Scottish volunteers with Garibaldi

The Italian Risorgimento in general, and Garibaldi’s exploits in particular, aroused a degree of interest and involvement in Scotland which surpassed that in the rest of Britain. When war broke out in 1859, Scots expressed their sympathy in a variety of practical ways. Subscription lists were opened in all the major towns and, if Norbert J. Gossman’s assessment of the total British contribution at £15,528 15s. 1d. is correct, Glasgow and Edinburgh alone raised more than a quarter of the entire sum collected in Britain. Hospital supplies were provided by the Ladies’ Garibaldi Benevolent Association and others such as Lady Panmure who gave orders to a firm in London to forward a large quantity of quinine to the hospitals at Messina; meanwhile the factory workers in Glasgow worked without pay on their Saturday half-holiday to make munitions for Garibaldi. Closer to the scene of action, Donald Miller of the firm of Henderson Brothers in Leghorn sold army supplies to Garibaldi at cost price and helped in other ways as well. He sailed to Palermo in the City of Aberdeen, an old Scottish paddle-wheel steamer owned by Denny Brothers of Dumbarton, which was chartered to take Garibaldian volunteers from Genoa to Palermo where Miller negotiated with the owners’ agent for further use of the ship; and so it was in a Scottish ship that Garibaldi crossed to the mainland, with two thousand men, the day before the Battle of Milazzo.

Closer still to the scene of action were the volunteers who enlisted to fight. In the beginning individuals or small groups with enough means to do so went out independently and offered their services, most of them being attached to Colonel Dunne’s regiment which was mainly composed of Sicilians but had some Sardinian and British officers. Later, Scottish recruiting was organised in Edinburgh

1 For an explanation of the diverse reasons—political, social and religious—for the greater degree of Scottish interest, see my ‘Scotland and the Risorgimento’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Guelph, 1976).

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and Glasgow, in loose liaison with the central recruiting offices in London and these volunteers served with the British Legion.¹

Among the earliest of the independent volunteers was A. B. Patterson, an eighteen-year-old student at Queen’s University, Belfast. His letters from the front were published in the Scotsman and no doubt helped to encourage others to follow his example. He took part in the Battle of Milazzo, was wounded, and promoted to 1st Lieutenant.² At that same battle was a surgeon trained in Edinburgh, probably Dr Albert Monastier, who wrote describing the aid he was able to give to the wounded, thanks to the techniques he had learned in Edinburgh:

I must here give credit to Syme, from whom I benefitted so much, and to the others, all of the Edinburgh Professors with whom I came in contact. I introduced several of the surgical appliances which I learned there, to the great benefit of the patients.³

British sailors in the Mediterranean were sufficiently excited by the news of the Sicilian campaign for many of them to leave their ships to join. One such was Peter Cunningham, of Springbank, Glasgow. John McAdam told his story:

Peter—a mere lad—had taken a dislike to stonecutting—went to sea and was handy in the Mediterranean when General Dunne formed his brigade, many of them being sailors . . . on attacking Melazzo they were rather warmly received and about to retire from the walls when Cunningham gallantly shouted “chuck me over”. His comrades did so, followed him, and took the battle.⁴

There is a story that Garibaldi’s decision to encourage the formation of the British Legion stemmed from this incident.⁵ When Cunningham travelled back to London with the Legion in January 1861, he was given a special reception as a wounded hero.⁶

Another independent volunteer was Captain John Gordon Davidson, who also periodically wrote letters to the Scotsman whose special correspondent, W. Adams Smith, was in a group of onlookers

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³ Ibid., 4 Sept. 1860. A later signed letter from Monastier to Samuel Bough was published in the Scotsman, 5 Nov. 1860, so it seems probable that the earlier anonymous letter was also from him.
⁴ John McAdam, MS ‘Autobiography’, in the possession of the author’s grandson, Captain Alex McAdam, Bedlay Castle, Chryston, near Glasgow. McAdam was an enthusiastic supporter of the Italian cause for more than thirty years.
⁶ Ibid.
accompanying Davidson to Naples. Adams Smith described his meeting with Davidson:

