

*Second lecture – The roles of
the Cabinet and of the Prime
Minister in British political
system, its developments, and
its most important holders*

MVZb2012 The Evolution of British Politics

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Structure of the presentation

- Most important Prime Ministers before 1945
- The role of the Cabinet and its development
- The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context
- Most important holders of the office since 1945
- Conclusions – Prime Ministerial or Cabinet government?
- Discussion

Key qualities of the Prime Ministers (according to Andrew Gimson) – part one

- 1. Courage.
- 2. Luck.
- 3. Hunger for power.
- 4. Eloquence, including the ability to think on your feet in the Commons.
- 5. The ability to distribute patronage in such a way as to gratify to a sufficient degree the appetites of your followers. Contenders for the prime ministership who have thought themselves too grand to doo this have failed.
- 6. A different style to your predecessor, of whom people have grown sick. Soon they will be sick of you.
- 7. An acute feel for public opinion, and, in the earlier part of this book, an equally acute sense of how to manage the monarch. The longer you are in Downing Street, the harder it becomes to see things as others see them, or even remember this is necessary.



Key qualities of the Prime Ministers (according to Andrew Gimson) – part two

- 8. The capacity to rise to a crisis, and give the nation its idea of itself.
- 9. An understanding of the money, which is the most important thing controlled by the Commons.
- 10. Respectability, or at least the absence of embarrassing eccentricities.
- 11. The energy and stamina to do (and to want to do) very heavy work. Overwork has shortened the lives of many of the people in this book.
- 12. The willingness and skill to perform that most humiliating manoeuvre, the U-turn. A free people cannot be ordered about: you are there to persuade MPs, and the wider nation, to follow your lead, which cannot be in a direction they do not want to take. You are not a tyrant, and must sometimes have the common prudence to change course. So although you need to know when to stick to your guns, you must also convey a tactful awareness of your own vulnerability.



Most important holders before 1945

- Sir Robert Walpole (1721– 1742), Whig
- ‘First’ Prime Minister as the First Lord of the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer
- First PM to live in Downing Street 10 (gift from the monarch)
- Governed in the joint leadership with Charles Townshend (1721 – 1730)
- Extremely manipulative and corrupt but skilled politician
- Remains to be the longest serving Prime Minister in British history



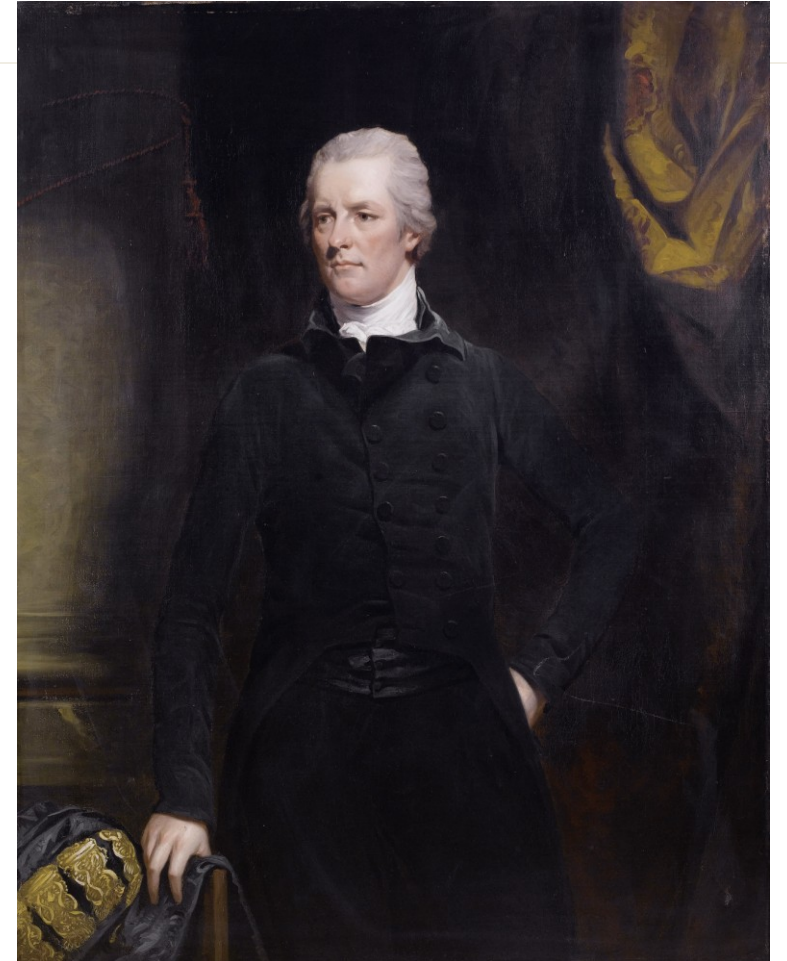
Most important holders before 1945

- Lord North (1770 – 1782), Tory (as PM)
- His relatively long tenure in Number Ten was dominated by foreign and economic policies
- The Prime Minister who ‘lost America’
- Resigned as a consequence of a motion of no confidence
- This happened after the British defeat at Yorktown (1781) but before the final Treaty of Paris (1783)



Most important holders before 1945

- William Pitt the Younger (1783 – 1801 & 1804 – 1806), Tory ('Independent Whig')
- An extremely intelligent but somewhat lonely and detached person (fluent in French, Latin and Ancient Greek at 10, started to study at Cambridge at 14), probably homosexual or asexual, heavy drinker 'three-bottle man'
- Most pressing issues during his premierships were the country's financial situation ('balance sheet'), foreign affairs, health condition of George III, French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, Act of Union 1800 and Ireland
- Life-long rivalry with Charles James Fox



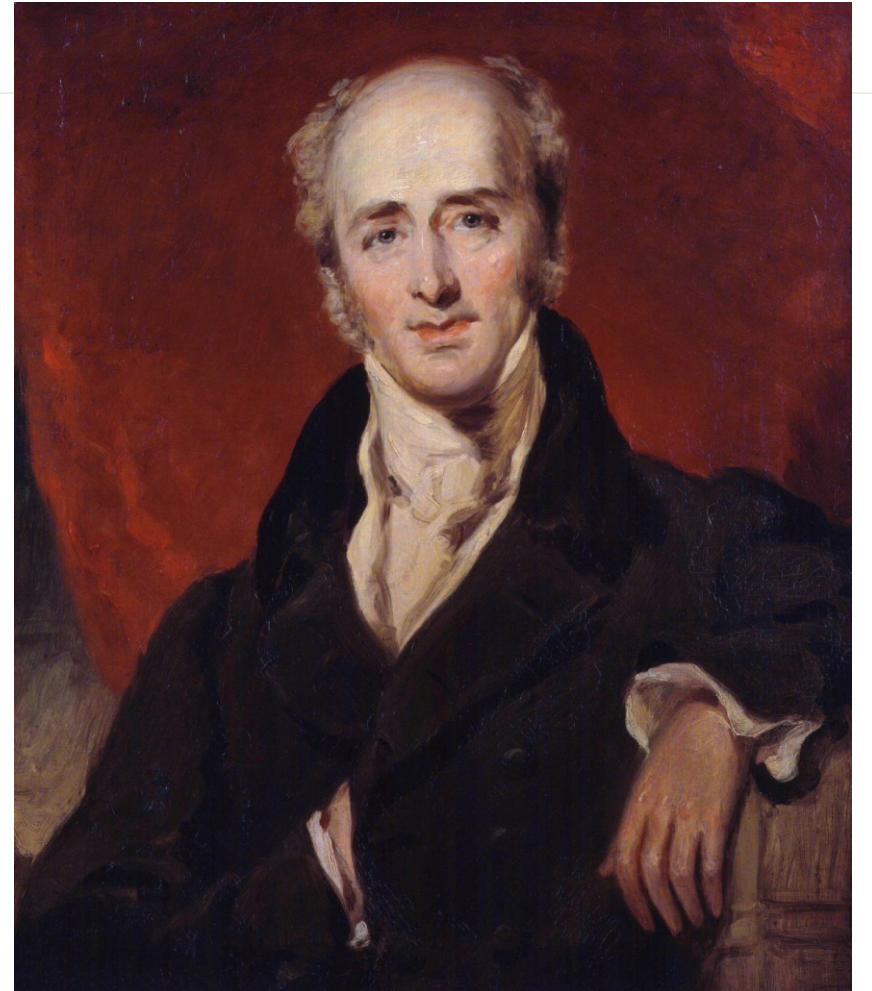
Most important holders before 1945

- The Earl of Liverpool (1812 – 1827), Tory
- Almost forgotten, although very successful Prime Minister
- He had to deal with the War of 1812, the last wars against Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna (1814 – 1815), the Peterloo Massacre (1819), pressures for Catholic emancipation, and turbulent domestic political and social situation
- His long-time Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh committed suicide in 1822



