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978-0-521-43812-4 - Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values

Philip Williamson

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STANLEY BALDWIN CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL VALUES

Stanley Baldwin is one of the most significant modern British politicians, but also one of the most controversial and puzzling. As Conservative leader 1923–1937 and three times prime minister, Baldwin presided over the beginning of his party's long twentieth-century dominance. He did so in new and difficult conditions: the onset of modern democratic politics, the rise of Labour, chronic economic depression, the General Strike, persistent newspaper attacks, imperial discontent, the Abdication, and the threats from Mussolini and Hitler. He retired amidst wide public acclaim, from opponents as well as his own party. Yet after 1940 his reputation collapsed, and he was blamed for many of the supposed shortcomings of interwar British government, especially failure to deter the European dictators. More recently he has been held to symbolise the backwardness of British national culture. The reasons for his ascendancy and the nature of his contribution to public life have remained elusive.

This book provides a new understanding of Baldwin's career, including the first serious analysis of the moral and intellectual influences in his early life. Its main concerns are investigation of a Conservative mind, and its communication with the various audiences that constituted the political nation. It considers the construction of 'public character' and a distinctive Conservative doctrine and language, and assesses Baldwin's part in Conservative electoral success and the performance of interwar governments. This is not a conventional biography, rather an examination of the nature of political leadership, Conservative politics, and 'national values'.

PHILIP WILLIAMSON is Reader in History, University of Durham, having previously studied at Peterhouse, Cambridge, and as a research fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford. He is the editor of *The Modernisation of Conservative Politics: The Diaries and Letters of William Bridgeman, 1904–1935* (1988), and author of *National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926–1932* (1992). He is also co-editor, with Edward Baldwin, of a forthcoming selection from Stanley Baldwin's letters and recorded conversations.

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521432276

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First published 1999

This digitally printed version 2007

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Williamson, Philip, 1953–

Stanley Baldwin: conservative leadership and national values / Philip Williamson.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 43227 8 (hardback)

1. Baldwin, Stanley Baldwin, Earl, 1867–1947. 2. Conservatism – Great Britain – History – 20th century. 3. Great Britain – Politics and government – 1910–1936. 4. Conservative Party (Great Britain) – Biography. 5. Prime ministers – Great Britain – Biography.

I. Title. DA566.9.B15W56 1999

9451.083'092 – dc21 [B] 98–43633 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-43227-6 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-43812-4 paperback

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For Joseph

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For fourteen years I preached . . . up and down Great Britain, attempting to achieve a national unity of spirit and a high conception of what democracy may be, and calling for unselfish service to that ideal.

Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, *An Interpreter of England* (1939), p. 10

S.B. was always an idealist; they tell me also he was quite a cunning politician.

Lady Baldwin in Cazalet journal, 1940
(R. Rhodes James, *Victor Cazalet* (1976), p. 223)

. . . a statesman who has gathered to himself a greater volume of confidence and goodwill than any public man I recollect in my long career.

Winston Churchill speaking of Baldwin at the 1935 Conservative party conference

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Acknowledgements

The central feature of this book is an examination of political leadership in its widest public aspects, and the use of public statements as its main source. Nevertheless the interpretation offered could not have been developed without information obtained from a large number of private records. I am especially grateful to the 4th Earl Baldwin and Lady Baldwin for their hospitality and assistance, and to Lord Baldwin for permission to consult and quote from his family's papers and publications.

For access to collections of Baldwin papers I am indebted to the Syndics and the staff of the manuscripts room of Cambridge University Library, and to the staff of Worcester County Record Office and the manuscripts section of the University of Sussex Library. Andy Burns of the British Steel East Midland Regional Records Centre was especially helpful in unearthing material on the Baldwin firms. I am also most grateful to Lord and Lady Crathorne for permitting me to consult the papers of the 1st Lord Crathorne, and to Richard Oldfield and Lord Davidson for enabling me to read material in the personal papers of the 1st Lord Davidson and Joan, Lady Davidson.

In Stourport Pauline Annis provided me with much information about the history of the Baldwin family and companies, helped with illustrations, and gave me a fascinating tour around local Baldwin sites. Mrs F. Llewellyn of Stourport Library and Mrs M. Sanders of Worcester City Library provided further information. At Wilden I am grateful to Nic Harvey for the gift of his history of Wilden School, and to his wife for showing me Wilden Church.

I thank the archivists in the libraries and record offices listed in the primary sources section on pp. 362–5 for answering my inquiries and supplying documents and copies, and numerous others who were helpful, if only in establishing that no Baldwin

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material had survived. I received particular help or information from Larry Bruce at Middlesbrough Central Library; C. P. Atkins at the National Railway Museum Library, York; David Beasley, the Librarian at Goldsmiths' Hall, London, and Jonathan Smith of Trinity College Library, Cambridge. Oliver Brett, the Librarian at Windsor Castle, gave permission to consult the 'Royal' volumes in the Baldwin papers. Material from the Royal Archives is used with the gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen.

Maurice Cowling and Professor John Vincent first suggested that I write this book, though its format has changed since its original conception. I am also grateful to them for research material, information on sources, and much intellectual stimulation.

