#### **CATHLEEN COOPER**

The Cataloguing Department, The Library University of Southampton.

Dear Ms Arnold,

I understand from telephoning the Library, that you would be willing, kindly, to insert the following pages of errata in my M. Phil. thesis of 2001 'The Political and Military Career of Major-General J. E. B. Seely 1868-1947'. These have been supplied to me by Lord Mottistone, formerly Governor of the Isle of Wight, the son of General Seely, and he is anxious that anyone reading the thesis should be aware of the corrections.

I should be most grateful for this service. You will note my appreciation of the Library in my acknowledgements!

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,



# THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY CAREER OF MAJOR-GENERAL J. E. B. SEELY 1868-1947

by

CATHLEEN E. COOPER

#### **ERRATA**

Abbreviations: add CB...Companion Order of the Bath.

CMG....Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George.

MC...Military Cross.

PC....Privy Councillor.

- p 1. 1 4. after 'business' insert 'and the insurance from the burning down of his mill'. 1.16. delete 'was ennobled' and insert 'made a baronet'. Par 2. L8 delete 'a captain' insert 'an officer'.
- p 2. 1 1. insert 'Emily Florence' before 'the daughter'. After 'officer' insert 'Colonel the Hon. Sir Henry Crichton KCB', Par 2. L1. insert 'Sir' before 'Charles'.
- p 3. 11. insert 'seems to have' before 'prevailed'. Lord Mottistone adds the following; 'The tradition of the Seely family maintains that, without checking the politics of his candidature, Seely accepted his nomination for the By-election in the Isle of Wight. He had later endeavoured to do so but first knew of it from a later telegram'. Par 2. 18 after 'energetically' add 'as did his father who had been a Liberal MP between 1869 and 1895, and his elder brother Charles, who was a Liberal Unionist Mp from 1895 to 1906'.p 5. 11. delete 'Arthur' and the brackets round 'Alick'.
- p 9. par 3. 17. insert 'may have' before 'foreshadowed'.
- p 1712. omit 'Privy Councillor' (inconsistent with later references to other such).
- p 20. note 1. insert 'National' before 'Lifeboat'.
- p 21. par 3.17. insert 'Irish' before 'Home'.
- p 22. note 1. insert 'director of Alfred Holt & co., the Liverpool based Blue Funnel Line'.
- p 27 note 1. As Louisa was born on August 1913, it seems that the date given is inaccurate.
- p 24 par 2.14. insert after Creswell, 'whom Seely had met in South Africa'.
- p 30. after par 1. insert, 'Churchill's famous father, Lord Randolph, had however been Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons in 1886 when Campbell-Bannermann was a leading opposition spokesman. In contrast, Seely's father and grandfather were always backbenchers and not nearly as distinguished MP's as Lord Randolph.'
- p 31. par 1.14. after 'times' insert, 'nor that he was made a Privy councillor, nor that he had received various Orders'.
- p 39. 13. after 'success' insert 'which he, in later years, regarded as the greatest honour that he had received'.
- p 53. 1 12. after 'Under-Secretary' insert 'at the Colonial Office'.
- p 59. 12. after 'president' insert 'This practice, slightly modified, to group two or more counties together with Lords Lieutenant taking it in turn to act as President, is still being followed in the early 21st century'.
- p 61.11. delete 'general' and insert 'nationwide'. par 1.12. after 'Wilson' delete 'went to Seely' insert 'approached Haldane who informed Seely'.
- p 63. par 2. 1 6. insert 'the Armed Forces and' before 'civil'.
- p 71. 1 10. delete 'admitted' and insert 'claimed'.
- p 78. par 1.15. delete 'son' insert 'brother'.
- p 81. note 2. add 'for discussion of the validity of this work see chapter 7'.
- p 85.13, insert 'Imperial' before 'General'.
- p 89. 1 89. delete 'Lord' and insert 'Earl'.
- p 90. par 3.13. delete 'protégé' and insert 'colleague'.
- p 92. par 1.17. delete 'Chief of the Imperial General Staff' and insert 'Commander-in-Chief British Exzpeditionary Force'.
- p 93. par 1. 13. insert 'and' after 'propaganda'

- p 94. par 3. 1 1. & p 77. 1 1. & p 87. note 2. insert 'of State' after 'Secretary'.
- p 97. 12. delete 'civil servant' and insert 'senior public officer'.
- p 108. par 2. 17. insert 'it' after 'took'.
- p 109. par 1.14. delete "s' after 'Ewart'.
- p 115. par 2.15. delete 'Governor-General' and insert 'Viceroy'.
- p 119. Is 2-3. Lord Mottistone challenges the assumption that whilst Secretary of State for War, Seely was as subservient to Churchill as is implied in the thesis.
- p 126. par 2. 1 1. delete 'from Sydney'.
- p 128. 11 and 13 delete 'civil' and insert 'public'
- p 140. par 1.11. par 2.11. par 311. delete 'Brigade' and insert 'Brigadier'.
- par 3.14. delete 'then'.
- p 141. par 2.18. after background, insert 'and yeomanry experiences in the Boer War'. 19.
- delete 'his commanding' and insert 'other British senior army officers'.
- p 153. par 1.14. before 'officer' insert 'commanding'.
- p 155. par 213. delete 'Royon' and insert 'Noyon'.
- p 158. 11. insert 'posthumous' before 'VC'.
- p 161.13. delete 'John' and insert 'Herbert'
- p 163 par 3. Lord Mottistone points out the awarding of the honours, CB in 1916 and CMG in 1918 and the Croix de Guerre and Legion of Honour from the French Government as other examples.
- p 170. par 1.12. insert 'Air' before 'Staff'.
- p 178. par 1.13. delete 'authorising' and insert 'recommending'.
- p 179. par 2. 17. delete 'widow' and insert 'heir'.
- p 180. par 2. 17. after 'Cabinet' insert 'as Secretary- of-Sate for India'.
- p 190. par 3. 1 1. insert 'George V' after 'Emperor'.
- p 194. par 1.17. Lord Mottistone refutes any accusation of vanity in his father.
- p 195. par 3.14. delete 'civil' and insert 'public'.
- p. 203. 1. 1 delete '1867' and insert '1868'. 23 March. delete 'R. B'. and insert 'Viscount'. 1912, insert 'Won' after Ilkeston'.

# THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY CAREER OF MAJOR-GENERAL J. E. B. SEELY 1868-1947

by

CATHLEEN E. COOPER

Master of Philosophy

September 2000

### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

## THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY CAREER OF MAJOR-GENERAL J. E. B. SEELY 1868-1947

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[ MASTER COPY ]

SEPTEMBER 2000 AD.

#### UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

#### **ABSTRACT**

FACULTY OF ARTS HISTORY

Master of Philosophy

THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY CAREER OF MAJOR-GENERAL J. E. B. SEELY 1868-1947

by Cathleen Elizabeth Cooper

J. E. B. Seely, a middle-ranking politician, made significant contributions to national affairs and yet he is poorly represented in print. After the Boer War, he was instrumental in bringing the employment of Chinese labour in South Africa to the public's attention. He was responsible for steering the South Africa Bill in 1909 and the Official Secrets Bill in 1911 successfully through the Commons. The creation of the Royal Flying Corps and the improvement of the mobilisation plans, between 1911 and 1914, owed more to him whilst he was Under-Secretary and then Secretary of State for War, than to Haldane.

He represented a type of Liberal who adapted to the changes in his party in the Edwardian period and he was on the radical wing, as a young politician. His election results show the national trends at the polls from 1900-1924 and the effect on a Liberal MP of the rise of the Labour Party, the Lib/Lab pact of the early twentieth century and the divisions within the Liberal Party after the First World War. When the Liberal Party declined, he remained loyal to it and refused to abandon his conviction that free trade should be retained. This brought an end to his career in the House of Commons in 1924 but he was able to exercise some influence on politics as an elder statesman. He urged the creation of a National Government in 1930. Such innovative ideas were also apparent in his advocacy of an independent Air Ministry and a Ministry of Defence. He conducted the successful publicity for the War Loan Conversion in 1932 and was responsible for encouraging the National Savings movement.

The Curragh Incident of March 1914 has been dealt with in some detail to explain why Seely was repudiated by Asquith whilst Winston Churchill and Lord Morley, Seely's probable collaborators, survived. Seely was acting to prevent the spread of disaffection in the armed forces, which was far more widespread and threatening than had been assumed. The public outcry over what appeared to be a bargain struck between a politician and army officers forced Asquith to make a scapegoat of him

Seely's military career shows his style of leadership, in contrast with the accepted attitudes of his time, and the problems of a volunteer officer serving under regular officers. This had earlier affected his conduct of affairs at the War Office. The success of his military command is evaluated, showing for example, that as late as 1918, cavalry could still make a difference to the outcome of a battle, as at Moreuil Wood.

Winston Churchill was Seely's life-long friend and responsible for recommending him for his various promotions. The tensions between the two, over the administration of the Air Ministry in 1919, however, caused Seely to resign a second time from ministerial office.

Seely's reputation suffered when he ranged himself with the appeasers in the 1930's. He was representative of those aristocrats who condemned the punitive nature of the Treaty of Versailles, looked favourably upon the economic achievements of Nazi Germany and saw the régime as a bulwark against Bolshevism.

#### **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis is the result of work wholly done whilst I was in registered postgraduate candidature, part-time.

C. E. COOPER.

6 September 2000

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#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.**

Many librarians and archivists and others have given me their time to answer letters, inform me of relevant material in their possession and send me photographs. I should like to thank the staff of Havant Library, of the Hartley Library and Mrs E. Vallis of Nuffield College, Oxford, who were unfailingly helpful on each of my visits. Dr A. Borg, formerly Director of the Imperial War Museum, showed me the Orpen portrait of General Seely and the records concerning Seely's time as a patron of the Museum. The Photographic Department of the Museum gave me permission to reproduce the portrait. The librarians at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, Churchill College, Cambridge, and the University Library, Cambridge, kindly found references for me in their collections, prior to my visits. Colindale National Newspaper Museum, the Isle of Wight County Press, the Hampshire Record Office and the Isle of Wight Record Office were among those who made newspapers and other material available.

The National Archives of Canada sent me the film strips of the War Diary of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade. The National Defence Headquarters, Ottawa, and the Lord Strathcona Regimental Museum sent me regimental material and Major McNorgan, of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, shared with me his research on 'Seely's Brigade' and sent me the catalogue of the Munnings' collection held in the Canadian War Museum.

The photograph of 'Queen Mary with Lord Mottistone (riding Warrior), Mottistone Manor' is reproduced by kind permission of 'Royal Archives © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II/ photographer'.

Herr Helmut Ernst, Studiendirektor, Reutlingen, Mr A. Gutteridge of Havant College and Miss F. Lief of Winchester obtained and translated German material for me. The Institute of Contemporary History and Wiener Library Ltd. found the relevant German newspapers and Dr N. Crowson of the Institute of Contemporary British History and Dr. R. Thurlow of the University of Southampton shared their ideas with me.

Colonel Parker and Major Craze took me to see Moreuil Wood and Ms Joanna Parker explained the sequence of the battle on site. Mme C. Dhérent of the Archives Department

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.**

of the Department du Pas de Calais, in Arras found local contacts for me and made material available.

General Seely's family have been supportive and generous throughout the project. His daughter, the Hon. Mrs Louisa Fletcher, now sadly deceased, gave me several interviews and showed me letters and photographs. His son, David Lord Mottistone CBE, made family papers available, gave me his time and encouraged me to continue the work.

Professor Paul Smith and Mr Adrian Vinson of Southampton University have sustained me throughout and given me their expertise.

#### ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TEXT.

ADC Aide-de-Campe

BEF British Expeditionary Force
CCB Canadian Cavalry Brigade
CCS Casuality Clearing Station
CID Campittee of Imperial Defe

CID Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS Chief of Imperial General Staff
DCM Distinguished Conduct Medal
DSO Distinguished Service Order

FO Foreign Office

GOC General Officer Commanding

IWM Imperial War Museum LSH Lord Strathcona's Horse

MM Military Medal

MP Member of Parliament

MSS Manuscripts

NCO Non-Commissioned Officer

PRO Public Record Office RCD Royal Canadian Dragoons

RCHA Royal Canadian Horse Artillery

RFC Royal Flying Corps
TF Territorial Force
UVF Ulster Volunteer Force

VC Victoria Cross

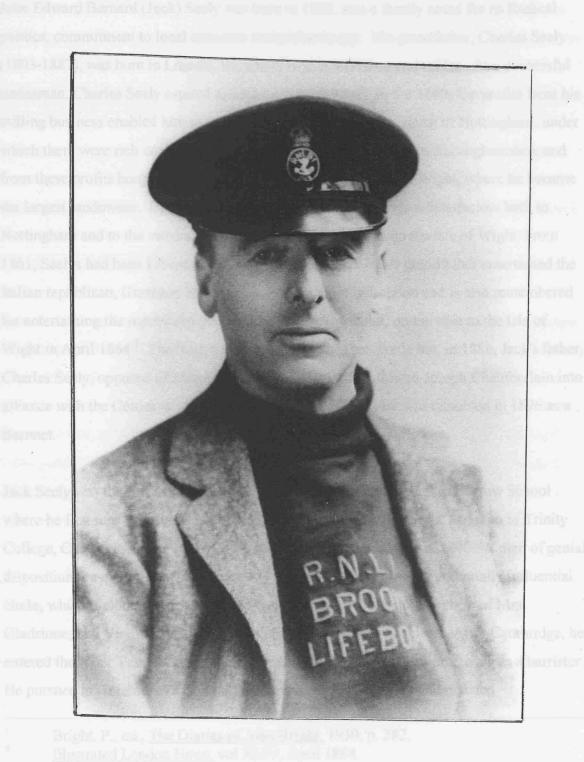
WO War Office

YMCA Young Men's Christian Association

#### FRONTISPIECE.

#### PLATE I.

#### JACK SEELY 1868-1947.



#### **CHAPTER ONE**

#### EARLY POLITICAL CAREER, 1900-1906:

#### FROM CONSERVATIVE TO LIBERAL.

John Edward Bernard (Jack) Seely was born in 1868, into a family noted for its Radical politics, commitment to local concerns and philanthropy. His grandfather, Charles Seely (1803-1887), was born in Lincoln, the son of a corn merchant and miller. As a successful tradesman, Charles Seely aspired to become a landowner. In the 1840s the profits from his milling business enabled him to purchase the Sherwood estate, north of Nottingham, under which there were rich coal seams. He acquired further collieries in Nottinghamshire and from these profits bought landed estates, especially on the Isle of Wight, where he became the largest landowner. Both he and his son, another Charles, were benefactors both to Nottingham and to the miners under their employ, as well as on the Isle of Wight. From 1861, Seelys had been Liberal Members of Parliament. Jack's grandfather entertained the Italian republican, Giuseppe Mazzini, during his exile in London and is also remembered for entertaining the republican guerrilla, Giuseppe Garibaldi, on his visit to the Isle of Wight in April 1864.<sup>2</sup> The Seelys were supporters of Free Trade but, in 1886, Jack's father, Charles Seely, opposed Gladstone's Home Rule Bill and followed Joseph Chamberlain into alliance with the Conservatives as a Liberal Unionist. Charles was ennobled in 1896 as a Baronet.

Jack Seely was the fourth son and third surviving son. He was sent to Harrow School where he first met Winston Churchill, who became a life-long friend, and then to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read Classics and Law, graduating in 1890. A man of genial disposition, he made friends there with an aristocratic, wealthy and potentially influential circle, which included Alfred Lyttleton, son of Lord Lyttleton and nephew of Mrs Gladstone, and Victor Cavendish, later the 9th Duke of Devonshire.<sup>3</sup> After Cambridge, he entered the Inner Temple, was called to the Bar in 1897 and began practising as a barrister. He pursued his interest as a captain in the Hampshire Yeomanry and married

Bright, P., ed., The Diaries of John Bright, 1930, p. 282.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Illustrated London News, vol XLIV, April 1864.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> J. E. B. Seely, Adventure, 1930, p. 13.

the daughter of his commanding officer, the son of the Earl of Erne, an Irish Protestant landowner from County Fermanagh. Erne's problems arising over his tenant and agent, Captain Boycott, in County Mayo in 1880, would have been part of the family lore.<sup>1</sup>

When the Second Boer War broke out in 1899, Jack Seely was a captain in the Isle of Wight Troop of the Hampshire Carabineers. Two troops from the Isle of Wight, together with one from Hampshire and one from Surrey, formed a squadron under his command but after receiving initial training and equipment, they found that there was no ship available. He therefore went to see his uncle, Sir Francis Evans, Chairman of the Castle Line, and persuaded him to provide a ship to transport them to South Africa. On 11 January 1900, Seely paraded the Island contingent at Cowes for inspection by Princess Beatrice, the Governor of the Isle of Wight, and with his wife, had an audience with Queen Victoria at Osborne House before embarking. He revealed a compassionate side of the Queen when he recounted how, when his wife began to cry at the prospect of his departure, 'the Queen kissed and comforted her'.<sup>2</sup> Seely remained on friendly terms with successive monarchs.

In 1900, Charles Seely wanted Jack to be adopted as a prospective Conservative candidate for the Isle of Wight, as the sitting member, Sir Richard Webster, was expecting to be made Master of the Rolls. Jack protested vehemently that he had always been a Liberal and therefore preferred to stand as a Liberal Unionist rather than as a Conservative. His father dismissed this, saying, 'With the situation as it is, there is no difference now'. This had some veracity for the Conservatives had, for example, accepted the fact of Free Trade for fifty years or, at least, they had made no effort to reverse the Gladstonian budgets. H. V. Emy suggests that the deciding factor at this time, as to whether a man might be a Liberal or Conservative, was more likely to be based upon family traditions, differences over electoral reform, religion or the impact of 'great issues', rather than on economic factors. Seely had ceased to practise regularly at the Bar after 1900 so that, with a growing family, this put considerable strain on his finances. He received an allowance from his father, however, as was customary in wealthy families at the time. Family pressure from his father and

Boycott. C. A., <u>Boycott. The Life Behind the Word</u>, Ludlow, 1997.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 54. 'Chairman' is used throughout as appropriate to the period.

Seely, Adventure, p.45.

H. V. Emy, <u>Liberals</u>, <u>Radicals and Social Politics 1892-1914</u>, Cambridge, 1973, p. 99.

financial dependence, rather than the family's tradition of radicalism, prevailed in this case, and Seely reluctantly agreed to stand as a Conservative.

It would have been unrealistic to expect to take the Isle of Wight in 1900 if Seely had adopted any kind of Liberal stance. The Conservatives had held the Isle of Wight since 1885. Lord Salisbury had, however, been careful to conciliate those with liberal tendencies from his Liberal Unionist allies by sanctioning some fairly minor measures of social reform in the 1890s. Given this, it was possible for someone of Seely's liberal tendencies to stand as a Conservative in 1900, especially as he was not a convinced supporter of Home Rule. Winston Churchill similarly followed his father, the late Lord Randolph, by being adopted as a Conservative candidate in 1899 but he likewise protested, in 1903, 'I am an English Liberal. I hate the Tory party, their men, their words, their methods'.' Both men were eventually to follow their political inclinations rather than their family's expectations, once returned to Parliament.

When Webster's promotion was confirmed and he was elevated to the peerage, a by-election was called for 23 May 1900. This date was fortunate as the news of the relief of Mafeking on 17 May 1900, after 217 days' siege, was received with enthusiasm on the Island with flag-bedecked streets. Apart from his family's reputation, Seely was wellknown locally for his lifeboat exploits, which earned him a gold medal from the French Government in 1891 for bravery. During the Boer War he was mentioned in dispatches, awarded the Queen's medal, five clasps, and the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). Because of his absence on active service, his wife canvassed for him energetically and the principal eve-of-poll speaker was Sir Edward Carson, the Solicitor-General and a prominent Irish Unionist. The result reflected both Seely's popularity and the renewed confidence in the Government. He won the seat, increasing the Conservative majority from 446 votes in 1895 to 1062 votes, with 54.5% of the poll.<sup>2</sup> He had gained the largest Conservative majority on the Island

R. S. Churchill, <u>Winston S. Churchill</u>, Vol II, <u>Young Statesman 1901-1914</u>, 1967, p. 71. Churchill to Hugh Cecil, 24 October 1903. Letter was not sent.

F. W. S. Craig, ed., <u>British Parliamentary Election Results</u>, vol I,1885-1918, 1974, vol II, <u>1918-1949</u>, 1983, and eds. B. & D. Butler, <u>British Political Facts 1900-1994</u>, 7th edition, 1994, for all election results and ministerial changes quoted in text.

since 1886. This was possibly helped by the fact that Cowes was dependent upon defence orders and, like the dockyard town of Portsmouth, voted Conservative at this period.<sup>1</sup>

By 1900, the Conservatives had lost fourteen and won only three by-elections since 1895 and any immediate election seemed set to end in a defeat for the Government. However, Seely's result, together with another favourable by-election result in Manchester South and further military successes in South Africa, influenced Lord Salisbury's somewhat reluctant decision to call a general election, the so-called 'Khaki' election, for September 1900. This time Seely was returned unopposed and took his seat on his return from South Africa in May 1901. Nationally, the Conservatives won but with a slightly reduced number of seats.

Once in the House of Commons, his undoubted charm, oratorical ability and reputation as a war hero ensured him an audience and made him many friends. In the summer of 1901, Lord Hugh Cecil and Churchill gathered around them a group of younger members of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, including Seely. Its strong aristocratic membership included the sons of the Duke of Northumberland and Lord Derby. The principal aim was, 'to enliven the proceedings' of what Churchill had thought of as a 'sleepy and exhausted and played out' Front Bench. 'It was a modest attempt at a latter day Fourth Party' and as such gained a reputation for attacking government policies. The group acquired the nickname 'Hooligans' or 'Hughligans' after Lord Hugh.

The House of Commons was a club where members were able to socialise with fellow MPs on all political sides. Among the Conservatives who became Seely's friends, apart from Cecil and Churchill, were George Wyndham, who became Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1900, Sir Alfred Lyttleton, the Colonial Secretary from 1903-1905, and Sir John Dickson-Poynder (later Lord Islington). His life-long friendship with F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead) dated from the election of 1906. Seely especially mentions his brother, Charles Seely, for his support in the Commons.<sup>3</sup> Among the Liberals who were his

R. Shannon, The Age of Salisbury 1881-1902. Unionism and Empire, 1996, p. 509.

Churchill, <u>Winston S. Churchill</u>, vol II, 1967, p. 23. The Fourth Party referred to that formed by Churchill's father, Lord Randolph Churchill, in the 1880s.

Lord Hugh Cecil, 1869-1956, later Baron Quickswood 1941, son of Lord Salisbury (Third Marquess). Alfred Lyttelton, 1857-1913, Colonial Secretary 1903-1905. Sir John Dickson-Poynder, Baron Islington, 1866-1937, was a contemporary of Seely

particular friends, he singled out Arthur (Alick) Murray, the Master of Elibank, who was to become Liberal Chief Whip under Asquith. He also listed several prominent Irish Nationalist MPs with whom he had good relations, including John Redmond, the Chairman of the Irish Nationalist Party, T. P. O'Connor, the journalist, author and MP for the Scotland Division of Liverpool, and Joe Devlin, another fervent and outspoken Nationalist. Seely also had a number of left-wing friends dating from his early days in the House of Commons and who were later to gain prominence, particularly John Burns who first took his seat in 1892, Arthur Henderson who entered parliament in 1903 and Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden who both entered in 1906.

Winston Churchill noted this affability between political opponents within the 'Unionist Alliance' during the army reform debates in 1903:

Last night Jack Seely and I gave a dinner at the House of Commons which 'A. J. B.' [Balfour, the Prime Minister], Austen Chamberlain, George Wyndham, St. John Brodrick, [Hugh] Cecil and Ivor Guest with some others attended. We had a pleasant evening. A. B. was most amiable and good humoured in spite of the fact that Cecil and I had been very rude to him in the House of Commons in the afternoon, as you will see if you read this debate<sup>2</sup>

At the height of the crisis over the Parliament Bill in 1911, Churchill and Smith formed The Other Club, of which Seely was a member, to bring together cross-party representatives from Parliament and the professions for discussion on topical issues.

Seely certainly enjoyed the convivial life of a Member of Parliament but he was also genuinely moved by the issues on which he took a stand. He was, for example, described as going 'into a blue passion if you talk to him about farm burning' in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> He was

and was born at Ryde, Isle of Wight. Churchill was the grandson of the Duke of Marlborough.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, pp. 87-88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Churchill, <u>Winston S. Churchill</u>, p.65. Churchill to Lady Randolph Churchill, 12 August 1903. Guest, later Lord Wimborne, was her nephew.

J. Wilson, C. B. A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, 1973, p. 591. Quoting Alfred Milner, 1854-1925, Governor of Cape Colony 1897 and Governor of Transvaal and Orange River Colony 1902-1906, from L. Curtis, With Milner in

not, however, happy as a member of the Conservative and Unionist Party compared with Liberal Unionists such as his brother, who found a permanent niche within it. For some, such as Seely, Gladstonian Liberal principles on issues like electoral reform, low taxation and Free Trade, seem to have remained more deeply seated than the desire to retain the Union.

His first conflict with the Conservative Government arose over the proposed army reforms which William Brodrick,<sup>1</sup> the Secretary of State for War, decided to introduce. The glaring deficiencies in the training of the soldiers and in logistics which the Boer War revealed stimulated the growth of the National Efficiency Movement after 1900, supported by politicians of both main parties such as R. B. Haldane and Arthur Balfour and urged on by the writings of the Fabian, Sidney Webb.<sup>2</sup> Brodrick responded by proposing an army consisting of six corps, three of regulars and three of auxiliaries from the Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers. This would mean eventually recruiting an extra 50,000 men and would cost £3 million, thus increasing the army estimates to nearly £30 million.

As a young 'Hooligan', Seely criticised the Government's army policy because Brodrick's scheme did nothing to redress the problems which the Boer War had revealed. He condemned the untrained nature of the reserves and the calibre of the remounts sent out to the Boer War.<sup>3</sup> He made the first of many pleas for the need to teach civilians rifle shooting, envisaging a population as skilled in this as in archery in olden days. He subsequently spent much time promoting local rifle clubs both on the Isle of Wight and elsewhere. His attacks made him prominent in the House as an energetic and frequent speaker.

South Africa. 1957, p. 205.

William Brodrick 1856-1942, Viscount Midleton 1907. Conservative MP for Guildford, Surrey. Secretary of State for War 1901-1903.

G. R. Searle, <u>The Quest for National Efficiency</u>. A Study in British Politics and <u>British Political Thought 1899-1914</u>, Oxford, 1971, provides an exposition on the movement.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 104, cols 758-762, 7 March 1902. Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 105, cols 283-286, 17 March 1902.

In the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill of 6 August 1902, he began his campaign to persuade the War Office to pay attention to new inventions and asked, 'Are we to continue, as we have continued for the last fourteen years, to be always anything between two years and a few months behind our probable enemies?'. He pointed out that at the time when the Government rejected the introduction of new, quick-firing guns on the grounds of cost, it was engaged in a programme of building expensive new barracks. He then put forward a proposal to which he was to return at different phases of his career. Lord Randolph Churchill had originally mooted the idea, which Seely now took up, of a single ministry of defence over the army and naval chiefs. Seely also wanted a chief of staff for each service to be responsible for investigating new inventions. His criticisms of the War Office were so important that the new Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, replied in person, saying that Seely took too dark a view of the condition of the army and that no comparison was possible with foreign powers for no country had sent 250,000 men 8,000 miles to fight a war. He also dismissed the usefulness of a fixed department to oversee inventions and strategy.<sup>1</sup>

Following these debates, the Army Reform Movement was formed in 1903 to oppose the Government's policy on military affairs. Its membership came from the 'Hooligan' group and included Winston Churchill, Seely, Lord Hugh Cecil, Sir John Dickson-Poynder and Ernest Beckett.<sup>2</sup> Ian Malcolm,<sup>3</sup> private secretary to George Wyndham, joined later, as did Sir John Gorst who had been a friend of Winston's father. Gibson Bowles, a supporter of Churchill since his entry into Parliament, Colonel Kemp, later Lord Rochdale, and Ivor Guest were among the other members. The Westminster Gazette for 2 April 1903, antagonistic to Churchill's 'party within a party', printed a cartoon entitled 'Primeval Caveman lecturing to a Fourth Party.' It showed Gorst, an original member of the Fourth Party', sitting on a boulder addressing six others, including Churchill and Seely, who, dressed in skins, were sheltering in a cave.<sup>4</sup>

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 112, cols 835-839, 6 August 1902

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Ernest Beckett 1856-1917, Conservative MP for Whitby, later Baron Grimthorp.

Malcolm had married Lily Langtry's daughter by King Edward VII and was therefore a 'son-in-law' of the King.

Seely, Adventure, p. 98.

## PLATE II. CAPTAIN SEELY, ELECTION CARD, MAY 1900



THE FAVOUR OF YOUR

### **VOTE & INTEREST**

IS RESPECTFULLY SOLICITED

## CAPTAIN SEELY,

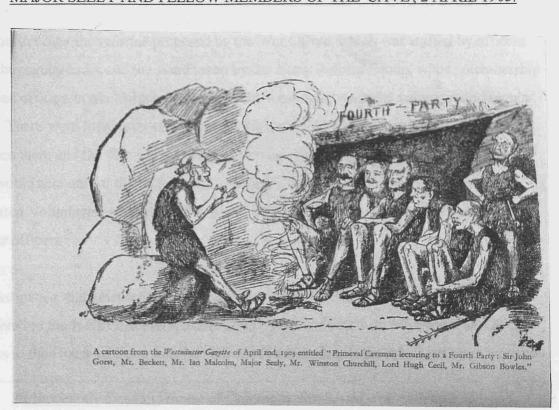
The Conservative & Unionist Candidate,

AT THE

Forthcoming Parliamentary Election, Wednesday, May 23, 1900.

[PLEASE TURN OVER.

## PLATE III. MAJOR SEELY AND FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE 'CAVE', 2 APRIL 1903.



The Army Reform group agreed that Beckett should speak on 24 February 1903 during the address in answer to the King's speech, and move the amendment criticising Brodrick's proposals:

We humbly regret that the organisation of the land forces is unsuited to the needs of the Empire and that no proportionate gain in strength and efficiency has resulted from the recent increases in military expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

Seely, who had already taken up the cudgels in a letter to <u>The Times</u> on 29 January 1903, seconded Beckett. He stated that he did not attack the personality but the principle which 'would end by landing the country in national disaster'. He pointed out that 'if troubles arose in the future we should be even less prepared to meet them than in the past' and more would be spent than on the Navy. He believed that the Government was trying to create too large a regular Army which would prove to be too costly on tax. He then launched an attack on the War Office, believing that the whole system was faulty; it needed rooting out from the bottom to the top, everyone meddled in everybody's business and red-tape had hindered the prosecution of the war in South Africa.

The conflict over the reforms proposed by the War Office, which was staffed by officers from the regular army, and the stand taken by the Army Reform Group, whose membership included officers in the Volunteers, reflects the tension between the voluntary and regular army. There were forty colonels among the MPs in 1900 and antagonism had arisen between them and the War Office over interference in the organisation of the Volunteers.<sup>2</sup> This would account for the opposition to Brodrick from within his party from such dedicated Volunteers as Seely and foreshadowed Seely's difficulties in later years with the regular officers.

Procrastination and amendments in committee destroyed Brodrick's proposals and he was transferred to the India Office in October 1903. The Army Reform Movement and Seely's attacks in the House of Commons had killed off the proposals though as yet there were no

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 118, cols 351-558, 23-24 February 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Rhodri Williams, <u>Defending the Empire</u>, 1996, p.14.

alternatives. Brodrick was replaced by Arnold-Forster and the reform of the army had to wait for the Haldane reforms in the next government and indeed for Seely himself at the War Office.

As a result of his war service, Seely considered himself something of an expert on South African affairs. He told the House of Commons, 'I have spoken to hundreds of Boers and have a knowledge of their language'. His advocacy of fair treatment for the Boers, his criticisms of the conduct of the war and his vehement opposition to the importation of indented Chinese coolie labour to work the Transvaal mines were to engage much of his efforts from 1901-1904.

Liberals had always found it difficult to accept imperialism. Gladstone had opposed it but had intervened in Egypt in 1882. By 1900, the British Empire had expanded rapidly especially in Africa. The Boer War further divided the Liberals between the imperialists, such as the former Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, H. H. Asquith, Sir Edward Grey and R. B. Haldane who supported the war, and its opponents, epitomised by Lloyd George, who became branded as pro-Boer. In 1901 championing the Boers was considered unpatriotic at a time when their adoption of guerrilla warfare was unexpectedly prolonging the war. Seely's opposition to the scorched earth policy, perpetrated by the British in South Africa, and his desire for good relations with the Boers after the war, aligned him with the Radical Liberals rather than the Conservatives. This occasioned Lord Milner's comment to him, 'All you soldiers are what we call pro-Boer'. Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, made a similar comment during a private dinner with Seely.

In July 1901, Seely wrote a letter to <u>The Times</u> in answer to allegations from a newspaper correspondent in South Africa that the 'Boers murder wounded men...a frequent incident'.

Seely, Adventure, pp. 89-90.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th series, vol 101, col 335, 20 January 1902.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 82. Reasons for the pro-Boer attitude among army officers serving in South Africa are suggested in, K. Surridge, "All you soldiers are what we call pro-Boer": The Military Critique of the South African War, 1899-1902', <u>History</u>, 82, 1997, p. 582 ff. His thesis, however, is based upon the experiences of the regular army officers and Seely was a member of the volunteer forces. Milner was High Commissioner for the Cape Colony.

Seely gave an account from his personal experiences of how the Boers had in fact attended wounded men under his command 'with the greatest kindness and care' and that he had spoken to many officers and men who had been left sick and wounded in the hands of the Boers. 'In no single instance have I heard anything but gratitude expressed for the treatment they received'.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, he spoke in the House of Commons in defence of the motives behind the setting up of the concentration camps by the British Army. His opinion was that if the Boers' women and children had been left unguarded and unsupplied by their menfolk on the farms then they would have been attacked by the blacks and starved 'worse than they were in the camps'. His assessment was based upon his personal experience of the camps in their early days, and he had come home to take his seat in the House of Commons in June 1901. After this the conditions in the concentration camps became a national scandal and the maladministration led to the death of some 20,000 people before the war ended in May 1902. Sir Charles Dilke, the Radical MP, replied to Seely. Whilst not accepting his arguments, Dilke acknowledged the achievements of one 'who has performed brilliant services in South Africa which are the envy of his military colleagues and which have won the respect of us all'. Seely was to speak frequently on many colonial and military subjects but he never returned to the discussion on the concentration camps.

His pro-Boer stance was not evidence of a general dislike of British imperialism. He accepted that the Empire was there to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. He believed the late Victorian and French point of view, that imperialism took the benefits of civilisation to backward peoples. 'To such views the most liberal could subscribe'.<sup>3</sup> On 27 March 1909, he attended a meeting on colonial affairs in Nottinghamshire where he made clear some of his attitudes, telling his audience that 'every mile of boundary which the

The Times, 12 July 1901. However, the Boers were known to shoot those black and coloured men who had been working for the British Army and who fell into their hands. This may have accounted for the rumours about the treatment of British troops. P. Warwick, Black People and the South African War, Cambridge, 1980. pp. 79-80.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol.101, col 335, 20 January 1902.

V. G. Kiernan, <u>European Empires from Conquest to Collapse</u>, 1815-1960, 1982, p.
 146.

British Empire spread was so much added for the sum of human happiness and so much detracted from the sum of human misery because, better than any other nation, we knew the art of governing subject races'.<sup>1</sup>

He believed, from his early years in politics, however, that there were moral and legal obligations behoven upon the British Government in its imperial administration. In 1906, following the imposition of martial law after a disturbance among the Zulus in Natal, he presented a closely argued discussion on the obligations of the Governor and the British Government. He believed that the Governor, ultimately responsible for the protection of the Zulus, should have transferred the case to the civil courts and reminded the House that judgement had been given in 1867 by Lord Carnarvon, with reference to the administration of colonies:

All exceptional legislation, especially martial law, is at variance with the spirit of English law. It is only to be justified in view of the imminence of armed rebellion. The Governor cannot be relieved from the obligations of deciding these matters himself.

Ultimately, Seely explained, martial law was always Britain's responsibility. Britain had, he believed, a special responsibility to the Zulus in particular and the native races in general. He summed up his beliefs on respect for the law and its application to all in the Empire, ending with a radical statement:

A spirit seemed to have grown up in the last year or two that the British Empire was a thing which had no common principle, that it was bound together by other means or no means at all. If they were to abandon the principles upon which the Empire was founded, better a thousand times the Empire were shattered to pieces. In the great principle of common respect for the law, the right of every man, black, white or yellow, to have a fair trial before a properly constituted court, was summed up

<sup>&</sup>lt;u>The Times</u>, 27 March 1909. Seely speaking on imperial affairs at Hucknall Tockard.

the whole justification for the Empire and if they were to abandon it, or allow others to abandon it, it were better the Empire had never been.<sup>1</sup>

Seely's first opportunity to take a stand on the morality of an imperial issue arose after 7 January 1904, when the Pretoria Government published a draft of the Chinese Labour Ordinance, to regulate the introduction into the Transvaal of unskilled, non-European labourers. It laid down the terms of the contracts and the licences to be issued to employers taking on such workers. Seely had already had conversations in South Africa with Colonel Frederick Creswell, the manager of the Village Main Reef Mine, Transvaal, who had convinced him that it was possible to staff all the mines with white labour and that the Chinese could never form part of the community in which they were to live. Seely opposed the plan to import indentured labour on the grounds that it would be inherently wrong and would result in the Chinese becoming tantamount to slaves:

I vividly remember walking along the downs at home, thinking it over, trying to argue the case every way, and finally convincing myself that the whole idea was inherently and fatally wrong. Sitting on top of Mottistone Down, I composed a letter to <u>The Times</u>, couched in strong language, I walked home, wrote the letter and sent it off. <u>The Times</u> did not then attach much importance to the matter, and put my letter in small print on a back page.

He pointed out that subsequently over a million and a half copies of his letter, published in <u>The Times</u> on 16 April 1904 under the title, 'Chinese Labour and the Transvaal', were distributed throughout the country by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.<sup>2</sup>

He put forward his objections to the proposals, in his letter, on grounds of expediency and of principle. He pointed out, firstly, that there had been no official inquiry into the opinions of the inhabitants. He believed that the importation of Chinese labour would no doubt check the numbers of whites employed and, in addition, Australia and New Zealand were

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 155, cols 245-255, 2 April 1906. Lord Carnarvon had been Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1874 when he had advocated a federal state for South Africa.

Seely, Adventure, p. 104.

hostile to the proposal. As far as principle was concerned, he maintained that what was not considered good enough for subjects of the King and any coloured people, was not good enough 'for any human beings wherever the British flag flies'. Lord Palmerston referred specifically to the right to protection of 'a British subject', in the 'Don Pacifico speech' of 1850. Seely now claimed these rights for all who lived within the bounds of the British Empire. He concluded by deploring the proposal to deport the Chinese by force at the end of their contracts. The letter opened the controversy to public debate. Prior to it there had been brief official reports of the measures taken to implement the Ordinance and a letter from Creswell published in The Times on 1 February justifying his argument that white and not coloured labour should be used in the mines. The moral aspects had not been discussed in the press, but now sides began to be taken, meetings were held, letters written to The Times and debates took place in the House of Commons.

On 3 May 1904, Seely wrote to <u>The Times</u> taking up points which had been made by correspondents, such as the journalist, Iwan-Muller, in reply to his original letter. He believed that the measure would be opposed if anyone, including Muller, thought that it would bring 'disgrace, disaster and dishonour' upon the Empire. In a further letter of 22 June 1904, he made a number of essentially Liberal statements, elaborating his argument against the legality of the Ordinance and pointing out that it would not be valid in English law:

because it is undue restraint of trade and of the liberty of the subject and is inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the Common Law ... The Law of England does not permit a master to have arbitrary powers of imprisonment over a servant'.

He called for publicity to expose the attempts to deprive a whole class of 'the benefits of some of the most essential principles of liberty assured to them by the existing law'.

The supporters of the Chinese Labour Ordinance were led by Lord Milner in South Africa and at home by Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister, and Alfred Lyttelton, the Colonial Secretary. Seely kept up his opposition in letters and speeches whilst at the same time

The Times, 22 June 1904.

continuing to play golf and dine with Lyttelton throughout the controversy. He spoke on the issue of Chinese labour in the House of Commons on a number of occasions in 1904. Violet, Asquith's daughter, described the uproar in the House from the Conservative benches when he rose to speak in a debate, following the issuing of the Ordinance. Churchill intervened, in vain, to try to get Seely a hearing. The controversy dragged on and became a factor in the defeat of the Conservatives in the the General Election of 1906. Seely continued his campaign, writing again to The Times on 4 June 1906 urging the repatriation of the 53,000 Chinese labourers still in South Africa. Under the new Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, this was gradually implemented. Seely's contribution to the final outcome was acknowledged and commended when he was the guest of honour at a dinner given by the New Reform Club in 1908. He was always more vehemently opposed to Chinese Labour than was Churchill, who saw Free Trade as the main electoral issue in 1906, a point emphasised by Churchill's son, Randolph.

The revival of the association between the Conservative Party and Protection exercised Balfour's government. On 15 May 1903, Joseph Chamberlain reopened the question when he put forward proposals at a meeting in Birmingham for Tariff Reform. He suggested reintroducing a measure of Protection which would include Imperial Preference. In Adventure, Seely made much of the fact that he had always been a Free Trader:

Both my grandfathers had been prominent members of the Anti-Corn Law League. I had tea with Mr Gladstone when I was a boy at Harrow and had sat on John Bright's knee. The idea of returning to Protection seemed to me to be positively wicked.

He opposed the reintroduction of tariffs on economic grounds and revived the old Liberal fear of the 'Dear Loaf'. He believed that Imperial Preference would raise the price of food

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 107.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 132, col 335-338, 21 March 1904. Violet Bonham Carter, Winston Churchill As I Knew Him, 1965, pp. 115-116. Violet, a prominent Liberal, became known as Lady Violet Bonham Carter after her marriage in 1915 to Sir Maurice.

The Times, 23 November 1908.

Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, p. 117. 'While other Liberal candidates attempted to worship at other altars it will be noticed that Churchill made none save nominal oblations on the issue of Chinese labour in the Transvaal'.

and encourage reciprocal and damaging tariffs on British exports. These impositions would bring the Empire into disrepute with the voters. He also saw it as a political move designed by Chamberlain to revivify the Conservative and Unionist Party which had lost popularity during the Boer War.<sup>1</sup>

Chamberlain announced his conversion to a measure of tariff reform in the House of Commons on 28 May 1903. Immediately following, Seely claimed that he was the first to speak publicly against the reintroduction of Protection, at a meeting at Belvoir on 29 May. Whilst in camp at Ringwood with the Yeomanry, he wrote to Winston Churchill on 30 May with proposals for a counter-measure:

My dear Winston,

The more I think of it the more certain I am that we are right and J. C. [Joseph Chamberlain] wrong. But whether the majority will see it is another matter... would Beach [Sir Michael Hicks-Beach] be President of a Free Trade Committee? So far no safe man of great reputation has said a word against the scheme...I am very fit and full of parliamentary zeal.<sup>2</sup>

This letter shows that although Churchill was regarded by his son, Randolph, as 'a prime mover in what was ultimately to be named the Free Food League', Seely had envisaged the creation of a pressure group to oppose Tariff Reform two days after Chamberlain's speech in the Commons, had suggested the name of the man who was to chair it and had proposed both ideas to Churchill.

On his return to London, Seely wrote that he was hailed as a prophet among Unionist Free Traders. A group of 54 like-minded MPs met in one of the committee rooms of the House of Commons on 2 July 1903, under the chairmanship of Lord Goschen, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer who had succeeded Randolph Churchill in 1887. The meeting resulted in the formation of the Free Food League on 13 July 1903 with Sir Michael Hicks-

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 100.

Churchill Archives, Churchill College Cambridge, Char. 2/7/49, Seely to Churchill, 29 May 1903. Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, later Lord St. Aldwyn, had been Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1885-1886 and from 1895-1902.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, vol II, p.62.

Beach, a venerable parliamentarian from Disraeli's day, as president, Henry Hobhouse, Privy Councillor, as chairman and Seely and Goschen as joint secretaries. Among the members from the House of Commons, including some sixty Unionists, were the 'Hooligans' including Winston Churchill and Lord Hugh Cecil. The Duke of Devonshire joined in October. Those Unionists who wanted to reintroduce a measure of Protection, formed the rival Tariff Reform League which held its inaugural meeting on 21 July 1903.

Seely and Goschen sent Balfour a resolution, handwritten by Seely and signed by both, which had been passed unanimously by the Executive Committee of the Unionist Free Food League, chaired by Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, on 30 July 1903. This affirmed that the purpose of the League was to place before the people the objections to the imposition of protective duties on food. It maintained that every Conservative Government since 1852 had opposed such duties and quoted from Balfour's speech to the Constitutional Club on 26 June 1903 when he had said, 'I hold with the deepest conviction that it would be perfect folly on the part of the Conservative Party, or the Unionist Party, to make particular opinions on economic subjects a test of party loyalty'. This opinion the League fully accepted. They wanted discussion in the country 'while abstaining from any action which might interfere with the unity of the Party'. The resolution was followed up by a dinner given by Churchill and Seely for Balfour and some of his colleagues, including Wyndham and Brodrick, as well as Hugh Cecil.<sup>3</sup>

Balfour struggled to maintain unity but Free Trade proved the issue on which the Party split and which was to culminate in the electoral disaster of 1906. Joseph Chamberlain offered to resign as Secretary of State for the Colonies on 9 September 1903 and tour the country to obtain converts to Tariff Reform. The disunity of the Cabinet was irreparable however, with the resignations of C. T. Ritchie, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Lord Balfour of Burleigh, the Secretary for Scotland, in October 1903 in support of Chamberlain, and the final decision of the Duke of Devonshire to resign from his office of Lord President of the Council. Balfour wrote on 11 October, 'if the Right wing insists on going, it is not so

Seely, Adventure, p. 100.

Bodleian Library Sandars Papers MSS Eng Hist c. 740/95-98. Seely and Goschen to Balfour 30 July 1903. J. S. Sandars 1853-1934 was Private Secretary to Balfour 1892-1911.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, vol II p. 65.

certain that we should not do better without the Left wing also'.¹ Churchill was finding it increasingly unpalatable to remain in the Conservative Party and on October 1903, wrote a long letter to Lord Hugh Cecil explaining that if he changed sides, his motive would be his conviction that the country should maintain a Free Trade policy. At the end was a post-script: 'I should like you to show this letter to Jack Seely and talk to him on the subject'.² However, he did not send the letter which nevertheless survives as evidence of his attitude at the time, his intimation that he would leave the Conservative Party and his collaboration with Seely.

As early as the end of the first Parliamentary session in 1901, Seely was being criticised by Isle of Wight Conservatives for his Liberal views in his speeches to his constituents. Sir Barrington Simeon, an Island landowner, told him that although they were excellent, nobody by any stretch of imagination could call them Conservative.' On 20 November 1903, Seely addressed the Shanklin Conservative Club, of which he was Vice-President. He made a long speech explaining the reasons why he opposed the reintroduction of Protection; 'it will decrease the prosperity of the country that imposes the duty'. Such publicly expressed sentiments, however, would make it difficult for him personally to remain a Conservative if Chamberlain's policy was adopted by the Party. He seems somewhat naive if he thought that he could become a Conservative Member of Parliament and tour round the Isle of Wight addressing the local Associations on Liberal issues, without raising opposition, or that he could, in view of his opinions, support the Conservative Party once he was in the House of Commons. Referring to this in June 1912, he remarked 'I thought it possible to be a Unionist but when I made speeches I soon found that my supporters said that they were Radical speeches. Really it was not my fault. I was always a Radical. I have been brought up as such and I suppose that was how it came about'. The local branches of the Isle of Wight Conservative and Unionist Association, not surprisingly, lost confidence in him as a Conservative and early in March 1904, requested the Central Office to find them a new candidate.5

Sandars Papers 740/128, Balfour to his cousin, William Palmer, Lord Selborne, 11 October, 1903.

R. Churchill, <u>Winston S. Churchill</u>, pp 70-72.

Mottistone MS 7/3.

Seely, Adventure, pp. 90-91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The Times,7 March 1904.

Following the reaction to his speech in the Commons on 21 March 1904, Seely applied for the Chiltern Hundreds on 25 March.<sup>1</sup> When he announced this to the House on 30 March he was greeted with loud jeers.<sup>2</sup> His decision to leave the Conservative and Unionist Party was not, however, a hasty one. He had planned to do so as soon as the Ordinance was published. His move therefore predated Winston Churchill's, who crossed the floor of the House of Commons on 31 May 1904.

Nine Unionists, including Churchill, Seely, Ivor Guest and Dickson-Poynder, crossed the floor between 1904-1906 over the proposals to reintroduce a measure of Protection and the way in which the Chinese labour issue had been handled. The leader of the 'Hooligans', Lord Hugh Cecil, remained with the Conservative Party, hoping for support from Balfour against Chamberlain, though this was not forthcoming. Balfour denounced the critics for taking every opportunity to attack the Government and condemned them as 'indeed no more than professional critics of their own side'. Other MPs who were opposed to Protection, including Seely's brother, Charles, remained with the Unionist Party, decided to stay and fight their own constituencies in 1906 but stood as Free Fooders, whilst 97 MPs retired. A

In June 1904, Seely addressed a meeting of the Cobden Centenary<sup>5</sup> held at Dewsbury where he explained in detail his reasons for his defection. Ignoring the ease with which he had been persuaded by his father to accept the Conservative party ticket in 1900, he emphasised that he had preferred principle to party. He said that he had never been in favour of Protection and that when the majority of one party was 'determined to uphold these fallacies of Protection it behoved him to go somewhere else'. He referred to the ideals of Cobden, who, he said, 'stood for freedom, justice and progress, all of which were now being assailed from different quarters'.<sup>6</sup>

Journals of the House of Commons vol 159, 2 February-15 August 1904. Session 1904, p. 108.

R. A. Rempel, <u>Unionists Divided</u>. <u>Arthur Balfour</u>, <u>Joseph Chamberlain and the Unionist Free Traders</u>, Newton Abbot, 1972, p.135, using <u>Adventure</u> for Seely's part in the episodes of 1904.

A. Sykes, <u>Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903-1913</u>, Oxford, 1979, p. 92.

A. K. Russell, Liberal Landslide. The Election of 1906, Newton Abbot, 1973, p.55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Richard Cobden, advocate of Free Trade, born in 1804.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, pp. 90-91.

