



Citation for published version:

Pearce, N 2022 'Constructing Disraeli in Twentieth Century Conservatism' Oxford University Press.

Publication date:

2022

Document Version

Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication](#)

This is a draft of an article that has been accepted for publication by The English Historical Review.

University of Bath

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Constructing Disraeli in Twentieth Century Conservatism

As one of his foremost scholars recently observed, Benjamin Disraeli is 'now the nineteenth-century British politician most discussed by historians.'¹ In the decades that followed pioneering studies in the 1960s of Disraeli's life and legacy by Robert Blake, Maurice Cowling and Paul Smith, historians concentrated on the Victorian statesman's record as a Tory politician and party leader, Prime Minister and social reformer, tending to the consensus that he was an inconsistent politician who left behind an insubstantial legacy; pragmatic at best, opportunist and self-serving at worst. From the 1990s onwards, scholarly attention turned increasingly towards Disraeli's early career and literary works, generating a revisionist literature which examined his youthful romanticism, the impact of continental thought on his ideas and politics, and his Jewishness. As well as fostering new perspectives on the continuities in Disraeli's thinking that were shaped by his early life, this literature prompted examination of his cultural significance and his 'iconic status in popular culture', locating him in debates on anti-semitism, race and empire.² In recent years, the 'cultural and imperial turn' in Disraeli studies has produced a body of research and new insights into the Disraeli's political life and literary works, and his posthumous influence on both politics and popular culture.³

¹ Jonathan Parry, Disraeli, the East and Religion: Tancred in Context, *English Historical Review*, No 556, (June 2017) p570.

² Tony Kushner, One of Us? Contesting Disraeli's Jewishness and Englishness in the Twentieth Century, in Todd.M.Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds) *Disraeli's Jewishness*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), p201. See also Jonathan Parry, Disraeli and England, *The Historical Journal*, 43, 3 (2000), pp. 699-728 for an overview of historiographical approaches to Disraeli up to year of publication.

³ Parry, Disraeli, the East and Religion, op cit

The political historiography of the 1960s and 1970s consolidated a view that Disraeli possessed few principles and gave little time or thought to the social and democratic reforms with which he was commonly associated, particularly the 1867 Reform Act and the social legislation of his 1874 administration. In turn, this cast a jaundiced pall over twentieth century evocations of the 'People's Dizzy' as the source of the 'One Nation' tradition of political Conservatism. If Disraeli was neither a champion of democracy and working-class interests, nor a pioneering social reformer, then the veneration of his legacy served merely as an exercise in mythmaking, undertaken for largely tactical or symbolic purposes by Conservative political leaders, from Lord Randolph Churchill onwards: good politics, perhaps, but bad history.⁴

The widening of the historical lens through which Disraeli has been viewed following the revisionist literature affords us the opportunity to re-examine the construction of the Disraelian tradition in twentieth century Conservatism. The account of the Disraelian One Nation 'myth' tends to obscure the myriad ways in which Disraeli's life and works were interpreted and put to work in Conservative ideological debates and political practice in the 20th century, and over-simplifies his intellectual and political legacies. It serves, first, to reduce the 'Disraelian' Conservative tradition to social policy and state intervention in the economy, overlooking the lineages of his political career, and his writing and speeches, in

⁴ On the development of the Disraelian One Nation 'myth' see David Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics* (New York, London: Continuum, 2010). See also, inter alia, Richard Carr, *One Nation Britain: history, the progressive tradition, and practical ideas for today's politicians* (Farnham. Ashgate, 2014); Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880 -1935*, (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1985) p132; Paul Smith, *Disraeli, A Brief Life*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Canto edition, 1999 pp 211- 222. Phillip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin, Conservative Values and National Leadership*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) p179.

Conservative political economy debates, conceptions of the nation and the constitution, and imperial and foreign policy thinking. Second, by viewing evocations of Disraeli as ‘mere’ political mythmaking, the dominant historical reading downplays the substantive ways in which his life’s work was drawn upon for the construction of Conservative political traditions in the 20th century, and the different political uses to which Disraelian legacies were put. Third, by focusing largely, if not exclusively, on public references to Disraeli by Conservative political leaders, it overlooks his presentation and reception in the popularising work of biographers and professional historians; in the articles, speeches and pamphlets of Tory public intellectuals and the political education institutions of the Conservative Party; and in popular culture, such as theatre and film.

The association of Disraeli with a ‘myth’ of social reform is in large part due to the central role his ‘ancestral line’ played in post-war ‘New Conservatism’ and the formation of the One Nation Group of MPs.⁵ Disraeli is commonly associated with an interventionist, socially inclusive Conservatism – as one pole of the ‘dual nature’ or ‘twin inheritance’ of the Conservative tradition.⁶ But closer examination of the varied ways in which Disraeli’s life and work were constructed in twentieth century conservatism demonstrates a more complex ideological picture and varied set of Disraelian interpretations than this binary suggests.⁷ These perspectives cannot be simply arrayed on a libertarian – interventionist spectrum,

⁵ David Seawright, ‘One Nation’, in Kevin Hickson (ed), *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 70

⁶ W.H.Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition, Volume Two, The Ideological Inheritance*, (London: Routledge, 1988) pp189 – 195.

⁷ Arthur Aughey, *The Conservative Party and the nation*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018). Stephen Evans, The not-so-odd couple: Margaret Thatcher and one nation Conservatism, *Contemporary British History*, 23:1, (2009) 101 -21. Kit Kowol, The Conservative Movement and Dreams of Britain’s post-war future, *The Historical Journal*, 62, 2 (2019) pp473 -493; David Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics*, op cit; Robert Walsha, ‘The One Nation Group: A Tory Approach to Backbench Politics and Organisation’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 11:2 (2000): 183–214.

along the axis of market vs state, but instead occupy a number of ideological and political positions on questions of political economy, civil society, nationhood and Britain's place in the world.

This article focuses on interpretations of Disraeli, and how his legacy was constructed, by conservative biographers, historians and public intellectuals from the decades after his death up until the new historiography of the 1960s. It traces how Disraeli was memorialised and celebrated in the Conservative movement; how his life and works were interpreted for popular audiences by a critical group of conservative historians in the inter-war period; and how Disraeli was mobilised in critical Conservative and Unionist Party debates on tariff reform, social reform, the nation and Empire, concluding in the aftermath of the Second World War, described by Enoch Powell as a 'springtime' for Disraeli, when his legacy and statecraft were consistently evoked in Conservative debates on post-war Britain.⁸ It demonstrates that Disraeli was interpreted in much more diverse ways, and with more diverse political objectives, than the standard readings of the Disraelian or One Nation tradition has hitherto appreciated.

Disraeli's place in the popular imagination of the late Victorian age was crystallised in the extensive obituaries, memorials and public commemorations that followed his death in 1881. As Sandra Meyer has shown, his posthumous reception partook fully in the Victorian culture of celebrity: as a figure of intense public fascination, Disraeli was commemorated,

⁸ Enoch Powell, A Strange Choice of Hero, in Rex Collings (ed), *Reflections of a Statesman, The Writings and Speeches of Enoch Powell*, (London, 1991) p361

not just in conventional obituaries and biographical sketches, but in a mass market of souvenir items, from illustrated woodcuts to verse tributes and Staffordshire figurines.⁹ Transgressing the boundaries of literature and politics, Disraeli cut a dazzling and deeply romantic figure, a ‘visitor from other ages, other climes, and another race, condescending to vary the dull monotony of politics’.¹⁰ On his death, his ethnic otherness – the subject of anti-semitism in both politics and popular cultural representations throughout his life – was redeemed by rendering him an outsider who had risen to the heights of national leadership, English virtue and monarchical affection. Those such as *Punch* magazine, whose cartoons had for decades represented Disraeli in the tropes of a manipulative, Oriental conjuror, now embraced him amongst the pantheon of national greats.¹¹

The enduring association of Disraeli with national institutions and patriotic virtue was fostered by the foundation of the Primrose League and the inauguration of the wearing of primroses - ‘Beaconsfield Buttonholes’ - on the anniversary of his death each year. Even to his most ardent detractors, this annual cult memorialisation of Disraeli presented an astonishing spectacle. In some parts of London, the journalist and Irish Nationalist MP, T. P. O’Connor wrote, the ‘primrose was worn by at least one or every two persons one met; and it was still more remarkable that it was worn by people of all classes.’¹² The Primrose League capitalised on public affection for Disraeli to cloak a new Conservative political organisation in his memory, one that would integrate men and women from across class divides into a romantic, medievalist social world of ranks and rituals, structured into local ‘habitations’

⁹ Sandra Mayer, Portraits of the Artist as Politician, the Politician as Artist: Commemorating the Disraeli Phenomenon, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 2016 Vol. 21, No. 3, 281–300

¹⁰ *The Times*, 21 April 1881, p. 9

¹¹ Sandra Mayer, op cit, p293 -294

¹² T.P.O’Connor MP, *Lord Beaconsfield: A Biography* (London: Fisher Unwin, 8th Edition, 1905), pxi

and a hierarchy of chivalrous orders. Its mass membership, reaching nearly two million in the Edwardian era, and calendar of social events and entertainments, allowed the Primrose League to sink deep roots into the social lives of Conservative supporters. Members of the League pledged allegiance to the institutions whose defence Disraeli had defined as central to the conservative creed - religion, the estates of the realm, monarchy and empire.¹³

