THATCHER
NORMAN TEBBIT and GEOFFREY HOWE
on the Iron Lady’s legacy twenty-five years since she swept to power

Plus: Helen Szamuely on Margaret Thatcher’s speeches; John Barnes on political party colours; Nicholas Hillman on Thatcher’s musical legacy; Mark Garnett reviews four new books on Michael Oakeshott and Ronald Porter reviews Anne de Courcy’s biography of Diana Mosley
AAfter a mere two issues I have decided to step down as co-editor of the Conservative History Journal but I am delighted that Helen Szamuely has agreed to step into the breach. She will bring a degree of thoroughness and historical perspective which I could never match. While I shall remain Director of the CHG I must devote my time now to my business and, perhaps more importantly, to winning back North Norfolk at the next election. This issue of the magazine is particularly important as it marks the 25th anniversary of the election of the Thatcher Government in May 1979. I remember it especially well as I stood as the Conservative Candidate in a mock election at my High School in Essex and romped home with a 27% majority over the National Front! Margaret Thatcher inspired me to get involved in politics. In her day we used to win elections almost at will. I remember what it was like standing on people's doorsteps knowing that what I was doing was helping her retain power. It's that kind of pride which we Conservatives now have to instill into our party workers up and down the country. They have to know that Michael Howard and candidates like me are not only worth campaigning for but, once we are successful, we will do justice to the legacy which Margaret Thatcher has left us.

Definitely not a farewell

Iain Dale

Iain Dale is the Conservative Parliamentary Spokesman for North Norfolk. Email him on iain@iaindale.com.

Conservative History Group

Party Conference Fringe

William Hague

will speak on

William Pitt the Younger

Monday 4 October

17.45–19.00

Purbeck Bar in the Bournemouth International Conference Centre
It is not, perhaps, the most auspicious way to start one’s stint as co-editor of this Journal, having to apologize for the issue’s late appearance. All I can say in my self-defence is that the last few months have been a steep learning curve. However, that is all behind me and I hope that the quality of this and future issues will live up to the excellent reputation the Conservative History Journal deservedly acquired under Iain Dale’s editorship.

Though a couple of months late we are celebrating in this issue the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first Thatcher government and we decided that the best way to do so would be to ask two of her colleagues, Lord Howe and Lord Tebbit, to give us their views on the phenomenon of Thatcherism. We are proud to present their insight along with a couple of other articles that cover other aspects of the subject.

The fascinating, entertaining and instructive interview with Andrew Roberts, one of our leading historians, will, we hope be the first of a whole series of interviews on the subject of Conservative or Tory history. Roberts, a widely respected historian and a brilliant wordsmith, is also a supporter of the Conservative History Group and of this Journal.

From the successful to the unsuccessful twentieth century Prime Minister. May also saw the anniversary of the fall of Chamberlain’s government and with it the destruction of his political reputation. We have an article from an historian in New Zealand on those events and the theme of Churchill’s government is taken up by Ronald Porter, if somewhat obliquely, in his review of the latest biography of Diana Mosley.

A characteristically entertaining piece by the co-editor of this Journal, John Barnes, deals with the important but somewhat neglected subject of party colours.

Conservative history has to look beyond the twentieth century and there is a section in this issue on Disraeli, another great Conservative Prime Minister and two of his colleagues. In future editions we hope to cover many other aspects of Conservative and Tory history and historiography, going back certainly to the eighteenth but, even, the seventeenth century.

We hope to write about Conservative political thought as in the review of several books on Michael Oakeshott and we shall have entertaining and, who knows, perhaps slightly scurrilous pieces about Tory and Conservative politicians, as well as forgotten or little known aspects of party history. We have great plans to expand our subject matter to include subjects to do with Conservative history in the United States and the Commonwealth countries.

The next issue will appear at the end of September - timing will be constrained by the Party Conference - and thereafter the Journal will be published twice yearly at the end of March and September. We are looking for contributions, articles, ideas, suggestions. The Conservative History Journal had a great start. After a slight hiccup it will have a great future.

The Conservative History Group

As the Conservative Party regroups after two general election defeats, learning from history is perhaps more vital than ever. We formed the Conservative History Group in the Autumn of 2002 to promote the discussion and debate of all aspects of Conservative history. We have organised a wide-ranging programme of speaker meetings in our first year and with the bi-annual publication of the Conservative History Journal, we hope to provide a forum for serious and indepth articles on Conservative history, biographies of leading and more obscure Conservative figures, as well as book reviews and profiles. For an annual subscription of only £15 you will receive invites to all our events as well as complimentary copies of the Conservative History Journal twice a year. We very much hope you will want to join us and become part of one of the Conservative Party’s most vibrant discussion groups.

Please fill in and return this form if you would like to join the Conservative History Group

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Helen Szamuely is the new co-editor of the Conservative History Journal. Email her on szamuely@aol.com.
Andrew Roberts is one of the new group of historians that has made modern British historiography internationally respected and domestically popular. As a man of the right, he has had various insults heaped on him by the more left-leaning media. Among other things he has been called a warmonger, an extremist (naturally) and a conservative historian, thus implying that his writings lack objectivity. Noticeably, none of the detractors have managed to point to any lack of research or objectivity but this has not lessened their ardour. Mr Roberts says that he is a Tory rather than a Conservative and insists that there is no such thing as a conservative historian. But he is proud of his political views (understandably) and is active in a number of organizations, such as the Bruges Group, the Freedom Association, the British Weights and Measures Association and the Centre for Policy Studies. What they all have in common is a high regard for the traditional liberties that have long been associated with Britain and the British people and are now under threat from inside and outside. Here Andrew Roberts gives his views on history, its study and its writing, as well as politics to Helen Szamuely.

HS: Andrew, thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. To start with, let’s go back to basics, as a certain Conservative Prime Minister once said.

AR: You’re right to say that he was a Conservative Prime Minister but he was not in any sense a Tory Prime Minister.

HS: That is very true, of course. Let’s say a Prime Minister who led the Conservative Party, though I suppose we could quibble about that as well.

AR: I think the word “leadership” is something I would pick you up on. Sorry.

HS: Well, let us get past that one. You have been described by friend and foe, and we are definitely friends, as a “conservative historian”. Would you describe yourself as a “conservative historian”?

AR: No, I emphatically would not. I think that the methods that conservatives as historians use, should be precisely the same as those used by a socialist or a whig or a marxist. We have to use exactly the same rigorous level of objectivity and so to be described as an historian who is coming from any angle at all is, I think, damaging and unfair. However, I am an historian who is a Conservative. And I am also an historian who writes more often about Conservatives and Conservative governments than other kinds, but I think that once you attempt to pigeonhole an historian for his political views you get into very dangerous territory with regards to his objectivity, which is an absolute prerequisite for his professionalism.

HS: So, would you say that there is no such thing as Conservative history writing. Most people would know what we mean by Whig history writing. Is there a similar idea of Conservative history writing?

AR: This is a very interesting point. Very roughly, Whigs believe in a
sense of progress, Marxists believe in dialectical materialism and class warfare and there is, in my view, a strand of Tory historicism, or historiography, in which mankind is not seen as moving towards any preordained end and is certainly not seen as moving in any straight direction either. History, in my view, zig-zags. Instead of being a locomotive that is moving to a destination, it can be shunted into sidings as it was, for instance, between 1914 and 1989; it can go into reverse as it has done several times. I think that should be the Tory philosophy of history. Without getting too much into semantics, the words Tory and Conservative, I have always believed, should be kept rigidly apart. The way they are interchangeable in journalism, I think, does the Tories a great disservice because the Conservative party in parliament - in opposition as well as in government - very rarely sticks to rigid Tory principles, more's the shame. And it is possible to be a Tory, as one could be between November 1990 and May 1997, without believing that the Conservative party is doing very much good.

HS: If you look back on historians of the past, whom would you describe as Tory historians?

AR: Interestingly, several of the ones I would call Tory historians, would not have considered themselves to be Tories or, indeed, Conservatives. But I would look to the people, who really stand up against whiggish and marxist views of history. I'd mention Norman Stone, J.D.C.Clark, Maurice Cowling, Niall Ferguson, going back a bit, I think Edward Gibbon, G.R.Elton, Hugh Dacre, A.L.Rowse, and others. People, who, like me, do not believe that mankind is on a natural progression to the betterment or the brotherhood of man.

HS: Most people would mention Lord Acton. What is your view on him?

AR: His History of Liberty was one of the great unwritten books of the world. Had he written a major work of history, I think it would have been one that would have emphasised the dangers and the threats to liberty as much as the benefits.

HS: A lot of people would say: oh yes, Tories, they do not, unlike, say Whigs or Liberals, believe in the concept of freedom, of liberty. Would you consider liberty an important subject for Tory historiography?

AR: I think it very much is and it is a great shame that nobody of Acton's stature has written a history of liberty. Nor is there a particularly good biography of John Wilkes, the early progenitor of eighteenth century liberty. What men then called a real and manly liberty. I would like to take issue with you over the idea that we as Tories think more about order and established power than liberty. I think, for example, that John Hampden was a Tory before the Tory party came into existence and I think that there is a very, very strong tradition, especially in terms of jurisprudence, a very strong Tory belief in the kind of liberty that is enunciated in the English Revolution and in the common law. What common law gives us - and it is, of course, now under threat from New Labour and from the European Union - is a massive ancient codification of customs and traditions and precedent, that does not circumscribe a Briton's liberty but allows him to act in a way that does not damage or threaten his neighbour. And you can't get more Tory than that.

HS: I think we'll stick to the word “Tory”. Once you start getting on to the Conservative Party and the notion of “conservative” with a small “c”, you get into serious problems. Some of the most conservative organizations are actually socialist.

AR: Precisely. Nothing was more conservative than the National Union of Mineworkers, for example.

HS: Except, maybe the TUC. This brings us rather neatly to the Thatcher government. With a bit of luck when this issue of the Journal comes out, we shall be celebrating, or, perhaps, some people will be mourning, the twenty-fifth anniversary of Mrs Thatcher winning her first election. If you were to write the history of the Thatcher government, not perhaps now, but, say in ten years' time, how would you approach it? What would be the good things you'd say about it, what would be the not so good things?

AR: My view is that the book cannot be written until the thirty year rule is up for the 1979 to 1990 period. So it can’t even be researched until January 2011. And after that it would take a good four or five years just to work your way through the various papers. I think that an intelligent biographer of Mrs Thatcher - and luckily we have Charles Moore doing that, a perfect example of a Tory who isn't always a Conservative - of her government as well as of her, will look at the fascinating dichotomy between rhetoric and practice, which happens in every government, of course, but was there even more startlingly with Margaret Thatcher. Her rhetoric was so powerful and so, too, was her practice, but there were several occasions (one thinks of the threat of the miners' strike in 1981, for instance) when she backed down. And she had been much tougher in opposition on subjects like Rhodesia and immigration.
than she turned out to be when she got into power. So I think there is an angle for a Tory historian to take Margaret Thatcher to task from the Right and to ask what happened to many of the hopes. However, one has to remember at all times that she was five hundred per cent better than anyone could have possibly hoped for in any political period for the Tories from 1945 up to her election in 1975. It was an astonishing stroke of luck that she won the party leadership and although an historian must be objective, that element of luck is a very important one. I am just about to publish a book called What Might Have Been, which is going to talk about the power of luck in history. We have some good Tories writing for it. I am thinking of Simon Heffer, Norman Stone, Conrad Black, David Frum. Though it is not a Conservative or a right-wing book, it does have a few

sound people writing for it and it does bring it home to me again and again, the element of luck. Simon Heffer writes about Margaret Thatcher being blown up in Brighton and what would have happened had she died back in 1984. When one thinks of those years from 1979 to 1990, any number of chance occurrences could have derailed the Thatcher experiment. We see it, perhaps because it also spanned the decade of the eighties, as a great monolithic, almost predes-tined, ministry.

HS: Yes, there is a tendency to emphasise that, partly by her and partly by that famous story of Callaghan’s about him driving home on the night of the election and saying that it did not matter, there was nothing he could do, there was a wind blowing the other way; but that is not at all how one remembers the election of 1979: not as a predestined event but just as another election. Most of us, I think, except maybe the few people close to Margaret Thatcher, probably did not realize that this was going to be a very different premiership.

AR: No, that’s right. I am rather sceptical of what Jim Callaghan said because … well, first of all, a losing politician is going to blame what T. S. Eliot called “the vast impersonal forces” for his defeat. But, in fact, when one looks at general elections, any number of tiny, perhaps at the time inconsequential factors, could be playing on the minds of the electorate. Pollsters should be really quizzing people as they come out of the polling booths, not the day before elections or the day before that, but as they come out. They should be asking people precisely what mattered to them, why they voted and instead of giving them lists to choose from, where the person automatically chooses the most high-minded reason, they should simply wait until they get the reply. We do this a bit with book-buying. When somebody comes out of a bookshop, he might be asked by a polling organization: was it the review; was it the front cover; was it the fact that he had read the author before; what was the reason for buying this book. And the results you get are very different usually from the ones you are expecting. People go into bookshops and buy completely different books from the one they were intending to as they walk through. And I wonder to what extent that is true of politics that people wind up at the end of an election. And when one looks at what they teach one shudders. At the same time, the writing of history and the reading of history have become very popular. People buy books, people watch serious pro grammes about history. How do you see the connection between these two developments?

