NAMING PAINS

A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF IMPERIAL COMMEMORATIONS AT WEMBLEY PARK

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Image 1: Poster of the British Empire Exhibition, Wembley.

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DEFINITIONS

Imperialism
the ideology in which a country extends its power and influence through diplomacy or military force to dominate and control other territories and peoples.

Colonialism
the practice or policy of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. It involves the establishment and maintenance of colonies in one territory by people from another territory.

Dominions
a self-governing country under the British Empire - examples of Dominions include Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, and South Africa. These nations had achieved a significant degree of autonomy but continued to owe allegiance to the British monarchy.

Colonies
a territory under the direct control and governance of the British Empire. Colonies were established through conquest, settlement, or annexation, and were administered by British officials appointed by the Crown.

Protectorates
a territory that maintained its own local government but was under the protection and partial control of the British Empire.

White Supremacy
a belief system that promotes the idea that White people are entitled to social, political, economic, and cultural dominance over others.

Imperial Nostalgia
a longing or longing for the past, specifically for the time when a nation was part of an Empire. This type of nostalgia often involves a romanticised or idealised view of the imperial past and may involve a desire to restore or reclaim the political, economic, or cultural status and power that the nation once had as part of the Empire.

Exhibition(s)
refers to an event designed to showcase the products and exploits of the colonies and territories under an empire. These exhibitions were often organised to display the wealth, resources, and technological advancements of the empire, as well as to promote the benefits and successes of imperial rule.

Ethnography
refers to the systematic study recording of the customs, cultures, and social life of colonised peoples by anthropologists, explorers, missionaries, and colonial administrators.

Modernity
an ensemble of socio-cultural norms, attitudes and practices that arose in the wake of the Renaissance - in the Age of Reason of 17th-century thought and the 18th-century Enlightenment.

Great Chain of Being
a concept that allegedly describes the hierarchical structure of the universe, which had a pervasive influence on Western thought. This idea, particularly propagated by ancient Greek Neoplatonists and further developed during the European Renaissance and the 17th and early 18th-centuries, envisions all matter and life arranged in a supposedly divinely ordained order. In this hierarchy, every entity has a specific place, with White people positioned at the top and non-White people at lower levels, and men placed above women.

Eugenics
a scientifically erroneous and immoral theory, often associated with "*racial improvement*" and "*planned breeding*," has been linked to historical and present-day forms of discrimination, racism, ableism, and colonialism. Gaining popularity in the early 20th-century, eugenicists worldwide believed they could perfect human beings and eliminate so-called social ills through genetics and heredity.

Social Darwinism
the theory that individuals, groups, and peoples are subject to the same Darwinian laws of natural selection as plants and animals. Now largely discredited, this concept was advocated by Herbert Spencer and others in the late 19th and early 20th-centuries. It was used to justify political conservatism, imperialism, and racism, as well as to discourage social intervention and reform.

Racialisation
refers to the process by which societies construct and assign racial identities to individuals or groups based on perceived physical and cultural characteristics.

Multiculturalism
an ideology and policy approach that recognises, values, and promotes the cultural diversity of a society. It emphasises the coexistence of different cultural, ethnic, and religious groups within a nation, encouraging respect for the distinct identities and contributions of each group.

Urban Renewal
a comprehensive process of redeveloping areas within a city that are experiencing decline, blight, or underuse.

Masterplan
a comprehensive, long-term blueprint for the development and growth of a city or a specific area within a city. It serves as a strategic framework that guides decisions on land use, infrastructure, transportation, housing, public realm, and community services.

Toponym
a name given to a specific geographical location or feature, such as a city, town, lake, or any other place or landmark.

Commemoration(s)
the act of remembering and honouring the memory of a person, event, or achievement, often through ceremonies, memorials, monuments, place naming, or other forms of tribute. It serves to preserve the legacy and significance of what is being commemorated, ensuring that it is remembered, celebrated, and respected by future generations.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

We believe in the inherent goodness of the reader and acknowledge that engaging with this work effectively requires a great deal of humility from the reader. We appreciate that this may prove uncomfortable for some.

We understand that Whiteness is a concept rather than an actual race. Although the term is commonly associated with skin colour, it more accurately refers to a structural position - a racialised social identity that is positioned as superior relative to other "*races*" within a system of racial hierarchy.[1] We believe that readers who self-identify as White can transcend this imagined concept, as there is no factual or biological basis for it. This work challenges many readers to re-evaluate their relationship with Empire and to reconsider the impact of Empire on their self-identity.

As an immigrant and a refugee of Iraqi origin, we have found community and a sense of home in Wembley, northwest London.

We have allowed Wembley to shape us into who we are today, and we love Wembley more than any other city in the world, and we insist on the right to criticise her perpetually for this very reason.

We are in pursuit of a post-imperial city

Image 2: Leaflet cover for a colour map of the British Empire Exhibition site.

PROLOGUE

The purpose of this work is to investigate, interrogate and address the imperial nostalgia embedded in the urban development of Wembley Park (circa. 2002)

Wembley, nestled in the heart of the Borough of Brent in northwest London, serves as an example for a community that embodies the rich diversity of the city. Renowned as one of the most diverse boroughs in London, the Borough of Brent is a vibrant home to numerous communities.

The demographic landscape tells a compelling story - as of 2021, approximately 64% of the population belongs to Black, Asian, and minority ethnic groups, ranking it as the third most ethnically diverse borough in London. Additionally, in 2011, a striking 55% of Brent's residents were born outside of the United Kingdom, marking the highest percentage in England and Wales. The linguistic diversity is equally impressive, with approximately 150 languages spoken, including Arabic, Gujarati, Portuguese, Somali, and Romanian.[2,3]

Beyond the statistics, Brent is a living tapestry of cultures and histories. The borough is proudly home to a significant African-Caribbean community, with many members of the Windrush generation settling in the area. This infusion of diverse backgrounds not only cultivates a thriving community but also serves as a fertile ground for creativity.

In essence, Brent stands as a microcosm of multiculturalism, where Wembley emerges as a symbol of this rich tapestry, weaving together a myriad of experiences and traditions into the vibrant fabric of the community.

This book provides a critical examination of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition's impact on the urban planning, design, and naming conventions within Wembley Park. It specifically scrutinises the commemorative choices for streets, open spaces, and buildings, considering the diverse cultural tapestry of the London Borough of Brent. This diversity stands in stark contrast to the painful legacy of British imperialism - a legacy marked by exploitation and suffering.

A central objective of this book also is to confront and diminish the imperial nostalgia prevalent among urban professionals and stakeholders who have been instrumental in shaping Wembley. By promoting a more critical understanding of the historical event.

The intention behind this critical analysis is to support in the creation of a post-colonial London that moves beyond imperial nostalgia - by challenging the naming of streets, open spaces, and buildings in commemoration of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition. And instead advocates for recognising the power of acknowledging our past, drawing lessons from it, and cultivating an environment that is just, inclusive, and untainted by the shadows of colonialism.

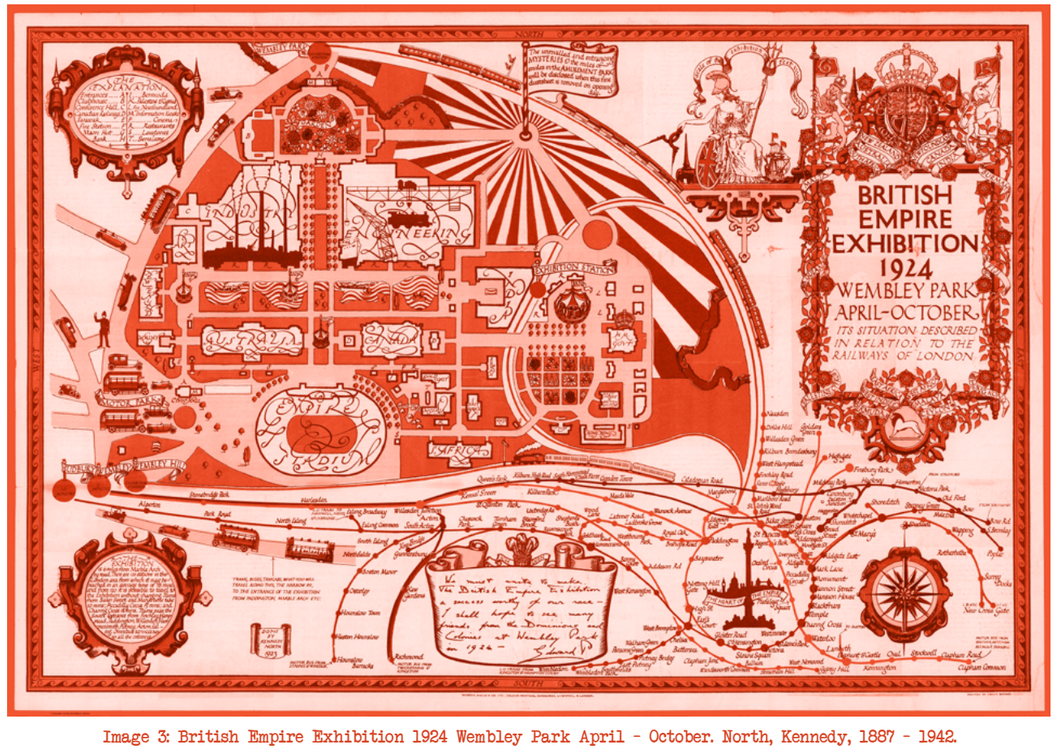


Image 3: British Empire Exhibition 1924 Wembley Park April - October. North, Kennedy, 1887 - 1942.

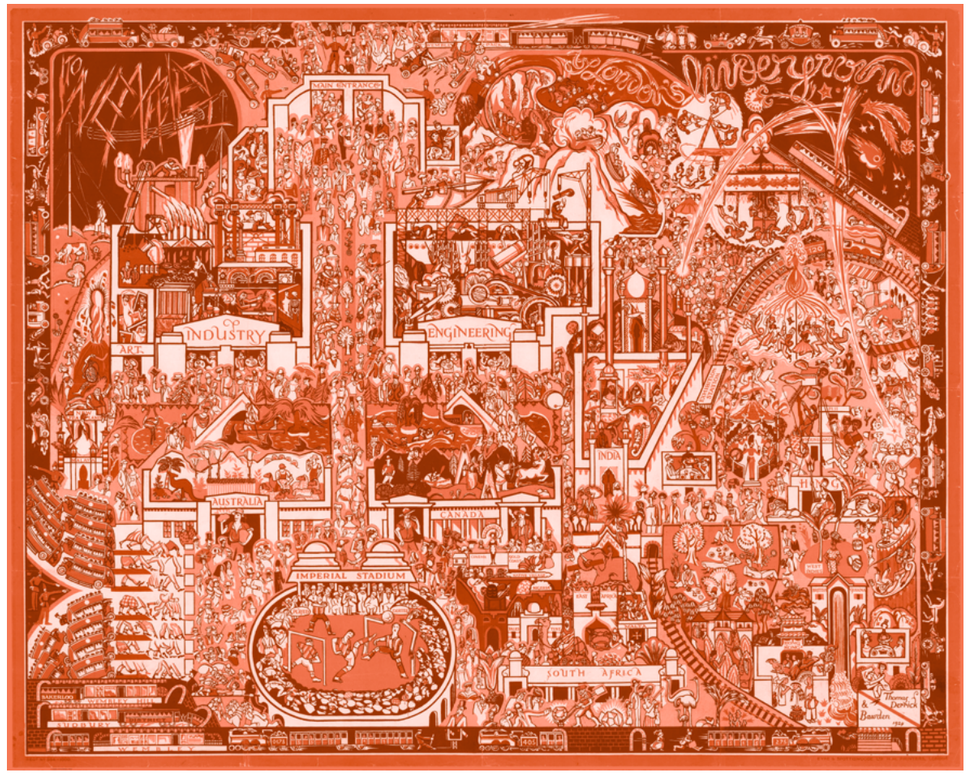


Image 4: London's Underground to Wembley. Thomas Derrick & Bawden. 1924.

URBAN RENEWAL AT WEMBLEY PARK

Wembley Park has etched its place in history as a venue for international events, including the 1948 and 2012 Olympic Games, the iconic 1966 World Cup, and unforgettable music milestones, such as the Beatles' final UK concert. Over the years, this area has undergone significant urban renewal, transforming it into an economic hub in the heart of northwest London.

In 2002, developers Quintain Estates acquired approximately 85 acres around the Wembley Stadium and embarked on the creation of a masterplan to transform Wembley Park, which commenced construction in 2005.

By the 2020s, the development had changed Wembley Park into a 365-day 15-minute city which included new public realm, places to live, venues for work and leisure, creating a dynamic urban environment. The urban renewal of Wembley Park was further bolstered by the contributions of other private developers who added to the area's transformation by introducing new housing and public realm around the area's periphery.

While some celebrated the urban renewal for bringing change to the area, others viewed it through a more critical lens, as it also perpetuates the glorification of Britain's imperial past. This perspective is particularly relevant given the area's connection to the 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition, which showcased the wealth and exploits of the British colonies and dominions. The Exhibition, which featured the inaugural ceremony of the original Wembley Stadium by King George V, has been heavily scrutinised for its role in promoting imperialist ideologies.

The lingering imperial nostalgia within Wembley Park is palpably reflected in the naming of its streets, open spaces, and buildings. For those who scrutinise Britain's colonial history, these designations act as a vivid echo of a time characterised by oppression and control. The British Empire Exhibition, despite representing a significant moment in Britain's technological and cultural development, simultaneously stands as a reminder of an imperial legacy that taints Wembley's history.

Within such a framework, the redevelopment of Wembley Park transcends mere urban transformation - it also represents a contentious form of remembrance. The honouring of the Exhibition through these urban elements invites ethical scrutiny. It suggests a problematic fusion of urban development with historical narratives laden with the complexities of imperialism, questioning whether such developments serve to reinforce outdated power structures.

As the city continues to evolve, this book challenges us to consider how our history may be commemorated appropriately, and without romance.

Image 5: Aerial view of the British Empire Exhibition site, June 1924. Historic England Archive. EPW010737.

Image 6: Aerial View of Wembley Park, following demolition and reconstruction of the Empire Stadium and Pavilions. circa 2013

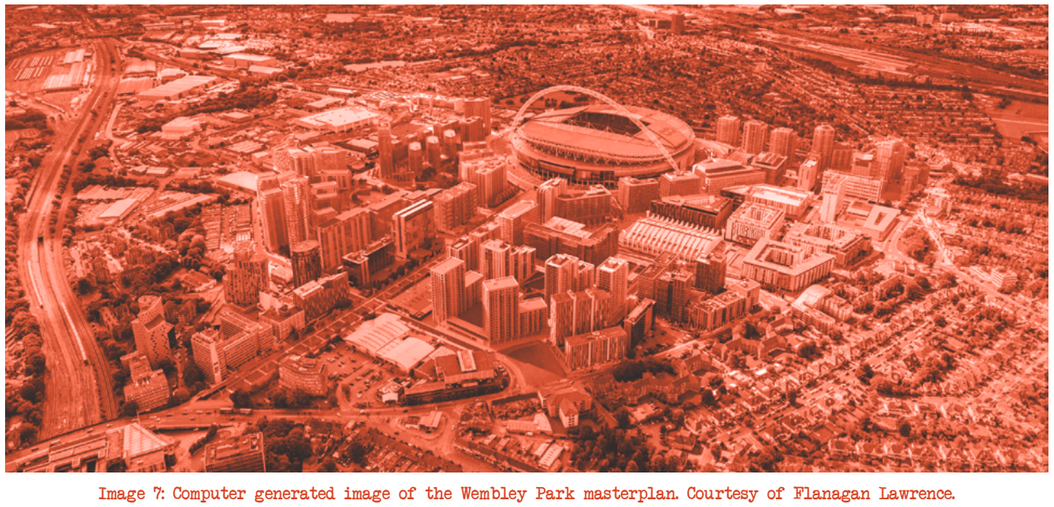


Image 7: Computer generated image of the Wembley Park masterplan. Courtesy of Flanagan Lawrence.

