

Liberalism and the Great War

Alan Mumford analyses Winston Churchill's and David Lloyd George's volumes on the First World War.

Churchill and Lloyd George: Liberalism



Winston Churchill
(1874–1965) and
David Lloyd George
(1863–1945)

HISTORIANS AND BIOGRAPHERS have already reviewed the extent to which the volumes written by Churchill and Lloyd George about the First World War are accurate, fair and plausible in respect of their views on strategy and its implementation. This article,

however, is concerned with two issues not written about previously: questions about liberalism and authorship. First, in the four volumes of Churchill's *The World Crisis* (*The Aftermath* is not considered here) and Lloyd George's six-volume *War Memoirs*, is entry into the war justified

...al authors on the First World War?

by reference to Liberal values?¹ And, later, was their conduct during the war as described in their books responsive to those values? Second, were they the sole, main or only part authors? Robbins claimed that Lloyd George did not write the *Memoirs*: ‘though he embellished them at suitable intervals’² (a claim which was the cause of the research for this article). Does Churchill’s reliance on others make him less the author?

Churchill and Lloyd George in the Liberal government 1905–1914

Churchill moved from the Conservative Party to the Liberals in 1904 largely because of his adherence to free trade, and as a minister he was interventionist on social issues, introducing labour exchanges, and he started work on unemployment insurance. At the Home Office later, he brought in a better balance between crime and punishment. From 1911 his focus was on equipping the navy. Lloyd George was even more interventionist in helping the less well off, through insurance, old age pensions and redistributionist budgets. The two of them were leaders of a particular strand of Liberalism: they were extremely vocal partisans on the 1909 Budget and the House of Lords, yet both were engaged in the abortive attempt in 1910 to agree a coalition to avoid a constitutional crisis.

Entry into the war

Both emphasised the significance of the German invasion of Belgium – Churchill as a treaty obligation, Lloyd George also as a ‘little country’ moral case. Churchill had no doubts about entering the struggle, and eagerly sought to persuade Lloyd George to join him. He emphasised their potential contribution on social policy.

There was a significant difference in their focus as the war started. Churchill’s oral belligerence

matched his interest in directing a major part of armed action – through the navy. Lloyd George had no such direct involvement – his energy was devoted to managing the financial consequences.

Did Lloyd George and Churchill carry Liberalism into the war?

Biographers have not paid attention to the extent to which Lloyd George and Churchill were proponents of Liberalism during the First World War. Lloyd George’s famous speech at Queen’s Hall on 19 September 1914 continued to give emphasis to defending Belgium as a treaty obligation but also as a small country. This was really the only – and only by inference – reference to Liberal principles. (Strangely he did not refer to this speech in his *War Memoirs*.) Conscriptio, of which Lloyd George was an early and pressing advocate, was initially unacceptable, especially to many Liberals. It was gradually pushed through the coalition cabinet with Conservative encouragement but opposed by Liberals McKenna, Runciman and Simon. Simon opposed it as conflicting with Liberal principles, and resigned; McKenna opposed it as a matter of practicality – removing workers from industry – and stayed.

Lloyd George’s strength and the reason for his eventual elevation to prime minister was that he was – and, perhaps more importantly, was seen to be – a vigorous activist. His successes in the war were based on his personality and his drive, not on any pursuit of Liberal ideals. However, he acted as a Liberal on domestic issues of significance. He was particularly suited as he had tried before the war to resolve disputes between workers and employers, and continued to give special attention to these, for example over wages and accepting women into ‘men’s jobs’. Asquith also gave him the task of trying to negotiate a peaceful settlement in Ireland in 1916. These negotiations

Biographers have not paid attention to the extent to which Lloyd George and Churchill were proponents of Liberalism during the First World War.

Churchill and Lloyd George: Liberal authors on the First World War?

at home and in Ireland were also adherent to Liberal principles.

Other Liberal interests are featured in his *War Memoirs*. Analysis of the index to the six-volume version of his *War Memoirs* shows seventeen lines of references to trade unions, and twenty-two to what was happening in the Liberal Party. There were thirteen lines on the role of women and suffrage, and twenty on conscription. There are nine lines of references to his attempt to tackle the problems in industry caused by alcohol. He wrote fully about the creation of Fisher's Education Act – very much a Liberal measure. However, he supported the Defence of the Realm Act, which conflicted with Liberal sensitivities about civil liberties; and he made no reference to press censorship, which also was in conflict with traditional Liberal values.

It is illuminating to compare the attention paid in Churchill's *Memoirs* to domestic and specifically Liberal issues with those identified by Lloyd George. There is no reference to the problems which gained Lloyd George's attention as cabinet minister and prime minister. Churchill's world crisis is a history of activity by the navy and the army – understandable in part because of his cabinet responsibilities but indicative of his lack of interest in Liberalism during the war. He wrote a little about women – as munitions workers not as potential voters. There is no indication once the war was in progress that he tried to follow through his suggestion in August 1914 that he and Lloyd George could implement a wide social policy. Neither of them refers to the major break in the Liberal principle of free trade made by McKenna in September 1915 when he placed import duties on 'luxury goods'.

Churchill, in contrast to Lloyd George, was excited at the prospect of, and in the early days the actuality of, war. Margot Asquith recorded him in January 1915: 'I would not be out of this glorious, delicious war for anything the world could give me.' He added, 'I say don't repeat that I said the word delicious – you know what I mean.'³

Lloyd George had none of Churchill's direct experience of war and indeed was a physical coward when it came to direct involvement. They both believed that slaughter on the Western Front was unacceptable because it was unsuccessful. So they both pursued the idea of different venues for battles. But this was imaginative minds attempting to produce a different solution, not Liberals trying to produce a Liberal answer.

Their Liberalism after 1918

Lloyd George and Asquith led two Liberal parties after 1918. Lloyd George, reliant on Conservative MP's, increasingly sought to create a new centre party, and his government had few Liberal credits, although his Liberalism was evident in some aspects of the Peace Treaty of 1919. Liberal reunion over free trade in 1923 did not lead to a

It is illuminating to compare the attention paid in Churchill's *Memoirs* to domestic and specifically Liberal issues with those identified by Lloyd George. There is no reference to the problems which gained Lloyd George's attention as cabinet minister and prime minister.

united party with a distinct Liberal message. But gradually he decided to return to interventionist Liberalism expressed in the 'We can conquer unemployment' manifesto for the 1929 general election. His big new ideas produced a small number of Liberal MPs.

Incapacitated through ill health and unable to participate in the 1931 general election, Lloyd George gave up leadership of the Liberals and effectively any hope of having a major role in government again. This provided the occasion for him to write his *War Memoirs*, still a Liberal.

