



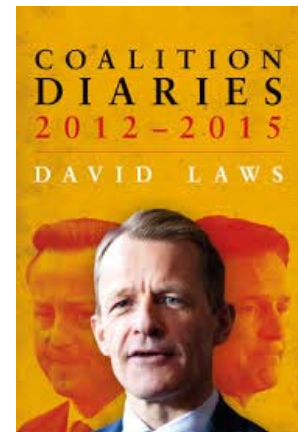
CHRISTMAS READING LIST 2017

Rt Hon Keith Simpson MP

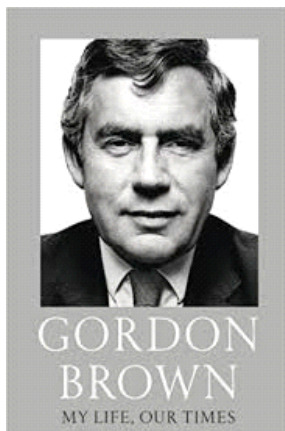
Over the past few weeks as the EU (Withdrawal) Bill grinds its way slowly through the Chamber of the House of Commons it has been noticeable that many MPs take refuge in the library to read and to sleep. This litany will continue for many, many months.

Christmas is a time to catch up on reading and to spot purchases for family and friends. Once again this is a personal list of books, mainly politics, history and war – the latter a good antidote for Brexit.

David Laws was a Liberal Democrat minister in the Coalition government and has already published a well received book Coalition. Now he has edited his diaries which give a perceptive and amusing account of life as a minister – Coalition Diaries 2012-2015 (Biteback).



Bernard Donoughue was head of the policy unit in No 10 under both Wilson and Callaghan and a decade ago published two volumes of diaries. Under



Blair in the Lords he served as a junior MAFF minister for two years and his Westminster Diary Volumes 1 and 2 show not only his old Labour sympathies but his love of the arts and the turf.

It has taken Gordon Brown seven years to write his memoirs which attempt to explain his political ambition but sit oddly with all the other accounts of his emotional instability as Chancellor and Prime Minister – Gordon Brown My Life Our Times (Bodley Head).

The Times has been publishing guides to the House of Commons since the 1880s and they have expanded beyond a statistical listing of candidates and constituencies. The Times Guide to the House of Commons 2017 is rather thin fare and at an outrageous price.



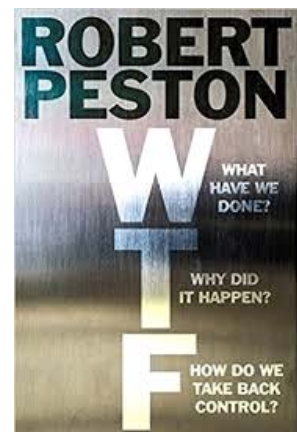
The General Election is now months ago, and we have seen several books written which combine gossip and facts to explain what happened. Tim Ross and Tom McTague Betting The House The Inside Story of the 2017 Election (Biteback) does just that.



Tim Shipman had already established his journalistic reputation with All Out War The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain's Political Class. Now he has written a further volume Fall Out A Year of Political Mayhem (William Collins) which makes for depressing reading for the political establishment. Shipman has increased his book sales by not providing an index so ambitious people have to buy it.

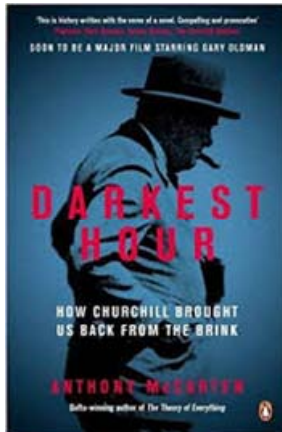
Oliver Letwin is a national treasure and like David Willetts a serious thinker and political practitioner. In the Coalition government he was Cameron's "odd job man" and general fixer. Letwin hasn't written a traditional biography; but he mixes his political experience with narrating the challenges faced in Hearts and Minds The Battle for the Conservative Party from Thatcher to the Present (Biteback).

