

Section 7: Britain & the First World War

Four key questions, though we are only going to engage fully in one:

- Why did Britain win the war?
 - How successfully was the Home Front organised?
 - How far was British politics affected by the war?
 - How was British society changed by the First World War?
- Nb – the last two can only be answered in part at this stage



INTRODUCTION: SOME BACKGROUND ON THE WAR ITSELF

Read **Pearce & Stewart** (pp 289-98)

- Kitchener's New Army, Pals' Battalions, Conscription (5.7m under arms over the whole course of the war)
- Trench Warfare
- Mons
- The First, Second & Third Ypres
- Gallipoli
- Munitions Crisis
- The Somme
- The War at Sea: the Lusitania, Jutland, the British blockade, the U-boat campaign
- The War in the Middle East and the British Mandates
- The Hundred Days & the Armistice

How close did Britain come to defeat? Why did Britain win?

Find out who the following were, and something about their roles in the war

- Lord Kitchener
- Sir John French
- Jackie Fisher
- Douglas Haig (have an idea why Haig is so controversial)
- William Robertson

Read this **History Today** article by **Stephen Cooper**, <http://www.historytoday.com/stephen-cooper/taking-sides-great-war>

Understand the idea of 'a Just War and a Forgotten Victory', and the Learning Curve.

THE POLITICS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, PART ONE: THE WARTIME GOVERNMENTS

Use Lynch, pp 51-77

The politics of the war might be seen as having three phases:

- **Asquith's Liberal government** (to May 1915)
- **Asquith's coalition** (from the creation of the coalition to the fall of Asquith in December 1916)
- **The National Government of Lloyd George**

As well as the issue of how well these three different governments ran the war, we also need to explain why Asquith fell in 1916: this would also have a profound impact on British politics

We might think of one other political theme, Ireland

Asquith's Liberal government to May 1915

- The idea of a political truce
- Total War: what was DORA, and what powers did it give the government? (nb not all these powers were enacted right away)
- Lloyd George as chancellor
- The reasons for the creation of a coalition in May 1915:
 - Gallipoli
 - Stalemate on the western front
 - The shell crisis

Asquith's Coalition (May 1915-Dec 1916)

- What was in it for the Conservatives?
- The relationship between Lloyd George & Bonar Law
- The balance of power in the coalition cabinet
- Lloyd George at the Ministry of Munitions
- The conscription issue:
 - Opposition to conscription
 - The Derby Scheme
 - The Military Service Act (and the later extensions to it)
- The suppression of The Easter Rising in Dublin
- Lloyd George as Minister of War
- The fall of Asquith

The simplistic notion that Asquith was a poor war leader has undergone a re-evaluation in the past twenty years: read [Roland Quinault's History Today article](http://www.historytoday.com/roland-quinault/asquith-prime-minister-war) <http://www.historytoday.com/roland-quinault/asquith-prime-minister-war>

The fall of Asquith is our first great political set piece: in this case the fall of one of the big figures of 20th century history. Read the relevant part of his DNB entry for his war leadership and fall; for his fall, also read the relevant part of [Lloyd George's DNB entry](#). When looking at this we have to balance the larger forces at play (such as the course of the war), alongside the motives of those involved. It is possible to view Asquith's fall as typical high politics: it suited Lloyd George's political

ambitions and Bonar Law's political advantage to plot to force Asquith out. On the other hand, it might be felt that their primary concern was the running of the war, and their belief in the need for a war cabinet. Was Asquith a poor war leader? Why did Asquith fall?

More importantly, the fall of Asquith would have a great effect on British politics. And it also brought Lloyd George to power.

How well did Lloyd George's National Government work in the war?

- There was serious tension between Lloyd George & his generals
- Lloyd George forced the convoy system the navy
- The role of the war cabinet, the cabinet secretariat and the Garden Suburb
- The Maurice Debate

How good a war leader was Lloyd George? Read the relevant part of his DNB entry. For two rather different views, read John Terraine, the man who first sought to restore Haig's reputation, and is thus less sympathetic to Lloyd George <http://www.historytoday.com/john-terraine/lloyd-george%E2%80%99s-dilemma> and Richard Wilkinson <http://www.historytoday.com/richard-wilkinson/lloyd-george-and-generals> is more so.

THE POLITICS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, PART TWO: THE WAR AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES

The First World War and the Liberals: 'hit by a bus'?