The Primrose League was the creation of Lord Randolph Churchill and a small clique formed around the Fourth Party group of MPs. Conceived as a means of furthering Churchill's ambitions, its impact endured well beyond his own short-lived political career, and like the idea of 'Tory Democracy' with which Churchill associated himself, it had the effect of promoting the perception that Disraeli's legacy resided in a popular and proactive Toryism capable of drawing the support of the enfranchised working class behind national institutions and an imperial mission. Lord Churchill's brief political effervescence, though lacking in ideological substance, thus contributed to debates about what constituted 'Elijah's mantle' – the title he gave to a famous article in the *Fortnightly Review* marking the occasion of the unveiling of the statue of Disraeli in Westminster in 1883, and one of a series of missives staking his claims to the Beaconsfield legacy. In the circumstances of defeat, disorientation and leadership conflict for the Conservatives that followed Disraeli's death, the idea of a Disraelian political inheritance became a weapon in struggles for control of the party, its organisation and policies. 'Tory Democracy' – or 'Dizzy's Dream' as the Fourth Party MP and political organiser Sir John Gorst called it – became a leitmotif in arguments about the pace and direction of the party.¹⁴

¹³ Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People 1880-1935*, (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1985). A. Cooke, *A gift from the Churchills: the Primrose League, 1883–2004* (London: Carlton Club, 2010)

¹⁴ R.F.Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1981),

If Churchill's own contribution was opportunistic and insubstantial, nonetheless important interpretations of the Disraelian inheritance were made by his early biographers, historians and journalists. Where the Primrose League maintained Disraeli's popular profile, and ritually enacted his memorialisation, his life and career were kept in the foreground of public intellectual discussion by numerous reminiscences and biographies that appeared between the final years of his life and the publication of the first volume of Monypenny and Buckle's official biography in 1910. These ranged from the unremittingly hostile biography penned by T. P. O'Connor, to more sympathetic treatments written by Georg Brandes, J.A. Froude and Wilfrid Meynell, and exercises in partisan defence published by T.E. Kebbel, Harold Gorst and Walter Sichel.¹⁵

Kebbel, a Tory journalist who edited Disraeli's speeches for publication, followed his subject – and prefigured the work of later conservative historians - in seeking to distill a set of principles and political tradition for Toryism from the study of its statesmen. Disraeli was one of the 'three great Tory Ministers' – alongside Pitt and Peel – who had 'impressed a distinct character on the political creed' of Toryism, extending its appeal to the working classes and ensuring their support for national institutions. Disraeli's radicalism consisted in 'trying to make the working class Conservative', not simply through social improvement and conciliation of their relations with employers, but through appeals to their patriotism and

¹⁵ In the second volume of his 'Unconventional Biography' of Disraeli, published in 1903, Wilfrid Meynell, a publisher and biographer, listed an extensive roll call of 'writers of ability on various aspects of Disraeli's career whose contributions have mostly made a month's magazines interesting...Mr Alfred Austin, Mr Frederick Greenwood, Mr Saintsbury, Mr James Sykes, Mr J Henry Harris...Mr Bryce, Mr Brewster, Mr Childres, Mr Zangwill, Mr Escott, Mr Walter Sichel, Mr Frederic Harrison, and Mr Freven Lord.' Wilfrid Meynell, *Benjamin Disraeli, An Unconventional Biography, Vol II*, (London: Hutchinson and Co: 1903) p489.

the 'splendour' of the nation's imperial traditions. Stressing the continuity in Disraeli's thinking, Kebbel argued that he saw early in his career that the Toryism of the future had to be 'popular Toryism or nothing'. The people had to become 'the guardians and custodians of the ancient order.'¹⁶

Kebbel thus reinforced the association of the Disraelian inheritance with popular imperialism and a romantic, elevated concept of the nation, arguing that the 'secret' of Disraeli's 'power with the masses' lay in his 'loftier conception of national life than had been propounded by the Manchester School'.¹⁷ Rebutting Gladstonian criticisms, Kebbel argued that Disraeli's 1874 administration upheld traditional and longstanding practices of imperial statecraft, and was neither novel nor adventurist. Nonetheless, Disraeli was a 'firm believer in the greatness and the glory of [the country's] Imperial mission', confirming Lord Salisbury's verdict that 'Zeal for the greatness of England was the passion of his mind.'¹⁸ In similar vein, Harold Gorst – son of Sir John – argued in his 1900 biography that 'the crowning work of Disraeli's life, and that which will determine his future place in history, is the broad national policy of imperialism which he has bequeathed to posterity'. Disraeli had succeeded in 'stamping out of the sphere of practical politics' the policy of 'dismemberment and isolation' espoused by leading figures in the Liberal party.¹⁹

Whilst shielding Disraeli from the charge of jingoism, biographers such as Gorst and Kebbel testified to the importance of their subject's attempt to assert Tory claims of ownership

¹⁶ T.E.Kebbel, *A History of Toryism*, (London: W.H.Allen Co., 1886) p337

¹⁷ T.E.Kebbel, *Life of Lord Beaconsfield*, (Philadelphia: J.P.Lippincott Company, 1888), p128

¹⁸ Marquis of Salisbury

¹⁹ Harold Gorst, *The Earl of Beaconsfield*, (London: Blackie and Son, 1900), p227

over patriotism and empire. From his 1872 Crystal Palace speech attacking liberalism for seeking to 'effect the disintegration of the Empire', to his policies in Afghanistan and South Africa, purchase of the Suez Canal shares, and proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India, Disraeli bequeathed, if not a 'new imperialism', then the building blocks of a politics of empire that his successors would work hard to consolidate into a Conservative and Unionist imperialist consensus, one that would elevate empire into a national interest above class interests and defend the stability of the economic and political order against disintegration from the centrifugal forces of Irish nationalism, Radical anti-imperialism and nascent socialism.²⁰ Among his first biographers, it was only the liberal imperialist and advocate of Greater Britain, J.A.Froude, who criticised Disraeli for stirring the 'pseudo-national spirit of jingoism' while neglecting to do anything to secure the continued allegiance of the colonies. Liberal historians would echo these charges, accusing Disraeli of political opportunism and of failing to take any concrete steps towards imperial consolidation.²¹

Whether imperialism had popular electoral appeal divided Disraeli's interpreters. Gorst was sceptical that Disraeli had awakened a spirit of imperialism in the working classes: empire was an elite project, not a democratic one. In this, his view was consistent with that of Salisbury and the leadership of late Victorian conservatism, for whom defence of the empire was intimately linked to preservation of the union and property – political tasks best achieved by a coalition of aristocratic and middle class interests (Gorst ground his axe with

²⁰ E.H.H.Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), p59-77.

²¹ J.A.Froude, *Lord Beaconsfield*, (London, Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 7th edition, 1896) p251 - 261. On Froude's 'Republican imperialism', see Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016) ch12, pp297-319. For liberal criticisms of Disraeli, see John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (London, 1903), I, II, p392, and discussion in Stanley R. Stemberge, Disraeli and the Millstones, *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Nov., 1965), pp. 122-139

the 'aristocratic element' of the Tory party elsewhere, on the millstone of his father's commitment to Tory Democracy, which he argued was 'dying for want of nutrition, stifled by the thick growth of the old Toryism that chokes its progress.'²²) In contrast, Kebbel's faith in the popular appeal of imperialism was linked to a wider assessment of Disraeli's politics, and particularly the territorial constitution to which he was himself deeply attached. Disraeli distrusted the middle classes, Kebbel argued, and 'had no faith in the bourgeois constitution' or commercial interest as the organising principle of empire. The self-interest of the capitalist class would secure neither a stable political settlement nor national greatness; for its part, the Conservative Party could only achieve and sustain power if it brought urban working class voters under the natural leadership of the landed country gentry. Political stability would be achieved in a balanced constitution that preserved national institutions, guaranteed a large measure of local self-government, and enabled each social class to share in both political power and social improvement.²³

This preoccupation with inhibiting sectional class interests from dominating in the constitution and defending the interests of property, while uniting a new electoral coalition of support behind a national imperial mission, became increasingly important in Conservative and Unionist political debates in the 1890s and early twentieth century. Kebbel's biography of Disraeli appeared in the late 1880s, in the years that followed the extension of the franchise in the Third Reform Act of 1884, and the 1885 Redistribution of Seats Act. While these reforms threatened the traditional landed Tory interests which Kebbel strove to defend, they also opened up new avenues for the Conservative Party to

²² Harold Gorst, *The Earl of Beaconsfield*, op cit, p226

²³ T.E.Kibbel, *Life of Lord Beaconsfield*, (Philadelphia: J.P.Lippincott Company, 1888) p168 -172

gain support from suburban 'Villa Toryism', which it would exploit successfully for the next twenty years.²⁴ At the same time, the Liberal split over Irish Home Rule in 1886 and the alliance of Chamberlainite unionists with the Conservatives brought energetic and programmatic social imperialist thinking into Tory ranks. It was to be Chamberlain's supporters – from both Liberal Unionist and Conservative wings - who most consciously embraced a Disraelien lineage in Edwardian debates about tariff reform, imperial unity and social improvement.