Robert Peston is a marmite journalist and can annoy many people but he is a stimulating journalist and for those wanting to stretch the little grey cells then WTF (Hodder and Stoughton) is for them.





This autumn we have seen two books published on Churchill and the crisis of May 1940. The most substantial and readable is by the author Nicholas Shakespeare Six Minutes in May How Churchill Unexpectedly Became Prime Minister (Harvill Secker). Shakespeare goes back to original sources and is very critical of Churchill and the Norway Campaign.



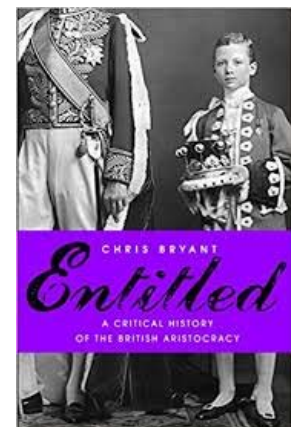
Coinciding with the film of the same title is the screen writer Anthony McCarten's Darkest Hour How Churchill Brought Us Back from the Brink (Penguin) in which he proposes that Churchill did not rule out some form of Peace agreement with Hitler; but only after the defeat of an invasion.

Churchill's political career barely survived the Gallipoli Campaign and was one of the factors which made people reluctant to support him in May 1940. Barry Gough has written a fascinating study Churchill and Fisher: Titans at the Admiralty (Seaforth Publishing) which shows that Fisher was close to being deranged.

David Cannadine has written some superbly stimulating books on British history and his Victorious Century The United Kingdom 1800-1906 (Allen Lane) ranks with the best.

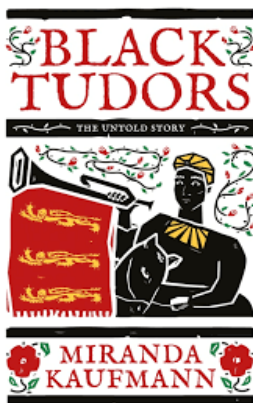
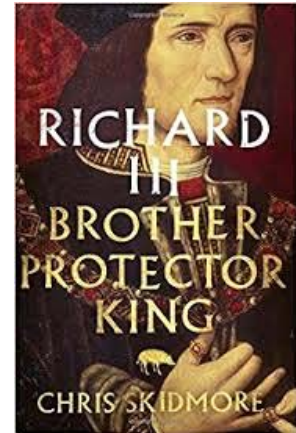
A provocative and rather tendentious analysis is offered by the Labour MP Chris Bryant Entitled A Critical History of the British Aristocracy (Doubleday) which at times has touches of Monty Python about the script.

David Kynaston has written a multi-volume history of the Bank of England and he has now edited the volumes and compressed them into one massive item Till Times Last Sand A History of the Bank of England 1694-2013 (Bloomsbury).



Recently we have seen two members of May's Cabinet resigning and there could be more at a later date. In Fighters and Quitters Great Political Resignations (Biteback). Theo Barcley writes an overview of modern political resignations from those who jumped to those who were pushed.

Chris Skidmore, a Cabinet Office Minister, is a well-respected historian of the fifteenth century and has now brought together the archival and archaeological research into Richard III Brother, Protector, King (Weidenfeld & Nicolson).



Based upon limited archival and literary sources Miranda Kaufmann has written a fascinating study of a number of Black Tudors The Untold Story (One World). There was prejudice but in a different way and we underestimate the widespread movements of people across Europe and Africa.

Ulysses S Grant's reputation has swung from Civil War criticism and then adulation to the same a century later. His time as President has come in for a lot of criticism but Charles W Calhoun has attempted to write a judicious account of The Presidency of Ulysses S Grant in the excellent series published by the University Press of Kansas.

Images of British troops and civilians in the Second World War frequently refer to the importance of a cup of tea. The cultural, commercial and historical aspects is well covered in Erika Rappaport A Thirst for Empire How Tea Shaped the World (Princeton University Press).



