

LEWIS HARCOURT'S POLITICAL PAPERS A NEW SOURCE FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY

In 2008, the Treasury allocated the Harcourt family papers to the Bodleian Library under the Acceptance in Lieu scheme. The main bulk of this archive had been on deposit and available to researchers since the 1970s, with further groups of papers being deposited in the 1980s.¹ This material included most of the papers of the Liberal MP and cabinet minister, Lewis 'Loulou' Vernon Harcourt, 1st Viscount Harcourt (1863–1922). **Mike Webb** reviews the contents of Harcourt's papers to analyse their value as a new source for the history of the Liberal Party and of the First World War.



POLITICAL JOURNAL 1914–16 PARTY AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

AMONG HIS PAPERS were his journals to 1895, and his official and private correspondence. In 2008 the Bodleian received further tranches of papers that had been retained by the family, comprising largely the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century correspondence of the Harcourt family, and also further papers of Lewis Harcourt.² Among these additional papers of Lewis Harcourt was his political journal for the years 1905–17 which gives us a new insight into cabinet politics during his time as first commissioner of works, 1907–10, and 1915–16, and as colonial secretary, 1910–15, before he lost his cabinet position with the fall of Asquith in December 1916. This article looks at the journal as a source for Liberal and coalition politics in the first half of the First World War, 1914–16.

Lewis Harcourt was a curious figure. He came into politics as his better-known father's close and constant companion, acting as his private secretary in the late Victorian period when Sir William was home secretary and then chancellor of the exchequer. He only occasionally makes an appearance in the published edition of the diary of Charles Hobhouse.³ Hobhouse gives two brief assessments of cabinet members in August 1912 and again in March 1915. In August 1912 he said of Harcourt:

Harcourt has many attractive qualities: charming manners

when he likes, a temper under good control, a hard worker, but no-one trusts him, and everyone thinks that language is only employed by him to conceal his thought.

In March 1915 he describes Harcourt as:

subtle, secretive, adroit, and not very reliable or *au fond* courageous, does not interfere often in discussion, but is fond of conversing with the P.M. in undertones; a hard worker and a good office chief.

Something of a cloud hung over his personal life. There is evidence that he was a sexual predator towards both sexes, though there is nothing reflecting this in his own papers. It seems that his death in 1922 at the age of fifty-nine was quite likely to have been suicide following accusations of sexual advances towards Edward James, an Eton schoolboy.⁴

The existence of Harcourt's journals is hinted at in the *Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers*,⁵ but the authors were told that a diary of 1905–15 had been lost since the 1970s. An obituary in the *Daily Sketch* relates a story that Harcourt admitted keeping a secret diary, and that it was so full that it would probably be burned by the public hangman.

Before looking at the substance of the journals, it is worth considering their nature. These are truly first-hand accounts of

cabinet meetings, and the absence of an official diary of cabinet meetings (until one was introduced by Lloyd George in December 1916) makes them all the more important as a source. They cover the whole of Harcourt's period in the cabinet, 1907–16, and they were derived from notes taken at cabinet meetings.

As already mentioned, these journals did not come to the Bodleian with the bulk of Lewis Harcourt's papers in the 1970s and 1980s; though had we but known it, we did have a few scraps of the diary for 1911 and 1912 in the form of notes on Foreign Office telegrams. Lewis Harcourt's papers include fairly comprehensive sets of printed Foreign Office telegrams, though as the Bodleian catalogue notes, a great many of these are 'wanting'. We now know the reason for their disappearance from the sequence. At the head of many of the 1914 and 1915 pages of the journal, Harcourt has written 'copied literally from F.O. Telegrams'; and as well as the journal, the 2008 accession included many other loose political papers, one carton containing a series of the original FO telegrams with Harcourt's journal scribbled in pencil in the margins and on the reverse of the printed pages. These telegrams were the ones missing from the sequence already in the library.

