

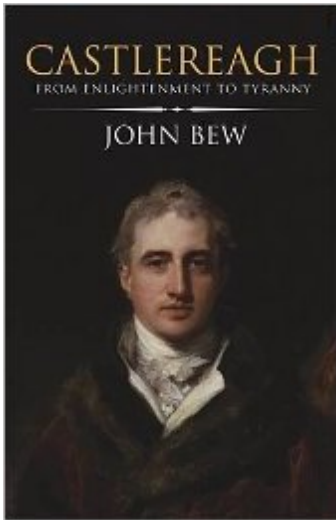


Foreign Office Ministerial Reading List Christmas 2011 *Keith Simpson MP*



With the Festive Season approaching colleagues look forward to being in the bosom of their families, with, perhaps, some spare time for reading. Also, this list may prove useful for those who will be participating in the last minute frantic search for a stocking filler.

This reading list is based upon a selection of books, mainly history, politics, war and conflict, that have been published over the past six months. Despite rumours to the contrary, they do not form the basis of an oral examination by the Chief Whip for suitability for promotion or demotion.



In a formidable biography, John Bew has addressed the reputation of Castlereagh, one of the dominant political personalities of Regency Britain. In his [*Castlereagh: Enlightenment, War and Tyranny*](#) (£25) he demonstrates how his reputation as a tyrant and reactionary followed him from Ireland to England. One of our great foreign secretaries he fought a duel with his rival George Canning and slit his own throat in 1822.

Bill Cash MP is known for his strident criticism of the EU, but less well known for his great admiration of the nineteenth century British parliamentarian, political reformer, orator and Cabinet Minister John Bright. A distant family relative, Bill Cash has written [*John Bright Statesman, Orator, Agitator*](#) (£25), and colleagues will not be disappointed to read some passing reference to the EU!

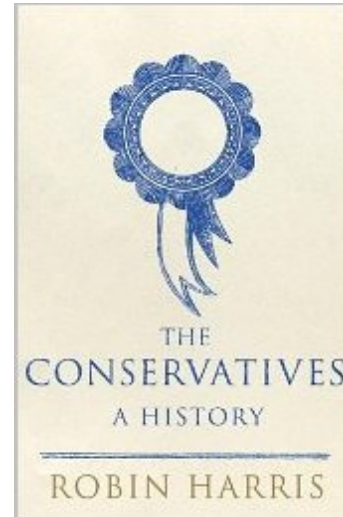


Political reputation can be a transitory phenomenon, and, as Joseph Chamberlain observed, there is, all too frequently, an inevitability of failure. Charles Stewart Parnell was a nineteenth century Protestant Irish Landlord who at one stage was thought likely to be a future Prime Minister. In [*Enigma A New Life of Charles Stewart Parnell*](#) (£21.99), Paul Bew shows a man of many contradictions and extremes who was ultimately brought down by his own appetites and lack of judgement.

The last one volume history of the Conservative Party was John Ramsden's [*An Appetite for Power*](#) (1999). Now Robin Harris, formally director of the Conservative Research

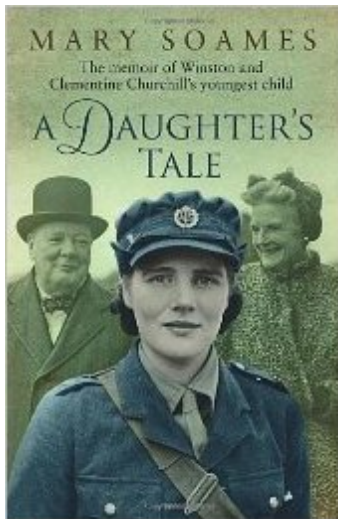


Department and a member of Margaret Thatcher's staff has written a trenchant, lively, opinionated and polemic history [*The Conservatives*](#) (£30). Very much in the tradition of the history of a political party through the lives of its leaders, his heroes are Disraeli, Salisbury and Thatcher. The tradition of Baldwin, Macmillan, Major and now Cameron receives short shrift.



