

← Travel and communications

An illustration used to advertise the "new overland route to India" in the early 1870s

A major theme in the expansion of the empire was the spread of new technologies supporting ever-quickening travel and communications. Journey times from Europe to the east gradually fell throughout the first half of the 19th century – thanks to faster steamships; then, in 1869, with the opening of the Suez Canal, they were slashed.

The "new overland route to India" took the traveller through Europe (France and Brindisi on the heel of the Italian boot) and via the Suez Canal aboard P&O steamers. This illustration is the work of Australian artist Nicholas Chevalier, who accompanied Queen Victoria's son Prince Alfred on a tour of the east in the late 1860s.

BODLEIAN LIBRARY-JOHN JOHNSON COLLECTION OF PRINTED EPHEMERA-EMPIRE & COLONIES FOLDER

OVER THE PAST 30 years historians have expended a good deal of time and energy exploring how empire and the non-European world has been represented in British popular culture. But while much has been written on the subject, not very much has been seen.

That's what makes the images on these pages so revealing. Taken from the Bodleian Library's John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, they give an insight into how the British public encountered a range of imperial themes. They offer us a rich and fascinating glimpse into Britain's social and cultural history.

References to empire or to Britain's engagement with the wider world appeared on everything from calendars, playing cards, food labels and paper bags through to hand bills, political tracts, exhibition programmes and advertisements. Such ephemera often offered a window in to an exotic world in which white people appeared in a privileged position and non-whites were caricatured along with the game-rich, fecund lands in which they lived.

The use of imperial images in selling soap, attracting visitors to museums and championing political causes meant that depictions of distant places and strange peoples were soon thoroughly domesticated. As such, they played a significant role in the development of consumer culture. And, while visual representations of empire sometimes formed part of conscious attempts to purvey imperial messages, sometimes they were much more incidental.

The images selected here illustrate several themes – and, as you'd expect, many of them have positive overtones: the importance of the monarchy as it became increasingly associated with empire and patriotism; exploration and the glorification of imperial 'heroes'; the significance of emigration, trade, travel and global communications networks in forging the imperial world; and the manner in which empire was consciously exhibited to the public and captured in popular music.

Yet not all the illustrations champion the imperial project. One reveals the constant presence of opponents in Britain. Another bears witness to the decolonisation that took hold as imperial rule became increasingly anachronistic and condemned – just as the attitudes towards non-Europeans that many cultural references promulgated were eventually discredited.

IMAGES OF EMPIRE

From expansion to endgame, Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins explore eight representations

of Britain's imperial adventure



← Imperial trade, commerce and marketing
 'Pride of Empire' sliced peaches from Australia, c1920s-30s
 Food and raw materials from the territories of the empire fed British industry and British households. Canned food and, from the late 19th century, even fresh fruit and meat, were imported from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

↓ Anti-imperialism
 A poster advertises a public meeting on the opium trade and its "destructive effects", mid-19th century
 While many images reflecting imperial themes celebrated empire as a beneficial force in world affairs, there was always a distinct anti-imperial strand. And imperial issues – the abolition of slavery, Irish Home Rule and the Suez Crisis – were often at the heart of British politics.
 This poster advertises a public meeting at which "startling revelations" about the opium trade and the impact of the narcotic were to be made. The venue for the meeting was a congregational school room, and one of the speakers was a missionary. This shows how missionaries could alert the public to inequities in the colonies, though they also played a role in western 'cultural imperialism'.

← An imperial monarchy
 Victoria: Queen & Empress
 The front cover of a poem by the Reverend FT Bramston, 1897
 This typically patriotic piece of jubilee memorabilia from 1897 shows a guardsman (representing the army) and a matelot (representing the navy), with a battleship steaming in the background.
 The 1897 diamond jubilee, like its 1887 predecessor, was a major national and imperial event marked by celebrations across the world, centred on a lavish London jamboree.
 In this publication, the Reverend FT Bramston praises the queen's goodness and the achievements of her reign through poetry, a familiar form of Victorian hagiography. The queen was eulogised along with national heroes such as Nelson and Gordon. The length of her reign, and the reinvention of the monarchy that occurred during it, made her a symbol of the nation above criticism or contempt.