Harcourt's journal turned out to be more than just a private record of cabinet meetings. Preserved among its pages are numerous items

Lewis ('Loulou') Harcourt, 1st Viscount Harcourt (1863–1922) in 1911

of correspondence, notes passed at meetings and even the odd sketch. Among these is this letter from H. H. Asquith dated 5 October 1916:

It has been represented to me by some of my colleagues that you are in the habit of taking notes of what goes on at the Cabinet.

As I have more than once pointed out in the past, this is a violation of our unwritten law, under which only the Prime Minister is entitled to take & keep any record of Cabinet proceedings.

Yours always
HHA

This of course explains why Harcourt wrote up the full journal after cabinet meetings, but he must still have kept fairly full notes in order to do this. This letter comes more than two years after a warning Harcourt noted in his diary during a cabinet meeting in July 1914:

Winston at this point remonstrated with me for taking notes of Cabinet proceedings, so I desisted – the following were made from memory later.

As Patrick Jackson has written in the *Dictionary of National Biography*,⁶ Harcourt was quite close to Asquith: not only were they neighbours at the cabinet table, but also on the Thames where the Harcourt seat at Nuneham Courtenay was across the river from Asquith's home, 'The Wharf' at Sutton Courtenay. They shared many social interests, and Asquith and his wife often crossed the Thames to visit the Harcourts. They saw eye-to-eye on several of the major issues of the day. By contrast, Harcourt clearly distrusted both Lloyd George and Churchill. The cabinet journal is full of negative remarks and stories at the expense of both. There are two cartoons by Jack Pease, the education secretary, among the pages of the journal, mocking Lloyd George and Churchill, which were presumably passed round the table like a secret joke in the classroom. Harcourt carefully preserved an exasperated note in the Asquith's hand dated March 1915:

I shall some day keep a Cabinet timetable. I roughly estimate

that about one-half of the whole is taken up by one person.

Harcourt has added the initials 'WSC' in case posterity should be in any doubt about who was meant.

Harcourt's political journals cover the period more or less continuously from 1906 to 1917. I have not read through the entire journal, which runs to twenty-four boxes;⁷ I have, however, made a more detailed study of the 1914–16 section in preparing the Bodleian Library's exhibition, *The Great War: Personal Stories from Downing Street to the Trenches, 1914–1916*, which ran from June to November 2014, and I published several extracts from the diaries in the accompanying book.⁸ An idea of their value as a source for the politics of the era can be gained by focusing on a few episodes recorded by Harcourt in the period 1914–16.

In July 1914 Harcourt was one of a group of cabinet ministers who argued the case for Britain's neutrality in the European war. In his own account he ascribes to himself a leading role in galvanising a 'Peace Party'. On the 26 of July, Harcourt records that he motored over from Nuneham to Sutton Courtenay to see Asquith:

We talked about the probable Austro-Servian War ... and I told him that under no circumstances could I be a party to *our* participation in a European War.

I warned him that he ought to order Churchill to move *no ship anywhere* without instructions from the Cabinet. I have a profound distrust of Winston's judgment & loyalty & I believe that if the German fleet moved out into the Channel (agst. France – not us) he would be capable of launching our fleet at them without reference to the Cabinet.

The P.M. pooh poohed the idea – but I think he is wrong not to take this precaution.

At the next day's cabinet meeting we find Harcourt determined to resist the slide to war, but we also learn that this position is not unconditional. The Germans attempted to gain British neutrality with a promise of no annexations in France – she would be content with some French colonies:

I said it was inconceivable that we should take part in a European War on a Servian issue, but still more inconceivable that we should base our abstention on such a bargain.

He adds:

After the Cabinet I had talks with several colleagues in order to form a Peace party which if necessary shall break up the Cabinet in the interest of our abstention.

I think I can already count on 11.

... If we destroyed this Govt. to prevent war, no other cd. make it'.

On 29 July 1914 he says:

I am determined not to remain in the Cab. if they decide to join in a war – but they cannot so decide as I am certain now I can take at least 9 colleagues.

