For the study of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history

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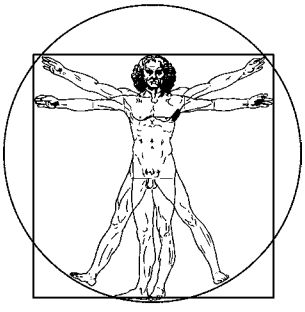
Journal of Liberal HISTORY

The Liberal Party and the Great War



Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrats and the coalition government of 2010–15

The Liberal Democrat–Conservative coalition government of 2010–15 was the first peacetime British coalition since the 1930s. Whatever the Liberal Democrats may have achieved in government, their electoral reward was the most catastrophic in the history of the party or its predecessors.

To analyse the impact of the coalition on the Liberal Democrats, and the impact of the Liberal Democrats on the coalition, the Liberal Democrat History Group is organising the following:

Evening meeting: National Liberal Club, Monday 13 July

Phil Cowley (Professor of Parliamentary Government, University of Nottingham and co-author of *The British General Election of 2010*) and **Baroness Olly Grender**, Paddy Ashdown's second-in-command on the 'Wheelhouse Group' which ran the Liberal Democrat election campaign, will discuss why everything went wrong. See back page for details.

Special issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*

The autumn *Journal of Liberal History*, due out in September, will be a special issue devoted to the coalition and the Liberal Democrats. In-depth interviews with former Liberal Democrat ministers, including Nick Clegg, will be accompanied by a series of opinion pieces from party members, some with experience from inside the coalition, some from outside.

Conference: Birmingham, Saturday 28 November

This one-day conference, organised by the *Journal of Liberal History* and the University of Birmingham, will examine the key issues the Liberal Democrats faced as partners in the coalition government and the party's performance during the 2015 general election. The conference will feature opening and concluding addresses and three panel sessions, looking at:

- Campaigning – what messages were the Liberal Democrats trying to communicate during their period in office and during the general election; how was this done and how effectively?
- Policy and ideological direction – getting Liberal Democrat policy implemented in government, the relationship with the Conservatives and how this played during the election.
- Parliamentary strategy – keeping the parliamentary party together, 2010–15; how the Liberal Democrat presence at Westminster was used to reinforce the wider messages the party was seeking to promote to the public and inside the government.

Saturday 28 November 2015 (10.00am – 4.00pm); University of Birmingham. Registration £20 (students and unwaged £15). Full details of the agenda and how to register will follow in the autumn *Journal of Liberal History*, due out in early September.

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Issue 87: Summer 2015

Special issue: the Liberal Party and the First World War

Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal of Liberal History* and other occasional publications.

For more information, including historical commentaries, details of publications, back issues of the *Journal*, and archive and other research sources, see our website at: **www.liberalhistory.org.uk**.

Subscribers' code for discounted sales from the History Group online shop: mbr001.

Chair: **Tony Little** Honorary President: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**

OLD HEROES F

As we have done in each of the last three Liberal Democrat leadership elections, in 1999, 2006 and 2007, in June the Liberal Democrat History Group asked both candidates for the Liberal Democrat leadership to write a short article on their favourite historical figure or figures – the ones they felt had influenced their own political beliefs most, and why they had proved important and relevant.

Sir William Beveridge and Simon Hughes: very different individuals, one a thinker and one a campaigner, but both of them endlessly inspiring and motivating.

Tim Farron – *William Beveridge, Simon Hughes*

My heroes are two people who exemplify my Liberal beliefs, Sir William Beveridge and Simon Hughes: very different individuals, one a thinker and one a campaigner, but both of them endlessly inspiring and motivating. And both of them good men, humble men who worked for the causes they believed in rather than for their own self-advancement.

William Beveridge never led our country or our party. But he changed both in a spectacular way. You will, of course, have heard of the Beveridge Report, with its boring title – *Social Insurance and Allied Services* – hiding its radical proposals for an assault on the 'five giant evils' of squalor, ignorance, want, idleness, and disease. In this and his second report – *Full Employment in a Free Society* – he identified the slayers of these evils: state education, a welfare state, full employment, decent homes and the National Health Service.

The solutions he put forward, together with the economic policies of his fellow-Liberal John Maynard Keynes, formed the consensus which underpinned the economic and social policies of Western democracies for a generation. They improved the lives of countless millions, and helped to steer Britain towards the greatest degree of equality it has ever known – until Thatcher's Tories startled to dismantle them.

Beveridge had the audacity to think the biggest and best of ideas and to make them happen. And he did this against the backdrop of the tightest fiscal contraction this country had ever seen. That is a lesson for us today as we seek to build a new consensus.

I count myself as a Beveridge Liberal, not so much because of the individual proposals he put forward, but because he looked beyond what was thought to be possible towards what he believed was necessary. I want our party to recapture his spirit of ambition, his inspired and inspiring confidence that government can make a difference; that in the face of huge challenges, politics and economics can provide positive solutions to make things better, that government should roll up its sleeves, not wring its hands.

Beveridge was a big-picture visionary. He was an MP for a year, but I can't really imagine him doing a regular *Focus* round! When I need inspiration in the day-to-day grind of politics, when I'm out on the doorstep in the freezing cold or the driving rain, when the political fight just seems too difficult, then I remember my second hero, Simon Hughes.

Simon is the campaigner's campaigner. Winning the Bermondsey by-election in 1983 – in what looked like very unpromising territory for Liberals – he then held the seat for eight further elections, for 32 years' uninterrupted service. He exemplified the community politician, devoting his time to serving his constituents. Stories abound of his constituency surgeries lasting until well past midnight, with people queuing round the block to see him; his having to be retrieved from constituents' homes during a canvassing session because he'd spent so long talking to them; and of constituents buttonholing him

FOR A NEW LEADER

even during a dance at the Ministry of Sound.

But he was never only a 'good local MP'. He fought for what he believed within the party, famously defying the Alliance leaders over their crazy idea of a 'Euro-bomb' in 1986 – his speech probably swung the debate – and consistently arguing for the party to take a more radical line. His stints as the Liberals' and Liberal Democrats' environment spokesperson in 1983–87 and 1990–94 were crucial in establishing us as the greenest of the main parties. And you have to love someone who introduces the word 'seventeenthly' into a Parliamentary debate!

Norman Lamb – *John Maynard Keynes*

My Liberal hero was never elected an MP. He was an economist, a Treasury civil servant, and finally a Liberal peer. As one lone man, through his determination and his vision he literally changed the world. He created the conditions in which Europe could turn its back on conflict and work to build a lasting peace.

His name was John Maynard Keynes.

After a promising start to his career as an academic economist at Cambridge, Keynes put his skills to use in the Treasury in the First World War, helping to finance the war effort; he quickly built a reputation for delivering the impossible.

At the end of the war, he was asked to represent the Treasury at the Allied peace talks. He understood the workings of the global economy better than anyone else at that time, and argued against crippling reparation payments. He believed that lasting peace should be based on a shared interest in prosperity: the politics of hope, not fear.

Keynes's liberal and generous-spirited argument lost out in the Versailles peace talks, but he did not give up. That summer he wrote what must be one of the only economic tracts ever to become a world best-seller, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. It was too late to stop the flawed Treaty of Versailles, but Keynes' book changed public opinion.

And over the coming decades, he was proved right. The reparations were unsustainable, and Germany slid into a period of economic depression, ruinous hyper-inflation and political instability that destroyed the fragile political consensus and triggered the rise of extremism.

Keynes saw vividly, in the smoke-filled rooms of Versailles and in the angry rhetoric of Allied leaders, the foundations being laid for the Second World War. He understood that, for any political system to be stable and enduring, it must first of all be fair. If the German people had no economic stake in the political settlement, it would not last.

With the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Keynes published the culmination of the theories he had developed, arguing for an activist government that invested in infrastructure during recession to drive up demand, rebalance the economy and create jobs. Keynes challenged the classical economic consensus, and won the battle of ideas that ultimately triggered the New Deal in America. For the first time, government consciously sought to tackle recession by increased borrowing and spending.

As one lone man, through his determination and his vision he literally changed the world. He created the conditions in which Europe could turn its back on conflict and work to build a lasting peace.

A decade later, when the Second World War was coming to a close, it was to Keynes that Britain turned to negotiate a peace that would last. Keynes used his influence to redesign the architecture of the global economy. He was driven by the crucial liberal principle that no country must be left at a disadvantage by the rules of the economy. He wanted the wealthiest nations – in particular the US – to stabilise and support the economies of countries suffering deficits in the aftermath of war.

Keynes didn't get everything right. Today his theories don't properly reflect the way that consumer spending relies on private borrowing. And modern macroeconomics broadens out his approach to look beyond consumer demand to a range of other measures of an economy.

But Keynes' vision – of a global economy where countries co-operated, where prosperity would be shared, and where government was proactive in making the economy work in people's interests – laid the basis of a peace that has now lasted for seventy years. It created the conditions that meant Britain could afford the first steps towards creating the National Health Service despite a level of public debt after the war unprecedented in modern British history. And it speaks clearly to the values that are still so important to me today.

WRITING ABO

Charles Kennedy, former leader of the Liberal Democrats, died suddenly on 1 June 2015. The shocking news was met with an outpouring of grief and sadness that is seldom accorded to politicians. Lord Paddy Ashdown, his predecessor as Liberal Democrat leader, tweeted: 'Charles Kennedy. In a political age not overburdened with gaiety and good sense, he brought us wit, charm, judgment, principle and decency.' **Neil Stockley** sums up Charles Kennedy's career in the SDP and Liberal Democrats through the many tributes and obituaries that appeared in the days following his death.

OUT CHARLES

In an affectionate piece, Baroness Shirley Williams, a former colleague from the SDP and the Liberal Democrats, called him a 'staggering human being'.[1] *The Independent* lamented the loss of 'a gifted, compassionate politician'.[2] *The Scotsman* remembered 'a man of high principles blessed with a keen sense of humanity and honour, who served his constituents with dedication'.[3] 'With Charles Kennedy's death, a light has gone out in Scottish and British politics,' wrote Alan Cochrane in *The Telegraph*.[4] The *New Statesman* opined 'that the passing of the former Liberal Democrat leader … has been greeted with such sadness is a reflection of his qualities: decency, principle, kindness and wit.'[5]

On 10 June, the House of Commons paid tribute to Charles Kennedy. The outgoing leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg, remembered 'a much-loved politician' and paid a heartfelt tribute to 'his wit, his warmth, his modesty' and 'honesty, wisdom and humility'.[6] The former party president, Tim Farron, fought back tears as he mourned 'a very, very special man' and declared, 'I loved him to bits'.[7]

Political opponents were sincere and generous in their praise. The former Conservative Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, spoke respectfully of a 'remarkably decent, honest, very highly principled' parliamentarian.[8] The Labour MP Tom Watson hailed Charles as 'a very great man [who] stood up for what he believed in [and] led a party of the centre-left with dignity and compassion.'[9]

Perhaps the most touching tributes came from friends and family. Alastair Campbell, Downing Street Director of Communications under Tony Blair, wrote a moving paean to a 'lovely man and a talented politician' who 'spoke fluent human'.[10] Writing in *The Telegraph*, his long-time friend and former brother-in-law, James Gurling, recounted with affection Charles's laid-back political style, his love of music and writing, his easy manner and sense of humour, his profound understanding of the Liberal Democrats, his political courage and his deep personal commitment to the causes of Scottish unionism and Europe.[11]

Charles deserved the accolades, both for his personal qualities and his significant achievements as a politician. Nearly all of the tributes and obituaries noted that under his leadership, the Liberal Democrats achieved their greatest electoral success: 53 seats in 2001 and 62 in 2005. Not since the 1920s had there had there been such large Liberal contingents at Westminster. Moreover, on his watch, the Liberal Democrats started to win seats from Labour; unlike the old Liberal Party, they did not go backwards with a Labour government in power.

The great communicator

There was widespread agreement that the key to Charles' successes was his tremendous gifts as a communicator. The first theme of the obituaries and commentaries was his remarkable ability to project himself through the media, especially television, to connect with all kinds of people.

The Guardian believed that:

> For much of his career, from the late 1980s until the middle of the 2000s, his was among the best and most authentic voices of the revived liberal tradition.[12]

The paper's obituary recounted how:

> Kennedy, red-haired and round-faced, a cheery and approachable figure, with a soft Highlands accent, will generally be remembered less for his political achievements than for the persona he exhibited in numerous television appearances, which stretched well beyond political programmes. Some envious colleagues marvelled at his easy charm and wry sense of humour, which chimed well with the public increasingly wary of dour, cautious and manipulative soundbite, party-line politicians, though it also earned him the sobriquet 'chatshow Charlie'.
>
> To the public, he scarcely seemed like a politician at all. 'I make no apologies,' he told an interviewer, 'for the fact that I am a paid-up member of the human race.'[13]

The Guardian columnist Martin Kettle described him as:

> … one of the very few politicians of the modern era to whom ordinary non-political people instinctively related. People liked him and were right to do so …
>
> … At his best, Kennedy had the ability to rise above the crowd and speak for his times in easily expressed and easily

Alastair Campbell, Downing Street Director of Communications under Tony Blair, wrote a moving paean to a 'lovely man and a talented politician' who 'spoke fluent human'.

> understood language. His ability to cut through the evasions and cliches of modern politics was a quality so many others struggle to emulate, often without success. He also had a great and natural sense of humour, unusual in a very private man such as he. It made him one of the few politicians who could master every form of television interview or appearance without looking awkward.[14]

'On a good day,' Nick Clegg lamented in a media interview shortly after Charles's death was announced, 'he had more political talent in his little finger than the rest of us put together.'[15]

Matthew d'Ancona, writing in the *Evening Standard*, explained why Charles Kennedy's use of humour and his willingness to step outside the more conventional formats was such an important asset to the Liberal Democrats, a third party struggling constantly for public attention:

> Though his 'chatshow Charlie' persona – most vividly apparent on *Have I Got News for You* – was interpreted by some as evidence of unseemly frivolity, it was no such thing. Kennedy grasped instinctively that communication between the political class and those they represented was breaking down, and that humour and humanity were essential antidotes to spin and control freakery … What was initially dismissed as frippery when pioneered by Kennedy is now fawned upon by 'brand managers' as 'authenticity'.[16]

Steely courage

Second, there was a broad consensus that Charles combined his skills as a media performer with astute political judgement and what Nick Clegg called 'a steely courage'[17] when he took the principled decision to oppose Britain's participation in the second Iraq war. *The Times* contended that:

> It was arguably Kennedy's finest hour. He was the first mainstream party leader to oppose British military action since Hugh Gaitskell resisted the Suez campaign in 1956. He spoke eloquently and resolutely against Blair's plans in the Commons. He addressed a 'Stop the War' rally of a million people in London's Hyde Park. He complained that Britain was 'being bulldozed into a war not of our choosing and not – on the basis of the evidence so far – vital to national interests'.
>
> It was a stance that won the Lib Dems many new supporters and one that was seen by them to be vindicated by subsequent events. It also proved to be the high-water mark of Kennedy's political career.[18]

Charles Kennedy with Patsy Calton, candidate and later MP for Cheadle, during the 2001 election campaign

Yet *The Times,* like *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian,* glossed over the tremendous courage that Charles displayed in opposing the Iraq war. As Vince Cable recalled:

> He was bombarded with advice from outside and inside the party to support the Blair government; it was said, in particular, that a party leader would never be forgiven by the public for criticising a military intervention in which British service personnel were being killed in action.
>
> But he was unpersuaded and constantly said: 'the case has not been made'. He went against the conventional wisdom and opposed the war. Those of us present will never forget the debate in parliament when he was denounced – mainly from the Conservative side – for treachery and treason, among the more printable accusations. He showed political courage and good judgement in sticking to a position that was ultimately vindicated.[19]

The Economist captured more faithfully than most papers the temper of the times, and the qualities that Kennedy displayed.

> He was perspicacious too, and at times bloody tough. His opposition to the 2003 Iraq war, presented in a packed and hostile House of Commons, against catcalling from both Labour and Tory MPs, exhibited all these qualities. His critics called him an opportunist, because the threatened war was, unusually in belligerent Britain, unpopular. Yet, in their hearts, they knew that his opposition to the war was based on principle; it also turns out to have been right.[20]

There was considerable support within the Liberal Democrats for the position that Charles took. The September 2002 Liberal Democrat conference had voted to support any military intervention only as a last resort and under a clear UN mandate, and only after a debate and vote in Parliament. There were also internal pressures on him to take a stronger position against the war, as shown when the Federal Executive voted unanimously that

the party officially should take part in the February 2003 march.

Writing in *The Telegraph*, Tim Stanley explained why the stance Kennedy took was so bold, and how it delivered political benefits for the Liberal Democrats.

> Until 2003, it was convention in British politics that opposition parties back governments over questions of war … By criticising Iraq, Kennedy put his reputation and his party's reputation on the line. It was not only a moral move but a smart one – for it cemented in the public's mind the impression that the Lib Dems were courageously independent minded.[21]

Other examples were given of the prescience and political courage that Charles Kennedy showed throughout his political career. *The Times*[22] and *The Telegraph*[23] recounted how, after the 1987 general election, Kennedy was the first of the SDP's five remaining MPs to break with the party's leader, David Owen, and call for a merger with the Liberals. He then helped to negotiate the terms amid great acrimony and charges of betrayal from fellow Social Democrats.

Nearly every paper asserted that alone amongst Liberal Democrat MPs Charles opposed going into government with the Conservatives in 2010. In fact, at the final Parliamentary Party meeting that approved the decision to go into the coalition, although Kennedy did express doubts, he abstained in the final vote; six other MPs either abstained or were absent. In the Commons, Charles voted against the rise in tuition fees and in private, he was critical of the coalition's welfare reforms.

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A social democrat and a liberal

The third theme of the tributes and obituaries, 'what Charles Kennedy stood for', was less informed and less conclusive than the other discussions. *The Economist* typified the views of many in casting him as a left-leaning social democrat who instinctively favoured statist policies.

> What Mr Kennedy was for, was sometimes harder to discern. Though he often presented himself as a classical liberal – his literary credo, *The Future of Politics*, is a treatise on all sorts of freedoms: from poverty, from government, to innovate, and so forth – he was not obviously one. He had more faith in the state than most liberals and was so predictably to the left of them that it was tempting to wonder why he had not returned to Labour.[24]

The paper also asserted that:

> As leader he positioned the Lib Dems to the left of the Labour government by opposing the introduction of university tuition fees and Britain's involvement in the Iraq war.[25]

It is quite correct that, as Labour moved towards the 'centre ground' under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, Kennedy took the Liberal Democrats into territory easily perceived as 'left of Labour' by, for example, promising free university tuition and personal social care. In the run-up to the 2005 general election, a defecting left-wing Labour MP, Brian Sedgemore, along with many like-minded people, joined the Liberal Democrats; Philip Collins of *The Times* (a former speechwriter to Tony Blair) was not being too harsh when he suggested that electoral considerations also played their part.[26] In 2005, the party performed especially well in university constituencies and areas with large Muslim populations and had hopes of capturing a large section of the grey vote.

But the 'left-wing' and 'populist' labels are too simplistic and fail to do justice to Charles's political beliefs. Vince Cable's observations are worth quoting at length:

> It is wrong to portray Charles as a socialist. He had come into parliament as a social democrat and remained one. Like me, he joined the SDP in the early 1980s when Labour was anti-Europe, anti-NATO and was looking back nostalgically to the era of state control and trades union power. For those of us who were attracted to the ideals of social justice, and wanted an alternative both to Thatcher's Conservatism and to what Labour then offered, the SDP then the Lib Dems offered a way forward.
>
> Charles retained a set of beliefs which has enduring value but is no longer fashionable: a strong commitment to progressive taxation and redistribution of income and wealth and a belief that the country deserved good public services and, unapologetically, should be asked to pay for them through taxation.
>
> The other strand in his political philosophy was liberalism. Again this was often unfashionable. I recall that during the 2005 election when the Tories were whispering, very loudly, 'are you thinking what we are thinking?', Charles was quite unequivocal: 'Yes, the immigration of black and brown people has been good for Britain, economically and culturally; and no, hanging and flogging doesn't solve the crime problem.'[27]

Charles brought together social democracy and liberalism in a way that was instinctive and not a little romantic. *The Guardian* was surely correct when it described him as 'a liberal social democrat who knew what he believed and loved what he knew'.[28]

It is, therefore, too easily forgotten that other elements of the liberal heritage revived and flourished under Charles's leadership. There were echoes of laissez-faire when the 2001 general election manifesto contained numerous pledges to reduce 'red tape'. The '1p in the pound for education', an iconic pledge from the 1990s, was dropped from party policy. Charles cannot be accused of being a knee-jerk statist or of being stuck in the past: senior colleagues were given licence to innovate. Chris Huhne led a major review of the Liberal Democrats' approach to public services. There were new attempts to be 'tough' and disciplined on public spending commitments, with mixed results. And, as Vince Cable recalled, *The Orange Book*, which presented many 'economic liberal' viewpoints, was published in 2004, albeit with the most lukewarm of endorsements from the party leader.

Here, then, was one of the paradoxes of Charles Kennedy's leadership: his roots were in the social democrat tradition and he was a communicator rather than a policy wonk, but in the run-up to the 2005

general election, it was becoming increasingly difficult to link the party's raft of 'market liberal' and 'spending' proposals together into a coherent, plausible programme that could be 'sold' to the electorate. And it is often forgotten that, fairly or not, many Liberal Democrats were disappointed at the results of that election. As *The Guardian* obituary recalled:

> [The party] was perceived to have fallen short. The anticipated breakthrough in the Tory marginals did not happen and, far from becoming the main opposition as some activists had hoped, it remained a distant third in the Commons. Kennedy was blamed internally for concentrating on trying to attract Tory voters rather than broadening the party's electoral appeal with more progressive electors disillusioned with Labour, but he was nevertheless re-elected leader shortly after parliament returned.[29]

Shortly after polling day, Charles himself said that the Liberal Democrats now had to 'find a fashion and narrative'[30]. But he seemed unsure as to what the narrative should be.

Tragic figure

Discussions of the 2005 general election and its aftermath led into the fourth theme of the commentaries and obituaries: Charles's shortcomings as a leader, his problems with alcohol and how they led to his deposition from the leadership in January 2006. Such was the frame for *The Times*' somewhat brutal obituary. The paper drew mostly unfavourable comparisons between Charles's leadership style and that of his predecessor.

> Unlike his disciplined, somewhat autocratic, policy-driven predecessor, Kennedy was laid-back, convivial and consensual … He consulted his fellow MPs on speeches and spokesmanships. He bantered with journalists at press conferences. He was not a strong leader in the conventional sense, and lacked a compelling political agenda. Some colleagues dubbed him 'inaction man' compared with Ashdown, a former Royal Marine commando. Others joked 'while Paddy Ashdown gets up at 5am, Mr Kennedy gives the impression of only going to bed at that time'.[31]

The Times went to revive some uncomfortable memories for many Liberal Democrats: Charles attending a formal meeting in 2001 with Yasser Arafat 'clearly the worse for wear'; his absence from Gordon Brown's Commons announcement on whether Britain would join the Euro, and Brown's 2004 budget – allegedly due to a 'stomach bug'; and the party's spring conference that same year when he appeared to be ill when giving the leader's speech. During an early-morning press conference to launch the party's 2005 manifesto, he could not explain the details of the party's policy for a local income tax. This was explained at the time as the result of a sleepless night caused by his new-born son, Donald, but was recognised by close colleagues as a sign of bigger problems.[32]

A legacy for liberals

For all his triumphs and tragedies, Charles left an important legacy for the Liberal Democrats, as they try to come to terms with their near-annihilation at the 2015 general election. Even though the early 2000s now seem like a different era, his approach to political strategy and his deepest political convictions could prove indispensable to the party as it tries to rebuild. *The Guardian* leader made some perceptive observations about the choices and the opportunities now facing the Liberal Democrats:

> A key decision facing the party's next leader is whether to embrace or reject the legacy of coalition. Mr Kennedy would have been fair in his judgment, but on the rejectionist side. However, he would have seen opportunities too, if the party is clear about its priorities and direction. He would have seen an uncertain Labour party, a frustrated Green movement, a decentralising spirit, a fresh impatience with the electoral system and, above all, a battle for Britain's place in Europe. It is a great loss that Mr Kennedy will play no part in Britain's political reshaping. But his reforming social democratic and European instincts will live on if the next Lib Dem leader takes the party on the kind of political journey that his late lamented colleague would have favoured.[33]

Shortly after polling day, Charles himself said that the Liberal Democrats now had to 'find a fashion and narrative'. But he seemed unsure as to what the narrative should be.

Philip Collins warned that Charles's brand of politics would be a dead end for the Liberal Democrats.

> For all Mr Kennedy's considerable virtues as a man, the political example he gave his party is one it ought not to follow … [He] sought to mobilise opposition wherever he could locate it. There are votes to be harvested in British politics being against things. The consequence of indulging oppositional sentiment, though, is that you are defined only by what you are against and not at all by what you are for …
>
> Charles Kennedy did what he did rather brilliantly, with style, wit and warmth and politics would be better for more people of his stamp. But what he did can only take you so far. Mr Kennedy's Liberal Democrats climbed all the way to the summit of the mountain he set out to climb. The trouble with that is that when you reach the top you cannot help but wonder at the point.[34]

Collins made a valid point. The Liberal Democrats face long-term strategic dilemmas and these will need to be addressed. But Matthew d'Ancona showed a clearer understanding of the party and its challenges when he suggested that the Liberal Democrats should be inspired by Charles Kennedy's passion as they begin their long, hard journey back to credibility.

> So what's it to be: Kennedy or Clegg? Campaigning passion or governmental competence? As so often, the dichotomy is false. The future of the Lib-Dems depends upon the convergence of the former's romantic liberalism with the latter's professional politics. Both are needed. UKIP has become the 'none-of-the above' party of protest – albeit with no stability – and Labour is at risk of drifting into its past

> as the voice of left-wing dissent rather than the engine of centre-left government. The Lib-Dems must start almost from scratch.
>
> Thus begins the slow, painful work of reconstruction: community causes, micro-politics, pavement-pounding, incremental renewal.

Crucially, d'Ancona pointed to a potential source of inspiration for the Liberal Democrats in the difficult years ahead.

> In the battle to prevent Britain leaving the EU – a battle in which Kennedy had hoped to play a central role – the Lib-Dems have a cause which should energise and revive them, a struggle in which the nation's very place in the world is at stake.[35]

This was a telling observation, because very few papers acknowledged what Vince Cable called Charles' 'bigger picture: … a strong, but practical internationalism centred on the European project'. He recalled that from his earliest days in parliament, Charles had spoken up consistently and strongly for full-blooded British commitment to EU membership.[36]

Nick Clegg told the Commons of his chagrin that Charles had been lost to the European cause:

> I suspect many of us will feel his absence most keenly when our country decides in the next year or two whether we belong, or not, in the European Union, because, of all his convictions, his internationalism endured most strongly. He was a proud highlander, a proud Scot and a man who believed in our community of nations within the United Kingdom, but he was also a lifelong believer that our outward-facing character as a country is best secured by remaining at the heart of Europe rather than retreating elsewhere. As the debate becomes dominated, as it no doubt will, by the noise of statistical claim and counter-claim, I will miss the lyrical clarity of Charles's belief that our future as an open-hearted and generous-spirited country is at stake and must be defended at all costs.[37]

'As the debate becomes dominated, as it no doubt will, by the noise of statistical claim and counter-claim, I will miss the lyrical clarity of Charles's belief that our future as an open-hearted and generous-spirited country is at stake and must be defended at all costs.'

It was left to *The Economist* – even though it cast Charles as 'a peripheral figure'[38] by the time he lost his Commons seat – to lay down the gauntlet to Liberal Democrats, and all supporters of Britain's role in Europe:

> Mr Kennedy was an outspoken pro-European in a way that few front-line political figures today are. Even at 55, he was one of the youngest of the remaining politicians with an enthusiasm for Britain's place in the EU based on idealistic rather than transactional factors. He was due to play a prominent role in the upcoming referendum on the country's EU membership; his energy, popularity and heartfelt commitment to the cause would have been a big asset to the 'Yes' camp. His death makes it all the more pressing that a new generation of pro-Europeans step forward and make the impassioned, wide-ranging case for Britain to remain in the union. A resounding mandate for such a vision at the polls would be a fitting political epitaph for the late laughing Cavalier of Lib Dem politics.[39]

Neil Stockley is a former Policy Director for the Liberal Democrats and a long-standing member of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

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4 Alan Cochrane, 'With Charles Kennedy's death, a light has gone out in Scottish and British Politics,' *The Telegraph,* 3 June 2015.
5 'Leader: Remembering Charles Kennedy,' *New Statesman*, 3 June 2015.
6 HC Deb, 3 June 2015, c593
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10 Alastair Campbell, 'Charles Kennedy – a lovely man, a talented politician, a great friend,' *Guardian,* 2 June 2015.
11 James Gurling, 'The Charles Kennedy I knew,' *The Telegraph,* 5 June 2015.
12 'Charles Kennedy's legacy: Lochaber no more,' *The Guardian,* 2 June 2015.
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15 'Death of a Liberal,' *The Economist*, 6 June 2015.
16 Matthew d'Ancona, 'Kennedy's legacy will be to remind his party of the real Liberal way', *The Standard*, 3 June 2015.
17 HC Deb, 3 June 2015, c593.
18 'Charles Kennedy,' *The Times,* 2 June 2015.
19 Vince Cable, 'Charles Kennedy: he was left of Labour, maybe, but always a true liberal,' *The Guardian,* 2 June 2015.
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23 'Charles Kennedy – obituary,' *The Telegraph*, 2 June 2015.
24 'Death of a Liberal,' *The Economist*, 6 June 2015.
25 'The laughing Cavalier,' *The Economist* (website), 2 June 2015.
26 Philip Collins, 'Kennedy's legacy will lead Lib Dems nowhere,' *The Times*, 5 June 2015.
27 Vince Cable, 'Charles Kennedy: he was left of Labour, maybe, but always a true liberal,' *The Guardian,* 2 June 2015.
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29 'Charles Kennedy obituary,' *The Guardian,* 2 June 2015.
30 Tania Brannigan, 'Kennedy prepares for the next step,' *The Guardian*, 20 May 2005.
31 Charles Kennedy,' *The Times,* 2 June 2015.
32 Ibid.
33 'Charles Kennedy's legacy: Lochaber no more,' *The Guardian,* 2 June 2015.
34 Philip Collins, 'Kennedy's legacy will lead Lib Dems nowhere,' *The Times*, 5 June 2015.
35 Matthew d'Ancona, 'Kennedy's legacy will be to remind his party of the real Liberal way', *The Standard*, 3 June 2015.
36 Vince Cable, 'Charles Kennedy: he was left of Labour, maybe, but always a true liberal,' *The Guardian,* 2 June 2015.
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39 Ibid.

