INTRODUCTION

Cecil Bisshop Harmsworth (1869–1948) was the third brother of a large, famous and influential family. His elder siblings were Alfred Charles William Harmsworth and Harold Sidney Harmsworth. These two self-made men – Lords Northcliffe and Rothermere, as they became – were amongst the most powerful and notorious press proprietors of their age. Both of them, Alfred especially, were brilliant and energetic, but they were not exactly well liked. By contrast, Cecil was an able person who had, by normal standards, a successful career as a Liberal MP and junior minister, and yet never acquired – and indeed never aspired to attain – the high profile of his brothers. If he was overshadowed, though, he had an important gift that they lacked: 'a genius for friendship'.[1] It is related that, before he was elected to Parliament, Cecil was invited to the terrace of the House of Commons and made a very good impression on those he met. Supposedly, Northcliffe, when informed of this by one of his journalists, replied sardonically: 'Oh, I understand. They were delighted to meet a human Harmsworth.'[2]

To the degree that Cecil Harmsworth is remembered today, it is as a walk-on player in his brothers' lives. This does him scant justice, although it is true that a sense of promise unfulfilled hangs over his career. As the former MP J.M. Kenworthy (later Lord Strabolgi) recalled in 1933, he had been 'an able administrator and politician, very popular with all parties, and [he] should have gone far in the public life of this country. His retirement from Parliament has been a great loss'.[3] Elected to the Commons for the first time in 1906 Harmsworth developed a reputation as a capable but unflashy speaker: 'a shrewd hand in a debate, level-headed in his opinions, who never spoke without a real knowledge of the subject under discussion'.[4] Having secured minor office early in the Great War, he became a member of David Lloyd George's personal secretariat after the latter displaced H.H. Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916. The following year,

[1] 'Death of Lord Harmsworth', *Daily Mail*, 14 Aug. 1948.
[2] 'Pleasure and Problem in South Africa', *Otago Witness*, 4 Nov. 1908.
[3] J.M. Kenworthy, *Sailors, Statesmen and Others: An Autobiography* (London: Rich Cowan, 1933), 184.
[4] 'Obituary: Lord Harmsworth', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Aug. 1948.

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Lloyd George offered him the post of Coalition Liberal Chief Whip. He declined because he knew that the position involved the sale of honours to raise party funds, which caused him disquiet. After the war he became Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in the post-war Coalition government, an office of considerable importance during the period (after 1919) when the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, was in the Upper House and thus not available to deal with government business in the Commons. He retired voluntarily as an MP in 1922, although it is quite possible that had he chosen to fight the general election of that year he would have lost his seat. Although created first Lord Harmsworth in 1939, he failed to make much of an impression in the House of Lords. Nevertheless, in the later part of his life he played a role as a public benefactor. His successful efforts to preserve Dr Johnson's house in Gough Square, London, for the nation form his enduring memorial.

Harmsworth's significance also lies in his role as a diarist. He was well connected, within both British and Irish society. Like all MPs, moreover, he sat at the nexus of high and low politics, simultaneously involved in the world of elite political manoeuvre and the retail zone of workaday constituency life. Harmsworth was an obsessive angler and the diary began as a record of his fishing. However, as the constitutional crisis developed in 1909 the entries became increasingly political. The diary forms a highly readable record of the politics of the period, detailing late-night Commons sittings and the rough-and-tumble of the campaign trail as well as giving skilful pen-portraits of the major figures of the day. Above all, it illuminates social and political culture in the age of Asquith and Lloyd George, being as valuable for its detail on the minutiae of campaigning as for the new light it casts on well-known episodes and individuals. He may have lacked the ambition to make it to the front rank of politics, but in his diary Harmsworth bequeathed to posterity both a valuable historical source and a fascinating document.

Cecil was the third son and fourth child of Alfred Harmsworth (1838–1889) and Geraldine Mary Maffett (1838–1925). Alfred was a barrister, Geraldine, the daughter of a County Down land agent. They started married life in Dublin but moved to London in 1867. They had eight boys and three girls who survived into adulthood (three further children died in infancy). Consequently, the family was usually short of money. Alfred and Geraldine's eldest son, also named Alfred (1865–1922), established the family firm in magazines and newspapers, founded the *Daily Mail* in 1896, received a peerage as Lord Northcliffe in 1905, and took over *The Times* in 1908. The second son, Harold (1868–1940), a key figure in the creation of the family media empire, was created Lord Rothermere in 1914 and took over the *Mail* after

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Northcliffe's death. Next came Cecil, followed by Leicester (1870–1937), who was also important in the development of the family firm and sat as a Liberal MP. Together, these four brothers were the weighty figures of the family: Paul Ferris refers to them, rather disparagingly, as 'the "heavies" ': 'They were solid, dignified men with polished motor cars, their waists growing thicker and their vehicles getting bigger with the years.'[5]

By contrast, the fifth son, Hildebrand (1872–1929), was a louche figure, notorious for playing billiards in office hours and enjoying a somewhat hedonistic lifestyle. The three remaining sons, none of whom played a part in the business, were Charles (1874–1942), who lived as a reclusive invalid in Sussex, well supported by his brothers' finances;[6] the sporty St John (1876–1933) who, among other things, had an affair with Rothermere's wife;[7] and Vyvyan (1881–1957), who lived his life as a gentleman farmer in Sussex.[8] The daughters were the second child, the younger Geraldine (1866–1945) whose son, Cecil King (named after his eponymous uncle) would go on to be a major media figure in his own right; Violet (1873–1961); and Christabel (1880–1967). Geraldine Harmsworth, who bore fourteen children in twenty years, was a true matriarch, who held the family together, particularly after the death of her husband in 1889. The size of the family can be illustrated by the fact that by 1939 there would be five living Lady Harmsworths (the widows of Leicester and Hildebrand, as well as the wives of Cecil, Sir Alfred (son of Leicester) and Sir Hildebrand junior.[9] The Maffett family was also large, Geraldine being one of eight children. Overall, the extended family was huge (Geraldine had no fewer than forty-one grandchildren), but they were also close, with the elder Geraldine and the younger Alfred (Northcliffe), in their different ways, asserting considerable claims to primacy, which were, to a large extent, accepted by the rest.

Cecil Harmsworth was born in Hampstead, London, in 1869. He attended a prep school run by 'the Miss Budds' and subsequently the Philological School in Marylebone Road, London (later called the St Marylebone Grammar School), together with his brother Harold. Of

[5]Paul Ferris, *The House of Northcliffe: The Harmsworths of Fleet Street* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 90.

[6]Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Northcliffe*, (London: Cassell, 1959), 229, 773; Ferris, *House of Northcliffe*, 22, describes him as 'mentally subnormal'.

[7]D.G. Boyce, 'Harmsworth, Harold Sidney, first Viscount Rothermere (1868–1940)', *ODNB*, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33718/33718?back=,33717,33718,33717 (accessed 18 Feb. 2014). This information is not included in Cecil, Baron Harmsworth, *St John Harmsworth: A Brave Life, 1876–1932* (Tonbridge: privately printed, 1949).

[8]Pound and Harmsworth, *Northcliffe*, 229.

[9]Ferris, *House of Northcliffe*, 303.

