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The Historical Journal / Volume 47 / Issue 01 / March 2004, pp 127 - 168

DOI: 10.1017/S0018246X03003546, Published online: 08 March 2004

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### How to cite this article:

PHILIP WILLIAMSON (2004). BALDWIN'S REPUTATION: POLITICS AND HISTORY, 1937–1967. The Historical Journal, 47, pp 127-168 doi:10.1017/S0018246X03003546

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## BALDWIN'S REPUTATION: POLITICS AND HISTORY, 1937–1967\*

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ABSTRACT. *In one fundamental sense, a British post-war consensus certainly existed: repudiation and denigration of interwar governments and their leaders. Stanley Baldwin was the chief victim, as it became widely believed during the 1940s that he had 'failed to rearm' the nation in the 1930s. Examination of the history of Baldwin's reputation after his retirement – precisely why and how it collapsed – reveals a striking case of the contingent construction of historical interpretation. Partisan politics, legitimization of a new regime, a Churchillian bandwagon, self-exoneration, and selective recollection together reinforced hindsight and a wartime appetite for scapegoats to create a public myth, which despite manifest evidence to the contrary was accepted as historical 'truth' by historians and other intellectuals. The main indictment was accepted even by Baldwin's appointed biographer, who added a further layer of supposed psychological deficiencies. Attempts to establish an effective defence were long constrained by official secrecy and the force of Churchill's post-war prestige. Only during the 1960s did political distance and then the opening of government records lead to more balanced historical assessments; yet the myth had become so central to larger myths about the 1930s and 1940s that it persists in general belief.*

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When Stanley Baldwin retired as prime minister and Conservative party leader in May 1937 several assessments of his career were possible, some critical but most of them favourable: as Churchill wrote, he left office 'loaded with honours and enshrined in public esteem'.<sup>1</sup> Yet three years later his reputation collapsed, as an extraordinary and in retrospect implausible degree of blame was focused upon him, most notably by the pseudonymous 'Cato' in *Guilty men*. During the 1940s and early 1950s the hostile verdict became an historical 'truth' – not just a public belief but an academic orthodoxy, given apparent confirmation by the first volume of Churchill's war memoirs in 1948 and even by the book Baldwin commissioned as a defence three years before his death in December 1947,

\* I am grateful to the 4th Earl Baldwin of Bewdley for allowing me to consult and quote from family papers of his grandfather and his father (hereafter cited as [Stanley] Baldwin additional papers and W. [Windham] Baldwin papers, which are to join the Baldwin [political] papers and other Baldwiniana in Cambridge University Library); to Duff Hart-Davis and Lori Curtis at the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, for copies from the Hart-Davis papers; to Peter Ghosh and Julia Stapleton for further materials and suggestive ideas; and to David Reynolds, Ross McKibbin, and his Oxford Modern British History seminar, John Ramsden, and an anonymous referee for helpful comments. I am further indebted to the British Academy for a research readership during which this article was completed.

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Churchill, *The second world war*, 1: *The gathering storm* (London, 1948), p. 16, or in the more common reset edition (hereafter cited as '1949 edn'), p. 18.

G. M. Young's biography of 1952. As leader Baldwin had on occasion aroused considerable controversy, and his style of leadership attracted private complaints from his colleagues; but from 1940 the contemporary criticisms were magnified and new reproaches were added, becoming so dominant that they obscured other qualities which had sustained, and which could explain, his long ascendancy in public life. More was involved than an individual politician's reputation. Belittlement of Baldwin had become intrinsic to a broader denigration of interwar British government, which was itself integral to a widely held understanding of Britain's wartime and post-war experiences. The resulting account of political leadership since 1918 underpinned the reputations of many public figures from 1940 to the 1960s. Phrases or dispositions associated with Baldwin were taken to characterize wider shortcomings in interwar public life, and a derided 1929 Conservative party poster slogan 'Safety First', misleadingly attributed to him, was used to condemn an entire phase of British political culture.

The chief points of the indictment were encapsulated in the shorthand of book indexers. In Churchill's memoirs these were 'Baldwin, Rt. Hon. Stanley ... aversion to foreign problems' and – on rearmament, notoriously – 'confesses putting party before country'.<sup>2</sup> Baldwin was said to have neglected in the mid-1930s to 'tell the truth' about the German threat and to have 'failed to rearm' the country, from fear of 'pacifist' opinion following the East Fulham by-election of October 1933 and more particularly in order to win the 1935 general election. He was said to have 'confessed' as much when speaking with 'appalling frankness' in the House of Commons on 12 November 1936:

Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming and that we must rearm, does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that moment? I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain.<sup>3</sup>

He had 'misled the people', even 'betrayed the nation', and so bore a large and peculiarly personal responsibility for Britain's diplomatic humiliations in the late 1930s and military defeats in 1940 – in some accounts even more so than Neville Chamberlain. From the early war years similar accusations were added in domestic policies: Baldwin or cabinets under his influence had also obstructed all significant efforts to overcome the interwar industrial and social problems.

The charges relating to Germany and rearmament were remarkably tenacious, despite manifest public evidence to the contrary. In difficult conditions the National government had proceeded cautiously, and the adequacy of the speed, scale, and scope of its responses were, and remain, legitimate matters of debate. Nevertheless, it had warned of the German threat, and it had rearmed. On behalf

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 615 (1949 edn, p. 697). Churchill himself did not compile or sanction the index, which was prepared by his publishers (information from David Reynolds); but see the text to which the 'party before country' entry refers, below p. 143. The indexer for G. M. Young, *Stanley Baldwin* (London, 1952), had 'Foreign Policy, S.B.'s lack of interest in' (p. 258).

<sup>3</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, 5th ser. (HCD) 317, c. 1144 (12 Nov. 1936).

of MacDonald's cabinet, Baldwin from late 1933 spoke repeatedly of the dangers from dictatorships; in May 1934 he promised 'parity' in air power with Germany; and in July announced an expansion of the Royal Air Force. In March 1935 a defence white paper made the case for general rearmament. Opening the 1935 general election campaign as prime minister, Baldwin declared that he would not continue in office unless he obtained power to strengthen all the armed forces, and further defence white papers in 1936 and 1937 contained successively more massive rearmament programmes.<sup>4</sup> As Bassett showed in 1948, Baldwin's November 1936 passages had been misrepresented because quoted selectively. As other sentences made clear, he had *not* said that he failed to seek a mandate for rearmament in 1935; on the contrary, his comments on the difficulty with peace opinion referred to earlier years – 'I am speaking of 1933 and 1934' – and he spoke of securing a large majority for rearmament at the 1935 election.<sup>5</sup> Yet Bassett's article made no initial impact on the prevailing verdict. Similarly, when Baldwin's second son published a reply to G. M. Young's biography in 1955,<sup>6</sup> its challenge to the orthodox view had only limited effects.

Only in the 1960s did specialist historians set aside the misrepresentations and turn from apportionment of individual blame to explanation of collective interactions, producing the balanced assessments now accepted in the superior general histories.<sup>7</sup> Yet the hostile verdict on Baldwin ('failed to rearm') remains ingrained in popular impressions, and is reiterated in reference works and by those ostensibly expressing informed opinion.<sup>8</sup> It had become a myth – a public belief resistant to counter-evidence and professional historical revision – which was intrinsic to and sustained by larger myths about the 'low, dishonest' 1930s, the 'finest hour' of 1940, and national regeneration under the wartime coalition and post-war Labour governments.<sup>9</sup> So strong were these myths that even as specific issues began to be reinterpreted, they continued to shape the overall intellectual and ethical scheme. For example, the generation of political leaders characterized by 'Cato' in 1940 as 'little men' shrank still further in Mowat's otherwise sensitive

<sup>4</sup> K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, *Baldwin* (London, 1969), chs. 27–33, is the fullest examination. For the public presentation, see also P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative leadership and national values* (Cambridge, 1999), ch. 10.

<sup>5</sup> R. Bassett, 'Telling the truth to the people: the myth of the Baldwin "confession"', *Cambridge Journal*, 2 (1948–9), pp. 84–95, commenting on the full text of *HCD* 317, cc. 1143–5 (12 Nov. 1936).

<sup>6</sup> A. W. Baldwin, *My father: the true story* (London, 1955).

<sup>7</sup> For the November 1936 passages see e.g. Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, pp. 970–3, and M. Ceadel, 'Interpreting East Fulham', in C. Cook and J. Ramsden, eds., *By-elections in British politics* (London, 1973), pp. 118–39, at pp. 119–23; and for a recent general verdict, P. F. Clarke, *Hope and glory: Britain, 1900–1990* (London, 1996), pp. 186–7: 'the rearmament programme was seriously begun under Baldwin, pushed along more slowly than Churchill wanted but more quickly than the Opposition advocated'.

<sup>8</sup> In 2003 these included most current biographical dictionaries and encyclopaedias, and the biography on the No. 10 Downing Street website.

<sup>9</sup> For growing examination of such myths, see J. Baxendale and C. Pawling, *Narrating the thirties: a decade in the making* (London, 1996); A. Calder, *The myth of the blitz* (London, 1991); and M. Smith, *Britain and 1940: history, myth and popular memory* (London, 2000).

1955 interwar history, to ‘pygmies’.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, assertions made in the late 1940s and early 1950s to ‘explain’ the supposed neglect on rearmament – Baldwin’s ‘complacency’, ‘indolence’, indifference towards foreign issues – remained central to many later accounts of his leadership, preserved as unquestioned assumptions long after historians had discarded the original accusations and had understood the collective processes of decision making and the diplomatic, financial, logistical, and political constraints on policy.

Why did Baldwin’s reputation collapse? Why was more blame attached personally to Baldwin than collectively to the cabinet and its advisers, or even to the opponents of rearmament? How did the worst possible accusations on rearmament become axiomatic, irrespective of the evidence? How was this related to the wider ‘myths’ of the 1930s and 1940s? Why did the earliest attempts to defend Baldwin’s reputation only broaden the criticism? How did reassessment begin, and what obstacles did this face?

Examination of Baldwin’s reputation from his retirement in 1937 to the opening of the government records in 1967 – the point when more adequate historical scholarship became possible – provides a striking case of the contingent construction of historical interpretation, and the fragilities of ‘contemporary history’. Baldwin was a casualty of the ‘politics of history’, literally so. Beginning in partisan politics, the critical verdict against him was sanctioned by a compelling hindsight and adopted widely for mutual advantage. Its dissemination served ostensibly good public causes, yet demanded the doctoring of published speeches and selective recollection, concealment, or plain dishonesty about its proponents’ own past actions or statements. It was extended by highly personal, almost perverse, choices by individual writers, and was challenged only under still stronger personal motivations. Consideration of Baldwin’s reputation raises wider issues about the significance of ministerial memoirs, the status of psychological biography, the constraints of official secrecy and libel threats, the ability of powerful public figures to shape accounts of the recent past, and the claims of amateur as against professional historians. An overlap with the historiography of Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement is evident,<sup>11</sup> but the history of Baldwin’s reputation is especially poignant as a counterpoint to the history of Churchill’s reputation. From 1940 the two were interdependent, and moved in inverse proportion to each other. Churchill’s apotheosis as a ‘maker of history’, in the double sense of a successful wartime leader and the historian of his own life and times,<sup>12</sup> in crucial

<sup>10</sup> ‘Cato’, *Guilty men* (London, late 1940 edn), p. 21; C. L. Mowat, *Britain between the wars, 1918–1940* (London, 1955; 1956 edn), p. 142.

<sup>11</sup> See the pioneering work by D. C. Watt, ‘Appeasement: the rise of a revisionist school?’, *Political Quarterly*, 26 (1965), pp. 191–213, and idem, ‘The historiography of appeasement’, in A. Sked and C. Cook, eds., *Crisis and controversy* (London, 1976), pp. 110–29, and more recently D. Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> See esp. D. Reynolds, ‘Churchill’s writing of history: appeasement, autobiography and *The gathering storm*’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 11 (2001), pp. 221–47; J. Ramsden, *Man of the century: Winston Churchill and his legend since 1945* (London, 2002).

respects required, as it certainly sustained, disparagement of Baldwin. Both reveal important features of British public belief and intellectual standards during the 1940s and 1950s.

## I

In the late 1930s Baldwin was the most respected figure in British public life. On his retirement he received warm tributes not just from grateful Conservatives and their National government partners, but also from members of the Labour and Liberal oppositions and a remarkable range of further organizations and individuals. Until early 1940 his good opinion as an elder statesman was valued by both members and critics of the government, from Chamberlain to Eden, Duff Cooper, and, on the left, Bevin, Citrine, and Cripps. National, imperial, and international bodies or causes sought him as a speaker, member, or chairman. In December 1938 he headed a transatlantic appeal for financial assistance for Jewish and other 'non-aryan' refugees from Nazism, and during 1939 was twice invited to speak and broadcast in North America as a world leader in the anti-fascist and anti-communist causes.<sup>13</sup> He was also in demand among the reading public. From 1937 to 1939 volumes of his recent and past addresses were published or republished and went into popular editions,<sup>14</sup> while his new addresses continued to receive extensive newspaper reports. There was said to be 'keen competition among publishers' to obtain his memoirs, described by one prepared to offer him a substantial advance payment as 'the book that the world is waiting for'.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to other leading politicians, Churchill above all, Baldwin had well-considered reasons for making no preparations to secure his future reputation.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, after some reluctance he did assist an 'instant' popular book to mark his retirement, in an episode which further indicates the heights from which his reputation would later fall. This 'tribute', by the historian Arthur Bryant, placed Baldwin among 'the great Prime Ministers of all time' for his work in social reconciliation, preservation of British democracy, and recreation of Conservatism as 'a great national creed'. On the main point of later controversy it stated

<sup>13</sup> See Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 3, 57–9, 260, 345–9; also letters on his retirement in Cambridge University Library, Baldwin papers, vols. 152–7.

<sup>14</sup> *Service of our lives* (London, 1937), together with *On England* (London, 1926), *Our inheritance* (London, 1928), and *This torch of freedom* (London, 1935; 4th edn 1937), republished in cheap editions during 1938. To 1940 these had total sales exceeding 50,000: Guildhall Library London, Hodder and Stoughton archives, 16312/3. There were also a Penguin paperback of *On England* in 1937; a new selection, *This torch I would hand to you*, ed. R. Bennett (London, 1937); his broadcast Toronto lectures, *An interpreter of England* (London, 1939); and a British Council leaflet, *The Englishman* (London, 1940), reprinted in *British life and thought* (London, 1941).

<sup>15</sup> Gower (Conservative party publicity officer), and Heath (of Hutchinson & Co.) to Bryant, 19, 21 Apr. 1937, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, Arthur Bryant papers, C/41, C/39/2. G. P. Brett (president of Macmillans, USA) to H. Macmillan, 17 Aug. 1939, W. Baldwin papers, proposed a Baldwin autobiography as likely to be 'a really great book'.

<sup>16</sup> See below, pp. 147–9.

squarely that he had worked to ‘educate’ the electorate on the need for stronger defences, and at the 1935 election had sought and obtained a mandate for further rearmament.<sup>17</sup> As Bryant was a Conservative party educational official and friend of Baldwin these views are unsurprising. More significant was the book’s purpose, to publicize and attract subscribers for a new National Book Association (NBA), which under Bryant’s editorship, and with clandestine Conservative Central Office support, had been devised to resist the ideological influence of the Left Book Club.<sup>18</sup> Its organizers also wanted to undercut what they regarded as an unsuitable, because narrowly conceived, rival, the Right Book Club, as they believed that the socialist left and communists would be better resisted by a widely based ‘national’ appeal, embracing liberals, moderate labour, and the non-committed as well as Conservatives. As the best symbol of this intention, they persuaded Baldwin to become the NBA president. This was Baldwin as a positive ideological force, where a ‘Baldwin book club’ (as some conceived it)<sup>19</sup> launched by a Baldwin ‘tribute’ was considered capable of commanding large sales and combating the Left Book Club’s remarkable success.

The NBA failed, partly due to business miscalculations, difficulties in book commissioning, and poor editorial selections – with Bryant’s naive tolerance towards fascist states subverting Baldwin’s ambition of rallying ‘central’ opinion – but also because deteriorating international relations made the political atmosphere less favourable to its aims. This deterioration also began to affect Baldwin’s reputation. Even at the time his 12 November 1936 passages had seemed damaging. While his cabinet colleagues were bewildered by what they regarded as a misleadingly weak account of their rearmament record,<sup>20</sup> Conservative critics of the defence preparations treated his words as a ‘confession’ that the government ‘never faced rearmament’ before 1935 for electoral reasons.<sup>21</sup> But it was events during 1938 that gave momentum to this meaning, as hindsight supplied politicians and commentators of various opinions with greater opportunities or pressures to ascribe blame. With the Austrian and Czechoslovakian crises and the now huge scale of both German and British armaments making

<sup>17</sup> A. Bryant, *Stanley Baldwin: a tribute* (London, 1937), pp. 5, 179, 183–5, 188.

