

CONSERVATIVE PARTY AGENTS IN SECOND WORLD WAR BRITAIN

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Organization played a significant part in the competition between British political parties in the twentieth century. Faced with the mass electorate that had developed from the nineteenth century onwards, and particularly in response to the introduction of universal manhood suffrage (and limited women's suffrage) in 1918 and universal adult suffrage ten years later, parties were well aware that they must organize or die. The details of how they did so varied, however. It is generally reckoned that, in the period prior to 1939, the Conservative party was the best-organized, and this is generally seen as a factor – although not necessarily the most important one – in the party's electoral dominance during the inter-war period. Labour's machine, while by no means contemptible, was generally regarded as less effective in peacetime, not least because it tended to be rather under-resourced. But Conservative organizational dominance was not predetermined. It depended upon a number of contingent factors; and some of these were significantly affected by the outbreak of war in 1939. One such factor was its ability to sustain certificated, full-time, salaried agents – 'the linchpin of the organization', as Stuart Ball puts it – in the majority of parliamentary constituencies.¹ Some have argued that the war hit the party very hard and at least implied that Labour gained a relative advantage; others, however, have suggested that this is a rather bogus claim, because there were still more full-time Conservative than Labour agents,² or that 'the Tories' were 'not ... much worse organized than anyone else'.³

This article sets out to investigate these claims by focussing on the Conservative party's records, not only at the national level, but also at the level of the constituency Conservative associations (CAs). Using a sample of a hundred associations (roughly one in six of the national total), it will attempt to offer a more nuanced version of the position of Conservative party agents during the Second World War. In particular, it suggests that there can be no question but that the party was hit hard by the departure of agents. It will also show how

Conservative Central Office attempted to prop up the agency; outline the various strategies that constituency associations employed to try to offset the impact of agents' departures; outline some of the problems that faced the agents who remained in post; and show how Central Office was thwarted in its attempt to use the opportunity of wartime to force through a measure that would have made all agents employees of party headquarters, rather than of the constituency associations. It will also demonstrate that although it is wrong to argue that Labour's position was unaffected, the much sharper reverse in this area suffered by the Conservatives probably helped Labour at the first post-war election in July 1945 by to some extent negating a traditional area of Conservative ascendancy. However, it will also suggest that the construction of a contrast between, on the one hand, Conservative self-sacrifice in this (and other) areas of organization and, on the other, Labour's continuing partisanship was an essential element in helping the party come to terms with its crushing election defeat in 1945 and moving forward without any of the internecine bitterness that had followed its last heavy defeat in 1906.

Immediately prior to the war most CAs had an agent. Out of 512 English and Welsh constituencies, Ramsden suggest that 352 had a qualified agent in 1937, and 99 a woman organizer; Ball claims that in 1938 'only 128 English and Welsh seats lacked a certificated agent', which would place the figure that had one at 384.⁴ Those associations that did not employ an agent aspired to do so. The agent (usually male) would often have paid assistance, such as a full-time woman organizer and a typist or office clerk.⁵ The agent would normally have a car unless the constituency was geographically compact or its association financially challenged; in either of the latter cases there would be some kind of expense allowance payable for travel and other incidental expenditure. Agents were employed, and paid, by constituency associations. They were not employees of Conservative Central Office. They were, however, expected to have passed the party's rigorous examination and qualification system (unless they were among the diminishing number who qualified by seniority alone), the introduction of which had been a hard-fought victory for party modernizers in the 1920s.⁶

They also had their own professional body, the National Society of Conservative and Unionist Agents (NSCUA).

Obviously, agents ran election campaigns, but they fulfilled a wide range of other functions, too. They organized committees and public meetings; presided over campaigning and fundraising; co-ordinated voluntary assistance to the party; and generally chivvied and encouraged party activists in their activism. Electoral registration, once a key role of constituency agents, had become less time consuming since the simplification of registration that had followed the Great War, but some agents still worked hard to make claims for Conservative supporters or against known opponents.⁷ In many cases they also liaised with other organizations, and with the local Conservative clubs: agents could be key figures in sustaining the often informal or semi-formal networks that helped buttress the work of Conservative associations in this period.⁸ A working week of up to 65 hours far from unusual.⁹

Agents might have been a necessity, but they were also expensive; and, with war looking increasingly possible during 1939, some CAs began to worry. Conservative agents' salaries in 1939 varied according to the wealth of the local association, but Ramsden's estimate of an average figure of around £400 a year seems about right.¹⁰ When travelling expenses were added on top of these sums, it meant that associations often had a very high financial commitment in maintaining their agency arrangements. It was widely expected that war would lead to a sharp diminution in CAs' incomes. So the issue of what to do about the agent if war broke out began to loom large in the thinking of many constituency officials during the spring and summer of 1939. As early as March 1939, some CAs were making contingency plans regarding their agents in the event of war breaking out.¹¹ For example, East Norfolk CA agreed that it would cease to employ its agent and woman organizer, although their positions would be held open for them until after the end of the war.¹²

The outbreak of war on 3 September 1939 changed speculation into reality. Chichester CA (Sussex) had decided in January 1939 that, in the event of war, it would pay its agent, Mr Ablewhite, his full pay for the first two months, and then place him on a half-pay retainer of £300 a year. He would be encouraged to get another job, but the association would then make up his pay, and the agency would be kept open for him at the end of the war.¹³ When the war came, however, they decided that they could not fulfil their earlier commitment due to lack of funds, and he was encouraged to find alternative employment.¹⁴ The Birmingham Unionist association had four of its eleven constituency agents called up for military service at the outbreak of war; the chief agent, fearing the financial consequences of having so many staff at a time when party politics appeared to be of little importance, arranged for the remaining seven – along with a junior organizer and nine typists – to transfer *en bloc* to the Food Control office, while a further four typists and the caretaker were to be employed by the Fuel Control office. Shortly afterwards, the chief agent himself went to work for the Fuel Controller, leaving just the association secretary, R. G. Hewins, and a single typist to do all the association's work.¹⁵

Initially, such reactions seemed to be in line with Central Office thinking. The first communication sent out by the party chairman, Sir Douglas Hacking, to constituency associations seemed to suggest that they should be winding down their activities to virtually nothing, and made no specific mention of agents, implying that they had no part to play and should therefore be released.¹⁶ However, Central Office rapidly realized that it needed to keep associations going, if only in skeleton form, in order to ensure that the party survived the war. Therefore Hacking sent out a second letter on 12 September, explicitly urging associations to remain active, and in particular to retain the services of paid organizers where possible. Hacking also praised associations that had promised to make up the pay of their agents who had joined the forces or taken on other war work at a lower salary.¹⁷ Further circulars from the centre followed, making essentially the same point.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the party's general director, Sir Robert Topping, tried to shore up agents' resistance to any efforts by the CAs to dismiss

or downgrade them.¹⁹ The NSCUA continued to publish the *Conservative Agents' Journal*, albeit quarterly rather than, as before the war, monthly; it tried to rally the spirits of its readers, for example by publishing a long list of useful work that agents could continue to perform in wartime. These tasks included fundraising, arranging meetings, and trying to keep in touch with association members; helping the Ministry of Information; acting as a contact point between MPs and their constituents; helping convey the views of farmers; establishing information bureaux and wartime savings groups; keeping a close eye on Communist activities; and co-operating with war emergency measures and other organizations such as Rotary Clubs, the YMCA, and the Red Cross.²⁰ In the case of Birmingham, there was a prime ministerial intervention in November when Neville Chamberlain (MP for the city's Edgbaston constituency) told the chief agent to return to work for the association after the death of the secretary, Hewins.²¹

Associations did not only try to retain their agents because of headquarters pressure. Many Conservatives soon realized that the Labour, Liberal, and Communist parties remained active; that the war would not bring imminent catastrophe from the skies; and that there might be more possibility for money-raising in wartime than had earlier been thought. In some cases, the Conservative MP or candidate intervened, concerned that the association which was instrumental in electing him or her to parliament might disappear and, with it, their parliamentary future. Therefore some associations began to take a softer line towards their staff. A common outcome was that the Association continued to employ the agent, but encouraged him or her to look for other work, on the understanding that if such work was taken he or she would continue to have some oversight of constituency business; in return, the association would make up any shortfall in pay.²² Chichester revised its earlier decision about Ablewhite – keeping him on, at two-thirds his pre-war salary of £600 – on the advice of its MP, who stated unequivocally that, if he was to be able to deal with constituents' problems in wartime, 'he ... must have an Agent & an office in the Division'.²³ In the event, the Army settled the matter by recalling Ablewhite to the colours in the spring of 1940.²⁴ In Clitheroe

(Lancashire), the association was somewhat undecided about what to do until its MP, Sir William Brass, told it that the agent must be retained to help with constituents' wartime problems and to keep him informed of popular opinion in the constituency.²⁵ However, when Roger Conant, the MP for the ultra-safe Worcestershire seat of Bewdley, tried a similar argument, he received short shrift from his association, which felt that 'transport restrictions and other war difficulties' made it impossible for an agent to function effectively.²⁶ Some area bodies, by offering subsidies conditional on the continued employment of an agent, helped to force matters: in November 1939, when Flintshire CA was preparing to lay off its paid employees, it was told that the Conservatives' Wales and Monmouthshire council would offer a subsidy to the association on condition that it retained the services of a full-time agent, which it duly agreed to do, the full-time agent remaining in place throughout the war.²⁷ Wessex area council paid subsidies to a few key constituencies like Swindon and Oxford to help them retain their agents.²⁸ Inevitably, though, such assistance could only be afforded in a limited number of cases.²⁹ And decisions in the early months of the war could later be reversed: by June 1940 the MP for Gainsborough (Lincolnshire), Harry Crookshank, who had earlier insisted on retaining the agent, had decided to give him notice on the grounds that he was effectively working full time for the Food Office and had 'done nothing at all in the constituency since the war began'.³⁰

There was widespread adherence to the principle that, if agents left for the forces or other war work, their CA should make up any shortfall in their pay.³¹ This was sometimes a tapering commitment: as people rose through the military or civil ranks, their pay increased, and the financial demands on associations were correspondingly reduced. The agent for Chelmsford, Miss A. Curtis, joined the Tyne and Humber Women's Royal Naval Service shortly after the outbreak of war, and the association made up her pay; but as early as February 1940 she had been promoted to a level where her wartime pay exceeded what the CA had been paying her, which meant it no longer needed to make a contribution.³² By spring 1940, Bewdley CA was told that it could stop subsidising the income of its former agent, H. K. Mason, because he

was about to be promoted to the rank of captain in the Army, which meant that his pay would be higher than his agent's salary (although in this case they decided to continue paying him a retainer of £52 a year).³³ But not all CAs were quite so generous. In late September 1939 the agent at Horncastle (Lincolnshire), Mr Fyson, volunteered to go on half pay to help the organization to continue, and was thanked warmly by his association.³⁴ Although he remained active, however, they did not review his pay, and the £100 a year he received as billeting officer for Spilsby rural district council did not cover his losses.³⁵ Perhaps he had expected a short war. In the event he was forced to tell the association in March 1944 that, having spent four-and-a-half years on half pay (which among other things had also reduced his pension entitlement by £18 a year), he could go on no longer, and would retire immediately (rather than waiting until his 65th birthday in October 1945) unless something was done.³⁶ In the event, they agreed to restore his full pre-war salary of £550 with immediate effect, and to pay him a bonus of £100 on top of that: and he did then remain until October 1945.³⁷ Although they had acted well in the end, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the association would have been quite happy to see Fyson remain on half pay throughout the war.