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one or two masters he had kindly memories, but principally he recalled with resentment 'the odious practice of summoning from class, in the loud voice of the school porter, the embarrassed urchins (myself sometimes among them) whose fees were in arrears'. He entered Trinity College, Dublin (TCD) in 1887, where his studies were to be sponsored by a long-standing friend of his father, George Robinson, and where his uncle-by-marriage Albert Maximilian Selss, Professor of German, allowed him free use of his rooms.[10] It was only after his father died in 1889 that the Harmsworth press empire really took off; from that point onwards Cecil never had any financial worries. For two years he studied theology, with a view to training for the Church. Two TCD figures who had a particular influence on him were the Revd Dr John Gwynn, the Regius Professor of Divinity, and Dr John Bernard, who would later become Archbishop of Dublin during a crucial phase of the Irish struggle for independence. Harmsworth, however, abandoned his plan of a religious career after experiencing a spiritual-intellectual crisis. As he recalled in some autobiographical reflections written during the First World War, he was unable to accept the Thirty-Nine Articles. 'I awoke suddenly to the disturbing realisation that I had all sorts of speculative views about them and about other things too that however permissible in the case of laymen were scarcely compatible with taking Holy Orders', he wrote. 'This was a dark and troubled time and I will not dwell on it.' He did, nonetheless, retain a 'nebulous' religious faith which was clearly important to him, although he felt little compulsion to discuss it with others. 'In a sort of way that I cannot define I have always been a clergyman at heart and my best and dearest friends have been and are still clergymen', he avowed.[11]

Harmsworth's TCD years were a formative experience and his existing family connections with Ireland were reinforced by his marriage in 1897 to Emilie Maffett (1873–1942). 'Em', as she was known, was Cecil's first cousin. She was the daughter of his mother's brother, the barrister William Hamilton Maffett of Finglas, County Dublin. The moderate Protestant circles in which he moved were far distant from die-hard Unionism. He was sympathetic to Irish national aspirations and understood the resentment caused by 'the blockheads of Dublin Castle', the seat of British administration in Ireland.[12] His connections with Bernard, and with the agricultural reformer Horace Plunkett and other liberal-minded Unionists, were to prove useful

[10]Cecil Bishopp Harmsworth (henceforward CBH), 'Lord N. and other Harmsworth memorials', unpublished MS, mid 1930s. Unless otherwise stated, all documents cited are part of the Cecil Harmsworth Papers, University of Exeter Special Collections.

[11]CBH, autobiographical notes, 1917, in diary volume for 1900.

[12]CBH, note of Oct. 1936 attached to diary of 19 Sept. 1911.

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to him when he was involved in the British government's efforts to secure a political settlement in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising. Although a peaceful solution remained elusive, the existence of this non-doctrinaire elite Protestant milieu is illustrative of the complexities of Irish society in the revolutionary era. Harmsworth's own role in these networks also casts significant light on the Anglo-Irish political world.

After leaving Dublin, Harmsworth went into the burgeoning family business, under Alfred's tutelage. He recalled these as 'days of happy memories, days of youth and dawning success'.[13] He appears to have been roped in to help with anything, including dealing with the mass of entries generated by a competition in *Answers* in 1889.[14] The 1891 census lists him as living with his widowed mother and seven of his siblings (including Harold, but not Alfred) in Maida Vale, London. His occupation was given as 'Journalist/Author'. In 1895 he passed a Bar exam but seems to have taken the Law no further.[15] Harmsworth Brothers Ltd. was incorporated in 1896, bringing together the existing Harmsworth publishing interests; each brother was allocated a shareholding according to family seniority, giving Cecil the third largest stake. He was described as the firm's 'literary editor'.[16] He insisted later that in spite of the Northcliffe legend, 'others of the brothers contributed largely if not essentially to the success of the firm'. He acknowledged, however, that he himself lacked 'the instinctive sense for news or the sleepless interest in the passing events of the day that are essential elements in the make-up of the true journalist'.[17] He edited *Answers* and, notionally, all the firm's other publications too. In 1898 he became the first editor of the monthly *Harmsworth Magazine*, which published middlebrow popular fiction.[18] 'Its production should greatly increase the prestige of our business,' Alfred advised him.[19] It was a tremendous commercial success, the first issue selling around 800,000 copies. Cecil retained the role until circa 1902, although he probably delegated much of the work as his political interests grew.[20] Afterwards, he maintained a

[13]CBH, 'Lord N. and other Harmsworth memorials'.

[14]J. Lee Thompson, *Northcliffe: Press Baron in Politics 1865–1922* (London: John Murray, 2000), 13.

[15]'Council of Legal Education', *The Times*, 24 Apr. 1895.

[16]'Harmsworth Brothers, Limited', *The Times*, 19 Oct. 1896; 'The Harmsworths and their publications', *The Bookman*, Dec. 1897.

[17]CBH, 'Lord N. and other Harmsworth memorials'.

[18]Sue Thomas, *Indexes to Fiction in the Harmsworth Magazine, later, The London Magazine (1898–1915)*, Victorian Fiction Research Guides X (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1984), 9.

[19]Pound and Harmsworth, *Northcliffe*, 236.

[20]Thomas, *Indexes to Fiction*, 9.

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degree of involvement in the family business – notably as Chairman of Associated Newspapers Ltd., founded in 1905 – although it is hard to discern exactly how active he was.

In September 1899, Harmsworth was adopted as Liberal candidate for Mid-Worcestershire.[21] The next month, the second Boer War started. The conflict created major divisions within the Liberal Party, which was already struggling to find an ideological direction in the post-Gladstone era and which was confronted by a dominant Conservative/Unionist government under Lord Salisbury. Harmsworth associated himself with the Liberal Imperialists, led by former Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, who supported the war. He feared that unless the Liberal Party adopted 'an unmistakeably patriotic tone' it would face electoral annihilation.[22] In response to accusations of factionalism, he denied that the Liberal Imperialists constituted a 'group' or 'section'. Rather: 'They desire merely to bring the other members of the Liberal Party into the mainstream of political thought as it affects imperial concerns.'[23] At the general election of 1900, his opponent was the sitting Liberal Unionist MP R. Biddulph Martin, who had strong backing from the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, and his Birmingham political machine. While supporting the war in principle, Harmsworth criticised the government's conduct of it, which he argued had led to 'a great deal of avoidable suffering'.[24] He was forced to deny claims that he was a pro-Boer, but could at least rely on the *Daily Mail* to pour scorn on such charges.[25] (He later recalled that whenever he stood for election Northcliffe always sent a fleet of cars to help 'and awaited the result with anxious interest'.[26]) An adept baby-kisser and a prolific speaker, he proved a very popular candidate, but, in the face of a pro-government landslide, he was defeated by 268 votes.

The following year, Harmsworth fought a by-election in North-East Lanarkshire, which occurred due to the death of the sitting Liberal MP. He urged a speedy and honourable end to the war, and advocated a range of policies that included a Catholic university in Ireland, an eight-hour day for miners and better houses for the poor.[27] According to the anti-war *Manchester Guardian*, his selection was a disappointment to local Liberals, who found his opinions too

[21] *Daily Mail*, 9 Sept. 1899.
[22] Diary for 1 Mar. 1900.
[23] CBH to the editor of the *Daily Mail*, published 5 Sept. 1900.
[24] 'Mr. Cecil B. Harmsworth at Wollescote', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 27 Sept. 1900.
[25] 'Election items', *Daily Mail*, 9 Oct. 1900; 'Meeting at Hanbury', *Worcestershire Chronicle*, 13 Oct. 1900.
[26] CBH, 'Lord N. and other Harmsworth memorials'.
[27] 'Lanark campaign opened', *Daily Mail*, 5 Sept. 1901.

