

Land and Empire: Politics and the British Aluminium Company

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Introduction

Historically national aluminium producers enjoyed a close relationship with the state.¹ Given the strategic importance of the metal, especially from the First World War onwards (above all with the expansion of military aircraft programmes), as well as the oligopolistic character and closed nature of the industry – dominated as it was for much of the twentieth-century by the almost country club atmosphere amongst the ‘pioneers’ and ‘first movers’ in the industry – this is unsurprising. Equally evident, in view of this highly energy-intensive industry’s continued reliance on hydro-electricity as its main source of power – and the associated issues over land use, regional development, as well as controversies over the impact on the aesthetics of landscape and surrounding environment – is that the industry would be politically embroiled on this front too. In a departure from much of the existing literature about the native British industry, this paper explores the social and political activities of the British Aluminium Company (BACo), the

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¹ George D. Smith, *From Monopoly to Competition: The Transformations of Alcoa, 1888 – 1986* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [hereafter CUP], 1988); Ivan Grinberg and Florence Hachez-Leroy (eds.), *Industrialisation et sociétés en Europe occidentale de la fin du XIXe siècle à nos jours: L’Âge de l’aluminium* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1997).

largest UK producer of primary aluminium for much of the twentieth-century.² In so doing, it addresses questions over the existence of a ‘gentlemanly capitalist’ order, business-government relations and Britain’s ‘Warfare State’ where it offers a case study that may equally cast light on other vital raw materials, such as steel, rubber, dyestuffs, optical glass to name a few – regional development and environmental impact.³ It directly addresses themes about how aims other than profit influence the behaviour of businessmen and the firm; how the inter-relationship between business and other organisations have affected the firm; and how business leaders have used non-profit making activities to advance their own entrepreneurial activities through measures to create goodwill. The paper is based on research conducted between 2006 and 2009 drawing on company and government records, private papers,

² Founded in May 1894, the British Aluminium Company (BACo) acquired the British and Colonial rights for the Héroult electrolytic process for the reduction of aluminium. They established their first domestic reduction works (smelter) at Foyers in 1896, followed by Kinlochleven (1907), Lochaber (1929), and latterly at Invergordon (1971-1981), all in the Scottish Highlands. They rapidly vertically integrated backwards into bauxite mining and the production of aluminium oxide (alumina, from which aluminium is reduced), as well as (unusually for many of the ‘first movers’ in this industry) into semi-fabrication. By the 1920s, they were the largest foreign direct investor in the Norwegian aluminium industry, and by the mid-1950s, they had operations all over the world. In 1959, they were taken over by Reynolds Metals and Tube Investments. In 1982 British Aluminium merged with Alcan Aluminium UK, who were subsequently taken over by Rio Tinto in 2007. For example: Ludovic Cailluet, ‘The British aluminium industry, 1945-80s: chronicles of a death foretold?’, *Accounting, Business and Financial History* 11 (2001), 79-97; For exceptions, see: Niall G. MacKenzie, ‘Be careful what you wish for.’; Andrew Perchard, ‘Sculpting the Garden of Eden’: Patronage, community & the British Aluminium Company in the Scottish Highlands, 1895-1982’, *Cahiers d’histoire de l’aluminium*, 38-39, (2007), 11-32; *Aluminiumville: Metal, the British Government & the Scottish Highlands* (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2010); ‘Of the highest Imperial importance: British strategic priorities and the politics of colonial bauxite, c.1916-c.1958’ in R. Gendron, M. Ingulstad, and E. Storli (eds.) *Bauxite, State and Society in the 20th Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), forthcoming.

³ Peter J. Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism 1688 – 2000*, this edition (Harlow: Longman, 2002); David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920 – 1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP (CUP), 2005); George C. Peden, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy: From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen Bombs* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007).

parliamentary papers, press reports, and oral history interviews undertaken by the author.

Land and Empire

In a private letter to a foreman at the British Aluminium Company's Kinlochleven reduction works in February 1920, William (later Sir William) Murray Morrison, BACo's then general manager, declared:

I am deeply touched by the affectionate appreciation extended to me by my fellow workers, many of whom have long and honourable records in the Same Service. To have been so closely identified with a great British Industry, to have struggled through its pioneer stages and to have seen it grow to be a vital "Key" Industry in the country is a record I am exceedingly proud of. Without the loyal co-operation of everyone employed by the Company its advancement to the position it now occupies would not have been possible. Community of interest has been an outstanding feature in our organisation and no man could have had more whole hearted help and support than it has been my good fortune to experience. The relationship that has existed between my colleagues and myself has always been of the most friendly nature which has made our work together a very real pleasure to me... I desire to express my pleasure in having your signature along with that of so many other friends and to assure you of my heartfelt thanks for your participation in this most kindly recognition of the work of a quarter of a century.⁴

Morrison was born into an affluent middle-class family in Inverness (the capital of the Scottish Highlands) in 1873, and studied natural philosophy at the University of Edinburgh before training as an engineer at the Royal Technical College in Glasgow and under the tutelage of

⁴ Letter from William Murray Morrison to Alexander Fraser, 5 February 1920. I am grateful to Alexander Fraser's grandson for sight of this authenticated letter.

Lord Kelvin.⁵ For over half a century, Morrison was a leading light within British Aluminium.⁶ Like his erstwhile teacher Lord Kelvin (who joined BACo's board of directors in 1899 and served until his death in 1907), Morrison became a figure of heroic stature in the company's literature. Indeed, though not the 'founder' of the company, it was Morrison who was to become the immortal *pater familias* for BACo.⁷ His potency as a symbol for the company was only further enshrined by the fact that he was a highlander and a former student of Kelvin's. Equally significant, at regional and local level in the Highlands, as well as national levels, was the access, through his uncle Charles Innes (who acted as British Aluminium's Highland solicitor) as the Conservative and Unionist Party agent in the area, to leading landowning families and clan chieftains, such as the Lovats of the Clan Fraser (who held lands in Inverness-shire, some of them acquired by BACo), the Camerons of Lochiel, and Mackintosh of Mackintosh.⁸

Discernible in both the content and tone of Morrison's letter are a number of symbols that recurred in the public utterances of BACo's directors, and in the company literature, including the company history. These embody the underlying themes of duty, whether in the service of the British Empire, the company or the Highlands. In part, they reflect the personal politics of directors and the social milieux from which they

⁵ Louis Stott, 'Morrison, Sir (William) Murray (1873–1948)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.webfeat.lib.ed.ac.uk/view/article/40348>, [Accessed 21 September 2006].

