

The author, clearly, has an eye for the memorable phrase. In middle age, an exasperated Catherine Gladstone exclaimed to her trying husband, 'Oh, William dear, if you weren't such a great man you would be a terrible bore!' (p. 52). In 1876 Disraeli thundered to Lord Derby, 'Posterity will do justice to that unprincipled maniac Gladstone – extraordinary mixture of envy, vindictiveness, hypocrisy and superstition – whether prime minister or leader of opposition – whether preaching, praying, speechifying or scribbling – never a gentleman' (p. 274). When it seemed very likely that Gladstone was about to become Prime Minister for the second time following the Liberal victory in the general election of 1880, a distraught Queen Victoria, beside herself with rage, let rip – 'she screamed that she would "sooner abdicate than send for or have any communication with that half-mad firebrand who would soon ruin everything and be a dictator"' (p. 306). Clem Attlee's reaction to reading Gladstone's letter of proposal to Catherine Glynne is recorded in a sublime footnote – 'He really was a frightful old prig ... He was a dreadful person.' (p. 29). Aldous does not, however, weary his reader with over-long quotations in the text.

The volume, although clearly based on meticulous, wide-ranging research and reading, reads like an historical novel from cover to cover. Richard Aldous writes in a captivating, enthralling style which makes it difficult for the reader to put down the book. There are a number of most engaging pen-portraits of the major characters. Of Catherine Gladstone we read, 'She rarely read books or even newspapers, and could be shockingly uninformed. Catherine attended both church and parliament regularly, but had little interest

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in discussing either. When apart, the Gladstones wrote to each other most days. These letters were frank, but also contain more than a hint of emotional detachment' (p. 52). Of her husband we read, 'Gladstone was seen as a difficult, prickly character. He was a habitual resigner, even creating problems for those he admired such as Peel and Aberdeen. His preachy, arrogant manner had often infuriated fellow MPs. Even those who admired him, such as John Trelawny, found him aloof and cold (p. 144).

Of Disraeli in the mid-1850s we read, 'His health had never been particularly robust, but the onset of middle age was taking its toll. He had begun to develop a marked, painful stoop, which ached when he sat in one place for too long. His weak lungs were susceptible to infection in the damp, foggy London winters. Jet-black locks now only retained their colour with the assistance of hair dye' (p. 99). There are similar pen-portraits of key players like Sir Robert Peel, the Duke of Wellington and Lord Palmerston as they flit across the pages of this enthralling tale, though they are firmly relegated to the sidelines of the main story.

The book is enhanced with a large number of most attractive pictures and photographs, most taken from Getty Images. There are detailed endnotes

which give the sources of the direct quotations in the text and other guides to further reading. Although this practice is now academically fashionable, it can be a little confusing, and the present reviewer at least would certainly prefer conventional numbered footnotes which are an easier read. Helpful, too, would have been a full systematic bibliography of all the sources used by the author while undertaking his research.

The book is a gripping read from cover to cover, likely to reawaken interest in the politics of mid-Victorian Britain and in the extraordinary lives and careers of these two central characters. It will appeal to academics, students and lay readers alike. Although Richard Aldous is most objective and scrupulously fair throughout his study, one detects a slight predilection in favour of William Gladstone.

This is Aldous's third major book. His previous publications include a biography of Sir Malcolm Sargent. One eagerly anticipates further volumes from the pen of this brilliant young academic who is currently Head of History and Archives at University College, Dublin.

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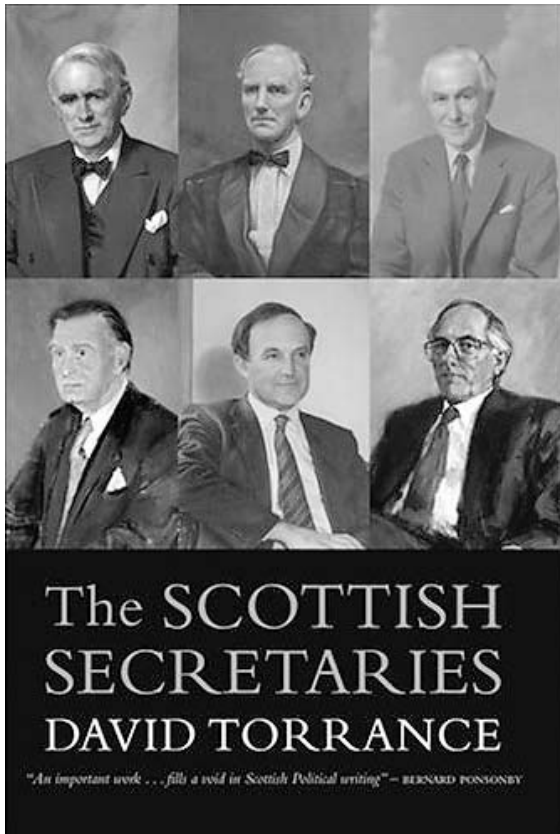
## Governing Scotland