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mild and indeed scarcely distinguishable from those of Sir William Rattigan, his Liberal Unionist opponent.[28] He was also damaged in the eyes of some by his association with the *Daily Mail*, which was seen as the epitome of distorted anti-Liberal journalism.[29] His chances were further prejudiced by the candidature of the trade unionist and socialist Robert Smillie. The United Irish League of Great Britain urged Irish nationalist voters in the constituency to vote for the latter rather than Harmsworth, who opposed Home Rule on the Gladstonian model, although he did strongly favour a more moderate measure of self-rule.[30] Rattigan polled 5,673 votes, Harmsworth 4,769 and Smillie 2,900. In an uncharacteristically bitter letter to *The Times*, Harmsworth blamed his defeat partly on the 'treachery' of Liberal MPs who had supported Smillie in opposition to his own official candidacy.[31] The setback was minor: he was quickly invited to stand again for Mid-Worcestershire, the seat that he would fight successfully at the next election.[32]

In the same year that he fought North-East Lanarkshire, Harmsworth founded the *New Liberal Review*, which he edited together with Hildebrand Harmsworth, the fifth of the brothers. In one of his rare entries before he started to keep a diary systematically Cecil recorded a visit to the Liberal elder statesman Sir Charles Dilke to discuss an article on the war, which in due course appeared in the first issue.[33] The *Review*'s aim was to 'clearly and faithfully reflect the best Liberal thought of the day', and it presented itself as pragmatic and non-sectarian.[34] However, the reception of the first number was mixed. 'It is put forth as an attempt to produce a 2s. 6d. review for 1s', observed the *Review of Reviews* caustically. 'It would be more accurate to describe it as an attempt to sell a sixpenny magazine for 1s. by eliminating the illustrations.'[35] *The Academy* was more generous, seeing it as 'a capital shilling's worth of opinion and criticism'.[36] Although the *Review* did have a Liberal Imperialist tinge, it attracted an impressive and eclectic range of contributors from well beyond the ranks of that group, including Lloyd George, Keir Hardie and the Irish nationalist leader John Redmond. Nevertheless, it survived only until 1904, presumably because it had failed to secure sufficient circulation.

[28] 'Our London correspondence', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 Sept 1901.
[29] 'The Lanarkshire election', *The Speaker*, 14 Sept. 1901.
[30] 'Lanark election', *Daily Mail*, 6 Sept. 1901.
[31] CBH to the editor of *The Times*, published 3 Oct. 1901.
[32] *Daily Mail*, 18 Nov. 1901.
[33] Diary for 29 Aug. 1900.
[34] 'Introduction', *The New Liberal Review*, 1, 1 (Feb. 1901).
[35] 'The New Liberal Review', *Review of Reviews*, Jan. 1901.
[36] 'The literary week', *The Academy*, 9 Feb. 1901.

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Em and Cecil's first child, also called Cecil, was born in March 1898, but he died in February 1899. A daughter, Stella, followed in August 1899, but she lived for only two months. Three further children survived infancy: Daphne Cecil Rosemary (1901–1993), Cecil Desmond Bernard (1903–1990) and Eric Beauchamp Northcliffe (1905–1988). Em struggled for acceptance but appears to have been roundly disliked by both Geraldines: Cecil King's much later account of his family would repeat suggestions that the deaths of the first two children were in some way Em's fault.[37] It does seem likely that the tenderness that Cecil Harmsworth felt for his last three children was intensified by the loss of the first two. A notable feature of his diary, which cannot be fully reflected in an edition which focuses on politics, is his description of family life. He was no stern and forbidding paterfamilias but rather a doting father who was actively involved with the upbringing of his offspring. Although the pace of political life was much slower in the Edwardian period than today, it is clear that Harmsworth found it exhausting and was glad, whenever he could, to relax in the bosom of his family. He had a strong sense of public duty but no great relish for politics as an activity. Nevertheless, it was the life to which he committed himself when he entered Parliament on the back of the sweeping Liberal victory of 1906.

As noted above, Harmsworth's failure to win North-East Lanarkshire had been followed by his re-adoption as prospective Liberal candidate for the Mid-Worcestershire, or Droitwich, constituency. Proximity to the Chamberlainite stronghold of Birmingham had hit Worcestershire Liberalism hard, and Droitwich had been a Liberal Unionist seat since the schism of 1886; successive Liberal challengers had failed to wrest it from the MPs John Corbett and Richard Martin, and in 1895 Martin had even been re-elected unopposed. The only Liberal success in the county's seven constituencies between 1886 and 1905 came in the Northern division, in Gladstone's last victory of 1892. However, this should not mask the varied nature of the county. In particular, the Northern and Mid-Worcestershire constituencies contained significant amounts of industry, and were in effect a kind of outer ring of the Black Country.[38] In Mid-Worcestershire, heavy industry in Stourbridge and carpet weaving at Stourport were particularly important, and gave the constituency a substantial body of working-class voters, although

[37] Cecil H. King, *Strictly Personal* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), 80–81.

[38] Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885–1910* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 197; Richard H. Trainor, *Black Country Elites: The Exercise of Authority in an Industrialized Area, 1830–1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1–4.

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middle-class and agricultural voters were also important.[39] It was not a hopeless seat for the Liberals, and Harmsworth had done well in 1900 to cut Martin's majority to only 3.4% of the votes cast.

The circumstances of 1906 were more favourable to the Liberals locally and nationally. Martin retired ahead of the election, and squabbles on the Unionist side led to a Conservative, E.A. Knight, rather than a Liberal Unionist, opposing Harmsworth. There seems little doubt that this cost the Unionists votes they could ill afford to lose. Harmsworth fought a campaign that drew heavily on the issues that would carry the Liberals to a sweeping victory nationally: there was little that was obviously 'New Liberal' about his stance. In his election address, free trade took pride of place, and was followed by a pledge to support national economy, in the belief that 'The best guarantee for flourishing industry and full employment [was] a careful and economical Government.' He called for the bringing of 'the culprits in [Boer] war scandals to justice'. He also denounced Chinese indentured labour in South Africa, and called for educational reform and a series of other changes, including the rating of land values, the reversal of the Taff Vale decision, and housing and temperance reform. On Ireland, though, his earlier enthusiasm for Chamberlain was combined with a canny reassurance to potential local Unionist defectors: he pledged that he would not see a Liberal victory as a mandate for the introduction of Home Rule, and that the introduction of same would need 'a special appeal to the country' – that is, a further general election.[40] Harmsworth won the seat, taking 5,165 votes (52.8%) to his opponent's 4,611 (47.2%), a majority of 554 votes (5.6%). Nationally, the Liberals won a landslide, with 399 seats to the Conservative and Liberal Unionists' 156. The Liberal government of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was now in an exceptionally strong parliamentary position, especially because the 82 Irish nationalist and 29 Labour MPs could normally be expected to support it too.

