

Historical Insights

Focus on Teaching



CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

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Historical Insights: Focus on Teaching
Contemporary Britain

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Introduction

Contemporary Britain is becoming increasingly popular both as a subject for historical research as well as for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. There is a burgeoning literature on the cultural, economic, political and social aspects of Britain in the 20th and 21st centuries, supported by well-respected journals focussing on the period and a growing number of online resources to support teaching and research. Contemporary history, of Britain or elsewhere, forms a major part of the undergraduate curriculum. According to a survey undertaken in 2007, there is no history degree programme in the country that does not include at least an optional module on contemporary history (Chambers, 2008: 3).

Contemporary British history is popular because it offers a fascinating means of understanding the concerns of the present day and of uncovering the reasons for massive social and economic changes wrought since 1900, especially from 1945 onwards. This past is seemingly more accessible than other periods, in terms of the rich variety and sheer amount of sources available. Contemporary British history offers great potential for innovative teaching, learning and assessment techniques, such as students undertaking oral history projects that can be digitally recorded and uploaded onto university virtual learning environments or onto publicly accessible websites. It also offers potential for interdisciplinary work and collaboration with, for example, sociology, politics, journalism and film studies departments. There are also many routes into contemporary British history from outside the academy, such as the inclusion of contemporary history topics within the National Curriculum, activities and exhibitions organised by museums and archives as well as specialist and popular television programming. Thus students are often already familiar with the contemporary history terrain and are comfortable with the thought of studying Britain in the 20th century and beyond.

Frequently asked questions

What IS contemporary British history?

The first problem anyone encounters who is planning or revising teaching on contemporary British history is simply this: when does it begin and end? For the purposes of meeting the needs of a variety of readers, this booklet will treat contemporary British history as 20th and 21st century Britain, beginning in 1900 in the final years of Queen Victoria's reign, and ending in the first decade of the 21st century. Yet the definition of 'contemporary' history is a contested one. Should we think of contemporary history as being contained behind a moving wall, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 years before the present day? Should we think instead of working forwards from a fixed date that acts as a watershed? Both have their merits and drawbacks. While the former provides a neat snapshot of British history, there are real questions of how processes and events within that period are truly exclusive issues of that period. For example, with a module beginning in 1979, to what extent can we deal with Margaret Thatcher without referring back through that decade and earlier? Other historians use the turn of the century or the two world wars in the 20th century as convenient watershed dates from which to begin their teaching. Although this allows for the study of contemporary British history over its *longue durée*, there is the question of the extent to which the inter-war period or the 1950s form a coherent whole with the 1990s or the 2000s. With teaching, the relative importance of these considerations is determined by the prior learning of the students and the structure of the degree programme, not to mention the emphasis of the module.

Is contemporary history too easy?

One common worry is the potential danger of students thinking that they know more than they actually do about the topic, especially if they lived through the period in question, or have parents or older friends with strong views on events in the past. This can be countered by steering the course materials towards encouraging more thorough engagement with the topic, while memories of a particular event can be channelled into more critical directions through seminar activities or related to concepts such as bias and the question of perspective.

Isn't there too much to cover?

The 20th century has an embarrassment of riches as far as primary sources are concerned, since they are readily accessible through libraries, archives and online databases as well as people's homes (I have supplemented my teaching of the Second World War and the 1950s by bringing in my personal copies of my grandparents' ration books and National Insurance record cards, for example). Such sources bring the topic to life for students, who may not otherwise have the opportunity to

examine such items closely. This relatively easy to access everyday documentation is supported by the increasing amount available online such as the archives of major newspapers. Various museums and archives have digitised parts of their collections and the rise of Web 2.0 technology – sites which enable users to post materials and collaborate – has had positive benefits for the history teacher. It is now possible to access a wide range of clips of historic events through sites like YouTube, whilst ITN Source and the BBC Archive pages are also useful.

Interdisciplinarity is also a key characteristic of contemporary British history, as stated in the first editorial of the journal, *Twentieth Century British History*: ‘... no adequate history of British urbanization in the twentieth century can be written which does not take account of the work of a geographer such as David Harvey or a sociologist such as Ray Pahl.’ The great advantage of contemporary history is that it both requires and is enhanced by an engagement with other disciplines, both in terms of method and content. Teachers of contemporary British history should not be afraid to sample the wares of other disciplines as appropriate. Some of the classic sociological studies of the 20th century – such as the *New Survey of London Life and Labour* or Willmott and Young’s *Family and Kinship in East London* – have become invaluable primary sources for historians. Approaches from other disciplines – for example, the application of the techniques of visual sociology to the analysis of films or advertising posters – can greatly enhance the possibilities open to teachers. This booklet will now outline key teaching themes in 20th-century British history. Each section will provide an indicative guide to key topics and questions, followed by a list of readings, and recommended primary sources and websites. All website addresses were correct at the time of writing in May 2010. A list of general texts and websites is provided at the end of the booklet.

Themes in political and economic history

The Liberal Governments, 1906–14

The Liberal Governments are a good starting point for the political history of the 20th century, as well as opening up possibilities for social and economic history. Although the Liberals came to power in a landslide election victory, this would be the final time this party would be in power as a majority. The Liberal Governments also set up a raft of key social legislation, from old age pensions to National Insurance, from school meals to juvenile courts. This subject can be treated as an economic or political history topic, or used as an entry point into social history. Can it be said that the Liberal Governments set up a prototype for the Welfare State? What can anxieties about the lives of the poor and vulnerable tell us about the state of the nation before the First World War? Why did the Liberal Governments support a wide range of social reforms, but refuse to grant the vote to women? The period 1906–14 is also a very good way of exploring political changes within the British nation, such as calls for Irish independence and the power of the trade unions. It also sets up discussion of the political emancipation of the working classes and the evolution of the Labour Party into one of the two parties of government. The topic of British supremacy and decline can also be explored through considering economic competition from Europe and the United States, attitudes towards the British Empire and military struggles with Germany.