The period in which Churchill and Seely left the Conservative Party and joined the Liberals coincided with the emergence of what became known as 'New Liberalism'. In 1903, the National Liberal Federation passed a motion in support of greater social radicalism. Its parliamentary advocates, such as Charles Masterman and Herbert Samuel, influenced by the 'national efficiency' debates, aimed to up-date the Liberal Party. In addition to the traditional Victorian concentration on, for example, Home Rule and temperance, 'New Liberalism' advocated a programme of state intervention to achieve social reform and to raise the standard of living. Its aims would be accomplished by the use of graded income taxation and increased legislation. The economist J. A. Hobson later drew together the ideas of New Liberalism in The Crisis of Liberalism (1909); others, such as L. T. Hobhouse, went further and advocated collectivism, namely increased public ownership and control of industry, together with the recognition of individual liberties and equal opportunities. These principles became the key-note of the younger Liberals in the Edwardian period and attracted adherents such as Lloyd George, Winston Churchill, Seely and sympathisers such as Asquith. Lloyd George's programme of social reform attempted to put the principles into practice.

Seely's radicalism was positively influenced by this new exposition of liberalism, as well as his family history of radical politics, by his friends in the Liberal Party such as the Master of Elibank, and by Churchill in particular who became one of the leading advocates of what he called 'a new constructive policy'. Negatively, discontent with the Conservative policies on army reform, free trade and the use of indentured Chinese labour all contributed to his decision to leave the Party.

Having applied for the Chiltern Hundreds, Seely stood as an Independent Unionist candidate for the Isle of Wight in the subsequent by-election in April 1904. William Gladstone's youngest son, Herbert, the Liberal Chief Whip from 1899-1905, had paved his way by persuading the Liberal Sir Godfrey Baring not to stand. Lord Hugh Cecil wrote to Winston Churchill on 27 March 1904, 'I am all in favour of helping Jack - if it were any use.

Sir Godfrey Baring was a well-known Island personality. He held the post of Chairman of the Isle of Wight County Council for thirty-six years from 1898 and was also Chairman of the General Committee of the Royal Lifeboat Institution.

I would write him a letter or even drag my infirm body to his lonely island to make a speech. But probably in view of the Non-Conformist feeling he is better without me.<sup>1</sup>

Non-Conformity, traditionally pro-Liberal, was strong on the Isle of Wight and opposition had arisen to the introduction of the Education Bill in 1902. As well as empowering county and county borough councils to set up secondary schools, church schools, supported by the rates, were placed under their control. Seely opposed the scheme, foreseeing trouble, and wanted the decision to be discretionary not compulsory. He had proposed an amendment to that effect on 20 August 1902 in the House of Commons, to which Balfour replied personally, averse to any opt-out clauses.<sup>2</sup> Cecil was a firm supporter of the Bill and had been the main speaker in its favour in the debate on the second reading. He would therefore hardly be a popular emissary among Non-Conformist voters.

Cecil's offer of help was unnecessary as Seely was returned unopposed on 6 April 1904, as an Independent Unionist. He took his seat 'with the Unionist Free Traders as they were called, amidst renewed cheers, led by Mr Churchill'.<sup>3</sup> The Unionist Free Traders were unable either to convert Balfour or to create a viable, independent party, so that a number, including Seely, decided to seek election as Liberals. He gave as his chief reason the Conservative consent to the Chinese Labour Ordinance.<sup>4</sup> During this period he kept his name to the fore, speaking frequently in the House of Commons, concentrating on military, South African and colonial matters.

It was through the auspices of Herbert Gladstone, who had been busy improving the party organisation, that Seely, having first considered the seats of Hyde and Middleton, found a new constituency, the Abercromby Division of Liverpool. He wrote to Gladstone in January 1905 agreeing to contest it as a Liberal and said that he would pay all expenses. Socially and economically diverse, the Division had its professional district, which included the University, businesses such as large shops, offices and the shipping companies. This area was largely Protestant and opposed Home Rule. In the centre of the Division were the poor,

Churchill Archives. Churchill College Cambridge. Char.2/16/96-97.

Parliamentary Debates House of Commons 4th Series, vol 113, cols 255-260, 20 October 1902

Seely, Adventure, p. 108.

Seely, Adventure, p. 108.

mainly Roman Catholics of Irish origin, living in slums. They distrusted the Liberals' coercion of the Irish even though the Liberals supported Home Rule. The Protestant workers opposed temperance and Catholicism, saw the Liberals as the representatives of the wealthy industrialists and tended to support Unionism. 'Protestantism before politics' was the cry. Seven of the nine Liverpool constituencies were Conservative in 1900 including the Liverpool Abercromby Division which had been held by the Conservatives since 1885. In the last contested election in 1892, they had a majority of 831 votes (12.8%).

Seely realised, therefore, that it would be a difficult seat to capture for the Liberals and pointed out to Gladstone, 'It seems a somewhat formidable enterprise, but I know that I can rely not only on your help, as you have kindly assured me, but also on that of Mr Evans, Sir Edward Russell, Mr Holt and others who forwarded the invitation through you in such generous terms'. During the election campaign, Seely was asked to speak to the Young Wales group in Liverpool and remarked that both Herbert Gladstone and Lord Rosebery had warned him that it was impossible for him to win a seat in the city but that he had said that he would go and try.<sup>2</sup>

By the time of the election of 1906, however, changes were taking place which made the result less predictable. Apart from national issues, such as opposition to Conservative legislation on education and licensing, the Conservatives were weakened by local factors. The movement of the better-off residents to the suburbs reduced their voting strength and the numbers on the electoral roll fell from 9,137 to 7,418.<sup>3</sup> The sitting Member, W. F. Lawrence, had lost the Jewish vote over his support of the Aliens Act of 1905, had not made his position clear on Tariff Reform and suffered from poor local organisation of the Party. The 'Drink Question' also played a part in discrediting the Conservative Party. It was

British Library. Viscount Gladstone Papers, vol LXXXVII Brit. Mus. Add MS 46061 fol 109. J. Seely to Herbert Gladstone, 10 January 1905. The sponsors named were noted Liberals in Liverpool. Sir Edward Russell was editor of the <u>Liverpool Daily Post</u>. Richard Holt stood for the Liverpool Division of West Derby in 1906 and Evans was the Liberal leader there. Herbert Gladstone (1854-1930) Chief Liberal Whip, 1899-1905, Home Secretary 1905-1910.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 16 January 1906.

P. J. Waller, <u>Democracy and Sectarianism</u>. A <u>Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1939</u>, Liverpool, 1981, pp. 219-229, for a detailed analysis of the constituencies in Liverpool in 1906, including Seely's role, though he was a Major not a Major-General at that date. p. 223.

revealed that the Conservatives had acquired a majority on the Liverpool Licensing Committee and favoured the applications made by publicans under the Licensing Act of 1904. 'In Abercromby the Unionists were insecure before fiscal matters hastened their overthrow'.<sup>1</sup>

Liberal prospects were further encouraged because the issue of Tariff Reform had divided the commercial classes between those who believed that Free Trade would continue to benefit them and the shippers who favoured Protection. Among the former, there were those who preferred to abstain from voting Conservative rather than vote Liberal.<sup>2</sup> In the Liberals' favour was the pact of 1903 made between Herbert Gladstone and Ramsay MacDonald of the newly formed Labour Representation Committee. They agreed not to contest all the seats but that each party would allow the other a free run in certain cases so as not to split the anti-Conservative vote, which had happened in a by-election in North-East Lanark in 1901.<sup>3</sup> This arrangement pertained in the Abercromby Division, which therefore became a straight fight between the Liberal and Conservative candidates.

Balfour resigned in December 1905 and the general election was called for January 1906. Seely now found himself on the same side as his former political opponents. He realised that because of his recent political defection it would not necessarily be a wise move to support Sir Godfrey Baring on the Isle of Wight in person. He wrote to Gladstone in August 1905, 'I believe that I can do Baring the best service by not attending his meetings, or even one of my own, at the present time'. Seely did not believe that the new Conservative candidate, a Colonel A. Hickman Morgan, who had replaced him, would command the same personal vote as he had done.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, there were notable occasions when an Islander tended to be preferred to a carpet-bagger, so Seely may have been correct in his assumption that his personal vote was important. Baring won the seat with a majority of 1,561, compared with Seely's previous majority of 1,062 for the

British Library, Viscount Gladstone Papers, vol LXX1X Add MS 46063/45. Seely to Gladstone, 17 August 1905.

Waller, <u>Democracy and Sectarianism</u>, p. 223.

H. Pelling, Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910, 1967, p. 250.

Bealey, F., 'Negotiations between the Liberal Party and the Labour Representation Committee before the General Election of 1906', <u>Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research</u>, XXIX, 1956, pp 261-278.

Conservative and Unionist Party. The decline of the Liberal, largely non-conformist, rural voter favoured the Conservatives in the long run, so that Baring subsequently lost the seat in January 1910.<sup>1</sup>

In January 1906, Churchill stood for North-West Manchester and Seely for Liverpool Abercromby as arranged. P. F. Clarke in Lancashire and the New Liberalism considers that Seely was, 'a great catch for the Liverpool Liberals'. His prominence as an upholder of controversial topics in the Commons commended him. He describes in Adventure how he was introduced as a man who would put country above party and that he was unanimously adopted by the local Liberal Association. In view of the traditional weaknesses of the Liberals in Abercromby, Seely's local chairman urged him to visit personally as many constituents as he could. This was not an impossible task in a such a small constituency and Seely estimated that he had met two thirds of the electorate. He recounted how he made the rounds and in so doing saw for himself the slum conditions in which the people existed, the over-crowding and the disease, and how this had led to his determination to rectify poor housing.<sup>3</sup>

During the general election campaign in January 1906, Seely energetically electioneered, holding several meetings in local halls and in the open every day. Attracting large crowds, he dealt with the current issues, especially Free Trade and Chinese labour. Sir Frederick Creswell was visiting England and Seely had invited him to speak on his behalf in Liverpool to explain his objections to the use of Chinese labour on the Rand. They spoke in the Temperance Hall and then they both addressed a meeting of two to three hundred coopers at a meeting held outside Messrs Stuart and Douglas, the brewers. Seely took questions from men in the crowd who were mainly concerned with the security of their jobs. In each case he insisted that tariffs would only worsen the situation as he believed they had done in America. Asked if he believed in the taxation of land values, he replied, 'Yes emphatically and if you will only give us a chance, we will tax them'. Turning to the question of religious toleration in a city divided by religion, Seely expressed his hope that

Seely, Adventure, pp. 111-112.

Pelling, <u>Social Geography</u>, p. 133.

P. F. Clarke, <u>Lancashire and the New Liberalism</u>, 1971, p. 236.

religious intolerance was a dying industry and certainly he would have none of it. When asked about Home Rule, he declined to discuss it, saying that he had already dealt with that matter. Home Rule was still not a priority in his politics at this stage, and he does not seem to have pronounced emphatically in its favour any more than, for example, R. B. Haldane, under whom he was later to serve at the War Office. Free Trade not Home Rule was the issue on which the election was fought, a point which Asquith made to Herbert Gladstone as being essential to a Liberal victory.

During the campaign in 1906, he was to experience the tactics of the Women's Social and Political Union, which had been founded in 1903 and which was becoming increasingly militant from 1906 in order to obtain votes for women. Neither Seely nor Winston Churchill was convinced by the campaign but they did not express outright opposition. Their attitude was more in line with that of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal leader, who 'personally sympathised, though without enthusiasm, with the aims of the movement'. Asquith was opposed to it whereas others, such as Sir Edward Grey, were in favour. The Liberal Party, though, had no commitment to extending the franchise to women at that date.

A persistent suffragette dogged Seely's meetings, loudly demanding the vote for women and asking whether he was in favour of Women's Suffrage. He retorted, 'I have already had the privilege of seeing our friend there before' and added, 'I am in favour of a tentative measure of Women's Suffrage. (Applause) But I am sorely tempted to add that it depends on the lady'. (Loud laughter and applause). Criticising Seely's campaign, the local Conservative newspaper, the <u>Liverpool Courier</u>, spotted that he had been somewhat guarded on certain issues such as Home Rule and women's emancipation:

Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 11 January 1906.

Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 12 January 1906.

Waller, <u>Democracy and Sectarianism.</u>, p. 222, referring to Haldane's speech in November 1905 in Liverpool against implementing Home Rule. M. Kinnear, <u>The British Voter. An Atlas Survey since 1885</u>, 1968, p. 141 points out that 10% of the Liberal candidates in the General Election of 1906 were opposed to Home Rule.

Sykes, Tariff Reform in British Politics, p. 97.

J. Wilson, C. B., A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, 1973. p.510.

<sup>6</sup> Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 12 January 1906.

Major Seely DSO made people forget how his newly adopted party leader [Campbell-Bannerman]cast slights on our soldiers in the Boer Wars while his assuming ways and his talent in not telling too much about his politics secured friends and diminished the hostility of opponents.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking four years later to the electors of Ilkeston, in February 1910, Seely, still ambivalent but somewhat more amenable, said that he was perfectly prepared to give women the vote if he were satisfied that the women of England really wanted it.<sup>2</sup> Mrs Pankhurst, the leader of the Women's Social and Political Union, arrived in Ilkeston in February and, standing on a chair, addressed a Suffragist meeting. She was targeting by-elections by attacking the Government's candidates as she had successfully done at Newton Abbot in January 1908. She denied that Seely was an adherent of Liberalism for, 'when he spoke about women, he did not use Liberal arguments at all.' When Seely addressed his constituents at Ockbrook, near Derby, in July 1910, he referred to the Conciliation Bill, which had proposed to enfranchise property-owning women, saying that he had voted against it and, in spite of letters of protest from some ladies in his constituency, he was still impenitent. He had always contended that there was not a vast demand for the suffrage on the part of the majority of the women of the country. He invited the women in the audience to express their opinion and only five hands were raised, though it is not recorded how many women were present.<sup>4</sup> Lloyd George had also opposed the Bill because it was likely to favour the Conservatives rather than Liberals.

Seely's opposition to women playing a political role was more apparent in 1924 when he voted against a motion to bring in a bill to enable peeresses in their own right to sit and vote in the House of Lords.<sup>5</sup> Writing in old age, he revealed that he had been opposed to Women's Suffrage, 'believing that it would lower, instead of raising, the status of women'.<sup>6</sup> His Victorian attitudes to the role of women in the home and as mothers would have been

Liverpool Courier, 17 January 1906.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>Ilkeston Pioneer and Erewash Valley Gazette</u>, 25 February 1910.

<sup>3</sup> Ilkeston Pioneer, 4 March 1910

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Times, 18 July 1910.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol CLXXI, col 1146, 20 March 1924. Note that the volumes in the 4th series are given in Arabic numerals whereas the 5th are given in Roman.

J. E. B. Seely, Paths of Happiness, 1937, p.205.

further encouraged in the early 1900s with the emphasis on 'Motherhood and Empire' as preached by the National Efficiency Movement as well as his essentially, very traditional, male-dominated life-style, as the father of a large family with a wife unable to take a political role.<sup>1</sup>

Party, which took 399 seats compared with the Conservatives' 157. The Labour Party increased its seats from two to 29 and the Irish Nationalists remained the same. However, only two seats in Liverpool, out of the nine in contest, changed hands. Six seats remained with the Conservatives and one seat remained with the Irish Nationalists. The Liberals took Liverpool Exchange from the Liberal Unionists; the other seat, Liverpool Abercromby, Seely narrowly won with a majority of 199. Between 1885 and 1918, the Liberals held Abercromby only during the next four years, 1906-1910. The Conservative hold on the city was retained and would only be dislodged with the defection of the working class voter to the Labour Party after the Great War. Clarke writes, 'It is clear that the radicalism of John Bright with its opposition to factory acts and its distrust of trade unions, had little appeal for the operatives'.<sup>2</sup>

The <u>Liverpool Courier</u>, under the heading 'The Campaign of Calumny', denounced the factors which had favoured Seely: 'In the large centres of population the unscrupulous manner in which the "Chinese Slavery" and "small loaf" cries have been utilised by the "party of progress" has not been without effect upon the unthinking members'.<sup>3</sup>

Both the <u>Courier</u> and the Liberal paper, <u>Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury</u>, dealt at length throughout the campaign with the speeches and activities of the candidates which they supported and gave negligible attention to the opposition.

A. Summers, <u>Angels and Citizens - British Women as Military Nurses 1854-1914</u>, 1988, p. 241 quotes Haldane's sister who as Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Council for the Territorial Force Nursing Service expected to hand over to Mrs Seely when Seely became Secretary of State for War. 'I called on Mrs Seely to enlist her sympathies. However, she is ladden (sic) down by an immense family (to be yet increased I fancy) and cannot do much so she wanted me to keep on as I was'. Miss Haldane to her mother, 26 June 1912.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Clarke, <u>Lancashire and the New Liberalism</u>, p. 31.

The Liverpool Courier, 17 January 1906

Having taken the Liverpool seat, Seely had found his political home. He was now a fully-fledged member of the Liberal Party, committed to its more radical policies on social amelioration. He supported free trade and army reform in line with the campaign for national efficiency but was not yet a convinced supporter of Home Rule and he was cagey about women's emancipation. As a recent defector to the Party, and as an MP who had made a name for himself by criticising his own party's policies, he had to convince Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman of his suitability for a junior ministerial post.

### **CHAPTER TWO**

### A LIBERAL SEEKING OFFICE: 1906-1911.

Although Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman initially had reservations in 1903 about accepting Seely and his friends, whom he described as 'doubtful or difficult recruits',¹ he had come to assist his electoral campaign in Liverpool by speaking at a meeting held at the Sun Hall on 10 January 1906. Seely omitted to recount in <u>Adventure</u> that the meeting was disrupted by the same suffragette as before, crying out, 'Will the Liberal Government give us the vote?' and that she had eventually to be removed.² Instead he gave his opinion that, 'The meeting was a huge success, and I covered Sir Henry with praise'.³ As a result, he was convinced that after the election victory, Campbell-Bannerman would offer him a ministerial position. This conviction was echoed by the <u>Liverpool Daily Post</u>. The editorial for the following day called upon the Liverpool voters to support the new administration:

Liverpool must do something in this direction by returning Mr. Cherry, the Attorney General for India, and Major Seely, who though not yet in the Administration, is, we have reason to believe, likely to find a place there before long.<sup>4</sup>

In his early years, Seely had gained the reputation of a Member of Parliament who had attacked his own party leaders, participated in a would-be fourth party and had crossed the floor. He had associated himself with New Liberalism and gained a reputation of a radical politician. He had made a name for himself by taking a stand on Chinese labour, Free Trade and Army reform, influenced by his belief that he was putting principles above party, even though he had been persuaded to stand initially as a Conservative. He had put that behind him and had found his political home, one within which he was to remain for the rest of his life in spite of the decline of the Liberal Party.

A. Sykes, <u>Tariff Reform in British Politics</u>, 1903-1913, Oxford, 1979, p. 74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 10 January 1906.

Seely, Adventure, p. 113.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <u>Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury</u>, 11 January 1906.

When Campbell-Bannerman became Prime Minister, following Balfour's resignation, Winston Churchill, six years younger than Seely, had obtained his first ministerial office in December 1905 as Under-Secretary for the Colonies. The Secretary of State, Lord Elgin, sat in the House of Lords, thus enhancing the importance of the Under-Secretary as spokesman in the Commons. This was the reason why Churchill turned down the offer of Financial Secretaryship to the Treasury which he was initially offered. When they all returned victorious to London after the election, Seely described how he, Churchill, Lloyd George, John Burns and a few others would meet together every night for dinner and await news of who had next been invited to join the Ministry. Ministerial experience was no bar to their expectations, for none had had any. The long ascendancy of the Conservatives since 1885, apart from two brief periods out of office, had precluded this anyway for the junior members.

Seely had had six years' experience of debate and had gained a reputation for his intelligent speeches and his often humorous comments, delivered always in an affable manner which had made him popular in the House. The ministerial post most suited to him would have been in the Colonial Office, in view of his personal experience in South Africa, but that remained with Churchill as Under-Secretary. In the end, Seely was the only one of the younger group of his friends omitted from junior office. He commented, with hindsight in 1930, 'I was frankly furious, but life was such fun that it did not prevent me from enjoying my own discomfiture'. He described an encounter with Balfour who expressed surprise that he had not been offered a ministerial post and asked him to which political group he now belonged, 'perhaps the Outside Left?' to which Seely replied, according to his account in 'Adventure', 'Oh no sir, a more formidable party, the left outside'. Clues to Seely's omission may be found here; his involvement in the previous parliament in a quasi fourth party and a suspicion, among the political leadership, that he had left-wing tendencies. On the other hand, Campbell-Bannerman believed in doing what he thought was right, regardless of political expediency, and both supported the maintenance of Free Trade and the ending of the Chinese labour in the Rand. The Chinese labour question, fuelled in

Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, p. 106.

Seely, Adventure, p. 114.

particular by Seely, had played a part in the defeat of the Conservatives. Campbell-Bannerman also 'warmly sympathised with the left-wing crusade against poverty'.

Personality may have played a part in his exclusion from office. Churchill's friend, John Colville wrote of Seely, 'He was a man of great good nature and unflinching courage but, unlike most brave men, he was boastful'. In Adventure, however, Seely did not refer to the fact that he was mentioned in dispatches five times, which might belie the accusation. Sir Frederick Ponsonby, Assistant Private Secretary to King Edward VII, wrote of Campbell-Bannerman, 'Vanity he always declared was the root trouble with most men'. Whereas this might have influenced Campbell-Bannerman to omit Seely from office, it did not prevent him from appointing John Burns 'He was merely amused by Burns' colossal vanity...C-B liked him and regarded him as a tough, honest Scot'. Nor did he omit Winston Churchill, a man seldom renowned for modesty and likewise a member of the 'Hooligans'.

The new Prime Minister had to reward those old hands who had served Lord Rosebery in 1895 with the senior posts, and appoint new blood. As the leader of a party which had been largely excluded from office for nearly twenty years, Campbell-Banneraman would be unlikely to approve the selection of too many newcomers, especially those who had recently crossed the floor. The balance required in a cabinet between experience and youthful enthusiasm and the need to reflect party feeling and opinions, although finding room for the brilliant and brilliantly connected Churchill, did not at this stage have room for Seely.

Once back in the House of Commons, Seely kept up his criticism of the organisation of the British Army which he had begun under Balfour, believing that it was not a party political issue but a national concern. Campbell-Bannerman, however, disagreed, and when Seely put down a motion on 14 March 1906 to reduce the army by 10,000 men, with the aim of stimulating debate on the need for reforms, the Prime Minister himself asked Seely to withdraw the motion. He was followed by the Chief Whip, G. Whiteley, who threatened Seely with expulsion if he did not withdraw it. Seely stubbornly and loudly refused. He

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> R. C. K. Ensor, <u>England 1870-1914</u>, 1936, p. 406.

J. Colville, <u>The Fringes of Power. Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955</u>, 1985, p.442 note.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p.312.

Wilson, <u>C. B.</u>, p. 640 and p. 463.

maintained in <u>Adventure</u> that this was because he had said the same things in two previous years, when he had similarly insisted on a division. He was engaging in conviction politics or he was still smarting from the Prime Minister's ingratitude or had simply misjudged the effects of his stand. When the motion was put to the vote only 56 voted in his favour. From that time onwards', wrote Seely, 'I knew that C-B would never include me in his government'.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 1906 and beginning of 1907, Campbell-Bannerman reshuffled his cabinet. Churchill had hoped to get promotion but remained an Under-Secretary. Lord Esher wrote, in January 1907, 'The P.M. won't hear of Winston being in the Cabinet at present. He is, like Mr. G., [Gladstone] old fashioned and disapproves of young men in a hurry'. John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, in a letter to Campbell-Bannerman in 1907, referred to a meeting with Winston Churchill where they had discussed which office Churchill should hold and during which Churchill made the first of a number of applications for office on behalf of his old friend and colleague; 'He mentioned that two *under* places would be vacated, whatever happened, and hinted that the appointment to one of them of *Jack Seely* would be to himself, Winston, a considerable consolation'. However, Churchill's intervention cut no ice with the Prime Minister.

Seely's chance to join the government occurred with the resignation of Campbell-Bannerman on 6 April 1908<sup>4</sup> and the appointment of Herbert Henry Asquith, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to replace him. Creating a very able team, Asquith retained some of Campbell-Bannerman's men such as Grey as Foreign Secretary and Haldane as Secretary of State for War. He promoted Churchill, at the age of thirty-three, to be the President of the Board of Trade, with a seat in the Cabinet, and Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer. John Burns remained as President of the Local Government Board. Asquith sent for Seely and proposed that he should replace Churchill as Under-Secretary of State for

Seely Adventure, p.115.

Wilson, C. B., p. 592. Quoting Esher Journals and Letters, pp. 215-216. Reginald Viscount Esher ed. Oliver Viscount Esher, vol 3, 1910-1915, 1938. Esher became a permanent member of the Imperial General Staff in 1905 and in 1914 he was president of the Territorial Force Association of the county of London.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Wilson, <u>C-B.</u>, p. 591.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> His health failed and he died on 22 April 1908.

the Colonies, believing that his friendship with General Botha might assist the negotiations over the settlement of the future of South Africa.<sup>1</sup> Compared with Churchill's advance, Seely was lagging behind but it was not such a bad decision for him because his superior, Lord Crewe, who had replaced Lord Elgin as the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was in the House of Lords.<sup>2</sup> This meant that, like Churchill before him, Seely was the spokesman for colonial matters in the Commons. Asquith also appointed him to the Committee of Imperial Defence, a position he was to hold for the next six years. Although it seems that 'Very little is known about the relationship between Seely and Asquith',<sup>3</sup> Asquith somewhat scathingly referred to Seely as the 'Arch-Colonel' in his letters to Venetia Stanley, but he was similarly irreverent about his other colleagues.<sup>4</sup>

Philip Snowden, in his autobiography, commented on Seely's appointment, and implied that Asquith desired to have Seely as an ally rather than a critic:

Mr Asquith gave two junior posts in the new Government to Colonel Seely and Mr Masterman. The appointment to office of these members robbed the Radical Benches of two of the most fearless Liberal critics of the Government. The attraction of office must be great to induce a private member to resign the freedom of independent speech for the fetters of official position.

Snowden's opinion was that these were 'two of the most popular men in the House of Commons'. Commenting on Seely's character, he remarked that Seely was 'the sort of man that one could not associate with any conduct which was not honourable or brave' and believed that his appointment 'gave the promise of a more humanitarian administration'. 

The Times, not known for any Liberal propensities, commented on the ministerial changes:

Seely, in <u>Adventure</u>, p.128, describes how his father drove him to Asquith's house and waited round the corner for the news.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Lord Crewe, senior political figure from 1905-1931. Colonial Secretary 1908-1910.

Lord Mottistone to author, September 1998.

H. H. Asquith, <u>Letters to Venetia Stanley.</u> eds M. & E. Brock, 1982, e.g. 21 March 1914, Asquith to Stanley.

P. Snowden, <u>An Autobiography</u>, vol I, 1864-1919, 1934, p. 180. Viscount Snowden, National Labour, served as Chancellor of the Exchequer under R. MacDonald in 1924 an in 1929-1931. Charles Masterman became Parliamentary Secretary to John Burns in 1911.

Lord Crewe has well deserved his promotion to the headship of a great department' and 'The new Under-Secretary, Colonel Seely, an able man who has the ear of the House of Commons, is also deeply committed to Mr Churchill's views on free trade and Chinese labour.<sup>1</sup>

Seely took up his new office on 12 April 1908 and now had to prove himself a capable administrator. Firstly he had to take on a staff and his friend, the Master of Elibank, suggested George Nicholson as his personal private secretary. Nicholson, married to Elibank's sister, was to become a great friend of Seely and his family. His Private Secretary in the Civil Service was R. V. Vernon, formerly financial adviser to the Government of Iraq, and his Parliamentary Private Secretary was Sir Godfrey Baring from the Isle of Wight.<sup>2</sup> As there was only one Under-Secretary and the civil service was small by today's standards, far more detail was personally attended to by the ministers. As a result, handwritten letters and memoranda from Seely are common in all the relevant archival sources, both whilst he was at the Colonial Office and subsequently at the War Office.

During his time at the Colonial Office, Seely seems to have been on good terms with Crewe, writing to keep him informed,<sup>3</sup> though there is little correspondence in either the Crewe Papers or in the Mottistone MSS to enable one to make a definitive decision on this, except for the kind letter of condolence which Crewe wrote to Seely on the loss of his seat in 1910. Crewe appointed him to chair committees such as on the staffing of the Office of Crown Agents for the Colonies<sup>4</sup> and on lesser matters such a committee to consider how to protect rare birds from the importation of their plumage.<sup>5</sup> From 1908-1911, Crewe expected him to make speeches and answer questions in the House of Commons covering

The Times, 13 April 1908. At the same time as Seely's appointment as Under-Secretary came promotion in the Yeomanry from Major to Colonel.

The Times, 6 May 1908. Seely later married Nicholson's widow in 1917.

Cambridge University Library, Crewe MSSC/34 e.g. 8 September 1909, Seely to Lord Crewe.

A Breviate of Parliamentary Papers, 1900-1916, Oxford, 1957. p. 29.

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol XV11, col 1448, 16 June 1910. Discussion of Protection of Rare Birds (Exports of Plumage). This refers to the opposition to the fashionable habit of the Edwardian ladies in decorating their huge hats with birds and feathers.

the widespread nature of the problems of administering the enlarged British Empire on topics ranging from Aden to Zululand.

The most important issue in colonial affairs facing the Liberal Government proved to be the settlement of the constitution of the proposed Union of South Africa. During a meeting held at Hucknall Torkard in Nottinghamshire in 1909, Seely referred to the forthcoming convention called to discuss the proposals for a federation of the South African states. He admitted that there was no equality between the races but it would be a mistake 'trying to ram race equality down the throats of unwilling people. It was a great mistake to go in front of public opinion in these matters'. His reference to 'public opinion' was to the white South Africans and the Boers in particular, whose approval was considered vital to the successful implementation of the proposals.<sup>1</sup>

The first step towards constitutional change in South Africa had been taken by the British Government, which had granted self-government to the Transvaal on 6 December 1906. Elections for the state parliament had followed on 20 February 1907. The Het Volk Party, representing the Boer interest, won, and General Botha became the first Prime Minister from 1907-1910. A similar provision gave the Orange River Colony self-government on 5 June 1907. There were now four self-governing states in South Africa: two Boer, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and two British, Cape Colony and Natal, with several native enclaves as protectorates of the British Imperial Government. Of the four states, only the Cape had a native franchise, a long-standing arrangement dating back 55 years.

These changes had been introduced as administrative measures by Orders in Council and Letters Patent under the Great Seal because opposition from the Conservative majority in the House of Lords would have resulted in their rejection had they been put into bills. The Lords had fatally mauled the Education Bill and rejected the Plural Voting Bill of 1906 and had thrown out the Licensing Bill of 1908 which had been passed by the House of Commons. A major constitutional change, the creation of the Union of South Africa, with a federal parliament representing the four states, could not be obtained by an Order in

The Times, 27 March 1909.

Council but would have to be implemented through the legislative procedure and become an Act of Parliament.

On 29 April 1909 Lloyd George had introduced the 'People's Budget', which was to result in serious conflict between the Lords and the Commons. Seely's task during the summer was therefore to obtain the necessary consensus at a time of increasing party strife and hostility from the Lords. Much would depend on his presentation and the way in which he dealt with questions, to ensure the enactment of the Bill. Crewe trusted Seely to steer the South African Bill through the Commons in such a way as to enable it to reach the Lords without a division.

Writing with hindsight, Seely believed that it was urgent to settle the Union whilst General Botha was in office in the Transvaal because Botha supported the proposals and was influential among the Boers. In addition, if war came with Germany then the provisions would have to be postponed indefinitely and that would not favour British strategic interests at the Cape should the Boers prove pro-German. The time was also ripe, Seely believed, because leading Conservatives such as Balfour, Lyttelton, Wyndham and F. E. Smith were prepared to back the Union and King Edward VII firmly supported it.

In 1908, General Botha had attended the Colonial Conference in London. As a result of this and the support from Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, a conference under the chairmanship of Sir Henry de Villiers, the Chief Justice of the Cape, was arranged between the British Government and delegates from the four South African states in Durban and Cape Town between October 1908-February 1909. Its purpose was to arrive at terms for the proposed Union of South Africa Bill. Seely reported its findings in a speech to the House of Commons on 27 July 1909 during which he worked hard to deny the existence of opposition at home or in South Africa. He was at pains to point out that the Bill was not the work of an individual, a government or a party but a concrete expression of the will of South Africa. As was common at the time, his interpretation of the 'will of the people' did not take account of that of the native population. He emphasised that the Bill was conceived in a spirit of conciliation and compromise and he hoped that the same spirit

Seely, Adventure, p. 133.

would be apparent in the House. He made a point of acknowledging, on behalf of the Government, the help given by all parties and he believed that it was due to their co-operation that the result would be secured. He went on to thank in particular Alfred Lyttelton, the former Conservative Colonial Secretary, for his support. Keir Hardie, the leader of the Labour Party since 1906, asked whether native opinion had been consulted. Seely replied that 'as to the wishes of the natives, we have taken every step we possibly could to ascertain what their wishes are', though he did not elaborate. He took up the theme of the protection of the native population on 16 August 1909 when he introduced the second reading of the South Africa Bill to the House of Commons.

Anxious to widen the support for the Bill during the second reading, he quoted a lengthy extract from a speech made by Joseph Chamberlain on 29 July 1902, in which Chamberlain had encouraged the idea of the union of the Boers and British under one flag. Seely also pointed out that Botha and others who had signed the peace treaty at the end of the Boer War were in favour of the Union and that the King would be sending the Prince of Wales [later King George V] to open the first Parliament. This firmly established the approval of the Bill from the highest quarters at the outset of the speech.

Later in his speech, he dealt with the criticism that the franchise was confined to those of European descent and expressed his regret but explained that it had been agreed with the two Boer states when they were granted their independence. The disabilities had to remain in order to retain the support of the Boers. The provision for the native to vote in the Cape was to be retained but so too was the bar on standing for the Assembly. On the other hand, he believed that the benefits of Union were immense. Better government, a unified railway system and abolition of internal customs would increase prosperity, a common judiciary would be welcome and the Union would increase the security of the member states. 'This is a real and not a paper Union. It is a deep and lasting Union. It is a Union of kindred people who have been too long estranged'.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol V111, cols 1023-1026, 27 July 1909.

He then returned to the unanimity of support for the Union:

Everyone, in what every part of the House he sits, I am sure will see that this is a great and statesmanlike measure. They admire the sentiments of those who have inspired it. They know that those who want this bill mean to do right and justice to all men and all races and creeds in South Africa. Naturally it is not perfect, and criticisms have been levelled against certain points.

He paid tribute to those who had had reservations about the Bill but who, 'by generously refraining from criticism at critical moments, have by their action rendered this Union possible'. He then mentioned some of these by name including Lord Curzon, the former Conservative Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, Walter Long, the member for South Dublin, and once again, Alfred Lyttelton. Above all though, he gave credit to Campbell-Bannerman. 'Without him Union might well never have been, for without self-government Union was impossible... But indeed, self-government was the common property of all parties'.<sup>1</sup>

On the completion of his speech, Lyttelton replied for the Conservative opposition, giving Seely credit for 'a statement, clear, eloquent and persuasive' and reiterating his promise that the Bill would be welcomed by his side with sympathy. He called it a great measure designed by the South Africans and accepted by the British. He did, however, want to register his view that the wishes of the native population had been slighted but accepted that 'the will of South Africa is that this shall be the Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill'. Lyttelton, the Conservative, was taking the moral tone whereas Seely the Liberal, who had made his name over the Chinese Labour question, was on this occasion the pragmatist.

The Bill subsequently went to its third reading and passed without a division in September 1909. The Union of South Africa officially came into being on 31 May 1910.<sup>2</sup> The Prince of Wales did not attend the opening of the new Union parliament as the death of King Edward VII and the constitutional crisis of 1910 precluded such a visit.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol 1X, cols 951 ff., 16 August 1909.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 9 Edw. 7, Cap. 9: An Act to Consolidate the Union of South Africa.

Seely always regarded his role in steering the Bill through to its completion as his most important political achievement and was made a Privy Councillor as a recognition of his success. He was applauded in his constituency, where the <u>Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury</u> wrote on 3 January 1910 'he took a leading part in the reconciliation and consolidation of South Africa, a great act of Liberal statesmanship which will go down to History forever with his name'.

After the elections, Botha, whose party held a majority, was invited to become the first Prime Minister of the new Parliament and under him began the rapid economic development which Seely had foreseen. In 1910, Botha, whom Seely had always regarded as a personal friend, acknowledged his debts:

As I have also written to Churchill, we do not forget today how much we owe you and the other friends in England who have been such good friends to us, and my hearty wish is that we may enjoy your friendship for many years to come yet. The task which I have undertaken is indeed no light one but I look forward to a bright and happy future when the Union of South Africa will occupy a prominent position in the row of sister nations in the British Empire.<sup>1</sup>

The Act was later criticised for bending over backwards to accommodate the Boers' demands, especially over native rights, in order to get their agreement to the proposals. In a speech to the New Reform Club in 1908, Seely was unduly optimistic that there would be a proper treatment of the native inhabitants by the whites.<sup>2</sup> The South Africa Act, however, kept the Boer leaders, Botha and Smuts, on Britain's side in the Great War. In 1914, the Boer generals put down a rebellion of pro-German Boers and went on to defeat the Germans in South-West Africa. A total of 231,000 white and non-white troops was raised, of whom 30,000 served on the Western Front, Field-Marshal Smuts became a member of the War Cabinet and British sea routes to the east remained secure.

The Times, 23 November 1908.

Mottistone MSS 1/289, Botha to Seely, 25 June 1910, from Pretoria.

The South Africa Bill was over-shadowed at home by the problems which arose over Lloyd George's controversial budget, designed to fund social reform and a naval building programme. Land Value Duties were among the proposals. At a meeting in Rochdale on 10 July 1909, Seely firstly referred to Lord Rosebery who had said that a land tax was revolutionary, but then pointed out that it had existed in South Australia, New South Wales, New Zealand, British Columbia and Western Australia for up to 30 years and there was no revolution there while the money came in well. He thought that the only marvel was that the tax had not been introduced before.<sup>1</sup>

The conflict over the budget continued into the autumn of 1909 and having passed the Commons on 4 November by 379 to 149 votes, it went to the Lords who rejected it on the second reading on 30 November by 350 to 75 votes. This unprecedented action and the constitutional crisis which ensued resulted in Asquith going to the country on the issue of not just the future of the budget but also the respective powers of the Lords and the Commons. A general election was called for January 1910.

Seely returned to his Liverpool constituency to put the Government's case for the budget and to support the reform of the House of Lords. Appealing to the Liverpool businessmen in an attempt to dissuade them from supporting the Unionists, he condemned the action of the Lords as gross, un-English, unbusinesslike and unfair. He believed the Conservatives would return to Protection, if elected, and suggested that, if the House of Lords remained as it was, then no Free Trade budget could become law.<sup>2</sup> He appealed for a mandate to maintain Free Trade and also to take away for ever from the non-elective Chamber the right to throw the finances of the country into confusion and to thwart the wishes of the people.<sup>3</sup> The popular version of this was the cry 'the Peers versus the People'. Speaking later in the Liverpool Exchange Division, he told his audience that they 'might bid goodbye to social legislation and social reform if they were going to let the Lords have their own way'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Times, 12 July 1909.

The Times, 7 December 1909. Seely's speech at the Law Association Rooms.

The Times, 8 December 1909. Seely's speech at a luncheon of the Liverpool Junior Reform Club.

Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 18 December 1910.

The pro-Liberal <u>Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury</u> summed up the situation in the Abercromby Division on 3 January 1910, recognising the political stature and career prospects of its Liberal candidate: 'the most distinguished of the nine members for the city...a brilliant young statesman whose connection with Liverpool will give the second city of the Empire her rightful share in the councils of the nation.'

Realistically, the writer then referred to the fact that Liverpool was traditionally Conservative, that Abercromby had been Conservative for 20 years before Seely, and it was questionable as to whether the only Liberal candidate to have got a footing there would be able to retain it. The wafer-thin majority of 199 in 1906 was threatened because the drift of residents from the city centre to the suburbs reduced the number on the electoral roll from 7,418 to 6,926. 'The Liberals are quietly relying on Colonel Seely's personality, record and policy, but Conservatives claim that the register is more favourable to them and "dry rot" has set into the division'. The <u>Liverpool Daily Post</u> did not seem to hold out great hopes for Seely, particularly with the demographic changes, but did its best for him with an appreciation of his work in the city:

he has made himself immensely popular with his constituents and has done extremely useful service to his country. The elements of his popularity are his breezy geniality and good humour, his frankness, fairness and straightforwardness, his attention to the needs of the division and his sense of responsibility to those whom he represents. His annual addresses to the electors have been models and his readiness to answer questions and to discuss knotty points without equivocation have made for him a host of admirers and friends.<sup>1</sup>

The reference to 'the needs of the division' concerned the work of Seely and Bishop Chavasse, together with the medical officer of health, to achieve slum clearance. Waller believes that housing improvements were more the result of the work of the Corporation's Housing Committee,<sup>2</sup> but no doubt the fact that the Member of Parliament and the Bishop were supportive would have brought some response from the corporation. Although Seely believed that their efforts 'helped in some degree to further the cause,

Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 3 January 1910.

Waller, <u>Democracy and Sectarianism</u>, p. 164

which was in the end successful, he also feared that he had offended vested interests. 'This cost me a great many votes and undoubtedly contributed to my defeat in 1910'.1

Liverpool in 1910 still had factors which made it an unusual city. Tariff Reform still divided business interests as it had done in 1906. Recognising this, Churchill, Wyndham and Lloyd George, all friends of Seely, had visited the city to support the Free Traders on a number of occasions. The Conservatives, however, apparently played down Protection as a major issue in the election of January 1910, to avoid losing support among the local chambers of trade.<sup>2</sup> The 'Drink Question' had re-emerged as a challenge to the Liberals with the proposed licence duties and increased duties on beer and spirits in the Budget of 1909. During the election campaign a thousand barmen were sent by brewers from North-West Manchester to canvass in both the Abercromby and Exchange Divisions.<sup>3</sup> The religious issue also continued to dominate local Liverpool politics with antagonism between the Irish Roman Catholics who opposed the Liberals' education policy and the Protestant Orangemen who opposed Home Rule. The Conservative, F. E. Smith, capitalised on this when he said: 'Liverpool stands by Belfast'.<sup>4</sup>

At least Seely was still unopposed by a candidate from the Labour Representation Committee, which could have split the Liberal vote both by gaining radical votes and by driving moderate Liberals to support the Conservatives in order to keep out a left wing candidate. As it was, the opposition associated Liberals with supposed socialist policies. The sole opponent was the Conservative, Colonel R. G. W. Chaloner, who had 'nursed the seat since 1907' and, 'was a power in the Church Association'. The emphasis on religious issues in Liverpool managed to keep the Protestant workers on the Conservative side, as it had done 1906 in the other Liverpool constituencies, and return dissidents to the Conservative fold in Abercromby.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 111.

Clarke, <u>Lancashire and the New Liberalism</u>, pp. 302-303. In an attempt to explain to the shipping interests the value of maintaining free trade, Seely had written the introduction to a book by Charles Booth of Liverpool in 1909, entitled <u>Fiscal Policy and British Shipping from the Free Trade Point of View</u>. <u>British Library Catalogue</u>, J. E. B. Seely.

Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury, 19 January 1910.

Waller, Democracy and Sectarianism, p. 242

Waller, <u>Democracy and Sectarianism</u>, p. 243.

The results of the General Election in January 1910 showed that the Conservatives had rallied support generally in the country, and had regained some of the ground lost in 1906. They now had 273 seats. There was a drastic fall in the number of Liberal seats in the English constituencies so that there were now only two seats more than the Conservatives. The continuance of the Lib/Lab pact and the decision of the Miners' Federation to support the Labour Party in 1909 also increased the number of Labour seats to 40. However, the Liberals were still in government with the Irish Nationalists now holding the balance of power. The Liberals, therefore, depended upon Irish support.

In Liverpool, Chaloner defeated Seely by 526 votes with a 6% swing, the same as Seely had obtained in 1906.<sup>1</sup> All the other Liverpool constituencies remained unchanged. Seely, by gaining Abercromby for the Liberals in 1906 and losing it to the Conservatives in January 1910, had followed the national trend though Lancashire tended to remain with the Liberals. The exceptionally high national turnout of 86.6% was nearly matched in Abercromby with 81.6%.

After his defeat, Seely received many letters of condolence, including those from leading Liberals who seemed genuinely regretful at his electoral setback and recognised his worth. Herbert Gladstone wrote as if he felt guilty about Seely's loss after all his hard work in the constituency and was anxious to reassure him of his political future:

My dear Seely, I am much concerned at your defeat. After winning that place you deserved to hold it. But you will remember I shook my head over your going there. Of course you won't be long out.<sup>2</sup>

Seely replied to Gladstone, thanking him for his 'particularly kind letter'. Realising the problem of fighting Abercromby, and acknowledging his obligation to defend the seat, he commented with some resignation:

R. G. W. Chaloner Conservative 3088

J. E. B. Seely Liberal 2562 Conservative Majority 526

Result of General Election result for the Abercromby Division of Liverpool, January 1910:

Mottistone MSS 1/271, H. Gladstone to Seely, 23 January 1910.

Yes, it is quite true that you warned me that Liverpool was a well-nigh hopeless place for any Liberal. I remember you telling me that your father said to you that Liverpool was the one place where it seemed to be impossible to deflect opinion. However, having gone there and just managed to get in, it was right to go through with it, to have run away would have discouraged all the Liberals in the neighbourhood. With many thanks to you again and my kindest regards to Mrs Gladstone,

Yours sincerely John Bernard Seely.1

Seely later wrote to J. Ramsay MacDonald from Ilkeston, again pointing out the duty which he had felt of continuing to stand for Abercromby: 'You and I are old friends and understand one another: but for quixotic scruples about sticking to the Liverpool ship I should certainly now be your colleague'.<sup>2</sup>

Seely's superior, Lord Crewe, also wrote a long letter to console and encourage him:

My dear Seely,

I mustn't delay in writing my most sincere condolences with your ill-luck...you will doubtless be provided for in due course. These things are always arranged some-how. Meanwhile one can only say that Liverpool is an unconscionable place, and I hope you will find a more steady-going permanent constituency.

Crewe went on to refer also to W. E. Gladstone who as Colonial Secretary had failed to secure the Duke of Newcastle's patronage for his re-election to the borough of Newark in December 1845 and had therefore held office without a seat until July 1846. Crewe added, 'You mustn't be so long as that'.<sup>3</sup> This sentiment was echoed by R. B. Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, who was later to support the appointment of Seely to the War Office. He wrote, 'It was with intense regret that I heard the result of Liverpool but the best

Viscount Gladstone Papers, vol LXXXIV Brit Mus Add MS 46068, fol 231, Seely to H. Gladstone, 24 January 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/277, Seely to J. Ramsay MacDonald, 28 February 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/248, Lord Crewe to Seely, 19 January 1910.

candidate of the United Kingdom will not be long without a seat; I'm sure this is only a temporary check'. 1

Sir Charles Dilke summed up Seely's difficulties in Liverpool, especially the sectarian, when he too wrote his condolences and also anticipated Seely's early return to the House;

My dear Seely,

The fact that we had long argued that it was probably inevitable even for such a 'perfect candidate' and member as you, to hold such a division of such a town with Protestants asking for Protestant pledges, with Catholics [demanding] more conditions about Education, does not diminish the extreme regret which I as much as anyone feel at the news. You agreed with me when you first went there that it was 'a handicap' and since you have taken office it has been more so. Now that you are clear of Liverpool you will get a fresh start under more favourable conditions and in the long run temporary defeat will only be an additional strength, as in the case of Gladstone and many others.

Believe me my dear Seely, your friend.2

Seely replied to Dilke thanking him for his letter and the friendship, advice and help which he had received since he had entered Parliament. He also commented on the vulnerability of the Liverpool seat:

I suppose as you say, that mine was bound to be a forlorn hope. Abercromby had never before been represented by a Liberal and I only won it by a small majority, so if the Government was to lose any seats at all, mine was bound to be one of the first to go.<sup>3</sup>

Dilke Papers XLIX Brit Mus Add Ms 43922/3, Seely to Dilke, 28 January 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/255, R. B. Haldane to Seely, 19 January 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/251, Dilke to Seely, 19 January 1910. Sir Charles Dilke, Radical lawyer and MP, served under W. E. Gladstone 1880-1885.

Among others who wrote were Margot Asquith; 'Henry and I are so sad at JS [sic] not getting in',¹ Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary,² and from overseas, the Agent General of the Transvaal³ and one on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia.⁴ T. P. O'Connor, the Irish Nationalist victor of the Scotland Division of Liverpool, wrote, 'I am so sorry. It made me so miserable that I forgot all about our success I have the consolation of knowing that it wasn't our people that failed us. But never mind: some other and better constituency will soon want you'.⁵

The earliest opportunity for Seely to fight a by-election after the general election of January 1910 arose with the resignation of the Liberal MP, Sir Walter Foster, in February, from the Ilkeston Division in the heart of industrial Derbyshire. Forster had held the seat since 1900 and in January 1910 had a majority of 4,200 votes. Seely's successful work in the Commons now entitled him to stand for what would be considered a safe seat compared with the marginal one of Abercromby. The Times for 23 February reported Seely's unanimous adoption at the local Liberal meeting and commented on, 'The fact that Colonel Seely's father resides in an adjoining constituency gives him a considerable local influence'. The Ilkeston Pioneer and Erewash Valley Gazette however, was not particularly enthusiastic. Foster had been elevated to the peerage as Lord Ilkeston soon after winning the election, and the editorial implied that the by-election was contrived in order to find Seely a seat. The electors were being handed over 'bag and baggage' to one described as a 'self-nominated successor'. Foster had always proclaimed his 'great love of the working classes and his sympathy with labour representation': now, instead of standing aside to allow a Labour candidate, he 'is in a hurry to pitchfork into the position he has precipitately vacated, a capitalist in every sense of the word'.7

Mottistone MSS 1/267, Margot Asquith (Mrs Herbert Henry Asquith) to Seely, 22 January 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/269, Sir Edward Grey to Seely, 22 January 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/261, The Agent General of the Transvaal to Seely, 19 January 1910.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Mottistone MSS 1/265, M. Collins to Seely, 21 January 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/246, O'Connor to Seely, 18 January 1910.

The Times, 23 February 1910.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> <u>Ilkeston Pioneer and Erewash Gazette</u>, 25 February 1910.

At the beginning of his acceptance speech, Seely acknowledged his debt. He grasped Foster's hand and expressed his 'undying gratitude' for one who, 'at a great crisis in his career, had thrown out a lifebuoy to save him from the water which he could assure them was very cold'. He justified his standing in a Derbyshire constituency by telling his audience that he was born in a Derbyshire parish and had spent his earliest youth in the county. It would, he said, be a delight to have the privilege of representing his 'native place'.

Ilkeston was largely a mining constituency with an estimated mining vote of 30-40% in 1910. The Labour Party had not, as yet, made much headway in Derbyshire as the rich coal seams were comparatively easy to work and wages were the third highest in the country per shift enabling 5,000 miners to own their own houses by 1914. The Derbyshire Miners' Association had good relations with the mine owners, who had voluntarily reduced hours of work, and both groups were notable in providing amenities, as had Seely's family in Nottinghamshire. The miners in Derbyshire were therefore prepared to support the Liberal candidates. Alternatively, as in the Mid-Derbyshire by-election in 1909, the Labour candidate stood with the support of the Liberals and the mine owners. In 1910, the Lib/Lab pact held up in Ilkeston, with MacDonald's approval of Seely's candidature.