In the autumn of 1907, Harmsworth took advantage of the fact that there was no autumn session of Parliament – which was itself indicative of the more relaxed pace of political life in those days – to travel to South Africa. The trip resulted in the publication of a travelogue, *Pleasure and Problem in South Africa* (1908), which also contained some political observations. Harmsworth was insistent that politicians and officials in London should leave the 'native problem' to their white fellow-subjects on the ground. 'The native in the town constitutes one of the gravest social problems in South Africa to-day', Harmsworth opined. 'Certainly it is the close contact between the two races in

[39] Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, 196.
[40] Cecil Harmsworth, election address, 4 Jan. 1906.

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the towns that is accountable for the largest part of dangerous racial prejudice.'[41] It may seem bizarre that he argued for separation of the races in the same breath as he deplored racial prejudice. However, his views were perfectly conventional for the time. The *Times Literary Supplement*'s reviewer scathingly commented that there was little in his account of South African problems that could not have been derived from a study of government Blue Books. At the same time, 'though we think that on most of these questions he gives a fair statement of the points at issue, we have not discovered a single suggestion which has not appeared in several of our English newspapers'.[42]

On the whole, at this time, Harmsworth was more focused on domestic affairs than foreign and imperial ones. The Liberal government of 1906 was, in many ways, a successful reforming administration. But the winter of 1908–1909 saw high levels of unemployment in industrial areas, while the government's dilemmas over public expenditure and how to balance demands for rearmament with those for greater social expenditure created real difficulties. When Asquith replaced Campbell-Bannerman on the latter's retirement in 1908, he was in turn replaced as Chancellor of the Exchequer by Lloyd George. Lloyd George's 1909 budget contained provisions, such as a land valuation ahead of a likely land tax, that were seen as particularly objectionable by many Unionists. The result was the unprecedented rejection of the budget by a House of Lords which had already obstructed significant parts of the government's programme; this, in turn, led to an intensification of radical demands for a reduction in the Lords' powers. This demand figured large in the Liberal and Labour campaigns at the general election that followed in January 1910. However, the Unionists recovered well from their 1906 disaster, helped by economic difficulties and some disillusionment with the failure of the Liberal government to fulfil its pledges in a number of areas, such as education. The Liberals fell back to 274 seats, as against 272 for the Unionists; the 82 Irish and 40 Labour MPs would keep the Liberals in power, but a third of the Liberal MPs had lost their seats. The election was taken as a mandate to pass the budget, but the failure of attempts at compromise meant that a further election had to be held in December 1910 to get a mandate for House of Lords reform; the Liberals came back with 272 seats, the Unionists with 271, the Irish with 84 and Labour with 42.

One of those defeated in January 1910 was Harmsworth. He had been a conscientious constituency MP, by the standards of the time, and had been an assiduous parliamentary performer. However,

[41] Cecil Harmsworth, *Pleasure and Problem in South Africa* (London: J. Lane, 1908), 143.
[42] Review of *Pleasure and Problem in South Africa*, in *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 May 1908.

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his margin of victory in 1906 had not been great. The Unionists improved their prospects by agreeing on a candidate, the Hon. John Lyttelton, who stood as a Liberal Unionist on a tariff reform platform, which united the various wings of his support. Tariffs appealed to many workers who had suffered unemployment under the free trade Liberal government. The fact that Lyttelton was also the son of a local aristocrat, Viscount Cobham, whose seat was at Hagley Hall near Stourbridge, also helped to rally votes, not least in agricultural areas.[43] His youth (he was only 28) might also have assisted him. Harmsworth based his appeal around 'Liberalism, free trade, and the Rights of the House of Commons'. He praised the work of the Liberal government, and denounced the 'unpatriotic' actions of the House of Lords. He declared his support for Lloyd George's budget and for national insurance, and his opposition to tariffs. He also, finally, pledged to support 'the maintenance of Our Naval Forces on such a scale as to forbid danger or rivalry from any quarter or quarters whatsoever'.[44] But his energetic campaign was in vain: he took 4,973 votes (49.5%) to his opponent's 5,078 (50.5%), a majority of 105 votes (1.0%). His defeat brought rumours of rioting in Droitwich: electoral violence, or the threat of it, was not atypical in this period.[45]

Harmsworth had begun to make his way in parliament. Given the scale of Liberal losses, he might have expected preferment had he just been able to retain his seat. There seemed every chance that he might regain it at a subsequent election. However, after returning from a three-week holiday in France in February 1910, he became ill with what he later described as 'a specially complicated kind of influenza', which affected him acutely for three months and then to a lesser extent for a while thereafter. In November 1910 he stated definitively that he would not contest the seat again because continuing fatigue had left him unable to contest a geographically scattered constituency. This may have been true, but in reality he had been working with the Liberal Chief Whip, the Master of Elibank, to find a safer seat as early as June 1910. The relatively safe Scottish constituency of Dunbartonshire was offered to him, but he turned it down, not least because of its distance from London. However, he continued to take a keen interest in politics, as his diary shows, and spoke for a number of candidates in December 1910, including Dr C.H. Brookes, his successor in Droitwich. In the

[43] Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, 196.

[44] Cecil Harmsworth, election address, Jan. 1910.

[45] See Jon Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 87–92.

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event his efforts were in vain: Lyttelton just managed to hold on with a tiny majority of 72 votes (0.8%).

Harmsworth was a likeable and quite gregarious individual. His fellow Liberal MP, Alexander MacCallum Scott, noted in 1913 that he was 'a pleasant fellow, pleasant to look at, pleasant manners, & a pleasant talker' with 'an invaluable gift of curiosity'.[46] While he was also prone to melancholy at times, Harmsworth's diaries do not really bear out the view of him portrayed by Ferris (among others) as being a political dilettante unsuited for the rough and tumble of politics and irresolute about his political career.[47] As he was to tell his fellow Liberal, Walter Runciman, in May 1918, 'I am not a Liberal by birth or training, religion or convention, but simply because I believed in Liberalism & still believe in it as a political force.'[48] The events of 1910 had hit him hard, but he soon resumed his career in earnest. In June 1911, the Liberal MP Thomas Gair Ashton was ennobled, creating a vacancy in the constituency of South Bedfordshire, or Luton. This had been a Liberal seat without a break since 1885; Ashton had even held it in the 'khaki election' of 1900, albeit by only 103 votes in almost 11,000; his December 1910 majority was 978 (6.8% of the votes cast). South Bedfordshire was a mixed constituency, with significant stretches of agricultural land, but by 1901 half its inhabitants lived in Luton, and this process was continuing. Luton itself was an increasingly industrial town, with a particular specialisation in the manufacture of straw hats. This industry was mostly small scale and unions were not prominent, which made it unlikely territory for any kind of Labour incursion, although, as the diary shows, there was increasing diversification by the time Harmsworth became involved in the town's affairs: Vauxhall Iron Works moved there in 1905, changing its name to Vauxhall Motors two years later.[49] There were Conservative enclaves, such as the town of Leighton Buzzard, but overall, 'this was a safe Liberal seat'.[50] Helped by Elibank, Harmsworth was adopted on 21 June. In his election address he emphasised that he would continue to support 'the Liberal and Progressive Party in its noble efforts to improve the conditions of life of the masses of the people' through measures such

[46]University of Glasgow Special Collections, MacCallum Scott papers, MS Gen 1465/4, diary 11 June 1913.

