

Contemporary History Now

Centre for Contemporary British History, Spring 2010

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www.ccbh.ac.uk

Centre for Contemporary British History, Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, Malet St, London WC1E 7HU. Tel: 020 7862 8802 Email: ccbhinfo@sas.ac.uk

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Contemporary British History Seminar, Spring 2010

Seminars take place in the Wolfson Room on the first floor of the Institute of Historical Research, at 5pm, unless otherwise indicated. All are welcome.

20 January **Andy Beckett**

Re-thinking the British 1970s: towards a new perspective on an orphan decade

Andy Beckett is the author of *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the 1970s*, a re-examination of an important and fascinating period in modern British political history. He interviewed people active at the time, from Heath to Scargill, and many less famous people, former members of the Gay Liberation Front, ex-hippy activists, and others, and argues that it was an era full of new possibilities as well as disasters and dead ends.

3 February **Laurence Black (Durham)**

Tories and Hunters: Swinton College in the Making of Conservative Identities

Between 1948 and 1975 the Conservative Party maintained a Castle in North Yorkshire that doubled as a party college and which was attended by more than 50000 activists, agents and others. It was also used by Macmillan as a base for shooting and by Edward Heath for away days for the shadow cabinet. The College was an early casualty of Thatcher's leadership. This paper tells the story of Swinton, but also uses it as a site on which historians can plot debates about party ideology, the sociology and regional appeal of the Party, its association with country sports and with aristocratic homes and rural images of Englishness.

17 February **Lord Hurd of Westwell and Edward Young**

'Choose your Weapons'. British Foreign Secretaries and their arguments, 1809-2009.

Lord Hurd of Westwell, Foreign Secretary 1989-95, and Edward Young, will mark the launch of their book on this topic with a seminar discussing Foreign Secretaries over the past two centuries. They examine the long-running argument between popular liberal interventionism and the more conservative diplomatic approach concentrating on co-operation between other nations. Starting with the disputes between Canning and Castlereagh after Waterloo, they consider Foreign Secretaries such as Lord Palmerston and Lord Aberdeen, Austen Chamberlain, Eden and Bevin and how these arguments are recognisable to their successors today.

3 March **Duncan Campbell-Smith (official historian of the Post Office)**

Post Office Reform - a perennial of British history

Duncan Campbell-Smith is now a full-time author and historian, working on a history of the Post Office for publication in 2011. He is the author of *Follow the Money: A History of the Audit Commission: The Audit Commission, Public Money and the Management of Public Services 1983-2008* (Allen Lane, 2008) and is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Historical Research.

17 March **Charles More (Gloucestershire)**

The British government and oil, 1945-1970s

Charles More is the author of *Black Gold: Britain and Oil in the Twentieth Century* (Continuum, 2009), and has published widely on modern British economic and social history. He will be examining the political, strategic, economic and social importance of oil and the way it shaped the twentieth century.

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Student Spotlight: Women's Service in the Navy and the Air Force

Kathleen Sherit, part-time PhD Student CCBH, supervised by Professor Pat Thane (CCBH) and Professor David Edgerton (Imperial College)

As an RAF officer, I was working in the Ministry of Defence in 1990 when the announcement was made that women were to serve at sea. The surprise amongst naval colleagues was palpable and was in marked contrast to the low key reaction to the 1989 statement that women could be trained as pilots in the RAF. Twenty years on, I am now researching the genesis of these policies in a thesis on the integration of women into the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force from post-Second World War to the early 1990s.

I have come to history by a circuitous route. A mathematics graduate from Oxford University, I first went into teaching, and then, seeking wider experience, joined the RAF. A three year commission turned into a 22 year career during which I studied for an MSc in aerosystems engineering (Loughborough University of Technology) and attended the Joint Service Defence College (1991) and the Royal College of Defence Studies (1999). After leaving the RAF in 2002, I was appointed as Deputy Principal at Newham College of Further Education, London. A career break from Newham in 2006-07 to study for an MA in Contemporary British history then took my life in yet another direction.

The Centre for Contemporary British History has proved an excellent route into my area of interest. For my MA dissertation, under the supervision of Professor Pat Thane and also guided by Dr Michael Kandiah, I chose to examine how the RN and RAF reached their policy decisions to extend women's roles to include flying and sailing. I made use of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000, the oral history collection at the Royal Naval Museum and my own interviews with participants in the actual policy-making to examine events for which files are not yet available in The National Archives.