Churchill was re-elected as a Liberal, supporting Lloyd George, in 1918 but lost the 1922 general election. Thereafter he was a political chameleon. He fought the 1923 general election as a Liberal, but lost. He stood again quickly for the Abbey Division of Westminster as an 'Independent and Anti-Socialist', but lost to a Conservative. In the general election of 1924 he gave his full support to the Conservative Party, and stood and won as a Constitutionalist without a Conservative opponent. Baldwin surprisingly appointed him as chancellor of the exchequer in the government he formed and Churchill re-joined the Conservative Party. The only threads of Liberalism as chancellor were continued adherence to retention of free trade for industrial policy, a new pension scheme for widows and orphans and a constant search for reductions in expenditure, a return to Gladstonian verities. He started major work on *The World Crisis* while still a Liberal in 1920, but completed it as he retreated from the Liberal Party. The work expressed a Churchillian rather than a Liberal or Conservative view.

Lloyd George and Churchill – their experience as writers

The foregoing review provides the context within which Churchill and Lloyd George wrote their memoirs, and the extent to which what they wrote was affected by their behaviour and beliefs about Liberalism. But how were the books written?

There was a major difference in the literary experience of Churchill and Lloyd George. Churchill made considerable sums of money from his journalism. He had published his first book in 1898 – largely drawn from the articles he wrote for the *Daily Telegraph* as an observer of a campaign in Northern India. Within a year he had published a further two volumes about the war in the Sudan. These were more substantial efforts which gave much more context and history. The following two books involved his own direct experience during the Boer War – and especially his capture and escape. The next stage of his development as an author (putting aside his one novel) was the work he did over three years on a life of his father, Lord Randolph, published in January 1906. The book received generally favourable reviews, but the most significant

comment about it in terms of discussing his authorship of *The World Crisis* is that of Roy Jenkins: 'He had not yet taken to his later habits of dictation and employing research assistants. The manuscript of Lord Randolph Churchill is all in his own hand, and the work on the documents was also done by himself.'⁴

If we put aside experiences at school, the first relevant experience for Lloyd George was in writing articles as a young lawyer and prospective politician in Wales. He wrote for local Welsh papers in Welsh. When he moved to London as an MP he wrote articles mainly for Liberal-oriented daily newspapers in London and Manchester. They put his views over, gained attention, and earned money, important for him. His first book, *Is It Peace?*, was published after leaving the premiership.⁵ It reprinted unchanged his journalism of that time. After he dropped his idea of writing his *War Memoirs* in 1924 (see later), his next effort was a small book on *The Truth about Reparations and War Debt*, published in 1932.⁶ The absence for fourteen years of any significant literary work on his experience during the First World War can be explained as being due to recreating the Liberal Party and to his ability to earn very large sums of money from his journalism.

Churchill as author of *The World Crisis*

In the view of Malcolm Muggeridge, at least, '*The World Crisis* ... must be considered, in a sense, the production of a committee rather than of an individual author.'⁷

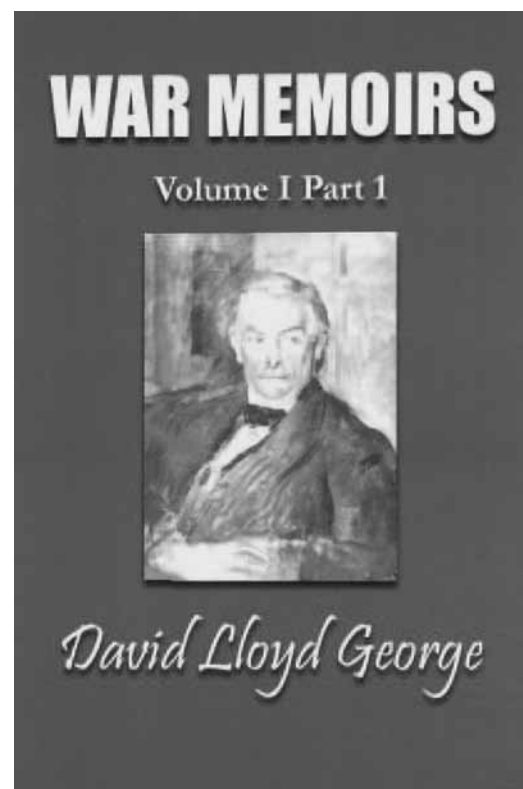
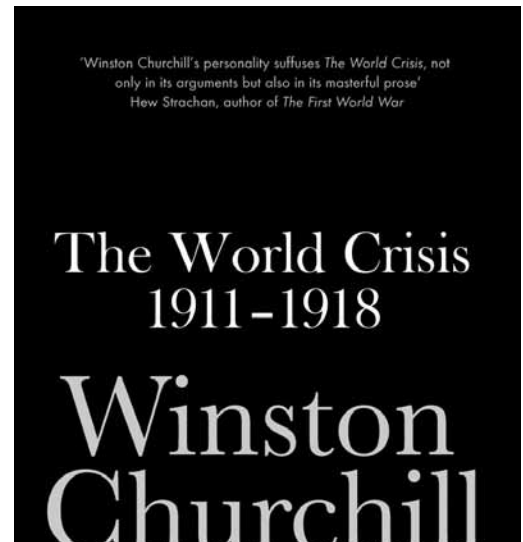
When were the volumes written?

At least from the time of the failure of the Dardanelles Campaign, Churchill had wanted to publish his account. The memorandum he produced for the cabinet in 1915, about the Dardanelles, was largely incorporated eventually in *The World Crisis*. Serious consideration of a more general memoir started in November 1919. Detailed preparation occurred in 1920, when he agreed contracts for the volumes and for serialisation in *The Times*, and committed to having the book ready by December 1922. By January 1921 he said he had written a great part of the first volume. This work was undertaken relatively close to the events he was describing. When he lost office and his seat in 1922, he was free to devote more time to writing. He spent six months in the South of France and claimed to have produced in one period more than 20,000 words in six days of writing. He had completed much of the writing by the time he was appointed as chancellor of the exchequer in 1924, although he continued to work on it until it was completed in 1925.

