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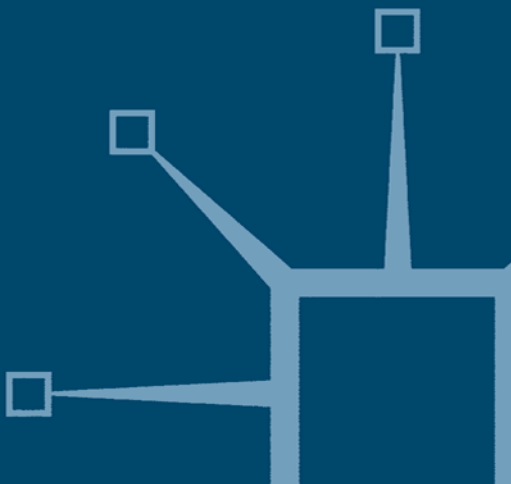
Ernest Gowers

Plain Words and Forgotten Deeds

Edited by

Ann Scott



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Ernest Gowers

Plain Words and Forgotten Deeds

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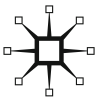

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Ernest Gowers

to

Ernest Gowers
for his life and work

Patrick Gowers
for rescuing the family archives

Roger Scott
for his enthusiasm for this research project,
his wise advice and his constant support

Sir Ernest Gowers, Senior Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London Region, with Lt. Col A. J. Child, Director of Operations and Intelligence, and K. A. L. Parker, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, in the Civil Defence Control Room at London Region's Headquarters in the Natural History Museum. The portrait was painted by Meredith Frampton in 1943. (reproduced by the kind permission of the Imperial War Museum, London)

Contents

List of Plates xii

Preface xiii
The aim of the biography xiii
Research method xv

1 Anatomy of a Victorian Family **1**
Ernest Gowers' father, Sir William Gowers 1
Sir William Gowers and his children 4

2 Education for Public Service **7**
Bilton Grange – the stepping stone to Rugby 7
Rugby – the choice of school 9
Clare College, Cambridge 11
Competition for employment among the new middle class 12
'Cramming' at Wrens and reading for the Bar 14
Success in the Civil Service Examination 15

3 Coping with Lloyd George **16**
The India Office 17
Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for India 19
Marriage and family 20
Talent uncovered – promotion to Principal Private Secretary to Lloyd George 21
The turbulent introduction of Lloyd George's National Insurance Bill 22
Lloyd George and the Marconi Scandal 24
Establishing the National Insurance Commission – Gowers joins the 'Loan Collection' 26

4 WWI: Under Cover at Wellington House **33**
Wellington House is established 33
The work conducted by Wellington House 37
The turning point for Wellington House 42
The contribution made by Wellington House 47
The impact of the war on the Gowers family 47
Calm between the storms: the Conciliation and Arbitration Board 51

5 Influential Head of 'Enfeebled' Mines Department **52**
The troubled history of the coal industry 54
Birth of the 'enfeebled mouse' 55
The Samuel Royal Commission 57
The 1926 miners' strike 60
The Samuel Memorandum 61
The miners' strike unresolved 62
The end of the miners' strike 64

6 'Quis Custodiet?' – Surtax, Syntax and Scandal **65**
Inland Revenue 65
'Mainly about the King's English' 68
Rescue at Entebbe 71

7 Mine Owners' Bogy Man **77**
Controversy at the outset 77
Failed test case 79
Steps towards nationalisation 82
Coal becomes a national property 84
Free at last 87
A weekender in the country 88

8 WWII: Preparing for London's Civil Defence **91**
The build-up of civil defence 91
Establishing the civil defence regions 94
On the brink of war 97
The Phoney War 99
Air raids begin 103
The Battle of Britain 107
The Battle of London (the Blitz) 109
The appointment of Special Commissioners 111
Herbert Morrison succeeds John Anderson 113
Euan Wallace retires 114

9 WWII: Leading London through the Blitz **117**
Gowers succeeds Wallace as Senior Regional Commissioner 117
Reorganising the fire services 122
After the Blitz, the 'long haul' of the Lull 123
The Little Blitz 131
The end of the war – the civil defence regions disbanded 134
War and the Gowers family 136
The end of the war – farewells 138

10 Post-war Reconstruction **141**
Harlow New Town Development Corporation 143
Committees of Inquiry: 'No. 1 Chairman' 147
Women in the Foreign Service 148
Closing hours of shops 149
Historic houses 151
Foot-and-mouth disease 152

11 Abolishing Capital Punishment **154**
The politics of capital punishment 154
Royal Commission into Capital Punishment established 159
The Royal Commission's report 161
The fate of the report 162
A Life for a Life? The Problem of Capital Punishment 166
1957 Homicide Act 168
Abolition of capital punishment 169

12 *Plain Words* **172**
Genesis 172
A fight for royalties 177
The *ABC of Plain Words* 178
The Complete Plain Words 182
Gowers and the language zealots 184
Revisions of *Plain Words* 186

13 Revising Fowler's *Modern English Usage* **188**

14 'A Last Retrospect' **200**
Gowers and the Civil Service 200
Gowers and English usage 203
Gowers and his family 205

Appendix 1: Governments and Prime Ministers 1900–1970 211

Appendix 2: Condensed Biographies 212

Notes 219

Bibliography 238

Index 249

List of Plates

Jacket and p. viii Portrait of Ernest Gowers by Meredith Frampton

1. Ernest Gowers
2. William Richard Gowers MD
3. Sketch of Cobham by William Richard Gowers MD
4. School leavers, Bilton Grange School (1894)
5. Rugby Eranos Literary Society (1898)
6. Midlothian compaign, election day (1910)
7. Ernest and Kit Gowers with their children (1918)
8. William Frederick Gowers (1926)
9. John Hindley, Kit Gowers, Ernest Gowers and David Shiffner (1931)
10. Coal Commission dinner menu (1939)
11. Three generations of Gowers men (1941)
12. Four generations of Gowers women (1941)
13. Ernest Gowers talking to women on parade with the National Fire Service (1943)
14. Ernest Gowers taking the salute at a National Fire Service parade (1943)
15. Ernest Gowers greeting the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, at Lambeth (1943)
16. After the Battle of Britain Ceremonial Parade in front of Buckingham Palace (1943)
17. Harlow New Town Exhibition (1948)
18. Harlow Development Corporation (1949)
19. Four generations of Gowers men (1963)

Preface

> Zeus makes one man a warrior, another a dancer,
> Another a singer, and in another's heart
> He puts wisdom, by which many profit
> And which saves many, as the god himself knows best.[1]

The aim of the biography

Ernest Gowers was a wise man. His words are remembered but his deeds are largely forgotten. He is best known as the author of a book on official English written for the Treasury at the end of the Second World War, but he had a long career during which he had to meet diverse challenges. The aim of this biography is to record his career and his many achievements.

In 1863 two sons wrote a biography of their father, Andrew Reed, Ernest Gowers' grandfather-in-law. In their introduction they explained why:

> The chief aim of Biography, it has been said, is not so much to preserve the memory as to prolong the usefulness of a valuable life.
>
> With this double object in view, the following Memoir has been prepared; in the hope that, while it gratifies the interest of personal friends, it will, at the same time, present to that much wider circle of readers who only knew Dr Reed through his written works, an acceptable portraiture of a public benefactor. …
>
> Dr Johnson says, in his 'Life of Addison', that 'history may be formed from permanent monuments and records, but lives can only be written from personal knowledge which is growing every day less, and, in a short time is lost for ever'. Though a man's children can lay no claim to impartiality, yet, in undertaking to narrate his history, they have, at least, the advantage of being able to record with accuracy facts with which they are necessarily familiar.[2]

My aim in this biography is much the same. No biography has been written of Ernest Gowers, my own grandfather; so I have attempted to provide a record of the long and interesting life of a man I loved and admired. Ernest Gowers' obituary in *The Times* describes him as 'one of the greatest public servants of his day' but he is not remembered for

this.[3] He is relegated to a footnote in many of the sources I have used, or appears merely in brackets. An annotation under a photograph of members of the Eranos literary society at Rugby is typical of the type of reference that is made: 'Ernest Gowers (*Plain Words*, etc.)'. It is the 'etc.', or forgotten deeds, that provide the main focus of this biography. Gowers had a long, varied and eventful career through an important period of social, economic and political change, including two world wars. I shall look at the momentous events in which he participated, often behind the scenes but still highly influential, taking his working life and experiences as the biography's primary focus.

In March 1945, when my father turned 35, my grandfather wrote him a contemplative birthday greeting, thinking about his own father, Sir William Gowers. This was one of the last letters Ernest Gowers wrote from his civil defence bunker under the Natural History Museum in London:

> I suppose that, if the Psalmist was right about the allotted span of man's life, you have now reached middle age. I find that an odd thought, just as I expect you will find it an odd thought when Patrick reaches the same landmark.
>
> Today a hundred years ago your grandfather was born. I wish I knew more about his early life. If I ever have any leisure during the rest of mine I must try to dig out something about it. Unfortunately I have left it rather late; twenty years ago there were still people alive who knew him as a young man. Now there is, of course, no-one. I wish you had known him; he had many of the qualities of a really great man, including some of the faults that often go with greatness.

It is now nearly 130 years since Ernest Gowers was born, and I am one of the few members of the family who remember him. But as someone who spent many years of her life as a civil servant, I have another perspective from which to view his life. My husband, Roger, and I have both been involved in public administration in practice and as academics. This has given me a framework within which to consider my grandfather's life and work.

There are two main themes to this biography: the first is Gowers' career as a 'typical' generalist Administrative Class civil servant in the first half of the twentieth century; the second is to record how he became a strong advocate for clarity of thought and writing within the Civil Service. Both are seen in the context of the time in which he lived, and within which his life and work should be assessed.

Research method

There is a special challenge in writing the biography of a civil servant, because of the Civil Service practice of anonymity: 'slaves of the lamp concealed from the public among the deeper recesses of Whitehall', as Churchill described them.[4]

Stanley Baldwin, with whom Ernest Gowers worked closely during the miners' strike in the mid-1920s, assessed the role of the Civil Service in an address to the annual Civil Service dinner in 1925:

> Unlike Cabinet Ministers who have their fame entombed in rows of bulging biographies, the great Civil Servants often hardly attain to the humble dignity of a footnote to history. A Civil Servant does good by stealth and would blush to find it fame; a Cabinet Minister does good by publicity and would resign if he failed to secure it! It is easy to decide which is the more indispensable to the nation's welfare. The country easily survives the frequent changes of ministries; it hardly moved a muscle when a Labour Government climbed for a moment to office; but it would receive a staggering blow if the Civil Service suddenly took it into its head to resign tomorrow. Some Governments are in office but not in power; the Civil Service is always in office and always in power.[5]

It was rare for civil servants to keep diaries. Indeed, the practice was frowned upon. Chapman has described the challenge of writing the biography of Lord Bridges. Bridges, who became Head of the Civil Service after the Second World War, was 'unsympathetic to officials keeping diaries or private papers relating to their work', particularly as they might be tempted to publish them.[6] Chapman describes the problems this poses when using official records:

> The work has been like a jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces have been put together not according to a picture or following the guidelines of a detailed research methodology carefully worked out in advance, but instead according to what can be made of the pieces that are available.[7]

One civil servant who defied the convention was Thomas Jones. In his introduction to the first volume of Thomas Jones' *Whitehall Diary*, Keith Middlemas writes that the diary shows 'the interaction of politicians and Whitehall, the respective influence of dedicated officials',

but that the diaries 'help, above all, to piece together the unwritten and largely unwritable history of the long-term influence of the Civil Service, of men like Sir Maurice Hankey and Sir Warren Fisher, in the formation of policy'.[8]

The challenge for me was to penetrate the anonymity of the Civil Service far enough to be able to bring my grandfather's career to life. This was achieved in stages. Ten years ago I would not have been able to write this biography from my base in Brisbane. However, modern technology and the work of many dedicated archivists and librarians have now made the task far easier.

Ernest Gowers' obituary in *The Times* provided a basic chronological outline of his career. The most significant source for the next stage was *The Times* online archive. This was a goldmine of information, giving me access to the precise dates of many of my grandfather's appointments, as well as reports of parliamentary debates, major events and public controversies.

I needed to find information to put more flesh on the skeleton of Gowers' career. My brother, the composer Patrick Gowers, held a collection of his surviving papers. These included briefings, articles and speeches he wrote for a wide range of purposes, readers and audiences. The family archives proved a rich resource, but much more information was needed to help understand the context within which they were written. Of my generation, my cousin Sir Henry (David) Shiffner has a memory that stretches further back than mine. He was a source of many family anecdotes that I have used in the biography to keep the balance between Gowers the family man and his work.

ARCHON, the linked British archives database, was invaluable in helping turn the central theme of the biography into an administrative history. The electronically linked archives enabled me to plan two focussed and highly rewarding research visits to England.

The family history was shadowy about Gowers' career. An ex-colleague wrote a letter of condolence to my father when my grandfather died. My father replied by asking him to lunch because 'I know so little about what my father did'. When researchers approached my father to find out whether my grandfather left any papers he replied that he had found few papers of any public interest, apparently unaware of the papers in the family archives.[9] L. F. Schooling, who helped Gowers revise Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, later sent the family all the letters he had received from Gowers, with the comment that these would be 'useful for a future biographer'.

It is a daunting task to write about someone who wrote so superbly himself. I remember asking my grandfather whether he ever got stuck when writing, and if so what he did about it. He said that if he was lost for a word he just wrote in 'pongo' and kept writing. He would replace the pongo later when he found the appropriate word. It was a useful technique for maintaining the flow of an idea. I have been fortunate that whenever a pongo beckoned, my grandfather's own words often came to my rescue.

I have quoted his own writing wherever possible, and provided background material to explain the context within which he was working and writing. As his career progressed, he wrote more frequently for public consumption. In the early stages I have had to rely largely on departmental archives and secondary sources. Later on, he speaks for himself.

I am most grateful to colleagues, friends, and family who have contributed to the project by providing material, commenting on the project or reading the drafts of the book. These include Don Anderson, Dr John Byng-Hall, Professor Richard Chapman, Bob and Sally da Costa, David Devine, Anne Draper, Richard Duveen, Dr Patrick Gowers, Rebecca Gowers, Professor Timothy Gowers, Hugh Griffith and the late Chris Griffith, Professor Colin Hughes, Samuel Hussey-Smith, Clare Ireland, Dr Michael Lee, Dr Chris Leithner, Dr Rodney Lowe, Rusty MacLean, Richenda Miers, Professor Bob Milns, Professor Rod Rhodes, Alexander Scott, Richard Scott, Professor Roger Scott, Sir Henry Shiffner, Dr Jon Stanford, Professor Barry Supple, John Topley, Doug Tucker, Professor Roger Wettenhall, and Dr Andrew Lees and Louise Shepherd from the National Hospital Queen Square. The Palgrave team, both in England and Bangalore, have been particularly patient with me managing my anxieties through the production stage of the book.

Archivists and librarians deserve a special tribute, particularly for the painstaking work they have undertaken to make their collections so easy to search electronically. I am grateful to the University of Queensland for appointing me to an adjunct chair when I retired, giving me access to the university's library. This allowed me to search *The Times Digital Archive 1785–1985* and *ARCHON*, the databases that underpinned my research. Then, through *ARCHON* or other Internet searches, I was able to discover and make contact with many archives and archivists, including: Bilton Grange School; Birmingham University Information Services Special Collections, Masterman Archives; Bodleian Library Modern Political Papers, Department of Special Collections and Western manuscripts; Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African

Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford; Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge; Girton College, Cambridge; Imperial War Museum, London; Inner Temple, London; London School of Economics and Political Science Archives Section; National Archives, Kew; National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; Museum of Harlow; Oxford University Press; Rugby School; St Felix School; the Baldwin Papers, Cambridge University Library; and the Wigan Archives Service.

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Files –
The Files –
Office Files!
Oblige me by referring to the Files.
Every question man can raise,
Every phrase of every phase
Of that question is on record in the Files – …

You've a better chance to guess
At the meaning of Success
(which is Greatness – *vide* press)
When you've seen it in perspective in the Files.

(Rudyard Kipling)[10]

1
Anatomy of a Victorian Family

Queen Victoria had been on the throne for 43 years when Ernest Gowers was born, and the British Empire was still expanding. The coal industry, the problems of which were to preoccupy him for many years, was at its peak during Victoria's reign, starting to decline at the turn of the century. Gowers was in his last year at Cambridge and at the threshold of his career when Queen Victoria died in 1901. His Civil Service career spanned the introduction of the welfare state, two world wars, the Great Depression and the decline and then nationalisation of the coal industry. After an early, rapid rise through the administrative ranks, he went on to hold a wide range of Civil Service positions before retiring in the late 1940s. But in practice he did not stop working until 1965, when he was in his mid-eighties. Few Civil Service contemporaries matched him as a generalist and few, if any, continued to work for as long as he did.

Ernest Gowers' father, Sir William Gowers

Ernest Gowers' grandfather was born in 1810. He moved to London and established a business making and selling ladies' boots in Hackney, which was then a village just outside the city of London. In 1835 he married Ann Venables from Headington in Oxford. They had two sons and two daughters. Only Ernest's father survived childhood. William Richard Gowers rose from this humble background to become an eminent physician.

In 1856, Ernest Gowers' grandfather died, and his grandmother was left with an 11-year-old son and little money. She returned to her Oxford relatives and raised enough money to send William to Christ Church College School, where he remained until he was 15 when his

formal education ended. In 1861 William and his mother were staying with relatives at Coggeshall in Essex, where the local doctor offered him a medical apprenticeship. William's first response was that he did not want to be a doctor. However, at the age of 16, having managed to raise the necessary £150, he accepted the offer and went to live with the doctor's family.

While at Coggeshall Gowers studied the general subjects necessary to pass the London Matriculation in his spare time. Displaying the intellectual ability he passed on to his children, he was ranked in the first division. In 1863, at the age of 18, he left Coggeshall to became a student at University College, London. He qualified MD, a gold medallist, in 1867.

Three years later, at the age of 25, he was appointed the first Medical Registrar to the National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic (later the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases) in Queen Square. He and his mother managed to raise enough money to buy the lease of 50 Queen Anne Street, Marylebone, where he lived until he retired. Gowers describes house-hunting with his mother and a walk he took from the British Museum to King's Cross 'through the squares where I found the practice of taking every first turning to left and right took me through that rather labyrinthine neighbourhood with surprising ease'.

In 1872 he was elected assistant physician but his further promotion was slow, and it was not for another 20 years that the Board elected him to the staff as an additional physician, in recognition of his long and eminent service. He held this post till he retired in 1910.

Sir Russell Reynolds, Professor of Medicine at University College, introduced him to his future wife. Gowers was notoriously uncomfortable on social occasions, but this did not prevent him from becoming engaged. In 1875 he married Mary Baines, daughter of Frederick Baines, Reynolds' brother-in-law. Baines was proprietor of the prosperous and influential newspaper, the *Leeds Mercury*. In 1887, when only 42, Gowers was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.

Dr Gowers made his name by writing medical texts. His greatest book was *A Manual of Diseases of the Nervous System*[1], which gained international recognition as 'the bible of neurology' and has been described as 'probably the most famous and successful textbook upon the subject of all time, written in a prose style which was elegant, correct and terse'.[2] A century later it was described as 'skilfully organised, never diffuse, remarkably concise and lucid, and with a straightforward, unaffected prose-style, free of those fustian lines and purple patches which characterised so much Victorian writing'.[3]

Ernest Gowers, therefore, was not the first member of the family to be noted for his plain words. Many years later, in a lecture to doctors on medical jargon, he described his father's exacting standards:

> My father was always a stickler for plain words; his bluntness in using them and his intolerance of woolly thinking were sometimes a source of embarrassment to his family, and, I suspect, occasionally of discomfiture to his housemen and even his patients.[4]

A visitor to Coggeshall had introduced him to shorthand which William, typically, taught himself. He became so fascinated by it that his interest bordered on fanaticism. His son Ernest later wrote that his father's mastery of Pitman's shorthand had profound and lasting consequences. To use shorthand himself for every possible purpose and to propagate its use by others became an absorbing interest throughout his life. All his casebooks were kept in shorthand.

He was knighted in 1897. In the latter part of his life Gowers became friends with Rudyard Kipling. The Society of Medical Phonographers, which had been founded in 1894 by Gowers, held a congratulatory dinner to celebrate his knighthood. Kipling referred to this 'festive spread with electric lights and waiters and plush and flumdiddle' in a letter to a friend:

> I went up to town and was roped in to two public dinners – one of them a doctor's entertainment to congratulate Sir William Gowers (who is a crank on shorthand) upon his getting a knighthood. Gowers is the deuce and all of a specialist: but I believe he is simply a maniac on shorthand as a means to help Doctors put down their diagnoses.[5]

He also lobbied enthusiastically for a number of causes. In 1902 he attacked the lunacy laws, in a strong address to the Medico-Psychological Association, arguing that many people who had to be declared insane under the existing law were such borderline cases that they were likely to be 'rendered insane by the process of being declared so'. His comments drew a response in an editorial in *The Times*:

> No more severe criticism has ever been passed on our lunacy laws than that expressed by Sir William Gowers, one of the highest authorities on certain forms of mental disease. … So weighty is the attack, so clearly are faults indicated, so precise are his suggestions as

> to changes in his judgment imperative, and he so obviously speaks from deep conviction, that his words can scarcely fail to have practical results.[6]

In 1904 he and other prominent medical men formed the Metropolitan Street Ambulance Association to lobby for the establishment of an ambulance service in London by sending postcards to candidates for the London County Council asking whether, if elected, they would 'interest' themselves in securing an efficient ambulance service.[7] However, the new motorised transport also had its drawbacks. Later in the same year, he was one of 'numerous' medical men who joined other residents of Marylebone to petition the Council, complaining at the increasing noise of heavy traffic and seeking wood paving instead of macadam to dull the sound. They were unable to sleep whether their windows were open or closed and 'had not only the noise of motor-cars to bear with, but also the terrible torture of the traction engines'.[8]

Sir William Gowers and his children

William and Mary Gowers had two sons and two daughters. William Frederick was born in 1875, Edith in 1878, Ernest in 1880 and Evelyn in 1884. Both sons achieved successful careers. The story of the sisters makes a sad contrast to the successes of their brothers. Little is known about their education apart from a reference to the return of their governess when the boys went off to their boarding schools, but the Gowers sisters suffered from a serious degenerative eye disease that led to almost total blindness in later life. Neither of them married.

Ernest Gowers particularly remembered his father's insatiable thirst for knowledge of every sort. He also described the way in which his father's mind was always active. No subject could be raised in conversation without his wanting to know everything about it that he did not know already, and family meals were punctuated by visits to the shelves of reference books. Drawing was one of his favourite pastimes. From instruction books he taught himself to draw and became an exquisite draughtsman. He drew the illustrations in the many medical texts he wrote.

His talent as a father was recalled with great warmth by Ernest. Sir William Gowers appears to have compensated for the early loss of his father and infant siblings by being a devoted father to his own children. He wrote animal stories for them in prose and verse that continue to delight his descendants. For more than ten years he wrote what he

called the 'Children's Diary', a whimsical and witty account of the day's doings as seen through the eyes of the children, recorded with all his great gifts of imagination, selectivity and literary skill and charmingly illustrated by his pen.

Music, which was to be a talent that developed strongly down generations of the Gowers family, was not one of Sir William's skills. Nevertheless, he recognised its value and allotted instruments to each of his children at an early age. Ernest wrote that he took an almost childlike (and sometimes to them embarrassing) pride and delight in all his children's accomplishments, especially when they were outside the range of his own.

He loved his home life and family and was reluctant to leave them. Ernest recalled that his father had few intimate friends, and most of those he had came from outside his own profession. He enjoyed the company of people like Kipling, who could tell him things he did not know.

It is worth considering the London surroundings within which the Gowers family lived. Clive Dewey devotes a section in *The Mind of the Indian Civil Service*[9] to 'the influence of place' on Sir Malcolm Darling, who was born in the same year as Ernest Gowers and who was brought up in Bloomsbury. Dewey discusses the influence that growing up in Bloomsbury 'in the middle of the densest concentration of intellectuals in Britain' would have had on Darling. The Gowers' house in Queen Anne Street, Marylebone, was not in the heart of Bloomsbury, but it was close to Harley Street and not far from the London Clinic, at the centre of another elite group, this one medical. The Gowers' house was within an easy walk of the University College London where the first medical school in England opened in the 1840s. This was where Sir William Gowers completed his training. Specialist hospitals sprang up in its wake – including the Hospital for Nervous Diseases that was to be the centre of his working life. Many of the Gowers' neighbours were physicians and surgeons.

By the turn of the century, life at home in Queen Anne Street was comfortable. The 1901 census lists four resident domestic servants: a butler, cook and two housemaids. His eldest granddaughter Peggy later recalled being taken to lunch with her grandparents as a child on Sundays, and that the house had a long passage with ferns and a fountain leading to the dining room. Ernest remembered as a boy seeing flocks of sheep driven along the street outside, and that his mother used to shop in Marylebone High Street in a horse-drawn carriage. A small insight into Ernest's childhood surroundings comes from a letter

he wrote many years later to Barbara Wootton, after she had undergone an operation at a Harley Street clinic:

> I hate to think of you cooped up in this sweltering weather in that rather dingy Weymouth Street, on to the back of whose houses my night-nursery used to look along the length of the mews from which the noises of stamping horses, jingling harness and cursing coachmen used to give me company in bed.[10]

The Gowers children had the great advantage of being brought up in a happy home with devoted parents and an increasingly successful father who guided their development with close interest and pride.

2
Education for Public Service

Sir William Gowers made three significant choices affecting his sons' careers, the last perhaps dictating the previous two: he chose Rugby as their public school, Classics as their subject, and entry into the Civil Service for their careers. The public school curriculum, the Classics courses at Oxford and Cambridge, and the entrance examination into the Civil Service were closely linked. Anyone wishing to gain a place as a First Division clerk in the late nineteenth century was well advised to study classics.

The Rugby curriculum at the time reflected the existing academic strengths and attitudes of the masters, especially the headmasters, most of whom had undertaken a classical education as the natural basis for admission to holy orders. Classics became the most highly regarded subject in the curriculum, as it did in the universities of the era. Students who wanted to achieve worked hardest at Classics – entry to the elite Sixth Form often depended exclusively on proficiency in Latin grammar; this in turn opened up the possibility of entry into the universities where such study was well entrenched, especially Oxford and Cambridge.

Bilton Grange – the stepping stone to Rugby

Ernest Gowers eventually reached the Sixth Form at Rugby, but to do so he had to demonstrate that he had the necessary intellectual ability. He went to his first boarding school at the age of ten. He spent almost the whole of his first term suffering from diphtheria with complications, and almost the whole of the second suffering from pneumonia with complications. However, these two terms were memorable for another reason: a schoolmaster nicknamed by Gowers after Mr Mell, the kindly,

flute-playing master at Salem House in Dickens' *David Copperfield*, who was victimised by Steerforth. Gowers said that his 'Mr Mell' was like Dickens' character 'in having the kindest of hearts and in being very unhappy'. Ernest spent the two terms in a sickroom with two beds:

> Whenever he could spare the time Mr Mell would come and lie on the other bed and read Dickens to me, by the hour, occasionally dropping off to sleep in a tantalising way, generally at a specially exciting point in the story. I remember now – so odd are the freaks of memory – that he fell asleep just while David Copperfield was trying to get the money for his jacket out of the gorilla-like pawnbroker who interspersed his conversation with goroo; and I had to wait in an agony of suspense to know whether David ever succeeded in screwing him up to one and sixpence.[1]

Ernest said later that he owed it to Mr Mell that, out of his two terms at that school, he got something much more valuable than he would have done if he had spent them wrestling with 'the mysteries of vulgar fractions or learning to decline and conjugate Latin nouns and verbs'.

Fortunately, his father was enlightened enough to take him away from what in all other ways was a poor school, deciding it was time 'to have a change of bowling'. In May 1891, shortly before his eleventh birthday, Ernest was sent to Bilton Grange preparatory school. Bilton was close to Rugby where his elder brother had been a pupil since 1889.

We have only one insight into Gowers' Bilton years, in a letter to *The Times* responding to his obituary:

> Son of a famous Victorian physician he was, as you say, one of the greatest public servants of our time and your obituary is wonderfully comprehensive *with one omission*. He was no mean athlete. At our prep school Bilton Grange, he became a very proficient wicketkeeper and was known as 'Flops'. I suppose for his large, useful hands! At Rugby this was euphoniously changed to 'Daisy' – why, I don't know! Schoolboy familiarities seem descriptive at the time. He was of course a great scholar and popular with everyone.[2]

Ernest's elder brother, Bill, was also known as 'Daisy' at Rugby. Ernest inherited the nickname. It is possible that it was an allusion to Dickens as Daisy was the nickname Steerforth gave to the 'young and innocent' David Copperfield.

Rugby – the choice of school

At Bilton, Ernest started to shine intellectually, and in June 1894 he was awarded an entrance exhibition to Rugby. Thomas Arnold, who became headmaster in 1828, had transformed Rugby and it flourished under his leadership. By the mid-nineteenth century, it had become the popular image of a 'real' public school, helped by the publication in 1857 of Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days*, which described a Rugby still dominated by the aristocratic and anti-intellectual ethos that pre-dated Arnold's arrival.[3] Arnold was the first headmaster to deliberately foster the Sixth Form in order to make the school 'a moral and intellectual force in the nation'.[4] Between the time Arnold left and the Gowers boys went to Rugby, there was a succession of headmasters, the most outstanding of whom was Frederick Temple.

Ernest's elder brother went to Rugby in September 1889. Ernest joined him there in January 1895, but they overlapped by only two terms. Bill was no stickler for convention either as child or adult. The boys were supposed to travel together on the train from London at the start of Ernest's first term. However, Bill did not turn up as he decided to spend extra time in London with a girlfriend, and Ernest had to travel alone. Bill was not pleased when he heard that Ernest had 'let on' about what had happened.

At the beginning of Ernest's second term, he made a second blunder: he left his hat on the train. We have one of his rare school reminiscences to draw on for this story, the only one from his Rugby days:

> Once upon a time, a great many years ago, I was sent as a boy of fourteen or thereabouts to a school where the rules enjoined the wearing of top hats on Sundays. On the occasion of my second term the school reassembled on a Thursday. I travelled to school by train, and my top hat, enshrined in one of those leather cases that used to be made for the conveyance of top hats, travelled with the rest of my luggage in the van. When I collected my luggage at the station I found to my dismay that my top hat was not there. Throughout Friday and Saturday morning I paid visit after visit to the station, anxiously enquiring after it. But there was no news of it. My house was half a mile from the school chapel, and the thought of walking all that way without the conventional headgear – of being the only one of six hundred boys who entered chapel without carrying a top hat reverently before him – these thoughts were intolerable to me. So on Saturday afternoon I went in desperation to the town and bought

> a new top hat. It cost me ten shillings. It was lucky it was not more, for that was the exact sum my kind parents had provided me with as pocket money for the term. And so my honour was saved. My original top hat turned up on Monday, having waywardly spent the weekend at Holyhead. So I started the term with two top hats and no money.[5]

The brothers did well academically and as sportsmen while at Rugby. Bill, in particular, was an outstanding sportsman and was in the First XI for three years. He was awarded a scholarship to read classics at Trinity College, Cambridge, in November 1895.

Ernest had some formidable contemporaries. Richard Tawney, who was to become a noted economic historian, started at Rugby in September 1894, a term ahead of Ernest Gowers. On his first day, waiting at Rugby railway station, Tawney met William Temple (son of the former headmaster) who later became Archbishop of Canterbury. Gowers, Tawney and Temple all became members of Rugby's Eranos literary society. The school magazine, *The Meteor*, records that at the speech day the year before they left Rugby the fourth 'Speech', or declamation, comprised 'Latin prose: Bishop Butler's Analogy, introduction, upper bench – R. H. Tawney; lower bench – E. A. Gowers and E. G. V. Knox, equal'. The fifth was a scene from *Antigone* in which A. L. F. Smith spoke the Chorus. However, Gowers and Knox were less than confident. The editor of *The Meteor* commented that they were both 'too modest to be audible'.[6]

Ernest's enduring love of English, Classics and music was already evident. While at Rugby he became a highly proficient organist. When he gave his last school recital before leaving, *The Meteor* reported:

> When we say that E. A. Gowers was the performer, it is needless to enlarge upon the excellence of the performance. Gowers is considerably the best organist that the School has had for many years, and his loss is likely to be felt for a long time.[7]

His love for playing the organ remained with him for the rest of his life.

Not long after Ernest started at Rugby, his father suffered a breakdown after a severe bout of sciatica. At the beginning of July 1898, just after Bill had achieved a First in the Classics Tripos and left Cambridge, Sir William set sail for South Africa on a trip designed to help his recovery. Bill went with him. It is not clear why Sir William Gowers and his son chose to visit South Africa. It may have partly been Kipling's influence. Kipling, who had made the journey out earlier in the year, certainly

offered advice about their sea voyage.[8] Gowers senior may also have had concerns about his somewhat wayward elder son. Bill remained in southern Africa. He joined the British South Africa Company which, with Cecil Rhodes' Pioneer Force, was attempting to annex the territory of Rhodesia. Bill served with the company from 1899 to 1902 and was made 'Assistant Native Commissioner' in Matabeleland. He resigned in 1902 when he joined the Colonial Civil Service in Northern Nigeria as the Resident of Kano under Lord Lugard. By 1921 he had become Lieutenant-Governor of Nigeria.

Clare College, Cambridge

In 1900, Ernest won a scholarship to Clare College, Cambridge. He was one of nine students in his year who were successful in gaining Classical scholarships to Oxford or Cambridge. The headmaster remarked with pride that it was the first time Rugby had achieved two Classical scholarships to Balliol, the able recipients being A. F. L. Smith and R. H. Tawney. Gowers was awarded a scholarship by Clare College, Cambridge. Cambridge had introduced inter-collegiate lectures in the late 1860s, so Gowers would have attended lectures outside the narrow confines of Clare, which was one of the smaller colleges, and stronger in natural sciences than Classics. The leading Cambridge classicists were at Trinity, notably Sir Richard Jebb and Henry Jackson. Both had been Fellows at Trinity for over 35 years by the time Ernest went to Cambridge. Jebb, though not an outstanding scholar himself, greatly improved the reputation of Cambridge Classics scholarship and prepared the ground for better scholars who thrived after him.[9] Jackson was not a productive scholar but was 'the life and soul of Trinity in its heyday'. He fostered scholarship by 'incisive conversation'.[10] Ernest's brother Bill, who read Classics at Trinity, would have come into closer contact with Jackson than his younger brother.

There is scant record of Ernest's two years at Cambridge, apart from the programmes he kept as souvenirs of two amateur dramatic club performances in which he took part. In 1901, he played Captain Horace Vale in Pinero's *The Magistrate*. The following year he played Major Kildare of the Midland Fusiliers in *His Excellency the Governor*, *A Farcical Romance*, by R. Marshall. He was also on the club's organising committee so it is clear that he did not confine himself solely to his studies. In 1902 he was awarded a First in Part One of the Classics Tripos and left Cambridge. Only young men who aspired to a university or public school career went on to Part Two of the Tripos.

Competition for employment among the new middle class

Bill and Ernest Gowers were children of the Victorian age. Their father was a 'self-made' professional man. But instead of following their father into a profession or entering the world of commerce, the sons joined different branches of the Civil Service. After three years in southern Africa, Bill joined the Colonial Civil Service. His younger brother, Ernest, joined the Home Civil Service the following year.

Entry into the Civil Service was the vocational goal of many classics scholars; this was seen as the best preparation for success in its competitive entry examinations. In 1853, the Northcote Trevelyan Report on the organisation of the permanent Civil Service had recommended replacing the existing patronage system with 'a proper system of examination, for the supply of the public service with a thoroughly efficient class of men'.[11] The recommendations of the Northcote Trevelyan Report were influenced by a submission from Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, who strongly promoted the Classics. When they were eventually implemented, Oxford and Cambridge renewed their emphasis on Classics to provide the grounding for future recruits to the Civil Service.

Gowers senior had entered a profession which was itself struggling for status. His own almost accidental entry into the medical profession was not untypical. It may have been an economic choice because, unlike a number of the other professions, a medical student could cut costs by living at home and studying with a local doctor (as Gowers had with his Coggeshall apprenticeship) and doing his clinical work at a nearby hospital (as he did in London). The growing middle class in the mid-nineteenth century was anxious over employment prospects. The 'formidable increase in the output of educated young men after the mid-nineteenth century' had not been matched by an expansion of employment that carried middle class salaries.[12] There was strong competition for suitable employment, and particularly strong competition for entry into the Civil Service.

The term 'overcrowded professions' was freely used in vocational handbooks, and while there was an expansion in the Civil Service in the nineteenth century, 'there was a progressive reduction in the number of well-paid appointments'.[13] The number of positions in the First Division was reduced. While it is only possible to speculate about Gowers senior's motives for directing his sons into the Civil Service, there is evidence from some of Ernest Gowers' contemporaries, such as Arthur Salter, John Anderson and Claud Schuster, as to the reasoning behind their choice.

Salter, who became a colleague of Ernest Gowers later on, explained the basis for his choice in clear economic terms. In his own estimation,

he lacked the spectacular results to become a don, lacked the family contacts to become articled to a solicitor, lacked the private income and risk-taking personality to study law and try out as a barrister, and lacked the experience of working in industries which anyway showed no interest in recruiting graduates. School teaching was the only alternative to the public service and he was not very good at games and did not much enjoy the company of boys. Salter sat the general entry examination, qualified for some relatively attractive opening in India but took fright at leaving home and settled for a desk clerk's post arranging coal supplies for the Admiralty.[14]

John Anderson went to Edinburgh University. Oxford and Cambridge did significantly better in the Civil Service entry examinations than most other universities. The Scottish universities, which tended to be independent of the English university hierarchy, were the only other serious contenders.[15] Anderson was one of Gowers' most outstanding contemporaries. His biographer notes:

> In those days Edinburgh University regarded it as virtually a *sine qua non* that its best scholars should take the Civil Service Examination. … It was deemed to be a duty to himself, to his family and to his Alma Mater to pass, and pass high, into the Civil Service.[16]

Although awarding him first place, Anderson's examiners were not altogether good at predicting his strengths. His political science paper was criticised for being 'limited in scope and not clear in plan … dull. Does not know how to group and give points to his facts'.[17]

Claud Schuster, another able contemporary, joined the Civil Service after a mediocre four years' practice at the Bar. Schuster's biographers suggest that marriage and the need for a more reliable income were the motive for Schuster's shift to the Civil Service.[18]

There are other examples. Leonard Woolf sat the Civil Service Examination in 1903. He had received a First Class in Part One of the Tripos, but in the third division, and a Second Class in Part Two. Woolf came sixty-ninth out of a field of 99 listed candidates in the Civil Service Examination. His name had an asterisk beside it in the Civil Service List, which meant he would be offered something, though not one of the best postings.[19] Woolf had very little money and 'no powerful relations' so he joined the Colonial Service, staying overseas until 1912.[20] Lytton Strachey's mother decided that the Civil Service was a good career for her son. She initially chose Balliol, but Strachey failed the Classics part of the relevant examination and so he was rejected.

She then urged him to try for Cambridge and he was accepted to read history at Trinity on the basis of passing the 'Little Go' (an exam taken by students at the end of their first year) but only achieved a Second:

> Lady Strachey was also anxious lest Lytton's indifferent degree should act as an impediment against his entering the Civil Service. … several of Lytton's friends at one time or another were conscripted into some branch of the Civil Service – A. R. Ainsworth, Ralph Hawtrey and Robin Mayor going to the Education Office; Theodore Llewelyn Davies and Saxon Sydney-Turner to the Treasury; Maynard Keynes for a couple of years to the India Office; and Leonard Woolf, for seven, to the Ceylon Civil Service. But competition was keen and most of Lytton's associates were awarded Firsts or Double Firsts. 'Personally,' wrote G. M. Trevelyan to Maynard Keynes, 'I think it is most distressing the way the Civil Service swallows nearly all the best Cambridge men.'[21]

The candidates in the Civil Service Examination were competing against each other for the best positions. Those who came top in the graded results (based on the consolidated and weighted results across all the papers) chose the department to join from the list of vacancies. The competition was strong.

'Cramming' at Wrens and reading for the Bar

By 1900 the criticisms recorded in successive reports of the Civil Service Commissioners about discrimination in favour of Classics could no longer be dismissed out-of-hand and more modern subjects were creeping in, though weighted less generously than Greek, Latin and pure mathematics – such as modern languages, geography, history, political science and economics. The need for subject breadth posed a challenge for most university graduates, who had depth in one, or at most two, academic disciplines.

Ernest returned to live with his parents in Queen Anne Street when he came down from Cambridge. In common with many of his contemporaries he took out additional insurance for the Civil Service Examination by attending a crammer. From October 1902 until the following July, he attended Wrens in Powis Square. Here he studied Roman history, Greek and Latin language and literature, English literature and comparative political economy. Dr Reich tutored him in English and general modern history. W. J. Whittaker tutored him in English law, Roman law and political science.

A month after enrolling at Wrens, he was accepted by the Inner Temple to study for the Bar. This involved attending lectures organised by the Council of Legal Education and passing the Bar exam set by the Council before qualifying as a barrister. Students were required to 'keep 12 terms', which included attending three dinners per term, a total of 36 dinners.

Success in the Civil Service Examination

On 3 August 1903 he applied for a Civil Service position on a generic form, which included posts in the Home Civil Service, the Indian Civil Service, and 'Eastern cadetships'. He cited Fletcher, his Rugby master, as his first referee. Fletcher, in response to a question on Ernest's trustworthiness, wrote 'most unhesitatingly – few more so'.[22] The second referee was Dr James Taylor, one of his father's colleagues at the National Hospital.

Gowers had the appropriate education to prepare him for a career as a generalist civil servant. The unanswered question in many of his career changes is whether he sought the changes or whether he was identified by others as the best man for the job at the time. His obituary in *The Guardian* seems to provide the answer:

> The astonishing diversity of the many posts which Gowers filled may possibly suggest that there was a certain restlessness in his make-up, and that he was one of those men who are better at starting a new job and communicating the first impulse of a new and lively personality than at the long and steady grind. Any idea that this was the case would be very wide of the mark. Gowers was always content to do what he was asked to do, and to carry a task, however arduous, through to completion.
>
> The reason for his frequent changes of post lies elsewhere. He had in a high degree so many of the qualities of a first-class administrator that he could be relied on to fulfil almost any job with distinction. Small wonder, then, that the powers that be turned to Gowers when in doubt how to fill an important post.[23]

Ernest Gowers passed the Civil Service Examination, though there is no record of his placing in the rankings. On 27 November 1903 he started work as a First Division clerk (the upper level of the Civil Service that later became known as the Administrative Class) in the Estate Duty Office of the Department of Inland Revenue.[24] It was the first step in the career of a man of whom it might be said that, compared to the majority of his able but more specialised contemporaries, he was one of the greatest true generalists of them all.

3
Coping with Lloyd George

Ernest Gowers left Rugby in 1899, having just turned 19. He graduated from Cambridge in June 1902. Queen Victoria had died the year before, in 1901, and was succeeded by Edward VII. Briggs describes Edwardian Britain as a contrast between poverty and display, 'shadows and sunlight'.[1] Edward remained on the throne until 1910. His predilection for money and pleasure meant that the gradual decline in the standard of living that was taking place in the country was largely ignored. 'England', said G. M. Young, 'was a very good country for gentlemen. And it all rested on two things – an income tax so moderate that it was hardly felt; and an unlimited supply of cheap efficient domestic service'.[2] During the early years of Gowers' career, there would have been a sense of security and quiet purpose. The work of the young graduates in the Civil Service was not pressing and most of the young men fresh from university complained of boredom. The working day started late, lunch was taken in the relaxed environment of gentlemen's clubs, and the day ended early.

Gowers joined the Department of Inland Revenue in 1903 at a starting salary of £200 per annum with an annual increment of £20. He remained there for a year. Despite it being such a brief posting, he may have found it a useful experience to draw on later in his career when he returned in 1927 as Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue. It would have been noteworthy when he first joined that Inland Revenue was one of the most progressive departments, having introduced typewriters a few years earlier after the Chairman of the Board, Sir Algernon West, had a 'battle royal with the Treasury'. By 1888, West had all important letters copied in this way, and 'he looked forward to the complete elimination of copyists'.[3] Shorthand 'was considered a suitable accomplishment for Lower Division clerks' and not a natural accompanying skill to typing.

Perhaps Ernest Gowers' father's insistence that his sons learn shorthand proved useful, though there is no evidence from Ernest Gowers' own papers, many of which were handwritten, that he often resorted to shorthand in later years.

The India Office

In 1904 Gowers was transferred to the India Office as a junior clerk in the Judicial and Public Department. In 1900 the entire staff of the India Office was only 589 people.[4] We have no first-hand account of Gowers' early days there, but John Maynard Keynes was a near contemporary and described his own initiation to the India Office. Three years younger than Gowers, he also joined the Civil Service from Cambridge. He, like Gowers, decided not to take a second Tripos but to sit for the Civil Service Examination. Keynes came second in the exam (though he scored badly in economics; Otto Niemeyer, a Classic scholar from Eton, took first place, chose the Treasury and was rapidly promoted).[5] Harrod describes the process of choosing a department:

> The list of vacancies only appeared after the examination, and Maynard decided that there were only two that he would care to accept – the Treasury and the India Office. … The first on the list [Niemeyer] (who had a long lead over Maynard) chose the Treasury, and thus Maynard had the India Office.[6]

The working day lasted from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., with an hour for lunch. Keynes complained:

> I'm thoroughly sick of this place and would like to resign. Now the novelty has worn off, I am bored nine-tenths of the time and rather unreasonably irritated the other tenth whenever I can't have my own way. It's maddening to have thirty people who can reduce you to impotence when you're quite certain you are right. …
>
> The public write in to obtain information on some point. One has the material which isn't in the least secret and which may prove most useful to them. But they mustn't have it unless it is *absolutely certain* that the information is correct in every detail – even when you add qualifications 'probably', 'as far as we know', 'without guaranteeing'. What 'absolutely certain' means is that somebody other than yourself is responsible for its accuracy.

> The consequence is that although one is most careful to acknowledge letters by return of post and to spend an infinite amount of trouble finding out what is 'absolutely certain', your final letter to the public is not worth the postage, although as the result of your investigations you may be bubbling with information of ordinary reliability.[7]

How familiar this is to anyone who has embarked on a public service career!

Keynes started in the Military Department of the India Office. He managed to write much of a dissertation for Cambridge during office hours. In March 1907, he shifted to the Revenue Statistics and Commerce Department where work was more interesting:

> I like my new Department. I have not much to write at present, but there is an excellent system by which everything comes to me to read, and I read it. In fact there is so much to read, that it takes me all my time. Some of it is quite absorbing – Foreign Office commercial negotiations with Germany, quarrels with Russia in the Persian Gulf, the regulation of opium in Central India, the Chinese opium proposals – I have had great files to read on all these in the last two days.[8]

Wyn Griffith, who worked with Gowers many years later, joined the Liverpool office of the Inland Revenue in October 1909, moving to London in 1912. He recalled a lesson he was taught about the dress code for the Civil Service in London, when his new boss, James Hunter, asked him to wear a morning coat and silk hat (which he had bought) to the office:

> I demurred somewhat, so he said quietly 'Will you have the goodness to go to Watney Rombe Leeds office, ask for the Secretary, and tell him that I would be obliged if he would come to see me on Friday morning'. I went there, but I did not see the Secretary, nor did I penetrate beyond the clerk at the counter; the Secretary was busy; I came back and told Hunter. 'Tomorrow, will you put on your morning coat and silk hat and go on the identical errand' he said. I did so, walked straight into Watney's office and before I knew where I was I was talking to the Secretary. When I came back and told Hunter, he merely smiled.[9]

Like Keynes, Gowers probably also had time on his hands. During his first three years in the Civil Service he managed to complete the

exams to qualify for the Bar; passing Roman Law in January 1904 and Evidence, Procedure, and Criminal Law the following June. He sat for his Finals in April 1906 and was called to the Bar.[10]

Nonetheless, he chose to remain in the Civil Service. Unlike Keynes who escaped back to Cambridge in July 1908 (against the inclination of his father who felt he was 'throwing up a certainty and taking risks'[11]), Gowers' escape route was to get closer to the political arena.

Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for India

In March 1907, just as Keynes joined the India Office, Gowers was appointed Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for India, C. E. Hobhouse. As Wyn Griffith recalled, young men with legal qualifications were in demand as private secretaries, for that was the first step in a political career if you had neither money nor influence 'and it was in the Inner Temple that most of these young men were to be found'.[12] It was a path that offered a significant opportunity for First Division clerks as such posts could still be allocated through patronage to aspiring politicians or family friends.

Lord Morley, the Secretary for India, sat in the House of Lords, so his parliamentary under-secretaries had to respond to criticisms of government policy in the House of Commons. Gowers gained a breadth of experience working for these men. The first, Hobhouse, had been appointed against Morley's wishes. He wanted T. R. Buchanan, who at that stage rejected the offer.[13] Hobhouse headed a royal commission into decentralisation in India, which gave Gowers his first experience of a commission of inquiry (but by no means his last).

Gowers continued in this position under three of Hobhouse's successors.[14] In 1908, T. R. Buchanan, after a long career in politics, succeeded Hobhouse. He was forced to resign in 1909 on health grounds after just over a year in the position. His obituary described him as a sensitive man, 'perhaps too sensitive for the rough works of politics'. Being Parliamentary Under-Secretary for India was the peak of his career.[15]

Buchanan was succeeded by the Hon. Alexander Murray, Master of Elibank, in June 1909. Elibank had an even shorter tenure in the position but rose to prominence in the Liberal Party hierarchy. Gowers impressed him. Despite Elibank's brief tenure, their families developed an enduring friendship. Elibank and Gowers had plenty of time to get to know one another as Gowers accompanied his boss on a 126-mile tour of his Midlothian constituency on polling day in 1910.[16]

After the 1910 election there were further Cabinet changes. Edwin Montagu succeeded Elibank. By this time, Gowers had already spent six years in the India Office, three of which had been spent as the Minister's Private Secretary. Only one year older than Gowers, Montagu had been elected to the seat of West Cambridgeshire in January 1906. Montagu may have been difficult to work for, particularly as he suffered severe mood changes. But he also had considerable personal charm. He had no previous experience of Indian politics, but his first Indian Budget speech, in July 1910, is said to have been a landmark in his career. His biographer quotes his 'masterly' speech at length.[17] Given the length of Gowers' experience in the India Office by that time, and the position he held, it is highly likely that he would have drafted the speech. Montagu had been Under-Secretary for India for barely five months.

Marriage and family

For Gowers, there were also a number of changes on the family front. In 1904, on a visit home to England, his brother Bill married Maud Loraine, a woman he had met in Northern Nigeria. It did not bode well for the marriage that she received her guests on one floor of the building and the bridegroom received his on another. Some years later when their marriage had collapsed, Maud would have willingly divorced him, but this was out of the question as it would have ruined his career. When he had retired and it would not have mattered, she apparently refused.

A happier and more conventional relationship was being forged between my grandfather and his future wife. In 1905, at the age of 25, he married Constance (Kit) Macregor Greer, daughter of Thomas Macregor Greer[18] of Ballymoney, Northern Ireland. Kit Greer's mother, Margaret, was the daughter of Sir Charles Reed MP, the first Chairman of the London School Board. Ernest and Kit Gowers kept visitors' books during much of their married life. The first recorded the family guests who attended their wedding on 19 May 1905 and the reception at their new home in Bullingham Mansions, Kensington – members of the Greer, Reed, Baines and Gowers families. However, their early married life was marred by the loss of their first child. Born in March 1906, baby John died in infancy. My grandmother was comforted by the frequent visits of her sister Eileen and brother Kenneth from Ballymoney. Eileen Greer spent Christmas with Ernest and Kit in 1906, staying through January 1907. Maud Gowers, Bill's wife, was also a frequent visitor when home on leave from Nigeria.

In 1907, Ernest and Kit moved to Campden Hill Square, South Kensington. In June that year, their first daughter, Margaret Mary (Peggy), was born. Eileen and Kenneth Greer continued to be frequent visitors through 1907 and 1908. But in 1909, my grandparents suffered another tragic loss when Eileen Greer died in a horrific accident. Dressed in the long skirts of the day, she was playing a game which involved jumping over a bonfire. Her skirt caught fire and her burns proved fatal. This was devastating in such a close knit family.

Ernest and Kit had two more children, both born before the beginning of the First World War; in March 1910 my father, William Richard (Dick) Gowers, was born; three years later, a second daughter, Eileen (named after Eileen Greer), was born.

Talent uncovered – promotion to Principal Private Secretary to Lloyd George

In the first decade of the twentieth century the political mood was changing, and before long the work of the civil servants would change dramatically. Industrial unrest had started to become a feature of political life. In 1889 the London dockers had struck, seeking a wage of six pence an hour. This strike had aroused more interest and sympathy than any previous strike and led to a rapid extension of trade unionism into the lower ranks of the labour force.[19] In 1893, Keir Hardie, a Scottish miner, formed the Independent Labour Party. Two members were elected to Parliament in the 1895 general election. In 1900, a meeting of delegates from the Independent Labour Party, the Trades Unions Congress and the Fabian Society, formed a fledgling Labour Party to facilitate the election of MPs sympathetic to working-class issues. By 1906, the Labour Party had 29 MPs.

Conservative peer, Lord Salisbury, the last prime minister to lead a government from the House of Lords, retired in 1902. Arthur Balfour, also a Conservative, succeeded him. When Balfour resigned in 1905, the King invited Henry Campbell-Bannerman, as leader of the next largest party, the Liberal Party, to form a government. In 1906, he led them to the greatest election victory in their history. Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George joined the Cabinet.

The 1906 Liberal landslide win had a profound and lasting effect on the work of the Administrative Class of the Civil Service. The Government had a strong reform agenda, but it was not until Asquith succeeded Campbell-Bannerman that these reforms gained full momentum. Under Asquith, the Liberals embarked on an ambitious program

which included establishing a national health insurance scheme. Lloyd George, one of the strongest reformers in Cabinet, became Chancellor of the Exchequer. Asquith's 1908 budget provided funding for a non-contributory Old Age Pension to relieve poverty by direct welfare payments from the State. Lloyd George's first budget, the 'People's Budget', introduced in April 1909, was intended to raise revenue to help finance the social reforms. It was strongly attacked by the Conservatives in the House of Commons and by the House of Lords. The Lords' persistent refusal to pass the finance legislation led to a constitutional crisis, resolved in 1911 by the intervention of George V, who had succeeded Edward VII in 1909. On Asquith's advice, the King announced that if the Bill was rejected again he would create enough new peers to ensure that it was passed when reintroduced. However, the Lords retained the power to delay legislation unrelated to Supply (which it used to considerable effect when it blocked moves to abolish the death penalty after the Second World War).

The turbulent introduction of Lloyd George's National Insurance Bill

Lloyd George's next major reform as Chancellor of the Exchequer was the 1911 National Insurance Act, which provided the first British contributory system of insurance against illness and unemployment. Sir John Anderson much later described the introduction of the Insurance Bill as 'in the nature of a miracle' because Lloyd George and those who supported him were 'up against the whole strength of Toryism'.[20] There was strong opposition to the Bill by the British Medical Association, its Chairman describing the introduction of national health scheme as 'a long step towards Socialism'.[21] Despite their opposition, the National Insurance Bill was introduced into the Commons on 4 May 1911, passed in December, and came into operation on 15 July 1912. Gowers was Principal Private Secretary to Lloyd George when the Act was passed. He described the turbulent passage of the Bill:

> The first National Insurance Act was introduced in May 1911 and passed in December. Its progress was stormy, both inside and outside Parliament, and the virulent campaign of the Northcliffe Press against it magnified its unpopularity. 'Never was legislation more needed; never was it less wanted' said its author afterwards. By the autumn many of the Cabinet had cold feet and were conspiring to get it dropped. Lloyd George's reaction was characteristic. He made a

speech in his best demagogic style to a vast audience in Whitefield's Tabernacle, nailing his colours to the mast. It was a dramatic day. It began with a bit of a fracas. As we were going on to the stage one or two people who had hidden themselves in the wings sprang out on us making hostile noises and in the momentary confusion that followed little Wedgwood Benn (now Lord Stansgate), one of our party, gallantly hurled himself upon Lloyd George's private detective, a very large man indeed [presumably mistaking him for a protester]. The speech was received with boundless enthusiasm and when we returned to No. 11 Lloyd George seized Mrs Lloyd George by the waist and whirled her round the room in a dance of triumph. His dissident colleagues had no choice but meekly to fall into line behind him.

Lloyd George being Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Bill was necessarily a Treasury measure and was piloted through the Commons by him and the Financial Secretary (first Mackinnon Wood and then Charles Masterman) with the help of the Attorney General (Rufus Isaacs). The Treasury officials who had been through the experience a few years before of having to sponsor Asquith's Old Age Pensions Act, had no liking for their novel role as a spending department. They looked on the whole business with disfavour, especially as Lloyd George was so engrossed in the Bill that it was only with the utmost difficulty that he could be made to take any interest in his duties as Chancellor.[22]

Gowers described the process of developing the National Insurance Bill:

One Treasury official … was assigned full-time to work on the Bill. He was the ablest of what were then called Principal Clerks, John Bradbury. He, with the draftsmen and the actuary, shared the main responsibility for it with W. J. Braithwaite, an Inland Revenue official interested in sociology.

Sir Robert Chalmers, who had succeeded Sir George Murray as permanent secretary early in the year, held aloof, though no doubt Bradbury kept him pretty well informed of what was happening. The only direct intervention I remember from Chalmers was when he discovered that the Bill as it stood made no provision for any ministerial responsibility for the actions of the body of salaried officials to whom the administration was to be entrusted. He made sure that an amendment was inserted on Report to set this right.[23]

Lloyd George and the Marconi Scandal

Lloyd George had a strong aversion to paperwork. His Permanent Secretary, Sir George Murray, refused to adapt to this and Lloyd George started to bypass him by seeking advice from elsewhere.[24] Gowers describes his own technique for managing this phobia:

> Not only did he refuse to look at any official papers – that was perhaps reasonable enough – but he fled at the very sight of them. I soon learned that it was no use to go down to No. 11 carrying Treasury files on which his decision was needed. As soon as he saw me approaching with any papers he would disappear – probably into the wc – and not emerge until he felt sure I must have gone. My only chance was to memorise the content of a file, go to him empty-handed, and steer a conversation about something else round to the topic in question. If I was lucky enough to get some indication of assent from him I would go thankfully back to my room and write 'The C of E agrees' on the papers. This was the way in which his approval was obtained to the proposed contract between the Post Office and the Marconi Company, and I have had a guilty feeling ever since that I did not put the case to him in a way that was likely to impress the existence of that contract deeply on his memory.