AR: I think there is a direct correla tion between the second-rate teaching of history in schools and the thirst for historical knowledge that people have by the time they leave full-time education. It is a sad reflection that I am probably making a living out of the collapse of history teaching in primary and secondary and, to a large extent, tertiary education. But there we are. I am and so are an awful lot of other people. I think that history ought to be taught in narrative terms; I think it ought to be taught chronologically; I think that the older a child gets the further down the story he ought to be brought. So the Tudors and Stuarts are ideal for children at the age of thirteen and fourteen and the Second World War and the First World War shouldn’t be really taught until the children are just about to take their final leaving exams. And when children are at primary school, then wattle-and-daub houses and motte-and-bailey castles are ideal, too. I really
do think that unless you see history in its full chronological narrative sense you can’t really appreciate it. I hate the way that first of all school-children are constantly taught the Nazis again and again when it hasn’t been put into proper historical perspective. There is an amazing gold-

“Tony Blair basically believes that history began on the morning of the 2nd May 1997”

en age of history writing at the moment. This has to be related in some way to the collapse of history teaching in our education system. Having said that, I am not sure that it is not just going to be a fad. It has been around for only five or six or seven years and all it would take, I think, would be for some big and powerful people in the BBC and various other places to say: “Right, that’s enough history. Let’s now move on to science.” Or “We ought to be concentrating now on some other area of human endeavour.” for the tap to be turned off. Obviously, that can’t be done in book publishing but it certainly can be in the TV world. And so, all that we can do is to keep our fingers crossed that really talented historians who can make first-class TV series, like Simon Schama, David Starkey and Niall Ferguson, should continue to do so,

“Society is a combination of the living, the dead and those yet to be born. And so history is a part of society’s present day existence as much as that of the past”

because I think there is a huge knock-on effect for people who will watch, say, Niall’s programmes on empire, will then take one of the fifty or so ideas that come from it and look more closely into them and buy books on some of them. That has to be a good thing, especially as

I am convinced that there is an external as well as an internal threat to British understanding of British history. It’s constantly being debelli-
cised. The kind of propaganda that we keep getting out of the European Union, and some of our newspapers are very good at spotting this, others aren’t, constantly tries to make Britain out to be yet another European country that does not have a completely unique historical back-
ground. And that’s tremendously dangerous because after a generation of being taught this a new generation of schoolchildren will come to matur-
y and voting age believing it. And if they do, that will not only betray them because that is untrue - Britain does have a history unlike any other nation - but it is also going to let the country down.

HS: I think one of the sad things about the study of history is that one is end-
lessly asked - I am sure you were when you first started studying it and I remember it - why does one want to study it. It’s just lots of stories about dead people. What does it matter? A particularly dangerous part of that is that politicians are very apt to say this. Now, one might say who cares what politicians have to say but they do have a lot of power.

AR: Well, Charles Clarke has, of course, spoken against the teaching of mediaeval history.

HS: Indeed back in the sixties, I think it was Edward Short, who was Education Secretary under Wilson, who said that it was more important for children to know about the Vietnam War, which was still going on at the time than about the Wars of the Roses. So the rot set in, perhaps, with that government.

AR: And also, of course, Tony Blair basically believes that history began on the morning of the 2nd May 1997.

HS: Yes, that is an extremely unfortunate part of it all. Now if a Minister of Education from a forthcoming Conservative government, as it is unlikely to be a Tory government, came to you and said: “Why do you think we should concentrate on teaching history at school?”, what would you answer?

AR: I would say: “Why do you think it is important for your brain to have a memory?” And I would also argue to those - and this is a truly Tory argument, one that Burke would have appreciated: I would say that why should experiences of the living be given any superiorty over those of the dead? Society is a combina-
tion of the living, the dead and those yet to be born. And so history is a part of society’s present day exis-
tence as much as that of the past. Especially in a country like this one. Tony Blair says we’re a new country. No, we’re not! Of Course we’re not a new country. You walk out into any street and you will immediately see that we are not a new country. We are not Arizona. It is completely absurd to argue that we are because every step we take remind us as that we are not. And the other thing, of course, is that we never learn from history. You look again and again at problems and the way in which the world tries to deal with them is pret-
ty much the way it has done in the past. The same problems, in fact, that face Tony Blair at the moment in terms of House of Lords reform, devolution, the Balkans, faced Lord Rosebery. And, don’t think that Mr Blair’s answers to them are any more well-informed or likely to be suc-
 cessful than were Rosebery’s. If we didn’t know what had been done in the past, we would be like the chap who wakes up every morning in the movie Memento. He’d lost his mem-
ory and he wakes up every morning and remembers nothing and has to find his way forward from snapshots he had taken. That would be what we would be like if a future minister tries to axe history even more than it has been deleted already from the national curriculum.

HS: Andrew, thank you very much.
Norman Tebbit was a close ally of Margaret Thatcher both in opposition and in government. He served as her Secretary of State for Employment, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade. Between 1985 and 1987 he was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Party Chairman. As the latter, he was credited with the strategy behind the third Conservative electoral victory. During the Brighton hotel bombing Norman Tebbit was seriously injured and his wife, Margaret, permanently disabled. He retired from the House of Commons in 1992 and became Baron Tebbit of Chingford. Here he gives his perspective on the Thatcher government.

Margaret Thatcher took office as Prime Minister of a country possessed by both hope and fear. The Heath government had been defeated following its failure to defeat a miners’ strike in 1974. The Callaghan government fell in 1979, following the “winter of discontent” during the strike of local government workers. Many voters hoped she would go the same way. Rather more hoped she would not - but many even of these feared that she might.

Foreign embassies were reporting to their governments that Britain had become ungovernable. Multi-national companies had all but ceased to invest as the English Disease, a lemming-like propensity to strike, savaged businesses. The vast state-owned sector of industry gorged itself on taxpayers’ money with no prospects of profitability.

Inflation was endemic and conventional wisdom held that it could be restrained only by a state sponsored “prices and incomes policy”, that is...
either voluntary or state control of prices and incomes.

During Margaret Thatcher’s term British industrial relations changed from the worst in the developed free world to the best.

She went on to win two further elections, defeated the unions’ “nuclear option” of a miners’ strike, and was brought down not by an ungovernable nation - but an ungovernable cabinet.

In the meantime inflation had been controlled by monetarism - not incomes policy - and foreign investment had poured into Britain. The financial haemorrhage of the nationalised industries had been stanched. After privatisation they became profitable corporation taxpayers.

Living standards soared, millions of the “working classes” had become homeowners and shareholders and Britain’s occupational pension schemes were the envy of Europe.

In passing Margaret Thatcher defeated Argentina, bringing down the junta and by a military operation pursued with purpose, skill and daring, established that Britain still had the will and power to defend unilaterally its people and its interest.

She left a great deal still undone, having had neither time - nor enough competent Ministers with courage to resolve other issues. Neither education, the Health Service, nor the welfare system were properly reformed. Local government finance reform was botched by Christopher Patten. Reform of the European Community was sabotaged by Geoffrey Howe. Nor did Thatcherism cure the sickness of the permissive society, which has - as some forecast - become the yob society of the 21st century.

Abroad Margaret Thatcher stiffened the resolve of President Reagan to defeat the challenge of the Soviet Union and bring a decisive victory in the Cold War. “Thatcherism” was widely adopted throughout the world.

So much achieved - so much more to be done.

Geoffrey Howe was Margaret Thatcher’s longest standing Cabinet minister, serving as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and Leader of the House of Commons. He resigned on November 1, 1990 with a thunderous speech in the House of Commons that is widely thought to have hastened Thatcher’s own downfall three weeks later. Geoffrey Howe retired from the House of Commons in 1992 and became Baron Howe of Aberavon. Here he gives his views of the Thatcher government.

No government, in my judgment, did more in the last quarter of the twentieth century to change the shape of our world. Some mistakes, of course - but overall it was fundamental and enduring change for the better.

Margaret Thatcher’s most important domestic achievement was the dismantling of the unspoken, but crippling, compact between state ownership and monopoly trade unionism. Almost as crucial was the recovery of control over the public finances and the key switch of Britain’s tax structure away from on which positively obstructed enterprise.

The real triumph was to have transformed not just one party but two - so that when Labour did finally return, these changes were accepted as irreversible. The irony is that Thatcherism might never have survived at all, had it not been for John Major’s success in consolidating it.

The one sadness is that Michael Heseltine might have done better still, by securing as well the European role for Britain, which Ted Heath had made possible.
Nicholas Hillman worked for David Willetts between 1999 and 2003. He has written for the Journal of Contemporary History, Searchlight and the Birmingham Post as well as a number of think-tanks. Here he analyzes the impact Margaret Thatcher’s personality and political achievements had on the pop songs of the period.

It is often assumed that pop music was depoliticised in the 1980s. The theory goes that once punk had flowed its full course, then politics and pop music disassociated themselves from one another. One journalist, for example, recently claimed that Ghost Town, the 1981 Number 1 single by The Specials - a ska band who emerged out of punk - marked the final moment when popular culture and politics came together ‘as one’.

But, while some of the general political heat might have dissipated out of the music scene during the 1980s, there was one subject that could still tempt even the most indolent songwriters to put pen to paper: Margaret Thatcher.

Many of the songs inspired by Mrs Thatcher and her breed of Conservatism are undeniably puerile and naïve and some are also remarkably unmemorable. The chance of them having any measurable impact on British politics was always going to be remote. But Conservative supporters nonetheless have to recognise that the devil does have all the best tunes.

**Stand Down Margaret**

It is not particularly easy to categorise the songs for which Margaret Thatcher was the primary target. But one recurring theme was a simple desire to see her leave office.

The Beat’s Stand Down Margaret, which reached Number 22 in the charts in 1980, is an early example. Simply Red expressed the same sentiment in their song She’ll Have to Go from the 1989 album A New Flame. The avowedly political - and now Blairite - lead singer, Mick Hucknall sang in the chorus: ‘Breaking our backs with slurs, And taking our tax for murdering. The only thing I know, She’ll have to go’.

Not surprisingly, given the title, many of the songs on She Was Only a Grocer’s Daughter, the second album by The Blow Monkeys, were inspired by Thatcherism. One of the singles from the album, the luxuriant (Celebrate) The Day After You focussed on the time when Mrs Thatcher would no longer be Prime Minister. The song was only in the charts for two weeks and peaked at Number 52 - forty-seven places lower than an earlier politically-motivated single from the same album. This relative failure appears to have been partly due to the concerns of broadcasters, such as the BBC, who were reluctant to play such an explicitly political song in the run-up to the 1987 General Election.

**Margaret on the Guillotine**

For other artists, it was not enough simply to wish Mrs Thatcher out of office. Elvis Costello, who would sometimes play Stand Down Margaret in his sets, expressed even harsher sentiments in Tramp the Dirt Down on his 1989 album Spike. The song begins with an image of Mrs Thatcher kissing a crying child in a hospital and continues with Costello hoping that he will live long enough to taunt the Prime Minister even after her death. When playing the song live in later years, Costello sometimes introduced it with a quick burst of Ding Dong the Witch is Dead from The Wizard of Oz and added a verse about John Major.

Margaret on the Guillotine was included as the final track on Viva Hate, the first solo album by Morrissey, previously lead singer of The Smiths. The song had originally been intended as the title track of what became the seminal 1986 album The Queen is Dead and, when it finally saw the light of day in 1988, Morrissey was interviewed by the police because the lyrics were regarded as menacing. While the music for Margaret on the
Hilda’s cabinet band

Guillotine lacks the power of many of Morrissey’s other songs, the lyrics contain an unmistakeably vitriolic anger. The same is true of the only chart entry by the band

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No assessment of modern British political song-writing is complete without some mention of Billy Bragg

S*M*A*S*H. Their 1994 single I Want to Kill Somebody, which reached Number 26, is also notable for finding something to rhyme with Virginia Bottomley and for the band’s incomplete grasp of spelling and grammar: ‘Whoever’s in power, I’ll be the opposition, I want to kill somebody, Margaret thatcher, Jeffrey archer, Michael heseltine, John Major, Virginia Bottomeley especially’ (sic).

Shipbuilding

Another theme popular among musicians opposed to Thatcher was the Falklands War. Elvis Costello wrote the lyrics to Shipbuilding for Robert Wyatt, formerly of Soft Machine, after reading about the war in the Australian press, and the song was a minor hit in 1983. Less direct than many anti-Thatcher tracks, the song cleverly contrasts the additional employment from new shipbuilding with the use of the ships in war - the words lament that ‘Within weeks they’ll be re-opening the shipyard, And notifying the next of kin once again, It’s all we’re skilled in, We will be shipbuilding’. The song is perhaps the most enduring and influential of all anti-Thatcher songs; it was also recorded by Costello himself, Tasmin Archer, who issued it as a single in the first half of the 1990s, and Suede.

Other songs that refer to the Falklands conflict range from the ironic Happy Days by The Shamen, to the strange War by The Rugburns: ‘The Falklands was cool but it was too damn short, I want a real war cause I built a bitchin fort’. The dour mentioned in Dispatches by Television Personalities and the Faith Brothers’ Easter Parade were more direct in their criticism. The latter tells of a 19 year old who is injured in battle: ‘My mind ingrained, I came home maimed, So was kept away from the Easter Parade. … The mother of the nation cries “Rejoice”, And I can hardly shuffle, Struck down for what the mean can do for political ambition’.

