The sovereign's relationship with the Commonwealth derives from Britain's imperial history. For, nearly all of the members of the Commonwealth are formerly dependent territories of the Empire, which chose to cooperate voluntarily on a basis of full constitutional equality. Since 1953, the Crown has been divisible, and the Queen of Britain is now also Queen of 15 other Commonwealth monarchies, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Jamaica, etc. In those countries, the functions of the sovereign are, in practice, undertaken by a Governor-General, appointed by the sovereign on the advice of the Prime Minister of the country concerned. But, since 1949, it has been possible for members of the Commonwealth to become republics, and the majority of the member states are now republics. They must, however, recognize the sovereign as `the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations and as such the Head of the Commonwealth’. But the position of Head of the Commonwealth is not an office but rather an expression of a symbolic character without any separate constitutional standing or capacity.

Britain, Commonwealth and the End of Empire

This chapter examines the history of Great Britain, the British Commonwealth, and the end of the British Empire in the twentieth
century, suggesting that the twentieth century ended in Britain as it began, with the constitutional structure of the United Kingdom a contested and vital subject of public discourse. It concludes that the transitions that characterised the Empire-Commonwealth over the twentieth century were ultimately constrained within the due process of British constitutionalism.

1886
Iain Mclean and Alistair McMillan

in State of the Union

Published in print: 2005 Published Online: February 2006
Item type: chapter

This chapter examines the unravelling of the Union between 1800 and 1886. The UK of Great Britain and Ireland was created in 1800, and the Union flag then took on its modern design, with crosses to represent England, Scotland, and Ireland (but not Wales). However, the Irish Union was never accepted in the way the Scottish Union was. The unravelling of the Union began seriously in 1886.

The City of London and British Imperialism: New Light on an Old Question
Niall Ferguson

in London and Paris as International Financial Centres in the Twentieth Century

Published in print: 2005 Published Online: September 2007
Item type: chapter

This chapter seeks to reassert the importance of Britain's formal empire in the 'unofficial mind' of the late 19th-century City of London, suggesting that even if they did not initially see independent gold standard countries as more risky than colonies, investors learned through experience that they were. The reality was that membership of the British Empire was a more reliable 'no default' guarantee than adherence to the gold standard by itself. The political upheavals of the period before, during, and after the First World War revealed the limits of commitments to gold in the face of war and revolution. By the 1920s, bitter experience combined with a new regulatory environment to increase substantially the proportion of overseas investment going to the Empire.
In Malaya and India, the British devised a system of indirect rule whereby they relied on local norms, social organizations, and indigenous institutions of authority such as landlords and sultans who managed the daily lives of their subjects but were controlled by the British through treaties. Both the colonial states used patronage to rule, creating dependencies between local authorities and the colonial state, and also creating economic, legal, and social structures that, along with the patronage, divided the society vertically.

Introduction

WM. ROGER LOUIS

The 20th-century British Empire cannot be understood without taking into account its Victorian origins. Thus, the volume begins with a chapter on the Empire before 1914, but the thematic design emphasizes the period from the outbreak of the First World War to the principal era of decolonization in the 1960s. In line with this, it highlights the contemporary view that the British Empire rested on sea power, that India was far and away its single most important component, and that the ‘Colonial Empire’ still included the Dominions as well as the colonies. This introductory chapter draws out of the regional chapters the dominating themes of nationalism and the granting of independence by the British. There are seven organizing themes that can be determined in the first half of the volume that help in understanding its overall design and purpose.
This book, which is volume IV in a series, is an assessment of the British Empire in the light of recent scholarship and the progressive opening of historical records. This series helps to understand the end of Empire in relation to its beginning, the meaning of British imperialism for the ruled as well as for the rulers, and the significance of the British Empire as a theme in world history. This 20th-century volume considers many aspects of the ‘imperial experience’ in the final years of the British Empire, culminating in the mid-century’s rapid processes of decolonization. It seeks to understand the men who managed the empire, their priorities and vision, and the mechanisms of control and connection that held the empire together. There are chapters on imperial centres, on the geographical ‘periphery’ of empire, and on all its connecting mechanisms, including institutions and the flow of people, money, goods, and services. The volume also explores the experience of ‘imperial subjects’ in terms of culture, politics, and economics; an experience which culminated in the growth of vibrant, often new, national identities and movements and, ultimately, new nation-states. It concludes with the processes of decolonization, which reshaped the political map of the late 20th-century world.

Introduction

WM. Roger Louis

in The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography

The word ‘historiography’ is used in the sense of the evolving or changing interpretations of the history of the British Empire. How did historians of the Empire go about their tasks and what were their assumptions? How were their accounts influenced by the political and cultural climate of their age? Above all, which of the historians of the Empire had the strength of intellect and personality to write works that have stood the test of time? This introductory chapter addresses itself to those questions through the historiographical revolution of the early
1960s. The issue of economic decline has been the specific Gibbonian theme applied to the history of the Empire. The focus of the present volume is principally on the work of professional historians since the 1880s. As this volume makes clear, the historiography of the Empire, as it entered a new century, was as rich and diverse as ever before.