DID THE GREA
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The First World War altered lives forever and transformed society; empires fell and new nations emerged. In Britain the party system underwent profound change, a transformation which plunged the Liberal Party into civil war and took it from a natural party of government to electoral insignificance within a few years. The History Group's conference in November 2014 examined key issues and personalities of the period. This special issue of the *Journal* contains most of the papers presented at the conference, plus other material. Here **Michael Steed** examines the impact of the war on the Liberal Party.

A GOOD STARTING POINT is the Trevor Wilson thesis (in his *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914–1935*). His historical analysis of the party's fortunes between 1914 and 1935 is encapsulated in a memorable allegory: the Liberal Party is likened to an individual who experienced a traumatic accident (a rampant omnibus which mounted the pavement and ran over him), following which he first lingered painfully, then died. The case for accidental death appears strong, but as the patient/party had had symptoms of prior illness (Wilson noted Ireland, Labour unrest and the suffragettes) there are those who maintain that despite previous robust health the patient/party was already dying – or at least was so weakened that natural causes played a part in his death. Wilson, writing in 1966, preferred the straightforward causal link from event to outcome.[1] How does that verdict stand up a century after the traumatic event?

First, what is death? The Liberal Party did not die – after declining for two decades, it maintained itself for another two and then revived; it is still alive, albeit with a slight change of name. What did cease to exist was a particular form of political party – a mass-supported broad party of sufficient size and strength to be one of a pair in a two-party system. Just as the First World War can be seen as causing the death of the Habsburg or Austro-Hungarian Empire, though Austria and

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Hungary each survived, the Wilson case is about the death of the Liberal Party's historic (1859–1915) role. The 'death' of the historic Liberal Party means the end of what made it effective on that scale.

Then, who were the relevant victims? Clearly the catastrophe of 1914–18 caused, in Wilsonian terms, many more dramatic deaths of more significant and longer-lived institutions – not just the Habsburg dynasty and empire, but Hohenzollerns, Ottomans and Romanovs, as well as many national borders. His omnibus ran over lots of pedestrians.

Specifically, in the category of Westminster political parties, it potentially injured four – Irish, Labour and Unionist as well Liberal. One (Redmond's Irish parliamentary nationalists) died almost instantly, one (Unionist) survived in good health with a name change while a third, after bad apparent injury, went on to grow stronger. This last case merits careful consideration.

In 1914, the Labour Party was deeply split by the onset of war, while the Liberal Party was ostensibly united. Most Labour MPs supported entry into the war, but Ramsay MacDonald, their leader, did not (though he subsequently supported the war effort) and had to resign. Much of the party in the country agreed with him, or went further, taking a pacifist position. In the first major by-election contest of the war, in November 1915, the late Keir Hardie's seat in Merthyr Tydfil was fought between pro-war and anti-war Labour candidates.[2] In the December 1918 election, Labour made small progress and Macdonald himself lost his seat, a defeat generally attributed to his record on the war (or to the right-wing press's distortion of it), while he was to suffer humiliation at the Woolwich East by-election in March 1921.[3] Yet only a little later the same Ramsay MacDonald led his party into government. The initially severe wounds inflicted by Wilson's omnibus had fully healed.

So how could the onset of war have been fatal for the historic Liberal Party but not for the nascent Labour Party? Was it that the patient/party's health in 1914 was already weak?

There are contemporary measurements of health – plenty of by-elections in 1911–14, as well as annual municipal elections each November up to 1913. These have been used, all too often selectively, to support contrary views as to the state of the historic Liberal Party. Generally, the fourteen by-election seats gained by Unionists from Liberals, and the role played in those losses by Labour interventions, are quoted in support of the ill-health thesis;[4] but other historians such as Roy Douglas have emphasised Liberal successes in taking Labour seats in Hanley (1912) and Chesterfield (1913), as well as some better results against the Unionists on the eve of the war.

Examining the votes cast in all the by-elections, not just seats changing hands, and sorting them by time and type of contest (critical psephological niceties all too often forgotten by historians), the picture becomes clear but complex. To simplify, I focus on one measure, the change in the Unionist share of the vote.[5] In 1912, up to the completion of the Liberal government's National Insurance legislation in December, the swing to the Unionists in the 23 contested by-elections was miniscule (mean 0.4 percentage points); in the 16 clear cases, Liberal/Unionist straight fights directly comparable with December 1910, it was a little larger (1.2). The Asquith government re-elected in December 1910 enjoyed twelve months of reasonable popularity.

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In 1912 and 1913 the picture changed dramatically as the Marconi scandal and other problems threatened. In all 33 contested by-elections, the pro-Unionist swing was 4.8 per cent; in the 18 clear cases it was 4.6 per cent. Given the large number of marginal seats at that period, any general election taking place with a swing on that scale would have put the Unionists back in power.

Then, although we have only eight contests in 1914 before the wartime truce took effect, another dramatic change is clear;[6] as Unionists grappled with the conundrum of how to be loyal both to the Crown and to Ulster, the Unionist vote actually dropped (0.1 per cent in all eight; 1.5 per cent in the solitary clear case). But the press headlines told a different story: the

Unionists gained four seats, all narrowly and three of them on a split in the anti-Unionist vote.

Here lies the material for rival predictions as to a hypothetical 1915 general election. If the Liberal and Labour parties fought each other on any scale, that could have allowed a Unionist victory. But if the nearly comprehensive pact of 1910 had been replicated, the Liberals would have been returned as the largest party, with Labour as an ally. Since the by-elections also showed the Liberal Party easily beating Labour challengers, it is likely that such a pact would have been agreed – otherwise Labour stood to lose most of its presence in parliament.

Local elections did show a small, net Labour advance – but as half the total Labour advance across the whole country was in Yorkshire, too much cannot be made of that, though the contrast in local elections between Yorkshire and Lancashire throws an interesting light on Peter Clarke's findings.[7]

Electoral support is not the only test of a political party's health, but it is a good one. On that basis, the historic Liberal Party showed no overt sign of disease in summer 1914. For an incumbent government, its support was holding up well against its main opponent; it was easily beating off the threat of a rival to its electoral base (more so, indeed, than the Conservatives were able to against UKIP in 2014); and it would probably have been re-elected for a fourth term in 1915.

That, of course, does not rule out another version of the 'natural causes' hypothesis – that the patient/party suffered from some hidden but inexorable medical problem or innate weakness which had yet to surface. The case of the other party killed by Wilson's omnibus throws light on what that might be.

For three decades, the Irish Nationalist MPs had held the firm allegiance of the nationally minded (or Catholic) Irish vote, despite the Parnellite split and despite the failure to have made much progress towards home rule. By 1914 they were close to that goal. Yet in 1918 (indeed also in by-elections towards the end of the war) they were utterly swept away by a rival party, Sinn Féin, dedicated to a much more far-reaching goal and a very different strategy.

There is little need to debate why. Wartime conditions altered the perceptions of force as a legitimate and effective means of attaining political goals, as well as the likely reaction of the authorities towards the use of force. The Easter 1916 rebellion followed, and then the brutal treatment of its leaders; their 'sacrifice' swung Irish opinion, and Redmond's party became irrelevant. So the Irish Party was not so much killed instantly by the omnibus as failed to survive what followed; or to shift the allegory, it expired in a radically changed environment.

The total war of 1914–18 put political parties, as with all institutions which had developed during the previous century of generally peaceful change, under totally new stresses. Some by their inner logic and character could survive (or even prosper) in such conditions; some found it more difficult, even impossible. Why should that have been such a strain for the historic Liberal Party?

Peace was in the core DNA of the party, expressed in its mission triptych, whether linked with Retrenchment and Reform or Reform and Liberation. Free trade had been central to the union of Whigs, Radicals and Peelites that formed it in 1859; Cobdenite evangelists for free trade always preached the peace-inducing effect of their cause. In 1868 Gladstone had defined his mission as bringing peace to Ireland; reforms – disestablishment, tenant rights and later home rule were means to that end. John Morley saw Gladstone's acceptance of the *Alabama* arbitration as adding 'brightest lustre to his fame', an action which Roy Jenkins described as 'the greatest triumph of nineteenth-century rationalist internationalism over short-sighted jingoism'.[8] The Liberal Party resisted late nineteenth century jingoism, and lost some support over its stance on questions like the Sudan or the Anglo-Boer War.

The landslide 1906 victory consolidated the Liberal sense that the party stood for peace, emphasising efficient, rational defence expenditure rather than Unionist profligacy. Campbell-Bannerman's personal electoral address condemned 'costly and confused War Office experiments'; the Liberal Imperialist Grey wrote of halting 'spendthrift … expenditure' on defence.[9] Capitalist and pacifist elements in the party sang in harmony. In 1910, Liberal candidates mentioned defence rather less and by the December election it had become a strongly Unionist tune, with 89 per cent of their candidates stressing defence as an issue compared with only 37 per cent of Liberal ones.[10]

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Thus the peace-promoting Liberal Party was clearly uncomfortable in the atmosphere of escalating armaments leading up to 1914. It stuck to its faith in a naval defence strategy to protect Britain, with international arbitration as the way to prevent war. Though Unionists were mainly on the attack over Ireland, the Lords and Marconi, there was also an incessant demand, especially in the right-wing press, for a stronger, more expensive, probably conscription-necessitating, more land-based defence strategy. The 1911 Agadir crisis caught the Liberal cabinet divided, with the once pro-Boer Lloyd George delivered a sharp warning to Germany in his Mansion House speech in July 1911; this calculated switch from dove to hawk had been cleared with Asquith and Grey, but not the cabinet – Morley and Loreburn saw the Chancellor's intervention as provocative and aggressive.[11]

Liberal MPs and the party at large were disturbed. The alliances by then in place meant that if the European powers went to war, support for France against Germany meant support for Czarist Russia, in Liberal activist eyes one of the more brutal and illiberal regimes in Europe. The Liberal rank and file turned out during the winter of 1911–12 to promote a campaign for Anglo-German understanding, moved more by belief in arbitration and dislike of Czarist oppression than by any love for the Kaiser.[12]

So when war loomed between Germany/Austria-Hungary and France/Russia in summer 1914, the Liberal Party was potentially deeply divided. That split was averted by the German invasion of Belgium, which turned a Great Power quarrel into a moral crusade on behalf of international law and small peaceful nations, so uniting all but a few Liberals. If the troops had really come home by Christmas, a united Liberal Party could

still have faced the electorate successfully in 1915.

It was not to be. The drawn-out land war (negating the assumptions of Liberal Imperialist strategists), the militarisation of life, the irrational and implicitly racist anti-German hysteria, the deeply divisive introduction of conscription and the arrogance of the conservative elite of military leaders (who sentenced conscientious objectors to death, to be reprieved at Asquith's insistence) all challenged Liberal values. The Labour Party was more divided by the outbreak of war, but as war did not challenge its raison d'être, the mobilisation of the working class interest, it could recover. For the historic Liberal Party, the belief that reason, trade and moral principle could together bring peace was close to a raison d'être.

It is an exaggeration to see this belief as being as central to Liberal identity as class was to Labour's. But it was an important constituent in the glue that held together the disparate elements making up the party. It was a key part of the historic Liberal Party's faith that it possessed the capacity to foresee and manage progress, and so promote the best common or national interest. With that glue softened by years of all-out war, the disparate elements looked to their particular interests and a different, Conservative, view of the nation's interest came to prevail. Liberal self-confidence and credibility evaporated. The party's historic role had gone.

This is a rather different version of the Wilson thesis. The evidence is that the historic Liberal Party was in pretty good health in 1914 and was not fatally injured by a single traumatic event. It may be better likened to an individual required by an unexpected event to alter their whole style of life. The new style made severe demands, which suited some individuals and not others; this one's particular character, which had previously served it so well, could not cope so well with those demands. Decline and a much reduced role in life followed.

This is also not far from a Darwinian version of the 'natural causes' thesis, understanding the impact of war as dependent on the character of each party. It was not the force of the omnibus hit, nor previous disease, that decided the outcome; it was a cruel form of natural selection in a harsh new environment.

The evidence is that the historic Liberal Party was in pretty good health in 1914 and was not fatally injured by a single traumatic event. It may be better likened to an individual required by an unexpected event to alter their whole style of life.

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1 Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914–1935* (London, 1966), especially pp. 18–19.

2 In a members' ballot the South Wales Miners Federation selected J. Winstone as the Labour candidate over the miners' agent in Merthyr Tydfil (C. B. Stanton) by 7,832 to 6,232. Stanton then stood as a pro-war Independent Labour candidate in the by-election on 25 November 1915, defeating Winstone by 10,286 to 6,080. In 1918 Stanton was re-elected as Coalition Labour (NDP) with a massive vote (78.6 per cent) over the official Labour candidate, though he was then defeated on a massive 35.8 per cent swing in 1922. There is no Liberal parallel to this indicator of Labour voters' attitude to the Great War at successive stages.

3 Labour had held Woolwich East unopposed in 1918, and was to hold the seat continuously from 1922 until it went SDP in 1983. But in the March 1921 by-election MacDonald was defeated by the Conservative candidate, a working-class war hero with Coalition Labour (NDP) antecedents.

4 Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *A History of British Elections Since 1689* (London, 2014) lists all 20 seats changing hands at by-elections in 1911–14 (table 11.10, p. 289), including a Liberal gain from Unionist in Londonderry not included in my analysis. Cook and Stevenson (p. 290) conclude that the evidence points to 'Liberal decline', but do not distinguish between by-elections held in 1912–13 and those held in 1914.

5 My analysis covers all British by-elections in 1911–14; figures taken from F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (London, 1974). It may seem counter-intuitive to measure Liberal health by reference to the change in the Unionist vote, but as we are concerned with the state of the historic Liberal Party's broad support at a period when that included a partial pact with Labour, change in the Unionist vote best captures this. The 1911–13 figures show that the change in the Unionist vote was very similar in the 34 clear cases to what it was including the 22 more complex ones (three-cornered fights or comparison with an earlier election where was no contest in December 1910).

6 The methodology and 1911–13 figures discussed in footnote 5 are crucial here. In 1914 there was only one clear case (Grimsby in May – with a switch from a Liberal Unionist label to simple Unionist), so the evidence of the seven other contests is critical for Grimsby's significance. The only other Unionist/Liberal straight fight in 1914, Wycombe in February, also saw a Liberal recovery, but compared with January 1910, as there was no contest in December 1910. See also Iain McLean, *What's Wrong with the British Constitution?* (Oxford, 2010), Figure 11.1, p. 230. McLean measures public opinion by the average Unionist vote at by-elections, rather than the change in the Unionist share; he shows a very similar pattern to my analysis, except that his method identifies the drop in the Unionist level of support as occurring in early autumn 1913. My analysis identifies the first sign of the change at a by-election in the tiny Wick Burghs constituency on 8 December 1913. Ignoring three-cornered fights, there are three by-election tests of Unionist/Liberal support in the December 1913 to May 1914 period. All showed a swing from Unionist to Liberal since the previous contest, with an average of 2.4 per cent.

7 P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971) provides support for the good pre-war health of the Liberal Party, based mainly on evidence from that region.

8 Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London, 1995), pp. 356–57, quoting John Morley in full.

9 Taken from more extensive quotations in A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide – The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot, 1973), p. 70; Russell summed up his analysis of Liberal candidates' election addresses as painting 'their belief in arbitration and rationality in international affairs on the canvas of alleged Unionist irresponsibility and war' (p. 69).

10 Analysis of individual candidates' election addresses in Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People – The British General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972), p. 326.

11 Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers – How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London, 2012), pp. 209–11.

12 Ibid., p 236.

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SIR EDWARD GREY AND LIB

To the historically conscious at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the name of Sir Edward Grey encapsulates a range of often barely understood impressions of Britain's past. It conjures up images of the long recessional, of the glorious Edwardian summer drawing to a thunderous close, of the moment when 'the lamps [were] going out all over Europe'.[1] Grey's tenure of the Foreign Office remains contested, but for now his critics dominate the field. More, he seems to stand for the failings of the upper-class amateurs who made up the Edwardian political class. To the wider public he is portrayed as 'a b***dy awful Foreign Secretary',[2] a frock-coated 'donkey' who, through incompetence and obstinacy, plunged Britain into war, leaving it then to the brass-hatted asses to lead the British army onto Flanders' fields.[3] **Professor T. G. Otte** examines Grey's record in the run-up to war.

HADOW OF WAR

BERAL FOREIGN POLICY BEFORE 1914

It is one of the many ironic twists of modern British politics – and of the history of the Liberal Party more especially – that Grey's historical persona is largely the product of David Lloyd George's poisonous pen. His wartime memoirs – self-serving and dishonest by any standard – were meant to settle old scores and to cement his own leadership credentials, and to that end the reputations of Asquith and Grey had to be eviscerated on the altar which the Welsh idol had erected for himself. Lloyd George dismissed Grey as more ignorant of foreign affairs than any other cabinet minister, and suggested that his 'personality was distinctly one of the elements that contributed to the great catastrophe' because he was 'not made for prompt action'.[4] It is little wonder that Margot Asquith should have wished to dance on Lloyd George's grave. As for Grey, he was too refined and too reserved for any such display of emotion. And here, perhaps, lies part of the explanation for Grey's low political reputation. His aloof personality and his own reluctance to refute Lloyd George, reinforced by his increasing blindness and compounded by family tragedies, left him an easy target. Indeed, 'neither [Grey's] admirers nor his critics know quite what they should say about him.'[5]

Grey's low reputation stands in sharp contrast to the high esteem in which he was held throughout his long public career. His political longevity, indeed, is remarkable. First elected for Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1885 – not natural Liberal territory then, Percy influence and the Anglican clergy usually ranged against him – he continued to represent the seat in parliament for the next thirty-one years.[6] For exactly eleven of these he was foreign secretary, irreplaceable if not always irreproachable. Grey, in fact, remains the longest, continually serving occupant of the office since the creation of the Foreign Office in 1782. Palmerston and Salisbury held its seals for longer overall – fourteen years and nine months in Palmerston's case and thirteen years, seven months in Salisbury's – but the former occupied the post three times and the latter four times. Amongst twentieth-century foreign secretaries, Antony Eden comes close with ten years and three months, yet he, too, took the Foreign Office on three occasions. But Grey was also vital to the inner workings of the last Liberal government as an essential connecting tube between different sections of the party. This role and the position which he occupied in the Liberal ideological spectrum make him a useful prism through which to study the variegated nature of Edwardian Liberalism, its fault lines and problems. Even so, it is on his stewardship of foreign affairs, and the degree to which he succeeded or failed in tackling its many challenges, that his reputation rests.

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Sir Edward Grey (1862–1933) in 1914

Grey's social background set him somewhat apart from the bulk of the 1905 administration. He was one of a handful of aristocrats – Crewe, Harcourt and, later, Churchill being others – amongst men mostly middle class by descent, profession or habits. Birrell and Haldane or McKenna and Morley, and indeed Asquith, were more representative of the *embourgeoisement* of the Liberal Party at Westminster and in the country at large. Grey's pedigree, however, was unquestionably Liberal. His family, the border Greys, was perhaps better known for its military and naval exploits – his great-great-grandfather, the 1st Earl Grey, was 'No Flint Grey' of North American fame, and his great-grandfather, the 1st Baronet, had been Nelson's flag captain on HMS *Victory* – or its ecclesiastical eminence – his great-grand-uncle was the Bishop of Hereford and through his paternal grandmother he was descended from two further bishops (Lichfield and London), and there was also a Wilberforce connection as well as, more curiously, one with Cardinal Manning.

But amongst the many admirals and generals, the scattering of clergymen, and the odd colonial governor, the Northumberland Greys had also achieved a certain political prominence in recent years. They had produced one prime minister, his great-grand-uncle, the 2nd Earl, one of the stars in Liberal firmament since 1832,

and his grandfather, Sir George Grey, three-times home secretary ('Prime Minister for Home Affairs') and one of the mainstays of Liberal cabinets from 1839 until 1866. From him, '[c]areful in action and moderate in speech',[7] Edward Grey inherited a strong patrician sense of public service. But he was also descended from the Whitbreads, the Bedfordshire brewers and Liberal politicians; and he was connected to the Whig cousinhood, albeit in its more recent extension. The Baring earls of Northbrook were relatives, as were the earls of Gainsborough.[8] Indeed, his background, familial connections and his private and public identification with rural Northumberland and Hampshire made Grey a much more recognisably English politician, a rarity in a party now dominated by the 'Celtic fringe'. Even Asquith and Churchill, as Anglo-Saxon as could be, after all, represented Scottish constituencies.[9]

Grey's political outlook also deserves closer attention. Given his association with Rosebery, in some ways one of his political mentors, and with Asquith and Haldane, his contemporaries in the Liberal League, Grey tends to be labelled as a Liberal Imperialist. He was that, but the label captures and privileges only part of his politics. These were more complex and variegated than the LImp label would suggest, even if Grey himself was far from the 'compleat politician', as his part in the clumsy Relugas intrigue against Campbell-Bannerman in 1905 underlined.[10] If anything, in his views on domestic affairs, he was closer to the Radicals than to any other Liberal grouping. He was part of a progressive caucus among members of the 1885/6 intakes, guided by John Morley, who 'may be said to have been our [political] foster parent':

> '[W]e were thrown together instantly as members of a little group of advanced Liberals, which formed itself soon after the General Election. The group consisted of Asquith, Edward Grey, Haldane, Arthur Acland, Tom Ellis and myself [Sydney Buxton]. We were personal friends, holding the same progressive views, and anxious as far as possible to advance these views. We sat together, worked together, introduced Bills together, and supported one another by speech and vote'.[11]

Grey was driven by a strong sense of the growing 'democratisation' of British society and politics. Even if he himself did not feel entirely comfortable with the new age of mass politics, the era of the common man was approaching, and it behoved the old elites to smooth its progress. This consideration was at the root of Grey's support for MPs' salaries to allow working men to enter parliament, his advocacy of land reform, his pro-home-rule stance, and his championing of women's suffrage when many leading Liberals were opposed to it, though not as fiercely usually as their wives. Of course, there were pragmatic calculations of political advantage at work here, too. An infusion of working men at Westminster would broaden the Liberals' base and so facilitate their survival as a truly 'national' party. Resisting such reforms, by contrast, would lead to social disintegration and class warfare, the break-up of the Liberal Party and political chaos.[12] But Grey pursued such schemes because he thought them to be right and necessary. Independence of thought, he observed in the House of Commons during a debate on MPs' salaries in words that have a familiar ring to them even at the distance of over a century, 'is not a monopoly of men of wealth and leisure … . [I]n our excessive anxiety to make sure Members are men of leisure, we not only get the men who are by nature and habit leisurely outside the House but who introduce habits of leisure into business inside the House.'[13]

In a similar vein he supported the female franchise because he understood the 'sense of injustice of [women] being deprived of the vote.'[14] Indeed, according to John Burns, the workingman Liberal minister, 'Grey ha[d] become almost obsessed by his fanatic adhesion to his cause.'[15] Support for it fitted a pattern of piecemeal constitutional reform to enlarge the democratic element in British politics. It was for this reason that Grey, in his Leith speech of December 1909, advocated reforming the House of Lords, by substituting popular elections for the hereditary principle, as necessary in terms of facilitating the transition to democratic politics and as the only practically viable alternative to a unicameral solution, which he regarded as dangerous.[16] Grey was, indeed, as A. J. Balfour observed with acuity, 'a curious combination of the old-fashioned Whig and the Socialist'.[17] For those to whom a Tory judgment may be suspect, Prince Lichnowsky, the German ambassador, a man of great intelligence and perception, later reflected that '[Grey] joined the left wing of the party and sympathised with Socialists and pacifists. One might call him a Socialist in the most ideal sense [of the term], for he carries the theory [of socialism] into his private life, which is marked by greatest simplicity and unpretentiousness, although he is possessed of ample means.'[18]

Grey was driven by a strong sense of the growing 'democratisation' of British society and politics. Even if he himself did not feel entirely comfortable with the new age of mass politics, the era of the common man was approaching, and it behoved the old elites to smooth its progress.

Whatever Grey's reforming instincts at home, on foreign policy he parted company with the Radicals, whose international pacifism made for loose thinking and self-delusions. His outlook, by contrast, was shaped by J. R. Seeley's *Expansion of England* with its emphasis on the imperial theme in Britain's post-1688 development, in sharp distinction from the usual Whig themes of the advance of constitutional governance and liberty.[19] If Seeley gave a degree of intellectual rigour to Grey's views, his favourite country pursuit offers a glimpse into Grey, the man and the politician. The qualities required to succeed in fly-fishing would serve any diplomat or politician well. They need to be alert to 'the untoward tricks' of wind and currents. These could not be overcome 'by sheer strength', but had to to be 'dodge[d] and defeat[ed] unobtrusively'. For this '[q]uiet, steady, intelligent effort' was needed; and the sportsman 'should make guesses founded upon something which he has noticed, and be ever on the watch for some further indications to turn the guess into a conclusion. […] But there is a third [quality] … It is self-control.'[20]

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Given Grey's association in the public mind with the events of 1914, historians have tended to view his foreign secretaryship through the prism of Anglo-German

relations. This is a problematic. For by privileging the German aspect it produces a skewed perspective on Edwardian foreign policy. It is imperative to keep in view its global, imperial character. In equal measure a European and an Asiatic power, Britain had a global strategic paradigm which linked her dispersed interests. The only other comparable power in this respect was Russia. Only she had the capacity to affect British interests on both continents. There was nothing novel about the Russian factor in British foreign policy. Indeed, it had been a constant in Britain's strategic equation since the 1820s, if not before.[21] International politics were anything but stable during Grey's period at the helm of the Foreign Office, however, and British policy faced unprecedented challenges. Russia's double crisis – catastrophic military defeat abroad and the subsequent turmoil at home – eliminated her as an international factor for the foreseeable future after 1905. London's strategic calculus thus was complicated by Russia's weakness and her resurgence from 1912 onwards.

The shifts in the international landscape on account of the waning and waxing of Russia's might established the broad strategic parameters of Grey's policy. There was a further significant factor which influenced his outlook: his political generation's experience of Britain's relative isolation in the 1890s. In the years after 1900, Grey toyed with the notion of a 'new course' in foreign policy. Its aim was a rapprochement with Russia 'to eliminate in that quarter the German broker, who keeps England & Russia apart and levies a constant commission upon us.'[22] Dispensing with Berlin's brokering services was the operative idea here; and it shaped Grey's thinking after 1905, as an internal minute from early 1909 testified. Britain 'used "to lean on Germany"' in the 1880s and 1890s, he noted: '[W]e were kept on bad terms with France & Russia. We were sometimes on the brink of war with one or the other; & Germany took toll of us when it suited her.'[23]

For as long as Britain was locked into antagonistic relations with France and Russia, it proved impossible to escape from this relative dependence on Germany. But the 1904 Anglo-French colonial compromise and now the crippling of Russian power had transformed Britain's strategic position. It presented an opportunity, but there were also risks attached to it. Russia's prostration made her biddable and so facilitated a compromise to defuse the 'Great Game', the struggle for mastery in Asia that had bedevilled relations between the two countries for so long. On the other hand, her decline had unhinged the European equilibrium. No longer threatened by the prospect of a two-front war, Germany was free now to throw her weight about. This was the root cause of the European crises after 1905.

The shifts in the international landscape on account of the waning and waxing of Russia's might established the broad strategic parameters of Grey's policy. There was a further significant factor which influenced his outlook: his political generation's experience of Britain's relative isolation in the 1890s.

