

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## War and the Colonial Book Trade: The Case of OUP India

### Book Section

How to cite:

Fraser, Robert (2008). War and the Colonial Book Trade: The Case of OUP India. In: Hammond, Mary and Fraser, Robert eds. Books Books Without Borders, Volume 2. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 137–150.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [not recorded]



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

[http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1057/9780230289130\\_10](http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1057/9780230289130_10)

[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230289130\\_10?noAccess=true](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230289130_10?noAccess=true)

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

## War and the Colonial Book Trade: The Case of OUP India

*Robert Fraser*

On the night of October 10, 1943, under pressure from heavy Monsoon rains, the two rivers in Madras – the Cooum and Adyar – burst their banks. Floods “as bad”, reckoned the *Madras Mail*, “as any known in living memory”, swilled across the city, soon reaching the business district where overseas publishers had their offices and *godowns*, or warehouses. Water, as one harassed editor reported, was “lapping at the gates of Longmans” and it rapidly inundated the bottom storey of the Kardyl Building in Mount Road, which housed the *godown* of the Oxford University Press. Much of the stock – bound books and loose quires - was ruined. From the relative safety of Head Office in Nicol Road, Bombay, R. E. Hawkins - overall Manager of the Indian Branch - relayed the plight of one of his hapless authors back to Oxford. “Roused from sleep by the rising waters,” he said, “she waited for rescue on the roof of her house, repelling the rats and snakes that also sought sanctuary”<sup>1</sup>. The following evening, safely down again, she heard wailing over the stricken city what under the circumstances seemed almost a homely sound. It was an air raid siren, keening the arrival of yet another consignment of Japanese bombs.

Thus concluded an episode that seems to belong in a novel – one of Paul Scott’s say – evoking the balance between inner and outer threat characterising the last few years of British political and commercial ascendancy in India. But the scene was real enough, several of the Madras populace were drowned, and the damage at Mount Road was assessed at 5,500 rupees<sup>2</sup>. The remaining stock had to be dried out, no easy

task in the wet season when, as Hawkins now lamented, “leather sprouts fungus”. It was, for Oxford and India, one of the lowest points of the war. With the Japanese at the gates of Bengal, a quarter of the working population of Calcutta had fled. The once lucrative Burmese market had collapsed. John Brown, OUP’s office manager in Bombay, an early conscript, had been captured by the Japanese<sup>3</sup>. Nobody knew where he was, though he was later to be identified as a Prisoner of War on Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> Deadlock subsisted between the British government, the Hindu-dominated Congress Party and the Muslim League over the political future of the sub-continent. Resentments still seethed, and in Calcutta the expatriate wife of the Principal of St Paul’s College was stabbed in the open street. Hawkins was negotiating over the rights to what he hoped might be a bestseller: *The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi*. But the subject was *incommunicado*, and rights difficult to obtain. There was, moreover, as his employer and regular correspondent, Sir Humphrey Milford “Publisher to the University of Oxford” brutally informed him, little demand for such a title in England, where indifference to the long-term fate of the colonies seemed, for the time being at least, to be almost total<sup>5</sup>.

And yet the correspondence itself, with its plethora of detail, tells a complementary and countervailing story. Roy Hawkins was 36. Senior among three British OUP officers in India, including the absent Brown, he had overall responsibility for operations there on a salary of 1100 rupees a month, though his standard thirty-three month contract had actually expired in 1940, and he had enjoyed neither home leave nor increment since the outbreak of war<sup>6</sup>. Milford, who was approaching retirement, was one of Oxford’s grandees. Since 1913 he had held the key post of Publisher, taking a personal interest in the development of the India branch, which had largely been formed on his initiative. It was to Milford that E.V. Rieu, first