David Torrance, *The Scottish Secretaries* (Birlinn, 2006)

Reviewed by Ewen A. Cameron

**D**AVID TORRANCE, a freelance journalist and parliamentary aide to the Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, has written a collective biography of the thirty-

nine men and one woman (the redoubtable Helen Liddle) who have held the office of Secretary (of State since 1926) for Scotland since 1885. The position is an oddity: a territorial



ministry among functional departments; sometimes Scotland's representative in the Cabinet; sometimes the Cabinet's representative in Scotland; sometimes not in the Cabinet at all. Unlike the Irish Viceroy and his Chief Secretary there was little dignity (nor, it is fair to say, much danger) attached to the position, a point perhaps noted by G. O Trevelyan who served at Dublin Castle and Dover House.

Until the inter-war period the Scottish Office had few civil servants; most were responsible to a series of autonomous boards operating in Edinburgh. Indeed, until the 1930s the Scottish Office had hardly any base in Scotland. St Andrew's House, opened in 1939, gave the position some architectural dignity, and an office with a fine view of Edinburgh. As he entered St Andrew's House in 1947, Arthur Woodburn may well have reflected that 'what's for ye'll no go bye ye', as he recalled his Great War imprisonment as a conscientious

objector in the Calton Jail, demolished to make way for his new workplace.

Arthur Balfour, who first encountered rebellious Celts during his short stint as Scottish Secretary in 1886–87, went on to be Prime Minister and others – John Gilmour, Walter Elliot, Ernest Brown, Archibald Sinclair – held other more or less senior offices, as have recent incumbents since George Younger in the 1980s. There have, however, been many political nonentities at Dover House: the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Richmond (1885–86), the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Dalhousie (1886), the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Linlithgow (1905), the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Rosebery (1945), William Adamson (1924, 1929–31), Joseph Westwood (1945–47). Lord Balfour of Burleigh (1895–1903), Thomas Johnston (1941–45) and William Ross (1964–70 and 1974–76) have been among the most substantial figures to hold office and were politicians who made an active choice to 'confine' their careers to Scotland. Hector McNeil (1950–51) may have gone on to higher things had he not died in 1955.

Readers of this journal will be most interested in what Torrance has to say about the Liberals, of various kinds, who held the office. Of these, John Sinclair (1905–12) and Robert Munro (1916–22) were the only ministers to hold the post for long enough to make a mark. They are scarcely the most distinguished Liberals to serve in this capacity, however. Sir Archibald Sinclair, who deserves that description, was in office for too brief a period to have much impact. Godfrey Collins (1932–36), from the notable Glaswegian publishing family, and Ernest Brown (1940–41) were Liberal Nationals; Lord Novar and John Colville, of the Lanarkshire steelmakers, were former Liberals who had turned Unionist. Torrance is surely right to

note of John Sinclair that he attracted praise and scorn in almost equal measure, and was seen as a creature of Campbell-Bannerman. Nevertheless, he had a long tenure after his master's death and presided over important land and educational reforms.

Indeed, the essay on Sinclair illustrates some of the faults of this worthy but rather dull book (in this it is rather like many of its subjects). Torrance has a good eye for anecdotal and personal material, but his political analysis tends towards legislative description, such as the vexed case of the Small Landholders (Scotland) Bill in Sinclair's case. Thomas McKinnon Wood and Robert Munro presided over some of the greatest political excitement in Scotland: the rent strikes of 1915, the industrial struggles on the Clyde, the forty hours strike of 1919. As servants of wartime governments and, in Munro's case, Unionist-dominated coalitions, they scarcely had the opportunity to have a *Liberal* influence. These cases exemplify the difficulty and misconception of this book. Unlike Roy Jenkins's stimulating collective biography of Chancellors of the Exchequer, the biographies are not sufficiently interesting to merit the treatment they receive here. The major figures have been dealt with in other contexts, either with their own biographies or in the wider context of the governments of which they were members.