Mother knows best

No assessment of modern British political song-writing is complete without some mention of Billy Bragg. Along with Paul Weller of The Style Council, he led the Labour-supporting Red Wedge in the mid-1980s and his songs cover topics as diverse as the recent Iraq war (The Price of Oil), the inter-war slump (Between the Wars) and right-wing newspapers (It Says Here); in 1990, his manager, Peter Jenner, was reported to have said, ‘If you have a good, right on cause, don’t ask Billy to play a benefit for it because you’ll lose.’ Bragg’s song Thatcherites lays wide-ranging criticism on top of the tune to a much earlier political song Ye Jacobites By Name: ‘You privatise away what is ours, what is ours, You privatise away what is ours, You privatise away and then you make us
pay. We'll take it back someday, mark my words, mark my words, We'll take it back some day mark my words'.

Other prominent folk singers also produced broad critiques of Thatcherism. Lal Waterson's Hilda's Cabinet Band is perhaps the cleverest anti-Thatcher song of all. The Cabinet is portrayed as a band who are leading a dance and the lyrics invert the traditional instructions of band leaders. Recalling 'the lady's not for turning', the song starts with 'the one where you never turn around' and continues with the command to 'Put your right boot in, put it in again, Poll tax your girl in the middle of the ring, Privatise your partner, do it on your own, Kick the smallest one among you, promenade home'.

Richard Thompson, originally of Fairport Convention, played at one time with Lal Waterson's band, The Watersons, and he penned his own anti-Thatcher song, Mother Knows Best. Lyrically, it, too, is a step above many other comparable songs. But it seeks to challenge Thatcherism head-on at its strongest point - the championing of freedom and the retreat of the nanny state - and many of the lyrics are ultimately unpersuasive: 'So you think you know how to wipe your nose, So you think you know how to button your clothes, You don't know shit, If you hadn't already guessed, You're just a bump on the log of life, Cos mother knows best'.

God Save the Queen
Some Conservatives would no doubt consider many of the songs targeted at Mrs Thatcher to be highly offensive, but she was not too concerned about them. When, in the run-up to the 1987 General Election, Mrs Thatcher was asked by Smash Hits, the leading pop music magazine of the day, what she thought of left-wing pop stars 'who can't wait to get you out of Number 10', she replied: 'Can't they? Ha ha ha! ... most young people rebel and then gradually become more realistic. It's very much part of life, really. And when they want to get Mrs Thatcher out of Number 10 - I've usually not met most of them. ... it's nice they know your name.'

Besides, Mrs Thatcher is in very good company. The Queen is also the target of a number of powerful songs, such as God Save the Queen by The Sex Pistols and the aforementioned The Queen is Dead, as well as Elizabeth My Dear, a 59-second pastiche of Scarborough Fair on The Stone Roses' debut album ('My aim is true, my purpose is clear, It's curtains for you Elizabeth my dear'). If anything, these songs are more effective than those targeted at Mrs Thatcher, yet they have done next to nothing to popularise republicanism.

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There is nothing like hearing speeches by a politician to bring back memories and to evolve comparisons with the present day. Helen Szamuely, co-editor of the Conservative History Journal listens to the 3 CDs produced by Politico’s of Margaret Thatcher’s great speeches.

Not long ago I was telling a young American, who works at one of the many think-tanks in Washington DC, that there was something about Margaret Thatcher that made all the men who had worked with her or just met her go weak at the knees. “Well,” - he said rather sheepishly, - “funny you should say that. I met her at a dinner last week and thought she was amazing.” Not for the first time I wondered how the Lady managed to captivate every male that came into her orbit. Listening to the speeches systematically I began to understand a little.

Two of the CDs chart Thatcher’s career from the first interview for ITN, given immediately after her maiden speech in February 1960. She sounds hesitant and rather prissy. Her slightly high, girlish gush would have been enough to irritate anyone. By the time of the second interview on her first day as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions, in October 1961, the gushing is less obvious, but there is still that high-pitched tone, that girlish breathlessness. Both disappear very quickly as Margaret Thatcher rises to become a force in the Conservative Party.

We plunge into a rapid trip through the years that came to be dominated by this extraordinary political figure: her tussles with the teachers’ unions, her election as leader of the party, that fateful election of 1979; and the years of the premiership: the fights with the unions and with inflation, with the Labour Party and her own so-called supporters, the fraught and finally glorious days of the Falklands War, the fight against the Communist enemy and its sympathizers at home; the lows of her political career: the Westland affair, the terrible Brighton bomb and, finally, the last struggle over Europe and the defeat at the hands of her own party. There are other speeches of her political life after November 22, 1990 but it is all a sad coda to a glittering career.

The third CD (a bonus, as it is described by the publisher) gives full versions of a couple of speeches, a specially produced sketch from Yes Prime Minister, in which Thatcher demands the abolition of economists on the grounds that they just fill politicians’ heads with ridiculous notions, and a couple of other curios.

Listening to the speeches one is reminded of all the famous occasions and phrases: the Iron Lady of the Western World, the Lady is not for turning, the famous No! No! No! to the back door socialism of Delors’s plans, the Labour Chancellor being “frit” and many others. But there is something else there. Well, two other things, to be precise.

One is Thatcher’s ability to adapt her speech to whatever goes on in the audience, whether it is friendly laughter or unfriendly heckling. As time went on she got better at it, as did many politicians of the older generation. She was, perhaps, better than most in the way she almost flirted with her audience, with the journalists, the camera-men. I cannot help remembering Thatcher’s visit to the then Soviet Union and the long TV interview she gave. Facing numerous journalists she answered them firmly and severely but with just a hint of flirtatiousness, finding the questions they thought very daring, extremely easy to handle. By the end of the hour she had them eating out of her hand. The rest of the country was swooning as well. When I went to Moscow a few weeks after her visit, I heard nothing but accounts of Thatcher’s clothes, Thatcher’s interview, what Thatcher said and where Thatcher went.

There is something else in those speeches: the constant theme of liberty and patriotism. Somehow, one forgets how often she spoke passionately of freedom and its importance for everyone, whether in Britain or other countries. Listening through the speeches, one after another, I was struck by the fact that she had, with some deviation and hesitation in her actions, kept faith with that early announcement that what she believed in was liberty.

A few weeks ago I saw Lady Thatcher in the House of Lords. She came out of the Chamber and went through Peers’ Lobby chatting to somebody. I am a strong, though not uncritical admirer of the Lady, but I was amazed to see that every head turned to watch her go. “What do you expect?” - said my companion. - “There has been no other politician since her time.”

Margaret Thatcher - The Great Speeches, 3 CDs, £19.99, published by Politico’s Media and available from www.politicos.co.uk
As the Prime Minister drove through the hallowed avenue to Buckingham Palace he was rapturously welcomed by streets 'lined from one end to the other with people of every class, shouting themselves hoarse, leaping on the running board, banging on the windows, and thrusting their hands into the car to be shaken.' The reader would be forgiven to believe that these were the words describing Winston Churchill at the end of the Second World War about to present himself to the exuberant multitudes that awaited him to celebrate victory in Europe in May 1945. In fact these were the words depicting Neville Chamberlain as he returned from Munich, infamously, with that little piece of paper that he assumed triumphantly, and in the end tragically, would mean 'peace in our time.'

The sixty-eight year old Chamberlain had been the "natural choice" to succeed the lethargic Stanley Baldwin and become Prime Minister and leader in 1937, his leadership seconded by no less a person than Winston Churchill. The second son of the great Joseph Chamberlain had a keen administrative talent that had been proven through his effective tenure at the Health Ministry and his financial acumen had enabled him to show a steady and businesslike competence when at the Exchequer during the Great Depression era.

Yet for all his domestic competence, his years of patient and prudent financial and social policy, his reliable Conservative statecraft, it is one policy that is forever entwined with his name - appeasement. This would initially earn the applause of Conservatives but would eventually compel them to assent to Chamberlain's dramatic dethronement in 1940.

History (and perhaps Winston Churchill) has often glorified Chamberlain's downfall as an event that corrected past mistakes and injustices. However, Chamberlain, just months before his resignation, was recording some of the highest
Neville Chamberlain

approval ratings in British political history and seemed to have silenced any opposition to his leadership. This enigmatic figure's leadership is too easily discarded by populist historical misunderstanding.

Chamberlain had returned triumphant from Munich, as the saviour of peace, greeted by relieved and delicious crowds the size of which were not seen again till VE day. The pact vindicated appeasement and sealed the ascendance of Chamberlain over his detractors. The only isolated casualty was the meek resignation of Alfred Duff Cooper, who had no wish to bring down the Government. The majority shared the concerted sense of alleviation that war had been forestalled, which proved intoxicating for Chamberlain and his followers.

Chamberlain had staked much on Munich as a populist method to contain his enemies at home as well as abroad. In the Cabinet the Prime Minister could rely upon Sir Samuel Hoare, Sir John Simon and Lord Halifax. These three most senior ministers, especially Hoare and Simon, would act as loyal Chamberlainites who buttressed and guarded their leader and with whom Chamberlain could compel the Cabinet towards his objectives. Subsequently, with their power entwined with Chamberlain's they would also share his leader's fate and for ever lose their centrality to power - Simon relegated to the wilderness of the Woolsack while Hoare and Halifax were effectively exiled as emissaries to Madrid and Washington respectively.

But in 1938 their power was substantial and Munich had, albeit fleetingly, strengthened their hold on the reins. With the chorus of support for the Prime Minister, Conservative Central Office urged Chamberlain to dissolve Parliament and secure an increased majority under his leadership that was predicated to be on the scale of victories in 1931 and 1935. Indeed, when the Prime Minister entered the Commons for the Munich debate the entire Government benches rose in ovation for Chamberlain with five notable exceptions that included Duncan Sandys, Harold Nicolson and Churchill.

The anti-appeasers, at this point, were more like a debating society and lacked cohesion and unity. Chamberlain, believing in his infallibility, was able with his popularity to deflate their most prominent member, the 'alarmist' Churchill. The normally stoic Prime Minister, to the lustrous amusement of the Treasury benches, mockingly exclaimed 'If I were asked whether judgement is the first of my Rt Hon. Friend's many admirable qualities I should ask the House of Commons not to press the point'.

The threat to other potential rebel members was de-selection and a snap election on an issue that the majority of the public and Party supported. Rebel MPs faced reprimand not only from the Whips but, dispiritingly, from their own constituencies. In the Munich debate, with a majority of twenty-two Conservatives was softly recorded. Writing to his sister, Chamberlain admitted the debate had been 'trying' and that he 'tried occasionally to take an antidote to the poison gas by reading a few of the countless letters & telegrams which continued to pour in expressing in moving accents the writer's heartfelt relief & gratitude. All the world seemed to full of my praises except the House of Commons'.

This exception would prove fatal.

Chamberlain, taking the praise and plaudits from Britain and across the world began to believe himself above the petty frays of the Commons. He feared the Germans but not domestic opposition. His ascendancy in Cabinet was almost absolute. Chamberlain craftily exercised his power to ensure his policies were implemented. Using advisors, like the more recent occupants of Downing St, he created separate channels of information and implementation, such as Sir Horace Wilson who would work over the heads of Halifax's Foreign Office. Responding to Simon's demands for a Committee of Control to examine defence expenditure Chamberlain made sure no ministers with defence portfolios sat on it.

Chamberlain's supremacy could last only as long as his personally stamped appeasement policy continued to deliver peace and the status quo. The Nazi occupation of Prague in March 1939 provided a sharp jolt to Chamberlain and eroded his credibility. Recounting in his diary Harold Nicolson wrote, 'the feeling in the lobbies is that Chamberlain will either have to go or completely reverse his policy. Unless in his speech tonight [in Birmingham] he admits that he was wrong, they feel that resignation is the only alternative...The Opposition refuse absolutely to serve under him. The idea is that Halifax should become Prime Minister and Eden Leader of the House'.

Six months earlier Chamberlain had been able to pursue his appeasement policy almost without hindrance. Now he was forced to make a public turnaround if he wished to carry on. At Birmingham, Chamberlain came out of his appeasement hypothesis by publicly stating that Britain would resist further Nazi territorial aggrandisement. The concession that Hitler had made a grave mistake and that the old negotiations could not continue appeased some of the old detractors and figures that had invested political capital in Chamberlain's appeasement policy. However, the very real contravention of Munich by Germany had already struck a cogent blow to his domestic and Party standing adding to his assailants fuel.

Yet Chamberlain was certainly not about to hand over the premiership. The Prime Minister was in fact answering many of his critics' demands on issues like rearmament, the creation of a ministry of supply and guarantees to European nations. Though these retractions somewhat belatedly mitigated his long-term critics like Churchill and Eden, it still amounted to a messy reversal of his policy as the Prime Minister now hurriedly mimicked his opponents' policies that he had previously caustically dismissed. This did not stop the Prime Minister from allowing Sir Joseph
Ball, Director of the Conservative Research Department, using friends in MI5 for wire-tapping the private telephone conversations of Churchill, Eden and their allies to check rumours of a 'palace coup' and whether they could be quietened with the 'prospect of office'.