In the coupé of the diligence was a young man smoking hard, and half military and very Scotchy in his appearance, but who, addressing himself to no one, we took for "a swell". I was deputed to speak to him and try his manners, and soon found that what we took for grandeur was simply diffidence. Captain Davidson was the person, a proprietor in Scotland, near Edinburgh, who, having belonged to a disembodied corps of artillery, was proceeding to join Garibaldi, to help the great cause, as well as to keep his soldiers in hand. He had written to Garibaldi previously to offer his services, which had been gladly and graciously accepted.\footnote{Scotsman, 8 Oct. 1860.}

If Davidson was the lieutenant of that name mentioned in the Scotsman of 16 June 1860 quoting from the Dumbarton Herald, he and Captain Hughes, the officers in command of the Edinburgh Militia Artillery Company garrisoning Dumbarton Castle, had written to Garibaldi offering their services and those of thirty of their men. Neither Davidson himself, however, nor Adams Smith, mentioned Captain Hughes or the thirty men in their reports.

On arrival, Davidson was interviewed by Garibaldi, appointed captain and attached to the command of Colonel Peard. He took part in the attack on Capua on 19 September 1860. Afterwards he was employed in preparations for the arrival of the British Legion, securing a barracks for them at Caserta and enrolling native cooks.\footnote{Ibid., 28 Sept. 1860. He reported that the pay for everyone from a general to a subaltern was two francs a day.} The Legion was expected long before it actually arrived, Adams Smith suspecting that the delay was caused by 'something worse than mismanagement by some parties at home, who have attempted to impose, in more than one way, upon Garibaldi's simplicity and misplaced confidence'.\footnote{Ibid., 11 Oct. 1860.} He had little more confidence in the parties in the field than he had in the parties at home; a close observer of what was going on, he concluded that there were only three or four men among the British volunteers to whom the Garibaldian funds could be safely entrusted, 'either for their honest or even their economical distribution or appropriation'—and one was Captain Davidson,\footnote{Ibid., 15 Oct. 1860. The other two were Colonel Peard and Captain Sarsfield (pseudonym of Lord Seymour). In a later communication, Adams Smith added Major Stuart Wortley to the list (Scotsman, 20 Oct. 1860).} who took part in and wrote an account\footnote{Written on 6 Oct., published in the Scotsman on 22 Oct.} of the battle of the Volturro and noted that they were still waiting for 'that long-delayed and mis-managed English brigade'.

Captain Cowper, from Aberdeen, also fought impressively on the Volturro.
I must not omit to mention that Captain Cowper, an Aberdonian, fought on the 1st like the very devil; he had command of an 18-pounder gun and some howitzers, and repelled two or three determined advances of the enemy; his men were killed all round about him, and he had latterly to load himself.\footnote{Ibid., 22 Oct. 1860.}

Cowper had previously served in the Austrian army, for twelve years according to Davidson and for fifteen according to Adams Smith, which suggests he was more of a mercenary than a volunteer. Yet he probably had some degree of commitment to the cause, if he was willing to enlist for a mere two francs a day. In any case, he served Garibaldi well: ‘Cowper’s battery’, wrote Adams Smith, ‘seems always prominent when anything is to be done’.\footnote{Ibid., 20 Oct. 1860.}

After the British Legion finally did arrive, Davidson was of some service to its Scotch Company and tried to mitigate the severities of Colonel Peard. This was noted by ‘an Artisan Member of the Scotch Company’ who wrote in a letter to the Scotsman that ‘we have also to thank Captain Davidson and Lieutenants Sarsfield and Munro for their united kindness, along with Mr Lawrie’s, to the Scotch Company; they do everything in their power for us when we are badly fed’.\footnote{Ibid., 1 Dec. 1860.} When the Legion was disbanded, also, Davidson seems to have tried to look after them. The muster roll of the Legion, preserved among G. J. Holyoake’s papers, has a slip of paper tipped in at the back noting that Captain John Gordon Davidson, commanding 210 men, had landed in London by steamer, along with Lieutenant Adjutant Smith: ‘These gentlemen say that the Scotch such as have no money and the Irish ought if money can be found to be forwarded to their country’.\footnote{Holyoake Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London.}

