The Canadian Guide to Britain
VOLUME ONE:

ENGLAND

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WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF
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and

The Lake St. Louis Historical Society

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To Wendy, Tait, and Danielle
who shared it all

CONTENTS

Introduction *xiii*

London and Area

Alberta House 2
All Hallows-by-the-Tower 3
Bank of England 3
Beaver House 4
British Columbia House 5
Brown's Hotel 6
Canada Gates, Victoria Memorial 7
Canada House 8
Charles Dickens's House 13
Chislehurst 17
Daily Express Building 18
The Duke of York's Column 22
Greenwich 25
Grey Coat School 27
Houses of Parliament 28
Isleworth 36
Kew Gardens 37
Lincoln's Inn Fields 38
London School of Economics 39
Macdonald House 41
The Maple Leaf Pub 42
The National Portrait Gallery 43
Nelson's Column 46

Nova Scotia House	47
The Old Vic Theatre	50
Ontario House	51
Orpington	53
Petersham	54
Quebec House	56
Royal Military Academy	57
St. Clement Danes	60
St. Ethelburga-the-Virgin	62
St. Giles Cripplegate	63
St. Katherine Docks	65
St. Margaret's	66
St. Martin-in-the-Fields	74
St. Mary-at-Lambeth	75
St. Mary Woolnoth	77
St. Paul's Cathedral	78
Saskatchewan House	80
12 Upper Brook Street	81
23 Suffolk Street	82
Westminster Abbey	85

The South-east

Bagshot Park, Surrey	91
Beauport, East Sussex	92
Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey	95
Burwash, East Sussex	96
Canterbury Cathedral, Kent	97
Chichester, West Sussex	98
Cranbrook, Kent	99
Eastbourne, East Sussex	103
Farnham, Surrey	104
Firle Place, East Sussex	107
Frant, East Sussex	108
Goodwood House, West Sussex	111
Guildford, Surrey	114
Mickleham, Surrey	116
Newhaven, East Sussex	118
Ripe, East Sussex	121

Riverhead, Kent	123
Rochester Cathedral, Kent	124
Sissinghurst, Kent	127
36 St. Mary's Terrace, Hastings, East Sussex	128
Throwley, Kent	130
Wakehurst Place, Ardingly, West Sussex	132
Waverley, Surrey	133
West Dean, East Sussex	134
Westerham, Kent	135
Winchelsea, East Sussex	142

South Central

Aldershot, Hampshire	145
Beaminster, Dorset	146
Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire	147
Canadian Memorial, New Forest, Hampshire	148
Chettle, Dorset	149
Elvetham, Hampshire	150
Nately Scures, Hampshire	151
Old Alresford, Hampshire	153
Poole, Dorset	154
Portsmouth, Hampshire	157
Rowland's Castle, Hampshire	160
St. Andrew's Memorial Church, Isle of Portland, Dorset	161
Salisbury, Wiltshire	164
Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire	164
Sherborne Castle, Sherborne, Dorset	169
Southampton, Hampshire	170
Stratfield Saye, Hampshire	171
Swanmore, Hampshire	172
Tolpuddle, Dorset	174
Winchester, Hampshire	176

The South-west

Bath, Avon	181
Bristol, Avon	183
Cannington, Somerset	186

- Compton Castle, Devon 188
Dartmouth, Devon 189
Dunkeswell Abbey, Devon 192
Dunsford, Devon 194
Exeter, Devon 195
Falmouth, Cornwall 196
Hatch Court, Hatch Beauchamp, Somerset 198
Newton Abbot, Devon 199
Newton Ferrers, Devon 201
Noss Mayo, Devon 203
Plymouth, Devon 204
Portquin, Cornwall 205
St. Michael Penkevil, Cornwall 206
Wolford, Devon 209

West Central and Wales

- Aston Somerville, Evesham, Worcestershire 212
Blithfield Hall, Rugeley, Staffordshire 214
Caerhun, Wales 216
Cardiff, Wales 218
Clydach, Wales 218
Cotterstock, Northamptonshire 220
Coventry Cathedral, Coventry, Warwickshire 222
Leamington Spa, Warwickshire 222
St. Nicholas, Wales 224
Uppingham, Leicestershire 225

Home Counties

- Aston Abbots, Buckinghamshire 228
Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire 229
Claydon House, Middle Claydon, Buckinghamshire 230
Cliveden and the Canadian Red Cross Memorial Hospital,
Buckinghamshire 233
Ewelme, Oxfordshire 235
Hatfield House, Hertfordshire 236
Hitchin, Hertfordshire 237

Oxford and Rhodes House, Oxfordshire	240
Reading, Berkshire	247
Ridge, Hertfordshire	249
Runnymede Memorial, Runnymede, Surrey	250
Southill, Bedfordshire	250
Virginia Water, Berkshire	254
Windsor Castle, Berkshire	255

The East

Cambridge, Cambridgeshire	267
Claypole, Lincolnshire	274
Cottingham, Humberside	275
Hollesley Bay Colony, Suffolk	276
King's Lynn, Norfolk	279
Parish Church, St. Andrew's, Norwich, Norfolk	281
Snake Hall and Moulton, Lincolnshire	283
Snettisham, Norfolk	284
Southwold, Suffolk	285
Spilsby, Lincolnshire	288
Thorpe-le-Soken, Essex	290

