Stanley Baldwin is one of the most significant modern British politicians, but also one of the most controversial and puzzling. As Conservative leader 1923–1937 and three times prime minister, Baldwin presided over the beginning of his party’s long twentieth-century dominance. He did so in new and difficult conditions: the onset of modern democratic politics, the rise of Labour, chronic economic depression, the General Strike, persistent newspaper attacks, imperial discontent, the Abdication, and the threats from Mussolini and Hitler. He retired amidst wide public acclaim, from opponents as well as his own party. Yet after 1940 his reputation collapsed, and he was blamed for many of the supposed shortcomings of interwar British government, especially failure to deter the European dictators. More recently he has been held to symbolise the backwardness of British national culture. The reasons for his ascendancy and the nature of his contribution to public life have remained elusive.

This book provides a new understanding of Baldwin’s career, including the first serious analysis of the moral and intellectual influences in his early life. Its main concerns are investigation of a Conservative mind, and its communication with the various audiences that constituted the political nation. It considers the construction of ‘public character’ and a distinctive Conservative doctrine and language, and assesses Baldwin’s part in Conservative electoral success and the performance of interwar governments. This is not a conventional biography, rather an examination of the nature of political leadership, Conservative politics, and ‘national values’.

STANLEY BALDWIN

Conservative leadership and national values

PHILIP WILLIAMSON
For Joseph
For fourteen years I preached . . . up and down Great Britain, attempting to achieve a national unity of spirit and a high conception of what democracy may be, and calling for unselfish service to that ideal.


S.B. was always an idealist; they tell me also he was quite a cunning politician.


... a statesman who has gathered to himself a greater volume of confidence and goodwill than any public man I recollect in my long career.

Winston Churchill speaking of Baldwin at the 1935 Conservative party conference
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Acknowledgements

The central feature of this book is an examination of political leadership in its widest public aspects, and the use of public statements as its main source. Nevertheless the interpretation offered could not have been developed without information obtained from a large number of private records. I am especially grateful to the 4th Earl Baldwin and Lady Baldwin for their hospitality and assistance, and to Lord Baldwin for permission to consult and quote from his family’s papers and publications.

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I thank the archivists in the libraries and record offices listed in the primary sources section on pp. 362–5 for answering my inquiries and supplying documents and copies, and numerous others who were helpful, if only in establishing that no Baldwin
Acknowledgements

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**Abbreviations and conventions**

Unless otherwise mentioned, the place of publication is London.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AC</td>
<td>Austen Chamberlain papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWB</td>
<td>A.W. Baldwin, My Father. The True Story (1956)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berrows</td>
<td>Berrow’s Worcester Journal (the principal Worcestershire newspaper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF</td>
<td>Baldwin family papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLtd</td>
<td>Baldwin Ltd papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>Board of Trade records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B/WCRO</td>
<td>Baldwin papers, Worcester County Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet</td>
<td>Cabinet conclusions (minutes, from PRO CAB 23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>Cabinet Papers (memoranda, from PRO CAB 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRD</td>
<td>Conservative Research Department papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUL Add.</td>
<td>Cambridge University Library, Additional manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBFP</td>
<td>Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919–1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DGFP</td>
<td>Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMY</td>
<td>G. M. Young, Stanley Baldwin (1952)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCDerb</td>
<td>House of Commons – or Lords – Debates, 5th series, unless otherwise stated (c., cc. indicate column numbers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>Earl Baldwin of Bewdley, An Interpreter of England (1939)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCCD</td>
<td>J. C. C. Davidson (1st Viscount Davidson) papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>Joan Davidson (Lady Davidson, née Dickinson) papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of abbreviations and conventions

Jones diary unpublished diary in the Thomas Jones papers (like the published extracts, actually a compilation of diary, memoranda, and letters, but ‘diary’ is used here as a convenient shorthand)


NC Neville Chamberlain papers

OE Stanley Baldwin, On England and other Addresses (1926)

OI Stanley Baldwin, Our Inheritance. Speeches and Addresses (1928)

PRO Public Record Office

SB Stanley Baldwin political papers

SOL Stanley Baldwin, Service of Our Lives. Last Speeches as Prime Minister (1937)

TTF Stanley Baldwin, This Torch of Freedom. Speeches and Addresses (1935)

WCRO Worcester County Record Office

WSC Comp Winston S. Churchill, Companion parts to vols. IV–VI, ed. Martin Gilbert (1976–94): references are by volume number, then part number and page number, e.g. WSC Comp IV/iii.2107–8

SPEECHES AND NEWSPAPERS

For non-parliamentary speeches before May 1923, newspaper and date of publication are given. From May 1923 such speeches and addresses are cited by place or audience and by date of delivery, e.g. ‘Birmingham, 9 Oct. 1931’ or ‘Primrose League, 6 May 1932’, as the texts are available in bound volumes in the Baldwin papers and were normally published verbatim in The Times (in the edition of the day following the date given here, except for Saturday speeches, printed on Monday). Certain newspapers were searched selectively for comment, but most references in the notes are not to the originals but to the press cuttings in the Baldwin papers at Cambridge.

PRIVATE PAPERS AND EDITIONS

The locations of manuscript collections of letters, diaries, and memoranda and the full titles of and publication details of editions of such papers, organised by
List of abbreviations and conventions

The subject’s name, are given in the list of primary sources, pp. 362–5. References to these editions in the notes are by shortened titles.

FURTHER PUBLISHED WORKS

Most secondary sources are identified in the notes only. The Bibliographical essay, pp. 366–71, is intended as a reader’s guide to contemporary and historical writings about Baldwin, and is arranged accordingly.