Marconi was developing wireless telegraphy. Marconi's mother was Irish, and in 1898 he visited Ireland. Between June and September he carried out experimental transmissions between White Lodge, a house near the harbour in Ballycastle, County Antrim (coincidentally Ernest Gowers' in-laws, the Greers, bought White Lodge in the early 1900s), and Rathlin Island. Transmission and reception between the island and Ballycastle enabled the world's first live ship-to-shore wireless report, of a yacht race, to a shore station in Kingstown, Dublin. Marconi took out a patent on wireless communication and established two companies: the British Marconi Wireless Telegraphy Company and an American subsidiary. It was the existence of two companies that led Lloyd George to mislead Parliament when the scandal erupted.

In March 1910, the British Marconi Company submitted a plan to link the British Empire by a network of wireless stations. Rather than provide licenses for the stations, the Cables (Landing Rights) Committee recommended that a state-owned system was desirable and that the Marconi Company should be approached to erect it. At a meeting in 1911, Asquith's Cabinet had approved the establishment of a chain

of state-owned wireless stations. Negotiations began in the autumn of 1911 and a tender was signed in March 1912 between the Post Office and the British Marconi Wireless Telegraphy Company, providing for the establishment of the first six stations.

Lloyd George, the Postmaster-General Herbert Samuel and Solicitor-General Sir Rufus Isaacs (brother of the managing director of the British Marconi Company) all bought shares in the American subsidiary, so three members of the Cabinet were implicated in the scandal that ensued (Isaacs was promoted to Attorney-General three months after the signing of the tender with the Marconi Company).[25] Although the contract was not made public, the price of shares in the company increased dramatically between August 1911 and March 1912. The Government's decision to award the contract to Marconi was not made public until April. The contract was not tabled in the House until 19 July. Rumours about the purchase of the shares hit the press the next day.

In October 1912 a motion to appoint a Select Committee to discuss criticisms of the contract was debated in Parliament. Lloyd George, Samuel and Isaacs stated that they had not bought shares in 'that' company.[26] The cross-party Select Committee, which voted on strict party lines, found that they had 'profited directly from the policies of the Government, but that they had not been guilty of corruption'. The scandal profoundly damaged Lloyd George's reputation and 'during the last two years before the war one heard less of Lloyd George than at any time since the Liberals had come to power'.[27]

The Master of Elibank was also a casualty of the scandal. In 1911 he had bought shares for himself and for Liberal Party funds in the American Marconi Company. He was summoned to appear before the select committee, but by then he was in South America on business. He sent messages from Bogota claiming inability to attend and 'Bogota' became a frequent Tory catcall at political meetings.

When we were teenagers and he was in his 70s, my brother and I asked our grandfather about his career during a long car journey together. In the discussion that followed he said that one of the most difficult moments was when he had to sit in the House of Commons and hear Lloyd George lie about buying Marconi shares, knowing that he was lying. But the scandal also had an unexpected impact on Gowers' career, propelling him into his next move. In November 1912 he was appointed Chief Inspector of Outdoor Staff at the National Insurance Commission being established by C. F. G. Masterman MP.[28]

He describes, with both gentle irony and self-deprecation, why he moved to the Commission:

> I myself went there comparatively late; the primary reason for my going was that Lloyd George wanted to get rid of me. I have never been quite sure why; I thought we had got on together pretty well. My going, and the advancement of my principal assistant to succeed me, left a vacancy in the private office which was immediately filled by the appointment of Frances Stevenson, then a mistress at the school Megan [Lloyd George's daughter] attended.[29]

During the Marconi scandal Lloyd George had turned to Frances Stevenson for support. She became 'mistress' in more senses than one. In 1911, she had been hired by Lloyd George as a governess for his youngest daughter, Megan. Towards the end of 1912 he offered her a job as his secretary on the explicit understanding that she would also be his mistress. She accepted these terms and joined his private office in 1913.[30] Gowers later confided to the family that he sometimes had to fake Lloyd George's signature on urgent state documents because Lloyd George was away with 'a girlfriend' and could not be located. Apparently this skill was not unusual: Andrew McFadyean describes reproducing the signatures of both Charles Masterman and Edwin Montagu, allowing them to leave the office without having to wait for letters that had been dictated to be produced ready for signature.[31]

Establishing the National Insurance Commission – Gowers joins the 'Loan Collection'

The pressure to implement the National Insurance Act was the reason for the most significant change for the Civil Service after the introduction of the common Civil Service Examination. In order to ensure that the most able men were engaged in the task of making the Act work, a group of talented young civil servants were drawn from across the Service to work together as a team to develop the processes to make the Act operable.

The machinery to implement the National Insurance Act had to be completed by 1 April 1913, when it came into force. The Insurance Commission had its first meeting on 30 December 1911. It soon assembled the team, under the direction of Sir Robert Morant, to implement the Act. The hand-picked group of high-fliers was nicknamed the 'Loan Collection' (a nickname that may have been inspired by Rugby

where artworks loaned to the school from collections such as the National Gallery were regularly housed in a room known as the Loan Collection).

Charles Masterman had entered Parliament in 1906, and had helped Lloyd George develop the legislation and establish the National Insurance Commission. He later wrote:

> When the terrific work was imposed on me of launching the Insurance Act, an accomplishment to be performed in six months (which Germany had taken twenty-five years to complete), I was permitted to select a body of the most brilliant younger men of the Home Civil Service, who were thus given a chance of independent action some ten years before they might otherwise have obtained it in their own departments. …
>
> Mr Salter was my private secretary. The tradition of the office was that he worked twenty-four hours round the clock, without any trace of sleep. Mr Bradbury was our financial adviser on the Commission. Mr Gowers was our chief inspector. Mr Anderson, Mr Warren Fisher, Mr Claud Schuster, Mr Wise were among the prominent men in their thirties who assisted effecting this almost incredible operation.[32]

Salter may have been an exception to the Loan Collection rule. In later years, he claimed he was not hand-picked by Morant but rejected by his department. He had selected the wrong department when he entered the Civil Service in 1904 and spent seven 'intolerably boring' years in the Transport Department. He then 'made himself unpopular' with the highest class of civilian officers in the Admiralty and when they considered who they could lose they selected him. 'At last I had my chance.'[33] His admiration for Lloyd George's achievement was enduring, writing in 1961 that the Loan Collection could have done nothing:

> [U]nless a great Minister, in perhaps the most brilliant administration Great Britain had ever had, had constructed the Bill and secured its passage, had both secured the necessary powers for the Department and sustained them in the face of every attack.[34]

Braithwaite tells the story about the decision to move Gowers to the National Insurance Commission slightly differently from Gowers' own version. He writes that in the autumn of 1912 the English Commissioners had identified the man they wanted to appoint as Chief Inspector, but Fisher wanted to appoint a friend of his. Morant

(diplomatically) suggested that Lloyd George should arbitrate. Lloyd George ignored the two nominees and appointed 'his own private secretary' (Gowers).[35]

John Anderson joined the Insurance Commission at the relatively junior rank of Principal in 1912, but was promoted to Secretary of the National Insurance Commission a year later. Claud Schuster is said to have been promoted three times within two months when he started with the Commission.[36] Alexander Maxwell was another young man whose career would later intersect with that of Gowers on the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment.

Warren Fisher was brought into the group by Lloyd George to organise the work of the Commission so that the scheme could be brought into operation on time and to bridge the gap between Morant and the Treasury. Fisher admired Morant and was his subordinate, but he was also very close to his former chief Chalmers, Morant's antagonist at the Treasury. Braithwaite 'who had done the groundwork on which the Act was based' recounted that 'the office is doing everything on its own and is Fisher's responsibility … Morant retired to his tent. Fisher was getting everything done without consulting him'.[37]

Morant was not an easy man. In 1917 Beatrice Webb wrote that while she considered him the 'one man of genius' in the Civil Service, he excited violent dislike in some men and much suspicion in many. He was 'public spirited in his ends but devious in his methods', that despite his 'malicious tongue and somewhat tortuous ways', he had achieved more to improve public administration in England than any other man.[38]

In the early 1960s, Gowers recorded his own perspective on the personalities working on the implementation of the National Insurance Act and his colleagues in the Loan Collection, many of whose careers would intersect with his over the years[39]:

> The team engaged in fashioning the Act worked together harmoniously on the whole. Their product, considering its immense complexity, was masterly. It was when the time came to put it into operation that the trouble began. Robert Morant, chosen after much hesitation by Lloyd George for the supreme command, is portrayed in Braithwaite's memoirs. The portrait is so unattractive that it may seem hardly credible. But as a description of one facet of Morant, rather than of the whole man, it is true enough. No-one who met Morant, or even looked at him, would have been surprised to hear that there was insanity in his family. That taint, if indeed he had

it, may in some respects have been a positive advantage. He was a crusader with fire in his belly, and during his later career won golden opinions from some people who had social reform at heart but did not have to work under him. But he did not know the first thing about administration and had grave faults of character. Under stress – and I rarely saw him except under stress – he was hysterical, petulant, pusillanimous, disingenuous and a bully to his subordinates. He was prejudiced against the measure he had to administer, which he thought was based in most respects on wrong principles. He was prejudiced also against Braithwaite, who, as the architect of the Act, naturally expected to be treated as indispensable in making it work. Tact not being one of Braithwaite's many gifts, he made no secret of that expectation. The story of their unhappy relations is told in the memoirs. It has, as their editor says, 'all the inevitability of a Greek tragedy'.

The task of bringing the Act into operation was bedevilled by an even more serious personal clash than that between Morant and Braithwaite. This was a vendetta between Morant and Chalmers, pursued with a duplicity on Morant's side and a venom on Chalmers' that did little credit to either. The two men resembled each other in one respect only. Both had a nice capacity for intrigue, though even here they differed in that Chalmers would make use of it only when other methods were unlikely to succeed, whereas with Morant it was instinctive. … In all other respects they were as unlike as could be. Chalmers, slow-moving and dignified to the point of pomposity, of few words and those often cynically barbed, as accomplished in the art of administration as Morant was inept, detested this to him extraordinary creature whom he always referred to as 'the Aphrostome' ['foam mouth']. Chalmers of course had the whip hand; only through him could Morant get staff of the quantity and quality he thought he needed and at the salaries he thought right. I think that fundamentally Chalmers must have been in the wrong. His contemptuous mistrust of Morant blinded him to the truth that, although a large part of the work would have to be done by what are now called the executive and clerical classes, this gigantic enterprise, different both in kind and degree from anything the Civil Service had ever undertaken before, would need men of the highest quality at the administrative level, with brains, courage and imagination. He took a sadistic delight in thwarting and infuriating the Aphrostome. …

To a large extent Morant brought it on himself by the devious methods it was his nature to employ. For instance he once wrote me

a letter of immense length in his own hand begging me to act as a channel by which he could get decisions from the Chancellor [this story refers back to when Gowers still worked as PPS to Lloyd George] on staffing questions, short-circuiting Chalmers (As Chalmers used to say, Morant suffered from 'chronic diarrhoea of the pen'). I replied explaining as gently and sympathetically as I could why it was out of the question for me to do what he asked. He wrote back a charming letter saying that he quite understood, but I do not think he ever forgave me.

After a few months Morant got panic. He was convinced that it was impossible to bring the Act into operation by the due date, and that he was heading for disaster. He stopped at nothing in his attempts to shake Lloyd George's resolution that postponement, hardly less disastrous politically, was not to be thought of. He lobbied Ministers; he got members of the opposition to ask questions in the House; he saw to it that the Press got hold of the idea that postponement was inevitable. Lloyd George, who of course knew what was going on, became worried. I remember his talking to me about it one day when I was performing my daily duty of taking him and his pug for a walk in St James's Park. Ought he to dismiss Morant? Or ought he to agree to postponement? I said he could not do the first and ought not to do the second, which I am sure he knew well enough but only wanted a little reassurance.

Then Chalmers saw the red light. Braithwaite says in his memoirs that Chalmers had orders from the Cabinet to give Morant what he wanted. That may be so, but I think it was rather that he realized at last that the credit of the service of which he was head was at stake. And so the famous 'Loan Collection' was sent to the rescue.

Chalmers chose as its leader the man who he had good reason to believe to be the ablest young man in the Civil Service. Warren Fisher was then 32; he had been Chalmers' private secretary at the Revenue, and when entrusted by him with the ticklish duty of carrying out the supertax provisions of the 1909/10 Finance Act had made a good job of it. The choice could hardly have been better. Fisher in his prime was a first-class administrator. He and his team were not placed under Morant's orders, and all had return tickets to their departments whenever they cared to use them. Fisher rarely if ever saw Morant. He did no paper work. He established his contacts, directly or through his team, with Anderson and the other heads of divisions, seeing that they got what they wanted in staff, money and accommodation and closely watching their progress so far as it

was measurable statistically. Ignoring all unessentials and keeping a firm grip on all essentials, he took the most daring decisions on his own responsibility with the knowledge that he was sure of Chalmers' support. (What Braithwaite calls 'the unlimited trust and favour that Chalmers showered upon Fisher' was not to last. There was to come a time, some years later, when Chalmers was to refuse, publicly and ostentatiously, to shake hands with him).

So the situation was saved, and Chalmers had the double satisfaction of showing what the Civil Service was capable of and denying Morant any credit for the achievement. And when the Loan Collection's work was done (to quote from a review of Braithwaite's Memoirs that I wrote for The Economist[40]), 'the storm-tossed Morant at last found the ballast that he so sorely needed in the level-headed sagacity of the two young men who are now Lord Waverley [John Anderson] and Lord Salter'.

This being the story, it is perhaps not surprising that so many of the original staff of the Insurance Commission later had distinguished careers elsewhere. The young civil servants who came in of their own accord, like Anderson and Salter, were of the enterprising and ambitious type that responded to the appeal of novelty and opportunity. The members of the Loan Collection were carefully handpicked; they had to be, for they were a desperate remedy. It is an interesting fact that in the autumn of 1912 there were no fewer than four Fellows of All Souls working in the department – Graham-Harrison, Gwyer, Malcolm and Young – and two others – Frederick Liddell and Wilfred Greene – had between them drafted the Bill. Later, when the measure had been safely launched, the work became largely routine, and the pioneers formed a pool of expertise that could be drawn on for other purposes, especially the numerous other new duties that were increasingly placed by Parliament on the Executive. Four of them – Anderson, Bradbury, Salter and Schuster – were eventually given peerages and a fifth – Fisher – might have had one if he had wanted it.

Gowers remembered Anderson with particular gratitude:

I did not get to know Anderson very well in the Insurance Commission days, but two things stand out in my memory about him during the short time we worked together then. One was his generosity when I had made a mistake of judgement that caused some trouble and an awkward debate in Parliament. The subject fell within Anderson's

> branch. I had mentioned to him casually what I thought of doing, but had not obtained his express authority. Nothing would have been easier for him than to deny responsibility and leave the blame on my shoulders. It was as characteristic of him that he immediately and unreservedly took full responsibility on himself as it would have been uncharacteristic of him to have approved the unwise thing I did if it had been formally submitted to him and he had had time to think it over.

Whatever the incident was it would have been a painful lesson for the young civil servant, trying to make his mark but making it in the wrong way (especially as the man who rescued him was two years his junior; Anderson turned 30 in 1912). He continues his assessment of Anderson:

> The other thing I remember is that when, in 1913, the organisation of the office was shuffled into its final form, and Anderson promoted to the head of it, there was no one among the many disappointed people, not even Brook, who had been practically promised the post, who failed to realise that no other choice could have been made; Anderson's outstanding ability had already set him apart.

Gowers gave another assessment, not of Anderson but of the long-term impact of the changes in the Civil Service that took place just before and during the First World War:

> The gigantic task of bringing the National Health and Unemployment Insurance Acts into operation taught the Service what it could do, and the control of the whole of the social and economic life of the nation during the war drove home the lesson. The Service is not now afraid of administrative difficulties.[41]

By this time war was not far off. Five years later, Wyn Griffith wrote:

> It is difficult, at this interval of time, to explain the general atmosphere of this golden period before the first war. Everything seemed so stable and secure, everything seemed possible, and in this part of London (Knightsbridge) everybody seemed prosperous.[42]

Lloyd George's proposals for land reform 'ran into procedural and other difficulties because he had not planned carefully well ahead'. His 1914 budget was in the process of being drastically trimmed down when war intervened.

4
WWI: Under Cover at Wellington House

Wellington House is established

After stating that Lloyd George was so impressed by the administrative ability of his young Private Secretary that he selected Gowers for the post of Chief Inspector in the National Health Insurance Scheme, Gowers' obituary continues that 'during the greater part of the 1914–18 War he combined his National Insurance responsibilities with special duties at the Foreign Office'. These 'special duties' were working as General Manager and then Chief Executive Officer of Wellington House.

When war was declared, Gowers was still in the National Insurance Commission. The war forced new demands on the Civil Service, and even greater adaptability. New departments came into being and new tasks had to be undertaken. For Gowers, this prompted his next unsought career move: into a secret Foreign Office unit that operated under the 'front' of the Insurance Commission, the propaganda unit that became known as Wellington House.

On 1 August 1914 Germany declared war on Russia; two days later she declared war on France. On 4 August Germany invaded neutral Belgium. Britain responded by declaring war against Germany.

By September the unit was being established, operating under the cover of the National Insurance Commission and housed in its premises, a block of flats at Buckingham Gate called Wellington House. There is some dispute about whose idea it was to create Wellington House. It is said that at the beginning of the war Lloyd George was becoming aware of the existing German propaganda machine, and realised Britain needed to be able to counter this by producing its own information. He urged Cabinet to set up an organisation 'to inform and influence public opinion abroad and to confute German mis-statements

and sophistries'.[1] Asquith asked Charles Masterman (who was responsible for the Insurance Commission) to 'look into it'. One of a number of propaganda units, the primary target of Wellington House was opinion-makers in foreign countries such as journalists, publicists, politicians, government officials and teachers. Its role was to explain Britain's position on the war, initially to explain to allied and neutral countries the reasons why Britain had engaged in it.

Early in September 1914, Masterman called a meeting to which he invited a galaxy of leading writers of the day.[2] The writers were all willing to help and agreed to working in the utmost secrecy. Several agreed to write pamphlets and books to put the Government's perspective on the events that led to the war. Others who were not present, such as Sir Arthur Quiller Couch and Rudyard Kipling, also offered their services. The meeting of potential authors was followed by a gathering of leading newspaper and journal editors.[3] Mr A. S. Watt (literary agent) and the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs also attended.

A number of the Insurance Commission staff, including Claud Schuster and Ernest Gowers, were moved into the unit. Initially Claud Schuster became Chief Executive Officer and Gowers General Manager. Masterman ran daily meetings called 'the Moot', which comprised a team of external advisers who formed the Wellington House decision-making body. Members of the Moot included the novelist Anthony Hope (Masterman's literary advisor), A. S. Watt, classicists Edwyn Bevan and J. S. Willimore, and the historians Arnold Toynbee, Lewis Namier and J. W. Headlam Morley.

Wellington House enlisted commercial companies to publish their material, including Hodder & Stoughton, Methuen, John Murray, Macmillan and Thomas Nelson. Messrs A. P. Watt and Son carried out negotiations with publishers and editors. The founder of the firm, A. P. Watt, had acted as literary agent to Arthur Conan Doyle when the creator of Sherlock Holmes was writing 'propaganda' pamphlets and a major book on the Boer War. A. P. Watt's son, A. S. Watt, acted as adviser to Ernest Gowers many years later in drawn-out negotiations with the Treasury over *Plain Words*.

Masterman's only formal reporting was to the Cabinet. In his first submission he reported that in its first nine months of existence, two and a half million copies of books, pamphlets, and other forms of literary propaganda had been circulated in 17 different languages.[4] Over 90 titles were listed as well as 14 official publications. The unit also distributed major speeches by the politicians of the day.

An early recruit to the writing team was John Buchan, who was hired to write a publication *The History of the War*, a monthly magazine published by his own company, Thomas Nelson. He wrote a number of

pamphlets as well, including *The Battle of the Somme* and *Britain's Land War*. In the spring of 1915 he became one of five journalists attached to the British Army, responsible for writing articles for both *The Times* and the *Daily News*. Towards the end of the war, when Wellington House was nearing the end of its life, he returned to propaganda work, to become Masterman's superior.

After nine months, Schuster left to become Clerk of the Crown in Chancery and Permanent Secretary in the Lord Chancellor's Office. In July 1915 Gowers succeeded him as CEO of Wellington House. We have a brief insight into the operation of the Moot from Gowers' own successor who left one of the few records about how the group operated:

> The Moot was generally a serious and often a long affair at which Gowers, and subsequently I, brought forward problems and material for discussion. 'Charles' as he [Masterman] was unofficially known, often sat hunched up in his chair silent until suddenly he would intervene with an unanswerable criticism or a final wise decision. Any records that were kept did not record his language, which was usually refreshingly unofficial. The work was not always dull and serious and we got a great deal of fun sometimes.[5]

Another member of the Insurance Commission recalled how Wellington House was perceived by near outsiders:

> One of the war activities which was concentrated in our head office at Wellington House, and intrigued us greatly, was the Hush-Hush Press Bureau, in which all sorts of authors and other literary people were enrolled. It was quite refreshing to find oneself going up in the lift in the morning with Anthony Hope, for example.[6]

By December 1915 questions were being asked in Parliament about what Masterman was doing, but the Government maintained its secrecy. Asquith was asked about the 'undefined office' of Mr Masterman in the national service and simply replied that he was engaged in 'very valuable work of a highly confidential kind' for the Government. It would be 'contrary to long-standing practice' to give particulars of Mr Masterman's remuneration which the Prime Minister said came out of Secret Service funds.[7]

Managing both the people and the distribution of the materials fell on Gowers' shoulders. Budget was a constant headache. As the work expanded, the Treasury had to be approached for supplementary funds. It was difficult to find and maintain staff given that there were staff shortages everywhere and Wellington House could only offer low wages.

But Gowers was not simply an administrator. The managers were as involved in the content as they were with the administration. We find, for example, correspondence between Gowers and Hubert Montgomery of the Foreign Office News Department:

> I return the letter about China sent to you by Walter Scott. This letter inspires afresh a desire that I have had simmering in my mind for some time to make a proper splash in China, instead of doling out the comparatively insignificant amount of stuff that we have doled out hitherto.

After discussing how distribution might be arranged by one of the British firms in China, it finishes:

> What do you think of the idea? I do not think it is much use relying on your people, who already have their hands pretty full with other matters and would not be disposed to enter this with much zest.

and a postscript:

> Incidentally I have rather a good scheme afoot for distributing propagandist pictures in packets of the British American Tobacco Co's cigarettes, millions of which are sold in China every year.[8]

The enthusiasm for the task evident in this letter tends to confirm Taylor's judgement that there seemed to be some 'collective relish' at Wellington House 'about the covert nature of the work'.[9]

Wellington House gradually extended its propaganda to include providing items for the press (which Masterman had been reluctant to do in the beginning) and producing foreign-language illustrated magazines (modelled on the *Illustrated London News*, a magazine whose printing facilities were made available to Wellington House to produce its pictorial propaganda).[10] When *The Daily Telegraph* congratulated the Government for two of these publications in August 1916, it embarrassed the Foreign Office which had been keen to keep the connection between the magazines and the Government a secret.[11]

The books and pamphlets were principally written by the external authors. The Wellington House staff occasionally interviewed politicians such as Asquith and Balfour, and 'ghosted' pamphlets. Masterman himself wrote several. It is tempting to speculate whether Gowers contributed. It is thought he may have written *Italy Our Ally*, a pamphlet formally attributed to Asquith who had visited Italy in 1916.[12] The pamphlet was obviously written for home consumption as it describes

the warmth of the Italian welcome. Compared to *The Times*' relatively factual reporting of the visit,[13] it has a more overtly persuasive tone. For example, the description of Asquith's departure from Rome reads:

> The houses all along the Via Nazionale were decorated with Italian and English flags and cheers of 'Down with Germany!' The immense procession reached the Piazza Esedra at 6.40, and at 7 the Italian Ministers, Prince Colonna, and various officials arrived at the station. Mr Asquith's arrival some minutes later was greeted with tremendous cheers; the bands played the British National Anthem and the flag was saluted. … As the train moved out of the station the cry of 'Long live England!' was raised, and the crowd outside continued to cheer enthusiastically.

After describing Asquith's visit to the Italian front, the pamphlet states:

> There was obviously something deeper than mere surface emotion on the part of the crowd. In intellectual and political circles alike Mr Asquith's visit was hailed with as much pleasure and satisfaction.
>
> He came as a representative of a great, allied people, standing in the forefront of an unparalleled struggle for the re-establishment of international justice and morality, and to all classes in Italy his coming seemed to symbolise fresh resolve and determination.[14]

Wellington House developed a network of world-wide distribution channels and used a variety of propaganda techniques. One of its first, and most prolific, outputs was pamphlets. Masterman wanted these to be of the highest quality, both as literature and in academic tone and content. To give them as much credibility as possible the pamphlets were published by the private publishing houses, under the authors' names.

The work conducted by Wellington House

Oxford Pamphlets

One of the first publishing houses to get closely involved with Wellington House was the Oxford University Press (OUP). At the time, Charles Cannan was Secretary to the Delegates of the Press (a governing board of Delegates chosen from members of the Press and chaired by the Vice Chancellor). In 1914 the Delegates included the theologian William Sanday and the historian C. R. L. Fletcher. The OUP had recently published Fletcher and Kipling's controversial *School History of England* which was 'viewed with misgivings by the Press in light of

Fletcher's known prejudices (Fletcher's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* says he gave full expression to his racial and political views, "describing Spaniards as vindictive, West Indians as lazy and vicious, and the Irish as spoilt and ungrateful") but proved irresistible when Kipling was presented as co-author, contributing twenty-three new poems'.[15]

The OUP's Clarendon Press initiated a series of 'Oxford pamphlets'. Sanday wrote the first: *The Deeper Causes of the War.* Fletcher wrote *The Germans, their Empire and How they Have Made It* and *The Germans: What They Covet.* He also made the first contact with Wellington House, writing to Cannan:

> In case I forget … my brother-in-law Sir C. Schuster seems to be in charge of a bureau (at the FO?) which is running much the same sort of tracts as ours – he has several well-known writers of fiction working for him. And he has a staff of translators. He would like to have an early copy (or a 2nd proof) of my tracts, and I think you might send him the others also (?). We might work in with his gang.[16]

While the Wellington House pamphlets were designed for overseas readers, the Oxford pamphlets were aimed at 'the instruction of the intelligent working man' in Britain. But many of the Oxford pamphlets could serve both ends. The 'nominal price' of the pamphlets was not commercial and any profits went to the Belgian Relief Fund. The authority of the Oxford pamphlets was invaluable to Wellington House; the speed at which they were produced was equally so. In turn, Wellington House provided a useful distribution point for the Oxford pamphlets:

> We will send Schuster copies of the pamphlets as they emerge (he has had Sanday[17] and proofs of Osler and 2 Fletchers). If he pays for them and doesn't give them away in this country there is as you say no objection to his flooding the Dominions.[18]

Through Fletcher, Kipling offered the Oxford 'tractandors' verses from their *School History*. Communicating this offer to the Clarendon Press, Fletcher suggested that Kipling might be asked to write 'either a tract or a new fable of the Wolf and the Lamb, or a poem'.[19] There was some concern in the Press about Kipling: 'RK could hardly be trusted to do a pamphlet?'[20] But they seriously considered him, Milford noting in a memo 'After Fletcher, why not Kipling? He couldn't wave a louder flag'.[21]

Humphrey Milford was based in the OUP's London office and stayed in close touch with Schuster. There was a frequent exchange of memos between Milford in London and Cannan in Oxford:

> Schuster may want to translate some of the pamphlets. Sanday's sermon was not hot stuff enough for him, and he thought the price was high (but it would not appeal as directly to the great heart of the people, even if published at 1d or 2d, as for instance Fletcher's breeziness).[22]

Gowers comes into the picture:

> Schuster may take Egerton, which he had not himself read but his sub. (Gowers) thought highly of. They both sighed heavily over Trevelyan, and having read it I sympathised. Anyhow Schuster doesn't intend to give away a lot at once; he has homing Americans chiefly in mind for the moment and thinks one carefully selected tract might be read, but more would merely be thrown out of the window.[23]

By 19 January 1915, the Clarendon Press had sold nearly 300,000 pamphlets, which was an average of over 5,000 a pamphlet. But their impact was declining. Early in March, Milford noted that 'the market shows distinct signs of saturation, and I should be inclined to finish up series and close down, except for the pamphlets that are already arranged for or any that may turn up of exceptional interest'.[24]

War Pictorial

Ivor Nicholson, a Welsh journalist of great personal charm, joined Wellington House in January 1916 to establish a Pictorial Propaganda Department. He initiated the *War Pictorial*, which became a popular publication. Masterman considered it to be one of the best pieces of propaganda Wellington House produced. By 1917, 700,000 copies a month were being distributed.[25]

Nicholson was the first person to write publicly about the role of Wellington House (and this was not until 1931). He described the civil servants in the team as some of the 'most brilliant' in the Insurance Commission.[26]

War films

Wellington House, although recognising the potential of films, had little success in its efforts to produce war-propaganda films. Gowers

reported to the Foreign Secretary that Wellington House had proposed to make great use of film propaganda shortly after its creation but the War Office and the Admiralty, in keeping with an early preoccupation with secrecy, had refused to provide the necessary facilities.[27] A change of heart at the War Office enabled Masterman to form a Cinema Committee, and Wellington House succeeded in gaining access to some footage of the navy in the North Sea, the build up of the army, and of munitions being manufactured by Vickers. This enabled the Cinema Committee to produce its only film, *Britain Prepared – A Review of the Activities of His Majesty's Naval and Military Forces*, which opened at the Empire Theatre, Leicester Square, at the end of December 1915. The film received world-wide distribution and acclaim.[28] Kay Gladstone has described how effectively it was used in Russia to demonstrate the British war effort to the Russian people.[29]

War artists

The Glasgow-born draughtsman and engraver, Muirhead Bone, became one of the first war artists, a role he played in both world wars. In May 1916, at a sale of blank canvases in aid of the Red Cross, the Wellington House literary agent, A. S. Watt, purchased an option on a work by Bone.[30]

Watt told Masterman and Gowers that Bone, who was 41, was about to be conscripted. Watt suggested that his talents would be put to better use by working as a war artist than fighting. Masterman and Gowers persuaded the War Office to exempt Bone from military service. The War Office gave him permission to travel freely at the front in order to sketch.[31]

In 1917 the Cabinet decided to set up a National War Museum to collect and display material 'relating to the Great War' which was still being fought. The interest taken by the 'Dominion' governments led to the museum being given the title of Imperial War Museum. It was formally established by an Act of Parliament in 1920.[32] Ernest Gowers himself was the subject of a war portrait in the Second World War. He was painted by Meredith Frampton in the Control Room in the Natural History Museum, when he was Senior Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence. The painting is owned by the Imperial War Museum.

Distribution of the Bryce Report

One of the most controversial activities of Wellington House was distribution of the Bryce Report. The German invasion of Belgium had prompted allegations of war crimes, particularly against civilians in occupied Belgium. 'With one eye on the propaganda war', Asquith

established a committee, chaired by the widely respected political scientist Lord Bryce, to investigate the veracity of the rumours.[33] The Bryce committee reported in December 1915, concluding that German troops had committed 'excesses' against Belgian citizens, as a 'conscious strategy of terror'. The report went into great detail about alleged rapes, using civilians as human shields during combat, and cutting off children's hands and ears in front of their parents.

The Bryce Report was distributed by Wellington House 'with powerful effect in neutral countries such as the USA'.[34] While it was effective propaganda, both the conduct of the inquiry and the report's prurient detail have since been strongly criticised. Wellington House may not have had much choice about handling its distribution, being subject to political direction. However, Masterman wrote to Bryce that his report had 'swept' America and that 'even the most sceptical declare themselves converted, just because it is signed by you!'[35]

Lusitania medallion

The Cunard passenger liner the Lusitania was sunk by a German U-boat off the coast of Ireland on 7 May 1915 with the loss of 1,201 men, women, and children. Of these fatalities, 128 were American citizens. It has been suggested that the Lusitania was also carrying munitions to Britain and it was the munitions that caused the huge explosion when the German torpedo hit; another theory is that the ship's coal bunkers exploded (an exploration licence for the wreck was granted in 2007).

The decision to produce replicas of a bronze medallion that had been struck in Germany to celebrate the sinking of the Lusitania was a most significant propaganda coup. A copy of this privately issued, limited-circulation German medallion came into the hands of the British. A photograph was sent to New York and was published in the *New York Tribune* on 17 May 1916, causing a considerable stir. While one side shows the stricken liner sinking, the reverse shows a skeleton sitting behind the ticket-office counter of the Cunard Line in New York issuing tickets to a crush of passengers. In the crowd a man reads a newspaper with the headline 'U-boat danger'.

Whose idea it was to create a replica is a matter of conjecture. What seems certain is that Wellington House was responsible for producing the first 50,000 replicas, subtly renamed as 'medals'. Demand for the replicas was high until the end of the war. My family still has one of these replicas in our possession, which was given to my mother when she was a child, long before she was associated with the Gowers family. To my knowledge neither she nor my father were aware of the connection.

The turning point for Wellington House

In 1915 the full horror of what was happening in the trenches was becoming public and also having a devastating effect on individuals at a personal level. This was no quick war to end all wars. Rudyard Kipling, still keen to help, gave recruiting speeches and had at least one pamphlet, *The Fringes of the Fleet*, listed in a Wellington House schedule. Kipling's commitment to propaganda work declined after his son was killed in action at Loos in October 1915. Kipling's contribution after this was to write reports from the front line, both on land and at sea. Two poignant short poems, published after the war, reflect Kipling's guilt and grief at the death of his son:

> If any ask us why we died
> Tell them 'Because our fathers lied'.
>
> My son was killed while laughing at some jest. I would I knew
> What it was, and it might serve me in a time when jests are few.[36]

Not long afterwards, Ernest Gowers' brother-in-law, Kenneth Greer, a lieutenant in the Irish Guards was killed at the Somme. He had made fleeting visits to London from L'Epinette (Nord) and Festubert early in 1915. In May 1915 he was severely wounded at Festubert. He returned home to be nursed back to strength by his mother at Ballycastle, then went back to the front in March 1916. He visited his sister in London for the last time on 10 September 1916 while on leave. Kipling, whose son had also been in the same regiment, wrote the official history of the Irish Guards. He describes how, as the fighting took its terrible toll at the Somme, Greer, by then the sole survivor of the four company officers who had taken their places early that morning, was fatally wounded on 15 September, five days after returning to the front. Kipling described the camp on the morning the survivors returned to base:

> No one seems to recall accurately the order of events between the gathering in Bernafay Wood and the arrival of the shadow of the Battalion in camp at the Citadel. The sun was shining; breakfast was ready for the officers and men near some trees. It struck their very tired apprehensions that there was an enormous amount of equipage and service for a very few men, and they noticed dully a sudden hustling off of unneeded plates and cups. They felt as though they had returned to a world which had outgrown them on a somewhat terrifying scale during all the ages that they had been away from it.

> Their one need, after food eaten sitting, was rest, and, when the first stupor of exhaustion was satisfied, their sleep began to be broken by dreams only less horrible than the memories to which they waked.[37]

Greer died at No. 2, Red Cross Hospital, Rouen, two months later.

This turning point in attitudes to the war was also a turning point in the Government's support for Wellington House. This had depended on Masterman's influence in Cabinet. He had reached the peak of his career by 1915. Asquith had appointed him Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in 1914, with a seat in Cabinet. Under the rules at the time, any MP accepting an 'office of profit under the Crown' was legally required to recontest their seat in a by-election. Masterman lost the by-election and failed to get the support of Lloyd George when trying for what was normally a safe Liberal seat in Swansea (Lloyd George did not discourage a Welsh Nationalist from standing for preselection and Masterman did not contest the seat). He resigned from Cabinet in February 1915. His 'insider' status was over as he had lost the ear of the Cabinet. Wellington House was weakened against competing propaganda agencies. Newspaper proprietors were particularly predatory.

Lack of coordination of the efforts of the various agencies involved in conducting propaganda overseas[38] had become a problem. As a result, Wellington House was placed under the direct control of the Foreign Office. In February 1916, Lord Newton, newly appointed Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, became nominal head of the 'improved' propaganda organisation, aided by authors on his staff such as John Buchan and Alfred Noyes.

But it was the newspaper proprietors (in whose disinterest Asquith 'never seemed wholly to believe'[39]) who were circling around their prey. They had been consistently critical of the propaganda efforts. When Lloyd George succeeded Asquith as Prime Minister, he immediately succumbed to the urging of the proprietors and asked Robert Donald, of the Liberal *Daily Chronicle*, to provide a report on propaganda. Donald's critical report, produced within a week, argued for journalistic methods to be applied to the Government's propaganda.[40]

In response to the Donald Report, the Cabinet asked John Buchan, who had been working with Masterman, to prepare a memorandum on propaganda policy. He delivered this in January 1917. In February Buchan was appointed Director of a new Department of Information, directly answerable to the Prime Minister. He restructured the department, leaving Masterman in charge of art and literature. Buchan echoed

Donald's criticisms, reporting to Cabinet that the publications had hitherto been the staple of the whole propaganda business:

> In the several existing Departments which deal with propaganda there are a large number of able men who have done admirable work. Many of them are in the wrong positions, and the work of all has suffered from the lack of central direction. I am confident that the bulk of this personnel could be used in the new Department, and that the staffing of it would be no serious difficulty. … A certain amount of surplusage can be dispensed with.[41]

Gowers was edgy about his budget, writing to Ralph Hawtrey at the Treasury:

> At present I am unavoidably eating my way rapidly into my next (as yet unsanctioned) grant, which gets rather on my nerves.[42]

He appears to have been identified as part of the 'surplusage' as he resumed his responsibilities in the National Insurance Commission the following month, in February 1917.

A decade later, Ivor Nicholson wrote an article about Gowers in which he gave a brief description of the role he played at Wellington House:

> He was Civil Service chief of the propaganda department under Mr C. F. G. Masterman in the war, the history of which would make fascinating reading. Ernest Gowers will do great things yet, but for a civil servant to handle the rag-tag and bob-tail of authors, artists, lawyers, school-masters, film magnates, publishers, journalists, invalids, school-boys and girls, and build up an entirely novel organisation which helped to maintain peace among the allies (an almost impossible task) a measure of belief in our cause amongst timid neutrals when our defeats on land and sea were enough to shake our own confidence in ultimate victory, then finally arouse consternation amongst the enemy, was an achievement surprising to witness in any man; but to see a civil servant rise to it and tackle it and win the affection and loyalty of all his associates was an inspiration and a lesson to anyone who had not realised what amazingly good stuff there was in the finest Civil Service in the World.[43]

Masterman's widow, writing about the demise of Wellington House, gives a glimpse of the esprit de corps in the unit in its early days and the response of the staff as the storm clouds gathered over them:

> The Moot never met again, though there were other co-ordinating committees. Nevertheless the Wellington House personnel, some of whom had fought under Masterman through the Insurance gales, held strongly together and to him. They appreciated warmly his trenchant defence of them against outside critics, and he retained the gift, described to me by Sir Claud Schuster, of making the work 'a huge sporting adventure'.[44]

The story of Wellington House was not quite over. Buchan achieved his reorganisation, but the new department was still in the sights of the predatory press. He and the department were 'viciously attacked' by the Northcliffe press and no minister defended them. On 20 October 1917 Buchan returned from a working visit to Paris to find a letter from the irrepressible Donald claiming that the Prime Minister had asked him, yet again, to investigate the propaganda work being carried out.

Buchan was clearly taken aback. So was the Foreign Office's Hubert Montgomery, who wrote despairingly to Buchan:

> I understand that Mr Donald states that he has received a letter from the Prime Minister saying that the War Cabinet have decided that he shall make such an enquiry: that as a matter of fact no such decision was come to by the War Cabinet: that neither Sir Edward Carson nor yourself knew that such an enquiry was contemplated: and that you have no knowledge of the grounds on which it has been decided to hold it: that, nevertheless, Sir Edward Carson considers it in the public interest to accept the position and to let the enquiry proceed, but to support you if he considers that any recommendations made by Mr Donald as the result of it are not justified. …
>
> An enquiry of this sort, when no reason has been produced to show that it is necessary, is calculated to discourage all those who work in the Department and to shake their confidence in themselves and in the officials to whom they are directly responsible.[45]

Donald criticised Wellington House for wasting paper and money. On 17 December, Ivor Nicholson submitted a bitter defence after strong criticism of the Pictorial Department and the *War Pictorial* in particular. But the end was near. After the second Donald Report, Sir Edward Carson became supervisory head. Buchan remained executive head. Three months later, in March 1918, Buchan's Department of Information was closed down. On his elevation to the peerage, Lord Beaverbrook[46] was made Minister in charge of a new Ministry of Information. Buchan became Director of Intelligence.

This is how Nicholson saw the change:

> Mr Lloyd George was evidently growing weary of this constant criticism from newspaper proprietors of British official propaganda and had characteristically decided to silence it by handing over the responsibilities to the critics themselves. …
>
> The big newspaper proprietors could not be expected to take subordinate positions in any organisation, so the late Lord Northcliffe had a department of his own at Crewe House. … Wellington House and the Department of Information were handed over to Sir Max Aitken, who became Minister of Information and, not long after, Lord Beaverbrook. We were ejected from Wellington House and placed in a number of hotels in Norfolk Street, Strand. Masterman and Buchan remained, but a large army of fresh faces was introduced.[47]

At the end of the war Buchan was appointed liquidator of the Ministry of Information, which he closed down on 31 December 1918. The genial Ivor Nicholson established the Wellington House Club of ex-staff members who dined together annually until Masterman's death in 1927:

> It was a hard blow when Masterman died in 1927, but when he was alive he was at his most delightful best on these occasions. No reports were ever made, and every imaginable indiscretion was uttered, principally by Masterman, to our huge delight.[48]

The affection is reflected in the letter of condolence Gowers wrote to Mrs Masterman when her husband died:

> My close connection with him during the early years of the war gave me a real love for him. I have served under many political chiefs, but never under one to whom loyalty to his staff was so unfailing a rule in life. When it was a matter of defending the interests of those who worked for him he never thought of himself; indeed he often got himself into trouble and made enemies by the vigour with which he met attacks on them. But he never thought of that: to him it would have been merely incomprehensible that anyone in his position should (as so many do) secure himself by allowing blame to fall on his subordinates. And so we not only delighted in the infinite fascination of his brilliancy, but all loved him as well. I doubt if there is any Minister of the past twenty years who would be so truly mourned as he is mourned by those of us in the Civil Service who were privileged to be his intimates.[49]

The contribution made by Wellington House

One of the first assessments of the role of Wellington House was written by a Harvard historian in 1935, when the fact of its existence was only just becoming generally known. It is worth citing at length:

> Great Britain entered the World War with nothing that could even remotely be termed an official propaganda department. She finished the struggle with the best developed and probably the most effective organization devoted to propaganda of any of the belligerent nations. The story of Mr Masterman's modest Wellington House of 1914 through its developmental stages until it eventuated in Lord Beaverbrook's pretentious Ministry of Information in 1918 will long remain one of the fascinating chapters in the annals of Great Britain and of her part in the World War. Building in part on the precedents of the unofficial propaganda experience of the past, but also doing a great deal of skillful pioneering of their own, the able men whom Mr Masterman and his successors gathered together accomplished one thing which history must not overlook. They revealed once and for all that official propaganda, dexterously handled and adequately financed, is one of the most potent instruments of modern warfare.[50]

Ernest Gowers' role at Wellington House may have been secret at the time, but was noted in Belgium. Wellington House had undertaken publicity for the Belgian government. In 1919 he and Charles Masterman[51] were awarded 'Ordre de la Couronne' (Order of the Crown) by the King of Belgium. It was an order which could be awarded to foreign nationals for services to the State.

The impact of the war on the Gowers family

It was important for Ernest Gowers and his colleagues to maintain their morale through their sense of purpose and comradeship. Gowers was one of the young men prevented from serving in the armed forces because they were civil servants. Duff Cooper records the strong press campaign against men of military age in the Civil Service, in which government departments were referred to as 'the funk-holes of Whitehall'. Young men had to have a strong argument to support their appeal to be released to fight and had to pass a medical examination. Young civil servants were referred to as 'Cuthberts' and covered with 'vituperation for carrying on their duties according to the instructions they

received'.[52] George Peden writes that Anderson was profoundly affected by being presented with a white feather, the symbol of cowardice, by a young woman when crossing Whitehall.[53] It is likely that, apart from his value in Whitehall, Gowers would not have passed the medical. He had been very ill at his first, ill-chosen boarding school and he was also a 'prolific bleeder', though not diagnosed as haemophaelic.

Ernest and Kit Gowers had their three young children to help provide at least some family optimism in the face of the tragedies unfolding around them. Theirs was the only family group to produce grandchildren for either set of potential grandparents. Kit's parents, the Greers, often visited Ernest and Kit's home during the war. In the second half of 1916, after Kenneth Greer's death, they visited constantly. Ernest's parents had already died. His mother, Mary, had died a year before the war, in January 1913, from pneumonia. Her husband, Sir William Gowers, suffered an acute attack of pneumonia at the same time and died two years later in May 1915, at the age of 70.

It must have been difficult for Ernest Gowers, working in the safety of Whitehall, to comfort his wife on the death of her brother Kenneth Greer. It is impossible to know how he felt at the time, but some of the anguish of not fighting was reflected in an exchange of letters with my father (cited later) at the start of the Second World War when my father wrote seeking advice on re-enlisting in the navy, a career he had abandoned after leaving Dartmouth.

Ernest's brother Bill brought his wife, Maud, to stay with Ernest and Kit on several visits, when on leave from Nigeria. In Africa Bill's linguistic accomplishments had been expanded by learning local languages. In February 1913, as Resident in Nigeria, he was reported as translating one of Sir Frederic Lugard's speeches into Hausa. During the war he served as political adviser to the General Commanding the Cameroons Expeditionary Force, for which he was mentioned in dispatches. He became a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG) in 1919, the honour awarded for services to Commonwealth or foreign nations.

During the war, my grandmother started to make her own mark by helping organise a base in London and domestic hospitality for allied soldiers through the International Hospitality League. Eloise Robinson, a writer with *Harpers*, wrote a description using a mythical Private Billy Thatcher, who was discovered the worse for wear by a police officer. The officer gave 'Thatcher' a card of introduction to Mrs Gowers, 'head of the hospitality department of the YMCA', and steered him firmly to the door:

> By and large it is Mrs Gowers who makes the success of the Hospitality League. A less wise, a less tactful, – even a less charming woman – in

her place and all the other contributory work of the League would go for little. …

They like her because she is good to look at, for her wayward, soft black hair, the Irish glint in her eyes and the Irish twist to her tongue that gives them back merrily as good as she gets. And they like her, most of all, because she is a good pal, one they can depend on. Each, somehow, has a feeling that she understands him, and he's just about always ready to do whatever she says she thinks he'd like, sure that she really knows what he would like.

Mrs Gowers looked at the rakish tilt to his hat – which he hadn't taken off when he came into the room – and at the hard, defiant look in his eyes, and at his ridiculous clothes, and while she talked to him lightly she meditated and turned the leaves of the big hostess book. Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Ilkley. 'Lad', she said at last, closing the book, 'wouldn't you like to try staying a few days with me, now?'

I don't know what happened, for I wasn't there to see, when Billy made his memorable visit. But I have heard about it! Oh, I have heard about it! And I have gathered some things. The children, for one. They didn't know Billy was tough and a 'bad lot'. They knew only that he was big and strong and wore the khaki they'd learned meant something, and his way of talking American slang was very funny, and that he had a peculiar gentleness in his blue eyes when he played with them. Mrs Gowers says it was the children who made Billy realize. But it may have been some other things, as well, – the room that was given to him – 'all flowery, you know, – and say, I can't describe it, but well, – pretty'. Or possibly the clean pyjamas – and ironed – that really belonged to Mr Gowers who is [a little poetic licence here] Mr Lloyd George's secretary.

The article gives a bit of background to the League:

> With the entrance of the last of the English-speaking nations into the war on the side of the Allies, the wives and mothers of England, most of whose own husbands and sons had already kept faith to the death in France, began to ask what was to be done. It was a question, not only of the Colonials, but, in addition, of a great host of the best of young America. I do not know any woman in England – none of all my friends – an English woman of birth and social prominence said to me, 'who has not lost everyone who made life personally worth living to her'.[54]

So my grandmother managed her grief at the loss of her siblings by throwing herself into this work. Her London home was seldom without

one or two overseas visitors. She made lasting friendships, which were maintained by correspondence throughout her life. She developed an unceasing energy for public work.

On a lighter note, the only author involved in Wellington House I ever met was John Masefield, who lived not far from where my parents lived in Oxfordshire. Whether the connection was made through my grandfather I have no idea, but in the summer of 1944 my family – my parents, my brother Patrick and I – were invited to tea with the Masefields. They lived in the village of Burcot, on the Thames, and after tea Masefield offered to take Patrick out in a small rowing boat on the river to look for a kingfisher he knew was nesting nearby. When they returned, successful, I disgraced myself by crying because I wanted to see it too. Masefield kindly took the rowing boat out again, just for me, but the kingfisher failed to materialise a second time, much to my disappointment. I look back on that episode with considerable adult-embarrassment. But I was only five at the time.

As well brought up children we were required to write 'thank you' letters. John Masefield replied (using sealing wax to close the envelope), with a poem which would probably not rate as one of his greatest, but at least I can claim it as 'hitherto unpublished':

> My thanks to Patrick and to Ann
> For making me a happy man,
> For sending me a note of thanks
> More precious than the gold of banks.
> The only words that I can say
> Are Hip … Hip … Hip
> Hip … HIP … HURRAY.

From the time when the horrors of the First World War became known at home, the casualties mounted up and writers such as Wilfred Owen started to describe life and death in the trenches, the reputations of many of the Wellington House writers was seriously damaged. Buitenhuis points out that the 'abyss between the schoolboy version of war, the imagery of knights and angels, and the reality of Flanders was unbridgeable … the prestige that had clung to the names of all great writers before the war substantially diminished after it'.[55] This would be an unfair judgement on Masefield. Masefield had pacifist leanings, but at the outbreak of the war he went with the British Red Cross to the Dardanelles (under the auspices of Wellington House); on his return he published *Gallipoli* which has been described as a fine account of

modern warfare because, although an 'official' commission, it gives 'a graphic insight into the life of the common soldier, in both its horror and its heroism'.[56]

Calm between the storms: the Conciliation and Arbitration Board

Gowers had returned to his work in the National Health Insurance Commission after leaving Wellington House. In 1917 he was awarded a CB (Companion of the Bath) and in March of that year became Secretary to the newly-established Conciliation and Arbitration Board for Government Employees. The pay and conditions for civil servants before the war had been haphazard, with few avenues for raising grievances. Within a year, *The Times* assessed this experimental Board as successful:

> Up to the date of the record (January 1, 1918) the Board had disposed of 48 cases, 15 by conciliation and 33 by arbitration. The schedule of cases attached to the record shows an extraordinarily wide field of activity, comprising employees so diverse as foremen at Woolwich, architects in the Office of Works, analysts at the Government laboratory, and postmen. One claim was made on behalf of three persons; another for 141,000. More than half the claims were for war bonus, and, as the general awards of war bonus issued by the Board in May and December were extended by the Treasury to all analogous classes in the permanent Civil Service, there must be few Civil servants who have not been affected, directly or indirectly by the operations of the Board.[57]

In 1919 Lloyd George, probably on the advice of Warren Fisher, then Secretary of the Treasury, formally unified the Civil Service, believing that this would make the best talents of all departments available for the difficult task of post-war reconstruction. Fisher became Permanent Secretary of the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service in September 1919. The First Division became the Administrative Class. For the next 20 years Fisher wielded enormous power, not only as head of the Treasury, but also as the source of advice on all appointments to the Administrative Class.

Gowers was Secretary to the Arbitration Board until its abolition at the end of 1919. He was then appointed head of the Production Branch of the Coal Mines Department.

5
Influential Head of 'Enfeebled' Mines Department

Shortly after the First World War ended, Ernest Gowers began an association with coal that was to 'claim many years of his labours'.[1] In 1919 he was appointed Director of Production in the Coal Mines Department within the Board of Trade, becoming Permanent Under-Secretary for Mines when a new Mines Department was established by Act of Parliament in September 1920. He held this position through seven tempestuous years for the coal industry, only moving on for a brief respite in Inland Revenue after the end of the painful and protracted miners' strike in 1926. Altogether, however, Gowers was involved with the troubled coal industry for 30 years. His respite as Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue came to an end in 1930 when he was appointed Chairman of the Coal Reorganization Commission, and he did not sever the connection totally until coal was nationalised after the Second World War. Despite the heavy demands of running London's civil defence during the war, Gowers combined this task with his Coal Commission responsibilities.

Over these 30 years he made many speeches, some of which have survived. A number of them give an insight into how he viewed the role of a civil servant. After the First World War the Civil Service started to promote itself more consciously as a profession. The Civil Service Arbitration Board was succeeded by the establishment of Whitley Councils, and in 1922 senior administrators, led by men like Haldane and Anderson, established their professional association, the Institute of Public Administration. Gowers' first address, on ministerial responsibility and the role of the civil servant, was given to the Institute in about 1923. It is the first example of Gowers' lifelong intellectual interest in public administration:

> The Institute, if I understand its purposes aright, is a product of that new spirit which is one of the few good results of the war; the spirit

> which is stirring us to think for ourselves instead of taking things for granted, which is leading us no longer to accept without question traditional views but rather to ask them to justify themselves on merits, which is not satisfied with phrases but looks behind them for the facts that they profess to represent. …
>
> On the administrative side, our position is, in theory at any rate, very clearly defined. The maxim *respondeat superior* rules our conduct throughout. We do things every day of which our ministers know nothing, but the constitutional fiction is that all our actions are their actions. Theirs is the credit for what we do well and theirs the blame for what we do ill. We are, as it were, merged in their persons. …
>
> The veil that shrouds us is wearing thin, and there is a tendency for Parliament, the Press and the Public to peer through the holes. We are naturally indignant at this. No-one likes being hit when he cannot hit back. It is not playing the game. …
>
> In all essentials the theory of ministerial responsibility is still firmly established. And it is right that I should add that, on the whole, the fiction is maintained by those whom we serve, even in the most trying circumstances, with a loyalty that ought to command our warm admiration. Perhaps on the other hand there may have been cases – although I think they have been very rare – in which civil servants, finding themselves unexpectedly in the warm glow of limelight, have not skipped back into the wings with quite that alacrity which constitutional theory demands.[2]

Gowers successfully stayed back in the wings when he was head of the Mines Department, so it is only possible to give a few examples of why historians have made the sort of assessment that Supple makes about Gowers' influence on coal policy. Supple writes:

> In spite of the poor reputation of the Mines Department, it did produce a critically significant administrator – Sir Ernest Gowers – whose influence permeated most of the interwar discussions of the industry, and endured into an altogether more considerable role in the early 1940s. Gowers was … extensively relied on by Cabinet Ministers for advice and initiatives in the crisis discussions of 1925–6.[3]

Once Gowers became involved in the problems besetting the coal industry, he rapidly developed a poor opinion of the mine owners, an opinion he never changed.

The troubled history of the coal industry

The first of many painful disputes in the coal mining industry took place in 1891 when Lord Londonderry evicted miners in Silksworth, Sunderland, from their homes. There were violent clashes in which police charged protestors, and 30 people, including women and children, were injured. Nearly 100 years later, in 1984, a miners' strike, provoked and eventually quelled by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, seriously undermined the trade union movement. In order to put Gowers' role in its historical context it is necessary to take a brief look at the complex history of the coal industry as a reminder of the condition the industry was in when he was made Permanent Head of the Mines Department in the early 1920s and of the challenges he faced.

By the beginning of the First World War, coalminers comprised ten per cent of the male labour force in Britain, and the industry was at the peak of its economic achievement. Between 1870 and 1914 the coal industry had been expanding. But it was an industry comprising a multitude of separate collieries, often in remote communities, which produced a variety of coal products serving different markets. Later political problems were largely associated with trying to deal with it as a single industry.

The war was a turning point. Once it started, shortage of manpower meant that coal supplies declined and prices rose. The Government imposed price controls in 1915. In South Wales the miners opposed the changes and went out on strike. In the middle of the war, when supplying coal was as vital as providing arms and soldiers, work ceased in 700 mines and 200,000 coalminers became idle. But the strike was short because Lloyd George intervened and produced a settlement which conceded to the men's demands.

During the course of the war, the Government established control boards over a range of industries, including the coal industry. The Coal Control Unit within the Board of Trade, headed by a Coal Controller, was expected to manage the entire coal industry. It not only had to manage manpower shortages but also crises in demand and distribution and rationalise the rail network for the carriage of coal.[4]

After the war, in the face of general instability across the country and a restive miners' union, the Government established a Royal Commission (the Sankey Commission) to 'enquire into the position of, and conditions prevailing in the coal industry'. The Commission's 13 members included Sydney Webb and Gowers' Rugby contemporary, economist Richard Tawney. The deliberations and reports of the Commission exposed to public view the appalling working conditions in the mining industry.

The Royal Commission recommended wage increases, reduced hours, and a restriction on profits. It was divided over the question of nationalisation. A minority report by Webb, Tawney and others argued that low wages had led to all-round waste and inefficiency in the production and distribution of coal. To prevent the need to raise coal prices, coal production should be improved, and this could only be achieved by unified ownership. Nationalisation would avoid the dangers that would arise if unification were effected under a 'capitalist trust'.[5] This was not accepted by the Government. The miners were disappointed. The employers were not.

The miners' union submitted a claim to the Coal Controller seeking an increase of 30 per cent on basic earnings plus the war wage of 3s per shift. Shortly afterwards the union added claims for a shorter working day and for nationalisation. A national strike was threatened. The Miners' Federation pressed for a pay rise for miners in light of soaring export earnings after the war and, despite an intervention by Lloyd George, began a strike on 16 October 1919. Twelve days later, after yet another intervention by Lloyd George, a settlement was reached.

Meanwhile, the Coal Control Unit was finding it hard to function. It was unable to explain the volatility of coal prices to the Sankey Commission. It had never had the status of a department and lacked resources. Indeed, it was suggested that the stress of the job had led to the death of the first Controller and the premature resignation of the second.[6]

Birth of the 'enfeebled mouse'

During the war, it had been suggested that a Ministry of Mines be created, but no action was taken on this until January 1920. The owners had sufficient political influence at the time to prevent it being established as a department in its own right. Instead, it was to become a subordinate branch of the Board of Trade, in the charge of a Secretary for Mines, a junior politician.[7] 'The mountain laboured and brought forth a mouse: an enfeebled Mines Department'.[8] The Mines Department was to coordinate a scheme of pit committees, district committees, and area boards, where representatives of the owners and of the miners would discuss a range of industry matters, including wages.[9]

On 7 September 1920 the new Mines Department was created, absorbing residual functions of the Coal Control Unit, with Gowers as its permanent head. The final structure and responsibilities of the Mines Department were not announced until December 1920.[10] John Hindley,

an experienced businessman, became commercial adviser to the new department. Nearly 30 years later Hindley (by then Hyndley) became first Chairman of the National Coal Board. He became a close colleague and lasting friend of Gowers.