⁶ For a full history of the company, as well as their impact on the Highlands, see the forthcoming: *Aluminiumville: Metal, the British Government & the Scottish Highlands*.

⁷ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, third edition (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2004), 15–17.

⁸ Ewen A. Cameron, 'Conservatism and Radicalism in the Highland Press: the Strange Cases of the *Highlander* and the *Northern Chronicle*', *Northern Scotland* 27 (2007), 117–129; Stott, 'Morrison'.

were drawn. Partly, they were deployed – like other motifs, visible in the personal correspondence of and public speeches by leading company figures, such as Morrison and Lord Kelvin, discussed later on in this paper – as a means of garnering public and political support for the British Aluminium at local, regional and national levels. Increasingly these reflected the ‘behavioral lock-in’ of the company to the state – further compounded by the recruitment of retired senior military officers, and later on civil servants, to the board – and the ‘feedback process’, with local pressure and sensitivities prompting the company to adapt and subsume certain shared ‘sites of memory’ in Highland history into their organizational narrative. First amongst these themes, and central to the organization that BACo became, was Morrison’s description of the company as the ‘Service’ and his invocation of a ‘community of interests’, bound by ‘loyal cooperation’. This was a theme to which Morrison’s colleague and company chairman, Robert Cooper returned in his speech to shareholders in 1934, in his reference to the ‘traditions and enthusiasm of the service.’ Second was the reference to British Aluminium as ‘a great British industry’, one that was a ‘vital “Key” Industry in the country’. Finally, Morrison’s reference to the company’s ‘pioneer stages’ is of relevance to their portrayal of the company as a progressive force saving the Highlands, steeped in the philosophy of ‘social imperialists’.⁹

⁹ BACo, *Annual Report & Accounts*, 1934, GUA, UGD 347/21/19/2; William Barnes, Myles Gartland and Martin Stack, ‘Old Habits Die Hard: Path Dependency and Behavioral Lock-in’, *Journal of Economic Issues* XXXVIII (June 2004), 372; Douglas C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 7; Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The construction of the French past, Vol. 3: Symbols* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); For discussions of the ‘social imperialists’, see Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 675; Lawrence J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to the Post-Imperial World* (London: IB Tauris, 2008), 5 – 10, 148 – 159.

Empire and national defence

Though BACo deployed the issue of national defence in order to stimulate the market for their product in advance of WWI and were well connected to armaments production through their first managing-director and founder, Emmanuel Ristori, and supplied the Army and Navy it was to be the Great War that transformed their relationship with the state.¹⁰ Quite aside from the military and civil service career pathways of a number of directors, between 1915 and 1953, BACo spent around 18 years under direct government controls, and during both world wars, a number of the company's senior managers were seconded to wartime ministries. Less than a year before Morrison's letter to Fraser, British Aluminium had emerged from wartime government controls which had been imposed progressively between August 1915 and 1917, and dismantled in March 1919 with a number of concessions and commitments exacted from government, as a result of the political brinkmanship of Andrew Wilson Tait (BACo's chairman) and Morrison (by then general manager) who built alliances with parties within the metropolitan British government who were actively promoting an imperial minerals policy, notably the metals controller, Sir Cecil Budd.*

¹⁰ Prior to forming British Aluminium in May 1894, the company's first managing-director Emmanuel Ristori (1857–1911) had been Head of Ammunition at Nordenfeldt Guns, and had worked with Alfred Nobel on explosives: Register of applicants for membership of the Institution of Civil Engineers, 1888–Dr Emmanuel Ristori, Institute of Civil Engineers Library; *Ninety-second Annual General Meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society*, February 1912, 251-2; J. T. W. Echewari, 'Aluminium and some of its uses', *Journal of the Institute of Metals* I (1909), 146.

* Tait and Morrison were joined by fellow director, Ernest Edward Sawyer, who worked for the Ministry of Munitions in France, Italy and Switzerland during the conflict. Though there is no paper trail to fully establish a link, it seems likely that it was Sawyer who alerted Tait to the opening on AIAG Neuhausen's board, leading to Tait's attempts to gain a foothold in the continental European aluminium industry by getting the

Arising from wartime shortages of the metal as demand grew in response to the increasing expansion of the Entente powers' military aircraft programmes high North American prices for the metal, and tensions with US producer Alcoa (the Aluminium Company of America), officials within a number of key wartime ministries became convinced of the need to support the development of the native industry politically and financially. This was justified on the grounds of security of supply in the event of another conflict, and strongly underlined by the experience in light of the problems of financing the war and exchange rates that Britain had faced as the exchequer for the Entente powers. Both Tait (a veteran political broker, as one of the founders of the Federation of British Industries) and Morrison were on hand, as members of and witnesses to two wartime committees commissioned to look into the post-war position of the non-ferrous metals industry to further encourage this and ensure the maximum political capital be gained for BACo from this. The Board of Trade's Departmental Committee on the Non-Ferrous Metals Trade, and the Minister of Reconstruction's own advisory committee on aluminium (reporting in 1917 and 1918 respectively), both concluded that aluminium be denoted as a 'key industry', and political support be provided for its expansion.¹¹ Culturally, the war exercised a profound effect on the industry, and British Aluminium in particular. Like many British businessmen, Tait and Morrison were brought into wartime service after the abandonment

British Government to insist on representation on the board of this Swiss concern, already compromised because of the German dominance of its board and its supplies to the Central Powers. See *Aluminiumville* for details: 'Obituary: Mr. E. E. Sawyer', *The Times*, 17 April 1937, 16.

