**‘This community which nobody can define’:
Meanings of Commonwealth in the late 1940s and 1950s**

**Abstract**

Assessments of early postwar understandings of the power and potential of the Commonwealth have suggested the body either failed to shield the British public from a sense of national decline or that it comforted them that there was no need to worry about decolonization because the organization enabled the maintenance of British authority by other means. However, historians and political scientists who provided public comment on the present and future of the body in the late 1940s and 1950s complicate such assessments, wracked as they were by a profound uncertainty over what the Commonwealth could achieve. Their sense of uncertainty was not derived from a pessimistic reading of the tangible events and processes of the period that we might today assume blunted commentators’ faith in Commonwealth cohesion, such as Britain’s relationship with Europe, neutralism, apartheid, or even Suez. Instead, uncertainty over the Commonwealth’s capacity to realise a latent potential supposedly rooted in its members’ willingness to work together was rooted in something more elemental, namely sustained uncertainty regarding the nature of the body’s connections and functions. The body was judged an abstraction, a nascent and unparalleled experiment whose bonds were extensive yet impossible to measure. Its perceived opacity rendered it neither a cause for concern nor a salve to a wounded British morale.

**Keywords**

Commonwealth, decolonization, historians, political scientists

In a world accelerating towards decolonization, amidst the end of all that British imperialists had taken to be solid and enduring, did the people of Britain find reassurance in the Commonwealth of Nations? In all likelihood, there is not enough work on the Commonwealth in the 1950s to talk of a conventional historical narrative about how any section of British society apart from governmental elites perceived this enormous world body.[[1]](#endnote-1) However, if one were to stitch together different congruent points, one might say there are two overarching hypotheses. First is the argument that the 1950s saw the gradual shedding of British optimism, only slowly at first, then more quickly, over the prospects of a postcolonial Commonwealth of Nations enabling Britain to retain the title of ‘Great Power’.[[2]](#endnote-2) From the late 1940s a sense that the whole enterprise would work – which survived the test of India becoming a republic within the Commonwealth – gradually ebbed away, accelerating and bleeding out particularly quickly in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There is backing for this point of view from some who were there at the time; looking back from the late 1960s, one scholar suggested that the early 1950s were the brief ‘golden years of hope’, an apex in a belief about the possibility of establishing an effective multi-racial Commonwealth.[[3]](#endnote-3) Such dwindling faith was caused by, amongst other matters, criticisms from other Commonwealth countries about British actions in Suez, and over the Commonwealth’s failure to rein in South Africa’s apartheid. One eminent historian who was a student in Cambridge in 1956 retrospectively argued that ‘the trauma of Suez marked the effective end of Britain as a great power’.[[4]](#endnote-4)

A second, and more general, argument is that most readily associated with a much-admired article by John Darwin, for whom the Commonwealth administered a soothing balm to the British electorate in the 1950s. The Commonwealth shielded the British from a sense of decline by allowing politicians to hold up the institution as the maintenance of British power by other means, even whilst, just across the Channel, the Fourth Republic was torn down over Algeria. To quote Darwin’s delicious simile, ‘It was like a man in the dentist’s chair, soothed by smiling nurses and laced with painkillers, while a dentist with a manic grin probed his jaw. Only later does he find that all his teeth have gone. But then it’s too late.’[[5]](#endnote-5)

The present article has a more modest aim than attempting to discern what British society as a whole thought of the Commonwealth in the 1950s. It is concerned with scholars – principally historians and political scientists – who used the recent (and not so recent) history of the British Empire and Commonwealth to understand what was going on in their own time, and even make comments about its future direction. The scholars themselves first need to be examined. Firstly, what follows will principally involve an examination of intellectuals recognised at the time as preeminent in their field, but it will also consider less exalted scholars whose works were nevertheless both available to the general British public and used in secondary and tertiary education. Secondly, the terms ‘scholar’ and ‘intellectual’ have been chosen over ‘academic’, because those under consideration had varying degrees of attachment to a university. The British Labour politician John Strachey held no academic posts in his lifetime, but his *The End of Empire* (1959) must count amongst the most erudite and considered works on Commonwealth of that era. Harry Hodson’s career as a Fellow at All Souls College in Oxford was confined to the interwar period, but he produced significant, serious works on Commonwealth whilst working at the *Sunday Times* from 1946 onwards. The majority considered here nevertheless held an academic post during the postwar period. Tamson Pietsch has argued that, during the late 1940s and 1950s, academic institutional and personal connections between British and Dominion universities began to be supplanted by other ties. What Pietsch labels ‘settler universities’ started simultaneously to forge new connections with non-British institutions across the world and turn inwards, focusing ‘their energies on building locally the academic infrastructure they had previously thought about in more expansive terms.’[[6]](#endnote-6) That this had direct implications for the ways scholars of the ‘old dominions’ studied their own nations would seem to be borne out by the historian Philip D. Curtin’s 1959 warning that ‘localism and ecumenicalism’ meant Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders had recently become more inclined to find the roots of their nationhood within their own borders, rather than any broader imperial or British context.[[7]](#endnote-7) This raises the possibility that ‘old dominion’ scholars who opposed a traditional British emphasis upon the importance of the Commonwealth simply neglected it as a topic rather than openly contested their British counterparts’ opinions.

Nevertheless, a good deal of material on the topic was produced by intellectuals from the ‘old dominions’ who had a clear physical and emotional connection with Britain, and a corresponding public presence within it. Thus, when examining the body of scholarly output available to British readers, one cannot focus solely on British-born writers, as if they wrote in national isolation. There were some writers from outside the old ‘imperial family’ who wrote about the Commonwealth, such as the Norwegian-American Paul Knaplund, but the two scholars working in the 1950s best-known to us today are the Anglo-Irishman Nicholas Mansergh and the Australian Keith Hancock. Mansergh was the first Smuts Professor of the History of the British Commonwealth. Hancock receives less attention here than had he not focused on his biography of Smuts throughout most of our period, but he nevertheless produced some works of relevance for the present article during his time at the Universities of Birmingham, Oxford and London. These were men whose connection with Great Britain surpassed the merely physical: Hancock would later recall that in Mansergh he had recognised a similarity to himself, for Mansergh was ‘a man condemned or privileged, just as I was, to love two soils and cherish two loyalties.’[[8]](#endnote-8) Other important scholars of the Commonwealth include the Australians J. D. B. Miller and Kenneth Wheare, who taught at the universities of Leicester and Oxford respectively. Such connections went both ways, with British-born scholars having substantial links with other Commonwealth countries. Between two academic stints in the UK, Ivor Jennings was principal and later the first Vice Chancellor of University College, Ceylon between 1940 and 1954. Charles Carrington, Professor of Commonwealth Relations at the Royal Institute of International Affairs between 1954 and 1962, had spent his childhood and teenage years in New Zealand.

Scholars invariably voiced their own opinions on the rights and wrongs of the Commonwealth in public, thanks to articles in journals such as the *Spectator* and talks for the BBC. As was the case before and during the Second World War, the more eminent among them were also involved with government.[[9]](#endnote-9) Mansergh’s 1947 Chatham House paper, for instance, had a role in shaping Cabinet discussions on India’s future in the Commonwealth,[[10]](#endnote-10) but scholars’ work for London often went beyond advice to co-option onto government committees. Amongst other examples, the economic historian Sir Frederick Rees was a member of the Commission on Constitutional Reform in Ceylon in 1945, and Rees, Vincent Harlow and Margery Perham were members of the 8-strong 1951 Committee of Enquiry into Constitutional Developments in the Smaller Colonial Territories. Darwin believes the publication of Robinson and Gallagher’s seminal 1953 article ‘The imperialism of free trade’ marked the point at which imperial history started to be buffeted less by ‘the passions and vagaries induced by the controversies generated by empire itself’.[[11]](#endnote-11) However, intellectuals did not stop wading in on important matters of the day, and Whitehall’s hostility to some of their conclusions did not deter it from continuing to employ scholars throughout the 1950s.[[12]](#endnote-12) In 1954, Hancock and the jurist Stanley de Smith served on the Buganda Constitutional Committee,[[13]](#endnote-13) and Jennings – the ‘most physically and intellectually available expert on constitution-making during the high tide of decolonization’[[14]](#endnote-14) – was the ‘master draftsman’ of the new Malayan constitution in 1956-7.[[15]](#endnote-15) These writers were not detached observers, but were instead what might be termed ‘scholarly-contemplative’ figures, concerned with the implications of the recent past for their own present.[[16]](#endnote-16)

I.