**Hong Kong and the Cold War**

Chi-kwan Mark

Published in print: 2004 Published Online: January 2010
Item type: book

After 1949, the British Empire in Hong Kong was more vulnerable than the lack of Chinese demand for return and the success of Hong Kong's economic transformations might have suggested. Its vulnerability stemmed as much from Britain's imperial decline and America's Cold War requirements as from a Chinese threat. It culminated in the little known '1957 Question', a year when the British position in Hong Kong appeared more uncertain than any time since 1949. This is the first scholarly study that places Hong Kong at the heart of the Anglo–American relationship in the wider context of the Cold War in Asia. Unlike existing works, which tend to treat British and US policies in isolation, this book explores their dynamic interactions — how the two allies perceived, responded to, and attempted to influence each other's policies and actions. It also provides a major reinterpretation of Hong Kong's involvement in the containment of China. The author argues that, concerned about possible Chinese retaliation, the British insisted and the Americans accepted that Hong Kong's role should be as discreet and non-confrontational in nature as possible. Above all, top decision-makers in Washington evaluated Hong Kong's significance not in its own right, but in the context of the Anglo–American relationship: Hong Kong was seen primarily as a bargaining chip to obtain British support for US policy elsewhere in Asia. Using a variety of British and US archival material as well as Chinese sources, the author examines how the British and US government discussed, debated, and disagreed over Hong Kong's role in the Cold War, and reveals the dynamics of the Anglo–American alliance and the dilemmas of small allies in a global conflict.

**State of the Union**

Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan

Published in print: 2005 Published Online: February 2006
This is the first survey of Unionism, the ideology of most of the rulers of the United Kingdom for the past 300 years. Because it was taken so much for granted, it has never been properly studied. In the twilight of Unionism, it is possible to see its long shadow over British and imperial history since 1707. The book studies the crucial time points at which the Union was built up and partly taken down: 1707, 1800, 1886, 1921, 1974, and 1997 to date. Primordial Unionism (the belief that the union is good in and for itself) now survives only in Northern Ireland. Instrumental Unionism supported the Union as a means to other ends, such as the Empire and the Welfare State; but the first is gone and the second is now evolving differently in the four territories of the UK. Representation and finance are the unsolved, and arguably insoluble problems of the post-1997 devolution settlement.

Poetry against Empire: Milton to Shelley
KAREN O’BRIEN

in Proceedings of the British Academy, Volume 117: 2001 Lectures

Published in print: 2003 Published Online: January 2013
Publisher: British Academy
DOI: 10.5871/bacad/9780197262795.003.0008
Item type: chapter

This chapter situates Milton's vehement anti-imperialism at the beginning of a poetic tradition, stretching as far as Shelley and beyond, which was global in sensibility and in which opposition to empire was a central form of imagination. It argues that the major poets of this era not only articulated a powerfully anti-imperial vision of the world, but also contended that artistic culture could not flourish under the political conditions of modern imperialism. This is partly a historical claim, and one which assumes that poetry in this period played an important role in the public contestation of Britain's changing place in the world; but it is also a literary claim about the continuing salience of the classical and early modern traditions which governed poetic forms of imagination right up to the Romantic age. The purpose is not simply to record a series of improvised poetic responses to the growth of the British Empire. Rather, it is to show how a poetry grounded since the Renaissance in universal habits of thought and expansive modes of territorial vision was transposed onto an evolving historical reality, and how this process of imaginative transposition took on a heightened sense of political urgency as the implications of Britain's imperial activities broke upon public consciousness.
The idea of trusteeship in international society originates in late 18th
century British India. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the
emergence of trusteeship as a justification of political power in territories
administered by the East India Company. The chapter has five sections:
From Merchant to Sovereign in British India; The Claim to Rule; The
Relations of Ruler and Subject; The Purpose of the Office of Government;
and Providing Protection, Directing Improvement.

Empire's Law
William Cornish, Michael Lobban, and Keith Smith

This chapter aims to note how both the essential constitutional doctrines
and the major rules of private law could fare in the process of adapting
the common law to its novel environments; for, among other things, that
suggests the extent to which English common law was dependent upon
its own circumstances of time and socio-political development.

The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II: The
Eighteenth Century
P. J. Marshall and Alaine Low (eds)

This book is volume II of a series detailing the history of the British
Empire and it examines the history of British worldwide expansion from
the Glorious Revolution of 1689 to the end of the Napoleonic Wars, a
crucial phase in the creation of the modern British Empire. This is the age
of General Wolfe, Clive of India, and Captain Cook. Chapters trace and analyse the development and expansion of the British Empire over more than a century. They show how trade, warfare, and migration created an Empire, at first overwhelmingly in the Americas but later increasingly in Asia. Although the Empire was ruptured by the American Revolution, it survived and grew into an empire that was to dominate the world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume V: Historiography
Robin Winks (ed.)