Most important holders before 1945

- Charles Grey (1830 – 1834), Whig
- He introduced the Reform Act 1832 (parliamentary reform) and the abolition of slavery in the British Empire (1833)
- The tea ‘Earl Grey’ is named after him
- He supported Catholic emancipation (Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829)



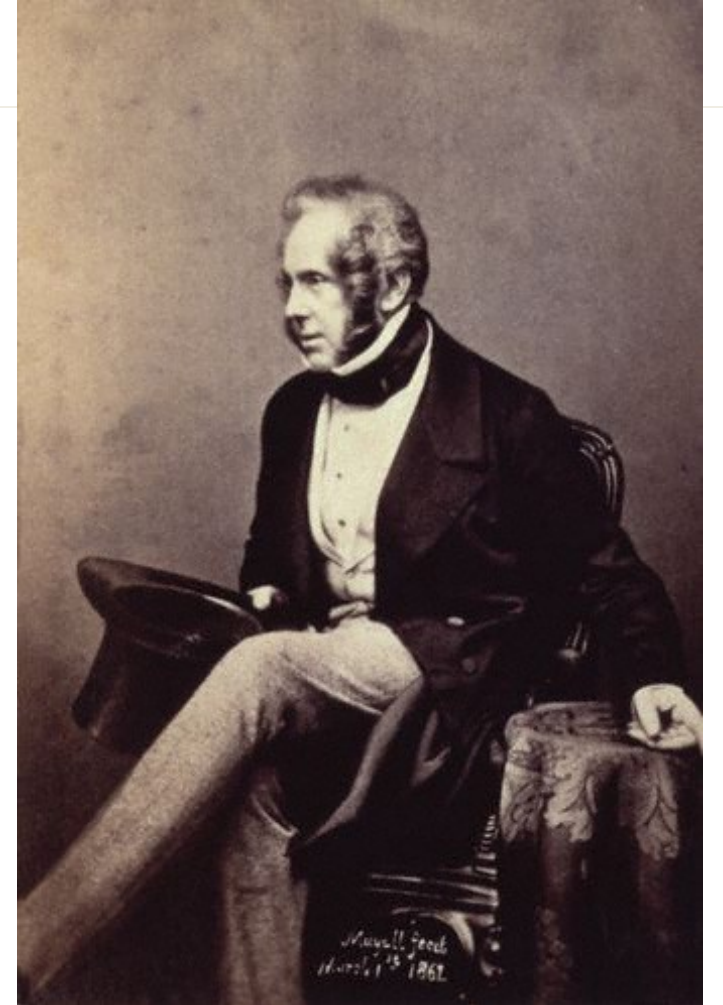
Most important holders before 1945

- Sir Robert Peel (1834 – 1835 & 1841 – 1846), Conservative
- As a Home Secretary, he successfully introduced a police reform
- He was mostly preoccupied with the economic situation and with the question of Ireland (Irish Famine of 1845 – 1849)
- The single biggest question he had to deal with was the abolition of the Corn Laws – finally he resigned as a consequence of a hostility from his own backbenchers (led by Benjamin Disraeli)
- He is seen as one of the founding fathers of the Conservative Party



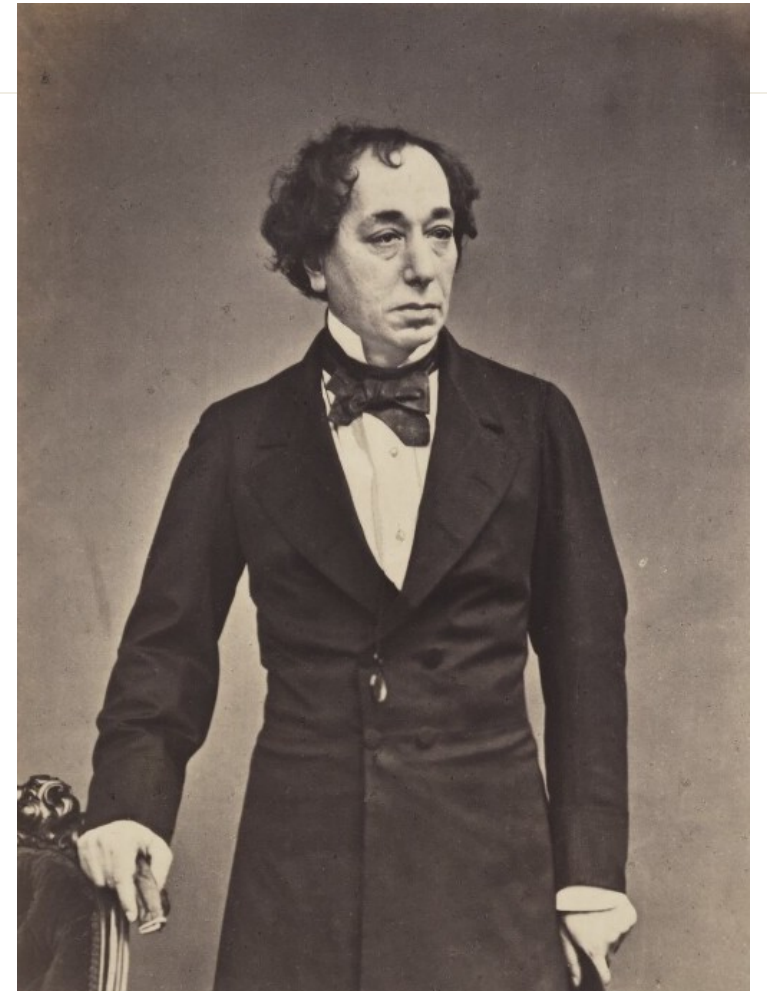
Most important holders before 1945

- The Viscount Palmerston (1855 – 1858 & 1859 – 1865), Whig (later Liberal)
- Very experienced politician with a particular interest in foreign policy
- During his first premiership, he ended the Crimean War (1856) and dealt with the Indian Mutiny (1857 – 1858)
- During his second premiership, he also focused on the domestic politics but he had to deal with the US Civil War (1861 – 1865, he sympathized with the Confederacy) or Second Schleswig War (1864)
- He died in office after an electoral victory that increased his majority