<sup>18</sup> For Bryant and the NBA, see J. Stapleton, *Political intellectuals and public identities in Britain since 1850* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 118, 137–41; more generally, E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism* (Oxford, 2002), ch. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Davidson to T. N. Graham, 8 Apr. 1937, House of Lords Record Office, Davidson papers, 230.

<sup>20</sup> W. W. Hadley, *Munich: before and after* (London, 1944), p. 25; Neville to Hilda Chamberlain, 14 Nov. 1936, Birmingham University Library, Neville Chamberlain papers, NC 18/1/985; and n. 29 below for Halifax.

<sup>21</sup> *The Leo Amery diaries*, ed. J. Barnes and D. Nicholson (2 vols., London, 1980–8), II, pp. 430, 433; Winterton diary, 12 Nov. 1936, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Winterton papers; *The Austen Chamberlain diary letters*, ed. R. Self (London, 1993), p. 513; Lloyd in *House of Lords Debates*, 5th ser. (HLD) 103, cc. 293–4 (19 Nov. 1936); *Winston S. Churchill*, v: *Companion volume*, ed. M. Gilbert (3 parts, London, 1979–82) (*WSC*, v), pt 2, p. 405, and W. S. Churchill, *Step by step* (London, 1939; 1947 edn), pp. 77–8. All these critics had as members of the Conservative defence deputation heard Baldwin say much the same, confidentially and more cogently, the previous July: *WSC*, v, pt 2, pp. 286–9.

earlier rearmament programmes seem inadequate, Baldwin's November 1936 words offered an easy and useful explanation for the failure of British deterrence – but only when presented as an admission of evasion, neglect, or delay, and especially as an acceptance of *personal* responsibility.

Churchill's selected speeches on defence and foreign policy, published after the *Anschluss* to claim prophetic foresight in the past as his case for leadership in the future, included a truncated extract from Baldwin's November 1936 passages which gave the impression that he had not called for any rearmament during the 1935 election.<sup>22</sup> Despite an editorial assurance that 'nowhere' was any Churchill statement omitted for reasons of 'political inconvenience', this manipulation of Baldwin's words required the unmarked excision from Churchill's own speech during that debate of his statement that Baldwin had 'fought, and largely won' the election on rearmament.<sup>23</sup> The selective Churchillian version of Baldwin's words was influential, and almost certainly the source for later misquotations; forty years later it was still being used by Martin Gilbert in Churchill's official biography.<sup>24</sup> During the Munich debates another anti-appeaser, Lord Lloyd, responded to Baldwin's call in the House of Lords for all-party co-operation to accelerate national defence by charging him with 'responsibility for failure to rearm'.<sup>25</sup> Over the next twelve months followers of Chamberlain, presumably unaware that as chancellor of the exchequer he had determined the limits and priorities for armaments expenditure in 1934–5, asserted that Baldwin's 'refusal to re-arm' had made Chamberlain's appeasement policies 'inevitable'.<sup>26</sup> This interpretation was accepted by Chamberlain's biographer, Keith Feiling, notwithstanding the evidence about Chamberlain's role in his private papers.<sup>27</sup> The charge featured in newspapers owned by Beaverbrook, who had conducted a political feud with Baldwin since 1923 and would continue to pursue it long after Baldwin's death, establishing a hostile tone for much of the popular press until the 1960s. On the day war began, Peter Howard's *Sunday Express* column stated that Baldwin 'had not told the electors the truth about rearmament at the

<sup>22</sup> W. S. Churchill, *Arms and the covenant*, ed. R. S. Churchill (London, 1938), pp. 385–6: the doctored extract excludes Baldwin's reference to Churchill's share of responsibility as chancellor of the exchequer for defence cuts in 1924–9; four further ellipses (three unmarked) affect the meaning; and it ends before Baldwin's statement that at the 1935 election the government had sought and secured a mandate for rearmament.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5, and compare Churchill's words on pp. 375–6 with the original in *HCD* 317 cc. 1103–4 (12 Nov. 1936). A total of some 230 words were silently omitted.

<sup>24</sup> Reynolds, 'Churchill's writing of history', p. 231; M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, v: 1922–1939 (London, 1976), pp. 797–8.

<sup>25</sup> *HLD* 110, c. 1416 (4 Oct. 1938).

<sup>26</sup> J. P. L. Thomas to Baldwin, 12 Sept. 1939, Baldwin additional papers; *WSC*, v, pt 3, p. 1238; *The diaries and letters of Robert Bernays 1932–1939*, ed. N. Smart (London, 1996), p. 389.

<sup>27</sup> K. Feiling, *The life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, 1946), pp. 312–13. Feiling failed to observe that before the 1935 election Chamberlain and Baldwin differed over the presentation, not substance, of rearmament. Chamberlain wanted it as the dominant, clear-cut, election issue; Baldwin presented it more palatably as support for British international obligations: see M. Cowling, *The impact of Hitler* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 92–4; Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 51–2, 311–12.



1935 general election'.<sup>28</sup> Amid the military defeats of June 1940 such views seemed so compelling that even Halifax, one of Baldwin's closest colleagues, conceded a version of it, even though in November 1936 – in sentences omitted from his republished speeches – he had responded to misunderstandings of Baldwin's passages with a categorical defence of the cabinet's rearmament efforts since 1933.<sup>29</sup> Halifax's first biographer, like Chamberlain's, followed suit.<sup>30</sup>

In the Liberal and Labour parties criticism of past defence preparations was at first constrained by the embarrassment of their opposition to all rearmament before October 1935, to unilateral 'national' rearmament until July 1937, and to military conscription in May 1939. Further to the left, early criticism of Baldwin's 'appalling frankness' passages was the reverse of the later orthodoxy: he had misled voters at the 1935 election, but in order to *increase* rearmament, not by postponing it.<sup>31</sup> As anti-appeasement broadened politically from early 1938, however, books by some liberal journalists, notably Douglas Reed and Malcolm Muggeridge, adopted the increasingly conventional interpretation of the passages.<sup>32</sup> After Munich Arthur Salter, the Oxford University professor and MP and former League of Nations official, incorporated it in his general indictment of Baldwin and the National government.<sup>33</sup> It entered academic work also through Labour intellectuals, in Harold Laski's 1938 book on parliamentary government and Ivor Jennings's textbook on the British constitution, completed during the Battle of Britain. From these beginnings, the *frisson* of constitutional impropriety associated with Baldwin's alleged 'confession' established a standard issue in post-war political and constitutional treatises<sup>34</sup> – without, it must be assumed, their academic authors reading Baldwin's original speech, or any ministerial statements on rearmament before the 1935 election.

The main impetus for the hostile interpretation came in May to July 1940, with military defeat, the change of government, a wave of popular and newspaper criticism of earlier ministers, and the publication of *Guilty men*. Although the chief

<sup>28</sup> Extract in Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p. 1056.

<sup>29</sup> Compare Halifax diary, 6 June 1940, in earl of Birkenhead, *Halifax* (London, 1965), p. 458, with *HLD* 103, cc. 309–10 (19 Nov. 1936), denying that time had been lost in defence preparations and that ministers had failed to justify further rearmament before the election. These passages were excluded from Halifax, *Speeches on foreign policy* (Oxford, 1940), p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> A. C. Johnson, *Viscount Halifax* (London, 1941), pp. 373–4, which falsely presents him as more advanced than Baldwin on defence.

<sup>31</sup> A. Hutt, *The post-war history of the British working class* (London, 1937), pp. 276–7.

<sup>32</sup> D. Reed, *Insanity fair* (London, Apr. 1938), pp. 186–7, and idem, *Disgrace abounding* (London, Mar. 1939), p. 157; M. Muggeridge, *The thirties* (London, 1940), pp. 188, 220.

<sup>33</sup> Sir Arthur Salter, *Security* (London, 1939), esp. pp. 194–8, also idem, *Personality in politics* (London, 1947), pp. 72–3, 82.

<sup>34</sup> H. J. Laski, *Parliamentary government in England* (London, 1938), p. 108; W. Ivor Jennings, *The British constitution* (Cambridge, 1941: completed 'during an air-raid warning'), pp. 216–17, elaborated in idem, *Cabinet government* (Cambridge, 1959 edn), pp. 507–9, and idem, *Party politics*, II: *The growth of parties* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 317–25; H. Finer, *The future of government* (London, 1946), pp. 96–7; S. Bailey, ed., *The British party system* (London, 1952), pp. vi–vii, 166.

purpose of *Guilty men*<sup>35</sup> was to reignite a newspaper and parliamentary campaign for the removal of Chamberlain and other 'men of Munich' from Churchill's new coalition cabinet, Baldwin figured prominently because its theme was not so much appeasement as rearmament – an explanation for an inferiority of British to German military hardware at Dunkirk.<sup>36</sup> By dating 'the genesis of our military misfortunes' from 1929, it adumbrated an account which others developed in later polemics and histories. It implied a connection between inadequate rearmament in the 1930s and failed economic policies since the 1920s. It asserted a long-standing collusion between MacDonald and Baldwin to exclude Lloyd George from government because he wanted action, even before their alleged 1931 'plot' to form the National government gave fuller scope to their complacency and inertness, condoning Hitler's and Mussolini's aggression while ignoring Churchill's warnings. It detached various Baldwin statements from their original contexts and meanings – 'the bomber will always get through', 'no great armaments', 'my lips are sealed', an admission that future German aircraft production had been underestimated – to create an account of inadequacy, evasion, and insincerity.<sup>37</sup> His November 1936 'frankness' passages were presented as referring to the 1935 general election, an impression reinforced in the book's early printings by the East Fulham by-election being placed in 1935 rather than 1933 – a mistake corrected in later 1940 printings but reproduced, without comment, in the 1998 reprint.<sup>38</sup>

*Guilty men*'s deficiencies as an account of the 1930s are now familiar: its tendentious selection of ministerial statements, generous presentation of Churchill's stances, disingenuousness about Labour policies, and silence about Liberals. Some of this might have been apparent even in 1940, if its provenance had been known. The three authors, Michael Foot, Frank Owen, and Peter Howard, were Beaverbrook journalists, all highly favoured by and personally devoted to their employer. Their use of a pseudonym is usually explained as a device to avoid annoying and embarrassing Beaverbrook, now a colleague of Chamberlainites in the coalition government and improbably presented in their book as a saviour of the nation, alongside Churchill, Bevin, and Morrison. But anonymity also protected the book from imputations about the authors' own attitudes and associations during the 1930s. As respectively an ex-Liberal socialist, a Lloyd George Liberal, and Beaverbrook's chief ghost-writer, none had ever been

<sup>35</sup> During the book's numerous reprints in 1940, the pagination was altered. Like most other commentaries, the page numbers given here as '1940' are to the most common impressions, from August 1940 onwards; references to the first impression, reprinted by Penguin, are indicated by the latter's publication date of 1998.

<sup>36</sup> For the circumstances, see P. Addison, *The road to 1945* (London, 1975), pp. 107–12, and S. Aster, "'Guilty men": the case of Neville Chamberlain', in R. Boyce and E. M. Robertson, eds., *Paths to war* (London, 1989), pp. 233–68, at pp. 233–5.

<sup>37</sup> *Guilty men* (1940), pp. 17–21, 23–7, 35–7 (1998), pp. 15–19, 21–5, 33–5).

<sup>38</sup> Compare *Guilty men* (1998), pp. 29–30, with (1940), pp. 31–2, a point noted by Ceadel, 'Interpreting East Fulham', p. 121. The correction of the by-election date made chronological nonsense of the book's argument about and dating of the Labour party's qualified acceptance of rearmament.

sympathetic towards Baldwin and all had reservations about Chamberlain's policies. Nevertheless, they had worked as editors or columnists for newspapers which (in more of the book's flagrant silences) under Beaverbrook's direction were distinctly Chamberlainite – supporting appeasement and the Munich agreement, criticizing Churchill's hostility towards Germany, insisting until August 1939 that there would be no war, complaining once it began about mobilization measures, and remaining loyal to Chamberlain right up to his downfall in May 1940.<sup>39</sup> Foot had particular cause for disguise: as a Labour candidate at the 1935 election, he had attacked Baldwin for seeking 'a mandate for rearmament'.<sup>40</sup>

*Guilty men* is testimony to a transformation of perspectives during May and June 1940. It was a tract for the time, not history but a lampoon without pretence to either balance or accuracy. As Foot himself later wrote, its 'notoriety' was largely due to 'the reckless and wanton nature of [its] charges'.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, it had not just immediate success but an enduring influence, accorded 'classic' status and credited with establishing an orthodoxy for the next twenty years, even among scholars.<sup>42</sup> The book's wartime popular appeal is easily intelligible: the shock of defeat, fears of invasion, and a collective mood of defiance created an appetite for ready explanations and scapegoats. By assembling earlier partisan criticisms into a comprehensive indictment of government in the 1930s, *Guilty men* articulated a sudden, angry, disillusionment with past leaders, made still stronger by a need to believe in the nation's essential soundness and capacity to survive, and by the intense impressions and myth-making capacities of Dunkirk, the fall of France, the Battle of Britain, the Blitz, and the broadcasts of Churchill and Priestley. In this atmosphere, the hostile interpretation of 'appalling frankness' and vilification of Baldwin himself – 'despised for failing to rearm' – became common currency, not only fed by the Beaverbrook press and other popular newspapers but accepted even in the serious journals.<sup>43</sup> It generated further waves of abusive letters to Baldwin, already started by Howard's August 1939 *Express* article. It contributed to the strange episode of the removal for scrap metal of gates and railings from Baldwin's home at Astley Hall, apparently encouraged by Beaverbrook. This in turn stimulated a vicious personal attack in the *Daily Mirror*

<sup>39</sup> A. Wolridge Gordon, *Peter Howard* (London, 1969), pp. 71–98, 104–5; G. Williams, *Firebrand: the Frank Owen story* (Worcester, 1993), pp. 34–50, 61–5; M. Jones, *Michael Foot* (London, 1994), pp. 69–72, 85–91; A. Chisholm and M. Davie, *Beaverbrook* (London, 1992), pp. 347–56, 366–8, 370–3, 380–3; R. Cockett, *Twilight of truth* (London, 1989), pp. 56–7, 74–5, 80–1, 94–6, 119, 156–7, 174.

<sup>40</sup> *Monmouthshire Beacon*, 1, 8 Nov. 1935. For his early 1930s career as a pacifist, see S. Hoggart and D. Leigh, *Michael Foot* (London, 1981), pp. 45–6, 52–4, 61–2.

<sup>41</sup> 'Cassius' (M. Foot), *The trial of Mussolini* (London, 1943), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. 1998 *Guilty men* reprint in the 'Twentieth-Century Classics' Penguin series, pp. xviii, xxiv–xxv.

<sup>43</sup> *The diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart*, II: 1939–1965, ed. K. Young (London, 1980), p. 193 (6 Sept. 1942), and e.g. H. Fyfe, 'Leadership and democracy', *Nineteenth Century*, 129 (May 1941), pp. 470–1; *Economist*, 9 May 1942, p. 637; *Times*, 20 Nov. 1943, pp. 5f.

by 'Cassandra' (William Connor)<sup>44</sup> and the egregious House of Commons comment by a Conservative MP, Alan Graham – who during the 1935 election had strongly supported Baldwin's case for rearmament – that it was 'very necessary to leave Lord Baldwin his gates in order to protect him from the just indignation of the mob'.<sup>45</sup> By the time the *Guilty men* authors were publicly identified in 1944, their interpretation had become so widely accepted that any doubts about their own records during the 1930s could not weaken its hold.