Hugh Trevor-Roper historian, wartime member of SIS and author of the report which was eventually published as [*The Last Days of Hitler*](#), illegally kept a journal during the Second World War. This contained a record of his thoughts, contacts and opinions on people, books and his SIS work. Edited by Richard Davenport-Hines Hugh Trevor-Roper [*The Wartime Journals*](#) (£25) complement the biography by Adam Sisman.

Attlee nearly always tops any political science league table of British Prime Ministers. This is due to the high rating given to the achievements of the Labour governments of 1945-51. Attlee appears a rather grey, diffident and reactive figure in many contemporary histories. Robin Crowcroft has written a stimulating re-assessment, rightly emphasising Attlee's role as deputy Prime Minister in the wartime coalition and his ability to defeat the frequent leadership manoeuvres of Peter Mandelson's grandfather, Herbert Morrison. [*Attlee's War*](#), despite the horrendous price of £56, is also a useful guide to the politics of coalitions and should be on Nick Clegg's reading list.

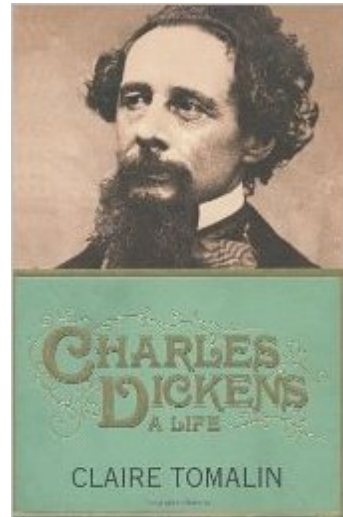


Mary Soames is the youngest and only surviving child of Winston and Clementine Churchill, widow of Christopher Soames and mother of Nicholas. She has an established reputation as an author writing with love and shrewdness about her parents. [*A Daughter's Tale*](#) The memoir of Winston and Clementine Churchill's youngest child (£25) relates her early life including the wartime years in military service and as a travelling companion to her father. She is able to combine autobiography with perceptive observations about her father and his intimate circle.



By using the Churchill archives and the diaries and personal recollections of many contemporaries Cita Stelzer has had the original idea of writing [*Dinner with Churchill*](#) Policy-Making at the Dinner Table (£20). For Churchill, meals were not just about food and drink but combined business with relaxation. Some of the rich wartime menus literally illustrated in this book were in strict contrast to the austerity rations of most of the population.

Boris Johnson, in his own imitable way, has decided to have a quick canter past London's history through the lives of some of its notable citizens. In [*Johnson's Life of London*](#), The People Who Made the City that Made the World (£20) he bumbles along from Boadicea to Churchill with some astute observations as well as asides worthy of Bertie Wooster. Some may question those lives he has excluded, including Charles Dickens whose bicentenary we celebrate this year and whose life and works can be found in Claire Tomalin [*Charles Dickens A Life*](#) (£30).



Max Hastings, journalist, countryman, military historian and pundit has become the doyen of Second World War historians. One could be forgiven for thinking that he had written himself out on that subject but his magisterial [*All Hell Let Loose*](#) The World at War 1939-1945 (£30) combines strategy, politics, operations and vivid personal accounts.

Ian Kershaw is the author of a two volume biography of Hitler and in [*The End*](#) Hitler's Germany 1944-45 (£30) he attempts to answer the question what made Germans keep on fighting? Using unpublished letters and diaries and secret recordings of captive German officers, he shows how loyalty to Hitler existed to the bitter end.