Motivations

Churchill's earlier books had been written because he enjoyed writing and saw it as a way of establishing himself as a public figure. Initially he had

proposed to write the book solely about his time as First Lord of the Admiralty, but this was soon extended into a more general survey. His bitter defensiveness over the Dardanelles was the prime motivator when he started in 1919. The balance of motivation changed after 1922 when he lost the ministerial salary of £5,000 a year he had received for most of the time since 1910. Lough has shown that his books and journalism were essential as a means of supporting his large scale over-spending.⁸



Winston Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911-1918* (abridged, one-volume version, Penguin, 2007)

David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs, Vol. I Part 1* (this version: Simon Publications, 1943)

The focus on the Dardenelles remained, so that around 242 pages out of 2,150 pages were devoted to it. His ego was certainly involved, captured memorably in A. J. Balfour's comment, 'I am immersed in Winston's autobiography *The World Crisis* disguised as a history of the universe.'⁹ Churchill described his own motivation in volume I. He referred to many other accounts already published, offering what he thought to be incorrect views about events. So, 'In all these circumstances I felt it both my right and my duty to set forth the manner in which I endeavoured to discharge my share in these hazardous responsibilities. In doing so I have adhered to certain strict rules. I have made no statement of fact relating to Naval operations or Admiralty business, on which I do not possess an unimpeachable documentary proof.'¹⁰ However, 'I must therefore at the outset disclaim the position of the historian. It is not for me with my record and special point of view to promise a final conclusion. ... I present it as a contribution to history of which note should be taken with other accounts.'¹¹

How was The World Crisis written?

Churchill's first books on India and Africa were written by hand as was his biography of his father, Lord Randolph Churchill. He did his own research on this: he was given access to documents at Blenheim Palace, and had some help from his brother. *The World Crisis* was different in two respects. The material was developed around documents and largely dictated to shorthand writers, and although he organised research for it he depended this time on much more significant help from a number of people, such as Admiral Thomas Jackson on naval issues and General James Edmunds on the army.

He had not kept a diary but had retained a lot of documents. He pursued more material from ex-colleagues and departments. In his introduction to the two-volume abridgement, Churchill says, 'the key documents are reprinted in their integrity' (sic).¹² (But see Prior on this in *Aftermath* later.)

In early drafts he wrote (in red ink) material around the documents which he was using in the text. The narrative sections were usually dictated to a shorthand writer who had worked for him in the Admiralty and continued with Churchill for four years after 1918.

In some areas the kind of detailed briefing notes provided for him became incorporated in drafts for the final chapters. Churchill wrote to Admiral Jackson, setting out his process for producing a draft: 'My habit is to dictate in the first instance what I have in my mind on the subject and a body of argument which I believe is substantially true and in correct proportion: and this I hope may be found to be the case as far as possible.'⁷ In addition to correcting and perhaps adding to the account he had drafted, he wanted any further suggestions for improving the text.¹³

Prior writes of an extreme example, 'unlike any of the other wartime chapters of *The World Crisis*, Churchill's final chapter on the U Boat War is substantially based on the work of one of his naval advisers, and Churchill described his use of it: "I have rewritten your excellent account in the more highly coloured and less technical style suited to the lay reader."¹⁴

One person who helped, perhaps surprisingly, was Haig, who gave him comments and maybe even some papers. Haig actually welcomed the eventual product. Churchill's original draft of volume I contained more criticisms of Haig than appeared in the final version, after Haig's comments. He also changed his account of the issue about whether reinforcements were held back in 1918: his published version agreed with Haig's recollections not those of Lloyd George. Prior provides another example of a change in a draft. He removed criticism of Bonar Law, perhaps because by 1922 he was leaning towards a rapprochement with the Conservative Party.

A different kind of help was given by Eddie Marsh, who was Churchill's civil service private secretary in the Colonial Office. Marsh advised on grammar and words. 'In one of *The World Crisis* volumes he used a coinage of his own 'choate' to signify the opposite of inchoate. I knew quite well that the word had no right to exist and it was my clear duty to warn him; but I thought it expressive and pleasing ... so I let it pass; and though he forgave me, I have never forgiven myself for the obloquy it brought on his head.'¹⁵

In 1922 Marsh wrote to Churchill, 'You are very free with your commas.' Churchill replied, 'I always reduce them to a minimum, and use "and" or an "or" as a substitute not as an addition. Let us argue it out.'¹⁶ Marsh who remained a civil servant until 1937, continued with this kind of assistance for Churchill.

When Churchill started writing *The World Crisis*, and particularly when he went to France for six months, he devoted ordinary working hours to his writing. He may have worked also at nights; as he certainly did on later books, dictating to his forbearing secretaries. Unfortunately, we have no direct evidence from secretaries who worked on *The World Crisis*.

The question of what proportion of words in the eventual volumes were (apart from the documents) written by Churchill as compared with words presented to him by experts and assistants is not clear. But Muggerridge's claim that *The World Crisis* was the work of a committee is clearly untrue. Apart from any other evidence it is impossible to imagine any individual or groups carrying out prolonged mimicry throughout four lengthy volumes. What can be said with certainty is that the habits of politicians then, and of politician authors, was substantially different from those with which we are familiar today. Politicians nowadays deliver speeches and books drafted and redrafted by people who are explicitly

His ego was certainly involved, captured memorably in A. J. Balfour's comment, 'I am immersed in Winston's autobiography *The World Crisis* disguised as a history of the universe'.

employed to do that. (An ex-cabinet minister I interviewed a few years ago said, when I pointed out an error in his autobiography, 'But I read every word of it after it was written'.)

What was produced

The initial production was four volumes of *The World Crisis*, followed by a fifth, *The Aftermath*, which dealt with events after the war. In 1931 an abridged two-volume version with very few changes was published. Churchill in his preface to that version said that 'I have not found it necessary to alter in any material way the facts and foundations of the story, nor the conclusions which I drew from them.' He had 'pruned a mass of technical detail and some personal justification.'¹⁷ This also appeared as a paperback in 2007.

Clearance

Politicians had been allowed to take their copies of their personal papers when they left their ministerial jobs. Hankey, as cabinet secretary from 1916, attempted to impose a view that such papers and other records of discussion were cabinet secrets not to be revealed and that no one was entitled to make public use of cabinet documents without the permission of the king. When Churchill published the first volume in 1923, his defence in using these papers was that official sources had been used in the memoirs of admirals and field marshals and he was entitled to provide a different view. Lloyd George had argued in favour of the publication of official papers: 'There is such a thing as fair play even when politicians are attacked.'¹⁸

When there was an attempt in 1934, ten years after *The World Crisis* but now after Lloyd George's memoirs, to require the return of official papers to the official archives, Churchill argued that they were his personal possession and therefore did not need to be returned.