Secondary reading

- P. Adelman, *The Decline of the Liberal Party 1910–31*, 2nd edn. (Harlow, 1995).
- C. Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party, 1900–2001* (Basingstoke, 2002).
- D. Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party in the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave, 2004).
- E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: the Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party* (London, 1995).
- J.R. Hay, *The Origins of the Liberal Welfare Reforms 1906–1914* (Basingstoke, 1983).
- K. Laybourn and J. Reynolds, *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour 1890–1918* (London, 1984).
- G.R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration 1886–1929*, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke, 2001).

Web resources

Liberal Democrat History Group: www.liberalhistory.org.uk

The First World War

The First World War can be treated in a number of ways. First, the military history of the war itself can illuminate the impact of industry and technology upon its progress, and the need for officers and rank and file soldiers to adapt to this. Second, the topic can be treated through the paradigm of the management of the British war effort, bringing in questions of the economy and its impact upon the major political parties. Questions of gender and class are popular topics for study. The Suffragettes suspended their campaign on the outbreak of hostilities in order to support the war effort. Women of all backgrounds found themselves working in jobs previously open only to men, or combining work and family life, effectively as single parents. Although this broadened the horizons of many women, it also created tensions with trade unions wishing to protect the interests of their male members. The experience of serving with others from a wide range of backgrounds also had the effect of expanding the world view of men; the experience of war itself also galvanised many towards pacifism. The question of its impact on British society and the economy is an important one to consider. What were the changes and continuities between 1914 and 1918? Did the war generate or accelerate change? How profound was change? The literature of the First World War can be a useful way into experiences of war. The war poets – Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg and others – provide insight into the horror of the conflict, whilst Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* is a superb memoir of her experiences as a VAD nurse. Jay Winter’s work on the commemoration of the war is a good place to begin analysis of its cultural impact. Novels such as Sebastian Faulks’ *Birdsong* and Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* can be used for interdisciplinary work – history as a source for literary fiction.

Secondary reading

- G. J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996).
- P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, revised edition (Oxford, 2000).
- S. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, (Harlow, 2002).
- A. Marwick (ed.), *Total War and Social Change* (Basingstoke, 1988).
- A. Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke, 2006).
- S. Pedersen, ‘Gender, welfare and citizenship in Britain during the Great War’, *American Historical Review* 95 (1990), pp. 983–1006.
- B. Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914–18* (Leamington Spa, 1987).
- J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Basingstoke, 2003).
- J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge, 1998).

Web resources

History in Focus issue on war: www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/War/

Parliamentary Archives, 'Called to Active Service': www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_publications_and_archives/parliamentary_archives/archives___wwI_conscription.cfm

Suffrage and political participation

The period to 1928 saw the introduction of full parliamentary democracy in the United Kingdom. The 1918 Representation of the People Act granted the vote to all men over the age of 21, and all women over the age of 30, subject to property qualifications. The 1918 Act changed the political landscape in terms of who could vote and how the parties interacted with the public. For feminists, the Act heralded a further wave of activism – 'equality feminism', the campaign for women to have the vote on an equal basis to men.

The topic can be opened up chronologically to explore broader questions of citizenship within the United Kingdom. A consideration of how the post-1945 Welfare State introduced citizens' rights and responsibilities can be a useful development of learning around the Representation of the People Act 1918 and the rationale for opening up the vote and thus citizenly responsibilities to all men and women over 28 years old. The lowering of the age of majority in 1969 from 21 to 18 can provoke debate about how citizens, their rights and responsibilities are defined.

Secondary reading

E. Biagini, *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles 1865–1931* (Cambridge, 1996).

J. Garrard, *Democratisation in Britain: Elites, Civil Society and Reform since 1800* (Basingstoke, 2002).

S. Holton and J. Purvis (eds.), *Votes for Women* (London, 1999).

S. Kingsley-Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860–1914* (London, 1987).

M. Pugh, *Electoral Reform in War and Peace 1906–18* (London, 1978).

M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement 1914–1959* (Basingstoke, 1992).

D. Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900–18* (Cambridge, 1990).

Web resources

Parliamentary Archives, 'Women and the Vote': www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_publications_and_archives/parliamentary_archives___the_suffragettes.cfm

The National Archives and Parliamentary Archives, 'Citizenship: A history of people, rights and power in Britain': www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/

The Women's Library: www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/

Inter-war politics

The key themes of politics in the inter-war period centre upon the reasons for the decline of the Liberal Party versus the rise of Labour, and the dominance of the Conservatives. The responses of the political parties to the economic crises of the inter-war period are also important. From 1931, there were three 'national' or coalition governments to tackle the problems of the Depression. A similar model was used during the Second World War. Questions to ask students include the impact of allegiance and non-allegiance to the national government on individual political parties, and how democratic the national governments were in practice. Other important themes include the roles of women and of class in parliamentary politics. Attention should also be given to the rise of fascism within both Europe and the United Kingdom, and the responses to it. Teachers may also like to consider focussing on the evolution of political communication, as politicians learned how to use radio and newsreel to best convey their political messages.

