

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Eden

D. R. Thorpe

Contents

Cover
About the Book
About the Author
List of Illustrations
List of Abbreviations
Dedication
Title Page
Epigraph
Author's Preface
PRELUDE

PART ONE: **The Rose of Youth**

1. The Way They Lived Then, 1897-1919
2. In the Ranks of Death, 1915-19
3. Oxford and Political Apprenticeship, 1919-24
4. From Warwick to Geneva, 1924-9
5. 'A Potential Foreign Secretary', 1929-5
6. Burdens of Office, 1935-7
7. The Path to Resignation, 1937-8

PART TWO: **The Business of War**

8. A New and Sharper Sword, 1938-9
9. Uphill All the Way, 1939-41
10. Alliances and Conferences, 1941-4
11. Avoiding Versailles, 1945

INTERLUDE: **Peacocks and Lilies**

PART THREE: **Crown Prince**

12. Towards the Property-Ownning Democracy, 1945-51
13. Coming Home, 1951-3
14. Waging Peace, 1953-4
15. Waiting for Winston, 1954-5

PART FOUR: **Greatness Going Off?**

16. 'A Pretty Tough Assignment', 1955-6
17. The Sparks Fly Upwards, January-July 1956
18. Into the Maze, July-October 1956
19. Last Months in Office, November 1956-January 1957
20. 'The Past Gone, Seize Today', 1957-77

POSTLUDE

Appendices

- I: Eden's Resignation Speech, House of Commons, 21 February 1938
- II: Eden's Speech on the Property-Ownning Democracy, Conservative Party Conference, Blackpool, 3 October 1946
- III: The Protocol of Sèvres, 24 October 1956
- IV: British Ambassadors to the Major Powers, 1935-57

Picture Section

Notes

Author's Acknowledgments

Select Bibliography

Index

Copyright

About the Book

Anthony Eden, who served as both Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister, was one of the central political figures of the twentieth century. He had good looks, charm, a Military Cross from the Great War, an Oxford first and a secure parliamentary constituency from his mid-twenties. He was Foreign Secretary at the age of 38, and the first British statesman to meet Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. Eden's dramatic resignation from Neville Chamberlain's Cabinet in 1938, outlined here in the fullest detail yet, made an international impact.

This groundbreaking book examines his controversial life and tells the inside story of the Munich crisis (1938), the Geneva Conference (1954), Eden's battles with Churchill over the modernisation of the post-war Conservative Party and his rivalry with Butler and Macmillan in the early 1950s, culminating in a fascinating analysis of the Suez crisis.

About the Author

D. R. Thorpe is a senior member of Brasenose College, Oxford. He has written widely on twentieth-century British political history, and was invited to undertake this biography by the Countess of Avon, Eden's widow, who has made important new material available to him.

D. R. Thorpe was born in 1943 and educated at Fettes and Selwyn College, Cambridge. For many years he taught political history at Charterhouse. He has also been Archives Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge; an Alistair Horne Fellow of St Antony's College, Oxford; and a contributor to the New Dictionary of National Biography. His first book, *The Uncrowned Prime Ministers*, was a study of Sir Austen Chamberlain, Lord Curzon and Lord Butler; and he subsequently wrote the official lives of Selwyn Lloyd, described by Max Beloff in the *Times Educational Supplement* as 'one of the most remarkable British political biographies to have appeared for a long time', and of Alec Douglas-Home, which Tam Dalyell in *Scotland on Sunday* described as 'superbly accurate and perceptive' and Anthony Howard in the *Sunday Times* as 'a model political biography'.

List of Illustrations

Anthony Eden's mother, Sybil.

Bronze bust of George Wyndham at the Musée Rodin. (*The Courtauld Institute of Art*)

Anthony Eden, aged three.

Windlestone Hall in 1918.

The Eden family at Windlestone, a photograph to commemorate the silver wedding of Sir William and Lady Eden and Jack's coming of age.

Anthony Eden, with members of the King's Royal Rifle Corps in 1916.