From the start of the period, the relative global decline of Britain and Western Europe more generally were broadly accepted by scholars as an ‘undeniable fact’.[[17]](#endnote-17) This was recognised as the reason the ‘old dominions’ had started to enter into strategic alliances with the United States,[[18]](#endnote-18)scholars of the Commonwealth commonly acknowledging the USA and the Soviet Union as the two global superpowers.[[19]](#endnote-19) For Hancock in 1954, when compared to the British Empire of a quarter of a century earlier, the Commonwealth had ‘suffered an immense loss of power’.[[20]](#endnote-20) Thus, what concerns us here is belief in the capacity or otherwise of the Commonwealth to only *partially* ameliorate any relative decline, by placing Britain at the heart of a worldwide entity of likeminded nations. That being said, we must not overstate how far all commentators felt decline had occurred, nor how far it was thought impossible to rebuild. Declinism – defined as a heightened sense that Britain had lost its purpose and was lagging behind the growth in living standards experienced in other Western European countries because its political elites were unfitted for economic modernization – was not as pervasive a sentiment as it would become in the 1960s.[[21]](#endnote-21) Even respected scholars were prepared to argue that the extent the United States and the Soviet Union were out in front had been exaggerated.[[22]](#endnote-22) For most scholars, the connection between the ‘old dominions’ and the United States did not spell the end for a potential close-knit Commonwealth. Whilst Canadian conservatives such as Donald Creighton feared ‘a very real American continentalism’,[[23]](#endnote-23) more common was the belief that the ‘old dominion’ military connections with the USA supplemented rather than replaced established connections with the UK.[[24]](#endnote-24) Britain still retained its position as a great power, it was believed, although not all scholars were convinced that Britain necessarily needed to be one; for Mansergh, it just needed to remain a good power, committed to fair play and moderation.[[25]](#endnote-25) Nevertheless, whilst Knaplund was cagey about making predictions – ‘[a]n historian must be economical with his prophecies’[[26]](#endnote-26) – scholars did not refrain from ruminating on whether Britain *could* remain a great power in the future.

There was, after all, a good deal of promising raw material from which to craft a strong Commonwealth. It was common for scholars of all political shades to feel that Commonwealth nations besides Britain – particularly the ‘old dominions’, and the ‘premier Dominion’ Canada most of all – were quickly growing in strength and importance, thanks to a greater political involvement in world affairs and, most significantly, rising economic power.[[27]](#endnote-27) For Mansergh writing in 1948, all of this meant that even if it were proven that Britain was weakened materially, the ‘old dominions’ were not, and there was therefore ‘no reason to assume that the strength of the whole has been thereby weakened.’[[28]](#endnote-28) Carrington among others felt much the same.[[29]](#endnote-29)

In addition to the possible nakedly geopolitical and economic benefits of close association with other nations, however, the Commonwealth’s potential was also defined in terms of what the world might be guarded against were it a success. It promised to be a panacea for a variety of global ills, most notably communism, racial division, and nationalism. In 1947, Alexander Brady argued that, in enhancing ‘the moral and psychological cohesion of the English-speaking world’, the Commonwealth could defend itself better from communism.[[30]](#endnote-30) For Mansergh in 1953, the Commonwealth was worth persevering with because the promise of ‘multi-racial’ cooperation was ‘welcome at a time when the democracies so often seem to be on the defensive’.[[31]](#endnote-31) The Commonwealth might bridge racial divides (and, for those whose sense of such divisions were particularly acute, stave off potential race wars),[[32]](#endnote-32) an idea that was also a feature of speeches by some senior Commonwealth politicians across the period.[[33]](#endnote-33) Scholars sometimes downplayed the significance of the United Nations – ‘where words are weighed, and contacts soured with suspicion or preserved in a deep-freeze of protocol’, wrote Carrington in 1955[[34]](#endnote-34) – as a means of emphasising the significance of the Commonwealth as the most important vehicle for bringing ‘East’ and ‘West’ together.[[35]](#endnote-35) Additionally, some scholars felt that whilst nationalism was necessary in the initial construction of nations, it was ultimately an atavistic, destructive force. This was, perhaps, as much a legacy of the Second World War as it was a reaction against the perceived violence of anti-British sentiment expressed by some African and Asian nationalists; towards the end of the conflict, Hancock wrote of ‘this snarling world of nationalisms’.[[36]](#endnote-36) For Carrington, the multiracial nature of the Commonwealth afforded an opportunity to wrest ‘the backward peoples’ away from their obsession with national self-determination ‘just when their more forward fellows are beginning to look for something better’.[[37]](#endnote-37) For another scholar, an effective Commonwealth would be of great use because ‘absolute national sovereignty bids fair to become one of the Molochs of our epoch’.[[38]](#endnote-38) Whilst this potential role for the Commonwealth in shaping global affairs was not the same as that expected of formal empire, it was not necessarily a ‘more modest’ task.[[39]](#endnote-39) It was felt to offer Britain the opportunity to retain a form of moral authority and a role as a mediator in world affairs in a manner not available to the United States. It all hinged on how far the whole acted as a whole.

II.

A particular reading of Britain’s historical relationship with the ‘old dominions’ offered succour to those adjusting to a post-imperial world. Hancock complained that there was too much ‘sweetness and light’ in any account of the Commonwealth that emphasised a smooth transition from Boston Harbor to the Statute of Westminster via the Durham Report ‘in a triumphant procession to the finishing post of self-government’.[[40]](#endnote-40) Yet the general tendency was to suggest that Britain had pragmatically perfected the art of letting go. In equality and no formal obligation, the post-1931 Commonwealth had at last found the stable resting point that the continually evolving empire could not. In 1960, Wheare’s *Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth* would suggest that some Commonwealth countries might strive for constitutional ‘autochthony’ or self-sufficiency,[[41]](#endnote-41) but in the 1950s, historians were still approvingly quoting Jan Smuts’ statement that the ‘successful launching of her former colonies among the nations of the world … will rank as one of the most astonishing achievements of British political genius. Forms and formulas may still have to be adjusted, but the real work is done.’[[42]](#endnote-42)

Any account of a smooth transition from empire to Commonwealth would, of course, be complicated by the departures of Ireland and Burma in the late 1940s. The narratives surrounding these nations took two rather predictable, though invariably speculative, forms. First was the idea that they were the unfortunate result of poor timing. For Carrington and Wheare, Burma and Ireland respectively may have remained in the Commonwealth had the decisions over their futures been made after April 1949, when it was announced that India could remain a member of the Commonwealth despite being a republic.[[43]](#endnote-43) Second was the idea that the departures had deeper roots, and were perhaps inevitable. For Jennings and others, Eire was *sui generis*, its longstanding connection to the UK meaning its politicians were much more hostile to Commonwealth membership than Asian anti-colonial nationalists.[[44]](#endnote-44) When in 1954 Heather Harvey updated D. C. Somervell’s *The British Empire* (1930), she implicitly criticised Somervell’s earlier failure ‘to take account of the depth of [Irish] anti-British sentiment.’[[45]](#endnote-45) Looking back from 1959, Carrington felt that Ireland’s relationship with Britain was perhaps too long and sad for Ireland to have taken any other path.[[46]](#endnote-46) Some authors oscillated between the two ways of thinking about Burma and Ireland.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Whilst these discussions were speculative, what was missing was any connection to a broader disintegrative tendency that might have been felt to reside within the Commonwealth. The departures were in fact deployed to highlight either the extant strength of the Commonwealth – demonstrating to all ‘the reality of Commonwealth independence’ and dispelling the idea that Britain’s intentions remained in any way coercive[[48]](#endnote-48) – or that they had directly led to a strengthening of the Commonwealth. For Mansergh, there had been an ‘element of compulsion’ to Ireland’s membership, so it left, but the subsequent constitutional variety thanks to India’s membership was a clear ‘source of strength’.[[49]](#endnote-49) Neither departure, whether described as a ‘lost cause’ or a case of ‘bad timing’, was believed to indicate the Commonwealth was a temporary resting point for territories passing through from colony to independent nation with no special connection to Britain.