Some associations, however, were not to be moved. North Cornwall CA, meeting on 11 September 1939, reiterated its pre-war decision to give the agent and woman organizer a month's notice, and remained largely inert until it appointed a new agent in May 1945.³⁸ Ealing South, which was to remain much more active during the war, nonetheless gave its agent three months notice at the outbreak of war, although it did fulfil its promise to take him back at the end of the conflict.³⁹

It was not solely the decision of the associations as to whether their agents should stay or go. The agents themselves were often keen to do something more directly related to the war effort, either by joining the armed forces or by undertaking various forms of national service. For example, Mr Hicks, the agent for Llandaff and Barry, was kept on at the start of the war, but was desperate to secure war-related employment, finally being appointed as the divisional

salvage officer for the Ministry of Food in early 1941.⁴⁰ The state, for its part, was quick to make the decision for some of those concerned. In the context of war, political agents were not seen as being in any way essential, and there was no protection for them from the call up for military or other service. Although by 1944-45 this would have changed, and ministers and officials of all parties would be agonising over how it was that agents and organizers were tied up in the forces, a very different mood prevailed in 1939-40.⁴¹

The result was that, by early spring 1940, many Conservative agents had left. Once the war intensified that May, there would be a further cull of agents, despite the increasingly vain urgings of some Central Office officials.⁴² Many continued to have some kind of relationship with their constituency body; in some cases, the relationship remained close. The agent for York, E. Bland, moved from part-time to full-time civil defence work in 1941, and this meant that the association office was closed for much of the time. But he continued to supervise the association's business, with the help of the honorary secretary, Councillor Wright.⁴³ Ipswich CA agreed in October 1939 to pay off its agent, George Sisam, with three months' salary. However, it also agreed that Sisam would continue to receive a retainer of £100 a year, and that – given that the party's offices were closed down – association business should be conducted from his house. Although the association showed little activity during the war, it clearly maintained a close relationship with Sisam, and reappointed him as full-time agent in May 1945.⁴⁴

Furthermore, it is worth remembering that, even where they were in the armed forces, some agents could continue to have some oversight of their association's affairs. This was particularly the case for various periods of the war with the Army, much of which was stationed on home territory; it was especially true of those agents who were in non-combatant units. For example, A. J. Gibb, Eden's agent at Warwick and Leamington, spent the war in the Army, but working for the pay corps on home territory; and as the war progressed, he moved closer and closer to his home base, ending up in Kidderminster, about 35 miles to the

west of Warwick, which meant that periods of leave could be, and were, spent in the constituency performing his agent's duties.⁴⁵ This is not to claim that Conservative claims of the wartime sacrifices of their agents were mythological, of course: among others, the agents for Wycombe (Buckinghamshire), E. C. Kennedy, and for Plymouth Drake, H. J. Murray, were killed in action in 1940-1, while R. J. Willey, the agent for Houghton-le-Spring (Co. Durham), was a prisoner of war.⁴⁶ Nor is it to impugn for a moment the contribution to the war effort made by people like Gibb. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that service in the Army, for all that it represented in terms of a contribution to the war effort and personal sacrifice, was not necessarily as heroic, nor as distinct from service on the home front, as might be thought at first sight.

A few agents, on the other hand, found the allure of a new career too much, and turned their backs on agency altogether. Mr Moody, the agent for Middleton and Prestwich (Lancashire) took a job with a local engineering firm early in the war. In September 1940, having been promoted to the position of Personnel and Welfare Manager, he told the CA that he would not be returning, and also that, as a result, his wife would no longer be acting as agent in his absence.⁴⁷ In 1941, the agent for Peckham (London) resigned, giving up political work in order to take up a job with an insurance company.⁴⁸ The following year the agent for Clitheroe, Mr Demain, made a permanent break with his association (which had continued to employ him full time up to that point) to become a factory welfare officer.⁴⁹

But even where Conservative agents remained (or were allowed to remain) thoroughly committed to the political life, they found that the war placed severe obstacles in their path. Restrictions on travel (especially in coastal areas), petrol shortages, the requisitioning of association offices by the military and civil authorities, and the lack of meeting halls all inhibited the activity of even the keenest, most stickable agents. Petrol rationing was a particular obstacle. It was introduced shortly after the outbreak of war and tightened progressively thereafter, culminating in the withdrawal of the basic ration from private

motorists in July 1942.⁵⁰ Agents continued to be eligible for small amounts, but these were woefully inadequate. In September 1940, the agent for Fylde (Lancashire) estimated that his normal political activities required him to cover 550-660 miles a month, which would use around 22 gallons. As he pointed out to the authorities, the constituency covered over 100,000 acres, and the association had ninety branches. The failure to get sufficient supplies led in part to the association suspending most of its activities and laying the car up over the winter of 1940-41.⁵¹ When the agent once again began to use the car in spring 1941, his new, lower, ration enabled him to travel only about 200 miles a month; and this was then further reduced that May.⁵² This was not an isolated example. By 1943, petrol shortages were severely hampering the work of the agent in the Hertford division,⁵³ and by late 1944, the agent for Chichester was calculating that the ration of seven gallons a month allowed to political agents was only enough to drive about 140 miles – totally inadequate for serious purposes in a large county division.⁵⁴ In 1941, Henley (Oxfordshire) CA decided not even to try to appoint anyone to act as agent on the grounds that petrol shortages would make it almost impossible for such a person to get around the geographically large constituency and meet branch officials, and that without such contact no appointment could be successful: ‘letters & telephone messages from a stranger would not be effective’.⁵⁵ Another problem was ‘the great increase in prices for all car accessories and repairs’ since the outbreak of war.⁵⁶ In many cases, such as West Fife, the association car was sold soon after the outbreak of war,⁵⁷ or disposed of once the war intensified in mid-1940;⁵⁸ in others, like Maidstone, it was laid up off the road (so saving on insurance and tax) and then brought back into action after the end of the war, once the agent had returned.⁵⁹ Just as Brian Harrison was right to suggest that transport improvements, by ‘enlarg[ing] what was regarded as the viable community’, were a key element in the development of British politics in the twentieth century, so the sudden and quite drastic impact of the war upon transport must have had a significant and deleterious effect on the ability of political parties to organize on their accustomed scale.⁶⁰ And, in this context, the disappearance of an agent – often the key individual holding a Conservative association’s different branches together, especially in rural constituencies – had a significant

impact indeed.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the extensive wartime movement of population – a civilian population of 48 million recorded around 60 million changes of address during the conflict – meant that even full-time agents who remained in post found their areas increasingly alien and difficult to reach politically, even if not geographically.⁶² The situation at the Wallasey by-election, where heavy air raids had led to widespread destruction such that over 20,000 election addresses were returned to the Conservative organization by the Post Office marked ‘address unknown’ was a ‘freak’, as the party itself recognized; but it does help to illustrate the point.⁶³

A number of expedients were employed to combat the increasing shortage of agents. One was the grouping of constituencies, first employed in the 1920s as a means of giving professional help to constituencies in areas where the party was weak. This meant placing a number of neighbouring constituencies were placed under the overall control of a single qualified agent or woman organizer. By April 1940, two groups had been formed in London (covering the four Islington seats on the one hand, and South and Central Hackney and Stoke Newington on the other), and two others were in the process of formation; and the scheme was being considered in other areas, too.⁶⁴ Topping pronounced the results ‘satisfactory’ in June 1940;⁶⁵ but the end of the Phoney War checked progress, and the start of the Blitz that autumn stymied it still further.⁶⁶ Even so, what limited grouping was achieved in London and the East and West Midlands was felt, by October 1941, to be ‘working satisfactorily’.⁶⁷ It was easier to group constituencies in areas where there was a strong existing superstructure, as in Birmingham. Here, the city association had long experience of overseeing the work of its associations, and so it was able to form its eleven constituencies into five groups – each with its own paid organizer – from May 1941 onwards.⁶⁸ Although individuals came and went, this system was retained for the remainder of the war, ensuring that the Birmingham organization did not collapse.