What may seem harder to understand is the afterlife and amplification of the 'guilty men' interpretation among politicians, publicists, and academics. For this there are both general and particular reasons. The *general* explanation turns on the same simple device that appealed so strongly in 1940. By concentrating upon just a few 'guilty men', Foot, Owen, and Howard unwittingly hit upon a peculiarly convenient understanding of the recent past. It was easier to argue by character assassination<sup>46</sup> than to investigate the economic, strategic, and logistical constraints on policy; or to recall how different the military demands of 1940 were from those which anyone, including Churchill, had expected, even as late as 1939; or, in what was very much an insular discussion, to weigh the proximate cause of Dunkirk, the collapse of the French army. It was also an account which combined the satisfying qualities of hindsight, a stark contrast between right and wrong, and a dramatic and damning denouement. However, the convenience was less evidential and literary than political, ideological, and moral. The 'guilty' were particular individuals – not the political, social, or economic system, not any one class nor any of the political parties, nor any newspapers (or their owners). By casting a harsh light on a few statements by the retired Baldwin and defeated Chamberlainites, the now unfortunate past statements of almost every other individual, group, and party could be consigned to decent obscurity. Many groups and individuals of quite different persuasions could reconcile themselves to some version of this account. Even the Conservative party was not denied exoneration, because the interpretation showed that in Churchill, Eden, Amery, and other anti-appeasers there were 'good' Conservatives as well as 'guilty' ones; and while many Conservatives might for a time dislike the attack on leaders and policies they had recently supported, it contained nothing objectionable in principle to Conservatism.

Above all, the 'guilty men' interpretation came to register the convergence of the Labour and Liberal parties with Conservative dissidents after the Munich debate, consummated in the coalition of May 1940 (with Beaverbrook as a late arrival) and invested with intense patriotic and moral force by national survival, the 'people's war', commitment to welfare reform, the crusade against fascist barbarity, and military victory. What, it transpired, had happened in May 1940

<sup>44</sup> Baldwin, *My father*, pp. 313–22; Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, pp. 1056–61; *Daily Mirror*, 27 Feb. 1942.

<sup>45</sup> *HCD* 378, c. 627 (4 Mar. 1942); cf. Graham speeches in *Birkenhead News*, 30 Oct., 6, 9, 13 Nov. 1935.

<sup>46</sup> The useful term in Dutton, *Chamberlain*, p. 77.

was not just a change of government but the end of a regime and creation of a new political order. This rupture enabled the wartime coalition partners and their followers to redeem or reinvent their ideological and moral credentials, whether as patriots, democrats, or social progressives, and to imply retrospective membership of what became a surprisingly large band of pre-war fellow-travellers with Churchill – the vital badge of respectability in post-war politics. As the ‘guilty men’ interpretation supplied a foundation story for this new regime and a legitimisation for these new commitments, many public figures acquired a stake in its credibility. The larger the stake, whether because pre-war positions required concealment or excuse, or because wartime and post-war positions were asserted as indefeasible, the more convenient the alleged inadequacy of the ‘guilty men’ became. While Eden and other Conservative dissidents had the difficulty of absolving their membership of or support for Baldwin’s and Chamberlain’s governments until 1938 – and Beaverbrook and most other Conservatives until 1940 – the internationalists, socialists, Labour, and Liberals had potentially still greater embarrassment as opponents even of the National government’s rearmament, let alone Churchill’s calls for accelerated rearmament.

## II

All this did not occur at once, as the hostile verdict spread more slowly among politicians and publicists than the reading public. The *particular* reasons for its development lay in the political struggles of the remainder of the 1940s. Arguments about current issues generated similar accounts of the recent past.

In May 1940 the coalition government partners agreed for the sake of national unity to refrain from recriminations against pre-war ministers, and until 1945 one prop of the wartime electoral truce was the formula that all parties shared the blame for any earlier shortcomings in defence and foreign policies.<sup>47</sup> Given their own records this suited Labour and Liberal leaders as much as former Chamberlainites, and this ‘official’ account of mutual responsibility received some support in wider debate, certainly into 1941.<sup>48</sup> The broader left, however, experienced a similarly abrupt change of perspective to that of the *Guilty men* authors: Naomi Mitchison noted in June 1940 how ‘very odd’ it was to find the *New Statesmen* ‘going all militarist, blaming the government because it “postponed conscription to the last moment” etc.’.<sup>49</sup> Some radical publicists and politicians regarded the military defeats and alleged government failure as such fertile material for discrediting the Conservative party that defiance of their own party leaders and the political truce became a point of principle. It was concealed or forgotten that everyone on the left – from Liberal to Communist – had, as

<sup>47</sup> Addison, *Road to 1945*, pp. 108–11.

<sup>48</sup> E.g. G. Mander, *We were not all wrong* (London, 1941; repr. 1944), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Among you taking notes: the wartime diary of Naomi Mitchison 1939–1945*, ed. D. Sheridan (London, 1985), p. 62. For the *New Statesman*’s opposition to rearmament until early 1939, see B. Morris, *The roots of appeasement* (London, 1991), pp. 26, 65, 73, 118, 134, 156, 176.

leading campaign themes at the 1935 election, publicly acknowledged that Baldwin wanted (in the words of the Labour party manifesto) a 'vast and expensive rearmament'. The most violent was A. L. Rowse, with his paradoxical mixture of Marxist, Lib-Lab, Keynesian, and Churchillian views, extraordinary egotism, and hatred of businessman-politicians. In *Political Quarterly* articles from 1938 to 1940 he anticipated some of the *Guilty men* charges, including the misrepresentation of Baldwin's November 1936 passages. But in a July 1941 article, republished in 1947, which even his editor thought psychologically false and potentially libellous, he pressed the accusations against Baldwin still further: an 'inferior man', dishonest and hypocritical, governing by 'fraud' and 'confidence trick', and 'betraying' the British people 'more completely than we have ever known in our history'.<sup>50</sup> Yet as a Labour candidate at the 1935 election Rowse had opposed Baldwin's advocacy of rearmament by declaring it a 'plain truth' that Britain was already 'perfectly well equipped for all defensive purposes'.<sup>51</sup>

The 'guilty men' accusations were also reiterated in popular political tracts, mostly in a series from Gollancz, publisher of the Left Book Club and *Guilty men*, but also in Penguin 'specials', and written by the radical Liberal MPs Geoffrey Mander and T. L. Horabin as well as by socialist publicists. Mander's 1941 book, attacking the coalition government formula that 'we were all wrong' in the 1930s, was an early claim that the Labour and Liberal parties had been essentially Churchillian – 'many ... were absolutely right' – achieved by emphasizing their eventual support for armed collective security while suppressing their (and his own) opposition to most national defence measures.<sup>52</sup> But the other tracts followed *Guilty men* in concentrating on 'exposures' of alleged Conservative 'misdeeds', dishonesty, and sympathy with fascism ('Tory Dictatorship'), and several produced Baldwin's 'dishonourable deception' in 1935 as a prize exhibit. The electoral purpose was usually explicit. Most were published or, like *Guilty men*, republished in 1944–5, in anticipation of a post-war election. *Your M.P.* by Tom Wintringham, the Marxist ex-International Brigade officer and Common Wealth party publicist, declared that Baldwin's November 1936 passages 'alone ought to defeat every Tory MP at the next election'.<sup>53</sup> In a few cases the accusations were even extended to Churchill, on the grounds of his long hostility towards Soviet Russia. But as the 1945 Nuffield election study noted, the chief value of such partisan accounts of the 1930s for the political left was that they normally

<sup>50</sup> *Letters of Leonard Woolf*, ed. F. Spotts (London, 1989), pp. 426–7; A. L. Rowse, 'Reflections on Lord Baldwin', *Political Quarterly*, 12 (1941), pp. 305–17; idem, *The end of the epoch* (London, 1947), pp. 77–89 and passim, themes reiterated *ad nauseum* in later works, e.g. *The later Churchills* (London, 1958) and *All Souls and appeasement* (London, 1961).

<sup>51</sup> *Falmouth Packet*, 8 Nov. 1935, and similarly *Cornish Echo*, 25 Oct., 1, 8 Nov. 1935.

<sup>52</sup> Mander, *We were not all wrong*, esp. pp. 9–15, and compare with his speeches in *HCD* 292, cc. 2389–96, 2443–4; 299, cc. 127–34, 161–2; 346, cc. 1458–9. Mander, like Horabin, joined the Labour party after 1945.

<sup>53</sup> 'Gracchus' [T. Wintringham], *Your M.P.* (London, 1944), pp. 18–19; and see T. L. Horabin, *Politics made plain* (London, 1944), esp. pp. 47–8; 'Diplomaticus' [K. Zilliacus], *Can the Tories win the peace? And how they lost the last one* (London, 1945), pp. 34–40.

contrasted Churchill to other Conservatives, making it possible to attack the Conservative party without criticizing a popular wartime leader. Better still, they enabled Churchill's criticisms of Conservative ministers during the 1930s to be used against the Conservative party.<sup>54</sup>

As the party truce dissolved into preparations for a post-war election in 1945, and with pre-war Labour resistance to rearmament now distanced by the war and coalition government, this tactic became attractive within the official Labour party. During the worst of the wartime abuse Ernest Bevin as minister of labour had told Baldwin of his anger that he was being blamed for 'a national failure, for which no one could escape responsibility', a view of pre-war foreign and defence policies which he restated in the House of Commons during 1941. Yet such were the temptations of ready-made electoral ammunition that in April 1945 Bevin spoke publicly of the Conservatives having 'completely failed to prepare for defence', and of the 1935 election as being 'won on a lie – a self-confessed lie' by Baldwin.<sup>55</sup> Yet the idea of Conservative 'guilt' had been so well disseminated by the wartime tracts that Labour leaders had little need to risk challenges on the point. Aside from one party election leaflet ('The guilty party') and criticism of Churchill's caretaker government for including former Chamberlainites, the accusations mostly arose spontaneously from audiences at election meetings.<sup>56</sup> After the Labour election victory the recent past continued to be a live political issue, as Labour ministers – Morrison especially, as leader of the House of Commons – tried to protect themselves against Conservative exploitation of the government's difficulties by taunts against Conservative policies in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>57</sup> By these means, the charges against Baldwin were transmitted into Labour party histories and the memoirs of Labour politicians.

Some Conservative replies to the wartime polemics were attempted. One party election leaflet declared that against 'socialist' opposition the National government had created the RAF and Royal Navy that had prevented invasion in 1940, while three others borrowed the radical titles of 'Guilty Men' and 'Your M.P.' to list Labour statements and divisions against armaments, and to name the Labour and Liberal MPs who had voted against conscription.<sup>58</sup> Several unofficial tracts extended this device, exposing Labour and Liberal hypocrisy over rearmament by adopting the *Guilty men* tactic of extracts from speeches. The most substantial was Quintin Hogg's *The left was never right*, which attempted to create an inclusive

<sup>54</sup> R. B. McCallum and A. Readman, *The British general election of 1945* (Oxford, 1947), pp. 50–1; also W. Harrington and P. Young, *The 1945 revolution* (London, 1978), pp. 55–6, 59–60, 66–7.

<sup>55</sup> A. Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: minister of labour, 1940–1945* (London, 1967), pp. 113, 368; *HCD* 373, c. 1362 (29 July 1941); *Times*, 9 Apr. 1945.

<sup>56</sup> McCallum and Readman, *General election of 1945*, p. 50; Cripps and Greenwood in *Times*, 21 June 1945.

<sup>57</sup> Compare, e.g., Morrison speech in *Times*, 13 Jan. 1948, with his earlier fierce opposition to rearmament, *ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1935, and wartime acceptance of shared responsibility, *News Chronicle*, 13 June 1940, and *Times*, 17 July 1942. Morrison later invented a fictional political past for himself in which, *inter alia*, he had not in 1931 voted for unemployment benefit cuts nor wanted to join the National government.

<sup>58</sup> *Conservative party pamphlets and leaflets*, 1945/20, 27–8, 48.

Conservative interpretation. Churchill had usually been right, while the National government, after initially underestimating the German threat, did eventually rearm the nation and take realistic decisions. In contrast Labour and the Liberals had always been wrong-headed, and opposed all sensible action: 'Better a million Baldwins or ten thousand Chamberlains than an Attlee' in 1934–5. The Gollancz authors had made a 'travesty' of Baldwin's November 1936 passages; it was a 'simple, historical fact' that the 1935 election had been fought on his 'demand to rearm on a very considerable scale'.<sup>59</sup>

As history Hogg's book was superior in accuracy and argument to *Guilty men*, but the politics were against it. No sustained Conservative counter-offensive developed. Defence of the National government was hardly a concern for Churchill and Conservative critics of Munich nor, now, for Beaverbrook, who provided the party's chief newspaper support; and for most other Conservatives the effort to defend rearmament policies without implying criticism of Churchill, their main electoral asset, was too difficult. Baldwin, the politician with the widest pre-war electoral appeal, was now ignored in his party's election literature and speeches.<sup>60</sup>

Conservative politics did not, then, generate a favourable or even balanced historical assessment of rearmament in the 1930s. Instead, after the 1945 election defeat the critical verdict was appropriated and reaffirmed for Conservatives, in the first volume of Churchill's war memoirs. It is now well understood that Churchill's differences with government defence and foreign policies were less substantial and constant than he and almost all commentators would claim after 1939, and that *The gathering storm* gave a highly partisan account of the 1930s, which depended on a questionable assessment of how Hitler might have been deterred.<sup>61</sup> Less obvious is the fluctuation in Churchill's attitudes towards Baldwin. Certainly he had been critical of delays in rearmament, and in private was frequently caustic towards him. But during the run-up to the 1935 election Churchill publicly pledged to support Baldwin as 'a statesman who has gathered to himself a greater volume of confidence and goodwill than any other man I recollect in my long public career' – a position which he privately told Baldwin was 'indispensable to our safety at the present time', indeed a 'blessing'.<sup>62</sup> While in part an obvious attempt to ingratiate himself back into government office, these statements also expressed a deeper concern: that in the face of Labour, Liberal, and peace

<sup>59</sup> Q. Hogg, *The left was never right* (London, 1945), pp. 48, 57, 59–60, 63–4. For general Conservative responses, see Harrington and Young, *The 1945 revolution*, pp. 53, 63–7. The other tracts were Hadley, *Munich*, pp. 21–6; B. Webb, *The house divided* (London, 1945); E. D. O'Brien, *Big 3 or big 2?* (London, 1945); and 'Talus', *Your alternative government* (London, 1945).

<sup>60</sup> J. Ramsden, *The age of Churchill and Eden* (London, 1995), p. 80.

<sup>61</sup> Important early reassessments were R. Rhodes James, *Churchill: a study in failure* (London, 1970), and Cowling, *Impact of Hitler*. More recent comments are D. C. Watt, 'Churchill and appeasement', in R. Blake and W. R. Louis, eds., *Churchill* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 199–214; Reynolds, 'Churchill's writing of history', esp. pp. 228–45; Ramsden, *Man of the century*, pp. 195–6, 205–9.

<sup>62</sup> Conservative party conference speech, *Times*, 4 Oct. 1935, p. 8c (a defence speech omitted from *Arms and the covenant*); Churchill to Baldwin, 9 July, 7 Oct. 1935, in *WSC*, v, pt 2, pp. 1210, 1289, and see p. 1213.



opinion, Baldwin was best placed to win an election majority that would preserve the 1935 rearmament measures, described by Churchill as ‘a most formidable and tremendous advance in British defence’.<sup>63</sup> After the National government had been re-elected and it became clear that Baldwin would not appoint him, he resumed his criticism. As prime minister in 1940, however, Churchill insisted on ministerial resistance to recriminations against the leaders of the 1930s, in his 18 June ‘finest hour’ speech deprecating any ‘quarrel between the past and the present’ as jeopardizing ‘the future’.<sup>64</sup> Conscious of the public abuse that Baldwin was suffering, Churchill was kind towards him, on three occasions entertaining him in Downing Street, asking his opinion on current issues and sympathetically recalling their differences during the 1930s.<sup>65</sup> After beginning work on his war memoirs he sent ‘a message of comfort’ assuring Baldwin that he would be ‘dealt with gently in the forthcoming book’.<sup>66</sup> After Baldwin’s death and the publication of *The gathering storm*, Churchill accepted Baldwin’s son’s invitation to dedicate the memorial to him at Astley in May 1950, speaking of him as ‘the most formidable politician I have ever known’ and (albeit with significant qualification) ‘in domestic politics ... one of the most capable leaders ... for many generations’.<sup>67</sup>

Why, then, did Churchill suspend his generous sentiments towards Baldwin when writing *The gathering storm*, even commenting privately that ‘it would have been much better if he had never lived’?<sup>68</sup> As an autobiographer, biographer, and historian as well as a politician with an unusually controversial record, Churchill was sensitive to the importance of understandings of the past for present politics, alert to their possibilities and dangers, and accustomed to treating them as a flexible resource. Striking instances in his political practice include the manipulation not just of his own and Baldwin’s statements about the 1935 election, but also of the phrase ‘the years of the locust’. First coined by ministers to describe a period which emphasized Churchill’s defence cuts while chancellor of exchequer during the 1920s, he instantly redefined and popularized it (to enduring effect) as applying to the years of the National government’s responsibility for armaments in the early 1930s.<sup>69</sup> This pragmatic use of the past also influenced the first volume of *The second world war*. Originally intended precisely as the start of his memoirs of the war, during 1947 and early 1948 he extensively recast it to include a much longer account of the interwar years. The expansion of this section from five to twenty-one chapters<sup>70</sup> was hardly motivated by

<sup>63</sup> *HCD* 302, cc. 423, 427 (22 May 1935). <sup>64</sup> W. S. Churchill, *Into battle* (London, 1941), p. 226.