Secondary reading

P. Adelman, *The Decline of the Liberal Party 1910–31*, 2nd edn. (Harlow, 1995).

P. Adelman, *The Rise of the Labour Party, 1880–1945*, 3rd edn. (Harlow, 1996).

S. Ball, *The Conservative Party and British Politics 1902–1951* (Harlow, 1995).

M. Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920–24: the Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971).

P. Graves, *Labour Women: Women in British Working Class Politics 1918–39* (Cambridge, 1994).

R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910–24* (Oxford, 1974).

R. D. Pearce, *Britain: Domestic Politics 1900–39*, 2nd edn. (London, 2000).

J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, vol. 3, in J. Barnes, ed., *A History of the Conservative Party* (Harlow, 1978).

- A. Reid and H. Pelling, *A Short History of the Labour Party*, 12th edn. (Basingstoke, 2005).
- N. Thompson, *The Anti-Appeasers: Conservative Opposition to Appeasement in the 1930s* (Oxford, 1971).
- A. Thorpe, *A History of the British Labour Party*, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke, 2001).
- P. Williamson, *National Crisis and National Government. British Politics, the Economy and Empire 1926–32* (Cambridge, 1992).
- P. Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin. Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge, 1999).
- M. Worley, *Labour Inside the Gate: A History of the British Labour Party between the Wars* (London, 2005).

Web resources

London Metropolitan University and the TUC, 'The Union Makes Us Strong':
www.unionhistory.info

Inter-war economics

This topic, tracing the impact of the First World War on the British economy, is closely related to the one above, although the two can comfortably be taught as separate classes. The first area concerns longer term internal trends within the British economy. Did the war cause or exacerbate the decline of British staple industries, and how apparent was this to contemporaries? British markets had also suffered through the impact of naval blockades and concentration on the war economy – were these successfully recovered or had the British moment gone? What was the role of the trade unions? The second aspect concerns the impact of the terms of the Armistice. Why did Britain face a downturn in 1920–1? When Germany was unable to make reparations payments, how did this impact upon other countries? How did the Wall Street Crash of 1929 impact on the British economy at macro and micro levels? Why did recovery take so long – and what was the role of rearmament within that? The topic can also be handled at micro level. The impact of the Depression was uneven. The south-east and parts of the midlands enjoyed a boom whilst certain areas suffered intense deprivation. What were the social impacts of unemployment and underemployment over extended periods of time?

Secondary reading

- P. Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain between the Wars* (London, 1980).
- N. Crafts, 'Long-term unemployment in Britain in the 1930s', *Economic History Review*, 40 (1987) 3, pp. 418–32.

- S. Glynn and A. Booth, 'Unemployment in interwar Britain: a case for re-learning the lessons of the 1930s?', *Economic History Review* 41 (1988) 2, pp. 236–58.
- S. Glynn and A. Booth, *Modern Britain: An economic and social history* (London, 1996).
- M. Morris, *The General Strike* (Harmondsworth, 1976).
- R. Pearce, *Britain: Industrial Relations and the Economy 1900–39* (London, 1994).
- J. Stevenson and C. Cook, *The Slump: Society and Politics During the Depression* (London, 1977).
- C. Webster, 'Healthy or hungry thirties?', *History Workshop Journal* 13 (1982), pp. 110–29.
- J.M. Winter, 'Infant mortality, maternal mortality and public health in Britain in the 1930s', *Journal of European Economic History* 8 (1979) 2, pp. 439–62.
- C. Wrigley, 'Labour and the Trade Unions in Great Britain, 1880–1939', in A. Digby and C. Feinstein (eds.), *New Directions in Economic and Social History*, Vol. 2 (London, 1992).

Web resources

The National Archives, 'The Cabinet Papers 1915–1978': www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/alevelstudies/1930-depression.htm

The National Archives, 'The General Strike': www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/alevelstudies/the-general-strike.htm?WT.ac=The%20General%20Strike/

Second World War

As with the First World War, exploration of the Second World War offers much opportunity for different approaches. To what extent did this war change British society, in terms of people's experiences of evacuation, conscription and the Home Front? Did it break down social barriers, or reinforce prejudices? How were gender relations shaped by the experiences of the war? What lessons did government learn, and how were these applied at the time and in the longer term? How did the experience of war set the scene for post-war reconstruction? How was the economy managed during this time? How did British relations with the rest of the world change during the course of the war and in its immediate aftermath?

Secondary reading

- P. Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (London, 1975).
- S. Benton, 'Women, war and citizenship', *History Workshop Journal* 58 (2004), pp. 326–334.
- B. Brivati and H. Jones (eds.), *What Difference Did the War Make?* (Leicester, 1993).
- S. Brooke, *Labour's War: The Labour Party During the Second World War* (Oxford, 1992).
- A. Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1991).
- A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939–45* (London, 1969).
- J. Harris, 'War and social history: Britain and the Home Front during the Second World War', *Contemporary European History* 1 (1992) 1, pp. 17–35.
- T. Harrison, *Living Through the Blitz* (London, 1976).
- A. Marwick, (ed.) *Total War and Social Change* (Basingstoke, 1988).
- L. Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity 1939–91* (London, 1998).
- R. Pope, *War and Society in Britain 1899–1948* (Harlow, 1991).
- S. Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939–45* (Oxford, 2003).
- H. Smith, *Britain in the Second World War: A Social History* (Manchester, 1996).
- P. Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War* (1984).

