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Black, Lawrence Edward Ian orcid.org/0000-0001-9321-2667 (2014) *Tories and Hunters : Swinton College and the landcapes of modern Conservatism*. *History workshop journal*. pp. 187-214. ISSN 0309-2984

<https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbt014>

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Fig. 1: Swinton Conservative College, *Country Life*, 1966.

Tories and Hunters: Swinton College and the Landscape of Modern Conservatism by Lawrence Black

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Between 1948 and 1975 54,000 activists, Agents and other students took courses at Swinton Conservative College. The College was housed in Lord and Lady Swinton's stately home in North Yorkshire, which they had donated to Rab Butler's Conservative Political Centre (CPC). It succeeded Ashridge College in Hertfordshire, which had been close to the Conservative Party since 1928.¹ Courses covered policy, campaigning, and history. Swinton was closely identified with Harold Macmillan's love of shooting and it was this rather than pedagogical targets that led him and the press to Swinton around the 'glorious twelfth' for the start of the grouse shooting season. Edward Heath used Swinton

for shadow-cabinet policy away-days until 1968 and it would have been famous had it hosted the 1970 meeting that agreed a reputedly more free-market election manifesto, which was held instead at Selsdon Park Hotel. The proto-Thatcherite ‘Selsdon Man’ was very nearly ‘Swinton Man’. By the mid 1960s Swinton had become one of the battlefields for skirmishes between market liberals and Butler-style paternalists. Despite this, the College was an early casualty of Thatcher's leadership and closed in 1976 because of its cost, its remoteness, a modernizing desire to shed elitism, and the emergence of think-tanks.

This article uses Swinton to examine ideology, activism and Conservatism's associations with field sports, aristocratic homes and rural images of Englishness. It plots the persistence of this cultural reputation and public association after Swinton, and despite Thatcher's efforts to shed it. Swinton then has wider historiographical resonances. There was a trace of ‘postcolonial melancholia’ in the nostalgic affections (and affectations) Swinton induced in Conservatives.² It offered a seemingly fixed Englishness to console imperial anxieties and destabilizations of class and nation. As a synecdoche for post-war Conservative identities, historians could hardly have made Swinton up.

My method is to reconstruct Swinton's ethos and its internal and external story, and to interrogate broader inferences. Buildings and place impart meaning and mesh together politics and culture – much Conservative history, in this period alone, was wrapped up in Cliveden or Selsdon. There were no innate politics to country piles. They hosted numerous Fabian summer schools and Stanford Hall housed the Co-operative Union College from 1945 to 2001. The 1960s project to turn the Arts and Crafts mansion, Plaw Hatch Hall in West Sussex, into a Trade Union Country Club prefigured several unions acquiring country house HQs in the 1970s.³ But the country house exhibited a persistent Conservative valency. The argument here is less about landed power (despite the title's allusion to E. P. Thompson's *Whigs and Hunters*) than party image. Such associations forged popular and enduring perceptions of the identity and differences between parties – which political historians burrowing into the finer details of policy and ideology ought to remember. This was the case in portrayals by opponents and the media, in the mental assumptions publicly at large, and in party lore.⁴ The world of Swinton was part of the

affective structure of Conservatism; its associations with aristocratic, landed lifestyles pre-dated Swinton, were epitomized by it, and survived its closure.

Swinton offers historians access to the undergrowth of Conservatism as well as its grandees. But historians should not lose sight of the site itself. That Swinton is largely absent from histories of Conservatism (despite its papers being in the Party archives) discloses much about the predilections of political historians. Swinton recurrently provided not the subject (thus its neglect), but the setting; it tells historians about the deeper cultural residues as well as the official political message; about the conservative imaginary, instinct and lifestyle, besides ideology and formal Conservatism.

Acres of historical debate have related English national identity, in popular, romantic and traditional forms to the countryside. Dave Russell summarized this debate in the 1980s, noting how since the nineteenth century a version had emerged ‘that celebrated the pre-industrial past and an idealized rural “deep England” in which the South of England often stood proxy for the nation’. The equation of landscape and national identity operated across multiple contexts: elite, landed power and gentility; an alternative to multicultural, metropolitan life; a stable, traditional ordering of society; and ideas of an authentic, simple life.⁵ The idea that real, organic English character was rooted in the land and predated the city or empire was as recurrent in radical as conservative discourse.⁶ But in the closely related stately-home idyll, it appealed to Conservative values and was something they readily cultivated. Stanley Baldwin’s 1924 speech, ‘On England’, located the nation’s essence in the country as a peaceful counter-point to war and industrial conflict. For Sir Arthur Bryant, close to Baldwin and a key figure at Ashridge College, a romantic, Disraelian vision of English history made country-house educational projects part of preserving national identity.⁷

This Conservative imaginary was also strong in regular Swinton lecturer, Enoch Powell. By the 1960s with former imperial frontiers now in urban constituencies like Powell’s, such sensibilities could take a ‘little England’ or racial tone. Much as he wanted to move on, not mourn the empire, its memory remained; Powell’s ‘instincts were proconsular’ although he recognized the ‘postcolonial’ context. His populist appeal lay not in neo-liberal economics (a theorizing which Bryant was sceptical of, but which burgeoned at Swinton), but in anti-immigrant nationalism. As he argued in 1961 (in a

speech to the Royal Society of St George that Baldwin had addressed in 1924), ‘when the looser connections ... with distant continents and strange races fell away’ the nation could return ‘to an unsullied core identity – Englishness, not Britishness’. In 1969 Paul Foot noted that now the ““natives” had taken control’, Powell’s empire of ‘equal citizenship’ had become ‘rhetoric about the desecration of “England’s green and pleasant land”’. Swinton contrasted with the direction in which Powell feared the nation was headed. It is too easy to regard such visions as backward-looking, not least since they did not obviously damage Conservative popular, electoral appeal. As Bill Schwarz argues, Powell’s unease at the end of empire was ‘a recurring feature of the larger public culture’. So was a rural nostalgia, much though Thatcherite modernizers wanted to move away from this.⁸

A key text in this debate in the 1980s was Martin Wiener’s *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, which explained industrial decline through the hegemony of aristocratic, arcadian values. Wiener found postwar Conservatives paternalistic, ‘aloof from industry’ and likely to look ‘with disdain at the vulgar behaviour and lifestyle of nouveaux riche businessmen’. He noted the equation of the nation and the rural in Quintin Hogg’s *The Case for Conservatism* (1947); Hogg being a noted exponent of fox-hunting and of politics as merely a means to such pursuits.⁹ The veracity of Wiener’s history is not the issue here, but that it was widely read by top Conservatives. His account chimed with Thatcher’s attempts to foster entrepreneurialism and to address why, as Keith Joseph put it in 1975, ‘Britain never really internalized capitalist values’. But it reproduced that culture in a penchant for finance and the City – a ‘gentlemanly’ institution until the mid 1980s – and rejected the idea that the state might offset it.¹⁰ Swinton, Northernness apart, fitted this narrative, providing a material, public link between Conservatism, rural escapes, sports like shooting, and aristocratic stylings. That Thatcherism’s modernizing project closed Swinton down, but that these instincts nevertheless flourished after Thatcher, attests to their power.