Late Victorian conservatism produced at least three different strands of political thought on social reform and the state.²⁵ The first was individualist and hostile to state regulation of the economy and taxation of property. It owed much to the work of Herbert Spencer, received further elaboration in the writings of W.H. Lecky and others, and was given political expression in the Liberty and Property Defence League and, later, the British Constitutional Association. It was hostile to democratic government and peppered with scepticism of Disraeli, in particular, his extension of the franchise in the 1867 Reform Act. The second was the governing conservatism of Lord Salisbury, which preceded on a cautious case-by-case basis, embracing individual social reforms where prudent and amenable to Conservative interests, but which resisted the logic of programmatic policy responses to working class pressure. It too cast a sceptical eye back to the 1867 Act, the 'leap in the dark' from which Salisbury had dissented. The third was the radical conservatism of Chamberlain and his supporters, which developed precisely the programmatic reforms that the quietist Salisbury

²⁴ James Conford, *The Transformation of Conservatism in the Late Nineteenth Century*, *Victorian Studies*, Sep., 1963, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 35-66; E.H.H.Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, ch4 pp120-156

²⁵ E.H.H.Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, op cit, p129-30.

resisted, and would come to dominate Edwardian Unionist social reform debates, linking social progress with tariff reform. Randolph Churchill had toyed with arguments for 'fair trade' in the early 1880s, and while most leading Conservatives were careful not to press the case for protective tariffs until Chamberlain launched his famous campaign in 1903, intellectual links were increasingly made between empire unity, tariff reform and social reform in the 1890s. The elements of a 'great policy of Imperial consolidation' that Disraeli had sketched out in his Crystal Palace speech were progressively brought together with promises of secure employment and social reforms in the nascent Chamberlainite agenda.²⁶

Tariff reformers drew extensively on the work of historical economists such as William Cunningham, W.J.Ashley, W.A.S.Hewins and L.L.Price, who in turn were profoundly influenced by 19th German economic theory.²⁷ The work of the historical economists provided the intellectual foundations for the Edwardian assault on the free trade consensus, and displayed numerous congruities with Disraeli's earlier critiques of laissez-faire liberalism. In each can be found opposition to the abstraction of economic 'laws' from particular historical contexts, the reduction of organic evolution to mechanistic individualism, and the elevation of commercial interests over the nation state in steering the economy and securing the destiny of the empire. Like Disraeli, the historical economists sought a national political economy that would balance and stabilise class relations, and secure Britain's interests in international relations.

²⁶ Ibid p130-135. Andrew Gamble, *The Conservative Nation*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) ch 2 pp16-23.

²⁷ E.H.H.Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), ch2; and *The Crisis of Conservatism*, op cit , ch5.

These congruities arose, in part, from the fact that Edwardian tariff reformers revived ideological critiques of free trade that had been made in the 1830s and 1840s.²⁸ In the mid-19th century, protectionists developed a distinctive political economy in opposition to the arguments of the Anti-Corn Law League, blending constitutional with economic and social arguments against liberal orthodoxy, and as the century ended, Conservatives 'once against measured free trade against a broader conception of the purposes of public policy and found it wanting.'²⁹ Edwardian historical economists could not easily draw directly upon Disraeli, given that he had weaned the Tory party away from protection after the repeal of the Corn Laws. But they freely made use of the intellectual heritage of mid-century conservative critiques of free trade liberalism, and a shared interest in the German economists is occasionally visible too: in his speech to the House of Commons of 25th April 1843 on free trade, Disraeli approvingly cited the work of Friedrich List, the patron saint of German national economics and a key influence on the British historical economists.³⁰ Just as his legacy had been contested in the intra-party leadership battles of the early 1880s, so Disraeli would be interpreted in the Edwardian era through the lens of ideological debates on tariff reform, the state and social reform, and the qualities of political leadership itself. Disraeli's dynamism and foresightedness could be contrasted with the caution and reserve of Arthur Balfour, and his commitment to imperialism, social reform and the balanced constitution arrayed against both liberal individualism and socialism. Thus in 1904,

²⁸ Anna Gambles, Rethinking the Politics of Protection: Conservatism and the Corn Laws, 1830-52, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 113, No. 453 (Sep., 1998), pp. 928-952

²⁹ Ibid p952

³⁰ Hansard, 25th April 1843, col 944 – 951 accessed at <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1843/apr/25/import-duties-commercial-treaties> . See too W.J.Ashley, Political Economy and the Tariff Problem, in The Committee of the Compatriots' Club (ed), *Compatriots' Club Lectures, First Series*, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905) pp233 -263. Paul Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Canto edition, 1999), p79

Walter Sichel eulogised Disraeli as a leader of imagination and ‘personality,’ who from the ‘outset...was convinced of a mission’ and brooded over ‘visions’ which he ‘realised in the world of action.’³¹ Disraeli ‘naturalised the democratic idea on the soil of tradition and order and thereby he cemented the solidarity of the State and the welfare of the nation.’ His imperialism was ‘never aggressive and always deliberate’ and he had set out a ‘foreseeing and far-seeing policy’ for the unity of the colonies with the nation, of ‘a united empire and united nation’ that was still being pondered by political leaders thirty years later. Positioning his subject carefully in the midst of the burgeoning debates on tariff reform and free trade, Sichel contended that Disraeli would have cautioned against the full Chamberlainite plan for protective tariffs, while ‘honouring the vision of a self-supporting empire’ and endorsing pragmatic reciprocal tariff measures.³²

Nonetheless, it was prominent tariff reformers who played the most important part in reconstructing the Disraelian tradition in the Edwardian era. With the formation of the Unionist Social Reform Committee in 1911, Disraeli’s legacy was repeatedly invoked in support of the development of a distinctive Tory theory of the state and a set of social policies that could bear the imprint of a Conservative tradition while modernising the party’s prospectus in the face of new electoral challenges.³³ In a succinct statement of this approach, F.E.Smith drew a direct line from Disraeli, through Randolph Churchill, to Joseph Chamberlain:

³¹ Walter Sichel, *Disraeli: A Study in Personality and Ideas*, (New York and London: 1904), p7

³² *Ibid* p72-3

³³ Jane Ridley, The Unionist Social Reform Committee: Wets Before the Deluge, *Historical Journal*, Vol 30, (1987), pp391-413. E.H.H.Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism*, op cit, p287.

*'They all believed in the nation, and in the people as the nation – nor could they conceive of Toryism as a form of class interest but only as an embodiment of that national unity which binds class to class, or kingdom to kingdom; which makes unity out of difference, and an Imperial whole out of bodies separated by the width of the world. One may follow, however humbly, in their footsteps, and say that a policy of union or of empire which leaves Social Reform and class unity out of account is built upon sand, and not upon the solid rock of political reality.'*³⁴

This reading of Disraeli as a progenitor of class cooperation and the unity of the nation, in a constitution elevated above sectional class interests, helped equip Unionists to respond to the bitter class and constitutional crises of the late Edwardian summer. It was a reading largely confirmed by Money Penny and Buckle's official biography, which appeared in six volumes between 1910 and 1920. Buckle concluded the magnum opus in terms familiar to F.E. Smith, Maurice Woods and other luminaries of the Unionist Social Reform Committee. Disraeli, he wrote, 'sought union, not disintegration of empire; class co-operation, not competition and strife at home; the reconstruction and development, not the destruction of ancient institutions.' He left behind 'a wealth of sound political doctrine which continued to profoundly influence political development.'³⁵ These judgements were to shape the understanding of Disraeli for at least the next half century, until they were dethroned by the historiography of the 1960s.

³⁴ F.E. Smith, *Unionist Policy and Other Essays* (London, Williams and Norgate, 1913), p44

³⁵ W.F. Money Penny and G.E. Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, Vol II*, (London: John Murray: 1929) p1518

It was in the work of conservative historians of the inter-war period that Disraeli's position in the pantheon of Tory leaders, as the author of visionary reforms and harbinger of the age of democracy and national unity, was cemented. The Cambridge don, Conservative politician and uncle of RAB Butler, Sir Geoffrey Butler, was one of the first conservative historians of the twentieth century to seek to assemble a 'Tory tradition' from the annals of Tory statesmanship. In a set of lectures originally delivered at the University of Pennsylvania and published on the eve of the First World War, he traced a lineage from Bolingbroke and Burke to Disraeli and Salisbury, constructing a conservative tradition that would furnish principles for contemporary politics: 'The captains of Toryism in the past can be made the instructors of Toryism in the present: and the Tory tradition is the Tory hope', he wrote.³⁶ Disraeli was the 'perpetual oracle of Toryism' whose 'service to the Tory party' consisted most clearly in 'protesting the control of the nation and its destinies by any single class'.³⁷ The balanced constitution of the nation, and the defence of the established institutions of Church and state, were the safeguards of a stratified but fluid class society in which no sectional interest could prevail over others, whether a Whig oligarchy, the Victorian industrial bourgeoisie or an enfranchised working class. 'Only in the doctrine that the interests of no one class must predominate did he see hope of saving England.'³⁸

Butler thus presented a reading of Disraeli that would legitimate Edwardian Conservative resistance to constitutional reform and the 'class tyranny' of trade union rights and minimum wage legislation. His project was not a simply reactionary one, however. Although a Tory programme would always seek to fend off 'predatory attacks on property and the

³⁶ Geoffrey. G. Butler, *The Tory Tradition*, (London: John Murray, 1914), ix

³⁷ Ibid p94

³⁸ Ibid p87

like', the 'constructive' side of Toryism needed positive articulation.³⁹ In contrast to what Butler claimed were the 'antiquated, prejudiced or trivial books' that had, with few exceptions, been written about Disraeli since his death, his own study of 'perhaps the greatest of all Tories' revealed the 'permanent reviving power of his philosophy' and 'the constant principles of government'.⁴⁰

Such an articulation of enduring Disraelian principles that would equip conservatives to meet contemporary political challenges was an abiding preoccupation of the medievalist, F.J.C. Hearnshaw. A student of J. R. Seeley's at Cambridge, Hearnshaw was a prolific author and lecturer who took seriously the vocation of publicly engaged conservative historian. From 1912 to 1934 he taught at Kings College London, where he gave well attended public lectures aimed at the professional classes, while travelling 'energetically throughout Britain delivering blistering conservative popular speeches to trades unionists and other working class groups about contemporary political issues such as the dangers of socialism...'⁴¹

Disraeli featured extensively in this anti-socialist proselytising. For Hearnshaw, Disraeli was 'the genius and pioneer' of Tory Democracy, who had a 'profound trust in the British working man'.⁴² He was therefore a vital source of inspiration for 20th century conservatives seeking to defend British institutions, the market economy and her empire from socialism in an era of universal suffrage. 'The influence of Disraeli is still living and operative, and his memory a flowering evergreen', Hearnshaw wrote, arguing that he offered a 'conservative

³⁹ Ibid, ix

⁴⁰ Ibid, p60, p102

⁴¹ Reba Soffer, *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America: From the Great War to Thatcher and Reagan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p60.

