

# ARCHIVES

## Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

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The Bodleian Library's Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts holds a large number of modern political collections dating from 1840 to the present day, including many generated by leading figures of the Liberal Party. Principal among these are the private papers of the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Clarendon (1800–70) and his wife, Katherine, Lady Clarendon (d. 1874), Lord Kimberley (1826–1902), Lord Bryce (1838–1922), Sir William Harcourt (1827–1904) and his son Lewis (later Lord) Harcourt (1863–1922) and the papers of John (later) Lord Morley (1838–1923). This last collection is one of our recent acquisitions.

The papers of Liberal politician and man of letters, John Morley, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount of Blackburn (1838–1923), provide valuable insight into the career of arguably one of the last great Liberals of the Gladstone era. Morley held deep reservations about his papers being used for future academic purpose. Their preservation can largely be attributed to liberal scholar and economist, F.W. Hirst, whose papers are also held in the Library.

The collection focuses largely on Morley's political career, as well as his later literary work, such as his authoritative *Life of Gladstone* (1903). Morley's diaries, 1882–96, throw light on his years as Liberal MP for Newcastle-

on-Tyne (alongside Joseph Cowen) and more crucially Morley's time as Chief Secretary of State for Ireland (1886, 1892–95). Most notable alongside his surviving general correspondence, c.1865–1921, are correspondence and subject files concerning Ireland and his tenure as Secretary of State for India (1905–10). Also of particular interest are papers relating to Morley's resignation (whilst Lord President of the Council) from the cabinet of the last Liberal government under Asquith in August 1914, over Britain's entry into World War One.

Moving further into the twentieth century, there are the private papers of Augustine Birrell (1850–1933), the Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith, later 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Oxford and Asquith (1852–1928), his second wife Margot Asquith, Countess of Oxford and Asquith (for electronic catalogues see [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/electres.html](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/electres.html)); Asquith's elder daughter, Lady Violet Bonham Carter, a leading Liberal figure in her own right, and a fellow member of the Liberal Party organisation, the journalist Honor Balfour (1912–2001) member of the Liberal Party ginger group and opponent of the wartime truce who contested Darwin in the 1943 by-election and again in the 1945 general election.

Asquith's large archive is overwhelmingly concerned with his political career (he

destroyed most of his private correspondence) but fortunately both the letters he wrote to Venetia Stanley (later Mrs Montagu) from 1910 to 1915 – key years in his premiership – and those he wrote to her sister Sylvia, the future Mrs Henley, from 1915 to 1919, were kept by their recipients and are now also part of the Library's collections.

The papers of Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Baroness Asquith of Yarnbury (1887–1969) provide an overview of a committed lifelong member of the Liberal Party. As H.H. Asquith's elder daughter, family life put her right at the very heart of politics during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and she continued to work for the party until her death in 1969. From an early age she spoke on the election platform for her father, most notably at the Paisley by-election in 1920, and she herself stood as the unsuccessful candidate for Wells in 1945 and Colne Valley in 1951. Her elder son Mark won the Torrington by-election in 1958. The papers in the Bodleian Library reflect these events, together with draft notes for most of the speeches and broadcasts that she made. Lady Violet's general and family correspondence sheds light on many topics of the day and includes, among others, letters from her son-in-law Jo Grimond, leader of the Liberal Party 1956–67. There is also an interesting sequence of scrapbooks containing both political and personal ephemera. The collection contains further papers of H.H. Asquith with correspondence and papers relating to Liberal Party Central Office, 1917–26.

Among other holdings are the papers of two academic figures who were prominent in national political

life: Gilbert Murray (1866–1957), and H.A.L. Fisher (1865–1940) whose tenure as President of the Board of Education saw the introduction of the 1918 Education Act. Murray's vast collection (microfilmed for preservation reasons) includes some material on the Liberal Party but much larger amounts describe his involvement with the League of Nations organisations and the United Nations, especially UNESCO. His stand on the Suez issue is well documented. Also active in public life around this time were Sir John (later Lord) Simon (1873–1954) – his papers were enhanced a few years ago by a further donation of material which sheds new light on his early years. Unlike Simon, Sir Donald Maclean (1864–1932) left relatively few papers but this small collection, which dates from 1906 to 1932, includes material concerning not only the Liberal Party but also Ireland, Irish Home Rule and British foreign policy.

Several of the Bodleian's manuscript catalogues now appear online. Details may be found at [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/electres.html](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/electres.html). Information relating specifically to the modern political collections is at [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/depts/scwmss/modpol](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/depts/scwmss/modpol).

Readers wishing to consult the collections must have a valid reader's card entitling them to use manuscript material. Application forms for admission are available from the Admissions Office, The Bodleian Library, Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BG. Further details are available at [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/modpol/access.htm](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/modpol/access.htm). Readers are advised to contact the Modern Papers Reading Room ahead of their visit (01865 277048 or email: [modern.papers@bodley.ox.ac.uk](mailto:modern.papers@bodley.ox.ac.uk)).