Secondly, associations could share their agent with a neighbouring constituency. As early as October 1939, the organising secretary in Glasgow Camlachie was deputed to cover the work of his counterpart in neighbouring Bridgeton, who had gone on military service.⁶⁹ The agent for West Dorset, A. G. Edwards, was shared with North Dorset from October 1939, on the proviso that North Dorset paid his salary for two months of the year.⁷⁰ The arrangement lasted until September 1940, when North Dorset terminated it due to financial difficulties; in any case, it had proved difficult for Edwards to devote sufficient time to that constituency given his work in West Dorset and his other responsibilities, which included acting as honorary secretary of both the local war savings campaign and the meetings sub-committee of the local Ministry of Information Committee, and as a platoon commander in the Home Guard.⁷¹ However, sharing was revived in September 1942 when it was agreed that he should work half of his time for Salisbury CA,⁷² an arrangement which lasted until his departure to a Buckinghamshire agency in April 1944.⁷³ The acting agent for Norwich CA, J. F. Coales, also acted as agent for the East Norfolk division between 1940 and January 1945.⁷⁴ When Alec Anderson, the agent for Rushcliffe (Nottinghamshire) died in 1942, it was agreed that James Smith, the agent for Nottingham city (covering four constituencies there) would attend to Rushcliffe CA correspondence and give what help and advice he could.⁷⁵ He remained in this position for almost two years until the association appointed a new agent.⁷⁶ And when the agent for Northampton, S. S. Jolley, was discharged from the RAF in early 1944, it was agreed that he would be shared with the neighbouring county constituency of Daventry.⁷⁷

A third option was to employ a lesser-qualified individual in a full-time or part-time capacity. In April 1941, Bristol West CA appointed the secretary of its women's branch, Miss G. Pamphlett, as acting agent and secretary while the agent, Mr Heather, was serving in the Royal Army Pay Corps.⁷⁸ Stafford CA had lost its agent, Captain F. R. Allison, to the Army at the outbreak of war; after a series of stand-in appointments, H. H. Harris was appointed on a shared basis with other local constituencies.⁷⁹ Association officials were so impressed by his work (and the clerical assistance provided by his wife, whom it also paid) that they agreed in

January 1945 to appoint him as the agent in place of Allison, who had havered about returning and who was now rather brusquely told of the change and thanked for his past services.⁸⁰

Fourthly, agents' wives often filled the gaps left by their husbands. In Tynemouth, Hugh Elliott left the agency to work for the Ministry of Information Northern Region in July 1941, leaving his wife to deal with correspondence in his stead and expecting to return after the war.⁸¹ In the event, although he died in 1943, she was persuaded to continue in her role until the spring of 1945, when she finally resigned shortly before VE Day.⁸² When the agent in Bury, Allen Moorhouse, joined the Army in 1942, it was agreed that his wife would take over the routine work of the association, an arrangement that lasted until the end of the war, when Moorhouse returned.⁸³ The fact that she had a full-time war job, however, obviously inhibited her effectiveness in the role.⁸⁴ A more unusual case was in Chichester, where Ablewhite's daughter took over his work when he was called up to the Army, for £1 a week (although she in turn later joined the Land Army).⁸⁵

Fifthly, lay constituency officials could take on some of the burden. When he became chairman of the party in October 1944, Ralph Assheton found that there was almost always someone, usually an officer or group of officers, keeping even the most inert associations going to some extent.⁸⁶ In Blackpool, the chairman and the treasurer ran the association, although this culminated in the resignation of the treasurer due to overwork in February 1944.⁸⁷ However, lay officials, unless middle-aged or older, were themselves liable to be called up. In Winchester, for example, the agent, H. T. Worlock, joined the Army soon after the start of the war.⁸⁸ But the chairman, vice-chairman and secretary also served, in the War Office, Royal Navy and RAF respectively; and the women's branch secretary and the CA clerk were also called up for national service. Although Treasurer, General A. J. F. Eden, and a Mrs Murray managed to keep things ticking over, they had no clerical help and were desperate, by early 1945, to get professional assistance.⁸⁹

Finally, of course, the work could simply go undone. The loss of the agent could be part cause, and part effect, of closure for the duration of the war. In Denbigh (North Wales) the agent joined the RAF on the outbreak of war; there were then no recorded meetings of the association or its committees until 21 June 1945, when he was welcomed back to the constituency after his war service.⁹⁰ In West Fife, the association declared its intention of carrying on as best it could in October 1939, but felt it had no alternative but to dismiss its organising secretary (as agents were known in Scotland); the result, perhaps unsurprisingly, was that there was virtually no activity for years to come.⁹¹

Statistical precision is difficult to achieve, but the available figures are very suggestive. About two months after the outbreak of war, of the 119 woman organizers on whom their National Society had information, 28 were still working full time, and 3 part time, for their constituency associations; 31 had been called up into the Forces; 28 were ‘doing other work’; and 29 had resigned, or been dismissed or placed under notice.⁹² In June 1940, Topping told Hacking that 193 agents and 69 woman organizers were in the Forces or on other forms of national service.⁹³ These figures accord with those quoted to the National Union, which suggest that April 1940, 120 agents and 34 woman organizers were serving in the forces and auxiliary services; by March 1941, the figures were 156 and 33, and by October 1941, 168 and 30, respectively. A further 63 agents and 28 woman organizers were engaged on various forms of national service in April 1940, these figures rising to 119 and 43 in March 1941.⁹⁴ By any standards, such levels of engagement with the war effort had a major impact on the Conservative party’s professional organization in the constituencies.

More localized examples bear this out. Out of 42 full-time agents in London, 29 were still carrying out their duties for their associations by the end of October 1939.⁹⁵ By the end of the year, it was reckoned that only 5 per cent of agents had lost their posts since the outbreak of war, although another 5 per cent were currently under notice to quit. However, almost 27 per

cent were in the Forces, and 16 per cent were engaged either full or part-time on some form of national service.⁹⁶ The Western Divisional Council of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Association had within its area 38 constituencies. At the outbreak of war, 28 of those CAs employed organising secretaries.⁹⁷ By June 1941, 9 remained in full-time employment with their associations; 1 was employed part-time; 9 were engaged on national service work (of whom 8 were also continuing to do some work for their associations); and 5 were serving in the armed forces.⁹⁸ By June 1944, it was reckoned that no more than 13 of the pre-war 28 would be working for their associations by the end of the war.⁹⁹ In Manchester, a comprehensive reorganization plan in March 1939 had left all ten constituencies with a full-time agent; however, on the outbreak of war, three were called up, and another two volunteered, for military service.¹⁰⁰

Even so, it is important not to go too far: in London, towards the end of the Blitz in March 1941, there were still 15 full-time and 8 part-time agents in employment.¹⁰¹ And while the party's Northern Area bemoaned the fact that only 8 of the 34 associations in its region had a full-time agent in 1940, and only 7 a year later, this was still better than nothing in the weakest Conservative area organization in England.¹⁰² But the Eastern area was especially hard hit, reflecting its position close to the front line of the British war effort. By January 1945 there were only 5 agents still working in the area; and even by mid-April, there were only 10, plus 3 woman organizers.¹⁰³

Although the attenuation of the pre-war agency was a problem for the party, it could also be seen as an opportunity. It had been a constant complaint of some Conservatives that agents were poorly distributed, with the best tending to be employed, not by financially hard-pressed CAs in the marginal seats where they were most needed, but by the wealthiest CAs, which could afford to pay the most generous salaries, in utterly safe seats. Topping was a firm subscriber to this view, and as early as November 1939, he suggested to Hacking that the war would lead to significant changes in electoral machinery and law, not least by introducing

new restrictions on the amount MPs and candidates could contribute to CAs. Such restrictions were likely to affect the ability of CAs to pay agents' wages, and so raised important issues.

He continued:

If these sweeping alterations take place, a revision of the system by which Agents and Woman Organisers [sic] of the Party are employed will be inevitable, and a central service must be established. It will not be easy to work out the details of such a scheme, but something must be done to enable the Party to place in the key constituencies those men and women who possess the best qualifications, and remove the present anomalies which permit of the best salaries being paid in Divisions with majorities so large that a mere novice could conduct an election campaign.

He recognized that it would be unwise to raise this issue of central employment of agents to ensure the concentration of the best ones in key marginal seats so early in the war.¹⁰⁴ By early 1941, however, he was starting to think that his chance had come. With no prospect of an early end to the war, reform could not be postponed on the grounds of potential electoral disruption. At the same time, the weakness and/or inactivity of many associations, for which local autonomy was 'a powerful totem', and the absence of so many agents on war duty, meant that key elements of possible resistance were weakened significantly.¹⁰⁵ Topping also believed that Churchill's preoccupation with the war effort would prevent him from being a major obstacle. More altruistically, Topping also claimed that centralising employment would ensure that agents who had gone to war could be assured of re-employment after they were demobilized.¹⁰⁶ In short, if ever there was a time to launch a campaign to centralize the agency, this was it.

At first, Topping seemed to be making progress. His Agents' Security Scheme (a clever sales pitch, playing on fears as to post-war employment prospects), involving a national pooling of agents under a Central Employment Board for Agents run by Central Office.¹⁰⁷ The aims were to increase co-operation between CAs; to ensure that qualified agents were provided in all marginal seats; to ensure 'a more uniform standard of Constituency Organisation [sic]'; and to

reduce election expenditure. In January 1941, council of the agents' body, the NSCUA, agreed to elect a war emergency council to consider these plans.¹⁰⁸ Although they refused to commit themselves fully, they did not rule the scheme out.¹⁰⁹ On 12 November 1941, the executive of the National Union reacted with similar caution, but again did not reject the scheme: instead, it appointed a committee of seven to confer with NSCUA representatives.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, in February 1942, it was agreed to place the issue before the branches of the NSCUA, and that area chairmen should also be consulted.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, Topping continued to try and talk round other party bodies.¹¹²

But there was a lot of resistance. Many objected to change taking place while agents were away fighting. There was some feeling that this was not the kind of thing that the party should be doing in wartime. And there was also considerable resistance to centralization from constituency associations jealous of their autonomy. Among the agents themselves, there were concerns about being moved around the country at the say-so of Central Office. On 25 May 1942, the NSCUA council met to discuss the scheme. Its branches had mostly managed, in one way or another, to express their views: the only area not functioning was Wales. Votes favouring the scheme had been recorded at a joint meeting of the Home Counties North and South, London, and Wessex branches; at a meeting of the North-Western branch; and by a postal vote of the membership of the Northern branch. However, the East and West Midlands branches, along with Yorkshire, had declared against the scheme, the Eastern Counties branch had recorded '[a]n indefinite decision', and the Western Counties had not yet met. Faced with this mixed response, the council meeting voted by 14 to 6 not to accept the Topping scheme; and an amendment to postpone a decision until an attempt had been made to get the views of agents in the Forces and on other national service was lost by a similar margin. It was agreed to try to draft some scheme to help 'the poorer key constituencies', but this was a mere sop.¹¹³ The plans then got a mixed response from the woman organizers' society on 17 July, and five days later a well-attended meeting of the backbench 1922 Committee of MPs also failed to come out in favour of the scheme.¹¹⁴