THE BRITISH EMPIRE AT A GLANCE

The British Empire, known as the largest in history, spanned a quarter of the world's land and governed over one-fifth of the global population. Historically, narratives have always been kind to the British Empire, alluding to the notion that the empire brought civilisation, law, justice, peace, prosperity, railways, and cricket to the most remote regions of the world.[4]

In the United Kingdom, a narrative persists that portrays the Empire as a grand, benevolent force - a civilising mission embarked upon with reluctance, aimed at elevating societies deemed 'backward' and bestowing upon them the advancements of modernity.[5,6]

However, many historical accounts have glossed over the darker aspects of the British Empire's legacy. Rarely do they delve into the brutal realities of mass murder, concentration camps, systematic starvation, cultural vandalism, theft, carnage, rape, exploitation, torture, and enslavement that the Empire brought to its colonies.[7-9]

The effects of British Imperialism were profoundly detrimental to indigenous populations from the 1600s until the late 20th century. The colonisation of nearly all of Africa and extensive parts of Asia radically altered these regions cultural, economic, and political landscapes. The repercussions of Imperial rule were severe and enduring, inflicting both immediate harm and long-lasting psychological trauma.

The imperialist ethos was, at its heart, marred by deeply entrenched racist ideologies. This was epitomised by Cecil Rhodes, the former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, who declared in 1877 *"more territory simply means more of the Anglo-Saxon race, more of the best [...] race that the world possesses"*.[10] This sentiment was echoed in novelist Rudyard Kipling's notion of the *"White man's burden"* - the duty to bring empire and its supposed benefits to the rest of the world (see image 107).[11]

Even those who placed less emphasis on 'race' supported imperialism as a means to 'civilise' the masses - carrying the torch of Enlightenment, Judeo-Christian ethics, and modernity, thereby framing Empire as an educational endeavour. Underpinning this mission was the belief that White, Western nations were the pinnacle of civilisation, tasked with enlightening and modernising "backward" and "barbaric" non-White communities. The most harrowing manifestation of this ideology was the Transatlantic slave trade, where the British Empire was instrumental to the shipping, mass subjugation, and dehumanisation of African populations.[12,13]

Through enslavement and military conquest - racial hierarchies were imposed, taught, and reinforced throughout the British Empire. The construction of racial hierarchies was not a social or cultural by-product of the imperial mission, but rather a deliberate imposition across the globe,

Image 8: A map of the world, showing the British Empire coloured in red at the end of the nineteenth century. Date: late 19th century

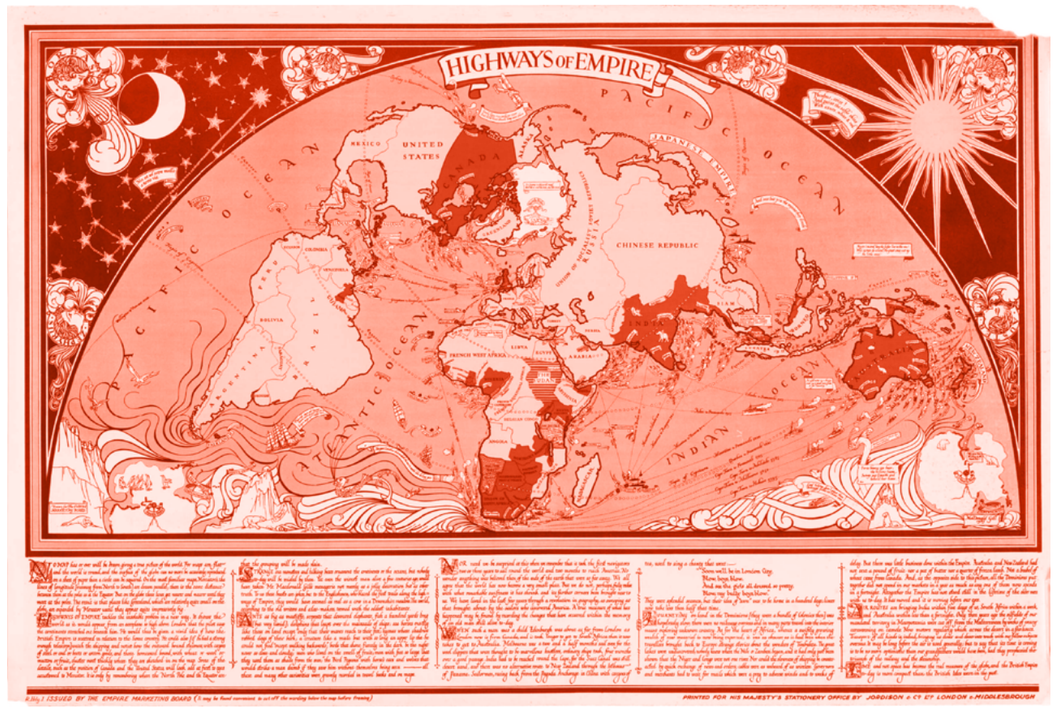


Image 9: 'Highways of Empire', poster issued by the Empire Marketing Board showing the British Empire and its trade routes. 1927.

Image 10: Muslim refugees crowd onto a train bound for Pakistan, as it leaves New Delhi, India. September 1947.

Image 11: British soldiers assist police searching for Mau Mau members during the Uprising, Kenya, 1954.

Image 12: Looting of the Yuan Ming Yuan (Old Summer Palace) by Anglo-French forces in 1860.

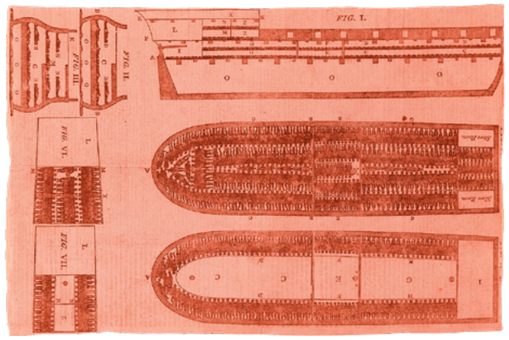


Image 13: A late variant of the well-known and widely copied set of stowage plans of the Liverpool slave ship 'Brooks', first published in 1789

Image 14: Famine in Mysore, India: six emaciated men wearing loin cloths, photo by Willoughby Wallace Hooper, 1876 - 1878.

Image 15: British colonial officers posing with looted items during The Benin Punitive Expedition of 1897.

Image 16: A British armored railroad wagon behind a railcar on which two Arab hostages are seated, 1936 - 1939 Arab Revolt

Image 17: Photo of Lizzie van Zyl who died in the Bloemfontein concentration camp during the Second Boer War 1899 - 1902.

instilled through the machinery of slavery, violence, and colonisation. Soldiers, missionaries, and colonial officers became the bearers of the so-called civilising tools: military installations, religious institutions, and educational systems, all geared towards re-shaping indigenous societies.[12,14]

British colonial rule has - at its foundation - been sustained by a systematic application of force. The history of the British Empire is punctuated with a litany of such violent episodes, which include, but is not limited to:[5]

- The **Royal African Company (1660 - 1752)**, which played a significant role in the transatlantic slave trade. See image 13.
- The **East India Company (1600 - 1874)**, instrumental in establishing British rule in India through a mix of trade and military force.
- The **Xhosa Wars (1779 - 1879)**, a series of nine conflicts fought between the British Empire and the Xhosa people.
- The **First Boer War (1880 - 1881)**, where British forces clashed with the South African Republic.
- The **Second Boer War (1899 - 1902)**, where British forces fought for control of South African territories rich in minerals.
- The **Amritsar Massacre (13 April 1919)**, where a peaceful protest turned into a tragedy with numerous Indian civilians killed by British troops.
- The **Partitioning of India (1947)**, which led to widespread violence and displacement during the division of British India. See image 10.
- The **Mau Mau Uprising (1951 - 1960)** in Kenya, marked by guerrilla warfare and severe British counter-insurgency tactics. See image 11.
- **Famines in India (14 recorded from 1769 - 1944)**, many exacerbated by colonial economic policies. See image 14.
- The **Black War (Mid-1820s - 1832)**, a conflict resulting in the near-destruction of Tasmania's indigenous population.
- The **Irish Potato Famine (1845 - 1849)**, a disaster exacerbated by policies orchestrated by the British government, resulting in mass starvation and emigration.
- The **Opium Wars (1839 - 1842 and 1856 - 1860)**, which saw the British Empire fighting to impose opium trade on China.
- The **Looting of Beijing (1860) during the Second Opium War**, where British and French troops pillaged and burned the Old Summer Palace, an act of cultural vandalism. See image 12.
- Various uprisings and conflicts, such as the **First Maroon War, New Zealand Wars, Demerara Rebellion, Christmas Rebellion, Indian Rebellion, Anglo-Zulu War, Benin Looting** (see image 15), and **Adubi War**, each illustrating the pattern of imperial aggression.

The breadth of literature archiving these events is vast and documents the scale of violence inherent in British imperialism. Ernest Jones, a Chartist leader in 1851, poignantly captured the essence of this legacy when he remarked, "*on its colonies the sun never sets, but the blood never dries.*"

While nostalgists of the British Empire might argue that imperial intervention contributed positively to the development of colonised lands, such defences are overshadowed by the undeniable reality that any alleged 'good' was overshadowed by the forceful imposition of an alien value-system. These were not mere cultural exchanges but assertions of dominance and assumed superiority, often unwelcome and always uninvited.

Colonisation frequently resulted in the systematic dismantling of indigenous structures and the forceful implementation of foreign cultural, economic, and political systems. The British Empire, in particular, pursued a policy of 'civilising' the colonised lands, which in practice often meant replacing local customs and governance with British institutions and ideologies.

The 'good' that is often celebrated by nostalgists of the empire is deeply interwoven with and overshadowed by the violence and coercion that underpinned colonial rule. The British Empire's interventions were characterised by the belief in its own cultural superiority and the right to reshape societies in its own image, irrespective of the desires or needs of the colonised peoples.

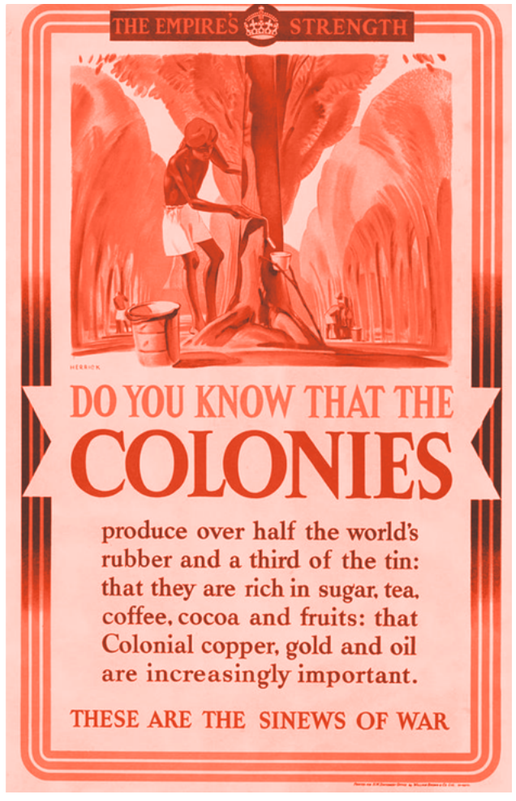


Image 18: The Empire's Strength Poster series, creator Herrick, Frederick Charles; William Brown and Co Ltd, London EC3 (printer); Her Majesty's Stationery Office (publisher/sponsor). Production date: 1939.

EXHIBITING EMPIRE AT WEMBLEY

Imre Kiralfy (1845 - 1919), was an impresario known for crafting spectacles that captured the world's attention (see image 21) - he also orchestrated exhibitions that were poignant displays of an era marked by imperial ambition. Some of his most notable spectacle productions, include the 1895 Empire of India Exhibition in Earls Court (see image 19) and the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition in White City (see image 20) - which were windows into an Empire's achievements and ambitions.[15,16]

In 1913, Kiralfy lent his expertise to Lord Strathcona (see image 22), planting the seeds for what would become the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. The concept of delivering a full British Empire Exhibition had been in discussion as early as 1913, following a proposal from Lord Strathcona, however it was delayed by the First World War. It wasn't until 1919 that the British government revived the project, endorsing Strathcona's proposal, allocating the necessary funds, and setting a date for the imperialist Exhibition at Wembley.[16,17]

In the aftermath of the First World War, Britain found itself in economic decline - and thus the nation projected its gaze outwards onto its colonies. With a legacy steeped in colonialism, the British government, by the twilight of the 19th century, found itself in a position where it had to justify its imperial pursuits not just to a global audience but increasingly to its own citizens. Doubts were creeping into the

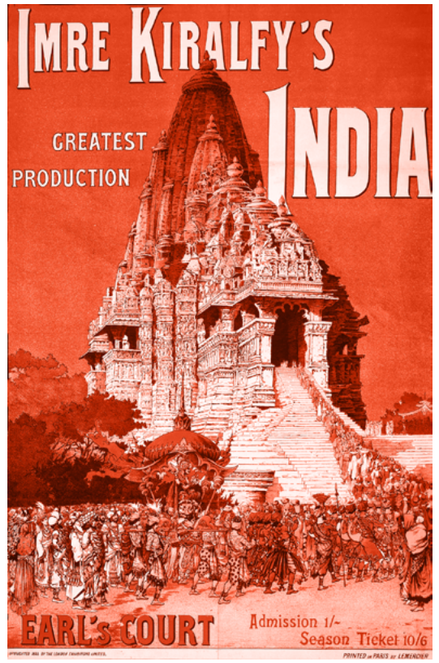


Image 19: Poster for the Empire of India Exhibition, Earl's Court, London, 1895.

Image 20: Poster for the Franco-British Exhibition, White City, London, 1908.

British conscience; many questioned the value of overseas territories, debating whether the substantial labour and financial investments in them might be better directed at domestic needs.

In an effort to sway public opinion and reinforce the perceived necessity and benefits of the Empire, the British state initiated widespread propaganda campaigns. These efforts were manifest in many forms, most notably through grand colonial exhibitions. These spectacles were designed not only to entertain but to educate and to persuade, painting the colonies in an alluring light and asserting their contribution to the 'greatness' of Britain.[18]

The devastation wrought by World War I necessitated a reframing of the exhibition's purpose. No longer just a triumphant display of progress, the exhibition was reimagined as a reassurance to a beleaguered nation. It sought to reaffirm the strength and resilience of the Empire, emphasising the critical role of inter-imperial trade in securing Britain's future prosperity. Organisers hoped that by extolling the Empire's vast accomplishments and its continued industrial and agricultural expansion, they could rekindle the public's belief in the imperial project.[19]

In its essence, the 1924 British Empire Exhibition was an assembly designed to bind together the many facets of the British Empire - the dominions, colonies, and protectorates - to exhibit a facade of unity. It aimed to display cooperation and promote imperial commerce at a time when the very foundations of empire were being questioned.[19]

Image 21: Imre Kiralfy, exhibition designer, dancer, impresario, spectacle producer.

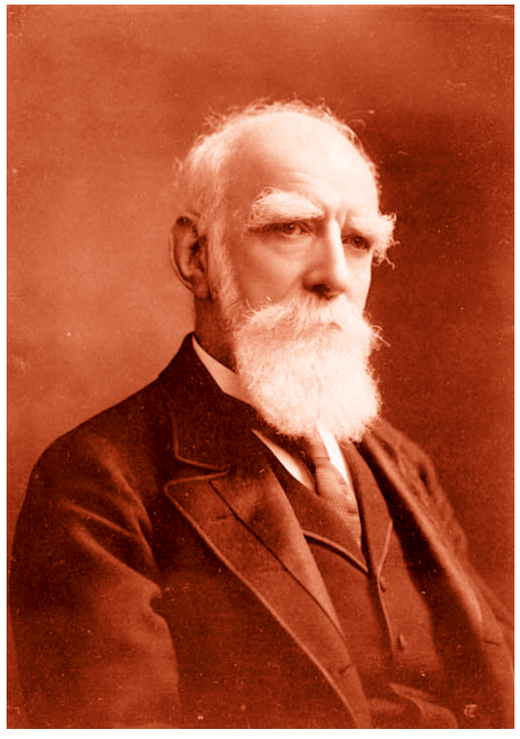


Image 22: Donald Alexander Smith, 1st Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal, fur trader, railroad financier, diplomat.

