.<sup>74</sup> The League's membership included Afrikaners, as well as English-speaking South Africans. It provided financial and other assistance to disabled ex-servicemen regardless of colour. Like the other patriotic and charitable associations, it was staunchly royalist and committed to strengthening imperial ties.<sup>75</sup> Because of this, and the fact that it was an imperial-wide association, it remained suspect to nationalist-minded Afrikaners. As a result, the BESL never had the political clout of the Canadian Legion of the BESL (later Royal Canadian Legion) or the Australian Returned Servicemen's League (RSC), both of which included politicians of all major parties and played a major role in influencing policies throughout the century.<sup>76</sup>

The MOTHS were founded in Durban in 1927 and by 1930 had nearly 20 000 ex-service members in South Africa alone. Like the BESL, it was fervently royalist and imperialist.<sup>77</sup> Known as the Tin Hat Brotherhood (and to Smuts, himself a MOTH member, as the "Brotherhood of the Springbok"<sup>78</sup>), the MOTHS followed the Masonic system of organising itself into lodges, called shell holes. Each shell hole ran its own affairs and its meetings involved rituals for the initiated and a certain measure of secrecy. While its charitable and welfare work overlapped with those of the BESL and the older associations, its main *raison d'être* was the camaraderie it provided its members. Together with the BESL and the other patriotic societies, the MOTHS played an important role in Remembrance Day and Delville Wood Day ceremonies, both at national and provincial monuments and at the many ceremonies throughout the Union commemorating the dead of the various associations.<sup>79</sup> Despite

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73 Of the Union's small white male population of military age of about 360 000, over 100 000, mostly English-speaking, had served in South African or British units. Of these 8 551 had been killed while a further 10 399 were wounded. Lambert, "Britishness, South Africanness and the 1st World War", p 297

74 *Pretoria News*, 14 July 1939, "Annual Laying of Wreaths". See also *Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa* ..., 24, 1948 (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1949-1950), p 233

75 *Pretoria News*, 17 May 1939, "Ex-servicemen's register"

76 Buckner, "The Long Goodbye", pp 196-200; "British and proud of it! Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia", in J. Arnold (ed), *Out of Empire: the British Dominion of Australia* (Mandarin, Melbourne, 1993), pp 73-78

77 C. A. Evenden, *Old soldiers never die: the story of Moth O* (No publisher, Durban, 1952)

78 *Pretoria News*, 18 December 1939, "Pretoria MOTH Notes"

79 *Pretoria News*, 14 July 1939, "Annual Laying of Wreaths"; *Pretoria News*, 17 July 1939, "Delville Wood Day in Pretoria". None were as grandiose as the bronze and granite memorial erected in Toronto to those members of the Canadian Sons of England who fell in the War – see <http://www.cdli.ca/monuments/on/sons.htm>

the success of the MOTHS, the BESL remained the largest body of ex-servicemen in the Union<sup>80</sup> and attempts in the 1930s and later to form a united ex-servicemen's association were unsuccessful, mainly because of opposition from the MOTHS.<sup>81</sup>

In spite of the impetus that the war had given to the associations, they were faced by many challenges during the interwar years. Important among these challenges was the fact that attempts to promote British emigration to South Africa after the South African War had had very limited success. The growing numerical disparity between the English-speaking and Afrikaner populations caused great concern to the former and in 1920, the centenary year of the 1820 settlement, the 1820 Memorial Settlers Association was founded in Grahamstown in order to promote British immigration to the Union. Although this association differed from the associations discussed in this article in that its emphasis was not on cultural and philanthropic activities, it can be seen as a "patriotic" society, in that its *raison d'être* was to reinforce the British element in the Union and that it attracted the same hostility from Afrikaner nationalists as did associations such as the Sons of England.<sup>82</sup>