manager of the branch in Bombay, had reported on his arrival there in 1912, and his constant, solicitous interest in the Indian connection is warmly attested to by his letter books of the period<sup>7</sup>. India at this time was, after all, very much the jewel in Oxford's crown. It was, moreover, where promising recruits to the Press were frequently sent to be trained. Two of the firm's senior home-based officials, Geoffrey ("Jock") Cumberlege, who in 1945 would succeed Milford as Publisher<sup>8</sup>, and Raymond Goffin, presently a private in the Royal Berkshire Regiment<sup>9</sup>, had begun their careers in Bombay, and both had written textbooks for the Indian market<sup>10</sup>. So when Hawkins had taken up his post in 1937, it is no surprise to find Milford requesting quarterly updates from him. They run from 1937 until 1944, and afford a valuable impression of a distinguished colonial publishing venture *in extremis*.

Hawkins, who was to devote his whole career to India, was a meticulous man, so the local set-up emerges clearly from these letters. The Indian branch, as it was invariably known, had for some years been expanding. By 1938 it employed 105 people between its three offices – 44 in Bombay, 37 in Calcutta, 24 in Madras – as compared to 80 in 1934<sup>11</sup>. (At home the essential status distinction was between those paid weekly in cash, and those paid monthly by cheque; here it was between those earning less than 150 rupees per month, who were entitled to a regular grain allowance, and those above that threshold who were not). Markets too were growing and diversifying, as Milford encouraged the boys on the ground to explore new worlds of readers in Persia, where the language of school instruction had changed from French to English in 1934, and East Africa with its thrusting Asian population<sup>12</sup>. The network of technical support is also apparent from these reports. Paper came from two mills: the Tishaghur Mills in Park Street, Calcutta and the Mysore Mills in Bangalore (both of which were still to be in business in 2005). The branch used one bindery, also in

Calcutta. Some of these facilities were shared with other companies, friendly rivals such as Macmillan, Nelson and Longman, with whom the Oxford people were obliged constantly to consult, especially in times of crisis. Indeed, one of the heartening aspects of this correspondence is the impression it conveys of a more or less congenial expatriate publishing community, in marked contrast to the naked competition that often characterised the book trade in Britain.

Most importantly, these reports have a lot to tell us about just what books Oxford was marketing in India at the time, where they originated, who wrote and printed them, and at whom they were aimed. They fall into four categories: Clarendon Press books (academic monographs imported from Oxford); London books, that is general trade items - principally Bibles and technical manuals – produced by the firm's commercial arm at Amen House in Warwick Square off Ludgate Hill; branch books, that is to say volumes produced locally; and the merchandise of other firms – Harraps and Constables for example – handled under licence<sup>13</sup>. It is the third of these divisions that is of interest in the unfolding scenario of war.

What happened in September 1939 was that the commercial and intellectual mix constituting the branch books was shaken and not so gently stirred. Habitually the cocktail consisted of three ingredients: so-called India Branch production (books commissioned, written, and manufactured on the spot), India Branch London Branch quires (that is, books made up in India from sheets imported from Amen House); and Indian Branch Clarendon Press quires (that is, books made up in India from sheets imported from Oxford). After 1939 this recipe officially served as before; in practice Neville Chamberlain's speech on September 3<sup>rd</sup> changed a great deal. With Europe at war, and Asia as yet free of it, Bombay could no longer carry on as it had previously; it was also freed from outside supervision in several significant and rewarding respects.

Inevitably attention in England was being directed elsewhere. At the declaration of hostilities, the London branch had evacuated its entire staff - including famously the Anglo-Catholic novelist and playwright Charles Williams, who edited the firm's newsletter - to Southfield House, Hill Top Road, just outside Oxford<sup>14</sup>. The focus of effort had also changed, since the Press soon landed a highly advantageous, though strictly confidential, government and Admiralty contract to produce maps, codebooks and cipher books. As Atalanta Myerson has effectively shown, this imperative commission pre-occupied the Press domestically for the duration of hostilities, absorbing much editorial time, and mountains of paper.<sup>15</sup>