Topping's last hope was that the party grassroots would rise in support of the scheme, but this was always unlikely. Most of the associations that discussed the proposals were hostile.¹¹⁵ Monmouth CA was one of a number that rejected them specifically on the grounds that it was the wrong time to raise the issue 'with so many agents away'.¹¹⁶ The area meetings that were called, typically comprising CA chairmen in the area, came up with mixed responses. The North West 'generally welcomed' the scheme, only about 6 out of the 50 present failing to vote in favour, and none voting against. Wessex pronounced itself broadly in favour; London voted in favour with only one dissident; so too did the Western Counties. The party's weakest areas, Northern and Wales, both voted in favour, with very little opposition. However, there were countervailing views. The Eastern Counties area meeting was 'very divided', and ultimately passed a 'colourless' resolution to the effect that something must be done 'to meet the needs of the poorest key constituencies'. Yorkshire and Home Counties North were largely hostile; the majority at the Home Counties South meeting were not in favour, but felt unable to vote finally for or against on the grounds that it was wrong to make such a decision with more than half of their agents away and without MPs having been consulted; and the East Midlands chairmen also opposed the scheme.¹¹⁷ When these views were reported to the NSCUA war emergency committee on 9 September, it agreed that, since the scheme 'could not command more than limited support', it could not proceed.¹¹⁸ An attempt to revive it at the NSCUA council meeting on 2 October was defeated.¹¹⁹

Topping had failed, and although he 'still felt that time would prove him right', he was clearly a beaten man.¹²⁰ On 11 November 1942, the NUEC finally rejected his proposals, although it did agree to look into the whole question of party finance.¹²¹ Although some references continued to be made to the scheme in the *Conservative Agents' Journal* during 1943, this was the end of any practical hopes of implementing the idea.¹²² (Even a more limited attempt to pool some resources to help key constituencies came to nothing.)¹²³ The post-war Maxwell-Fyfe report, harbinger in other areas of significant organizational change, did not revive it.¹²⁴

It was not until the early 1970s that the party would actually attempt to implement such a centralising scheme, albeit with disappointing results that tended to vindicate the views of most of Topping's wartime critics, almost three decades after Topping himself had departed the scene.¹²⁵

The failure of the Topping scheme meant that, as the party began to revive from early 1944 onwards, the agency was recognizably similar in form to that which had prevailed in the later 1930s. In one way, this represented an achievement for Topping: there remained considerable stress on the maintenance of the professional standards that were represented by qualification and certification. This was no mean feat. The agents' training scheme had been suspended at the outbreak of war and therefore there were no new people coming through with the requisite qualifications.¹²⁶ But for Topping, it was axiomatic that the party must avoid the situation at the end of the Great War, when large numbers of 'unqualified people' had been acting as agents.¹²⁷ Where unqualified, or partially qualified, staff were employed, it remained the expectation that their job titles and remuneration would reflect the fact.¹²⁸ By April 1944, Topping had come up with the idea of a Guild of Party Workers as a body to represent, regulate, and ultimately restrict the role of, uncertificated agents and organizers.¹²⁹

Significantly, it was to be a temporary body: there was no sense that the party should seek to accommodate a non-professional agency in anything but the shortest of terms.¹³⁰ He also tried to revive the idea of a central pool of agents, to be made up of former agents leaving the Forces and seeking work, but little was to come of this: overwhelmingly, such agents as were in this position preferred to apply to constituency associations direct.¹³¹ Central Office began to look for people who had been invalided out of the Forces to train as agents, although the initiative appears to have achieved relatively little.¹³² But still, increasing calls for the employment of unqualified staff were largely rejected.¹³³ It seems likely the raising of the spectre of the deprofessionalization of the agency was sufficient to tip the party hierarchy into the call to revival that was finally issued by the party chairman, Thomas Dugdale, in September 1944, part of which was renewed pressure for the release of agents from the

Armed Forces and other forms of national service. After the war, it remained the case that agents were expected to be fully qualified.¹³⁴

The push to release agents had begun earlier in 1944, in part as a response to the Conservative by-election defeats at Skipton and West Derbyshire. One of the key reasons identified for an earlier string of by-election defeats, in 1942, had been a lack of full-time agents in the constituencies concerned.¹³⁵ Now, the party leader himself became involved in the issue. At an emergency meeting at 10 Downing Street immediately after the polls closed in West Derbyshire on 17 February 1944, Churchill, Anthony Eden, Lord Beaverbrook, Brendan Bracken, Dugdale and the chief whip, James Stuart, agreed that it was urgently necessary that the party organization in the country should be revived, and that a key component of this process was the revival of the agency. 'Wherever possible,' they agreed, 'efforts should be made to recall Agents who are engaged in other work or to appoint new ones'; and, '[i]f necessary, negotiations should be opened with the Ministry of Labour and National Service after consultation with the political parties supporting the Government'.¹³⁶ However, the crisis passed, and the urgency was lost. Churchill then became preoccupied with the build-up to the Normandy landings of June 1944; and then, as Kevin Jefferys has suggested, military success meant that the Conservative leadership became more complacent about the party's post-war prospects.¹³⁷ When, on 28 June, the war cabinet discussed the possibility of seeking the temporary release from the Forces of party agents for constituencies in which by-elections were pending, the matter was effectively shelved.¹³⁸ With the end of the war apparently in sight, the release of *all* agents now seemed more important than the issue of *ad hoc* releases for by-elections.

But this was a bigger issue to tackle, and progress was slow. It was clear, though, that the Conservatives had much to gain from making the effort. Topping's calculations showed that Conservative agents and officials were heavily engaged in various aspects of the war effort. In October 1944, 163 agents and 25 woman organizers were serving in the forces, and 53 agents

and woman organizers on other forms of national service, a total of 216 agents and 76 woman organizers. Of the agents, 14 were serving in the Royal Navy, 117 in the Army, and 32 in the RAF; of the woman organizers, 2 were serving in the WRNS, 15 in the ATS, and 8 in the WAAF.¹³⁹

Topping therefore joined forces with the chief agents of the Labour, Liberal and Liberal National parties to impress upon the government and its ministries the need for agents to be released ahead of the general election which they were now expecting to take place shortly after victory in Europe.¹⁴⁰ On 11 December, the war cabinet referred the matter to Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour and National Service.¹⁴¹ Eleven days later, Bevin chaired a meeting of ministers and officials from the service ministries and the Treasury, along with the chief agents of the four main parties, to try to address the problem of candidates and agents being released in time for the election. Where agents were concerned, it was agreed that, 'subject to overriding military considerations', people who had been agents prior to joining the Forces should be released early, regardless of whether they were to return to their former constituency or go to a different one; 'key staff' of headquarters and regional organization were to be treated similarly. There would be no such favours for people who had not formerly been agents but had now been appointed as such, or for former agents who were now required for headquarters or regional work. It was felt that releases from industry 'would be easier to arrange', and the MLNS would deal with such cases on their merits. It would be for the respective party headquarters to apply for agents to be released. Agents and others who were released and then did not act in that capacity would be recalled to the Forces. Finally, it was accepted that 'Cabinet authority w[ould] be necessary before releases c[ould] begin'.¹⁴² But the government was slow to act, partly due to other business. Conservative pressure in parliament grew, however, with Hacking, among others, demanding a statement about the release of agents.¹⁴³ Finally, on 29 January 1945, the war cabinet approved a policy essentially in line with the decisions of the 22 December meeting, of the terms under which candidates, agents, organizers and officials would be released.¹⁴⁴

It was one thing to get the war cabinet to agree to the release of agents, but quite another to get the MLNS and forces ministries to agree to let them go. As late as 5 June, questions were still being asked in parliament about when agents would be released.¹⁴⁵ Part of the problem was that agents, with their organizational skills, had often attained important positions in military or civil bodies. The agent for South Ealing, H. G. Lancaster, had joined the Ministry of Food in 1939: by the end of 1944 he was 'a key man' in the Food Office at Cork Street. Recognising the strength of his bargaining position, he demanded a significant increase in salary, which was duly agreed to: even so, despite the CA applying for his release in February 1945, he was only able to serve as election agent thanks to being given six weeks' leave in June.¹⁴⁶ It was a similar story at Fylde (Lancashire) where the agent, J. R. Almond, worked for the Food Control Committee of Preston Rural District Council from October 1939, and only returned on 1 June 1945, to a salary that had increased from the pre-war £350 to £600.¹⁴⁷ It must have seemed perverse to the Ministry of Food that it was losing some of its ablest administrators to party politics at a time when it was still in urgent need of their services in the face of serious ongoing problems.