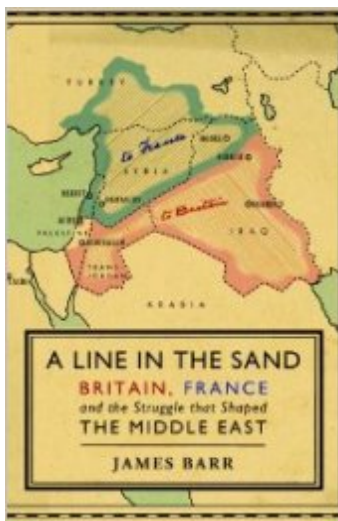
A Nazi who headed a vast empire whose members adhered to the motto "My honour is loyalty" was Heinrich Himmler. Originally published in Germany in 2009, Peter Longerich's biography [*Heinrich Himmler*](#) (£25) shows how a superficially unimpressive man acquired vast powers developing the SS empire. Not a light read.

Those wishing to read interpretations or re-interpretations of the British Empire are spoilt for choice. Kwasi Kwarteng MP's [*Ghosts of Empire*](#) Britain's Legacies in the Modern World

(£25) published this summer addressed the realities. Richard Gott's [Britain's Empire](#) Resistance, Repression and Revolt (£25) is a no-holds barred demolition of claims of a benevolent and civilizing empire. Jeremy Paxman has written a rather good book [Empire](#) What Ruling the World Did to the British (£25) which in fact really considers what it did to the subject peoples.



It would be fair to say that Franco-British relations have had their ups and downs and at the time of writing there have been one or two little local difficulties. James Barr, who worked for Francis Maude ten years ago, has been fascinated with European rivalries in the Middle East. In 2007 he wrote [Setting the Desert on Fire](#) T E Lawrence and Britain's Secret War in



Arabia 1916-18. Franco-British rivalry is the subject of his latest book [A Line in the Sand](#) Britain, France and the Struggle That Shaped the Middle East (£25) which is based upon French memoirs and archival sources. Both France and Britain were prepared to support and arm terrorist/ independence movements in each other's sphere of influence.

Peter Mangold, journalist and author, shows in his [Britain and the Defeated French](#) From Occupation to Liberation, 1940-1944 (£18.99) the ambivalent British attitude both to the Vichy and Free French, and how those wartime relationships resonate today – something for President's Sarkozy's stocking?



Policy, strategy and operational capability are crucial in understanding wars of choice as well as intervention. David French who has written widely about British strategy and the armed forces gives a sobering assessment of [The British Way in Counter-Insurgency](#) 1945-1967 (£65) which challenges the received wisdom of minimum use of force and “winning the hearts and minds of the people”.

Frank Ledwidge's [Losing Small Wars](#) Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan (£20) offers a critique of US and UK intervention policy and the failure of diplomats, policy makers and the senior military beyond the usual ministerial scapegoats. Jack Fairweather, relying on named and anonymous interviews, covers similar ground in his [A War of Choice](#) The British in Iraq 2003-9 (£20).

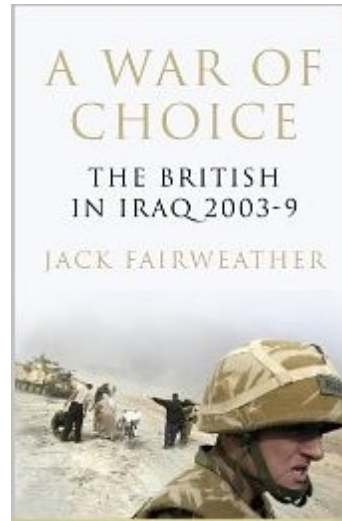


Many of the recent studies on conflict in Afghanistan neglect to offer an Afghan perspective. Rob Johnson [The Afghan Way of War](#) Culture and Pragmatism: A Critical History (£25) does just that with a depressing continuity of Afghan reactions to external interventions throughout their history.



In [Can Intervention Work](#) (£14.99) Rory Stewart and Gerald Knaus tackle the challenge of Western intervention based upon their own personal experiences in the Balkans, Iraq and

Afghanistan. In what they see as the failed wreckage of interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, they emphasise the importance of understanding local political cultures, our own limitations and the need for restrained outside support. Rory Stewart MP is the Conservative Party's own "Lawrence of Penrith and the Border" while Gerald Knaus worked in international organisations in Bosnia and Kosovo.