Web resources

- Imperial War Museum links to Learning Resources: www.iwm.org.uk/server/show/nav.24197/
- Mass-Observation Online: some institutions have a subscription to the online archive, check with your librarian: www.massobs.org.uk

Labour Governments, 1945–51

The Labour Party came to power in a landslide election in 1945, trouncing Winston Churchill. Building on the proposals within the Beveridge Report, they promised the British public a bright new future. Issues to consider include how the Labour Governments managed the establishment of the Welfare State, the National Health Service and implementing their nationalisation programme. How did they cope with the economic cost of the Second World War and a changing international political scene? How did ordinary Britons react to Stafford Cripps's 'austerity' policy? How was demobilisation managed, at the same time as National Service for young men continued? What was the cost of maintaining the Empire? How did relationships with the United States and Europe change as the Cold War developed?

Secondary reading

- P. Addison, *Now the War is Over: A Social History of Britain 1945–51* (London, 1995).
- S. Fielding, 'What did "the people" want? The meaning of the 1945 General Election', *Historical Journal* 35 (1992) 3, pp. 623–39.
- S. Fielding, P. Thompson and N. Tiratsoo, *'England Arise!' the Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain* (Manchester, 1995).
- M.J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain and the Reconstruction of Western Europe 1947–1952* (Cambridge, 1987).
- K. Jefferys, *The Attlee Governments 1945–1951* (London, 1992).
- R.J. Moore, *Escape from Empire: the Attlee Government and the Indian Problem* (Oxford, 1983).
- K. Morgan, *Labour in Power 1945–51* (Oxford, 1984).
- R.D. Pearce, *Attlee's Labour Governments 1945–51* (London, 2002).
- L. Scott, *Conscription and the Attlee Governments: the politics and policy of national service, 1945–51* (Oxford, 1993).
- A. Sked and C. Cook, *Post-war Britain: A Political History* (Harmondsworth, 1990).
- J. Tomlinson 'The Attlee government and the balance of payments 1945–1951', *Twentieth Century British History* 2 (1991), pp. 47–66.
- I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, controls and consumption 1935–55* (Oxford, 2000).

Consensus: economics and politics to 1975

The question of consensus centres upon the extent to which the two major political parties – Labour and the Conservatives – were in agreement over the importance of the Welfare State. Was the maintenance of the Welfare State as important to both parties? How did economic performance impact upon governmental and public attitudes to the provision of welfare? How successful were Keynesian economics in supporting the Welfare State?

Secondary reading

- P. Addison, 'Consensus revisited', *Twentieth Century British History* 4 (1993), pp. 91–4
- C. Barnett, *The Audit of War* (Basingstoke, 1986).
- V. Bogdanor and R. Skidelsky (eds.), *The Age of Affluence 1951–1964* (London, 1970).
- F. Cairncross and A. Cairncross, *The Legacy of the Golden Age: the 1960s and their Economic Consequences* (London, 1992).
- Contemporary British History* – 21 (3) 2007 special issue on the 1964 General Election.
- N. Crafts, *Britain's Relative Economic Decline 1870–1995* (London, 2002).
- J.C.R. Dow, *The Management of the British Economy 1945–60* (Cambridge, 1965).
- D. Dutton, *British Politics Since 1945: The Rise and Fall of Consensus* 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1997).
- R. Eatwell, *The 1945–1951 Labour Governments* (London, 1979).
- D. Edgerton, 'Barnett's audit of war: an audit', *Contemporary Record* 4 (1990) 2, pp. 7–9.
- D. Edgerton, *Science, Technology and the British Industrial 'Decline' 1870–1970* (Cambridge, 1996).
- D. Edgerton, *Welfare State: Britain 1920–1970* (Cambridge, 2005).
- H. Jones and M. Kandiah (eds.), *The Myth of Consensus: New Views on British History 1945–64* (Basingstoke, 1996).
- D. Kavanagh and P. Morris, *Consensus Politics from Attlee to Thatcher* (Oxford, 1989).
- D. Kavanagh, 'The postwar consensus', *Twentieth Century British History* 3 (1992), pp. 175–90.
- R. Lowe, *The British Welfare State since 1945*, 2nd edn. (Basingstoke, 2005).
- R. Lowe, 'The Second World War, consensus and the foundation of the welfare state', *Twentieth Century British History* 1 (1990), pp. 152–82.

- H. Pemberton, 'A taxing task: combating Britain's relative decline in the 1960s', *Twentieth Century British History* 12 (2001), pp. 354–74.
- J. Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill and Eden 1940–1957* (London, 1995).
- A. Ringe, N. Rollings and R. Middleton (eds.), *Economic Policy Under the Conservatives: A Guide to Documents in the National Archives* (London, 2004).
- N. Rollings, 'Poor Mr Butskell: a short life, wrecked by schizophrenia', *Twentieth Century British History* 5 (1994), pp. 183–205.
- C. Webster, 'Conflict and consensus: explaining the British health service', *Twentieth Century British History* 1 (1990), pp. 115–51.
- N. Woodward, *The Management of the British Economy, 1945–2001* (Manchester, 2004).

Economics and politics in the 1970s

The economic crises of the 1970s – the OPEC crisis, rising inflation and trade union unrest – had a major impact on the two main political parties. Both tried to deal with these issues, as well as growing unrest in Northern Ireland. The economic crisis threw the economic underpinnings of the Welfare State and the 'social contract' between the government and the trade unions into the air. Inflation rose dramatically, and James Callaghan's Labour Government of 1976–9 fought unsuccessfully to keep it in check. A cap on public sector pay rises resulted in major strikes – most notoriously by refuse collectors – causing the 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978–9. This is seen as leading to Margaret Thatcher's landslide election victory in 1979. Other important themes include the relationship of the Labour Party to the trade unions, as well as the reconfiguration of the Conservative Party following the Selsdon Park Hotel conference of 1970. The Selsdon Group – formed in 1973 – supported free market economics, and was a major influence on and within Thatcherite policies.