The August Non-Aggression Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, and the invasion of Poland compelled serious reactions from Chamberlain that he would have scoffed at a few months previously. War spelled the clear failure of the Government's and therefore scuttled Chamberlain's existing policies. The reputations of the inner circle, especially Hoare and Simon, never recovered from this clear indictment that the outbreak of War brought. Chamberlain was now compelled to invite Churchill into the War Cabinet while Eden became Dominions Secretary.

Yet Chamberlain, still hanging on for control, only dropped two ministers, and made minimal changes with twenty-four of the thirty one ministers from peacetime keeping their posts. These infinitesimal changes did little to rejuvenate Chamberlain's power, nor did it endear his reputation to the nation at a time of international crisis. The inclusion of Churchill and Eden meant there were two key ministers that did not owe their allegiance to him. Dangerously for Chamberlain, both, especially Churchill, were figures seen as viable alternative Prime Ministers.

Churchill, rather than continue to be parodied as a troublemaker and adversary of the government worked strongly in its defence. The new First Lord of the Admiralty, far from attacking his former critics, enhanced his position cleverly by praising his old detractors, and thereby raised his credibility. Now Churchill far from being perceived as extreme, established himself as a statesman and thus challenged the Prime Minister and contributed to the atrophy of the Chamberlain's leadership.

Chamberlain, writing (rather convolutedly) to his sister in January 1940, said that 'I don't see that other to whom I could hand over with any confidence that he would do other than I'. These were not the words of someone who intended to retire despite the repudiation of the central plank of his very personal foreign policy. By emphasising, as many Conservative leaders had before and since, the inviability and paucity of worthy successors Chamberlain sought the continuance of his leadership and premiership. During the period of the 'Phoney War' Chamberlain, despite meeting quarters of dissent in the Commons, could still appeal to a nation that did not want full-scale war. Some opinion polls even as late as April 1940 still indicated key support for Chamberlain at a level close to sixty per cent. The calamity of the Norwegian campaign and the German onslaught into Western Europe would draw the curtain of Chamberlain's infallibility down theatrically. The spectre of a positive and effective, though still precarious, campaign convinced Chamberlain of the need of Norway to demonstrate his capability of being the leader who could bring victory not vacillation. Chamberlain perhaps also had an eye across the Channel where the tenacious Churchill-like figure, Reynaud had usurped his fellow Munich signatory Daladier, as Prime Minister of France. The consequent failure of Norway, rearrangement deficiencies, and the lacklustre conduct of war enabled the various opposition groups an opportunity to apply real pressure on Chamberlain during the debates scheduled for 7-8 May. Clement Davies, a future Liberal leader, headed the All-Party Action Group, which contained "progressive" Tory MPs and Centre-Left MPs that had shown little loyalty to Chamberlain and were presumed averse to his continuity. The Eden Group, containing figures like Amery, had shown antipathy towards Chamberlain's policy but had loyalty to the Party. There was also Lord Salisbury's 'Watching Committee', which contained upcoming Conservatives like Macmillan as well as being filled with Tory heavyweights. The group, though not wanting to bring down the Government or Chamberlain, was at the very least discomfited by Chamberlain's policy and poor direction. All these groups had oscillated between stances that wanted to reform the ancien regime with the disposal of Simon and Hoare but keep Chamberlain, to demanding the complete radical reformation of the government to include all parties. Norway now united the groups and gave the cohesion that was lacking before regarding Chamberlain's position that would soon dramatically crystallise.

Chamberlain began the debate on Norway in less than convincing style and interestingly stated, alluding perhaps to Churchill's disaster in the Great War, that Norway was 'not comparable to the withdrawal from Gallipoli'. The infamous onslaught in May is perhaps best remembered for Leo Amery's historic and venomous diatribe against Chamberlain and the Chamberlainites. Amery talked of the present Cabinet being filled with 'peace-time statesmen who are not too well fitted for the conduct of war...'. This is what Cromwell said to the Long Parliament when he thought it was no longer fit to conduct the affairs of the nation: "You have sat too long for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!".

Figures on the Opposition like Herbert Morrison and Chamberlain's old adversary Lloyd George, sensing blood, roused the ready passions of the Commons, which fast turned into an internecine chamber of obloquy. Chamberlain jolted by this, responded to the open attacks from Tories and others by stating with embattled fervour that 'I do not seek to evade criticism, but I can say this to my friends in the House - and I have friends in the House. No Government can prosecute a war efficiently unless it has public and Parliamentary support. I accept the challenge. I welcome it indeed. At least we shall see who is with us and who is against us, and I call upon my friends to support us in the Lobby tonight'.

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Lloyd George seized upon these exasperated and ill chosen words that erroneously called for 'friends' at a time when everyone else was talking of unity and nation building. The mercurial old Welsh orator capitalised on this by asking Churchill not be an 'air raid shelter' for Chamberlain and then vehemently launched a forceful attack on Chamberlain - 'He is not in a position to appeal on the grounds of friendship. He has appealed for sacrifice. The nation is prepared for every sacrifice so long as it has leadership...I say solemnly that the Prime Minister should give an example of sacrifice, because there is nothing which can contribute more to victory in this war than that he should sacrifice the seals of office.'

The ensuing vote saw detractors openly herald the fall of Chamberlain and gave confidence to Conservatives, who normally feared the wrath of the Whips, to vote against their own Government. Not for the last time Parliament would be instrumental in bringing down a Tory leader. According to Jörgen Rasmussen, Chamberlain, like many of his successors, had showed a 'persistent refusal to heed constructive criticism' which did 'frustrate even staunch supporters' who 'in despair...were driven to vote against their leaders.'

The ineffectual war leadership and direction, distaste of continuing prevarication, lingering stench of appeasement, the Government’s defeatism, and years of adversarial politics rendered the demanded coalition government under a Chamberlain banner implausible, and thus struck against the possibility of Conservative hegemony. The Government, who could normally count on a majority of around two hundred twenty, now humiliatingly collapsed to eighty-one. Forty-two Government MPs voted with the Opposition while eighty-eight abstained. Labour MPs and the likes of Harold Macmillan sang ‘Rule Britannia’ and chants of ‘Go, go, go’ resounded in the Chamber as Chamberlain, stiff and inflamed, walked silently from this infamous gladiatorial spectacle.

As evidence of his impotence Chamberlain even tried to offer high office to Tory rebels like Amery with the Treasury or Foreign Office. Coalition government was essential for survival. Not only were the public and the House demanding it, but also any government would need the support of Labour and their Trade Union links to mobilise fully the workforce for the unique requirements of war. With the distinct and real animus between Chamberlain and Labour the chances were at best remote.

In an interview at 10.15, the morning after the momentous debate, Chamberlain discussed with the Foreign Secretary, the possibility of him taking over. Though his reluctance and peerage usually discount the possibility of Halifax’s succession - the details are not as neat. Andrew Roberts argues that ‘Halifax simply calculated that he would be in a more powerful position standing behind the throne than sitting on it and still be ‘heir-apparent’ and as Halifax himself stated in that inimitable patroniac, High Tory nonchalant way, ‘he felt he could do the job’.

Perhaps Halifax not only wanted to restrain the excesses of Churchill, but step in at a later date - but at this point he had no wish to emulate Asquith in the previous war (with Lloyd George making all the noise and finally usurping him from the premiership). Halifax finally abnegated from taking the mighty responsibility and told Chamberlain to advise the King to send for Churchill. In the evening the weary Prime Minister met with Labour leaders who only delayed their inevitable negative response to coalition under him by their requirement to defer the choice to their National Executive. Early next morning Chamberlain was awoken with the news that the Low Countries had been struck by Blitzkrieg. Chamberlain thought that this may not be the time to change the old guard, but in the Cabinet only Hoare defended this position, while his ally Sir Kingsley Wood advised the Prime Minister to step down and was supported by no less than Halifax. Later a call came through from Bournemouth from Labour confirming that its politicians could not serve under him, which finally destroyed any illusion of Chamberlain continuing. A dispirited Chamberlain immediately proceeded to hand over the seals of office to a saddened King who soon formally ushered in the contrasting Churchill era.

Importantly, Chamberlain retained the leadership of the Conservative Party and stayed in the five-member War Cabinet as Lord President. Chamberlain played a key role in the administration of the war and worked well with Churchill in whose absence he chaired meetings until his terminal cancer made resignation unavoidable in October. He died only a month later. Yet any power that he retained was due to Churchill, and not the Conservatives who had ruthlessly allowed the downfall of their leader who could not give the nation or the Conservatives the leadership required with war after being embazoned by the failure of appeasement.

Chamberlain’s leadership of the Party was now largely nominal since its efficacy had plummeted as so many of its Parliamentary Party had deserted their leader’s direction at such a crucial time. On paper his powers as Conservative leader appear impressive but the fact remained that a decisive minority had lost confidence in him. Chamberlain’s career ended in ignominy and tragedy.

As Chamberlain tragically recognised - ‘Only a few months ago I was Prime Minister in the fullest enjoyment of mental and physical health and with what was described as an unprecedented hold on the H[ouse of] C[ommons]. Then came the Norwegian withdrawal, the panic-ridden vote which brought down the majority in such spectacular fashion, my instant realisation that the loss of prestige could only be counteracted by a gesture of increased unity here and that unity could not be achieved by me in the face of Labour and Liberal opposition to myself.’ The Conservatives sacrificed Chamberlain for not being able to provide that unity and obtained the ultimate censurable price for being the principal prophet of appeasement when that policy had long ceased to pay political dividends for the Conservative Party.

1 David Dutton, Neville Chamberlain, London: Arnold, 2001, p 52
5 Ibid. pp 348-355
6 Ibid. p 368
8 Op. Cit. p 397
10 Stewart, Burying Caesar, pp 402- 412
12 Roberts, The Holy Fox - A Biography of Lord Halifax, PP 198-201
13 Stewart, Burying Caesar, p 419
14 Dutton, Neville Chamberlain, pp 5-6
The leader of the Conservative Party... did not reward his followers by any very startling originality. Perhaps it is unfair to be always looking for something profound or paradoxical or mystical when he makes a popular oration, but we cannot help it; he has created the curiosity, and we are disappointed if it be not satisfied."

*The Times*, 25 June 1872

Benjamin Disraeli’s speeches at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester and the Crystal Palace in 1872 have been discussed widely by historians and granted a far-reaching significance by a number of twentieth and twenty-first century politicians. Remarkably, a consensus of sorts exists between these two diverse groups and interpretations have revolved around the dual themes of Conservative Party fortunes and social reform. Beyond dispute is that events after 1872 illustrate the extent to which the speeches constituted part of the Conservative revival and allowed the Party to raise itself from the political graveyard of opposition thereby setting the scene, in 1874, for the first Conservative majority administration since that of Peel in 1841. Such common ground, with the benefit of hindsight, is indeed well founded. Conversely, opinion in 1872 was slightly more sceptical about the significance, if any, of Disraeli’s platform pronouncements. *The Times*, then, as now, was one of the key tenets of what might be described as the ‘liberal’ establishment and, at best, was lukewarm to the Tories. It claimed, in late 1871, that Conservative majority government was impossible because “the leaders of the Party do not believe in it. The country gives them no confidence. The majority is against them. All the forces of time are strained in an opposite direction”; and noted, on the eve of the Manchester speech, that “Mr Disraeli is achieving a great success by his visit to Lancashire. If he were the most potent of Ministers, instead of the chief of the weakest Opposition which Parliament has known for many years, he could not have been met with a more hearty welcome.”

Why this negative tone, one may ask, in commenting on one of the greater figures of nineteenth-century public life, compared with the measured assessment of historians? The answer lies in the former quotation, dealing with the perceived state of the Party by mainstream opinion, a view confirmed, no doubt, by the fortunes of the Tories since the split of 1846, when three short spells of minority office merely interrupted the thankless task of almost permanent opposition, and confirmed their inability to shape the national agenda. Compared with the zealous reforming spirit that was alive in Westminster with Gladstone’s first administration ironing out ancient abuses and anomalies ranging from the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland to the introduction of the secret ballot and the abolition of the purchase of army commissions, the Tories’ somewhat lacklustre opposition to these measures gave the impression that the Liberals were in control. The publication of *Lothair*, Disraeli’s first novel in a generation, coupled with a lack of parliamentary activity and leadership, raised questions about his political commitment and future. Rumours of a leadership plot by Party grandees sponsoring the Earl of Derby, the son of Disraeli’s predecessor, which in the event were not wholly without foundation, fuelled such speculation. Disraeli’s birth, fashion and even aspects of his ideological outlook allowed him to be cast in the role of outsider, though with Party apparatchiks this was not always advantageous. When times were electorally lean, such attitudes could become hostile, particularly in the surroundings of Hatfield House. Therefore, aside from individual friendships, he did not benefit from
Disraeli

Disraeli's first term as premier was notable for reform, but the manner in which these legislative successes were attained and implemented made the government unpopular, not just with the special interests that they offended, but also the general public. As well as making enemies of elements within the Church, the House of Lords and, of course, the breweries - although not all at the same time - the liberal and reforming ideology that gave each piece of legislation its own interventionist and, in the eyes of the general public, meddling characteristics was proving unpalatable to the middle ground.