Members of the various associations were also apprehensive about the implications for English-speaking South Africa and the Union's connection with Britain by the strengthening of Afrikaner nationalism during and after the war, an apprehension that was justified when Hertzog's Pact Government was elected in 1924. The following year, a bill to replace the Union Jack with a new South African flag was tabled in Parliament. The associations reacted angrily to the bill, reinforcing the government's belief that their loyalty was to Britain, rather than South Africa. The Sons of England, the Caledonian, Cambrian and Cornish societies, as well as the BESL all opposed a new flag, specifically if it did not include the Union Jack. Members of the associations were prominent in national societies formed with the purpose of saving the Union Jack. These included the Unity League of South Africa, the Empire Group of South Africa and the British Patriotic Union, founded in Natal to defend the retention of the Union Jack as the national flag, and whose Durban chairman was also chairman of the city's Caledonian society. In furtherance of their campaign, in 1927 a Coordinating Council of Patriotic Societies in South Africa was formed under the chairmanship of W.H. Pitcher, Grand President of the Sons of England.<sup>83</sup>

Although the Sons of England was no more vocal in their opposition to a new flag than were the Caledonian or other associations, the government singled them out as the main opponents of the bill. Hertzog saw their opposition as a challenge which had to be taken up. The Sons were labelled an unSouth African society and policemen were barred from belonging to the association.<sup>84</sup> They were blamed both for English-speaking opposition to a new flag and for the fact that the South African Party supported the retention of the Union Jack. Hertzog's antipathy to the Sons was

80 *Pretoria News*, 4 April 1939, "Tribute to Work of BESL"

81 See NASA, TAB, GG 3/5034, The President, BESL to the Governor General, 11 November 1930

82 For a discussion of the Society, see K. Fedorowich, "Anglicization and the Politicization of British Immigration to South Africa, 1899-1929", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 19, 2, pp 226-246

83 H. Saker, *The South African flag controversy, 1925-1928* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), pp 35, 113; P. Thompson, *Natalians First: Separatism in South Africa, 1909-1961* (Southern, Johannesburg, 1990), pp 32, 41

84 Thompson, *Natalians First*, p 33

not assuaged when, in 1927, the government had to accept a compromise flag bill incorporating the Union Jack in the national flag and continuing recognition of the Union Jack as a national flag.<sup>85</sup> His anger increased in 1934 when, during the debates on the Status Acts, the Sons of England lodges in Natal sent telegrams of approval to the South African Party opponents of the Acts who split away from the Party to form the staunchly pro-British Dominion Party.<sup>86</sup> The Sons were not alone in being singled out, however. The 1930s also saw the beginning of a concerted Afrikaner attack on Freemasonry.<sup>87</sup> Despite this, during the Voortrekker centenary celebrations in 1938, various associations held out olive branches to the Afrikaners – the Sons of England sending a message of congratulations and goodwill, while the BESL presented a Bible to be carried on Cape Town's ox wagon. These, and other gestures of goodwill from English-speaking South Africans, tended to be dismissed with disdain.<sup>88</sup>

The successful campaign to retain the Union Jack was the last time that the associations were able to play a significant role in South African affairs. In addition to being regarded with suspicion by the Government, they now also found their access to the British establishment in the Union weakened. As seen, they had enjoyed vice-regal patronage, but this began to change from the mid-1920s. The adoption by Britain and the Dominions in 1926 of the Balfour Declaration asserting the complete equality of the Dominions with the United Kingdom, altered the position of Dominion Governors-General, removing their political role as agents of the British government and making them purely ceremonial representatives of the Crown in each Dominion. In the Union this placed the Earl of Athlone and his successor, the Earl of Clarendon, in a difficult position, as they represented the King in a Dominion governed by anti-imperial Afrikaner nationalists. In his first year in the Union, 1924, Athlone had granted his patronage to a number of patriotic, cultural and charitable associations including the Navy League, the BESL, various Freemason and Sons of England lodges, and the Cape Cambrian Society.<sup>89</sup> From 1925, however, he began declining his patronage of association functions and, because of Hertzog's antipathy, particularly of those of the Sons of England. Although links with the various associations were not completely severed,<sup>90</sup> they became more tenuous. In 1925, for example, Athlone was advised by his staff not to grant the Sons of England's Nongoma Lodge permission to change its name to Athlone Lodge, because, "though most laudable in its aims", it was a sectional society.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, when in South Africa in 1925, the Prince of Wales was advised not to receive addresses from Freemason lodges.<sup>92</sup> Clarendon was even more careful not to upset Afrikaner susceptibilities. In 1934, his secretary, Colonel Hore-Ruthven, advised the Duchess of York to decline a request to become patroness of the Sons of England