Secondary reading

- M. Artis and D. Cobham, *Labour's Economic Policies 1974–9* (Manchester, 1996).
- S. Ball and A. Seldon, *The Heath Government, 1970–1974: A Reappraisal* (London, 1996).
- A. Booth, *The British Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001).
- K. Burk and A. Cairncross, *Goodbye Great Britain: the 1976 IMF Crisis* (New Haven, 1992).
- A. Britton, *The Trade Cycle in Britain 1958–1982* (Cambridge, 1986).
- A. Britton, *Macroeconomic Policy in Britain 1974–1987* (Cambridge, 1991).
- P. Browning, *The Treasury and Economic Policy 1964–1985* (London, 1986).

- N. Crafts, *Britain's Relative Economic Decline 1870–1995* (London, 2002).
- R. Floud, *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain, Vol.3 Structural Change and Growth* (Cambridge, 2003).
- A. Taylor, *The Trade Unions and the Labour Party* (London, 1987).
- J. Tomlinson, 'Tale of a death exaggerated: how Keynesian politics survived the 1970s', *Contemporary British History*, 27 (2007), pp. 405–27.
- M. Wickham-Jones, 'Right turn: a revisionist account of the 1975 Conservative party leadership election', *Twentieth Century British History* 8 (1997), pp. 74–89.
- N. Woodward, *The Management of the British Economy, 1945–2001* (Manchester, 2004).

Margaret Thatcher and British politics in the 1980s

What was the electoral appeal of Margaret Thatcher; and what was her contribution to British politics? Did she dismantle the post-war consensus – or set the scene for New Labour? Topics for consideration include: the Falklands Crisis; the Brighton Bomb; the handling of Northern Ireland; the Miners' Strike; the handling of the economy; the Poll Tax riots; and relations with Europe. Reconfigurations on the political left should also be considered – the split of the SDP from Labour and the political alliances of the Liberals. Responses to Thatcherism – such as *Spitting Image* – open up potential discussions of the role of satire within the mass media.

Secondary reading

- S. Ball, *The Conservative Party since 1945* (Manchester, 1998).
- B. Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: why do women vote Tory?* (London, 1987).
- R.A. Church, *The Rise and Decline of the British Motor Industry* (Cambridge, 1995).
- E.J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, 2nd edn. (London, 2002).
- A. Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: the Politics of Thatcherism* (Basingstoke, 1988).
- S. Hall and M. Jacques, *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London, 1983).
- A. Seldon and D. Collings, *Britain Under Thatcher* (London, 1999).
- A. Taylor, *The Trade Unions and the Labour Party* (London, 1987).
- N. Woodward, *The Management of the British Economy* (Manchester, 2004).
- H. Young, *The Iron Lady: A Biography* (London, 1989).

Politics in the 1990s

The political and economic history of the 1990s has not as yet been substantially covered within the discipline of history, although it is worth consulting the expansive literature on the period in political science and economics. However, new editions of books on contemporary Britain, expanded to include this period, emerge on a regular basis. The principal topics for British political and economic history in the 1990s centre upon the Conservative leadership struggles, as well as the question of economic and monetary involvement with Europe. The reconfiguration of Labour into New Labour, and their subsequent landslide victory in 1997 also require consideration. What exactly was 'new' about New Labour? Tony Blair and Gordon Brown ushered in a new age of the Labour Party, breaking away from many of its traditions, such as Clause IV. Why did Blair and Brown break from Labour traditions? Were they closer to the Conservatives than their 'Old' Labour counterparts? What was the impact on New Labour upon the political landscape? What were the processes behind devolution in Scotland and Ireland?

Secondary reading

- B. Brivati and T. Bale, *New Labour in Power: Precedents and Prospects* (London, 1997).
- T. Heppell, 'A crisis of legitimacy: the Conservative party leadership of John Major', *Contemporary British History* 21 (2007), pp. 471–90.
- S. Hogg, *Too close to call: power and politics, John Major in No. 10* (London, 1995).
- D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon, *The Blair Effect 2001–5* (Cambridge, 2005).
- D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon, *The Major Effect* (Basingstoke, 1994).
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- K.O. Morgan, *Britain Since 1945: the People's Peace* 3rd edn. (Oxford, 2001).

Ireland, Scotland and Wales

The Home Rule question had gained pace at the end of the 19th century, leading to vehement calls for Irish independence from the United Kingdom at the start of the 20th. Irish independence was achieved by 1922, although the question of Ulster – the seven counties of Northern Ireland which remained in the Union – was not resolved. Tensions between the Catholic majority and dominant Protestant minority led to the outbreak of the Troubles in the late 1960s. Successive British governments tried and failed to reach a peaceful agreement, with a lasting peace brokered finally in the 1990s. The Scottish and Welsh similarly developed nationalist movements, with varying degrees of success. The nationalist movements achieved devolution in Scotland and partial devolution in Wales in the late 1990s. The political history of the Celtic nations can also be studied in terms of relationships with England and English national identity; this in turn can be linked with questions of Empire and imperial identities.

Secondary reading

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Ireland

P. Bew, *The Politics of Enmity, 1789–2006* (Oxford, 2007).

D.G. Boyce, 'A place apart?: Ulster, Britain and devolution, 1886–1939', in D. Tanner *et al.* (eds.), *Debating nationhood and governance in Britain, 1885–1945: perspectives from the 'four nations'* (Manchester, 2006).