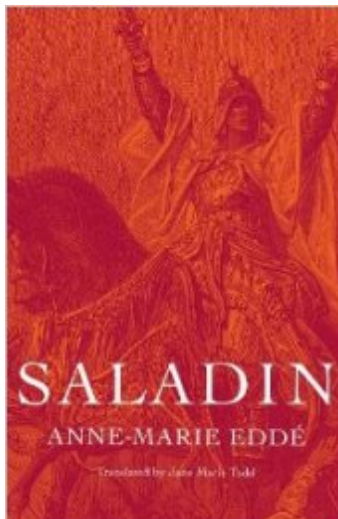


Richard Holbrooke was an American diplomat whose career spanned from Vietnam through Bosnia to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Holbrooke recently died and Derek Chollet and Samantha Power have edited a collection of his writings as well as essays by former colleagues and friends. Aptly entitled



[The Unquiet American](#) Richard Holbrooke in the World (£19.99) "the bulldozer" became a one man travelling animator continually texting and talking on his mobile phone hoping by sheer personality to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan as he had in Bosnia. Sadly all these

recent books on conflict and intervention prove that rarely are lessons learnt, and if they are, all too often they are misapplied.



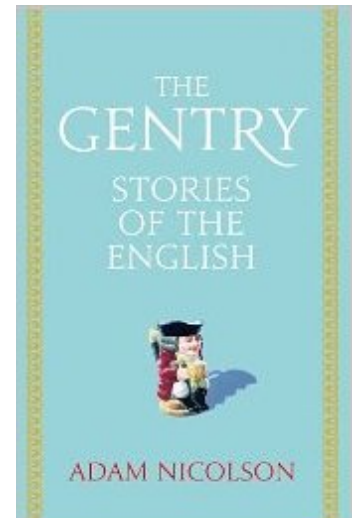
Both the European and Arab interpretations of the importance of Saladin are the stuff of myth, legend and propaganda. [Saladin](#) by Anne-Marie Edde (£20) pieces together what limited facts we have about the man personally and shows that he was far from the Muslim fanatic of Western caricature. Above all this book is valuable for showing us what the Crusades looked like from the Muslim perspective.

For those of us brought up at school on Geoffrey Elton's interpretation of the Tudors and more recently David Starkey, Thomas Penn's biography of Henry VII, [Winter King](#) The Dawn of Tudor England (£20) is a refreshing re-

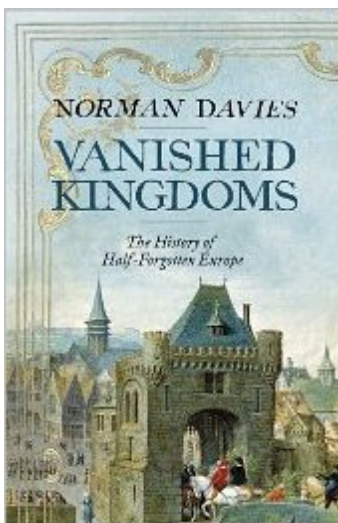


interpretation. Henry VII emerges as a controlling, paranoid, avaricious and ruthless monarch. Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that Henry VIII displayed similar characteristics.

A crucial social strata in English history has been the gentry, who Adam Nicolson, in his [The Gentry](#) Stories of the English (£25) examines through the history of some twelve families, showing rise and fall, success and failure. He writes that the gentry has always been composed of "Gentle ungentle", younger sons and daughters of old families who had declined into the gentry, and "ungentle ungentles" those from humble origin who through energy, ability and achievements bought or married their way up the social ladder.