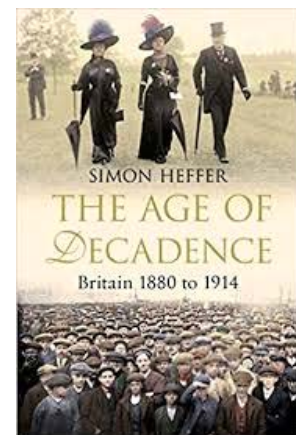
One for Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. In 1932-33 nearly four million Ukrainians died of a starvation due to Stalin's policy. Anne Applebaum has written extensively on Stalin's Russia and in Red Famine Stalin's War on Ukraine (Allen Lane) documents the politics and the immense human suffering. Not a book one suspects that is on V Putin's reading list.



Thomas Weber wrote a fascinating book on Hitler's First World War experiences and his soldiering in the List Regiment. Now he documents Hitler's radical right wing politics and early days in the tiny Nazi Party in Becoming Hitler The Making of a Nazi (OUP).

The massive three or four volume Victorian biographies are rarely seen these days but Stephen Kotkin is past his half way mark in the first two volumes of a massive life and times biography of Stalin. The first volume was published last year and now we can read Stalin Waiting for Hitler 1928-1946 (Allen Lane).

Simon Heffer is an independently minded Conservative journalist and commentator and author of several fine books. He has written an excellent book on the British experience of the late nineteenth century The Age of Decadence Britain 1880-1914 (Random House).



In the Second World War Gibraltar was very vulnerable to Franco's Spain and Hitler's Germany. It was a crucial fortress and listening post and much of its population was evacuated to Britain. Nicholas Rankin examines this in Defending the Rock How Gibraltar Defeated Hitler (Faber & Faber).

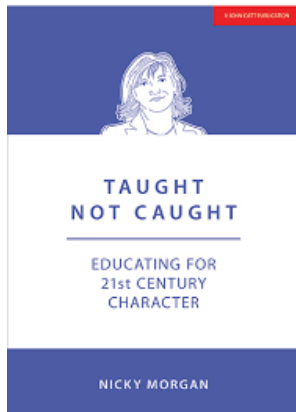
It could be argued that the Second World War was the BBC's finest hour – it informed and entertained the Empire and was a crucial link with the population of the occupied

territories. Edward Stourton is a well respected BBC journalist and has written an informative and wonderfully entertaining book in Auntie's War The BBC During the Second World War (Doubleday).



Christopher Mallaby is an old style British mandarin whose memoir Living the Cold War Memoirs of a British Diplomat (Amberley Publishing) are of a different world but well written, incisive and amusing. Another diplomat of that era is Patrick R H Wright and he has used his diaries in Behind Diplomatic Lines Relations With Ministers (Biteback).

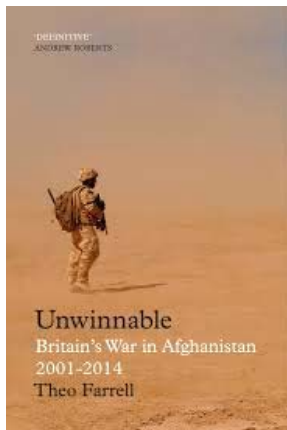
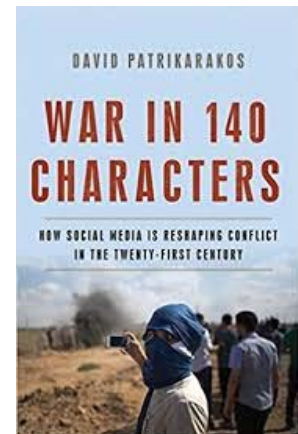
Michael Burleigh is both an historian and journalist and much of his latter work is meant to be provocative and to make one think. In The Best of Times, The Worst of Times A History of Now (Macmillan) he ranges across contemporary politics and conflict.



