



EXTRAORDINARY  
CANADIANS

Lord Beaverbrook  
*by* DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS



# Beaverbrook

In so, so many ways, Max Aitken's success came from his failure to do what he wanted to do.

He was born in Ontario and moved with his family to Newcastle, New Brunswick, when he was one year old. He started his own paper when he was eleven, tried law and political campaigning at seventeen, sold bonds when he was twenty, became a millionaire at twenty-five, went to England, was knighted at thirty, and became a Lord of the Realm at thirty-eight. He was instrumental in helping one of the great politicians of the era, Liberal David Lloyd George (a man who would betray him soon after), become prime minister of Britain in 1916. He did the same for his friend and fellow New Brunswicker Conservative Bonar Law in 1922, had a decades-long feud with Conservative British prime minister Stanley Baldwin, and was a lifelong friend of Sir Winston Churchill. (At times the only friend Churchill had.) He was courted by and counselled kings and statesmen, bedded scores of women, was influential in helping

artists create modern Canadian art, and was the greatest newspaperman in the world by the age of forty. He was by far the most influential and important Canadian of the twentieth century and, arguably, could be credited with almost single-handedly saving Western civilization.

Yet he was reviled in his adopted country of England, looked upon as a colonial, and hated by the aristocracy as an upstart. He was snubbed by those he most wanted to impress, and betrayed by those he trusted and helped. The heroic and historic role he played on the world stage from 1910 to 1945 is almost forgotten in Canada (like so much else about our history). And of all the things he hoped for, the one he most wanted, the thing for which he, as a financial genius, would have given up everything else—an Empire Free Trade agreement between Britain and her Commonwealth of Nations (much like the Free Trade agreement in place now between Canada and the United States)—never came to be.

The people he knew in Canada and Europe were the Who's Who of the political, financial, and artistic world for three generations. Even if their voices are now receding into history, make no mistake about this. When I mention David Lloyd George or Stanley Baldwin or Bonar Law or First Sea Lord Fisher, I am naming some of the most influential men

in a Britain that still maintained its Empire. This was a British Empire still at its height (if we consider its height from Waterloo to the Somme), and in a way it was Max Aitken's as much as anyone's.

There were three great moments in his life, intersected by others almost as momentous.

The first was the Canada Cement fiasco of 1910, which made him a multimillionaire.

The second was the part he played, as a sitting member of the Conservative Party in the British House of Commons, in the ascendancy of Machiavellian Liberal radical David Lloyd George to the position of prime minister in a war-weary England of 1916.

The third was his being called to cabinet by Winston Churchill as minister of aircraft production, and then as minister of war production and supply from 1940 to 1942.

Among these significant events were many others: buying and selling Rolls-Royce and being knighted in 1910; being elected to the British parliament in 1912; buying the *Daily Express* in 1916; being granted a lordship in 1917; becoming minister of propaganda (or minister of information) in the First World War coalition cabinet of David Lloyd George; bedding various glamorous women; and failing in his Empire Free Trade campaign, on which all his hopes rested.