Another Scottish gentleman who went out independently at first, then returned to Scotland, took part in the recruiting of the Scotch Company and then embarked a second time for Italy was Henry Ronald Hislop McIver, who appears to have been known also as Sergeant H. M. Hislop. The main source of information about McIver is a highly romantic biography by W. D. L’Estrange, which could almost be classified as fiction.\footnote{W. D. L’Estrange, Under Fourteen Flags (London, n.d.)} The facts, however, divorced from the gilding, are in John McAdam’s autobiography, a letter to McAdam from McIver and in reports in the Scotsman. According to L’Estrange, McIver was the wealthy son of a Virginian heiress and a Ross-shire gentleman, a son of the chief of the clan McIver. He was educated in Scotland for a military career under the tutelage of General Donald Graham, a retired officer. When he was about sixteen years old, he fought for the East India Company at the time...
of the Mutiny—confirmed by Holyoake's muster roll which lists him as 'Gren. Indian Service'. On his return to Scotland, he heard in quick succession of General Graham's, his father's and his mother's deaths, brooded over them for many months, then grew restless and longed for escape from a humdrum existence into a life of action in the Italian war. McIver was moved to enthusiasm by stories of the glorious deeds of Garibaldi, which, thought L'Estrange, was extraordinary considering that his father had been a staunch Jacobite, his mother a Douglas, and his early training by General Graham 'so utterly opposed to the principles of a cause such as that in which Garibaldi was fighting'. He was staying in Glasgow at the time, and induced several of his friends to accompany him. Possibly they were the group referred to in this report:

To show how intense is the feeling in favour of Garibaldi and his cause, we may mention that Mr M'Tear (the secretary to the Glasgow Committee engaged in raising subscriptions) was called upon this week, and the offer made to him of the services of a band of highly respectable and well-educated young men to join Garibaldi in Sicily. This "volunteer corps" were willing to pay their own expenses, and have nearly all the French and Italian tongues. Mr M'Tear very properly declined either to accept their services or to give them any information as to how to proceed in the matter, as the committee are determined to have nothing to do with the enlistments.

In spite of M'Tear's discouragement, McIver enrolled as a volunteer and was attached to the Légion de Flotte, then commanded by Major Pogan since De Flotte had fallen at the Battle of Milazzo. In September he entered Naples with Garibaldi who is said to have entrusted him with a mission to Scotland to organise a Scottish company; and his name is indeed mentioned in reports of recruiting in Edinburgh and Hawick. He sailed in the Melazzo with the Legion to Italy, took part in the bombardment of Capua and then, by L'Estrange's account, transferred back to the Légion de Flotte where he was commissioned as a Lieutenant. McAdam described his departure from Edinburgh, along with the group recruited there by Alex Lawrie:

In 1860 when in Edinburgh I was informed that a body of lads were leaving Granton pier to join the Legion for Garibaldi, and hastened down to prevent their going without effect—the steamer was pushing out, so I threw a direction to M'Iver who commanded the party— instructing him as they had no funds to call on our London treasurer for the Glasgow fund, who supplied them until they got on board the

1 Ibid., 16–17.
2 Scotsman, 16 June 1860.
3 Ibid., 3 Sept. 1860 (advertisement); 5, 14 Sept. 1860.
4 L'Estrange, Under Fourteen Flags, 22.
steamer for Italy. On the voyage M'Iver differed with the ship's officer and was for a time in irons, which he so indignantly resented that when they landed, he joined the French Garibaldian Zouaves under the brave De Flotte, which gave him an earlier opportunity for fighting.\(^1\)

On arrival in London, the quarrelsome McIver wrote to McAdam, thanking him for his interest and saying that he had gone to Mr Ashurst as instructed and 'found him to be a very feeling and kindhearted Gentleman: He promised to do everything in his power for us (the 14)'.\(^2\) The only certainty about McIver's activities on his return to Italy is that he did return, and that he fought both with the enemy and with his brother officers. His name subsequently appears on Holyoake's list of those who, back in London, received payments from the committee at the request of the Sardinian government.\(^3\) Nor did the Italian campaign exhaust his appetite for adventure; shortly afterwards he fought for the Confederate States in the American Civil War.\(^4\) Accompanying McIver to Italy was his 'friend and countryman', Lieutenant Robert Scott, possibly the R. Scott from Glasgow who is recorded in Holyoake's muster roll and also later fought for the Confederate States, dying at Gettysburg.\(^5\)