The real interest of the post of Scottish Secretary lies not in its holders' biographies, but in the dissonance between its constitutional position – to conduct government policy in Scotland where, prior to devolution, a separate legal system necessitated distinctive treatment of many issues – and the political role often adopted by its incumbents – to be, like Thomas Johnston, a chauvinistic defender of Scotland's

national interests. These points are discussed in passing but they are submerged in a welter of personal detail. Although Torrance has read quite widely in fairly well-thumbed secondary sources and has ploughed through a good deal of manuscript material and diary comment, he seems unaware of much recent research on modern Scottish history. While there are some cases – those of Walter Elliot or Willie Ross, for

example – about which it would be good to know more, Torrance's accounts do not provide much additional detail or interest and readers wishing to know more would be better advised to turn to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

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## Man of contradictions

Arthur H. Cash, *John Wilkes, The Scandalous Father of Civil Liberty* (Yale University Press, 2006)

Reviewed by Nancy LoPatin Lummis

**H**E WAS a mass of contradictions. John Wilkes was gentleman, journalist, a captain in the King's army and a carousing libertine. He was a landowner who continually over-borrowed and depended on others to get him out of debt. He was a careless student but a loving father, committed to his daughters' education. He was also a flamboyant rabble-rouser and trouble-maker who stood before courts, jubilant crowds and Parliament, attacked government abuses, sat in prison to dramatise injustice, and fought tirelessly to sit in the parliamentary seat to which electors had, by popular vote, returned him. He was a fugitive in exile, negotiating for a safe return to England, while a national hero seeking political power. James Boswell adored him, as did his daughter Polly, seeing him as a caring man, committed to strong principles. Voltaire found him charming. He was an impetuous country squire who identified with the working man, an outlaw defended by the eighteenth-century

French *philosophes*. George III referred to him as 'that devil Wilkes', a characterisation echoed by Lord Mansfield, William Hogarth and numerous judges and politicians, as well as the cuckolded husbands of his many lovers. Then there were those, like Horace Walpole, who hated the man but admired his belief in liberty and electoral freedom. All, however, would agree that John Wilkes was a formidable force, whether ally or enemy.

This superb new biography of John Wilkes by Arthur H. Cash gives an entire picture of this amazing historical figure. A politician, fugitive and renegade legal reformer, Wilkes's life is revealed as one filled with principle and immorality, self-interest and tremendous generosity and, above all else, joy. Cash traces the life of this rogue and sometime demagogue from his early marriage and parliamentary career sitting for Aylesbury, through the enormously important publication of issue no. 45 of his *North Briton* and the legal and parliamentary battles and

precedents that ensued, to the culmination of his public career as Alderman, Lord Mayor and Chamberlain of the City of London. Cash argues that 'John Wilkes had established for Great Britain and subsequently the United States two closely related principles: within the simple limits of constitutional law, the people can elect as their representative whomever they please regardless of the approval or disapproval of the legislature ... [and] the first ten amendments to the American Constitution, the Bill of Rights, were written by men to whom Wilkes was a household word' (p. 3). The book then sets about the narrative of the man's life and deeds with a careful analysis of the significance, in legal and political terms, of his bold actions, which prove the success of his fight for the primacy of law and show his stamp on the development of the modern constitutional state.

Beginning with his family background, formal education and ill-conceived arranged marriage, the biography moves on to Wilkes's early forays into sexual experimentation, his local charitable and political causes, and the birth of his political career. Wilkes entered Parliament as a Pittite MP for Aylesbury in 1757. The ensuing political battle between his faction and the followers of Lord Bute, following the accession of George III, rapidly became more than simply a battle for attaining and securing political position. The infamous role of the *North Briton*, originally a response to court papers such as the *Briton* and the *Auditor*, and part of the larger propaganda war for public opinion, changed rapidly because of the suppressive tactics adopted by the King's ministers. While Wilkes's original intention was to have Bute removed from government office, his political arguments progressed

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