

ROY'S DIARIES

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Authorship, Memory & Manuscript seminar, 6 February 2012, Bodleian Library

I can't talk about the whole range of the Jenkins papers in the time available, so instead I shall talk about one small part of them - his diaries and his use of them to write his memoirs.

Jenkins was a biographer. He not only wrote several major biographies himself and dozens of shorter biographical essays; he also read and usually reviewed every political biography, autobiography and diary of the past 150 years, starting with all the Victorian tombstone biographies which he read one after another at the end of the war when waiting to be demobilised which became his hobby for life.

He was fascinated by biography and the patterns of political careers.

As a result he was also very self-conscious about his own career. He did not keep a diary as such, of the Castle/Benn type, but he kept

- (a) Detailed engagement diaries, from 1945 to 2002
- (b) Occasional memoir material dictated soon after major episodes
- (c) His *European Diary*, which is actually more like (b).

His engagement diaries are both as spare and as full as Gladstone's – not what he read or whom he wrote to, but his travels, precise timing of meetings and whom he had lunch and dinner with every day of his life, often the weather. (Actually they only become full from 1948)

He was obsessed with time and keeping a record of it. 'I enjoy the illusion that by measuring it I somehow control it'.

He used the diaries to make his memoirs [A Life at the Centre, 1991] exceptionally precise and accurate.

They are also a remarkable record for the biographer of his extraordinary mixing of political and social life (between which he made little distinction) and his extraordinarily wide circle of friends (within a narrow caste of the political establishment).

I want to give you a taste of the diaries to illustrate these points.

By focussing on the diaries I don't want to seem frivolous or trivial. Jenkins was a major political figure who took his politics very seriously and left – without becoming Prime Minister – a bigger imprint on several different areas of public life than many who did.

(a) His Home Office reforms in 1965-67 – godfather or midwife of the permissive society, still controversial today

(Not his time at the Treasury – a Chancellor’s footprints are swept away by the next tide)

(b) His role in getting Britain into Europe – second only to Ted Heath – and launching the euro (Now in question?)

(c) The SDP, the Liberal Democrats and New Labour (But PR is still denied)

But he achieved all this – and a prolific output of writing: articles, reviews, essays and books - while simultaneously maintaining a very full social life. The latter was the soil in which the former were nourished, so I think it is important (as well as a fascinatingly detailed picture of the political/social world from the 1950s to the 1990s).

Examples

1. A typical Treasury week, 14-20 October 1968. **[Show diary]**

- Monday: 8.10 train from Didcot.
- Lunch with Jack Diamond (Chief Secretary) at Brooks’s
7.00, saw Sam Spiegel who was proposing to make a film of *Dilke*
(with Alec Guinness and Julie Christie)
Dined at home (unusually)
- Tuesday: Cabinet
Lunch with David Dowler (his private secretary) at No.11
Something illegible
6.30 Collins party (+ Sam Spiegel again)
8.00 Peter Jay Club dinner at the Gay Hussar
- Wednesday: Cabinet Committee

Lunch with Hugh Cudlipp (*Daily Mirror*) at No.11
Illegible meeting
Meeting with HW, 7.30-900
Dinner at HoC, voting until 11.30
- Thursday: Cabinet
Lunch Lord Thomson (*The Times*) with David Rockefeller (Chase Manhattan bank, but also a friend)
Mansion house dinner (the Chancellor’s annual major speech)
- Friday: 10.00 Governor of the Bank (Leslie O’Brien)
12.00 Sam Brittan
12.30 party for Jack Diamond

1.30 lunch, Caroline Gilmour at the Toque Blanche

4.00 David Rockefeller again

Then he seems to have cancelled both his Stechford Advice Bureau and the Midland Drapers' (?) dinner, but taken the 5.00 from Paddington back to East Hendred

- Weekend at East Hendred: Barley Alison to lunch (+ Edward) on Saturday, followed by the Davenports for tennis and croquet; and Ann Fleming to lunch on Sunday.

This was a quiet weekend. But he tells us in ALATC (p.261), based on his contemporary journal, that 'the consumption trend began to look too high' and 'I decided over the weekend of 19-20 October that exactly the circumstances for which I had kept a tightening of hire-purchase controls in reserve had arisen, and that they should be activated forthwith'. So there was work as well as play!

2. His June 1975 row with HW over Reg Prentice. Playing off left against right as usual after the referendum, Wilson had determined to balance the removal of Tony Benn from Industry to Energy by the simultaneous demotion of Prentice from the Department of Education – even though he had earlier explicitly promised Jenkins that Prentice's position was safe. When he heard of this Jenkins abandoned his dinner (and his dining companion, an American friend Liz Stevens) at the White Tower to demand an immediate meeting with Wilson at which he threatened his own resignation (as Home Secretary) if Prentice was sacked.