- Explain how Liberal principles were challenged during the war, especially by the Lloyd George government
 - DORA
 - Conscription (including the proposal to extend conscription to Ireland in 1918 & the conscientious objectors clause in 1918)
 - The growth of the state
 - Repression in Ireland
 - Use of force against strikers
- The growth of Liberal opposition to the government, and especially to Lloyd George
 - The Resignations of Morley and Burns in 1914
 - The Union of Democratic Control
 - The opening of a split with the fall of Asquith
 - The widening of the split: the Maurice Debate especially, but also over Irish conscription and conscientious objector

What is the connection between the war, the Lloyd George-Asquith split, and the decline of the Liberal Party; does Wilson's 'rampant omnibus' thesis have wheels? This issue can be more fully assessed when we have looked at Lloyd George's post-war government and the decline of the Liberals.

The First World War and Labour

The war split Labour, but they recovered

- The First World War split Labour

- MacDonald, the ILP tradition (Snowden), the Union of Democratic control, the No-Conscription Fellowship
- The majority: Arthur Henderson, the trade unions
- The Treasury Agreement & the role of trade unions in the war (union membership doubled)
- The role of Henderson ([see his DNB entry](#))
- The Stockholm Conference & Henderson's resignation
 - The reuniting of the party; the roles of Henderson, MacDonald & Sidney Webb
 - Labour's statement of war aims (Adelman, p 49)
 - The 1918 constitution, *Labour & the New Social Order*
 - Irish policy ([see Henderson's DNB entry](#))

Is it fair to say that whereas the Liberals were greatly harmed from their split, Labour benefitted from theirs? Once again, this will be revisited in the light of the rise of the Labour Party after the war.

The Conservatives & the War

- The war got the Conservatives back into government; under Lloyd George they numerically dominated the cabinet & the war cabinet
- The Conservatives were the only party to be unequivocally & unanimously in support of the war
- The war helped the Conservatives increase their support among the working class
- They were very well placed to win the 1918 election (the Coupon election)
- The Unionists from Ulster were now more closely tied to the Conservatives than ever

Had the war rehabilitated the Conservatives? Once more, this issue will be revisited in the light of the fact that the Conservatives dominated inter-war politics.

Irish Nationalism, Britain & the War

- The split in Irish nationalism over the war: Redmond & the Volunteers
- The Easter Rising
- The Constitutional convention
- The attempt to impose conscription on Ireland in 1918
- The rise of Sinn Fein

By 1918, nationalist Ireland had left Westminster, never to return: was it the Easter Rising, or the war itself? [John Gibney's History Today article looks at this issue directly:](#)

<http://www.historytoday.com/john-gibney/ireland-easter-rising-or-great-war>

FURTHER READING, LISTENING & VIEWING

Sixth form history needs you to do reading of your own. Already, this guide had given you references to the Flagship textbook, and some other resources. You need to take steps beyond that both online and, of course, by resorting to another revolutionary technology, the book. For modern British history, there is a dizzying array of printed and online resources, of startlingly variable quality. If you do find something not on here that's good, let the rest of us know through the Facebook page or email s.tilbrook@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk and we'll add it.

For each topic or area, we have colour coded each book or article:

- Blue is essential
- Yellow means if you want to develop a deeper understanding you should read one or all of these
- Green means this is a monograph, or a sophisticated or highly detailed account. Learn how to dip into real history books, a vital study skill; you might sometimes find full books actually become more engrossing
- Pink is for choices that are more loosely related, and have grabbed someone's interest at some point. Try one or two, they might be fun

A WORD ABOUT ONLINE RESOURCES

Three of the best resources are, of course, the History department's very own Blog, Facebook page and Twitter feed.

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)

Beyond that, for the British history course, get used to using one of the best resources available, and for free; the DNB. Any local library card will get you in: anyone can join the City Library via this link <https://eforms.newcastle.gov.uk/popup.aspx/RenderForm/?F.Name=JVpTDqdaf2o>

Once you have a library card number, got to <http://www.oxforddnb.com/> and fill in your number. You then have access to it all. They vary in quality from the good to absolutely excellent, and they are all written by leaders in the field. The best have a particularly good last section, dealing with how history has viewed these men and women, and their historiography. There are also some very good **Themes**, such as the one above on the Union of Democratic Control.

History Today

Beyond that, another invaluable resource is **History Today**. We have institutional access to the entire archive, here: <http://www.historytoday.com/user/login>

Username: Tilbrook

Password: historian

You can search at your leisure, and find all sorts. These guides will flag some up for you.