Immediate reviews

Reviews of volume I were generally favourable. The *New Statesman* thought the book was a vindication of Churchill's actions at the Admiralty and though 'remarkably egotistical' was 'honest'. Margot Asquith's personal letter to him made the remarkable claim that she 'started and finished it in a night'. The tone of some reviews changed for the second volume. *The Times* criticised him 'for distorting documents and deploying undue censure in his account of the Dardanelles'.¹⁹ A particularly interesting review was that of J. M. Keynes who wrote that Churchill 'pursues no vendetta, and shows no malice'. He saw it as 'a tractate against war – more effective than the work of a pacifist could be'.²⁰

General Maurice reviewed his second volume and said that it differed from the first: where 'he was brilliant and generous, he is in this second volume querulous and mean.' Maurice was particularly bothered by 'nauseating' attacks on

generals.²¹ In the UK, the most detailed criticisms appeared in a book by Colonel the Lord Sydenham. Although he liked the literary style, 'many of the conclusions he has formed are inaccurate and the theories he has formulated unsound.'²²

Rose writes that American reviews were mostly positive, but there were some telling criticisms. The reviewer in the *American Historical Review* took the view that the book was readable for the layman but that the professional historian would have a different opinion. He also 'detailed Churchill's tendency to blame others for his own failures'.²³

One potential reviewer is absent from this survey. There is nothing in the diaries of Frances Stevenson or A. J. Sylvester to show that Lloyd George read *The World Crisis* when it was published. But he did so when he prepared to write his *War Memoirs* in 1931.

Lloyd George as author of his *War Memoirs*

Robbins' extraordinary claim that Lloyd George did not write the memoirs ignored the biographies (Thomson, Owen, Rowland) and the diaries of Frances Stevenson and A. J. Sylvester which showed how much Lloyd George wrote or dictated. Those diaries give us so much more information on Lloyd George's method of working and his productivity than is available for Churchill.

Motivations for writing the memoirs

Lloyd George started preparations for his memoirs on the war in 1922 and wrote a chapter dealing with the events of 4 August 1914. By 1922 he had been frustrated in his attempt to form a new political party, had developed for a time the ambition to be the editor of *The Times* and claimed to be exhausted by his political work. The memoirs became a serious proposition when he secured a contract for publication with American publishers and associated serialisation in America and the UK. News that he would receive £90,000 for this created a storm and on 28 August 1922 a statement was issued for him which said that he would give the money derived from the book to charities connected with the relief of suffering caused by the war. That Lloyd George, even with his level of energy, could have presumed he could write this book at the same time as being prime minister suggests that he had no idea then of the work that would be required. In fact, when no longer prime minister he took on remunerative journalism. He gave up work on the memoirs entirely in 1924, when he was fully reactivated as a Liberal leader. In 1922 the money motivation may have been quite strong. He certainly expressed pleasure as monetary offers progressively increased. It should be remembered that there was not then a pension for prime ministers.

When he started work again in 1932 he was no longer leader of the Liberal Party, which freed up

A particularly interesting review was that of J. M. Keynes who wrote that Churchill 'pursues no vendetta, and shows no malice'. He saw it as 'a tractate against war – more effective than the work of a pacifist could be'.

Churchill and Lloyd George: Liberal authors on the First World War?

his time. It is of interest to assess whether or to what extent his decision to write the *War Memoirs* was influenced by Churchill's *The World Crisis*. He wrote to Frances Stevenson about Churchill's effort, on 26 November 1931: 'I am reading Winston's Crisis. Brilliantly written – but too much apologia to be of general value. How he foresaw everything and was prepared etc. I could tell another tale about his shells, mines and torpedoes.'²⁴ Later he wrote, 'I have read marked and annotated Winston's four volumes. You might have thought the central figure throughout was WSC himself. He is not always fair to me.'²⁵

A factor in 1932 was that memoirs by participants or friends of participants during the war had emerged with views about the war which were contrary to those which Lloyd George held, and some of which in his view were factually inaccurate. A need to re-establish what he regarded as his proper reputation in relation to his contribution in successfully fighting the war was another element – self-justification.

In the preface to volume I he justified the memoirs, asserting that all the dominant personalities of the war had told their tale. (He forgot President Wilson.) He claimed to be giving evidence – but in some places it is clearly the case for the prosecution. 'I regret more than words can express the necessity for telling the bare facts of our bloodstained stagger to victory. But I have to tell them or leave unchallenged the supremacy of misleading and therefore dangerous illusions.'²⁶ (It is not obvious that he regretted having to comment on Haig!)

The first volume appeared in September 1933, and succeeding volumes appeared until the final volume was published in 1936. In addition, he worked on a two-volume abridged version in 1937, published in 1938.

The process of writing

Lloyd George kept no diary and began writing the *War Memoirs* much later than Churchill. There were no cabinet minutes until LG became prime minister in December 1916. Sylvester ensured that the large collection of official papers LG held at Churt, his Surrey house, were indexed by two clerks from the Cabinet Office, which made later clearance by Hankey easier.

He was relatively inactive in the House of Commons after 1931, and his last significant effort to create public support for his ideas, particularly on unemployment in 1935, did not seriously delay the production of his last volume. Lloyd George wrote by hand, and also dictated drafts.

Frances Stevenson and Sylvester comment in their diaries on the process. Frances records a discussion in February 1934 'of the alternative merits of writing in one's own handwriting as against dictating.'²⁷ Unfortunately she does not offer a conclusion!

Most biographies have used one source (Lockhart) from 1933 on how Lloyd George produced

drafts: 'The manuscript was written in bed between the hours of five and eight am,' ... all in 'A stumpy pencil which he never sharpens'. 'He owes too, something to his two typists who alone of living mortals can decipher his manuscript'.²⁸ One biographer adds, 'What he had written would be typed and he would work over it again until about eleven thirty. He worked again after tea but not after dinner.'²⁹

A. J. Sylvester, his principal private secretary, gives a different account when work started on 20 September 1932. 'He suddenly rushed in to see me, and suddenly dictated the very first words of his war memoirs, amounting to some 400 words. In the evening he dictated just under 3,000.'³⁰ On 20 January 1933 'he remarked to me that he was fitter mentally and physically now than before the operations. Previously he could never have done what he was now doing in the way of writing his book. He had started in August – incidentally when everybody else had been about to go on holiday – and finished on 1st December. During that time, he had written 230,000 words.'³¹

Drafts were produced and sent to others for comment. Those comments sometimes influenced what was finally produced, depending particularly on how strongly LG held his original view, sometimes in defiance of the comments offered.

A brilliantly evocative, different picture of how the volumes were written is provided by Fraser.

His method of composition was to write 10 or 15 pages of extremely incisive and opinionated commentary unsupported by any sources, to launch each chapter. ... The skilful welding of Lloyd George's rousing tirades, brilliant character sketches and ever present sense of the appropriate shades of innuendo with the tirelessly redrafted documentary framework provided by Thomson and Stevenson. He would redraft ineffectual passages in briefs prepared for him by Thomson and would insert pungent sentences, often slashing at some particular *bête noire* in the high command or leadership.³²

However, examination by this author of the Lloyd George papers quoted by Fraser do not provide evidence for this colourful description.