As for Britain’s connections with its nearest neighbours, that closer integration with Western Europe would inevitably involve the ‘abandonment’ of the Commonwealth was not immediately apparent to scholars at the time. In the late 1940s, Mansergh had suggested that ‘to regard the crystallization of Britain’s dual personality in international affairs as bringing to the surface an acute tension between the rival claims of the overseas Dominions and of Western Europe is to see the whole in a false perspective’, because a strong Western Europe ‘could only safeguard the Commonwealth by building up a barrier against any aggressor on the Continent.’[[50]](#endnote-50) This might appear to indicate Mansergh was railing against a body of work seeking to prove the opposite, but scholarly warnings that Britain ‘must not sacrifice her special relationship with her kith and kin throughout the world for participation in a union with continental Europe’ did not emerge with any force until the early 1960s.[[51]](#endnote-51) Indeed, Europe was frequently absent from discussions of the Commonwealth.[[52]](#endnote-52) When it was mentioned, scholars accepted assurances given by successive governments from Attlee onwards that London believed the members of the Commonwealth were more important to Britain than the nations of Western Europe, and were closer friends.[[53]](#endnote-53) Given the broader context, this is perhaps understandable; many were convinced by what London said, the Australian government included.[[54]](#endnote-54) Consequently, it was thought London would pursue closer relations with Western Europe only to the point that these did not impinge upon Britain’s connections with the other Commonwealth nations. Such was the strength with which this view was held, that once Britain’s intention to apply to join the Common Market was made public in July 1961, one scholar suggested Britain was unwilling to join ‘unless her political and commercial relations with other Commonwealth countries can be fully safeguarded.’[[55]](#endnote-55) Again, this is understandable given the broader context. George Wilkes has shown how, excepting a small group of right-wing Tory backbenchers and the *Daily Express*, it was actually only as late as the end of 1962 when Britain’s relationship with Western Europe, and its possible future membership of the EEC in particular, came to be seen more widely in Britain as a ‘betrayal’ of the Commonwealth.[[56]](#endnote-56)

For the manner in which scholars dealt with tensions surrounding the Commonwealth, we therefore need to turn to what went on within the body itself. There is a tension between the notion of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ meetings as an arena for the free exchange of different opinions, and of the meetings as a key vehicle in the Commonwealth’s development as a cohesive unit. Such tension, however, was invariably avoided thanks to the belief that, as the member nations had a shared political or judicial or emotional legacy, they commonly agreed on most matters anyway.[[57]](#endnote-57) They did not, of course, agree on *all* matters. For scholars, the two biggest threats to intra-Commonwealth harmony were Asian neutralism and South African apartheid.

Despite their frequent assertions that the Commonwealth did not exist for the formation of a common foreign policy, scholars still invariably depicted Asian members’ non-alignment as something to be worked around, particularly in the wake of the Bandung Conference in 1955, which was to Western observers the most visible embodiment of neutralism. Were the Commonwealth to function it would be *in spite of* a Western failure to win over its non-Western members. Nevertheless, neutralism was not thought as fissiparous as one might assume. On the eve of Bandung, Mansergh suggested that in the eight years since independence, the Asian ex-colonies’ membership of the Commonwealth had a ‘more settled appearance’.[[58]](#endnote-58) Two years previously, he had pointed to the fact that, whereas the old Imperial Conferences had been held every five years, there had been Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ meetings in 1944, 1946, 1949, 1951 and 1952, as well as meetings of Foreign, Finance, and Defence Ministers. Thus, it was felt likely that any impairment of what Mansergh referred to as the Commonwealth’s ‘structural unity’ due to the admission of Asian countries, was offset by the likely strengthening of the body’s ‘inner cohesion’ that such constant consultation generated.[[59]](#endnote-59)

Both before and after Bandung, fears for neutralism’s effects were attenuated by two alternative visions of Asian attitudes. Firstly, there was a residual sense that India joining the Commonwealth validated the notion that for all their anti-colonial bluster, Indians ultimately recognised the Raj had played a positive part in their nation’s development.[[60]](#endnote-60) This was part of a broader sentiment expressed across the period, whereupon writers of all political persuasions suggested the Commonwealth’s existence was proof that ‘British rule really did have many of those positive features in which we like to plume ourselves.’[[61]](#endnote-61) Alternatively, Britain’s entering into a spirit of partnership had successfully convinced the Asian powers that British intentions were no longer imperialist.[[62]](#endnote-62) If this was neutrality, it was consequently a neutrality which did not preclude co-operation in the future.

Jennings demurred from the general suggestion that India was inherently friendly towards Britain; having spent more time in Asia than the other scholars discussed here, he concluded that the political climate in India in particular was embittered against Britain,[[63]](#endnote-63) and that communism was ‘intrinsically attractive to Asian peoples.’[[64]](#endnote-64) This did not, however, preclude the possibility of more cordial relations being entered into in the future; Jennings argued that nationalism would prove a transitory force,[[65]](#endnote-65) and if the ‘old dominions’ were patient, a generation or more of aid and technical assistance might eventually truly annul any anti-British sentiment and render Asian countries more enthusiastic members of the Commonwealth.[[66]](#endnote-66) Not every scholar was prepared to pass final judgement on the Colombo Plan’s efficacy, [[67]](#endnote-67) but those who did suggested it had done ‘immense good’ in raising Asian living standards and had consequently brought about some sort of greater cohesion to the Commonwealth.[[68]](#endnote-68) There was therefore a sense that the non-Asian members had at least gotten off to a good start in their efforts to forge a multiracial body.

Increasing Western awareness of black South Africans’ situation under *apartheid* necessarily complicated any narrative of a ‘good start’.[[69]](#endnote-69) That the empire stood for ‘a tradition of equality’ gave Britons the means with which to dissociate themselves from *apartheid*,[[70]](#endnote-70)and in the middle of the 1960s, it was easy for scholars to look back and suggest that this ideological fissure meant South Africa’s departure from the Commonwealth ‘had all the makings of an inevitable tragedy’.[[71]](#endnote-71) However, scholars of the late 1940s and 1950s ventured a wide range of opinions about South Africa’s future relationship with the Commonwealth. At their most optimistic, intellectuals suggested South Africa would reform itself. Immediately prior to the Nationalists’ 1948 election victory, Mansergh argued that Malan was a pragmatic politician, and that the impact of the war and urbanization would lead to the softening of segregation.[[72]](#endnote-72) When this looked increasingly unlikely in the wake of the raft of segregationist legislation passed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, some suggested that Nationalists’ continued interactions with other countries’ politicians through the Commonwealth would persuade them to reform. This idea was surprisingly enduring,[[73]](#endnote-73) but as the 1950s progressed, the possibility of South Africa’s departure from the Commonwealth was discussed more frequently,[[74]](#endnote-74) prompting the suggestion that Britain’s stand for multiracialism would cement the commitment of the Commonwealth’s Asian and African members to the body. Last, and most pessimistic, was the idea that the Commonwealth could not affect South Africa, which invariably accompanied the argument that one of the body’s governing precepts was that there would be no interference with fellow members’ domestic politics.[[75]](#endnote-75) However, even then scholars suggested that, whilst it tarnished the public image of the Commonwealth, an *apartheid* South Africa did not hamper the body’s inner workings. For Carrington, whilst in the ‘world of diplomacy’, India, Pakistan and South Africa were ‘on very poor terms, in all the other far more serviceable functions of social life they co-operate freely through the Commonwealth channels.’[[76]](#endnote-76) At any rate, the problem of South Africa was, it was argued, outweighed by the other benefits of Commonwealth membership.[[77]](#endnote-77) Therefore, regardless of their thoughts on South Africa, no account of its relationship with the Commonwealth threatened the body’s future efficacy.