By the spring of 1945, agents were beginning to return in large numbers. Ultimately, 187 Conservative agents were temporarily released from the Forces or other forms of national service.¹⁴⁸ If an association appealed for its agent's release in January or February, he or she was usually back by May.¹⁴⁹ On 10 May 1945, Assheton could tell the NUEC that 65 agents had been released from the Forces in the last month alone.¹⁵⁰ By April 1945, meanwhile, Birmingham had full-time organizers in all twelve of the divisions covered by the city's Unionist association, although of these only six were qualified agents, one was partly trained, and five were unqualified 'young trainees'.¹⁵¹ However, things were still not going as smoothly as they might. On 9 May, Churchill had been informed that 26 Conservative agents whose release had been requested were still being kept in the services: in five cases, the release had been requested as long ago as February, and a further eight in March. He took the

matter up with Bevin, and releases quickened thereafter.¹⁵² In many cases, as with that of George Brudenell, the Darwen agent, such releases were temporary, for the duration of the election campaign only.¹⁵³

Of course, there were associations that, for one reason or another, had no continuing commitment to an individual, and a number of them began to advertize for agents in the summer and autumn of 1944.¹⁵⁴ In September 1944, members of the executive committee of Sowerby CA (West Yorkshire) were presented with a *fait accompli* when, at the meeting called to revive the association after a 'dormant' period going back to mid-1941, their chairman, Percy Carter, presented them with their new agent, Lt. Col. A. H. Barker, who had been appointed by the officers and who had already started work in the constituency.¹⁵⁵ Bodmin CA (Cornwall) was able to appoint P. Newton Clare from a field of five south-west based applicants in September 1944.¹⁵⁶ By February 1945, the area organizer for the South West was able to report that, as well as Bodmin, the associations in Bristol East, Bristol South, Bridgwater, Frome, Weston-super-Mare, Penryn and Falmouth, and Tavistock had all appointed new agents, while Bath, Plymouth Sutton, and North Cornwall were in the process of doing so.¹⁵⁷

However, even where such associations were keen to make appointments, they often faced great difficulty. In Penryn and Falmouth (Cornwall), where the previous agent had been dismissed for embezzling funds in May 1940,¹⁵⁸ efforts to find an agent during much of 1944 proved unsuccessful until the MP brought in a friend whom he proposed to train up for the position.¹⁵⁹ As stated above, the closure of agent training courses meant that the pool of qualified agents was shrinking: as the chairman of Salisbury CA put it in frustration at their failure to find an agent in 1944, the demand for agents 'far exceed[ed] a very limited supply'.¹⁶⁰ Newbury (Berkshire) CA was fortunate in July 1944 that the one applicant responding to its advertisement in the *Daily Telegraph* for a woman organizer proved to be appointable.¹⁶¹ In August 1944, Clitheroe CA was able to appoint a Central Office trainee as

its agent thanks to the intervention of the area organizer.¹⁶² By early 1945, larger numbers of people were applying for organising posts.¹⁶³ Even so, it was by no means unusual for an association to be unable to appoint an agent ahead of the 1945 election, as Middleton and Prestwich, among others, found.¹⁶⁴ A few associations made appointments from a thin field and found that their new agents were incompetent, as was the case in the new constituency of Harrow East.¹⁶⁵

In many cases, the former agent simply returned to duty. In April 1944, Central Office had laid down that, where an agent had been promised reinstatement, it must be given unless there were 'insurmountable difficulties': conversely, any agent receiving a retainer from a CA should not try to leave that association before the next general election.¹⁶⁶ When dormant associations began to be revived following the Dugdale letter of September 1944, therefore, former agents were contacted to see whether they wished to return, and in some cases the response was a swift and straightforward affirmative, as was the case in Louth (Lincolnshire).¹⁶⁷ In Kirkcaldy Burghs, another constituency association that had remained wholly inactive for most of the war, the pre-war organising secretary, David Paxton, returned to work in March 1945 and was soon galvanising the organization.¹⁶⁸ In the west of Scotland, meanwhile, the former organising secretaries in Glasgow Hillhead, North Lanarkshire, Bute and North Ayrshire, Kilmarnock, and Clackmannan and East Stirlingshire all returned to their former posts in the period between January and March 1945.¹⁶⁹ In some cases, though – as in Louth – there was a problem, in that such agents were often still in the forces, and so could do little, if any, work for the time being.¹⁷⁰ In associations that had remained more active, similarly, the former agent often returned to his post. In Salisbury, F. J. Tucker, who had joined the Army at the end of 1939, finally returned to work on 14 May 1945. Whether he knew that they had been seeking full-time agents in his absence in Italy, where he had been wounded in action, is unclear.¹⁷¹ However, many expected a substantial increase in their pay: in Eden's constituency of Warwick and Leamington, for example, the agent's salary was increased from the pre-war £500 to £750, and that of the woman organizer from £250 to £375; they also

found to their displeasure that they could not get a typist/clerk for less than £3 per week.¹⁷²

Birmingham's chief agent told the city's Unionist association that, unless pay increased significantly after the war, the agency as a profession would die; this helped secure increases in the pay of constituency agents from £400 to £500 a year, while his own remuneration also rose to well over £1,000.¹⁷³

In other cases, however, the previous agent did not return. Henley had expected that its agent, Major Shirley, would return at the end of the war when he departed in September 1939.¹⁷⁴ However, when told in February 1945 that if he returned it would have to be at his pre-war salary of £450, Shirley – now a Colonel – refused the offer. A new agent was appointed whose wife, herself an experienced and certificated Conservative organizer, was appointed assistant agent at the same time.¹⁷⁵

It is also worth noting that returning agents did not always remain with their old associations for very long before either moving to a different location or leaving the profession altogether. Moorhouse returned to Bury in May 1945 after three years in the Army, but left that September, this time for good.¹⁷⁶ The agent for North Cornwall, Mr Tillotson, was appointed in May 1945, but lasted barely six months.¹⁷⁷ Mr Nicholls, the agent for Harborough (Leicestershire), was paid a retainer throughout the war as he was engaged on war duties, and formally returned to full-time employment with the association in October 1945, but he resigned just three months later, having been appointed to the agency at Derby.¹⁷⁸ Some were drawn into working at Central Office as headquarters began to re-establish itself: the agent for Newbury (Berkshire), C. F. R. Bagnall, returned to his constituency in May 1945, but then left it for a post at Central Office in February 1946.¹⁷⁹

But the overall trends immediately after the war were very encouraging. By December 1945, every constituency but four in the party's Eastern Area (which had had only five agents in post at the start of the year) had a full-time, certificated agent, and, of the four, two had

uncertificated full-timers while the remaining two were in the process of making an appointment.¹⁸⁰ By early 1946, attempts to recruit agents were eliciting significant interest. The advertisement to fill the Harborough vacancy, for example, resulted in 38 applications.¹⁸¹ However, shortages of agents did persist into 1946 in some places, with the Northern Area and Yorkshire both reporting difficulties: at the end of 1945, 15 of the 34 Northern associations were still without an agent.¹⁸²

What of the relative position? Labour's peak year for agents had been 1928, when 189 had been employed, which meant that roughly a third of constituency Labour parties (CLPs) had had one.¹⁸³ In May 1939, the figure had been only 115, or around a fifth of CLPs. Initially, the war had very little effect on the numbers employed, and Labour headquarters was much firmer at the outset of the war about the need to retain agents where possible.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, the figure for May 1940 was 117, marginally up from twelve months earlier. However the figure then fell, to 103 in June 1941 and then plummeting to 62 in May 1942 and 58 in June 1943. The 60 CLPs in the London County Council area had had 31 agents on the outbreak of war; by January 1942 only 7 remained, and some of those had 'additional onerous duties' in, for example, the ARP or the Home Guard. Of those who had left, some had gone into the forces, others to employ their organizational skills in areas of more immediate need as food officers, fuel officers, council rehousing officers, or air raid inspectors.¹⁸⁵ Some Conservatives hinted darkly that Bevin, as Minister of Labour and National Service, was pulling strings to save Labour agents from being called up: 'I cannot understand,' wrote Eden's agent in Warwick and Leamington, A. J. Gibbs, in mid-1942, 'how the Labour Agent, Wright, is avoiding Military Service for he is quite a young man working on the railway.'¹⁸⁶ However, the overall decline in numbers suggests that there were no special favours, despite the hopes of some Labourites that Bevin might prove biddable.¹⁸⁷ There appears to have been only one exception. The call-up of the Labour agent for Derby, Harry Russell, was delayed for long enough to allow him to reach his forty-first birthday, the age beyond which he would no

longer be liable for military service, with the result that he was able to serve his CLP continuously throughout the war.¹⁸⁸

The number of Labour agents did not recover dramatically in the later years of the war, either. By May 1945, there were still only 64 full-time Labour agents in post, and the party was sharing all the Conservatives' difficulties in getting its agents released by the relevant authorities. Labour went into the 1945 general election with fewer full-time agents than at any general election since 1918. At the election, in the 39 seats of the East Midlands region, replete with marginal seats in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, and Rutland, the party had only 7 full-time agents, and three of those were only appointed after the election date had been set. In this sense, any idea of a Labour 'advantage' in 1945 is a myth. Even by June 1946, the party would still have only a hundred full-timers in post. It is these figures that have suggested to some observers that the Conservatives had little to complain about.

It would be misleading to leave it there, however. As Michael Kandiah has pointed out, the key point was that the Conservatives had been accustomed to being much better endowed with full-time agents and other staffers than their rivals.¹⁸⁹ It was this loss of *relative* superiority that so affected the Conservatives, both practically and emotionally, in 1945. Labour was far more accustomed than the Conservatives to fighting election campaigns with amateur agents and organizers. CLPs were far more used than CAs to functioning effectively between elections without the ministrations of a professional. Thus more Conservative associations than Labour parties were hit, and hit harder, by the lack of a full-time agent both during the war and in 1945. The Conservatives were further from pre-war normalcy than Labour, and in this sense they were at a relative disadvantage. This does suggest that there was something in the argument that, in respect of agents at least, the Conservative party machine had been damaged more than the Labour one in the war years as a whole.

It was part of the Conservative ‘myth’ of 1945 that the decayed state of the agency had a significant impact on the results of the general election. Maxwell-Fyfe summed it up effectively enough in 1964:

During these years the Conservative Party in the constituencies was not functioning. It had not, like the Labour Party, a hard core of Trade Unionists, organized in active branches, whose jobs prevented them going to the [sic] war. All except the elderly Conservative agents were in the Services, and the same applied to constituency officers.¹⁹⁰

Another post-war reformer, R. A. Butler, also argued in retrospect that war had left the Conservative organization in a ‘parlous’ state, ‘much harder hit than that of our opponents by the absence of agents and organizers on war service’.¹⁹¹ But we need to be sceptical here, too. In the context of 1945, it suited most Conservatives to blame organizational decline for political failure and electoral humiliation, and move on. It suited Churchill, whose shortcomings as party leader were thereby obscured; it suited party reformers like Maxwell-Fyfe and Butler as giving them a mandate for change; and it suited Conservatives more generally because it set their apparent patriotic self-sacrifice against the perceivedly ‘party first’ mentality of Labour. Yet on the specific matter of agents, less concern was expressed before the election results were declared than afterwards. Central Office area agents’ reports on the election made *prior* to the declaration of the results contained very little adverse comment on the subject of agents, beyond occasional derogatory references to individuals.¹⁹² Even in the immediate aftermath of the election defeat, when the area agent for Yorkshire, Brigadier Rawcliffe, identified ten reasons for the Conservative defeat, he made no reference to agents at all.¹⁹³ Indeed, the agent for the East Midlands went so far as to say that he ‘[could] not speak too highly of the way the Agents ha[d] carried on, particularly ... the untrained ones. ... I have had no trouble at all with any of them’.¹⁹⁴ More and better agents in 1944-45 might have made some difference: it was widely agreed, for example, that the electoral registers compiled in 1945 were far from perfect, and experienced Conservative agents might have been able to do more to challenge their validity.¹⁹⁵ A stronger agency

would almost certainly have secured better registration of business votes.¹⁹⁶ But these were of significant numbers in only a handful of constituencies, and overall no-one would claim that the Conservatives lost the 1945 general election because of the state of the register.

