
Landowner and Minister

Angus Hawkins and John Powell (eds):

*The Journal of John Wodehouse, First Earl
Kimberley, for 1862–1902*

(Camden Fifth Series, Press Syndicate of the
University of Cambridge, 1997)

Reviewed by Tony Little

John Wodehouse was born in 1826 and died in 1902. He kept a journal from 1862 onwards, but in the first few pages gave a summary of his life to date and his service in the diplomatic corps in Russia. He was a member of each of Gladstone's cabinets and served Rosebery. He died, effectively still in service under Campbell-Bannerman, as leader of the much-diminished opposition group of Liberal peers.

Kimberley was an ambitious politician who in the early part of the *Journal* spends much time fretting that his talents have not been noticed by the Palmerstonian leadership. Yet he went on to hold office as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland – a success in a post in which few won laurels – during the outbreak of the Fenian revolt. He was Lord Privy Seal and Colonial Secretary in the first Gladstone Government. He was again Colonial Secretary for part of the second Gladstone administration, and went on to the India Office. In 1892, he became Lord President of the Council (responsible for education) and when Rosebery became premier Kimberley took his place as Foreign Secretary.

This is a general journal, useful not only for the detail it brings out on the various controversies of the period, but for reminding us that even the most dedicated politicians led other lives. As a landowner, Kimberley regularly noted the state of the harvest and the weather and enjoyed his fishing and shooting. He took an interest in local affairs, whether as a magistrate looking at penal policy or as paternalist concerned with the practical arrangements for the poor.

As a family man he was evidently closely attached to his wife¹ and children, but had concerns about a son whose gambling proved expensive. A householder's worries do not stop with the harvest, and in the course of the book Kimberley suffered both fires and a burglary to his homes. A firm Protestant, he harboured a strong prejudice against Catholicism but could not prevent it reaching into the family as well as the political circle. Towards the end of his life he was even to try a 'motor car', described in 1899 as 'that horrible vehicle' (p. 468) – perhaps Kimberley was an early environmentalist.

Nevertheless, it is the general politics which make the *Journal* worthwhile. Kimberley refers to items of departmental concern but did not use the *Journal* as a daily record of his actions as a minister. Rather it is the overall political stage and the actors upon it that most attract his pen. Kimberley had prepared a *Journal of Events* in the 1870s, based on the first Gladstone ministry, which has subsequently been published.² He also prepared a memoir which has not survived but is known through notes taken by Rosebery and held in his archives (and reprinted at the end of

the *Journal*). Consequently, the *Journal* is not completely unblemished. At the start of his cabinet career, he tried to be careful not to record the details of secret cabinet discussions, and as the *Journal of Events* and the memoir were prepared he went back over the diaries, amending and, more unfortunately, excising, comments. Despite this activity, what is left is worthwhile and for the period of the second Gladstone ministry onwards, Kimberley was more relaxed about the material he included and more forthright in the judgements he passed.

As a Liberal rather than a Whig, it is clear that he was not a part of that close-knit circle of the Cousinhood, and despite his loyalty to the Gladstonian wing of the party he did not follow his leader uncritically. Kimberley is generally viewed as a kindly but talkative old buffer, but the *Journal* gives a somewhat tougher view of his judgements. He was particularly harsh about Harcourt – 'utterly without principle, an arrant coward and a blustering bully' (p. 438) – emphasising the degree of difficulty faced by Rosebery in trying to run his ill-fated regime. Even Lady Waldegrave, the great Whig hostess, fell heavily foul of his pen: 'She was once rather good-looking, but always coarse and had a fat ill-shaped figure ... She fancied she understood politics and that she exercised a great influence on statesmen, who behind her back only laughed at her ... As to her entertainments the food and wine were always bad ...' (pp. 311–12)

In fact, Kimberley rarely found the food at public banquets or great events to his liking, though he did consider the wine at Buckingham Palace up to scratch. Not all his verdicts are so harsh; he was generally kind to Granville and, among the opposition, to Salisbury, though never to Derby (the Prime Minister). Offsetting these judgements, he was usually tough on himself, rarely saying anything complimentary about his own speeches and recognising that his public following was limited.