The Brigade Major, on his favourite horse, The Cat, 1918.

Anthony Eden with his brother Tim, at Windlestone after the Great War.

Captain Eden in his Warwick and Leamington Constituency, 1928.

The wedding of Anthony Eden and Beatrice Beckett at St Margaret's, Westminster, 5 November 1923.

Eden about to set foot on Russian soil in 1935.

Austen Chamberlain with Gustav Stresemann and Aristide Briand in Geneva, 1927.

Anthony Eden's first visit to Moscow in 1935.

Sir Samuel Hoare, Anthony Eden and Sir Robert Vansittart.

Sir John Simon and Eden.

Eden with Halifax at Le Bourget, 11 March 1936.

Neville Chamberlain returns from his second visit to Germany, 16 September 1938. (*Mirror Group Newspapers/Syndication International*)

The Beau Brummel of British politics, 1935. (*Sport and General*)

Eden with Chips Channon.

Eden greets the Belgian Prime Minister, Paul van Zeeland, in the week of the funeral of King George V, 1936.

July 1937: Eden and his son Simon walk through St James's Park.

25 February 1938: on his way to his Warwick and Leamington constituency after his resignation as Foreign Secretary.

Out of office: the backbencher in the south of France, with his wife Beatrice and Lucy and Stanley Baldwin, 1938.

In Camp at Beaulieu, August 1939. (*Imperial War Museum*)

Middle East Headquarters. Eden with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir John Dill (on his right) and Pierson Dixon (on his left) at a conference in 1941. (*By kind permission of Piers Dixon*)

In the Western Desert in 1941: Randolph Churchill 'with the light of battle in his eyes'.

In Egypt in 1941. Eden with Nahas Pasha with whom he had signed the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936.

The War Cabinet in 1941.

Moscow, 1943: Eden with Molotov and Maisky.

With troops in Egypt, 1943. (*Imperial War Museum*)

With troops in Italy, 1944. (*Imperial War Museum*)

Beatrice in Paris, 1945. (*By kind permission of the late Sir Martyn Beckett*)

Mary Churchill and Anthony Eden surrounded by Russian and British servicemen outside the Reichstag, 1945.

Simon Eden, a few weeks before his death on active service with the RAF in Burma, June 1945.

April 1945: Alec Cadogan and Eden leave the Capitol in Washington after the first part of Roosevelt's funeral.

Robert Carr, 1951

Clarissa and Anthony Eden outside 10 Downing Street on the day of their wedding, 14 August 1952. (*Fox Photos*)

Anthony Eden at the height of his powers: with Pierson Dixon in Rome, 1952. (*By kind permission of Piers Dixon*)

The Geneva Conference, May-June 1954: Bedell Smith, Bidault, Eden.

Eden with an interpreter and Chou-En Lai.

Waiting for Winston. (*Syndication International*)

Harold Macmillan and Anthony Eden at Le Reposoir, Geneva.

The only meeting. Nasser with Eden and the British Ambassador, Ralph Stevenson, at the British Embassy, Cairo, 20 February 1955. (*Topham*)

The 1955 General Election.

Balmoral, 1955: Clarissa and Anthony Eden with the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

Broadlands: Eden with Dickie and Edwina Mountbatten.

Eden at the Cabinet Room window.

Sir Anthony Eden and Sir Winston Churchill with their wives at the Garter ceremony at St George's Chapel, Windsor, in 1955.

Eden with Robert Menzies, during the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference, 1956.

Archbishop Fisher in Lambeth Palace Chapel. (*The Times*)

Eden with John Foster Dulles at No 10 at the height of the Suez crisis in August 1956. (*BBC Hulton Picture Library*)

At Chequers:

Patrick Buchan-Hepburn with Eden.

Beaverbrook with Eden.

Nicholas Eden with Sir William Hayter and Rab Butler.

Pandit Nehra with Walter Monckton.

Gaitskell with Bulganin.

Norman Brook with General Templer.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Dermot Boyle, Marshal of the RAF Sir William Dickson, General Sir Charles Keightley First Sea Lord Mountbatten. Eden with his back to the camera.