Philip Allan Resources

Another good resources is Philip Allan Magazines Online, aimed very much at sixth-form students: here <http://my.dynamic-learning.co.uk/default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2farchive.aspx>

Username: j.richardson@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk

Password: rgs1

The archive is then searchable

FURTHER READING: textbooks and student introductions

There is a range of series aimed at sixth form history students. None make for exciting reading, and they vary in quality, but you should always aim to read at least one. The politics of the war are pretty well covered in the following:

Stephen Lee, *British Political History 1914-1995* (Lon 1996), ch 2 (especially pp 25-32)

Michael Lynch, *Britain 1900-51 (Access to History)* (Lon 2008), pp 51-70

Going further, there are works which are still intended as introductions or overviews for students, but which are somewhat more in depth, or thematic. One series, the *Seminar Studies*, are often excellent (and are very much so here):

Paul Adelman, *The Decline of the Liberal Party 1910-1931* (2nd ed, Lon 1995), ch 2

The Rise of the Labour Party 1880-1945 (3rd ed, Lon 1996), pp 45-55

Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party & British Politics 1902-1951* (Lon 1995), pp 55-64

Here are some other overviews:

John Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics 1900-1996* (Lon 1996), pp 53-59

A breezy account from a Conservative point of view, highly opinionated and very much focused on party politics

Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-1997* (5th ed, Lon 1997), ch 6

Gordon Philips, *The Rise of the Labour Party 1893-1931* (*Lancaster Pamphlets*) (Lon 1992)

TO Lloyd, *Empire, Welfare State, Europe: English History 1906-92* (4th ed, Oxford 1993), ch 3

Martin Pugh, *The Making of Modern British Politics 1867-1945* (3rd ed, 2002), ch 8

Pugh is one of the best current writers on the history of Britain in the first half of the 20th century (see below)

The episode of Andrew Marr's *The Making of Modern Britain* on the war is worth a watch:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88OiGypD8s4>

There is a **Timewatch** on Lloyd George as a war leader:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovTer2sFmEo>

If you want the whole war in one lecture, by David Stevenson

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMEFg_-26Ms

The DNB entries on Lloyd George and Asquith are essential (and use the one on Henderson)

Roland Quinault, *Asquith: a Prime Minister at War* (2014)

As a peacetime premier Herbert Asquith was held in high regard, but the First World War undid his reputation. That is an unfair judgment

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/roland-quinault/asquith-prime-minister-war>

Roy Jenkins, *Asquith* (Lon 1966)

Jenkins was a major figure in the Labour Party of the 1960s and 1970s, though was perhaps always more of a natural Liberal (he went on to found the SPD in 1981). This is a sympathetic and thoughtful, if dated, account from a political insider.

Stephen Koss, *Asquith* (Lon 1976)

George H Kassir, *Asquith as a War Leader* (Lon 1966)

Seeks to systematically rehabilitate Asquith as prime minister in the war.

William Verity, *Asquith & Haldane* (1968)

Haldane and Asquith were close political friends and colleagues from 1882 until Haldane was abruptly dropped from office in 1915

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/william-verity/haldane-and-asquith>

Kenneth O Morgan, *Lloyd George and the Modern World*

Philip Allan 20th Century History Review | Modern History Vol 9 | 2 November 1997

A good overview of Lloyd George

The Age of Lloyd George, 1914–22: British Politics and War

20th Century History Review | Modern History Vol 5 | 3 February 1994

<http://my.dynamic-learning.co.uk/default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2farchive.aspx>

John Terraine, *Lloyd George's Dilemma* (1961)

The supreme direction of the First World War has remained a matter of controversy; in this essay, John Terraine, the author who made the greatest contribution to the restoration of Haig's historical reputation, contrasts Lloyd George's hopes with the manner of their realization, and is critical.

History Today:

<http://www.historytoday.com/john-terraine/lloyd-george%E2%80%99s-dilemma>

Richard Wilkinson, *Lloyd George & the Generals* (2008)

The contest that marked, and marred, the British war effort in 1914-18. Takes a critical, but more sympathetic line.

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/richard-wilkinson/lloyd-george-and-generals>

John Grigg, *Lloyd George: from Peace to War, 1911-16* (Lon 1985)

Griggs's sadly unfinished life of Lloyd George is especially good on the fall of Asquith

Roy Hattersley, *David Lloyd George: the Great Outsider* (Lon 2010)

A largely hostile account from another political insider. Hattersley was a minister in the 1970s and Labour Deputy Leader to Neil Kinnock in the 1980s

John Shepherd: Review of Richard Toye, *Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness*.

We will make much more of Churchill later, but here Toye thinks about war leaders and reputations.