So it is hardly surprising if India faded a little from view. To begin with, in any case, South Asia appeared to be "far from the seat of conflict". War conditions also made the place less accessible from England since, though air letters continued to arrive, as far as bulk freight was concerned Indian ports were now much more difficult to reach. In May 1940, fearful of an Italian assault on Egypt, Churchill instructed the Admiralty to thin out shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean<sup>16</sup>. Henceforth, for the first time since the opening of the Suez Canal three quarters of a century previously, traffic to Asia was sent round the Cape. The result initially was to slow down shipments to pre-1869 levels. By July Hawkins is observing: "since shipping was diverted round the Cape, we have had little stock from England."<sup>17</sup> This is phrased as a complaint, but all the signs are that Hawkins treated it as an opportunity, even when supplies began to trickle through. After all, Asian markets were still wide open, the Indian government was yet to ration paper, and the pressures of nationalism and educational aspiration continued unabated. Hawkins had read between the lines of Milford's replies; Oxford was clearly tied up in some kind of official war work, though unable for legal reasons to say what it was. Paper rationing in Britain, in any case, was no secret, even if

Oxford manufactured its own. The upshot was an unusual offer from an overseas branch: Hawkins proposed that, if Oxford found herself overstretched, Bombay was prepared to assist with her printing.

There is no sign that the offer was taken up. The confidence behind the suggestion, however, bore fruit in other ways, since, despite the lack of overseas supplies, local business flourished. Before the war sales had already been rising; for the first time in 1938-9 they had exceeded a million rupees. In November 1939 Hawkins was able to report that: “up to the present the war has made little difference to our business.” In January of the following year, in the midst of Europe’s co-called “phoney war”, his tone is even breezier:

The effects of the war on India, provided we do not start fighting here too, will be beneficial. We are already getting better prices for our exports, and many new manufacturing industries are being started up to supply those goods which are now too rare or too expensive to bring from abroad. Politically too I think – perhaps because of this economic situation – we shall settle down without dislocation of civil life. So that the war is not likely to mean any diminution of our business in educational and general books, but if anything will stimulate it. And if there is a general rise in prices, a rise in the cost of books will have no special effect. I conclude that our policy should be to increase our income rather than decrease our expenditure.<sup>18</sup>

So Hawkins’ policy - accepted perforce by officials in Oxford who had little time or energy to argue otherwise - was to expand. There were, of course, challenges to be met, since indirect price inflation was unavoidable. Owing to food imports the cost of living index was creeping up, and salaries had to rise to keep pace. The price of Indian printing paper went up by 30% over four months, and cover paper and cloth

rose by 50%.<sup>19</sup> When a surcharge on insurance premiums was imposed all firms, Macmillan took the lead by reducing discounts by a uniform 5%. Oxford followed suit immediately, but the small resulting drop in demand was more than compensated for by the increase in revenue. Already that January Hawkins is boasting “The present position is very satisfactory in so far as the sales are only Rs 10,000 below last years’ record ones: as you know, Calcutta sales have shown a steady increase every year since 1932, during which period they have nearly doubled.” By November this has become “all branches are still selling as well, or better, than ever”<sup>20</sup>. This is English understatement: as the figures demonstrate, they were actually performing very impressively.

However, it is not simply the volume, but the kind, of new business that is striking. The increase, as you would expect, is principally accounted for by branch production. But, even within this band, there is an interesting shift in the privileged language medium. Again, Hawkins had foreseen this development, writing to Milford shortly after his appointment in 1937; “The new Ministries, particularly the Congress ones, are showing a lively interest in education, and many schemes for reshaping syllabuses are being discussed. The general idea is to extend and cheapen a form of primary education that will be of more practical use to the villager: it will be given through the mother-tongue...The Secondary school syllabuses are sure to be modified too, and we are likely to have a busy time remaking our own list”<sup>21</sup>. The impact of these new directives is soon visible. In 1938, the year before hostilities, the Indian branch had issued 46 new titles in English and 93 reprints, compared to 15 new publications in all of the Indian vernaculars, with 7 reprints. In 1939, the gap narrowed, with 33 new English-medium titles and 132 reprints, compared to 16 new titles in the vernaculars, with 18 reprints. By the end of 1940, the year of Hawkins’