Separate foreign crises involving arbitration proceedings with the US government, a dispute with Russia over the Crimean settlement, and the fallout from the Franco-Prussian War, compounded Gladstone's difficulties. As 1872 progressed from winter into spring there was a sense that with the Liberals running out of steam, Disraeli was being presented with an unprecedented opportunity. As Cairns put it memorably to Richmond, "you know that last year, and in 1870, he was down in the mouth and rather repelling meetings to concert plans etc: now he thinks things are looking up, and awakening himself, he turns round and insists that every one else is asleep".

A mass Tory demonstration at Manchester had been discussed since the election defeat of 1868. However, the timing of such an event and the unconditional loyalty from any specific strand within the Party. Of course, his position as leader was secure when the Party triumphed at the polls in 1874, but in the aftermath of electoral defeat in 1868 and until 1872, Disraeli was vulnerable.

From 1870, however, there were developments occurring within the inner workings of the Party machine that bolstered the leader's position. With the retirement of Lord Cairns, Disraeli neutralised the conspirators in the Upper House by appointing the more amenable Duke of Richmond to lead the Tory peers in the Lords, thereby stifling the campaign in favour of Lord Salisbury. Party organisation was strengthened, if not professionalised, by the creation of Conservative Central Office and the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, the umbrella organisation for local Conservative organisations under the able stewardship of John Gorst.

On a personal level, Disraeli secured a triumph by being elected Rector of Glasgow University in late 1871, defeating John Ruskin. Perhaps the turning point in his fortunes occurred in February 1872 with his reception at St Paul's Cathedral, at a service of thanksgiving for the return to health of the Prince of Wales, when he was cheered by throngs of Londoners from the City to the Carlton Club. As the late Lord Blake put it "there occurred one of those seemingly inexplicable gusts of public opinion which now and then by some freak of political weather came down from a calm sky to ruffle the hitherto still political waters". Sir William Fraser speculated that as Disraeli sat in the morning-room of the Carlton Club, staring into the distance, rather than participating in a discussion on Napoleon, his thoughts were focused on a return to high office. The frosty and occasionally hostile reception the same crowd accorded Gladstone perhaps gave such thoughts a hint of realism and allowed Disraeli to develop them further.

By 1872, Gladstone's administration was reaching that crucial midterm point, when governments tend to be judged on their programme and achievements. His first term as premier was notable for reform, but the manner in which these legislative successes were attained and implemented made the government unpopular, not just with the special interests that they offended, but also the general public. As well as making enemies of elements within the Church, the House of Lords and, of course, the breweries - although not all at the same time - the liberal and reforming ideology that gave each piece of legislation its own interventionist and, in the eyes of the general public, meddling characteristics was proving unpalatable to the middle ground.

Separate foreign crises involving arbitration proceedings with the US government, a dispute with Russia over the Crimean settlement, and the fallout from the Franco-Prussian War, compounded Gladstone's difficulties. As 1872 progressed from winter into spring there was a sense that with the Liberals running out of steam, Disraeli was being presented with an unprecedented opportunity. As Cairns put it memorably to Richmond, "you know that last year, and in 1870, he was down in the mouth and rather repelling meetings to concert plans etc: now he thinks things are looking up, and awakening himself, he turns round and insists that every one else is asleep".

A mass Tory demonstration at Manchester had been discussed since the election defeat of 1868. However, the timing of such an event and the
choice of principal speaker had created some controversy. Lord Sandon, a Lancashire grandee and future cabinet minister, stated in 1871 that "I do not myself like the idea of a public appearance of the members of the late Cabinet in Lancashire. . . . I do not hold a very high opinion of their capacity and I feel sure that such an appearance would tell against us in the country." Disraeli's reassertion as leader and the extent of Liberal unpopularity signalled that such a meeting was now opportune.

Through the medium of Disraeli's speeches, certain key initiatives were launched at both the Manchester meeting on 3 April 1872 and that held at the Crystal Palace on 24 June 1872. As there is a certain amount of overlap between the contents of both speeches, it would be appropriate to deal with them collectively; firstly, by setting the context in which each speech was delivered, and secondly, assessing the key issues which were addressed, i.e. the constitution and nation, social reform and empire.

The Speeches

Disraeli's experience of mass oratory was certainly limited, compared to that of Gladstone. He had, of course, dallied, but gained no reputation for speaking outside the familiar environs of House of Commons and constituency, although in mid-Victorian public life this was not such a handicap. As he said at Manchester, "I have never in the course of my life obtruded myself upon any meeting of my fellow-countrymen unless I was locally connected with them, or there were peculiar circumstances which might vindicate me from the imputation of thrusting myself unnecessarily on their attention." In spite of being a 'novice' he managed to speak for three and quarter hours to an audience in excess of 30,000 delegates, though his delivery began to fade as he approached the end of his discourse. We can, of course, only speculate as to the extent to which Disraeli's consumption of "two bottles of white brandy, indistinguishable by onlookers from the water taken with it" affected the final hour of his speech.

At the Crystal Palace he spoke to a much smaller audience of 2,000 delegates, after a banquet held at the National Union Conference. This speech built on the key messages announced at Manchester, particularly social reform and empire. It should be noted that whilst Disraeli did not participate in the art of mass oratory often, when he did, he was not just addressing the delegates in the hall, but more significantly, utilising the platform as a forum to reach a national audience.

The Manchester speech had been much hyped in the press and political circles in advance, and The Times noted that, "we should be glad to hear something like a statement of principle," but sounded a warning note to the effect that "if it be clear that this programme will consist of nothing else than the appropriation of the chief ideas of those very radicals [i.e. the Liberal government], then the enthusiasm which today calls forth will very soon pass away even among Lancashire Orangemen".

The Constitution and the Nation

Disraeli initially concentrated on core Tory beliefs, using the speeches as a means of restating basic Conservative principles. There was a reaffirmation of allegiance to Crown, established church and House of Lords. The message was indeed timely, as this triumvirate of institutions had been under attack from the fringes of the Liberal Party, particularly Sir Charles Dilke, without so much as a public rebuke from Gladstone. As Disraeli observed, "Her Majesty's new Ministers proceeded in their career like a body of men under the influence of some deleterious drug. Not satiated with the spoliation and anarchy of Ireland, they began to attack every institution and every interest, every class and calling in the country." The Conservatives were, by contrast, offering a tranquil and measured alternative to the unstoppable juggernaut of Gladstonian Liberalism. By re-emphasising their loyalty to the monarchy as the pinnacle of Britain's institutions, the Conservatives were championing the maintenance of a constitutional norm that was theoretically above Party politics, yet highlighting an area of Liberal vulnerability.

In this post-1867 world, with a much enlarged electorate, Disraeli was making a play for the votes of the middle and upper working classes, whose instincts were naturally conservative - that is, with a small 'c' - and who would be more likely to rally to a national rather than a class-based banner. Not since the death of Palmerston in 1865, had the Conservatives been presented with such a perfect opportunity, in the words of Blake, to "find a voice and not an echo".

Disraeli gave credit to the Liberals for carrying out reform in areas where it was necessary, but observed that the government were running out of steam. In a fine turn of phrase which deserves to be quoted in full, and was considered by Lord Morley, Gladstone's official biographer, to be "one of the finest classic pieces of the oratory of the century" he warned, "as I sat opposite the Treasury Bench the Ministers reminded me of one of those marine landscapes not very unusual on the coasts of South America. You behold a range of exhausted volcanoes. Not a flame flickers on a single pallid crest. But the situation is still dangerous. There are occasional earthquakes, and ever and anon the dark rumbling of the sea".

Liberalism, in practice, could not be trusted to maintain the constitutional status quo or govern responsibly, rather "it is to attack the institutions of the country under the name of reform and to make war on the manners and customs of the people of this country under the pretext of progress". Disraeli dismissed Liberalism as 'cosmopolitan' and 'continental', an ideology based on abstract principles, rather than one grounded in reality and serving the collective interests of the nation. Whilst social reform and adherence to empire were certainly of importance,
the 'national' theme was perhaps, in the short term, the more pertinent in persuading uncommitted electors to support the Conservatives, in many instances for the first time.

Social Reform
At Manchester Disraeli stated that, "the first consideration of a Minister should be the health of the people". This certainly appeared to be new ground for the Party, although Disraeli had spent a large portion of his youthful intellectual energies in developing his own unique One Nation brand of Toryism, with responsibility for the welfare of the working man placed on the shoulders of his social betters, who, as a result of their lofty positions, had a duty to look after the lower orders. The message from both speeches to the newly enfranchised working man was not to concern himself with political activity and agitation, but instead to trust the Conservatives to act on his behalf. Disraeli, in jest, placed key Conservative principles in the narrow context of the Liberal legislative agenda by stating that, "the policy of the Tory Party - the hereditary, the traditional policy of the Tory Party, that would improve the condition of the people - is more appreciated by the people than all the ineffable mysteries and all the pains and penalties of the Ballot Bill". Indeed, the people of England would be "idiots . . . if, with their experience and acuteness, they had not long seen that the time has arrived when social and not political improvement is the object at which they should aim".

Of course, Disraeli was scant on detail, preferring to focus on the broader picture not delving into specifics. On the question of affecting some reduction of the working man's hours of labour and improving working conditions his musings introduced a subtle caveat, as he mentioned the difficulties of "achieving such results without violating those principles of economic truth upon which the prosperity of all States depends," that is, cautioning against interference with the free market. As the Party was to discover to its electoral chagrin a generation later, laissez-faire, as the economic model and provider of mid-Victorian largesse, had acquired a near infallible and divine status, with which only the foolhardy tempered.

It is easy to be cynical about Disraeli's motives in addressing social reform. The Times noted that "Mr Disraeli evidently knows the advantages of making new alliances" and there is, indeed, an element of truth in this. Yet in a lofty and idealistic sense, he was conscious that Britain's prosperity and continued international position depended upon a healthy and fit population. In turn, for the constitutional status quo to continue and receive fresh impetus, it was essential to bring the working classes into the Tory fold and give them a stake in the forging of the nation. If it meant that working class concerns and grievances would be dealt with by a Conservative Party that was seen to be listening and acting responsibly, rather than interfering in their lives and pastimes - as was the case with the Liberal government and associated puritan killjoys - then perhaps this was preferable. As Professor Smith observes, in relation to the social reform strand of the speeches, "there was more of the politics of mass seduction than of those of mass arousal".

The Empire
For Disraeli, the choice England was facing was "whether you will be content to be a comfortable England, modelled and moulded upon Continental principles and meeting in due course an inevitable fate, or whether you will be a great country, an Imperial country, a country where your sons, when they rise, rise to paramount positions and obtain not merely the esteem of their countrymen, but command the respect of the world". Disraeli was certainly on shaky ground when championing the empire, as he had famously likened the colonies, in an earlier age, to "mill-stones." Politics may be the art of the possible, although, in reality, it is more often the art of pragmatism, and by 1872 Disraeli's imperial ideal had evolved to that of an empire "with the durability of Rome with the adventure of Carthage". In this era, with late Victorian imperial expansion but a few years away, he was linking patriotism with the allure of empire and making a bid for the imaginations of the urban working class. Disraeli sensed that the Liberals were vulnerable on this issue, as their past conduct had affected "the disintegration of the empire," pointing to colonial self-government as an example. He was not opposed to granting self-government but asserted that this should be in tandem with "a great policy of imperial consolidation" and "accompanied by an imperial tariff, by securities for the people of England for the enjoyment of unappropriated lands which belong to the Sovereign as their trustee, and by a military code which should have precisely defined the means and the responsibilities by which the Colonies should be defended, and by which, if necessary, this country should call for aid from the Colonies themselves". A representative council was canvassed "which would have brought the Colonies into constant and continuous relations with the Home Government".

As with social reform, Disraeli shied away from outlining a detailed imperial strategy. By highlighting these two topical and populist areas he was giving the electorate a taste of what would follow under a future Conservative administration, rather than compromising his room for manoeuvre at this early stage. Perhaps he was heeding the advice of his predecessor, Lord Derby, to Lord George Bentinck not to start "detailed projects in opposition".

A Precursor for Electoral Success?
"Excellent generalship is a characteristic of the Conservative Party, and
has often compensated for numerical inferiority", noted *The Times* after the Crystal Palace speech. Whilst for Disraeli this statement may have seemed obvious - indeed, he had established the parliamentary precedent after the 1868 General Election defeat by resigning rather than facing the House as head of a minority administration - he was also conscious that it was the Party's Achilles' Heel. It was, therefore, imperative for the Party's parliamentary base to be expanded. Party organisation was obviously one way of connecting with the ordinary elector in a local sense. The other method of reaching new voters was by devising a programme that was in keeping with the instincts and interests of the more numerically significant and unaligned portion of the electorate, whilst retaining the Party's core supporters.

