

Citation style

Potter, Simon: review of: Neville Thompson, *Canada and the End of the Imperial Dream. Beverley Baxter's Reports from London through War and Peace, 1936-1960*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013, in: *Reviews in History*, 2014, June, downloaded from recensio.net

First published: <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1612>

 **Reviews**
in History

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Over the past 15 years, a substantial, diverse group of scholars has worked to develop the concept of the 'British world'. They have explored the various and varied connections that linked Britain with a wider British diaspora. The focus has been predominantly on the so-called 'colonies of settlement' or 'white Dominions': Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. However, some scholars have insisted on a broader definition of the British world. Recent work has explored how smaller overseas fragments of the British diaspora, in places like Shanghai, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, or Kenya, were plugged into the British world. Other scholars have focused on how non-white colonial subjects (in southern Africa, Sierra Leone, and the West Indies, for example) claimed to be British and used British identities and connections to pursue their own political and cultural projects.

Much of the early work on the idea of a British world was driven by two main impulses. First, historians were uncomfortable with the way that the study of British imperial history had developed over the previous half-century, resulting in the progressive marginalisation of the settler empire. The major theories and historiographical debates about British overseas expansion had come to focus overwhelmingly on Africa and Asia, particularly India. The historical significance of British overseas settlement had as a result been neglected.

Second, historians in the former dominions had over the same period focused on writing national histories, further contributing to the tendency to edit the settler colonies out of the imperial past. Histories of Canada and Australia, and perhaps to a lesser extent New Zealand and South Africa, had often been shaped so as to pursue nation-building agendas, and had relegated the British connection to the margins. At best, empire appeared as something that white settlers had struggled to free themselves from, the obstacle in the path to the realisation of national identity. By the end of the 20th century, many scholars had come to see this as a wilful and even dangerous misreading of the past. It neglected the close bonds between the settler colonies and Britain that had developed during the 19th century, and that had continued to operate into the 1950s and beyond. It also tended to ignore the role of settlers as the shock-troops of empire, killing and dispossessing indigenous peoples across the expanding frontiers of settlement and rejoicing in their white, British, global identity.

A wave of new historical research and writing has now significantly transformed our understanding of the connections between Britain and the settler colonies, superseding an older and more staid history of 'Anglo-Dominion' relations. Historians of the British world have explored many different aspects of the British connection, traversing the terrains of political, economic, social, and cultural history. We now know a great deal more about the massive and variegated migratory patterns upon which the British connection was based. This has in turn helped us achieve a more nuanced sense of the economic and cultural, as well as demographic, impact of long-distance human movement within the British world. The politics and economics of the British connection are now also better understood, with scholars exploring the interplay of

cultural, sentimental, and more hard-nosed material factors. The diverse cultural connections among the component parts of the British world have been revealed by work on the mass media, for example, and we also have a clearer sense of how British identities related to hierarchies of class, race, and gender difference. We might anticipate that work on the British world will in future follow two further, underexplored paths. First, it might focus more directly on the impact of the British world on Britain itself. Here, it might offer a counterpart and complement to work which has emphasised the role of black and Asian 'others' in shaping British identity. Second, it might increasingly blend into the study of global history. Indeed, some historians believe that global history represents the best hope for future scholarship about the British Empire.

Neville Thompson's book *Canada and the End of the Imperial Dream* offers a lively and readable illustration of how the British world perspective can enrich both British and Canadian histories. Thompson takes recent literature on the British world, and on British identity in Canada, as the jumping-off point for his study. As the sub-title indicates, the book is centrally concerned with the work of Beverley Baxter, a Canadian-born journalist and politician who was based for most of his career in London. Between 1936 and 1960 Baxter kept himself busy by writing (among other things) fortnightly columns on British affairs for Canada's *Maclean's* magazine. His working life in London displayed all the hallmarks of an era during which Canadians nurtured a British identity and looked to London as the centre of their British world. Thompson's book is in part a biography, sketching out the main elements in Baxter's life and personality. Baxter's upbringing in Toronto was Methodist and Conservative. After leaving school at the age of 15, Baxter spent his early working life trying to sell pianos and get his writing published. In 1917 he enlisted and travelled to England as a signals officer: he served in France for three months before being invalided back to London with pleurisy. There he began to write occasional articles for the British press, and met Lord Beaverbrook, the Canadian financier who had bought the *Daily Express* and insinuated himself into a position of influence in British politics. Beaverbrook gave his fellow-Canadian a job as an editorial writer and reporter for the *Express* and, despite a week in which Baxter seemed a conspicuous failure in his new post, promoted him to literary editor of the paper. 'Thereafter he was primarily an editor, a commentator on politics and the arts, and a publicist for Beaverbrook's causes' (p. 34). Most notable among these causes was Beaverbrook's quixotic 'Empire free trade' campaign, designed to forge the empire into a tariff-protected, self-sufficient economic bloc, and picking up the mantle of Joseph Chamberlain's failed tariff reform campaign. Baxter worked for Beaverbrook until 1933. After a stint in public relations, he left to become an editorial writer for Allied Newspapers. In 1936 he stood as Conservative candidate for the north London constituency of Wood Green. He was elected after making substantial donations to the constituency association and other local charities, and retained his seat for almost 30 years. Shortly after the election he began writing for

Maclean's, the only magazine published in Canada with a nation-wide readership.