It is interesting to compare this with Hobhouse's version of events. He records that only Harcourt, Simon and Beauchamp were for unconditional peace.

Harcourt's journal entry for 30 July 1914 runs to several pages and makes some important observations on events, among which is a record of meetings with several colleagues that day, including Hobhouse, as part of his peace campaign:

Simon, J. Morley, Hobhouse, Beauchamp, Pease, Runciman, Montagu, Birrell all been in my room this afternoon – all with me, but Hobhouse with some reservations as to Belgium (he was of course a soldier).

As colonial secretary, Harcourt was of course obliged to carry out certain preparations in case war should break out, though he records his reluctance to do so:

Sent special fresh warnings by tel. to all Domins. & Cols. to prevent search – am much afraid of an 'incident' over search on some German vessel ...

Lambert of Admlty told me Churchill last night hired 'Acquitania' (Cunard)? What for? transport of troops to

'We talked about the probable Austro-Servian War ... and I told him that under no circumstances could I be a party to our participation in a European War.'

Belgium or for guard ship in Mersey? also commandeered all coal in South Wales – Cardiff paralysed: he is sd. to have incurred expenditure of over £1,000,000 – he told us at Cab. yesterday 'Precautionary' stage expenses wd. not exceed £10,000. I think he has gone mad. Every room in admiralty lighted & men at work when I passed at 2 a.m. this morning. I fear he is carrying his preparations too far & getting prematurely in the war stage.

And later that day Harcourt records that he declined to send a telegram asking 'Australia to place her fleet at our disposal ... on ground premature, unnecessary & that I wanted initiative to be taken by Australia'.

The 30 July entry is rounded off with several interesting statements. Harcourt suggests most overtly here that he is the moving force in the peace party:

J. Morley told me this aft. he was prepared to resign at my signal, but I don't think it will be tomorrow.

Then:

Ld. Bryce has been to me – and separately Molteno M.P. on behalf of Radicals to ask situation. Both sd. they were confident in me and as long as I stayed in Cabinet they wd. assume that peace was assured. I am to let them know if *that* situation alters.

The situation did indeed alter, though Harcourt does not record the reactions of these colleagues to his own change of heart. At the end of the day's entry, Harcourt is violently for peace:

War situation I fear much worse tonight. Pray God I can still smash our Cabinet before they can commit the crime.

Reporting the cabinet meeting of 31 July, Harcourt begins to emphasise the importance of the appearance at least of cabinet and government unity over individual consciences. When Arthur Ponsonby, who was strongly against intervention, asked for assurance that no commitments should be made to France or anyone without

'War situation I fear much worse tonight. Pray God I can still smash our Cabinet before they can commit the crime.'

seeking the approval of the House of Commons, Harcourt's view was that he should receive a reply, as:

... it helps our Peace friends to keep quiet – most important they should do so and we in Cab. still remain uncommitted so as to strengthen Grey's hand diplomatically.

As always though, Harcourt does not trust Lloyd George who, having canvassed business opinion, leant towards non-intervention:

Ll. G. very eloquent agst. our participation & impressed Cabinet – but as he depends on public opin. he may wobble over again in 2 days.

With all this, Harcourt is at this stage optimistic that Britain will stay out of the war:

I feel *now* that *this* Cabinet will never join in *this* war – though several colleagues are uneasy on the subject of our treaty obligations about Belgium.

As we have seen the journal goes beyond recording cabinet meetings, and includes references to ad hoc gatherings. One such entry occurs on Sunday 2 August when Simon and Illingworth came to see Harcourt at 14 Berkeley Square at midnight to ask him to come to see Lloyd George at 11 Downing Street at 10 o'clock the next morning. At the meeting were Pease, McKinnon Wood, Beauchamp, Simon, Runciman, Lloyd George and Harcourt himself:

Settled we wd. not go to war for mere violation of Belgian territory & hold up if possible any decision today.