buoyant letter, new Indian language publication has edged ahead for the first time: 36 new titles, as opposed to 30 in English. Throughout that year, the lion's share of English language production consisted of reprints: 122 in all. This momentum was not evenly maintained, and by the end of 1943 the pattern has almost reverted. Nonetheless, the short-term redressing of the balance in favour of Indian-language books suggests just where, in the period between say Dunkirk and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the commercial advantage – and much of the activity – lay<sup>22</sup>.

[INSERT HERE:

Figure 9.1. New Publications by OUP India Branch, 1938-43: Arranged by language group.

Figure 9.2. Books Re- Issued by OUP India Branch, 1938-43: Arranged by language group.

Figure 9.3. Books Published by OUP India Branch, 1938-43: Percentage of New Titles to Total Output.]

Pearl Harbour, of course, marked a watershed. Hawkins' report of January 1940 had contained the all-important proviso "provided we do not start fighting here too". Following the American declaration of war in December 1941 and the opening up of the Eastern theatre, British India, if not exactly fighting, was on heavy war alert, and the business community, of which publishing formed a minor part, faced challenges of an altogether different order. Whole markets disappeared: in Singapore, Malaya and most drastically and worryingly close-at-hand, in Burma, previously responsible for about 15% of OUP's Calcutta sales. In Rangoon £1,000 worth of stock was lost<sup>23</sup>.

In neighbouring Bengal the effect was immediate. By February 1942 Calcutta University had postponed its exams, only one in four students was attending college, and all girls' schools had closed. Within a few months these disruptions had spread down the Eastern seaboard of India. Early in April 1942 a state of emergency was declared in Madras, and a large part of the population quitted the city "headed by the government". Two-thirds of the school population absconded. Apart from the ever-present fear of invasion, Hawkins was concerned by a lingering threat of civil disobedience from the ongoing Quit India movement. The Burma rice harvest having failed, Bengal was now in the grips of the severest famine it was to endure during the entire twentieth century. In Calcutta, where the office was under the management of an enterprising Bengali – Ranga Lal Sen - starving people were "a common sight"<sup>24</sup>. The manager of the Madras branch, 32- year-old P. J. Chester, was being threatened with conscription; his future remained uncertain and, in the meantime, his wife was deputizing for him. Within a few weeks she too had left the town by special train<sup>25</sup>. In November the Government of India at last got round to rationing paper, reserving 90% for official purposes. Shipments remained extremely irregular. In the first quarter of the year the branch received only six, and two had been lost at sea aboard a boat bound for Calcutta and Madras<sup>26</sup>.

In the circumstances there was little publishing firms could do but raise prices. This time it was Longmans who took the initiative, but again Oxford soon followed suit. Faced with a choice between reducing discounts again - thus penalising hard-pressed local booksellers - and hitching prices by 12% all round, they took the second and riskier path. For the first time a note of despondency enters the correspondence. Nonetheless, by May Hawkins is reporting that the loss of sales to schools is being offset by the embarkation of British and American troops at the port of Bombay<sup>27</sup>.

Ever alert to the main chance, he has rushed through the press a guidebook, Moraes' and Stimpson's *Introduction to India*, to help them find their feet<sup>28</sup>. He anticipates ready pickings. Partly as a result, whilst sales from the Calcutta office have dropped by 10%, in Bombay the fall is less than 1%. Elsewhere sales have actually risen, and with them, Hawkins' mood.