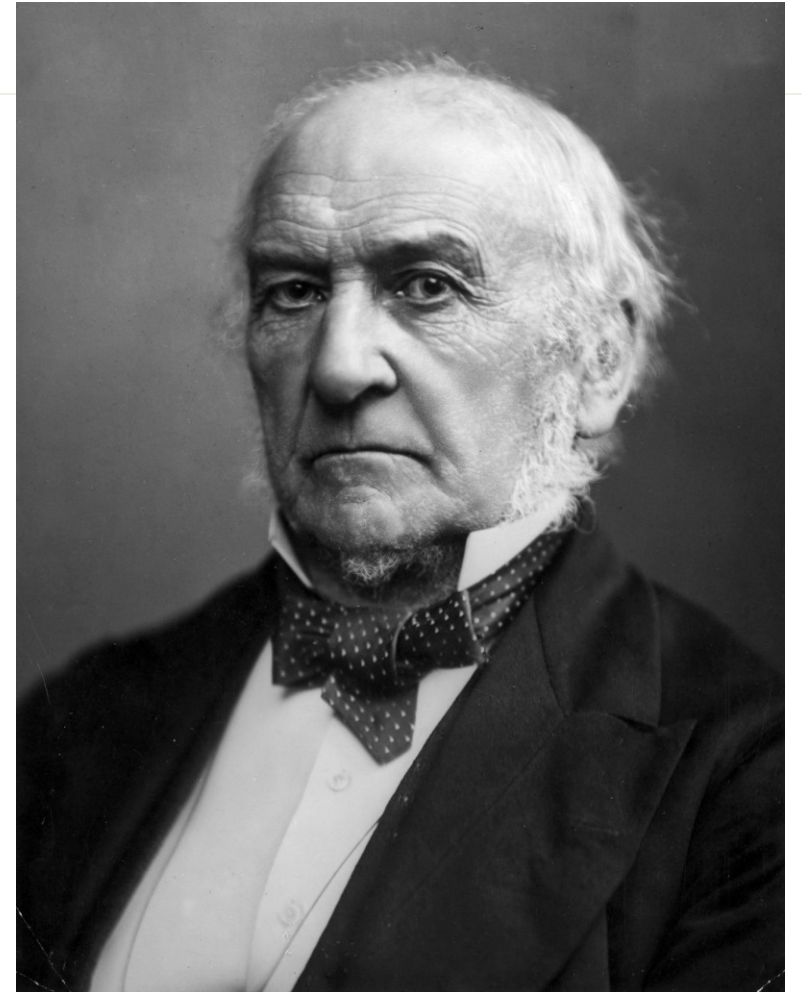
Most important holders before 1945

- Benjamin Disraeli (1868/2 – 1868/12 & 1874 – 1880), Conservative
- So far, the only British Prime Minister of Jewish origin
- One of the three British PMs who were also novelists
- An excellent parliamentary as well as public speaker, who somewhat preferred style over substance
- He had a huge influence on the Conservative Party (One-Nation Conservatism, Primrose League)
- Reformist Prime Minister (social and health legislation) with a somewhat romantic interest in foreign policy (especially regarding the Eastern Mediterranean and the Orient). He also played a prominent role in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War (1877 – 1878) and led the British at the Congress of Berlin (1878) where he secured the Cyprus for Britain and defended the Ottoman case ('sick man of Europe') against the Russians



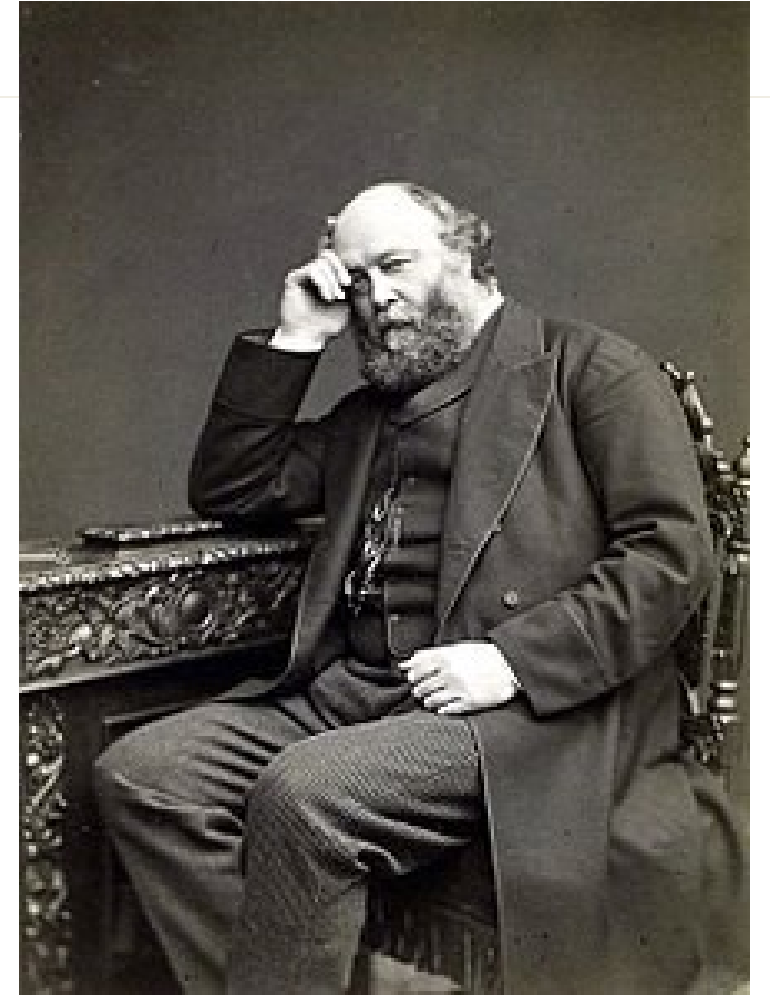
Most important holders before 1945

- William Ewart Gladstone (1868 – 1874 & 1880 – 1885 & 1886/2 – 1886/7 & 1892 – 1894), Liberal
- G.O.M is widely considered to be one of the greatest British Prime Ministers in history
- During his four premierships, he was mostly occupied by further reforms but also by foreign policy (he secured the Egypt for Britain – 1882), extending the franchise (Reform Act of 1884), and the question of Irish Home Rule (although his attempts to introduce it were not successful)
- Although very religious, he passionately hated Disraeli



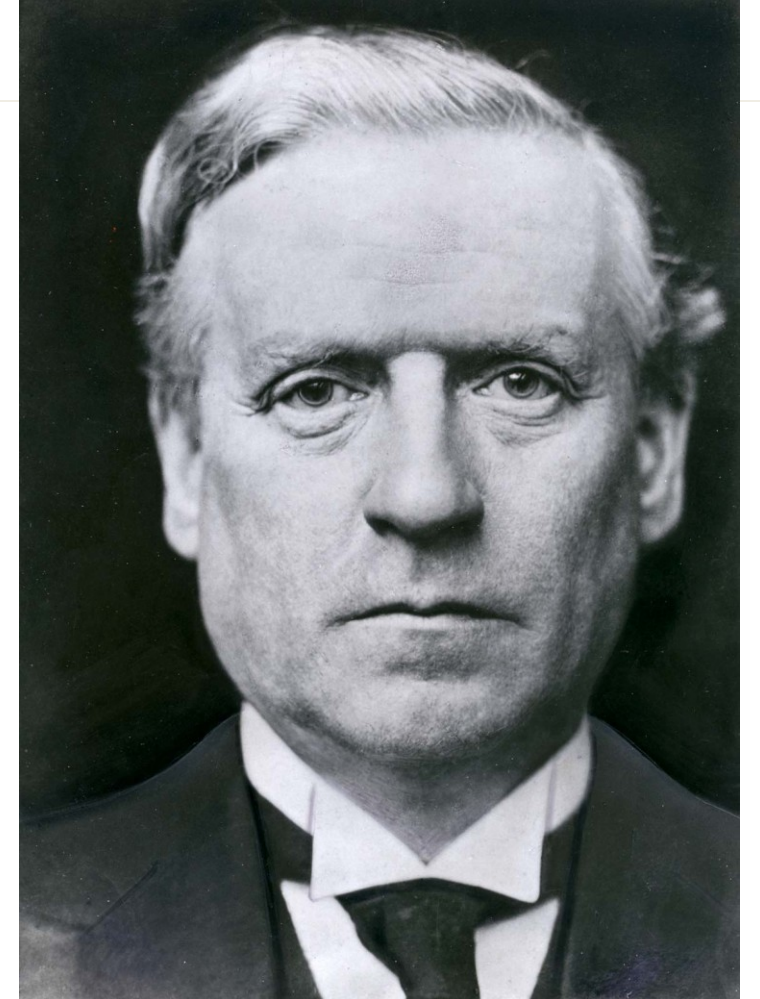
Most important holders before 1945

- The Marquess of Salisbury (1885 – 1886/1 & 1886/7 – 1892 & 1895 – 1902), Conservative
- Politically, he benefited from the split of the Liberal Party over the Irish Home Rule
- He was mostly interested in and occupied with foreign policy (‘splendid isolation’, Africa, Venezuela (1895), Second Boer War (1899 – 1902) and German naval armament – he was his own Foreign Secretary
- ‘Hotel Cecil’ – Arthur Balfour (next PM and later the Foreign Secretary)



