

little under a quarter of a ton – five great lumps of vanity’, including a primus stove to sterilize his food and drink in the trenches. Unlike Crawford, they seemed incapable of fending for themselves. No less than 14 per cent of Crawford’s RAMC unit were officers’ servants.

In mid-June 1915 he took up his duties as an orderly in a makeshift casualty clearing station at Hazebrouck, a town in French Flanders of which he became very fond. He remained there for the next twelve months. There is not a word of complaint in the diaries about the conditions in which he lived. ‘I sleep on a wooden floor and feel it as soft, softer indeed than a feather bed at home.’ He greeted the inevitable arrival of lice with imperturbability; the ways in which their habits differed from those of fleas greatly interested him. He soon got used to constant swearing. It was not difficult to tolerate ‘a very few foul phrases repeatedly employed’.

He regarded the German army with considerable respect. ‘The ignorance of our officers, and above all their hopelessly unprofessional way of looking at things, offers a sad contrast to the attitude of the enemy.’ He was impressed by what he heard and saw of those who were taken prisoner. A typical German junior officer ‘takes himself very earnestly, never forgets he is an officer, and loses no chance of self-improvement in captivity even when sick. How very different with us,’ he wrote on 25 September 1915. A captured airman, Lieutenant Buchholz, won the diarist’s esteem. ‘Though young, Buchholz is only 17, he had a professional and business-like air, lacking in many of our officers of 10 years’ service.’

In peace, as well as war, this great Christian Conservative with wide interests lived by the principles of duty, service and sacrifice. His diaries show how he put those principles into practice to his country’s lasting benefit without ever taking himself or the world around him too seriously.

■ **Lord Lexden** is *Chairman of the Conservative History Group*. He has drawn extensively on Crawford’s diaries for his own publications, and first reviewed these diaries for *The House* magazine, to which he is a regular contributor.



## Making the Heavens Hum: Kingsley Wood and the Art of the Possible 1881–1924

By Hugh Gault  
(Cambridge: Gretton Books, 2014)  
276 pp., £18

Reviewed by **Lord Lexden**

**S**ir Kingsley Wood (1881–1943), who died in office as Chancellor of the Exchequer, deserves a full, politically well-informed biography to rescue him from the near oblivion into which he has been most unjustly cast since his sudden, unexpected demise as the tide turned decisively in Britain’s favour during the Second World War. A formidable figure in his lifetime, praised for his social conscience and hatred of poverty, he needs to be given his proper place – belatedly – in the history of the party to whose success he contributed so much.

‘Neville and Kingsley are carrying the Bill along with masterly precision’, wrote the Tory diarist Cuthbert Headlam on 20 January 1929, as Chamberlain and Wood dominated the lengthy Commons debates on the complex legislation which created the structure of local government that was to last until Margaret Thatcher’s day. Chamberlain, who was in overall charge of the legislation, recognized his junior minister’s outstanding qualities, describing him in a letter to a colleague as ‘very quick, very industrious and painstaking’. They were exactly the qualities in which the future Prime Minister himself excelled. To them Wood added one more that Chamberlain notably lacked: ‘he continues to keep on such terms with our opponents that he can always find out their intentions and frequently can manage a deal with them’. The great Tory leader found it impossible to conceal his dislike of Labour, a feeling which was vigorously returned.

Chamberlain had no finer or more devoted colleague than Kingsley Wood, though the latter had no hesitation in

telling the leader he admired so much that he had to resign in May 1940 after the fateful vote on the Norwegian campaign. It was of course their close political relationship that proved fatal to the survival of Wood’s high reputation. Although he became an able and skilful Chancellor under Winston Churchill, he had committed the unforgivable sin of flourishing during the 1930s, years which Churchill decreed should be damned for ever. It is from this dominant, but utterly misleading, view of the prelude to the Second World War that a successful biographer needs to extricate Kingsley Wood.

That is a task that Hugh Gault will face later, having decided, perhaps surprisingly, to devote two volumes to this venture. Here he shows how the serious, hard-working son of a leading Methodist minister in London enthusiastically embraced the long-standing family tradition of relieving hardship and distress through Christian and charitable endeavour. Wood became an expert on poverty in the most effective possible manner: by living in the East End to which his father ministered. Early in his career he started giving free legal advice to impoverished families as he built up his practice as a solicitor specializing in insurance law which quickly made him a wealthy man.