<sup>65</sup> M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vii: 1941–1945 (London, 1986), p. 1040, for Oct. 1944; the other meetings were in February 1943 and April 1945, for which see below p. 153.

<sup>66</sup> W. Baldwin note, undated, W. Baldwin papers.

<sup>67</sup> *Times*, 22 May 1950, and see Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, Churchill papers, CHUR 2/312, and material in W. Baldwin papers. Churchill later contributed £20 (in 2003 values, over £350) to the memorial’s maintenance fund.

<sup>68</sup> 1947 statement quoted in M. Gilbert, *In search of Churchill* (London, 1994), pp. 105–6.

<sup>69</sup> Compare Inskip, *HCD* 317 cc. 742 (10 Nov. 1936), also Baldwin, c. 1143 (12 Nov.) with Churchill, cc. 1101, 1107 (12 Nov.); Churchill, *Step by step*, p. 77, and *Gathering storm*, ch. v: ‘The locust years, 1931–1935’.

<sup>70</sup> Reynolds, ‘Churchill’s writing of history’, p. 224.

self-vindication alone: none doubted after 1940 that his criticisms of the National government had been 'right'. Contemporary concerns were more pressing. Humiliated by his 1945 election defeat and no longer in government, after his Fulton speech in March 1946 warning of the threat from Soviet Russia he had regained an international role by re-enacting his pre-war warnings against the threat from Nazi Germany. The redrafted interwar chapters would underpin this position as a Cold War prophet and the champion of both Anglo-American co-operation and a 'United Europe', by reclaiming his credentials as a uniquely successful diagnostician of military threat and by presenting events in the 1930s as 'lessons' for the late 1940s and the future.<sup>71</sup> However different in style, *The gathering storm* was, like *Guilty men*, a tract for the times. The effects for Baldwin's reputation were similar. Again, the causes of the war and military defeat were attributed more to British 'unwisdom' than to German aggression or the French collapse, and again the blame fell largely on individuals. The root of the difficulties again lay in the 1920s, though not (as it could not be, given Churchill's tenure of the Treasury) in economic policies, but in the defeat of the Lloyd George Coalition in 1922, which made Baldwin 'the ruling force in British politics' within a 'Baldwin-MacDonald Regime'.<sup>72</sup> Again Baldwin, even more than Chamberlain, was the key figure, because Churchill asserted that until 1936 the war could have been prevented if only Baldwin had kept his pledge to preserve air parity.<sup>73</sup> Churchill's 'statesman' of 1935 was now diminished to a 'party manager', thinking 'in majorities and aiming for a quiet life between elections'.<sup>74</sup> Dominating an 'administration more disastrous than any in our history', Baldwin refused 'to face unpleasant facts', lacked knowledge and interest in foreign issues, and wanted 'peace at any price'.<sup>75</sup> Many of Churchill's own warnings were quoted, but none of Baldwin's. Much was made of Baldwin's statement in May 1935 that he had been 'wrong' about future German aircraft production ('a shocking confession'),<sup>76</sup> but for the government little was noted apart from the July 1934 RAF programme ('belated and inadequate') and secret ministerial consultations with Churchill on defence innovations. There was no indication of the successive increases and accelerations in RAF construction, nor even of the 1935, 1936, and 1937 defence white papers. The mangled extract from Baldwin's November 1936 passages reappeared as an 'avow[al] that he had not done his duty in regard to national safety because he was afraid of losing the election'.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 222, 227–8; Ramsden, *Man of the century*, ch. 4. Explicit statements include W. S. Churchill, *Sinews of peace: post-war speeches* (London, 1948), dustcover and p. v; and *Gathering storm*, pp. vii–viii, 14, 33, 162, 165 (1949 edn, pp. ix–x, 16–17, 186, 190).

<sup>72</sup> *Gathering storm*, pp. 16–17 (1949 edn, pp. 18–19).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 90–1, 93, 101, 115, 129, 180 (1949 edn, pp. 83, 103, 106, 115–16, 132, 207).

<sup>74</sup> An insistent point, with the belittlement accentuated by successive adjectives – a 'great', 'remarkable', 'profoundly astute' party manager: *ibid.*, pp. 26, 141, 157 (1949 edn, pp. 30, 162, 181).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 69, 137 (1949 edn, pp. 162, 80, 157).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97–9 (1949 edn, pp. 111–13). <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169, also p. 88 (1949 edn, pp. 195, 100–1).

*The gathering storm* had an immense impact on interpretations of the 1930s. It had the literary power, epic qualities, and use of documents – helped by expert researchers and advisers – that made it seem exceptionally informed and authoritative. Above all, Churchill's extraordinary post-war international prestige and the massive sales of his book and its widely syndicated extracts transformed his personal interpretation into world history. It was not only endorsed by his wartime political and military associates, but embraced uncritically by intellectuals and historians who lionized him as a new Gibbon or Macaulay; and it established a political and moral perspective that even now remains influential in the imaginations of British and United States leaders.<sup>78</sup> Churchill's account was not derived from *Guilty men* and its radical successors, any more than he shared their political sympathies. The Labour and Liberal parties were not spared for being 'completely wrong and mistaken' on armaments until 1936 and failing in 'duty' on conscription in 1939: they too, with the National government, were 'deeply blameworthy before history'.<sup>79</sup> As party conflict again sharpened from 1947, Churchill as Conservative opposition leader had the ironic task of defending his party against continued Labour use of the 'guilty men' charges – counter-attacking with sarcasm on the Labour record during the 1930s, and threatening that if Labour ministers tried at the next general election 'to revive these former controversies' the Conservatives would publish a record of their past 'utterances'.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, despite the different perspectives of the two books, *The gathering storm* seemed to confirm the *Guilty men* accusations. It also extended the contemporary convenience of the repudiation of the leaders of the 1930s. By rallying to Churchill historically as well as politically the Conservative party now had a more presentable past to underpin their party's political recovery, while everyone on the left could continue to swim with the tide, adopting his indictment of the National government while ignoring his criticism of their own parties. From the late 1940s this shared account was reinforced by further ostensibly authoritative histories of the 1930s, from academics with particular reasons to deplore 'appeasement' and by *The Times's* repudiation of its past support for Baldwin and Chamberlain written by a radical friend of Beaverbrook.<sup>81</sup> In these conditions, such plausible criticisms of the National government as having collectively failed to rearm 'adequately' or 'quickly

<sup>78</sup> See Reynolds, 'Churchill's writing of history', pp. 222–3, and Ramsden, *Man of the century*, ch. 3.

<sup>79</sup> *Gathering storm*, pp. 66, 69–70, 88, 90–1, 98–9, 278 (1949 edn, pp. 76, 80, 100, 102–3, 111–13, 319).

<sup>80</sup> W. S. Churchill, *Europe unite: speeches 1947 and 1948* (London, 1950), pp. 50–1, 74, 432, also 232–3, where Churchill dryly advised 'all Parties to leave the past to history, especially as I propose to write that history myself'. For him ignoring his own advice, see 1950–1 speeches in idem, *In the balance* (London, 1951), pp. 363–4, and *Stemming the tide* (London, 1953), pp. 25, 122, 142–3, 171.

<sup>81</sup> J. Wheeler-Bennett, British editor of the captured German foreign office documents, in his *Munich* (London, 1948), esp. pp. 229–30, 243–5, 250, 254, 264, 433–4; L. Namier, a Jewish admirer of Churchill, endorsing *The Gathering storm* interpretation in his *Europe in decay* (London, 1950), pp. 150–70; [Stanley Morison], *The history of the Times*, v, pt 2: 1921–1948 (London, 1952), pp. 1009–13, 1023 (notwithstanding the bibliography, p. 1139, accepting Bassett's disposal of the 'popular myth' about Baldwin's 1936 'confession').

enough' were habitually abridged – as they commonly still are – into the entirely false shorthand that 'Baldwin failed to rearm'. Baldwin's speeches warning about fascism, defending democracy, and justifying rearmament were overlooked and forgotten, because these contradicted the far stronger assumptions that he had completely misjudged the dictators.

Moreover, during these early years of the welfare state, economic management, and full employment, further criticisms were added, again as *Guilty men* had pre-figured: an imputed link between failures in defence and foreign policies, and the industrial troubles, unemployment, and social hardship of the 1920s and 1930s. The Churchill wartime government's efforts for reconstruction, as well as the reforms of the 1945 Labour government, assumed inadequacies in interwar economic and social policies, which commentators and politicians on the left – including further authors in the 1943–5 Gollancz series – could easily attribute to the indifference, complacency, or class interest of Conservative ministers. After 1945 Churchill tried to counteract what he variously described as this 'extraordinary myth', 'legend', 'falsehood', and 'lie' – particularly after Attlee publicly called him 'the most disastrous Chancellor of the century' – by defending the social reforms of Baldwin's 1924–9 government and speaking of the 'constant, ceaseless progress ... made in the social life of the people' under both Conservative and National governments.<sup>82</sup> But here too interpretations of the interwar period slipped from party conflict into a broadly agreed version of the recent past. From 1947 and particularly after their narrow 1951 election victory the Conservative leaders accepted some of the fundamental measures and techniques of the Labour government, implicitly repudiating the attitudes and policies of Baldwinite Conservatism.

What emerged was a fused Churchillian–Labour–Keynesian interpretation dismissive towards government in the 1920s and 1930s, accompanied by hostile commentaries from Beaverbrook and his columnists and reviewers. This historical consensus had considerable public importance, as the real substance underlying the so-called 'political consensus' of the 1950s. Given these political, ideological, and populist currents and their powerful moral charge, denigration of Baldwin and Chamberlain became intellectual and cultural norms which few had the incentive to question.

It might have been worse, if the one episode almost universally credited to Baldwin had been reopened to controversy. With difficulty, the duke of Windsor's legal advisers persuaded him not to base his 1951 memoirs of the abdication on 'aggressive and vindictive' notes supplied by Beaverbrook, which presented Baldwin as an 'intriguer' forcing the king off the throne 'in order to retrieve his own political fortunes'.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, VIII: 1945–1965 (London, 1988), pp. 322–3; Churchill, *Europe unite*, pp. 88–90, 114–15, 143, 203; idem, *In the balance*, pp. 110, 183, 192–3, 220–1.

<sup>83</sup> W. Monckton and G. Allen notes, 4, 21 Oct. 1949; duke of Windsor to Monckton, 24 Oct. 1949; Monckton to Allen, 11 Sept. 1950, Bodleian Library, Monckton Trustees papers, 20/92–3, 105–7, 111.

## III

Baldwin retained a loyal group of friends, and received some sympathetic letters. But few offered a public defence. Those meaning to be generous usually made no attempt to refute the criticisms, but in extenuation stressed his other qualities and achievements. When, with the customary respect for former prime ministers, both houses of parliament adjourned after Baldwin's death in December 1947, speakers from all parties praised his personal character, devotion to the House of Commons, and love for and embodiment of a version of 'England'. Some newspaper obituarists dwelt on his 'understanding of his countrymen', or resorted to appealing to 'history' as likely to 'judge that he was too severely censured'.<sup>84</sup> Both those offering Baldwin wartime comfort and the more favourable obituarists did invoke the obvious alternative interpretation of his career, sketched by Bryant in 1937: he had helped assimilate the Labour movement to parliamentary government and preserve national unity during the industrial troubles of the 1920s and the abdication. But so long as the charges on rearmament and the 'progressive' consensus against interwar domestic policies remained strong, this line of defence had little purchase. In 1944 Bryant declined to consider an enlarged edition of his 1937 'tribute': people were 'too prejudiced'.<sup>85</sup>

As shown by Baldwin's first, and for many years only, academic defender, an unusually unorthodox mind was needed to dissent publicly from the main charges against Baldwin. Bassett had been one of those scarce 1930s figures, a MacDonaldite, and after 1945 was still rarer in continuing to admire the National government, about which he published two important historical books during the 1950s. As a politics tutor at the London School of Economics he was appalled by what he regarded as the falsification and suppression of facts to suit prejudices about the interwar years, especially the obliteration of MacDonald's contribution to the Labour party by his senior colleague, Laski. He also thought it 'wicked' that students were being 'misdirected' by lecturers and writers who misquoted Baldwin's November 1936 passages.<sup>86</sup> Although his 1948 article was aimed principally at fellow political scientists it also treated 'Baldwin's confession' as a 'legend' with 'immense political influence', and included among its targets both *Guilty men* and *The gathering storm*. So entrenched had the distortions become that Bassett's method of exposure was to apply to a twelve-year-old public document the sort of close textual analysis normally applied to centuries-old manuscripts. Yet even here lack of access to the archives, compounded by Baldwin's original clumsiness, only shifted the ground of misunderstanding. Although Bassett

<sup>84</sup> *HCD* 445, cc. 1466–74 (15 Dec. 1947); *HLD* 153, cc. 317–27 (17 Dec. 1947); *Daily Telegraph*, *Times* leader, and Templewood (Samuel Hoare) in *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Dec. 1947. The tone of most media obituaries was critical. One of the more remarkable was that of British Movietone film news; the same footage and reporter used while praising Baldwin in the 1930s were now reused with a denigratory commentary: see J. Ramsden, *Stanley Baldwin* (InterUniversity History Film Consortium, 1980), item 13.

<sup>85</sup> Bryant to Davidson, 14 Nov. 1944, Davidson papers 293.

<sup>86</sup> Note of Bassett interview, 6 June 1950, W. Baldwin papers; R. Bassett, *Democracy and foreign policy* (London, 1952), and *idem*, *Nineteen thirty-one* (London, 1958).

rebutted the charge of deception in 1935, he missed Baldwin's hypothetical, counter-factual, argument and mistakenly supposed that decisions had been taken in 1933–4 to postpone both rearmament and a general election.<sup>87</sup> The article had one immediate convert in Hoare, Baldwin's foreign secretary in 1935, who employed Bassett as a researcher on rearmament policies for his memoirs. Bassett's participation helped to make them the most cogent self-defence by a National government minister<sup>88</sup> – though like the memoirs of other Conservative ministers, they retrospectively established some personal distance from Baldwin himself. Copies of Bassett's article were circulated by Baldwin's friends, but otherwise it was either ignored or absorbed into the larger charge of delayed rearmament.

Why did Baldwin himself not reply to his critics? Why, after his death, did those best placed to provide a defence not only concede the points of censure, but supply further material for the detractors?

Baldwin was certainly hurt and depressed by the collapse in his reputation. He assumed that the Astley gates incident and obstructions to his second son's military promotion were vindictive, and he was dismayed by ugly stories about himself: 'innumerable people believe that I went to America [in 1939] to hide!'. But he tried to be philosophical, shrugging off the enmity of the Beaverbrook press as inevitable and the abusive letters as understandable in the circumstances. He also took the sensible and dutiful view that any public statement by himself would only provoke further vilification and that he should not exacerbate controversy during wartime, the more so because he admired Churchill's leadership.<sup>89</sup> There were, however, prior reasons for his reticence.

Even before the war Baldwin stated that he would write 'no memoirs or nonsense of that kind'.<sup>90</sup> His reasons were in part personal scrupulousness and public principle. He thought it 'a pitiful thing when men tried to justify their actions and speeches after retirement', and he 'did not wish to write things which would inevitably cause grief and pain' to others.<sup>91</sup> Abstention from public comment about former colleagues was included in a pledge he made on his retirement, to withdraw altogether from party and ministerial politics.<sup>92</sup> He was also sensitive to

<sup>87</sup> Bassett, 'Telling the truth', esp. pp. 84, 87–8, 95, and for seeing off Beloff over rearmament as a 1935 election issue, *Cambridge Journal*, 2 (1948–9), pp. 237–42.