Most important holders before 1945

- Herbert Henry Asquith (1908 – 1916), Liberal
- People's budget of 1909, subsequent constitutional crisis and Parliament Act 1911
- Domestically, the Irish Home Rule was still the most important question
- In terms of foreign policy, he relied on his Foreign Secretary Edward Grey (German naval armament and Agadir Crisis of 1911)
- He was the Prime Minister during the outbreak of the First World War (1914) and he led the Coalition government formed in 1915



Most important holders before 1945

- David Lloyd George (1916 – 1922), Liberal
- He is widely seen as to be one of the most ambitious Prime Ministers
- After an effective coup against Asquith and split within the party, he was a successful war leader
- He oversaw a wide administrative reform of government (War Cabinet, Cabinet Office)
- As a representative of Britain at the Paris Peace Conference, he played a prominent role in the negotiations that took place there



Most important holders before 1945

- Stanley Baldwin (1923 – 1924/1 & 1924/11 – 1929 & 1935 – 1937),
Conservative
- During his three premierships, he had to deal with protectionism, General Strike of 1926, rise of Nazi Germany, rearmament, and the Abdication crisis of 1936
- He was the first Prime Minister to use the broadcast for political purposes
- Widely considered to be responsible for the relative unpreparedness of Britain for the Second World War



The role of Cabinet and its development



The role of Cabinet and its development

- An institution which developed from the Foreign Committee of the Privy Council in late-17th century, the Cabinet as such existed from the 18th century onwards
- At first, it was highly informal (it sat over a dinner with several members asleep, no minutes were taken and the ministers were leaving just with their own subjective – and rather general – impression of what has been agreed)
- Towards the end of the 19th century and especially during the First World War (reforms of 1916 and 1919), it became more or less the institution that exists until today

The role of Cabinet and its development

- It is a collective body with a collective decision-making responsibility for governing the country
- Since the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1903, it started to function through (with the help of) Cabinet committees
- These committees (their existence, focus and membership) are officially appointed by the Prime Minister, who chairs the Cabinet
- However, the Prime Minister is constitutionally considered to be only the first among equals

The role of Cabinet and its development

- Key roles of the Cabinet are:
 - a) Approving policy which will be put before Parliament
 - b) Resolving disputes between the departments
 - c) Constraining the Prime Minister (not a personal government)
 - d) Unifying the government by coordinating it
 - e) Unifying the parliamentary party by balancing the differing views/values

The role of Cabinet and its development

- Cabinet membership depends on the will of the Prime Minister and political circumstances of the time
- Cabinet members are ranked based on their seniority ('Great Offices of State' – PM, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Foreign Secretary and Home Secretary)
- Cabinet is not the same as government as a whole – three different ranks of ministers – secretaries of state, ministers of state and parliamentary undersecretaries
- Some other senior politicians from the governing party/-ies might attend the Cabinet

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- Sir Robert Walpole is considered to be the first Prime Minister (as First Lord of the Treasury) but there were some leading members of the Privy Council (typically Lord Chancellor, Lord High Treasurer or Secretary of State) who were effectively functioning as one (e.g. Thomas Wolsey, William Cecil or Robert Cecil)
- It was not uncommon when the Prime Minister was his own Chancellor of the Exchequer (almost all until the mid-19th century), Foreign Secretary (viscount Palmerston or Marquess of Salisbury) or even Minister of Defence (Winston Churchill)

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- It was not uncommon for the Prime Ministers to sit in the House of Lords (last such PM was Marquess of Salisbury but it proved to be a key problem for the ambitions of Lord Curzon after the resignation of Andrew Bonar Law in 1923)
- Unlike his Cabinet colleagues, Prime Minister does not have his/her own department and is therefore reliant on the relatively small secretariat and on the Cabinet Office as such
- In the course of time, Prime Minister have experimented with several different strategies of increasing their powers – creating ‘think tanks’ or appointing special advisers or Chiefs of Staff

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- Conventionally (but not statutory), Prime Minister is the most powerful person in the government
- His/her legitimacy comes from the fact that he or she is able to command the majority in the House of Commons and that he or she is appointed by the Monarch
- It could be argued that the Prime Minister's power rely on his or her abilities to execute his or her will
- Historically, some Prime Ministers tended to be more dominant and others more consensual

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- Prime Minister's powers are:
 - a) Managing the relationship between the Monarch and the government as a whole
 - b) Hiring and firing ministers (reshuffles)
 - c) Chairing the Cabinet and its most important committees
 - d) Arranging other 'Cabinet business' such as the chairmanships of other committees, their memberships and agendas

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- Prime Minister's powers are:
 - e) Overall control of the Civil Service as First Lord of the Treasury (Minister for the Civil Service)
 - f) The allocation of functions between departments, their creation and abolition
 - g) Relationships with other heads of government
 - h) An especially close involvement in foreign policy and defence matters

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- Prime Minister's powers are:
 - i) Top Civil Service appointments
 - j) Top appointments to many institutions of a 'national character'
 - k) Certain scholastical and ecclesiastical appointments
 - l) The handling of 'precedent and procedure'
- Increasingly, the Prime Minister is also seen as the 'face' of the government he or she leads

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- Possible Prime Ministerial typologies could be (depending on their character and the circumstances under which he or she entered office, furthermore, they may overlap):
 - a) Innovators – power seeking personalities with a clear (personal) goal or vision they want to achieve (e.g. Margaret Thatcher)
 - b) Reformers – they seek power in order to achieve a particular policy programme on which there is a consensus within their party (e.g. Clement Attlee or Theresa May)

The role of the Prime Minister and its development – powers, typology and context

- c) Egoists – power (and only power) seeking personalities, usually with very good political skills (e.g. Harold Wilson or Tony Blair)
- d) Balancers – personalities seeking to maintain stability, they could either be power-seekers (e.g. Harold Macmillan or James Callaghan) or conscripts (e.g. Sir Alec Douglas-Home)
- Some academics also like to rank the respective Prime Ministers based on their overall record (Clement Attlee and Margaret Thatcher are usually at the top)

Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Clement Attlee (1945 – 1951), Labour
- Huge shift in perception of him from 1980s onwards
- He is born to money and privilege (public school and Oxford), but he became Labour member because of ‘Limehouse’ (East End)
- Served as an officer during the First World War (‘the Major’)
- He became an MP and member of governments of 1924 and 1929
- Became Leader of the Labour Party in 1935 (because all the other big beasts lost their seats)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Attlee backed Churchill in his opposition to Munich Agreement of 1938
- During the Second World War, he became Lord President of the Council and then Deputy Prime Minister (from 1942)
- ‘Monologue is not a decision’ – Attlee to Churchill
- He was a huge fan of military efficiency and planning
- ‘Anti-charisma’ – special type of leadership (contrast with Blair)
- ‘Lot of clever people have everything except judgement’
- Cabinet of the big beasts – E. Bevin, S. Cripps, H. Gaitskell, H. Wilson, H. Morrison, A. Bevan – but he is a wonderful Cabinet chairman



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He was the most left-wing Prime Minister in British history
- Authors of the Labour Manifesto are Keynes, Beveridge and Michael Young – it is not a socialist manifesto
- In the course of the government, Labour splits between socialists and social liberals
- ‘It is not about revolution but about decency’
- The National Health Service – 1947/1948
- Labour delivered what was promised and they did it quickly