During the 1970s, the political left and Thatcherite New Right felt that ‘talk about national identity was code for a reactionary nostalgia for past imperial glories or a cosy, ruralist Englishness’. But these were not just atavistic issues. Emma Griffin shows that in the 1980s blood field-sports, animal rights and land and associated issues of class, access,

tradition and ethics, were political lodestars.¹¹ In recesses of Conservatism the issue remained sensitive. Nigel Everett's 1994 study, *The Tory View of Landscape* – an anti-Wiener squib – itself corroborates the cultural associations and sensibility which he fears have little modern residue. Everett's purpose was to distinguish a non-commercial and pre-industrial (rather than just backward-looking) tradition from more Whiggish, liberal strands (Adam Smith, Edmund Burke). It deflates the claims of modern Conservatives, free-marketeers (David Willetts) or not (Chris Patten), to adhere to Tory values by denouncing their sacrifice of the familiar stabilities of the landscape to heritage commercialism. Conservatism has long hosted such debates.¹²

Ewen Green has effectively dispensed with the pretence that Conservatives were less ideological in actuation than Labour. That they believed this so, until the Thatcher era, was part of the characteristic Conservative outlook. Thatcherism did not hijack the Party with some alien creed, but was the product of an ongoing debate *within* Conservatism more than a novel postwar commitment to monetarism. Equally, the tone of debate mattered: whether the New Right were more liberal than Tory, or the Butler-Heath generations had been too prone to Labour's *dirigisme*, this was cast as a battle over 'true' Conservatism.¹³ Swinton exposes the pre-Thatcher ideological, educational agenda and justifies the scepticism of Clarisse Berthezène about the perception of the Conservatives as – in John Stuart Mill's description – 'the stupidest party'.¹⁴

Swinton picked up Ashridge's battle against social-democratic values. Since Swinton's currency was ideas, debate and activism, it is no surprise that it played a part in the growth of Thatcherism. Thatcher conceived of her battle as one of ideas, but no less than Butler in the aftermath of 1945. In form the New Right was hardly new, in content and manner quite distinctive. Ben Jackson and Daniel Stedman Jones have shown the varied business and media support, international networks and ideologies (neo-liberal, libertarian, nationalist, authoritarian) constituting the New Right.¹⁵ Existing work has focused on elites and ideas; Swinton brings a wider terrain into range, and suggests limits to the change that Thatcherism marked (less the 'new times' alleged by critics) – not just that it emerged, in part, from Swinton, but that it exhibited some recognizably Conservative cultures.

SWINTON, SHOOTING, SITE

Lord Swinton (1884–1972) was a minister in all Conservative and National Governments 1922–55 except 1938–43. Macmillan reckoned when Swinton stepped down as Commonwealth Secretary in 1955 that he had ‘the ablest and most versatile brain in the Conservative Party’. According to Rab Butler he was of ‘Prime Minister calibre’ (a topic on which Butler had some expertise). King George VI commented of his development of the Spitfire, as Secretary of State for Air, that, ‘if there hadn’t been a Swinton, there wouldn’t have been an England’. But Swinton was not publicly prominent. Elected MP as Philip Lloyd-Greame in 1918, in 1924 he took his wife’s family name, Cunliffe-Lister; he became Viscount Swinton in 1935 and Earl in 1955. He was part of the shrinking landed gentry in the Commons, although the family wealth was industrially acquired.¹⁶ Confirming Mort’s suggestion that the Tory elite were not as blind-sided by the Profumo revelations as they pretended, Swinton also kept a Knightsbridge apartment. In 1967 he met playwright Joe Orton, they conversed about a set of Austen Chamberlain nutcrackers, and Swinton enjoyed a performance of Orton’s play, *The Good and Faithful Servant*. Orton confessed Swinton’s name meant nothing to him.¹⁷

‘Swinton’s conservatism’, his biographer John Cross noted, ‘owed little to ideology’, but much to ‘such civic virtues as patriotism... public service’ and ‘getting things done’. The circumstances of his offer of the property are, as Cross puts it, ‘obscure’. Historian John Ramsden, who met Swinton in the Party archives while they were at the College noted that the offer came when it proved impossible to reopen Ashridge as a Party college after the war. Swinton recalled he offered the ‘great house’ when Butler’s Conservative Political Centre was heard to need ‘a place... the size of a small Cambridge College’. Swinton hosted a school (Harrogate Girls) during the war that eased the conversion. The offer was endorsed by Macmillan who felt ‘people from the South, apart from having a very agreeable place to go to, should recognize it’s a jolly good thing for them to go to the North’.¹⁸

Butler offers little insight other than that the original title, Conservative College of the North, contained the hope that there might soon be one in the South to succeed Ashridge. Instead, he contends, Swinton became a ‘Tory Mecca’, and ‘all the more romantically attractive to Southerners for being so far from home and quite far even from a convenient

railhead'.¹⁹ Leasing part of the house to the Party avoided the perceived indignities of quasi-nationalization via the National Land Fund, opening up to tourists, or selling to the National Trust. It also avoided the 'development charge' on 'change of use' levied by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. The Swintons saved around £100,000. Besides being good business, this evinced the patrician-client relationship Swinton enjoyed with the Party and Butler.²⁰

Harold Macmillan, who with Butler ensconced Swinton in Party life, extolled Swinton's charms. He wrote to Lady Swinton in the wistful terms of rural escape from modernity that resounded at the College's closure: 'why one loves a holiday on the moors is that, in a confused and changing world, the picture in one's mind is not spoilt. If you go to Florence or Venice... you might as well be at Victoria station – masses of tourists, chiefly German in shorts. If you go to Yorkshire or Scotland, the hills, the keepers, the farmers... there is a sense of continuity... of neighbourliness that goes with... remote and beautiful country'. This was the antithesis of the London salon gossip and man-about-town behaviour that would be his minister John Profumo's undoing, and of what Macmillan knew (and tried to ignore) about his wife's relationship with Bob Boothby. At Swinton in 1963, contemplating the Denning Report into Profumo, he contrasted 'the clean Yorkshire air' with 'Whitehall and its fog'. His diaries were peppered with asides on the catharsis of shooting. He shot pigeons, ducks, rabbits and stag as well as pheasant -and shot at numerous country houses and at his West Sussex home. A sad note was added if the 'glorious' 12th August arrived and he wasn't shooting.²¹

The premiership hardly diminished his shooting. He 'loved shooting' and 'had an excellent eye'. Macmillan's 'Edwardian stylishness', epitomized by 'voluminous plus-fours on the grouse moor', was immediately subject to Harold Wilson's attacks on 'ducal grouse moors and all that', which remained potent as the leadership passed to the Earl of Home. Macmillan liked Swinton 'more to get away than anything', if also for the way that this 'grouse-moor image' augmented his aura of 'unflappability'. He was at Swinton during the Berlin Wall crisis and after his 1962 cabinet purge. Even Labour opponents like Richard Crossman noted jealously what a resource it was 'for the Tories... to relax for the weekend in those great country-house parties!'²² Satirists and journalists ensured that rarely a moment or phrase of Macmillan's premiership passed without it being

imagined on the moors. This kept Swinton in public mind. It was in any case a place where Conservatives' perorations attracted media attention. At the formal opening in July 1948 Lord Woolton inveighed against Clement Attlee's propensity for ideology.²³ Lord Swinton and the Duke of Devonshire (who owned nearby Bolton Abbey, where Macmillan had shot since 1923) were among the Prime Minister's 'small circle of friends' and he was 'at his happiest in the country-house world'. Swinton was more connected in Macmillan's mind with 'two splendid days shooting' than pedagogical concerns.²⁴ Butler too, more intellectual in manner, was keen on field sports. He was photographed for the newspapers at Swinton in 1957 with Macmillan and the former US ambassador Lewis Douglas bagging some 190 pheasants. Butler's admiration of Swinton ('in a deep gill watching some tiny black objects approaching... while I was still uttering the ten commandments... Philip would have picked the leaders right out of the sky') would also have impressed those conscious of his client relationship to Swinton.²⁵