⁴² F.J.C.Hearnshaw, *Prime Ministers of the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Macmillan, 1926) p199; *Conservatism in England: An Analytical, Historical and Political Survey* (London, 1933) p215

collectivism' that was neither liberal nor socialist, but organic, religious, patriotic and imperialist.⁴³ Disraeli's 1874 administration 'had no such hesitation in using the power of the state to improve the condition of the people as had marked the doctrinaire politicians of the Manchester school of Liberalism. They were Collectivists in a non-Socialistic sense of the term...'⁴⁴. Like Butler, Hearnshaw presented Disraeli as the heir to Bolingbroke and Burke, reinforced by immersion in Victorian Romanticism. Disraeli's principles were consistent and deep; properly understood, he geared conservatism to the pragmatic reconciliation of class interests in a hierarchial, ordered society that eschewed radical utopias in favour of piecemeal, incremental reform.

By the time he came to lecture at the conservative political education centre, Ashridge College, in the 1930s, Hearnshaw's tone was more apocalyptic and his remedies more extreme. Looking back to the Edwardian Liberal administrations, he saw a 'full and raging flood' of socialism and 'trade union tyranny', that had led the country to the brink of civil war. The Coalition government that followed had corrupted conservatism, while the two Labour administrations had taken Britain to the 'verge of the bottomless sea of insolvency.' Even the term 'social reform' became less a byword for Disraelian legislation than a 'seductive title' for offering the working class electorate 'enormous bribes of other people's money.' Hearnshaw cited the libertarian Sir Ernest Benn favourably and advocated a programme of major fiscal retrenchment. At the furthest extreme, he saw 'hope in eugenic reforms; in the segregation or sterilisation of the unfit; in the purification of the race; in the growth of temperance and self-control.'⁴⁵

⁴³ Hearnshaw, *Prime Ministers*, p228

⁴⁴ *Ibid* p202

⁴⁵ Hearnshaw, *Conservatism in England*, pp250 -303

Yet Hearnshaw could still argue that Disraeli's influence was 'enduring and increasing' and that the 'ideals of Tory democracy' stood as a 'perpetual memorial to his name'.⁴⁶ Disraeli's principles of religiously-ordained social order, an organic and adaptive state, solidarity and unity between the social classes, and a balance of powers and interests, were sufficiently capacious to guide Conservatives across the treacherous terrain of industrial strife and geo-political threats in the 1930s. In Hearnshaw's hands, Disraelian principles could shroud a programme that stretched from libertarian state-scepticism to Stanley Baldwin's pragmatic conservatism of national unity, all the way across to eugenics and racial 'purification'.

The task of distilling a 'spirit' and 'enduring principles' of conservatism from the study of British history in order better to equip it for the challenges of the twentieth century was taken up in the influential writings of Keith Feiling, the 'quintessential Oxford political historian'⁴⁷ who first made his name with '*Toryism: A Political Dialogue*', published, like Butler's study, on the eve of the outbreak of World War One.⁴⁸ An imagined classical dialogue between representatives of different Tory worldviews, *Toryism* ranged across the ideological preoccupations of Edwardian conservatism, from tariff reform and the future of the Empire, to the role of the State and private property in national life, and the relationship of Toryism to the teachings of the Church of England. With considerable fluency for the discussion of political ideas, Feiling probed the principles and practices of conservatism, sharpening up the contemporary dilemmas it faced and the tools it had to address them.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p224

⁴⁷ Soffer, *History, Historians, and Conservatism in Britain and America*, p86

⁴⁸ Keith Feiling, *Toryism: A Political Dialogue*, (London: G.Bell and Sons Ltd, 1913)

Disraeli appears only fleetingly in the dialogue, as a novelist of social reform and anti-Whig imperialist who 'seized on' and 'revived...as a staple of the modern age' the 'genuine Tory spirit, a constant and deep attachment to the Crown coupled with a horror of uniformity of institutions and of economic formulas'.⁴⁹ Yet here Feiling signalled a quality he admired in Tory leaders, and which would mark his historical research on Toryism: an ability to put a tradition or 'spirit' to work in the service of political renewal in the changed circumstances of a given historical era. In a review of Moneyppenny and Buckle's official biography of Disraeli, he wrote that 'Tories...cohere not in a programme but in a temper or a spirit. Only in the spirit of their whole tradition, our reading of this biography suggests, can they hopefully embark on the central difficulties of a new age.'⁵⁰ It is these 'difficulties' that forward looking Tory leaders - 'vigorous figures...who accepted fact and fought on principle' - were able to confront.⁵¹ Here and elsewhere, Feiling placed Disraeli in a lineage stretching back to Harley and Bolingbroke, via Pitt and Canning, of conservative leaders who were able to take stock of the currents of an era, to look into the future, and to shape their party's programme accordingly. None of these leaders was without their flaws, but they were nonetheless able to perform the 'pioneer task of bridging the party over the intellectual revolutions of the last two hundred years' and to do 'radical things from inside the conservative frame...'⁵²

As an influential historian with lifelong links to the Conservative leadership who became Neville Chamberlain's official biographer, Feiling's facility with political theory and his

⁴⁹ Ibid, p96

⁵⁰ Keith Feiling, *Sketches in Nineteenth Century Biography*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co: 1930), p177

⁵¹ Ibid p180

⁵² Ibid p89

commitment to engaging in the ideological renewal of the conservative tradition, endow his readings of Disraeli's life and legacy with a particular importance in the mid twentieth century. Feiling's Disraeli is a leader who anticipates the democratic age and refashions the Conservative Party for its demands. He is able to command the landscape of the future, rallying democracy to the 'conservative causes' of Crown, Church, imperialism and social reform. He rejects liberal political economy in favour of an organic and ordered national capitalism, suitably steered to preserve social harmony in an age of rising class antagonisms. Although he achieved power too late in life, nonetheless Disraeli's 1874 government was 'an active, reforming ministry' whose social legislation was its 'most decisive work'. For Feiling, Disraeli had insisted 'from his first days' that social reform was the 'Conservative Party's function and the condition of its survival.'⁵³

Disraeli was thus a critical figure in the transition to the party system of the twentieth century, and particularly the era of mass democracy, offering lessons in leadership, principles and even policy programme to Feiling's conservative contemporaries.

Nonetheless, Feiling was acutely aware that the Disraelian epoch had closed, and that one of the most decisive tasks for Conservative leaders was correctly to understand the economic and political terrain on which they fought in the inter-war period. At the end of the 1920s, it was futile, indeed, 'senility' to 'sit in corners and spin incantations out of Bolingbroke and Disraeli'. Instead, conservatives had to look to 'the continuing spirit' in their history and to 'find in conservatism the principles of action which alone can enable it to survive in an active world'.⁵⁴

⁵³ Keith Feiling, *A History of England: From the Coming of the English to 1918*, (London: Macmillan, 1950) pp943-946

⁵⁴ Keith Feiling, *What is Conservatism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930) pp8-9

The chief antagonist of conservatism was no longer liberalism, whose ideas Feiling contended had been continuously absorbed into the conservative cause, but socialism, and the ground on which the battle of ideas would now be waged would be the management of the economy, the role of the state, and the condition of the people. With notable and exact prescience, Feiling declared that 'The State is here, and it must preside; humanly speaking the controversy of State versus Individual is, for the next half century, decided.'⁵⁵ The state would intervene to supply credit and steer investment, build homes, tax unearned wealth and provide a minimum of social security. Yet for conservatives it could not be guided by the quest for a classless society and equality of condition, but rather 'the lasting values of life itself', a class structure and set of national institutions that were enduring but sufficiently flexible to be open to all, able to nurture mobility and 'render justice without mangling the national quality'.⁵⁶

The most popular and widely read of the group of conservative historians who taught at Ashridge College and had close links with the Conservative party's senior figures in the inter-war years was Sir Arthur Bryant. A now controversial figure, in large part because of the critical exhumation of his Nazi sympathies and intellectual credentials by Andrew Roberts, Bryant wrote voluminous books of popular patriotic history, selling millions of copies, as well as a regular column for the *Illustrated London News* and other journalistic pieces for print, radio and film. He was an advisor and confidant to leading politicians, and a consummate networker across the British establishment, an historian who assiduously

⁵⁵ Ibid p32

⁵⁶ Ibid p32

cultivated ‘middlebrow opinion’ and in the process became a national institution.⁵⁷ The mass public audience he secured, and his close elite relationships with Stanley Baldwin, Neville Chamberlain and other key figures in the Conservative leadership, endowed Bryant with a central role in the popularisation of Disraeli in the mid-twentieth century.

