A Fortnight in Oxford 2017
Seminar

The Gathering Storm? Politics and Society in Britain and the Shadow of War, 1924-51

This course looks at British politics and society in one of its most challenging periods, when the very stability of the nation seemed under threat, from both internal and external forces. Beginning with an introduction to the period we will go on to explore crucial themes and events which defined contemporary Britain, from the rise and fall of the first Labour government, and the outbreak of a General Strike, to Churchill’s electoral defeat, and the foundation of the Welfare State. We will also examine the critical importance of international affairs to Britain at this challenging time, from Soviet power and the rise of Italian and German Fascism, to the perils of Appeasement, and the dark clouds of war – the second such conflict in a single generation.

Throughout this course students will be actively encouraged to examine history through the eyes of those experienced it, with the aid of a wide range of contemporary sources, both written and visual. They will also be asked to reflect on how these experiences affected the very nature of British society and even identity, in a rapidly changing world - and what this implied for Britain’s longer term status, at home and abroad.

1. Introduction to the main themes, events and people
2. Popular Politics and the Rise of Red Scare: Labour in power and the shadow of the USSR
3. A Brave New World?: The rise of Fascist Italy and the creation of Weimar Germany
4. Baldwin’s Britain: Politics, personalities and the impact of the General Strike
5. ‘Locarno Spirit’: International Relations and the Pursuit of Peace
6. The Depression Era: Socio-economic challenge and the rise of National Government
7. ‘The Guilty Men’?: The Rise of Nazi Germany and the Politics of Appeasement
8. War on the Home Front: The impact of World War Two
10. Concluding thoughts

Preparatory Reading:

There are a great many texts that students might find useful as preparatory reading for the course, and students are encouraged to read widely around the subject. However for those students looking for a useful overall introduction to the period, the relevant sections of the following text are highly recommended (in any edition):

Stephen J. Lee, Aspects of British Political History, 1914-1995 (Chapters 3-12)