11.0 a.m. Before Cab. Ll. Geo. & I went to P.M. & sd we represented 8–10 colleagues who wd. not go to war for Belgium. P.M. listened, sd. nothing.

There follows an account of the cabinet meeting held between 11am and 1.55pm, and of Churchill threatening to resign:

'If Germ violates Belg. neutrality I want to go to war – if you don't I must resign'. J Morley sd. 'if you *do* go to war I resign'.

Burns clearly realised the implications of a commitment to defend the French coast, and was not prepared to wait for any further German moves:

J. Burns sd. he could not agree to Grey's formula to Cambon this afternoon as to German fleet attack on Fr. coast and must resign at once – almost in tears.

After the cabinet meeting, Harcourt was at another gathering at Beauchamp's house in Belgrave Square:

J. Morley, Simon, Samuel, Ll. Geo. also came. We telephoned for Pease, Mc K[innon] Wood & Runciman who joined us after luncheon & discussed plans for afternoon. Beauchamp feels we were 'jockeyed' this morning over Germ. Fleet; Simon agrees & thinks we ought to have resigned with Burns. I differ as I think the prevention of a German fleet attack & capture of French territory on shore of Channel a *British interest*.

We agreed to refuse to go to war merely on a violation of Belg. *neutrality* by a traverse for invasion purposes of territory but to regard any permanent danger or threat to Belg. *independence* (such as occupation) as a vital Brit. interest.

For Harcourt, then, an attack on France by the German fleet was more important as an issue than an invasion of Belgium, with the caveat that invasion and occupation were to be seen in very different lights.

During the cabinet meeting of the morning of 3 August, Harcourt records his own intervention: 'I sd. gt. advantage if Germany declared war on us'. The waverers were perhaps now looking for a formula that would allow them to stay in government and save their consciences should it come to war.

During this cabinet Asquith announced the resignations of Burns, Morley and Beauchamp and acknowledged a split in the party, saying that it was a

'most thankless task to me to go on'. ... Simon sd. 'if country at war it was the duty of men like himself and the Peace party to

support the Govt.': he broke down.

It is not entirely clear at exactly what point Harcourt becomes committed to intervention. On 4 August 1914, he is still trying to rein in Churchill:

I insisted, and Asq. agreed, that orders shd. be sent to our Mediterranean Fleet *not* to fire on 'Goeben' till we have become at war with Germany. Winston was compelled to send these orders & *at once*.

But Harcourt has clearly already made his decision to stand by the government, and on the eve of the declaration of war we find him busy playing his part, sending the delayed telegrams to the colonies, and in the thick of discussions about possible military strategy:

Long discussion as to tactics. Churchill wants to block Amsterdam & mouth of Rhine, Asq., Grey & I insisted we wd. not violate neutrality of Holland. Our defence of small nationalities our greatest asset. We insisted on this.

There is another swipe at Lloyd George:

I think Ll. Geo. weakening in his peace 'convictions' under the impression of mad popular enthusiasm in streets for war.

The very fact that he can criticise the shallowness of someone else's convictions so readily seems to show that he himself now had no doubts about the rights of the cause, and that he had satisfied his own conscience that he was doing the right thing. From now on, he records cabinet discussions and describes his own role in furthering the war effort without any comment or reflection on his former position. We can only speculate how much the importance of government unity and the threat to his own career might have played a part, and we only know from other sources that Morley for one was angry at his abandoning the cause. Esher's journal records that Harcourt sent an apologetic letter to Morley, saying that he had decided to stay in the cabinet for

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'two Imperial reasons', which he declined to explain.

It is not really possible to say at this stage what Harcourt's journal adds to our understanding of Asquith's government 1914–16. It certainly provides some new perspectives. As colonial secretary he seems to take a very personal ownership of some of the operations, which is surprising given his recently recorded convictions. Whereas on 3 August 1914 he was able to record his holding back on launching any strikes against German possessions in South West Africa with the lofty remark to de Villiers Graaf that it is 'often easier to take than to give up at end', by the next day he writes almost enthusiastically:

I told them I cd. tomorrow destroy or seize great German wireless station in Togoland. May do so tomorrow.

