General editor's foreword

In this extensively researched, judicious and revealing book, Thomas Hajkowski makes a compelling argument for recognition of the major role played by the BBC in constructing an inclusive and pluralistic British national identity in the first half of the twentieth century. He demonstrates convincingly that the BBC set out to promote both the empire and the monarchy as unifying institutions for the nation as a whole. Support for the empire was inculcated by twin methods: education (talks, documentaries) and entertainment (dramatizations of key imperial texts such as *The Four Feathers* and *Sanders of the River*). Close links were established with the Empire Day Movement and the Empire Marketing Board, and the BBC Empire Service was launched in 1932. This commitment to empire continued throughout the Second World War and on into the post-war decade. The monarchy was promoted by regular coverage of royal events, coronations, weddings, and overseas tours and by the introduction, in 1932, of the King's annual Christmas broadcast, which brought the voice of the monarch into every home in the empire.

But complementing this commitment to national unity, the BBC also cultivated the distinct identities of the constituent countries of the United Kingdom, particularly Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Contrary to the received scholarly wisdom that regional identities were stifled and neutered by an ongoing policy of centralization and the imposition of a metropolitan southern English culture, Hajkowski demonstrates by reference to both policies and programmes that the regional services of the BBC developed and maintained vibrant independent voices.

The regional services in Scotland and Wales, largely staffed by Scots and Welsh people, produced regular programmes of indigenous music, dramatizations of iconic Scottish and Welsh novels, and documentaries on the history, culture and everyday life of the Scots and the Welsh. At the same time they stressed the full participation of Scotland and Wales in the empire and the

wider national community. The situation in Northern Ireland was rather different. The BBC sought to stress the integration of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom and largely avoided programmes about history, with its inevitable sectarian implications. But there was a sustained bid to create an Ulster identity with programmes on the landscape, culture and everyday life of the province. The result of these policies was the strong reinforcement of multiple identities, national and regional to which everyone could belong. Hajkowski's book fundamentally alters the way in which we should assess the history of the BBC and its role in British cultural life.

Jeffrey Richards