The Anglo-French convention of April 1904 was the work of Grey's predecessor, Lord Lansdowne. But he had supported this colonial compromise as an act of overdue imperial consolidation that would remove any leverage which the not entirely honest broker in Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse (the location of Germany's foreign office) had over Britain.[24] The agreement remained a 'cardinal point in our foreign policy' for Grey. Indeed, 'the spirit of the agreement is more important than the letter of the agreement', he argued.[25] Several historians have criticised Grey's apparent preoccupation with the 'spirit' of the convention, with the implication that he neglected Britain's national interests.[26] This is a grotesque caricature. For Grey had not irrevocably committed Britain to France. Given the international instability after 1905, he followed a policy of constructive ambiguity. When, during the first Moroccan crisis, the French ambassador 'put *the* question … directly & formally' – that is, would Britain support France in the event of a continental war – Grey promised 'benevolent neutrality', but intimated that the British public 'would be strongly moved in favour of France', provided she did not commit an act of aggression.[27] Such carefully dosed assurances also extended to the controversial military talks, which Grey authorised to continue in January 1906. The advantages of learning the details of French military planning aside,[28] Paris had to be prevented from buckling under pressure from Berlin. If that happened, the colonial agreement of 1904 was likely to unravel, and with it Britain's position in Egypt. Whatever assurances of support were given, however, they had to be conditional so as to ensure that France did not provoke Germany. This was meant to render impossible any 'independent action' by France without prior consultation with Britain. A British guarantee was out of the question. Such an undertaking would be 'a very serious [matter] … it changes the Entente into an Alliance – and Alliances, especially continental Alliances, are not in accordance with our traditions.'[29]

Carefully phrased statements addressed to Berlin were the reverse of Grey's constructive ambiguity in dealings with the French. London 'did not wish to make trouble', the Wilhelmstrasse was told, but this assurance was coupled with the hint that, were Germany to fall upon France, 'it would be impossible [for Britain] to remain neutral.'[30] Grey's stance compelled both France and Germany to act with restraint, the former to secure Britain's support, the latter to prevent her from entering any continental conflict. This was not traditional balance-of-power politics; Russia's weakness made that impossible. It was rather a form of British neo-Bismarckianism, to which the Edwardian generation was attracted.[31]

Grey stuck to this line in subsequent years. The Anglo-French notes of November 1912, and the 'division of labour' between the two navies underlined this. The arrangement was an exercise in *entente* management and in containing Germany, but without committing the government to any particular course of action. Britain had the flexibility and the strength to forge a policy commensurate with her regional interests. Decision-makers in London were 'faced with alternatives, not necessities.'[32] Britain's degree of leverage over Paris was confirmed by none other than the French president. As the Sarajevo crisis reached its climax, Raymond Poincaré recorded in his diary that '[o]n account of the ambiguous attitude of England, we let it be known at St. Petersburg … .'[33] Although not altogether free of duplicity, advising Russia not to precipitate matters was dictated by the necessity of carrying Britain with the Franco-Russian group.

Britain's dealings with France were conditioned by the changing value of the Russian factor. Grey's attitude towards Russia, however, was complex. As any right-thinking Liberal, he was suspicious of tsarist autocracy. In the spring of 1917, out of office now, he 'rejoice[d] at seeing Russia purge her Gov[ernmen]t & strike out for freedom.'[34] No doubt, such overt ideological hostility especially amongst the Radicals complicated dealings with St Petersburg. Grey's Russian policy was nevertheless driven by pragmatic considerations of British global strategic interests. He appreciated the broader view that the waning of Russian power disrupted the European equilibrium. It was desirable, therefore, that Russia was soon 're-established in the councils of Europe & I hope on better terms with us than she has yet been.'[35] But he also understood that Russia's recent decline allowed for settling matters in Asia. Such an arrangement would help to consolidate the security glacis around India, including the Persian Gulf: 'And if we don't make an agreement, we shall be worried into occupying Seistan and I know not how much besides' – and overstretch would beckon.[36]

By any standard, the 1907 Anglo-Russian convention was a considerable success, but Grey's policy towards Russia suggests a deeper understanding that this imperial compromise was no more than a temporary alignment, made possible by Russia's weakness and likely to loosen again once Russia recovered her strength. British policy could not control Russia, but nor did Grey give in to Russian blackmail during the Bosnian crisis of 1908–9.[37] Nor, for that matter, could he prevent the subsequent rise of Austro-Russian antagonism in the Balkans.[38] In many ways, a Romanov–Habsburg settlement in the region would have diffused the most explosive international flashpoint: '[A] war between them [Austria-Hungary and Russia] would be very inconvenient. I do not think that we could take part in it, and intervene on the Russian side in a Balkan War, and yet our absenteeism would prove a danger to the present grouping of European Powers.'[39]

During the two Balkan wars of 1912–13 Grey continued his even-handed policy by supporting joint action by the powers as the only means of preventing an Austro-Russian rupture.[40] Lack of influence over Russia remained a problem, but Grey did not privilege preserving the wire to St Petersburg over maintaining the international concert. He could not do so because the two were linked. Without coordination with the Franco-Russian group, there was no prospect of moderating St Petersburg, in which case Germany was unlikely to keep Vienna in check. The challenge was to balance these competing demands. That this could be done was demonstrated by Grey's surefooted mediation and his skilful presiding over the London ambassadorial conference, in many ways the zenith of his international influence. There was, however, a tension between the two objects, and Grey was alive to the inherent risks of this policy. By 1913–4, he had begun to realise that international politics was on the cusp of major change, and it seemed better to stay one's hand until the pieces had settled into a new pattern: 'The best course … is to let things go on as they are without any new declaration of policy. The alternatives are either a policy of complete isolation in Europe, or a policy of definite alliance with one or the other group of European Powers.' Indeed, Grey knew that 'we have been fortunate in being able to go on for so long as we are' without having to choose.[41]

Russia's recovery from the nadir of 1905 complicated Anglo-Russian relations and Great Power politics in general. More robust Russian proceedings in Persia raised doubts about the continued viability of the 1907 compromise.[42] Renegotiating the compact, Grey thought, would be awkward: 'all along we want something, and have nothing to give. It is therefore difficult to see how a good bargain is to be made.'[43] A Franco-Russian attempt to coax Britain into a naval agreement complicated matters further.[44] Grey was adamant that no such deal with Russia was possible, even if it was not politic to say so to St Petersburg.[45] Any move in that direction would impair relations with Germany, so much improved in the last eighteen months before Europe's last summer: 'we are on good terms with Germany now and we desire to avoid if possible a revival of friction with her, and we wish to discourage the French from provoking Germany.'[46]

Steering such a course was nevertheless beset with practical difficulties, largely because Grey and the Foreign Office found it well nigh impossible to read Germany. *Pace* some historians, they did not invent the 'German threat' to suit some psychological need on their part.

The cooling of relations with Russia and the détente with Berlin were linked. Indeed, the state of Anglo-German relations had been very much a function of those with the Russian empire since at least 1878. Even so, it would be a perverse attempt at revisionism to suggest that the antagonism between Britain and Germany after 1905 did not exist. But in terms of high politics it was short-lived, and it needs to be placed in its proper context. The nexus with Anglo-Russian relations aside, Grey strove for the same even-handedness in his dealings with Germany as characterised his policy towards France and Russia. 'Real isolation of Germany would mean war', he thought, but 'so would the domination of Germany in Europe. There is a fairly wide course between the two extremes in which European politics should steer.'[47]

Steering such a course was nevertheless beset with practical difficulties, largely because Grey and the Foreign Office found it well nigh impossible to read Germany. *Pace* some historians, they did not invent the 'German threat' to suit some psychological need on their part. If any thing the nature and direction of Germany's ambitions, and the motivations that underpinned them, appeared confused. The kaiser's glittering public persona – so unlike Grey's in almost every way – was one complication. 'I am tired of the Emperor', he confessed, '– he is like a great battleship with steam up and the screws going but no rudder and you cannot tell what he will run into or what catastrophe he will cause.'[48] More fundamentally, uncertainty about Germany mirrored the strategic confusion at the heart of German policy. As Zara Steiner has observed, '[a]s the Germans themselves were divided, no foreign secretary, however acute, could have accurately read the German riddle'.[49] Official *Weltpolitik* rhetoric, emanating from the Wilhelmstrasse and its pliant press, covered that puzzle in stardust but it offered no real clues as to what Germany really wanted.

Grey's policy towards Germany sought to combine accommodation

with compellence. He was ready to make concessions to satisfy legitimate German ambitions, but not at the price of sacrificing Britain's naval supremacy or her relations with other powers. To some degree, Grey's readiness to accommodate Germany was shaped by the ideological divisions in the Liberal Party between 'navalists' and 'economists'. But his attempts to negotiate a naval agreement with Berlin was also driven by his conviction that the various arms races between the powers risked ruining them. They faced a danger, 'greater … than that of war – the danger of bleeding to death in times of peace.'[50]

Any naval agreement with Berlin, however, had to be based on reciprocity.[51] And this proved to be the nub of the problem. In 1909 and 1913, Grey's policy of compellence, tempered by conciliation, appeared to have manoeuvred Berlin to where he wanted it to be, ready to settle the naval question and to agree to a fixed ratio of capital ships.[52] Both sides, however, misread the situation, and the talks remained fruitless. Grey reasoned, not entirely inaccurately, that growing financial pressures would force Germany to curb her naval programme. In Berlin, by contrast, Grey was thought to be under the thumb of the Radicals who were calling for retrenchment and social reform. Ultimately, the German demand for a political formula to complement a naval convention, in effect a British neutrality pledge, was a step too far. It would have given Berlin a blank cheque to resort to preventive war.[53] Neither Haldane nor Churchill in 1912 and 1913 was able to remove this obstacle. But by then the Anglo-German naval race was over. German defence spending had come up against a fiscal ceiling, compounded by the accelerating French and Russian (and Belgian) armaments programmes on land, and threatening to trigger a constitutional crisis in Germany. The 1913 German army channelled funding away from the navy, and was, in effect, a unilateral German declaration of naval arms limitation.[54]

Grey understood well enough the reasons behind Berlin's now more emollient tone: '[I]t is not the love of our beautiful eyes, but the extra 50 million required for increasing the German Army.'[55] Even so, he refrained from exploiting Germany's difficulties for political gain. It seemed politic to let matters run their natural course. Any attempt to formalise the end of the naval race ran the risk of prolonging it by encouraging Tirpitz and his supporters to mount a rearguard action against the shift in defence spending. With this in mind, Grey stopped Churchill from travelling to Germany to meet the kaiser on the fringes of the Kiel regatta in June 1914. Even under very different circumstances, the idea of letting these two mercurial men, liable at the best of times to be carried away by their own rhetoric, settle matters had little to recommend itself to Grey.[56] But in 1914 such a visit was likely to cause more problems than could be resolved afterwards by Grey and his diplomats.

As naval matters receded into the background in 1913/14, there was a growing sense in diplomatic circles of '*une détente et … un rapprochement*' between Britain and Germany.[57] This was not merely a question of atmospherics. A fortnight before Sarajevo, the two governments concluded an agreement on Near Eastern affairs, which aimed 'to prevent all causes of misunderstandings between Germany and Britain', and which, it was hoped, would provide a platform for further arrangements.[58] Grey certainly was determined to build on it: 'the German Gov[ernmen]t are in a peaceful mood and they are anxious to be on good terms with England, a mood which he [Grey] wishes to encourage.' International politics were on the cusp of change. As the Franco-Russian group regained its strength, so Britain could revert to her traditional balancing role. She could now act as 'the connecting link' between Berlin, Paris and St Petersburg, and so help to restrain 'the hastiness of Austria and Italy.'[59] There is, in fact, a substantial body of circumstantial evidence to suggest that Grey was ready to go further and to explore the possibility of a more substantive rapprochement. For this purpose his private secretary was meant to visit Germany on a secret mission. Ultimately, the visit never materialised. It had to be postponed several times, and was finally scheduled for July 1914 – but by then another matter occupied the minds of Grey and the German chancellor.[60]

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To some extent, the episode was yet another amongst countless such failed initiatives that litter the pages of diplomatic history books. But to see it in this light means to miss its real significance. For it underlines the essential flexibility of British foreign policy. In 1914, Grey and his officials anticipated another shift in the constellation of the powers. Russia's resurgence tilted the military balance against Germany, but also left a question mark over Anglo-Russian relations in Asia. Some repositioning on Britain's part then seemed necessary, and a rapprochement with Germany was an option worth pursuing. The episode therefore also suggests the need to reconsider Grey's policy in more general terms. Grey did not privilege relations with France and Russia, and to that extent he was not '*ententiste à outrance*'. Supporting France was the correct policy response in 1905 and 1911; an Asiatic arrangement with Russia was practical politics after 1905; and maintaining it after 1907 served Britain's global, strategic interests. But Grey was not willing to adhere to both agreements beyond the point at which they ceased to be useful policy tools. And yet, Grey *was* '*ententiste*' in that the Near Eastern agreement with German conformed to the principles that had informed the arrangements with France and Russia. Like them, it was meant to consolidate Britain's international position by accommodating a rival without sacrificing vital interests. This has broader implications for scholarly interpretations of pre-1914 foreign policy. For it calls into question the descriptive and analytical value of the notion of a 'policy of the ententes'. No such policy existed in the sense of a commitment to France and Russia. It did exist as a strategy of imperial consolidation through targeted and limited concessions to actual or potential competitors; and this was in a line of continuity with much of British foreign policy since the Crimean War.

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The détente with Germany and the underlying sense Great Power politics were on the verge of a major transformation established

the parameters of Grey's diplomatic moves in July 1914. From the moment the news of the Sarajevo murders reached London, he was fully alert to the risk of escalation. Indeed, he was 'rather nervous as regards Austria & Servia.'[61] His room for manoeuvre, however, was limited, both on account of foreign policy calculations and of domestic constraints. The latter were not insignificant. Any premature intervention had the potential to split party unity, always brittle in matters of foreign policy. At the same time, any firm indication of Britain's stance was liable to trigger unwelcome reactions by the other powers.

Grey's interviews with the German and Russian ambassadors on 6 and 8 July constituted a form of early, if indirect, intervention. The peaceful resolution of the Sarajevo crisis depended on cooperation with Germany. Already the previous Balkan turmoil had demonstrated this. The groupings of the powers were not to 'draw apart', Grey warned and promised that he 'would use all the influence [he] could to mitigate difficulties.'[62] It was vital, moreover, that the Russian government reassured Germany, 'and convince her that no *coup* was being prepared against her.'[63] If it failed to do so, a diplomatic solution would prove elusive. The resurgence of Russia made the alliance with Austria-Hungary more important for Berlin, and 'the more valuable will be the Austrian alliance for Germany, and the more leverage Austria will have over Germany.' Indeed, Grey sought to instil a sense of urgency in both the Russian and German ambassadors: 'The idea that this terrible crime might unexpectedly produce a general war with all its attendant catastrophes – after all the great efforts in recent years to avoid it … "made his hair stand on edge".'[64]

In this manner, Grey signalled British concerns about a possible escalation, coupled with a reminder that London could not be ignored if matters were to escalate. Even so, the focus in the scholarly literature on Grey's actions in the summer of 1914, whether by commission or omission, is misplaced. For at the root of the escalating crisis was the reluctance of France and Russia to listen to counsels of moderation, and the fact that the Wilhelmstrasse turned a deaf ear to the warnings of its man in London. For Grey there were good practical reasons for pursuing the course he had chosen. Recent experience had reinforced the importance of Anglo-German cooperation in settling problems in South Eastern Europe; and throughout the first half of 1914 everything seemed to indicate German willingness to establish closer ties with Britain. Any direct warning addressed to Berlin would abort joint crisis management, and might drive Germany into a preventive war, precisely what Grey – and his contemporaries and later critics – wished to avoid.[65]

That criticism of Grey is coloured largely by a Lloyd Georgeian fable has already been noted. But it is also based on an assumed dichotomy between a 'blue-water' and a continental security strategy. This is a strategic fallacy. For the purposes of practical politics, no such alternative existed. For Britain, the Russian and German factors were connected because she was both a European and an overseas power, and her security paradigm was thus global.[66] The cabinet did not decide to enter the war in Europe as a lesser evil when compared with the recrudescence of the Anglo-Russian Asiatic antagonism. Ultimately, a majority of ministers, swayed by Asquith and Grey, concluded that non-interference was not a realistic proposition. Whatever the outcome of the war, Britain would be left in a much-reduced position. If, most likely, the central powers won, they would reorder Europe; and a now rampant Germany would challenge Britain at some point in the future, and from a much broader base owing to her acquisition of the French navy and colonial empire. If, by contrast, France and Russia emerged victorious, they would destroy the two Germanic powers and the balance of power with it, and they were not likely to pay much attention to British interests.[67] And even if the continental powers, weakened by a prolonged war, were to agree to a negotiated peace, it would unite them against Britain. Peace might have been a British interest – the old mantra since 1815 – but once a continental conflict hove into view, there were no good outcomes for Britain. In the summer of 1914, the inherent logic of Britain's geopolitical position meant that, given the greater likelihood of an Austro-German victory, Britain had to enter the war against these two.[68]

'I have searched my heart continuously as to whether we could have kept out of it & I am sure the consequences of staying out would have been worse than being in, but it is awful.'

Grey made mistakes, however. Consistent in his pursuit of international mediation, his various schemes for intervention by the four powers not directly affected by the Serbian crisis were nevertheless problematic. The quartet idea was not without its own internal logic, but Grey never explained why he preferred this slimmed down version of the classic European concert to involving all the Great Powers; and it allowed Vienna to operate in the shadows of international diplomacy to plot a war against Serbia. Grey also misread Austro-Hungarian policy in that he concluded that Habsburg policy could only be moderated by Berlin, and so never developed the habit of direct exchanges with the Ballhausplatz. But in most other respects, British influence was limited. In 1929, Grey wondered whether he could have gone further in his attempts to restrain Russia. Yet London's ability to apply pressure on the Russian government was circumscribed, not least by the knowledge that any such attempt would have triggered demands for a firm commitment to Russia: 'And to that question he [Grey] could not have given an affirmative answer.'[69] Indeed, given that, in July 1914, the Russian foreign minister pressed for the mobilisation of Russia's armed forces in the expectation that Britain would not join the fray, it is scarcely credible that moderating advice would have had any effect on him. If anything, it was Russian, and to an extent French, recalcitrance that forced Grey to utter his explicit warning of a world war on 29 July.

The experience of Europe hurtling towards war weighed heavily on Grey's mind afterwards:

> I can't tell you how much I feel the horror of the great catastrophe. The whole time is like a great scourge; something inexorable & inevitable. I have searched my heart continuously

> as to whether we could have kept out of it & I am sure the consequences of staying out would have been worse than being in, but it is awful.[70]

Indeed, at some point later in August he seems to have suffered a mental breakdown.[71]

The war marked the end of an era for Europe, for Britain and her empire, and for Grey's party. He himself ploughed on, impelled by a sense of duty and despite significant health problems,[72] until Asquith's resignation in December 1916. But he was a man out of his time now: 'I took things as I found them and for 30 years spoke of progress as an enlargement of the Victorian industrial age: as if anything could be good that led to telephones and cinematographs and large cities and the *Daily Mail*.'[73]

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It has been tempting for historians to present British foreign policy in 1914 as a study in failure. It has proved even more tempting for them to follow Lloyd George up the garden path of history. Both temptations should be resisted. If anything, the events of 1914 underline the limits of British power at the end of the long nineteenth century. It is a peculiarly British, or perhaps more particularly English, delusion to think that this country could (or can) shape the decisions made by others. All too often, indeed, criticism of Grey is little more than a form of latter-day 'Little Englanderism', albeit one appearing in the drab garb of scholarship. Grey himself had a shrewder appreciation of the constraints placed on Britain, and of the range of practical options open to British diplomacy.

This raises the wider issue of agency. Whatever Grey's manoeuvres in July 1914, once Vienna and Berlin had embarked on a course of escalation, he had no tools left to avert the descent into war. To that extent it might be argued that British policy had run its course. It cannot be argued, however, that under Grey's stewardship of foreign affairs that process was accelerated.

Whatever Grey's manoeuvres in July 1914, once Vienna and Berlin had embarked on a course of escalation, he had no tools left to avert the descent into war.

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1 As quoted in H. W. Harris, *J.A. Spender* (London, 1946), p. 159. Grey's recollection was less clear, [E.] Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years*, 2 vols. (New York, 1925) vol. ii, p. 20.
2 M. Parris, *The Spectator*, 22 Feb. 1997.
3 Most recently M. Hastings, *Catastrophe: Europe Goes to War* (London, 2013). Grey's most persistent scholarly critic is Keith Wilson, see *Policy of the Ententes: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy, 1904–1914* (Cambridge, 1985); 'Grey' in id. (ed.), *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy: From Crimean War to First World War* (London, 1987), pp. 172–97; and 'The Making and Putative Implementation of a British Foreign Policy of Gesture, December 1905 to August 1914: The Anglo-French Entente Revisited', *Canadian Journal of History*, xxxi, 2 (1996), pp. 227–55.
4 D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, 2 vols. (new edn., London, 1938) vol. i, pp. 56, 58 and 60. For an interesting parallel with Churchill's memoirs see D. Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, 2004).
5 K. Robbins, *Sir Edward Grey: A Biography of Lord Grey of Fallodon* (London, 1971), p. 13. For a succinct appraisal of Grey's policy see K. Neilson, '"Control the Whirlwind": Sir Edward Grey as Foreign Secretary, 1906–1916', in T. G. Otte (ed.), *The Makers of British Foreign Policy: From Pitt to Thatcher* (Basingstoke and New York, 2002), pp. 128–49.
6 G. M. Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon* (London, 1937), p. 24; H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885–1910* (London, 1967), pp. 331–3. Before 1885 Liberals and Conservatives were evenly balanced here, and its electors usually returned one candidate from each party. Only Sir Alan Beith represented this seat for longer (Nov. 1973 – May 2015).
7 M. Creighton, 'Grey, Sir George (1799–1882)', *Dictionary of National Biography*, viii (London, 1908), p. 627; also *Memoir of Sir George Grey, Bart., GCB* (London, 1901), pp. 113–6.
8 Through his paternal grandmother he was also related to the Tory Ryder family (the earls of Harrowby), and both Northbrook and Gainsborough joined the exodus of the Whigs.
9 M. Bentley, *Politics without Democracy: Perception and Preoccupation in British Government* (pb., London, 1984), p. 319, who, however, implies a degree of 'Scottishness' in Grey. I am grateful to Keith Robbins for his thoughts on Grey's 'Englishness'.
10 In later years Grey suggested that the 'Relugas Compact' had been more about the tone and style of Campbell-Bannerman's pronouncement than about the substance of his politics, Grey to Elizabeth Haldane, 14 June 1930, Haldane MSS, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, MS 6037.
11 S. Buxton, 'Notes on Asquith' (MS), n.d., Buxton MSS, British Library (henceforth BL), Add. MSS. 87045.
12 This was a constant concern of Grey's, e.g. Grey to Asquith (private), 26 Oct. 1910, Asquith MSS, Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Asquith 12. For further thoughts on the perceived danger of social disintegration see also H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The Ideas and Politics of a Post-Gladstonian Elite* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 128–9.
13 Hansard, Parl. Deb. (series 4), vol. 334, col. 1196 (29 Mar. 1889).
14 Hansard, HC (series 1), vol. 36, cols. 673–7 (28 Mar. 1912). He remained silent, however, on women MPs.
15 Burns diary, 25 Jan. 1913, Burns MSS, BL, Add. MSS. 46335.
16 'Sir Edward Grey at Leith', *The Times*, 6 Dec. 1909; see also V. Bogdanor, 'The Liberal Party and the Constitution', *Journal of Liberal History*, 54 (2007), pp. 48–52.
17 As quoted in R. Jenkins, *Mr. Balfour's Poodle: Peers v. People* (pb. repr. London, 1989), p. 71.
18 [K. M.] Prince Lichnowsky, 'Meine Londoner Mission, 1912–1914', *Börsen-Courier*, 21 Mar. 1918, repr. in M. Smith (ed.), *The Disclosures from Germany* (New York, 1918), pp. 86–88 (my translation).
19 Trevelyan, *Grey of Fallodon*, p. 28. For Seeley see D. Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the Uses of History* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 75–109.
20 [E.] Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Fly Fishing* (rev. ed. repr. London, 1947 [1st edn. 1899]), pp. 18–20.
21 See K. Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy towards Russia, 1894–1917* (Oxford, 1995); also T. G. Otte, '"A Very Internecine Policy": Anglo-Russian Cold Wars before the Cold War, 1743–1940', in C. Baxter, M. L. Dockrill and K. Hamilton (eds.), *Britain in Global Politics*, vol. i: *From Gladstone to Churchill* (Basingstoke and New York, 2013), pp. 17–49.
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THE LIBERAL PARTY, THE LABOUR PARTY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

by **Pat Thane**

Unquestionably the Liberal Party emerged weaker from the war, Labour stronger. The extent to which Labour gained at the Liberals' expense is harder to judge, but there are reasons to believe it was one of the significant factors in the Liberal decline. These reasons include the following.

Labour was represented for the first time in the wartime coalition cabinets. In 1915–16 there was just Arthur Henderson, first at the Board of Education, then as paymaster-general; then Henderson and George Barnes in Lloyd George's war cabinet, although Henderson resigned in 1917 over the government's unwillingness to seek a negotiated peace, while Barnes remained in the cabinet until 1920. The trade unionist John Hodge was the first minister for the newly formed Ministry of Labour in 1916–17, followed by George Roberts, 1917–19. Labour politicians thus gained experience which perhaps gave them greater credibility in the eyes of voters.

The trade union movement grew significantly in numbers and strength during the war, from 4.1 million in 1914 to 6.5 million in 1919.[1] Most trade unionists were automatically Labour Party members. The unions were Labour's main source of funding and bigger unions meant more funds for the party and improved capacity to fight elections. Of course, being a union member had not prevented men from voting Liberal or Conservative in the past, but Labour's clear support for wartime strikes, while Asquith was far more equivocal, may have won the support of some trade unionists.

Labour Party supporters were actively and prominently involved in a range of successful social reform campaigns during the war: for rent controls, more and better housing, higher old-age pensions, improved maternal and child welfare, and for the extension of the franchise to women and to all men. All of these were implemented, to varying degrees, during or immediately after the war. Many workers, especially trade unionists, had enjoyed unprecedented full employment and improved living standards during the war.[2] They wanted these conditions to continue after the war, supported the reforms and may have trusted Labour to carry on pressing for delivery. Also Labour were unequivocally in favour of continued state action to improve social and economic conditions, of the sort that had been successful during the war, whereas the Liberals were more divided on the role of the state. Some reform minded Liberals of course switched to Labour during or after the war, such as Christopher Addison.

Labour agreed a new constitution in 1918 which improved its organisation, including for elections. It established permanent constituency parties with individual members, whereas previously membership was only possible via membership of an affiliated organisation such as a trade union or the Fabian Society. This assisted it in mobilising members more effectively to improve its performance in central and local elections after the war.

The impact of the franchise extension in 1918 is hard to judge because, of course, voting was secret and there were no opinion polls at this time. Many working men and women got the vote for the first time, but so also did many middle and upper-class men who were not independent property holders, mainly younger, unmarried men.[3] However, the percentage of potential electors from the manual working class increased from 76 per cent to 80 per cent of an electorate which grew dramatically from 7 million to 21 million. It is unlikely that all new voters voted Labour but there was a probable advantage to Labour from the extended male franchise. Women had at last achieved the vote, but the female franchise was biased against poorer women: excluded were the large numbers of living-in servants and shop workers, and any woman over the age of 30 who was not a ratepayer or married to a ratepayer. However women made up a substantial proportion of the individual membership of the party, over 250,000 by the late 1920s – at least half of individual party membership, in some constituencies more.[4] It is often argued that women voters were always strongly biased towards Conservatism, but there is no clear evidence of this for the interwar period.[5] The refusal of Asquith's government to grant votes for women before the war alienated some women from Liberalism. On balance, it is likely that Labour gained votes from the franchise extension to the disadvantage of the Liberals.

Deep dissension within the Liberal Party contributed a great deal to its post-war decline. The fact that a reform-minded alternative existed in the form of the Labour Party, which was growing in strength and credibility, gave many voters an alternative.

Deep dissension within the Liberal Party contributed a great deal to its post-war decline. The fact that a reform-minded alternative existed in the form of the Labour Party, which was growing in strength and credibility, gave many voters an alternative, assisting the long-run decline.