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C. O'Donnell, 'Pan-nationalism: explaining the Irish government's role in the Northern Ireland peace 1992–98', *Contemporary British History* 21 (2007), pp. 223–45.

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G.A. Williams, *When Was Wales? A History of the Welsh* (London, 1985).

The end of Empire?

Although the British Empire had been increasingly difficult to manage by the inter-war period, imperial sentiment still had a powerful role in British society. The so-called White Dominions were granted greater freedoms before the Second World War, whilst the Labour Party commenced what would become a full programme of decolonisation with the granting of Indian independence in 1947. Embarrassing episodes such as the Suez Crisis and the growing tensions of the Cold War demonstrated that Britain was no longer the major colonial power it had been. Along with the costs of policing the Empire, there were increasing political and philosophical reasons to support independence. Yet the processes of independence were complex and sometimes bloody. The end of the Empire and the development of multicultural Britain also caused tensions in race relations from the 1950s onwards.

Secondary reading

L. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (London, 2002).

P. Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire: An Introduction* (London, 1993).

P. Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London, 2004).

P. Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York, 2005).

P. Gilroy, *Small Acts* (London, 1993).

D. Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger: the rise and fall of the British Raj 1600–1947* (Oxford, 2004).

T.O. Lloyd, *The British Empire 1558–1983* (Oxford, 1984).

T. Rooth, 'Economic tensions and conflict in the Commonwealth, 1945–1951', *Twentieth Century British History* 13 (2002), pp. 121–43.

A. Thompson, *Imperial Britain: The Empire in British Politics 1880–1932* (Harlow, 2000).

J. Tomlinson, 'The decline of the Empire and the economic decline of Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 14 (2003), pp. 201–21.

W. Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939–1965* (Oxford, 2007).

Web resources

History in Focus issue on Empire: www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Empire/

Europe

At the same time that Britain relinquished some of its imperial ambitions, it began to deal with the question of Europe. From 1914 onwards, Britain was forced to engage with the destinies of its European neighbours. How did this – and the onset of the Cold War – change British policies and perspectives? Why did economic relations with Europe become increasingly attractive in the 1950s, and how did this impact on relations with the British Empire? Why was there opposition to British entry to the European Economic Community?

Secondary reading

- B. Brivati and H. Jones (eds.), *From Reconstruction to Integration: Britain and Europe since 1945* (Leicester, 1993).
- R. Denman, *Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1996).
- D. Gowland and H. Turner, *Reluctant Europeans* (Harlow, 2000).
- S. Greenwood, *Britain and European Co-Operation Since 1945* (Oxford, 1992).
- V. Preston and R. Broad, *Moored to the Continent? Britain and European Integration* (London, 2000).
- H. Young, *This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair* (London, 1998).
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Themes in social and cultural history

Class

How did class in Britain change in the course of the 20th century? What were the impacts of the Welfare State, the National Health Service, comprehensive education and the changing industrial base of the British economy on people's identification of their class? Was there a shift in power relations between the classes? Are we all 'middle class' now, as John Prescott stated? Has class ceased to be an important factor in British social relations – and if so, when did this happen? How does class relate to entry into higher education and the professions, to questions of social inclusion and exclusion?

Secondary reading

- B. Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working Class Men in Britain 1850–1945* (Manchester, 2005).
- J. Benson, *The Working Class in Britain 1850–1939*, rev. edn. (London, 2003).
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- J. Goldthorpe, C. Llewellyn and C. Payne, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1987).
- S. Gunn and R. Bell, *The Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl* (London, 2003).
- R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998).
- J. Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, 2001).
- W.D. Rubinstein, *Wealth and Inequality in Britain* (London, 1986).
- M. Savage and A. Miles, *The Remaking of the British Working Class 1840–1940* (London, 1994).

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G. Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius* (1941).

J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (1934).

A. Ross, *Noblesse Oblige: An enquiry into the identifiable characteristics of the English aristocracy* (London, 1956).

M. Young and P. Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (1957).

Gender

One of the major thematic questions in 20th-century British history is the changing nature of relations between the sexes. Women gained a range of social, political and economic freedoms in the course of the century, although the rate of achieving equal treatment to men has been slower. How did public changes impact upon private life? How did ideas about love, courtship and sexuality change in the 20th century? How did this influence life course patterns, such as rates of marriage or cohabitation? What were the consequences of the 'sexual revolution'? As the status of women has changed, has that of men also altered? How has discussion of the issues around sexualities transformed our understanding of gender and identities?

Secondary reading

S. Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and other essays in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Feminist History* (London, 1994).

M. Collins, *Modern Love* (London, 2003).

H. Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex and Contraception 1800–1975* (2005).

C. Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650–1950* (London, 1982).

J. Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* (Oxford, 2004).

L.A. Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1880* (London, 2000).

M. Houlbrook and H. Cocks, *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke, 2005).

A. Oakley, *The Ann Oakley Reader: Gender, Women and Social Science* (Bristol, 2005).

S. Rowbotham, *Hidden From History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight to End It* (London, 1973).

P. Summerfield, 'Women, War and Social Change: Women in Britain in World War II', in A. Marwick (ed.), *Total War and Social Change* (Basingstoke, 1988).

J. Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London, 1981).

I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, (ed.), *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2001).

Race and ethnicity

Although the British Isles have welcomed many waves of migrants over the millennia, the 20th century saw great anxieties emerge over immigration and its impact on British society, especially in the post-1945 period. Political debates around immigration and multiculturalism have been well covered, but there is also an increasing body of literature exploring the experience of minority ethnic Britons. This topic is particularly rich for exploration through sources provided by oral history and reminiscence projects.