<sup>88</sup> Templewood to Bassett, 29 Dec. 1948, and letters and notes 1949, 1952–3, Cambridge University Library (CUL), Templewood papers, xvii/4 (30), xix/10; Lord Templewood, *Nine troubled years* (London, 1954), p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> T. Jones, *A diary with letters, 1931–1950* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 482, 491–2, 515; Baldwin reported in Mrs Burges memo., 24 Apr. 1940, W. Baldwin papers, and in P. Howard, *Beaverbrook* (London, 1964), p. 77; Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p. 1058; Baldwin to Davidson, 27 Feb. 1943, Davidson papers, 289. Churchill independently heard concerns about Windham Baldwin's position, and made enquiries: Colville to Greig, 18 Jan. 1944, Churchill papers, CHAR 20/139A.

<sup>90</sup> Baldwin to Robertson Scott, 4 Jan. 1938, CUL MS Add. 8770.

<sup>91</sup> Burges memo., 24 Apr. 1940, and Peter Howard memo., 30 Aug. 1941, W. Baldwin papers.

<sup>92</sup> Cabinet 22(37), 26 May 1937; Baldwin to Pick, 2 May 1940, in H. Montgomery Hyde, *Baldwin* (London, 1973), p. 550.

the claims of official secrecy. He had experienced the difficulties created by ministerial memoirs while overseeing the vetting of Lloyd George's *War memoirs*, when some of the official papers cleared for publication had aroused grievances. This had contributed to a tightening of the 1934 rules on public use of cabinet documents, which Cabinet Office officials interpreted as prohibiting any published reference to cabinet proceedings.<sup>93</sup> Nor would Baldwin at first encourage any biographer. His family associations with popular biographical subjects – William Morris, and his own cousin, Rudyard Kipling – had alerted him to the frequent gulf between subject and biography, and given him a distrust of all biographers. He shared Kipling's distaste for writers who 'coined [money] out of Lives while the subjects are still alive' or sought to lay bare 'all the life and intimacies of men as soon as they are dead', and adopted his scathing description of these practices as 'The Higher Cannibalism'.<sup>94</sup> Both particularly disliked biographers' use of 'psychological methods', making what Baldwin regarded as improper connections between 'a man and his work' to produce 'caricature'. He would not have Lytton Strachey's books in his house.<sup>95</sup>

Another reason for Baldwin's reticence was a detached perspective towards his own career. He understood that proximity and hindsight distorted judgement, while the lapse of time brought a truer assessment – an intelligent grasp of the superiority of historical knowledge, first learned from Montagu Butler at Harrow.<sup>96</sup> He believed that 'no man can write the truth about himself', and observed of Lloyd George's memoirs that a participant in past events found it difficult to avoid writing 'in the light of what has happened since'. Congratulating Asquith's widow on the imminent official biography of her husband, he spoilt the sentiment by observing that 'it is so difficult to tell the truth – or even to dig it out – within a generation'.<sup>97</sup> In the late 1920s he failed to soothe Churchill, always yearning for instant fame, with the view that 'one can't expect to see the result of one's own work'; and in 1940 he affronted rather than consoled a dying Chamberlain with the observation that 'whether our work has been good or not will not appear until long after we have passed away, and no worrying on our part will affect the verdict'.<sup>98</sup> He had long declared that 'only history' could properly

<sup>93</sup> J. F. Naylor, *A man and an institution: Sir Maurice Hankey, the cabinet secretariat, and the custody of cabinet secrecy* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 206–7, 214–16, 223–4, 233–4.

<sup>94</sup> Jones to Lady Grigg, 30 Apr. 1936, in Jones's 'diary', National Library of Wales, Thomas Jones papers; Jones, *Diary with letters*, p. 207; Baldwin to Monica Baldwin, 10 Aug. 1941, Baldwin additional papers.

<sup>95</sup> Baldwin reported in H. Pearson and H. Kingsmill, *Talking of Dick Whittington* (London, 1947), p. 189; Jones, *Diary with letters*, pp. 524, 538.

<sup>96</sup> Burges memo., 24 Apr. 1940. Baldwin was also, of course, a Cambridge history graduate. For Butler's otherwise unfortunate involvement in his early life, see Baldwin, *My father*, pp. 44–7.

<sup>97</sup> Baldwin to Salisbury, 1 July 1943, Hatfield House archives, 4M/188/1; Jones, *Diary with letters*, p. 105; Baldwin to Lady Oxford, 2 Oct. 1932, Bodleian Library, Margot Asquith papers, MS Eng. c.6669/106.

<sup>98</sup> Baldwin to Irwin, 8 Sept. 1933, Borthwick Institute, York, Halifax papers, A4.410.14.4; and to N. Chamberlain, 13 Oct. 1940, NC 13/18/783.

judge the work of himself and other politicians, because the current generation lacked both adequate information about their actions and knowledge of the after-effects. As he retired he commented that 'only 50 years hence could the real value of his or any Premiership be judged'.<sup>99</sup>

Baldwin's willingness to leave his public career to the verdict of 'history' and his distaste for investigations into private lives not only did early disservice to his reputation. It also caused difficulties for later historians, working with an access to political records and with expectations about personal evidence far beyond those he could have foreseen. Although he knew from publication during the 1920s and 1930s of political diaries, biographies, and memoirs (including Churchill's Great War volumes) that some ministers and officials collected documents in order to present their own version of events, he himself never wrote diaries, nor did he modify his habit of conducting political business verbally so as to have letters or memoranda for the record. The letters and papers he received were preserved by his secretaries and family, not kept by himself for later use. Consequently, historians have been denied the access to Baldwin's private thoughts that they have for those of Churchill, the Chamberlains, Amery, and other contemporaries. Baldwin also unwittingly complicated later judgements by not being entirely consistent to his best intuitions. The adamant self-certainty which Neville Chamberlain maintained even after May 1940 was temperamentally alien to him,<sup>100</sup> and he was not so immune to hindsight that he did ask himself and discuss with others whether he might have acted differently in the mid-1930s. From such self-questionings some of Baldwin's interlocutors gained an impression of an uneasy conscience, particularly when – as with Churchill and G. M. Young – they were unsympathetic on the sensitive issues, causing him either from politeness to concede more than he meant, or to retreat into taciturnity.<sup>101</sup>

Yet as Baldwin's discussions with more sympathetic individuals show, although he occasionally thought he might have been more active on foreign policy, on rearmament 'his conscience [was] clear'. Through all the criticism he remained confident that 'in years to come unbiased historians would say he could not have done more than he did'.<sup>102</sup> His own assessment of his career rested on the themes taken up by Bryant and several obituarists: social reconciliation, educating Labour in parliamentary methods, and establishing the Conservatives as a national party.<sup>103</sup> Here a September 1939 letter from the Labour MP, David Kirkwood, became a comfort (he had copies made for friends), as a statement

<sup>99</sup> Winterton diary, 4 May 1937; and see S. Baldwin, *Our inheritance* (London, 1928), pp. 248–9, 307–8; Burges memo., 24 Apr. 1940; Baldwin, *My father*, p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> Jones, *Diary with letters*, p. 482, records Baldwin's unease with the attitude revealed by Chamberlain to Baldwin, 17 Oct. 1940, in Feiling, *Chamberlain*, pp. 455–6.

<sup>101</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill*, vii, p. 1349, and below for Young.

<sup>102</sup> Baldwin, *My father*, p. 317; Hinchingsbrooke journal, 9 Feb. 1938, in A. Best and J. Sandwich, *Hinch* (Mapperton, 1997), p. 54; Burges memo., 24 Apr. 1940; Howard, *Beaverbrook*, p. 77.

<sup>103</sup> E.g. 'Mr Baldwin's testament', 28 Apr. 1937, Crathorne papers, courtesy of Lord Crathorne; Baldwin, *My father*, pp. 327–8; Hyde, *Baldwin*, p. 550.



by a radical 'Clydeside' socialist of the 1920s that the national co-operation in war mobilization owed much to his efforts for industrial peace.<sup>104</sup> Baldwin knew his 'appalling frankness' and 'unsealed lips' passages had been misjudgements – 'stupid' and 'foolish' – but he was still puzzled by the misunderstandings, where these were not obviously malevolent. His defence was consciously *historical* in form, stressing the need to understand conditions in 1933–5: 'the critics have no historical sense'. After so long accusing him of weak leadership they now assumed that he had been a dictator, responsible for everything that had happened. Information on German rearmament had been unreliable, Hitler still seemed to want agreements, and his later actions could not have been foreseen, any more than the fall of France had been. Given the strength of peace feeling and illusions about collective security, precipitate large-scale rearmament on apparently 'flimsy' grounds would have split the country and jeopardized the re-election of the only party grouping committed to national defence; instead he had presented rearmament carefully and successfully, and in 1935 won a majority for general rearmament.<sup>105</sup>

It was not Baldwin himself but his private secretary, Geoffrey Fry, and his closest advisers, Tom Jones and J. C. C. Davidson, who were most concerned to arrange a defence of his reputation. Baldwin remained reluctant: first mentioned in September 1940, it was late 1942 before he would entertain the idea, perhaps influenced by the experience of talking with Feiling about Neville Chamberlain's biography. Even so it took a further two years of 'explanation & persuasion' before he agreed to commission a book, and then on condition that it would be published after his death.<sup>106</sup>

An obvious author might have been Jones himself, as a cabinet secretary during the 1920s, Baldwin's principal speech writer, and as a diarist the nearest he had to a Boswell. To Jones's own later regret, however, he chose instead to write a life of Lloyd George.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, Jones made a large contribution to verdicts on Baldwin, as the anonymous author of his most substantial obituary notice, prepared for *The Times*. Commissioned in December 1934 and submitted three years later, it was written with the knowledge of Baldwin who, knowing an obituary was inescapable and trusting Jones as he would no ordinary

<sup>104</sup> Kirkwood to Baldwin, 18 Sept. 1939, in Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 94–6, and copies in Davidson papers, 262, and Jones papers, A6/41; Baldwin to Bryant, 14 Dec. 1940, 2 Jan. 1941, Bryant papers, C/62.

<sup>105</sup> Burges memo., 24 Apr. 1940; Jones, *Diary with letters*, pp. 447, 482–3, 491; Best and Sandwich, *Hinch*, p. 54; R. A. Butler, *The art of the possible* (London, 1971), p. 88; Baldwin to Davidson, 27 Feb. 1943, Davidson papers, 289. For the problems with information on German rearmament, see W. K. Wark, *The ultimate enemy: British intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (London, 1985).

<sup>106</sup> Jones, *Diary with letters*, pp. 470, 527; Jones to Flexner, 3 Dec. 1942, 20 Dec. 1947, Jones papers, S3/18, 86. Baldwin had Feiling to visit at Astley in September 1942, persuaded by Horace Wilson's plea for assistance and the knowledge that Feiling was a professional historian: Baldwin to Wilson, Aug. 1941, copy in NC 11/15/133. Fry had contemplated a future biography even before Baldwin retired: Howarth to Fry, 10 Mar. 1937, Baldwin additional papers.

<sup>107</sup> Jones to Fry, 9 Oct. 1951, Jones papers, A7/59.

biographer, helped with information on his early life and answered Jones's questions on political incidents.<sup>108</sup> It is indicative of the decline in Baldwin's reputation by 1947 that *The Times* printed only a shortened version, although there remained sufficient interest for it to publish the full text as a separate pamphlet.<sup>109</sup>

Jones's memoir drew on his own familiarity with Baldwin, the knowledge of several of his secretaries and officials, and an intelligent understanding of interwar government. It remains among the best, and generally most sympathetic, of the short Baldwin biographies. But it added two elements to the critical interpretation. The first was indirect and peculiarly contingent. As the 'real explanation' for Baldwin's decision for the 1923 protectionist election, Jones quoted from his note of a Baldwin recollection in September 1935. Speaking while exercised by the electoral challenge of Lloyd George's Council of Action, Baldwin said that twelve years earlier one of his purposes had similarly been to pre-empt Lloyd George. Jones's account probably became the source for the same claim made in *The gathering storm*,<sup>110</sup> and it certainly struck a chord with another of Baldwin's former colleagues. Amery had resented Baldwin's resistance to his own imperial economic proposals, and had a general impression that in his political style Baldwin sought to be 'as unlike Lloyd George as possible'. When writing his autobiography in 1951 he reread Jones's 1947 memoir and obtained and published a copy of his full 1935 note, which crystallized a new and larger idea. Amery now concluded that for Baldwin 'the one dominant motive all through ... was fear of Lloyd George and his influence', and that this was the main explanation not only for the 1923 decision but also for two further, emblematic, actions: his appointment of Churchill to the Treasury in 1924 (to separate him from Lloyd George) and his agreement to form the 1931 National government (to exclude both Lloyd George and Churchill from office).<sup>111</sup> In turn Jones, always interested in Lloyd George's influence, himself adopted Amery's view in his 1951 Lloyd George biography, and then in the edition of his own diaries and his *Dictionary of national biography* article on Baldwin, both prepared in 1953-4. He did so even though it meant overlooking a fuller explanation of the 1923 decision that Baldwin had sent him in 1940, in which Lloyd George was not a significant consideration.<sup>112</sup> A dubious 'recollection' and a jaundiced impression had been conflated by supposedly authoritative writers to construct what in later historical accounts

<sup>108</sup> Material in Jones papers, A7; and see Jones, *Diary with letters*, pp. 154-5, 160, 207.

<sup>109</sup> *Times*, 15 Dec. 1947, and *The Times* [T. Jones], *Lord Baldwin: a memoir* (London, 1947).

<sup>110</sup> *Lord Baldwin*, p. 8; Churchill, *Gathering storm*, p. 18 (1949 edn, p. 20). In 1923 Churchill had still been a Liberal, with no knowledge of Conservative leadership calculations.

<sup>111</sup> Amery to Jones, 12, 16 Nov. 1951, Jones papers, AA1/14, A7/60; L. S. Amery, *My political life* (3 vols., London, 1953-5), II, pp. 280-1, 299, 479, 511, III, p. 397, and see *Amery diaries*, II, p. 195n.

<sup>112</sup> T. Jones, *Lloyd George* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 207-8; Jones, *Diary with letters*, p. xxxii; *Dictionary of national biography, 1941-1950* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 44-5; cf. Baldwin to Jones, 25 Nov. 1940, Jones papers A6/2. Jones might also have reflected on his own knowledge that Baldwin seriously considered including Lloyd George in his 1935 cabinet.

became – despite its inherent implausibility – a general interpretation, almost a ‘fact’, which reinforced the view of Baldwin as inadequately focused upon the crucial national issues: that a principal aim of his whole career was to exclude Lloyd George from power.<sup>113</sup>

The second legacy of the memoir was more direct. Although Baldwin and Jones shared some social and moral sympathies, in other respects their perspectives were different, in ways which Jones did not always fathom. As a radical, Labour-voting admirer of Lloyd George and an administrative ‘man of business’ – and one whose readiness with policy suggestions was not always appropriate to his position and knowledge – Jones considered Baldwin the cautious Conservative, anti-statist, politician to be ‘impervious to detail’, having ‘only the sketchiest acquaintance’ with much cabinet business, and reluctant to take decisions. Although Jones qualified these statements and suggested balancing strengths, his account did much to elevate a common impression of an aspect of Baldwin’s style into a determining aspect of his leadership and government policy: he was liable to ‘bovine indolence’, and ‘posterity will have hard things to say of his inertia’.<sup>114</sup> Particular instances of these traits were also implied. In 1935–6 Jones had been an early and enthusiastic appeaser, visiting Germany to meet Nazi leaders and trying to arrange a meeting between Baldwin and Hitler. His efforts came to nothing because Baldwin, not trusting the Germans ‘an inch’, eventually preferred the judgement of his foreign secretary, Eden – who deprecated the proposal as a German tactic to weaken Anglo-French relations – rather than the urgings of someone, even a friend, with no foreign policy experience. For Jones this was a missed opportunity which he increasingly regretted as Anglo-German relations deteriorated, until by early 1938 he hated Eden and thought that ‘a heavy load of guilt lies on S.B.’. In his memoir Baldwin was presented not just as ‘ill at ease’ and lacking interest in foreign affairs, but even as distrusting and disliking ‘foreigners’ – notwithstanding the evidence of their many conversations on foreign issues in his own diaries, and his knowledge of Baldwin’s foreign trips and friendships.<sup>115</sup> On the main accusation, Jones in mitigation argued that Baldwin had decided ‘to educate the country’ in the need for rearmament. But he forgot that in a June 1935 article he had described Baldwin in November 1934 bringing ‘public and pacific opinion to accept the drastic positive measures for aircraft production ... now in operation’. Writing with the perspectives of 1937 and after Baldwin’s ‘appalling frankness’ passages, Jones now described the rearmament preparations as beginning only *after*

<sup>113</sup> For reassessment of Baldwin’s 1923 decision, see esp. M. Cowling, *The impact of Labour* (Cambridge, 1971), chs. 15–16; for comment on the larger claims, see Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 10–11, 228–31, 235.