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/john-shepherd/lloyd-george-and-churchill>

There is a blog article on Lloyd George as chancellor:

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/09/19/the-chancellors-2-david-lloyd-george/>

There is a blog article on Bonar Law:

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/05/26/some-thoughts-on-tory-leaders-of-yore-andrew-bonar-law/>

And on Bonar Law as chancellor:

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/11/02/the-chancellors-4-andrew-bonar-law/>

Robert Pearce, *Andrew Bonar Law* (2005)

Robert Pearce argues that we should get better acquainted with the 'unknown prime minister'.

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/robert-pearce/andrew-bonar-law>

RJQ Adams, *Bonar Law* (Lon 1999)

There are blog articles on the wartime chancellors:

Lloyd George

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/09/19/the-chancellors-2-david-lloyd-george/>

Reginald McKenna

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/09/28/the-chancellors-3-reginald-mckenna/>

Bonar Law

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/11/02/the-chancellors-4-andrew-bonar-law/>

On the **wartime home secretaries**:

Reginald McKenna

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/09/26/the-home-secretaries-3-reginald-mckenna/>

Sir John Simon

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/10/02/the-home-secretaries-4-sir-john-simon/>

Sir Herbert Samuel

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/10/07/the-home-secretaries-5-herbert-samuel/>

Sir George Cave

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/11/13/the-home-secretaries-5-sir-george-cave/>

On the **wartime foreign secretaries**:

Sir Edward Grey

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/09/11/the-foreign-secretaries-1-sir-edward-grey/>

AJ Balfour

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/10/13/the-foreign-secretaries-2-aj-balfour/>

There is **another article on Balfour** here:

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2017/09/29/tory-leaders-we-have-known-aj-balfour/>

There is an excellent DNB Themes article on the **Union of Democratic Control**

There is a massive literature on the war, and this does not attempt to cover it. It is, instead, a few snippets.

Stephen Cooper, *Taking Sides on the Great War* (2014)

As commemorations of the outbreak of the First World War get underway, Stephen Cooper offers an overview of the often fierce debate among British historians about the conduct and course of the conflict over the last hundred years.

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/stephen-cooper/taking-sides-great-war>

Malcolm Pearce & Geoffrey Stewart, *British Political History 1867-2001* (3rd ed, Lon 1992) pp 289-98

Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: Myths & Realities of the First World War* (Lon 2002)

The best single volume account of the war on the western front and Britain's role in victory

Allan Mallinson, *Churchill's Plan to Win the First World War* (2012)

As Home Secretary in 1911 Winston Churchill intervened in a debate about Britain's role in a future European conflict. His observations were remarkably prescient and, had they been implemented, might have shortened the First World War.

History Today:

<http://www.historytoday.com/allan-mallinson/churchills-plan-win-first-world-war>

Allan Mallinson, *Churchill & the Great War* (Podcast 2013)

In this episode of the podcast, Allan Mallinson joins us to discuss a 'lost' memo penned by Winston Churchill in 1911 concerning the prospect of a European war, a missive that, had its recommendations been implemented, may have brought the conflict to an early end.

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/blog/2013/11/churchill-and-great-war>

Graham Goodlad, *An Impossible Union? Great Britain and Ireland 1798-1921*

Philip Allan: 20th Century History Review | Modern History Vol 13 | 1 September 2001

A decent introduction

<http://magazinesonline.philipallan.co.uk/default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2farchive.aspx>

John Gibney, *Easter Rising or Great War* (2015)

The events that led to the creation of the Irish Free State and reshaped the United Kingdom were part of two inextricably linked histories

History Today:

<http://www.historytoday.com/john-gibney/ireland-easter-rising-or-great-war>

Catriona Pennell, *Ireland & the First World War* (2014)

British historiography has been offered a once-in-a-generation opportunity to integrate Ireland's contribution into analyses of the Great War.

History Today: <http://www.historytoday.com/catriona-pennell/ireland-and-first-world-war>

The blog has a series of articles on Irish history at this time, these through the lens of *A History of Ireland in Ten Englishmen* (a wholly original concept, of course):

(5) The Riddle of Erskine Childers

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2015/03/17/a-history-of-ireland-in-ten-englishmen-5-erskine-childers/>

(6) Augustine Birrell and the Dust Heap of History

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2015/05/17/a-history-of-ireland-in-ten-englishmen-6-augustine-birrell-and-the-dust-heap-of-history/>

(7) General Sir John Maxwell: the Man Who Lost Ireland

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2015/06/02/a-history-of-ireland-in-ten-englishmen-7-general-sir-john-maxwell-the-man-who-lost-ireland/>

Then:

Irish Nationalism & British Politics, 1912-22

<https://rgshistory.wordpress.com/2015/04/21/irish-nationalism-1912-22-and-british-politics/>