North Central

Bolsover, Derbyshire	295
Chatsworth, Derbyshire	296
Gawthorpe Hall, Lancashire	298
Hartington, Derbyshire	299
Liverpool, Merseyside	300
Matlock Bath, Derbyshire	305
9 Christian Road, Preston, Lancashire	305
Parkgate, South Wirral, Cheshire	307
Shibden Hall, Halifax, West Yorkshire	309

The North

Alnwick, Northumberland	311
Berwick upon Tweed, Northumberland	316
Castle Howard, North Yorkshire	321

Cleveland County	323
Middlesbrough	324
Great Ayton	325
Staithes	328
Whitby	328
Dalemain, Cumbria	330
Howick Hall, Northumberland	333
Kiplin Hall, North Yorkshire	335
Penshaw Monument, Tyne and Wear	337
Wylam, Northumberland	341
Appendix	343
Index	345

Introduction

How often has it been observed that Canadians know too little about their own history? Study after study has documented this regrettable state of affairs, yet who can say with conviction that our history is better understood now than it was twenty, or even ten, years ago? This book offers a modest contribution to bringing Canadians closer to their history, or at least to that part of their history that lies in what used to be known as the Mother Country.

Why yet another book about Britain? Surely no country has been so thoroughly picked over. Bookshelves fairly groan with guides and “how to” books about Britain which offer the traveller, active or armchair, discriminating or otherwise, everything that could possibly be desired about how to get there; where to eat and stay; how to move about; what to treasure or avoid; how much things cost; how to change money; how to secure tickets to the theatre, a royal garden party, Wimbledon or Glyndebourne; how to understand a Cockney or a Yorkshireman; how to find tube stations and walking paths, stately homes and market squares, pubs and inns, dales and moors, streams and lakes. And yet there is nothing in all this vast and variegated literature that informs Canadians that this too is their country, the place where so much of what we know of Canadian history began.

Leave all the “how to” and “where to” questions for others. This book is about Canada in Britain, the intermingling of two histories, a guide and perhaps an inspiration for the thousands of Canadians who visit Britain every year to look about them and discover part of their country’s own history.

No book about Canada’s links in Britain could possibly be complete. Millions of Canadians trace their ancestry to

Britain, and the stories of those ancestors, sometimes recorded but often forgotten, are too voluminous for any historian, or group of historians, to chronicle. These stories form the backdrop for those of the celebrated, the notorious and the comic whose lives stand out in the history books. So we have perforce concentrated on characters and events we believe will be known to most of our readers.

We set for ourselves many tasks but only one rule, which like so many rules we occasionally broke. That rule, imposed by the daunting size of our project, required that the links we traced offer something tangible for the traveller to behold in Britain—a museum, stately home, theatre, church, gravestone, memorial, statue, borstal, bridge, pub, ship, cottage, gate, house, library, town hall, hotel; in short, anything that could be observed. We broke our rule, as discerning readers/travellers will no doubt note, in cases in which a person's contribution to Canadian history was so striking that to have excluded him for lack of suitable commemoration in the land of his birth seemed absurd and unfair. But we have tried for the most part to heed our rule—only links that could be seen with the naked eye—appreciating that no book could capture them all. We hope that, if this book finds sufficient favour to warrant a prolonged life, we shall be able to incorporate in future editions new material—and corrections if need be—from stout travellers and informed readers.

Those of Scottish descent and all others who love Scotland should not despair. Our original intent had been to offer a one-volume account of Canadian links in the whole of Britain. But it became apparent as our work progressed that such a volume would be nearly twice the size (and price) of this one, rather too large we thought for pockets or easy digestion on a long winter's night. So we have split our work, and a second volume will subsequently appear tracing Canada's many links with Scotland. This volume, as the title suggests, deals only with England, a mighty task in itself.

Doug Gibson, the publisher of Macmillan, first suggested this project, never failed in his enthusiasm for it, and offered throughout that support and advice for which we, like so many Canadian authors, are grateful. Maggie MacDonald, our editor, has moulded more names, places, and dates than she may have ever seen in one manuscript into a comprehensible and we hope entertaining whole. She, too, deserves our thanks.

This book represents not only a discovery for us of Canada's history in Britain, but of Britain itself through her people. Lords and ladies, Members of Parliament and diplomats, vicars and vergers, librarians and record-keepers, publicans and innkeepers—they all responded in every corner of Britain with curiosity, courtesy, and often indispensable help.

We received invaluable assistance from the late David M. Stewart, President of the Lake St. Louis Historical Society in Montreal. The marriage of our project with Miss Victoria Stewart's extensive research into Canada's heritage in Britain has made this book more complete than it would otherwise have been.

If this book brings Canada's history a bit closer to those travelling in Britain, or reminds armchair readers of stories and people long-forgotten, it will have served its purposes. We are, of course, responsible for any of its failings.

Jeffrey Simpson
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