As permanent head, Gowers had a challenge ahead: creating the new organisation, building morale, and facing an uncertain future in the difficult mining environment of the time. From the end of 1920 both the coal export market and domestic industrial sales began to collapse. Up to that point, an Exchequer subsidy had protected the collieries. However, when there was a general slump, rather than solely a crisis in the coal industry, the Board of Trade advised that 'at a time when every other industry in the country is working either without much profit or at a loss', a subsidy was inappropriate. Gowers argued that a continuing subsidy was 'unthinkable'.[11]

Government control of prices and exports ceased on 1 March 1921; financial control ceased at the end of the month. This threw both sides at the mercy of the declining market. The owners refused to participate in the consultative committees provided for under the Mining Industry Act of 1920. They were now free to offer lower rates of pay under new contracts, which they did. The miners immediately went out on strike for three months. In June they accepted an unfavourable settlement of their dispute. Pits closed and there was widespread unemployment. The workforce became demoralised.

The first Annual Report of the Secretary for Mines (drafted by Gowers) summed up the dismal situation the fledgling department had inherited. It had become clear that the industry was in an alarming condition and that enterprise and initiative were stifled. Output had fallen off and quality had deteriorated. There was little investment and virtually no development by private enterprise. Demand greatly exceeded supply and the artificial distribution mechanism in existence was 'perpetually on the verge of disaster'. The hybrid system of regulating the industry had clearly become intolerable and it was necessary 'to go either forward to nationalisation or back to private enterprise'.[12]

George Lane Fox became Secretary for Mines in 1922. He had a comparatively long tenure from 1922 to 1928, briefly interrupted during the Labour Government of 1924 when Emmanuel Shinwell was appointed to the position. Shinwell's appointment raised expectations of a more sympathetic hearing for the coalminers. One of the miners' MPs complained to the Prime Minister that when Labour came to office, miners had expected to get an 'intelligent discussion on mining questions, with the Chief of the Department [the Minister], instead of listening to

permanent officials.... For years we've kept this before our men in the coalfield'.[13] Shinwell eventually won the respect of the miners for his strong support for nationalisation, something he would not accomplish until a quarter of a century later.[14]

The Samuel Royal Commission

Towards the end of 1922, wages had descended to minimums agreed in 1921 and throughout the decade the coal industry continued to decline. The miners achieved a rise in the minimum wage in 1924 but this coincided with mounting problems in the domestic economy and increased international competition. Between 1924 and 1925 there were 508 pit closures, resulting in the loss of 110,000 jobs. The situation was increasingly desperate.

In July 1925 the colliery owners announced that they would break the 1924 wages agreement, effectively abolishing the minimum wage. The miners rejected the new terms and threatened to strike. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) promised to support the miners in their dispute with their employers. The Government established a special court of inquiry to inquire into the case put forward by the owners, but it was stymied because the miners refused to cooperate. However, the court concluded that workers were justified in claiming that any wages agreement they could be asked to accept should provide for a minimum wage. They also stressed the need for greater efficiency in the industry.[15]

On the day the report was published the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, met with the miners and the owners (separately) both in the morning and the evening. Thomas Jones noted in his diary:

> It has been desperately heavy going all day, and such little progress as has been made has been mainly due to Gowers and H. J. Wilson operating privately on the owners' group. I think they actually drafted the owners' proposal put to the men at 6.30.[16] …
>
> Steel-Maitland [Minister for Labour] has got up the case but he is not a Birkenhead or John Simon – very far from it – and gives the impression of being more concerned to display his suddenly acquired knowledge than of solving our difficulties. That, of course, is not the case, it is only the impression his halting, apologetic method of speech conveys. Bridgeman has said nothing and Lane Fox has been silent. The PM has got to look more and more worried and helpless as the day has gone drearily on.[17]

On 30 July the TUC issued instructions for a nationwide embargo on the movement of coal. The following day the Prime Minister intervened, to the consternation of the Conservatives, and provided the necessary money through a subsidy, to bring the miners' wages back to their previous level and an imminent strike was averted. This became 'Red Friday' in the trade union calendar. However, their success was short-lived as the subsidy was to last only nine months.

In August 1925 the Government announced another inquiry into the industry, this time a Royal Commission, under the chairmanship of Sir Herbert Samuel, the former Liberal Home Secretary. The Commission comprised Samuel; Sir Herbert Lawrence, a banker and industrialist; Sir William Beveridge, the economist who had Civil Service experience; and Mr Kenneth Lee, a leading cotton manufacturer. They took six months to receive evidence and write the report, which included substantial, extremely detailed coverage of the issues using extensive statistics provided by the Department.

Gowers appeared before the Samuel Commission in October 1925, his evidence taking up the first two days of the hearing. He told the Commission that a major depression had been 'lying in wait for the coalmining industry'.[18] He played an active role, providing expert advice and information to the Royal Commission, seeing and commenting on drafts of various sections (according to Supple, with some effect). However, towards the end of December he was worried that Beveridge's preoccupation with detail was unduly delaying the Commission's work. He wrote privately to Ronald Waterhouse, Baldwin's Private Secretary, airing his concerns:

> I hear that the Prime Minister is to see Herbert Samuel early next week. I am a little disquieted (perhaps unnecessarily) by what I have heard in the last day or two about the way in which the Commission are attacking the next stage of their job. They have now heard ample evidence to enable them to start thinking about what their recommendations are to be; and, in view of the shortness of time, one would expect them now to concentrate on the cardinal points, to be in almost constant discussion about them, to see whether they can make up their minds on the evidence already heard, to confine any fresh evidence to what may be necessary to supplement their information on those points, and to disregard, for the present at any rate, all the mass of unimportant stuff (however interesting) that has been put before them.
>
> But what they are doing (as I understand) is devoting themselves entirely to the marshalling of all the evidence, important and

> unimportant (a colossal job), and do not propose to start really to think until that has been done. In other words they are postponing attacking the operative side of their job until they have finished the whole of the recital side of it. That would, of course, be perfectly proper for a Commission with unlimited time. But this Commission's time is far from unlimited, and I fear that they may find the thinking part of the job, when they come to it, so difficult that, if they postpone it until they have finished the whole of the recital part to their satisfaction, their programme may be sadly thrown out, or their conclusions hastily arrived at. Samuel's intensely orderly mind and Beveridge's passion for information for its own sake both work in the same direction.
>
> All that this is leading up to is the suggestion that it might be useful if the Prime Minister were to show Samuel that he would have expected the Commission to have reached the stage by now of thinking very hard about their recommendations. If it prove that I am wrong, so much the better.[19]

Waterhouse responded that Gowers' letter had reached him at a very opportune moment, that he acted on it immediately, and that Gowers' anxieties had been taken into account and 'touched upon' in a way which should 'tend to dispel them and prove salutary'.[20] To judge from Beveridge's autobiography, Gowers had continuing difficulties with the Commission. Describing the drafting of the report, Beveridge writes:

> the long descriptive part at the beginning was thrown at Ernest Gowers of the Mines Department to do against time, after we [the members] had dined already to celebrate completion of the report.[21]

Indeed, Beveridge made the claim that '[w]e proved that a Royal Commission could report quickly'.[22] The Samuel Commission presented its report in March 1926. In contrast to the Sankey Report its findings were unanimous. It recognised the need to reorganize the industry but it rejected nationalisation, urging amalgamations with a limited degree of State compulsion if voluntary amalgamations failed to materialise. The Commission also recommended that the Government subsidy should be withdrawn and the miners' wages reduced.

The Commission's report clearly documented the problems of the industry and effectively delayed what was by then an inevitable stoppage. Gowers urged that an attempt at resolution should not be delayed. The Secretary for Mines wrote to the Prime Minister to say

that 'our people here' had raised doubts about a suggestion that the Government's response be set out in letters from the Prime Minister to the parties involved. It might fail to expedite matters and might even produce delay.

The Prime Minister established a Cabinet Coal Committee to consider the report. He chaired the committee which met about 50 times through 1926. Lane Fox pressed ministers to accept the Samuel Report without reservation. On their part, the miners said that they were willing to accept heavy unemployment rather than lower wages, but also insisted that reorganisation must have absolute precedence in any policy to deal with the economic crisis.[23]

The 1926 miners' strike

In November 1925, Lane Fox had presented a report to the Cabinet on the coal situation, 'presumably' guided by his officials, particularly 'the well-informed and influential Ernest Gowers'.[24] Lane Fox advised Cabinet that as the miners would not shift their position over wages and hours, a stoppage had to take place before any reduction in wages or increase in hours could take place. He predicted, accurately, that the industry was bound to come to a halt at the end of April 1926, as it had done at the end of March 1921.[25]

The Government was prepared to accept the report in its entirety only if the miners and the colliery owners were prepared to do likewise. This did not happen. The position of the Miners' Federation was summed up in their slogan 'Not a minute on the day, not a penny off the pay'. In April, a month after the Samuel Report was published, the mine owners announced new terms of employment including an extension of the seven-hour working day, local wage agreements, and wage cuts for all miners, of between ten and 25 per cent.

On 30 April the Government subsidy to the coal industry ceased. The miners refused to consider any reduction in wages before reorganisation proposals put forward in the Samuel Report were implemented. The TUC held a conference with the Miners' Federation on 1 May. Immediately afterwards they announced that there would be a General Strike in defence of miners, to start on 3 May. In the following days the leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party tried to negotiate with the Government and the mine owners. They failed to reach an agreement and the strike went ahead.

Daily conferences were held at the Home Office during the week of the strike. Gowers and Sir John Anderson, by then Permanent Under-Secretary

at the Home Office, attended. Gowers recorded that their paths crossed during the General Strike because both were 'at the centre of things':

> It was an unforgettable experience to watch him dominate the meeting and rally a set of rather jittery ministers, himself confident and imperturbable, sometimes even verging on the contemptuous.[26]

Another participant, Philip Game, also noted Anderson's influence at a meeting he attended:

> It was, to be tactful, a somewhat noisy and disorderly meeting, everyone talking (and shouting) what I can only describe as hot air. After 10 minutes of this someone I did not know got up and, in less than another 10 minutes, all was calm and everyone knew what to do and went off quietly to do it. … The unknown to me was John Anderson.[27]

The Samuel Memorandum

Against the wishes of the Government, Herbert Samuel decided to intervene in the crisis, even though his task as chairman had concluded when his Royal Commission's report was complete. On 7 May 1926 he approached the TUC offering to help bring the strike to an end. Without telling the miners, the TUC negotiating committee met Samuel secretly and worked out a set of proposals to end the General Strike.

On 11 May, the TUC General Committee decided to accept the terms proposed by Samuel and to call off the strike, and on the following day visited 10 Downing Street to announce to the Government that the strike was over. The following day Samuel issued a Memorandum on the Coal Industry, the outcome of his unauthorised discussions with the Council. The draft proposals had been submitted to the Miners' Executive overnight 'but did not appear to carry conviction to those directly concerned'.[28]

During the negotiations the TUC asked the Government to support the Samuel proposals and to offer a guarantee that there would be no victimisation of strikers. The Government refused. As a result, the terms accepted by the TUC negotiating committee were rejected by the miners' union. Between them the TUC and Herbert Samuel had simply confused the issue for the miners. The General Strike might be over, but the miners' strike was not.

The miners' strike unresolved

Gowers continued to be at the centre of events in negotiations over the unresolved miners' strike. On 14 May, the Prime Minister sent a memorandum to both the miners and the colliery owners clarifying the Government's proposals to settle the dispute and to distance the Government from the unauthorised Samuel negotiations. The Government's memorandum proposed, amongst other things, legislation covering four 'immediate' points: amalgamation of undertakings; a welfare levy on royalty owners; the restriction of recruitment and the setting up of a wages board.

The Times commented that 'a good deal of tact and patience' would be required to overcome the difficulties presented by Samuel's intervention.[29] Gowers was the man called on to embark on this diplomatic mission. He also drafted the Prime Minister's report to the House of Commons. On 17 May, he met the TUC Secretary, A. J. Cook, to discuss the Government's new proposals for a settlement of the mining dispute.[30] He distanced the Government from the Samuel recommendations:

> At the outset, Mr Gowers made it perfectly clear that the proposals of the Government should be read and treated as entirely independent of the proposals contained in the Samuel Memorandum; the latter document had no official existence, and if the miners had accepted it on the understanding that the Government had also done so, an impossible situation would have arisen for all concerned.

In response to the Government's proposals, the owners accused the Government of contributing to the troubles of the coal industry by 'political interference'. Gowers drafted a strong reply:

> [The Prime Minister] would point out that what is called 'political interference' in the Mining Industry has been entirely due to the incapacity, now again so conspicuously shown, of that industry, unlike other industries, to settle its disputes for itself. He deplores your Association's apparent inability to recognise that it was quite impossible for any Government to have stood aside in matters where the national wellbeing is so vitally and disastrously affected.[31]

The response to the miners' union was less uncompromising. But the Government warned the union that if the stoppage in the mining industry continued beyond the end of the month, it would not be able to hold open the offer of any further subsidy.

There was still no resolution to the strike. On 21 June the Government introduced two Bills into the House of Commons. The first was the Coal Mining Reorganization Bill and the second, the Eight Hours Bill. The Eight Hours Bill received Royal Assent on 7 July. It took another three years for a new Coal Act, covering reorganisation of the industry, to be passed.

The strike dragged on through July and August. Baldwin, exhausted by the General Strike, took a holiday in France at the end of August. He wrote to the King saying that he had devoted the three days before he left to the coal question, and talked to Winston Churchill, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lord Birkenhead:

> Both are within easy reach of London and will be accessible to the Ministers of Labour and Mines, who have the advantage of being advised by two most experienced civil servants.[32]

The Miners' Federation was in disarray. Churchill responded to their request for a meeting and a delegation including Herbert Smith (President of the Federation) and A. J. Cook (TUC Secretary), had a meeting with Churchill, Steel-Maitland (Minister for Labour), and Lane Fox at 7 p.m. on 26 August. Thomas Jones and Gowers were both present:

> Herbert Smith was uncompromising throughout and reiterated the old demands. All four pressed the Chancellor hard over and over again for temporary financial assistance. The Chancellor firmly resisted further help either by way of subsidy, loan or guarantee. He made quite plain that the Government would gladly help to resume negotiations with the Owners if proposals from the Men were such as to create a really new situation. No such proposals emerged but it was evident that Cook especially was anxious to get out some such proposals; but Herbert Smith had his foot on Cook's neck. When the meeting was over Cook in unmistakable language told Gowers and me what he thought of Smith and he tried to make our joint communiqué to the press say that the men were prepared to face a reduction in wages. This I had to turn down as it went beyond what took place and would have justified Smith in denouncing it. We therefore agreed on a quite colourless announcement and promised to issue to the press tomorrow a verbatim report.[33]

At the beginning of September, in an attempt to act as intermediary, Ramsay Macdonald, Leader of the Opposition, sought a secret meeting with Churchill. The meeting took place at Chartwell. Only six men were present. In addition to Churchill, Macdonald, Steel-Maitland and

Lane Fox, there were two civil servants, Gowers and Jones, who drove down to the meeting together. Like so many attempts at negotiation, the meeting brought resolution no closer.

The end of the miners' strike

By October extreme hardship forced the men to begin to drift back to the mines. By the end of November most miners had reported back to work. Their union funds had been running out and so had the workers' savings. Those miners who could went back to work in the end; and on terms far, far worse than they could have had at the beginning of the strike. Many remained unemployed for years, and those who were employed were forced to accept longer hours and lower wages.

The position of the coal industry did not improve and the country was heading towards the Depression. Gowers reported to the Secretary of the Mines Department that the task of securing enough of the world's markets to satisfy the present capacity of the industry was beyond the reach of the coal owners. Gowers wrote that the attitude of the owners 'almost makes one despair', and Keynes saw it as 'one of several indications that we are dealing with a decadent, third-rate industry'.[34] Lord Birkenhead wrote to a friend that 'it would be possible to say without exaggeration of the miners' leaders that they were the stupidest men in England, if we had not had frequent occasion to meet the owners.[35]

The coal owners continued to cause insuperable problems for Gowers over the next two decades. He enjoyed a three-year respite from coal as Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, but was then appointed Chairman of the Coal Reorganization Commission established under the Coal Act of 1930. He spent the first half of the 1930s trying to cajole or coerce the mine owners into amalgamations.

It was not long before Gowers himself found he had to step out on stage and into the warm glow of the limelight. Indeed, on one occasion the limelight became uncomfortably more than a warm glow, and he must have felt at risk of singeing. However, before that happened, he had a total break from coal and at the age of 47 returned to Inland Revenue, the department in which he started his career, leaving what *The Times* described as the 'doomed' Mines Department. The 'enfeebled' mouse was expected to die under the Geddes axe – a drive for public economy and cutbacks in government expenditure following a review by the Committee on National Expenditure chaired by Sir Eric Geddes. However, despite a recommendation to this effect by the review, the frail mouse survived, only because of the legislative complexities that would be involved in killing it.

6
‘Quis Custodiet?’ – Surtax, Syntax and Scandal

Inland Revenue

It is hard to inject much sense of drama into an account of Ernest Gowers’ three-year appointment as Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue. Ivor Nicholson, friend and ex-colleague of Gowers from the Wellington House days, wrote a series, ‘Stories of Success’, for the *Pall Mall Magazine*. In September 1927, he chose Ernest Gowers as his subject. He was somewhat less reticent about the Board:

> Of all the poisonous institutions in this pleasant country the most odious and most unpopular is undoubtedly the Board of Inland Revenue – in other words *Income Tax*. … [Gowers] is at the head of an organisation which costs nearly seven solid million pounds a year to run, and he is responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the collection of a revenue which is given in reference books as £428,441,000.[1]

Gowers moved to the Board of Inland Revenue at the beginning of August 1927, on a salary of £3,000 a year, after what must have been a gruelling seven years as head of the Mines Department. He was knighted for his work with the coal industry, receiving a Knight Commander of the Bath (KCB) in June 1928.

Inland Revenue should have been a welcome respite from the problems of the coal industry. The General Strike had exhausted many people, including the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin. Baldwin went on tour with the Prince of Wales to Canada in 1927. At about the same time Gowers moved to the Board of Inland Revenue.

The country's finances were suffering the after-effects of the General Strike and the prolonged miners' strike. These had 'reduced revenue by £13.5 million in 1926/27, with a further £30 million lost in income tax and supertax or surtax in subsequent years, mainly 1927/8'.[2] Income tax had been 'continuously in force' since 1842. Lloyd George's 1909 'People's Budget' had introduced supertax. The rate was 6d in the pound on incomes over £5,000 a year. By the end of the First World War the top rate of supertax had risen to 4s 6d, applied to all incomes over £2,000. In 1927 supertax became surtax – a form of additional income tax. The readers of *The Times* were most likely to have been the targets of the new tax, and resented it.[3]

The main issues for the Board of Inland Revenue during Gowers' tenure appear to have been the passing of the Finance Act in 1928, and restructuring the Department, including abolishing the role of Tax Assessors. Gowers moved to Inland Revenue just as the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Winston Churchill, was steering a Finance Bill through Parliament. This was not an easy ride for Churchill and 56 divisions were necessary to secure its passage. *The Times* claimed that the growing complexity of the financial legislation had rendered the laws by which citizens were taxed almost unintelligible to all except the trained legal expert and that this tended to transfer the real power of raising taxes from the elected representatives of the people into the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Inland Revenue officials. In an article headlined 'Quis Custodiet?', *The Times* argued that:

> [t]he Department of Inland Revenue has long shown itself fertile in inventing ingenious devices for squeezing the taxpayer – of which 'simplification' is evidently the latest example. Fiscal contrivances of this kind help no doubt to make budgeting a little easier, but they can only in the long run defeat their own ends if they leave the taxpayer with the irritating impression that he is being treated unfairly: for it is upon his willingness to pay that the buoyancy of the revenue ultimately depends.[4]

Three months later, *The Times* attacked the bureaucrats again:

> Unfortunately, the constant elaboration of the law by Somerset House officials has created a measure of great complexity, which only an expert can unravel, with the result that most members of Parliament are quite unable intelligently to debate clauses in a Finance Bill.[5]

Gowers gave an overview of the changes in income tax in a talk on 'The Income Tax Machine' in 1934, and found that even tax can be the topic of gentle humour:

> The merger of the two taxes [income tax and supertax] that was marked by the change of name from supertax to surtax has one disadvantage to the taxpayer, namely that whereas formerly he only needed to pay supertax while he was alive, he now has to go on paying surtax for a year after he is dead. But against this he must set the comforting consideration that, as long as he is alive, the tax has become, in the words of the author of this reform 'far more intelligible' to him.[6]

Gowers had to be diplomatic with the rich and influential when dealing with sensitive tax issues. On one occasion he travelled to Jersey to persuade, successfully, a wealthy tax-evading widow to part with £1.5m. This followed successful negotiations which took place in August 1927 between Inland Revenue and the Channel Islands authorities in which the authorities agreed to provide Inland Revenue with information on British tax citizens who had moved to the islands in order to evade tax. After the cheque had been cleared, he had it framed as a memento.

In May 1928 the President of the Association of Officers of Taxes drew attention to the inadequacy of the 'machinery' of the department, citing in particular the shortage of accommodation which led both to lack of privacy for interviews and security for confidential papers. Such conditions, he said, were a disgrace to the department and 'worthy of strong public criticism'.[7] Gowers was quick to respond to these complaints, earning high praise from his staff. A rare insight into Gowers as a manager comes in an appreciation from the Association when he ceased to be Chairman of the Board in 1930:

> Some people think that one Head of a Department is as bad as another. Whoever he may be, he is to many a distant figure moving in the dim recesses of Somerset House, formulating the policy of 'The Board' – that inhuman institution which we associate with a certain omnipotence and much wickedness.
>
> A change of Chairman of the Board is accordingly of less individual significance to the majority of us than a change of District Inspector. To the leaders of the Association, however, who are brought into close and frequent contact with the Head of the Department, and to the Association as a whole whose business we do with him, the

> outlook and personality of the Chairman of the Board matter a great deal. That is why, when we have a Chairman whom we have come to know, to trust, and even to like, we are exceedingly sorry to lose him.
>
> We had such a Chairman in Sir Ernest Gowers, and the news of his departure was received by the Committee and Officers of the Association with considerable dismay. … His approach to the Association's claims and aspirations was a friendly, an understanding and a sympathetic one, and we feel that we owe much to him personally for the substantial measure of improvement of the conditions of the Clerical Staff which it has been possible recently to obtain in circumstances of extreme difficulty.[8]

Ivor Nicholson, in his assessment, noted that Gowers could also be formidable:

> I should not recommend any reader of these lines should he or she be in trouble over Income Tax to pay a casual visit to Somerset House and ask for an interview with Sir Ernest Gowers. Supposing in the unlikely event of an interview being granted you, I know few men who have a more brutal and cold-blooded way with callers than Sir Ernest. Not that he intends to hurt you or embarrass you. He just looks at you with cold steely eyes and waits for you to talk. I have seen him discomfit some of the most inflated gasbags in Europe in this effective way. I suppose he was well trained by a succession of brilliant chiefs.[9]

'Mainly about the King's English'

The Department of Inland Revenue was one of the fastest-growing departments in this period. Between 1900 and 1930 the number of staff grew from 5,345 to 21,342. This was a development not altogether welcomed by the readers of *The Times*. But letters, both resentful and supportive, often focussed on the Department's inspectors and the English used in its communications with the public. The attacks against the Department of Inland Revenue may have been the trigger that prompted Gowers to start his crusade against officialese. In 1929 he gave his second speech to the Institute of Public Administration. The title 'Mainly about the King's English' was a reference to the work of brothers H. W. and F. G. Fowler, *The King's English*.[10] The Fowlers' work was directed principally towards journalists. Gowers' address was directed towards his own colleagues.

He dealt with two themes to which he frequently returned over the years: the English used by civil servants, particularly when communicating with the public, and his analysis of the changing role of the Civil Service. He was alert to the growing antipathy towards bureaucrats, reflected in comments in the press:

> During the quarter of a century that I have spent in the Civil Service, I have watched with interest a change coming over the attitude of the public towards us. Superficially, perhaps, there is not much difference. Criticism and jest at our expense were the fashion then just as they are today. But a note of bitterness – sometimes indeed of venom – has crept into the benevolent, if contemptuous, tolerance of those days. …
>
> Too many people saw the insides of Government Departments during the war to permit of the illusion continuing that civil servants are ornamental or that they lead an idle life. Too much social legislation has been passed by all parties during the past twenty-five years to permit of the ordinary citizen continuing to look on the ordinary civil servant with an aloof benevolence. In one respect the attitude of the public is unchanged. They have always loved, and still love to flatter their own intelligence by catching us out in apparent stupidities – sometimes, no doubt, in real ones.
>
> But the chief count in the indictment against us nowadays is not that of stupidity or that of idleness; on the contrary we are often accused of being too clever and habitually of being too active. The gravamen of the charges falls under three heads. It is said: first, that we thirst for power over our fellow-men and lose no opportunity of sapping the freedom of the public by extending the tentacles of bureaucracy; secondly, that in our administration we are unimaginative, rigid, cumbrous, and inelastic; and thirdly, that we revel in jargon and obscurity. …
>
> The type of English that we are wont to use in writing to one another and to the public is almost invariably scrupulously accurate in grammar and syntax; and in this we can claim superiority over the commercial world. There is no danger of our being caught out in false concords or split infinitives. It is significant that the Civil Service proved to be the profession of a man I once met who made it a hobby to search for split infinitives in advertisements, notices, and other productions of the commercial world, and, whenever he found one, to write a letter of expostulation to the author. He got a good deal of amusement out of it, but, on the whole, I think his zeal

> was misplaced. There are worse things in English prose, even than split infinitives, and something more is needed for the writing of good English than the avoidance of turns of phrase condemned by popular convention; and although our best is a model of what good English should be, the ordinary run of our pronouncements gives some colour to the popular criticism.
>
> The peculiarities of our method of expression seem to me to arise partly from a leaning towards the 'grand' style, and partly from that caution which plays so large a part in the training of the official. The first is easily explicable. The outstanding feature of all British Government institutions is the tenacity with which they cling to old forms, however changed the substance; and the 'grand' style of today is the plain style of the past, become 'grand' on account of the tinge of archaism that it has acquired.[11]

By the time he left Inland Revenue, Gowers' message appears to have reached at least some members of his department. A correspondent to *The Times* wrote in praise of a letter he had received:

> One hears a great deal about the soullessness of income-tax officials, but it is seldom that they get a word of appreciation when it is due to them. Recently I received a letter from a London inspector of taxes who deals with my own somewhat unimportant case, in the course of which occurs the following:
>
> > It would appear probable that you are entitled to repayment in respect of assessments on untaxed interest for the years 1928–29 and 1929–30. Will you, therefore, kindly inform me the actual amount of untaxed interest received in respect of each of the three years to April 5 1929, when I will investigate the matter, and if repayment is found to be due will ask you to forward receipts to cover.
>
> This very pleasing and charming communication goes to show that the interests of the income-tax payer are as closely watched as are the interests of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and that the inspector and his assistants are quite human and not so black as some people like to paint them.[12]

Gowers' influence on the Board's correspondence with the public endured. Over 30 years later, Sir Alexander Johnston wrote that 'if the taxpayer raises his problem in correspondence the Revenue does its best to reply in "plain words" as recommended by Sir Ernest Gowers'.[13]

Rescue at Entebbe

Ivor Nicholson closed his article on Ernest Gowers with a tribute to Gowers' family life:

> I think Ernest Gowers is one of the most fortunate men I know. He has achieved brilliant things in his own world. He occupies one of the five most important posts in the country. He is loved by his friends, and he has a home life which is as near perfect as I have seen anywhere in my pilgrimage. Riches he has not. But I call his life a success.[14]

By the end of the war Ernest and Kit's three children were at school; by the end of the miners' strike they were young adults. In 1920, their elder daughter Peggy had been sent as a boarder to St Felix School, in Suffolk, following in the footsteps of her mother who had, in 1898, been one of the school's first four pupils. In 1925, Peggy was awarded an exhibition to Newnham College, Cambridge. She matriculated in natural sciences in 1927 (until 1947, women were precluded by the university from actually receiving a degree). The Gowers' son William Richard (Dick) was sent to Dartmouth. He did not go directly into the navy, choosing (or having chosen for him) to go to Cambridge. He followed his father's footsteps and went to Clare. He first enrolled to read maths, baulked at calculus, and quickly switched to law. The younger daughter, Eileen, was still at school.

Also by this time, Ernest Gowers' elder brother, Bill, was at the peak of his career. In August 1921, he had been promoted to Lieutenant-Governor in Nigeria. Four years later, in January 1925, after 22 years in Nigeria, he was appointed Governor of Uganda, a position he held for seven years. He was knighted, becoming, like his father before him, Sir William Gowers. As Governor he supported African advancement, particularly through education, and did not support the extension of European land ownership.

There were some domestic problems looming at Government House in Entebbe. The Governor's shaky marriage was disintegrating. His wife, Maud, left Uganda to live in Paris. Sometime after Maud's departure, Gowers' secretary, Winifred Paul, became his constant companion. Protocol ensured that she had to disappear when Government House functions took place, earning her the nickname 'Cinderella', by which she was known by the family for the rest of her life.

While his marriage disintegrated, rumours started circulating in the expatriate communities in both Uganda and neighbouring Kenya about the Governor's womanising, gambling and failure to pay his debts. The rumours reached England and were the subject of an exchange of correspondence between the Governor, Leo Amery (Colonial Secretary), Amery's deputy William Ormsby-Gore and Lord Lugard. Sir William Gowers forcefully denied accusations about gambling and debts. Ormsby-Gore wrote to Lugard suggesting that if a quarter of the accusations about the Governor's 'social atmosphere' were true, it was very embarrassing:

> If you reply, I hope you will issue a friendly word of warning. Gowers is a good man but slightly intolerant of Victorian views. His quarrel with his wife is most unfortunate in the circumstances. He has got himself 'talked about' not only in Uganda but in Kenya and the Sudan. His nickname 'naughty Willie' has become widespread. I am sorry for him, but there it is.
>
> There is no doubt that Gowers has shocked Church Missionary Society opinion which is strong among missionaries and natives in Uganda. It is a country where more concessions to puritan traditions must be made by any governor who is really respected. …
>
> Governors, especially in a place like Entebbe where all are his subordinates and he is 'the Excellency' must take extra care. The 'tales' have not reached Buckingham Palace yet – but knowing how strong the feeling is there on such subjects I sincerely hope they will not.[15]

If they did, Buckingham Palace was not so disapproving as to ban the Prince of Wales from staying with the Governor. He made two trips to Uganda, in 1928 and again in 1930. Both HRH and Gowers kept diaries and these were later combined by an editor to form the published version of HRH's trips to East Africa. The Governor taught HRH 'some rudiments' of Swahili and they paired up on several occasions as (consistently losing) golfing partners.[16] His ADC, Henry Shiffner, played golf with HRH at Jinja where they had to conform to the local rule which allowed a player to lift a ball from the footprint of a hippopotamus without penalty.

The Prince's secretary, Alan Lascelles, thought Gowers 'a good chap but with a weakness for women which is dangerous in a governor, especially when his wife is permanently resident in Paris, as is the case here'.[17] But Bill must have somewhat redeemed his reputation when he ran from a charging elephant rather than standing and shooting it. Lascelles judged

that 'he did entirely the right thing – he couldn't have let his rifle off without killing somebody, probably the Prince of Wales'.[18]

In November 1928 Kit Gowers visited her brother-in-law to 'sort out Government House', taking her daughter Peggy, who had just left Cambridge, with her. They travelled via Marseilles, where they met Faith Murray (sister-in-law of the late Master of Elibank).[19] The three women arrived at Government House in early December where they were met by Henry Shiffner. Peggy remained in Uganda after her mother returned to England, and acted as hostess for Government House receptions when Cinderella was secreted somewhere out of sight. Peggy's scheming mother left her attractive daughter at Government House hoping that a romance might develop with the highly eligible ADC, as duly transpired.

Not everyone thought that Bill was a threat to young women. In August 1931 Jessy Mair, Sir William Beveridge's secretary (and later his wife), wrote to Kit Gowers to say that her daughter Lucy had been awarded a Rockefeller Foundation grant to investigate problems of colonial administration in Uganda. 'I am hopelessly ignorant about Uganda' wrote Mair 'and do not know how completely civilised it is'. A young Arthur Bottomley wrote a similar appeal from the Colonial Office, pointing out that Lord Passfield (Sydney Webb), then Colonial Secretary in the MacDonald Labour Government, also took a keen interest in the project:

> She [Jessy Mair] is afraid that Lucy will be too adventurous and will get into remote districts where she may incur undesirable risks. Mrs Mair hopes that the authorities will keep a very watchful eye on Miss Lucy's movements and not let her go anywhere unaccompanied by some British protection. … I think you will have no difficulty in finding a means whereby Miss Mair will not in any way be hampered, and yet will run no risk of getting into difficulties.[20]

In response, the Governor gave an assurance that she would be offered hospitality at Government House: 'I cannot imagine that there are any undesirable risks awaiting her in Buganda. I suppose she won't want to hunt elephants or buffalo. Otherwise it seems to me that a girl is as safe, or safer in Buganda than she is in London. … As you know my private secretary [Cinderella] is a girl and she works alone accompanied by porters only in much more remote uncivilised country'. Lucy Mair's first book, *An African People in the Twentieth Century*, was published in 1932. She went on to a distinguished career as a social anthropologist.

Another distinguished academic, African historian Margery Perham, also braved the moral danger posed by staying with Gowers at Entebbe as an unattached young woman. Perham reflected on the breakdown in the relationship between the governors in East Africa, recalling discussions with one of Gowers' counterparts: '… officials in general are almost all bitter about the administration beyond their own frontiers. My approval of Uganda here was received with stony silence … Mutual suspicion is bred out of ignorance'. She recalled an occasion in Tanganyika:

> The Jardines came to dinner and his Excellency [Sir Donald Cameron] gave us full details of that recent controversial Governors Conference in London and many revelations about another governor who shall remain nameless. … I might add that I had some furious arguments with Mr Jardine (Chief Secretary) who was, or pretended to be, horrified (a) at my having stayed unchaperoned with the Governor of Uganda and (b) of my having liked him.[21]

She wrote that Sir Donald Cameron, who was helping spread the rumours against Gowers, was someone 'full of malice'. 'He has disparaged most other governors I know or know of, except I think Sir Hugh Clifford. Even Lord Lugard! But Gowers, Maxwell and Grigg are his special prey'.[22] Sir William Gowers' term as Governor might have raised some eyebrows, especially within missionary circles and the Kenyan white community (which was not devoid of its own 'white mischief'). An assessment, after his death in 1954, was more complimentary:

> Of unusual ability, he was quick in thought and action, a good judge of men, firm but just, and determined to use his term of office for the advancement of the Protectorate as a whole. … Gowers had an inherited interest in scientific affairs, and he lost no opportunity of emphasising the importance of research, of expanding the technical departments, and of giving medical, agricultural, veterinary, and educational and other officials the confidence that they could look to him for understanding and support.
>
> His knowledge was many-sided. He was well-read in English and the classics, he had an excellent historical memory, he delighted in small talk if it was good, he welcomed a raconteur, and he found it amusing to meet specialists on their own ground.[23]

My grandmother's hopes for Aunt Peggy were realised when she married Henry Shiffner, in the church of St Martin in the Fields, Trafalgar

Square, in May 1929. In March 1930 their only child, and Sir Ernest's first grandchild, Henry David (known in the family as David), was born. In 1930 Ernest Gowers was 50 years old, yet still had 35 more years of highly productive work in front of him. His brother's career was at its peak, though not over. There is a family story that when he ended his term as Governor of Uganda in 1932, Bill was offered the position of Governor of Kenya. He said he would accept the position if his ADC, Shiffner, stayed with him. To the disappointment both of Sir William and his niece Peggy, Shiffner chose to resume his military career and went to India as a subaltern rather than enjoying reflected glory as a gubernatorial ADC. Peggy disliked her experience in India, particularly the racist attitude of British officers towards their Indian colleagues. She returned to England, and successfully applied for a place at the Royal College of Music in London. After five years at the College she became a professional oboe player.

Bill returned to London in 1932 to take up the position of Senior Crown Agent for the Colonies, a position which by that stage had earned a reputation as 'a reward for long years of service and as a dumping ground for individuals who were incompetent or could no longer adequately perform duties because of ill health, lack of drive' or 'uncongenial personalities'.[24] Either interpretation may be true, but it may have seemed safer to bring him home. He held the post until he retired in 1938. His East African nickname was converted to the more alliterative 'Wicked Willy', a family nickname by which he is still remembered. Ernest and his brother could barely have been more different. But they shared lively intellects and a keen sense of humour. It is clear from letters in the family archives that they were also firm friends.

Kit Gowers continued to be a woman of great organisational energy. In 1929 she became involved in running the Margaret Club and Day Nursery for unmarried mothers and their children which had been established ten years earlier. Under her leadership it was rebuilt and given a firm financial grounding.[25]

In October 1929 the American stock market crashed, with immediate repercussions across the world. Ernest Gowers was still Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue. Government revenues contracted as national income fell, while the cost of assisting the jobless rose. By the end of 1930 unemployment had more than doubled in Britain, from 1 million to 2.5 million (20 per cent of the insured workforce), and exports had fallen in value by 50 per cent. The industrial areas and coal-mining districts were hardest hit. The country was facing a grim future.

Gowers' last two years as Chairman of the Board must have been fraught with difficulties because of the looming Depression, but he was persuaded to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. Nicholson makes a tantalising comment in his article about Gowers' opportunities outside the Civil Service, which has been impossible to confirm, but does fit with a story in the family that he was offered, or invited to apply, to become head of his old Cambridge college:

> Sir Otto Niemeyer is reported to be leaving the Civil Service for the Bank of England which cannot prove a very revolutionary change. Sir Ernest Gowers was offered a more exciting opportunity to escape which he eventually declined.[26]

In 1930 the Government passed the Coal Mines Act. This created the Coal Reorganization Commission. Early in 1931, Sir Ernest Gowers became Chair of the Commission, and embarked on a decade of frustration trying to deal with the coal owners.

7
Mine Owners' Bogy Man

While Gowers was chairing the Board of Inland Revenue, new legislation was being developed for coal. The Coal Mines Act 1930 came into force in August 1930. On 10 December, the Government announced that it had appointed the members of the Coal Reorganization Commission, created under the Act, with Gowers as Chairman.

In January 1930, G. D. H. Cole wrote a perceptive article in *The Political Journal*. He criticised the proposed Bill largely because there was no basis for consent in the coal industry. Without the power to force amalgamations, he concluded the draft Bill was unsound and 'utterly inadequate'. Neither the miners nor the owners could be relied on to accept an unenforceable recommendation if either of them thought they could do better by ignoring it.[1]

Controversy at the outset

These were turbulent times, with the political leaders in a state of confusion and discord about how to manage the economy during the Depression. In July 1931, a committee appointed to review the state of public finances recommended public sector wage cuts and large cuts in public spending (notably in payments to the unemployed) to avoid incurring a budget deficit. This proposal was contentious and several Labour ministers refused to support any such measures. The Labour Government that had come to power in 1929 was split, and fell. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald did not resign, but instead offered to form a National Government with Liberals and Conservatives. MacDonald was seen to have betrayed his own party, and was expelled in September 1931. But his Coalition won a large majority in the general election held in October 1931.

Gowers' appointment as Chairman of the Coal Mines Reorganization Commission immediately landed him in a controversy he must have found extremely painful. In 1966, an obituary recalled this incident:

> Not everyone will recall the extraordinary political row of which he was the innocent centre 35 years ago. The Labour government of 1929–31 appointed him as Chairman of the Coal Mines Reorganization Commission at a salary of £7,000 a year with allowances. This figure, worth about £21,000 today and then twice the amount paid to the permanent head of the Treasury [Warren Fisher], caused an explosion in Parliament.[2]

In 1931 the split within the parliamentary Labour Party led to various acts of 'minor rebellion'.[3] One of these occurred when two miners' union MPs supported a Conservative motion to reduce Gowers' salary. The Government's offer of £7,000 was an increase of £4,000 over his salary as Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue. A briefing setting out the rationale for this rise compared Gowers' new position with that of the Chairman of the Central Electricity Board, pointing out that because Gowers had resigned from the Civil Service, his new salary had to be calculated against comparable positions. This was defended publicly by the Secretary for Mines, Emanuel Shinwell, on the grounds that Gowers had been, 'deliberately taken out of the Civil Service to remove all suspicion of bureaucratic control of the new mines commission'.[4] The briefing to Shinwell pointed out that Gowers 'was at no time a candidate for this post'. Had he been consulted on his own personal preferences, he would still be Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue. His 'willingness to place himself unreservedly at the disposal of His Majesty's Government surely cannot be pleaded as a justification for paying him less than the market rate for the job'.[5]

But the salary was criticised for being too high, particularly given the economic plight of the nation at the time. When the matter was debated, Ramsay MacDonald faced a rebellion on his Labour backbench. A vote was taken on a motion to reduce the salary by £500, which the Government won by five votes. Because it was a close call for MacDonald, reports of the incident even reached the American press. MacDonald was quoted there as saying that a majority of five was good enough to proceed with for another couple of years, 'but the melancholy thing is that if the Government had been turned out it would not have been through the Liberals and Conservatives, but through a number of our own members who apparently are unable to accept any form of team responsibility'.[6]

Failed test case

Fortunately Gowers did not become a cause celebre by bringing down the Government and the storm subsided. (It was not entirely forgotten. In 1937 W. A. Robson gave a detailed account of the work of the Commission, commenting about the salaries that 'highly qualified as the Commissioners were, neither they nor any other persons available should have been paid the fantastic remuneration offered for their services'.)[7] Apart from this unwelcome publicity, Gowers had to adopt a more public profile in order to promote his new role. Part I of the Act established statutory marketing schemes to control the output and price of coal and was intended, in part, to spread the available employment among the greatest possible number of men. The legislation was developed shortly before the Wall Street crash and it had to be adjusted a number of times in light of the impact of the Depression.

Part II of the Act established the Coal Mines Reorganization Commission. Throughout the 1920s coal owners had offered implacable opposition to any extensive program of voluntary amalgamation.[8] The Commission's role was to encourage voluntary colliery amalgamations and, should this strategy prove unsuccessful, to develop schemes for compulsory amalgamations, which the legislation was designed to enable.

Gowers was soon using the press to inform the public about the work of the new Commission, trying to get the colliery owners to agree to amalgamations. But G. D. H. Cole's prediction proved accurate. What compulsory powers the Commission had were found, under legal challenge, to be flawed. As his obituary stated: 'Not even Gowers, a master in the art of securing cooperation, could win success for the reorganisation scheme of 1930 though he spent five years in the effort'.[9]

Supple comments on Gowers' continuing influence in the coal industry:

> Throughout the 1930s his attempts to stimulate amalgamations dominated the industrial side of the Government's policy. From that position he made cogent and innovative contributions to official discussion of legislation concerning marketing controls and royalty nationalisation. …
>
> Gowers was an interventionist by experience rather than by inclination. As early as 1927 he appreciated that the industry's excessive capacity would not be eliminated, nor its disorderly markets stabilized, without a measure of coordination and cooperation.

> Thenceforth, he was a consistent advocate of 'orderly' control and reduction of output – a posture which occasioned the most painful frustration when, in the 1930s, the owners failed to cooperate in any way with the Coal Mines Reorganization Commission.[10]

The Commission embarked on a program of extensive consultations, but soon ran into difficulties. Changes of government caused delays as coal owners hoped for policy change. In 1932, after explaining the obstacles to amalgamation, the commissioners reported to the new (Liberal) Secretary for Mines, Isaac Foot:

> More than this it would be useless to attempt so long as colliery owners cherish the conviction that our Commission is about to be abolished. We have been handicapped in this way from the outset: there has always been an impression that a change of government would mean the repeal of Part II, and this has created a disinclination to face up to the policy of amalgamation as a reality to be tackled seriously and constructively. When, therefore, the change of Government came, and it was known that the Mining Association had formally asked that we should be ended, it was natural that we should find those with whom we had to deal disposed to mark time and await events.[11]

The following year the Commission again reported that many owners had expected that the change of government would lead to a repeal of Part II of the Act and their disappointment and failure to respond, because of their suspicion of the Commission's intentions, had led to difficulties.[12]

In 1933 Gowers was invited to give a talk on coal to Cambridge University's Marshall Society (established in 1927 to promote discussion in the 'Dismal Science', its members included Maynard Keynes). Gowers concluded his address by summing up the lack of progress in amalgamations:

> The Coal Mines Act 1930 did not solve any problems: rather it created a new set of them. In part it has already failed; in part its success is still in the balance. There must very soon be another step, either backward or forward. The coal owners, who are never unanimous except in opposing things, are unable to agree what policy to recommend. The next step must be either back towards laissez faire or forward to more close and effective regulation of the industry.[13]

Gowers worked hard to try to secure cooperation, talking to colliery owners and giving public addresses. In 1934 he addressed the Dundee Business Club on 'The Coal Question of Today':

> Sir Ernest A Gowers … said that the subject was one in which he was necessarily absorbed, for his present lot was to be attached to the industry as a sort of therapeutic blister. The irritant effects of a blister upon the patient were immediately apparent, while its ultimately remedial effects lay hidden in the womb of hope.

In an article in *The Times*, he wrote:

> I have had on more than one occasion to recall the remark once made by Mr Keynes to the effect that the devotees of capital are apt, in their conservatism to reject reforms in its technique which might really strengthen and preserve it, for fear that they may prove to be the first step away from capitalism itself. But coal owners who do this fall short of that enlightened self-interest which built up the industry. For nothing can be more certain than that the 'force of the necessity of things' will continue to drive the Parliamentary machine up against the industry; and it lies with the coal owners themselves – as it seems to me – to determine whether, at long last, that machine is used to destroy their capitalism or to fulfil it.[14]

In 1934 the Commission prepared a test case for the partial amalgamation of the West Yorkshire coalmines. The case was refused on the grounds that it did not meet criteria established under the legislation: the court was not satisfied that the scheme was in the national interest; or that it would lower the cost of production; or that it would not be financially injurious to undertakings to be closed down; or that it was fair and equitable to the persons affected. As *The Times* commented, the decision meant that the scheme was dead and pretty thoroughly damned.[15] The Commission was preparing another case when the Secretary for Mines intervened, suspending work on the case pending further consideration of the position and powers of the Commission.[16]

By 1935 Gowers was again despairing. His contract was due to expire on 15 December. The Commission's work was at a standstill. On 17 October he wrote to Captain Crookshank, the Secretary for Mines, reluctant to renew his contract:

> I do not know whether the Government mean to terminate it then, but I have not been told so, and this letter is written on the assumption

> that I must either terminate it myself or commit myself to going on for another two years. I do not want to find myself in that position.
>
> It will be no surprise to you to learn that five years' experience of trying to make Part II of the Act work has convinced me that if (as must, I suppose, be presumed) Parliament intended to bring about, by compulsion if necessary, the reorganisation of the coal mining industry by amalgamation, it failed to create an effective instrument for its purpose. … I should not write in this way now if there were any likelihood of a test case being heard before the 15th December. But there is none. … And so, with the 15th December now less than two months ahead, I cannot delay letting you know that I do not want to bind myself for another two years. … You will, I am sure, realise that the situation of my Commission has become an embarrassing and unprofitable one. You asked us last July not to initiate any fresh inquiries in regard to possible amalgamations. We are accordingly almost at a standstill. …
>
> I hope therefore that, if you do want me to go on beyond the 15th December, it will be on terms which provide that the appointment may be ended at short notice.[17]

Six months later Gowers tendered his resignation. The Commission could do little as it waited for the Government to prepare new legislation. Gowers was not a man who tolerated idleness. He was also most anxious not to be drawing money from the public purse and providing nothing in return.

His resignation was not accepted and he was asked to stay on. The Prime Minister told him that the Government was going to proceed with a new Bill. As this might take another year, the Prime Minister's office approached Gowers' former colleague from the Loan Collection, Sir Warren Fisher, now Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service, to find work to fill in this void. Gowers would be given 'special duties in relation to Defence problems'.[18]

Steps towards nationalisation

Supple suggests that by the 1940s Gowers had become 'perhaps the most influential advocate of a public-corporation solution' for the problems of the mining industry:

> His political pressure and advice were felt throughout the War, and his testimony was to play an important part in the consideration of public ownership and compensation in 1945–6.[19]

The Coal Act 1938 removed the private ownership and control of coal royalties. Under the Act coal deposits in the ground were nationalised, with ownership vested in a Coal Commission which would have the power to grant mineral leases. The Coal Commission also inherited the powers and functions of the Coal Mines Reorganization Commission, and the Act repealed the criteria for compulsory amalgamations that had caused the test case to fail. In February 1939 Gowers became Chairman of the new Commission.

However, the Second World War intervened. Gowers wrote a piece for *The Times* explaining that it would not be until July 1942 that the Commission would take over the administration of the coal estate, then it would 'step into the shoes of the lessor of every coalmining lease':

> The haphazard methods of the past would make the task full of difficulties, but the Commission, as universal landlord, would be in a unique position gradually to introduce an organization planned as a whole, while still leaving full play to private enterprise in the actual working of the industry.[20]

Luckily his team had time for some humour. At their first (and probably only) annual office dinner and dance on 8 February 1939 the menu included Hors-d'oeuvres Amalgamation; Potage Compensation; and Salade d'Enever; Bombe Consolidation and Friandises Overlaps. The cover of the programme had a cartoon of Gowers (Rex Carboni) and his 'Superjazzin' Orchestrata'. He obviously appreciated the humour as he kept it with his small collection of treasured memorabilia.

Gowers and his colleagues appeared more pessimistic than optimistic, but also appeared to be preparing energetically for the deadline of 1 January 1940, after which – had the war not intervened – they could have tested their new powers in the Houses of Parliament.[21] In June 1939 he sent all colliery owners a memorandum containing an 'outline plan' for reducing the number of coalmining undertakings, accompanied by a covering letter seeking the cooperation of the Mining Association.[22]

Early in 1942 Gowers wrote a memorandum, 'The Coal Industry after the War', in which he argued that coal industry reorganisation would ultimately have to be forced on the owners, and that the need to use legal compulsion to create giant enterprises meant that the industry would have to be the responsibility of a public corporation.[23]

By February 1942, Hugh Dalton was President of the Board of Trade, and Hugh Gaitskell his Principal Assistant Secretary. Dalton was concerned about the quality of some of the Mines Department staff,

particularly the Permanent Secretary who could not be shifted for political reasons. But his deputy could. In March, Hugh Gaitskell, dined with four members of its senior executive to sound them out about a possible replacement. One of the suggestions was Gowers' friend Lord Hyndley, who had been its commercial adviser since 1920. Gaitskell reported back to Dalton:

> They described him as a man of great public spirit, extremely progressive, a tremendous expert on the coal industry and its problems who would be completely loyal to you and would not hesitate to carry through a policy – however opposed to vested interests – if he felt that it was the right one. You would not realise probably, at first, how good he was, because of his diffident manner and his weakness in discussion. He was much better when you got him alone. He would, however, need both drive from above, and some associate to sharpen his mind on. This highly favourable picture fits in, of course, with what you have already heard from other quarters. Lord Hyndley is, without doubt, one of the great assets in the situation.[24]

Dalton appointed Hyndley with a ruthless disregard for the man he was replacing. The operation was carried out with 'a maximum of provocation and tactlessness' and Dalton told the incumbent to vacate his desk within 24 hours.[25] As it turned out, Hyndley was uncomfortable in the position because he was primarily a businessman with particular strengths in marketing. He resigned at the end of 1943.

As well as dining with the senior executives, Gaitskell also had a meeting with Gowers, after which he reported to Dalton that Gowers took a most gloomy view of the principal coal owners. Half of them 'had one foot in the grave'. Gowers gave Gaitskell a copy of the memorandum he had sent to the head of the Mines Department on the public ownership of coal. Gaitskell recorded that Gowers felt that the need for financial unification came second only to the need for men in the pits.[26]

Coal becomes a national property

On 1 July 1942 coal became a national property and the Ministry of Fuel and Power was created, subsuming the old Mines Department. In an article in *The Times* Gowers explained why coal had become a national property:

> During their first year the Coal Commission began a campaign under Part II by producing plans for reorganization of this sort in all

the coalfields. But they suspended it when war broke out, with the remark:

> We hope that at the end of the war the task may be resumed where we laid it down, for the need of it is likely then to be even more urgent than it was when the Act was passed.

A pointer in the same direction may be found in a sentence in the recent White Paper on Coal which says that the powers of control over the industry that are now being assumed by the Government 'will continue pending a final decision by Parliament on the future of the industry'. Today sees the end of a chapter, but not the end of the story.[27]

Supple suggests that 'even more than among politicians radical questions relating to reorganization and public ownership were canvassed among civil servants, suggesting that, *their* experience may be seen as a vital element in the growing acceptability of the idea of public ownership in the early 1940s because they "transcended" the simple questions of direct government intervention which had been posed by the threat of immediate crisis':

> By the 1940s Gowers had lost all political as well as economic confidence in the coal owners, and became perhaps the most influential advocate of a public-corporation solution for the industry's problems (Dalton described him as a 'most able man, with a clear brain, a sense of irony, and … a very low opinion, based on long experience, of most coal owners.') His political pressure and advice were felt throughout the War and his testimony was to play an important part in the consideration of public ownership and compensation in 1945–6.[28]

In 1943 Gowers chaired an internal committee (on which Hyndley also served) established to consider the post-war organisation of the coal industry. Its existence was kept secret because of the political sensitivities. The committee reported in June 1943, recommending full nationalisation and arguing that owners would not amalgamate on their own initiative unless certain that it would happen anyway.

The following year the Government appointed a Technical Advisory Committee, chaired by Sir Charles Reid to examine the present technique of coal production from coalface to wagon, and to advise what technical changes were necessary to bring the industry to a state of full technical efficiency. The Reid Report identified all the inefficiencies in the mining industry and was more forceful than the Gowers committee's report

because of the 'inescapable implications of what it had to say: the problems of the industry could only be approached on a national and planned basis'.[29] The Reid Report was enthusiastically received by the press.

Supple writes that Gowers was still seen by the owners as the 'bogy man' at work behind the scenes. One Durham owner believed he was trying to 'panic the Mining Association so as to justify his existence'.[30] But still little progress was being made in convincing the owners of the merits of amalgamations. In July 1944 the Coal Commission asked the owners' district associations to specify their plans, if they had any. There was a poor response and the Minister for Fuel and Power told the Commission to stop exerting this pressure.

There was drama still to come. Robert Foot, former General Manager of the Gas, Light and Coke Company and most recently General Manager of the BBC, had been appointed Chairman of the Mining Association in 1944. Early in 1945 the Board published the 'Foot Plan' in which Foot asserted that his appointment was 'to save this industry for private enterprise and from the dreadful fate of nationalisation or of control by a public corporation'.

This was the last straw for Gowers who wrote an acid critique of the 'Foot Plan'. His assessment opened with the words:

> As literature, Mr Foot's Report makes easy and pleasant reading; its style has an engaging intimacy and naivety. As an exposition of a Plan it has the defects of being verbose and repetitive, and in arrangement haphazard, not to say chaotic.

It concluded:

> More surprising than his own belief in his plan is his failure to see that what is wanted is not merely a scheme which Mr Foot thinks will work, but one which manifestly contains within itself such assurance of success as to enable a Government that believes in private enterprise to commend it to Parliament as a justification for lifting control. He cannot really think that Parliament is likely to be content with a promise by colliery owners, still so organised that the force of self-interest is centrifugal, to be reformed characters in the future, even though human frailty is reinforced by the time-honoured expedient of signing the pledge.[31]

Gowers' contract and patience were both at an end. When the Minister of Fuel and Power, Major Gwilym Lloyd George wrote in May 1945

offering to reappoint him as Chairman of the Coal Commission, he replied that given the impending election he would accept reappointment in the short term without committing himself to any definite period, but his exhaustion was palpable:

> I have already wasted too many years in the hope that opportunity was just round the corner, and have no wish to commit myself to what may prove to be another year so spent.[32]

Free at last

In July 1945, Clement Attlee's Labour Government was elected. The new Government and took little time to arrange for nationalisation of the coal industry. Emanuel Shinwell succeeded Dalton as Minister of Fuel and Power in August 1945. It is interesting to note that Harry Willink, who first met Gowers in 1923 when he was 'head of an immensely difficult and frustrating Department' wrote later that: '[t]rue to the traditions of the Civil Service, Ernest Gowers kept clear of party politics, but I have a vivid recollection of the admiration he expressed for the drive and energy of Mr Shinwell, then his political chief'.[33]

The Coal Industry Nationalisation Bill was introduced on 19 December 1945; it received its Second Reading on 29 and 30 December 1945. It was not quite the end of Gowers' involvement in coal industry policy. The committee stage of the Bill continued until the early summer of 1946. Gowers gave evidence to a committee which developed the Government's case on compensation for the coal owners to a Coal Industry Nationalisation Compensation Tribunal established by Shinwell to break an impasse of compensation and avoid damaging political fallout. He reminded them of the comments of Judge Sir Francis Taylor who had adjudicated the 1936 test case, who had said that no one could have listened to Gowers' evidence without appreciating his arduous and incessant labours in endeavouring to promote what he felt to be in the interest of the coal industry – real amalgamation.

The Bill received the Royal Assent on 12 July 1946. Lord Hyndley became the first Chairman of the National Coal Board. The Board proceeded to buy out 200 separate companies at the cost of £338 million.[34] This time Hyndley was more comfortable in his role, in which he remained for another five years. The man the Gowers family always referred to as 'the Baron' was elevated further, becoming Viscount Hyndley in 1948.

A weekender in the country

Fortunately there were pleasant family distractions to engage Gowers in the 1930s. His children were now creating their own families. His son Richard (Dick) had graduated in 1932. He went on to train as a solicitor with the Law Society in London, passing his finals in December 1935. He was admitted as a solicitor in January 1936. From then on his father frequently turned to him for legal advice.

Dick, my father, first met my mother, Stella Pelly, in Cambridge. In 1932 she had been working as a set designer and scene painter at the Festival Theatre. She was introduced to my father by a mutual friend, architecture student Hugh Casson. Their courtship took place through an intermediary, my mother's Dalmatian dog, Lordy, who used my father's rooms as a temporary home while my mother worked at the theatre. My father, like his grandfather Sir William Gowers, was far from extrovert. The story of my parents' engagement made it sound almost accidental, and their engagement party ended with their first row because he had hidden in the kitchen. They had a long engagement during which my mother went on a trip to South Africa to 'make sure'. My mother's father, Canon Douglas Pelly,[35] was vicar of Wincanton, in Somerset, where my parents married on 8 August 1934. Though not Quakers themselves, the Pelly family were descended from Elizabeth Fry, two of whose children married members of the Pelly family, a connection of great pride to my mother.[36] After my parents married they settled in London, where my father was embarking on his legal career.