By the time he addressed the Liberal adoption committee at Ilkeston in February 1910, Seely had become out-spokenly radical in his beliefs concerning the House of Lords. He posed the question:

Is it well to limit the veto of the House of Lords, or to abolish the hereditary principle in that Chamber?' The answer seems to me clear - it is well to do both. The two policies are interdependent, the one being the necessary preliminary to the other.

R. Gregory, The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914, Oxford, 1968, p. 12

Gregory, The Miners and British Politics, p. 55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Gregory, <u>The Miners and British Politics</u>, p. 147.

He denied that any second chamber ought to posses the powers which were held by the House of Lords and proclaimed that the House of Commons should be the predominant chamber:

An unrepresentative and irresponsible Chamber, such as the House of Lords is at present, is ill fitted to exercise any functions at all in a democratic country.

Each member of the Second Chamber should be responsible to the people and elected by them.

He believed that the best men in the state might well be in the second chamber but that they would have got there by election and not by accident of birth. The House of Lords, as it existed, should be swept out of the way for a very good reason, to get on with social reform. This was a more extreme proposal than that of the Government which had fought the election of January 1910 on the issue of the introduction of a limit on the Lords' veto of Commons' bills and not on the abolition of the hereditary principle.

Writing to J. Ramsay MacDonald from Ilkeston, Seely told him that he wanted statute law to bring about the abolition of the absolute veto and assure the supremacy of the House of Commons. He went on to insist that 'Root and Branch' reform should be pursued so that the Lords would be a smaller chamber, directly elected and as democratic in its origin as the first. He then complained to MacDonald that the Nottingham press had distorted his opinions on the reform of the Lords, accusing him of 'faithlessness to democratic principles' and was moved to write to MacDonald about this in an unusually plaintive manner: 'I expected your help and I still expect it. I am not a bit angry with you people and of course least of all with you but I am disappointed'. MacDonald immediately replied in a conciliatory manner, explaining himself: 'Needless to say I regret sincerely anything which brings us into conflict'. He concluded with: 'I am exceedingly sorry that you should be the victim of any such opposition'. MacDonald then said that he wanted to see him back in the House.'

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The Times, 24 February 1910 and Ilkeston Pioneer, 25 February 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/277, Seely to J. Ramsay MacDonald from Ilkeston, 28 February 1910.

Mottistone MSS 1/278, Ramsay MacDonald to Seely, 1 March 1910.

Seely's complaints arose from the <u>Nottingham Evening News'</u> report of his speech made on 23 February and the editorial comments. Although these had agreed with his sentiments, he was accused of widening the issue and therefore of endangering the immediate policy of achieving the restrictions on the veto. The pro-Liberal commentator wrote: 'We do not mean that we harbour the slightest admiration for the House of Lords as it is at present constituted. The lines of Colonel Seely's reform are quite admirable, but must come later'. Coupling reform with the ending of the veto, it was feared: 'may yet do great harm'. Generally speaking though, Seely received a good press in Nottingham with headlines such as 'Liberals' enthusiastic adoption of Colonel Seely'.<sup>1</sup>

Asquith's reactions to Seely's speech on the reform of the Lords were reported the next day in the <u>Nottingham Evening News:</u>

Mr Asquith merely remarked that Colonel Seely had, by his own admission, no authority for making those speeches beyond his own personal opinion. Any attempt to bring in such reform would spell certain and speedy disaster. It must not be forgotten that all the Labour members are Single Chamber men.

Seely referred to the controversy which he had aroused in a speech to his constituents. He admitted that he had used strong language and that he had even got into trouble for being so Radical but he stuck to his opinion:

Why a man, because he was the son of a cousin of a brother of a man who had rendered the country a great service should inherit through the devious road along the genealogical tree the right to vote against the things the people's representatives said they wanted, he could not understand.<sup>2</sup>

This was similar to the sentiments of Lloyd George with his well-known denunciation of the 'five hundred men chosen accidentally from among the unemployed'. Then, in an attempt at damage-limitation by refocusing the campaign on to the original issue, Seely proclaimed

Nottingham Evening News, 24 February 1910.

Nottingham Evening News, 26 February 1910.

'Send me back with the message: "The veto must go" '. He could not resist, however, returning to the point that he was in favour of abolishing the hereditary principle altogether, as when later he addressed the Stanton ironworkers.<sup>2</sup>

Seely was not alone for there were men of both parties who favoured reform of the composition of the House of Lords. Sir Edward Grey was among those on the Liberal side and Lord Lansdowne, the Leader of the Unionists in the Lords, proposed measures in May 1911 which echoed Seely's ideas. Lansdowne had written to Balfour in May 1910 saying that they might have to go a great deal further than either Balfour or he would like.<sup>3</sup> He suggested a much smaller House of 300 peers elected by the hereditary peers, 25% of whom would retire at three yearly intervals, 120 others elected by electoral colleges made up of MP's and 100 appointed by the Government to represent proportionately the parties in the Commons, as well as retaining some of the Lords Spiritual and Law Lords.<sup>4</sup>

After the General Election of January 1910, Home Rule had become part of the Liberal package to secure the Irish Nationalists' support for the Parliament Bill. The Parliament Bill and Home Rule had therefore become interdependent. By the time Seely stood for the Ilkeston Division of Derbyshire in February 1910 as a member of the Liberal Government, he had become more definite in his attitude towards Home Rule. In his election campaign he referred to the part which he had played in introducing the South African Union Bill, which had shown him the results of trusting the people. He said that he saw no reason why a similar policy should not be applied to Ireland. Whereas, he explained, in his earlier years he had opposed Home Rule, he was now reconciled to it. This was still somewhat half-hearted and it was not until June 1912, when he had to fight another by-election following his appointment as a Secretary of State, that he made a speech in which he assiduously toed the Liberal Party line, declaring himself as, 'an out-and -out Home Ruler'. He was called to task over his volte-face by the opposition candidate, Marshall Freeman, who asked why Seely had changed his mind over Home Rule when Ireland was 'utterly divided on the subject' and added, 'Seely serenely ignores the question'. With the Liberal

Nottingham Evening News, 26 February 1910.

Nottingham Evening News, 1 March 1910.

Lord Newton, Lord Lansdowne, 1929, p. 387.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series vol 8, cols 215ff, 8 May 1911.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The Times, 18 June 1912.

Government committed to Home Rule in order to pass the Parliament Bill and Seely on the verge of Cabinet office, it would be unlikely that he would defy the Party on this issue even though he had avoided an outright public commitment to Home Rule in the past.

Another controversial issue which had arisen during the Liberal ministry concerned the Osborne Judgement, which decided that political levies could not be deducted from union fees to support a political party without the worker contracting in. This had been upheld by the Law Lords in 1909 and had angered the trades unions. Seely was conciliatory when he addressed his audience in Ilkeston. He explained that Asquith was meeting the Labour Party leaders and would no doubt find a solution. As far as he was concerned, he sympathised with minorities but was quite clear that the judgement was not what any responsible person had intended. In August 1910 he was back at Ilkeston addressing a miners' demonstration and gave especial consideration to the Osborne Judgement. He said that he was not in a position to make any statement but that the Government would not allow the situation to drift on. He suggested that the problem could be resolved either by introducing the payment of MPs and the expenses of their returning officers or by reversing the decision.<sup>2</sup>

Ilkeston was more homogeneously working-class than the more socially mixed Abercromby Division and, during the by-election campaign, Seely's more extreme attitude, compared with his speeches in January in Liverpool, is notable. By expressing more advanced views than his party leaders he risked annoying Asquith, on whom he depended for his ministerial career. He was, on the other hand, indebted to Ramsay MacDonald for arranging the Lib/Lab pact and tailored his speeches accordingly, calling himself 'an advanced Liberal'.<sup>3</sup>

He did not have things all his own way during the election. The <u>Ilkeston Pioneer</u> kept up the criticism that Foster had deserted them, had handed them Seely and that the Radicals would have preferred to have a local candidate like Wright. Mrs Pankhurst, as has been noted, arrived in good voice to have her say. The by-election was held on 7 March 1910

Nottingham Evening News, 25 February 1910.

The Times, 22 August 1910. The Osborne Judgement was reversed in the Trade Union Act of 1913.

Nottingham Evening News, 26 February 1910.

with the expected victory for Seely, though with a reduced majority of 3,333 votes compared with Foster's 4,200 in January 1910. The turn out had been exceptionally high at 87.7%.

On 11 March, the <u>Ilkeston Pioneer</u> commented on the results, the good fight which Wright had put up and how his 'Vote for Daddie' card, depicting his six children, had sold out. Now that Seely had won the seat, the <u>Pioneer</u> was prepared to admit that the new Member was a popular choice and that he and Wright were in fact old friends. The enthusiasm of the people during the election was attributed to the fact that the contest was between the local man and 'the undeniably attractive personality of Colonel Seely'. In his victory speech, Seely commented on the fact that the result had been a message to the House of Lords.

In November 1910, Asquith reshuffled some of his ministers. Lord Crewe became Secretary for India and Lewis Harcourt succeeded him as Secretary of State for the Colonies. Churchill was forging still further ahead, having been made Home Secretary in February 1910, whereas Seely had yet to make the Cabinet and his chances of promotion were temporarily dashed when Asquith wrote to him personally 'a most charming letter'.

My dear Seely,

I know that I am asking an unusual proof of loyalty and good comradeship when I request you to continue for a time in your present place. But I also know that you are one of those men to whom such an appeal can be made.

Asquith explained that this was necessary as the Imperial Conference was imminent and he would be needed to brief Lewis Harcourt, the new Colonial Secretary. The Prime Minister believed that this was 'a sufficient justification (on public grounds)' for asking Seely to stay for a while. He assured him that it would not 'in any way substantially retard your future career'.<sup>2</sup>

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 137. Harcourt, a member of the Cabinet since 1907, was the First Commissioner of Works.

Mottistone MSS 1/292, Asquith to Seely, 4 November 1910.

Charming though the letter may have been, it did not, in fact, please Seely as he considered the request tantamount to a demotion. He had been the spokesman in the Commons for Lord Crewe and colonial affairs for three years, but now his chief was also in the Commons. Seely's father, however, advised patience. He wrote to him with condolences and recognition of his disappointment but counselled him:

your prospects for the future were secure if you accepted your now more subordinate post with cheerfulness and active loyalty to your new chief. If you give Harcourt your <u>best</u> help your claim will be too strong to be passed over.<sup>1</sup>

Violet Asquith wrote in her diary for 9 December 1910, 'Personally I am anti-Seely as a successor to Haldane - as I don't feel he will be a very invigorating dash of new flavour in the Cabinet Pudding' but her comments do reveal that Seely was being considered, in some quarters, as Haldane's successor by the end of 1910 whilst he was still an Under-Secretary.

Once back in the House of Commons, in spite of the time spent on the constitutional crisis, Seely was called to speak on as many colonial topics as he had under Lord Crewe. He was regarded as a 'considerable authority' on South African affairs on both sides of the House.<sup>3</sup> In June 1910 he made a long speech on colonial issues, reported in full in <a href="The Times.">The Times.</a>
beginning with an acknowledgement of his own achievement: 'In respect of the self-governing Dominions the outstanding feature was the accomplishment of the Union of South Africa'.

King Edward VII had died on 6 May 1910 and was succeeded by his son, King George V, who played a role in the decision to hold a constitutional conference in an attempt to resolve the deadlock with the House of Lords. It met from 17 June and collapsed on 10 November 1910. King George then reluctantly agreed to create the necessary new Liberal

Mottistone MSS, 1/290, Charles Seely, Snr. to Seely, 6 November 1910.

Ed. M. Bonham Carter and M. Pottle, <u>Lantern Slides</u>. The Diaries and Letters of <u>Violet Bonham Carter 1904-1914</u>, 1996, pp. 324-325.

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol XXII, col 243, 28 February 1911, speech by Sir Gilbert Parker, a Canadian novelist of Anglo-Irish descent who came to England and became Conservative MP for Gravesend from 1900-1918. He was a foundermember of the Tariff Reform League,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Times, 30 June 1910.

peers to enable the Parliament Bill to pass the Lords, providing that Asquith took the issue to the country again.

Parliament was therefore dissolved on 28 November and the second general election of 1910 took place in December. Standing again for Ilkeston, having established his position there, Seely increased his majority to 4,044 with the same number of voters on the electoral roll. His share of the poll rose from 59.8% in March to 62.7%, against a new Conservative contender, W. Freeman. Nationally, the Liberals secured 44.2% of the poll. Ilkeston showed a slight drop in the turnout to 81.9%, in line with the national turnout of 81.6%. The national results showed little change from January, with the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party now level with 272 seats each. The Labour Party had gained two seats as had the Irish Nationalists, having 42 and 84 seats respectively. Once again the balance was held by the Irish.

On 28 February 1911, the second reading of the Parliament Bill was introduced to the House of Commons. Alfred Lyttelton spoke for the Opposition and warned that, as a result of the failure of the Conference to come to an agreement over the Parliament Bill, there would be 'a bitter and most acrimonious controversy' and called for concessions from the Government. Seely then replied for the government. Asquith had chosen him to speak in the debate because the Opposition had suggested that changes along the lines of those implemented in South Africa might be considered for the reform of the second chamber. Seely, keeping strictly to the party line and refraining from the wilder statements of his by-election campaign, began his speech by denying the criticism that the Government's proposals implied absolutism. He did not, however, believe that the South African practices would be advantageous compared with the proposals in the Parliament Bill.<sup>1</sup>

Lyttelton then suggested that on matters of great constitutional importance there should be a referendum. Seely opposed this idea on the grounds that the electorate had already given a mandate for the Bill. A referendum would 'strike at the very root of the whole representative principle'. He thought that one would be justified if there was no other way of getting an opinion. 'It has not been suggested that you should take a poll of the women of

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol XII, cols 233-246, 28 February 1911.

of getting an opinion. 'It has not been suggested that you should take a poll of the women of this country on the question of women's suffrage'. He was sure that the electors knew for what they were voting. The Prime Minister had toured the country and the election had been decided on a single issue, namely the Parliament Bill. He was also sure that the electors were quite aware that the passing of the Parliament Bill would result in the passing of the Home Rule Bill.

Sir Gilbert Parker then challenged Seely from the Opposition benches, putting forward the arguments in favour of retaining the constitutional status quo. He demanded to know why should they deprive the Lords of their powers, which dated back hundreds of years; other states with two chambers gave the upper house the right to reject or amend money bills and the present Government had only a very small majority and none in England.

When the division took place, the Bill was passed on the second reading in the House of Commons by 368 votes in favour to 242 against. The House of Lords, faced with the creation of enough new peers to pass the Bill, succumbed and passed it in August 1911. The veto was limited to a two year delay and the Lords could not interfere with money bills. Though their power had been reduced, the hereditary principle remained untouched.

Following his successful defence of the Government's proposals in the debate on the Parliament Bill in February, Seely was moved from the Colonial Office and became Under-Secretary of State for War, under R. B. Haldane, on 23 March 1911 in succession to Lord Lucas. In his memoirs Seely wrote, 'Haldane asked me to go and help him at the War Office, as Under-Secretary of State. I had no kind of promise, but it seemed possible that I might succeed him, if and when he went to the Woolsack'.<sup>1</sup>

When Seely did in fact obtain Haldane's post, in June 1912, he had to return to Ilkeston in July 1912 to fight a by-election as was customary for a newly appointed minister before 1918. Lloyd George went to Ilkeston to speak on Seely's behalf on 27 June 1912 and the election was held on 1 July. Seely won by 1,211 votes but his majority had dropped from 25.4% to 7.2%. In 1910, the Nottingham Evening News had reported 'Colonel Seely to

Seely, Adventure, p. 137.

unpopular with the miners because he had opposed the insertion of the '5 and 2' clause in the Minimum Wages Mines Bill of 1912, fearing that in some areas pits would close if wages were pushed up.<sup>1</sup> The Miners' Federation had proposed a general tariff of wages of not less than five shillings (25p) for adults and two shillings (10p) for children, on pain of a general strike if refused. The Times weighed his unpopularity over his opposition to the clause:

Against... the fact that the Liberal candidate is a member of a great coal mining family in the district and that praise of the Seelys is in all mouths for their ever kindly relations with the workers and for the pensions, hospitals and convalescent homes they maintain.

The Times suggested that the Conservative Miners' Association, described as the only one in the country, had swayed the young men in the rank and file and divided them from their leaders who 'are all on the side of Colonel Seely'. It was not until 1914, however, that a Liberal was opposed by a Labour candidate in a Derbyshire constituency with the result that the Conservatives gained North-East Derbyshire. In Ilkeston, however, the Lib/Lab pact held until 1918 when Seely, standing as a Coalition Liberal, was opposed by a Labour candidate for the first time in his political career.

Seely had had to wait for ministerial office but considering that there were four hundred Liberal MP's elected in 1906, he had not done too badly by becoming an Under-Secretary in 1908, especially as there was only one per department. His radicalism took him further than the Liberal leadership on the future composition of the House of Lords but his successful piloting of the South Africa Bill had put him in a much stronger position to obtain political preferment.

D. Tanner, <u>Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918</u>, Cambridge, 1990, p. 213.

The Times, 28 June 1912.

### PLATE IV.

# COLONEL SEELY LEAVING THE WAR OFFICE WITH WINSTON CHURCHILL, 28 APRIL 1913.



#### CHAPTER THREE

## AT THE WAR OFFICE: 1911-1914. Part One.

Under-Secretary of State: 1911-1912.

The Liberal Government revived Brodrick's task of reforming the Army because the short-comings, revealed by the Boer War, had still not been redressed. R. B. Haldane, who had taken over from Arnold-Forster as Secretary of State for War, proposed in 1906 that the Army should not exceed 190,000 men for service at home and abroad in six infantry divisions and one cavalry division with auxiliary support. He made the General Staff fully operational, introduced the Officers Training Corps and planned to restructure the volunteers. Seely, from his early days as a member of the Army Reform Movement, had taken a keen interest in military affairs in the House of Commons, tabling questions and speaking frequently, especially during the annual debates on the Army Estimates.

Haldane decided to appoint him in May 1906 as vice-chairman of the Territorial Army Committee which was set up to work out the details of a new auxiliary force. The chairman was firstly Lord Roberts and then Lord Esher. With its chairman in the House of Lords, Seely would have to speak for the committee in debates in the Commons, which would give him some prominence. Spiers, Haldane's most recent biographer, suggests that Haldane and Esher 'sought to placate Seely' because of his attacks on the Army Estimates, 'even to flatter his vanity, thereby dampening his ardour for Parliamentary protest. So successful was this ploy that Haldane recommended Seely as his next Financial Secretary a mere seven months later'. Although Campbell-Bannerman did not act on this, Seely had gained Haldane's approval and support, which was to prove valuable.

The recommendations of the Territorial Army Committee became the foundation for the Territorial and Reserve Forces Bill which Haldane introduced on 4 March 1907.<sup>2</sup> The Bill proposed the abolition of the Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers and the creation instead of

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 170, col 503ff., 4 March 1907.

Sir Frederick Maurice, <u>Haldane 1856-1915</u>, 1937, p. 206. and E. Spiers, <u>Haldane:</u> <u>An Army Reformer</u>, Edinburgh, 1980, p. 59 referring to Esher MSS Army Letters vol III, 10/26 Haldane to Esher, 3 May 1906

the Territorial Force under military committees of County Associations with each Lord Lieutenant as the ex-officio president. Seely's dream of teaching the adult male population to shoot came a step nearer, with the provision in the Bill of rifle ranges and drill halls for the new Territorial Force.

The debates on the Bill continued throughout the Summer, with Seely making a number of contributions in its support. As vice-chairman of the Committee, he was now involved with the formation of policy. He was no longer a critic on the outside as in the Brodrick debates, and he now had to answer questions from the Opposition. The Bill passed its Third Reading in the House of Commons on 19 June 1907 by 286 votes to 63. The Lords' amendments were debated in the Commons on 30 July, after which it received the Royal Assent.

Seely had spoken on matters concerning the Territorial Force on behalf of the Government on a number of occasions in 1908.<sup>2</sup> He opposed the motion to reduce the cost of the army and suggested that a real economy could be achieved by reducing the Civil Service Estimates.<sup>3</sup> In March 1909, now Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, he was the main speaker for the Government during the debate of the Committee of Supply on the Army Estimates. Arthur Balfour challenged Seely's competence to speak. He could not understand why Seely was being given an opportunity to contribute to this important Army debate in which he, Balfour, was the main speaker for the Opposition: 'Now, as I understand it, the Hon. Gentleman has been selected from among all the talent on that Bench to deal with a matter not within his department, with which his department has nothing whatever to do'. Seely refuted this, saying that the Colonial Empire was concerned with Army matters. Balfour however persisted: 'I am still puzzled, why is it that the Secretary for War, instead of calling on his natural ally who sits upon his right, <sup>4</sup> has called upon a very unnatural ally

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 174, cols 1490-1501, 28 May 1907.

e.g. <u>Parliamentary Debates</u>, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 183, cols 1399 and 1480, February 10 1908, vol 184, cols 1183, 24 February, col 426, 17 February, col 1439, 25 March 1908.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 185, cols 409-414, 2 March 1908.

Reference to C. Hobhouse, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury from 12 April 1908-23 October 1911.

who sits on his left?'. The debate as it unfolded showed Seely's grasp of the military situation, of statistics and of the role of the auxiliaries, but Balfour gave no quarter. They engaged in a lively dispute over the competence of the new auxiliary forces.<sup>1</sup>

Seely's credentials for speaking on Army matters were no longer in question when Asquith appointed him as Under-Secretary of State for War. Haldane was created a viscount and went to the House of Lords as Lord Haldane of Cloan on 27 March 1911, so that once again Seely was the chief spokesman for his department in the Commons. John St Loe Strachey, the editor of the Spectator, recognised the significance of Seely's new post. 'With the Secretary of State in the Lords, your new billet becomes unquestionably the next thing in importance to a Cabinet office which I for one devoutly hope you will soon attain'. Seely and Haldane were on good personal terms and Seely had rendered him a personal favour whilst at the Colonial Office by sponsoring the application of his nephew for a post, though Haldane was anxious that the latter should not 'go over the heads of others more entitled, by reason of his relationship to myself'. Seely's former chief, Lewis Harcourt, wrote to him on his new appointment:

I want to thank you most warmly for your kindness to me. I shall not easily forget your generosity to me under exceptional circumstances, now that you have gone to the drum of the War Office. I shall often want your help and I feel that I shall have it.<sup>4</sup>

Seely now had to prove himself competent as the Under-Secretary at the War Office before Asquith would consider promoting him to the Cabinet.

On 1 July 1911, the German gun-boat *Panther* arrived at Agadir to counter French claims to occupy Fez in Morocco. The resulting international crisis developed into an Anglo-German

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5 th Series, vol II, cols 227-238, 9 March 1909.

House of Lords Record Office, Strachey Papers S/13/6/2. Strachey to Seely, 31 March 1911.

Mottistone MSS 1/287, R. B. Haldane to Seely from a German walking tour, 5 May 1910.

Bodleian Library. Lewis Harcourt Colonial Office Official Correspondence 1910-1916, O-W 465-97, Harcourt to Seely, 26 March 1911.

power struggle and even the threat of war with Germany. On 17 August, a general strike on the railways in Britain was declared. This could aggravate social unrest and upset the status quo if the disruption to food supplies affected the poorer classes. The editorial in <a href="The Times">The Times</a>' stated: 'War has been declared by the Union railwaymen against the public and the nation and all the information points to the utmost determination on their part to carry it through'. The immediate response by the Government was to detail Lloyd George to negotiate with the railwaymen. Troops were sent to guard the essential services and communications throughout the country and were based in London parks and barracks to support the police.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir John French, and the Director of Military Operations, Sir Henry Wilson, went to Seely and told him that in order to support the Army, it was urgent to pass a more stringent Official Secrets Bill than the Act of 1889. This would have the dual purpose of strengthening the authorities against underground subversion at home at a time of fear of the spread of Syndicalism, as well as enabling foreign spies to be more easily arrested should they take advantage of the situation to infiltrate the country. Seely recounted how he went to see the Speaker, J. Lowther, on the Friday morning, 18 August, and announced that it was his intention to steer the Bill through so that it would pass all of its stages in one sitting and receive the Royal Assent the same day. The Liberal Government had already moved towards greater control of information with the expansion of the Special Branch of the police force and Haldane's Secret Service Bureau in 1909, in order to monitor the activities of aliens, especially Germans. Churchill went further, during the current crisis, with his directives to intercept mail and the maintenance of a register of aliens.

Both the Speaker and the Clerk of the House of Commons Courtenay Ilbert, were opposed to the Official Secrets Bill on constitutional grounds, saying that such a move was contrary to every parliamentary precedent and to every principle of sound government. Seely decided that there was enough cross-bench support from his friends in the House of Commons to proceed with his plan. He mentioned by name George Wyndham, F. E. Smith, T. P. O'Connor, and John Redmond on the Opposition side.<sup>2</sup> He then rose in the House and

<sup>&</sup>lt;u>The Times</u>, 19 August 1911.

Seely, Adventure, p. 145.

proposed that the Bill be read a second time. He did not however have a completely trouble-free passage. The first speaker on the second reading for the Opposition, F. H. Booth, argued that the police were to be given too much power. The superintendent of police, instead of a justice of the peace, could in an emergency give a constable a warrant to search premises and arrest suspects.

The state of emergency however, had persuaded Seely to agree to present the Bill on behalf of the Government, in spite of its illiberal contents. He insisted that 'in no case would the powers be used to infringe any liberties of His Majesty's subjects'. He persuaded the Bill's critics to agree to allow its passage to the statute book in one day. Booth, conceded, saying: With regard to the rest of the Bill, although I do not like some of it, I understand that it is necessary'. When the House went into committee it voted, at 12.45 pm, with 107 for the motion and ten against it, a majority of 97 including Booth and another leading opponent, A. C. Morton. Among the ten who opposed the Bill were the Labour Party members George Lansbury, Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden. The reason for the poor attendance at the discussion of such a vital piece of legislation was probably the timing for the debate and the heat of the day; England was in the midst of a heatwave and the House was meeting for the last time before adjourning until 24 October. The Bill then returned to the Commons for the third reading and was carried without a division and the House suspended until 3.30 pm when it reconvened to hear the assent of the Lords. The Royal Assent followed so the Bill became Law. The record for the passage of a Bill through all its stages, in the space of 24 hours, stood for Seely's lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

Seely recorded that he was on tenterhooks because any member might have challenged the right to pass all the stages of a Bill in one day 'without a word of explanation from the minister in charge...It was open to any of them to say that such a gross interference with the liberty of the subject had never been presented to the House of Commons, even in most troublous and revolutionary times'. He acknowledged that the Bill gave 'extremely drastic powers to the executive' but he was in retrospect grateful to the members for not opposing it and allowing it to pass so rapidly.<sup>2</sup> On Saturday 20 August, the railway strike was called

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol X1X, cols 2251-2259, 18 August 1911.

Seely, Adventure, pp. 145-145.

off. It had lasted for two days. Lloyd George had appealed to the railwaymen's patriotic duty at the time of international crisis but he had behind him the Army and a more effective Official Secrets Act.

The Act was unprecedentedly authoritarian for a Liberal Government. The vexed issue of warrants had been the concern of radicals since the conflict with John Wilkes in the 1760s. Not since the Six Acts of 1819 had a government assumed such powers in peace time, when faced with civil disorder and Morton declared: 'It upsets Magna Carta altogether'. The Bill has been described as 'draconian legislation' and the Government condemned for 'pulling a fast one' by the haste with which it was passed. However, Sir Maurice Hankey, the Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defence at the time, describes Seely's handling of the passage of the Act as 'a masterly example of Parliamentary strategy'. The Times gave a full account of the passage of the Bill but there was no editorial comment on it, apparently concurring with Seely that the ends justified the means.

Seely had become an instrument of the Liberal Government's curtailment of the liberties of the individual at the behest of the military. The popular fear of German spies, initially fuelled by Erskine Childers' Riddle of the Sands in 1903, had aided the army to get its way. Although the Official Secrets Act was a step away from open government and regarded by its opponents as an infringement of civil liberties, the Act did not turn Britain into a police state. It did, though, enable the Government to exact from civil servants a commitment to secrecy with an oath to obey the Act. Section 2 was to prove the most restrictive. Government permission had to be given for the release of any information from any department to the public or press. The Defence of the Realm Acts of 1914-1915, also passed under a Liberal Government but in the context of the war, conferred still more far-reaching powers to restrict the freedom of the subject.

The Official Secrets Act reinforced the 'D. Notice' of 1909, by which the British press was expected to practice self-regulation. As the guest speaker in May 1913 at the annual dinner

The Times, 19 August 1911.

R. Thurlow, <u>The Secret State</u>. British Internal Security in the Twentieth Century, Oxford, 1994, p. 40-44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Lord Hankey, <u>The Supreme Command.</u> 1914-1918, vol I, 1961, p. 115.

of the Newspaper Society, Seely commended the Press for maintaining its independence as well as using its discretion over publishing vital facts which should not be made public in the interests of the State. This, he said, had been of great service to the nation in times of crisis. He recognised that the maintenance of the status quo was therefore deemed to depend not only on an Official Secrets Act but also on the willingness of the Press to support it.

Another area where Seely was able to make an impact, whilst Under-Secretary, resulted from his recognition of the possibilities of the use of aeroplanes in war and his interest in flying. Haldane, who had set up the sub-committee of the CID on Aerial Navigation [the 'Air Committee'] on 23 October 1908, under Lord Esher, had no reputation for grasping its potential and lacked interest. Asquith was supportive but was too involved in the current crises at home and abroad. They therefore left the crucial development to Seely who had been interested in flying from its early days and recognised the importance of air power in a future war.<sup>2</sup>

In order to gain publicity and raise the profile of powered flight, he was driven down to Hendon to meet Grahame-White, a well-known pilot, who took him up for a 'spin' in April 1911. The Times reported the incident and declared that it was the first time that a Minister from any country had flown in an aeroplane.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently he travelled widely by air, taking the controls himself on occasion.<sup>4</sup>

On 18 November 1911, Seely was appointed President of the Technical Sub-Committee of the Sub-Committee of Imperial Defence, containing members of both armed forces, with the task of forming the Royal Flying Corps.<sup>5</sup> He faced a number of difficulties. The

The Times, 18 May 1913.

H. Driver, <u>The Birth of Military Aviation</u>. <u>Britain 1903-1914</u>, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1997 p. 203, 'In fact the problem was left to his Parliamentary Under-Secretary and successor J. E. B. Seely'. Driver also quotes from Haldane's <u>An Autobiography</u>, 1929, p. 234, 'I had myself little to do with such developments'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The Times, 26 April 1911.

The Times, 20 December 1913.

The members were Major-General A. J. Murray, Director of Military Training, Brigadier-General G. K. Scott-Moncrieff, the Director of Fortifications and Works, Brigadier-General D. Henderson, General Service Officeer to the Inspector General of the Forces, M. O'Gorman, the Superintendent of the Aircraft Factory, officers

problem arose of co-ordinating plans for the development of air power between the Navy, the Army and a new, independent, force. The Army, for example, had wanted to retain control over air power because the Balloon School, the precursor of the Royal Flying School, was under the control of the Royal Engineers. Seely, as Chairman of the Air Committee, with the support of Churchill, managed to persuade the Royal Engineers to part with this section so that it could be an independent body. His answer to these conflicts of interest was to advocate a separate Air Ministry in the Cabinet. Taking the chair at the first meeting of the Air Committee in July 1912, Seely foretold that there would be an Air Office in a few years' time with the same status as the War Office and the Admiralty.

He was handicapped by the forcible character of Churchill who dominated Admiralty policy, concentrated on the Royal Naval Air Service and relegated Seely to a subordinate role. Hugh Trenchard, an instructor at the newly formed Central Flying School in 1912, observed that Seely would always be at a natural disadvantage in competing with Churchill for public funds.<sup>3</sup> The Navy was expected to defend the shores and Seely consequently never received enough financial support from the Liberal Government to enable the RFC to assume the dual role of home defence and service aboard.

Churchill was detailed by Asquith to cut defence expenditure and as late as February 1914 he was writing plaintively to the Prime Minister on the subject, pointing out that in addition to the reductions in naval expenditure, air had been reduced from its original £500,000 to £400,000.<sup>4</sup> Any increase of expenditure for defence came up against the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Lloyd George, who protested that this would necessitate increased taxation, even though this was supported by Churchill, Haldane and Crewe.<sup>5</sup> Seely wanted £1,000,000 for new aircraft on 10 March 1914: 'The most expensive thing an Army has ever

from the Royal Navy and two secretaries, Hankey and Rear Admiral Ottley.

Driver, <u>Birth of Military Aviation</u>, pp. 268-270.

Gollin, Air Power, p.196. ref. CAB 14/1 Air Committee, Minutes of First Meeting, 31 July 1912.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A. Boyle, <u>Trenchard</u>, 1962, p.107.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> R. Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, vol II p. 679.

Cabinet Reports from the Prime Minister to the Crown 1868-1916, Harvester Press, 1974, Reel 12, 1911-1916, 11 December 1912.

had to face'. In fact, 'Armaments, Engineer Stores and Aviation' received £1,732,000, but this was passed on 4 August 1914.<sup>2</sup>

Churchill recognised Seely's difficulties in financing the creation of an air force large enough for service at home and overseas and also Seely's desire to retain control:

The War Office claimed on behalf of the Royal Flying Corps complete and sole responsibility for the aerial defence of Great Britain. But owing to the difficulties of getting money, they were unable to make any provision for this responsibility, every aeroplane they had being earmarked for the Expeditionary Force...The War Office...claimed that they alone should be charged with the responsibility for home defence. When asked how they proposed to discharge this duty, they admitted sorrowfully that they had not got the machines and could not get the money.<sup>3</sup>

Gollin criticises Seely and his advisors for the shortages of trained pilots and aeroplanes in the Royal Flying Corps in 1914.<sup>4</sup> Hankey has pointed out, however, that the fact that so much was inadequate was more of a reflection upon the failure of the government to allocate sufficient funds to develop and produce the technology required. Kitchener also recognised that Seely had had to fight for every penny in the Army Estimates for the RFC but believed that the War Office was right to do 'the most important work, namely the equipping of our armies in the field, first'.<sup>5</sup>

On 4 March 1912, Seely answered questions in the House of Commons about the proposed plans for the Royal Flying Corps, giving details of the structure, training, manning and finance but also making sure that his own role was known. There would be a naval wing, a military wing and a central flying school. He concluded by saying:

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol LIX, col 1097, 10 March 1914.

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol LXV, col 1935, 4 August 1914.

Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, vol II p. 687, quoting from Churchill, The World Crisis, 1923.

Gollin, Air Power, p. 201.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Gollin, <u>Air Power</u>, p.305.

This is a very ambitious scheme and it is an entirely new scheme for a new service. We have worked very hard to make a good scheme and nobody is more conscious than I am as Chairman of the Committee that we must have made a great many mistakes and there must be a great many omissions from the very nature of the case, owing to the novelty of the science we have to study. I think and believe that even with all these mistakes and omissions we have laid the foundation of a plan which will ensure that this country in the long run and sooner rather than later, shall be able to hold her place in the air as she has done in the centuries past both on land and sea.<sup>1</sup>

On 29 March, Seely announced to the House of Commons:

The King has been graciously pleased to approve of the newly constituted aeronautical branch of His Majesty's Forces being styled the Royal Flying Corps and of the wearing by all members of the corps of a distinguishing badge with the Royal Crown superimposed.<sup>2</sup>

The formation of the Royal Flying Corps was therefore the result of team work between the military and naval members of the Committee but steered by Seely, as Chairman. He had kept the support of both the Army and Navy and had shown skill in resolving their vested interests. At the same time, he played his part in creating a clearly defined unit with its own infrastructure and personnel, though as yet subservient to the War Office. As with the South Africa Bill, he had managed, in the national interest, to ensure all-party support in the House of Commons. He was congratulated by the Marquess of Tullibardine, the son of the Duke of Atholl, for keeping the debate out of politics as far as possible. He was also

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons 5th series, vol XXXV, cols 70-74, 4 March 1912.

A. Gollin, <u>The Impact of Air Power on the British People and their Government 1909-1914</u>, 1989, p.184 ref. CAB16/16 CID 139B, Report of the Technical Sub-Committee, 27 February 1912. This was the basis of the announcement to the Commons. <u>Parliamentary Debates</u>, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol XXXIV, col 1278, 29 March 1912.

assured of Opposition support from his foremost parliamentary critic on aeronautical affairs, Arthur Lee, MP for Fareham.<sup>1</sup>

The role of the Royal Flying Corps in a future war had yet to be defined. Seely's advisers, including Brigadier-General Henderson and the General Staff saw the task of the RFC to undertake reconnaissance rather than acting as a combat force or to bomb the enemy, and Seely accepted the recommendations.<sup>2</sup> Even this role was to arouse hostility from the traditionalists, as 'senior officers on each side proved more ready to believe their own preconceptions than the reports of aerial observers...Cavalrymen thought it might frighten the horses, gunners resented the need for increased camouflage, soldiers of the old school distrusted airmen on principle and the infantry fired at everything that flew'.<sup>3</sup>

As Chairman of the Air Committee, Seely was aware of the basic needs in establishing air power sufficient to participate in a future war. It was necessary to provide an organisation which would be capable of expanding from the six squadrons of 1911 to 60 when war came, with sufficient trained pilots and superior machines compared with the enemy's. He reckoned that the first two requirements had been met by 1914 but he had reservations about the last.<sup>4</sup> He was criticised by aeronautical interests for failing to provide government contracts to enable private firms to survive competition, especially from France. Instead, the government's plan was to use the establishment at Farnborough to develop military aviation. When a delegation from aeroplane manufactures met him on 5 December 1911, he discouraged them from thinking that they could depend upon government orders. They came away dissatisfied, which soured subsequent relations: 'He undoubtedly alienated several members of the delegation, to the extent that he became to many, like C. G. Grey, the personification of government wrong-headedness'.<sup>5</sup> Grey was the

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons 5th series, vol XXXV, col 74, 4 March, 1912.

Captain F. Sykes (later Controller-General of Civil Aviation) was sent to France by Sir Henry Wilson and subsequently prepared a report, 'Notes on Aviation in France'. The introduction, 'General Principles of the use of the Aeroplanes in War' emphasised the reconnaissance role. Gollin, Air Power, p. 199.

D. B. Tubbs, 'The Air War', <u>History of the First World War</u>, vol 2, no 4, p.539.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> J. E. B. Seely, <u>Fear and Be Slain</u>, 1931, p. 130.

Driver, The Birth of Military Aviation, p. 144.

editor of the journal, <u>The Aeroplane</u>, and, as such, an influential figure. He was to keep up an attack on Seely in the following months.

As both Under-Secretary of State for War and then as Secretary of State, Seely was frequently grilled in the House of Commons about the number of aeroplanes and pilots which the country could put into the air should a war come. This continued throughout his time at the War Office. In January 1913, the press tried to whip up an 'air panic' on the lines of the earlier 'navy panic' of 1909. This led to an incident which exacerbated the loss of confidence in his leadership in aeronautical circles. An over-enthusiastic Seely, when questioned in the House of Commons during the presentation of the Army Estimates on 19 March 1913 about the number of aeroplanes of serviceable use, replied confidently that, compared with the previous year's total of 17, there were now 101 aeroplanes at the disposal of the War Office capable of flying. His critics immediately seized on this figure, Seely refused to retract, ordered the acquisition of any old machines which could make up the numbers and dug himself into a hole from which his reputation emerged tarnished. Sir William Joynson-Hicks and G. T. Sandys, the Conservative MP for Wells, took it upon themselves to go round the country counting the aeroplanes and then published their findings. They decided that there were about 50 efficient aeroplanes available and publicised this to the House of Commons. Grey, in The Aeroplane, launched into attack: 'Colonel Seely has betrayed his trust. So far from putting our aerial defences on a sound footing during the past year, he has actually left them in a worse relative condition than they were a year ago'. There were even more bitter attacks in the magazine, Flight. Grey went on to condemn Seely more personally in a further article on 27 March 1913: 'Those of us who are in touch with Service matters hear that the pressure of work in the offices of the Secretary for War has been so great that Colonel Seely is breaking down under a task which is too big for him'. The problem of one person trying to run the War Office and the Air Ministry was, therefore, apparent from the beginning. Seely was able to report to the House of Commons on 24 March 1914 that the country now had 161 efficient aeroplanes but that

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons 5 th series, vol L, col 437, 13 March 1913, col 1402, 24 March 1914.

Gollin, Air Power, pp. 247-249.

one could not assume that more than 80 at any one time were ready to fly. He had learnt his lesson as to the need to present an accurate assessment.

As well as building enough aeroplanes, there were the technical problems to be tackled in the run-up to the Great War such as the provision of aerodromes, anti-aircraft guns, searchlights and telecommunications, all of which came before the sub-committee.<sup>2</sup> General Henderson became Director General of Military Aeronautics under the personal supervision of Seely. Gollin believes that this enabled Henderson to get things done.<sup>3</sup> Seely recognised the importance of new technology so that Henderson was able as a result to encourage experiments in all these fields, and some progress was made before the Great War. Hankey summed up Seely's contribution to the pioneer years of the Royal Flying Corps: 'I can testify to the splendid work he did in developing the new arm and in making a start with all kinds of technical devices including anti-aircraft guns and searchlights'.<sup>4</sup>

At the outbreak of war, a rudimentary airforce was in being, only 11 years after the Wright brothers' first powered flight. It was inadequate and Seely had lost the confidence of aeronautical circles but he was inhibited by lack of resources and the newness of the concept of air power as an adjunct to the traditional forces. Once war had broken out, the unresolved problems became apparent, worsened by the unexpected length of the war and its global nature, but the potential of air power was becoming recognised. His success in over-seeing the formation of the RFC and in steering the Official Secrets Bill on to the statute book was sufficient for Asquith to consider his promotion.

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol L, col 1402, 24 March 1914.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Hankey, <u>Supreme Command</u>, vol I, p.110.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Gollin, Air Power, p.274.

Hankey, The Supreme Command 1914-1918, vol I, p. 110.

## Part Two.

## Secretary of State for War: June 1912- March 1914.

When Haldane became Lord Chancellor, Seely took his place on 12 June 1912 as Secretary of State for War, a post he held until 30 March 1914. His promotion owed as much to Churchill's support as to Haldane, who was anxious to ensure continuity, especially over the development of the Territorial Force. Churchill had been appointed First Lord of the Admiralty on 23 October 1911 and it would suit him to have Seely at the War Office. Seely's inexperience in the Cabinet would make him subservient to Churchill, who wanted to get his own way over defence matters concerning the Admiralty. John Colville wrote in his diary in 1941 an account of a conversation which took place at a dinner at Chequers, hosted by the Prime Minister and attended by Seely, among others. He recalled that Churchill admitted that he had been responsible for the appointment of Seely as he had proposed him to the Prime Minister, Asquith, during a cruise on the Admiralty Yacht, Enchantress, 'on the only occasion on which Asquith had mentioned politics'. However, John Gooch writes 'The precise manner of his [Seely's] selection is not clear, though it may have owed something to Harcourt and Crewe who both had his interests at heart'..2 This is likely because Seely had served under both as Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, but also indicates that they must have been satisfied with his performance to have supported his promotion.

Haldane realised that there would be opposition to the appointment of an Under-Secretary to Secretary of State from those who held less exalted posts within the Cabinet. John Burns, for example, had remained at the Local Government Board since 1908. Haldane wrote to Seely in March 1912, which indicates that Seely was being considered for the post as early as then, 'A tough fight is raging over you - a fight by the members of the Cabinet who are not Secretaries of State. I shall see the P.M. as soon as I can get him back'. Haldane

J. Colville, <u>The Fringes of Power. Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955</u>, 1985, p.444. Diary entry for Sunday 28 September 1941. He was grandson of Lord Crewe and at that time Private Secretary to Churchill.

J. Gooch, The Plans of War. The General Staff and British Military Strategy, c. 1900-1916, 1974, p. 123.

Mottistone MSS 2/102, Haldane to Seely, 7 March 1912.

continued to support Seely and wrote to Asquith on 5 June 1912, 'There are reasons connected with the Army which make me think that the advantages of taking Seely would much outweigh other considerations'. Asquith either had enough confidence in Seely in that he was prepared to move him on the strength of his work as Under-Secretary or he was anxious to accommodate Churchill and Seely's other supporters.

Once Seely was appointed, Haldane publicly endorsed him in June 1912 before an audience of Territorials at Plumstead. He assured them that they could rely on Seely to support the Territorial Force as he had worked hard for its affairs for years past and had one advantage which he, Haldane, lacked: he was the commander of a Territorial Force Unit. If Colonel Seely wanted any help, then, he said, 'an old friend would be at his elbow'. Haldane trusted in Seely's ability to succeed him at a time when continental war was considered a probability rather than a possibility, and wrote to him on 12 June 1912, 'I feel that you will put great life into army affairs more in some ways than I was able to do. I feel, too, that continuity of appointment will remain unbroken'. He was not, however, to prove as supportive as Seely might have hoped.

The Times, not a Liberal paper, approved Seely's candidature as he had 'already played a distinguished part in respect to War Office organisation especially in the matter of the Royal Flying Corps'. It mentioned other names which had been suggested for the post, Herbert Samuel, the Post-Master General, and C. Hobhouse, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and also recognised that 'it would be in the nature of a precedent for an Under-Secretary to become at one step the Secretary of State in the Department in which he was serving'. Herbert Samuel when writing to Seely to congratulate him on his appointment recognised that if he, Samuel, had been given the office, he believed that it would be unwelcome to the army, the Commons and to himself. His confidence in Seely is

D. Sommer, <u>Haldane of Cloan</u>. <u>His Life and Times 1856-1928</u>, 1960, p. 269, Haldane to Asquith 5 June 1912.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Times 22 June 1912.

Mottistone MSS 2/109, Haldane to Seely, 12 June 1912. Seely received the documents from the Privy Council that he had been duly sworn in on 14 June 1912. Mottistone MSS 2/19.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Times, 11 June 1912.

revealed in his enthusiastic comment, 'You have taken a further step on the road that leads to the woolsack'.1

Churchill wrote to congratulate his old friend: 'My dear Jack,\_If I may use such a familiar address towards a Secretary of State\_accept my most sincere and warm congratulations'. Churchill added a comment which reflected his purpose in supporting Seely for the position: 'We must keep in the closest touch. Yours always W'.² John Burns expressed his opinion of Seely's association with Churchill when he recorded: 'Went to Speaker's dinner at which Seely and Churchill sat side by side. Mars and Neptune, with 13 medals on their manly breasts, both from Harrow School and both ex-Tories as chirpy as two boys from a tuck shop'.³ This was written in February 1914, but epitomises the close link between the holders of the War Office and the Admiralty during the period from 1912 as well as Burns' slightly soured attitude now towards Seely.

Though he was confirmed in his new Cabinet position, the generals had no high regard for Seely, even though Sir Hugh Lacy had written optimistically in <u>Punch</u> on 19 June 1912: 'He has been one of the most conspicuous successes of a singularly gifted Ministry. His appointment is as popular in the House as it will be with soldiers, who like to see one of themselves placed at the head of Army affairs'. Patricia Jalland remarks, 'It was more common for the Secretary of State for War to be a civilian, but Seely was a soldier with a reputation for gallantry in the Boer War'.<sup>4</sup>

But Jalland, as well as Seely's contemporary Hugh Lacy, were incorrect. The confusion may have arisen because Seely was entitled to call himself Colonel Seely, had served in the Boer War, continued to attend the Territorial camps and frequently referred to his war

Mottistone MSS 2/116, Samuel to Seely, 13 June 1912. Samuel was a Jew and this, together with his involvement in the inauguration of New Liberalism, given the conservative nature of the Army, may have influenced his opinion.

Mottistone MSS 2/105, Churchill to Seely, June 1912.

Peter Rowland, <u>The Last Liberal Government.</u> vol 2, <u>Unfinished Business</u>, <u>1911-1914</u>, 1971. p. 267. Burns was writing on 20 February 1914 and Seely had only five weeks left in office.

Patricia Jalland, <u>The Liberals and Ireland</u>. <u>The Ulster Question in British Politics to 1914</u>, Brighton, 1980, p. 216.

experiences, but he was in fact a civilian<sup>1</sup>. He was by profession a barrister and a politician and, as a Territorial, only a part-time soldier, not a regular. In 1911, St Loe Strachey had recognised Seely's civilian status: 'I am quite sure that the Army will benefit very much from having as one of its chiefs a civilian with war experience, one who knows what the real thing is without being an imitation Regular'. Strachey wrote again to Seely in 1912, congratulating him on his promotion and referred to his noted concern for the welfare of the other ranks: 'I am quite sure that it will be a great advantage to the army to have a man at its head who knows and understands the British soldier as you do'.<sup>3</sup>

It was, however, his yeomanry status which was to bring Seely into conflict with the regular officers, imitation or otherwise, such as Major-General Sir Charles Fergusson, in command of the Fifth Division in Ireland during the Curragh crisis of March 1914. Seely was 'only a Yeomanry Colonel', who, according to Sir James Fergusson, used his position to act in a superior manner towards the high ranking officers with whom he dealt.<sup>4</sup> In 1912, Strachey observed the problems between the regular and voluntary forces when he wrote to Seely to comment on recent manoeuvres under Colonel Le Roy-Lewis of the Hampshire Regiment: 'I was filled with admiration for the Yeomen as well as for the Regulars, but really the prejudice of some of the Regulars in regard to the Yeomanry is too absurd'.<sup>5</sup>

There was a history of distrust between the generals and Liberal politicians, fuelled by Gladstone's reluctance to rescue General Gordon and more recently by the attitudes of the pro-Boer Liberals. The War Office Act of 1870 had vested control over the Army in the Secretary Of State and the Army Council was created in 1904 to replace the autocracy of the old Commander in Chief, Lord Roberts. As a result, ministers were unlikely to have

National Army Museum Military List, 1916. Seely had been a Captain in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Yeomanry in the Boer War and was now an Honorary Colonel in the Hampshire Territorial Association, 72nd (Hampshire). When the Yeomanry was absorbed into the Territorial Force as part of Haldane's army reforms he commanded the Hampshire Carabineers from 1908-1912.

House of Lords Record Office, Strachey Papers, S/13/6/2, Strachey to Seely, 31 March 1911.

House of Lords Record Office, Strachey Papers, S/13/6/7, Strachey to Seely, 13 June 1912.

Sir James Fergusson, <u>The Curragh Incident</u>, 1964, p.29.

Strachey Papers, S/13/6/9, Strachey to Seely, 24 September 1912.

had any service experience and had to rely on the advice of the 'military members' who, as in Sir Henry Wilson's case, deprecated Seely as an 'amateur soldier'.