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85 Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, King George V Archive [with appreciation for the gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen for the use of this and other material from the Royal Archives], FF3/ATH, Hertzog to Athlone, 6 July 1926; Thompson, *Natalians First*, p 33

86 Thompson, *Natalians First*, p 108.

87 Cooper, *The Freemasons*, p 153

88 *Pretoria News*, 17 December 1938, "SOE message to Dr Jansen"; Bickford-Smith (ed), *Cape Town*, p 79; Lambert, "An identity threatened", p 65

89 NASA, TAB, GG 1/52, 1924; 1/64, 1924; 1/116,136, 1924; 1/189, 1924; 1/81, 1924

90 In 1936, for example, Lady Clarendon was patroness of the Sons of England Womens' Association. See NASA, TAB, GG 3/5306, Secretary, Sons of England Women's Association to HRH, the Duchess of Kent, 24 February 1936

91 NASA, TAB, GG 19/902, Minute, H L. Smith to Governor-General, 1 December 1925

92 Cooper, *The Freemasons*, p 158

Womens' Association as "in view of the difficult situation out here, it is probably best not to encourage people who fan the flames of racialism either English or Dutch ... I feel one must be cautious."<sup>93</sup>

In 1937, Sir Patrick Duncan was appointed the Union's first South African Governor-General. The associations greeted Duncan's appointment with mixed feelings. Some were concerned that the appointment would undermine the status of the King's representative and therefore endanger the position of the Union in the Commonwealth. Others, particularly the Federated Caledonian Societies, welcomed Duncan's appointment as he had been a member of the Caledonian Society since his arrival in South Africa in 1903.<sup>94</sup> The Guild of Loyal Women (Pretoria Branch) also welcomed Duncan's appointment, because of his long association with the Guild.<sup>95</sup> Duncan, however, was even more cautious than his predecessors and only extended his patronage to the BESL, although he was prepared to advise the Queen to accept the patronage of the Federated Caledonian Society.<sup>96</sup>

As a result of government hostility and vice-regal caution, by the late 1930s, the members of the various associations, like English-speakers generally, felt that their position in the Union was under threat.<sup>97</sup> As bodies that had been nurtured within an imperial ethos, they found it difficult adapting to the new South Africa in which the imperial was giving way to a specifically South African civic culture and in which they tended to be seen as outdated remnants of the high tide of empire. Their main concern by this time, however, lay outside the Union. The clouds of war gathering in Europe were threatening to involve Britain and the Commonwealth in a devastating war. As the clouds thickened, so the associations prepared for war and actively encouraged recruiting.<sup>98</sup> As early as March 1939, the BESL was registering ex-servicemen on a national register; by May 1 000 men had registered in Pretoria alone.<sup>99</sup> The MOTHS also played an important part in recruiting and, after the outbreak of war in September 1939, raised a MOTH battalion.<sup>100</sup> At the initiative of the Transvaal and Pretoria Caledonian societies, a new Scottish regiment, the Pretoria Highlanders, was formed in September, while in 1940 a regimental pipe band was formed by the enlistment of the whole band of the Pretoria Caledonian Society.<sup>101</sup> In August 1939, the South African Women's Auxiliary Service (SAWAS) was formed as an umbrella body for a wide variety of women's organisations, including the

93 NASA, TAB, GG 3/5245, Secretary to the Governor General to Secretary to HRH, the Duchess of York, 14 June 1934 See also NASA, TAB, GG 19/1104, Secretary to the Governor-General to President, Navy League of South Africa, 25 September 1934

94 NASA, TAB, GG 19/1138, Secretary, Federated Caledonian Societies, to Governor General, 17 April 1937; *Pretoria News*, 2 November 1903, "Pretoria Caledonian Society"

95 NASA, TAB, GG 19/1138, Secretary, Guild of Loyal Women (Pretoria Branch) to Sir Patrick and Lady Duncan, 4 April 1937

96 NASA, TAB, GG 19/1268, Patronage; Mackenzie with Dalziel, *The Scots in South Africa*, p 247

97 See J Lambert, "An Identity Threatened: White English-Speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South Africanism, 1934-1939", *Kleio*, 37, 2005, pp 50-70