In May 1936 my brother, William Patrick Gowers, was born, the second grandchild for Ernest and Kit Gowers. At this stage my mother had plenty of help in the house, including a nursemaid, though she did fret at receiving rather too much advice on running her home from her mother-in-law who was still an energetic, if rather overwhelming organiser.

In September 1938, Eileen, Ernest Gowers' younger daughter, married Anthony (Tony) Duveen. One of Eileen's bridesmaids was Jock Hyndley's daughter Betty.[37] The Duveens had little time together before Tony joined the Royal Artillery and went off to war.

My grandparents maintained a comfortable domestic life at their London home in Chester Terrace. Their eldest grandson, David Shiffner, recalled it as 'gorgeous'. The house had a large basement kitchen where he used to visit the cook, Mrs Drawneck, and listen to the BBC on a crystal set with earphones. Visitors to Chester Terrace in the early thirties included David's parents Peggy and Harry Shiffner, Hugh Casson, Winifred Paul ('Cinderella'), various members of the Pelly family, the

Greer family, and Faith Murray (who had accompanied Kit and Peggy to Uganda).

In 1932, my grandparents bought their weekend retreat, Rondle Wood, near Liphook in Hampshire, a wooded estate with two Elizabethan cottages on it, one of which they planned to extend so they could use it as a retreat from London. David Shiffner recalled that they had a chauffeur who drove them down to Rondle Wood at weekends, a house which was 'none too luxurious' as it was still in its original cottage form. Early in September 1935 they went on a vacation to the United States, arriving in New York on the Aquitania. Characteristically they combined this pleasure with some business. They travelled to Knoxville to visit the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)[38] and then went on to Chattanooga and Washington, sailing back to England at the end of the month.

They were planning alterations to their Hampshire retreat, and came back with new American ideas about how houses should be arranged. Most striking was the American practice of having a bathroom attached to every bedroom (what would Gowers have thought of the modern noun 'ensuite'?). When they returned, they completed the renovations at a cost of £700, providing ample space and comfort for a number of guests at a time. Their life there was transformed into one of comfort and, indeed, luxury. David Shiffner recalled Rondle Wood 'in all its glory'. As was the case for so many others who enjoyed this sort of luxury in the 1930s, all was to change when war broke out. But before it did, son and sons-in-law were put to work to dig out and construct a kitchen garden and a swimming pool.

I was the last of the grandchildren to arrive before the war, born in October 1938 (my grandfather addressed the Holborn Chamber of Commerce that night on the limitations of laissez-faire). Though I have no memory of Rondle Wood before the war, my mother, brother and I went to live at Rondle Cottage when my father left to serve in the navy. That is where many of my own memories began.

Jock Hyndley had stayed at Rondle Wood before the war. My grandfather was anxious to sell some of the land that he had bought with the cottages. After the war, my grandfather raised this with my father:

> I find that Jock Hyndley is eager to buy as much of our land as we will let him have. Will you think carefully over this so that we may come to a decision next weekend; I told him I could say nothing without consulting you. Can you get here early enough on Friday to walk over the ground? If so bring a gun and we might get a pheasant; there are lots about.

Hyndley did buy land from my grandfather and built a house, tennis court, and squash court in the grounds. As we grew up, the grandchildren were encouraged to use the courts when we visited Rondle Wood and came to know the Hyndleys well.

Hyndley and Gowers were unlikely friends. Their characters were quite different. The Baron liked to dress in yachting clothes, made cocktails in one of the cocktail shakers that were fashionable at the time, and was bluff and good humoured. My grandfather was more austere and intellectual, though certainly not lacking in a humour that was characteristically his. He was certainly not a teetotaller (he used to divide the family into two categories: boozy and non-boozy – rather preferring the boozy side) but cocktail shakers were not his style. He and the Baron obviously had complementary skills that carried them through the long years of pain in the coal industry.

But Hyndley's approach to buy land from Gowers came after the war. Although Gowers continued as Chairman of the Coal Commission throughout the war, his far greater preoccupation was running London's civil defence, a continuation of the 'special duties' which had held his attention since the mid-1930s.

8
WWII: Preparing for London's Civil Defence

Gowers had spent the First World War working in utmost secrecy. His role in the Second World War was, by contrast, highly visible. Shortly before the war he was appointed Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London Region, reporting to a Senior Regional Commissioner. Then in January 1941, he was promoted to Senior Regional Commissioner, a position he held for the rest of the war.

The build-up of civil defence

There was considerable tension during the 1930s about civil defence planning. Warren Fisher later described what he saw as the Government's reluctance to acknowledge the threat of war and the civil servants' almost covert civil defence preparations:

> We all remember the wise saw of the British Empire coming into being 'in a fit of absence of mind' and, so far as Ministers were concerned (and they weren't), this is applicable to the initiation of what later became known as Civil Defence. You'll have inferred that in the 30s my colleagues, the Chiefs of Staff, and I did not share the easy optimism of our Ministers. In this atmosphere, haphazardly if indeed not slyly, the embryo of Civil Defence began faintly to move.[1]

According to his biographer, Fisher felt that his greatest failure in the years leading up to Munich was that he could not persuade the Government to alert the public to the German danger.

Until the spring of 1935, civil defence planning had been undertaken secretly, through the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence. Planning became more public when the Home Office issued to all local

authorities an Air Raid Precautions circular on 9 July 1935. An Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Department was established, under the Home Secretary, the following April.[2]

Gowers became involved in this early civil defence planning. From July 1935, in response to his appeal for constructive work to fill the void when coal negotiations were at a stalemate, he was 'made available for such special duties as the Prime Minister might think fit', and was attached to the Department for the Co-ordination of Defence, to be primarily concerned with the 'general question of food supplies'.[3] In March the Board of Trade's Food Supply in Time of War Sub-Committee provided a report which set out what needed to be done to ensure the food supply. The first sub-committee, chaired by Sir William Beveridge, was asked to make recommendations on a scheme for food rationing. Gowers chaired a second sub-committee, with the brief to consider how to maintain and conserve food supplies.

Some time later, Gowers was appointed Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence's Manpower Sub-Committee. His obituary in *The Times* noted that

> [Gowers] played a large part in bringing the Services and the interested departments together in a single policy that took practical shape in the famous *Schedule of Reserved Occupations*. Some observers described his handling of this sub-committee as an object lesson in the delicate art of reconciling departmental differences.[4]

The Government's reluctance to face the possibility of another war was shaken by the Munich crisis, and planning became more urgent as other people realised that the country was being forced into war despite Chamberlain's belief that it was avoidable.

John Anderson, Gowers' ex-colleague from the Loan Collection, and now an Independent MP in the Scottish Universities' seat, had a critical role in civil defence in the Second World War. Neville Chamberlain made him Lord Privy Seal in November 1938, to 'take in hand, as the darkening shadows overspread Western Europe, the problems of manpower and civil defence'. At the outbreak of war Anderson became Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, with responsibility for civil defence, evacuation arrangements, internment of aliens and other measures required in war. Although he was not a member of the War Cabinet, he attended its meetings regularly. When Churchill formed the Coalition Government on 10 May 1940, he asked Anderson to continue in office.

Gowers had last worked with Anderson during the General Strike. He later placed on record his own assessment of Anderson's contribution during the war:

> We were thrown together again in the months preceding and following the outbreak of the second war when, at his invitation, I had undertaken the post of Regional Commissioner for London for which he had himself been designated at the time of Munich. I thus had an inside view of the work about which the author of the Official History of Civil Defence, departing for once from the rule he evidently set himself to allot neither praise nor blame, has truly said that for the difference between our preparedness in 1939 and 1938 the country owed to Anderson 'a debt which cannot be measured'.[5]

Another of Gowers' former colleagues from the Loan Collection, Arthur Salter, had been elected to the Oxford University seat in a by-election in February 1937. Salter later recalled that by 1938 he had become 'obsessed' with the possible effect of air attacks on the country and the gross inadequacy of the Government's civil defence preparations:

> What was true and was certain was that the official plans at the time for defence against air attack were scandalously inadequate. The plans consisted largely of defence against the least of the dangers – that of a gas attack. … Defence against the much more serious danger of the bombing of the great centres of population was then practically non-existent. Whitehall shrank from planning, on any substantial scale, evacuation … and was scared of mentioning the word 'evacuation' at all.[6]

He formed an Air Raid Precautions League which had frequent meetings, ran an energetic press campaign and published a series of pamphlets setting out their policy, 'completely different from the policy and preparations of the Government of the day'. John Anderson was one of the members of the group.

Wartime roles were being provisionally allocated. Gowers himself, up to a few months before the war broke out, was 'cast for a different role'. Up to then:

> I was earmarked as the official head of a new cocked-hat Ministry of National Service which, as plans then stood, was to be set up, independently of the Ministry of Labour, to be supreme in the allocation

> of manpower – to tell the whole population what each had to do. I cannot be too thankful to have escaped my fate. For the year or two for which the grim prospect lasted it was my duty to preside over a sub-committee of the CID for the making of manpower plans. The broad lines we followed were something like this. It was probable – so we all thought then – that the first action of the enemy against us would be an all-out attempt to knock us out from the air. We ought therefore to be generous in the initial allocation of manpower to Civil Defence.[7]

Establishing the civil defence regions

Warren Fisher and Maurice Hankey (Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence from 1912 to 1938) suggested to the Committee of Imperial Defence that in wartime two 'institutional novelties' should be created for civil defence: a Ministry of Home Security, and an overriding regional organisation.[8] Both suggestions were adopted. In September 1938, during the Munich crisis, John Anderson was secretly appointed Regional Commissioner for London and the Home Countries. He appointed Harold Scott, who had until then spent his civil service career in the Home Office, as his Chief Staff Officer.[9] Because at that stage the regional commissioners' existence was secret, they were not able to make proper contact with local authorities, and 'there was a great deal of confusion in their relationships with the various Ministries, and dark suspicions were created'.[10]

At first there was feverish activity in the London Region with the 'only concrete result … the installation by the Post Office of a battery of telephones with direct lines to the Home Office, the War Office and County Hall'.[11] When Chamberlain returned from Munich with his notorious 'peace with honour' message at the beginning of October, London Region 'came to an end', and Harold Scott returned to his earlier position of Prisons Commissioner.[12]

But not for long. Once it was clear that the Munich agreement was worthless, a new structure was decided upon. Immediately after the war broke out Sir John Anderson was to become both Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security. As Minister of Home Security he was to continue to perform the two functions of coordinating all civil defence activities at the seat of Government, and through regional commissioners, and controlling ARP operations. His small general staff and the rapidly expanding ARP Department was to be fused into the single instrument of a Ministry of Home Security.[13]

In February 1939, before the permanent regional commissioners were appointed, Harold Scott was brought back to become the Chief Administrative Officer of the London Region. In his own words, he turned to his task 'with a freedom that until now civil servants had only dreamed about. …' The appointment was unprecedented 'but so was the situation of the country. It made all the difference to our work, for I was able to take decisions and *get on*'.[14]

Work began again at the Geological Survey Office in the Natural History Museum in Exhibition Road:

> The ground floor of the Survey Office was easily turned into protected accommodation by bricking up the windows, and we began at once on the installation of a control room, with steel gas-proof doors, ventilation and gas filtration plants. … In no time at all, it seemed, the control room was linked by direct telephone lines with the group centres, New Scotland Yard, the headquarters of the fire and ambulance services, and the Home Security War Room in the Home Office basement.[15]

On 18 April 1939 Anderson wrote to the nominees, notifying them that they would be appointed 'in due course' as regional commissioners. The following day, their names were announced in Parliament. Anderson made it clear that they were to have no formal duties (and no pay) unless and until war came. They were, however, expected to get to know their areas, to get in touch with their local authorities and to work out the organisation which a war might make necessary. Gowers' letter of appointment outlined their powers:

> The Senior Regional Representatives of the Departments concerned with Civil Defence will have powers delegated to them by their Ministers, and normally any authority required for measures taken will be given by them on behalf of their Ministers.

However the regional commissioners were to have more autonomous power, which they could use in an emergency:

> If communication with the Government becomes very difficult or impossible, it may be necessary for you to act on behalf of the Government, and emergency measures outside the powers of the Departmental representatives may have to be taken without consultation with Ministers.

> In such circumstances you will, on behalf of the Government, take such steps as in your judgment are necessary for the public safety and you will be entitled to expect all persons to give you facilities or assistance in pursuance of their duty to cooperate in the defence of the realm. Such action, duly recorded, will be supported by the Government, and the Government will ask Parliament to give you whatever indemnification may subsequently be found necessary.[16]

The Times reported favourably on the appointees:

> It is to be hoped that one of the biggest shadows in this shadow organization – namely, the senior regional commissioner for London, who is still anonymous – may prove, when he becomes substantial, to be a further reinforcement of the principle of all-party cooperation. For the rest of the list fulfils Sir John Anderson's ambition to obtain 'men with big names, but with something behind them'....
>
> London, in addition to the anonymous shadow already mentioned, has two Regional Commissioners – namely, Sir Ernest Gowers, who has had the not less delicate job of Chairman of Coal Mines Reorganization Commission, and Admiral Sir Edward Evans. It is a good list, which will easily survive any attempt to show that the appointments were dictated by anything except first-class qualifications.[17]

Warren Fisher, who later joined the London Region, was appointed Regional Commissioner for the North Western Region, having left the Treasury earlier in the year. When he was appointed Permanent Secretary of the Treasury in 1919 it was the first time the position had included the title of Head of the Civil Service, the role in which he advised the Prime Minister about promotions to senior departmental posts. Ministers did not have to follow Fisher's advice, nonetheless he had wielded considerable influence over the careers of higher civil servants. Fisher had been a strong advocate of the generalist administrator, and the mobility between departments that he fostered was identified later by Sir Edward Bridges as one of the defining strengths of the Administrative Class. Fisher left Treasury early in 1939, shortly before becoming a regional commissioner.

The local authorities were highly suspicious about the regional commissioners' potential powers. Their sensitivities demanded matching diplomacy on the part of the new regional commissioners. London Region was unique because its area embraced such a large number of

local authorities. The London County Council was almost a state within the state and, apart from the metropolitan boroughs which existed subordinately but autonomously, the Region included the county boroughs of West Ham and Croydon, which had major powers of their own.[18] London also had a special position in civil defence because it was likely to be the primary target of enemy attacks.

'Civil defence' included providing air raid wardens, firefighting services, first-aid, rescue and decontamination squads and bomb reconnaissance units. But the broader role included: providing shelters; making arrangements for air raid warnings and the blackout; the supply, maintenance and distribution of special equipment; the recruitment and training of staff to carry out new and often unpredictable tasks, as well as manpower planning. Throughout the war, the civil defence organisation had to be ready to adjust to new forms of attack.[19]

On the brink of war

On 23 August 1939, before war had been declared, a coded telegram was sent to the regions directing them to take up battle stations. Scott recalls the ten days before the country was officially at war:

> Looking back on it, those last few days of August seem a nightmare. Lock, stock and barrel our staff and papers were moved to the war headquarters in Exhibition Road. … Arrangements had already been made for sleeping and eating on the premises, and from then onwards a twenty-four hour watch was kept. Our day began at seven and ended after midnight.…
>
> Our first visitors were the two Regional Commissioners, who now took up their duties. Two more dissimilar men than Sir Ernest Gowers and Admiral Evans it would be hard to imagine.
>
> Ernest Gowers, quiet and scholarly, with the wide experience of a higher civil servant, brought to us a fund of quiet wisdom and humour and an uncanny knack of reading the minds of those with whom he had to deal, which often helped to reconcile, with quite unorthodox speed, the conflicting views of the local authorities and the Ministry of Home Security. He slid into his new job so smoothly that after a day or two he seemed to have been with us from the beginning.[20]

Writing of the ambiguity between their roles, Scott wrote that Gowers and he never resolved the riddle of their exact relationship. Was

Gowers, as Regional Commissioner entitled to overrule Scott, or was Scott as Chief Administrative Officer entitled to bypass Gowers?

> Complete frankness on both sides was the only answer, and we had no differences that we could not settle in friendly discussion.[21]

The other Regional Commissioner, Admiral Evans, was, indeed, a complete contrast to Gowers. His *Times* obituary commented that he was never one to hide his light under a bushel; he revelled in publicity. He enjoyed being in the public eye but there was nothing spurious in the light which he delighted in displaying: he held the post of Regional Commissioner honourably and energetically throughout a most harassing period and his personality and bearing stimulated all ranks of the civil defence services. Ziegler describes Evans in similar terms:

> Evans was a naval hero, noisy, extrovert, endlessly good-humoured, who appeared the first morning on horseback and never ceased to delight and outrage his colleagues by his extravagance and informality. He was the front man; it took him almost a year to visit all the 95 boroughs or local authorities within the region, but where he had been he was never forgotten.[22]

The practicalities of moving out of a section of the Natural History Museum to make way for the apparatus and staff of London Region must have been difficult for the museum staff. Correspondence in the museum's archives dwells on practical problems such as undue noise made by the civil defence staff at night, the need to erect a tennis court on the museum roof for their use, and the price being charged for sherry in the canteen.[23]

At the end of the war Gowers thanked the people who had had to tolerate, and make space for, the new regional headquarters:

> Those latter day saints who have so cheerfully borne for six years the trials that we have inflicted on them. Never since the day when Penelope's suitors were given short shrift by her much-enduring husband can anyone have seen with greater relief the melting away of guests who had outstayed their welcome. For six years we have been settled upon them like a cloud of locusts; they have been bandied about from pillar to post to meet our insatiable demands; they have had to do their work huddled away in unregarded corners; all that we leave to them is a proper mess to clear up and a control room which I cannot imagine will ever be the slightest use to them.[24]

The London Region carried out exercises to test their readiness such as mock air raids and ARP rescue competitions. The first air raid test was carried out in Chelsea in June 1939. Scott recalls that the practice exercises became more and more elaborate in 'those curiously unreal months of the Phoney War, and the realistic faking of wounds developed into a fine art, so effective that first aid workers were frequently known to faint at the sight of them'.[25] In August they tested their communications in front of the press, and *The Times* reported that 'the intricate machinery which has been built up in the last four months to meet all … contingencies is now in full working order'.[26]

The Phoney War

Almost immediately after Neville Chamberlain, at 11 a.m. on 3 September 1939, informed Britons that they were at war, the air raid sirens in London announced that a raid was imminent. A stray French aircraft had blundered into Britain's air space and triggered a false alarm.[27] The King (dressed in khaki) and the Queen, in their first appearance since war was declared, visited the Natural History Museum two days later. They were met by Anderson, Gowers and Evans and given a 'long and complete tour'.[28]

It was a time of difficult decisions for everyone. Two weeks after taking up his position, Gowers responded to a plea from my father who had given up the prospect of a naval career on health grounds, and had been working since 1937 as a solicitor in an Oxford firm (whose clients included Morris Motors). My father sought advice on whether to try to join the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.[29] It is worth quoting his father's response in full, because of the insight it gives to the atmosphere of the time. Writing from the museum on 6 September, he replied:

> You ask me a damned difficult question – damned difficult because I should like so much to answer it differently from the way in which I feel I ought to. I don't think there is any hurry. I fancy all the services, Civil and Military, have got all the officers they can deal with at the moment. But I don't see how one can escape the conclusion that you, who have been trained as a sailor, ought to play your part in that capacity, provided always that you are passed as fit, which I should have thought was by no means certain. If you are not, then I see no reason why you should not go on with your ordinary work. There are so many barristers trying to get legal work in administrative departments … that there is no case for pursuing that line.

Having responded to his son's question, he goes on to describe his feelings about the war:

> If you come to town do come and see me. Ring me up first, or you will be stopped by the sentry. It is a dog's life, though in a way rather an exhilarating one. I have been fairly successful in giving up thinking of the tragedy of the thing, which was so oppressive while it was uncertain whether it was going to happen. It doesn't bear thinking about: the only thing is to look forward to the end and hope that there will still be something left living for in the world. Even before the war was certain I could not help feeling that, if not for people of my age, at any rate for people of your age and your children, it would be best if war came, because I did not see any way out that would not leave the Nazis entrenched.…
>
> I feel as if I had lived here an age, instead of only a fortnight. They are a marvellous crowd here, both men and girls: I never saw anything like the spirit of them.

Four days later, after speaking to his colleague Evans, Gowers wrote again to his son with the advice that the first step was to have the medical, to see whether he was fit. My father passed the medical and was posted to the Royal Naval Training Establishment, Isle of Man: 'A very interesting job, I should think' commented his father, 'but perhaps not quite active-service enough for you'. Further approaches from Evans were successful in getting my father to sea:

> Evans has been characteristically vigorous on your behalf. He has persuaded Admiral Gordon Campbell to earmark for you a place as No 3 in one of his light craft. It went rather against the grain to be active in getting you into a position of greater danger, but there it is; such is war. Best of luck to you. I hope Stella will forgive me.

My grandmother also wrote to my father: 'I think the only way in which one can face a war is by not looking a day ahead and putting one's imagination in God's hands. I know this can be done, from my own experience'. She refers to the way in which the First World War made my father highly sensitive. Perhaps the loss of his uncle Kenneth affected him deeply, or the graphic descriptions towards the end of the war when the full horrors became known. He was only six years old when Kenneth Greer died, and eight years old in 1918 when the First World War ended.

In London it was a case of anticipation rather than action until the spring of 1940, a period which came to be referred to as the 'phoney' or 'twilight' war:

> It was business as near usual as possible in London in the spring of 1940. The Government viewed the people's mood with some dismay. To preserve *sang-froid* was all very well, but not if it implied a blinkered reluctance to confront the dangers ahead. How would the Londoner cope if the phoney war became reality?[30]

Euan Wallace MP, at this time Minister for Transport but shortly to become London Region's first Senior Regional Commissioner, was surprised by the attitude of some of his aristocratic friends:

> Spending the day shooting at Blenheim one could not fail to be impressed with the attitude of people to whom the war has meant no difference whatever. All the other guns were personal friends of mine and one of them is very fully occupied as a Regional Commissioner [this is not a reference to Gowers, but to a member of the 'landed' gentry]. The others, although as friendly and as charming as usual, were inclined to resent slower trains and other transport difficulties and to cavil at the fact that the added money for some of the more important races next season was likely to be diminished! They all had their own valets and appear to have no difficulty in motoring from place to place to shoot five days week.[31]

In October 1939 Gowers submitted a report to Sir Thomas Gardiner at the Home Office with some suggestions on street lighting: how to devise a form of illumination which would be adequate for road users without giving a glow in the sky which would guide enemy airmen, and to install this system in a way that could be switched off within a few seconds at certain central points. The conclusion to his memo reflects the increasing sense of urgency in civil defence planning:

> Might it not be wise to concentrate the attack on this subject by appointing someone of standing, experience and common sense (not an expert) with expert assistants, charged with the duty of giving their whole time to these two problems and reporting in a very short time? We all know what a danger there is, in matters such as this, of time being frittered away by experts disproving one another's theories.[32]

Gowers was also out and about supervising and reporting on civil defence preparations. He visited a first-aid post in November 1939 and submitted a memorable report:

> I visited a first-aid post in Willesden yesterday, and found there certain features that are, in my experience, unique.
>
> It is for walking cases only, in a hall below a Roman Catholic Church. In itself it is ordinary enough; its oddness lies in the way the contaminated cases have to get into it. These, instead of entering like the non-contaminated cases by the main doors at the bottom of the hall, are directed by a notice saying 'Anti-Gas' to the sandbagged entrance of a narrow corridor that runs outside the hall for its full length, so that they eventually enter the hall on the stage at its far end. This corridor is without any gas curtains or doors, and has several windows opening into it from the hall. Its continuity is unbroken, but it is notionally divided into four parts. In the first part the patients of both sexes take off all their clothes (the sister in charge emphasised the 'all'), put them into bins or paper bags, and wait, with, I suppose, such modesty as they can assume, their turn for the second stage. Here there is a bucket of bleach with which the patient's body is plastered with the aid of a large stippling brush. (The very old, however, are to be spared this particular indignity.) The bleach is at once washed off again by a shower in the next stage. In the final section the corridor doubles in width, thus making possible some concession to the conventions, and a wooden partition has been run longitudinally down the middle of it. The sexes divide, passing on either side of the partition, but only, it seems, to rejoin one another in the same simplicity at the far end. Here they turn left on to the stage of the hall, and find a no doubt welcome collection of clothes hanging higgledy-piggledy from a rack of pegs. These are the most astonishing miscellany of sartorial junk I have ever seen outside Clarkson's. If I had been a patient, and had taken, as I should probably have felt moved to do, the clothes that came first to hand, I should have presented myself for treatment in a new bowler hat of excellent design though rather flimsy build and a striped blue and white (female) woollen bathing costume, slightly soiled.
>
> The sister was uneasy about these arrangements, but said that those were her instructions; she had to do her best; the doctor had said that the patients would be too agitated to heed the unusual intimacy of their surroundings.
>
> But I am less concerned with the curiosities of this institution than with the discovery to which the discussion of them led, that the

> Town Clerk (though he was too loyal to be outspoken) is evidently dissatisfied with the ARP work of the MoH, who resents any interference. I think that an inspection by the Ministry of Health of the first-aid arrangements in Willesden would be repaying.[33]

Parents had to decide where their children would be safest. At the beginning of 1940 my mother was preparing to evacuate my brother and me to America. Many of her friends in Oxford were doing the same. But her brother, a career naval officer serving in the Atlantic, wrote to my father, urging him to dissuade her:

> I hear from Stella that she intends taking the children abroad, and I should never feel happy if I didn't give you a bit of information on the subject. I do not for a moment criticise your decision to get them out of the country, because the wisdom of such a move is entirely a matter of opinion, and you are just as likely to be correct in your prediction of future events as I am.
>
> But you may not know the true state of affairs in the Western Approaches as nothing has come out in the papers about the renewed submarine activity which is far more intense and successful just now than it has ever been. I've just been down there chasing the swine and they are attacking everything whether escorted or not.
>
> The 'higher command' tells me that it's all part of Hitler's plan to draw our destroyers away from the East Coast and give him a better chance of invasion. Whatever the plan, our losses are alarmingly big and during the week I was there, some 15 ships were sunk.
>
> Given another few months the 'Hunt' class ought to be down there in force and mop them up, but until then I am sure that the danger of an invasion which is not yet here should take second place to the danger of being torpedoed which is so much there that our propaganda experts are keeping it under their hats.

This had the effect it intended. We moved from our home in Canterbury Road, Oxford, only as far as the Rondle Wood cottage. People feared that the presence of Morris Motors would make Oxford a target.

Air raids begin

In May 1940 Euan Wallace took up his post as Senior Regional Commissioner and moved into the Natural History Museum. Despite failing health and a punishing schedule, he kept a diary throughout his five-month

tenure as Senior Regional Commissioner. The diary provides invaluable insights into the decision-making and day-to-day pressures of the months in which he held the position, working closely with Gowers and the rest of the regional team until the early days of the Blitz in September 1940.

Wallace noted in his diary that the post of Senior Regional Commissioner was originally offered to Herbert Morrison who, after consulting the Labour Party, felt unable to accept it, but that it was always contemplated that the senior commissioner should be of ministerial rank.[34]

It was planned that Gowers could move on now that Wallace was in place as Senior Regional Commissioner. Gowers name was being mooted to take over the reins at the Ministry of Home Security, replacing Sir Thomas Gardiner who was expected to return to the Post Office, his home department. At the first meeting between Wallace, Gardiner, Gowers and Evans, discussion centred on who should be appointed to replace Gowers, or whether Wallace and Evans could manage alone. Gardiner said that he and Anderson favoured a triumvirate representing the Ministerial, Fighting, and Civil Service aspects of the job, and added that he thought that if Evans and Wallace (who had served in the army) were left on their own 'the outdoor, fighting and personal touch would be superbly represented but that they might be slightly weak on the office side!'[35]

Wallace wrote to Anderson pointing out the disadvantages of moving Gowers just when active operations seemed to be much more likely. He reported that Gowers himself was most anxious to remain a Regional Commissioner but was precluded from saying so officially (perhaps Gowers felt, as Anderson had, regret at having been prevented from fighting in the First World War).[36] His plea was successful. It was agreed that Gowers should not leave London Region in the immediate future.

During May, Gowers escorted Wallace on visits to London boroughs and various civil defence services such as the Air Raid Precautions personnel. Competitions were held to test their readiness:

> The Rescue Party gave an excellent demonstration of the moving of two 'casualties' from underneath heavy girders and hoisting them in stretchers over a 20ft wall by means of a swinging derrick which they put up in remarkably quick time. This particular squad had won the City competition and will represent them in the Group Contest on Sunday. We have the finals for the Region in about three weeks' time.[37]

Between 26 May and 4 June the evacuation of Dunkirk took place. By midnight on Tuesday, 4 June, 211,000 fit members of the British Expeditionary Force had been evacuated from northern France, as well as 13,000 wounded. Over 80,000 Allied troops had also been evacuated. This raised new problems for London Region because a military zone was created extending 20 miles from the south-east coast. As a result the Region was deprived of billets they had planned for about 60,000 London children. Already there were 117,000 children registered for evacuation should there be an air attack on London. In May 1940 Gowers found time to guide St Felix School through their evacuation from East Anglia, first to Cornwall and then to Somerset (he had been Chairman of the Board of Governors since 1934).

On the night of Thursday, 7 June, 'red' air raid warnings were given in four Regions, but not London. Wallace noted that it was remarkable that the London area should have escaped. Bombs were dropped in a number of places with little damage, but 'it may only be for the purpose of getting our fighters into the air', he commented.

Gowers, Scott and Wallace attended a meeting with Gardiner at the Home Office to see whether a new Defence Regulation which gave the Minister of Home Security (or the regional commissioners if he wished to delegate) wide compulsory powers over the activities of local authorities could not be made the means of getting a move on with the provision of shelters in the London Region. There was still shortage of accommodation for about a million people. They concluded that the regulation could and should be used for this purpose.

One of Anderson's first actions in 1938 had been to commission the design of small shelters that could be erected, half buried in the ground and covered in earth, in people's gardens. By the time war broke out over two million families had an Anderson Shelter in their garden. By 12 June 1940, Anderson could report to the House of Commons, in a general review of civil defence achievements, that London had already reached the original target for shelter, but that there were now more far-reaching plans. The only debate was over the comparative merits of Anderson shelters and deep shelters (this was an issue that would polarize the planners). Twelve days later Gowers, Scott and Wallace attended the opening of the first entrance to a deep tunnel shelter under Borough High Street in Southwark, which would eventually hold over 2,000 people.[38]

Later they went to a meeting of social service workers which was addressed by Sir William Deedes, a man who later became a firm friend of Gowers. He was the new Regional Information Officer for London

Region. Wallace reports that a number of questions were asked and most ably and wittily answered by Deedes. 'If anybody can be a successful Regional Information Officer in London, he is undoubtedly the man.'[39] Deedes was also Chief ARP Warden for Bethnal Green.

Meanwhile the bombing was getting closer to London. The first bombs on the London Region fell on 8 June on open country at Addington, but there was still a month to go before the Blitz. Anxious anticipation under the threat of invasion was making people edgy. Between 11 May and 5 July there were 57 false reports of the landing of parachutists. In late June evacuation, both from the coast and from London, was still a matter of concern. One issue which was to prove particularly difficult was how to protect the evacuees' possessions. Many people were reluctant to leave their homes because they were uncertain of the fate of their houses and their furniture. Regional commissioners had the power, in the event of compulsory evacuation, to appoint a custodian of property left behind. They also had discretionary power to grant exemptions from a general order that all schools in evacuation areas should be closed in the event of heavy and continuous bombing, which Wallace and Gowers agreed to use generously because they felt that children were 'far better at school, even during a period of severe air raids, than at home or running about the streets'.[40]

But the threat of invasion was still the country's greatest fear. Rumours circulated that the invasion would take place on 7 July, although intelligence reports were suggesting that the Germans would be unlikely to have assembled their full strength before the middle of the month.

Preparations went on as usual. An extraordinary order came from the Department of Home Security early in July requiring all air raid wardens to hand in their uniforms because there was no material for replacements. The regional team agreed that taking away uniforms would do much harm and no real good. 'Energetic protests … secured the cancellation of this absurd proposal.'[41] Again, under the threat of invasion, Defence Regulations were issued giving additional powers to regional commissioners to order the detention of suspected persons, forbidding the possession of maps by aliens, the use of fireworks by anybody at all, and also for the regulation of traffic.

Without consulting the Region, the Office of Works was told to drain St James's Park so that a line of anti-tank obstacles could be put in place. This action placed the London Region's firefighting precautions in jeopardy. The plan for the obstacles was abandoned and the lake had to be refilled immediately. By mid-July, a cement shortage was threatening to bring the shelter program in London to a standstill and Anderson had

to try to reorder the priority list for receiving cement which at the time was: fighting services; aerodromes; armament factories; and ARP.

The proposal to move Gowers to Home Security still had not been resolved. At lunch with Anderson at Brooks' Club, Wallace suggested leaving Gowers where he was and replacing Gardiner with Scott. This, he said, would suit both Gowers and Scott. The suggestion failed because Scott was not sufficiently senior to become a permanent head, but Wallace said he felt that if Gowers had to go, he could cope with Evans alone. It was fortunate that this proposal was not accepted, as Wallace's health was already beginning to fail.

The Battle of Britain

The Battle of Britain began on 10 July 1940 when bombers attacked merchant convoys in the Channel.[42] In August they attacked British fighter airfields. In June bombs had fallen in a field at Colney, and Greater London heard its first alert of 1940. On 15 August German bombers struck at Croydon airport. On 24 August the first bombs fell on central London, starting fires in the East End:

> The authorities knew that these [air raids] were only a foretaste of what the Germans were likely to direct at London. They were still far from confident about the ability of Londoners to stand firm in the face of sustained attack and every report was anxiously scrutinized for evidence of panic or loss of heart. There were some early grounds for worry. 'The excess of air raid warnings and gun-fire and bombs has seriously affected East End morale', read a report on 26 August.[43]

While these early air raids were going on, defence of the Natural History Museum was being strengthened. Scott later recalled that:

> [t]he tempo of German attacks increased during July, while a new control room – at my suggestion – took shape in the gardens of the Natural History Museum, with an underground passage leading to the Geological Museum. Six months of exercises had given us a very clear idea of what was needed in planning this fortified rectangular pillbox, in which our work could go on under any circumstances. …
>
> By mid-August … the stronghold in the garden was ready – but not a bit too soon. On the 24th the first bombs were dropped in daylight over Central London; that night there was what appeared

> to be a general attack; and on the 28th London had its first all-night alert.[44]

Harold Scott also described the inside of the control room at the Natural History Museum:

> On one side of the room was a big map on which every incident – to use our nice little euphemism – was plotted: at a glance you could see what roads were blocked, where the damage was concentrated, and other vital information. On the other side was the tally-board, which showed the number of men and machines available in stretcher, rescue and ambulance parties, and every control room in each borough had a similar check.…
>
> Every night we made out a situation report, summarising the damage, the casualties, and the whole position, and this was submitted to the Home Security War Room in the morning.
>
> Next door there was a liaison room, for representatives of the army, police, fire service, and the electricity, gas and water authorities, who could report at once anything of interest to their respective headquarters. Then, apart from the telephonists' room, there were two small bedrooms – one for Gowers and Evans, and the other for Hughes-Gibb and me.
>
> As time went on, the control room became something of a museum: there was a green silk parachute, used for magnetic mines, and the end of a parachute mine painted to look like a shark; while one wall was covered by a large cartoon of the civil defence services by a Kensington artist.[45]

This was the control room in which Meredith Frampton portrayed Gowers, Parker and Child in his portrait, commissioned by the War Artists Advisory Committee in 1941. Lt Col Child was Director of Operations and Intelligence and K. A. L. Parker was a civil servant who had moved from the Home Office. Gowers thought it would look rather absurd if he appeared to operate the control room on his own, and suggested that Parker and Child should be included. All sketches and the final work had to be submitted to the censor before anyone but the artist could see them. The painting is striking for its level of detail, nonetheless, and one of the only visual records of the control room. By the time the painting was executed, the Natural History Museum had been badly bombed, but working space was found for Frampton in its photographic studio.

Evans also gave a brief insight into's London Region control room:

> Telephonists, messengers, teleprinter girls, tally-board and plotting clerks, and the representatives of the heads of services all in charge of a selected deputy, whose job was to supervise the reports from the Wardens; dissect them and despatch the requisite aid – perhaps a rescue party and an ambulance, perhaps a great combination of rescue parties and ambulances.[46]

The Battle of London (the Blitz)

The raids were becoming more frequent. Between 1 and 5 September the Germans made 11 major attacks. The bombing changed from sporadic air raids to the full-scale Blitz in September. The London Blitzkrieg, or 'Battle of London' started on 5 September 1940 with the first big aerial bombardment, and continued both there and in the provinces, with the final, heaviest assault on London on 10 May 1941. A mass air attack on London took place on Saturday, 7 September 1940 between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., bombing Woolwich Arsenal, Beckton gas works, Dockland, West Ham power station, the City, Westminster and Kensington. The civil defence preparations were therefore immediately and sharply put to the test.

At 9.15 a.m. on Sunday, 8 September, Gowers rang Wallace to say that they had had a 'pretty bad night'. Stepney had suffered worst but East Ham, West Ham, Poplar, Bermondsey and Southwark had also 'caught it'. At 1.15 p.m. he rang to say that during the evening and night there were estimated to have been about 400 killed and 1,400 injured and fires were still blazing.

The Regional Commissioners were taking rostered breaks. Wallace decided to go up to London to relieve Gowers:

> At 8 p.m. the sirens sounded again and the red warning was in force from then until 5.37 a.m. I spent my entire time between my room in our war building, the control room and the roof of the Geological Museum, except for going out for 20 minutes to a local restaurant to get some food.
>
> Scott had been summoned to accompany the Prime Minister at 5 p.m. on a tour, under police auspices, to the Isle of Dogs and only got back at 8.45 p.m. Gowers came in for a few minutes at 9 p.m; he was clearly quite exhausted after being up all last night and quite a heavy day, and went home to bed.[47]

The bombing was not as bad on the Tuesday. The most serious damage was in the city and East End, and there were three serious fires at Old Change, Minories and Golden Lane. The worst injuries were in a school at Canning Town which was being used as a shelter by 600 people.

In the control room, the regional team were inundated with telephone calls and in the morning they found it difficult to do anything but answer calls. Unexploded bombs and provision for the homeless were emerging as the two major problems. People were favouring the deep shelters, trekking from the East End to the existing shelters, not because they were homeless but because they were determined to get into deep shelters rather than use their domestic Anderson shelter or even local public shelters.

Red warnings continued during the day on Tuesday, 10 September, causing disruption but there was little enemy action. The nightly raid warning went just before 8 p.m. There was general bombing throughout London Region, all groups being affected to some degree.

To lift morale the following day, the King and Queen visited the west and south-west districts:

> Hardinge rang up to say that the King and Queen were going to do a tour tomorrow and I was very glad of the opportunity of suggesting that Gowers should go with them. The route has been arranged, as had become customary, by the police; and when I rang up Game I discovered that the places he had selected for the King and Queen were in several cases identical with those to which Evans proposed to take the Duke of Kent. This necessitated a certain amount of work in altering the Duke of Kent's tour and I extracted a promise from Game that he would not in future settle the routes of these visits without consulting with us.[48]

But Gowers was not normally involved in the business of escorting royalty. A week later he received a message from Hackney Town Council demanding the immediate evacuation not only of women and children but also of men who were homeless and workless. He met their Emergency Committee to explain the difficulty of carrying out such a plan. He then went on to Poplar where the housing crisis was more serious, but 'being viewed in a much more robust spirit'. Wallace described Gowers' night:

> He had dinner with Bell and went visiting some shelters afterwards; a bomb burst fairly close to them and Beaumont (our local Regional Officer) was actually knocked out for a short time. Bell flatly refused to allow Gowers to drive himself back again alone so came back with him and slept at RHQ.

> We had a fairly quiet night for the first part, but activity increased when the weather cleared and the moon rose.[49]

After he died in 1966, one of Gowers' obituaries described the impression he gave on his visits:

> He was the most civil of servants, and would lean from that immense height, his blue eyes blazing with interest, to listen courteously to the merest of dogsbodies: even during the most frantic days – or nights – of the London Blitz, he could still find time and control to be polite, though his position as Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence for the London region must have left him with little margin of strength for anything but the almost insuperable job in hand. There were occasions when he could give the impression of vagueness as he came to inspect some project or sympathise with the victims in a shattered street or ruined shelter; but if one later assessed the action taken as the result of his visit, it was clear that nothing had escaped that apparently innocent eye.[50]

O'Donoghue describes the impact of the early bombing raids on the East End, and the looming shelter problem:

> The first few nights of bombing made a shattering impact, especially on the East End. People wandered individually and in family groups in the streets looking for shelter. Many had lost their life's possessions. Some carried their salvaged belongings in sad bundles or stacked on old perambulators or handcarts. There was little public transport and often the gas and electricity had been cut off. … The shelter situation … blew up into a major crisis for Churchill and the Government during September.[51]

The appointment of Special Commissioners

On 26 September 1940 Wallace attended the Civil Defence Executive Sub-Committee which was told that there had been 24,000 homeless people in Rest and Feeding Centres in the London Region the previous morning. Two nights earlier there had been 165,000 people in the tube stations, raising problems of sanitation and control.

That night the attacks on London were less intense; the bombing was most severe in North London and in Middlesex. Numerous parachute mines were dropped. An unexploded land mine in Finsbury Park caused the evacuation of 5,000 people from Islington. The Home Office and

India Office were damaged by a bomb; the west front of the House of Lords was also hit and a fine window over the memorial in Westminster Hall destroyed.

There was an immediate problem for London Region, not only of what to do about the bombed buildings but also their contents. Gowers later recalled the problem this posed:

> Then came what was for me easily the biggest headache of the war. In the autumn of 1940 London was sprinkled with the hideous and depressing sight of buildings lying in ruins. Large numbers of streets were impassable. It was impossible to get through the City. Twenty-five percent of Londoners were without gas. Water was being taken in carts over wide areas. I suggested to the Home Secretary that we should get Sir Warren Fisher to do this one, and everyone knows what a brilliant job he made of it.[52]

Fisher had been Regional Commissioner in the North Western Region. On Gowers' recommendation he was brought down to London to manage the bomb damage. So the man Gowers had worked for in his early days in the Insurance Commission, was brought in to organise the clearance and salvage of debris and to coordinate London's numerous authorities in restoring public utilities, communications, houses and other buildings. There were mixed feelings about Fisher's role. O'Halpin comments that 'there is no doubt that in official civil defence circles he was regarded, rightly or wrongly, as being as much hindrance as a help'.[53]

The other continuing problem was homelessness. Gowers, again, had a name to suggest, an old friend, Harry Willink MP. Willink had unsuccessfully contested Ipswich for the Conservatives in 1938, but won a by-election at Croydon North in June 1940.

The idea was that with the two extra commissioners, and Evans concentrating on the shelter problem, Gowers and Wallace would be left free from any particular routine duties. Wallace put the proposal for Special Commissioners to the Civil Defence Sub-Committee. He noted that Willink was received more favourably than Fisher 'but on Gowers' recommendation I said that I was glad to agree'.[54] The new Special Commissioners were to be attached to London Region and would be working under the Senior Regional Commissioner on the ground.

Wallace's colleagues must have been more aware of his increasing frailty than Wallace himself was prepared to admit. When he suggested that he had now been provided with so many people to do his work

that he should have little to occupy him, people kindly joked that he would be more and more disillusioned on that score as time went on.

The regional team continued to head off impractical orders from above. When the Prime Minister visualised a system by which all the inhabitants of London would have their own numbered bunk in some shelter as a personal belonging, Wallace's first reaction was that it was quite fantastic and that he hoped nothing would be put into the press until it had been carefully examined. Both Gowers and Scott were 'quite horrified' when Wallace told them of the PM's idea when he returned to headquarters. They proposed a system of season tickets for shelters, instead of personally owned bunks.

Herbert Morrison succeeds John Anderson

Early in October 1940, Churchill promoted Herbert Morrison to the dual roles of Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security. When Chamberlain resigned from the War Cabinet on grounds of ill health, Anderson took his place. Churchill appointed Anderson Lord President of the Council, making him virtually in charge of the 'home front'. It has been suggested that Anderson was shifted because his 'austere and impersonal' manner was unsuited to raising the morale of the inhabitants of the devastated East End, and that his replacement, Morrison, was seen as 'the only man that Londoners trust … if London runs, the war will be lost'.[55] Anderson became Chancellor of the Exchequer in September 1943.

Anderson had been enmeshed in a debilitating parliamentary and press debate about the virtue of developing deep shelters, which he opposed. The need to provide adequate shelter remained one of the foremost problems for the London Region. The Anderson shelters proved to be dark and damp, and they did not keep out the sound of the bombing. People were reluctant to use them at night. In addition, only houses with gardens could install an Anderson shelter. While Anderson's transfer in 1940 was not in any way a demotion, he is said to have been deeply disappointed by it.[56] The news of his move was met with some dismay by those working in civil defence, though it was seen as 'inspired' to move him into Neville Chamberlain's place in the War Cabinet.[57]

The Prime Minister sent for Evans and Willink and told them to get on with their jobs regardless of departmental ministers or any consideration of expense, saying that the London people were 'now holding the front line and everything was to be done for their comfort'.

He told the Admiral (Evans) that he was to be in uniform on all occasions and 'appears to be rather sorry that Willink could not be in the same position'.[58]

The effects of the heavy bombing not only included homelessness and the need for secure shelter. The large number of unexploded bombs raised issues of training and procedure. Willink found during a visit to Shoreditch that the residents were more concerned at being turned out of their houses because of these, than about the actual bombs themselves. In Bethnal Green they complained that six unexploded bombs had been there for 25 days without even being inspected.

The bombing continued. On 4 October, 40 local authority areas were involved, and there were 191 fires. However, there were no particularly significant incidents. On 8 October a large number of incendiary bombs were dropped causing serious fires in the East End and Chiswick.

The regional team was desperately tired, and increasingly frustrated by their dealings with the Ministry of Home Security. 'The … Ministry of Home Security, unlike the London Region, is being run on too much of a peace-time basis. If you do not get a letter in time to be opened by lunch time on Saturday the chances are that nothing is done about it until Monday morning.'[59]

Whether to require evacuation from the bombed areas or leave it as a matter of personal choice continued to be a tricky issue for the Government. 'The Admiral' claimed he had been promised 2,500 Nissen huts to provide shelter for the homeless. As a result, local authorities were told by Willink that the huts would be provided. But Evans' claim was then refuted by the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Supply who told Gowers that the 4,000 Nissen huts being produced only represented 63 per cent of what the army wanted. Evans was dispatched to a meeting at the Home Office Shelter Committee with the instruction that 'he will have to fight hard if we are all not going to be made to look rather foolish over these huts'.[60]

Euan Wallace retires

Euan Wallace was by now becoming seriously ill. The last day that he spent as Senior Regional Commissioner was Friday, 18 October. He chaired the London Regional team meeting at 9.30 a.m. and then went on to the Civil Defence Coordination Committee, chaired by Morrison, taking Willink with him. The previous night there had been heavy bombing in Whitehall, which suffered 'pretty severely'. There had been

bombs in Trafalgar Square and on the Treasury, and an unexploded bomb was found just by Birdcage Walk.

Discussions at the meeting ranged round a number of pressing issues. For example, around 40 per cent of the people seeking billets (on some nights as many as 22,000) were temporarily homeless because of unexploded bombs. By this time 300,000 out of 500,000 children in the London City Council area had been evacuated; for Greater London the figures were approximately 490,000 out of 800,000 children. Furniture salvage and storage was becoming a major problem.

By this stage the regional team was becoming worried that the task of clearing the debris was getting on top of them. Fisher had a meeting with the Prime Minister in which he threatened to resign unless he was given enough men to help him carry out the job he had been asked to do. In due course this caused bureaucratic problems because he appeared to have direct access to budget and appointment processes outside the control either of the Department of Home Security or the regional administration. There was an exchange of memorandums between a number of civil servants bemoaning the lack of proper bureaucratic procedure.[61]

After his final Civil Defence Coordination meeting, Wallace gave Morrison a letter telling him that he felt obliged to take at least ten days' sick leave:

> He was very sympathetic about it but took the opportunity of mentioning that he had had in mind the appointment of 'another Commissioner' for the special duty of dealing with welfare in the London Region, who was to be a 'Labour man'. I asked whether it was proposed that he should be under the same kind of arrangement as Warren Fisher and Willink or whether it was intended to appoint a fourth Regional Commissioner. Morrison somewhat hesitatingly confessed that the latter proposal was in his mind. He then went on to suggest one or two prominent Trade Union officials and the possibility of Alderman Key. I said that I should like to think over the possibility of adding a fourth Regional Commissioner but would certainly mention it to Gowers before I went away. Morrison's answer was that he would be glad to discuss the matter with Gowers but felt that he might well have to make the appointment before my return.[62]

Euan Wallace underwent a serious operation before Christmas that year, and resigned his post early in January because of continuing ill health.

He died early in February 1941. Wallace left four sons, three of whom were killed later in the war.

An obituary said that the gift which most distinguished him and for which he would be longest remembered was a radiant disposition, but that being in charge of London's civil defence at the start of the Blitz had taken its toll on his health and outlook:

> At the beginning of the intensive night attacks on London he never left his post of duty, visiting from hour to hour the various scenes of disaster, supervising the work of protection and the care of the wounded. Some of his friends thought that the strain of those dreadful nights and the spectacle of suffering and destruction that he continually witnessed were beginning to tell upon his spirits. The cheerful smile, to which they were accustomed, less often lit up his face. But in fact the illness that was to prove fatal had already laid its hand upon him. For many weeks he went on working when he was a very sick, and as it proved, a dying man.[63]

The only hint from Wallace's diary that he was ill was the record of a visit to a specialist. At no point was there any hint of self-pity. His departure meant that Gowers had to take over control of London Region.

9
WWII: Leading London through the Blitz

Gowers succeeds Wallace as Senior Regional Commissioner

In October 1940, when Wallace went on sick leave and Gowers took over as Senior Regional Commissioner, the threat of invasion was, for the moment, receding. On 12 October 1940, Hitler had cancelled Operation Sealion, because the Luftwaffe had failed to establish conditions under which the Germans dared hazard a Channel crossing. The attempt had cost the Luftwaffe 1,733 aircraft. It was one of the decisive air battles of the war.[1]

It was not until 4 January 1941 that Gowers was formally appointed to the position of Senior Regional Commissioner. Alderman Charles Key MP, who had been heavily involved in organising civil defence in his own borough of Poplar, took his place as the second Regional Commissioner. Key was put in charge of the shelters.

Gowers' obituary in *The Times* describes how he approached his work as Senior Regional Commissioner:

> In this post he showed his full powers as an administrator, and indeed as a leader. Energetic, forceful, always cheerful, with an unfailing eye for the essential, he gave the impression of being master of every unexpected development and, as a result, infused confidence into all who came in contact with him. In the early years of the war his whole day was taken up with meetings with Ministers, local government officials and members of his own staff, at which he was called on to make difficult decisions at short notice on matters that had proved incapable of solution at lower levels. He did his 'paper work' after supper, and his typist would arrive in the morning to find a pile of letters and minutes that he had written when other people were in their

> beds. Yet somehow he found time to re-read Gibbon and Professor Toynbee's *A Study of History* to 'keep his perspectives right'.
>
> The post of Regional Commissioner had many of the exacting duties of a commander-in-chief, responsible to the Minister of Home Security and the Cabinet for the broad policy and strategy of the 'Battle of London' and charged with the control of the operational machine of civil defence.[2]

Homelessness remained a serious problem. In 1943, in his assessment of the pre-war civil defence planning, Gowers suggested that the planners had underestimated the number of people who would have their homes destroyed without being injured themselves:

> Perhaps this was to some extent a failure to foresee the marvellous efficiency of the Anderson Shelter. Many of the homeless of course went to friends, and the number who had to be publicly provided for was never exceedingly great. But it was more than the machine could deal with and here again we had an anxious time and were the targets of some just criticism, until we called to our aid the gentleman [Willink] who has now become Minister of Health, and his reforming hands created everywhere in the Region facilities for looking after the homeless which are now among the brightest features of our Civil Defence arrangements.

The bombing Blitz on London continued through the early months of 1941. On 6 February, a month after he was formally appointed Senior Regional Commissioner, Gowers gave a secret briefing on the Blitz to Members of Parliament whose constituencies fell in the London Region. It was a comprehensive overview of what London had suffered:

> It is now almost exactly five months since the attack began. There had already been some precision daylight attacks on aerodromes and factories in the Region, and a little desultory and trifling bombing of the suburbs by night, but September 5th is when the real attempt to dislocate the life of London by promiscuous and sustained night bombing began. From that day to the 3rd November, a period of sixty days, there was a raid every night. During the remaining twenty-seven nights of November there were only three that were free from them. In December, however, the enemy only attacked on seventeen nights and in January only thirteen. Daylight attacks during the same period were negligible by comparison, though there were a few nasty episodes, including hits on Buckingham Palace, the

War Office, Charing Cross Underground Station, and Tower Bridge and the plastering of an area of residential property in Ealing by a badly aimed formation attack on Northolt aerodrome.

It is impossible to trace the steady pursuit of any tactical plan in the night attacks. The early ones disclosed the aim of starting fires by daylight and bombing them through the night. The results on the night of September 7th were disastrously effective. Then came a period when the main form of attack was the haphazard dropping of heavy high explosive, including large numbers of parachute mines, interspersed promiscuously with incendiaries. This had its greatest success on the night of October 15th. Then there was a rather futile interlude during which small high explosive was dropped in large quantities, sometimes as many as fifty bombs together. This was no doubt very terrifying to the people who happened to be there, but did less damage to persons and property than smaller quantities of larger bombs. Latterly there has been a reversion to the original tactic of starting fires first and then bombing them, with these differences; that parachute flares instead of daylight are now used to open the proceedings, that the incendiary bombs are vastly more numerous, and that the subsequent bombing with high explosive has not up to now been pressed home to anything like the extent that it was at the beginning.

In the first half of the period aeroplanes often came over from dusk to dawn; in the second half the raids have rarely lasted much after midnight and many have finished well before. In the most destructive attack of the last phase the last bomb fell at nine o'clock. This was the night of December 29th, when what the London Fire Brigade have always called the 'danger area' of the City was almost wholly destroyed.

There are two obvious explanations of the diminution in the weight of the attack on London. One is that the enemy often chose other places for his main attack in the second half of the period. The other is that an exceptionally favourable type of prevalent weather was succeeded by an exceptionally unfavourable one. Whether there are any other reasons is anyone's guess.

The number of people killed was 214 in August, 5,730 in September, 5,090 in October, 1,876 in November, 827 in December and 639 in January, making 14,376 in all. The total number of dwelling houses damaged is over 700,000; of these nearly 41,000 were irreparably destroyed. The largest number of separate fires (1,724) was on the 9th December; the most devastating conflagrations were on the 7th September and 29th December.[3]

The Natural History Museum was also hit in the raids. A number of bombs, both high explosive and incendiary, fell on the museum premises causing serious fires. The 'petrified' fossil tree, just in front of the control room in the museum grounds had reason to be petrified again. It was knocked down and broken (later to be repaired and re-erected where the tree still stands today in front of the site where London Region's bunker stood, and clearly visible from Cromwell Road).

Despite the success of the Anderson shelters, these had not provided the psychological protection Londoners sought in the Blitz. London Region faced a critical challenge managing the thousands of people who crowded into the tube stations during the air raids. There were no arrangements for sewage disposal, regular cleaning, for medical inspection, or for eating. Morrison persuaded the Cabinet to provide public deep shelters, with amenities such as bunks, lighting, heating, drinking water, sanitation, first aid, and staff to control the crowds. A survey in November 1940 found that nine per cent of those surveyed slept in public shelters, four per cent used underground stations, 27 per cent used Anderson shelters, and the rest were either on duty or slept in their own homes.[4]

Harold Scott wrote that it was not until the spring of 1941 that the shelter problems were brought under control. Every night he and the Regional Commissioners went on a tour of the public shelters 'to see for ourselves what conditions were like and how quickly they were being improved'.[5] In March 1941 the Government also introduced a new type of domestic shelter, the 'Morrison Shelter', named after the Minister, for use indoors. These indoor shelters were made of heavy steel. They could also be used as a dining table, and were suitable for people who had neither gardens nor basements.

Gowers later identified the failure to predict the human reaction to the air raids planning as having caused the biggest headache in the early days of the Blitz:

> [T]he failure to foresee all-night raiding and its consequence in leading many people to sleep in the tube railways or in public shelters where they could be in company and out of earshot of the guns and bombs. In that matter … we went through a very anxious time before we had got things right, and many people suffered much discomfort. But you must not think the number of people who went to public shelter at night was ever more than a quite small percentage of the population of London. The great bulk of the people slept sensibly in their Andersons or fatalistically in their beds.[6]

Evans was highly visible and 'made himself a familiar figure in the shelters, where his immaculate naval uniform, complete with white kid gloves, raised laughter and cheers'.[7] According to Scott, Evans' presence in the air raid shelters was 'electric':

> Everywhere he radiated confidence, cheerfulness and encouragement. As we passed along those endless rows of bunks, in that foetid air of squalid overcrowding, faces would light up and the shelterers would greet him with 'Blimey, 'ere's the ruddy admiral again!'[8]

The climax of the Blitz came two months after Gowers' briefing to the MPs, with a severe incendiary attack on 10–11 May during which the Chamber of the House of Commons was destroyed and Westminster Hall severely damaged. On 19 May, Gowers provided a report to Sir George Gater, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Security, on the organisation of fire prevention during that attack:

> The heavy attack was concentrated within a radius of three miles of Charing Cross. Some 1,860 fires resulted. It is established that fire prevention arrangements averted a far more serious situation – eg. in Islington, where 28 premises were burnt out, 1,000 incendiary bombs were smothered and 216 fires extinguished. On the present basis and with the present scale of equipment fire prevention parties are little more than an outpost line. Fire prevention, therefore, depends for success upon prompt support by the Fire Brigade. Nevertheless, more effective fire prevention would have reduced the number of fires and the task of the Fire Brigade. An attempt has, therefore, been made to discover where and why prevention is inadequate.[9]

In his covering letter he indicates that '[t]he point which is abundantly clear is that the weak spot at present lies not so much in the arrangements for putting out incendiary bombs as in the gap between the starting of a fire (which, even under an ideal system of fire prevention will always sometimes happen) and the tackling of it by Fire Brigade apparatus'.