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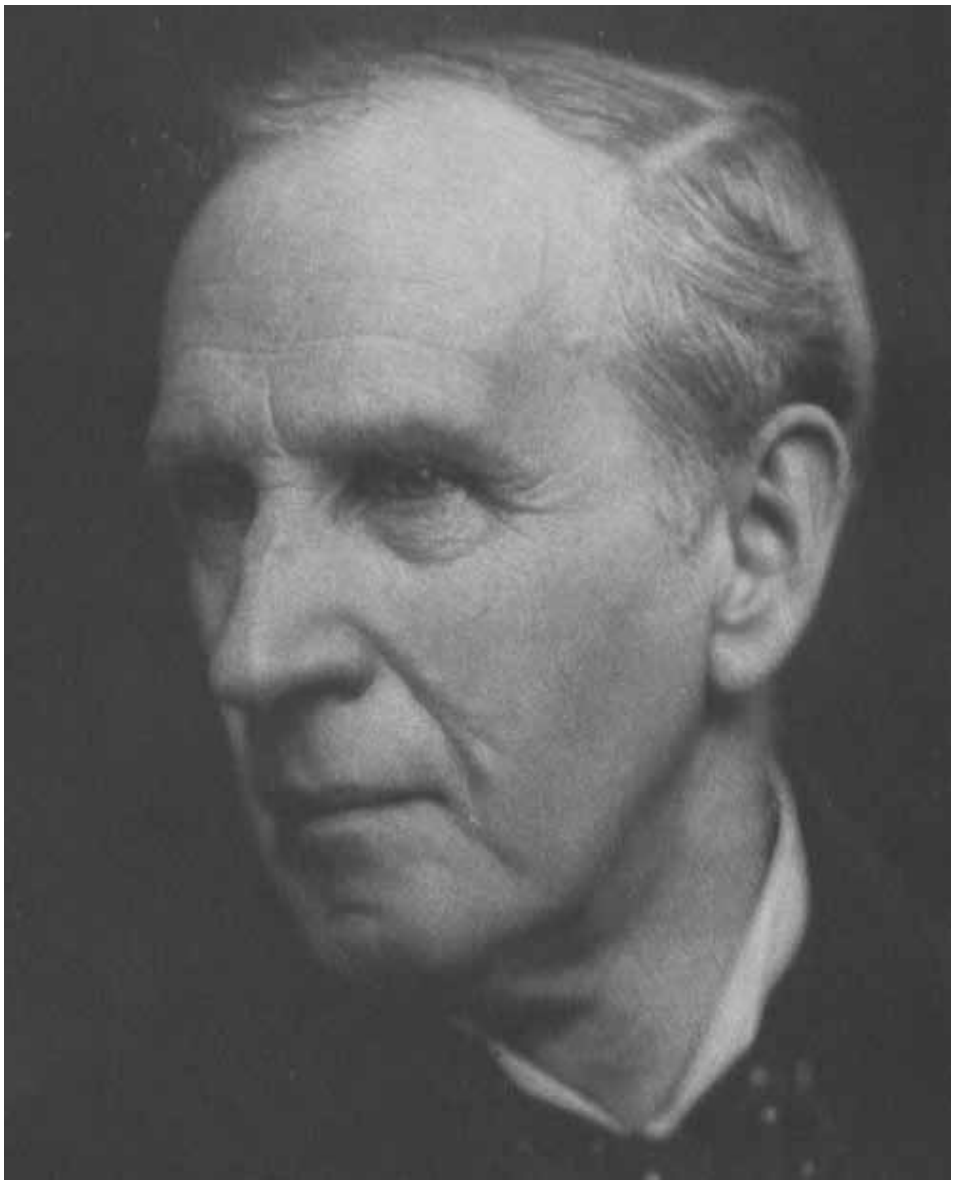
JOHN MORLEY'S RESIGN

This article supplements the account in *Morley of Blackburn*[1] of John Morley's resignation from Asquith's cabinet on the outbreak of war in 1914. Writing such an article is not easy because of the unceasing flow of books and articles about the origins of the war, and the need to maintain a reasonable level of objectivity about an event that, even after a hundred years, arouses powerful emotions. In one of the last articles he wrote before his death, **Patrick Jackson** analyses the reasons for Morley's resignation and challenges the views of those who ascribed it solely to his optimism about Germany and his pessimism about Russia.



NATION IN AUGUST 1914

Some commentators have no doubt that Britain was right to join France in a war justified, despite an appalling cost in human lives, by the need to safeguard Europe from German domination, just as it was right to resist Nazi aggression twenty-five years later. For those who take this view, Morley's motives are of little significance. His inability to recognise self-evident truths must be attributed to declining powers, and he can be written off as 'yesterday's man', an elderly icon of obsolete Gladstonian morality who failed to understand the new realities of twentieth-century power politics. David Hamer writes almost despairingly in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography that Morley 'did not even [my italics] find a casus belli in German aggression against Belgium.'

On the other hand, for those of us who believe that more could have been done in July 1914 to prevent the Balkan crisis from escalating into a catastrophic world war (regarded by all the participants as defensive or preventive), and who find the case for British involvement inconclusive, Morley's resignation raises significant questions. Why did he fail to ensure that the cabinet explored the key issues adequately before reaching its precipitate decision? Why did he refuse to speak out publicly against the war? Admirers who remembered his resounding denunciation of the Boer War fifteen years earlier were disappointed if they hoped for a similar declaration in 1914. Instead Morley opted out of his share of responsibility for the war by retiring quietly to the well-stocked library of his home in Wimbledon Park. Nevertheless in private he remained certain that he had been right to resign, and that the leaders of the Liberal government, particularly Asquith and Grey, bore a heavy responsibility for what had gone so disastrously wrong. As he told Rosebery in November 1920, amid the clamour over German war-guilt, 'I do not let go my obstinate conviction that the catastrophe … was due to three *blunderers*, the Kaiser and a couple of Englishmen whom I'd as lief not name with the proper adjectives.'[2]

John Morley, 1st Viscount Morley of Blackburn (1838–1923)

The international background

Despite a general rise in economic prosperity during the early years of the twentieth century there was a widespread feeling of insecurity as the great powers jostled for competitive advantage and prestige. Britain's vulnerability, as an overextended maritime empire, had been painfully exposed in the Boer War; and Russia, despite huge natural resources, had been similarly humiliated by Japan. France still resented the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871, and the ramshackle 'dual monarchy' of Austria-Hungary felt threatened by militant Slav nationalism. Germany feared encirclement by Russia and France. Behind the strident nationalism there was a deep-seated fatalism about the inevitable decline of older regimes and their evolutionary replacement by rising races, a struggle for the survival of the fittest in which war played a natural part. Some of the European powers sought greater security in alliances that were regarded by the participants as defensive but by opponents as threatening.

Britain had traditionally favoured a policy of isolation, relying on naval supremacy to avoid entanglements in mainland Europe, but when the Liberals came to power in 1905 the foreign secretary, Edward Grey, inherited British membership of a new entente designed to end the imperial rivalry with France. Liberals were uneasy about the implications of the alliance between France and tsarist Russia, and feared that the strategic conversations between army and naval officers would commit Britain to a policy of hostility towards Germany. In 1871, after the Franco-Prussian war, Morley had welcomed 'the interposition in the heart of the European state system, of a powerful, industrious, intelligent and progressive people, between the Western nations and the half-barbarous Russian

swarms.'[3] The following decades saw a growing antagonism between Britain and Germany, but Morley, like many Liberals, continued to believe that German militarism was a temporary phase better dealt with by conciliation than by confrontation. The tensions reached a climax in 1911, after a German infringement of French colonial pretensions in Morocco. Morley urged caution on Asquith, 'I utterly dislike and distrust the German methods … But that is no reason why we should give them the excuse of this provocation.'[4] He recognised the dangerous instability of the kaiser, but argued that 'the way to treat a man who has made a fool of himself is to let him down as easily as possible'.[5]

In August 1911, when it emerged that plans had been finalised to transport British troops to France in the event of war, Morley secured a ruling that no firm commitment should be incurred without prior cabinet approval. During the next two years Grey encouraged a series of initiatives designed to relieve Anglo-German tensions. During Haldane's mission to Berlin in February 1912, it became clear that the Germans would not renounce their competitive programme of warship building without a reciprocal British undertaking to remain neutral in a continental war. Discussions took place over colonial policy when Lewis Harcourt, negotiated with his German opposite number an agreement for the partitioning of Portugal's African colonies in the not unlikely event of financial default. The agreement was initialled in October 1913, but not published. In June 1914 agreement was reached on the vexed question of the Baghdad railway project: the Germans agreed to terminate the line at Basra and to consult the British government before any subsequent extension. Scholars differ about the significance of these initiatives, but they show that Grey did not regard Germany as an implacable aggressor with whom improved diplomatic relations were not to be contemplated. Plans for a secret mission to Berlin by his private secretary Sir William Tyrrell were aborted by the outbreak of war,[6] but in July 1914 relations with Germany were better than they had been for over a decade. On 23 July (less than a fortnight before war broke out) Lloyd George told the House of Commons that 'the two great Empires begin to realize that the points of cooperation are greater and more numerous than the points of possible controversy.'[7]

Accounts of the events leading to the outbreak of the war tend to underestimate the seriousness of the delay in responding to the assassination at Sarajevo on 28 June.

A wasted month: 28 June – 24 July 1914

Accounts of the events leading to the outbreak of the war tend to underestimate the seriousness of the delay in responding to the assassination at Sarajevo on 28 June. Nearly a month of inactivity followed, with no determined diplomatic attempts to defuse the dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia before the other major European powers were dragged in. In Britain, politicians and the press were preoccupied by the situation in Ireland resulting from the militant refusal of Ulster to accept subordination to a home rule authority in Catholic Dublin.

A conference of the conflicting parties at Buckingham Palace collapsed in failure on 24 July. On the following day, when news broke of the harsh Austrian ultimatum to Serbia, nearly four weeks after Sarajevo, *The Times* belatedly acknowledged the existence of these wider problems: 'England cannot suffer the failure of the Home Rule Conference … to divert her attention from the grave crisis that has arisen in Europe within the last thirty-six hours.' John Morley had been particularly preoccupied by Ireland: the third Home Rule Bill was the climax of a political career that had begun nearly thirty years earlier when he had acted as Gladstone's deputy in introducing the first home rule legislation.

For many British people Sarajevo, and Belgrade the Serbian capital, were distant places in which it was hard to detect any direct national interest. Many would have agreed with John Burns, the president of the Board of Trade who later resigned from the cabinet with Morley, when he robustly declared, 'Why 4 great powers should fight over Servia no fellow can understand.'[8] C. P. Scott's *Manchester Guardian* took a similar view: Manchester cared about Belgrade as little as Belgrade cared about Manchester. However none of this provides any satisfactory explanation for Grey's failure to act as soon as he heard about the assassination. After nearly nine years at the Foreign Office, making him the most experienced foreign minister in Europe, Grey was well aware of the precarious balance of power in the Balkans. He must have realised that the murder of the heir to the imperial throne, with the suspected connivance of Belgrade, would provoke a violent reaction in Vienna, and that the Austrians would seek a preliminary guarantee of support from their German allies just as the Serbs would appeal for help from Russia. When the crisis finally ended in a world war, Grey claimed that he had worked tirelessly for peace; but most of his initiatives took place in the final days of frantic activity that followed the Austrian ultimatum, and by that stage they were all 'too little, too late.'

When Grey was warned on 6 July by the German ambassador Lichnowsky that Germany would support an Austrian attack on Belgrade he seems to have remained complacently confident that the balance of power would work to achieve a peaceful settlement. Germany could be relied on to restrain Austria (rather than urging her to act quickly before Russia was ready to retaliate), and France would similarly restrain Russia. Poincaré, the French president, was due to pay a crucially important state visit to St Petersburg from 20 to 23 July; but Grey had no idea whether Poincaré's aim was to be conciliatory, or whether he would be mainly concerned to stiffen Russian resolve.[9] A *Times* leading article on 23 July expressed the hope that the state visit would 'operate as a salutary warning to the "war parties" in all the great countries against the danger of playing with fire.'

This reflected Grey's wishful thinking. His over-optimism arose partly from his acknowledged success during the previous year, when he had chaired an ambassadorial conference of the six major European powers (France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Great Britain) which achieved a provisional settlement of the first Balkan War: the Treaty of London, signed on 30 May 1913. However, this diplomatic coup makes it all the more surprising that Grey did not reconvene the conference immediately after Sarajevo, in an attempt to secure international agreement

about the terms that it would be reasonable to impose upon Serbia. Instead he waited until 27 July, when the Austrians were about to attack Belgrade (after an ultimatum that shocked him by its severity) before proposing a four-power ambassadorial conference. Austria-Hungary and Russia, the two major powers involved directly in the dispute, would be excluded from the conference and thus in effect subjected to arbitration. Grey explained to the House of Commons that, as long as the dispute had involved only Austria-Hungary and Serbia, 'we had no title to interfere.' When it became obvious that Russia would intervene, the short time available had forced him to take the risk of 'making a proposal without the usual preliminary steps of trying to ascertain whether it would be well received.' Unsurprisingly the extraordinary proposal was rejected, although *The Times* applauded the way in which Grey had taken such prompt action, 'with characteristic indifference to considerations of personal and national *amour propre*'.

Of course the powers might have similarly rejected a much earlier initiative to recall the full six-power conference, but at that stage Grey would have had time to consider alternative initiatives. Perhaps the king might have been persuaded to suggest to the kaiser a conference in Berlin, attended by the tsar and the Austrian emperor with all their senior advisers. Although notoriously unpredictable, the kaiser was susceptible to flattery and ambivalent about Britain, his mother's country. As it was, no attempt was made to take advantage of the imperial family relationships until 1 August, when the king was awakened by Asquith in the early hours of the morning to send a message to his cousin, the tsar, in a belated and predictably futile attempt to delay Russian mobilisation. Another possible initiative during the period immediately after Sarajevo might have been to invoke the good offices of the United States President Woodrow Wilson, who was to play a key role in the setting up of the League of Nations after the war. When he offered to mediate, on 2 August, it was far too late, but he might have responded to an earlier approach. On 25 May 1914, his representative Colonel House had described the European situation to him as 'jingoism run stark mad.' Unless someone acting for the president could 'bring about a different understanding there is bound some day to be an awful cataclysm.'[10]

Grey was respected for the honesty of his motives, but he lacked the imagination to seek new ways of filling the gaps in the international negotiating machinery. Instead he pursued a policy that seemed sometimes to consist of little more than drifting, hoping for the best of both worlds by enjoying the security of the entente while avoiding its aggressive commitments and seeking to remain friendly with Germany. During the final days of July it became increasingly clear that the two aims were incompatible. However, if Grey failed to seize the diplomatic initiative during the crucial weeks after Sarajevo, it has to be said that Morley and those who were to oppose British involvement in the conflict showed little greater awareness of the urgency of the situation. In 1911 Morley had spoken out about the dangerous implications of the entente, but in 1914 he waited until 24 July for Grey to raise the crisis in the cabinet. The delay was disastrous.

Grey was respected for the honesty of his motives, but he lacked the imagination to seek new ways of filling the gaps in the international negotiating machinery.

The final days

During the days after 28 July when Austria declared war on Serbia and Russia embarked on partial mobilisation, the focus of the crisis shifted with dramatic suddenness to the prospect of an impending continental war in which none of the European powers could avoid entanglement.

In Britain the shift was especially remarkable: by the bank holiday weekend of 1–2 August, when the decision to go to war was reached, the issue was widely seen in terms of Britain's moral obligation to support France (and incidentally Belgium) against unprovoked military aggression. The fact that France had knowingly placed herself at risk by the alliance with Russia no longer seemed relevant except to Morley and a minority who still thought in these terms.

The changing perspective can be seen in successive leading articles in *The Times*. Although nominally Conservative, the paper was a strong supporter of Grey's policies and was regularly briefed by Tyrrell. On 29 July a leader ('Close the Ranks') insisted that there could be no question of a change in political control involving the replacement of Grey. This same article emphasised the need to be faithful to allies: 'England will be found as ready to stand by her friends today as ever she was aiding Europe [to] fling off the despotism of Napoleon.' However the article reiterated that Britain had no direct interest in the Balkans, and there was as yet no suggestion that Germany was the only threat, even though powerful pressures were being brought to bear to overcome the 'pacific leanings' of the kaiser. By 31 July any remaining balance in the assessment of the situation had disappeared:

> We must make instant preparations to back our friends, if they are made the subject of unjust attack. … The days of 'splendid isolation' … are no more. We cannot stand alone in a Europe dominated by any single Power.

On Saturday 1 August the tone of self-righteous emotional conviction persisted: for Britain this would not be a war of national hatred, since we had 'nothing to avenge and nothing to acquire.' Our only motives were 'the duty we owe to our friends and the instinct of self-preservation.' There was no serious examination of essential questions such as the exact nature of the supposed threat to British interests, and the arguments for and against British involvement in a continental land war rather than relying upon traditional naval power. The absence of any rational discussion of the case against British participation was partly offset by the publication on the same day of a long letter from Norman Angell (whose *The Great Illusion*[11] had strongly influenced the international peace movement) and of a pro-German manifesto signed by a group of academics. Angell repudiated the suggestion that neutrality would result in dangerous isolation: on the contrary it would mean that, while other nations were torn and weakened by war, Britain 'might conceivably for a long time be the strongest Power in Europe.' Conversely British involvement would

ensure the supremacy of Russia ('two hundred million autocratically governed people, with a very rudimentary civilization, but heavily equipped for military aggression'), rather than a Germany 'highly civilized and mainly given to the arts of trade and commerce.'

Behind the scenes, in a series of seven cabinet meetings on the ten days between 24 July and 2 August, ministers stumbled confusedly from the consideration of a distant crisis that no one regarded as calling for British participation, to the prospect of an unprovoked attack on France about which it was difficult for anyone to remain indifferent. By the end of the series of meetings only Morley and Burns, out of a much larger original number of dissenters, remained committed to British neutrality. It is not easy to follow the process by which this shift occurred, but no one reading the surviving accounts (there were no formal minutes of cabinet proceedings) can fail to be appalled by the inadequacy of the discussions. This was supposed to be a mature parliamentary democracy facing one of the most critical moments in its history and the failure to address many of the major questions was lamentable. Asquith and Grey must bear the main burden of responsibility, but Morley, too, failed to ensure that the cabinet considered the crucial issues adequately. What would be the probable outcome if Britain remained neutral? How serious would German supremacy in Europe actually be? Would it be possible to confine British participation to naval action rather than sending land forces to the continent? What would be the costs of involvement, in financial and human terms? Was it right to dismiss without further exploration the offers made by Germany in an attempt to secure British neutrality?

It became obvious at an early stage that the cabinet was deadlocked. Grey, inhibited by his assurance that the military discussions with France had not involved any firm commitment, failed to convince a majority of his colleagues that there was a valid case for British participation in the forthcoming war. But he threatened to resign rather than concede the demand for a declaration of unconditional neutrality. The two sides held firm to their own positions and the discussions were patchy and perfunctory, with neither Grey nor Morley making any serious attempt to win the overall argument. Eventually cabinet agreement, of sorts, was reached on the peripheral questions of Belgian territorial integrity and the security of the Channel coast, rather than on the major questions that had gone unaddressed.

Morley's account of the cabinet meetings, in his *Memorandum on Resignation*,[12] is an essential source for anyone seeking to understand his role; but it is a flawed and frustrating record that reads at times like a later reminiscence. However the text was written within a few weeks of the events, and cleared with John Burns, who confirmed its essential accuracy and added a passage clarifying his own standpoint. In August 1928, Guy Morley, who had inherited his uncle's papers, decided that the work ought to be published. The *Memorandum* plunges straight into an account of the cabinet meeting on 24 July, the first since Sarajevo at which foreign affairs had been discussed. Grey startled his colleagues by disclosing the contents of a telegram from the ambassador in St Petersburg who reported that Russia and France were determined to react strongly to the Austrian ultimatum against Serbia, and that the Russian foreign minister was calling for Britain's support. According to Morley, Grey announced 'in his own quiet way' that the time had come for the cabinet to 'make up its mind plainly whether we were to take an active part with the other two Powers of the Entente, or to stand aside … and preserve an absolute neutrality.' Morley was relaxed about the cabinet's likely response, and Asquith's account of the meeting (in a letter to his inamorata Venetia Stanley) reported that although Europe was 'within measurable … distance of a real Armageddon … Happily there seems to be no reason why we should be anything more than spectators.'[13]

During the next two meetings the impasse remained unresolved. After the 27 July meeting, Lloyd George told C. P. Scott that there could be 'no question of our taking part in any war in the first instance.'[14] However Grey continued to resist calls for a declaration that Britain would remain neutral,

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and after the 29 July meeting Burns reported that when the situation had been 'seriously reviewed from all points of view' it was 'decided not to decide.' Grey was instructed to tell the French and German ambassadors, Cambon and Lichnowsky (both increasingly frustrated by Britain's indecision) that we were unable to pledge ourselves in advance 'either under all conditions to stand aside or in any conditions to join in.' However Grey warned Lichnowsky, without cabinet authorisation, that if Germany and France went to war Britain might be forced to intervene.

It seems to have been at the 29 July meeting that the possible infringement of Belgian neutrality was first raised, but Morley insisted that the issue remained secondary to that of support for France. In the final days before the declaration of war, Belgium provided a highly emotional pretext for those previously opposed to British participation, but it remained a peripheral issue. Belgium had not always been a popular subject for radical sympathies, outraged by Morel's condemnation of colonial atrocities in the Congo. Moreover no one knew whether the German army would need to cross more than a corner of Belgian territory, and whether the Belgian government would actively resist the invasion rather than accepting a German offer to respect Belgian territorial integrity after the war.

Morley's account of the cabinet discussions during the last week of July is spasmodic, and the tone of his interventions is sometimes casual, almost as if he was taking part in an academic debate. He was clearly over-confident about the strength of support for a policy of neutrality, and seems to have had no expectation that the case for war would soon prove irresistible. When, on one occasion, Grey 'rather suddenly let fall his view … that German policy was that of a great European aggressor, as bad as Napoleon', Morley merely replied that although 'I have no German partialities … you do not give us evidence.' This was surely the crucial question upon which Grey should have been challenged. On another occasion Lloyd George 'furthered the good cause' by reporting that leading figures in the City and major manufacturers were

'*aghast* at the bare idea of our plunging into the European conflict.' However when Morley sought to raise this important question at a later meeting, Lloyd George replied 'rather tartly' that he had never said he believed it all. At another session Morley found his colleagues 'rather surprised at the stress I laid on the Russian side of things':

> If Germany is beaten … it is not England and France who will emerge pre-eminent in Europe. It will be Russia … [and people] will rub their eyes when they realise that Cossacks are their victorious fellow champions for freedom, justice, equality of man … and respect for treaties.

This little speech has a rather 'set piece' flavour, like the riposte when Grey extolled the contribution to peace of the balance of power. For Morley this was a euphemism for 'two giant groups armed to the teeth, each in mortal terror of the other, both of them passing year after year in an incurable fever of jealousy and suspicion!'

In contrast the *Memorandum* records John Burns's uncompromising stand against British intervention. Burns saw himself as a trustee for the working classes, and as such it was his 'especial duty to dissociate myself … from such a crime as the contemplated war would be.' After the 29 July meeting, Burns told Morley 'with violent emphasis' that 'we look to you to stand firm'; but after a similar appeal on 31 July, Morley 'was not keen in response as to my taking any lead.' On 1 August there was no real progress and the cabinet remained deadlocked. In Asquith's account they came 'near to the parting of the ways,' with Morley still on 'the *Manchester Guardian* tack' of declaring that 'in no circumstances will we take a hand. This no doubt is the view for the moment of the bulk of the party.' Lloyd George, although 'all for peace' was 'more sensible and statesmanlike, for keeping the position still open.' Grey continued to insist that 'if an out & out … policy of non- intervention … is adopted he will go.'[15] The crucial decisions that led to war were reached on 2 August – the Sunday of a hot Bank Holiday weekend – when unprecedentedly there were two cabinet meetings. By the end of the day Morley and Burns had resigned, but the way in which the final decision swung against them seems almost casual with none of the critical issues debated.

Morley doubted what grounds there were 'for expecting that the ruinous waste and havoc of war would be repaid by peace on better terms than were already within reach of reason and persistent patience.'

At the morning session Grey conceded that the entente entailed no formal commitment to support France, and that Britain was not 'bound by the same obligations of honour' as those that bound France to Russia. However he reminded his colleagues that, under the terms of the Anglo-French naval agreement, the French fleet had been deployed in the Mediterranean, leaving the Channel coast undefended. After a long and difficult discussion Grey was authorised to assure an increasingly agitated Cambon that the British navy would provide protection in the event of German aggression in the Channel. At this point Burns resigned (a blow that Asquith took 'a trifle too coolly'), since he regarded the decision as tantamount to a declaration of war. Morley was readier to accept it, and similarly he reported in an oddly relaxed way how the cabinet acquiesced in Grey's request to warn Lichnowsky that 'it would be hard to restrain English feeling on any violation of Belgian neutrality by either combatant.' In fact, a minute reproduced at the end of the published *Memorandum* reveals that this warning had been given to the German ambassador on the previous day, when Lichnowsky attempted to draw Grey into formulating the assurances, relating to French or Belgian territory, that would secure British neutrality. Grey had refused to consider any such bargain, and Asquith dismissed this 'rather shameless attempt … to buy our neutrality' as an example of 'something very crude and almost childlike about German diplomacy.'[16] However Morley noted his view that it was a pity not to 'take advantage of the occasion for more talk and negotiation … instead of this wooden *non possumus*.'

In his account of the morning cabinet, Asquith reckoned that Lloyd George, Morley and Harcourt were still opposed to intervention, as were three-quarters of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons. Asquith listed the points on which he was quite clear what was right and wrong: it was 'against British interests that France shld be wiped out as a Great Power', as it was for Germany to be allowed 'to use the Channel as a hostile base.' But the employment on the continent of a British expeditionary force was seen by Asquith 'at this moment' as being 'out of the question.'[17]

In the *Memorandum* Morley described a lunchtime meeting of eight or nine cabinet ministers who opposed British participation in the war. These included Lewis Harcourt, who had organised the lobby with his usual diligence and deviousness, and Lloyd George who was still sitting on the fence. Morley offered the waverers a way to opt out:

> Personally my days were dwindling. I was a notorious peace-man and little Englander. My disappearance would be totally different from theirs … with their lives before them and long issues committed to their charge.

Morley left the meeting doubting whether 'the fervid tone' of these colleagues would last: 'I saw no standard bearer.' But he had few doubts about his own position, and during a period of quiet reflection at the Athenaeum he cleared his mind before returning for the evening cabinet. Morley doubted what grounds there were 'for expecting that the ruinous waste and havoc of war would be repaid by peace on better terms than were already within reach of reason and persistent patience.' He compared the gains of war 'against the ferocious hatred that would burn with inextinguishable fire, for a whole generation at least, between two communities better fitted to understand one another than any other pair in Europe?'

> With a fleet of overwhelming power … when the smoke of battlefields had cleared … England might have exerted an influence not to be acquired by a hundred of her little Expeditionary Forces.

This was a powerful message and if delivered in parliament, or even in cabinet, it might have provided the leadership which the opponents of British participation so conspicuously lacked. But Morley no

longer had the mental or physical stamina to face the emotional turmoil. Instead he returned for the evening cabinet and told Asquith of his decision to resign with Burns. He agreed to remain until after the meeting on the following morning, Monday 3 August.

Morley was anxious not to spoil the occasion of this last cabinet, twenty-eight years after he joined Gladstone's third government in l886. Asquith paid tribute to Morley as 'the senior of us all, the one who is the greatest source of the moral authority of the government.' He recognised that other members of the cabinet and many government supporters in the House of Commons shared Morley's views, and in normal circumstances this would impose on a prime minister the duty to resign. However Asquith said that in the present national emergency 'I cannot persuade myself that the other party is led by men … capable of dealing with it.' This speech is a reminder that party politics remained an important consideration for many members of a Liberal government who were proud of its achievements. On the previous day Bonar Law had written to Asquith undertaking to provide Conservative backing for any measures the government decided to take 'in support of France and Russia.' This could be seen as a threat, as well as a promise.

Morley included in the *Memorandum* an extraordinary final exchange of correspondence with Asquith, who wrote at midnight on 3 August begging Morley 'with all my heart' to rethink his position before taking a step 'which impoverishes the Government, and leaves me stranded and almost alone.' Morley was touched by this uncharacteristically emotional appeal but reiterated the 'cardinal difference' on foreign policy which made his resignation necessary. It would be easy to judge Asquith's final approach cynically. The claim that he was being left 'stranded and almost alone' came oddly from a leader who had maintained party unity by isolating all those who opposed him, and who could rely on cross-party support in parliament. On 1 August 1914 he had told Venetia Stanley that 'we may have to contemplate with such equanimity as we can command the loss of Morley.'[18] Perhaps Asquith was playing a last tactical card, relying on Morley's vulnerability to flattery and emotional blackmail to ensure that he did nothing to rock the boat. If that was the aim it was very successful.

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The closing of the ranks

On the afternoon of 3 August Morley did not go to hear Grey's House of Commons speech in which the decision to go to war was announced. He would have found the cheers from the Conservative benches depressing; but he might have been heartened to hear the strong case made by some of the Liberal dissenters, which showed that Morley's views on the war were not a personal eccentricity. Much of Grey's speech was devoted to an insistence that he had worked untiringly for peace and that, although Britain was not formally committed by the entente to provide armed support to France, there was a moral obligation:

> If … we run away from those obligations of honour and interest … I doubt whether, whatever material force we might have at the end, it would be of very much value in face of the respect we should have lost. … [We should be unable to prevent the whole of the West of Europe] falling under the domination of a single Power.

Bonar Law assured the government of Conservative support, and the only immediate note of dissent came in a brief speech by the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald. He dismissed the appeal to honour: throughout history statesmen had similarly justified their crimes. As for the special relationship with France, 'no such friendship … between one nation and another could ever justify one of those nations entering into war on behalf of the other.'

An attempt by backbenchers to extend the discussion was frustrated by Asquith's vague promise of a full debate on some later date, but eventually they secured a two-hour adjournment debate at the end of the day's sitting. Many accounts pay insufficient attention to this debate, in which about twenty Liberals spoke forcefully against what they saw as Grey's precipitate failure to explore the German offers to negotiate terms for British neutrality. Many of the speakers saw Germany as a less serious long-term threat than Russia, and they were unconvinced by the need to safeguard the territorial integrity of Belgium. The underlying cause of the war was 'a deep animosity against German ambitions … [a] mad desire to keep up an impossibility in Europe.' It was not a people's war, but one brought about 'by men in high places … working in secret … [to preserve] the remnant of an older evil civilisation which is disappearing by gradual and peaceful methods.' The Conservative Balfour finally wound up the proceedings, contemptuously dismissing the arguments as 'the very dregs and lees of debate.' Asquith had secured majority support in the House of Commons, but at a heavy price.