¹¹ Perchard, *Aluminiumville*, chapter 2; See also the forthcoming: Idem, 'Of the highest Imperial importance': British strategic priorities and the politics of colonial bauxite, c.1915-1958' in R. Gendron, M. Ingulstad and E. Storli (eds.), *Bauxite, State and Society in the 20th Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010).

of the ‘business as usual’ approach to the war economy after the stark realities of the military deadlock on the western front and the so-called ‘shells crisis’ of May 1915. The effect of wartime service, according to one of the most insightful studies of the Ministry of Munitions was that these men of enterprise became: ‘disillusioned with free market competition at home and abroad and favoured co-operation in industry, mergers and large-scale organisation.’¹² Industry leaders were also taken in, to some degree, by coalition Prime Minister, and former Minister of Munitions, David Lloyd George’s assurances that the value of ‘state action, state help, state encouragement, and state promotion’ would be learnt. As experience showed, the reality was somewhat different to the rhetoric. The blurring of public and private spheres was again resurrected during WWII and its immediate aftermath. For example, Lord Beaverbrook – the Canadian newspaper magnate and Churchill’s wartime aircraft production supremo – used the Ministry of Munitions as the template for the Ministry of Aircraft Production (in which the light metals control was based).¹³ Furthermore, at the close and immediate aftermath of WWI, British Aluminium became further linked in with imperial interests, through two of Budd’s brainchildren, the Imperial Minerals Resource Board (IMRB) and the British Metal Corporation (the

¹² Chris J. Wrigley, ‘The Ministry of Munitions: An Innovative Department’ and John Turner, ‘The Rise and Fall of ‘Business as Usual’ in Kathleen Burk (ed.), *War and the State: The Transformation of British Government, 1914-1919* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 7–31, 32 and 52; For background, see: Gerd Hardach, *The First World War 1914-1915*, this edition (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1987), *passim*; Hew Strachan, *Financing the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), *passim*; George C. Peden, *Arms, Economics and British Strategy: From Dreadnoughts to Hydrogen Bombs* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 49-97.

¹³ Richard H. Tawney, ‘The abolition of economic controls, 1918-1921’, *Economic History Review* XIII (1943), 11; Sir Raymond Streat, ‘Government Consultation with Industry’, *Public Administration* 37, (1959), 1; Wrigley ‘The Ministry of Munitions: an Innovative Department’, 32-56; John Turner, ‘The Politics of Business’ in J. Turner (ed.), *Businessmen and Politics: Studies of Business Activity in British Politics 1900-1945* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 7.

latter a vehicle for ensuring pursuit of, ‘a self-contained British Empire in metals’, of which Tait was a director), as well as through Andrew Tait’s membership of the Company Law Amendment Committee [the Wrenbury Committee] in 1918, charged by the President of the Board of Trade, with investigating foreign capital investment in British industries.¹⁴ Thus, British Aluminium, as Morrison’s letter alludes to, increasingly viewed itself as a patriotic, indeed imperial, concern, and saw the benefits of promoting the enterprise publicly as such. This was illustrated over the case of bauxite mining rights in British Guiana (Guyana) and the Gold Coast (Ghana), where British Aluminium reluctantly acquired mining rights, at the behest of the Colonial Office and the IMRB, in order to reinforce their imperial credentials and ensure the political and financial support of the government for the expansion of their domestic smelting capacity, while ‘social imperialists’ were in the ascendency in government (between 1919 and 1921). This sense of national and imperial mission was only further inured by the recruitment of prominent retired senior military officers. The effects of this are evident from an examination of some of the other leading personalities in the company, their personal politics, their role in advancing British Aluminium’s strategic priorities, and how this percolated into the organisation’s philosophy and narrative.¹⁵ However British Aluminium remained committed to this long after there had been a paradigm shift in government, first with the Treasury re-asserting their authority over

¹⁴ Lord Chandos, *Memoirs* (London: Bodley Head, 1962), 125 and 129; R. C. Wyse, ‘The Future of London as the World’s Money Market’, *The Economic Journal* 28 (December 1918), 386-397; ‘Trade Prospects’, Note by the President of the Board of Trade, 12 June 1924, TNA (UK National Archives, formerly PRO, Kew), CAB 24/167.

¹⁵ Perchard, *Aluminiumville*, and ‘Of the highest Imperial importance’; For discussions of the ‘social imperialists’, see Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 675; Lawrence J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to the Post-Imperial World* (London: IB Tauris, 2008), 5–10, 148–159.

departmental budgets, and particularly defence expenditure and stockpiling by the mid-1920s, and then, with their separation from Alcoa, the reconciliation of officials with using Alcan and Canada as their chief source of aluminium in the event of another conflict.

The company culture emerging out of the potent *mélange* of personal politics, organizational identity and strategic priorities, was embodied in Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald Edmonston Charles. Prior to his appointment to the BACo board in 1934, Sir Charles had enjoyed an illustrious career in the British Army. Born in British India in 1875 to the Deputy Surgeon-General and physician to Queen Victoria, he was immersed in Empire and was quickly marked out in his service career for rapid promotion, on account of his abilities and heroism (he won the Sword of Honour at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, the Distinguished Service Order in the 2nd Anglo-Boer War, and passed out top of the Army Staff College), as well as social connections. Charles proved himself also as an effective commander during WWI. In December 1915, he was appointed as chief of staff to XVII corps on the western front, and his leadership saw the 17th as the only corps of the British Army on the western front able to repel the German spring offensive of 1918. His aptitude for ‘tactical innovation’ and ‘military efficiency’ were illustrated again by his ability to turn the shattered and demoralized 25th division, whose command he was given in 1918, into a highly effective force. After the war, Charles was appointed to a number of influential army posts, including commandant of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. However, it was to be his last two posts before retirement – making him one of the most powerful staff officers in the British Army – that attracted British Aluminium. As Director of Military

Operations and Intelligence at the War Office (1926-31) and Master General of the Ordnance (1931-4), Sir Charles had an intimate knowledge of strategic level operations and, crucially, given BACo's commercial interests, defence procurement procedures.¹⁶ These roles, his place on the Army Council, service record and social background also placed him in a prime position. Lt Gen Sir Ronald Charles's experience and connections were not long in being ushered into service by British Aluminium, when in April 1935 Charles dispatched a letter offering the company's support for rearmament programmes to the Committee of Imperial Defence Principal Officers Committee (CID-PSO). Unlike other committees in the PSO, this was heavily composed of senior staff officers from all the branches of the armed services. Thus Charles, BACo opined, would carry more weight with this audience. This was followed shortly afterwards by a missive from William Murray Morrison enquiring after Treasury funds to support the extension of BACo's Lochaber hydroelectric scheme. In a climate in which the Treasury were still exercising considerable fiscal control, and were opposed to granting a loan to the company, the granting of these funds was remarkable and said as much for British Aluminium's connections, not least the personal intervention of Montagu Norman, governor of the Bank of England, and Edward Bridges, head of defence materials at the Treasury. However the withdrawal of the offer, once Canadian and Norwegian producers had indicated that they could provide ample supplies, is both illustrative of concerns over BACo's finances and of the

¹⁶ 'Obituary: Lt.-Gen. Sir Ronald Charles', *The Times*, 28 December 1955, 11; Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 51, 156, and 384-5; My thanks are also due to Dr John Bourne of the Centre for WWI Studies, University of Birmingham, for additional information about Lt. Gen Sir. Ronald Charles.