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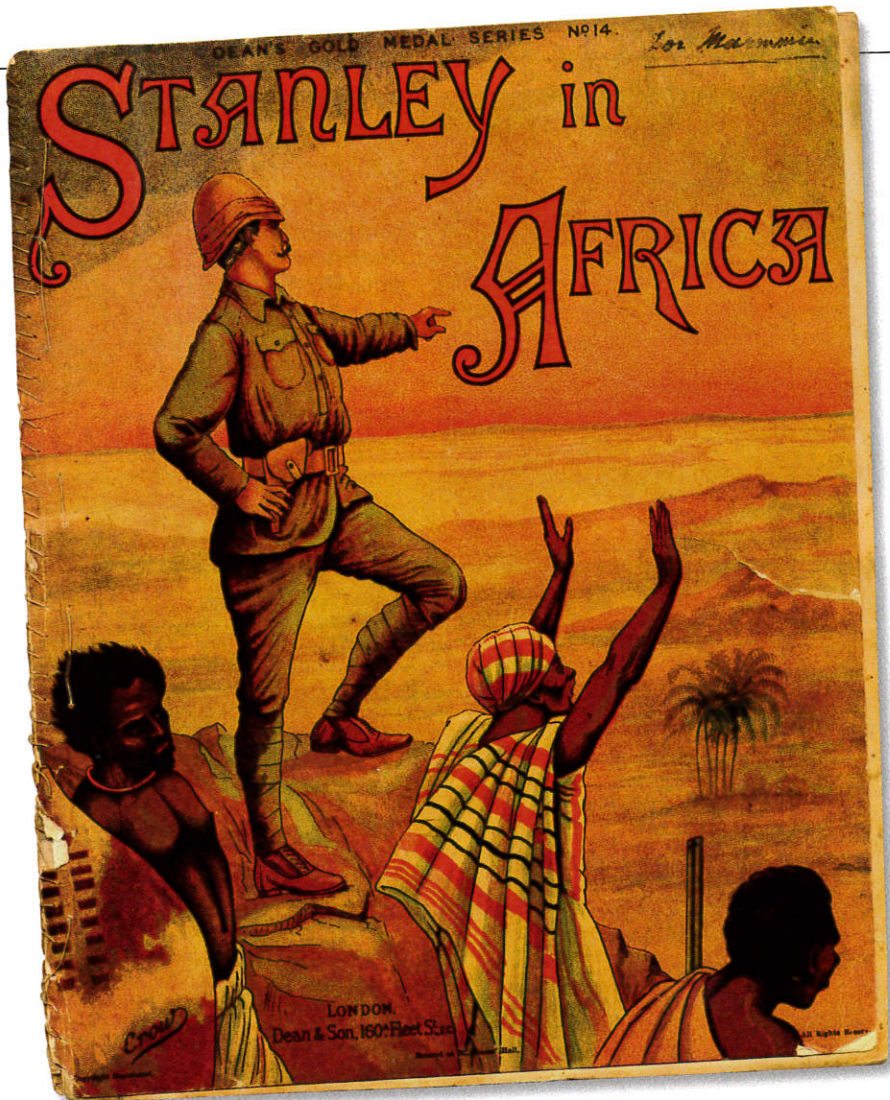
India! Opium! & China!
 A
PUBLIC CONVERSATION
 WILL BE CONDUCTED
 ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, FEB. 10th,
 AT THE
CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL ROOM,
 CALEDONIAN ROAD,
 THE REV. E. DAVIES, AND MR. REYNOLDS,
 IN WHICH
STARTLING REVELATIONS
 Of the demoralizing and destructive effects of Opium on the population of India; its physical, social, and religious effects on the population of China; and the duty of British Christians of both sexes at the present crisis, will be submitted.
 The Chair will be taken at Eight o'clock.—FREE ADMISSION.
Warren Hall & Co., Book Printers and Stationers, 10 Cambridge Terrace, Camden Town, N.W.

While most images celebrated the empire, there was always a distinct anti-imperial strand

→ New life in the colonies
 A brochure from the interwar period tempts Britons to start a new life in Canada
 The settler societies marketed themselves as sunny, prosperous, new 'Britains', where people could build new lives. These emigrants would contribute to the growth of a global economy in which Britain – with its industrial productivity and insatiable appetite for raw materials and food – dovetailed with fledgling settler societies desiring a market for their wool or wheat.
 New Zealand described itself variously as "the empire's dairy farm" and "Britain in

the south". Canada portrayed itself as a land overflowing with unfeasibly large carrots and wide, empty, fertile plains.
 As the settler colonies improved their image – which had once been associated with unfriendly environments, criminality and economic failure – at home propaganda emphasised the positive benefits of living overseas. Negative aspects were papered over: the Canadian weather, for example, went from freezing cold to 'bracing'.





» Exploration

Henry Morton Stanley on the cover of Darton's *Heroes in Africa*, c1890

This colourful magazine presented dramatic scenes from the African journeys of the journalist-explorer Henry Morton Stanley and illustrates the manner in which such information was put before the public. The images are fanciful and demonstrate contemporary ignorance of Africa and its people, and the late 19th-century taste for jingoism and the glorification of acts of imperialism and their associated 'heroes'.

Stanley is a deeply controversial character, and his journeys are widely understood to have damaged African societies just as they opened up parts of the 'dark' continent's interior to the forces of European 'progress' and 'civilisation'.

The images demonstrate the late 19th-century ignorance of Africa and its people, and the glorification of acts of imperialism

» Decolonisation

The official programme for Ghana's independence celebrations, March 1957

The major theme of imperial history in the 20th century was decolonisation. The European empires collapsed between the 1940s and 1960s – though the process of decolonisation continued into the 1990s and even beyond. This image is a good example of contemporary design as post-independence administrations sought new symbols and colours with which to build a national identity.

The official independence programme marks the transformation of the colony of the Gold Coast into the independent nation-state of Ghana, as Governor Sir Charles Arden Clarke handed over to President Kwame Nkrumah. It was a landmark event as Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African colony to quit the empire. The British parliament passed the Ghana Independence Act in January 1957, and on 6 March the new national assembly issued a proclamation of independence.

The colours of the new national flag are stylishly displayed within a design based upon the country's borders.



Ashley Jackson is professor of imperial and military history at King's College London. **David Tomkins** has managed a number of digital access projects relating to the Bodleian Library's John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera. They are co-authors of *Illustrating Empire: A Visual History of British Imperialism*

JOURNEYS

Books

- **Illustrating Empire: A Visual History of British Imperialism** by Ashley Jackson and David Tomkins (*Bodleian Library*, 2011, £19.99 pb)
- **Mad Dogs and Englishmen: A Grand Tour of the British Empire at its Height** by Ashley Jackson (*Quercus*, 2009)
- **Imperialism and Popular Culture** by John MacKenzie (ed) (*Manchester University Press*, 1987)
- **The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain** by Bernard Porter (*Oxford University Press*, 2006)