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J. Walvin, *Passage to Britain: Immigration in British History and Politics* (Harmondsworth, 1984).

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House of Commons Parliamentary Papers:

Scarman Report: *The Brixton Disorders 10–12 April 1981*, Cmnd 8427 (1982).

Swann Report: *Education for All: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds*, Cmnd 9453 (1985).

Dub poetry: Linton Kwesi Johnson, 'Inglan is a Bitch', see www.lintonkwesijohnson.com

Web resources

Black and Ethnic Minority Experience: www.be-me.org

Black History Month: www.black-history-month.co.uk

Butetown History and Arts Centre: www.bhac.org

Connections: Hidden British Histories: www.connections-exhibition.org

History in Focus issue on migration: www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Migration/

Moving Here: 200 Years of Migration in England: www.movinghere.org.uk

Runnymede Trust: www.runnymedetrust.org

Consumption and leisure

How did rising levels of affluence and changes in working life alter British leisure patterns in the inter-war and post-war periods? How did these intersect with class, gender, race and lifestage? How does consumption relate to identity? How do changing patterns of consumption relate to the changing fabric of family life and associational cultures? How have changing methods in organising businesses impacted on personal and family life – for example, what are the impacts of supermarkets, shopping malls and online shopping?

Secondary reading

S. Barton, *Working-Class Holidays and Popular Tourism 1840–1970* (Manchester, 2005).

B. Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain 1850–1945* (Manchester, 2005).

A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900–1939* (Milton Keynes, 1992).

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- M. Hilton, *Consumerism in the Twentieth Century: The Search for an Historical Movement* (Cambridge, 2003).
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- R. McKibbin, 'Class, politics, money: British sport since the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History* 13 (2002), pp. 191–200.
- S. O'Connell and C. Reid, 'Working-class consumer credit in the UK, 1925–60: the role of the check trader', *Economic History Review* 58 (2005), pp. 378–405.
- K. Soper and F. Trentmann (eds.), *Citizenship and Consumption* (Basingstoke, 2008).
- B. Supple (ed.), *Essays in British Business History* (Oxford, 1977).
- J.K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2000).

Web resources

Science Museum, 'Everyday things': www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/onlinestuff/subjects/everyday_things.aspx

Working lives and education

In 1900, most Britons could expect to complete their education between the ages of 12 and 14 and to enter immediately into their working lives. By 2000, secondary education to the age of 16 was the norm, with increasing numbers continuing into higher education. Why did British education expand in the 20th century? What were its social impacts? How did it relate to economic requirements? How did it change gender expectations? Did it open up the possibility of a meritocratic society? What were the political implications of such policies as comprehensivisation and selection? How did the inclusion of parent power and choice in Thatcherite education policy reflect or presage changes in attitudes to other areas of the Welfare State? Why did Britain retain a two-tier system of private and public education? How did educational policies differ across the Four Nations? How did working lives change in the course of the 20th century? What were the impacts of changing legislation with regard to health and safety, holidays and equality of opportunity? How did women and men experience entry to the workplace and professions in gendered ways? How did technology impact upon the experience of working?

Secondary resources

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- C. Dyhouse, *Students: a Gendered History* (London, 2005).
- J. Goldthorpe et al, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge, 1968).
- H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London, 2002).
- M. Savage, 'Trade unionism, sex segregation and the state: women's employment in "new industries" in inter-war Britain', *Social History* 13 (2) (1988), pp. 209–30.
- D. Smith-Wilson, 'A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain', *Twentieth Century British History* 17 (2006), pp. 206–29.
- G. Sutherland, 'Education' in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950: Volume 3, Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990).
- S. Todd, 'Poverty and aspiration: young women's entry to employment in inter-war England', *Twentieth Century British History* 15 (2004), pp. 119–42.
- S. Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England, 1918–1950* (Oxford, 2005).
- A. Witz, *Professions and Patriarchy* (London, 1995).
- C. Wrigley, *British Trade Unions Since 1933* (Cambridge, 1992).
- M. Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy 1870–2033* (Harmondsworth, 1961).

Web resources

Working Lives Research Centre: www.workinglives.org

The media, communication and entertainment

There was what can be described as a 'communications revolution' in British society during the 20th century. By the inter-war period, radio and cinema had become extremely popular, while television took off from the 1950s. Postal and telegraphic communications were supplemented by telephones, faxes and emails, further connecting the globe. The relationship between the media and the establishment is an important one to consider. How and why did the press barons have such an important role in political debates from the inter-war period onwards? What is the relationship between the BBC and the government? What is the role of the media – to entertain or to educate? What challenges do new media pose to British society?

Secondary reading

- A. Aldgate, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present* (London, 1999).
- C. Barr, *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London, 1986).
- A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2004).
- J. Curran and M. Gurevitch, *Mass Media and Society* (London, 2005).
- J. Curran and J. Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press, Broadcasting and New Media in Britain* (London, 2003).
- S. Hanson, *From Silent Screen to Multi-Screen: A History of Cinema Exhibition in Britain Since 1896* (Manchester, 2007).
- D. Hendy, 'Bad language and BBC Radio Four in the 1960s and 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History* 17 (2006), pp. 74–102.

Web resources

BBC Archives: www.bbc.co.uk/archives

British Library, 'Concise History of British newspapers in the Twentieth Century':
www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/news/concisehistbritnews/britnews20th/

Guardian Century: <http://century.guardian.co.uk>

ITN Source: www.itnsource.com

Science Museum, 'Communications and Computing': www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/onlinestuff/subjects/communications_and_computing.aspx

See also institutional subscriptions to newspaper digital archives.