changed political climate, with Alcan by now legally separated from Alcoa, and Canada seen increasingly as the ‘Arsenal of Empire’.¹⁷ However, these events also illustrate where the personal was political, and the overlapping of directors’ personal beliefs with the company’s commercial objectives. For Sir Charles was also a prominent member of the Army, Home and Empire Defence League – first formed in 1937 – and was a public advocate for rearmament.¹⁸ Charles’ personal commitment to empire, as well as on the tenets of ‘muscular Christianity’ – the redefining of manhood ‘marrying physicality to spirituality’, with ‘militaristic’ and ‘patriotic overtones’ – were embodied in his prominent position within the Young Men’s Christian Association, an organization which embraced these ideas in the 1930s.¹⁹ After WWII, Charles’ views (he remained a director until his death in 1955) on these fronts were enshrined in the company’s commitment to organising youth camps underpinned by these very principals, as well as supporting placements of young BACo employees with organisations with similar philosophies

¹⁷ The circumstances behind this case are both explored in *Aluminiumville: Committee of Imperial Defence-Principal Supply Officers’* (CID-PSO) committee, Memo from Lt. Gen. Sir Ronald E. Charles, K.C.B., C. M.G., D.S.O., to CID-PSO, 29 April 1935, TNA, SUPP 3/82; Hector MacKenzie, ‘“Arsenal of the British Empire”? British orders for munitions production in Canada, 1936-39’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31 (2003), 48; Letter from Murray Morrison to the Secretary, Board of Trade, 7 August 1936; Sir William Palmer, Board of Trade, to E. E. Bridges, Treasury, 11 August 1936; Sir F. Phillips to Sir R. Hopkins and Mr Barlow, Treasury, 12 September 1936; Memo from Bridges to Barlow, 22 October 1936; Memo from Bridges to Mr Wilson Smith along, with minute relating to Treasury Inter Service Committee – Proposed guarantee to British Aluminium Company, 23 October 1936, SUPP 3/82; BACo, directors report and accounts for 1936-1939; Peden, *The Treasury and Rearmament*, 72-9.

¹⁸ ‘Responsibility for defence: Preserving the chain’, *The Times*, 10 January 1936, 13; ‘“In defence of freedom”: New Army League to help recruitment’, *The Times*, 18 February 1938, 8; ‘Readiness for defence: Registration and service’, *The Times*, 1 November 1938, 10.

¹⁹ *The Times*, 5 March 1943, 6; C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: understanding secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001), 88, and 96-114; Nick J. Watson, Stuart Weir and Stephen Friend, ‘The Development of Muscular Christianity in Victorian Britain and Beyond’, *Journal of Religion and Society* 7 (2005), 1–21.

(such as Outward Bounds), and the Territorial Army. Great importance was also attached to the military service records of employees.²⁰

Like Charles, Lt. Col. Stephen Pollen, who replaced Tait as temporary chairman in 1928 and served as vice-chairman of the company from 1910 until his death in 1935, was both socially well connected and had held several illustrious civil and military posts. The brother of the famous Arthur Hungerford Pollen – a director of the British Small Arms Company, and renowned for his part in introducing new methods of naval gunnery – two years after graduating from Sandhurst, Stephen Pollen became the aide de camp to two Viceroy of India, Lords Landsdowne and Elgin, between 1890-99. He retired from the army in 1902, having served in the 2nd Anglo-Boer War on the staff of General Sir Redvers Buller (being present at the relief of Mafeking and receiving a number of mentions in dispatches). Though joining the board of British Aluminium in 1910, Pollen volunteered again for war service during WWI, as military secretary to the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of British forces in the Mediterranean Sir Ian Hamilton during the Gallipoli campaign and then to the C-in-C of British forces in Egypt. At the coronations of King Edward VII and George V, Pollen acted as the captain of the monarch's ceremonial bodyguard. His funeral was well attended by many figures in the military and civil elite, including the then Admiral of the Fleet and the 4th Earl of Lucan (chief whip in the House of Lords) amongst others. In a premonition of BACo's future chairman, Lord Portal, aside from Pollen's posts, one of the most glittering claims made for him in his obituary was that: 'he was a good

²⁰ *Aluminiumville*, chapter 3.

shot, having had much big game shooting, and was also an angler and a golfer.²¹

Fellow BACo director Gerald Steel (who served on the board between 1925 and 1952) was one in a line of senior career civil servants that came to epitomize the characteristics of British Aluminium's strategic management. After public school and Oxford, he held Civil Service posts in the Admiralty, Ministry of Transport, before moving to one of most senior appointments in the Scottish Office. As with Charles and Pollen, these connections, if not commercial acumen, were of paramount importance to the company.²²

Despite the palpable signs of a change in the government's attitudes towards the company immediately before and during WWII, BACo's sense of itself as a national industry was further cemented by the wartime service of senior company managers – such as the Hon Geoffrey Cunliffe (aluminium controller between 1939 and 1941, and son of a former Governor of the Bank of England) and George Boex – in the government's light metals control. This was compounded after the war by the addition of Lord Portal, the wartime head of the Air Staff and first chairman of the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) (credited with convincing Labour PM Clement Attlee of the need for Britain to

²¹ Pollen was appointed vice chairman of British Aluminium on immediately joining the company in April 1910: 'Obituary: Lt Col Stephen Pollen', *The Times*, 26 March 1935, 21; 'Funeral and Memorial Services: Lieutenant-Colonel S. H. Pollen', *The Times*, 29 March 1935, 19; Register of BACo Directors, 1894 – 1948, GUA, UGD 347/21/5/1; BACo, *Annual Reports and Accounts*, 1910 – 1935; Richard P.T. Davenport-Hines, 'Pollen, Arthur Joseph Hungerford (1866-1937)' in D. J. Jeremy and C. Shaw (eds.), *Dictionary of Business Biography: A Biographical Dictionary of Business Leaders Active in Britain in the Period 1860 – 1980, Volume 4* (London: Butterworths, 1986), 753 – 758.