98 *Pretoria News*, 5 August 1939, "Scotsmen and Afrikaners"

99 *The Springbok: Official Organ of the British Empire Service League (SA)*, 22, 2, January 1940, p 3, Editorial; *Pretoria News*, 24 March 1939, "National Defence"; *Pretoria News*, 17 May 1939, "Ex-servicemen's Register"

100 *Pretoria News*, 18 December 1939, "Pretoria MOTH Notes"; *Pretoria News*, 4 March 1940, "Pretoria MOTH Notes"

101 See <http://www.regiments.org/regiments/southafrica/volmil/inf/PretorHd.htm>



British Empire Service League, the Navy League Wartime Workers, Sons of England Women's Association, the Victoria League, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and numerous Jewish women's organisations. During the war, SAWAS coordinated the entertainment of convoys and organised comforts sent to servicemen.<sup>102</sup>

From September 1939, the various associations threw themselves into fund-raising activities. Much of the money raised was for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, and also for victims of air raids in Britain. In 1943, for example, the Sons of England sent 30 000 garments to air raid victims as part of the Bundles for Britain campaign.<sup>103</sup> In addition, more stress was placed on service to South Africa than had been the case during the First World War.<sup>104</sup> The BESL, for example, officially renamed itself the South African Legion of the BESL. There were also frequent calls for cooperation between members of the associations and Afrikaners.<sup>105</sup> The banning of members of the civil service belonging to the Ossewabrandwag and threatened action against the Broederbond by the Government, however, saw the Nationalists attack the Sons of England and the Caledonian societies, labelling them un-South African secret societies and a threat to South Africa.<sup>106</sup> Such assertions were ridiculed, the editor of the *Pretoria News* contrasting the "bald heads and portly figures, the insignia of office in a charitable concern" with the "youthful, vigorous, aggressive-looking Ossewabrandwagers marching in columns of three".<sup>107</sup>

As elsewhere in the Commonwealth,<sup>108</sup> the war years, and their immediate aftermath, saw a steady increase in the membership of the associations and particularly of the MOTHs and the South African Legion. Both societies benefited from the large numbers of ex-servicemen who joined their ranks. By the early 1950s, over 100 000 white men were MOTHs and scores of new shell holes were established bearing Second World War names.<sup>109</sup> By 1947, the Legion had 220 branches and 101 branches of its women's auxiliary. Its monthly publication, *The Springbok*, had a circulation of 40 000 numbers.<sup>110</sup> All the societies were involved in raising funds for building memorials to the dead, while the large number of war widows and orphans, and of disabled soldiers requiring support, gave them a new lease of life and ensured that they were increasingly involved in fund-raising activities for their members. And, in the aftermath of the war, as the reality of Britain's economic plight sank in, so the associations redoubled their efforts to provide assistance to Britain through funds such as the People of Britain Fund.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, they realised that Britain's difficulties provided an opportunity to boost the number of South Africans of British stock. The 1820 Memorial Settlers Association and the Caledonian societies were on

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102 Bickford-Smith (ed), *Cape Town*, p 96

103 *Pretoria News*, 21 April 1943, "SOE War Work"

104 *Pretoria News*, 26 March 1940, "SOE Women's Auxiliary"

105 *Pretoria News*, 5 August 1939, "Scotsmen and Afrikaners", *Pretoria News*, 26 March 1940, "SOE Women's Auxiliary"

106 *Pretoria News*, 2 October 1944, Editorial

107 *Pretoria News*, 25 March 1941, "The Ban is not a Joke"

108 Buckner, *The Long Goodbye*, p 200

109 Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, pp 179-183

110 Evenden, *Old soldiers never die*, p 269; *Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa ...*, 24, 1948 (Government Printer, Pretoria, 1949-1950), p 233

