

## Responses to Geoff's presentation on Stanley Baldwin

### Response from Matthew Stephens

Geoff,

Thanks for your interesting analysis of the "Baldwin" years. My observations:

From the perspective of a century later he is certainly viewed as an "also ran" amongst the political leaders of the day and not someone to keep promises!

As you indicated, having "inherited" a safe Tory parliamentary seat he was often promoted by accident or fate - may be his limited capabilities were better suited to his positions of a County Councillor and Chairman of School Governors? – not being disrespectful to either!

Your notes were also a reminder of the hawkish position always taken by Churchill, Austen Chamberlain, Beaverbrook etc on issues of Empire (notably India).

He clearly benefitted from a weak and fractured Labour Party in the 1930's and arguably his one "success" was his handling of the "abdication" crisis.

Although he has never been forgiven over the lack of rearmament at least he backed Churchill over Halifax for PM when Neville Chamberlain resigned in 1940.

Finally, a couple of issues that now look quite amazing:

- De Valera being consulted over the "abdication" crisis!!
- His indolence - demonstrated by Baldwin's insistence (despite the world changing events of the time having a major impact on people's everyday life) on regularly taking time out for 4-6 weeks in Aix-les-Bains!

I look forward to an interesting discussion on Monday afternoon.

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### Response from Hugh M<sup>c</sup>Credie

Thanks Geoff for your informative account of this singularly unremarkable political actor.

Best regards,

Hugh

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Response from Stephen Gill

Thank you for your interesting paper on Stanley Baldwin.

A few observations:

1. It is remarkable reading of his career that he became PM when and in the manner he did - given his lack of experience in the Cabinet and the greater experience of other potential candidates (although given recent PMs perhaps that should not surprise me!). It is particularly interesting to note how he was selected (by the King, of course!) using 'soundings' with court-favoured members of the Tory party and the apparent advice of Bonar Law, the outgoing PM. Yet such a mechanism for selecting the PM was still in operation in the sixties.
2. It is also astonishing every time I read of the history of the inter-war years, how a mix of indolence, indifference and incompetence marked successive government's handling of the economy and the social fracturing that the Depression brought about, and Baldwin was central to these policies at the time. The wonder is that there was not more social, political or violent unrest as happened in many other countries.
3. Much the most interesting part of his life appears to be his private and family life. One has to speculate about the intra familial relationships given that his eldest son, heir to his hereditary earldom granted after he left office, was an elected Labour MP, and lived in an openly (or as openly as was possible in the inter-war and post war years) gay relationship which was apparently tolerated by Baldwin, though not his wife.

I look forward to the discussion on Monday

Stephen

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Reply to the Responses from Geoff

Thank you for your comments on Baldwin. The conundrum for me remains as to how he kept himself at the top of British politics for so long and yet we still cannot work out why! It reminds me of the comment: there is less to him than meets the eye. He was an operator, with a native cunning that allowed him to out manoeuvre his rivals and, in some respects, his way of operating in Government was more like that of an 18th or 19th century patrician than a 20th century industrialist. The contrast with Churchill is, of course, immense, the latter being a far more complex individual whose reputation was saved by WW2, rather than tarnished like Baldwin's.

We can discuss this all further on Monday.

Response from Angela Reid

Thank you Geoff for your interesting introduction and also additional comments of Stephen Matthew and Hugh.

Something missing in our discussion of the “moderate and easy going” Stanley Baldwin and his limited successes, is his decision to propose legislation to his Cabinet in March 1927 for the enfranchisement of nearly 5 million women aged from 21-30. Prior to this only women with property aged 30 and over had the vote. Churchill was against this and wanted his dissent recorded. The resulting legislation The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 which was made law on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1928 meant women made up almost 53 percent of the British electorate. Baldwin wrote to Millicent Garrett Fawcett the leader of constitutional suffrage campaign, stating the legislation “would be good for our beloved country”.

Was interested to read of his strength of character against Beaverbrook and Rothermere the two powerful press barons who had created a United Empire Party with the main aim of splitting the Conservative Party and destroying Baldwin. They failed.

Look forward to our meeting tomorrow.  
Angela

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Response from Tessa Roxburgh

Thank you every one for all the research you have done. I’ve been a bit pressed for time and when I started to read about Baldwin I got tangled up in the issues around the plight of the miners particularly in the 1920s.

Baldwin is something of an enigma and it’s difficult to understand why he was able to keep the leadership of the Tory party for so long.

Looking forward to our Zoom meeting.  
Tessa

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