Shooting was an elite sport, but reinforced notions of the 'wild' North. If Northern industrial nostalgia proffered working-class authenticity in the postwar era, as Waters argues, then the non-industrial North performed similar work for Conservatives. Swinton's appeal was as an earthy alternative to urban, consumerist Englishness; an escape from the moral risks of the more modern, cosmopolitan South in the 1960s. Cliveden House, twenty miles west of London, site of Profumo's fall, meant the reputed stabilities of a country house were best augmented with a Northern, not just rural, retreat.²⁶

Lord Swinton remained in the upper echelons of Conservatism after 1955. The College helped and in 1966 his grandson married Willie Whitelaw's daughter, who worked with him on his memoir, *Sixty Years of Power*. He enjoyed parliamentary reshuffle gossip, suggesting to Whitelaw in 1966 that there was 'no humanity' in Keith Joseph.²⁷ Swinton, by contrast, was a clubbable shires gent who continued to live in the House after 1948. Every August the press pictured the shooting party on Masham Moor (a 7,000 part of his 20,000 acres). The *Daily Express* noted that 1965 was the first time in thirteen years that there was no cabinet minister 'popping away with a pair of Purdeys'. In 1968 Whitelaw joined the Macmillan-Swinton shooting party.²⁸

Macmillan was less fond of the house itself, noting on a 1952 trip to lecture at the College: ‘hideous... a very bad mixture of early Victorian... and Gothic battlements... There was a lovely Queen Anne house before’. This showed arcane knowledge, since as John Cornforth’s 1966 profile of Swinton in *Country Life* explained, the original house had been extended and was now an ‘odd conjunction’: Regency façade, castellations and (Robert Lugar) tower rebuilt in the 1890s, and stables from 1753 (admired by Macmillan as Chatsworth-like). Besides landscaped lakes, Cornforth was taken with the Spanish, Italian and English (Gainsboroughs, Landseers) art and an Epstein sculpture added by the current incumbents. The Cunliffe-Listers were Bradford industrialists and acquired the property in 1882, expanding the estate for sports. All the essentials of an English country house were here – even a Druid’s Temple folly, imitating Stonehenge. Cornforth thought it the sort of house from a Disraeli novel rather than Trollope or Austen. Politics were brushed over, other than the involvement of Samuel Cunliffe-Lister (Swinton’s father-in-law) in Joseph Chamberlain’s tariff-reform campaign and the present Lord’s career. Its use as a Conservative College was noted as ‘a success which speaks for itself’.²⁹

As a Conservative College, Swinton had two predecessors. In Northamptonshire, Overstone Hall was donated by architect Sir Philip Stott in 1923 and sold in 1929. Its Principal, Brigadier-General Sir Reginald Hoskins, went on to Ashridge³⁰ when it was acquired by the Bonar Law Memorial Trust as a college for Conservatives and citizenship, and was Principal from 1928–38. Requisitioned during the war as a hospital, it reopened as a college in January 1947 and Lord Davidson succeeded Baldwin as Chair of Governors. But within six months Bryant, Davidson and Principal General Sir Bernard Paget decided Ashridge would best achieve its aims if it ‘ceased to be associated with one political party and now becomes a college of citizenship’. Butler was troubled at this prospect. But such tensions were longstanding: education slipped into propaganda too often for the Ashridgians (who preferred Conservatism to be backstage, acquired without the hectoring of party), but not consistently enough for the party hierarchy.³¹

The Board of Education would not fund a quasi-political Ashridge. (This was also an issue for the Women’s Institute’s residential college at Marcham Park Manor House in Oxfordshire.) And Ashridge was losing money, making it dependent on the Party. The separation of College and Party, in effect from 1948, was legalized in 1954 as Ashridge

became a charity (granting it the tax exemptions which party ties precluded) and the Party Leader and Chairman's roles as Governors (not taken up since 1948) came to an end. The point for the Party was, as Lord Woolton told Churchill, 'since we established the Conservative College of Swinton we no longer have the need for Ashridge'. Woolton himself had shifted from party acquaintance to stalwart, personifying the transition from Ashridge to Swinton.³² From 1959 Ashridge became a management school, with a board of business and government officials.³³

LIFE AT SWINTON

Ashridge's evolution shored up the status of Swinton. The Party's political education committee felt 'nothing must be done to prejudice the position of Swinton, even though a college closer to London would be a great asset'. Marjorie Maxse, the party's chief organizer, urged each constituency to appoint a Swinton representative.³⁴ However, the opening course at Easter 1948 on 'freedom and order' hit a snag when Woolton told Maxse he would not attend during 'the most sacred Christian festival'. By 1951 a chapel was opened.³⁵

Swinton was part of the CPC's mission to combat the left's perceived lead in the sphere of ideas and renew Conservatism's influence amongst opinion-formers. It was to be part of a network of bookshops, publications and what Butler and Angus Maude termed 'a corps of intelligent people'. If this emulated the left's 1930s summer schools – in 1947 the CPC described itself as 'a Conservative society on the lines of the Fabian society' – it was also the sort of cadre training and hegemonic project that had distanced the Party and Ashridge. It tied Swinton's agenda, in form if not content, to Thatcher's. Thatcher herself makes this explicit, recalling visits to Swinton as a prospective parliamentary candidate in 1950 and 1951. Principal Reginald Northam, who she notes was a friend of Keynes and a Butler acolyte, 'would instil into us that the real political battle was for "the hearts and minds of the people"'.³⁶

As 'What is Swinton?' in each *College Journal* explained, the aim was to produce 'a nucleus of well-informed and enthusiastic people in each constituency whose faith is so firmly founded that it will inspire others'. Butler also aimed at a two-way exchange between leaders and activists. David Maxwell Fyfe (then the Lord High Chancellor)

found it to serve as such when at a 1955 course Party Agents voiced disgruntlement at the pay rise MPs had voted themselves.³⁷ Being semi-detached from the political centre facilitated this role, but could foment division, as by the later 1960s Swinton became a hotbed of new thinking. Students were one such force. Federation of Conservative Students (FCS) conferences meant a Swinton tutelage survived to the 1990s. Government ministers Ann Widdecombe, David Mellor and David Davis all attended FCS meetings at Swinton and Richard Ryder, John Major's Chief Whip, was a tutor from 1972.³⁸