For my PhD, I am now undertaking a comparative study of women's service in the navy and the air force, from the post-war decision to have women serving on a regular basis through to the opening of what has been described as 'their essential functions', namely sailing and flying, to women. The factors usually cited by historians and sociologists for the expansion of women's roles are demography, technology which reduced the reliance on physical strength, changing social attitudes and legislation, and the changing nature of warfare. My aim is to explore the validity and relative importance of these aspects and also to determine how the discourse on what constitutes combat has changed over this period. I continue to make use of the methodology I pioneered in my MA: FOI in tandem with oral histories. Both these methods take more time than the scrutiny of documentary sources, so my part-time PhD schedule is a benefit here. FOI particularly relies upon planning and persistence. My experience to date shows that some government departments are better record keepers than others, with the Ministry of Defence and Treasury being good and the Office of Manpower Economics woeful. This FOI experience and my ability, from my own service background, to bring new oral histories to light, both provide opportunities for some interesting commentary on methodological issues in my thesis.

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‘Left and Right’: Modern Political Archives



As most contemporary British historians will know, the Churchill Archives Centre collects political and other papers from the “Churchill era” to the present day. We have always collected across the political spectrum, from Sir Winston Churchill to Ernest Bevin and from Fenner Brockway to J. Enoch Powell. There is no better illustration of this diversity than the papers of Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock: while they were bitter opponents in the 1980s, their papers sit side by side in our strongrooms. Thatcher led her party for over 15 years, Kinnock led his for 9 years. The breadth of their records in our custody reflect their political longevity.

There are some very contemporary sources available to tantalise contemporary historians. As we wrote this the Chilcot enquiry into the Iraq war was underway, giving further insights into aspects of the activities of the British Government of the last decade. However, much of the detailed analysis by historians of the 1980s has yet to be written as the source materials have not been fully

available. Historians and biographers had the outline of the narrative story of the period but not the rich details of day to day developments.

The Centre is currently engaged in making both the Thatcher and Kinnock papers much more widely known and available to scholars.

Margaret Thatcher’s papers are vast, nearly 3000 archive boxes of material. Between 2004 and 2008 her earliest surviving political and personal papers from the 1940s- May 1979 were catalogued and made available. We think the release represented the first time that any personal papers of a former Prime Minister had been opened during their lifetime. Significant extracts were placed online, free of charge, via the website of the Margaret Thatcher Foundation (www.margaretthatcher.org).

From 1 February 2010 the first release of Lady Thatcher’s personal papers from the period she was Prime Minister will take place here, in line with the “thirty-year rule” for official papers. Again, the Centre will work closely with the Thatcher Foundation to disseminate the material as widely as possible. In parallel, the Centre will also start to release the papers of some of the people who worked closely with Thatcher at No 10, helping formulate, shape and present policy, including Bernard Ingham, her long-serving Press Secretary, and John Hoskyns, Head of the No 10 Policy Unit. Many of these papers are unique and have not been retained by the National Archives. Others have added value because they are covered with Thatcher’s annotations.

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On the face of it, the Kinnock papers have been much more accessible: as they are the papers of an Opposition leader, the rules on closures for the papers of a governing party do not apply. Lord Kinnock also allowed them to be opened to readers (with his personal permission) virtually as soon as they arrived. However, as any researchers who have tried to use a large, unsorted collection with only an interim box list to help them will know, having access to a collection before it has been catalogued is not necessarily much use.

The Kinnock papers are not as large as those of Margaret Thatcher (relatively small, at 937 boxes), but unlike hers, they were exceptionally disordered: you might find one half of a file thirty boxes away from the other half, and as quite a lot of them had been put into boxes loose, papers on half a dozen different subjects and dates were often mixed up together. So although there are obvious advantages to researchers in getting first crack at a collection as soon as it has been opened (and before the archivists have got their meddling hands on it), anyone trying to use the Kinnock papers in all their untouched glory would not get very far.

Now, however, the core of the archive, relating to Kinnock's key reforms of the Labour Party in the 1980s and early 1990s, has been catalogued in detail, and work on the rest of the papers is continuing: the section relating to elections fought by Kinnock is being completed now, and the online catalogue is being added to all the time. The papers of the Left held by the Archives Centre may not be as sizeable as those of the Right, but they are coming up fast!

Catalogues of both collections and many others in our custody are online, see <http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/>.