Jim Thomas with Harold Macmillan.

Winston at Chequers in 1956.

Eden with Sid Holland, the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Anthony Eden and Selwyn Lloyd at Broadchalke, 30 May 1958.

Nicholas Eden.

The private royal visit to Villa Nova in 1966.

Lord Avon at de Gaulle's funeral, November 1970, with, among others, a top-hatted Harold Macmillan, Harold Wilson, Edward Heath and the Prince of Wales.

An old friendship: Eden with Lord Welensky at Alvediston.

Meeting Haile Selassie in Barbados.

Eden with President Johnson at the White House.

Eden with Avon Priam.

The Avons in the garden of the British Embassy in Paris.

Cartoons by Low (5 July 1939 and 29 July 1955) and Vicky (29 October 1951): *Associated Newspapers. The author and publishers are grateful to Dr Tim Benson and the Political Cartoon Society.*

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List of Abbreviations

AC	Austen Chamberlain
ADC	Aide-de-camp
AE	Anthony Eden
ANZUS	Australia, New Zealand and United States
AP	<i>Avon Papers</i>
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CAB	<i>Cabinet Papers</i>
CC	Carlton Club
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
DBFP	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy</i>
DCL	Doctor of Civil Law
DGFP	<i>Documents on German Foreign Policy</i>
DO	Dominions Office
DSO	Companion of the Distinguished Service Order
D(T)C	Defence (Transition) Committee
ECSC	European Coal-Steel Community
EDC	European Defence Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EOKA	Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston
ERNIE	Electronic Random Number Indicating Equipment
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
f-n.	Footnote
FO	Foreign Office

FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
FS	Foreign Secretary
HMG	His/Her Majesty's Government
HMSO	His/Her Majesty's Stationery Office
H of C	House of Commons
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ITV	Independent Television
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
KCB	Knight Commander, Order of the Bath
KG	Knight of the Garter
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti
KORR	King's Own Royal Regiment
KRRC	King's Royal Rifle Corps
LCC	London County Council
LDV	Local Defence Volunteers
LG/Ll. G	Lloyd George
MC	Military Cross
MCC	Marylebone Cricket Club
MI5	Directorate of Military Intelligence
MI6	Secret Intelligence Service
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NC	Neville Chamberlain
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NY	New York
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Cooperation
PM	Prime Minister

POW	Prisoner of war
PPS	Parliamentary Private Secretary
PRO	Public Record Office
PUS	Permanent Under-Secretary
RA	Royal Archives
RAB	R. A. Butler
RAF	Royal Air Force
RMS	Royal Mail Steamer
RNVR	Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
RSC	Royal Shakespeare Company
SB	Stanley Baldwin
SC	Stafford Cripps
SCUA	Suez Canal Users' Association
SEAC	South-East Asia Command
SEATO	South-East Asia Treaty Organisation
<i>SELO</i>	<i>Selwyn Lloyd Papers</i>
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SL	Selwyn Lloyd
S of S	Secretary of State
UK	United Kingdom
UNEF	United Nations Emergency Force
UNO	United Nations Organisation
US	United States
USA	United States of America
VIP	Very Important Person
WEU	Western European Union
WSC	Winston Spencer Churchill
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association*

* Also used as the nickname for a group of young progressive Conservative backbenchers in the 1920s and 1930s who followed the ideas of Noel Skelton on 'the property-owning democracy'.

For Patrick Croker

EDEN

The Life and Times of Anthony Eden
First Earl of Avon, 1897-1977



D. R. THORPE



PIMLICO

A politician's character and position are measured in his day by party standards. When he is dead, all that he achieved in the name of party is at an end. The eulogies and censures of partisans are powerless to affect his ultimate reputation. The scales wherein he was weighed are broken. The years to come bring weights and measures of their own.

Winston Churchill on his father, Lord Randolph Churchill

Author's Preface

The Countess of Avon asked me in 1991 if I would consider writing a new biography of her late husband, Anthony Eden, First Earl of Avon. At the time I was working on the official life of Alec Douglas-Home, whose career dovetailed with Eden's in several crucial respects.