Swinton hosted courses for Conservative trade unionists, women and Party Agents. There were Circles of ex-students – London Circle took theatre visits and was addressed by Butler (1960) and Thatcher (1965). Swinton's 10,000th student attended in 1952. Macmillan greeted the 25,000th in August 1960. Till 1964 the party's North West, Northern and Yorkshire areas made up fifty-nine per cent of students; Wales, the South East and Western, eight per cent. There were scholarships for students from Yorkshire (named after Northam) and the North West (named after Sir Robert Catterall, Mayor of Bolton and Chair of the National Union of Conservative Associations).³⁹ Attendance waned after 1970, allegedly because the 'increasing range of leisure activities was distracting people from party activity'.⁴⁰

Swinton revelled in its grounds, house and art collections that it felt enhanced the college motto, engraved on its entrance: 'knowledge, understanding, thought, faith'. 'The pleasure of attending a course at Swinton', it was stressed, 'derives from the pleasant surroundings' and its leisurely pace of life was manifest in the single hand on the stable's eighteenth-century clock-face. Reports on the stag in Swinton's herd of deer were keenly followed in the *Journal*. It delivered speakers' courses and Agents' exams – the April 1951 round saw forty-four candidates pass, but thirty-five fail.⁴¹ Qualified Agents found Swinton 'a splendid respite from constituency cares', and by the 1970s superior cuisine, the Brighouse Agent recalled, meant that 'Swinton isn't the place of dread now that it was'. Its role was discreet, however – a 1967 history of the National Society of Conservative and Unionist Agents did not mention Swinton.⁴² Weekends for 'tycoons' started in 1957, hosted by Swinton himself and addressed by top-rank Tories like Heath, Hailsham, Joseph and Butler.⁴³

The bulk of courses (eighty-five per cent in 1962) were ‘political’ and ‘closed’ – for Party members – but much attention was devoted to ‘open’ trade-union and industrial courses, started in 1951. Northam spoke widely to encourage industrialists to send employees and give financial support. Between 1959 and 1963 130 firms sent employees, including nine Yorkshire branches of Lloyds Bank and 158 employees of ICI in Middlesbrough (the nearest industrial town), but only four firms from London and the Home Counties. The North, North West and Yorkshire contributed eighty-five per cent of the 7,477 industrial course students up to 1973. Attendance fell after 1971 as the Industrial Relations Act entrenched conflict and militants like the Economic League took on such industrial training.⁴⁴

The party’s *Industrial Charter* (1947) gave impetus here. The College worked closely with the Conservative Trade Unionists and Trade Union National Advisory Committee.⁴⁵ Northam and J. V. Garmonsway, who headed Central Office’s Industrial Department, organized an annual Trade Union course. A Garmonsway room at Swinton was funded by industrialists after his death in 1961. There was always a trade-unionist amongst Swinton’s governors. From 1964, this was Newcastle postal worker Tom McGeorge. The party was preoccupied with the sensitivities of selecting candidates for industrial seats. The *Charter* was concerned with industrial relations besides votes – that employers who donated to the party might lose it votes through workplace actions.⁴⁶

Swinton’s industrial courses, like the *Charter*, were for employers and employees. Northam put great store by these, cultivating the likes of ICI who also used Swinton for management away-days. He stressed ‘their non-political nature’ and that this was an effective way of addressing workers, since ‘60% are from the shop floor... the majority are shop stewards’. Claims that the courses were ‘strictly objective’ seem more plausible as evidence of Northam’s desire to reassure funders who were anxious to cloak political donations. Northam told Swinton’s governors in 1956 that ‘many employers have told me that their employees on returning have been more co-operative’.⁴⁷ He presented the Party’s Central Finance Board with employer and employee feedback to this end in 1958:

I selected... an enthusiastic Young Conservative, and a shop foreman, a very hard worker for the Labour Party. As they both came home without falling out... everybody concerned has benefited...

... if the College had not been named Swinton Conservative College it would have been difficult to say which political party has sponsored it...

... [courses] brought to the fore many ideas and suggestions whereby management and trade unions might get down to... increasing the efficiency of industry.

[Most noted how] the interest of the lectures was added to by the beauty of the countryside around Swinton College.⁴⁸

Northam supplied Central Office with pen-portraits of Conservative trade unionists at Swinton. These, in 1951, were damning: 'I have not met any trade unionists at Swinton about whom one could say "that man ought to be in the House of Commons"'. Several were described as politically 'immature' or prone to get tongue-tied. Northam felt it might be 'dangerous to put a man straight from the bench or the mine into a constituency without... knowledge of what is familiar to public school and / or University people'.⁴⁹

In 1949 the Conservative Central Board of Finance created the Civic Education Trust to 'give financial help to certain non-controversial activities initiated by the Conservative Party', and ideal for businesses reluctant to be seen giving directly to the party. Such arrangements corroborate Ramsden's assertion that party finances were 'shrouded in secrecy'. A proposal for Patrons who endowed the College with £5,000 to have their names inscribed on headed notepaper or a College board, Northam felt, 'would not be... very graceful'. 'Many firms would prefer to be as anonymous as possible in their donations', for fear that such information 'might find its way to our political enemies'. The Central Board saw Swinton courses as loss-leaders – leverage for extracting donations from participating companies. The Trust discussed charging full economic cost, since not all those who sent students made other contributions. In 1970 weekend courses cost the College £18.80 per student per day, but students were charged £6.60. By

1966 the Trust was sponsoring Swinton with £1,000 annually, its largest single payment, which it preferred to be expended on ‘non-political’ courses.⁵⁰ When towels bought in 1968 were embossed with ‘Swinton College’, Tom McGeorge suggested the College should follow suit, arguing that ‘dropping of the word “Conservative” from our name would have a beneficial effect’ for industrial and business courses.⁵¹

One entrepreneur to support Swinton was Ross Seymour, a Canadian-born Manchester industrialist. He donated £5,000 in 1959 and by 1962 was funding around 100 students, including in 1961 Nicholas Scott, later a minister under Thatcher.⁵² But dealings with Seymour were fraught (a necessary evil for the money he supplied) and hint at unease in dealing with industrialists. ‘Seymour feels that he is not taken enough notice of’, the Party noted in 1967, and he had to be cajoled and dined by Heath and Home at party conferences. One memo ordered ‘humour him’, when his payments became erratic from 1966.⁵³

For all that Swinton’s appeal was its setting, it could be austere. Rooms had no curtains and renovations were difficult. Until 1968 students had to bring their own soap and towels and for tycoons’ weekends this and the shortage of single rooms were drawbacks. Northam was an ‘insular disciplinarian’, opposed to ‘the frivolity exhibited by students’. But this was at odds with Swinton’s pedagogy of open discussion. Over time a TV, garden flower shop, tennis courts, cricket on the lawn, billiard table, Bechstein piano and a fête entered Swinton life. Many accoutrements came as inheritances. There were arm chairs and wood-panelling in the lecture rooms and lounge bar.⁵⁴ By the later 1960s, Swinton was convivial, budding with romance as much as monetarism. Christine and Neil Hamilton, in the 1990s the epitome of Conservative sleaze, met at an FCS conference at Swinton in 1969. Christine recalled the ‘magnificent paintings’ and ‘castellated battlements’ of a place where she ‘felt quite at home’ and encountered Neil ‘tinkling the ivories on the piano’. The daily routine was: morning service in the chapel, breakfast at 8.15 a.m. followed by lectures, the afternoon free, lectures after tea at four and after a seven o’clock dinner until 9.30 p.m.⁵⁵