<sup>114</sup> *Lord Baldwin*, pp. 20, 22. For the Baldwin–Jones relationship, see Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 66, 72, 159–62.

<sup>115</sup> Jones, *Diary with letters*, pp. 175–6, 180–1, 193–4, 207–8, 239–65; E. L. Ellis, ‘T.J.’: *a life of Dr Thomas Jones* (Cardiff, 1992), pp. 400–10; Jones to Lady Grigg, 25 Feb. 1938, Jones papers, WW1/8; *Lord Baldwin*, pp. 7, 20, 21.

June 1935, and accepted the now conventional view that Baldwin had been 'slow to act'.<sup>116</sup>

These themes were absorbed most readily by the recipient of Baldwin's commission, chosen on Fry's and Jones's recommendation. As an historian, man of letters, public servant, and Conservative political commentator, G. M. Young seemed a good choice. Baldwin had been acquainted with him since the mid-1930s, occasionally seeking his advice on literary matters. As respectively president and chairman of the British Association for International Understanding they had corresponded during the early war years, and Young had been an occasional guest at Astley Hall. Baldwin admired Young's writings, and considered him well qualified to produce the only kind of book he would contemplate about himself – not a personal biography but a life explained by his times, or as Young had written of Victorian England, a *Portrait of an age*. 'No one', Baldwin wrote, 'could [better] picture the mentality of that strange post war era in England from 1918 to the out-break of the present war.'<sup>117</sup>

Young worked with considerable advantages. He could talk with Baldwin about his career, spending around thirty days at Astley for the purpose, and Baldwin's political papers were made available to him at his Wiltshire home by Fry, a close neighbour. As Baldwin had authorized the book, his family, friends, and former associates answered questions or lent documents.<sup>118</sup> During 1945 Young was shown material in the Royal Archives, and the king and his secretaries commented helpfully on his draft abdication chapter. Although not suspected by readers when his book was published nor later by historians once the same records became publicly available, he was also granted a privilege denied to Feiling three years earlier. By special dispensation which Baldwin obtained personally from Churchill, Young was the first person other than ministers and officials to read the interwar cabinet records – stretching a provision under the 1934 Cabinet Office rules which coincided with the reason for Baldwin's changed attitude towards official secrecy: access to official documents 'might ... be given for the purpose of vindicating the memory of a deceased Cabinet minister', where that memory had been 'injured'.<sup>119</sup> Young had at his disposal a range and quantity of sources not available to other

<sup>116</sup> *Lord Baldwin*, pp. 3, 17, 22; compare 'P.Q.R.' [Jones], 'Mr Baldwin', *Spectator*, 7 June 1935, authorship established by Jones's unpublished 'diary', 6 June 1935.

<sup>117</sup> Baldwin to Jones, 23 Dec. 1944, in Jones, *Diary with letters*, p. 527; G. M. Young, *Victorian England: portrait of an age* (Oxford, 1936).

<sup>118</sup> To those listed in Young, *Baldwin*, p. 13, can be added Baldwin's sons and daughters, Halifax, Templewood, Duff Cooper, Reith, Lady Davidson, Mann of the *Yorkshire Post*, Barrington-Ward of *The Times*, and Baldwin's parliamentary private secretaries, Rhys and Hinchbrook.

<sup>119</sup> Public Record Office (PRO) CAB 21/4476, July 1945 material, and Brook note, 20 Aug. 1945; 1934 rules in PRO PREM 1/171. Baldwin had not used draft letters by Davidson and Jones, cited respectively in Middlemas and Barnes, *Baldwin*, p. 1063, and Naylor, *A man and an institution*, p. 235 (which, published before relevant PRO files were released, understandably but mistakenly assumed that Young did not see cabinet material). For Feiling see Bridges to Howarth, 7 Oct. 1941, CAB 21/2166. Churchill was not, therefore, the first to have access to public records, as is commonly assumed;

biographers and historians for another twenty years, and in some cases much longer.<sup>120</sup>

Even so, by 1948 Young despaired of writing anything adequate. He became disillusioned with Baldwin himself and suffered some form of nervous breakdown over the book, twice offering to abandon it and finishing it in 1952 only with the persuasion and assistance of his publisher, Hart-Davis.<sup>121</sup> Even during the final production stages there were difficulties and postponements, which reveal further constraints on interpretation of interwar politics in the 1950s. Although the book is now noted for its criticism of Baldwin, before publication the greater concern was its criticism of other figures, still alive and powerful. These included ministers in the 1951 Conservative government, who considered it appropriate to use civil servants to protect their historical reputations.

Young's proofs survived scrutiny by the Cabinet Office (a condition of his access to its records) with only slight changes to remove direct references to cabinet papers and named officials, and by libel lawyers (the publisher's precaution) with dilution of a few comments on individuals, notably the duke and duchess of Windsor. But these processes placed copies of the text in other hands. Eden, always worried that his first period as foreign secretary in 1935–8 might tarnish his subsequent reputation as an 'anti-appeaser', was 'profoundly disturbed' by Young's account of the 1936 Rhineland crisis, which suggested that the British government had restrained the French from taking military action against Germany. After mediation by a fellow cabinet minister, J. P. L. Thomas, only resulted in Young proposing what Eden regarded as insufficient changes, he turned for heavier pressure to his permanent secretary, declaring that the issue affected not just his own reputation but also those of Baldwin and 'the Cabinet and our Party and the country'. Although cabinet officials still thought Young's account a 'fair summary of the Cabinet minutes', the Foreign Office appeal to national interests persuaded Brook, the cabinet secretary, to prevail on Hart-Davis to impose further amendments. Consequently several sentences in chapter 22 are not Young's but those of the Foreign Office librarian, who invoked the authority of *The gathering storm* against the cabinet records: such was the contemporary ascendancy of Churchill's published opinion over even the best

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indeed in 1946 he used his prime-ministerial dispensation to Baldwin and Young as a precedent when asking Atlee to allow access to official papers for his own researchers: Gilbert, *Churchill*, vii, p. 235.

<sup>120</sup> For instance, Young read cabinet records on the abdication crisis not released in the PRO until 2003. He was also responsible for the unique record of the cabinet discussion on Hoare's 1935 resignation being unsealed (though it is uncertain whether he was allowed to read the contents): Brook note, 19 June 1946, CAB 21/4476, explaining the incident recounted in Naylor, *A man and an institution*, p. 253. Young spent many weeks from September 1945 to June 1946 reading papers in a Cabinet Office room, for which he was given his own key.

<sup>121</sup> Many of these and following details are in the G. M. Young file in McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Hart-Davis papers, hereafter, unless otherwise stated, the source for Hart-Davis correspondence. But see also Hart-Davis letters in CUL MS Add. 7799, and R. Hart-Davis, *Halfway to heaven* (Stroud, 1998), p. 38.

documentary evidence.<sup>122</sup> Another copy of Young's proofs reached Beaverbrook, who was advised by his lawyer and by Robert Blake, the Oxford historian he had commissioned to write the biography of Bonar Law, that the book contained defamatory statements about himself and Churchill. The main complaint was over Baldwin's claimed view that in the early 1920s they, together with Lloyd George and Birkenhead, had been bent on enjoying power for its own sake, were 'degrading public life', and wanted a war against Turkey for the purpose of relieving unemployment. After setting libel lawyers on to Young and Hart-Davis, Beaverbrook sent the proofs to Churchill, who found additional causes for complaint. An embarrassed Brook – who, on a matter not affecting policy, was now careful to say he was only acting privately, not as the cabinet secretary – was instructed to inform the publishers that Churchill considered the book to contain untrue and 'ill-natured comments and charges' against himself. The combination of legal threat and prime ministerial displeasure brought rapid compliance and agreement on yet more changes, negotiated with the lawyers.<sup>123</sup> These now involved much work, expense, and delay because the whole first edition had been printed and stitched: seven pages had to be cut from 7,800 copies, and the revised and reprinted pages glued back by hand.<sup>124</sup>

Why, though, had Young found it hard to write the book at all, and how did an authorized defence of Baldwin produce yet more accusations against him? Young blamed much of his difficulty on the nature of Baldwin's papers; they contained, he wrote, so few personal letters and notes as to be 'utterly worthless' for any biography better than a version of the 'Annual Register'. He even made this into a grievance against Baldwin's sons, imagining they had destroyed and delayed delivery of important papers, and demanding an increased share of the royalties as financial compensation.<sup>125</sup> All researchers on interwar British politics will sympathize with Young's frustration at the scarcity of Baldwin's political letters and his insubstantial presence even in cabinet minutes; but it is surprising that he found so little inspiration in the now 233 volumes of Baldwin's political papers,

<sup>122</sup> PRO FO 370/2297 and CAB 21/4476, material for July–Aug. 1952, esp. undated Eden memo., Brook note, 7 Aug., and Passant note, 9 Aug. For Eden's obsessive surveillance over his own reputation, see D. Dutton, *Anthony Eden* (London, 1997), pp. 1–16.

<sup>123</sup> For Beaverbrook (who also involved Birkenhead's family), see Blake memo., 22 Sept. 1952, and legal papers Sept.–Oct. 1952 in House of Lords Record Office, Beaverbrook papers, C/43, H/152, H/406. For Churchill, Sept.–Oct. 1952 exchanges in PREM 11/239 and CAB 21/4476.

<sup>124</sup> Hart-Davis to Young, 8 Oct., 12 Nov. 1952; and Hart-Davis list, Nov. 1952, in CUL MS Add. 7938. The pages replaced in the book's first impression were pp. 30, 31, 39, 116, 161, 227, 240.

<sup>125</sup> Young to Murray, 26 Jan. 1948, Bodleian Library, MS Gilbert Murray, 99/8–9; and to Hart-Davis, 19 June 1949, 22 Feb. 1950, 20 June 1951; Young, *Baldwin*, p. 11. He supposed that Oliver Baldwin burned a 'large' collection of papers at Astley, when (as Fry could have told him) the political files never went there. The destroyed material consisted of some, though not all, post-1940 personal and abusive letters (a number have survived). Windham Baldwin delivered three boxes in 1951 which Young (as he conceded after publication) had been offered in 1948, but then forgotten: W. Baldwin, Watt and Pinsent exchanges, Dec. 1952–Jan. 1953, CUL MS Add. 7938.

and thought the cabinet records ‘very bleak and not of much value’.<sup>126</sup> The real problems lay not with the sources, but with Young himself. He was not, like Feiling, a research historian familiar with political records, indeed he was contemptuous of what he called ‘the machine-turned researcher’.<sup>127</sup> He was an essayist, an impressionist whose favourite devices were allusion, anecdote, classical tropes, and literary quotations.<sup>128</sup> As Kitson Clark noted, Young’s *Portrait of an age* had been less ‘history’ than precisely a ‘portrait’, containing ‘that selection of facts which commended itself to the vision of the artist’, considered from a self-consciously personal perspective.<sup>129</sup> He had a poor understanding of how to handle original sources, pursue and assess evidence, and preserve accuracy. He wrote on documents, mislaid or forgot to return them to owners, and incorporated those from which he wanted to quote in his manuscript, defaced with his own text or typing instructions.<sup>130</sup> For all his complaints about inadequate sources, he did not interview or ask for documents from some obvious figures – Churchill, Eden, Amery, the widows of Bridgeman and the Chamberlains, Tom Jones and Baldwin’s cabinet secretary, Hankey. When Young did contact Baldwin’s associates, rather than encouraging independent testimonies he tended to state his own views and to seek confirmation for them with leading questions.<sup>131</sup> As he worked he trusted to his normally prodigious memory, despite being aware that it was liable to make slips and to elaborate the evidence: he even gave this trait a playful name (‘the Imp’) and wrote an essay about it. The result was similar to that found by Kitson Clark in the *Portrait of an age*: almost every quotation and even some basic factual details in the Baldwin book were inaccurate, where not corrected at the last moment by Hart-Davis.<sup>132</sup>

The larger reasons for Young’s difficulties were his assumptions, his questions, and the kind of book he chose to write. He tried to be balanced, and stressed some positive features. He admired Baldwin’s love of classics, his political oratory (hiding his dismay at discovering that he used speech writers), his resistance to the ‘press lords’, and his stand against Churchill on India. More than any previous account, he developed the case for Baldwin as a great domestic prime minister, whose constitutionalism and sympathy towards the Labour movement ‘saved

<sup>126</sup> Bridges note, 27 Feb. 1946, and Brook note, 28 Jan. 1948, CAB 21/4476.

<sup>127</sup> Young to Bryant, 16 Jan. 1937, Bryant papers, E/3.

<sup>128</sup> See Young’s collected essays, *Daylight and champaign* (London, 1937); *Today and yesterday* (London, 1948); and *Last essays* (London, 1950). Hart-Davis noted that Young’s previous publications had ‘come largely out of his head’, but the Baldwin book demanded ‘a lot of work’ which he ‘wouldn’t or couldn’t do’: *The Lytton Hart-Davis letters, 1: 1955–1956*, ed. R. Hart-Davis (London, 1978), p. 132.

<sup>129</sup> G. Kitson Clark, ed., *G. M. Young: portrait of an age: annotated edition* (London, 1977), pp. 10–11.

<sup>130</sup> E.g. Baldwin papers, 1/80a–c, 167/187–90, and complaints about non-return of documents in W. Baldwin papers. Windham Baldwin recovered further documents from Young’s executors after his death in 1959.

<sup>131</sup> See esp. Young to Citrine, 20, 23 June 1948, British Library of Political and Economic Science, Citrine papers, 10/1.

<sup>132</sup> Young, *Today and yesterday*, pp. 194–7; *Lytton Hart-Davis letters*, 1, p. 133, and Young/Hart-Davis papers, early 1952; Kitson Clark, *Portrait of an age*, p. 13.

Parliamentary Government' and helped create the national unity of 1939–40.<sup>133</sup> But these were not his principal concern. He settled his main line of interpretation early, in 1946, and thereafter regarded much in Baldwin's career as clutter, complaining that his theme 'got clogged with rubbish about miners' wages, and Beaverbrook, and the crisis of 1931, and the Red Letter'.<sup>134</sup> Despite the richness of his sources, Young was unable to detach himself from the dominant view about Baldwin. He took it for granted that his main problem, and the focus for the whole book, was to explain why Baldwin 'was slow to take up Germany's challenge to start rearmament'.<sup>135</sup> He soon concluded that the conventional charge was right: Baldwin had 'concealed the truth to win an election'; as Bevin had said, he 'lied'.<sup>136</sup> He was therefore predisposed towards the verdict of *The gathering storm* (which, like most contemporaries, he considered an 'immortal' book); indeed, he printed Churchill's severest sentences and the notorious index entry ('party before country') at the start of his own book. He accepted the usual mutilated version of Baldwin's November 1936 passages, and was so fixed in his assumptions that he dismissed Bassett's article as 'of no importance'.<sup>137</sup>

As Young's correspondence demonstrates, his focus on rearmament determined what evidence he wanted to find. When it could not be found in the places he expected, he developed further fixed ideas, which in turn determined which type of material he would use and which he would ignore. On discovering that Baldwin's papers and the cabinet minutes had little on his personal views, Young did not ask to see the cabinet committee and imperial defence papers, which contained the real evidence about rearmament. Nor did he examine Baldwin's speeches in detail, even though the main charge turned on his public statements. Nor did it occur to him that he might have misconceived the problem, and should ask different questions. Instead, he decided that a conventional biography was impossible, and that he was left with two choices. The first was the book which Baldwin thought he had commissioned Young to write: 'a political history of the inter-war years with Baldwin as the main figure among a number of other figures'.<sup>138</sup> The alternative, and the one he chose, was precisely what Baldwin had dreaded. Young found that 'the psychology of the subject is so absorbing that the history is moving further and further into the background'.<sup>139</sup> He did not inform Baldwin of his decision. In 1946 Baldwin still believed that Young shared his own 'dislike for the modern psychological approach in biographies', and was writing 'a history of the inter-war years' which might be an 'introduction' to a much

<sup>133</sup> See esp. Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 12, 253–4. For speeches, Young to Jones, 12 Apr. 1948, 30 Oct. 1951, Jones papers, A7/55, WW32/73.

<sup>134</sup> Young to Jones, 30 Oct. 1951, *ibid.* <sup>135</sup> Bridges note, 22 Feb. 1946, CAB 21/4476.

