



HISTORY & POLICY

Connecting historians, policymakers and the media

Tuesday, 4th December, 2007

Call for government to appoint Chief Historical Adviser

A senior historian will call for the appointment of historical advisers to Whitehall departments and a Chief Historical Adviser to the government, at an event to launch the History & Policy initiative on **Wednesday 5th December**.

Professor David Cannadine will tell an audience of politicians, senior civil servants and academics that policymaking would benefit from the involvement of expert historians at the heart of the process. He will be one of three leading historians speaking at *Why Policy Needs History*, the official launch of History & Policy, at the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms on Wednesday, 5th December.

Professor Cannadine said:

“I believe Whitehall departments should have historical advisers and the government should have a Chief Historical Adviser. Historians and politicians bring very different perspectives to bear on the contemporary world and greater dialogue between them would be beneficial to the policy process. Historians can suggest, on the basis of past precedents, what might or might not work and counsel against raising public expectations that policies will be instantly effective. This would be particularly valuable in policy areas such as constitutional reform, which have a long and complex history that must be understood to make the right decisions for today.”

Why Policy Needs History will be co-hosted with the All Party Parliamentary History Group, chaired by Mark Fisher MP. The discussion will be chaired by David Goodhart, editor of *Prospect* magazine, with contributions from:

- David Cannadine: *Britishness: devolution, evolution and revolution*
- David Reynolds: *The Prime Minister as world statesman*
- Pat Thane: *Are things getting better? Governing a changing society*

Professor Thane said:

“We believe that policymaking could gain from paying more attention to history. History can help unravel how today’s policy problems have been constructed and dispel the ‘golden-ageism’ that often dominates public discourse. For instance, boys’ underachievement at school is often assumed to be a recent problem caused by family breakdown and a lack of male role models. In fact, governments have been concerned about this since at least the mid-nineteenth century when divorce was rare. History could help today’s policymakers focus on the real issue, which is how to educate boys and whether they need a different school culture to girls, rather than blaming the ‘broken society’.”

Professor Reynolds said:

“The recent history of international relations is full of situations where world leaders could have achieved better outcomes by ‘thinking in time’. This is where diplomatic historians have something to offer policymakers – they can suggest case studies from the past that may ring bells for current leaders and bring a longer perspective to bear on politics and diplomacy. It is now commonplace for government departments to appoint scientific advisers, but why not make better use of their ‘historical moles’? There are many historically-trained advisers, already in place and familiar with the workings of Whitehall, who should be encouraged to tout their expertise more vigorously.”

Mark Fisher MP said:

"The Parliamentary All Party History Group is pleased to co-host this discussion as the study, and understanding, of history is vital to the making of policy. Most of today's major problems have their origins in the past and there is much that governments can learn from studying the successes and failures of our predecessors. The past is with us today: in foreign affairs, in education, in social policy, in economics. Only by studying that past will we be able to avoid repeating its mistakes. "

History & Policy is the UK’s first initiative connecting historians with policymakers and media. It works to improve public policy through an understanding of history:

- Demonstrating the relevance of history to contemporary policymaking
- Putting historians in touch with those discussing and deciding public policy today
- Increasing the influence of historical research over current policy
- Advising historians wanting to engage more effectively with policymakers and media

Notes to Editors:

- History & Policy and its new website (www.historyandpolicy.org) will be officially launched at *Why Policy Needs History*, a discussion evening and reception at the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms on Wednesday 5 December.
- If you would like to send a reporter and/or photographer to *Why Policy Needs History*, or to arrange an interview with one of the historians involved, please contact Mel Porter, History & Policy External Relations Manager. Tel: 020 7862 8768, email: mel.porter@sas.ac.uk. Space is very limited at the event and entrance is strictly by advance registration only. We regret this event is not suitable for television crews.
- [History & Policy](#) is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history. It was founded by historians at the Universities of Cambridge and London and is based in the [Centre for Contemporary British History](#), at the [Institute of Historical Research](#), University of London. History & Policy is funded through a charitable grant from the Philanthropic Collaborative.
- [David Cannadine](#) is the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother Professor of British History at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London. He was recently appointed by the Prime Minister to a panel tasked with reviewing the thirty-year rule for the release of government archives. His most recent book is *Mellon: An American Life* (Penguin, 2006).
- [David Reynolds](#) is Professor of International History at Cambridge University and Fellow of Christ's College. His latest book is *Summits: Six Meetings That Shaped the Twentieth Century* (Penguin, 2007), which he will present as a BBC 4 TV series in January-February 2008.
- [Pat Thane](#) is Leverhulme Professor of Contemporary British History at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London and co-founder of History & Policy. Her latest book is *Britain's Pensions Crisis: History and Policy* (co-edited with Hugh Pemberton and Noel Whiteside, Oxford University Press, 2006)

- *Why Policy Needs History* is being held in association with the All Party Parliamentary History Group chaired by Mark Fisher MP. The group was established in 2006 and holds regular lectures and discussions in Parliament on various matters of history, for the benefit of all Members and Peers.