²² 'Obituary: Mr. G. A. Steel', *The Times*, 16 December 1963, 12.

have an independent nuclear deterrent); Commodore Robert Linzee, a long service naval officer, who had headed the Royal Navy's staff training establishment and was decorated for his part in organizing the evacuation from Dunkirk; as well as leading civil servant, Sir Edwin Plowden, who had followed Portal as head of UKAEA. It was further enshrined by BACo's decision after 1948 to put staff through the newly founded Administrative Staff College at Henley. A former RAF staff training institution, the Staff College at Henley primarily trained senior civil servants, along with strategic-level managers from amongst the newly nationalised industries. Crucially, given the importance of BACo's relationship with the state, great emphasis was placed in the Henley curriculum on public service:

A special virtue of Henley is its recognition that government and business leaders must be trained in common problems of policy and administration if they are to understand one each other and take independent but consistent action designed to further the common interest of the nation.²³

The cumulative effects of this bred myopia in the company's dealings with government, which was glaringly exposed in negotiations over the Volta River Project and the company's takeover by Reynolds Metals and Tube Investments in the 1950s, and, even after the takeover, in the negotiations over the power contract for the Invergordon smelter in the 1960s and 1970s. This same culture of the 'Service' cited by Morrison

²³ M. E. Dimmock, 'The Administrative Staff College: Executive Development in Government and Industry', *The American Political Science Review* 50 (1956), 168; Dennis Richards, *Portal of Hungerford. The Life of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Portal of Hungerford KG, GCB, OM, DSO, MC* (London: Heinemann, 1977); D. Richards, 'Charles Frederick Algernon Portal', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com> [accessed 16 December 2007]; R. G. H. Linzee, Royal Navy service record, TNA, ADM 196/123/0/256; Kenneth Harris, *Attlee* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), 289; Edwin Plowden, *An Industrialist in the Treasury: The Post-War Years* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1989); R. Armstrong, 'Obituaries: Lord Plowden', *The Independent*, 19 February 2001.

was again evoked by Geoffrey Cunliffe and Lord Portal in their parting message to BACo employees in the Spring 1959 edition of the company organ, *The B.A. News*: ‘We are both deeply conscious of the “B.A. Spirit” which has pervaded the whole Company and it is this spirit of good will and unselfish devotion which, more than anything else, has made it a pleasure and a privilege to work with you all.’²⁴ Portal and Cunliffe’s remark was not simply the fanciful ruminations of the bitter losers of a power struggle, but captured much of what the organization had become, tethered to emblems of empire and duty that failed to accept the changing world around them. Indeed the famous observation of US Secretary of State Dean Acheson to West Point cadets in 1962 that Britain had ‘lost an empire and not yet found a role’ was equally applicable to British Aluminium.²⁵ Those that followed the ‘Colonel Blimps’ that did much to shape British Aluminium after Andrew Tait, failed to recognise the writing on the wall, and as the screen Blimp was warned by his superior at the War Office: “keep clear of politicians.”²⁶

Land: ‘Saviours of the Highlands’

The two allusions in Morrison’s letter to British Aluminium claims as a ‘pioneer’ – as were the personal tone, and invocation of a ‘community of interest’, the latter meant to refer more broadly too to the national situation – were affected by its local relations in the Highlands, and its wish to project for itself an image of modernity and progress espoused by

²⁴ *The B.A. News*, 12 (January-February 1959), 3, GUA, UGD 347 21/33/8.

²⁵ Douglas Brinkley, ‘Dean Acheson and the ‘Special Relationship’: The West Point Speech of December 1962’, *Historical Journal* 33 (1990), 599.

²⁶ Colonel T. H. Betheridge’s advice to the young Lt. Clive Candy (“Colonel Blimp”) in Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger’s 1943, ‘Life and Death of Colonel Blimp’.

a good many aluminium concerns.²⁷ Important to British Aluminium's image, and corporate narrative, over the years in the Highlands was of itself as a 'pioneer' bringing 'progress', and acting as a 'saviour' to, the benighted region.

This was a theme first explored by Morrison's erstwhile teacher Lord Kelvin in a speech to BACo employees at the opening of the company's Scottish carbon factory at Greenock in 1897. He declared of the company's recent construction of their first aluminium reduction works (smelter) at Foyers on the banks of Loch Ness in the Scottish Highlands:

That magnificent piece of work of the Aluminium Company was the beginning of something that would yet transform the whole social economy of countries such as the Highlands, where water abounded. He looked forward to the time when the Highlands would be re-peopled to some degree with cultivators of the soil, but re-peopled also with industrious artizans doing the work which that utilization of the water would provide for them. The British Aluminium works were very popular in the locality... He thought when the time came that every drop of water that now fell over the Falls of Foyers was used for the benefit of mankind, no wise man, no man who ever thought of the good of the people, would regret that the power in the waterfall was developed for the benefit of mankind.²⁸

Kelvin was, in this address, not only alluding to his own convictions as a post-enlightenment thinker and someone touched by rural deprivation

²⁷ Eric Schatzberg, 'Symbolic Culture and Technological Change: The Cultural History of Aluminum as an Industrial Material', *Enterprise and Society* 4 (2003), 226–271.

²⁸ Work on Foyers started in 1895 and was completed in 1896. The factory, converted to super purity refining of aluminium in 1954, closed in 1967. Crosbie Smith and M. Norton Wise, *Energy and Empire: A biographical study of Lord Kelvin* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), 721; Chris (T. C.) Smout, *Nature contested: Environmental History in Scotland and Northern England since 1600* (Edinburgh: EUP, 2000), 112-3, and 154-5; Ian G. Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain. From 10,000 years ago to the present* (Edinburgh, EUP, 2001), 182-3..

in his native Ireland. More specifically he was confronting objections to the construction of the company's first aluminium reduction works and hydro-scheme in the beauty-spot of Foyers on the banks of Loch Ness which prompted considerable public criticism from the early conservation movement, including eminent Victorians such as John Ruskin and the Duke of Westminster while acknowledging support from local groups. His speech also alluded to his personal conviction that the British Empire was a vehicle for progress.²⁹

These themes of land, empire and 'progress', and the association with Lord Kelvin's name, would become replicated and subsumed into the historical narrative that the company developed over the course of the twentieth century, embossed with popular motifs in Highland history, such as the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 ("the '45") and the land clearances.³⁰ Yet it was to be Morrison, both his knowledge and reputation as a Highland Scot, and subsequently as a symbol, who was to play the most central role in building the crucial networks in the region. For Morrison understood the continued significance of land and clanship in the Highlands. As Allan Macinnes has observed of Argyllshire in the west Highlands (where the company's Kinlochleven reduction works was located), even after "the '45" and the effective dismantling of the power of the clan chieftains in its aftermath and estate clearances, the 'cultural baggage of clanship', that still required 'incomers' 'to exercise paternalism to offset periodic economic distress

²⁹ *Energy and Empire*, 799–814; *Aluminiumville*, Chapter 4.