Published in print: 1999
Published Online: October 2011
Item type: book

This series is an assessment of the British Empire in the light of recent scholarship and the progressive opening of historical records. From the founding of colonies in North America and the West Indies in the 17th century to the reversion of Hong Kong to China at the end of the 20th, British imperialism was a catalyst for far-reaching change. This series aims to help with the understanding the end of Empire in relation to its beginning, the meaning of British imperialism for the ruled as well as for the rulers, and the significance of the British Empire as a theme in world history. This fifth and final volume shows how opinions have changed dramatically over the generations about the nature, role, and value of imperialism generally, and the British Empire more specifically. Chapters discuss the many and diverse elements which have influenced writing on the Empire: the pressure of current events, access to primary sources, the creation of relevant university chairs, the rise of nationalism in former colonies, decolonization, and the Cold War. They demonstrate how the study of Empire has evolved from a narrow focus on constitutional issues to a wide-ranging enquiry about international relations, the uses of power, and impacts and counterimpacts between settler groups and native peoples.

“From the Cabins of Connemara to the Kraals of Kaffirland”
Bruce Nelson

in Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race

Published in print: 2012
Published Online: October 2017
Item type: chapter
This chapter examines Irish nationalism in the context of the British Empire and its rapid expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century. It focuses on Michael Davitt, who participated in the South African War. Davitt became a bitter opponent of British foreign policy and a war correspondent for American and Irish newspapers. He had long been committed to an essentialist discourse of Anglo-Saxon versus Celt that required the demonization of the Saxon for his manifold sins. While Davitt became famous for his opposition to anti-Semitism and support for the aboriginal peoples of Australia and New Zealand, we must also recognize that in romanticizing the Boers as heroic victims of British imperialism he allowed himself to demonize their black African adversaries in ways that not only distorted historical reality but also reflected the intense racism of his time.

Railways in the Victorian Economy

Mark Casson

in The World's First Railway System: Enterprise, Competition, and Regulation on the Railway Network in Victorian Britain

Published in print: 2009 Published Online: September 2009
Item type: chapter

This chapter argues that Victorian Britain was not so committed to laissez faire as some historians have suggested. Although railways were privately promoted they needed to be authorized individually by Local & Personal Acts of Parliament. Railways were only one of a number of innovative types of project promoted in Victorian Britain; others included ports and harbours, and gas, electricity, and water schemes. Railways connected mining and manufacturing districts to ports, and connected major towns and cities to London. Together with ocean shipping, they formed a crucial part of the steam-powered inter-modal international system of transport on which the British Empire was based.

A History of Cant and Slang Dictionaries

Julie Coleman

Published in print: 2008 Published Online: January 2009
Item type: book

This book provides a survey of dictionaries of slang and cant (the language of thieves and beggars) in the period 1859-1936. It covers Britain, American, Australia, India, and other countries then part of
the British Empire. Dictionaries by Hotten and Farmer and Henley are covered in particular detail. By the end of the period, war, the Depression, and prohibition all played a vital role in determining what type of dictionaries were being produced.

The Metropolitan Economics of Empire
D. K. FIELDHOUSE

This chapter concentrates on the metropolitan economic structure of the British Empire. It also focuses on the British side of the equation because B. R. Tomlinson extends the discussion into the post-colonial era. During the 20th century, the British had to make a choice between an open, multilateral economic system, based on free trade between all countries, and a more or less closed Imperial economy. There were three main methods by which a modern Imperial state such as Britain might attempt to obtain special economic benefit from possession of colonies: by regulating their trade; by manipulating their monetary systems; and by investing in them. These main methods are specifically described. Moreover, a discussion on currency and the sterling area, capital investment in the Empire; commercial advantages of Empire before 1914, between the wars, and after the Second World War is provided.

Introduction
P. J. Marshall

For this book the 18th century has been extended at both ends. Although strict uniformity has not been imposed on all chapters, this volume is for the most part set between two dates traditionally taken as marking eras in British history: 1689, the year of the Glorious Revolution, an event seen by most English people as a time which ensured their liberties, and 1815, the year of Waterloo, the last battle in wars between Britain and France that had begun in 1689. During the first half of this century,
occasional British ships defied Spanish claims to a monopoly of the navigation of the Pacific. In the second half, voyages of exploration were despatched to the Pacific, most notably those of James Cook. The British Empire of the first half of the 18th century was essentially an Atlantic one, peopled by inhabitants of British origin, and held together by economic and cultural ties with Britain, as much as by the exertion of authority. By the end of the 18th century, British economic interests were certainly becoming increasingly ‘global’, in the sense that they were spreading beyond the limits of the Empire.