

Alfred Brunel

**BRUNEL, ALFRED** (his name appears on his death certificate as **Alfred Varnell Brunell**), engineer, militia officer, and public servant; b. in 1818 in England; d. 17 April 1887 at Tivetshall St Margaret, Norfolk, England.

In his capacity as a civil engineer, Alfred Brunel was first employed on various public works for the Province of Canada beginning in 1844. In 1851 and 1852 he conducted the surveys for the Victoria Bridge in Montreal with Thomas Coltrin **Keefer**\*. He was then appointed assistant engineer for the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railroad Union Company (after 1858 the Northern Railway Company of Canada) and served as its superintendent from 1853 to 1856. Also during this period he was an active member of the Canadian Institute, serving as secretary 1852–53 and as a member of the council 1853–55. He served as an alderman for St George's Ward in Toronto, 1857–59 and 1861–62; for two years, 1859 and 1860, he also acted as city engineer.

Brunel began his second career when he took a leading part in organizing the 10th Battalion Volunteer Militia Rifles in Toronto formed on 14 March 1862, a contribution to the general mobilization which took place in the British American colonies in response to the strained relations between Britain and the United States after the *Trent* affair in 1861. He was gazetted major in 1862 and with the Fenian troubles brewing in 1865 he rose to the command of his regiment as lieutenant-colonel on active duty. He retained this rank after his resignation from active service in 1871.

Military duties did not interfere with Brunel's third career as a public servant. On 28 Oct. 1862 he had been appointed to a royal commission to inquire into the customs ports of the Province of Canada, with special reference to the free ports of Gaspé, Canada East, and Sault Ste Marie, Canada West. This experience led to his appointment as inspector of customs, excise, and canals in 1863. It was then a natural transition to his appointment, in 1867, as assistant commissioner of inland revenue in the new federal civil service. Four years later he was promoted commissioner, or permanent deputy head, a rank he retained until he was superannuated in December 1882.

The Department of Inland Revenue over which Brunel presided for more than a decade was not a large department, even by early standards, but it embraced a curious variety of tasks that required a far-flung, dispersed staff. Its officials collected a host of miscellaneous excise duties as well as sundry fees and charges from the users of public works, from the measurement of timber (the culler's office), and from the canal system. Early consumer protection services were also assigned to this department, including inspection of food and drugs, control over suppliers of gas, and testing of the weights and measures used in retail trade. It was a special burden of responsibility on Brunel and his small headquarters staff to ensure the integrity of such a dispersed staff, many of whom were constantly on the move. The detailed statistical tabulations which made up the bulky annual reports of this department suggest that Brunel's training as an engineer served him in good stead during the period in which he had to control and coordinate these varied operations.

As the highest ranking civil servant in his department Brunel testified in 1877 before a select committee of the commons investigating the relationship between the political heads of departments and the permanent deputy heads. He informed the committee that he had been "treated well by both political parties" and stated: "It is a matter of perfect indifference to me which is in power." Not surprisingly, he was one of the public servants chosen as a member of a royal commission, established in 1880, to undertake a thorough review of the civil service. Moreover, his *ex officio* position on the civil service examining board as well as the board of audit placed him among that small number of senior permanent officials who played such a notable, but on the whole unnoticed, role in preparing the new civil service of the dominion to face the more demanding tasks waiting in the wings of the 20th century.

**J. E. HODGETTS**

Can., House of Commons, *App. to the journals*, 1877, app.7; Parl., *Sessional papers*, 1867–82 (annual reports of the Dept. of Inland Revenue); *Sessional papers*, 1880–81, X: no.113. *CPC*, 1877–81. *The Colonial Office list . . .* (London), 1876, 1882. *Dominion annual register*, 1880–83. *Political appointments and judicial bench* (N.-O. Coté). Hodgetts, *Pioneer public service. The Royal Canadian Institute, centennial volume*, 1849–1949, ed. W. S. Wallace (Toronto, 1949).

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