[47]Ferris, *House of Northcliffe*, 180, where he suggests Cecil went into politics because of 'the corporate pride of the Harmsworths' and 'to please Northcliffe'.

[48]Cecil Harmsworth to Walter Runciman, 10 May 1918, Runciman papers WR 169, quoted in John Turner, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915–1918* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 302.

[49]Katie Carmichael, David McOmish and David Grech, *The Hat Industry of Luton and its Buildings* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2013).

[50]Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections*, 114.

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as national insurance.[51] On 21 July he was elected, with 7,619 votes (52.1%) against 7,006 votes (47.9%) for his Conservative rival, J.D. Hickman, a majority of 613 (4.2%).

Harmsworth's diary for this period gives fascinating insights into the life of a conscientious constituency MP. Luton was closer to London than Droitwich, which made it easier to juggle alongside parliament, his commercial and other interests, and his young family. One feature of his commitment to the constituency was a regular column in the *Luton News*, the first of which appeared on 27 July 1911, less than a week after his election. These reports kept his name firmly in the public eye and covered a wide range of topical issues from a loyal Liberal perspective. Much of his activity otherwise consisted of openings: allotment shows, sales of work by supporters, a new Liberal Hall at Shillington, new corporation baths in Luton. The diaries also offer insights into the life of the Edwardian backbencher. All-night sittings were not uncommon and MPs faced grisly meals at unmentionable times, while trying to work out at what time to stop drinking alcohol to sustain them and start drinking tea. The diaries show Harmsworth to be a defender of the rights of parliament: he voted against the guillotine on Home Rule in 1912, for example, and reflected many years later that 'In the arena of the H[ouse] of C[ommons] the fate of Empires is decided and not in outside activities however interesting and important.'[52] The diary also shows that it was possible for backbenchers to make an impact on legislation, as with Harmsworth's 1911 amendment to the National Insurance Bill, which McKenna accepted on behalf of the government: this protected the position of medical institutes established by friendly societies.[53] Outside parliament, backbenchers were also part of the hidden wiring of the Edwardian Liberal party, as when Harmsworth and a number of his colleagues dined with Liberal lawyers and businessmen in 1911.

Harmsworth soon left the life of the backbencher behind. In November 1911 he was appointed parliamentary private secretary (PPS) to Runciman, President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries and one of the party's rising stars. That Harmsworth only accepted 'after serious hours of hard thinking' hardly suggested that he was eager for office at all costs.[54] But he soon found that he worked well with the president, and his new job gave him the chance to influence policy in a number of areas. First, in November 1912 Runciman appointed him to chair a committee of inquiry into the application

[51] Cecil Harmsworth, election address, June 1911.
[52] Supplement, 23 June 1934, to diary, 8 Apr. 1914.
[53] Hansard, 1 Aug. 1911.
[54] 15 Nov. 1911.

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of Devon and Cornwall local fisheries committees for government grants to allow fishermen to install motor power in their boats. This was a question of considerable importance to an industry which had fallen on hard times, and Harmsworth threw himself into it with the assistance of his fellow committee members, the Indian civil servant S.H. Fremantle, and the author and social thinker Stephen Reynolds. They travelled widely in the area, and in April 1913 their detailed report, written in large part by Reynolds, pointed out that the position varied between the two counties, with the situation in Cornwall being rather worse, and also within them. It argued that the best form of state aid would be by means of loans to co-operative groups of fishermen, so it recommended that state grants should be made to establish such groups. Although only applying to one industry in one part of the country, this was in some ways a significant extension of the role of the state.[55]

Even while the committee was still deliberating in January 1913, Runciman appointed a larger body under Sir Stafford Howard to conduct a much wider investigation into the inshore fisheries of England and Wales. It was testament to their progress on Devon and Cornwall that the committee included both Harmsworth and Reynolds. Its report in 1914 recommended, among other things, raising the status of fisheries within the Board, relieving local authorities of any financial responsibility for fisheries administration and making it solely a charge on the national finances, and the creation of a Fisheries Organisation Society (FOS) to spread co-operative credit and other good practices among fishermen.[56] Harmsworth and Reynolds – who appear to have got on extremely well together – went on to play a major role in the creation of the FOS, which was to last until the 1990s. Harmsworth also helped to make policy in respect of the decrepit horse trade, after conducting a thorough investigation into the export of horses to France and Belgium. His investigation had been expected to come up with a simple denunciation of foreign cruelty to animals, but he found that the horses were often treated badly in Britain en route to the continent, too. This led him to make a timely intervention in the debate on the Exportation of Horses Bill in April

[55]Report of the committee appointed to consider applications of the Devon and Cornwall local fisheries committees for grants from the Development Fund for assisting fishermen to instal motor power in their boats, and for other purposes (Cd. 6752, 1913), esp. 3–17; *The Times*, 22 Apr. 1913.

[56]Report of the departmental committee on inshore fisheries appointed by the President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries to inquire into the present condition of the inshore fisheries, and to advise the Board as to the steps which could with advantage be taken for their preservation and development (Cd. 7373, 1914), esp. xxxv–xxxviii; *The Times*, 10 June, 11 Dec. 1914.

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1914, arguing for much stronger powers to prevent the embarkation of horses that were clearly unfit to travel.[57] However, Harmsworth's hopes that he would soon move on from his subordinate PPS status were dashed in April 1912 when a plan to make him a junior whip had to be abandoned following fears that he might lose his seat at the by-election that such a promotion required. Asquith's consoling comment that preferment would not be long in coming did not bear fruit.

The years down to August 1914 had been characterised by periodic international crises, but it was not easy at the time to discern a particular pattern: reactions to events in Sarajevo in June 1914 appear to have met with an initially muted response. There is no sense in Harmsworth's diary of a crisis before late July. However, as is well known, the declaration of war on Serbia by Austria–Hungary triggered such an escalation of international tension that by 4 August Britain was at war with both Austria–Hungary and Germany. The Liberal Party went into the war largely united. When John Burns, the President of the Board of Trade, resigned in protest at British intervention, he was replaced by Runciman, who took his PPS with him. The Board of Trade was of major importance to the war effort, and Harmsworth was soon very busy indeed.

Harmsworth finally rose from the lowest rank in February 1915, becoming Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Home Office. This did not involve him having to fight a by-election, and he was soon working well with the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna. Harmsworth clearly revelled in the role, but he could never quite escape the shadow of Northcliffe, and when the latter launched a stinging attack on the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, in May 1915, Harmsworth felt compelled to offer McKenna his resignation. The matter then became subsumed in the creation of the Asquith Coalition government, the upshot of which was McKenna's translation to the Treasury and his post being taken up by Sir John Simon, who wasted no time in telling Harmsworth that he was one of the Liberals who would have to make way for a Coalition partner nominee – in his case the Labour MP, William Brace.