On the following day, 4 August, *The Times* report of the debate was euphoric. The House of Commons had been 'at its best' in its reception of a speech 'destined to remain memorable in the history of the world', and the half-hearted voice of dissent 'served but as a foil to the general unanimity.' On 6 August, *The Times* reported that the House of Commons was 'maintaining its united front superbly': when the prime minister announced the resignations of Morley, Burns, and Trevelyan, 'nobody showed the slightest concern.' Even the *Manchester Guardian*, which had campaigned for British neutrality, was muted, although in one of the letters congratulating Morley on his resignation C. P. Scott said that it would have been dreadful if we had been 'dragged into a war for the balance of power without a single resignation from those who stand for the older Liberalism.'[19] One of the most moving of the letters was one from Grey:

> My heart is too full of all the misery of the time to let me write what I feel. I am choked with it. But I think of you with much tender feeling & affection.[20]

The absence of any trace of triumphalism in this letter reinforced Morley's resolve not to make things harder for those left to bear the brunt of the war. He told Haldane

that 'I part from my colleagues in more sorrow than I expected. The pang is sharp.'[21] Morley's stance was not a heroic one. He had always lacked the last degree of ruthlessness necessary for a political career, and by 1914 he was too old and tired to lead a crusade for peace. Even for a younger man it was not easy to stand out against the popular war fever. On 18 August 1914, Morley wrote to Rosebery, after reading a 'screed' in *The Times* about the war being 'long and very long', that 'the insanity of the hour would have seemed incredible a month ago.'[22] Lloyd George, who up to the eleventh hour had been doubtful about British participation, was soon producing speeches full of stomach-turning rhetoric: on 19 September he professed to envy young people their opportunity to share in 'the glow and thrill of a great movement for liberty.'[23] Almost paradoxically, the appalling level of casualties, instead of raising doubts about whether the corresponding benefits were proportionate, merely made it harder to admit that the slaughter might initially have been avoided.

It is only through occasional references in the letters written during the war that Morley revealed his feelings. The comradeship that he had established with John Burns in the stressful time of their resignations was reinforced over the years. On 9 July 1916, Morley wrote that he would not soon 'forget your visit here tonight … the angry vision of this hideous war … makes me proud that I hold the hand of such a comrade in a great piece of history.'[24] Morley enjoyed being entertained in one or another of Rosebery's great houses, and he kept in touch with some of his former ministerial colleagues. Sometimes he argued with them, but as he put it to Haldane in November 1914, the issues were 'too momentous … to reduce them to mere cut and thrust. It is as if some blasting and desolating curse had fallen over the world.'[25] He wondered 'whether any war has not been too heavy a price for its gain – excepting perhaps the American Civil War' which had ended slavery.

Conclusion

Morley's failure to explain more clearly his motives for opposing Britain's involvement in the war in 1914 was partly personal: he was old and tired and reluctant to speak out against ministerial colleagues of whom he had become fond. But the failure was also more general. There was no adequate debate, in the cabinet or in parliament, about the reasons for going to war (particularly the case for sending an army to France rather than relying on naval power). Opponents of the war failed to face up clearly to the implications of neutrality. It was uncomfortable to argue that France should be 'left in the lurch' against a German attack, and those taking such a line needed to make it clear whether they believed that the consequences of a German victory were not as serious as suggested. Looking back after a century (much of which has been devoted to the struggle against Russian domination that Morley foretold), it is easier to accept Germany's leadership of Europe as natural and inevitable. But at the time few were willing or able to spell this out, and Morley's critics were able to portray his optimism about Germany and his pessimism about Russia (although these views were widely shared) as being based upon emotional prejudice. There is still no clear consensus.

Patrick Jackson was the author of Morley of Blackburn*, a biography of John Morley published in 2012. This article was one of the last he wrote before his death in November 2014 (see obituary,* Journal of Liberal History *86 (winter 2014–15)).*

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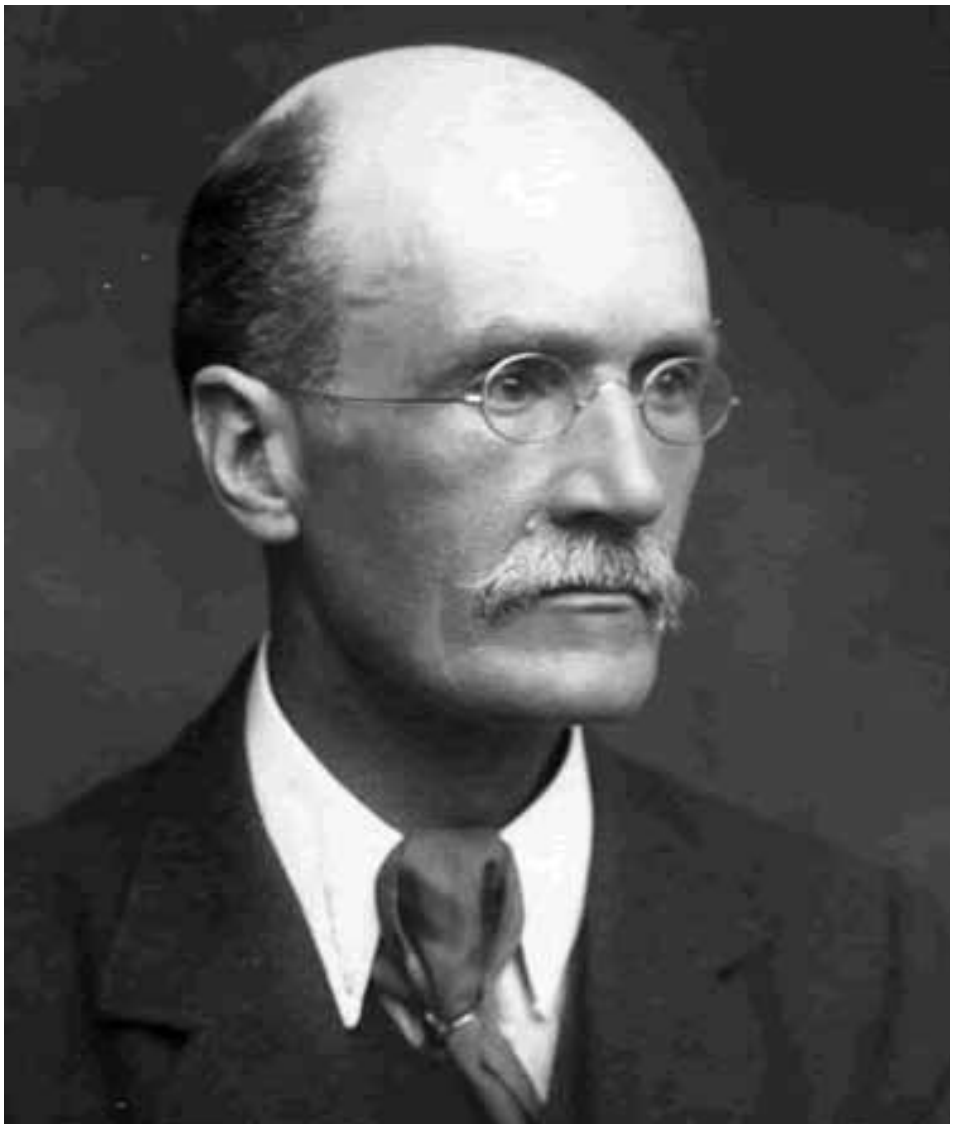
GILBERT MURRA
LIBERALISM'S DEBILITATING D

Students of early-twentieth-century British politics have for the most part been more comfortable with domestic-policy debates than with foreign-policy ones. They have been happier distinguishing New Liberal social policies from the Gladstonian variety than differentiating the thinking of the League of Nations movement from that of the Union of Democratic Control. In consequence, they have largely neglected the cleavage that came to the fore during the First World War between liberal-internationalist and radical-isolationist tendencies within the Liberal Party and the damage which that cleavage did to that party. By **Martin Ceadel**.



AY v. E. D. MOREL
DIVIDE OVER FOREIGN POLICY

From 3 August 1914 these divergent approaches to foreign affairs were respectively personified by Gilbert Murray and E. D. Morel. Murray endorsed Grey's foreign policy from 3 August 1914; he soon became a leading campaigner for the League of Nations; and he always stayed loyal to the Liberal Party. By contrast, Morel opposed Grey; within days of British intervention he helped to found the Union of Democratic Control; and he ended up in the Labour Party. This article therefore asks: how significant was this foreign-policy split of August 1914 for the party's subsequent decline?

The Liberals had long seen themselves as the party of 'peace, retrenchment, and reform', the word order being a revealing one; but they had developed two rather different answers to the question of how peace was to be promoted, in which the origins of the Murray–Morel split of 1914 can be detected. The answer that I call radical, and which later became associated with E. D. Morel, stressed the need *within states* democratically to control the domestic elites and vested interests that benefited from war. It assumed that the people did not so benefit, and so were always a force for peace. It therefore advocated popular control of foreign

policy. The one that I call liberal, and which later became associated with Gilbert Murray, doubted that any section of the population was immune from the war-promoting cult of sovereign nationalism. It therefore promoted internationalism, and stressed the need to improve relations *among states* by promoting commercial links, by agreeing to arbitrate inter-state disputes, and by developing international law.

The way in which these radical and liberal approaches emerged in Britain had been somewhat haphazard. The radical approach was the first to articulate itself clearly, being a product of the French revolutionary era. In the 1790s the radical thinkers William Godwin and Thomas Paine had blamed war on monarchs and aristocrats, and had argued that republicanism – what would later be called democratic control – would achieve lasting peace.[1] But they had disagreed about how best to promote republicanism: Godwin abhorred war, except possibly in self-defence, so would promote republicanism only in a pacific way; yet Paine was a crusader who hoped that Revolutionary France would win its war against Britain, so as more quickly to bring about a republic here.

The liberal-internationalist approach did not fully set out its distinctive stall until the 1830s and 1840s, its emblematic figure being Richard Cobden, free-trade campaigner and spokesman for the Manchester School. His dismissal of much military spending as outdoor relief for the aristocracy harked back to Paine and Godwin. So too did his hostility to the Concert of Europe, whereby in the name of Christian legitimacy, as well as by the logic of realism, the great powers managed the international relations of their continent in the way that the UN Security Council was later supposed to manage those of a wider world. Cobden's suspicion of elitist diplomacy of this kind was expressed in his early cry of 'no foreign politics'. But his more constructive policies of creating economic interdependence through free trade and of inserting arbitration clauses into all interstate treaties heralded a new and more positive liberal internationalism.

Ironically, Cobden's principal political bugbear was the first prime minister to espouse the Liberal label, Palmerston, a political magician who managed to present a chauvinistic foreign policy in such a way as to appeal to the increasingly influential radical artisans who wanted Britain to crusade for the liberties of Europe against the despots repressing the 1848 revolutions. The Peace Society, then close to Cobden, loathingly admitted that Palmerston was 'an adroit trickster, perfect in the art of moral legerdemain [whom] … straightaway the English people fall down and worship'.[2] The major foreign-affairs feud of the mid-nineteenth century was thus within the emergent Liberal Party, as the non-interventionist Cobden clashed repeatedly with the ultra-interventionist Palmerston, not only over the Don Pacifico affair in 1850 and the Crimean War of 1854–6, but also over the bombardment of Canton in 1857, following which Cobden brought Palmerston down in the House of Commons, though the Cobdenites were trounced by the Palmerstonians at the ensuing general election.[3]

By 1865, the year in which the polarising antagonists Cobden and Palmerston both died, artisan and other enthusiasm for crusading had somewhat subsided. Liberalism's new leader, the political moralist William Gladstone, now gave his party a clearer foreign-affairs identity.[4] Ever since his days as a High Church Tory, before he became a Peelite and thereby migrated into the Liberal Party, Gladstone had approved of the Concert of Europe and its management of continental affairs, and was in consequence much more engaged with international politics than Cobden had been. But Gladstone now grounded this engagement, not upon great-power legitimacy and privilege, but upon the need to uphold what he called 'the public law of Europe'. This was an idealist and supra-national idea, though like almost all his Liberal contemporaries Gladstone stopped short of proposing an international organisation to develop that public law and impose it upon states. Without repudiating Manchester School thinking, Gladstone thus moved liberalism away from the non-interventionist, little-England ethos that Cobden had imbued it with, and towards an internationalist engagement.

Previous pages: left – Gilbert Murray (1866–1957); right – E.D. Morel (1873–1924)

But in promoting such an engagement Gladstone held back from the crusading enthusiasms to which some radicals had previously succumbed and which Palmerston had often found it useful to exploit. Gladstone presented Liberalism as a pacific tendency that above all repudiated, at least in the rhetorical sphere, the spirited foreign policy now claimed on behalf of the Tories, since Palmerston's demise, by the Earl of Beaconsfield, the former Benjamin Disraeli. Gladstone's condemnation in 1876 of Britain's traditional ally, the Ottoman Empire, for the 'horrors' it was inflicting upon its Bulgarian subjects, suggested that the Liberals would pursue morality in foreign policy rather than realpolitik. This was confirmed during the 1879–80 Midlothian campaign by Gladstone's sustained attack on 'Beaconsfieldism' – his short-hand for Tory jingoism, imperialism, and raison d'etat.

Gladstone's intense yet pacific rhetoric enthused in particular some newly enfranchised artisans and helped to bring them into the Liberal fold. I stress that I am talking here of rhetoric, and recognise that it was belied in office by, in particular, the occupation of Egypt in 1882. Yet when this rhetoric was confronted by the Lord Salisbury's more judicious playing of the imperial defence card, it did not perform well electorally, as some Liberals soon realised. Indeed, as a generalisation, progressive rhetoric has fared less well in the international sphere than in the domestic one. Relatively orderly state structures can be expected to implement domestic reforms – or at least could be expected to do so prior to the post-cold-war period with its increasingly globalised economy and its many failed states. It was always less plausible to expect a relatively anarchic international structure to do the same, except in especially fortunate zones of peace such as western Europe during the last six decades. In late-nineteenth-century Britain, as mass opinion became more important because of suffrage extension, and moreover became so at a time of imperial competition and social-Darwinist thinking, an idealistic, pacific rhetoric could seem implausible. In the 1890s a 'Liberal Imperialist' faction therefore emerged within

Liberalism that regarded Gladstonian rhetoric as a political handicap. Indeed, the opposition of a radical section of the Liberals, soon dubbed 'pro-Boers', to the South African War helped to lose the party the 'khaki election' of 1900.

When, largely as a result of Tory disarray, the Liberal Party returned to government in December 1905 under Campbell-Bannerman, domestic circumstances proved conducive to its 'New Liberal' reform programme, which revived the party's ideological confidence. But external circumstances, particularly the German threat, were ill suited to its traditional external-policy watchwords, peace and retrenchment. In this area of policy, the Liberal government inherited two commitments from its Tory precursor. The first was to out-build the expanding German fleet, which eventually forced it to abandon retrenchment. The second was to nurture an entente with France, which was eventually supplemented by one with Russia. Gladstonians worried about the abandonment of retrenchment and the confrontation with Germany. And the radicals on the left of the party, though no longer troubled by monarchical or aristocratic power, were suspicious of the behind-the-scenes influence of both the elitist Foreign Office (which they suspected of secretly practising an entangling diplomacy for its own professional satisfaction) and the arms trade (which obviously had a vested interest in war). Both Gladstonians and radicals feared that – given the dreadnought race, the ententes, Grey as foreign secretary, and Asquith as Campbell-Bannerman's successor – the Liberal Imperialist faction had captured foreign policy. For their part, of course, Grey and Asquith saw themselves as upholding the public law of Europe against a militarist threat in a fashion of which all Liberals should approve.

During these years both Gilbert Murray and E. D. Morel were among the many Liberal critics of Grey and Asquith, though it would have been possible to predict that Murray might be won over by the party leadership whereas Morel never would.

Gilbert Murray was an amiable man whose Liberalism was of the sensitive, well-connected and elitist kind.[5] Born in Australia in 1866, he was at a young age drawn to teetotalism and animal welfare in reaction to his father's alcoholism and his class-mates' cruelty. Arriving in England aged 11, just as Gladstone limbered up for his Midlothian campaign, and being sent for a classical education to public school and Oxford, he espoused both partisan Liberalism and cultural Hellenism, which fused in his mind as a single civilising mission. They were further entrenched when in his early twenties he both married into the Whig aristocracy and became a professor of Greek. A supporter of Irish home rule and female suffrage, he was in Liberalism's pro-Boer camp, though, revealingly, he disapproved of J. A. Hobson's *Imperialism: a study*, when he was sent it in draft, disputing its radical critique that the pandering of an elitist government to financial interests had caused the war. Thereafter Murray's political interests were mainly in domestic affairs, though he became senior member of the Oxford War and Peace Society, formed in February 1914 to support the work of Norman Angell, whose recent best-seller *The Great Illusion* had argued a neo-Cobdenite case; and after Austria-Hungary declared war against Serbia on 28 July Murray initially campaigned for British neutrality. He thus had good reason to claim, looking back a few months later: 'We Radicals had always worked for peace, for conciliation, for mutual understanding'.[6]

During these years both Gilbert Murray and E. D. Morel were among the many Liberal critics of Grey and Asquith, though it would have been possible to predict that Murray might be won over by the party leadership whereas Morel never would.

E. D. Morel was a difficult man whose Liberalism was of the strident, alienated, and populist kind.[7] Born in 1873 to a French father, who had died when he was 4, and an English mother, who had quarrelled with her in-laws and returned to Britain, he became a shipping clerk in Liverpool, and later wrote trade-related articles for the local press. Learning through this work of the maltreatment of his Congolese subjects by the king of the Belgians, he in 1904 launched the Congo Reform Association, a one-man band which succeeded in having the Congo Free State removed from royal control – a remarkable campaigning achievement. While pulling this off, Morel developed an almost paranoid loathing of British and French policymakers, whom he accused of deliberately obstructing him in order not to offend their Belgian ally. Given the fanaticism and self-obsession that troubled even his admirers, it is hard not to speculate about a psychological link between Morel's intense hatred of the entente cordiale and his unhappy Anglo-French background. He vented his anti-entente (and therefore inevitably pro-German) feelings in a well-researched book, *Morocco in Diplomacy*, which appeared in 1912, the year he also became prospective Liberal candidate for Birkenhead. And, unsurprisingly, he too favoured British neutrality when the European war broke out on 28 July 1914.

The split between Murray and Morel came on 3 August 1914 when Murray was present in the gallery of the House of Commons to hear the speech by Sir Edward Grey, a tour de force of halting anti-rhetoric that won over many Liberals to the cause of British intervention, which duly took place the following day. Murray felt sympathy for a fastidious Oxonian from an old Whig family struggling to do the right thing, and became Grey's apologist, making two contributions to OUP's *Oxford Pamphlets 1914* series, and publishing a short book, *The Foreign Policy of Sir Edward Grey*, in 1915. Even so, Murray still regarded himself as pro-peace. Despite supporting the war, he championed the cause of conscientious objectors. And he supported the movement for a League of Nations, the institutionalisation of Gladstone's public law of Europe. The League of Nations Society, established in May 1915 attracted loyal Asquithians like Murray who had reluctantly accepted British intervention but took seriously the justification for that intervention as a war that would end war. Many patriots regarded post-war projects like a League of Nations as 'pacifist' distractions from crushing Prussianism; and the mainstream Liberals who mainly comprised the League of Nations Society did not want to offend them. So the society kept its head down until American entry into the war under a pro-League president transformed the League project from liberal dream to prospective reality. After April 1917, therefore, realists sought to adapt it to their own purposes,

some of them calling for the immediate formation of a League on the basis of the wartime alliance against Germany. When the League of Nations Society rejected this, a separate body, the League of Free Nations Association, was founded in the summer of 1918, to press for an immediate League, without Germany. The sudden ending of the war in the autumn rendered the disagreement between the two League associations moot, enabling them to merge in November 1918 as the famous League of Nations Union. Murray played a crucial role: he had been a vice-president of the League of Nations Society; he was chairman of the League of Free Nations Association; and he became chairman also of the merged League of Nations Union, which was within a decade to put down deeper roots in civil society than any other peace association, in Britain or elsewhere.[8]

By contrast, Grey's speech probably reinforced E. D. Morel's neutralism; and, within six days of Britain's declaration of war on 4 August, Morel helped to create the First World War's most influential peace association, the Union of Democratic Control (or UDC, as it soon became known). As its title indicated, the UDC was a radical organisation, which implicitly blamed British secret and elitist diplomacy, as much as German militarism, for the conflict.[9] Professing not to be a stop-the-war organisation, it called for an eventual peace settlement that reflected democratic wishes and therefore avoided annexations and indemnities. Morel's three UDC co-founders were: Ramsay MacDonald, who stood down from the chairmanship of the Labour Party in opposition to British intervention; Charles Trevelyan, who resigned as a Liberal junior minister; and Norman Angell, whose Neutrality League had been the most dynamic element within the eight-day campaign to keep Britain out of the European conflict.[10] Arthur Ponsonby, a Liberal MP, was also involved from the outset, but did not go public at this stage. The UDC was widely denounced as pacifist; but its radical members endured unpopularity much more stoically than the Asquitheans of the League of Nations Society; and the intransigent Morel positively relished it, becoming the UDC's principal driving force.

Though one of the UDC's demands was for an international council, which has sometimes been equated with a League of Nations, Morel envisaged this merely as a public forum through which diplomacy could be made un-secret and therefore democratically accountable. He never wanted a collective security organisation of the kind favoured by the League of Nations Society, and even more so by the League of Free Nations Associations. Indeed, Morel came strongly to dismiss the international organisation eventually established at Geneva as another diplomatic device for entangling his country in conflicts that did not concern it.

During the first half of the war the UDC had been a controversial body. But it steadily gained acceptance as war-weariness developed, particularly after the tsar's abdication raised doubts as to Russia's perseverance with the military effort. It found the British labour movement increasingly fertile soil for its propaganda during 1917–18. Morel thereby became such a thorn in the British government's side that he was gaoled for a fairly technical breach of the Defence of the Realm Act. The UDC's historian, Marvin Swartz, rather cruelly observed that, parted from his UDC followers, Morel suffered 'malnutrition of the ego'; but, having been given the prison system's punitive 'second division' regime, he also suffered physically – indeed he suffered so palpably that when Bertrand Russell was similarly convicted he made sure of being placed in the first division.

The Murray–Morel split thus reflected two longstanding cleavages within Liberalism. One was an ideological cleavage between internationalist engagement of a Gladstonian variety, represented by Murray, and little-England isolationism, represented by Morel.

The Murray–Morel split thus reflected two longstanding cleavages within Liberalism. One was an ideological cleavage between internationalist engagement of a Gladstonian variety, represented by Murray, and little-England isolationism, represented by Morel. The other was a sociological cleavage between mainstream Liberal loyalism of a respectable kind, embodied by Murray, and anti-establishment radicalism of a 'trouble-making' kind (as A. J. P. Taylor lovingly described it),[11] embodied by Morel.

But what part did the split play in the Liberal Party's sidelining by Labour? This requires me to touch on the controversy between 'declinists', who see Liberalism as destined to lose working-class support even if the First World War had not taken place, and 'catastrophists', who believe that a going political concern was destroyed by the particular events of 1914–18. My instincts are declinist: I find it hard to interpret Britain's class-based partisanship, which seemed so deeply entrenched from the 1930s to the 1980s during which time a majority of the working class identified with Labour, as in a sense accidental.

Already by the First World War, the Liberals had alienated enough trade unionists and working-class would-be politicians for the Labour Party to become a significant force even on a limited suffrage. The Gladstonian party's preoccupation with home rule for Ireland and dislike of sectional legislation had held it back from helping the trade unions when important court judgements started going against them in the 1890s. In addition, particularly after Salisbury had astutely made single- rather than double-member constituencies the norm from 1885, the Liberals failed to adopt working-class candidates, except in the handful of wholly proletarian constituencies, such as mining districts, where 'Lib-Labs' were indeed chosen. Politically ambitious workingmen had mostly therefore been forced to look elsewhere. The consequence was the Labour Representation Committee of 1900, which, thanks in part to an electoral pact unwisely conceded by the Liberals, overtook the Lib-Labs to become *the* Labour Party following the 1906 election. Labour was thus entrenched in the Commons before New Liberal policies could signal to workingmen that the post-Gladstonian party was interested in social reform. And the industrial unrest of 1911–12 signalled to many workers that the Liberals were a party of bosses. The union ballots under the 1913 Trade Union Act all went in favour of paying a political levy to Labour. For declinists, therefore, the eventual shift from householder suffrage to male suffrage would have clinched Labour's supplanting of the Liberals even without the First World War. But of course declinists would have expected a slow death of Liberal

England. They fully accept that the war dramatically speeded it up.

Catastrophists see the First World War as causing problems for the Liberals at the organisational, ideological, and leadership levels. Their organisation fell apart as Liberal agents joined the army and Nonconformist congregations declined, whereas trade unionism expanded and thereby provided Labour with a stronger institutional base. Entering a war, accepting the McKenna duties, and introducing conscription constituted ideological challenges to Liberalism, though Asquith skilfully kept the resultant resignations to a minimum. Meanwhile, the increased state control required by the war economy was helping Labour's ideological cause. The biggest catastrophe was obviously the leadership split between Asquith and Lloyd George in December 1916. The ousting of a leader who had been dominant during peacetime but could not provide inspiration and drive in wartime need not in itself have been fatal. The Tories survived the very similar split of 1940 between Chamberlain and Churchill, a comparison which shows that the behaviour of the ousted prime minister was the key factor. Chamberlain served under his successor, and, by dying promptly, enabled Churchill soon to become party leader as well. The Conservatives therefore went into the 1945 general election in one piece. Asquith performed neither of these services for Lloyd George. Instead, he went into semi-opposition on the backbenches, his division of the House of Commons in the Maurice debate brought about the 'coupon election' in which the split between Asquithians and coalitionists was entrenched. And Asquith stayed on as official Liberal leader for another decade. By 1922 the Liberals had ceased to be the official opposition to the Conservatives.

For declinists, the Murray–Morel split was merely another factor speeding an inexorable decline. But for catastrophists, every factor that caused Liberalism to lose its lustre and Labour to broaden its appeal was of importance. The Murray–Morel split did both. Despite hitching its star to the League of Nations and adapting well to the ideological challenges posed by the war effort, the party mainstream's support for what proved to be a messy and protracted British intervention, which Murray represented, undoubtedly made it much harder than previously to identify Liberalism with progress. Support for the war undoubtedly tarnished the Liberal brand.

In addition, the Morel faction helped Labour in two ways. First, as was pointed out by Swartz as early as 1971, Labour's ability to recruit UDC members gave it a significant infusion of the workers 'by brain' which it aspired to enrol, as clause 4 of its new constitution indicated. In particular, the UDC supplied foreign-policy experts who assisted Labour in its rapid transition from a single-issue pressure group into a plausible party of government. Although UDC members fared disastrously in the December 1918 general election, thirty of them were elected as Labour MPs in November 1922, when MacDonald resumed the Labour leadership; and in due course the UDC's co-leaders – Morel, Trevelyan, Angell, and Ponsonby – all joined MacDonald in the Parliamentary Labour Party. The first Labour government contained fifteen UDC members, nine of them in the cabinet, including MacDonald not merely as prime minister but also – to the distress of the excluded Morel, who felt entitled to the post – as foreign secretary. Few, if any, of those transitioning from Liberal to Labour via the UDC would have done so over domestic issues.

Secondly, and less commonly noted, UDC thinking helped Labour heal its own divisions over the war, which at one time looked very serious. The party lost its dominant figure when MacDonald's opposition to British intervention prompted his resignation. He was no pacifist, as he showed when he allowed his name to be used at a recruitment meeting during the military crisis of late August and September 1914. MacDonald was instead a radical isolationist who, except during that military crisis, believed that British interests were not involved in the European quarrel. One of the party's most important affiliates, the ILP, also opposed the war, for a mixture of pacifist, radical, and socialist reasons. But most Labourites were pro-war, even if some – like Arthur Henderson, who replaced MacDonald as leader – had joined the UDC. There was a real prospect that this split over British intervention would become entrenched when Henderson was drawn first into the coalition government which Asquith formed in May 1915 and then into Lloyd George's small war cabinet. One important reason why it did not was the war cabinet's insensitive treatment of Henderson in the famous doormat incident of August 1917, which led to his resignation in order to reconstruct the Labour Party on a firmer ideological basis and with a broader popular appeal. Henderson even wanted to change its name to the People's Party.[12] In reconstructing Labour, Henderson received MacDonald's cooperation. But these old colleagues could not have come together as effectively as they did had the UDC not provided a policy which their pro- and anti-war followers could both enthusiastically support. Setting aside their previous disagreement about the merits of intervention, both factions now focused on the need for a peace without annexations and indemnities. As a result Labour ended the war more united and in a more positive frame of mind than could have been predicted eighteen months or so previously. And, although the public's patriotic, and therefore anti-UDC, mood in the 1918 election held Labour back for a parliament, by 1922 the party's UDC policies helped it cash in on the public reaction against the Treaty of Versailles, which had notoriously involved both annexations and indemnities.

During the early 1920s Morel seemed thus to have triumphed over Murray, as his foreign-affairs thinking enjoyed a period of hegemony whereas the form in which the League of Nations had been created in 1919 caused initial disillusion with Murray's alternative.