Bryant was a romantic conservative with a lifelong attachment to an imagined ideal of a pre-industrial, rural England. Disraeli’s evocation of an English national genius, embodied in its institutions and balanced constitution, was deeply influential upon him. In his first book, *The Spirit of Conservatism*, published on the eve of the general election in 1929 and based on his lectures to students at Phillip Stott College - the precursor Conservative training school to Ashridge College - Bryant drew repeatedly on Disraeli’s speeches to illustrate the ‘creed’ of Conservatism he aimed to distil for the ‘man on the street’. ‘It is for modern Toryism’, he argued, ‘to recreate a world of genial social hours and loved places, upon which the conservative heart of Everyman can anchor’. Disraeli had held that ‘the first object of Conservatism was to teach men to love their national institutions’ and his ‘national policy’ had been to secure a stake in the land for the peasant, decent conditions of life and work for the industrial working classes, and a system of local government for all.⁵⁸

More than any of his contemporaries, Bryant drew upon Disraeli as an opponent of Manchester liberalism and Whiggism, as a conservative who stood for the organic against the mechanical, the spiritual against the rational, the national against the sectional, and for

⁵⁷ Julia Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in Twentieth Century Britain* (Maryland: Lexington Books), p4. Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, (London: Phoenix Books, 1995), ch6, pp287 – 322. Bryant was knighted in 1954 and raised to the Companionship of Honour by none other than Harold Wilson. See David Edgerton, *Rise and Fall of the British Nation*, (London: Allen Lane, 2018), p378.

⁵⁸ Arthur Bryant, *The Spirit of Conservatism*, (Ashridge: The Bonar Law College, 1929), p74-5.

an ordered democracy of historic institutions against the rule of an oligarchy. Bryant's Disraeli is not just a far sighted social reformer, but an opponent of radical liberalism who preserves national institutions from attack, rescues the state from centralisation and capture by sectional interests, and defends the balanced economy from the abstractions of liberal political economy. Against radical liberalism, 'it was left to Disraeli to recreate Conservatism and to lead the crusade of an ancient national party to restore the rights and liberties of the people.'⁵⁹

This neo-feudal reading of Disraeli could be readily repurposed to serve conservatism in its mid-20th century struggle with socialism, and Bryant moved fluidly in *The Spirit of Conservatism* between critiques of 19th century liberalism and attacks on contemporary socialism. He defended private property, and the rights and duties it bestowed, against state ownership, and the diversity of the human condition against socialist demands for equality that 'would force a universal Hampstead Garden Suburb on all.' Mechanical utilitarianism found its counterpart in the 'machine-ruled world' of Socialism, the centralising tendencies of 19th century liberalism in the bureaucrats who would be 'Gods from a machine' under Socialism, not the servants, but masters of the nation.⁶⁰

Bryant maintained his interest in Disraeli throughout the 1930s, and entered into an agreement with Longmans to write his biography in 1936 – an agreement which he was not able ultimately to fulfil. But Bryant's unremitting hostility to the British left, and his increasing sympathy with Nazi Germany, including his publication through the National Book

⁵⁹ Ibid p21

⁶⁰ Ibid p31

Association of an expurgated edition of *Mein Kampf* in 1939 and active efforts in support of appeasement, eventually led his reading of Disraelian Toryism into what Julia Stapleton calls 'wild' parallels with Nazism.⁶¹ Introducing *Mein Kampf*, Bryant compared Hitler's commitment to social reform with 'the old idea of historic English Toryism' and regarded Hitler's argument for 'conserving national character' as 'Disraelian... pregnant [and] incisive'.⁶² Although historians have exonerated Bryant of complicity with Nazi war aims and other charges, his Disraelian Toryism was clearly swept up into the baggage of fellow traveling with Nazism.⁶³

The events of the summer of 1940 led Bryant to return to earlier themes of his historical writing, and to revise once again his reading of Disraeli's life and career for the changed circumstances of the war. Written in the shadow of Dunkirk, *English Saga* was a social history of Britain in the preceding century, designed to be read by a nation in arms. In it, Bryant painted a portrait of the recent history of the United Kingdom through the upheavals of industrialisation, imperial expansion and war. *English Saga* would serve not only to stiffen national fighting morale, but to strengthen the bonds of allegiance between the 'British nations' currently engaged in the defence of her empire, and to prepare the ground for the urgent tasks of post-war social and economic reconstruction. As with Bryant's earlier works, it was relentlessly critical of laissez-faire liberalism and the degradation of the physical and moral condition of the people by industrial capitalism. But drawing on the intellectual

⁶¹ Julia Stapleton, *Political Intellectuals and public identities in Britain since 1850*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) p141.

⁶² Arthur Bryant 'Editorial Note', ABP/LHCMA, C44, cited in Julia Stapleton, *Sir Arthur Bryant and National History in Twentieth Century Britain*, op cit, p116

⁶³ For Stapleton's responses to Andrew Roberts's charges against Bryant, see *Ibid*, chapters 6, 7 and 8, pp101 – 160.

traditions of 19th advocates of 'Greater Britain' such as J.R. Seeley, Dilke and Froude, and extolling the virtues of late Victorian imperialism, it gave a new emphasis to the dominions of empire, and to the possibility of national renewal through overseas settlement in 'the lands of promise won for [Britain] in the past'.⁶⁴

Disraeli emerges as the prophet of this reconstructed social imperialism. Disraeli was a 'great man', who alone amongst his contemporaries in the 1840s, 'perceived the fallacy of the Manchester School' that a free trade policy would 'leave the nation at the mercy of world-wide forces beyond its control'. Free trade would not just weaken agriculture and leave the nation dangerously dependent on foreign imports, it would undermine the social order and the civilisation that rested upon it: 'To the mind of this half-alien patriot the Corn Laws were no mere plank of fiscal policy but an outwork of an historic system which protected a priceless civilisation'.⁶⁵ In his opposition to the abolition of the Corn Laws, Disraeli upheld the rural social hierarchy and the social obligations of property owners to the propertyless: he was a 'Socialist before socialism became a political force', opposed to both disembodied, irresponsible capital, and to bureaucratic state intervention alike.⁶⁶

Consistent with this promotion of the condition of the people and the defence of national institutions, Disraeli was also 'one of the first' to 'call in a new world' of Britain's colonial settlements against the jealousies of rising empires. Bryant portrayed Disraeli as an imperialist visionary who foresaw the need for greater economic and political unity with the English-speaking colonies, and a great power realist who took steps to secure the empire's

⁶⁴ Arthur Bryant, *English Saga*, (London and Paris: The Albatross Ltd, 1947) p305

⁶⁵ *Ibid* p 93.

⁶⁶ *Ibid* p94.

strategic artery with the purchase of the Suez Canal. Disraeli was the inspiration, not just of Tory democracy and social reform, but of popular support for the expansion of the settler colonies and ties of 'kith and kin' that 'formed a link of sentiment between working class homes in Britain and thriving townships in Canada and Australia'. Just as Disraeli associated his party with growing demands for social reform, so too he was 'able to associate it with that other popular longing - for a new world of opportunity overseas.'⁶⁷

Bryant here invoked Disraeli and an account of national exceptionalism in support of an anticipated post-war conservative project of domestic social reform and managed capitalism, coupled with tariff preferences and resettlement programmes for the Britannic dominions. This was congruent with the political agenda of long-standing social imperialists such as Leo Amery, with whom Bryant corresponded, and would bear fruit in Bryant's subsequent support for implementation of the Beveridge Report and, much later, opposition to Britain's entry to the European Economic Community. It was a Disraeli fashioned, not just for an age of welfare state expansion, but for the mid-century 'Anglo-world' of imperial preference and sterling-area migration and trade.⁶⁸

For the group of conservative historians active at Ashridge College and close to the Conservative Party's leaders in the inter-war years, Disraeli thus occupied an important role. He was a leader who anticipated the 20th century world of mass democratic politics and social reform, and gave contemporary conservatives principles with which to renew their

⁶⁷ Ibid p220-221

⁶⁸ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). David Thackeray, *Forging a British World of Trade: Culture, Ethnicity, and Market in the Empire-Commonwealth, 1880-1975*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

political tradition. He offered an account of the nation, and its enduring institutions and character, that could be championed against the cosmopolitanism and abstractions of liberals and socialists alike. And he was a Tory who offered a model of political agency that could be invoked to challenge the unfolding of impersonal logics in both Marxian and Whig interpretations of history which the conservative historians sought to contest – a figure who demonstrated the importance of political action, vision and will, and ‘accidents and conjunctures, and curious juxtapositions of events’ against the ‘eliciting of general truths or propositions claiming universal validity’.⁶⁹ Disraeli was placed in a lineage of Tory leaders who, through their historically situated actions, upheld ancient ideals and national institutions, and could be set against ideas of immutable progress. As Clarisse Berthezene argues, the Ashridge historians ‘established a genealogy of Tory history’ and it was one in which Disraeli had a commanding presence.⁷⁰

The conservative historians of the inter-war period were in close and regular contact with Conservative politicians, through institutions such as Ashridge College and their personal connections to political leaders. Their readings of Disraeli therefore helped shape his political reception. Of these politicians, it was Stanley Baldwin, as Conservative leader and Prime Minister in the inter-war period, who did more than any other political figure to articulate a consciously Disraelian political tradition for the age of mass democracy, and is commonly credited with coining the term ‘One Nation’. Shortly after winning the 1924 general election, in a speech at the Royal Albert Hall, he urged ‘every member of the

⁶⁹ Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Pelican, 1974), p54

⁷⁰ Clarisse Berthezene, *Training Minds for the War of Ideas: Ashridge College, the Conservative Party and the cultural politics of Britain, 1929 – 54*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p130.