Wilson's resentful attitude towards Seely between 1912-1914 is therefore more understandable as being typical of such officers towards part-time soldiers, especially one whom they regarded as arrogant. Wilson was a career soldier who had, however, gained his commission through joining the militia in Ireland, a recognised way into a commission 'by the back door' for one who, like he, had failed to get into Sandhurst. The similarity in age between two ambitious men, Seely aged 44 in 1912 and Wilson aged 48, meant that they were, by then, both self-assured, assertive and reluctant to be dictated to by each other.

Relations between the two were not good and on 26 May 1912 Wilson recorded his disgust because Seely had made claims regarding the Expeditionary Force, which Wilson did not believe would hold good in practice and he even threatened to resign. Wilson referred to a meeting over this in which he maintained that Seely tried to 'outface' him.<sup>2</sup> Seely, on the other hand, had been over-anxious to present an optimistic view of the Army's capabilities to the Commons, compared with the gloomy prognostications of the Opposition.

Wilson continued to write disparagingly of Seely in his diary but there is no equivilent archive to give the other side of the question.<sup>3</sup> Studies of Wilson tend, therefore, to concentrate on his interpretation of events.<sup>4</sup> John Gooch blames Wilson's attitude on Seely's lack of commitment to the General Staff.<sup>5</sup> The High Level Bridge Conferences from 1913-1914, of which Wilson was not a member, were set up to work for inter-departmental cooperation and tended to over-shadow the General Staff, which may account for Gooch's opinion. The regular officers despised and denigrated the Territorial Force which Seely was dedicated to building up, and this would probably affect his trust of the Staff officers.

Callwell, Wilson, vol I, pp 2-3.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Callwell, Wilson, vol I, p.113

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Callwell, Wilson, vol 1, p.125. Entries for April 1913.

Koss, <u>Lord Haldane</u>, pp. 106-107. In addition to Callwell, Basil Collier <u>Brasshat</u>.

<u>A Biography of Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson 1864-1922</u>, 1969, and Bernard Ash The Forgotten Dictator, 1961, perpetuate Wilson's hostile opinions.

Gooch, <u>Plans of War</u>, p. 124. Citing Beaverbrooke Library, Bonar Law Papers, Wilson to Bonar Law, 20 April 1913.

As Secretary of State for War in a Liberal Government, Seely was also faced with the major handicap of its attitude towards the Army. C. Townshend stresses that the War Office was low in Asquith's priorities so that Seely's appointment as Haldane's successor was 'a reversion to authentic Liberal estimation of the Horse Guards.' The post remained unattractive in a Liberal Cabinet and its status as a backwater was reflected in the appointment of Yeomanry Colonel Seely: an appointment which was in itself symptomatic of the government's lack of alertness to the impending clash'. Seely was therefore caught between the generals' distrust of the politicians and the relative indifference of the Liberal Government to military affairs.

Colonel Charles à Court Repington, the 'Military Correspondent' of <u>The Times</u> from 1904-1918, in contrast with the editorial approval of Seely's appointment, had little confidence in the ability of the new Secretary Of State to follow in Haldane's footsteps. A. Mallinson, in his review of Repington's letters, remarks that 'He fell out with most politicians at some stage...Haldane was a hero and then a huge disappointment, Seely, much the same'. Repington was a former colleague of Henry Wilson, the Director of Military Operations, with whom he had served in the 4th Dragoon Guards in 1894. They had taken their leave together as young men. Although they subsequently quarrelled over Repington's relations with a woman in 1902, they retained similar views on Army matters. Both Kitchener and Wilson regularly 'leaked' information to their supporters in the press and Wilson's criticism of Seely's conduct of the War Office between 1912-1914 was reflected in Repington's articles.

Five days after his appointment to the War Office, Repington took the side of the Army officers when he wrote a long article for <u>The Times</u> entitled 'British Military Policy,

C. Townshend, 'Military Force and Civil Authority in the United Kingdom 1914-1921'. <u>Journal of British Studies</u>, 28, no. 3 (1989), p.264. The 'Horse Guards' was the metaphor for the War Office, taking its name from its original meeting place.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> C. Townshend, <u>Political Violence in Ireland.</u> Government and Resistance since 1848, Oxford, 1988, p.268.

A Mallinson, 'The Letters of Lieutenant Charles à Court Repington', <u>The Spectator</u>, 12 February 2000, pp. 35-37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> C. E. Callwell, <u>Field Marshall Sir Henry Wilson</u>, 1927, Vol I, p.16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> H. Strachan, The Politics of the British Army, Oxford, 1997, pp.105 ff.

Colonel Seely's task'. He urged the new Secretary to concentrate on the regular army 'for when a Territorial officer is placed in charge of the War Office there is much more danger that he will neglect the First Line than the Second'. He continued:

The need of the Army on the civil side is for a capable and conscientious administrator of the Cardwell and Haldane type, who does not take office with the intention of making a splash in the world or of prancing and perorating in the House of Commons but is prepared to spend long hours in his office, to live laborious days and to remember that the first duty of an administrator is to administer. No one pays much attention to speeches in Parliament these days and the reputation of a minister is made or marred in his own office......The more we think of the duties of the British Army and of the extremely complex problems which its service in peace and war entails the more we realise the frightful danger of a charlatan at the War Office and the better we see how little scope there is for gush and glitter and how very slight is the opportunity for fresh developments after all the practical needs of the time have been met.

Repington was prepared to concede that, 'Colonel Seely is a popular figure among his friends' and that the army preferred him to the other candidates.<sup>1</sup> Sir Henry Wilson, had contrary opinions, however, which he confided to his diary, 'I suppose we shall get Jack Seely. Ye gods!'<sup>2</sup>

Repington's fears that Seely would not take his new duties seriously enough were already belied by the numerous topics on which the latter had been required to speak as Under-Secretary in 1911; they fill fifteen columns in the index to <u>Hansard</u>. Haldane recognised Seely's industry when he recorded in his diary in July 1912, 'In the evening met with Jack Seely who said the War Office is a big job. He has been working early and late. He does not wonder Arnold- Forster and Brodrick broke down'. Seely's many handwritten memoranda and letters and his marginal notes on the documents in the Mottistone MSS in Nuffield College and in the archival deposits of his fellow politicians bear witness to both

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Times, 17 June 1912,

Spiers, Haldane: An Army Reformer, p. 196.

Sommer, <u>Haldane of Cloan</u>, p. 176. Diary entry for 25 July 1912.

his industry and his personal involvement, as opposed to leaving the work to his civil servants. This would also imply that he was his own master as far as policy was concerned, though he did rely on advice from Hankey who provided a link between the Prime Minister and the War Office.

Once in office, Seely had to appoint his team. He chose H. J. Tennant as his Parliamentary Under-Secretary. Tennant was the youngest son of Asquith's brother-in-law and another contemporary of Seely at Trinity. He had been in 1909 the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to Churchill at the Board of Trade. Seely retained as his Private Secretary George Nicholson, the son-in-law of the Chief Whip, the Master of Elibank. As his Parliamentary Private Secretary, he appointed Godfrey Collins MP, a former Royal Navy man who had taken over the direction of Collins publishing house, and the new Financial Secretary was Harold Baker. Both men Seely described as his close friends. He had therefore a team with connections in high places and on whom he could depend for support. The Director of Personal Services¹ was Major-General Nevil Macready, who was to become General Officer Commanding in Belfast in 1914. His assistant was Major Childs, with the task of liaising between the public and the Army in cases of civil disorder. On the military staff of the War Office were Sir Spencer Ewart, Adjutant-General, and Sir John French, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.²

Seely was Secretary of State for War at a time when the involvement of generals and admirals in politics was certainly the case on the Continent. The fear of social disorder and the increased professionalism of the General Staffs enhanced the dependence of politicians upon them. In Germany, for example, Admiral von Tirpitz had been responsible for extensive propaganda to persuade the Reichstag to pass the Navy Bill in 1898 and Field Marshal von Schlieffen had formed his Plan in 1904, which constrained diplomacy in 1914. In France, Marshal Joffre had produced the inflexable Plan XVII and in Britain, by the end of 1912, Roberts and Wilson were prepared to play politics to achieve their ends.

The controversy over whether to introduce conscription dated back to 1902 when Lord Roberts had decided to advocate it as the answer to the manpower problem in the Army.

This is the title designated in Beckett, <u>The Curragh Incident</u>, p.430.

The Times, 15 June 1912 and Seely, Adventure, pp. 151-152.

The Duke of Wellington had taken the chair at a meeting at Apsley House to discuss this with Roberts as one of the speakers. On the strength of his contributions to the Army debates, Seely had been invited to attend and speak but he believed that, from the outset, he was not of one mind with the others.<sup>1</sup> The meeting resulted in the formation of the National Service League to press for obligatory training for home defence. In a speech made on 9 December 1902 during the debate on the Militia and Yeomanry Bill, Seely opposed any element of compulsion, although he was still a Unionist and had not yet crossed the floor. He pointed out that every single man in his force of Yeomanry in the Boer War had volunteered for active service.<sup>2</sup>

Roberts had taken over as President of the League in 1905 and this gave the movement popular appeal so that, together with publicity and the deteriorating international situation, the membership rose from 10,000 in 1907 to 270,000 in 1914<sup>3</sup> but there was a deep-seated aversion to compulsion in Great Britain. A standing army in peacetime had been forbidden in the Bill of Rights of 1689 and recruits were traditionally volunteers. Seely acknowledged this in the Commons in 1912 when he asserted that 'compulsory service for our fighting force is bitterly opposed by the mass of the working men of this country'. The National Service League, however, continued with its demands, supported by Sir Henry Wilson who had confronted Haldane on the issue as early as 1909.

In a speech to the Artists' Rifles in January 1912, Seely defended the record of recruitment in the Territorial Force and criticised Roberts and the members of the National Service League for advocating compulsory service, while at the same time it had members who, fit and able, were not prepared to serve.<sup>6</sup> Though not openly supporting compulsory service, he had not condemned it, which gave the Unionists hope that they could convert him to

Seely <u>Adventure</u>, p. 92.

Parliamentary Debates, 4th Series, vol 116, col 583, 11 November 1902.

R. Adams and P. Poirier, <u>The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain 1900-18</u>, 1987, p. 17.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol XLIV, col 2456, 4 December 1912.

Callwell, <u>Henry Wilson</u>, p. 76. Wilson had been attacked in the <u>Westminster</u> <u>Gazette</u> in March 1909 for advocating conscription as the means of expanding the home defence force.

The Times, 26 January 1912. Annual dinner of the 28th Battalion, the London Regiment (Artists' Rifles), an old militia organisation now in the Territorial Force.

their side. As Secretary Of State for War, he was, however, in somewhat of a dilemma. His credibility would be questioned if he failed to bring the numbers of the Territorial Force up to target but, as a Liberal, to advocate compulsion, anathema to the Liberal belief in individual liberty, would mean political suicide.

Whilst there was no likelihood of a Liberal government agreeing to a conscript army, a measure of compulsion for home defence might be considered in the tradition of the militia where all adult males had to be trained to bear arms. In June 1912, Repington, in his article 'British Military Policy, Colonel Seely's Task', threw his weight behind Roberts and Wilson. He suggested that Seely should consider short-term service of two years' conscription for home defence in order to ensure the safety of the nation. He acknowledged however that it would take time, money and a change of public attitudes to accomplish.<sup>1</sup>

Wilson felt, as the year progressed, that Seely was veering towards his point of view. He recorded in his diary in November 1912 a meeting over dinner with Sir John French, Churchill, Seely and Lloyd George. He commented, 'Seely also is coming to heel, and it really was amusing to hear Sir John and myself pounding in the fact that unless we got conscription we were dead men. And all this in front of Seely'. Following this, Seely was at pains to deny publically that he was ever a supporter of compulsory service, in a speech to the House of Commons made on 4 December 1912. Whilst he agreed that everyone should be able to defend himself, he qualified this by challenging whether it was wise ever to attempt to get the required forces by compulsory service: 'I have never said so. I have repeatedly said the contrary and I repeat it tonight'.<sup>3</sup>

The Unionists had set up a committee in July 1912 to enquire into the condition of the land forces and its report of l February 1913 stated that an efficient home defence could only be achieved by compulsory training of the Territorial Force and recommended that drill should be compulsory in schools. When it was proposed by the Opposition and debated in the

The Times, 17 June 1912.

Callwell, Wilson, pp 118-119. Diary entry for 5 November 1912.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol XLIV, col 2456, 4 December 1912.

House of Lords on 10 February 1913, the Government, represented by Lord Crewe, opposed.<sup>1</sup>

Writing in retrospect, Seely showed how difficult it had proved to reconcile the needs of the time with his long-held Liberal beliefs. He seems to imply that he had indeed been amenable to conscription before the war when he wrote that with National Service and a well-armed land force in Britain, the World War 'could without a doubt have been avoided'. On the other hand, he was adamant that he had always believed that voluntary enlistment in the Territorial Army as an expression of the citizen's duty, was preferable. Another dichotomy was that he was duty bound to press for more money for the Army and yet his Liberal instincts were to put the needs of social reform first. In a speech at Barnstaple in May 1913 he challenged further expenditure on the Army, in addition to the fleet 'when all the time funds were urgently needed to carry forward the great work of social reform'.

Seely met Roberts in 1913 and pointed out that conscription for home defence would, as the Cabinet feared, split the parties. It would require massive publicity and a General Election to get it through Parliament. Even so, there was considerable doubt as to whether the electorate would agree to it.<sup>5</sup> Again, he did not dismiss compulsion outright, as his argument was based upon his fear that there was insufficient time to bring in conscription before the completion of the widening of the Kiel Canal in August 1914, which, it was believed, would signal the timing for possible or probable hostilities with Germany.

Rhodri Williams suggests that Seely was personally amenable but lacked the stature in the Cabinet to persuade his colleagues to back him, even if he was in favour of compulsion.<sup>6</sup> Seely remained ambivalent rather than definite in his attitude and the nearest he came to showing any sympathy in the Commons towards compulsion was on 19 March 1913, when he acknowledged 'the desirability of having a large number, fully trained to arms' and agreed that military drill, 'by expanding lungs and cultivating "the spirit of obedience" could

R. Williams, Defending the Empire, 1991, p.221.

J. E. B. Seely, *Mayflower* Seeks the Truth, Stuttgart/Berlin, 1937. p.42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> J. E. B. Seely, <u>For Ever England</u>, 1932, p.258.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Times, 30 May 1913.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, pp.157.

Williams, Defending the Empire, p.222.

do much for national well-being'. With not only Asquith but also Churchill and Lloyd George opposed, it would indeed be difficult to convince the Liberal Cabinet that it should adopt compulsion. Conscription, anathema to the Liberal Party, was eventually adopted by the Coalition Government in January 1916 and Seely returned home from the Western Front to vote for it.

During 1912 and 1913, Wilson gave a series of lectures throughout the country with powerfully expressed opinions on what he saw as the lack of war-readiness. He had come to the conclusion that the best way to get conscription was to show the inefficiency of the Territorial Force. This he believed would bring Asquith round to accepting compulsory service. He wrote in his diary for 23 November 1912:

Lord Bobs [Roberts] slept here last night after his speech about the Territorials. It has staggered Seely and his crowd; they have all sorts of fantastic plans to bolster up the terriers and I am terrified they may get Sir John [French] to allow his name to be used.<sup>2</sup>

In April 1913 Wilson tried to bring Sir John French to his side on compulsion and drafted a speech for him to read to the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>3</sup> but because French had just been made a Field Marshall, this 'a little crippled him and made him anxious not to be more nasty to Seely than he could help'.<sup>4</sup> Wilson's lectures resulted in even cooler relations with Seely, who resented his tone. On 6 November 1913, Wilson wrote, 'Seely sent for me and tried to check me for my lecture yesterday, but I wasn't for it.<sup>15</sup> Haldane had previously come up against the intransigence of the regular officers, as represented by Lord Kitchener: 'I was unable to prevail upon him to adopt or even make use of the Territorial organisation I had provided'.<sup>6</sup> In each case the generals were trying to force their opinions upon the executive. However, in the <u>Army Review</u>, Sir John French wrote in 1912: 'Politics are not matters for

Parliamentary Debates, 5th Series, vol L, col 1093, 19 March 1913.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Callwell, Wilson, vol I, p.120.

Wilson did not specify to which Chamber he referred but as he met French at the Marlborough Club for lunch and handed the speech over, it would have probably been the London Chamber.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Callwell, Wilson, p. 125, entry for April 20, 1913.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Callwell, <u>Wilson</u>, p. 130, entry for 6 November 1913.

Simkins, Kitchener's Army, p.41.

soldiers to dabble in, and with this side of our public life officers should have nothing whatever to do...Our sole duty is to make the best of our military resources, and not to trench upon ground reserved for the Government and the Legislature'. The failure of the Army officers to keep to these guidelines would cause problems for Seely during the Curragh crisis.

Seely had to face considerable and sustained criticism on the state of the Territorial Force from the Opposition and the Conservative press, throughout his tenure at the War Office. The <u>Daily Mail</u> criticised the £200,000 allocated for the Territorial Force, 'a dwindling and dispirited second line army'. Instead, it advocated spending the money on improving barracks at home and abroad for the Regular Army. 'The War Minister has put his money on the Territorial horse. His selection should be tested...There should be a full mobilisation to test efficiency and the County Associations should be made to publish full accounts'. In the Commons, on 16 July 1912, J. L. Baird, Private Secretary to Bonar Law, opened the criticism of the Force as 'this lawyermade army, which enjoys no respect whatever abroad and very little respect in this country' and he chose to attack, specifically, Seely's regiment, the Hampshire Carabineers. In the debates of 3 December 1912, Seely faced criticism that the Territorial Force was quite incapable of defending the country.

Seely had inherited from Haldane the problem of getting enough recruits and training them. He deplored the fact that well-to-do young men were not coming forward to train as officers. In 1911, 197,000 Territorials had failed to attend the full 15 days required in camp each year. Haldane had envisaged in 1908, a Force of 313,000 men trained for two weeks in annual camp. After four years it was short of 51,000 men and over 34,000 did not attend camp. Of those who did 40,000 were too young and feeble to march with full soldier's kit.

Peter Simkins, the historian of Kitchener's Army, blames Seely, rather than the restraints upon him, for the failure to bring the Force up to strength. He 'lacked the ability and the

Gooch. Plans of War, p.125 quoted from The Army Review 2, no 2, April 1912.

Daily Mail, 18 March 1914.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol LXI, col 300 ff, July 16 1912.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol LXIV, col 2110, 3 December 1912, col 2497, 4 December 1912.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, vol LXI, col 300 ff, July 16 1912

personal commitment needed to stop the rot'. Seely's personal commitment would not, however, seem in doubt, in view of his life-long dedication to the volunteers and the onus upon him to make a success of the new Force but, by September 1913, the Territorial Force was short of 1,893 officers and 64,778 other ranks and the annual rate of wastage was 12.5% compared with the Regular Army rate of 7%. By July 1914 the numbers had risen to 268,000 officers and men but the Force was still short of its target. Simkins attributed the major cause to the large numbers of young men, over 178,000 in 1913, who were emigrating at the time, a factor which also affected recruitment to the Regular Army.

Financial support was lacking. The War Office was only allowed one shilling (5p) per head for the organisation of the Territorial Force and this particularly affected the problem of equipping the Force with modern weapons, a situation which had applied to the militia in the Napoleonic Wars as it would to the 'Home Guard' in the Second World War. In December 1914, there were still only 240,000, of the 400,000 rifles needed, available to the Territorial Force. Seely pointed out to the House of Commons that the Territorials were only allowed £1 for their fifteen days at camp. On the other hand, he did not want to create a mercenary force where the men were only in it for the money. He acknowledged, though, that there were problems because of the novelty of the new organisation. The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, F. D. Acland, blamed members of the National Service League for encouraging employers' reluctance to release men from their jobs for the fortnight's annual camp. 'They did lip service to it in public, but in private they went around among employers of labour doing all they could to discourage service in that force.<sup>4</sup>

The belief that a forthcoming European war was a probability rather than a possibility determined the decisions of the War Office and the Admiralty, particularly in the three years prior to 1914. One of the crucial tasks was to draw up plans for mobilisation of the British Army, its transport to the Channel ports and across to France, should war break out. Sir Henry Wilson was aware of the gaps in these plans when he took command as Director

Simkins, <u>Kitchener's Army.</u> p. 17.

Simkins, Kitchener's Army, p. 18-19.

P. Dennis, <u>The Territorial Army 1907-1940</u>, Suffolk, p. 33.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol LIX, col 1079, 10 March 1914

of Military Operations in 1910. There were no arrangements to move and concentrate forces by railway, to organise horse supplies or to guard the Woolwich Arsenal. His worries continued into 1911. He met the Chief of General Staff, Field Marshall Sir W. Nicholson, in January and complained that the date of completed mobilisation was unknown: 'At present *absolutely nothing* exists, which is scandalous'. There were still no train arrangements to the ports, there were no naval arrangements and he demanded emergency measures to strengthen fortresses and to send troops from Aldershot to the East Coast when threatened by attack. At a meeting with Haldane, he expressed his discontent: 'I told him exactly what I thought of the state of unpreparedness we were in, I said it was disgraceful and could be, and should be, rectified at once!.3

Seely has incurred criticism that he was not as effective as Haldane in the House of Commons and it is his predecessor who popularly has the credit for the successful mobilisation in 1914.<sup>4</sup> Haldane had, in fact, neglected this: 'Having reorganised the Army into an Expeditionary Force, Haldane can certainly be faulted for failing to sustain interest in mobilisation'.<sup>5</sup> It was left to Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty, Seely at the War Office and the standing sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the Co-ordination of Departmental Action on the Outbreak of War, over which Seely presided from 1911, to co-ordinate the actions of various departments in the 'War Book'.<sup>6</sup>

Wilson's fears on the shortcomings in mobilisation were shown up by the muddled response to the Moroccan crisis in July 1911. The next few months were taken up by the War Office and the General Staff improving the ability of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) to mobilise quickly and efficiently. Seely was responsible for the organisation carried out by the sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on Local Transportation. The problem of transporting troops from their bases to the ports was tackled when it was

Callwell, Wilson, vol I, p. 89. Diary entry 27 October 1910.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Callwell, <u>Wilson</u>, vol I, p. 91. Diary entry 10 January 1911.

Callwell, Wilson, vol I, p. 92. Diary entry for 20 January 1911.

e.g., S. E. Koss, <u>Lord Haldane: Scapegoat for Liberalism</u>, 1969, p. 97: 'His [Haldane's] successor, Colonel J. E. B. Seely, lacked the stature to defend the policy he had inherited.'

Spiers, <u>Haldane</u>, p. 159.

A. Hurd, <u>The Merchant Navy</u>. <u>History of the Great War Based on Official</u> <u>Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the CID</u>, vol I, 1921, p. 221.

decided that the railways would be taken into State control at the outbreak of war and run as a single concern by the railway managers. By April 1912 railway movements had been worked out and timetables were provided by the London South West Railway Company in November 1912. Seely wrote to the Admiralty in May 1912 about the revised plans for the embarkation of the BEF: 'As requested, train loads have in each case been shipped complete, leaving more or less spare accommodation on most of the vessels. The scheme also allows spare ships to be available at Southampton from the 7th day'.<sup>2</sup>

Questions of priority between the Services and civilian users were also ironed out in the sub-committee of the standing sub-committee of the CID on the local transportation and distribution of supplies in time of war, of which Seely was chairman from June 1910-August 1912.<sup>3</sup> The Government was anxious that food supplies should be secured for London in particular, having regard to the possibility of civil disorder should such supplies be disrupted or fetch a high price. Seely was responsible for contacting the general managers of the main railway companies to ensure co-operation and co-ordination of traffic.<sup>4</sup> That the policy did not work well in practice was owing to the large numbers of the younger dockers and railwaymen who enlisted, resulting in a manpower shortage, followed by the U-Boat menace to British shipping. The convoy system was not considered before the war on grounds of restraint of trade and the belief that the Merchant Navy was so large that it could sustain losses.<sup>5</sup>

Seely was also responsible for holding a census of horses to assuage another of Wilson's anxieties. He gave the House of Commons details each year on the numbers available on mobilisation and the compensation to the owners for the requisition of their animals.<sup>6</sup>
Horses were required for draft and transport as well as for the cavalry and it was estimated that it required 5,500 horses to keep an infantry division of 18,000 men in the field. The

N. W. Summerton, <u>The Development of British Military Planning for a War against Germany</u>, 1904-1914, Unpublished PhD. thesis, London, 1970, pp. 565-567.

Mottistone MSS 19/311, Admiralty (T 2218/1912) 25 May 1912, reference supply of ships. Secret letters dated 13 November 1912.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> J. E. B. Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, 1930, p. 147.

Mottistone MSS 11 1/325. Report of the above sub-committee, November 1911.

A. Offer, The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation, Oxford, 1989. p. 221.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol XLIV, col 2496, 4 December 1912.

MPs were worried that there was an overall reduction on farms of 100,000 horses over the previous three years owing to the spread of mechanisation and the export of animals. The War Office, under Seely, finalised its plans so that between 4-14 August 1914, 165,000 horses were requisitioned to supplement the 25,000 already owned by the army. The Remount Commission was geared up to acquire horses immediately from the USA and Canada. The first arrived in October 1914 and thereafter at the rate of up to 25,000 a month. As a keen horseman, Seely was distressed by the sufferings and the neglect of the horses in the Boer War and progress was made by the War Office, prior to 1914, in setting up veterinary care for the battlefield.

It was essential to find enough ships, suitably adapted to take horses, and to settle the cost of maintaining sufficient vessels to ship the British Expeditionary Force across the Channel. In November 1912, Seely reported the measures so far taken concerning the transportation of horses to the Continent and that the Admiralty had proposed, 'subject to the concurrence of the Army Council, to order the horse gear and to invite firms of contractors at once to tender for the fittings for 20,000 horse stalls at the cost of £27,000'.<sup>2</sup>

After the Moroccan crisis of 1911, the Royal Navy determined its area of effective patrol in relation to the French Navy. Winston Churchill, created First Lord of the Admiralty on 23 October 1911, announced the Anglo-French Naval Agreement in March 1912, whereby the Navy would abandon its control over the central and western Mediterranean Sea to France and return to control home waters including the English Channel. This, in effect, committed Britain to protecting the French side of the Channel from enemy attack and made it necessary for the War Office to come to an agreement with the Admiralty over the question of transporting the BEF to French shores.

The Moroccan crisis had highlighted the inter-service conflicts. The Admiralty viewed its role in war as the protection of the sea-routes and the shores of Britain from invasion, the blockading of foreign ports and a possible showdown with the German High Seas Fleet.

P. Young, 'The War Horses', <u>Purnell's History of the First World War</u>, vol 8, no I, 1971, p. 3154. Over 250,000 British horses and mules were killed in the war.

Mottistone MSS 19/307, Confidential letter from the Secretary at the War Office, 9 November 1912.

The War Office wanted the Navy to be ready to take the British Expeditionary Force to Europe immediately on mobilisation. A meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence in August 1911 had shown that the Navy was not in a position to achieve this, nor was it willing to do so. Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, the First Sea Lord, said that he 'could not give assurances regarding escorting troopships to the Continent'. He had worked out his own plans for landing men on the German coast, rather than in France, without reference to the Committee of Imperial Defence. It devolved therefore upon the political chiefs to try to work out a solution to the discord between the service chiefs. This was imperative if the vital problems concerning mobilisation were to be overcome.

During October and November 1912, Seely drew Churchill's attention to the problem of acquiring ships to transport the BEF at short notice.<sup>3</sup> Churchill then suggested a conference between the chiefs of the Admiralty and the War Office which Seely convened. In a handwritten memorandum following the meeting, Seely made his strategy clear that the transportation should depend upon the merchant navy:

As soon as HMG [His Majesty's Government] should decide on the dispatch of the Expeditionary Force, the Admiralty in consultation with the War Office should proceed forthwith to charter or retain in port the necessary ships and encourage the necessary labour at what ever cost, due prudence being exercised, the First Lord and myself taking full responsibility for the action and expenditure thus incurred in anticipation of the regular authorisation.<sup>4</sup>

Following these discussions, in a memorandum to Asquith on 22 November 1912, Hankey referred to the 'War Book' and the progress made so far: 'It will be found when this is ready, that the machinery to be put in motion on the outbreak of war is enormously improved. Nearly all the gaps in the first edition of the War Book will have been filled and all the machinery will have been tuned up'.<sup>5</sup>

R. K. Massie, <u>Dreadnought</u>. <u>Britain</u>, <u>Germany and the Coming of the Great War</u>, 1992, p. 746.

P, Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery, 1991, p. 278.

Mottistone MSS 19/294, Seely to Churchill, 24 October 1912.
 Mottistone MSS 19/301-2, Seely to Churchill, 5 November 1912.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Churchill Archives Centre Cambridge, Hankey MSS 7/8-12 memo no. 10 from

At a meeting held on 1 December 1912 attended by Churchill, Seely, Sir Henry Wilson, General Cowans, the Quartermaster General, and representatives from the Transport Department it became apparent, however, that the Admiralty was still unable and unwilling to guarantee the passage of the BEF as required. Traditionally, the Merchant Navy had provided transport for troops in time of war and Seely fell back on the solution which he had followed in 1900. He contacted the chairmen of the shipping lines and called a meeting in his room at the Commons attended by Sir Philip Royden, chairman of Cunard, Sir Owen Philipps, chairman of the Royal Mail Line, Sir Lionel Fletcher, manager of the White Star Line and Richard Holt, owner of the Blue Funnel Line. The chairman of P & O was out of the country but Seely believed that he too would co-operate in the scheme. He required merchant vessels to be ready rapidly once war was declared, with certain vessels earmarked for immediate transformation into troop carriers. Royden and Fletcher agreed to draw up suitable plans and the former, together with an Admiralty representative, visited French ports to assess the landing facilities.<sup>1</sup>

The impression given by, for example, Lyn Macdonald's eye-witness accounts in 1914, that the arrangements were ad hoc on the day, is misleading as the plans were formulated and laid down in the 'War Book'.<sup>2</sup> The outbreak of war required immediate requisition of small vessels to transport the Army to France and the unloading of their cargoes to make room for the troops, which gave the impression of makeshift planning. In the light of experience, however, modifications had to be made. The big liners used too much coal and smaller vessels had to replace them.<sup>3</sup> F. E. Smith, first Lord Birkenhead, regarded the work which Seely did to secure the merchant vessels necessary to transport the British Expeditionary Force on mobilisation as his greatest contribution whilst at the War Office. This was, he said, at a time when the Royal Navy was reluctant to envisage such a role for itself and: 'Probably Paris would have fallen if the shipping arrangements had been less intelligently conceived and prepared'.<sup>4</sup>

Hankey to Asquith, 22 November 1912.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, pp. 140-141, confirmed in Summerton, <u>British Military Planning</u>, p. 567.

L. Macdonald, <u>1914</u>, 1987, p. 61.

D. Woodward, 'Clearing the High Seas', <u>History of the First World War</u>, vol I no. 7, Bristol, 1969, p. 184.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> <u>Isle of Wight County Press, 25 October, 1924.</u> Smith to editor.

Another task of the sub-committee of the CID was to arrange with the representatives in the dominions, colonies and India for the transportation of their troops at the outbreak of war. The success of the plans was evident in practice: 'A convoy of 31 merchantmen brought Canadian arms to our assistance. Australians, in 36 ships, crossed the Indian Ocean to take up stations in Egypt'. By the end of August 1915, 84,032 Canadian troops had sailed for Britain. The garrison troops from Malta and Egypt and Gibraltar and South Africa were moved with a celerity that is unexampled; a huge contingent from India was placed on the field in record time.

Hankey had sent a secret memorandum to Asquith in November 1912 recommending Churchill's idea that the CID should 'consider as a whole the distribution of the army and navy and the preparations at home to support them'. In February 1913 Churchill accordingly set up a committee to discuss matters concerning both services consisting of himself, Seely, Prince Louis of Battenberg, the First Sea Lord, Sir John French, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, as well as the Permanent Secretaries of the War Office and Admiralty. The Secretary was Hankey; other high ranking defence chiefs were called in when required. Seely claimed to have named the committee the 'High Level Bridge's and Churchill wrote to him in February 1913 from the Admiralty, 'I am glad you like the idea of a monthly meeting'.

Tensions between the political heads of the War Office and the Admiralty, as well as the service chiefs, were still apparent, however. In a letter of 17 April 1913, Churchill chided his protégé at the War Office for attempting to answer questions in the House of Commons on subjects under discussion in the Committee of Imperial Defence: 'I cannot help thinking that it is a great mistake...and extremely inconvenient and will hamper us all in thinking our

Bone, Merchantmen-at-War, p.163.

D. Bone, Merchantmen-at-War. The British Merchant Service in the War, 1929, p.163.

A. F. Duguid, <u>The Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War</u> 1914-1919, General Series vol I, Ottawa, 1938, App. 133, p. 550.

Hankey MSS 7/8-12. Memo no. 16, Hankey to Asquith, 22 November 1912. No minute because the memo was secret.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 140.

Mottistone MSS 20/148, Churchill to Seely, 3 February 1913.

way towards the truth'. Churchill was referring to Seely's replies to questions put in the House concerning the ability of the Territorial Force to withstand a projected enemy invasion of 70,000 men. As the Navy was responsible for coastal defence, Churchill was annoyed that Seely had trodden on his ground. Seely wrote back immediately to justify his action:

It was necessary for me, therefore, when challenged on the subject, to state definitely the conclusions to which the General Staff had come. This could not be done without some reference to the Admiralty, for it must be assumed that the two War Staffs are in constant communication. It remains true that an invasion army could not land as long as we retain our present naval predominance.<sup>2</sup>

The inter-departmental co-operation was subsequently put on a formal footing, as opposed to the personal links between Churchill and Seely, when the High Level Bridge began its regular meetings from August 1913-May 1914. It dealt with secret matters of defence and strategy, met alternately at the War Office and the Admiralty and successfully settled the allocation of duties between the two services, particularly over home defence.<sup>3</sup> Spiers believes that Wilson, who had kept up his criticism, was prone to exaggerate the shortcomings of the mobilisation scheme when he stated that the securing of ships and the arrangements for embarkation were not resolved before about May 1914: 'it was, in fact, more efficient, at an earlier date, than he would ever admit'.<sup>4</sup>

Hankey, then Lord Hankey, writing in 1961, summed up the state of war readiness in 1914:

The naval plans were fully elaborated, and the Admiralty had ready alternative plans to meet developments in the situation...The fleet rendezvous was decided on.

Subject to some important exceptions the bases were equipped and defended.

Forces were allocated for coastal defence. The arrangements for coal and oil fuel

Mottistone MSS 20/212, Churchill to Seely, 17 April 1913.

Mottistone MSS 20/214-215, Seely to Churchill, 17 April 1913.

Public Record Office, CAB 18/27/1-9. Secret CID. 'Proceedings of Conferences held at the War Office and the Admiralty between August 1913 and May 1914'. 'High Level Bridge Conferences'.

Spiers, Haldane, p.199.

were complete. Merchant vessels had been earmarked as auxiliary cruisers. Details had been worked out for taking up colliers. Rapid mobilisation was ensured. Every detail had been worked out for the mobilisation of the Regular Army and its transport to a place of concentration in France prearranged with the French General Staff, as well as for its protection by the Navy. The railway and shipping and embarkation arrangements were complete. Plans had been worked out for home defence. The maximum of secrecy both of naval and military movements had been provided for. The risks of espionage and sabotage had been reduced to a minimum. The smooth working of our cable and telegraphic communications. had been arranged for. Provision had been made for cutting the enemy's cables. World-wide systems of naval and military intelligence had been preconcerted. Preparations had been made for warning our merchant shipping. Every detail had been though out and every possible safeguard provided for ensuring that, once decided on, these arrangements should be put into operation rapidly and without a hitch... From the King to the printer, everyone knew what he had to do.<sup>1</sup>

John Terraine comments that Hankey's assessment was a very formidable statement and an astounding record for a primarily peace-loving Liberal administration.<sup>2</sup>

The detailed plans and railway timetables proved vital after 4 August 1914 to the successful mobilisation of the British Expeditionary Force to their embarkation points and avoided the French muddles of 1870. The remarkable feat of organising the transportation of the BEF to France, following the declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914, meant it was able to disembark its first troops, artillery, horses and supplies on 9 August 1914, three days ahead of schedule. By 14 August, five British Divisions were assembled at Amiens under Sir John French, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, ready to march. The transportation of the men and stores was accomplished without a single casualty.

These achievements and the subsequent cross-channel and trans-oceanic traffic in persons and stores were the culmination of the work of the standing sub-committee of the CID under Seely's chairmanship, Churchill's driving force at the Admiralty and then their

J. Terraine, Douglas Haig. The Educated Soldier, 1963, p. 61.

Lord Hankey, The Supreme Command, 1914-1918, Vol I, 1961, pp. 138-139.

meetings in the High Level Bridge Committee, and the work of the General Staff. Before these initiatives, there was only inter-service rivalry and no co-ordinated plans. In 1927 Sir William Joynson-Hicks, the Conservative Home Secretary, acknowledged Seely's work, 'It was largely due to General Seely as Secretary of State for War that the Army was as efficient as it was when the call, the greatest call ever made upon it, came in 1914'.

To achieve his goals, Seely recognised the importance of propaganda, though he needed the stimulus of a professional to realise its potential. One of his golfing companions was Hedley Le Bas, the founder of the Caxton Publishing Company. Le Bas chided Seely over the poor presentation of the publicity from the War Office in its drive to gain more recruits in the autumn of 1913. Le Bas undertook to revolutionise the campaign, using modern methods both in presentation and in psychology. Instead of single sheets distributed haphazardly around the countryside, he would take full-page advertisements in the daily newspapers. The result of this contact was that Seely asked Le Bas to prepare a formal presentation of his plan for the War Office which, when implemented, proved both highly effective and cheaper than former schemes.<sup>2</sup> Seely then drew upon the editorial experience of St Loe Strachey who referred him to Garett Fisher, the advertising agent for the new Encyclopaedia Britannica.<sup>3</sup> Although Seely had lost his office by the outbreak of war, Le Bas was to continue as the leading figure in charge of propaganda was appointed chairman of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, made up of well-known advertising writers from the daily and weekly newspapers. He is credited with the phrase 'Your King and Country Need You', and the success of the advertising campaign to raise 'Kitchener's Armies' in the autumn of 1914. The famous 'Kitchener poster' was adopted from a magazine cover of the time.5

Some Opposition MPs did not let up their criticism during what were to prove Seely's last days at the War Office though others, such as George Wyndham, were prepared to support

Portsmouth Evening News, 13 October 1927. Speech at the Guildhall.

J. P. Wood, <u>The Story of Advertising</u>, New York, 1958, p.350 and Nicholas Hiley <u>Imperial War Museum Review</u>, no. 11, (1997). '"Kitchener Wants you" and "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?": the Myth of British Recruiting Posters', p. 44.

Strachey Papers, S/13/6/21. Strachey to Seely, 28 October 1913.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Hiley, 'Kitchener Wants you', p. 44.

Wood, <u>Advertising</u>, p. 351 and p. 142. Le Bas was also responsible for publicising the War Loans during the war.

Seely over the Army Estimates because of the international situation.<sup>1</sup> In the debate in March 1914 on the Army Estimates, Hamar Greenwood, a Liberal MP, criticised both Seely and Haldane before him for having no clear and precise policy as to the use of the British Army.<sup>2</sup> It is of interest that both Secretaries were castigated thus indicating that there was no holy aura at the time about the reforms of Haldane that came in subsequent historical writing. Liddell Hart, for example, in the year following the publication of Haldane's Autobiography, states categorically: 'For the progress in organisation in the years before 1914, the British Army owed much to Lord Haldane...<sup>13</sup> Acknowledging the constraints imposed by peacetime limits on military expenditure, Spiers, however, believes that Haldane 'contributed less originality of thought and less prescience about the demands of a future war in Flanders than he subsequently claimed...he was less impressive than he cared to remember': i.e. in his memoirs.<sup>4</sup>

William Brodrick, the former Secretary of State for War, now Lord Midleton, was also critical of Haldane and described how he was empowered by the Opposition in 1913 to approach Seely and urge him to take special measures to increase the numbers in the Regular Army and also the reserves of munitions. Midleton described his meeting:

Seely was direct and emphatic in response. Apart from his acknowledgement of the public spirit shown, he was profoundly convinced of the necessity, and was confident of being supported by the Cabinet. I asked him:

'What about the Lord Chancellor?'.

The reply was: 'If he speaks, it must be in my harness'.5

Midleton seems to have an impression of a decisive Secretary who believed that he could carry the Cabinet and his former chief on military matters. When Midleton asked the Lords to consider whether the existing forces were adequate to defend the shores, Haldane replied

Williams, <u>Defending the Empire</u>, p. 218 and Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 143.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol LIX, cols 1274, 11 March 1914.

Liddell Hart, <u>The Real War</u>, 1930, republished as <u>History of the First World War</u>, 1970, p. 62.

Spiers, Haldane, p. 199 referring to Haldane, <u>Autobiography</u>, 1929.

The Earl of Midleton, Record and Reactions 1856-1937, 1939, pp. 283-285.

for the Government. He was categorical that it was impossible to get 300,000 men for home defence as well as maintaining overseas garrisons and the British Expeditionary Force. In addition, he said, it would add £30 million to the Army Estimates and concluded: 'I therefore dismiss that suggestion as an impossible one'. It was unnecessary as, 'we are not afraid of invasion'.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, Midleton laid the shortcomings of the army in 1914 at Haldane's door. In October 1918 he was still angry with Haldane and quoted a conversation with Lord Curzon and Lord Lansdowne at the end of the debate, Curzon allegedly said, 'We have all three been sold. Haldane has beaten Seely in the Cabinet'. Midleton then asserted that 'Haldane was the real author of our unpreparedness'. Seely took issue with him and pointed out that 'I had got more from the Cabinet than my predecessors' and that 'all the ministries, of the big spending departments, were subject to Budget constraints'. Seely was loyal to his former chief and unwilling to agree that there was a state of unpreparedness in 1914 as this could be construed as denigrating his own efforts.

Midleton retained his opinion of Haldane. He wrote to Seely in 1933, 'I shall never forget the effort you made in 1913, though frustrated by Haldane, to bring the forces and munitions up to strength - and had you succeeded, many weary weeks of danger on the Western Front would have been avoided'.<sup>3</sup> He believed that Haldane's obduracy lost the British Army eighteen months of valuable time and 'the cachet of the Organiser of Victory was maintained at the expense of sufferings which were felt by the British Army throughout the whole of the first year of the War'.<sup>4</sup>

The outbreak of war on 4 August 1914, and the commitment of the British to protect the Channel ports against the advancing German armies, meant that the shortfall in manpower was immediately evident. Kitchener distrusted the competence of the Territorial Force and refused to use it as the basis for his recruitment programme. Instead he raised the New

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, vol X111, cols 895 ff, 10 February 1913.

Mottistone MSS 23/67. Copy of conversation between Midleton and Seely, 30 October 1918.

Mottistone MSS 5/23, Midleton to Seely, 4 June 1933.

Midleton, Records and Reactions, p. 284.

Armies, calling for 100,000 men on 7 August and eventually enlisting two million by 1916, but they had to be trained and equipped before they could be dispatched to the front. Seely criticised Kitchener for wasting the potential of the Territorial Force in 1914, an opinion which recent historians P. Dennis and Peter Simkins support. When the Territorials agreed to waive the 'not abroad' rule, they served with distinction, especially at Gallipoli, as well as reinforcing the regulars on the Western Front.

Seely was not only concerned with military logistics; he was also concerned with the welfare of individual soldiers of all ranks. He pointed out in September 1924 that he had been associated with the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen Families' Association for thirty years<sup>2</sup>. As Secretary of State, he proposed the provision of sanatoria for those who had contracted tuberculosis, wanted more funds made available for the support of war widows and orphans and was unhappy that unemployed ex-soldiers ended up in the workhouse. He maintained, as early as 1908, that it was regrettable that the Army failed to teach a trade to recruits to enable them to find employment when they returned to civilian life: 'Every man enlisted in the Army was potentially adding to the ranks of the unemployed'. Repington commended Seely's work to initiate practical training schemes and maintained that 'no one will be more justified than Colonel Seely in claiming the credit for this reform when it is achieved'. Another of Seely's concerns was to obtain pensions for ranker officrs and their secretary, Captain F. Bone, maintained in 1924 that 2,500 of them owed their pensions to him.<sup>5</sup> Seely also supported the move to increase the pay of impoverished regimental officers. Repington, appreciating the financial restraints on the War Office, believed that he would have done yet more 'had he lived in more spacious days'. Repington also praised Seely's contribution to military science and to aeronautics, though he admitted that the latter had not been without incurring some inevitable criticism: 'and who would not'.6

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, pp. 208 and 182. P. Dennis, <u>The Territorial Army 1907-1940</u>, Suffolk, 1987, p.37. P. Simkins, 'Kitchener's First 100,000', <u>Purnell's History of the First World War</u>, vol 3, no 5, (1970), p. 1019.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> <u>Isle of Wight County Press</u>, 27 September 1924.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 185, cols 409-414, 2 March 1908.

The Times, 31 March 1914, Our Military Correspondent, 'An Appreciation of Colonel Seely's Period in Office as Secretary Of State for War.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Isle of Wight County Press, 26 October 1924.

The Times, 31 March 1914.

Such favourable comments from one who had been scathing of Seely's appointment and far from an ally, together with Hankey's evaluation from a civil servant's viewpoint, would suggest that Seely had made important contributions in his own right and was not just a tool of Churchill. Hankey was Secretary of the High Level Bridge Conferences, of the CID and then of the War Cabinet. He had, therefore, worked with Seely on a daily basis and was able to assess his contributions. Hankey believed that, apart from Haldane and Asquith, Seely did more solid work in preparation for war than almost any other minister of his day. He singled out the organisation of the railways, for both war and the transport of food supplies, and the formation of the RFC. He commended Seely's patience, tact and drive and concluded: 'His judgement was never at fault in any of these matters, and his resignation a few months before the war was a national misfortune'. The civil servant and the military correspondent had a higher regard for the Secretary of State than had the Regular Army officers, who were acutely aware of the short-comings still apparent in the British Army. Wilson and his coterie remained antipathethic.

A particular concern was the armaments industry. In August 1914 it was only producing 6,000 rifles a month. Of the existing 800,000 rifles, only half were the new short pattern, rapid-firing Lee-Enfields; the rest were obsolete. In 1914, the shell allocation worked out at only ten rounds a day for the 18-pounder guns. Shell-shortage was to bedevil the forces on the Western Front through to 1915 when the reverses at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle were attributed to this factor and as a result Lloyd George became Minister of Munitions. The kit for the cavalry and the infantry was also poor for their cloaks and greatcoats were of inferior quality and were not waterproofed. They had to wear their blankets for extra protection during manoeuvres in 1912. Seely had to answer questions on this in the House of Commons but was unable to give the assurances required by his critics that anything would be done to improve the matter.<sup>2</sup>

That there were still serious problems in 1914 concerning the shortage of manpower, equipment and munitions, was because of the traditional financial restraints of the Liberal Government on military spending and its opposition to conscription. The electorate was

Hankey, The Supreme Command, vol I, p. 147

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol XLIV, col 1252, 27 November 1912.

adverse to increased defence expenditure, except on Dreadnoughts, and the Liberal Government feared that any sharp rise in taxation would bring electoral disaster. Seely had to champion his financial demands in Parliament but after the demands of the Admiralty and the cost of social reforms. From the height of the Boer War, when the expenditure on the Army was £43.6 million, it had fallen in peace time to £27.2 million in 1910, whereas that on the Navy, in the same period, had risen from £26 million to £35.8 million to pay for its costly rebuilding programme. The Government continued to maintain that the Navy could successfully defend the shores so that only a small Army was necessary, especially as a long war was not generally envisaged. The Treasury consequently exercised rigour over military expenditure and the regular Army competed with the Territorials for the limited funds available. Seely was, as a result, expected to run a department, and pursue policies towards which neither the Liberals, Labour Party nor the Trade Unions had much empathy.

Seely had been subject to the propaganda of the National Service League and attacks from the Opposition, the press, and the Regular Army officers, especially over the Territorial Force. The overall strategic considerations concerning the relative rolls of the defence forces and the Navy had aroused vested interests. He had not, however, sufferred any major political catastrophe, in fact seemed to have a good record so far at the War Office, holding his own against the powerful Admiralty and learning from his mistakes, for example over the need for accuracy rather than exaggeration.

John Ramsden writes, 'In the political world there were issues that Unionists could always exploit against a Liberal Government such as defence policy and the administration of the Empire'. It had fallen to Seely during his parliamentary career, to represent both interests in the Commons, which, up to March 1914, he had fulfilled as successfully as the politics of

An illustration of the popular discontent with proposed increases in taxation to pay for the army and navy under the Liberal Government may be seen in the [undated] ceramic cartoon on the front of the Coach and Horses at Hilsea. The coachman is the taxpayer and he is being held up by the highwayman representing the Inland Revenue. The coachman says, 'Your pal Haldane has already had all I've got'.

D. Butler and G. Butler, eds., <u>British Political Facts 1900-1994</u>, 1994, p. 481.

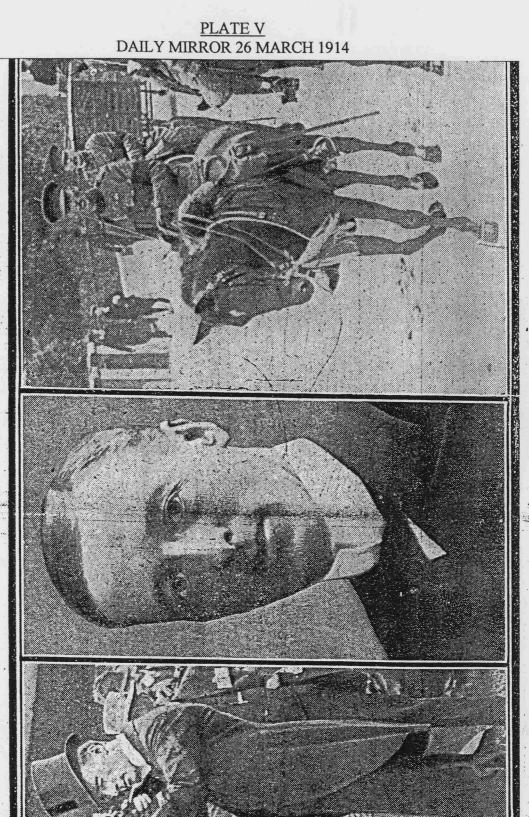
Martin Gilbert, <u>First World War</u>, 1994, p. 38, observes that anti-war sentiment was rife in those circles prior to the war.

J. Ramsden, <u>The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-1940</u>. A History of the <u>Conservative Party</u> 1978, p.72.

his day would allow. George Dangerfield, in <u>The Strange Death of Liberal England</u>, summed up the potential dangers of a Secretary of State for War under a Liberal Government: 'Of all positions in the Cabinet, that of Secretary for War was least grateful; its present incumbent, Colonel Seely, was not to be spared its goblin machinations'. The Curragh Incident was to prove the truth of this assertion and Seely had to face the most taxing episode of his political career.