During the early 1920s Morel seemed thus to have triumphed over Murray, as his foreign-affairs thinking enjoyed a period of hegemony whereas the form in which the League of Nations had been created in 1919 caused initial disillusion with Murray's alternative. But 1924 proved to be radical isolationism's last hurrah. Those joining the first Labour government had to resign their UDC membership. Needing as prime minister and foreign secretary constructively to resolve the Franco-German quarrel, MacDonald came to realise how negative and biased were the UDC's isolationism and hostility to France. And, within weeks of the government's fall, Morel, whose health had been

lastingly damaged in prison, died suddenly. Without his fanatical commitment the UDC faded fast; and an attempt to commit it to blanket opposition to League of Nations sanctions caused a damaging split in 1928. By then, public hopes for peace had come to be focused on Geneva; and, with Gilbert Murray still chairing its executive committee, the League of Nations Union rapidly supplanted the UDC as the country's principal peace association, collecting more than 400,000 annual subscriptions at its organisational peak in 1931 and even more remarkably persuading 38 per cent of the adult population to take part in its pro-League pseudo-referendum, the Peace Ballot, in 1934–5.[13] Liberal internationalism thus became intellectually hegemonic: even Tories such as Baldwin had to pay lip service to the League; and Churchill linked his rearmament campaign to the internationalist cause rather than to that of go-it-alone patriotism. Labour had to stop dismissing Geneva as a league of capitalist victors, and – despite a wobble in 1933 – were steered towards collective security by Arthur Henderson.[14] The declining Liberal Party saw the League as its own special cause. As Richard Grayson has noted of the inter-war period: 'if a Liberal knocked on your front door to canvass, then there was a fairly high probability that when asked what the Liberal Party stood for, this earnest man or woman would talk about "Peace" and the League of Nations prior to anything else.'[15]

From the mid-1920s, therefore, Murray's mainstream-Liberal foreign-policy approach triumphed definitively over Morel's radical alternative.

From the mid-1920s, therefore, Murray's mainstream-Liberal foreign-policy approach triumphed definitively over Morel's radical alternative. But the Liberal Party was by then too far gone institutionally to benefit from this final triumph. And Morel's foreign-policy-led defection had contributed significantly to the speed of this institutional failure.

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1 Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: the British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730–1854* (Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 36–40.
2 *Herald of Peace*, August 1862, p. 86.
3 Martin Ceadel, 'Cobden and Peace', in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan (eds.), *Rethinking Nineteenth-Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicententenary Essays* (Ashgate, 2006), pp. 189–207.
4 Martin Ceadel, 'Gladstone and a Liberal Theory of International Relations', in Peter Ghosh and Lawrence Goldman (eds.), *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 74–94.
5 For Murray, see Duncan Wilson, *Gilbert Murray OM, 1866–1957* (Oxford University Press, 1987); and Francis West, *Gilbert Murray: A Life* (Croom Helm, 1987).
6 Cited in Martin Ceadel, 'Gilbert Murray and International Politics', in Christopher Stray (ed.), *Gilbert Murray Reassessed: Hellenism, Theatre and International Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 223.
7 The authoritative source for Morel's life is Catherine Cline, *E. D. Morel 1873–1924: Strategies of Protest* (Blackstaff Press, 1980).
8 The foundational work on this subject is Henry Winkler, *The League of Nations Movement in Great Britain, 1914–1919* (Rutgers UP, 1952). See also Donald Birn, *The League of Nations Union 1918–1945* (Clarendon Press, 1981); Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945* (Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 7; and Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, citizenship, and internationalism, c.1918–45* (Manchester University Press, 2011).

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LETTERS

Emlyn Hooson and the Falklands war

J. Graham Jones' article on 'Emlyn Hooson, Voice of Montgomeryshire' (*Journal of Liberal History* 86, spring 2015), continues his excellent work on Welsh Liberal history.

He mentions Emlyn's remarkable speech against the Falklands war, made in the House of Lords when the conflict was at its height and when there was considerable pressure on politicians to close ranks and to support the British forces. It was all the more impressive because it came from a distinguished Liberal lawyer rather than from a kneejerk left-wing Labour speaker.

Graham should have mentioned the comment of Labour peer, Hugh Jenkins – Lord Jenkins of Putney – who spoke immediately after Emlyn: 'My Lords, your Lordships have just listened to what was to me perhaps the most remarkable speech that I have listened to since I had the privilege of joining your Lordships' House.'

Michael Meadowcroft

Emlyn Hooson and the law

I read with interest the article on Emlyn Hooson. I think Graham Jones has not understood him prior to his taking silk and becoming a serious politician. When he was defending as a junior he showed a charm when addressing a jury which was accompanied by a twinkle in his eye.

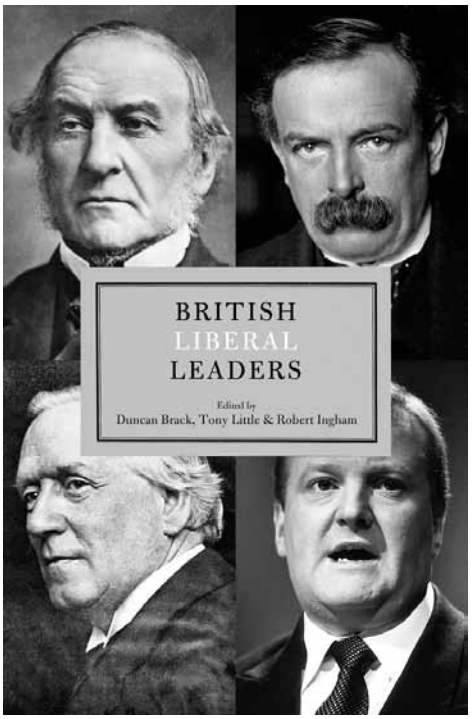
On one such occasion I was sent by my principal to 'instruct' him at a trial at Denbighshire Quarter Sessions. I saw at first hand all these qualities. While the jury was out, his instructions to me were to go to his car (a beautiful Rover 90) many times to see from his car radio if the Torrington by-election result was yet declared. This was in 1958. The fortunes of the party came a very close second.

Quentin Dodd

New from the Liberal Democrat History Group

British Liberal Leaders

Leaders of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats since the Great Reform Act



Edited by Duncan Brack, Robert Ingham and Tony Little

The British Liberal Party, and its successor, the Liberal Democrats, has a good claim to be the oldest political party in the world. From the Whigs of 1679 to the formation of the Liberal Party in 1859, and then to 1988 and the merger with the Social Democratic Party to form today's Liberal Democrats, politicians of all these labels held to a core of liberal principles: the belief in individual liberty; the quest for an equitable society at home and abroad; and the pursuit of reform, in the economic and social spheres as well as the political, with the aim of enlarging freedom for all.

This book is the story of those parties' leaders, from Earl Grey, who led the Whigs through the Great Reform Act of 1832, to Nick Clegg, the first Liberal leader to enter government for more than sixty years. Chapters written by experts in Liberal history cover such towering political figures as Palmerston, Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George; those, such as Sinclair, Clement Davies and Grimond, who led the party during its darkest hours; and those who led its revival, including David Steel, Roy Jenkins and Paddy Ashdown. Interviews with recent leaders are included, along with an analysis of the characteristics required to be an effective Liberal leader.

Liberal Leaders will be available in September, as part of a series of three books, published by Biteback, examining the leaders of the three major British political parties.

British Liberal Leaders will be launched at the Liberal Democrat History Group's fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrats' autumn conference in Bournemouth, on Sunday 20 September (time and venue to be confirmed in the autumn issue of the *Journal*).

The book will be available at a special discounted price to subscribers to the *Journal of Liberal History*: £20.00 instead of the normal £25.00. Copies will be available at the History Group's stand in the conference exhibition at Bournemouth or ordered via our website, www.liberalhistory.org.uk.

9 Harry Hanak, 'The Union of Democratic Control during the First World war', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, 36* (1963), pp. 167–80; Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Clarendon Press, 1971); Sally Harris, *Out of Control: British Foreign Policy and the Union of Democratic Control* (Hull Academic Press, 1996).

10 Martin Ceadel, *Living the Great Illusion: Sir Norman Angell, 1972–1967* (Oxford University Press, 2009), ch. 5.

11 Morel was one of the heroes of Taylor's *The Trouble Makers: Dissent over British Foreign Policy 1792–1939* (Hamish Hamilton, 1957).

12 I owe this information to Ross McKibbin.

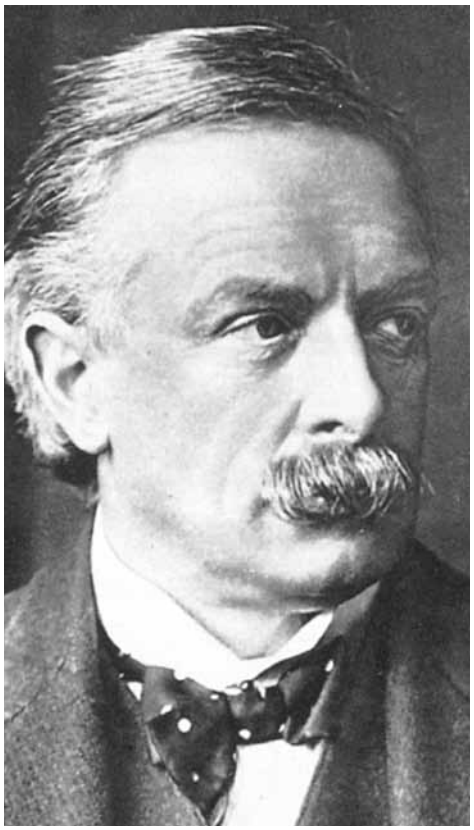
13 Martin Ceadel, 'The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934–5', *English Historical Review*, 95 (1980), pp. 810–39.

14 Martin Ceadel, 'Arthur Henderson: An Evolving Liberal Internationalist among Labour Little-Englanders', in C. Clare V. Griffiths, James J. Knott, and William Whyte (eds.), *Classes, Cultures, and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 247–62.

15 Richard S. Grayson, *Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement: The Liberal Party, 1919–1939* (Frank Cass, 2001), p. 139.

LLOYD GEORGE A

David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill were the two most important political figures in twentieth-century British political history, a status that derives substantially but not wholly from their positions as war leaders.[1] Comparing their experiences in the First and Second World Wars raises questions which go beyond the matter of who had the greater personal leadership ability. It provides us a lens with which to examine key issues such as state capacity, civilian–military relations, the relationship between parliament and the executive, and the construction of historical memory. By **Richard Toye**.



In Britain, there has already been published a flood of books surrounding the hundredth anniversary of the war's outbreak, and there has been a great deal of public discussion. Gary Sheffield has claimed: 'Like all wars, it was tragic, but it was certainly not futile.'[2] Max Hastings has argued: 'The [British] Government has not uttered, and apparently does not plan to utter, a word about the virtue of Britain's cause, or the blame that chiefly attaches to Germany for the catastrophe that overtook Europe.'[3] These historians seem to suggest that there is a historical consensus that the Germans were chiefly at fault in 1914 and the government is being pusillanimous in failing to articulate this view themselves. In fact no such consensus does exist. Given that fact, the British government may well have been right to insist that the officially sponsored centenary events should involve commemoration but not interpretation.

Nevertheless, it is true that the Second World War tends to be seen in Britain as 'the good war', in contrast with the First World War, which, even if it is not viewed exclusively negatively, is certainly much more contested. On this basis it is hardly surprising that, in Britain, Churchill is viewed overwhelmingly positively whereas Lloyd George fails to benefit from having been 'The Man Who Won

AND CHURCHILL AS WAR LEADERS

the War'. Undoubtedly, First World War revisionists are correct that the 'lions led by donkeys' caricature is unsatisfactory. Still, there a risk in going too far in the opposite direction. An understanding of the war based on the works of the poets Robert Graves and Wilfred Owen is obviously insufficient. But a perspective that simply discounts their viewpoint is obviously wrong too. It is quite right to point out that millions of people in 1914 regarded the conflict as a fight for national honour, but that does not mean that we, too, are bound to accept that verdict, which at any rate oversimplifies the way the public related to the war. Vocal patriotism could combine with subtle acts of resistance to authority.

This article's comparison of Lloyd George and Churchill as war leaders will consider firstly their interactions with one another throughout their careers, but particularly during the two world wars, and secondly their capacities as military strategists and their attempts to enforce civilian control of the military.

The personalities of Lloyd George and Churchill

We may begin by noting that the two men had very different personalities. Lord Hankey, the most influential civil servant of the age, summarised the difference between Lloyd George and Churchill as follows: 'Imagine the subject of balloons crops up. Winston, without a blink, will give you a brilliant hour-long lecture on balloons. L.G., even if he has never seen you before, will spend an hour finding out anything you know or think about them.'[4] When war broke out, Lloyd George and Churchill were already closely associated with one another in the public mind on account of their political alliance that developed after Churchill joined the Liberals from the Conservative in 1904. To their political opponents during the Edwardian constitutional crisis, they were peas in a pod – dangerous quasi-socialists determined to stir up class hatred for their own political ends. Long after they had gone their different ways politically, they were still lumped together by those who distrusted them. Talking privately in 1937, Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative prime minister, repeated with approval a saying he had heard: 'L.G. was born a cad and never forgot it; Winston was born a gentleman and never remembered it'. In the same year Neville Chamberlain referred to them as 'These two pirates'.[5]

'L.G. was born a cad and never forgot it; Winston was born a gentleman and never remembered it'.

But in spite of the perception that they were thick as thieves, the relationship between the two men was not always warm and comfortable. They themselves created a powerful mythology that suggested that, as Lloyd George put it in 1936, 'in spite of the fact that we have fought against each other on many occasions there has never been an occasion when I could not call Mr. Winston Churchill my friend and I think that he could do the same'.[6] In fact, Lloyd George and Churchill did not always feel affection towards one another, and at crucial moments the relationship broke down. One such crucial moment came when Churchill's career hit the rocks in 1915 as the Gallipoli disaster unfolded. After Asquith demoted Churchill from his position at the Admiralty, the latter complained bitterly at Lloyd George's failure to protect him. According to the diary of Lord Reading, 'W. says [he] has always supported L.G. through thick & thin but L.G. has now made his dispositions in such a way as to bring Winston down'.[7] Around this time Churchill wrote to a friend: 'Between me & Ll G tout est fini.'[8]

Another telling comment was made by Churchill in January 1916, when he was serving on the Western Front, having temporarily withdrawn from politics but hoping to make a comeback. He wrote to his wife that, although Lloyd George would not be sorry if he, Churchill, were killed, he would find it politically inconvenient. Therefore, even though her own severe criticisms of Lloyd George's personal disloyalty had much merit, she should stay in touch with him all the same – because he stood to be useful in the future. Yet at other moments the claim that political conflict had never descended into personal acrimony was politically convenient for both Lloyd George and Churchill; hence, in part, their displays of comradeship and protestations of mutual devotion.

This does not mean that we should treat their relationship cynically. Rather, we must be alive to its paradoxes. After Lloyd George succeeded Asquith as prime minister in 1916, he brought Churchill into his coalition government as soon as he judged it politically safe to do so. As minister of munitions, he may not have shown as much originality and flair as Lloyd George had previously done in the same role. But Churchill did demonstrate both efficiency and creativity and, furthermore, he demonstrated a growing political maturity. He largely kept his head

down and got on with the job at hand, and there were fewer flare-ups with Lloyd George than there had been previously. Still, Churchill resented his exclusion from the war cabinet, and during the four years of the post-war coalition the relationship again showed its characteristic alternation between conflict and cooperation. Key issues included the Russian civil war, the conflict in Ireland, British policy in the Middle East, and the 1922 Chanak crisis (which triggered Lloyd George's fall from power).

After the collapse of the coalition the two men's paths diverged politically and, during the 1930s, Lloyd George was of considerably less political relevance than Churchill was, even though both were 'in the wilderness'. As Churchill campaigned against the dangers of Nazism, Lloyd George made the gross error of visiting Hitler and showering him with fulsome praise. In spite of clear differences between the two men, Churchill was still tainted in some people's minds by his past links with Lloyd George. In his novel *Men at Arms*, Evelyn Waugh recounts the hero's reaction to the political changes of 1940: 'Guy knew of Mr Churchill only as a professional politician, a master of sham Augustan prose, a Zionist, an advocate of the Popular Front in Europe, an associate of the press-lords and of Lloyd George.'[9]

The experience of the two world wars

Let us now turn to what Lloyd George and C *did* as war leaders. To understand this fully we should compare the strengths and weaknesses of their respective positions. They both succeeded once-popular figures who appeared to have failed to prosecute the war with sufficient vigour. Although they were both still distrusted by significant sections of opinion, in both cases their premiership appeared more or less inevitable. Both then had to deal with a predecessor viewed by loyalists as the 'king over the water' – although in this respect H. H. Asquith was more problematic to Lloyd George than Neville Chamberlain was to Churchill. Chamberlain of course remained in Churchill's cabinet, whereas Asquith insisted on staying outside. Actually, Churchill's problem in the summer of 1940 was the upsurge of popular anti-Chamberlainite feeling, but when he wanted to – as a quid pro quo for getting Chamberlain's agreement to Lloyd George entering the war cabinet – he could pull strings to get the press campaign stopped, 'like turning off a tap'.[10]

'Lloyd George was finding his way through an untried field', noted Walter Layton, who had been a Ministry of Munitions official during the First World War. 'Winston Churchill was applying the lessons of the first war and adapting a highly developed apparatus of government.'

To a much greater extent than Churchill, Lloyd George was obliged to improvise his own machinery of government. The Ministry of Munitions has already been mentioned. After Lloyd George entered 10 Downing Street there was a further wave of innovations. These included the introduction of a prime ministerial secretariat, a small executive war cabinet, and an array of new ministries under 'men of push and go' such as Sir Joseph Maclay, the shipping controller. There was also now a gradual move towards an efficient system of food rationing. Some of these developments had been anticipated under the previous government, and did not all take place overnight. There were further crises to come. Yet, as Churchill later wrote, the 'vehement, contriving, resourceful, nimble-leaping Lloyd George seemed to offer a brighter hope, or at any rate a more savage effort' than the staid Asquith regime.[11] The era of 'wait and see' was at an end.

'Total war', it should be said, was not a fact but an aspiration, which was arguably never fully realised, even by 1918. (The failure to implement conscription in Ireland is clear evidence of this.) Nonetheless, the achievements were considerable; during the Second World War Churchill was able to benefit from lessons that had previously been learned. 'Lloyd George was finding his way through an untried field', noted Walter Layton, who had been a Ministry of Munitions official during the First World War. 'Winston Churchill was applying the lessons of the first war and adapting a highly developed apparatus of government.'[12]

This coincides with the arguments that David Edgerton has made in recent years. He argues that the now-dominant view of Britain's role in the conflict is one that suggests that the country was 'a faltering power in 1940, which in one last heroic gesture bankrupted itself to save the world'. In contrast, he makes a persuasive case that in fact Britain was 'a first-class power' with impressive technical and scientific capacity and a position as 'an industrial giant which remained at the heart of the world's trade' – the idea that she was pacificistic and poorly prepared was a myth. He also makes a convincing effort to show why it was that the optimistic narratives that accompanied the end of the war were in time supplanted by 'declinist' ones that suggested that Britain had at best muddled through against its more technically sophisticated German opponents.[13]

Here we may digress for a moment to reflect on two diary descriptions, one of Lloyd George in the First World War, and one of Churchill during the Second World War. The second of these is well known but the first is not. It is from the journal of Cecil Harmsworth, a Liberal MP, who was the brother of Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere. In his entry for 22 May 1918, Harmsworth reflected his experiences working in Lloyd George's prime ministerial secretariat:

> Those anxious radicals who have imagined Ll.-G. as dominated in Cabinet by the reactionary Tories – Curzon, Milner & Bonar – have been strangely mistaken. On the few occasions that I have been present at Cabinet the Wizard has ruled the roost with no appearance of challenge from any quarter. When, too, he has been absent in France or elsewhere it has been interesting to observe from the Cabinet ministers how many decisions have been deferred "until the Prime Minister returns". He is in truth the life & soul of the party in no merely conventional meaning of the expression. His vivid personality prevails in the Cabinet room as in the world outside. […]
>
> An easier chief to work with in some respects it would be difficult to find. He is wholly unaffected & unspoilt by enormous success. I knew him slightly in the dark days of the Boer War when he was certainly the most unpopular man in England. I see no change in his manner now when he is, I suppose, the most popular man in the whole great

> Alliance. I have often spoken to him more directly than I dare to my brother N. [Northcliffe] &, whether he has agreed with me or not, he has never resented anything I have said. The experience […] of the other members of the Secretariat has been the same.[14]

Contrast that with the second of our entries, written by General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) from 1941 onwards, who repeatedly denounced Churchill's behaviour in his diary. In 1944 Brooke wrote:

> He [Churchill] knows no details, has only got half the picture in his mind, talks absurdities and makes my blood boil to listen to his nonsense. I find it hard to remain civil. And the wonderful thing is that ¾ of the population of the world imagine Winston Churchill is one of the great Strategists of History, a second Marlborough, and the other ¼ have no conception what a public menace he is and has been throughout this war. […] Without him England was lost for a certainty, with him England has been on the verge of disaster time and again. […] Never have I admired and despised a man simultaneously to the same extent. Never have such opposite extremes been combined in the same human being.

The diary, it should be stressed, was written in the heat of the moment, and after the war Brooke conceded that he had made insufficient allowance for Churchill's difficulties. 'I thank God I was given an opportunity of working alongside such a man,' he wrote.[15]

Arguably, Churchill was luckier than Lloyd George in his commanders. Brooke and many others may have been driven up the wall by Churchill's behaviour but they were not contemptuous of politicians *as a class*, in contrast to the way that Henry Wilson, as CIGS during the First World War, dismissed them as 'the frocks' (a reference to their frock coats). Lord Kitchener's appointment as war secretary in 1914 was symptomatic of a problem that was in evidence well before Lloyd George became prime minister. Kitchener commanded huge respect, and was in many ways very able, but felt under no obligation to tell anyone else what he was doing. The earlier 'Curragh incident' (of March 1914), for example, was symptomatic of a wider crisis of civil–military relations which Churchill simply did not face. When Churchill perceived that generals such as Claude Auchinleck were underperforming or failing to communicate he simply got rid of them. We may do more than hazard that Lloyd George's problems in this regard were connected to the Irish issue, which in itself was also much more problematic for the British government as a whole during the First World War than during the Second. However irritating and inconvenient Irish neutrality was in 1939–45 it was nothing compared to the problems caused by the 1916 rebellion and its aftermath.

During the worst periods of the Second World War, Churchill was repeatedly urged to take the Lloyd George small war cabinet model as his own. In April 1941, Lloyd George argued in the House of Commons for a 'real War Council'. Churchill, he said, was 'a man with a very brilliant mind – but for that very reason he wanted a few more ordinary persons to look after him', independent people who would stand up to him. Churchill resisted such calls:

> My right hon. Friend spoke of the great importance of my being surrounded by people who would stand up to me and say, 'No, No, No.' Why, good gracious, has he no idea how strong the negative principle is in the constitution and working of the British war-making machine? The difficulty is not, I assure him, to have more brakes put on the wheels; the difficulty is to get more impetus and speed behind it. At one moment we are asked to emulate the Germans in their audacity and vigour, and the next moment the Prime Minister is to be assisted by being surrounded by a number of 'No-men' to resist me at every point and prevent me from making anything in the nature of a speedy, rapid and, above all, positive constructive decision.[16]

This reminds us that up until this point, if not beyond, Churchill had been operating in Lloyd George's shadow. But by the same token he was able to learn from him, although without imitating him slavishly.

It might be better to say that Churchill was the greater geopolitical (not military) strategist, but that Lloyd George had a more creative and inventive vision of the power of the wartime state.

Conclusion

Lloyd George's executive management of the war effort was in many ways very successful but this was combined with a 'presidential' political style that tended to marginalise parliament.[17] Churchill undoubtedly found criticism very irritating but to his credit he did not attempt to run away from it. He made a point of answering parliamentary questions even when he could have delegated the task to others. His willingness to answer 'as humbly as if he had been the youngest of Under-Secretaries' endeared him to MPs: he carried out the task 'dutifully, carefully, subserviently'.[18] Unlike Lloyd George during the First World War, he did not isolate himself from the Commons but took pains to present himself as its servant.

But if in some ways Churchill's war leadership was superior to that of Lloyd George, it was Lloyd George's own experience and efforts that helped make that possible. It seems impossible to say which of the two men faced a more difficult job as prime minister – which in turn makes it inappropriate to ask which was the greater war leader, as though this were a question that could be settled by awarding marks out of ten. The orthodox view is encapsulated in the phrase, 'Lloyd George was the abler politician, Churchill the greater statesman.'[19] This may seem superficially persuasive but it is perhaps too glib. It might be better to say that Churchill was the greater geopolitical (not military) strategist, but that Lloyd George had a more creative and inventive vision of the power of the wartime state.

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LEWIS HARCOURT'S POLI
A NEW SOURCE FOR THE LIBERAL P

In 2008, the Treasury allocated the Harcourt family papers to the Bodleian Library under the Acceptance in Lieu scheme. The main bulk of this archive had been on deposit and available to researchers since the 1970s, with further groups of papers being deposited in the 1980s.[1] This material included most of the papers of the Liberal MP and cabinet minister, Lewis 'Loulou' Vernon Harcourt, 1st Viscount Harcourt (1863–1922). **Mike Webb** reviews the contents of Harcourt's papers to analyse their value as a new source for the history of the Liberal Party and of the First World War.

TICAL JOURNAL 1914–16
PARTY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Among his papers were his journals to 1895, and his official and private correspondence. In 2008 the Bodleian received further tranches of papers that had been retained by the family, comprising largely the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century correspondence of the Harcourt family, and also further papers of Lewis Harcourt.[2] Among these additional papers of Lewis Harcourt was his political journal for the years 1905–17 which gives us a new insight into cabinet politics during his time as first commissioner of works, 1907–10, and 1915–16, and as colonial secretary, 1910–15, before he lost his cabinet position with the fall of Asquith in December 1916. This article looks at the journal as a source for Liberal and coalition politics in the first half of the First World War, 1914–16.

Lewis Harcourt was a curious figure. He came into politics as his better-known father's close and constant companion, acting as his private secretary in the late Victorian period when Sir William was home secretary and then chancellor of the exchequer. He only occasionally makes an appearance in the published edition of the diary of Charles Hobhouse.[3] Hobhouse gives two brief assessments of cabinet members in August 1912 and again in March 1915. In August 1912 he said of Harcourt:

> Harcourt has many attractive qualities: charming manners when he likes, a temper under good control, a hard worker, but no-one trusts him, and everyone thinks that language is only employed by him to conceal his thought.

In March 1915 he describes Harcourt as:

> subtle, secretive, adroit, and not very reliable or *au fond* courageous, does not interfere often in discussion, but is fond of conversing with the P.M. in undertones; a hard worker and a good office chief.

Something of a cloud hung over his personal life. There is evidence that he was a sexual predator towards both sexes, though there is nothing reflecting this in his own papers. It seems that his death in 1922 at the age of fifty-nine was quite likely to have been suicide following accusations of sexual advances towards Edward James, an Eton schoolboy.[4]

The existence of Harcourt's journals is hinted at in the *Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers*,[5] but the authors were told that a diary of 1905–15 had been lost since the 1970s. An obituary in the *Daily Sketch* relates a story that Harcourt admitted keeping a secret diary, and that it was so full that it would probably be burned by the public hangman.

Before looking at the substance of the journals, it is worth considering their nature. These are truly first-hand accounts of cabinet meetings, and the absence of an official diary of cabinet meetings (until one was introduced by Lloyd George in December 1916) makes them all the more important as a source. They cover the whole of Harcourt's period in the cabinet, 1907–16, and they were derived from notes taken at cabinet meetings.

Lewis ('Loulou') Harcourt, 1st Viscount Harcourt (1863–1922) in 1911

As already mentioned, these journals did not come to the Bodleian with the bulk of Lewis Harcourt's papers in the 1970s and 1980s; though had we but known it, we did have a few scraps of the diary for 1911 and 1912 in the form of notes on Foreign Office telegrams. Lewis Harcourt's papers include fairly comprehensive sets of printed Foreign Office telegrams, though as the Bodleian catalogue notes, a great many of these are 'wanting'. We now know the reason for their disappearance from the sequence. At the head of many of the 1914 and 1915 pages of the journal, Harcourt has written 'copied literally from F.O. Telegrams'; and as well as the journal, the 2008 accession included many other loose political papers, one carton containing a series of the original FO telegrams with Harcourt's journal scribbled in pencil in the margins and on the reverse of the printed pages. These telegrams were the ones missing from the sequence already in the library.

Harcourt's journal turned out to be more than just a private record of cabinet meetings. Preserved among its pages are numerous items

of correspondence, notes passed at meetings and even the odd sketch. Among these is this letter from H. H. Asquith dated 5 October 1916:

> It has been represented to me by some of my colleagues that you are in the habit of taking notes of what goes on at the Cabinet.
>
> As I have more than once pointed out in the past, this is a violation of our unwritten law, under which only the Prime Minister is entitled to take & keep any record of Cabinet proceedings.
>
> Yours always
> HHA

This of course explains why Harcourt wrote up the full journal after cabinet meetings, but he must still have kept fairly full notes in order to do this. This letter comes more than two years after a warning Harcourt noted in his diary during a cabinet meeting in July 1914:

> Winston at this point remonstrated with me for taking notes of Cabinet proceedings, so I desisted – the following were made from memory later.