Although Lockhart said most of the writing was done at Churt, in fact a great deal was written during trips abroad, to Portugal, Morocco, Jamaica: 230,000 words were produced in Portugal in January 1934 (on a family holiday). In January 1936 LG was in Marrakech and wrote 160,000 words in six weeks – in round figures 4,000 words a day on average. 'On one or two days however he had done nothing because he had been travelling so on the other days he had written, in his own hand, as many as 10,000 words.'³³ (This does seem a high figure.)

The Lloyd George papers in the parliamentary archives provide further direct proof on the issue

He wrote to Frances Stevenson about Churchill's effort, on 26 November 1931: 'I am reading Winston's Crisis. Brilliantly written – but too much apologia to be of general value. How he foresaw everything and was prepared etc. I could tell another tale about his shells, mines and torpedoes.'

of how much of the material was actually handwritten by him. The archive is incomplete – there is no way of knowing what was not kept. There are a few typewritten draft chapters, and most of these seem to be the final draft – which does not clarify what he had originally produced. However, a handwritten description of Asquith³⁴ is the verbatim version of what was finally published, as is a draft on the Politics of the War,³⁵ also reproduced in the printed version. Even more illuminating in terms of how much LG actually wrote are notebooks covering less exciting commentary: one handwritten in Jamaica in January 1936 covers 100 pages. These are in perfectly legible writing – some other material is indeed written in a thick pencil difficult to read.

The helpers

The early focus of this article was on the presence or absence of Liberal policies or values in the Lloyd George/Churchill volumes. Frances Stevenson and A. J. Sylvester were closely attached to Lloyd George and supportive of his ideas – but there is no indication that they influenced content at all. The two people who helped most on content, Hankey and Liddell Hart do not reveal themselves in their comments to be interested in Liberal issues.

When he began to prepare to write his memoirs in 1922 he took on Major General Swinton to find material for him and comment on the technical, particularly military aspects on which he was writing; Swinton was to be paid £2000. Swinton completed a set of chapters by 1925 covering the whole war, some of which were used in the *War Memoirs*. His chapter on the financial crisis stands practically unaltered, apart from minor editorial changes and some characteristic anecdotes about Lord Cunliffe and Lord Rothschild.

General Edmunds of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, who had helped Churchill on *The World Crisis*, also helped. Liddell Hart was however the main military expert throughout all the volumes. Specific advice on naval matters was received from Admiral Richmond, and also from a number of ex-governmental colleagues and others with specific knowledge.

It is clear that, once the *War Memoirs* were properly underway in 1932, there were three people working directly on producing material for him: Frances Stevenson, A. J. Sylvester and Malcolm Thomson. (Churchill had no equivalent helpers of this kind on his staff.)

Frances' diaries tell us when work started and how many words Lloyd George had written or dictated. Her involvement with the *War Memoirs* started before LG left for Ceylon in 1931, when she and Malcolm Thomson prepared material for the first volume. On 29 March 1934 Frances Stevenson reports that there was trouble over the final draft of his book. He was 'incapable of achieving anything without reducing all around

him to nervous wrecks.'³⁶ In her autobiography, she noted: 'My own copy of the Memoirs is inscribed on the flyleaf in LG's hand writing "To Frances, without whose sympathetic help and understanding I could not have carried through the burden of the terrible tasks whose stories are related in these volumes. D Lloyd George".'³⁷ (The formal signature is interesting – not David, D or Taid.) Lloyd George used an extract from her diary for 19 October 1915, but said it was a note made by a secretary. He also quoted from her diary for 30 November 1915, pretending on this occasion that it was part of something he himself had written.

Sylvester interviewed people and sorted out papers. He complained that he was the only person who was not getting anything extra for work on the book (unlike Frances and one other person, presumably Thomson). He made a further bitter comment later when LG said 'JT (Davies) and Frances are the only people who know the papers' which is absolute balls. Frances only knows the papers when they are asked for by him and then they are only there because they were sent there by me from London. I said nothing, but thought a lot.'³⁸ There are far more references by Sylvester to the detail of Lloyd George's work on the *War Memoirs* than Frances makes in her diaries. Sylvester needed to record for at least his own satisfaction the extent to which he contributed, whereas Frances had no doubt how important she was to Lloyd George, and was less involved in the detail.

A number of people were asked to comment, including LG's brother William who was upset by LG's attacks on Sir Edward Grey, foreign secretary between 1905 and 1916. LG responded that Grey 'was quite futile in any enterprise that demanded decision and energy', but 'I made certain alterations in my draft and I send it along to you and I shall be very glad if you would give me your opinion'.³⁹

Hankey, cabinet secretary during and since the war, was a major influence. He had been the prime mover in trying to prevent Churchill's use of official documents for *The World Crisis*, and had initiated the discussion of the proposed rule about the use of such papers. However, by 1933 he had given up the attempt to control the use of papers, although he occasionally suggested there were serious reasons for deleting passages which could affect the conduct of government. In fact, Lloyd George had access to more material than Churchill in 1923. So far from preventing the use of cabinet papers Hankey actually facilitated it by opening the way for Sylvester to review material not already in Lloyd George's own files. His second role was to correct any factual mistakes, on which Lloyd George generally gave way.

Hankey prepared notes on personalities, issues and policies, and his third and most delicate role was to try and get some of the criticisms of other people toned down, both because he sometimes thought such criticisms unfair but also because,

On 29 March 1934 Frances Stevenson reports that there was trouble over the final draft of his book. He was 'incapable of achieving anything without reducing all around him to nervous wrecks.'

Churchill and Lloyd George: Liberal authors on the First World War?

he said, the criticisms sometimes reflected badly through their exaggerated nature on Lloyd George's own judgement. He wrote (on pink paper!) that the attacks on personalities were sometimes too strong – such as about Churchill – and the acerbities were toned down. The vitriol about generals was also diluted – but not about Haig.

Hankey had two motivations for involvement. First he wanted to get a more accurate history of the First World War than that provided so far by other participants. The second was his strong belief in Lloyd George's virtues as a war leader.

The role of Captain Basil Liddell Hart was wide ranging. After several conversations with LG about various military personalities and actions, he was approached in April 1933 (by Hankey) to see if he would take on the task of vetting LG's *War Memoirs*, and was delighted to accept. He left the decision on a fee to Lloyd George and does not tell us what fee was agreed for his work on this and later volumes.