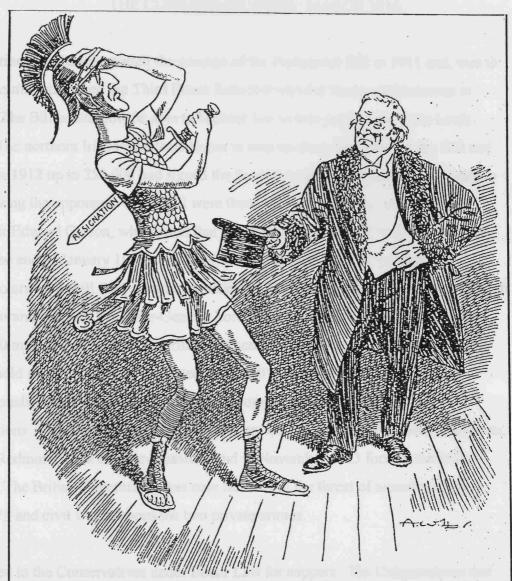
G. Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1935, p.119.

# THE PREMIER REFUSES TO ACCEPT COLONEL SEELY'S RESIGNATION.



Three portraits of Colonel Seely, D.S.O. He has been War Secretary since 1912, and represents the Ilkeston Division of Derbyshire.

## PLATE VI. PUNCH 1 APRIL 1914



AT THE DRESS REHEARSAL OF THE NEW COMIC OPERA, "RESIGNATION" (AS PLAYED TWICE WEEKLY.)

Scelius. "I am undone!"

[Thrusts sword beneath armpit and expires.

Actor-Manager. "Capital! But try, if possible, to make it just a leetle more convincing."

### **CHAPTER FOUR**

### THE CURRAGH INCIDENT: MARCH 1914.

The Irish Nationalists had supported the passage of the Parliament Bill in 1911 and, true to his word, Asquith introduced the Third Home Rule Bill into the House of Commons in April 1912. The Bill would now be able to become law in two years, even if the Lords rejected it. The northern Irish Protestants began to step up their opposition to the Bill and by September 1912 up to 250,000 had signed the Solemn League and Covenant, vowing to resist it. Among the opponents of the Bill were those such as the leader of the Ulster Unionists, Sir Edward Carson, who feared that the British Army would be used to coerce Ulster. By the end of January 1913, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was formally established to arm and drill the Protestant resistance. This grew rapidly so that by 14 March 1914 a memorandum from Brigadier-General Lord Gleichen in Belfast stated that there were 110,000 men, armed with 80,000 rifles and some machine guns, organised into a Home and Field Army. The latter consisted of 46,000 men prepared to take the field against Nationalist or regular troops and ready to commit sabotage to destroy communications. Women had also been enlisted for hospital work.<sup>1</sup> The Irish Nationalists, under John Redmond, took counter-measures and in November 1913 formed the Irish Volunteers. The British Government was now faced with the threat of armed resistance from the UVF and civil war between the two private armies.

Carson turned to the Conservatives under Bonar Law for support. The Conservatives and Liberals suspected deep-laid plots by each other. Conservatives believed that there was a conspiracy being organised to rouse Ulster into resistance so that it could be crushed by the British Army. The Liberal Government believed that the Opposition was in league with certain Anglo-Irish Army officers to bring it down. The necessary secrecy of the orders from the War Office would not have enabled the Irish press or subordinate Army officers, for example, to distinguish between defensive or offensive moves by the Army.<sup>2</sup>
Throughout the crisis over Ulster the War Office and the Admiralty maintained, however,

Mottistone MSS 22/191-194, Gleichen to Seely, 31 January 1914.

Seely, Adventure, p. 165.

that potential troop movements were solely to protect arms dumps and not for coercion. The suspicion of a Government plot to coerce Ulster is not now generally accepted.<sup>1</sup>

Bonar Law showed his colours in a speech which became known as the Blenheim Pledge, at a rally at Blenheim Palace on 27 July 1912, where he said 'I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster will go, which I shall not be ready to support, and in which they will not be supported by the overwhelming majority of the British people.' Law may, however, have been pushed into a more extreme attitude than he might have wished by the vigorous campaigning of the Ulster Defence League within his party. He was faced with those who were determined to force a General Election, 'even by pushing Asquith to the brink of civil war'.<sup>3</sup>

Before the First World War, Ireland was garrisoned by the British Army, as it had been for centuries. There were about 12,000 men scattered throughout the province. Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Paget was the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the forces in Ireland, which consisted of two divisions. The Headquarters of the 5th Division of the Guards, under Sir Charles Fergusson, was near Dublin, at the Curragh, which was regarded as the Aldershot of Ireland. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade with two regiments, the 4th Hussars and the 16th Lancers, was also at the Curragh, under Brigadier-General Sir Hubert Gough. Curragh became the focal point of the Army's resistance in Ireland to Asquith's policy over Ulster in March 1914.

Hubert Gough and his brother John, who was on the General Staff at Aldershot, Henry Wilson, whose family came from Limerick, and Lord Roberts were among the prominent Anglo-Irish officers who were becoming increasingly anxious that the British Army might be ordered north against Ulster. All were key figures in the forthcoming Curragh Incident, though Beckett believes that the over-all percentage of Anglo-Irish officers in the British Army may have been small.<sup>4</sup> Numbers alone, however, may be off-set by the influence

E.g. Ian Beckett, <u>The Army and the Curragh Incident</u>, 1914, 1986, p. 11. 'The balance of evidence available does not substantiate a "plot" to coerce Ulster'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> R. C. K. Ensor, <u>England 1870-1914</u>. p. 455.

Richard Murphy, 'Faction in the Conservative Party and the Home Rule Crisis\_ 1912-1914', History, vol 71, (1986), p. 230 and pp. 222-223.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Beckett, Curragh Incident, p. 3.

which such men had over their fellow officers on the Ulster question and their determination to preserve the Union. Henry Wilson, for example, continued to involve himself in politics and kept close contact with Bonar Law. He recorded several meetings in which he made suggestions for obtaining guarantees from Asquith that the Army should not be used against Ulster and he regularly furnished Law with military intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

There were recent precedents for the Government ordering in the Army to supplement the efforts of the local police in cases of civil disorder. Churchill, as Home Secretary, used troops in Wales in 1910 and 1911 and in London in 1911. He has been described as 'dispatching troops in all directions without even waiting for the authorities to ask for them'.<sup>2</sup> This would have been contrary to the recommendations to the Home Secretary in the Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Riots (1894) that magistrates could only call out troops through the Chief Constable.<sup>3</sup> It was with such a colleague, now First Lord of the Admiralty, that Seely, as Secretary of State for War, had to work.

King George V became increasingly concerned about the speeches being made by the leaders of the Government and Opposition and over the position of the British Army in relation to disturbances in Ulster. He counselled caution in a series of handwritten letters to his Prime Minister. Negotiations were at a delicate stage over the possibility of partitioning Ireland with four or even six, mainly Protestant, northern counties opting out of Home Rule for six years. However, on 9 March 1914, the Unionists rejected the proposals because they were satisfied neither with the boundary line nor with the time scale.<sup>4</sup>

St. Patrick's Day, on 17 March, was marked in 1914 by a conspicuous display of shamrocks in the Commons and commented upon by the <u>Daily Mail</u> the following day: 'But it was the least happy St. Patrick's Day that anyone in the House can remember' The <u>Daily Mirror</u> also published a photograph of Lord Roberts receiving his shamrocks at Wellington Barracks. The Curragh Incident therefore took place immediately after the heightened

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> C. E. Calwell, <u>Field-Marshall Sir Henry Wilson</u>, 1927, vol I, pp.138 ff.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> E. Halévy, The Rule of Democracy (1905-1914), pb. ed 1961, p.459.

C. Townshend, 'Military Force and Civil Authority in the United Kingdom, 1914-1921'. Journal of British Studies, vol 28, Chicago, (1989), p.267.

Bodleian Library, Asquith Papers 40/39-40, King George to Asquith, 30 November 1913, 40/42, 5 January 1914 and 40/48, 14 February, 1914.

emotions of St. Patrick's Day, always an opportunity for Irish Nationalist sentiments to be expressed and even more so when faced with the militaristic demonstrations in Protestant Ulster. Any troop movements within Ireland would be similarly adverse to Nationalists and Asquith could not afford to lose their support in the Commons.<sup>1</sup>

On 18 March 1914, Paget went to the War Office to report to the Secretary of State the growing disquiet among the officers at the Curragh. He returned to Ireland and addressed them on 20 March, giving them to understand that Seely had agreed that those who were domiciled in Ulster would be allowed to 'disappear' until any operations in the north were complete. Any other officer who refused to participate might tender his resignation but this could not be accepted and the officer would be dismissed.<sup>2</sup> As the British Government had made it clear that there was no intention of moving troops for more than the protection of arms dumps, Paget was either over-reacting or misinterpreting his conversation with Seely. The problem was that there was no written memorandum resulting from that meeting for Paget to take back with him.

Hubert Gough made it clear to Paget on 20 March that he would not take up arms against the Ulster loyalists. He telegraphed his brother, John, who replied, 'I will not serve against Ulster and if you are dismissed, my resignation goes in at once'. Hubert Gough repeated Paget's message to the officers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade and they all decided to resign, rather than take part in operations against Ulster. If they were expected to initiate action rather than maintain law and order then, they affirmed, they would prefer to be dismissed. Led by Hubert Gough, a total of 60 officers resigned, as did John Gough in support.<sup>4</sup>

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p. 255, Seely's private secretary, George Nicholson, 'the eruption was equally likely to be caused by Nationalists as by Orangemen'.

There are a number of eye-witness accounts of this interview between Paget and his officers, written from memory; Sir Charles Fergusson in Sir James Fergusson,

The Curragh Incident, 1964, pp. 92-93, notes made by Hubert Gough, quoted in Beckett, Curragh Incident, pp. 149 ff, Geoffrey Brooke, Good Company, 1954, p. 140 ff, accounts by those involved in England, Mottistone MSS 22/3-15, Nicholson's 'Account of the events of 18-26 March 1914' (undated holograph), Seely, Adventure, pp.157 ff.

Ian Beckett, <u>Johnnie Gough V. C.</u>, 1989, p.160.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p. 14, gives the figure of 60, declaring that Paget's figure of 57, which he telegraphed to the War Office, was erroneous and 'inevitably quoted in many accounts'.

Over the next ten days, until 30 March 1914, the events which have become known as the Curragh Incident, or even 'Mutiny', occurred. These were complex and contentious and have been the subject of several full-length books and substantial sections in others on related subjects, such as Irish and military history, and in the memoirs and biographies of the chief participants.<sup>1</sup>

Seely found himself dealing with generals who were expressing what were probably the first independent attitudes on politics since the Glorious Revolution. He had made the War Office's position clear as early as 9 December 1913, in a memorandum, firstly for the Cabinet and then presented as a similar statement to the Army chiefs, including Field-Marshal Sir John French, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff [CIGS] and Lieutenant-General Sir John Spencer Ewart, the Adjutant General, on 16 December. Such directives were necessary because The Report of the Select Committee on Employment of Military in Cases of Disturbances, drawn up in 1908 following riots in Belfast in 1907, was imprecise as to the military's responsibility in such cases. He made a number of pen insertions and alterations but the memorandum for the Cabinet was the same in substance as the statement to the generals. He inserted, but then deleted, his interpretation of the dilemma: For example, one man would say he would shoot an Ulsterman but not a Trade Unionist or Socialist, another would shoot a Trade Unionist or Socialist but not an Ulsterman, another would shoot a Socialist but not an Ulsterman or Trade Unionist. Such a state of affairs would of course be impossible'.

The completed draft of the memorandum stated that soldiers were not expected 'to use force more than is required to maintain order and the safety of life and property'. If they were, for example, ordered 'to massacre a demonstration of Orangemen who were causing no danger to the lives of their neighbours...they were, in fact and in law, justified in contemplating refusal to obey'. But, he asserted, there had never been, and nor was there now, any intention of giving outrageous and illegal orders to the troops. He believed, as did Wilson and French,<sup>4</sup> that attempts had been made to dissuade troops from obeying lawful orders

See Bibliography.

Townshend, 'Military Force and Civil Authority in the United Kingdom', p.268.

Mottistone MSS 22/150-161, 'Position of the Army with Regard to the Situation in Ulster', Memorandum, 9 December 1913.

Beckett, Curragh Incident, p. 40, quoting IWM, 75/46/8 French MSS, French to

given to them when acting in support of the civil power. 'This amounted to a claim that officers and men could pick and chose between lawful and reasonable orders saying they would obey in one case and not in another'. Should any subversive conduct arise, then he would submit to the King that 'The officer should be removed'.<sup>1</sup>

In the morning of 22 March, Hubert Gough and three of his colonels arrived in London to discuss the crisis with the War Office. Sir John French had an audience with the King and informed him that he too would resign unless Gough was reinstated. On 23 March Gough had an interview with French and Ewart and informed them that he was unwilling to return to Ireland without a written guarantee that they would not be asked to coerce Ulster into accepting the Home Rule Bill. French refused to do so without the authority of the Secretary of State and he took Gough and Ewart to Seely, who was with Paget.

Gough commented unfavourably in his report on the way in which the Secretary for War tried to assert himself when faced with this group of regular officers: 'Colonel Seely's manner expressed extreme hauteur. He was most stiff to Sir John French and Ewart and honoured me with a glare. He very haughtily pointed to various chairs and directed us to be seated in those he named'. Gough commented upon how submissive were French, Ewart and Paget:

As soon as we were seated Col. Seely, in a very truculent manner, turned his eyes on me and attempted to brow-beat me and to stare me out of countenance. I was not going to allow this and he eventually dropped his eyes. His manner then altered. From excessive truculence he went to that of superior wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

Wilson recorded in his diary for 23 March that he had met Hubert Gough at the War Office who told him that a 'long and somewhat hostile interview with Seely' had taken place.<sup>3</sup>

Stamfordham, 25 September 1913.

Mottistone MSS 22/150-161, 'Position of the Army with Regard to the Situation in Ulster', Memorandum, 9 December 1913.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p. 250, quoting Gough's account of the events of 22-23 March 1914.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p. 183, citing Imperial War Museum DS/Misc/80, HHW 23 Wilson Diary.

Meunger describes the attitude of the officers as showing the 'Latent distrust with which most career military regarded civilian politicians.' This had been one of the underlying problems which had faced Seely since he took over the War Office, and was to prove an adverse factor during these crucial negotiations.

Seely attempted to reassure Gough that Asquith had just stated that it was not and never had been the intention of the Government to coerce Ulster and that such assurance should be sufficient. Gough pressed for something in writing, at which Seely reacted indignantly and said that no government would allow itself to be thus dictated to. French supported Gough's request and pointed out that Gough would not be able to return to Ireland and face his officers without a written guarantee. Gough drafted a statement for Ewart on 22 March with reference to the situation in Ulster. Seely accepted it and took to Asquith at No. 10 on 23 March, to obtain the Cabinet's approval and left it there whilst he went to see the King.<sup>2</sup>

Asquith amended the statement in general terms, omitting specific reference to the problem over Ulster. It read:

You are authorised by the Army Council to inform the officers of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade that the Army Council are satisfied that the incident which has arisen in regard to their resignations has been due to a misunderstanding.

It is the duty of all soldiers to obey lawful commands given to them through the proper channels by the Army Council, either for the protection of public property and the support of the civil power in the event of disturbances, or for the protection of the lives and property of the inhabitants.

This is the only point it was intended to be put to the officers in the questions of the General Officer Commanding, and the Army Council have been glad to learn from you that there never had been and never will be in the Brigade any question of disobeying such lawful orders.

E. A. Meunger, <u>British Military Dilemma in Ireland, Occupation Politics 1886-1914</u>, Kansas, p. 173.

Beckett, Curragh Incident, p. 214.

Seely did not believe that as it stood, without the references to the Ulster situation, it would satisfy the generals and get them back to Ireland without further delay. It was then that he took unprecedented and immediate action which was to destroy his political career and his subsequent reputation. He decided to add two paragraphs, which became known as the 'peccant paragraphs', whilst he was still at No. 10:

His Majesty's Government must retain their right to use all the forces of the Crown in Ireland, or elsewhere, to maintain law and order and to support the civil power in the ordinary execution of its duty.

But they have no intention whatever of taking advantage of this right to crush political opposition to the policy or principles of the Home Rule Bill.

He gave this amended document to Ewart, then they, together with French, initialled it. Gough was still not entirely happy and wrote out what he believed to be the meaning of the paragraphs, namely that the troops under their command would not be called upon to enforce the present Home Rule Bill on Ulster and that they could assure their officers of this. French then added 'This is how I read it' and initialled it.<sup>1</sup>

Gough returned to Ireland the same night and was given a triumphant reception from his officers but it was not the end of the matter. The affair broke in the press on 24 March, probably leaked by Wilson, though this is not proven. On 25 March Asquith repudiated the 'peccant paragraphs' in the Commons, denying that he had in any way authorised Seely to add them.<sup>2</sup> The next day, the full document was public knowledge and was reproduced on the front page of the <u>Daily Mirror</u>. The turmoil which ensued in the press and in debates in both Houses of Parliament during the following week arose from the belief that the generals had agreed to return to Ireland with guarantees which did not have the backing of the Cabinet and that they had held a pistol to the Government's head. French and Ewart found

Mottistone MSS 22/ 230-232.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol LX, cols 392 ff,
 March 1914

themselves in a dilemma. They had accepted in good faith that the added paragraphs had been agreed upon by the Cabinet.<sup>1</sup>

In the evening of 25 March Seely tendered his resignation, but Asquith, hoping to limit the damage, refused to accept it. Bonar Law said that he had heard of people being thrown to the wolves but never of a man being thrown to the wolves with a bargain that they would not eat him. Ewart's made a similar comment in his diary, Seely had been made to seem 'rather like a sacrificial goat and no knife'.<sup>2</sup> On the morning of Thursday 26 March, French and Ewart tended their resignations but Asquith, again hoping to quieten the atmosphere, refused to accept them. After the earlier controversies of the 'Peers versus the People', he had no wish for the Opposition to use the resignations to stir up a rival issue of 'the Army versus the People'.

Mirror on 26 March ran the resignation of Seely on its front page, together with three different photographs of Seely. The headline read, 'The Premier refuses to accept Colonel Seely's resignation'. On 27 March, The Times ridiculed Seely for tendering a mock resignation which he knew would not be accepted and the Prime Minister for declaring that Seely was an excellent fellow who could not be spared: 'Was there ever so bewildering and contemptible a business as this March hare?' Seely's offer of his resignation and its refusal by the Prime Minister was also the subject of a sarcastic cartoon in Punch on 1 April.

The Times included on 27 March a long report from 'Our Special Correspondent' in Belfast of an interview with Sir Edward Carson who regretted that the Prime Minister could both repudiate the action of the Secretary for War and the Chief of Staff and yet allow them to remain in office as if nothing had happened. In future, he prophesied, the officers would not believe a word they said without confirmation from the Prime Minister or Cabinet. Carson then accused the Government of deception: 'There have been sham excuses, sham misunderstanding, sham resignations'. He put forward a plea for more open Government and accused Churchill and Lloyd George of hatching a plot, 'to cover up the various matters which have made them unpopular with their own party'. He then accused them of

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p. 193, quoting Ewart's diary for 24 March 1914.

Beckett, Curragh Incident, p. 194, quoting Ewart's diary for 25 March 1914.

deceiving a guileless Asquith. He made it clear that he regarded Paget, French, Churchill, Lloyd George and Seely as being hand-in-glove and that their actions had as yet to be sifted to ascertain the whole truth.

On 27 March the Army Council clarified the position of the Army's obligations on discipline by issuing new Army Orders, which stood until 1944. French and Ewart came to the conclusion that it was untenable to remain in office and resigned the same day. Once Asquith had accepted their resignations, Seely made it public that he was honour bound to go as well, although Ewart says that French tried to dissuade him. He resigned on 30 March 1914 and Asquith wrote to Haldane, 'I see no way out of the imbroglio, but for Seely to go also and I propose myself (for a time) to take his place', which implies that Seely had no choice in the matter. He added a comment, which shows Churchill's ability to extricate himself from any blame, even by denying his friend: 'Churchill, who is here, is entirely of the same opinion'. Asquith was able to focus the blame on to Seely alone and therefore make him the scapegoat. His resignation closed the incident and saved the Government from the embarrassment of appearing to be bargaining with the Army. The cry of 'the People versus the King and the Army' on which the generals, in particular, feared the leftwing would force a general election, was silenced. A possible constitutional crisis was averted. The Liberal Government could not afford another after that of 1911.

The sequence of events during the crisis now seems to be generally accepted though many questions have never been fully answered, particularly whether Seely acted on is own or in concert with other Cabinet members. Lord Morley, recognising its complexities and contradictions, described the whole affair as like a 'Serbonian Bog'. The main problem is that there are gaps in the relevant documents. The Prime Minister's correspondence with Seely during the Curragh Incident is in the Asquith Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, but a relevant folio, No.147, is missing. This included events in April 1914 so that, for example, there is no record of a letter of resignation from Seely to the Prime Minister or of Asquith's reply. Similarly, the Mottistone Papers have been carefully weeded, as previously

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p. 197 quoting Ewart's diary for 30 March 1914.

Beckett, Curragh Incident, p. 234, Asquith to Lord Haldane, 29 March 1914.

Fergusson, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, pp. 170 ff, discusses the antagonism in the press towards the King's role.

Derby Daily Telegraph, 27 March 1914.

noted. Muenger, one of the more recent students of the Curragh Incident, notes, 'too many documents are either missing or tantalisingly incomplete', making it impossible, she believes, to find the full truth of the events. Mallinson, in his review of Repington's letters, remarks that 'The volume is curiously silent on the Curragh Incident'. He offers no explanation.

Beckett's publication in 1986 of many of the extant documents, has, however, enabled a wider appreciation of the events than was formerly possible, though he comments that Seely's and Churchill's true intentions 'will never be fully and satisfactorily answered'.<sup>3</sup> There were no Cabinet minutes at that time either, so knowledge of its proceedings is gleaned from the short daily memoranda from Asquith to the King. Otherwise, the main sources are the accounts kept by the participants in the events, their diaries, letters and explanations given to Parliament, either during the debates or in evidence to the White Papers issued during the crisis. The participating generals, Wilson and Hubert Gough, were anxious to put their side of the story in their memoirs, as was Douglas Haig, who accused Seely of 'remarkable imprudence\_or stupidity'.<sup>4</sup> Sir Charles Fergusson's son, Sir James Fergusson, put his father's participation in the best light by disparaging the Liberal Government and Seely in particular.<sup>5</sup>

In view of the hostility shown in the press, in Parliament and from the generals, it is not surprising that the historiography of the events of March 1914 has tended to deprecate Seely's conduct of affairs. Referring to Paget's meeting on 18 March with Seely at the War Office, George Dangerfield subsequently wrote:

any other man than Seely might have felt that the only answer to it was a sharp rebuke and an order to the General to go about his business. But Seely besides

J. Fergusson, The Curragh Incident, 1964, p. 29 and pp. 210-211.

E. Muenger, <u>The British Military Dilemma in Ireland. Occupation Politics</u>, 1886-1914, Kansas, 1991, p. 165.

A. Mallinson, 'The Letters of Lieutenant Colonel Charles a Court Repington', <u>The Spectator</u>, (12 February 2000, p.36

Beckett, Johnnie Gough, p. 157.

ed. R. Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919, 1952, p. 26.

being possessed of a kind heart and pliable disposition, was remarkable, even among Secretaries for War, for an extreme ineptitude for the office he held.<sup>1</sup>

This is an early use of the word 'ineptitude' to describe Seely's capabilities and this judgement and the word *inept* to describe his handling of the Curragh Incident has been perpetuated in subsequent writing over sixty years.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Blake, in an article for <u>The Listener</u> in 1974,<sup>3</sup> denigrated Seely in no uncertain terms. He was taken to task by Seely's son, the Fourth Baron Mottistone, and replied, 'I feel very guilty after receiving your letter. I am afraid I may have been too much influenced by Sir James Fergusson and possibly by the way Asquith referred to your father as 'the Arch Colonel'. He went on to apologise for his scathing comments: 'I do agree that it must be unfair to describe anyone who reached the Cabinet as "half-witted", and, although I was only quoting, [Fergusson]not making a judgement myself, I regret having referred to the matter at all in this way'. Blake also believes that Paget should have resigned for misinterpreting his orders to the officers and cannot understand why this was not done.<sup>4</sup> To have dismissed Paget, however, would have reopened the wounds in the Army, whereas Seely's resignation drew a line under the affair. Paget, who, the King allegedly said, had 'made a fine mess of it',<sup>5</sup> was however, soon replaced by Major-General Friend as GOC Ireland and did not receive another command.

Questions remain concerning Seely's actions. Why did he believe that he was reflecting Government policy? Were there other politicians involved in the preparation of the 'peccant paragraphs'? If so, why was Seely the only politician to resign? Was he therefore made a scapegoat by Asquith? Was he deciding policy throughout the Incident or was he being manipulated, by Churchill in particular?

G. Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1935, p. 119.

See e.g. A. P. Ryan, <u>Mutiny at the Curragh</u>, 1956, p.97. P. Jalland, <u>Liberals and Ireland</u>, 1980, p. 217. K. Robbins, <u>Eclipse of a Great Power</u>, 1983, p.119. R. F. Foster, <u>Modern Ireland</u>, 1989, p. 469, all use the word 'inept'.

Robert Blake, 'The Curragh Incident and UDI', <u>The Listener</u>, (21 March 1974), commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Incident.

Seely Papers, Lord Mottistone, Blake to Mottistone, 1 April 1974.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p. 197, quoting Ewart's diary for 30 March 1914.

Although Seely certainly maintained before the House of Commons on 30 March 1914 that he was solely to blame for the additional paragraphs, he believed that he was interpreting Government policy. He said that when a Minister resigned it was usually because of a difference of policy or principle but in this case there had been no difference between himself or any of his colleagues. He acknowledged that it did, however, appear that he had made, unintentionally, a bargain between the Government and a group of officers as to the services which they would render to the Crown.

Seely had not been present at the Cabinet when Asquith amended the original document as he was seeing the King at Buckingham Palace. In his speech to the House of Commons on 25 March, he was therefore somewhat plaintive: 'Had I been present at the discussions none of this misunderstanding would have occurred'. Haldane concurred on the same day in the Lords. George Nicholson, who delivered Gough's amendment to Seely in the Cabinet room, believed that 'no-one in the Cabinet ever dissented from the sense of the two paragraphs'. As the other members had dispersed by then for lunch, Seely thought it was up to him to satisfy Gough's demands for reassurance over Ulster.<sup>2</sup>

On 26 March 1914 Ewart revealed in his diary that he believed that Seely had been sacrificed. He maintained that once the officers had returned to Ireland and the excitement in the Army allayed by the guarantee to Gough; 'we found it repudiated in both Houses and Seely made the (temporary and political) scapegoat'. A similar opinion was voiced by the Marquis of Lansdowne, formerly Balfour's Foreign Secretary, in the House of Lords on 25 March 1914. He showed surprise that Seely was being deserted by the rest of the Cabinet:

We gather that it is only when we come to the two concluding short paragraphs that Colonel Seely ceased to be in agreement with his colleagues. I must say that it is

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol LX, col 403, 25 March 1914.

Mottistone MSS 22A /3-15, Nicholson's account. R. Blake in <u>The Unknown Prime Minister</u>, 1955, p. 200, also believes that the Cabinet had agreed to the substance of the two paragraphs.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p.194. Blake, <u>Unknown Prime Minister</u> p. 200, cannot decide whether Seely was a scapegoat or a blunderer.

surprising that these two paragraphs have been annulled by His Majesty's Government.<sup>1</sup>

The criticism of the Government levelled by the editor, Geoffrey Dawson, in <u>The Times</u> on 27 March, was not the wisdom or otherwise of making the additional guarantees to the officers but

When the undertaking had been seen and approved by two Cabinet Ministers, had been consigned to writing and had been signed by three members of the Army Council, representing a quorum and consequently committing that Council, it is an act of unpardonable bad faith for the Government to disown their bond.

The mention that there were two Cabinet Ministers responsible, brings in the question as to whether Lord Morley, the Lord President of the Council, was privy to the addition of the two paragraphs. That he was present when Seely added the paragraphs seems to be acknowledged but is rarely mentioned by historians, even though Ensor did so as early as 1938.<sup>2</sup> Lord Curzon, the former Governor-General of India, speaking in the Lords' debate on 25 March, stated his belief that the paragraphs were, in fact, inserted in consultation with Lord Morley who must have known what was in the mind of the Government,

If I am correct, does not a share, perhaps more than a half share, of the responsibility for Colonel Seely's action rest on the shoulders of the Noble Viscount? If there is to be a resignation, then will the House lose its greatest ornament? [Morley].<sup>3</sup>

The editorial in <u>The Times</u> on 26 March accepted the belief that Morley was involved, recognised that Asquith wanted to retain him in office and showed its contempt for the policies of Churchill and Seely during the crisis:

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, vol XV, cols 891ff., 25 March 1914.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> R. C. K. Ensor, England 1870-1914, 1938, p. 478.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, vol XV, col 720, 25 March 1914.

The Secretary for War did right to resign, but wrong to return to office. The participation of Lord Morley in Colonel Seely's action doubtless made it excessively inconvenient for the Government that the latter should resign but this fact made it no less incumbent on the Secretary for War, in the interest of the officers who had been tricked, to resign.

Repington, writing on the same day in <u>The Times</u>, realised that the Government could not afford to lose Morley, who was a valuable member of the Upper House. He had led the Lords for the Liberals during the conflict over Lloyd George's Budget and the Parliament Bill and he would have to oversee the remaining stages of the Home Rule Bill. Beckett writes, 'Lord Morley, with whom Seely was conversing at the time, apparently concurred [over the addition of the paragraphs] although Margot Asquith was to claim that Lord Morley was too deaf to hear what was going and too vain to admit it'. Margot Asquith would have had a vested interest in exonerating Morley. Her husband had been intent on saving him by allowing Seely to take sole blame. The lawyer A. V. Dicey wrote to Bonar Law asking for clarification of Morley's role: 'If Morley knew and approved of the alterations or rather additions made by Colonel Seely, it is vain for Asquith to treat the blunder made by Seely as being a blunder for which Colonel Seely bears the whole responsibility'. Nicholson states categorically that, having added the two paragraphs, Seely discussed the wording of them with Morley before returning to the War Office.<sup>3</sup>

This was the line taken by the Opposition during the debate of 30 March in the Commons. Seely's old friend and political opponent, F. E. Smith, refused to accept that Asquith would would not have told Seely if the Cabinet had refused to agree to Gough's demands: 'No one in this world will ever believe it...Lord Morley never left that Cabinet meeting. He took part in all the discussions'. Smith believed that Morley would therefore have known of any denials by the Cabinet. He said that if Morley did help to draft the paragraphs then, 'How can he sit in a Cabinet which has thrown the Secretary for War over?'

Beckett, <u>Johnnie Gough</u>, p. 166.

House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law Papers 32/1/78, Dicey to Bonar Law, 28 March 1914.

Mottistone MSS 22A/3-15, Nicholson's account of the events from 18-26 March 1914.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol LX, col 887, 30 March 1914.

On Monday 30 March <u>The Times</u> published a long letter from the journalist L. S. Amery MP, a critic of the Government and one of those who, according to Beckett, obtained his information from serving officers. He examined the sequence of events which, he considered, provided sufficient evidence that not only Morley but also Churchill knew at the time about the additions to the document. He did not believe that Seely would have acted on his own without consulting the Prime Minister or any of the other Ministers who were still at No. 10. 'In fact Lord Morley had admitted to the House of Lords that he had drafted the paragraphs with Colonel Seely'.<sup>1</sup>

Amery believed that Seely had been monitored throughout the crisis by Churchill. He made much of the fact that Churchill had requested that the letter from Gough should be sent over to No. 10 and it was delivered by taxi in a box:

Is it conceivable that Colonel Seely should now, at this critical moment, have failed to consult the confederate on whom he had so completely depended or indeed that Mr. Churchill would have allowed Colonel Seely to come to any decision without his sanction and approval?

Is it possible from all the welter of conflicting evidence to disentangle the true story of what took place?

Amery believed that Seely, on reading Gough's letter, realised that the amended Cabinet memorandum would not satisfy Gough and that the additions were made in consultation with Morley and Churchill but, in the absence of direct evidence, he was prepared to allow that Asquith was not informed. 'Perhaps his colleagues did not want to disturb his lunch. And now, Colonel Seely, after a first resignation, is to be thrown to the wolves after all. But what becomes of his partners in this business?' Amery realised that Seely alone was to take the consequences of his action and forfeit his political future.

The question arises as to whether Seely was, as Amery suggests, 'a mere tool in the hands of his masterful and sinister colleague' or whether he had any freedom to decide policy.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th Series, vol XV, cols 695ff, 25 March 1914.

Throughout the affair, Churchill's role was enigmatic and ambiguous but always intrusive. In Wilson's oft quoted observation in his diary on 18 March 1914, he wrote, 'It appears that they [Seely, Churchill, Birrell, French, Ewart, Paget and Macready] are contemplating scattering troops all over Ulster, as though it were a Pontypool coal strike'.

On 19 March 1914, Churchill decided to order the 3rd Battle Squadron to Lamlash, on the Scottish coast, seventy miles from Belfast, and to send five destroyers to Irish ports with contingents of troops. A secret note, undated, was then sent from Churchill to Seely which showed that, from the outset of the crisis, he seemed to be directing Seely into taking decisions on his advice:

My dear Jack,

I think you ought to make the demands for railway transport to the company at the proper moment this afternoon. Their refusal will raise questions which can be [awkward?] Don't use the cruisers except as a second alternative. The question of taking over the liner will have to be faced pretty soon.<sup>2</sup>

Ewart's impression of the direction of affairs shows Churchill attempting to push his colleagues and the War Office into precipitate action on 20 March:

Winston talked very big about bringing the officers over in a battleship to be tried by court-martial. I however urged that we should wait to hear what the Senior Officers concerned had to say. I felt at great loss to understand why the trouble had occurred in the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, as we had ordered no officer or man at all to move in connection with our precautionary measures.<sup>3</sup>

On 21 March 1914 Asquith countermanded Churchill's orders to the fleet. Although Churchill had informed the Cabinet of his proposals, Asquith kept this quiet and let it be

Callwell, Wilson p. 138.

Bodleian Library, Asquith Papers, 40/20, Churchill to Seely.

Beckett, <u>Curragh</u>, pp. 189-190, citing Scottish Record Office RH 4/83/4 126 Ewart MSS.

generally assumed, even by his politically astute daughter, that Churchill had acted on his own initiative.<sup>1</sup> Churchill's history of taking independent decisions may have provided Seely with an example which he felt free to copy when he received the document from Asquith.

Churchill's direction of events is apparent, for example, on 21 March. He began the day with an early morning call upon Seely and then went immediately to see Asquith, whilst Seely went to see the King at Buckingham Palace. Lord Esher observed how Churchill was taking the initiative and that his colleagues were letting him. He wrote in his diary for 22 March: 'The Home Rule Bill even if they get it through, is useless against the resistance of Ulster...No-one can tell what the outcome will be. Winston is running the whole show! Marvellous that his colleagues allow him so much rope'. That Churchill was in constant touch with Seely is evident from the records of the names of those attending the crucial Cabinet sub-committee meetings, the daily personal contact, recorded in detail in The Times, his frequent presence at the War Office and the memoranda which he sent to Seely.

One is faced with the choice that Seely had either added the paragraphs on his own initiative, believing that he was following Government intentions, and therefore had to take sole blame when Asquith refused to support him or, alternatively, he, Morley and Churchill had acted together. If the former is true, he may have seized the opportunity to show that he, not Churchill, was in control of the War Office. Nicholson also believed that Seely had some reason to assume that he had a more or less free hand to deal with the situation, though he did not elaborate.<sup>3</sup> If the Opposition is correct in that Morley and Churchill were present and the three colluded over the paragraphs, Seely, at the time and subsequently, gave no indication of this. He had let it appear that he alone was responsible so that, when the events became public knowledge he was, as a result, unable to involve anyone else. Once Seely had safely resigned, Churchill challenged Morley's earlier confession of 25 March in the Lords and put his version of these events in the debate of 30 March in the

R. Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, vol II, p. 499.

ed. Oliver Viscount Esher, <u>Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher</u>, vol 3, <u>1910-1915</u>, 1938, p. 159. Esher was an old-style Liberal who had served under Lord Hartington.

Mottistone MSS 22A/3-15, Nicholson's account of the events from 18-26 March 1914.

Commons. Now, in every sentence he isolated Seely and defended himself and his colleagues. He insisted that the document had not arrived in time to be read by the Cabinet. He assured the House that Seely had: 'On his own responsibility and after the document had left the hands of the Prime Minister, added the last two paragraphs himself. Nothing but that fact has caused a separation from him which we all regret today'. He referred to Lord Morley copying out the two paragraphs and told the House that it was solely to provide him with material for his speech in the Lords. He now denied Morley's involvement and blamed the Opposition's attitude on being 'intoxicated by the powerful newspapers on which they feed. Having read The Times, the Daily Express and the Pall Mall Gazette, the Members arrive at the House of Commons with distorted judgements!'

On 31 March 1914, the Morning Post reported the resignation of Seely on the previous day. 'Colonel Seely has had to resign, General Paget is held up to blame but the First Lord [of the Admiralty] whom we believed to be the arch-instigator of the plot goes unharmed. Thus credulous fools are caught'. Seely was castigated as 'a poor, credulous dupe', who, 'although he has been used as an instrument and has been thrown aside like a broken potsherd, remains the slave of illusions'.

Once the Curragh Incident became public knowledge, neither Asquith nor Churchill was prepared to share responsibility. In his report to the Crown on 28 March 1914 Asquith told the King that Seely had admitted his mistake and that the assurances were never authorised by the Cabinet.<sup>2</sup> Because Seely's action was deemed to have been taken individually within his department, the concept of collective Cabinet responsibility was deemed not to apply, even though the 'military members' of the War Office had agreed to the paragraphs.<sup>3</sup>

It could be said that it was Seely's misfortune to have had a colleague who was an old personal friend but with far more political guile and ministerial experience, one to whom he

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol LX, cols 891-892, 30 March.

Cabinet Reports from the Prime Minister to the Crown 1868-1916, Harvester Press 1974, Reel 11.

D. L. Keir in <u>Constitutional History of Modern Britain 1485-1951</u>, 1953, p. 498, refers to the Curragh Incident and the Hoare-Laval Pact of 1935 as instances where a minister was unsupported by his colleagues.

may have owed his promotion and who engaged in confrontational politics, inappropriate given the tinderbox which was Ulster. Churchill denied any involvement and survived. Seely's acceptance of sole responsibility led to his resignation. The vehement outcry was so politically dangerous that Asquith had to sacrifice him. Bargains with generals were a new phenomenon, fleet movements were not.

The final question concerns the factors which were pushing Seely to take the action which he did when he added the paragraphs. Why did he believe that the situation was so serious that it would become a national crisis unless he intervened as he did and were his fears justified?

Although the Marquess of Anglesey maintains that the vast majority of the rank and file in the British Army gave the matter concerning their officers little thought and would have obeyed orders without question, there was the lurking fear of the influence of Syndicalism. In March 1912, Tom Mann, the noted revolutionary agitator, with four fellow Syndicalists, had published an 'Open Letter to British Soldiers' which called on the troops not to shoot their brothers during the industrial strikes which were rife at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Haldane told the House of Lords on 25 March that although he believed that Seely was guilty of an error of judgement, he had acted in 'perfect frankness, believing he was doing the best in difficult circumstances', namely the fear of imminent and widespread disaffection in the armed forces following the resignations at the Curragh. This was the key factor in pushing Seely into such precipitate action. As early as 9 November 1913 Wilson wrote that he had visited Bonar Law and 'I told him there was much talk in the Army, and that if we were ordered to coerce Ulster there would be wholesale defections. It had been suggested to him that 40 pc. of officers and men would leave the Army. Personally I put the pc. much lower, but still very serious.' On 2 December 1913 he wrote in his diary 'Already all ranks are talking in a hostile manner of being employed against the north of Ireland'.<sup>3</sup>

The Marquess of Anglesey, <u>The History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919</u>. The <u>Curragh Incident and the Western Front</u>, volume VII, 1996, p. 48. A. Offer, <u>The First World War</u>. An Agrarian Interpretation, Oxford, 1989, p. 306, quoting <u>Tom Mann's Memoirs</u>, 1923, pp. 230-262.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Callwell, <u>Wilson</u>, p.131.
<sup>3</sup> Callwell, <u>Wilson</u> p. 135.

Charles Hobhouse, in the Cabinet, agreed on 23 March that there was 'quite as much disaffection to be found amongst the rank and file as among the officers'.<sup>1</sup>

These fears were also those of Sir William Robertson, Director of Military Training, who warned French on 20 March 1914 of the 'Half-heartedness and distaste of practically the whole army, enhanced by good feeling which has always existed between Ulster and troops and bad feeling between Home Ruler MPs and troops, engendered by S. African War episodes, etc'. Ewart was similarly aware of potential dangers. He wrote in his diary for 22 March 1914 that if Seely removed Gough then 'all the Military Members [ie at the War Office] feared that... we might have sympathetic action at Aldershot and throughout the Army'. 3

Beckett shows how near to a general mutiny were not only the regular officers but also other ranks, the Territorials and the Royal Navy, pointing out that most accounts of the Curragh Incident have tended to neglect this aspect. He believes that the support in the Regular Army at Aldershot for Gough and the Curragh officers was overwhelming, 'a frequently stated rumour having it that only one officer in the entire command would have willingly gone to Ulster as a reinforcement to Paget's field force'. There was support not only from the Guards' Staff at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst but also from the students at the Staff College at Aldershot and from other cavalry and Scottish regiments.<sup>4</sup>

The Bonar Law Papers contain a number of letters warning of the disaffection in the ranks. Major Tweedie of the 2/ Royal Scots wrote to Bonar Law to disabuse him of the belief that the rank and file were willing to take up arms against Ulster. In his regiment 'the whole of the sergeants and lance-sergeants, with the exception of three, are heart and soul with Ulster' and seven out of ten officers would not take the field against Ulster.<sup>5</sup> Carson also wrote to Bonar Law that he had heard from an informant that the troop trains at Aldershot

ed. E. David, <u>Inside Asquith's Cabinet. From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse</u>, 1977, p.165. Diary entry for 23 March 1914.

Beckett, Johnnie Gough, p. 164.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, pp. 190-191, quoting Ewart's diary.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, pp. 22-24.

House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law Papers 32/1/62, Tweedie to Bonar Law, 25 March 1914.

were waiting but that 'No cavalry will go...He does not think that they can now make any troops go'.¹ The wife of an NCO based at the Curragh expressed strong feelings about the affair and wrote: 'all our men say they would have been shott [sic] first than take up arms against Ulster'.² Support was also forthcoming from the Army overseas.³ Beckett gives a list of the serving officers who sent letters or telegrams of support to the Gough brothers. They are divers and range from the Military Assistant to the Chief Superintendent of Ordnance Factories to officers based in New Zealand, Canada and India.⁴

Ewart summed up the dangers on 24 March 1914: 'Bethune [Director General Territorial Force] warned us that the Territorials were ready to resign in large numbers; Haig said there would be a sympathetic move in Aldershot; half the officers in the War Office could not be trusted. What we did, we did to prevent something worse happening, though it was a blow to discipline. French said, "I would have signed anything yesterday to get those fellows back to duty"\_and he was right. We might have had something like a general mutiny.<sup>5</sup>

Seely received personal correspondence on the matter. His neighbour, the 2nd Lord Tennyson, wrote to say that his son, Lionel, in the Rifle Brigade was on his way home from South Africa: 'But I wish you to know that I do not intend that he shall stay in the Army if his battalion is ordered to proceed against the loyalists of Ulster'. Lord Tullbardine informed Bonar Law that he had warned Seely that the trouble would spread to Aldershot if they were so foolish as to ask officers the direct question, 'Will you fight if you go to Ulster?' Nicholson, defending Seely, wrote 'It should be remembered that he [Seely] more than anyone realised the extremely critical state of affairs in the Army and the possibility of wholesale resignations if General Gough did not return to Ireland'.

House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law Papers 32/11/66, Carson to Bonar Law, 26 March 1914.

House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law Papers 32/2/13, Letter endorsing a letter from an NCO's wife to Bonar Law, 4 April 1914.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, pp. 23-24.

Beckett, Curragh Incident, p 437.

Beckett, Curragh Incident, p. 194, quoting Ewart's diary, 24 March 1914.

Mottistone MSS 2/121, Lord Tennyson to Seely, 21 March 1914, from Farringford.

House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law Papers 32/1/41, Tullibardine to Bonar Law, 21 March 1914.

Mottistone MSS 22A/ 3-15, Nicholson's account of the events from 18-26 March 1914.

The discontent brewing up in the Army was also beginning to emerge in the Royal Navy. The Times for 25 March 1914 had moved on to this aspect of the crisis. The editorial expressed the opinion that the Government was proposing to use the Navy to co-operate with the Army in the coercion of Ulster. Fred T. Jane, writing in the Hampshire Telegraph, on 27 March 1914 on the historical and present role of the Navy in Ulster affairs, condemned the Government soundly. He accused it of risking civil war and called upon the Navy to refuse to be a tool of party politicians in the repression of Ulster. This was tantamount to seditious writing and he was accused by a correspondent in his paper of offering 'gratuitously stupid advice to the lower deck on questions of Naval discipline... tampering with the discipline of the Army and Navy...a foolish and criminal game... '.2 Beckett also questions the loyalty of the Royal Navy, believing that there was 'widespread disinclination among Naval officers to take part in the coercion of Ulster. Such disinclination extended to most senior ranks'. A British version of the Solemn League and Covenant was also in being and a letter to Bonar Law from a serving officer at Netley made it clear that he had signed it and would resign if ordered to Ulster.<sup>3</sup> The possibility of the Army officers' attitude over Ulster spreading to the Royal Navy was an added motive for settling the demands of the generals as soon as possible and getting them back to Ireland.

The railways were not immune either, following the strike of 1911. When approached on the matter of the transport of troops to the ports by railway, Major-General Friend wrote to Major-General Macready on 20 March that he feared that the Great Northern Railway, whose Board consisted of strong Ulstermen, might refuse to allow the troop trains to use their lines to Belfast from the Curragh.<sup>4</sup> Paget replied that if there was any problem then they would have to go by sea.

<sup>1914.</sup> 

Fred T. Jane, Naval Correspondent for <u>Hampshire Telegraph and Post</u> and illustrator for several British national papers including <u>Illustrated London News</u>. Author of <u>Jane's All the World Fighting Ships</u>, 1898, which became an annual publication now known as Jane's Fighting Ships.

The <u>Hampshire Telegraph</u>, 3 April, published a long letter from a correspondent calling himself 'Royal Navy' opposing Jane. (One assumes it was a man.)

House of Lords Record Office, Bonar Law Papers 32/1/67, Engineer Lieut. F. Ranken to Bonar Law, 26 March 1914.

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, pp. 68-69.

In view of the spread of disaffection, which seems real rather than imagined, Seely's action, which was branded as an error of judgement, could be seen as the only way to prevent the disintegration of the British Army; there was a closing of the ranks in support of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. Ewart did not believe that it would have been difficult to have got up a revolution had one been of that mind. Recalling the late nineteenth century French Army crisis, he wrote, 'I found myself a sort of Boulanger with my portrait in every paper in the Kingdom'. It could be argued that the common-sense of Ewart, in refusing to have his head turned, and the prompt action of Seely had diffused the situation, though Wilson persisted in seeing himself as the nation's saviour and his involvement in Irish affairs led to his murder by the Irish Republican Army in 1922.

On 27 March 1914, Repington for <u>The Times</u>, not usually a Government supporter, gave his assessment of the gravity of the situation. He believed that had these undertakings not been given, then Gough and his officers would not have returned to duty and that the resignations of numerous other officers would have begun to flow in.

When Seely wrote his memoirs he was convinced that the deciding factor for both himself and French was the wish to avoid any form of mutiny in the Army, which could have been one of the most serious results of the Curragh Incident, in view of what they felt was the certainty of an impending war with Germany. 'Harm', he wrote, 'had been done. But a disaster had been averted' and he pointed out that no officer thereafter refused to obey a single order.<sup>2</sup> How far the officers would have led the Army into an unprecedented defiance of the Government is speculation. Perhaps, like General Boulanger, they would have held back at the last minute.

The opposition press was generous to Seely once he had finally resigned. On 31 March, Repington published an appreciation of Seely:

Beckett, <u>Curragh Incident</u>, p.195. In 1889, General Boulanger had attracted right wing and popular support from the enemies of the Republican government in France.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 170.

It has been the unfortunate duty of the writer to criticise the administration of the retiring Secretary of War on more than one occasion, but at the present moment Colonel Seely's merits will be more remembered than his faults.

Seely had been forced out of office by Asquith so Repington may have been making a political point, for he concluded: 'As minister he has been easy to work with, loyal to his colleagues, and a real friend to the Army'. The <u>Daily Mail</u>, reporting Seely's resignation speech on 31 March 1914, said that he had tried to see fair play to the Army at a difficult time. The <u>Morning Post</u> was, however, still maintaining that there was a conspiracy against Ulster, hinted that Seely was an 'unwitting tool' and warned the country that every vote for a Liberal Government was a vote for civil war.

Sir Ian Hamilton wrote to Seely from Sydney condoling with him on his problems. When he heard of his resignation, he added a post-script: 'I am dreadfully sorry for I never in my life worked with anyone whom it was so easy and straightforward a business to serve... I know you acted with courage and for what you thought to be best for the Army and that is the main thing'.<sup>2</sup>

Wilson did not abandon his political interference. He went to see Lord Milner on 4 April 1914 and tried to persuade him to make the Government incriminate itself by explaining what orders it had given to Paget. To disclose these, he was sure, would 'ruin Winston, Lloyd George, Birrell, Seely and (I think) Asquith, hence his determination not to let it out'. Wilson was still using the affair, as he had hoped all along, as a means of destroying the Government.

On 23 April 1914, Churchill wrote to Clementine, 'Seely goes about like a disembodied spirit, trying to return from the wastes of the infinite to the cosy world of man. He is terribly hard hit and losing poise. The world is pitiless to grief and failure'. Seely had now lost his job and reputation as well as his wife, who had died suddenly in childbirth on 9

The Times, 31 March 1914.

Beckett, Curragh Incident, p. 299. Hamilton was GOC Mediterranean.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Callwell, Wilson, vol I, p.146.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Churchill, Winston S. Churchill, vol II, p. 502.

August 1913. From then he had held office whilst going through a period of intense mourning. Lord Crewe referred to this in a letter to Colonel Sir Beachamp Duff: 'Poor Seely's calamity is a terrible one and I hear he is greatly broken'. The Curragh Incident remained a sore with him for the rest of his life and with his family subsequently, though he never blamed Asquith, except to state that he believed that he was carrying out the Government's intentions.