Disraeli proclaimed at Manchester "the Conservative Party are accused of having no programme of policy. If by a programme is meant a plan to despoil churches and plunder landlords, I admit we have no programme. If by a programme is meant a policy which assails or menaces every institution and every interest, every class and every calling in the country, I admit we have no programme." With Gladstone's gravitation to a radical agenda, politics finally became competitive, with the role of champion of the national interest now up for grabs. The Conservatives, under Disraeli's stewardship, were well placed to capitalise on the vacuum at the centre and, quite crucially, provide choice, a luxury denied to the electorate during the mid-Victorian period by the presence of Palmerston. From his conduct of foreign policy down to his physical form, Pam was the epitome of John Bull, therefore making it exceptionally difficult for a Conservative opposition to oppose policies that on the whole were in line with measures that they might have implemented in government. Pam's death in 1865 created a new electoral opportunity, which by 1872, with Liberal ineptitude in foreign affairs, coupled with their unquenchable thirst for reform, enabled Disraeli to claim the Palmerstonian mantle for the Conservatives and assure a harassed electorate that a future Tory government would augur in a more tranquil and stable age.

The other facets of the 1872 speeches - social reform and imperialism - add a distinct contemporary flavour: the former raising issues regarding the health and welfare of the British people and a precursor to the Edwardian national efficiency campaigns, whilst the latter policy was one with which the Party was to be closely identified under Disraeli's successors. It is fair to say that Disraeli's 1874-80 administration is remembered less for social reform and more for diplomacy and colonial unrest. In fact, the handful of social measures introduced, owed more to the imagination of Richard Cross, the Home Secretary, than the Prime Minister. Michael Howard, in a recent speech to the Charities Aid Foundation, discussed Disraeli's social legislation, as laying the foundations for future Tory commitment to social reform, in the context of housing, a process which continued through the policies of Conservative governments in the 1920s and 1930s, to the establishment of local authority social service departments by Keith Joseph in the 1970s. In a symbolic, rather than practical sense, Howard is correct to identify Disraeli as the source of this Conservative social reform tradition, especially as this policy area has never been the exclusive domain of the centre left. With memories of Disraeli still relatively fresh, F. E. Smith and a future generation of Conservatives established the Unionist Social Reform Committee in 1911, with membership including Stanley Baldwin and Samuel Hoare, to discuss ways of resolving social problems that had come to a head in the Edwardian period. The purpose of such a body, according to F.E., was "not only to expose and correct the usual crudities of Radical-Socialist legislation, but to give form to a comprehensive policy of social reform". Indeed, echoes with the past were still audible in the 1980s with the implementation of the Children Act 1989 and the Community Care Act 1990, two measures in the Disraelian tradition which illustrate that Margaret Thatcher's administration was not quite so uncaring as her critics would have us believe. In respect of the imperial tariff and representative council as a means of imperial consolidation, Disraeli was aiming views that would be given greater impetus and intellectual credence by Joseph Chamberlain.

Individual policies and choice soundbites give the 1872 speeches a contemporary feel but Disraeli's most significant point was that it was only the Conservatives who could deliver responsible government, preserve ancient institutions, particularly the monarchy, and restore national harmony. The seizing of the middle ground and the long overdue pitch for the bourgeois and working class vote provided the Conservatives with the foundation from which to build a long-term electoral base that ultimately reached its Victorian zenith under Salisbury. With the Liberals plunging from crisis to crisis in the remaining years of Gladstone's first administration, Conservative tactics were to sit back and give the government enough rope to hang itself. Disraeli had established his Party's credibility in 1872, and by early 1874 the Party gained, for the first time in a generation, a majority, and a respectable one at that, of fifty seats.

And what of Disraeli? A Punch cartoon published in February 1874 is perhaps a fitting epitaph. The new Prime Minister is cast in the form of an angel in a recent speech to the Conservative History Journal | issue 3 | Summer 2004 | 21

"As with social reform, Disraeli shied away from outlining a detailed imperial strategy."
in June 1850. The Whig Foreign Secretary, Viscount Palmerston, had instigated a blockade of Piraeus harbour after the Greek government had failed to settle various minor British claims for compensation, not least those of the unsavoury ‘Don’ Pacifico. At the culmination of the Lords debate on the affair, it fell to Malmesbury to marshall the opposition votes. The Conservatives defeated the Whig Government in the division. Though the success was of course the result of a broad Conservative attack on the government in the Lords, Malmesbury was nevertheless proving himself a useful lieutenant. This was of no small importance during a period when the party had lost prominent front-benchers such as Gladstone and Sir James Graham after the split over the Corn Laws, and they could call upon few able men.

More importantly in terms of his career trajectory, Malmesbury had a long acquaintance with and interest in foreign affairs. In 1837, for example, the young Conservative had published a pamphlet attacking Palmerston’s foreign policy. Palmerston had sent aid to the Spanish government, embroiled in a civil war. Malmesbury had vigorously opposed such interventionism. The principle of ‘non-interference’ in the internal affairs of other countries was to remain an article of faith for him throughout his career. But his most important asset was his other great lifelong friendship, with Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, better known to history as Emperor Napoleon III of France. The two had been friends since they had met as young men, when Malmesbury had been on the nineteenth century equivalent of the ‘grand tour’. He had even interceded on Napoleon’s behalf whilst the latter had been imprisoned by King Louis Philippe’s regime. Bonaparte had become French president in 1848. When Derby’s Conservatives took power in 1852, Louis Napoleon had just overthrown the Second Republic in a coup d’état. Malmesbury’s friendship with the French dictator made Derby’s close ally the obvious
choice for the Foreign Office. Significantly, the mild-mannered conciliatory peer also represented the antithesis of Palmerston, who revelled in controversy and whose confrontational approach in foreign policy left many Conservatives distinctly uneasy.

In office, Malmesbury cultivated an entente cordiale with France. He used his Bonapartist connections. When it came to the controversial declaration of Napoleon's Second Empire in late 1852, Malmesbury worked hard to maintain European peace. He reassured Napoleon of Britain's peaceful intentions, and the British public of Napoleon's desire for close alliance with Britain. By the time Malmesbury left office in December 1852 one French diplomat boasted of "une entente parfaite" with Britain. But the Foreign Secretary had worked closely with other Great Powers too. Anglo-Austrian friendship had been renewed. With Russian assistance Britain had discouraged Napoleon from attacking Belgium. Malmesbury's patient skills had also helped to resolve European disputes over Greece, Switzerland, Tuscany and Schleswig-Holstein.

After the defeat of the Conservative government in December 1852, while most of the ousted ministers licked their wounds, Malmesbury brought his experience to bear in opposition. Most importantly, he was one of the few Conservatives who kept up a sustained critique of the Aberdeen's coalition's foreign policy as it drifted into the Crimean War. He also assisted and encouraged Disraeli in his efforts to set up a Conservative publication, the Press. In his spare time, he even amused himself by writing for Punch. In 1855, when Lord Aberdeen's government collapsed in the Crimean quagmire, Derby tried - unsuccessfully - to form another administration. He named Malmesbury as his first choice for the Foreign Office. When the Conservatives unexpectedly returned to power in February 1858, after Palmerston's government was defeated on the Conspiracy to Murder Bill, it was a foregone conclusion that he would once more oversee foreign policy.

In 1858, Malmesbury again successfully resolved several minor European disputes. He also worked hard to restrain France as it became clear that Napoleon and the Piedmontese leader Cavour were colluding to oust the Austrians from their Italian puppet and satellite states. Though Malmesbury and Derby were unsuccessful in preventing the Franco-Austrian war of 1859, they did prevent their critical colleague Disraeli (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) from initiating a more flamboyant policy. Though Disraeli's ideas were vague, he favoured a "significant demonstration" by Britain, to prevent war, instead of Malmesbury's quieter diplomatic approach. He even secretly worked behind Malmesbury's and Derby's backs to undermine the government's foreign policy. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, however, feared the consequences of bellicose posturing. They were determined to avoid Britain being drawn into a conflict. They firmly rejected Disraeli's criticisms and exposed the flaws in his hazy diplomatic logic. Until he became Prime Minister in 1868, Disraeli played no significant role in foreign policy.

When Derby formed his last government in 1866, Malmesbury's ill-health prevented a return to the Foreign Office. Instead, his post went to Derby's son, who maintained the same neutral, conciliatory policies. Although Malmesbury was Lord Privy Seal between 1866 and 1868, and in 1874-6, he never returned to prominence. In retirement in the 1880s, he nevertheless attracted a brief flurry of publicity when - strapped for cash after a late second marriage - he published his two-volume 'Memoirs of an Ex-Minister'. The memoir, written in diary form, was the only record of the mid-Victorian Conservative party published by one of its leading participants; Derby left no similar volume, and Disraeli left only sketchy, unedited notes. But, while references to the memoirs regularly pop up in historians' footnotes, Malmesbury himself has largely been forgotten. Yet for twenty years he played a key role in Conservative politics, diplomacy, strategy, organisation and propaganda. Examination of his policies and career help illuminate an important strand of British political opinion with a long pedigree and a contemporary resonance.
Most politicians do not reach the top of the greasy pole. They are either honest in acknowledging their political shortcomings, or have a ready excuse as to why they never quite made it. We sympathise, blame or applaud. But occasionally we are confronted with those who really could have become Prime Minister, but either chose to ignore the ultimate prize, or were denied it by peculiar twists of fate. Though such figures are difficult to categorize, and harder to judge, they allow us an unusual insight into the politics of power.

Stafford Northcote was born the grandson of a Devon Baronet of distinctly modest means. Though his Victorian hagiographer assures us that at birth his “planets were all in the ascendant”, and that he could read by the age of two, the future did not seem particularly bright. At Eton he was beaten regularly for no particular reason, and developed, though not as a consequence of the cane, a profound religiosity. Severe shortness of sight too struck at an early age - cricket was out, rowing in. There then followed Balliol, a scholarship, and a call at the Inner Temple in 1840.

Lawyerly life was cut short, however, when in 1842 Northcote’s cane wielding former headmaster, one Rev Coleridge, recommended him as private secretary to William Gladstone, the already proven genius then President of the Board of Trade in Peel’s government. “There is no single statesman of the present day”, wrote Northcote, “to whom I would more gladly attach myself.”

His new job opened up the prospect of a career he had “always secretly desired” - a seat in parliament, he modestly noted, “will probably be considered by-and-by desirable”.

Before he entered the Commons, and besides his secretarial duties, Northcote became closely involved with the Great Exhibition and Civil Service reform. Characteristic over-exertion in the former brought on the first signs of a heart condition that would mark his character and dog the rest of his life, whilst the latter gave him a platform on which to make his political reputation. The 1853 Northcote/Trevelyan report highlighted the absurd jobbery within the civil service, which was a profession reserved for “the unambitious and the insolent and incapable”. Positions were awarded by possessors of patronage, who would “bestow the office upon the son or dependent of some one having personal and political claims upon him.” Though this last criticism bore a marked similarity to contemporary political practice, the Northcote/Trevelyan suggestion of competitive entry was accepted, and the modern civil service was born.

In the winter of 1855 Northcote received the following telegram from Gladstone; “If you wish for parliament, come up instantly without fail to me; if not, answer by telegraph.” A seat at Dudley, the rather rotten borough in the pocket of Lord Ward, had fallen vacant following the death of its Trollopian incumbent, the 87 year old Mr Benbow. Within two weeks (and would that it were this easy today) Northcote was an MP. Though a free-trader, fear of the Radicals and an admission that he was “a rather stiff Conservative” obliged Northcote to join those Tories who followed the 14th Earl of Derby.

Northcote’s early Parliamentary career was uneventful, for which we can blame Palmerston’s political domination from 1855-65. Three events are perhaps worth noting: in 1856 he voted against the Jew Bill; in 1859 he was appointed Financial Secretary to the Treasury in Lord Derby’s brief second administration; and in 1861 his stinging attack against Gladstone’s budget cemented his reputation as a politician of the first rank. Lord Stanley, no flatterer he, thought the speech “the most complete parliamentary success that I have heard in the twelve years I have sat in the House,” and he noted, prophetically, that Northcote was “marked out for a Chancellor of the Exchequer”.

Palmerston’s death in 1865 was as the uncoiling of a political spring. “He held a great bundle of sticks together”, Lord Clarendon observed, “They are now unloosed, and there is...
nobody to tie them up again.”

For the last decade Palmerston had been the one barrier between England and the Democratic flood. As soon as the septuagenarian Lord Russell began his second spell in Downing Street, thirteen years after the first, it became clear that a Reform bill would be introduced to Parliament. The Conservatives had merely to find the 40 Whig/Liberal MPs opposed to reform and power would be theirs. Few could have predicted, however, that within eighteen months Derby and Disraeli would have passed their own Reform bill, one more far reaching than anything Russell had dared propose. The conservative liberalism that, in Whig hands, had governed Britain since Russell’s first ministry of 1846 would soon be at an end.

Perhaps mindful of his own importance in the events about to unfold throughout 1865-6 Northcote began to keep a diary. It is worth dwelling for a moment on what he observed in his role as one of Disraeli’s key lieutenants in the parliamentary struggle to “dish the Whigs”. Through Northcote we learn of Disraeli’s fear lest Russell’s government pass even a moderate Reform Bill; “such a course”, he warned, “would seat the Whigs for a lifetime.” He was probably right. Reform was in truth as much about gerrymandering on a massive scale as any philanthropic desire to extend the franchise. While Disraeli practiced the despatch box bravura with which he had already brought down four governments, Northcote was one of those deputed to find the MPs needed to reverse Russell’s majority. In fact, there were some fifty Whigs and Liberals who might vote against Reform - the so-called “Adullamites” who coalesced around the brilliant oratory of a half-blind albino Oxford don, Robert Lowe. But unfortunately for Disraeli, and even for Lord Derby, the Adullamites’ preferred option was “fusion” - a coalition under the leadership of Derby’s son, Lord Stanley. It is in Northcote’s diary that we see Disraeli at his duplicitous best, at once denying Stanley’s ability or wish to become Premier - while in Stanley’s diary we read Disraeli pressing “strongly the necessity of my [Stanley’s] accepting office as Premier if called upon.”