He was sent drafts and returned them with his comments and then went to discuss those comments with Lloyd George. 'Its presentation in final form was his own, but I saw so much of the process of composition at close quarters, over several years, as to appreciate that it deviated far less from the trend of the evidence than most of the memoirs produced by statesmen and soldiers, while providing a much more solid basis of factual evidence on the great decisions.³⁰ If they had arguments, they were usually about the manner of presentation rather than on the main strategic issues. 'I remember him standing on the staircase at Bron-y-de, and shouting down at me "who is writing these memoirs – you or I?"³¹ Hart reports an occasion where Lloyd George had demolished a point of view presented in John Buchan's book about the First World War but continued the demolition job long after it was necessary. Hart's suggestion that this should be reduced in length was supported by Megan Lloyd George who was also present. Passages were cut in the final version. There was much more scrutiny by Hankey, Hart and others of drafts of the *War Memoirs* than Churchill received for *The World Crisis*; comments went to Lloyd George who decided what to do with them. Together with the detailed record by his secretaries of his direct dictation and writing, it is clear Lloyd George was indeed the author.

Clearance

There had been no precedent for Churchill's use of official papers for *The World Crisis*. The precedent he set for Lloyd George was partial in the sense that Churchill was a cabinet minister whereas Lloyd George was prime minister.

Both Churchill and Lloyd George took with them and quoted extensively from minutes, memoranda and telegrams and other documents. In January 1922 the cabinet reversed its previous decision and allowed ministers to 'indicate their

actions against misrepresentation by publishing the necessary documents'. The proviso was that no one was entitled to make public use of cabinet documents without the permission of the king. The general point about including direct quotations was stated in principle eventually by Ramsay MacDonald as prime minister – that access to records was fine but verbatim public quotation of cabinet minutes was not justified. Lloyd George slid round this by making them look less like direct quotations. The arrangement became that Baldwin on behalf of the government trusted that Hankey would have influenced Lloyd George to produce an acceptable version.

Hankey in fact arrived at a position others might have found impossible. His circulation of chapter drafts to relevant departments is not controversial. But he was advising Lloyd George on the content of the *War Memoirs*, while also acting as the conduit through which Lloyd George's eventual final drafts were submitted to Baldwin and King George V. Baldwin wrote to Lloyd George on 19 April 1933, 'I read every word – carefully, and with the greatest interest. ... I agreed with Hankey that there is no publication to which exception could be taken.'³² Hankey, at the request of George V's secretary, gained the excision of the comments about what should be done with the tsar in 1917. LG had promised to defer to Hankey on questions of national interests 'without demur'. But he did not tone down what he said about MacDonald's actions during the war, despite George V's objections.

Part of Hankey's help was acknowledged. 'These documents I have chosen and quoted or used with a full sense of the responsibility resting on every public servant not to reveal or publish anything which may injure the interests of his country. In the exercise of this discretion I owe much to the scrutiny of one of the most efficient and distinguished public servants of his generation – Sir Maurice Hankey.'³³

Immediate reviews

The first two volumes were on the whole well received. While recognising that they were Lloyd George's version of incidents, opinions and events, he was complimented on a vivid display of interesting material.

Volumes III and IV received more criticism, particularly regarding his bitterness about people who disagreed with him during the war, when in his view he was always right. Frances however, registered, 'An amazing press. ... D very pleased because for the first time there is a general deference to his literary ability'.⁴⁴

Lloyd George felt guilt about not preventing Passchendaele. Volume IV contained his fiercest criticisms of British generals, especially Haig and Robertson, and received equivalent defensive responses from supporters of those generals. There was criticism because they were not alive to defend themselves. Lloyd George,

The first two volumes were on the whole well received. While recognising that they were Lloyd George's version of incidents, opinions and events, he was complimented on a vivid display of interesting material. Volumes III and IV received more criticism, particularly regarding his bitterness about people who disagreed with him during the war, when in his view he was always right.

characteristically combative, regretted that they were not alive actually to read his volumes and see what he thought.

A reviewer of the final volume (the fourth) wrote, 'It is indeed amazing that a man ... in his 70th year should have written a million words, every letter ... stamped with his own personality. Our literature knows nothing like it since Macaulay...'.⁴⁵

In many ways the most interesting reviewer was Winston Churchill in the *Daily Mail*. His comments were more favourable than otherwise, particularly in complimenting Lloyd George on his focus on winning the war. They were of course in accord on the alternative strategy to trench warfare on the Western Front. Churchill ventured into literary criticism on Volume II: 'There is a certain lack of design and structure about this new volume.' He comments that needless liberties were taken with chronology. However, it was 'A Volume which in its scope, fertility, variety, and interest decidedly surpasses its predecessor'. Written as it was with a 'lucid and unpretentious style', the volume was 'set off by many shrewd turns of homely wit and a continual flow of happy and engaging imagery'.⁴⁶ These condescending remarks were unlikely to have been well received by Lloyd George.

Churchill registered his disagreements over what he saw as Lloyd George's misjudgement over Russia, Nivelle and Passchendale, while strangely, accepting that LG could not have prevented them. Churchill's overall comment on volume IV was 'This monumental work may not be literature but it is certainly History'.⁴⁷ The focus on Passchendale (on which Churchill had written little) is noted – over 300 pages on this. (This can be compared with 242 pages on the Dardanelles in *The World Crisis*.)

Aftermath

Churchill published his fifth volume, *The Aftermath*, in March 1929. This was the story from the end of the world war to the prospect – fortunately not, in the event, the actuality – of a war with Turkey over Chanak. His title is used here for comments about the longer-term results of these two sets of writing about the First World War. None of the authors or reviewers encountered during research for this article commented on the Liberal perspective from which Churchill or Lloyd George might have been acting and later writing, as outlined at the beginning of this article. Either they did not see this as an important aspect of these works, or it did not occur to them at all.

These two memoirs changed the content and basis of political memoirs. They were both longer than previous ministerial autobiographies – and only the Money Penny and Buckle biography of Disraeli was as lengthy. As well as using official papers more extensively, they offered a view of the shambles and awfulness of the strategy on the

These two memoirs changed the content and basis of political memoirs ... they offered a view of the shambles and awfulness of the strategy on the Western Front which challenged – as they had done at the time – that strategy and its implications, especially in lives lost without benefit. The portraits drawn of participants were, for that time, unusually revelatory – if at times, by LG, close to malice. His version helped create the perception that the land war had been mismanaged by 'stupid Generals'.

Western Front which challenged – as they had done at the time – that strategy and its implications, especially in lives lost without benefit. The portraits drawn of participants were, for that time, unusually revelatory – if at times, by LG, close to malice. His version helped create the perception that the land war had been mismanaged by 'stupid Generals'.