On 5 August 1914, when Lord Kitchener took over as Secretary of State for War, Asquith wrote to Venetia Stanley that 'it is important to avoid a repetition of the Arch-Colonel fiasco'. When the affair was a thing of the past, he wrote to Stanley: 'For three weeks at least no one thought or talked of anything else, and now it is all as dead and securely buried as Queen Anne'. But Asquith was also to resign as a result of lack of confidence in his conduct of affairs and he spent his first Christmas out of office on the Isle of Wight, in a house lent to him by Seely. He retained Seely on the Committee of Imperial Defence until the outbreak of war to take advantage of his experience with the war plans, and in 1915 approved his appointment as Commander of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, in spite of parliamentary and Canadian opposition. Such moves would hardly have been those of a Prime Minister totally without confidence in his former minister. The King and Queen also remained personal friends, Queen Mary visiting Mottistone Manor annually during Cowes Week and the Seelys dining on the Royal Yacht.

There were those who knew Seely well and continued to hold him in high regard. John Colville, Winston Churchill's Secretary, observed: 'He was a man of great good nature and unflinching courage'. Viscount Snowden wrote that Seely was: 'the sort of man one could not associate with any conduct which was not honourable and brave'. When it came to

<sup>4</sup> Roy Jenkins, Asquith, 1969.

Crewe MSS Cambridge University Library Cambridge C/34, Crewe to Duff, 14 August 1913. Duff was a former assistant to Lord Roberts and later the Commander-in -Chief, India

H. H. Asquith, <u>Letters to Venetia Stanley.</u> eds. M. & E. Brock. 1982. p. 116. Asquith to Stanley, 23 March 1914.

Asquith <u>Letters to Venetia Stanley</u>, 17 March 1915, p. 485.

John Colville, <u>The Fringes of Power</u>. <u>Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955</u>,1985, p. 444 note.

Philip Viscount Snowden, <u>An Autobiography</u>, vol I, <u>1864-1919</u>, 1934, p. 180. Snowden became the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the first Labour Government.

recommending Seely for a peerage, three senior civil servants, Maurice Hankey, Herbert Creedy and Warren Fisher approached Ramsay MacDonald in 1933. Hankey had worked closely with Seely since 1912 and had become a family friend. For the most respected civil servant of his time, this personal association in addition to his favourable summary of Seely's work at the War Office would indicate a measure of respect for his former political master.

The Home Rule Bill was sent to the House of Lords on 28 May 1914 where it was drastically amended on 23 June with the permanent exclusion of Ulster, as a whole and without a plebiscite. The King was urged by the Unionists to veto the Bill and this forced him to intervene, knowing that such a move was untenable. He summoned a conference of the leading politicians at Buckingham Palace under the chairmanship of the Speaker. This move again aroused criticism of Royal interference but, after four meetings, nothing had been resolved.

The months following Seely's resignation saw more gun-running into Ulster from Germany, for example at Larne in April, and the Irish Volunteers in the south had also been building up their arms. On 24 July, Asquith, fearing civil war, sent General Macready to Belfast but he had his hands tied as a result of the Curragh Incident. He recalled that his troops were to sit tight and make no moves of any kind. The King's Own Scottish Borderers were sent to Dublin on 26 July to seize illegal arms which had been landed from Hamburg. The troops confronted the armed Volunteers at Howth as they returned to Dublin with their shipment. When Dubliners stoned the soldiers and shots were fired and three were killed as well as a number seriously injured, it seemed that this could be a spark to set Ireland alight.

The Liberal Government between 1906 and 1914 could not afford to lose the co-operation of the Army at a time when, apart from the crisis in Ireland, it was faced with disorder among industrial workers, the fear of Anarcho-Syndicalism and other extremist political movements, the activities of militant suffragettes and a deteriorating international situation. Seely was forced to act very quickly to get the generals back to duty. He had thrown a life-line to them and in so doing had prevented what Ewart and Sir Edward Grey had seen

Lord Mottistone to author, September 1998.

as a potentially revolutionary situation from resulting. Given the spreading dissatisfaction among both the officers and other ranks in the Army and also in the Royal Navy, such prompt action could be seen as urgently necessary rather than 'inept'.

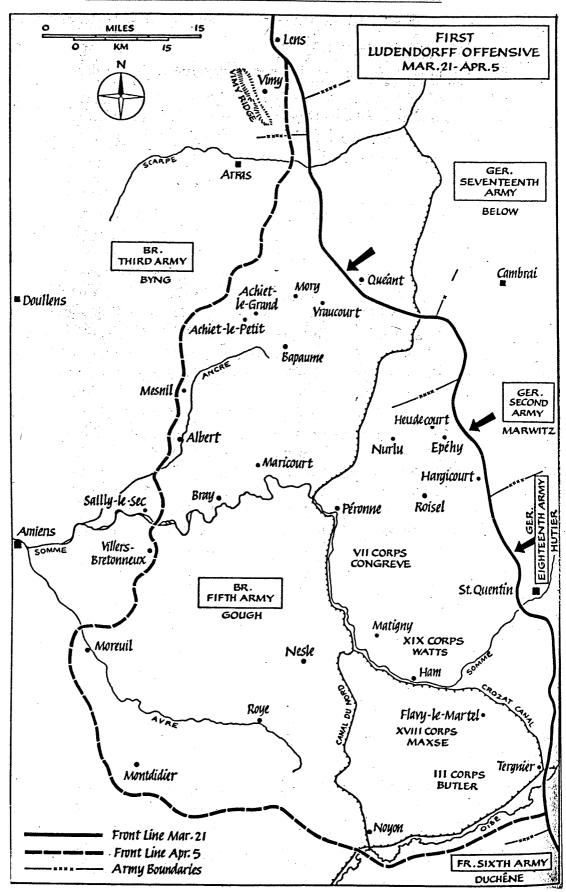
Geoffrey Brooke, referring to the Curragh Incident and Seely's resignation, wrote in 1954, 'It is old history now and generally forgotten, but at the time it stirred up a commotion unknown in the annals of the British Army'. The continued political and historical interest in the affairs of Ulster proved him wrong on the first count but he was right to refer to the unique part which the affair played in British military history. The most serious long-term result was probably the legacy of further distrust between the Liberal politicians and the generals. This proved most damning once war had broken out and was a feature of the war years, with generals such as Haig writing to the King behind the back of the Cabinet. The Great War restored the absolute loyalty of the Army and the Royal Navy to the state, but epitomised by the King rather than by any political party.

The debate on 4 August 1914 in the House of Commons was on the Irish Question when the news of the German rejection of Belgian neutrality was announced. The Great War which ensued would provide Seely with the chance to rehabilitate his reputation in a different field but his connection with the Curragh Incident was to bedevil his dealings with the generals on the Western Front.

G. Brooke, Good Company, 1954, p. 140.

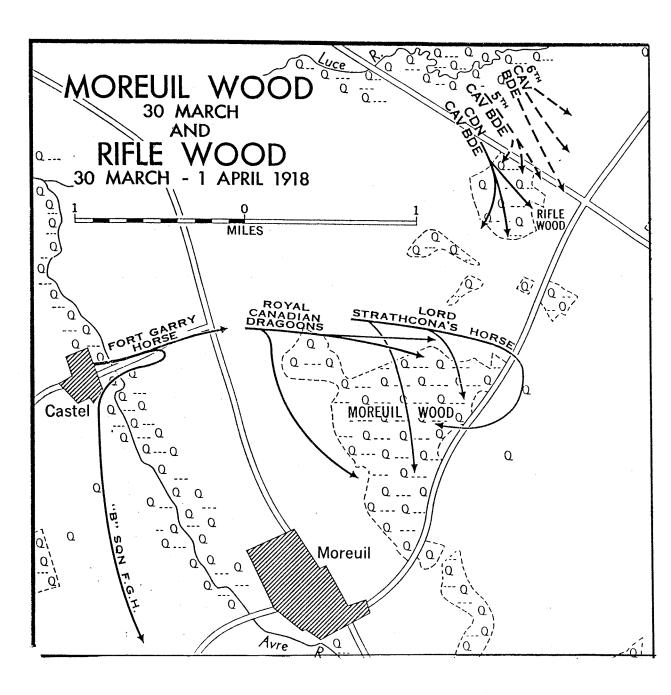
### MAP I PLATE I

# MAP ILLUSTRATING THE POSITION OF THE GERMAN SALIENT AT MOREUIL IN RELATION TO AMIENS, 21 MARCH-5 APRIL 1918.



### MAP II PLATE II

# MAP ILLUSTRATING THE CANADIAN CAVALRY BRIGADE'S ADVANCE ON MOREUIL WOOD AND RIFLE WOOD, 30 MARCH-1 APRIL 1918.



#### **CHAPTER FIVE**

## 1914-1918 AND AFTER.

On 4 August 1914 Seely immediately offered himself for service. His standing with Lord Kitchener, the new Secretary Of State for War, was not high after the Curragh Incident. However, Kitchener could not ignore him as he still had powerful friends in all political circles, especially Churchill, Lloyd George, F. E. Smith and Ramsay MacDonald, as well as the King. Kitchener therefore appointed him as a Special Service Officer on the recommendation of Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief, British Expeditionary Force. French did not seem to have harboured any resentment over the alleged deception of the 'peccant paragraphs', but their roles were now reversed as Seely was now the subordinate.

As a member of French's staff, Seely's task was to go over to Belgium observe and report to home on the day-to-day situation as he saw it. This gave him the opportunity to get to the front line and become involved with events taking place in Belgium as the Germans advanced and besieged the Belgian fortresses in the first weeks of the war. Although Asquith supported Seely's appointment, he sniped at Seely's panache in his letters to Venetia Stanley, for example; 'The Arch-Colonel who has turned up at Antwerp, full of fight and hope, gave a much more optimistic view of the situation' compared with Edward Grey who was '(as usual) most dolorous and despondent'. On the fall of Antwerp, however, Asquith wrote, 'The Arch-Colonel himself - characteristically - was the last to leave Antwerp and he came the whole way with the General [French] in a motor'.

Whilst Special Service Officer in 1914, he made many visits to Sir John French's Headquarters to discuss how the plight of the Indian troops serving in the Indian Corps could be alleviated in 'the bitter cold and muddy trenches of northern Europe'. French detailed him to walk along the trenches and report back, a task which he undertook with

ed. M. & E. Brock, Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.268, 8 October 1914.

Brock, Letters to Venetia Stanley, p.271, 10 October 1914.

Seely, Adventure, p.207.

F. E. Smith, who had been appointed Recording Officer to the Indian troops.<sup>1</sup> As a result, he wrote, 'It is impossible to exaggerate the acute misery of the Indians in the bitter cold and wet'. He commented that although the Indians 'were sick with cold and dysentery and far from home, they never wavered or failed'.<sup>2</sup> The error in bringing the Indians to France was realised by the British High Command so that in 1915, following severe losses, the infantry were transferred to other theatres of war such as the Dardanelles, the Middle East and to East Africa, leaving the cavalry in France.<sup>3</sup> Seely regarded his mission with F. E. Smith as important in encouraging this move, in spite of opposition from the Indians' commander, Sir James Wilcocks.

Seely was also moved by the plight of the refugees. When Sir John French sent him on a mission from Compiègne to see General Galliéni, the Military Governor of Paris, prior to the Battle of the Marne in September 1914, he found that the roads were cluttered with refugees fleeing from the advancing Germans. He wrote, 'It was the most heart-breaking journey I have ever taken'. He described the scenes on the roads with, 'tens of thousands' of old men, women and children of all ages who were 'trudging along the road with such household goods as they could hurriedly collect, piled on carts and wagons of every description'. He also showed his sympathy towards the many wounded and towards the German prisoners-of-war who, he insisted, should be treated according to the Geneva Convention.

When the front line stabilised after the retreat to the River Aisne at the end of September 1914, Seely's role had little relevance so he returned to England. Asquith records that Churchill was anxious about Seely's future, partly because, according to Churchill, he had a bad name at the front, i.e. with the regular officers, because of his War Office record, and partly because of his ebullience. Asquith wrote to Stanley: 'I don't know what can be done

J. Campbell, F. E. Smith. First Earl of Birkenhead, 1983, p. 385. A Recording Officer acted as a Regimental Historian. Max Aitken held a similar position to Smith in relation to the Canadian forces.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Seely, Adventure, p.209.

The 2nd Indian Cavalry Division became the 5th Cavalry Division on 17 June 1916, which also included the Canadian Cavalry Brigade. P. J. Haythornthwaite, <u>The World War One Source Book</u>, 1994, p. 246.

Seely, Adventure, p. 180.

for him unless some fattish Colonial Governorship were to turn up'. Whatever strings were pulled, the result was that Seely was called in to see Sir John French, who told him to report to Lord Kitchener.

Following the British Government's declaration of war, the Government of the Dominion of Canada had immediately agreed to assist, without actually declaring war. On 6 August, the British Government accepted the Canadian offer to send a contingent of troops. The Canadian Prime Minister, Robert Borden, then mobilised the forces to send a Canadian Expeditionary Force to Europe. Canada had a very small regular army of about 3,000 men as the majority of her forces were in the militia, including her most famous commander, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie. The Canadian Expeditionary Force therefore, like the Australian, New Zealand and South African, was largely made up of enthusiastic volunteers.

On 7 August 1914 the Canadian Government offered to send units in addition to the infantry. Three cavalry regiments, the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, the Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona's Horse were consequently ordered to prepare to sail on 20 September 1914. Very few of the men had seen any active service and the squadrons were made up to strength from men in the camp who could ride, but in some cases their experience had only been with the Egyptian Camel Corps. Of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, about two thirds were born in Great Britain. Of the others there were, besides Canadians, Americans, New Zealanders, Poles, Italians, and even Chileans and a Roumanian. Attached to these three cavalry regiments was the first ever Automobile Machine Gun Brigade (No. 1). The total number transported for the three cavalry regiments was 1816 horses, 78 officers and 1578 other ranks.<sup>2</sup> Arriving in England, they were sent to Salisbury Plain where they remained for 16 weeks in appallingly muddy conditions during the wettest summer of the century.<sup>3</sup>

Brock, Letters to Venetia Stanley, p. 271.

B. Greenhous, <u>Dragoons. The Centennial History of the Royal Dragoons</u> 1883-1983, Ottawa, 1983, p.178.

A. F. Duguid, Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919, General Series, vol I, Ottawa, 1938, p.158. Duguid was only able to complete his history up to September 1915. It was completed by G. W. L. Nicholson in 1962.

When Seely went to the War Office in January 1915, Kitchener told him of his decision to form a mounted brigade out of all the Canadian units which did not make up part of the first Canadian Infantry Division and offered him the command. On 30 January 1915, the following appeared in the Salisbury Plain Orders,

The Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona's Horse are to be formed into the Canadian Cavalry Brigade with the addition of the 2nd King Edward's Horse. Colonel, the Honourable J. E. B. Seely, DSO, will take over the command of this Brigade from 1st February 1915.<sup>1</sup>

Although his rank was still that of Lieutenant-Colonel, he subsequently held the office of Brigadier-General until 1918. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade [CCB] was independent of the Canadian Corps and was in turn part of the 5th Cavalry Division of the British Army until, in 1918, it became part of the 3rd. The 2nd King Edward Horse was composed of colonials living in Britain.

Sam Hughes, the Canadian Minister of Militia and Defence, sent a cable to Major General Carson in England: 'Regarding command of Canadians in Britain, General MacDougall is in military command of all Canadian units in Britain excepting those under Brigadier-General Seely'.<sup>2</sup> However, Borden was not happy with the appointment and he wrote privately to Sir George Perley, the acting Canadian High Commissioner in London, 'I shall see to it that the next Mounted Corps that goes from Canada is placed in command of one of our own men as Brigadier'.<sup>3</sup> The situation of appointing British officers had arisen because of the shortage of appropriately staff-trained Canadians in their small regular army.

The hostility among the officers at the front to Seely's appointment was noted in Asquith's letters to Venetia Stanley, though the editors comment that 'Seely did well in France'.<sup>4</sup> Lord Edmund Talbot, one of Bonar Law's inner circle and Member of Parliament for Chichester, made similar reservations in a series of letters to Lieutenant-Colonel Brinsley

ed. Brock, Letters to Venetia Stanley, 1982, note p. 397.

Duguid, Official History, p. 185.

Duguid, Official History, p. 443.
 G. W. L. Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919. Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War, Ottawa, 1962, p. 39.

Fitzgerald, a close personal friend of Sir John French. The first such letter, dated 14 February 1915, was headed: 'Confidential' and reflected the Canadian reactions,

There is trouble about Jack Seely's appointment.

The Canadians are furious and say with some justice, 'We are only too pleased to be commanded by English Generals but we aren't going to be commanded by a damned politician, we have got plenty of politicians of our own to choose from'.

The pressure is getting so great I expect we shall have to have a question in the House.

I want to know to what extent Sir J. [French] is in any way implicated. Will he recommend it? Can the Govt. [sic] say he did or was he asked?

It has been a blunder, especially giving him Canadians.<sup>1</sup>

On 23 February 1915, Talbot referred to the belief that Seely's appointment was recommended by Sir John French and showed how this was resented:

I confess I am amazed about it. Not that I begrudge Jack Seely his appointment but it doesn't do Sir John any good. It isn't only that the Canadians who are so wild but people say Sir John picked out a fellow like Jack Seely over the heads of lots of other colonels of the Regular Army who had served him and the country better and had prior claim.<sup>2</sup>

By 3 March 1915, Talbot had received a reply from Fitzgerald which led him to deduce that Seely's appointment came from Asquith, who had inveigled French into accepting Seely:

About J. S., from what you say it is clear that Asquith laid a trap for the General [French] and having got him to say J. S. was fit to command they could easily twist this to saying he had recommended him which is just what they did do.<sup>3</sup>

Imperial War Museum, Papers of Lieutenant Colonel Brinsley Fitzgerald CB. PP/MCR/118/3/19, Talbot to Fitzgerald, 14 February 1915.

Imperial War Museum, Fitzgerald Papers 3/30, Talbot to Fitzgerald, 23 February 1915.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Imperial War Museum, Fitzgerald Papers 3/21, Talbot to Fitzgerald, 3 March 1915.

Questions about his appointment to command the Canadian Cavalry Brigade were indeed asked in the House of Commons by Walter Long on 11 March 1915. He was concerned that the fundamental difference between the professional and the amateur soldier should be maintained. He was anxious to assure the House that his criticism of Seely's appointment had nothing to do with his politics or his abilities, for Lord Salisbury also commanded a brigade. 'As amateurs they have worked hard at soldiering as a temporary occupation for a period of the year. They have done their best to make themselves efficient'. Long criticised the War Office as being gravely remiss in allowing 'these plums of the Army' to be given to these men who were amateurs, instead of giving them to professionals with life-long service in the Army.<sup>1</sup>

Seely had to face this initial prejudice to his appointment and long-standing hostility from certain regular officers during the war. He put intense efforts into his command over the next three years; he had to prove that he was equal to the professionals. In spite of the criticism that a politician was commanding soldiers, he remained a Member of Parliament throughout the war, representing the Ilkeston Division of Derbyshire. There were in fact 164 MPs in the armed forces by 1916, including one Major-General.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the Canadian Government's initial suspicion of Seely, his appointment was accepted by Sam Hughes, the Canadian Minister of Defence. Hughes was noted for making a practice of giving appointments to friends and political allies and was therefore unlikely to favour Seely but, surprisingly, in view of his own prejudices and Borden's opposition, accepted this appointment. It has been suggested that he was indebted to Seely for saving his face in front of King George V in 1912. Seely recounted how Hughes became involved in a fight with General Beyers of South Africa, blows were actually exchanged, and Seely was only just able to restore order before the King arrived to inspect the camp at Babraham in Cambridgeshire.<sup>3</sup> The Canadian Government remained suspicious of Seely throughout

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol. LXX, col 1580, 11 March 1915.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series vol LXXVII, cols 1117-1123, 6 January 1916.

Seely, <u>Fear and Be Slain</u>, pp 80-81. I am indebted to Major M. McNorgan, a serving officer in the Canadian Royal Dragoons and author of 'Canadian Cavalry Brigade', unpublished MSS, Ottawa (1998), for suggesting this interpretation.

the war but was not able to secure his replacement as Commander of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade until May 1918 when he retired to England, gassed.

From his appointment, Seely showed concern for his men which never failed over three years. He recalled, in <u>Adventure</u>, his efforts to find the new brigade on water-logged Salisbury Plain. Appalled by the conditions in the camp, his first task was to find billets for the men in nearby villages and to improve the stabling for the horses which had been left outdoors. One Canadian observer noted, 'Colonel Seely is very much in evidence these days and there can be no doubt that the cavalry will fare well as regards arms and equipment. One can hardly have been War Minister without at least knowing which ropes to pull'.

The First Canadian Division had suffered heavily in the Second Battle of Ypres and infantry replacements were urgently needed in April 1915. Seely's own account, verified by Greenhous, explains that Kitchener asked him if the Canadian Cavalry Brigade would volunteer to go to France as dismounted infantry. W. B. Fraser, the historian of Lord Strathcona's Horse, states without qualification that Seely had contacted Lord Kitchener and volunteered to take the Canadian Cavalry over to France. Major McNorgan of the Royal Canadian Dragoons accepts Seely's version, though Fraser's would be in keeping with Seely's forward character. Seely recorded the unanimous agreement when the proposals were put to the officers concerned.

The cavalry regiments then had to be supplied with the necessary artillery equipment. Further conflict arose with the Canadians over the provision of rifles. Seely obtained Lee-Enfields, which he considered more suitable for cavalry, compared with the Ross, which Hughes favoured. As a result, the Ross was withdrawn, to Hughes' considerable ire. 

The horses were left behind and handed over to the Fort Garry Horse which was to remain

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 218.

Greenhous, <u>Dragoons.</u> p. 180, citing C. L. Flick, <u>Just What Happened.</u> A Diary of the Mobilisation of the Canadian Militia, 1914, p. 68.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 221, Greenhous, <u>Dragoons</u>, p. 184, W. B. Fraser, <u>Always a Strathcona</u>, Calgary, 1976, p.71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> McNorgan, 'Canadian Cavalry Brigade', p.15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Nicholson, Official History, p.156.

behind temporarily in reserve. The rest sailed from Folkestone as dismounted units between 4 May-20 July 1915.

On arrival at the camp on 5 May 1915, orders arrived that the regiments were to form one battalion from the Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona's Horse and that King Edward's Horse was to be split up to form drafts for other regiments. Kitchener had promised that the Canadian Cavalry Brigade was to retain its identity. The promise may have been broken because of the Canadians' suspicions of Seely. Colonel J. J. Carrick, a spy for Hughes, reported to him: 'There appears to be an opinion that Major-General Alderson, the General Officer in Command (GOC) of the 1st Canadian Division, was not anxious to have so strong a man as General Seely commanding a Brigade in his Division'. Seely was thought to have undue influence over those generals who were promoted during his period in office as Secretary of State for War, such as Sir Douglas Haig. Carrick wrote that Seely, 'is considered a strong and aggressive man'. On reading the Order, Seely immediately went to see Sir John French at General Headquarters (GHQ) and it was decided to let the Brigade remain as an infantry brigade of three weak battalions, and each regiment, therefore, formed into two double companies. Seely had managed to persuade French and the Brigade was known as 'Seely's Detachment' for the duration. He had gone straight to the top to put his case on behalf of the Regiments which made up the Brigade. At this point, the Detachment numbered 85 officers and 1421 NCOs and other ranks.

The CCB took its turn on the front line. On 15 August 1915, for example, it was relieved after 48 days without a break in the trenches in the Neuve Eglise area.<sup>2</sup> Much of the time, however, was spent on labour duties in working parties, constructing trenches, building railway lines, burying the dead, carrying, wiring and patrolling. Seely, ever inventive, devised plans to hoodwink the enemy. There is an account in the War Diary for September 1915 of how 600 sacks, possibly filled with straw, were set alight and thrown over the trenches to give an impression of a gas attack along a 1000-yard line. This was followed by

McNorgan, 'Canadian Cavalry Brigade', p. 16, citing Carrick to Hughes, May 16 1915. National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, RG (111D1) 4681/22/4.

National Archives of Canada, Military and Defence Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919. RG9 Series 1113D, War Diaries 1914-1919, vols. 4812-5075. Future references will be abbreviated as War Diary.

an artillery bombardment and rapid rifle fire which succeeded in drawing fire from the enemy.<sup>1</sup>

Seely's main task as Brigade General was to carry out orders issued through a chain of command from the Division, the Corps, the Army and ultimately the Commander-in-Chief. In 1915 when the Canadian Cavalry Brigade went to France, General Sir Hubert Gough commanded the 1st Corps and General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien commanded the Second Army. The Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in France in 1914, Sir John French, was blamed for the reverses at Loos in 1915 and was replaced by Sir Douglas Haig in December 1915 who then held the post throughout the remainder of the war. Seely felt that French had been made a scapegoat and wrote a sympathetic letter acknowledging the 'idiotic but malevolent attack upon yourself', and the nation's debt to him.<sup>2</sup>

The ladder of command gave a Brigade General little individual initiative to decide strategy but in the heat of the battle he could be expected to make on-the-spot tactical decisions if the situation demanded, as Seely did at Guyencourt on 27 March 1917 and in the Battle of Moreuil Wood, 30 March 1918. It was the responsibility of the Brigade General to know the extent of the front the Brigade had to cover in an attack and whether to advance with one or two regiments, leaving the third in reserve. Commanding officers would be called periodically to GHQ for conferences on tactics before an attack was launched.

The Brigade Major would be responsible for accompanying the Brigade General on his various visits, passing on the Orders of the Day and keeping the War Diary. That for the Canadian Cavalry Brigade was meticulously entered by Brigade-Major C. E. Connolly and then Brigade-Major Geoffrey Brooke from the Curragh, who became a close personal friend of Seely. This diary is unusually detailed and conscientiously kept, chiefly by these two Majors and regularly signed by Seely as GOC. The members of the Signal Troop were responsible for the production and distribution of the Orders. Brooke wrote of his commanding officer, 'From a Brigade-Major's point of view he was delightful to work for.

War Diary, 25 September 1915.

Imperial War Museum, JEBS 1868-1947, 75/46/11, Seely to French, 19 November 1915.

If ever you had occasion to put up a point, he grasped it immediately, appreciated its significance, and even if it should be in opposition, accepted it then and there'.

Seely's first aide-de-camp (ADC) was Captain Sir Archibald Sinclair<sup>2</sup> of the 2nd Life Guards. He was a friend of Churchill and generally known as Archie. Churchill's letters to Seely ask after 'Archie's' well-being and when Churchill was given command in the Royal Scots Fusiliers in 1915 following his resignation after Gallipoli, he poached Sinclair from Seely. When Seely re-married in 1917, Sinclair was his bestman. From March 1916, Seely's ADC was his eldest son, Frank Seely, who had absented himself from Harrow and joined up. He was taken on to the strength of the Brigade until he left to join the 1st Battalion Hampshire Regiment in January 1917, when he was replaced by Prince Antoine d'Orléans et Braganza.<sup>3</sup> Seely was very fond of both of his aides and was devastated when his son was killed in the Battle of Arras in April 1917.<sup>4</sup> Prince Antoine survived the war to be killed in an air accident 18 days after the Armistice.

The Canadian regular officers were mainly from the middle or lower-middle class. The sons of wealthy Canadians who wanted an army career would go to Britain to enrol in more prestigious and ancient regiments. The junior officers were sons of white-collar workers such as bank-clerks. The men of the other ranks were farm workers or other labourers. Promotion, though, was largely from the ranks and during the Great War this brought problems with the British cavalry officers who had difficulty in accepting a former ranker as an equal and in appreciating the more informal colonial style of soldiering. Seely, with his Territorial background, would no doubt have had more empathy with his Canadians than would his commanding officers. Major A. C. Macdonnell, who had also served in the Boer War, commanded the Lord Strathcona's Horse, became a Lieutenant-General and

G. Brooke, <u>The Brotherhood of Arms</u>, 1941, p. 61.

Seely, Adventure, p. 262.

Sir Archibald Sinclair, first Viscount Thurso, 1890-1970, adopted a political career after the Great War and in 1935 became Chairman of the Parliamentary Liberal Party.

Mottistone MSS 24/76. Antoine d'Orléans was a descendant of Louis Philippe, King of the French. Though barred by French law from serving in the French Army, Seely used his influence with Kitchener to have Antoine made a captain in the Royal Canadian Dragoons on 20 June 1916 and took him on to his staff.

commanded the 1st Canadian Division from 1917-1918 and became one of Seely's many life-long friends.

As Brigade GOC, Seely had to supervise the daily lives of the men. He had a rapport with them: they were horsemen and so was he. In a letter to Winston Churchill, he shows that he understood the Canadians' reluctance, however necessary, to leave their horses in England: 'My men are in great form though they pine for their horses just for the idea of the thing and for the status it would bring them'. The War Diary records his daily visits over three years to the various regiments which made up the Brigade and he claimed that he made over four hundred visits to the front line. Captain Williams of the Royal Canadian Dragoons concurs: 'He was always poking about the front line if it so happened that any of his command were in the front line'. Williams recognised that Seely always led from the front even when not strictly necessary. Seely was always anxious to ensure that there were suitable billets, abandoning them if they were found to be over-crowded or insanitary and ordering the disinfecting of the horses' stables. When gas became a problem, 50 local women were found from the medical service to make gauze-covered wads of cotton for the Canadians as temporary respirators.

In spite of their being re-equipped as infantry, there were shortages in the men's requirements. Seely had received a letter from the War Office stating that it was impossible to send out any more telephones.<sup>4</sup> He immediately took it upon himself to spend hundreds of pounds from his own pocket, subsequently reimbursed by the War Office, on pumps, periscopes, gumboots, thick telephone wire, 'and all the appurtenances of sedentary warfare'. He recounted this to Churchill in another letter and he made reference to the troopers as 'real good stout-hearted men who are almost as fond of me as I am of them'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Seely, Adventure, p.208.

4 Mottistone MSS 3/3, W.O to Seely, 18 August 1915.

Churchill College, Cambridge, Churchill Archives, Char1/117/80, Seely to Churchill, 2 July 1915. Their horses were restored to them in 1916.

S. H Williams, <u>Stand to your Horses</u>. <u>Through the First World War 1914-1918</u> with Lord Strathcona's Horse, Winnipeg, 1961, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Churchill Archives, Char 1/117/92-94, Seely to Churchill, 14 September 1915.

This was not a piece of wishful thinking on his part. An article in the Pall Mall Gazette for 6 September 1920, commented on the success which Seely obtained with the Canadians. The casualties from his Brigade were sent home to the Military Convalescence Hospital at Wodcote Park, Epsom in Surrey. A letter was sent to him in June 1918, from 75 of the men, with reference to the rumour that he was about to give up his command. It referred to the distinguished record of the Brigade in the war under his command and added, 'therefore we feel that if we are to lose you we are not only losing a distinguished General but an old friend who has endeared himself to the Canadians as few others do'. It continued, 'Although you were not with us you were remembered by all present. A lusty cheer, given for your benefit, certainly raised the roof. We feel that if you had been present we would now be paying Barrack Damages, viz. one new roof for one YMCA'. The letter was typed and personally signed by all 75 men in scratchy, illiterate writing.\(^1\) Captain Williams recalled the conscious effort which Seely made to learn and remember everyone's name and how psychologically beneficial this was, especially for new recruits.\(^2\)

Brooke explained the success of Seely's command: 'once his plan was put into action he would take the entire responsibility. No blame would ever be foisted onto a subordinate who carried out his orders and they were all aware of this'. Brooke also extolled the virtues of the Canadians of all ranks as 'exceptionally fine men and each one an individualist'. As a result, they wanted to know the reasons for a decision. Seely was anxious to see that the men were well versed in what was expected of them and Brooke's task, as Brigade Major, was to attempt to know the answers.<sup>3</sup> Not until Montgomery was a similar approach to British troops adopted, contrasting with the traditional belief 'Their's not to reason why, Their's but to do and die'.

Seely, who was himself injured and invalided home in June 1917, returned to his Brigade at the end of August 1917. He described in <u>Adventure</u> how he was greeted at St. Pol by a crowd of men, put into an old-fashioned charabanc drawn by four horses and driven for three miles along the road lined by the entire Brigade, cheering, waving their hats and firing

Mottistone MSS 24/191, 75 casualties to Seely, 5 June 1918.

Williams, Stand to your Horses, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> G. Brooke, <u>Good Company</u>, 1954, p. 156.

off Very lights. 'It really was the most affecting home-coming'. This was borne out by Brooke, who wrote in his memoirs that 'All ranks were devoted to him and had complete trust in the Brigadier and Jack Seely was equally devoted to his Brigade'. Brooke commended the keen imagination, generosity and physical and moral courage which he believed that Seely possessed, 'to a marked degree'. Greenhous quotes from an eye-witness, Lt. R. Nordheimer of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, who recounted in his 'Reminiscences' an occasion when Seely was visiting an area known as 'Death Valley' during the Battle of the Somme. He arrived bringing wine and cigars for the officers but after lunch, when he was talking to some of the men, a shell landed a hundred yards away killing 11 and wounding 15 men, 'Seely himself helped to clear the human debris'.<sup>3</sup>

Captain Williams recalled that miscreants would be tied spread-eagled to a waggon wheel. This was known as Field Punishment No. 1. Seely came across a certain Private Shand in such a position, ordered his release and then insisted on being strapped on to the wheel in the same way. After several minutes he asked to be released and then said, 'There will be no more of that in this Brigade whilst I am in command of it'. He substituted pack-drill in full kit as a punishment.<sup>4</sup> Such cavalier behaviour would be another reason for the British General Staff to regard him as a maverick but was consistent with his humanitarianism.

His complete fearlessness brought him, in addition to the DSO in the South African War, five mentions in despatches in the Great War. Throughout the war, he never wore a steel helmet but only his red general's cap; a fact often quoted by veterans and the sort of behaviour which Asquith had deprecated earlier. In <u>Fear and Be Slain</u> Seely put forward the thesis that one had to be without fear in order to survive<sup>5</sup> and his nickname, throughout the war, was 'Mad Jack'.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p.270.

Brooke, <u>Brotherhood of Arms</u>, p.61. These sentiments were borne out by veterans who spoke on a radio programme 'Flanders Fields', produced by CBC in 1963-1964 for the 50th anniversary of the Great War.

Greenhous, p. 201, citing R. Nordheimer, 'Reminiscences', <u>The Goat</u>, (August 1930).

Williams, Stand to your Horses, p. 38.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Seely, Fear and Be Slain, Foreword.

Sergeant-Major T. A. Aisthorpe of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, who had received both the DCM and the MM, wrote to Seely in May 1919 to say how sorry he had been to miss him when he last visited the 'Old Brigade'. He had been on leave, and wanted to write to thank him for all that he had done for the Brigade. He reminisced about the devotion of Seely to his men and of them to him, concluding with 'now, Sir, in the name of the Boys of the Royal Canadian Dragoons we all wish to express our sincere gratitude to you; for all the kindness you showed the boys when you were our Guide and Comforter'. 1

This almost messianic attitude towards their commander, in spite of all the hardships and losses during the war, was reflected in the Canadian obituaries of him. The Legionary, a military journal, recorded his death in 1947 and began the report that he was, 'Beloved of the Canadian cavalrymen in the First World War' and after summarising his career, ended with the belief that, 'his name will live, as long as there is an officer, NCO or trooper left in the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Lord Strathcona's Horse or Fort Garry Horse'. Viewing the war in such terms was common at the time. It was depicted as the ultimate sacrifice for good over evil and, after the war, every cemetery created by the Imperial War Graves Commission had its stone Cross of Sacrifice with a bronze sword imposed upon the shaft and heroes were popularly adopted and revered in the post-war period.

Relations between the British High Command and Seely did not improve as the war progressed. Churchill wrote to him during the Battle of the Somme in July 1916 and commented, 'How badly the soldiers have treated you... You have a fine record which will always command the respect of the nation'. Churchill was probably referring to Haig's decision to put the Brigade into reserve during the action on the Somme following Rawlinson's decision to hold the cavalry back on 1 July. This was in spite of the belief held by Greenhous that there was an opportunity for the cavalry on the right flank to support the infantry's breakthrough on the one part of the line where the plan of attack had succeeded, but Rawlinson failed to exploit it. He preferred to hold on in case of a counter-attack. The

Mottistone MSS 24/112. Aisthorpe to Seely, May 1919. Seely had gone to Bramshott to say farewell to the Regiment before they left for Liverpool and embarkation.

National Defence HQ, Ottawa, Jackson Papers, File 000.9(D106), December 1947.

Mottistone MSS 3/56, Churchill to Seely, 31 July 1916.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Greenhous, <u>Dragoons</u>, p.201.

'soldiers' to whom Churchill was referring were the professional generals, the long-term antagonists of Seely, the amateur.

Churchill maintained correspondence with Seely throughout the war, writing in July 1916: 'I was so glad to hear from you. I think often of you and the long row you are hoeing so steadfastly'. He used Seely as a political confidant and would analyse the current political situation in his letters. At this point he believed that Asquith's premiership had not long to run and commented on his probable successor in the same letter, with whom he was anxious to be on good terms: 'Lloyd George is affable and I see a great deal of him. I will take any chance that offers of advancing his interests'. In his next letter in August 1916 Churchill wrote similarly: 'There are hostile forces at work in the Cabinet and at any time a collapse is possible'. He concluded with 'Good luck to you, my dear. Count on me if the moment comes.' Asquith in fact lasted until December 1916 and was replaced by Lloyd George.

In the autumn of 1916, Seely faced grave criticisms of his abilities as a commander from his superior officers. Brigadier-General Sir Archibald Home of the Cavalry Corps and a friend of Haig, wrote in his diary for Sunday 29 October:

Yesterday went down to inspect part of the Canadian Bde under Seely. The whole thing [is] a failure, the material is excellent but with such a Brigadier the thing is impossible. We asked him to review the operations and he made a speech which was useless from a military point of view. He ought to go back to politics, that is his proper sphere. Honest downrightness is what is wanted with soldiers, not fine phrasing and verbiage.<sup>3</sup>

Home's next sentence revealed the problems facing cavalry: 'The weather has been appalling. We go forward over bad ground'. On Thursday 31 October he wrote 'The country is a sea of mud, in places feet deep - horses and men get bogged down and cannot

Mottistone MSS 3/56, Churchill to Seely, July 1916.

Mottistone MSS 3/58, Churchill to Seely, 13 August 1916. The use of affectionate terms of address between male friends and to one's sons was the norm at that time.

Brigadier-General Sir Archibald Home, <u>Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer</u>, Tunbridge Wells, 1985, pp. 125 ff..

move. The horses are beginning to feel it a great deal'. He concluded his comments by continuing to deplore the mud in the area of the Butte de Warlencourt 'Napoleon's fifth element 'mud' is now victorious and we shall have to go into winter quarters...Men fall into shell holes full of liquid mud and are drowned, horses stick in the mud and have to be shot...People can have no conception of what this warfare means'. In spite of his appreciation of the impossible conditions under which the cavalry were labouring and the realisation that it would have to retreat into winter quarters, Home made no allowances for Seely's difficulties, for on Thursday 2 November 1916 he wrote: 'The weather is still very bad. Yesterday we went down and saw the Canadian Brigade on the march commanded by Seely. I have never seen such a show. It was very bad'.

Lieutenant General Sir Charles Kavanagh, the Commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, had reported his own misgivings to Haig who recorded in his diary for Sunday 5 November 1916 that Kavanagh had been to lunch and mentioned that he would 'probably have to report that Brigadier General Seely was unfit to command the Canadian Cavalry Brigade'. Haig pointed out to Kavanagh that he must only think of Seely as a cavalry brigadier in the field responsible for the efficiency and handling of his command and not as an MP and ex-Secretary Of State for War. In other words, Seely's past eminence must not influence judgement on his present performance. Home recorded on Thursday 9 November 1916 that Kavanagh followed this meeting by returning to address the Canadian Cavalry Brigade 'on the subject of Discipline - they want it badly. It was a good straight talk of a soldier and must have been very different from the political jargon of Seely. I think it will do a lot of good'.<sup>2</sup>

General Kavanagh then returned to England where he saw Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff [CIGS] and King George V about Seely's alleged incompetence. The criticisms of his command may have arisen from the problems of keeping the cavalry in a state of readiness from 1 July 1916. Having been moved into reserve, 'they waited, week after week, for a breakthrough which might allow them to break out. None materialised'. The time was therefore taken up with routine tasks. Then came the

ed. R. Blake, The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1916-1919, 1952, p. 174.

Home, Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer, pp. 125-126.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Greenhous, Dragoons, p. 201.

continual rain and the consequent sea of mud. Seely's somewhat relaxed attitude towards the traditional means of enforcing discipline, his ability to get on with his men, together with the persistent antagonism towards his Liberal politics and Territorial origins, all contributed to the opposition which he faced at his time.

When Kavanagh returned to France, he saw Haig who reported the conversation in a letter to Lady Haig on Tuesday 21 November 1916:

General Kavanagh commanding the Cavalry Corps came to see me on his return from leave to England where he had seen both Sir William Robertson and the King. They both told him that he would make a grave mistake if he sent home, as being incapable, Brig-Gen. Seely, who now commands the Canadian Cav. Bde. in Gen. Macandrew's Cav. Div. I said that if a Divisional General reports anyone of his Brigadiers as unfit, I had only one of two alternatives. Either the Brigadier must go or the Div. GOC. I had however seen Seely last Sunday and warned him that I had received reports from the Cav. Corps and Div. that his Brigade was in a bad order and his Div. Gen. was not satisfied with him. Before taking action, however, I would give him warning. I agreed with Kavanagh that he should keep an eye on the Brigade and if he considered Gen. Seely no use as a Brigadier, he must report to that effect, and I would send him home. [Abbreviations as in text]

Seely in contrast, held Kavanagh in high regard. In <u>Adventure</u>, he referred to him as 'General Kavanagh, the Cavalry Corps Commander, a fine soldier, a loyal and greathearted man, but a bit of a martinet'. This would imply that he regarded the criticisms as emanating from an old-fashioned disciplinarian rather than from someone who appreciated the difficulties facing the Canadians during that autumn.

Seely heeded the warnings from his superiors and either he improved his generalship or his critics were subdued by the strength of the support shown on his behalf at home. This included the King, with whom Haig was on good terms. In addition there was always Churchill behind Seely and Churchill's affable relationship with Lloyd George, probably the

Seely, Adventure, p. 293.

most powerful member of the Government at that time. Home was aware of this close connection and wrote in his diary on 28 May 1917: 'Winston Churchill has invited himself here tomorrow - of course he wants to see Seely, so we shall send him off there as soon as he arrives.'

By Wednesday 6 December 1916, Home was able to write, 'Went down and inspected the Fort Garry horse in marching order. They are Canadians and belong to Seely's Brigade. It was a good turn out and a great improvement'. Seely's leadership qualities needed the back up of a skilled brigade major. There is no evidence that Brooke was deliberately chosen to enable Seely to achieve the improvement necessary for his survival as Commander but his appointment in January 1917 provided his commander with the expertise of an exceptionally able Brigade-Major to deal with the technicalities of running the Brigade.

Seely survived as improvement became marked. He became more methodical. In Notes to Instructors, 21 February 1917, he minuted that the instructors should spend three quarters of an hour each day after morning parade running through the work for the next day. He devised a series of activities to prevent the men from becoming bored with the routine of being held in reserve. The troops' commanders must see that all exercises were carried out thoroughly and efficiently but they should take care to avoid monotony'. He then listed a series of suggestions for a variety of equestrian activities whilst the men were in reserve and he organised sports and international horse shows for the cavalrymen. He also planned carefully some successful diversions and raids against the Germans. Like his contemporaries, he had to adapt to a new type of warfare and he learnt as he went along so that by 1917 he had become a much better commander and more versatile in his tactics than he was in 1915.

By mid-March 1917, the Germans had begun to pull back to the Hindenburg Line so that there was the opportunity to use the cavalry to close the gap between the front lines. A successful attack was mounted on a wood south of Equancourt at Lieramont, north-east of Peronne on the Somme, at the end of March and Seely decided to exploit the situation and

Home, <u>Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer</u>, p.141.

Home, Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer, p.127.

War Diary, 21 February 1917.

push ahead in front of Guyencourt. At 5 pm on 27 March 1917, Lord Strathcona's Horse, the Fort Garry Horse with the Royal Canadian Dragoons in support, cantered through the wood under cover of a snow-storm. The historian of the Dragoons commented, 'It may well have been the last brigade-strength charge on the Western Front - the last ever for Canadian troops and for Western Europe'. The War Diary records that Lord Strathcona's Horse attacked on the enemy's right, in front of Guyencourt. From their last bound previous to reaching the outskirts of the village the troops advanced in order at a gallop. By 5.50 pm the enemy had withdrawn rapidly, blown up a large ammunition dump at Saulcourt and by 6.00 pm the whole objective was held. Seely proceeded to organise defence of position before dark and decided to hold until dawn but was withdrawn at 2.00 am to bivouac except for a holding force. Casualties of two officers and 32 other ranks were evacuated during the night. Withdrawal was difficult because the Germans had cut down the trees across the roads, blown up all cross roads and blown up the bridges. The 4th Army Commander-in-Chief, General Rawlinson, congratulated Seely on the achievements of the Brigade. Lieutenant Harvey received the VC and Prince Antoine d'Orléans and other officers received the MC. After this, the Brigade returned to reserve once the position had been consolidated behind the Hindenburg Line. This action was one in which Seely took the decision, on his own initiative, to advance with the cavalry and although it was successful, he was not allowed to hold on to the position because of the difficulty of reinforcing the gains.

In May 1917, he participated in an attack on the Guillemont Farm area on the Somme. This was part of the over-all plan to relieve the pressure on the French Army, riven with serious mutinies, following the failure of the Nivelle Offensive of April 1917 in the Aisne area. The Canadian raid was acknowledged by Home on 27 May as 'a great success with 18 prisoners and a lot of Boches killed, our casualties two wounded and one killed. Wires of congratulation from the Chief and Army Commander'. Home then recorded that he had visited Seely and described the raid as 'a very well organised show and the Canadians are fine fellows to fight'. As Home's diary was private and not published until 1985, one must assume that he was genuinely impressed with the improvement in the Brigade. He even modified his criticism of future parades, though he was still guarded in his comments. He

Greenhous, Dragoons, p. 204.

Home, Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer, p. 141.

wrote on 19 September 1917: 'Spent the morning watching the Can Cav Bde in a scheme under Seely, they were a trifle slow I thought'.<sup>1</sup>

On 19 July 1917 Seely had a riding accident and cracked his ribs and sprained his ankle. He was evacuated to the Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) at Tincourt and then sent home. It was whilst on this leave that he married the widow of his private secretary, George Nicholson, who had been killed in a flying accident.

During his time on the Western Front, Seely wrote many short letters to his baby girl who had been orphaned in 1913. These show his concern for her and his awareness of the little there was to appreciate in his surroundings. The following are a few extracts, unusual survivals in the archives of the Imperial War Museum of correspondence from a serving soldier to a small child:

Here is some lace for a frock for you which I saw an old lady making near where the Germans are. My delightful men are very well.

You should see me now - lying in bed in a very big tent with two quite adorable kittens fast asleep against my good leg.

I send you a little flower which I picked. Somehow it makes me think of you. You should see the daffodils here. They are lovely

I went to a Christmas tree which the flying men had arranged for the children in the village where they live when they are not flying somewhere else. I handed them toys and buns and then ran races with them.<sup>2</sup>

One cannot imagine any of the other generals running races with small French children.

Home, Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer, p. 149.

Imperial War Museum MSS 67/391/1, Major-General J. E. B. Seely. Seely to Louisa Seely, 1914-1917.

By the autumn of 1917, the action again moved up to the Ypres Salient and preparations began for the Third Battle of Ypres. This culminated in the final attack on Passchendaele in October and November 1917. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade was not thrown into the slaughter but held back for the approaching attack at Cambrai in November 1917. Haig finally agreed that the new tanks should go into action at Cambrai to break through the Hindenburg Line. The cavalry should come up behind to exploit the projected breakthrough. Seely was doubtful from the beginning that this would be possible because horses would never be able to get in and out of the steep-sided St. Quentin Canal. The CCB was to lead the 5th Cavalry Division on the right flank. The first problem was to find a suitable crossing.

Seely was an advocate of air power and he often flew over the enemy lines, believing that thorough reconnaissance was essential by the GOC, either by air or on the ground, before any attack. On this occasion, he had, however, failed to spot a second bridge which could have been used after the Masnières Bridge, which they had been scheduled to cross, had collapsed under the weight of a tank. Greenhous comments, 'Seely's reconnaissance left much to be desired and apparently no information concerning alternative crossing sites had been circulated to the cavalry before the operation, although the infantry knew about it'.1 This is the only occasion on which the regimental historian of the Royal Canadian Dragoons makes any criticism of the GOC's generalship. Brooke excused his commanding officer's oversight in failing to locate the alternative bridge by asserting that 'unfortunately it was not marked on the maps issued'.2 It was true that maps which had been issued to the army in 1914 were inaccurate as they had been taken from surveys carried out during the Second Empire. They had therefore to be corrected by reconnaissance undertaken by the officers in order to discover the best routes for the movement of troops and supplies. It seems therefore that the map which Seely was using was inaccurate but that he had not followed his own precept, that of thorough reconnaissance on the ground by the commanding officer; he seems to have relied too much on aerial reconnaissance on this occasion. Major MacDonald of the Strathconas approached Seely to send a foot patrol to another bridge, west of Masnières. Seely told him to go ahead and to cross to the other

Greenhous, <u>Dragoons</u>, p.209.

Brooke, <u>The Brotherhood of Arms</u>, 1941. p.71.

side, 'if he thought it wise to do so'. There was no question of giving impossible orders if the Major thought otherwise.

A confused situation, however, developed. Only one squadron of the Fort Garry Horse got across the canal to charge the enemy but then the horses had to be stampeded to get them to return whilst the men made their way home on foot. Lt. Strachan, who took over command when his officer was killed, was later awarded the VC. He returned with 68 men out of 127. Seely had a horse shot from under him and the cavalry were criticised for cluttering up the roads and hindering the tanks but Seely believed that the prompt arrival of the cavalry saved the right flank from going under. The Canadians held a defensive position to the west of the canal; the hole had been plugged in the line and the front was again stabilised. He later wrote an article, 'The Cavalry Saved the Flank at Cambrai', which was concerned to make his point about the crucial result of the intervention of the cavalry.<sup>2</sup> The front was indeed stabilised again, along the line occupied before the advance 12 days before.

Following this engagement, the Brigade went into reserve. At the beginning of 1918 it was sent to Le Verguier, 40 miles east of Amiens, where much time was spent on routine duties and coping with the incessant wet weather. Seely showed innovation, attention to detail and ability to learn from the mistakes which had been made in the offensives launched over the previous three years of warfare, with their huge losses of men, when in February 1918 he planned a raid on the enemy lines opposite to the section held by the Brigade. A raiding party was to gain control of No-man's Land, then a foray was to precede the attack by getting to the wire and placing three torpedoes under it. When these were detonated and the wire was destroyed, that would be the signal for artillery fire and the raid would commence. The raiding party had practised a few miles behind the front for five days, twice a day. When the exercise was mounted, it was a complete success. The German trenches and dug-outs were cleared, at least 20 Germans were killed, the wire had been destroyed, two machine guns were captured and 14 German prisoners taken. There were four casualties, including one killed among the nine officers and 177 other ranks of the Canadians. The

Greenhous, Dragoons, p.210.