It said something about Harmsworth's abilities that that both his former chiefs immediately sought his services as their PPS; it may have said something about his ambitions at the time that he chose to follow McKenna to the Treasury rather than retrace his steps to Runciman at the Board of Trade. But what followed was not to be a happy period for Harmsworth. He had enjoyed working on discrete projects that might seem mundane but in which he was able to make

[57] Hansard, 3 Apr. 1914, Vol. 60 cols 1540–1543.

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a difference. Now, he spent considerable amounts of time chairing various committees, and felt that he was unable to make a real mark: after the war he would look back on it as a period when he would have been better off on the back benches. Things were not helped by the fact that he struggled with the subject matter – after one discussion with ministers, bankers and officials he confided to his diary that 'Most of the discussion is metaphysics to me.'[58] Worse still, perhaps, his relationship with Northcliffe made his position difficult: first, because he tended to be used as a bridge to his more powerful older brother, but also, secondly, because Northcliffe's attacks on the government became stronger and stronger as the war effort continued to stutter.

The failure of the major offensive on the Somme in July–November 1916 was a significant factor damaging the image of the Asquith government, and in December 1916, aware that his position was weakening, the Prime Minister resigned in an attempt to show that he was, in the words of his Labour colleague Arthur Henderson, 'the indispensable man'. However, he was not: Lloyd George was able to form a Coalition which included Henderson and other Labour members as well as the Conservatives. The change of government put McKenna – a firm Asquithian – into opposition. There was little question other than that Harmsworth would follow Lloyd George. He felt some unease at breaking with his closest political friends – as he wrote to Runciman, he and Leicester did not attend the Asquithians' Reform Club meeting because it was 'excruciatingly uncomfortable for us to take part in proceedings in connection with the Party of so intimate and domestic a character which arise largely from the action of a member of our family'.[59] Lloyd George, recognising that around two thirds of his fellow Liberal MPs had gone into opposition, and keen to appease Northcliffe, saw the merits of promoting Harmsworth. In April 1917, therefore, he was offered the position of Coalition Liberal Chief Whip in succession to Neil Primrose, who was keen to return to his regiment.[60] But Harmsworth rejected the offer, and all Lloyd George's charm could not change his mind. Harmsworth was flattered to hear that he was popular among Liberal MPs, but he disliked the business of dispensing honours that came with the role; he was probably aware, too, that the 'trade' in honours was not likely to get any cleaner under Lloyd George. In some ways the decision was proof of the wisdom of Lord Birkenhead's aphorism, 'never refuse'. Had he taken office at this point, he would have placed himself on a

[58] 14 June 1915.

[59] John Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 25.

[60] Ibid. 20.

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path that might have led him into the cabinet at some future point. It would certainly have given him the opportunity to show whether he was capable of such a role. Harmsworth himself seems to have realised this at the time: 'It is a pity and a disappointment and I am a fool – but there it is'.[61]

Lloyd George worked quickly to establish a small war cabinet, set up new ministries to offer closer intervention on the home front, and bring in businessmen and other 'outsiders' to offer a new urgency to government. He also established his own secretariat to offer advice in a number of policy areas, housed in temporary buildings in the garden of 10 Downing Street and hence known as the 'Garden Suburb'. Having turned down higher preferment, it was here that Harmsworth ended up working. The position suited Harmsworth well. He was one of five secretaries whose responsibility was to keep Lloyd George abreast of particular issues, and where possible to help resolve administrative crises as they arose. In Harmsworth's case, this involved working mainly on labour questions (where he sympathised considerably with working-class fears of profiteering and offered a broadly favourable view of labour in its relations with capital);[62] manpower (where he played a part in resolving the disputes between the Ministries of Munitions and Labour, the War Office, and the Director-General of National Service, Neville Chamberlain, which ended with Harmsworth helping to ensure Chamberlain's exit in 1917));[63] shipping and shipbuilding (where he played a major part in streamlining administration, with positive results);[64] and in the development of insurance against air raid damage.[65] The diary offers some useful detail on life in the Garden Suburb, and suggests that it did indeed play an important part in the war effort. It was happy and successful period of his career, and Turner's positive verdict on the enterprise as a whole – that 'It reflected confidence and sincerity in the pursuit of "progressive" measures at home and abroad' – was one that Harmsworth himself would have shared.[66]

It was logical that, after the 1918 Armistice, Lloyd George should waste no time in seeking the election of a new parliament to make the peace, but it did not take the most hardened cynic to believe that he was also keen to cash in on his reputation as 'the man who won the war' while party boundaries remained relatively fluid. On 23

[61] 26 Apr. 1917.
[62] Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat*, 39.
[63] Ibid. 29–30, 40–42.
[64] Ibid. 30–38.
[65] Ibid. 42–43.
[66] Turner, *Lloyd George's Secretariat*, 195.

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November, Harmsworth was adopted as 'Liberal-Coalition' candidate for the revised constituency of Bedfordshire Luton. His possession of the 'Coupon' helped ensure that he did not face Conservative opposition, and his only opponent was a Labour candidate, Willet Ball. Harmsworth won a stunning victory, with 13,501 votes (69.4%) to Ball's 5,964 (30.6%), a majority of 7,537 (38.8%).

Immediately after the election, Rothermere raised his younger brother's hopes of a major position in government. But this was not a very likely outcome. Harmsworth had proved himself a reasonably safe pair of hands, but there could only be a limited number of Liberals in the leading roles, and Harmsworth's claims were weaker than they might have been if he had taken on the role of chief whip in 1917. All the same, he was offered and accepted a significant role as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in January 1919. He also acted as Minister of Blockade, which reflected his wartime experience. When the formal cabinet was reinstated in October 1919, it contained only eight Liberals, including the Prime Minister; thus Harmsworth was certainly in the top dozen or so ministerial Liberals at the time. The diaries offer some insights into the part that Harmsworth played in the Paris peace talks, and, later, in the development of Anglo-Soviet relations. Lord Curzon's appointment as Foreign Secretary in November 1919 might have been a great opportunity for Harmsworth, since it left him as the leading Foreign Office minister in the Commons. But in reality Lloyd George conducted much of his own foreign policy, Curzon was not keen to delegate, and Harmsworth scarcely pushed himself forward at this point.

There was a sense, indeed, that Harmsworth was beginning to lose his appetite for politics. As early as April 1919, the spectre of Northcliffe again loomed over his career when he considered resigning after Lloyd George launched a ferocious attack on Northcliffe in the House of Commons, referring to his 'diseased vanity', implying mental illness, and saying that he would 'as soon rely on a grasshopper' for information.[67] In the event Northcliffe himself advised Harmsworth against resignation. But by early 1921 the latter was clearly losing his way, as when he went absent without leave from Commons questions on foreign affairs to go fishing on the River Wye. When parliament broke up in the summer of 1921, he bade farewell to 'The most wearisome and thankless parliamentary year in my experience!' A trip to the League of Nations in Geneva provided a temporary fillip, but it seems that he was, at best, marking time politically.

Moreover, as the economy turned downwards in 1920, and problems mounted at home, in Ireland and abroad, so doubts about the

[67]Hansard, 5 series, Vol. 114 cols 2952–2953, 16 Apr. 1919.