Swinton was costly. During elections it closed, courses were cancelled, constituency finances diverted and staff campaigned. Lord and Lady Swinton did not charge the College rent, but did extract maintenance costs.⁵⁶ House minutes show the recurrent

difficulties of an aging country pile: dry rot, an unruly boiler (central heating was installed in 1967), an AGA whose central oven burnt out, linen in constant use needing to be replaced, and summer charabanc visitors who expected a tour and disturbed political work.⁵⁷ By the later 1950s it was being advanced £4,500 a quarter, and closed owing £66,400 to the party, although there was no expectation this would be repaid. The party's 1965 subsidy (£20,127) matched the House costs. In short, the party was maintaining Swinton's property and grounds. Not that Lord Swinton was cash-strapped: he left almost half a million in his will.⁵⁸

Labour relations at Swinton illustrated its fragile finances and Conservative values. To cater for eighty students and visiting speakers, as well as resident tutors and secretaries, there were a chef, assistant cook, kitchen porter and maid, three dining-room maids, four housemaids, two chauffeurs-cum-barmen and (in Lord Swinton's pay) four gamekeepers. The presiding housekeeper lived in. Staff turnover was high. In April 1958 six domestics left and seven started; chefs and drivers were fired; those who married needed dispensation to live out. Families were preferred, such as the teenage sisters recruited in 1952 from Middlesbrough who lived on site. Pay for those starting at sixteen in 1951 was £1.15s per week. By 1960 the bursar concluded that the difficulties of retention meant wages would 'have to be increased considerably... into line with wages in other employments'.⁵⁹

Tutors' pay was also deliberately low. A tutor on £850 a year in 1954 who demanded higher pay and a car, was asked whether he was 'more concerned with the emoluments of the job... than with the prospects... for doing some really constructive work at Swinton'. The ethos was one of apprenticeship, of paying political dues. Limits on salary discouraged those lingering beyond the usual four-year tenure.⁶⁰ MPs and Research Department (CRD) officials were regularly recruited from Swinton tutors – helped, Ramsden notes, by the 'monastic conditions' which 'did not allow for staff tutors who were married'. A turnover of tutors was deemed healthy, but the opposite was the case with domestic staff and Principals. When David Clarke succeeded Northam, the Principal's salary doubled (to match Clarke's professorial salary), and a pension scheme was agreed. Northam was paid so little (£3,400 in 1965) as his post came with Radleigh

House in nearby Masham and a car, so that it equalled the pay of top Party Agents and he was promised ‘the party would treat him generously... on his retirement’.⁶¹

PEOPLE

The College Principals reflected Butler’s ideological influence. Northam (1948-67) had been Butler’s predecessor as President of the Cambridge Union. He had lectured at the other Conservative Colleges and was a minor player in battles with the Left Book Club in the 1930s. His prose replete with Burke and Disraeli references, he saw Tory politics as ‘the art of doing what is possible’. He lost Batley and Morley in the 1951 election and West Hull in 1955. He was a Methodist, invariably took Swinton’s morning chapel service and lived alone in Radleigh House after his sister died in 1950. Northam’s policy contributions aside (which Butler found increasingly out-of-touch), he provided Swinton with ‘zealous direction’.⁶²

Upon Northam’s death Lord Swinton urged Heath not to appoint as successor a ‘has-been’ politician (like recently-sacked frontbencher, Angus Maude) who might be ‘suspect’ for industrial courses. Butler suggested Richard Bailey, Director of think-tank Political and Economic Planning.⁶³ The eventual appointee, David Clarke, came with a family, had been Director of the Conservative Research Department (1946–51) and secretary to the *Industrial Charter* (1947) committee. Such impeccable ‘one nation’ credentials meant that Clarke was often cited in anthologies as defining the CPC’s worldview. For later New Right critics, this represented the perils of accommodation to the welfare state: being too squeamish about capitalism, lacking an eye for the art of the *impossible*. But Harriet Jones contends that the *Industrial Charter* was less about substantive policy or ideological changes than updating Conservative language. After CRD, he worked in management education.⁶⁴ Esmond Wright, who succeeded Clarke in 1972, taught history (and John Smith and Donald Dewar) at Glasgow University and won the 1967 Glasgow Pollok by-election. Like Heath, he was a grammar school boy. Wright co-ordinated a seminal study of the 1950 election, but his expertise was US history. His approach was distrustful of ideology and schematic blueprints in favour of the biographical.⁶⁵

Swinton's faux castle notwithstanding, that most visiting speakers at the College were MPs or military grandees proved an allure for activists and the politically ambitious. The Arthur-Bryant types who had fashioned Ashridge were less apparent, by dint of Swinton being a more party operation. Cambridge historian George Kitson-Clark, who advised Ashridge and the party, contributed to courses and the *College Journal*. Kitson-Clark's work on nineteenth-century politics centred on 'pragmatic men and technocratic landlords' and how circumstance outweighed principle, and tied in neatly with the CPC.⁶⁶ Rebecca West, feminist author, anti-Communist and anti-trade unionist (and sometime participant in the free-market Mont Pelerin society), spoke in 1952 about 'The USA in the modern World'.⁶⁷ Historian (and later Lord) Robert Blake turned down a Governorship in 1969 as 'Ripon is a long way from Oxford'. The post was taken by Leeds law Professor Philip James, later a backer of Britain's first private University, Buckingham, opened by Thatcher in 1976. Academics like economist John Vaizey and political scientist Vernon Bogdanor participated. Journalist Thomas E. Utley, admired by and admiring of Thatcher, was a regular. Thatcher made four trips to Swinton as an M.P., speaking to a 1968 economic policy course, to the FCS in 1970 and 1972 and to a local government conference in 1974.⁶⁸

Typical of those who did a stint as a tutor was Paul Dean (1924–2009), at Swinton, where he met his wife, from 1952. They were usually male and Oxbridge-educated. Dean had been President of the Oxford University Conservative Association; he was a Welsh Guard and a member of the Governing Body of the Church in Wales. He joined the CRD in 1957 and contested Pontefract, Castleford and Featherstone (where the Swintons had owned the colliery until nationalization) in 1962. He was elected MP for North Somerset in 1964; he served as a Deputy Speaker of the Commons from 1982 till his retirement in 1992 and in 1993 was made a Lord. He was 'the epitome of the gentlemanly, old-fashioned Conservative', according to Andrew Roth's obituary. Other tutors had Ashridge connections, like Ben Patterson who was the son of Eric Patterson, Ashridge's Principal from 1938-39. He joined Swinton in 1961 from Cambridge, moved to the CPC in 1965 and became Conservative MEP for Kent West 1979–94.⁶⁹

Swinton was quite a masculine environment. Women were well represented amongst students, but the only female tutor arrived in 1950. Of forty-one lecturers between May

and August 1958, two were women, whereas eight listed a military title. Historians were favoured as tutors, perhaps as John Turner reckons because compared with their Labour counterparts, ‘historians of British conservatism have been active sympathizers with the party’.⁷⁰