In Disraeli’s favour, however, were the many Conservative MPs, chief among them Northcote, to whom Stanley, an agnostic, was unacceptable because of his ‘unsound’ stance on Church matters. It is thanks largely to these ‘Churchmen’ that ‘fusion’ failed, and a purely Conservative government was formed. Northcote was Disraeli’s Vir pietae gravis. Northcote joined Derby’s third government as President of the Board of Trade - his first Cabinet post. He seems not have a played any significant role in shaping the Conservatives own reform bill of 1867. Disraeli and Derby liked to work alone. It is perhaps surprising that the basic tenets of the bill, with its profound consequences for the map of political Britain, were agreed by the Cabinet in just half a dozen fractured meetings; hence the description of the bill as a ‘leap in the dark’. Political survival rather than political science guided the actions of Derby’s minority administration. By the time the bill had passed close to one million voters had gained the franchise, and the electorate was doubled in size - all of which was too much for Lord Cranborne, one of the few Conservatives to realise just how radical, intentionally or not, the Reform Bill was. Cranborne’s resignation meant another promotion for Northcote - to Secretary of State for India.

It is as Chancellor of the Exchequer in Disraeli’s second government (1874-80) that Northcote is perhaps best remembered. It was he who first made the income tax permanent, it being still improbably collected as a ‘temporary measure’. His budgets are notable for radically reducing the national debt, through an annual sinking fund, whilst at the same time facilitating the social legislation passed by Disraeli’s visionary Home Secretary Richard Cross.

But war, or the threat of war, played havoc with Northcote’s finances (not to mention his political loyalties) in the latter half of the government. The Eastern Crisis of 1875-7 threatened at several moments to destroy Disraeli’s Premiership. Following a rebellion in the Balkans Russia had declared war on the Ottoman Empire in April 1877. In England the Cabinet was split between the Foreign Secretary, the 15th Earl of Derby (previously Lord Stanley), and the Prime Minister. The former, concerned with what he saw as the real currency of England’s power - stability, trade and peace - held that conditional neutrality must be Britain’s policy. Disraeli on the other hand, desperate for glory, prestige, and perhaps even war, held a positively hyperbolic view of Russian power, and was convinced the Tsar’s army could occupy Constantinople, and even sweep through Arabia to seize his newly purchased Suez Canal. Put simply, Derby and many of his colleagues, Northcote included, feared that Disraeli’s bellicose proposals would provoke an Anglo-Russian war. Thus it was Northcote, intimate Disraelian though he professed to be, who, sharing Salisbury’s fear that Disraeli’s policy would place Britain “on the steep slope which leads to war”, suggested in December 1877 that Derby should “take a lead and give us a line of his own.”

In the event Derby, ever the reluctant politician, refused to out his friend of 30 years standing, and remained instead the brake within Cabinet on Disraeli’s febrile imagination.

Both Derby and Northcote were critical of Disraeli’s policy on grounds that we might now regard as unusual - cost. Today we never consider the cost of foreign policy. But during the Eastern Crisis Northcote’s total annual tax revenue was just £75 million. If you feared, as Derby did, that Disraeli “would think it quite sincerely in the interests of the country to spend 200 million on a war if the result of it was to make foreign states think more highly of us as a military power”, then it was easy to see how a “spirited foreign policy” could severely upset Britain’s economic prosperity. In addition it became apparent from about 1876 onwards that Britain was entering a serious depression. Consequently, the £6 million vote of credit (raised by the government in 1878 to pay for potential war preparations), and the £5 million cost of the Zulu war (1879), not to mention costs arising from the Afghan wars, caused “the whole business of the Chancellor of the Exchequer [to be] thwarted by the course of foreign politics.”

Perhaps we may turn to Gladstone for a typically evangelical, but nonetheless accurate, reflection of much contemporary wisdom: “The expenses of a war are the moral check which it has pleased the Almighty to impose upon the ambition and the lust of conquest that are inherent in so many nations.” Ultimately, however, it was party politics that belatedly brought Northcote behind Disraeli as the Eastern Crisis reached its denouement in early 1878. A classic weathervane politician, Northcote tended to move with the prevailing wind,
Northcote

and, as the Russians set up camp in the suburbs of Constantinople elements of the Conservative party, the mob, and that great Jingo the Queen-Empress herself, created such a storm that it appeared, in February and March 1878, that the Government might fall if a decided line were not taken against the Russians. Northcote could not afford to view politics with the same disinterested hauteur as Derby, a wealthy and powerful peer. Northcote had, after all, spent most of his political career in opposition, and he did not relish the thought of once more returning to the cold side of the House. It was not war that Northcote feared most in 1878, but a “disastrous… division of the Cabinet.”

1881, in which year Disraeli died, raised an altogether thornier question - who was to lead the Tories? Northcote had easily seen off his only rival to the Commons leadership, Gathorne Hardy, when in 1876 Disraeli took ermine as the comfortable flannel to his old age and elevated himself to the Elysian fields. And as the place to attack Gladstone’s new government was in the Commons, not the Lords, then Salisbury’s peerage seemed a sordid boon.

Though the party leadership was a “dual” one, it was Northcote who initially led the opposition. The problem came, however, in Northcote’s style of leadership. Despite his sometimes tortuous ability to see both sides of any argument, which left Salisbury for one “in a weak frame of mind”, “Northcote was popular and trusted in the Commons. He possessed that inestimable political quality, ‘soundness’.”

for Mr Gladstone than a wooden three-decker would be a match for a dreadnought” said one - an unjust quip - but in coming from A. J. Balfour, nephew of “Bob” Salisbury, we can see how the covert battle for the party leadership was conducted. By the time Gladstone’s government was defeated on the nominal issue of the 1885 budget it was apparent that Northcote’s stock had fallen, and Salisbury’s had risen.

Northcote, it seems, did little to rally support for his Prime Ministerial candidacy in the crucial days of June 1885. And yet, in many ways one can hardly blame him. The Conservative party could not ultimately decide between him or Salisbury. The choice was the Queen’s. Victoria had so often told Salisbury what title she looked to him to form the next Conservative government, this being the course recommended by her beloved Disraeli, that he perhaps made the fatal assumption that power would be his. Quite why Victoria chose Salisbury without so much as “a word of sympathy or regret” to Northcote has yet to be fully explained.

Northcote apparently became so emotional at hearing the disastrous news that he had to leave the room. It was in fact the deathblow to a career that henceforth collapsed in a series of undignified events justly described as “pantomimic”. Lord Randolph Churchill, one of Northcote’s Fourth Party tormentors, forced his removal from the Commons. When asked what title he would take if a peerage were offered him, Northcote had always said “Done For” was the only suitable one he could think of. He chose

A small group of young and vigorous Tory MPs, dubbed the “Fourth Party” and more attuned to the demand of modern politics, emerged as severe critics of Northcote’s leadership. Northcote was “no more a match too much excitement could kill him accounts for his calm and conciliatory political manner - an advantage in government, but quite the reverse in opposition. In addition, Northcote’s strategy was aimed at separating the dwindling and disaffected Whigs from Gladstone and the Liberals. But here we can perhaps see a man who, though in the prime of his career, was out of his time. Following the 1867 Reform Act the parliamentary politics favoured by Disraeli were in many ways redundant. As Salisbury noted, “Power is more and more leaving parliament and going to the platform.”

“Northcote was popular and trusted in the Commons. He possessed that inestimable political quality, ‘soundness’”

Premier’s office he suddenly collapsed. Twenty minutes later he was dead. “I had never happened to see anyone die before”, Salisbury wrote, “…just before the sudden parting… I had, I believe, for the first time in my life, seriously wounded his feelings. As I looked upon the dead body stretched before me, I felt that politics was a cursed profession.”

Northcote had succumbed to the long-threatened heart condition which had for so long governed his temperament, political approach and modus operandi.

Northcote’s health must, it seems, account for his reluctance and inability to play the political role that his intellect and talent had for so long promised. On such things does history turn.

1 Life, Letters, and Diaries of Sir Stafford Northcote First Earl of Iddesleigh, by Andrew Lang, 2 Volumes, 1893, Vol 1 p 55 quoting Northcote to his father, 21st June 1842
2 Lang Vol 1 p 57 quoting Northcote to a Mr Shirley 30th June 1842
3 Lang Vol 1 p 103-4, quoting the report in each case
4 Lang Vol 1 p 109, telegram sent February 28th 1855
5 Lord Stanley to Northcote, May 3rd 1861, Iddesleigh Papers, British Library.
6 Lord Clarendon to Lord Granville 21st October 1865, “Life of the 2nd Earl Granville” by Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice p 487
7 Northcote’s diary February 22nd 1866 Iddesleigh Papers British Library 172
8 “Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party, the Journals of Lord Stanley” (ed. John Vincent) entry for 28th April 1866
9 Salisbury to Northcote 15th December 1877, “Life of Robert, Third Marquis of Salisbury”, by Lady Gwendolen Cecil
10 Northcote to Salisbury 14th December 1877, Hatfield Archive, Letters from SHN to LD 5 1123
11 Lang, vol 2 p 98
12 Richard Cross to Mary, Countess of Derby, 29th October 1877, Hatfield Archive Mary Derby Papers, MCD 80 ff53
13 Salisbury to Lord Carnarvon 15th February 1874 Carnarvon Papers, British Library, Add 60758 1127
14 Lord Carnarvon’s diary 5th April 1877 British Library Carnarvon Papers Add 60909
16 Roberts p 325
17 Roberts, p 427, quoting Salisbury to Lord Randolph Churchill

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When the author was adopted as PPC for Walsall North in 1963, he was despatched on his first canvass with a blue rosette. He was immediately greeted by a lady in the street who rushed over, kissed him, and said I’ve waited thirty years (a slight exaggeration) to see a Liberal candidate in Walsall. Returning to the office, I asked the obvious question and was told that traditionally the Conservatives had used red, the Liberals blue and labour yellow or latterly yellow and red. We immediately determined on a red, white and blue rosette, with blue and white on the manifesto cover. But in the committee rooms, the boards recording the canvassing returns, which were then used to record who had voted in preparation for “knocking up”, were still marked off red for Conservatives and blue for all others. It was a salutary reminder that, although the National Union had decided to standardise on blue on 17 March 1949, they had no way in which to enforce their decision.

In fact red has considerable claims to be the colour of the Tory party. This was said to be because it was the racing colour of Lord Derby, who led the party, initially in the Lords only, from 1844 until February 1868. That would certainly appear to be the reason why it was so widely used in the north-west. However, as Geoffrey Block observes, the use of the colour red can be traced to the 17th century, and during the exclusion crisis it was the colour of those who supported the Crown against the Whigs, who used blue.

When Gladstone stood as a Conservative at Newark in 1832, he had a Red Club enthusiastically working for him. He was presented with a banner of red silk and an address from the ladies, who expressed “their conviction that the good old Red cause was the salvation of their ancient borough”. There were large tea parties to enlist the support of “Red Ladies”, while Red inns dispensed rather more intoxicating beverages to Red voters and a Red band was paid 15/- a day to play.

When H.G.Wells wrote *The New Machiavelli* in 1910, he recalled the election four years earlier when the Liberals had swept the board: “The London World reeked with the General Election; it had invaded the nurseries. All the children of one’s friends had got big maps of England divided up into squares to represent constituencies, and were busy stick-
In fact red has considerable claims to be the colour of the Tory party. This was said to be because it was the racing colour of Lord Derby in Northumberland, County Durham, in much of Cheshire, in Liverpool and in Birkenhead. But it was also the colour in at least two seats in Staffordshire and three in Worcestershire and it was also to be found in West Wales. Seven of the ten divisions in Middlesex also used red. As late as 1964, red remained the colour of choice for many of the constituencies north of the Tees. Geoffrey Block identified 37 constituencies in all that continued to use it.

When, in March 1961, the Bromley Association resolved to change its colours from orange and purple to royal blue, a survey of the associations in Kent revealed that seven used orange and purple, ten blue, one blue and white, and one red, white and blue. From knowledge of Royal Tunbridge Wells, it is probable that what the survey took to be orange was in fact gold and that these were the Abergavenny colours of purple and gold. In 1927 these were the Conservative colours in virtually all the Kent and Surrey constituencies, and they could be found also in two divisions in Sussex and three in Hampshire. Many of the south London boroughs like Lewisham and Lambeth were also sailing under those colours. About forty constituencies in all appeared to be using them.

In Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Rutland, the Isle of Ely and parts of Norfolk in the 1920s pink was the dominant colour, although in Cambridgeshire it was coupled with white, in three of the Norfolk divisions with purple and in Grantham with red. The use of pink was still evident in the 1960s, although by then North Norfolk had moved to blue and Grantham to blue and gold. Pink and white were also Disraeli's colours when he first stood for parliament at Wycombe in 1832.

