



# HISTORY & POLICY

Connecting historians, policymakers and the media

## **History & Policy helps historians to the heart of Government**

*- launch of new history section for Number 10 website*

**Thursday, 2 February 2012**

Historians from the History & Policy (H&P) Network have been delving behind the famous front door of Number 10 Downing Street to bring to life the fascinating history of the house in a dynamic new [history section for the Number 10 website](#).

Lively new biographies of previous Prime Ministers, an exciting monthly feature by expert historians and fresh content on the history of Downing Street itself are among the features launched today. H&P has drawn on the expertise of its national network of 350 historians to provide visitors to the Number 10 website with accessible and freely available articles on:

- the evolution of the role and office of Prime Minister since the 18th century;
- the changing role of the Cabinet Secretary; and
- life after Number 10: what ex-Prime Ministers do with their time.

H&P is an independent, charitably-funded initiative based in the Institute of Contemporary British History at King's College London. It is collaborating with Number 10 on a voluntary basis as part of its mission to improve public policy through a better understanding of history. H&P promotes engagement between academic historians, based at universities around the UK, and policy makers in government and elsewhere, helping them to better understand the background to, and possible solutions for, current policy issues.

With the eyes of the world on Britain in 2012, those interested in the fascinating history of this unique building and its previous 52 residents will now be able to find out more from expert historians. For example:

- To be called a 'prime minister' in the 18th century was a term of abuse. The role and office of PM have only gradually evolved and become accepted since Robert Walpole's era almost 300 years ago.
- Before the introduction of pensions in 1937, some former Prime Ministers - including both William Pitt the Elder and the Younger, Lords North and Melbourne - were so impoverished that their debts were paid off by the state or the monarch.
- The role of Cabinet Secretary has emerged only in the last 100 years, undergoing many, often contentious, changes to meet the perceived needs of the governments of the day.

Alastair Reid, Visiting Professor of History & Policy at King's College London, fellow of Girton College, Cambridge, and co-founder of the History & Policy project, said:

"This year, History & Policy celebrates its tenth anniversary. What better way to mark our progress than by launching historians' contributions to the Number 10 website? The new history section of the website will be a great resource for anyone wanting to know more about the role and institution of the British Prime Minister, and how it has changed and developed over the past 300 years.

"When I founded History & Policy with Simon Szreter in 2002, we hoped to build bridges between academic history and the policy world, which then seemed very disconnected. It is great to see

history now making an impact at the very heart of government, both through the Number 10 website and our engagement with other government departments."

Dr Andrew Blick of King's College London has co-authored with George Jones of LSE the articles on the role of Prime Minister and on Cabinet Secretaries. Dr Blick said:

"History & Policy has come to provide the perfect medium through which historians can present their research to a wider policy-forming and media audience, in a form that is useful to the recipients, while preserving the integrity of the work. It is through this means that we can promote a better understanding of history as a discipline, and a better informed, wider debate about important public policy issues. This project for No.10 is a natural and high-profile extension of this approach, and we are all delighted to be involved."

Dr Paul Readman, head of history at King's College London, welcomed the collaboration:

"This is a chance for historians of different eras, from medieval times to the contemporary world, to deploy their expertise in a format that will be widely and easily accessed, bringing high quality history to a global audience. Scholars at King's are engaged in a rich diversity of historical, and we look forward to contributing to this exciting initiative."

H&P will continue to work with Number 10 during 2012, commissioning and editing articles by historians in its network. H&P is also working with the Mile End Group, based at Queen Mary, University of London, to commission and roll-out updated biographies of all past Prime Ministers, written by historians expert on the period. Contributors will include Arthur Burns and Paul Readman from King's College London, and Boyd Hilton, Andrew Thompson, Jon Parry and Eugenio Biagini from Cambridge University.

#### **Notes to editors:**

1. The new history section of the Number 10 website is available at: [www.number10.gov.uk/history-and-tour](http://www.number10.gov.uk/history-and-tour). Further articles, biographies and information will continue to be added during 2012.
2. History & Policy (H&P), [www.historyandpolicy.org](http://www.historyandpolicy.org), is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history. It was founded in May 2002 by Cambridge historians Alastair Reid and Simon Szreter and is now based in the [Institute of Contemporary British History](#) at King's College London.
3. H&P's current work is funded with charitable grants from [The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#). H&P and historians in our Network are collaborating with Number 10 on a voluntary basis as part of our work to connect historians with policy organisations.
4. 2012 is H&P's tenth anniversary year. We are currently fundraising for events that will showcase historians' contributions to today's most pressing policy challenges, and to support the project in the longer term. If you are interested in supporting this unique project, we would love to hear from you.
5. H&P now supports a network of almost 350 historians based at UK universities, who are willing and able to engage with current policy discussion. On our website you can access 128 freely available [policy papers](#) in which historians explore current policy issues ranging from the economic crisis to climate change and welfare reform.
6. You can [sign up on our website](#) to receive H&P's newsletter. To receive our latest news as it happens, you can follow [@HistoryPolicy](#) on Twitter or join our [Facebook](#) group.
7. For further information about H&P, to discuss a donation or to request an interview with a historian in our network, please contact the public affairs office:

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