In 1964 when history graduate David Alexander joined, Cambridge gained a monopoly on tutorial staff (even 1968’s new chef came from Emmanuel College). By the 1970s the budding Swinton tutor was more like Stephen Eyres, who read Political Economics at St Andrews University. Eyres was secretary of the FCS’s Higher Education Loans campaign to replace grants, a proposal too radical to win the then Secretary of State for Education’s support. St Andrews was distant from ‘metropolitan political culture’ and ‘a nest of neoliberalism’, influenced by Ralph Harris who co-founded the free-market think-tank the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). Alexander and Eyres were part of a new vanguard, disaffected with ‘one nation’ moderation and convinced that the nation needed radical redirection. They were also activists, always Swinton’s *raison d’etre*.⁷¹

IDEOLOGY

Swinton was a site for fevered debates about policy and philosophy. *The Times* reckoned that Esmond Wright’s 1967 by-election victory had raised electoral prospects and sharpened the differences between supporters of Heath’s technical approach and those seeking comprehensive change. The latter was urged in the *Swinton Journal* in 1968 by historian and Soviet critic, Tibor Szamuely. Szamuely was close to the neo-liberal cadre of tutors at Swinton and influenced thinkers like Willetts.⁷² Butler lectured at Swinton to mark it as ‘one nation’ territory, arguing in a 1971 series on ‘Conservatism and Change’ (since the seventeenth century) that it had been right not to reverse Attlee’s reforms and to embrace the Common Market. Heath addressed the 25th anniversary conference. The controversial case for local government reform in 1974 was headlined at Swinton by centrists like Peter Walker and Ian Gilmour.⁷³

This Heathite reputation was forged at policy away-days from 1965 to ’68. Party leaders met for what Heath described as a ‘brain-storming exercise’ on policy. This prosaic approach seemed at odds with Swinton’s stately ethos, and the place’s aging

grandeur meant that cartoonists like Vicky (Fig. 2) could mock Heath's modernizing claims of distancing the party from the aristocratic clique of Macmillan and Home. Within a month of becoming leader he convened a study session, continuing the tradition of leading Tories being pictured alongside Lord Swinton on the moors in August. Heath, despite lower middle-class origins, was decorous and enamoured of Tory establishment stylings. He did not shoot at Swinton, but played the chapel harmonium.⁷⁴



Fig. 2: *Evening Standard*, 1 Sept. 1965 (British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent and © Solo Syndication.)

The first 'away day' in November 1965 received apologies, including from Thatcher and Powell. Keith Joseph, Peter Thorneycroft, Selwyn Lloyd and Maude did attend. Heath was reported to be 'pleased' and Northam was congratulated. If the exercise was to be repeated, the CRD wanted to charter a plane given the location.⁷⁵ For 1966 policy strands were organized – health and education; power, transport, science and technology; and government. There was concern that non-MPs were insufficiently involved. Winter was not ideal ('the living conditions are spartan'), but it was felt the meetings 'give the college a shot in the arm' and focused minds away from Westminster.⁷⁶

In 1967 invitations went to academics (like the LSE's John Barnes), 'key party workers' (the CRD's Norman Lamont) and businessmen (such as Boots Chairman Arthur Cockfield, who was close to Iain Macleod and a minister under Thatcher). Macleod, Joseph and Edward Boyle chaired the policy strands. A 'Swinton document' was issued and the 'news that the Tory party is... thinking' had, the CRD's James Douglas judged, an 'important propaganda effect'. It even dampened the usual complaints about 'monastic conditions' if not about the distance from London.⁷⁷ There was pressure to delay a 1968 meeting until nearer an election. Douglas told Principal Clarke, 'we do not need to stimulate discussion... so much as get agreement' and that Swinton was the 'ideal place' to 'incarcerate' shadow ministers to this end. But it was in suburban London (Croydon) at the more luxurious, accessible (for frontbenchers) Selsdon Park Hotel in January 1970 that the manifesto was finalized.⁷⁸ This was as much the summation of the Heath-initiated Swinton discussions as a proto-Thatcherite ur-text.

'Selsdon Man', a term coined by Harold Wilson, was adopted by Conservative critics of Heath who alleged he betrayed Selsdon's radicalism in a series of 'U-turns' in 1972/73. It was significant, in demonstrating the interactions within Conservative cultures, that "Selsdon Man" was partly conceived at Swinton. But there were cultural and sociological distinctions between him and the might-have-been 'Swinton Man' – Selsdon being more doctrinal and suburban and less patrician. A transparently doctrinal manner accompanied a waning of the assumed authority by which Conservatives believed they exercised power. Thatcher aimed to check, if not banish, this patrician world, of which Swinton College was part, from party life and rejected it in her undeferential rhetoric of the 'grocer's daughter'. Such degentrification was aided by the identity of post-1959 Tory MPs – more professional middle class than 'knights of the shires'. They sat for more Southern constituencies, more suburban, and North of the Severn-Wash they were more sparse.⁷⁹

By the 1970s budding Thatcherites were Southbound towards think-tanks like the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS, which recruited from Swinton, as the CRD had) and the party's commanding heights in London. Having become leader Thatcher closed Swinton, despite its past nurturing of Thatcherism. She learnt the importance of the party machine from advice Lord Swinton gave Heath on

joining the government in 1950. Thatcher and Joseph saw the CPS as waging a battle of ideas, as at Swinton's outset, but part of that battle was now against the CRD. Thatcher made Maude CRD chair in 1975 to balance its Heathite Director, Chris Patten.⁸⁰

Protagonists inflated differences and competing mythologies in this battle. At Swinton in 1973 Powell critiqued Heath's unprincipled 'U-turn' from the portents of Selsdon. In the final *Swinton Journal*, Esmond Wright retorted: 'Conservatism is not a doctrine – though some voices here have been trying to tell us that it is – but an attitude based on knowledge of human nature and of the folly of utopianism, recognising the triumph of age and experience over innocence and naivete'.⁸¹ But clear air between the Newer Right and High Tory verities was not always discernible. Thatcher's Swinton tutelage has been noted. Another example was Russell Lewis, CPC Director 1965–74 (Bow Group Chair, 1958–59 and later IEA Acting General Director). In *Principles to Conserve* Lewis cleaved to Burke and religion, and noted 'man's imperfect nature' in critiquing utopian models (Communism, but later a charge against neo-liberalism). Thus for Conservatives, politics was of 'secondary importance' – here he referenced Quintin Hogg on fox-hunting – it might enable civilized living 'but it is not as important as civilised living'.⁸²

The College and CPC were as close as under Butler, and Lewis fed calls from tutors like Alexander, Eyres and John O'Sullivan for free-market speakers, establishing Swinton as a New Right outpost. That Lewis occupied a key post scotches the idea that Thatcherism was a peasant's revolt that occurred under the aloof noses of the party grandees. Alexander, Eyres and Lewis participated in the Selsdon Group from 1973; Swinton men perpetuated Selsdon Man's mythic status. O'Sullivan edited *Swinton Journal* as a tutor 1965–9. Later editor of the US *National Review* and advisor to Thatcher, he acquired his worldview from 'countless Swinton Conservative college lectures'.⁸³