Unionist Party – Unionist in the sense that we stand for the union of those two nations of which Disraeli spoke two generations ago...to make one nation of our own people at home...⁷¹ In the following year, while claiming his party had ‘no political bible’, he nonetheless argued that ‘possibly you might find our ideals best expressed in one of Disraeli’s novels.’⁷² He would return to Disraeli frequently in his speeches, writings and broadcasts, repeatedly anchoring the values of contemporary conservatism in Disraelian texts. Addressing his party conference at Bristol in 1934, he asserted that ‘Disraeli laid our principles down at the Crystal Palace many years ago, and you cannot go wrong if you stick to them’.⁷³

Many of the key themes of Baldwin’s inter-war public discourses on Disraeli’s legacy were given influential exposition in Maurice Woods’, *A History of the Tory Party*, published in 1924.⁷⁴ A leader writer, erstwhile Secretary of the Unionist Social Reform Committee, and Private Secretary at one time to both Earl Birkenhead and Lord Beaverbrook, Woods occupied a nodal point between the worlds of the conservative historians, journalists and politicians of his age, and as an active Conservative was explicit that his history of Toryism was written by an ‘avowed Tory’.⁷⁵ Tracing the evolution of Disraeli’s political philosophy and statecraft, Woods argued that by the late 1860s Disraeli had shifted from the ‘dualism’ of a union of the aristocracy and working class against the industrial bourgeoisie that marked his early career, to a ‘trialism’ which included all three social classes and embodied a

⁷¹ Stanley Baldwin, *On England*, (London: Penguin Books, 1937), p82

⁷² Ibid p205

⁷³ Stanley Baldwin, *Leader’s Speech, Bristol*, (1934) accessed 3rd August 2021 at <http://britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=93>. See also Richard Carr, op cit, pp40-47.

⁷⁴ Maurice Woods, *A History of the Tory Party in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924).

⁷⁵ Ibid ix

‘profound doctrine of the essential unity of all classes in the State’. While the Tory party needed the support of the middle-classes, the 1867 Reform Act brought the working classes into the electorate and laid the foundation for a ‘popular Toryism’, ensuring that the post-Palmerston ‘Tory-Whig’ party did not become ‘purely Conservative and reactionary’. Disraeli’s final administration then enacted a series of social measures ‘for the benefit of the labouring classes’ which ‘showed that he had neither forgotten his youth nor the appeals that he had made in Opposition for the support of all good citizens for a policy of social reform.’⁷⁶

All of this was clearly consistent with how the Unionist Social Reform Committee had framed the Disraelian legacy before World War One, stressing the unity of social classes in the constitutional order of the state and the national economy, and burnishing Tory democratic and social reform credentials. Following Birkehead, Woods argued that the torch of the Disraelian tradition had passed first to Randolph Churchill, and then to Joseph Chamberlain: Disraeli had supplied the ‘intellectual concept’, Churchill the ‘brilliant rhetorical exposition’ of the Tory democratic sensibility, and Chamberlain an ‘ordered programme’ of social reform.⁷⁷ But Woods qualified the longstanding view of Disraeli as the ‘founder of Imperialism viewed as a political creed’, and distinguished, like Chamberlain, Baldwin and other heirs to Seeley, between the white settler dominions and the rest of the Empire. Disraeli, ‘had no conception of the Empire in the light we chiefly think of it to-day as a Commonwealth of white self-governing Dominions under the Crown...It was the Raj which

⁷⁶ Ibid pp 431- 434

⁷⁷ Ibid pp444-5

fascinated him, not the self-governing colony. That other aspect of the Imperial spirit only flowered after his death.⁷⁸

If Woods's Disraeli bore the imprint of pre-war influences, an alternative minting of the Disraelian tradition took shape on the left of the Conservative Party in the 1920s amongst the 'YMCA' group of young Tory MPs. It was focused on the distinctive challenges of unemployment and industrial decline faced by inter-war British capitalism, and on finding constructive conservative responses to the economic and social claims of the working class. The leading intellectual light of this group, Noel Skelton MP, developed a highly influential account of 'constructive conservatism' in a series of articles in the early 1920s, in which he coined the term 'property owning democracy' for the economic enfranchisement of the industrial and agricultural working class in new forms of individual asset ownership, profit sharing and co-partnership of firms, a prospectus designed to clearly distinguish conservatism from laissez-faire liberalism and state socialism.⁷⁹ He and others in the group, notably Harold Macmillan, invoked Disraeli as the inspiration for a radical, national conservatism. Skelton often acknowledged his debt to Disraeli's example, and particularly credited him with the conception of the Tory party as a national party, governing for the general good. For his part, Macmillan was schooled early in his life in Disraeli's works, reading every book he could obtain about Disraeli at university, and each volume of Money Penny and Buckle as it came off the press. To the end of his political career, he would consider himself a Disraelian radical.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid p436

⁷⁹ Noel Skelton, *Constructive Conservatism* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1924). See David Torrance, *Noel Skelton and the Property-Owning Democracy* (London: Biteback, 2010).

⁸⁰ Harold Macmillan, *Winds of Change 1914- 1939* (London: Macmillan, 1966), p44. D.J.Thorpe, *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmillan*, (London: Pimlico, 2011), p42.

The ideas shaped by the Tory left in this period were to achieve enduring importance when its key figures ascended to the leadership of the party in the second half of the 20th century. While committed to tariff reform and Neville Chamberlain's programme of social insurance and local government reforms, the problems of industrial capitalism and mass unemployment in Britain between the wars demanded intellectual tools and policy prescriptions that could not be supplied by Chamberlainite social imperialism, let alone the political economy of the 1870s. In an extensive series of books, pamphlets and manifestos published in the 1920s and 1930s, Macmillan and ginger groups of progressive Tory MPs developed arguments for industrial planning and reorganisation, public investment and demand-management, coordinated collective bargaining, social security, and state aid to depressed regions – drawing freely on Keynesian ideas, the examples of modern business organisation and economic policy offered by Fordism and the New Deal in the USA, as well as the intellectual currents nourishing Yellow Book liberalism. A number of these ideas – if by no means all – were to find their way into the 'New Conservatism' of the post-Second World War era.⁸¹ While Macmillan and many of his progressive Tory peers remained politically marginal before the Second World War, they nonetheless received some encouragement and a measure of patronage from the party leadership. Baldwin on occasion listened to their counsel and lobbying, and Neville Chamberlain engaged with their early writings⁸².

⁸¹ Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain, 1918-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), chs 1 and 5; W.H.Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition, Volume Two, The Ideological Inheritance*, op cit pp245-254; Ewen Green, *The Conservative Party and Keynes*, in E.H.H.Green and D.M.Tanner, *The Strange Survival of Liberal England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp186 - 211.

⁸² Although Macmillan would be sharply critical of Baldwin's Disraelian credentials in the 1930s, particularly on the failure to secure economic recovery in the 'depressed areas'. See Carr op cit, p47.

Most significant, perhaps, for the long-term fortunes of this group was their cultivation by Winston Churchill after his appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1924. Churchill regarded the young progressives as legatees of his father's Tory Democracy, and appointed one of their number, Robert Boothby, as his Parliamentary Private Secretary.⁸³ When in 1906 he had published a twin volume biography of his father to wide acclaim, Churchill's interest had been in justifying his own youthful break with the 'old gang' who had 'misruled' the Conservative Party after Lord Randolph's fall from power.⁸⁴ By the time he had returned to the Conservative fold as Chancellor, he would speculate instead that 'a strong Conservative Party with an overwhelming majority and a moderate and even progressive leadership is a combination which has never been tested before. It might well be the fulfilment of all that Dizzy and my father aimed at in their political work.'⁸⁵ Later still, in the preface to the second edition of the biography published in 1951, he would argue that 'the Tory Democracy' of which his father was 'the exponent, has enabled the Conservative Party to preserve its inherent strength and vitality, and to hold its position in spite of world convulsions and ceaseless domestic change'. He would repeat the sentiments in his best selling *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, from which Disraeli emerges as the architect of the modern democratic Conservative Party and the two-party system, and his father the standard bearer of Tory Democracy.⁸⁶ For reasons of filial loyalty and personal justification,

⁸³ Macmillan, *Winds of Change*, op cit, p176

⁸⁴ W.S.Churchill, letter to Lord James, 18th Jan 1906, cited in Roy Foster, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, op cit, p386.

⁸⁵ W.S.Churchill, letter to his wife, cited in John Ramsden, *A History of the Conservative Party, Vol III: the Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940* op cit, p 187.

⁸⁶ Winston S. Churchill, *A History of the English Speaking Peoples, Volume Four: The Great Democracies*, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co. 1958) p234 & pp274-5.