³⁰ For examples: *Royal Commission on Canals and Waterways, Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, Vol.III*, 1907, PP, (c.3718), Q.30154, W. Murray Morrison, British Aluminium Company, 10 July 1907; G. Boex, *The Aluminium industry in Scotland* (London: Institute of Mining Engineers, 1933), 58; BACo, *The history of the British Aluminium Company Limited 1894-1955* (London: BACo, 1956) [hereafter BACo, *History*].

among their tenantry.³¹ While anthropologist Sharon Macdonald has observed of the west Highlands in particular, that ‘kinship ties and less visible matters, such as knowing the cultural codes of behaviour, are equally important’, but that: ‘identities can change and adapt, and if there is any one particular theme that seems to emerge from this story it is local people’s capacity to be resourceful, to appropriate and reshape that which emanates from outside.’³² In these observations, we see, along with centrifugal, the centripetal forces of the local ‘moral economy’ and ‘moral choices’ shaping company policy.³³

This emergent cultural narrative developed by the company was partly to fend off criticisms of their Highland hydroelectric developments and factories – and as a large property owner and employer in Scotland as well as ensuring political support at a local and regional, as well as in Edinburgh and Whitehall, land owning interests, development campaigners, and government officials. This was particularly significant in a region, which had been neglected by government, and was judged by officials as a problematic periphery.³⁴ From the perspective of some

³¹ Allan I. Macinnes, ‘Landownership, Land Use and Elite Enterprise in Scottish Gaeldom: from Clanship to Clearance in Argyllshire, 1688-1858’ in Thomas M. Devine (ed.), *Scottish Elites. Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar University of Strathclyde 1991-1992* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1994), 3

³² Sharon Macdonald, ‘Locality and Community: A West Highland Parish’ in J. Beech, O. Hand, M. A. Mulhearn, and J. Weston (eds.), *Scottish Life and Society, Vol.9: The Individual and Community Life* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland/ John Donald, 2005), 415-6.

³³ Edward P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), 76-136; Amartya Sen, *Rationality and Freedom* (Harvard MA: Belknap Press, 2004).

³⁴ As late as 1977, despite the sale of around 22 per cent of their landholdings in the intervening years (the bulk to NSHEB and the Forestry Commission), they were the largest landowner in Inverness-shire (with more modest estates of 6,300 acres in Argyllshire), and the eighth largest in Scotland: John McEwen, *Who Owns Scotland: A Study in Land Ownership*, 2nd Edition (London: Argyll, 1981), 10, 22 and 26; A. Crab,

Highland land owners, British Aluminium's company identity and social tenets complemented their own views, but also provided them with the means to support regional development while giving them some civic power in an era when they had lost much of their political and economic puissance.³⁵ Highland development campaigners and local populations were overwhelmingly supportive of BACo's schemes in a region blighted by rural poverty and mass migration.³⁶ British Aluminium's deployment of these social emblems and popular historical events was also used as a means after WWII – with the growth in power of trade unions and their strengthening with workplace negotiating machinery – and with the memory of the strikes in 1910 at Kinlochleven, and particularly that of 1936 at Lochaber, which damaged the company's reputation in the area, in the back of directors' minds.

This local politicking and concocting of historical narratives were also accompanied by the welfarist policies pursued in the socially stratified company villages. In all of this, British Aluminium were little different from the rest of the aluminium fraternity, in part because of the localities in which primary aluminium works were located (with access to

Who Owns Scotland Now: The use and abuse of private land, this edition (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2001), 26; Ewen A. Cameron, 'The Scottish Highlands: From Congested District to Objective One' in Thomas M. Devine and Richard J. Finlay (eds.), *Scotland in the twentieth century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996), 153-169; Niall G. MacKenzie, "Chuckin' Buns Across the Fence?" Government-Sponsored Industry Development in the Scottish Highlands, 1945–1982', *Business and Economic History On-line* 4 (2006).

³⁵ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London: Vintage, 1990).

³⁶ 17 per cent of the population of the Scottish Highlands migrated, or emigrated, (predominantly from the most economically active age groups) between 1870 and 1911. A further 13.8 per cent departed between 1921 and 1930: Jeanette M. Brock, *The Mobile Scot. A Study of Emigration and Migration 1861- 1911* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), Tables 2.6 and 2.7; Marjory Harper, *Emigration from Scotland between the wars: opportunity or exile?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 6, 71-108.

hydro power), and partly because of the capital intensive nature of the industry, requiring reasonably peaceable industrial relations.³⁷

This cultivation of regional elites and regional development campaigners was perfectly captured in William Murray Morrison's private correspondence to Donald Walter Cameron of Lochiel, the 25th Clan Chieftain of the Clan Cameron, and Dr Lachlan Grant, a Highland physician and prominent Highland development campaigner. Cameron of Lochiel was influential in the Highlands, as head of the Clan Cameron, and Convenor of Inverness County Council. He was also deemed highly important at a national Scottish level, with the Scottish Landowners' Federation suggesting to one of their subcommittees in 1939: 'The publicity value of Lochiel's name on this H & I [Highlands & Islands] subcommittee would be very great should its actions get into daylight. He ought to be on it even if he can't attend.'³⁸ As late as 1964 the influence of, and apparent affection for, the Camerons of Lochiel were inferred as the reason for the poor performance of the Labour Party in Fort William in 1964 after a local Labour candidate remarked that 'A Wilson government will sort out Lochiel.'³⁹ Lochiel, and fellow landowners Lord Lovat and Mackintosh of Mackintosh (Convenor of Inverness-shire County Council and Lord Lieutenant of the county at the time of the Lochaber bill), provided invaluable service to the company in

³⁷ José E. Igartua, *Arvida ou Saguenay: Naissance d'une ville industrielle* (Montréal and Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996); Gérard Vindt, *Les hommes de l'aluminium. Histoire sociale de Pechiney 1921-1973* (Paris: Les éditions de l'atelier, 2006).

³⁸ Letter from Col. A. D. Gardayne to Erskine Jackson, 18 July 1939, National Archives of Scotland (NAS), GD325/1/315.