Swinton College Journal was another ideological weathervane. Chiefly filled with ads at its outset, it voiced disquiet at Macmillan's indifference to the impact of inflation on the middle class in the late 1950s, although the charge for Swinton courses was frozen 1957–61.⁸⁴ By 1965 opponents mocked Swinton's educational claims to neutrality, whilst *Crossbow* editor Timothy Raison felt it lacked influence. A shift came with new editors Alexander and O'Sullivan, who in summer 1965 gave Enoch Powell space to argue for a

break with the 1951–64 Conservative agenda. But this was only a shift – free-marketeers like IEA-founder Arthur Seldon had written in the journal as early as 1961 and in 1966 Swinton's bucolic charms were still savoured, as recently celebrated in *Country Life*.⁸⁵

In late 1967 it was re-badged *Swinton Journal* and carried less Swinton news (although it still advertised 'open courses'). By summer 1968 its cover touted not the deer park, but its ideological wares. Inside readers were now more likely to find Madsen Pirie (a St Andrews graduate and founder of the Adam Smith Institute) reviewing new volumes of Friedrich Hayek's writings and adverts for the IEA. In 1968 the topic 'Intellectuals and Conservatism' was debated. Seldon, Maude and Utley pushed a free society and economic liberalism as a 'meta-narrative', Raison, David Howell and Michael Spicer argued 'against an over-emphasis on dogma and ideology'.⁸⁶

Powell's relationship to Swinton was also evidence of the overlaps between varieties of the New Right and the party mainstream. From 1952 he regularly lectured on practical and ideas courses; in August 1954, alongside Utley, on 'what divides the parties'; and in June 1958 to constituency officers. In 1970's *Biography of a Nation*, written with another Heath outcast and Swinton regular Angus Maude, Powell lamented how after the war Britons' 'idea of themselves and their place in the world underwent an unprecedentedly severe revision... downwards'. For Powell, Britain was better off without empire, Common Market and immigrants.⁸⁷ Utley felt he saw an opportunity to shift from 'an outmoded imperialism to a realistic patriotism'. Peter Mandler argues that Powell was trying to 'reclaim an older... mystical, abstracted idea of Englishness' that pre-dated empire and operated at 'gut-level'. Powell never made it explicit, but Swinton's appeal lay as much in its landscape and lifestyle as its privileging of ideas and rightward leanings. In rare moments not discussing politics or classics, he could be found exalting the English virtues of fox-hunting. Swinton fulfilled what Utley described as Powell's 'interest in the traditions and customs of... the English ruling class' and a desire for order in the domestic service it practised in the mode of Oxbridge, a colonial outpost or army mess. It enabled him to live, as Schwarz avers, in 'the present as if it were the past'. Few on the New Right were as ardent about a particular national vision and by 1974 Powell and Utley felt more at home with an Ulster Unionist than Conservative view.⁸⁸

CLOSURE

Some Conservatives opposed renewing Swinton's lease in 1962. Selwyn Lloyd's party organization report suggested a non-residential college in London. Swinton's Governors maintained there were advantages to a collegiate atmosphere, but admitted the College was 'isolated' and many invitations to lecture there were turned down.⁸⁹ The idea of a College in the South had been bandied around the CPC by Maude from 1952, as a counter-weight to trade union orientated institutions like Oxford's Ruskin College. Maude favoured a residential base as 'the willingness to learn... can much more easily be awakened and stimulated there', but costs limited his proposal to using YMCAs in Torquay and Eastbourne. Maude thought that 'a prejudice in the South against any movement Northwards, except on business' limited Swinton's appeal. In 1956 Garmonsway and Central Office concluded a London base would be preferable. In 1966 Witanhurst, a mock-Georgian mansion in Highgate, was offered by Paul Crosfield to the party, but improvement costs and limited capacity ruled it out.⁹⁰

Swinton also had advocates. In the Treasurer's department in 1960 Geoffrey Drewe noted the maintenance costs and loss-making courses, but pointed out that Ashridge also ran at a loss. There were advantages to a residential college, where students 'mix and interchange ideas without being tempted away by other distractions... as would be the case if courses were held in hotels or day schools'. Metropolitan culture was a pedagogical justification for Swinton. It was remote – five hours by train from London and eleven miles from Ripon station (which, despite Lord Swinton's objections, closed in 1969). But by car it was eighty miles from Newcastle, Manchester and Leeds. Rent-free accommodation of equivalent style, would be hard to find in London, where the big-house market was more vibrant. A move would be resented by the Swintons who would lose 'a good bargain' and by the Northern Areas who already felt they got few big-name speakers. Finally, for Drewe it was 'in a beautiful location and has an atmosphere which those who have been there appreciate. Many... could not imagine a Conservative College in any other surroundings'.⁹¹

Swinton's ethos also marginalized it. It proffered 'reflection in an atmosphere of some seclusion', but by the 1970s this had been by-passed by the media and think-tanks. Such modernity, according to Wright, was why 'a quiet house in a deer park in the Dales is

earmarked for change'. He recognized that rising fuel costs made it 'an expensive indulgence' and that it was 'way away in miles, in milieu and in motivation' from the 'sophisticated world' of London. Thatcher agreed, dismissing Wright's anxieties about what 'we do with our thought in an age of instant comment by news makers on all the media?' Swinton fuelled the rise of think-tanks, but it was also their victim. Fashioned by a burgeoning international New Right, think-tanks' quasi-independence acknowledged the difficulty of reconciling party and educational aims and maintained that parties were less in need of activists.⁹²

Wright wrote Thatcher a plea that recognized 'the image of a Country House – however attractive – may no longer be very appealing to the young or professionals', but pointed out that Swinton was admired by West German Christian Democrats (Kai-Uwe von Hassel, Bundestag President, gave 1972's Swinton Lecture) and US Republicans. Wright's uber-point was that it should 'not die unmourned' and that the Centre for Political Studies (as he mis-identified the CPS, confirming him as out-of-touch) 'appears to be (intellectually) as remote from the main thinking of the party as (physically) Swinton was'.⁹³

The College's prospects were limited after Lord Swinton's death in 1972, but Thatcher's election as leader in February 1975 sealed its fate. That month Lord Thorneycroft, the new Chairman, declared Thatcher's intentions and she explained these to Swinton staff. For all the story of Thatcher importing ideology to the party, here it was being shut down. In her estimation, cost outweighed both its traditional appeal and that it had schooled numerous Thatcherites. 'The tower, the green of the deer park, the stimulus of the lectures... the companionship of the bar have all been familiar and affectionate aspects of membership of the Conservative party', but Thorneycroft was 'clear that it is an expensive item on the party's budget'. Lindley Lodge, a Christian youth initiative, moved into the building.⁹⁴ Thatcher was warned that Swinton 'does have a mystic (sic) which enthuses some of the party' and there was a slew of claims such as that 'sacred Swinton' had 'benefitted my political soul' and 'maintains the balance of opinion'. But the mood was against country piles, as Butler discovered when he touted his Stanstead Hall in Essex as an alternative and was told there was 'no question of the party keeping up a country house'.⁹⁵

Like many British stately homes, Swinton's time was up by the 1970s. In September 1976 the library went to Central Office, party archives to Newcastle University and Hansard volumes to University College Buckingham. Plaques commemorating Agents killed in WW2 and Northam went to Central Office and Masham church respectively.⁹⁶ Not only Wright hoped for some reprieve. In 1977 Tony Baldry proposed 'Swinton in the Carlton Club'. Thatcher replied 'if only the party had the resources'. London's Swinton Circle did endure – in 1982 providing a platform for Powell at Party conference to hold forth on repatriation and by the 2000s white supremacist and Unionist in its politics.⁹⁷