As Patrick Jackson has written in the *Dictionary of National Biography*,[6] Harcourt was quite close to Asquith: not only were they neighbours at the cabinet table, but also on the Thames where the Harcourt seat at Nuneham Courtenay was across the river from Asquith's home, 'The Wharf' at Sutton Courtenay. They shared many social interests, and Asquith and his wife often crossed the Thames to visit the Harcourts. They saw eye-to-eye on several of the major issues of the day. By contrast, Harcourt clearly distrusted both Lloyd George and Churchill. The cabinet journal is full of negative remarks and stories at the expense of both. There are two cartoons by Jack Pease, the education secretary, among the pages of the journal, mocking Lloyd George and Churchill, which were presumably passed round the table like a secret joke in the classroom. Harcourt carefully preserved an exasperated note in the Asquith's hand dated March 1915:

> I shall some day keep a Cabinet timetable. I roughly estimate that about one-half of the whole is taken up by one person.

Harcourt has added the initials 'WSC' in case posterity should be in any doubt about who was meant.

Harcourt's political journals cover the period more or less continuously from 1906 to 1917. I have not read through the entire journal, which runs to twenty-four boxes;[7] I have, however, made a more detailed study of the 1914–16 section in preparing the Bodleian Library's exhibition, *The Great War: Personal Stories from Downing Street to the Trenches, 1914–1916*, which ran from June to November 2014, and I published several extracts from the diaries in the accompanying book.[8] An idea of their value as a source for the politics of the era can be gained by focusing on a few episodes recorded by Harcourt in the period 1914–16.

In July 1914 Harcourt was one of a group of cabinet ministers who argued the case for Britain's neutrality in the European war. In his own account he ascribes to himself a leading role in galvanising a 'Peace Party'. On the 26 of July, Harcourt records that he motored over from Nuneham to Sutton Courtenay to see Asquith:

> We talked about the probable Austro-Servian War … and I told him that under no circs. could I be a party to *our* participation in a European War.
>
> I warned him that he ought to order Churchill to move *no ship anywhere* without instructions from the Cabinet. I have a profound distrust of Winston's judgment & loyalty & I believe that if the German fleet moved out into the Channel (agst. France – not us) he would be capable of launching our fleet at them without reference to the Cabinet.
>
> The P.M. pooh poohed the idea – but I think he is wrong not to take this precaution.

At the next day's cabinet meeting we find Harcourt determined to resist the slide to war, but we also learn that this position is not unconditional. The Germans attempted to gain British neutrality with a promise of no annexations in France – she would be content with some French colonies:

> I said it was inconceivable that we should take part in a European War on a Servian issue, but still more inconceivable that we should base our abstention on such a bargain.

He adds:

> After the Cabinet I had talks with several colleagues in order to form a Peace party which if necessary shall break up the Cabinet in the interest of our abstention.
>
> I think I can already count on 11.
>
> … If we destroyed this Govt. to prevent war, no other cd. make it'.

On 29 July 1914 he says:

> I am determined not to remain in the Cab. if they decide to join in a war – but they cannot so decide as I am certain now I can take at least 9 colleagues.

It is interesting to compare this with Hobhouse's version of events. He records that only Harcourt, Simon and Beauchamp were for unconditional peace.

Harcourt's journal entry for 30 July 1914 runs to several pages and makes some important observations on events, among which is a record of meetings with several colleagues that day, including Hobhouse, as part of his peace campaign:

> Simon, J. Morley, Hobhouse, Beauchamp, Pease, Runciman, Montagu, Birrell all been in my room this afternoon – all with me, but Hobhouse with some reservations as to Belgium (he was of course a soldier).

'We talked about the probable Austro-Servian War … and I told him that under no circs. could I be a party to *our* participation in a European War.'

As colonial secretary, Harcourt was of course obliged to carry out certain preparations in case war should break out, though he records his reluctance to do so:

> Sent special fresh warnings by tel. to all Domins. & Cols. to prevent search – am much afraid of an 'incident' over search on some German vessel …
>
> Lambert of Admlty told me Churchill last night hired 'Acquitania' (Cunard)? What for? transport of troops to

> Belgium or for guard ship in Mersey? also commandeered all coal in South Wales – Cardiff paralysed: he is sd. to have incurred expenditure of over £1,000,000 – he told us at Cab. yesterday 'Precautionary' stage expenses wd. not exceed £10,000. I think he has gone mad. Every room in admiralty lighted & men at work when I passed at 2 a.m. this morning. I fear he is carrying his preparations too far & getting prematurely in the war stage.

And later that day Harcourt records that he declined to send a telegram asking 'Australia to place her fleet at our disposal … on ground premature, unnecessary & that I wanted initiative to be taken by Australia'.

The 30 July entry is rounded off with several interesting statements. Harcourt suggests most overtly here that he is the moving force in the peace party:

> J. Morley told me this aft. he was prepared to resign at my signal, but I don't think it will be tomorrow.

Then:

> Ld. Bryce has been to me – and separately Molteno M.P. on behalf of Radicals to ask situation. Both sd. they were confident in me and as long as I stayed in Cabinet they wd. assume that peace was assured. I am to let them know if *that* situation alters.

The situation did indeed alter, though Harcourt does not record the reactions of these colleagues to his own change of heart. At the end of the day's entry, Harcourt is violently for peace:

> War situation I fear much worse tonight. Pray God I can still smash our Cabinet before they can commit the crime.

'War situation I fear much worse tonight. Pray God I can still smash our Cabinet before they can commit the crime.'

Reporting the cabinet meeting of 31 July, Harcourt begins to emphasise the importance of the appearance at least of cabinet and government unity over individual consciences. When Arthur Ponsonby, who was strongly against intervention, asked for assurance that no commitments should be made to France or anyone without seeking the approval of the House of Commons, Harcourt's view was that he should receive a reply, as:

> … it helps our Peace friends to keep quiet – most important they should do so and we in Cab. still remain uncommitted so as to strengthen Grey's hand diplomatically.

As always though, Harcourt does not trust Lloyd George who, having canvassed business opinion, leant towards non-intervention:

> Ll. G. very eloquent agst. our participation & impressed Cabinet – but as he depends on public opin. he may wobble over again in 2 days.

With all this, Harcourt is at this stage optimistic that Britain will stay out of the war:

> I feel *now* that *this* Cabinet will never join in *this* war – though several colleagues are uneasy on the subject of our treaty obligations about Belgium.

As we have seen the journal goes beyond recording cabinet meetings, and includes references to ad hoc gatherings. One such entry occurs on Sunday 2 August when Simon and Illingworth came to see Harcourt at 14 Berkeley Square at midnight to ask him to come to see Lloyd George at 11 Downing Street at 10 o'clock the next morning. At the meeting were Pease, McKinnon Wood, Beauchamp, Simon, Runciman, Lloyd George and Harcourt himself:

> Settled we wd. not go to war for mere violation of Belgian territory & hold up if possible any decision today.
>
> 11.0 a.m. Before Cab. Ll. Geo. & I went to P.M. & sd we represented 8–10 colleagues who wd. not go to war for Belgium. P.M. listened, sd. nothing.

There follows an account of the cabinet meeting held between 11am and 1.55pm, and of Churchill threatening to resign:

> 'If Germ violates Belg. neutrality I want to go to war – if you don't I must resign'. J Morley sd. 'if you *do* go to war *I* resign'.

Burns clearly realised the implications of a commitment to defend the French coast, and was not prepared to wait for any further German moves:

> J. Burns sd. he could not agree to Grey's formula to Cambon this afternoon as to German fleet attack on Fr. coast and must resign at once – almost in tears.

After the cabinet meeting, Harcourt was at another gathering at Beauchamp's house in Belgrave Square:

> J. Morley, Simon, Samuel, Ll. Geo. also came. We telephoned for Pease, Mc K[innon] Wood & Runciman who joined us after luncheon & discussed plans for afternoon. Beauchamp feels we were 'jockeyed' this morning over Germ. Fleet; Simon agrees & thinks we ought to have resigned with Burns. I differ as I think the prevention of a German fleet attack & capture of French territory on shore of Channel a *British interest*.
>
> We agreed to refuse to go to war merely on a violation of Belg. *neutrality* by a traverse for invasion purposes of territory but to regard any permanent danger or threat to Belg. *independence* (such as occupation) as a vital Brit. interest.

For Harcourt, then, an attack on France by the German fleet was more important as an issue than an invasion of Belgium, with the caveat that invasion and occupation were to be seen in very different lights.

During the cabinet meeting of the morning of 3 August, Harcourt records his own intervention: 'I sd. gt. advantage if Germany declared war on us'. The waverers were perhaps now looking for a formula that would allow them to stay in government and salve their consciences should it come to war.

During this cabinet Asquith announced the resignations of Burns, Morley and Beauchamp and acknowledged a split in the party, saying that it was a

> 'most thankless task to me to go on'. … Simon sd. 'if country at war it was the duty of men like himself and the Peace party to

> support the Govt.': he broke down.

It is not entirely clear at exactly what point Harcourt becomes committed to intervention. On 4 August 1914, he is still trying to rein in Churchill:

> I insisted, and Asq. agreed, that orders shd. be sent to our Mediterranean Fleet *not* to fire on 'Goeben' till we have become at war with Germany. Winston was compelled to send these orders & *at once*.

But Harcourt has clearly already made his decision to stand by the government, and on the eve of the declaration of war we find him busy playing his part, sending the delayed telegrams to the colonies, and in the thick of discussions about possible military strategy:

> Long discussion as to tactics.
> Churchill wants to block Amsterdam & mouth of Rhine, Asq., Grey & I insisted we wd. not violate neutrality of Holland. Our defence of small nationalities our greatest asset. We insisted on this.

There is another swipe at Lloyd George:

> I think Ll. Geo. weakening in his peace 'convictions' under the impression of mad popular enthusiasm in streets for war.

'I think Ll. Geo. weakening in his peace "convictions" under the impression of mad popular enthusiasm in streets for war.'

The very fact that he can criticise the shallowness of someone else's convictions so readily seems to show that he himself now had no doubts about the rights of the cause, and that he had satisfied his own conscience that he was doing the right thing. From now on, he records cabinet discussions and describes his own role in furthering the war effort without any comment or reflection on his former position. We can only speculate how much the importance of government unity and the threat to his own career might have played a part, and we only know from other sources that Morley for one was angry at his abandoning the cause. Esher's journal records that Harcourt sent an apologetic letter to Morley, saying that he had decided to stay in the cabinet for 'two Imperial reasons', which he declined to explain.

It is not really possible to say at this stage what Harcourt's journal adds to our understanding of Asquith's government 1914–16. It certainly provides some new perspectives. As colonial secretary he seems to take a very personal ownership of some of the operations, which is surprising given his recently recorded convictions. Whereas on 3 August 1914 he was able to record his holding back on launching any strikes against German possessions in South West Africa with the lofty remark to de Villiers Graaf that it is 'often easier to take than to give up at end', by the next day he writes almost enthusiastically:

> I told them I cd. tomorrow destroy or seize great German wireless station in Togoland. May do so tomorrow.

And on 6 August 1914, he writes:

> German Colonies: I shall take most of them but not Cameroons at present.

~

The brief sketches of personalities around the cabinet table are one of the most interesting aspects of the journal. Kitchener and Winston Churchill not unexpectedly feature prominently. Harcourt records a Churchillian joke made at the cabinet of 18 August 1914:

> Winston said 'we may have to borrow one thousand millions before the war is over'. Some laughed & he said 'It is time we got something out of posterity'.

The First Lord and the War Secretary feature again in the cabinet meeting of 31 August:

> Kitchener says he can't have War correspondents at the front: give great trouble to Commanders.
> Asq. sd. to Kitchener 'you are thinking of your neighbour' (Churchill) who had great rows when he was a correspondent in S. Africa with Kitchener.

And in a further passage, not recorded by Hobhouse, Harcourt says that:

> Churchill wants to put German prisoners on German captured ships to clear the floating mine fields. We refused to allow this.

On the next day, he records that:

> Churchill has ordered all *neutral* fishing vessels to be seized or sunk in the North Sea if suspected! We told him to cancel order at once.

At the cabinet meeting of 7 September another lighter moment is recorded:

> We laughed when Kitchener proposed … to say that this was 'a war against military despotism' Ll. Geo. applying this phrase to Kitchener. [Presumably said behind his back.]

Sometimes Harcourt records private conversations, at dinners or in private houses. In January 1916 Harcourt noted a conversation with Kitchener at York House, where he had been invited to help in designing the war secretary's garden at Broome Hall in Kent (Harcourt being a keen gardener himself). The conversation inevitably drifted to the war, and Harcourt notes down Kitchener's six-point plan to finish the war by the end of 1916:

> 1. Offensive by allies in west in Mar–April with considerable German retreat
> 2. Offensive by Russia May–June with similar results
> 3. Internal trouble in Germany in consequence and request for allies' terms of peace, June–July
> 4. These terms specified and rejected by Germany August
> 5. Renewed offensive by Russians, French & British Sept and Oct with further success viz retirement of Germans beyond Meuse to the Rhine
> 6. Nov – acceptance by Germany of terms previously offered.

This was of course the rationale for the Somme offensive (originally planned for spring 1916), and it all seems impossibly optimistic in the light of what we know of the battle which began that summer.

The personal insights that Harcourt gives us into the political

world are highly illuminating, especially at moments of crisis such as the formation of the coalition government in May 1915. Now, clearly we have to take into account that Harcourt might have been overstating his part in these events. The journal reads in many ways like a self-conscious preparation for memoirs. Indeed, in a private letter dated 4 March 1916 he refers to his memoirs which 'will never be written'.[9] Harcourt includes in the journal a detailed account of the forming of the coalition, written at Nuneham on 25 May 1915. He records a conversation with Asquith in which the latter tells him that he deeply regrets having to sacrifice Harcourt (he was moved to the Board of Works) and that he thought it 'an Imperial disaster that you should leave the Colonial Office and so do most other people'. On being told that Bonar Law is to have the Colonial Office, Harcourt records his own reaction: 'Good God then Canada & the rest of the Dominions are to be ruled by Sir Max Aitken'. He explains that Bonar Law is intimate with Aitken and under financial obligation to him – this was of course the future press baron Lord Beaverbrook, who worked to bring Asquith down. Asquith then gave his opinion that Bonar Law would be less dangerous at the Colonial Office than at the Foreign Office, and Harcourt joked that 'It is for you to choose which part of the Empire you would soonest lose'. At the end of the account, Harcourt records that he asked Asquith if he could remain next to him at the cabinet table, and Asquith agreed. Harcourt carefully preserved a letter from Asquith in the journal, received just before the coalition cabinet first met, in which Asquith apologises for changing his mind about keeping Harcourt next to him at cabinet:

> On reflection I think Lansdowne must sit next me [sic] – sorry as I am to part with your close companionship.

This is followed by a sketch of the new arrangements at the cabinet table, with Lansdowne intruded between Harcourt and the PM.

A few days after that first coalition cabinet meeting, Harcourt went over to the Colonial Office to, as he puts it:

> see Bonar Law…to tell him the ropes & teach him his lesson in words of one syllable. I was horrified to find that he contemplated corresponding direct with Prime Ministers of the Dominions behind the back of the Gov[ernor]s General, but I think I got this idea out of his head.

On 8 June the cabinet discussed conscription, which Harcourt was against. He gives himself credit for wrecking the Universal Registration Bill. He sat on a committee to discuss this proposal and records Long's complaint that the bill had been destroyed by the committee's proceedings – '(he meant by me!)'.

On the 17 June Harcourt recorded an acrimonious debate in which Lloyd George and Carson were against reinforcing the Dardanelles expedition, which was 'marching straight to disaster' in Lloyd George's words: 'Carson sd Winston 'talking nonsense'. Winston very angry'.

In October there is an extraordinary copy or draft letter on Office of Works headed paper from Harcourt to the prime minister. Marked 'Secret', it states:

> For God's sake do not accept 30,000 [conscripts] per week as a possible number because
> a. you cannot get them
> b. you cannot afford them
> c. new divisions are not doing well
> d. we cannot arm & officer 70 divisions
> e. after April 1st '16 we cannot afford to pay for them with other liabilities
>
> L.H. 14.10.15.

And another letter of the same date also to the PM states that he thinks it 'very indecent that a civilian minister like Curzon should collect (& circulate) opinions from anonymous officers at the front on the question of conscription'. He ends the letter by saying that he thinks half the cabinet are mad, but that he does not think more than 10 per cent of the British population share their mania. One has to wonder if he ever sent these letters.

The compulsion issue remained to the forefront for several months more. There is a particularly vivid account of the cabinet of 19 April 1916 when Labour's refusal to accept a compromise threatened to break up the government. We have the image of Curzon coming in reeking of chloroform as he had just had another operation on his elbow. In the debate Harcourt claims that he himself pressed home the danger that the French would make peace if they thought Britain was not prepared to commit to compulsion (incidentally noting that they had the Cameroons to bargain with owing to the British blunder of handing it to France). Grey said it was the most serious crisis since 2 August; Kitchener was threatening to resign though acknowledging that the break up of the cabinet would be an 'appalling disaster'; Bonar Law said that even if he accepted a six-week delay to try to persuade the Labour Party (Henderson's proposal), the Tory Party would bring the Unionists out of the cabinet. Harcourt then records the meeting as though it were a play, something he did quite often to convey a dramatic quality:

> Now 2.45
> Asq. 'What am I to say in the H of C at 3.45'
> Balfour 'that the Brit constitution is bankrupt, that we have broken down & are unfit to conduct the war & tell the allies to make the best peace they can & soon as they can'
> Asq. 'Am I to say that?'
> Balfour 'It is the bare truth''.

On 8 June the cabinet discussed conscription, which Harcourt was against. He gives himself credit for wrecking the Universal Registration Bill.

In these extreme circumstances, the coalition agreed to accept Henderson's proposals and the crisis was averted for the time being. A few days later the Easter Rising erupted.

There is a great deal that might be said about the cabinet debates of 1915–16, and I hope that there is enough here to make some kind of judgement as to the value of this journal as a source. The interest of the journal seems to me to lie in its very personal perspective; we have seen how character sketches of the likes of Lloyd George and Churchill add a certain dimension to the journal, and the accounts of private conversations, particularly with the PM and the king, are really fascinating and unique. We learn much about the attitudes of Harcourt and his close allies to other cabinet members,

as in January 1916 when at a lunch at Downing Street, Harcourt and Asquith discuss the fear of Simon's possible resignation at the Home Office. Asquith felt that Harcourt was the only man for the job. Harcourt's response was that nothing would induce him to take it, listing the factors that would make it uncongenial, 'Press Censor, aliens, prisoners camps, capital sentences, police, prisons & above all heavy parliamentary work with innumerable bills'. He candidly admits that his suggestions for alternatives had but 'one object … to find some one who is not myself'.

There is an interesting sidelight on the conversion of both Harcourt and Asquith to the idea of female suffrage in August 1916. As always, Harcourt gives himself a lead role in this. If true, it appears to push back the date of Asquith's conversion, though I have not checked detailed sources on this:

> PM says his opposition to female suffrage is vitally affected by women's work in the war. I said the only logical & possible solution is Universal Suffrage (including women). This upset most of the cabinet, but the PM agreed with me …
>
> Grey says this is a criminal waste of time when we ought to be devoting our energies to winning the war.

I will end with another insight into the fall of Asquith in December 1916 when Harcourt, who of course fell with Asquith, records his conversation with King George V on the occasion of his ennoblement as Viscount Harcourt. Speaking of Asquith, the king said:

> 'I feel his loss very much & I stuck to him and fought for him to the end, but I fear your Govt. had got a little out of touch with public opinion, you allowed them to push you instead of leading them, and then you had all that d—d Press agitation against you'. I said I wondered how long it wd be before Northcliffe turned agst. Ll. Geo. and that when he did I expected Ll. Geo. wd. close up his papers and shut Northcliffe up. The King sd 'and a good job too or this country will be ruled only by the newspapers'.

'PM says his opposition to female suffrage is vitally affected by women's work in the war. I said the only logical & possible solution is Universal Suffrage (including women).'

Mike Webb is Curator of Early Modern Archives & MSS at the Bodleian Libraries. He is the author of the book From Downing Street to the Trenches: First-hand Accounts from the Great War, 1914–1916 *(Bodleian Publishing, 2014).*

1 See the Bodleian online catalogues of Harcourt family papers: http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-w-l/harcourt-w-l.html; http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-w-l-add/harcourt-w-l-add.html; and http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-estate/harcourt-estate.html.

2 For the catalogue of the Additional Lewis Harcourt papers, see: http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/harcourt-lewis-adds/harcourt-lewis-adds.html. For the mainly eighteenth and nineteenth-century additional Harcourt family papers, see: http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-fam-add/harcourt-fam-add.html.

3 See Edward David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse* (John Murray, 1977).

4 See James Lees-Milne, *The Enigmatic Edwardian: Life of Reginald, 2nd Viscount Esher* (Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd, 1986), p. 337.

5 Cameron Hazlehurst, Sally Whitehead and Christine Woodland (eds.), *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900–1964* (Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks, 19; Cambridge University Press, 1997).

6 Patrick Jackson, 'Harcourt, Lewis Vernon, first Viscount Harcourt (1863–1922)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan. 2008.

7 Now catalogued as MSS. Eng. c. 8264–8271, d. 4173–4188.

8 Mike Webb, *From Downing Street to the Trenches: First-hand Accounts from the Great War, 1914–1916 (*Bodleian Publishing, 2014).

9 Bodleian Library, MS Harcourt 446, fo. 79.

REPORTS

Among the Fallodonistas

Sir Edward Grey and the outbreak of the First World War
FCO/LSE symposium, 7 November 2014
Report by **Iain Sharpe**

The understandable focus of First World War centenary commemorations on the suffering and sacrifice of those on the front line has meant that the political and diplomatic background to the outbreak of war has tended to be marginalised. Even so, it was a surprise to learn in Professor David Stevenson's opening remarks that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office/LSE symposium 'Sir Edward Grey and the Outbreak of the First World War' at Lancaster House on 7 November 2014 was the only 1914 centenary event to focus specifically on diplomacy. Yet, if it was the only such event, it was certainly an impressive and enlightening one, with speakers including many leading experts on pre-First World War European diplomacy.

The opening speaker was Professor T. G. Otte of the University of East Anglia, whose recent book *July Crisis* is broadly sympathetic towards Grey's diplomacy. Professor Otte commented that Grey has been unlucky in the treatment of his posthumous reputation. His critics have been the dominant voice, from the unfair attacks in Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* to his being voted the worst MP ever in a

recent poll. What Otte described as Grey's 'aloof and reticent personality' combined with the destruction of his personal papers has contributed towards this. He argued that historians have often failed to recognise the constraints under which Grey laboured. Throughout his foreign secretaryship, he pursued a diplomatic policy of constructive ambiguity, trying to deter France from provoking Germany, but warning Germany against belligerence towards the French. As a result, in order to win British support, in 1914 France went to some lengths not to be seen as the aggressor, even at the expense of greater initial losses.

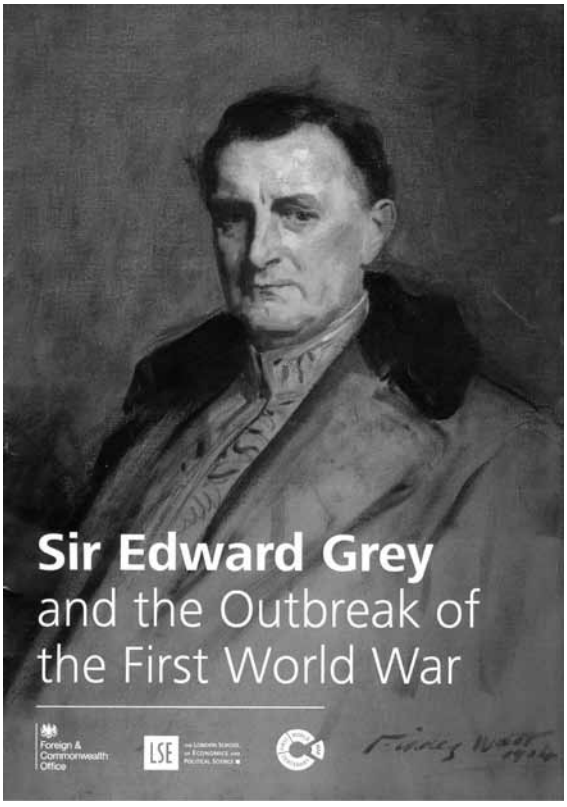
Grey was concerned about the dangers of British isolation: even when in opposition he had written privately of the need to make peace with Russia to escape the problem of always requiring diplomatic backing from Germany, for which it exacted a high price. Russia's temporary weakness following defeat in the 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War enabled Grey to conclude a treaty in 1907. But he was aware that this weakness was transient, and increasing tensions between the two meant that Britain might not have renewed the agreement when it expired in 1915. Although Grey has been accused of prioritising the entente with France above all else, Otte argued that he was aware of the twin dangers of German isolation and domination. He insisted on British naval supremacy but by 1914, with the naval race effectively won by Britain, he sought détente with Germany based on resolving imperial and Near East matters and this was increasingly bearing fruit. Throughout the July 1914 crisis he was alert to the dangers of conflict escalating. This is why he sought to promote conflict resolution mechanisms via Anglo-German crisis management, an approach that had proved successful in the Balkan wars of 1912–13. Grey made mistakes, particularly in trying to deal with Austria through Germany rather than directly but, citing the comment of a contemporary writer that 'diplomacy could only postpone the evil day', Otte concluded that 'Grey's policy did not bring that day forward.'

The next session focused on Grey's relations with the 'entente powers', France and Russia. Professor John Kieger of Cambridge University argued that while Grey sought to avoid making a specific commitment to France, the defining moment was the exchange of letters between the foreign secretary and French ambassador Paul Cambon in November 1912, which divided naval responsibilities between the two countries, with Britain concentrating on the North Sea and France on the Mediterranean. While the prime minister, Asquith, claimed that the letters made no specific commitment and indeed were 'almost a platitude', in Kieger's view they meant that Cambon had manoeuvred Grey into a position from which he could not break free in August 1914: Britain having a moral obligation to France which amounted to an alliance in all but name.

Keith Wilson, emeritus professor at Leeds University, discussed Grey's relationship with Russia. Wilson's work in many ways prefigured Niall Ferguson's arguments about Britain's reasons for going to war, in particular claiming that Grey had already committed Britain to supporting France and Russia in the event of war, and stressing the importance of Britain's need to conciliate Russia in Asia in order to protect the Indian frontier. He highlighted Grey's assurance to Russian Foreign Minister Sazanov, three weeks before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, that friendship with Russia was the cornerstone of British policy. According to Wilson this gave Russia greater leverage over Britain, so that in late July Sazanov was effectively able to blackmail Grey by saying that Britain must either support Russia or forfeit her friendship in Asia. He concluded that this imperial dimension, Grey's belief that peace on the Indian frontier trumped everything, together with the impact on the Liberal cabinet of his threat to resign, was what carried Britain into war.

The first afternoon session was devoted to Grey's personal life. Dr Richard Smith, senior historian at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office stressed the apparent contradictions about Grey: his lack of overt political ambition, his interest in country pursuits and his reputation as a man of high principle; versus his long tenure of high office, spending much of his life in London, and rumours of extra-marital affairs and illegitimate children. It appears that Grey and his first wife Dorothy were soul mates without being lovers, and she yearned for him to give up politics. Dr Smith commented that it is interesting to speculate whether Grey would have remained at the Foreign Office until 1914 had she lived. He expressed scepticism about the cases cited by Michael Waterhouse, in his recent biography of Grey, about possible illegitimate children. While men did take mistresses, there were rules, including sticking to married women, and it seems unlikely that Grey would have been caught out three times. This was reinforced by comments from Grey's great-great nephew, Adrian Graves, who said that recent DNA tests showed no close match with descendants of three of the supposed illegitimate children.

In the case of Grey's second wife, Pamela Tennant, Grey certainly enjoyed a long and close friendship with her during her first, unhappy marriage, although he was also a close friend of her husband, Margot Asquith's brother Eddy Tennant. Pamela was rumoured to have had many affairs and one of her children, David Tennant, believed Grey might have been his father. David Lloyd



George thought Grey's untainted personal reputation too much to bear and made references in his papers to Grey not being found out. Dr Smith concluded that there are elements of Grey's private life, as well as his public life, that are destined to remain an enigma.

The next speakers considered Grey's relations with the Central Powers, with F. R. Bridge, emeritus professor at Leeds University, and Professor Annika Mombauer of the Open University discussing Austria and Germany respectively. Professor Bridge stressed the extent to which Grey's prestige in the country and reputation for honesty and integrity enabled him to overcome radicals in the cabinet. Grey rejected the idea of trying to build friendship with Austria because he did not want Germany to be isolated. At the same time, he feared Russia being drawn into the orbit of the Triple Alliance, which would leave Britain isolated. So he tried to preserve the balance of power, believing that Europe could be divided into two diplomatic groupings without being at war. The London Conference after the Balkan Wars appeared to vindicate this approach, but according to Professor Bridge, it destroyed Austria's confidence in diplomacy, with Serbia doubling in size and looking to add to its territory. Although he criticised Grey's 'insouciance' during the July Crisis, his greater charge was that by prioritising good relations with Russia above all else in the preceding years, Grey had already alienated Austria.

