for the Liberal candidate were split with the Conservatives’ favour. (In 1924, for the Liberal vote overwhelmingly split in the proportions of split voting in Dundee throughout the two parties. Despite Churchill’s landslide victory in 1922, Dundee was actually highly marginal in the 1923 and 1924 general elections, with the Liberal candidate just 314 votes from victory in the general election of 1923, and in 1925, in conjunction with Dundee’s last Liberal MP, Dingle Foot (brother of Michael Foot). Both Foot and Horsbrugh were defeated in 1945, and their tenure at Dundee can be seen as the fulfilment of Churchill’s own design for winning the constituency after the First World War.

Churchill was undoubtedly motivated by major national and international factors in his attitude towards coalition, and in his rapprochement with the Conservatives. However, the experience of representing Dundee, with its unusual political environment, has long been relevant chapters of Martin Gilbert’s Churchill: Volume IV, 1917–22 as founder of the ‘National Government’ in Modern Conservatism and Foreign Torment (London: Heinemann, 1975) pp. 591–93. For more on Churchill’s affinity for coalitions, see G.R. Neele, Country Before Party: Coalitions and the Idea of ‘National Government’ in Modern Britain, 1885–1997 (London: Longman, 1995), especially pp. 120–47. See Minutes of the Dundee Unionist Association, passion, University of Dundee Archives. For Churchill’s ‘life seat’ remark, see Churchill to Lady Randolph Churchill, 25 April 1908, Randolph S. Churchill (ed.), Winston S. Churchill: Volume II Companion, Part 2, 1907–1911 (London: Heinemann, 1996) p. 798. This is often misquoted as ‘a seat for life’. 6. Dundee Liberal Association papers, Dundee City Archive, GD/DLA/4/6. 7. As a two-member constituency, the electorate was approximately twice the size of most contemporary Scottish boroughs. 8. The corresponding vote shares were 18.6 per cent for Baxter and 30.2 per cent for Churchill, although these percentages are not directly comparable to the 1908 by-election, as that was fought over a single vacancy, while the general elections were two-member elections. 9. Minutes of the Dundee Unionist Association, ff. 117–18, 11 August 1923, University of Dundee Archives. The Dundee Liberals were extremely organised in pursuing the new Lodge Franchise, with a series of circulars, and the deployment of the Dundee and District Women’s Liberal Association. Dundee Liberal Association papers, Dundee City Archive, GD/DLA/4/6. 10. Minutes of the Dundee Unionist Association, ff. 127–8, 11 August 1913, University of Dundee Archives. 11. For a detailed analysis of the national context of this Act in its various stages, see Pagh, Electoral Reform in War and Peace, pp. 213–42. 12. Minutes of the Dundee Unionist Association, 15th–16th April 1918, University of Dundee Archives. See also George Brown, Representation of the People Act: Memoirandum by Central Council (Edinburgh: Scottish Unionist Association, 1918), p. 4. 13. The most detailed study of the politics of this period remains Kenneth O. Morgan, Consensus and Division: The Lloyd George Government, 1919–1922 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). 14. Tobin Rose, Conservation and Foreign Policy during the Lloyd George Coalition, 1918–1922 (London: Frank Cass, 1990) pp. 204–20. For more on long-standing Conservative mistrust of Churchill’s influence over Irish policy, see David Dutton, ‘His Majesty’s Local Opposition’: The Unionist Party in Opposition, 1905–1914 (Liverpool University Press, 1992) especially pp. 219–33. 15. Thomson is now best remembered as founder of the Beano and Dandy, but his Dundee-based publishing empire included several major Scottish newspapers. 16. For the view that Thomson engineered Churchill’s defeat, see Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, Volume IV, p. 285, which is based on Churchill’s own strong belief that he was being hounded by Thomson. Most subsequent accounts repeat this interpretation. 17. See, for instance, pro-Churchill stories like the two-column article on ‘MR. CHURCHILL AS AN ANTI-WARTER – Claims Large Part In Cutting Expenditure!’ Dundee Advertiser, 1 November 1922, and articles attacking Churchill’s Community and Labour opponents, like ‘MR. GALLACHER ON MR. MORRIS – Led by Churchill into a trap’, Dundee Courier, 9 November 1922. 18. People’s Journal, 14 December 1918. 19. ‘Dundee Advertiser’, 14 November 1922 – a quarter-page, front-page advertisement on the eve of poll. 20. ibid. 21. F.W.S. Craig, British Parliamentary Election Results, 1918–1949 (Chichester: Parlimentary Research Servies, 1996 [rev. 3rd ed. 1985]), pp. 755–756.

The news that the St. Stephen’s Club is closing its doors in December signals the end of an institution closely bound to the Conservative Party for more than 140 years. Stephen Parkinson surveys its history.