More significantly, Thompson's book is an account of the major events that occurred in Baxter's adult lifetime, as reported in and refracted through Baxter's letters to *Maclean's*. Coverage of the abdication crisis helped build Baxter's audience, and Thompson also surveys Baxter's running commentary on the diplomacy of appeasement. Baxter was well aware of the threat that fascism posed to peace in Europe. He advocated increased British military spending, though he also backed Chamberlain and supported the Munich agreement. Along with many others, he only turned definitively against appeasement when the German army marched on from the Sudetenland into the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Throughout the war, Baxter used his 'London Letter' not only to comment on the shifting tide of events at home in London and further afield, but also to strengthen the sentimental link between Britain and Canada so as to support the imperial war effort. The 'London Letters' also offered him opportunities to support the political machinations of his old boss, Beaverbrook. After the war, Baxter provided a predictably Conservative running commentary on British affairs, and continued to champion the cause of imperial unity. His letters did not necessarily seem atavistic: the Commonwealth connection remained important to both Britain and Canada well into the 1950s. During the Suez crisis, Baxter was a prominent supporter of Eden's assault on Egypt. More surprisingly, perhaps, in November 1956 Baxter finally abandoned the imperial dream (not, it should be noted, because of the Suez debacle), and announced that Britain should follow the only remaining path to future prosperity and 'cast its lot in with Western Europe' (p. 333). One of the last of those who shared Joseph Chamberlain's dream of an economically united British empire had finally woken up. Baxter went on to support Macmillan's plans for rapid decolonisation.

Baxter's work for *Maclean's* harked back to an earlier age of long-distance journalism, to the venerable tradition of the 'London Letter' that would have been familiar to readers around the British world, and indeed in the British provinces, throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Baxter's reports were mailed back to Canada (rather than telegraphed) and published every two weeks. They were thus, at best, semi-topical. They did not provide news but instead offered comment, attempting to plug readers into the London social and political scene.

It is not quite clear what an analysis of Baxter's reports adds to our existing understanding of British and imperial affairs during his long period as a fixture in the pages of *Maclean's*. Baxter was certainly a well-informed and well-connected commentator, but he hardly used his 'London Letters' to spill the beans on the inside story of British politics. His wartime reports might best be viewed as part of the subtle, unofficial, massive British propaganda campaign that worked to ensure that the Commonwealth was fully informed about the conflict and fully behind Britain in the military effort. People like Baxter did not work directly for the state, and did not pass on material written for them by anonymous bureaucrats: the fact that their efforts were diverse, heart-

felt, and voluntary made them even more effective propagandists. The significance of Baxter's post-war efforts meanwhile might lie in the reminder they offer that the idea of a British world lived on through the 1950s and, to some extent, beyond.

As Thompson argues, Baxter's reports for *Maclean's* 'were infused with a passionate belief in the close identity of Canada and Britain, a fervent advocacy of imperial unity until 1956, and a strong Conservative political, social, and economic outlook' (p. 6). *Maclean's* must have given him some opportunity to shape Canadian understandings of British politics, although it is not possible to measure in any meaningful way how influential he was. Baxter can hardly be presented as a heroic, lone voice bringing British or international affairs to isolated, information-hungry Canadians. Canadian audiences were very well served with news from Britain in this period, through the Canadian press and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (and its predecessor the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission), as well as through the numerous American newspapers, magazines, and broadcasts that crossed the border on a daily basis. Baxter's was one voice among many, and to put him in his proper place we would need to survey the broader media ecology he inhabited.

We might label Baxter a professional expatriate. He parlayed his identity as a Canadian into a journalistic career, which in turn offered him a route to wealth and a seat at Westminster. To some extent, Baxter could sell himself to British audiences as an authentic voice of dominion opinion, while simultaneously using his presence in London to establish a place for himself in the Canadian press as a mediator of London life. He could sell himself as a commentator on British affairs who knew what Canadian audiences wanted to read about, how news from Britain could best be presented to them, what they needed explained, and what they didn't. His ability to bridge these two sections of the British world declined the longer he stayed in London, and the more 'UK British' he became. But he was also able to use his connections with Beaverbrook to establish and present himself as an insider with privileged knowledge, giving him an added advantage. Ultimately, Baxter occupied only a marginal position in British journalism and politics, but by carefully constructing his public image he could strut before his Canadian readers as a bigger man than he actually was. This perhaps explains the pompous and self-aggrandizing tone of much of Baxter's journalism. It does not make appealing reading now, and as Thompson points out in his book, some of Baxter's contemporary Canadian readers responded in a similarly allergic fashion.

We should also see Baxter as part of a 20th-century colony of Canadian expatriates who lived and worked in the United Kingdom, and who were reasonably prominent figures in the British media industry. These people could play on the Britishness of their Canadian identity when it suited them, but also position themselves as outsiders, bringing a fresh perspective, when that worked better as a means to advance their careers. Beaverbrook was the most famous and most powerful Canadian on Fleet Street. But there were others. Montreal-born Campbell Stuart

worked for Lord Northcliffe after wartime military service, producing propaganda at Crewe House: after the First World War Northcliffe made him managing director of *The Times* and managing editor of the *Daily Mail*. Numerous Canadians worked closely with the British Broadcasting Corporation during the Second World War, giving them immediate and intimate access to Canadian listeners throughout the war years, and opportunities to reach British listeners too. After the Second World War, Canadians like Rooney Pelletier and Sydney Newman occupied influential positions at the BBC. It is perhaps a bit of stretch, but we could see these people, and Baxter, not just as members of a Canadian colony in London, but as part of a British world that shaped Britain itself, and as part of the history of 'global Britain'.