For local activists, Swinton's passing was a 'bitter blow' and brought on 'a severe attack of nostalgia' in one Agent. Many viewed it as their 'alma mater' and felt any replacement should be 'buried deep in the countryside, rather than with the counter-attractions of sea and city'. In 1989 one Agent revisited Swinton on holiday, recalling 'beautiful Wensleydale', the 'lovely furniture' and 'beautiful turreted entrance'.⁹⁸ The Principal struck the most melancholic note. At its denouement, Esmond Wright invoked Swinton's continuities and Englishness as a refuge from the 1970s and Thatcherism:

We live by images, shorthand guides through the surrounding chaos, mnemonics without which our minds and imaginations would be at the mercy of every passing idea... We might not be sure of what, in today's restless world, the Conservative image is... But for many it rests in large part in a feeling for the country, for patriotism, not just for the land in the abstract but for those little parts of it we call 'home'... what the French call 'pays'. And for some in the Party Swinton came, I believe, to stand for that: a familiar tower in a deer park in Yorkshire.⁹⁹

LEGACY

The ready coupling of Conservatism with ostensibly nostalgic rural trappings intensified after Swinton's demise, despite Thatcher's iconoclasm towards the old-school establishment. Partly this was because country sports became politically salient. Labour had long, if fitfully, tried to outlaw hunting, whilst Conservatives 'held steadfastly to their... hunting sympathies'. These were minor skirmishes, but from the 1980s hunt saboteurs targeted leading Tories like Whitelaw and New Labour legislated, albeit

uneasily. Conservative thinkers like Roger Scruton retorted and the Countryside Alliance mobilized on a scale that astonished an enfeebled late-1990s Conservative Party. Again, Tories and hunters were in a brace.¹⁰⁰

Thatcherism hardly expunged shooting instincts from Conservatism. *The Official Sloane Ranger Handbook*, the early-1980s best-selling style-guide for country sports and middle-class professional urbanites, explained that ‘all sloanes were good at’ hunting and shooting, ‘go north every August... with dogs, guns... tweeds’ and ‘the Sloane ranger always works for the Conservative Party’. This bred ‘young fogeys’ besides modern yuppies. For all their avowed dislike of the archaism of rural, aristocratic life which they blamed for national decline, it was to versions of this lifestyle that many Conservatives in the 1980s turned. Thatcherism’s ebullient self-confidence, more than ‘Victorian values’, liberated these cultural instincts – despite her move away from the grouse moors.¹⁰¹

Thatcher ‘loathed’ her trips to the royal estate at Balmoral and its austere, hunting ethos. Monarchy and patriotism fine, but she had ‘no interest in horses, dogs or country sports’. In this she was at odds with many supporters. Her Home Secretary, Whitelaw, continued a checkered shooting career and recoiled from the 1981 summer riots by observing the fields of Dorneywood, his government house in Buckinghamshire, as ‘the *real* England’.¹⁰² Thatcherite ministers – businessmen (Michael Heseltine), aristocrats (Nicholas Ridley) and ideal-type militants (Norman Tebbit) – all espoused countryside as a store of Englishness. Heseltine and Tebbit wrote in *The Field* in 1990 on the topic. Tebbit took to shooting, imagining the Blairs as his quarry.¹⁰³

Another example of how persistent and deeply embedded in Conservatism this culture was comes from journalist Jo-Anne Nadler. In 2001 she was offered a weekend stalking deer. Her generation of Conservatives thought themselves more ‘radical Thatcherites than conventional Tories’ and struggled to relate to the ‘inheritors of wealth and titles’, ‘soggy shire sentimentalism’ and ‘people whose houses smell of dogs’. Nonetheless, Nadler immersed her urban, cosmopolitan self amongst the ‘Tory squirearchy’. She found ‘the donning of tweeds... and rifle’ an ‘alien aspect of my party’s culture’, but began to warm to it, despite (or, as a Thatcherite, because of) it being a tourist enterprise. It seemed to induce an instinctive Toryism. Nadler was awe-struck by the views, even taken with the ruddy complexions of ‘real class’ rather than the ‘nouveau riche’. This new-found

affinity was tainted by a young MP brandishing the severed head of a deer, but affirmed by a sense of the squeamishness this would have induced in New Labourites.¹⁰⁴

The 2009 expenses scandal reinforced seemingly arcane class presuppositions of politics. The most headline-grabbing was Douglas Hogg (son of Quintin) MP's claim for clearing his manor-house moat. Former Tory Quentin Davies's repairs to the bell tower of his stately home stood out amongst New Labour mortgage claims.¹⁰⁵ True, David Cameron has not been spotted in 'breeches and barbour... on a rain-swept Yorkshire moor enjoying a double gun day'. But biographies picture him at shooting parties, he has stalked deer, shot foxes and regards hunters as his 'tribe'. There remained a 'whiff of the grouse moor about "Dave"'. Thus, Conservative commentators were excited by Cherie Blair and Peter Mandelson attending a 2009 shoot at Waddesdon, the Rothschild's Buckinghamshire house. Neither shot, but Conservatives nudged that they inhaled the mix of wealth, palatial houses and report of a Purdey, as 'something we in Britain do well'.¹⁰⁶ The Party's association with shooting made Conservatives sensitive to its political charge and they greeted the prospect of some uncoupling.

This signals a persistent facet of Conservative culture that flourished in adversity. In 2008 advocates of Britain's 459 grouse moors were bullish. With bankers as villains in the economic crisis, Andy Beckett reckoned a certain 'Tory chic' attached to locally-sourced produce and 'tweed has become hip'. Peter York updated his guide in light of 'the return' of Sloanes. The late 1970s vogue for Mulberry and Laura Ashley styles and the TV adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* seemed concomitant with Thatcherism. In 2009 *Brideshead* was filmed and its TV popularity equalled by *Downton Abbey*. There was substance to such cultural conservatism – the 2010 Conservative manifesto committed to a free vote on hunting.¹⁰⁷

Landed imagery remains very much part of politics – a visceral, instinctive class and cultural animus in British society. Swinton tells as much about the enduring cultural coupling of Tories and hunters (OK, shooters) as about the emergent New Right or the demise of mass party education. Its landscape symbolized plenty about Conservatism that political history alone can miss. This is not to reprise Wiener; but to caution that whilst cultural historians have shown his overplaying of Englishness and nostalgia, some not entirely clichéd political associations have had significant traction in the public domain.

That Thatcherism closed the College, but could not really brake “Swinton culture” suggests it lacked the resources to thoroughly transform Conservatism. Ironically, a rumoured Thatcher memorial museum in 2013 referenced the Swinton model, but would be located in London. And it discloses much about the twin-tracks of modern Conservative identity that Ashridge is now a premier business school and Swinton an up-market ‘castle hotel’ (bought back by the family in 1998) that exploits its landed ancestry with suites designated by social rank (Knights cheapest, Dukes most expensive).¹⁰⁸

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I am grateful for feedback from the 2010 North American Conference on British Studies; Duke University history department seminar; the German Historical Institute, London; British History seminar, Institute of Historical Research; Kit Kowol, Julia Stapleton, Martina Steber and Philip Williamson.

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