³⁹ T. Dalzell, 'Obituaries: Col Sir Donald Cameron of Lochiel, 26th Chief of the Clan Cameron', *The Independent*, 15 June 2004, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/col-sir-donald-cameron-of-lochiel-730576.html> [accessed 5 January 2008].

their depositions in support of BACo's Lochaber waterpower bill.⁴⁰ Both before and after the passing of the bill, Morrison was at pains to impress upon Lochiel the degree of personal commitment he had to the developments, declaring in a letter to Lochiel during the passage of the Lochaber Water Power Bill in May 1921: 'I have the enormous personal reward of knowing that the foundation has been laid for a lasting and far-reaching benefit to the Highlands of Scotland.'⁴¹ As well as being a large landowner in the area, Simon Joseph Fraser, the 14th Lord Lovat, was the first chairman (1919-27) of the other large employer in the region, the Forestry Commission, the first convenor of Inverness County Council after 1929, and served between 1927-8 as Under-Secretary of State for the Dominions, chairman of the Overseas Settlement Committee (1928-9), and the first chairman of the Highland Reconstruction Association (as the name suggests, an organization devoted to developing the Highlands and diversifying the economy).⁴² Moreover Lochiel's campaign as Convenor of Inverness-shire County Council after the Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1929 to draw attention to what he perceived to be the disproportionate burden of subsidy on landward non-agricultural ratepayers – though clearly driven

⁴⁰ Lochaber Water Power Bill, Minutes of Evidence, 6 May 1921 – Colonel Donald Walter Cameron of Lochiel, CMG., ADC, The Rt. Hon. Lord Lovat, KT, KCMG, KCVO, CB, DSO, Alfred Donald Mackintosh of Mackintosh; 'Highland problem: Lord Lovat on agricultural employment', *The Scotsman*, 2 October 1920.

⁴¹ Lochiel had opposed the original scheme on the grounds that it intended taking the water from Inverness-shire and diverting it to Argyll-shire. However he wholeheartedly endorsed the amended Bill: Petition to the Scottish Office from Col. D. W. Cameron of Lochiel against the Lochaber Water Power Bill, January 1918, Cameron of Lochiel Papers, Lochaber Archives Centre (LAC), CL/A/3/2/45/1; Letter from William Murray Morrison to Col. D. W. Cameron of Lochiel, 12 May 1921; See also: Morrison to Lochiel, 29 December 1920, 24 February 1921, 18 May 1921, and 15 and 22 June 1921, LAC, CL/A/3/2/45/2.

⁴²J. Martin, 'Fraser, Simon Joseph, fourteenth Lord Lovat and third Baron Lovat (1871-1933)', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.webfeat.lib.ed.ac.uk/view/article/33254?docPos=5> [accessed 5 October 2007].

by his own desire to support economic diversification for the region, and therefore recognizing the potential obstacle that this might present to enterprises prospecting the area – served British Aluminium’s interests too.⁴³ Lochiel was again called into service during the 1936 Lochaber strike in a failed bid to broker a deal between the company and the workforce, using clan and kinship ties.⁴⁴ The benefits accruing to Lochiel and Lovat, apart from their genuine commitment to retaining population in the Highlands out of a sense of hereditary *noblesse oblige*, was in also in attracting a larger ratepayer to the local economy and enhancing their position in civil society.

Dr Lachlan Grant, who served as BACo’s medical officer and was a prominent development campaigner in the region – founding amongst other bodies the Highland Development League (HDL), which drew its inspiration for a vision of a revitalized Highlands from FDR’s Tennessee Valley Authority – was even more smitten by the company and Morrison. Grant’s support as a local physician was critical but perhaps more important was his role with the HDL, an organization which the Scottish Landowners’ Federation watched warily while acknowledging its potential power.⁴⁵ Writing in one of largest circulating local papers in the Scottish west Highlands, *The Oban Times*, in March 1923, Grant observed that: ‘The full history of the aluminium industry in Scotland, if written, would read like a fairy tale, and to Mr Murray Morrison must be

⁴³ James Hunter, *The Claim of Crofting: The Scottish Highlands and Islands, 1930 – 1990* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1991), 45; John S. Gibson, *The Thistle and The Crown: A history of the Scottish Office* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1985), 81.

⁴⁴ The strike arose over pay, working conditions, and an increase in rents in company housing. Community support for the strike – in what was seen as a transgression of the ‘moral economy’ of the area by the company – sustained it to a successful end for the strike committee: ‘Lochiel and the Aluminium Strike’, *Oban Times*, 11 July 1936

⁴⁵ Gardayne to Jackson, 18 July 1939.

given the credit of the man mainly concerned in its origination and development.⁴⁶ Grant became a passionate advocate for and defender of the company. This became particularly useful to British Aluminium over the issue of Highland development but also in refuting criticisms of the effects of industrial effluents on the environmental conditions both within the company's plants and in the company villages.⁴⁷ Morrison's understanding of Grant's importance to BACo, as well as a genuine shared belief in Highland development, are captured in this extract of a letter of January 1935 from BACo's managing-director to the Highland medic:

My feeling is that as more and more attention is drawn to these matters and development in other directions, we shall gradually restore better conditions in our native land, and you are doing your best in this that connection. It is a most pleasing recollection in my career that I have also been able to do some practical and lasting good to my beloved Highlands.⁴⁸

Writing in a piece for the *Caledonian Medical Journal* later that year, Grant observed:

The enterprise of the British Aluminium Company, and the very great benefit to the Highland communities of Kinlochleven, Foyers, and Inverlochy, resulting from their operations, might well be repeated in other parts of the Highlands. To a far seeing Gael Mr. W. Murray Morrison of the Aluminium Company is mainly due the credit for the development of this hitherto neglected, great national asset water power.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ 'The city among the hills: Present day industrial activities Kinlochleven', *The Oban Times*, 24 March 1923.

⁴⁷ For example: *The British Medical Journal*, 9 April 1932.

⁴⁸ Letter from William Murray Morrison to Dr Lachlan Grant, 1 January 1935, Dr Lachlan Grant Collection, Vol.8, Acc12187/8, National Library of Scotland (NLS).

⁴⁹ Lachlan Grant, 'Highland Life, Its Past and its Future', *Caledonian Medical Journal*, Vol.XV, No.13, (July-October 1935), Acc12187/8, NLS.