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Coalition began to grow. The failure of attempts at 'fusion' between the Lloyd George Liberals and the Conservatives in March 1920 can be seen, in retrospect, as a turning point in the Coalition's long-term prospects.[68] By July 1922, Harmsworth had served as MP for Luton for 11 years and had been in ministerial or quasi-ministerial roles for most of that time. He was 53 and close to the height of his powers. Yet within four months he would be out of parliament. This was his own decision: he did not defend Luton at the general election that was held in November 1922. A number of reasons contributed to his decision to leave front-rank politics. In part, it came down to frustration. Harmsworth was far from being an unbridled office-seeker, but he had been a junior minister for many years and must have reflected that, if he was still not seen a serious contender for cabinet rank, then his chance had probably gone. Once this was the case, the prospects of continuing parliamentary life were probably a good deal less appealing, especially against the demands and attractions of family life. His doubts were not assuaged by the increasingly uncertain political future: there was doubt as to whether the Coalition would fight another election under Lloyd George or break up into its constituent parts. With no immediate prospect of Liberal reunion whether the Coalition survived or not, Harmsworth was making a rational calculation in deciding to give up his seat.

However, what really knocked Harmsworth off an even keel in the summer of 1922 was the death of Northcliffe, on 14 August, after eight weeks of 'dreadful illness'. Cecil had been devoted to him, despite their differences of temperament. (Northcliffe once described Cecil as having 'no judgement or brains' and probably felt frustration at his lack of ambition.)[69] Cecil and their brother Vyvyan were with Northcliffe when he died. Cecil became rather aimless and depressed, fishing when he could do so and working on Foreign Office affairs when he could not. Duff Cooper, at this time Harmsworth's Foreign Office private secretary, recalled: 'He told me he thought it [Northcliffe's death] was a warning that men of his family should not work too hard after a certain age. I was gently amused, for I doubted whether excessive devotion to hard work had ever been Cecil Harmsworth's failing, and a man less like his dynamic brother could hardly be imagined.'[70]

[68] K.O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 188–190.

[69] J.M. McEwen (ed.), *The Riddell Diaries 1908–1923* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 125 (entry for 2 July 1915).

[70] Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), 115.

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On 5 October Harmsworth wrote to his constituency chairman to say that he did not intend to contest the next election. That event came sooner than perhaps he had expected, because the Coalition collapsed later that month. At the general election the Conservatives, led by Bonar Law, won a sound overall majority. In Luton, Sir John Prescott Hewett won for the Conservatives. Although Labour had come third, it had arguably split the 'progressive vote' and allowed the Conservatives to win; and in many ways the real story of the election was the advance of the Labour Party to become the second party in the state. Although many Liberals believed that this position need not be permanent, and would work hard for many years to overturn it, Cecil Harmsworth would not play a significant part in their struggle.

Harmsworth now entered a life of semi-retirement. He continued some public and philanthropic duties, which he mixed with low-key business activities, socialising, angling and some minor literary work. He and his brother St John edited for publication Northcliffe's diary of his round-the-world trip of 1921–1922; he wrote a little book of sketches about fishing; and he published a volume of eyewitness descriptions of famous historical and literary figures.[71] The diary for these years recounts some interesting encounters with, amongst others, Winston Churchill, W.B. Yeats and the painter Sir William Orpen (who painted Harmsworth's portrait). However, Harmsworth's engagement with politics was now limited. Years later, he would tell Collin Brooks that he had 'always missed being in the Commons' and that 'Had 1922 not been a bad year for him, owing to Northcliffe's illness, he would have stayed there.'[72]

Rothermere had become the proprietor of the *Daily Mail* on Northcliffe's death. In the early 1930s, notoriously, he used the paper to promote Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. It is interesting to consider Cecil's attitude to this. It has been alleged, on the basis of the memories of those who knew him, that he was 'extremely anti-Semitic'.[73] The diary certainly does contain some distasteful observations, yet to a certain extent he could see beyond

[71] Alfred, Viscount Northcliffe, *My Journey Round the World, 16 July 1921–26 Feb. 1922*, ed. Cecil and St. John Harmsworth (London: John Lane, 1923); Cecil Harmsworth, *A Little Fishing Book* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1930); Cecil Harmsworth (ed.), *Immortals at First Hand: Famous People as Seen by their Contemporaries* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1933). CBH and his son Desmond had earlier published *Holiday Verses and Others* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1922).

[72] N.J. Crowson (ed.), *Fleet Street, Press Barons and Politics: The Journals of Collin Brooks, 1932–1940*, Camden Fifth Series, Vol. 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 1998), 226 (entry for 14 Oct. 1938).

[73] Richard Bourne, *Lords of Fleet Street: The Harmsworth Dynasty* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 86–87.

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his prejudices. Thus, in 1916 he described the Liberal politician Sir Alfred Mond as 'an "Hebrew Jew" ' but thought him 'with all his thick utterance and swarthy appearance well-nigh as able a man as there is in the House'.[74] And although he did not treat Mosley himself as a social pariah and considered him to have 'great and courageous powers of leadership', he was nonetheless privately critical of Rothermere's political support of him. At the same time, he agreed with his brother's campaign for greater British rearmament.[75] He simultaneously supported the appeasement of the Nazis, but he did note in the aftermath of *Kristallnacht* in 1938 that 'The savage persecution of the Jews in Germany has angered people very greatly.'[76]

Harmsworth still considered himself a Liberal. In 1939, he was elevated to the House of Lords, which appears to have 'entirely rejuvenated' him. He had to be dissuaded by his family from becoming taking the title Lord Northcliffe that had become extinct on his brother's death. Instead, he became first Baron Harmsworth of Egham (where he now resided when not in London). What he did not know was that Harold had bought the peerage for him. Collin Brooks, one of Rothermere's intimates, recorded that 'the secret price of Cecil's peerage' was a £25,000 donation to Conservative Party funds.[77] Given his own manifest hostility to the sale of honours, Cecil would have been mortified had he discovered this. Having earlier praised Chamberlain's actions during the Munich Crisis, he used his maiden speech to further urge 'appeasement and conciliation', and suggested that there were some grounds for hope in one of Hitler's recent speeches.[78] During the Phoney War, the Conservative Earl of Crawford rated him as one of a 'little pacifist group' surrounding the German-sympathising Lord Brocket.[79] However, there is no sign that Harmsworth actively pursued the idea of a compromise peace. From this point onwards his few contributions in the Lords, the last of which he made in June 1945, focused on agricultural, town planning and post-war reconstruction matters.

[74]Diary entry for 9 May 1916.

[75]Diary entries for 2 Dec. 1937 and 12 June 1939; CBH, 'Lord N. and other Harmsworth memorials'.

[76]Diary entry for 27 Nov. 1938.

[77]Crowson, *Journals of Collin Brooks, 1932–1940*, 246 (entry for 20 Feb. 1939)

[78]CBH, 'The Wide Horizon', *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 Oct. 1938; Parliamentary Debates, Fifth series, House of Lords, Vol. 112, 2 May 1939, cols. 843–847.

[79]John Vincent (ed.), *The Crawford Papers: The Journals of David Lindsay, Twenty-Seventh Earl of Crawford and Tenth Earl of Balcarres 1871–1940, during the years 1892 to 1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984), 607 (entry for 15 Nov. 1939).