The World Crisis produced a later consequence of great significance for Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* because the attempt by Hankey to prevent the use of official papers failed. Churchill's horse bolted through a partially opened door, and Hankey did not attempt to close the door later to the Lloyd George horse.

The desire (in Churchill's case the imperative) to earn money was achieved. No total sales figures have been published for Churchill. Payments in advance from his publishers and newspaper for serialisation produced £47,000 – over £1 million in today's money.⁴⁸ There may have been additional royalties. Sales for Lloyd George's six volumes fell from 12,707 for volume I to 5,819 for volume VI: the total was 53,637. By October 1944, sales of the two-volume version were 286,429.⁴⁹ He earned around £65,000⁵⁰ and was delighted to know he had done better than Churchill. This was estimated to be worth £2.4 million at 2010 values.⁵¹ (If he had gone ahead in 1922 he had been guaranteed £90,000 and his agent forecast £137,000.) There was no suggestion this time of giving the money to charities.

Biographies generally sustain or demolish the reputation of their subjects. Malcolm Thomson – who had worked for Lloyd George on the *War Memoirs* – was his official biographer and the first one to give an account of how the memoirs were written.⁵² Rowland, Owen, and Tom Jones also repeat the Bruce Lockhart version.⁵³ Surprisingly, Hattersley does not refer at all to how the volumes were written.⁵⁴ Crosby, the most recent biographer, says very little about the memoirs.⁵⁵ Suttie wrote a critical, but balanced appraisal of the memoirs especially the 'alternative strategy' but does not comment on how it was written.⁵⁶

Churchill has been the subject of many biographies and studies of his literary style and method of writing. Reynolds on the Second World War⁵⁷ and Clarke on Churchill's *History of the English Speaking Peoples*⁵⁸ provide evidence on his method of writing these later books. Ashley's description of how Churchill wrote is based on his direct experience of working with him on his book on Marlborough, but cannot be taken as evidence on how he wrote *The World Crisis*.⁵⁹

Two, more unfavourable assessments have been made. Jenkins devoted a complete chapter 'A Relentless Writer' to Churchill's books including *The World Crisis* and is critical of Churchill's partial (in both senses) use of documents.⁶⁰ Robin Prior wrote a damaging critique of *The World Crisis*.⁶¹ Not only did he disagree with some of Churchill's actions during the war and

Churchill and Lloyd George: Liberal authors on the First World War?

conclusions about decisions and strategies during it, but he also criticised the way in which Churchill had supported his arguments during the book. These criticisms specifically were about the overuse of Churchill's own memoranda, which clearly supported whatever case he was making in the book, and the absence of contemporary replies or differences of view. In some cases, Prior found that papers had not, as Churchill claimed, been reproduced in full meaningful entirety and that parts had been eliminated which affected the strength or otherwise of Churchill's case.

Ramsden writes mainly about the memoirs of the Second World War, but includes Churchill telling Ashley, on the writing of *English Speaking Peoples*, 'Give me the facts Ashley and I will twist them the way I want to suit my argument.' Ramsden writes that although this was 'clearly a joke, it was like many good jokes, one that diverted attention away from the truth'.⁶²

In the longer term, *The World Crisis* became a source for arguments about decisions made in the First World War. Historians agreed or disagreed with Churchill's facts or conclusions, or compared his account with those of others. Since there was no other published account by a senior British cabinet minister for many years, his version continued to be accepted as both a good version of history and 'a good read'. Churchill's general literary reputation was further enhanced with his book on Marlborough and his account of the Second World War, although not by his *History of the English Speaking Peoples*.

Lloyd George's vivid *War Memoirs* have similarly been used in arguments about strategy and his contribution as 'the man who won the War'. His unsparing, detailed denunciation of Haig was criticised by Haig's defenders but generally was accepted for a long time. Haig has received more balanced assessments more recently.

Lloyd George produced an abridged version in two volumes in 1938. He asserted he had checked his first edition in the light of public criticisms; his response was 'After a careful perusal of this fresh material I have not found it necessary to revise or correct any of the assertions I have made or opinions I expressed in the original narrative.'⁶³ (See earlier for Churchill's similar claim).

The initial popularity of both versions of his *War Memoirs* has not been sustained. There has been no republication or paperback version.

Churchill's literary style

Early reviews of *The World Crisis* commented primarily on content, but later books have included more criticisms of his literary style as over-dramatic and rhetorical. Churchill read and initially approved of Macaulay but later disliked his view of history. He was also a devotee of Gibbon, whose style is to a significant extent reflected in Churchill's writing, which was always full of colour; but that colour could also be described

as florid. His oratory reflected his literary style, and his writing reflected his oratory. This is not surprising because, after the handwritten early books, *The World Crisis* was the result of dictation. The words pour out; he is the Dylan Thomas of writers about the First World War – essentially an adjectival writer. However, these are the remarks of the author of this article written in 2016 in a context wholly different from the reception Churchill's volumes received in the 1920s.

A different kind of comment was made by the award to Churchill of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953. He was not very interested in the award, which was given to him for his mastery of historical and biographical description as well as for brilliant oratory in defending exalted human values. *The World Crisis* was given only a brief mention as part of the justification for the award. The award stands as an oddity in the company of awards to, for example, Kipling, Shaw, and T. S. Eliot – but is less odd than some Nobel Peace Prizes.

There has been no equivalent analysis of Lloyd George's style. Readers continue no doubt both to enjoy and be scandalised by his vividly antagonistic descriptions of the generals, and of Grey and McKenna. An otherwise critical historian comments that his 'skills of an unsurpassed political orator and an accomplished journalist had been translated successfully to the medium of the memoir'.⁶⁴

A view of premierships in war

These memoirs contributed, as intended, to the reputation of the authors. Comparison of the extent to which they were successful as wartime prime ministers continues to spark debate. One aspect of that comparison not previously made is revealed in this study of their books on the First World War. Lloyd George as prime minister continued his involvement as a Liberal in issues other than purely military actions. This broader concept of what a wartime prime minister should concern himself with provides a different view of a leader in war. Churchill's priorities in the Second World War were, as his *World Crisis* showed earlier, focused on military problems, not on the home front – but by then he was no longer a Liberal.

Alan Mumford is a historian on political cartoons. His most recent book is David Lloyd George: A biography in cartoons.

These memoirs contributed, as intended, to the reputation of the authors ... Lloyd George as prime minister continued his involvement as a Liberal in issues other than purely military actions. This broader concept of what a wartime prime minister should concern himself with provides a different view of a leader in war. Churchill's priorities in the Second World War were, as his *World Crisis* showed earlier, focused on military problems, not on the home front – but by then he was no longer a Liberal.