Evans describes these nights of the worst fires, and writes:

> To appreciate something of what our Fire Service in the Battle of London competed with, one should see at the NFS [National Fire Service] … the Fire-Film, taken in action, which shows the City aflame, and the firemen with hundreds of hoses at work, with the bombs falling and exploding all round them, the water freezing as it fell in the bleak winter night. Many a fire man lost his life that night.[10]

One of the planning flaws, which caused critical problems for the fire services in the Blitz was failure to provide a reliable supply of water. The number of water turncocks was quite inadequate.[11] Gowers later suggested that if they had had in London the vast provision of additional water for firefighting that they had later, the stories of the nights of 29 December 1940 and 10 May 1941 might have been very different.

Reorganising the fire services

In May 1941, the Government decided, on Morrison's advice, that amalgamation of the fire services was the best way to resolve some of the firefighting problems. Administrative control of the subdivided 'fire forces' was given to regional commissioners, but local authorities were promised that after the war the fire services would be returned to them (which they were).[12]

By 1942, there were six Fire Forces comprising over 30,000 men, and a body of 42,500 men practised, in one way or another, in the removal of debris and the repair of roads and communications. Each Fire Force radiated from the centre of London to the outer boundary of London Region, and a River Fire Force which covered the Thames from Weybridge to its mouth, all under the supreme command of the Senior Regional Commissioner (One of the most treasured possessions of the River Thames Fire Force was the fireboat 'Massey Shaw' which took part in the evacuation from Dunkirk).

At the end of the war, when the future of the National Fire Service was uncertain, Gowers described the difficulties he faced when he took over the fire brigades. His rather rueful tone signals the organisation's imminent demise:

> I was presented with some 40,000 members of 66 Fire Brigades – dejected members many of them were too – I had to hold them together into the forces of a National Fire Service. I turned to Mr Simpson to shoulder my share of this burden. Only those who have been behind the scenes will ever know how formidable the task has been or with what success it has been done. And if – as now seems likely – the National Fire Service is to have the epitaph inscribed on the tombstone of the historic infant: 'If so early I am done for; What on earth was I begun for?'[13]

But London's worst ordeal was nearly at an end as the Luftwaffe was already moving its squadrons to the east 'whence few were to return'.

On 22 June 1941 Hitler's armies invaded Russia and 'gave Britain not only an ally but a breathing space'.[14] The Germans' Russian offensive eased the strain on Fighter Command, which had been suffering badly from being the principal focus of the Germans' attention. It was close to breaking point when the Germans gave up their invasion plans and switched their effort to the attack on London. The punishment meted out on London was a critical turning point in the war.[15]

London Region's staff were fully stretched during the Blitz. Administrative staff took regular turns in manning the control or war rooms. London Region did not reach its peak of over 800 staff until the middle of 1942.[16]

The assault on London had taken a huge toll on its population. Titmuss recorded that 62,464 civilians died as a result of war operations in Great Britain. About 86,000 more were seriously injured. About 50 per cent of these casualties were sustained in London. The number of civilians killed did not fall below that of the three armed services until two years after the war began, and it was not until three years after the outbreak of the war that the enemy had killed more soldiers than women and children.[17]

The London Region had to manage the aftermath of the Blitz as well as learn from their planning errors and prepare for future attacks. Sixty per cent of all houses completely demolished across the country during the war were in the London Region, and the same percentage of the lesser 'damage incidents'. In London County, if the heart of London, only about one house in ten was undamaged. In Bermondsey alone, only four houses in every 100 came through the war unscathed.[18]

After the Blitz, the 'long haul' of the Lull

The writer William Sansom, who was himself one of the civil defence workers during the war, gives an eloquent and moving account of what the war on London was like from their perspective:

> It must always be remembered, simply but constantly, that at the time nobody knew what was going to happen next. Now we know. In retrospect the period seems neatly parcelled into events and into lulls without event. But then, obviously, it was different. … This is of course very obvious. But it is easy, in reading history, to forget the simple fact of ignorance before the event. It must always be first in mind.[19]

The Blitz came to an end in May 1941. Harold Scott was moved to the Ministry of Home Security. At the end of the war Gowers paid tribute to Scott: 'No-one reviewing the career of London Region at the close of its work could fail to mention the architect of London Region, Sir Harold Scott, whose demonic energy created it in an incredibly short space of time and in the face of tremendous difficulties'.[20]

The challenge for the civil defence regions was to remain alert and manned with or without air raids or invasion, but also to be prepared for or responsive to changes in the type of attack. They had to adjust their operational organisation and methods to new forms of attack, maintaining and supplying special equipment, recruiting and training people for new and often unpredictable tasks, and planning how to use the manpower available to them.

Despite relief that the Blitz appeared to be over, London Region and the Regional Commissioners had to maintain the morale and training of the civil defence workers. Ziegler describes the period between the end of the Blitz in May 1941 and the later 'Little Blitz', which took place early in 1944, as the 'long haul'.[21] Titmuss described it as 'dawdling intolerably between phases of action'.[22]

While the 'ubiquitous' Evans was out and about in London, the Senior Regional Commissioner, Gowers, was reassessing London's defences to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the civil defence organisation. The Region had to ensure it maintained the manpower necessary to provide adequate civil defence services in case of further air raids and in the face of the country's general shortage of manpower. Gowers rallied his civil defence colleagues to stay prepared for enemy attack:

> I was last in Guildhall some six months ago. It was a desolating and unforgettable experience to clamber over the heaps of fallen masonry, open to the sky, with which this floor was then covered, and to pick my way among twisted girders and still smouldering beams. Today Guildhall stands once more as of old, battered it is true, but serene, imperturbable, the perennial shrine of the spirit of the City of London and the custodian of yet another glorious memory of the City's secular championship of the cause of freedom.
>
> How symbolic it is. This Battle of London was a battle of the spirit. Some say Hitler is mad, that is as it may be, but he cannot be mad enough to suppose that he could defeat this country by knocking down the bricks and mortar of the capital. No; his attack on London was an attempt to destroy the soul of the Londoner, to make him insist on peace at any price as an escape from every form of terror and

> savagery that perverted science could devise. But not even this past master in the art of destroying the human soul could work his will here. The spirit of London, like its Guildhall, remains for all its battering, erect, unconquered and unconquerable. It is well over 2,000 years since a patriot statesman, in the cradle of freedom of the human spirit, voiced the eternal truth that it is men not walls that make a city. Never was there a better illustration of this than the Battle of London.
>
> You in the Civil Defence Services, the police and the fire brigades, have been in the middle of the target, and the front line of this battle – a battle which I do not doubt will come to be recognised as one of the decisive battles of history. Its issue depended in large measure on you. …
>
> It has been well said of the Civil Defence Services of this country, 'their need has been proved, their efficiency has been demonstrated, their courage has won the admiration of the world'. That verdict comes with the more force because it is taken from the soulless and colourless pages of the report of a Parliamentary Committee whose duty was to criticise not to praise, and it is a verdict that will stand unchallenged for all time.

Gowers made an interesting diversion into praising the role of women in the war. It was a theme he returned to on numerous occasions after the war was over.

> I do not like, on occasions such as this, to pick out any classes or services for special mention. All alike have shown the same qualities: London's debt is to all alike. But I must make one exception to this rule. I must pay a special tribute to the women. Their part in the battle has been one that is new for women, one for which women used not to be thought fitted – that of sharing with men the dangers and terrors of the front line. You all know the immortal laurels their heroism has won. …
>
> Women have shattered once and for all the curious but persistent illusion of us men that they are less brave than we are, and have placed us in the humiliating position of no longer being able to claim that we are superior to them in any respect.

His main message was the continuing threat to London, despite the Lull.

> What of the future? We are going through an awkward time in the present lull: action is easier than waiting. We do not know what is

> to come. But we should be indeed foolish if we acted on any other assumption than that we have before us attacks at least as severe, experiences at least as trying, as those we have had in the past. And so my last words to you must be these. Do not let this lull lower in any degree that fine standard of efficiency which you have taught us to expect from you. Keep yourselves fit and prepared in body and spirit, so that when the second round of the Battle of London comes, if it does come, you may see your fellow-Londoners through to victory again with the same magnificent courage and resource that you showed in the first round, and so hasten the day when the triumph of Liberty is once more celebrated in this Hall.[23]

In July 1941 Churchill reviewed 200,000 civil defence workers at a parade in Hyde Park. Amongst those who greeted him were Anderson, Gowers and Evans. Mrs Churchill was presented a bouquet by Eileen Cannon, aged 13, an evacuee.

From July 1941 to December 1944, Gowers submitted regular reports to the War Cabinet on progress and problems in the London Region. Each included reports on attacks by the enemy; civil defence; fire services; preparations for invasion; preparation of plans for attack; lessons from raids; and movement of population. By 1942 the Government was becoming concerned about 'a dangerous feeling' that 'spread among the local authorities, who had to find much of the money for civil defence, that London was over-insuring against what was now a distant threat'. Churchill warned the House of Commons that the danger of air attack was far from over.

Ziegler claims that later in 1942 Gowers 'surprised London' by announcing that invasion was still a potent threat.[24] Gowers gave a press conference in August explaining the civilians' role in defence if London were to be invaded.[25] In October he exhorted the Invasion Officers of Wandsworth and Battersea not to assume that the threat of invasion was over, reinforcing the point that the Government was trying to make:

> You have undertaken a difficult, tiresome and invidious task in trying to bring home to the people of London the need to make themselves ready against an invasion. Three years ago, when we were preparing to meet air attack things were different. That was something which, so far as human foresight could judge, was bound to come sooner or later. But the form of future attacks on this country is more problematical. Invasion in present circumstances seems remote. I am sure

> that there are two questions that you are often asked today. One is whether it is really necessary in the heart of London to do all these troublesome things against an event that now seems so unlikely.
>
> No man can say with certainty that invasion is off the map. In war the face of events changes with surprising and disconcerting suddenness. Hitler has a way of doing the improbable and achieving the impossible. Now invasion is the one thing for which we cannot afford to be caught unready, for it is the one thing in which we shall be given no second chance. If we do not meet it successfully we are lost irretrievably. The question whether it is probable or improbable does not really matter so long as it remains a possibility. … We must never assume that invasion is not going to happen until we have reached our goal with the day of victory. The stakes are too high. … I am not saying that this is going to happen, but what I do say emphatically is that it might happen, and that we have got to be prepared for anything that might happen, and that if we are not, we do not deserve to win the war.[26]

But the Lull allowed Londoners some relaxation. Gowers managed to find the time to play the organ in a Kensington church, not far from his official headquarters, and 'sought some relief in Bach and Handel from the stress of his office'.[27] One loss to London Region was Warren Fisher, whose tenure came to an abrupt end in 1942 after a public dispute with Herbert Morrison. Fisher wrote to the press defending an ex-colleague from the North Western Region who had resigned after being mildly disciplined for using official vehicles and petrol to ferry fire officers to a football match between the fire services of two regions. Morrison was furious, and when Fisher refused to resign Morrison sacked him.

Gowers had time to poke a little fun at the expense of the Ministry of Home Security and its bureaucratic sensitivities. On 15 September 1942 the department had issued HD Notice 65/42:

> A proposal by a local authority is sometimes dealt with in the Region by the Regional Commissioner personally – eg. by receiving a deputation of the local authority – and the proposal is then submitted to Headquarters for decision. Cases have occurred where the decision is contrary to the expressed views of the Regional Commissioner, and the letter conveying the decision is signed by a subordinate officer, even though the decision was taken at a higher level. In future, when it is known that the Regional Commissioner has dealt with a case personally and received a deputation from the Local Authority, any

> decision from Headquarters contrary to the views of the Regional Commissioner, will be conveyed to the Region by a letter signed by the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary or the Head of the Division concerned.[28]

Gowers wrote a sonnet in response:

> Now no Commissioner, remote, forlorn,
> Can grumble that his dignity's forgotten,
> Nor Mayors and Controllers say with scorn
> 'The fellow's judgement's manifestly rotten.'
> No longer shall we suffer from dubiety,
> Struggling to read the Master Mind aright:
> The Secretary (Permanent variety)
> Or else the Deputy will cast his light
> On what is dark to us. Nor is this all.
> Heads of Divisions, almost as wise as they,
> Will stretch out helping hands, and, if we fall,
> Replace us firmly on the narrow way.
> And who could ever question a decision
> Arrived at by the Head of a Division?[29]

Scott described London Region's insistence on clear communications:

> One of Gowers's great qualities was an ability to express in terse and scholarly English just what he wanted to say, and the most ordinary memorandum, when drafted by him, became a work of art. Together, we declared war on the obscurities of officialdom, and, realising that any document going out from London Region would be taken to mean what it said, we were careful that it should equally say what was meant.[30]

At least one of the Town Clerks agreed about the 'obscurities of officialdom'. Towards the end of the war Gowers cited a letter he had received which said that:

> [o]ne of my projected peace celebrations is to make in front of the Town Hall an enormous bonfire of circulars, around which the young members of the staff will perform a circular dance (like that performed at Athens on the third day of the Anthesteria[31]) while the Borough Treasurer and I sing and play the flute and drum. I am

> afraid, however, that this is an idle dream as the District Auditors will still be trying to find out if the circulars meant what they said, or said what they meant, in 1953.[32]

The London Region held a series of lectures for civil defence workers during the Lull. In February 1943, Gowers addressed the London Region social club on official English, drawing examples from recent government circulars.[33] The talk was well received, and noted by Treasury officials. It was this talk that prompted the Treasury to invite Gowers to write a pamphlet on official English, for training purposes, after the war. This was the genesis of *Plain Words*.

The poet Stephen Spender was one of Gowers' staff who fretted during the Lull. Medically unfit to fight, Spender had talked himself into the Auxiliary Fire Service in September 1941. In slack periods he wrote poetry. He also organised educational programs for his fellow firemen. But 'sitting around without solitude' in the Lull obviously worried him and he begged Gowers to find something productive for him to do, 'as my patron, because I have come to realise that my existence as an artist is largely in your hands', enclosing a book of sonnets. He was eventually shifted to the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department.

But he was just one of the thousands of people in London who were in this state of limbo. The country was still at war, despite the Lull in air raids. Gowers continued to visit the local authorities as often as he could. In East Ham in July 1943 he looked forward to the end of the war and discussed the possible future role of the regional commissioners:

> It is clear that we have now reached the climax of what have probably been the most dramatic years in the whole history of western civilisation. We can now see the pattern of events unfolding as surely and inexorably as in the pattern of an old Greek play. We are now at the point of what they used to call the Catastrophe, when Nemesis at last overtook those whose overweening arrogance had intoxicated them with love of ruthless power. One of these two men [Mussolini] has already met his fate and nothing can be more certain than that the other is destined sooner or later to go the same way. …
>
> It is more than eighteen months since I last paid a visit here. I am sorry that it should have been so long. … It may be eighteen months or two years before I can come again, and if that is so I feel bound, without I hope of being guilty of any wishful thinking to recognise the possibility that this may be my last visit to you as Regional

> Commissioner. I do not know what will be the fate of Regional Commissioners in general after the war. …
>
> But I do know what will happen to this particular Regional Commissioner. The moment the war comes to an end I shall have to leave you and resume the task [Chairman of the Coal Commission] which I laid down at the end of August, 1939.

In November 1943 he gave a more detailed talk on the role of the regional commissioners: why they were appointed and why civil defence was structured the way it was:

> No doubt you all know the origin of Regional Commissioners. They date from 1938. It was a case of making provision for going back to the Heptarchy, only now it should I suppose be called a Dodecarchy, as there are twelve Regions. The power of the bomber was unknown. Omne ignotum pro magnifico [everything unknown tends to be exaggerated]. It was feared that communications might be interrupted between London and other parts of the country; hence the need for Commissioners in the Provinces, each to carry on the Government of his region if the ordinary threads of authority were cut. So too it was feared that the Central Government might be bombed out of London; hence the Regional Commissioners for London, to exercise authority over the eight million people and 700 square miles of Greater London until the Central Government could pick up the reins again.
>
> It is an odd coincidence which I may mention in passing that the Regions into which England was then divided are the same in number and follow substantially the same boundaries as the administrative Regions into which Oliver Cromwell divided the country, and a still odder coincidence that two of the Regional Commissioners appointed five years ago have the same names as two of Cromwell's gauleiter Major-Generals. But there the parallel ends, at least I hope so. We are not as they were, given instructions forcibly to promote virtue among the people, nor can the result of our tenure of office be described, I hope, in the words which have been used of them: 'Merry England became a silent and melancholy place, where no man could trust his neighbour'.[34]

Gowers wrote later, somewhat wryly, about the way the press interpreted his allusion to Cromwell:

> I remember once saying when trying to introduce a little well placed levity into a dull address that the only historical precedent in our

> history for Regional Commissioners – Cromwell's Major Generals – was a very unhappy one, that we were not likely to last much longer than they did, and that it was very proper that this should be so. On this a local paper made the scornful comment 'The Regional Commissioner sought to justify his existence by appealing to a precedent in Cromwell's time'. I did feel on that occasion that there must be something wrong with the mirror of the Press.[35]

Gowers' speech of November 1943 continues with an assessment of London's civil defence at the time:

> The Services are much thinner on the ground than they were, and the need to keep the machine in good working order is all the greater. It might have been expected that after these years of comparative inaction, it would have rusted up a bit, and that the men and women in the services would have deteriorated through idleness and suffered from a sense of futility. That is not so; their spirit is amazing, and it reflects the greatest credit on them that this should be so. The enemy has helped lately by giving them just enough to keep them on their toes and prevent them from feeling that what they are doing is not worth while. The disaster at the dance-hall a few weeks ago [on 8 November 1943 a bomb hit a dance hall in Putney High Street, with considerable loss of life], though a very difficult job to tackle, was handled supremely well.

The Little Blitz

After the major Blitz was over in May 1941, occasional raids using increasingly larger bombs continued throughout 1941 and through to 1944. In January 1944 the 'Little Blitz' began. Early January was the quietest it had been in London since November 1942. But later in the month bombing raids began again. Between 21 January and the end of March, 2,350 tons of bombs were dropped – more than the total load delivered in 1943. All but 100 tons were delivered in 15 attacks, 13 of which were aimed at London.

London's 13 major attacks were a significant blow to Londoners' morale. A high proportion of the bombs were new forms of incendiary bomb, particularly 'firepot' and 'phosphorus' bombs, putting the new National Fire Service to the test. The bombing raids were 'short and severe' and the fire service managed to cope with them. Then in August 1944 Germany's first V1 rockets fell on London. In September V2 rocket

attacks started. These flying bomb and rocket attacks on London and the south-east of England continued from June 1944 until March 1945. Again London bore the brunt of the assault. Nearly 1,000 people lost their lives in the seven major raids in February. More than 2,300 flying bombs reached London.

The US navy's salvage expert Edward Ellsberg was in London in 1944. Ellsberg had been on the beaches of Normandy where he 'cleared up an unholy mess in the placement of the Phoenix caissons for Operation Mulberry – the artificial harbors that enabled the Anglo-American-Canadian armies to crack the wall of Hitler's Fortress Europe'.[36] In a letter to his wife at home in the United States, Ellsberg described a visit to the Gowers' London home during a flying bomb attack. Punctuating his letter with descriptions of an air raid, he wrote:

> I had tea this afternoon with Lady Gowers. She certainly is looking well, better I thought than when I last saw her in New York. She is very busy in the WVS [Women's Voluntary Service] here and went directly from tea (at her home) to give a talk somewhere on fire control methods. Sir Ernest is, of course, having a hectic time since the flying bombs started coming over; he wasn't there but if it can be arranged, I'm to have dinner with both of them next week.
>
> Lady Gowers was particularly pleased that fire has almost been completely absent from the flying bomb attacks; for she long ago learned (what I knew) *[siren just sounded, followed almost immediately by the roar of a bomb engine. I looked out in the dusk, saw the bomb in level flight, rather high, about 3000 ft., perhaps a half mile on my left. While I watched, it turned steeply down, engine still running, and exploded about 5 seconds later. I am afraid that one landed somewhere near Piccadilly]* that fire is the best weapon *[another bomb, heard it but didn't see it. About the same distance off]* and the damage from fire far exceeds that of simple explosives. But the Germans are suffering under the naïve illusion that they are blowing London to bits, and fire, which was the worst enemy in the 1940–41 Blitz, is being left out of this attack.[37]

In February 1944, Gowers was asked to provide an assessment of Londoners' morale:

> It is extremely difficult to give you a report on public morale which I can feel confident is a true picture. Statements made to me vary from that of a Town Clerk who said that it is just as high as in 1940, if not higher, and that a typical remark is 'Well, we're giving them

> Hell and we can't complain if they try to give us Hell' down to a Red Cross Lady in Chelsea who said to me yesterday that the people were alarmingly jittery and that a typical remark was 'God, I can't stand this. Why don't we stop bombing Berlin?'
>
> The truth, of course, lies somewhere between the two. Morale is good, and I have no doubt that the people can 'take it'. But at present it is not quite what it was. There is below the surface (and coming to the surface occasionally) a strain of nervousness, restlessness and edginess. There are no doubt lots of reasons for this. One is the obvious one that war-weariness is cumulative. Another, curiously enough, is the intensity of our barrage. Another is the formidable nature of the enemy's HE [high explosive] and the stories of the devastation we have caused in Germany. Another is the presence in London of far more children than three years ago and fewer of their fathers.
>
> One thing there is no doubt at all about, and that is the willingness of people to turn out and lend a hand, whether Fireguards or not, if incendiaries drop in their street, even at the height of the barrage. And the spirit of the National Fire Service and Civil Defence Services is magnificent.[38]

But there were occasional sour notes. When Gowers turned up to address a meeting with the London MPs in August 1944 they complained that they were expecting Morrison. Gowers wrote to the Minister that the resentment took him completely by surprise as he had not sought the meeting but had been told that the MPs were 'keenly anxious for it'. The MPs' letter of complaint implied that because many people had evacuated themselves from the flying bomb attacks, it reflected badly on London Region. Gowers commented:

> I confess that it never occurred to me that the fact of a million people having left London on their own would be thought to detract from the credit due to the Ministry of Health for arranging for the official evacuation of 300,000.

The MPs' grievance at not meeting Morrison, and the desire of those present that any report sent to the press should contain all their names, Gowers wrote, 'excited more feeling than any other subject'.[39]

Towards the end of the war, Gowers spoke to civil defence workers about the ordeal of the flying bombs:

> I should like to add a word of special thanks for your services during the recent trial of the flying bomb attack. Your ranks were depleted,

> you had lost many of your younger members, like all of us you were no doubt a bit war-weary and, what was perhaps most trying of all, the continuity of the attack, day after day, night after night, gave you no rest. I have seen many of you in this room at many incidents, always cheerful and imperturbable, but I have marked too often in your faces that grey complexion and those sunken eyes that show the strain of lack of sleep. Yet you and those under you never failed; your energy was unflagging and your efficiency superb; and you have indeed the right to be proud of the way in which your Service stood up to what I hope may prove to have been its last great test.[40]

The first bomb on the London Region had fallen on 18 June 1940; the last, a rocket bomb, fell on 20 April 1945.

The end of the war – the civil defence regions disbanded

Fortunately the end of the war in Europe was nearly within sight. With the Allied invasion of Europe, the threat at home began to recede. From late 1944 preparations were made to reduce the level of civil defence. In the first few months of 1945 a final spate of circulars dealt with the release of premises; the fate of shelters, posts, depots, cleansing stations, and administrative centres; the collection and disposal of vehicles, equipment, and records; grants, gratuities, post-war credits and other financial matters. On 26 April a memorandum was circulated describing the action to be taken to wind up the war organisation of the Civil Defence General Services when the Government decided that this was no longer needed.[41]

On 2 May 1945 the greater part of the Civil Defence Orders were revoked and the powers conferred on the regional commissioners transferred to the minister concerned. There were ceremonial parades across the country throughout May as the organisations were disbanded. Finally, on 10 June, representatives of the Civil Defence Services were reviewed and thanked by King George VI at a farewell parade in Hyde Park.[42]

When Gowers looked back over the years of the war and the effectiveness of London's civil defence, he recognised the strength in the civil defence planning that had taken place before the war began, and what a difference it had made:

> The first is the great skill and foresight with which in the years before the war, the pioneers in the little, neglected, starved, ARP

> Department of the Home Office planned the machinery of Civil Defence. The Civil Defence Services fitted with extraordinary precision into what experience proved to be the needs of the case – the wardens to set an example of steadfastness and performed in a thousand different ways the offices of good Samaritans, the stretcher parties to give first aid to the wounded on the spot, the rescue parties to dig out the buried, the ambulances to take the seriously wounded to hospital, the first aid posts to tend to the more lightly hurt. The communications system worked like clockwork. Not even in the heaviest and most prolonged of the London raids, looking at London as a whole, was any Civil Defence Service (I do not include the Fire Service in that expression) stretched to capacity. Of course we had surprises. Human foresight, even official foresight, is fallible. … But on the whole the planning reflects the greatest credit on those who, with only the experience of the Spanish Civil War to guide them, drew the blue-prints of Civil Defence.
>
> There were, of course, other surprises, but on the whole it proved possible to adapt ourselves to them fairly quickly. We were well prepared with labour and material for repairing gas and water mains, and both the railways and the Telephone Service were marvels of efficiency in getting damaged services working again. We were not prepared for the number of delayed-action bombs that we got and were caused some embarrassment for a time not only by the real ones but also by the vast crop of imaginary ones that at first accompanied them. But experience, and prompt reinforcements of the Royal Engineers soon set that right. No praise of mine could do justice to the cold-blooded heroism that these soldiers showed in this dangerous work.
>
> It is part of a Regional Commissioner's duties to decide when the need to remove a delayed action bomb is so urgent as to justify the additional risk to the soldiers' lives involved in its being tackled immediately. That was sometimes a difficult decision to make. But I remember one easy one. I was asked to accord this priority to a bomb that had fallen in the ostrich house in the zoo. That was too good an opportunity to be missed, and I refused unhesitatingly, pointing out that all that seemed necessary was for the birds to bury their heads in the sand.[43]

Harold Scott tells another bird story in his autobiography. It seems appropriate to include it here, especially as it is another illustration of

some of the minor frustrations experienced in communications between the Region and some of the higher levels in the hierarchy:

> One night we received a report of an unusual rescue operation: digging in a bombed house the rescue squad heard a voice faintly in the ruins, and with their usual zeal they began to tunnel their way towards it. As they got nearer, they were greeted with a stream of curses; nothing would stop the swearing; but when at last they unearthed the victim of the blitz they found it was a grey parrot. Thinking to relieve the monotony, I sent the report of this incident on to … the Director of Operations at Home Security, but he was not amused. He spoke, in fact, of 'unseemly levity'.[44]

War and the Gowers family

The war had changed the way in which many people lived. My grandparents were perhaps typical examples of the change in the standard of living for the middle classes. David Shiffner recalls the change at Rondle Wood when all the able-bodied staff were called up and any luxury that existed never returned. Rondle Wood continued 'fairly well staffed' during 1940, but practically all had left for wartime occupations of one sort or another by the end of that year, when Gowers' mother-in-law, Mrs Greer, came over from Ireland with her companion and her cook (who took over the kitchen). They remained there until Mrs Greer died in 1943:

> With the arrival of the war, life at Rondle changed considerably, at first filling up with evacuees from the East End of London. My ex-governess, Erna, and another woman set up a school for them in the cottage and I recall thinking how much I would have preferred to go to that school and not be sent back to my boarding variety.
>
> At the same time [Kit Gowers] went berserk and went around the countryside sticking notices on the doors of people's weekend cottages saying 'Requisitioned by Lady Gowers for London evacuees'. When the owners came down to visit there was a devil of a rumpus and [Ernest Gowers] had to use all his diplomatic powers to calm things down! As London was not considered a good place for children to be, I spent my holidays for the first year of the war mostly at Rondle, which was a pretty chaotic spot, with strange people from all countries and walks of life passing through – I am none too sure to where in a good many instances.[45]

Gowers came and went, spending most of his time occupying a flat in London. His eldest grandson recalls his large car with its yellow 'Regional Commissioner' flag and its police driver, and the 'wonderful sensation of being driven around on roads almost empty except for essential traffic in a large chauffeured car that everyone saluted as it went by!'[46]

As was the case in the First World War, my grandmother rallied to the demands of the war. She took on a heavy workload with the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence (WVS) which had been established in May 1938.[47] The WVS worked with government departments and with the London Region headquarters, providing a range of services when London was under attack, including running information centres at bomb sites.

Despite some family jokes about her excessive enthusiasms, my grandmother made a significant contribution to civil defence in the war. In charge of the Gordon Services Club in Vauxhall Bridge Road, she was responsible for converting a disused hospital into a hostel for soldiers on leave, which she managed 'with a rod of iron'. More than a million servicemen of many countries passed through the club when in transit through London.[48] David Shiffner recalled that when he was at a loose end during school holidays he would drop in for a 'free feed'. David even absconded from Rugby during term-time and appeared at the club looking for a meal. His understanding grandmother fed him (helped by his Czechoslovakian ex-governess who was also enlisted to work at the club) and then gave him the train fare to get him back to Rugby.[49] Meanwhile, Rondle Wood had a constant flow of people she sent there to recuperate.

My mother, brother and I stayed at Rondle Cottage while my father was away. David Shiffner remembered the day of our first visit, in September 1940 when I was two years old, when he made rainbows on my bedroom wall with a prism and a ray of sunshine, which I 'pursued on all fours with great glee. In the middle of it all Erna and your nurse rushed out into the garden, followed by me, to watch an aerial dog fight in progress above our heads – really a most foolhardy action!' This was the Battle of Britain. David climbed the hill in front of the house and counted 17 smoking wrecks of German bombers shot down. He pin-pointed one, found it after a long walk through the woods and 'pinched a lot of bits with long German words on them to sell to other small boys at school as souvenirs: luckily the pilot must have escaped'.[50]

My mother lost what domestic help she had when the nurse became a Land Girl. Like many of her contemporaries, my mother had to learn

to cook, never having been near a kitchen before the war. My earliest memories are of gathering stinging nettles to boil and eat as a non-stinging, spinach-like vegetable. Later in the war there were Polish refugees who camped in the woods behind the cottage, occupied as charcoal-burners. They once set fire to the woods in their enthusiasm so we were evacuated to the main house until the fire was put out and it was safe to return. But we had some lively games of darts with them, supervised by my grandmother.

Both Ernest Gowers' sons-in-law served in the army. David's father, Henry Shiffner, served in North Africa. He was killed in action in the Middle East on 22 November 1941 at the age of 39. As with so many families, the Shiffner family suffered casualties in both world wars. Sir Henry Shiffner had inherited his title from his elder brother, who was killed in the First World War. Following the death of his father, David Shiffner became eighth baronet Shiffner and inherited his father's estate at Coombe Place in Sussex. Ernest Gowers' brother Bill, who had ended his career as Senior Crown Agent for the Colonies, retired from the Colonial Civil Service in 1938. During the war he served as Civil Defence Liaison Officer, Southern Command. He also managed the Shiffner estate for his great-nephew.

The end of the war – farewells

When the war ended Gowers made a number of farewell speeches. In an address to the Town Clerks, he said:

> There have been many times during the past five years when I felt as I entered the Geological Museum – those vasty halls of Death in which it has sometimes seemed to me that I was fated to remain until I became as fossilised as the exhibits which they properly house – there have been many times I have felt that the day on which I left them for the last time would be the happiest day of my life. And yet, as the Latin poet says: medio de fonte leporum surgit amari aliquid.[51] There will be a trace of bitterness in that modest stock of champagne which I have preserved all this time to celebrate victory with.[52]

And in his farewell to the London Region civil defence team:

> Today is an occasion of mixed feelings – of rejoicing that the end for which we have waited so long has come at last, and come so

> gloriously, and sorrow at the breaking up of a notable band and the parting of friends who have gone through much together.[53]

At Gowers' memorial service in 1966, Harry Willink summed up Gowers' contribution to the war:

> I would rather speak of his great work, first as one of the three Regional Commissioners, then for four years as Senior Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence in the London Region – with its pre-war population of eight million and its 101 Local Authorities, including the London County Council. I doubt if he regarded any of his many appointments as being as responsible as this.
>
> During these years the administration of the capital, and not less the maintenance of the morale of its people, were of immense national importance. Many and varied were the bodies – official and voluntary – concerned. I myself, in a subordinate position, responsible for co-ordinating the care of those made homeless by bombing, was closely associated with the three Regional Commissioners – Ernest Gowers himself, the gallant and debonair Admiral Sir Arthur Evans, and Charles Key, the Labour Member of Parliament and former Mayor of Poplar, whose knowledge of East London was of such great value.
>
> Subject only to the Ministers of Home Security and of Health, Ernest Gowers was the apex of the whole organisation, with his finger on its pulse. As has been recalled elsewhere, he refreshed himself, early in the morning, by half-an-hour playing the organ in a church close to Regional Headquarters: but by 9.30 correspondence and reports had been read, and each morning the Commissioners reviewed the progress of what was indeed the Battle of London.
>
> I recall the agility, the sensitivity of his mind: I remember too, his patience, his courtesy and his humour. He felt deeply for those who suffered in the bombing of London. He was untiring in his visits to areas that had suffered heavily: his inspections of the men and women serving in Civil Defence were not only searching but inspiring.[54]

Both Ernest Gowers and his wife Kit were awarded an Order of the British Empire in the June Birthday Honours. Gowers was awarded the Knight Grand Cross in the June Birthday Honours, together with Field Marshal Montgomery and the controversial Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur (Bomber) Harris.[55] Evans was elevated to the peerage, becoming

Lord Mountevans. My grandmother was awarded an MBE for her work at the Gordon Services Club.

In 1952 Gowers became entitled to a coat of arms, when he became Gentleman Usher of the Purple Rod, as the most senior of the recipients OBE. He became entitled to a coat of arms. Its description reads:

> The jays quote from the arms of the Gouverts family who were Dutch forbears. The open book alludes to scholarship. The jay in the crest holds a spring of willow-herb, or fireweed, the familiar plant of bombed sites in London symbolising the office of Regional Commissioner which was held by Sir Ernest during the Second World War.

10
Post-war Reconstruction

On 6 June 1945 Gowers wrote to his son:

> I am on the move all day now saying my goodbyes. I shall be very glad when Sunday comes and I can draw breath. … I haven't any other job [than coal] at present except my school and hospital odds and ends. I was asked by the Secretary of State for Air to take on the chairmanship of a Commission to investigate and report on every aspect of the results of our bombing of Germany, but I said no. I have had enough of bombing; I would sooner turn my mind to something more constructive.[1]

Gowers' role as Senior Regional Commissioner for the London Region was over. His term as Chairman of the Coal Commission was nearly over. He had reached 65 but still had another 20 productive years ahead of him. After the war he was asked to chair a range of inquiries, joining the list of eminent men and women invited to chair commissions of inquiry and governing boards. A list of the names of people suitable for appointment to such inquiries, referred to as 'the Great and the Good', was created by the Treasury in 1949.[2]

After he finally left the Civil Service, Gowers' life was spent juggling the demands of the commissions and inquiries he chaired and the publishers for whom he wrote (he was commissioned by the Treasury to write *Plain Words* in 1946). He was appointed to chair four public inquiries between the end of the war and 1952: Women in the Foreign Service (1945); the Closing Hours of Shops (1946); Houses of Outstanding Historical or Architectural Interest (1948); the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment (1949) and a departmental inquiry into foot-and-mouth

disease (1952). In 1946 he was also appointed Chairman of the Harlow New Town Development Corporation.

Inactivity was not in Gowers' nature. During the war he had sought extra work during the Lull between the Blitz and the Little Blitz. In 1942 he re-established contact with his father's hospital, the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, Queen Square, to offer them support. He had heard that his brother Bill had become a governor of their father's other hospital, University College Hospital and, as he recalled fifteen years later, 'not to be outdone in filial piety' he made 'diffident approaches' to the hospital. Gowers became a governor, then Chairman of the Board of the National Hospital. He continued his association with St Felix School until 1947 (when he was made an Honorary Old Girl as a mark of respect).

When the end of the war was in sight, he was offered the job of Deputy Director-General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), which had been founded in 1943 to give aid to areas liberated from the Axis powers. He had severe doubts about the organisation. 'There never was an organisation in such a mess since the world began', he wrote to his son in October 1944, saying that when he had had two days to recover from the shock of the offer, he came to the conclusion that he had no choice but to say yes. So he took a Boeing flying boat to Baltimore, en route to Washington. The British Government told him that the Deputy's headquarters were to be in London, so he hoped not to have to spend too much time away.

> I suppose I shall have to dart about to places like Cairo, Moscow and Chungking. It will no doubt have its interest, but I am too old for that sort of thing; what I was looking forward to was a peaceful life at Rondle Wood and, for a year to two, a far from exacting job as Chairman of the Coal Commission.

The incumbent at UNRRA was Gowers' old Loan Collection colleague, Arthur Salter. Salter had resigned because of frustration with his role. Gowers found that the Americans' conception of the role was different from the description in his London briefing. He was offered a post as Senior Deputy Director-General Resident, to be based in Washington. This did not differ from the limitations of the job which had caused Salter to resign. After Gowers had some 'long and intimate' talks with Salter, he decided not to accept the post. Salter recalled these discussions many years later, after Gowers had died, when he wrote that this close though brief association 'implanted in me an indelible memory of his

great and rare qualities'.[3] Instead, Gowers focussed on a range of domestic issues associated with aspects of post-war reconstruction.

Harlow New Town Development Corporation

There was a housing crisis at the end of the war, particularly as a result of the London Blitz creating massive homelessness. But even before the war, there had been 'widespread unease' at the extent to which population and industry in Britain were becoming concentrated in particular urban areas. A Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population, established in 1938, submitted its report in 1940. The Commission favoured 'planned decentralisation' and suggested that planning should be the concern of a single central authority. At first the Commission's recommendations were merely 'noted'. However, within three years a central authority, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was established, and asked to consider the reconstruction of Britain after the war. The devastation caused by the Blitz had made post-war planning urgent. In 1943, one of the members of the Royal Commission, architect Sir Patrick Abercrombie, was asked to prepare a plan for the London area.

When the Labour Government was elected in 1945, Lewis Silkin became Minister for Town and Country Planning, and a New Towns Committee was established. Following its report, legislation to establish new towns was introduced in Parliament in April 1946. Each new town was to be administered by its own Development Corporation. These corporations were given powers to acquire sites for the new town, to undertake all the necessary development including providing houses, factories, commercial buildings, and public services.

Between 1947 and 1950, 14 new towns were started. Harlow was one of the eight planned to take people and jobs dispersed from Greater London after the war, and was one of the first four new towns to be formally designated. In September 1946 Silkin invited architect Frank Gibberd to design Harlow. Gowers was appointed Chairman of the Harlow New Town Corporation.

Gowers had accepted the invitation to chair the Corporation on condition that he could have a general manager of his own choice. He had his eye on Eric Adams, who he had first met in 1938. Adams had worked with Gowers during the war when Adams, as Town Clerk of Islington, was involved in a metropolitan civil defence committee. He started work before his salary and pension had been worked out. As the history of Harlow New Town comments, it said much for Gowers, that he could command such loyalty.[4] The Corporation also formally

appointed Frank Gibberd as consultant architect-planner. This gave Harlow a head start over other new towns as Gibberd had already done so much work on the plan. Harlow's Master Plan was approved in January 1948.

Frank Gibberd found Gowers and Adams to be an effective team:

> Gowers and Adams made a formidable pair. Gowers was distinguished in every sense – in appearance, manner and quality of mind – a man I trusted absolutely. He soon came to understand the principles I was trying to establish for the design of the town and got them accepted as Board policy. Eric Adams, on the other hand, was a man who got things done, a born administrator, a dynamo obsessed with the job.[5]

Work quickly got under way. But there was trouble looming between Gowers and the officials in the Ministry. On a celebrated occasion he decided to go direct to Silkin, taking Adams and Gibberd with him, seeking support for one of Gibberd's ideas. Adams describes what happened next:

> Silkin was flanked, as I remember, by at least four senior civil servants, who had already taken a stand against the scheme. It was a tricky situation. It was recognised, I think, that this was a test case.[6]

Gowers was an effective advocate for his Corporation's preference and Silkin decided to approve Gibberd's plan. This incident went down in Ministry as well as Harlow folklore. Gowers became known, along with Lord Reith, who was now Chairman of Hemel Hempstead, as one of the 'difficult' new chairmen, and he became unpopular with the civil servants in the Ministry. There were other problems. For example, when the Master Plan had been drawn up, taking into account the traffic flow the town would generate and ensuring that the road pattern was adequate for Harlow's long-term future, Harlow Development Corporation found that the Ministry of Transport had suddenly decided to switch the route of a road from the east to the western side of the town. Gibberd commented that it was 'as though he had designed a seaside town and then somebody moved the sea'.[7]

Gowers' term as Chairman came to an absupt end. When his three-year contract was about to run out, Hugh Dalton, who was by then Minister for Housing, summoned him to a meeting. Gowers went to see him in April 1950 expecting to be consulted about the reappointment

of the Corporation members. Adams' deputy at the time, Ben Hyde-Harvey, recalls that Dalton greeted him with the words: 'Sir Ernest, I see you are now 70 years old and it is my intention, therefore, to make a new appointment as Chairman', to which Gowers replied:

> Minister, I have recently been appointed by your government to be Chairman of the Royal Commission on the Death Penalty. I was not too old for that and I am sorry you take the contrary view.

Hyde-Harvey continued:

> To say that he was regarded with affection by members and officers would be an understatement. Most people felt that he had paid the penalty for his forthrightness.[8]

A more recent explanation of the sacking came, in 2007, from someone who had worked at Harlow. Donald Anderson recalls:

> Sir Ernest's big argument with the then Ministers and their Permanent Secretaries was about the consequence of building so fast. We were attracting only under-thirties – the oldies who were eligible preferred to remain in their East London villages, repair their bomb-damaged housing and find a new job. With no TV the youngsters who came to us (mostly back from the war) bred like rabbits. No-one in Whitehall would believe the abnormal age structure this was creating. My wife and I counted the new born babies … and found six times the national average.[9]

When Churchill returned to office in 1951 he appointed Harold Macmillan Minister for Housing. The Conservatives had promised to build 300,000 houses a year. Macmillan achieved this. Harlow had to double its target to providing houses for 40 new families a week. It was a difficult dilemma for both Dalton and Macmillan. Rehousing after the Blitz, coupled with the post-war baby boom, created a demand for housing which was a challenge for any government. The Harlow Corporation's ideal had to give way to the pressures of the times. Before he left in 1950, Gowers had a parting shot at the Ministry in his last Annual Report, and in doing so tried to assist the other corporations:

> The Corporation wishes to put on record that, in its opinion, its progress has been unnecessarily delayed and its expenses unnecessary

> swollen by prolonged scrutiny on the part of the Ministry officials of matters of detail which might have been left to the Corporation's discretion. … What can hardly be questioned is that the tangled thicket of controls and overlapping duties … contains much that serves no useful purpose, and needs to be drastically pruned if Development Corporations are to be given a chance to build new towns in reasonable time and at a reasonable cost.[10]

Three members resigned because of the Ministry's treatment of Gowers, including his deputy, General Pakenham-Walsh, Countess Patricia Russell and Ben Alsopp.[11] Pakenham-Walsh had had a distinguished military career as Engineer-in-Chief with the British Expeditionary Forces and was wounded at Dunkirk. He had also worked as a military historian with Winston Churchill. Patricia Russell, or Peter Spence as she called herself after her divorce, was an ex-wife of Bertrand Russell. She was very outspoken when defending the Corporation.

Sir Thomas Sheepshanks, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, must have written Gowers a personal letter after his meeting with Dalton, though this is not in the archives. Gowers sent back a profoundly bitter reply:

> Thank you for your letter. I am sure you mean the kind things you say in it, but I do not find it easy to understand why, if you do mean them, you thought it necessary to compass my dismissal. Not that my dismissal itself matters a bit. None of us can pretend to judge for ourselves when our powers are beginning to fail, and I should be the last to question anything so obvious as that, man and man, Costain is more suitable for such a job than I am. But what does distress me deeply – as deeply, I think, as anything that has ever happened to me – is the way in which you have contrived to shatter to bits all that I loved and was proud of in the Harlow Corporation. I have heard you criticise Silkin for not consulting chairmen about the merits and demerits of the members of their corporations, but what you have done beats anything that he was ever guilty of.[12]

He wrote that the members of the Corporation who resigned had been 'driven out by disgust and indignation':

> You have left the remaining members of the corporation, and all its chief officers, full of resentment against the methods of your Ministry and of mistrust of the integrity of its motives. You have,

> I suppose, achieved whatever you intended to achieve – I don't know what that was, except that it was something more than replacing someone approaching senility by someone in the prime of life – but you have paid – or others have paid for you – a pretty high price.

My grandmother wrote to my father about the pain Gowers felt on the day he left the Corporation. 'Today must have been foul for [Gowers] – goodbye to Harlow.'

Gowers' successor, Dick Costain, was head of one of the largest civil engineering and building firms in the country, but he was scrupulous in ensuring that none of his subsidiary companies was given work at Harlow. It was a difficult situation to inherit, but Costain is said to have established a close working relationship with Evelyn Sharp (later Baroness Sharp), who was initially head of the Planning Division and later Permanent Secretary at the Ministry. This led to a better understanding between the Corporation and its officers and the officials at the Ministry.

Sir William Beveridge, who wrote an obsequious comment in his Stevenage Annual Report at the time of Gowers recorded his parting shot in Harlow's, fared the same way as Gowers shortly afterwards at the hands of Harold Macmillan. Lady Beveridge commented to A. L. Rowse that Macmillan 'just wrote William a note, only three or four lines, saying that we were too old for the job. After all that he had done there – oh, it was fearfully *raw* you know'.[13] The authoritarian, centralised attitudes of the Housing bureaucrats persisted beyond the next change of government. The Crossman diaries record his response to their attitudes, again dealing with Harlow and the imposition of external control over the Corporation's decisions.[14]

Committees of Inquiry: 'No. 1 Chairman'

Fortunately the various inquiries Gowers was asked to undertake were more rewarding. Gowers' obituary in *The Scotsman* was given the headline 'Known as "No. 1 Chairman"':

> Known as the nation's No. 1 chairman because of the unrivalled number of government inquiries over which he presided. … His talents as a chairman were immediately apparent and in 1930 he left the Civil Service to become chairman of the Coal Mines Reorganisation Commission. From then on he was chosen as chairman of many Government commissions and committees of inquiry.[15]

Women in the Foreign Service

In 1945 Gowers was appointed chair of an inquiry into women's career opportunities in the Foreign Service. This issue had been on and off the agenda since the passing of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919, which technically opened the way to admit women to the administrative grade of the Diplomatic and Consular Service. However, regulations made in 1921 restricted all posts in the Diplomatic and Consular Service, and certain other posts overseas, to men.

In 1933 Sir Claud Schuster, still Permanent Secretary in the Lord Chancellor's Office, chaired a committee to examine the matter again. The committee held diverging views, which were reflected in its report the following year. The Cabinet decided to accept the conclusions of the majority against the admission of women into these positions. Sir John Simon, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, took no action but 'buried the question until he left office' and Sir Samuel Hoare 'would not touch it'.[16] Sir Anthony Eden published the report as a White Paper in 1936, recording the Government's view that they did not consider that any injustice was being done to women by their continued exclusion from the Diplomatic Service.[17]

Proposals for the readmission of women were revived during the war as a result of criticism of the Foreign Service and Eden published a White Paper on the Reform of the Foreign Service in 1943. In June 1945, Ernest Bevin, the new Labour Foreign Secretary, appointed Gowers to chair another inquiry. The committee deliberated quickly, completing its work in January 1946. Two months later, the Government announced that it had accepted the recommendations.[18]

The committee's report recommended that 'women should be equally eligible with men for admission to the Foreign Service', but that they should be required to resign from the Service if they married,[19] and that movement between the newly unified Foreign Service branches should allow women to move from the clerical branches upwards into the administrative ranks.

Some witnesses suggested that women were 'less objective than men, less capable of keeping secrets, less good at teamwork, more liable to allow authority to go to their heads and more prone to let enthusiasm run away with them'. The Gowers Committee observed that 'Parliament must … have disposed of such arguments as these once and for all by passing the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act'.[20]

Gowers drew on his experience running civil defence in London when considering the claim that women would not fit into the intimate life of the Embassy, or the lonely life of a Consulate, arguing that

since the war had caused men and women to work closely together in so many fields of action and 'if there was ever any doubt about the capacity of women to show courage, resource and leadership in dangerous situations, it has been dispelled for good during the past five years'.[21]

In answer to suggestions that women might be ill-equipped to manage difficult customers, Gowers commented:

> Neither every man nor every woman is equipped by nature to handle unruly fellow-creatures easily and successfully, and we ourselves agree with those witnesses who thought that among those who have the gift, women's sex (femininity) gives them an actual advantage.[22]

The committee's report was published in May 1946. Appointment of the first permanent women diplomats began in the same year. Women were still paid 20 per cent less than men for the same work, a situation that remained until 1955. It was not until 1972 that the marriage bar was rescinded.

Closing Hours of Shops Committee

In 1946 the Home Secretary asked Gowers to chair a committee to look into the provisions of the Shops Acts relating to closing hours, and more generally to look at the health, welfare and safety of employees at places of employment other than those regulated by the Factories or Mines and Quarries Act. This was complex because of the breadth of occupations covered. It was also asked to look in particular at the hours of employment of young people.

Barbara Wootton, one of the members, writes warmly about Gowers' chairmanship:

> All in all, from experience of the many commissions on which I have served, I get the impression that the chairman's job must be a great deal more difficult than it looks. But I hope that all the other chairmen under whom I have served will forgive me, if I say that never have I seen this role so skilfully and delightfully filled as by the late Sir Ernest Gowers. … Sir Ernest's ability to seize the essentials of any discussion and to deflate windbags without loss of good will and good humour on all sides were a constant source of admiration; and his appreciation of the linguistic niceties … made the drafting of our Report an exhilarating intellectual exercise.[23]

Wootton earlier described Gowers 'as much my hero in his capacity of author of *Plain Words* as in his skill and wisdom' as a Chairman.[24] She had to miss some meetings because of ill health. My grandfather wrote to her while she was in hospital:

> So far you have not missed much by being away from our Councils. We were only four in the morning – even Nugent was an absentee – and only three in the afternoon. Before lunch we spent time mostly in trying to decide what ought to be done in theatres without any clear idea of what is done there at present; in the afternoon we had before us two very charming representatives of the National Coal Board, who had come prepared to answer all sorts of questions to which we did not want to know the answers, and could not answer any of the questions we did want to ask.[25]

Lady Nathan, another member, was as impressed by his chairmanship as Wootton:

> Witnesses … were put at their ease. I remember one entering the room looking somewhat nervous. We discussed – among other things – the claim that sweet shops should remain open late, to enable young men to buy sweets for their girl friends. Sir Ernest with a twinkle, suggested 'What about asking Mum to buy them when out shopping in the morning?' 'Oh', said the witness, now quite at ease, 'have a heart, Mr Chairman. What a cold-blooded suggestion'. He had a way with him – penetrating insight, yet with a light touch, which made him an ideal chairman.[26]

The inquiry was complex and the post-war times were hard. An interim report was submitted to the Government in 1947, and a final report in March 1949. It stated that the gravity of Britain's post-war economic difficulties had 'imported a certain unreality into our proceedings' but that the Committee had assumed that they should be acting in accordance with the wishes of the Home Secretary if they ignored the issues that might make some of their recommendations 'not immediately practicable'. Its report made recommendations on what is now occupational health and safety in a wide range of jobs, and also recommended extending the ban on night work by juveniles.

The Gowers Report had flagged that the state of the economy might limit the Government's capacity to implement its recommendations. The TUC pressed the Government to act on the report but the saga

dragged on interminably. One correspondent to *The Times* described the Shops Bill as 'drifting vaguely towards the Commons'.[27] There was debate about how an 'office' could be defined. But at least an Offices Bill went up to Parliament in 1960, 11 years after Gowers submitted his report, to come into force in January 1962.

Houses of Outstanding Historic or Architectural Interest

In December 1948, Gowers was appointed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer,[28] then Sir Stafford Cripps, to chair an inquiry into Houses of Outstanding Historic or Architectural Interest. Cripps was troubled by the accelerating disintegration of notable houses and their contents. The members included Sir John Anderson's wife, Lady Anderson, and Professor Anthony Blunt.

Gowers summed up the problem facing the owners of houses of historic interest in an address to the Institute of Chartered Surveyors in March 1953:

> In 1892 Sir William Harcourt introduced a modest system of death duties, with a levy ranging from one percent on the smallest estates to eight percent on those of a million or more. … From these small beginnings we have now made such progress that the highest rate of death duty is ten times as great – 80 percent instead of eight percent – and of income tax nearly 12 times as great – 19s 6d instead of 1s 8d. Three deaths may reduce an estate of £1million to one of less than £50,999, and no one today can have more than about £6000 to spend, however rich he is, and an income of £100,000 a year or more is needed to give him that.[29]

The Committee decided that it was preferable that houses be lived in than become museums. It recommended offering tax relief to any owner of a house of outstanding importance provided that it was maintained properly and open to the public, thus becoming hereditary custodian of a national asset and receiving suitable assistance from the State to perform that duty.

Gowers presented the Labour Government with a political problem. The newly appointed Minister of Town and Country Planning, Hugh Dalton, was strongly against the proposal to give large tax relief to the 'owners of fine houses', but wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer (now Hugh Gaitskell) that the Government should not seem to be insensitive to the value of the cultural heritage and 'if we let much more time pass, we shall lose beyond recall much that is very beautiful

and characteristic of our genius'.[30] In due course, the recommendations of the Gowers Committee were largely adopted by the Conservative Government that took office in 1951, and incorporated in the Historic Buildings and Ancient Monuments Act 1953. This enabled the establishment of the Historic Buildings Council for England, whose main task was to advise on grants payable under the Act to owners of buildings of outstanding historical or architectural interest.[31]

Gowers was no longer alive when Blunt was publicly exposed as a spy by Margaret Thatcher and so never knew that this particular committee included one member who was rather less than Good. Indeed, to use Orwell's *1984* language, he was doubleplusungood. Gowers would have been profoundly shocked, had he known. He made his views on spies clear to the family when, in the early 1950s, he bought a couple of black sheep to keep the grass down in one of the pastures at Rondle Wood. He named them Burgess and Maclean.

Foot-and-mouth disease inquiry

In 1949 Gowers was appointed to chair the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment. This was so significant for him that it is described separately in the next chapter. But there is one other committee to discuss. In 1952 Gowers was asked by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to chair an internal inquiry into the probable causes and appropriate responses to outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease. By this time he must have become somewhat bemused by the range of inquiries he had been asked to chair, as he somewhat ruefully recalled some years later in a speech to farmers at the Petersfield Autumn Show dinner:

> A few years ago I found myself in the odd position of chairman of a committee on foot-and-mouth disease. Don't ask me why. I have no idea. Perhaps it was on the time-honoured principle of always choosing as chairman of a committee of investigation someone who it is certain knows nothing at all about the subject. Perhaps it was that I was already chairman of a committee on capital punishment; after all, both are concerned with the question whether the slaughter policy is the right one.[32]

There had been considerable debate about the merits of mass vaccination versus slaughter in the event of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. Gowers apparently favoured open hearings. The Minister agreed on the grounds that this would reassure a 'fractious public' but other members of the committee voted for closed hearings, and officials from

the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (which had taken a strong position against vaccination) supported the majority view.[33]

Members visited Argentina and upset the locals by comments in their report about foot-and-mouth coming into Britain through infected meat. *La Prensa* attacked 'Britain's travelling wise men' and said that any Argentinian threat to the British beef industry was not from disease but from the excellence of its beef.[34]

While the eventual report upheld the official belief that there was, at the time, no alternative to slaughter, it did not accept the departmental view that the Ministry had been trying to 'impress so dogmatically upon the nation'.[35] The officials were not pleased, and 'cherry picked' the report's conclusions. Woods suggests that this, coupled with public apathy about foot-and-mouth control 'seriously curtailed the impact of one of the most painstaking, wide-ranging and open-minded enquiries ever undertaken into foot and mouth disease vaccination'.[36] Disagreement between the advocates of slaughter and those of vaccination remained contentious and had not been resolved by the time of the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease crisis in Britain.[37]

All of these reports, important though they were, were relatively straightforward. The complex and politically charged inquiry that had the greatest impact on my grandfather was the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment.

11
Abolishing Capital Punishment

In 1964, Terence Morris and Louis Blom-Cooper dedicated their book *A Calendar of Murder: Criminal Homicide in England since 1957* to:

> Sir Ernest Gowers, GCB, GBE, Chairman of the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment 1949–1953 whose report ranks as one of the great social documents of our age, and whose recommendations have been – to the country's detriment – spurned by the legislature.[1]

The evidence to the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment had a profound effect on Gowers. The framing of the Commission's report, and Gowers' subsequent book, *A Life for a Life? The Problem of Capital Punishment*[2], changed the level of debate over capital punishment in England, contributing significantly to its eventual abolition.

Gowers was appointed chair of the Royal Commission in May 1949. It was given limited terms of reference in an attempt to dampen down what had become a highly charged political debate. Nonetheless its report exerted a strong influence on the discussions that took place between its tabling and the ultimate abolition of the death penalty over a decade later. The report provided evidence in a debate previously notable for the statement of assertions based more on belief than evidence, and clarified a confusion of issues being hotly argued in the political arena and in the media.

The politics of capital punishment

Since the mid-nineteenth century attitudes towards capital punishment had been characterised by strongly held divergent views, reflected in a split between the House of Commons and the House of Lords, with the

Commons eventually tending to favour abolition and the Lords remaining firmly retentionist. In the twentieth century the House of Lords was the source of the greatest resistance towards limiting or abolishing the death penalty. In addition, public opinion polls showed strong and continuing support for the retention of capital punishment.

The British penal code had been roughly similar to that of other comparable European countries until the eighteenth century. However, while criminal justice on the Continent became somewhat more humane under the influence of the Enlightenment, the reverse was true in Britain. Some social historians suggest that this was the result of an expanding and increasingly wealthy governing class who feared the newly industrialised working class. This fear was reflected in a highly punitive law and order regime.

> Between 1700 and 1820 capital offences were increased from about fifty to two hundred and twenty. Of these offences many were quite trivial, if indeed in some cases offences at all – stealing turnips, consorting with gypsies, damaging a fishpond, impersonating an outpensioner at Greenwich Hospital, being found disguised in a rabbit warren, picking a pocket, shoplifting and the like.[3]

There was a history of public relish in executions that were seen as festive occasions. In the mid-eighteenth century there had been 11 public holidays in Britain, three Christian festivals (Christmas, Easter, Whitsun) and the eight hanging days at Tyburn, 'The Kings Gallows'.[4]

> 'Hanging, drawing, and quartering' – the procedure whereby a half-strangled convict is cut down, eviscerated, and castrated alive, and then dismembered and burned – was the big attraction at what is now Marble Arch on the north-eastern corner of Hyde Park, then called Tyburn. Grisly keepsakes were commonplace. Favourable vantage points were for sale. Ministers of religion (usually Protestant) were on hand. Executioners were celebrities. The free availability of strong drink, loose women, and a generalised atmosphere of *fiesta* were of the essence.[5]

However, some measure of humanity began to emerge. Tyburn closed in 1783; then, in the nineteenth century, impetus for change accelerated, partly through the reluctance of juries to bring in a verdict of guilty for minor offences where the only available penalty was death, but also

from concerted pressure from humanitarians, initially led by Sir Samuel Romilly. His Bill to abolish the death penalty for shoplifting to the value of five shillings and over was passed by the Commons, but defeated by the Lords six times: in 1810, 1811, 1813, 1816, 1818 and 1820. It was eventually passed in 1832, 14 years after Romilly's death. By the mid-nineteenth century the 220 capital offences had been reduced to 15, which were consolidated into four: murder, treason, piracy with violence and arson in the royal dockyards.[6] The death penalty was mandatory for anyone convicted of murder. Judges had no sentencing discretion. The decision to recommend the commutation of the death penalty to a prison term rested with the Home Secretary.

