



Grandchild of Empire: A British life in changing times

David Tolliday-Wright

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David Tolliday-Wright was a war baby, born in Shropshire in April 1943, but growing up in post-war North London and taught to know the ‘red parts’ on a world map. He became just one of the last generation to feel duty or opportunity calling them towards the dwindling twilight of the British Empire. Signing up as a 19-year-old for the tough work of the Northern Rhodesia Police force, where he helped to keep order in the ‘Copper Belt’ as de-colonisation gathered pace around him, 1962 saw him policing the very ground on which Dag Hammarskjöld’s plane had crashed so mysteriously the previous year. This comprised only the first occasion when Tolliday-Wright found himself occupying a ring-side seat in the theatre of world politics. Northern Rhodesia gained independence as Zambia in 1964, and Tolliday-Wright went east to Hong Kong where he found himself under machine-gun fire from Maoist mobs on the Hong Kong border during the disturbances at Sha Tau Kok in 1967/8. Fortunately for all, the border settled down eventually, and Tolliday-Wright’s career adjusted to the rhythm of this increasingly frenetic part of South-East Asia, in which the American war in Vietnam saw GI’s coming and going for R&R, which brought its own distinctive challenges. Marriage to a Chinese lady and a change of career saw Tolliday-Wright swap peaked-cap and baton, for wig and gown, as Hong Kong prepared for the new political reality of ‘one country – two systems’. Grandchild of Empire provides a vivid account of an ordinary life in extra-ordinary times. And gives a human perspective on events too large to experience directly. Memoirs like these provide an important footnote to the unfashionable topic of ‘empire’ but in doing so they reveal the workings of time and fortune on the unassuming lives led in their shadow.

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