The effects of the war upon Conservative agency were significant, but essentially transient. Without a doubt, the agency was severely hit by the war – the sheer number of agents who left to serve in the forces, undertake various forms of national service, or take on other employment, attests to this. This meant that there was, in turn, a significant negative impact on the constituency associations that relied upon agents for their organizational effectiveness, despite the noble efforts of wives, part-timers, volunteers and constituency officials to fill the gap. However, there was always a sense that – discounting financial catastrophe – associations would once again employ full-time agents and organizers after the war. In fact, financial catastrophe was averted to such an extent that associations were often more, rather than less, likely to do so after 1945 than they had been in the later 1930s. But it was this expectation, and the realization that they would be financially solvent after the war, that helped to stiffen associations' resistance to Topping's plans for centralization: and the defeat of those plans meant that, in many ways, the agency was very similar in form after the war to what it had been before it. But if that was a defeat for Topping, his victory came in the maintenance, despite the pressures of war, of a professional standard for agents, rigorously enforced. It was significant that the NSCUA was quick to declare, at its first post-election meeting, that members of what was now known as the Guild of Conservative Workers should be encouraged to take the agents' examination as soon as possible; and it was also partly to ensure the maintenance of professional standards that the NSCUA and National Society of Conservative and Unionist Woman Organisers were merged after the war, and the position of women organizers generally improved.¹⁹⁷ Although the Maxwell-Fyfe report was to leave the issue of central employment closed, it did defend, and reinforce, the principle of a professional agency based on rigorous training and examination, and it did seek to improve the lot of agents more generally.¹⁹⁸ Overall, therefore, the Conservatives emerged from the

war with an agency that was different in detail, but recognizably similar in form, to that which had predated the war; and in post-war Britain, the Conservatives would continue to have far more full-time agents than their rivals.¹⁹⁹

¹ S. Ball, 'Local Conservatism and the evolution of the party organization', in A. Seldon and S. Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, 1994), 261-311, at 281.

² K. O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945-1951* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 29-30; *idem.*, *Labour People: Leaders and Lieutenants, Hardie to Kinnock* (Oxford, 1987), p. 232.

³ J. Grimond, *Memoirs* (London, 1979), p. 130.

⁴ J. Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin, 1902-1940* (1978), p. 239; Ball, 'Local Conservatism', p. 284.

⁵ See e.g. Surrey History Centre, Reigate CA papers, 353/3/2/3, emergency committee 22 Mar. 1945, with agent reminiscing about situation prior to 1935 general election.

⁶ Ramsden, *Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, pp. 238-9.

⁷ M. Pinto-Duschinsky, *British Political Finance, 1830-1980* (Washington, D.C., 1981) p. 114; Bolton Archives Service [AS], Bolton CA papers, FDC/1/6, general purposes committee 29 Aug. 1938; Reigate CA papers, 353/3/1/1, annual report 1938 to annual meeting 10 Mar. 1939.

⁸ For this, see esp. M. Stacey, *Tradition and Change: A Study of Banbury* (1960).

⁹ See e.g. Oxfordshire Record Office [RO], Henley CA papers, S. Oxon. Con. I/3, executive committee 26 Jan. 1938.

¹⁰ Ramsden, *Age of Balfour and Baldwin*, p. 240; see also Ball, 'Local Conservatism', 282.

¹¹ Essex RO, Chelmsford CA papers, D/Z 96/7, executive committee 29 Mar. 1939.

¹² Norfolk RO, East Norfolk CA papers, SO 92/1, joint executive committee 29 Apr. 1939.

¹³ West Sussex RO, Chichester CA papers, CO/1CH/Add. MS 12,088, finance sub-committee 19 Jan. 1939.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, emergency general purposes and finance committee 5 Sep. 1939.

¹⁵ Birmingham City Archives, Birmingham CA papers, uncat., officers' sub-committee 19 Sep., 12 Nov. 1939.

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- ¹⁶ Conservative Party Archive [CPA], CCO 500/1/9, Hacking circular to associations, 6 Sep. 1939.
- ¹⁷ CCO 500/1/9, Hacking circular to associations, 12 Sep. 1939.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Ramsden to CA chairmen, 23 Sep. 1939; Hacking to CA and women's chairmen, 26 Oct. 1939.
- ¹⁹ See e.g. CCO 500/1/9, Topping to agents, 6 Oct. 1939; Topping to agents and woman organizers, 13 Nov. 1939; also Maxse to agents 14 June 1940.
- ²⁰ *Conservative Agents' Journal* [CAJ], July 1940.
- ²¹ Birmingham CA papers, uncat., officers' sub-committee 19 Sep., 12 Nov. 1939.
- ²² See e.g. Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Hertford CA papers, Acc 3258/unclassified, executive committee 25 Nov. 1939.
- ²³ Chichester CA papers, CO/1CH/Add. MS 12,088, emergency general purposes and finance committee 12 Sep. 1939.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, general purposes and finance committee 12 Feb. 1940.
- ²⁵ Lancashire RO, Clitheroe CA papers, DDX 800/1/3, executive committee 21 Sep., 16 Oct. 1939.
- ²⁶ Worcestershire RO, Bewdley CA papers, BA 956/8, officers' meeting 29 Mar. 1940.
- ²⁷ Flintshire RO, Flintshire CA papers, D/DM/307/4, management committee 11 Sep. 1939, executive committee 25 Nov. 1939, management committee 11 Apr. 1942, annual general meeting 29 Sep., 1945.
- ²⁸ CPA, Wessex area council papers, ARE 10/1/3, finance and general purposes committee 4 Oct. 1939, 28 Feb. 1940, 24 Nov. 1943.
- ²⁹ National Library of Wales [NLW], City of Cardiff CA records 26, Llandaff and Barry CA special finance committee 2 Oct. 1939.
- ³⁰ Bodleian Library, Crookshank papers, MSS Eng. Hist. d. 360, diary 29 June 1940.
- ³¹ See e.g. Bewdley CA papers, BA 956/8, officers' meeting 1 Sep. 1939.

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- ³² Chelmsford CA papers, D/Z 96/7, ways and means sub-committee 15 Sep. 1939, 12 Feb. 1940.
- ³³ Bewdley CA papers, BA 956/8, officers' meeting 29 Mar. 1940.
- ³⁴ Lincolnshire Archives, Horncastle CA papers, Misc. dep. 268/1, finance and general purposes committee 25 Sep. 1939.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, finance and general purposes committee 20 May 1940.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, finance and general purposes committee 20 Mar 1944.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, finance and general purposes committee 20 Mar 1944, 23 Apr. 1945; annual general meeting 13 Oct. 1945.
- ³⁸ Cornwall RO, North Cornwall CA papers, DDX 381/5, special finance and general purposes committee 28 Aug. 1939, executive committee 11 Sep. 1939, 2 June 1945.
- ³⁹ London Metropolitan Archives, South Ealing CA papers, Acc 1338/2, executive committee 30 Sep. 1939, 2 Mar. 1945, council meeting 1 June 1945.
- ⁴⁰ City of Cardiff CA records 26, Llandaff and Barry CA finance committee 29 Jan. 1941.
- ⁴¹ See e.g. East Norfolk CA papers, SO 92/1, joint executive committee 24 Feb. 1940.
- ⁴² See e.g. CCO 500/1/9, Maxse to agents 14 June 1940.
- ⁴³ York City Archives, York CA papers, Acc. 156/53/121, annual report for 1941; /123, for 1942; 156/22, annual general meeting 7 Mar. 1942.
- ⁴⁴ Suffolk RO (Ipswich), Ipswich CA papers, GK 401/1/1, executive committee 5 Oct. 1939, 14 May 1945.
- ⁴⁵ Birmingham University Library [UL], Avon papers, AP 11/1/14, A. J. Gibbs to A. Eden, 27 Apr. 1943; 16, 8 Aug. 1943; /26, 17 Jan. 1945.
- ⁴⁶ CPA, National Union papers, NUA 4/2, Card 148, NUEC report to NUCC 4 Apr. 1940; card 149, 27 Mar. 1941.
- ⁴⁷ Lancashire RO, Middleton and Prestwich CA papers, PLC 1/2, finance and general purposes committee 19 Sep. 1940.

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- ⁴⁸ British Library of Political and Economic Science, Clapham CA papers, vol. 5, microfilm 546, Metropolitan Association of Conservative and Unionist Agents, executive committee 2 July 1941.
- ⁴⁹ Clitheroe CA papers, DDX 800/1/3, executive committee 4 Mar. 1942.
- ⁵⁰ D. J. Payton-Smith, *Oil: A Study of War-Time Policy and Administration* (1971), pp. 288-93.
- ⁵¹ Lancashire RO, Fylde CA papers, DDX 1202/3/7, J. R. Almond to Divisional Petroleum Officer, Manchester, 2 Sep., 7 Nov. 1940.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, Almond to B. A. Warner (Divisional Petroleum Officer, Manchester), 2 Apr. 1941; Warner to Almond, 23 May 1941.
- ⁵³ Hertford CA papers, Acc 3258/unclassified, annual report 1943 to annual general meeting 6 May 1944.
- ⁵⁴ At 20 m.p.g. in 16 h.p. car. See Chichester CA papers, CO/1CH/Add. MS 12,088, organisation sub-committee 20 Nov. 1944.
- ⁵⁵ Henley CA papers, S. Oxon. Con. I/3, finance and general purposes committee 30 Aug. 1941.
- ⁵⁶ Staffordshire RO, Stafford CA papers, D1289/1/3, finance committee 19 May 1942.
- ⁵⁷ St Andrews UL, West Fife UA papers, MS 36593, annual general meeting 19 Mar. 1940.
- ⁵⁸ See e.g. Staffordshire RO, Stone CA papers, D1289/1/12, women's divisional committee 30 Sep. 1940.
- ⁵⁹ Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone CA papers, U1634/A3/1/2, emergency sub-committee 16 Oct. 1939; U1634/A3/1/3, emergency sub-committee 5 May 1945.
- ⁶⁰ B. Harrison, *The Transformation of British Politics, 1860-1995* (Oxford, 1996), p. 120.
- ⁶¹ A. H. Birch, *Small-Town Politics: A Study of Political Life in Glossop* (Oxford, 1959), p. 47.