111 *Pretoria News*, 2 February 1946, "Scots Rally to the 'People of Britain' Funds"; UCTL, M and D, SoE Collection, B7, Good Hope Lodge regular meeting, 13 August 1948

the forefront of encouraging and supporting immigration to the Union from the United Kingdom. Despite an upsurge in the number of immigrants in 1947 and 1948, the Nationalist victory in the General Election of 1948 effectively ended the prospects of large-scale British immigration and associations such as the 1820 Memorial Settlers Association tended to lose their *raison d'être*.<sup>112</sup>

The Nationalist victory and the concerted attempts made by the new Government until 1961 to marginalize English-speaking South Africans and eradicate everything British in the Union, made it extremely difficult for the associations to maintain their position in the country. The situation was now radically different to what it had been even in the 1930s, and the associations found themselves impotent in face of the changes taking place. A Nationalist Governor-General, E.G. Jansen, was appointed from 1951. He and his staff were at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to the associations and snubbed them on every possible occasion.<sup>113</sup> Unlike during the flag campaign of the 1920s, the associations found themselves unable to do more than protest at the changes taking place, such as the removal of the prayer for the Queen at the opening of the Senate in 1955<sup>114</sup> and the abolition of the Union Jack and *God save the Queen* in 1957. The associations were particularly outraged at the steps taken by Defence Minister Erasmus to remove royal and imperial insignia from the regiments. Caledonian societies protested angrily, but in vain, at Erasmus's treatment of the Highland regiments, his attempts to ban kilts and, failing this, refusal to subsidise the costs of Highland uniforms.<sup>115</sup>

With Empire Day abolished as a public holiday and other commemorations and celebrations such as Delville Wood, Remembrance Sundays and the monarch's official birthday downplayed, the associations found their more public ceremonies reduced in importance. Empire Day services had been held at Queen Victoria's statues in the major English-speaking cities since the beginning of the century. Although associations such as the Sons of England and the Caledonian and Cambrian Societies continued laying wreaths at these statues, the last services in Cape Town and Durban seem to have been held in 1957, and were possibly abandoned because of the small turnout.<sup>116</sup>

With the growing threat to the constitution in the 1950s, support for more overtly political leagues, such as the Springbok Legion and the Torch Commando, could have been expected, yet both peaked in the early 1950s, after which their membership declined rapidly. UNESSA and the Anti-Republic League, founded in 1959, never attracted more than a small handful of supporters. In 1958, English-speaking apathy was attacked by the chairman of UNESSA, Peter Parnwell:

112 *Pretoria News*, 26 September 1946, "Caledonians Want Scots Immigrants" For efforts by the 1820 Memorial Settlers Association to encourage immigration after the war, see *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* VI (Nasou, Cape Town, 1972), p 32

113 This was particularly the case with new organisations which were openly anti-nationalist such as the UNESSA. The organisations' attacks on the position of the Governor General became increasingly bitter, particularly once it was announced that Swart would succeed Jansen NASA, TAB, GG 3/5869, Secretary to Governor General to National Secretary, UNESSA, 20 July 1959, National Secretary to HM The Queen, 11 December 1959

114 NASA, TAB, GG 23/806, President, Sons of England, to Governor General, 25 April 1955

115 NASA, TAB, GG 3/5869, National Secretary, UNESSA, to Minister of Defence, 15 May 1959; Defence Force Documentation Centre, Pretoria, Adjutant-General, AG 14, "Malan's Africa Corps"; Hyslop, "Cape Town Highlanders", p 18

116 *Natal Mercury*, 25 May 1957, "Empire Day Service at Queen Victoria's Statue"

Are we, 1,000,000 of us content to go on doing nothing  
This is our country It is our home We are here, by right of settlement, by conquest,  
and by the value of our achievements  
Here, if we can regain our self-respect, we have every right to remain  
But if we wish to survive we must be determined to fight<sup>117</sup>

There was little inclination to fight, however. English-speakers made one last rally in 1960 when almost unanimously they voted against the establishment of a republic. Their marginalization and withdrawal from public and political life from the 1950s was accompanied by a declining interest in the associations, membership of which shrank rapidly. In an attempt to reverse the decline, a number of associations focused their attention on educational activities. The Freemasons, for example, set up the South African Masonic Education Fund and offered school and university scholarships.<sup>118</sup> The Sons of England established the South African Council for English Education in 1955 to preserve and promote English education in the Union and also funded education bursaries for English-speaking education students.<sup>119</sup>