The pressure to abolish the death penalty altogether began after the First World War. The Howard League for Penal Reform, a predominantly Quaker organisation formed in 1921, made abolition a principal objective, but it was not until 1929, under a Labour government, that the Parliament established a Select Committee, chaired by Sir Herbert Samuel, to examine the question. The Committee recommended suspension of the death penalty for a five-year trial period.

The recommendation was not adopted by the Commons until nearly ten years later, in 1938, when, in a free vote, the House passed a motion calling for a five-year trial to abolish hanging in peacetime. This motion was stalled in 1939 when the Home Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, opposed the proposed abolition clause being inserted into the wide-ranging Criminal Justice Bill (which proposed changes to a large number of offences and increased the length of jail sentences for many of them). The Bill had reached the Committee Stage in Parliament, and Hoare feared inclusion of the abolition clause might jeopardise its passage. Opposing the clause, Hoare flagged an issue which was to cause great difficulty over the next 25 years. This was whether it was possible to make a legal distinction between one kind of murder and another. When it came to a gradation of killings other than infanticide, he said, the difficulties were almost insuperable. He also asserted his confidence that no one who had been hanged in recent years had been wrongly convicted.[7]

Further consideration of the Criminal Justice Bill was delayed by the onset of the Second World War. However, the abolition issue did not leave the public agenda for long, and became the topic of lively exchanges in the correspondence columns of *The Times* after the war. There was confusion as to whether people should be hanged because they were insane, or whether they should be reprieved for this same reason. Considerable space was given in the correspondence columns to

discussion of the McNaughten Rules on insanity that had applied since 1843. Daniel McNaughten shot Sir Robert Peel's secretary, mistaking him for Peel. McNaughten had an insane delusion that he was being persecuted by Peel. He was tried and acquitted on the ground of insanity. The House of Lords eventually debated the issue and put to Judges five questions about the criminal responsibility of people 'afflicted with insane delusions'. The replies constituted what came to be known as the McNaughten Rules: that 'it must be clearly proved that, at the time of committing the act, the party accused was labouring under such a defect of reason, from disease of the mind, as not to know the nature and quality of the act he was doing, or, if he did know it, that he did not know he was doing what was wrong'.

Another important issue over which there was strong disagreement was whether or not the evidence available supported the popular view that capital punishment had a deterrent effect.

After the war, in November 1947, the Criminal Justice Bill was back on the parliamentary agenda, initially without a clause on capital punishment – which still could be added on a motion after the legislation had been through the committee stage.

It was a Conservative Home Secretary, Samuel Hoare, who had opposed the abolition clause in 1939. The Labour Government that had come to power in 1945 was also apprehensive. The new Home Secretary, Chuter Ede, introducing the Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill in November 1947, said that the Government did not regard the time as 'opportune' to include the clause, because of the rising crime rate, but that it recognised this was a matter on which strong, individual, conscientious feelings were held. In April 1948 a new abolition clause for inclusion in the Criminal Justice Bill, put forward by the most persistent abolitionist in Parliament, Labour member Sidney Silverman, was accepted by the House. The Home Secretary announced that the Government could not recommend the House to support the clause because it was not in accord with public opinion.[8] Nonetheless, in a 'free' vote, in which Ministers were required to vote according to the Government's decision to oppose the clause, the Commons agreed, by a narrow majority, to suspend the death penalty for an experimental period.

The emotions that had been raised by this contentious debate, were running high:

> In spite of the Home Secretary's weightily delivered counsel against such a reform at this time, the House of Commons amid scenes of fervent enthusiasm decided tonight by 245 votes to 222 to suspend for

> an experimental period of five years the death penalty for murder. … It was a remarkable culmination to a debate which one member had described as great and historic, and which had evidently stirred the deepest feelings in the House.
>
> Excitement had been steadily rising in the crowded chamber during the closing stages of the debate on a new clause to be added to the Criminal Justice Bill, but jubilation found vent in a roar of cheering when it was evident how the voting had gone.[9]

The amendment still had to go to the House of Lords, which had traditionally been strongly opposed to abolition. Before the Lords debated the issue, *The Times* considered the nature of the decision they would face, given the not entirely free vote in the Commons, concluding:

> Whatever the strength of the argument for the suspension of the death penalty no responsible supporter of the decision of the House of Commons can reasonably deny that this is a case where the revising and delaying power of the House of Lords can properly be exercised.[10]

Delay it did, decisively, when on 4 June 1948, after a two-day debate, the House of Lords rejected, by 181 to 28, the proposed trial abolition clause. Even for church leaders this was a contentious issue. The Bishop of Chichester voted for the abolition clause but the Bishop of Winchester opposed it. The Judges were also divided. Lord Goddard claimed they were unanimously opposed to the clause, but had to retract his claim when he discovered that two out of the 20 judges supported it.

The Lords' vote presented the Government with a new dilemma:

> The decisive vote of the House of Lords against a suspension of the death penalty confronts the Government with a particularly awkward issue at a time when a more serious clash between the two Houses on the Parliament Bill seems to be impending. By its vote on the death penalty the House of Lords has in effect ranged itself with the Government – though a divided Government – against the House of Commons.[11]

The following month the Government put forward a 'compromise' proposal: to establish two degrees of the offence of murder, and to suspend the operation of the death penalty on murderers found guilty

only in the second degree. The Commons 'in an atmosphere of mounting excitement' adopted the new clause by 307 votes to 209. The game of parliamentary ping-pong continued. The compromise clause went to the House of Lords, where it was rejected 'not merely decisively but derisively'.[12] At this point the Government 'threw in their hand'. The Criminal Justice Bill was passed by the Lords on 5 July 1948, without the abolition clause.[13]

Royal Commission into Capital Punishment established

The abolitionists were still looking for a way out of the deadlock. Conservative MP Christopher Hollis wrote to *The Times* suggesting the need for an impartial inquiry into capital punishment. In November 1948 the Home Secretary told the House that he intended to appoint a Royal Commission. Hennessy describes the establishment of a Royal Commission as the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, 'kicking the issue into touch'.[14] There was a long wait before the Royal Commission was formally established. On 21 January 1949, the Prime Minister finally announced that Gowers would be its chair and provided the terms of reference for the inquiry:

> To consider and report whether liability under the criminal law in Great Britain to suffer capital punishment for murder should be limited or modified, and, if so, to what extent and by what means, for how long and under what conditions persons who would otherwise have been liable to suffer capital punishment should be detained, and what changes in the existing law and the prison system would be required; and to inquire into, and take account of, the position in those countries whose experience and practice may throw light on these questions.

The Royal Commission was constrained by its terms of reference from considering the question of abolition. It was only allowed to consider in what ways the law of capital punishment could be improved, granted that capital punishment was retained. Hollis describes the air of scepticism about its worth:

> Doubtless those who appointed it, and many others, thought that its fate would be the same as that of many other Royal Commissions – a mountain of evidence, a judicious and conscientious report and than a final resting-place in a Whitehall pigeon-hole.[15]

It was not until April that the composition of the Royal Commission was announced. The 11 member committee included criminologist Professor Leon Radzinowicz and one of Gowers' colleagues from the Loan Collection, Sir Alexander Maxwell, who had recently retired as Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office.

Many years later, when in his 90s, Radzinowicz wrote his autobiography. This provides one insider's account of the working of the Royal Commission. It is probably fair to say that in Radzinowicz Gowers found someone whose extrovert nature and flamboyance was similar to that of Admiral Evans. 'Always immaculately dressed in a bespoke suit and handmade shoes he never boarded a bus but travelled everywhere by taxi. He stayed in the best hotels … and enjoyed martinis and good restaurants. He had a reputation as a dynamic and witty conversationalist'.[16] Radzinowicz described the composition of the Royal Commission as an 'exciting human cocktail'. He initially praised the choice of Gowers as chair:

> Sir Ernest Gowers was our star. It would have been very difficult indeed to make a better choice to chair a Royal Commission on Capital Punishment in the prevailing circumstances. With his impressive appearance, perfect manners, imperturbable patience, tactful and yet persisting probing of witnesses, and with a gift for assimilating swiftly the central parts of an issue, he could hardly be equalled, and certainly not surpassed.[17]

However, he tempered this fulsome praise with some acidity:

> He was basically withdrawn, rather cold and very much aloof. A top professional type of Chairman. … He never said foolish things, but equally hardly ever uttered profound or arresting remarks. He had not much of a sense of humour and was invariably solemn.[18]

A letter from Gowers to Barbara Wootton gives some insight into what he himself was thinking during the first weeks of the formal hearings:

> I am not above admitting that it gives me much pleasure to be told such things as you tell me – both queer bits of evidence about the permeation of 'Plain Words' and also what you so charmingly say about your sending your girls to the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment to learn the deportment of the Chair.

> I wish I had you with me there. So far the deepest impression made on me is the astonishing force of *vis inertiae* of the existing state of affairs merely because it is the existing state of affairs. So far all our evidence has been that everything connected with the death penalty is perfect and nothing needs changing in any respect. And when it comes to a selected trio of prison doctors stoutly maintaining, as they did, that no pleasanter or more humane method of disposing of people than hanging could possibly be devised – Well Really, as Lloyd George used to say when there was nothing more to be said.[19]

The Royal Commission held 31 days of formal hearings. A questionnaire was sent to a number of countries, as well as to eight American states. Members visited various European countries in October 1950 and then toured the United States in May 1951. They completed their report in 1953.

Radzinowicz later recalled the atmosphere as the members left their last meeting:

> I well remember the last, late afternoon meeting of the Commission. We dispersed in virtually complete silence, no shaking of hands, no goodbyes, certainly no *au revoir.* Everyone followed his or her destination by underground, bus, car or on foot, as if we had never met before, or possibly only on one or two furtive occasions. … Our almost unreal dispersal was in harmony with our Chairman's temperament and style of life.[20]

The Royal Commission's report

The Royal Commission's report was tabled in Parliament in September 1953. It concluded that there was no single class of offence which varied so widely in character and culpability: the motives may spring from weakness, wickedness, lust, revenge, duty; it may occur in the heat of passion or be brutal and callous to an unbelievable degree.

The Royal Commission found that the statistical evidence on the deterrent effect of capital punishment was not convincing, although 'distinguished judicial witnesses' agreed with the police and prison officials, who were virtually unanimous that it had a deterrent effect on professional criminals; but there were many offenders on whom the deterrent effect was limited or negligible, so the deterrent argument should not be exaggerated.

Constrained by its terms of reference from recommending abolition, the report proposed suggestions for limiting the liability to suffer death for murder, but concluded:

> We began our inquiry with the determination to make every effort to see whether we could not succeed where so many have failed and discover some method of classifying murders so as to confine the death penalty to the more heinous. … We conclude with regret that the object of our quest is chimerical and that it must be abandoned.[21]

The report found that the McNaughten Rules were so defective that the law should be changed either by extending their scope or by abrogating the rules and leaving the jury to decide. The Royal Commission found that it was impracticable to limit the scope of capital punishment by redefining murder more narrowly, and that there was no clear criterion for distinguishing between two degrees of murder.

The Royal Commission also recommended that juries could be asked, if they decided on a verdict of guilty, to find if there were extenuating circumstances. If there were, the sentence would be life imprisonment. This, the Royal Commission argued, would not be too heavy a burden for a jury. Although there might be some diversity of verdicts, this was the only way of limiting the effects of the existing law.

It also examined the methods of execution and concluded that neither electrocution nor the gas chamber had a balance of advantages over hanging, and the method of lethal injections had too many difficulties but should be re-examined in the light of progress in anaesthetics. Barbara Wootton commented that this was a task they discharged with the utmost conscientiousness, despite its 'macabre nature'.[22]

One of the most significant statements in the Report, which suggested an outcome outside the Royal Commission's terms of reference, was that if the recommendation on jury discretion was not acceptable, the real issue became whether capital punishment should be retained at all or should be abolished.

The fate of the report

The proceedings of the Royal Commission had an immediate impact on a number of the key players. For example, in 1951, before the report was published, Lord Templewood (formerly Samuel Hoare), in

his book *The Shadow of the Gallows*, wrote that his 'belief in medical infallibility as to the mental condition of murderers has since been gravely shaken'.[23] The former Home Secretary confessed that if asked the question: 'Am I certain that, during my two years at the Home Office, twenty-four murderers were rightly reprieved, four rightly sent to Broadmoor, and nineteen rightly executed? I cannot honestly say, "Yes". All that I can claim is that I took every possible step to reach the right decision'.[24]

Meanwhile, the abolitionists' case was strengthened in the early 1950s by three hangings that 'profoundly shocked public opinion'; those of Timothy Evans (March 1950)[25], Derek Bentley (January 1953) and Ruth Ellis (July 1955).

Timothy Evans was hanged for the murder of his wife, which he had confessed to. However he was mentally retarded and his evidence was inconsistent. He also claimed that John Christie, with whom he shared a house, was responsible. Christie was later found to have committed multiple murders and was hanged in 1953. A question therefore remained about Evans' guilt, and whether he should have been hanged.

Another mentally retarded man, Derek Bentley, was hanged for his role in the murder, by shooting, of a police officer. The man who pulled the trigger, Christopher Craig, was 16 and therefore under age for the death penalty. Both men were found guilty of murder. Caught on the roof of a building by a police officer who said to Craig 'Give me the gun', Bentley was found by the jury to have encouraged Craig by saying 'Let him have it, Chris!' and being armed with a knife and knuckle-duster. The jury recommended mercy for Bentley but this was not reflected in the Judge's report to the Home Office. It was another case in which the mental capacity, and therefore responsibility, of the condemned man was called into question.

The third case was a *crime passionelle*. Ruth Ellis, an attractive 28-year-old blonde, murdered her lover David Blakely by firing six shots at him outside a public house. Ellis did not leave the scene and asked a waitress to call the police. It took the jury 14 minutes to convict her and she received the mandatory death penalty.[26] A crowd of 1,000 people gathered outside the prison when she was hanged in 1955, and there were many petitions for her reprieve. A teacher from a school near Holloway prison, where Ellis was executed, commented:

> My colleagues and I agree that if there is any argument which weighs above all others for the abolition of capital punishment then it is this

> dreadful influence it has had. For not only was Ruth Ellis hanged today, hundreds of children were a little corrupted.[27]

The Royal Commission into Capital Punishment had been established by a Labour government. The Conservatives were returned to power in 1951. The Royal Commission's report was presented to Parliament in September 1953. There was a long delay before it was debated, although abolitionist Sidney Silverman immediately started to press for a debate.

It was not until February 1955 that the Government submitted a motion asking the House 'to take note of' the report. The Royal Commission had done nothing to weaken the abolitionists' case: on the contrary, it had strengthened it by demolishing the claim that capital punishment had a deterrent effect. An amendment to the Criminal Justice Act 1948, again proposing an experimental suspension of the death penalty, was tabled by 29 members (including four government MPs):

> That this House, taking note of the report of the Royal Commission, is of the opinion that for a period of five years persons convicted of murder in the United Kingdom should be sentenced in place of the death penalty, to imprisonment for life; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government forthwith to introduce legislation to that end.[28]

The amendment was rejected by the Commons. The ever-persistent Mr Silverman then sought leave to introduce a Death Penalty (Abolition) Bill. In 1956, a motion to retain the death sentence but change the law on murder was defeated in the House of Lords. Silverman's Death Penalty (Abolition) Bill was initially approved for consideration in the Commons but was withdrawn when it reached its Second Reading, when it was relegated to the bottom of the list of Private Members' Bills. The Government then introduced a further Bill, which retained the death sentence but introduced degrees of murder with different sentences. This eventually formed the basis of the Homicide Act of 1957.

Gowers was becoming pessimistic about capital punishment being abolished. In an address to law students at Leeds University at about this time, he reiterated the Royal Commission's recommendation that the stage had been reached where 'little more can be done effectively to limit the liability to suffer the death penalty, and the real issue is

now whether capital punishment should be retained or abolished', and concluded:

> In this country, with its population of fifty million, the scope of capital punishment has been so reduced that only about a dozen people are hanged every year. There is clearly not much room for limiting it any more, and the question whether the limitation is left to the Home Secretary, as it is now, or assigned to the jury, as the Commission proposed, is not likely to be regarded by any government as important enough to prompt them to stir up the hornets' nest that any proposal to amend the law would certainly prove to be.
>
> I hope that the Report will be of lasting value to students of law and criminology, for it contains a vast amount of interesting matter. But I would lay long odds against any of its more important recommendations ever being carried out. The lawyers do not like them. The abolitionists do not like them lest reforms in the law relating to capital punishment might give a fresh lease of life to the system itself. I think we shall go on as we are until the day comes, if ever it does come, when public opinion is ripe for abolition.[29]

Gowers concluded his Leeds address by giving his own views on the issue of capital punishment, and the public reluctance to abolish it:

> I think the real reason that moves most of those who oppose the abolition of the death penalty is something more emotional than belief in its value as a deterrent, something less analysable, perhaps less creditable. You may give it what label you like: call it if you will the satisfaction of a desire for revenge, or the exaction of retribution, and there are some murders which in the present state of public opinion, demand the emphatic denunciation of all, or, in the words of one of the most distinguished and thoughtful of the Commission's witnesses, punishment is the 'emphatic denunciation by the community of a crime'.
>
> But what it all boils down to is a vague feeling that those who commit shocking murders ought not to get away with anything less than whatever the State can inflict on them. There are some who think this feeling to be unworthy of a civilised nation. Perhaps it is. But I am sure it has had a strong hold on the people of this country, and so long as this is so, no government can ignore it.
>
> For myself, I regret it. I began this inquiry with an open mind, inclined if anything to favour capital punishment. I ended it a confirmed abolitionist.

Despite his pessimism, the parliamentary pressure to abolish capital punishment continued. On 16 February 1956, in a genuinely free vote, and 'in an atmosphere of intense excitement', the Commons called for immediate legislation to abolish the death penalty for murder or suspend it for an experimental period. This was carried, by 293 votes to 246, as an amendment to the Government motion for retaining the death penalty but amending the law on the crime of murder.[30] *The Times* described the high emotion in the House:

> The chamber was crowded in every corner when the tellers returned with the figures. The buzz of chatter which filled the air mounted in volume as they stood by the table, and as soon as the Clerk handed the voting paper to Mr de Freitas, one of the tellers for the amendment, everybody knew how the decision had gone. … A great cheer burst from scores of throats and excited members … there was a pause while Mr de Freitas struggled to control his feelings before he could announce the result.[31]

The Times asserted that it was now reasonably certain that capital punishment for murder would be quickly ended. The Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, told the House that the Government had decided to allow a Second Reading of Silverman's Bill rather than putting forward a Bill of its own.

A Life for a Life? The Problem of Capital Punishment

Gowers himself had been profoundly affected by the evidence the inquiry heard and collected. He had not been content to leave the report gathering dust. Now free from the constraints of the Royal Commission's terms of reference, he decided to write a book about the Royal Commission and the reason for his change of heart. The result was *A Life for a Life? The Problem of Capital Punishment*, published in 1956, in which he explained how he had been converted from the middle ground to become firmly abolitionist:

> Before serving on the Royal Commission, I, like most other people, had given no great thought to this problem. If I had been asked for my opinion, I should probably have said that I was in favour of the death penalty and disposed to regard abolitionists as people whose hearts were bigger than their heads. … In the end I became convinced that the abolitionists were right in their conclusions – though

> I could not agree with all their arguments – and that, so far from the sentimental approach leading into their camp and the rational one into that of the supporters it was the other way round.[32]

With his publishers, Chatto and Windus, Gowers timed the book's publication to ensure it had maximum publicity before the Second Reading of Silverman's Bill. He wrote to my father from Rondle Wood on 3 February 1956, to report on its progress:

> My D-Day is 27 February. I believe it is an all-time record for speed in publishing. A spot of serialisation first in the Evening News, which the Editor insists must be before the Commons debate. Every MP has been sent a notice of the book by the publisher. I have sent the Bishop of Chichester a copy and he is lunching here tomorrow to be briefed for his speech in the Lords.[33]

Professor James Christoph assessed *A Life for a Life?* in an overview of four books arguing the abolitionist case at the time[34]:

> The fourth book that appeared at that moment, Sir Ernest Gowers' *A Life for a Life?*, was in a class by itself. … More important than the book's judicious and unemotional examination of the controversy was the revelation that Sir Ernest, Chairman of the Royal Commission on Capital Punishment of 1949–53 and the very model of the cautious and discreet civil servant, had become a convert to abolition. The conversion was all the more impressive because it had occurred quietly and only after long deliberation.[35]

Hollis agreed:

> It is probably to Sir Ernest Gowers more than to any other individual that we owe the growth of public suspicion that it is really the retentionists who are sentimentalists.[36]

Gowers' decision to write *A Life for a Life?* clearly rankled with Radzinowicz in his later years:

> We … felt encouraged when, after our report had been printed, each of us refrained from giving any interviews, in the press or on the radio, or making any other pronouncements. The report was

our collective effort and we believed it should speak for itself and for us. Sir Ernest was the only one who 'went public' on the issue. He granted interviews to one or two organisations known for their abolition views and he published a book, *A Life for a Life?*, a skilful but rather pedantic *resume*, of the evidence and of the report. He also announced his conversion to the abolitionist cause, but at the same time safeguarded his position with the correct wording of a well-seasoned civil servant.[37]

1957 Homicide Act

In March 1956 Silverman's Death Penalty (Abolition) Bill was carried by the House of Commons with a majority of 24, but this time the atmosphere was more subdued. The Bill moved forward to the Committee Stage. *The Times* reported that there was optimism about its passage through the Lords.

The optimism was misplaced. In July, 333 peers turned out to take part in the House of Lords debate. On 11 July the Lords appeared to surprise themselves when they rejected the Bill, in a free vote, by 238 to 95: 'when the Lord Chancellor read the result there was a gasp of surprise, apparently at the size of the majority'.[38] Sir John Anderson, by now Viscount Waverley, was one of the peers who spoke opposing the Bill in the Lords.[39]

It took nearly ten years for public opinion to change enough to accept the abolition of capital punishment. In the meantime, the Government put forward a Bill to restrict the death penalty to five forms of murder and to repeated murder – grading murders in the very way that had been firmly rejected by the Royal Commission. After extensive debate at the Committee Stage both in the House of Commons and later the Lords, the Homicide Act 1957 was passed and came into operation on 21 March 1957.

In the Homicide Act the law of murder was amended by abolishing 'constructive malice' – the doctrine that killing in the course of committing an offence where there was no intention to kill was reckoned as murder. The law recognised that the killer, even though not unfit to plead, may yet be a person suffering from diminished responsibility. The survivor of a suicide pact, who has killed the partner of the pact, was guilty of manslaughter and not of murder. A distinction was made between categories of murder. Certain murders were identified as capital murders. Only those who by their own act committed the murder were guilty of capital murder. Accomplices were not guilty

of capital murder. For non-capital murders the punishment was life imprisonment.

Hollis comments that there was nobody who favoured such a law on its own merits:

> The very Government that passed it had declared against it only two months before. As Lord Templewood very fairly put it in the debate in the House of Lords, it was 'nothing more than an expedient to extricate the Government out of a difficult position'.[40]

Barbara Wootton's assessment of the 1957 Homicide Act was that it was an outstanding example of the inability of the British ever to reach a sensible conclusion except by way of an illogical compromise:

> During the eight years in which all its provisions were in force, the absurdity and injustice of the distinction between capital and non-capital murders was amply demonstrated.[41]

Abolition of capital punishment

People were gradually changing their minds about capital punishment. Herbert Morrison, with whom Gowers had worked closely during the war, was a late convert to the abolitionist cause, influenced by Gowers:

> He was greatly influenced by Sir Ernest Gowers … for whom Morrison had enormous respect. 'He is not over-emotional or sentimental. No thoughtful person could afford to ignore his judgment'.[42]

In 1957, Oxford's Professor of Jurisprudence, H. L. A. Hart wrote an assessment of the Royal Commission's report:

> Within the confines of this report, there is a far more comprehensive, dispassionate, and lucid evaluation of the arguments both as to questions of fact and to questions of law and principle relevant to murder and its punishment, than in any of the many books published in either of our countries [Britain and the US] on this subject. Certainly the publication of this report in England introduced altogether new standards of clarity and relevance into discussions of a subject which had too often been obscured by ignorance and prejudice. The value of this most remarkable document was not diminished by the fact

> that the Commission's terms of reference postulated the retention of the death penalty.[43]

It was not until 1965, the year before my grandfather died, that capital punishment was effectively[44] abolished for a five-year trial period (it was totally abolished four years later). The Murder (Death Penalty Abolition) Bill was sponsored in the House of Commons by the doggedly persistent Sidney Silverman, and in the Lords by Gowers' friend Baroness Barbara Wootton.[45]

Towards the end of his life Gowers said that of all the inquiries he had been asked to chair, the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment was 'far, far the most interesting'[46], and, one might add, the one that most profoundly moved him.

My grandfather established a tradition of reading aloud to his grandchildren after lunch at Rondle Wood. He often discussed his current work with family and friends gathered there. In 1953, when I was 15, he chose to read excerpts from the report on capital punishment to those assembled to enjoy the sun and the traditional Rondle Wood relaxations. He described the evidence heard at the Royal Commission, and tested his arguments on the family, particularly when he was writing *A Life for a Life?*. The report of the Royal Commission, and the conviction that prompted him to write *A Life for a Life?*, made a great impression on me – at an impressionable age. We sat on the lawn with the summer sun warming us, after a lunch accompanied by the home-made ginger beer that was a much-anticipated pleasure when staying with him, and listened to the meticulous description of the horrific detail of execution by hanging, punctuated by comments about some of the detail from evidence that did not reach the published report. It made a lasting impression on me, but also (and this impact came later) his discussion about how the Royal Commission gathered its evidence, and what it then concluded, was the best tuition I could have received on research method and how to draw conclusions from the evidence.

In *A Life for a Life?*, Gowers led the reader through the arguments and the evidence, and concluded:

> It would be difficult to say just what it was that converted me to this [abolitionist] view; it was the cumulative effect of many things, including such considerations as the right approach for a professedly Christian people, the manifestly objectionable, not to say repulsive, features of capital punishment and the morbid interest they excite,

the possibility, however small, of hanging an innocent man and the large part that the element of vengeance seems to play in the demand for capital punishment. Perhaps the turning-point was when I learned what a large number of applications there were for the post of hangman. Any State institution, I thought, that inspires ambitions of that sort in its citizens, and satisfies some of them, though it does not necessarily stand condemned, surely does need to justify itself on utilitarian grounds.[47]

12
Plain Words

Genesis

In 1946 Sir Edward Bridges wrote asking Gowers to write a pamphlet on official English for the Civil Service. Gowers' interest in clarity and precision in Civil Service English had started long before 1946. He had written the article 'Mainly About the King's English' for the Institute of Public Administration in 1927.[1] He drew attention to his personal crusade in his farewell speech to the London Civil Defence Region at the end of the war. After summing up what he hoped had been his contribution to the Region's achievements (mainly, in characteristic style, referring to his ability to pick good people for the jobs that had to be done), he concluded:

> But perhaps in order to do myself full justice I ought to add this; that I have tried to preach the doctrine that the proper use of words is not to darken counsel but to convey ideas. In this, however, I am diffident about claiming any marked success.[2]

He had addressed his civil defence troops about English usage in one of a series of occasional lectures he initiated during the Lull. His audience had enjoyed his talk, and word got back to Bridges.

Towards the end of the war, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Ralph Assheton, had chaired a committee on Civil Service training, which reported in 1944.[3] It looked generally at the training of civil servants, and also whether a staff college should be established. It rejected the latter, recommending instead that the Treasury appoint a director of training and exercise control over all Civil Service training. Each department should have a training scheme, and large departments should

have a full-time departmental training officer. Bridges appointed Paul Sinker to the new position of Director of Education and Training for the Treasury. Other departments followed suit, appointing their own training directors.

Gowers started work on the pamphlet in September 1946. Early in 1947 Sinker wrote to a number of departmental heads seeking their cooperation with the project, saying that this pamphlet would be 'the opening shot in a long term campaign designed to improve the standard of written communications with the public'. One of the objectives of this campaign would be to tackle the special problem confronting many civil servants, namely how to interpret the law to the man-in-the street.[4] This was a problem that Gowers had first confronted before the First World War, with the need to explain the National Insurance Act to the public.

In April 1947, the departmental training officers decided that a committee should be appointed to make recommendations on training in the use of English and established an Advisory Committee the following August.[5] Representatives of the sub-committee visited the Civil Service Commission to look at the examination scripts written by candidates in the clerical examinations and the comments made by the Commission's examiners. After this visit, the members recorded their impressions in a file note:

> The general impression [of the sub-committee representatives] is that the English is of a reasonable standard though often marred by faults essentially typical of modern days, due largely to the influences which are brought to bear upon young people, eg. films, novels, the press, advertisements, service slang. Although much of the work was marred by faults due to the above influences, yet the writing was often lively and alert and showed promise in so far that it indicated considerable mental agility, which was evidenced by a spate of words which though often ill-arranged and uncouth was capable of reduction and pruning. There is definitely no trace of the peculiar vices of Civil Service phraseology such as pomposity, meaninglessness, and stilted diction. It would seem that these are developed after entry from the bad example set by senior officers. The main faults noted by the examiners in the scripts were colloquialism, long-windedness, diffuseness, irrelevance and moralising.[6]

The committee commented on drafts as Gowers wrote his pamphlet. One of the members, Wyn Griffith, had been appointed to the new

position of Staff Training Officer in the Department of Inland Revenue. He had recently been honing his Civil Service writing skills by having to explain the new Pay As You Earn (PAYE) tax system to the general public. He took a particular interest in the preparation of *Plain Words*, and Gowers greatly valued his contribution. In its preface, Gowers said that the book owed much to the 'fertile suggestions and candid criticisms of one who is both an official of wide experience and professional writer of rare skill in the precise and delicate handling of words'.[7] Gowers' respect for Griffith is clear from a progress report to Sinker written in September:

> I have rewritten Chapters IV and V and am waiting for them from the typist. I will let you have them as soon as possible, but I must find out first what Wyn Griffith has to say about them, as they are an attempt to meet a criticism first made by him. Besides, I have got myself into a state in which I don't feel any confidence in myself unless he approves.[8]

Consultation was not confined to Wyn Griffith. All the members of the Advisory Committee commented on the drafts. Gowers ends a letter to Sinker:

> I enclose your suggestions, with notes about what I have done about them. I am most grateful. I always myself feel a shade resentful if I have made suggestions about anything and they disappear into silence.

The pamphlet became a book. It was Wyn Griffith who spotted that *Plain Words* might appeal to a much wider audience. As an author himself, he advised Gowers to find a commercial publisher, both on financial grounds and because of the greater prestige he thought a commercial publication would have. However, the Treasury was keen to have it published quickly by the Stationery Office (HMSO). Handing over to a commercial publisher, they feared, might add a year's delay to publication as well as make the book more expensive. The Treasury was also concerned that the higher cost of a commercial publication might be a deterrent for the very people it was aimed towards, the civil servants. Thomas Padmore, who had a central role in the negotiations, pointed out that it would be good for the Civil Service to be seen sponsoring Gowers rather than allowing a private publisher to get the

kudos. Gowers discussed the options with Bridges, who showed him some Stationery Office publications. He took away some specimens showing how nicely the HMSO could print, including a volume on 'edible fungi'.[9] They agreed that the Stationery Office should be the publisher.

When the draft was ready, it was sent up the chain of command to Bridges. Sinker added a handwritten comment to his covering briefing note to Padmore: 'Incidentally, one of the best things in the book is the contribution from a 10-year-old in Chapter V'. Padmore added a note to the file agreeing that the essay by the ten-year-old was the funniest thing he had read in years. The essay in question had been written by a wartime evacuee, and was his response to an invitation to write an essay on a bird and a beast. It was included in *Plain Words* in the chapter 'The Choice of Words':

> The bird that I am going to write about is the Owl. The Owl cannot see at all by day and at night is as blind as a bat.
>
> I do not know much about the Owl, so I will go on to the beast which I am going to choose. It is the Cow. The Cow is a mammal. It has six sides – right, left, an upper and below. At the back it has a tail on which hangs a brush. With this it sends the flies away so that they do not fall into the milk. The head is for the purpose of growing horns and so that the mouth can be somewhere. The horns are to butt with, and the mouth is to moo with. Under the cow hangs the milk. It is arranged for milking. When people milk, the milk comes and there is never an end to the supply. How the cow does it I have not yet realised, but it makes more and more. The cow has a fine sense of smell; one can smell it far away. This is the reason for the fresh air in the country.
>
> The man cow is called an ox. It is not a mammal. The cow does not eat much, but what it eats it eats twice, so that it gets enough. When it is hungry it moos, and when it says nothing it is because its inside is all full up with grass.

Gowers comments that the writer had something to say and said it as clearly as he could, and had unconsciously achieved style. The essay was such a hit that it was even set to music by American composer, Celius Dougherty.[10]

The pamphlet went up to Bridges for final approval in October 1947, Sinker and Padmore having agreed that it was 'admirable for its purpose'.

Plain Words was published by HMSO in April 1948. It became an almost instant best-seller, running to seven reprints in the first year alone.

> When *Plain Words* first came out, in April, 1948, it was evident to those with an ear for such things that here was something quite outstanding in the art of writing lucid prose. … For many of us the war, amongst other losing battles, had involved a running fight with the flood of turgid circulars descending ceaselessly from above. It seemed almost too good to be true when Sir Ernest produced these lessons for officialdom, and the wonder grew when his little book ran into seven printings before the year was out.[11]

Although there was a favourable review of *Plain Words* in the Institute of Public Administration's journal *Public Administration*,[12] some civil servants did not welcome the book quite as enthusiastically as the general public and the reviewers. One of the contributors to the history of Harlow New Town provides an interesting explanation of his own for Gowers not having his term as Chairman of the Development Corporation renewed:

> We ought not to forget the very mixed feelings which the publication of *Plain Words* provoked in Civil Service circles. Sir Thomas Sheepshanks, who was then Permanent Secretary at the Ministry, made the point that a number of very senior people felt the work demeaned the civil servant.[13]

But this is only one negative note from someone with an axe to grind renowned for his own brand of officialese. Gowers had trodden on many bureaucratic toes when *Plain Words* popularised the American expression 'Gobbledygook'. None of the letters of congratulation have survived though there are many reviews from the press. One gets a glimpse of how Gowers felt from a letter he wrote to Barbara Wootton when she wrote to congratulate him. She received the following response (which is some comfort for those of us who battle with grammar):

> I do thank you for your letter with all of my heart. I have been getting quite a lot of uplift-feelings lately by reading praises of 'Plain Words'. I admit to shakiness in pronouns. I keep on catching myself out – or, what is worse, wondering whether I have caught myself out or not.[14]

By December 1949, the Stationery Office had sold 200,000 copies of *Plain Words*.

A fight for royalties

During their negotiations over *Plain Words*, the Treasury offered Gowers a lump sum of £500 for writing the pamphlet. This became something of a cause celebre in the Civil Service because Gowers asked to receive royalties instead. The Treasury refused, and Gowers said he would talk this issue through with 'a friend of his' who was a literary agent (A. S. Watt, with whom Gowers had worked in the First World War when Watt was literary agent for Wellington House). Gowers reported to Sinker:

> I have had a talk to Watt. He makes light of possible objections to publication by the Stationery Office – especially when set in the balance against their advantage in speed and paper resources – with one exception. That exception is, of course, the ban on royalties, and I confess it to be a disadvantage that I should find it a struggle to swallow.[15]

A lengthy correspondence followed, and the issue re-emerged each time the book was revised and expanded. Gowers, with Watt behind him, was not prepared to concede what he felt was his right to royalties, particularly as a lump sum paid in a single year would incur heavy supertax. In addition, Gowers wanted 'a bit of a flutter' rather than accepting the relatively generous lump sum (compared to major authors recruited to write the official histories of the war).

The difficulty with the royalties was not resolved until after the book was published. In August 1948, Padmore went on leave and the file went straight up to Bridges, who wrote to Gowers:

> You have been having correspondence with Padmore about 'Plain Words'. Padmore is on leave. Assuming that he has not been washed into the sea by the recent downpour he will be back on the 23rd August. It might well be more satisfactory for both of you to wait until he is back. But lest you should feel that it is discourteous of us to leave your letter of 31st July so long unanswered I should be very ready to stand in his place and do a battle with you in the meantime. But I would much rather discuss the matter with you than write letters. Like you, I hate arguments about money – although I must admit that you do it frightfully well. But the arguments are much better face to face.[16]

Gowers finally won his royalties. Given the book's instant success, the Treasury must have found their position weakening. In October 1948 he wrote to Padmore:

> It is a great pleasure to me that you have been able to arrange that all ends happily, and I am most grateful to you. It makes me feel faintly guilty, but I do not think that I have really been unreasonable.[17]

The letter has a file note in which one member of the losing side has underlined 'happily' and written 'I don't know that anyone except EG is rapturously happy'. The final bargain struck was for a flat rate royalty 'inclusive of official copies' of 1s 6d per copy.

In its *Government Publishing and Bookselling*, the Stationery Office described the arrangements for publication of *Plain Words* as 'without precedent in official publishing and the controversy of terms with the author emphasised the difficulties of reconciling the private rights of authorship with the official conception of publishing by retired civil servants'.[18] In 1988, Richard Chapman gave an assessment of the Treasury's stance on the issue:

> Reading the Treasury files now, many years after the events, the Treasury attitude appears exceedingly mean towards Gowers, and short-sighted about the reflected benefits on the civil service. The sensitivity was, of course, heightened because Gowers was behaving out of character for an individual in his position. Gowers, having created an asset by his own effort in his own time did not see why he should sacrifice it to the public interest simply because the suggestion that he should write the book came from the Treasury and the Treasury was expecting him to give up his interest in the work. Bridges continued his active involvement in the matter, issuing clear instructions to Padmore who was dealing with Gowers: 'Wrestle with him and explain that we are giving him a very substantial share of the profits: and that the sort of figures he has suggested really are not practical politics'.[19]

The *ABC of Plain Words*

In 1948 the Treasury, buoyed by the strength of the public enthusiasm for what had started life as an in-house Civil Service training manual,

decided that a book, arranged alphabetically, would be useful; something that civil servants would keep beside them as a reference book. Gowers agreed to take on this new commission, and by March 1949 had produced a first draft, ready for circulation to the Advisory Committee coordinating the project. Unfortunately the production proved far slower than he had expected.

The first draft was circulated to the Advisory Committee for comment. Gowers was immersed in the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment. In April 1949 they were still discussing how best to organise the *ABC*. Gowers was offered a copy editor. He accepted gratefully. In May, the Treasury's Miss Kirk was appointed editor of the new book. Gowers sent her his first draft:

> Here is the last of the bits I have, with many thanks. I think some attention is still needed to making sure there is uniformity in the terms used to describe the cases – nominative or subjective, accusative or objective, genitive or possessive – whatever it has been decided they should be called.[20]

The following month he wrote:

> You told me some time ago that I ought to have a section on double negatives. I agree, and have written one which you will say is too highbrow, but I shall stick up for it.[21]

By August 1949, after much correspondence between the author and the editor, it appeared the book was about ready to go in to the HMSO for typesetting. To speed up the book's production, the Advisory Committee proposed to Gowers that readers could be invited to send in suggested additions and amendments from which improvements could be introduced in later editions. Gowers said he was 'willing to accept the risk of a flood'.

Towards the end of the year galley proofs were distributed for a final check. This was obviously a painful process. There were many suggested corrections to the proofs. Griffith wrote to Kirk:

> Phew!!! I've been through it all again and made notes of points to discuss on Thursday afternoon. I daren't think what HMSO will say when they see the proofs![22]

When the final draft went to Sir Edward Bridges for approval, the accompanying memorandum mentioned the royalties again. By this time the Treasury had conceded defeat.

> Until *Plain Words* we had always stood firm on the principle that authors of official publications, eg. the Histories of the War, should be paid a lump sum and not on a royalty basis. When we discussed with Sir Ernest Gowers the arrangements for *Plain Words* he wanted to back his fancy and he stood out for royalties. As the value of *Plain Words* depended mainly on what he put into it himself rather than on what he derived from official sources, we gave way. We propose to make the same arrangements for the second book. The Stationery Office are quite content.[23]

It was approved. It was not quite the end of the story on royalties because a question was asked in Parliament about the income from *Plain Words*. As a result, Bridges initiated internal discussion about formulating a general rule about disclosing fees paid to authors.

The Treasury wanted the book to be published before Christmas, and set out a timetable to try to ensure this, but there was trouble in the Stationery Office. By December 1950 Gowers was becoming anxious. He wrote a despairing letter to Miss Kirk:

> I should be grateful for any news you can give me of the progress (if any) of the ABC. If I remember rightly, it must be nearly a year since we passed the typescript to HMSO. Even making allowance for heavy proof-correcting and compositors' strike, the movement since then seems leisurely; I hope complete coma has not supervened. I shall be disappointed if it is not published until I am dead, and my expectation of life is only about eight years.[24]

The following day the Treasury responded saying that the Stationery Office had to make fresh galleys because there had been so many corrections and that, indeed, it had been held up by the compositors' dispute. The galleys had only just arrived. 'Needless to say we hope there won't be many more alterations, otherwise I'm afraid the Stationery Office will explode.' When returning his marked galleys, Gowers said that he hoped he would be regarded as meritorious for his restraint in proof-correcting.

The Christmas deadline was not met. In a sharp letter to the Treasury towards the end of January 1951 Gowers was losing patience with the HMSO:

> I am disturbed about my ABC. The story of it is something like this. I wrote it during the winter of 1948/9 and sent it to the Treasury in May 1949. Miss Kirk and Miss Norman were good enough to do a lot of work on it; it was submitted to several training pundits, and there were some conferences on it. It did not get to the Stationery Office until the beginning of 1950. But that was a year ago, and there it has been ever since, except for a few weeks in the summer for the correction of the first proofs and a few days in December for correction of the revise. When, before *Plain Words* was published, there was some argument about who should publish, I was told that what was greatly in favour of HMSO was that they could arrange for publication so much more quickly than a private publisher. And so it proved. They had the typescript in, I think, December, and the book was out in April. But this time I believe that they kept the typescript for months before they even set it up. I was asked to write the book by the Treasury, who said it was urgently needed; I have put myself to a good deal of trouble to do it as quickly as I could, and I must say that I think I have a grievance. Other similar books are coming out thick and fast; soon all my thunder will be stolen and everyone will be sick of the subject.
>
> I am not asking for a post-mortem on the past; that never does any good. But I do hope I can rely on you to see that everyone now does everything possible to speed up publication.[25]

But even then he could not quite let the text alone. In April he wrote to ask his contact whether it was too late to cut out one sentence from the *ABC*:

> It has occurred to me that I have been guilty of one gross piece of pedantry, and I should like to escape the reproach of it if I can.[26]

The *ABC of Plain Words* was finally published in October 1951. The Stationery Office did not believe that they could have a second best-seller on their hands. Referring to the success or otherwise of 'permanent textbooks' they commented:

> There are few examples in the history of publishing or authorship of the exceptional harmony being repeated in the second edition or

> another volume of the same series or a book on another subject by that same author.[27]

They were wrong. The *ABC of Plain Words* was also a bestseller. By 1952, an additional 17,135 copies of *Plain Words* had been sold, and 78,279 copies of the *ABC*. Gowers received 1s 6d for each *Plain Words* sold and 2.4d for each *ABC* (proportional to the increased price of the book).

The Stationery Office had been negotiating with Gowers on the Treasury's behalf. When they wanted to raise the sale price of *Plain Words*, it appears that HMSO felt that, as Gowers had done well out of his 'little flutter' (over £17,000 by that stage), he should not be allowed a corresponding rise in royalties. This was made explicit in a memorandum that eventually made its way up to Bridges:

> I am sure that, if the price is raised, no higher royalty would be justified. The full story in the file shows why Sir Ernest should not be given the slightest pretext to claim an increase.[28]

There was an additional file note from Sinker, 'Spoke to Sir EB who thought we should try to hold the [*Plain Words*] line at 1s 6d'. Sinker sent a memorandum to Padmore saying that although on paper it was possible to argue that 2.4d [for the *ABC of Plain Words*] was generous:

> I don't think we could have done any better by direct negotiation with Sir Ernest Gowers, and I don't know of anybody in Treasury who would have wanted to take him on in such a negotiation, so it seems to be all tied up and accepted by him.

Against 'anybody' Padmore added a brief marginal note 'Nor I!'.[29]

The Complete Plain Words

Gowers, his advisers, and his editor had been worried about the structure of the *ABC*. These were resolved when it was decided to combine the two books in a successor, *The Complete Plain Words*. The Stationery Office decided not to reprint the separate volumes and to ask Gowers to undertake the revision. This book, published in September 1954, was also a bestseller. One final royalties battle had to be fought. In July 1956, the price of *The Complete Plain Words* was increased to 6s. When the Treasury informed Gowers of this and suggested that the royalty should continue at the existing rate, he did not accept their argument that they were simply covering costs. In fact they had built

in an increase in their profits from the book. Without going into any of the detail, it is significant that the internal memo about the royalties said that the topic of the rate of royalty payable to Gowers had 'raised it ugly head again':

> You ought however perhaps to remind yourself that the royalty rate in respect of Plain Words was fixed only after a protracted and somewhat acrimonious period of negotiation between Sir Thomas Padmore and the author.[30]

It appears that my grandfather named a dog after Padmore. At the end of the war he wrote to my father from the Natural History Museum that my grandmother had gone down to Rondle Wood to 'sit and whistle for Padmore'. This was before the battle over royalties started. He may simply have been amused by the fact that Padmore was such an appropriate name for a dog. He did not have any animal named after other colleagues with Dickensian names such as Sheepshanks, Sinker or Schooling.

In 1952 Penguin Books offered to republish *Plain Words* and the *ABC* as a combined edition. This was turned down by the Stationery Office, after consulting Gowers, because it was felt that their royalties were unlikely to be high enough to compensate for the loss of sales of the official edition.

The Complete Plain Words was published by HMSO in September 1954 (Gowers negotiated a royalty of 3.2d). In 1962, Penguin Books again offered to re-issue the book in their Pelican imprint. The offer was accepted and the proceeds were shared equally between the Stationery Office and Gowers.[31] By December 1962 Gowers had received a total of £5,852.4.9d in royalties from HMSO, Penguin Books and Knopf (whose American edition was less successful than the British ones).[32] So from his perspective it was worth having held out for royalties rather than accept the original lump sum offer.

Despite the haggling that went on over the royalties, the Treasury was pleased with the publications it had commissioned. When Gowers' revision of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* was published, Bridges wrote to congratulate him:

> I was tremendously impressed with the high purpose and faith and self-confidence which you must have had to start on the heavy task of revision of this book at the age 78 and to spend eight years on the job, and to bring it to such an outstandingly successful conclusion

at the age of 85. Very few people can have achieved anything comparable with this.

Then again I feel a certain sense of personal satisfaction that some part in your work on the English language was played by my invitation to you to write an introduction to the course of instruction to civil servants in the way in which they should use the English language. This pleases me more, I expect, than it ought to.[33]

Gowers and the language zealots

Gowers himself became concerned at the response of the language zealots, who misinterpreted or misunderstood his message. He reflected on the impact of *Plain Words* four years after it was first published, to a group of English teachers, and what he saw as the misplaced enthusiasms of some grammarians.[34] He began by musing over how he himself had been taught English:

As I look back on the now distant days of my own education there is very little direct instruction in the handling of words that stands out in my memory. I have dim recollections of being set at a very tender age to do something called 'parsing and analysis' – a form of mental gymnastic that I thought at the time exceptionally revolting, though I fancy it may in fact have been useful, like the scaffolding that can be taken down when it has helped to build something more durable. I remember – more vividly – it is indeed an unforgettable memory – being called on at the age of ten to write my first essay – an ordeal that ended with tears of shame that I should have been so poorly endowed by Providence with the blessed gift of creative imagination – a misfortune that still depresses me from time to time, though I no longer show my regret in the same way. Later in my school career I remember clearly being taught to avoid the solecism committed by the translators of the New Testament in the sentence 'whom say men that I am'. At Cambridge I recollect being taught not to split infinitives and, more usefully, to curb the exuberant rhetoric to which youth is prone. But I remember little other instruction than this in the art of expressing myself, though I daresay there may have been a little here and there.

I have spent much of what is now a longish life amid the torrent of words, written or spoken, that are the life-blood of our present-day democracy, sometimes battling with it, sometimes adding to it

> myself. And I have found much interest in the study of the use of words as a vehicle for conveying thought from one mind to another. It was as a result of that study that I wrote my book.

He then turned to his choice of *Plain Words* as a title, and the problems this appeared to have caused:

> I chose its title after much thought and rejecting many alternatives. In a way, that choice has proved unfortunate. 'Plain Words' has become a sort of cliché associated with my name, and I have been taken to task by some critics for preaching a doctrine I never intended. It has been said that the cult of plain words will produce a style just as artificial and unnatural, and therefore just as bad, as the use of words that are not plain, if those are a writer's natural method of expression. Thus I seem to have unwittingly added yet another to those vague and dangerous clichés that are so rife nowadays, to which we can all attach any meaning we please, and so save the trouble of thought.
>
> All I had in mind by the doctrine of plain words was this: that one ought to be clear about what one means to say and then say it in a way readily intelligible to the person one says it to. I advocated it because I could not help noticing how much of what is written nowadays cannot be readily intelligible to the person addressed, if indeed intelligible at all, and sometimes, one cannot help suspecting, not overclear to the writer himself. George Orwell, in his picture of 1984, imagined a new language called Newspeak, forced on the then totalitarian world, intended not only to provide a medium of expression for the world view and mental habits proper to the devotees of the conquering doctrine, but to make all other modes of thought impossible, and indeed ultimately to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centres at all.
>
> The kind of writing I had in mind when I chose my title is that which has as its purpose to convey information, not to awaken emotion – that functional writing which so many have to attempt nowadays as an incident of their daily life and so few can hope to avoid having to read. …
>
> Another way in which this campaign [of the zealots] is misdirected is its excessive concentration on the Civil Service. That is perhaps natural enough. Officials are specially vulnerable; they write so much, and we all have to read so much of what they write; and as it generally tells us to do something we do not want to do or to refrain

from doing something we do want to do, we are inclined to approach it in a critical spirit. Mocking our officials is a national pastime of great antiquity, and arises no doubt from a commendable trait in our national character. But it can be carried too far. I do not deny that the official has a literary style of his own, but on the whole he is no worse than other people – he is better than the business man – and to concentrate the attack on him is unfair, and liable to defeat its purpose by putting his back up and making him think that the doctrine of plain words is bunk. …

I suppose what it all boils down to in the end is clarity of thought. 'Accurate writing depends on accurate thinking' said Horace in the *Ars Poetica* nearly 2,000 years ago, and many have repeated the same thing since. I believe that the question of how far thought is possible without words is one about which philosophers and psychologists argue. But it must surely be true that, as the Departmental Committee said:

> What a man cannot state he does not perfectly know, and, conversely, the inability to put his thoughts into words sets a boundary on his thought. … English is not merely the medium of our thought: it is the very stuff and process of it.

Teaching boys and girls to think clearly must be at once the most important and the most difficult of a teacher's tasks. His pupils will grow up under a constitution that puts its faith in the ordinary citizen and relies on his thinking sensibly. That theory runs through the whole structure, from the jury box to the ballot box. At the same time the modern extension of the paternal functions of government tempts the ordinary citizen to the illusion that he need not think for himself, so largely is his way of life ordered for him. Yet on his continuing to think for himself depends the continuance of democracy as we understand it. And so, if it is true, as I think it is, that the right teaching of English is the best way of teaching clarity of thought, then exceptional responsibility and exceptional opportunity do indeed rest with those who teach their mother-tongue.

Revisions of *Plain Words*

It was not long after his death that my father and his two sisters had to make decisions about revision of *The Complete Plain Words*. They were concerned (as Gowers himself was when he revised Fowler's *Modern English Usage*) that any revision maintained the character of the originator.

By the time Gowers came to write *The Complete Plain Words* he could record that great pains were being taken to train civil servants to write clear and straightforward English. He added that there might not yet have been much to show for it in results. The demand for his books led to two revisions.

In February 1964, the Stationery Office wrote to Gowers asking him whether he was willing to consider working on a revision of *The Complete Plain Words* because their stocks were dwindling. In March, at the age of 84, he wrote back to say he was preoccupied with the *MEU* revision but that after that he would be happy to 'give it a go'. The Stationery Office decided that they would have to go ahead with a photographic reprint, because of the potential delay. Gowers died before the question of revision came up again.

In 1968 the Stationery Office approached my father, as one of Gowers' executors, about a possible revision, writing that 'in order to preserve the high standard of the book, it is essential that the revision should be carried out by somebody of acknowledged eminence'. They suggested Lord Wolfenden, who accepted, but he was too busy to complete it in time and eight months later withdrew.

Correspondence flowed between the family and the Stationery Office. My father wrote to his sister Eileen that Wolfenden had withdrawn because the book had been written by a distinguished civil servant for civil servants, and he was not the right person as he found it difficult to know what to write. The Stationery Office then asked whether anyone remembered who the team was that helped with the revision of *Fowler's Modern English Usage*. His other sister, Peggy, suggested Harry Willink. HMSO came back with the name of Sir Bruce Fraser. Peggy wrote back to say the family knew nothing of Fraser 'or what kind of a mind he has. He needs to have a quizzically humorous one', and asked to see samples of his writing. Three specimens were provided. The Stationery Office argued that the choice must be a civil servant first and author second – 'indeed it is more the faculty of authorship as such than that skilful and attractive workmanship in the field of written work we are seeking'.[35]

Fortunately they chose Fraser, who included some new gems, such as 'I have discussed the question of stocking the proposed poultry plant with my colleagues', and 'Bulletin No. 160 on Housing of Pigs from Her Majesty's Stationery Office'.

I am sure my grandfather would have approved, though not because he bore any grudge against the Stationery Office.

13
Revising Fowler's *Modern English Usage*

The final years of Gowers' life were spent at Rondle Wood, revising Fowler's *Modern English Usage (MEU)* as well as providing a welcome holiday retreat for many friends, his children and grandchildren. After his successes with *Plain Words* and its successors, Cambridge University awarded Gowers an honorary Doctor of Letters. Gowers was introduced at the degree ceremony with the words:

> I present to you in plain words the indefatigable opponent of administrative and governmental incomprehensibility, the ardent champion of the devocabularisation of words like devocabularisation, the tireless and eloquent defender of the principle that intelligent rulers should be able to make intelligible rules. It is a subject on which he can speak with authority born of much experience; for it is more than fifty years since he exchanged the austere discipline of prose composition in the Classical Tripos for the unbridled luxuriance of English as she is writ in Government offices.[1]

Cambridge may have honoured him, but it was Oxford that put him to work. The Clarendon Press had been considering a revision of Fowler's original for some time and had been undecided as to whether a supplement should be published and Fowler's text left untouched, or whether there should be a complete revision:

> We have several times considered the possibility of revising this excellent book which is not up to date in all its details; but have hesitated because another editor, however good, might remove the

> individual quality of Fowler's judgements by remodelling them so that everybody would agree.[2]

In December 1951, the Press tentatively sounded out Gowers, seeking his views on the best approach to revising *MEU*.

> If you have any views on what ought to be done I should be glad to hear them and if you thought there was any prospect of you yourself taking a hand we should be even more pleased.[3]

Gowers had a meeting with A. L. P. Norrington, who had become Secretary to the Delegates in 1948, and D. M. Davin, the Assistant Secretary:

> We decided that we should get a number of copies broken up and mounted on sheets and send them to, say, half a dozen English scholars and two or three Americans. We should ask them to annotate the margins, indicating what parts of Fowler they think might be deleted and what additions seemed called for. We should allow about a year for this process and when we had all the mounted copies back again should ask Sir Ernest Gowers whether he would consider attempting to coordinate the various annotations.[4]
>
> The disadvantages of turning to a number of people for help are of course patent: but we have no one man capable of handling the job. I think that provided the new editor knew when to leave well alone (and Gowers has a great admiration for Fowler) we have a chance of emerging with a revivified Fowler.[5]

Davin was not certain that Gowers was the man for the job. He raised these doubts with a staff member in a memo outlining how the Press planned to approach the task, saying that he was now beginning to feel a little doubtful about whether Gowers was quite the man but had not yet got to the point where a decision must be made.[6] She replied that perhaps Gowers was the right choice and the plan wrong.