Images 23 to 31: Series of promotional posters for the 1924 to 1925 British Empire Exhibition.

The objectives of the exhibition, as described in the official guide, were steeped in the rhetoric of economic opportunity and mutual familiarity:[17,20]

"*To find, in the development and utilisation of the raw materials of the Empire, new sources of Imperial wealth. To foster inter-Imperial trade and open fresh world markets for Dominion and home products. To make the different races of the British Empire better known to each other, and to demonstrate to the people of Britain the almost illimitable possibilities of the Dominions, Colonies, and Dependencies overseas.*"

Amidst the sprawling 216 acres of Wembley Park, the British Empire Exhibition stood with over 100 buildings, as a glaring representation of an empire that once claimed nearly a quarter of the earth. Structures like the Palace of Industry and Palace of Engineering, forged from concrete, were meant to signify the enduring legacy of the empire. They housed displays of British industrial and artistic advancements, symbolising a narrative of progress and permanence. The pavilions showcased the Empire's exploits - its food, clothing, and goods - and unwittingly chronicled the narratives of those subjugated and marginalised by imperial rule.[20-25]

The 1924 British Empire Exhibition, while widely celebrated, offered a narrative steeped in the ideologies of the time - ideologies that often went unchallenged. It was an orchestrated display of propaganda, one that sought to perpetuate the notion of White superiority.

Beneath its veneer of unity and progress, the exhibition was a poignant testament to the era's belief in the "*White man's burden*", an ethos that justified the subjugation and cultural domination of peoples deemed 'savages' by the standards of the British Empire.[18,21,23,26-30]

The exhibition itself was a grandiose celebration of the British settler's ability to replicate European society in the farthest corners of the world. It was a pageant that not only displayed the material successes of colonisation but also fostered a sense of cohesion among settlers, reinforcing a narrative of national unity predicated on the supposed triumphs of imperial expansion.[22,31-33]

In its formative stages, the exhibition's promotional material was undeniably Anglocentric, reflecting a prevailing sentiment of racial superiority. The literature subtly, yet unmistakably, suggested that the prosperity and advancements of Anglo-settler communities were the standard bearers of civilisation, a sentiment that quietly underpinned the exhibition's early promotional efforts.[19]

The introduction of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition Handbook of General Information encapsulates the ethos of the era with a clear declaration of intent:[34]

"*Wembley will emphasise our racial achievements up to date, and will convey to the visitor not only a wider and more definite idea of what our people have accomplished in the past, but a clearer knowledge of what it will be possible for us to achieve in the future.*"

This statement reflects the prevailing attitudes of the period, which unabashedly celebrated the perceived progress and dominance of the White race - an outlook that, through today's lens, is viewed critically for its imperialistic and racial implications.

Throughout the promotional materials for the exhibition, there was a discernible thread of racial and paternalistic undertones. These narratives subtly contradicted the exhibition's professed message of unity, revealing an underlying belief in the 'civilising' mission of the British administration. This mission was framed as a benevolent effort to uplift and modernise what was implied to be an inherently 'primitive' environment. Such language not only reflects the ideologies of the time but also belies the complex and often exploitative realities of the colonial experience.[19]

Images 32 to 38: Series of photos inside Pavilions at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition. In clockwise order; Jamaica, Tobago, Grenada, Antigua, Malta, Bengal Pavilion.

PORTRAYAL, PERCEPTION & PROPAGANDA

The Imperial Section was a central feature of the exhibition, encapsulating the geographical span of the British Empire. This section included pavilions and exhibitions dedicated to various territories such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Malaya, India, Burma, Newfoundland, South Africa, regions of West and East Africa, Palestine, Cyprus, Fiji, the West Indies, Hong Kong, Ceylon, and Sarawak.

In the West Africa exhibits, one could find the Nigeria, Gold Coast, and Sierra Leone colonial displays - while the East Africa section showcased the Kenya, Nyasaland, the Seychelles, Somaliland, Sudan, Tanganyika, Uganda, and Zanzibar exhibits. The pavilions of the West Indies displayed exhibits for the Bahamas, Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, British Guiana, Honduras, and the Falklands. Each pavilion reflected on the place of the dominions, colonies, and dependencies within the broader narrative of the British Empire.[35]

The Exhibition's most revealing aspect was not the presence of the numerous countries under British control, but the manner in which they were portrayed. A stark contrast was evident between the self-representation of dominions like Australia and New Zealand, and the portrayal of the dependent colonies. Representatives from dominions such as Canada directed their own narrative, and presented themselves at Wembley as fundamentally independent countries in charge of their own economies.

In contrast, the British-appointed Exhibition Commissioners dictated the representation of dependent colonies, such as those in the African continent. Consequently, countries like Nigeria and Sierra Leone were depicted not through the lens of their own people but through the British perspective. The aim of the exhibition's organisers was less about accurate representation of the nation, and more about crafting a narrative that suited the image they desired to project, often overlooking the perspectives, dignity and sentiments of the indigenous populations involved.[25,36]

Architectural choices reinforced the distinction between the pavilions of the dominions, largely settled by Anglo-Saxons, and of the dominions primarily inhabited by indigenous populations. The Empire Exhibition continued a practice that had become customary by the late nineteenth century, where the architectural design of colonial pavilions was intended to evoke the narrative of the 'noble savage' living in societies untouched by Western influence. This approach not only reflected but also simplified indigenous cultures, architectural styles, and technologies, often reducing them to mere caricatures within a Western-conceived narrative.

The Exhibition's West African section, known as the Walled City, served as a vivid illustration of the event's tendency to caricature its colonial territories. It featured a walled village modelled after the northern Nigerian

Image 39: Photograph of the New Zealand Pavilion at Wembley.

Image 40: Photograph of the South Africa Pavilion at Wembley.

Image 41: Photograph of the Canada Pavilion at Wembley.

city of Kano, featuring structures akin to dried brick huts. Further reinforcing these caricatured portrayals, the East Africa pavilion incorporated Arab architectural influences, while the representation of Burma showcased a village built to embody a traditional and simplistic aesthetic.

These depictions, while crafted to capture the imagination of visitors, perpetuated reductive stereotypes of 'primitive' life, underscoring the exhibition's role in shaping a particular imperial narrative. They were deliberately designed to exude a primitive aesthetic, evoking images of supposed traditional societies from the pre-colonial era.[23,25,37,38]

Conversely, the British erected the imposing Palace of Engineering and Palace of Industry, notable not only as the exhibition's most grandiose structures but also as some of the world's largest concrete constructions of the time. These buildings, along with those representing the dominions, were designed in the austere neo-classical style, emblematic of the might and permanence of the British Empire.

The architecture of the British and dominion buildings at the exhibition was designed to impress, reflecting grandeur and architectural sophistication (see images 39 to 41). Whereas, the colonial pavilions were styled with an exotic flair, intended to portray 'primitive' aesthetics that conjured up images of traditional societies prior to colonial influence (see images 39 to 41) - a visual narrative that subtly reinforced the concept of the *"White man's burden"* and the perceived righteousness of the civilising mission.

Ethnography, prominently featured at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, and was originally conceived as a colonial discipline to study 'othered' peoples through the lens of European settler colonialists. It was a field born from the imperative to catalogue and understand the diversity of human societies deemed 'primitive' or 'ancient' by colonial standards.[39,40] The discipline's methodologies and frameworks were developed in an era when colonial powers were keenly interested in the languages, histories, and cultures of the peoples they colonised, often through an exploitative and hierarchical lens.[41]

The exhibition's ethnographic displays outwardly juxtaposed the 'civilised' European observer and the 'exotic' subjects under scrutiny. Ethnography at the Exhibition assumed a normative standpoint - White, European, male - as the universal standard, rendering all else as deviations to be examined and categorised. Far from being impartial, this viewpoint was imbued with the colonialist ideologies of the era, including the Great Chain of Being, eugenics and Social Darwinism.[42-44]

The South African pavilion at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition stood as an example of the event's ethnographic ambitions. The pavilion had a 'Native Exhibit' section which presented a collection of artifacts - curated as a series of display cases filled with tribal items and complemented by large-scale photographs. These pieces, on loan from esteemed South African museums, were supposedly meant to offer insights into the native cultures.[33]

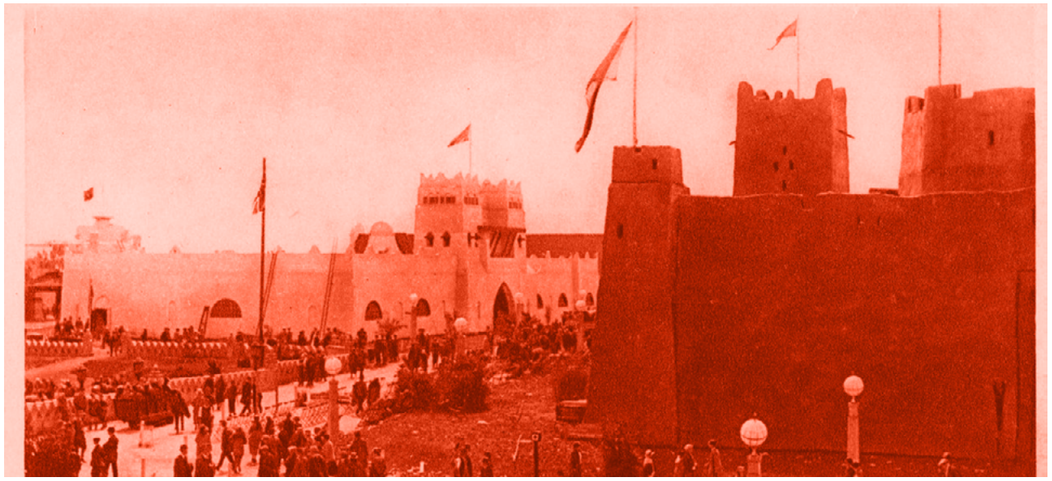


Image 42: Photograph of the Nigeria and Gold Coast Pavilions at Wembley.

Image 43: Photograph of the India Pavilion at Wembley.

Image 44: Photograph of the Hong Kong Pavilion at Wembley.

Image 45: Photograph taken at the Gold Coast Pavilion.

Image 46: Photograph of jugglers at the India Pavilion.

Image 47: Malayan lady with an embroidery frame at the Malay pavilion.

Image 48: Photograph taken of individuals at the Gold Coast Pavilion.

Image 49: Photograph of a family of five people who were identified as indigenous people from British Guiana.

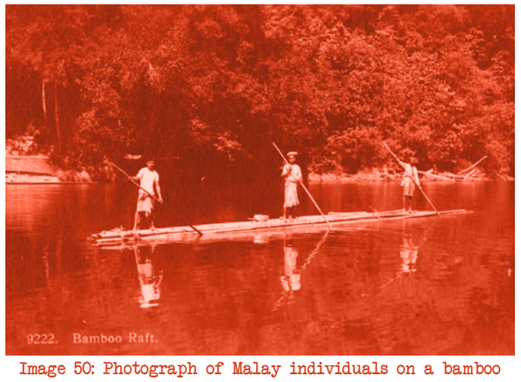


Image 50: Photograph of Malay individuals on a bamboo raft at the Malay Pavilion.

Image 51: Photograph of Tibettan dancers in the India Pavilion.

Image 52: Photograph taken inside the Nigeria Pavilion.

The exhibition was assembled under the supervision of Major C.L.R. Harries, a figure of colonial administration, and marketed as an educational resource for enthusiasts of 'African Ethnology'.[45] Yet, the exhibit's approach casts a long shadow, as it displayed the native peoples and their diverse heritages not as living cultures but as historical footnotes, baldly juxtaposed with the narrative of South Africa's British colonial 'progress'. This reductive portrayal, treating the cultures as though they were mere relics to be observed, mirrored the era's troubling racial hierarchies and the pervasive belief in the 'civilising mission' of colonialism.

Another example of an ethnographic display at the 1924 Empire Exhibition was "The Walled-City," a purpose-built representation of West African society, through a heavily curated and paternalistic colonial lens. This exhibit, encompassing pavilions for Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and Sierra Leone, aimed to portray a narrative of transformation under British influence, suggesting that the reputed 'violence' and 'idleness' of the past were replaced by cooperation and order.[34]

The ethnographic display within The Walled-City - complete with colonised individuals donning traditional attire and engaging in artisanal crafts within a constructed 'native village' setting - was a performative enactment of daily life, one that was paid and staged.[46,47]

Despite its claim to authenticity, the exhibit reduced complex cultures to simplistic and racialised stereotypes. The official guide boasted of replicating "*the exact conditions under which the West African people live*", a statement that contrasted with the exhibit's artificial and extractive underpinnings.[20]

Visitors were presented with a curated, sanitised, and exotic vision of West African life - a far cry from previous derogatory depictions of supposed disease and depravity. The exhibition aimed to soften the image of the continent, illustrating the 'natives' as amiable, industrious, and cooperative to British rule.

This narrative was further reinforced by publications like Donald Maxwell's "Wembley in Colour," which wrote that he had "*expected to be at least beheaded by a fearsome-looking ebony potentate*" but "*was relieved to find that no less charming a ruler than Lady Guggisberg, the wife of the famous Governor, Sir Gordon Guggisberg was to pronounce sentence*".[48]

The labour displayed by the Africans on display was positioned as an outcome of British guidance and reform - an indicator of 'colonial progress' from the days of ceremonial rituals and war dances of previous ethnographic exhibitions. Through this narrative, the Exhibition propagated the concept of the "*White man's burden*" and posited that it was the British who had civilised and disciplined West African societies into models of European work ethic.[49]

This perspective perpetuated a colonial mission narrative that justified the domination and transformation of what were perceived as uncivilised parts of the world.

The Imperial Section of the 1924 Empire Exhibition also showcased the geopolitical ambitions of the British Empire, particularly regarding the Zionist movement. With Britain's entry into Jerusalem in 1917 and the establishment of the British Mandate of Palestine in 1922, the stage was set for significant political shifts in the region. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, issued by the British government, had already laid the foundation for the creation of a "*national home for the Jewish people*" in Palestine, a declaration that carried profound implications for the Palestinian populace.[50-54]

Against this backdrop, the 1924 Exhibition became a venue where the British mandate and its policies were presented to the nation. It underscored the interplay of colonial interests, Zionist aspirations, and the resultant impact on the indigenous Palestinian populace.[32]

The Palestine Pavilion at the 1924 Empire Exhibition offered a portrayal that predominantly reflected the narrative of the Zionist movement rather than the daily realities of the Palestinian Arabs in the 1920s (see image 53). The pavilion's design, the nature of its exhibits, and the overarching message provided only a limited window into the actual lives and experiences of the Palestinian Arab population. Furthermore, the inclusion of exhibits from the Zionist Executive within the pavilion underscored a broader political motive. It highlighted the fact that the development of the Palestinian territory under the British Mandate was informed by Zionist aspirations and interests, which were aligned with the ambitions of the British Empire.[32]

The Palestine Pavilion at the 1924 Empire Exhibition embodied the logic of the British-Zionist partnership. It portrayed the European presence in Palestine as an endeavour of modern development and a supposed historical return to an ancestral homeland - a narrative that resonated with the goals of the Zionist movement. Within this context, the exhibition's depiction of Palestine was confined to a series of economic projections, developmental plans, and archaeological findings, presenting a limited view of the land and its indigenous people.[32]

The exhibit offered visitors a curated array of visual displays, including photographs, dioramas, and artistic renderings of significant locations within Palestine, all framed within the narrative of Eretz Yisrael (Hebrew for the 'Land of Israel'). This portrayal co-opted Palestinian history and geography into the Zionist vision (see image 55).

Additionally, a selection of lectures provided insight into the historical architecture of Jerusalem, while also detailing how British and Jewish agricultural reforms were systematically colonising and appropriating Palestinian territory. The pavilion served to reinforce the imperial and colonial undertones of the Exhibition, subtly advocating the legitimacy of land appropriation under the guise of progress and alleged historical reclamation.[55,56]

Many Zionists viewed the pavilion as a representation of the growing synergy

Image 53: Postcard of the Palestine Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition.