Wood never had the slightest doubt that the state should be enlisted in the conquest of poverty through the Unionist Party (as the Conservatives were then known), not the parties of the left, though he recognized the successful start which Lloyd George made before the First World

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## This is a biography of a forgotten public figure who practised and preached one-nation politics with great success.

War through the introduction of old age pensions and the first national insurance scheme for certain categories of industrial workers. Wood combined fierce loyalty to the Unionists with goodwill towards their opponents.

He began his political career in Shoreditch, where over 50 per cent of the population were officially classified as living in poverty. As election agent for the Hoxton constituency in 1906, he played a key part in securing a Unionist success and keeping an overwhelming Liberal landslide at bay. In 1911 he was elected to represent Woolwich on the London County Council, proclaiming that the 'one duty of politics ... [is] the social welfare of the people'.

When in 1912 the Liberal government organised a national health week, Wood called for 'a minimum standard of health for every man, woman and child in the country'. He was the first person to propose the creation of a separate ministry of health which would also have responsibility for housing and slum clearance. 'The betterment of the health conditions of the people' was at the centre of his manifesto in 1918 when he became MP for Woolwich. He believed that health services must be organized on a national basis – a vision which he and Neville Chamberlain realized in the inter-war years as a distinctively Tory welfare state began to take shape, only to be cast aside during the war-time coalition when Churchill allowed this area of policy to fall into Labour hands.

What this book lacks is the personal dimension. Gault labours under the biographer's greatest curse: the disappearance of his subject's personal papers. The book has nearly a thousand footnotes: not one relates to an unpublished letter, diary or note by Wood, or by any of his associates commenting

on his character or personality. Gault's principal source is a set of 33 volumes of press cuttings held by Kent University.

This is a biography of a forgotten public figure who practised and preached one-nation politics with great success. It is wholly unclear what Wood was like in private life. There are hints of unusual characteristics. This prominent Methodist layman married a chorus girl from the London stage who lied about her age and her address. Having no children, they gave a home to the daughter of a singer. The girl apparently shared a bed with Wood's wife, Agnes, until she was eighteen. 'Perhaps only coincidentally', Gault speculates, 'it may have enabled Agnes to resist Wood's attentions'. Lacking personal papers, he can go no further. Wood, the man, remains an enigma. We have to be content with a detailed record of political work which made the Conservative Party hum, though not perhaps the heavens.

■ **Lord Lexden** is Chairman of the Conservative History Group.



## Peel in Caricature: The Political Sketches of John Doyle (HB)

Edited by Dr. Richard Gaunt  
(Tamworth: The Peel Society)  
200 pp. with 149 colour plates, £40

Previewed by **Nigel Morris**

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In October 1829, a paragraph appeared in the press under the title 'Ministerial Occupation':

*Yesterday afternoon the Right Hon. Home Secretary amused himself for some time with viewing the caricatures in a shop in Henrietta Street, Covent Garden. At some of them he laughed heartily, but one that*

*attracted most attention was a picture entitled 'Spinning Bobby'.*

Robert Peel – as he then was – like most politicians, enjoyed seeing himself portrayed in a caricature or cartoon. The 'Spinning Bobby' referred to his father's background in the fast-growing cotton industry. The first Sir Robert Peel made a fortune between 1770 and 1790 around Bury in Lancashire.

By 1829, his son, then 41, had been an MP for twenty years. In that time he had been Chief Secretary for Ireland, Home Secretary, and Leader in the House of Commons of the Government under the Duke of Wellington. The year 1829 was a momentous one for Peel as he inaugurated the Metropolitan Police Act (famously giving rise to the famous designations 'Bobbies' or 'Peelers') and pushed through Parliament Catholic Emancipation, against his own long-held views. He was thus a prominent face in these turbulent political times, with agitation for parliamentary reform and Ireland in a permanent state of revolt.

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Three years ago the Tamworth-based Peel Society, which honours the memory of Sir Robert Peel and his family, bought 149 hand-coloured caricatures by 'HB' dating from 1829 to 1848, which covers the momentous years of Sir Robert Peel's political life as leader of the Conservative opposition to the Whigs and twice Prime