<sup>136</sup> Young to Duff Cooper, 22 Sept. 1946, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, DUFC 2/1; to Citrine, 20 June 1948, Citrine papers, 10/1; and to W. Baldwin, 21 Feb. 1950, CUL MS Add. 7938.

<sup>137</sup> Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 11–12, 228–9; Fry to Jones, 22 Oct. 1952, Jones papers, AA1/19.

<sup>138</sup> Bridges memo., 22 Feb. 1946, CAB 21/4476; Young, *Baldwin*, p. 11.

<sup>139</sup> Young to Cooper, 22 Sept. 1946, DUFC 2/1; to W. Baldwin, 8 Aug. 1946, CUL MS Add. 7938.



later biography.<sup>140</sup> Nor did Young inform his readers. He stated why his book was not a 'fully documented life', but omitted to specify the 'different form' that it took. This created misunderstandings about its status and quality: as an authorized book, it was assumed to be an authoritative record. Yet, like *Portrait of an age*, it was, as Young himself privately wrote, 'not history': it was a 'psychological study', more than a 'contribution to political history'.<sup>141</sup> Though more sophisticated than *Guilty men* and other wartime polemics, like them it based explanation more on purported personality defects than political analysis.

Balancing his admiration for some of Baldwin's qualities with an assumption of his shortcomings over rearmament, and characteristically resorting to a classical model, Young chose a single overarching theme for the book, that of Aristotelian tragedy: 'the good man with the weak spot which unfitted him for the situation he had to face'.<sup>142</sup> Baldwin's weakness, he decided, was that 'popular sympathy had become a drug which he could not do without. And it had been administered in quantities which must have made deprivation an anguish.' Consequently he 'could not say hard things, when hard things needed to be said': it followed that Baldwin could not tell the full truth about Germany and rearmament to the people.<sup>143</sup> Consequently too, Young claimed that Baldwin suffered great anguish over his unpopularity in 1940: 'They hate me so.'<sup>144</sup> Once these premises are understood, much that is otherwise puzzling about Young's work falls into place. Although Baldwin talked readily with Jones about rearmament and the 1935 election, Young found him elusive on these matters. Given Baldwin's dislike of 'psychology', this is not surprising: he would have been embarrassed by Young's intrusive questions. Yet Young regarded that evasiveness as significant: this convinced him that the 'popular verdict' was true, and he made much of it in his book. He deduced that for Baldwin the 1935 election was a 'sensitive spot', about which he had a 'bad conscience'. From there he further deduced that Baldwin had 'lost his nerve'

<sup>140</sup> Pearson and Kingsmill, *Whittington*, p. 189; Baldwin to Oliver Baldwin, 3 June 1946, CUL MS Add. 9569/7.

<sup>141</sup> Young, *Baldwin*, p. 11; Young to Davidson, 27 Jan. 1946, Davidson papers 302; to W. Baldwin, 21, 24 Feb. 1950 (emphasis in original), CUL MS Add. 7938; to Hart-Davis, 22 Feb. 1950; Brook note, 30 Jan. 1948, CAB 21/4476.

<sup>142</sup> Young to W. Baldwin, 23 June [1946], 23 May 1947, 21 Feb. 1950, CUL MS Add. 7938. The theme is submerged in the book's text, though see Young, *Baldwin*, p. 205.

<sup>143</sup> E.g. Young to Cooper, 22 Sept. 1946, DUFC 2/1, and to Halifax, 8 Aug. 1947, Halifax papers, A.2.278.96; G. M. Young, 'Stanley Baldwin', *Sunday Times*, 21 Dec. 1947, carried into Young, *Baldwin*, p. 57.

<sup>144</sup> Young, *Baldwin*, p. 250. The point was important to Young, as presumed confirmation of his thesis: see Young to W. Baldwin, 23 June [1946], CUL MS Add. 7938. No independent evidence exists of this well-known statement, nor of Young's other claim that he was 'advised, or warned' not to visit London. Baldwin's letters state that he stayed away because he did not wish to bother friends preoccupied with the war crisis, and because of the problems of wartime travel. For Young's probable source, see n. 148 below.

after the East Fulham by-election and could not bring himself to press for adequate rearmament.<sup>145</sup>

The problems with all this are plain: the successive and self-reinforcing suppositions, and the arguments from silence, both documentary and verbal. Quite how Young decided that Baldwin craved popular affection is unclear, unless it followed from his initial assumption – that Baldwin had not been explicit about rearmament from fear of public criticism. What is certain is that Young had no documentary evidence. Such psychological speculations were not susceptible to written proof, and no contemporary Baldwin statement about East Fulham has survived. This explains Young's complaints about the deficiency of the papers he had seen, his disinclination to pursue further sources, and what close inspection reveals to be strikingly low standards of 'evidence'. He wanted testimonies about personal 'character', not more documents about politics. His despair about the book from 1948 came as he realized the difficulty of building substance around his assumptions. As he told Hart-Davis, he would just have to 'rely on my prose to carry off the truth that the subject has ceased to appeal to me'.<sup>146</sup>

This prose included conjecture, insinuation ('it seemed to me', 'I often thought') and presentation of particular incidents as general traits ('he would'), all given apparent legitimacy through reported conversations and an implied intimacy with Baldwin ('we talked', 'he told me', 'I noticed'). His substance, when detached from his premises, amounts to little more than impression and hearsay.<sup>147</sup> It came in two parts. The first, on Baldwin's supposed dependence on public affection, consisted of cumulative psychological innuendo. He was the only child of an invalid mother, a lonely boy, a humiliated schoolboy, an unsuccessful undergraduate, a disappointment to a domineering father, shy with women, and between him and his wife (notwithstanding their seven children) 'there was not much passion in their mating' – a particularly unprovable, as well as tasteless, assertion. Consequently, Young argued, Baldwin's personality was not natural but artificial, 'built-up', the more so because as a surprise late-comer to leadership he had to improvise a claim to authority. Also, because he found close personal relationships difficult and felt burdened by 'the ultimate loneliness' of the premiership, Baldwin found his happiness in large gatherings, in the House of Commons and still more in public meetings, 'giving and taking affection without personal intimacy and individual concern'. So he resolved to capture public admiration by making himself representative of his largest audience. Although by temperament and partial descent a 'Celt', he 'deliberately and by election'

<sup>145</sup> Young to Davidson, 8 Mar. 1946, Davidson papers, 302; to Halifax, 8 Aug. 1947, Halifax papers, A.2.278.96; to Jones, 18 Apr. 1948, Jones papers A7/57, and to W. Baldwin, 4 Apr. 1949, CUL MS Add. 7938; Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 176–7, 200, 229–30. <sup>146</sup> Young to Hart-Davis, 25 Aug. 1948.

<sup>147</sup> E.g. Fry-Jones exchanges, 10, 13 Oct. 1952, 1 Feb. 1953, Jones papers, AA1/17, W7/163, A7/62, on the unlikelihood of the much-repeated story of Baldwin practising a pose before a mirror (Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 56–7) – which actually derived from Rowse (*End of the Epoch*, p. 84), who maliciously presented as 'fact' what had only been speculation in Salter, *Security*, p. 196.

adopted the persona and ‘played the part’ of an ‘Englishman’.<sup>148</sup> A Baldwin statement during the special circumstances of the abdication crisis – ‘my worst enemy could never say that I do not understand the people of England’ – became for Young a key not just to a supposed timidity over rearmament, but to his whole career.<sup>149</sup>

The second set of arguments were those validated by Jones’s memoir and Churchill’s *Gathering storm*. As his Aristotelian theme required Baldwin to be unfitted to his situation, so Young made a great deal of his supposed ignorance and aversion to foreign and defence matters, even (with no known evidence) creating the still-current legend that when foreign affairs came before the cabinet he ‘would close his eyes’ and ask to be woken after the discussion had finished. This failing arose, Young wrote, because ‘he could never bring his mind to bear on anything that did not interest him’, a claim established by an insistence on Baldwin’s ‘indolence’: ‘his inertia, his laziness, his easy-going ways’.<sup>150</sup> Again Young found personal confirmation, making no allowances for a man in his late seventies when observing Baldwin’s short attention span, nor for Baldwin’s diffidence when in his well-known first sentence he described Baldwin’s invitation to write the book as offered ‘somewhat languidly’.<sup>151</sup> From these alleged traits followed assertions about Baldwin’s ‘neglect of much that a Prime Minister ought not to neglect’, his dislike of paperwork and decision making, and the time he spent in the House of Commons, in order to avoid officials and colleagues.<sup>152</sup> Young even elevated Baldwin’s temperament into general political narrative, where the course of various episodes, particularly the aftermaths of the General Strike and Hoare–Laval crisis, were determined by his supposed fluctuation between impulsive exertion and nervous relapse (an account formed partly from analogy with Young’s own mood swings).<sup>153</sup> As an example of negligence he

<sup>148</sup> Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 18–23, 25, 52–7, 134–5. Hardly any letters between Baldwin and his wife survive, and there is no sign that Young examined his parents’ papers. But the development of these assertions can be traced from Young’s own letters. His principal source was Baldwin’s eldest son, Oliver, even though Windham warned Young not to trust his testimony, given Oliver’s breach with his own father, ignorance about his grandparents, and liking for amateur psychology. Young nevertheless seized on Oliver’s stories: W. Baldwin–Young exchanges, 8, 10, 23 June 1946, W. Baldwin papers, and CUL MS Add. 7938. Young himself was a bachelor with unusual domestic circumstances, see *Lyttleton Hart-Davis letters*, 1, pp. 132–3.

<sup>149</sup> Young to W. Baldwin, 23 June 1946, CUL MS Add. 7938, and to Cooper, 22 Sept. 1946, DUFC 2/1; Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 54, 129, and see pp. 225–6: the phrase was, typically, misquoted. The book’s Homeric epigraph – ‘Now let everyone remember the kindness of poor Patroclus, who knew how to be gentle to all’ – was calculatedly double-edged: in Young’s terms, Baldwin’s conciliation of the Labour movement and his sensitivity towards peace opinion were two aspects of his desire to retain public affection.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27–8, 36, 57–8, 60–3, 72, 122, 128, 150, 173, 182–4, 200, and see e.g. Young to Halifax, 8 Aug. 1947, Halifax papers, A.2.278.96. The ‘falling asleep’ canard was repeated on BBC *Newsnight*, 10 Sept. 2001.

<sup>151</sup> Young to Murray, 26 Jan. 1948, MS G. Murray, 99/8–9; compare Young, *Baldwin*, p. 11, with Baldwin in Jones, *Diary with letters*, p. 527, and, for his decline from 1945, pp. 538, 541.

<sup>152</sup> Young, *Baldwin*, pp. 57–8, 128, 167.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 162; Young to W. Baldwin, 4 Apr. 1949, CUL MS Add. 7938.

seized on an account from Citrine, the TUC secretary, about Baldwin finding in 1935 that trade union leaders were ready to assist rearmament but then (as Young understood it) failing to pursue discussions, a story which confirmed his disenchantment with his subject, not any effort to substantiate it.<sup>154</sup> Many of these various claims, derived from or made central by Young's psychological speculations, became standard elements in future accounts of Baldwin's life.

#### IV

Young's book was serialized in *The Sunday Times*, noticed prominently in many newspapers and journals, and won the 1952 James Tait Black prize for biography. Nevertheless, responses to it were mixed. Unlike Eden, Beaverbrook, and Churchill, neither those who had initiated the book (Jones, Fry, and Davidson) nor Baldwin's executors (his two sons) saw any draft or proofs. They were variously dismayed, appalled, or furious. Reviewers, even Baldwin's former colleagues and admirers Cooper and Elliot, accepted all or much of Young's interpretation. Amery thought it 'a brilliant study', and mysteriously supposed that 'no one would have enjoyed [it] more than Baldwin himself'. But even while accepting the book's substance, others criticized its literary style and tone: 'uneven', 'oblique', 'irritable', 'limp and tired'.<sup>155</sup> Churchill's private judgement should also be noted: 'ill-natured', 'ill-conceived', a 'very inadequate appreciation of Mr. Baldwin'.<sup>156</sup> Young was so disappointed by the 'bleak and unfriendly reception', that he asked Jones to take over his commission to write Baldwin's entry for *The dictionary of national biography*.<sup>157</sup>

However, the book did provoke the beginnings of a reaction in Baldwin's favour, encouraged by the Conservative political revival of the early 1950s. Perhaps licensed by Churchill's address at the Baldwin memorial, a 1953 Conservative Political Centre pamphlet on *Great Conservatives* included Baldwin (and Chamberlain), in a Humphry Berkeley essay directed against 'socialist untruths and misrepresentations'. In letters to the press criticizing Young's reviewers, Bassett publicized his reinterpretation of Baldwin's 'appalling frankness'.<sup>158</sup> David Somervell, a public school master, historian and brother of Baldwin's last attorney-general, published a short essay and four of Baldwin's speeches in reply to Young's strictures, which stressed Baldwin's domestic record, insisted that the 1935 election had been won on rearmament and, given international conditions and British opinion in the 1930s, asked how anyone, even

<sup>154</sup> Young-Citrine exchange, 20, 22, 23 June 1948, Citrine papers 10/1; Young to W. Baldwin, 4 Apr. 1949, 21 Feb. 1950, CUL MS Add. 7938; Young, *Baldwin*, p. 204, and see below p. 163.

<sup>155</sup> Cuttings in W. Baldwin papers, including Amery in *Spectator*, 14 Nov. 1952.

<sup>156</sup> Pitbaldo to Gisborne, 7 Oct. 1952, PREM 11/239.

<sup>157</sup> Young to Jones, 6 Jan. 1953, Jones papers, A7/61.

<sup>158</sup> Berkeley to Mrs N. Chamberlain, 1 Sept. 1952, NC 11/1/77, describing his unfulfilled plan for a joint biography of Baldwin and Chamberlain; W. Baldwin papers contain a collection of Bassett's letters to newspapers.

Churchill, could have done more. He even had the temerity to challenge *The gathering storm* as containing passages 'open to serious criticism', and suggested that in future editions Churchill should consider revising his verdict on Baldwin.<sup>159</sup>

The most substantial reply came from Windham Baldwin, the son whose campaign to vindicate his father had begun with his asking Churchill to speak at the Astley memorial.<sup>160</sup> He had tried to help Young in his early research, but as Young's nervous complaints as well as his line of interpretation became apparent he decided that he should not attempt to influence the book's arguments. Instead, even before Young had finished his book he began collecting material for a published response, which developed into an answer to the whole post-war denigration of his father, presented in biographical form.<sup>161</sup> Windham Baldwin was a businessman, not a historian or writer, and had no particular political attachments. Nor had his father confided political information and opinions to him. But he had one great advantage over other commentators: his utter disbelief in the statements made since 1940 about his father's character, which made him immune to the interpretation of 1930s government and politics that depended on his supposed character flaws. He also had explanations of how the criticisms had developed and persisted, giving him what was at that time a further interpretative strength: distrust of the ostensibly most knowledgeable writers. When Jones asked for his comments on Young's book to help him in writing the *Dictionary of national biography* article, Windham declined in a remarkable reasoned criticism of Jones's own published views on Baldwin. Jones, a man with vast experience of public life, was startled into the comment that 'in a long life I cannot recall receiving a letter which has so shaken me'. It had some effect: Jones collected fresh opinions from Baldwin's former officials, read the Bassett article and reread Baldwin's defence speeches, so that even while incorporating some of Young's material his article was more circumspect than his earlier memoir.<sup>162</sup> In Windham's book, the belittlement was explained as a legacy from interwar party enmities and frustrations, Baldwin's long struggles with Beaverbrook, Rothermere and their newspapers, and his outspoken scepticism about 'intellectuals'.<sup>163</sup> His private explanations were more pungent, but also perceptive. Amery, Hoare, Cooper, Elliott, and most of Baldwin's other ministerial colleagues had been 'debrained and dememorized by ... false post-war propaganda' and the 'Heroic Virus

<sup>159</sup> D. C. Somervell, *Stanley Baldwin: an examination of some features of Mr G. M. Young's biography* (London, 1953), esp. pp. 22–3, 34, 40–1, 46–7, 51, and see his essay on Baldwin in the *History Today* collection, *British Prime Ministers* (London, 1953), pp. 154–67. His brother's papers contain appreciative letters: Bodleian Library MS Eng. c.6565/294–320.

<sup>160</sup> The briefing notes he prepared for Churchill even implied that he might wish to retract the worst of the accusations in *The gathering storm*: W. Baldwin notes, c. May 1950, CHUR 2/312.