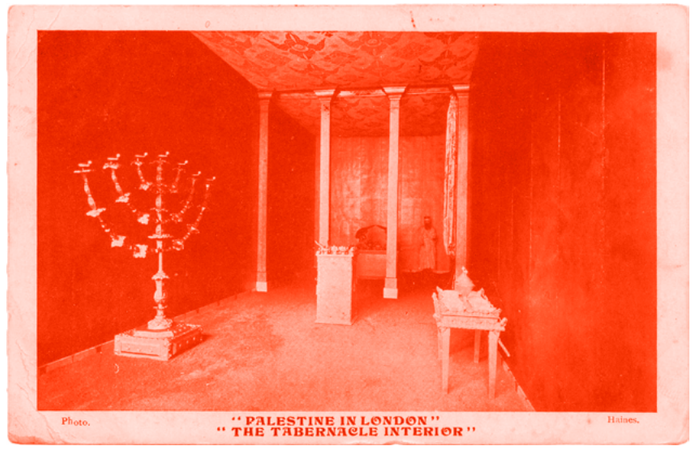


Image 54: Photographic postcard depicting religious Jewish models displayed in the Palestinian exhibit - "The Tabernacle Interior"

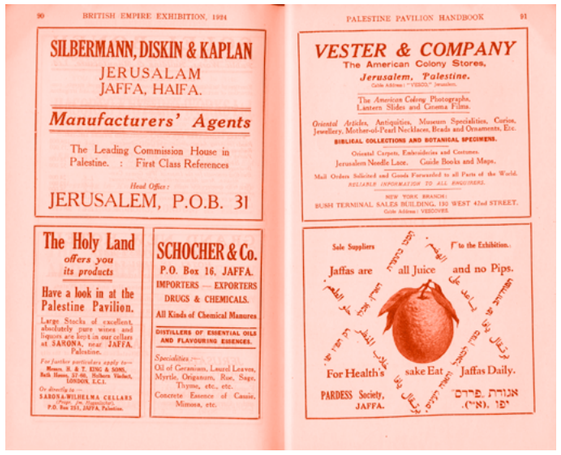


Image 55: Information booklet for the Palestinian Pavilion, which contains dozens of advertisements from colonial manufacturers and a list of colonial exhibitors.

between Jewish interests and British colonial policies.[55]

An April 25, 1924 article from the Jewish Chronicle exemplifies this sentiment, expressing optimism about the strengthening relationship between Jewish and British interests and the implications it could have for the future of a Jewish state. This convergence of goals at the Exhibition was seen as a promising indicator of the potential for the establishment of a homeland in accordance with Zionist objectives:

"The inclusion within the Exhibition of the Palestine pavilion is […] a token that, albeit embryonically, the Jewish nation has become part of the British Empire […]. It were [sic] well for Great Britain to understand, and for the British Empire to appreciate, the immense moral gain they have acquired […] in thus enfolding the Jewish Nation within their bosom. With a proper understanding of the true position on both sides, there is room ample and to spare for the development to the fullest degree of Jewish Nation aspirations consistent with the very best interests of the British Empire […]. Thus the great exhibition, which has drawn together representatives from every corner of the Empire upon which the sun never sets, by the inclusion within it of the Palestine exhibit makes manifest to all that now subsists between the British Empire and the Jewish people."

Palestine's majority Arab population, with its rich cultural heritage, found no representation amidst the displays - a silence reminiscent of their absence in pivotal historical documents like the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate for Palestine, which referred to them merely as "non-Jewish inhabitants". This obfuscation continued at the exhibition, where the grand British and Zionist exhibits overshadowed the significant economic and social roles of the Arab Muslim and Christian communities.

Scrutiny into the composition and funding of the pavilion's planning committee revealed a deliberate pattern of excluding Arab voices from the narrative construction process. The exhibition's portrayal of Palestine, therefore, emerged as a land touched only by British and Zionist development.[32]

The poignant outcome of this selective curation was the Palestine Pavilion itself, which emerged not merely as a display but as an act of cultural erasure, an exhibition space that echoed the Zionist slogan of *"a land without a people, for a people without a land."* This phrase effectively negated the presence and history of the indigenous population, advancing a narrative that served the ideological ends of the Zionist movement at the expense of the Palestinian people's cultural and historical identity.[32,56]

Image 56: Advertisement for the Palestine Pavilion.

LIVING EXHIBITS & HUMAN ZOOS

From the 1870s, 'native villages' had become a hallmark of international exhibitions, often employed as powerful tools of propaganda aimed at shaping public perception. These displays, which featured colonised individuals and their cultural practices, became increasingly prominent in British exhibitions, especially in the 1908 White City Exhibition orchestrated by Imre Kiralfy in the period leading up to the First World War (see image 57). This tradition reflects a long-standing approach to the presentation and interpretation of colonised cultures to Western audiences.[18,33]

The 1924 British Empire Exhibition marked a continuation of the practice of showcasing colonised individuals from the colonies. Termed "Races in Residence", this aspect of the exhibition saw people from various colonies living within caricatured replicas of their home environments, built within their respective national pavilions. Unlike previous exhibitions, where such displays were often confined to commercial and entertainment areas, the 1924 Exhibition sought to integrate these cultural representations more centrally within the exposition's fabric. It was documented that a total of 273 people from the British colonies were part of this live display.[23]

The "Races in Residence" exhibit at the British Empire Exhibition was described in the official guide as such:[20]

"*Every section of the empire is represented at Wembley. Many of the colonies have representatives of their local inhabitants at work in local conditions. The following list gives the name of the races and the approximate numbers actually living in the exhibition: Malays 20, Burmans 30, Hong Kong Chinese 160, West Africans 60, and Palestinians 3. In addition there are Indians, Singhalese, West Indians, and natives of British Guiana, who live outside the exhibition, but attend their respective pavilions daily.*"

The presence of indigenous representatives at the exhibition served a dual purpose: while they demonstrated their traditional crafts and work, their primary role was performative. They were living exhibits meant to demonstrate the Empire's purported civilising impact - suggesting that it had brought progress and civility to these communities (see images 58 to 61). This portrayal was not merely descriptive; it was prescriptive, casting the subjects in a light that aligned with colonial narratives and the era's Social Darwinist beliefs, perpetuating stereotypes, and reinforcing the notion of cultural and racial hierarchies.[17,20,23,38]

By categorising the indigenous 'natives' on display as "Races", the exhibition created a distinction between these groups and the archetypal Englishman. The literature accompanying the various colonial exhibits often highlighted this perceived exotic otherness, thus

Image 57: A poster and photographic postcard of the Senegalese Village at the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition.

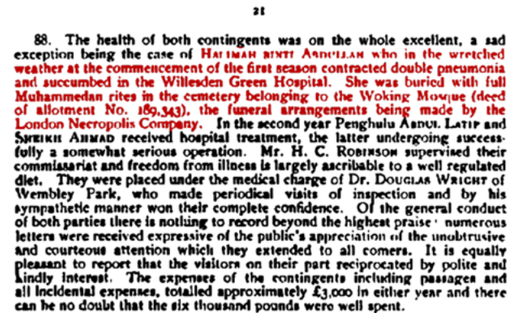
Image 58 to 61: A series of colour lithograph posters called "Scenes of Empire", produced by Gerald Spencer Pryse.

emphasising the supposed novelty and distinctiveness of the colonies in contrast to the familiarity of English culture - for instance, Royal Anthropological Society issued a leaflet for the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, cautioning readers that "*many primitive beliefs and customs appear repulsive to the civilised man*" and that among the exhibition displays were 'natives' imported from the colonies to demonstrate their "*cultural, linguistic, intellectual and technological inferiority.*"[57]

The "Races in Residence" feature at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, while framed as an educational showcase, bore the hallmarks of a human zoo. Participants from the colonies were displayed in a manner that explicitly ranked their cultures as inferior, in a manner that was both racist and demeaning. This dehumanising portrayal was not an isolated practice but part of a larger pattern of exhibitions that objectified living people for the purpose of entertainment and supposed education.[18,23,25]

The Malayan Pavilion at the 1924 Empire Exhibition was a stage for the display of colonised peoples - prominently featuring 20 individuals from Malaya, including a skilled weaver named Halimah Binti Abdullah of Johor. Halimah brought the craft of her homeland's textiles to Wembley, living within the pavilion and potentially selling her woven creations and other goods to an international audience.

The British Empire Exhibition Report of 1925 records Halimah's name and her skills as an "expert weaver," an art she practiced and performed before visitors. At 60 years of age, not long after her arrival in Britain, she fell ill with pneumonia - an illness believed to have been brought on by the harshness of the British winter. Despite receiving care at Willesden Green Hospital, Halimah succumbed to the illness (see image 62).[58]



21

88. The health of both contingents was on the whole excellent, a sad exception being the case of HALIMAH BINTI ABDULLAH, who in the wretched weather at the commencement of the first season contracted double pneumonia and succumbed in the Willesden Green Hospital. She was buried with full Muhammedan rites in the cemetery belonging to the Woking Mosque (deed of allotment No. 189,343), the funeral arrangements being made by the London Necropolis Company. In the second year Penghulu ABDUL LATIF and SHEIKH AHMAD received hospital treatment, the latter undergoing successfully a somewhat serious operation. Mr. H. C. ROBINSON supervised their commissariat and freedom from illness is largely ascribable to a well regulated diet. They were placed under the medical charge of Dr. DOUGLAS WRIGHT of Wembley Park, who made periodical visits of inspection and by his sympathetic manner won their complete confidence. Of the general conduct of both parties there is nothing to record beyond the highest praise: numerous letters were received expressive of the public's appreciation of the unobtrusive and courteous attention which they extended to all comers. It is equally pleasant to report that the visitors on their part reciprocated by polite and kindly interest. The expenses of the contingents including passages and all incidental expenses, totalled approximately £3,000 in either year and there can be no doubt that the six thousand pounds were well spent.

Image 62: Extract from the 1925 Wembley Malay Report.

The details of Halimah's life and passing are sparse, a blunt reminder of the many untold stories of colonial subjects who participated in these exhibitions. Her final resting place was in the "Muhammedan" section of Brookwood Cemetery, marking the end of her story far from home (see image 63). Her death casts a light on the experiences and vulnerabilities of those from the colonies, brought to Britain for display and subjected to unfamiliar and potentially perilous conditions.

Image 63: Allotment No. 189,343 in Woking Mosque.

The British Empire Exhibition Report of 1925 unveils the contrast between the grand budget of over £4.5 million allocated for the Exhibition and the meagre £136 spent on living quarters for the Malayan contingent. The accommodations provided were rudimentary at best: a converted 60-foot long by 20-foot-wide ex-army officer's mess hut, partitioned into five cramped sections. The only sources of warmth were paraffin stoves, while illumination came from petrol incandescent lamps, with no mention of any modern electrical services. In addition to these living conditions, three old war stock circular huts were adapted to serve as a kitchen and as segregated lavatories for men and women.[58]

The untimely demise of Halimah Binti Abdullah casts a sombre light on the reality faced by colonised individuals within the Exhibition. Rather than arranging for suitable lodgings or hotels outside the grounds, the British authorities chose to house colonial subjects on-site. This decision, made during an era marked by racial segregation in Britain, is indicative of the broader societal constraints and the colour bar that shaped early 20th-century Britain - reflecting a troubling disregard for the welfare and dignity of the colonial subjects brought to the heart of the empire for display and entertainment.

Image 64: Malaya Exhibit, includes a women of East Asian descent operate a weaving machine.

Image 65: Malaya Exhibit, includes a women of East Asian descent operate a weaving machine.

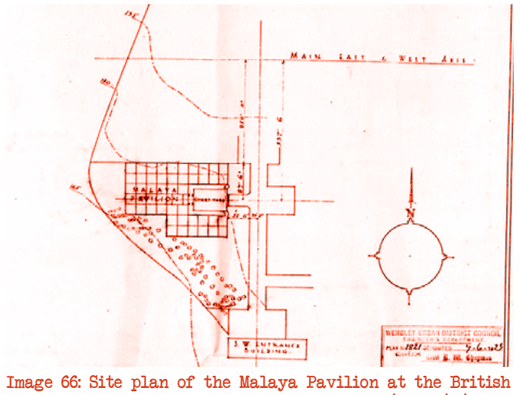


Image 66: Site plan of the Malaya Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition, Brent Archives Ref: BLD/WEMB/1/1769-1863/49.

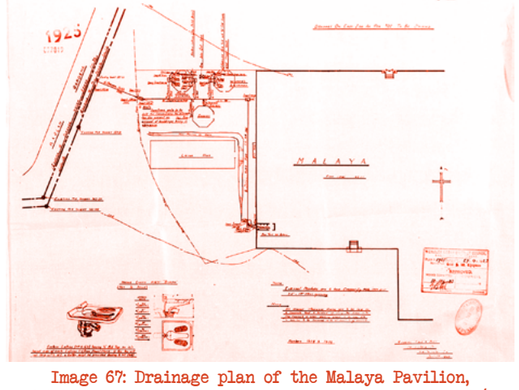


Image 67: Drainage plan of the Malaya Pavilion, highlighting "Living Hut". Brent Archives Ref: BLD/WEMB/1/1769-1863/49.

THE FIGHT FOR DIGNITY

W.E.B. Du Bois' theory of 'Double Consciousness' is particularly relevant to the experiences of the colonised individuals displayed in the Races in Residence at the British Empire Exhibition. Double Consciousness refers to the internal conflict experienced by oppressed and/or colonised groups in an oppressive society. It describes the sense of looking at oneself through the eyes of a racist society and measuring oneself by the means of a nation that looks back in contempt.[59,60]

The individuals showcased at the Wembley exhibitions were in a position of performing their identities in ways that were often dictated by the colonial gaze. They were expected to live up to the stereotypes, caricatures, and simplified roles that the imperialist organisers had crafted for them - often eroticised, infantilised, or romanticised portrayals that catered to Western notions of racial superiority and the 'otherness' of colonised peoples.

Even though the colonised individuals in the Races in Residence at Wembley were paid, their performances were constrained within a framework designed by their colonisers, limiting their ability to present their authentic selves and cultures. They were forced to navigate the duality of their true identity and the caricatured identity that was superimposed upon them, thus embodying Du Bois' concept of Double Consciousness. One may conclude that the individuals showcased at Wembley grappled with a profound duality: they were wholly aware of their own rich cultural heritage yet compelled to act out the simplistic and demeaning roles expected of them, for the entertainment and supposed education of the Western public.

This duality highlights the internal struggle and the psychological toll that such performances would have on colonised individuals, as they had to reconcile their self-perception with the reductive and racialised perceptions that were forced upon them. It also underscores the broader systemic issues of power and representation in colonial societies, where the dominant group controls and distorts the image of the subjugated for its own purposes.

The "Races in Residence" exhibit at the British Empire Exhibition was not just a display of colonial subjects; it was a reflection of the era's racial prejudices, presenting people from the colonies in a manner that was both derogatory and reductive. These exhibits amplified the prevailing racial biases of the time - biases that were entrenched in British society and propagated through media outlets. Newspapers and journals of the day were rife with distorted and prejudiced portrayals of colonised peoples, reinforcing negative stereotypes and perpetuating a narrative of racial superiority that was deeply woven into the fabric of 20th-century British culture (see images 68, 69, and 70).

Image 68: A Daily Mirror Cartoon by William Kerridge Haselden. Published 15th May 1924.

Chota Lal Charbutty (just arrived). "SALAAM, OFFICER SAHIB. I WISH THE WEMBLEY DÂK BUNGALOW. THANKING YOU NOT HALF."

Image 69: A Punch Magazine cartoon of an infantilised Indian man speaking broken English.