Churchill would make his own distinct contribution to the construction of the Disraelian lineage.

Political and historical interest in Disraeli in the first half of the 20th century was mirrored in popular culture, particularly in theatre and in the new medium of film. The most important stage presentation of his life was *Disraeli: A Play*, by Louis Parker, starring the British actor, George Arliss, which opened in Montreal in 1911 and transferred for successful runs at theatres across the USA before opening in London in 1916. It made Arliss's name as an actor and he subsequently starred in a Warner Brothers film version of the play, released in 1929. *Disraeli* was a commercial and critical success and won Arliss the Oscar for Best Actor. It portrayed Disraeli as an outsider who overcomes anti-Semitic prejudice to lead his country and secure its empire.⁸⁷

Such was Arliss's popularity in the part that the National Conservative and Unionist Film Association commissioned him to read from selected Disraeli speeches for another film, *Impressions of Disraeli* (1931). The Conservative party made substantial and innovative use of the new media of cinema in the inter-war years, employing travelling cinema vans and mobile projectors to take party political propaganda films out to the country at large. The trade journal *World Film News* estimated that 1.5 million people saw Conservative party films during the 1935 general election campaign.⁸⁸ The projection of Disraeli through the

⁸⁷ Steven Fielding, British Politics and Cinema's Historical Dramas, 1929-1938, *The Historical Journal*, Vol 56, No. 2, 2013, pp 487 -511.

⁸⁸ Cited in Richard Cockett, *The Party, Publicity and the Media*, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds) *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), pp561.

medium of film would therefore have reached a large popular audience. In an introduction to *Impressions of Disraeli*, Baldwin stressed Disraeli's contemporary resonance and relevance, claiming 'that of all the statesmen of his period - the time of our grandfathers - he is perhaps the only one who can be read today and appreciated as though he was a modern, speaking in the times of today. The explanation of that is the remarkable vision and sympathy of the man.'⁸⁹

Warner Brothers made another film of Disraeli's life during the Second World War, *The Prime Minister* (1941), this time starring Sir John Gielgud in the lead role. It was an attempt to buttress British national identity and help recover the reputation of the Conservative Party from the stain of appeasement, 'contrasting [Disraeli's] success at Berlin with Chamberlain's failure at Munich'.⁹⁰ Unlike the earlier 1929 film, the wartime biopic made no reference to anti-semitism, but as Endelman and Kushner note, the lead actors in the two portrayals, Arliss and Gielgud, played Disraeli 'as Fagin and Shylock respectively, a tribute to the strength of 'semitic discourse' at this time.'⁹¹

References to Disraeli's Jewish identity featured in almost all of the biographies and historical sketches published between the wars. Money Penny and Buckle's biography concluded with the observation that 'The fundamental fact about him was that he was a Jew...[who] seemed never to be quite of the nation which he loved, served, and governed.'

⁹²Even his admirers accepted his alien status and used racial tropes to characterise his

⁸⁹ *Impressions of Disraeli*, (Conservative and Unionist Film Association, 1931).

⁹⁰ Tony Kushner, *One of Us? Contesting Disraeli's Jewishness and Englishness in the Twentieth Century*, in Todd.M.Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds) *Disraeli's Jewishness*, London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), p237.

⁹¹ Todd.M.Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds) *Disraeli's Jewishness*, London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), p14.

⁹² Money Penny and Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, op cit, p1507.

'genius'. Feiling described him as 'a Messiah of strange race, loaded with watchchains, a dandy, an adventurer, a debtor'; Hearnshaw attributed his 'singular detachment' in matters of diplomacy to the 'fact that he had no drop of British blood in his veins', and was of 'alien origin' and 'Jewish faith'.⁹³

But while rank anti-semitism still permeated some accounts of Disraeli's life, notably E.T.Raymond's 1925 biography, *Disraeli: Alien Patriot*, for conservative activists in the Primrose League and the standard bearers of the Diehard Right, invoking Disraeli enabled charges of anti-semitism and intolerance to be deflected.⁹⁴ Embracing Disraeli exuded an image of Conservative tolerance – a useful cover for restrictive immigration legislation and widespread anti-alien rhetoric that associated foreigners and Jews with communism, class conflict and threats to the empire.

After the Second World War, as the Conservative Party first adjusted to defeat, and then equipped itself for political renewal with new institutions of research, political education and policy development, Disraeli provided a model of leadership and an historical reference point for a wide spectrum of Tory intellectuals and politicians. Rather than falling neatly into progressive interventionist, and right wing or free market camps, these currents of Conservative thinking occupied different positions on a range of normative and substantive

⁹³ Keith Feiling, *Sketches in Nineteenth Century Biography*, op cit p172; F.J.C.Hearnshaw, *Prime Ministers of the Nineteenth Century*, op cit, p223

⁹⁴ E.T.Raymond, *Disraeli: Alien Patriot*, (New York: George Doran Co, 1925). On the Primrose League and Diehard anti-alienism, see Matthew Hendley, Anti-Alienism and the Primrose League: The Externalization of the Postwar Crisis in Great Britain 1918-32, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 243-269. For a comprehensive discussion of the popular cultural and political treatment of Disraeli's Jewishness in this period, see Tony Kushner, *One of Us?* op cit.

policy questions. In his recent study of the wartime ‘conservative movement’, Kit Kowol identifies three main Tory traditions at work in this period: that of the Tory Progressives, divided between a party leadership cadre centred around RAB Butler, and a younger group of MPs mobilised in the Tory Reform Committee (TRC) whose leading lights were Viscount Hitchinbrooke, Peter Thorneycroft and Quintin Hogg; Individualists, whose most prominent advocate was as Sir Ernest Benn and his Society of Individualists; and constructive imperialists like Leo Amery.⁹⁵

Of these three traditions, it was the Tory Progressives who most self-consciously sought to define themselves as the heirs and practitioners of a Disraelian Conservatism. The TRC styled themselves as youthful Disraelian inconclasts in the Young England mould, agitating for implementation of the Beveridge Report, full employment, and a ‘happy marriage’ of state and private enterprise.⁹⁶ Its members were united in the view that the Disraelian tradition consisted in an orientation towards the future, a determination to understand the challenges of the times and apply Conservative principles to them, and a political practice of seeking to unify and lead the nation. Disraelian Conservatism was thus not so much a distinctive political economy, nor even the consistent pursuit of social reform, but rather a set of political precepts, dispositions and practices that could be pragmatically interpreted and applied in each successive generation. As Quintin Hogg put it in 1943, it was an enduring characteristic of the Conservative Party that it had a ‘faculty for renewing itself in

⁹⁵ Kowol, op cit. For an extensive recent treatment of the Tory Reform Committee, see Gary Love, Making a ‘New Conservatism’: The Tory Reform Committee and Design for Freedom, 1942–1949, *The English Historical Review*, Volume 135, Issue 574, June 2020, Pages 605–641. See also James Freeman, ‘Reconsidering “Set the People Free”: Neoliberalism and Freedom Rhetoric in Churchill’s Conservative Party’, *Twentieth Century British History*, xxix (2018), pp. 522–7.

⁹⁶ Quintin Hogg, *One Year’s Work*, (London: National Book Club, 1945) p50

every generation’, producing youthful protagonists for change who ‘preach reform in the name of Conservatism.’ In common with Tory intellectuals of the earlier 20th century, Hogg placed Disraeli at the fountain head of a tradition of Conservative reformism: ‘Such a one was Disraeli, such too was Lord Randolph Churchill. To such a movement in the Tory Party belonged F.E.Smith’s Social Reform Committee of 1911. There is reason for thinking that this attitude has become particularly appropriate to the solutions of the problems of the present day...’⁹⁷

Tory progressives in the Conservative party leadership also sought to articulate a distinctive Conservative reform tradition in which Disraeli had a central part. Writing in the *Swinton College Journal* in 1951, RAB Butler argued that, ‘To steep one’s mind in the writings of Disraeli, Burke, Shaftesbury, Oastler and others is to realise the essentially constructive character of Conservatism, and to perceive trends in the next generation.’⁹⁸ Butler had a particular view of the ‘Tory Tradition’ - the title of his uncle’s work, which strongly influenced him and to which he supplied a new preface when the Conservative Political Centre republished it in 1957.⁹⁹ He embraced an Oakshottian view of the conservative political tradition as ‘neither fixed, nor finished’ but a mature and human form of political behaviour that could be absorbed from close historical reading of Tory politicians – attentive to change, empirical in method, and popular in idiom. He argued that the tradition consisted of three streams: a pragmatic one associated with Peel and Salisbury; a romantic one of service to the nation, initiated by Bolingbroke and carried forward by Disraeli and

⁹⁷ Hogg, op cit, p80

⁹⁸ R A Butler, ‘Conservatism Today and Tomorrow’, *Swinton College Journal* 1:1 (September 1951): pp 3-8, Conservative Party Archive, PUB 188/1

⁹⁹ Geoffrey Butler, *The Tory Tradition*, (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1957)

Randolph Churchill; and an evangelistic one, associated with the moral crusades of Wilberforce and Shaftesbury¹⁰⁰.