Conventional wisdom has been as unremittingly hostile towards Eden over Suez as towards Neville Chamberlain over Munich. Suez and Munich were the most divisive political crises of the twentieth century, indeed memories of the first conditioned responses to the second. It is not difficult to see why the controversies have endured. Munich has been mythologised by its critics as unprincipled abandonment, based on self-interested expediency; Suez as devious recklessness, anachronistic colonialism masquerading as a police action. One crisis was a prelude to war; the other the clearest indication of Britain's declining post-war position as one of the world's great independent powers. Eden was a central figure in both events. Twenty-five years after his death, and nearly half a century since Suez, a long term view is possible, and this is one aim of the present study, part of an unfinished (and unfinishable) process of assessment of the recent past.

Eden served three periods as Foreign Secretary, a unique twentieth-century record. Other issues central to his career have assumed fresh relevance, not least 'Europe', one of the dominating political issues of the new century. For some commentators, the significant watershed came in 1955 during the Messina Conference, which began in the week Eden became Prime Minister. Britain had

‘observer’ status, and missed the opportunity to move towards a Common European Market. This, say some Europhiles, was a more important cause of Britain’s decline than Suez, which was its symptom. Eden’s own views on Messina, published here for the first time, are a compelling addition to the ongoing European debate.

By any standards Eden remains one of the seminal figures of his age. As with Sir Robert Peel, Joseph Chamberlain and Winston Churchill, his response to events helped to shape the course of history. Undertaking a fresh account, built around Eden’s career, of political issues between 1920 and 1970, was a prospect of considerable fascination to me, especially in the light of the vast amount of new material in public and private archives, here and abroad, that is now available. There is also scope in less inhibited times for a greater candour about how aspects of Eden’s private life impinged upon his public career, and how his increasingly tense post-war relationship with Churchill, in particular over the delayed succession to the Conservative Party leadership, affected both domestic and international events.

I did not, however, wish to commit myself to writing a new biography until I had spoken to Sir Robert Rhodes James, whose 1986 life of Eden, the first to be based on the private papers, and also undertaken at the invitation of the Countess of Avon, will always be a landmark in Eden studies. I am grateful for Sir Robert’s generous understanding towards me, in what I know was a delicate situation, as well as for the material advice he gave me. His premature death in May 1999 was a grievous shock to the many historians and biographers who had for so long laboured in neighbouring vineyards.

‘I have no doubt’, wrote Sir Robert in 1986, ‘that more documents not yet available for inspection or publication will be discovered and published about Eden’s life and career, and that judgments may have to be amended in the

light of these. There will be further, and different, assessments.’¹ The fact that two contrasting studies have appeared since Sir Robert Rhodes James’ biography, as well as several television documentaries, shows the fascination that Eden’s career still has, and is a testimony to his towering presence in the politics of the twentieth century.^{fn1}

Towering presence he may have been on the international scene, but often he was a prophet without honour in his own country. French colleagues of the 1940s who have spoken to me were at one in being mystified by the relatively low esteem in which so many of Eden’s fellow countrymen hold him. But then after the war Eden was widely regarded as ‘the one British statesman for whom France had ever felt any tenderness.’² However, at home it is a different story. In his magisterial survey of the post-war Premiership, Professor Peter Hennessy concluded that Anthony Eden ‘falls into a catastrophic category of his own.’³ Yet when a BBC poll at the turn of the century listed Eden last among the nineteen twentieth-century Prime Ministers, an informed debate ensued as to whether this ought actually to be his final placing, especially as the relevance of his views on the Middle East and Europe came to be acknowledged.⁴ Whatever opinions may be held on his Premiership, Eden was for several decades a major world figure. He was, like his American colleague Dean Acheson, ‘present at the creation’. He was an enduring influence on the shaping of the post-war world, as well as one of the generation who saved freedom for that world by his service from 1940 to 1945. In France, this has always been recognised.

