



Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai

Robert Bickers

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Richard Maurice Tinkler was an ordinary man in an extraordinary time and place. This riveting "biography of a nobody" offers a rare glimpse of imperialism and the making of modern China seen from the perspective of a working-class Englishman enforcing the order of everyday life on the streets of Shanghai. Culled from Tinkler's many personal letters, *Empire Made Me* meticulously documents his astonishingly revealing life in the service of the British Empire between 1919 and 1939, one of hundreds of young men who joined the Shanghai Municipal Police. Responsible for maintaining order in Shanghai's International Settlement, the SMP expanded and enforced British dominion in China's most important political, commercial, and cultural center.

Tinkler would have remained just another anonymous and forgotten colonial policeman were it not for his unexpected death, at the hands of Japanese marines and an incompetent local doctor, in June 1939. His suspicious death created a noisy diplomatic incident that was picked up by journalists and splashed across the front pages of Britain's newspapers. Many of Tinkler's personal letters survived, and they describe his personal life in unusually vivid detail, including his relationships, his knowing masculinity, his travels, and his bitter meditations on his lowly position in a powerful but waning empire.

Robert Bickers absorbing biography uses Tinkler's letters as well as extensive archival research to tell the story of this man's everyday life and violent decline in a colonial world? a story that offers an uncommonly candid history of twentieth-century imperialism.

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