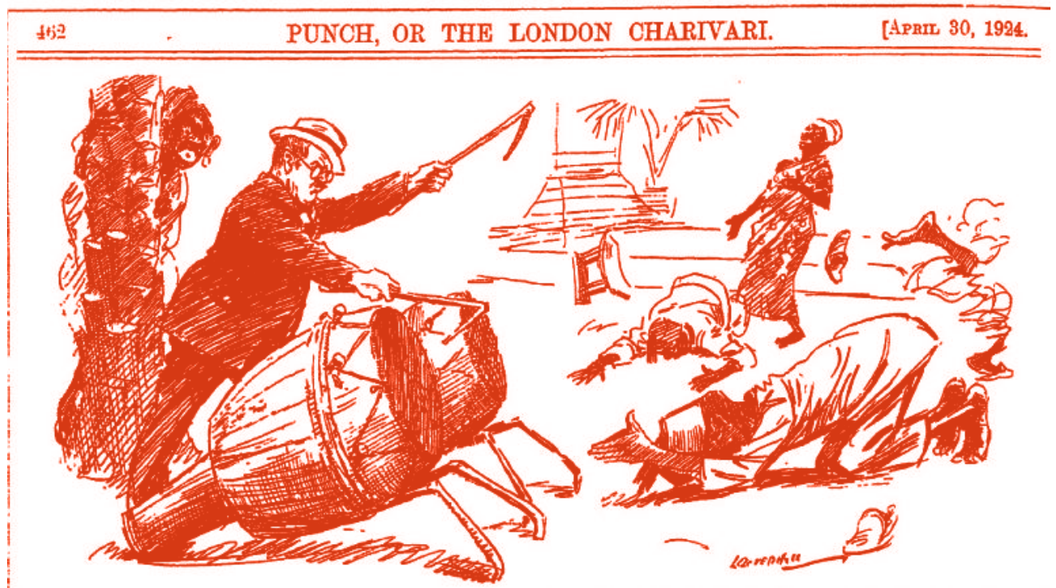


Image 70: A Punch Magazine depiction of a group of Africans dropping to their knees in supplication to spiritual commands issued by the 'Illustrator's' inept beating of the drums.

The representations within the Pavilions and 'Native Villages' at the Exhibition did not reflect the self-identity of the indigenous peoples depicted; rather, they were filtered through the colonial lens of British perception. These distorted representations, which reduced vibrant cultures to simplistic stereotypes, sparked widespread dissent. Individuals and groups from across the expanse of the British Empire voiced their protest, challenging the exhibition's narratives and asserting their own identities and truths against the imperialist portrayals.

For instance, the portrayal of India within the framework of British imperialism at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition proved to be a profound and distressing revelation for Srinivasa Sastri (see image 71). The highly esteemed Indian advocate and statesman, tasked with supporting the representation of India at the exhibition, was confronted with a portrayal that starkly contradicted his known public endorsements of British colonial policies.

Image 71: Srinivasa Sastri, India's Agent to the Union of South Africa, Member of the Council of State (India), Member of the Imperial Legislative Council of India.

Historically, Sastri had advocated compliance with British rule, as evidenced in 1891 when he urged students in Lucknow, India to adhere to the colonial government's orders.61 This encounter at the exhibition marked a significant juncture, challenging his previous positions and compelling a re-evaluation of the empire's narrative he had once echoed.

Image 72: India Postcard, Souvenir of Wembley 1924 British Empire Exhibition

The Exhibition was presented as a celebration of racial harmony within the Empire, yet Srinivasa Sastri understood it to be a mere facade, masking the true dynamics of imperial domination. He critically noted how the Exhibition's policies favoured dominions and White settler communities, while marginalising native populations and immigrants. For Sastri, this disparity highlighted the Exhibition's blatant oversight of deep-seated inequalities and the superficiality of its claims of unity. It was this realisation that exposed the Exhibition not as a unifying cultural showcase but as a stage for reinforcing the unequal power structures inherent in colonial rule.

Srinivasa Sastri questioned the alleged authenticity of the British Empire Exhibition, and urged India to formally renounce its involvement, challenging the Exhibition's assertion of representing a unified metropolitan culture. In a decisive act of defiance and symbolic significance, Sastri relinquished his role on the organising committee for the Exhibition. He took a stand, advocating for India's immediate withdrawal and calling for a boycott, signalling a refusal to endorse or partake in what they saw as an elaborate facade of imperial propaganda.[19]

"*Few persons realise in India what great importance is attached to the Exhibition as the display of the resources of the empire and what glowing hopes are entertained in the business world of its material benefits. In both directions, India's part in the show is imposing. Doubtless trained exploiters of the world would see that she has profited as little as possible in the end, correspondingly her withdrawal if its possibility be conceived, would be felt as in the nature of a blow at the Empire*"

– Srinivasa Sastri[19]

Sastri's concerns extended beyond mere representation; he was acutely aware that the British Empire Exhibition was not just a cultural display but a conduit for the British Empire's industrial and agricultural ambitions in India. The exploitation of India's resources under the guise of unity and progress became a focal point of his challenge. This economic predation, blatantly at odds with the ostensible goals of the Exhibition, fuelled his insistence on disengagement.

The underlying motives of the Exhibition, Sastri argued, were not in India's best interests, and he sought to expose and counteract this veiled agenda of exploitation.[19]

Protests against the 1924 British Empire Exhibition weren't isolated to Indian representatives - West African individuals who were studying in England were deeply disturbed by the portrayals of their homelands at the British Empire Exhibition. Their sense of alienation deepened following the release of derogatory articles, such as those published in the Sunday Express; which was laden with offensive and crude insinuations about the workers of the Walled City exhibit. In response, the Union of Students of African Descent (USAD) expressed a series of incisive criticisms regarding the depiction of West Africa at the event (see image 73). The student body stood in solidarity and criticised the exhibition for reducing the representation of West African nations to caricatures, suggesting that the true intent behind the inclusion of West Africans was not to celebrate their cultures but to subject them to public ridicule.[30,62,63]

Image 73: Group picture of the Union of Students of African Descent, founded by Ladipo Solanke.

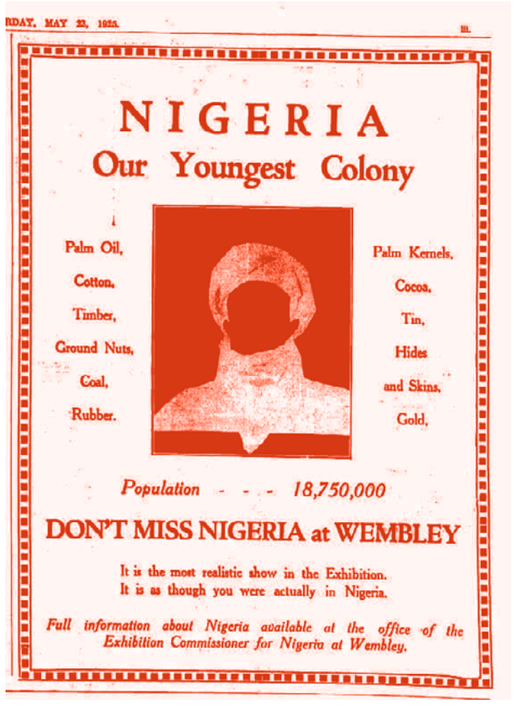


Image 74: An advert in the "Times of London", May 23, 1925.

The portrayal of West Africans within the confines of the British Empire Exhibition's Walled City sparked a wave of anger among students. They were deeply troubled by the reductive imagery, particularly the photographs depicting a "*half-naked individual, grimy and streaked with perspiration.*" These images, they felt, were designed to pique the curiosity of an ignorant audience, presenting a narrative of struggle that bordered on spectacle rather than an authentic account of their lives and challenges.[30,49]

Moreover, there was a widespread consensus that the Exhibition did a disservice to the contemporary realities of West African nations. The displays were critiqued for perpetuating outdated perceptions, showcasing West Africa not as a region with a dynamic present and promising future but as a tableau of antiquated customs. Those from the region who witnessed the exhibit first-hand found a disconnect, asserting that the Walled City fell short of capturing the true representation of West Africa, instead offering a skewed and anachronistic view that failed to acknowledge their rich and complex societies.[49,63]

The British Empire Exhibition of 1924 catalysed a significant movement among African students, who perceived the event as an attempt to caricature West Africa's subjugated role within the British Empire. This spurred them to action, sowing the seeds for the burgeoning pan-African movement of the 1930s, that would challenge colonial governance in the decades leading to the decolonisation movements of the 1950s.[23,64]

In the summer of 1924, the USAD orchestrated numerous protests targeting the Colonial Office. They convened a series of comprehensive meetings to deliberate on the trajectory of West Africa's future. This marked a defining moment as West African students residing in London found a renewed sense of purpose, and in the aftermath, they established new associations with a focus on African nationalist aspirations and Garveyism. These groups would come to play a crucial role in the discourse of African autonomy and Pan-Africanism, as the struggle for self-determination and independence gained momentum throughout the mid-20th century.[23,64]

During the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, the voices and perspectives of the West African individuals put on public display were largely muted in the contemporary press. Reporters at the time did not capture their testimonies or engage them in interviews; instead, the colonised individuals were frequently depicted as silent yet compliant figures, almost child-like in their wonderment at their new surroundings - environments that were alien to them, especially under the unfamiliar and often dreary British skies.[30]

A turning point came when the West Africans on display at within the confines of the Exhibition's Walled City, took a defiant stand. They rejected the demeaning caricatures propagated by the British press, asserting their self-respect by expelling intrusive photographers who sought to ridicule them. In one incident, their determination to protect their privacy and control their representation led to a forceful ejection of a photographer, a symbolic act of resistance against the objectifying gaze.[30]

At Wembley, Canada was notably featured as a self-governing dominion within the British Empire, showcasing its modernity and appeal as a destination for commerce and settlement. However, the Canadian story told at the dominion's pavilion was incomplete, as the existence of the First Nations Canadians was notably absent from the Canadian pavilion.

This omission was a deliberate choice to craft an image of a civilised nation, unencumbered by the complexities of its indigenous heritage. The official narrative prescribed by the pavilion organisers maintained that Canada's Native populations were well-assimilated, having embraced state-run education, Christianity, and land settlement schemes - a narrative of benevolence and progress.

The juxtaposition at the Wembley Exhibition between the sanitised image of Canada as a bastion of supposed civility and the overlooked existence of its First Nations people was a gap that did not escape discerning eyes. The attempt to project a sanitised national image while obscuring the rich cultural heritage of the indigenous population revealed an uncomfortable chasm that many could not, and would not, ignore.

It sparked critical reactions among some Canadian observers, who challenged the conflicting and reductive portrayal that failed to reconcile the nation's indigenous identity with its projected modern image. The discrepancy highlighted a deeper struggle with identity and representation, one that resonated with a poignant undertone of cultural erasure within the grandeur of the Empire's showcase.[65]

IMPERIAL COMMEMORATIONS AT WEMBLEY

In present-day Wembley, the echoes of colonial Britain resonate, etched into the fabric of the urban landscape through lasting architectural and environmental tributes.

The map below and table enclosed outlines the commemorations of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition, outlining their connection to the event and identifying the owners of the commemorative assets:

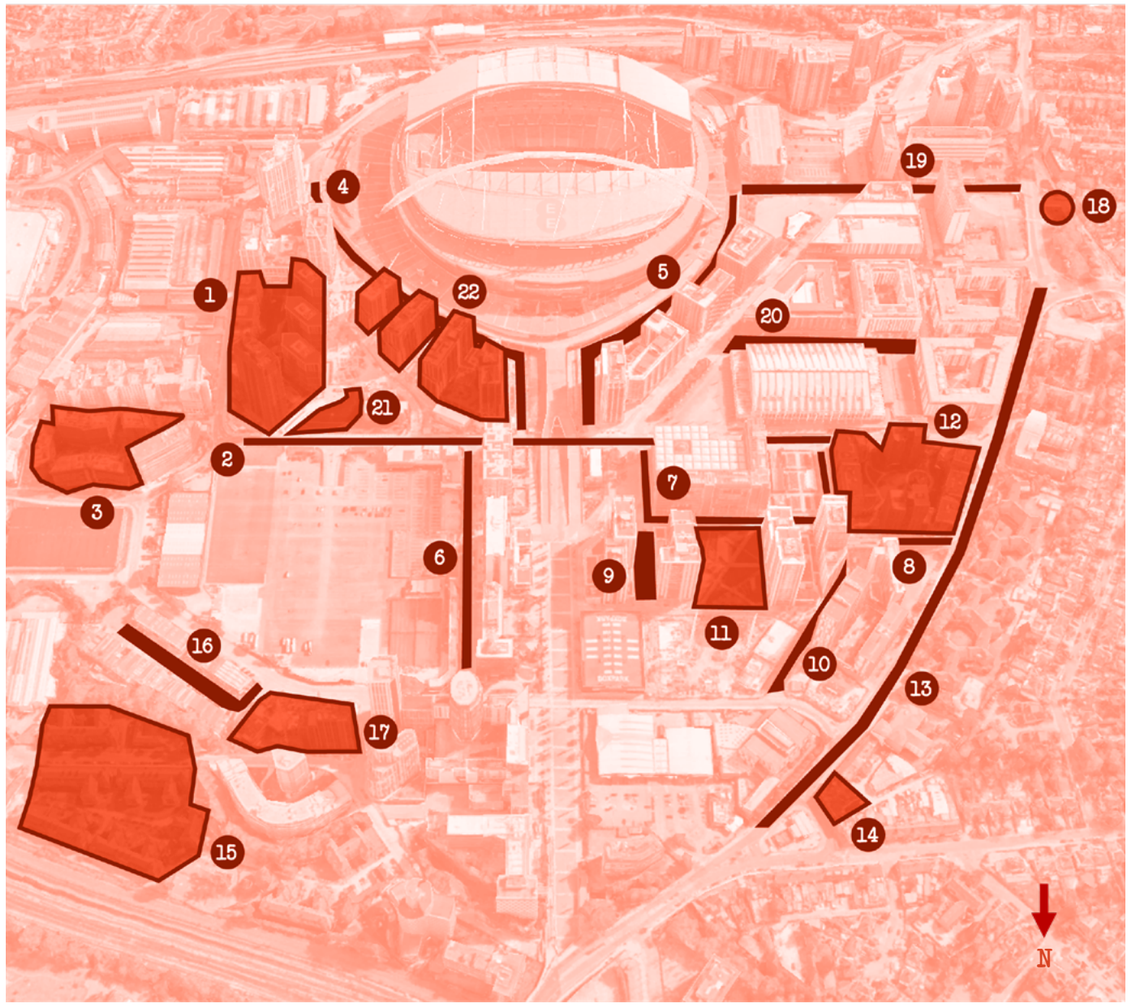


Image 75: A map highlighting assets in Wembley that commemorates the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.

Map Reference	Commemoration	Link to 1924 British Empire Exhibition	Owner (correct as of March 2022)
1	Canada Gardens	Commemorates the 'Canada Pavilion', which previously stood on the same geographical location. Inclusive of Canada Lane.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
2	Engineers Way	Commemorates the 'Palace of Engineering' of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	London Borough of Brent
3	Pavilion Court	Commemorates the 'Pavilions' of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	Watkin Jones Group
4	Atlantic Crescent	Commemorates the 'Atlantic Slope' named by Rudyard Kipling, which previously stood on the same geographical location. And near the site of the 'Canada Pavilion'.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
5	Pacific Crescent	Commemorates the 'Pacific Slope' named by Rudyard Kipling, which previously stood on the same geographical location. And near the site of the 'Australia Pavilion'.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
6	Rutherford Way	Commemorates Sir Ernest Rutherford, whose work was displayed at the Pure Science Exhibition at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	London Borough of Brent
7	Exhibition Way	Commemorates the 1924 British Empire Exhibition	Quintain Estates Ltd.
8	Palace Arts Way	Commemorates the 'Palace of the Arts', which previously stood on the same geographical location.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
9	Weaver Walk	Commemorates Lawrence Weaver, who organised the British Halls of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
10	Harbutt Road	Commemorates the display of Harbutt's Plasticine in the 'Palace of Industries', which previously stood on the same geographical location.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
11	Elvin Gardens	Commemorates Arthur Elvin, a cigarette kiosk operator at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition - who went on to purchase multiple Wembley assets, including the Stadium.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
12	Emerald Gardens	Commemorates the 'New Zealand Pavilion', which previously stood on the same geographical location. Inclusive of Art Studios which are geographically located where the 'Palace of the Arts' previously stood.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
13	Empire Way	Commemorates the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	London Borough of Brent
14	Empire One	Commemorates the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	Camrose London
15	Empire Court	Commemorates the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	Freshwater Group of Companies
16	Watkin Road	Commemorates Edward Watkin, railway entrepreneur who was the previous owner of the Wembley site which would go on to become the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	London Borough of Brent
17	10 Watkin Road	Commemorates Edward Watkin, railway entrepreneur who was the previous owner of the Wembley site which would go on to become the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	Barratt Developments plc.
18	Lionhead Memorial	Commemorates the 'Palace of Industry'.	London Borough of Brent
19	Royal Route	The Route used by the King George V to open the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
20	Lakeside Way	The road ran alongside the lake in the 1924 British Empire Exhibition	Quintain Estates Ltd.
21	Union Park Lake	A lake that stands in the same geographical location of the Wembley Lakes during the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.	Quintain Estates Ltd.
22	Lexington, Madison & Bowery	Inclusive of Hudson Walk. Linked to the 'Atlantic Slope' commemoration. A series of buildings adjacent to 'Atlantic Crescent' named after places across the 'Atlantic' Ocean in New York City (Bowery Lane, Lexington Avenue, Madison Avenue, the Hudson River).	London Borough of Brent, L&Q, & Quintain Estates Ltd.