The independent volunteers, with the exception of Patterson, all had previous experience of soldiering. Not so the recruited volunteers, who came from a wide variety of peacetime occupations. Active recruiting for what was later known as the 'Scotch Company' began in Edinburgh almost accidently. An advertisement was placed in the \textit{Scotsman}:

Garibaldi:—Any young fellow wishing to join the Regiment volunteering at present in London, under Colonel Styles, to assist the Sicilians under the above-named General, may have a companion by applying as below. The volunteers are of the highest respectability, and some of independent means. 500 have already volunteered. Apply by letter to R. Eirival, Hogg's Temperance Hotel, Hunter Square.\(^6\)

R. Eirival was in fact Alex Lawrie, an employee of John Cowan's of Princes Street, Edinburgh; his pseudonym was discovered by one of those who replied to the advertisement.\(^7\) There were so many replies that a whole company could be formed, and Lawrie advertised

\(^1\) John McAdam, 'Autobiography'.
\(^2\) McAdam Papers, McIver to McAdam, 12 Sept. 1860.
\(^3\) Holyoake Papers, Bishopsgate Institute, London.
\(^4\) L'Estrange, \textit{Under Fourteen Flags}, 44; McAdam, 'Autobiography'.
\(^5\) L'Estrange, \textit{Under Fourteen Flags}, 44.
\(^6\) \textit{Scotsman}, 20 Aug. 1860.
\(^7\) \textit{Scotsman}, 3 Sept. 1860: letter from 'Veritas'; ibid., 4 Sept. 1860: reply by Lawrie.
again giving a time and place for enrolment. Lawrie may have bought a commission from Captain Styles, who was recruiting in London and, according to G. J. Holyoake, profiting from the sale of commissions. Lawrie certainly went out to Italy under the impression that he was a lieutenant but, on arrival, was immediately reduced to the rank of a cadet since he had never held a commission before.

The *Scotsman* praised Lawrie's endeavours and appealed for contributions to the expense of sending 'those young men who enter upon this highly chivalrous undertaking' to join their English comrades in London. The Scottish papers and the Scottish volunteers themselves were always completely open about the purpose of the journey to Italy, scorning the transparent disguise of a tourist excursion by which the London promoters of the scheme hoped to avoid prosecution under the Foreign Enlistment Act.

On 27 August 1860, a meeting of about seventy members of the Edinburgh Company of Garibaldian Volunteers was held: Lawrie pointed out the probable expenses—uniform and arms would be provided and the cost of transit to Italy borne by the London Committee, but money would still be needed by the volunteers to supplement their scanty pay in Italy. Then, according to the report in the *Scotsman*,

>a gentleman present suggested that any of those enrolled who had others depending upon them, or who felt in any way dubious about the movement, should withdraw their names before the thing went further, but the suggestion only evoked a hearty cheer from all present.

A committee of nine was appointed to conduct the necessary arrangements, and two of them were commissioned to go to Glasgow and recruit a second company there; and an appeal was to be made to the public for further contributions.

By 29 August the Company numbered one hundred and ten men—among the rejected applicants a twelve-year old boy who had persuaded his father to bring him in from Dalkeith so that he could offer his services as a drummer. Collection boxes were placed in the principal shops and hotels of the city, and it was suggested that the

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1 Ibid., 21 Aug. 1860.
3 *Scotsman*, 1 Dec. 1860: letter from 'An Artisan Member of the Scotch Company'.
4 Ibid., 24 Aug. 1860. Mr Burnett, Ainslie Place, had already sent in a handsome subscription.
5 Ibid., 27 Aug. 1860. John McAdam, who was in Edinburgh about this time, wrote in his autobiography of his attempts to dissuade recruits, especially those who had families, from a too-hasty decision to leave their homes and jobs.
6 Ibid., 29 Aug. 1860. Had he been accepted, his youth would not have particularly distinguished him for there were a good many children in Garibaldi's army.
young ladies might care to honour the volunteers by presenting them with a silk banner with the lion rampant worked upon it.¹ Already, however, there was dissension in the ranks. A volunteer, signing himself Veritas, wrote several letters to the Scotsman criticising Lawrie’s conduct of the enrolment and the committee’s decision that only fifteen of the company could go² owing to the smallness of the sum collected—by 5 September only £27 16s. 6d., most of it collected by Mr Coutts of the Waterloo Arms, the hotel where the group was accustomed to meet.³