The fact is the business community was adapting its ways of working, and those enterprises that remained in operation were soon flourishing. This was as true of publishing as of every other commercial sector. Indeed, as Hawkins was later to report, "There has been...a mushroom growth of general publishing firms in the last few years, favoured by the lack of competition, the increased market and the chance of quick profits."<sup>29</sup> With the gradual re-opening of colleges after the panic of early 1942-3, the educational market once again took off. There were "unusually large profits" that year, and in the following twelve months, with Europe still embroiled in the Normandy campaign, sales at the India branch again broke all existing records<sup>30</sup>. The fruits of this staggered growth were shared by the office staff too, as the figures for the commissions on sales earned by the four office managers over this period well show.

[INSERT HERE: Figure 9.4. Commissions on Profits Earned by Office Managers, OUP India Branch, 1939-43, expressed in sterling.]

Indeed, far from looking back – and despite discouraging episodes like the floods in Madras – Hawkins is soon making plans for the post-war period. The creation of a Muslim-dominated state in Pakistan seemed increasingly likely. Is it not wise, he asks, to consider opening an office there eventually, bringing out a fourth member of the expatriate staff to run it? "If the Indian Branch can be of any help in getting trade started again in Malaya, you will doubtless let us know." If an

opportunity occurs of investigating trade links with China, Hawkins would, he gamely insists, much appreciate being considered for the job.<sup>31</sup> Almost two years before VJ day, he is even enthusing about possibilities for English-language textbooks in Japan. Language teaching in any case, will evidently form a large share of overseas business. Already Churchill had caused discomfort by rising to his feet in the House of Commons to announce government backing for Basic English, C. K. Ogden's scheme for a substitute language for non-native speakers employing a vocabulary of 600 words. If it takes off, many of the existing textbooks will have to be rewritten. Predictably Longman is rubbing their hands at this prospect, as is the now ten-year-old British Council, but Oxford mandarins on both continents are horrified. The chimera fades as Basic goes out of fashion, but Hawkins knows where his bread and butter lies. The language teaching market is ripe for the picking, and he is determined to seize it<sup>32</sup>.

In Oxford, these initiatives found a ready ear. Milford was not due to retire until September 1945 but, as in 1912-3, there was a handover period of about year before his successor, Jock Cumberlege, took over as Publisher. Cumberlege had worked at the Bombay Head Office for four years in the early 1920's. He had experienced the curb of overseas supervision first-hand, and was keen to give Bombay its head. In May 1944 Hawkins is briskly informed that reports on routine India Branch business are no longer required in Oxford, whereupon – frustratingly for us - the quarterly reports abruptly cease<sup>33</sup>. With them, Milford's paternalistic regime draws to a close. From the continuing though now occasional communications between Bombay and London, however, it is abundantly clear just how radically the atmosphere has changed. Hawkins for one is enthusiastic to democratise the market. There are, he remarks, 50 bookshops in the city of Bombay carrying general books; in addition, and ignored by most overseas firms, there are hundreds of one-man booths

flogging books to passers by in the street. Soon Hawkins is reminding Cumberlege of this fact of local life: "I merely want to indicate that there is all the machinery for a market here if we wish to use it." As far as Oxford is concerned, however, the priorities are now clear. Henceforth the main emphasis is to be on inter-branch trade, much of which Bombay will be expected to initiate by itself<sup>34</sup>. They are to build up and export their own lists, liase directly with New York and other branches, and to consolidate the liaison with East Africa that has been interrupted by the war. They are, in other words, to make their own paradise. There are still a few wartime commissions to be tidied up, of course. The order for a Service of Thanksgiving for the Armistice is printed in Oxford and sent out under conditions of strict secrecy to India, where a specially adapted programme for the event will include the hymn "Praise my Soul, the King of Heaven", by a former Director of the East India Company, Robert Grant.<sup>35</sup>

Already the gesture seems a little dated. With a Labour government in control, and the Congress Party posed to take over two years later, the metropolitan network is loosening fast. In May 1946 Cumberlege spells out where Hawkins must look to now, not that he needs much encouragement: to Persia, East Africa and Iraq; to Aden, China and Egypt<sup>36</sup>. In August 1947 the long-promised Independence dawns, both for India and Pakistan. Import controls are imposed in India; in Bombay, a few streets away from Hawkins' Head Office, an infant called Salman Rushdie lets out his first yelp.