Yellow, in general not a Conservative colour - Trollope used it when contesting Beverley as a Liberal in 1868 was, however, the colour of the Lowther family and it is no surprise to find that Cumberland and Westmoreland Conservatives followed suit, leaving blue to the Liberals. That remained the case into the 1960s. Further north in Scotland, where colours were reported, they were predominantly red, white and blue.

There were also some unusual combinations to be found in 1927. The two divisions in Lambeth used orange and Rugby was still doing so as late as 1959. Camborne coupled black and yellow and Brighton purple and primrose.

When Gladstone fought Greenwich as a Liberal in 1874, the two Conservative candidates used crimson and Gladstone blue, while the Radical in compliment to his Home Rule supporters adopted Green.
The intellectual reputation of Michael Oakeshott (1901-90) has been a source of pride to Conservatives - and of irritation to the Left - since he succeeded Harold Laski as Professor of Political Science at the LSE in 1951. His appointment to that Fabian foundation seemed to mark a dramatic shift in the intellectual climate, to accompany the decline and fall of the Attlee Government. Laski had never concealed his passionate commitment to socialism. Oakeshott could not have provided a starker contrast, in his writings and his teaching. To critics who could read between the lines, it was obvious that he despised everything that Labour stood for. But instead of engaging directly with Laski’s legacy, Oakeshott presented his own views in a style which seemed both elegant and evasive.

Despite his disdain for polemical encounters, Oakeshott was identified as something of a court philosopher during the Thatcher years, with an assured status even if he refused to dance attendance. For Thatcherrites his reputation was sufficient to rebut any allegation that they belonged to ‘the stupid party’. Since his death - in the month following Thatcher’s removal from office - that reputation has grown further, on both sides of the Atlantic. One commentator has gone so far as to acclaim him as “the greatest political philosopher in the Anglo-Saxon tradition since John Stuart Mill - or even Burke”. There is now a burgeoning Oakeshott industry, which includes a commemorative association and a website. The four books under review are the first products of a special Oakeshott series, issued by the publisher Imprint Academic which is building an impressive list of studies in the work of major British philosophers.

But is all this fuss justified? These books certainly confirm that Oakeshott’s philosophical writings are difficult enough to require elucidation for a wider audience, and sufficiently important to make the effort worthwhile. Although he was too wise to construct a system, the various authors succeed in presenting his work as a broadly coherent attempt to fathom some aspects of the mystery of experience. Yet in one respect the precise nature of his reputation remains a puzzle. Oakeshott clearly regarded the Conservative Party as Britain’s most promising bulwark against socialism: but it is equally evident that he was not himself a conservative. Three of the present authors shed new light on his liberalism. The exception - Roy Tseng - only succeeds in emphasising Oakeshott’s clear divergence from the traditions of Locke, Kant and Bentham. But this by no means exhausts the varieties of liberal ideology, and Efraim Podoksik is much more persuasive in linking Oakeshott to other (half-forgotten) European liberal thinkers, notably von Humboldt who also influenced Mill.

From this perspective, the title of Oakeshott’s most celebrated essay, ‘On being Conservative’ (from the 1962 volume, Rationalism in Politics) could be regarded as a deliberate piece of mischief, typical of this puckish philosopher in his off-duty moments. Bernard Crick was scarcely guilty of caricature when he summarised Oakeshott’s formula as: “when-ever so-and-so sensible is preferred to such-and-such silly, that is what I mean by being conservative’. Yet the popularity

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**“These books certainly confirm that Oakeshott’s philosophical writings are difficult enough to require elucidation for a wider audience, and sufficiently important to make the effort worthwhile.”**
of the essay among post-war Conservatives does help us understand ideological change within their party. The Oakeshottian 'Conservative' might admire traditional practices, but he is an individualist, secure within his own skin and perfectly equipped for autonomous existence in the modern world - if only the state would leave him alone. This is a distinctively liberal vision, but it amounts to something like an ideal self-image for many contemporary Conservatives.

Oakeshott's writings on history also illustrate the liberal character of his thought. In his volume on this subject, Luke O'Sullivan traces Oakeshott's developing ideas with commendable clarity, drawing on unpublished manuscripts and enlivening his account with biographical snippets. Oakeshott originally trained as an historian, and he included valuable reflections on the subject in Experience and its Modes (1933). But in On Human Conduct (1975) he expounded a view of the past which fell short of the exacting standards which he had set for historical writing. He presented a highly schematic story about the development of European individualism, in order to characterise rival understandings of the state: one, as a 'civil association', in which individuals pursue their own goals under a general framework of rules, and the other as a compulsory 'enterprise association', where the population is directed towards common goals. There could be no doubt as to Oakeshott's personal preference, and as a finishing touch he skewed his 'evidence' to imply that the idea of 'civil association' was older as well as better than the alternative.

If Oakeshott's view of the past begs more questions than it answers, it also encouraged students to re-examine some of the classics of political theory. The most notable beneficiary of Oakeshott's revisionism was the unlikely figure of Thomas Hobbes. Ian Tregenza's meticulous study shows how Oakeshott deployed selective readings of Hobbes to support his own developing ideas. Far from being an apologist for over-mighty rulers, in Oakeshott's hands Hobbes turns out to have been a champion of 'civil association'; his Leviathan might be strong where strength is needed, but there is no question of the state imposing priorities on the populace. In part, this sympathetic view of Hobbes seems to have been inspired by Oakeshott's feeling that Hobbes was a kindred spirit. This encouraged him to overlook awkward features of Leviathan - for example, it would be difficult to square Hobbes' picture of acquisitive human nature with Oakeshott's 'Conservative' disposition - but, as Tregenza shows, his work has inspired other scholars to present a more nuanced understanding of the Sage of Malmesbury.

The most debatable aspect of Oakeshott's interpretation is his attempt to deny the orthodox view that Hobbes was a pioneer of the Enlightenment. Unlike most liberals who venerate the Enlightenment, Oakeshott believed that it introduced a 'rationalist' approach which (among other things) infected politics and promoted the idea of the state as an 'enterprise association'. His antipathy to the 'Enlightenment Project' has encouraged recent commentators to classify Oakeshott as a precursor of postmodernism. Among the present authors, Roy Tseng comes closest to this position. Yet Efraim Podokskik is a better guide to understanding Oakeshott's work in the appropriate context. In a wide-ranging and perceptive account, Podokskik presents Oakeshott as a defender of modernity, despite his acute awareness of its various dilemmas.

The debate about Oakeshott and postmodernism is reflected in the tension in his work, where optimism and nostalgia always seem to be wrestling for supremacy. The explanation seems to lie in Oakeshott's encounter with the modern world, which was as partial as Hobbes' contact with Restoration England. As an academic who was well rewarded for conducting civilised conversations with intelligent young people, he could consider himself to be fortunate. But he came to feel increasingly isolated in holding the view that education was an activity which should be prized for its own sake. From this perspective, the increasing emphasis on 'vocational' study after 1979 was part of the same 'rationalist' enterprise which Oakeshott had been attacking since the 1940s. By that time Oakeshott himself was living in retirement in Dorset, and never made public his intellectual distance from the Thatcherites who praised him.

The contents of these books overlap and their interpretations are different; but taken together they make a thought-provoking read. Although no student of Oakeshott's work can ignore the question of ideological allegiance, the collective effort of the authors suggests that his political writings are less important than his earlier reflections on the nature of knowledge. Oakeshott began his career when the main hazard for philosophers was negotiating a way between the backwash of Hegelianism and the spring-tide of logical positivism. His highly distinctive response to this dilemma justifies a high ranking among twentieth-century British philosophers, even if a place alongside Mill seems too lofty. Hopefully Oakeshott's true status will be consolidated soon by an authoritative biography, based on full access to private papers.

Mark Garnett, an historian and biographer is a regular contributor to the Conservative History Journal.
'You are all the world to me'. These were the last words Lady Diana Mosley [1910-2003] spoke to the dying Sir Oswald [1896-1980] at their home near Paris on the night of 2nd December 1980. Anne de Courcy's *Diana Mosley* has much new material in it and it is a more honest account than her subject's autobiography, *A Life of Contrasts*. The theme of de Courcy's book could easily be summed up in those final seven seven words spoken by Diana Mosley to her 'darling Kit' on his death bed. She was utterly devoted to a man who was essentially a rogue. And that goes for his public as well as his private life.

Anne de Courcy is, of course, no stranger to the Mosleys. In her previous book, *The Viceroy’s Daughters: The Lives of the Curzon Sisters*, Lady Cynthia Curzon's short life [1898-1933] is admirably set out. She was Mosley’s first wife. They married in 192. King George V and Queen Mary were among the wedding guests. Lady Cynthia died, officially, from an infection after an appendix operation. But as de Courcy makes clear, she really died from a broken heart after finding out about Diana’s affair with Mosley. Diana was quite open with de Courcy about all this, and much more. She gave the author access to all her correspondence and private papers. Even Diana’s two sons by her first marriage, in 1929, as the Hon. Diana Mitford, to a scion of the beerage, Bryan Guinness, helped her. As did her two sons by her marriage to Mosley, Alexander and Max. They were born after her marriage to Mosley took place in the Goebbels’ drawing room in Berlin in 1936. Adolf Hitler was one of the guests. The overall result is a book which outshines all previous biographies of Diana. It is very strong on the personal and emotional lives of the Mosleys. For example, we are told that Mosley had a long affair with his first wife’s sister. We are even told of the reasons behind the nicknames the Mosleys addressed to each other. He was ‘Kit’ and Diana was ‘Percher’, prison notwithstanding. And if
you want to know, as I certainly did, how much they paid for their main Paris home, the Temple de la Gloire, and how much profit Diana made on its sale in 2000, you will find all the answers in the book.

Where the book fails us is in political sphere. De Courcy is good at telling us who Diana's favourite prison wardens were in Holloway. But she does not deal, as adequately as I would have liked, with the politics of fascism or the problems the Mosleys presented to Churchill [a distant kinsman of Diana's] and a democratic nation fighting for its very survival in 1940. As the leader of the British Union Of Fascists, Mosley could see the war coming before 1939. As a slavish devotee of Hitler, he wanted Britain to keep out of it. He led campaigns to this effect. But when war came, he changed his stance. Although he wanted a 'negotiated peace' [whatever that was supposed to mean] he did urge his followers to support the civil power in every way and to try and repel any invaders. Many fascists rallied to the cause and joined up. The British Communists took a different line. Before the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, they were anti-fascist at home and abroad. We all know about the trouble they caused at Mosley's meetings because he was not 'allowed' free speech. And we know about some of the brave Communists, like Jack Jones, who fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War. When the Stalin - Hitler pact emerged, they changed their tune. Suddenly, they all became pacifists, albeit that they still tried to break up Mosley's lawful meetings. We should not, they argued, have anything to do with the war or fight for an army which was furthering a war. Many communists preferred to continue with their favourite hobby of infiltrating the Labour Party and the trade unions, which were weak because of the Call-Up and the Churchill Coalition with Labour. As soon as Hitler broke the non-aggression pact, the Communists were told by Moscow to change their tune yet again. They advocated an all out war against Germany and the 'evils of nazism'. They were as silent as the driven snow about the 'evils of communism'.

Powerful Labour barons in the Churchill coalition, like Morrison and Ernie Bevin, were always anti-Mosley. He was regarded as a turncoat, having resigned from Macdonald's government in the early thirties. He was also regarded as a rabble rouser and as someone who could split the working class vote. They were entirely sympathetic to calls from the communists inside and outside the Labour party and trade union movement to imprison Mosley. Churchill, anxious to keep up a united political front at home, very reluctantly endorsed the decision to imprison the Mosleys, who were perceived as fifth columnists. He was always uneasy about doing this. But then he had bigger fish to fry and we were at war with Germany and not the Soviet Union. In 1943, he was finally successful in pressurising the stubborn and myopic Morrison to release them. A lot of the political background needs more treatment in the book. The ties between the Labour Party, the trade unions and the Communists need spelling out. The Mosleys were absolutely RIGHT to feel they were being picked on when compared with the mayhem the communists were covertly causing. The author moans about the Mosleys' 'poor conditions' in prison, albeit that they were allowed food, wines and liquers from their Harrods Account and were able to pay other prisoners to do domestic chores for them in their married quarters! Now would Mosley have allowed, for one minute, any of his opponents such a pampered life style had he been where Churchill was in 1940? It is an absolute crucial question which the author should have asked herself. You only have to look at the Nazi concentration camps to see what Mosley would have done to Churchill.

Another drawback of the book is that it does not deal in any way with the problem of anti-democratic parties, like the communists and fascists, using all the advantages of free speech in a civilised and mature capitalist democracy, to gain power, and then kicking away the ladder once the goal has been achieved. The Mosleys presented to Churchill their lawful meetings. We should not, they argued, have anything to do with the war or fight for an army which was furthering a war. Many communists preferred to continue with their favourite hobby of infiltrating the Labour Party and the trade unions, which were weak because of the Call-Up and the Churchill Coalition with Labour. As soon as Hitler broke the non-aggression pact, the Communists were told by Moscow to change their tune yet again. They advocated an all out war against Germany and the 'evils of nazism'. They were as silent as the driven snow about the 'evils of communism'.

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