One of the people enlisted to help was Professor Norman Davis.[7] Davin reported to the Secretary of the Delegates:

> Norman Davis will finish his revision of the interleaved copy by October. He begs that we should not let Gowers do the ultimate

> revision since he thinks that a Civil Servant is not the man. He wanted me to do it but I turned the cup aside. I have at this moment a tiny fancy that Peter Fleming might do it better than anyone but think that the best course is to wait until all the annotated stuff is in and see what the volume looks like.[8]

By 1956 Gowers had heard nothing further. The previous year he had written to L. F. Schooling, a colleague from the *ABC of Plain Words* Advisory Committee, to say that the Clarendon Press had invited him to be 'a sort of ganger of a party they were trying to collect to revise Fowler'. Gowers wrote to him about this commission:

> I assented in a vague way, but I have done nothing whatever about it, partly because I have been very busy with other things, and partly because I was expecting to receive contributions from members of the gang. The CP may have forgotten their invitation to me, for all I know, and given me up as a bad job.[9]

In November 1955 the Press recruited Schooling to help with the *MEU* revision. The following January he sent them a progress report, in the course of which he mentioned Gowers:

> I ought to mention that I recently met Sir Ernest Gowers … and was interested to learn from him that a few years ago you had invited him to take charge of a party you were trying to collect to revise *MEU*. He also informed me that he had never done anything further about the matter, partly because he had been very busy with government business (Royal Commissions, etc.) and partly because he had been expecting to receive contributions from members of the team. He has however never received any such contributions, and the interleavings on his copy of *MEU* remain as virgin today as they were on the day he received them. …
>
> He would, I think welcome a renewed approach from you at this stage. At any rate he agreed that I should take the opportunity of reminding you about the matter the next time I wrote.[10]

The Clarendon Press appeared to have overcome any misgivings about the choice of Gowers. Davin replied to Schooling:

> To turn to the editorship; when we discussed this with Gowers the plan was that the editor should consider all the suggestions made on

> the interleaved copies when they came in and make a single master copy for the printer. This is still the plan but as the commentators have been slow in returning their copies and new helpers like yourself have come in at a later stage, there has been no occasion to trouble Sir Ernest and we thought we would raise the whole question again with him when the copies were ready.[11]

In light of some of the later criticism that the revision was too conservative, it is significant that Davin reiterated the intentions of the Press:

> I should explain that we want to keep as much of Fowler as possible, since it is a very personal book. What we aim at doing is removing purely lexicographical matter in order to save space; pruning out dead wood (like some of the items in genteelisms); ceasing to flog any dead horses; removing false prophecies; and inserting fresh abuses which would have qualified for reprobation had they existed in Fowler's time.[12]

As with the tribute to Wyn Griffith for his help with *Plain Words*, Schooling is given a special mention in the acknowledgements section of the *MEU* revision:

> To Mr. L. F. Schooling my obligation is unique. He not only started me off with a comprehensive survey of what needed to be done, but has shared throughout in every detail of its execution, fertile in suggestion, ruthless in criticism, and vigilant in the detection of error.[13]

Schooling later wrote that he appreciated the acknowledgement, but wanted to place on record his 'deep gratitude for the never-failing patience, tolerance and good-humour with which he suffered my own slow and pernickety ways'.[14] When Gowers died in 1966, Schooling sent all the letters that he had received to his executors with the comment:

> I don't know whether anybody is contemplating writing a biography of Sir Ernest but the voluminous correspondence … might make a useful appendix to any such book. I think I have kept practically every letter he ever wrote me.[15]

This collection gives only one side of the correspondence as Schooling's letters to Gowers have not survived. But they are especially valuable for

two reasons: to illustrate how Gowers approached this mammoth task and, more movingly, his characteristically matter-of-fact approach to his final illness.

H. W. Fowler's *Modern English Usage* was first published in 1926. It was described by *The Times* as 'probably the most remarkable book ever devoted to the art of expression in English'.[16] Gowers described it as the 'finished work for which *The King's English*[17] had been a sketch'.[18]

Gowers was 76 when, in 1956, he was formally asked to revise *MEU*. Characteristically he accepted this daunting task, completing his revision at the age of 85. He may not have shared what he described as Fowler's 'spartan simplicity' but he was determined to keep working for as long as he could:

> Anyone undertaking to revise the book will pause over the opening words of Fowler's own preface: 'I think of it as it should have been, with its prolixities docked'. He cannot be acquitted of occasional prolixity. But his faults were as much a part of his idiosyncrasy as his virtues; rewrite him and he ceases to be Fowler. I have been chary of making any substantial alterations except for the purpose of bringing him up to date; I have only done so in a few places where his exposition is exceptionally tortuous, and it is clear that his point could be put more simply without any sacrifice of Fowleresque flavour.[19]

Gowers and Schooling were fully engrossed in the revision by 1957. Gowers kept his sense of humour throughout the tedious process:

> I am plodding along, realising that quite a lot will be left for final revision. So far I have done A, B, C, and M. I sent B and M to Davis, but have not yet had any comment. I wonder who were the scrutineers who wrote, one in black ink and the other in pencil, on your copy. I don't much take to Mr Black Ink; he seems to have a perpetual sneer on his face. Mr Pencil is much more kindly. When you differ from either or both of them I find myself almost invariably agreeing with you. The only point on which I do not see wholly eye to eye with you is that I would not alter Fowler so much as you would. I would hardly ever alter him merely because he expresses himself clumsily and obscurely. These faults are as typical as his virtues; and this book has to remain Fowler.[20]

Some years later, Schooling described the way they worked together revising Fowler:

> His methods of work were peculiarly his own. What usually happened was that either he or I would suggest a new article or the revision of an existing one. In either case he would make the draft himself and send it to me to criticise, thus reversing the normal procedure between editor and assistant. …
>
> One of the qualities I admired most in him was his extraordinary faculty of reproducing Fowler's style so exactly as to make it difficult (unless of course a discrepancy in dates or some other anachronism gave things away) for anybody not steeped in 'Fowler' to distinguish the new from the old. 'Fowleresque' writing he used to call it.[21]

In a Presidential Address to the English Teachers' Association, Gowers explained his admiration for Fowler:

> I would say that a study of *Modern English Usage* reveals five themes with variations that form the texture of Fowler's teaching. Sometimes the variations have a bravura that obscures the theme, but they always derive from it. Those themes are first the careful choice of precise words, second the avoidance of all affectations, third the orderly and coherent arrangement of words, fourth the strict observance of what is for the time being established idiom, and fifth the systematisation of spelling and pronunciation.
>
> Strange things are happening to the English language; the revolt against the tyranny of the old grammarians seems to be producing a school of thought which holds that grammar is obsolete and it does not matter how we write so long as we make ourselves understood. It cannot be denied that, if we had to choose between the two, it would be better to be ungrammatical and intelligible than grammatical and unintelligible. But we do not have to choose between the two. We can rid ourselves of those grammarians' fetishes which make it more difficult to be intelligible without throwing the baby away with the bath-water. Fowler's true place is among the first of the rebels rather than among the last of the die-hards. Some of his pronouncements are of course no longer valid; in a living language neither idiom nor meaning can ever stand still. But so long as there are people who regard writing as a craft, and hold it better to be a good craftsman than a bad one, I do not see how in its essentials Fowler's teaching can ever be out of date.[22]

Later in 1957 Schooling asked Gowers what progress he was making. Gowers replied:

> I began by going through the whole book on my own and making such notes as occurred to my unaided intelligence, a quality which, when I got your comments, I formed a pretty poor opinion of. I then went through numerous suggestions made by other commentators – R. W. Chapman, Peter Fleming and some others, making notes of such of their ideas as I thought good and adding them to my own. Then, with this collection beside me and your volumes in front of me I began the job of edition. I have just reached P, and calculate that if my progress continues at much the same rate as during the past six weeks I shall come to the end of Z in another 70 days.[23]

A year later Gowers wrote appreciating an example of mixed metaphors, probably sent by Schooling:

> I forget whether it was you who sent me 'The Rt Hon Gentleman is leading his followers over the precipice with his head in the sand'. That is a very choice one, and I added it to the examples of mixed metaphor with the comment 'a confusion between the behaviour of Gaderene swine and that of ostriches'. …
>
> I think that by Easter I ought to have finished in the sense of having done all I can do by steady and systematic work, but of course in another sense one can never finish; as soon as one says 'now it's done' one will come across something else that must go in. …
>
> Some of the new and re-written articles have led me into research that was full of interest: up and down, for instance, tax and levy, baroque and rococo and sentence. I have been quite unable to find anyone who will give me an authoritative opinion about the difference between ale and beer.[24]

The use of 'up' and 'down' to describe train journeys most intrigued him, particularly the fact that one always went 'up to London', and was the subject of discussions over the family meals. He concluded that the 'vigour' of the phrase 'up to London' still resisted the logic of the map.

In March 1959 Gowers sent Schooling another progress report:

> I suppose I ought to be finished before the end of the summer, so far as one can ever finish such a thing. But I do not think I shall ever see it published unless I live much longer than I have any wish to do.[25]

By 1961, Gowers was becoming anxious about the speed at which the Clarendon Press was preparing for publication. He sent a covering letter with an article on 'Collectives' Schooling had promised to look at:

> I have no doubt that the Clarendon Press are deliberately stalling because, by mistake, they have turned out more copies than they intended of a recent reprint of MEU. That is natural enough. It is annoying for me, but not really any great matter. I like to think that, if I do not live to see the thing through, there will be as competent hands as yours to do it for me.[26]

Schooling clearly made some trenchant criticisms, to which Gowers responded:

> Thank you for the proofs. I am really shocked that I did not notice, until you pointed it out to me, what a ghastly mess I had made of COLLECTIVES. Obviously it has got to be entirely rewritten, and I have tried my hand at this. It is not easy, and I should be grateful for your criticism of what I have done. My aim has been to preserve the gist of the two original articles as far as possible, but to present it in an orderly way. I think myself that the whole thing is rather bilge – a striking example of the lengths to which F allowed himself to be driven by his passion for docketing everything into pigeon-holes. But I am more reluctant than I fancy you would like me to be to cut Fowler merely because I think he was rather silly; after all, his shortcomings are as characteristic as his virtues.[27]

In May 1962, they were looking closely through the galley proofs:

> Glancing through the sheets you sent me yesterday, I noticed what you say about his (Fowler's) pronouncement in favour of –ize. I couldn't agree with you more when you say that you couldn't agree with F less. But I think it is right, in such a case, to let F stand.[28]

The following July, the classicist in him responded to an article Schooling had written:

> One point arising out of it puzzles me, and I wonder whether you can clear it up. It is of no importance, but I hate not getting to the bottom of things.
>
> You have evidently taken a great deal of trouble about MARATHON. I preferred to derive our use of it from P's [Pheidippides] run to

> Sparta before the battle, mainly because it is related by an almost contemporary historian who says nothing about the run to Athens after the battle. Did you in the course of your researches discover the original source of the latter story? You say something about Plutarch's having told it, but I can't find it in the life of Aristides, which would be its natural place; moreover you say that Plutarch says it was some other chap. Where did Browning and the compiler of the works of reference get it from? The Pan story is, of course, in Herodotus.[29]

Gowers' father, Sir William Gowers, particularly liked the adage that 'genius is the infinite capacity for taking pains'. His son's persistence in pursuing the answer to his question about Marathon demonstrates that his infinite capacity for taking pains remained with him to the end of his life. At the age of 82 he wrote:

> I have at last tracked [the answer] down after a two-hour quest in the London Library, though I could have got it in a few minutes if I had gone first to the place I went to last – an elaborately annotated edition of Browning, which led me to Lucian. I can find no earlier authority for the second run than a light-hearted essay of his on the question whether it is what we should now call 'U' to greet a person before you start talking to him. The relevance is the suggestion that if Pheidippides had not said 'Hallo chaps' he might have had enough breath to say 'We've won' without passing out.
>
> I cannot find where Lucian got the story from. I don't suppose anyone knows.[30]

In November the following year, he responds to another batch of corrected proofs from Schooling:

> Many thanks for the last batch – Fowler at his dreariest.
>
> I am amused at your inviting me to pillory the 'No through thoroughfare' notice in the passage leading from Guildford Street to Queen Square, for I suppose I ought to accept some personal responsibility, having been until recently chairman of the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, the owner of the passage. I must have walked through it hundreds of times, but the notice made no impact on me. I am going to lecture at the hospital the week after next, and I will see whether it is still there.[31]

A week later he was commenting on the next set of proofs:

> Yes, I am feeding the corrected galleys to the printer – would Fowler think it legitimate to say 'as and when' they are ready?[32]

By January 1964 he was thanking Schooling for the 'antepenultimate and penultimate' batches:

> What dreary stuff they are, and yet, in their way, very good too if one has the patience to study them with enough concentration, as I suppose some people do, besides you and me who must.
>
> I have just sent the printer (very reluctantly) corrected revises to page 420. So things are hotting up.[33]

R. W. Burchfield, the man who was to undertake a second revision of *MEU* 30 years later, was already working for the Press. He read the final draft of the Gowers version in October 1964:

> This seems to me to be a splendid adaptation and modernisation of Fowler's original. … He has managed to steer clear of transformational grammar and other Chomskyesque horrors without fear that they can attack him from the flank – and by 'they' I mean any of the modern descriptivists. To all but that small band of linguistic scholars who want to treat English as an experiment in 'information retrieval' the new *MEU* will have something of interest on every page.[34]

In May 1965 the revision was published. The first printing of the English edition, 50,000 copies, had sold out within a month. The American edition, published at the same time, had sold 30,000 copies by August 1965. But by this time Gowers was ill with cancer of the throat. A lifetime of smoking was taking its toll. He wrote again to Schooling:

> I am sorry not to have answered your last letter sooner, but I have been in hospital for a few days to see whether anything could be done about my throat. The result was not encouraging, so I feel as Pheidippides must have felt when he just made it, though I have already had longer than he had to enjoy that agreeable sensation. …
>
> I have had quite a lot of letters from both sides of the Atlantic, all laudatory. Not many were from well known people, though these included Raymond Mortimer, Barbara Wootton and John Reith. Several reviews commented on the point you mention of

> the similarity of Fowler's and my styles, especially the lady who talked about the book in the reviews that follow the 10 o'clock news in the Home Service on Friday nights. She provoked a letter from a (lady) friend of mine expressing indignation that I should be so insulted.
>
> As you know, I have always been in favour of a uniform –ise; I nailed those colours to my mast in *Plain Words*. If I had known that the COD [*Concise Oxford Dictionary*] was weakening I might have watered Fowler down a bit.[35]

By October 1965 Gowers' health had deteriorated further, but he was still well enough to write to Schooling about corrections for later editions. He ended his letter:

> The *Times Literary Supplement* is still the only discordant note in the chorus of praise.
>
> I have been rather preoccupied by having to undergo a course of radio-therapy to do down the carcinoma in my larynx. It seems to have been successful – for the time being at any rate. Very remarkable. A kind of selective weed-killer.[36]

The last letter to Schooling, who was still suggesting amendments, was written at the end of January 1966:

> Many thanks. I will go through your suggestions and shall no doubt find many things to record for the attention of whoever prepares the next revision of *MEU*.
>
> I am very sorry to hear about your brother, but I suppose he was one of those who are fortunate to be released fairly quickly. I look as if I was heading the other way. Radio-therapy having proved disappointing on my throat, I was told that there was nothing left but laryngectomy, an operation from which I am now convalescing.[37]

In 1965 Gowers was interviewed by 'Our Man in Trotton', for the *New York Times*. The interviewer, quoted back at him his introduction to the revised *MEU*: 'He [Fowler] knew what he wanted from life; what he wanted was within his reach; he took it and was content', and asked 'Do you think that also applies to you?'

> I think so. I've had a very happy life. I have no quarrel with it. I would no doubt do different things if I could have it over again. But

> I've been very fortunate. I've been very fortunate in living to my present age without, as far as I know, any marks of senility. I think it is a very pleasant thing to have this particular achievement – the new book – at this point. It gives me rather the sensation of going out not with a whimper but a bang, and that's very agreeable.[38]

In April 1966 at the age of 85, he died in the Midhurst hospital, nine months after his revision of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* was published.

14
‘A Last Retrospect’

I have named this chapter ‘A Last Retrospect’ as a tribute to my grandfather’s fondness for Charles Dickens, and as a result of my re-reading *David Copperfield* in search of the unfortunate Mr Mell. In his introduction to the second edition of *David Copperfield*, Dickens wrote:

> I remarked in the original Preface to this Book, that I did not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from it, in the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest in it was so recent and strong, and my mind was so divided between pleasure and regret – pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions – that I was in danger of wearying the reader with personal confidences and private emotions.

This biography has concentrated on three aspects of Ernest Gowers’ life: his career as a Civil Servant; his books on English usage; and his family. There are a few words to be added on each before I finally separate myself from my own ‘long design’, a work that has involved much pleasure for what I have learned about my grandfather, and considerable regret at what is now past.

1965 was a fitting final year of achievement for Gowers: in May his revision of Fowler’s *Modern English Usage* was published. In November, Royal Assent was given to the abolition of capital punishment.

Gowers and the Civil Service

There are many critics of the Administrative Class of Gowers’ era. Gowers and the majority (but not all) of his contemporaries came from

the professional middle class and had been educated in Classics at one of the leading 'public' schools such as Winchester or Rugby followed by a Classics degree at Oxford or Cambridge. Their parents saw the Civil Service as offering a secure career at a time when professional openings were scarce. From the time Asquith became leader of the Liberal Party in 1908, the Civil Service had to adapt to a series of significant changes. Gowers' career demonstrates how one man responded to these new demands.

It was not until 1950, when Sir Edward Bridges gave a lecture about the Civil Service entitled 'Portrait of a Profession: The Civil Service Tradition', that strident criticism of the Administrative Class began to be voiced.[1] In this address, Bridges provided an overview of developments in the Service since the mid-nineteenth century, particularly the recommendations of the 1855 Northcote Trevelyan Report and their implementation in the 1870s (after considerable resistance by individual departments). He traced the development of the unified Civil Service through a number of stages: the introduction of central recruitment through the open, competitive entry examination; the establishment of the 'Loan Collection', which for the first time drew staff together from a range of departments to manage a particular project; the establishment of a number of new departments during the First World War; and, finally, the transfer of senior staff between departments (fostered by Warren Fisher when he was Head of the Civil Service between the wars).

Bridges' lecture had a far greater impact than perhaps he expected. Richard Chapman suggests that it helped to fuel public debate and criticism about the British Civil Service of the time. In particular, the Civil Service was strongly criticised by political economist Thomas Balogh, in an essay published in 1959 in 'The Apotheosis of the Dilettante'. Balogh was highly critical of the Treasury and Warren Fisher's hold over the Civil Service in the inter-war years. He accused the Civil Service Examination, through which Gowers' cohort was selected, as encouraging a 'purposefully useless, somewhat dilettante, erudition which would keep "dangerous thoughts" well away'.[2] In his enthusiasm for his argument Balogh distorts the case, for example arguing that before 1921 'the Lloyd George-Churchill combination effectively called in brilliant young men to build up the administrative structure needed by the reforms of 1906–12', implying that these were not civil servants.[3] This included the Loan Collection. Balogh described the formal establishment of the unified Civil Service in 1919 as 'total victory' from the point of view of the permanent bureaucrats.[4]

The debate that Bridges unwittingly began eventually led to the creation of the Fulton Committee on the Civil Service in 1965.[5] O'Toole describes the upper levels of the Civil Service as:

> A group of intellectually confident and competent people in a powerful and closed community who acquired over the years considerable expertise in government administration. It was a community, centred around Ministers, who they advised on policy and high politics. These were the people largely responsible for pursuing 'the public interest' and who might be regarded as having the most astute sense of public duty.[6]

O'Toole suggests that it was their privileged position which was most criticised by the antagonists of the Civil Service, most notably the Fulton Committee.

The Fulton Committee was established by the Government in 1965 (two months before Gowers died). Its terms of reference were to 'examine the structure and management, including training, of the Home Civil Service'. The Committee presented its report in 1967. It argued that the Civil Service was essentially based on the cult of the amateur, or generalist, most evident in the Administrative Class that dominated it. Fulton argued that the 'fuller professionalism now required from all administrators … in turn calls for new principles to be applied to their selection, training and deployment'.[7] The implementation of the Fulton Committee recommendations marked the end of an era. Unfortunately perhaps, its criticisms of the Administrative Class became, and appear to have remained, accepted wisdom.

One of Gowers' contemporaries, Arthur Salter, lived long enough to be able to comment on the changes being considered by the Fulton Committee. Salter did not claim that the Civil Service was perfect, and identified a number of significant flaws. But he described the development and implementation of the 1911 National Insurance Act as conditions under which civil servants were able to perform at their best. He singled out both the creation of the Health Insurance System in 1911 and the following Insurance Commission years; and the conduct of the civil part of administration in the ensuing war, when the permanent officials and those recruited from business and industry worked in equal and successful partnership. In both cases, Salter wrote, the official had the spur of urgent necessity and the opportunity of seeing directly what, and whom, he was directing:[8]

> I think that those who bear the responsibility of making important changes in the structure of the Service should bear in mind what the Service has shown to be its most distinctive characteristics, not only in recent years but during the exacting experience of work in and after the war. I believe that among such characteristics will be found a greater capacity for personal responsibility than among other comparable countries.[9]

There were a number of occasions when Gowers was able to perform at his best under the 'spur of urgent necessity': the Loan Collection, Wellington House, and as Senior Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence in the Second World War. Coal presents a different picture. While there was urgent necessity in the crises during the early to mid-1920s, in the case of the Coal Reorganization Commission and its successor, the Coal Commission, there was little external sense of urgency, and strong resistance to change. It is clear that he was deeply frustrated by this political inertia.

Nevertheless, his career reflects the strengths of the much-maligned Administrative Class which dominated policy-making and policy implementation for half a century, especially its capacity for innovation within the constraints of anonymity and public accountability.

The breadth of thinking associated, at least at the time, with a classical education and the mobility of the Administrative Class, may no longer be valued but is clearly illustrated in Gowers' own range of achievements.

Gowers and English usage

A historical perspective also has to be taken when considering Gowers' contribution to the debate about English usage. Looking back on his own work in Whitehall, between 1952 and 1982, John Delafons maintained that *Plain Words* and its successors had a fundamental effect in influencing the course of public administration, suggesting that they 'altered the attitude of officials in their dealings with the public' and that any defects that remained were, by 1982, due 'more to failures of literacy or competence than to reliance on any tribal dialect'.[10]

However, as with the debate over the Civil Service, debates over English usage were starting towards the end of Gowers' life, including the emerging division between 'prescriptivists' and 'descriptivists'. When Robert Burchfield read the draft of Gowers' revision of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* he commented that Gowers had managed to 'steer

clear of transformational grammar and other Chomskyesque horrors without fear that they can attack him from the flank – and by "they" I mean any of the modern descriptivists'.[11] Gowers was given a specific brief from the Clarendon Press: to revise the work but be true to the essential Fowler. The result was not universally applauded. Lovers of Fowler were pleased with the result, but this approval was not unqualified. For example, *The Times Literary Supplement* was generally unenthusiastic about the revision saying that 'the sad truth is that *Fowler*, revised or original, is old-fashioned':

> But today *Fowler* has little to say that is of specifically contemporary use, and those of us who are Fowler-raised pundits may well prefer the spring of English as it first spurted in 1926 to this decorous, decent, often witty but already old-fashioned revision.[12]

Burchfield took a totally different approach to his own revision of *MEU*, basing it on 'modern evidence' obtained and classified by electronic means. In his introduction he described the earlier *MEU* as a fossil 'and an enduring monument to all that was linguistically acceptable in the standard English of the southern counties of England in the first quarter of the twentieth century', and wrote that the original 'shows what it was like to be linguistically aware before a new race of synchronic linguistic giants appeared'.[13] His edition was also controversial: one reader apparently suggested that Burchfield's 'wildly descriptionist perversions of the classic prescriptionist masterpiece have assured him a definite place in Hell'.[14] Burchfield's revision was so radical that some people felt his 1996 edition should not have maintained the name 'Fowler' on its cover. John Simpson, who wrote Burchfield's entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography writes that 'he applied his descriptivist techniques to this work, and produced a text that pleased some and frustrated others'.[15]

The study and teaching of English language is obviously an academic minefield. In his book, *Living Words*, McArthur criticises the introduction to the 1965 *MEU* in which Gowers' biography of Fowler includes an overview of his education. McArthur comments that it reflects not just the idiosyncrasy of the man 'but the idiosyncrasy of a whole social caste, dominant for so long that it takes itself and its dominance for granted', arguing that books on English usage like Fowler/Gowers represent a dual state of affairs when:

> On the one hand they praise fine writing and clear speech and on the other fire their broadsides at people who are already socially weak,

> linguistically 'substandard', ethnically wrongfooted, and generally part of the white man's burden.[16]

The energetic debate about English usage will continue, but some criticism has seemed less than fair. For example, one writer asserts that there is a common characteristic among usage manuals such as Fowler's *Modern English Usage* and other 'corpses of usage manuals littering the battlefields of English: Gowers and Partridge in the UK, Strunk and Levin in the USA'. The writer suggests that you have to look hard to find a vestige of a smile in them because 'they are all being too angry to laugh'.[17] It is hard to agree with that if you have read *Plain Words*. Its gentle humour is one secret of its popularity.

Gowers has to be seen as a man of his times, but he was far more open-minded than some of his later critics would allow. He was a gentle, liberal and good-humoured prescritivist. Gowers himself was alert to first stirrings of the debate, and it is appropriate to leave the last word to him:

> It is nearly fifty years since the Board of Education themselves took a hand in the sport, and threw an outsize brick with the declaration that 'there is no such thing as English grammar in the sense which used to be attached to the term'. The queer thing is that at the end of it all we seem to have been left not with one grammar but with many. We have formal grammar as distinct from functional grammar, pure grammar as distinct from the grammar of a particular language, descriptive grammar as distinct from prescriptive grammar – distinctions I will not dwell on because I am not sure that I perfectly understand them.[18]

Gowers and his family

In an interesting choice of author, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* invited Burchfield to write Gowers' entry. It ends on a rather strange note, saying that Gowers 'spent the later years of his life pig farming in west Sussex'. This conjures up an image that, to me, is barely recognisable. He did have a small piggery, but he also had much more.

My grandparents restarted their practice of keeping visitors' books in 1938. That year, many of the people already encountered in this biography stayed at Rondle Wood, including my great-grandmother from Ballycastle, Margaret Greer, who had been widowed in 1928.

Both of my grandfather's sisters, the near-blind Evelyn and Edith Gowers were also guests in 1938, signing the book with large and

sprawling letters. Edith Gowers died in January 1939. After Edith's death, Evelyn made many visits alone to Rondle Wood in the early years of the war, but her name does not appear in the book from the middle of the war onwards. The National Hospital, Queen Square, received legacies from both sisters in 1946 that were used to endow a triennial Gowers Memorial Lecture. That year I paid my first visit to the hospital when I presented a bouquet to Princess Alice, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria, when she formally named the Gowers Ward to celebrate the centenary of Sir William Gowers' birth.

Uncle Bill always added his visitors' book comments in either Latin or Greek. In 1947 his first wife, Maud, died and he was free to marry Cinderella. By 1951 the visitors' book records them as Sir William and Lady Gowers. Bill and Ernest remained good friends, despite the differences in their personal style. When his brother was working on the *ABC of Plain Words*, Uncle Bill was roped in to help with reading the proofs and suggesting improvements. He was a devoted member of the Zoological Society (as his father obviously had been – he gave Kipling free tickets) and took us on expeditions to Regent's Park Zoo, nostalgic for his days in Africa.[19]

In 1944 Tony Duveen returned from the war. He and Eileen used Rondle Wood as a temporary home from August 1944 to March 1946, and the Gowers' first post-war grandchild, Sally, was born there. The arrival of Michael two years later, and then Richard, completed that generation, giving Ernest and Kit six grandchildren in all.

After the war my grandfather used Rondle Wood as his working base, using a hut in the woods as a study to retreat to with his golden retriever, Saki. He would stride off to his hideaway where no one ever interrupted him. This was where he would write his letters, his books, and contemplate the revisions to draft committee reports, *Plain Words*, and Fowler's *MEU*. He loved being surrounded by nature and bought a record of bird songs to help identify what he heard. He knew where the badgers had their setts and would take us for walks in his beloved woods to show us. He once referred to a poem by Thomas Hardy in a speech, saying that Hardy 'mused over the question whether, when he was dead, he would be remembered as one who is in tune with nature, and hoped when the spring came round, people would be reminded of him because they would remember how he loved its loveliness'. His idyllic surroundings meant a great deal to my grandfather.

By the end of the war Patrick and I had reached an age when we relished the freedom of the woods, climbing trees, feasting on hazel nuts and sweet chestnuts. A vivid memory to this day is of the excitement

of arriving at Rondle Wood, my father, ever-patient on the drive from our Oxfordshire home when we repeatedly asked, 'Are we nearly there?' When we arrived we were let out of the car on the edge of the woods above the house and would run through the woods until we reached the clearing at the top of the hill where you could look down and see the house in the valley below. In the house that had been so influenced by my grandparents' visit to America, each of the bedrooms not only had its own bathroom, but each was painted a different colour and had bed linen to match, so that part of the anticipation was whether one was to be billeted in the yellow room, the green room, the pink room or, more exciting, on a camp bed on the open deck behind the house.

One legacy of the war was the naming of a flock of geese at Rondle Wood, geese that caused great anguish to the less courageous grandchildren such as me. They were kept in a field between the main house and the swimming pool that had been dug by the family before the war. To get to the pool meant passing through the field, and those of us who could not or would not learn the lesson that the best thing to do was to run at the geese rather than away from them, have painful memories of hurtling down the hill with a hissing gaggle of Hitler, Himmler, Goering and Goebbels in hot pursuit.

There was a white piano that my grandmother played with skill despite having only one arm – how she lost the other when she was a child was a closely guarded secret. To see her play the bass chords with her wooden artificial hand was a matter of deep curiosity to the grandchildren. On Sundays, the family attended the local Trotton church, where my grandfather played the organ. He played in his socks so that he could feel what he was doing. There was a curtain in front of the organ that did not reach the ground, and all one could see from the congregation were his stockinged feet leaping rather awkwardly across the pedals.

Wartime civil defence colleagues such as Philip Game and Wyndham Deedes were made welcome at Rondle Wood. Game and his wife were frequent visitors. Game commented 'I have learned to walk and on a broken leg! and enjoyed every moment'. And after being subjected to our family passion for playing the card game Misere, he commented, 'In spite of Misere, extremely happy weekend'. Wyndham Deedes wrote, 'Tis here I would come to renew my pitcher at the well'. Like many contemporaries, his pitcher needed renewal. In addition to his brief tenure as Information Officer for the London Region, Deedes had been Chief Warden in Bethnal Green, which had suffered an exceptionally severe ordeal in the Blitz, including two appalling disasters in public shelters.

He was fondly remembered by my grandfather for insisting on helping in the kitchen because he was striking up a friendship with the girl who came in from the village to do the washing up.[20] Patricia Russell (Peter Spence), who had become firm friends with my grandfather through the Harlow New Town Corporation, and her son Conrad also became frequent visitors. Other frequent visitors were the Fiennes family. My grandfather's godson Ranulph Fiennes was already proving 'mad, bad and dangerous to know', leading the young Duveens into adventurous exploits in the woods, all recorded in the visitors' book.[21]

In September 1948 my family stayed at Rondle Wood to celebrate my grandmother's birthday. The following month I reached 'double figures'. By this time my brother and I were both at boarding school and our visits tended to coincide with the long summer holidays. We were old enough to appreciate my grandfather reading aloud. The first book I remember him reading returns us to the Kipling connection, as it was *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Set in east Sussex, *Puck of Pook's Hill* was a most appropriate choice for children immersed in similar countryside not far away.

The second book that I remember more clearly was Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which was a great success with us. We shared the animals' 'wild excitement' for the anthem that Old Major taught them. We probably irritated our parents on the journey home when we sang all four verses, to the tune of Clementine. My grandfather admired Orwell and included in *Plain Words* a passage from an article of his that had appeared in *Horizon* in 1947, about political language. My grandfather's departure into a little pig farming was most memorable for the naming of Napoleon, the dominant boar, and Squealer, his junior.

In June 1950 my grandfather turned 70. By this time my grandmother was seriously ill, so his heavy work schedule was undertaken against the background of her increasing frailty. We spent the summer holidays with them. We had by now followed up our interest in Orwell and read *1984*. Patrick's comment in the visitors' book at the end of the holiday was that it had been 'doubleplusgood'. I was still preoccupied with the farm and the birth of a new calf named Maggie. My comment, prompted by my grandfather when I asked what he would call the calves yet to be born, was, 'Maggie arrived. Misery, Dispare and Madness expected'. No one ruined the moment by correcting my spelling, nor did they tell me that this was an echo of Mr Micawber.

My grandmother died in 1952. I was nearly 14, and at my second (and most detested) boarding school. My last contact with her was when I was taken out by my parents for the day to go to Rondle Wood to see

her. I was only allowed to wave at her in her sickbed as I walked along the public right of way that ran past the house. Uncle Bill died two years after my grandmother, in October 1954.

By this time Gowers' career was being recognised in a variety of ways. In 1951, for example, he was elected by London's exclusive Athenaeum Club to join the ranks of people who 'have attained to distinguished eminence in science, literature, or the arts, or for public services.[22] When my grandfather received his GCB in the 1953 New Year honours, Alexander Grey, one of his colleagues from the Loan Collection wrote to congratulate him: 'It is indeed a very long time since we used to meet daily in the Moot attached to the Lugenfabrik [a term used by Goebbels in the Second World War, referring to 'Churchill's Lie Factory', or propaganda machine]; and the inhabitants of Wellington House are getting sadly thinned. But there are still a few stout survivors of what used to be called "Morant's young men"'.[23]

A week before my grandmother's memorial service, my grandfather had been appointed by the new Queen to become Gentleman Usher of the Purple Rod in the Order of the British Empire, and in this role he took part in the Queen's procession into Westminster Abbey for the coronation service the following year, heading the 'Officers of the Orders of Knighthood' with Sir Edward Bridges walking just behind him.[24]

Peggy Shiffner moved to Rondle Wood after my grandmother died. By this time, the demands of travelling to London were becoming too arduous so my grandfather resigned from the chair of the National Hospital. But he and Peggy became involved in voluntary work at institutions closer to home, particularly the first of Leonard Cheshire's 'Cheshire Homes', Le Court.

My brother and I both married in the 1960s. In October 1963 Roger Scott and I were married in Kampala, Uganda, where he was conducting the field research for his Oxford doctorate and teaching at Makerere University. We had met when I was working for Norman Chester (who himself had worked with Sir William Beveridge on the Beveridge Report) at Nuffield College. Chester was Roger's supervisor. I began a courtship not only with Roger but also with the study of government and public administration. We went on our weekend-long honeymoon to the Kichwamba Club, on an escarpment high above the Queen Elizabeth game park and looked down on the herds of elephants that had been so familiar to Uncle Bill. Tony and Eileen Duveen came to stay with us at Makerere and we revisited some of Uncle Bill's haunts with them, including a visit to Hoima, where we ate with spoons inscribed 'Gowers Park'. It was on a sabbatical leave from Makerere, in June 1965, that

we stayed at Rondle Wood and I saw my grandfather for the last time. Roger was offered a job at Sydney University, so we were about to leave Makerere and settle in Australia, Roger's native land.

When my grandfather died the following year he was given a private family funeral and buried in the churchyard at Trotton. In May, a memorial service was held for him in the OBE Chapel at St Paul's Cathedral. His old friend, Harry Willink, gave the address. In addition to family and friends, the service was attended by representatives from many of the organisations he had been associated with, including his first department, the Department of Inland Revenue.

Despite the various battles of salary and royalties over the years, and his study of the impact of death duties on houses of historic interest, my grandfather did not take any steps to avoid death duties, apart from leaving my aunt Peggy the Rondle Wood cottage. So after he died a substantial amount of money returned to the public purse, through the Department of Inland Revenue. The family had to sell the house and land to meet the death duties. It was bought by Lord Hyndley's daughter, Betty.

Gowers may have been a man of his time, but he was also a man of great humanity and humility. This biography has been, for me, an extraordinary journey of discovery. I apologise to anyone who identifies with Fowler's description of 'that persistent fellow, the critical reader' who has found fault with my own English usage. At the same time, I also feel sympathy for Dickens when he wrote in his preface to *David Copperfield* that it would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know who sorrowfully the pen is laid down at the close of this three-year task; or how the author feels as if she were dismissing some portion of herself into a shadowy world in which the creatures of her memory are going from her for ever. But particularly, I wonder about my grandfather: the man so modest about his career that even his son knew little about his achievements. He may not have approved of this close scrutiny of his life. Perhaps he would have sympathised with Mrs Gamp in *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

> We never knows wot's hidden in each other's hearts; and if we had glass winders there, we'd need to keep the shutters up, some on us, I do assure you!

Fortunately he left gaps between the shutters that let enough light through to enable us not only to read his words but also to allow us to discover his remarkable deeds.

Appendix 1

Governments and Prime Ministers 1900–1970

Years	Government	Prime Minister
1900	Conservative	Lord Salisbury
1902–05	Conservative	Arthur Balfour
1905–08	Liberal	Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman
1908–15	Liberal	Herbert Asquith
1915–16	Coalition	Herbert Asquith (Lib.)
1916–22	Coalition	David Lloyd George (Lib.)
1922–23	Conservative	Andrew Bonar Law
1923	Conservative	Stanley Baldwin
1924 (Jan. to Nov.)	Labour	Ramsay MacDonald
1924–29	Conservative	Stanley Baldwin
1929–31	Labour	Ramsay MacDonald
1931–35	National	Ramsay MacDonald (Lab.)
1935–37	National	Stanley Baldwin (Lib.)
1937–40	National	Neville Chamberlain (Con.)
1940–45	National	Winston Churchill (Con.)
1945 (May to July)	Caretaker	Winston Churchill (Con.)
1945–51	Labour	Clement Attlee
1951–55	Conservative	Winston Churchill
1955–57	Conservative	Sir Anthony Eden
1957–63	Conservative	Harold Macmillan
1963–64	Conservative	Sir Alec Douglas-Home
1964–70	Labour	Harold Wilson

Appendix 2

Condensed Biographies

The condensed biographies below are, in the main, selectively edited entries from the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, occasionally with some additional material included. They have been edited to highlight those periods in each subject's career that are relevant to this biography.

Anderson, John, first Viscount Waverley (1882–1958), civil service administrator and politician. BSc Edinburgh 1903, MA mathematics and natural philosophy; 1905 first place in the Civil Service Examination – entered Colonial Office; 1912 recruited to the National Health Insurance Commission, promoted to Secretary in May 1913; 1919 Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue; 1920, appointed Joint Under-Secretary to the Chief Secretary for Ireland; 1922–32 Permanent Under-Secretary Home Office; 1924 chaired Sub-Committee of Committee of Imperial Defence on Air Raid Precautions; 1926 chaired committee controlling preparations for the General Strike; 1932–8 Governor of Bengal; 1938–50 held Scottish Universities seat as Independent; September 1938, during the Munich crisis, temporarily appointed Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London and the Home Counties; 31 October joined National Government as Lord Privy Seal with responsibility for co-ordinating civil defence measures; 1939 Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security; 1940 Lord President of Council; 1943–5 Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Beveridge, William Henry, Baron Beveridge (1879–1963), social reformer and economist, closely associated with development of the welfare state. 1906 advised Lloyd George on old-age pensions and

national insurance; involved in manpower planning in First World War; 1919–37 Director, London School of Economics; 1925 member of Samuel Royal Commission on the coal industry; 1942 report on post-war reconstruction (the Beveridge Report recommended need to fight five 'giant evils': want; disease; ignorance; squalor, and idleness); 1944–5 Liberal MP; 1946 appointed Liberal peer; 1947–52 Chairman of Newton Aycliffe New Town Corporation; Beveridge Report led to establishment of National Health Service in 1948 and 'social security' partly built on Lloyd George's national insurance scheme.

Blunt, Anthony Frederick (1907–83), art historian and spy. 1945 Surveyor of the King's Pictures; 1947 Director, Courtauld Institute of Art and Professor, History of Art, University of London; 1979 Prime Minister Thatcher confirmed in the House of Commons that Blunt had been an agent of, and talent spotter for, Russian intelligence before and during the Second World War.

Bradbury, John Swanwick, first Baron Bradbury (1872–1950), civil servant. Colonial Office, then Treasury; 1909 head of the Treasury's First Division (Finance) under Lloyd George; prepared 'People's Budget' with W. Braithwaite (Inland Revenue), and R. G. Hawtrey (Lloyd George's then Private Secretary); 1911–13 Insurance Commissioner and member of the National Health Insurance Joint Committee (without relinquishing Treasury post); 1913 Sir R. Chalmers resigned as head of the Treasury and his position split – Bradbury was put in charge of purely financial functions; retired from the Civil Service in January 1925.

Bridges, Edward Ettingdene, first Baron Bridges (1892–1969), civil servant. Joined the Treasury after being wounded in the First World War; 1934–8 primarily concerned with rearmament as Treasury representative on the Committee of Imperial Defence; 1937 Principal Assistant Secretary; 1938 Cabinet Secretary; 1945–56 Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service.

Burchfield, Robert William (1923–2004), lexicographer and linguist, born in New Zealand. 1949 Rhodes scholar; 1957–86 editor of four-volume *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary* in 1957, completing the fourth volume in 1986; 1986–96 carried out second revision of Fowler's *Modern English Usage*.

Cannan, Charles (1858–1919), Aristotelian scholar and publisher. Tutor and lecturer at Trinity College, Oxford; elected Delegate of Oxford University Press in 1895; I898–1919 Secretary to the Delegates.

Chalmers, Robert, Baron Chalmers (1858–1938), civil servant. 1882 first place in Civil Service Examination; entered the Treasury as second-class clerk; 1903 Assistant Secretary (Treasury); 1907 Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue; 1913 Governor of Ceylon; March 1916 appointed joint Permanent Secretary of the Treasury (with J. Bradbury and T. Heath); retired March 1919.

[Elibank] Murray, Alexander William Charles Oliphant, Baron Murray of Elibank (1870–1920), politician and businessman. 1900–6 Liberal MP for Midlothian; 1906–10 MP for Peebles and Selkirk; 1910–12 MP for Midlothian; 1909 Under-Secretary of State for India; 1910 Parliamentary (Patronage) Secretary to the Treasury and Liberal Chief Whip; 1912 resigned from Commons.

Evans, Edward Ratcliffe Garth Russell (first Baron Mountevans) (1880–1957), naval officer. 1900 junior officer in ship sent to the relief of Captain Scott's first Antarctic expedition; 1910 joined Scott's second Antarctic expedition as captain of the Terra Nova; April 1917 commanded the *Broke* which, together with the *Swift*, engaged six German destroyers that had just bombarded Dover harbour. The *Broke* successfully rammed one of the German ships (became known as 'Evans of the *Broke*'); 1929–31 first flag command was in the Australian Squadron cruiser *Australia*; 1933 Commander-in-Chief Africa station; Commander-in-Chief at the Nore 1935; 1939–45 'Outdoor' Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London Region.

Fisher, Sir (Norman Fenwick) Warren (1879–1948), civil servant. 1903 Board of Inland Revenue; 1908 joined the Treasury as Chalmers' Private Secretary and became involved in the planning for the 1909 Budget; 1912 transferred by Lloyd George to the National Insurance Commission; May 1913 Inland Revenue; August 1918 Chairman of the Board; 1919 Permanent Secretary to the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service; 1939 Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, North Western Region (based at Manchester); 1940–2 Special Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London Region, in charge of the restoration of bomb-damaged roads and public utilities, the demolition of unsafe buildings; 1942 dismissed by Herbert Morrison.

Fletcher, Charles Robert Leslie (1857–1934), historian. 1883–1906 tutor and then fellow of Magdalen College Oxford; 1905 Delegate of the Clarendon Press; 1912–27 Perpetual Delegate.

Fowler, Henry Watson (1858–1933): lexicographer and grammarian. 1906 with his brother Francis George Fowler, published *The King's English*; 1926 alone, published *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*.

Fraser, Sir Bruce Donald Fraser, (1910–93), civil servant. 1933 onwards served in a number of departments; 1966–71 finished his civil service career as head of the Exchequer and Audit Department (now the National Audit Office). Best known for his revision of *The Complete Plain Words*.

Game, Sir Philip Woolcott (1876–1961), air force officer. 1930–5 Governor of New South Wales (dismissed the Premier J. T. Lang in 1932); 1935–45 Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police.

Griffith, Llewelyn Wyn (1890–1977), writer and broadcaster. 1909 non-university entrant to Inland Revenue; 1945–52 Assistant Secretary; worked closely with Gowers on *Plain Words*; 1954 published a history of the Civil Service; a prolific broadcaster and author in his later years. Strong advocate of the Welsh language and Welsh history.

Hankey, Maurice Pascal Alers, first Baron Hankey (1877–1963), civil servant. 1912 Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence; 1916–38 established procedures for, and ran first Cabinet Office; 1939 elevated to House of Lords; September 1939 appointed Minister without Portfolio in Chamberlain's War Cabinet; chaired the Cabinet's Scientific Advisory Committee, that played a key role in the development of the atomic bomb program; 1942 dismissed by Churchill.

Hindley, John Scott, Viscount Hyndley (1883–1963), businessman and coal industry administrator. 1919–39 commercial adviser to Mines Department; 1942–3 Controller-General in Ministry of Fuel and Power; 1946–51 first Chairman of the National Coal Board.

Keynes, John Maynard, Baron Keynes (1883–1946), economist. 1906 clerk, India Office; 1908 Fellow King's College Cambridge; 1915 Treasury Finance Division; 1916 head of new division responsible for all external finance; 1920 onward active in the Liberal Party and in promoting the use of public corporations and interventionist strategies; 1940 appointed member of Consultative Council to the Chancellor the Exchequer; also on Chancellor's Budget Committee; adviser to the Treasury.

Lugard, Frederick John Dealtry, Baron Lugard (1858–1945), colonial administrator. 1878–86 army officer; 1889 joined the Imperial British East Africa Company; 1890 sent by the company to Uganda where he became military administrator; 1900 High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria; 1906 Governor of Hong Kong; 1912 returned to Nigeria as Governor of the two protectorates; 1914–19 Governor-General of the combined Colony of Nigeria;1922–36 British representative on the League of Nation's Permanent Mandates Commission.

Masterman, Charles Frederick Gurney (1874–1927), politician and author. 1906 elected MP for West Ham; 1908 Under-Secretary to the Home Office; 1910 Financial Secretary to the Treasury; 1912 first Chairman of the National Insurance Commission; 1914 established Wellington House propaganda unit; 1914 created Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster with seat in Cabinet; resigned from Cabinet 1915.

Maxwell, Sir Alexander (1880–1963), civil servant. 1904 Home Office (private secretary to successive secretaries of state); 1928 Chairman of the Prison Commission; 1932 Deputy Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, 1938–48, Permanent Under-Secretary; 1949 member of the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment.

Milford, Sir Humphrey Sumner (1877–1952), publisher. 1900 assistant to Charles Cannan, Secretary to the Delegates of the Oxford University Press; 1906 Cannan transferred him to the London office; 1913–45 manager of the London business.

Morant, Sir Robert Laurie (1863–1920), civil servant. 1886 tutor to Crown Prince of Siam and helped reform Siamese education system; 1895 Board of Education; 1903 Permanent Secretary responsible for implementing the Education Act 1902; 1911 Chairman of National Insurance Commission; 1919 first Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health.

Nicholson, Ivor (1891–1937), publisher. During WW1 in charge of the Pictorial Propaganda Branch at Wellington House, under Charles Masterman MP; 1931 founded Ivor Nicholson and Watson publishing house.

Padmore, Sir Thomas (1909–96), civil servant. 1931 Inland Revenue; 1934 the Treasury; 1943 Principal Private Secretary to Sir John Anderson; 1945 Deputy Cabinet Secretary; 1951 returned to the Treasury; 1952 promoted to Second Secretary; until 1962 primarily in charge of personnel and management matters for the Civil Service.

Radzinowicz, Sir Leon (1906–99), criminologist. 1938 arrived in Britain from Poland; developed study of criminology at Cambridge and founded Cambridge Institute of Criminology. 1949 member of Royal Commission into Capital Punishment.

Salter, (James) Arthur, Baron Salter (1881–1975), civil servant, politician, and university professor. 1904 Transport Department of the Admiralty; 1911 Private Secretary to Charles Masterman MP; 1913

Assistant Secretary of the Insurance Commission; 1914 Director of Ship Requisitioning, the Admiralty; 1919 secretariat, League of Nations; 1930 journalist and author in London; 1934 Gladstone Professor of Political Theory and Institutions and Fellow of All Souls, Oxford; 1937–50 MP for Oxford University; 1944 Deputy Director-General of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). 1951–3 Conservative MP for Ormskirk.

Schuster, Claud, Baron Schuster (1869–1956), civil servant. 1899 secretary London Government Act Commission; 1903 legal assistant to Robert Morant, Board of Education; 1911 Principal Assistant Secretary, Board of Education; 1911 moved with Morant to National Insurance Commission; 1914 Chief Executive Officer of Wellington House; 1915–44 joint offices of Clerk of the Crown in Chancery and Permanent Secretary in the Lord Chancellor's Office.

Scott, Sir Harold Richard (1887–1969), civil servant. Home Office 1911, Ministry of Labour in the First World War; 1919 returned to the Home Office; 1938 chief staff officer to Sir John Anderson; 1939 Chief Administrative Officer, London Civil Defence Region; 1941 Ministry of Home Security; 1944 Commissioner of London Metropolitan Police.

Sheepshanks, Sir Thomas Herbert (1895–1964), civil servant. 1919 Ministry of Health; 1936 Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Health; 1937 Air Raid Precautions section, Home Office; 1939 Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Home Security; 1945 Under Secretary in the Treasury; 1946 permanent secretary, Ministry of Town and Country Planning; 1951–5 Permanent Secretary of Ministry of Local Government and Planning.

Sinker, Sir (Algernon) Paul (1905–77), university teacher and civil servant. 1940 volunteered to become temporary civil servant; 1941–2 posted Washington DC as head of Admiralty's War Registry; 1945 appointed by Bridges as first Director of Training and Education in the Treasury, to implement the recommendations of the Assheton Committee; 1950 Chairman of the Civil Service Selection Board.

Tawney, Richard Henry (1880–1962), historian and political thinker. Contemporary of Gowers at Rugby; 1899 Balliol College, Oxford; 1903 Toynbee Hall; 1905–47 active in Workers Educational Association; part-time university lecturer; 1914 army service in ranks and wounded twice on first day of Somme; 1912 London School of Economics; taught at LSE for all of his professional life; appointed Professor of Economic History in 1931.

Wallace, Captain Rt. Hon. (David) Euan Wallace (1892–1941), politician. 1922 Conservative MP for Rugby; 1924–41 MP for Hornsey; assistant Government Whip 1928–9; 1939 Minister of Transport; May–October 1940 Senior Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London Region. Took sick leave in October 1940 at which point Gowers took over his responsibilities as Senior Regional Commissioner; died February 1941. Gowers formally succeeded him in February 1941.

Willink, Sir Henry Urmston (1894–1973), politician and academic administrator. MC and the Croix de Guerre WW1; 1935 took silk; 1940 won by-election at Croydon North for the Conservatives; 1940 appointed Special Commissioner for the Homeless in the London Civil Defence region; 1943–5 Minister of Health.

Wootton [*née* Adam], Barbara Frances, Baroness Wootton of Abinger (1897–1988), university professor. 1922 Research Department of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress; 1926 Principal of Morley College; 1927 Director of Studies London University; 1944 Reader, Bedford College; 1948 professor, Bedford College; expert in criminology, penology, and social work, served on the Gowers inquiry into the Closing Hours of Shops; 1958 created life peer.

Notes

Preface

1. Homer, *Iliad* xiii.
2. A. and C. Reed (1863) *Memoirs of the Life and Philanthropic Work of Andrew Reed DD with Selections from His Journals* (London: Strahan & Co), pp. iii–iv.
3. Obituary: Sir Ernest Gowers. Author of *Plain Words', The Times*, 18 April 1966.
4. Cited in P. Barberis (1996) *The Elite of the Elite: Permanent Secretaries in the British Higher Civil Service* (Aldershot: Ashgate), p. xi.
5. S. Baldwin, speech to 1925 Civil Service Dinner, Baldwin Political Papers, Box 185, f. 55.
6. R. A. Chapman (1988) *Ethics in the British Civil Service* (London: Routledge), p. xiv.
7. Chapman (1988), p. xvi.
8. T. Jones, Keith Middlemas (ed.) (1969) *Whitehall Diary vol. i 1916–1925* (London: Oxford University Press), p. xvii.
9. C. Cook, P. Jones, J. Sinclair, and J. Weeks (1985) *Sources in British Political History 1900–1951: vol 2, Public Servants* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 100.
10. R. Kipling (undated), 'The Files', *Rudyard Kipling's Verse, Inclusive Edition, 1885–1918* (London: Hodder & Stoughton).

1 Anatomy of a Victorian Family

1. W. R. Gowers (2 vols: 1886 and 1888) *A Manual of Diseases of the Nervous System* (London: J & A Churchill).
2. G. Holmes (1960) *Queen Square and the National Hospital 1860–1960* (London: Edward Arnold), p. 76.
3. J. D. Spillane (1981) *The Doctrine of the Nerves: Chapters in the History of Neurology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 404.
4. E. A. Gowers (1958) 'Medical Jargon: The Osler Oration', *The Practitioner*, 8, September, 338–44, p. 338.
5. Kipling letter to James M. Conland, 17–18 December 1897, quoted in Thomas Pinney (ed.) (1990) *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling: vol. 2 1890–9* (London: Macmillan), p. 329.
6. Editorial, 'Sir W. Gowers on the Lunacy Laws', *The Times*, 21 November 1902.
7. Arthur James MD, Metropolitan Street Ambulance Association, *The Times*, 29 February 1904.
8. Anonymous, 'Street Noises in Marylebone', *The Times*, 28 October 1904.
9. C. Dewey (1996) *The Mind of the Indian Civil Service* (Delhi: Oxford University Press). This compares the influences on, and lives of Frank Lugard Brayne (1882–1952) and Sir Malcolm Darling (1880–1969) two influential members of the Indian Civil Service.
10. Gowers to Wootton, Girton College Archives, 2 August 1948.

2 Education for Public Service

1. E. A. Gowers (undated) address to the Dickens Society (Gowers archive).
2. F. Clayton, 'Sir Ernest Gowers', *The Times*, 21 April 1966.
3. The book was in its sixth edition when republished in 1904. By then, the market in popular fiction was being flooded by school stories lauding the public school experience and supplemented by magazines such as *Boy's Own Paper* launched in 1870. One author, Talbot Baines Read, a relative of Gowers, wrote several school stories, including *The Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch*.
4. W. Reid and J. Filby (1982) *The Sixth: An Essay in Education and Democracy* (Lewes: Falmer Press), p. 19.
5. E. A. Gowers (1954) Address, Churchill College, Cambridge (Gowers archive).
6. Rugby School (1898) *The Meteor*, 25 June.
7. Rugby School (1899) *The Meteor*, 17 October.
8. Letters from Kipling to Sir William Gowers (Gowers archive).
9. C. N. L. Brooke (1993) *A History of the University of Cambridge, vol. iv 1890–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 214.
10. Brooke (1993) p. 212.
11. S. H. Northcote and C. E. Trevelyan (1853) *Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service*, Parliamentary Sessional Papers 1854, no. 1713.
12. F. Musgrove (1959) 'Middle-Class Education and Employment in the Nineteenth Century', *The Economic History Review*, 12/1, 99–111, p. 102.
13. Musgrove (1959) p. 107.
14. J. A. Salter (1961) *Memoirs of a Public Servant* (London: Faber and Faber).
15. R. N. Soffer (1994) *Discipline and Power: The University, History, and the Making of an English Elite, 1870–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
16. J. W. Wheeler-Bennett (1962) *John Anderson, Viscount Waverley* (London: Macmillan), p. 15.
17. Wheeler-Bennett (1962) p. 17.
18. J. G. Hall and D. Martin (2003) *Yes, Lord Chancellor: A Biography of Lord Schuster* (Chichester: Barry Rose Law Publishers), p. 12.
19. V. Glendinning (2006) *Leonard Woolf: A Life* (London: Pocket Books), p. 69.
20. Q. Bell (1995) *Bloomsbury Recalled* (NY: Columbia University Press), p. 118.
21. M. Holroyd (1971) *Lytton Strachey: A Biography* (London: Penguin Books), p. 174.
22. E. A. Gowers personal file, 1903–30, TNA: PRO CSC 11/114.
23. Obituary, 'Sir Ernest Gowers', *The Guardian*, 18 April 1966.

3 Coping with Lloyd George

1. A. Briggs (1960) *They Saw it Happen: An Anthology of Eye-witnesses' Accounts of Events in British History 1897–1940* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 31.
2. G. M. Young (1952) broadcast talk cited in Briggs, p. 28.
3. E. W. Cohen (1965) *The Growth of the British Civil Service 1780–1939* (London: Frank Cass), p. 151.
4. D. Butler and A. Sloman (1979) *British Political Facts 1900–1970* (London: Macmillan), p. 264.

5. R. Skidelsky (1983) *John Maynard Keynes: (vol. 1) Hopes Betrayed 1883–1920* (London: Penguin), p. 175.
6. R. F. Harrod (1972) *The Life of John Maynard Keynes* (London: Pelican Books), p. 139.
7. Harrod, p. 144.
8. Keynes to Strachey, 7 March 1907, cited in Harrod (1972) p. 142.
9. W. Griffith, unpublished autobiography.
10. Ernest Gowers' brother Bill qualified for the Bar in 1913, taking the exams when on leave from Nigeria.
11. Harrod, p. 151.
12. W. Griffith, unpublished autobiography.
13. C. Hobhouse, E. David, ed. (1977) *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: from the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse* (London: John Murray), p. 56.
14. C. E. Hobhouse (1907–8), T. R. Buchanan (1908–9), A. W. C. O. Murray (1909–10), E. S. Montagu (1910–14).
15. G. F. Millar, 'Buchanan, Thomas Ryburn (1846–1911)', *ODNB*.
16. Newspaper photograph at Plate 6, headed 'A Gladstonian Majority in Midlothian' showing Elibank, his wife, his political agent, and Gowers (Gowers archive).
17. S. D. Waley (1964) *Edwin Montagu: A Memoir and Account of His Visits to India* (London: Asia Publishing House), pp. 39–44.
18. Son of Samuel McCurdy Greer, a member of the Irish Bar and at one time MP for Co. Derry, and Recorder of Londonderry.
19. D. C. Somervell, *British Politics Since 1900* (Andrew Dakers, 1950), p. 33.
20. J. Anderson (1950), address to dinner of New South Wales Regional Group of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, *Public Administration* (Sydney, N.S.W.), ix, I, March, p. 550.
21. L. Masterman (1968) *C. F. G. Masterman* (London: Frank Cass), p. 228.
22. Written in the late 1950s, the paper refers to the 'recent' publication of Braithwaite's memoirs. Gowers wrote an anonymous review of the book, 'Administrative Drama: Lloyd George's Ambulance Wagon, the Memoirs of W. J. Braithwaite', *The Economist*, 7 September 1957.
23. E. A. Gowers (c. 1950) unpublished paper, (Gowers archive).
24. G. C. Peden (2000) *The Treasury and British Public Policy 1906–1959* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 35. A. J. Sylvester, who became Lloyd George's Principal Private Secretary during the First World War gives a graphic description of the continuing challenge of managing his paperwork. See A. J. Sylvester (1947) *The Real Lloyd George* (London: Cassell). See also H. Hobhouse (1977) *Inside Asquith's Cabinet*.
25. F. Donaldson (1962) *The Marconi Scandal* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis), pp. 16–17.
26. 'The Marconi Agreement: Ministerial Repudiation of Charges', *The Times*, 12 October 1912.
27. D. C. Somervell (1950) *British Politics since 1900* (London: Andrew Dakers), p. 92.
28. Specific research had to be undertaken on the implications of the Act for a range of areas such as Outdoor Staff, Audit Staff, Actuarial Advisory Committee, Outworkers, Employees of the Crown, and Tuberculosis. L. Masterman, p. 223.