As for Britain’s place in the Commonwealth, by the postwar era, scholars were well-steeped in the ethos of the Statute of Westminster. Intellectuals’ stated acceptance of the theoretical equality of Commonwealth members was reflected in the effort they put into the search for nomenclature that best evoked such equality. The relatively neutral term ‘association’ was sometimes employed,[[78]](#endnote-78) but more evocative words were more common, particularly ‘family’, allowing as this did for the reheating of the tired metaphor of the ‘mother country’ now living happily alongside her grown-up children.[[79]](#endnote-79) ‘Fellowship’[[80]](#endnote-80) and ‘partnership’[[81]](#endnote-81) were also used, as were ideas of brotherhood.[[82]](#endnote-82) Additionally, most took their cues from the April 1949 Prime Ministers’ meeting communiqué and dropped the ‘British’ from the title ‘British Commonwealth of Nations’ in their writings on the subject, it being felt that the change could neutralise claims of neocolonialism,[[83]](#endnote-83) (although some continued to use the older title well into the 1950s).[[84]](#endnote-84)

Readers may well have had some difficulty adjusting to the idea of the equality of the family, particular in relation to its Asian members. The legacy of well-established racial ideas meant Western depictions of Asian countries as equal partners lived alongside the belief that Indians had not completely adjusted to modernity.[[85]](#endnote-85) Aside from any preconceptions, readers would not have taken from scholars’ work any sense that Britain was about to be subsumed within a morass of nations, to be rendered without influence. At the most basic level was the matter of numbers. For the immediate future at least, it was suggested that there would be a relatively small number of Commonwealth members. For example, right up until the end of the 1950s, it was widely felt that it would be a generation before the colonies of East Africa became independent. Speaking in 1956, Hancock argued it would be one or two decades before there were some new arrivals to the Commonwealth; his biographer suggests that from ‘one who in 1954 had helped nudge Uganda towards self-government, this was scarcely prescient.’[[86]](#endnote-86) Some scholars were also enthusiastically caught up in what Michael Collins has termed the ‘federal moment’.[[87]](#endnote-87) Were federations to come to pass, this might further mitigate against Britain being crowded out of the discussion. Rather than each individual former West Indian colony attending future Commonwealth meetings, for instance, one representative from a Caribbean federation would do the job for all. Thus, in 1955 Carrington predicted that a future Commonwealth would involve the existing eight members, as well as a Caribbean federation, the Gold Coast and Nigeria, the Central African Federation, a ‘Greater Malaya’ and possibly an East African Federation.[[88]](#endnote-88)

In addition to this was the perpetuation of an older view that Britain would, in effect, continue to take the lead on new policies, at least in the near future. Britain was still described as *prima inter pares* or as an ‘equal, although the senior’ member of the Commonwealth.[[89]](#endnote-89) The power gap between Britain and the remainder had closed, though not completely. Viewed one way, the colonial wars fought by the British might have threatened to disrupt the ideals of a multiracial and equal Commonwealth,[[90]](#endnote-90) but looked at from another, such warfare signalled that Britain retained its central role in defining how the empire transformed into the Commonwealth. For Mansergh writing in 1948, the Commonwealth’s focus on practical issues such as defence and economics meant that ‘Equality of status may now be assumed, though many of its implications remain to be worked out.’[[91]](#endnote-91) A disjuncture therefore existed between the new rhetoric of Commonwealth and a perceived reality.

The arrival of new members nevertheless led to a certain amount of anxiety about a loss of intimacy. This did not necessarily mean that Britain and the ‘old dominions’ could not continue to work together; that was, after all, one of the benefits of a Commonwealth in which all acted on a voluntary basis. Whilst the idea of a formal secondary (labelled ‘mezzanine’) level of Commonwealth membership for newly independent nations such as Ghana had been rejected by London by the middle of the 1950s,[[92]](#endnote-92) this did not prevent scholars suggesting that some members were more closely interconnected than others, and acted accordingly. The historian Harry Allen wrote of a full Commonwealth, bound together by a sense of common history and of the ‘practical value of such a voluntary association in a troubled world’, with an ‘inner Commonwealth circle’ of ‘old dominions’ brought together by more emotional ‘bonds of sentiment’.[[93]](#endnote-93)

III.

This simultaneous emphasis upon practical value and emotional bonds leads us away from specific issues to the broader matter of the quality and quantity of Commonwealth connections. At the same time, the above composite account of ideas risks overstating the level of scholarly consensus about the Commonwealth’s latent potential. There are three main areas of possible difference that need examination, namely the types of bonds believed to be most important, the strength of such bonds, and any changes in attitude over time, particularly in the wake of Suez.

With republics allowed to remain within the Commonwealth after 1949, the last major symbolic connection between its members was broken, with all now merely required to recognise King George VI as the Head of the Commonwealth.[[94]](#endnote-94) Mansergh suggested that the agreement over India significantly helped reconcile constitution and reality,[[95]](#endnote-95) whilst others questioned whether the body even needed symbols.[[96]](#endnote-96) However, Wheare was quick to grasp the significance of the changes of the late 1940s, asking, ‘If you have no common stock, no common form of government, no common allegiance, no common citizenship, and if you extend to citizens of Eire outside the Commonwealth rights which belong to those inside, what really is left that is *common* in your Commonwealth?’[[97]](#endnote-97)

The range of intra-Commonwealth interactions, combined with the range of scholars’ political and methodological leanings, inevitably meant that Wheare’s question was met with a range of answers. Towards the end of the 1950s, a number of left-wing scholars (who will here be labelled ‘critics’) increasingly sought to minimise the Commonwealth’s importance. In 1959, the Australian international relations expert Hedley Bull censured British commentators in particular for being won over by a Commonwealth ‘myth’.[[98]](#endnote-98) Taking a different approach to the one he had adopted until the middle of the 1950s,[[99]](#endnote-99) in 1960 the Canadian historian Frank Underhill believed the Commonwealth had ‘become the great Utopia of British political writers and politicians. What the British public needs just now is a succession of infants to point out the scantiness of the emperor’s clothes’.[[100]](#endnote-100) Bruce Miller spoke in similar terms.[[101]](#endnote-101) From this viewpoint, sentiment was not an important bond. In his 1958 work *The Commonwealth in the World*, Miller argued that although the Commonwealth countries often spoke a shared parliamentary language and were invariably hostile to communism, what held the body together was a desire to retain economic links with the UK. In the future, these links would take the form of the UK buying goods from other Commonwealth countries and providing aid to newer members, rather than there being any heavily integrated ‘division of responsibilities in production and marketing’.[[102]](#endnote-102) There were no strong emotional, social or political connections between the nations; the Commonwealth was simply a ‘concert of convenience’.[[103]](#endnote-103) Similarly, Bull argued that Asian and African members were essentially playing a game with Britain, allowing the Commonwealth to continue in order to secure ‘conveniences and services’ and an influence over British policy ‘accruing to them from the knowledge in Britain that they might leave.’[[104]](#endnote-104)

Critics’ attitudes were in clear contrast to other scholars’. Mansergh, for instance, felt the Commonwealth was principally the result of elite political connections. These connections were strengthened by two elements. First was a shared commitment to parliamentary democracy, which ‘would seem to be an unwritten condition of membership’.[[105]](#endnote-105) Second was the ‘continuing conference of cabinets’, the constant intra-Commonwealth consultation ‘upon which the relationship of the self-governing members of the Commonwealth depends’.[[106]](#endnote-106) Mansergh was alert to the possibility that with the post-1947 diversification of the Commonwealth, it might cease to function as the expression of relationships that were somehow unique, and it appears that this sense of continual interaction was what enabled him to feel that intra-Commonwealth connections were still of a different order of intensity to those its nations enjoyed with non-members.