That Grant had been busy extolling the company's virtues at public engagements is also clear from this warm letter from Morrison from December 1936, revealing the latter's conscious deployment of the company's role as a major employer of Highlanders to effect:

I am obliged to you for your letter of the 10th instant and for having sent me the paper containing a report on your recent speech in London, which as a matter of fact I had seen in another paper. I was very pleased to observe the clean bill of health which you give to our employees as a result of your long experience of the health of our community at Kinlochleven. As a layman I can speak to the same effect from my own experience going still further back – namely for the 40 odd years during which the Foyers works have been in operation. You will be interested to hear that a recent census of our 1,100 employees in the Highlands shows that 74% of these are Highlanders and 93% are natives of Scotland, and this is a fact of which I am very proud. With kindest regards and wishing Mrs. Grant and yourself and your family all the compliments of the season.⁵⁰

As well as their role in economic development in the Highlands, Grant's espousal of BACo reflects his belief in what he perceived to be the socially ameliorative effects of 'paternalism'. As Grant explained in an article to the *Caledonian Medical Journal* of January 1930:

Voltaire said that labour rids us of three great evils – irksomeness, vice, poverty. But to do this effectually the labour must be on a moralized basis, and in proportion to man's needs and capacities. Man's whole sphere of manifestation has been divided into thinking and acting... Enlightened captains of industry like the Leverhulmes, the Fords, and the Cadburys have rediscovered the fact that man is not a machine, and that his capacity for work has a psychological side. They have found from experience that sufficient leisure not only conduces to the workers' health and happiness but to loyal service, augmented output, and a higher quality of work. The new

⁵⁰ Letter from William Murray Morrison to Grant, 18 December 1936, Acc12187/10.

‘paternalism’ in industry pays, and also makes for stability and social progress.⁵¹

BACo was just such a concern to be encouraged. All of this is not to detract from William Murray Morrison’s personal belief in Highland development, but it does illustrate the value attached by Morrison and his colleagues to public advocacy of British Aluminium’s role as a saviours.

The importance of the Highlands as an emblem were illustrated by the place it occupied in the company’s post-war literature for employees. Designed to ‘stimulate the interests and loyalty of employees’, this included an employee handbook, the company organ, *The B. A. News*, and eventually BACo’s company history published in the mid-1950s. These publications, produced by the company’s Establishment Division and edited by Hugh Woodhouse, a former Fleet Street journalist, RAF officer and then welfare officer at the Highland reduction works, were overseen by the Director of Establishments, Commodore Linzee, who directed BACo’s personnel policy and estates.⁵² In the pages of *The B.A. News* was developed a potent historical narrative (subsequently incorporated into the company history) that once again invoked BACo as ‘saviours’, against the backdrops of the defeat of the

⁵¹ Lachlan Grant, ‘Work and leisure’, *Caledonian Medical Journal* XIV (January 1930), 160.

⁵² ‘The History of the Company’, *The B. A. News*, 1, 2, (September-October 1948), 3; ‘History of the Company, Part II’, *The B. A. News*, 1, 3, (November-December 1948), 3; ‘History of the Company, Part III’, *The B. A. News*, 2, 1, (January-February 1949), 3; ‘History of the Company, Part IV’, *The B.A. News*, 2, 2, (March-April 1949), 5; *The B.A. News*, 2, 3, (May-June 1949), 5; ‘Establishment Division’, *The B.A. News*, 2, 5, (September-October 1949), 8-9, UGD 347 21/33/3; ‘Our Highland Story’, *The B.A. News*, 5, 4, (July-August 1952), 8-9; BACo, *The history of the British Aluminium Company Limited 1894-1955* (BACo: London, 1955); BACo, *Employees Handbook* (BACo: London, 1948), UGD 347 21/32/18; BACo, Minutes of annual managers’ conferences, 28 April 1948.

1745 Jacobite rebellion and repression that followed, and mass migration. Tellingly it was careful to tailor this history to ignore the widespread clearing of crofters and tenants off the land in parts of the Highlands by landowners, and lamenting the demise of the sporting estates. Readers of the corporate literature were left in little doubt as to the hero of the piece, Morrison, such as this reference in ‘Our Highland Story’: ‘Most of our developments in the Highlands were planned by a man who for obvious reasons had the interests of the Highlands at heart he was himself a Highlander who loved his native country.’⁵³ Reinforcing Morrison’s role as *pater familias* the author assured readers that, ‘those who have succeeded Sir Murray in his high office are equally mindful to areas where we have set up factories.’⁵⁴ Similarly the other significant public luminary of the company’s pioneering years, Lord Kelvin, was oft evoked.⁵⁵ Even with the transformation of company outlook by the 1970s, and especially after the merger with Alcan, it was to be a theme to which Alcan would continue to return in publications, and in their recognition of the potent emblematic sensitivities around the Highland works when staging the closure of Kinlochleven between 1995 and 2000.⁵⁶

The legacy of this powerful ‘history’ is still visible in collective and personal narratives in the area, as the following extract from an interview with a former British Aluminium employee revealed: ‘I will say this: were it not for Lord Kelvin and his compatriots, who initialized the building of the Foyers smelter and started this whole thing off, where would I have

⁵³ ‘Our Highland Story’, *The B.A. News*, Vol.5, No.4, (July-August 1952), 8-9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ BACo, *history*, 5 and 18.

⁵⁶ Alcan, *Aluminium in the Scottish Highlands* (Fort William: Alcan, 1990).

been today? Here I am in a wonderful part of the country, I've got my family, I've got my granddaughter. It's been good. The aluminium industry was a saviour to the Highlands.⁵⁷ Sandy Walker's own narrative made an explicit link between his Highland ancestry and the key motifs of Highland history, and the company. At the same time, it was ambivalent about some of the working conditions endured by employees, and arising health issues. Walker's narrative was visible amongst many of the former employees and residents of the former company villages interviewed. It is this perception illustrating the interpretive value that oral history offers in understanding human emotion that vividly captures the potent, long-term effect of BACo's strategies in the Highlands.

Conclusion

From the outset British Aluminium identified itself strongly with the themes of empire and land. British Aluminium's outlook was also affected by their close proximity to the state and the imperial networks they became enmeshed in. In part this arose from a vested self-interest in ingratiating itself with certain important constituencies such as central government, landowners and development campaigners and its own workforce. Equally critical though was the personal politics, occupational backgrounds and social milieux of their directors, which directly influenced the organizational culture and strategic direction of the firm locking it in to certain patterns of behaviour and a dependency on the state. The company was also directly affected by the social

⁵⁷ Interview with (Alexander) Sandy Walker, Inverlochy, 2006, conducted by A. Perchard.

networks and cultural forms in the Scottish Highlands, with the 1936 strike, in particular, a reminder of what happened if it transgressed the ‘moral economy’ of the area. This local relationship in the Highlands was brought with it a mutual dependence, with the populations and the region reliant on the company for employment, taxation and increasingly structure, and the company on the motif that these Highland smelters represented.