Religion

A major subject for debate is the apparent secularisation of the nation after the Second World War, particularly the decline in Church of England attendance. The rise of other faith groups during this period is also of interest. This topic intersects with questions of race, ethnicity and migration, along with the provision of welfare, as faith groups are traditional providers of welfare. In the case of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the question also ties in with devolution, independence and civil rights.

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- S. Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1995).
- H. McLeod, *Religion and the People of Western Europe 1789–1989* (Oxford, 1997).
- G. Parsons, *The Growth of Religious Diversity, Britain from 1945. Volume 1: Traditions* (London, 1993).
- G. Parsons, *The Growth of Religious Diversity, Britain from 1945. Volume 2: Issues* (London, 1994).
- K. Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London, 1993).
- K. Robbins, *England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales: the Christian Church 1900–2000* (Oxford, 2008).

Crime

Has Britain become a more violent place in the course of the 20th century? How was policing changed, and what does this say about ideas of community and social relations? What was the impact of war and rising levels of affluence upon crime? Why did separate courts for children and young people emerge – and why do young people remain a problem? What are the connections, if any, between youth cultures and crime? How does place intersect with crime and the fear of crime? Why was it such a hot political issue by the 1990s for both parties?

Secondary reading

- S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and the Rockers* (St. Albans, 1973).
- P. Cox, *Gender, Justice and Welfare: Bad Girls in Britain, 1900–1950* (Basingstoke, 2003).
- S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Basingstoke, 1978).
- S. Hall and T. Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals* (Birmingham, 1976).
- D. Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (London, 1979).
- S. Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889–1939* (Oxford, 1995).
- G. Pearson, *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears* (London, 1983).
- E. Smithies, *Crime in Wartime: A Social History of Crime in World War 2* (London, 1982).
- J. White, *The Worst Street in North London: Campbell Bunk, Islington between the Wars* (London, 1986).

Welfare

The 20th century witnessed dramatic changes in the organisation of provision for the needy. Although government involvement in welfare increased through poor law and the extension of the powers of local government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the largest proportion of support came from charities and mutual aid associations. Exposés of urban poverty from the 1860s and the social research of Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree encouraged demands for reform, which were in turn given additional credence by the outrage of the poor physical state of conscripts to the Boer Wars. The Liberal Governments introduced a series of reforms, including pensions and compulsory membership of unemployment and sickness insurance schemes, before the First World War. Jane Lewis described this system of local government, charitable and mutual provision as the mixed economy of welfare. The unemployment system came under intense pressure during the depressions of the 1930s, leading to further calls for greater state intervention at a national level. The Beveridge Report of 1942 is seen as providing a blueprint for the post-war Welfare State, as William Beveridge's proposals were taken and adapted by the Labour Party for their 1945 election campaign. The post-war Labour Governments established a 'cradle to grave' welfare scheme and the National Health Service. But did the Welfare State deliver all that it promised to? Did it create new problems around concepts of rights and responsibilities? Why was poverty 'rediscovered' in 1965? Why did poverty become repackaged as 'social exclusion' by New Labour?

Secondary reading

- B. Abel-Smith and P. Townsend, *The Poor and the Poorest: A New Analysis of the Ministry of Labour's Family Expenditure Surveys of 1953–4 and 1960* (London, 1965).
- K. Bradley, *Poverty, Philanthropy and the State: Charities and the Working Classes in London 1918–79* (Manchester, 2009).
- H. Fawcett and R. Lowe (eds.), *Welfare Policy in Britain: The Road from 1945* (Basingstoke, 1999).
- G. Finlayson, *Citizen, State and Social Welfare in Britain 1830–1990* (Oxford, 1994).
- D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke, 2003).
- B. Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800–1945* (Basingstoke, 2004).
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R. Lowe, *The Welfare State in Britain since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2005).

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Web resources

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The National Archives, 'The Welfare State': www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/alevelstudies/welfare-state.htm?WT.ac=The%20Welfare%20State/

The National Archives, 'The Cabinet Papers 1915–1978: the National Health Service': www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/alevelstudies/nhs.htm?WT.ac=The%20National%20Health%20Service/

Primary sources

Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services, London: HMSO, 1942.

General reference guides

Secondary works

- B. Brivati, J. Buxton and A. Seldon, *The Contemporary History Handbook* (Manchester, 1996).
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- W. Simpson, *Twentieth Century British History: A Teaching Resource Book* (London, 2005).

Key journals

Twentieth Century British History

Contemporary British History

Web resources

BBC Archive: television and radio clips from the BBC Archives: www.bbc.co.uk/archive/

British Film Institute Online, Screenonline: excellent site linking films to themes in British history: www.screenonline.org.uk/history/history_culture.html

British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent: searchable online archive of cartoons – ideal for both political and social history teaching alike: www.cartoons.ac.uk

Centre for Contemporary British History, Institute of Historical Research, University of London. The CCBH was founded in 1986 to promote the study of the recent past: www.ccbh.ac.uk

Culture 24: portal for access to collections of museums, galleries, libraries and archives: www.culture24.org.uk/home/

History and Policy: demonstrates the relevance of history to contemporary policy-making. It has a searchable archive of papers on a variety of historical topics: www.historyandpolicy.org

ITN Source: clips from the footage libraries of Reuters, ITN, ITV, British Pathé, Fox News, Movietone and others: www.itnsource.com

The National Archives, Cabinet Papers 1915–1978: a JISC-funded project aimed at A-level students and teachers. Provides bite-size definitions of major events as well as links to primary sources and further reading: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/browse-by-theme.htm

Additional references

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