And so to a tentative conclusion. Commercial publishing in India during the war years was the product of an elaborate nexus of conditions, some of them sub-continental, most of them global. The Second World War, even more so than the first, was the ultimate cross-national event. It disturbed patterns of trade and avenues of transit, causing shortages in unexpected places, and opening up unlooked for opportunities in others. In certain respects it induced India into unprecedented modes

of collaboration or co-operation (several Bengalis, for example, fought for the Japanese). In other ways it isolated a colony whose destiny, for better or for worse, had been caught up for some 180 years in an unequal relationship where many, but not all, of the shots were called elsewhere: from the plush plum-coloured armchairs of the directors of the East India Company in the City of London, then from the corridors of the India Office in Whitehall. Since 1912, when Emile Rieu had set up the India Branch of OUP, its affairs had been directed magisterially from Oxford or London. From the outset of hostilities in 1939, however, Bombay had increasingly to go it alone. In doing so, it began to carve out its own future, and in the process to diversify its local markets and to lay the ground for a commercial collaboration with its parent company that was eventually to be established on fairer, more equal terms. The end result was to be fortunate, not simply for the branch itself, but for OUP worldwide. In volume one of *Books Without Borders* I illustrated how unimaginative overall planning during much the same period, together with rigidities in organization and a general indifference to the market, caused Nelsons and Sons, one of Oxford's principal rivals in the imperial textbook trade, to founder in the post-war years, and eventually to cease business altogether. Nelsons had never properly confronted the challenges and opportunities posed by its various branches in France, Canada and elsewhere. Learning from its wartime experiences, and cushioned to some extent by its status as a university department, Oxford by contrast used the post-war decades gradually to renegotiate its relationship with all of its offices overseas. As a result it flourished, as Nelsons did not.

That the war should have initiated this beneficial process of renewal is not in the least surprising. A disaster in so many respects, international conflicts on this scale sometimes have the compensatory effect of freeing up a variety of social and economic

constraints. In the Second World War several communities had felt such beneficial effects. On the home front in Britain, women signed up in the factories to mass-produce munitions to the strains of the BBC's entertainment programme *Music While You Work*. The liberation was to be temporary since after the armistice most returned to the home. Yet the opportunities – and the new patterns of life – the war had opened up could not be withdrawn permanently. In Britain greater gender equality at work - to this day incomplete - was to be one long-range result of the conflict. Throughout the empire too, soldiers from the colonies either volunteered for, or were conscripted into, the armed forces, disclosing to them vistas of experience - and political ideals - which were eventually to transform whole swathes of the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

The effects on business are less well documented though just as dramatic, and publishing was no exception. In India, where in 1939 political independence was already on the cards, the effects are clear to see. Though the fortunes of OUP's India branch between 1939 and 1945 reflect the shifting face of the global conflict, the triggering of successive military zones and the impact of distant regulations, the overwhelming evidence is that the war became the branch's Open Sesame. It closed down certain markets, of course, and put an unprecedented strain on resources: on paper, distribution and the like. However, it also relieved local management temporarily of Oxford's controlling hand. The correspondence between Hawkins and Milford had originated as a sort of monitoring device to provide supervision for a younger member of staff working in an infant branch in a distant location. Ironically what it reveals is an emancipation of employee and branch well beyond practicable direction from abroad. Inevitably, just as in England, there was a time lag before these re-ordered priorities were to become permanent. Indeed, as the records suggest, and