Annika Mombauer was rather less critical of Grey and placed responsibility on Germany for the outbreak of war. She pointed out that even before taking office, Grey in a famous speech of November 1905 had spoken of the need for rapprochement with Germany, provided this did not compromise good relations with France. Unfortunately, détente was only possible if both sides wanted it and Germany felt strong enough repeatedly to reject British overtures. Although relations began to improve after the 1911 Agadir Crisis, Germany wanted more than Britain could give, namely a guarantee of neutrality. In 1912 Grey had pointed out to Germany that although Britain's hands were not tied they could not stand aside and let France be crushed. During the July Crisis itself, for Grey the fact of Germany transgression of Belgian neutrality was important for convincing those in Britain who doubted the wisdom of war. Professor Mombauer concluded, however, that British ambiguity did not affect the outcome of the crisis. Other countries took decisions regardless of what was decided in London and Britain's role was less decisive than British diplomats liked to think.

Professor Clark discussed the contradictions of Grey's career: the fact that his policy was opposed by many of his Liberal colleagues and supported by his Conservative opponents; his aura of engaging in politics out of duty not ambition, yet becoming foreign secretary only as a result of conspiratorial planning.

The July Crisis was the specific focus of the lecture by Christopher Clark, newly appointed Regius professor of History at Cambridge University. Professor Clark began by coining the term 'Fallodonistas' (after Fallodon, Grey's Northumberland home) to describe the assembled company. Like Richard Smith earlier, Professor Clark discussed the contradictions of Grey's career: the fact that his policy was opposed by many of his Liberal colleagues and supported by his Conservative opponents; his aura of engaging in politics out of duty not ambition, yet becoming foreign secretary only as a result of conspiratorial planning.

Through his recent bestselling work, *The Sleepwalkers*, Professor Clark is known for arguing against the primary German responsibility for the outbreak of war, and his book is quite critical of Grey. To the ears of this audience member, his comments at the conference represented a slight softening of attitude towards Grey. He acknowledged that the pace of change in European diplomacy was stepping up in the years before 1914, with the Italo-Turkish War and the Balkan Wars. He acquitted Grey of any charge of failing to take the news of the assassination in Sarajevo seriously. For example, on 5 July Grey warned France of the need to calm things down, and he warned the German ambassador, Lichnowsky, that Britain's relations remained good with its entente partners and later made clear that Britain would find it hard to stand aside and watch France be crushed.

At the same time, Clark remained critical of Grey's attitude towards Austria-Hungary. Although acknowledging that some of the dual monarch's demands against Serbia were fair, Grey still considered its note of 23 July to be 'the most formidable document I have ever seen addressed by one state to another' and, as the crisis progressed, he did not really consider the justice of the Austro-Hungarian demands – he continued to view the crisis through the lens of the entente. For example, he believed that it would be difficult to persuade Russia not to mobilise when Austria-Hungary was mobilising, while failing to consider that the latter's mobilisation was only against Serbia, whereas the former's was against Austria-Hungary and Germany (and therefore by implication more provocative). Nonetheless, Clark acknowledged the constraints that Grey faced, including the reality that in foreign policy the building blocks are not of one's own making, that his influence over his entente partners was limited and that he could not know if his own cabinet would ultimately support him. Clark concluded that there was no evidence that clearer signs from Grey to Germany would have changed the course of the crisis. On the question of the decision to intervene, it was hard to fault the argument of his speech to parliament on 3 August 1914.

The final panel session included contributions by Zara Steiner (author of many works on pre-1914 diplomacy, including *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*), Grey's biographer Professor Keith Robbins and Professor T. G. Otte. Dr Steiner stressed the extent of Grey's independent-mindedness: in 1905 he was firmer than both his Liberal Imperialist colleagues Asquith and Haldane in negotiations with Campbell-Bannerman. Despite his reputation for being on the right of the Liberal party, he was in domestic politics firmly Liberal: in favour of labour interests and women's suffrage. As foreign secretary, his views were independent of his officials, who have wished for a clearer commitment to France. Grey believed in Britain having ententes rather than alliances and pursued his own policy.

Keith Robbins, whose 1971 biography remains the most authoritative study of his Grey's life, focused on aspects of his personality that are often ignored. He stressed the importance of Grey's physical vigour. While the focus is often on his interest in birdwatching and fly-fishing it is too easy

forgotten that he was also a real tennis champion. Robbins also defended Grey against criticism about not travelling or speaking foreign languages: pointing out that Grey was always at his desk, unlike modern foreign secretaries who 'travel all the time and do nothing'. Robbins stressed the importance of the influence on Grey of the historian and Anglican bishop Mandell Creighton, in particular his essay on the English national character and the sense of Grey being groomed as the embodiment of that character. In a cabinet with considerable Celtic influence, Grey was a very English figure and played up to the idea of the sensible Englishman. Professor Otte agreed with Professor Robbins about Grey's Englishness and stressed the influence of the imperialist and historian J. R. Seeley on Grey's generation – in particular the belief in the importance of British greatness and of Britain being different because it was a maritime power.

The symposium showed how vigorous the debate remains about Grey's policy and reputation. The overall impact of the contributions might have left an open-minded audience member more sympathetic to Grey by the end of the day than at the start; however, he is destined to remain an elusive and controversial figure. It is unfortunate that the 1914 commemorations did not include more events of this nature, but it remains a considerable achievement to bring together such an impressive range of speakers for a one-day event. The organisers also deserve credit for making attendance free of charge and open to members of the public rather than restricted to policy-makers, parliamentarians and academics.

Podcasts of most of the papers given at the conference are available at: https://audioboom.com/playlists/1265752-sir-edward-grey-and-the-outbreak-of-the-first-world-war-podcasts

Dr Iain Sharpe completed a University of London PhD thesis in 2011 on 'Herbert Gladstone and Liberal party revival, 1899–1905'. He works as an editor for the University of London International Academy and has served as a Liberal Democrat councillor in Watford since 1991.

REVIEWS

The view from Downing Street

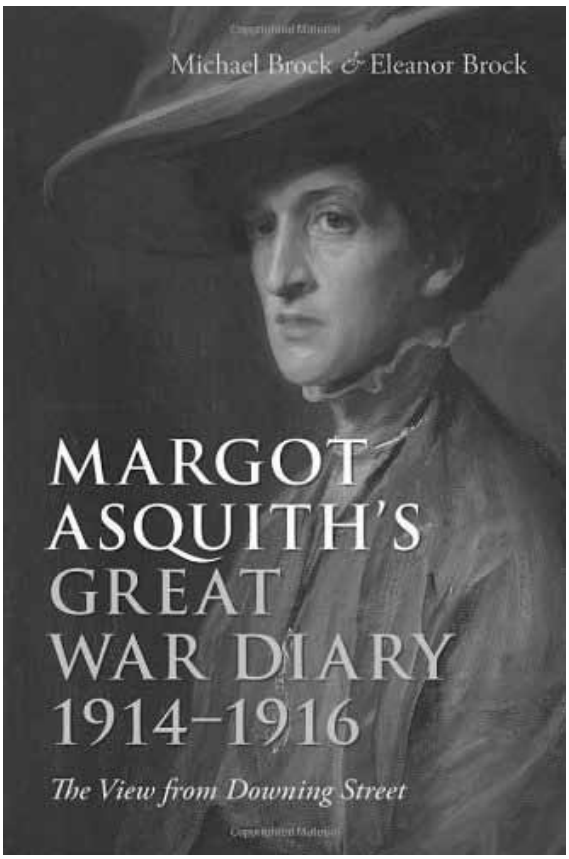
Michael and Eleanor Brock (eds.), *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary 1914–1916: The View from Downing Street* (Oxford University Press, 2014)
Review by **David Dutton**

I cannot recall ever having had such an entertaining and enjoyable hour's conversation with anyone before.' So wrote Sir Walter Runciman, father of the one-time Liberal cabinet minister of the same name, after a meeting in 1920 with Margot Asquith, second wife of H. H. Asquith, then still leader of the Liberal Party. She was, judged Runciman, 'a most likeable person, perfectly frank and, I think, taking into consideration her characteristics, much misjudged'.[1] Over the years that followed, Sir Walter would have cause to modify his opinions, not least when Margot wrote to suggest that he might finance the purchase of a new car for her personal use, as an alternative to her husband's Rolls Royce, and when in 1926 she suggested that Walter junior could become Liberal leader in succession to her husband and 'Prime Minister whenever he likes', providing father and son were prepared to 'put up a quarter of a million'. Quite how this transaction was to be put into effect was not explained, but Sir Walter's assessment on this occasion of 'a clever incompetent person without any sense of proportion' does not seem wide of the mark.[2]

What had charmed Sir Walter in 1920 was a preview of the first volume of Margot's *Autobiography*, published later that year. She had, she admitted, 'been discreet about Downing Street'.[3] Even so, what she did write offended many. 'People who write books ought to be shut up', suggested George V in evident perturbation at the prospect of Margot's forthcoming publication.[4] The king's concerns appear to have been justified. He 'let fly about Margot', recorded Lord Curzon. 'He severely condemns Asquith for not reading and Crewe for reading and passing her scandalous chatter.'[5] What His Majesty would have made of Margot's unexpurgated wartime diaries, edited now by Michael and Eleanor Brock, whose earlier collaboration made Asquith's revealing letters to his young confidante, Venetia Stanley, generally available, we can only surmise.

The diary is written in the same breathless manner, with passion as evident as punctuation is absent. Margot frequently employed underlining – one, two or even three lines – to drive home her emphasis and sometimes her indignation.

This book, covering the period between the outbreak of war and her husband's loss of office in December 1916, is certainly of more value to historians than the memoir published nearly a hundred years ago. It has the merit of immediacy, with no evidence that the author attempted to revise her contemporary judgments in the light of later reflection, though she did occasionally add marginal comments at a later date. Furthermore, the Brocks reveal the cavalier way in which Margot used her diary as an aide-memoire in the writing of her autobiography. But an uneasy question remains about the diary's worth as an historical source. Scholars who have worked on the Liberal Party's history in this period, even if they have not used the diaries themselves, will be familiar with Margot's style. Her letters, often scribbled in pencil, pepper the surviving private collections of her husband's political contemporaries. The diary is written in the same breathless manner, with passion as evident as punctuation is absent. Margot frequently employed underlining – one, two



or even three lines – to drive home her emphasis and sometimes her indignation. But no one can read her words in the belief that here was a sound and balanced observer of the political scene of which her marriage to Herbert (or Henry, as she invariably called him) Asquith made her an intimate witness. The Brocks' own assessment that she was 'an opinionated egotist, often inaccurate, the victim of flattery, and occasionally prone to fantasy' is difficult to dispute. But their further contention that such disadvantages are outweighed by her advantage – 'she was closer to the Prime Minister, and thus to the centre of events, than anyone else' – is more open to challenge, not least because she was so often mistaken in her assessments of her husband and his qualities (p. vii).

Most notably, Margot failed to appreciate the erosion of Asquith's position as a wartime leader, still less his inherent disqualifications for such a role. She clearly took a fairly dim view of the majority of her husband's political contemporaries, particularly – though not exclusively – those in the Conservative Party. Her dismissal of the Tory leader, Bonar Law, was especially brutal: 'He is cunning, cautious and shallow', judged Margot; 'very quick, hopelessly uneducated and naif' (pp. 31–2). 'No cad that was ever bred could have made a viler speech' than Law's on the government's temporary resolution of the Irish problem in September 1914 (p. 38). His inclusion in the coalition government after May 1915 clearly pained her: 'I could not help watching Bonar Law, and feeling how tragic it was for Henry to see this third-rate man, who had called him "liar", "cheat", "fraud" – every name under Heaven – sitting quietly there, wondering which of his followers he would impose upon Henry' (p. 123). Indeed, Margot clearly held that the formation of the coalition involved the inclusion of a lesser breed inside the British government. 'What have we gained by having Lansdowne?' she asked herself, '(charming, courtly, elderly, barren person); Bonar Law? (provincial, ignorant, unreliable); Austen Chamberlain? (sticky and correct).'

In contrast to such political pygmies, Asquith's stature was, in Margot's eyes at least, almost heroic. 'Henry knocks all the others into a cocked hat', she wrote in November 1914. 'His calm, sweetness of temper, perfect judgment, sympathy, imagination and un-irritability *have amazed me*. I feel proud of being near so great a man' (p. 49). 'Henry was born for this war', she noted just over a year later (p. 222). And as late as the end of July 1916, she was convinced that 'Henry's position in the country and in the cabinet [was] stronger than it has ever been' (p. 273). The problem is that such assessments are a long way from those of many, perhaps the majority, of the prime minister's contemporaries and of subsequent historians. Margot's reaction to her husband's address to the parliamentary Liberal Party, explaining the formation of the first coalition, well illustrates the point. He 'made the most wonderful speech he ever made in his life', insisted the ever-loyal Margot. When he had finished, 'there was not a dry eye, he had not only melted but moved all his men to the core' (p. 125). Richard Holt, MP for Hexham, was among those who were less enthusiastic: 'The PM attended an impromptu meeting of Liberal members … and alleged foreign affairs of an unrevealable character as his reason in a speech impressive but not ultimately convincing.' Within days, Holt was writing of his suspicions of a 'dirty intrigue'.[6]

Such alternative opinions of Asquith cannot be ignored. Lady Tree's throwaway question to the prime minister – shrewd jibe or merely a joke – 'Do you take an interest in the war?' may have been extreme (p. c). But contemporary observers and later commentators have judged that Asquith, often befuddled by drink, probably failed to devote himself with sufficient energy to the national crisis and certainly did not convince others that he was doing so. Margot was no doubt sincere in her belief that her husband was irreplaceable. But there was also a financial dimension in her concern at the prospect of leaving Downing Street. World war had not curbed her notorious extravagance. 'If the Gov. is going to break', worried Margot, 'Where H., Puff, Eliz. and I would live … I've never had less than 16 servants, sometimes more, and my secretary Miss Way' (p. 229). On another occasion she expressed the hope that, after the war, Asquith might be given Walmer Castle as a residence for life, together with a generous pension. 'He deserves everything the King can give him: of this there are not two opinions' (p. 100).

This book is full of minor gems, throwing light on the extraordinary domestic bubble within which the wartime premier operated, not least Margot's outrageous attempts to influence the conduct of many of her husband's ministers. Her narrative, however, does not always serve to clarify. The account of Asquith's final removal from Downing Street is particularly confusing. 'I have no time for anything! I can't write up my notes, so jump from date to date', she confessed, and there is mention of a separate volume, which has not survived, containing 'every fact of the crisis' (pp. 311, 297). The Brocks' editorial work is of a high quality, though one or two mistakes have crept in. Jacky Fisher resigned from the Admiralty in May 1915, not March, and it was Prussian, not Russian, militarism that Asquith condemned in his Guildhall speech in November 1914 (pp. 99, 302). More seriously, Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill met its fate in the Commons, not the Lords

as suggested. But, if we cannot necessarily accept Margot's self-assessment that she was 'a sort of political clairvoyant' (p. xlvii), there can be no doubt that the editors have provided us with a rollicking good read!

David Dutton's most recent book is Tales From the Baseline: a History of Dumfries Lawn Tennis Club *(2014) – a new departure for a student of twentieth-century British politics.*

1 Elshieshields Tower, papers of Sir Walter Runciman, Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman, 28 April 1920.
2 Ibid., Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman 6 November 1926.
3 Ibid., Sir W. Runciman to W. Runciman 28 April 1920.
4 H. Nicolson, *King George V* (London, 1952), p. 342.
5 K. Rose, *George V* (London, 1983), p. 376.
6 D. Dutton (ed.), *Odyssey of an Edwardian Liberal* (Gloucester, 1989), p. 38.

Assessing Edward Grey

Michael Waterhouse, *Edwardian Requiem: A Life of Sir Edward Grey* (Biteback 2013)
Review by **Dr Chris Cooper**

The historical reputation of Sir Edward Grey (1862–1933) stands remarkably high for a man whose efforts to maintain European peace as foreign secretary (1905–1916) failed in August 1914 with catastrophic consequences. Neville Chamberlain, whose similar efforts failed twenty-five years later, has not been afforded such a sympathetic hearing. Michael Waterhouse's biography of Britain's longest continuously serving foreign secretary reinforces the conventional view of Grey: he strove admirably to avert the seemingly unstoppable drift to war. He is depicted as 'a first-class Foreign Secretary' who 'prepared his country for the inevitable' (p. 375). While Grey was less flamboyant than Liberal contemporaries such as Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, he is well remembered. The famous words he uttered after the House of Commons had in effect sanctioned Britain's entry into war, 'The lamps are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime', have been grafted on to Britain's national consciousness. This was signified in August 2014, on the centenary of Britain's declaration of war, when the lights went out across the UK and candles were lit in their place.

With the last biography of Grey being published four decades ago, a fresh study taking account of historiographical developments and drawing upon fresh sources would be most welcome. But this reviewer was disappointed. The book offers little beyond the existing knowledge of Grey. Many readers will understandably be interested in his political career and diplomacy. Yet fishing adventures and birdsong repeatedly interrupt the narrative of important events in European history. Grey's attachment to the country and wildlife should really have been dealt with separately and more briefly.

Edward Grey was drawn from Whig stock. His most famous ancestor was the second Earl Grey, prime minister when the 1832 Reform Act was passed. Grey entered parliament in 1885 and, after establishing himself on the imperialist wing of the party, he became Lord Rosebery's junior minister at the Foreign Office in 1892. Yet Waterhouse suggests that Grey was always a reluctant participant. He served in several governments only out of a sense of duty. Nonetheless, with the foreign secretary in the Lords, Grey explained the government's policy and answered questions in the elected chamber. He had, therefore, assumed an important role and he filled the post with distinction. It was in this capacity that he made his celebrated declaration in 1895, outlining British interests on the River Nile to deter French expansionism. Before the turn of the century William Harcourt, the outgoing Liberal leader, described Grey as 'the young hope of the party' (p. 72).

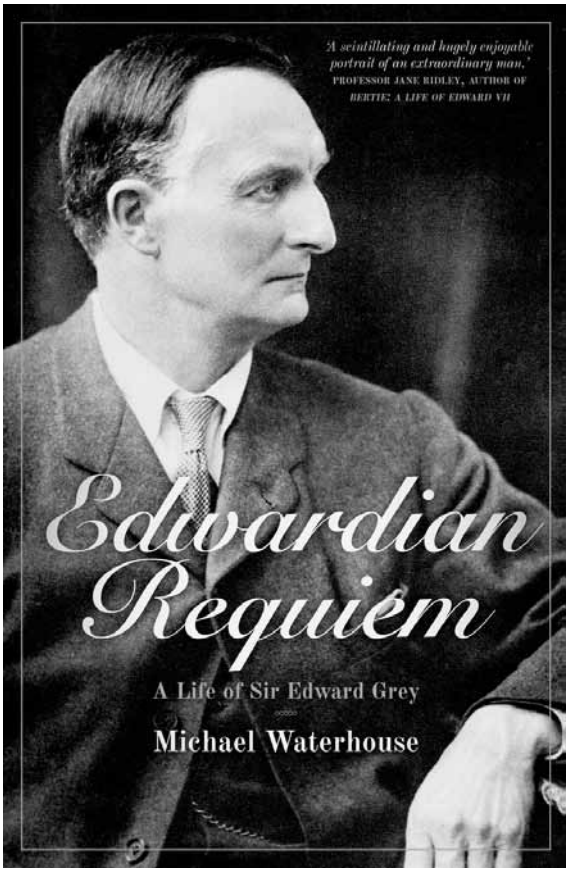
Waterhouse is too ready to defend a man he clearly admires and is unwilling to mete out criticism.

Though embarrassing party leader, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, over his very public support for the Boer War, and being one of the 'Relugas Compact' conspirators, Grey's standing in the Liberal ranks ensured that he was offered the post of foreign secretary shortly before the party's election landslide of 1906. Grey accepted and retained the post until 1916. His tenure of the Foreign Office was characterised by closer relations with both France and Russia and a failure to achieve an understanding with Germany. After outstanding colonial disputes between Britain and France had been settled, Grey, who was given great latitude under both Campbell-Bannerman and Herbert Asquith, emerged as one of the foremost champions of the Anglo-French entente. Though he inherited this policy from his Conservative predecessor, he pursued it vigorously. He sanctioned formal military conversations with the French, thereby enhancing Britain's moral commitment to them whilst managing to cultivate crossbench support for his approach to foreign affairs.

Grey's previous dealings with German leaders bolstered his desire for an Anglo-French rapprochement. Convinced that 'morals do not count' in German diplomacy (p. 146), he refused to threaten a blossoming friendship with France for an agreement with Germany which might have proved worthless. He began warning the German ambassador about Britain's likely participation in a Franco-German war in defence of France as early as January 1906. During the Moroccan Crises of 1905–6 and 1911 Grey threw diplomatic support behind the French, thereby strengthening the entente. Linked to the Anglo-French accord was Grey's advocacy of closer relations with Russia, particularly granted the two powers' unresolved colonial issues. This was a formidable task, not least because many Liberals loathed the autocratic tsarist regime. Nonetheless, an entente was signed with Russia in 1907. Grey then attempted to reach an agreement with Germany. He was, however, thwarted in his attempts to slow the pace of German naval construction and refused to

guarantee British neutrality in a future Franco-German war.

Following several near misses, Grey was unable to avert a general European war in 1914. After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Grey's previous success in containing the first Balkan War (1912–3) prompted his unsuccessful attempt to assemble a conference in London in July 1914. Once hostilities began, Britain's participation in the conflict, though likely, was far from certain. Despite the moral commitment to France, and to a lesser extent Russia, Britain was not legally obliged to go to their aid. The crass German ultimatum sent to Brussels and the subsequent violation of Belgian neutrality, however, helped clarify Britain's position. Grey's noteworthy speech to the Commons on 3 August 1914 'carried a united nation into war and solved a ministerial crisis' (p. 353). But Grey's career had, by now, passed its peak. Once the war began, Grey was 'not a Foreign Secretary for a wartime environment' (p. 354). He enjoyed little success in foreign policy from 1914–16. After receiving a peerage in July 1916, he stepped down as foreign secretary when Lloyd George became prime minister in December. He



was never to return to high office, although he did serve a brief, and largely fruitless, term as Britain's ambassador in Washington and acted as the Liberal leader in the Lords during 1923–4, despite his failing eyesight.

Grey the politician is difficult to compartmentalise. Arthur Balfour, once remarked that Grey was 'an odd mixture of an old-fashioned Whig and a Socialist'. His imperialist credentials were clear and Grey adopted a non-partisan approach to foreign affairs, which saw a good deal of support from the Conservative benches. Yet, as Waterhouse notes, he 'had surprisingly strong ties to the radical wing of the party' (p. 69). This was clear in his support for extending the franchise, land reform, the establishment of a federal United Kingdom, an elected second chamber and a scheme of national insurance. Grey also sat on the board of directors for the North Eastern Railway and accepted the need for business and government to work with, rather than smash, trade unions.

One new departure in Waterhouse's study is the possibility that Grey may have had a colourful private life. This is surprising granted that he was renowned for his integrity and straightforwardness in public life. While the evidence presented is circumstantial, Grey, who had married the frigid Dorothy Widdrington, may have had extramarital affairs and fathered illegitimate children. But Waterhouse uses these claims to draw conclusions about Grey's political career. His ability to 'justify to himself his double life', helps explain 'how he managed to survive so long at the top in politics' (p. 59). The author also draws odd parallels between Grey's love of wildlife and his political career. His 'amazing ability to tame birds and animals' somehow demonstrated 'the same sense of trust and patience that had stood him so well at the Foreign Office' (p. 393).

Waterhouse continually reminds his readers that Grey was a proficient ornithologist, lover of wildlife, reader of poetry, keen fisherman and gifted sportsman. Yet the detail that the author goes into regarding Grey's pursuits is tiresome. The chapter entitled 'The Boer War' is constantly interrupted with tales from the countryside. One extract from Grey's *The Charm of Birds* (1927) is a page and a half long. Even in the midst of the July Crisis the reader learns about Grey's catches, when the author should probably have criticised Grey for leaving his desk in Westminster – particularly as his diplomacy was arguably overtaken by events.

Michael Waterhouse has missed an excellent opportunity to contribute to the historical record in terms of Grey's career after 1916. The sketch reveals little that is new. While Grey's private papers were destroyed shortly after his death, a proper trawl through Hansard, digitised newspapers and the private papers of leading Liberals would have shed considerable light on his post-1916 career. The main revelation is that, despite Grey's increasing blindness, he could still catch trout! Although Grey was consulted by Liberals who held office during the hectic days of 1931 and 1932, his thoughts on the splintering of the Liberal party, the banking crisis, the formation of the National Government, the celebrated 'agreement to differ', and his disillusionment with what he called the 'so-called Liberal Party' are either barely mentioned or completely ignored. Disappointment is compounded when one learns nothing about Grey's thoughts on the League of Nations World Disarmament Conference which began in 1932, or the preceding Preparatory Commission, particularly as Grey was the first president of Britain's League of Nations Union and it was he who coined the maxim 'great armaments lead inevitably to war'. This lack of new findings is unsurprising granted that the select bibliography implies that no archival research has been undertaken and there is little engagement with recent historiographical debates. Waterhouse repeatedly picks a very easy target, in Lloyd George, to correct what he deems are common misconceptions. While myths peddled in Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* (1933) are identified, the Welshman's apparent amnesia is already well documented.

Waterhouse's overall grasp of the period under discussion is unconvincing. He relies on succinct studies such as Norman Stone's *Short History of World War One* and merely regurgitates the findings of worthy, but dated, studies. To undermine Lloyd George's claims

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that the cabinet was unaware of the nature of Britain's commitments to France, Waterhouse quotes Zara Steiner's 1969 monograph at length. The infamous 'misunderstanding' between Grey and the German ambassador on 1 August 1914 is not explored – despite the historiographical debate on the subject being nearly forty years old. Likewise the proposed mission to Germany in mid-1914 by Grey's private secretary, William Tyrrell, is overlooked. While vaguely acknowledging Grey's commitment to maintaining 'the European balance power', the author does not explore the 'unspoken assumptions' which helped shape British policy.

Waterhouse's judgment is also questionable. Without more evidence, Grey's supposed role in constructing the 'Special Relationship' with the United States appears exaggerated. Grey was on friendly terms with prominent Americans but this falls some way short of bringing America into the First World War. He himself admitted that 'it was the unrestricted [German] submarine campaign that precipitated American entry' (p. 372). Furthermore, Grey, according to Waterhouse, was a 'tenacious character', 'made of 'sterner stuff than many give him credit for', carried 'great weight in cabinet' (p. 213) and 'was nothing if not resolute and, at times, downright obstinate' (p. 269). He was at the zenith of his powers in 1914, respected in parliament and across Europe, and he was not afraid to threaten resignation. Grey is, therefore, portrayed as a political heavyweight who could carry the cabinet with him. Yet, if so, why did Grey not deliver a timely and an unequivocal message to Berlin about Britain's near-certain participation in the unfolding war? True, there were divisions in the cabinet and parliament had to be consulted, but if Grey was the unflappable and universally trusted statesman depicted, surely he could have acted more decisively to solve the crisis.

Many readers would also challenge the claim that Grey had a 'capacity for hard work' (p. 36). Amazingly, this stay-at-home diplomat made only one trip abroad during his eleven-year tenure of the Foreign Office. Grey characteristically retreated to his country cottage over the weekend of 25–26 July 1914, just as Churchill had left the First Fleet at Portland to guard the Channel. Similarly, it is difficult to accept the contention that Grey 'continued to push himself to the limit' during the first years of the war, particularly as Waterhouse informs us that he 'enjoy[ed] a certain amount of leisure time during his war years in office.' (p. 363).

A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

CATASTROPHE

THE 2015 ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND ITS OUTCOME

The 2015 election is the most catastrophic in the history of the Liberal Democrats and its predecessor parties; in no other previous election has the party lost such a high proportion of its votes and seats.

Entry into coalition with the Conservative Party in 2010 meant that the party always knew it would lose a good number of those who had voted for it in 2010, but Liberal Democrats hoped that they could replace at least some of them with new supporters who had not previously believed the party had a realistic chance of power. The party also assumed that the incumbency factor would save many of their MPs even though the national vote was falling. Neither of these things happened, despite a campaign that was generally recognised as well organised and well funded.

Discuss why everything went wrong with **Phil Cowley** (Professor of Parliamentary Government, University of Nottingham and co-author of *The British General Election of 2010*) and **Baroness Olly Grender**, Paddy Ashdown's second-in-command on the 'Wheelhouse Group' which ran the Liberal Democrat election campaign. Chair: Lord Wallace of Saltaire.

6.30pm, Monday 13 July
David Lloyd George Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

This study is not without merit, but it is far from 'scintillating' as the book jacket claims. Waterhouse is too ready to defend a man he clearly admires and is unwilling to mete out criticism. Grey's conduct during July 1914, his failures in wartime diplomacy, his failed mission to the America after the armistice and his work rate should all have been thoroughly interrogated. It is to be hoped we don't have to wait another forty years for a fresh assessment of Grey's life and career.

Dr Chris Cooper was awarded a PhD by the University of Liverpool in 2013. He has lectured at a number of higher education institutions and he has published a number of journal articles covering a variety of themes of modem British political history. He currently teaches History and Politics at St Anselm's College, Birkenhead.

Lloyd George and Churchill as war leaders

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