Like Mansergh, Jennings explicitly rejected the notion that the main drivers of conflict and change in the world were economic. Instead, Jennings believed that Commonwealth unity was principally derived from emotional and intellectual comity.[[107]](#endnote-107) Any problem, he felt, ‘rests in, and is succored by, emotion’.[[108]](#endnote-108) Unlike Mansergh, however, Jennings did not feel that the ‘formal protestations of the politicians’ were the principal driver of any emotional connection.[[109]](#endnote-109) Instead, the most important legacy of empire was a socio-cultural one. A Western-style education system and ‘remarkable similarities’ in social institutions across the Commonwealth (‘from religious foundations and universities to cricket teams’), helped create an environment in which numerous formal and informal channels of communication such as the Commonwealth Press Union, the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth, the BBC, were ‘so much used’.[[110]](#endnote-110)

For the most part, the critics were taking aim at what was becoming known as ‘the establishment’, and there was a tone to their declarations that was simultaneously self-distancing and self-congratulatory – ‘we’ are not blinded by myth, and consequently ‘we’ are doing the innovative work. In their emphasis on economic over non-economic factors, the examples of Mansergh and Jennings would nevertheless appear to validate critics’ claims of a bifurcation in Commonwealth scholarship. However, many scholars who did not identify as critics were prepared to acknowledge the role of self-interest in holding the Commonwealth together. Indeed, the presence of Asian members made it difficult to argue otherwise.[[111]](#endnote-111) Carrington even went so far as to look forward to a future Commonwealth that had ‘shed its political past, which relies upon no historic loyalties but is integrated by hard material common factors’.[[112]](#endnote-112)

More importantly for our story, that critics particularly emerged at the end of the 1950s is suggestive of Suez’s importance. The crisis may indeed have changed some scholarly attitudes. By the time he wrote *The Commonwealth Experience* (1969), Mansergh identified the late 1950s as simultaneously the ‘climax of Commonwealth’ and the ‘dawn of disenchantment’.[[113]](#endnote-113) In his inaugural lecture as Smuts Professor in October 1954, in contrast, Mansergh delivered an argument that was essentially the same in tone and content as the papers he had been writing since 1947. The multi-racial Commonwealth had started well because Western politicians had recognised the need for the Commonwealth to be flexible and powered by continual discussion. Some tensions undoubtedly existed, but interactions were typified by goodwill and a desire to cooperate.[[114]](#endnote-114) This attitude continued into 1955.[[115]](#endnote-115)

Mansergh’s response could indicate Suez’s significance to him. Although invariably guarded and softly spoken, Mansergh was deeply upset by the crisis, publically railing against Eden and declaring he would never vote Conservative again.[[116]](#endnote-116) Commonwealth leaders’ public dismay at London’s actions and failure to consult with them provided Mansergh with evidence of Britain’s failure to maintain a ‘continuing conference of cabinets’. That Mansergh put such emphasis upon open lines of communication may explain why in the wake of the crisis he appeared to have taken seriously the possibility that the Asian members of the Commonwealth would have departed in that ‘moment of high emotion’ were it not for what he labelled an ‘Indo-Canadian entente’.[[117]](#endnote-117)

However, it is hard to precisely quantify the importance of Suez in Mansergh’s thinking in comparison with other factors. Any shifts are partially shielded from view, because his most substantial late-1950s work, 1958’s *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, only covered as recently as 1952, and adopted a more impassive tone than his earlier works.[[118]](#endnote-118) It is also possible to identify another potential reason for Mansergh’s growing despondence, namely his concerns for his other plank of Commonwealth unity, a commitment to parliamentary democracy. In 1958, Mansergh suggested that recent events in Pakistan in particular reopened the issue of ‘the nature and permanence of the existing enlarged membership of the Commonwealth, and … future membership’.[[119]](#endnote-119) The increasingly anti-democratic quality of South African life also appears to have affected him. Following his involvement in the 1954 Unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference, he concluded that despite obvious differences of opinion, the Asian members engaged with South Africa and discussed its racial issues in a constructive and positive manner.[[120]](#endnote-120) In the *Survey*, the early 1950s appears to have been recast, Mansergh now suggesting that relations between old and new members, ‘South Africa always excepted, were conducted in an atmosphere of friendship and goodwill’.[[121]](#endnote-121)

It is easier to establish a continuity of attitudes amongst other historians. Hancock’s continuities of attitude will be considered below but, in contrast with Mansergh, Suez did not disabuse Carrington of the idea that Commonwealth members worked in collaboration with one another. In 1959, he showed he still held to the idea that the myriad connections between its different members meant that the ‘Commonwealth is in continuous session.’[[122]](#endnote-122) Looking back on the first edition of his *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1948) from the perspective of the fourth edition in 1961, Jennings argued he could no longer write about defence, foreign affairs and trade in Commonwealth terms because ‘new international alignments had made the Commonwealth almost, if not quite, irrelevant in these fields.’[[123]](#endnote-123) This might suggest a reduced faith in Commonwealth potential, but even in the first edition, Jennings did not sell the Commonwealth too strongly, arguing that it was ‘a collection of nations associated for a few purposes but dissociated for most.’[[124]](#endnote-124) Furthermore, Jennings’ belief that the depth of intra-Commonwealth connections through ‘unofficial channels’ grew across the decade, facilitating his argument that in the socio-cultural areas of interaction to which he attached most importance, Commonwealth countries remained in ‘close sympathy.’[[125]](#endnote-125)

IV.

However, this is to suggest a greater level of certainty on the part of scholars than was the case. Those who were not critics, Britons or otherwise, actually demonstrated a greater degree of circumspection and uncertainty than suggested by figures such as Underhill. Such uncertainty was partly fed by a belief that it was extremely difficult to get a hold on what Commonwealth members were up to, and how their relationships were developing. Scholars were open about the methodological challenges they felt they faced, although rarely as reflective as the Australian economist Sir Douglas Copland, who in 1955 ventured that ‘[p]erhaps we who are in the midst of the great social changes of our lifetime are ill-equipped to see them in perspective’.[[126]](#endnote-126) More commonly, difficulties were externalised, with the problem of finding and analysing hard evidence of Commonwealth activity highlighted.

There are good reasons for this. Public speeches could be scoured for the basic contours of intra-Commonwealth debates,[[127]](#endnote-127) but the bland affirmations of fraternity that continued to typify the majority of Commonwealth speeches could only get one so far.[[128]](#endnote-128) The Prime Ministers’ Conferences were the most visible political manifestations of Commonwealth interactions, and attracted plenty of scholarly attention accordingly. Yet Conference discussions were intentionally kept secret.[[129]](#endnote-129) According to the former Secretary of State for India and Burma Lord Listowel, even if there were disagreements over the future of the Commonwealth, there was no reason why anyone outside of a conference had to know of it.[[130]](#endnote-130) Communiqués were uninformative – Eden thought it an excellent idea to have them drafted before conferences took place[[131]](#endnote-131) – which led Lester Pearson to joke that, had the leaders of the Commonwealth met King John at Runnymede, the resulting statement would have read ‘There has been a full and friendly discussion of feudal rights and the conference decided to make some recommendations to King John.’[[132]](#endnote-132) Scholars recognised that the release of scanty information surrounding the discussions between Commonwealth leaders was central to their informal nature, even whilst being simultaneously frustrated by this.[[133]](#endnote-133) Furthermore, even when communiqués did reveal anything it was thought extremely hard to assess ‘truly how far the conventions of co-operation … are obeyed in practice.’[[134]](#endnote-134)