A full list of the collections held by the Centre is also available, at <http://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/collections/full.php>

Katharine Thomson and Andrew Riley

Churchill Archives Centre, December 2009

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HISTORY & POLICY

www.historyandpolicy.org

In recent History & Policy papers, James Moher has revisited [the Osborne Judgement](#) of 1909, which banned trade unions from funding political parties, Glen O'Hara [suggested three lessons](#) from recent history for policymakers attempting to curb Britain's national debt today, Iain MacLean argued for [reform of the House of Lords](#) and David Ceserani argued [that recent anti-Muslim demonstrations](#) should not be compared to the attacks on Jews in the 1930s.

In a recent Opinion article, Chris Burgess [looks at the tradition of leadership marketing](#) in British politics and why a huge image of David Cameron dominates the new Conservative election poster. Also in Opinions, Jane Berney of the Open University uses the history of the Contagious Diseases Act in Victorian Britain and Hong Kong to [shed light on the contemporary debate](#) over the scale of sex trafficking.

H&P response to HEFCE consultation on REF

In December, H&P submitted its [response to the consultation](#) by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) on the new Research Excellence Framework, which will govern the assessment and funding of academic research from 2012. We support the introduction of a new strand to assess research impacts, which will incentivise historians to engage with policymakers. But we have concerns about the proposed criteria and methods for assessing impacts and would like to see the weighting of this strand reduced to 15 per cent of the overall assessment.

H&P's Network of Historians respond to the Queen's speech

On 18 November, historians in the H&P Network offered a [rapid response](#) to the announcements in today's Queen's speech:

- Historian and former civil servant Geoffrey Rivett welcomed moves to create a National Care Service, but warned that proposals could be 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'.
- Dr Mark Roodhouse of the University of York warned that cutting the bureaucracy associated with police stop and search powers could be a backwards step.
- Dr John Welshman of Lancaster University evaluated the government's plans to enshrine in law its target to eradicate child poverty by 2020.
- Ann Lyon of the University of Plymouth talked of the gap in the law relating to the Constitutional Renewal Bill

You can read their responses on our [opinion page](#).

Bad History

The new 'Bad History' series has started! This gives historians the opportunity to dismantle the historical myths that abound in contemporary debate and expose the spinning of history for political and PR purposes. The series was launched in the *Times Higher Education* magazine on 15th October, and links to the first seven comments by historians are available on the History & Policy site [here](#).

For further information on any of H&P's publications or events please contact Mel Porter:
mel.porter@sas.ac.uk



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FORTHCOMING EVENTS AT CCBH

www.ccbh.ac.uk

Call for Papers: Britain in the 1970s

CCBH Summer Conference, 7-9 July 2010

The 1970s marked a watershed in post-war British history with economic crises and profound political and social discord precipitating major social, cultural, political and economic changes with enduring consequences. Three decades after the 'winter of discontent' and the election of Margaret Thatcher, and with the papers now fully open, this major interdisciplinary conference will reassess developments in this crucial decade, placing them in the context of postwar British history as a whole. The conference will include keynote addresses from notable academics and contemporary figures.

Proposals are invited for panels and for individual papers addressing themes related to Britain in the 1970s in a wide range of fields of enquiry across political, economic, social and cultural history. In addition to proposals from contemporary historians, we encourage submissions from colleagues in a wide range of related fields in the social sciences.

Possible subjects for papers might include:

- Economic performance & policy
- The social contract
- The 1976 IMF crisis
- The Thatcher revolution
- Britain and Europe
- The Cold War
- North Sea oil
- 'Overload' & 'ungovernability'
- The 'winter of discontent'
- The end of 'the classic welfare state'?
- The women's liberation movement
- Gay Liberation
- Devolution & Northern Ireland
- Immigration, race and racism
- Constitutional Change and the Law
- Demographic change
- Arts and culture, fashion, design
- Environmentalism
- Intellectual trends
- Historians in the 1970s
- Myths & representations of the 1970s
- The 1970s in postwar history

Please send abstracts of 150-250 words and a one-page CV to: Lawrence Black (lawrence.black@durham.ac.uk), Hugh Pemberton (h.pemberton@bristol.ac.uk) and Virginia Preston (virginia.preston@sas.ac.uk). **Deadline for proposal submission: 1 March 2010.**

Using Archival Sources to Inform Contemporary Policy Debates

16-17 February 2010

A two-day course for doctoral students, funded by the AHRC, to be held at The National Archives, Kew. It will work with students on researching aspects of 20th century British history and on how to make their research findings accessible to the public (without dumbing down) and especially how to contribute to public debate about issues of contemporary significance. For the full programme and booking details, and a report on a previous course, see the CCBH website

http://www.ccbh.ac.uk/news_frame.php?article_id=458

See the CCBH website for more forthcoming events: www.ccbh.ac.uk