<sup>161</sup> See correspondence in CUL MS Add. 7938, esp. W. Baldwin to Davidson, 13 May 1952. He also acceded to Young's demands for revised royalty payments from sympathy for his 'age and infirmity'. His co-executor, Oliver Baldwin, took no serious interest in Young's book.

<sup>162</sup> Jones–W. Baldwin exchange, 16–31 Mar. 1953, *ibid.*; June–July 1953 material in Jones papers, A7, AA1, W7.

<sup>163</sup> Baldwin, *My father*, pp. 155–69.

spread by Churchill'. Nor had the professional experts done better: the 'professors of All Fool's College, Oxford and almost all historians ... failed to comprehend, partly through dealing in second-hand sources, partly through prejudice, and partly through susceptibility to propaganda and winston-worship'.<sup>164</sup>

Windham Baldwin assembled some unpublished political material, and obtained from Citrine the full story of Baldwin's 1935 enquiries about TUC attitudes on rearmament, confirming that Bevin, not Baldwin, had let the prospective discussions lapse.<sup>165</sup> But in fulfilment of his father's will he sent Baldwin's political papers to Cambridge University Library. He made little use of these papers himself, because having identified the two root charges against Baldwin he understood that their weaknesses would be best exposed by other sources. Against the assertions about his character and particularly Young's damaging innuendos about its formation, Windham used his own knowledge and family papers which Young had largely ignored. His candour about Baldwin's schoolboy punishment for some mildly indecent scribblings had the unintended effect of encouraging further psychological interpretations of his politics. But Windham's own emphasis was on his father's contented childhood and happy marriage; his religious faith, moral earnestness, and ethic of service; his sincerity, modesty, and straightforwardness; his vigour, crispness in despatch of business, and trust in delegation to experts; and his shy, highly strung temperament which made public meetings an agony – in displaying a man who was not capable of deception, neglecting duty, or chasing popularity.<sup>166</sup> Against the accusations about rearmament he grasped, as the academics had not done, that as the central issue was his father's public statements, extensive study of his speeches was required. He bought the *House of Commons debates* for 1932 to 1937 to add to volumes of newspaper cuttings of Baldwin's extra-parliamentary speeches, and from these demonstrated his extensive and detailed engagement in foreign and defence debates. He showed, as none since Hogg had done, the relentless Labour and Liberal opposition to rearmament, and he went further than Somervell in stating not just that *The gathering storm* contained 'unreasonable arguments and aspersions' but even that Churchill's speeches in 1932–6 were unrealistic and often 'superficial and self-contradictory'.<sup>167</sup> He argued that Bassett's revised interpretation of the November 1936 passages did not go far enough, because Baldwin had not meant that heavy rearmament was postponed in 1933–4: nothing larger than the successive RAF increases had been considered necessary or desirable, given

<sup>164</sup> W. Baldwin to Davidson, 13, 22 May 1952, CUL Add. MS 7938, and 6 May 1955, 10 Sept. 1958, Davidson papers, 310, 311. The Fellows of All Soul's College included Young, Rowse, and Salter. See Ramsden, *Man of the century*, pp. 116–28, 142–3, 209, 528, for examples of this 'winston-worship' in the historical profession, notably from Rowse and A. J. P. Taylor but including Bryant, who, however, squared it with continued admiration for Baldwin, expressed periodically in his *Illustrated London News* column.

<sup>165</sup> W. Baldwin–Citrine letters, Nov. 1952–Mar. 1953, Citrine papers, 10/1; Baldwin, *My father*, pp. 344–5.

<sup>166</sup> Baldwin, *My father*, chs. I–VII, pp. 326–8.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 278–86.

contemporary information about German armaments, international obligations to seek disarmament, and a continuing prospect of arms limitation. Nevertheless, the government had begun rearmament in 1934, and Baldwin's careful advocacy had persuaded an electoral majority to accept an unequivocal commitment to increased rearmament at the 1935 election. The phrase 'no great armaments' was an assurance 'to pacify the pacifists' that the government was not war-mongering.<sup>168</sup> As Windham privately summarized his interpretation, with 'skill and courage' Baldwin had 'walked the finest tightrope' between precipitate rearmament which would have divided the nation and escalated international tensions, and inadequate rearmament which would have left Britain defenceless in 1940. That Britain had withstood the unexpected disintegration of Belgian and French resistance was testimony to the work begun in the mid-1930s. The prevailing interpretations should be inverted. It was not on the constitutional issues of 1926 and 1936 but on rearmament in 1934–5 that Baldwin did his 'most difficult and miraculous' work. Rightly understood, Baldwin, not Churchill, was the heroic figure of the 1930s.<sup>169</sup>

There would have been another significant book on these issues in the 1950s, but for a further entanglement with the Cabinet Office's vigilance over official papers. Sir Graham Vincent, a former Downing Street and Committee of Imperial Defence official who also wished to vindicate Baldwin's memory, offered to collaborate with Windham Baldwin in developing suggestions made in his book that delays in rearmament were caused primarily by deficiencies in the apparatus of defence staff and committees. Such a study would have had a considerable impact on the debate, and it had a promising start. In a replay of his father's request to the prime minister of the day on Young's behalf, in 1957 Windham asked Harold Macmillan, an old friend, for access to Cabinet Office records, though now, more pertinently, to its defence papers. Again on the principle of allowing special facilities for relatives defending a statesman's injured reputation, Macmillan and Brook agreed to the request. One discovery by Vincent produced further evidence of the weight of received opinion on the 1930s. Cabinet Office officials were surprised and worried to find that in July 1936 Baldwin had spoken to Churchill and the defence deputation of having won the 1935 election on a 'perfectly free hand on arms'. As this statement was not reported in *The gathering storm's* account of the meeting and contradicted Churchill's notorious accusation against Baldwin, there was concern over whether it would be 'politically expedient to reveal it now'. Eventually, however, publication of the whole book was prevented by the Cabinet Office's contorted efforts to stop confidential information being used in memoirs by former officials. As it was obvious from the draft that Vincent rather than Windham Baldwin was

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. XIII, pp. 242–3, 269–72.

<sup>169</sup> W. Baldwin to Davidson, 27 Oct. 1952, 10 Sept. 1958, Davidson papers, 308, 311; to Jones, 29 Mar. 1953, CUL MS Add. 7938; to Barber, 26 Feb. 1959, W. Baldwin papers; Baldwin, *My father*, p. 315.

the main author, and as the latter rejected as dishonest Brook's suggestion that he should present it as his own sole work, the Cabinet Office felt it had to insist on a convention that debarred civil servants from publishing books using official documents.<sup>170</sup>

## V

Publishers had been nervous about Windham Baldwin's biography, not least because Churchill was still prime minister when they assessed it: he himself took advice over possible libels, and disguised Churchill's name when printing an extract from a document. Publishers also thought the book a 'risk' because Baldwin remained unpopular, and was 'a permanent Aunt Sally for every political journalist'.<sup>171</sup> Predictably, this turned out to be true in the Beaverbrook and Labour press. But other reviewers were impressed, even moved, by the account of Baldwin's character, and most, including Churchill's son, now agreed that Young's book had been too harsh. A few accepted that the accusations about the 1935 election and November 1936 passages were unjust, but more commonly the contrast between the book and received opinion produced confusion. Some concluded that as an act of 'filial piety' its case was overstated. Others took the critical interpretation back a stage: Baldwin's personal merits were admitted, but it was argued that good intentions were no substitute for tough-mindedness on international and economic problems.<sup>172</sup>

Nevertheless Windham Baldwin's book began to change informed assessments of Baldwin. At the very least these became less critical, if only because attempts to accommodate his account made these assessments more complicated. Broader opinion was also gradually becoming less hostile. As the Second World War receded and as the Cold War advanced, earlier summary views and moral simplicities about British policy in the 1930s could seem less convincing. As Conservative political dominance and acceptance of the welfare state continued through the 1950s, a more favourable perspective became possible, that of Baldwin as a forerunner of the 'progressive' Conservatism of Butler and

<sup>170</sup> PREM 11/2231 and CAB21/5819, esp. Trend to Brook, 18 Apr., and Brook to Macmillan, 6, 7 June 1958. For the tortuous Cabinet Office policing of civil service memoirs and diaries in the 1950s (including those of its own former members, Jones and Hankey), see Naylor, *A man and an institution*, pp. 274–7, 285–9. Copies of the Vincent–Baldwin typescript are in W. Baldwin papers, and the Brotherton Library archives, University of Leeds.

<sup>171</sup> Baldwin, *My father*, p. 115, for 'X'; Allen and Unwin report, Feb. 1955, and related material in W. Baldwin papers. Three other publishers had rejected the book, one also fearing 'promotional' problems. But the main difficulty was an unwieldy first draft, which Windham recast with advice from his author-cousins, Denis Mackail and Monica Baldwin, and encouragement from Davidson, Bassett, and J. R. M. Butler, the Cambridge historian, member of the Cabinet Office historical section, and son of Dr Butler of Harrow.

<sup>172</sup> W. Baldwin papers include a collection of cuttings, all 1956: see e.g. *Daily Express*, 19 Jan., and *New Statesman*, 20 Jan., for hostility; R. Churchill in *Truth*, 27 Jan.; Elliot in *Daily Telegraph*, 20 Jan., and *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 Feb., accepting the point about 1935; Pakenham in *Observer*, 22 Jan., and Ensor in *Sunday Times*, 29 Jan., for the other reactions.



Macmillan. Within Conservative opinion this was assisted by the efforts of Davidson, who distributed copies of Windham Baldwin's book to national and regional party officials and university Conservative societies, and later helped ensure a wide circulation for an admiring pamphlet on Baldwin by a free-lance Conservative journalist, protégé of Bryant, and former Chamberlainite, D. H. Barber.<sup>173</sup> Earlier certainties among intellectuals also started to yield as specialist historians of twentieth-century British politics began to emerge.

Robert Blake provides one register of these shifts. While working for Beaverbrook in the early 1950s, he wrote *Evening Standard* reviews of Young's and Somervell's books which accepted Churchill's verdict and much of Young's account: 'history', he wrote, would probably judge Baldwin as 'the most disastrous Prime Minister ... since ... Lord North'. He nevertheless thought Young's book poor and unscholarly, and realized the possibilities of following his own far-superior biography of Bonar Law with a major study of 'The age of Baldwin'. He was deterred when Beaverbrook declared that he was already engaged on a book with exactly that title, and refused Blake access to his hoard of political archives.<sup>174</sup> Once again Beaverbrook had a malign influence on Baldwin's reputation: although this work was never completed it delayed a full, expert, historical re-examination of his career. But in 1960 Blake did publish an influential essay on Baldwin, which used Windham Baldwin's biography – 'the only satisfactory portrait' of him – to produce a more favourable assessment. The worst of the *Guiltly men*–Churchill–Young accusations on rearmament were repudiated, and it was recognized, as Windham had suggested but no other commentator had noted, that as government records remained closed the 'full facts' were not yet available. Baldwin, argued Blake, had cleansed public life after the squalid dealings of Lloyd George (who in this respect now replaced Baldwin as the modern 'Lord North'), and created the modern 'one-nation' Conservatism that was being consolidated in the 1950s. Yet after removing the rearmament controversy from the core of the interpretation, Blake replaced it with elements stressed by Young and Jones: a half 'Celt' who embodied 'Englishness', a preoccupation with Lloyd George, and if not 'indolence' then a failure to try hard enough.<sup>175</sup>

The first of these – the notion of Baldwin's representativeness – was also offered by the first historians to write general histories of the interwar years.

<sup>173</sup> List, Dec. 1956, Davidson papers, 311; Davidson to W. Baldwin, 17 Dec. 1959, 14 Dec. 1960, W. Baldwin papers; D. H. Barber, *Stanley Baldwin: patriot statesman* (privately published, 1959), and see his autobiography, *Twenty years of free-lancing* (London, 1947).

<sup>174</sup> *Evening Standard*, 14 Nov. 1952, 25 Sept. 1953; Blake notes, 22 Sept. 1952, and Blake–Beaverbrook letters, Sept. 1955, Mar. 1956, Beaverbrook papers, C/43–5. It is not clear whether Beaverbrook had indeed started this book, or whether Blake gave him the idea. His assistants' research material remains in his papers, section G/5, but the only completed and published parts were *The Decline and Fall of Lloyd George* (London, 1963) and, posthumously, *The abdication of King Edward VIII* (London, 1966). Blake turned instead to the biography of Disraeli.

<sup>175</sup> R. Blake, 'Baldwin and the right', in J. Raymond, ed., *The Baldwin age* (London, 1960), pp. 25–65, and see R. Blake, *The Conservative party from Peel to Churchill* (London, 1970; 1972 edn), pp. 215–38.

Mowat and A. J. P. Taylor acquitted Baldwin of deceit and neglect, and acknowledged that he had strengths as well as weaknesses. Although they differed over whether he had aggravated (Mowat) or eased (Taylor) class bitterness in the 1920s, both sought to explain his dominance by placing him firmly in the context of his times. Baldwin no longer bore a special personal responsibility for the ills of the 1920s and 1930s. Rather, his significance was that he embodied and interpreted the mood of the British people at the time, a view which in some later accounts developed into a leading explanation of his political success.<sup>176</sup>

By the 1960s Baldwin was ceasing to be a subject of *political* controversy. Public figures with a personal stake in the *GUILTY MEN* and Churchillian interpretations were falling silent, and political life had moved on. Churchill's death in 1965 was particularly significant; once the aura of his living presence was removed and it was no longer a solecism to be sceptical about his own version of his career, his political opponents could seem less culpable. Baldwin was becoming a *historical* figure, and as Mowat's and Taylor's volumes showed, as historical investigation of interwar Britain proceeded it broadened into an examination both of many more individuals and of the wider structures – economic, social, diplomatic, and bureaucratic as well as party-political. This passage from politics into history was symbolized by commemorations of the centenary of Baldwin's birth in 1967: a House of Commons lunch chaired by the Speaker was attended and addressed by prominent politicians from all three parties,<sup>177</sup> and newspaper articles offered 're-appraisals' of him which concentrated much more on his domestic politics than on rearmament.<sup>178</sup> The discussion of his career became more properly historical with the adoption that same year of the 'thirty-year rule' on Public Record Office files, which was anticipated or followed shortly afterwards by the opening to historians of the papers of Baldwin and many of his associates, and by the publication of interwar political diaries and documented memoirs. There was soon, in Middlemas's and Barnes's biography, a life and times on the lines that Baldwin thought he had commissioned in 1945, followed by studies embedding his career in the histories of party, government, diplomacy, and policy, and able to reveal the 'full facts' on foreign and defence issues. Again, as in 1937, several interpretations of Baldwin's career became possible. Although much of this historical work retained a critical tone and older claims remained influential,

<sup>176</sup> C. L. Mowat, 'Baldwin restored?', *Journal of Modern History*, 27 (1955), pp. 169–74, and idem, *Britain between the wars*, esp. pp. 195–7, 553–6, 558, 660; A. J. P. Taylor, *British prime ministers and other essays*, ed. C. J. Wrigley (London, 1998), pp. 50–8 (1960 broadcast), and idem, *English history, 1914–1945* (Oxford, 1965), esp. pp. 205, 227, 236, 387. For comment on the general theme, see Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 8–9 and conclusion.

<sup>177</sup> The organizing committee included Windham Baldwin, the Davidsons, R. A. Butler, and Baldwin's former secretaries, Fry, Vincent, Dugdale, Duff, Neville Butler, and Geoffrey Lloyd. The main speakers were Edward Heath, Harold Macmillan, Roy Jenkins, and Jo Grimond: *Times*, 15 July 1967.

<sup>178</sup> R. Rhodes James, in *Times*, 14 July 1967, and C. Coote in *Daily Telegraph*, same date (contrasting with his criticisms when reviewing Young's book, *ibid.*, 14 Nov. 1952); P. Norman in *Sunday Times Magazine*, 30 July 1967, and a mellowed Attlee in *Observer Colour Supplement*, 6 Aug. 1967.

the verdicts were now more reasoned and measured. For historians the earlier hostile stereotype had gone, though it persisted as Baldwin's public reputation; the new feature was a gulf between the historical assessments and the popular myth. Nor did the legacy of political partisanship immediately disappear. When in the early 1980s several Conservative MPs campaigned for a statue of Baldwin to be placed in the House of Commons lobby, it was blocked by Michael Foot, now Labour party leader but still brandishing *Guilty men*. In the 1990s, however, even this political residue had dissolved: not only a Conservative prime minister but even his Labour successor could appeal to Baldwin as an exemplar of the politics of social reconciliation.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Williamson, *Baldwin*, pp. 6, 8.