PREFACE

I have had the good fortune to live through an exceptionally exciting and eventful period of British history, and to have witnessed much of it from the grandstand of ministerial office, or the humbler position of a seat in the House of Lords since 1932, which makes me the longest serving member of the House.[66]

Social reform and political change had been frozen during the Second World War, and Parliament still reflected the inertia of pre-war Baldwin and Chamberlain Conservative Governments. But with the end of the war the General Election in 1945 resulted in the return of the first Labour Government with an absolute majority of seats, under a new leadership pledged to improve conditions of life for the ordinary citizen. I am one of those who consider the Attlee Government of 1945 as having the best record of achievement in this regard since the Liberal Government of 1906.

As I had served as a junior minister in the Churchill Coalition Government during the war, I was promoted by Attlee to be a senior minister in his Government, and I had the privilege of serving first at the Post Office, then at the India and Burma Office, and finally at the Colonial Office. I was therefore able to assist in the building of the Welfare State, and in the transformation of this country from the status of a world-wide British Empire to that of an equal partner in a Commonwealth of nations and a medium-sized European power.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to all those, in many parts of the world, who, in conversations, in letters or publications, have enabled me to recall people and events from childhood to old age which would otherwise have escaped my octogenarian memory. I am particularly grateful to my nephew, Michael Blakenham, for the gift of family letters, which gave me a link with my predecessors. But I am above all grateful to my son-in-law, Tim Voss, who first put the idea of this book into my head and who pestered me, with the connivance of my family, until I had finished it. I must also thank my daughter, Diana, for her patience and editorial skill, Diana

[66] It should be mentioned that his fellow Anglo-Irish peer the 4th Lord Ornamore and Browne took his seat in the Lords before him in 1927 and outlived Listowel by five years, dying in 2002.

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