Further information about sources was kindly provided by Anne Jenkin, Alistair Cooke, Professor David Dilks, and Professor Cameron Hazlehurst. Christina Bussfeld, Matthew Grimley, and Lindsay Edkins sent me copies of useful documents. Peter Claus supplied information on the City and further materials, and asked hard questions. I thank Stuart Ball for copies from the Headlam diary, and Geoffrey Channon for copies of his articles on railway history. I am grateful to David Jarvis for the loan of his important doctoral thesis.

For answering specific questions I thank Chris Brooks, Catriona Burness, Duncan Bythell, Barry Doyle, Alan Heesom, Anne Orde, and Oliver Westall. Ranald Michie has given advice on business issues, and created a price series for conversion of various sums into modern values. Jonathan Parry gave me the benefit of his Victorian expertise in commenting on Alfred Baldwin. William Davies has been a most patient and tolerant editor.

I am grateful for support from the University of Durham – from colleagues in the History Department and from staff of the University Library, and for assistance from the University research and travel funds. I am especially grateful to the University for electing me to a Sir Derman Christopherson Research Fellowship in 1994–5.

Michael Bentley, Duncan Bythell, and Christine Woodhead read the whole book in draft and made many valuable comments. To Helen and Peter Ghosh and their family I owe particular debts of hospitality. Peter has throughout been a source of ideas and a rigorous reader and commentator.

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Unless otherwise mentioned, the place of publication is London.

AC	Austen Chamberlain papers
AWB	A.W. Baldwin, <i>My Father. The True Story</i> (1956)
<i>Berrows</i>	<i>Berrow's Worcester Journal</i> (the principal Worcester-shire newspaper)
BF	Baldwin family papers
BLtd	Baldwin Ltd papers
BT	Board of Trade records
B/WCRO	Baldwin papers, Worcester County Record Office
Cabinet	Cabinet conclusions (minutes, from PRO CAB 23)
CP	Cabinet Papers (memoranda, from PRO CAB 24)
CRD	Conservative Research Department papers
CUL Add.	Cambridge University Library, Additional manuscripts
<i>DBB</i>	<i>The Dictionary of Business Biography</i> , ed. D. J. Jeremy (5 vols., 1984–6)
<i>DBFP</i>	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939</i>
<i>DGFP</i>	<i>Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography 1941–1950</i> (Oxford, 1959)
GMV	G. M. Young, <i>Stanley Baldwin</i> (1952)
<i>HCDeb</i> , <i>HLDeb</i>	<i>House of Commons – or Lords – Debates</i> , 5th series, unless otherwise stated (c., cc. indicate column numbers)
<i>Interpreter</i>	Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, <i>An Interpreter of England</i> (1939)
JCCD	J. C. C. Davidson (1st Viscount Davidson) papers
JD	Joan Davidson (Lady Davidson, née Dickinson) papers

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Jones diary	unpublished diary in the Thomas Jones papers (like the published extracts, actually a compilation of diary, memoranda, and letters, but 'diary' is used here as a convenient shorthand)
Jones <i>DL</i>	Thomas Jones, <i>A Diary with Letters 1931–1950</i> (1954)
Jones <i>WD</i>	Thomas Jones, <i>Whitehall Diary</i> , ed. K. Middlemas (3 vols., Oxford, 1969)
M&B	K. Middlemas and J. Barnes, <i>Baldwin. A Biography</i> (1969)
NC	Neville Chamberlain papers
<i>OE</i>	Stanley Baldwin, <i>On England and other Addresses</i> (1926)
<i>OI</i>	Stanley Baldwin, <i>Our Inheritance. Speeches and Addresses</i> (1928)
PRO	Public Record Office
SB	Stanley Baldwin political papers
<i>SOL</i>	Stanley Baldwin, <i>Service of Our Lives. Last Speeches as Prime Minister</i> (1937)
<i>TTF</i>	Stanley Baldwin, <i>This Torch of Freedom. Speeches and Addresses</i> (1935)
WCRO	Worcester County Record Office
<i>WSC Comp</i>	<i>Winston S. Churchill, Companion</i> parts to vols. IV–VI, ed. Martin Gilbert (1976–94): references are by volume number, then part number and page number, e.g. <i>WSC Comp</i> IV/iii.2107–8

SPEECHES AND NEWSPAPERS

For non-parliamentary speeches before May 1923, newspaper and date of publication are given. From May 1923 such speeches and addresses are cited by place or audience and by date of delivery, e.g. 'Birmingham, 9 Oct. 1931' or 'Primrose League, 6 May 1932', as the texts are available in bound volumes in the Baldwin papers and were normally published verbatim in *The Times* (in the edition of the day following the date given here, except for Saturday speeches, printed on Monday). Certain newspapers were searched selectively for comment, but most references in the notes are not to the originals but to the press cuttings in the Baldwin papers at Cambridge.

PRIVATE PAPERS AND EDITIONS

The locations of manuscript collections of letters, diaries, and memoranda and the full titles of and publication details of editions of such papers, organised by

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List of abbreviations and conventions

the subject's name, are given in the list of primary sources, pp. 362–5. References to these editions in the notes are by shortened titles.

FURTHER PUBLISHED WORKS

Most secondary sources are identified in the notes only. The Bibliographical essay, pp. 366–71, is intended as a reader's guide to contemporary and historical writings about Baldwin, and is arranged accordingly.