Lord Mottistone (Gen. Jack. Seely), 'The Cavalry Saved the Flank at Cambrai', The Great War: I Was There, ed. Sir John Hammerton, 1938, pp. 1584-1587.

War Diary summed up the reasons for the tactics used in the operation, all of which reveal Seely's accurate perception of the factors essential to a successful raid.

# Report of the Raid.

# Complete success because:-

- a. Complete command of No-Man's Land.
- b. Thorough reconnaissance including careful study of aeroplane photographs.
- c. Careful thought out preparations inc. training.
- d. All ranks knowing the plan thoroughly so that parties were able to cooperate with each other.
- e The element of surprise.
- f. Everyone connected being convinced of success from the beginning.
- g. Adequate protection by advanced and flanked guards. An enemy patrol was driven in during the advance.
- h. Effective employment of artillery.
- i. Knowledge of all ranks of their safety in 'box barrage'.
- j. Importance of guiding by means of firing a shell from 4.5" Howitzer so that it enabled entrance to be made at required spot.<sup>1</sup>

Following the raid, Seely wrote a letter 'to add my personal congratulations to all concerned'. Congratulatory telegrams were sent to Seely from General Daly of the 24th Division and General Seligman, Canadian Royal Artillery: 'Heartiest congratulations on successful raid!'<sup>2</sup> Seely's generalship had indeed improved in the light of experience in the Battle of the Somme. He realised that harassment was preferable to frontal attacks which were useless without surprise, something which the heavy bombardments had always destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

The over-all situation in the war was changing at the end of 1917. The Russians had withdrawn from the war after the November Revolution. The Germans were then able to move troops from the Eastern to the Western Front, where the French were still recovering

War Diary, 14 February 1918.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> War Diary, 13-14 February 1918.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Seely, Adventure, p. 254.

from the mutinies and heavy losses of the Nivelle Offensive of 1917. The Italians had collapsed at Caporetto but the United States of America had entered the war. In April 1917, the American Army consisted of 5791 officers and 121,797 other ranks in regular service. It was going to take time to build up the Army, train it and transport large numbers across the Atlantic Ocean. This convinced the German High Command that an all-out offensive on the Western Front should be undertaken early in 1918 before the mass of Americans had arrived. Field Marshal von Hindenburg therefore planned his March Offensive, aiming his main blow against the British sector south of Amiens, held by Hubert Gough's Fifth Army, and then he would roll up the British line from the south. This was probably because the area of the Channel ports was heavily defended and the Ypres Salient was a sea of mud after Passchendaele. Martin Gilbert comments that Haig's policy of building up the strength of the 3rd Army around the Channel ports left the 5th Army weakened and therefore more exposed.<sup>2</sup>

On 21 March 1918 the Germans launched their massive attack with three armies of 1,000,000 men, and so began the March Retreat of General Gough and the Fifth Army. Gough ordered withdrawal to the west bank of the Somme and the French were driven to within 50 miles of Paris. It may be, in view of these German successes, that Haig was prepared to let Gough go under in order to retain control of the ports and let the Germans over-stretch their supply lines, though this is a controversial suggestion.

On 24 March 1918 Seely was appointed to command all the dismounted cavalry units in the area and all were placed at the disposal of the French General Dibold who instructed the Canadian Cavalry Brigade to remount and to remain in reserve east of Royon. The Brigade was now attached to the 2nd Cavalry Division.

On 25 March the Germans attacked and took the high ground in front of Amiens and pushed back the Allied defences on the boundary between the British and French lines. This was in an area near Moreuil and the advance had produced a salient. The French fear was that if the front line crumbled here the enemy could cross the River Avre. Should the line break, then Amiens would lie open to German attack. If taken, this would give the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I. Hogg, <u>Dictionary of World War One</u>, 1994, p.6.

M. Gilbert, First World War, 1994, p. 406.

Germans control of the main supply base for the British forces on the Somme and of the railway to Paris. The Allied armies would, as a result, be split; the French would be forced to withdraw to protect Paris and the British right flank would be rolled back to the Channel ports. On 28 March, the British Government made Gough a scapegoat, he was dismissed and General Henry Rawlinson took over.

On 29 March the British line was driven back along a three mile stretch between Moreuil and Rifle Woods, creating a dangerous salient. The situation was so serious that Marshal Foch was now appointed over-all commander on the Western Front and on 3 April he became the Allied Commander in Chief. The enemy advanced guard was already into Moreuil and threatening Villers-Bretonneux. Major-General Pitman, Commander of the 2nd Cavalry Division, had taken over command of all the cavalry in the area. He was aware that the German control of Moreuil would enable the enemy to cover the whole valley in front of Amiens so he ordered the attack and capture of Moreuil Wood. It was occupied by the 101st Grenadiers, 23rd Saxon Division, awaiting relief from the 243rd Wurttemberg Division. Home, writing on 30 March 1918, referred to the German advance as 'a masterpiece in a way of organisation. Its object was to get a decisive success. It has not done so up to the present...If we can only put in an effective counter, it will have a great effect now. The Boche are pushing the French SW of Amiens'.

On 30 March, aerial attacks began on Moreuil Wood and Seely went ahead to reconnoitre, leaving word for the Brigade to follow with the Dragoons leading. He met the French, persuaded them not to withdraw and hastily devised a plan to attack the wood which basically involved encircling it and then fighting back through it to join up with the supporting regiments. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade consequently charged the wood and engaged the enemy in fierce hand-to-hand fighting with their swords. All the Germans were killed as the resistance was incredibly stubborn, with no thought of surrender. The CCB War Diary records that one badly wounded German, shot through both legs and the stomach, refused to allow the stretcher bearers to move him, saying that he would sooner die uncaptured. Canadian casualties were heavy too, with 478 men killed, missing or wounded.

Home, Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer, p.162.

Apart from the cavalry there was also a valuable contribution from the Machine Gun Brigade, which had been called up to come to the aid of the Canadian defence. They covered 97 miles in 24 hours and succeeded in holding the crossings on the Somme. Ironically, their speed of arrival and effectiveness in this engagement indicated where mobile warfare would lie, with motorised transport not with cavalry. In addition, there was the contribution of the Royal Flying Corps, with air crews constantly harrying the German advance.

After Moreuil Wood, Rifle Wood was the next objective and that was also successfully taken and although Moreuil Wood was soon retaken by the Germans, the line had been held. The battle of Moreuil Wood had proved to be the vital counter-attack. On 31 March, Home described the events of the previous day and commented:

The Canadians cleared Moreuil Wood but suffered heavily in doing so.

The Corps Commander met Sir D. H. [Haig] at the Army HQ and the Chief was most complimentary on the work of the Cavalry. Clemenceau, the French Premier, was also there and the Chief turned round to him and said,

"The Cavalry are my best troops": 1

Clemenceau with Churchill who, as Minister for Munitions, frequently visited the front lines, saw Rawlinson who told them, 'We have taken a wood. Jack Seely, with the Canadian Cavalry, has just stormed the Bois de Moreuil'. Clemenceau pledged support so that the high ground gained by Seely could be held and then requested that he should be taken up to the front to see Moreuil Wood. Rawlinson also attributed the holding of the line to Seely and the Canadians.<sup>2</sup>

Home, <u>Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer</u>, p.163. A full account of the Battle of Moreuil Wood was written up for the War Diary 'An appendix', 4 April 1918. The individual Commanders of the participating regiments in the Brigade also wrote their accounts for the Diary. The events of the battle have been described in great detail in the Official Histories, the Regimental Histories and in the memoirs of many of those who took part, including Seely and the Canadian officers: see Bibliography.

J. Toland, No Man's Land, 1980, pp. 110-111.

After the battle, a number of medals were awarded to the participants including a VC for Lieutenant G. M. Flowerdew, Lord Strathcona's Horse, the hero of the attack, and the Legion of Honour for Prince Antoine for carrying dispatches under fire. Gough's replacement, Rawlinson, took the parade of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade and congratulated them on their achievements at Moreuil and Rifle Woods. Marshal Foch also sent Seely his congratulations. Both made the point that if the woods had not been held then it could have been fatal for Amiens and the fortune of the war.

Seely always regarded the action at Moreuil Wood as the supreme moment of his life and that everything had led up to that. He came to believe that he had turned the tide of the German advance in March 1918.<sup>2</sup> However, there were other desperate holding actions such as by the British and then the Australian forces at Villers-Bretonneux, as well as the general resistance of the 5th Army against the huge German advance, but the line held. It is also now considered that the Germans had over-reached themselves by then. Their supply lines were over-stretched; the long marches had weakened their fighting power. Hindenburg later commented that the Germans should have really concentrated on taking Amiens but, he said, 'It was in vain: our strength was exhausted'.<sup>3</sup>

Field Marshall Haig's dispatch of Tuesday 22 October 1918, giving his full account of the March Retreat of that year, referred to the, 'brilliant counter-attack' by which the Canadian Cavalry Brigade and the 3rd Cavalry Brigade restored the line at Moreuil Wood.<sup>4</sup> Haig, however, failed to mention Seely by name in his dispatch. This rankled with Seely who wrote to General Wetherby, the GOC British Armies in France, after the armistice, pointing out the achievement at Moreuil Wood and the omission of his name. Wetherby's reply offered the suggestions that either the cavalry division or corps forgot to send in Seely's name or that the dispatch only contained the names of major-generals.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Greenhous, <u>Dragoons</u>, p. 229.

War Diary, Royal Canadian Dragoons, 3 April 1918, PRO WO 95 1084.

Lord Mottistone (General Jack Seely), 'The Supreme Event of My Life. When My Brigade Recaptured Moreuil Wood', The Great War: I Was There, vol 3, p. 1584.

Mottistone MSS 24-205. The report was printed in full in <u>The Times</u>, 22 October 1918.

Mottistone MSS 24/84-86, Moggridge [Seely's PS] to Weatherby, 31 December 1918, Weatherby to Moggridge, 4 January 1919.

Marshal Foch, though, was generous in his praise of Seely's decisive contribution at Moreuil Wood:

Je n'oublie pas l'héroisme de la vaillante Brigade de Cavalerie Canadienne...la bataille était aux portes d'Amiens. Il s'agissait de maintenir à tout prix l'union intime de nos deux armées. Le 30 Mars, a Moreuil...elle réussit, par son magnifique entrain et son élan offensif, à tenir l'ennemi en échec et a briser [sic] définitivement son élan.<sup>1</sup>

Foch wrote this letter for Seely to take to Canada to read to the Empire Club which he had been invited to address in 1920.<sup>2</sup> General Weygand, Foch's Chief of Staff, later told Seely, 'While you held on to that ridge, I got 95 batteries of 75's into position and during the ensuing days they fired one million 300,000 shells'.<sup>3</sup>

Although Moreuil Wood may receive a mention in the general histories of the war, it is only in specialist studies, such as the regimental histories, particularly the Canadian, that its significance is examined and Seely's contribution acknowledged. This may be because of reliance on Haig's account and because Seely had never had the support of the old regular officers, all writing memoirs between the wars. Recent accounts, however, give the engagement more weight. Peter Simkins, lecturing in June 2000, refers to the 'distinguished action' by the CCB and the successful delaying tactics at Moreuil Wood, which held up the Germans long enough to halt the attack on Amiens.<sup>4</sup> Anglesey, in his final volume of The History of the British Cavalry 1818-1919, devotes a section to the Battle of Moreuil Wood and its significance. Whilst he considers that Seely was 'a great self-publicist', and that Rawlinson's praise of Seely 'is perhaps too fulsome...it was not entirely unjustified. It was he without a doubt who carried out "the coup" which, according to Liddell Hart [historian of

Mottistone MSS 3/212, Marshal Foch to Seely, 11 October 1920.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Mottistone MSS 3/213.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Greenhous, <u>Dragoons</u>, p. 229.

P. Simkins, 'British Divisions at Villers-Brettoneux 1918'. Lecture given 14 June 2000 to Hampshire and Isle of Wight Branch of the Western Front Association, Portsmouth. He also makes the point that although the line was pushed forward, it did not break, as has sometimes been assumed, in the March Retreat.

the First World War], seemed "to have extinguished the now flickering flame of German energy" '. Seely's memoirs <u>Adventure</u>, Anglesey grudgingly says, was 'worth quoting from even if it did contain half truths.' Martin Gilbert also gives a favourable assessment of the significance of the battle:

On March 30 a successful counter-attack by British, Australian<sup>2</sup> and Canadian troops, in which most of Moreuil Wood was captured, signified the turn of the tide for the Allies. The Germans were only eleven miles east of Amiens, but the city eluded them. They had advanced in places as much as forty miles, over-running all gains during the Battle of the Somme, taking 90,000 prisoners and 1300 guns. But the impetus of their attack was broken and their own losses were high.<sup>3</sup>

The engagement at Rifle Wood, in which the Canadian Cavalry Brigade was also involved, was Seely's last. On 20 May 1918, he relinquished his command.<sup>4</sup> He had inhaled a variety of gases whilst on reconnaissance and was no longer fit. This provided the opportunity for the Canadian Government to replace him with a Canadian commander, fulfilling its policy to create a Canadian Army as opposed to the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Haig was adverse to the latter and commented, 'I could not help feeling that some people in Canada regard themselves rather as "allies" than fellow citizens of the Empire'.<sup>5</sup> Hughes' reputation persisted, for Home wrote in his diary, 'Just heard the Canadians are dispensing with Seely's services and Patterson [sic] gets the CCB - more graft! These Canadians are awful political intriguers'.<sup>6</sup>

Ever optimistic, Seely hoped to get a Division to command. When it was learnt that he was to be replaced by the Canadian Brigadier-General R. W. Paterson, Fort Garry Horse, Churchill wrote to tell Seely that he did not think that he would get a division to command because GHQ 'seemed quite decided against it...They were quite civil about you but

The Marquess of Anglesey, <u>History of the British Cavalry 1818-1919</u>, vol VIII, <u>The Western Front, 1915-1918</u>, 1997, p.199.

The Australians were at Villers-Bretonneux, not in the attack on Moreuil Wood.

Gilbert, <u>First World War</u>, p.410.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> War Diary, 20 May 1918.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> PRO. WO 256/31/133 memo from Haig, 5 May 1918.

<sup>6</sup> Home, Diary of a World War One Cavalry Officer, p.171, entry for 16 May 1918.

evidently they do not think anybody but a professional competent to train a division, even though he could fight it well'.<sup>1</sup>

Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, the Director of Military Operations until April 1918, wrote to Seely on 11 July 1918 on the same theme, to inform him that after having seen Sir John Creedy, Lord Derby's Private Secretary, and Viscount Milner, the new Secretary of State for War, at the War Office he gathered that 'GHQ are even more difficult about the matter than Winston indicated. In fact Haig seems to have intimated that there were others (no doubt regulars!) to whom he would first wish to offer brigades'. Maurice went on to tell Seely that he had suggested that Milner should consider how many men, who had endured the hardships and dangers of the campaign for three and a half years and who were now newly and happily married, would refuse the offer of a 'cushy' job at home. This was the modest post of Assistant Minister for Munitions. Maurice then saw Sir Robert Borden, the Canadian Prime Minister, who had only just heard of the problem on his arrival in England. Maurice told Seely that he had explained to Borden that, 'as the great example of the citizen-general, you did not object to the principle of a Canadian general'.<sup>2</sup>

Churchill and Maurice were well aware of the disadvantages of Seely being a Volunteer when it came to a question of promotion, in spite of the successes of his command. Seely, however, against his wishes, remained at home, but he was not a well man at this time. A portrait painted of him by Sir William Orpen shows him haggard and gaunt-faced. Seely realised that his command was at an end and he wrote a letter addressed to 'all ranks' in the Brigade, regretting his departure and expressing his appreciation of the Canadians' contributions during the three and a half years in which he was their commander.<sup>3</sup>

He continued to take a keen interest in the Canadian Cavalry Brigade after all it had been renamed 'Seely's Detachment'. Prior to the departure of the remaining members of the Brigade, Seely hosted a grand dinner at the Savoy Hotel on 30 April 1919 for the officers. Among the guests was the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, former Governor-General of

Mottistone MSS 3/93, Churchill to Seely, 6 June 1918.

Mottistone MSS 3/96, Major General Sir Frederick Maurice to Seely, 11 June 1918.

War Diary, Appendix F [Undated].

Canada.<sup>1</sup> On 2 May 1919, a service was held at St. Paul's Cathedral for the fallen of the cavalry and yeomanry. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade sent representatives. The Brigade had lost 514 men of all ranks.<sup>2</sup>

No longer in command, Seely was not able to participate in the victory parade of Saturday 3 May 1919 for 12,000 of the Dominion troops. The parade through London, past Buckingham Palace where the King reviewed it, was led by General Currie and his staff, followed by the Canadian Cavalry Brigade marching on foot as they had served most of the war dismounted, then came the Canadian Corps, 2nd and 4th Divisions, and then the other Dominions: Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Newfoundland. As the Canadian Cavalry Brigade reached Buckingham Palace, an arrow formation of the new Royal Air Force flew overhead and an air ship hovered above. This tribute was no doubt the result of instructions from the new Under-Secretary of State for Air, Major-General Jack Seely.<sup>3</sup> On 9 May 1919, Seely went down to Bramshott to bid farewell to the Brigade.<sup>4</sup> On 21 May the men entrained at Liphook for Liverpool and arrived home on 29 May 1919.

In the early 1920's, Seely as Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight from 1918, spent much time attempting to heal some of the scars of war. The desire for remembrance pervaded the country in the post-war period and, having lost his eldest son, he chaired the Monchy-le-Preux Committee, set up on the Isle of Wight in 1922 to adopt that devastated French village, near to where his son fell, and send it aid. When it was discovered that there was money to spare from the local appeals, the Committee decided to pay for the Monchy war memorial and the gates to the civilian cemetery, both of which still bear inscriptions acknowledging the village's debt to the people of the Isle of Wight. The Committee was under the auspices of the British League of Help, a national organisation of which he and Churchill were patrons. He attended the dedication of the many overseas and local war memorials and projects such as hospitals, set up in memory of the fallen. He continued to work to improve the employment prospects for ex-soldiers and pension rights

<sup>2</sup> War Diary, 2 May 1919.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> War Diary, 30 April 1919.

The Times, 5 May 1919 and War Diary, 3 May 1919. Seely was promoted on relinquishing his command as was the custom and had become Air Minister on 10 January 1919.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> War Diary, 9 May 1919.

for ranker officers. He also supported the work of the British Legion in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and became President of the House of Commons Branch.<sup>1</sup>

Following his years on the Western Front, he supported the embryo movement to ensure that the nation should have a permanent museum to commemorate the Great War.<sup>2</sup> He was among those who wanted to preserve the artefacts and archives in one building and became a member of the Standing Committee of the Imperial War Museum's Board of Trustees from 1920-1946, when he resigned through ill-health. During the Second World War he was anxious that the Imperial War Museum should be closely linked to a national war memorial or rehoused more centrally. In fact, it remained where it was and was enlarged to accommodate material from the Second World War.<sup>3</sup>

Seely was a war hero who had gained a reputation, especially among the Canadians, for his bravery, his compassion and his tactical success with the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, particularly at Moreuil Wood. His portrait by William Orpen hung in the Imperial War Museum and the equestrian portrait by Alfred Munnings, the official war artist of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, was exhibited in the Royal Academy. Seely also figured among the leading generals of the Great War in pictorial collections such as postcards. In the 1930s, when the immediate trauma of the Great War was more distant, the war poets and the generals, as well as some of the other ranks, began to publish their impressions and memories. The success of Adventure, which ran into several editions, encouraged Seely to produce further works.

Although neither the British Government nor Haig accorded him the recognition which he felt that his war service deserved, the greatly revered Marshal Foch was a personal friend and he received several foreign decorations, including the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honour from the French Government. Among his former adversaries, Gough had revised his opinions: 'The War blew away many misunderstandings and brought us all together in affectionate comradeship - and cold bows are no longer exchanged between General Seely

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Isle of Wight County Press, 25 October 1924.

G. Kavanagh, Museums and the First World War, Leicester, 1994, p.145.

Imperial War Museum B/6/2 Standing Committee of Board of Trustees Lord Mottistone (Major-General J. E. B. Seely), 1930-47.

and myself, but warmer greetings...I learnt to appreciate his courageous heart in maintaining his country's cause'. Seely and I eventually became great friends...He was generous-minded and never bore any malice'.

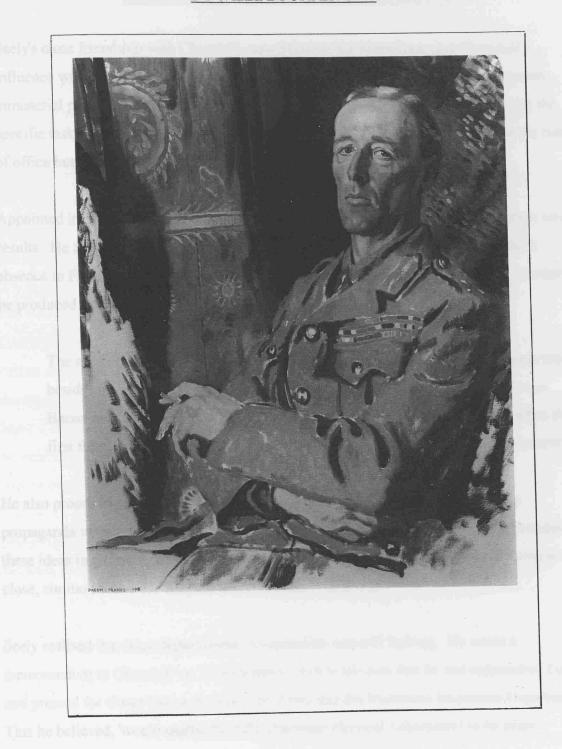
Seely had achieved the rank of Major General, and had served throughout the war, whilst Churchill, only a major, had cut short his time at the Front and had made a political comeback after the disaster of Gallipoli. The Curragh Incident had ruined Seely's career and his war service his health but he had served with distinction and success on the Western Front. When he returned home, having been denied any further military role, he set about rebuilding his career in politics.

H. Gough, The Fifth Army, 1931, p.44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> H. Gough, Soldiering On, 1954, p. 112.

# PLATE VII.

# BRIGADIER-GENERAL THE RT HON J.E.B. SEELY CB DSO MP BY WILLIAM ORPEN 1918.



#### CHAPTER SIX

## BACK IN OFFICE AND OUT AGAIN: 1918-1919.

Seely's close friendship with Churchill, now Minister for Munitions, and Churchill's influence with Lloyd George, the new Prime Minister, enabled Seely to obtain a junior ministerial post at the Minister of Munitions as Parliamentary Under-Secretary, with the specific task of overseeing the increased output of tanks. He was back on the bottom rung of office but at least he had a foothold.

Appointed in July 1918, he had, it transpired, less than four months in which to show any results. He took the opportunity make an impact in his new office during Churchill's absence in France, when he supported the introduction of a delayed action shell, on which he produced a memorandum:

The only persons who know about this and its possible application on a great scale, besides myself, are Sir Douglas Haig, whom I told verbally last week, Admiral Bacon and Sir Keith Price. Mr Churchill was away in France at the time when the first fuse to operate successfully was produced. He will be informed on his return.<sup>1</sup>

He also proposed the use of discordant sounds, dazzling lights and more effective propaganda within Germany, to confuse the enemy fire and spread terror. He elaborated on these ideas in a further memorandum and although the First World War was drawing to a close, similar ideas were adopted in the Second World War.<sup>2</sup>

Seely realised that inter-departmental co-operation was still lacking. He wrote a memorandum to Churchill on 10 September 1918 to tell him that he had approached Haig and pressed for closer liaison between the Army and the Munitions Inventions Department. This he believed, 'would enable the NPL [National Physical Laboratory] to be more

Mottistone MSS 23/7, Undated App A. 1918, Memorandum from Seely.

Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon was the commander of the Dover Patrol. Sir Keith Price was a Member of the Council of the Ministry of Munitions, 1917-1919. Mottistone MSS 23/7, Undated Appendix A, 1918 Memorandum from J. Seely.

completely at the disposal of the Army in the field'. It seems very late in the day, four years into the war, with the Allies driving back the German army, for a minister to be making such a recommendation, but Seely was an experienced commander of a brigade who had tried out new ideas whilst on the front line. He was also concerned with the supply of tractors. His personal involvement is evident, in a note in his own hand to a typescript on this subject, as well as his desire to appear to be consulting personally with Haig: 'You might show this letter to General Lawrence as soon as convenient. I had a discussion with the C in C [Haig] on the subject last week'. He also wrote to Washington with reference to the United States Government's agreement made with Churchill to supply 16,500 Browning machine rifles by the end of March 1919. A fortnight from the end of the war, Seely and the Office of Works were negotiating for extra men to be put on night shifts and on Sundays at Morecambe Filling Factory.

Following the end of the war, Lloyd George, anxious to retain power as leader of the Coalition and save the Liberal Party from the effects of the split with Asquith, decided to call an election for 14 December 1918. This was the so-called 'Coupon Election' whereby the supporters of the war-time coalition were endorsed by both Lloyd George and Bonar Law. The Labour Party members, who had largely withdrawn from the coalition on 15 November, and the Liberal supporters of Asquith, were left outside. Both Churchill, who was anxious to maintain the Coalition into peacetime, and Seely received the 'coupon'.

Seely stood as a Coalition Liberal and was opposed by a Labour Party candidate at Ilkeston. He went up to Dundee on 28 November 1918 to canvass for Churchill, who had left to return to his sick wife. The electoral roll in Ilkeston had increased by over 8,000 since 1912 so that the support for Seely among the additional workers and women over 30 years of age who had been enfranchised in 1918 was as yet unknown. The result at Ilkeston was not very different from the by-election in 1912 although Seely now faced a Labour candidate instead of a Conservative. His share of the vote rose slightly from 53.6%, a

Mottistone MSS 23/32, Seely to Churchill, 10 August 1918.

Mottistone MSS 23/39-40, Seely to Brigadier-General Lyon, 20 August 1918.
General Sir Henry Lawrence had replaced General Sir Launcelot Kiggell at GHQ in January 1918.

Mottistone MSS 23/38, Seely to Barclay, Washington 13 August 1918.

majority of 1,211 in the previous election, to 54.8%, a majority of 1,698. The Labour share of the vote was 45.2% compared with the Conservative share in 1912 of 46.4%, indicating that should there be a three-cornered contest in the future, Seely's position would be uncertain. Nationally, the Coalition romped home with 478 seats but only 133 were Lloyd George Liberals and only ten were Labour supporters. The opposition, fragmented into six main groups, included 63 seats held by Labour, 28 by the Liberal supporters of Asquith, six Irish Nationalists and 73 by Sinn Fein, who refused to come to Westminster from Ireland.

On 3 January 1919, Seely received a brief letter from Lloyd George asking for his resignation from the Ministry of Munitions owing to the end of the war.<sup>1</sup> Churchill, appointed Secretary of State for War from 10 January 1919 in the new Government, now had an unemployed Seely to help. He remained loyal and wrote to Lloyd George on 26 December 19 with reference to finding him a possible ministerial position, suggesting the Ministry of Pensions.<sup>2</sup>

Seely had had a useful few months in a junior capacity at the Ministry of Munitions but Lloyd George was kept in power by the Conservative majority in the Coalition so there was an overwhelming number of Conservatives who expected office in return for support. Ilis priority was not finding Seely a post, however well and sympathetically Churchill spoke of him, but holding on to the premiership. Pensions in fact went to Laming Worthington-Evans who had the advantage of being a Conservative with experience in office whilst Seely had been away on active service.

Churchill's appointment as Secretary of State for War now included the Air Ministry. His solution to finding a ministerial appointment for Seely was to take him into his department as Under-Secretary of State on the Air Board, a post confirmed by Lloyd George on 10 January 1919.<sup>3</sup> This was a compromise position for although the Air Board was a self-contained department, it was subordinate to the War Office. Churchill was still Seely's superior. Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the <u>Daily Express</u> and <u>Evening Standard</u>,

Mottistone MSS 23/93, Lloyd George to Seely, 3 January 1919.

Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, vol IV, p. 177, Churchill to Lloyd George, 26 December 1918.

Mottistone MSS 23/97, Lloyd George to Seely, 9 January 1919.

recognised Seely's position when he wrote, 'Churchill was well pleased with his new place in 1919. Colonel Seely at the Air Ministry was peeping out from behind his coat tails'. The <u>Daily Mail</u> also agreed: 'We shall have air proposals bandied to and fro between Mr Walter Long, the new First Lord of the Admiralty, Mr Churchill at the War Office and General Seely who has to fetch and carry for Mr Churchill'. Seely, however, tried to appear independent. The immediate post-war problem facing the Air Ministry was to organise the demobilisation of the serving men in the Royal Air Force which he realised would lead to unemployment. In a speech in the House of Commons on 19 November 1919, he put in a plea to the Government to delay their stand-off.<sup>3</sup>

Seely's first task was to accompany Churchill to the peace conference in Paris in 1919. He represented Churchill on the Aviation Committee, the main outcome of which was the prohibition of all German military and naval air forces and the destruction of all air materials. (Clauses 198-202). The newly created League of Nations was to consider the establishment of internationally recognised flight paths which, together with the recognition of international sea-lanes and markers, became interests of Seely between the wars.

He supported the principle of the League, a popular cause with the intelligentsia, and became the President of the Hampshire Federation of the League of Nations from its inception. This post was not held just because he was the Lord-Lieutenant of the county but he seems to have genuinely believed in the cause. During the election campaign of November 1922 he wrote to the electors of Ilkeston making out a case for the League which he was convinced should be maintained, extended and strengthened so that mutual disarmament could be secured.<sup>4</sup>

Although he had been through the war, he opposed the punitive nature of the Treaty of Versailles, especially the imposition of the War Guilt Clause (231) upon the Germans. He wrote: 'Whether the Peace imposed upon Germany was too vindictive, we shall never know. I shuddered when the deed was done...I think it was in the minds of all of us that, although

Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, vol IV, p. 197.

Lord Beaverbrook, Men and Power 1917-1918, 1956, p. 142.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol CXXI, col 1023, 19 November 1919.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ilkeston Pioneer, 3 November 1922.

we had obviously tried to do the best, the seeds of other, more desperate conflicts were to be found in the Treaty which had been signed'. Thus by 1931 he feared that the Treaty could be a factor giving rise to another European war. He felt, though, that under Hindenburg, the German Chancellor, the Germans could be trusted not to seize the Rhineland once the Allied army of occupation had been withdrawn.

His war experiences had shown the efficacy of air attack, as opposed to unsupported and expensive land expeditions. He therefore supported Trenchard, now Chief of Staff of the RAF, over how air power should be used, specifically in Somaliland in 1919, where the Mullah was causing trouble. A successful air operation, followed up by a single battalion of the King's African Rifles with the addition of a local Camel Corps, cost £77,000, a fraction of a purely land-based invasion.<sup>2</sup> This set an example for future operations and was immediately followed in the summer of 1920, after Seely's resignation ,with the deployment of ten squadrons supported by a small land force to Mesopotamia. The campaign in Somaliland had given Seely and Trenchard the opportunity to show the economic and effective use which could be made of the Royal Air Force, which would add weight to their argument for an Air Ministry independent of the War Office and Admiralty.

Seely's advocacy of a separate ministry predated his appointment in 1919, to the time, in July 1912 when he was Secretary of State for War and therefore with nothing to gain personally from wishing to see an independent Air Ministry.<sup>3</sup> Once Under-Secretary for Air, he took up the cause again and had to fight for his corner, as 'The Air Ministry was small, new and had few friends'.<sup>4</sup> This time, Seely had much to gain from achieving a separate ministry, especially if he could acquire a Cabinet seat for the Air Minister. His determination to press for this was brought to a head by his relations with Winston Churchill who, he considered, was not giving air affairs proper attention.

There was a growing concern that Churchill had bitten off more than he could chew by taking on the War Office and the Air Ministry. The Times wrote: But can any single man

M. Armitage, The Royal Air Force, 1993, p.34.

Seely, <u>Fear and Be Slain</u>, p.243.

A. Gollin, The Impact of Air Power on the British People and their Government 1909-14, 1989, p.196.

Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, vol IV, p. 208.

cover the huge span of both these Departments of the Army and the Air? We gravely doubt it...One horse, one man; we doubt even Mr Churchill's ability to ride two at once, especially two such high spirited and mettlesome creatures'. This doubt began to spread and was taken up by Walter Long at the Admiralty, who wrote to Lloyd George on 1 February 1919 on the matter, adding, 'You have an excellent man in Seely - keen and knowledgeable'. He went on to advocate a separate ministry under Seely.¹ Lloyd George, however, wanted Churchill to keep both offices. It was cheaper to have Air under the War Office than to set up a separate department, especially at a time when there was a general desire for reduced costs on defence.

In the meantime Seely had to do all the donkey work of the department. The Times on 12 November 1919 pointed out that the Under-Secretary for Air had a higher status than was usual for such a position because he introduced the Air Estimates, answered all questions addressed to the Air Ministry, took the lead in debates on Air legislation and administration so that 'It was only occasionally that members were reminded that behind him was the suzerainty of Mr. Churchill'. Once again, Seely was the chief spokesman in the Commons for his ministry but without Cabinet rank.

He had begun to anger Churchill by his criticisms and by making independent decisions. One of his main complaints was that Churchill did not keep up to date with ministerial correspondence and his increasing exasperation over Churchill's failure to deal with his letters on Air Ministry affairs was met by Churchill's increasingly censorious attitude to Seely. There had been a few minor conflicts over, for example, Seely's alleged misrepresentation of casualty figures.<sup>3</sup> A serious disagreement, however, arose over Sir Frederick Banbury, who was appointed chairman of a House of Commons Select Committee of Enquiry on National Expenditure in July 1919. Banbury questioned Trenchard on the use of Royal Air Force aeroplanes by members of the Air Ministry and especially by the civilian members. The breach between Churchill and Seely came about not because of the nature of the enquiry but because, at one stage, Seely had countermanded

Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, vol IV, p. 197-198.

The Times, 12 November 1919.

Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, vol IV, p. 207.

Churchill's instructions concerning an apology to Banbury over a change of schedule during the enquiry. Churchill wrote to Seely, censuring his underling:

My Dear Jack,

I really must protest against your conduct in cancelling the specific instructions which I had given McAnally about the apology sent to Banbury. You had no right to do this and the consequences have been most unfortunate...

I have written a letter to Banbury apologising for this further indignity to which he has been subjected and I have censored McAnally for disregarding my instructions. I very much regret that you should treat me in the way you do.<sup>1</sup>

Seely replied in a long, handwritten answer explaining his side of the matter but failed to mollify Churchill, who replied, 'You countermanded my instructions and took some other action which you thought better, without even informing me of the change you had made' and he chided him for not even writing him a note on the matter.<sup>2</sup> The fact that it took Churchill from 17 July-24 August to acknowledge Seely's letter of explanation seems to support the latter's complaint that Churchill did not keep up with his correspondence. Churchill for his part was not prepared to put up with Seely's constant badgering about a separate Ministry and put him in his place over what seems a trivial slight.

The Select Committee on National Expenditure, under Banbury, was investigating corruption within the Air Ministry. It covered a variety of aspects. The investigation of 7 August 1919 dealt with the finances of the Ministry. The committee commented that there was a tendency by the Air Ministry to usurp the functions which belonged properly to the Finance Department. There was evidence of corruption at the Renfrew Aerodrome where account books and time-sheets were falsified. In the Clothing Department, contracts had been given to a Manchester firm for greatcoats which had not been put out to tender. There was also a lengthy account of the evidence from Miss O'Sullivan of the WRAF Clothing Department who alleged irregularities over contracts and stated that in her department 40

Mottistone MSS 23/248, Seely to Churchill, 17 July 1919 and 23/250, Churchill to Seely, 24 August 1919.

Mottistone MSS 23/245, Churchill to Seely, 15 July 1919. Banbury, MP for the City of London and Chairman of the Great Northern Railway. Henry McAnally had been Assistant Secretary to the Air Ministry from 1918.

men were doing inspection work which could be done by 12 women. The irritation expressed by Churchill over the somewhat trivial issue of Seely altering the schedule by which Banbury was to attend the enquiry into the complaints made by Miss O'Sullivan may have gone much deeper and be rooted in the exposure of the corruption within the Air Ministry, which ultimately was his responsibility, and Seely's attempt to exert his independence over finance.

Not only was Seely an advocate of a separate Air Ministry, he also favoured the creation of a Ministry of Defence. In July 1919, he presented a memorandum on the matter to Lloyd George, at the Prime Minister's request. Sir Henry Wilson recorded in his diary how he stayed with Lloyd George and Churchill at Criccieth, on 11 July 1919, and they discussed the idea. Wilson and Churchill 'warmly advocated' it. Lloyd George was unenthusiastic and said that the difficulty would be to find three good Under-Secretaries. 'Churchill', wrote Wilson, 'who already sees himself Minister of Defence, suggested Hugh Cecil for the War Office, Freddie Guest for Air and no-one as yet for the Admiralty'. They were all cronies of long-standing. There was no suggestion that if Seely's proposition was implemented, there would also be a place for him. Seely suspected that Churchill had taken up the idea of a Ministry of Defence to undermine any possibility of creating three autonomous ministries and to enlarge his sphere of influence. By advocating a separate Ministry of Defence, Seely could find himself squeezed out.

Now on the defensive, Seely began to approach men of influence about his proposals for a separate Air Ministry. He wrote to Sir Maurice Hankey, Cabinet Secretary, on 4 November 1919, 'I am convinced that it is necessary that there should be a separate Air Force directed by a separate Air Ministry, equal in authority to the Admiralty and the War Office'.<sup>3</sup> Hankey saw Lloyd George but got nowhere, for the Prime Minister told him that there already was a separate Air Ministry, 'and the fact that the Secretary of State for War is also the Secretary of State for Air makes no difference'.<sup>4</sup> Seely told Trenchard in November 1919, 'Winston's impossible. He's busy grooming himself for the post of Defence Minister.

4

W. J. Philpot, 'The Campaign for a Ministry of Defence, 1919-1936', in P. Smith ed., Government and the Armed Forces in Britain, 1856-1990, 1998, p. 116.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Callwell, <u>Sir Henry Wilson</u>, vol II, p. 203.

Mottistone MSS 23/282, Seely to Hankey, 4 November 1919.

Mottistone MSS 23/284, Hankey to Seely, 5 November 1919.

I'm going to force his hand and the Government's. Either they agree to a separate Air Ministry, or I go'.<sup>1</sup>

On 10 November 1919 and after less than a year in office, Seely, having failed in his quest, decided to resign. This brought his ministerial career, once more, to an end. He returned to the back benches, as he had previously done following his resignation in March 1914, becoming the only minister to have resigned twice. He was succeeded by a Conservative, G. C. Tryon, later First Lord Tryon, who held the post for a mere three months before being moved to Pensions whereupon the 7th Marquess of Londonderry succeeded him.<sup>2</sup>

Churchill wrote to Seely, this time the day after the resignation:

My dear Jack,

I am grieved to receive yr letter; but after our numerous talks I feel there is nothing more to be said.

I did what ever was in my power wh sincere and old friendship suggested to assist yr return from the military to the political arena. Had greater offices been in my sphere of influence, I wd have found one for you. As it was I was able only to secure for you the best in my power. That after trial and consn you do not find it possible to retain this will always be a source of deep regret to me.

I cannot accuse myself in any way; but that does not at all lesson the disappt wh I feel at the course you have taken or my conviction that yr own interests wd have pointed differently.<sup>3</sup> [Abbreviations as in text].

The tone of the letter suggests that Churchill believed that Seely was acting as he did because he had failed to obtain a more senior post but in the latter's resignation speech on 12 November 1919 and in subsequent speeches, Seely's main objection was that Churchill

1

A. Boyle, Trenchard, 1962, pp. 346-347.

Londonderry had a keen interest in aviation and in 1931 was to become Secretary Of State for Air with a seat in the Cabinet.

Gilbert, Winston S. Churchill, vol IV, p. 214.

had failed to give the Air Ministry the attention which it required. He returned to his criticism that one man could not run both the War Office and the Air Ministry. To do so, he asserted, was wasteful of time, energy and money, it left out the Admiralty from decisions and it condemned the Air Ministry to a subordinate role. The Times on 13 November 1919 acknowledged that Seely had resigned on a matter of principle.

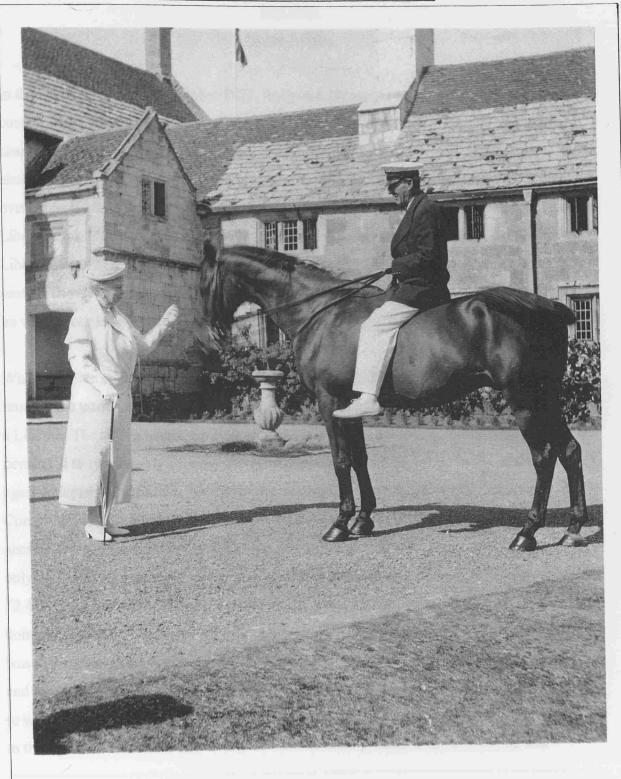
On 31 October 1922, Sir Samuel Hoare was appointed the first Secretary of State for Air of an independent department and achieved Cabinet rank on 25 May 1923. In a letter to <u>The Times</u> on 29 May 1923, Seely wrote, 'Tout vient à qui sait attendre' but regretted that it had taken so long and that as a result Britain was lagging behind other nations in air development.

Seely had the perception to realise the potential and importance of the air force after its showing in the Great War and although his unrelenting arguments for a separate ministry might have furthered his career by restoring to him a seat in the Cabinet, when he failed to carry the day he did not give in and retain office, he resigned. He had lost Churchill's support by the independent way in which he ran his ministry and his attacks upon his chief's competence. No longer was he to ride tandem behind Churchill and although they remained on good terms, there was not the close friendship of the past.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol CXI, cols 373-376, 12 November 1919.

# PLATE VIII

# QUEEN MARY WITH LORD MOTTISTONE (RIDING WARRIOR) MOTTISTONE MANOR 4 AUGUST 1934



# CHAPTER SEVEN <u>ELDER STATESMAN AND LOCAL DIGNITARY: 1919-1947.</u>

#### Part One.

## Home Affairs.

In the General Election of October 1922, Seely lost his seat at Ilkeston, in his first three-way contest with the Labour and Conservative Parties. The result was affected by psephological changes brought about by the increasing strength of the Labour Party, its decision to abandon its agreement with the Liberals after the war and the enfranchisement of women over 30 in 1918. Labour won Ilkeston with 40% of the poll. Seely, standing as a National Liberal, took 35.3% and the Conservative 24.7%. Nationally, Labour won 142 seats and the Liberals, who were divided between the supporters of Lloyd George and Asquith, took 116 seats. The Conservatives, with 347 seats, formed the government under Bonar Law, though he was succeeded by Stanley Baldwin the following May.

When Baldwin called a General Election in December 1923 to obtain a mandate to reintroduce tariffs, Seely decided at the last minute to return to the Isle of Wight to stand as a Liberal. The sitting tenant, Sir Edward Chatfield-Clark, a life-long family friend, was persuaded to stand down for him.¹ Seely won narrowly with 90 votes, 46.5% of the poll, against Captain Macdonald, the Conservative candidate, who took 46.2%. Nationally, the Conservatives lost their over-all majority and Ramsay MacDonald decided to call yet another General Election in October 1924. This time, Seely was heavily defeated, taking only 37.8% of the poll compared with Macdonald who had a majority of 5,402 votes and 52.4% of the poll. Labour came a poor third, as usual, on the Island. Seely had squeezed home in 1923 largely because the electorate was caught unawares by his candidature. He was defeated in 1924 because of his consistent opposition to the reintroduction of tariffs and the successful Conservative publicity depicting him as a weather vane, unable to decide to which party he belonged.² His defeat brought an end to a quarter of a century of service to the House of Commons and he retired from national politics until, in 1933, he was

Election Supplement to the <u>Isle of Wight County Press</u>, 25 October 1924.

Mottistone MSS 27/2, Chatfield-Clark to Seely, 16 December 1923. Clark regretted that there had not been enough time to refute the Protectionists.

created First Baron Mottistone, taking his title from his home village, and was able to play an active part in the Lords.

Local affairs, always an important part of his life, now occupied him. As Lord Lieutenant, he was the permanent representative of the Crown in the county, fulfilling ceremonial duties and authorising the appointment of the magistrates.<sup>1</sup> There were also ancient duties concerning the armed forces, especially in connection with the raising of local reserves. In addition to his attendance at the dedication of a variety of memorials following the Great War, he officiated at the opening of public buildings such as hospitals, libraries and schools throughout Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and was expected to grace social functions for fund-raising.<sup>2</sup>

Unanimously elected in 1919 as an Alderman of the Isle of Wight County Council, he took an active part in Island politics.<sup>3</sup> He led deputations to the Ministry of Transport to have the Island roads reclassified in 1924, and to support the passage of the Isle of Wight Highways Act (1925). As a result, the rates were reduced overall and the County Council took over the cost of maintaining rural roads from the Rural District Councils.<sup>4</sup>

He was concerned about unemployment in Hampshire and on the Island after the Great War, and supported road building schemes such as the Eastern Road, Portsmouth and the extension to East Cowes' Esplanade. He declared that he wanted: 'works of utility for the unemployed, including the keeping open and improvement of the Island harbours and the cheapening of transport'. These were, however, in the nature of public works schemes rather than any commitment to a philosophy of state intervention. In his speeches on his return to England from his German tour in 1935, he used his experiences in an attempt to influence thinking about unemployment. He visited South Wales to see the situation for himself and he addressed the question during a meeting of the North-West Regional Savings Conference at Lytham St Anne's on 11 October 1935. He spoke of the urgent need

Hampshire Record Office, <u>Lieutenancy Letter Books 1918-1942</u> Q 30/1/12 illustrate his duties.

E.g. E. F. Laidlaw, <u>The Royal National Hospital</u>, <u>Ventnor</u>, Newport, 1990, p. 51.

The Times, 11 December 1919.

Isle of Wight County Press Jubilee Supplement, p. 110.

Isle of Wight County Press, 18 October 1924, speech in Newport.

to reduce unemployment and advocated schemes for land drainage and reclamation as offering the widest scope for the employment of direct labour. He also favoured the production of more oil from our coal reserves to provide employment for the miners and he concluded, 'Young people are growing up who have never done any work or seen their fathers do any work. Stop the rot now'. As early as 1929, the Ministry of Labour had opened a labour camp at Presteigne in mid-Wales. By 1939, there were ten such camps in Britain which took in 25,000 unemployed aged 18-25 years. There is no evidence that these owed anything to Seely's influence and they were of dubious value, but as so often in his career, he was tapping into a problem, publicising it and suggesting a solution.

He had a life-long love of the Island, concern for the environment and love of the countryside but believed that it should be more accessible to the public. He had written to Lloyd George as early as 1913, congratulating him on a speech which he had made at Swindon suggesting that the Land Commissioners should be given powers to extend the rights of way through large estates.<sup>3</sup> This question was still being debated at the end of the millennium.

As Lord Lieutenant, Seely was a keen supporter of the University College of Southampton and of its aspiration to become a chartered university. With other local notables, he was instrumental in lobbying for funds from the general public in 1930 to set up an engineering laboratory to be known as the Scott-Montagu Laboratory, in memory of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, a former Governor of the College.<sup>4</sup> He was elected in 1934 to succeed Dr. Montefiore as President, a largely honorary post, which he held until his death in 1947.<sup>5</sup> As a mark of his long association, Seely's widow presented his medals to the College.

The Times, 22 March 1922. Insufficient funds were donated so that only a prize resulted to commemorate Scott-Montagu.

The Times, 12 October 1935, reported the speech in full.

S. Humphries & P. Gordon, Forbidden Britain. Our Secret Past 1900-1960, 1994, p. 116.

House of Lords Record Office, Lloyd George Papers C/Box 6/4, Seely to Lloyd George, 23 September 1913.

Southampton University Library Archives and MSS MSI.MBK.1/7-8 Council Minute Book 1929-37 and 1938-51, University of Southampton and A. Temple Patterson, <u>The University of Southampton</u>, Southampton, 1962, p. 181

His love of the sea dated from his youth when he had sailed before the mast to the Antipodes. He became coxswain of the Brooke Lifeboat and annually gave a dinner for its crew of local fisherman and farmhands. Even when a Minister, he made a point of attending the practice launch twice a year. At the age of 66 he was still on call and took his place in the Yarmouth Lifeboat when it successfully rescued six sailors. As President of the Isle of Wight Lifeboat Board, he regularly presided at its annual meetings in Newport and visited mainland stations. He was also particularly interested in promoting the Territorial Army, rifle clubs, and the Boy Scout Movement. Whilst some of his activities were honorary and ceremonial, he was one of the last in the long tradition of non-stipendary local dignitaries who believed that he or she should fulfil one's obligations to the community in a practical way. In recognition of these services, he was given the Freedom of the City of Portsmouth in 1927. The citation mentioned, especially, his work to acquire playing fields for the people.<sup>2</sup>

To enhance income, Seely became a director of various concerns between the wars and wrote his memoirs. He travelled widely as a director of Thomas Cook and was on the Board of Wembley Stadium from its inception. His social life was largely based on sporting activities, golf, sailing and hunting in particular, though he loved music and art as well. However, after losing his seat, he lacked a positive outlet for his energies on the national scene.

The opportunity to widen his scope came in 1926 when he was appointed by the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, to be Chairman of the National Savings Committee. He held this post until 1943 and then became Vice-Chairman until his death in 1947. He was already the Chairman of HM Forces Savings Association and of the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, so had had some experience of the task ahead. Winston Churchill was now Chancellor of the Exchequer and he probably recommended Seely for the post.<sup>3</sup> Another friend of many years, Lord Birkenhead, was also a member of the Cabinet at the time. Seely's ready manner, practice at public speaking and willingness to travel the country made him a suitable choice, though he admitted that he had never personally been

The Times, 11 January 1912 and 28 November 1912.

Portsmouth Evening News, 13 October 1927.