OUP India's official historian Rimi Chatterjee confirms, some of the momentum of the war years was inevitably lost during the later 1940s and the 1950s. Hawkins himself would remain in post until 1970, and he grew more cautious with the years. As Chatterjee puts it with generous understanding "He was still a consummate publisher, but with all his interest in India, his heart was still at the Clarendon Press"<sup>37</sup> He was also slower to grasp the implications of nationalism for OUP's local hiring policy than he might have been. By 1944, for example, the branch was short of managers, yet Hawkins' solution to this temporary difficulty had been to request that three junior members of the Press's British-based staff be sent out for expatriate training. Such policies seem timid now, and after independence they were in practice bound slowly to abate. Indeed indigenisation was already under way, even if in the eyes of some it was to advance far too slowly. Early in the war, the ever-efficient Ranga Lal Sen was offered what, in the contractual terminology of the time, was known as "home leave" in England. He politely declined, since his home he said was in Calcutta<sup>38</sup>. To his personal disappointment, Sen was never to be promoted, but by 1970 the managers of the Calcutta and Bombay offices would both be Indian citizens.

In other important respects the Indian Branch was now more autonomous and flourishing than ever before. In the immediate post-war years, two of its home-commissioned titles, Minoos Masani's *Our India* and Jim Corbett's *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, became international bestsellers, with hefty sales in America<sup>39</sup>. The latter was adopted by the parent firm as a mainstream World's Classic. Even so in 1944 Hawkins, playing his options in uncharted waters, was still planning to adjust local discounts so as to encourage again direct sales from England. The imposition of import duties on books by the Congress Party government in 1947 put paid to these suggestions; it also ensured that local publishers and booksellers had from now on to

make their own, independent arrangements. Indeed it could be argued that the charter of OUP's India Branch's independence, so energetically prepared in war-time, was not fully to be realised until 1971, when the headquarters of the branch moved to Ansari Road in Darya Ganj in Delhi, a change consolidated five years later when Ravi Dayal took over as General Manager. The liberation was accelerated by the economic conditions of the 1980s when the sliding value of the rupee, another hiccup of which the firm took full advantage, obliged the firm to concentrate its activities locally to an extent never before attempted. Its spectacular success is amply attested by the range of Delhi-published Oxford titles cited in several of the essays in the present volume.

In November 1937 the young Indian writer Raja Rao had written in the Foreword to his revolutionary first novel *Kanthapura*, "We cannot write as the English. We should not." For all that, Rao's seminal book was published the following year by George Allen and Unwin in London. Ten years later he might well have extended his claim to read: "We cannot publish as the English. We should not." *Kanthapura* is now a modern Indian classic, several times re-issued by local firms such as Orient Paperbacks, whose Hind Edition with a cover design by Narayan Barodia is printed by the Shiksha Bharati Press in New Delhi. The most widely prescribed critical edition, expertly typeset by Rashtriya Printers, appeared in 1989 from the OUP's Delhi offices in the nearby YMCA library building, followed by a second edition in 2000. The resonance of these facts is another of the long-term fruits of war.

---

Unless otherwise stated, the typescript documents referred to in this essay are held in the OUP archive in Oxford.

---

<sup>1</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 November 1943. From the useful file headed BOMBAY 1937-44. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 February 1944. OUP/PUB12/3

<sup>3</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 17 August 1942. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>4</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 17 August 1943. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>5</sup> Humphrey Milford to R. E. Hawkins, 24 September 1943. OUP/PUB12/3. The book's editors were R.K. Prabhu and E.R. Rao. In fact, when published by the India branch in 1945, this compilation proved fairly successful, with large sales outside India. It went to a second edition the following year, and remained in print until the 1960s.

<sup>6</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 November 1943. OUP/PUB12/3. In 1940 the rupee averaged 13.23 per pound sterling, giving Hawkins an annual salary of just short of £1,000, or £30,000 in 2005 values. There was an additional commission on profits. See Figure 9.4 above. As for home leave, a forlorn telegram to Milford on 19 June 1940 reads IMPOSSIBLE FLY ENGLAND RETURNED BOMBAY = HAWKINS.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Sutcliffe, *The Oxford University Press: An Informal History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 200-1.