29. E. A. Gowers (c. 1950) unpublished paper, (Gowers archive).
30. J. Campbell (2006) *If Love Were All: The Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George* (London: Jonathan Cape).
31. A. Mcfadyean (1964) *Recollected in Tranquillity* (London: Pall Mall Press), p. 52.
32. L. Masterman, p. 262.
33. J. A. Salter (1967) *Slave of the Lamp: A Public Servant's Notebook* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), pp. 5–6.
34. J. A. Salter (1961) *Memoirs of a Public Servant* (London: Faber & Faber), pp. 60–1.
35. W. J. Braithwaite (1957) *Lloyd George's Ambulance Wagon: Being the Memoirs of William J. Braithwaite 1911–1912* (London: Methuen), p. 282.
36. Hall and Martin (2003) *Yes, Lord Chancellor*, p. 15.
37. E. O'Halpin, *Head of the Civil Service: A Biography of Sir Warren Fisher* (London and NY: Routledge), p. 17.
38. M. I. Cole, ed. (1952) *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912–1924*, cited in Geoffrey K. Fry, 'Morant, Sir Robert Laurie (1863–1920)', *ODNB*.
39. E. A. Gowers (c. 1950) unpublished paper, (Gowers archive).
40. E. A. Gowers (1957) 'Administrative Drama: Lloyd George's Ambulance Wagon, Being the Memoirs of W. J. Braithwaite'.
41. E. A. Gowers (c. 1950) 'The Place of the Civil Service in British Government', one of a series of lectures on 'Public Life in England Today' given at the Sorbonne, under the auspices of the British Institute in Paris (Gowers archive).
42. Griffith, unpublished autobiography.

4 WWI: Under Cover at Wellington House

1. Cited in M. L. Sanders and P. M. Taylor (1982) *British Propaganda During the First World War, 1914–18* (London: Macmillan), pp. 38–9.
2. There were 25 authors who attended the meeting. They were William Archer, Sir J. M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, A. C. Benson, Rev. Monsignor Benson, Robert Bridges, T. H. Hall Caine, G. K. Chesterton, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Galsworthy, Thomas Hardy, Anthony Hope Hawkins, Maurice Hewlett, W. J. Locke, E. V. Lucas, J. W. Mackail, John Masefield, A. E. W. Mason, Professor Gilbert Murray, Sir Henry Newbolt, Sir Gilbert Park MP, Sir Owen Seaman, George Trevelyan, H. G. Wells, and Israel Zangwill. The meeting was also attended by a number of government officials.
3. These included Sydney Brookes, E. T. Cook, Robert Donald (*Daily Chronicle* – a man who later caused the demise of Wellington House), A. G. Gardiner (*Daily News*), Geoffrey Dawson, J. L. Garvin (*Pall Mall Gazette*), H. L. W. Lawson MP (*Daily Telegraph*), Sidney Low (*Standard*), Thomas Marlowe (*Daily Mail*), Sir William Robertson Nicoll (*British Weekly*), Geoffrey Robinson (*The Times*), J. Alfred Spender (*Westminster Gazette*), J. St Loe Strachey (*Spectator*), and Fabian A. G. Ware (*Morning Post)*.
4. C. F. G. Masterman (1915) 'Interim Report of the Work of the Bureau Established for the Purpose of Laying before Neutral Nations and the Dominions the Case of Great Britain and Her Allies', Imperial War Museum Library. The list of publications included three by Conan Doyle.
5. L. Masterman (1968) pp. 293–4. Lt T. O. Willson succeeded Gowers as CEO of Wellington House.

6. R. W. Harris (1939) *Not So Humdrum: The Autobiography of a Civil Servant* (London: John Lane), p. 201.
7. 'War Questions', *The Times*, 9 December 1915.
8. Gowers to Montgomery, TNA: PRO INF4, 4 May 1916.
9. P. M. Taylor (1999) *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 38.
10. Sanders and Taylor, p. 120.
11. Foreign Office minutes, 14 August 1916, TNA: PRO FO 39/55, cited in Sanders and Taylor, p. 121.
12. Exchange of emails, Imperial War Museum and author. Authorship of pamphlets uncertain.
13. 'Italy and Great Britain: A Strong Alliance, Mr Asquith's Visit to Rome', *The Times*, 3 April 1916.
14. 'Italy and Great Britain', p. 18.
15. C. R. L. Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling (1911) *School History of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). Comments from C. H. K. Marten (Rev. R. Symonds): 'Fletcher, Charles Robert Leslie (1857–1934)'. *ODNB*.
16. William Sanday (1914) *The Deeper Causes of the War*, was the first Oxford pamphlet. It covered 'The psychology of Prussian militarism; German public opinion; and Germany's aggressive ambitions', (OUP pamphlet summary).
17. Fletcher to Cannon, September 1914, OUP CP71, CPED 1001208.
18. Chapman to Milford, OUP, CPED 1001208 Box CP71, 18 September 1914.
19. Fletcher to Cannan, 17 September 1914, OUP, CPED 001207, Box CP71.
20. Milford, file note, OUP, CP71: CPED 001208, 18 September 1914.
21. Milford to Cannan, OUP, CP71: CPED 1001208, 19 September 1914.
22. Milford to Cannan, 18 September 1914.
23. Milford to Cannan, 24 September 1914.
24. Milford to Cannan, 11 March 1915.
25. C. Masterman, evidence to Spurgeon/Donald Inquiry, 14 November 1917, TNA: PRO INF4.
26. I. Nicholson (1931) 'An aspect of British official wartime propaganda', *Cornhill Magazine*, New Series, LXX, January to June 1931, 593–606, p. 594.
27. Gowers to Foreign Office, 29 May 1916, TNA: PRO FO 395/37.
28. Sanders and Taylor, p. 126.
29. K. Gladstone (undated) 'Film as Allied assistance: Captain Bromhead's mission to Russia, 1916–17', *Imperial War Museum Review*, no. 9, pp. 61–74.
30. S. Malvern (2004) *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), p. 13.
31. Sanders and Taylor, p. 123.
32. Imperial War Museum, 'History of the Imperial War Museum', www.iwm.org.uk.
33. National Archives Research and learning online/Spotlights on History/First World War/Alleged German 'war crimes': www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.
34. National Archives Alleged German 'war crimes'.
35. T. Wilson (1986) *The Myriad of Faces of War: Britain and the Great War, 1914*. (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 183.
36. R. Kipling (undated) *Rudyard Kipling's Verse, Inclusive Edition 1885–1918* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), p. 440.

37. R. Kipling (c.1924) *1916 – The Salient to the Somme – the Irish Guards in the Great War*.
38. The Foreign Office News Department, the Neutral Press Committee (established in September 1914 to provide information to journalists from allied and neutral countries) as well as Wellington House itself. Domestic propaganda to maintain public commitment to the war effort was overt, initially run by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and later, in 1917, also by the National War Aims Committee.
39. Nicholson (1931) p. 604.
40. R. Donald, 'Report on Propaganda Arrangements', 9 January 1917, TNA: PRO INF 4/4B, p. 3.
41. J. Buchan, 'Propaganda – a Department of Information: Secret Report to the War Cabinet', January 1917, TNA PRO INF4.
42. Gowers to Hawtrey, 17 January 1917, TNA: PRO INF4.
43. I. Nicholson (1927) 'Sir Ernest Gowers KBE CB, Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue', *Pall Mall Magazine*, September. (proof copy, Gowers archive).
44. L. Masterman, p. 301.
45. Montgomery to Buchan, 24 October 1917, TNA: PRO INF4.
46. Formerly W. M. Aitken, Conservative MP.
47. Nicholson (1931) p. 605.
48. Nicholson (1931) p. 605.
49. Gowers to Mrs Masterman, 19 November 1927, Masterman Collection, Birmingham University, CFGM.
50. J. D. Squires (1935) *British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917* (Harvard Historical Monographs: Harvard University Press), pp. 80–1.
51. L. Masterman, p. 275 records Masterman's receipt of this award. Others from Wellington House may also have received it.
52. D. Cooper (1954) *Old Men Forget: An Autobiography of Duff Cooper (Viscount Norwich)* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis), p. 60.
53. See G. C. Peden, 'Anderson, John, first Viscount Waverley (1882–1958)', *ODNB*, and J. W. Wheeler-Bennett (1962).
54. E. Robinson (c. 1917) 'The Home in Reserve', draft article for *Harpers* (Gowers archive).
55. P. Buitenhuis (1987) *The Great War of Words: British, American, and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914–1923* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), pp.179–80.
56. D. Gervais, 'Masefield, John Edward (1878–1967)', *ODNB*.
57. 'Pay of Civil Servants: Successful Arbitration Experiment', *The Times*, 24 April 1918.

5 Influential Head of 'Enfeebled' Mines Department

1. 'Obituary: Sir E. Gowers, Author of Plain Words', *The Times*, 18 April 1966.
2. Undated typescript, (Gowers archive).
3. B. Supple (1987), *The History of the British Coal Industry Vol. 4. 1913–1946: The Political Economy of Decline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), pp. 596–7.

4. Supple, p. 88.
5. Coal Industry Commission Report (Sankey Commission), vol. II Cmd 360, 1919.
6. Supple, p. 144.
7. Supple, p. 144. Mr Guy Calthorp, the wartime Coal Controller, died in February 1919. In October, Sir Evans Jones resigned 'providing an opportunity for the complete reorganization of the Department' ('Coal Control Changes', *The Times*, 20 October 1919).
8. C. L. Mowat (1955) *Britain Between the Wars, 1918–1940* (London: Methuen), p. 55.
9. Mowat, p. 35.
10. His starting salary was £1,800 with a £500 'war bonus'.
11. Cited in Supple, p. 155.
12. Supple, p. 146.
13. P. Slowe (1993), *Manny Shinwell: An Authorised Biography* (London: Pluto Press), p. 124.
14. In 1930–1, Shinwell was again Secretary for Mines after a period in the political wilderness after he lost his seat in October 1924.
15. A. Hewes (1926), 'The Task of the English Coal Commission', *The Journal of Political Economy* 34/1, 1–12, February, p. 3.
16. T. Jones, ed. Keith Middlemas (1969), *Whitehall Diary, vol. 1: 1916–1925* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 324.
17. Jones, p. 325.
18. Letters and memoranda dated February 1926 in TNA: PRO POWE 16/5141, cited in Supple, p. 229.
19. Gowers to Waterhouse, Baldwin 13, ff. 108–10, 19 December 1925.
20. Waterhouse to Gowers, Baldwin 13, f. 111, 28 December 1925.
21. W. H. Beveridge (1953), *Power and Influence* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), p. 219.
22. Beveridge, p. 221.
23. Supple, p. 240.
24. Supple, p. 226.
25. Supple, pp. 226–7.
26. E. A. Gowers (c. 1950), unpublished paper (Gowers archive).
27. Air Vice-Marshal Sir Philip Game, 'Obituary: Lord Waverley', *The Times*, 15 January 1958.
28. 'The General Strike: Diary of Events', *The Times*, 18 May 1926.
29. 'Back to Coal', *The Times*, 15 May 1926.
30. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain (1926), 'Memorandum of Interview with Mr Gowers (Permanent Under-Secretary for Mines), re the Government Proposals for a Settlement of the Mining Dispute', Trades Union Congress (TUC): www.tuc.org.uk.
31. Drafts held in the Baldwin Papers, Box 17.
32. Baldwin to King George V, 23 August 1926. Cited in P. Williamson and E. Baldwin (2004). *Baldwin Papers: A Conservative Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 190.
33. Jones to Baldwin, Baldwin Papers, Box 18, 26 August 1926.
34. Cited in Supple, p. 209.
35. Lord Birkenhead, cited in A. Briggs (1960), p. 382.

6 'Quis Custodiet?' – Surtax, Syntax and Scandal

1. Nicholson (1927) (draft in Gowers archive, no page numbers).
2. Peden, p. 208.
3. A. Johnston, *The Inland Revenue* (The New Whitehall Series No. 13) (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1965), p. 17.
4. 'Quis Custodiet?', *The Times*, 5 July 1928.
5. 'Bureaucracy and the Taxpayer', *The Times*, 8 October 1928.
6. E. A. Gowers (1934) 'The Income Tax Machine', address to Dumfermline Chamber of Commerce (Gowers archive).
7. 'The Inland Revenue Department', *The Times*, 4 May 1928.
8. A. L. N. D. Houghton (undated), journal of the Association of Tax Officers, pp. 19–20 (Gowers archive).
9. Nicholson (1927).
10. H. W. and F. G. Fowler, *The King's English* (Second edn; Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1918).
11. E. A. Gowers (1929) 'Mainly About the King's English', *Public Administration*, / 2, pp. 182–91.
12. E. Kessel, 'The Human Inland Revenue', letter to *The Times*, 20 June 1930.
13. Johnston, *The Inland Revenue*, p. 57.
14. Nicholson (1927).
15. Ormsby-Gore to Lugard, 27 July 1928, L. S. Amery Papers, Churchill Archive, Churchill College, Cambridge, AMEL 2/4/13.
16. P. R. Chalmers (c. 1931) *Sport and Travel in East Africa: An Account of Two Visits 1928 and 1930. Compiled from the Diaries of HRH the Prince of Wales* (First American edition edn; NY: E. P. Dutton), p. 18.
17. A. Lascelles, D. Hart-Davis ed. (1989) *In Royal Service: Letters and Journals of Sir Alan Lascelles, 1920–1936* (London: Hamish Hamilton), p. 91.
18. Lascelles, p. 91.
19. The details of this trip are described in Faith Murray (1944) *The Diary of Faith Murray – Selections Chosen by Her Husband* (Edinburgh: R & R Clark Ltd).
20. Bottomley to Sir W. F. Gowers, Colonial Records Project, Rhodes House, Oxford, CPA, mss.afr.s1150, f. 2. For a fuller assessment of Sir William Gowers as Governor of Uganda see R. D. Scott (2009) 'Gowers of Uganda: the public and private life of a forgotten colonial governor', *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 30/2, December.
21. M. Perham (1976) *East African Journey* (London: Faber), p. 46.
22. Perham, p. 209.
23. Anon. (1954) 'Sir William Gowers: Great Services to Uganda', *East Africa and Rhodesia*, p. 181.
24. D. Sunderland (2007) *Managing British Colonial and Post-Colonial Development: The Crown Agents, 1914–1974* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer), p. 2.
25. Obituary, 'Lady (Ernest) Gowers', *The Times*, 2 October 1952.
26. Nicholson (1927), p. 4.

7 Mine Owners' Bogy Man

1. G. D. H. Cole (1930) 'The Problem of the Mines', *The Political Quarterly*, 1/1, January, 38–69, p. 68.
2. 'Bumper Salary', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 April 1966.

3. R. Skidelsky (1967) *Politicians and the Slump: The Labour Government of 1929–1931* (London: Macmillan), p. 324.
4. 'Mines Reorganization', *The Times*, 11 March 1931.
5. Unsigned briefing note. TNA: PRO POWE 2/3/31.
6. 'M'donald Escapes Defeat by 5 Votes', *New York Times*, 14 March 1931.
7. W. A. Robson (1937) *Public Enterprise: Developments in Social Ownership and Control in Great Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 230.
8. Supple, p. 202.
9. Obituary, *The Times*, 18 April 1966.
10. Supple, pp. 596–7.
11. Coal Mines Reorganization Commission (1932) 'Report to the Secretary for Mines 1932'.
12. Coal Mines Reorganization Commission (1933) 'Report to the Secretary for Mines 1933'.
13. E. A. Gowers (1933) 'Address to the Marshall Society', 9 November (Gowers archive).
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15. 'Five Times Dead', *The Times*, 25 May 1935.
16. Coal Mines Reorganization Commission (1936) 'Report to the Secretary for Mines 1936'.
17. Gowers to Cruikshank, TNA: PRO COAL, 17 October 1935.
18. Crookshank statement, *Hansard*, 2 July 1936.
19. Supple, p. 597.
20. 'Tasks for Coal Commission', *The Times*, 27 February 1939.
21. Supple, p. 355.
22. 'Plan of Coal Commission', *The Times*, 14 June 1939.
23. E. A. Gowers (1944) 'The Coal Industry after the War', TNA: PRO POWE 22/127.
24. Memo Gaitskell to Dalton, 2 February 1942, LSE: DALTON 2/7/4.
25. B. Pimlott (1985) *Hugh Dalton* (London: Jonathan Cape), p. 352.
26. Memo Gaitskell to Dalton.
27. Anon., 'Coal a National Property', *The Times*, 1 July 1942.
28. Supple, pp. 596–7.
29. Supple, p. 617.
30. Supple, p. 620.
31. E. A. Gowers (1945) typescript (Gowers archive).
32. Gowers to Major Gwilym Lloyd George, 23 May 1945, TNA: PRO COAL 15/22.
33. H. Willink (1966) address at Gowers' memorial service (Gowers archive).
34. A. Sampson (1965) *Anatomy of Britain Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 539.
35. For an account of an extraordinary adventure Pelly had in Canada, when a young man, see R. Gowers (2004) *The Swamp of Death: A True Tale of Victorian Lies and Murder* (London: Hamish Hamilton).
36. My mother's grandmother, Alice Larkins (who later married a Pelly), was sent home to England from India during the Indian Mutiny. Her parents were massacred in 1857 in the siege at Cawnpore.
37. John Hindley had by now become Baron Hyndley.
38. 'English Knight and Lady Enthusiastic over TVA', *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, September 1935.

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2. T. H. O'Brien (1955) *Civil Defence – History of the Second World War* (London: HMSO). O'Brien gives a comprehensive overview of the build-up of civil defence.
3. 'Agriculture and Defence', *The Times*, 22 July 1936.
4. Obituary, *The Times*, 18 April 1966.
5. E. A. Gowers (c.1950) unpublished paper (Gowers archive).
6. Salter (1967) p. 133.
7. E. A. Gowers, address to Zone and Battalion Commanders of the Home Guard, 11 November 1942 (Gowers archive).
8. O'Brien, p. 116.
9. Hennessy describes Scott as regional commissioner, 'supremo', or 'Mr Civil Defence'. See P. Hennessy (1993) *Never Again: Britain 1945–1951* (London: Vintage), pp. 15 and 29.
10. H. Scott (1959) *Your Obedient Servant* (London: Andre Deutsch), p. 107.
11. Scott, p. 106.
12. Scott, p. 107.
13. O'Brien, p. 175.
14. Scott, p. 109.
15. Scott, p. 113.
16. Anderson to Gowers, 18 April 1939 (Gowers archive).
17. 'Two Points of Defence', *The Times*, 19 April 1939.
18. A. Calder (1969) *The People's War: Britain 1939–45* (London: Jonathan Cape), p. 199.
19. O'Brien, p. xv.
20. Scott, p. 115.
21. Scott, p. 116.
22. P. Ziegler (1995) *London at War 1939–1945* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf), p. 28.
23. Papers held in the archives of the Natural History Museum.
24. E. A. Gowers (undated) handwritten notes for address to Natural History Museum farewell dinner (Gowers archive).
25. Scott, p. 122.
26. *The Times*, 22 August 1939.
27. Ziegler, p. 36.
28. 'Royal Visit to ARP Workers', *The Times*, 6 September 1939.
29. All family correspondence in this chapter held in the author's personal collection.
30. Ziegler, pp. 62–3.
31. E. Wallace diary, August–December 1939, f. 160.
32. Gowers to Gardiner, 19 October 1939, TNA: PRO HO186/39.
33. Gowers archive. 28 November 1939.
34. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 34.
35. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 35.
36. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 42.
37. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 56.
38. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 94.

39. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 94.
40. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 98.
41. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 117.
42. P. Young (1966) *World War 1939–45* (London: Arthur Barker), p. 74.
43. Ziegler, p. 111.
44. Scott, pp. 124–5.
45. Scott, pp. 134–5.
46. Mountevans (1946) *Adventurous Life* (London: Hutchinson), p. 225.
47. Wallace diary, January–July 1940, f. 66.
48. Wallace diary, August–October 1940, f. 94. Morale had been a concern to authorities since before the war. See R. Mackay (2002) *Half the Battle: Civilian Morale in Britain During the Second World War* (Manchester and NY: Manchester University Press).
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50. 'Sir Ernest Gowers', *The Tablet*, 23 April 1966.
51. B. Donoughue and G. W. Jones (1973) *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p. 282.
52. Address to unknown audience, November 1943 (Gowers archive).
53. O'Halpin, p. 276.
54. Wallace diary, August–October 1940, f. 117.
55. H. Swaffer cited in B. Donoughue and G. W. Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician*, p. 284.
56. J. Wheeler-Bennett, p. 255.
57. Wallace diary, August–October 1940, f. 142.
58. Wallace diary, August–October 1940, f. 140.
59. Wallace diary, August–October 1940, f. 179.
60. Wallace diary, August–October 1940, f. 180.
61. Correspondence, TNA: PRO HO207/163.
62. Wallace diary, August–October 1940, f. 199.
63. 'Obituary: Capt. Euan Wallace MP', *The Times*, 11 February 1941.

9 WWII: Leading London through the Blitz

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2. Obituary, *The Times*, 18 April 1966.
3. E. A. Gowers, address to MPs for the London Region, House of Commons, 6 February 1941, Churchill Archives: PRKP3.
4. TNA: PRO CAB67/9/44.
5. Scott, p. 131.
6. E. A. Gowers, address to unknown audience, November 1943 (Gowers archive).
7. A. Calder, p. 199.
8. Scott, p. 131.
9. O'Brien, p. 245.
10. Mountevans, p. 245.
11. E. A. Gowers, address to Members of Parliament, 6 February 1941 (Gowers archive).
12. Donoughue and Jones, p. 295.

13. E. A. Gowers, handwritten notes for address at Natural History Museum farewell dinner, 1945 (Gowers archive). The 'historic infant' reference comes from H. R. Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (Digitised by Harvard University March 8, 2006: Burdick Brothers 1857).
14. Young, p. 149.
15. B. H. Liddell Hart (1970) *History of the Second World War* (London: Cassell), p. 105.
16. O'Brien, p. 311.
17. R. M. Titmuss (1950) *Problems of Social Policy* (London: HMSO), pp. 335–6.
18. Titmuss, p. 330.
19. W. Sansom (1990) *The Blitz: Westminster at War* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 26. A copy of the first edition (Westminster City Council, May 1947) was presented to Gowers by the City of Westminster at the end of the war.
20. E. A. Gowers farewell address at Natural History Museum, 1945 (Gowers archive).
21. Ziegler, p. 179.
22. Titmuss, p. 348.
23. E. A. Gowers, address to Civil Defence Services at the Guildhall, London, 24 July 1941 (Gowers archive).
24. Ziegler, p. 211.
25. 'If London Is Invaded', *The Times*, 7 August 1942.
26. E. A. Gowers, address to Invasion Officers (Wandsworth), August 1942 (Gowers archive).
27. 'Sir Ernest Gowers, GCB, GBE, 1880-1966 – Honorary Fellow', *Clare College Magazine*, 1966, pp. 102–3.
28. Ministry of Home Security, HD Notice 65/42, 15 September 1942 (Gowers archive).
29. Typescript held in Gowers archive.
30. Scott, p. 116.
31. An Athenian festival in honour of Dionysus. During the feast, social order was interrupted or inverted, the slaves being allowed to participate. It lasted three days: on the first, libations were offered from newly opened casks of wine; the second was devoted to merrymaking and dressing up; the third was a festival of the dead.
32. E. A. Gowers, address to Town Clerks, 25 September 1942 (Gowers archive).
33. E. A. Gowers, address to London Region social club, February 1943 (Gowers archive).
34. E. A. Gowers, address to unknown audience, 27 November 1943 (Gowers archive).
35. E. A. Gowers, address to London Region Civil Defence Wardens, undated (Gowers archive).
36. E. Ellsberg, website: www.edwardellsberg.com.
37. Ellsberg.
38. 'Public Morale', Report to the Minister of Home Security on London Region for the months of January, February, March 1944', Churchill Archives, Cambridge, PRKR2, para 9.
39. Gowers to Herbert Morrison, 18 August 1944, TNA: PRO HO 207/163.
40. E. A. Gowers, address to London Region civil defence services, undated (Gowers archive).

41. Scott, p. 672.
42. O'Brien, p. 672.
43. E. A. Gowers, address to Natural History Museum farewell dinner, 1945 (Gowers archive).
44. Scott, p. 136.
45. Sir H. D. Shiffner, letter to author.
46. Shiffner, letter to author.
47. N. Longmate (1971) *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life During the Second World War* (London: Hutchinson), p. 364.
48. Obituary: 'Lady (Ernest) Gowers', *The Times*, 2 October 1952.
49. Shiffner, letter to author.
50. Shiffner, letter to author.
51. 'From the midst of the fountain of delights arises something bitter', Lucretius.
52. E. A. Gowers, address to Town Clerks, 1944 (Gowers archive).
53. E. A. Gowers, address to Natural History Museum farewell dinner, 1945 (Gowers archive).
54. H. Willink address at the memorial service for Sir Ernest Gowers, 1966 (Gowers archive).
55. Knight Grand Cross of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (Civil Division).

10 Post-war Reconstruction

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2. J. M. Lee (1977) *Reviewing the Machinery of Government 1942–1952: An Essay on the Anderson Committee and its Successors* (London: privately printed), p. 146. Lee records that the file is referred to in a letter written by Sir Edward Bridges in May 1949.
3. Lord Salter to W. R. Gowers, 9 June 1966 (Gowers archive).
4. F. Gibberd, B. Hyde Harvey, L. White and other contributors (1980) *Harlow: The Story of a New Town* (Stevenage: Publications for Companies), p. 19.
5. Gibberd, p. 24.
6. Gibberd, p. 22.
7. Gibberd, p. 22.
8. Gibberd, p. 57.
9. D. Anderson, email to author, 6 September 2007.
10. Harlow Development Corporation (1950), *Third Annual Report for the Period Ended March 31st 1950*.
11. Allsop had been awarded the Military Cross in the First World War.
12. Gowers to Sheepshanks, 12 May 1950 (Gowers archive).
13. A. L. Rowse, ed. R. Ollard, *The Diaries of A. L. Rowse* (London: Penguin Books, 2004). p. 169.
14. R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister: Minister of Housing 1964–66*, 3 vols, (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1975). Crossman believed Sharp was too sympathetic to the Corporation.
15. 'Obituary: Sir Ernest Gowers', *The Scotsman*, 1966.

16. British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) (1999). 'Women in Diplomacy: The FCO, 1782-1999', www.fco.gov.uk, p. 10.
17. FCO, p. 10.
18. Women in the Foreign Service: Equality of Admission', *The Times*, 21 March 1946.
19. Requiring a woman to resign on marriage was a common requirement at the time.
20. FCO, p. 11.
21. FCO, p. 11.
22. FCO, p. 12.
23. B. Wootton (1967) *In a World I Never Made: Autobiographical Reflections* (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 253.
24. Wootton, p. 192.
25. E. A. Gowers letter to Barbara Wootton, 2 August 1948, GCPP Wootton 1/1/26.
26. Eleanor, Lady Nathan, letter to *The Times*, 25 April 1966.
27. J. Metcalf, 'Shop Hours Bill', *The Times*, 14 March 1957.
28. Cripps' health was failing and he was forced to resign in October 1950. He was succeeded by Hugh Gaitskell.
29. E. A. Gowers (1953) 'The Past and Probable Future of the Historic Country Houses', *Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Journal*, June, 912–1, p. 917.
30. Dalton to Gaitskell, LSE DALTON 2/9/9, 20 December 1950.
31. J. Delafons (1997) *Politics and Preservation: A Policy History of the Built Heritage 1882–1996* (London: Taylor and Francis).
32. E. A. Gowers (undated), address to Petersfield Autumn Show dinner (Gowers archive).
33. A. Woods (2004) *A Manufactured Plague: The History of Foot and Mouth Disease in Britain* (London: Earthscan), p. 104.
34. '"Britain's Double Game": Argentine Attack on Gowers Report', *The Times*, 3 August 1954.
35. Woods, p. 105.
36. Woods, p. 107.
37. A. Hindmoor (2009) 'Explaining Networks through Mechanisms: Vaccination, Priming and the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease Crisis', *Political Studies*.

11 Abolishing Capital Punishment

1. T. Morris and L. Blom-Cooper (1964) *A Calendar of Murder: Criminal Homicide in England since 1957* (London: Michael Joseph).
2. E. A. Gowers (1956) *A Life for a Life? The Problem of Capital Punishment* (London: Chatto and Windus).
3. C. Hollis (1964) *The Homicide Act* (London: The Trinity Press), p. 1.
4. Hollis, p. 9. See also A. Koestler (1994) 'Reflections on Hanging', *The Trail of the Dinosaur*, (2nd edn, London: Vintage), pp. 176–9 (first published by Gollanz in 1956).
5. C. Duff (2001) *A Handbook on Hanging* (NY: New York Review of Books Classics). Introduction by C. Hitchens.

6. These remained on the books until the Homicide Act of 1957, although the death penalty was, in practice, only used for murder.
7. 'The Commons and the Death Penalty', *The Times*, 5 March 1945.
8. 'Free vote of Commons on Death Penalty', *The Times*, 28 November 1947.
9. 'Suspension of the Death Penalty', *The Times*, 15 April 1948.
10. 'Capital Punishment', *The Times*, 17 April 1948.
11. 'Government's Difficulty', *The Times*, 4 June 1948.
12. Gowers, undated address, Leeds University (Gowers archive).
13. Gowers, undated address, Leeds University (Gowers archive).
14. Hennessy, p. 447.
15. Hollis, pp. 21–2.
16. R. Hood , 'Radzinowicz [Formerly Rabinowicz], Sir Leon (1906–1999)', *ODNB*.
17. Radzinowicz (1999) *Adventures in Criminology* (London: Routledge), p. 254.
18. Radzinowicz, p. 255.
19. E. A. Gowers, letter to Barbara Wootton, 23 November 1949, GCPP Wootton 1/1/2.
20. Radzinowicz, p. 268.
21. Report of the Royal Commission into Capital Punishment (1953) (London: HMSO), p. 189, paragraph 534.
22. B. Wootton (1978), *Crime and Penal Policy: Reflections on Fifty Years' Experience*, (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 138.
23. Lord Templewood (1951), *The Shadow of the Gallows* (London: Victor Gollancz), p. 60.
24. Templewood, p. 59.
25. This case is covered by Ludovic Kennedy (1971) in *Ten Rillington Place* (London: Panther Books, 1971). It was also made into a film.
26. Two movies were later made about this. 'Yield to the Night' with Diana Dors, and 'Dance with a Stranger' with Miranda Richardson.
27. 'School near Prison "in a Ferment"', *The Times*, 14 July 1955.
28. 'Debate on Death Penalty: MPs Call for Suspension', *The Times*, 7 February 1955.
29. E. A. Gowers (c. 1950) address at Leeds University (Gowers archive).
30. *The Times*, 17 February 1956.
31. *The Times*, 17 February 1956.
32. Gowers (1956), *A Life for a Life?*, p. 8.
33. E. A. Gowers to W. R. Gowers, 3 February 1956 (Gowers archive).
34. V. Gollancz (1955) *Capital Punishment: the Heart of the Matter* (London: Gollancz); A. Koestler 'Reflections on Hanging'; G. Gardiner (1956) *Capital Punishment as a Deterrent: and the Alternative* (London: Gollancz); and Gowers (1956), *A Life for a Life?*
35. J. B. Christoph (1962) *Capital Punishment and British Politics: The British Movement to Abolish the Death Penalty, 1945–57* (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 132.
36. Hollis, p. 30.
37. Radzinowicz, pp. 259–60.
38. *The Times*, 11 July 1956.
39. Wheeler-Bennett, p. 390–1.

40. Hollis, pp. 54–6.
41. B. Wootton (1978) *Crime and Penal Policy*, p. 139.
42. *Empire News*, January 1959, cited in B. Donoughue and G. W. Jones, p. 545.
43. H. L. A. Hart (1957), 'Murder and the Principles of Punishment: England and the United States', *North Western University Law Review*, 52, 433–61, p. 436.
44. In July 1998, High Treason and piracy with violence were removed as capital crimes from the Criminal Justice Act.
45. B. Wootton (1978) provides analysis of the deficiencies in the Homicide Act and the arguments put forward by both sides of the debate.
46. 'Our Man in Trotton', *The New Yorker*, 14 August 1965, pp. 21–3.
47. Gowers, *A Life for a Life?*, pp. 134–5.

12 Plain Words

1. E. A. Gowers (1929) 'Mainly about the King's English', *Public Administration*, VII/2, April.
2. E. A. Gowers (c. 1945) Address at Natural History Museum farewell dinner (Gowers archive).
3. Assheton Report (1944) *Report of the Committee on the Training of Civil Servants* (London: HMSO), Cmd. 6525.
4. For example, see A. P. Sinker to Sir Alexander Maxwell (permanent head of the Home Office). TNA: PRO HO356/18, 14 January 1947.
5. Members of the sub-committee were Miss J. A. M. Oliver (Board of Trade), T. R. Newman (Ministry of Transport), L. C. J. Orchard (Ministry of Supply), L. de O. Tollemache (Home Office), S. H. Wood (Ministry of Education), and Llewelyn Wyn Griffith (Inland Revenue). There were also four other officers from the Treasury.
6. Unsigned file note, 12 September 1947, TNA: PRO HO 356/18.
7. E. A. Gowers, *Plain Words: A Guide to the Use of English* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948a).
8. Gowers to Sinker. 23 September 1947, TNA: PRO TE 23/04.
9. Bridges file note. 6 November 1947, TNA: PRO HO356/18.
10. Celius Hudson Dougherty, 1902–86.
11. Anonymous, 'Sir Ernest Gowers', *The Tablet*, 23 April 1966.
12. C. Kent Wright (1948) 'Plain Words', *Public Administration*, XXVI. 3, pp. 196–9.
13. Gibberd, p. 57.
14. Gowers to Wootton (Wootton Papers, Girton College archives).
15. Gowers to Sinker. 23 September 1947, TNA: PRO TE 23/04.
16. Bridges to Gowers, 10 August 1948 (Gowers archive).
17. Gowers to Padmore, 25 September 1948, TNA: PRO T119/45.
18. Her Majesty's Stationery Office (1963) *Government Publishing and Bookselling* (London: HMSO).
19. R. A. Chapman (1988), p. 237.
20. Gowers to Kirk, May 1949, TNA: PRO T199/452.
21. Gowers to Kirk, June 1949, TNA: PRO T199/452.
22. Griffith to Kirk, 23 April 1950, TNA: PRO T199/452.
23. Sinker to Sir Stafford Cripps, 12 December 1949, TNA: PRO T199/452.
24. Gowers to Kirk, 7 December 1950, TNA: PRO T199/452.

25. Gowers to Parnis, 29 January 1951, TNA: PRO T199/452.
26. Gowers to Tickner, 13 January 1951, TNA: PRO T199/452.
27. Cited in HMSO (1963), p. 124.
28. Wigfull to Stephens, 12 December 1952, TNA: PRO 199/624.
29. File note by Winnifreth, 'Plain Words Revised (or words to that effect)', 21 January 1952, TNA: PRO TE/23/615.
30. Internal Treasury memo, Signed Thimont, 1 April 1957, TNA: PRO 199/452.
31. HMSO, p. 124.
32. HMSO, p. 124.
33. Bridges to Gowers, 8 September 1965 (Gowers archive).
34. Excerpt from E. A. Gowers (1952) address to London Council English Teachers on *Plain Words*.
35. Correspondence held in Gowers archive.

13 Revising Fowler's *Modern English Usage*

1. Clare College, Honorary Doctorate of Letters declamation, Gowers archive.
2. 'LB' to James Agate, 20 June 1946, OUP MEU/3/56.
3. Davin to Gowers, 13 December 1951, OUP MEU/3/109.
4. Meeting note, 16 January 1952, OUP MEU/3/113.
5. Davin to K. Sisam, 5 February 1952, OUP MEU/3/114.
6. Davin to Hutchinson, 6 May 1954, OUP MEU/3/159.
7. Davis was a Professor of English language. The others included R. W. Chapman, Norman Davis, Shaw-Kennedy, Peter Fleming, Elsasser, James Sutherland, L. F. Schooling, and Miss Nicholson. OUP MEU/3/184.
8. Davin to the Secretary of the Delegates, 30 June 1954, OUP MEU/3/158.
9. Gowers to Schooling, 26 November 1955 (all correspondence from Gowers to Schooling held in Gowers archive).
10. Schooling to the Secretary of the Clarendon Press, 26 January 1956, OUP MEU/3/182.
11. Davin to Schooling, 5 March 1956, OUP MEU/3/183.
12. Davin to Schooling, 5 April 1956, OUP MEU/3/183.
13. H. W. Fowler (1965) *Modern English Usage*, 2nd edn, Ernest Gowers (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
14. L. F. Schooling, unpublished appreciation sent to *The Times* on 18 May 1966 (Gowers archive).
15. Schooling to Gowers' executors, 18 May 1966 (Gowers archive).
16. Obituary, 'Mr H. W. Fowler, a Lexicographical Genius', *The Times*, 28 December 1933.
17. Fowler and Fowler (1906).
18. E. A. Gowers (1957b) *H. W. Fowler – The Man and His Teaching* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 3.
19. H. G. Fowler, *Modern English Usage*. p. ix. Gowers' introduction.
20. Gowers to Schooling, 19 July 1957 (Gowers archive).
21. Schooling, letter of appreciation, 18 May 1966 (Gowers archive).
22. E. A. Gowers, address to English Teachers' Association, 1952, p. 14 (Gowers archive).

23. Gowers to Schooling, 30 October 1957.
24. Gowers to Schooling, 17 November 1958.
25. Gowers to Schooling, 11 March 1959.
26. Gowers to Schooling, 23 March 1961.
27. Gowers to Schooling, 7 October 1961.
28. Gowers to Schooling, 28 May 1962.
29. Gowers to Schooling, 14 July 1962.
30. Gowers to Schooling, 9 August 1962.
31. Gowers to Schooling, 13 November 1963.
32. Gowers to Schooling, 24 November 1963.
33. Gowers to Schooling, 6 January 1964.
34. Burchfield to Davin, 28 October 1964, OUP MEU/3/244.
35. Gowers to Schooling, 1 June 1965.
36. Gowers to Schooling, 20 October 1965.
37. Gowers to Schooling, 22 January 1966.
38. 'Our Man in Trotton', p. 23.

14 'A Last Retrospect'

1. E. E. Bridges (1950) *Portrait of a Profession: The Civil Service Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press).
2. T. Balogh (1959) 'The Apotheosis of the Dilettante', republished in H. Thomas (1968) *Crisis in the Civil Service* (London: Anthony Blond), p. 12.
3. Balogh, p. 14
4. Balogh, p. 14.
5. Chapman (2004).
6. B. J. O'Toole (2008) *The Ideal of Public Service – Reflections on the Higher Civil Service in Britain* (London: Routledge), p. 89.
7. Fulton Committee (1968) *The Civil Service: Report of the Committee 1966–68* (London: HMSO), p. 18.
8. Salter (1967) p. 278.
9. Salter (1967) p. 284.
10. Delafons, p. 256.
11. Burchfield to Davin, 28 October 1964, OUP MEU/3/244.
12. 'How Modern Is Your English Usage?', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20 May 1965.
13. R. Burchfield (1996), 'Introduction', *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, (Oxford: OUP), p. xi.
14. Oxford English Dictionary, at http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk.
15. J. Simpson, 'Burchfield, Robert William (1923–2004)', *ODNB*.
16. T. McArthur (1998) *Living Words: Language, Lexicography and the Knowledge Revolution* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press), p. 95.
17. D. Crystal (2006) *The Fight for English* (NY: Oxford University Press), pp. 157–61.
18. E. A. Gowers, address to English Teachers' Association, 1952 (Gowers archive).
19. E. Eliahu (et al.) (1958) *Memories of Sir Wyndham Deedes* (London: Victor Gollancz), p. 60.

20. R. Fiennes (2007) *Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know: The Autobiography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton).
21. F. R. Cowell (1975) *The Athenaeum: Club and Social Life in London, 1824–1974* (London: Heinemann).
22. Grey to Gowers, 3 January 1953 (Gowers archive).
23. The Order of the British Empire was established by George V in 1917 to commemorate 'all levels of service to the country in the "total" war'. Sir Frederick Kenyon held the position of Purple Rod from its establishment in 1918 to his death in 1952.

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Index

A Manual of Diseases of the Nervous System, 2
Adams, Eric, 143–4
Aitken, Max, *see* Beaverbrook
Amery, Leo, 72
Anderson, John (later Lord Waverley), 48
  Chancellor of the Exchequer, 113
  Civil Service entry, 12–13
  Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, 92–3, 104–7,113
  House of Lords vote, 168
  Loan Collection, 27–8, 31–2
  Lord President of the Council, 113
  Permanent Under-Secretary, Home Office, 60–1
  Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, London and the Home Counties, 92, 94–6
Anthesteria, 128
Arnold, Thomas, 9
Asquith, Herbert, 21–4, 34, 36–7, 40
Assheton, 172, *see* Civil Service
Association of Officers of Taxes, 67–8
Attlee, Clement, 87, 159

Baines, Frederick, 2
Baldwin, Stanley, 57–63, 65
Balfour, Arthur, 36
Balliol College, Oxford, 11–13
Ballycastle, Co Antrim, 24, 42, 206
Balogh, Thomas, 201–2
Bar, reading for, 15, 19
Beaverbrook, Lord, 45–6
Beveridge, William, 58–9, 73, 92, 147
Bevin, Ernest, 148
Bilton Grange School, 7–9
Birkenhead, Lord, 57, 63–4
Blunt, Anthony, 151–2
Board of Trade, 52, 55, 92
Bone, Muirhead, 40
Bottomley, Arthur, 73
Bradbury, John, 23, 27, 31
Braithwaite, William, 27–30
Bridgeman, William, 57
Bridges, Edward, xv, 96, 183
  and *Plain Words*, 172–3, 175–6
  Plain Words royalties, 177–180
  'Portrait of a Profession', 201
Buchan, John, 34, 43, 45–6
Buchanan, Thomas, 19
Burchfield, Robert, 197, 204

Cameron, Donald, 74
Campbell-Bannerman, Henry, 21
Cannan, Charles, 37–9
Capital Punishment
  A Life for a Life? The Problem of Capital Punishment, 154, 166–8, 170
  Criminal Justice Bill, 156–9
  Death Penalty (Abolition) Bill (1956), 164, 168
  final steps towards abolition, 169–70
  Homicide Act (1957), 168–9
  impact of Bentley, Evans and Ellis hangings, 163–4
  McNaughten Rules, 157, 162
  Murder (Death Penalty Abolition) Bill (1965), 170
  politics of, 154–9
  Royal Commission (1949), 141, 154
    established, 159–60
    hearings, 160–1
    impact on Gowers, 166, 170–1
    Radzinowicz on, 160–1
    Report (1953), 161–2, 164, 169–70
  Select Committee (1930), 156
Casson, Hugh, 88
Chalmers, Robert 23, 28–30
Chamberlain, Neville, 92, 94, 99
Chapman, R A, xv-xvi, 178, 201
Churchill, Winston, 63, 66, 92, 113, 126, 145, 146, 209

Civil Service, 1, 7, 12, 28, 47, 51–2,
  Administrative Class, xiv, 15–16, 21, 51, 96, 201–2
    Bridges' 'Portrait of a Profession', 201–2
    criticisms of, 201–3
  anonymity, problems for researchers, xv
  Assheton Report on Civil Service Training (1944), 172
  Baldwin on role of, xv
  Civil Service Examination, 13–15, 17
  Colonial Civil Service, 11–12, 13
  competition for entry, 12–15, 201
  Conciliation and Arbitration Board (1917–1919), 51–2
  First World War, impact of, 32, 51,
  Fulton Report (1968), 202
  Gowers on changing role, 32, 69–70
  hostility to *Plain Words*, 176
  Institute of Public Administration, 52, 68, 172. 176
  National Insurance Commission, impact of 22, 26–31, 201
  Northcote Trevelyan Report, 12, 201
  official English, 68–70, 128, 172–6, 203–5
  pace of work in early 1900s, 17–19
  unification (1919), 51, 201
Clare College, Cambridge, 11, 76
Clarendon Press, 38–9, 188–91, 197
Classics, 7, 10–11, 188, 201
Closing Hours of Shops inquiry (1946), 141, 149–51
Coal industry
  Board of Trade, 55
  Cabinet Coal Committee (1926), 60
  Coal Act (1938), 83
  coal becomes a national property, 84–7
  Coal Commission (1938–45), 83–7
  Coal Control Unit, 54–5
  Coal Industry Nationalisation Act (1945), 86–7
  Coal Mines Act (1930), 64, 76–7, 80–2
  Coal Mines Reorganization Commission (1930–38), 64, 76, 78–82, 203
  Coal Mining Reorganization Bill, 63, 91
    test case, 79–81
  coal owners, 54–64, 80, 82, 85–6
  Eight Hours Bill, 63
  Foot Plan, 86–7
  General Strike, 60–2
  Miners' Federation of Great Britain, 55–6, 63
  Miners' strike (1926), 88–93
  Mines Department, 55–6
  Mining Association of Great Britain, 80, 85
  National Coal Board, 56, 87
  nationalisation, 52, 55–6, 82–7
  Red Friday (1925), 58
  Reid Report, 85–6
  Samuel Memorandum, 61–2
  Samuel Royal Commission, 57–60
  Sankey Royal Commission (1919), 54–5
  Trades Union Congress, 58, 60–2
Committee of Imperial Defence, 91, 94
Commons, House of, 19, 22–3, 62,
  capital punishment debate, 154, 156–9, 164–6, 168–9
  National Insurance Act, 22–3, 26–7, 32
Conciliation and Arbitration Board for Government Employees, 51
Cook, A J, 62–3
Cooper, Duff, 47
Costain, Richard, 146–7
Crewe House, 46
Cripps, Stafford, 151
Cromwell's gauleiter Major-Generals, 130–1
Crookshank, Henry (Harry), 81

Dalton, Hugh, 83–4, 144–5, 151
Darling, Malcolm, 5
David Copperfield, 7–8, 200
Davin, D M, 189–91
de Freitas, Geoffrey, 166
Deedes, William, 105, 208
Delafons, J, on *Plain Words* 203
descriptivists vs prescriptivists, 193–7, 204–5

Distribution of the Industrial Population Royal Commission (1938), 143
Donald, Robert, 43, 45–6
Duveen, Anthony, 88, 206
Duveen, Eileen (*nee Gowers*), 21, 88, 206

Ede, Chuter, 157
Eden, Anthony, 148
Edward VII, King, 22
Edward, Prince of Wales, 65, 72
Elibank, *see* Murray, Alexander
Elizabeth II, Queen, Coronation, 140, 209
English teaching, 182–4, 193
Evans, Admiral Sir Edward, 96–100, 110, 121, 139–40

Fiennes, Sir Ranulph, 208
First World War, 33–51, *see* also Wellington House
Fisher, Warren, xvi, 82, 91
  Loan Collection. 26–30
  Permanent Secretary of the Treasury and Head of the Civil Service, 51, 82, 201
  Regional Commissioner, North Western Region, 96
  Special Commissioner '(London Region) for bomb damage, 112, 127
Fleming, Peter, 190–4
Fletcher, C R L, 37–8
Fletcher, Frank, 15
Foot and Mouth Disease inquiry (1952), 141, 152–3
Foot, Isaac, 80
Foot, Robert, 86
Foreign Office, 33, 43–5
Foreign Service, 141, 147–9
Fowler, F G, 68
Fowler, H W, 68
Fowler's *Modern English Usage*,
  Clarendon Press commission, 180–90
  Gowers' letters to Schooling, 194–8
Frampton, Meredith, viii, 108
Fraser, Bruce, 187
Fuel and Power, Ministry of, 84, 86
Fulton Report (1968). *See* Civil Service

Gaitskell, Hugh, 84, 151
Game, Philip, 61, 207–8
Gardiner, Thomas, 101, 104, 107
Gater, George, 121
Geddes, Eric, 64
General Strike (1926), 60–2
George V, King, 22, 63
George VI, King, 99, 110, 134
Gibberd, Frank, 143–4
Gowers, Ann (*nee Venables)*, 1
Gowers, Constance (Kit) Macgregor (*nee Greer*), 20, 48–50, 75, 88–9, 132, 136–7, 206, 208–9
Gowers, Edith, 4, 206
Gowers, Evelyn, 4, 206, 274
Gowers, Mary *(nee Baines)*, 1, 48
Gowers, Maud (*nee Loraine*), 20, 48, 71, 206
Gowers, Stella (*nee Pelly*), 88, 103, 137
Gowers, William (Bill) Frederick, 4, 8–12, 48, 71–5, 142, 206, 209
Gowers, William Patrick, xvi, 88, 137, 207, 209
Gowers, William Richard (Dick), xiv, xvi, 21, 89, 99–100, 102
Gowers, William Richard MD, 1–8, 10–11, 17, 48
Gowers, Winifred (*nee Paul*), 71, 206
'Great and Good', 141
Great Depression, 75–6, 78
Greer, Eileen, 21–2
Greer, Kenneth, 20–1, 42–3, 48
Greer, Margaret (*nee Reed*), 20, 206
Greer, Thomas Macgregor, 20
Grey, Alexander, 209
Griffith, Wyn, 18, 173–5

Haldane, Richard, 52
Hankey, Maurice, xvi, 94
Hardie, Kier, 21
Harlow New Town Development Corporation, 143–7
Harris, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur (Bomber), 139

Hart, H L A, 169
Hawtrey, Ralph, 14, 44
Health, Ministry of, 103, 133
Hemel Hempstead New Town Corporation, 144
Hindley, Betty, 88, 210
Hindley, John (later Lord Hyndley), 55, 84, 87, 89–90, 210
HMSO, 174–82, 187
Hoare, Samuel (later Lord Templewood), 156–7, 162, 169
Hobhouse, Charles, 19
Hollis, Christopher, 159, 169
Home Office, 94, 114, 160,
Hope, Anthony, 34, 35
Houses of Outstanding Historic or Architectural Interest inquiry (1948), 151–2
Hyndley, Lord
  See Hindley

Imperial War Museum, viii, 40
Income Tax, 65–8
India Office, 17–19
Information, Department of, 43–4
Information, Ministry of, 45
Inland Revenue, Board of, 65–8, 75
Inland Revenue, Department of, 15–16, 210
Institute of Public Administration, 52, 68, 172, 176
International Hospitality League, 48–9
Isaacs, Rufus, 25

Jackson, H, 11
Jardine, D J, 74
Jebb, R, 11
Johnston, Alexander, 70
Jones, Thomas, xv, 57, 63
Jowett, Benjamin, 12

Key, Charles, 117, 139
Keynes, John Maynard, 14, 17–19, 64, 80–1
Kipling, Rudyard, 3, 5, 10, 38–9, 42–3, 206
Kirk, E M, 179, 180–1

Lane Fox, George, 56, 60, 63
Lascelles, Alan, 72
Leugenfabrick, 209
Liberal Party, 19, 21, 77, 201
Lloyd George, David, 21–6, 28–30, 32–3, 43, 46, 54–6
Lloyd George, Gwilym, 86
Lloyd George, Megan, 26
Loan Collection, 26–32, 51, 82, 202–3, 209
London Civil Defence Region
  air raid shelters
    Anderson Shelter, 105, 113, 120
    deep shelters, 105, 113, 120
    Morrison Shelter, 120
  Battle of London, 109–11, 124–5
  Blitz, 109–11, 118–23
  Blitz, Little, 131–4
  bomb damage, 106, 114, 118–19
  bombing raids, 109–13, 119, 121, 123, 131
    casualties, 119–23
    last bomb to fall (1945), 134
  bomb types, 119, 131–3, 135
  end of the war, 179, 180, 186, 191
  evacuation, 105–6, 111
  First Aid Post inspection visit, 102
  Headquarters, Natural History Museum, xiv, 95, 98, 107–9, 120, 167
    control room, viii, 108–9, 110
  homelessnness 110, 114–16,
    Nissen Huts, 114
    Special Commissioner for, 112, 114, 143
  invasion threat, 127
  local authorities, 135
  Londoners' morale, 120, 125, 127, 132
  Lull, 123–31
  National Fire Service, 121–3, 131, 135
  Phoney War, 99–103
  Regional Commissioners, 129–31
  Senior Regional Commissioners (London)
    Euan Wallace appointed, 101
    Euan Wallace's illness, 114–16
    Gowers appointed, 117

Gowers says farewell, 128
Morrison rejects appointment, 104
Special Commissioners, 111–13
Special Commissioners appointed, 111–12
Lords, House of, 22, 164
capital punishment, 154, 157–9, 164, 168, 170
Lugard, Frederick, 11, 48, 74

MacDonald, Ramsay, 63, 77–8,
Macmillan, Harold, 145, 147
Mair, Lucy, 73–4
Makerere University, Kampala, 210
Marconi Scandal, 24–6
Margaret Club and Day Nursery, 75
Marshall Society, Cambridge, 80
Masefield, John, 50–1
Masterman, Charles, 26–7, 34–7, 39–41, 43, 46
Masterman, Lucy, 44, 46
Maxwell, Alexander, 28, 160
Milford, Humphrey, 38–9
Mines Department, *see* Coal
Montagu, Edwin, 20
Montgomery, Field Marshal, 139
Montgomery, Hubert, 36
Moot, *see* Wellington House
Morant, Robert, 26–31, 209
Morley, Lord, 19
Morris Motors, 99, 103
Morrison, Herbert, 104, 113, 115, 127, 133, 169
Murray, Alexander (the Master of Elibank), 19–20, 25, 73
Murray, Faith, 73

Nathan, Lady, 150
National Coal Board, 87, 150
National Government (1930), 77–8
National Hospital, Queen Square, 2, 5, 15, 142, 196, 206
National Insurance Act (1911), 22–3, 26–31, 202
National Insurance Commission, 26–31
Natural History Museum, Exhibition Road, see London Civil Defence Region HQ
Newnham College, Cambridge, 71
Newton, Lord, 43
Nicholson, Ivor, 39, 44, 46, 65, 68, 71
Niemeyer, Otto, 17, 76
Norman, M I P, 181
Norrington, A L P, 189
Northcliffe, Lord, 45
Northcote Trevelyan Report, *see* Civil Service
Noyes, Alfred, 43
Nugent, Richard, 150

Offices Bill, 151
Old Age Pensions Act (1908), 22–3
Ormsby-Gore, William, 72
Orwell, George, 185, 187, 208
Oxford University Press, 37
Oxford Pamphlets, *see* Wellington House

Padmore, Thomas, 174–5, 177, 183
Pakenham-Walsh, General, 146
Passfield, Lord, *see* Webb, Sydney
Pay As You Earn (PAYE), 174
Pelly, Canon Douglas, 88
People's Budget (1909), 22, 66
Perham, Margery, 74
Pheidippides, 196
Plain Words, 34, 172–87
ABC of Plain Words, 178–82
dispute over royalties, 177–80, 182–3
genesis, 129
revisions, 186–7
The Complete Plain Words, 182–4
Plutarch, 196

Quiller Couch, Arthur, 34

Radzinowicz, Leon, 160, 167–8
Reed, Andrew, xiii, 1
Reich, Dr, 14
Reith, Lord, 144, 197
Romilly, Samuel, 156
Rondle Wood, 88–90, 103, 136–8, 170, 205–8, 210
Rowse, A L, 147
Rugby School, xiv, 9–11, 15, 26, 137, 201
Eranos literary society, xiv, 10

Russell, Conrad, 208
Russell, Patricia, 146, 208

Salisbury, Lord, 21
Salter, Arthur, 12–13, 27, 93–4, 142–3, 202
Samuel, Herbert, 57–9, 61–2
Sanday, William, 38
Schooling, L F, xvi, 190–8
Schuster, Claud, 12–13, 27–8, 33–9, 148
Scott, Ann (*nee Gowers)*, xiv, 89, 206, 209–10
Scott, Harold, 94–6, 107, 124, 135
Scott, Roger, xvi, 209–10
Scott, Walter, 36
Second World War, s*ee* also London Civil Defence Region
  Air Raid Precautions (ARP), 91–3, 97
  Battle of Britain, 107–9, 137
  Civil defence planning, 91–4
  Civil defence regions, disbanded, 134–6
  Civil defence regions, establishment of, 94–7
  Committee of Imperial Defence Planning, 91
    Manpower Sub-Committee, 92
  evacuation planning, 105
  Gordon Services Club, 137
  Home Security, Department of, 92, 106
  Home Security, Ministry of, 92
  homelessness, post-war, 143
  invasion threat, 106, 126–7
  National Fire Service, 121–3, 131, 135
  Schedule of Reserved Occupations, 92
  War Cabinet, 113
Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act (1919), 147–9
Sharp, Evelyn, 147
Sheepshanks, Thomas, 146, 176
Shiffner, Margaret (Peggy) Mary (*nee Gowers*), 21, 71, 73–5, 187, 209–10
Shiffner, Sir Henry Burrows, 74, 138
Shiffner, Sir Henry David, xvi, 75, 88–9, 137–8
Shinwell, Emanuel, 56, 78, 87
Silkin, Lewis, 143–4
Silverman, Sidney, 157, 164, 166, 168, 170
Simon, John, 57
Sinker, Paul, 173–5, 182
Smith, A L F, 10–11
Smith, Herbert, 63
Somerset House, *see* Inland Revenue
Spender, Stephen, 129
St Felix School, 71, 105
Stansgate, Lord, *see* Wedgwood Benn
Steel-Maitland, Arthur, 63
Stevenson, Frances, 26
Strachey, Lytton, 13–14
Supertax, 66–7
Supple, Barry, 58, 85

Tawney, Richard, 10–11, 54
Temple, Frederick, 9
Temple, William, 10
Templewood, Lord, *see* Hoare, Samuel
Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), 89
Thatcher, Margaret, 54, 152
Tom Brown's School Days, 9
Trades Union Congress, 58–63, 150
Treasury, the, 14, 17, 23, 28, 51, 78, 82, 141, 172, 174, 178, 180
Trevelyan, George, 14
Trinity College, Cambridge, 11, 14
Trotton, 198, 207, 210
Tyburn, 155

United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), 142–3
University College Hospital, 142

Victoria, Queen, 1, 16

Wallace, Euan, 101, 103–117
Waterhouse, Ronald, 58–59
Watt, A P & Son, 34
Watt, A S, 34, 40, 177
Webb, Sidney, 54, 73
Wedgwood Benn, William, 23
Wellington House, 33–47, 203
  Bryce Report, distribution of, 40–1
  Donald Report (first), 43

Donald Report (second), 45
Information, Department of, 43
Lusitania medallion, 41
Moot, 34, 45, 209
Oxford Pamphlets, distribution of, 37–9
Pictorial Propaganda Department, 39
war artists, 40
war films, 39–40
War Pictorial, 39
West, Algernon, 16
White Paper on the Reform of the Foreign Service (1943), 148
Whitley Councils, 52
Whittaker, W J, 14
Willink, Harry, 112–14, 118, 139
Wilson, H J, 57
Wise, Edward, 27
Wolfenden, Lord, 187
Women in Civil Defence, 125, 148–9
Women in the Foreign Service inquiry (1945), 141, 148–9
Woolf, Leonard, 13–14
Wootton, Barbara, 6, 149–50, 160, 162, 169–70, 176
Wrens, Powis Square, 14–15