Nicky Morgan, former Cameron Cabinet minister “let go” by Mrs May, Chair of the Treasury Select Committee and leading Remainer. A former Education minister she feels strongly about the subject which she writes about in Taught Not Caught Educating for the 20th Century Character (John Catt Educational).

Despite great political experience and a fine mind David Willetts never made it to the Cabinet. A pamphleteer and author he is struck by the need to redefine the role and structure of our universities, not least Oxford and Cambridge, and his thoughts are laid out in A University Education (OUP)).

The impact and role of the internet and social media is the great game changer today, and David Patrikarakos in War in 140 Characters How Social Media is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century (Basic Books) isn't Karl von Clausewitz but jolly stimulating.



Despite maintaining limited British military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan the conflicts that lasted a decade are almost forgotten history. But it is important to look back on the decisions made and the mistakes perpetuated and this is what Theo Farrell does in Unwinnable Britain's War in Afghanistan 2001-2014 (Bodley Head).

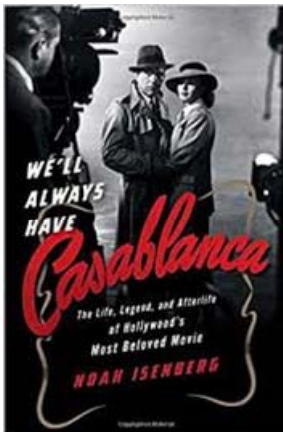
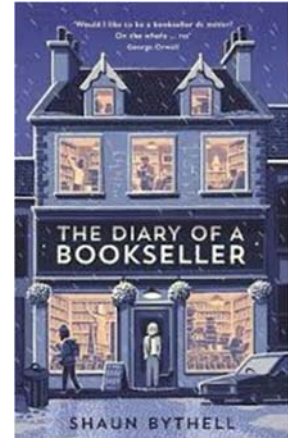
Lawrence Freedman has been a distinguished historian of conflict and adviser to government, not least to Tony Blair. In The Future of War A History (Allen Lane) he attempts to bring together his writing and thoughts which is a useful bluffer's guide but offers little for the future.

Niall Ferguson is a formidable historian whose research and thinking is both stimulating and provocative. One doesn't have to be totally convinced of his arguments not to admire The Square and the Tower Networks, Hierarchies and the Struggle for Global Power (Allen Lane).



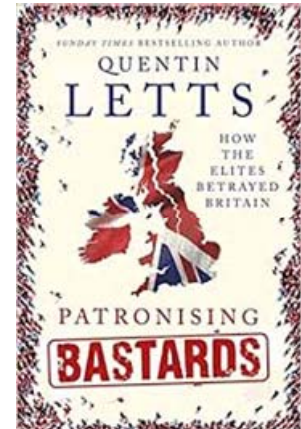
A book based on editing and recycling previous volumes, James Owen's The Times Great Letters A Century of Notable Correspondence (Times Books) is a good standby for long Brexit debates.

For those of us who, despite the temptations of Amazon still love to browse in secondhand bookshops then Shaun Bythell The Diary of a Bookseller (Profile Books) is a must. He is the owner of a second hand bookshop in Wigtown and his diary entries cover the usual list of eccentric, annoying, delightful and bloody awful browsers.



I have always loved the cynical Vichy Police officer, Captain Renault, played by Claude Rains in the film Casablanca – “round up the usual suspects” could be the motto of the whips. For those who want to read about the making and aftermath then We'll Always Have Casablanca The Life, Legend and After Life of Hollywood's Most Beloved Movie (Faber & Faber) is a must for Boxing Day.

The doyen of the Press Gallery and Parliamentary Sketch Writers must be the Daily Mail's Quentin Letts. Acerbic and amusing his Patronising Bastards How the Elites Betrayed Britain (Constable) will delight Brexiteers and enrage Remainers.



Finally, a wonderful stocking filler for the Labour PLP is the tongue in cheek The Unofficial Jeremy Corbyn Annual 2018 (Portico). Happy memories of the Beano and the Eagle!