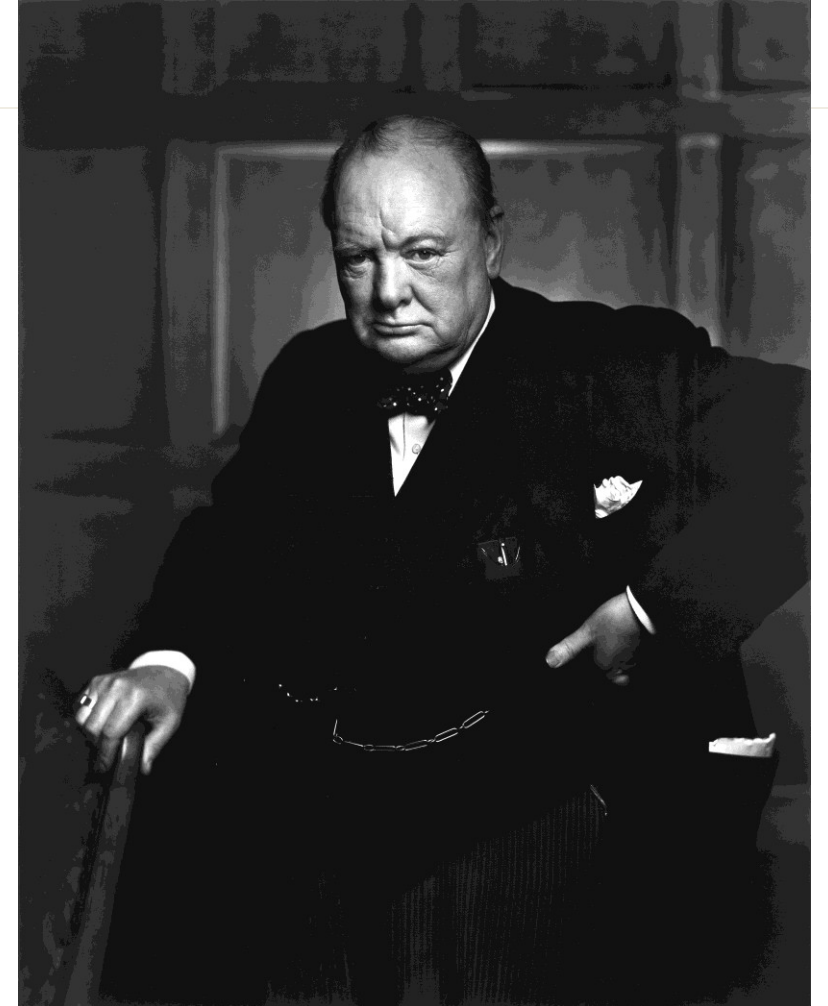
Most important holders of the office since 1945

- British economy was mostly mobilised economy in the Second World War
- Huge empire, $\frac{1}{4}$ of Germany... and no money (almost bankrupt)
- ‘Loss of India’ as a loss of superpower status
- Cold War – NATO, Marshall aid (‘keep Americans in, Russians out and Germans down’)
- He was famous for his military style – also in reshuffles (‘best butcher since the war’)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Sir Winston Churchill (1951 – 1955), Conservative
- ‘Gloriously unfit for office’
- No university education – autodidact
- Huge energy and want to be remembered
- He loved action – West Indian Frontier, South Sudan, South Africa...
- He learned a lot from David Lloyd George
- Wilderness years of the 1930s
- Mostly interested in foreign and defence policy during his second premiership
- After Stalin’s death, he wanted to organise world powers’ summit (end of Cold War)



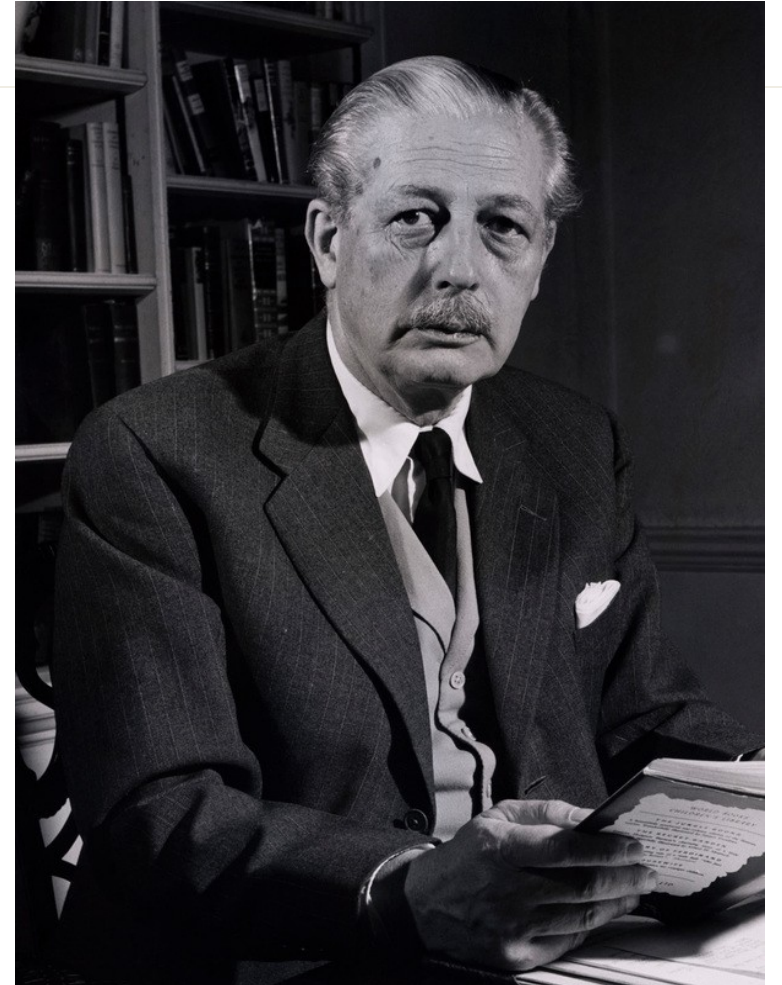
Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Sir Anthony Eden (1955 – 1957), Conservative
- Liberal Toryism
- Educated at Eton and Oxford
- Interested only in foreign affairs (no expertise or even an understanding in economy or domestic politics)
- Huge mistake and trauma – Suez Crisis of 1956
- Shock of Suez for British foreign and imperial policies
- Widely considered to be unsuccessful ('I don't think that Anthony is up for it' – Churchill)



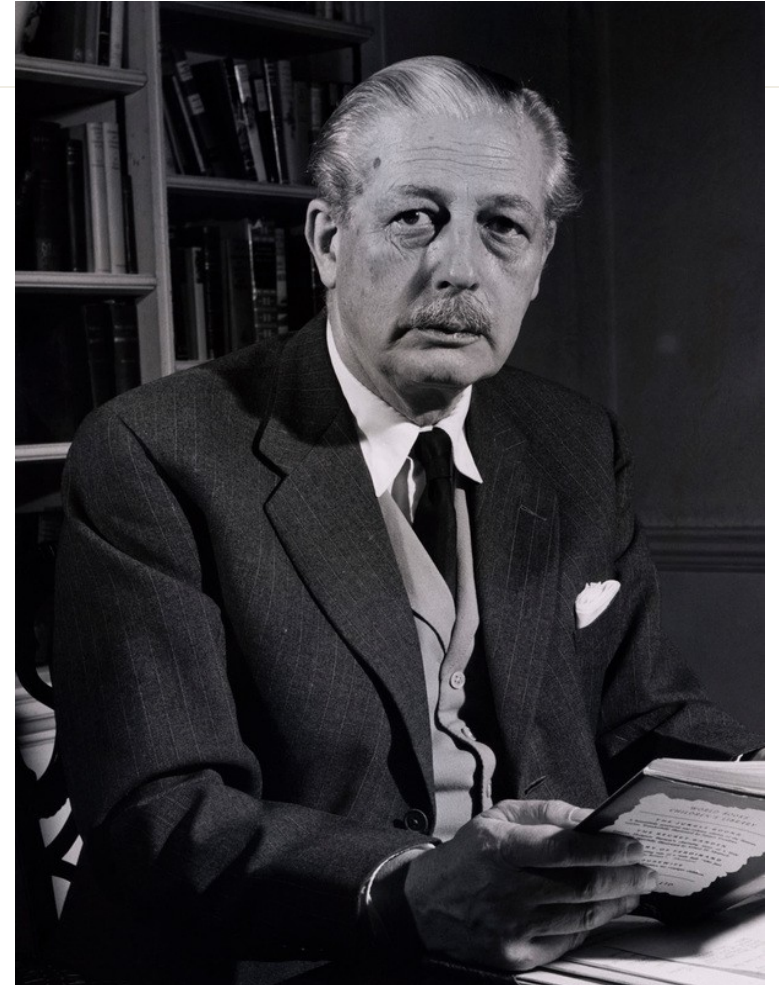
Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Harold Macmillan (1957 – 1963), Conservative
- American mother – ‘born well’
- Educated at Eton and Oxford
- Crucial experience of the First World War (pretending to be dead in the no man’s land)
- Formative years of 1920s and 1930s – conversations to join every party – Tory, Liberal, Labour and even New (before it became fascist)
- He was a Tory MP but for a working class constituency