On 5 September, fourteen volunteers left for London, presumably the fifteen chosen by the committee minus one who, according to Veritas, ‘was so disgusted with the proceedings that he washed his hands of the affair’.⁴ Wearing scarves of Stewart tartan, they marched from Coutts’ hotel to Granton Pier where they boarded the Princess-Royal for London. A crowd was assembled on the pier to cheer them on their way, and the band of the Leith Rifles ‘played several inspiriting airs appropriate to the occasion’.⁵ The names of four of the fourteen are known because of a letter they wrote to the editor of the Scotsman: H. Hislop [i.e. McIver], John Gibb, Donald MacCallum and W. Ritchie.⁶ John Gibb, aged 20, had been a member of the 2nd Edinburgh Rifle Artisan Company; Donald MacCallum was 26 and had been discharged in August 1859 from the 4th Battalion, 60th Royal Rifles⁷; William Ritchie was listed in Holyoke’s muster roll only by name, but a letter of 10 January 1861 probably refers to him:

Ritchie, the Scotch Volunteer, happened to be here just as Mr McAAdam of Glasgow came in and upon your recommendation backed up by Mr McAdam’s approval Mr Ashurst gave him enough to take him home (£2) and Mr McA. has taken him under his care.⁸

Lawrie himself remained behind for another nine days to continue the work of recruiting and fund collecting.

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid., 3, 5, 6 Sept. 1860; Lawrie replied to the criticisms in ibid., 4 Sept. 1860.
³ Ibid., 5 Sept. 1860.
⁴ Ibid., 6 Sept. 1860.
⁵ Ibid., 5 Sept. 1860.
⁶ Ibid., 3 Sept. 1860.
⁷ His name was included also in the list of returning volunteers sent to the Sardinian consul in London on 4 Feb. 1861, to be given tickets home. (Holyoke Papers, ‘Lists of men sent to the Sardinian Consul’). The same section of the muster roll lists another eight Edinburgh volunteers, three of them by name only (William Rutherford, Peter Adams and [ ] Tweedale) and the others with height, age and military or volunteer experience (William Matthew, 23, 2nd Edinburgh Highland Rifles; Daniel Gray, 23, 4th Company, City Artillery; William Lindsay, 23, 1st Edinburgh Artisans; James Scott, 20, 1st Edinburgh Artisans; George Henderson, 23, 1st Edinburgh Artisans; and William Williamson, 19, Royal Navy). With the four who signed the letter, this probably accounts for all but two of the fourteen who left Edinburgh.
⁸ Holyoke Papers, Austin to Holyoke, 10 Jan. 1861.
A further contingent left Edinburgh with him on 14 September, along with the first detachment of the Glasgow volunteers under Lieutenant Gabriel (i.e. Cueto)—a combined group of fifty men.\(^1\) Recruiting in Glasgow, and the collection of money there to finance the 'excursion', began later than in Edinburgh but seems on the whole to have been more efficient and more successful. The larger population of Glasgow would partly account for the success, but the greater efficiency probably stemmed from the efforts of McAdam, McTear and the Garibaldi Fund Committee to restrain impractical enthusiasts. McAdam wrote in his autobiography that they rather encouraged the idea of the Legion at first, because Mazzini was anxious that the sympathies of 'our people' should be known to the Italians in a manner they could understand. However, when it became obvious that Garibaldi did not really need outside military help, the Sicilians and Neapolitans having rallied round in large numbers, they decided to have nothing to do with the enlistment, which was organised by Lieutenant Gabriel, originally from the Edinburgh company. The committee, according to McAdam, did not wish to discountenance the scheme entirely but rather to keep it within reasonable limits:

Now that we did not need it [i.e. the Legion], it would appear ungracious not to accept those that had enrolled so after considerable circumlocution we dwindled down our 400 Glasgow volunteers to fifty odd. I attended their meetings to dissuade them, but this remnant were resolved to go—so we gave them two sets each of Tartan shirts and bonnets with the Scottish thistle to show their nationality, and sent them off and with them some Italian and Polish exiles from money provided *privately* to me by a Glasgow friend.\(^2\)

It was easier to obtain recruits than it was to finance them. The sum raised by 5 September 1860, was £75 8s. 6d., an improvement on the Edinburgh total of £27 8s. 6d., but still inadequate to transport four hundred men as far as Dumfries, let alone London; the whittling down to fifty-odd would have been necessary from financial reasons alone. From Holyoake's muster roll, and from a loose sheet tipped in at the back of it, it would seem likely that the Glasgow group included F. de Gallo, aged 32, a fencing master; H. Fraser, aged 20, a clerk; Jno. Law; John Monteith; George McFarlane; Mauchline; N. Matthews; J. Nichol; P. Pearson; James Sinclair; B. Scrivener; R. Scott; and Jno. Wagand. It seems that De Gallo was accompanied by his wife:

3 of these exiles were commissioned officers when I was in Italy—the wife of one—a Scots lassie—played the part of Jeannie Deans, having gone to Victor Emmanuel to beg the release of the person

\(^1\) *Scotsman*, 8, 14, 19 Sept. 1860. \(^2\) John McAdam, 'Autobiography'.

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who had gone out as Captain of the Glasgow Company [i.e. Lieutenant Gabriel] but had got into prison through some misunderstanding. I had sent her out with her husband Signor de Gallo for some time a fencing master in the West of Scotland.¹

The Garibaldi Fund Committee was anxious to ensure a proper reception for the men in London, since the funds provided in Glasgow would take them no further. McTear wrote to Styles and received the following answer:

In reply to yours of the 17th inst, advising me of the departure of fifty picked men under Lieutenants Gabriel (Cueto) and Lawrie, I beg to say that I had already seen and approved of these men—with whose general appearance and demeanour I have every reason to be satisfied—before receipt of your favour; and I can only say, while expressing to you my sincere thanks for your great exertions in our cause, that these men shall have my special attention, and they shall, according to your wish, form, in honour of "Fair Scotia", a separate company, and I will do all in my power . . . to enable them duly to uphold their country's honour, and to shed lustre on the arms of our noble chief.²

The earlier contingent from Edinburgh had been met with considerable discourtesy by Styles's agent, Captain Minchin, but McAdam's instructions to call on Mr Ashurst served them well, and the Garibaldi Special Fund Committee saw that they were housed in London until the departure date.³ All the recruits finally sailed for Italy in the Melazzo and the Emperor along with the rest of the British Legion and, once in Italy they stayed together, except for McIver, as the "Scotch Company".

On 19 October the Legion had its first experience of battle before Capua and acquitted itself creditably. 'An Artisan Member of the Scotch Company' paid tribute to the gallant way in which Alex Lawrie led his men, for which he was to be put in orders on the first vacancy for a Lieutenancy.⁴ A Glasgow volunteer, Mitchell,
was one of the two men killed in that engagement, the other being Ensign Tucker, the artist-corrector of the Illustrated London News. There were eight wounded, of whom one died the following day.\(^1\)

The several volunteers who wrote letters to the Scotsman, and Adams Smith, were unanimous in praise of the conduct of the Legion under fire, but they varied in their descriptions of their living conditions and the competence of their commanding officers. One volunteer wrote that ‘in our camp life here we are very happy, and there is far more kindness and good fellowship than ever I saw before’.\(^2\) Another, writing almost simultaneously from the same camp, complained of being ‘ill-used in a thankless foreign land’, and of ‘feeding on coffee which we would give to the pigs in Scotland, and two ounces of beef per day’\(^3\).

After the fighting was over, the British Legion did garrison duty with the 53rd Regiment of the Sardinian line at Salerno. Garrison duty seems to have been less congenial than fighting; there was a certain amount of insubordination and petty thievery and one more serious case where five men were sentenced to death for plundering. The sergeant of the guard who took charge of these men when they were arrested wrote an account of the affair to a friend in Edinburgh, which differs slightly from the usual version by which Garibaldi is supposed to have countermanded the sentence of Colonel Peard.