Other voices encouraged me to accept Lady Avon’s invitation, and I am particularly grateful to the late Lord Goodman for formalising the arrangements and setting me on my path. It was accepted that I could not for some time devote myself fully to researching Eden’s career. However, in the course of the five years before the publication of my

Home biography in 1996, much parallel work was possible, particularly interviewing Foreign Office officials who had worked with both Eden and Home. I was also able to discuss Eden's career with Alec Douglas-Home (who referred to the Eden biography as my 'overtime'), one of the dwindling band who had been alongside Eden in the House of Commons in the 1930s, and whose first post of Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in 1945, was under Eden, whom he regarded as 'a master of the situation and of all the diplomatic arts.'⁵

By one of those chances of circumstance, each of my six biographical subjects over the past three decades – Rab Butler, Austen Chamberlain, Lord Curzon, Alec Douglas-Home, Anthony Eden and Selwyn Lloyd – has served as Foreign Secretary. Indeed from Curzon's appointment as Foreign Secretary on 23 October 1919 to Rab Butler's resignation of the office on 16 October 1964, one or other of these six figures worked at the Foreign Office in some capacity for all but nine of those forty-three years. They span the Foreign Office eras of Sir Eyre Crowe and Sir Thomas Brimelow, from the economic consequences of the Peace Treaty of 1919 to the economic consequences of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. Eden's career filled the years framed by these chronological bookends. Versailles and Peacemaking provided the back-drop to his work with Austen Chamberlain in the 1920s, and at Geneva in the 1930s; whilst the Arab-Israeli conflict proved to be one of the postludes of the Suez crisis of 1956. Eden, to adapt Bagehot, was the buckle that joined, and the hyphen that fastened, many of the central foreign policy concerns of a troubled century, and was the one figure who had been in Parliament with all these Conservative Foreign Secretaries from Curzon to Butler. Among his first speeches in the House of Commons was a contribution to the debate on 17 March 1924 on the Peace Bill arising from the Lausanne Treaty negotiated by Curzon; his last action as Prime

Minister was to signify to the Queen 'that my own debt to Mr Butler while I have been Prime Minister was very real.'⁶

Eden was given his first significant parliamentary promotion by Austen Chamberlain, who proved an important mentor. Writing to Dame Ivy Chamberlain, when Foreign Secretary himself, Eden stated that 'for however long or short a time it may be my destiny to sit at this desk, it will be his standards and his teaching that I shall seek to follow.'⁷ Eden first gave the future Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home, Cabinet Office in April 1955; and his symbiotic relationship with Selwyn Lloyd, who also first entered the Cabinet under him, and was his Foreign Secretary throughout the Suez crisis, was central to the political scene in the 1950s. In Foreign Office terms, Eden remains a pivotal figure. With Sir Edward Grey (a distant kinsman) and Ernest Bevin (a trusted war-time colleague and friend), he was one of the undisputed triptych of 'great' twentieth century Foreign Secretaries, whose influence, both in institutional reform and policy-making, was extensive and far-reaching.⁸

During Eden's lifetime, only seven politicians served as both Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister – Salisbury and MacDonald (both simultaneously), Balfour (subsequent to his Premiership), Macmillan (prior to his); with Eden, Home (also a post-Premiership Foreign Secretary) and Callaghan as the trio that moved from King Charles Street directly to Downing Street. Eden remains the only Conservative member of the House of Commons in the twentieth century to have gone straight from the Foreign Office to Downing Street, and the only Conservative Foreign Secretary of the modern age never to have held office in a domestic department. Even more unusually, he is the only senior member of any potential governing party whose eventual translation to the highest office was anticipated for nearly two decades. The majority of heirs apparent somehow manage 'to mock the expectation of the world'. Such a

period of 'close-lipp'd patience' makes Eden the undisputed 'Crown Prince' of modern British politics, and this theme, with its consequences, is also one that the present study seeks to examine.