The associations were fighting a losing battle, however, and by the 1960s many branches of associations were closing. By the 1970s there was a tendency for English-speakers to concentrate their educational and cultural efforts on the 1820 Settlers Foundation, established in Grahamstown.<sup>120</sup>

Years of indoctrination by radio and in schools had had their toll on the associations and it proved difficult for them to attract new and young members. As is hardly surprising, the ex-servicemen's organisations, the South African Legion and the MOTHs, failed to attract support from a new generation of South African soldiers. Despite officially accepting the constitutional change of 1961 and trying to cooperate with Afrikaner institutions, it proved impossible for the Sons of England to adapt itself to a republican South Africa. Despite its involvement with education, its membership dropped to less than 1 500 by 1965 and one after the other its lodges closed, but not before it, together with the Freemasons and the Afrikaner Broederbond, had been subjected to a ludicrous commission of enquiry into secret organisations.<sup>121</sup> Although a couple of branches clung tenaciously on until the end of the century, each had only a small handful of elderly members. The Freemason constitutions fared much better and by the mid-1970s the English, Irish and Scottish Grand Lodges had a membership of 50 000 compared to 4 500 members of the old Netherlands Grand Lodge, now reformed as the Grand Lodge of South Africa. Despite this impressive figure, many members were no longer active.<sup>122</sup> A small core of members maintain lodges of the Cambrian and Irish Associations and of the

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117 *Sunday Times*, 31 August 1958, "A Story to Remember"

118 Cooper, *The Freemasons*, p 153

119 E Jenkins, "The changing fortunes of English in South Africa", *SACEE News*, 9, 1, January 2005, p 4

120 The Foundation has now been renamed the Grahamstown Foundation and remains English-speaking South Africa's main educational and cultural association – see [www.foundation.org.za](http://www.foundation.org.za)

121 NASA, TAB, PM, 1/4/412, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Secret Organisations, RP 20/1965*, p 3.

122 NASA, TAB, PM, 1/4/412, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Secret Organisations, RP 20/1965*, p 12; <http://www.grandlodge.co.za/glsahist.html>; [http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/freemasons\\_apartheid.html](http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/freemasons_apartheid.html).

Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes,<sup>123</sup> while the Federated Caledonian Society of Southern Africa continues to draw support from South Africans of Scottish descent.<sup>124</sup>

Probably the most important reason for the decline of the associations resulted from the fact that the associations had tried to maintain British habits and customs, a British way of life, in South Africa. Membership had rested on the acceptance of values and beliefs that most English-speaking South Africans had held in common until the middle of the twentieth century. By mid-century, few English-speaking South Africans had been born in Britain and, as the emotional ties that had bound the group to the British Isles frayed, these habits, customs, values and beliefs meant less to them. In short, they had become South African, rather than British. By the 1960s, as they began trying to adapt to the new republican South Africa, so associations that were steeped in British traditions found it difficult to adapt and lost members.<sup>125</sup>

Important reasons for the decline in membership of the associations also included the declining need for social help by English-speaking South Africans in the second half of the century. As the overall standard of living of the group improved, so the associations lost one of their most important *raison d'être*.<sup>126</sup> Declining interest in the associations went hand in hand with the drop in church attendance that also marked English-speaking society. As mentioned above, St Patrick's Anglican Church in Pietermaritzburg had enjoyed strong ties with both the Sons of England and the Freemasons. By the end of the twentieth century, not only had these ties virtually disappeared, but the church itself was in danger of closure.<sup>127</sup>

Associations only appear to have attracted members if they were able to offer something that men and women could not find elsewhere. The Caledonians are a case in point. By concentrating on Scottish dancing and supporting pipe bands and Highland gatherings, they cater for the continuing interest, not only amongst Scottish South Africans, in Scottish traditions. The Federated Caledonian Society of Southern Africa remains a well-structured national association, holding annual congresses and is strong enough to offer support to the Cambrian and Irish societies.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, the Cambrian societies are associated with a number of Welsh male voice choirs.<sup>129</sup> Where associations continue to work for charity, they have survived by including the wider community in their charitable work.<sup>130</sup>