Lord Mottistone to author, 31 October 1997.

any good at saving.1 His task was to promote the formation of small local savings groups so that in the course of one week, for example, he visited the East Midlands, Winchester and Newcastle.<sup>2</sup> In 1931, he presented the 1,000 millionth National Savings Certificate to King George V. Arthur Henderson, the Secretary of the Labour Party, writing from Transport House in the same year, commended him for holding meetings throughout the country to promote the movement, and congratulated him on his 'able and energetic leadership', especially the measures to encourage the small saver.<sup>3</sup> Sir Robert Kindersley, a Director of the Bank of England, was in a position to advise the Government on economic measures and receives the credit, as President of the National Savings Association from 1920-1946 for its success,4 but the National Savings Committee, which did all the work, was under Seely's direction. Kindersley himself publicly acknowledged this and pointed out that Seely had kept interest in the National Savings Movement alive throughout difficult years.<sup>5</sup> The National Savings Association was therefore in a strong position to play a significant role during the Second World War, though Seely had had to fight to prevent it being absorbed by the Ministry of Information.<sup>6</sup> The Government was anxious to cut consumption and reduce inflation, by taking spending power out of the economy at a time of shortages. National Savings became a useful adjunct to the rationing of commodities and the imposition of price controls, such as the Goods and Services (Price Control) Act of 1941, which gave the Government power to impose maximum prices. Together, these measures successfully kept inflation down more than had proved possible during the Great War. The contribution of National Savings to the National Debt was also significant in the Second World War in that there was a greater percentage of direct money raised by the British Government compared with debt funding, than there had been in the Great War. Seely had made, therefore, an effective contribution to an important area of the Government's economic policy. His successor, Sir Harold Mackintosh, recognised this in 1947 when he wrote:

Isle of Wight County Press, 10 February 1940.

Mottistone MSS 4/29, Seely to Lord Reading, 27 September 1931.

Mottistone MSS 4/26, Henderson to Seely, 24 September 1931.

<sup>4</sup> A. Calder, <u>The People's War. Britain 1939-1945</u>, 1969, p. 356.

The Times, 15 November 1947.

Mottistone MSS 5/198, Hoare to Seely, 26 May 1939, 5/206, Seely to Hoare, 1 June 1936, 5/240, Simon to Seely, 25 August 1939.

The movement has lost one of the best friends it ever had. It was largely due to his work and personality that the savings movement was maintained in such good heart in the years between the two world wars and was found ready to serve the nation when the last war began.<sup>1</sup>

During the Great War, the Government, as in previous wars, raised loans by selling stock. Three War Loans were raised, in 1914, 1915 and 1917. In 1919, the Victory Loan was floated and Seely arrived from London, by air, to promote it at a meeting in St. James's Square, Newport. The War Loan paid 5% interest, which was deemed necessary to retain foreign investors, but it took too much of the government's income at the expense, for example, of funding social policy.<sup>2</sup> In 1932, faced with the continuing economic crisis, Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in MacDonald's National Government, supported by the Bank of England, offered to redeem the stock. For those who wished to retain their holdings, the Government proposed to reduce the rate of interest from 5% to 3½% on the £2,000 million debt. Sir Warren Fisher, the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, entrusted Seely with the publicity. His task was to persuade the investors to accept this reduction as a patriotic duty. He was chosen because he was a war hero and was widely known in the country as a result of his work to promote National Savings. With the depression generally reducing interest rates to 2%, he found that there was a willingness to support the proposal of a guaranteed interest of 31/2% and his tours resulted in public acquiescence in the Loan Conversion, which saved £23 million immediately. In 1934, the savings on the Budget enabled the Government to reverse the spending cuts made in 1931.

Seely's elevation to the peerage was in recognition of his work to publicise the Loan Conversion and as Chairman of the National Savings Committee. Both were ideal motives for ennobling him, if, as his friends believed, somewhat belatedly. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, was ultimately responsible for the recommendations to the Crown for any inclusion in the Honours List. He and Seely had always been on friendly terms in the Commons and were together briefly on the Western Front, one as a combatant and the other as an observer. In 1933, MacDonald led the National Government which had been formed in August 1931 and which may have owed something to Seely's persistence.

Isle of Wight County Press, 15 November 1947.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, <u>English History 1914-1945</u>, 1965, p. 125.

Between the wars, the idea of a National Government, as opposed to a coalition, emerged as a possible solution to the problems of the day. In 1922, Seely had made a plea for the continuation of the war-time coalition but took it a stage further. He believed that the war had shown that country was greater than party and pronounced, 'I stand now for national co-operation for men of all parties'. He expressed his belief that 'the party game had done England nothing but harm...if they could get away from it forever it would be the better for England'. His plea failed, for the Conservatives refused to fight a second election on a 'coupon'. He was not just motivated by self-interest when threatened with the loss of his Liberal seat, for he returned to the theme after he had left the Commons.

The General Election of May 1929 had resulted in Labour gaining 288 seats, Conservatives 260 and the Liberals 59. Ramsay MacDonald returned to office with a minority Labour Government, dependent upon Liberal support as he had been in 1924. He faced rising unemployment, a budget deficit and a lack of consensus in his party as to how to tackle the economic crisis. In 1930, the situation worsened, Government borrowing reached £70 million and the registered unemployed were 16.1 % of the insured workforce.<sup>2</sup>

Various ideas were being floated in the 1930s as an answer to the political and economic problems, including those expounded by Oswald Mosley after his resignation from the Labour Party. By the end of 1930, Mosley had also started to attract disgruntled elder statesmen exasperated by the current stalemate and looking for some new departure. Winston Churchill had also been considering an alternative to the political stalemate when on 30 June 1930, in the Romanes Lecture at Oxford, he had suggested a solution to the country's economic problems by advocating a kind of meritocracy. A similar idea had been floated by Seely as early as 1909 in a conversation with King Edward VII. The King perceptively argued that if he appointed a government of 'best men', who then proved

A. Thorpe, Britain in the Era of the Two World Wars 1914-45, 1994, p. 88.

M. Gilbert, Prophet of Truth. Winston S. Churchill 1922-1939, 1976, p.362.

Ilkeston Pioneer, 3 November 1922.

G. R. Searle, Country Before Party. Coalition and the Idea of 'National Government' in Modern Britain 1885-1987, 1995, p. 154.

unpopular and were voted out by the people, who then would be able to replace them; 'a government of worse men'?<sup>1</sup>

In 1930, Seely began to promote actively the idea of a National Government as a practical solution to the immediate political and economic problems.<sup>2</sup> He customarily socialised, dined and played bridge with politically influential men, especially at the Other Club, the Athenaeum, Brooks's and the Royal Yacht Squadron, entertained at his London home and was a guest at great houses.<sup>3</sup> Although no longer in Parliament or Government office, he was, therefore, still in contact with policy makers and was party to their discussions. At the time, 'London clubland and Westminster were awash with rumours and vague panaceas'.<sup>4</sup> A letter of 3 July 1930, for example, from John Simon, referring to a report which Simon was drawing up on the Indian situation asked Seely to 'keep the conversation last night as strictly confidential...this holds good particularly if as you said you might be lunching with the PM'.<sup>5</sup>

Seely had, therefore, sufficient stature to invite leading politicians to consider his proposals over dinner at the Athenaeum on 29 October 1930. The guests included Ramsay MacDonald, Lloyd George, Lord Reading and their sons, Churchill, Sir Robert Horne, Henry Mond, [the son of Lord Melchet] and Lord Southborough, 'an exceptionally close friend of the King'. Discussion, lasting three hours, ensued. He followed this by making contacts with leading figures in the City and held a further meeting, also at the Athenaeum, on 3 December 1930. Lloyd George's son, Gwilym, represented him this time. Ramsay

Searle, Country before Party, p. 164. Searle descibes him as a 'fervent advocate'.

Searle, Country before Party, p. 163.

Seely, <u>Adventure</u>, p. 136.

Mottistone MSS 4/16, Blenheim Palace Game Card, 11-12 November 1930, 4/20, Marlborough to Seely, 17 November 1930. Seely had organised a torchlight procession for the Duke.

Bodleian Library, MS Simon 65 General Correspondence Papers, 26 June - July 1930, fol 78-2067, Simon to Seely, 3 July 1930. Simon was then the Chairman of the Indian Statutory Commission.

Sir Robert Horne had been Chancellor of the Exchequer in Lloyd George's Coalition Government. Philip Williamson, National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926-1932, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 151 ff. Williamson identifies the contacts as Louis Greig, a stockbroker and Gentleman Usher to the King and friend of MacDonald, Felix Schuster, R. H. Brand and Lord Kindersley, bankers. D. Marquand, Ramsay MacDonald, 1977, pp. 580 ff.

MacDonald's son, Malcolm, recalled the events to Seely: 'I remember your dinner party shortly before the formation of the National Government in 1931 when you broached the subject of a National Government in the presence of a number of leading political personalities'.<sup>1</sup>

Seely then made his ideas public with a letter, written from Mottistone Manor, to <u>The Times</u> on 3 December 1930. He firstly, though, submitted the text to the King who apparently favoured a national government as a solution to the nation's economic problems. Lord Stamfordham, the King's private secretary, replied and 'wished the General "every Success" '.<sup>2</sup>

The letter in The Times was headed 'General Seely's Plea'. He began by stating that he did not consider that another general election on party lines would be likely to solve the current unstable political situation nor the economic emergency. He believed that the disturbed situation in India would be worsened if the Indians felt that Britain was a divided nation, an opinion put to him by 'a very wise man'. He doubted that Britain, in a state of party strife could continue to hold its Empire: 'One or the other must go'. Relations with the Dominions would also be harmed by a lack of continuity over agricultural policies. He believed that the Government's need for economy and any proposals to cut unemployment benefit could not be resolved by a single party; any attempt to do so would bring it down. He disagreed with sceptics who did not believe that it was possible to form a national government. Referring to his experiences over the previous four and a half years as Chairman of the National Savings Committee, he said that he had met 'not hundreds but thousands of men and women of every class and shade of opinion' the majority of whom agreed that 'an all-party Government is essential if we are to cure our troubles'. He concluded by craving the help of The Times when he pleaded that 'this great act of statesmanship may be achieved before it is too late'.

<u>The Times</u> did indeed respond to Seely's call. An editorial of the same day examined his credentials for being taken seriously. The fact that he was no longer 'in the arena of party

discusses the results of Seely's first dinner party.

Mottistone MSS 5/154, Malcolm MacDonald to Seely, 19 November 1937.

Williamson, National Crisis and National Government: p. 153.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Identified by Williamson as Lord Reading, p. 156.

war' was considered an advantage and he had travelled widely around the country, which had put him in touch with the opinions of the floating voter. The main objection was that governments were not assembled 'like pieces of a puzzle' but determined by party political principles. On the other hand, the worsening economic situation had led, even the day before, to 100,000 Scottish coal miners being laid off. The Times therefore urged the Prime Minister to get a consensus with the Opposition, in which case 'the appeal of General Seely and all who think with him would be substantially answered'. The following day a number of letters appeared, challenging Seely. Alfred Duff Cooper, formerly the Conservative Financial Secretary at the War Office, firmly opposed the idea on the grounds that there were too many policy differences between the parties. Though not yet amenable to pursuing the ideas in practice, Ramsay MacDonald had, however, been made aware of Seely's arguments as a result of the dinners and then through his letter to The Times as early as October 1930.

MacDonald agreed in August 1931, under pressure from the Liberal and Conservative leaders, to form a National Government. On 8 September, Parliament met to pass Philip Snowden's stringent emergency budget. On 27 September 1931, Seely wrote to Lord Reading, putting pressure on him to support an all-party programme and telling him about 'an exceptionally large meeting of National Savings workers representing the East Midlands' where he witnessed a call for a concerted all-party lead. MacDonald agreed to hold an election, based on a joint policy statement, for 27 October. It was fought under MacDonald's name and the banner of a National Government and resulted in 554 supporters being returned of whom 13 were members of the Labour Party, 35 were National Liberals and 33 were Liberals. The remaining 473 members were members of the Conservative and Unionist Party. The independent Labour Party returned a mere 52 Members.

MacDonald returned as leader of a National Government which was to last, in one form or another to the end of the Second World War in 1945. The party leaders all saw something to their advantage. For Baldwin, it placed the onus on the Labour leadership to introduce unpopular benefit cuts. For Lloyd George's Liberals the arrangement was preferable to Baldwin taking office. The King has also been blamed for making use of MacDonald to

Mottistone MSS 4/29, Seely to Reading, 27 September 1931.

achieve an appearance of national unity.<sup>1</sup> As for MacDonald himself, his motives have been the subject of some debate. He has been both credited with putting the country's emergency before party and vilified for hanging on to power at the expense of his party. His critics in the Labour Party condemned his instant conversion to National Government and most of them refused to serve under him.

The National Government, with MacDonald as Prime Minister, contained representatives from the Conservative and Unionist Party, who took the majority of posts. The Liberals did well, with Lord Reading and Herbert Samuel taking the Foreign and Home Offices respectively. From among his few supporters in the Labour Party, Philip Snowden became Chancellor of the Exchequer, J. H. Thomas took the Colonial Office and Lord Sankey remained as Lord Chancellor. Baldwin became Lord President of the Council. Lloyd George, discredited since 1922, was side-lined because of his illness and Churchill remained on the back benches. Seely wrote that the new Government was a 'god-send' in the circumstances, but, in view of its predominantly Conservative membership, would have preferred a more 'broadly and solidly national' arrangement. He appealed, unsuccessfully, to the prominent Labour member, Arthur Henderson, to support it.<sup>2</sup>

On 3 November 1931 Seely received a letter from Ramsay MacDonald thanking him for his congratulations and adding 'I wish you had been in the team'. Seely later took some of the credit for the creation of the National Government. After his elevation to the House of Lords, he wrote to Sir John Simon, who had succeeded Lord Reading, to thank him for his congratulations and added, 'I shall be glad to be back at Westminster, and I believe I may be of service to the Government which, in a humble way, at its inception, I helped to make'. Lloyd George went as far as to dub him, 'Father of the National Government'. The Times obituary of Seely noted his contribution: 'In 1930 he wrote a forceful letter to The Times in

H. Nicolson, <u>King George V. His Life and Reign</u>, 1952, p. 465 and K. Rose, <u>King George V</u>, 1983, p. 379.

Williamson, National Crisis and National Government, p. 346, Reading Papers, F/118/131, Seely to Reading, 18 September 1931. Henderson had refused to accept benefit cuts.

Mottistone MSS 4/45, MacDonald to Seely, 3 November 1931.

Bodleian Library. MS Simon 76 fol 183, vol 2068, General Correspondence Papers March-June 1933, Seely to John Simon, 10 June 1933.

Williamson, National Crisis and National Government, p.154.

which he stated that headship of the British Empire and party strife at home were incompatible and pleaded for an all-party government'. G. R. Searle believes that this was 'the event which more than any other made the idea of 'National Government' a major talking point', though he goes on to say that the letter was 'only one episode in the flurry of speculation on the subject'. The letter had stimulated the public debate on the advisability and possibility of solving the crisis with a National Government. His wide circle of personal contacts had enabled Seely to broach the question with men of influence but economic events and MacDonald's pragmatism controlled the outcome.

When Seely returned to Westminster in 1933, he had an audience for his opinions on national issues such as the need for a Ministry of Defence. He had first proposed this 20 years before, when Secretary of State for War. It had been discussed in the Commons in 1928 and 1929 and in the Lords in 1926 and in 1934. He proposed to reintroduce the subject in the debate on defence on 15 May 1935 but met with opposition from Hankey, who was personally opposed, as a result of his observations of the Australian system, and anxious that Seely should not upset MacDonald, whose supporters were inclined towards disarmament. Hankey realised, however, that some integration was necessary and drafted a speech for Seely in which he proposed a body more on the lines of the pre-war High Level Bridge meetings. He also tried to get the debate postponed.<sup>3</sup> Seely refused to be side-tracked and kept to his original proposition, though his speech was criticised the next day in the Morning Post as unrealistic.<sup>4</sup> Hankey then had to do some damage limitation. He wrote to Baldwin with a statement suggesting that he should say that the Government was considering the question and would heed any points made in the debate on Defence, on 22 May, but was not, as yet in favour.<sup>5</sup> The vested interests of the separate service departments and the reluctance of successive Prime Ministers, Baldwin in particular, urged

Searle, County Before Party, pp. 162-163.

4 Morning Post, 17 May 1935.

The Times, 8 November 1947, Obituary, 'Lord Mottistone. Gallant figure in war and politics'.

W. J. Philpott, 'The Campaign for a Ministry of Defence, 1919-1939', P. Smith (ed), Government and the Armed Forces in Britain, 1856-1990, 1996, p. 146.

Public Record Office, CAB 21/4, Hankey to Hailsham, 10 May 1935.

Public Record Office, CAB 21/472, Private and Confidential, Hankey to Seely 10 May 1935.

Public Record Office, CAB 21/472, Hankey to Baldwin, 20 May 1935.

on by Hankey, to hand over the political direction of defence policy to one minister, frustrated Seely's efforts.

On 7 March 1936, Adolf Hitler reoccupied the Rhineland in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles. On 13 March 1936, a compromise solution over the question of a Minister of Defence was reached. Sir Thomas Inskip, the Attorney General, was appointed Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence. Seely's long campaign was at last largely satisfied. This office, however, only lasted until 3 May 1940 when it was abolished. On 10 May 1940, Hitler invaded the Low Countries and France and Winston Churchill took over as Prime Minister and appointed himself as Minister of Defence. It was only after the Second World War that Defence was relinquished by the Prime Minister, when Viscount Alexander took over from Attlee in 1946.

Seely's work for National Savings and the War Loan Conversion, his memoirs, his articles for the press and letters to <u>The Times</u> had kept his name before the public. His reputation as a war hero and his role in society had given him some influence over the formulation of policy, even though he no longer held government office, but this depended ultimately on whether those in power found it acceptable.

#### Part Two.

## Foreign Affairs.

The later 1930s, saw the decline of Seely's political influence. He was getting older, suffered increasingly from ill-health and became involved with the supporters of the European dictators. He had visited Italy, met Mussolini and, like other British visitors, was impressed with the outward appearance of his reforms. To the classically educated upperclasses, Mussolini seemed to epitomise the 'cult of the dictator', the answer to ineffective post-war democracies with their unstable governments, social unrest and the fear of Bolshevism.

Seely had lived through the 'Scramble for Africa' and seems to have regarded the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in May 1935 as merely the last in the long line of European acquisitions, rather than as anything reprehensible in itself. He had made a number of Italian friends through the Athenaeum Club including Count Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, and Count Volpi, an industrialist and financier and he has been described as the most prominent of those who proclaimed Italian sympathies.<sup>2</sup> He was, though, castigated at the time by Josiah Wedgwood MP for his 'evil Italian associates'.<sup>3</sup>

Although there was much enthusiasm for the King Emperor at his Silver Jubilee, also in May 1935, the age of imperialism was on the wane and Italy was running against the tide in Africa. Seely, ironically, found himself ranged with the anti-imperialists when he opposed the imposition of sanctions on Italy by the League of Nations. There were those in the Labour Party, such as George Lansbury, Lord Arnold and Lord Ponsonby, who feared that sanctions would bolster the authority of the League, which they regarded as an imperialist tool. Seely, Arnold and Ponsonby were among those who were personally thanked by Mussolini for their resistance to the sanctions.

Seely, For Ever England, p 21.

D. Waley, <u>British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War 1935-6</u>, 1975, p. 117.

Mottistone MSS 5/118, Wedgwood to Seely, 4 August 1936.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th series, vol C, cols 951-954, 12 May 1936.

R. Lamb, Mussolini and the British, 1997, p. 156.

In spite of the Italian attack on Albania at Easter 1939, Seely expressed his wish to Grandi that the two countries should remain friends.<sup>1</sup> This was not to be, for on 18 June 1940, Mussolini declared war on Britain and France. Seely was either not present in the House of Lords at the time or had nothing to say but his admiration for Mussolini survived at least until July 1939, for he kept a signed photograph of the dictator displayed in his library at Mottistone Manor.<sup>2</sup>

Influenced by anti-Bolshevism and his desire that Europe should never again experience the horrors of the Great War, he joined the Anglo-German Fellowship in the mid-1930s. The members were mainly from the upper echelons of the nobility, leading businessmen and bankers.<sup>3</sup> Their aims were to encourage good relations with Germany and work towards maintaining peace between the two nations. It was an organisation similar to the many Francophile societies of the time but, unlike the British Union of Fascists, was not designed to promote fascism within Britain. Griffiths points out that, by early 1939, most of those who wanted to pursue a more favourable attitude towards Germany had left. Seely, however, remained until its disbandment on 1 September 1939.<sup>4</sup>

Along with many others, not only from the upper classes, Seely came to admire Hitler and his achievements. The improvements in the German economy, the fall in unemployment, the discipline, order and purpose given to the German youth, influenced him to believe that Hitler was the saviour of the German nation and that appearement was a better alternative to another war. Though not a member of the right-wing Nordic Society, he, like Joseph Chamberlain, was attracted by the idea of the solidarity of the northern races.<sup>5</sup>

Seely had become acquainted with Joachim Ribbentrop, a frequent visitor to England who had insinuated himself into highsociety, including the Cliveden 'set'. He had become a member of the Athenaeum Club, where he met Seely, and had infiltrated the Anglo-German

Mottistone MSS 5/236, Seely to Grandi, 21 August 1939.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th series, vol 116, cols 517ff., 18 June 1940. Isle of Wight County Press, 8 July 1939.

For a list of members see N. West, MI5 British Security Operations 1909-1945, 1981, Appendix I.

R. Griffiths, <u>Patriotism Perverted</u>. <u>Captain Ramsay</u>, the Right Club and British Anti-Semitism 1939-40, 1998, pp. 38-39.

Lord Mottistone, <u>Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit</u>, Stuttgart/Berlin, 1937.

Fellowship.<sup>1</sup> From 1936-1938, Ribbentrop served as German Ambassador to the Court of St. James's. In 1934, he set up an agency to foster good relations between war veterans and to arrange visits to Germany of veterans and prominent Britons, many of whom, such as Lloyd George, Lord Lothian and Lord Londonderry, beat a path to Hitler.<sup>2</sup> Seely had maintained his interest in air affairs and there was a feeling of companionship between the British air aces and their former enemies.<sup>3</sup> It was in his capacity as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Air League that Ribbentrop invited him to stay as his guest at the luxury Hotel Adlon, Berlin, in 1933 and in 1934. As a result of these visits, Seely claimed to have met Hitler many times and even to have lectured him on the persecution of the Jews.<sup>4</sup> He certainly attended the theatre with him and had an interview in 1934 when Hitler persuaded him that the Hitler Youth was inspired by the Boy Scout movement.<sup>5</sup>

Following his visit of 1934, the Nazi Party's newspaper, Völkischer Beobachter, published a long report of his speech to the House of Lords where he had expressed his wish for peace and had maintained that he 'had not found one single German who wanted to pick a quarrel with England'. Seely appears to have been sufficiently well-known in Germany for the newspaper to give him prominence without needing to explain who he was and to use his speech for its own propaganda purposes at a sensitive time when German rearmament plans might antagonise the British. In 1935, he was invited by Dr. Budding, the President of West Prussia, to visit Germany, tour the model schemes, visit Hitler and then lend his name to a book for the Berlin press, all of which seems to indicate a measure of manipulation by the German authorities and ready compliance by their too trusting guest.

J. Weitz, <u>Joachim von Ribbentrop</u>, 1992, p. 119 and p. 137. The Cliveden 'set' met at Cliveden, the home of Lady Nancy Astor and gained the reputation of harbouring pro-Nazi sympathies, though this has since been played down as exaggerated. There is no evidence that Seely was attached to it.

G. T. Waddington, 'Aspects of the Operations of the Dienststelle Ribbentrop in Great Britain, 1934-1938', <u>History</u>, vol 82, (1997), pp. 44 ff.

R. Griffiths, Fellow Travellers of the Right, British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-1939, 1980, p.123 and p. 137.

Mottistone MSS 7/256, extract from War Diary 1941-1944, 25 July 1941.

Seely, <u>Paths of Happiness</u>, pp. 189-191. B. Lunn, <u>Switchback</u>, 1948, pp. 244-247, describes Seely's visit to Ribbentrop in 1934 and the theatre visit which was photographed.

Völkischer Beobachter, 15 November 1934, 'England does not want war'.

Seely had made the acquaintance of Budding, a doctor of law, at Winchester. He was presented with the innocuous idea that he should see what lessons he could learn from Germany which might help Britain's unemployment problems. He set off in June, with a crew of three, to voyage round the Baltic in his small yacht, *Mayflower*. He put ashore and was entertained by the German Navy and by leading Prussians who took him to visit labour camps, youth camps and reclamation works and he was shown the anomalies of the Polish Corridor, but, like other visitors, he was only shown what the régime wanted him to see and he only met selected persons. Wherever he went, he had to listen to speeches expounding National Socialist views.

Leaving his yacht, Seely went to Berlin and had a long session with Hitler, recorded in detail in <u>Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit</u>, the account of his Baltic journey. Although this was published under his name, much of the content and style suggest a measure of ghost writing by Dr. Goebbel's propaganda machine. The German author, Dietrich Aigner, has analysed the participation of sympathetic English writers in the movement to improve Anglo-German relations. He particularly comments on Seely's contribution but points out that whilst he and others were impressed by the discipline and order instilled into the youth:

Authors like Lord Mottistone however distinguished very clearly between aggressive militarism and a soldierly attitude. Glorification of war was foreign to their nature and they clearly allowed themselves to be far too easily reassured and their judgement clouded by the reassurance that no such cult was indulged within the Hitler Youth and Labour Service. This is not to say that they uncritically admired all aspects of National Socialism.

Aigner mentions the journalists Ward Price and Philip Gibbs, and others who were members of the Link, a right-wing pro-German society, but omits, for example, Henry Williamson, the well-known nature writer.<sup>2</sup> Seely's story of his war-horse was translated as Mein Pferd Warrior and published in 1938.

Lord Mottistone, <u>Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit</u>, Stuttgart/Berlin, 1937.

Dietrich Aigner, <u>Das Ringen um England -das deutsch-britische Verhältnis. Die</u> öffentliche Meinung 1933-1939 <u>Tragödie zweier Völker</u>, <u>[The Struggle for England - the German-British Relationship. Public Opinion 1933-1939. Tragedy of Two Nations]</u>, two volumes, München/Essen, 1969, p.120. Seely's publisher's

Although any book translated into German was subject to Nazi control, the publishers were more inclined, at this time, to rely upon their writers' willingness to agree to self-censorship. Aigner comments that the propaganda department was, however, not really satisfied with their authors and constantly complained how little 'even well-intentioned Englishmen' could grasp the true nature of National Socialism, so that by 1939 only books critical of England were being published.¹ Some of Seely's remarks in <u>Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit</u> do seem to have escaped censorship. He stated that he rejected any idea of a dictatorship in England, that he was in no way inclined to National Socialism, as such, and that the idea of a chosen race destined for the mastery of the rest of humanity was repellent to him.

Seely had been taken in by the outward appearances of National Socialism and its stand against Bolshevism. He had confused German institutions with those at home and saw German solutions as an answer to British problems in a sentimental way. Comparing the German experiment with the British, he wrote, in <u>Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit</u>, 'The pitiful state of our out of work youngsters tugs at my heart'. He was not really given any freedom to explore beneath the surface of any of the institutions which he was shown any more than most official visitors are to any institution. He had been flattered by the attention of the Nazi leaders and his aristocratic associates at home, even though there was plenty of evidence of the evils within the régimes in public knowledge. He was not alone, any more than were the Fabians who returned with glowing reports of Stalin's Soviet Russia, ignoring the purges, persecution of the Jews and millions of deaths.<sup>2</sup>

Between 1935-1939, he identified himself with those who wanted to appease the dictators.<sup>3</sup> This placed him, however, on the opposite side to Churchill, who was warning the public of the danger of such a policy. In June 1939, Seely was still advocating appearement and was one of the last to abandon his pro-German stance in the House of Lords but he was now reporting to the Foreign Office, to Hankey and to Neville Chamberlain details of his

archives were destroyed in the Second World War, Marita Wetzel (Archivist for DVA) to Helmut Ernst (Studiendirektor, Reutlingen), 30 January 1998. Ward Price was the Special Correspondent of the Daily Mail.

Aigner, <u>Das Ringen um England</u>, pp. 70-71.

Griffiths, Fellow Travellers of the Right, deals in detail with the extent of pro-German sympathy in Britain before the Second World War.

E.g., <u>Parliamentary Debates</u>, House of Lords, 5th series, vol XCIV, cols 1043-1044, 22 May and vol CXIII, col 388, 12 June 1939.

conversations with Volpi and his letters from Grandi.<sup>1</sup> He had wanted to avoid another terrible war but once it broke out, his patriotism prevailed and he probably realised, at last, how dangerous was the way in which he had allowed himself, really very naively, to be manipulated by the Nazis. A total of 1,373 members of pro-German and Fascist groups were detained under the Emergency Powers Act when the war broke out and Seely had to rehabilitate himself in official eyes.<sup>2</sup> He became outspoken in his condemnation of National Socialism and the invasion of Poland.<sup>3</sup> He now maintained that the youth of Germany had been used 'in the cause of cruelty, faithlessness and wrong'.<sup>4</sup> He also reported to Hankey the details of the meetings during September 1939, convened by the Duke of Westminster who, with other aristocrats, was hoping to persuade Chamberlain to make peace with Germany. Hankey then passed Seely's information on to Lord Halifax at the Foreign Office.<sup>5</sup>

Seely's last years were dominated by the Second World War. Princess Beatrice dissuaded him from taking an active role abroad and he was confined to his county duties, particularly concerning the raising of the Local Defence Volunteers.<sup>6</sup> He remained highly regarded by local people and he rehabilitated his reputation as a patriot with the articles which he produced for the national press<sup>7</sup>

His service to the country was recognised by the dozens of letters which his widow received on his death in 1947 from King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary, the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, the Leader of the Conservative Party, Winston Churchill, Lord Hankey and other civil servants, Church leaders and literary figures as well as his staff His obituaries summed up his long and eventful life. He was buried in Mottistone Church,

Mottistone MSS 5/238, Seely to Chamberlain, 21 August 1939, 5/239, Chamberlain to Seely, 22 August 1939, 5/249, Seely to Halifax, 16 September 1939.

West, MI5 British Security Operations, p. 127.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 5th series, vol XCIV, col 1562, 26 October 1939.

Mottistone MSS 7/29, notes for an article, 'A Call to Youth and a Call to Action', undated.

PRO FO 800/371, Hankey to Halifax, 12 September 1939.

Mottistone MSS 6/3, Princess Beatrice to Seely, 16 January 1940.

Mottistone MSS 27 and letters to author from Island residents.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> 'Great Leader Passes', <u>The Legionary</u>, December 1947, Jackson Papers. National Defence H.Q. Ottawa, file 000.9(D106) 'Lord Mottistone. Gallant figure in War

where he had been churchwarden and had worshipped with his family. A specially constructed canopy bears a eulogy in Latin composed by the Second Lord Birkenhead which commemorates the virtues of a man of his generation:

This chapel was adorned and improved for the worship of God in memory of John Bernard Seely, First Lord Mottistone, a man of steadfast faith in Christ, whose ashes lie at the altar steps.

Much gifted, he lavished his talents in the service of all men. Wise in counsel and vigorous in action, his simple gaiety and imperturbable courage were the inspiration of many and his loving kindness the special delight of children.

A most loyal subject of his King and a statesman of high distinction, as Lord

Lieutenant of the County of Southampton, Minister of the Crown and Privy

Councillor, he strove always for the true greatness of his county and the happiness

of her people.

An intrepid horseman, valiant in war, he led the Canadian Cavalry to final triumph in a momentous battle.

A skilled mariner, he was instant in answering the call of those in peril on the sea.

An author of insight and clarity, his writing enshrined for many others, the ideals which inspired his life.

and Politics'. <u>The Times</u>, 8 November 1947. <u>Isle of Wight County Press</u>, 8 November 1947, 'Death of Lord Mottistone. Distinguished Island Soldier and Statesman'.

A trusted colleague of the highest, he yet remained a faithful friend to the humblest.

A devoted husband and a loving father.

Thus, in epitome, he guarded and passed on the immemorial English tradition which by the grace of God will never die.

### CONCLUSION

John Seely was a member of the House of Commons from 1900-1924 and was close to the centre of a wide range of topical concerns. He began his political career as a Unionist in 1900 then embraced the ideas of 'new liberalism' in the Edwardian period, crossed the floor in 1904 and became a Liberal. On some issues he was on the radical wing of the radical government of December 1905-1915, on others he held to more traditional views. He cannot be type-cast and he was not always consistent.

In some respects Seely's radicalism went further than Asquith's when he wanted to see reforms pushed beyond those which the Cabinet thought advisable. He urged, in particular, the abolition of the hereditary principle in the House of Lords.<sup>1</sup> He supported Lloyd George over the proposed taxation on land values but he wished to extend the payment of the old age-pension to paupers who were disqualified in the budget of 1909.<sup>2</sup> By 1924 he was supporting the abolition of the means test for old-age pensions, pensions for widowed mothers and the availability of early retirement through the payment of voluntary contributions. Like many in the pre-war Liberal Party, he was not a committed supporter of women's emancipation. His Unionist background and family connections may explain why it was not until he was on the brink of office under Asquith, that he pronounced definitely on Home Rule.

One Liberal principle to which Seely always adhered and which influenced his decision to cross the floor in 1904 with Winston Churchill was his life-long commitment to free trade. He maintained his belief that it was essential to British prosperity, even during the economic crises of the 1920s and 1930s. The McKenna duties of 1915 which had been imposed on various luxury imports during the war marked a blow to Liberalism. In January 1924, when Baldwin wanted to reintroduce tariffs, the Liberals, including Seely, supported the Labour Party on the successful vote of no confidence. When the Labour Government which replaced Baldwin proposed to reduce the McKenna duties, Seely voted again in its

The Times, 18 December 1909, Seely's speech at Liverpool.

Ilkeston Pioneer, 25 February 1910, Seely's speech at Ilkeston, and Mottistone MSS 1/277, Seely to Ramsay MacDonald, 28 February 1910.

support. He was consequently accused by the Conservative opposition on the Isle of Wight of having socialist leanings.<sup>1</sup>

He was prepared to support the Labour Government, hoping that it might bring some political stability to the country.<sup>2</sup> This contrasts with those in the Liberal Party who, after 1918, hoped to use opposition to socialism as a means of restoring electoral support, but he was by no means a socialist.<sup>3</sup> He feared Bolshevik influence within the Labour Party and was against the proposal of a loan to Soviet Russia in 1924. He was also opposed to the socialist policy of nationalisation and corporate ownership.<sup>4</sup> He had always disliked a political doctrine which would impose uniformity in education, believing that variety was the essence of progress.<sup>5</sup> By 1936, however, he was still radical enough to urge a fairer distribution of wealth and warned the nation to see as far as possible 'that nobody shall be very, very rich whilst others are dreadfully poor', and quoted Sir Robert Kindersley of the Bank of England who had pointed out that in 1936 that only 4% of the country earned more than £8 pounds a week:

Without a fair distribution, prosperity will be short-lived; but with fair distribution, and a sane and just improvement in the standard of living, we can look forward to a period of world prosperity which will surprise the most optimistic.<sup>6</sup>

He was not prepared to jettison the voluntary nature of the British Army, a national tradition to which the Liberal Party, in particular, adhered. He did, however, veer towards some notions of universality when in 1913 he suggested that this principle should apply to the payment of National Insurance. Here he stood to the left of his party but in 1916 both he and the majority of the Liberal Government accepted conscription to the armed forces.

The Wight Elector, Isle of Wight County Press, 25 October, 1924.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th Series, vol CLXXIX, col 364, 17 January 1924.

G. R., Searle, <u>The Liberal Party</u>. <u>Triumph and Disintegration</u>, 1886-1927, 1992, p.153.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 5th series, vol CLXXIII, col 1247, 13 May 1924.

The Times, 23 November 1908, Seely's speech at Abercrombie.

Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, vol CIII, col 942, 16 December 1936.

The Times, 30 May 1913. Seely's speech at Barnstaple.

They acquiesced, through necessity, to the final abandonment of a fundamental Liberal principle.

He had supported native rights in South Africa but he was limited in his ability to extend them beyond the Cape in the South Africa Act of 1909 because of the opposition from the Boers. On the one hand, he believed that Britain should surrender her Empire if she failed to rule the native peoples according to British Common Law<sup>1</sup> and he initiated the publicity against the use of Chinese labour in South Africa; on the other, like the Liberal imperialists in post-Gladstonian Britain, he accepted the British Empire. He believed that it was worthwhile and a benefit to its inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> This influenced his attitude in 1935 when he supported Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. Having been born in the year in which Disraeli formed his first ministry, he died in the year in which India gained its independence but he had not appreciated that the 'wind of change' was gathering force in the Empire.

As Under-Secretary and Secretary of State for War, between 1911-1914 he was instrumental in getting the Official Secrets Act passed and helped to create an efficient war machine for the Liberal Government. These actions, in response to the dangers of the time, undermined the Liberal belief in individual liberty and the Party's tradition of keeping down expenditure on defence. It was ironical that a politician of strong liberal convictions should have been the agent of the erosion of his party's philosophical base.

Churchill saw no future in remaining with the Liberals. He lost patience with them for supporting the Labour Party and he crossed the floor again in 1924, returning to the Conservative fold. This time, Seely did not follow him although he sometimes had ideas which seemed more Conservative than Radical. Perhaps influenced by the growth in home-ownership in his mining constituency, he supported Neville Chamberlain's proposals in 1923 to encourage either the central or the local authorities to subsidise as much building as possible at reasonable prices. He opposed John Wheatley's Housing Act in 1924, which encouraged local authorities to build houses for rent.<sup>3</sup>

Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 4th Series, vol 155, cols 245-255, 2 April 1906.

Seely, Fear and Be Slain, p. 248.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> <u>Isle of Wight County Press</u>, 25 October 1924.

Seely had always had a reputation for cutting across party political boundaries and viewing problems in national rather than partisan terms. With his wide circle of friends on all sides, his advocacy of a national government in 1930 came better and more naturally from him, and was more acceptable from someone now outside of Parliament than from the politicians jostling for power within the House of Commons. Similarly, he was able to advocate the creation of a Ministry of Defence from his position in the House of Lords after 1933.

Seely has been poorly represented in print. References to his achievements are found in specialist studies on the development of air power and defence policy but generally these are fragmentary and often reliant upon his memoirs in <u>Adventure</u>. He is either neglected in favour of other ministers, such as Haldane, or is denigrated for his conduct of the Curragh Incident. Seely's supposed error of judgement in March 1914 is the one well-known incident of his career, rather than, for example his work to establish the Union of South Africa, create the Royal Flying Corps and improve mobilisation plans prior to the outbreak of war in 1914.

One questions why he has been overlooked to such an extent. This may be because the Mottistone Papers are incomplete and Seely's personal diaries do not cover his years in politics. Any appreciation of his career as a whole has to be pieced together from many different sources and is not helped by the constant repetition of received opinions on his handling of the Curragh Incident. His reputation initially suffered when Asquith subsequently repudiated him. His resignation from the Air Ministry in 1919 gave him the dubious reputation of being the only minister to have resigned twice in the 20th century. He saw the failures of the British Government to get to grips with the social and economic problems of the inter-war years and, unlikely as it seems, one who had always been a convinced liberal came to applaud the achievements of the European dictators. His support for appeasement and his admiration of Mussolini and Hitler in the 1930s cast him in a poor light during and after the Second World War.

He represented the type of military hero who, especially having fought in the Boer War, became deeply unfashionable in the post-imperial age of the later twentieth century. His

portrait was relegated from prominence in the main hall to the stacks in the Imperial War Museum. He had, however, set standards of humane leadership, was aware of the futility of a war of attrition and had made an important contribution to the final British and Allied victory in 1918. His relations with the regular army officers meant that he had not received the recognition which his ability as a military commander might have warranted. This has not been so in Canada, where his regiments still hold him in respect and even affection. The paintings by Alfred Munnings of his Brigade still hang in the National War Museum in Ottawa. His generalship is still studied by the Royal Canadian Dragoons and there is literature on the Battle of Moreuil Wood by veterans and Canadian historians.

Seely remained in the Liberal Party in spite of its internal divisions, the weakening of its traditional beliefs and its relegation to third party status after 1918. One sees an Edwardian Radical Liberal overtaken by the rise of the Labour Party and left stranded by the economic circumstances which dictated the return to protection. A consideration of the varied aspects and achievements of Seely's career especially in ministerial office, shows where he was an innovator and where he stood as a Liberal politician. One might conclude by quoting Sir Maurice Hankey's opinion of Seely: 'A much better man than he is given credit for'.<sup>1</sup>

S. Roskill, <u>Hankey. Man of Secrets</u>, vol I, <u>1877-1918</u>, 1970, p. 134.

### APPENDIX I MAIN EVENTS IN JOHN SEELY'S LIFE.

|                  | MAIN EVENTS IN JOHN SEELY'S LIFE.  |
|------------------|--|
| 1867             | Born 31 May, near Nottingham.  |
| 1890             | Graduated in Law, Trinity College, Cambridge.                                      |
| 1891             | Gold Medal from French Government for saving life.                                 |
| 1895             | Married Emily Crichton.  |
| 1897             | Called to the Bar by the Inner Temple.   |
| 1900-1901        | Served with the Imperial Yeomanry in the 2nd Boer War. Awarded                     |
|                  | DSO.   |
| 1900             | By-election, 23 May, Conservative, Isle of Wight. Won.                             |
|                  | General Election, September-October, Returned Unopposed. Isle of                   |
|                  | Wight.   |
| 1904             | Resignation. Returned unopposed. Independent Unionist. Isle of                     |
|                  | Wight.   |
| 1906             | General Election, January-February. Liberal. Liverpool/Abercrombie.                |
|                  | Won.   |
| 12 Apri1908-     | Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office under 1. Lord Crewe,               |
| 23 March 1911    | 2. Lewis Harcourt.   |
| 1910             | General Election, January. Liverpool/Abercrombie. Lost.                            |
|                  | By-election, 7 March, Liberal. Derbyshire/Ilkeston. Won.                           |
|                  | General Election, December. Liberal .Derbyshire/Ilkeston. Won.                     |
| 23 March 1911-   | Under-Secretary of State at the War Office under R. B.                             |
| 12 June 1912     | Haldane.   |
| 1912             | By-election, 1 July. Liberal. Derbyshire/Ilkeston                                  |
|                  | (1915 Coalition Liberal supporting Lloyd George)                                   |
| 6 June 1912-     | Secretary of State at the War Office. Resigned.                                    |
| 30 March 1914    |  |
| 1913             | Death of first wife.   |
| 1914             | Special Service Officer under Sir John French.                                     |
| 30 January 1915- | Brigadier-General in command of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade.                      |
| 20 May 1918      | To the Manager   |
| 1917             | Death of eldest son at Arras. Married Evelyn Murray.                               |
| 18 June 1918-    | Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Munitions                         |
| 1 January 1919   | G 171 d' 14 December Coalition Liberal   |
| 1918             | General Election, 14 December. Coalition Liberal.                                  |
| 1010             | Derbyshire/Ilkeston. Won   |
| 1 January 1919-  | <u>Under-Secretary of State for Air</u> . Resigned.                                |
| 22 December 1919 | Appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.                      |
| 1918             | Elected Alderman of Isle of Wight County Council.                                  |
| 1919             | General Election, 15 November. National Liberal Derbyshire/                        |
| 1922             |  |
| 4000             | Ilkeston. Lost. General Election, 6 December, National Liberal. Isle of Wight. Won |
| 1923             | General Election, 29 October. National Liberal. Isle of Wight. Lost.               |
| 1924             | Chairman of National Savings Committee. 1943-1947                                  |
| 1926-1943        | Vice-President   |
| 1930             | Published letter to <u>The Times</u> on a National Government.                     |
| 1932             | Conducted publicity on War Loan Conversion.  |
| 1933             | Created First Baron Mottistone.  |
| 1935             | Sailed in Mayflower to the Baltic.   |
| 1947             | Died.  |
| **               | •••  |

## APPENDIX II TIME TABLE OF EVENTS DURING THE CURRAGH INCIDENT

12 June 1912 Colonel J. E. B. Seely appointed Secretary of State for War.

9 December 1913 Seely drew up memorandum for Cabinet re Irish situation.

16 December 1913 Memorandum presented to the Army chiefs.

**MARCH 1914** 

Sunday 15 Memorandum from Gleichen at H. Q. Belfast.

Letter to Paget from Army Council.

Monday 16 Telegraph sent from Seely to Paget for details.

Tuesday 17 Paget wrote to the War Office.

Wednesday 18 Paget met French, Ewart and Seely at the war Office.

Thursday 19 Telegram sent from Seely to Paget. Paget left for London.

Friday 20 Paget addressed the senior officers at the Curragh barracks.

Paget sent telegram to Ewart.

H. Gough sent telegram to J. Gough.

Seely wrote to French.

Seely sent telegram to H. Gough.

Gough and 56 officers resigned. (Beckett gives number as 60)

Wilson contacted Bonar Law.

Minutes sent from Gough to H. Q. Irish Command.

Saturday 21 Winston Churchill called on Seely.

Seely went to Buckingham Palace for audience with King

George V.

Churchill went to see Asquith at No.10 Downing Street.

Lord Stamfordham, King's Private Secretary, went to see

Asquith.

Lord Roberts went to see the King.

Seely went to see Asquith at No.10.

Lord Roberts went to see Seely at the War Office.

Sunday 22 Major Kinaird-Smith, assistant to Stamfordham, saw Ewart and

Nicholson, (Seely's Secretary).

Ewart then saw H. Gough.

## APPENDIX II TIME TABLE OF EVENTS DURING THE CURRAGH INCIDENT

Seely went to Buckingham Palace for audience with King. Seely and Churchill went to see Asquith at No.10. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson) went to see Asquith and stayed one hour 30 minutes. Asquith went to see the King and spent 1 hour at the Palace. Sir John French also went to see the King. Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, went to see Asquith. Generals H. and J. Gough went to see Seely at the War Office. Monday 23 10.30 Paget went to the War Office. The Goughs, Lt. Col. Parker of 5th Lancers and Lt. Col. MacEwan of 16th Lancers arrived. 11.30 French went to the War Office. H. Gough, French and Ewart saw Seely. 11.30-12.00 12.00 Cabinet met. French and Ewart saw Nicholson. 12.30 Seely went to see the King at the Palace. 1.00 Cabinet broke up whist he was away. H. Gough's letter to Ewart sent to Cabinet. Asquith amended 1.30 it and handed it back to Seely who had returned from the Palace. H. and J. Gough and the colonels received the letter from 4.00 French. Seely added the two paragraphs at No. 10 Seely returned to the War Office and handed the amended document to Ewart. Seely went to the House of Commons. French and Ewart went to the House of Commons to get Seely's initials on the amended document. French and Ewart returned to the War Office to meet the Generals. The Generals got French to acknowledge significance of 5.00

## <u>APPENDIX II</u> <u>TIME TABLE OF EVENTS DURING THE CURRAGH INCIDENT</u>

amended document. Haldane's speech in House of Lords implied that all was well. Tuesday 24 The Generals leaked the story to the press. Ewart went to see Asquith at No.10. Wednesday 25 Asquith repudiated the guarantee. Parliamentary debates. Seely gave his account of events and was cross-examined by Balfour. Debate in House of Lords. Thursday 26 Ramsay MacDonald went to see Lloyd George. 9.30 French and Ewart tended resignations, not accepted. 10.30 Seely went to the War Office and had a long conference with 11.00 the Commanders-in-Chief. Seely and Churchill went to see Asquith and stayed 45 minutes. 12.00 The King and Queen returned to Euston after a visit to 2.25 Knowsley. Asquith went to see the King at the Palace. 3.25 French went to see Haldane. Asquith returned to No. 10. 4.30 Haldane, French and Grey went to No. 10. French went to see the King at the Palace. 6.30 Lloyd George, Seely, Harcourt and Churchill went to see Asquith at his home. Roberts went to the War Office to see French. The Archbishop of Canterbury went to see the King. French and Ewart wanted to resign. Seely offered his resignation. Asquith refused it. Lord Morley spoke in the Lords.

| Friday 27 | •                                     |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| 10.30     | Cabinet met.                          |
| 11.30.c   | French and Ewart went to the Cabinet. |

# APPENDIX II TIME TABLE OF EVENTS DURING THE CURRAGH INCIDENT

| Some Cabinet members left but Churchill, Seely,    |
|--|
| French and Haldane remained until 1.00.            |
| Cabinet met again. French and Ewart attended until |
| 3.15   |
| Cabinet broke up but Seely stayed until            |
| then went with Asquith to the House of Commons.    |
| Asquith made a statement to the House.             |
| New Army Orders issued.                            |
|  |
| Ewart went to the War Office.                      |
|  |
| Ewart went to Seely's house.                       |
| Ewart went to see Haldane.                         |
| Seely, French and Ewart went to Buckingham Palace  |
| and had separate audiences with the King.          |
|  |
| Ewart met French at the War Office.                |
| Ewart went to No. 10.                              |
| French and Ewart resigned.                         |
| Parliamentary debates.                             |
| Churchill made a long speech in the Commons.       |
| Seely made a statement.                            |
| Lord Morley questioned in the Lords.               |
| Seely resigned.                                    |
| Asquith took over as Secretary of State for War.   |
|  |

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## APPENDIX III THE ORGANISATION OF THE CAVALRY IN THE BRITISH ARMY.

#### COMMANDED BY:

| COMMANDER-IN CHIEF |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| CAVALRY CORPS      | LIEUTENANT-GENERAL |
| CAVALRY DIVISION   | MAJOR-GENERAL      |
| BRIGADE            | BRIGADIER-GENERAL  |
| REGIMENT           | LIEUTENANT-COLONEL |
| SQUADRON           | MAJOR              |
| TROOP              | LIEUTENANT         |
| SECTION            | CORPORAL           |
| HALF SECTION       | LANCE-CORPORAL     |

## ORGANISATION OF THE CANADIAN CAVALRY BRIGADE IN 1915.

COMMANDER IN CHIEF
[SIR JOHN FRENCH]

INDIAN CAVALRY CORPS

STH CAVALRY DIVISION

## CANADIAN CAVALRY BRIGADE ['SEELY'S DETACHMENT']

The Canadian Cavalry Brigade numbered about 2,000 men.

ROYAL CANADIAN DRAGOONS, LORD STRATHCONA'S HORSE, ROYAL CANADIAN HORSE ARTILLERY, KING EDWARD'S HORSE (2nd) WITH 1st CANADIAN MOTOR MACHINE-GUN CORPS ATTACHED.

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Bodleian Library Oxford, Samuel Papers,

Bodleian Library, Oxford, Sandars Papers.

Bodleian Library Oxford, Simon Papers.

British Library, British Museum, Burns Papers.

British Library, British Museum, Dilke Papers,

British Library, British Museum, Viscount Gladstone Papers.

British Library, British Museum, Spender Papers.

Cambridge University Library, Crewe MSS.

Churchill College Cambridge, Churchill Papers.

Churchill College Cambridge, Hankey MSS.

Churchill College Cambridge, Phipps Papers.

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