Of course, this would not have been so much of a problem for those with a less elite-centred conception of the Commonwealth than it was for the Manserghs of this world. Nevertheless, most scholars also faced a broader difficulty of how to weigh up the relative importance of the different bonds that held the Commonwealth together, a problem compounded by the fact that in its composition, the body was clearly rapidly changing, even if the full implications of this were difficult to ascertain. Whilst Mansergh, Jennings and the critics claimed specific facets of Commonwealth interactions as of preeminent importance, this was in fact the exception rather than the rule. The closest Wheare could come to an answer to his own question about what was common about the Commonwealth was that the extant bonds were ‘of a peculiar kind’, partly historic, partly racial, partly economic, strategic and political, and partly a belief in ‘common ideals’.[[135]](#endnote-135) Some took this further and delivered up exhaustive lists of just about every connection they could find,[[136]](#endnote-136) but more commonly, the bonds that held the Commonwealth together were simply deemed to be ‘of a most indefinite character’.[[137]](#endnote-137)

A further fundamental difficulty that affected scholarship thus centred around precisely how the Commonwealth was to be conceptualised. Words surrounding empire have invariably proved troubling to those who would seek to define and use them,[[138]](#endnote-138) and the postwar era was no different. When it came to terms like imperialism, colony, and trusteeship, Hancock complained, ‘Our generation has befogged itself by its inveterate and atrocious use of language.’[[139]](#endnote-139) Uncertainty over the yardsticks by which Commonwealth should be measured added fat to this usual fire, eliciting a broad range of responses from scholars of Commonwealth in the process. Some were frustrated; in 1956, Underhill rolled his eyes slightly at ‘our old British genius for avoiding definition’,[[140]](#endnote-140) but by 1960 he was complaining about people still believing in ‘this community which nobody can define’.[[141]](#endnote-141) Some, particularly of a legal bent, found its imprecision offended their sensibilities. The scholar barrister James Fawcett thought it remarkable that people were happy to leave the Commonwealth undefined,[[142]](#endnote-142) whilst de Smith wrote that the spokesmen and drafters of the Commonwealth’s ‘political instruments’ were imprecise on purpose, instead favouring a ‘calculated ambiguity of expression’.[[143]](#endnote-143) British statesmen, de Smith continued, had ‘established a mastery over words that might have evoked the admiration of Humpty Dumpty, not to speak of more sophisticated students of semantics’.[[144]](#endnote-144) Others could not avoid a little mischief. In 1952, Mansergh suggested that the ‘nature of the Commonwealth, it goes almost without saying, is not easy to understand’, but that it would be disappointing were this not the case, ‘for the incapacity of foreigners to comprehend the working of British institutions is for them a source of unfailing satisfaction.’[[145]](#endnote-145) Some, however, simply shrugged. There were practical reasons why such imprecision over definitions continued, for therein lay its strength and adaptability.[[146]](#endnote-146) The whole was kept together by goodwill and personal connections, and might fall apart were its aims or modus operandi too tightly defined.[[147]](#endnote-147) Even the lawyers grudgingly accepted as much.[[148]](#endnote-148) Whatever their attitude on the Commonwealth, all were agreed that ‘no one quite knows what it means.’[[149]](#endnote-149)

It is therefore unsurprising that, for all their study, scholars frequently echoed others, such as the Labour MP George Thompson, who said ‘I do not profess to understand it; I think the Commonwealth is one of the great mysteries of the world in which we live.’[[150]](#endnote-150) It was branded ‘peculiar’,[[151]](#endnote-151) defying explanation; ‘[i]f it did not exist’, wrote Wheare, ‘you could not invent it’.[[152]](#endnote-152) Even Jennings felt that the ‘strange entity called the Commonwealth of Nations is amorphous and, in appearance, almost mystic.’[[153]](#endnote-153) Whilst frustrating in one sense, this could prove some comfort in another. The roles played by particular non-Britons such as Smuts and Mackenzie King in the birth of the Commonwealth were acknowledged.[[154]](#endnote-154) However, that the body was felt collectively averse to anything set in stone could be used to support the possibly pleasing notion that the Commonwealth was the ultimate embodiment of a specific reading of Britishness.[[155]](#endnote-155) This popular version of Britishness emphasised pragmatism over ideology, a tendency to make things up as one went along, and mild eccentricity.[[156]](#endnote-156)

Such an emphasis upon change without preconceived purpose, as well as the lack of obligation on the part of its members, and the aforementioned difficulties in understanding the Commonwealth and uncertainties over the best means by which the strength of its connections should be measured, explain the manner in which Commonwealth activity was framed. Discussions of the Commonwealth’s future were suffused with tentativeness. For Strachey, the Commonwealth could only work ‘if we are careful and don’t put too much strain on it’.[[157]](#endnote-157) This was echoed in some politicians’ comments; as late as 1963, the Duke of Devonshire was still referring to the Commonwealth as ‘a tender plant … [needing] nurture and careful attention.[[158]](#endnote-158) It was felt that the body was only at the start of its life, representing a ‘new beginning’ for the old members of the British Empire, according to Hancock in 1950.[[159]](#endnote-159) Even into the 1960s, Hancock and others spoke of the Commonwealth as having only just started.[[160]](#endnote-160)

Most importantly, perhaps, the Commonwealth was repeatedly referred to as an experiment.[[161]](#endnote-161) The Commonwealth was ‘probably the most interesting and startling political experiment that has ever been made’,[[162]](#endnote-162) ‘so fascinating an experiment in co-operation between nations’,[[163]](#endnote-163) or simply an ‘experiment in co-operation’.[[164]](#endnote-164) Because it was only experimental, commentators were not prepared to make a final call on what the Commonwealth could do. Some retained a sense of hopeful optimism until the last, and others did not, but the Commonwealth provided no answers as to whether or not the body might succeed.[[165]](#endnote-165) For Mansergh in 1953, ‘the experience of the multi-racial Commonwealth is too brief to allow of any final judgment’[[166]](#endnote-166) and, although more pessimistic about its prospects following Suez, into the late 1950s he continued to stress that it ‘remains an experiment in co-operation between states of varied races and cultures’.[[167]](#endnote-167) The future of the Commonwealth was uncertain. For Hancock both before and after Suez, it was impossible to tell whether each member of the Commonwealth would be willing to pool its strength in order to create an effective multi-racial body. It sometimes felt like a ‘precarious creation’.[[168]](#endnote-168) Hancock suggested that, in enabling the growth of communications across the world, the Commonwealth was ‘buying time’ for itself. It had adapted to the modern world well, and it was possible that ‘new patterns of mutual trust and aid’ would make the new Commonwealth more enduring than the old empire. Thus, the Commonwealth had the capacity to succeed. But Hancock went no further than that.[[169]](#endnote-169)

V.

Issues that retrospectively came to be recognised as major challenges to Commonwealth cohesion - Europe, neutralism, and South Africa in particular – were either ignored by intellectuals or deemed not insuperable at the time. Readers were provided with scholarly accounts that, for all of their admissions of the challenges facing the Commonwealth, were remarkably resilient in holding to the possibility of it being a significant force in the future. Such resilience is further demonstrated by Suez’s failure to change individual attitudes as much as some have suggested. Contemplation of the specifics of everyday postwar life, therefore, did not close down the possibility of future Commonwealth success. Yet such a possibility was undermined by opacity. When scholars pulled back from the immediacies of particular issues to consider the Commonwealth as a whole or in the abstract, uncertainties about how the body was bound together and the strength of such bonds clouded scholars’ visions of the extent of the Commonwealth’s latent potential. Contemplation of abstractions and the ‘bigger picture’ closed down the possibility of suggesting with any confidence that the Commonwealth had a bright future.

Consequently, at no point in the late 1940s and 1950s did scholars feel that the body was fully functional as a partial antidote to decolonization. It was always conceived of as a work in progress. Of course, intellectuals express uncertainty about the future all the time, and with good reason. The scholars of Commonwealth of the late 1940s and 1950s were not even unique in their own field, as pre-war Empire and Commonwealth-related books republished after 1945 made clear.[[170]](#endnote-170) Nevertheless, the uncertainty and tentativeness on display mean that, as far as scholars of the immediate postwar era are concerned, we cannot locate in the Commonwealth either a source of optimism or pessimism about Britain’s future status as a global power. The experimental, tentative nature of the Commonwealth meant that the defining attitude was ‘wait and see’.