It was Peel, not Disraeli, who served as Butler's self-declared 'historical mentor', and the Tamworth Manifesto as inspiration for the programmatic policy renewal that Butler and the leadership progressives led after 1945, culminating in the famous *Industrial Charter* of 1947, which Butler later said was 'out-Peel Peel' in giving the Party 'a painless but permanent facelift', followed by the *Right Road for Britain* in 1949 and the party manifestos of the 1950 and 1951 general elections.¹⁰¹ Butler clearly did not view Disraeli as programmatic social policy reformer whose example could motivate detailed policymaking, but rather as a romantic and imaginative Tory leader committed to the unity of the social classes in the nation and a broadly democratic vision. By 1954, when Butler opened the proceedings of the Conservative Political Centre summer school held at Wadham College Oxford to mark the 150th anniversary of Disraeli's birth, and he was safely installed as Chancellor of the Exchequer in a Conservative administration, he would put Peelite policy renewal firmly behind him. 'We have moved into a new period' he argued, in which philosophy and vision were required, not detailed policy documents. The nation, he argued, citing Disraeli, was a 'work of art and time', not a 'mere mass of bipeds'.¹⁰²

Writing about the formation of the One Nation Group in the early 1990s, Enoch Powell reflected that Disraeli enjoyed a 'springtime' amongst young Tories after the Conservative

¹⁰⁰ R A Butler, 'Conservatism Today and Tomorrow', op cit.

¹⁰¹ RAB Butler, *The Art of the Possible*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1971) p145

¹⁰² RAB Butler, *A Disraelian Approach to Modern Politics*, in Angus Maude et al., *Tradition and Change* (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1954). Available at PUB 559/5, Conservative Party Archive, Bodleian, Oxford.

defeat of 1945 because he was evidence that ‘the heirs of Toryism, with their rooted belief in the nation as a homogeneous, organic phenomenon of nature, could recognise concern for all its members as an essential mark of society – and Tory society mark you, not socialist society.’¹⁰³ Although there were different emphases on the role of state and market, and diverse perspectives within mid-century conservatism, there were in each considerable continuities of thought, idiom and practice with the late Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war eras. While the contexts, objects and tools of policymaking had changed, statements of Conservative belief and policy programmes remained couched in the language of an organic society, evolving incrementally - united across the social classes, and governed in historic national institutions by a responsible (and Christian) elite. One reason Disraeli was evoked so frequently by post-war Conservatives was precisely because his speeches and novels could be so readily rendered in the terms of this Conservatism.

The Cambridge don, R. J. White, gave intellectual expression to these continuities of Conservative thought and practice in the introduction to an edited collection of key texts, *The Conservative Tradition*, first published in 1950.¹⁰⁴ This introduction is often remembered for warning Conservatives against ideological inattention and complacency, and reminding them that ‘parties are forever in need of refreshment at the springs of doctrine.’ But it is also notable for the central place it affords to Disraeli in ‘recalling’ Conservatism to traditional Toryism – that is, injecting the concepts of ‘traditional English society’ into Conservative politics. For White, these concepts were feudal, aristocratic and Christian. Society was an ordered hierarchy, in which each member had duties and responsibilities and

¹⁰³ Enoch Powell, *A Strange Choice of Hero*, op cit, p362

¹⁰⁴ R.J. White, *The Conservative Tradition*, (London: Nicholas Kaye Ltd, 1950).

honour was accorded to their observance. The distribution of power, authority and status in society embodied a feudal cosmology. Disraeli's genius was to unite these concepts of a traditional Toryism with the 'invigorating energies of an educated and energised people' into the final synthesis of Tory democracy – to call upon the people to safeguard their national institutions and liberties against usurpation from sectional class interests. This 'inspired Jew' was capable of plenty of 'gorgeous nonsense', White argued, but nonetheless 'did more than any other single mind to make modern Conservatism an intellectual synthesis capable of outliving the conditions which gave it birth'.¹⁰⁵ Fealty to ancient institutions, responsibility and duty - all the values of an older, aristocratic society - had to be mobilised in the new conditions of an industrial class society with an administrative, central state. Property would need to be reminded of its responsibilities, labour guaranteed its status. Whitehall would need to be constrained from sapping the vitality of the nation in civil society and local government. Society's members were to recognise that they were equal before God, but unequal in all else.

In this summary of the contribution of Disraeli to the Conservative political tradition, White captured many of the assumptions of post-war Conservative thinkers - assumptions which were widely shared across the heterogeneous traditions and perspectives that made up the post-war Conservative movement. Society was hierarchial and stratified, with status and esteem given to its members, and inequality a natural and valuable condition. It was organic and unified, not mechanical and individual, and its national institutions embodied the duties and obligations that were to be observed by social classes. Power was to be dispersed

¹⁰⁵ Ibid p15

across the nation's territories and institutions, not concentrated in one centre or held by one social class. National institutions were capable of evolutionary, incremental change, both to safeguard the inheritance of history, and to ensure that new social and economic needs could be met. Conservatism was a positive, constructive doctrine, not merely a reactionary one – and above all, a national not sectional one.

By the end of the 1960s, the springtime of Disraeli had long since passed and winter was approaching. He was no longer the subject of Conservative veneration, a 'captain of Toryism' or revered founder of Tory Democracy. He had been dethroned and 'knocked off his pedestal' as Michael Foot would observe – not at the hand of a practising politician, but by an historian, Lord Blake. Blake's monumental biography of Disraeli did for a new generation of Conservatives what Money Penny and Buckle had for an earlier one, but this time in reverse, framing him, not as a visionary statesman, but as 'an adventurer, impure and complex'.¹⁰⁶

Yet whilst the impact of Blake's biography doubtless cannot be underestimated, there were other reasons why Disraeli's star waned in the 1960s. The simple passage of time is one: by the end of the 1960s, the generation of Tory politicians who had been born while Disraeli was still alive, and had been brought up in the age of the Primrose League, had died. One of their number – Winston Churchill – now occupied pride of place in the pantheon of national leadership, having written his own first drafts of history and shaped his own myths. The

¹⁰⁶ Michael Foot, *Debts of Honour*, (London: Picador, 1981) p41

model of political leadership to which politicians aspired had changed too. The age no longer demanded romantic nation building, and the cloaking of national institutions in mystery and majesty, but expertise, rationality and technocracy; not a Christian elite of aristocratic leaders, but secular, scientifically literate and democratic politicians. Meanwhile, declinists in the 1960s who went 'hunting the aristocratic Snark', as E.P.Thompson memorably put it, caught Victorian political leaders in their crossfire.¹⁰⁷ It would fall to outcasts like Enoch Powell to mobilise the romance of the nation and give it a street vernacular, preparing the way for a new politics of nativist Euroscepticism.

Disraeli's utility to Conservatives as the progenitor of a democratic and social reform Tory tradition had also diminished. The Conservative Party had accumulated years of governing a mass democracy with a developed welfare state. In the general elections of the 1950s it had achieved broad based, cross-class appeal. It no longer needed Disraeli to burnish its democratic credentials as it had done for much of the twentieth century, nor to provide authority and legitimacy for a Conservative approach to social reform. Similarly, with the British Empire reduced to scattered outposts, the party could make little use of Disraelian imperialism, even as a guide to managed decolonisation.

More tellingly for Disraeli's fate, perhaps, was the profound shift in Conservative philosophy and political strategy in the electoral contest with Labour in the era of Wilson's 'white heat of technology'. As Charles Lockwood has convincingly argued, the 1960s saw the Conservative Party, the CPC and allied think-tanks like the Bow Group, pioneer new forms of

¹⁰⁷ E.P.Thompson, *The Peculiarities of the English*, cited in David Edgerton, *op cit*, p392.

rational, scientific Tory politics, grounded in a materialist electoral sociology, technocratic policymaking and a managerial approach to leadership. New insights from the social and behavioural sciences, informed the Conservative understanding of the modern electorate as rational, instrumental voters, and framed political leadership in terms of efficient delivery of policy outputs, not moral or rhetorical appeal. The Burkean, idealist public doctrine of Hogg, Butler and the post-war Tory progressives, which was shared widely in the Conservative movement and which had drawn so readily on Disraelian themes, was abandoned in favour of a new materialist and rationalist policymaking – foregrounding economic modernisation in the party’s electoral appeal and hierarchy of policy priorities. This was perhaps the moment of real rupture in post-war Conservative politics, not the apparent ‘ideological caesura’ of ‘Thatcherism’.¹⁰⁸

Disraeli would continue to be invoked in the final decades of the twentieth century, but most commonly simply by association with the One Nation tradition and the One Nation Group of Conservative MPs, than in discussion of his own life and legacy. Conservative historians would tackle new preoccupations - the legacy of the British Empire, Britain’s relationship with Europe, and the idea of the Anglosphere among them - while conservative political education and pamphleteering shifted to the New Right think-tanks, and away from the institutions of the party itself.¹⁰⁹ As a new wave of Disraeli scholarship emerged in the academy, political interest in the subject himself declined. Nonetheless, the conservative historians, public intellectuals and politicians of the earlier twentieth century left behind a

¹⁰⁸ Charles Lockwood, ‘Action Not Words’: The Conservative Party, Public Opinion and ‘Scientific’ Politics, c.1945–70, *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 31, No. 3, 2020, pp. 360–386

¹⁰⁹ Ben Jackson, The think-tank archipelago: Thatcherism and neo-liberalism. In B. Jackson & R. Saunders (Eds.), *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012); pp. 43-61; pp105-159; Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch (eds), *Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic: 2019).

more diverse, substantive and politically important legacy of interpretations of Disraeli than scholarship has hitherto allowed.