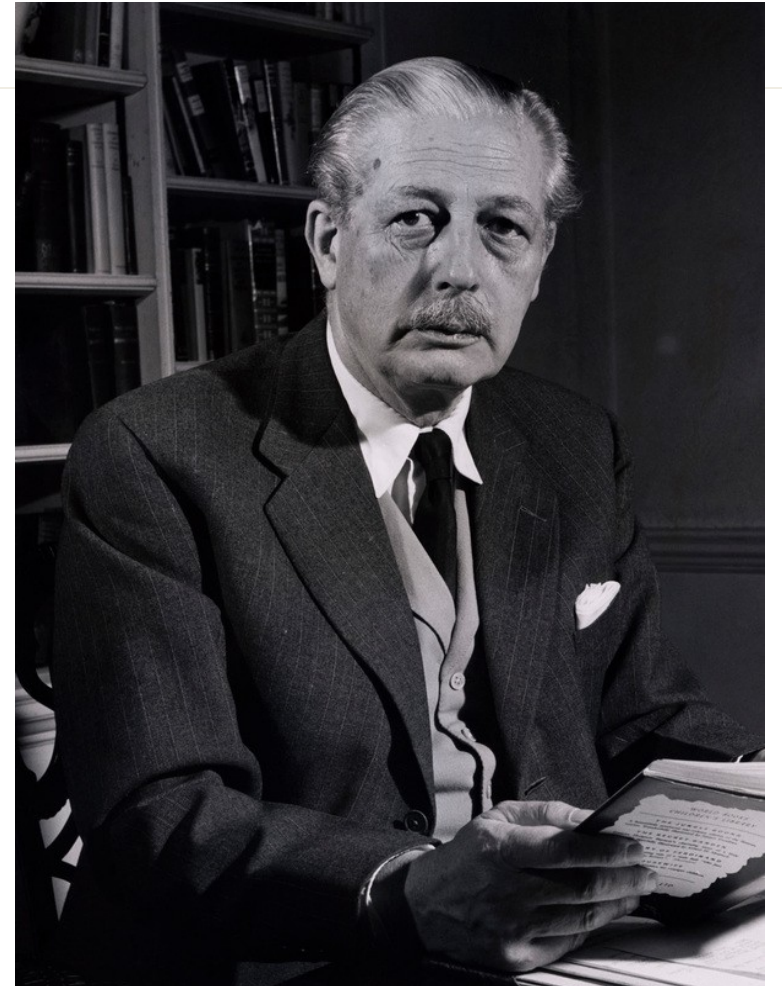
Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He backed Churchill over appeasement
- During the Second World War, he became Viceroy of the Mediterranean – he meets de Gaulle and Eisenhower
- Extremely successful Minister for Housing (combining public and private money)
- He loved to read history and novels (Austen, Trollope)
- He was used to get what he wanted by outthinking everyone else
- Six years of policy – moderniser, investment in infrastructure but ‘relative economic decline’
- Edwardian appearance and style but known for his vitality and a lot of energy



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He decided to leave the Empire behind – decolonisation (Colonial Secretary Iain Macleod)
- After Suez, he has repaired the relationship with the US (UK purchased the delivery systems for its nuclear weapons)
- Britain is not a part of European integration (Macmillan is anti-German but pro-European)
- British application to join the EEC (vetoed by the French President de Gaulle)
- 1962 – ‘The Night of the Long Knives’ (meant to be a sign of political power but ended as a sign of political weakness)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Sir Alec Douglas-Home (1963 – 1964), Conservative
- Educated at Eton and Oxford
- PPS to N. Chamberlain during the Munich Crisis
- Tory version of Attlee (calm but wants decisions, not very good with media)
- Iain Macleod decided that he would not serve under him
- Being the PM as a ‘terrible intrusion into one’s private life’
- Virtually forgotten Prime Minister (later served as the Foreign Secretary under Heath – an interesting precedent)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Harold Wilson (1964 – 1970 & 1974 – 1976), Labour
- Although not from a privileged background (lower middle class), educated at grammar school and at Oxford (extremely intelligent)
- Years of overall economic decline (not per se but compared to other European countries and Japan)
- ‘What is wrong with Britain?’, ‘The anatomy of Britain’
- 1964 – the first election thought on the topic of decline
- He has won 4 out of 5 general elections (he loved campaigning)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He is conscripted as a statistician during the Second World War
- He decided to go into politics (1945 – becomes MP, 1947 – enters Cabinet)
- Labour Party splits between Bevanites and Gaitskellites (Wilson resigned with Bevan)
- Wilson as Labour's Macmillan
- He was able to negotiate with Communists
- Wilson was great opposition leader ('New Britain speech')
- Scientific affairs to public affairs (he created the Ministry of Technology and the Department of Economic Affairs)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He liked to talk at Cabinets, he loved politics (the pipe)
- Decision not to devalue the pound (devaluation happened in 1967 and caused huge damage to the Labour Party) – Roy Jenkins becomes Chancellor and Jim Callaghan becomes Home Secretary
- Public expenditure cuts
- 1967 – East of Suez decision (American rage)
- Beginning of ‘the troubles’
- ‘In place of strife’ – attempted reform of the trade unions
- Labour rather unexpectedly loses in 1970



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Two general elections in 1974
- ‘Cabinet of incompatibles’ – B. Castle, M. Foot, J. Callaghan, T. Benn, S. Williams, D. Healey, A. Crossland, R. Jenkins (all great politicians)
- Already ill – Alzheimer
- Two huge topics – Economy and the EEC
- Renegotiation of terms of membership and referendum in 1975
- He created the Policy Unit (two special advisors per Cabinet member)
- Resignation’s List scandal in 1974
- Deep mistrust towards the intelligence services



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Edward Heath (1970 – 1974), Conservative
- Came from very poor background, but educated at Oxford (organ scholarship – he loved music)
- He fought in the Second World War – love for European culture (contrast with Wilson)
- He became Chief Whip and Cabinet minister under Eden and he negotiated the first EEC application under Macmillan
- The technocrat, but first elected Leader of the Conservative Party (1965)
- He had to face the militant trade unions



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- His conduct of Cabinet is encouraging but authoritative – Prime Ministerial government
- Possibly, Heath was not political enough – dependent on civil servants (lonely figure)
- Weakened by the sudden death of Iain Macleod in 1970
- During the strike of the trade union, he introduced ‘three-day week’ – 1 million unemployed
- Britain joined the EEC in 1973 (his biggest achievement)
- He lost the ‘Who governs Britain?’ election of February 1974



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- James Callaghan (1976 – 1979), Labour
- He came from a poor background (comparable to Heath's) – no university education (he felt bad for it)
- Former Chancellor, Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary (great experience)
- He advocated for a change in educational policy
- The IMF Crisis of 1976 – Britain goes bankrupt
- Callaghan managed this crisis greatly – through Cabinet government
- No majority in the House of Commons (dependent on the Liberals, then on nationalists)
- The Winter of Discontent – 1978/1979