St. Stephen’s Club, 1870–2012

The original St. Stephen’s clubhouse stands in the shadow of Parliament (The Graphic, 21 February 1874)

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rom the start, the St. Stephen’s Club was closely associated with the machinery of the Conservative Party organisation. It was founded in 1870 – the same year as the Conservative Central Office, and shortly after the establishment of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations. All three were products of the second Reform Act, which became law in 1867 and brought about permanent changes in election management. Although it had been championed by Disraeli, the first election under the Act – held in 1868 and involving nearly three times as many voters including, for the first time, women in urban seats – saw the Conservatives ejected from office. The Tories faced a stark challenge:

To convert the recently enfranchised voters required more systematic organisation, and without many such concessions, the Conservative Party could not return to office.

Hitherto, organisational work had taken place at that ‘first great Party battle’, the Carlton Club – which had itself been established in the wake of the first Reform Act in 1832. But clubs like the Carlton – and its Liberal counterparts, Brooks’s and the Reform Club – were highly exclusive, and not (in their minds) suitable for members of the newly-enfranchised electorate. A ‘new era’ therefore opened in 1868 and, as well as the development of Party apparatus, a range of new building saw a new wave of political clubs catering for ordinary business men or party workers from the provinces who came up to London on political business. In 1870, a new principal agent for the Party was appointed – John Gorst, a 35-year-old barrister who had recently lost his seat in Parliament.

The headquarters he established at 53 Parliament Street became the first home of Conservative Central Office. Gorst was a devoted follower of Disraeli and, like his leader, a fervent adherent of the policy of building the future of the Tory party on the loyalty of the working masses. He set about strengthening and co-ordinating the Conservative Party organisation – registering voters, finding

Seth Alexander Thévez teaches history at the University of Warwick, and holds degrees from the Universities of Cambridge and London. He is in the final stages of completing a Ph.D. with the History of Parliament Trust on the political impact of London clubs, 1832–68.
candidates, forming new associations around the country, publishing pamphlets, and supporting the Party's representatives in Parliament. His work paid dividends: at the following general election in 1874, the Conservatives were ousted by Gladstone's Liberals, but won more seats, gaining 79 new MPs and enabling Disraeli to form his first majority administration. His work done, Gorst left to pursue his own return to the House of Commons, and Central Office moved to a premises opposite Parliament on the corner of Westminster Bridge – St. Stephen's Chambers, the home of the St. Stephen's Club.

This location made the St. Stephen's a convenient meeting place for Conservative MPs and their associates, being ' nearer than the Carlton and easier to join.' Indeed, Tory MPs did not have to set foot outside to reach it: a subway connected it to the premises of Westminster newspaper (along with a new Underground station opened in 1868). The club took its name from the site of the earliest Conservative meeting place of the Commons, and Benjamin Disraeli was one of its founding fathers. Members were required to 'profess and maintain Conservative principles as recognised by the leaders of the Conservative Party of Great Britain'. However, provision was made for up to 100 non-political members who were allowed to omit that clause – a striking departure from the practice of the Carlton and other political clubs of the day, but designed to allow members of the Armed Forces or other professions which debarred them from professing political opinions to join. Indeed, the St. Stephen's attracted a 'surprising blend of Tory politicians and consulting engineers' from its earliest days. It was a period of rapid growth for Britain's railways and, with enabling Disraeli to form his first majority administration. His work done, Gorst left to pursue his own return to the House of Commons, and Central Office moved to a premises opposite Parliament on the corner of Westminster Bridge – St. Stephen's Chambers, the home of the St. Stephen's Club.

The club’s premises were designed by John Whitchord, Jr., later president of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Whitchord was an apt choice. In 1869, he had made an unsuccessful bid for Parliament as a Conservative in Barnstaple. Among his commissions was another building which would play a prominent role in Conservative history: the Grand Hotel at Brighton. His clubhouse for the St. Stephen’s, finished in 1874, was 'a classical building with boldly corbelled projections'. Inside, it was not only a convenient meeting place for the Party's Parliamentary members and supporters, but designed to allow members of the Armed Forces or other professions which debarred them from professing political opinions to join. Indeed, the St. Stephen's attracted a ‘surprising blend of Tory politicians and consulting engineers’ from its earliest days. It was a period of rapid growth for Britain’s railways and, with enabling Disraeli to form his first majority administration. His work done, Gorst left to pursue his own return to the House of Commons, and Central Office moved to a premises opposite Parliament on the corner of Westminster Bridge – St. Stephen’s Chambers, the home of the St. Stephen’s Club.

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The return MPs were informed that, soon after eight o’clock, the Irish members had permitted the debate to proceed. The bell would clang here as it did in the Commons’ dining-room, and they would bolt off to save the state.

Nothing happened. They ate their dinner in peace and quietness, and, strolling back about half-past ten, were met at the lobby door by the despatch Whig, who, in language permitted only to Whips and the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, reproached them with their desertion.

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Stephen Parkinson is Director of the Conservative History Group. He was the Conservative candidate for Winchester about half that sum, but that in either event, he would probably have been left with no alternative but to close the club. The botanist and administrator Sir George Birdwood, a member of the club’s committee, suggested that the club should be left with no alternative but to close the club. The botanist and administrator Sir George Birdwood, a member of the club’s committee, suggested that the club should be decorated with primroses (reportedly Dior’s favourite flower) on the first anniversary of the death of Disraeli, originated in the Disraeli’s death, originat...