The book is not primarily a study of British foreign policy throughout this lengthy period, as such an approach would entail many volumes; I have, rather, concentrated on the portrait of a man on his journey through life.^{[fn2](#)}

Eden's career falls naturally into four phases, and the shape of the book reflects that pattern. Part One ('The Rose of Youth') deals with the traumatic effect of the Great War, and the subsequent years of promise to the outbreak of the Second World War. The pivotal moment of this phase remains Eden's resignation from the Chamberlain Government in February 1938, a seismic shift in the long ideological battle between the proponents of appeasement and their opponents. Eden's rôle in this crucial debate is by no means as clear-cut as was once thought, nor was his position accurately reflected by Churchill's romantic portrait of him, ten years after the event, as the 'one strong young figure'. Indeed, this book argues that many of Eden's post-war difficulties stem from Churchill's premature indication of the identity of his successor.

Part Two ('The Business of War') deals with the crucial years from Eden's rehabilitation, first as Dominions Secretary, then as War Secretary, before his five year spell as Churchill's war-time Foreign Secretary, arguably the peak of his career. His relationship with the Americans and the Soviets, cultivated over numerous conferences, and his place alongside Churchill at the key moments of the global struggle, were to position him at the heart of the fight for the survival of civilisation, and to shape many of his post-war attitudes.

Part Three ('Crown Prince') deals with the years leading up to the Premiership. Eden's contribution to Conservative

renewal in the immediate post-war years, in fields as diverse as finance, philosophy and organisation proved seminal for the Conservative Party, and gave the lie to the myth that he had no interest in, or aptitude for, domestic political concerns. The fact that this revivalist contribution came at a time of great difficulty in his private life, which in a more prurient age almost ended his political career, adds to the poignancy of the almost unparalleled drama of the final phase, with 1954 standing as an *annus mirabilis* of diplomatic achievement. Then, after waiting for the succession for seventeen years, his fate was to be a stop-gap Prime Minister. As Harold Macmillan wrote in his diary on the day that Eden became Prime Minister, 'It is a pretty tough assignment to follow the greatest Englishman of history.' Eden never cast off the shadow of Churchill's massive presence.

Part Four ('Greatness Going Off?') looks at Eden's culminating years, and argues that many of the difficulties that arose during Eden's Premiership, even before Suez, were exacerbated by the intense and covert disloyalties of ambitious subordinates, disloyalties of which he was well aware.

A postlude looks at Eden's fluctuating reputation since his death and the way that mythology and fable, as ill-founded as those pre-war myths from appeasement days, have served as a substitute for historical truth.

Eden's lengthy career inevitably produces a bulky book, but as Virginia Woolf said when writing the life of Roger Fry, 'You can cut a novel by 250 pages, but how do you cut a life?'

I am most grateful to the following people who have generously given of their time to talk to me about aspects of Anthony Eden's life and career:

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D. R. THORPE
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^{fn1} Victor Rothwell, *Anthony Eden: A Political Biography 1931-1957*, Manchester University Press, 1992. David Dutton, *Anthony Eden: A Life and Reputation*, Arnold, 1997. The vast cover price of the Rothwell book, an elegant and balanced short study, has militated against its recognition as arguably the best of all introductions to Eden's career. The Dutton book, a thematic study rather than a biography, and following on from his studies of Austen Chamberlain, Eden's first political mentor, and John Simon, one of his first political adversaries, is an essential source. The strangely disconcerting cover derives from the fact that the photograph of Eden is printed the wrong way round. Dr Dutton continues his examination of Eden's career in the 1930s in his *Neville Chamberlain* (2001), a masterly summation.

[fn2](#) Specialist examinations of all phases of Eden's career are readily available. Apart from Eden's three volumes of memoirs, the five essential studies are A.R. Peters *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931-1938*, Elizabeth Barker Churchill *and Eden at War*, John W. Young *The Foreign Policy of Churchill's Peacetime Administration 1951-1955*, James Cable *The Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina* and Keith Kyle *Suez* (1991), together with its revised edition, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (2003). Details of all six books are in the bibliography.

PRELUDE