The decline and disappearance of South Africa's English-speaking patriotic, cultural and charitable associations, however, reflects what has happened throughout the Commonwealth. Although associations like the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire continue to survive in Canada, and the Royal Overseas League and the

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123 See <http://www.grand-lodge-south-africa.net/firms.com/grand-lodge.htm>

124 See <http://www.geocities.com/capetowncallies/>

125 Despite a number of attempts to make themselves more South African, the Sons of England were never able to gain the acceptance of their members of the need for change

126 For example, even those orphanages and children's homes which associations had maintained, began to close in the 1970s. See UCTL, M and D, SoE Collection, B5 3, Magna Charta-Lord French Lodge, Report of the 78th session of the Grand Lodge, 10 September 1976

127 Nuttall, *St Patrick's Church*, p 11

128 Information received from Rose MacMillan, Lady President of the Federated Caledonian Society of Southern Africa, 16 March 2009

129 See <http://www.cmca.co.za>

130 See *Rekord Oos*, 28 Julie 2006, "Buffalo's donate money for charity", p 30

Royal Commonwealth Society in Australia, their membership is now tiny and the Sons of England closed its last Canadian lodge as early as 1976.<sup>131</sup> In part this reflects the social changes that have occurred throughout the English-speaking world – men no longer look to clubs and associations for recreation, while most women now have careers and have less time for voluntary work.

Equally important, the decline of the associations, as much in the other “old Dominions” as in South Africa, reflect the decline of Britain’s position in the world, the disappearance of the Empire and the disintegration of the British World. Associations that drew their support and inspiration from the imperial mother country could not but find it difficult, often impossible, to adapt to a world in which imperialism had been abandoned by that country.

### **Abstract**

As part of on-going research on the history of white English-speaking South Africans, this article examines the role played by a number of patriotic, cultural and charitable associations in the lives of English-speakers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Most of the associations were transplanted to South Africa from the United Kingdom or from Canada and they were firmly grounded in the British and imperial ethos that was so marked a feature of the group. The article examines the establishment and growth of the associations and shows how they flourished during the years of British paramouncy in the sub-continent and during times of crisis such as the two World Wars. It then examines the reasons for a decline in association membership from the middle of the twentieth century.

### **Opsomming**

#### **Die behoud van ’n Britse lewenswyse: Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners se Patriotiese, Kulturele en Liefdadigheidsverenigings**

As deel van voortgesette navorsing oor die geskiedenis van wit, Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners, ondersoek hierdie artikel die rol wat ’n aantal patriotiese, kulturele en liefdadigheidsverenigings in die negentiende en twintigste eeu in die lewens van Engelssprekendes gespeel het. Die meeste van hierdie verenigings is uit die Verenigde Koninkryk of Kanada na Suid-Afrika oorgeplant, en hulle fondasies was deeglik in die Britse en imperiale etos gevestig – ’n kenmerkende eienskap van die groep. Die artikel ondersoek die stigting en groei van die verenigings, en dui aan tot watter mate hulle gedurende die jare van Britse oppergesag oor die sub-kontinent, asook gedurende krisistye soos die twee Wêreldoorloë, gedy het. Dit ondersoek dan ook redes waarom lidmaatskap van die verenigings van die middel van die twintigste eeu afgeneem het.

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131 See Buchner, “The Long Goodbye”, p 201; communication from Jim Davidson, Melbourne, 4 June 2006

**Key words**

British Empire Service League; Britishness; brotherhood; Caledonian societies; charity; culture; English-speaking South Africans; First World War; Freemasons; Guild of Loyal Women; imperialism; MOTHS; patriotic, cultural and charitable associations; patriotism; Protestantism; Second World War; Sons of England; South Africanism; sport.

**Sleutelwoorde**

British Empire Service League; Britsheid; broederskap; Caledoniese Verenigings; Eerste Wêreldoorlog; Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners; Guild of Loyal Women; imperialisme; kultuur; liefdadigheid; MOTH's; patriotiese, kulturele en liefdadigheidsorganisasies; patriotisme; Protestantisme; Sons of England; sport; Suid-Afrikanisme; Tweede Wêreldoorlog; Vrymesselaars.