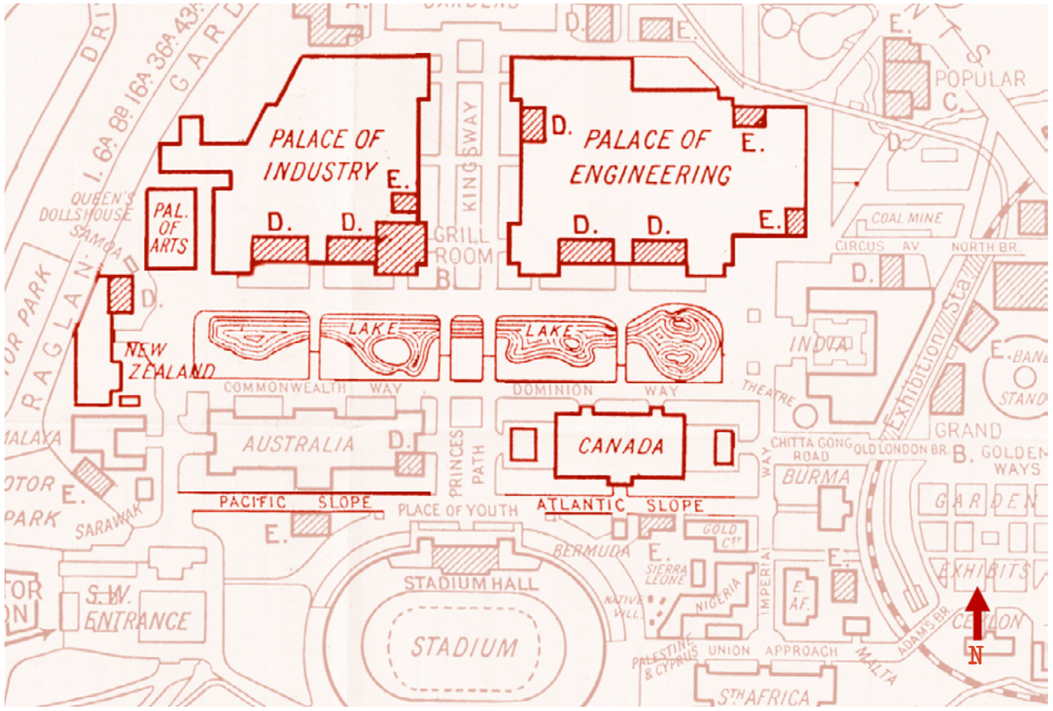


Image 76: A 1924 map of Wembley highlighting assets at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition that are commemorated today.

Wembley's contemporary urban fabric is intricately embroidered with enduring echoes of its colonial heritage, not just in its monuments and relics, but also within its very blueprint for the future. The area's planning principles exhibit a certain reverence for its imperial history, suggesting a desire to preserve the narrative of its bygone era within the progression of Wembley's urban development.

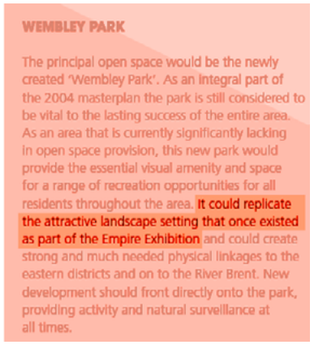
The Wembley Masterplan, a Supplementary Planning Document endorsed by the London Borough of Brent in June 2009, serves as a testament to this (see image 77). This strategic guide sought to steer the redevelopment of Wembley over design and construction period, suggesting that the very framework for future growth is steeped in historical romanticism.

As the local planning authority, the London Borough of Brent's role is pivotal in shaping development that is sympathetic to their vision - a vision that subtly resonates with echoes of a bygone imperial era (see image 80).

This becomes particularly influential when planning documents subtly imbue development goals with undertones of imperial reminiscence. Developers, eager to gain approval, may thus find themselves echoing these themes to align with the stated vision.[66]

Embedded within the pages of the Masterplan are nostalgic references that evoke the grandeur of the Empire Exhibition. Statements like *"[The new public open space] could replicate the attractive landscape setting that once existed as part of the Empire Exhibition*

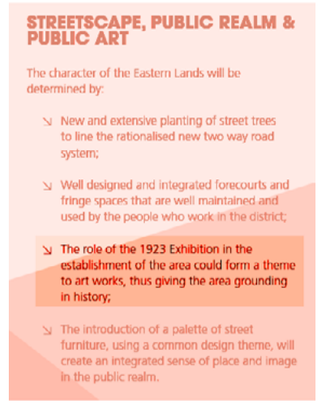
Image 77: Cover of the Wembley Masterplan.



WEMBLEY PARK

The principal open space would be the newly created 'Wembley Park'. As an integral part of the 2004 masterplan the park is still considered to be vital to the lasting success of the entire area. As an area that is currently significantly lacking in open space provision, this new park would provide the essential visual amenity and space for a range of recreation opportunities for all residents throughout the area. It could replicate the attractive landscape setting that once existed as part of the Empire Exhibition and could create strong and much needed physical linkages to the eastern districts and on to the River Brent. New development should front directly onto the park, providing activity and natural surveillance at all times.

Image 78: Extract from Wembley Masterplan refering to open space.



STREETSCAPE, PUBLIC REALM & PUBLIC ART

The character of the Eastern Lands will be determined by:

- New and extensive planting of street trees to line the rationalised new two way road system;
- Well designed and integrated forecourts and fringe spaces that are well maintained and used by the people who work in the district;
- The role of the 1923 Exhibition in the establishment of the area could form a theme to art works, thus giving the area grounding in history;
- The introduction of a palette of street furniture, using a common design theme, will create an integrated sense of place and image in the public realm.

Image 79: Extract from Wembley Masterplan refering to public art.

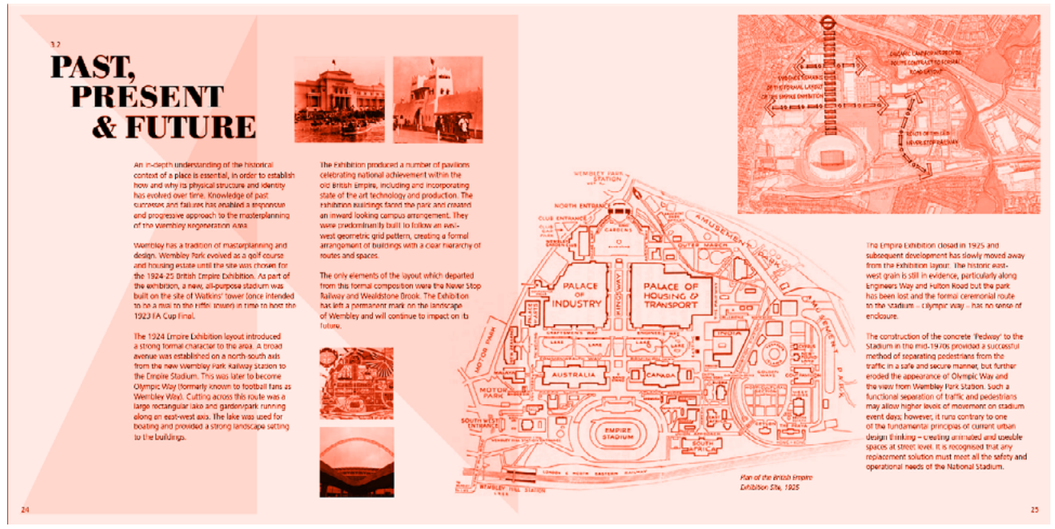


Image 80: One of the introductory chapters of the Wembley Masterplan, asserting the importance of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition in relation to future developments of Wembley.

[...]" and "*The role of the 1924 Exhibition in the establishment of the area could form a theme to art works, thus giving the area grounding in history,*" found on pages 25 (see image 78) and 160 (see image 79), respectively, illustrate a conscious choice to perpetuate the legacy of a colonial epoch, shaping Wembley's evolution in its lingering shadow.

Furthermore, temporary projects at Wembley have also suffered from imperial nostalgic sentiments, such as the Yellow Pavilion - which was a temporary community space offering classes across a variety of disciplines, including arts and culture, health and wellbeing, and education.

The Yellow Pavilion had urban planters in it's foyer configured in positions reflecting a birds eye view of the map of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition (see image 81). The entrance of this temporary community centre was designed to be a welcoming entrance and garden to encourage locals to spend time there (see image 82).

The project was delivered by property developers, Quintain in partnership with Brent Council. And the temporary project, which reopened as "The Yellow" in October 2018 at a new location, has since been under new management and rebranded since 2024.

Image 81: Entrance to the Yellow Pavilion - circa. 2016.

Image 82: Urban planter configuration by the entrance to the Yellow Pavilion - circa. 2016.

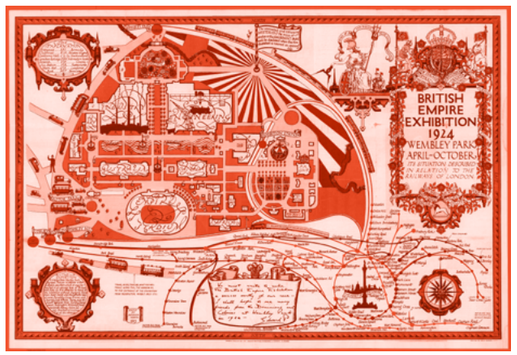


Image 83: British Empire Exhibition 1924 Wembley Park April - October. North, Kennedy, 1887 - 1942.

Additionally, imperial nostalgia is also expressed by commercial occupiers of units built in Wembley, for instance, in 2019 the Getty Images Gallery, which took up tenure at Wembley, launched a year-long programme named 'The Ages of Wembley' (see images 84 to 87). Featuring a selection of never-before-seen photographs sourced from Getty Images' archival and contemporary libraries of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition.

Image 84 to 87: Photographs showcasing the 'Ages of Wembley' debut exhibition of Getty Images Gallery.

The strategy by which landowners at Wembley curate the mix of uses across the site also greatly suffers from imperial nostalgia - this is observed in the location selected for the Second Floor Studios & Arts studios, which provide affordable, long-term, high quality studio workspace for artists, designers and makers at Wembley Park (see image 88).

Image 88: Map graphic highlighting Second Floor Art Studio locations at Wembley Park.

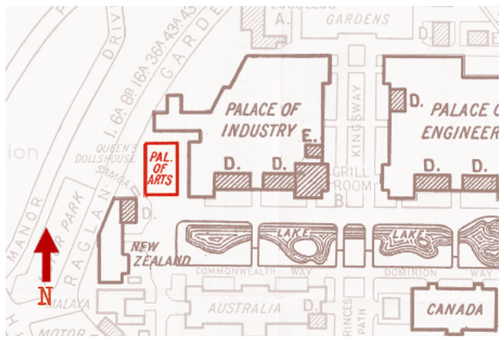


Image 89: 1924 Wembley map highlighting the location of the 'Palace of Arts'.

Image 90: 'Palace of Arts' postcard

The studios are unfortunately geographically located where the 'Palace of the Arts' once stood (see image 89). A clear commemorative decision to honour the Palace that once stood at the British Empire Exhibition.

Wembley's public open spaces also commemorate individuals associated with the British Empire Exhibition. E.g. 'Elvin Gardens' situated in the Wembley Park estate contains a children's play area with sculpted letters scattered across the space, that spells out "Elvin" (see image 92) - commemorating Arthur Elvin, a cigarette kiosk operator at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition - who went on to purchase multiple Wembley assets, including the Stadium (see image 91).[67]

Image 91: Sir Arthur Elvin, Norwich-born British businessman who owned and operated Wembley Stadium.

Image 92: Children's play area in Wembley Park with urban elements that spells out 'Elvin'.

Image 93: Concrete Lion Heads, on the side of the Palace of Industry, in the process of removal for preservation.

Image 94: Concrete Lion Head salvaged for preservation.

Image 95: Concrete Lion Heads from the Palace of Industry mounted on plinth in a Wembley public open space.

Further commemorations include a concrete lion head, salvaged from old Palace of Industry in 1924 British Empire Exhibition mounted on a plinth in a Wembley public open space (see images 93 to 95).

These examples showcase how the imperial nostalgia embedded in Wembley is not limited to the toponyms of the site, but across various policy, tenant activities, open spaces, monuments, and much more.

To grasp the significance of these commemorations, it is crucial to critically analyse the commemorative toponyms of places, people, and symbols associated with the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Park.

For instance, examining the commemorative name 'Canada Gardens' (map reference #1 on page 42 and 43) reveals that the seven built-to-rent apartment tower blocks stand on the exact location of the 1924 Exhibition's 'Canada Pavilion,' directly commemorating the original structure. One would also discover that the seven apartment blocks symbolise and pay tribute to the renowned "Group of Seven" - a collective of Canadian landscape painters who exhibited at the 1924 British Empire Exhibition (see image 96 and 97).

The Wembley exhibition occupies a significant place in the history of Canadian art and national identity, particularly in relation to the Group of Seven. In 1924, the seven painters gained recognition from British art critics for their bold depictions of the Canadian landscape, which were showcased in the exhibition's Palace of Arts.

Several of the artists, including A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, and Lawren Harris, emphasised the importance of cultivating a distinctly Canadian artistic expression, one that set Canada apart as a North American nation with a unique character, mood, and spirit, distinct from those of Europe and Great Britain.[65]

Image 96: An image of the Group of Seven painters. Pictured are: Frederick Varley, A. Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, Barker Fairley (not a member), Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, and J. E. H. MacDonald.

Image 97: An image of 'Canada Gardens', with a corresponding table (below) highlighting the names of the buildings shown.

Image Reference	Building Name	Commemorated Artist
1	Collyer	Nora Collyer‡
2	Lismar	Arthur Lismer
3	Heward	Prudence Heward‡
4	Thomson	Tom Thomson†
5	Varley	Frederick Varley
6	Jackson	Alexander Young Jackson
7	Seath	Ethel Seath‡

†A closely associated artist (not officially part of the Seven)
‡Associated female artists (not officially part of the Group of Seven)

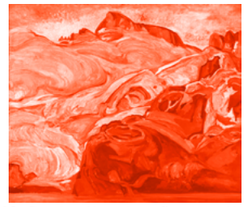


Image 98: Early Morning Sphinx Mountain, by Frederick Varley.

Image 99: The Jack Pine, by Tom Thomson.

Image 100: A September Gale Georgian Bay, by Arthur Lismer.

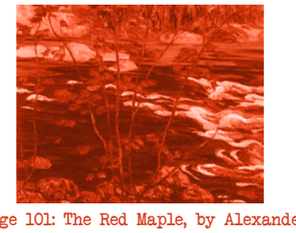


Image 101: The Red Maple, by Alexander Young Jackson.

Journalist and art critic F. B. Housser described the Group of Seven's critical success at Wembley as a professional triumph, reflecting what he saw as a "*complete racial expression of herself through art*" for Canada. Yet, subsequent studies of Canadian art and culture have questioned the accuracy of this narrative, viewing the Group's work as emblematic of a central Canadian regionalism that was anglophone, White, and male.