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- ⁶² I. C. B. Dear (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (rev. edn., Oxford, 2001), p. 885; R. M. Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (1950), p. 101; and see e.g. Hampshire RO, Winchester CA papers, 73M86W/5, finance and general purposes committee 5 Nov. 1945.
- ⁶³ Lancashire, Cheshire and Westmorland Provincial Area of the Conservative party, ARE 3/1/2, annual meeting 4 July 1942.
- ⁶⁴ National Union papers, NUA 4/2, Card 148, NUEC report to NUCC 4 Apr. 1940; *CAJ*, Apr. 1940.
- ⁶⁵ Birmingham UL, Chamberlain papers, NC 8/21/19, Topping to Hacking, 26 June 1940.
- ⁶⁶ See e.g. Essex and Middlesex Provincial Area Council papers, ARE 8/1/2, finance and general purposes committee 21 May 1940, 13 May 1941.
- ⁶⁷ National Union papers, NUA 4/2, Card 149, NUEC report to NUCC 2 Oct. 1941.
- ⁶⁸ Birmingham CA papers, uncat., officers' sub-committee 26 May 1941. Although the by-election (8 May 1941) saw the seat retained by the Conservatives by a large majority against two independent candidates, it had highlighted the extent of the desuetude into which the local party machine had fallen, and was thus something a 'wake-up call' for the Birmingham association.
- ⁶⁹ National Library of Scotland [NLS], Glasgow UA papers, Acc. 10424/74, executive committee 9 Oct. 1939.
- ⁷⁰ Dorset RO, West Dorset CA papers, D399/3/1, meeting of officers 17 Oct. 1939.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, war emergency executive committee 27 Sep. 1940.
- ⁷² West Dorset CA papers, D399/3/2, war emergency executive committee 25 Sep. 1942.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, executive committee 25 Mar 1944; 4/1, finance committee 29 Apr. 1944.
- ⁷⁴ East Norfolk CA papers, SO 92/1, joint executive committee 24 Feb. 1940, 13 Jan. 1945; Norfolk RO, Norwich CA papers, SO 122/4, finance and advisory committee 11 Dec. 1939.
- ⁷⁵ Nottinghamshire RO, Rushcliffe CA papers, DD/PP/1/1, annual meeting 18 Apr. 1942.
- ⁷⁶ Rushcliffe CA papers, DD/PP/3/1, West Bridgford CA executive committee 15 Feb. 1944.
- ⁷⁷ Northamptonshire RO, Northampton CA papers, NCCA 29, annual report Mar. 1944.

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- ⁷⁸ Bristol RO, Bristol West CA papers, 38036/BW/2(b), annual general meeting 4 Apr. 1941.
- ⁷⁹ Stafford CA papers, D1289/1/3, finance committee 2 Nov. 1939, 19 May 1942.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., finance committee 11 Jan. 1944, 11 Jan. 1945, executive committee 3 Feb. 1945.
- ⁸¹ Tyne and Wear AS, Tynemouth CA papers, Acc. 1633/2, executive committee 18 July 1941.
- ⁸² Tynemouth CA papers, Acc. 1633/6/1, finance committee 6 Nov. 1943; Acc. 1633/2, special executive committee 4 May 1945.
- ⁸³ Bury AS, Bury CA papers, GCP/C/1/3, executive committee 19 Aug. 1942.
- ⁸⁴ Bury CA papers, GCP/D/2/1, women's CA annual report, 26 Mar. 1945.
- ⁸⁵ Chichester CA papers, CO/1CH/Add. MS 12,088, general purposes and finance committee 12 Feb. 1940, 24 Sep. 1945.
- ⁸⁶ P. Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (1975), p. 259.
- ⁸⁷ Lancashire RO, Blackpool CA papers, PLC 5/1/3, annual general meeting 8 Feb. 1944.
- ⁸⁸ Winchester CA papers, 73M86W/52, women's branch annual report for 1939 (Feb. 1940).
- ⁸⁹ Winchester CA papers, 73M86W/5, Eden to branch officials, 12 Sep. 1939; finance and general purposes committee 12 June 1945; central executive council 1 Dec. 1945.
- ⁹⁰ Denbighshire RO, Denbigh CA papers, DD/DM/80/6, finance and general purposes committee 21 June 1945.
- ⁹¹ West Fife UA papers, MS 36593, central council 23 Oct. 1939, annual general meeting 19 Mar. 1940, annual general meeting 11 Mar. 1947.
- ⁹² CCO 170/2/1/1, National Society of Conservative and Unionist Woman Organisers, meeting of officers 10 Nov. 1939.
- ⁹³ Chamberlain papers, NC 8/21/19, Topping to Hacking, 26 June 1940.
- ⁹⁴ National Union papers, NUA 4/2, Card 148, NUEC report to NUCC 4 Apr. 1940; card 149, 27 Mar. 1941, 26 Mar. 1942.
- ⁹⁵ *CAJ*, Jan. 1940.
- ⁹⁶ *CAJ*, Jan. 1940, quoting Marjorie Maxse to Elton Halliley, 18 Dec. 1939.

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- ⁹⁷ NLS, Scottish Conservative and Unionist association papers, Acc. 10424/27(viii), western divisional council, annual report for year ending 30 June 1944.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid., western divisional council, annual report for year ending 30 June 1941.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., western divisional council, annual report for year ending 30 June 1944.
- ¹⁰⁰ Liverpool RO, Derby papers, 920DER(17)/16/4, Manchester CUA, report of the emergency committee to the annual meeting, 26 Apr. 1940.
- ¹⁰¹ Clapham CA papers, vol. 5, microfilm 546, Metropolitan Association of Conservative and Unionist Agents, executive committee 6 Mar. 1941.
- ¹⁰² Northumberland RO (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), Northern Area Conservative Council papers, NRO 3303/2, annual report for 1940 to annual meeting 3 May 1941; annual report for 1941 to annual meeting 18 Apr. 1942.
- ¹⁰³ Eastern Area Conservative party papers, ARE 7/1/8, annual report to annual meeting 18 Apr. 1945.
- ¹⁰⁴ CCO 4/1/86, Topping to Hacking, 14 Nov. 1939.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ball, 'Local Conservatism', p. 262.
- ¹⁰⁶ National Union papers, NUA 6/2/1, memorandum, 'Draft post-war scheme for the employment of agents, 1942', n.d.
- ¹⁰⁷ Westminster Archives Office, NSCUA papers, Acc. 485/5, war emergency committee 26 Mar. 1941.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., council meeting 23 Jan. 1941.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., war emergency committee 19 Sep. 1941.
- ¹¹⁰ National Union papers, NUA 4/1, card 62, NUEC 12 Nov. 1941.
- ¹¹¹ NSCUA papers, Acc. 485/5, war emergency committee 24 Feb. 1942.
- ¹¹² See e.g. CCO 170/1/1/2, Conservative party central women's advisory committee 25 Mar. 1942; Clapham CA papers, vol. 5, microfilm 546, Metropolitan Association of Conservative and Unionist Agents, executive committee 10 Apr. 1942. It was later to reverse this decision: see *ibid.*, executive committee 19 Jan. 1943.

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- ¹¹³ NSCUA papers, Acc. 485/5, council meeting 29 May 1942.
- ¹¹⁴ CCO 170/2/1/3, National Society of Conservative and Unionist Woman Organisers, meeting 17 July 1942; 1922 Committee papers, CPA 1922/4, meeting 22 July 1942.
- ¹¹⁵ See e.g. Ealing South CA papers, Acc 1338/2, executive committee 20 July, 17 Aug. 1942; Maidstone CA papers, U1634/A3/1/2, special emergency sub-committee 28 July 1942.
- ¹¹⁶ NLW, Monmouth CA records 10, finance and general purposes committee 31 Aug. 1942.
- ¹¹⁷ National Union papers, NUA 6/2/1, memorandum, 'Post-war agents' scheme: summary of chairmen's reports arranged in the order in which the meetings were held', n.d. [c. Sep. 1942].
- ¹¹⁸ NSCUA papers, Acc. 485/5, war emergency committee 9 Sep. 1942.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, council meeting 2 Oct. 1942.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, annual general meeting 2 Oct. 1942.
- ¹²¹ National Union papers, NUA 4/1, card 63, NUEC 11 Nov. 1942. This was the genesis of what was to be the 1944 Proby Report on party funding.
- ¹²² *CAJ*, Apr., July 1943.
- ¹²³ NSCUA papers, Acc. 485/5, council meeting 30 Mar. 1943.
- ¹²⁴ National Union papers, NUA 6/2/7, Maxwell-Fyfe committee, 'Interim report', 1948; J. D. Hoffman, *The Conservative Party in Opposition, 1945-51* (1964), pp. 93-4.
- ¹²⁵ Pinto-Duschinsky, *British Political Finance*, p. 154.
- ¹²⁶ Birmingham CA papers, uncat., management committee 20 Apr. 1945.
- ¹²⁷ CCO 170/2/1/3, National Society of Conservative and Unionist Woman Organisers, meeting 17 July 1942.
- ¹²⁸ See e.g. Clapham CA papers, vol. 5, microfilm 546, Metropolitan Association of Conservative and Unionist Agents, executive committee 26 Apr. 1940; Winchester CA papers, 73M86W/5, finance and general purposes committee 12 June 1945.
- ¹²⁹ CCO 500/1/11, report of Central Office staff conference, 2-3 Apr. 1944.
- ¹³⁰ NSCUA papers, Acc. 485/5, war emergency committee 21 Sep. 1944.
- ¹³¹ CCO 500/1/12, report of staff conference, 2-3 Apr. 1944.