And on 6 August 1914, he writes:

German Colonies: I shall take most of them but not Cameroons at present.

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The brief sketches of personalities around the cabinet table are one of the most interesting aspects of the journal. Kitchener and Winston Churchill not unexpectedly feature prominently. Harcourt records a Churchillian joke made at the cabinet of 18 August 1914:

Winston said 'we may have to borrow one thousand millions before the war is over'. Some laughed & he said 'It is time we got something out of posterity'.

The First Lord and the War Secretary feature again in the cabinet meeting of 31 August:

Kitchener says he can't have War correspondents at the front: give great trouble to Commanders.

Asq. sd. to Kitchener 'you are thinking of your neighbour' (Churchill) who had great rows when he was a correspondent in S. Africa with Kitchener.

And in a further passage, not recorded by Hobhouse, Harcourt says that:

Churchill wants to put German prisoners on German captured ships to clear the floating mine fields. We refused to allow this.

On the next day, he records that:

Churchill has ordered all *neutral* fishing vessels to be seized or sunk in the North Sea if suspected! We told him to cancel order at once.

At the cabinet meeting of 7 September another lighter moment is recorded:

We laughed when Kitchener proposed ... to say that this was 'a war against military despotism' Ll. Geo. applying this phrase to Kitchener. [Presumably said behind his back.]

Sometimes Harcourt records private conversations, at dinners or in private houses. In January 1916 Harcourt noted a conversation with Kitchener at York House, where he had been invited to help in designing the war secretary's garden at Broome Hall in Kent (Harcourt being a keen gardener himself). The conversation inevitably drifted to the war, and Harcourt notes down Kitchener's six-point plan to finish the war by the end of 1916:

1. Offensive by allies in west in Mar–April with considerable German retreat
2. Offensive by Russia May–June with similar results
3. Internal trouble in Germany in consequence and request for allies' terms of peace, June–July
4. These terms specified and rejected by Germany August
5. Renewed offensive by Russians, French & British Sept and Oct with further success viz retirement of Germans beyond Meuse to the Rhine
6. Nov – acceptance by Germany of terms previously offered.

This was of course the rationale for the Somme offensive (originally planned for spring 1916), and it all seems impossibly optimistic in the light of what we know of the battle which began that summer.

The personal insights that Harcourt gives us into the political

world are highly illuminating, especially at moments of crisis such as the formation of the coalition government in May 1915. Now, clearly we have to take into account that Harcourt might have been overstating his part in these events. The journal reads in many ways like a self-conscious preparation for memoirs. Indeed, in a private letter dated 4 March 1916 he refers to his memoirs which 'will never be written'.⁹ Harcourt includes in the journal a detailed account of the forming of the coalition, written at Nuneham on 25 May 1915. He records a conversation with Asquith in which the latter tells him that he deeply regrets having to sacrifice Harcourt (he was moved to the Board of Works) and that he thought it 'an Imperial disaster that you should leave the Colonial Office and so do most other people'. On being told that Bonar Law is to have the Colonial Office, Harcourt records his own reaction: 'Good God then Canada & the rest of the Dominions are to be ruled by Sir Max Aitken'. He explains that Bonar Law is intimate with Aitken and under financial obligation to him – this was of course the future press baron Lord Beaverbrook, who worked to bring Asquith down. Asquith then gave his opinion that Bonar Law would be less dangerous at the Colonial Office than at the Foreign Office, and Harcourt joked that 'It is for you to choose which part of the Empire you would soonest lose'. At the end of the account, Harcourt records that he asked Asquith if he could remain next to him at the cabinet table, and Asquith agreed. Harcourt carefully preserved a letter from Asquith in the journal, received just before the coalition cabinet first met, in which Asquith apologises for changing his mind about keeping Harcourt next to him at cabinet:

On reflection I think Lansdowne must sit next me [sic] – sorry as I am to part with your close companionship.