His engagement diary allows him to be absolutely precise in his memoirs that he saw HW on Monday 9 June at 9.10. **[Show diary]** It shows that

- He drove up from East Hendred that morning for Cabinet at 10.30
- He lunched with his supporters (known as the Walston Group) at Bill Rodgers' house
- He had a meeting with someone illegible at the HO at 3.15
- He dined with Liz (Stevens) at the White Tower at 7.45
- He saw HW at 9.10 but also voted at 10.00 (and saw him again at 10.15?)
- He then saw Harold Lever at 10.20 (but in ALATC he says Shirley as well)

He gave a pretty frank account of their interview in ALATC:

'It was a lowering occasion Wilson sat with his head down and poured out a stream of petty venom. There were all the old complaints He defended his retreat from his promise of 19 May on the ground that his chance remark to Harris gave me perfectly adequate notice of

his change of mind. I am afraid that, under the provocation of all this, I said some ultimately unforgiveable things about the general triviality of his mind and his incapacity to rise to the level of events. We moved towards no solution and parted with distaste'. [pp.421-2]

But the contemporary note on which his published account was based was even stronger:

'I cannot recall my exact words but they were several times in a form which left no doubt that I regarded him as a squalid little man who was using squalid little arguments in order to explain why he was performing so much below the level of events, as well as going back on a firm undertaking which he had given me, and that this was not the way in which I was prepared to do business.... I only made my offensive remarks ... in reply to extremely offensive dribbles from him'.

With some reason he feared that this - 'almost the most disagreeable row of my political life' - might have 'a long-term effect on my relations with Wilson'. In fact they remained warily friendly.

The rest of that week's engagement diary shows him

- lunching with Liz Eldon (?) and dining with D Phillips (or Phipps?) on Tuesday
- lunching with David Owen and dining (again) with Liz Stevens on Wednesday;
- speaking (after Cabinet) at lunchtime at the Paternoster Club (?) and dining (after a PLP meeting) at the Other Club on Thursday)
- attending an all-day meeting at Chequers on Friday
- flying to Newcastle on Saturday (?)
- Back at EH on Sunday for lunch with (or at) illegible, then having Gordon Richardson (Governor of the Bank) to tennis and dinner (+ Robert Armstrong and someone else)

3. A typical high pressure day in Brussels, Monday 26 November 1979:

This was in the middle of an extremely busy time. He had just delivered the Dimpleby Lecture in London the previous Thursday and spent the weekend anxiously gauging the reaction to it. Three days later was the European summit in Dublin at which the Community had its first taste of Mrs Thatcher in full cry, demanding 'her' money back and refusing to talk about anything else until she got it.

Putting together his engagement diary and his journal for this day we get:

- 9.05 from Didcot, met by driver at Paddington
- 10.15-11.30 meeting with Mrs Thatcher in Downing Street

- 12.50 plane to Dublin (He had hoped to have time to visit Ann Fleming in hospital, but no time!)
- 2.45- 4.10 meeting with the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch
- 5.15 plane to Brussels (with time to kill in the Irish National Gallery)
- Working dinner at home with Crispin Tickell and someone else (possibly Nick Stuart of his *cabinet*)
- Into his office for 10.10 telephone call with Helmut Schmidt (40 mins, in the dark). 'Sitting in total darkness, I rounded things up with him'.
- 11.15 home for reading before bed at 12.30.

His journal summarises accurately but on this occasion quite briefly his conversation with Mrs Thatcher: he had described and assessed her more fully in earlier entries, e.g on 22 October:

'A rather wild and whirling interview with Mrs Thatcher, lasting no less than an hour and fifty minutes. She wasn't to be honest, making a great deal of sense, jumping all over the place, so that I came to the conclusion that her reputation for a well-ordered mind is completely ill-founded. On the other hand she remains quite a nice person, without pomposity'. [p.511]

But these conversations are fully reported in Crispin Tickell's minutes, also in the archive, which are a wonderful source.

4. That day (22.10.79) was a bit less high pressure than the later one, but when in London (from Brussels) he still crammed as much as he could into every day.

[Show diary]

- He started with a run around the garden at EH (8.25-8.37)
- Driven to London to meet Tickell at Brooks's before seeing MT
- Seen MT 11.30-1.20
- Had a drink with Sir John Partridge (U-S, DHSS) at Brooks's
- Late lunch with Ian Chapman of Collins
- A haircut!
- Further meetings with John Nott (MoD) and John Harris at Brooks's
- Drink with the Gilmours at Garlton Gardens
- Dinner (at Brooks's) with Jennifer, Caroline and Nicko Henderson (just appointed Ambassador to Washington)
- Stayed at the Gilmours' house at Isleworth before flying to Strasbourg next morning.

By these examples I hope I have given some idea of the pace of Jenkins' social/political life; and a sense of the extraordinary value of his diaries in recreating it.

If there is time I could add (but this is purely social):

He went home for Easter 1977.

Thursday 7 April: meeting with Callaghan, then lunch with Leslie B-C
Good Friday 8th, lunch with M.Astors, tennis + croquet
Saturday 9th, lunch at EH – Hendersons and Wyatts
Sunday 10th, family lunch, followed by visit from the Owens
Monday 11th, Rodgers' and Oakeshotts to lunch + croquet
Tuesday 12th, to the Davenports, lunch and tennis
Wednesday 13th, lunch with CG and her mother Mollie Buccleuch, near Kettering;
and to Hatley (Jakie Astor) for dinner
Thursday 14th, 'spectacularly good dinner' with Victor Rothschild. Cambridge
Friday 15th, lunch + tennis with J and the Annans (Blue Boar)
Saturday 16th, lunch for Gilmours, Caters, Ann Fleming and Peter Quennell
Sunday 17th, to Washington (Carter), Chicago and NY.