**Notes**

1. Heinlein, *British Government Policy*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. May, ‘Empire loyalist and “Commonwealth men”’, 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Mansergh, *Commonwealth Experience*, 337. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Metcalf, ‘Introduction’, in *Forging the Raj*, 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Darwin, ‘The fear of falling’, 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars*, 187. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Curtin, ‘The British Empire and Commonwealth’, 75-80, quote at 75. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Hancock, ‘Nicholas Mansergh’, 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. McIntyre, ‘Commonwealth Secretariat’, 140; McIntyre, *The Britannic Vision*. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Murphy, *Monarchy*, 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Schwarz, ‘An unsentimental education’, 128. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The Smaller Colonial Territories report was rejected by the Colonial Office as ‘attractive intellectually but academic, un-English and not to be recommended’; McIntyre, *The Britannic Vision*, 292. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. For details of the committee’s work, see Hancock, *Professing History*, ch.5; Low, *Buganda*, 114-34. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Kumarasingham, ‘Introduction’, in Kumarasingham (ed.), *Constitution-maker*, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Fernando, ‘Sir Ivor Jennings’, 577. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Although he used it in a slightly different manner, the term is J. D. B. Miller’s; Miller, *Survey of Commonwealth Affairs*, 490. Some were explicit that their readings of the past offered basic rules for the policy-makers of the present; Hancock, *Wealth of Colonies*, 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Carrington, *The British Overseas*, 1023; see also Parsloe, *Britain and Her People*, 131. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 356. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 290. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Hancock, ‘A Commonwealth view’, *Spectator*, 1 January 1954, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Tomlinson, ‘Inventing “decline”’, 731-57, especially 732; Tomlinson, ‘The Decline of the Empire’, 201-21, especially 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 290. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Creighton, *The Story of Canada*, 272; see also Berger, *Canadian History*, 228. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 65; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 356; see also Brady, *Democracy*, 35; Brebner, *Canada*, ix. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Knaplund, *Britain, Commonwealth and Empire*, 348. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. On Canada, see Frank Underhill, ‘Preface’, in *The Canadian Northwest*, v; Creighton, *The Story of Canada*, 266; Brock, *Britain and the Dominions*, 486; Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 57; Brady, *Democracy in the Dominions*, 21. The ‘premier Dominion’ quote is in Knaplund, *Britain, Commonwealth and Empire*, 300. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Carrington, *Exposition*, 130. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Brady, *Democracy in the Dominions*, 439; Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies was one of many politicians in agreement; Robert Menzies, ‘Australia and the Commonwealth’, *The Listener*, 17 May 1951, 779. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 291; see also Simnett, *Emergent Commonwealth*, 168. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Digby, *Agricultural Co-operation*, vi; Maitland, *Task for Giants*, 275. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. ‘Extracts from the Presidential Address to the First Plenary Session by the Prime Minister The Rt Hon. Walter Nash 12 January 1959’, in *The Commonwealth Relations Conference 1959*, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Carrington, ‘A new theory’, 145; see also Newton, *A Junior History*, 289; Taylor, *The Years of Challenge*, 248. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 53. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Hancock, *Argument of Empire*, 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Carrington, ‘A new theory’, 139; see also Carrington, *Liquidation*, 23; Maitland, *Task for Giants*, 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Strachey, *The End of Empire*, 262. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. May, ‘Empire loyalists and “Commonwealth men”’, 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Hancock, quoted in McIntyre, ‘The Commonwealth’, in *Oxford History*, 560. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Wheare, *Constitutional Structure*, ch.4. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Quoted in Carter, *Across the Seven Seas*, 360. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Carrington’s 1959 Reid Lectures of Acadia University were later published as Carrington, *Liquidation*, 69; Wheare, *Constitutional Structure*, 156. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1948 edition), 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Compare Somervell, *The British Empire* (1930 edition), 218 to Somervell and Harvey, *The British Empire and Commonwealth* (1954 edition), 218. On Burma, see Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Carrington, *Liquidation*, 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Compare Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1948 edition), 163-4, to Jennings, *Problems*, 4-5. The former section on Burma was written in late 1947. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Carrington, *Liquidation*, 69. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 284. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Mansergh, ‘Postwar strains on the British Commonwealth’, 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Allen, *The Anglo-American Predicament*, 81. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. See, for example, Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1948, 1954 and 1956 editions). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Mansergh, ‘Britain, the Commonwealth, and Western Union’, 495; see also Mansergh, ‘Commonwealth Foreign Policies 1945-56’, in *Commonwealth Perspectives*, 42. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Ward, ‘Anglo-Commonwealth relations’, 93; John B. O’Brien, ‘The Australian Department of Trade and the EEC, 1956-61’ in *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe*, 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Bradley, *The Living Commonwealth*, 504. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. George Wilkes, ‘The Commonwealth in British European Policy’, in *Britain, the Commonwealth and Europe*, 55-65. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1954 edition), 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Mansergh, ‘Whitehall and the Commonwealth’, 237. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 286. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Jennings, *Problems of the New Commonwealth*, 45, 47. On the manner in which Indian independence was understood in 1947, see Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 58-61. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. John Strachey, *The End of Empire* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959), 251. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Mansergh, *The Multi-Racial Commonwealth*, 137. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Jennings, *The Commonwealth in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Jennings, *Problems of the New Commonwealth*, 94. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Jennings, *The Approach to Self-Government*, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Jennings, *British Commonwealth of Nations* (1948 edition), 168. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Rayner, *A Concise History*, 690. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Mansergh, ‘The triumph of nationalism in South Asia’, *The Listener*, 14 June 1951, 948; Mansergh, ‘The impact of Asian membership’, *The Listener*, 9 December 1954, 1001. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. See, for example, Smith, ‘*Apartheid*, Sharpeville and “Impartiality”’, 253. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 363. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Soper, *Evolving Commonwealth*, 108. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 87-8; see also Brady, *Democracy in the Dominions*, 380-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Taylor, *The Years of Challenge*, 245; see also Smith, ‘*Apartheid*, Sharpeville and “impartiality”’, 251. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Knaplund, *Britain, Commonwealth and Empire*, 320; Allen, *The Anglo-American Predicament*, 79. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Brookes, *The Commonwealth To-day*, 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Carrington, ‘A new theory of the Commonwealth’, 144. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Jennings, *The Commonwealth in Asia*, 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
78. Newton, *Junior History*, 286. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
79. Wheare, ‘The nature and structure of the Commonwealth’, 1028. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
80. Somervell and Harvey, *The British Empire and Commonwealth* (1954 edition),371; Somervell and Harvey, *The British Empire and Commonwealth* (1959 edition),371. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
81. Carrington, *Exposition*, 123. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
82. Brock, *Britain and the Dominions*, 510. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
83. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 11; Taylor, *The Years of Challenge*, 247-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