Garibaldi was himself both witness and judge, and his orders were that the prisoners should be marched up and instantly shot. Garibaldi’s character is too well known for justice and mercy to be considered cruel or unjust now. I immediately marched them up to our Colonel, who ordered out a firing party, but, out of respect to the men’s feelings, countermanded the order, and begged for a Sardinian party to execute the sentence. Garibaldi said that he would not disgrace Englishmen by having them shot by foreigners, and so spared their lives. A week or two afterwards they were tried by the highest civil authorities, and sentenced to five years in the galleys.\(^4\)

They did not serve the five years. On his visit to Italy shortly afterwards, John McAdam enlisted the help of Admiral Persano in interceding for the men and they were released after a brief period of imprisonment.\(^5\)

When Garibaldi handed over power to Victor Emmanuel and retired to Caprera, the men of the British Legion were given the option of remaining in the Sardinian army or of being discharged with six months’ pay and a passage home. John McAdam helped with the arrangements for discharge which, he said, owing to the chaotic state of the government at that time, were tied up in red tape;

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1. Ibid., 17 Nov. 1860.
2. Ibid., 8 Nov. 1860.
3. Ibid., 1 Dec. 1860.

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and also bought 'handsome uniform tunics' for the twelve Scots who planned to stay with the Sardinian army.¹ McAdam visited the Glasgow company in their headquarters in an old convent, and was not impressed by the appearance of the Glasgow men in comparison to the muscular Englishmen; but he found their generosity rather more commendable than their physique, for they wanted to share with their English and Irish comrades the money he had brought for them—£52 17s. 9½d. which the Glasgow Garibaldi Fund Committee had voted to be used for this purpose at its winding up. Since this was rather a small sum to be divided among 500 men, McAdam went to Naples and borrowed more; with it he bought long woollen stockings, worsted comforters and some flannels, and also obtained from the Sardinian Arsenal woollen Guernsey shirts, shoes and greatcoats for those that had none. Half of all this clothing he handed out to 250 men sailing to London on the Melazzo while Colonel Peard paid them off; the remainder was for the other 250 men, who were to sail in the Fiera Mosca some days later. McAdam also seems to have given the Scottish volunteers to understand that the Garibaldi Special Fund Committee would pay their fares from London to their homes. The Minutes of the Committee for 25 January 1861 recorded, however, that

The Secretary reported that more than two hundred and fifty men had arrived sent from Naples in the Fiera Mosca to Genoa and thence overland;... As the destination of the greater part was the north of England, Scotland and Ireland, they applied to the Treasurer of this Committee to be sent on. Many of the men had been told by Mr McAdam that this Committee would forward them home. This being within neither the province nor power of this Committee, the men remained in suspense until Mr Crawford had received from the Sardinian Minister an intimation that Count Cavour... had forwarded instructions that the men should be sent on.²

The Sardinian Embassy gave each man a railway ticket and 5s. for food. According to Anthony P. Campanella, about fifty Scots refused to accept the money because they had saved enough from their pay, unlike the English who had squandered theirs in Naples or on board ship.³

So most of the volunteers from Glasgow and Edinburgh returned to their homes at the beginning of February 1861 'generally improved by their visit', according to McAdam. Their contribution to

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¹ Ibid. Anthony P. Campanella, however, relying on reports in the Daily Chronicle, 26 Nov. 1860, and the Times, 14 Dec. 1860, states that none of the British Legion remained with the Sardinian army although a few enrolled with the Légion de Flotte ('La Legione Britannica', 536).
² Holyoke Papers, Garibaldi Special Fund Minutes.
³ Campanella, 'La Legione Britannica', 539.
Garibaldi’s military achievement was, because of their late arrival, almost negligible, but they gave a good account of themselves when occasion allowed and Garibaldi was grateful for their help as ‘a proof of the good will borne by their noble nation for the liberty and independence of Italy’.¹