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The death of Emilie in 1942 brought to an end a notably happy marriage. In his final years, Harmsworth maintained his connection with Dr Johnson's house in Gough Square, London. Built about 1700, the house had been Johnson's home from 1748 to 1759 and he had compiled his famous dictionary there. Though it was almost derelict when Harmsworth bought it in 1911, he paid for its renovation and presented it to the nation.[80] Unfortunately, the house was damaged by bombing during the Second World War. One of Harmsworth's final public acts, in May 1948, was to re-open it to the public. He died on 13 August that year.

What of the diary itself? Cecil Harmsworth first kept a systematic journal on a trip to Newfoundland in 1903, but it was only in 1905 that he started to keep one on a regular basis. At first, it lacked significant political comment. This changed, however, in the summer of 1909, as the budget controversy escalated, and it is at that point that the selection presented here opens. The diaries shed significant light on Liberalism and the Liberal Party in the period, but it would not do to overstate this: Harmsworth was not intimate with leading Liberals, although Lloyd George would occasionally flatter him otherwise for reasons that probably had as much to do with Northcliffe as with Harmsworth himself. If anything, the reader notices most the star-struck nature of some of Harmsworth's comments about ministers. For him, Asquith was always a remote figure, respected but not loved. For Lloyd George, on the other hand, he had a fascination, in part because he struggled to reconcile the small and rather unimpressive private man with the inspiring public leader.

But if the diary does not contain many new high-political revelations, it is nonetheless valuable for other reasons. For example, it sheds light on events in Ireland. Harmsworth rubbed shoulders with the leading Irish politicians of the day, particularly John Redmond and John Dillon. He paid regular visits to Ireland, combining holidays with fact finding, and almost always visiting Trinity. The 1916 Easter Rising took him completely by surprise, but the diary contains a valuable account of its aftermath, when Harmsworth travelled to Dublin and discussed matters with a range of leading figures including businessmen and the (Anglican) Archbishop of Dublin, feeding back information to Lloyd George at the latter's request. For the Great War itself, the diary is mainly useful in three ways. First, it gives a sense of how key events were received by an informed and articulate member

[80]Cecil Harmsworth, *Dr Johnson: A Great Englishman* (London: Jones, 1923); Cecil, Lord Harmsworth, *Dr Johnson's House, Gough Square, London* (London: Trustees of Dr Johnson's House 1947).

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of the political and media elite. Secondly, it demonstrates aspects of the home front, such as air raids, Belgian refugees and recruiting. And, finally, it shows the effects of the war on the Harmsworth and Maffett families. Larry Maffett, Em's favourite brother, was killed in action in October 1914; Lucas King, Harmsworth's nephew, the following May. Two of Harold's sons, Vere and Vyvyan, were killed in November 1916 and February 1918 respectively. In the light of these losses, Harmsworth was understandably proud when Esmond, Harold's surviving son, was elected as the youngest MP in 1919.

The diary also sheds light on Harmsworth's many enthusiasms. It is perhaps fitting that this edition opens with the 1909 Henley Regatta, which was a pretty well unmissable event for him and his immediate family. Fishing was another great enthusiasm: indeed, he was to write a book about it,[81] and the diary shows him often having recourse to fishing for recreational purposes, sometimes with Northcliffe. It was a point of comment for him in 1915 that he did not manage a day's fishing until May, and then could not enjoy it because he could not get the Flanders battlefields off his mind. Golf was another pastime which he enjoyed, although perhaps not quite so much as Northcliffe. He was also a great enthusiast of aviation. These were pioneering years and Harmsworth's sense of excitement is palpable in the pages of the diary. He knew most of the leading aviators of the time; but he also saw the danger involved. In July 1910, he revelled in the sight of three planes in the air at once at an air show, before alluding to the death the previous day of Charles Rolls, the first Briton to be killed in an aviation accident. Perhaps more substantive than any of these, though, was his support for the Garden Cities movement and his wider interest in town planning. The first mention of the subject in the diary comes in 1911, when Harmsworth visited Letchworth. Impressed by what he saw, he agreed to become a director, and by 1912 he was closely involved in its work. Later that year, he combined this with his work in government, as a member of a departmental committee on buildings for smallholdings. He conducted the opening ceremony at Knebworth Garden Village in April 1912, and used his position as an MP to help raise funds for a town-planning tour of Australasia in 1914.

Harmsworth was not a compulsive diarist like, say, Cuthbert Headlam, who felt compelled to fill a page every day. Nor was he a deeply reflective diarist on the lines of Beatrice Webb. His entries were more matter of fact, briefer and to the point, sometimes frustratingly so for the historian. But nor were they the terse notes kept by Gladstone.

[81] Harmsworth, *A Little Fishing Book*.

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Harmsworth wrote when he felt he had something to write about. In terms of the period, perhaps the closest parallels are with the diaries of the Richard Durning Holt, Liberal MP for Hexham 1907–1918, and the letters of Arnold Rowntree to his wife.[82] Harmsworth realised that he was part of an important family and came to understand that he had lived through politically important times. It is clear that he hoped to publish the diaries at some stage. By the early 1930s, there had been a number of diaries published from the era by the likes of Lord Riddell of the *News of the World* and the former Coalition Liberal minister Christopher Addison. Harmsworth was careful to keep the diaries in good condition; indeed, he had transcriptions made to help the process. He also periodically went through the diaries and added comments, most of which we have reproduced here alongside the entries to which they referred. Examples come from 1927, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936 and 1937. Those later notes enhance understanding of the original entries but also provide insights into Harmsworth's own later reflections on his earlier actions. We have placed them in square brackets. Our editorial comments are in italic with occasional use of italicised square brackets when occurring mid-text. All ellipses without square brackets are original; editorial omissions are in (non-italic) square brackets.

In editing the diaries, we have been very conscious of the need to allow a full reflection of all aspects of Harmsworth's political life, as well as some insights into the more personal side. We agreed at an early stage that we should cover only the period from 1909 to his departure from parliament in 1922; although the later diaries (available in the University of Exeter Special Collections) are interesting, they are essentially reflections from the political sidelines, where they discuss politics at all. This concentration has allowed us to include the great majority of the content from that period in this edited volume. Overall, the significance of Cecil Harmsworth's diary lies chiefly in the light it casts on the activity of other, better known politicians, and in its illumination of the day-to-day life of a middle-ranking MP. As Ian Packer has noted, 'the world of the backbencher remains relatively obscure [. . .] This is largely because few of these men left any detailed records.'[83] Well-connected but unambitious, Harmsworth was able to provide a middle-ranker's inside account

[82]David J. Dutton (ed.), *Odyssey of an Edwardian Liberal: The Political Diary of Richard Durning Holt*, The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, Vol. CXXIX (Gloucester, 1989); Ian Packer (ed.), *The Letters of Arnold Stephenson Rowntree to Mary Katherine Rowntree, 1910–1918*, Camden Fifth Series, Vol. 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2002).

[83]Packer, *Letters of Arnold Stephenson Rowntree*, 1.

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of the workings of government and parliament. The diary above all illustrates the *texture* of politics – the ways in which it was connected to social life and civil society – as well, of course, as giving significant insight into the most powerful press dynasties of the age. If Cecil was a 'human Harmsworth', he also left behind him a very human record.

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