This is followed by a sketch of the new arrangements at the cabinet table, with Lansdowne intruded between Harcourt and the PM.

A few days after that first coalition cabinet meeting, Harcourt went over to the Colonial Office to, as he puts it:

see Bonar Law... to tell him the ropes & teach him his lesson in words of one syllable. I was horrified to find that he contemplated corresponding direct with Prime Ministers of the Dominions behind the back of the Gov[ernor]'s General, but I think I got this idea out of his head.

On 8 June the cabinet discussed conscription, which Harcourt was against. He gives himself credit for wrecking the Universal Registration Bill. He sat on a committee to discuss this proposal and records Long's complaint that the bill had been destroyed by the committee's proceedings – '(he meant by me!)'.

On the 17 June Harcourt recorded an acrimonious debate in which Lloyd George and Carson were against reinforcing the Dardanelles expedition, which was 'marching straight to disaster' in Lloyd George's words: 'Carson sd Winston 'talking nonsense'. Winston very angry'.

In October there is an extraordinary copy or draft letter on Office of Works headed paper from Harcourt to the prime minister. Marked 'Secret', it states:

For God's sake do not accept 30,000 [conscripts] per week as a possible number because

- you cannot get them
- you cannot afford them
- new divisions are not doing well
- we cannot arm & officer 70 divisions
- after April 1st '16 we cannot afford to pay for them with other liabilities

L.H. 14.10.15.

And another letter of the same date also to the PM states that he thinks it 'very indecent that a civilian minister like Curzon should collect (& circulate) opinions from anonymous officers at the front on the question of conscription'. He ends the letter by saying that he thinks half the cabinet are mad, but that he does not think more than 10 per cent of the British population share their mania. One has to wonder if he ever sent these letters.

The compulsion issue remained to the forefront for several months more. There is a particularly vivid account of the cabinet of 19 April

1916 when Labour's refusal to accept a compromise threatened to break up the government. We have the image of Curzon coming in reeking of chloroform as he had just had another operation on his elbow. In the debate Harcourt claims that he himself pressed home the danger that the French would make peace if they thought Britain was not prepared to commit to compulsion (incidentally noting that they had the Cameroons to bargain with owing to the British blunder of handing it to France). Grey said it was the most serious crisis since 2 August; Kitchener was threatening to resign though acknowledging that the break up of the cabinet would be an 'appalling disaster'; Bonar Law said that even if he accepted a six-week delay to try to persuade the Labour Party (Henderson's proposal), the Tory Party would bring the Unionists out of the cabinet. Harcourt then records the meeting as though it were a play, something he did quite often to convey a dramatic quality:

Now 2.45

Asq. 'What am I to say in the H of C at 3.45'

Balfour 'that the Brit constitution is bankrupt, that we have broken down & are unfit to conduct the war & tell the allies to make the best peace they can & soon as they can'

Asq. 'Am I to say that?'

Balfour 'It is the bare truth'.

On 8 June the cabinet discussed conscription, which Harcourt was against. He gives himself credit for wrecking the Universal Registration Bill.

In these extreme circumstances, the coalition agreed to accept Henderson's proposals and the crisis was averted for the time being. A few days later the Easter Rising erupted.

There is a great deal that might be said about the cabinet debates of 1915–16, and I hope that there is enough here to make some kind of judgement as to the value of this journal as a source. The interest of the journal seems to me to lie in its very personal perspective; we have seen how character sketches of the likes of Lloyd George and Churchill add a certain dimension to the journal, and the accounts of private conversations, particularly with the PM and the king, are really fascinating and unique. We learn much about the attitudes of Harcourt and his close allies to other cabinet members,

as in January 1916 when at a lunch at Downing Street, Harcourt and Asquith discuss the fear of Simon's possible resignation at the Home Office. Asquith felt that Harcourt was the only man for the job. Harcourt's response was that nothing would induce him to take it, listing the factors that would make it uncongenial, 'Press Censor, aliens, prisoners camps, capital sentences, police, prisons & above all heavy parliamentary work with innumerable bills'. He candidly admits that his suggestions for alternatives had but 'one object ... to find some one who is not myself'.