84. Fawcett, *The* Inter se *Doctrine*, 5; Stamp, *The British Commonwealth*, 1; Wheare, ‘Is the British Commonwealth withering away?’; see also Attlee, *The Development of the Commonwealth*, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
85. Webster*, Englishness and Empire*, 57. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
86. Davidson, *A Three-Cornered Life*, 270. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
87. Collins, ‘The “Federal Moment”’, 21-40; see also Hodson, ‘Racial problems in the Commonwealth’, *The Listener*, 25 January 1951, 124; Wheare, ‘The nature and structure of the Commonwealth’, 1025. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
88. Carrington, ‘A new theory of the Commonwealth’, 148; see also Eden, *Memoirs*, 392. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
89. Brookes, *Commonwealth To-day*, 22; Rayner, *A Concise History*, 687. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
90. Webster, *Englishness and Empire*, 119. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
91. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
92. McIntyre, *British Decolonization*, 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
93. Allen, *Anglo-American Predicament*, 79, 81; see also Jennings, *The Commonwealth in Asia*, 121-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
94. On the context, see Murphy, *Monarchy*, 38-46. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
95. Mansergh, ‘Commonwealth membership’, in *Commonwealth Perspectives*, 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
96. Wheare, ‘The nature and structure of the Commonwealth’, 1017. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
97. Wheare, ‘Is the British Commonwealth withering away?’, 553. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
98. Bull, ‘What is the Commonwealth?’, 577-87. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
99. Buckner, ‘Canada and the end of empire, 1939-1982’, in *Canada and the British Empire*, 114; Francis, ‘Historical perspectives on Britain’, 319. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
100. Underhill, ‘Review of *Commonwealth Perspectives* by Nicholas Mansergh and *The Commonwealth in the World* by J. D. B. Miller’, *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 26:1 (1960), 165-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
101. Miller, ‘Review of *The Years of Challenge: The Commonwealth and the British Empire, 1945-1958* by Don Taylor’, *Political Science Quarterly* 75:4 (1960), 582. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
102. Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, 293. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., 275. [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
104. Bull, ‘What is the Commonwealth?’, 583. [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
105. Mansergh, ‘Commonwealth membership’, in *Commonwealth Perspectives*, 33; see also Mansergh, *The Name and Nature of the British Commonwealth*, 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
106. Mansergh, ‘Whitehall and the Commonwealth’, 236. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
107. On emotion, see Jennings, *Problems of the New Commonwealth*, 9-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
108. Ibid., 9. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
109. Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1948 edition), 167; see also Jennings, *Problems of the New Commonwealth*, 72-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
110. Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1961 edition), 200. [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
111. Jennings, *The Commonwealth in Asia*, 116-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)
112. Carrington, ‘A new theory of the Commonwealth’, 143. [↑](#endnote-ref-112)
113. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, 340. [↑](#endnote-ref-113)
114. Mansergh, *The Name and Nature of the British Commonwealth*, 11-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-114)
115. Mansergh, ‘Whitehall and the Commonwealth’, 236-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-115)
116. Hyam, ‘Mansergh, (Philip) Nicholas Seton (1910–1991)’. [↑](#endnote-ref-116)
117. Mansergh, ‘Commonwealth Foreign Policies 1945-56’, in *Commonwealth Perspectives*, 55. [↑](#endnote-ref-117)
118. Thus, whilst in 1953, Mansergh believed that there was reason for ‘tempered optimism’ about the potential of the Commonwealth), by 1958, it was merely suggested that many had cause for ‘tempered optimism’; Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 291; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 421. [↑](#endnote-ref-118)
119. Mansergh, ‘Commonwealth membership’, in *Commonwealth Perspectives*, 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-119)
120. Mansergh, *The Multi-Racial Commonwealth*, especially 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-120)
121. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 257. [↑](#endnote-ref-121)
122. Carrington, *Liquidation*, 86. [↑](#endnote-ref-122)
123. Jennings, *The British Commonwealth* (1961 edition), 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-123)
124. Ibid. (1948 edition), 77. [↑](#endnote-ref-124)
125. Ibid. (1948 edition), 167; ibid. (1961 edition), 201. [↑](#endnote-ref-125)
126. Copland, ‘The Commonwealth’, 443. [↑](#endnote-ref-126)
127. In this way Mansergh was able to correctly conclude that in 1943 Mackenzie King’s government had opposed Australian plans for the creation of a Commonwealth Secretariat; Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 165-71. [↑](#endnote-ref-127)
128. Hancock, however, believed that Commonwealth politicians became more frank as the 1950s progressed; Hancock, ‘Commonwealth documents’, 490. [↑](#endnote-ref-128)
129. Eden, *Memoirs*, 375. [↑](#endnote-ref-129)
130. Listowel, *Commonwealth Future*, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-130)
131. Eden, *Memoirs*, 513. [↑](#endnote-ref-131)
132. Quoted in Hancock, ‘Commonwealth documents’, *Spectator*, 30 October 1953, 490. [↑](#endnote-ref-132)
133. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth and the Nations*, vi. [↑](#endnote-ref-133)
134. Wheare, *Constitutional Structure*, 146. [↑](#endnote-ref-134)
135. Wheare, ‘Is the British Commonwealth withering away?’, 554. [↑](#endnote-ref-135)
136. Bradley, 'The Commonwealth today', in *The Living Commonwealth*, 497-510. [↑](#endnote-ref-136)
137. Southgate, *The British Empire* (1953 edition), 322; Southgate, *The British Empire* (1960 edition), 322. [↑](#endnote-ref-137)
138. Koebner, *Imperialism*. [↑](#endnote-ref-138)
139. Hancock, *Wealth of Colonies*, 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-139)
140. Underhill, *The British Commonwealth*, 79. [↑](#endnote-ref-140)
141. Underhill, ‘Review of *Commonwealth Perspectives* by Nicholas Mansergh and *The Commonwealth in the World* by J. D. B. Miller’, *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 26:1 (1960), 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-141)
142. Fawcett, *The* Inter se *Doctrine*, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-142)
143. de Smith, *Vocabulary*, 5; see also Fawcett, *The* Inter se *Doctrine*, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-143)
144. de Smith, *Vocabulary*, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-144)
145. Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 277; he repeated these words in Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, 367. [↑](#endnote-ref-145)
146. Simnett, *Emergent Commonwealth*, 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-146)
147. Wheare, *The Constitutional Structure of the Commonwealth*, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-147)
148. de Smith, *Vocabulary*, 5-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-148)
149. Carrington, *Exposition*, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-149)
150. Thompson, ‘Political diversity has its value’, in *JCSC*, 6; see also Hole in *Experiment in Freedom*, no pagination. [↑](#endnote-ref-150)
151. Wheare, ‘The nature and structure of the Commonwealth’, 1016. [↑](#endnote-ref-151)
152. Wheare, ‘The nature and structure of the Commonwealth’, 1016. [↑](#endnote-ref-152)
153. Jennings, *The British Constitution*, 118. [↑](#endnote-ref-153)
154. Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1948 edition), 77; Jennings, *The British Commonwealth of Nations* (1961 edition), 188. [↑](#endnote-ref-154)
155. Fawcett, *The* Inter se *Doctrine*, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-155)
156. Hodson, ‘United Kingdom opinion’, 14; Carrington, *The British Overseas*, 1035; Mansergh, ‘Britain, the Commonwealth’, 491. [↑](#endnote-ref-156)
157. Strachey, *The End of Empire*, 262. [↑](#endnote-ref-157)
158. Duke of Devonshire, in *JCSC*, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-158)
159. Hancock, *Wealth of Colonies*, 81. [↑](#endnote-ref-159)
160. Hancock, *Four Studies of War and Peace*, 111-2; Arnold, *Towards Peace*, 17; see also Bailkin, *Afterlife*, 88. [↑](#endnote-ref-160)
161. Wilson, ‘The Commonwealth and the law of nations’, in *Commonwealth Perspectives*, 84. [↑](#endnote-ref-161)
162. Simnett, *Emergent Commonwealth*, 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-162)
163. Mansergh, ‘The impact of Asian membership’, *The Listener*, 9 December 1954, 1001. [↑](#endnote-ref-163)
164. Underhill, *The British Commonwealth.* [↑](#endnote-ref-164)
165. For an example of hopeful optimism, see Carrington, *Liquidation*, 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-165)
166. Mansergh, ‘The Commonwealth at the Queen’s accession’, 291. [↑](#endnote-ref-166)
167. Mansergh, ‘Commonwealth membership’, in *Commonwealth Perspectives*, 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-167)
168. Mansergh, *The Name and Nature of the British Commonwealth*, 31; Hancock, *Four Studies of War and Peace*, 111-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-168)
169. Hancock, ‘A Commonwealth view’, *Spectator*, 1 January 1954, 5-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-169)
170. Muir, *Short History*, 738.

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