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He upgraded Polaris to Trident and hide it from his party
- End of Keynesianism – end of post-war consensus (his government was the first to reflect that, not Thatcher's)
- In 1979, government loses a vote of no confidence by just one vote (dramatic circumstances with ill MPs)
- 'Sea change' quote (he anticipated something like Thatcherism)
- Generally seen to be underrated PM (exceptionally skilled and firm) by many academics and analysts



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Margaret Thatcher (1979 – 1990), Conservative
- A titan of post-war British politics (in a way comparable to wartime Churchill, post-war Attlee and Blair)
- The end of post-war consensus happened during her premiership (at the beginning of it according to Hennessy)
- Thatcher was the first post-war Prime Minister who did not have any war experience
- Change of interpretation of Margaret Thatcher (importance of folk memory and Charles Moore's authorised biography)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- She was defined by her austere and Methodist upbringing (morality of improving oneself)
- She got a degree from Oxford (chemistry) and subsequent training in law
- She married well – the importance of Denis
- Entered House of Commons in 1959 and Cabinet in 1970
- She had deep thoughts on leadership, loyalty, patriotism and economy (good housekeeping)
- Became a Leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and Prime Minister in 1979



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Her first Cabinet is divided (‘dries and wets’, ‘one of us’)
- She put her supporters into economic ministries (Howe, Joseph, Tebbit, Lawson...) and almost never brought economic policy into Cabinet (instead, she pursued it through Cabinet committees)
- She wanted old industries to be allowed to die rather than being saved by the state
- Massive unemployment (no experience with the Great Depression) and its psychological impact
- The most unpopular Prime Minister ever



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- 1980 Conservative Party conference – ‘the Lady’s not for turning’) – she is authentic
- Huge importance of the 1981 Budget, the Labour split in the same year (creation of the Social Democratic Party), and the Cabinet reshuffle
- Different approach towards the Civil Service
- Her handling of the Falklands War was exemplary and exceptional (Macmillan’s advice not to appoint the Chancellor into the War Cabinet)
- 144- majority in 1983 – ultimate victory for her and a loss for Labour and the SDP (split in the centrist and leftist vote)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Different approaches between early- and late-Margaret Thatcher (overconfidence in 1990)
- Trade unions were seen as true patriots during the Second World War but they moved leftwards during the 1950s and 1960s (they became extremely important during 1960s and 1970s)
- Thatcher government prepared for the strike in 1984 – secret ballots (‘the enemy within’)
- Strike breaks in early months of 1985 – she finally broke the influence of the state unions



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- The ‘Big Bang’ of 1986 in the City of London (deregulation)
- Privatization (‘denationalisation’) programme – 1/3 of the British economy was nationalised (right-wing Tories hated it)
- Chancellor Nigel Lawson (1983– 1989) is the most powerful Minister, second only to the PM
- ‘Share-owning democracy’ – profits (PM’s voters benefited from it)
- 1987 – another victory in the general election
- Administrative revolution (‘Should the government do something about this?’)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- ‘Poll Tax’ – folklore disaster of politics –this policy was ‘tried’ in Scotland first)
- William Whitelaw (huge supported of Margaret Thatcher, who was loyal to her) retired in 1988
- In late-1980s, Margaret Thatcher started to lose her own people
- Michael Heseltine resigned over the Westland Crisis in 1986
- Historical Budget of 1988, but Nigel Lawson resigned in 1989 over the ERM (and PM’s special advisor) – he wanted to shadow the German economy



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- She appointed John Major as her next Chancellor (ministerial appointments could be seen as power but also as weakness of the Prime Minister)
- Nicholas Ridley resigned during the summer of 1990 and Geoffrey Howe resigned in the autumn of 1990 ('Question of loyalty')
- She resigned in November 1990 after the first ballot
- PM's 'No, no, no' speech in the House of Commons
- Huge influence on the Conservative Party until the end of her life



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- John Major (1990 – 1997), Conservative
- He was raised in a relatively poor background (no university education)
- Extremely ambitious but somewhat uncharismatic (compared to his predecessor and his successor)
- Relatively quick political career (became an MP in 1979, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Foreign Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer)
- Extremely dramatic circumstances of his rise to the premiership (traumatising for the party)
- Seen as weak but not quite ('Thatcherism with a human face' – continuation of her policies)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Surrounded by big beasts (M. Heseltine, K. Clarke, N. Lamont and D. Hurd) but also by several key allies (Ch. Patten – lost his seat in 1992)
- Unexpected victory in the 1992 general election (minimalistic Conservative campaign versus presidential Labour rallies – N. Kinnock)
- Immediate problems with Eurosceptic Conservatives (‘bastards’) and with rebellions over the Maastricht Treaty in the House of Commons
- Huge blow to his government – Black Wednesday of September 1992 (decision to leave the ERM) – ‘hands in blood’ approach
- IRA’s attack on Number 10



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- In terms of foreign policy, he did not have such a close relationship with both American Presidents (Bush and Clinton)
- Detached approach towards the Balkans and Africa (Bosnia and Rwanda)
- After 1994, he had to face extremely strong opposition from New Labour and ‘the Sleaze’
- Calm personality but full of strength (attacked by Margaret Thatcher in the House of Lords)
- Historical loss of 1997 (comparable to the Conservative losses in 1906 and 1945)
- Somewhat unfortunate (being between Thatcher and Blair), but not that weak or bad Prime Minister (he ‘survived’ there for almost 7 years under bad circumstances)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Tony Blair (1997 – 2007), Labour
- Educated at Fettes and Oxford (law, but later regretted not studying history), where he was intellectually influenced by Christianity
- Became an MP in 1983 (shared an office with a Scottish MP Gordon Brown)
- Modern and moderate views (loyal member of Shadow Cabinets) – ‘Third Way’
- Extremely charismatic speaker (‘Tough on crime and on the causes of crime’ – style over substance?)
- Inspired by Bill Clinton (rebranding of Labour – ‘New Labour’), helped by Peter Mandelson



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Cooperation and then rivalry with Gordon Brown (who is the main moderniser able to win the general election?) – Granita Pact of 1994 (after the death of the Labour Leader John Smith)
- Gordon Brown remains the Shadow Chancellor with the overall responsibility for economic and social policies
- Probably the best opposition work in British history (1994 – 1997) with relatively moderate views and changed manifesto (contrast with Labour during the 1980s)
- An overwhelming victory of the Labour Party in 1997 (huge expectations)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Governing in tandem (coalition?) with Gordon Brown – ‘Blairites’ and ‘Brownites’
- As PM, he focused on education, law and order and foreign policy (specific governing style – ‘sofa government’), his Deputy was John Prescott
- New Labour wanted to build on Thatcherism (not reverse it) but reform the social services and the state as such (devolution and reform of the House of Lords)
- He did not trust the senior civil servants (brought in Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell – ‘spin doctor’)
- Professionalism regarding the media, weak opposition (William Hague, IDS, Michael Howard) and growing economy
- ‘Cool Britannia’ (British soft power), constructive policies towards Europe (Euro?)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He wanted Britain to be active internationally (an interventionist foreign policy with ‘an ethical dimension’ – Robin Cook) – inspired by Christianity
- 1998 – Iraq, 1999 – Kosovo (Chicago Speech – Blair’s doctrine of international community and humanitarian intervention), 2000 – Sierra Leone
- 9/11 – Blair’s vision of Britain as a bridge between the US and Europe
- US-UK relationship – a) nuclear weapons, b) intelligence sharing
- 2001 – Afghanistan, 2003 – Iraq (extremely controversial decision, parliamentary rebellion)
- His foreign policy record started very well but then it deteriorated (‘Bush’s poodle’)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- His legacy is being debated passionately (war criminal or charismatic leader? Or both?)
- His impact on the Labour Party was long-lasting (both negative and positive), he also inspired a new generation of Tory leaders (Cameron's circle)
- Electorally successive politician with a vision, charisma and strength but restrained by the position (and battles with) of Gordon Brown, who wanted to be the PM
- Finally, he resigned in the summer of 2007 (bitter relationship with his Chancellor) and went to work on the Middle East peace process