It has to be largely a matter of speculation why so many men chose to risk their lives in a foreign cause, but there are some clues. Idolisation of Garibaldi himself, the romantic hero who could so easily be seen as the William Wallace of Italy, undoubtedly played a very large part in inducing young men to fight for him; and accompanying this, very often, was the explicit conviction that for the good of mankind it was necessary for Italy to be freed from oppression and united into a nation so large and strong that no foreign ruler could ever again hope to divide and conquer her. G. M. Trevelyan’s description of the British Legion as largely made up of ‘toughs from London and Glasgow’ out for a holiday at someone else’s expense is contradicted by the tone of the letters which the Scottish recruits wrote home, many of which were published in the newspapers.² The letters were obviously not written by unscrupulous adventurers or even by romantic dreamers, but by articulate and literate and informed young men who had found an outlet for their senses of duty and adventure, the two not being incompatible. Certainly there were those who may have applied from improper, or at least confused, motives, but few of these could have been among the select group chosen to go. The Edinburgh contingent at least, on the basis of the evidence, was not drawn from the lowest levels of society but from the skilled artisans or higher social groups. Many of them were or had been members of volunteer corps at home, which in itself implied a degree of prosperity sufficient for the purchase of a uniform and equipment. Probably very little, if any, of the recruitment was the result of economic distress or unemployment. Those who attended Lawrie’s meetings are recorded as having questioned him about the advisability of immediately resigning their positions, which could hardly have been a matter of concern to the unemployed.³

Generally, it seems reasonable to assume that the volunteers were a small body of men whose opinions were similar to, and formed by the same influences as, those of the much larger body of philo-Italians who expressed their sympathies differently. Personal association with Italian exiles, and personal experiences of travel in Italy, were important formative influences among that larger body; but few of the volunteers were old enough to have known Agostino

¹ Letter to Ashurst, 26 Jan. 1861, quoted by Campanella, ibid., 552–3.
² G. M. Trevelyan, Garibaldi and the Making of Italy (London, 1911), 260.
³ Scotsman, 3 Sept. 1859.
Ruffini, for example, undoubtedly the most influential of the Italian exiles in Scotland, who lived in Edinburgh from 1840 to 1848. Nor were the working men among the volunteers likely to have had much experience of foreign travel, except for those like Peter Cunningham who had been merchant seamen in the Mediterranean. Other influences, however, were probably common to both groups. The Mazzinian societies such as the Friends of Italy and the later Committees for the Emancipation of Italy were particularly active and particularly well-supported in Scotland. Although the names of known volunteers are not found on the lists of council members of these societies, some of them may have been ordinary members, especially in Glasgow where there was a large working-class membership; those who were not members may have attended the large public meetings which were a feature of the societies’ work. From at least 1851, groups of Glasgow working men had been ‘in the habit of meeting regularly to entertain subjects of conversation arising out of their interest in the affairs of Italy’—a quotation which refers to members of the Society of the Friends of Italy; and these groups, consisting largely of those skilled artisans who were so prominent among the volunteers, continued to meet under a variety of auspices, usually with John McAdam as a key figure, up to and beyond the time of the recruitment. Anti-Catholicism was also, no doubt, as potent a motive among the volunteers as it was in the general population; the erroneous but widely-held view that Garibaldi was a protestant in arms against papal tyranny was an added incentive.

The emphasis on distinctive Scottish dress and the formation of a separate Scottish company points to national pride as an additional motive for service with Garibaldi. John McAdam, whose enthusiasm for Italian liberty was second to none, was anxious that the conduct of those Scots who fought to secure it would be a credit to their own country also, and newspaper reports described the recruits as chivalrous and patriotic young men. Some of the recruits, at least, must themselves have subscribed to this view of their actions. There was already, of course, a long tradition within which Scottish military achievements in foreign service counted for national virtue. Idealism rather than opportunism impelled Scotsmen to follow Garibaldi. If there was any one motive overriding all the others, it was surely that expressed by the obscure Highland soldier, John Bower, who wrote in a letter to R. B. Reed of Newcastle that he wanted to fight for Garibaldi ‘from my sense of freedom that I should like every man to enjoy’.

2. Tyne and Wear County Record Office, Cowen Collection, C. 1508, Bower to Reed, 25 Aug. 1860.