There is an interesting sidelight on the conversion of both Harcourt and Asquith to the idea of female suffrage in August 1916. As always, Harcourt gives himself a lead role in this. If true, it appears to push back the date of Asquith's conversion, though I have not checked detailed sources on this:

PM says his opposition to female suffrage is vitally affected by women's work in the war. I said the only logical & possible solution is Universal Suffrage (including women). This upset most of the cabinet, but the PM agreed with me ...

Grey says this is a criminal waste of time when we ought to be devoting our energies to winning the war.

I will end with another insight into the fall of Asquith in December 1916 when Harcourt, who of course fell with Asquith, records his conversation with King George V on the occasion of his ennoblement as Viscount Harcourt. Speaking of Asquith, the king said:

'I feel his loss very much & I stuck to him and fought for him to the end, but I fear your Govt. had got a little out of touch with public opinion, you allowed them to push you instead of leading them, and then you had all that d—d Press agitation against you'. I said I wondered how long it wd be before Northcliffe turned agst. Ll. Geo. and that when he did I expected Ll. Geo. wd. close up his papers and shut Northcliffe up. The King sd 'and a good job too or this country will be ruled only by the newspapers'.

'PM says his opposition to female suffrage is vitally affected by women's work in the war. I said the only logical & possible solution is Universal Suffrage (including women).'

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- 1 See the Bodleian online catalogues of Harcourt family papers: <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-w-1/harcourt-w-1.html>; <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-w-1-add/harcourt-w-1-add.html>; and <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-estate/harcourt-estate.html>.
- 2 For the catalogue of the Additional Lewis Harcourt papers, see: <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/harcourt-lewis-adds/harcourt-lewis-adds.html>. For the mainly eighteenth and nineteenth-century additional Harcourt family papers, see: <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-fam-add/>

[harcourt-fam-add.html](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/harcourt-fam-add.html).

- 3 See Edward David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse* (John Murray, 1977).
- 4 See James Lees-Milne, *The Enigmatic Edwardian: Life of Reginald, 2nd Viscount Esher* (Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd, 1986), p. 337.
- 5 Cameron Hazlehurst, Sally Whitehead and Christine Woodland (eds.), *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900–1964* (Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks, 19; Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 6 Patrick Jackson, 'Harcourt, Lewis Vernon, first Viscount Harcourt (1863–1922)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan. 2008.
- 7 Now catalogued as MSS. Eng. c. 8264–8271, d. 4173–4188.
- 8 Mike Webb, *From Downing Street to the Trenches: First-hand Accounts from the Great War, 1914–1916* (Bodleian Publishing, 2014).
- 9 Bodleian Library, MS Harcourt 446, fo. 79.

REPORTS

Among the Fallodonistas

Sir Edward Grey and the outbreak of the First World War
FCO/LSE symposium, 7 November 2014

Report by Iain Sharpe

THE UNDERSTANDABLE FOCUS of First World War centenary commemorations on the suffering and sacrifice of those on the front line has meant that the political and diplomatic background to the outbreak of war has tended to be marginalised. Even so, it was a surprise to learn in Professor David Stevenson's opening remarks that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office/LSE symposium 'Sir Edward Grey and the Outbreak of the First World War' at Lancaster House on 7 November 2014 was the only 1914 centenary event to focus specifically on diplomacy. Yet, if it

was the only such event, it was certainly an impressive and enlightening one, with speakers including many leading experts on pre-First World War European diplomacy.

The opening speaker was Professor T. G. Otte of the University of East Anglia, whose recent book *July Crisis* is broadly sympathetic towards Grey's diplomacy. Professor Otte commented that Grey has been unlucky in the treatment of his posthumous reputation. His critics have been the dominant voice, from the unfair attacks in Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* to his being voted the worst MP ever in a