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Gordon Brown (2007 – 2010), Labour
- Educated at the University of Edinburgh (PhD in history)
- Became an MP in 1983, seen as a rising star within the Party
- Became a Shadow Chancellor in 1992 (did not run against John Smith after Kinnoek's resignation)
- Granita Deal with Blair (most powerful and longest serving Chancellor of the Exchequer in modern British history) – unfulfilled ambitions and bitterness
- Personally, not the easiest person to deal with (extremely serious)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Occasionally, he was trying to undermine Blair as the PM (use of his advisors – Ed Balls, Ed Miliband, Damian McBride)
- Successful economy, reform of the civil services (‘free at the point of delivery’)
- He became the PM in 2007 (far later than he wanted)
- He did not want to be like Blair (some minor changes) but he was afraid the people might get bored because they know him so much
- Politically damaged by the decision not to call an early general election in 2007



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Quite an uneasy relationship with his Chancellor (Alistair Darling) and his Foreign Secretary (David Miliband)
- In terms of foreign policy, he was less pro-US and pro-EU (late for the Lisbon Treaty in 2007) than Blair and mostly interested in international development, poverty reduction and so on
- Internationally, he led the response to the global recession of 2007 – 2009 (bank rescue package) – 2009 G20 London summit (‘we have saved the world’)
- He is remembered as an unlucky Prime Minister with a great potential but with a problematic personality



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- David Cameron (2010 – 2016), Conservative
- Born into an upper class – educated at Eton and Oxford
- Apart from a few years in marketing, he spent most of his career in politics (special advisor to Norman Lamont and Michael Howard and later an MP)
- He became the Leader of the Conservative Party in 2005 and he modernised the party (marketing, policies, MPs...)
- He operated in a tandem with George Osborne (Shadow Chancellor) and was surrounded by loyal advisors and friends



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- He was seen as mildly-Eurosceptic by his fellow MPs and by the public (he wanted to avoid the topic of Europe)
- Hung Parliament of 2010, he formed a Coalition with the Liberal Democrats (good relationship with Clegg – some similarities)
- Main focus on the economy but many further reforms (establishment of the NSC) – ‘the austerity’
- Government functioned through ‘the Quad’ – Cameron, Clegg, Osborne, Alexander (earlier Laws) – two Lib Dems and two Tories (two members from the Treasury)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Very hard-working Prime Minister (he woke up at 5AM) – good at making decisions
- Extremely close and good working relationship with George Osborne (Sunday evening's calls between them as well as many meetings during the week)
- To run a Coalition was not that hard but it meant better governance – insider's opinion
- Commitment to re-negotiate the terms of the membership and to hold a referendum on EU membership in the next Parliament
- Terrorism, London Olympics, Afghanistan, Syria vote in 2013



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Unexpected victory in the 2015 general election – majority government
- After 2015, George Osborne became even more powerful
- Problem with Boris Johnson and his ambitions
- Conservative Party was never comfortable with David Cameron (frequent rebellions in the House of Commons)
- He resigned after a loss of the EU referendum in 2016
- Seen by many as a failure but his governments' record is actually not that bad – depends on the opinion and political standing



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Theresa May (2016 – 2019), Conservative
- Educated at grammar school and Oxford (not a typical subject – Geography)
- Very ambitious, strong but somewhat private and introvert person
- Member of Shadow Cabinets (Chairman of the Conservative Party – ‘the nasty party’ speech) and later Home Secretary (2010 – 2016)
- Longest-serving Home Secretary for more than 100 years (most senior woman in the Coalition government) – no small talk, very tough in negotiations
- She relied heavily on special advisors Nick Timothy and Fiona Hill (no broader circle of friends and allies in politics)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Chosen as a safe and experienced pair of hands in a dramatic leadership election of 2016
- Main goal – to deliver Brexit (‘Brexit means Brexit’) – reluctant Remainer
- She wanted to pursue far broader agenda of social policies (one-nation Conservatism), but did not have enough time to do it
- Very unlucky Prime Minister (very uncomfortable at making decisions, a good company in private but not in public) – Windrush scandal, Grenfell fire
- ‘Strong and stable’ general election of 2017 – government lost the majority in the House of Commons – deal with the DUP from Northern Ireland



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Very resilient Prime Minister but politically damaged by the outcome of the election, Cabinet resignations (of her enemies as well as allies – Damian Green) and Brexit negotiations
- Seen as a lonely and isolated figure at international and European meetings (photos of her not being approached by her fellow heads of governments in Brussels)
- She was finally brought down by her inability to compromise on the EU deal
- Dramatic resignation speech in front of the Number Ten
- She remained in the House of Commons (possible future Cabinet member?)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Boris Johnson (2019 –), Conservative
- Educated at Eton and Oxford (Classics – fluent in Ancient Greek)
- Extremely ambitious (and opportunistic?)
- After Oxford, he pursued a career in journalism (editor-in-chief of the Spectator)
- Elected to the House of Commons in 2001 (junior Shadow Cabinet member under M. Howard and D. Cameron)
- Columnist, TV presenter (popular history) and author



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Extramarital affairs (womaniser – many children)
- Elected Mayor of London in 2008 (re-elected in 2012) – successful Olympics
- Very active and visible Mayor (often criticised the Coalition government)
- Elected to the House of Commons in 2015
- Prominent role in the EU referendum campaign – leading Brexiteer
- Leadership candidate in 2016 (Michael Gove ended it)



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Theresa May made him the Foreign Secretary in 2016 (seen as incompetent, some scandals – journalist in Iran)
- He resigned over the Cabinet's Brexit strategy in 2018
- He became the Leader of the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister in 2019
- Dramatic circumstances of the final stages of the Brexit negotiations – Whig removed from some Tory MPs
- Victory in the General Election of 2019
- Dramatic resignation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer Sajid Javid – replaced by Rishi Sunak



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Somewhat sloppy response to the first wave of COVID-19 (became ill and almost died)
- Huge importance of Dominic Cummings and his visions and plans on how to reform Britain (investing into infrastructure but also reforming the Civil Service)
- Uneasy relationship with the Civil Service and its senior members
- Many experienced politicians are not in the Cabinet
- Economic problems
- Ongoing trade talks between the UK and the EU



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- Political errors (mostly wrong appointments) and lost byelections
- Series of scandals culminated in massive resignations from his cabinet
- Eventually, he decided to resign
- Still very popular with the membership (biggest majority since 1987)
- Might return? Did not resign his parliamentary seat



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- **Liz Truss**
- **Merton College, Oxford – PPE**
- Liberal Democrat turned Conservative
- Worked in private sector (e.g. Shell)
- Became MP in **2010** (after loses in 2001 and 2005), entered government in **2012**
- **Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** (2014/2016),
Justice, Lord Chancellor (2016/2017),
Chief Secretary to the Treasury (2017/2019),
International Trade, President of the Board of Trade (2019/2021),
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs (2021/2022)
- 6/9/2022 – Became **Prime Minister**



Most important holders of the office since 1945

- **Energy crisis**
- **High inflation**
- **Housing crisis**
- **Ukrainian crisis**
- **New monarch?**
- **Brexit**
- **Scottish independence**
- **Northern Ireland**
- **General election**



Conclusions – Prime Ministerial or Cabinet government?

- Historically, some Prime Ministers tended to be more dominant while others more consensual (some even had other Cabinet positions). Ultimately, Cabinet is able to prevail over the Prime Minister (Thatcher in 1990) so the ability to chair it is one of the key competences that the PM should have.
- Circumstances (international meetings, the media) make the PM to be more and more visible and responsible for everything the government does (insufficient PMQs?)
- It is impossible for one person to govern alone and having the loyal and capable Cabinet colleagues is the best strategy how to succeed – but what does it mean in the British political system?

Discussion – Thank you for your attention!