The *Journal* reinforces current positive views on the effectiveness of

the Hartington/Granville leadership in the period 1875–80 and of the difficulties Gladstone found in leading the party after 1880, particularly in the realm of foreign affairs. Kimberley is especially interesting on the response of Britain to the rise of Germany, where he was inclined to take a much more vigorous line than the rest of the government in confronting the Germans over their colonial ambitions.

The House of Lords was where Kimberley operated – a topic which, I believe, is a much-neglected part of Victorian studies. The *Journal* throws several interesting sidelights on the Lords. In 1869, there were probably over 160 Liberal peers (p. 236) but after the gradual loss of support among the aristocracy over Irish land reform and the split over Home Rule, the Liberal strength in the Lords dwindled to around forty, only half of whom were present at the meeting at Spencer House in 1897 to elect Kimberley as their leader (p. 445). No wonder Lord Rosebery felt he lacked support as prime minister.

This is a well-produced work with a substantial array of 1447 footnotes to assist in explanation or further detail (plus a further forty-five for the memoir), including cross-referencing to the Gladstone Diaries where relevant. Some further help could have been given on foreign affairs in the early part of the book but, as the editors get into the rhythm of the work, they become sure-footed guides in the main period of domestic interest. Kimberley has not had a full biography but, taken together with the extracts from his correspondence, also edited by John Powell,³ we are beginning to see a fuller picture of the contribution he made to the Liberal front bench. The *Journal* is well worth the study but does require some prior knowledge of the main events of the period.

Notes:

- 1 She may have been less happy – see John Powell (ed): *Liberal by Principle* (The Historians Press, 1996).
- 2 Ethel Drus (ed): *A Journal of Events during the Gladstone Ministry 1868–74* (1958).
- 3 Powell, *Liberal by Principle*.

recognition from his participation in the then popular radio show, *The Brains' Trust*. The broadcast was not a great success; Samuel not only overran his allotted fifteen minutes but was cut off before he reached the end of his talk, due to a misunderstanding with the producer over the pre-arranged signal for ending the broadcast. Given this, it is perhaps a matter of some relief that the broadcast does not feature on the tape!

However, the omission of Lord Samuel does highlight the major weakness of this otherwise enjoyable and useful collection. Although extracts from forty-two broadcasts are included, and the tape runs to almost three hours, many of the most famous or significant broadcasts are missing. The collection is also heavily weighted towards the 1990s, with twenty-three of the forty-two broadcasts included dating from 1991 or later.

Nonetheless, there are enough for the interested viewers to see for themselves some of the changes in the construction and use of broadcasts since 1951. Many of the early ones – including the first on the tape from Labour in 1951 – show a relatively naïve approach to the TV medium, with interviews where the interviewee, rather than looking at the interviewer, immediately turns to the camera on speaking. Nonetheless, from very early on many of the broadcasts were slickly – for their day – packaged.

One of the four political broadcasts from the 1950s included on the tape is Labour's from September 1959, which was a very polished piece masterminded by Anthony Wedgwood Benn (as he then called himself). As he himself later said, 'I was the Peter Mandelson – Bryan Gould of the 1959 election. I fought a brilliant campaign and lost.' Based on the format of the then popular BBC programme *Tonight* the broadcast had the appearance of a current affairs programme. It provoked the Conservatives to broadcast a reply, filmed in the same studio and revealing some of the tricks used by Labour.² This was the first election

Politics on TV

Party Political Broadcasts: The Greatest Hits

(Politico's Publishing; VHS, 169 minutes)

Reviewed by Mark Pack

The eagle-eyed pedant may be a little confused by the start of this videotape. It announces that in 1953 Harold Macmillan starred in the first official party political broadcast, and then goes straight into a Labour broadcast from 1951. In fact, 1951 saw the first political broadcasts during a general election (often called party election broadcasts, or PEBs) whilst 1953 saw the first broadcasts outside election time (often called party political broadcasts, or PPBs).¹

The BBC had been pressing for political broadcasts to be used during the 1950 election, but initially met hostility from politicians. The very first political broadcast, either PEB or PPB, was eventually seen on

15 October 1951, and featured the former Liberal Home Secretary Lord Samuel. An eighty-one year old peer, he made a rather odd choice for this leading role, although he had a certain degree of