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- ¹³² National Union papers, NUA 4/1, NUEC 27 July 1944; Ramsden 1995, p. 71.
- ¹³³ CCO 170/1/1/2, Conservative party central women's advisory committee 26 July 1944.
- ¹³⁴ See e.g. Cornwall RO, Bodmin CA papers, DDX 385/1, executive committee 12 Jan. 1946.
- ¹³⁵ See e.g. comment on Grantham in a nearby constituency: Horncastle CA papers, Misc. dep. 268/1, annual general meeting 18 May 1942; for Rugby, see CCO 1/3/312, Major Little (CCO agent, West Midlands) to Topping, 1 May 1942.
- ¹³⁶ Churchill Archives Centre, Chartwell papers, CHAR 2/507, minutes of meeting held at 10 Downing Street, 17 Feb. 1944, 10 p.m.
- ¹³⁷ K. Jefferys, *The Churchill Coalition and Wartime Politics, 1940-1945* (Manchester, 1991), p. 158.
- ¹³⁸ The National Archives, Cabinet papers, CAB 65/41/83(44), war cabinet conclusions 28 June 1944.
- ¹³⁹ CCO 4/2/2, untitled memorandum, n.d. [c. Oct. 1944].
- ¹⁴⁰ CCO 4/2/2, Topping to G. R. Shepherd (Labour party), Sir R. Evans (Liberal National party) and Raymond Jones (Liberal party), 25 Oct. 1944.
- ¹⁴¹ Cabinet papers, CAB 65/41/164(44), war cabinet conclusions 11 Dec. 1944.
- ¹⁴² CCO 4/2/2, notes of meeting to consider release of candidates etc. from the Forces, 22 Dec. 1944.
- ¹⁴³ *House of Commons Debates, 5 series [H.C. Debs.]*, vol. 407, cols. 343-4, 18 Jan. 1945; col. 945, 25 Jan. 1945.
- ¹⁴⁴ Cabinet papers, CAB 65/49/12(45), war cabinet conclusions 29 Jan. 1945; *H.C. Debs.*, vol. 407, cols. 1599-1601, Bevin, 1 Feb. 1945.
- ¹⁴⁵ *H.C. Debs.*, vol. 411, col. 697, 5 June 1945.
- ¹⁴⁶ Ealing South CA papers, Acc 1338/2, executive committee 27 Nov. 1939, 17 Nov. 1944, 2 Mar., 11 May 1945; council meeting 1 June 1945.
- ¹⁴⁷ Fylde CA papers, DDX 1202/1/1, emergency committee 3 Oct. 1939, 16, 28 Apr. 1945.
- ¹⁴⁸ J. Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill and Eden, 1940-1957* (1995), p. 71.

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- ¹⁴⁹ See e.g. Berkshire RO, Newbury CA papers, finance and general purposes committee 26 Feb., 10 May 1945; Centre for Kentish Studies, Gravesend CA papers, U1795/AD3/1, women's advisory council 11 May 1945; Maidstone CA papers, U1634/A3/1/3, emergency sub-committee 9 Dec. 1944, 7 Apr. 1945.
- ¹⁵⁰ National Union papers, NUA 4/1, NUEC 10 May 1945.
- ¹⁵¹ Birmingham CA papers, uncat., management committee 20 Apr. 1945, officers' sub-committee 18 July 1945.
- ¹⁵² Chartwell papers, CHAR 2/545, T. L. Rowan to Churchill, 9 May 1945.
- ¹⁵³ Lancashire RO, Darwen CA papers, PLC 2/2/2, annual general meeting 2 Jun. 1945.
- ¹⁵⁴ See e.g. *CAJ*, July, Oct. 1944.
- ¹⁵⁵ West Yorkshire AS (Calderdale), Sowerby CA papers, CV3, executive committee 18 Sep. 1944.
- ¹⁵⁶ Bodmin CA papers, DDX 385/1, executive committee 16 Sep. 1944.
- ¹⁵⁷ Western provincial area council papers, ARE 11/7/3, annual report to annual meeting 9 Feb. 1945.
- ¹⁵⁸ Cornwall RO, Penryn and Falmouth CA papers, DDX 551/16, finance and general purposes committee 20 May 1940.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, finance and general purposes committee 24 June, 21 Oct. 1944.
- ¹⁶⁰ Wiltshire and Swindon RO, Salisbury CA papers, 2639/1, annual general meeting 22 Apr. 1944.
- ¹⁶¹ Newbury CA papers, finance and general purposes committee 31 July 1944.
- ¹⁶² Clitheroe CA papers, DDX 800/1/3, executive committee 2 Aug. 1944.
- ¹⁶³ See e.g. Maidstone CA papers, U1634/A3/1/3, special emergency sub-committee 17 Feb. 1945.
- ¹⁶⁴ Middleton and Prestwich CA papers, PLC 1/3, finance and general purposes committee 1 Jun. 1945.
- ¹⁶⁵ A. Mitchell, *Election '45: Reflections on the Revolution in Britain* (1995), p. 50.

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- ¹⁶⁶ CCO 500/1/12, report of staff conference, 2-3 Apr. 1944.
- ¹⁶⁷ Lincolnshire Archives, Louth CA papers, Misc. dep. 250/1, reorganisation committee 7 Dec. 1944.
- ¹⁶⁸ St Andrews UL, Kirkcaldy Burghs UA papers, MS 36621, executive committee 15 Mar. 1945.
- ¹⁶⁹ Scottish Conservative and Unionist association papers, Acc. 10424/33, western divisional council, propaganda committee sub-committee 7 Feb. 1945.
- ¹⁷⁰ Louth CA papers, Misc. dep. 250/1, executive committee 11 Dec. 1944, 18 Apr. 1945.
- ¹⁷¹ Salisbury CA papers, 2639/1, annual general meeting 27 Apr. 1940; 2639/13, finance and general purposes committee 15 Jan. 1946.
- ¹⁷² Warwickshire RO, Warwick and Leamington CA papers, CR1392, finance committee 3 Nov. 1945.
- ¹⁷³ Birmingham CA papers, uncat., officers' sub-committee 31 Mar. 1944, 18 July 1945.
- ¹⁷⁴ Henley CA papers, S. Oxon. Con. I/3, finance and general purposes committee 16 Sep. 1939.
- ¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, finance and general purposes committee 13 Feb. 1945, 6 Apr. 1945.
- ¹⁷⁶ Bury CA papers, GCP/C/1/3, executive committee 22 May 1945, emergency committee 27 Aug. 1945.
- ¹⁷⁷ North Cornwall CA papers, DDX 381/5, executive committee 2 June, 15 Sep., 15 Dec. 1945.
- ¹⁷⁸ Leicestershire RO, Harborough CA papers, DE 1170/4, executive committee 13 Jan. 1940, 20 Oct. 1945, 23 Mar. 1946.
- ¹⁷⁹ Newbury CA papers, finance and general purposes committee 2 Feb. 1946.
- ¹⁸⁰ Eastern Area Conservative party papers, ARE 7/1/8, finance meeting 12 Dec. 1945.
- ¹⁸¹ Harborough CA papers, DE 1170/4, executive committee 23 Mar. 1946.
- ¹⁸² Northern Area Conservative Council papers, NRO 3303/7, annual report for 1945 to annual meeting 4 May 1946; West Yorkshire AS (Leeds), Yorkshire Provincial Area Council

papers, WYL 1856/1/3, half-yearly report of executive committee to area council, 22 Sep. 1945.

¹⁸³ All national-level figures for number of Labour agents are based on Labour party, *Annual Conference Reports*, passim.

¹⁸⁴ National Museum of Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Labour party NEC papers, box XVIII, Greenwood, Gould, and Middleton circular to DLP officials, 4 Sep. 1939.

¹⁸⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, London Labour party papers, Acc. 2417/A/25, Herbert Morrison to G. R. Shepherd, 11 Sep. 1939; 26, H. Atkinson, 'Report on individual membership', 11 Feb. 1942.

¹⁸⁶ Avon papers, AP 11/1/10, A. J. Gibbs to Anthony Eden, 20 July 1942.

¹⁸⁷ For such hopes, see Labour party NEC papers box XVIII, NEC 26 June 1940, organisation sub-committee 17 July 1940, NEC executive committee 21 Aug. 1940, organisation sub-committee 20 Nov. 1940.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, organisation sub-committee 14 Oct. 1941.

¹⁸⁹ M. D. Kandiah, 'The Conservative party and the 1945 general election', *Contemporary Record* 9 (1995), 22-47, at 24-5.

¹⁹⁰ Earl of Kilmuir, *Political Adventure: The Memoirs of the Earl of Kilmuir* (1964), p. 76.

¹⁹¹ Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible* (1971), p. 127.

¹⁹² CCO 4/2/61, Major H. H. Little to Topping, 28 June 1945.

¹⁹³ CCO 4/2/61, Brigadier Rawcliffe to Topping, 3 Aug. 1945.

¹⁹⁴ CCO 4/2/61, J. W. Lancaster to Topping, 17 July 1945.

¹⁹⁵ R. B. McCallum and A. Readman, *The British General Election of 1945* (1947), pp. 30-1.

¹⁹⁶ I. G. C. Hutchison, *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 71.

¹⁹⁷ NSCUA papers, Acc. 485/5, war emergency committee 12 Sep. 1945; J. Lovenduski, P. Norris, and C. Burness, 'The party and women', in A. Seldon and S. Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford, 1994), 611-35, at 622; CCO 170/2/1/2,

National Society of Conservative and Unionist Woman Organisers, 'Report covering period June 1939-May 1946', n.d. [May 1946].

¹⁹⁸ National Union papers, CPA NUA 6/2/7, Maxwell-Fyfe committee, 'Interim report', 1948.

¹⁹⁹ By 1963, they had 520 full-time agents to Labour's 208 and the Liberals' 64: see R. L. Leonard *Elections in Britain* (1968), p. 33.