Of the latter Caroline Dakers has written a superb history of one family, the Morrisons in [A Genius for Money](#) Business, Art and the Morrisons (£25). The maker of the family fortune and social elevation was James Morrison, the son of an innkeeper who by the beginning of the nineteenth century had become the richest commoner through his haberdashery business. A radical free trader he became a country gentlemen and an MP. Within two generations his descendants had drifted into the Conservative Party and pursued spending rather than making money.

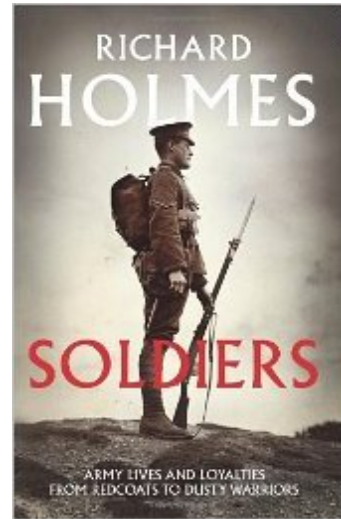


Norman Davies has written extensively on the history of Poland and Central and Eastern Europe. In [Vanished Kingdoms](#) The History of Half-Forgotten Europe (£30) he reflects that there have been dozens of kingdoms in Europe that have disappeared, some lasting centuries, others only a few years. Of the former Aragon, Burgundy and Litva can be seen as part of the evolution of modern Spain, France, Germany or Russia and Poland. Napoleon set up a series of client kingdom like Etruria that inevitably failed to survive his overthrow. A very timely book and should be a stocking filler for all those interested in the future of the United Kingdom and the EU.

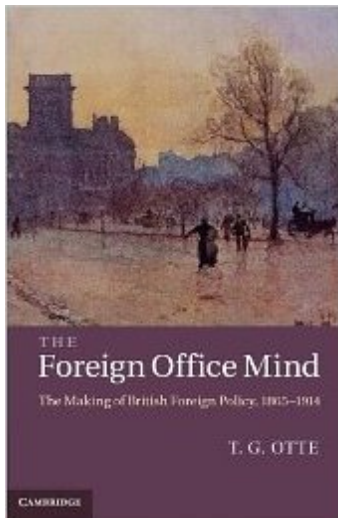


My former colleague and old friend Richard Holmes who died earlier this year was a distinguished military historian. His last book delivered to the publishers shortly before his death is [Soldiers](#)

Army Lives and Loyalties from Redcoats to Dirty Warriors (£25) in which he reflects on everything from recruits, officers, camp followers and the treatment of casualties.



Matthew Sweet is an author who spends years collecting letters, diaries and interviewing people before eventually publishing a book that has slowly matured. In a wonderfully entertaining and gossipy book [The West End Front](#) The Wartime Secrets of London's Grand Hotels (£20) he recounts life during the war from the perspective of guests, customers and staff of the Ritz, the Savoy, the Dorchester and Claridges.



The personalities, opinions, culture and what today we would describe as “group think” are crucial in our understanding of the personnel of the FCO – perhaps more so today than for many decades. T G Otte's [The Foreign Office Mind](#) The Making of British Foreign Policy 1865-1914 (£65) examines this during a period of great change both in foreign policy and the organisation of the Foreign Office itself. He emphasises the very small cadre of diplomats and their longevity in ambassadorial posts. Perhaps a book for the FCO Permanent Secretary?



For those attempting to understand the financial crash of 2009 and the current challenges in an historic perspective then Carmen M Reinhart and Kenneth S Rogoff [This Time is Different](#) Eight Centuries of Financial Folly (£13.95) is a must. They argue that financial combustions are universal rites of passage for emerging and established market nations.

-----NEW YEAR STOP PRESS-----

All those admirers of the distinguished American biographer Robert A Caro will be delighted that the fourth volume in his magisterial biography of Lyndon Johnson will be published in May 2012. [*The Passage of Power*](#) describes Johnson's time as Vice President and early years as President.

Keith Simpson MP

PPS to the Foreign Secretary