Despite ongoing debates over the Group's standing as Canada's most prominent artists, retrospective studies reveal a more troubling reality: their art was used to establish the "white man's" dominance in Canada, erasing Indigenous cultures from Canada's landscapes and reinforcing the colonial notion of terra nullius - "uninhabited land" in Latin (see images 98 to 101).[65,68-75]

Another example of commemorative toponymy is the Atlantic and Pacific Crescents at Wembley Park (map reference #4 and #5 on page 42 and 43).

Analysing these walkways reveals that they honour their predecessors, the Pacific and Atlantic Slopes, which were situated in the same geographical location at the 1924 Exhibition (see image 103).

Notably, all the walkways at the 1924 Exhibition were named by the well-known British novelist, Rudyard Kipling (see image 105).[76,77]

Renowned as the author of The Jungle Book and famously known as the "Empire's Poet," Rudyard Kipling also penned The White Man's Burden, a poem lamenting the supposed hardships faced by the White man in his self-proclaimed mission to civilise "backward savages" abroad (see images 107 and 108).[11,30]

Kipling, a notorious White supremacist, attended the 1924 Exhibition multiple times and took great pleasure in the event. His views on other races were evident in his reactions to the West African section of the 1924 Exhibition grounds (see image 102).[64]

The patronizing fiction lying behind liberal pretensions to "racial politeness" was captured in remarks made by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling had provided names for the walkways that bisected the fairgrounds and attended the exhibition several times in 1924, meeting with visiting Americans and other notables. Early in the year Kipling toured the exhibition grounds a few weeks before the formal opening and recorded his reactions to the larger exhibition and the West African exhibits in a private letter later recalled by Nigerian governor Hugh Clifford. Kipling remarked, "It's the biggest thing man ever set hand to, in design and in a certain grandiosity. . . . The West African building is full of the Spirit. One almost smells the nigger passing by."[15] Kipling's remarks passed without comment by Clifford, suggestive of the way in which the "liberal" colonial discourses of the 1920s preserved older relationships of power.

Image 102: Extract of Kipling's private letter to Nigerian governor Hugh Clifford. From Stephen, D. M. (2009). "The White Man's Grave": British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-1925. Journal of British Studies, 48(1), 102-128.

What might appear to be a benign commemoration may, in fact, conceal a more troubling reality. By honouring these walkways, we are celebrating the legacy of a White supremacist who harboured reprehensible views about those he considered 'lesser races.'

Additional commemorations linked to the 'Atlantic Slope' include several buildings adjacent to 'Atlantic Crescent,' each named after notable locations across the Atlantic Ocean (see image 106):

Image Reference	Place Name	Commemorated Place
1	Bowery	Bowery Lane, New York, USA
2	Lexington	Lexington Avenue, New York, USA
3	Madison (East/West)	Madison Avenue, New York, USA
4	Hudson Walk	Hudson River, New York, USA

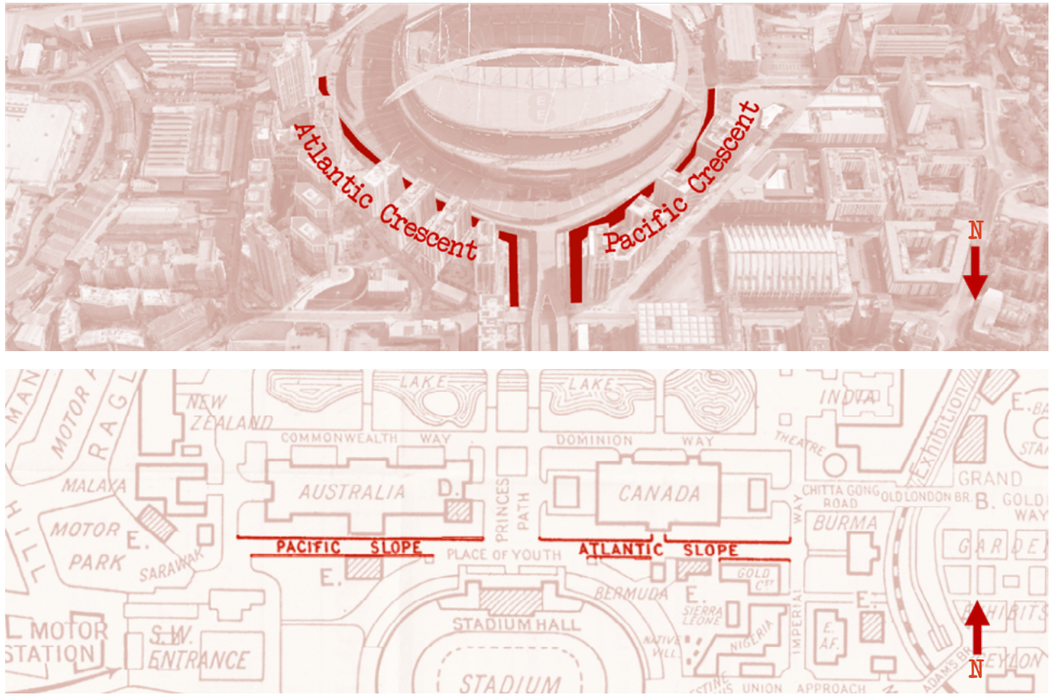


Image 103: A comparative image highlighting the Atlantic and Pacific crescents in modern-day Wembley Park, which stands in the same geographical location of the Atlantic and Pacific slopes of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley.

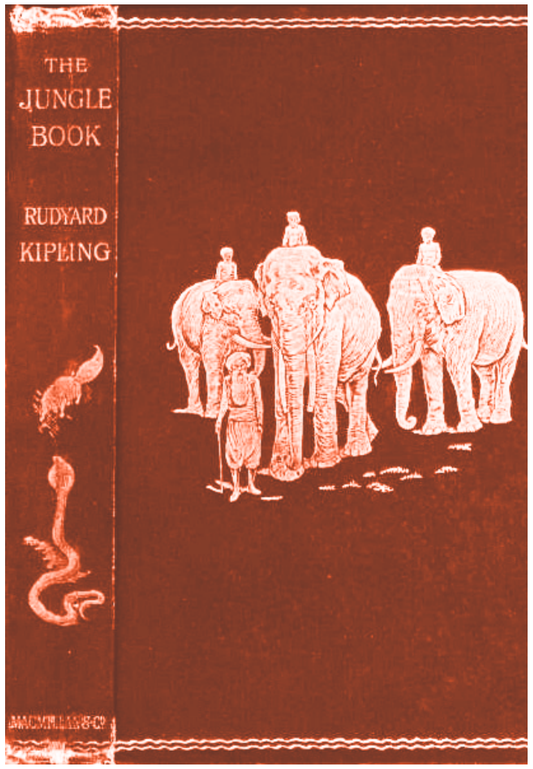


Image 104: Image of the cover of the first edition of The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling, illustrated by John Lockwood Kipling.

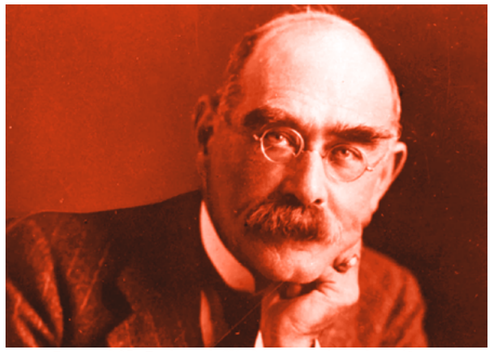


Image 105: Rudyard Kipling, poet and author.

Image 106: An image of Atlantic Crescent, with a corresponding table (page 50) highlighting the names of the buildings/walkways shown.

McClure's Magazine.

Vol. XII. FEBRUARY, 1899. No. 4.

THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN.

By Rudyard Kipling.

Take up the White Man's burden—
  Send forth the best ye breed—
Go, bind your sons to exile
  To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
  On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
  Half devil and half child.

Take up the White Man's burden—
  In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
  And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
  An hundred times made plain,
To seek another's profit
  And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden—
  The savage wars of peace—
Fill full the mouth of Famine,
  And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
  (The end for others sought)
Watch sloth and heathen folly
  Bring all your hope to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden—
  No iron rule of kings,
But toil of serf and sweeper—
  The tale of common things.
The ports ye shall not enter,
  The roads ye shall not tread,
Go, make them with your living
  And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden,
  And reap his old reward—
The blame of those ye better
  The hate of those ye guard—
The cry of hosts ye humour
  (Ah, slowly!) toward the light:—
"Why brought ye us from bondage,
  Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden—
  Ye dare not stoop to less—
Nor call too loud on Freedom
  To cloke your weariness.
By all ye will or whisper,
  By all ye leave or do,
The silent sullen peoples
  Shall weigh your God and you.

Take up the White Man's burden!
  Have done with childish days—
The lightly-proffered laurel,
  The easy ungrudged praise:
Comes now, to search your manhood
  Through all the thankless years,
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,
  The judgment of your peers.

UNDER WATER IN THE "HOLLAND."

A VOYAGE IN THE DIVING TORPEDO BOAT.

By Franklin Matthews.

WHEN one goes under water in the "Holland," there is a certain tremulous feeling as one climbs down the barrel-like turret and finds himself in a brightly-lighted steel cave that tapers off at one end in a constantly narrowing circle to the place where a slender shaft thrusts itself outside to a propeller, and, at the other end, stops short in a blunt compartment into which one cannot look without stooping. The man who operates the boat stands in the turret, and only his legs, as he stands on a bench, can be seen by those who are down in the body of the boat. You hear the top of the turret clamped down, and then you look about somewhat nervously to see what is to be done next. The pilot or commander in the turret rings a little bell, and one of the five men in the crew turns a wheel, and you see that the boat is under way, running along the surface. One of the crew is far in the stern, where the gasolene engine and the electrical appliances are. Another is near the center, where there are two long levers, by which he fills or empties the big water-tanks in the bottom of the boat. Another lies stretched on the bottom of the main

Image 107: Original publication of Rudyard Kipling's poem, The White Man's Burden. McClure's Magazine, February, 1899 (Vol. XII, No. 4). Part 1.

Image 108: Original publication of Rudyard Kipling's poem, The White Man's Burden. McClure's Magazine, February, 1899 (Vol. XII, No. 4). Part 2.

Image 109: A computer generated image of the 10 Watkin Road residential development.

Image 110: An image highlighting the 'Watkin' commemorations at Wembley.

Image 111: Road sign for Watkin Road.

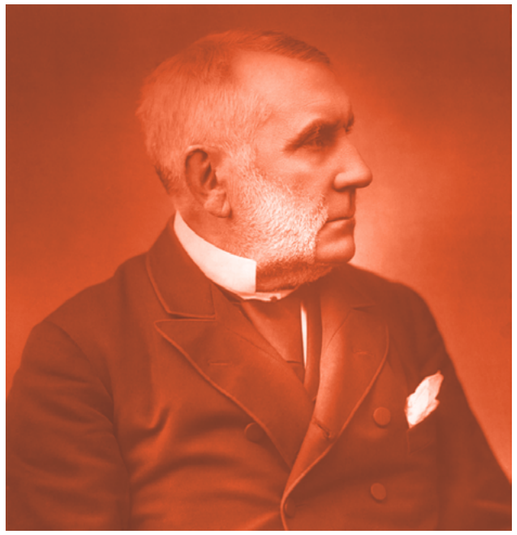


Image 112: Edward William Watkin, 1st Baronet was a British Member of Parliament and railway entrepreneur.

Today, a commemorative street known as Watkin Road and a 23-story residential complex named 10 Watkin Road (see image 109) celebrates the memory of Sir Edward Watkin (see image 112) - who was instrumental in the construction of the Metropolitan Railway line from Central London to Wembley Park, a remarkable engineering feat which was crucial to the urban development of the area (map reference #16 and #17 on page 42 and 43).

Driven by ambition, he oversaw numerous large-scale railway engineering projects to fulfil his business aspirations, eventually chairing over nine different British railway companies. Watkin also lent his expertise to international projects, including the Indian Railways, which the East India Company built to serve its own private interests and those of the British Empire, rather than the needs of the local population (see image 113).[78,79]

Watkin's expertise extended to international projects in Canada. At the request of the British Colonial Secretary, he embarked on a mission to unify the five British colonies and construct railways connecting Quebec to the rest of Canada and the Atlantic. He also restored the financially struggling Grand Trunk Railway of Canada, transforming it into the foundation for the Canadian Pacific Railway (see image 114).[80,81]

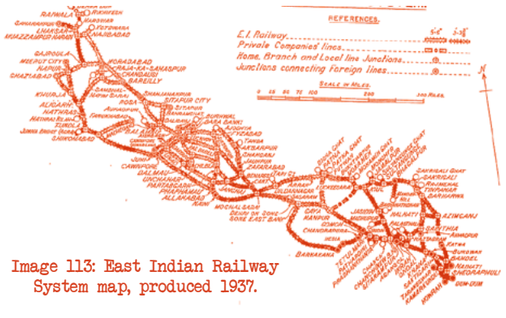


Image 113: East Indian Railway System map, produced 1937.

Image 114: Logos of the Grand Trunk Railway System, and it's successor the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Edward Watkin played a direct role in developing the Belgian Congo railway system, thereby supporting Leopold II's colonial campaign in the region. The origins of the Belgian Congo Railways lay in King Leopold II's personal interest in exploiting Congo under the guise of "development." Leopold enlisted Watkin's expertise to help construct the railway network, which became a key infrastructure enabling the exploitation of Congo's natural resources. As a token of appreciation, Leopold awarded Watkin the title of Knight Commander of the Order of Leopold of Belgium.[79]

Image 115: Leopold II was the second King of the Belgians from 1865 to 1909, and the founder and sole owner of the Congo Free State from 1885 to 1908.

From 1865 to 1909, Leopold II ruled Belgium and believed that the nation's strength depended on expanding its empire like other European powers. His ruthlessness left a trail of horror in Congo, where it is estimated that 10 million Congolese lost their lives as a result of his regime's brutal policies. Watkin's involvement in aiding Leopold's colonial ambitions ultimately rendered him complicit in the tyranny that befell Congo under Belgian rule.[82,83]

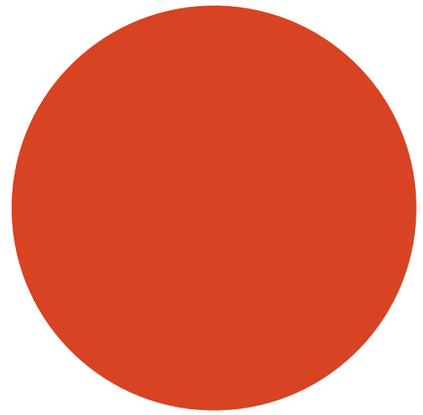
Image 116: Punch magazine cartoonist, Linley Sambourne depicts King Leopold II of Belgium as a snake attacking a Congolese rubber collector. Produced 1906.

Image 117: Congolese men holding the severed hands of those who failed to make the daily rubber sap quota, circa. 1904.

Image 118: Successor of Leopold II, King Albert I on one of the first trains of the Belgian Congo.

It's important to note that the commemorations cited in this document represent what is readily available and publicly accessible, leaving open the possibility that additional commemorative toponyms exist in modern-day Wembley but have not been mentioned in this book. There may be lesser-known commemorations that are either hidden or subtle in nature, which continue to influence public memory and shape perceptions.

These unlisted commemorations could contribute to the ongoing nostalgic narrative and may deserve further exploration to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which history is recognised and perpetuated in contemporary Wembley.



LEST WE FORGET

Okay, but commemorative place naming isn't necessarily 'celebrating'...

Toponyms refer to geographical names, and they are far from arbitrary combinations of form and meaning - they reflect the lived experiences of the people who use them.