- 1 D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vols. i–vi (Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1931–1936); W. S. Churchill, *The World Crisis 1911–1918*, vols. i–iv (Thornton Butterworth, 1923–1927).
- 2 K. Robbins (ed.), *British Political Life* (Blackwell, 1990), p. 274.
- 3 M. Brock and E. Brock, *Margot Asquith's Great War Diary* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 68.
- 4 R. Jenkins, *Churchill* (Macmillan, 2001), p. 201.
- 5 D. Lloyd George, *Is It Peace?* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1923).

- 6 D. Lloyd George, *The Truth about Reparations and War Debt* (Heinemann, 1932).
- 7 M. Muggerridge in C. Eade (ed.), *Churchill by His Contemporaries* (Hutchinson, 1953), p. 237.
- 8 D. Lough, *No More Champagne: Churchill and his Money* (Head of Zeus, 2015).
- 9 B. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour: First Earl of Balfour*, vol. ii (Hutchinson, 1936) p. 337.
- 10 Churchill, *World Crisis*, vol. i, p. 6.
- 11 *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 9.
- 12 *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 15.
- 13 M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. iv (Heinemann, 1976), p. 755.
- 14 R. Prior, *Churchill's World Crisis as History* (Croom Helm, 1983), p. 252.
- 15 E. Marsh, *A Number of People* (Heinemann, 1939), p. 339.
- 16 C. Hassall, *Edward Marsh* (Longman, 1959), p. 498.
- 17 Churchill, *World Crisis*, vol. i, p. 15.
- 18 Lloyd George, *Is It Peace?*, p. 239.
- 19 Gilbert, *Churchill*, vol. v, p. 14.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 21 F. Maurice, 'Review of The World Crisis', *The Spectator*, 3 Nov. 1923, p. 657.
- 22 Colonel Sydenham, *The World Crisis, by Winston Churchill: A Criticism* (Hutchinson, 1927), p. 5.
- 23 J. Rose, *The Literary Churchill: Author, Reader, Actor* (Yale University Press, 2014), p. 205.
- 24 A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *My Darling Pussy: The Letters of Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson 1913–41* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1975), p. 155.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 26 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. iii, p. xi.
- 27 A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson* (Hutchinson, 1971), p. 255.
- 28 R. H. Bruce Lockhart, 'Lloyd George's 500,000 Words', *Evening Standard*, 7 Sep. 1933, p. 64.
- 29 T. Jones, *Lloyd George* (Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 268.
- 30 A. J. Sylvester, *Life with Lloyd George* (Macmillan, 1975), p. 81.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 90.
- 32 P. Fraser, 'Cabinet Secrecy & War Memoirs', *History*, vol. 70, 1985, p. 405.
- 33 Sylvester, *Life with Lloyd George*, p. 141.
- 34 Parliamentary Archives LG 226.
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: A Diary*, p. 226.
- 37 F. Lloyd George, *The Years That Are Past: The Autobiography of Frances Lloyd George* (Hutchinson, 1967) p. 225.
- 38 Sylvester, *Life with Lloyd George*, p. 193.
- 39 P. Rowland, *Lloyd George* (Barrie & Jenkins, 1976), p. 703.
- 40 B. Liddell Hart, *The Memoirs of Captain Liddell Hart*, vol. i (Cassell, 1965), p. 361.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 362.
- 42 Parliamentary Archives LG 212.
- 43 D. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, abridged edn (Odhams, 1938), p. viii.
- 44 Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: A Diary*, p. 278.
- 45 Fraser, 'Cabinet Secrecy', p. 405.
- 46 M. Woolf (ed.), *The Collected Essays of Sir Winston Churchill*, vol. iii (Library of Imperial History, 1976), p. 92.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 48 Gilbert, *Churchill*, vol. iv, p. 754.
- 49 G. W. Egerton, 'The Lloyd George War Memoirs: A Study in the Politics of Memory', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 60, March 1988, p. 79.
- 50 I. Packer, *Lloyd George* (Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 105.
- 51 K. Theakston, *After Number Ten: Former Prime Ministers in British Politics* (Palgrave, 2011), p. 124.
- 52 M. Thomson, *David Lloyd George* (Hutchinson, 1948).
- 53 F. Owen, *Tempestuous Journey* (Hutchinson, 1954); P. Rowland, *Lloyd George* (Barrie & Jenkins, 1975); T. Jones, *Lloyd George* (Oxford University Press, 1951).
- 54 R. Hattersley, *David Lloyd George* (Little Brown, 2010).
- 55 T. L. Crosby, *The Unknown Lloyd George* (IB Travers, 2013).
- 56 A. Suttie, *Rewriting the First World War: Lloyd George Politics and Strategy 1914–18* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) pp.11, 13.
- 57 D. Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (Allen Lane, 2004).
- 58 P. Clarke, *Mr Churchill's Profession: Statesman, Orator, Writer* (Bloomsbury, 2012).
- 59 M. Ashley, *Churchill as Historian* (Secker & Walberg, 1968).
- 60 R. Jenkins, *Churchill* (Macmillan, 2001), pp. 418–432.
- 61 R. Prior, *Churchill's World Crisis as History* (Croom Helm, 1983).
- 62 J. Ramsden, *Man of the Century: Churchill and his Legend since 1945* (Harper Collins, 2002), p. 201.
- 63 Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, abridged edn., p. v.
- 64 Egerton, 'The Lloyd George War Memoirs', p. 66.

Archive sources

Churchill Archives Centre

Liberal archives at the Churchill Archives Centre at Cambridge
by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

THE CHURCHILL ARCHIVES Centre was purpose-built in 1973 to house Sir Winston Churchill's papers – some 3,000 boxes of letters and documents ranging from his first childhood letters, via his great wartime speeches, to the writings which earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature. They form an incomparable documentary treasure trove.

The Churchill Papers served as the inspiration and the starting point for a larger endeavour – the creation of a wide-ranging archive of the Churchill era and after, covering those fields of public life in which Sir Winston played a personal role or took a personal interest. Today the centre holds the papers of almost 600 important figures and the number is still growing. Contemporaries

of Winston Churchill, including friends and family, sit alongside major political, military and scientific figures like Margaret Thatcher, Ernest Bevin, John Major, Neil Kinnock, Admiral Ramsay, Field Marshal Slim, Frank Whittle and Rosalind Franklin.

The following archival collections would be of interest to students of the Liberal Party:

Broadwater collection

Churchill family photograph albums and press-cutting books, and other