<sup>8</sup> Sutcliffe, 200-2.

<sup>9</sup> E. C. Parnwell to R.E. Hawkins, 7 September 1939, OUP/PUB12/3. Parnwell, who had joined the press in 1915, had in 1928 been entrusted my Milford with general responsibility for "education overseas". Travelling widely, he was the first OUP employee to discern the vast potential of the educational market in Africa, overseeing the highly successful Oxford English Readers for Africa. Sutcliffe, 213-6.

---

<sup>10</sup> G. F. L. Cumberlege ed., *Several Essays*, and R. C. Goffin ed., *Some Representative Verse and Prose*. India Branch Books File at Amen House, 10 March 1933.

OUP/PUB12/3. A third member of the home staff who had done time in India was A. L. P. Norrington, later to be appointed Secretary to the Delegates.

<sup>11</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 1 March 1938. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>12</sup> Parnwell had visited Persia in 1933 to investigate the possibilities there. See E. C. Parnwell to Humphrey Milford, 11 March 1933. From the file headed 'General India Branch Correspondence with London, 1928-48'.IB/00000029.

In late 1936 Hawkins himself had made an exploratory trip to Iraq, Persia and Palestine.

<sup>13</sup> L. Brander of Amen House to R. E. Hawkins, 14 November 1946. IB/00000029.

<sup>14</sup> Sutcliffe, 248.

<sup>15</sup> Atalanta Myerson, "Top Secret Books: The Oxford University Press in World War Two", *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 2004, 269-74.

<sup>16</sup> Winston Churchill, *The Second World War* 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (London: Cassell, 1951), ii (*Their Finest Hour*) 40, 112, 370, 373.

<sup>17</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 29 July, 1940. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>18</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 January 1940. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>19</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 January 1940. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>20</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 16 November 1940. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>21</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 10 October 1937. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>22</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 February 1944. OUP/PUB12/3. The comparative figures are set out in Table One above.

<sup>23</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 4 May 1942. OUP/PUB12/3. The stock had been on sale at the American Baptist Mission Press.

---

<sup>24</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 November 1943. OUP/PUB12/3

<sup>25</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 31 October 1942. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>26</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 4 May 1942. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>27</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 4 May 1942. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>28</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 31 October 1942. OUP/PUB12/3. Illustrated by the artist G. H. C. Moorhouse, the book proved a runaway success. After its first edition in 1943, two more were required within the year. After the war it enjoyed a substantial international sale during the lead-up to Indian independence. The fourth edition of 1944, though printed in India, was issued by OUP jointly in Bombay and New York.

<sup>29</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 February 1944. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>30</sup> A useful indication of the growth in trade during the first five years of the war is given by the commissions on profits paid to the three branch managers during the years in question. See Figure 9.4. Source: Memo from OUP's London warehouse in Neasden Lane, London NW10, 14 April 1944. OUP/PUB12/3. The Neasden warehouse remained open throughout the war.

<sup>31</sup> R. E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 November 1943. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>32</sup> The crisis over Basic, and the whole vexed issue of competing language teaching methods during this period, is usefully covered in a later Oxford book: A. P. R. Howatt, *A History of English Language Teaching* (OUP, 1984).

<sup>33</sup> E. C. Parnwell to R. E. Hawkins, 21 February 1945. IB/00000029.

<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey Cumberlege to India Branch, 17 October 1945. IB/00000029.

<sup>35</sup> Oxford to India Branch, 21 February 1945. Headed 'STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL'. IB/00000029.

<sup>36</sup> Geoffrey Cumberlege to R. E. Hawkins, 24 March 1945. IB/00000029.

---

<sup>37</sup> Rimi B. Chatterjee, *Empires of the Mind: A History of the Oxford University Press Under the Raj* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> R.E. Hawkins to Humphrey Milford, 22 January 1940. OUP/PUB12/3.

<sup>39</sup> Sutcliffe, 268.