Commemorative place naming is designed to intentionally invoke memories of the past, often drawing on the memory of notable individuals and events. It's important to recognise, however, that all toponyms, even those not specifically created to memorialise, carry historical weight. They serve as repositories of personal and collective memories that influence people's identities and behaviours.[84,85]

While commemorations are rooted in the past, it remains closely tied to the present, as landowners wield nearly exclusive influence over shaping and negotiating memory to align with contemporary cultural, economic, and political interests.[85,86]

Commemorative place naming, especially when tied to imperial histories, imprints oppressive memories onto urban landscapes, perpetuating a legacy of shared tyrannical actions. This type of naming has the ability to give tangible familiarity to past ideas and beliefs, normalising distressing memories. It also serves to preserve and honour specific historical narratives and cultures, making it an undeniable expression of power. Though many may regard place names as impartial historical markers, commemoration is inherently selective, often highlighting only part of the story while obscuring others.[85,87]

Commemoration, or remembrance, is inherently intertwined with forgetting - a process that excludes alternative historical narratives and identities from public discourse. Toponyms often reflect the values and beliefs of dominant, elite social classes, typically landowners from the landed gentry and/or aristocracy, who tend to overlook the experiences and struggles of marginalised groups.

Addressing the issue of imperial commemorative place naming presents a significant challenge due to Britain's reluctance to acknowledge the brutality of its past actions and its denial of complicity in historic cruelties.

"[...] I think it's time we stopped our cringing embarrassment about our history, about our traditions and about our culture, and we stop this general bout of self-recrimination and wetness."

- Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Boris Johnson, 2020

Often framed as expressions of national pride, these commemorative toponyms obscure Britain's imperial past, presenting the British Empire as a noble force while neglecting the grim realities of colonial rule. How did we arrive at this selective recollection? How could Britain overlook its involvement in centuries of tyranny and insist on the benevolence of its empire, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary? Why do landowners continue to celebrate this legacy?

A possible answer lies in an event from 2009 when a group of Kenyan war veterans courageously sued the British government over the atrocities committed in Kenya between 1952 and 1960 during the Mau Mau Uprising. Britain sought to suppress this anti-colonial rebellion by confining 1.5 million Kenyans to a vast network of detention camps and heavily patrolled villages, a story marked by systemic violence and orchestrated cover-ups at the highest levels.[88,89]

Their pursuit of justice unearthed a long-buried cover-up that sent shockwaves through Britain in the late 2000s, forever changing the perception of Britain's colonial past.[90,91]

Britain's withdrawal from its Colonies and Dependencies is often remembered as a peaceful and cooperative process in modern Britain, with decolonisation neatly wrapped up over the span of a few decades. However, a crucial truth left out of this narrative is that as the sun set on the largest empire the world had ever known, columns of smoke rose across the globe as Britain destroyed incriminating historical evidence. This purge was called "Operation Legacy."[92]

Commissioned by the British Colonial Office (later rebranded as the Foreign Office), Operation Legacy sought to destroy or conceal files that might otherwise be inherited by Britain's former colonies. This systematic purging of sensitive documents occurred throughout the 1950s to 1970s, the peak of the British Empire's decolonisation.[93-95]

The eradication of these records spanned the globe, affecting British Guiana, Aden, Malta, North Borneo, Belize, the West Indies, Kenya, Uganda, and any territory under British rule. The operation enlisted thousands of colonial officials, MI5 and Special Branch agents, and military personnel across the British army, navy, and air force. Despite legal obligations to preserve official documents for the historical record, they were destroyed or concealed, breaking the expectation that most would ultimately be declassified.[92]

British agents vetted all secret colonial administration documents to eliminate any that could potentially embarrass the government, particularly those revealing racial or religious prejudice. Approximately 20,000 files, covering at least 37 countries and territories were either destroyed on-site or "migrated" to the UK under strict secrecy.[93-95]

Trustworthy civil servants - defined by the British government as "British subjects of European descent" - were assigned to identify and gather all sensitive documents and pass them up the bureaucratic chain. At the moment of independence, or sooner, these documents could either be destroyed on-site or migrated. To ensure the inherited "legacy" files appeared comprehensive, false documents were sometimes created to replace the ones weeded out, or all references to them were carefully removed from the remaining files.

A set of Operation Legacy instructions given to colonial officials in Northern Rhodesia read:[94,96,97]

"[…] all papers which are likely to be interpreted, either reasonably or by malice, as indicating racial prejudice or religious bias on the part of Her Majesty's government."

More than fifty years after the British Empire began its decline, historians still struggle to assess the full extent of the atrocities obscured by self-righteous rhetoric and later by administrators' bonfires, as they prepared to leave on the final ships out.

"Operation Legacy allowed the British to nurture a memory of Empire that was deeply deceptive - a collective confabulation of an imperial mission that had brought nothing but progress and good order to a previously savage world, unlike the French, Italians, Belgians, Germans and Portuguese - those inferior colonial powers whose adventures had been essentially brutal, cynical and exploitative."

- Ian Cobain, in '*The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation*'

It seems a collective amnesia has enveloped much of Britain, causing the nation to overlook its past and, tragically, diminishing the potential for reconciliation. The remnants of the Empire's brutal legacy are buried under layers of selective memory and the destruction of incriminating documents, leaving a sanitised historical narrative that glosses over the darker truths. In failing to confront these realities, the nation risks losing the chance to fully reckon with its imperial history and achieve a more honest, restorative understanding of its place in the world.

"Those who do not remember their past are condemned to repeat their mistakes."

- George Santayana, 1906

The imperialistic symbols embedded in Wembley's urban landscape are linked to sources of trauma for many.[98-100] The recent urban developments at Wembley Park offered an opportunity to build something new, a chance to forge a space free from the painful legacy of the former British Empire. Instead, today's Wembley honours its old colonial heritage, perpetuating oppressive histories and links.

Landowners of Wembley could have embraced its new beginning by redefining its urban narrative and fostering a future unburdened by the past, instead they chose to preserve and commemorate symbols rooted in colonial domination. In doing so, they denied the opportunity to create a new place unmarred by the trauma of imperialism.

Naming streets, open spaces, and buildings after the 1924 British Empire Exhibition are understood to be an act of celebrating or commemorating the event. This choice implies a positive recognition or acknowledgment of the exhibition and its perceived historical significance. By deciding to name a street, open space, and/or building in its honour, a lasting tribute is established that suggests an endorsement of the exhibition's values and historical impact, cementing its legacy in the contemporary urban landscape and reinforcing values rooted in imperialist ideologies.

Even if some commemorations appear benign, the individuals or events being commemorated would have contributed to the imperialist agenda at Wembley and thus revive the memory of the broader imperialist mission in 1924. As a result, treating seemingly benign commemorations lightly risks underestimating their role in shaping the historical narrative and in perpetuating the context and legacy of that imperial mission.

Renaming commemorative toponyms could offer "symbolic reparations", helping to restore the dignity and public identity of those oppressed by the celebrated individuals or events.[101] While reparations are often viewed through financial or legal lenses, a more comprehensive approach acknowledges the importance of commemoration in recognising historical injustices and fostering a more just future. Amending commemorative toponyms helps address historical wrongs, ensuring marginalised voices are represented and are challenging dominant narratives that have traditionally erased their struggles.

A POST IMPERIAL CITY

In the intricate tapestry of our built environment, the names we assign to streets and buildings are not mere labels but powerful symbols that bridge our present to the past. As landowners, they hold a unique responsibility in shaping the urban realm and the stories it embodies. Our decisions in place-naming, particularly when drawing from historical events such as British imperialism, bear a profound influence on collective memory and cultural identity.

The 1924 British Empire Exhibition intended to showcase the breadth of the Empire - and its legacy endures in the urban landscape of Wembley Park, where the streets and buildings bear names that echo this colonial past. Such naming choices are not just a nod to history; they are a vivid reminder of an era marked by both tyranny and controversy. It's crucial to recognise how these names serve as enduring links to our collective past, shaping perceptions and narratives about British imperialism.

The act of naming places within urban landscapes carries weighty implications. In the context of Wembley Park, names drawn from the British Empire Exhibition are not mere commemorations; they're a canvas on which complex narratives of imperialism are painted - narratives of White supremacy, social Darwinism, alleged "*civilising of barbarians and savages abroad*", etc. These decisions subtly influence public consciousness, either reinforcing or challenging perspectives on British imperialism. As creators of cities, landowners must ponder: do these names serve to glorify a contentious past, or do they encourage critical engagement and understanding?

Acknowledging the past, learning from it, and creating an environment that is just, inclusive, and free from colonial shadows is a powerful and necessary pursuit. Contemporary Wembley has the potential to be a beacon of progress, understanding, and reconciliation.

Wembley, a place that has undergone significant transformation through the 20th and 21st Century, contains within its streets, buildings, and public spaces a distinct history that is deeply entwined with an imperial past. For landowners seeking to create a post-imperial city, the following five-point plan offers a framework that could help contribute towards the creation of such a city:

1. **Conduct an investigation into the naming convention(s) of your assets, and publish findings**

   Landowners must initiate a thorough investigation into the origins of the current naming conventions at Wembley. Unveiling the historical context behind each name will provide a clear understanding of the implications they carry. Findings must be made public, fostering transparency and accountability.

2. **Release a formal acknowledgement of the need for rectification of the imperial commemorations to the general public**

   Acknowledgment is the first step towards reconciliation. Landowners must publicly acknowledge the need to rectify the colonial commemorations present at Wembley. This acknowledgement will serve as a sign of a commitment to fostering an environment that is respectful and considerate of the diverse history and experiences of Brent residents and the wider northwest London region.

3. **Champion the need for education on the realities of British imperialism and its lasting legacies, both within landowner organisations and to the public it serves.**

   Education is a powerful tool for change. Landowners must champion the importance of educating both their organisation and the public about the realities of British imperialism and its far-reaching consequences. This knowledge can inspire empathy, understanding, and a shared commitment to a future that is free from the shadows of colonial oppression.

4. **Retroactively rename assets that commemorate the legacy of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition**

   As a symbol of your dedication to change, Landowners must rename assets that commemorate the legacy of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition. By doing so, Landowners will take a significant step towards creating an environment that is more understanding to the experiences of those who have been affected by the darker aspects of this history.

5. **Memorialise the 1924 British Empire Exhibition and its legacy appropriately - and without romance**

   History must be preserved in a way that is truthful, sensitive, and representative of all perspectives. Landowners must explore ways to memorialise the 1924 British Empire Exhibition and its legacy without romanticising or glorifying it. By commemorating it appropriately, Landowners may contribute to a deeper and better understanding of history.

Wembley has the potential to become a shining example of progress and inclusivity. By addressing the colonial legacy, landowners can lead the way toward healing, understanding, and unity - thereby contributing to building a future that respects the past while embracing a more just and equitable present.

And although renaming commemorative toponyms only offers 'symbolic reparations', it invites the possibility for wider discussions relating to financial and/or other forms of reparations - which are long overdue.

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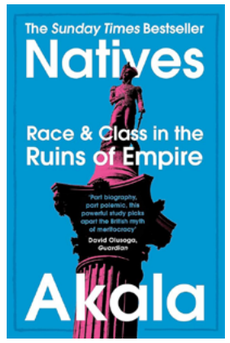
By Sathnam Sanghera



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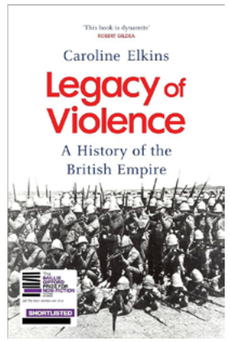

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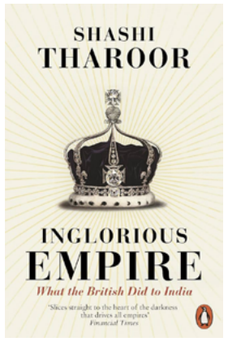

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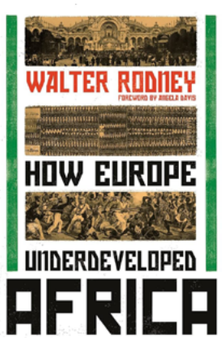

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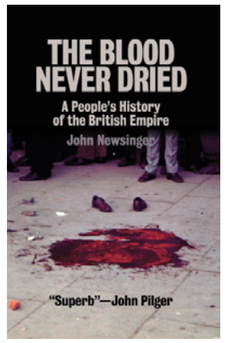

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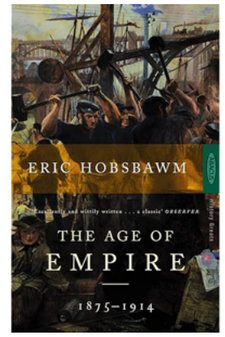

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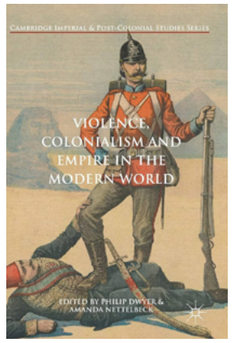

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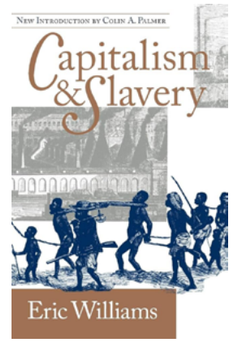

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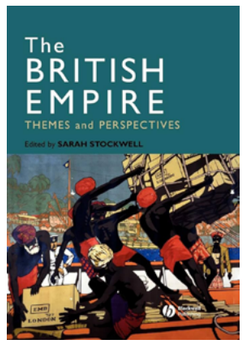

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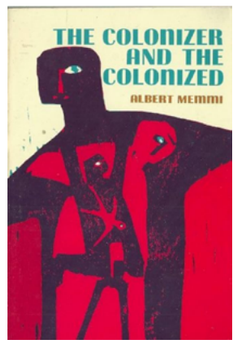

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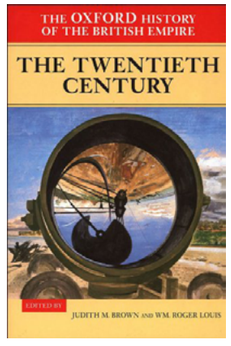

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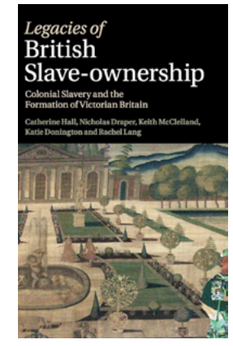

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS WORK IS TO INVESTIGATE, INTERROGATE AND ADDRESS THE IMPERIAL NOSTALGIA EMBEDDED IN THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF WEMBLEY PARK (CIRCA. 2002)

NAMING PAINS OFFERS AN INSIGHTFUL EXPLORATION INTO THE PROFOUND IMPACT OF THE 1924 BRITISH EMPIRE EXHIBITION ON THE URBAN PLANNING AND CULTURAL MEMORY OF WEMBLEY PARK. THIS BOOK DELVES INTO THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE EXHIBITION, SCRUTINISING THE COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES THAT CONTINUE TO SHAPE THE AREA'S LANDSCAPE TODAY. IT CHALLENGES READERS TO RECONSIDER THE IMPLICATIONS OF IMPERIAL NOSTALGIA EMBEDDED IN WEMBLEY'S STREETS, BUILDINGS, AND PUBLIC SPACES, ADVOCATING FOR A POST-IMPERIAL CITY THAT ACKNOWLEDGES AND RECTIFIES THE OPPRESSIVE LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM.

"EVERY SINGLE EMPIRE IN ITS OFFICIAL DISCOURSE HAS SAID THAT IT IS NOT LIKE ALL THE OTHERS, THAT ITS CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SPECIAL, THAT IT HAS A MISSION TO ENLIGHTEN, CIVILIZE, BRING ORDER AND DEMOCRACY, AND THAT IT USES FORCE ONLY AS A LAST RESORT.

AND, SADDER STILL, THERE ALWAYS IS A CHORUS OF WILLING INTELLECTUALS TO SAY CALMING WORDS ABOUT BENIGN OR ALTRUISTIC EMPIRES, AS IF ONE SHOULDN'T TRUST THE EVIDENCE OF ONE'S EYES WATCHING THE DESTRUCTION AND THE MISERY AND DEATH BROUGHT BY THE LATEST MISSION CIVILIZATRICE."

- EDWARD SAID, PREFACE TO THE 2003 EDITION OF ORIENTALISM, 1978

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